Rationalization in architecture with surfaces foliated by elastic curves

We develop methods for rationalization of CAD surfaces using elastic curves, aiming at a cost-effective fabrication method for architectural designs of complex shapes. By moving a heated flexible metal rod though a block of expanded polystyrene, it is possible to produce shapes with both positive and negative Gaussian curvature, either for direct use or for use as moulds for concrete casting. If we can control the shape of the rod, while moving, we can produce prescribed shapes.

The flexible rod assumes at all times the shape of an Euler elastica (or elastic curve). The elastica are given in closed analytic form using elliptic functions. We use a gradient-driven optimization to approximate arbitrary planar curves by planar elastic curves. The method depends on an explicit parameterization of the space of elastic curves and on a method for finding a good initial guess for the optimization.

We approximate CAD surfaces by first extracting a collection of planar surface curves and approximating these by elastica. Providing the data for these curves to robots holding the flexible rod, we can produce an elastica-foliated surface that approximates the given CAD surface. Since not all surfaces can be closely approximated by an elastica-foliated surface, an arbitrary CAD surface must first be subdivided into segments that can be approximated. We discuss strategies for subdividing an arbitrary surface into segments that can be closely approximated, taking into account the aesthetics of the segmentation and the production constraints. If the given surface is smooth, we want the approximating surface to be smooth as well, so we must ensure smooth transition between the surface segments of the final result.

As an alternative to rationalization of arbitrary designs, we also present a method for direct generation of design surfaces using foliated Euler elastica. Here we work from a grid of blocks, so the segmentation is given, but we must still ensure smooth transition between segments.