Modeling Channel Forms and Related Sedimentary Objects using a Boundary Representation Based on Non Uniform Rational B-Splines

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Abstract In this paper, we aim at providing a flexible and compact volumetric object model capable of representing many sedimentary structures at different scales. Geo-bodies are defined by a boundary representation; each bounding surface is constructed as a parametric deformable surface. We propose a three-dimensional sedimentary object with a compact parametrization which allows for representing various geometries and provides a curvilinear framework for modeling internal heterogeneities. This representation is based on Non-Uniform Rational Basis Splines (NURBS) which smoothly interpolate between a set of points. The three-dimensional models of geobodies are generated using a small number of parameters, and hence can be easily modified. This can be done by a point and click user interaction for manual editing or by a Monte-Carlo sampling for stochastic simulation. Each elementary shape is controlled by deformation rules and has connection constraints with associated objects to maintain geometric consistency through editing. The boundary representations of the different sedimentary structures are used to construct hexahedral conformal grids in order to perform petrophysical property simulations following the particular three-dimensional parametric space of each object. Finally these properties can be upscaled, according to erosion rules, to a global grid that represents the global depositional environment.

Keywords Architectural Elements; Geobody; Surface-Based Modeling; Event-Based Modeling; Channel; Clinoforms; Meanders; Lobes

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1 Introduction

Most clastic deposits consist in geometric arrangements of sedimentary facies which control petrophysical heterogeneities. Capturing the spatial layout of sedimentary facies is therefore critical for subsurface modeling tasks. For instance several authors have studied the influence of small scale sedimentary heterogeneities on subsurface flow (Alpak et al, 2013; Desbarats, 1987; Haldorsen and Lake, 1984; Jackson and Muggeridge, 2000; Novakovic et al, 2002). For instance Jackson et al (2009) show that the thicknesses of sealing facies between clinoforms impact the prediction of hydrocarbon recovery volumes in shallow marine reservoirs. Jackson and Muggeridge (2000) also depict different flow behaviors depending on the scale of shale heterogeneities and the number of fluid phases. In the case of CO₂ storage capacity in reservoirs Issautier et al (2013) show the strong influence of heterogeneities on uncertainties related to both transport and storage capacity.

Classical approaches for facies modeling in sedimentary contexts upscale small scale core data and use geostatistical methods at the modeling grid scale to deduce spatial distribution of given properties (e.g. rock types, porosity, permeability, ...) based on their spatial probabilistic distribution. In the case of pixel-based approaches, the geometric and multi scale aspects of sedimentary heterogeneities are most commonly handled using the cookie cutter strategy (Journel, 1996; Journel et al, 1998), whereby properties are simulated within simulated facies deemed stationary. Over the past decade, multiple-point geostatistics (MPS) has emerged as an interesting practical way to describe complex channel geometries (see for instance Mariethoz and Caers (2014) and Renard and Mariethoz (2014) for reviews of recent progresses). This type of methods is based on analog training images to obtain conditional probabilities in stochastic spatial simulation processes. These approaches can be easily conditioned to dense well data. However, generating three-dimensional training images deemed representative of the geological environment remains a practical challenge in the application of MPS (Boisvert et al, 2007; Mirowski et al, 2009). In practice, object-based simulation is often used to generate training images.

Classically, object based methods (Deutsch and Wang, 1996; Deutsch and Tran, 2002; Haldorsen and Lake, 1984; Hassanpour et al, 2013; Holden et al, 1998; Shtuka et al, 1996; Viseur, 2004) simulate sedimentary bodies by sampling from probability distributions of geometric objects parameters. Internal heterogeneities are then represented in a background grid (Deutsch and Wang, 1996; Holden et al, 1998) or in a curvilinear grid defined in each channel (Shtuka et al, 1996). Object-based methods can also be applied at a smaller scale to represent centimetric to decimetric sedimentological bedforms, then upscaled to decametric scale (Wen et al, 1998; Nordahl et al, 2005).

The choice of the geometric object parametrization is non-unique and can influence the ability of the method to produce realistic sedimentary shapes. Therefore, process-oriented and pseudo-genetic methods try to model or approximate the results of depositional processes to define channel shapes (Abrahamsen et al, 2007; Howard and Knutson, 1984; Howard, 1996; Lopez, 2003; Pyrcz et al, 2009).

Most of these methods rely on grids to construct or to represent the object geometries. The limited resolution of grids can be a source of aliasing at the interfaces

between objects. To mitigate such approximations in object representation, several authors have proposed a surface-based description of object boundaries. A possible strategy consists in using the top and bottom bounding surfaces (Bertoncello et al, 2013; Fisher and Wales, 1992; Graham et al, 2015; Pyrcz et al, 2005; Sech et al, 2009). For instance Fisher and Wales (1992) suggest using parametric surfaces in order to capture the patterns of fluvial bodies between well data. They represent the top and bottom of the channel by two parametric surfaces yielding a boundary representation. The bounding surfaces of architectural elements can also be implicitly represented around channel axes, which makes it possible to maintain consistency of shapes during simulation and editing (Deutsch and Wang, 1996; Hassanpour et al, 2013; Gai et al, 2012; Pyrcz et al, 2009).

This paper proposes a similar strategy using a boundary representation based on NURBS surfaces (Piegl and Tiller, 1995). The NURBS models can represent sedimentary bodies in many types of depositional environments, but this paper focuses on alluvial deposits (Sect. 2). As other surface-based representations, the proposed approach can accurately represent small-scale sedimentary structures without prior limitations imposed by the volumetric grid resolution. Additionally, our method directly and explicitly represent volumes, in the same spirit as done by Viseur (2004) with polyhedral objects. As compared to previous methods, the proposed representation makes it possible to maintain the geometric consistency of the structures during pseudo-genetic evolution. Additionally, NURBS can represent a number of 3D alluvial features such as channel asymmetry depending on meander curvature, channel bifurcation and confluence, levees, point bars and lobes (Sect. 3). Also, NURBS are compact in the sense that they can describe relatively complex geometric shapes with a limited set of parameters. In addition to CPU and RAM efficiency, this allows interpreters to create and deform objects with a small number of graphical interactions. This compact parameterization also makes it possible to use optimization methods to automatically reshape objects to match features in seismic or aerial images (Rui et al, 2015). Finally, modeling the petrophysical properties in sedimentary structures can be tedious as their distribution highly depend the geometry of the object and the support grid is not usually aligned on the heterogeneity. Managing this particular distribution implies either the definition of locally varying anisotropy (Deutsch and Wang, 1996) or complex meshing approach (Shtuka et al, 1996). The volumetric representation presented in this paper allows to construct direct conformable grids for several types of architectural elements and with different types of internal architectures, giving a curvilinear coordinate system for modeling internal heterogeneities (Sect. 4).

2 Conceptual Descriptions of Sedimentary Structures

2.1 Alluvial Deposit Context

In continental environments, rivers are the main agent of transport of sedimentary load toward coastal areas. Alluvial formations are shaped by channels which erode, transport and deposit sediments (Miall, 2010).

Miall (1985, 1996) decomposes river deposits in a construction of eight architectural elements (channels, gravelly bars and bedforms, sandy bedforms, foreset macroforms, lateral accretion deposits, sediment gravity flow deposits, laminated sand sheets and overbank fines). These elements are equivalent in size to the channel fill, and can be differentiated by their external shape, internal geometry and facies combinations. These types of deposits are usually characterized by their good porosity and permeability, which explain their interest in hydrocarbon exploration and production. However, owing to internal heterogeneity, alluvial reservoirs can be highly compartmentalized (Miall, 2010).

2.2 Hierarchical Organization of Alluvial Sedimentary Structures

Miall (1996) describes a hierarchical classification of alluvial sedimentary structures, based on a typology of their bounding surfaces. These different structures are constructed by multiscale nested organizations of microforms (e.g. ripple marks), mesoforms (e.g. dunes) and macroforms (e.g. point bar, levee, crevasse splay, etc) (Table 1).

The first order and second order bounding surfaces are microforms and mesoforms made of cross-bed surfaces with little or no internal erosion. The third order surfaces are cross-bedding erosion surfaces dipping at an angle up to 15° . They are usually draped with mudstones. The fourth-order surfaces are the upper bounding surface of macroforms. The fifth order surfaces limit major sand deposits such as channel fill features and channel phases. The architectural elements constituting the river deposits are of the 3rd to 5th order (Miall, 1996).

[Table 1 about here.]

Rules are defined on these bounding surfaces (Miall, 1996). A surface can truncate any surface of equal or lower order, but none of higher order. In this way, a surface always limits a set of nested bounding surfaces. Surfaces of low order can change order laterally. Bounding surfaces can disappear because of erosion. These rules can be used for the modeling of sedimentary structures using deformable templates.

3 NURBS-based Boundary Representations of Sedimentary Objects

We propose to construct boundary models of sedimentary structures by combining several cubic NURBS surfaces, each defined by a set of control points. These surfaces represent an approximation of the actual body geometry. Common points between surfaces must remain collocated in order to maintain the coherence of the shape throughout editing.

3.1 Mathematical Elements of NURBS

Non-Uniform Rational Basis Splines (NURBS) are a mathematical model commonly used in computer-aided design (CAD) for representing curves, surfaces and solids. They consist of a smooth interpolation between an ordered set of points called the

control points of the NURBS. The interpolation function is a piecewise continuous polynomial or rational function whose degree is directly related to the number of interpolated points (Piegl and Tiller, 1995). The NURBS formulation also relies on knot vectors that specify the parametric coordinates of the points separating the different interpolation functions in each direction of the parametric space. The number of elements in a knot vector is equal to the sum of the number of controls points and the degree. At a knot, the NURBS continuity is C^{p-k} where p is the degree and k is the multiplicity of the knot. Thus increasing the multiplicity of a knot creates creases in the NURBS. This feature can be used to allow for watertight connection between several smooth NURBS surfaces, for example to connect channel and levees surfaces (Sect. 3.3).

A NURBS curve C is a function of a parametric coordinate u , controlled by n control points P_i (Piegl and Tiller, 1995)

$$C(u) = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n N_{i,p}(u)W_iP_i}{\sum_{i=1}^n N_{i,p}(u)W_i}. \quad (1)$$

Where p is the degree of the NURBS, W_i are the weights of control points and $N_{i,p}(u)$ are the p^{th} -degree basis functions.

A NURBS surface S is defined as a tensor product of curves with two independent parameters (u, v) (Piegl and Tiller, 1995) by

$$S(u, v) = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n \sum_{j=1}^m N_{i,p}(u)N_{j,q}(v)W_{i,j}P_{i,j}}{\sum_{i=1}^n \sum_{j=1}^m N_{i,p}(u)N_{j,q}(v)W_{i,j}}. \quad (2)$$

[Fig. 1 about here.]

Where p, q are the degrees of the NURBS in each direction of the parametric space, $P_{i,j}$ is one control point and $[n+1] \times [m+1]$ is the number of control points, $W_{i,j}$ is the weight of the control point (Fig. 1) and $N_{i,p}(u), N_{j,q}(v)$ are the p^{th} -degree and q^{th} -degree basis functions.

3.2 Channels Shapes

3.2.1 Description

Coarse deposit facies in alluvial environments are formed in channels. In alluvial sediments, channels are seldom observable but are deduced from paleocurrent measurement from lower-order structures (Miall, 1985). In an active channel, the sediment fill is usually sandy with coarser elements at the base of the structure (Reineck and Singh, 1980). An abandoned channel facies is more muddy due to the diminution of the sediment load (Miall, 1996). Commonly, the channel term is only used when the deposits cannot be described as lower-order sedimentary structures generated by

accretion processes. However, modeling channels is essential because channels condition the spatial layout of all other sedimentary structures in fluvial-environment. A channel geometry is usually defined by its depth, width, length and sinuosity. The top bounding surfaces can be erosional or aggradational and the bottoms are concave up erosional surfaces. Their slopes decrease when the channel width increases (Miall, 1996). Channel bounding surfaces are generally from the 5th order as summarized in Table 1.

3.2.2 Construction

A channel form is represented by using three connected NURBS surfaces. The channel shape is constructed around the backbone of the channel, which represents the line of maximum depth projected onto the top surface. The backbone is a piecewise linear curve that can be manually picked on a horizon slice or stochastically generated (Deutsch and Tran, 2002; Viseur, 2004; Pyrcz et al, 2009). The 3D shape of the channel is constructed by sections which are placed at the end points of each segment of the backbone (Fig. 2). They represent the control points of the channel bounding surfaces. The shape of each channel section is defined by a width, a height and an asymmetry aspect ratio. The latter corresponds to the relative location of the backbone between the edges of the channel, i.e. the channel section is symmetric if the asymmetry value is 0.5).

The top surface control net is constructed from the backbone and the width (Fig. 2(a)). In order to maintain the width of the channel each section is aligned according to the bisector of the angle formed by two consecutive segments of the backbone (Fig. 2(a)). The lateral surfaces are constructed starting from the top surface and their points are placed along a quadratic shape (Fig. 2(b)). In particular the point at the base of the quadratic function is aligned with the two above points to obtain the continuity at the channel base. A section modification process is applied to obtain an asymmetric shape of a channel according to its map view curvature (Fig. 2(c)). The resulting NURBS interpolation is shown on Fig. 3), which illustrates in particular the impact of channel curvature on the asymmetry (Fig. 3(b) and (c)).

[Fig. 2 about here.]

[Fig. 3 about here.]

3.2.3 Branching Channels

In many fluvial formations (braided, meandering, or anastomosed rivers), several channels can be connected. Avoiding geometric inconsistencies such as holes between branching channels calls for special processing. The connection between two channels can be created at a section in the control mesh of the main one. The first step is to fix the backbone extremity of the branching channel, to its corresponding point on the designated section of the main channel (Fig. 4(a)).

The second step to connect the channel is to project the other control points of the extremity to branch onto the main channel. For an initial control point P of the

branching channel, the parametric coordinates of the closest point on the main channel surface is found using the Newton Method (Piegl and Tiller, 1995)

$$\begin{bmatrix} \frac{\partial}{\partial u} f(u_i, v_i) & \frac{\partial}{\partial v} f(u_i, v_i) \\ \frac{\partial}{\partial u} g(u_i, v_i) & \frac{\partial}{\partial v} g(u_i, v_i) \end{bmatrix} \cdot \begin{bmatrix} u_{i+1} - u_i \\ v_{i+1} - v_i \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} f(u_i, v_i) \\ g(u_i, v_i) \end{bmatrix} \quad (3)$$

with $\begin{cases} f(u_i, v_i) = \frac{\partial}{\partial u} S(u_i, v_i) \cdot (S(u_i, v_i) - P) \\ g(u_i, v_i) = \frac{\partial}{\partial v} S(u_i, v_i) \cdot (S(u_i, v_i) - P) \end{cases}$.

Where are u_i and v_i the parametric coordinates at the i^{th} iteration of the projection of P on the NURBS surface $S(u, v)$ (side surface of the main channel on which the branching channel is connected). The final result of the branching operation is shown with the control net on Fig. 4(c) and without on Fig. 4(d). This process can be used to connect either one or the two extremities of a channel. This method is used for the manual three-dimensional interpretation (with an arbitrary depth value) of thirteen distributary deltaic channels on a satellite image of Atchafalaya Delta near Bayou Sale, Louisiana (Fig. 5).

[Fig. 4 about here.]

[Fig. 5 about here.]

3.2.4 Stochastic Generation

To stochastically generate several channels, the lines of maximum depth are simulated (Fig. 6) in a way similar to Viseur (2004): from an initial random line, lateral evolution is simulated. The proposed input parameters of this generation are the channel length, the mean amplitude of the sinuosity orthogonal to the global stream direction $\vec{F}$ (normalized vector), the wavelength of the sinuosity parallel to the global channel direction and the mean width of the point bars. As noted by Abreu et al (2003), channels can migrate both downdip along the main stream direction $\vec{F}$ (sweep) and laterally (swing). Therefore, a growing ratio (γ) corresponding to the relative importance of both migrations is applied in the pseudo-genetic process.

Primarily, the growing process of the channel relies on the evaluation of tangents and the curvatures to determine the directions and amplitudes of migration. Initialization is simply performed by an unconditional one-dimensional sequential Gaussian simulation (Fig. 6(a)). To obtain a smooth channel trajectory, a Gaussian variogram with is used with a range equal to half of the channel wavelength, as also done by Deutsch and Tran (2002). Using an one-dimensional sequential Gaussian simulation allows to obtain a relatively smooth initial channel that reproduce the mean amplitude and wavelength of the channel while introducing a stochastic variability on the initial shape. This initial variability has an impact on the final shape of the channel. More advanced methods based on physical analogy (Pyrce et al, 2009), multiple-point statistics (Mariethoz et al, 2014) or Lindenmayer systems (Rongier et al, 2015) could also be used.

For the initial channel geometry, meandering aspects are obtained using a growing process. According to Knighton (2014) the channel migration can be decomposed in three elementary displacements: an extension, a translation and a rotation. In this

work, growing is obtained by displacing iteratively the control points by the following vector (Fig. 6(b))

$$\vec{G}_i = \gamma \times (\|\vec{g}_i\| \times \|\vec{F}\|) \times \vec{F} + (\|\vec{g}_i\| \times \|\vec{F}_{ortho}\|) \times \vec{F}_{ortho}$$

with $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Diagram showing a curve with tangent } \vec{T}_i \text{ and curvature } \vec{C}_i. \text{ A vector } \vec{F} \text{ is shown below the curve.} \\ \vec{F} \cdot \vec{F}_{ortho} = 0 \\ \vec{g}_i = \alpha \times \vec{T}_i - \beta \times \vec{C}_i + \delta \times (\vec{T}_i \cdot \vec{F}) \times \vec{F} \end{array} \right. , \quad (4)$

where $\vec{T}_i$ is the tangent which represents the rotation component and $\vec{C}_i$ the curvature which represents the extension due to the lateral migration (swing (Abreu et al, 2003)). $\vec{F}_i$ is the vector representing the global flow direction and is associated with downdip migration of the channel (sweep (Abreu et al, 2003)). These elementary vectors are evaluated at the projection of the control point i on the NURBS channel.

[Fig. 6 about here.]

3.3 Levees

3.3.1 Description

The formation of levees is the consequence of the flooding of rivers. It results in the deposition of a high proportion of fine sands, silts and muds organized in overlapping lenses parallel to the channel borders. Levees consist in a sharp ridge which can reach 10 meters in thickness (Miall, 1996; Reineck and Singh, 1980). The deposits get thinner and the facies finer as the distance from the guiding channel increases (Miall, 1996). Levee bounding surfaces are of the 4th order as summarized in Table 1.

3.3.2 Construction

Levee forms are represented by using four connected NURBS surfaces. Two lateral surfaces are used to construct the lateral faces of the levee ridge (Fig. 7(a)). The control points are placed following a quadratic function as for channel construction. An asymmetry aspect ratio is used to modify these surfaces in order to reproduce the asymmetric aspect of levees (surfaces 1 and 2 on Fig. 7(b)). The third surface represents the bottom of a levee. As levees are constructed from a guiding channel, a fourth surface is added (surface 3 on Fig. 7(b)) to ensure the consistency in depth between a channel and a levee. From a given channel lateral side, a levee shape is defined by the width of the levee, the height of the levee, and an asymmetry aspect ratio (formulated as a ratio of the width, i.e. the levee is symmetric if the value is 0.5).

[Fig. 7 about here.]

3.3.3 Levee-Channel Coherency

The coherency in depth between the channel and its levee is ensured by extracting the portion of the common surface form between the levee and the channel down to the appropriate depth (Fig. 8). This part of the channel side is isolated using the property of NURBS knot vector Described in Sect. 3.1. Indeed, the multiplicity of the knot at the desired parametric value can be increased while preserving the shape of the NURBS (Fig. 8(b)). Thus, a knot is inserted in the appropriate channel side surface by solving the equation (in the case of a curve) (Piegl and Tiller, 1995)

$$\sum_{i=1}^n N_{i,p}(u) P_i^W = \sum_{i=1}^{n+1} N'_{i,p}(u) Q_i^W, \quad (5)$$

where Q_i are the new control points and $N'_{i,p}(u)$ are the p^{th} -degree basis functions corresponding to the new knot vector. The equation (5) is generalized to surfaces by applying it to each row or column of control points.

[Fig. 8 about here.]

[Fig. 9 about here.]

3.4 Lateral Accretion

3.4.1 Description

Lateral accretion deposits (point bars) are abundant in meandering rivers. They are formed by the migration of a channel due to the erosional water stream outside the bend of the channel. Point bars are formed by this continuous migration of the channel and are the result of the sediment deposition inside the bend of the channel (Reineck and Singh, 1980). This type of deposit is constituted by successive clinoforms which are macroforms delimited by third order bounding surfaces, called epsilon cross-bedding (Allen, 1963) and constructed by the increment of lateral growth. Epsilon cross bedding surfaces are dipping surfaces with a dip inversely proportional to their width/height ratio (Miall, 1985). These structures usually present a height approximately equal to the depth of their related channel with an offlapped upper termination and a downlapped one on the channel floor (Miall, 1996).

3.4.2 Construction

The clinoforms, representing the successive increments of the lateral accretion, are constructed using six connected NURBS surfaces. Two surfaces are used to represent the top and bottom foresets and two others for the topset and the bottomset (Fig. 10). For the foreset, the control points are placed according to the same quadratic function as for a channel (Fig. 10(b)(c)). Two lateral surfaces are used to obtain a closed boundary representation (Fig. 10(b)). Using this representation, the clinoform shape is defined by the length, width and height of the clinoform, the thickness corresponding to the distance between the two foresets, the amplitude of the channel which has

formed the clinoform and an asymmetry aspect ratio (formulated as a ratio of the width, i.e. if the value is 0.5 the clinoform is symmetric).

[Fig. 10 about here.]

3.4.3 Clinoform Generation from Channel Growth

The channels growth equation (4), can be used to generate point bars and their constitutive clinoforms (Fig. 11(a)). The channels of each step of the growth process intersect at the extremity of clinoforms. To determine the domain of a clinoform, the intersection between the control nets of the successive channels is computed; projecting these intersection points on the corresponding surfaces approximates the clinoform extremity locus in the parametric space (Fig. 11(b)). The portion to isolate can be determined knowing the parametric coordinates of the extremities of the clinoforms on the original channel (Fig. 11(c)). The control points are determined using the same method as described on Fig. 8(b) to ensure the conformity between the different clinoforms. The results and the link between the channel and its clinoforms are shown on Fig. 12.

[Fig. 11 about here.]

[Fig. 12 about here.]

[Fig. 13 about here.]

3.5 Crevasse Splay Lobes

3.5.1 Description

Lobe shapes can be present in several sedimentary deposits at different scales, such as alluvial deposits (crevasse splay), delta (deltaic lobe) and turbidite basin floor. Their usual geometry is a very large shape body (Miall, 1996; Bhattacharya, 2010; Arnott, 2010). In the case of alluvial deposits this type of structure can be up to 10 km long and 5 km large. The crevasse splay sequence can be up to 10 m high and gets thinner away from the associated channel. Crevasse splay bounding surfaces are generally of 4th order as summarized in Table 1.

3.5.2 Construction

Lobe shapes are constructed using three connected NURBS surfaces (Fig. 14). The first surface is used to construct the lobe's top. As for channels, the control points of this surface are placed along a quadratic shape. The second surface is used to construct the bottom and is flat. The third surface has the same shape as a channel section and is used to connect the lobe to its source channel (Fig. 14(c)). From a given channel object and a crevasse branching location, the lobe shape is defined by the backbone, the width and the height of the lobe.

[Fig. 14 about here.]

4 Property modeling

The sedimentary structures described in this paper provide a frame to create conformable, regular curvilinear grids. These grids define a local frame suitable to model the petrophysical properties which are controlled by depositional processes.

4.1 Individual Object Petrophysical Properties

4.1.1 Grid Construction

The same way a NURBS surface is constructed by performing a tensor product between two NURBS curves, a NURBS volume is established using a tensor product between three curves. Considering three curves of degrees p , q and r defined for the independent parameters (u, v, w) , a NURBS volume V is defined as

$$V(u, v, w) = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n \sum_{j=1}^m \sum_{k=1}^l N_{i,p}(u) N_{j,q}(v) N_{k,r}(w) W_{i,j,k} P_{i,j,k}}{\sum_{i=1}^n \sum_{j=1}^m \sum_{k=1}^l N_{i,p}(u) N_{j,q}(v) N_{k,r}(w) W_{i,j,k}}, \quad (6)$$

where $P_{i,j,k}$ is one control point and $[n] \times [m] \times [l]$ is the number of control points, $W_{i,j,k}$ is the weight of the control point and $N_{i,p}(u)$, $N_{j,q}(v)$, $N_{k,r}(w)$ are the p^{th} -degree, q^{th} -degree and r^{th} -degree basis functions.

The three-dimensional NURBS formulation is applied to the four types of objects previously described (channels, levees, clinoforms and lobes). For each object the function is regularly evaluated in the parametric space, providing the cell corners of a hexahedral grid. If the grids are constructed from the entire parametric space they are intrinsically conformable to the bounding NURBS surfaces up to the chosen spatial resolution (Fig. 15). On the contrary if just a partition of the parametric space is taken into account (Fig. 16(c)), post-processing is required to ensure the conformity of the grid. Also, grid conformity accross different objects is not necessarily guaranteed and would call for non-neighbor connections to be defined, as for instance between channel and levee (Fig. 16(d)).

[Fig. 15 about here.]

4.1.2 Channel Internal Patterns

Reineck and Singh (1980), based on McKee (1957), defined three types of channel filling patterns:

- (i) By horizontal layers. This type is most common in preserved fluvial type channels.
- (ii) By concave up surfaces conforming to the channel shape. This type is usually present in submerged channels such as turbiditic ones.
- (iii) By asymmetrical inclined surfaces. This type is common in tidal influenced deposits.

Such internal geometries can be obtained by modifying the way the control mesh of the channel bounding surfaces is considered to construct the trivariate volumetric NURBS. For instance, the construction of the prograding grid in Fig. 16(a) is based on the mesh of the two lateral surfaces (Fig. 3). The divergent grid in Fig. 16(b) is constructed using the mesh of the top surface and by considering the two lateral surfaces as a global bottom one. The aggrading grid Fig. 16(c) is extruded proportionally to the top surface. Then, the lower corners of the cells directly below the base surface of the channel are then vertically projected on that surface and all the underlying cells are deactivated.

[Fig. 16 about here.]

4.1.3 Example of Property Modeling

The conformable grids of the sedimentary objects enable the easy definition of the local direction of anisotropy by performing geostatistics in the grid's parametric space. As an illustration, unconditional Sequential Gaussian Simulation is performed on grids of Fig. 16. The simulations are computed using the same variograms and the same input distributions. In this example, the effect of grid block volume variation is neglected, so more advanced simulation method could be used instead (Manchuk et al, 2005; Bertoncello et al, 2008; Manchuk and Deutsch, 2012). A realization of these simulations on each grid is presented in Fig. 17. These results illustrate the impact of the different geometries on the computation of the internal channel heterogeneities.

[Fig. 17 about here.]

4.2 Erosion between Objects and Upscaling to Reservoir grids

The NURBS objects presented up to now are all organized in response to the continuous evolution of a single channel. In reality, however, alluvial channels and associated deposits migrate laterally and vertically and can cross-cut and erode older systems. In the current state of this work, the geometries of the eroded structures are not directly computed. For each object, an uncut grid is created and filled with petrophysical properties. Erosion relations between the objects are then taken into account when transferring properties to the global reservoir grid.

For this, objects are ordered from their deposition order and their stratigraphic order within each deposition phase (a channel with its levees and point bars) (Table 1) (Miall, 1996). The stratigraphic order is reproduced by assigning a value to each object according to the erosive relations of their bounding surface orders defined by Miall (1996). In this case, the depth value is used to determine the deposit order of the object, assuming that the deepest objects are the oldest.

To illustrate the petrophysical property upscaling from the grids generated using individual geo-objects, 20 channels were stochastically generated. In the corresponding grids, porosity values were simulated using a Sequential Gaussian Simulation (Fig. 18(a)). The upscaling process was then performed object by object following

the previously defined order to reproduce the impact of erosion. The upscaling of porosity was performed by simple volume weighted averaging (Durlinsky, 2005)

$$\phi^* = \frac{1}{V_b} \int_{V_b} \phi dV, \quad (7)$$

where ϕ is the fine scale porosity in the fine grid over the volume V_b of coarse cell, and ϕ^* is the equivalent porosity at coarse scale. The result of this simple upscaling process is shown on Fig. 18(b).

This cookie cutter strategy is not fully satisfactory because it approximates values in grid blocks crossed by the erosion surfaces. Also, thin shale drapes are not yet taken into account in this method. More advanced and rigorous upscaling and discretization methods should certainly be developed in the future to provide more accurate representations of heterogeneities.

[Fig. 18 about here.]

5 Conclusion and discussion

This paper introduces a method to construct three-dimensional boundary models of sedimentary objects and use them as a framework for petrophysical properties modeling. NURBS surfaces allow the creation of boundary representations of geological objects with great flexibility and a relatively small number of parameters (as compared for instance to linear polygonal surfaces (Viseur, 2004)). This type of representation is well adapted for modeling sedimentary structures, as interpreters can interactively fit these surfaces to data. A priori knowledge about the three-dimensional shape of the sedimentary structures can be maintained because derivative and curvature constraints can be defined. To create boundary representation of sedimentary structures, a control point hierarchy has to be created in order to keep the connection of common points between faces.

Pseudo-genetic lateral migration has been proposed to automatically generate point bar structures from channel migration. This process can be inverted to help point bar reconstruction from observed channels (Rui et al, 2015). As presented in Appendix A, further refinement can be introduced in the forward channel migration process to generate oxbow lakes. These geobodies could easily be populated by abandonment shale facies. Currently, the proposed method only deals with lateral migration and does not include stacking patterns due to vertical aggradation and avulsion. The main limitation to deal with these processes lies in the extraction of point bars during the channel growth as it relies on the intersections between the channel's top surfaces control nets, which is not applicable in case of channel vertical migration. A possible enhancement could be to more generally compute intersections between all constituting surfaces of the successive channels.

Concerning the property modeling, the gridding of the objects allows the modeling of the internal heterogeneities in the sedimentary structures and to transfer them in a background grid. Heterogeneities at the interfaces between objects (e.g. shale lens deposits between clinoforms in point bars) are not yet considered. This could be simulated in the parametric spaces of the sedimentary structure boundary surfaces as

done by Li and Caers (2011) and integrated in the reservoir grid as transmissibility multipliers.

In this work, only deterministic values are considered for the parameter used to construct the different objects. It would be interesting to simulate these parameters to generate more diverse shapes, to be used for instance as input training images in multi-point simulation. Future work also includes the definition of architectural element templates adapted to other depositional environments (turbiditic, deltaic, ...).

In subsurface applications involving the presence of conditioning data, two main avenues can be considered to use the proposed object models. The simplest strategy is to generate non-conditional realizations to be then used as training images for multiple-point geostatistical simulation (Comunian et al, 2014). Alternatively, significant research should still be done to allow for data conditioning directly on the proposed object models (Viseur, 2004; Pyrcz et al, 2009; Bertoncello et al, 2008; Ruii et al, 2015).

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Appendix A: Construction of an oxbow lake

Oxbow lakes are formed during the lateral migration of a channel when a meander becomes very curved and the two concave banks at the extremity of the meander becomes very close. The meander cutoff occurs when the neck of land between the two concave banks is eroded due to the channel migration or due to strong current during a flooding event. The meander is then abandoned and a shortcut in the channel path is created where two concave banks are connected (Fig. 19).

In the proposed approach, this process is taken into account during the lateral channel migration by detecting the self-intersections in the control point net of the top surface of the channel.

[Fig. 19 about here.]

Segment intersection

Consider two non-parallel segments belonging, for instance, to the control mesh of a channel top surface. Their intersection can be computed by determining two scalar values a and b such that

$$\mathbf{p}_1 + a \mathbf{v}_1 = \mathbf{p}_2 + b \mathbf{v}_2 \quad (8)$$

where $\mathbf{p}_1$ is the origin of the first segment, $\mathbf{p}_2$ the origin of the second segment, and $\mathbf{v}_1$ and $\mathbf{v}_2$ the vectors corresponding to the segments.

Taking the cross product of (8) with $\mathbf{v}_1$ and $\mathbf{v}_2$, respectively, the following equation comes for a and b :

$$\begin{cases} a (\mathbf{v}_1 \times \mathbf{v}_2) = (\mathbf{p}_2 - \mathbf{p}_1) \times \mathbf{v}_2 \\ b (\mathbf{v}_2 \times \mathbf{v}_1) = (\mathbf{p}_1 - \mathbf{p}_2) \times \mathbf{v}_1 \end{cases} \quad (9)$$

If $0 \leq a \leq 1$ and $0 \leq b \leq 1$, the two segments intersect and the coordinates of the intersection points are given by $\mathbf{p}_{inter} = \mathbf{p}_1 + a \mathbf{v}_1$.

Construction of an oxbow lake

[Fig. 20 about here.]

The construction of an oxbow lake from a NURBS channel is divided in five steps:

- (i) Detection of the self-intersection for each side of the channel top surface (Fig. 20(a)). The index of the channel sections behind and ahead of the intersecting segments are memorized.

- (ii) Sorting and reduction of the number of intersections. This operation may be needed to keep only one intersection, see below.
- (iii) Increasing knot multiplicity at the parametric coordinate corresponding to the projection of the intersection point on the NURBS. This operation is used to decrease the continuity of the NURBS while preserving its shape.
- (iv) Selection of the sections before and after the intersection point (Fig. 20(b)).
- (v) Lateral closure of the oxbow lake sections and connection of the cutoff sections to maintain channel continuity (Fig. 20(c))

[Fig. 21 about here.]

The proposed intersection sorting is essential to obtain consistent final geometry. For each intersection, a couple of channel section indices is determined. Their number has to be reduced so that only one intersection by meander remains. Four possible configurations have been determined. If there is only one intersection in the meander, then it is directly stored in the final intersection list (Fig. 21(a)). If two sections are included into another one, only the largest one is kept in the final list (Fig. 21(b)). If the first element of a couple of sections linked with a self-intersection is included in the space defined by another couple, the second couple of intersections is kept in the final list of intersections (Fig. 21(c)). If the second element of a couple of sections linked with a self-intersection is included in the space defined by another couple, the first couple of intersections is kept in the final list of intersections (Fig. 21(d)).

Once the final intersection list has been determined, the control points between two sections corresponding to an intersection are removed from the channel (Fig. 20(c)). The result of the channel lateral migration process associated with the construction of oxbow lakes is shown on Fig. 22.

[Fig. 22 about here.]

Fig. 1 Bi-cubic NURBS surface with weight $w = 10$ at the black points and $w = 1$ at the grey points. The dark grey lines representing iso-parametric evaluations of the surface are particularly attracted around these two points

Fig. 2 Construction steps for a channel section. (a) Sections are constructed for each point of the backbone (in red) and are aligned on the bisector between two consecutive segments. (b) The points of the section are placed along a quadratic function defined from the width W and height H of the channel. (c) Points are translated to obtain the desired asymmetry

Fig. 3 Model of an asymmetric channel based on NURBS surfaces (modified from Ruiu et al (2014))
 (a) Top view of the channel (the control point net is represented by black lines). (b) Section view of the asymmetric channel in a positive channel curvature (a different color is used for each surface control point net). (c) Section view of the channel with an inverse asymmetry corresponding to a negative channel curvature

Fig. 4 Process to branch to channels. (a) Extremity of the channel to link is aligned on the main channel. (b) This extremity is projected on the main channel. (c) Result with the control points. (d) Result with the channels only

Fig. 5 Application of the channel branching Process: manual three-dimensional interpretation (with an arbitrary thickness value) of thirteen channels on a satellite image of Atchafalaya Delta (Google Earth, October,29 2012). (a) Original image. (b) Pickings of channels (1 line by channel). (c) Result in top view. (d) Result in top lateral view

Fig. 6 Construction of ten channels using a stochastically generated backbone. (a) The channel path is generated using an unconditional sequential Gaussian simulation. (b) Lateral migration steps of a channel. (c) Simulation of ten channels

Fig. 7 Modeling of a levee using four NURBS surfaces placed according to the width W and height H of the levee. Black lines represent the control net and grey points the control points. (a) Top view of the levee with its related channel (in wireframe mode). (b) Section view of the levee

Fig. 8 Extraction of a portion of parametric surface.(a) Initial state (b)Adding knots lead to add control points on the channel. Knots are added at the desired parametric coordinate in order to maintain the shape of the parametric surface. The knot is added to have a multiplicity equal the degree of the NURBS plus one in order to obtain C_0 surface at this point and to ensure the surface goes through the control points

Fig. 9 Levees are constructed in association to a channel. (a) Top view of levees associated with a channel. (b) Zoom on the top view (Channel in wireframe mode). (c) Lateral section of the channel and its levees showing the coherency in depth between the forms

Fig. 10 Modeling of a clinoform using six NURBS surfaces from width W , height H , thickness T , length L of the clinoform and the amplitude A of the channel which has formed the clinoform. Black lines are the control point net and the grey points are control points. (a) Top view of the clinoform. (b) Side view of the clinoform. (c) Section view of the clinoform

Fig. 11 Extraction of a clinoform from a channel growing process. The channels are presented using their maximum depth lines. (a) A channel with its growing steps (in black final state and in color the others). (b) The intersections between the control net of these surfaces are computed. (c) Surface parts between the intersection points are extracted

Fig. 12 Clinoforms are extracted from simulated channel growth. (a) Clinoforms in top view associated with a channel. (b) Slab view of the clinoform succession (c) Cut off view of the channel and its clinoforms showing the coherency between the different forms in three-dimensional

Fig. 13 Realization of a fluvial deposit environment presenting four channels (in yellow) with their associated point bars (in orange) and levees (in green)

Fig. 14 Modeling of a lobe shape using three NURBS surfaces. Black lines are the control point net and the grey points are control points. (a) Top view of the lobe (b) Channel shaped section connecting the lobe to the extremity of a channel. (c) Lens shaped section

Fig. 15 Hexahedral grids constructed from NURBS based boundary representations using different types of filling methods (a) Grid constructed from a channel. (b) Grids constructed from clinoforms (c) Grid constructed from a levee. (d) Relations between these different grids

Fig. 16 Hexahedral grids constructed from NURBS boundary representations using different types of filling methods (Reineck and Singh, 1980) (a) Prograding channel. (b) Divergent channel. (c) Aggrading channel

Fig. 17 Porosity values simulated using channel grids (a) Prograding channel. (b) Divergent channel. (c) Aggrading channel

Fig. 18 Upscaling of divergent channel porosity values simulated using unconditional SGS (in this case the same stochastic seed has been used for each channel porosity simulation) (a) Divergent channel grids to upscale (b) Upscaling result

Fig. 19 Principle of the formation of an oxbow lake during the lateral migration of a meander

Fig. 20 Construction of an oxbow. During the process of a channel lateral migration, self intersections can occur and are associated with the formation of an oxbow lake. (a) Self intersections are detected (Red points). (b) Sections before and after the self intersection are detected (red lines). (c) Control point between sections are detected and suppressed to form the oxbow lake and the new channel path

Fig. 21 Sorting of the different cases of self-intersections during the NURBS channel migration. (a) Unique intersection. (b) Sections associated with an intersection are included between the sections corresponding to another intersection. (c) The first intersection associated with an intersection is included between the sections corresponding to another intersections. (d) The second intersection associated with an intersection is included between the sections corresponding to another intersections

Fig. 22 Result of the oxbow lake formation during the channel lateral migration

Sedimentary order	Fluvial architectural elements	Specifics characteristics
1 st order	microforms (ripples)	Centimeter scale undulations with little or no apparent erosion.
2 nd order	mesoforms (dunes)	Large meter scale ripple with little or no apparent erosion.
3rd order	macroforms of growth increment (clinoform formed by the lateral accretion increment in channel)	Dipping depends of width depth ratio of the channel, usually up to 15° in the direction of accretion.
4th order	macroforms (point bars, levee, crevasse splay)	Variable geometries depending of the nature of the architectural element. Extension can be between few meters to few kilometres.
5th order	channel	Defined by width, length, depth, width/depth ratio with a concave up basal surface.

Table 1 Hierarchy of fluvial architectural elements, after Miall (1996). The sedimentary orders addressed in this paper are in bold