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Multi-objective Optimisation in Additive Manufacturing

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Abstract

Additive Manufacturing (AM) has demonstrated great potential to advance product design and manufacturing, and has showed higher flexibility than conventional manufacturing techniques for the production of small volume, complex and customised components. In an economy focused on the need to develop customised and hi-tech products, there is increasing interest in establishing AM technologies as a more efficient production approach for high value products such as aerospace and biomedical products.

Nevertheless, the use of AM processes, for even small to medium volume production faces a number of issues in the current state of the technology. AM production is normally used for making parts with complex geometry which implicates the assessment of numerous processing options or choices; the wrong choice of process parameters can result in poor surface quality, onerous manufacturing time and energy waste, and thus increased production costs and resources. A few commonly used AM processes require the presence of cellular support structures for the production of overhanging parts. Depending on the object complexity their removal can be impossible or very time (and resources) consuming.

Currently, there is a lack of tools to advise the AM operator on the optimal choice of process parameters. This prevents the diffusion of AM as an efficient production process for enterprises, and as affordable access to democratic product development for individual users.

Research in literature has focused mainly on the optimisation of single criteria for AM production. An integrated predictive modelling and optimisation technique has not yet been well established for identifying an efficient process set up for complicated

products which often involve critical building requirements. For instance, there are no robust methods for the optimal design of complex cellular support structures, and most of the software commercially available today does not provide adequate guidance on how to optimally orientate the part into the machine bed, or which particular combination of cellular structures need to be used as support. The choice of wrong support and orientation can degenerate into structure collapse during an AM process such as Selective Laser Melting (SLM), due to the high thermal stress in the junctions between fillets of different cells.

Another issue of AM production is the limited parts' surface quality typically generated by the discrete deposition and fusion of material. This research has focused on the formation of surface morphology of AM parts. Analysis of SLM parts showed that roughness measured was different from that predicted through a classic model based on pure geometrical consideration on the stair step profile. Experiments also revealed the presence of partially bonded particles on the surface; an explanation of this phenomenon has been proposed. Results have been integrated into a novel mathematical model for the prediction of surface roughness of SLM parts. The model formulated correctly describes the observed trend of the experimental data, and thus provides an accurate prediction of surface roughness.

This thesis aims to deliver an effective computational methodology for the multi-objective optimisation of the main building conditions that affect process efficiency of AM production. For this purpose, mathematical models have been formulated for the determination of parts' surface quality, manufacturing time and energy consumption, and for the design of optimal cellular support structures.

All the predictive models have been used to evaluate multiple performance and costs objectives; all the objectives are typically contrasting; and all greatly affected by the part's build orientation.

A multi-objective optimisation technique has been developed to visualise and identify optimal trade-offs between all the contrastive objectives for the most efficient AM production. Hence, this thesis has delivered a decision support system to assist the operator in the "process planning" stage, in order to achieve optimal efficiency and sustainability in AM production through maximum material, time and energy savings.

Contents

List of Tables.....	11
List of Figures.....	13
Author’s declaration.....	19
Nomenclature.....	25
1. Introduction.....	29
1.1 Research Background and Rationale.....	29
1.1.1 Criteria and Complexity in Additive Manufacturing.....	29
1.1.2 Multi-objective Optimisation.....	32
1.2 Research Objectives and Contributions.....	33
1.2.1 Overall aim and objectives.....	33
1.2.2 Research Methodology and Development.....	34
1.2.3 Principal contributions.....	35
1.3 Thesis overview.....	36
2. Background.....	39
2.1 Advanced material structures in aerospace.....	39
2.1.1 Aerospace materials and lightweight applications.....	39
2.1.2 Lightweight structure components with complex and optimal geometries.....	42
2.1.3 Lightweight cellular structures.....	45
2.1.4 Conventional manufacturing of complex aerospace components.....	47
2.1.5 Conventional manufacturing of lightweight cellular structures.....	49
2.2 Additive Manufacturing.....	57
2.2.1 Introduction to additive manufacturing.....	57

2.2.2	Technical aspects of additive manufacturing.....	58
2.2.3	AM for aerospace and defence applications.....	59
2.2.4	State of art of main AM processes for aerospace applications.....	63
2.2.5	Limits and challenges of AM for production in aerospace.....	70
2.3	Multi-objective Optimisation.....	72
2.3.1	Multi-criteria decision analysis for optimisation of industrial processes.....	72
2.3.2	Importance of Multi-object optimisation in industrial design.....	73
2.3.3	Basic multi-objective optimisation concepts - dominance and Pareto front.....	78
2.3.4	Solution methods.....	80
2.4	Conclusions.....	87
3.	Multi-objective Optimisation of Selective Laser Sintering Processes for Surface Quality and Energy Saving.....	89
3.1	Introduction.....	89
3.1.1	Previous works on multi-object Optimisation in AM.....	90
3.1.2	Importance of surface finish in industrial design and applications.....	92
3.1.3	Issues in surface finish of AM parts.....	94
3.1.4	Model for roughness prediction of AM parts.....	96
	3.1.4.1 Theoretical models based on geometrical considerations.....	96
	3.1.4.2 Models based on experimental data interpolation.....	96
3.2	Models for multi-object optimisation of Selective Laser Sintering processes.....	98
3.2.1	Computational model for surface roughness prediction	98
3.2.2	Effects of sloping angles on the surface roughness of SLS polymer parts.....	100
3.2.3	Mathematical formulation.....	103
3.2.4	Model for energy prediction.....	104
3.3	Multi-Objective problem definition and algorithm implementation.....	106
3.4	Results and discussion.....	108

3.5	Conclusions.....	115
4.	Multi-Objective Optimisation of Selective Laser Melting Processes for Manufacturing Time and Surface Quality.....	117
4.1	Introduction.....	117
4.1.1	Surface roughness in Selective Laser Melting process.....	118
4.1.2	Build time and post-manufacturing operations of SLM Fabricated parts.....	121
4.2	Model for surface roughness prediction.....	124
4.2.1	Surface morphology and roughness analysis.....	124
4.2.1.1	Surface roughness and morphology analysis using profilometer.....	125
4.2.1.2	Surface Morphology Analysis through SEM.....	130
4.2.2	New model for prediction of surface roughness.....	136
4.2.2.1	Stair-step effect and surface roughness in Selective Laser Melting.....	136
4.2.2.2	Mathematical formulation.....	138
4.3	Model for build time prediction.....	144
4.4	Multi-objective problem definition and algorithm implementation.....	146
4.5	Results and discussion.....	148
4.6	Conclusions.....	155
5.	Support structure optimisation for additive manufacturing.....	157
5.1	Introduction.....	157
5.1.1	Support Structures and build orientation.....	160
5.1.2	Design of cellular support structures.....	161
5.2	Design of optimal support structures for additive manufacturing.....	166
5.2.1	Optimisation of part build orientation.....	166
5.2.2	Design of support structures through 3D mathematical functions.....	169
5.2.2.1	Effects of changing cell periodicity.....	171

5.2.3	Method validation.....	173
5.3	Evaluation of a complex shape structure as a case study.....	175
5.4	Result and discussion on support structures for a complex structure.....	178
5.5	Conclusions.....	180
6.	Multi-objective optimisation of parts and support structures.....	181
6.1	Introduction.....	181
6.1.1	Manufacturing optimisation of part with supports structures.....	182
6.2	Three-objective optimisation.....	185
6.2.1	Models used for the three-objective optimisation.....	185
6.2.2	Performance objective functions for three-objective optimisation.....	187
6.2.3	Case study definition.....	192
6.4	Results and discussion.....	194
6.5	Conclusions.....	203
7.	Conclusions.....	205
	Appendix.....	211
Appendix A	– Matlab code for multi-objective optimisation.....	211
Appendix B	– Program to generate graded support microstructures.....	219
Appendix C	– Publications.....	223
	Glossary.....	279
	Bibliography.....	281