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► To cite this version:

Jérôme Duriez, Cedric Galusinski. Discrete simulations of granular materials with a Level Set shape description. Particles 2021, Oct 2021, Hamburg, Germany. hal-04222019

HAL Id: hal-04222019

<https://hal.inrae.fr/hal-04222019v1>

Submitted on 28 Sep 2023

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Discrete simulations of granular materials with a Level Set shape description

Jérôme Duriez^{*,†} and Cédric Galusinski[‡]

[†] INRAE, Aix Marseille Univ, RECOVER, Aix-en-Provence, France

^{*} e-mail: jerome.duriez@inrae.fr, web page: <https://www6.paca.inrae.fr/recover/Membres-du-laboratoire/Pages-personnelles/Jerome-DURIEZ>

[‡] IMATH, Université de Toulon, CS 60584, 83041 Toulon Cedex 9, France

ABSTRACT

Numerical modelling of granular materials classically adopt Discrete Element Methods (DEM) that provide a direct description of their discrete nature, together with all mechanical traits related with the latter. The Level Set-Discrete Element Method (LS-DEM) recently pushed DEM even closer to generic shapes, possibly mimicking real particles of a granular material [1]. LS-DEM relies onto a discrete form of the signed distance function to a particle's surface, indirectly describing the latter as the zero level set of the former, as well as onto boundary nodes being exactly located on a grain surface for the purpose of contact treatment.

The precision of LS-DEM is logically impacted by the resolution of the particle-attached grids and by the number and locations of boundary nodes. Computational costs then increase with the required precision and these are investigated by comparing LS-DEM with respect to DEM in the ideal case of spherical particles where a reference solution can be obtained, for a LS-DEM implementation based on the YADE code [2]. On the one hand, memory (e.g. RAM) cost increases, in line with the grid resolution mostly, from the order of megabytes to the order of gigabytes for a 3D REV. On the other hand, time costs are directly impacted by the loop over boundary nodes during contact treatment, turning the duration of a sequential triaxial simulation from hours into days [3]. This logical surge, by two or three order of magnitudes, of computational costs can nevertheless be alleviated by a simple OpenMP parallelization [3] and, possibly, algorithmic modifications [4].

Coming along increased computational costs, the versatility of the method is finally evidenced looking at the mechanical behaviour of superquadric particles, whose LS-DEM simulation is shown to be lighter than an alternative non-spherical description based on polyhedra.

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