

Sketching Shiny Surfaces: 3D Shape Extraction and Depiction of Specular Surfaces

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Many materials including water, plastic, and metal have specular surface characteristics. Specular reflections have commonly been considered a nuisance for the recovery of object shape. However, the way that reflections are distorted across the surface depends crucially on 3D curvature, suggesting that they could, in fact, be a useful source of information. Indeed, observers can have a vivid impression of 3D shape when an object is perfectly mirrored (i.e., the image contains nothing but specular reflections). This leads to the question what are the underlying mechanisms of our visual system to extract this 3D shape information from a perfectly mirrored object. In this paper we propose a biologically motivated recurrent model for the extraction of visual features relevant for the perception of 3D shape information from images of mirrored objects. We qualitatively and quantitatively analyze the results of computational model simulations and show that bidirectional recurrent information processing leads to better results than pure feedforward processing. Furthermore, we utilize the model output to create a rough nonphotorealistic sketch representation of a mirrored object, which emphasizes image features that are mandatory for 3D shape perception (e.g., occluding contour and regions of high curvature). Moreover, this sketch illustrates that the model generates a representation of object features independent of the surrounding scene reflected in the mirrored object.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Computer vision systems for recovering a three-dimensional (3D) shape from single static images typically impose stringent restrictions on the lighting conditions or reflectance properties of the object under scrutiny. For example, it is common for shape-from-shading algorithms to require orthographic projection, a single, infinitely distant point light source, or Lambertian reflectance [e.g., Bruckstein

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1988; Horn and Brooks 1985; Samaras and Metaxas 1999; Zheng and Chellapa. 1991]; for a review see Horn and Brooks [1989] and Zhang et al. [1999]). By contrast, the human visual system is extremely flexible. Although the appearance of a surface can change dramatically depending on its material composition, we rarely experience any difficulty in recovering a detailed and accurate estimate of an object's shape, irrespective of its reflectance properties.

One of the most striking examples of this is our ability to recover the shape of a perfectly specular (i.e., mirrored) surface, such as a chrome bumper or polished kettle. Perfectly specular surfaces are particularly problematic for the visual system because the images that they project onto the retina consist of nothing more than a distorted reflection of the surrounding scene. Consequently, as a mirrored surface is moved from scene to scene, the image changes dramatically. Indeed, depending on the context in which it is placed, a mirrored object can be made to take on any arbitrary appearance. For example, by carefully modifying the reflected scene, it is possible to make a surface appear to contain bumps or dents. The visual system would have no way of knowing that it was the environment and not the object's geometry that was responsible and thus the problem of recovering the 3D shape of a mirrored surface is fundamentally ill-posed [Hadamard 1902].

Given the inherent ambiguity of the problem, it is not possible to completely recover a 3D shape without imposing additional assumptions or constraints. One solution is to assume that the positions of features in the surrounding environment are known in advance [Savarese and Perona 2001; 2002], so that their reflection in the surface can be identified and interpreted. However, as a model of human shape perception this is not very satisfying, as it seems quite unlikely that the visual system constructs a complete representation of the environment surrounding the object prior to recovering its shape.

Here, we take an alternative approach. Rather than attempting to fully reconstruct a 3D shape, we develop a biologically motivated image processing model that is designed to extract a restricted, but highly informative, class of shape measurements from the image. Importantly, the model requires only weak assumptions about the statistical properties of the reflected scene and thus operates across a wide range of real and artificial illumination conditions.

1.1 Goals

We apply the image-processing architecture to achieve two distinct goals. The first goal is to provide a model of the front-end of a 3D shape estimation system, inspired by the physiology of the early visual system. We aim to provide a plausible model of how the human visual system could use simple image measurements to achieve shape constancy across variations in illumination. In addition, by applying further constraints to the output of the model, the image-processing architecture we present here could also form the basis of a computer vision system for fully recovering a 3D shape under complex, unknown illumination.

The second goal is a concrete application of the model to computer graphics and visualization, specifically, facilitating the visualization of 3D surface geometry. The image of a mirrored surface under natural illumination is riddled with complex, high-contrast patterns, which can be distracting if the aim of the user is to quickly visualize the most important properties of a shape (see Figure 1). The image-processing system presented here produces as output a modified "sketchlike" representation of the input image, in which salient shape features that are invariant across illuminations are emphasized, while distracting, illumination-specific image features are suppressed. This nonphotorealistic sketch could be used to enhance shape apprehension in industrial or graphic design, somewhat like a technical illustration. On the other hand, it could also be useful for aesthetic applications, to create, bold, charcoal-like renditions of objects. Finally, the model could also be used to guide the design of novel shape visualization systems, as it provides a principled explanation of which shape properties should be emphasized to confer an illumination-invariant impression of shape.

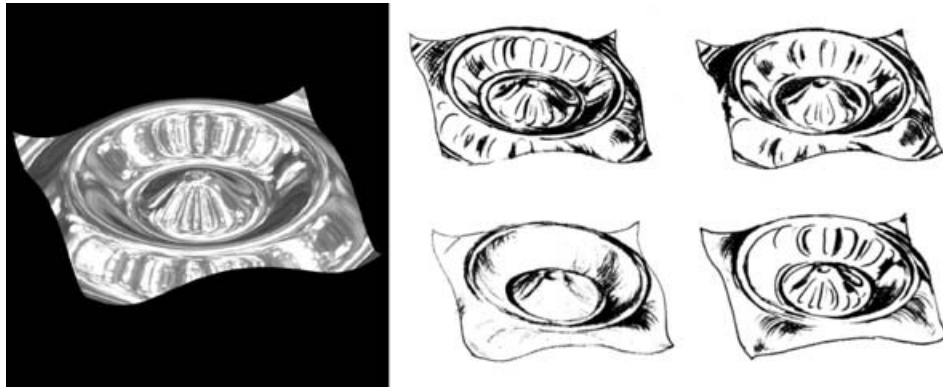


Fig. 1. (a) Perfectly specular object illuminated by a forest scene (left) and different versions of sketch drawings created by a skilled artist (right). Note that the artist seems to emphasize those features that seem to be important for the perception of 3D shape.

1.2 Previous Work

1.2.1 Human Perception. It is well established that specular reflections facilitate human shape perception. Psychophysical studies have shown that specular reflections contribute to shape estimation in the presence of other cues, such as shading, binocular stereopsis, and texture [Blake and Bühlhoff 1990; 1991; Norman et al. 2004; Todd and Mingolla 1983; Todd et al. 1997].

Savarese et al. [2004] showed subjects patches that were cropped out of photographs of mirrored surfaces reflecting a standard checkerboard pattern. The subjects' task was to identify which of three categorically different shapes the patch belonged to (sphere, cylinder or hyperbolic paraboloid). They found that subjects performed barely above chance levels. By contrast, using the popular "gauge figure" task, Fleming et al. [2004] found that humans are good at estimating 3D shapes from mirrored surfaces, even when the objects are shown in isolation (i.e., so that there is no information about the surrounding scene). The inconsistency between these findings likely results from differences in the stimuli. Fleming et al. used complex, irregular object shapes; the entire object was simultaneously visible; and the patterns reflected in the surface were richly structured real-world scenes. Under these conditions, humans seem to be excellent at inferring 3D shape from specular reflections.

1.2.2 Computational Work. Compared to the immense body of work on shape from shading, specular reflections have received relatively little attention. A number of authors have used active light techniques to overcome the inherent ambiguity of specular reflections. For example, Ikeuchi [1981] analyzed photometric stereo for the special case of specular surfaces. Sanderson et al. [1988] developed SHINY, a structured light system to recover surface depth and orientation for industrial applications, using both single and multiple cameras. More recently, Zheng and Murata [2000] developed a system in which a rotating specular object was illuminated by extended circular light sources. The shape for each rotation plane was computed from motion stereo, or by tracing the specularities' motion across the surface.

Other authors have used multiple views or camera motion. Koenderink and van Doorn [1980] described the qualitative behavior of specular highlights as they move across curved surfaces in response to viewer motion. Blake and colleagues [Blake 1985; Blake and Brelstaff 1988; Blake and Bühlhoff 1990; 1991] analyzed the problem of specular stereo, showing how the position, in depth, of a specular highlight is related to the curvature of the surface. Zisserman et al. [1989] provided a quantitative analysis of the information available to a camera undergoing known motion. One key result was that

the convex/concave ambiguity can be resolved under unknown illumination. Oren and Nayar [1996] developed an algorithm for discriminating between real and virtual features based on their motion across the surface. The authors use their analysis to uniquely recover 3D surface profiles by tracking a single virtual feature across the surface.

In elegant computational work, Savarese and Perona [2001, 2002] were the first to provide a general solution for recovering shape from mirror reflections in single static images. However, the solution requires a calibrated scene to be reflected in the mirrored surface. Where three intersecting lines are visible in the reflected pattern, first-order local information can be recovered.

Several authors have observed that the shapes of specular highlights are influenced by surface geometry [Beck and Prazdny 1981; Hartung and Kersten 2003; Longuet-Higgins 1960; Todd et al. 2004], noting that this could be important in discriminating highlights from other effects, such as texture markings. Extending this observation, Fleming et al. [2004] showed how populations of simple filters tuned to different orientations could be used to extract information related to 3D surface curvatures directly from single static images of mirrored surfaces under unknown illumination. Surface curvature distorts the reflected environment into complex patterns of image orientation that vary continuously across the surface. Fleming et al. showed how these “*orientation fields*” are systematically related to the underlying geometry.

The current work builds on this observation to create a complete neurally inspired architecture for extracting clean, reliable orientation fields from noisy images. The most important contribution is the addition of an iterative grouping circuit, that refines the local orientation estimates depending on the neighbourhood. This substantially improves the accuracy with which shape properties can be estimated. Furthermore, it is this feedback circuit that enables the model to produce the nonphotorealistic sketch representation for emphasizing the illumination-invariant features of the image.

1.2.3 Nonphotorealistic Rendering and Shape Visualization. The technical illustrator’s art is to depict the essential structural and functional components of a device without overpopulating the image with confusing or distracting details. It is widely believed that simplified illustrations of objects actually improve perception (and/or comprehension), although the empirical evidence for this [e.g., Biederman 1987; Dwyer 1967; Fraisse and Elkin 1963; Ryan and Schwartz 1956] is rather mixed, and likely depends on the task to be performed (e.g., recognition of familiar objects versus assembling a complex object from instructive illustrations). However, there are certainly cases in which exaggerated or caricatured stimuli are preferred to their realistic counterparts in a biological context [Tinbergen and Perdeck 1950; Tinbergen 1951] or yield superior task performance in humans [Benson and Perrett 1991; Rhodes et al. 1987], suggesting that nonphotorealism might be exploited to facilitate perception. Here we attempt to create sketchlike representations of the input image (see Figure 1) to aid shape apprehension and for aesthetic applications.

There is a large body of previous research on image-based nonphotorealistic rendering (NPR), in which arbitrary images or videos are fully or semiautomatically modified to create the impression of a particular medium or artistic style, including paint [Curtis et al. 1997; Hays and Essa 2004; Hertzmann 1998; Shiraishi and Yamaguchi 2000], pencil [Jin et al. 2002; Yamamoto et al. 2004], stipple drawings [Deussen and Strothotte 2000], mosaics [Hausner 2001], cubism [Collomosse and Hall 2003], impressionism [Litwinowicz 1997], or simply stylized [DeCarlo and Santella 2002].

A number of researchers have involved some degree of user interaction, to improve the quality of results. For example, Durand et al. [2001] developed a system for creating artistic renditions of photographs, in which the user determines stroke density and important structural features to interactively create the drawing. Recently, Kang et al. [2005] developed an interactive technique for generating cartoonlike sketches from photographs. The system uses *wavelet frames* to allow multiresolution control

of B-splines, which represent the depictive strokes. Other NPR sketch systems are designed more to give an overall “gist” of the depicted person or object [Chen et al. 2004; Gooch et al. 2004] rather than faithfully showing 3D shape properties of arbitrary objects.

There has also been considerable amount of work on the optimal rendering parameters for visualizing 3D shape from geometric models. Gooch et al. [1998] developed a shading technique for automatically generating technical illustrations from 3D models. The resulting sketches combine edges for depicting boundaries and a highly stylized “cool-to-warm” shading to produce the impression of curvature in 3D, although no psychophysical motivation or validation was offered. Interrante and colleagues [Interrante and Kim 2001; Interrante et al. 2002; Kim et al. 2003] have systematically explored the influences of texture on 3D shape visualization, and developed methods for depicting transparent surfaces so that two superimposed surface shapes can be simultaneously visualized. Recently, Bair et al. [2005] used a combination of psychophysics and machine-learning techniques to find perceptually optimal textures for visualizing two superimposed surfaces.

By contrast to most previous NPR research, our sketch algorithm is intended to take a single greyscale image as input and to automatically produce a modified version of the image as output. In the resulting “sketch,” image regions containing reliable illumination-invariant shape features are emphasized, while regions containing spurious orientations that are because of reflections of the environment are suppressed.

2. METHODS

In this section, we explain how a particular class of curvature-related information can be extracted directly from a 3D model of an object. This information (the “*ground-truth*”) will be used later to assess the accuracy with which our model estimates these values from a rendered image of the object. We then continue to give an overview of our proposed model for the extraction of curvature information, followed by a detailed description of the model and its different components.

2.1 Extracting Ground-Truth Curvature Information from the 3D Model

The intrinsic properties of surface geometry can be described by means of differential geometry. For example, a regular surface in R^3 is locally defined by its orientation and curvature properties depicted by mutually orthogonal tangent vectors and mutually orthogonal normal sections that define the curves of minimal and maximal normal curvatures. The product of the normal curvatures defines the Gaussian curvature of the surface at a selected point on the surface. In perception, we are concerned with the extraction of surface properties from *images* of illuminated surfaces taken from a certain viewpoint. Because of the projection of the visible surface part of an object, its shape can be described by its height, that is, as a function $z = f(x, y)$ (known as Monge patch [do Carmo 1976]).¹ In this coordinate system, (Figure 3) the first derivatives of f (i.e., the gradient of f) describe the slant of the surface which is the angle between the viewer’s line of sight and the surface normal. The second derivatives of the surface (i.e., the Hessian matrix) describe the rate at which the surface normal changes with respect to the viewer. This can be described as the *view-centered* curvature of the surface.² Note that this has to be distinguished from the *intrinsic* curvature, which is defined in local coordinates. For example,

¹We are neglecting influences of perspective projection in image acquisition by assuming that the object size is small in comparison to viewing distance, such that the mapping can be approximated through an orthographic projection.

²For convenience, from here on we refer to the Hessian matrix and related concepts loosely as “curvature.” The reader should be careful to keep in mind that when we use the term “curvature” we mean the *second derivatives*, and when we speak of “principal curvature directions” and “principal curvatures,” we mean the *eigenvectors* and corresponding *eigenvalues* of the Hessian matrix. For Monge patches the Gaussian curvature can be calculated from the Hessian by taking its determinant scaled by a measure of the slant [do Carmo 1976].

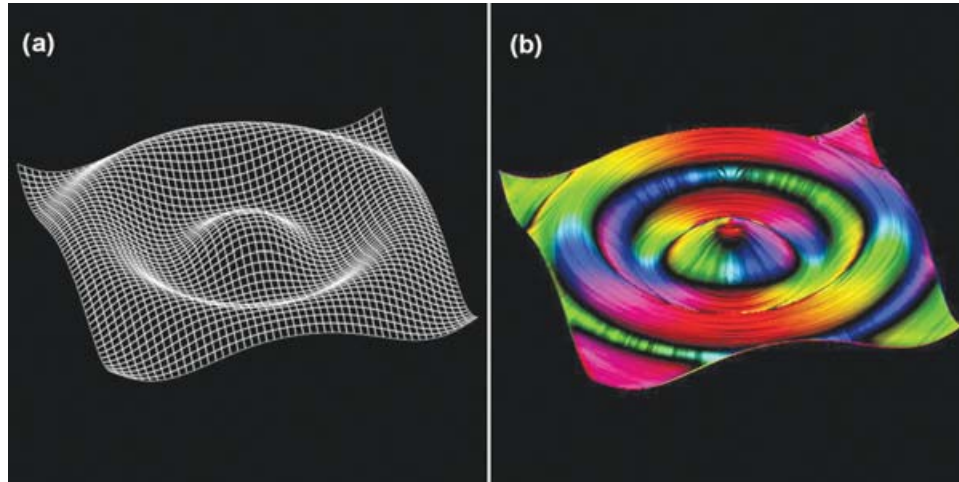


Fig. 2. 3D model and corresponding curvature information. Minimal curvature orientations are color coded. The anisotropy of curvature is displayed as the intensity of the color. We use the LIC method described in Cabral and Leedom [1993] and Stalling and Hege [1995], in addition to the color coding to illustrate local orientations. Note that there are distinct lines of isotropic curvature (dark) which belong to inflection points of the surface. Here one curvature component changes the sign, resulting in an abrupt change of the orientation by 90° .

the *intrinsic* curvature is constant in all directions at all locations on a sphere, while the *view-centered* curvature is equal in all directions only in the middle of the projected sphere; close to the boundary, the second derivatives are increasingly large in the direction perpendicular to the circumference, and zero parallel to the circumference.

Each point on the surface has a minimum and a maximum curvature direction which are always perpendicular to each other. In the case of view-centered curvature, they are always perpendicular to one another *in the image plane*. If the maximal and the minimal curvatures have the same magnitude, we then speak of an *isotropic* surface. When minimal and maximal curvatures are different magnitudes, then the surface is *anisotropic*. Here, the ratio between maximal and minimal curvature magnitudes describes the strength of the anisotropy of curvature. In other words, the anisotropy of curvature describes how spherical or cylindrical a surface patch is at any point. The anisotropy is very important because we will later see that distortions in the mirrored scene are directly related to this parameter. To extract the discussed parameters, we need to compute the Hessian matrix (Eq. 1):

$$H = \begin{pmatrix} f_{xx} & f_{xy} \\ f_{yx} & f_{yy} \end{pmatrix} \quad (1)$$

where f is the surface function as mentioned above. The eigenvalues (λ_1, λ_2) and the eigenvectors (v_1, v_2) of H have the following meaning:

1. The first eigenvector v_1, v_2 of the Hessian matrix describe the orientation of maximal curvature and minimal curvature, respectively.
2. The ratio of the eigenvalues describes the anisotropy of curvature where the term $1 - \frac{\lambda_2}{\lambda_1}$ yields values between zero (isotropic) and one (anisotropic).

The directions of minimal curvature and the anisotropy computed from the 3D model represent the ground-truth information, illustrated in Figure 2. To understand the ground-truth images, there are a few things worth mentioning: first, we can see that there are distinct lines of low-curvature anisotropy

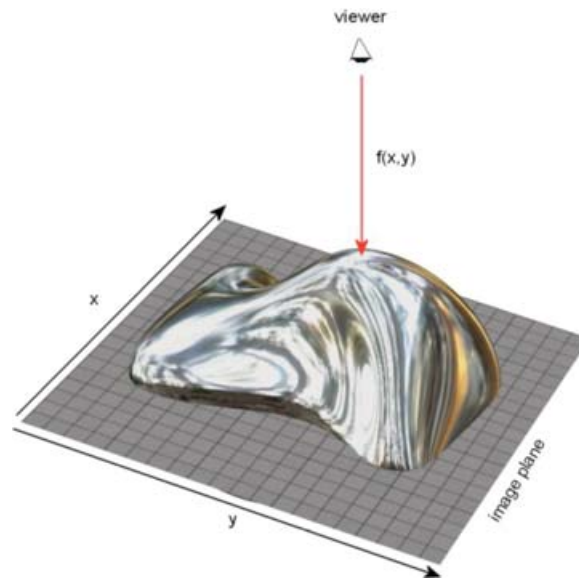


Fig. 3. View-centered coordinate system. The visible surface part of an object is described by its height, i.e., as a function $z = f(x, y)$, where z represents the depth and (x, y) are the coordinates in the image plane.

which belong to inflection points of curvature. Here, the surface curvature is equal in all directions, leading to no distortions of the reflected world on the surface. Note that as we cross these lines, the orientation of minimal surface curvature changes abruptly by 90° . The reason for this effect is that the surface changes from a concave or convex to a saddle condition where one principal curvature component changes sign. Second, we can see singular points of low-curvature anisotropy, which belong to locally spherical patches (concave or convex) facing the viewer. These points are usually surrounded by a radial field of minimal curvature orientations. For more information about the surface geometry see do Carmo [1976].

2.2 Evidence for Curvature Orientation in Image Space

When a scene is reflected in a curved mirror, the reflection is distorted in a way that depends systematically on the 3D surface geometry [Beck and Prazdny 1981; Fleming et al. 2003; Fleming et al. 2004; Hartung and Kersten 2003; Longuet-Higgins 1960]. Intuitively, highly curved surfaces “see” a large angle of the surrounding scenery and thus compress many features into a small proportion of the image. By contrast, for slightly curved surfaces the compression is weaker (see Figure 4). When the surface has different curvatures in different directions, the reflections will be differentially compressed in the two directions, leading to a locally affine distortion of the reflection. The strength of the distortion depends on the ratio between minimal and maximal curvatures, which we call the surface anisotropy. For example, a spherical surface patch is curved equally in all directions (i.e., isotropic) and, thus, the surrounding scene is simply miniaturized in the reflection and is not subjected to any anisotropic distortion. By contrast, a cylindrical surface patch is somewhat curved in one direction, but completely flat (i.e., curvature equals zero) in perpendicular direction. This leads to a strong distortion of the surrounding scene caused by a high anisotropy of curvature. In this case, the reflections tend to

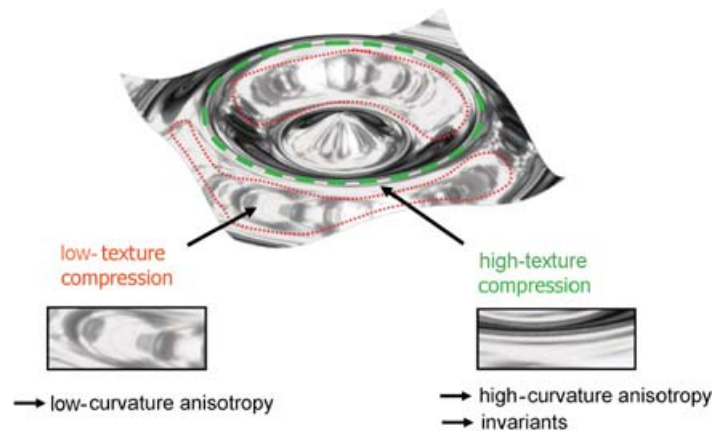


Fig. 4. Image of a mirrored object. We can see that on areas with high-curvature anisotropy, such as the curvature ridge marked in green, the surrounding scene is compressed into thin long streaks aligned along the direction of the ridge (which is the direction of minimal curvature). Note that these areas turn out to be the locations where the local image statistics are invariant when changing the surrounding scene. On other areas where the surface curvature is nearly isotropic (marked red), the reflected scene shows much weaker compressions resulting in a flat mirrorlike reflection. Here, the local image statistics are very dependent on the surrounding scene.

be distorted into parallel streaks that are aligned with the direction of minimum curvature³ (see also Figure 2). We can summarize that situation:

1. The orientation of structures in the mirrored scene tends to be aligned with the minimal-surface curvature.
2. The strength of the distortions in the mirrored scene indicates the ratio of minimum to maximum curvature (anisotropy of curvature).

2.3 Biological Model for Extraction of Curvature Information

Our model receives as input a greyscale image of a specular object. The model is able to estimate the minimal curvature orientations and the anisotropy of curvature from the 2D input image. To measure the success of this estimation, we can compare the results to the ground-truth information derived from the 3D model of the object. The model also produces a sketchlike representation of the input image. Our proposed model consists of three main components: (1) extraction of oriented contrasts, (2) orientation-selective grouping, and (3) a recurrent feedback cycle. An overview of the model architecture is given in Figure 5.

2.3.1 Basic Assumptions of the Model. Our model assumes that any anisotropy measured in the image is due solely to distortions of the reflected scene caused by the geometry of the mirrored surface. This tacitly assumes that the texture of the environmental scene is isotropic (i.e., contains a uniform distribution of orientations) [Fleming et al. 2004]. For many artificial and natural scenes, this is approximately true globally, although it is clearly infringed locally when the scene contains extended oriented structures, such as trees or buildings. Despite this, the distortions introduced by surface anisotropy can be very powerful, and—unlike naturally occurring oriented structures—affect all spatial scales equally.

³Note that the orientation of maximal curvature is always perpendicular to the orientation of minimal curvature as long as we consider the *view-centered* curvature, depending on the second derivatives of the surface (Hessian matrix). As a consequence, it is sufficient to recover the direction of minimal curvature.

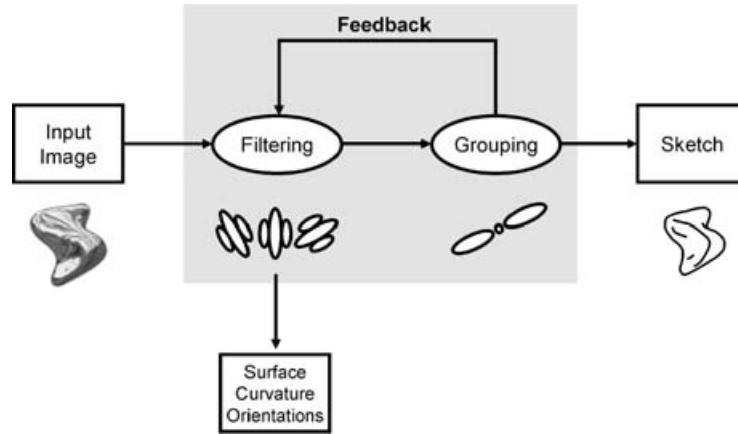


Fig. 5. Overview of the raw model architecture. Within the model we use multiple orientation layers to process each orientation response separately.

Indeed, even environments with unnaturally anisotropic scene statistics can nevertheless yield orientation fields that are predominantly biased in the correct directions, although this depends on the shape properties of the reflecting object. The effects of this “isotropy assumption” are discussed in greater detail in Section 4.

2.3.2 Extracting Oriented Contrasts Using a Population of Linear Gabor Filters. The initial stage of our model applies a family of orientation-selective Gabor filters [Daugman 1988] resembling the response properties of cortical simple cells [Hubel and Wiesel 1968]. The result is interpreted as a population code describing local contrast information. In our simulations, we employ 18 filters rotated from 0 to 170° to extract local contrast information (Eq. 2).

$$R_\phi = I * G_\phi \quad (2)$$

where I is the input image of the mirrored object, G_ϕ is the oriented Gabor filter rotated by angle ϕ (see Figure 6), and $*$ is the convolution operator. In order to get a proper scaling of the computed responses, we apply a normalization to the Gabor filter output (Eq. 3). Parameter μ affects the strength of the normalization curve. To compensate for global contrast effects, μ is multiplied with the average contrast over all responses for a given orientation, where x and y are the dimensions of the image (see Eq. 4).

$$S_\phi = \frac{R_\phi}{\mu k_\phi + R_\phi} \quad (3)$$

where

$$k_\phi = \frac{\sum R_\phi}{x \cdot y} \quad (4)$$

In Figure 6, the population responses for two different locations in the input image are shown. The first population response is extracted from a location in the image where the texture is strongly distorted in one direction, leading to strong responses in one preferred orientation. The other population response is extracted from a location in the image where the texture is only weakly distorted. Here the population responses are nearly equally distributed over all orientations. Figure 6 illustrates how the direction is extracted from the orientation of the Gabor filter producing the maximum response at one specific

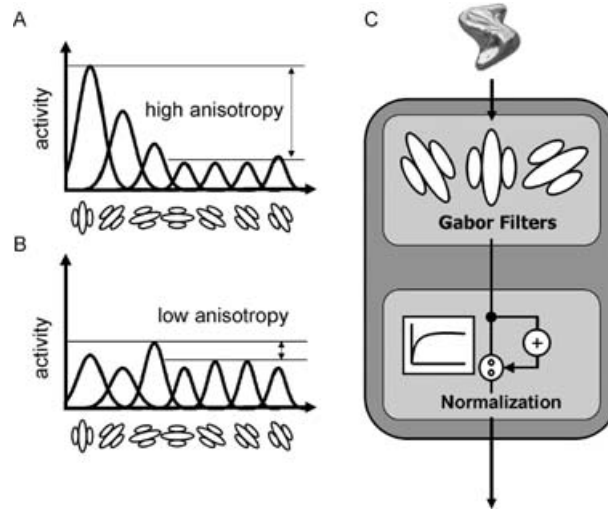


Fig. 6. Initial filter stage of the model (C). A family of orientation-selective Gabor filters is applied to the input image, followed by a normalization step in order to get a proper scaling of the responses. The distribution of the filter responses is shown for an anisotropic texture condition (A) and a nearly isotropic texture condition (B). Note that the filter, which yields maximal response, determines the prevailing orientation of texture distortion. Note also that the more the distribution differs from an equal distribution, the stronger the anisotropy of the texture.

location (Eq. 5).⁴

$$\phi_{\max} = \operatorname{argmax}(S_{\phi}) \quad (5)$$

We employ the ratio between minimal and maximal filter response to compute the anisotropy of the distortion; specifically, we use the term in Eq. (6).

$$A = 1 - \frac{\min(S_{\phi})}{\max(S_{\phi})} \quad (6)$$

which yields values between zero (isotropic) and one (anisotropic). Note that this data interpretation has been adopted from Fleming et al. [2004].

2.3.3 Orientation-Selective Grouping. The second component of our model consists of orientation-selective grouping filters. The grouping filter is constructed of two displaced elongated Gaussian functions $G_{\sigma_1, \sigma_2}^{\leftarrow}, G_{\sigma_1, \sigma_2}^{\rightarrow}$ (elongation ratio $\sigma_1 : \sigma_2$) that are combined in a multiplicative manner (Figure 7). These filters are applied to locally enhance coherent filter responses and to enforce the initial estimated anisotropy signal (Eqs.8–9). Note that the grouping filters are rotated in the appropriate direction ϕ when they are applied for each orientation layer.

$$F_{\phi}^{\leftarrow} = S_{\phi} * G_{\sigma_1, \sigma_2, \phi}^{\leftarrow} \quad (7)$$

$$F_{\phi}^{\rightarrow} = S_{\phi} * G_{\sigma_1, \sigma_2, \phi}^{\rightarrow} \quad (8)$$

$$L_{\phi} = F_{\phi}^{\leftarrow} \cdot F_{\phi}^{\rightarrow} \quad (9)$$

⁴Note that in this case the texture distortion is always unimodal in the direction of minimal surface curvature. Moreover, our filters are relatively small (just a few pixels per diameter) so that it is very unlikely that the distribution of orientation responses has more than one peak. Thus, we assume that the *argmax* operation always yields a unique result.

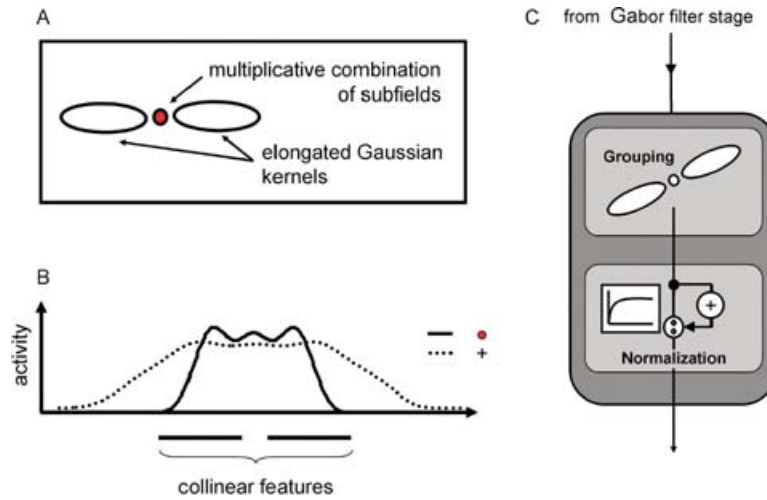


Fig. 7. Grouping stage of the model consisting of the actual grouping step and an additional normalization that is necessary to achieve bounded output and to get a proper scaling of the filter responses (C). The grouping filter consists of two elongated Gaussian kernels, which are combined by a multiplicative connection (A). (B) shows a comparison between filter responses in case of an additive (dotted) and a multiplicative (solid) connection when the input is a short line segment. Note that an additive connection would lead to smearing effect at line ends.

In particular, this kind of filter has the effect that collinear Gabor responses (from the initial stage) are enforced, while potentially erroneous responses typically occur without context and, thus, are weakened by this operation. The multiplicative connection in Eq. (9) ensures that input from both sides of the centre is needed to generate activation. Using an additive connection would lead to smearing effects at line ends (see Figure 7). In other words, this stage produces strong responses if the underlying input signals a continuous orientation pattern. This is consistent with physiological findings about nonlinearities in the response of V2 contrast cells [von der Heydt et al. 1984].

Finally the grouping filter responses are passed through a second normalization step (Eq. 10) similar to the operation in Eq. (3). This operation is necessary to keep the filter responses bounded while strong filter responses are enforced and weak filter responses are diminished.

$$M_{\phi} = \frac{L_{\phi}}{1 + L_{\phi}} \quad (10)$$

2.3.4 Full Recurrent Model. So far we have described feedforward connections of the model. Now we use the locally grouped information (Eq. 10) to iteratively refine the initial estimates (Eq. 3). This operation can be realized by using the grouped filter responses as a recurrent feedback signal. Physiological evidence supports the view that top-down projections serve primarily as a modulation mechanism to control the responsiveness of cells in the primary visual cortex [Bullier et al. 1988]. Accordingly, we use the grouped Gabor responses (M_{ϕ}) as a feedback signal. Here, the feedback signal acts as a prediction of an error-free input pattern. The feedback modulation is realized by the following equation:

$$S_{\phi}^{new} = S_{\phi}^{init} \cdot (1 + \alpha M_{\phi}) \quad (11)$$

where α is a parameter to adjust the influence of the feedback signal M_{ϕ} and S_{ϕ}^{init} is the initial signal from Eq. (3). Note that Eq. (3) has to be replaced by Eq. (11) for the full recurrent model (see also Figure 8). The logic of the feedback modulation can be interpreted as follows:

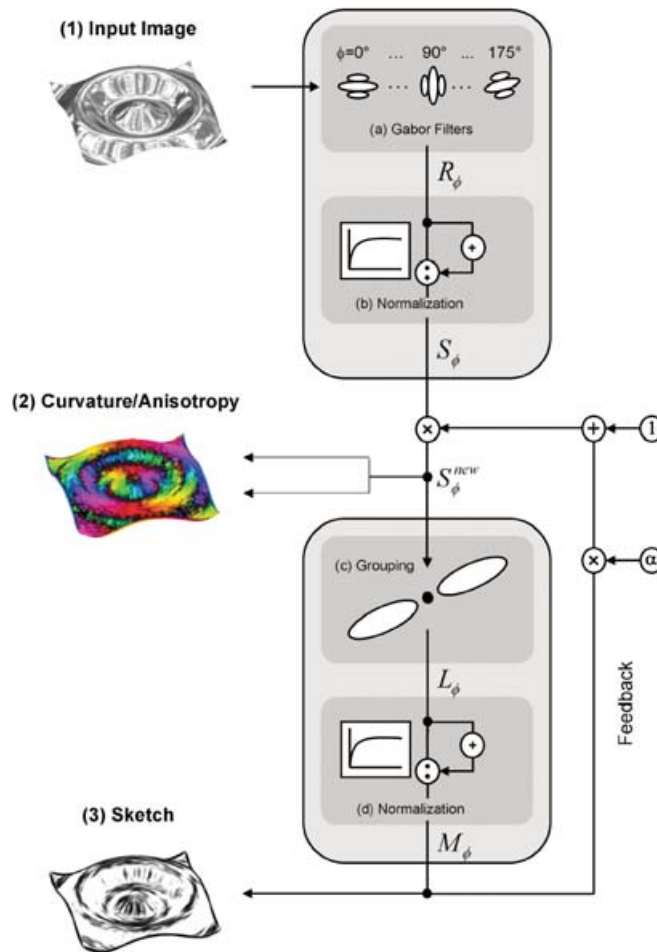


Fig. 8. The full recurrent model in detail. The model receives a greyscale image of a specular object as input (1) First, a family of orientation-selective Gabor filters is applied to the image (a) followed by a normalization step (b) to get a proper scaling. Second, a grouping filter is applied for each orientation to enhance collinear features (c), followed by another normalization step (d). The signal is then fed back to iteratively refine the initial Gabor responses. Model outputs are the orientation of minimal curvature and the anisotropy of curvature (2). Furthermore, a sketch representation of the input image is extracted in (3).

The input signal is enhanced at locations where the initial signal matches the feedback signal. Thus, the feedback signal can be regarded as an expectation signal-biasing local input activations. In cases where feedback is zero, the “one” in Eq. (11) ensures that the initial signal remains unchanged. Iterative feedback processing thus strengthens collinear features over time and helps to reduce the influence of noise and the prece of errors.

2.3.5 Output Signals. There are three output signals of the model. The first and second output signal of the model yield the estimated minimal surface curvature orientation⁵ (from Eq. 5) and the anisotropy signal (Eq. 6), respectively. Both output signals are illustrated in one single output image

⁵Recall that features on the mirrored surface are aligned with the direction of minimal surface curvature. Thus, the filter direction with maximal response determines the *minimal* estimated curvature.

where the orientations are color coded and the anisotropy is coded as the intensity of the colors (see Figure 8, Part 2). The third output signal (Figure 8, Part 3) is an image of a nonphotorealistic sketch of the input image. The sketch output is computed by the difference between maximal and minimal activity of the filter responses (Eq. 12). Note that the sketch signal is similar to the anisotropy signal (Eq. 6). However, it is extracted after the grouping stage of the model and with a slightly different computation rule.

$$A_{sketch} = \max(S_\phi) - \min(S_\phi) \quad (12)$$

3. SIMULATIONS

In this section, we show the competencies of our proposed model for three different specular objects, depicted in Figure 9. In particular, we show the estimated minimal curvature directions in combination with the anisotropy of curvature and a sketch representation of the object for a variety of model parameters.

3.1 Model Input

As input, we use greyscale images of synthetically generated specular objects. All objects have a smoothly curved surface containing concavities and convexities, as well as self-occlusions. To give the objects a specular surface, we used reflection maps from Debevec et al. [2000]. In Figure 9, the objects are depicted in a mesh style (to give a clear impression of the shape) and with a perfectly specular surface (used as model input). For computational simulations we utilize input images with a resolution of 600×600 pixels. Figure 9 also shows a reflection map from Debevec et al. [2000], where the world around the mirrored objects is compressed into a 2D image.⁶

3.2 Evaluation of Principal Curvature Orientations and Anisotropy

In Figure 10 we show the orientation error depending on the actual level of curvature anisotropy. The results demonstrate that for isotropic curvature conditions the orientation error is significantly higher than for the anisotropic curvature conditions. We further illustrate the initial estimates of curvature directions and surface anisotropy (without feedback and grouping) for different Gabor sizes in Figure 11. It is clearly visible that small Gabor filters, tuned to high frequency components lead to better results than Gabor filters of larger scale. We also demonstrate qualitatively (Figure 11) and quantitatively (Figure 12b) that the orientation error increases as we enlarge the size of the Gabor filters. As a consequence of this, we use small-sized Gabor filters ($\sigma = 0.9$) for all subsequent simulations.

In Figure 13, we show the curvature directions/anisotropy of curvature initially detected by the model and after 10 time steps of grouping and feedback. The initial output qualitatively matches the ground truth, except for some noise in areas where the surface curvature is isotropic. Figure 13, shows that the process of directional grouping and recurrent feedback removes noise in these areas and enhances the anisotropy signal. To corroborate this, in Figure 12a, we show quantitatively that the orientation error decreases significantly over several steps of iterative feedback and converges after 10 iterations.

In Figure 14, we show the extracted sketch from the input image for different grouping filter ratios. As the elongation ratio of the Gabor filters (grouping stage) increases, more and more collinear features are enhanced and grouped together. By subsequently applying these grouping filters within the recurrent feedback cycle, smoothly connected object structures, such as curvature ridge lines and self-occlusions, are enhanced and completed over time (principle of good continuation).

⁶Each pixel in the reflection map belongs to a specific direction in space. The spherical surrounding can be divided into degrees of latitude and longitude where each pixel in the reflection map belongs to a specific coordinate in latitude/longitude space. In other words, the reflection map is simply used as a look-up table in the rendering process.

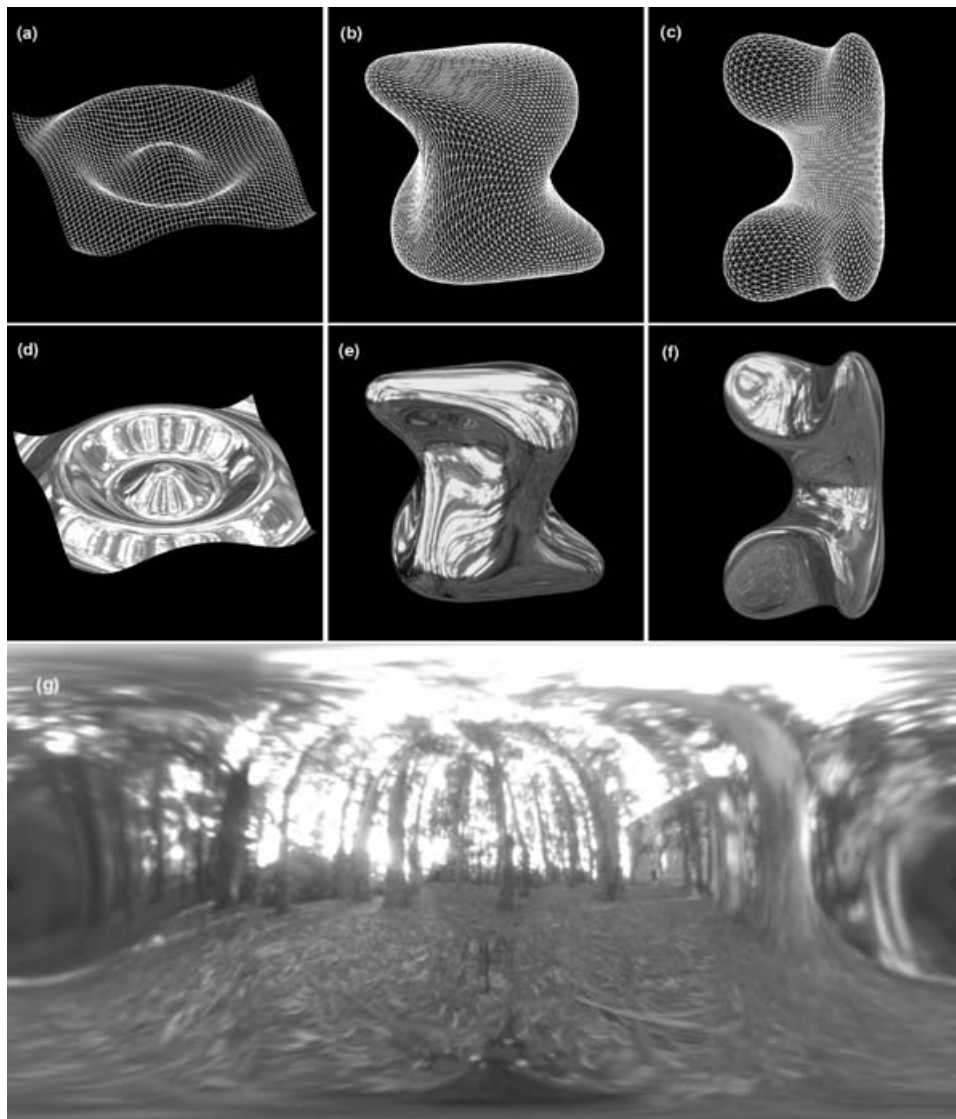


Fig. 9. Three synthetically created specular input objects (d–f) and their corresponding 3D-models (a–c). The objects are mirrored with the “Eucalyptus Grove” reflection map from Debevec et al. [2000] (g). Object (a) was inspired by [Todd 2004] and shows a plane perturbed by a circular wave function. Object (b) shows a sphere, which was also squeezed and stretched to achieve a smoothly varying curved surface. Object (c) was created by bending and squeezing an ellipsoid, which leads to a surface shape where nearly all possible curvature conditions are visible.

Figure 15 shows that the quality of the sketch depends on the combination of the two parameters α and μ . The strength of the initial normalization step is controlled by parameter μ and the strength of the feedback signal is controlled by parameter α . In Figures 16 and 17, we employed two different objects rendered under four different surrounding scenes as input for the model. Model simulations show that the extracted sketch images produced from a given shape under different environmental scenes exhibit only marginal differences. Figure 16 therefore gives a very powerful impression that

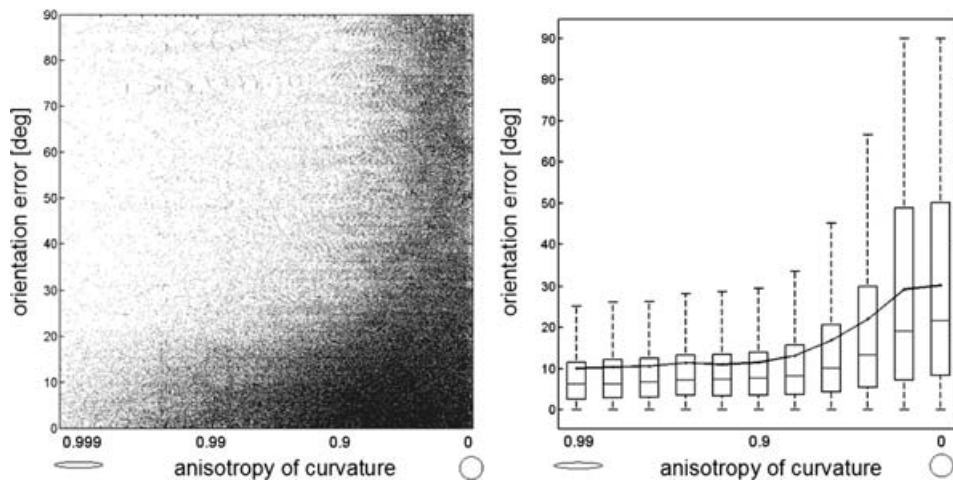


Fig. 10. The figure illustrates orientation error as a function of surface anisotropy. Left plot shows individual observations, where each dot represents the measurement from a single pixel (several objects and environmental scenes were used). Right plot shows box plots computed from (a), where we divided the anisotropy axis into 11 bins (box represents lower quartile, median and upper quartile). For low-curvature anisotropies the distribution of orientation errors is spread from 0 to 90°, while for high-curvature anisotropies, the distribution is only spread between 0 and 25°. Mean orientation error drops from 30° (isotropic condition) to about 10° (anisotropic condition). Note that in both plots we use a logarithmic scale for the x axis. Note also that as we employ only 18 different filter orientation in steps of 10°, the resulting mean orientation error cannot be lower than 10°.

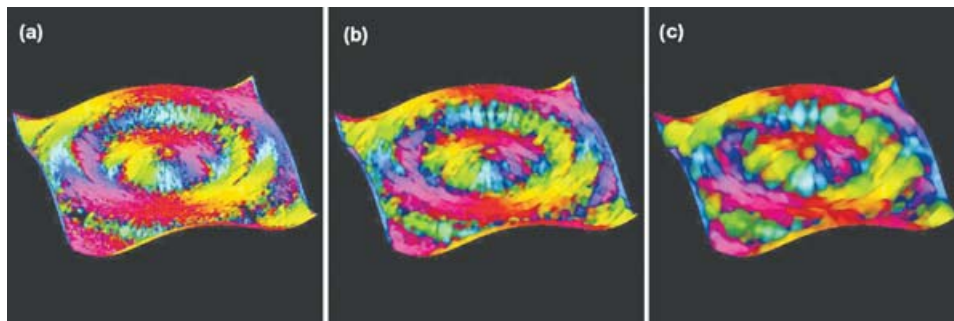


Fig. 11. Initial detected minimal curvature orientation and anisotropy of curvature for different sizes of the initial Gabor filter stage. In (a) we employed small Gabor filters (4 pixels/cycle), (b) shows results for medium sized Gabor filters (8 pixels/cycle), and (c) shows results for large-sized Gabor filters (16 pixels/cycle). We can see clearly, that as the size of the Gabor filter increases, we lose more and more detail information. For an explanation of the color code, see Figure 13.

the produced sketch is independent of the surrounding scene. Additional results are also shown in Figure 18.

To demonstrate the performance of the model with images of real-world objects, we have also produced sketches from photographs of a kettle and a tap (see Figure 19).

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

We have shown that by making some simple measurements on the image of a mirrored object it is possible to estimate surface-curvature properties accurately and reliably. We have shown that these measurements can be performed by extracting and interpreting population codes using simple

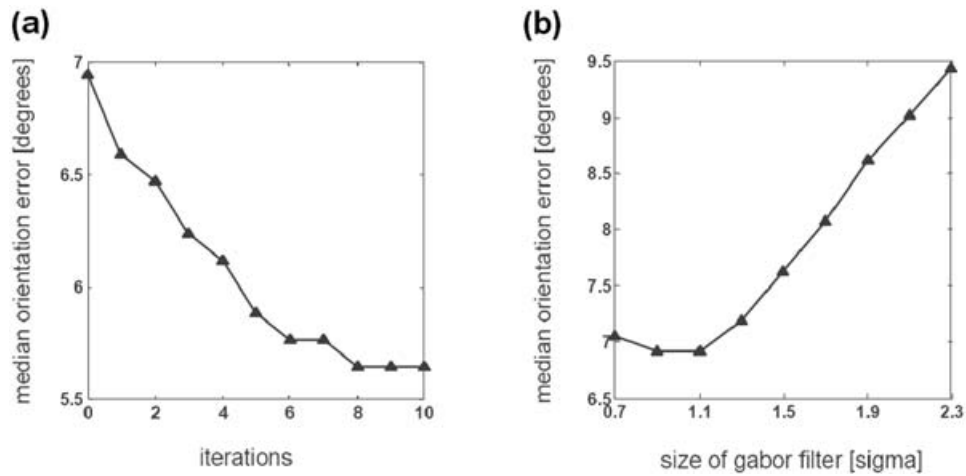


Fig. 12. The graph in (a) shows the orientation error computed from one object/scene configuration over subsequent time steps of the feedback cycle. We can see that the error is decreasing with each time step and nearly converging after 10 time steps to a value of 5.6° . The graph in (b) shows the median orientation error across different Gabor sizes of the initial filter stage. We can find a minimum error of 6.9° for a Gabor filter size of $\sigma = 0.9$. Increasing the size of the Gabor filters leads to a monotonic increase of the orientation error. We can also observe that too small Gabor filters have a negative effect by producing slightly higher error measures.

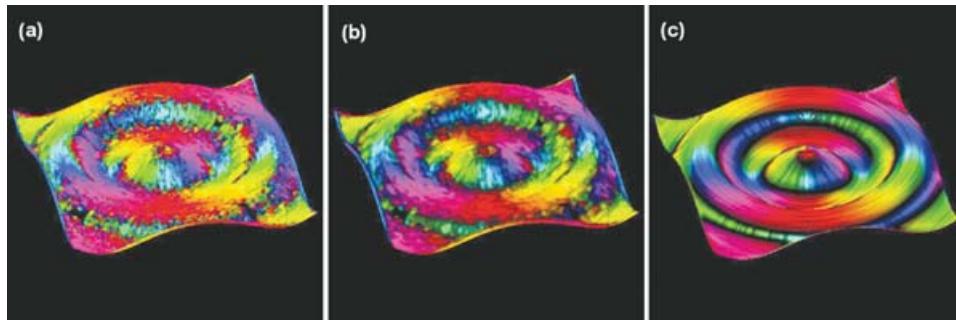


Fig. 13. The figure shows measures of the minimal curvature orientations and the anisotropy of curvature. Curvature orientations are coded in color, whereas the anisotropy is displayed as the intensity of the color (dark means isotropic curvature). The ground-truth information (c) is compared to the initial detected curvature (a) (no grouping/feedback) and to the refined model output (b) after 10 cycles of grouping and feedback. We can see that especially in areas where the ground-truth image shows isotropic curvatures, the feedback helps to reduce orientation errors and to stress the anisotropy signal.

orientation-selective linear filters. We improved these initial measurements by collinear grouping of perceptually relevant features, which mainly occurs at locations where the surface anisotropy is high. We have shown that recurrent combination of contextual features substantially enhances the quality of the estimates. In addition, it is possible to extract a sketchlike representation from the input image, which is nearly invariant to the surrounding scene. The iterative grouping stage has the effect that isolated errors and noise are reduced in the curvature estimates and that the extracted sketch becomes more distinct.

The model dynamics were developed in the context of contour perception by Neumann and Sepp [1999]. We bring together and further extend previous proposals on perceptual grouping of surface features [Grossberg and Mingolla 1985] with recent proposals of human shape perception of specular

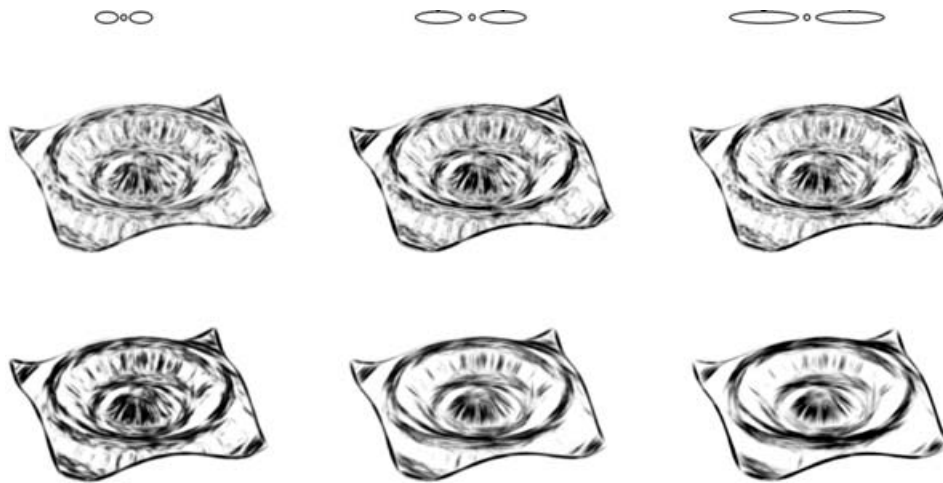


Fig. 14. Sketch output of the model for different grouping filter elongation ratios. We used elongated Gabor filters with a ratio $\sigma_1 : \sigma_2 = 2, 4,$ and 6 (filter shapes are illustrated scaled uniformly by a factor 3). We show the initial model output (without feedback) (first row) and the output after 10 iterations (second row) for each filter configuration. A low elongation ratio (resulting in a short-range grouping filter) produces a rather noisy initial output, whereas a medium or high filter ratio produces more clear and smooth results. Note that even for short-range grouping filters the feedback helps to improve the signal by closing discontinuities between collinear features.

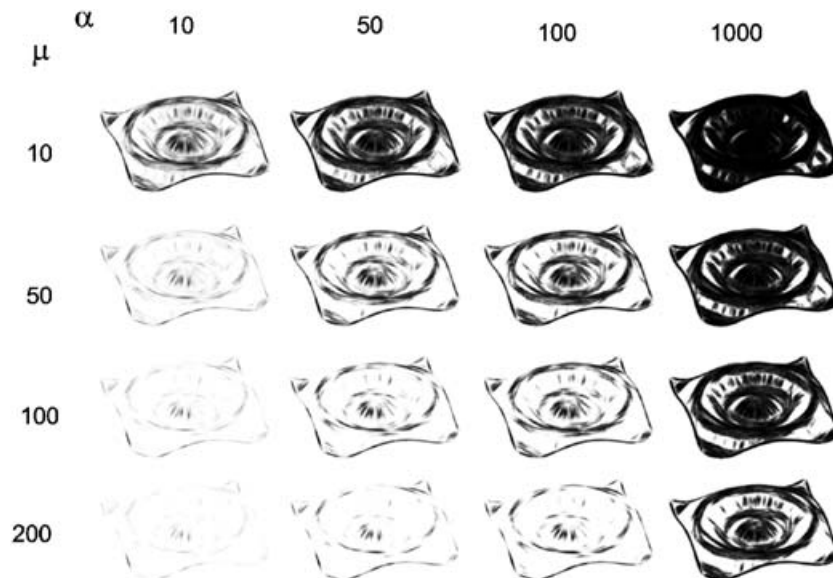


Fig. 15. This figure shows sketch results after 10 iterations of feedback for different parameterizations of α and μ , where α adjusts the influence of the feedback signal and μ , adjusts the strength of the initial normalization step. The figure illustrates that both parameters have to be chosen carefully in order to receive good looking sketch results. In cases where α is very low, the feedback signal has less influence. Thus, the resulting sketch shows insufficient detail. In cases where α (feedback contribution) is high in combination with a low μ (normalization), this leads to an overemphasized sketch result. If not mentioned otherwise, we used $\alpha = 100$ and $\mu = 100$ for model simulations.

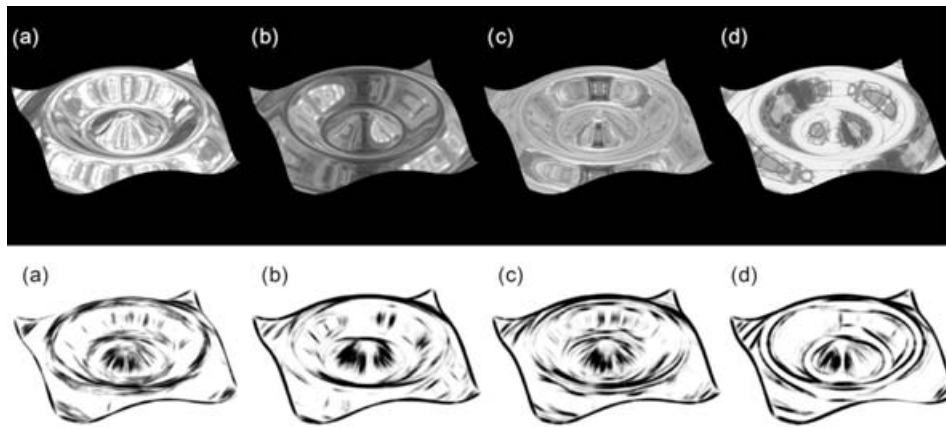


Fig. 16. Input images rendered with four different environmental scenes (first row). The specular objects are rendered with the “Eucalyptus Grove” scene (a), “St Peters Basilica” (b), “Galileo’s Tomb” (c), and the “Overcast Breezeway” (d). The reflection maps are taken from Debevec et al. [2000]. For each different scene, we show the sketch output of the model after 10 cycles of feedback (second row). We can see that although the input images look quite different, the sketch output looks very similar in all four cases.

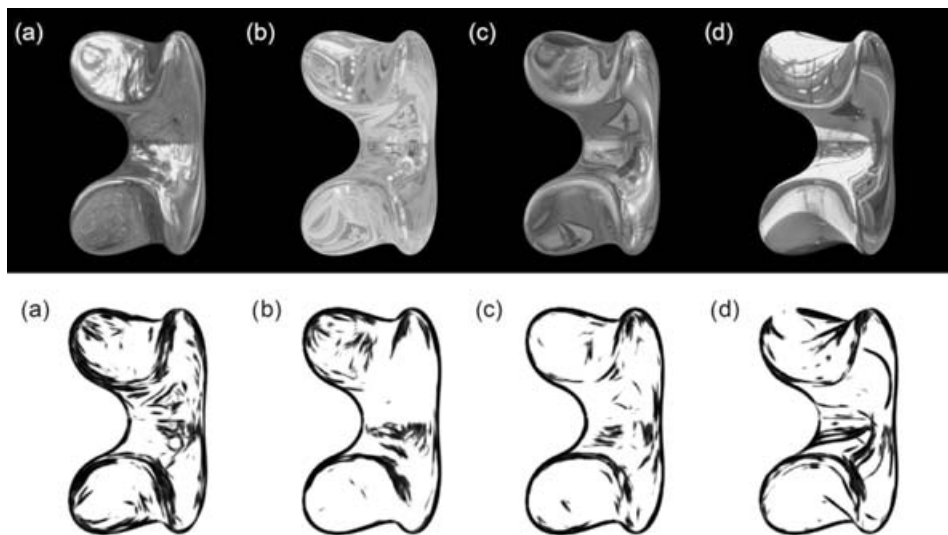


Fig. 17. We show another mirrored object rendered under four different environmental scenes: (a) “Eucalyptus Grove,” (b) “St Peters Basilica,” (c) “Galileo’s Tomb,” and (d) “Overcast Breezeway.” Model parameters are the same as used in Figure 16. The figure illustrates that the resulting sketches look very similar, even though environmental scenes do not perfectly obey the assumption of isotropic scene statistics.

surfaces [Fleming et al. 2004]. Our model employs simple biologically motivated mechanisms as it is well known that primary visual cortex contains cells that are tuned to different image orientations [Hubel and Wiesel 1968].

It is important to note that our model output can only provide *constraints* on 3D shape, rather than a complete estimate of the shape model. Orientation fields are inherently ambiguous. For example, convex

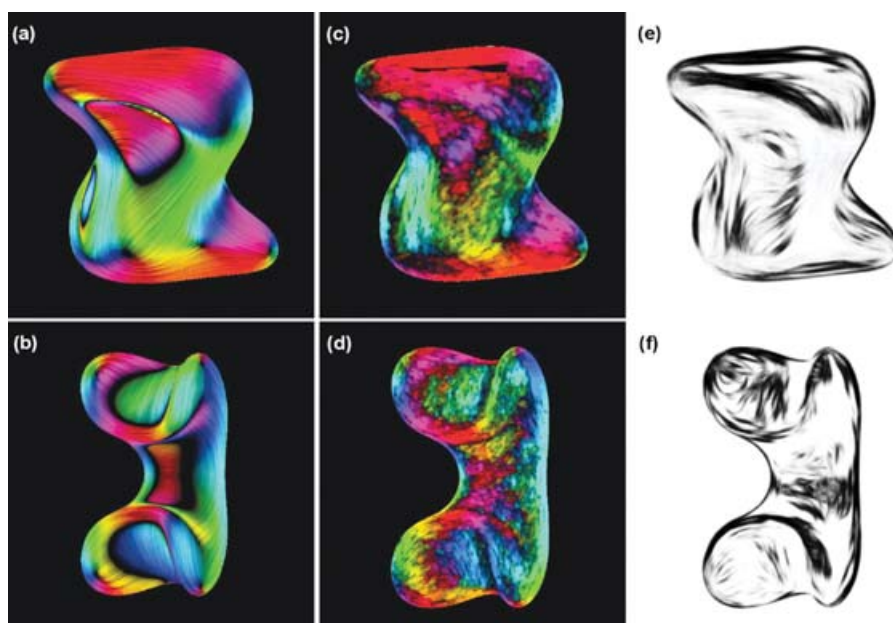


Fig. 18. Model output for two different objects (rendered with the “Eucalyptus Grove” scene and parameters $(\alpha = 10, \mu = 10)$). We show the estimated minimal curvature orientations in combination with the anisotropy of curvature after 10 iterations of feedback (c + d) in comparison to the ground-truth image images (a + b). We also show the sketch computed from each object (e + f).

and concave surface patches cannot be distinguished locally. However, human vision almost certainly applies additional constraints to resolve these ambiguities, e.g., by enforcing boundary conditions based on occluding contours [Koenderink 1984], or by enforcing global constraints, such as smoothness.

Our model naturally extracts object structures, such as smooth occlusion contours and curvature ridge lines. These features have been described by Todd [2004] as typical features of line drawing showing 3D objects. Indeed, the fact that image orientations tend to align with these shape features may provide an explanation of *why* artists choose to depict these features, in particular. Our simulations also demonstrate that the model sketch can be used as an abstract representation of the 3D object, invariant to the reflected scene (Figure 16). The sketch tends to emphasize regions of high-curvature. Previous work on the perception of 2D shape, has suggested that high-curvature regions are the most informative locations on a 2D curve [Attneave 1954; Feldman and Singh 2005].

Previous work on 3D shape visualization has suggested the utility of aligning texture with the intrinsic principal directions of the surface [Interrante and Kim 2001; Interrante et al. 2002; Kim et al. 2003]. Here, we suggest that the principal directions defined in *view-centered* coordinates may also be useful for conveying surface shape. Note that areas of high curvature tend to bear patterns of high spatial frequency, because this is where the reflection is most compressed. By emphasizing fine structures, the extracted sketch also looks subjectively like a charcoal drawing.

4.1 Limitations of the Model

Although our model behaves well for most objects and surrounding scenes, there are, of course, some special cases where the model fails to provide accurate estimates. As mentioned earlier, our model

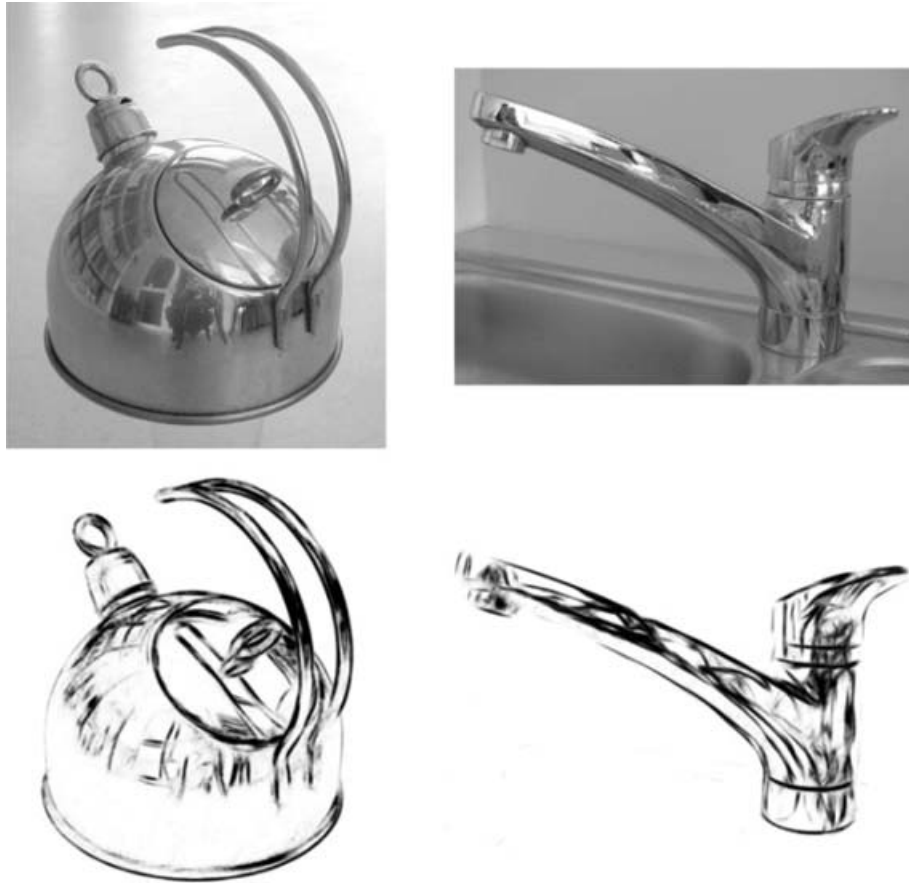


Fig. 19. The figure shows sketch results from images of real world scenes containing shiny surfaces. Here we demonstrate that the model also performs well on images taken from real-world scenes. Note that, overall, the mirrored kettle has relatively isotropic curvature properties and thus the model tends to produce patterns that depend on the environmental scene.

implicitly assumes the surrounding scene is isotropic. If we infringe this assumption, which we tacitly do when we use real-world scenes, this leads to errors in our curvature measures and also in the sketch generation (see Figure 20). It has been shown by Fleming, Torralba, and Adelson [Fleming et al. in press] that this is no problem as long as the surface anisotropy is strong enough to overcome the anisotropies in the surrounding scene. However, when the surface is locally isotropic, such as in the central region of a sphere, the orientation measurements are dominated by the contours of the objects in the surrounding scene. Nevertheless, even weak curvature anisotropy biases the texture distortion in correct. Furthermore, on complex smoothly curved surfaces, these isotropic conditions appear relatively rarely, generally only at singular points (in the centre of humps or dimples) or along lines of inflection points of curvature (where one curvature component changes its sign). Assuming ordinary real-world scenes, the reflections on such areas are not characterized by smoothly curved streaks but rather by a noisy orientation field. Consequently, we designed our model to weaken such areas by introducing the grouping component in combination with the recurrent feedback signal.

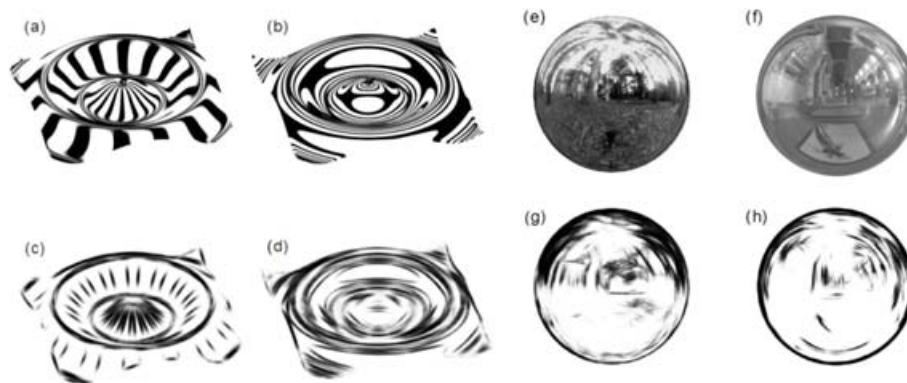


Fig. 20. (a) and (b) An object mirrored with an artificial scene that consists of vertical (a) and horizontal stripes (b). This artificial environment represents a very unnatural scene with purely anisotropic scene statistics (which strongly infringes the assumption of an isotropic scene). Hence, the resulting sketches in (c) and (d) look very different from one another. Despite this, it is observable that on highly curved areas on the surface (curvature ridges), both sketches show similar striped patterns. (e) and (f) a sphere illuminated with the “Eucalyptus Grove” scene (e) and the “Galileo’s Tomb” scene (f) from Debevec et al. [2000]. Apart from the outer rim, a sphere has roughly isotropic curvature properties. Thus, the sketches in (g) and (h) show rather different orientation patterns, which are not invariant to the surrounding scene.

4.2 Generalization of the Model

Most objects in our environment do not have a perfectly specular surface. Indeed, this type of surface reflectance property, where incoming light is only reflecting in one single direction, is quite unusual. Most materials scatter light in many directions, leading to a continuous shading pattern on the surface. However, Fleming et al. [2004] showed that orientation fields also remain somewhat stable across changes in material. In future work, we intend to extend our model to also deal with rough or diffuse materials, like brushed aluminum or chalk. Our model could also be extended to interpret specular highlights which have the same characteristics as perfectly specular reflections, except that they appear only at isolated locations.

In summary, we have shown a novel architecture of shape processing from specular objects that combines orientation selective filtering [Fleming et al. 2004] with recent proposals on perceptual grouping and feedback processing [Neumann and Sepp 1999]. Our model can be used to reliably extract the principal curvature directions of smoothly curved specular surface and to generate a non-photorealistic sketch which is invariant to the surrounding scene.

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