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Comprehensive Investigation of Mechanical Properties of Fused Deposition Modelling

A dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
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PREFACE:

The author declares that this is his own work except where due acknowledgment has been given. It is being submitted for the PhD in Engineering, majoring in Mechatronics to the Massey University, New Zealand.

This thesis describes the research carried out by the author at the School of Engineering and Advance Technology, Massey University, Albany, New Zealand from June 2014 to May 2017, supervised by A/Prof J. Potgieter and Dr. K. Arif.

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Abstract

Fused depositing modelling (FDM) is a layer wise manufacturing method whereby parts are printed from the bottom up through the extrusion and deposition of a filament onto a print base. Various test methods exist for the determination of part mechanical properties. These include tensile, flexural, and impact testing and are conducted using a variety of standards including those of ASTM and ISO. Many researchers have investigated the effects of factors such as road width, raster orientation, layer height, and air gap on the mechanical properties of FDM parts. However, there are many unexplored factors that also impact on the properties of printed parts. For example, the printers used in characterisation studies are mostly commercially available or consumer market printers which allow only limited control over the print parameters and print with a limited set of materials. Similarly, the life of the printer can also affect the print quality but this has not been studied before.

Control over machines could be achieved by purchasing additional print profiles from the manufacturers or by open-sourcing legacy hardware through retrofitment with new electronics and software. The latter option is more economically viable as there are a large number of decommissioned legacy machines that have superior hardware cheaply/freely available. A retrofitted commercial 3D printer would allow control over print parameters and printing with materials outside the ones sold by the manufacturers. This can open new avenues to study the properties of the printed parts. In this work, a Stratasys Vantage X 3D printer has been retrofitted and made open-source through a combination of hardware, software, and firmware modifications. These modifications result in complete control by the user over all print variables along with the ability to use any feedstock including custom made feed stocks and ones that are locked by the manufacturer. The printing accuracy of the machine is evaluated by optical imaging of the printed samples and destructive testing in accordance with the ASTM D638 standard. .

To study the effect of the machine's life on the properties, a longitudinal study is designed in which two groups of parts (with 0° and 90° orientations) are printed at two different times during the course of this research. The temporal spacing between the parts is eighteen months. The parts are designed according to ASTM D638 standard and printed on identical printers using the same parameters on both occasions. The parts are subjected to tensile

testing for the mechanical characterization while scanning electron microscopy (SEM) is used for the examination of the sample's fracture and topographical surfaces.

A difference is discovered between the Young's moduli of old and new groups. The orthotropic nature of FDM parts becomes prevalent in the strain responses of samples with 0° samples experiencing the largest strain. Distinct differences exist between the diffusion levels of the chronological sample groups, with the original batch exhibiting greater diffusion resulting in almost indistinguishable layers and higher tensile strengths. Individual layers are easily observed in the newer sample groups. Topographical analysis of samples shows up to 0.1mm difference between the road widths with the older samples roads being the narrowest. Results from this research show that the age of the printer affects the mechanical properties of the parts with the older parts exhibiting greater strength compared to their new counterparts even though both were printer under identical conditions. Therefore, a significant difference exists between temporally spaced FDM parts.

To conclude, this research has successfully retrofitted an old FDM system which is capable of printing various materials through a choice of user parameters. The longitudinal study conducted to study the effect of the machine age on the printed parts purports that as the printing machines get older their print quality deteriorates and this factor should be considered by designers when designing parts for functional purposes.

List of Terms and Definitions

Print orientation: This refers to the inclination of the part with respect to the X, Y, and, Z axes with the X and Y -axis parallel to the build platform and the Z axis perpendicular to the platform in the direction of the build.

Raster angle: For the purposes of testing, it is the angle between the raster relative to the applied direction of the load. During the printing process, it is traditionally referenced to the angle of the raster relative to the X-axis on the build table.

Layer thickness: This is the thickness of the layer deposited by the nozzle.

Nozzle height: This is the height between the extrusion nozzle and the previously deposited layer or at the start of a print, the height between the nozzle and the print bed.

Road: This refers to a single strand of deposited material. The conglomeration of the roads makes up the raster pattern.

Raster width: This is the width of a single deposited road.

Raster gap (air gap): This refers to the gap between two adjacent roads on the same print layer.

Voids: These are spaces between two adjacent roads or layers where material would ideally exist but was not successfully filled.

Infill: This is a value usually represented as a percentage. It represents how much of a solid model should be filled in.

Number of shells (boundary layers): This is the number of outlines printed in each layer. The higher the number of shells, the greater the strength of the printed object.

Extruder temperature: This is the temperature at which the extruder operates during printing. This temperature setting is dependent on the material used.

Printing speed: This is the speed at which the printhead moves while it is extruding filament.

Extrusion rate: This is the speed at which filament is extruded.

Movement speed: This is the speed at which the printhead moves while it is not extruding the filament.

Fill pattern: This is the pattern used for the interior fill of a part. This is made up of linear roads at varying raster angles but can also be hexagonal, diamond and other patterns.

Printer age: The time between the printer being commissioned and the current date.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
List of Terms and Definitions	v
Table of Contents.....	vii
1. Introduction.....	1
1.1. Research Objective	1
1.2. Problem Statement	2
1.3. Research Solution	4
1.4. Thesis Layout.....	5
2. Literature Review.....	6
2.1. Introduction.....	6
2.2. Mechanical Testing.....	8
2.2.1. Tensile Testing.....	8
2.2.2. Compression Tests	11
2.2.3. Impact Testing.....	13
2.2.4. Flexural Testing	16
2.2.5. Fatigue Testing.....	19
2.2.6. Alternate Mechanical Testing	21
2.3. Scanning Electron Microscopy	24
2.4. Fiber Bragg Grating	25
2.5. Finite Element Analysis.....	28
2.6. Glass Transition Temperature:.....	30
2.7. Retrofitment of Machines as 3D Printing Systems:.....	32
2.8. Summary	32
3. Retrofitment and Characterization of Vantage Fused Deposition Modelling System	35
3.1. Introduction.....	35

3.2.	Hardware Modifications	38
3.2.1.	Electrical Design	38
3.2.2.	Front Panel Controller.....	42
3.2.3.	Other Physical Modifications.....	43
3.3.	Firmware Development.....	44
3.3.1.	Extruder Controller	44
3.3.2.	Power Supply Controller.....	44
3.3.3.	Heater Controller.....	45
3.4.	Software Design.....	46
3.5.	Machine Calibration.....	47
3.6.	Printing Experiments	49
3.6.1.	Effect of Process Parameters.....	50
3.7.	Summary	55
4.	Mechanical Properties of Temporally Spaced FDM Printed Samples.....	57
4.1.	Introduction.....	57
4.2.	Hypothesis.....	58
4.3.	Methodology	59
4.3.1.	Sample Preparation	59
4.3.2.	Sample Tensile Testing Procedure.....	60
4.3.3.	Sample Storage	62
4.3.4.	Scanning Electron Microscope (SEM) Imaging Procedure	62
4.4.	Tensile Test Results	64
4.4.1.	Elastic Modulus Results.....	66
4.4.2.	Strain Evaluation Results	71
4.4.3.	Tensile Strength Results.....	74
4.5.	Summary	81
5.	Topographical and Fracture Surface Analysis with Scanning Electron Microscopy.....	83
5.1.	Introduction.....	83

5.2.	Topographical Analysis	84
5.3.	Fracture Surface Analysis	93
5.3.1.	New Fracture Surface Analysis.....	94
5.3.2.	Old Fracture Surface:.....	99
5.4.	Summary	103
6.	Conclusions and Future Recommendations.....	106
6.1.	Conclusions.....	106
6.2.	Recommended Future Work.....	109
7.	References.....	112
8.	Appendices.....	121
8.1.	Appendix A.....	121
8.2.	Appendix B.....	122
8.3.	Appendix C.....	123

Table of Figures

Figure 1.1 Blue: Factors that are known to affect the mechanical properties of FDM parts. Red: Factors whose effects on FDM mechanical properties have yet to be investigated..... 3

Figure 2.1 (a) Schematic of FDM process; (b) three types of raster orientations, 90° orientation specimen; 0° orientation specimen, 45° orientation specimen; (c) Images of printed single layer specimens; (d) representative tensile testing data for ABS at each raster orientation, modified from [17]..... 7

Figure 2.2 Tensile strength of ABS/OMMT nanocomposites samples, (a) made by injection moulding and (b) made by FDM 3D printer [38]. Tensile failure mechanisms for (c) orientation which displays non-uniform deformation at the rupture site as opposed to (d) orientation which shows a nearly uniform fracture surface [48]..... 10

Figure 2.3 (a) A specimen during the compression test [56]. (b) Four failure modes of the specimens: (1) FDM-axial (2) FDM-transverse (3) 3D printer-axial and (4) NCDS-axial. (c) Compressive strength of each specimen [29]. NCDS stands for nanocomposite deposition system. 12

Figure 2.4 (a) Characteristic force displacement curves for bulk and porous specimens [60]. (b) The different build orientations and notch placements used in this study for samples printed on Fortus 400mc. The staggered lines represent raster orientation. (c) SEM micrographs of impact test fracture surfaces printed from Ultem 9085. (d) Graphical representation with Tukey–Kramer honestly significant difference analysis of impact test results for the different types and notched specimens printed on Fortus 400mc from Ultem 9085 [28]..... 15

Figure 2.5 (a) A typical 3–point bending test setup. (b) Print orientations marked with black arrows in I–VI and (c) corresponding stress-strain curves [62]..... 17

Figure 2.6 (a) Dimensions of the sample for physical and FEA simulation test with possible building bases numbered. (b) Diagram of the different slices disposition in the cantilever for each building orientation 1, 2 and 5. Setup for the experimental test, (c) and model for the simulation (d), small displacement (c & d), and photos taken at 35 mm of deformation (e & f) [67]..... 22

Figure 2.7 SEM micrographs of 3D-printed dumbbell specimens printed from ABS in, horizontal orientation (a), vertical orientation (b) and perpendicular orientation (c) [77]. SEM of the fracture surface of tensile samples of (d) injection moulded, (e) negative air gap and (f) positive air gap samples FDM [41]. 24

Figure 2.8 (a) Diagram of an ISO 3167 tensile test specimen with the location of the installed fiber (dimensions in mm). (b) Top and side views of the build area with the component under construction shown inside the powder-bed, surrounded by powder retaining walls. On the left, the removable place holder is shown. (c) Typical example of the strong changes in spectral profile and grating strength observed during thermal cycling of FBGs embedded in glass-filled nylon, indicating that this material combination is unsuited to the direct embedding of FBGs into the material during an AM process [82].	27
Figure 2.9 A heat vs. temperature plot of left; for a crystalline polymer reaching its melting temperature; right: An amorphous polymer reaching its T_g . [93]	31
Figure 3.1 Print process layout with retrofit components	37
Figure 3.2 Retrofitted Stratasys FDM Vantage X system	38
Figure 3.3 Power supply redesign showing main components, connections, and control board.	39
Figure 3.4 (a) Controller board with extruder boards mounted. (b) PCB schematic of the solenoid voltage switching/opto-isolator board.	41
Figure 3.5 Motherboard layout with Arduino Mega controller (a) and connection diagram (b).	42
Figure 3.6 Front Panel Display Layout	43
Figure 3.7 Custom loaded print material.	43
Figure 3.8 Oven temperature fluctuation with original PID settings (a) and with modified PID settings (b).	45
Figure 3.9 Modified ReplicatorG 0037 control panel layout	46
Figure 3.10 Temperature error measurement of the extruder.	48
Figure 3.11 Microscopic views of extruded filament at different temperature settings.	50
Figure 3.12 Microscopic image of initial test Box.	51
Figure 3.13 Cut-away of test box hexagonal (a), $0^\circ/90^\circ$ (b) and criss-cross fill pattern (c). Scale bar = 2mm	52
Figure 3.14 Miscellaneous small test parts printed on OpenVantage. Scale bar = 10mm	52
Figure 3.15 Stress strain diagram for samples printed on the OpenVantage	53
Figure 3.16 Magnified view of OpenVantage (left) and Up Box (right) printed samples	54
Figure 4.1 FDM samples; (a) 90° and 0° raster orientations and (b) sample position relative to printbed.	60

Figure 4.2 (a) Instron 5967 used for tensile testing; (b) experimental setup for tensile testing with extensometer position; (c) 50mm Instron GL50mm extensometer used	61
Figure 4.3 Samples prepared for SEM analysis for the old (left) and the new (right) samples as positioned on the carbon tape stubs.	63
Figure 4.4 SEM imaging and sextant break up of a sample fracture surface.....	64
Figure 4.5 Fracture surface images of sample groups A, B, C, D, and E as presented by their respective a, b, c, d and, e group labels.....	65
Figure 4.6 Scatter plot of the "Old" and "New" Young's Modulus values for sample groups C and D on top. Similarly, groups A and B are represented at the bottom.	66
Figure 4.7 Box plot representation of the four sample groups Young's Moduli.....	68
Figure 4.8 Scatterplot representation of the stress values for the Old and New 0° samples on top and Old and New 90° samples on the bottom.....	72
Figure 4.9 Individual fibre representation of the 0° and 90° raster orientation	73
Figure 4.10 Ultimate Tensile Strength distribution of (a) New and Old 0° samples and (b) New and Old 90° samples	75
Figure 4.11 Box plot representation of the four sample group's Tensile strength.....	77
Figure 4.12 Left: Three phases of deformation in plastics. (a) Polymer molecule stretching. (b) Straightening of a molecular chain. (c) Slippage between molecules. Right: Nominal stress-strain diagram. Similar to Chanda et al. [114].	78
Figure 4.13 Plot of the average stress vs. strain response for all sample groups.	78
Figure 4.14 Stress vs. Strain response of sample groups A, B, C and, D by the respective plots.....	80
Figure 5.1 Topographical representation of a 90° raster samples with 1 depicting the smearing effect during build and 2 the triangular voids produced due to the print patten for (a) the new samples and (b) the old samples. (c) represents the print pattern followed during the internal fill process of the samples.....	85
Figure 5.2 SEM topographical images of the old 90° samples (a) Triangular voids on the left of the sample, (b) Triangular voids on the right side of the sample and, (c) 200 x magnification of a triangular void.....	86
Figure 5.3 Comparison between the new samples left and right resultant print voids with several voids depicted for either side by a and c. B and d depicts a magnified view of a representative voids for either side of the sample.....	87

Figure 5.4 Topographical views of: (a) Bonded length measurement between consecutive voids for the (a) Old sample group and (b) new sample group. (c) The old sample roads without the presence of voids. (d) The new sample group depicting a void. SEM images of (e) new and (f) old sample partial delamination due to shrinkage. 89

Figure 5.5 Representation of (a) road shapes with a zero-layer height setting, (b) roads with a more oval shape when printed with a negative air gap. Representations of roads printed using identical layer height settings depicted by (c) roads printed with the centre-to-centre road distance equal to the road width and, (d) with a centre-to-centre road distance less than the road width..... 90

Figure 5.6 Average road width for both the new and old samples measured across the topographical surface..... 92

Figure 5.7 Fracture surface images of the new sample surface sectors on the left and the old sample on the right 94

Figure 5.8 53x Magnification SEM images of the new 90° samples fracture surface with measurements of the diffused areas on either side and the striped lines indicating the direction of crack propagation. (a) Corresponds to sector 1, (b) to sector 3, (c) to sector 4 and, (d) to sector 6 as per Fig. 5.7. 96

Figure 5.9 SEM images of (a) image of the central layer regions showing the variation in the bonded surface width and (b) the bubbles induced in the right side of the sample with the pattern represented by the white intermittent line. 97

Figure 5.10 Average layer thickness measurement across the new sample fracture surface corresponding to the distance as measured from the datum. The trend line shows a slight decline in layer thickness of the roads moving to the right side of the fracture surface..... 98

Figure 5.11 SEM imaging of the old samples fracture surface of sectors 1, 3, 4, and,6 for a, b, c and, d respectively. 99

Figure 5.12 100 times magnified SEM image of the central fracture surface region for the old sample. 102

Figure 8.1 SEM image of the new sample fracture surface depicting the recurring bubbles that are introduced during the printing process..... 121

Figure 8.2 Magnified image of the inclusions observed throughout the fracture surface of the sample. 122

Figure 8.3 Magnified image of the old sample fracture surface depicting consecutively bonded print layers fracturing along different planes. The bubbles induced during the printing process and observed in the new sample group is absent in the old samples..... 123

Table of Tables

Table 2.1 Summary of mechanical testing techniques	23
Table 3.1 PID parameters used in the retrofitted Vantage X	49
Table 4.1 Printer control variable setting for both the old and new sample groups.	59
Table 4.2 Sample group with the corresponding labelling method used to for ease of reference.....	62
Table 4.3 Obtained tensile test results for the samples groups A, B, C, and D.....	64
Table 5.1 Summary table of the old vs new samples topographical and fracture surface features. ...	103