

Mammographic Image Analysis

Computational Imaging and Vision

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Mammographic Image Analysis

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	ix
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Breast cancer screening	3
1.3 Basic breast anatomy, physiology and pathology	7
1.4 The image processing challenge	16
1.5 Snapshot description of the contents	22
1.6 Concluding introductory remarks	27
PART I: GENERATING h_{int}	
2 A Model of Mammogram Image Formation	31
2.1 Introduction	31
2.2 Mammographic imaging process model	31
2.3 Summary and Results: Computing h_{int}	50
3 A Model of Scattered Radiation	57
3.1 Introduction	57
3.2 Anti-scatter grid	58
3.3 Defining the “scatter volume” when the grid is not used . .	62
3.4 Defining the scatter volume when a grid is used	65
3.5 Estimate “scatter function”	68
3.6 Implementation	70
3.7 Summary and Results: Computing scatter	74
4 A Model of Extra-Focal Radiation	77
4.1 Introduction	77
4.2 The work of Lam and Chan	79
4.3 A model of extra-focal radiation	81
4.4 A model of the breast edge	81

4.5	Estimating the extra-focal constant	81
4.6	Summary and Results: Computing extra-focal	86
5	Estimating the Thickness of a Compressed Breast	91
5.1	Introduction	91
5.2	What is the breast edge?	92
5.3	Using the h_{int} representation to locate the breast edge . . .	94
5.4	An appropriate roughness measure	96
5.5	An initial estimate of breast thickness	99
5.6	Summary and Results: Estimating H	99
6	Model Verification and Sensitivity	103
6.1	Introduction	103
6.2	Practical verification of modelling	103
6.3	Theoretical sensitivity analysis	107
6.4	Summary: Sensitivity	119
PART II: EXPLOITING THE h_{int} Model		
7	Image Enhancement	123
7.1	Introduction	123
7.2	Simulating light-box appearance	125
7.3	Simulating different exposures	129
7.4	Correcting for unsharpness	134
7.5	Simulating a scatter-free examination	135
7.6	Simulating a different x-ray source	136
7.7	Summary: Image enhancement	140
8	Disease Simulation	143
8.1	Introduction	143
8.2	Cysts	144
8.3	Malignant masses	144
8.4	Curvilinear structures	148
8.5	Calcifications	148
8.6	Summary: Disease simulation	150
9	Breast Compression	151
9.1	Introduction	151
9.2	Literature survey	152
9.3	Differential compression mammography	153
9.4	Breast compression and image analysis	163
9.5	Matching between views	169
9.6	Summary: Breast compression	174

10 Removing the Anti-scatter Grid	175
10.1 Introduction	175
10.2 Theoretical analysis	175
10.3 “Soft” removal of scattered radiation	183
10.4 Summary: Removing the anti-scatter grid	184
11 Calcifications	191
11.1 Introduction	191
11.2 Microcalcifications	193
11.3 Radiological assessment of microcalcifications	195
11.4 Computer-aided detection and classification of microcalcifications	198
11.5 Image filtering	206
11.6 Karssemeijer’s adaptive noise estimation process	208
11.7 Blur in mammography	212
11.8 Detecting film-screen “shot” noise	213
11.9 Improving detection schemes	216
11.10 Estimating thickness of calcifications	217
11.11 Image analysis	220
11.12 A novel detection scheme	220
11.13 Summary: Calcifications	222
12 Curvilinear Structures	225
12.1 Introduction	225
12.2 The CLS detector algorithm	229
12.3 Modelling the expected CLS profile	234
12.4 From continuous to discrete	240
12.5 CLS modelling conclusions	242
12.6 Results	242
12.7 Removing the CLS	246
12.8 Summary: Curvilinear structures	250
13 Masses	251
13.1 Introduction	251
13.2 Preliminary considerations	253
13.3 A representation of salient bright regions	255
13.4 The transformation between a temporal pair	259
13.5 Constraint-based region matching	265
13.6 Matching bilateral pairs	271
13.7 Locating abnormal regions	276
13.8 Summary: Masses	284

PART III: FURTHER BREAST IMAGE ANALYSIS

14 Breast MRI	287
14.1 Introduction	287
14.2 Image processing systems for breast MR	295
14.3 Breast Segmentation	299
14.4 Pharmacokinetic model for breast MR image analysis	301
14.5 Image registration	312
14.6 Motion from enhancement curve model errors	324
14.7 Clinical trial	329
14.8 Summary: Breast MRI	330
15 Other Modalities and Future Prospects	333
15.1 Introduction	333
15.2 Digital mammography	334
15.3 Image guided, minimally invasive breast surgery	338
15.4 Nuclear medicine	341
15.5 Ultrasound	346
15.6 Decision aids	352
15.7 Summary	355
A Receiver operating characteristic (ROC) curves	357
Bibliography	361
Index	375

PREFACE

Breast cancer is a major health problem in the Western world, where it is the most common cancer among women. Approximately 1 in 12 women will develop breast cancer during the course of their lives. Over the past twenty years there have been a series of major advances in the management of women with breast cancer, ranging from novel chemotherapy and radiotherapy treatments to conservative surgery. The next twenty years are likely to see computerized image analysis playing an increasingly important role in patient management.

As applications of image analysis go, medical applications are tough in general, and breast cancer image analysis is one of the toughest. There are many reasons for this: highly variable and irregular shapes of the objects of interest, changing imaging conditions, and the densely textured nature of the images. Add to this the increasing need for quantitative information, precision, and reliability (very few false positives), and the image processing challenge becomes quite daunting, in fact it pushes image analysis techniques right to their limits.

There are many stakeholders in the search for better ways to detect tumours and manage patient care. Most important are the teams of clinicians, typically comprising a radiologist, a surgeon, and a pathologist. They, in turn, rely on medical technicians and radiographers, medical physicists, and, increasingly, medical image analysts. Future developments mostly come from researchers and students (who first have to learn the basics of the subject effectively). Finally, women act as subjects and volunteers, and more and more want to be informed about the nature of their disease and the decision making process that concerns their well-being. Though we are image analysts, we have tried to write this monograph so that the ideas can be accessed by the widest possible range of stakeholders. To this end, we have tried to keep mathematical detail in boxes independent of the text and put in plenty of examples. So, if the going gets tough occasionally, please don't give up!

Many of the ideas described in the monograph originally appeared in journal articles written over a period of nine years, though we have discovered a lot of new material during the course of writing this monograph. We embarked on the roller-coaster ride that is writing a monograph because we

wanted to promote two themes that underpin all of our work and which can only be described episodically in any single article. First, we believe that the high levels of reliability demanded of mammographic image analysis inevitably imply the development of techniques that are specific to mammography, irrespective of whether it is based on x-ray, magnetic resonance imagery (MRI), ultrasound, nuclear medicine, or any other imaging modality. We interpret this as meaning that it is necessary to base our algorithms on a set of detailed, explicit models: of image formation, of contrast agent take-up, of anatomy, and of pathology. Part I of the monograph develops such a model-based approach to x-ray mammography, Part II shows how it can be exploited, while Part III develops a model and exploits it for contrast-enhanced MRI mammography.

Second, the key contribution of our approach to x-ray mammographic image analysis is the development of a representation of the non-fatty compressed breast tissue that we show can be derived from a single mammogram. The importance of the representation, which we call h_{int} , is that it removes all those changes in the image that are due only to the particular imaging conditions (for example, the film speed or exposure time), leaving just the non-fatty “interesting” tissue. Normalising images in this way enables us to enhance them, match them, and classify regions in them more reliably, because unnecessary, distracting variations have been eliminated. We show how the h_{int} representation can be developed in Part I, then put it to work on a range of clinically-important tasks in Part II.

This monograph has had a long gestation period, partly because we have made numerous discoveries while writing it, and partly because the subject is in a period of rapid development. One of the more pleasant tasks for the authors is to thank publicly the many people who have helped us realise this monograph and the ideas that it promotes. First, the UK Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council funded RPH as a doctoral student and subsequently as a post-doctoral researcher, and awarded JMB a Senior Research Fellowship for five years and funded his major project on mammography. Max Viergever encouraged us to write the monograph and remained patient long after our estimated finish date. RPH thanks Philips Laboratories for the six month sabbatical he spent there, and in particular Charles Carman. JMB thanks Nicholas Ayache, the members of Project Epidaure and INRIA for hosting two stays on the Côte d’Azur that changed his life in many ways. We thank the staff of the Breast Care Unit at the Churchill Hospital, Oxford for their continuing support over many years, particularly Basil Shepstone, Ruth English, Yvonne Swainston, Wendy Hills, Hazel Bailey, Sue McDougal, June Pickvance, Coral James, Jane Cobb, Janet Green, Liz Robinson, Lorriane Tucker, Christine Cherry, Jan Lougher, Betty Harvey, Lettice Bowen, Geraldine Ashworth,

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Finally, JMB dedicates this monograph to the memory of his wonderful mother-in-law, Dr. Irene Friedlander, whose untimely death from breast cancer was the spur for his research in mammography.