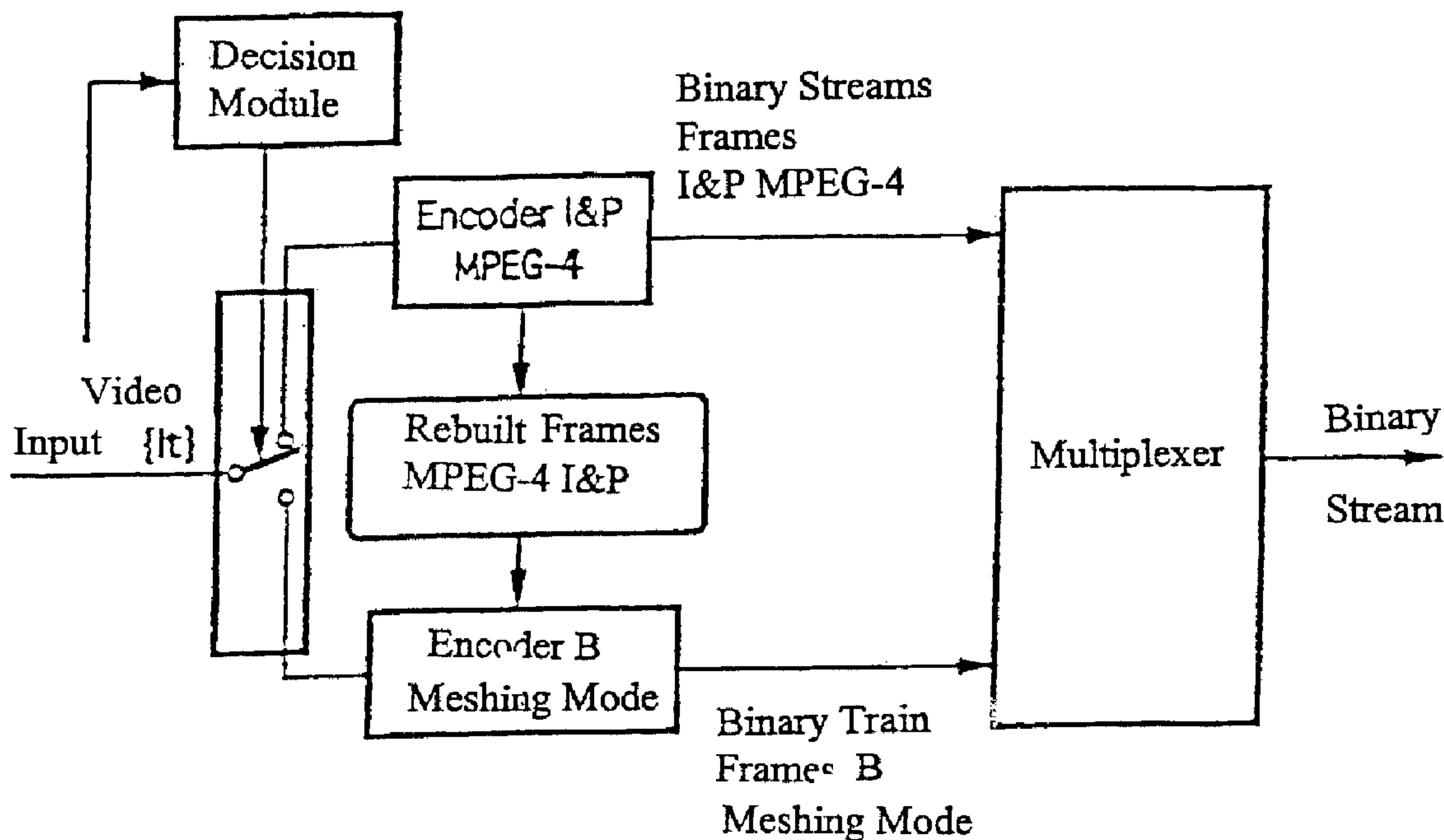




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 (71) Demandeur/Applicant:
 FRANCE TELECOM, FR
 (72) Inventeurs/Inventors:
 SANSON, HENRI, FR;
 LAURENT-CHATENET, NATHALIE, FR;
 BUISSON, ALEXANDRE, FR
 (74) Agent: OYEN WIGGS GREEN & MUTALA

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(57) Abrégé/Abstract:

The invention concerns a method for coding images using selectively at least two image coding modes, each optimising compression of at least a video sequence image on the basis of different optimisation criteria.

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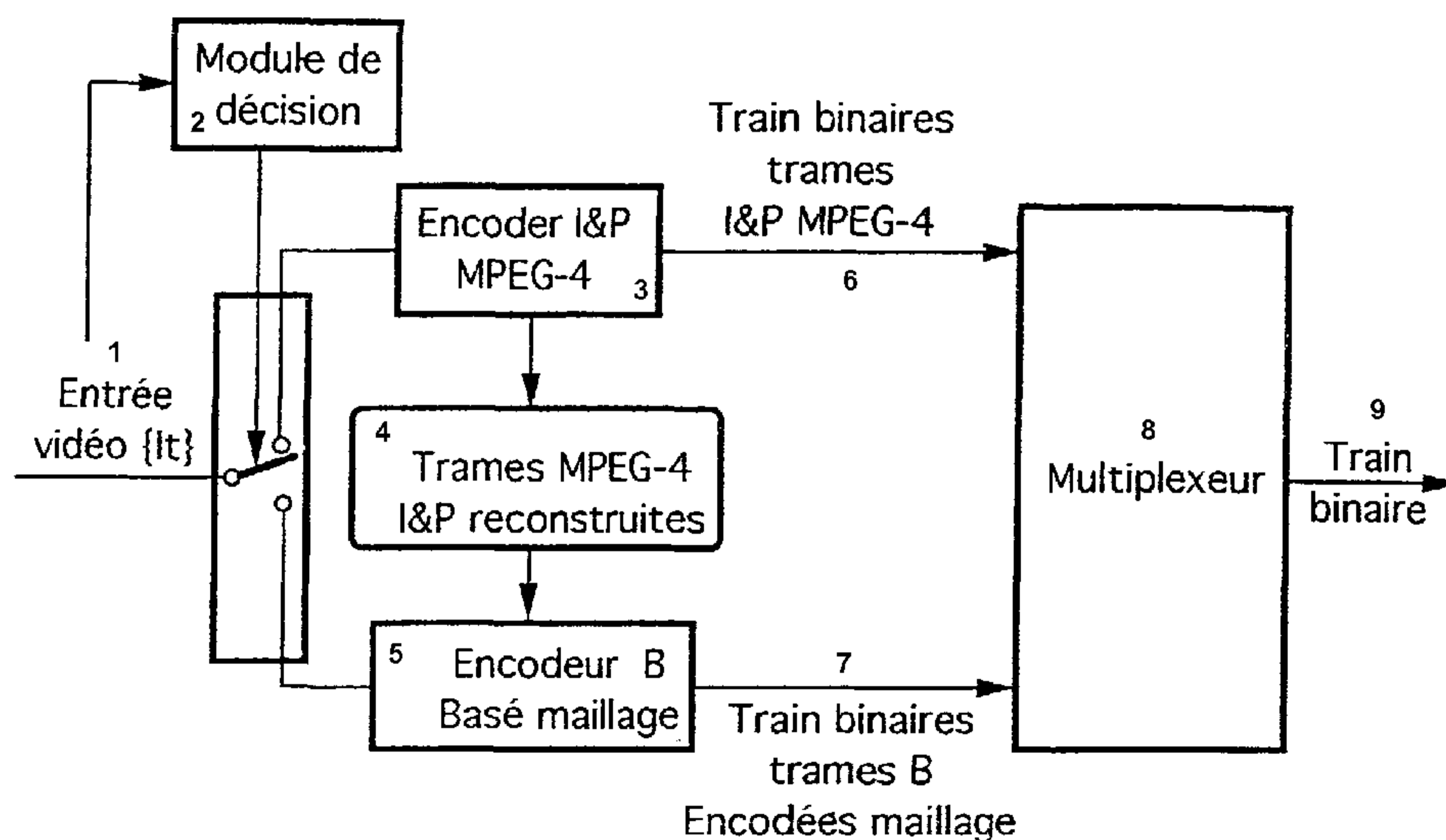
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FRANCE TELECOM [FR/FR]; 6 Place d'Alleray,
F-75015 PARIS (FR).

(72) Inventeurs; et

(75) Inventeurs/Déposants (pour US seulement) : SANSON,
Henri [FR/FR]; 12 Allée des Roseaux, F-35690 ACIGNE
(FR). LAURENT-CHATENET, Nathalie [FR/FR]; 3 rue
des Fraîches, F-35630 VIGNOC (FR). BUISSON, Alexan-
dre [FR/FR]; Résidence "Ondine", Appart B211, 18 rue
Noël Blayay, F-35000 RENNES (FR).(74) Mandataire : VIDON, Patrice; Cabinet Patrice Vidon,
Le Nobel - Bât. A, 2 Allée Antoine Becquerel, BP 90333,
F-35703 Rennes Cedex 7 (FR).(81) États désignés (national) : AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ,
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1...VIDEO INPUT

2...DECISION MODULE

3...I&P MPEG-4 ENCODER

4...RECONSTRUCTED I&P MPEG-4 FRAMES

5...MESH-BASED ENCODER B

6...MPEG-4 I&P FRAME BIT STREAMS

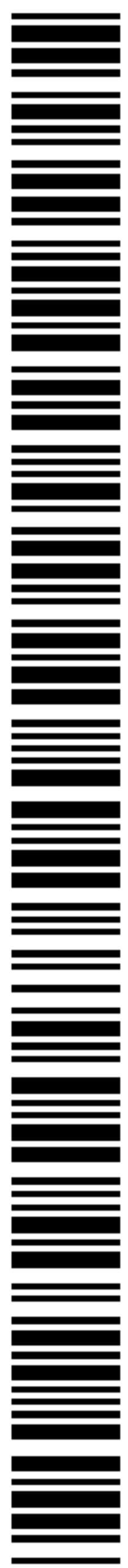
7...MESH-BASED B ENCODED FRAMES BIT STREAM

8...MULTIPLEXER

9...BIT STREAM

(57) Abstract: The invention concerns a method for coding images using selectively at least two image coding modes, each opti-
mising compression of at least a video sequence image on the basis of different optimisation criteria.

[Suite sur la page suivante]



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En ce qui concerne les codes à deux lettres et autres abréviations, se référer aux "Notes explicatives relatives aux codes et abréviations" figurant au début de chaque numéro ordinaire de la Gazette du PCT.

(57) Abrégé : L'invention concerne un procédé de codage d'images mettant en oeuvre sélectivement au moins deux modes de codage d'images, optimisant chacun la compression d'au moins une image d'une séquence vidéo en fonction de critères d'optimisation différents.

ENCODING AND DECODING PROCEDURES OF IMAGES, DEVICES AND
CORRESPONDING APPLICATIONS

The technical domain of the invention is that of encoding by reducing the bit rate of animated image sequences, particularly video.

There are a great number of video encoding applications. These include (list not exhaustive):

- Digital TV transmission
- Real-time video transmission on several types of networks: IP, mobile, ("Streaming IP")
- Computer storage of video

10 The invention is applicable, in particular, within the framework of systems that implement MPEG-type encoding. MPEG-type encoding means encoding based on temporal prediction and discrete cosine transformation based on a hard block structure, often with a fixed size,
15 but possibly with variable size. The two representative standards for this encoding family are the MPEG-4 standards of versions 1 to 4 and ITU-T/H.263 up to

version 2. The invention can also be applied within the framework of the CCITT H26L recommendation (for example, see corresponding VCEG-N83d1 document).

The video encoding and decoding diagrams currently offered are divided into 2 categories:

- Encoding standardised by either ISO/MPEG, or by ITU-T, all based on the same type of techniques (temporal prediction and discrete cosine transformation based on a block structure)
- Encoding under development offered by research laboratories that invoke a large panel of techniques: wavelet encoding, regional encoding, fractal encoding, meshing encoding, etc.

Currently, MPEG-4 encoding is considered the trade standard, not only in standardised encoding, but also in terms of published encoding.

MPEG-4 or ITU-T/H.263++ type encoding is considered as having reached its limitations, in particular due to the fixed-size hard block structure used as support for all encoding calculations and operations. In particular, the temporal prediction of images within a sequence is not sufficiently exploited.

Furthermore, published alternative encoding has not yet achieved a sufficient degree of optimisation.

Therefore, to allow encoded video sequences at low bit rates to be obtained, encoders normally reduce the size of images and create temporal subsamples of the original video sequence. Nevertheless, the second technique has the inconvenience of restoring erratic

movements that are more or less problematic for the user depending on the subsample level.

To avoid these erratic movements, the missing images (unencoded) must be regenerated in the decoder using
5 temporal interpolation.

Nevertheless, current techniques for the temporal interpolation of images do not allow satisfactory results to be obtained, particularly when they are implemented in a single decoder. Indeed, these techniques are the source
10 of visual artefacts related to the movement compensation techniques based on blocks that only define a single movement vector for all the pixels of a block.

The purpose of the invention specifically is to remedy the limitations of previous techniques.

15 More precisely, one objective of the invention is to provide a technique for encoding and decoding image data, which allows a reduced bit rate and/or improved regenerated image quality to be obtained with respect to known techniques.

20 This objective is achieved, according to the invention, with the help of an image encoding procedure that selectively implements at least two methods of image encoding, each optimising the compression of at least one video sequence image depending on the various
25 optimisation criteria.

According to several beneficial embodiments, information regarding the choice of one of the said encoding modes of a decoder may be known to a decoder according to at least one of the techniques that belong

to the group comprising the following:

- predefined choice, known at the encoding and decoding level;

- representative information of the choice included
5 in the data flow comprising of at least some encoded image data;

- representative information of the choice included in the data flow regardless of the encoded image data;

- determination of choice in predefined manner by
10 the decoder.

Beneficially, the procedure involves a phase for selecting an encoding mode to apply to said image, which includes at least:

- an initial encoding that optimises the photometric
15 representation of an image.

- a second encoding that optimises a representation of the movement between at least two images.

As such, the present invention involves a new video encoding procedure by encoding hybridisation, in
20 particular, MPEG-type encoding and encoding using temporal interpolation based on a representation by meshing, as well as the decoding procedure and the structure of the associated binary representation.

Preferably, said second encoding takes into account
25 at least one previous image and/or at least one subsequent image encoded using the first said encoding.

Beneficially, said second encoding takes into account a movement vector field calculated from the immediately preceding image encoded using said initial

coding and/or a movement vector field calculated from the immediately subsequent image encoded using said initial coding.

Beneficially, these movement vector fields are applied to the meshing.

In this case, said vector movement fields can be used to determine a reduced movement vector field, associated with an image encoded using said second encoding.

According to a preferential embodiment of the invention, said selection phase is based on the implementation of an N fixed factor subsample, an image on N being encoded using said initial encoding.

Beneficially, this N value is variable, depending on at least one predefined criterion.

According to a specific embodiment, said initial encoding implements a transformation on image blocks and a temporal prediction by blocks. This transformation is, for example, a DCT-type transformation, Hadamard transformation, wavelet transformation, etc.

It will be observed that the image blocks are not necessarily square, but can take on any form adapted to the needs and means available.

This initial encoding can, in particular, be MPEG -4 or H26L encoding.

In the case of the latter, it is preferable to use type I (intra) images and/or type P (predictable) images (and not, preferably, type B images).

According to another particular aspect of the

invention, said second encoding is based beneficially on the implementation of an M-level hierarchical meshing, where M is greater than or equal to 1, and, for example, triangular meshing.

5 In this case, the procedure preferably involves a management phase of the occlusion areas, or blanking areas.

The data produced can be grouped into a single flow. Beneficially, at least two data flows that can be
10 transmitted on independent transmission paths can be expected.

Beneficially, said data flows belong to the group that comprises:

- a global header;
- 15 - image data encoded according to said initial encoding;
- image data encoded according to said second encoding.

Flow transmission can therefore take place
20 independently. In particular, this allows progressive and/or partial decoding of images, depending on means and needs.

Therefore, according to a particular embodiment of the invention, the following aspects are exploited:

- 25 - Optimisation driven by constitutive modules of standardised MPEG or ITU-T/H.263-type encoding
- Powerful temporal prediction and related error encoding for meshing-based techniques.

Indeed, the meshing-based approach helps avoid the

effects of normal blocks thanks to the use of continuous movement fields. Furthermore, the meshing technique allows blanking "objects" to be detected, as well as error encoding that is properly adapted to these areas.

5 In addition, by combining MPEG-type error encoding around these areas, the efficiency of interpolation can be substantially improved at a cost much lower than that of the bi-directional images (type B images) offered by MPEG.

10 Therefore, basic information can be efficiently encoded with low temporal resolution using MPEG-type encoding, with good quality, and the full flow of the sequence can then be restored using encoding in interpolated mode by meshing.

15 The invention also involves, of course:

- procedures for decoding an image signal encoded using the encoding procedure described above;

- procedures for encoding an image signal encoded using the encoding procedure described above;

20 - devices for decoding an image signal encoded using the encoding procedure described above (including, beneficially, means for determining at least part of a vector field and/or at least a part of the blanking areas, similar to those implemented during encoding;

25 - devices for storing at least one image signal encoded using the encoding procedure described above

- encoding, transmission and/or decoding systems of an image signal encoded using the encoding procedure described above (the choice of one of the said encoding

modes may be known beneficially to a decoder according to at least one of the techniques that belong to the group, comprising the following:

- 5 - predefined choice, known during encoding and decoding;
- representative information of the choice included in a data flow comprising at least some of the encoded image data;
- 10 - representative information of the choice included in a data flow regardless of the encoded image data;
- determination of the choice in an intrinsic manner, by the decoder;
- the computer program products for encoding and/or decoding of an image signal encoded using the encoding
15 procedure;
- data support for such a program.

The invention also involves image data signals comprising encoded data according to the procedure described above.

20 Beneficially, this signal comprises at least one indicator that specifies whether the procedure has been activated or not.

 Preferably, the signal comprises data that specifies the frame structure, at the beginning of the video
25 sequence and/or at each signal frame.

 Beneficially, a sequence that is encoded using said second encoding begins with a header that indicates the number of frames encoded according to this second encoding.

According to a specific embodiment, the signal comprises at least two data flows, which can be transmitted on separate transmission paths.

In this case, said data flows belong beneficially to the group comprising:

- a global header;
- image data encoded according to said initial encoding;
- image data encoded according to said second encoding.

The invention finds applications in various domains and, in particular, in domains belonging to the group comprising:

- digital TV;
- real-time video over IP network;
- real-time video over network to mobiles;
- image data storage.

Other features and advantages of the invention will be more evident on reading the description of a preferential embodiment of the invention, provided as a simple illustrated, non-limiting example, as well as the drawings attached in which:

- Figure 1 is a schematic diagram of the encoding of the invention;
- Figure 2 illustrates an example of the hierarchical meshing structure for the movement;
- Figure 3 illustrates the affine interpolation principle on a triangular mesh;
- Figure 4 is an example of blanking detected by

covering triangles;

- Figure 5 illustrates the transformation process of any image triangle in a symmetrical square matrix;

- Figure 6 illustrates the transformation of any
5 triangle into a rectangle isosceles triangle;

- Figure 7 illustrates a hierarchical meshing and representation by the related quaternary tree;

- Figure 8 is an example of an encoding decision for the hierarchical meshing;

10 - Figure 9 illustrates the global structure of a binary string according to the invention;

- Figure 10 illustrates a block diagram of a decoder according to the invention.

The embodiment of the invention described below
15 essentially consists in the hybridisation of MPEG-type encoding, for example MPEG-4, using meshing encoding that operates in interpolated mode, also called B mode or B images in the MPEG standards.

It should be noted that the MPEG-4 encoding
20 mentioned here can be replaced by any encoder based on equivalent techniques, that is, using a temporal prediction and discrete cosine transformation based on a block structure, and quantifications and entropic encoding for the generated information. In particular,
25 ITU-T/H.263++ encoding can be substituted for MPEG-4 encoding.

For each image of the sequence coming into the encoder, the encoder decides according to a specific decision-making process (for example, fixed factor

temporal subsampling) of the encoder with the MPEG-4 encoding module, or with the meshing-based encoding module.

The images encoded in meshing mode use, as a reference for their temporal prediction, images encoded in MPEG-4 mode located immediately before or immediately after the group of images encoded in meshing mode to which they belong.

The key point of the compression efficiency of the invention is that the meshing-based movement compensation leads to a very powerful temporal prediction, with a very low associated encoding cost.

Indeed, this technique:

- Takes into account various types of movement within the images.

- Specifically processes the covering and uncovering of areas due to the movement of objects.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the principle of the encoder.

First, incoming images are directed to either the MPEG encoding module or the meshing-based encoding module, according to a given decision method, for example, according to a predefined rhythm: 1 image in N is encoded in MPEG, the rest are encoded in meshing interpolated mode. It is noted that N_k represents the number of images encoded in MPEG mode.

All the other $I_k, N_k < l < N_{k+1}$ images are encoded by a meshing based encoder, for example triangular, that operates in interpolated mode, called B mode. The general

principle of this encoder is as follows:

1. Calculation of before and after movement fields between N_k and N_{k+1} images. These fields are modelled in the form of triangular meshings.

5 2a. Estimation of predictable areas: during interpolation, the movement between I_t and $I_{t'}$ is estimated. If the movement vector application does not lead to a conversion (which means that one is in the presence of a predictable area), movement compensation is
10 performed by weighting the vectors using $k(0 \leq k \leq 1)$ scalar in order to interpolate I_{t+k} with $t+k$ belonging to $]t, t'[$. There are three possible approaches to movement compensation, as described below.

15 2b. Estimation of non-predictable areas: detection of non-predictable blanking areas, in I_l images to be encoded, from the awareness of these movement fields.

3. Specific encoding of these blanking areas according to one of the following three possible modes:

20 - Prediction with one of the reference images (N_k, N_{k+1} , or these images compensated during movement with their movement fields) without movement compensation, then encoding the prediction error with a triangular meshing-based technique.

25 - Prediction with one of the reference images (N_k, N_{k+1} , or these images compensated during movement with their movement fields) with intra-image movement compensation, then encoding the prediction error with a triangular meshing-based technique.

 - Intra-image encoding based on a triangular

meshing-based technique

4. Optionally, mode P MPEG-type encoding of the residual prediction error or encoding, limited to an area around the blanking area.

5 As mentioned above, movement compensation can be performed using three approaches: with an estimate before, with an estimate after or with an estimate before and an estimate after.

1) with an estimate before:

10 During interpolation, the movement between I_{t1} and I_{t2} is estimated. If the movement vector application does not lead to a conversion (which corresponds to the predictable areas), then movement compensation is performed by weighting the vectors with $k = m/(t1+t2)$
15 $(0 < k < 1)$ scalar in order to interpolate I_m with m belonging to $[t1, t2]$. The E1 estimated image is obtained.

2) with an estimate after:

20 During interpolation, the movement between I_{t2} and I_{t1} is estimated. If the movement vector application does not lead to a conversion (which corresponds to the predictable areas), then movement compensation is performed by weighting the vectors with $k' = 1-m/(t1+t2)$
25 $(0 \leq k' \leq 1)$ scalar in order to interpolate I_m with m belonging to $[t1, t2]$. The E2 estimated image is obtained.

3) both together:

During interpolation, the movement between I_{t1} and I_{t2} and between I_{t2} and I_{t1} is estimated. If the movement

vector application does not lead to a conversion (which corresponds to the predictable areas), then movement compensation is performed by weighting the "before" vectors with $(0 \leq k \leq 1)$ scalar, and E_1 is obtained. The
5 same is done with the "after" vectors using the k' ($0 \leq k' \leq 1$) scalar, and E_2 is obtained. The estimated image is then $E = aE_1 + (1-a)E_2$ with $(0 \leq a \leq 1)$.

Every 2 bits, the best solution is taken after calculating the PSNR between the estimated solution and
10 the related source image.

1. Calculating before and after movement fields between N_k and N_{k+1} images

The before and after movement fields between N_k and
15 N_{k+1} images are calculated, in the form of hierarchical meshing, for example triangular, T_k^b and T_{k+1}^b as indicated in Figure 2.

These meshings are obtained by dividing certain meshes, for example, triangular meshes are divided into 4
20 sub-triangles, according to a specific criterion during the movement estimation process. At each hierarchical level, division decisions are taken or not for each mesh. Once these divisions have been decided upon, the adjacent meshes of the divided meshes are divided in order to
25 maintain a uniform meshing structure. The initial meshing, before division (top of the hierarchy) can take any form.

In the example in Figure 2, the movement estimator decides to divide triangles 3 and 8. This leads to the

division of triangles 2, 4, 7, and 9. The process is repeated up to a predefined hierarchy level.

In the case of triangular meshings, the movement field expression defined by the triangular meshing T is given for each triangle e by:

$$\vec{d}(\vec{p}, D) = \sum_{\{ver(e)\}_n} \psi^e(\vec{p}) \vec{d}_n \quad \forall \vec{p}(x, y) \in e$$

where:

- e indicates the triangular element of T containing the current point \vec{p} of the x and y coordinates
- $\{ver(e)\}$ indicates all three nodes or peaks, numbered i, j, k of positions \vec{p}_i , \vec{p}_j , and \vec{p}_k
- $\Psi_l (l=i, j, k)$ represents the barycentric coordinates of point $\vec{p} (x, y)$ in the $e_{i,j,k}$ triangular element with:

$$\Psi_l^e(x, y) = \begin{cases} \alpha_l^e + \beta_l^e x + \gamma_l^e y, \alpha_l^e, \beta_l^e, \gamma_l^e \in \mathbb{R} & \text{if } \vec{p}(x, y) \in e_{i,j,k} \\ \sum_{l=i,j,k} \Psi_l^e(x, y) = 1 & \\ \Psi_l^e(x, y) = 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

This type of model defines a fully continuous field. Furthermore, it allows full control of representation accuracy, an essential feature for compression.

At each level of the meshing hierarchy, nodal movement vectors are calculated in order to minimise prediction errors. Various meshing-based movement estimators can be used, for example those described in patent FR No. 98 11227, or FR No. 99 15568.

The important point to remember is that the final meshing is the result of a hierarchical process from the initial meshing by divisions. This hierarchical nature is indeed used to advantage for the differential encoding of nodal movement vectors between a node and its parent nodes (the edges of the arc in which it is inserted). The meshing structure is recalculated in the decoder using the knowledge from the initial meshing, as well as the mesh division indicators.

Therefore, at the end of the process, 2 movement meshings are obtained for each group of images comprised of N_k and N_{k+1} images used to regenerate all the images of the group.

2. Detection of blanking areas

From these 2 meshings, the blanking areas occlusions, that is the non-predictable areas in the N_k image obtained from the N_{k+1} image or vice versa, from the covering or uncovering of objects, are detected.

These areas are simply defined by the covering of triangles after they have been moved by their nodal vectors.

The figure illustrates the basic blanking detection on the uncovering of triangles after movement.

The encoder can continue the movement estimate by deactivating the triangles in the blanking areas, in order to obtain movement vectors that are less biased.

Nevertheless, this is strictly an internal feature of the encoder's strategy, and at the end, it is the two

T_k^b and T_{k+1}^f complete movement meshings that are encoded and inserted in the binary stream. The decoder is then able to find the blanking areas using these 2 meshings.

These blanking areas are defined in the N_k and N_{k+1} images and once they are detected, their corresponding triangles are labelled as a result, both in the encoder and in the decoder.

Nonetheless, the encoder must know where these areas are found in the N_{k+1} and $N_{k+1}-1$ images. These images are simply obtained by projecting the T_k^b and T_{k+1}^f meshings on the image to be encoded by applying nodal movement vectors that are renormalized to take into account the temporal distance between the current image and the reference N_k or N_{k+1} image.

15

3. Blanking area encoding:

For each blanking area, the reference image for a possible prediction is selected among I_{Nk} , $I_{N(k+1)}$, as well as I_1^c , which is the image obtained at 1, by movement compensation with the T_k^b or T_{k+1}^f meshing, at a level in which there is as yet no mesh covering.

More precisely, the choice between I_{Nk} and $I_{N(k+1)}$ simply depends on the T_k^b or T_{k+1}^f meshing that generated the current blanking area. Then, this meshing is used to predict the image and provide I_1^c . The choice between I_1^c and I_{Nk} or $I_{N(k+1)}$ is based on a prediction error criterion: the image causing the weakest error is maintained. Therefore, it is simply a matter of inserting 1 bit in the binary flow, per area, to encode the choice of the

25

prediction that was maintained.

Take note of I , the selected reference image.

The rest of the encoding of these areas includes 2 stages:

- 5 - A prediction stage.
- An encoding stage of the prediction error or of the original texture in the case of an incorrect prediction.

10 3.1 Residual prediction of the blanking area texture

Three methods can be used, in an exclusive manner. The decision is based on the lowest error criterion.

Method 1:

- 15 The values Y , U and V of a pixel in the area are simply those of the pixel located in the same reference image I_1 . That is, \hat{I}_1 the resulting image. The prediction error between \hat{I} and I_1 is then encoded.

20 Method 2:

- A movement estimate is therefore performed between I_1 (the image to be encoded) and \hat{I}_1 (the result of the prediction from method 1) on the blanking area. The resulting meshing, that stems from the last meshing level
25 T_r , $r=k$ or $k+1$, before the meshes are covered, is therefore encoded as are its nodal movements. Lastly, the residual prediction error is encoded according to a procedure defined later.

Method 3:

No prediction is performed and the original values of the area's pixels are encoded.

5 4. Encoding the texture or prediction error of blanking areas.

The original texture and prediction error undergo the same encoding, for which the principle is as follows:

10 It is assumed that an initial triangular meshing was able to be defined from the T_r meshing movement maintained for the prediction of the area to be encoded. The way of obtaining this initial meshing will be described later.

15 The texture is therefore approximated on each mesh according to a choice:

- Meshes with many high frequencies are encoded based on the transformation by discrete cosine called DCT.

- The smoother meshes are encoded using a refined 20 model of finished elements.

Again, a hierarchical approach will be used to reduce the cost of encoding the representation through meshing.

25 The approach used allows the low cost of encoding related to a regular hierarchy of meshes to be maintained whilst permitting local adaptation of image contents that the irregular decomposition of meshes allows.

From the thick initial meshing of the area, meshes are subdivided into 4 triangular sub-meshes up to a given

level.

On the last level, an optional permutation of the quadrilateral diagonals generated by 2 adjacent triangles can be implemented, if this results in a reduction of the approximation error.

4.1 Initialisation of texture meshing on blanking areas

This meshing is simply given by the last T_r level (meshing resulting from the movement of T_k or T_{k+1} depending on the direction maintained) before the conversions appear in the area under consideration. Therefore, a texture meshing that is inserted naturally into the movement meshing is obtained, because it is extracted from the latter.

15

4.2 Representations used for the texture on triangles

Two representations are combined: affine interpolation and triangular 4 DCT

20 Affine interpolation

The triangular meshing nodes contain the photometric (colour, error) information and interpolation for the points inside the triangle is performed by a Lagrange finished element, also called affine interpolation.

25

The $v(\vec{p})$ value of point $\vec{p}(x,y)$ inside the triangle $e_{i,j,k}$ defined by the 3 nodes $\vec{p}_l, l=i,j,k$ is provided by the following equation:

$$v(\vec{p}) = \sum_{l=i,j,k} \psi_l^e(x,y) \vec{p}_l$$

where $\Psi_1(l=i,j,k)$ represents the barycentric coordinates of the point.

$v(\vec{p})$ can be one of the Y, U, or V photometrical components of the point or the prediction error for these
5 components.

Several methods can be used to calculate the nodal values, in particular, the method of lesser squares.

Discrete cosine transformation (DCT) on triangles

10 The principle of the method consists in transforming any triangle into a rectangular isosceles reference. The content of this triangle is therefore rendered symmetrical with respect to the hypotenuse to provide a symmetrical square matrix (Figure 4).

15 A classic DCT (square) is therefore applied to this matrix. It can be shown that the transformed matrix is also symmetrical. Only the coefficients of its lower triangle are therefore quantified then statistically encoded (entropic encoding).

20 Figure 4 describes the various stages of the process: selection of the T triangle, affine transformation of the T triangle into a T' rectangle isosceles triangle. Through affine transformation, the triangle pixels are no longer located on a regular
25 orthogonal graph, and resampling of the photometric values inside the reference triangle is recommended. To do so, a process similar to the process for movement compensation in the image (during affine transformation) is used, using an interpolater, for example bilinear.

The affine transformation F and its inverse F^{-1} are defined by the following equations:

$$F: \begin{cases} X = \frac{(x_2 - x_1)(y_1 - y) + (y_1 - y_2)(x_1 - x)}{(x_3 - x_1) + (y_2 - y_1) + (y_1 - y_3)(x_2 - x_1)} N \\ Y = \frac{(x_1 - x_3) + (y_1 - y) + (y_3 - y_1)(x_1 - x)}{(x_3 - x_1)(y_2 - y_1) + (y_1 - y_3)(x_2 - x_1)} N \end{cases}$$

$$F^{-1}: \begin{cases} x = x_1 + (x_3 - x_1) \frac{X}{N} + (x_2 - x_1) \frac{Y}{N} \\ y = y_1 + (y_3 - y_1) \frac{X}{N} + (y_2 - y_1) \frac{Y}{N} \end{cases}$$

5

The photometric values $M(i, j)$ of the T' triangle (therefore of the M block rendered symmetrical of T') are obtained by the F^{-1} inverse transformation, and then the Γ interpolation of the texture of the image to encode:

$$10 \quad M(i_Y, j_X) = I_{\Gamma}(P_{(x,y)}) = I_{\Gamma}(F^{-1}(Q_{(x,y)}))$$

where:

the $M(i_Y, j_X)$ coefficient is the value at the $Q(X, Y)$ point where the transformed $P(x, y)$ is $F^{-1}(Q)$

15 I_{Γ} indicates the interpolater used to calculate the image value at the point, the coordinates that are potentially non-integers.

The $\hat{\Gamma}$ regeneration of the Γ texture is given by:

$$\hat{\Gamma}(P_{(x,y)}) = I_{\Gamma}(Q_{(X,Y)}) = I_{\Gamma}(F(P_{(x,y)}))$$

20 where I_{Γ} indicates the interpolated texture from the M' block values, a quantified version of M .

This technique can only be applied to non-null area triangles. But, by definition, this type of triangle does

not need texture encoding.

Contrary to SADCT (DCT adapted to a form), this transformation does not guarantee the perfect regeneration after inverse transformation, even if there is no quantification.

In order to reduce regeneration errors, a scale factor α is introduced to calculate the M_i block (size $N_i \times N_i$) for triangle i :

$$N_i = E(\alpha \sqrt{2A_i})$$

where:

- E is the complete part by excess,
- A_i is the triangle i area.

In fact, $\alpha = 1$ provides for an interesting compromise, which is more effective for triangles that are close to an isosceles. The case $\alpha < 1$ is used in conjunction with the quantification step to compress the information volume.

Once the M_i block is defined for each triangle, a classic DCT transformation is applied to them, and the transformed coefficients are quantified according to several possible procedures, for example, uniform scalar quantification, or even incremental quantification with the frequency of the transformed coefficient. The use of well known MPEG or JPEG quantification matrices is also possible.

The DCT expression is given by:

$$F(u, v) = \frac{1}{\sqrt{NM}} \sum_{i=0}^{N-1} \sum_{j=0}^{M-1} \lambda(u) \lambda(v) \cos \frac{(2i+1)u\pi}{2N} \cos \frac{(2j+1)v\pi}{2M} f(i, j)$$

$$\lambda(\xi) = \begin{cases} \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}} & \text{if } \xi=0 \\ 1 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

5 The $F(u, v) = F(v, u)$ relationship is present because:
 $f(i, j) = f(j, i) \quad (\forall u, v, i, j = 0, \dots, N-1)$ by definition.

As a result, it is enough to calculate only the coefficients of the lower part of the transformed matrix.

10 4.3 Global encoding of texture

As previously indicated, a uniform hierarchical meshing is used which is obtained by dividing each triangle of a given level of the hierarchy into 4 sub-triangles, and inserting nodes in the middle of the arcs.
 15 The process is repeated until the maximum level is reached. This hierarchy of triangles is also represented and managed by the encoder in the form of a quaternary tree (Figure 5). Note that only the triangles included in the area to encode are taken into account. The
 20 construction procedure of the basic initial meshing guarantees that all the triangles of the meshing hierarchy belong to the area to encode.

The encoding process by meshing a blanking area can be summarised as follows:

25 1. An interleaved hierarchical meshing is defined on the area to encode by creating a regular initial

meshing and then repeatedly subdividing triangles into 4 sub-triangles and inserting new nodes in the middle of the arcs. The node values are calculated in order to minimise the approximation error of the area due to meshing.

2. The pixel values are moved closer together using affine interpolation on the triangle that contains the pixels using the node values.

For each triangle in the hierarchy, the approximation error E is evaluated and then the various representation and encoding methods are decided upon based on 2 thresholds: σ_1 and σ_2 :

1. if $E < \sigma_1$, affine interpolation on the triangle is sufficient.

2. If $\sigma_1 < E < \sigma_2$, the thinnest decomposition of the triangle must be used to obtain a good approximation, always using affine interpolation.

3. if $E > \sigma_2$, the triangle is textured and the affine interpolation error is encoded using DCT.

Lastly, on the thinnest meshing, the reduction of the error produced by the permutation of the quadrilateral diagonals formed by 2 adjacent triangles is tested. If a positive result is obtained, this permutation is validated.

According to the encoding methods chosen for the different triangles, the various data are encoded in the following manner.

The YUV nodal values are first predicted using the values of the parent nodes (edges of the arc where the

current node is inserted). The difference between the node value and its predicted value is therefore quantified.

5 Lastly, the quaternary tree structure (including the division and non-division indicators of the triangles), the diagonal permutation indicators, the differential nodal values of YUV and the quantified DCT coefficients are encoded using an arithmetic encoder and inserted in the binary string.

10

5. Summary of encoded information in the binary flow of frames encoded by meshing

Each group of frames encoded in meshing mode between N_{k+1} and $N_{k+1}-1$ (where N_k N_{k+1} are the preceding and subsequent frames, respectively, encoded in MPEG mode) is represented as a whole in the binary flow.

The driven data comprises, in encoded form:

A header for the set of frame groups, including, among others, the real number of encoded frames.

20 The movement meshings (structure and movement vectors of nodes) T_k^b and T_{k+1}^f .

The prediction or original error texture, for each image of the group.

25 6. Global structure of the binary string

The global binary string comprises a succession of frames encoded in MPEG mode and groups of frames encoded in meshing mode, as indicated in Figure 8.

The global header of the binary string that

represents the encoded sequence contains, among others, the indication of the hybrid encoding.

The part of the binary stream that corresponds to a group of frames encoded in meshing mode begins with a header that indicates, among other things, the number of frames actually encoded, and may be null.

The various data flows (binary strings) that correspond, respectively, to the global header of the encoded sequence, the images encoded in MPEG and the groups of i images encoded in interpolated meshing mode can be sent through different, independent paths if required. In particular, the encoding procedure allows hierarchical (or scalable) encoding of the sequence, that is, decoding that only uses a part of the total bit rate.

15

7. Decoding procedure

Figure 9 provides an overview of the decoding principle.

Firstly, the header decoding allows hybrid decoding to be activated.

20

Then, the decoder recognises for each part of the binary string that corresponds to an independent entity if it is a frame encoded in MPEG-4 or a group of frames encoded by meshing.

25

MPEG-4 frames are provided to the MPEG-4 decoding module, and the groups of frames encoded in meshing mode are provided to the decoding module through meshing.

7.1 Meshing-based decoding

Firstly, the T_k^b and $T_{(k+1)}^f$ movement meshings for the $I_1, N_k < 1 < N_{k+1}$ image group are decoded.

Next, the blanking areas for these images are found according to the same procedure as in the encoder.

5 Then, the pixels outside the blanking areas are simply interpolated using the I_{N_k} and $I_{N_{k+1}}$ images and the T_k^b and T_{k+1}^f movement fields.

10 Meshing of the thickest texture (top of the hierarchy) is found for each blanking area according to a procedure that is identical to that of the encoder procedure.

15 The information related to the corresponding hierarchical meshing (triangle division indicator, affine interpolation decisions or DCT encoding, differential nodal YUV values and quantified DCT coefficients) is therefore decoded and the pixel YUV values of these areas are regenerated.

CLAIMS

1. Image coding process, characterised by the following steps:

- selecting two images IT_1 and IT_2 , split by series of at least one image that has to be undersampled;

5 - coding said IT_1 and IT_2 images delimiting said series of images through a first mode of image coding, optimizing significantly a photometric representation of an image;

10 - coding each image of the series of images through a second mode of image coding optimizing a representation of movement between at least two images, based on a determination of at least one field of movement vectors described by a mesh made up of nodes to which is affected a movement vector, so that each image is coded according
15 to only one coding mode.

2. Encoding method as claimed in claim 1, wherein a piece of information representing a choice of one of said encoding modes is known by a decoder according to at least one of the techniques belonging to the group
20 comprising:

- a predefined choice, known at the encoding and decoding levels;

25 - a piece of information representing said choice and included in a data flow comprising at least some encoded image data;

- a piece of information representing said choice and included in a data flow regardless encoded image

data;

- determining said choice in an intrinsic manner, by the decoder.

3. Encoding method as claimed in either of claims 5 1 and 2, wherein it comprises a step of selecting an encoding mode to be applied to said image, among which at least:

- an initial encoding substantially optimising a photometric representation of an image.

10 - a second encoding substantially optimising a representation of movement between at least two images.

4. Encoding method as claimed in claim 3, wherein said second encoding takes into account at least one previous image and/or at least one subsequent image 15 encoded using said initial encoding.

5. Encoding method as claimed in claim 4, wherein said second encoding takes into account a movement vector field calculated from an immediately preceding image encoded using said initial coding and/or a movement 20 vector field calculated from an immediately subsequent image encoded using said initial coding.

6. Encoding method as claimed in claim 5, wherein said movement vector field is applied to a meshing.

7. Encoding method as claimed in either of claims 25 5 and 6, wherein said movement vector fields are used to determine a deduced movement vector field, related to an image encoded using said second encoding.

8. Encoding method as claimed in any of claims 5 to 7, wherein said second encoding implements an estimate

of movement before, between an I_{t1} image and an image after I_{t2} , and a step of movement compensation in which movement vectors obtained during said movement estimate and not leading to conversion are weighted by a
5 $k=m/(t1+t2)$, $0 < k < 1$ scalar in order to interpolate at least one I_{m1} image with m belonging to $[t1, t2]$.

9. Encoding method as claimed in any of claims 5 to 7, wherein said second encoding implements an estimate of movement after, between an I_{t2} image and an image
10 before I_{t1} , and a movement compensation phase in which the movement vectors obtained during said movement estimate and not leading to conversion are weighted by a $k'=1-m/(t1+t2)$, $0 \leq k' \leq 1$ scalar in order to interpolate at least one I_{m2} image with m belonging to $[t1, t2]$.

15 10. Encoding method as claimed in claims 8 and 9, wherein it implements an after estimate and a before estimate, in order to obtain an estimated I_m image such as $I_m = aE1 + (1-a)E2$ with $0 \leq a \leq 1$.

20 11. Encoding method as claimed in any of claims 3 to 10, wherein said selection phase is based on the implementation of an N fixed factor subsampling, one image in N being encoded using said initial encoding.

12. Encoding method as claimed in claim 11, wherein N is greater than 2.

25 13. Encoding method as claimed in either of claims 11 and 12, wherein N is variable.

14. Encoding method as claimed in any of claims 3 to 11, wherein said initial encoding implements a transformation on image blocks and a temporal prediction

by blocks.

15. Encoding method as claimed in claim 14, wherein said initial encoding is an MPEG-4 or H26L encoding.

16. Encoding method as claimed in claim 15, wherein
5 images obtained by said MPEG-4 or H26L encoding comprise type I (intra) and/or type P (predictable) images.

17. Encoding method as claimed in any of claims 3 to 16, wherein said second encoding is based on an M level hierarchical meshing, M being greater than or equal
10 to 1.

18. Encoding method as claimed in claim 17, wherein said meshing is triangular.

19. Encoding method as claimed in either of claims 17 and 18, wherein it comprises a management phase of
15 occlusion areas.

20. Encoding method as claimed in any of claims 1 to 19, wherein it produces at least two data flows that can be transmitted over separate transmission paths.

21. Encoding method as claimed in claim 20, wherein
20 said data flows belong to a group comprising:

- a global header;
- image data encoded according to said initial encoding;
- image data encoded according to said second
25 encoding.

22. Method for decoding an image signal encoded using the encoding method as claimed in any of claims 1 to 21.

23. Device for encoding an image signal encoded

using the encoding method as claimed in any of claims 1 to 21.

24. Device for decoding an image signal encoded using the encoding method as claimed in any of claims 1
5 to 21

25. Decoding device as claimed in claim 24, wherein it comprises means for determining at least one part of a vector field and/or at least one part of occlusion areas, similar to those implemented during encoding.

10 26. Storage device with at least one image signal encoded using the encoding procedure as claimed in any of claims 1 to 21.

15 27. System for encoding, transmission and/or decoding an image signal encoded using the encoding procedure as claimed in any of claims 1 to 17.

20 28. System as claimed in claim 27, wherein a piece of information regarding the choice of one of said encoding modes is known to a decoder according to at least one of the techniques that belong to a group comprising the following:

- a predefined choice, known at the encoding and decoding levels;

- a piece of information representative of the choice and included in a data flow comprising at least
25 some encoded image data;

- a piece of information representative of the choice and included in a data flow regardless encoded image data;

- determining the choice in an intrinsic manner by

the decoder.

29. Computer program product for encoding and/or decoding image signals encoded using the encoding method as claimed in any of claims 1 to 21.

5 30. Data media hosting a computer program for encoding and/or decoding an image signal encoded using the encoding method as claimed in any of claims 1 to 21.

10 31. Image data signal wherein it comprises data encoded according to the procedure as claimed in any of claims 1 to 21.

32. Signal as claimed in claim 31, wherein it comprises at least one indicator specifying whether the method as claimed in any of claims 1 to 21 is activated or not.

15 33. Signal as claimed in either of claims 31 and 32, wherein it comprises a data element that specifies the frame structure, at the beginning of a video sequence and/or in each signal frame.

20 34. Signal as claimed in any of claims 31 to 33, wherein a sequence encoded using said second encoding begins with a header specifying a number of frames encoded according to this second encoding.

25 35. Signal as claimed in any of claims 31 to 34, wherein it comprises at least two data flows that can be transmitted over separate transmission paths.

36. Signal as claimed in claim 35, wherein said data flows belong to a group comprising:

- a global header;
- image data encoded according to said initial

encoding;

- image data encoded according to said second encoding.

37. Application of the method of encoding as
5 claimed in any of claims 1 to 21 to at least one of the domains belonging to a group comprising:

- digital TV;
- real-time video over IP network;
- real-time video over network to mobiles;
- 10 - image data storage.

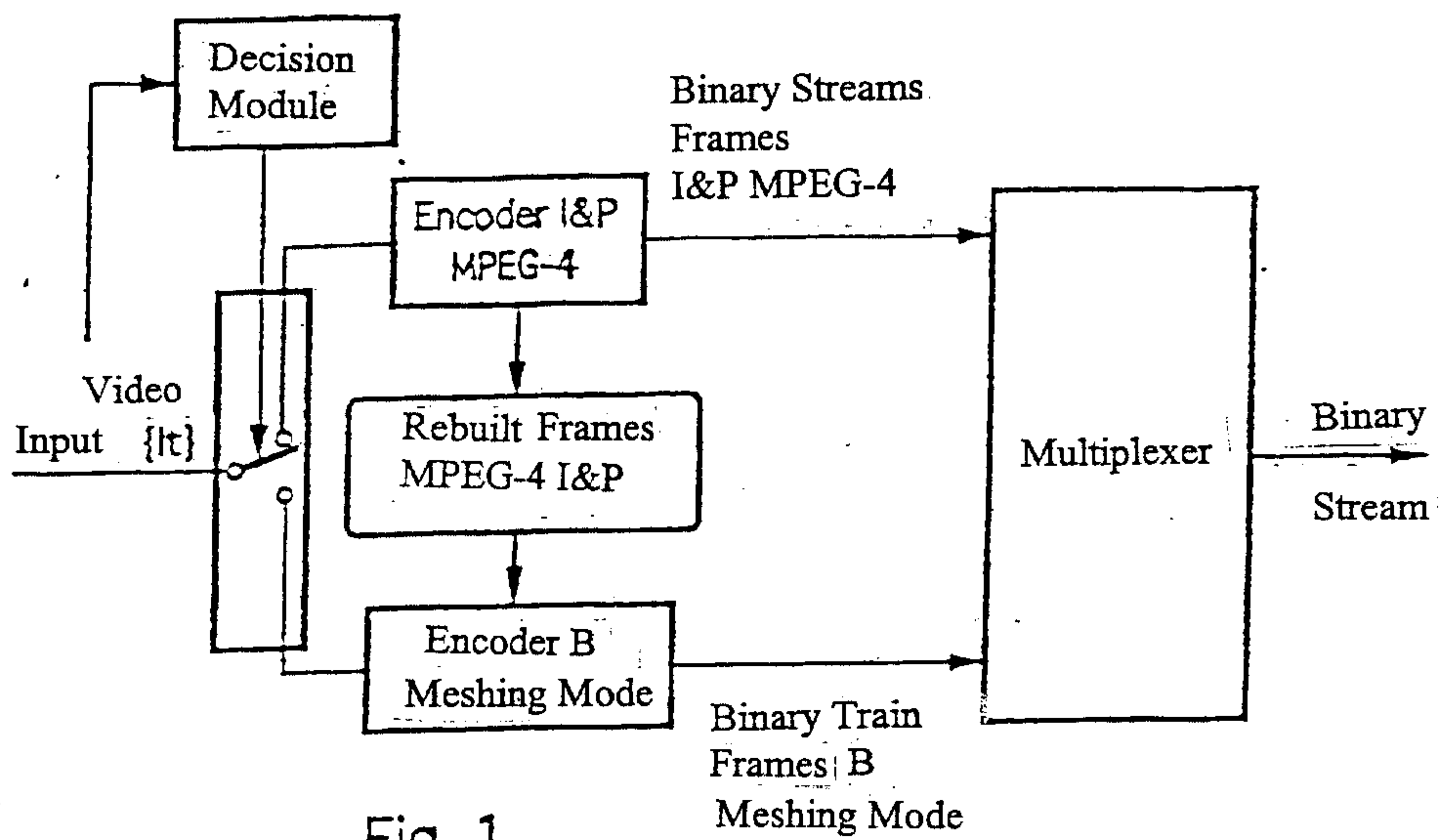


Fig. 1

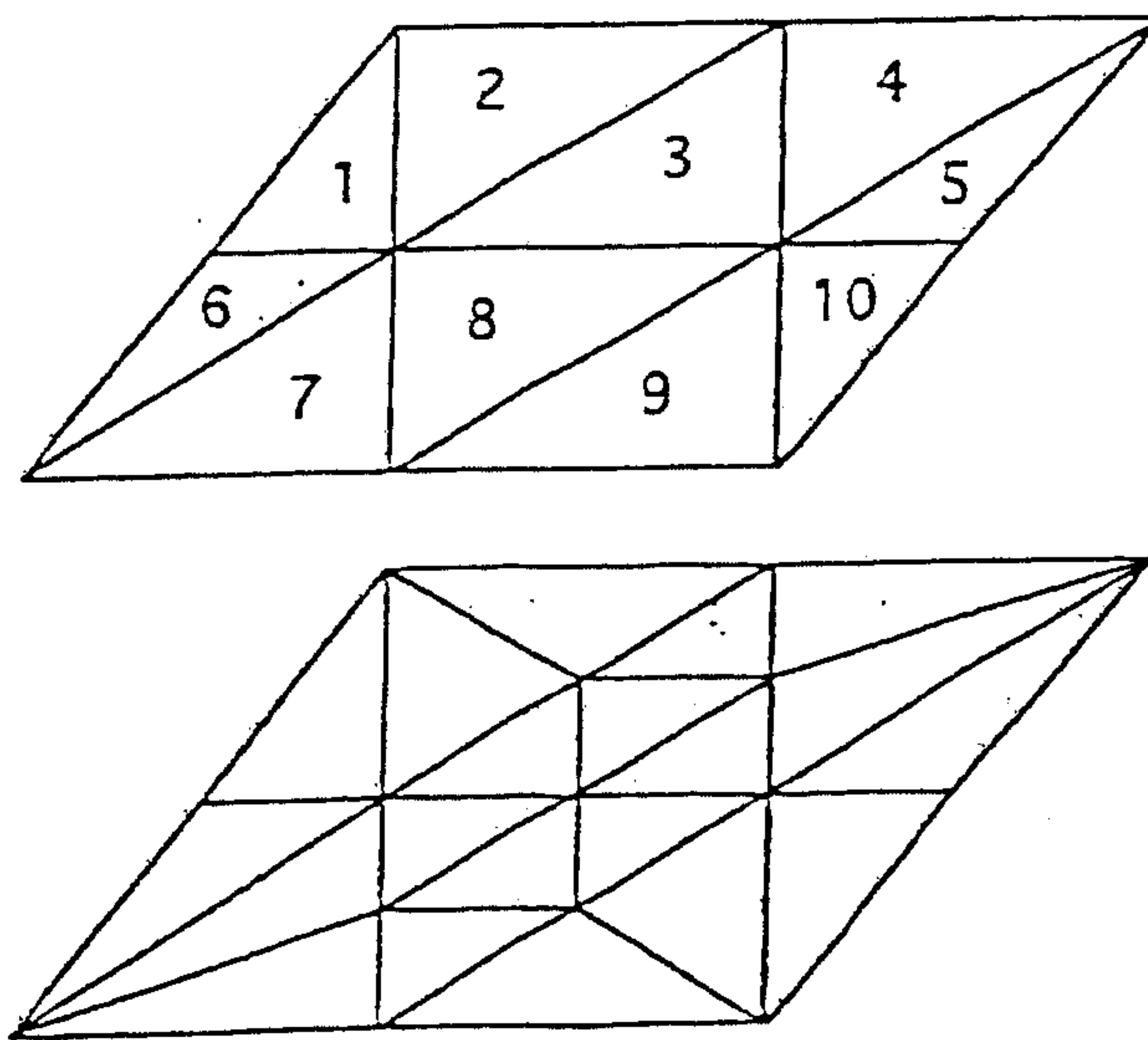


Fig. 2

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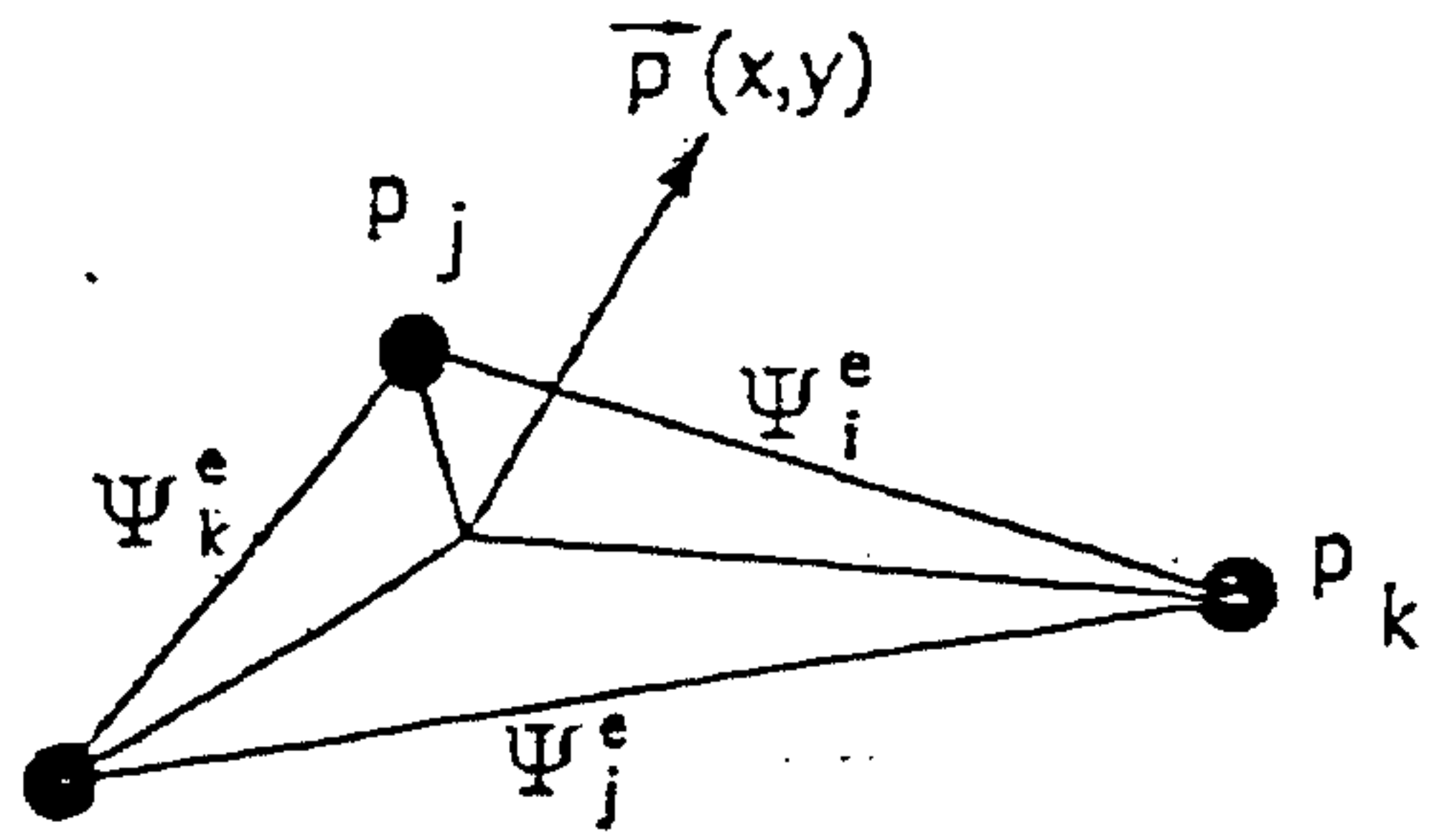


Fig. 3

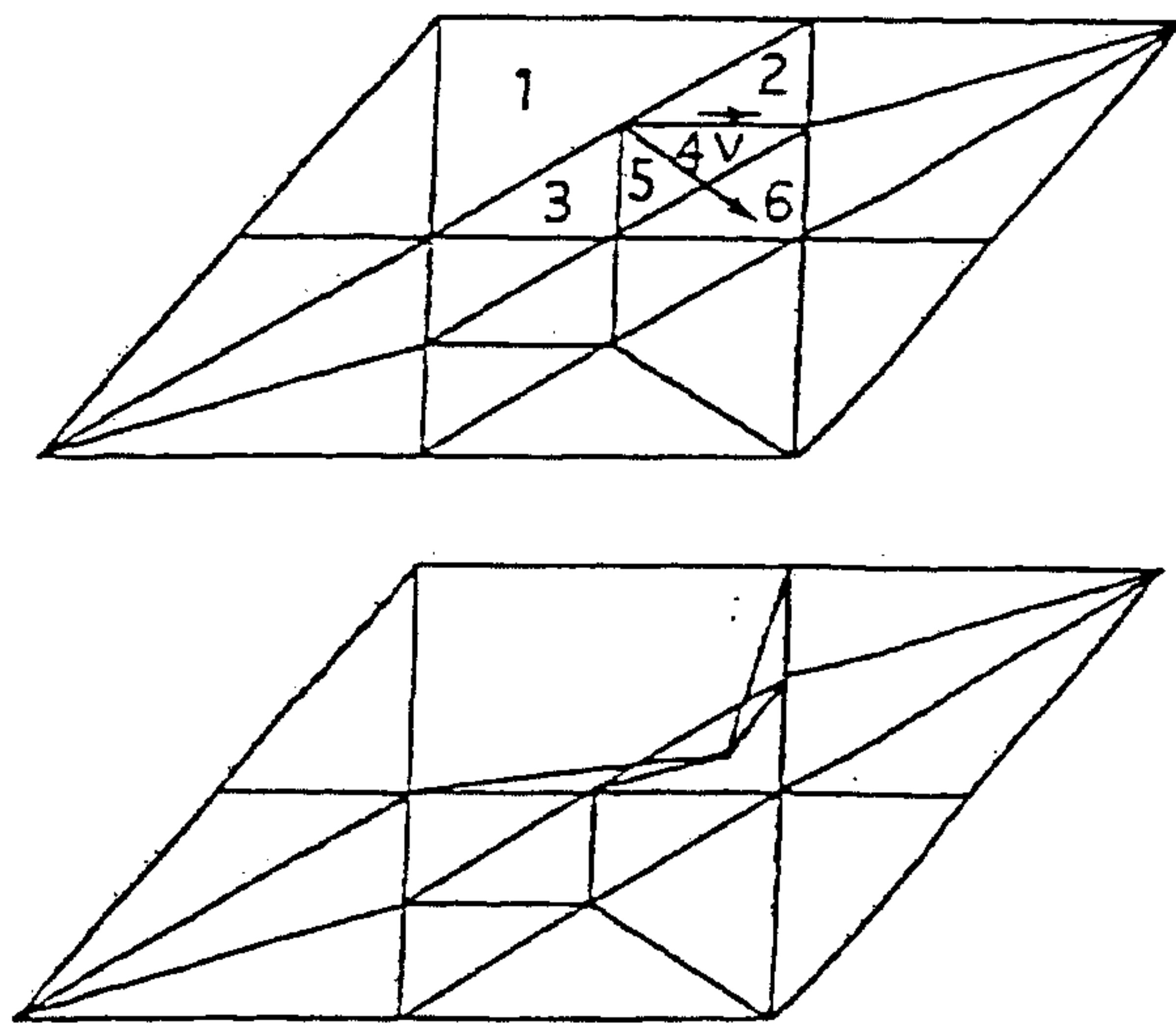


Fig. 4

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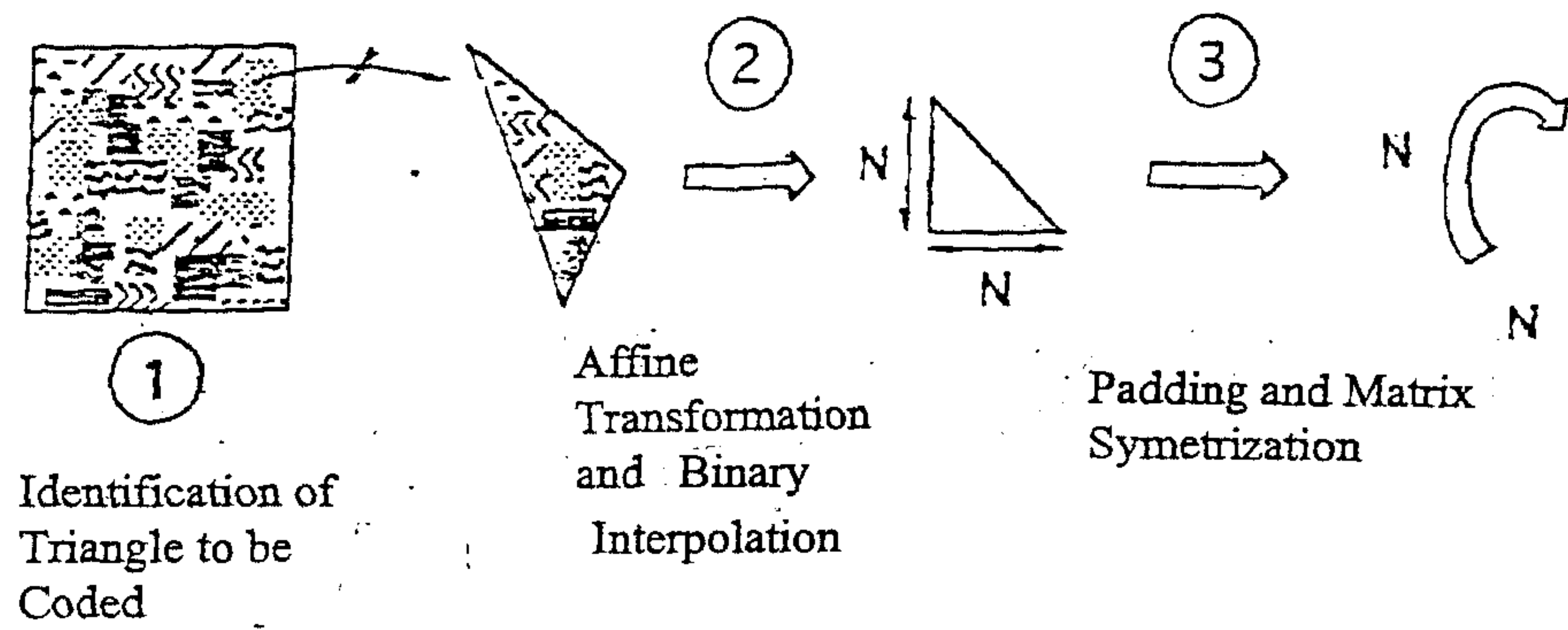


Fig. 5

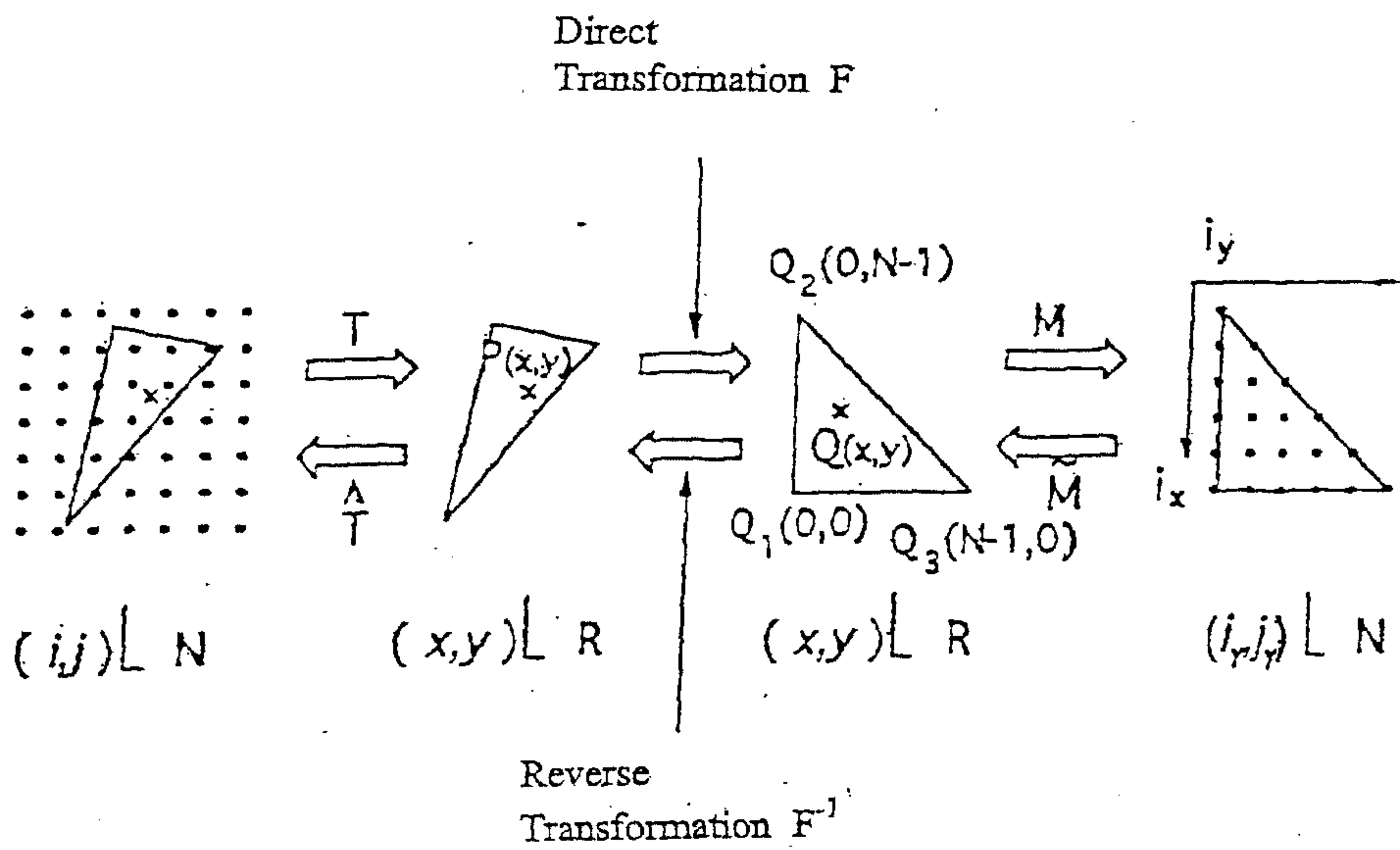


Fig. 6

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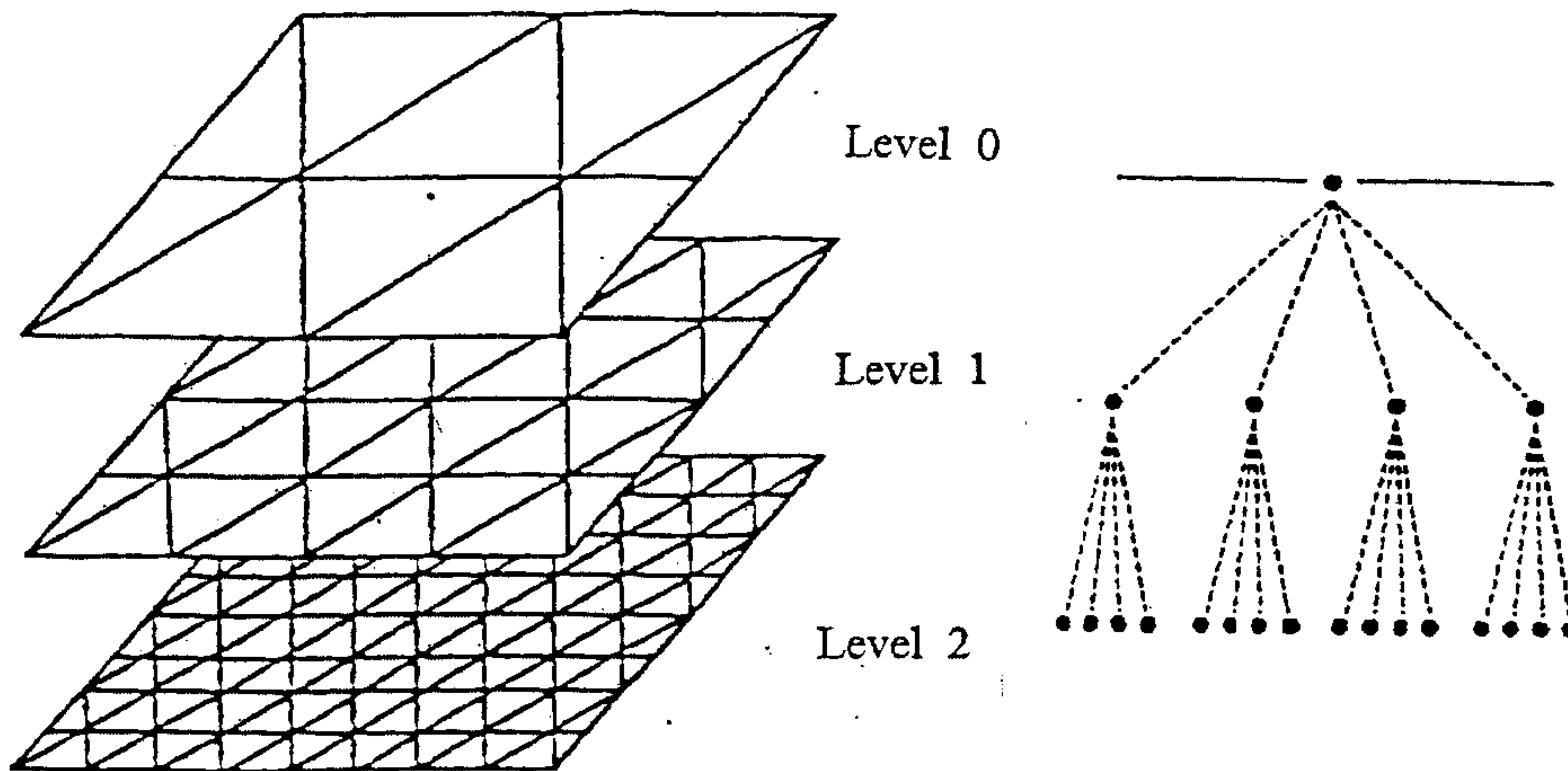


Fig. 7

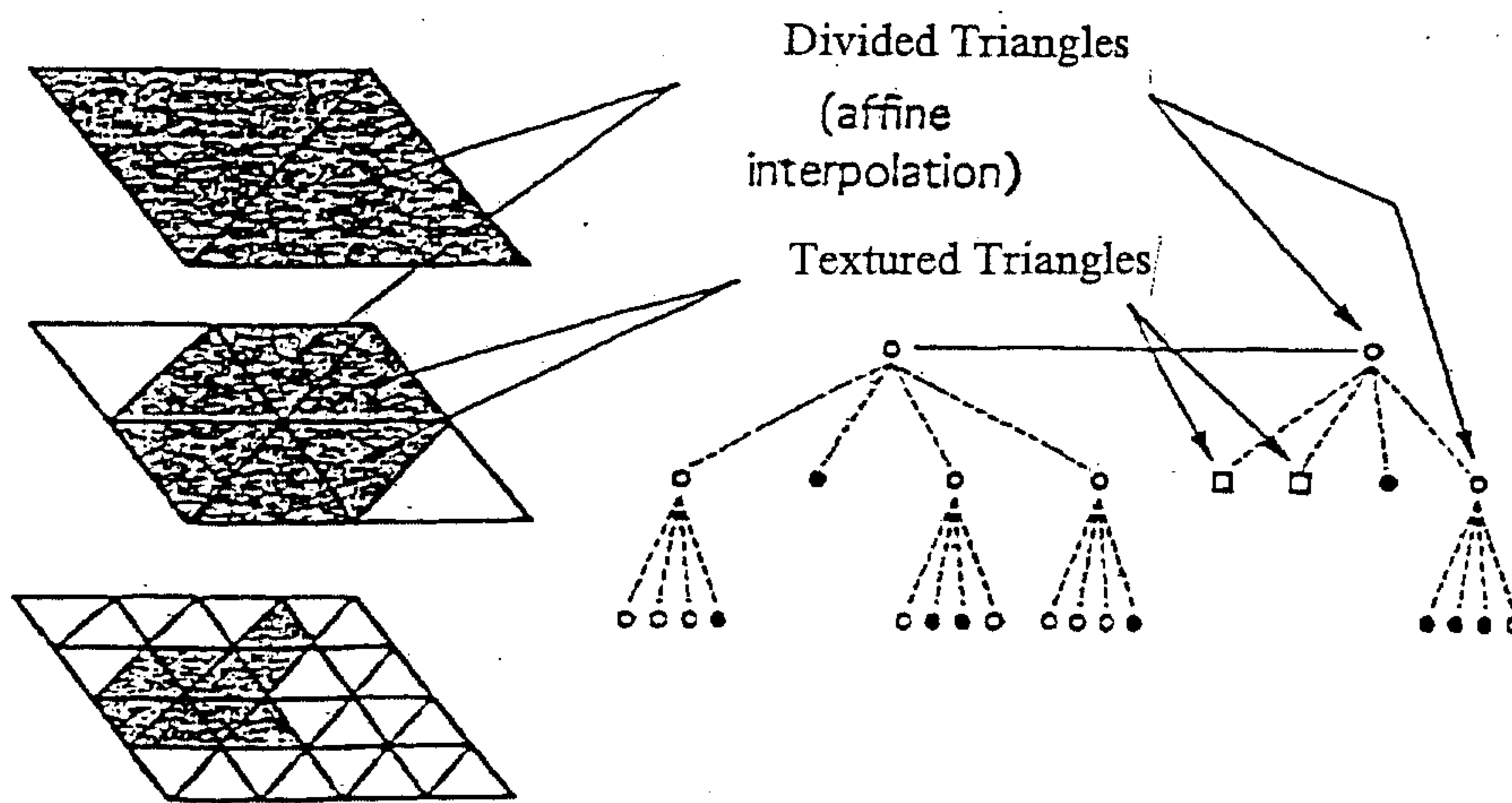


Fig. 8

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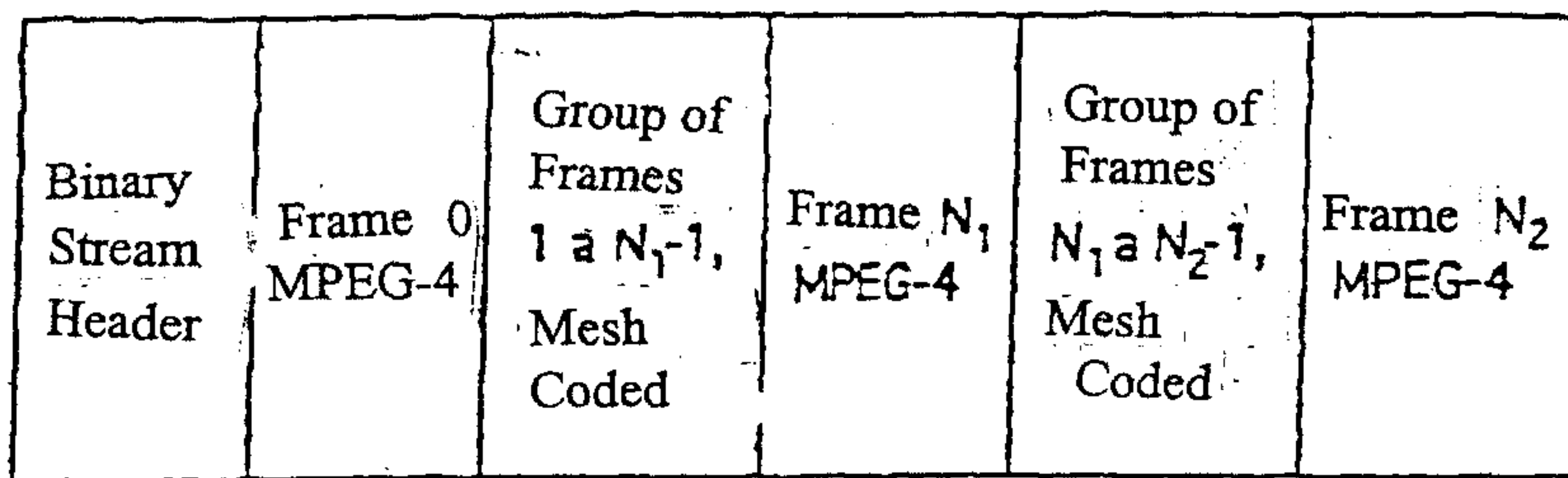


Fig. 9

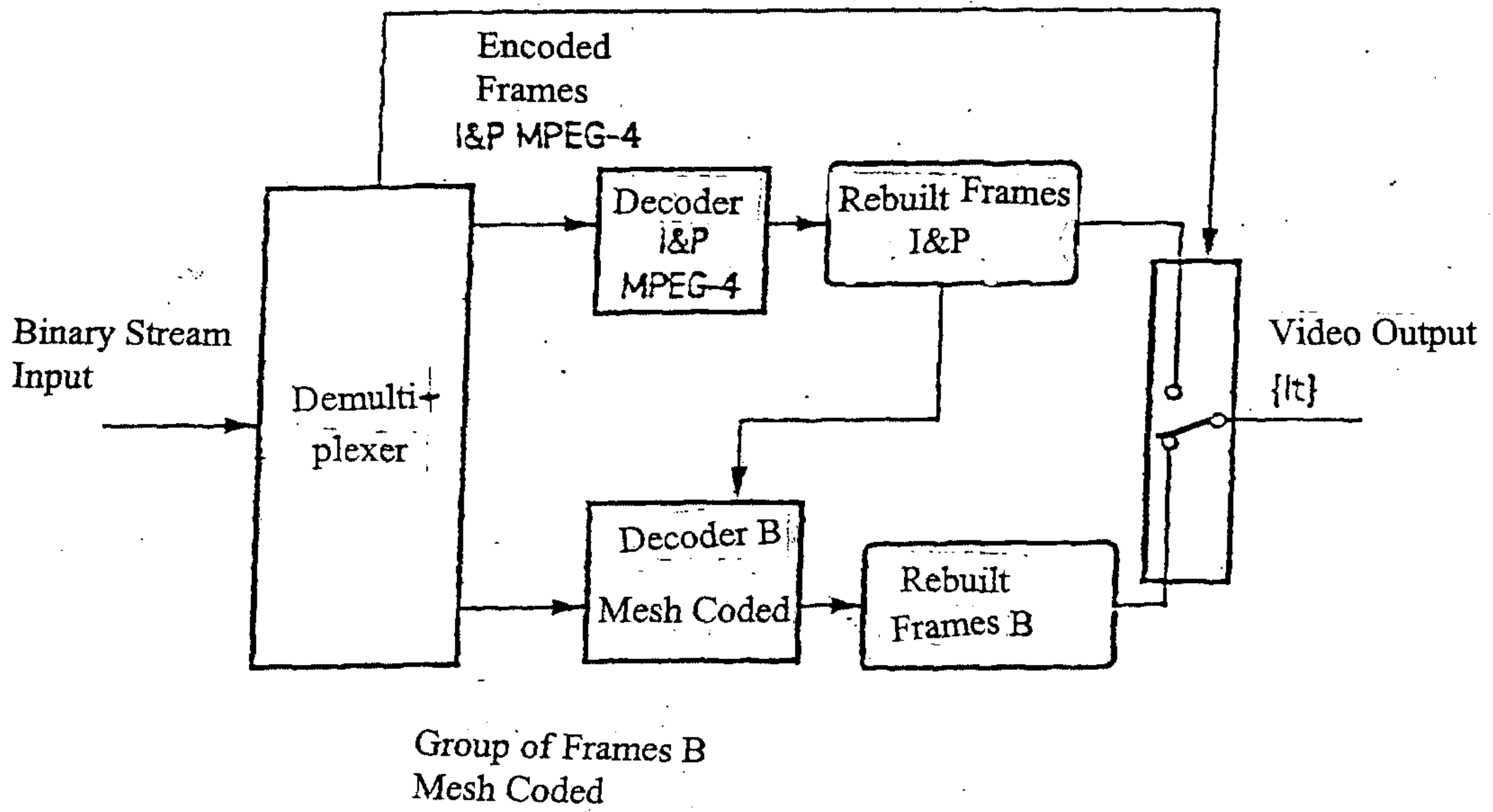


Fig. 10

