Polygon Meshes and Implicit Surfaces

What do we need from shapes in Computer Graphics?

- Local control of shape for modeling
- Ability to model what we need
- Smoothness and continuity
- Ability to evaluate derivatives
- Ability to do collision detection
- Ease of rendering

No single technique solves all problems!

Polygon Meshes

- Any shape can be modeled out of polygons
  - If you use enough of them...
- Polygons with how many sides?
  - Can use triangles, quadrilaterals, pentagons, ... n-gons
  - Triangles are most common.
  - When > 3 sides are used, ambiguity about what to do when polygon nonplanar, or concave, or self-intersecting.
- Polygon meshes are built out of
  - Vertices (points)
  - Edges (line segments between vertices)
  - Faces (polygons bounded by edges)

Shape Representations

- Polygon Meshes
- Parametric Surfaces
- Implicit Surfaces

Modeling Complex Shapes

- An equation for a sphere is possible, but how about an equation for a telephone, or a face?
- Complexity is achieved using simple pieces
  - Polygons, parametric surfaces, or implicit surfaces
- Goals
  - Model anything with arbitrary precision (in principle)
  - Easy to build and modify
  - Efficient computations for rendering, collisions, etc.
  - Easy to implement (a minor consideration...)

Normals

- Triangle defines unique plane
  - \( \mathbf{n} = \frac{\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b}}{||\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b}||} \)
  - Depends on vertex orientation
  - Clockwise order gives
  - \( \mathbf{n} = -\mathbf{a} \times \mathbf{b} \)
- Vertex normals less well defined
  - Can average face normals
  - Works for smooth surfaces
  - But not at sharp corners
  - Think of a cube
Where Meshes Come From

- Specify manually
  - Write out all polygons
  - Write some code to generate them
  - Interactive editing: move vertices in space

- Acquisition from real objects
  - Laser scanners, vision systems
  - Generate set of points on the surface
  - Need to convert to polygons

Data Structures for Polygon Meshes

- Simplest (but dumb)
  - float triangle[n][3]; (each triangle stores 3 (x,y,z) points)
  - redundant: each vertex stored multiple times

- Face List, Vertex List
  - List of vertices, each vertex consists of (x,y,z) geometric info only
  - List of triangles, each a triple of vertex id's (or pointers) topological (connectivity, adjacency) info only
  - Fine for many purposes, but finding the faces adjacent to a vertex takes O(F) time for a model with F faces. Such queries are important for topological editing.

- Fancier schemes:
  - Store more topological info so adjacency queries can be answered in O(1) time.
  - Winged-edge data structure: vertex structures contain all topological info (pointers to adjacent vertices, edges, and faces).

A File Format for Polygon Models: OBJ

# OBJ file for a 2x2x2 cube
v -1.0 1.0 1.0 - vertex 1
v -1.0 -1.0 1.0 - vertex 2
v 1.0 -1.0 1.0 - vertex 3
v -1.0 -1.0 -1.0 - vertex 4
v 1.0 -1.0 -1.0 - vertex 5
v 1.0 1.0 -1.0 - vertex 6
v 1.0 1.0 1.0 - vertex 7
f 1 2 3 4
f 4 3 7 8
f 5 1 4 8
f 5 6 2 1
f 2 8 7 3

Syntax:
- # anything - comment
- v x y z - a vertex at (x,y,z)
- f V1 V2 ... Vn - a face with vertices V1, V2, ... Vn

How Many Polygons to Use?

Different models for near and far objects
Different models for rendering and collision detection
Compression of data recorded from the real world

We need automatic algorithms for reducing the polygon count without
- Losing key features
- Getting artifacts in the silhouette
- Popping

Problems with Triangular Meshes?

- Need a lot of polygons to represent smooth shapes
- Need a lot of polygons to represent detailed shapes
- Hard to edit
- Need to move individual vertices
- Intersection test? Inside/outside test?
Shape Representations

Polygon Meshes
Parametric Surfaces
Implicit Surfaces

Parametric Surfaces

\[ p(u,v) = [x(u,v), y(u,v), z(u,v)] \]
- e.g. plane, cylinder, bicubic surface, swept surface

Parametric Surfaces

Why better than polygon meshes?
- Much more compact
- More convenient to control — just edit control points
- Easy to construct from control points

What are the problems?
- Work well for smooth surfaces
- Must still split surfaces into discrete number of patches
- Rendering times are higher than for polygons
- Intersection test? Inside/outside test?

Two Ways to Define a Circle

Parametric
\[ x = f(u) = r \cos(u) \]
\[ y = g(u) = r \sin(u) \]

Implicit
\[ F(x,y) = x^2 + y^2 - r^2 \]
Implicit Surfaces

• Implicit surface: \( F(x,y,z) = 0 \)
  – e.g. plane, sphere, cylinder, quadric, torus, blobby models
  sphere with radius \( r \):
  \[ F(x,y,z) = x^2 + y^2 + z^2 - r^2 = 0 \]

  – terrible for iterating over the surface
  – great for intersections, inside/outside test

What Implicit Functions are Good For

Ray - Surface Intersection Test

\( X \times kV \)

Inside/Outside Test

\( X + kV \)

Surfaces from Implicit Functions

• Constant Value Surfaces are called
  (depending on whom you ask):
  – constant value surfaces
  – level sets
  – isosurfaces

  • Nice Feature: you can add them! (and other tricks)
  – this merges the shapes
  – When you use this with spherical exponential potentials, it’s
called Blobs, Metaballs, or Soft Objects. Great for modeling animals.

Blobby Models

Source: blender.org (2017)

How to draw implicit surfaces?

• It’s easy to ray trace implicit surfaces
  – because of that easy intersection test
• Volume Rendering can display them
• Convert to polygons: the Marching Cubes algorithm
  – Divide space into cubes
  – Evaluate implicit function at each cube vertex
  – Do root finding or linear interpolation along each edge
  – Polygonize on a cube-by-cube basis
**Constructive Solid Geometry (CSG)**

- Generate complex shapes with basic building blocks
- Machine an object - saw parts off, drill holes, glue pieces together

![CSG Diagram]

**Set Operations**

- UNION: \[ \text{Inside}(A) \cup \text{Inside}(B) \]
  - Join A and B
- INTERSECTION: \[ \text{Inside}(A) \cap \text{Inside}(B) \]
  - Chop off any part of A that sticks out of B
- SUBTRACTION: \[ \text{Inside}(A) \cap \overline{\text{Inside}(B)} \]
  - Use B to cut A

**Examples:**
- Use cylinders to drill holes
- Use rectangular blocks to cut slots
- Use half-spaces to cut planar faces
- Use surfaces swept from curves as jigsaws, etc.

**Negative Objects**

Use point-by-point boolean functions
- remove a volume by using a negative object
- e.g. drill a hole by subtracting a cylinder

\[ \text{Inside}(\text{BLOCK-CYL}) = \text{Inside}(\text{BLOCK}) \land \overline{\text{Inside}(\text{CYL})} \]
Implicit Functions for Booleans

- Recall the implicit function for a solid: $F(x,y,z)<0$
- Boolean operations are replaced by arithmetic:
  - MAX replaces AND (intersection)
  - MIN replaces OR (union)
  - MINUS replaces NOT (unary subtraction)

- Thus
  - $F(\text{Intersect}(A,B)) = \max(F(A),F(B))$
  - $F(\text{Union}(A,B)) = \min(F(A),F(B))$
  - $F(\text{Subtract}(A,B)) = \max(F(A),-F(B))$

Implicit Surfaces

- Good for smoothly blending multiple components
- Clearly defined solid along with its boundary
- Intersection test and inside/outside test are easy
- Need to polygonize to render — expensive
- Interactive control is not easy
- Fitting to real world data is not easy
- Always smooth

CSG Trees

- Set operations yield tree-based representation

Summary

- Polygonal Meshes
- Parametric Surfaces
- Implicit Surfaces
- Constructive Solid Geometry