

SheetAnim - From Model Sheets to 2D Hand-drawn Character Animation

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Abstract: We present an intuitive method to create 2D hand-drawn character animation suitable for novice animators. Given the 2D model sheet of the character that shows how the character looks from the front and side, our method can generate sketched views of the character from any direction, using the sketch stroke style used in the model sheet. Subsequently, our system can generate an animation of the character using motion capture data, and render it using the same sketched strokes. Our method is not only able to reproduce the sketch stroke style, but also the colours and other character details that the animator adds to the model sheet. The method can resolve occlusion correctly, both due to moving body parts and change in orientation of the character with respect to the camera. The animator can interactively change the sketch style, colours or other details, at any frame, as required. The animation generated by our method has the fluid style of hand sketched animation, and provides a very good starting point for novice animators that can be then improved to create the final, desired animation.

1 INTRODUCTION

Hand-drawn character animation is a beautiful art form. It offers the animator unique expressive freedom in creating characters. However, it requires a significant amount of skill and effort on the part of an animator to create. Not only is it difficult to convincingly sketch a character in different poses from different view directions, it is even harder to do this while maintaining rhythm and temporal coherence.

Many researchers have attempted to develop methods and tools to aid and simplify the creation of 2D character animation (Jones et al., 2015; Xing et al., 2015; Patel et al., 2016). However, most of these are restricted in the kind of interaction they allow the animator to have with the character and the resulting animation that they can generate. Many of these methods cannot handle changing orientations of the character with respect to the camera position during the animation, and thus, cannot also handle the occlusions that result from such motion. Also, some of them cannot preserve the style of sketching of the animator.

Our method allows the animator to intuitively and easily generate animation from a character model sheet and also preserves the sketch style and colours present in the model sheet. If the model sheet shows the character from a front and a side view, then our

method can generate sketched views of the character for any camera angle. Thereafter, given any motion data for the character, we can generate an animation of the character performing the same motion, even if the relative orientation of the character with respect to the camera changes during the motion of the character.

Our system is especially suited for novice animators. They can easily start from the animation that our system generates and refine it so that it becomes more visually appealing. Our system is very intuitive and easy to use, but it also allows the animator complete freedom to change, edit and update the suggestions given by the system, if the animator so desires.

An example of the kind of output produced by our system can be seen in Figure 1. Our method relies on a background template mesh that is registered to the character sketch given in the model sheet. The template mesh is posed and deformed to match the sketches in pose and shape. Thereafter, any additional element drawn on the model sheet, like the sunglasses or the smile as seen in the coloured model sheet in Figure 1, are correctly reproduced by our method in the desired animation. The animation motion is generated based on input motion data.

We start by discussing relevant related work in Section 2. We follow this up by an overview of our entire method in Section 3. We then discuss the de-

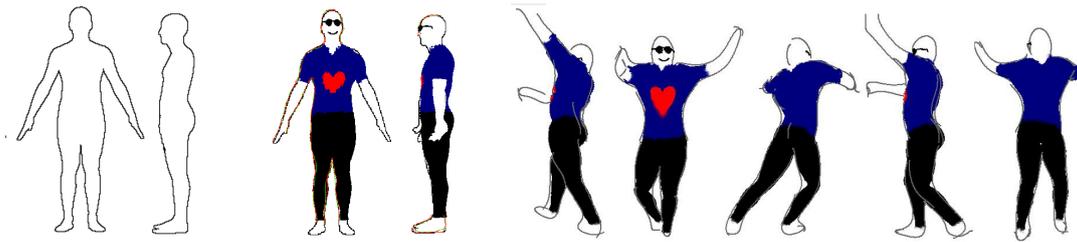


Figure 1: Given a model sheet of a character, an animator can colour the character and add accessories to the character like sunglasses. Our method generates an animation of the character, according to given motion data. Here frames from a dance animation are shown. The colors, sketch style and accessories are correctly reproduced by our method in each frame.

tails of template mesh to sketch registration in Section 4, and animation generation in Section 5. We explain ways in which we can enhance the animation in Section 6. We present frames from multiple result animations generated by our method in Section 7 and we conclude with a discussion of limitations of our system and future work in Sections 8 and 9.

2 BACKGROUND

Creating 2D character animations has attracted the attention of a lot of researchers. Sketch-based interfaces for creating animation have been used to create character animation of stick figures (Davis et al., 2003), doodle paths along which characters can move and perform actions based on path shape (Thorne et al., 2004) or create three dimensional animations (Jain et al., 2009). Some research has also been done to aid various aspects of animation like storyboarding (Henrikson et al., 2016). Very good results for character modelling from sketches were recently shown by (Bessmeltsev et al., 2015). Their method generates the character geometry from the sketch and a very well fitting skeleton. It uses a strong assumption of rotational cross-sectional symmetry at every point on the contours to generate the model. We believe our method based on template fitting is more generic and can handle more body types.

NPR rendering of animated characters has also been tried in literature (Kalnins et al., 2002; Kalnins et al., 2003). These systems support sketching directly on the mesh to stylize its appearance. In using our system the user never needs to know about the 3D proxy mesh and never needs to sketch on a 3D surface, which is harder to do. Recent work has also looked at consistent paint stroke renderings of 3D models (Bassett et al., 2013), and video stylizations (Ben-Zvi et al., 2016). We actively help the animator in creating the animation from a model sheet and do not restrict the animator to a particular sketching or motion style.

In other literature, there has been some attempt toward actually aiding the 2D character animation creation process. Xing et al. (Xing et al., 2015) present a method to auto-complete hand-drawn animations. This work can predict future frames of an animation based on the current and previous frames. It can also assist the animator by automatically transporting colour and texture information across frames. However, this method cannot handle out of plane motions for the character, i.e., it cannot predict a future frame when the relationship between the character and camera changes. It can also not handle occlusions correctly. Another recent work, Tracemove (Patel et al., 2016) can predict future frames of a 2D character animation from partially sketched frames based on a matches found in a pose image database and motion capture data. It is also restricted to handling poses whose camera positions match those present in the image pose database, and it cannot change during an animation. Other methods have attempted to rapidly create animations by cloning texture sprites (Jones et al., 2015), however, these cannot support animation in general.

In order to handle varying orientations of the character, we register a template mesh to the sketch. We match the shape and pose of the mesh to the sketch of the character as given in the model sheet. We are inspired by the method presented in (Zhou et al., 2010) to reshape the mesh and register it with the sketch of the character. Grasp and Taylor (Grasp and Taylor, 2000) and Kraevoy et al. (Kraevoy et al., 2009) present methods to recover pose of the character from sketches. Levi and Gotsman (Levi and Gotsman, 2013) present Arti-Sketch, that recovers pose and shape in one framework from 3 views of the character. There are, of course, many other works that use sketches for modelling (Igarashi et al., 1999; Henrikson et al., 2016) objects and characters. We base our method of mesh-sketch registration on this body of literature and implement a robust scheme that lets us design a system that is easy and intuitive for the animator to use.

The registered mesh serves as a background proxy for the sketch and allows us to copy the sketching and colouring style of the animator from the model sheet and use it to create the resulting animation. The idea of mimicking sketching style has been explored in several works (Hertzmann et al., 2002; Xing et al., 2015; Magnenat et al., 2015). We are able to perform this in the presence of unstructured sketching styles and changing camera views. We were motivated in this direction by the use of 3D proxy meshes to enhance production quality 2D animation in Disney’s Paperman (Whited et al., 2012).

3 OVERVIEW

Our method allows an animator to create a 2D character animation from a model sheet. Given a model sheet, we register the character in the model sheet to a template mesh. We use a standard template mesh from the MakeHuman (MakeHuman, 2016) project for this purpose. We first match the pose of the template mesh to the character in the model sheet. In order to do this, the user has to drag and approximately adjust a predefined skeleton on the character on the model sheet. This is done only once. After this the pose of this skeleton is used to change the pose of the skeleton embedded in the template mesh. This matches the pose of the mesh to that of the sketched character. Subsequently, we deform the mesh to match the shape of the sketched character. This is done automatically using the outside boundary of the sketched character and the silhouette of the template mesh.

At this stage the animator can add more details to the model sheet, if required - like colours, or glasses or pockets on shirts. Even sketch strokes in various styles can be added to the model sheet by the animator, by sketching directly over the model sheet. Then the animator just has to provide motion data and our method produces the animation of the character using that motion data, while preserving the colours and other sketch details added during the process. This entire process is schematically illustrated in Figure 2.

We can generate animations from any camera viewpoint, generate novel sketched views, and handle different sketch and colouring styles. We explain the details of various parts of our method in subsequent sections.

4 MESH-SKETCH REGISTRATION

We register the template mesh to the sketched character in the model sheet. We do this by first matching the pose of the mesh to the pose of the character, and then deforming the mesh so that its silhouette matches the character’s shape.

4.1 Pose Matching

Grasp and Taylor (Grasp and Taylor, 2000) present a method to find 3D pose from 2D-3D joint correspondences under a weak perspective camera projection. However, their reconstruction suffers from a scale ambiguity. We use the front and side view of the character from the model sheet to overcome this limitation of the method. A weak perspective camera matrix maps a 3D point (X, Y, Z) to a 2D point (u, v) , up to a scale s , as

$$\begin{pmatrix} u \\ v \end{pmatrix} = s \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 0 \end{pmatrix} \begin{pmatrix} X \\ Y \\ Z \end{pmatrix} \quad (1)$$

Now, given a skeleton bone segment in 3D, which has end points (X_1, Y_1, Z_1) and (X_2, Y_2, Z_2) , if the segment projects to (u_{11}, v_{11}) and (u_{21}, v_{21}) in the front view of the character and to (u_{12}, v_{12}) and (u_{22}, v_{22}) in the side view, then we can write the direction cosines of the bone segment as

$$\begin{aligned} l_x &= \frac{u_{12} - u_{11}}{D} \\ l_y &= \frac{v_{12} - v_{11}}{D} \\ l_z &= \frac{(u_{22} - u_{21}) * s_1}{s_2 * D} \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

where D is:

$$D = \sqrt{(u_{12} - u_{11})^2 + (v_{12} - v_{11})^2 + \left(\frac{u_{22} - u_{21} * s_1}{s_2}\right)^2}$$

Here s_1 and s_2 are the ambiguous scales in both the projections. As the length of the bone does not change, and the camera is stationary, the scales cancel each other out. If l , the length of the bone segment, is known, then given one of the bone end points, the other one can be determined by moving along the direction cosines found above. Therefore, if we fix the position of the root joint in world coordinates, we can find the pose of its children bones and continuing thus, the pose of the entire skeleton hierarchy.

Note, that the corresponding 2D positions of joints on the model sheets are found by adjusting the joints of a predefined skeleton to correct locations on the

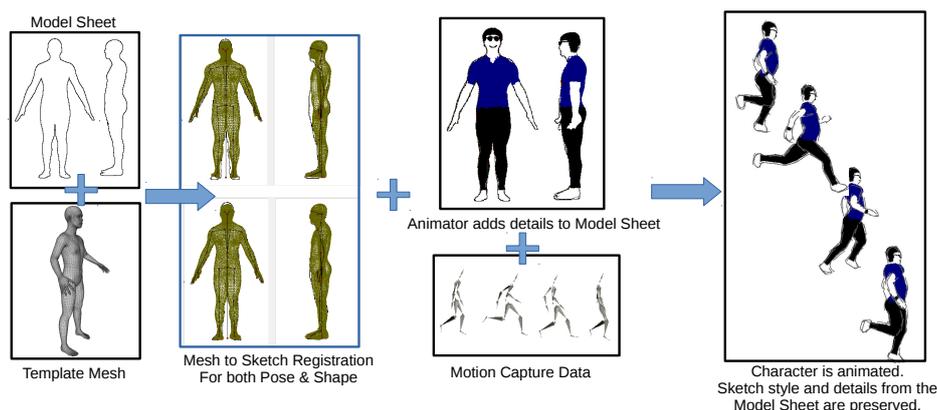


Figure 2: An overview of our system.

sketch. This has to be done only once and is a very simple and intuitive process to follow.

The mesh can be posed as per the pose of the skeleton by using a suitable form of skinning.

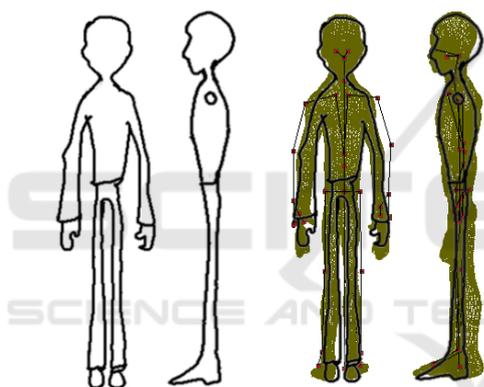


Figure 3: The character model sheet is given on the left. The template mesh was registered to it by posing it and deforming its shape to fit the character and is drawn in brown on the right.

4.2 Shape Fitting

Now we deform the mesh so that the silhouette of the mesh matches the boundary shape of the character. We first identify the boundary of the character sketch by using contour tracing. This contour has to be a closed contour, so it is closed as a post-processing step if it is already not so. We then identify correspondences with the silhouette vertices of the template mesh. The correspondences are found by minimizing a cost metric that depends on proximity of the contour point to the mesh vertex, smoothness and continuity of successive matching mesh vertices (Kraevoy et al., 2009). We do this for both the front and side view sketches of the character. Finally the corresponding mesh vertices are deformed toward the contours of the

character by using mean value encoding (Kraevoy and Sheffer, 2006). At the end of this process we have a template mesh that approximately matches the character sketches in pose and shape.

An example of the template mesh registered to a model sheet can be seen in Figure 3. The registration is not perfect, as the mesh does not exactly match the extreme shape of the character's limbs in the model sheet. However, this is not a problem for our method, as the mesh is only used as a background proxy and is never seen by the animator. This registration is sufficient for us to proceed further and create the desired animation of the character.

5 ANIMATION GENERATION

After the template mesh has been registered to the sketch, we generate our animation. The motion is added from any motion data supplied by the animator. This data can be obtained from pre-recorded motion capture or keyframing. The rendering style is based on the sketching style of the model sheets. An overview of the animation generation process is shown in Figure 4. The steps of the process are explained below.

5.1 Extracting Mesh Boundary Curves

The registered mesh is posed as per the skeleton pose in the current frame of the given motion capture data, using skinning. This mesh is then rendered into the depth buffer, and silhouette edges are extracted. These are then grouped as per the bones they are associated to and converted to Bézier curves. We call these curves *boundary curves*.

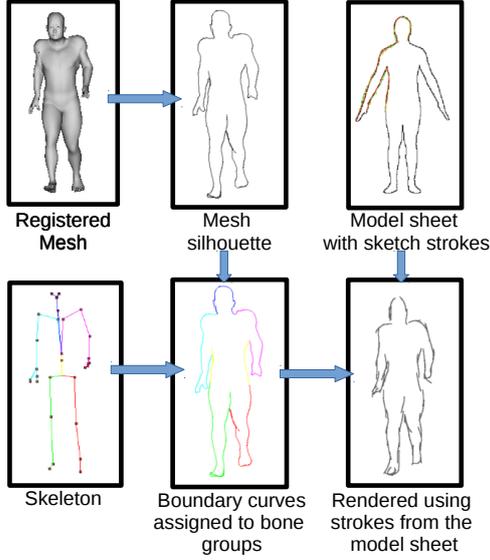


Figure 4: Generating the animation frame in the sketch style of the model sheet.

5.2 Synthesis with Given Stroke Style

The character in the model sheet is converted to a closed *contour curve* to aid mesh-sketch registration.

The animator can now sketch over the model sheet in any desired stroke style. As the animator sketches, the strokes drawn over the contour curve on the character on the model sheet, get associated with parts of the contour curve. Each part of the contour that matches a sketch stroke is called a *segment*. These sketch strokes will, subsequently, be used to render the animation. For each stroke, S_i , the following attributes are stored

1. Samples points that make up the stroke, $s_{i,j}$.
2. Segment of the contour curve on the model sheet to which stroke corresponds, C_i .
3. Index of the sample on C_i to which each stroke sample $s_{i,j}$ corresponds, $n_{i,j}$. The point on the contour curve segment at $n_{i,j}$, is given by $c_{i,j}$.
4. Overlap with the previously drawn stroke if there is any, O_i

Points on the contour curve, $c_{i,j}$, that are closest to the stroke sample points, $s_{i,j}$ are computed. C_i is then the curve segment between the minimum and maximum $c_{i,j}$'s. These attributes have been illustrated in Figure 5. We also compute a average overlap over all strokes, O_{avg} . If the current stroke is within a specified range of the previously drawn stroke, we update the value for average overlap as, $O_{avg} = \frac{(n-1)O_{avg} + O_i}{n}$, where $n - 1$ is number of pre-

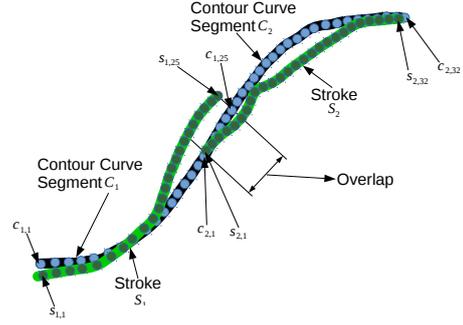


Figure 5: Parameters stored for strokes, shown in green. The contour curve is shown in black. Here curve segment C_1 has 25 sample points, and C_2 has 32 sample points shown in blue. The sample points on the strokes are shown in dark green.

viously accounted overlaps, and O_i is the overlap for the current stroke.

In order to synthesize the mesh boundary curves in the style of the sketched strokes, the boundary curves are sampled uniformly. The contour curve segments on the model sheet are also sampled at the same rate. Now, we use a dynamic programming algorithm to find the best matching contour segments for the boundary curve, and then render the boundary curves with a set of user strokes corresponding to that contour segment. This process is illustrated in Figure 6 and is explained below.

Consider a part of a boundary curve with samples numbered from a to b , is given by $B_{a:b}$. Now for a contour curve segment, C_i , we compute an error metric that measures similarity between them as

$$d_{ij}^{ab} = \arg \min_{R_{ij}, T_{ij}} \text{dist}(R_{ij} C_{i,j:(j+b-a)} + T_{ij}, B_{a:b}) \quad (3)$$

Here j is the index for the sample point on the contour segment C_i , and we match contour segments with $b - a$ sample points, with $B_{a:b}$, starting at each j . This is represented as $C_{i,j:(j+b-a)}$. R_{ij} and T_{ij} are rotation and translation matrices. $\text{dist}(\cdot)$ returns the sum of squared distances between the corresponding samples of $B_{a:b}$ and C_i . Note that part of a boundary curve may match only a part of the contour segment. Correspondence is established by simple ordering of the sample points, i.e., if the j -th sample on the contour curve corresponds to the a -th sample on the boundary curve, then the $j+k$ -th sample will correspond to the $a+k$ -th sample. Iterating over all C_i 's, the best matching part of a contour curve segment is found as $i^*, j^* = \arg \min_{i,j} d_{ij}^{ab}$.

Let $d_1^{ab} = d_{i^*j^*}^{ab}$ represent the value of the error metric achieved at the best match. This error may be reduced further if $B_{a:b}$ is replaced by smaller parts of the contour segments (or consequently, more number

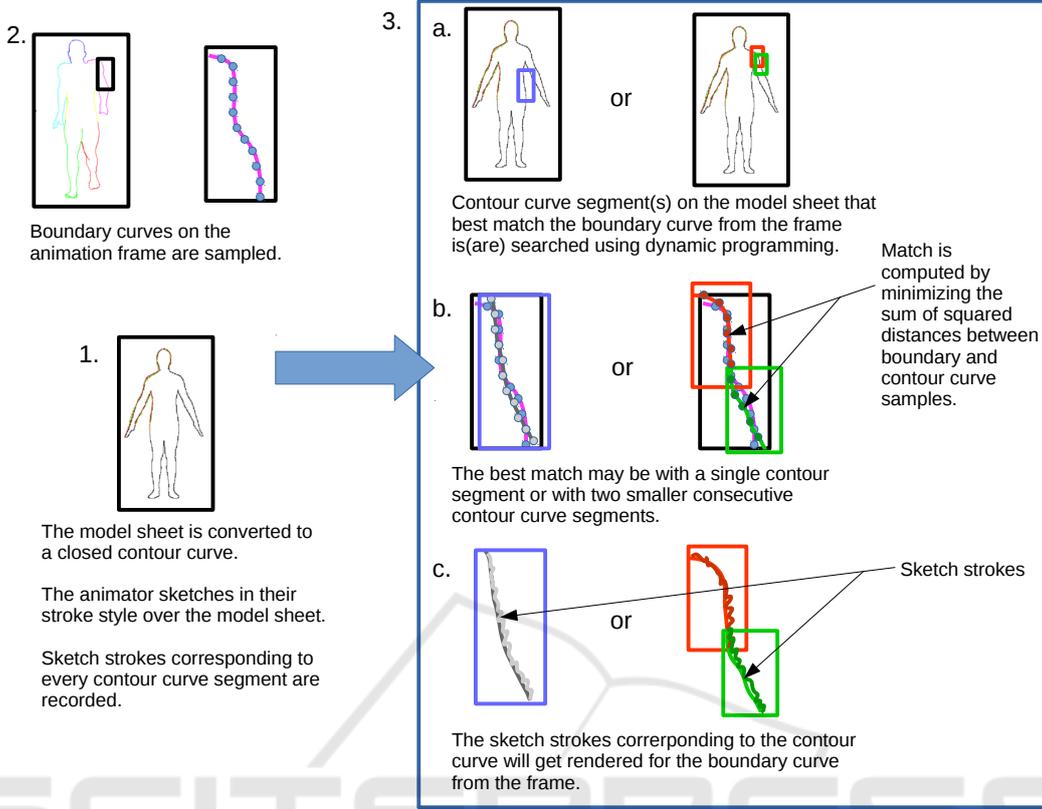


Figure 6: Rendering boundary curves from an animation frame as sketch strokes.

of overlapping strokes). This is taken care of by also looking at smaller sized solutions of the above matching problem as

$$k^* = \arg \min_k (d^{ak} + d^{(k-O_{avg})b}), \text{ where } a < k < b \quad (4)$$

$$d_2^{ab} = d^{ak^*} + d^{(k^*-O_{avg})b} + b_p \quad (5)$$

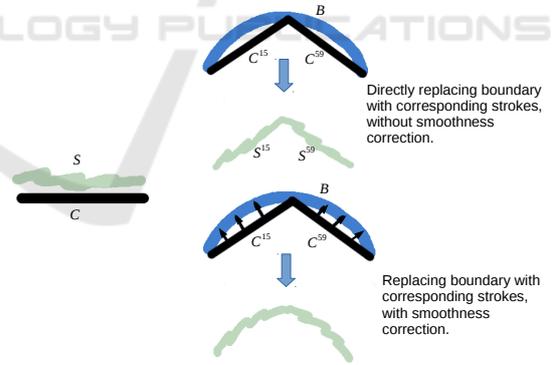
where b_p is a break penalty. This prevents unnecessary splitting of user strokes. The absolute minimum value of the error metric is therefore, given by $d^{ab} = \min(d_1^{ab}, d_2^{ab})$.

In order to find the actual stroke for replacing $B_{a:b}$, we will first rotate and translate contour curve C_{i^*} and corresponding user stroke S_{i^*} as:

$$C^{ab} = R_{i^*j^*} C_{i^*,j^*:(j^*+b-a)} + T_{i^*j^*} \quad (6)$$

$$S^{ab} = \{R_{i^*j^*} S_{i^*,k} + T_{i^*j^*} \mid S_{i^*,k} \in S_{i^*} \wedge j^* \leq n_{i^*,k} < j^* + b - a\} \quad (7)$$

If $B_{a:b}$ is replaced directly by S^{ab} , then we may end up with poor results as shown in Figure 7. This is because if B matches multiple contour segments, then direct replacement does not guarantee smooth transition between 2 continuous strokes. In order to achieve


 Figure 7: The effect, of pushing the contour curve toward the boundary curve, on stroke smoothness is shown. S is the stroke, C is the contour curve segment, and B is the boundary curve.

smooth results, we push C^{ab} towards $B_{a:b}$ as

$$\begin{aligned} \tilde{C}^{ab} &= w_c C^{ab} + w_b B_{a:b} \\ \tilde{S}_{i^*,k}^{ab} &= S_{i^*,k}^{ab} + (\tilde{C}_{i^*,k}^{ab} - C_{i^*,k}^{ab}) \end{aligned} \quad (8)$$

w_c and w_b are relative weights assigned to C^{ab} and $B_{a:b}$, and they add up to 1. $C_{i^*,k}^{ab}$ represents the sam-

ple points on C^{ab} at index m_j . Similarly \tilde{c} represents the sample points on \tilde{C} . The smoothed stroke \tilde{S}^{ab} , is made up of the samples $\tilde{s}_{i^*,k}^{ab}$, where $s_{i^*,k} \in S_{i^*}$ and $j^* \leq n_{i^*,k} < j^* + b - a$. This smoothing is optional and can be disabled by the animator if not desired. Now, $B_{a:b}$ can be replaced by a list of sketch strokes P^{ab} , where

$$P^{ab} = \begin{cases} \tilde{S}^{ab} & \text{if } d_1^{ab} \leq d_2^{ab} \\ P^{ak^*} \cup P^{(k^*-O_{avg})b} & \end{cases} \quad (9)$$

The above equations are computed recursively using dynamic programming. The output is a set of sketch strokes, that correspond to the entire mesh silhouette. Examples of the same animation frames rendered using different stroke styles is given in Figure 8.

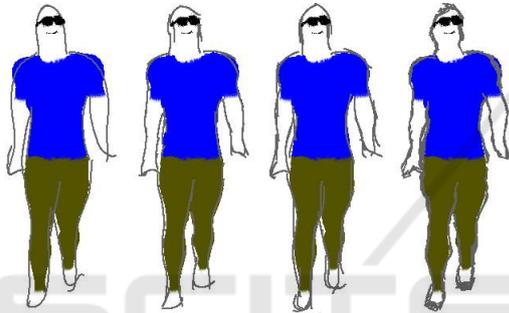


Figure 8: The same animation frame generated with different stroke styles varying from smooth long strokes to short, overlapping strokes, left to right.

5.3 Adding Colour and Other Details

The animator can colour the model sheet. Since the back of the character is not visible on the model sheet, we assume that the colour painted on the front of the character is the same as the colour on the back, for a given part of the body. Mesh-sketch registration allows us to register vertices of the mesh to parts of the sketch. The colours from the sketch are projected from the model sheet to the registered mesh vertices in the background and reproduced in the drawing by interpolation from the corresponding mesh vertices, followed by a smoothing pass.

In addition to colour, the animator can also add details such as glasses, or short hair, or pockets on shirts, to the character. The detail can be added to the model sheet, or any in-between frame of the animation by directly drawing on the generated frame.

In order to do this, the pixels making up the detail are uniformly sampled. For each sample pixel i on a frame j , p_{ij} , we find the nearest mesh vertex, v_k , on the registered mesh. At each animation frame j , we

compute the set of motion vectors, $D^j = \{f_k^j | 1 \leq k \leq N\}$, for all N mesh vertices. This gives us the amount by which a mesh vertex moves in any given frame of the animation. If the closest vertex, v_k moves by f_k^j in frame j , we displace p_{ij} by the same amount. If the vertex gets hidden, we do not draw the pixel sample as well. This enables us to handle occlusion in the presence of moving body parts, and changing viewpoints.

An example of a colour and details added to the character and reproduced correctly during animation can be seen in Figures 1, 11 and 12.

6 ENHANCING THE ANIMATION

The method described in the previous section produces frames for the animation in the animator's sketching style, with colour and other added details. However, since this process is repeated independently for each frame, there is no temporal coherence between the generated strokes. This produces a distracting flickering in final output. If the animator wishes to remove this, we allow the animator to apply a kind of temporal smoothing that is explained below. Also, we allow the animator to edit the skeleton in the mesh at any frame of the animation. We explain below why this is useful to the animator.

6.1 Temporal Smoothing

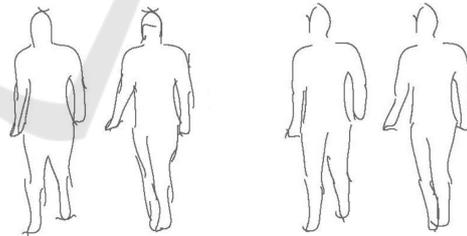


Figure 9: The first two images show consecutive frames generated without temporal smoothing. The next two images show the same consecutive frames generated with temporal smoothing.

In order to achieve temporal coherence between strokes in consecutive frames, we track the joint angles of the skeleton. As can be seen in Figure 4, we group the boundary curves by the skeleton bones that they are associated to. Therefore, we know which boundary curves get effected if a bone moves. Now if the boundary curves associated to a bone are synthesized using sketch strokes in a frame, j . At frame $j + 1$, if the joint angle change in the same bone is more than 5 degrees then we recreate the sketch

strokes from the boundary curves as explained in Section 5. If not, then the sketch strokes from frame j are repeated for frame $j + 1$, with appropriate rigid transformations. Similarly, if the change in joint angle from frame $j + 1$ to $j + 2$ is less than 5 degrees, again the same strokes from frame j are repeated. The effect of this is a temporal smoothing that reduces flickering in the final output substantially. This threshold of 5 degrees is determined empirically, as larger thresholds resulted in strokes that did not match the frame boundary curves well and smaller thresholds resulted in flickering. Intuitively, the threshold is dependent on the speed of motion being animated. An example of this can be seen in Figure 9.

6.2 Skeleton Editing

We allow the animator to update the skeleton, by moving positions of joints manually, at any frame of the animation. This will cause one or more bones of the skeleton to rotate from their previous configurations to newer orientations. The change acts as a hard constraint and automatically updates all subsequent frames in the generated animation accordingly, as the mesh now uses the updated skeleton for generating the animation. It is done by factoring in the rotation caused by the change in configuration for each bone into the skinning matrix for the bone. This causes the mesh to deform differently, which in turn generates the updated sketched animation frame. An example of this kind of correction can be seen in Figure 10.

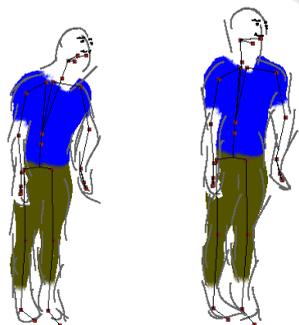


Figure 10: The left frame is generated by the original skeleton. The right image shows the same frame after the skeleton has been updated by the animator. The character appears more upright, after the correction is made.

7 RESULTS

We have tested our system with different character model sheets and different motions and produced multiple different animations. These can be seen in Figures 11 and 12. In the result shown in Figure 12,

we see that our method works correctly even for if we only fill colour details in one view on the model sheet. Our system correctly predicts the colour in the relevant parts of the character during animation. We have used the same template mesh model for all animations. The actual animations can be seen in the supplementary video submitted with this paper.

8 LIMITATIONS

While our method works for a large class of character model sheets, and allows the animator a lot of flexibility in creating the animation, it has certain limitations. We cannot handle free flowing clothes or hair on the model sheets. One way to do that is to adopt a method like the one presented by Jain et al. (Jain et al., 2012).

Another limitation is that though we can handle sketch strokes of different kinds, we cannot handle complex composite sketch strokes with a lot of overlap, like cross-hatching. We also cannot vary the kind of brush or pen being used to add drawing detail. This would require us to implement a complete brush and paint subsystem.

9 CONCLUSIONS

We have presented a method to generate 2D hand drawn character animation from a model sheet of a character. The animator can use any stroke style to sketch on the model sheet, add colour and details. These get automatically reproduced on the resulting animation. We smooth the output to make it temporally coherent. A mesh is registered to the character on the model sheet to enable all this. The animator also has the option to edit and correct any part of the animation by changing the skeleton used to deform the mesh, and the strokes produced by our method. Our system has been used by a few novice animators, and they have found the system easy and intuitive to use.

As future extensions to our system, we would like to extend it so that the animator can generate novel animation sequences and not be restricted by input motion data. This could be done using various kinds of motion synthesis techniques, that make the process even more intuitive and simple for the animator.

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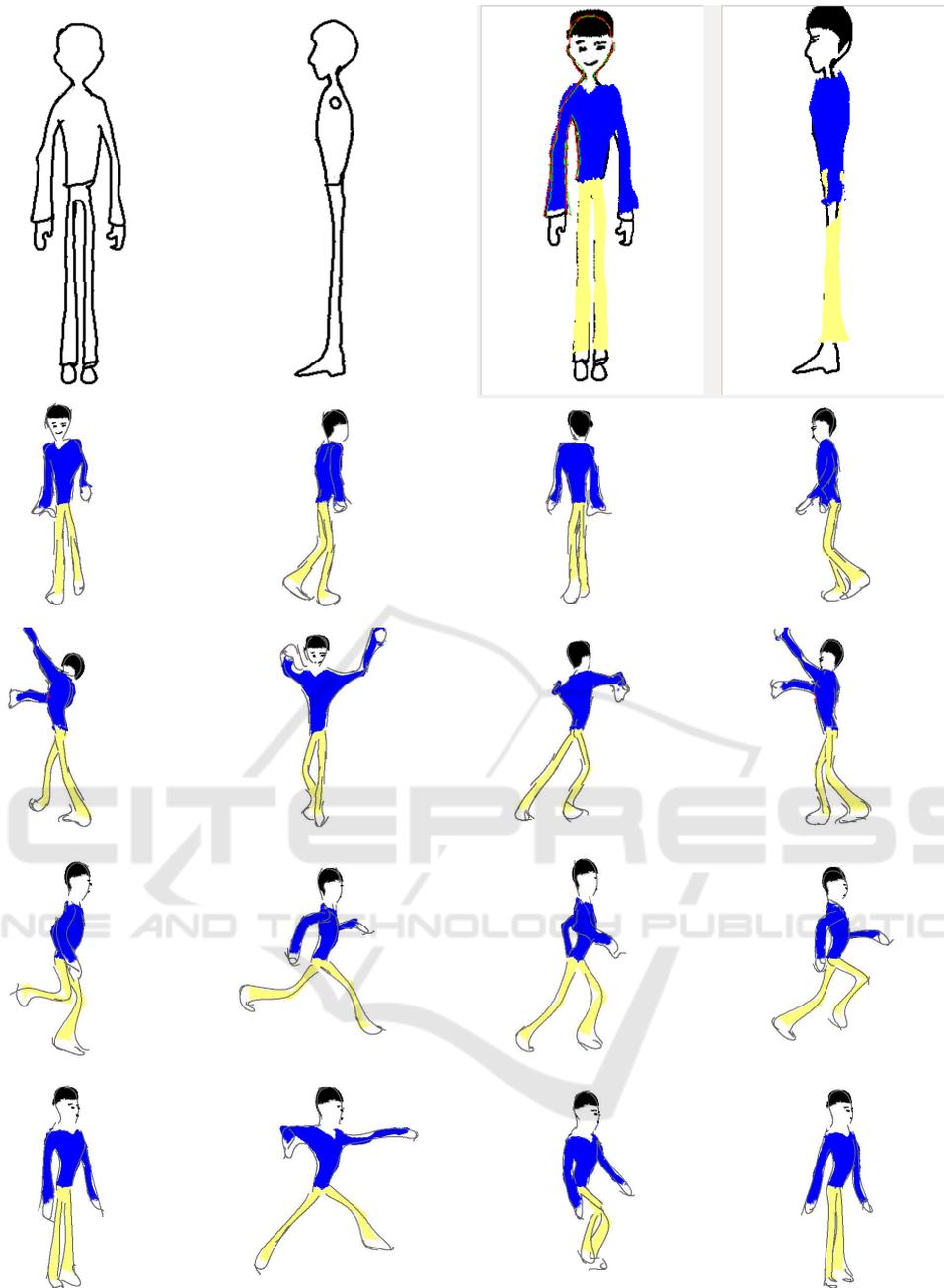


Figure 11: The top row shows the input model sheet on the left, and the model sheet with details added by the animator on the right. Frames from a walk, dance, run and jump animation are shown in the rows below.

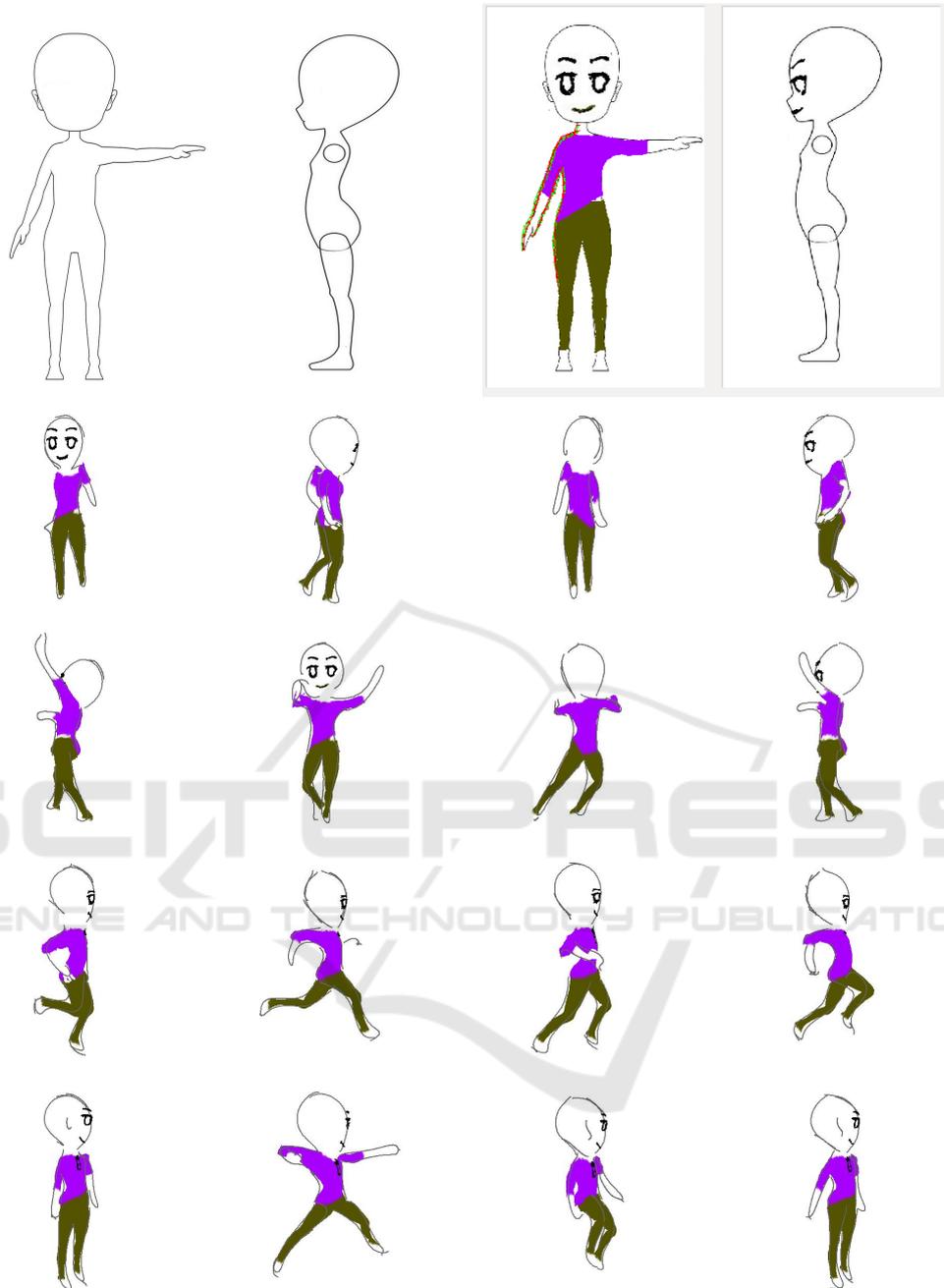


Figure 12: The top row shows the input model sheet on the left, and the model sheet with details added by the animator on the right. Frames from a walk, dance, run and jump animation are shown in the rows below.