

MARCHING CUBES: A HIGH RESOLUTION 3D SURFACE CONSTRUCTION ALGORITHM

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Abstract

We present a new algorithm, called *marching cubes*, that creates triangle models of constant density surfaces from 3D medical data. Using a divide-and-conquer approach to generate inter-slice connectivity, we create a case table that defines triangle topology. The algorithm processes the 3D medical data in scan-line order and calculates triangle vertices using linear interpolation. We find the gradient of the original data, normalize it, and use it as a basis for shading the models. The detail in images produced from the generated surface models is the result of maintaining the inter-slice connectivity, surface data, and gradient information present in the original 3D data. Results from computed tomography (CT), magnetic resonance (MR), and single-photon emission computed tomography (SPECT) illustrate the quality and functionality of *marching cubes*. We also discuss improvements that decrease processing time and add solid modeling capabilities.

CR Categories: 3.3, 3.5

Additional Keywords: computer graphics, medical imaging, surface reconstruction

1. INTRODUCTION.

Three-dimensional surfaces of the anatomy offer a valuable medical tool. Images of these surfaces, constructed from multiple 2D slices of computed tomography (CT), magnetic resonance (MR), and single-photon emission computed tomography (SPECT), help physicians to understand the complex anatomy present in the slices. Interpretation of 2D medical images requires special training, and although radiologists have these skills, they must often communicate their interpretations to the referring physicians, who sometimes have difficulty visualizing the 3D anatomy.

Researchers have reported the application of 3D medical images in a variety of areas. The visualization of complex

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acetabular fractures [6], craniofacial abnormalities [17,18], and intracranial structure [13] illustrate 3D's potential for the study of complex bone structures. Applications in radiation therapy [27,11] and surgical planning [4,5,31] show interactive 3D techniques combined with 3D surface images. Cardiac applications include artery visualization [2,16] and non-graphic modeling applications to calculate surface area and volume [21].

Existing 3D algorithms lack detail and sometimes introduce artifacts. We present a new, high-resolution 3D surface construction algorithm that produces models with unprecedented detail. This new algorithm, called *marching cubes*, creates a polygonal representation of constant density surfaces from a 3D array of data. The resulting model can be displayed with conventional graphics-rendering algorithms implemented in software or hardware.

After describing the information flow for 3D medical applications, we describe related work and discuss the drawbacks of that work. Then we describe the algorithm as well as efficiency and functional enhancements, followed by case studies using three different medical imaging techniques to illustrate the new algorithm's capabilities.

2. INFORMATION FLOW FOR 3D MEDICAL ALGORITHMS.

Medical applications of 3D consist of four steps (Figure 1). Although one can combine the last three steps into one algorithm, we logically decompose the process as follows:

1. Data acquisition.

This first step, performed by the medical imaging hardware, samples some property in a patient and produces multiple 2D slices of information. The data sampled depends on the data acquisition technique.

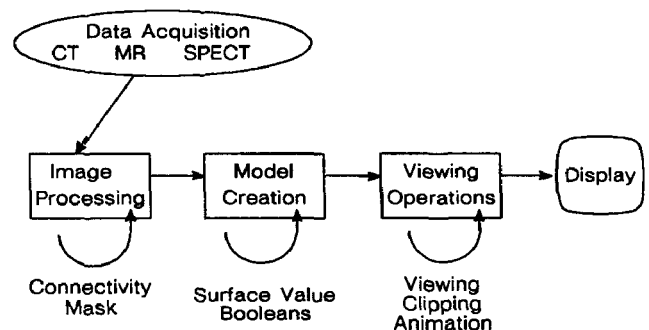


Figure 1. 3D Medical Information Flow.