

# MESH SIMPLIFICATION USING DISTANCE LABELS FOR VIEW-INDEPENDENT SILHOUETTE PRESERVATION

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**Keywords:** Computational Geometry and Object Modelling, Three Dimensional Graphics and Realism, Picture and Image Generation.

**Abstract:** Multiresolution modelling is a good method to achieve both quality and performance in the rendering of complex scenes. Within this framework, the detection and preservation of outstanding features, such as silhouettes, become very important. The goal of this paper is to present a technique based on Distance Transforms that allows to classify the elements of the mesh according to their proximity to both the internal and the external contours and makes use of this information for weighting the approximation error which will be tolerated during the mesh simplification process. The approach used in this work precomputes silhouettes for a given set of cameras and performs an estimation for any other point of view. The results obtained are evaluated in two ways: visually and using an objective metric that measures the geometrical difference between two polygonal meshes.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Highly detailed polygonal meshes may contribute to the generation of realistic renderings and physical simulations; however the high computation time requirements may avoid fluent interactivity, resulting paradoxically in a reduction of realism. Consequently, whenever computation time is a concern, techniques which decrease the model's polygon count while keeping an acceptable visual appearance are desirable.

Multiresolution modelling presents itself as a suitable solution by representing objects at different resolution levels and choosing the proper approximation according to the visualization conditions (Xia and Varshney, 1996; Hoppe, 1997). Basic principles of this approach were set by James Clark (Clark, 1976); comprehensive surveys can be found at (Puppo and Scopigno, 1997; Garland, 1999; Luebke, 2001; Luebke et al., 2003; De Floriani et al., 2005). Within this framework, the detection and preservation of features that drive the observer's attention become crucial. Silhouettes constitute an example of such features, since they are known to be critical for the final visual quality appreciated by our visual system (Lue-

bke and Erikson, 1997).

The goal of this paper is to propose a new technique that allows taking into account the proximity of a mesh element to the mesh's contour for weighting the approximation error which will be tolerated during the simplification process. More specifically, the contributions of this work can be briefly summarized as follows:

- Applying a Distance Transform for detecting the proximity of mesh elements to the silhouette for a set of points of view.
- Extending the detection technique in order to include internal silhouettes.
- Using the precomputed proximity measure as an error tolerance map in order to guide a simplification technique.
- Interpolating the proximity to the silhouette for a new point of view not considered in the precomputed set of cameras.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents a short overview of some previous work related to mesh simplification algorithms and the different approaches to identify and preserve

the model's silhouette. A brief introduction to basic concepts of digital Distance Transforms and Multi-Tessellation is also included. Section 3 describes the proposed approach, while Section 4 shows some experimental results. Finally the conclusions and future work are presented in Section 5.

## 2 PREVIOUS WORK

### 2.1 Mesh Simplification

Many mesh simplification techniques have been proposed during the last years. Among the methods based on objective metrics, work has been done in order to incorporate other attributes besides geometry like color, texture or normals (Garland and Heckbert, 1998; Cohen et al., 1998). Perceptual metrics have also been developed (O'Sullivan et al., 2004; Cheng and Boulanger, 2005); Lindstrom and Turk use an image metric to guide the simplification process (Lindstrom and Turk, 2000). Reddy introduced a perceptual model to guide the selection of the appropriate level of detail (Reddy, 1997). (Luebke, 1998) defined a contrast sensitivity function that predicts the perception of visual stimuli. Some of the perceptually driven simplification methods explicitly pursue a good silhouette preservation, defining normal cones (Williams et al., 2003). Good silhouette approximation through contour computation in image space has also been researched (Raskar and Cohen, 1999; Sander et al., 2000).

The approach presented here not only identifies the objects' silhouette. It also performs an explicit classification of the mesh's elements in object space, depending on their proximity to the contour from a given point of view.

The final goal of a simplification process may be either to obtain a discrete set of simplified models or to create a continuous multiresolution model. In this last case, a hierarchical data structure is created in a preprocessing stage and will be queried at run time in order to extract the desired level of detail (Hoppe, 1997; De Floriani et al., 1997).

The Multi-Tessellation method, originally called Multi-Triangulation, was introduced by De Floriani *et al.* (De Floriani et al., 1997). It provides a general multiresolution framework for polygonal meshes offering several attractive features like selective refinement, locality or dynamic update (De Floriani et al., 1998). The Multi-Tessellation, MT for short, is a hierarchical model that can be generated during an off-line simplification process and queried at run time

for extracting a simplified mesh fulfilling some defined restrictions. Some useful restrictions are already implemented in the distributed package (Geometric Modeling and Computer Graphics Research Group, 2005), while the implementation of new ones can be easily done.

The MT package has been used in this work for implementing the extraction of a simplified model that takes into account the visual relevance of a model region. Its flexibility and implementation convenience have been some of the underlying reasons for this choice.

### 2.2 Digital Distance Transforms

Measuring the distance between image elements may be of interest for further processing in many image analysis applications. Basics concepts regarding digital distances can be found in (Rosenfeld and Pfaltz, 1966; Rosenfeld and Pfaltz, 1968; Borgefors, 1984).

The application of a Distance Transform to a binary image produces as output a distance image where each element of this distance-image is assigned a distance label. For any element its label stores a value indicating its closest distance to the background. Therefore, the computed distance image can be seen as a grey-level image where the intensity level identifies the minimum distance to the complement of the object.

A distance transform can be computed in two steps by propagating local distances over the image; this is true for 2D, 3D and higher dimensions (Rosenfeld and Pfaltz, 1966). Initially, the elements belonging to the object are set to infinity and the elements belonging to the background are set to 0. In the case of a 2D image, during the first step the image is analyzed from top to bottom and from left to right. During the second step, the image elements are visited from right to left and from bottom to top. Each element is assigned the minimum value between itself and the already visited neighbors incremented by their connectivity weight.

Distance transforms and some variations of them in combination with other image processing techniques can be applied for representing and analyzing 3D objects in multiple applications (Nyström, 1997; Svensson, 2001; Sintorn, 2005; Jones et al., 2006). Distance fields have also been applied in computer graphics environments, such as in collision detection (Teschner et al., 2004), and have been implemented with graphics hardware (Sud et al., 2006).

However, digital distance transforms can be used in other fields that have not been explored so far. The work presented here aims to open a way for new ap-

plications of Distance Transforms within computer graphics environments.

### 3 METHOD DESCRIPTION

The approach followed here classifies the mesh faces or vertices according to their proximity to the silhouette, as seen from a specific point of view. The classification process uses a Distance Transform, computed over the mesh elements' projection on the visualization plane. This transform provides for each element its distance to the projected contour, being useful for extracting the mesh elements which compose or are located near the mesh silhouette for a particular point of view. The distance of the mesh elements to the projected contour (measured in image space) is encoded as distance-labels which are assigned to the mesh, producing this way a view-dependent tagged mesh.

If this process is applied for a number  $NC$  of cameras, it will produce  $NC$  collections of precomputed distance-labels, one collection for each camera. Since these precomputed distance-labels are only valid for the point of view from which they were extracted, an interpolation technique is applied for any other point of view.

The tags of the polygonal mesh elements, either assigned or interpolated, can then be used in different ways to guide the simplification process, providing a criterion for modifying locally the approximation error allowed in areas close to the contour.

It must be highlighted that the computation of distance-labels for a set of cameras is performed in a pre-processing stage, producing a set of labels which will be used later on during the simplification stage. Figure 1 depicts a scheme of the whole process and Alg. 1 collects its pseudo-code description. The following Sections describe each of the method's stages.

#### 3.1 View-dependent Distance Labels Computation

Silhouettes are view-dependent features. For that reason, their extraction must be done from a certain point of view. This method's first stage is entirely carried out as preprocessing. As a result, a set of distance labels is obtained, encoding the proximity of every mesh element to the contour for a fixed point of view. Since this analysis will be carried out for a set of  $NC$  points of view, the final result will be  $NC$  sets of labels, being each set valid for the analyzed point of view. Subsections 3.1.1–3.1.4 give a detailed explanation of this process.

##### 3.1.1 Mesh Mapping

Given a visualization plane, the 3D mesh is projected on it by applying the proper projection matrix to the coordinates of each vertex. In order to extract the object's silhouette, it is necessary to create a binary image where distance measurements can be made. For that purpose the visualization plane is partitioned into cells forming a grid which can be seen as a 2D digital image. The number of cells making up the grid is analogous to the image resolution; consequently the parameterization of this value allows the analysis at different resolutions.

Every face belonging to the projected polygonal mesh is tested to find the cells of the 2D grid with which it intersects.

A data structure is updated where every grid element keeps track of the faces intersecting with it. This way, the posterior backprojection of distance values is straightforward. This procedure is computationally expensive, but affordable as pre-processing.

##### 3.1.2 Binary Image Computation

In the case that only the external contour has to be preserved, the binary image is extracted from the grid occupancy information, setting as object every cell with any face mapping over it. Object pixels adjacent to the background will determine the external silhouette.

However, since internal silhouettes are known to have a big impact in the visual quality perceived by a human observer, their preservation is also desirable. Detection of internal contours cannot be directly performed in image space, but it can be easily carried out in object space. By checking the angle formed between a face normal and the visual vector it can be concluded whether it is a frontfacing or backfacing face. All the vertices shared by backfacing and frontfacing facets are tagged as silhouette. With this information, the occupancy binary image is modified in the following way: an object pixel is set as background if a face containing a silhouette vertex projects onto it. With this modification, the silhouette (internal and external) will be determined by the background pixels which are adjacent to an object pixel. Figure 2 illustrates the extraction of both internal and external contours.

##### 3.1.3 Distance Transform Computation

Once the 2D image is obtained, the next stage consists in obtaining a distance image by applying a distance transform to the binary image. The result is a new image where the assigned intensity values increase as the pixel gets further away from the background.

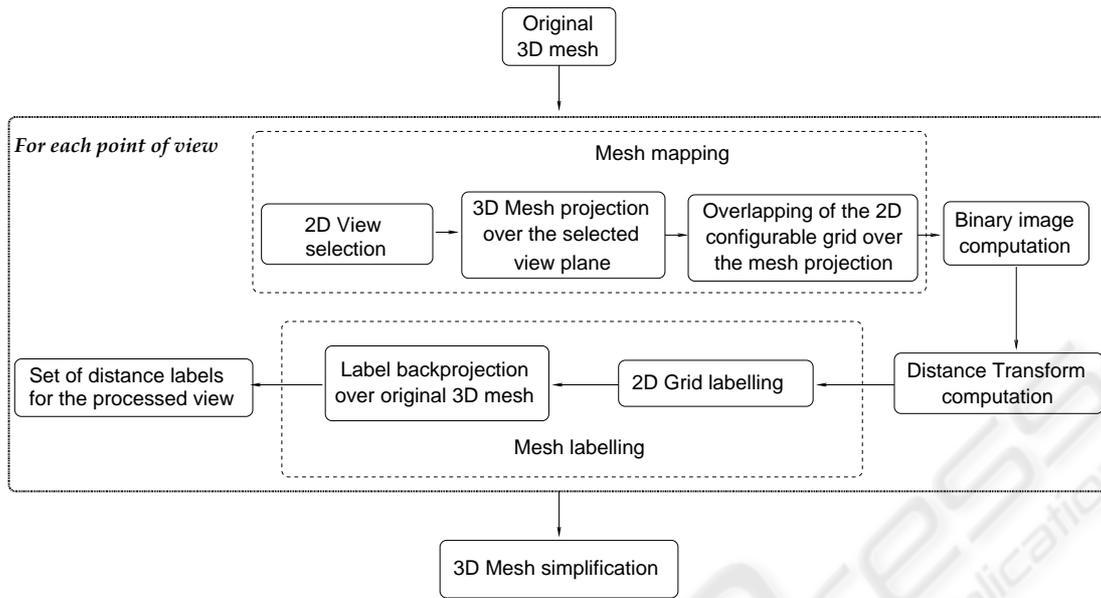


Figure 1: Mesh simplification stages.

**Algorithm 1** Pseudo-code of the pre-processing stage.

- 1: {INPUTS: 3D mesh, visualization parameters}
- 2: {OUTPUT: Collection of view-dependent labels}
- 3: Create a 2D grid over the visualization plane of the 3D input mesh
- 4: **for all** precomputed point of view **do**
- 5:   **for all** grid-cells **do** {It is computed in a pre-processing stage}
- 6:     Label each grid-cell with the 3D mesh vertices that project onto it
- 7:   **end for**
- 8:   Extract a binary image using the grid-cells occupation {Each pixel represents a grid cell}
- 9:   Compute a Distance Transform over the binary image
- 10:   Assign to each grid-cell the distance value of its associated pixel
- 11:   **for all** grid-cells **do** {Assign labels to 3D vertices}
- 12:     Backproject its distance value to all the 3D mesh vertices that project onto it and obtain a view-dependent set of labels
- 13:   **end for**
- 14: **end for**
- 15: Store distance labels together with the point of view parameters

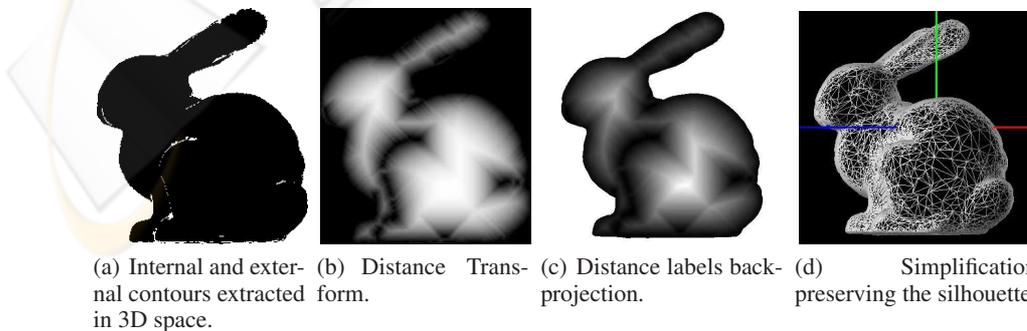


Figure 2: Extraction of both internal and external contours.

### 3.1.4 Mesh Labelling

At this point, the distance of an object pixel to the background has already been computed. Previously, the correspondences between pixels and the facets mapping into them have also been calculated. Therefore, the labelling of every face with a value representing its distance from the background is a simple process. The distance label of a pixel, which is equivalent to a grid cell, is assigned to all the faces that intersect with the cell.

As a result a set of labels is obtained, where every label belongs to a face and represents its proximity to the contour for the analyzed point of view.

The same approach may be followed when the distance label is assigned to vertices or edges instead of faces. Figure 3 shows the results of backprojecting the distance values onto the mesh. Fig. 3(a) and 3(d) show a rendered view of the original mesh. Fig. 3(c)-(b) and 3(e)-(f) represent the same meshes under different points of view. The grey levels in the images represent distance to the silhouette (lighter intensities represent higher distances to the contour).

## 3.2 Distance Labels Interpolation for New Points of View

Whenever the point of view from which the model is to be rendered does not belong to the preprocessed set of views, there is no valid set of distance-labels pre-computed. In this case, the approach followed in this work interpolates a new set of distance-labels from the precomputed ones.

Two approaches have been implemented: the first one consists in using the labels from the closest pre-computed view; the second one interpolates for every vertex  $v_j$  the labels of the same  $v_j$  in the  $n$  closest views in the following way: Let  $PV = \{PV_0, \dots, PV_{NC}\}$  be the set of precomputed points of view;  $\{PV_i.labels\}$  the set of labels precomputed for the point of view  $PV_i$ ;  $PV_i.labels_{v_j}$  the label of the vertex  $v_j$  for the point of view  $PV_i$ ; and finally,  $PV_c$  the current point of view, for which a set of labels is needed. Then,

```

if  $PV_c \in PV$  then
     $PV_c.labels$  are valid labels
else
    Let  $\{PV_k \dots PV_n\}$  be the subset of  $n$  closest pre-computed points of view
    for  $j = 1$  to  $nv$  do  $\{nv$  is the number of vertices of the mesh $\}$ 
         $PV_c.labels_{v_j} = \sum_{k=1}^n (PV_k.labels_{v_j}) / n$ 
    end for
end if

```

This way a new set of distance-labels is obtained. Since this estimation is performed in real time, computational efficiency is highly desired. For this reason, the precomputed set of views are regularly distributed, allowing the detection of the closest views to take a constant time.

At this point, a tagged mesh can be obtained for any point of view, using either precomputed distance-labels or estimated ones.

## 3.3 Mesh Simplification

The method's last stage is also the final goal of the whole process, where the extracted distance values are used for mesh simplification purposes.

The use of the distance labels depends on the selected simplification technique. The work presented here has been based on the Jade approach, a vertex decimation technique based on global error (Ciampalini et al., 1997). The distance information is computed for the vertices of the original mesh. Since the vertices belonging to a simplified model are a subset of the original mesh, the pre-computed distance labels are valid for any level of detail. Multi-Tessellations obtained through the application of the Jade method are freely distributed with the MT-Package.

The proximity of every facet to the contour is taken into account in the extraction stage. This means that for a given error threshold, the error allowed in regions close to the silhouette is reduced according to a predefined law.

The implemented solution, requires the definition of two parameters:

- Distance interval: range of distance labels which identify the region where a more accurate approximation is desired.
- Error factor  $f$ : the purpose of this parameter is to define a lower error threshold for the portion of the mesh within the region of interest.

The width of the contour area can be simply modified by changing the range of distance labels that define the region of interest. In our case, the range is defined by setting a threshold over the minimum distance of the vertices belonging to a face. Given a distance threshold, and a vertex  $v_j$  of triangle  $t_i$  ( $\forall t_i \in 3D$  mesh):

```

if  $PV_c.labels_{v_j} \leq distance\_threshold$  then
     $t_i \in contour$ 
else
     $t_i \notin contour$ 
end if

```

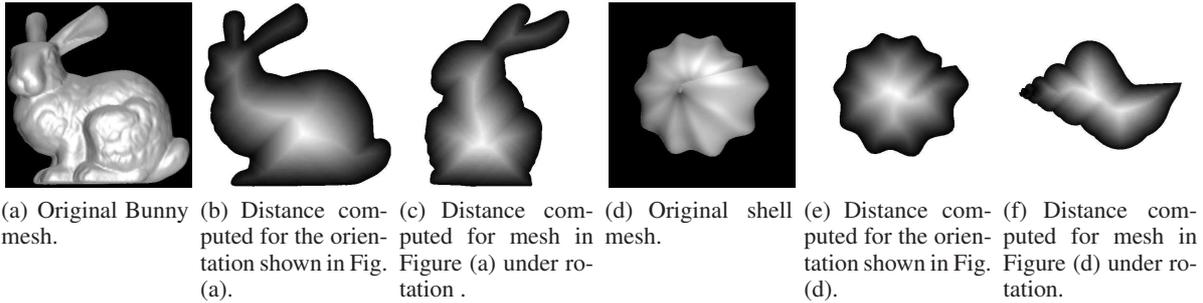


Figure 3: Backprojection of distance values over the 3D model. Mesh vertices color represent the backprojected distance label with grey levels proportional to the distances to the external silhouette.

Remember that  $PV_c$  is the current point of view and  $PV_c$ .labels have been extracted following the algorithm described in section 3.2.

The error factor allows to refine the quality of the approximation in the contour region taking into account the threshold error fixed for the rest of the model. Given a global allowed error  $e$  we can define a more restrictive error that will be tolerated in the contour region. Given the restriction factor  $f < 1$ , the allowed error  $e_a$  will be computed in the following manner:

```

if  $t_i \notin$  contour then
   $e_a = e$ 
else
   $e_a = e \cdot f$ 
end if

```

If the allowed error is uniform along the model, then

$$e_a(t_i) = e \quad \forall t_i \in \text{3D mesh}$$

Again, other error functions are also feasible.

## 4 RESULTS

The experimental results presented in this section were obtained by applying the technique previously described to Multi-Tesselations either distributed together with the MT-Package or generated from available surface models. The precomputed collection of distance-labels has been obtained from a regular distribution of orthographic cameras over a bounding sphere sampled every 15 degrees. The results presented in figure 4 show simplified models obtained by imposing a restrictive error threshold over the silhouette, setting the error factor to 0. This means that no error is allowed on the region of interest. It can be seen that the rest of the mesh is coarser (it has suffered a strong simplification process), while the density of triangles over the silhouette is extremely high. Polygonal meshes rendered in blue correspond to precomputed points of view, while meshes rendered in red

color are interpolated ones.

Figures 4 and 5 show the transition between two precomputed points of view, making use of the closest precomputed camera, while figure 6 shows the same transition interpolating between the four closest precomputed cameras. It can be noticed in the video accompanying the paper that transitions are smoother when using interpolated distance-labels. However, the fact that the thickness of the contour can be parameterized, allows to work with wider silhouettes, decreasing this way the perceived changes between consecutive views. This effect can be better appreciated in figures 4 and 5 that show the simplification of the mesh obtained by imposing a restrictive error threshold over the silhouette and varying the distance interval. In both cases, the error factor was set to 0, meaning that no error is allowed on the external contour. Using greater error factors would result in silhouettes with greater approximation errors as it can be noticed in Fig. 7(a) and 7(b). The region of interest (the mesh portion considered to be near the silhouette) is made up of faces whose vertices have a minimum distance label less than or equal to 2 (Fig. 4) and less than or equal to 4 (Fig. 5). It can be seen that the rest of the mesh is coarser (it has suffered a strong simplification process), while the density of triangles over the silhouette is extremely high.

In addition to a visual inspection, an objective measurement of the approximation error has also been performed. The difference between the two polygonal meshes to be compared is computed following an approach similar to (Aspert et al., 2002): given a mesh  $M1$  and a coarser approximation  $M2$ , for every vertex of  $M1$  the minimum distance to the faces belonging to  $M2$  is computed. A visual representation of the deviation is shown by coloring  $M1$  with a predefined color palette. Figure 7(c) presents the results of measuring the difference between the original model and the simplification extracted in figure 7(a). Figure 7(b) measures the difference between the original model and a homogeneous LOD extracted over the whole

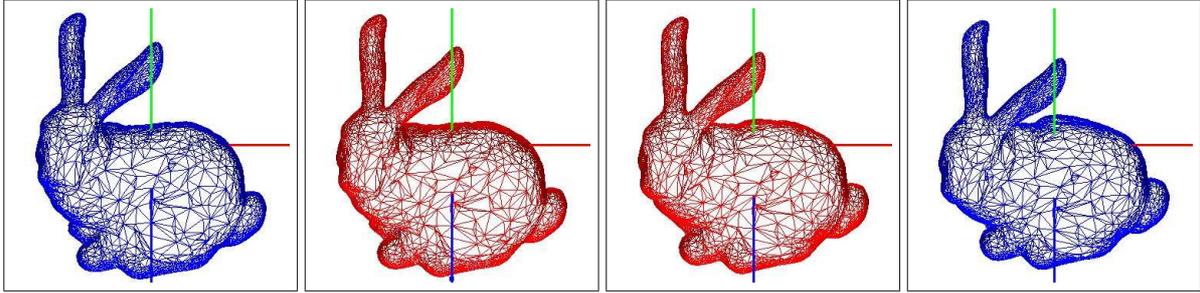


Figure 4: Transition between precomputed points of view (in blue) showing the extracted silhouettes for new points of view (in red) using the closest view. Bunny with a rotation over the X axis of  $\theta = 45^\circ$ ,  $\theta = 50^\circ$ ,  $\theta = 55^\circ$  and  $\theta = 60^\circ$  setting distance interval=2.

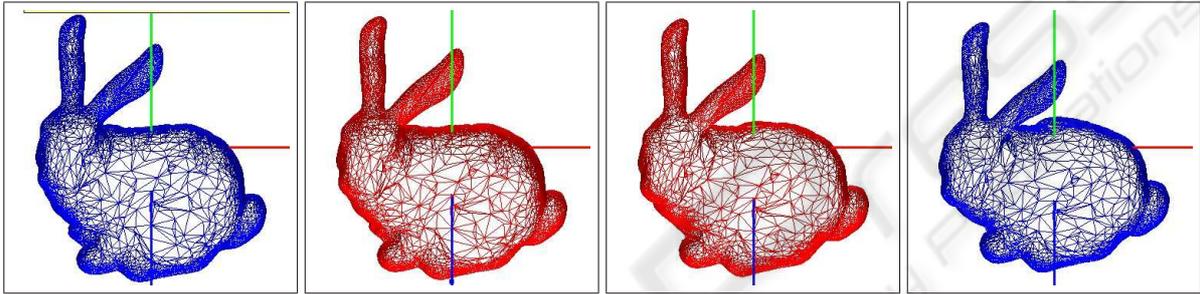


Figure 5: Same experiment of Fig. 4 setting distance interval=4.

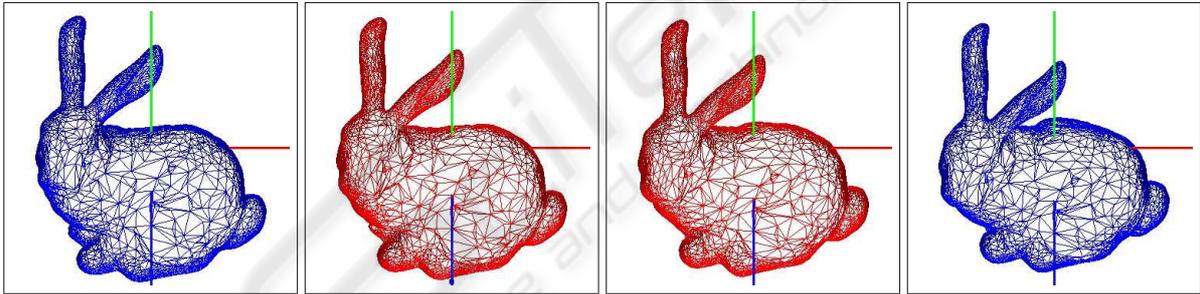


Figure 6: Same transition of Fig. 4 interpolating from the 4 closest views.

model using the same global error allowed in 7(c). From the error distribution it can be concluded that the approximation in the silhouette is quantitatively better with our method. Regarding computational issues, cost in terms of memory requirements is of one extra value per vertex and per precomputed camera. By delimiting the sector where the observer next position will fall into, the number of cameras in memory may be noticeably decreased. With respect to computational cost, it has to be noted that all the heavy computation is performed at pre-processing time. The most expensive step is the mesh mapping over the 2D grid, in order to collect the information needed for backprojecting the distance values. Efficient implementations for these operations using spatial data par-

tititioning could be considered.

Execution time measures have been acquired in order to compute the overload of managing distance-labels with respect to extracting a simplification from a Multi-Tessellation without distance-labels. In both cases, the parameters have been set in such a way that the extracted meshes are at full-resolution, producing this way the same load for the rendering stage. With this experiment, measured times do not take into account the advantage of multiresolution modelling, that would result in the rendering a model with less number of triangles. Table 1 shows the total time spent in extracting a LOD from a distance-labelled mesh versus the total time required for extracting an homogeneous mesh of the same number of faces. Ta-

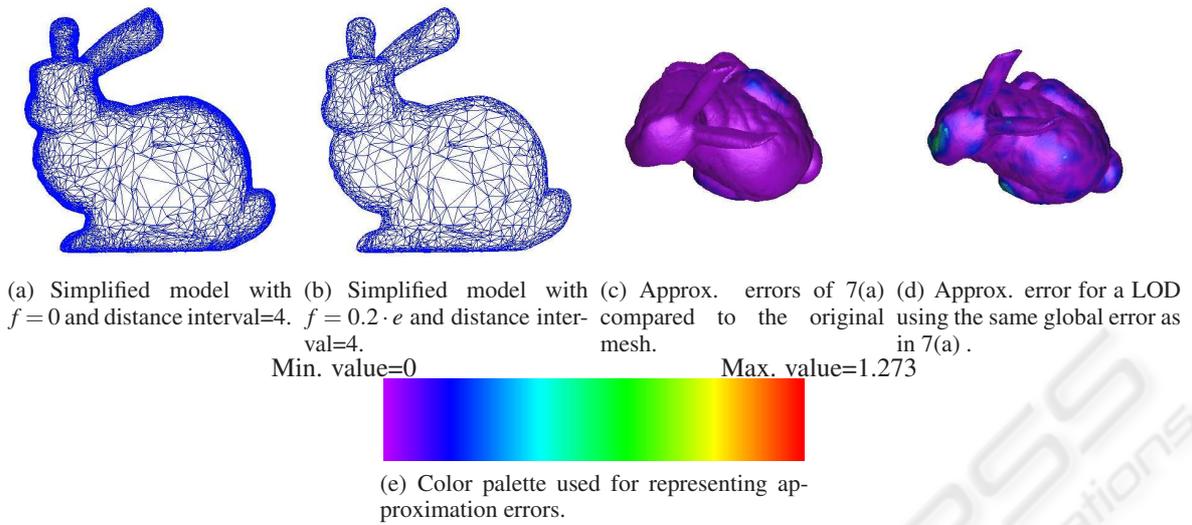


Figure 7: Simplified models modifying the error factor. Visual representation of approximation error rendered under rotation for a better perception of values.

Table 1: Statistics data extracted from executions using the closest precomputed point of view.

Model	# facets	TT (ms)	PLI %	PES %	PRS %	TTH (ms)	OAH %
Shell	46550	45,65	0,04	23,85	76,10	43,84	3,96
Bunny	69451	69,22	0,02	24,65	75,32	66,91	3,33
Mannequin	204957	208,65	0,01	19,49	80,50	204,74	1,87
Sphere	360612	430,11	0,00	22,77	77,23	418,88	2,61

Table 2: Statistics data extracted from executions interpolating between the 4 closest points of view.

Model	# facets	TT (ms)	PLI %	PES %	PRS %	TTH (ms)	OAH %
Shell	46550	55,17	17,10	20,02	62,88	44,22	19,84
Bunny	69451	82,39	16,24	20,97	62,79	66,93	18,76
Mannequin	204957	279,51	16,87	16,64	66,49	227,96	18,44
Sphere	360612	465,15	16,03	18,70	65,27	374,94	19,39

Table 1 also shows the percentage of the total time spent in obtaining the closest view's labels, extracting a level of detail from the multi-tessellation, and rendering the final model. It can be observed that a very small part of the total time is spent in getting distance-labels for the current view. Table 2 shows the same execution times as Table 1 measured interpolating between the 4 closest cameras.

It can be observed that using the closest camera results in a lower overload ( $OAH < 4\%$ ), since the estimation of labels for new points of view is computationally lighter. An additional advantage is the fact that the extra time required for finding the closest point of view is constant, independently of the size of the mesh.

The notation used in Tables 1 and 2 is the following:

**TT:** Total execution time (ms).

**TTH:** Idem considering an homogeneous LOD.

**PLI:** % of total execution time involved in accessing the valid or interpolated distance-labels.

**PES:** Idem involved in the extraction of a LOD from the multi-tessellation.

**PRS:** Idem involved in the rendering of the extracted mesh.

**OAH:** Overhead introduced by using the proposed method versus obtaining an homogeneous LOD from the multi-tessellation.

The computer used in the tests was a 3.2 GHz Pentium IV CPU with 1 GB of main memory and a general purpose graphics card (NVIDIA GEFORCE 7800 GTX).

## 5 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

Simplification algorithms are usually guided by some criteria in order to select which elements of the mesh shall be removed or replaced. Introducing precomputed distance labels as part of the guiding metrics is a straightforward process, opening a new way to design a set of techniques which are useful for including a wide range of criteria in mesh simplification algorithms. Additionally, the approach presented here can be applied in order to achieve higher resolution in other relevant regions besides the silhouette, such as visually outstanding areas, or semantically important parts.

The results presented here suggest that the use of distance information is a promising approach for mesh simplification techniques, since adding distance labels to mesh elements provides more information than the conventional methods based on the extraction of the silhouette edges. This fact becomes patent in the examples shown, where it can be seen that by increasing the width of the preserved contour, the quality of the silhouette in interpolated views also increases. This flexibility in parameterization of contour's width, makes also possible to use the closest view instead of interpolating between the  $n$ -closest views, resulting in a valuable saving of computational time.

The proposed technique may be easily adapted to a wide range of simplification methods, since distance information can be assigned to any element of the mesh (vertices, edges or faces). This fact implies that the nature of the basic underlying operator (vertex removal, edge collapse, etc) does not impose additional limitations. Furthermore, the applicability of distance labels goes from off-line simplification processing to run-time selective refinement.

Simplification techniques have a wide range of applications in leisure, science, industry, arts, etc. All of them can benefit from the improvements in the quality of the simplified models.

The work presented here may be extended in the following ways:

- Integrating distance to the silhouette into other mesh simplification methods besides the multi-tessellation.
- Applying different error factors to internal and external contours.
- Estimating changes in the position of the point of view, allowing the computation of distance-labels in advance.

- Performing an analysis of variability between points of view, in order to optimally redistribute the precomputed cameras.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work has been partially funded by the the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science (grant TIN2007-67188) and Government of the Community of Madrid (grant S-0505/DPI/0235; GATARVISA).

The authors also thank to the Geometric Modelling and Computer Graphics Research Group for distributing the MT-Package.

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