Abstract

Image reconstruction is an important task in X-ray computed tomography. In this paper we discuss the results of morphological analysis of test objects in high-noise conditions and compare image reconstruction using two widely employed methods in computed tomography, namely Filtered Back Projection and Algebraic Reconstruction Technique. In our test tomography experiments, we used a laboratory X-ray source designed and manufactured at the Institute of Crystallography, Moscow, Russia.

1. Introduction

This work is devoted to the problem of image reconstruction [1-7] and morphological analysis of images in X-ray computed tomography (CT). A key problem here is image reconstruction from the distribution of linear attenuation coefficients inside the object under study. In medical applications, it is often more important to determine only the parameters of inclusions, such as their size, position, etc. with some controlled accuracy. This can be done by performing morphological analysis [8, 9].

2. Test object

A polypropylene vial, 10.5 mm in diameter and with 1.6 mm wall thickness, filled with water was used as a test object. This is a classical test object widely employed for calibration of medical tomographs and is convenient because it is comprised of two distinctly separated homogeneous media. The vial diameter and composition/thickness of its walls can be adjusted in such a way that the absorption of a given X-ray is significant at a relatively high transmission, which in turn would ensure an image contrast at a level of several dozen percent. In our experiments, the vial was illuminated by X-rays (Mo-K\alpha radiation, \(\lambda=0.07\) nm) in parallel [5, 6] scan mode.
Morphological Analysis and Reconstruction for Computed Tomography

parameters of investigated object inclusions. This kind of sub-space is also defined by \((x_0, y_0, d_1, d_2)\).

The denominator is discarded when \(p(\varphi, \zeta) = \text{const}\) which corresponds to measurements of a projection of homogeneous space. Such a projection is formally described by

\[
\alpha = c_1 = c_2 = c_3 \quad (6)
\]

In the presence of a casual error of measurement \(p(\varphi, \zeta)\) morphological affinity is not equal to 0 with a probability of 1. If the noise is Gaussian, then

\[
\mathcal{J}(x_0, y_0, d_1, d_2)(p) = \frac{p(V_3(x_0, y_0, d_1, d_2, p)}{p(V_0, p)} \quad (5)
\]

The value \(\mathcal{J}(x_0, y_0, d_1, d_2)(p)\) is a measure of similarity of the given measurements with theoretically calculated data from the vial with \((x_0, y_0, d_1, d_2)\). It is the noise to signal ratio provided that \(x_0, y_0, d_1, d_2\) are the true values of shape parameters of the vial. If this condition is met then the difference of the numerator \(p(V_3(x_0, y_0, d_1, d_2, p))\) from 0 can be explained only by the presence of noise. The denominator represents the difference of projection from the constant of its best approximation and characterises the projection part, bearing information about the parameters of the vial.

A point estimate of \((x_0, y_0, d_1, d_2)\) can be obtained using a solution to the following variation problem:

\[
\mathcal{J}(x_0, y_0, d_1, d_2)(p) \rightarrow \min_{x_0, y_0, d_1, d_2} \quad (7)
\]

For our test object, the minimum of \(\mathcal{J}(x_0, y_0, d_1, d_2)(p)\) was attained at the inner vial diameter about 7.8 mm and outer diameter 10.5 mm, which agrees well with the size of the test object used in the experiments.

According to [11], the set which can be used to evaluate parameters \((x_0, y_0, d_1, d_2)\) with probability \(\alpha\) has the form:

\[
\Psi_\alpha(p) = \{ (x_0, y_0, d_1, d_2) : \mathcal{J}(x_0, y_0, d_1, d_2)(p) \leq c_\alpha \} \quad (8)
\]
A diagram of the function $j(x_0, y_0, d_1, d_2)(p)$ of co-ordinates of the vial centre at fixed values of diameters $d_1, d_2$ is shown in Fig. 2.

Figure 2. Function $j(x_0, y_0, d_1, d_2)(p)$ of co-ordinates of vial centre at fixed values of diameters $d_1, d_2$.

Setting the value of noise to signal ratio, we will receive set of points $\{(x_0, y_0, d_1, d_2)\}$, that give the position of the vial centre. It is the set of points, for which diagram lays been lower than chosen value.

5. Filtered back-projection method

This method is most frequently being used in medical tomography [1,5]. It is based on a projection theorem according to which the Fourier transform of projection data along coordinate $\xi$,

$$P(\varphi, \omega) = \int p(\varphi, \xi)e^{-i\omega \xi}d\xi$$

$$= \int \int f(x, y) \exp(-i(\omega x \cos \varphi + \omega y \sin \varphi))dx dy$$

is equivalent to the Fourier transform of the object function in polar co-ordinates

$$F(\omega_x, \omega_y) = \int \int f(x, y) \exp(-i(\omega_x x + \omega_y y))dx dy$$

i.e.

$$P(\varphi, \omega) = F(\omega_x, \omega_y)$$

For reconstruction of image $f(x, y)$, one has to perform the reverse Fourier transform of $P(\varphi, \omega)$

$$f(x, y) = \int \int \Phi(\omega)P(\varphi, \omega)e^{i\omega x}dx d\varphi$$

where $\Phi(\omega)$ is the function of the frequency filter.

For a parallel measurement scheme

$$\Phi(\omega) = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } |\omega| \leq \omega_{\text{max}} \\ \omega_{\text{max}} - |\omega| & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

(13)

where $\omega_{\text{max}} = (2T_d)^{-1}$ is the maximal sampling rate, $T_d$ the linear size of detector array element, and $\varepsilon \in [0,1]$ some parameter.

In practice [1,5,6], Equation (12) can be solved using the filtered backprojection (FBP) method. Let $\Phi(\omega)$ be given by Equation (13) and $K(\xi)$ be its Fourier transform, then the product of $\Phi(\omega)$ and the Fourier transform of projection can be regarded as the Fourier transform of the convolution of projection with function $K(\xi)$:

$$f(x, y) = \int \int K(\xi - \xi_0)p(\varphi, \xi)d\xi d\varphi$$

(14)

where $\xi_0 = x \cos \varphi + y \sin \varphi$ and

$$K(\xi) = \int \omega d e^{i\omega \xi}d\omega = \frac{1}{2T_d} \sin(\frac{2\pi \xi}{2T_d}) - \frac{1}{4T_d^2} \left(\frac{\sin(\frac{\pi \xi}{2T_d})}{\frac{\pi \xi}{2T_d}}\right)^2$$

(15)

A sample FBP reconstruction is shown in Figure 3(a). Shown in Figure 3(b) are cross-sections obtained by FBP and by a modified ART method introduced in the following section.

Integral calculation is performed using a numerical method. Conveniently, data processing can occur almost in parallel with measurement, since the calculation of a return projection after a filtration can be performed during registration of the following projection, and the result of the calculation summarised in appropriate storage locations.

Figure 3. a) Section of polypropylene tubes with water reconstructed by FBP. Average rate of absorption - water: $\mu = 0.094$ mm$^{-1}$, $\sigma = 1.5 \cdot 10^{-4}$;
polypropylene: $\mu = 0.056$ mm$^{-1}$, $\sigma = 0.6 \cdot 10^{-4}$,
b) Cross-section of the reconstructed image. Gray line: FBP reconstruction; black line (smooth): ART reconstruction with median filtering, $J = 0.005$.

Before the real experiment, mathematical simulation has been performed to estimate the optimal
conditions. To reach the optimum here means to reduce the time of experiment performance, and to keep acceptable quality of the reconstruction. The FBP technique was used for condition estimation. Understandably, the structure of liquid, at scales comparable with resolution of the device, is homogeneous and constant in terms of density. Hence, disorder values in terms of fluid density, and also average value of density received during the experiment can characterise the accuracy of the method of measurement and reconstruction.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 4. Absorption and standard deviation depending on number of projections, used for reconstruction, for different noise levels and different parts of the object (a,b – outside of object; c,d – water; e,f – polipropilen tube).**

The simulation parameters were as follows:-
- the size of the reconstructed region (size of slice) is 250x250 pixels;
- pixel size is 0.1x0.1 mm$^2$;
- the vial is presented by a cycle with an external diameter of 104 pixels and an internal diameter is 88 pixels;
- the linear attenuation coefficient in the wall of vial is 0.006 pixel$^{-1}$, linear attenuation coefficient inside the vial is 0.01 pixel$^{-1}$;
- the simulated projections were distorted with additive noise, having normal distribution.

Figure 4 shows, how quickly and to what value the reconstructed value converges when increasing the number of projections and at different levels noisiness of the original signal. At noise levels of less than 30% and number of projections of more than 70 (these conditions correspond to the real experiment) the intensity of artefacts does not exceed 0.002 mm$^{-1}$, which makes about 5% of the tabulated value of linear absorption coefficient of the object under study.

The observed dependencies show that 72 projections measured during the experiment is sufficient so as to obtain the correct reconstructed value with an accuracy about 5%. Underestimated values of are due the frequency filtering method used in reconstruction by FBP. Hence this part of the signal energy is diffused.

6. Modified ART method

In this method, an image to be reconstructed is covered by a grid comprising of $N$ pixels. For the $j$-th pixel, the function $f_j$ is assumed to be constant. Then the integral Equation (3) can be reduced to the following system of linear algebraic equations:

$$ p_i = (f_j, t_i), \quad i = 1, \ldots, M $$

where the $i$-th component of vector $t_i$ is regarded as the weighting coefficient which, in the model of infinitely thin beams [12], is the path length of an X-ray beam passing through the $j$-th pixel, and $M$ is the total number of points in all recorded projections, i.e. the product of the number of projection angles $M_\phi$ and array elements in the position-sensitive detector).

Equation (4) is solved using the iteration method [13]. For each iteration $k$, there is a solution $f^k$ which is improved upon by the projection of vector

$$ f^{k+1} = f^k + \gamma \frac{p_i - (f^k, t_i)}{(t_i, t_i)} t_i $$

on the $i$-th hyperplane defined by equations from (16). Here, $\gamma$ is the relaxation parameter [14].

In our implementation of the algorithm we first calculate a set of weight sparse matrices $t_i$ for all rotation angles.

In many ART implementations the weights are simply replaced by 1s and 0s depending on whether the centre of the pixel is within the fine ray. This makes the implementation easier. This approximation,
although easy to implement, often leads to artefacts in the reconstructed images. In our calculations, we used the beam–strip model [12]. The weighting coefficient was calculated as the ratio of pixel area hit by the beam to the overall pixel area. The beam diameter was chosen equal to the size of detector array element.

An iteration is assumed completed when projection onto all hyperplanes has been performed. The choice of path tracing represents a standalone problem [15].

To minimise the influence of two neighbouring hyperplanes on each other we used the following scheme:

$$p(\phi_1, \xi_1), p(\phi_1 + \frac{\pi}{2}, \xi_1), p(\phi_1, \xi_2), p(\phi_1 + \frac{\pi}{2}, \xi_2), \ldots,$$

$$p(\phi_1, \xi_{N/2}), p(\phi_1 + \frac{\pi}{2}, \xi_{N/2}), \ldots, p(\phi_M + \frac{\pi}{2}, \xi_{N/2})$$

(18)

Because the projections are noisy, the intersection of the hyperplanes is not a point in the $N$-dimensional space but a polygon. Each iteration projects the estimated solution to a polygon wall area. On the other hand, the solution sought for belongs to the image class sub-space. The size, shape and position of the sub-space depend on the accuracy of the image description (accuracy of the image model). The image sub-space and the polygon can intersect or be close to each other. The regularisation operator brings the estimated solution from the polygon wall area to the image sub-space [16]. The space of the piecewise constant functions is well suited for the description of the tomography images. However, it is very difficult to construct the projector which brings an estimated solution to this image sub-space. We have taken the space of piecewise smooth functions as the image space, i.e. if the function belongs to this space it will belong to the same space after the median operator was implemented. Then the median filtering operator can be used as the projector from the polygon wall area to the image sub-space. We have implemented the median filtering as the second sub-iteration [17,18].

The non-negativity constraint is reinforced, when instead of $f<0$ we set $f=0$.

One iteration is completed after the full set of measurements has been processed.

In the next iteration it is projected onto the hyperplane represented by the first Equation in (16), and successively onto the rest of the hyperplanes in Equation (16), then the filtering is implemented and so on until the last iteration.

In the last iteration, all images are saved. The final step of the algorithm is the averaging over these images to exclude the specific influence of the last hyperplane projection.

The initial guess $f^0$ is assigned a value of zero. It was shown [19] that from any initial guess the sequence generated by the ART converges to a weighted least square solution. This initial guess is projected on the hyperplane represented by the first Equation in (16) to yield $f_1^0$. The subscript indicates how many hyperplanes are included in the correction process. After each projection onto a hyperplane, the estimated image is updated. The first sub-iteration is finished if the correction over all hyperplanes is finished.

The results are presented in Figure 5. For water, $\mu=0.098 \text{ mm}^{-1}$, $\sigma=0.003 \text{ mm}^{-1}$. On 2xAMD Opteron 275 computer (RAM 8 Gb), the reconstruction time for the 2D image was 4 s.

![Figure 5](image.png)

**Figure 5.** a) Result of the reconstruction by ART. Used parameters: $\gamma=0.01$; median filtering mask is 3x3 pixels.

b) Cross-section of the reconstructed image. Gray line: reconstruction without median filtering, $\gamma=0$; black line: reconstruction with median filtering, $\gamma=0.005$.

c) Cross-section of the reconstructed image. Gray line: median filtering mask is 3x3, $\gamma=0$; black line: $\gamma=0.03$, reconstruction without median filtering.

### 7. Conclusions

In this paper we have performed image reconstruction using two different methods. In conditions of high noise, each of the methods has its own advantages. FBP provides better reconstruction of boundaries, ART shows lower dispersion upon reconstruction within prolonged areas, while morphological analysis is better in reconstruction of inclusions. A new modified version of ART was used in our experiments and shown to give good results. Currently, we are planning to perform rapid image reconstruction by combining the above methods.

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References


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