

Evaluation and Optimization of a Multi-Point Tactile Renderer for Virtual Textures

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Matthew Philpott

October 21, 2013

Abstract

The EU funded HAPTEX project aimed to create a virtual reality system that allowed a user to explore and manipulate a suspended virtual textile with the thumb and index finger. This was achieved through a combination of a tactile renderer on the fingertips for surface textures and a force feedback system for deformation of the virtual material.

This project focuses on the tactile rendering component of this system, which uses a tactile display developed at the University of Exeter. The 24 pin display is driven by piezoelectric bimorphs. Each of the pins can be driven independently, allowing for a variety of different sensations to be transmitted to the fingertip.

The display is driven by rendering software that uses a spatial spectrum of the intended surface, in combination with the frequency response of touch receptors in the skin, position on the surface, and exploration velocity to produce a signal that is intended to recreate the sensation of exploring the surface texture. The output signal on each of the 24 contactors is a combination of high (320 Hz) and low (40 Hz) frequency sine waves.

In this project, the tactile renderer is initially evaluated based on its ability to recreate the sensations of exploring particular textured surfaces. The users were asked to rank virtual textures in order of similarity to a real target texture. The results of the initial test were disappointingly low, with a $38.1 \pm 3.1\%$ correct identification rate. However, feedback from this initial test was used to make improvements to the rendering strategy. These improvements did not give a significant improvement in identification ($41.3 \pm 1.6\%$).

Finally, the tests were repeated with a target virtual texture instead of the real one used in previous tests. This test yielded a higher identification rate ($64.1 \pm 5.5\%$). This increase in identification suggests that the virtual textures are distinguishable but that they not always accurate recreations of the real textures they are mimicking.

Acknowledgements

When I started this project in 2009, having completed my MPhys in Astrophysics, I had minimal knowledge of haptics as an area of study. For me, the subject had mostly been an interesting curiosity but not something I had ever seriously looked into. However, when my PhD supervisor, Doctor Ian Summers, offered me the opportunity to work in this field, I found it hard to resist. The chance to dive into something almost completely new, connected to such a wide variety of subject areas such as Biology and Psychology, yet still not be completely out of my depth, thanks to my previous programming and scientific knowledge, was something I could not pass up.

Over the course of this project, Ian has been a great help to me. His ability to find solutions and new approaches to problems never ceases to impress me. I am grateful to him for the initial offer of this project and the support he is given me throughout.

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“When you are studying any matter, or considering any philosophy, ask yourself only: What are the facts, and what is the truth that the facts bear out. Never let yourself be diverted, either by what you wish to believe, or what you think could have beneficent social effects if it were believed; but look only and solely at what are the facts.”

(Bertrand Russell, BBC Interview on “Face to Face”, 1959)

Contents

1	Introduction	18
2	The Sense of Touch	21
2.1	Psychophysics	21
2.1.1	Just-Noticeable Difference and Weber's Law	22
2.1.2	Psychometric Measures	22
2.1.3	Multi-Dimensional Scaling	23
2.1.4	Perception of Objects	23
2.2	Biology of Touch	25
2.2.1	Human Nervous System	26
2.2.2	Mechanoreceptive Afferents	29
2.2.3	Perception of Fine Textures	31
2.2.4	Frequency Response	31
2.3	Haptic Perceptual Spaces	32
2.4	Summary	38
3	Tactile Rendering Device	40
3.1	Existing Devices	40
3.1.1	Electrostatic Display	41
3.1.2	Piezoelectric Devices	42
3.1.3	Rheological Fluid Display	43
3.1.4	Electroactive Polymer Displays	43
3.1.5	Ultrasound Display	44
3.1.6	Surface Acoustic Waves	44
3.1.7	Shape Memory Alloy Displays	45

3.1.8	Electrocutaneous Display	45
3.1.9	Pneumatic Display	47
3.1.10	Electrovibration Display	47
3.1.11	Shear Force Display	48
3.2	The Tactile Rendering Setup	49
3.2.1	Principles of Operation	49
3.2.2	Tactile Display	53
3.2.3	Driving Electronics	56
3.2.4	Rendering Software	61
3.2.5	Texture File Creation	70
3.3	The HAPTEx Project	78
3.3.1	Overview of System Development	80
3.3.2	Physical Simulation	82
3.3.3	Force Feedback	83
3.3.4	Tactile Renderer	83
3.3.5	Evaluation	85
3.4	Improvements to Renderer	89
3.4.1	Direction of Motion	89
3.4.2	Textile Frequency Range	90
3.4.3	Modifications to Amplitude Calculation	90
3.4.4	Filter Modifications	91
3.4.5	Amplitude Scaling Factors	92
3.4.6	Buffering Calculated Amplitudes	94
3.4.7	Contact Surface Area	95
3.4.8	Dynamic Range and Spectral Balance	95
3.4.9	Summary of Modifications	97
3.5	Summary	98
4	Characterisation of Renderer	99
4.1	Characterisation Strategy	100
4.2	Characterisation of Experimental Renderer	101
4.3	Comparison with HAPTEx Renderer	110

4.4	Characterisation of Scaled Texture Files	111
4.5	Summary	115
5	Public Demonstration	116
5.1	Demonstration Environment	117
5.2	Demonstration Setup	118
5.3	Feedback	121
5.4	Summary	127
6	Virtual Texture Evaluation	128
6.1	Experimental Design	129
6.2	Experiment 1	131
6.3	Experiment 2	141
6.4	Experiment 3	148
6.5	Perceptual Dimensions	153
6.6	Experienced Users	157
6.7	Summary	157
7	Conclusions	161
7.1	Summary of Thesis	161
7.2	Overview of Project Conclusions	163
7.3	Discussion and Future Work	164
7.4	Potential Applications	166
	Appendices	168
	References	168
A	Texture Database	177
B	Spectra of Texture Files	189
C	Chance Result Derivation	190
D	Ethics Application	193
E	Additional Discriminability Plots	196

List of Tables

2.1	Comparison of different mechanoreceptor types based on their receptive field sizes and adaptation rates	30
2.2	The four mechanoreceptor populations, their sensitivity ranges, and their associated functions	33
2.3	List of the car seat material samples and their main characteristics	34
2.4	Co-occurrence matrix showing the number of participants who grouped specific pairs of stimuli together	35
2.5	Correlation coefficients between each adjective scale and each dimension of the MDS texture space	37
2.6	A comparison of the sensory perceptual spaces suggested in the literature	38
3.1	The characteristic values that are output by the KES-F	73
5.1	Results of the survey conducted to gather feedback about the tactile renderer installation	125
5.2	Results of the survey conducted to gather feedback about the presented facsimiles	126
6.1	The recorded details of the eight subjects who participated in experiment 1	132
6.2	The sample set used in experiment 1	132
6.3	Cumulative scores for matching real and virtual textiles in experiment 1	135
6.4	The number of subjects that chose the virtual textiles as their first choice match to the target textile	139
6.5	The sample set used in experiment 2	141
6.6	The recorded details of the eight subjects who participated in experiment 2	141
6.7	Cumulative scores from experiment 2 for matching real and virtual textiles	143
6.8	Dissimilarity matrix generated from the results of the second experiment, measuring dissimilarity between each real textile and the 16 virtual textile	145

6.9	The recorded details of the eight subjects who participated in experiment 3	149
6.10	Cumulative scores from experiment 3 for matching virtual textiles	149
6.11	Dissimilarity matrix generated from the results of the third experiment . . .	151
6.12	The one- and two-dimensional solutions to the Multi-Dimensional Scaling .	154
6.13	Comparison of the correct identifications between the subjects in the experiments and more experienced users	157
A.1	Abbreviations of the fibre contents of the textiles	177
A.2	Database of the available textures	178
B.1	The spectral lines of the texture files	189
C.1	The number of microstates available for each number of subjects that selected the most popular choice, and the total number of microstates	192

List of Figures

2.1	Movement patterns associated with each of the exploratory procedures . . .	24
2.2	The maximum-likelihood estimate integration of two hypothetical situations	25
2.3	Signal propagation in neurons	27
2.4	A schematic of a triggered action potential	28
2.5	The mechanoreceptors in the glabrous skin	29
2.6	Micrograph of a Pacinian corpuscle	30
2.7	Locations of Pacinian corpuscles within the right index distal phalange . . .	31
2.8	Threshold measurements for different populations of mechanoreceptors in the thenar eminence of the hand	32
2.9	Four dimensional MDS space presented as two two-dimensional planes . . .	36
3.1	An example of an electrostatic actuator, including structure and function .	41
3.2	Schematic diagrams of the piezoelectric display mechanism showing a cross- section side view and a top view	42
3.3	An example of an electrorheological actuator	43
3.4	A schematic of an electroactive polymer actuator	44
3.5	An example of an ultrasound display, consisting of an annular array of 91 ultrasound transducers packed in an hexagonal arrangement	44
3.6	A schematic of a surface acoustic wave tactile display	45
3.7	A side view of an example shape memory alloy actuator	46
3.8	A schematic of an electrocutaneous contactor	46
3.9	Schematic of the pneumatic circuit associated with an pneumatic actuator .	47
3.10	Schematic illustration of the electrode-skin interface	48
3.11	The ShiverPad generating a net rightward force	49
3.12	As the exploratory points move across the surface, they are displaced in a direction normal to the surface	49

3.13	A representation of the tactile workspace and how the spatial spectrum is mapped onto temporal frequency according to velocity of exploration	50
3.14	The spectrum of temporal frequencies is reduced to components at 40 Hz and 320 Hz, and the output is specified by their amplitudes, A_{40} and A_{320} . . .	52
3.15	Schematic drawing of the Piezoelectric effect	54
3.16	Schematic of a parallel configuration Piezoelectric bimorph	54
3.17	Measured frequency response of a piezoelectric drive element with and without the mechanical load presented by the skin	55
3.18	The tactile display used in this project and the arrangement of the static and dynamic contactors	56
3.19	The driving electronics for the tactile display	57
3.20	A schematic of the operation of the drive electronics	58
3.21	The board that hosts the USB controller, data bus and variable voltage supply	58
3.22	The circuit galvanically isolating the USB controller from the rest of the system	59
3.23	Amplification stages of the variable voltage supply	60
3.24	The board hosting the DAC, address logic, and the amplifiers	60
3.25	Passive, first order low-pass RC filter	61
3.26	The two amplitude stages of each channel	62
3.27	An example of an output signal, as generated by the driving electronics . .	62
3.28	The tactile rendering framework, showing the four threads within the software	63
3.29	The Kalman filter uses a predictor-corrector feedback loop	64
3.30	An example of the graphical display presented to the user	66
3.31	The schematic operation of the software's tactile rendering thread	66
3.32	Average detection thresholds as a function of frequency of the tactile receptors in the skin for Pacinian and non-Pacinian channels used in this project	68
3.33	The filter functions H_{40} and H_{320}	69
3.34	The HAPTEx selection process	71
3.35	The KES-F surface tester	74
3.36	Schematic of the KES-F roughness tester contactor	75
3.37	An example of a Hamming window	76
3.38	Derivation of a set of spatial spectra from a Kawabata line profile	76

3.39	The surface profiles recorded by the KES-F roughness tester while travelling across the right-side surface of textile 03, as well as the first 20 lines of the mean of the spectra	77
3.40	The surface profiles recorded by the KES-F roughness tester while travelling across the right-side surface of textile 20, as well as the first 20 lines of the mean of the spectra	79
3.41	The target virtual scenario for the HAPTEX project	80
3.42	Schematic of the concept of the proposed HAPTEX device	81
3.43	The different threads within the HAPTEX system	81
3.44	The development levels of the HAPTEX system	82
3.45	The GRAB system from PERCRO	83
3.46	A CAD model of the layout of the HandExos device	84
3.47	The tactile array used in the HAPTEX system	85
3.48	Finger positions and manipulations used to test the properties	86
3.49	Comparisons between mean ratings from subject 1 and subject 2 for the properties of tensile stiffness, surface roughness, surface friction, and bending stiffness	87
3.50	The relation between the average subjective ratings of the virtual textiles for both subjects and the corresponding physical values for tensile stiffness, surface roughness, surface friction, and bending stiffness	87
3.51	The relation between the average subjective ratings of the real textiles for both subjects and the corresponding physical values for tensile stiffness, surface roughness, surface friction, and bending stiffness	88
3.52	The relation between the average subjective ratings of the virtual textiles for both subjects and the corresponding average subjective ratings of the real textiles for both subjects for tensile stiffness, surface roughness, surface friction, and bending stiffness	88
3.53	The original band-pass filters that were used to highlight the fundamental frequency components for tactile rendering, compared to the new filter functions	91
3.54	The sum in both channels of the maximum amplitudes that were calculated for a 10 cm s^{-1} exploration of the various surface textures	93
3.55	Without the buffer for the amplitudes, the output wave is updated when the new amplitudes are received by the firmware from the rendering software	94
3.56	The Exeter tactile display before and after the addition of caps to the contactors	95

3.57	Comparison between the sum of mean characteristic amplitudes of sample set 1, and the subjective best match to the real textiles, as established by the author, and the fitted scaling power law	96
4.1	The characterisation plots for the tactile renderer, based on the texture data used in the first experiment, showing the mean and CoV values of A_{40} and A_{320} during exploration of texture surfaces at 10 cm s^{-1}	102
4.2	Comparison between the root-sum-square of warp and weft geometrical roughness from the KES-F and the sum of the mean 40 Hz and 320 Hz amplitudes calculated for the characterisation plots	103
4.3	The characterisation plots for the tactile renderer, based on the texture data used in the first experiment, showing the mean and CoV values of A_{40} and A_{320} during exploration of texture surfaces at 3 cm s^{-1}	104
4.4	The characterisation plots for the tactile renderer, based on the texture data used in the first experiment, showing the mean and CoV values of A_{40} and A_{320} during exploration of texture surfaces at 30 cm s^{-1}	105
4.5	The mean amplitude values for the two channels as a function of exploration speed for 1 cm s^{-1} to 30 cm s^{-1}	106
4.6	The CoV of the amplitude values for the two channels as a function of exploration speed for 1 cm s^{-1} to 30 cm s^{-1}	107
4.7	A comparison of the anisotropy of the mean intensity experienced by a user travelling in each of the four directions of motion across a surface, between textures 37_R, 39_R, 03_R, and 54_R	109
4.8	Characterisation plots based on the tactile renderer and texture data that existed at the beginning of the project, showing the mean and CoV values of A_{40} and A_{320} during exploration of texture surfaces at 10 cm s^{-1}	112
4.9	A comparison of the mean intensity experienced by a user travelling in each of the four directions of motion, for texture 54_R, between the experiments renderer and the original HAPTEX renderer	113
4.10	A comparison of the sum of the mean amplitudes between the scaled and unscaled texture files, as well as the scaling that was used	113
4.11	The characterisation plots for the tactile renderer, based on the texture data used in the second and third experiments, showing the mean and CoV values of A_{40} and A_{320} during exploration of texture surfaces at 10 cm s^{-1}	114
5.1	The setup being used as part of “The Big Bang South West Fair”	116
5.2	Two other strategies presented at “Touching the Untouchable”, allowing for physical and virtual explorations of a “Lewis Chessmen” piece	118
5.3	A replica of the queen “Lewis Chessmen” piece	119

5.4	Diagram of the ghost touch setup	119
5.5	Use of the ghost touch setup to explore the surface of the “Lewis Chessmen” piece	120
5.6	Diagram of the haptic pen setup	120
5.7	Use of the haptic pen setup to explore the surface of the “Lewis Chessmen” piece	121
5.8	The textile that was the subject of the recreation for “Touching the Un- touchable” project: the original, archaeological, textile along with a modern recreation	122
5.9	Schematic of the installation used at the museum	122
5.10	The installed tactile renderer, featuring the Exeter tactile display and a visual overlay to navigating the virtual environment	123
5.11	Two facsimiles of the Falkirk tartan	124
5.12	A group of the facsimiles presented at the “Touching the Untouchable” event	125
6.1	The tactile rendering setup used for the experiments	130
6.2	How the tactile display is held during use	131
6.3	Characterisation plots for the tactile renderer for the sample set of 16 tex- tures used in the first experiment, showing the mean and CoV values of A_{40} and A_{320} during exploration of texture surfaces at 10 cm s^{-1}	133
6.4	An example of one of the virtual workspaces presented during experiment 1, showing four virtual textiles that are to be ranked against the target textile	134
6.5	An example of the presentation of a real textile as a target	134
6.6	A breakdown of the results of experiment 1, showing the percentage of times each of the 8 subjects assigned the correct textile with a particular rank of similarity to the target	135
6.7	A breakdown of the results of experiment 1, showing the percentage of times each of the 16 correct virtual textiles was assigned a particular rank of similarity to the target	136
6.8	Mean scores from 5 subjects for matching real and virtual textiles, as a function of the number of textiles in the stimulus set	137
6.9	From experiment 1, breakdown of the percentages of how the “most pop- ular” choice scored across all the test items, compared to what would be expected from chance	138
6.10	A comparison of the distribution of mode choices between cases where the mode is the correct choice and cases where it is not the correct choice	139

6.11	The error patterns obtained from the first choices of the subjects made during experiment 1	140
6.12	Characterisation plots for the tactile renderer for the sample set of 16 textures used in the second experiment, showing the mean and CoV values of A_{40} and A_{320} during exploration of texture surfaces at 10 cm s^{-1}	142
6.13	A breakdown of the results of experiment 2, showing the percentage of times each of the 8 subjects assigned the correct textile with a particular rank of similarity to the target	143
6.14	A breakdown of the results of experiment 2, showing the percentage of times each of the 16 correct virtual textiles was assigned a particular rank of similarity to the target	144
6.15	From experiment 2, breakdown of the percentages of how the “most popular” choice scored across all the test items, compared to what would be expected from chance	146
6.16	Graph showing the relationship between the correlation coefficient between virtual textures and the Euclidean distance in the mean characterisation space	147
6.17	Graph showing the relationship between the correlation coefficient between virtual textures and the Euclidean distance in the CoV characterisation space	147
6.18	An example of one of the virtual workspaces presented during experiment 3, showing four virtual textiles that are to be ranked against the target textile	148
6.19	Comparison of the results from the 3 experiments	149
6.20	Graph showing the relationship between the correlation coefficient between virtual textures from experiment 3 and the Euclidean distance in the mean characterisation space	150
6.21	Graph showing the relationship between the correlation coefficient between virtual textures from experiment 3 and the Euclidean distance in the CoV characterisation space	152
6.22	A plot comparing the dissimilarity scores for identifying target textiles, experiment 2 against experiment 3, along with a line of equality	152
6.23	Scree plots comparing the stresses of various multi-dimensional solutions	153
6.24	The two-dimensional MDS solution	154
6.25	Schematic of the mean characterisation space being compared to the calculated MDS space	155
6.26	Comparison of the mean characterisation space and the two-dimensional MDS solution, rotated through 193.1°	158
D.1	The first information sheet given to potential subjects	194

D.2	The second information sheet given to potential subjects	195
D.3	The consent form to be signed by individuals who agree to participate in the study	195
E.1	Graph showing the relationship between the correlation coefficient between virtual textures and the Euclidean distance between mean 40 Hz amplitudes	196
E.2	Graph showing the relationship between the correlation coefficient between virtual textures and the Euclidean distance between mean 320 Hz amplitudes	197
E.3	Graph showing the relationship between the correlation coefficient between virtual textures and the Euclidean distance between CoV 40 Hz amplitudes	197
E.4	Graph showing the relationship between the correlation coefficient between virtual textures and the Euclidean distance between CoV 320 Hz amplitudes	198

List of Acronyms

AHRC	Arts & Humanities Research Council
CNS	central nervous system
CoV	coefficient of variation
DAC	digital-analogue converter
EP	exploratory procedure
EPSRC	Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
FA	fast adapting
FAST	Fabric Assurance by Simple Testing
FFT	Fast Fourier Transform
HAPTEX	HAPtic sensing of virtual TEXtiles
IC	integrated circuit
IDT	interdigital transducer
jnd	just-noticeable difference
KES-F	Kawabata Evaluation System for Fabrics
MDS	Multi-Dimensional Scaling
MLE	maximum-likelihood estimate
NP	non-Pacinian
P	Pacinian
PNS	peripheral nervous system
PZT	Lead Zirconate Titanate
RAM	random access memory
root-sum-square	root of the sum of the squares
SA	slowly adapting

SAW	surface acoustic wave
SMA	shape memory alloy
USB	Universal Serial Bus
VR	virtual reality
warp	vertical
weft	horizontal