

RE-USING 3D MODELING DATA FOR CONSTRUCTING 3D SIMULATION DATA

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Abstract: With the aid of the powerful computational ability and software tools, we undergo rapid change in a whole product manufacturing process. In a traditional way, it took long time and cost to build real manufacturing line. The behind time change for the manufacturing process ends up with supplementing large amount of budget. Therefore early detecting the errors on manufacturing process saves quite a big amount of time and money. As a result, the need for plant simulations rises. When we simulate manufacturing line on a virtual environment, it is not easy to acquire 3D data. If we have 3D CAD data, we can reuse them for each tools, products and equipments for the manufacturing line. Even in this case, the size matters. The large size of CAD data makes it difficult for us to directly use CAD data for simulation. As the CAD data and simulation data differs in their own purpose, we can reduce the size of the CAD data without losing simulation purpose. In this paper we propose effective methods for reducing the size of the CAD data and re-using them for simulation, assuming the 3D CAD data are already available.

1 INTRODUCTION

As the computer hardware gets faster, we can deal with large data which needs huge computation. In a product design, the commercial CAD software is widely used to model the products. Preparing 3D simulation data from the scratch takes enormous efforts and time which is not applicable for most cases. The importance of the availability of CAD information in product and process design and process visualization is increasing rapidly. If we already have CAD data for each component used in the manufacturing process, we can reuse the CAD data for simulation.

To build the simulation data, we need to integrate the CAD information with manufacturing models such as machining process simulation models upstream with concurrent engineering activities. In this case, there are two problems. One is the data interfacing problem due to various CAD data format (Iyer, Arjun, 2002). The other is the size

of the integrated CAD data. For the data format problem, we used simple STL (Stereolithography) format as a data interface. For the data size, we will discuss in this paper.

Simulation data for the production line consists of hundreds of CAD data for each device, robot and part. Each CAD data can be some hundred megabytes when represented in STL format. Even for a small cell, the size of direct sum of CAD data can reach several gigabytes. As a matter of fact, this approach is not applicable for production line or whole plant even we take consideration of the high performance of the modern computer hardware.

The purpose of the CAD data is different from that of the simulation data. The main purpose of CAD data is to produce the model by verifying the shape and checking the static interference between assembled parts. It contains very detailed level of geometry like small sized holes and small parts like bolts and nuts, which results in a big size of the data. On the other hand, simulation data needs not be

described so detail. Though, it depends on the simulation purpose, generally speaking, simulation data needs far less level of detail compared to that of the CAD data. In a large scale simulation like manufacturing process simulation or whole plant simulation, we assume that the operations which need high accuracy already have been verified on a cell level using OLP(off line programming). It means, the error tolerance of the geometry for the simulation data can be larger than that of CAD data. Using the increased error tolerance, we can reduce the size of CAD data. In this paper, we assume that

- 1) 3D CAD data is available for simulation.
- 2) In some cases, we assume that OLP program data is available, like IGRIP or RobCAD for the devices which has kinematic information like robots or jig fixtures.
- 3) Triangular mesh is used for solid geometry handling for various CAD data interface.
- 4) We do not assume any restriction for the relationship between original CAD data and converted triangular mesh geometry hierarchy by IGRIP or RobCAD.
- 5) We assume developing our own simulation software to adopt our simulation data.

2 REUSING 3D CAD DATA

We are developing manufacturing process simulation software called PlcStudio. It is divided into two major modules called generic kernel and graphic module. The generic kernel is used to build logical model of the manufacturing process. It uses either software PLC(Programmable Logic Control) or hardware PLC to control and verify the manufacturing process, and interfaces graphic module to display the simulation results and/or to get the sensory information (Chang Mok Park, 2006).

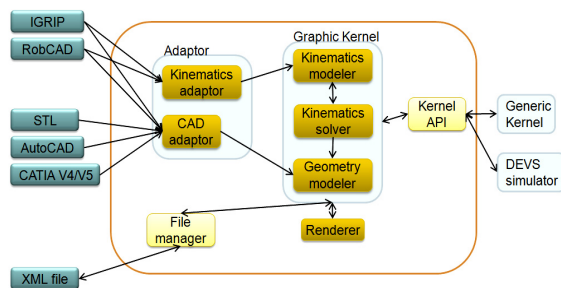


Figure 1: Graphic module architecture.

Graphic module gets the geometry information from the CAD file generated by the CAD software

like AutoCAD or CATIA. Similarly, it can get both the geometry information and kinematic information from various OLP software like IGRIP or RobCAD.

2.1 Background and Related Work

There were many research for simplifying mesh for the curved surface. Michael *et al.* summarized these efforts into 3 classes (GarlandM, 1997). Vertex decimation, vertex clustering and iterative edge contraction. They suggested pair contraction method using a quadric error calculation. The implementation of the idea is available as an open source, and it shows nice performance for the curved surface. In many cases, the geometry of device for the production line does not contain curved surface. Therefore this approach is not effective for device CAD model. For device CAD model, it is more plausible to use geometric features only if we can extract them.

2.2 Classification of CAD Data

If we have to build simulation data from the CAD files, the size of total simulation data grows exponentially. We can effectively reduce the size of CAD data based on the features

Conceptually, CAD data can be divided into two groups. The one is manufacturing devices like robots, jigs, conveyors etc., which contains few curved surfaces. The other is parts or workpieces, which contains lots of curved surface. For the convenience, we call the former as *device CAD model* and the latter as *workpiece CAD model*.

2.2.1 Device CAD Model

Device CAD model data has the following characteristics.

- 1) Has few curved surface :
In almost case, it can be represented with the combination of box, cylindrical frustum, sphere etc.
- 2) Has lots of primitives :
Contains lots of cylinders, boxes etc.
- 3) Has lots of small part :
It contains lots of small parts like bolts and nuts, which are not necessary for simulation purpose.
- 4) Has lots of holes :
The purpose of the device CAD model is to manufacturing the device itself, so it contains lots of holes for bolts and nuts for part assembly.

5) It contains inner part data :

In many cases, device CAD model data contains invisible inner part data, which are not necessary for simulation purpose.

2.2.2 Workpiece CAD Model

In many cases, workpieces have lots of curved surface. For car assembly line, almost every workpieces have smooth surface, like body, side, door, hood, fender etc. The CAD model for this workpieces are far more bigger than that of the device CAD model, because it represents smooth surface using triangular mesh. Typically, CAD model for car door exceeds some hundreds mega-bytes, while the size of device CAD model for robots is some mega-bytes.

Due to the different characteristics, we apply different methods to reduce the size of CAD model.

2.3 Reducing Device CAD Model Size

After converted by various software, the structural information for the geometry data can be lost. This makes it difficult to go further processing for geometry handling. However, it is relatively easier to detect geometric features from device CAD model rather than workpiece CAD model.

We used the geometric features extracted from device CAD model to reduce data size.

2.3.1 Replacing the Primitives

In many cases, the device CAD model contains lots of primitives like cylinder, sphere etc. For replacing cylinders, we assume that a n -side cylinder representation in the CAD model is an approximation of the pure logical cylinder which has infinitely large n .

A cylinder consists of top, bottom and n -side faces, where $n \geq 3$. A cylinder with n -side consists of $4n-4$ triangles. A cylinder contained in the device CAD model typically has large n value. By detecting this cylinder geometry and reducing the n , we can reduce the size of data.

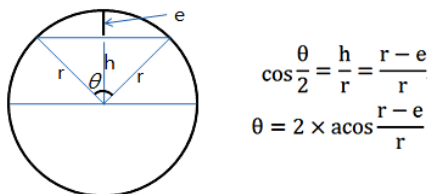


Figure 2: Calculation of n -side for cylinder.

Figure 2 shows how many number of cylinder sides we can reduce, when the final error tolerance e for simulation data is given. Using the radius r of the pure logical cylinder and error tolerance e , we can calculate maximum θ for reduced cylinder. The reduced cylinder has $360/\theta$ side faces.

Though this method is quite effective, it is difficult to apply in real situation, because it is hard to identify cylinder geometry from unstructured triangular meshes. For sphere, it is more difficult to identify. So this method is only applicable when the CAD data contains structural information and we can identify them.

Another problem for this method is after replacing into the simple geometry, some parts attached to the original cylinder side surface can be dangling on a replaced cylinder.

2.3.2 Removing Small Parts

The device CAD model contains lots of small components needed for part assembly. Small bolts and nuts are one of those things. If these parts are so small that the size is less than the error tolerance for the simulation, we can safely remove them.

But in this case, it is not always possible to identify small parts from unstructured triangular meshes.

2.3.3 Removing Small Holes

The effect of removing holes from the geometry is quite potential. A cube without hole can be represented with 12 triangles, while a cube with one hole of n side needs $4n + 8$ triangles. ($n+4$ for top, $n+4$ for bottom, $2n$ for side) If a hole is consists of 20 sides, the number of triangles reaches $4*20+8 = 88$, which is more than 7 times of 12. If number of holes increases, the number of triangles increases rapidly.

The hole removing algorithm is difficult to implement, because it is not always possible to identify holes from unstructured meshes. For this reason, first we detect small inner circle from a surface. It is relatively easy to implement even if we don't have structural information.

Step 1: Group faces which exists in a same plane. That means, the faces has the same plane equation, and they are inter-connected.

Step 2: merge the grouped faces

Step 3: Trace boundary edges from the merged face

Step 4: Identify outmost boundary edges

Step 5: Using the boundary edges, re-triangulate the surface.

By applying these steps, we can easily remove any circle in a plane, but it can only remove top or bottom of the hole, whereas the wall of the cylinder still remains. These cylinder walls are hard to identify from unstructured set of meshes. These walls can be further removed by visibility check routine explained later.

2.3.4 Removing Invisible Parts

In many cases, CAD model contains invisible parts. Components or parts of a component placed below other component are invisible from user. For example, the engine installed in a car is not visible to the user unless the hood is open. In a simulation, these invisible components need not be rendered. After applying hole removal process, the cylinder walls of the hole geometry are not removed, yet. These wall are invisible to the user, so it can be removed by applying visibility checking, too.

Deciding whether a given geometry is visible from a given camera position or not requires quite large computation and the implementation of the algorithm is not simple. With the aid of modern graphic card functionality, we can successfully distinguished invisible parts from visible parts (Sang C. Park, 2005). This method is easy to implement and it is fast enough to apply, because it uses hardware function.

We take a shot for the scene while moving the camera position. The typical camera positions looking at the scene are 6 cubic directions plus 8 corner positions. Cubic directions are TOP, BOTTOM, FRONT, REAR, LEFT and RIGHT directions. Corner directions are top-front-left, top-front-right, top-rear-left, top-rear-right, bottom-front-left, bottom-front-right, bottom-rear-left and bottom-rear-right directions as depicted in figure 3.

After taking shots at a given camera positions, we collectively combine all shots, and mark(remember) all visible parts. On the whole scene, parts which is not marked as visible forms invisible parts. The camera positions are heuristically determined, and there are cases that given camera positions can't distinguish invisible parts. But in many cases, 6 cubic angle point and 8 additional corner point is enough to distinguish visibility property.

These process can be implemented by drawing each entities with unique color onto the back-buffer, while moving the camera positions, and read each pixel value back from back-buffer, and checking the color value as a unique key.

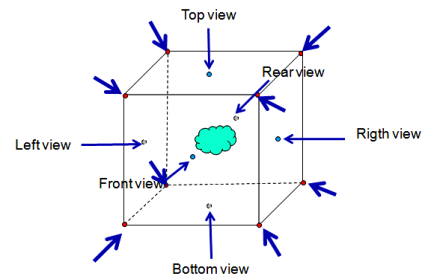


Figure 3: Camera positions to view the scene.

By using graphic hardware for deciding visibility, we need not implement the visibility algorithm and it can be computed very fast. The visibility checking algorithm implemented in a graphic card is widely tested by vendor for a long period of time, so it is well verified algorithm. We can use the algorithm almost for free. In addition, modern graphic card can draw millions of triangles in a second. It means that we can compute the visibility for a large scene in a very short time.

Next figure shows the result of data reduction by removing invisible parts after removing small parts and holes.

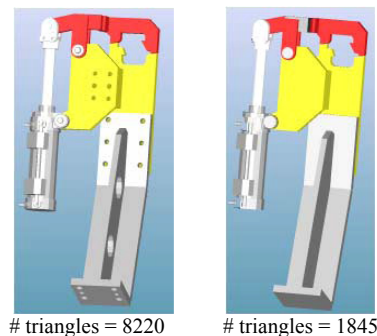


Figure 4: Processing result: before and after.

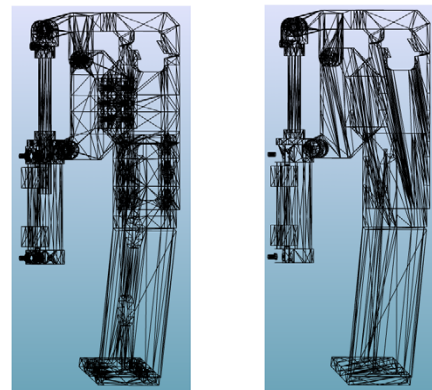


Figure 5: Mesh view: before and after.

2.4 Reducing Workpiece CAD Model Size

Workpiece CAD model which contains very complicated surface is not proper to apply the proposed algorithm. The proposed algorithm is based on the features extracted from 3D CAD model. It is almost impossible to identify features from the workpiece CAD model containing curved surfaces. So we can use well known mesh simplification methods like decimation to the curved surface.

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The proposed methods are based on the feature extraction of the CAD model. Extracting primitives from the CAD is not always successful. If the CAD keeps the information about the primitive, we can easily extract them and we can apply the methods. But in general case, we can't assert that information is available. Identifying small parts has the same problem. But, identifying the holes and removing invisible parts works very well even the CAD data does not keep any information about the feature. It can even be extracted from raw triangular mesh.

The next table shows the result of reducing cell data which contains 16 devices. We only applied non curved surface reduction algorithm for this result.

Table 1: CAD data reduction result.

| | Original data | Reduced data | Ratio(%) |
|-------------|---------------|--------------|----------|
| # devices | 16 | 16 | 100 |
| # solid | 4,567 | 2,966 | 64.94 |
| # mesh | 86,833 | 24,170 | 27.84 |
| # triangles | 3,316,146 | 600,478 | 18.11 |

4 CONCLUSIONS

When we have to construct 3D simulation data from CAD data, we have difficulties for the size of the CAD data. In the proposed method, we used an hole removal and visibility checking algorithm to reduce the data size. This method is easy to implement and very fast because it utilizes graphic hardware functionality. If the original CAD data contains more information for solid identification, we can further apply the methods by replacing the geometries. These methods applied to non-curved surface do not distort the original shape except that it

removes the holes and small parts, which are smaller than the simulation tolerance error. Using these methods, we can reduce the size of the sample production line by 20% of the original data. In our future work, we plan to develop improved method to identify features from unstructured triangular mesh.

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