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# **3D printing a transposed design in biopolymer materials using an articulated robot and pellet-based extrusion**

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## Abstract

The aim of this project was to develop a new method of 3D printing. This method is a mix between Fused Deposition Modelling and freeform printing, using a 6 degree-of-freedom articulated robot and a pellet-based extruder to mix and distribute the biopolymer, to create commercial quality thin-shelled parts with aesthetic aspects unique to the process and with a reduced amount of material wastage. There is the potential for many industries to benefit from this new technology.

Initially this project is focused on applications for artists as thin-shelled designs rarely provide the physical properties required for functional parts. An artist has provided a design to test the printer.

The hopper is designed to work with a range of different polymer pellets. It is based off a previous student's design and mimics the operation of an injection moulder by pushing the pellets through a heating chamber with an auger.

The robot controlling the movement of the platform is an ABB IRB120. This robot has six degrees-of-freedom that allows it to reach several positions that would otherwise be impossible with a Cartesian system. The IRB120 has a very high spatial accuracy and repeatability.

The design's original format is converted to a flattened 2D format and the lines are interpolated to produce a 2D set of points. The overlaps in the shapes are removed to reduce the number of times the nozzle traces over previous paths, which helps to keep the layer thicknesses the same. These shapes are filled in with points so the contours are not empty. The points are then projected onto a mathematical model of the platform to produce a 3D point cloud. Finally, these points are converted into data for the robot to read. The design data points stream to the robot, which interprets them on the fly.

Many iterative changes and improvements were done to the hardware and software as the result of continuous testing of the process and analysis of the print.

The pellet-based extruder is an elementary design with numerous variables that affect the resulting extrusion. After many design iterations and improvements to the extruder, the extruder can produce a continuous strand of material, with relatively constant flow.

The software accurately converts a design from the given format into a path for the contours, and another path to fill the contours. These paths are projected onto a model of the moulded platform. Each point along the path is put through multiple affine transforms to generate a

## Abstract

location and orientation for the end effector of the robot. The robot is moved by streaming each point to the robot one at a time. The extruder was controlled simultaneously to create a printed design.

The printed design is geometrically correct. However, the width of the extrusion path needs to be improved to increase the accuracy of the design to the reference one. The current prints achieve the correct visual properties in the extrusion. However, they require a secondary process to improve the surface finish.

This project has produced a new 3D printing process, mixing Fused Deposition Modelling and freeform printing. This process can be adapted to be used in a wide range of applications. It has also produced a low-cost, effective pellet-based extruder that can be used to test a range of different materials, and their effectiveness in being used for 3D printing.

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## Table of Contents

<b><u>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....</u></b>	<b><u>1</u></b>
<b><u>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....</u></b>	<b><u>4</u></b>
2.1 ADDITIVE MANUFACTURING .....	4
2.2 INDUSTRIAL ROBOTS .....	10
2.3 EXTRUSION.....	17
2.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY .....	22
<b><u>CHAPTER 3: MECHANICAL DESIGN OF THE ARTICULATED PLATFORM AND EXTRUDER.....</u></b>	<b><u>23</u></b>
3.1 PLATFORM .....	23
3.2 ROBOT ARM .....	26
3.3 HOPPER AND EXTRUDER DESIGN .....	34
3.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY .....	48
<b><u>CHAPTER 4: DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF ALGORITHMS IN A SOFTWARE APPLICATION</u></b>	<b><u>49</u></b>
4.1 COORDINATE SYSTEMS .....	50
4.2 CLASSES.....	52
4.3 GRAPHICAL USER INTERFACE .....	54
4.4 OVERALL PRINTING PROCESS.....	57
4.5 DXF FILE IS CREATED FROM A CAD PACKAGE .....	58
4.6 FILE LOADING.....	60
4.7 CONTOUR POINT GENERATION .....	60
4.8 GEOMETRIC OPERATIONS .....	63
4.9 OVERLAPS ARE REMOVED.....	63
4.10 FILL POINT GENERATION.....	65
4.11 2D TO 3D PROJECTION .....	69
4.12 SAVING/LOADING FILES .....	70
4.13 PRINTING .....	70
4.14 COMMUNICATION TO HOPPER AND ROBOT.....	71

## Table of Contents

4.15	CONVERTING THE POINT3D TO ROBTARGET FORMAT .....	72
4.16	LIMITATIONS.....	76
4.17	FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS.....	77
4.18	CHAPTER SUMMARY .....	81
 <b><u>CHAPTER 5: SYSTEM INTEGRATION AND DESIGN IMPLEMENTATION .....</u></b>		<b><u>82</u></b>
5.1	DEVELOPMENT.....	82
5.2	TESTING .....	84
5.3	CHAPTER SUMMARY.....	90
 <b><u>CHAPTER 6: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....</u></b>		<b><u>91</u></b>
6.1	DEVELOP A PELLET-BASED EXTRUDER SYSTEM FOR 3D PRINTING BIOPOLYMERS .....	91
6.2	DEVELOP SOFTWARE AND PARAMETERS TO CONVERT THE DESIGN INTO COMMANDS FOR THE ROBOT.	91
6.3	DEVELOP SOFTWARE TO CONTROL THE ROBOT.....	92
6.4	BUILD A FUNCTIONAL DESIGN USING THE DEVELOPED 3D PRINTER.....	92
6.5	MR TRUBRIDGE’S PERSPECTIVE .....	96
 <b><u>CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION .....</u></b>		<b><u>97</u></b>
 <b><u>CHAPTER 8: REFERENCES .....</u></b>		<b><u>98</u></b>
 <b><u>APPENDIX A – DESIGN DRAWINGS.....</u></b>		<b><u>101</u></b>
 <b><u>APPENDIX B – PCB DRAWINGS .....</u></b>		<b><u>107</u></b>
 <b><u>APPENDIX C – JOURNAL ARTICLE .....</u></b>		<b><u>108</u></b>

## List of Figures

FIGURE 2-1: FILAMENT EXTRUSION PROCESS (CARNEIRO, SILVA, & GOMES, 2015).....	6
FIGURE 2-2: METHODS OF PRINTING CURVED SURFACE (DIEGEL, SINGAMNENI, HUANG, & GIBSON, 2011B).....	7
FIGURE 2-3: PELLET BASED EXTRUDERS. (A) SHOWS A DESIGN TO BE ATTACHED TO A DELTA 3D PRINTER. (B) IS DESIGNED FOR A LARGE SCALE 3D PRINTER .....	7
FIGURE 2-4: FREEFORM PROCESS. (A) THE WIRE FED PROCESS (DONGHONG DING, 2015), AND, (B) THE DROPLET BASED PROCESS (TSENG, LEE, & ZHAO, 2001). .....	9
FIGURE 2-5: APPLICATIONS OF FREEFORM TECHNOLOGY (A) IN ART (MX3D, 2015A), (B) IN MANUFACTURING (MX3D, 2015B) .....	9
FIGURE 2-6: THE SIX LOWER-PAIR JOINTS (CRAIG, 2005). .....	10
FIGURE 2-7: HUDSON ROBOTICS' PLATECRANE EX ROBOT (HUDSON ROBOTICS, N.D.). .....	12
FIGURE 2-8: CARTESIAN ASSEMBLY LINE ROBOT (SCHUNK, 2015) .....	12
FIGURE 2-9: SPHERICAL ROBOT ARM BY KAWASAKI (ROBOTICS BIBLE, N.D.).....	12
FIGURE 2-10: ESPON'S G3 SCARA ROBOT (EPSON, N.D.).....	13
FIGURE 2-11: ABB'S DELTA FLEXPICKER ROBOT (ABB, N.D.-A). .....	13
FIGURE 2-12: ABB'S IRB 1520ID ARTICULATED ROBOT (ABB, N.D.-B). .....	13
FIGURE 2-13: SINGLE SCREW EXTRUDER (DOUROUMIS, 2012).....	17
FIGURE 2-14: SCHEMATICS FOR SCREWS: (A) FLOW RESTRICTION/MIXING TYPE; (B) BARRIER-TO-MELT TYPE; (C) BARRIER BETWEEN SOLID BED AND MELT POOL TYPE; (D) SOLID/MELT MIXING TYPE (CHUNG, 2011) .....	19
FIGURE 2-15: ILLUSTRATION OF DISPERSIVE AND DISTRIBUTION MIXERS .....	19
FIGURE 2-16: DIAGRAM SHOWING HOW A GEAR PUMP MOVES POLYMER THROUGH IT (SKIBBA & THOMA, 2001) .....	21
FIGURE 3-1: PROCESS TO CREATE THE MOULD. (A) LAMINATING MDF SHEETS, (B) CNC MILLING OF MOULD, (C) SANDING AND FILLING REQUIRED AREAS, AND (D) SEALED AND WAXED MOULD .....	24
FIGURE 3-2: (A) FIBREGLASS PLATFORM, (B) RIBS INSIDE PLATFORM, (C) PLATFORM BASE WITH LOCKING MECHANISM, AND (D) BRACKET TO ATTACH PLATFORM TO ROBOT .....	25
FIGURE 3-3: ROBOT WITH PLATFORM ATTACHED.....	26
FIGURE 3-4: ROBOT CONTROLLER .....	26
FIGURE 3-5: ABB'S FLEXPENDANT .....	27
FIGURE 3-6: WORKSPACE OF IRB 120.....	27
FIGURE 3-7: LINK LENGTHS OF IRB 120 .....	27
FIGURE 3-8: ABB'S ROBOTSTUDIO .....	28
FIGURE 3-9: DIFFERENT ROBOT CONFIGURATIONS FOR THE SAME POINT .....	30
FIGURE 3-10: PELLETS USED FOR PRINTING .....	34
FIGURE 3-11: PREVIOUS STUDENT'S EXTRUDER.....	36
FIGURE 3-12: CAD MODEL OF THE EXTRUDER .....	37
FIGURE 3-13: CROSS SECTION OF HOPPER SECTION WITH COUPLING RING .....	37
FIGURE 3-14: ARDUINO UNO (ARDUINO INC, N.D.) .....	38



## List of Figures

FIGURE 3-15: MOTOR SHIELD (ROBOTSHOP, N.D.).....	38
FIGURE 3-16: EXTRUDER MOTOR CONTROLLER .....	38
FIGURE 3-17: PROTOTYPE HEAT SINK .....	39
FIGURE 3-18: CLOSE UP OF HOT END.....	40
FIGURE 3-19: SCREW AFTER BEING USED .....	40
FIGURE 3-20: CROSS SECTION OF CAD MODEL OF EXTRUDER, AND EXTRUDER ATTACHED TO TEST PLATFORM .....	41
FIGURE 3-21: FAN BRACKET .....	42
FIGURE 3-22: WORM GEAR DRIVEN 4RPM MOTOR.....	42
FIGURE 3-23: 2 MM LASER CUT STEEL PLATES .....	42
FIGURE 3-24: HEATING COMPONENTS. (A) PID HEATING CONTROLLER, AND (B) HEATING BAND .....	43
FIGURE 4-1: CARTESIAN COORDINATE SYSTEM .....	50
FIGURE 4-2: (A) PLATFORM COORDINATE SYSTEM, AND (B) ROBOT COORDINATE SYSTEM.....	51
FIGURE 4-3: USER INTERFACE TO CONTROL PRINTER.....	54
FIGURE 4-4: PROCESS TO CONVERT DXF.....	55
FIGURE 4-5: FLOW DIAGRAM OF THE PRINTING PROCESS.....	57
FIGURE 4-6: (A) ISOMETRIC VIEW OF THE CAD DESIGN, AND (B) TOP VIEW OF THE CAD DESIGN.....	58
FIGURE 4-7: INTERPOLATED DESIGN .....	62
FIGURE 4-8: CLOSE-UP OF INTERPOLATED DESIGN.....	62
FIGURE 4-9: (A) ENTITIES BEFORE OVERLAP IS REMOVED, (B) ENTITIES AFTER OVERLAP IS REMOVED .....	63
FIGURE 4-10: DESIGN AFTER OVERLAPS ARE REMOVED .....	65
FIGURE 4-11: (A) POINTS OF INTERSECTION ALONG A SCANLINE, (B) FILL LINE WITHIN POLYGON BETWEEN START AND STOP POINTS, (C) POINTS OF INTERSECTION ALONG SCANLINE AND OPEN CONTOUR, AND (D) FILL LINE WITH SCANLINE INTERSECTING POLYGON ON A TANGENT. ....	67
FIGURE 4-12: 2D DESIGN WITH FILL POINTS.....	68
FIGURE 4-13: SIDE VIEWS OF THE (A) SINGLE POINT PROJECTION METHOD, AND THE (B) VERTICAL PROJECTION METHOD ....	69
FIGURE 4-14: VIEW OF POINT NORMAL TO THE XY PLANE .....	69
FIGURE 4-15: PLANES NORMAL TO SURFACE ROTATED AROUND A CENTRAL AXIS .....	73
FIGURE 4-16: STARTING POINT OF DIAGRAM USED FOR MATHEMATICS CALCULATION .....	73
FIGURE 4-17: ENDEFFECTOR VECTOR IN RELATION TO ORIGIN .....	74
FIGURE 4-18: BLACK DIAGRAM IS TRANSPOSED TO (0,0,150).....	74
FIGURE 4-19: BLACK DIAGRAM HAS BEEN ROTATED AROUND (0,0,150) .....	75
FIGURE 4-20: CLUSTERING OF POINTS AROUND CENTRE .....	79
FIGURE 5-1: BONDING TEST FOR OVERLAPPING MATERIAL .....	82
FIGURE 5-2: FLOW INCONSISTENCY OF EXTRUSION.....	82
FIGURE 5-3: TEST DESIGNS. (A) RECTANGULAR DESIGN, (B) CIRCULAR DESIGN, (C) HEXAGONAL DESIGN.....	83
FIGURE 5-4: METHODS OF SIMULATION. (A) THROUGH ROBOTSTUDIO, AND (B) WITH A PENCIL .....	84
FIGURE 5-5: GUIDES RESTING ON PLATFORM TO KEEP THE NOZZLE HEIGHT CONSTANT.....	85
FIGURE 5-6: (A) TAGS AND (B) ARTEFACTS LEFT BY THE PRINTING PROCESS .....	87

## List of Figures

FIGURE 5-7: HORIZONTAL FILL PATH TRIAL .....	88
FIGURE 5-8: EXTRUSION QUALITY OF 4 RPM MOTOR .....	90
FIGURE 6-1: 3D PRINTED DESIGN .....	92
FIGURE 6-2: CLOSE-UP OF SURFACE FINISH .....	93
FIGURE 6-3: COMPARISON OF REFERENCE DESIGN AND PRINT .....	94
FIGURE 6-4: COMPARISON OF PRINT AND REFERENCE DESIGN .....	95
FIGURE 6-5: PRINTING ALONG A CONTOUR. (A) OVER THE PATH. (B) WITHIN THE PATH.....	95
FIGURE 6-6: RESULT FROM TESTING THE NEW MOTOR.....	95
FIGURE 6-7: UNDERSIDE OF 3D PRINTED DESIGN .....	96

## List of Tables

### List of Tables

TABLE 2-1: TABLE OF PROCESSES AND TECHNOLOGIES USED IN ADDITIVE MANUFACTURING.....	4
TABLE 2-2: TYPE AND DESCRIPTION OF ROBOT JOINT TYPES (SAHA, 2014). .....	11
TABLE 2-3: PROS AND CONS OF TWIN SCREW EXTRUDERS (CHUNG, 2011). .....	17
TABLE 3-1: LINK LENGTHS FOR THE IRB 120.....	27
TABLE 3-2: JOINT RANGES AND MAX SPEED FOR IRB 120 .....	28
TABLE 3-3: TABLE OF RAPID MOVEMENT COMMANDS.....	31
TABLE 3-4: PROS AND CONS OF MOVING HOPPER .....	35
TABLE 3-5: PROS AND CONS OF STATIONARY HOPPER .....	35
TABLE 3-6: COMMANDS TO CONTROL THE EXTRUDER .....	44
TABLE 4-1: DIFFERENT REFERENCE FRAMES PROVIDED FOR PROGRAMMING ABB ROBOTS .....	51

### List of Code Snippets

CODE SNIPPET 3-1: MAIN FUNCTION OF ROBOT CONTROLLER .....	32
CODE SNIPPET 3-2: INTERRUPT SERVICE ROUTINE FOR SETTING THE ROBOT'S MOVEMENT SPEED .....	33
CODE SNIPPET 3-3: INTERRUPT SERVICE ROUTINE TO MOVE THE ROBOT .....	33
CODE SNIPPET 3-4: ALGORITHM TO CALCULATE SPEED FROM THE ENCODER.....	45
CODE SNIPPET 4-1: METHOD OF SAVING TO DXF .....	55
CODE SNIPPET 4-2: OVERLAP REMOVING ALGORITHM .....	64
CODE SNIPPET 4-3: SCANLINE ALGORITHM TO CREATE THE FILL PATH.....	66
CODE SNIPPET 4-4: GETS THE POINTS OF INTERSECTION FROM THE SCANLINE AND THE POLYGON .....	68
CODE SNIPPET 4-5: PROJECTION FUNCTION .....	70
CODE SNIPPET 4-6: METHOD TO CREATE THE COMMAND FOR THE ROBOT .....	72

### List of Equations

EQUATION 3-1: EQUATION OF THE PLATFORM .....	24
EQUATION 4-1: EQUATION OF A LINE .....	61
EQUATION 4-2: ROTATION MATRIX FOR 2D POINTS.....	66
EQUATION 4-3: X VALUE OF INTERSECTION.....	67
EQUATION 4-4: Y VALUE OF INTERSECTION.....	67
EQUATION 4-5: MATRIX FOR INITIAL TRANSLATION .....	73
EQUATION 4-6: X VALUE FOR ROTATION ABOUT A POINT.....	74
EQUATION 4-7: Y VALUE FOR ROTATION ABOUT A POINT.....	74

## List of Terms

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Expansion</b>
CAD	Computer Aided Design
CNC	Computer Numerical Control
DOF	Degrees of Freedom
FDM	Fused Deposition Modelling
IPC	Inter-process communication
ISR	Interrupt Service Routine
MDF	Medium Density Fibreboard
PCB	Printed Circuit Board
PID	Proportional, Integral, Derivative control
PLA	Polylactic acid
PWM	Pulse-width modification
STL	Stereolithography

