

An approach to achieving optimized complex sheet inflation under constraints

Abstract

Sheet inflation is an enhanced and more general version of the classic pillowining procedure[1] used to modify hexahedral meshes. The flexibility of sheet inflation makes it a valuable tool for hex mesh generation, modification and topology optimization. However, it is still difficult to generate self-intersecting sheet within a local region while assuring the mesh quality. This paper proposes an approach to achieving optimized complex sheet inflation under various constraints. The approach can generate complex sheets that intersect themselves more than once and guarantee the quality of the resultant mesh. We successfully apply this approach to mesh matching and mesh boundary optimizing.

Keywords: hex mesh; sheet inflation; mesh optimization; mesh modification; mesh matching

1. Introduction

In finite element analysis, hexahedral meshes are usually preferred to tetrahedral meshes due to higher accuracy, faster convergence and lighter storage[2, 3]. Therefore, many researchers have been committed to the research of hex meshing for decades. Although there has been tremendous progress in this area, perfect solutions are still eluding for hex mesh generation, modification and topological optimization. The main reason for the difficulties is that local modification inevitably influence the whole hex mesh due to the inherent global connectivity of hex mesh[4, 5, 6, 7]. Figure 1 shows an example that even though we want to make small local modification as adding one new quad to the boundary of the hex mesh(Fig. 1(b)), a circle of quads on the boundary (Fig. 1(c)) as well as a set of hex have to be generated in order to keep the hex mesh valid (Fig. 1(d)). The dual structures, which contribute to the global connectivity of hex meshes, are called sheets. The set of hex in Fig. 1(d) is actually a sheet.

More specifically, starting from one mesh edge, we recursively get all its topologically parallel mesh edges. All of these mesh edges along with the adjacent hex define a sheet. In addition to its primal representation as a composition of vertices, edges, faces and hexahedra, a hex mesh can also be seen as a set of intersecting sheets, known as Spatial Twisted Continuum[4]. Therefore, as a set of operations that directly and effectively deal with the sheets, sheet operations attract more and more attention in recent years. The most common sheet operations include pillowining[1], dicing[8], column collapse[9], sheet extraction[9, 10] and sheet inflation[9, 11, 12].

Sheet inflation takes a continuous quad set as input and generates a new sheet by inflating the quad set. The process of the sheet inflation is illustrated in Fig. 2. This continuous quad set (Fig. 2(b)) is called the quad set for sheet inflation (or quad set if not ambiguous in the context) which is provided by other procedures or specified directly by the user. Sheet inflation duplicates the nodes, edges, and quads on the quadset (Fig. 2(b)) and then forms new hexahedra by connecting the nodes in the

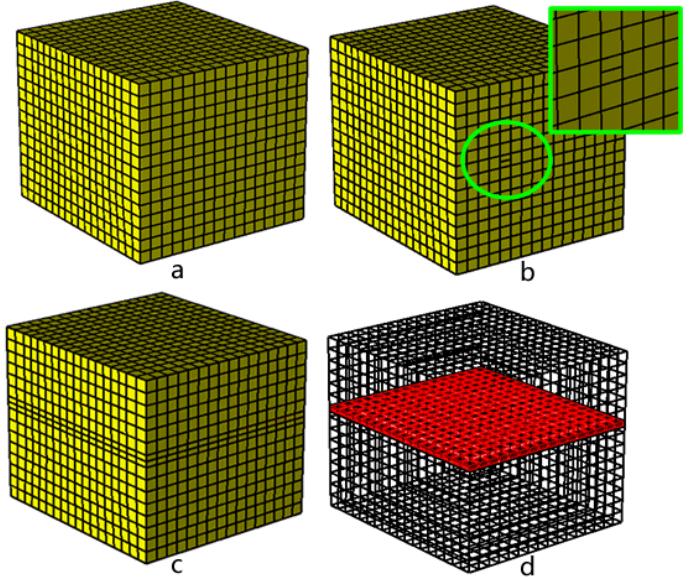


Figure 1: An example of local modification resulting in global change: (a) the original hex mesh; (b) local modification by adding a quad on the mesh boundary; (c) a circle of quads on the mesh boundary have to be added; (d) a set of hexahedra have to be added.

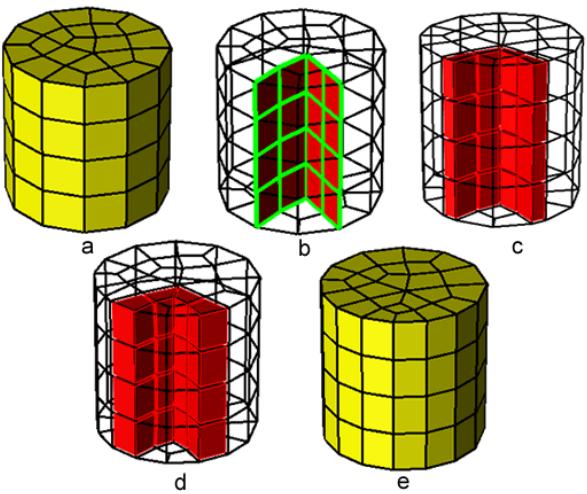


Figure 2: The procedures of sheet inflation: (a) the hex mesh before sheet inflation; (b) the quad set for sheet inflation; (c) the new sheet is created by inflating the quad set; (d) the new sheet is created; (e) the hex mesh after sheet inflation.

³⁸ quad set to their corresponding duplicates (Fig. 2(c) and Fig. 2(d)). The process of the sheet inflation shows that the quad set
³⁹ is critical for sheet inflation because it determines the position,
⁴⁰ shape and topology of the sheet to be generated by the sheet
⁴¹ inflation. And compared with pillowung, sheet inflation is more
⁴² flexible and versatile, having the potential ability to create any
⁴³ kind of sheets, provided that a suitable quad set can be deter-
⁴⁴ mined. Therefore sheet inflation can be used to support various
⁴⁵ hex mesh modification.

⁴⁷ Sheet inflation is a flexible and versatile sheet operation that
⁴⁸ can create various and complex sheets, and thus it can be uti-
⁴⁹ lized to effectively support many hex mesh modification sce-
⁵⁰ narios. One common scenario is to use sheet inflation to locally
⁵¹ change the mesh topology, especially the boundary topology of
⁵² a hex mesh. In this scenario, new sheets usually need to be
⁵³ created to satisfy certain constraints like at the specified pos-
⁵⁴ tion within a delimited region. As the quad set plays a key role
⁵⁵ for sheet inflation, the main difficulty to achieve this is how to
⁵⁶ construct a qualified quad set under the given constraints. In
⁵⁷ practice, these constraints are normally specified by a set of
⁵⁸ boundary edges and a set of hexahedra. The former determines
⁵⁹ the positions where the new sheet should appear on the mesh
⁶⁰ boundary, and the latter delimits the region where the new sheet
⁶¹ belongs to.

⁶² Figure 3 shows an example where such constrained sheet in-
⁶³ flation is required. In this example, the hex mesh (Fig. 3(a))
⁶⁴ contains one boundary node whose valence is 6 and it is unde-
⁶⁵ sirable. As shown in Fig. 3(b), this high valence can be reduced
⁶⁶ by splitting the node into two nodes with lower valences, and a
⁶⁷ constrained sheet inflation can be used to achieve this. Specif-
⁶⁸ ically, two mesh edges adjacent to the high-valence node are
⁶⁹ selected as the position constraint of the new sheet (Fig. 4(a))
⁷⁰ first, then a quad set is constructed (Fig. 4(b)), finally the new
⁷¹ sheet is inflated based on the quad set (Fig. 4(c))). The result is
⁷² shown in Fig. 4(e).

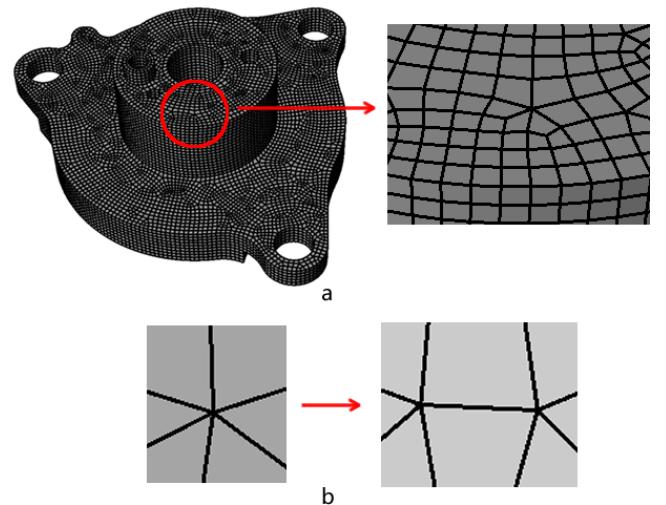


Figure 3: An example where boundary modification is required: (a) the hex mesh with a high-valence node; (b) the high valence is reduced by splitting the node into two nodes.

⁷³ Without region constraints being specified, the quad set may
⁷⁴ spread uncontrollably through the hex mesh, e.g. the quad set
⁷⁵ in Fig. 4(b). Inflating quad sets like this will impact almost the
⁷⁶ whole mesh. To localize the sheet inflation, region constraints
⁷⁷ need specifying by a set of hexahedra (yellow in Fig. 5(a)). The
⁷⁸ quad set is then constructed within that delimited region (Fig.
⁷⁹ 5(b)). Compared to Fig. 4(d), the localized sheet inflation will
⁸⁰ impact only a limited part of the hex mesh as shown in Fig.
⁸¹ 5(d).

⁸² In recognizing the importance of sheet inflation, many re-
⁸³ searchers have been investigating algorithms for decades and
⁸⁴ have achieved great progress. Mitchell et al. proposed the
⁸⁵ Pillowing algorithm to deal with the doublet problem[1]. Its
⁸⁶ simplicity and effectiveness makes Pillowing prevalent in mesh
⁸⁷ modification, especially in mesh quality improvement. Al-
⁸⁸ though it can be adapted to satisfy simple constraints, Pillow-
⁸⁹ ing lacks the ability to generate complex sheets such as self-
⁹⁰ intersecting sheets.

⁹¹ Suzuki et al. introduced a method to construct interior sheet
⁹² surfaces when the boundary dual cycles are given[13]. They
⁹³ used this method to first construct dual structures and then de-
⁹⁴ duce the primal hex meshes from these dual structures. While
⁹⁵ in the paper they illustrated the topological structures of sheet
⁹⁶ surfaces in the dual space, particularly self-intersecting sheet
⁹⁷ surfaces, they didn't mention how to determine the quad set
⁹⁸ and generate the corresponding sheets on the primal hex mesh.

⁹⁹ Staten et al. proposed the General Sheet Inflation method
¹⁰⁰ which explained in detail how to do sheet inflation on hex
¹⁰¹ meshes when boundary mesh edges are specified[9]. This
¹⁰² method can create normal, self-touching and self-intersecting
¹⁰³ sheets. However, Staten provides no details on how construct
¹⁰⁴ quad sets. While his theory supports self-intersecting and self-
¹⁰⁵ touching sheets, it is not clear whether his algorithm can gener-
¹⁰⁶ ate the required quad sets.

¹⁰⁷ Sheet inflation is an enhanced and more general version of

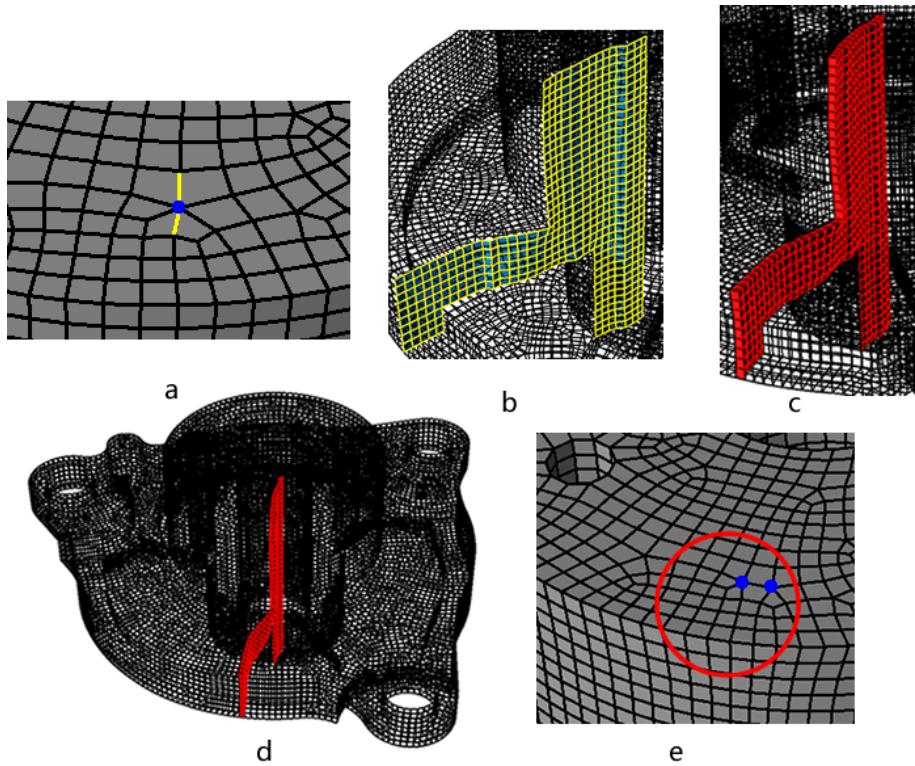


Figure 4: Reducing high valence by non-localized sheet inflation : (a) selected mesh edges where new sheet needs inflating; (b) the quad set for sheet inflation without local consideration; (c) the new sheet; (d) the new sheet (from the global perspective); (e) the high valence is reduced.

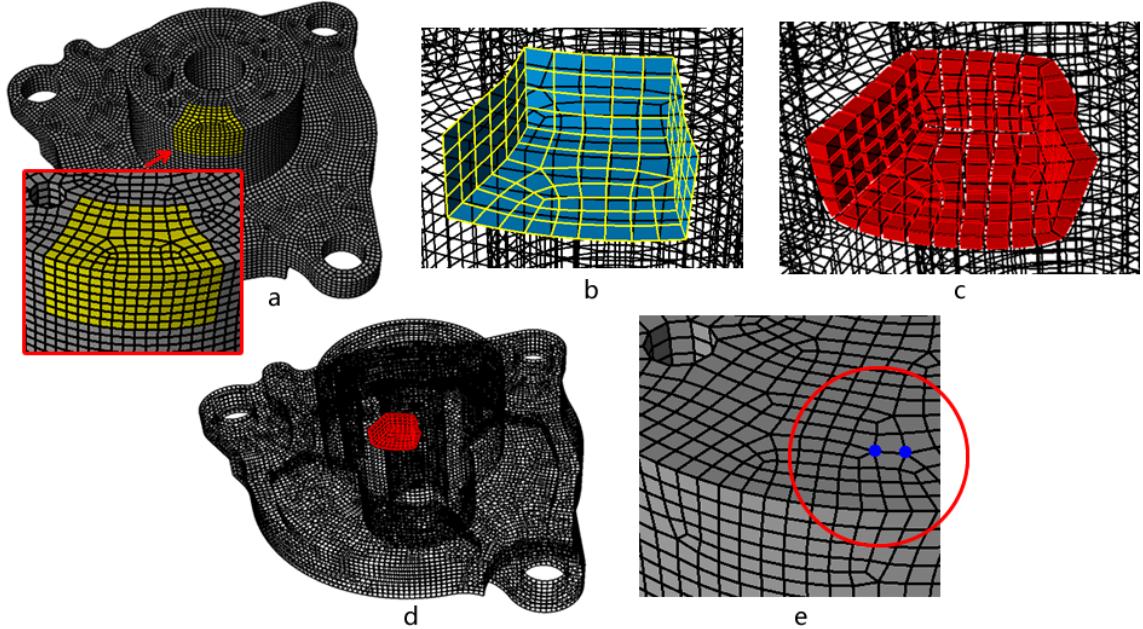


Figure 5: Reducing high valence by localized sheet inflation : (a) delimited region specified by a set of hex (yellow); (b) the localized quad set for sheet inflation; (c) the new sheet; (d) the new sheet is localized to the whole mesh; (e) the high valence is improved.

108 the classic pillowing. Pillowing actually can be seen as a spe-
 109 cial form of sheet inflation whose quad set is determined by the
 110 shared quad set between the shrinking set and the rest of the
 111 mesh.

112 Chen et al. proposed a new approach to inflate sheets when
 113 conducting mesh matching on complex interfaces[14]. This
 114 method first constructs the boundary loop of the quad set, and
 115 then determines the interior quad set. Although it can locally
 116 generate self-intersecting sheets under constraints, it allows the
 117 sheets to self-intersect no more than once. Meanwhile, the op-
 118 timization method it applies on quad set cannot guarantee the
 119 quality improvement.

120 Despite these achievements, to inflate complex sheets un-
 121 der various constraints, especially to generate self-intersecting
 122 sheets within a local region, is still very difficult. Furthermore,
 123 how to assure the mesh quality for complex sheet inflation is
 124 also a challenging problem. Here it should be pointed out
 125 that in many situations it is imperative to locally create self-
 126 intersecting sheets. For the example in Fig. 6(a), where a
 127 node's valence is 7, splitting method shown in Fig. 3(b) can
 128 not effectively reduce the high valence since the valence of one
 129 new node is still 6 (Fig. 6(b)). Thus, instead of selecting two
 130 adjacent edges, four adjacent edges need to be selected and the
 131 node needs to be split into four nodes as shown in Fig. 6(c),
 132 which requires a self-intersecting sheet be generated. Since the
 133 edge valences (the number of the quads that are adjacent to the
 134 edge) have significant impact on the quality of quad mesh and
 135 hex mesh[15], we use the irregular degrees (the edge's valence
 136 variance from a regular edge) of the quad set[14] to measure its
 137 quality in this work.

138 In this paper we propose a new approach to achieving com-
 139 plex sheet inflation by providing a new method of constructing
 140 complex quad sets. For a quad set, all its mesh edges on the hex
 141 mesh boundary form a loop/loops, called the quad set's bound-
 142 ary loop/loops. We first determine the boundary loop and utilize
 143 the max-flow-min-cut algorithm[16] to construct an initial quad
 144 set that fulfills all the constraints. We then apply a chord-based
 145 optimization method to improve the quality of the quad set and
 146 thus the mesh quality after sheet inflation is guaranteed.

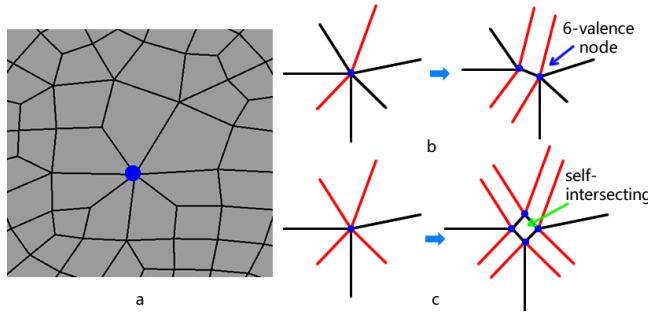


Figure 6: An example when a self-intersecting sheet is required to be generated: (a) the hex mesh with a high-valence node; (b) there is still a 6-valence node after splitting the node into two nodes; (c) the high valence is reduced by splitting the node into four nodes.

148 the outline of the approach in the second chapter, explain the
 149 procedures of constructing the boundary loops of quad sets in
 150 the third chapter, provide the details of the determination and
 151 optimization of the initial quad set in the fourth and fifth chap-
 152 ters respectively, and then give some results in the sixth chapter
 153 and list conclusions and future work in the last chapter.

154 2. Overview of the Approach

155 In this paper, an approach is proposed to achieving com-
 156 plex sheet inflation under various constraints while maximizing
 157 mesh quality. It takes a set of boundary mesh edges and a set
 158 of hexahedra as input. The edges specify the boundary position
 159 where the new sheet should appear. The hexahedra set refers to
 160 the delimited region where the new sheet belongs to. It is spec-
 161 ified by the user and used to achieve local sheet inflation. Un-
 162 der these constraints, it constructs a qualified quad set and then
 163 creates the new sheet as output. To avoid the difficulty of de-
 164 termining a qualified inflatable quad set directly, our approach
 165 involves three major steps: (1) determining the boundary loops
 166 for the quad set that satisfy the boundary constraints; (2) con-
 167 structing the initial quad set based on the boundary loops; (3)
 168 optimizing the initial quad set. Figure 7 shows the overview of
 169 our approach.

170 Our approach needs to solve two critical problems. The first
 171 problem is how to construct the valid boundary loop and ini-
 172 tial quad set satisfying various boundary constraints. Boundary
 173 constraints specified by the user can be either a loop or just a set
 174 of edges, a set of edges, and can be non-self-intersecting or in-
 175 tersecting itself more than once. The second problem is how to
 176 effectively optimize the initial quad set when a global optimal
 177 result can hardly be reached.

178 To solve these two problems, our basic ideas are:

- 179 1. We use path searching and max-flow-min-cut algorithms
 180 to construct the valid boundary loop and initial quad set
 181 that meet the various boundary constraints. In accordance
 182 with the inherent characteristics of valid boundary loops
 183 and quad sets, loops can be formed by the path searching
 184 algorithm if the boundary constraints are not loops, and
 185 intersecting lines on the quad set can also be determined
 186 by the path searching algorithm. The valid boundary loop
 187 and initial quad set can be effectively determined by the
 188 max-flow-min-cut algorithm due to the fact that the deter-
 189 mination of these structures on the mesh is analogous to
 190 finding a cut set on a graph;
- 191 2. We optimize the initial quad set by optimizing its chords,
 192 which are the dual structures of the quad set. The chords
 193 are more global than individual edges while less con-
 194 strained than the whole quad set. By optimizing the
 195 chords, we can effectively improve the quality of the quad
 196 set while avoiding the difficulty in optimizing the quad set
 197 as a whole.

198 In the following sections specific details of the major steps
 199 are provided.

147 The rest of this paper is organized as below: we will show

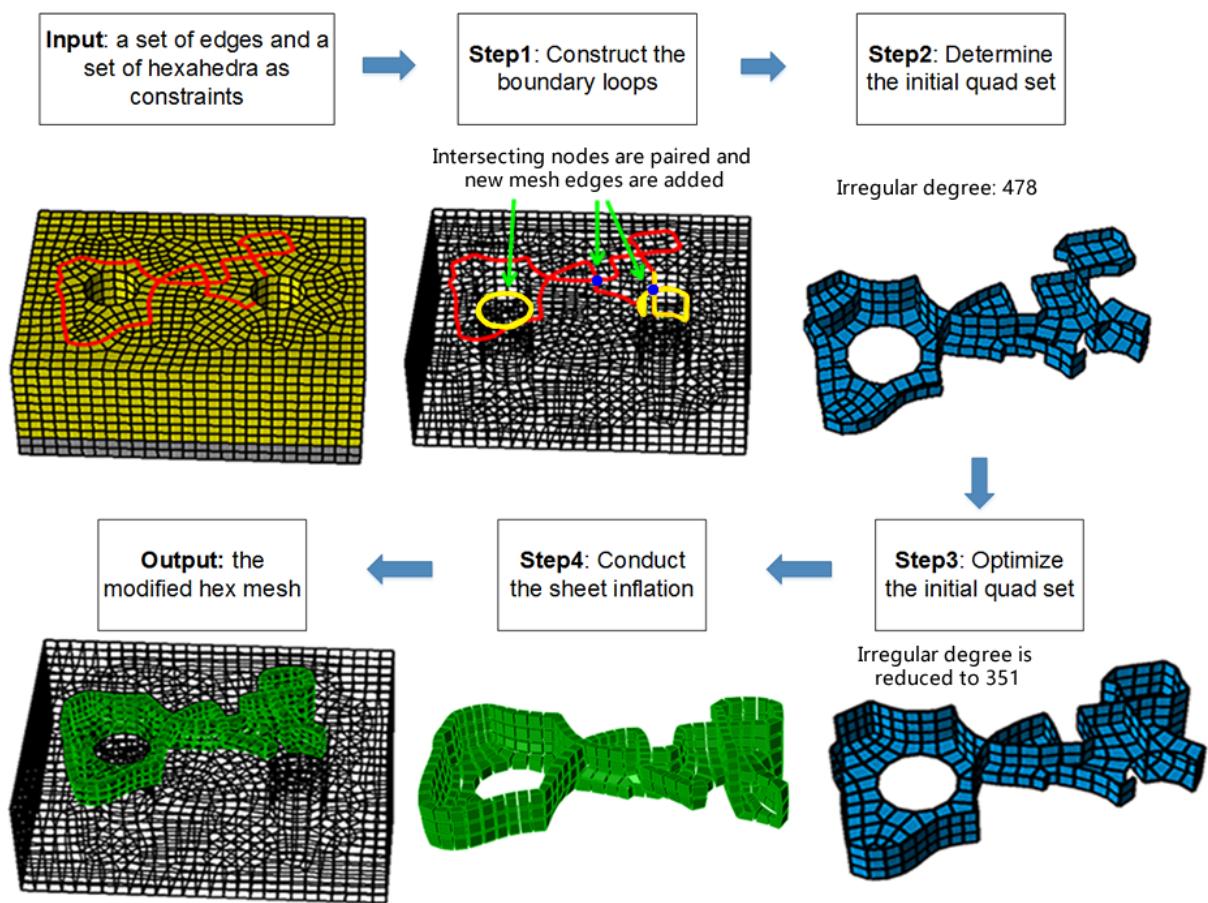


Figure 7: Flowchart of the optimized complex sheet inflation.

200 3. Determination of the Boundary Loops

201 It is quite difficult to find a qualified quad set satisfying all
202 the constraints directly. The quad set's boundary loop is con-
203 structed first. This section first discusses the characteristics
204 of valid boundary loops and quad sets, and then presents the
205 method to construct a valid boundary loop under the boundary
206 constraints.

207 By observation of the structures of valid quad sets and the
208 process of sheet inflation, an inflatable quad set and its bound-
209 ary loop have two characteristics:

- 210 1. An inflatable quad set separates its local hex set into $2 + N$
211 subsets, where N stands for how many times the quad
212 set intersects itself. For example, the non-self-intersecting
213 quad set in Fig. 8(b) separates the local hex set into two
214 parts (Fig. 8(c)). The self-intersecting quad set in Fig.
215 8(g) separates the local hex set into 3 subsets (Fig. 8h).
216 Meanwhile, the boundary loop of the quad set separates
217 the boundary of the local hex set into $2 + n$ subsets, where
218 n is the number of self-intersecting nodes on the boundary
219 loop. The non-self-intersecting boundary loop in Fig. 8(a)
220 separates the boundary of the local hex set into two sub-
221 sets (Fig. 8(d)), and the self-intersecting boundary loop in
222 Fig. 8(f) separates the boundary of the local hex set into 4
223 subsets (Fig. 8(i)).
- 224 2. Intersecting nodes on the boundary loop can be grouped
225 into pairs. An intersecting line on the quad set can be
226 found between two nodes in each pair.

227 The first characteristic, which is also called local separation,
228 means that the quad set separates the hex set that is local to the
229 quad set into a certain number of hex subsets. It is necessary
230 for a quad set to be inflatable, because the sheet inflation op-
231 eration is actually done by separating the hex subsets and filling
232 the gaps with new hexahedra, as shown in Fig. 8(c), Fig. 8(e),
233 Fig. 8h and Fig. 8(j). It also indicates that the boundary loops
234 must be closed otherwise new hexahedra on the mesh boundary
235 will not be correctly created. The second characteristic also in-
236 dicates that each intersecting node on the boundary loop needs
237 to be paired with another intersecting node in order to deter-
238 mine an intersecting line, which means there should be an even
239 number of intersecting nodes on the boundary loop. This also
240 indicates that a boundary with loop with an odd number of in-
241 tersecting nodes is invalid for constructing a quad set for sheet
242 inflation.

243 Based on the above analysis, we check whether the specified
244 constraint edges are eligible to be a valid boundary loop. If not,
245 we use the path searching algorithm and max-flow-min-cut al-
246 gorithm to determine a valid boundary loop. The flowchart of
247 the determination of boundary loops is shown in Fig. 9. Note
248 that E in Fig. 9 denotes the constraint mesh edges specified by
249 the user. The rest of this section will provide detailed descrip-
250 tion about the method of the determination of boundary loops.

251 3.1. Pairing Intersecting Nodes

252 For self-intersecting quad sets, the intersecting line plays a
253 very important role in defining the structures of the quad sets,

254 which is a piecewise continuous set of edges interior to the hex
255 mesh connecting a pair of intersecting nodes. Therefore, the
256 intersecting nodes on the boundary lines need to be paired in
257 order to construct the intersecting line between each pair of
258 intersecting nodes. When there are more than two intersecting
259 nodes, improper pairing of intersecting nodes can result in non-
260 orientable surface with very poor quality or even no surface at
261 all[13]. Based on the observation about the structures of quadri-
262 lateral sets, we introduce two types of local intersecting struc-
263 tures that can be used to effectively pair intersecting nodes. By
264 recursively searching these two types of local intersecting struc-
265 tures from the input boundary mesh edges, properly pairing of
266 intersecting nodes can be achieved.

267 On various intersecting quad sets, two types of local inter-
268 secting quad subsets are commonly observed which are shown
269 in Fig. 10(a) and Fig. 10(f). These two types of quad subsets
270 both have one intersecting line and two intersecting nodes on
271 their boundary loops. The topological structures of their bound-
272 ary loops are shown in Fig. 10(d) and Fig. 10(i). Conversely, if
273 a local intersecting structure of the mesh edges is found to share
274 the same topology with that shown in Fig. 10(d) or Fig. 10(i),
275 there should be a corresponding local intersecting quad subset.
276 Hence, it is reasonable to pair the two intersecting nodes on
277 this local part of the mesh edges, which will not result in the
278 improper pairing mentioned in [13].

279 To recursively find pairs of intersecting nodes, the local topo-
280 logical structures are modified accordingly as shown in Fig.
281 10(e) and Fig. 10(j). Currently, we treat these two local inter-
282 secting structures equally and use a depth-first strategy to search
283 and handle the two types of local intersecting structures, which
284 means if we find either local intersecting structure, we pair its
285 two intersecting nodes involved in the structure and modify it
286 at once until no more intersecting nodes can be paired.

287 Some structures near the intersecting lines or intersecting
288 nodes are very important for determining the quad set later.
289 The hexahedra adjacent to the intersecting lines are separated
290 into four subsets by the local structures of quad sets, as shown
291 in Fig. 10(b) and Fig. 10(g). These hex subsets are called int-4-
292 hex-sets of the intersecting line. The associated local structures
293 of boundary loops are shown in Fig. 10(c) and Fig. 10(h).
294 The quads of same color mean they are adjacent to the same
295 int-4-hex-set. The numbers in different colors on the two local
296 intersecting structures in Fig. 10(d) and Fig. 10(i) indicate the
297 corresponding int-4-hex-sets.

298 Two examples in Fig. 11 are presented to explain how to
299 pair intersecting nodes by searching these two local intersecting
300 structures.

301 The pairing process for the 1st example is shown in Fig. 12.
302 The intersecting nodes A and B are first paired according to
303 the 1st local intersecting structure. After topological structure
304 is modified, C and D are also paired according the 1st local
305 intersecting structure.

306 The pairing process for the 2nd example is shown in Fig. 13.
307 The intersecting nodes A and B are first paired according to the
308 2nd local intersecting structure. After topological structure is
309 modified, the nodes C and D are paired based on the 1st local
310 intersecting structure.

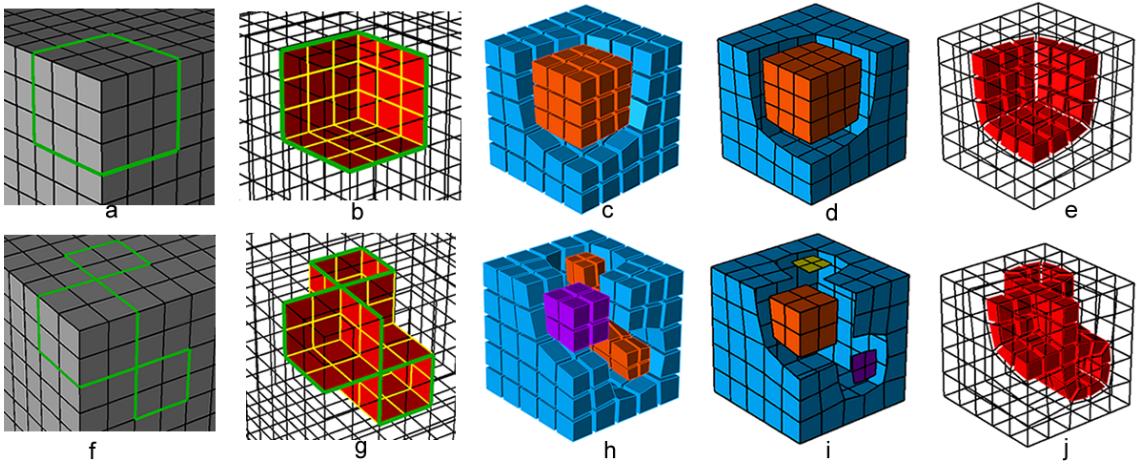


Figure 8: Characteristics of valid boundary loops: (a) a non-self-intersecting boundary loop; (b) the non-self-intersecting quad set; (c) two hex sets separated by the quad set; (d) two boundary quad sets separated by the boundary loop; (e) the new non-self-intersecting sheet; (f) a self-intersecting boundary loop; (g) the self-intersecting quad set; (h) three hex sets separated by the quad set; (i) four boundary quad sets separated by the boundary loop; (j) the new self-intersecting sheet.

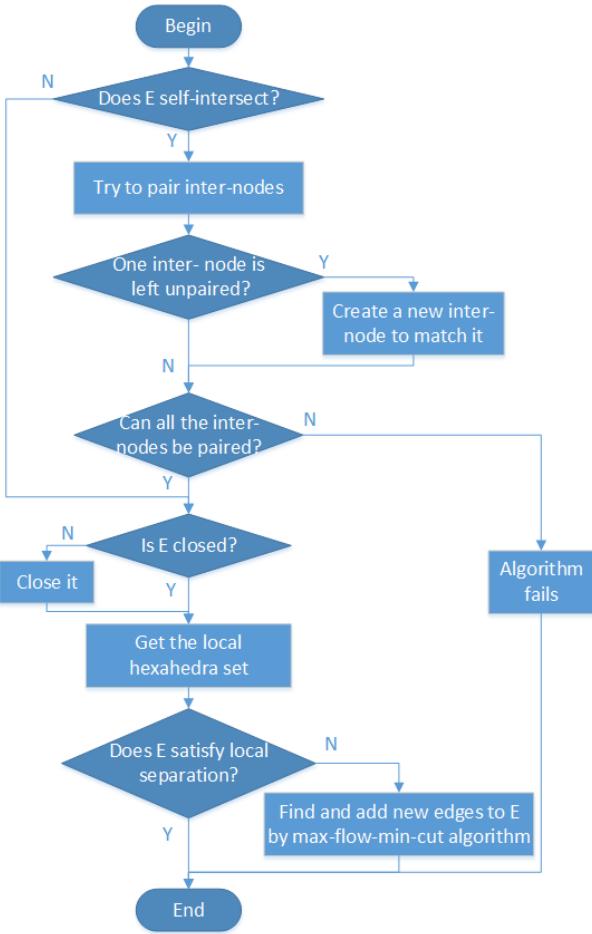


Figure 9: Flowchart of the determination of boundary loops.

311 After recursively searching these two local intersecting structures,
 312 if there is still one intersecting node left unpaired, we
 313 need to create a new intersecting node at an appropriate pos-
 314 ition in order to pair these two intersecting node according to
 315 the local intersecting structures. The creation can be automatic
 316 based on the topological information provided by the two types
 317 of local intersecting structures.

318 For example, in Fig. 14(a), the intersecting node A is un-
 319 paired. Since a substructure of the 1st intersecting structure can
 320 be found in current mesh edges, which contains a closed circle
 321 with a single intersecting node, the 1st intersecting structure is
 322 used to help us create the second intersecting node. First, we
 323 choose either end nodes on the current mesh edges, v in Fig.
 324 14(a) for instance. Second, from v we search for a suitable
 325 mesh node to be the second intersecting node B which should
 326 meet two requirements: 1) its node valence should be no less
 327 than 4 in order to be an intersecting node; 2) the distance be-
 328 tween B and v should be relatively equal to len (length from A
 329 to v as shown in Fig. 14(b)) to make B and A symmetrical to
 330 v which usually enhances the mesh quality. The second inter-
 331 secting node B is determined in Fig. 14(b). Third, according to
 332 the 1st local intersecting structure, the substructure at B is con-
 333 structed (Fig. 14(c)). At last, to achieve better symmetry, we
 334 extend the edge circle adjacent to B to the extent that encloses
 335 a similar number of quads as the circle adjacent to A as shown
 336 in Fig. 14(d).

337 Our algorithm would fail if some intersecting nodes are un-
 338 able to be paired according to the two local intersecting struc-
 339 tures. These boundary loops usually determine non-orientable
 340 quad sets[13] which will largely degenerate the mesh quality
 341 after sheet inflation. Therefore we do not handle such kind of
 342 boundary loops in this paper.

343 3.2. Forming Closed Boundary Loops

344 The ability to do local separation requires the constraint
 345 edges to form closed loops. Sometimes the constraint edges,

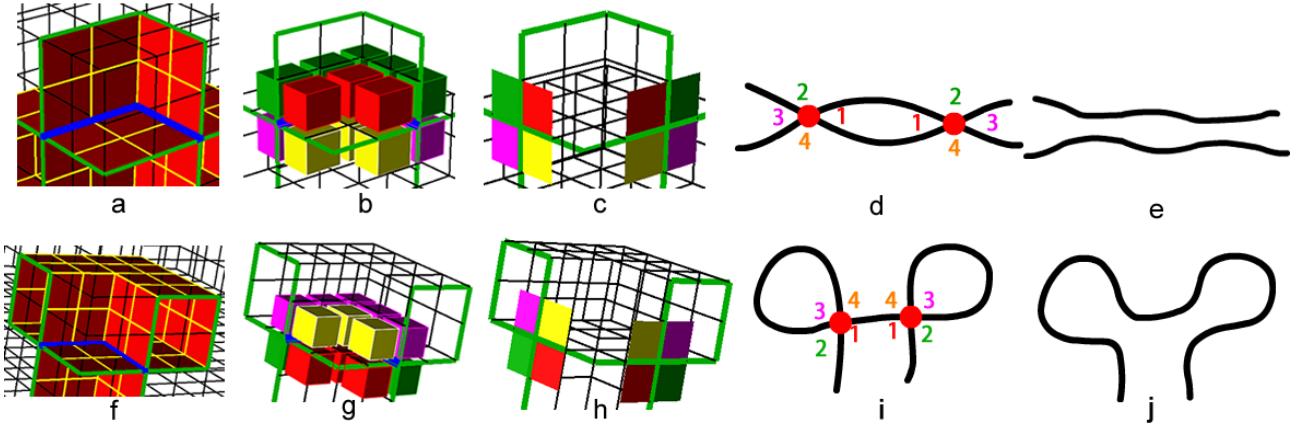


Figure 10: Two types of local intersecting structure for pairing intersecting nodes: (a) the 1st local intersecting quad subset; (b) int-4-hex-sets around the 1st local intersecting quad subset; (c) the 1st local intersecting structure of the boundary loop; (d) the pairing information of the 1st local intersecting structure; (e) the 1st local intersecting structure is resolved for recursive searching; (f) the 2nd local intersecting quad subset; (g) int-4-hex-sets around the 2nd local intersecting the quad subset; (h) the 2nd local intersecting structure of the boundary loop; (i) the pairing information of the 2nd local intersecting structure; (j) the 2nd local intersecting structure is resolved for recursive searching.

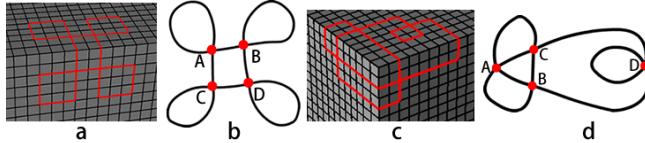


Figure 11: Two examples of pairing intersecting nodes: (a) the boundary loop of the 1st example; (b) the topological structure of the boundary loop of the 1st example; (c) the boundary loop of the 2nd example; (d) the topological structure of the 2nd example.

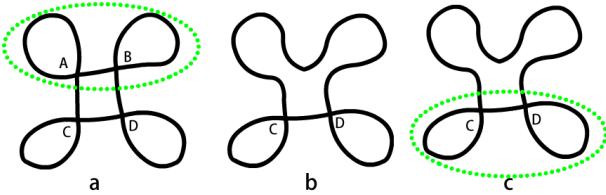


Figure 12: The pairing process of the 1st example: (a) node A and B are paired; (b) node A and B are resolved; (c) node C and D are paired.

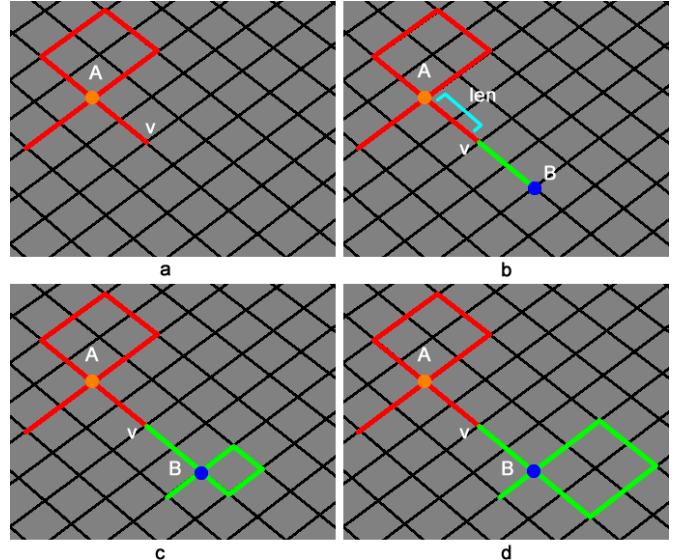


Figure 14: Handling of the situation when single intersecting node is unpaired: (a) intersecting node A is unpaired; (b) the new intersecting node B is determined; (c) the substructure adjacent to B is constructed; (d) the edge circle adjacent to B is expanded according to the size of the edge circle adjacent to A.

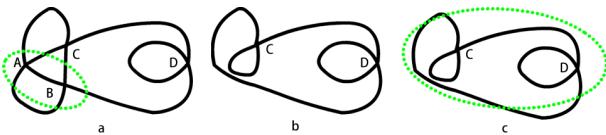


Figure 13: The pairing process of the 2nd example: (a) node A and B are paired; (b) node A and B are resolved; (c) point C and D are paired.

which are specified by the user according to specific mesh modification requirements, may not be closed loops. When this happens, we need to close the constraint edges by adding new edges on the mesh boundary. This is done by connecting the dangling edges on the constraint edges using the A* path searching algorithm[17].

A* path searching is a one-source-one-target path searching algorithm which runs very efficiently. It is an extension of the Dijkstra's algorithm[18]. The formalization of A* algorithm is shown in Equ. 1. Here, $g(n)$ is the known cost of getting from the initial node to n ; this value is tracked by the algorithm. $h(n)$ is a heuristic estimate of the cost to get from n to the target node. For the algorithm to find the actual shortest path, the heuristic function $h(n)$ should never overestimate the actual cost to get to the target node.

$$f(n) = g(n) + h(n) \quad (1)$$

Given two boundary mesh edges e_1 and e_2 and their common mesh node v , e_1 and e_2 separate v 's adjacent quads into two quad subsets Q_1 and Q_2 . The turning angle in this paper is the quad number variance between these two quad subsets, which can be calculated by Equ. 2 where $\|Q_1\|$ and $\|Q_2\|$ stand for the number of quads in Q_1 and Q_2 respectively.

$$ta(e_1, e_2) = \|Q_1\| - \|Q_2\| \quad (2)$$

For example, in Fig. 15(a), Q_1 and Q_2 contain 1 and 3 quads respectively. So $ta(e_1, e_2) = 2$. In Fig. 15(b), Q_1 and Q_2 both contain 2 quads. So $ta(e_1, e_2) = 0$.

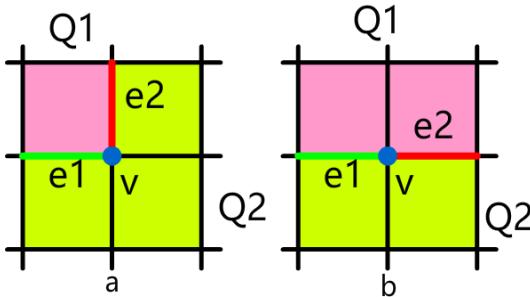


Figure 15: Turning angles between two boundary mesh edges: (a) the two edges separate the v 's adjacent to two quad subsets and $\|Q_1\| = 1$ and $\|Q_2\| = 3$; (b) the two edges separate the v 's adjacent to two quad subsets and $\|Q_1\|$ and $\|Q_2\|$ are both 2.

When applying A* algorithm, in addition to considering the count of mesh edges on the path, we also take the angles between adjacent edges on the path into consideration. This is necessary because if the turning angles are large, the mesh quality, especially the boundary mesh quality, will degenerate. Therefore, suppose the current mesh edges are E , the determined part in A* algorithm can be calculated using Equ. 3 where $\|E\|$ stands for the number of edges in E . The weight ρ controls the magnitude of how the turning angle impacts on the searching result. Usually $\rho = 1$ is feasible.

$$g(E) = \rho * \sum ta(e) + \|E\|, e \in E \quad (3)$$

For the heuristic part of A*, we use a breadth-first strategy to estimate at least how many mesh edges are needed to be traversed from current node to the target node. Since the breadth-first estimation only takes the number of traversed edges into consideration, it meets the requirement in A* algorithm that $h(n)$ should never overestimate the actual cost to get to the target node. For example, after conducting a breadth-first iteration, the minimum numbers of mesh edges that are needed to be traversed from a given mesh node to v_1 are shown in Fig. 16(a). Therefore $h(v_2) = 2$ and $h(v_3) = 4$.

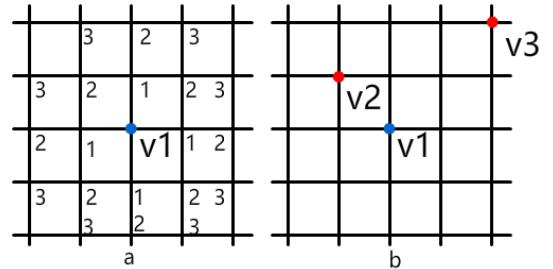


Figure 16: Estimation for the heuristic distance between two nodes: (a) the minimum distances are calculated by using a breadth-first iteration; (b) the heuristic distances of v_2 and v_3 regarding to v_1 are 2 and 4 respectively.

Figure 17(b) shows the result when the angles between adjacent edges are not considered, and Fig. 17(c) shows a better result when the angles are taken into consideration.

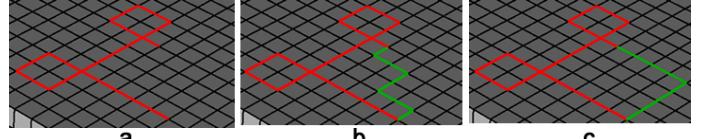


Figure 17: Closing the boundary loop: (a) the unclosed boundary loop; (b) new edges determined by A* algorithm without considering the turning angles; (c) new edges determined by A* algorithm considering the turning angles.

3.3. Making the Boundary Loop Able to Do Local Separation

After previous sections, the constraint edges specified by the user become a closed boundary loop with intersecting nodes being paired. According to the discussion in the beginning of Section 3, a valid boundary loop should be able to do local separation. Sometimes the closed boundary loop may fail to do local separation due to the existence of through holes on the hex mesh. To fix that, we use the max-flow-min-cut algorithm to add necessary edges to the boundary loop to make it able to do local separation. Suppose the boundary loop is E , the algorithm flowchart is illustrated in Fig. 18.

The following example illustrates the process. Figure 19(a) shows the hex mesh containing a through hole and the boundary loop E (red). To check whether E is able to do local separation, we first get E 's adjacent hex set H (Fig. 19(b)) and iteratively add H 's adjacent hexahedra to H and test whether the new boundary of H can be separated by E into two sub-sets before reaching the maximum iteration times (Fig. 19(c)).

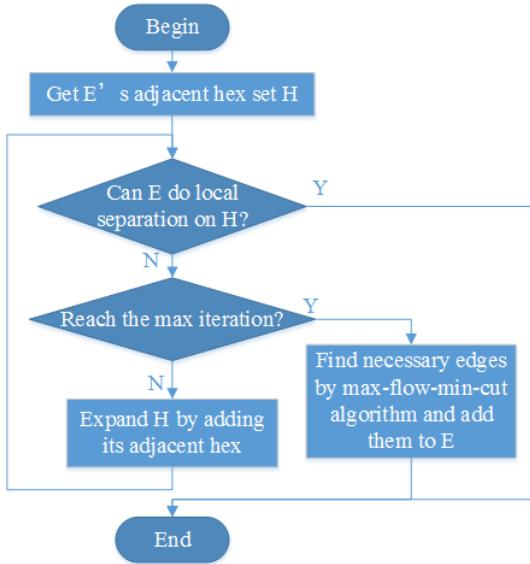


Figure 18: Flowchart of the process of making the boundary loop able to do local separation.

411 However, E is still unable to do local separation on H since
 412 there are still only one quad set (blue in Fig. 19(d)) on H 's
 413 boundary. Hence, we need to use the max-flow-min-cut algo-
 414 rithm to add other necessary mesh edges to E to make it able to
 415 do local separation.

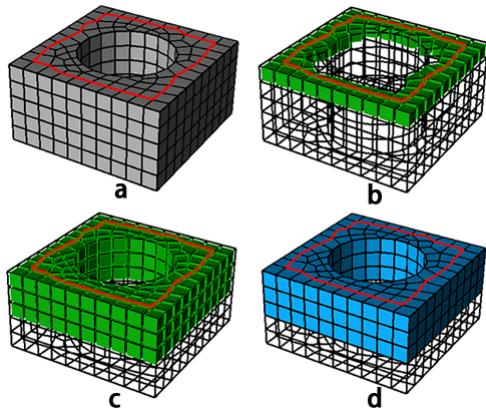


Figure 19: An example of boundary loops that are unable to do local separation:
 (a) the boundary loop E ; (b) E 's adjacent hexahedra H (green); (c) expand H by iteratively adding its adjacent hexahedra; (d) E still cannot separate H 's boundary into two subsets when reaching maximum expanding iteration times.

416 Max-flow-min-cut algorithm is an effective and efficient al-
 417 gorithm to find the minimal cut set in a directed graph. On a
 418 directed graph with weighted edges, i.e. a flow graph, the max-
 419 imum flow is the maximum amount of flow passing from the
 420 source (the s node) to the sink (the t node). And the minimum
 421 cut is the cut (a partition of the vertices of a graph into two dis-
 422 joint subsets) no more intersecting nodes can be paired. The
 423 max-flow-min-cut theorem states that given a flow graph and s
 424 and t nodes, the max-flow equals the min-cut.

425 As shown in Fig. 20(a), to use the max-flow-min-cut algo-
 426 rithm, a directed graph should be constructed with an s node
 427 and a t node, and the weights of the edges should also be set
 428 before calculation. The algorithm will find a minimal cut set
 429 that determines the max flow from s to t .

430 If we take the boundary of H as a graph where the nodes
 431 stand for a quad or a quad set and the edges stand for the ad-
 432 jacency relationship between the quads or quad sets, then to be
 433 able to do local separation is similar to find a cut set on this
 434 graph. Hence, the max-flow-min-cut algorithm can be used to
 435 help us to find necessary edges to make the boundary loop sat-
 436 isfy the local separation. Specifically, in this work, we use the
 437 Ford-Fulkerson[19] method to efficiently compute the maximum
 438 flow in a flow graph.

439 To use the algorithm, we need to construct the directed graph
 440 at first, including constructing the s and t nodes and deciding
 441 the edges' weights. As the current boundary loop E must be
 442 part of the final boundary loop, the two quad sets on its two
 443 sides just can be the s and t nodes as shown in Fig. 20(b). Since
 444 all of the edges on the final boundary loop should be on the
 445 boundary of the hex mesh, the quads shared by H and the rest
 446 of the hex mesh, which is shown as Q_{in} in Fig. 20(b), should be
 447 accordingly grouped into a single node in the graph to guarantee
 448 that Q_{in} won't be separated by the min cut. Additionally, mesh
 449 edges whose adjacent quads are all boundary quads should not
 450 be added into the boundary loop because it usually results in
 451 poor mesh quality if the quad set for sheet inflation contains
 452 boundary quads. Hence we group the quads sharing these mesh
 453 edges into a single node. For example, q_2 and q_3 in Fig. 20(c)
 454 are grouped into a single node.

455 After constructing the nodes, we assign weights to the graph
 456 edges according to how many mesh edges are shared by the
 457 two nodes. For example, q_1 in Fig. 20(c) shares two edges with
 458 node t , so the weight of the directed edges in the graph between
 459 q_1 and t is 2. There is one directed edge from s node to each
 460 of its adjacent nodes. Similarly, for each of t 's adjacent nodes,
 461 there is one directed edge from this node to t . For each pair of
 462 adjacent nodes, if they are neither s node nor t node, there is a
 463 pair of opposite directed edges with the same weight between
 464 the two nodes.

465 The final directed graph is shown in Fig. 20(d). After cal-
 466 culation, new edges are found as shown in Fig. 20(e), and now
 467 E is able to do local separation after adding these new edges as
 468 shown in Fig. 20(f).

469 When a self-intersecting boundary loop is unable to do local
 470 separation, we also need to apply max-flow-min-cut algorithm
 471 to find necessary new edges to make it able to do local separa-
 472 tion. The procedures are quite similar to non-self-intersecting
 473 boundary loop discussed previously. We treat a self-intersecting
 474 boundary loop as several non-self-intersecting boundary loops
 475 and handle each of them individually. The self-intersecting
 476 boundary loop in Fig. 21(a) consists of three sub loops $loop_1$,
 477 $loop_2$ and $loop_3$. The local hex set is shown in Fig. 21(b). Due
 478 to the existence of three through holes on the hex mesh, the
 479 boundary loop is unable to do local separation. After applying
 480 max-flow-min-cut algorithm to $loop_1$ and $loop_3$, new edges are
 481 found as shown in Fig. 21(c).

4. Determination of the Initial Quad Set

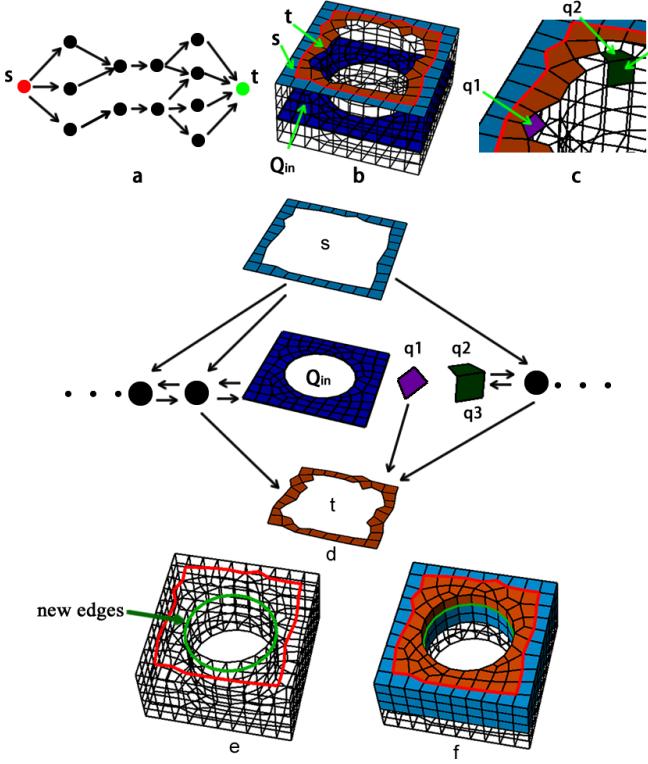


Figure 20: Using max-flow-min-cut algorithm to find necessary edges for local separation: (a) directed graph used for ordinary max-flow-min-cut problem; (b) the quad sets on E 's two sides can be s and t nodes; (c) q_1 shares two edges with t , q_2 and q_3 share an edge on the geometric hard edge; (d) the directed graph for max-flow-min-cut algorithm; (e) new edges are found (green); (f) E is able to do local separation after adding new edges.

This section provides specific details of the determination of the initial quad set based on the boundary loop. The intersecting lines are first constructed according to the pairing of the intersecting nodes. The initial quad set is then constructed using the max-flow-min-cut algorithm. Since the boundary loops satisfy the boundary constraints and the max-flow-min-cut algorithm is conducted within the local region specified by the user, the initial quad set fulfills all the constraints.

4.1. Determination of Intersecting Lines

Intersecting lines, each of which connect a pair of intersecting nodes, are very important for defining the structures of self-intersecting quad sets. Before determining the initial quad set, we need to construct the intersecting lines first. In Section 3.1 the two local intersecting structures not only make two intersecting nodes be paired but also setup the corresponding relationships between the int-4-quad-sets of the two intersecting nodes. In this section, we use this information to construct the intersecting lines and the int-4-hex-sets of these intersecting lines.

The following example shows the process of constructing the intersecting line and its int-4-hex-sets. In Fig. 22(a), the blue nodes are two intersecting nodes paired based on the 1st local intersecting structure (in this example they can also be paired according to the 2nd local intersecting structure), and the numbers and different colors denote the correspondence between the int-4-quad-sets of the two points. We use A* algorithm to determine the intersecting line between the two intersecting nodes. Similar to Section 3.2, in order to get a smooth path, we take the turning angles between adjacent edges in the path into consideration while applying the A* searching. The intersecting line is shown in Fig. 22(b). Next, we get all the hexahedra adjacent to the intersecting line, and use the correspondence between the int-4-quad-sets to construct the int-4-hex-sets as shown in Fig. 22(c) and Fig. 22(d).

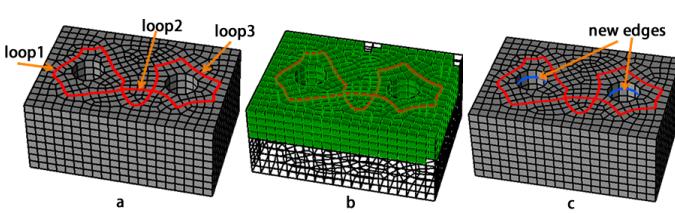


Figure 21: Making self-intersecting boundary loop able to do local separation: (a) the self-intersecting boundary loop with three sub loops; (b) the local hex set; (c) new edges (blue) are found by using max-flow-min-cut algorithm.

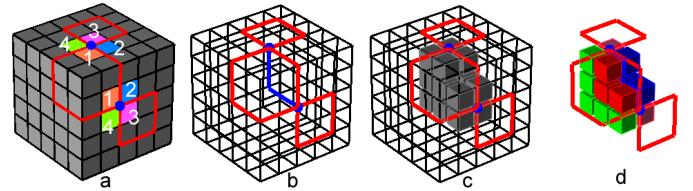


Figure 22: Process of constructing the intersecting line and its int-4-hex-sets: (a) two intersecting nodes paired based on the 1st local intersecting structure; (b) the intersecting line determined by A* algorithm; (c) the hexahedra adjacent to the intersecting line; (d) the int-4-hex-sets of the intersecting line.

4.2. Determination of Initial Quad Set by Max-flow-min-cut Algorithm

After constructing the intersecting lines and their int-4-hex-sets, we now construct the initial quad set. The idea is similar to that mentioned in Section 3.3, we convert the problem from being able to do local separation to acquiring min cut on a graph.

523 If we see the hexahedra as nodes and the adjacency between the
 524 hexahedra as edges of the graph, the quad set is actually a cut set
 525 of the graph. Hence, max-flow-min-cut algorithm can be used
 526 to efficiently get a quad set that is able to do local separation.
 527 This section provides specific details about this process.

528 As the boundary loop separates the boundary of the local hex
 529 set into $2 + n$ subsets (n is the number of intersecting nodes), we
 530 can get $2 + n$ hex sets that are adjacent to these $2 + n$ quad sets.
 531 From these $2 + n$ hex sets and the int-4-hex-sets of the inter-
 532 secting lines, we merge hex sets that share common hexahedra.
 533 This will result in $2 + N$ hex sets (N is the number of intersecting
 534 lines). We then apply the max-flow-min-cut algorithm multiple
 535 times to get the initial quad set. The pseudo-codes are provided
 536 in Algorithm 1.

Algorithm 1 Determination of the Initial Quad Set

Input: The boundary loop L and the local hex set H_{local} ;
Output: The initial quad set Q_{init} ;

- 1: $n =$ the count of self-intersecting nodes on L ;
- 2: $N =$ the count of intersecting lines;
- 3: Get the quad subsets on the boundary of H_{local} as $Q_{bound} = \{Q_{b1}, Q_{b2}, \dots, Q_{b2+n}\}$;
- 4: $H_{bound} = \{H_{b1}, H_{b2}, \dots, H_{b2+n}\}$ where H_i is the hex set adjacent to $Q_i, i = 1, 2, \dots, 2 + n$;
- 5: $H_{int} = \{H_{ini1}^1, H_{ini1}^2, H_{ini1}^3, H_{ini1}^4, \dots, H_{inN}^1, H_{inN}^2, H_{inN}^3, H_{inN}^4\}$ where $\{H_{ini1}^1, H_{ini1}^2, H_{ini1}^3, H_{ini1}^4\}$ is the int-4-hex-sets of the i th intersecting line;
- 6: $H_{merge} = H_{bound} \cup H_{int}$;
- 7: **while** $\exists H_{mi}, H_{mj} \in H_{merge}, i \neq j$ that $H_{mi} \cap H_{mj} = \emptyset$ **do**
- 8: Merge H_{mi} and H_{mj} ;
- 9: **end while**
- 10: $Q_{init} = \emptyset$;
- 11: **for** each $H_{mi} \in H_{merge}$ **do**
- 12: $H_{rest} = \bigcup\{H_{merge} - H_{mi}\}$;
- 13: Let H_{mi} be the s node and H_{rest} be the j node;
- 14: Perform the max-flow-min-cut algorithm and get the quad set Q_i ;
- 15: $Q_{init} = Q_{init} \cup Q_i$;
- 16: **end for**

537 Two examples are provided to illustrate the procedures of Al-
 538 gorithm 1. The first example is a non-self-intersecting boundary
 539 loop as shown in Fig. 23. n and N are both 0 for this example.
 540 The two quad subsets on the boundary of the local hex set H
 541 are Q_{b1} and Q_{b2} as shown in Fig. 23(c). We get the two hex
 542 sets adjacent to Q_{b1} and Q_{b2} as H_{b1} and H_{b2} (Fig. 23(d)). We
 543 construct the directed graph by taking H_{b1} as s node and H_{b2} as
 544 t node, taking other hexahedra as normal nodes, and assigning
 545 weights to the edges according to the number of quads shared
 546 by two hex sets. After running the max-flow-min-cut algorithm,
 547 we get the initial quad set Q_{init} as shown in Fig. 23(e).

548 The second example is a self-intersecting boundary loop as
 549 shown in Fig. 24. The boundary loop (red in Fig. 24(a))
 550 intersects itself once, hence $n = 2, N = 1$. We first get
 551 the int-4-hex-sets $i4h_1-i4h_4$ (Fig. 24(b)). The boundary of
 552 the local hex set H is separated into $Q_{b1}-Q_{b4}$ (Fig. 24(c)),
 553 and the hex sets adjacent to these quad subsets are H_{b1} -

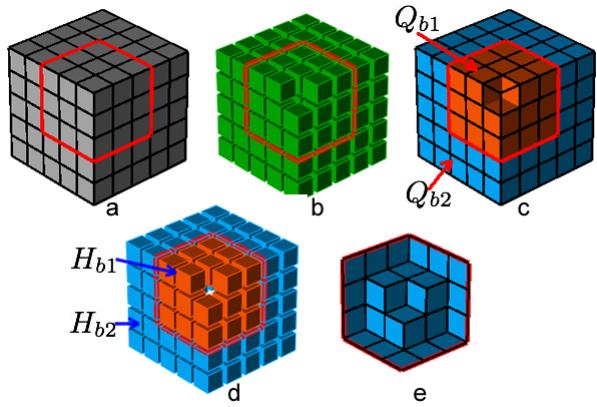


Figure 23: Process of the determination of the initial quad set from a non-intersecting boundary loop: (a) the non-intersecting boundary loop; (b) the local hex set; (c) the two boundary quad subsets Q_{b1} (orange) and Q_{b2} (blue); (d) two hex sets H_{b1} (orange) and H_{b2} (blue); (e) the initial quad set Q_{init} .

554 H_{b4} (Fig. 24(d) and Fig. 24(e)). Therefore $H_{merge} =$
 555 $H_{int} \cup H_{bound} = \{i4h_1, \dots, i4h_4, H_{b1}, \dots, H_{b4}\}$. After merging,
 556 $H_{merge} = \{H_{m1}, H_{m2}, H_{m3}\}$ (Fig. 24(f) and Fig. 24(g)). We then
 557 conduct the max-flow-min-cut algorithm twice. For the first
 558 time, we take H_{m1} as s node and $H_{m2} \cup H_{m3}$ as t node (Fig.
 559 24(h)), and get the quad set Q_1 (Fig. 24(i)). For the second
 560 time, we take H_{m2} as s node and $H_{m1} \cup H_{m3}$ as t node (Fig.
 561 24(j)), and get the quad set Q_2 (Fig. 24(k)). Finally the initial
 562 quad set is $Q_{init} = Q_1 \cup Q_2$ (Fig. 24(l)).

5. Optimization of the Initial Quad Set

564 Although the initial quad set determined by previous section
 565 satisfies all the constraints specified by the user, the quality of
 566 the mesh after sheet inflation is usually not good enough. In
 567 this paper we propose a new optimization method for the quad
 568 set based on the quad set's dual structures. In this section we
 569 discuss the details of this optimization method.

5.1. Quality Evaluation of the Quad Set

571 In a hex mesh, the valence of a mesh edge stands for the count
 572 of its adjacent quads. Staten et al. showed that the edge valence
 573 has direct impact on the mesh quality in [15]. For a mesh edge
 574 e inside the hex mesh, the ideal valence is 4 because this will
 575 make the average dihedral angle at the edge be 90° . When e
 576 is on the mesh boundary, however, the ideal valence will be
 577 different depending on the dihedral angle θ between the two
 578 boundary quads adjacent to that edge, which can be calculated
 579 using Equation 4.

$$IV(e) = \begin{cases} 2 & \text{if } 0^\circ < \theta \leq 135^\circ, \\ 3 & \text{if } 135^\circ < \theta \leq 225^\circ, \\ 4 & \text{if } 225^\circ < \theta \leq 315^\circ, \\ 5 & \text{if } 315^\circ < \theta < 360^\circ. \end{cases} \quad (4)$$

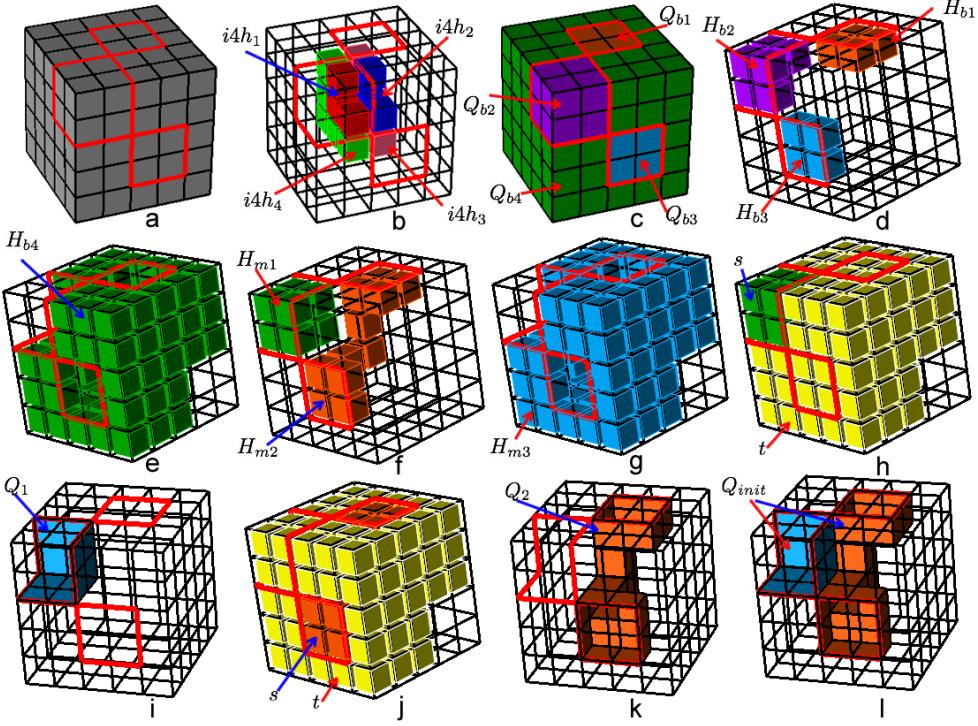


Figure 24: Process of the determination of the initial quad set from a self-intersecting boundary loop: (a) the self-intersecting boundary loop; (b) the int-4-hex-sets $i4h_1-i4h_4$ of the intersecting line; (c) the four quad subsets $Q_{b1}-Q_{b4}$ on the boundary of the local hex set separated by the boundary loop; (d) the hex sets $H_{b1}-H_{b3}$ adjacent to $Q_{b1}-Q_{b3}$ respectively; (e) the hex set H_{b4} adjacent to Q_{b4} ; (f) the hex set H_{m1} merging from $i4h_1$ and H_{b2} and H_{m2} merging from $i4h_3$, H_{b1} and H_{b3} ; (g) the hex set H_{m3} merging from $i4h_2$, $i4h_4$ and H_{b4} ; (h) take H_{m1} as s node and $H_{m2} \cup H_{m3}$ as t node; (i) the quad set Q_1 determined by the max-flow-min-cut algorithm; (j) take H_{m2} as s node and $H_{m1} \cup H_{m3}$ as t node; (k) the quad set Q_2 determined by the max-flow-min-cut algorithm; (l) the initial quad set $Q_{init} = Q_1 \cup Q_2$.

580 A mesh edge is called a regular edge if its edge valence is
 581 not ideal. Otherwise it is called an irregular edge. The irregular
 582 degree is the difference of valences between one edge and its
 583 corresponding regular edge. Suppose v_e stands for a mesh edge
 584 e 's valence, the irregular degree of e is computed as Equation
 585 5.

$$ID(e) = \|v_e - IV(e)\| \quad (5)$$

586 Therefore in this paper we use the edges' valences and irreg-
 587 ular degree to evaluate the quality of the quad set.

588 When creating new sheets, different quad sets have different
 589 impact on the quality of the mesh. In Fig. 25(a), before sheet
 590 inflation, $ID(e_1) = 0$; after sheet inflation, e_1 is splitted into
 591 two edges e_2 and e_3 and $ID(e_2) + ID(e_3) = 0$ as shown in Fig.
 592 25(c). However, if Q_2 (Fig. 25(d)) is inflated, although e_4 is a
 593 regular edge, the two edges splitted from e_4 are irregular edges
 594 as shown in Fig. 25(f), and $ID(e_5) + ID(e_6) = 2$. The inherent
 595 reason for the difference of irregular degrees is that Q_1 and Q_2
 596 separate the adjacent hex sets into different configurations as
 597 shown in Fig. 25(b) and Fig. 25(e).

598 Suppose e is an edge on quad set Q , and Q separates e 's ad-
 599 jacent hexahedra into two subsets H_1 and H_2 , then the variation
 600 between the irregular degrees of e and two edges splitted from
 601 e can be computed by Equation 6. $\|H_1\|$ and $\|H_2\|$ represent the
 602 numbers of hexahedra in H_1 and H_2 respectively. A negative
 603 ΔV_e means the mesh quality near e has been improved by the

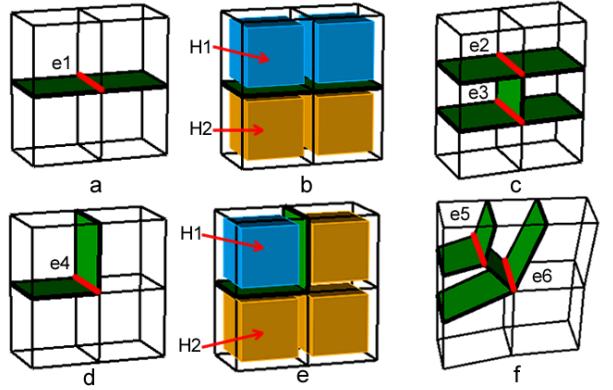


Figure 25: Different impacts on the mesh quality of different quad sets: (a) quad set Q_1 (green) and one of its mesh edges e_1 (red); (b) the hex set adjacent to e_1 is separated into two subsets H_1 and H_2 by Q_1 ; (c) e_1 is splitted into two edges e_2 and e_3 after inflation; (d) quad set Q_2 and one of its mesh edges e_4 ; (e) the hex set adjacent to e_4 is separated into two subsets H_1 and H_2 by Q_2 ; (f) e_4 is splitted into two edges e_5 and e_6 after inflation.

inflation, otherwise the mesh quality becomes worse. For example, in Fig. 25(d), $IV(e_4) = 4$, so $ID(e) = 0$. $\|H_1\| = 1$ and $\|H_2\| = 3$, so $\Delta V_e = 3 + 1 - 0 = 4$. $\Delta V_e > 0$ means that this inflation makes the mesh quality worse. Note that we do not need to explicitly calculate the irregular degrees of e_5 and e_6 since they are implicitly involved in $\|H_1\|$ and $\|H_2\|$.

$$\Delta V_e = \|H_1\| + \|H_2\| - ID(e) \quad (6)$$

If Q is non-self-intersecting, $E = \{e_1, e_2, \dots, e_n\}$ is the set of edges on Q where n is the count of the edges, Q 's variation of irregular degrees ΔV_Q can then be computed by Equation 7.

$$\Delta V_Q = \sum_{i=1}^n \Delta V_{e_i} \quad (7)$$

5.2. Chord-based Optimization of the Quad Set

To improve the quality of the quad set, it needs to adjust the structure of the quad set to make it contain as few edges with large variation of irregular degrees as possible. It is, however, not a trivial task since any changes applied on one edge will inevitably impact its adjacent edges. Theoretically, if we evaluate all the possible quad sets then we can find the optimal quad set with least variation of irregular degrees. Nevertheless it is almost impossible due to the large searching space. Chen et al. proposed an optimization method which locally handles concave or convex edges one by one[14]. This method avoids the difficulty of global optimization by handling the irregular edges on the quad set in a greedy-based manner. However, it cannot guarantee the mesh quality due to the interaction between edges on the quad set, and sometimes it may be even not convergent. In this paper, we propose an optimization method based on the dual structure of the quad set. Our method not only avoids the difficulty in global optimization, but also guarantees the mesh quality after sheet inflation.

On a quad mesh, starting from an edge, we can recursively get all the edges that are topologically parallel to this edge. These edges and the adjacent quads form a chord, the dual structure of the quad mesh[4, 20]. Similar to the quad mesh, the quad set for sheet inflation also consists of chords. All of the mesh edges on the boundary loop pairwise belong to one chord. For example, in Fig. 26(b), e_1 and e_2 belong to the chord c_1 , and e_3 and e_4 belong to the chord c_2 . Theoretically the two kinds of chords, the chord on a quad mesh and the chord on a quad set for sheet inflation, are the same. They are both obtained by recursively searching topologically parallel mesh edges on the quads. The only difference between these two kinds of chords is the chord on a quad mesh is not associated to a sheet (because there are no hexahedra here) while the chord on a quad set for sheet inflation is associated to a sheet (because it resides inside a hex mesh). For example, in Fig. 26(c), e_3, e_4 and their chords are contained in the sheet s (red). Due to the association with a sheet, a chord on the quad set for sheet inflation can be optimized by searching a new path within that sheet to improve the irregular degrees of its edges.

We improve the quality of the quad set by iteratively improving the quality of the chords that contain the edges on the

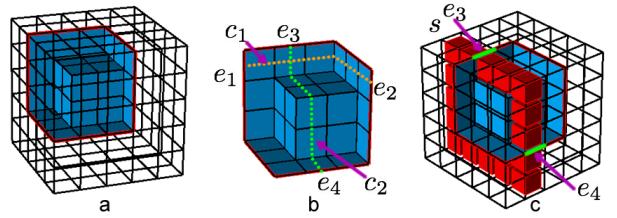


Figure 26: The chords of the quad set: (a) the quad set; (b) two chords c_1 and c_2 on the quad set; (c) the sheet s that contains e_3 and e_4 .

boundary loop. The chords are neither too constrained as the whole quad set nor too local as one single concave or convex edge. By optimizing the chords, we can effectively improve the quality of the quad set while avoiding the difficulty of optimizing the quad set as a whole. Suppose the quad set is Q and its edge set is E , the details of the optimization procedures are explained:

1. Divide the edges on the boundary loop into groups according to whether they are in the same sheet. For example, e_3 and e_4 are grouped in Fig. 27(a), and $e_1 - e_4$ are grouped in Fig. 28(a);
2. Select a group of edges that have not been processed. Get all of the edges in the corresponding sheet and the quads adjacent to these edges. These edges and quads compose the searching space for new chords that connect these edges. Suppose the edge group is $g = \{e_3, e_4\}$, Fig. 27(b) shows the edges that are in the same sheet of g and the adjacent quads;
3. Since the edges in the group pairwise connect to one chord, we use A* algorithm to search for the new chords. While searching, we take the edges' variation of irregular degrees into consideration. For example, in Fig. 27(c), there are three quads adjacent to q_1 . If we select q_2 or q_4 as the next forward step, the variation of irregular degrees of e_5 will be 2; if we select q_3 as the next forward step, the variation of irregular degrees e_5 becomes 0. Hence we select q_3 . The new chord connecting e_3 and e_4 is shown in Fig. 27(d). If there are more than two edges in the group, it needs to be decided which two edges should be paired. For example, four edges $e_1 - e_4$ in Fig. 28(b) are in the same group. If we connect e_1 and e_3 and get the new chord c_3 (blue in Fig. 28(c)), then e_2 and e_4 cannot be connected without intersecting with c_3 which is not allowed for keeping the quad set valid as shown in Fig. 28(d). So we search new chords between e_1 and e_4 , e_2 and e_3 . The two new chords are shown in Fig. 28(e);
4. The new chords and the original chords encompass a hex set on the sheet. For example, the hex set h in Fig. 27(e) is encompassed by the two chords c_2 and c_4 , and the hex set h in Fig. 28(f) is encompassed by the four chords c_1, c_2, c_4 and c_5 . We get the boundary quad set Q_h of h , and let Q be the symmetric difference between Q and Q_h , i.e. $Q = Q \cup Q_h - Q \cap Q_h$. The updated Q is shown in Fig. 27(f) and Fig. 27(g);

5. Repeat the process of Step 2-4 until all of the edge groups are handled. The final quad sets for the two examples are shown in Fig. 27(g) and Fig. 28(g).

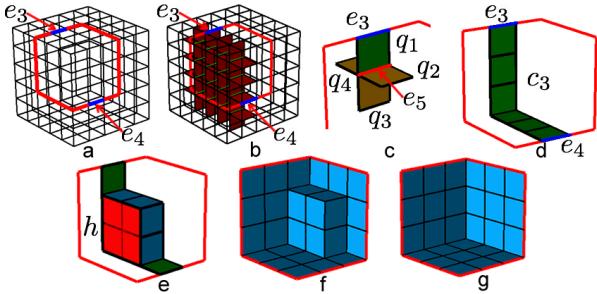


Figure 27: The 1st example of the quad set optimization: (a) two edges e_3 and e_4 on the boundary loop; (b) the edges on the sheet (green) and adjacent quads (red); (c) q_1 's three adjacent quads q_2 , q_3 and q_4 ; (d) the new chord connecting e_3 and e_4 ; (e) the hex set h encompassed by the two chords; (f) Q is updated by getting the symmetric difference between Q and Q_h ; (g) the final quad set.

The variation of irregular degrees ΔV_Q of the initial quad set in Fig. 26(a) is 42. After optimization, the variation of irregular degrees of the quad set in Fig. 27(g) $\Delta V'_Q$ becomes 18, which is 24 smaller than ΔV_Q .

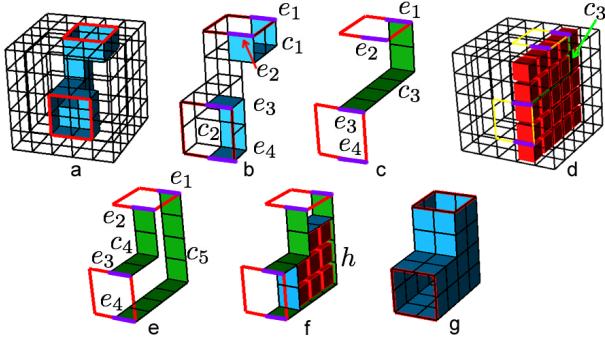


Figure 28: The 2nd example of the quad set optimization: (a) the initial quad set; (b) e_1 - e_4 on the same sheet and two chords c_1 and c_2 ; (c) the new chord c_3 connecting e_1 and e_3 ; (d) e_2 and e_4 cannot be connected by a chord without intersecting c_3 ; (e) the two new chords c_4 and c_5 ; (f) the hex set h encompassed by the four chords; (g) Q is updated by getting the symmetric difference between Q and Q_h .

The variation of irregular degrees ΔV_Q of the initial quad set in Fig. 28(a) is 76, and it becomes 56 after optimization which is 20 smaller.

If the quad set is self-intersecting, we first split it into quad subsets at the intersecting line. For example, in Fig. 29, we separate the quad set into QS_1 and QS_2 (Fig. 29(b)). Then we apply the above optimization algorithm on these quad subsets successively. The quads adjacent to the intersecting line (Fig. 29(c)) should keep unchanged in order to keep the topology valid.

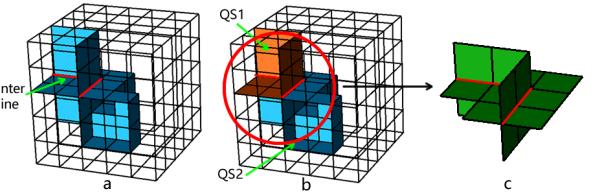


Figure 29: Optimization of the self-intersecting quad set: (a) the self-intersecting quad set with the intersecting line (red); (b) we first separate it into individual quad subsets and then conduct the optimization algorithm on them successively; (c) the quads adjacent to the intersecting line should be kept unchanged.

6. Examples

We implement our approach in C++ on a 32-bit Windows 7 platform, using Visual Studio 2010. The approach has been tested on different meshes under various constraints. This section presents three practical applications of the approach: one is complex sheets generation for mesh matching and the other two are the quality improvement for the mesh boundary by reducing high node valences. In these three examples, self-intersecting sheets are all required to be locally generated. Comparisons between our approach and existing works are also provided at the end of this section.

6.1. Complex Sheets Generation for Mesh Matching

Mesh matching is an algorithm to convert non-conforming interfaces to conforming ones [14, 15]. Starting from interfaces with different topologies, it gradually changes the interfaces' topologies by sheet operations until the interfaces' topologies become identical. The typical process of the mesh matching algorithm is shown in Fig. 30.

Our approach in this paper can be used in mesh matching to locally generate complex sheets that intersect themselves multiple times, which cannot be done in these previous works. In Fig. 31, there is an unmatched chord on the interface of hex mesh M_a in Fig. 31(b). A new sheet needs to be created to match it on hex mesh M_b under the constraints shown in Fig. 31a (H is the volumetric constraints).

Under the constraints, we construct the boundary loop as shown in Fig. 32. Since the constraint edges contain three intersecting nodes, a new intersecting node is created as shown in Fig. 32(b). By running the max-flow-min-cut algorithm, new edges are found, enabling the boundary loop to do local separation. The final boundary loop is shown in Fig. 32(e).

Intersecting lines are then constructed, as well as the int-4-hex-sets as shown in Fig. 33(a) and Fig. 33(b). Then we get the merged hex sets in Fig. 33(c) and the initial quad set in Fig. 33(d). The variation of irregular degrees of the initial quad set is 478. By contrast, the final quad set is much better after optimization as shown in Fig. 33(e) whose variation of irregular degrees is reduced to 351.

The new sheet is inflated from the quad set as shown in Fig. 34.

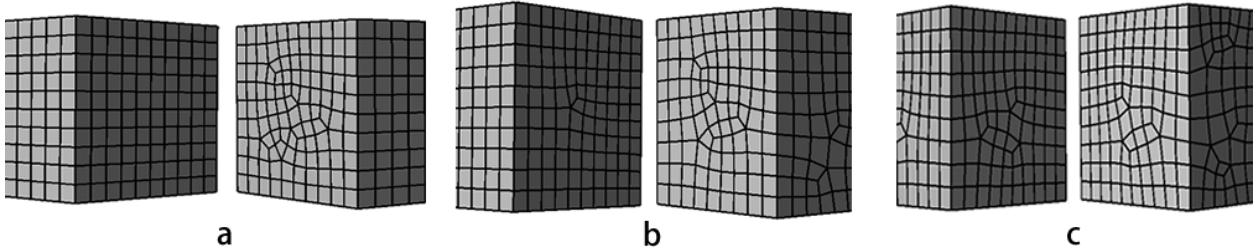


Figure 30: The typical process of mesh matching: (a) non-conformal interfaces; (b) interfaces are changed by sheet operations; (c) non-conformal interfaces are converted to conformal interfaces.

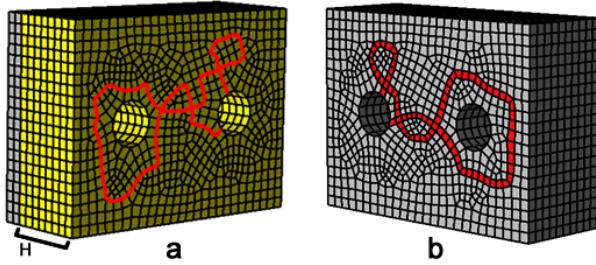


Figure 31: Complex sheet inflation is needed for mesh matching: (a) the constraints for sheet inflation on mesh M_a ; (b) the unmatched chord(red) on mesh M_b .

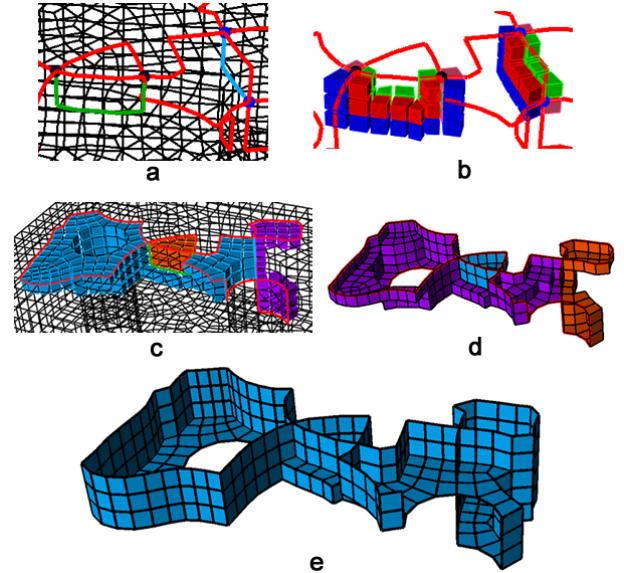


Figure 33: Determination of the quad set: (a) constructing the intersecting lines; (b) the int-4-hex-sets; (c) the merged hex sets; (d) the initial quad set; (e) the optimized quad set.

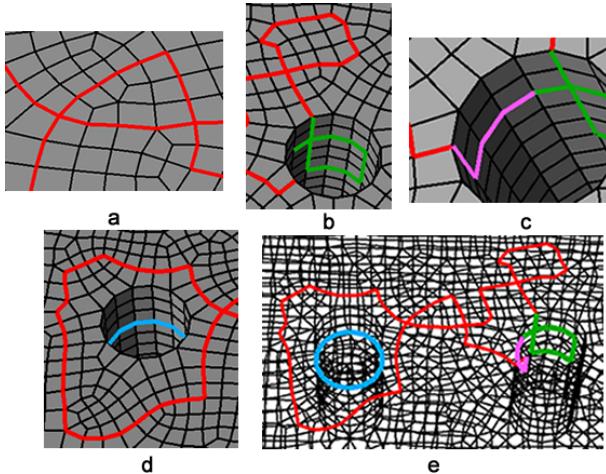


Figure 32: Determination of the boundary loop: (a) the two intersecting nodes are paired; (b) a new intersecting node is created; (c) the boundary loop is closed; (d) new edges are determined by the max-flow-min-cut algorithm; (e) the final boundary loop.

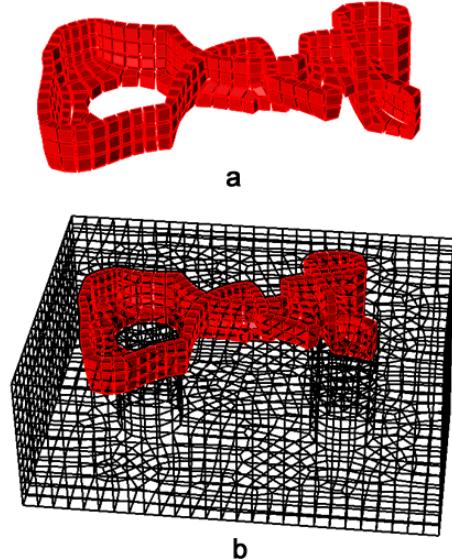


Figure 34: Sheet inflation: (a) the new sheet inflated from the quad set; (b) the new sheet in the hex mesh.

755 6.2. High Edge Valences Reduction

756 In hex meshes, the elements in the area near the boundary are
 757 usually very important for finite element analysis[21]. Mean-
 758 while, the node valence and edge valence are critical for the
 759 quality of the quad mesh and hex mesh respectively[22, 15, 23].
 760 High node valence or edge valence will largely reduce the ac-
 761 curacy and efficiency of the analysis, or even make the mesh
 762 unable to be handled by the solver. The fun sheet matching
 763 algorithm proposed by Kowalski et al. [21] can help the hex
 764 mesh capture the geometric boundary by inserting fundamental
 765 sheets. This algorithm, however, can neither improve the node
 766 valences on the mesh boundary nor the edge valence near the
 767 mesh boundary. In this section, we present two examples to
 768 show how our approach can be used to reduce the high node
 769 valences and edge valences near the mesh boundary.

770 Figure 35(a) shows a hex mesh that contains two boundary
 771 nodes v_1 and v_2 with high valences. The valences of v_1 and
 772 v_2 are 6 and 7 respectively. Consequently, the edges inside the
 773 hex mesh that are adjacent to these two nodes also have high
 774 valences which are 6 and 7 respectively as shown in Fig. 35(b).
 775 It is usually unacceptable for node or edge valences to be larger
 776 than 5 near the boundary. Therefore, these high valences need
 777 to be reduced.

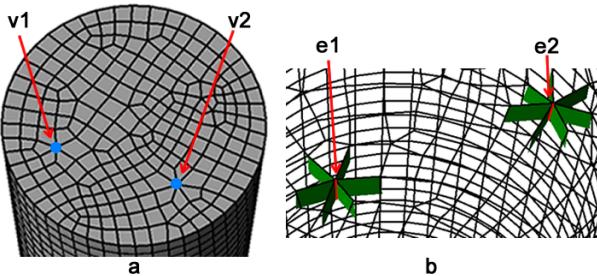


Figure 35: Nodes and edges with high valences: (a) v_1 's valence is 6 and v_2 's valence is 7; (b) v_1 's adjacent edge e_1 has the valence of 6 and v_2 's adjacent edge e_2 has the valence of 7.

778 To reduce the high valences by our approach, the user first se-
 779 lect several edges on the mesh boundary that are adjacent to the
 780 two nodes and the local region as shown in Fig. 36(a). Our ap-
 781 proach takes these edges as constraints, and then try to achieve
 782 the sheet inflation under the constraints. Figure 36(b) and Fig.
 783 36(c) show the process of determination of the boundary loop,
 784 and the final boundary loop is shown in Fig. 36(d).

785 The quad set is then constructed through the procedures
 786 shown in Fig. 37. The variation of irregular degrees of the
 787 initial quad set is 184. The final optimized quad set is shown
 788 in Fig. 37(e) and its variation of irregular degrees is reduced to
 789 159.

790 Sheet inflation is conducted after getting the quad set. The
 791 new sheet is shown in Fig 38(a) and Fig. 38(b). The two nodes
 792 v_1 and v_2 are actually splitted into two nodes and four nodes
 793 respectively as shown in Fig. 38(c). The new edges splitted
 794 from e_1 and e_2 are shown in Fig. 38(b). There has no longer
 795 any nodes or edges with valences larger than 5.

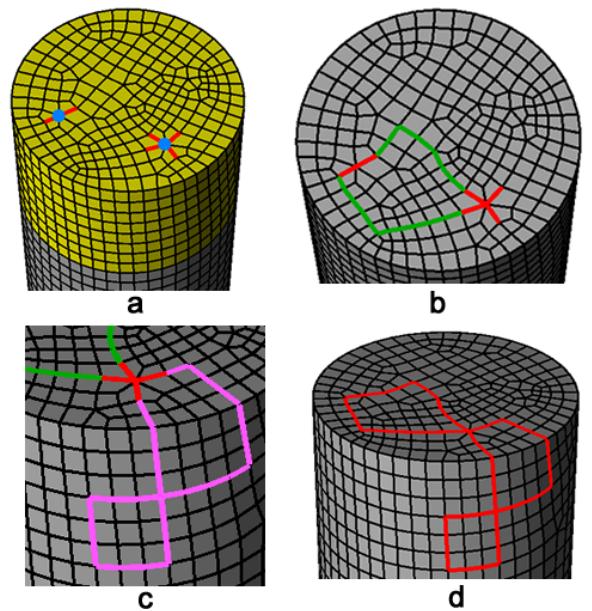


Figure 36: User-specified constraints and the determination of the boundary loop: (a) several boundary edges adjacent to v_1 and v_2 are selected as boundary constraints(red) and a set of hexahedra are selected as local region (yellow); (b) the constraint edges are first connected; (c) a new intersecting node is created; (d) the final boundary loop.

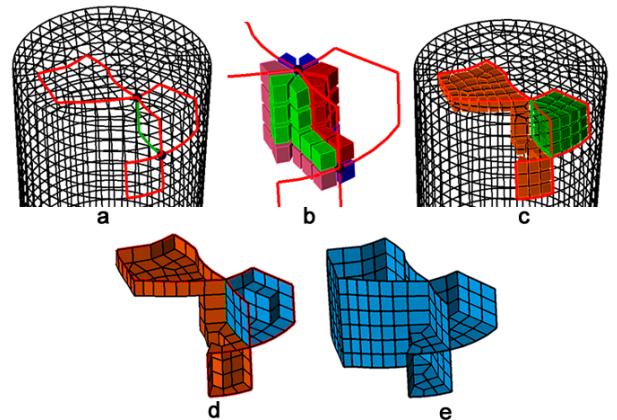


Figure 37: Process of the determination of the quad set: (a) the intersecting line is determined; (b) the int-4-hex-sets are constructed; (c) the merged hex sets; (d) the initial quad set; (e) the optimized quad set.

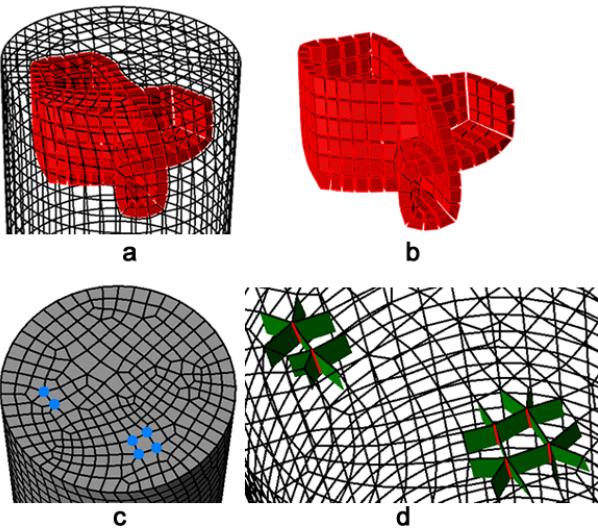


Figure 38: Results of high valences reduction: (a) the new sheet inflated from the quad set in the hex mesh; (b) the new sheet; (c) the new nodes with valences no larger than 5; (d) new edges with valences no larger than 5.

We have also tested our algorithm with the famous Stanford Bunny. As shown in Fig. 39, the hex mesh of Stanford Bunny contains two high-valence boundary nodes. To reduce the valences of these two nodes, a sheet inflation is conducted, creating a self-intersecting sheet. The major steps are shown in Fig. 40. And the modification result is shown in Fig. 41, where the high valences of the two nodes are successfully reduced.

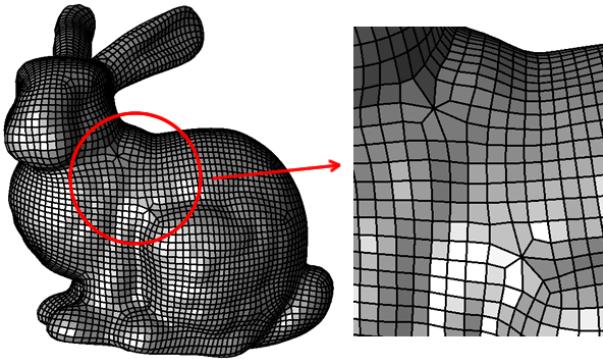


Figure 39: Hex mesh of Stanford Bunny with two high-valence boundary nodes.

6.3. Comparisons with existing works

Results show that our approach can effectively generate complex localized sheets that self-intersect more than once while guaranteeing the mesh quality. Comparisons are made between our approach and existing works including Mitchell's Pillowing[1], Staten's General Sheet Inflation[9] and Chen's Sheet Inflation[14]. Table 1 lists the detailed comparisons between our approach and existing works.

Pillowing cannot handle these three examples because it does not support self-intersecting sheets. And Staten provides insuf-

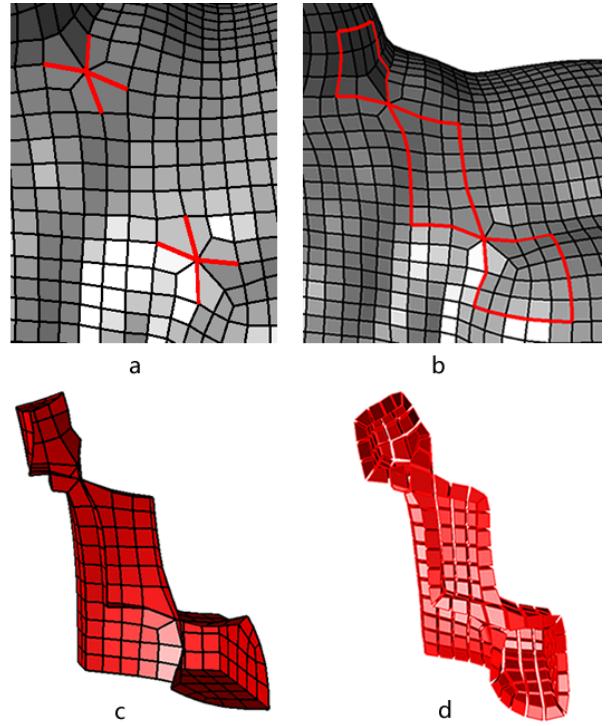


Figure 40: Process of reducing the high node valences on Stanford Bunny: (a) several boundary edges adjacent to the high-valence nodes are selected as boundary constraints; (b) the boundary loop is constructed; (c) the quad set is constructed; (d) the new sheet is inflated.

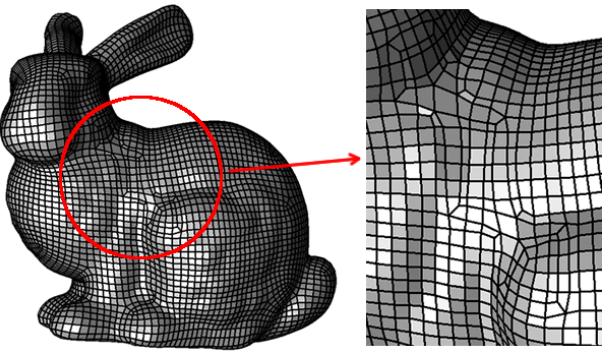


Figure 41: The high node valences are reduced by conducting our sheet inflation.

Table 1: Comparisons with existing works.

	Example 1 (Mesh Matching)	Example 2 (Valences Reduction in cylinder)	Example 3 (Stanford Bunny)
Mitchell's Pillowing		Does not support self-intersecting sheets	
Staten's General Sheet Inflation		Insufficient details to implement	
Chen's Sheet Inflation	Failed	Succeed. Irregular degrees = 177	Succeed. Irregular degrees = 285
Our Sheet Inflation	Succeed. Irregular degrees = 351	Succeed. Irregular degrees = 159	Succeed. Irregular degrees = 196

813 sufficient details to implement. Although Chen's Sheet Inflation 854
 814 can inflate sheets that self-intersect only once, the mesh qual- 855
 815 ity suffers from their optimization algorithm due to the fact that 856
 816 their optimization algorithm is based on simply handling con- 857
 817 cave/convex mesh edges. Our approach can achieve better mesh 858
 818 quality thanks to the new chord-based optimization algorithm. 859

819 7. Conclusions and Future Work

820 In this paper, a new approach is proposed to achieving opti- 821
 822 mized complex sheet inflation under various constraints. Main
 features of our approach are summarized:

- 823 1. By using the A* and the max-flow-min-cut algorithms, the 824 valid boundary loop of the quad set for sheet inflation is 825 effectively determined, which satisfies the boundary con- 826 straints.
- 827 2. With intersecting nodes on the boundary loop being rea- 828 sonably paired by recursively searching two local inter- 829 secting structures, valid intersecting lines are constructed 830 between each pair of nodes by using A* algorithm, and 831 the int-4-hex-sets are determined around the intersecting 832 lines, enabling our approach to effectively construct com- 833 plex quad sets that intersect themselves more than once.
- 834 3. By using max-flow-min-cut algorithm, the valid initial 835 quad set is effectively and efficiently determined within the 836 local region specified by the user.
- 837 4. A chord-based optimization method is proposed which can 838 effectively improve the quality of the quad set while avoid- 839 ing the difficulty in optimizing the quad set as a whole.

840 Compared with previous sheet inflation methods, three ex- 841 amples show that our approach can effectively generate com- 842 plex sheets within a local region while guaranteeing the mesh 843 quality. These three examples also present two applications 844 that our approach can be used: one is modifying the interfaces 845 in mesh matching and the other is reducing node valences and 846 edge valences to improve mesh quality.

847 The shortcomings of our approach and future work are listed 848 below:

- 849 1. It is not very convenient to generate self-touching sheets. 850 In some rare cases, self-touching sheets need to be gen- 851 erated. By combining other dual operations like column 852 collapse and sheet extraction, our approach is able to cre- 853 ate self-touching sheets. However, currently it is not very

convenient. We will propose simpler solutions to generate self-touching sheets;

- 854 2. Currently the constraints can only be specified by bound- 855 ary edges and hexahedra. However, sometimes the user 856 needs to specify edges or quads inside the hex mesh to con- 857 trol the sheet inflation, e.g. improving the edge valences 858 inside the hex mesh. Hence, we plan to adapt our approach 859 to accept constraints specified inside the hex mesh.

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