2 Related Work

Visualization domains that are related to our work can be categorized into molecular visualization, and occlusion management. Wewill focus mainly on occlusion management as this is also the focus of this paper. //After we present a short historic overview of the development of cutaway techniques we discuss more recent techniques.

2.1 Occlusion Management

**Object based approaches:**

Cutaway and ghosting techniques were first introduced by Finer & Seligmann in 1992 as an automated approach for generating illustrations that consider the occlusion of user defined objects. The authors introduced a set of algorithms that automatically identify and handle potentially obscuring objects which - enabled due to the introduction of the z-buffer to then modern graphics hardware.

In 2002, Diepstraten et al [diepstraten2002]picked up the technique again and defined a set of rules for computer-based rendering of technical illustrations to achieve a view-dependenttransparency model that mimics the ghosting techniques of technical illustrations. They later extended these rules for interactive cutaway illustrations [diepstraten2003].

Analogous to the cutaways for polygonal representations, Weißkopf et al. developed an interactive clipping technique for volume rendering that supports complex clipping geometries.

In 2004, Viola et al developed an automated approach for focus & context visualization for segmented volumetric objects. An assigned object importance determines the visibility priority for the segmented parts of the volume. Techniques such as opacity modulation, screen-door transparency, and volume thinning were applied to make occluded objects visible.  
Follow-up work focused on the definition of levels of sparseness and importance compositing for cutaway and ghosting calculations [importance driven feature enhancement]

In 2005, Viola et al. give an overview of current “smart visibility” techniques that comprise expressive visualization techniques that smartly uncover the most important features of the displayed data, such as cut-away views, ghosted views, and exploded views. baer et al published a perceptual evaluation of smart visibility techniques for two ghosted view approaches in comparison to semi-transparent approaches. the results clearly favored the ghosted view techniques.

[which part of your phd thesis should I highlight?]

A. Krüger et al. combined visualization and interaction techniques such as cutaway views, silhouettes and color-coded distances to improve the spatial perception of feature arrangement for surgical planning. lymph nodes are emphasized using ghosted views to easily convey their spatial position.  
J. Krüger developed a system that applies transparency and shading to enable focus&context visualization in volume data sets with a simple point&click interface.

li et al developed an approach that allows interactive exploration of complex models, e.g., mechanical or anatomical. the user has to rig each part of the respective model, so that the system knows, which type of cuts to apply.the cuts that their system produces adhere to a set of rules that were inspired by cutting conventions found in medical and mechanical illustrations.//for the dense molecular data that we are dealing with, a 1:1 implementation of this approach would not work. it would require some sort of segmentation that would yield objects that then can be rigged by the user. however, a segmentation of this type of data would already be a challenge of its own.

the approach by burns & finkelstein for view dependent cutaways inspired our aperture that is discussed in section Y. the cutaway shape is determined by the enlarged shape of the focus objects in the depth image. to preserve the information of the cut geometry, they apply shading & contouring/outlining of the cut surfaces, and ghosting of the cut geometry contours.

also view dependent is the peel-away approach for volume data by Birkeland and Viola. segmentation masks determine which structures should be reveiled to the user. the peel-away is suggested as an alternative to transparency/tf based approaches that surpress the contextual information also in regions where the context does not occlude the feature of interest.

Sigg et al propose an approach for automatic cutaway box placement with optimized visibility for target features that are specified as degree-of-interest functions during interactive visual analysis of the volume data.

Diaz et al developed an approach that preserves the relevant context information in volume clipping by allowing the user to extrude segmented surfaces such as bone structures from the clipping plane.

Lidal et al. propose design principles for Cutaway Visualization of Geological Models. they promote boxes as ideal cutaway shapes for emphasizing the shape and depth of focus features in layered structures, such as geological sediments. Lidal et al further promote the use of illumination to effectively communicate the shape and spatial ordering inside the cutaway, as well as enhancing relationships between the focus features and the context. they define five design principles that we discuss in section X in relation to our approach. //our approach also supports box shaped cutaways but not exclusively. the cutting geometry corresponds to the coarse step in our approach - which will act as a window into the dense data. However, in order to achieve images that mimic manual scientific illustrations as they can be found in medical books, a cutaway geometry alone is not sufficient. the context around box acts as a frame of reference for the focus data. in our approach we also achieve this with the fine step - the visibility histograms.

Most recently, lawonn et al present a composite technique that combines flow visualization and rendering of volumetric/poly? structures. the structures (blood vessels) are cut to reveal the flow within. additionally, the structures visually encode the wall thickness as colored regions in order to preserve context information that is of relevance to the user. the also apply the depth image approach that was published by burns & finkelstein. //they use the depth image of the objects of interest — in this case the pathlines — to create the cutaway.

In **Transfer function based approaches,** the user assigns importances to materials/density values in a volume data set. Based on the TF, the ray that is cast through the volume determines the importance of a material and the properties, such as opacity, that the material should be rendered with for the composition of the final image.

The context-preserving volume rendering model proposed by Bruckner et al is an extension of direct volume rendering. The technique uses a function of shading intensity, gradient magnitude, distance to the eye point, and previously accumulated opacity to selectively reduce the opacity in less important data regions. Contours of surfaces that would be removed due to opacity remain visible as the amount of illumination received is taken as a measure whether a point should be visible or not.

Burns et al propose a multimodal approach that combines CT scan data and realtime ultrasound data. Importance driven shading is used to emphasize features of higher importance that have been revealed through the culling/ghosting.

The notion of visibility histograms proposed by Correa et al. inspired our visibility equalizer metaphor. These histograms represent the distribution of visibility in a volume-rendered image and should help users manage a set of transfer function parameters to maximize the visibility of interesting intervals in the volume.

Ruiz et al. propose an approach for automatic transfer function optimization. The transfer functions are obtained by minimizing the informational divergence or Kullback-Leibler distance between a user specified target distribution and the visibility distribution captured from certain viewpoints.

**[conclusion of the occlusion sub-section]**

Transfer function based approaches are well suited for volumetric data that contains segmentable structures, such as the organs or bones in a medical scan. For molecular data this only holds partially true, as some types of molecules do indeed form solid structures that could be made visible with a TF (membranes, nucleus). On the other side, within these structures there is a more noise like distribution of these molecules.

since the obstructing information is cut away - most modern approaches have something in common in alleviating this inherent shortcoming: they try to preserve the structures that have been cut, in some way or another.

due to the data type& how we handle it, our approach is fundamentally different from existing cutaway approaches. in our approach, (partial) occlusion of individual objects is not an issues as the data does not contain large singular entities such as polygonal or segmented volumetric objects where each single one has a semantic meaning.

instead there are thousands of instances of a couple of dozens molecule types. objects are never partially cut - just removed or not. not based on a density function as in TFs in volume rendering or on specific objects of interest - but based the combination of those two aspects: clipping object(s) &a visibility function/histogram for each molecule type.

still, principles from existing cutaway algorithms can also be applied to our approach.

2.2 Molecular Visualization

//TODO

3. Overview

3.1 Data

our data according to the Elmqvist taxonomy:

* high object density
* high object interaction:
  + high proximity: hundreds of thousands (millions?) of molecules of dozens of different types, densly packed
  + high enclosure: some molecules form structures that enclose other types of molecules, e.g., nucleus, cell membrane
* object complexity:
  + low, from a cutting perspective: since objects are either entirely cut or not
  + high, from a visual perspective: they are complex structures that consist of dozens or hundreds of atoms
  + partial occlusion of individual molecules is not an issue since there typically are many instances of each type visible at the same time

X Discussion

X.1 Elmqvist’s taxonomy for occlusion management

elmqvist et al described a taxonomy of occlusion management techniques. the techniques can be grouped into five different design patterns that support different tasks and are suitable for different data types. the visibility equalizer (VE) falls into the virtual x-ray technique that applies transparency or object removal - which is the most suitable method for the dense molecular data that we are dealing.

virtual x-ray techniques such as cutaways make discovery trivial & facilitate access. They have very high disambiguation strength –which means they can handle dense data (high proximity) with enclosement, containment, .. they support view dependent and static approaches to occlusion handling.

inherent downsides:

* weakens occlusion depth cues => decrease in depth perception, makes spatial relation difficult. However, this can be tackled with special cutting conventions & illumination / shading. And also other special approaches: [=>refer to fuzziness section]
* transparency (ghosting): yields additional visual complexity, more cognitive load  
  [=>mention ghosting/contours if we implement them]

the user task according to the taxonomy:all three tasks are somewhat relevant in our context

* target discovery: know where specific molecule types lie in the cell
* target access: retrieve graphically encoded info: not on a single instance level - however on a per-type level - how big is the volume of the type
* spatial relation:which types are enclosed by which, where do they lie, how is the distribution?

other techniques such as multiple view, tourplanners, volumetric probes, and projection distorter would not be well suited to gain the desired insight into the dense molecular cell data

* multiple viewports, tour planners: the cell data is dense => multiple view ports would still suffer from occlusion. Cutaways &transparency necessary acts as a window into this dense data
* probes, projection distortion: we do not want to distort the data since the organic / anatomical / cellular structure needs to be preserved

X.2

Related techniques can be grouped into techniques that..

* OOI based vs TF
* polygon vs volume representation
* automated vs interactive specification of the cutaway