

Robotic Protein Crystal Streak Seeding Using Silicon Microtools

Atanas Georgiev¹, Peter Allen¹, William Edstrom², John Hunt², Ting Song³, Andrew Laine³
 Department of Computer Science¹ / Biological Sciences² / Biomedical Engineering³

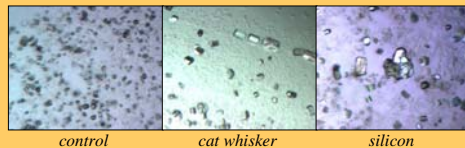
Introduction

Goal:
Automated streak seeding of 96-well plates

- Problems:**
- Tools for seeding
 - Crystal detection in image
 - Droplet location in image
 - Robotic streak seeding system

Streak Seeding With Silicon

- A cat whisker is normally used for manual seeding by crystallographers
- Cat whiskers are not rigid
- Difficult to:
 - Track in image
 - Locate tip
 - Detect contact
- Silicon microtools produce good seeding results



Design and Fabrication

- Created CAD designs of over 30 different shapes and sizes of *microshovels*
- Used MEMS technology (photolithography, DRIE) to manufacture over 100 tooltips out of silicon wafers
- Microshovels used for both streak seeding and crystal mounting



Seeding Steps

1. Wash tool in bucket



2. Detect & poke crystals



3. Streak through droplets



Crystal Detection



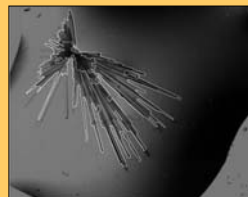
2a/
Detect edges in image



2b/
Fill in holes and threshold



2c/
Clean up using morphological operators



2d/
The original image with the boundary of detected crystals overlaid

Droplet Location



3a/
Successful detection of a small offset



3b/
Successful detection of a large vertical offset

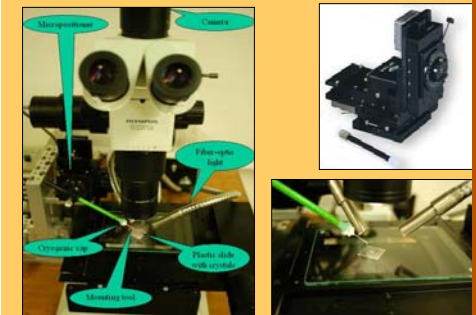


3c/
Successful detection of a large horizontal offset



3d/
Successful detection of a large diagonal offset

Prototype Microbotic Streak Seeding System



Sample Seeding Run



1. Initial image



2. Detected crystals



3. Probe poking crystal 1



4. Probe poking crystal 2



5. Droplet center located



6. Streaking through droplet

Conclusions

- Progress toward automated crystal seeding
- Designed and manufactured new tools to address limitations of traditional cat whiskers
- New tools can be used for both manual and automatic manipulation
- Built a functional prototype of a microbotic seeding system