

## THE FLOODLIGHT PROBLEM\*

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### Abstract

We prove a new result on dissecting point sets: Given three angles summing to  $2\pi$ , given  $n$  points in the plane and a tripartition  $k_1 + k_2 + k_3 = n$ , the plane can be tripartitioned into three wedges of the given angles so that the  $i$ -th wedge contains  $k_i$  of the points. We use this result to prove that lights of specified angles not exceeding  $\pi$  can be placed at  $n$  fixed points in the plane to illuminate the entire plane if and only if the angles sum to at least  $2\pi$ .

### 1. Introduction

Illumination problems have been a source of many interesting results in computational geometry, for example the area of Art Gallery theorems and algorithms—see [O'R]. The usual scenario is that we have some target objects in two or more dimensions that are to be illuminated, and some specified sites for lights, which are assumed to shine light in every direction—i.e. with an angle of illumination of  $360^\circ$  in the planar case. See [CRU] and [CRCU] for some recent results of this nature.

In this paper we will consider a variant of these problems in which lights are constrained to shine in some specified angles of illumination: Given  $n$  points in the plane which are to be the positions of  $n$  floodlights, and given  $n$  planar angles representing the arcs of illumination of the floodlights, decide how to assign the floodlights to the points and how to fix their rotational angles, in order to light up some target. A harder problem is to minimize the number of floodlights needed. We will consider two types of target: a line segment (or “stage”), and the whole plane.

At a recent workshop, Jorge Urrutia posed the version of this problem for lighting up a stage. This “Stage Light” problem seems difficult. In section 3 we give a counterexample to an intuitively plausible greedy algorithm.

Section 2 concerns the problem of lighting up the whole plane. In the case that all the angles are bounded by  $\pi$ , we give a simple necessary and sufficient condition for lighting the plane: the given angles must sum to at least  $2\pi$ . In the course of proving this we give a result on tripartitioning the plane: Given three angles  $\theta_1, \theta_2, \theta_3$ , with sum  $2\pi$ , given  $n$  points in the plane, and a tripartition  $k_1 + k_2 + k_3 = n$ , the plane can always be partitioned into three wedges  $W_1, W_2, W_3$  such that  $W_i$  has angle  $\theta_i$  and contains  $k_i$  of the given points. This result fits into a large family of results on dissections of point sets, of which the most famous is the Ham Sandwich Theorem (see [E, Chapter 4]). We give algorithms for tripartitioning, and for the floodlight problem. Our model of computation is the real RAM (see [PS]).

### Definitions

A *wedge* is the closed area of the plane bounded by two rays emanating from a common point. Its *complementary wedge* is the wedge of the same angle formed by rotating each of the bounding rays by  $180^\circ$ . If the angle of a wedge is greater than  $\pi$ , then the wedge and its complement intersect in a region of positive area.

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## 2. Illuminating the Plane

In this section we will give a simple necessary and sufficient condition for placing  $n$  small lamps at  $n$  points to light up the whole plane. By a “small” lamp we mean one that shines light in a wedge of no more than  $\pi$  radians. In this problem the  $n$  points are specified, and the angles of the  $n$  lamps are specified. We have the freedom to assign the lamps to the points, and then to rotate each lamp about its point.

**Theorem 2.1.** Given  $n$  points in the plane, and  $n$  angles  $\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_n$ , where each  $\alpha_i$  is at most  $\pi$ , lights of the given angles can be placed at the given points to light up the whole plane if and only if  $\sum_{i=1}^n \alpha_i \geq 2\pi$ . Furthermore, in case the angles do add up to at least  $2\pi$ , there is an  $O(n \log n)$  time algorithm to place the lights at the points to illuminate the plane.

The theorem is not true in general if one of the given angles is greater than  $\pi$ : for example the three angles  $330^\circ, 15^\circ, 15^\circ$ , and the three points of an equilateral triangle cannot be used to light the plane.

The optimization version of the problem—to minimize the number of floodlights required to light the plane—can be solved in case all the angles are bounded by  $\pi$ : simply discard as many small angles as possible while maintaining a sum of at least  $2\pi$ .

Our proof of Theorem 2.1 will provide an efficient algorithm to place the lights. We will divide the plane up into wedges, and light the wedges separately. The following lemma gives a sufficient condition for lighting a wedge.

**Lemma 2.2.** Let  $W$  be a wedge of angle  $\theta \leq \pi$ , let  $P$  be a set of  $k \geq 1$  points in the complementary wedge, and let  $\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_k$  be angles with  $\sum \alpha_i \geq \theta$ . Then lights of the given angles can be placed at the given points to light up the whole wedge  $W$ . Furthermore, there is an algorithm to position the lights that runs in time  $O(k \log k)$ .

The condition given in the lemma is sufficient for lighting a wedge, but not necessary. The lemma is not true in general for  $\theta > \pi$ : for  $k = 1$ , a point in the interior of the wedge and its complement cannot be used to light the whole wedge.

**Proof of Lemma 2.2.** Suppose that  $W$  consists of the rays  $r$  and  $s$ , emanating from the point  $x$ , together with the counter-clockwise angle  $\theta$  from  $r$  to  $s$ . See Figure 2.1.

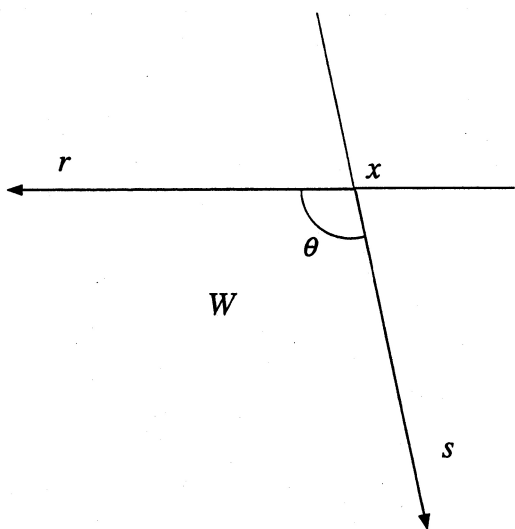


Figure 2.1

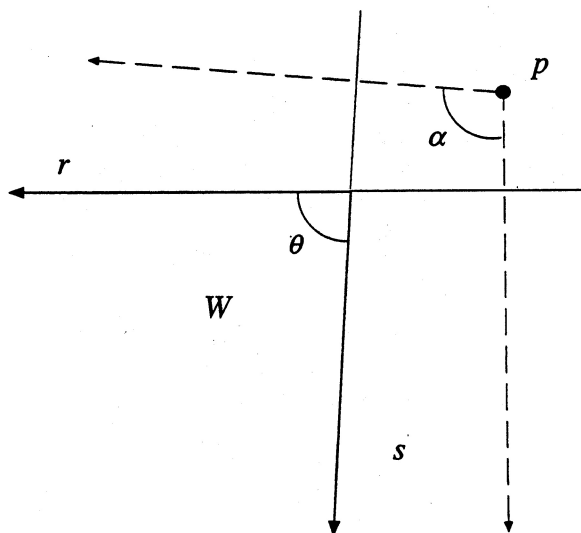


Figure 2.2

The proof will be by induction on  $k$ . In the general step we will reduce to problems of roughly half the size in order to obtain an efficient algorithm. If  $k = 1$  then, since  $\alpha_1 \geq \theta$  and the single point of  $P$  is in the complementary wedge, we can place a light of angle  $\alpha = \alpha_1$  at the point to light the whole wedge. See Figure 2.2.

For  $k > 1$ , let  $k' = \lfloor \frac{k}{2} \rfloor$  and let  $\alpha' = \alpha_1 + \alpha_2 + \dots + \alpha_{k'}$  and  $\alpha'' = \alpha_{k'+1} + \dots + \alpha_k$ . If  $\alpha' \geq \theta$  then we can simply throw away the other angles and half the points. So assume  $\alpha' < \theta$ . Consider the family  $L$  of directed parallel lines making a counter-clockwise angle of  $\theta - \alpha'$  from the line of ray  $r$ . There is some member of  $L$  having  $k'$  points of  $P$  to its right, and  $k - k'$  points of  $P$  to its left. Let  $l$  be such a line. Let  $W'$  be the wedge of angle  $\alpha'$  formed by the directed line  $l$  and the directed line of  $s$ . Let  $W''$  be the wedge of angle  $\theta - \alpha'$  formed by the directed line  $l$  and the directed line of  $r$ . See Figure 2.3. Observe that  $W'$  and  $W''$  together cover  $W$ .

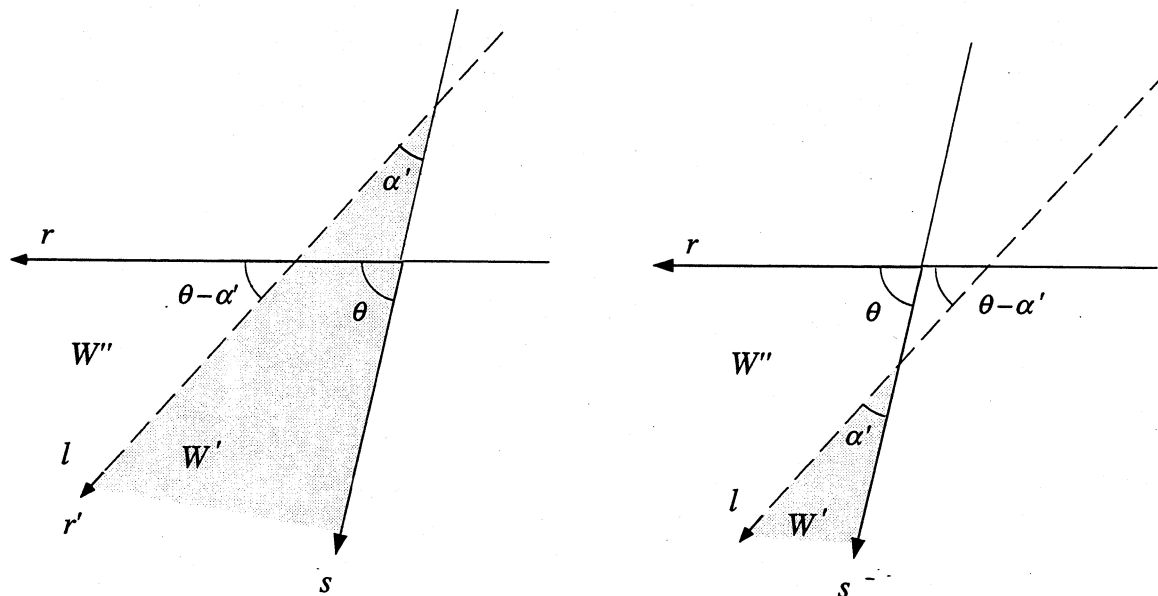


Figure 2.3

The complement of  $W'$  contains  $k'$  points, so by induction we can place lights of angles  $\alpha_1, \alpha_2, \dots, \alpha_{k'}$  at these points to light the wedge. The complement of  $W''$  contains  $k - k'$  points so by induction we can place lights of angles  $\alpha_{k'+1}, \dots, \alpha_k$  at these points to light the wedge. (Note that the angle of the wedge,  $\theta - \alpha'$ , is less than or equal to the sum of the angles of the lights,  $\alpha''$ .)

Finally, note that this proof is algorithmic: we can find the line  $l$  in  $O(k)$  time using median finding [BFP], and then we have decomposed the problem into two subproblems of half the size. Thus the total time required is  $O(k \log k)$ . ■

This lemma immediately implies one case of Theorem 2.1: suppose that the angles  $\alpha_i$  can be partitioned into two sets  $A_1$ , of size  $k$ , and  $A_2$ , of size  $n - k$ , such that the sum of the angles in each set is  $\pi$ . (Of course, it is a difficult problem to *determine* if the angles can be partitioned in this way—we are claiming conceptual simplicity for this special case, not algorithmic simplicity.) Find a line that has  $k$  of the given points to one side and  $n - k$  points to the other side. Let  $H_1$  and  $H_2$  be the half-planes formed by the line, where  $H_1$  contains  $k$  points and  $H_2$  contains  $n - k$  points. We will apply Lemma 2.2 twice: once to the wedge that is the half-plane  $H_1$ , the  $n - k$  points in the complementary half-plane, and the angles of  $A_2$ ; and once to the wedge that is the half-plane  $H_2$ , the  $k$  points in the complementary half-plane, and the angles  $A_1$ . Since the hypotheses of Lemma 2.2 are satisfied, we can light the two wedges, and thus the whole plane.

In general the angles will not partition in two so neatly—and in any case, we cannot test whether they do—so we will instead partition the angles into three sets, such that the sum of the angles in each set is at most  $\pi$ . (This is always possible, as will be shown in the proof of Theorem 2.1.) In order to apply Lemma 2.2 we must tri-partition the plane into three wedges with the appropriate angles and the appropriate number of points in each wedge. This is a natural generalization of bipartitioning the plane into two half-planes with a specified number of points in each half.

**Lemma 2.3.** Let  $\theta_1, \theta_2$ , and  $\theta_3$  be three non-trivial angles summing to  $2\pi$ . Let  $P$  be a set of  $n$  points in the plane, and let  $k_1 + k_2 + k_3 = n$  be a partition of  $n$ . Then there is a point  $x$  in the plane and three disjoint

wedges  $W_1, W_2, W_3$  emanating from  $x$  such that for each  $i = 1, 2, 3$ , wedge  $W_i$  has angle  $\theta_i$  and contains  $k_i$  points of  $P$ . Furthermore, there is an algorithm to find  $x$  and the  $W_i$ 's in time  $O(n \log n)$ .

Note that this includes the case of bipartitioning, by uniting two of the wedges into one. Lemma 2.3 has the same flavour as many other results on dissecting point sets—see Chapter 4 of Edelsbrunner's book [E]. As for many of those results, a continuous version is also true: we can replace the discrete point set by a convex body whose area must be tripartitioned into specified portions by specified angles.

**Proof of Lemma 2.3.** At most one of the angles can be greater than or equal to  $\pi$ , so suppose that  $\theta_1$  and  $\theta_2$  are less than  $\pi$ . Suppose the wedges are ordered clockwise. Let  $r_1$  be the ray between  $W_1$  and  $W_2$ ,  $r_2$  be the ray between  $W_2$  and  $W_3$ , and  $r_3$  be the ray between  $W_3$  and  $W_1$ . See Figures 2.4 and 2.5. Choose an initial orientation of the rays  $r_1, r_2, r_3$  so that no line parallel to one of the rays goes through two or more of the given points. This orientation will be fixed from now on, and we will simply translate the configuration in the plane to achieve our goal.

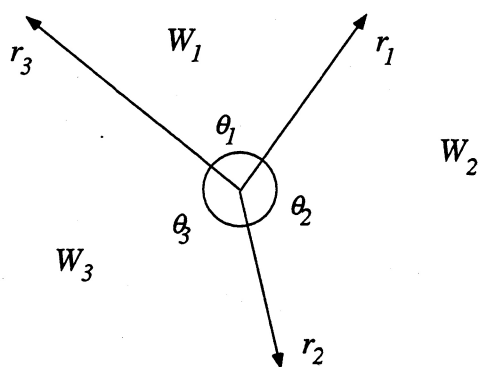


Figure 2.4

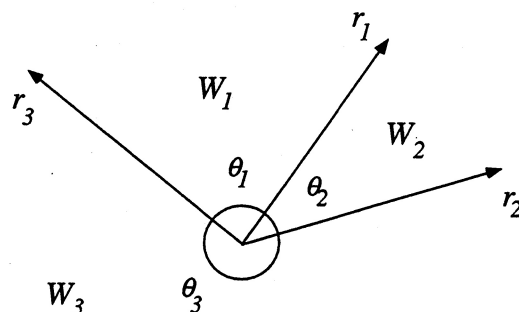


Figure 2.5

Among the family of directed lines parallel to  $r_1$ , consider which one is appropriate for  $r_1$ . We must have at least  $k_2$  points to the right of the line because we need that many points in  $W_2$ . Similarly we must have at least  $k_1$  points to the left of the line because we need that many points in  $W_1$ . Given a line  $l_1$  that meets these conditions, we must place  $r_2$  so that it makes a clockwise angle  $\theta_2$  from  $l_1$  and so that  $k_2$  points lie above it in  $W_2$ . Let  $x_2$  be a point on line  $l_1$  from which  $r_2$  can emanate. Similarly, let  $x_3$  be a point on line  $l_1$  from which  $r_3$  can emanate so that it makes a counter-clockwise angle  $\theta_1$  from  $l_1$  and has  $k_1$  points above it in  $W_1$ . See Figure 2.6. If  $x_2$  and  $x_3$  coincide then we have the desired configuration. When  $l_1$  is at its rightmost position, there are exactly  $k_2$  points to the right of it, and  $x_2$  can be as far in the negative direction along  $l_1$  as we wish—certainly below  $x_3$ . On the other hand, when  $l_1$  is at its leftmost position there are exactly  $k_1$  points to its left, and  $x_3$  can be below  $x_1$ . Thus, by continuity, there must be some intermediate position for  $l_1$  where  $x_2$  and  $x_3$  coincide.

This existence proof can be turned into an  $O(n \log n)$  algorithm. We will use binary search to find the line of  $r_1$ . After choosing the initial orientation for  $r_1, r_2, r_3$ , sort the points in the direction perpendicular to  $r_1$ . We cannot do a discrete search, fixing the line of  $r_1$  at one of the  $n$  points, because it is possible that the unique solution has the line of  $r_1$  lying somewhere strictly between two points in this ordering. Thus at each step of the binary search we will choose a *pair* of consecutive points in the ordering, and test the possibility of locating the line of  $r_1$  somewhere in the range  $l'_1$  between these two points. In case of failure we must know whether to move the range  $l'_1$  left or right.

Given such a trial range  $l'_1$  partition the points into  $R$  and  $L$ , the set of points to the right and left, respectively, of  $l'_1$ . We must position  $r_2$  so that  $k_2$  points of  $R$  lie in  $W_2$ . This constraint gives a range  $l'_2$  of possible lines for  $r_2$ . We can find  $l'_2$  using a linear time selection algorithm [BFP]. Similarly, we must position  $r_3$  so that  $k_1$  points of  $L$  lie in  $W_1$ , and we obtain a range  $l'_3$  of possible lines for  $r_3$ . See Figure 2.7. If these three ranges  $l'_1, l'_2, l'_3$  have a common intersection point  $x$  then the desired solution is obtained when the wedges emanate from that point. Otherwise the intersection of  $l'_2$  and  $l'_3$  lies either to the left or to the right of  $l'_1$ . As justified by the above proof,  $l'_1$  must be moved in the opposite direction. Thus each step of our binary search takes  $O(n)$  time, and we can find the desired configuration in  $O(n \log n)$  time. ■

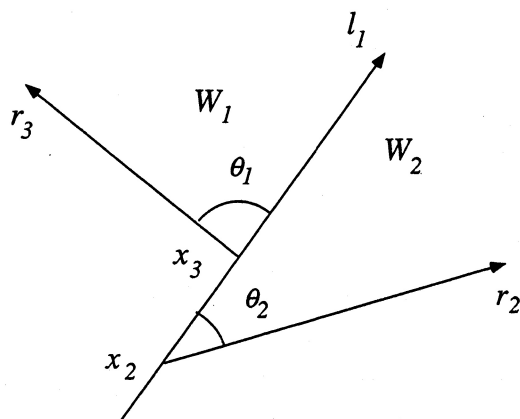


Figure 2.6

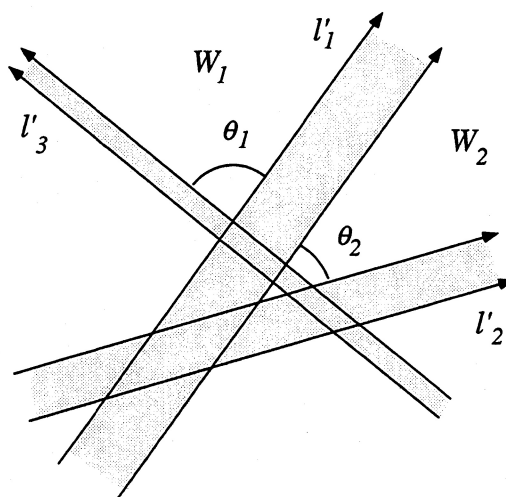


Figure 2.7

Lemma 2.3 does not extend to 4-partitions: it is not possible to partition the plane into wedges of angles  $\theta_1 = 15^\circ, \theta_2 = 165^\circ, \theta_3 = 15^\circ, \theta_4 = 165^\circ$  counter-clockwise in that order so that they contain  $k_1 = 2, k_2 = 0, k_3 = 1, k_4 = 0$  points of an equilateral triangle.

We are now ready to prove the main floodlight theorem.

**Proof of Theorem 2.1.** Suppose without loss of generality that the angles sum to exactly  $2\pi$ . (Otherwise some of the angles can be decreased, and increasing them after the plane is lit will not hurt.) Partition the angles into three sets,  $A_1, A_2, A_3$ , such that the sum of the angles in each set is at most  $\pi$ : take an arbitrary ordering of the angles,  $\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_n$ ; let  $t$  be the maximum index such that  $\sum_{i=1}^t \alpha_i \leq \pi$ ; let  $A_1 = \{\alpha_1, \dots, \alpha_t\}$ ; let  $A_2 = \{\alpha_{t+1}\}$ ; and let  $A_3$  consist of the remaining angles. Let  $k_1 = t, k_2 = 1$  and  $k_3 = n - t - 1$ , and let  $\theta_i, i = 1, 2, 3$  be the sum of the angles in  $A_i$ . By Lemma 2.3 we can find three disjoint wedges  $W_1, W_2, W_3$  emanating from some common point such that  $W_i$  has angle  $\theta_i$  and contains  $k_i$  of the given points. By Lemma 2.2 we can use the points that are in  $W_i, i = 1, 2, 3$  to light the complementary wedge. Since the three complementary wedges partition the plane, this lights the whole plane.

Note that we get an  $O(n \log n)$  algorithm since the initial division into  $A_1, A_2, A_3$  is trivial, and each of the remaining two steps takes  $O(n \log n)$  time. ■

### 3. Lighting a Stage

In this section we consider the seemingly more difficult problem of lighting a horizontal line segment, or *stage*. Given  $n$  points above the stage, and  $n$  angles, can lights of the given angles be placed at the given points to light up the stage? We do not know how to decide this question efficiently even for the special case where the  $n$  points are all on one horizontal line and the  $n$  angles are all equal.

A lamp at a given point illuminates the smallest subsegment of the stage when it projects light straight downwards, and the length of the illuminated subsegment grows monotonically as the lamp is rotated toward the horizontal. One might thus hope for the following “crossing condition”: if a subsegment  $s$  can be lit by two lights from two given points, then it can be lit by “crossing” the lights, using the light at the leftmost point to illuminate the rightmost portion of  $s$ , and the light at the rightmost point to illuminate the leftmost portion of  $s$ . If this crossing condition were true then the stage light problem would be easy for equal angles, since the order of the lights hitting the stage would have to be opposite to the order of the points from which the lights emanate.

Unfortunately, the crossing condition is false. Consider the situation in Figure 3.1, where two lights of equal angles  $\alpha$  are used. A little trigonometry will show that by having the right lamp illuminate the right portion of  $s$  and the left lamp illuminate the left portion, the length of the illuminated segment is  $(85h^2 \tan \alpha +$

$30h^2 \tan^2 \alpha)/(12h - 40h \tan \alpha - 48h \tan^2 \alpha)$ , which is larger than the length of the segment illuminated by crossing the lights:  $(85h^2 \tan \alpha - 30h^2 \tan^2 \alpha)/(12h - 40h \tan \alpha + 7h \tan^2 \alpha)$ . Similar counterexamples can be provided if the two lamps are at the same height or if the left lamp is higher than the right lamp.

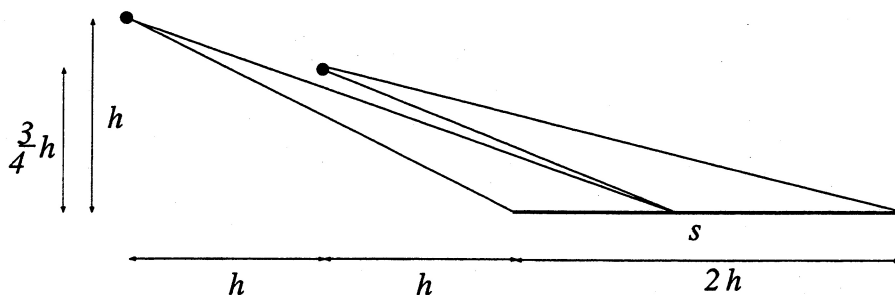


Figure 3.1

The results on lighting the plane from the previous section do have one implication for the stage light problem. Given an instance of the stage light problem, construct a line  $r$  through the right endpoint of the stage, with all the given points above  $r$ ; construct a line  $l$  through the left endpoint of the stage, with all the given points above  $l$ ; let  $\theta$  be the angle between  $r$  and  $l$  that faces the stage. If the sum of the given angles is at least  $\theta$  then by Lemma 2.2 the stage can be lit.

#### 4. Open Questions

We have proven that lights of specified angles not exceeding  $\pi$  can be placed at given points to illuminate the plane if the angles sum to at least  $2\pi$ . This is not true in general if one of the angles exceeds  $\pi$ . Is there an efficient algorithm to decide the general case: given  $n$  points and  $n$  angles, can lights of those angles be placed at the points to illuminate the plane?

Our main theorem holds because we have the freedom to assign the angles to the points and to rotate each light about its point. If the assignment of angles to lights is fixed ahead of time, then it is not always possible to rotate the lights in order to illuminate the plane even if the angles sum to  $2\pi$ , and none exceeds  $\pi$ . Is there an efficient algorithm to decide when this is possible?

Finally, it would be of interest to have a version of the floodlight theorem for three dimensions.

#### Acknowledgements

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