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VIP: A Python package for high-contrast imaging

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Summary

Direct imaging of exoplanets and circumstellar disks at optical and infrared wavelengths requires reaching high contrasts at short angular separations. This can only be achieved through the synergy of different techniques, such as adaptive optics, coronagraphy, and a relevant combination of observing strategy and post-processing algorithms to model and subtract residual starlight. In this context, `VIP` is a Python package providing the tools to reduce, post-process and analyze high-contrast imaging datasets, enabling the detection and characterization of directly imaged exoplanets and circumstellar disks.

Statement of need

`VIP` stands for Vortex Image Processing. It is a collaborative project which started within the Vortex group at the University of Liège, and aiming to integrate open-source, efficient, easy-to-use and well-documented implementations of state-of-the-art algorithms used in the context of high-contrast imaging. The package follows a modular architecture, such that its routines cover a wide diversity of tasks, including:

- image pre-processing, such as sky subtraction, bad pixel correction or bad frames removal (`preproc` module);
- modeling and subtracting the stellar PSF using state-of-the-art algorithms leveraging on a range of observing strategies such as angular differential imaging (ADI), reference star differential imaging (RDI) or spectral differential imaging (SDI; `psfsub` module) Marois et al. (2006);
- detecting (and characterizing) point sources through inverse approaches (`invprob` module);
- characterizing either point sources or extended circumstellar signals through forward modeling (`fm` module);
- assessing either the achieved contrast in PSF-subtracted images or the significance of any detected point sources (`metrics` module).

The features implemented in `VIP` as of 2017 are described in (Gomez Gonzalez et al., 2017). Since then, the package has been widely used by the high-contrast imaging community, for the discovery of low-mass companions (Hirsch et al., 2019; Milli et al., 2017; Ubeira-Gabellini et al., 2020), their characterization (Christiaens et al., 2019, 2018; Delorme et al., 2017; Wertz et al., 2017), the study of planet formation (Maucó et al., 2020; Reggiani et al., 2018; Ruane et al., 2017; Toci et al., 2020), the study of high-mass star formation (Rainot et al., 2022, 2020), or the development of new high-contrast imaging algorithms (Dahlqvist et al., 2020, 2021; Gomez Gonzalez et al., 2018; Pairet et al., 2021). Nonetheless, given the steady expansion of `VIP`, a new publication is in order to summarize all novelties that were brought to the package over the past 5 years.

The following paragraphs summarize all major changes since v0.7.0 (Gomez Gonzalez et al., 2017), included in the latest release of `VIP` (v1.3.0). At a structural level, `VIP` underwent a major change since version v1.1.0, which aimed to migrate towards a more streamlined and easy-to-use architecture. The package now revolves around five major modules (`fm`, `invprob`, `metrics`, `preproc` and `psfsub`, described above), and complemented by four additional modules containing different kinds of utility functions (`config`, `fits`, `stats` and `var`). New `Dataset` and `Frame` classes have also been implemented, enabling an object-oriented approach for processing high-contrast imaging datasets and analyzing final images, respectively. Similarly, a `HCIPostProcAlgo` class and different subclasses inheriting from it have beend defined to facilitate an object-oriented use of `VIP` routines.

Some of the major changes in each module of `VIP` are summarized below:

- `fm`:
  - new routines were added to create parametrizable scattered-light disk models and extended signals in ADI cubes, in order to forward-model the effect of ADI post-processing (Christiaens et al., 2019; Milli et al., 2012);
  - the log-likelihood expression used in the negative fake companion (NEGFC) technique was updated, as well as the default convergence criterion for the NEGFC-MCMC method - it is now based on auto-correlation (Christiaens et al., 2021);
  - the NEGFC methods are now fully compatible with integral field spectrograph (IFS) input datacubes.
- `invprob`:
  - a Python implementation of the ANDROMEDA algorithm (Cantalloube et al., 2015) is now available as part of `VIP` ;
  - the FMMF algorithm (Pueyo, 2016) is now also available in the `invprob` module.
- `metrics`:
  - calculation of standardized trajectory maps (STIM) is now available (Pairet et al., 2019);
- `psfsub`:
  - all principal component analysis (PCA) based routines (Amara & Quanz, 2012), (Soummer et al., 2012) have been re-written for improved efficiency, and are now also compatible with 4D IFS+ADI input cubes to apply SDI-based PSF modeling and subtraction algorithms;
  - an implementation of the Locally Optimal Combination of Images (Lafrenière et al., 2007) was added;
  - an annular version of the non-negative matrix factorization algorithm is now available Gomez Gonzalez et al. (2017);
  - besides median-ADI, the `medsub` routine now also support median-SDI.
- `preproc`:
  - the module now boasts several new algorithms for (i) the identification of either isolated bad pixels or clumps of bad pixels, leveraging on iterative sigma filtering (`cube_fix_badpix_clump`), the circular symmetry of the PSF (`cube_fix_badpix_annuli`), or the radial expansion of the PSF with wavelength (`cube_fix_badpix_ifs`), and (ii) the correction of bad pixels based on either median replacement (default) or Gaussian kernel interpolation (`cube_fix_badpix_with_kernel`);
  - a new algorithm was added for the recentering of coronagraphic image cubes based on the cross-correlation of the speckle pattern, after appropriate filtering and log-scaling of pixel intensities ***Gary: which reference should I cite?.

We refer the interested reader to release descriptions and announcements in the Discussion section of the GitHub for a more complete list of all changes, including improvements not mentioned in the above summary.

Two major convention updates are also to be noted in `VIP`. All image operations (rotation, scaling, resampling and sub-pixel shifts) are now performed using Fourier-Transform (FT) based methods by default (which are also implemneted as new low-level routines in `preproc`).

FT-based methods significantly outperform interpolation-based methods in terms of flux conservation (Larkin et al., 1997). However, given the order of magnitude slower computation of FT-based image rotations, the option to use interpolation-based methods is still available in all relevant `VIP` functions. The second change of convention concerns the assumed center for even-size images, which is now defined as the top-right one of these 4 central pixels - a change motivated by the new default FT-based methods for image operations. The center convention is unchanged for odd-size images (central pixel).

Finally, a total of nine jupyter notebook tutorials covering most of the available features in VIP were implemented. These tutorials illustrate (i) how to load and post-process an ADI dataset (quick-start tutorial); (ii) how to pre-process ADI and IFS datasets; (iii) how to model and subtract the stellar halo with ADI-based algorithms; (iv) how to calculate metrics such as the S/N ratio (Mawet et al., 2014), STIM map (Pairet et al., 2019) and contrast curves; (v) how to find the radial separation, azimuth and flux of a point source; (vi) how to create and forward model scattered-light disk models; (vii) how to post-process IFS data and infer the exact astro- and photometry of a given point source; (viii) how to use FT-based and interpolation-based methods for different image operations, and assess their respective performance; and (ix) how to use the new object-oriented framework for `VIP`.

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