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Reprinted from *International Journal of Robotics Research*,
Volume 1, Number 1, 1982, pages 15-64, "Survey of Model-Based
Image Analysis Systems" by T.O. Binford by permission of The
MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Abstract

A survey and critique of the state of the art in model-based image analysis systems is presented. The paper includes summaries of a selection of systems and evaluates them from the viewpoint of progress toward general vision systems. The paper also describes principles of design of general vision systems.

1. Introduction

Human beings pursue many goals in an unconstrained, constantly changing world with many objects; they work within a *general vision system*. Robots work in manufacturing performing a single, repeated task with few objects, all known, in constrained environments engineered to simplify those tasks. In vision systems for manufacturing, many special-case tricks are used that do not generally apply to worlds with many objects and many goals. However, those systems must eventually come to resemble general vision systems more than is generally acknowledged.

Consider what is required to make improvements in current industrial vision systems to make them saleable in a large market. A single system must (1) be easily programmed to accomplish many tasks of visual control or inspection, (2) not need extensive special-case engineering, and (3) be insensitive to variations in lighting. A single system must be instructed effectively to determine many classes of defects, including rare defects and those not encountered in training, and to distinguish cosmetic from real defects. While a single industrial task is very constrained, the range of tasks and objects in a

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major company, industry, or industries is not. It is not cost-effective to build a separate system for each task; thus, an adequate system must have modules specialized for a particular task. Other applications now being pursued impose even more severe requirements for high-speed object classification in complex environments.

We work to make machines see as people do, to understand how people see, to implement performance systems for visual applications, and to incorporate current capabilities in an experimental system to support further research. Those activities all depend on common visual operations and common representations.

In this paper, *prediction* refers to mappings from object models to their predicted appearances in images (i.e., top-down mappings in the direction from symbol to signal). *Description* and *observation* refer to mappings from sensed images to perceived surfaces and objects (i.e., bottom-up mappings from signal to symbol). *Interpretation* refers to mappings between predictions and descriptions. *Generic* means defined over a class (e.g., generic with respect to viewpoint meaning defined over a range of viewpoints). One example of interpretation is *template matching*, that is, finding the best embedding of a template subimage to an observed image, over all translations and rotations. One example of prediction is the mapping of a specific object model to a specific image from a particular viewpoint by techniques of computer graphics. Neither example is interesting for general vision systems.

In the "bad old days," work on vision systems was commonly justified by statements that general segmentation and description were impossible, a dead end. Description modules might be improved a bit, but not much. It was not necessary to improve them. With that doctrine, powerful vision systems could be made by combining existing modules into systems that used extensive world knowledge. Not only was this the way to successful applications pro-

The International Journal of Robotics Research

Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring 1982.

0278-3649/82/010018-47 \$05.00/0

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grams, but it was a basis for human visual performance.

A minority held the contrary view that low-level vision modules were weak, fulfilling less than 1% of their potential. This minority felt that although the problems are fundamental, segmentation and description are powerful in humans and will eventually be powerful in machines. Combining ineffective procedures, they thought, would produce little of interest. (Three pieces of junk are usually worth less than one; there are more to get rid of.) Vision systems would be inherently limited by performance of segmentation modules. Further, ad hoc building of systems would be frustrated because without effective representation and description, knowledge cannot be used effectively. There are deep problems in encoding and using world knowledge in a general way in a wide range of situations, that is, in relating world knowledge to image structures where world knowledge is typically about object classes in *three space*. This view held that combination of existing modules to build vision systems would not lead to powerful vision systems. Useful systems might be made for limited applications, however, and building systems is a useful exercise for looking at the full problem. Yet this group believed that careful theoretical analysis and implementation of individual vision operations was an essential basis for building vision systems and especially for effective applications.

The minority opinion is now held by the majority, and studies of fundamental vision science are underway. System building is no longer an end in itself, but is used for applications and demonstrations. It is now time to look at both applications and the total problem.

2. Observations About Systems Surveyed

Except for the first four, the systems surveyed will be discussed in alphabetical order. One vision system has succeeded in labeling large regions in aerial photographs (Nagao, Matsuyama, and Ikeda 1978); another has labeled large regions in a few outdoor scenes from ground-level views (Ohta 1980). ACRONYM has identified aircraft in aerial ph-

tographs (Brooks 1981). Another system has labeled objects in typical scenes of a desk (Shirai 1978). The results of these and other efforts are encouraging as first demonstrations. As general vision systems, they have a long way to go.

With several of the summaries of systems are comments about their limitations as general-purpose vision systems. The lists of limitations are only reminders with examples, not complete descriptions of the ways in which these systems would not have general applications. Complete descriptions of problems follow summaries of systems.

What works in the best of these systems? What makes them go? They succeed with quasi-two-dimensional scenes; for example, aerial photographs, industrial scenes from a fixed viewpoint, x-ray images, and ground-level photos from a fixed viewpoint. Even ACRONYM, which incorporates viewpoint-insensitive mechanisms, has been demonstrated only on aerial images, although there is reason to believe that ACRONYM will succeed with ground-level photographs also. Ohta (1980) demonstrated some success with a set of similar scenes from several viewpoints. Still, the system uses relations that are manifestly viewpoint-dependent.

The systems "use" image models. In Ohta's system (1980), the model includes the following relations: the sky touches the upper edge of the picture; the road touches the lower edge of the picture; trees are in the middle of the picture; and buildings have a linear upper boundary with the sky. One type of image model includes maps and symbolic sketches. Several systems use maps in registration of images with symbolic databases. An exception, ACRONYM (Brooks 1981), generates viewpoint-insensitive image models from object models in three space.

The systems "know" few objects. Ohta's (1980) has four objects with subobjects. Nagao (1978) mentions about nine classes of areas, but the system described apparently distinguishes only four: fields (with vegetation or bare); buildings; wooded areas; and linear features (roads, rivers, rail). ACRONYM has models of generic wide-bodied passenger aircraft, Lockheed's L-1011, and Boeing's 747-B and 747-SP. Shirai's (1978) includes a few objects found on desks: a lamp, a book stand, a cup, a telephone, and some small objects such as a pen. These four

systems take advantage of the limited set of objects by using predominantly top-down interpretation of images, and relying heavily on prediction. The systems use models of specific objects. For example, Ohta's (1980) uses a model in which a car is darker than the road against which it appears.

Depth information is powerful. With depth data, input and models are at the same level. Depth data directly describes surfaces, which are natural for object interpretation. Images are two-dimensional, while objects are three-dimensional. Image-level invariants are weak, while three-dimensional invariants are strong and valuable for object-level interpretations. The projection process destroys information. The remark is often made that vision is the inverse of graphics, as if to imply that vision is thus somehow simpler than we find it to be. The inverse of projection is indeed simple, but it is useless. There is no unique inverse; only very high orders of continuous infinities of projectively equivalent surfaces. Depth can be inferred from sequences of images (stereo, observer motion, object motion, photometric stereo). A primary problem is determining corresponding elements in the sequence. Direct depth measurement avoids the correspondence problems of reconstructing depth data from image sequences. There are much greater problems in inferring surface structure and depth relations from single images.

One key to performance of systems is in their use of measurements that are simply related to characteristic properties of surfaces and to three-space relations of surfaces. Surface reflectivity and surface material are often characteristic (e.g., concrete and asphalt roads, or vegetation). Surface material can be partially inferred from color and texture. Intrinsic properties such as color, texture, and shape thus provide powerful and simple clues to interpretation. In Rubin's system (1978), 44% identification of pixels was achieved with the intensity of the blue channel alone. Remote sensing has depended on pixel classification based on spectral properties. Nagao, Matsuyama, and Ikeda (1978) use spectral properties of vegetation; shape descriptors, including elongation and straight boundary; and a simple texture descriptor. Ohta (1980) uses color, simple texture, straight boundary, and hole, in addition to nonintrinsic relations that are viewpoint-dependent.

ACRONYM (Brooks 1981) utilizes shape descriptors that are ribbons and ellipses and describes a larger class of quasi-invariant observables of shape. The use of simple intrinsic properties can be pushed much further than has been done thus far.

2.1. LIMITATIONS

What are the limitations of these systems in the restricted domains for which they were designed? How do they limit attempts to extend them to general vision systems?

In my opinion, most systems have not attempted to be general vision systems. The performance they achieve is based on a severely limited context and reveals low ambitions for the quality of scene description they generate. ACRONYM does demonstrate some progress toward the goal of a general vision system, a goal that is still distant. The fundamentalist view of systems appears to have been accurate: first, performance of vision systems is strongly limited by performance of segmentation modules; second, systems make weak use of world knowledge. Existing systems have weak description, with little use of shape. Systems, like description operations, have achieved less than 1% of their potential, even allowing for weak description. They use little information in weak ways. Systems primarily relate image relations to image observables; they lack most the ability to relate three-space models to images. Systems are being built, but there is relatively little emphasis on basic vision problems in system building. Until recently, systems efforts have been small and short-lived—a few years' effort. Focused and continuous efforts are necessary but not sufficient for system building. Just the system programming task in building a vision system is enormous.

With the exception of ACRONYM, the systems surveyed do not appear to have the capability of viewpoint-insensitive interpretation. Since the systems depend on image models and relations, they are strongly viewpoint-dependent. To generalize would require three-dimensional modeling and interpretation, as in ACRONYM.

The systems do not appear to be effective in envi-

ronments with many objects. They jump to conclusions based on flimsy evidence and would probably not distinguish many objects in a complex visual environment. Humans may occasionally hallucinate in the same way, but usually they have strong evidence for interpretation.

The primary limitation in seeking stronger evidence for interpretation is weak segmentation capability and weak implementation of observation primitives. For example, in Ohta's system (1980), shadows are identified as having low intensity; black objects would be confused with shadows in typical scenes. In indoor scenes, contrast across shadow boundaries can be low. Most systems surveyed segmented images based on *pointwise properties*, that is, connected components of points that independently fall in some spectral band. Few systems used shape in segmentation of regions, that is, used continuity of edges that form ribbons. In other words, most systems segment regions then describe their shape, while a few segment well-formed regions. Simple texture measures are used; however, segmentation of extended edges is a major void, especially segmentation of textured regions. Correspondingly, shape description is primitive. Interpretation systems do not appear yet to make full use of even these limited capabilities. No system surveyed has effective texture segmentation and description such that surface texture is an intrinsic property in identification. Where range measurements are available, surfaces can be segmented directly at occlusions, that is position discontinuities. This is not the same as segmenting objects as humans do, because an object resting on a plane will not be segmented from the plane; the object and the plane are coincident. Even with range data, systems make poor symbolic, segmented descriptions of surfaces because of the fundamental weakness in segmentation.

None of the systems duplicates the human capability of color constancy, that is, the systems are incapable of sensitivity to source spectrum. Brightness constancy is related, inferring which surfaces are white and black in black-and-white images. Color constancy and brightness constancy are obtained by estimating surface reflectivity by a global partial ordering of local relations (Land and McCann 1971). It is no accident that multispectral data are useful,

since surface reflectivity is characteristic in many cases (but not unique). It is also no accident that color constancy and brightness constancy have not been integrated in the systems surveyed, since constancy requires a global computation that is much more complex than pointwise, multispectral calculation and that requires effective segmentation. Horn (1973) has demonstrated partial success with color constancy; however, that capability is not integrated in any system. To my knowledge, no use has been made of surface reflectivity in black-and-white images for those same reasons. In the case of an active ranging sensor, reflectivity can be computed directly at points from reflected intensity and range.

Systems typically use the hypothesis-verification paradigm. Hypothesis generation is the crucial part. Hypothesis generation is trivialized in the top-down case. For example, ACRONYM now searches only for aircraft. Another approach to hypothesis generation is evident in the systems surveyed. If an object class has a stable property, they assign the object class as an interpretation for any image region that has that property. For example, they assign vegetation as an interpretation for any image region that has the right color: green. That assignment has utility in restricted scene domains. But in typical cases, assignment must be generalized. For example, a house has straight lines, but to assign a house interpretation to image regions with straight lines would have little usefulness. The appropriate interpretation is not necessarily the union of all objects with straight edges, since that class is very large and the simple prescription does not tell how to break down the class. Rather, systems should relate straight lines to structural elements with straight edges. That requires powerful capabilities for inference of shape such as those being developed in ACRONYM (Binford 1981). Thus, that method of hypothesis generation is successful in restricted scene domains with a few object classes that are easily separated by local operations.

2.2. NAGAO, MATSUYAMA, AND IKEDA

In the systems described by Nagao, Matsuyama, and Ikeda (1978; 1980), an aerial photograph is first seg-

mented into regions by several processes. Judging from the dominant features of each extracted region, specialized feature extraction and recognition programs are applied to that region only. Properties of objects are summarized and are fed back in order to reanalyze ambiguous regions.

To extract major regions, the following operations are used: (1) edge-preserving smoothing; (2) segmentation into regions that are continuous in spectral properties; (3) extraction of five kinds of regions, called *cue regions*; (4) analysis of each cue region by an object-detection program specific to region type; and (5) summary of properties of regions fed back to subsystems.

Cue regions include large homogeneous regions, elongated regions, shadow and shadow-making regions, vegetation regions, water regions, and high-contrast texture regions. Each kind of cue region is extracted independently of the others. Some regions may appear in several types of cue regions.

Nagao and Matsuyama's book shows data from several pictures with four spectral bands taken at low altitude from an airplane. The pictures are 256×256 with 8 bits per pixel, corresponding to 50×50 cm on the ground. Spectral bands are red, green, blue, and infrared.

Pictures are first processed by an edge-preserving smoothing operator. It is intended to remove "noise" and to remove the blurring at edges of regions for pixels that overlap two regions. It is somewhat successful; however, it erodes thin lines and small regions (smaller than 3×3). It presumably rounds corners.

After smoothing, each picture in the four bands is divided into small patches with constant gray level. Patches with similar spectral properties are grouped together: if the differences in four bands are less than a threshold between a labeled pixel and its neighbor, the neighbor is merged. This is a gradient operation that allows shading. The threshold value in each spectral band is adaptively determined as follows. The differentiated picture is divided into $16 \times 64 \times 64$ blocks and a histogram made of nearest-neighbor differences for each block. A valley is found for each histogram where the valley has a value lower than the succeeding nine values. The minimum value is chosen for valleys among the 16

blocks. This follows the reasoning that noise will have a large peak, and edges will have a smaller peak.

Small regions with less than 4 pixels are merged with neighboring large regions with the most similar spectral properties. This is done because boundaries of homogeneous regions sometimes are ragged as a result of separate smoothing in each spectral band.

One shape descriptor is the best *minimum bounding rectangle* (MBR), defined as the MBR with maximum ratio of region area/area of MBR over angles 10° apart. Elongation and direction are taken from the best MBR.

Large homogeneous regions are defined by making a histogram of homogeneous region size and applying a valley-detection algorithm. Small regions are assumed to result from noise. Regions larger than the threshold are processed further. They may be fields, grasslands, lakes, and sea.

Some regions are flat (e.g., fields and the sea); however, houses, buildings, and trees have height. Shadows give information about height. Shadows are usually available because aerial pictures are usually taken in good weather. Shadows are obtained in the following way. A histogram is made of brightness of smoothed pictures. The average brightness in the whole picture is calculated. The brightness is calculated that makes the interclass scatter minimum when divided into two classes. If the gradient at this value is small, it is chosen as the threshold brightness, II. Otherwise a search is made for a valley near that value (II). Homogeneous regions whose average brightness is less than the value II are chosen as shadows. Shadow-making regions are chosen to be those adjacent to shadows with a long common boundary in the direction away from the sun. Shadows are used to discriminate between flat objects and those with height.

Elongated objects include roads, rivers, and railroad lines. No analysis is made of railroad lines. Elongated regions may be broken by cars, trains, or shadows, and they may be curved. For curved regions, the MBR does not give a good estimate of elongation; the system determines an elongation effective for curved regions by taking the longest path on the skeleton of a region. If length/width > 3 , regions are considered to be elongated.

Vegetation areas have a small ratio of red to infrared intensity, a property that is quite stable. However, blue roofs have the same property. Thus, the system was made to exclude regions with large intensity in the blue band. Adjacent vegetation regions are merged into a large vegetation region. Water regions are identified by spectral properties, with the additional condition that water regions are darker than adjacent regions. Problems were found for water in shadow and where there were weeds. Extraction of vegetation and water are two examples of segmentation according to intrinsic properties of materials.

High-contrast texture regions are treated as follows. After smoothing, only coarse texture remains from objects 1.5 m on a side. Woods and residential areas contain small objects such as trees, houses, roads, and shadows. The authors found it almost impossible to recognize these small objects using only individual properties such as shape. Thus, the system extracts a set of small regions as a whole and recognizes each constituent region based on properties of the group of small regions. The system extracts homogeneous regions, then moves a $N \times N$ window over the image; if the window contains more than $2N$ boundary points, the system considers the central point of the window as part of a high-contrast texture region. The system removes small holes and peninsulas by growing regions two steps, shrinking four steps, then growing two steps. The system merges any homogeneous region that has more than half its area in high contrast but that is not a large homogeneous region. The common area between the high-contrast regions and the large vegetation regions is registered as a high-contrast vegetation region.

A large homogeneous region may be a crop field, bare soil, or a grassy area. Boundaries of large homogeneous regions composed of straight lines are designated *crop field* unless they are elongated regions. Boundaries are called *straight* if more than 60% of pairs of forward and backward boundary chords have angles of less than 22.5° (for point i , the forward chord is the pair of points indexed by $i, i+5$, the backward chord is the pair indexed by $i, i-5$). Crop fields so designated are put into two classes, one with vegetation, the other without. A

region adjacent to a crop field or bare crop field is a candidate for either if its area is greater than half the threshold for large homogeneous regions.

Elongated regions include rivers and roads, which are used to register images. Elongated regions may be broken by bridges, cars, and shadows. They are not vegetation regions, shadows, or shadow-making regions. Road candidates are elongated, not vegetation, and not water regions. The system examines all pairs of candidate regions and connects those that have nearly the same intensity and color, adjacent ends, the same width, and the same direction. The conditions are difference of average gray scale in the four spectral bands less than a threshold (separate for each band); ratio of widths near 1 (between $2/3$ and $3/2$); smallest separation between ends less than $3W$, where W is the smaller of the two widths; and direction difference less than 45° . Roads are candidates with elongation >8 from length/width along the *skeleton* and for which the variance of widths along the skeleton is small. Intervening gaps may not be vegetation or water regions. The system traces any such road and picks up nearby side roads connected to it, with small difference in hue, with ratio of widths between $1/2$ and $2/1$, and with one end point within $3W$ of the first road found. The system recurses on side roads to find their side roads. Cars are recognized as rectangular regions on roads.

River candidate regions are water regions, not necessarily elongated. Analysis of rivers is similar to that of roads. Multispectral properties of water in shadow are greatly affected. Thus, shadow regions are merged with water if they are adjacent to a water region, if they are not a vegetation region, and if merged regions have increased elongation.

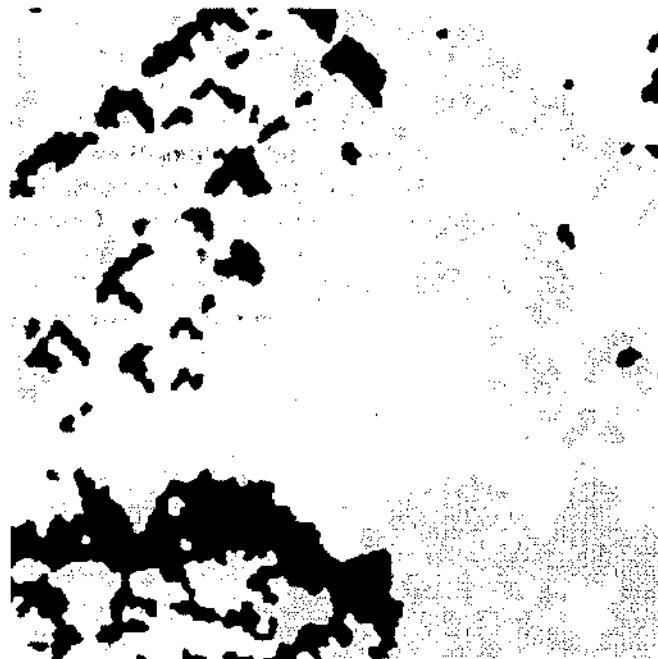
Each high-contrast vegetation area is assumed to be a wooded area. Small elements should have irregular shape (from the straightness condition above). A high-contrast vegetation region contains shadows and shadow-making regions; this distinguishes woods from grass.

The approach for finding houses is to identify candidates for residential areas first and then find houses. High-contrast regions that are not large homogeneous regions and not large vegetation areas are candidates for residential areas. Residential areas are identified as areas in which gradients are strong

Fig. 1. An aerial photograph, basis for system identifications shown in Figs. 2–17. (From Nagao and Matsuyama 1980.)



*Fig. 2. Shadow regions.
(From Nagao and Matsuyama 1980.)*



in two orthogonal directions. Houses typically have walls at right angles. The method would be valid where houses are laid out on an orthogonal grid. HOUSE1, a recognition routine for houses, uses these properties: in a residential area; not a vegetation region, not a shadow region, not a water region, but a shadow-making region; rectangular shape. HOUSE2 extracts regions whose average gray levels in the four spectral bands are similar to those of any houses recognized by HOUSE1. HOUSE2 requires a weaker condition on rectangularity, and waives the condition that the region be a shadow-making region if it is in a residential area. Houses also appear as two rectangular elements, where two inclined surfaces are segmented as separate, adjacent regions. HOUSE3 tries to recognize parts of a roof that are not recognized and that are adjacent to roofs already recognized. HOUSE4 looks for missing houses in regular arrays. It looks for regions that fall on sites determined by "regularity vectors" of the pattern of houses. Candidates must not be vegetation region, water region, shadow region, or elongated region and must satisfy rectangular fit. Buildings are designated as regions that are not vegetation or water

regions, that are shadow-making regions, that have area greater than an ad hoc value, and a predominantly straight boundary.

System control tries to resolve conflict labels and to deal with unlabeled regions. If a region has more than one label, the most reliable label is chosen and other interpretations are rejected. Interpretations that are dependent on rejected interpretations (e.g., car identified from road) are also rejected. If regions are unlabeled because their shapes do not satisfy conditions of object classes, the system activates a split-and-merge process to attempt to split the region into two regions or to merge the region with adjacent regions. This sometimes corrects faulty segmentations. Splitting takes place at bottlenecks in width along the longest path on the skeleton of the region.

Results are shown for several images in the book (Nagao and Matsuyama 1980). The system does well for roads, fields, and forest. Figures 1–17 show steps in an example of analysis. Some areas are falsely labeled as houses by HOUSE2 (seven in one picture). About 3% of the scene is shadow that is unlabeled. Small shadows on roads and rivers can be correctly labeled; shadowed vegetation areas can

Fig. 3. Shadow-making regions. Regions enclosed by black lines show the shadow-making regions;

gray shading denotes shadow regions. (From Nagao and Matsuyama 1980.)



Fig. 4. Vegetation regions.
(From Nagao and Matsuyama 1980.)



also be labeled. Otherwise, there is difficulty with large shadowed areas. A large area around houses is left unlabeled. The system has difficulties with urban scenes. For five scenes, unlabeled shadow and unrecognized areas are 3%, 19%; 1.6%, 16%; 10%, 31%; 22%, 30%; and 4%, 16% respectively. Thus, 20–52% of the area is unlabeled. This is a pessimistic evaluation, since significance of many details is not related to size. The interpretation process requires about 200 s per multispectral picture on a machine with 90 ns average instruction time, plus about 240 s of smoothing.

This is a fine and well-crafted system. It performs interesting interpretations on these examples. Its approach is to use special subsystems to recognize specific objects. Thus, it is not intended as a general vision system. The following limitations appear when it is considered as a general vision system.

Description and segmentation are limited. The system makes weak use of texture, a problem throughout the computer vision community. Its only texture descriptor is textured versus nontextured, based on boundary density. The system's shadow identification is not general and not reliable. It is

unlikely that in general scenes a valley will show up in the histogram, and unlikely that any intensity threshold will separate shadow from nonshadow. Reflectivities vary by about 0.05 to 0.90, a factor of 16, while shadow to full illumination typically has a ratio of 0.1/1.0. Their ranges overlap. Segmentation appears highly dependent on color input. The smoothing operation degrades the picture considerably.

Interpretation depends on assumptions that are not broadly useful. Shadows provide the only three-dimensional interpretation. No use is made of shadows to determine shape of objects other than as non-flat. Shadows are assumed to be adjacent to shadow-casting regions. This is not generally true and, even when true, makes assumptions about surface marking and performance of edge operators. Interpretation is appropriate for large areas, not for human-scale objects for which shape is important. There are models for only a few objects. Weak use is made of shape. Even for the domain of aerial photos, interpretations are made on weak assumptions. Grass pastures can have straight boundaries. Water can appear brighter or darker than surrounding land; the condition that water appears dark

Fig. 5. Large vegetation areas. Each area consists of many elementary regions. (From Nagao and Matsuyama 1980.)



relative to adjacent land is not general. Interpretation is image-oriented. In a view from ground level, fields would not be as prominent and models for fields would not be adequate. Houses would not appear as rectangular or L-shaped roofs.

2.3. OHTA

Ohta (1980) describes a system that assigns semantic labels to regions in color images of outdoor scenes. Ohta presents a new set of color parameters used in an Ohlander-like region analysis system (Ohlander 1975) that forms regions by splitting, using thresholds selected from histograms of the new color parameters. A plan is generated by an initial bottom-up coarse region segmentation. A symbolic description of the scene is made by top-down analysis using a production system, with knowledge of the world represented as a set of rules.

Region analysis tends to "oversegment"; that is, to split semantic regions (images of surfaces or objects) into several regions. In part, this is because

the author's choice of color parameters is intensity-dependent. Matching searches for a many-to-one correspondence between regions and images of surfaces. Each region is evaluated for each surface interpretation rule.

Ohta determines the best set of parameters for segmentation of color regions. Ohta proposes as color parameters the three eigenvectors of the covariance matrix (Karhunen-Loeve transformation). He starts out to find eigenvectors dynamically, but finds it about as satisfactory to determine eigenvectors once and for all. The eigenvectors turn out to be: $x_1 = (r + g + b)/3$; $x_2 = (r - b)/2$ or $(-r + b)/2$; $x_3 = (-r + 2b - b)/4$. Eight scenes were used in an experimental analysis. Ohta used 109 selected regions, large regions that split into "not-small" regions. In the w_r, w_b plane, eigenvector x_1 is in the first quadrant (83 regions), x_2 is in second and fourth quadrants (22 regions), and x_3 is in the third quadrant (4 regions). Thus, x_1 is by far the most important, x_2 next, and x_3 almost negligible. If images are synthesized based on only x_1, x_2 , with a constant value for x_3 , the results are reasonably good except for several small regions. That is, color is roughly two-dimensional. x_1, x_2 , and x_3 are intensity-dependent, which may not be acceptable to everyone. Regions tend not to have constant intensity; thus, regions are broken into bands using this set of color parameters.

The system processes images 256×256 , with 5 bits or 6 bits. Region segmentation fails with texture, so the author segments off textured regions, obtained as follows. In a 9×9 window, if the Laplacian of 8 out of 9 subwindows (3×3) exceeds threshold, it is considered a texture window. In a building scene, this process obtained the outer portions of a tree. The remainder (not strongly textured) is segmented by recursively applying thresholds determined from peaks of histograms of color parameters. A score is calculated for each peak, including the relative depth of the valleys and the sharpness of the peak. Regions thus obtained are evaluated by a *looseness criterion* related to the fraction of border cells to total cells. The segmentation with minimum looseness is chosen. Regions with size greater than a threshold are scanned with a 32×32 window. The data structure includes regions, boundaries, and ver-

Fig. 6. A. Boundaries of elementary regions. B. Areas with high density of boundary points. C. Result of removing small holes.

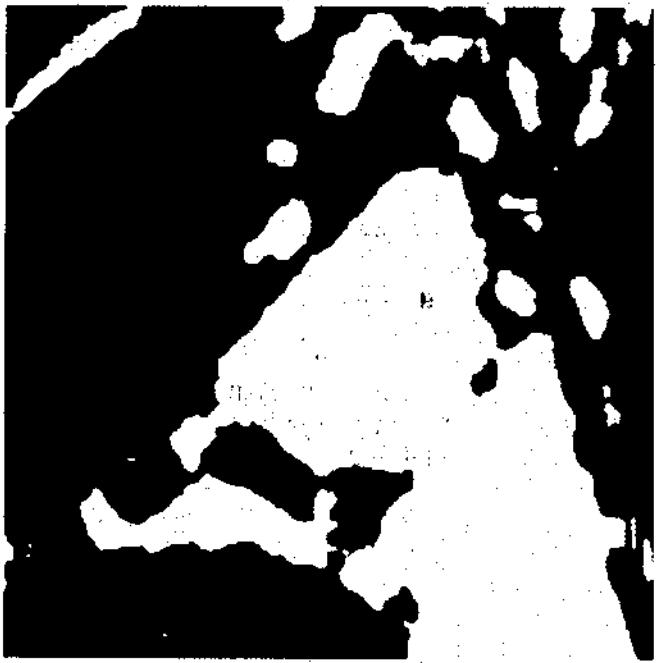
and thin peninsulas. D. High-contrast texture area consisting of elementary regions. (From Nagao and Matsuyama 1980.)



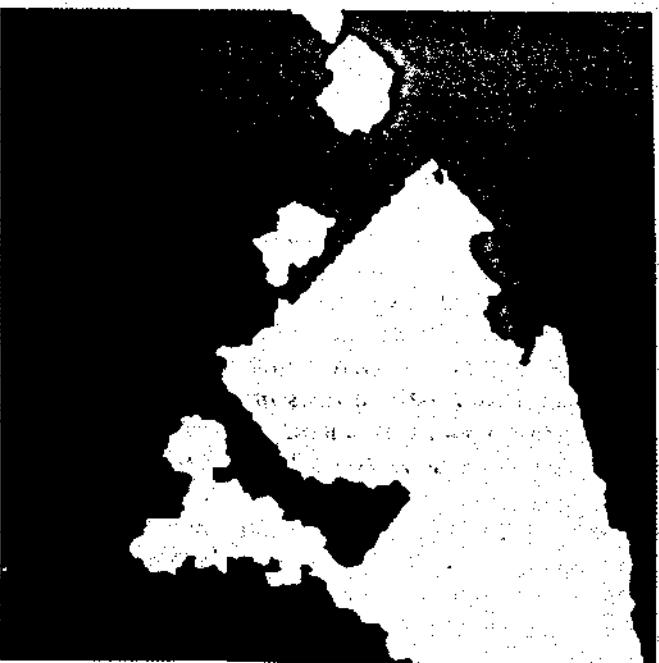
A



C

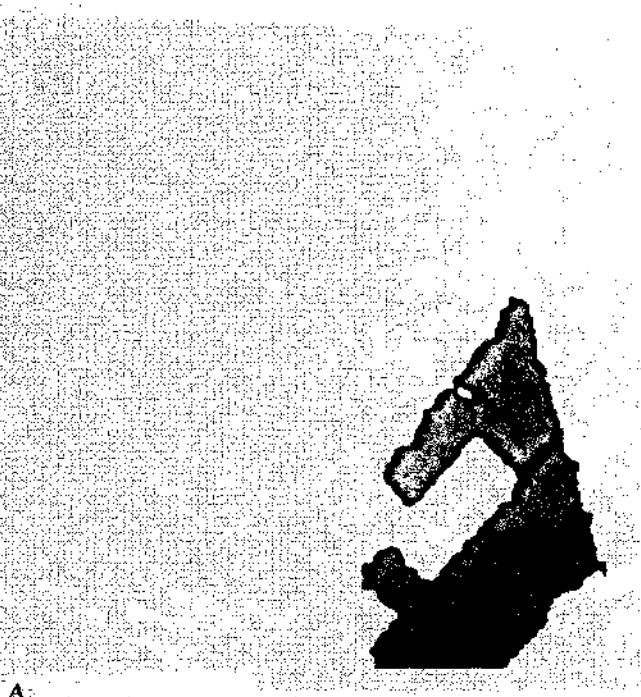


B



D

Fig. 7. A. Recognized crop fields. B. Recognized bare soil fields. (From Nagao and Matsuyama 1980.)



A



B

ties. Boundaries are four-neighbor connected and segmented into straight lines with iterative end-point fits.

Only primary features are in the data structure. Regions are represented by area; mean intensity of red, green, blue; degree of texture; contour length; center of mass; number of holes; scatter matrix of pixel positions; and MBR. The degree of texture is the mean value of the Laplacian for texture, described above. The scattering matrix is the covariance matrix of pixel positions, equivalent to an ellipse fit. Boundary segments include chain code, length, and contrast. Vertices include position and number of boundary segments. Holes have contour length. Line segments have distance from origin (rho), orientation, length, and positions of end points. Topological relations have pointers among regions and boundary curves and vertices, together with subset/superset relations for holes. In order to retrieve regions with similar color, a history of the tree of segmentations is maintained.

Calculation of properties of merged regions is described. Various secondary features can be computed easily from primary features. Only primary

features are in the database. There are three functions for retrieving regions: ALL-FETCH, THERE-IS, and T-FETCH, corresponding to all regions from a set with specified properties, the first region of a set with specified properties, and all regions adjacent to a region respectively. In two results of segmentation, there are 339 and 391 regions, occupying about 90 KB for data structures.

There are four object classes: sky, trees, buildings with subobjects (windows), and roads with subobjects (cars). A plan image is generated by taking regions with large areas, called *keypatches*. The system tentatively merges all small patches to adjacent keypatches by choosing the highest score based on similarity of color and compactness of merged region. No semantic information is used in the merge.

The plan formulated by the bottom-up process is a set of object labels for keypatches and estimates of their correctness. The top-down process examines these interpretations and analyzes small, detailed structures in the context of large patches that have already been interpreted. When the top-down process makes a significant decision, the bottom-up process is activated to reevaluate the plan.

Fig. 8. A. Candidate areas for forests. B. Result of extracting large connected areas. Each area consists of a set of elementary regions. C. Result of ex-

tending shadow-making regions in candidate areas.

D. Recognized forest areas. (From Nagao and Matsuyama 1980.)

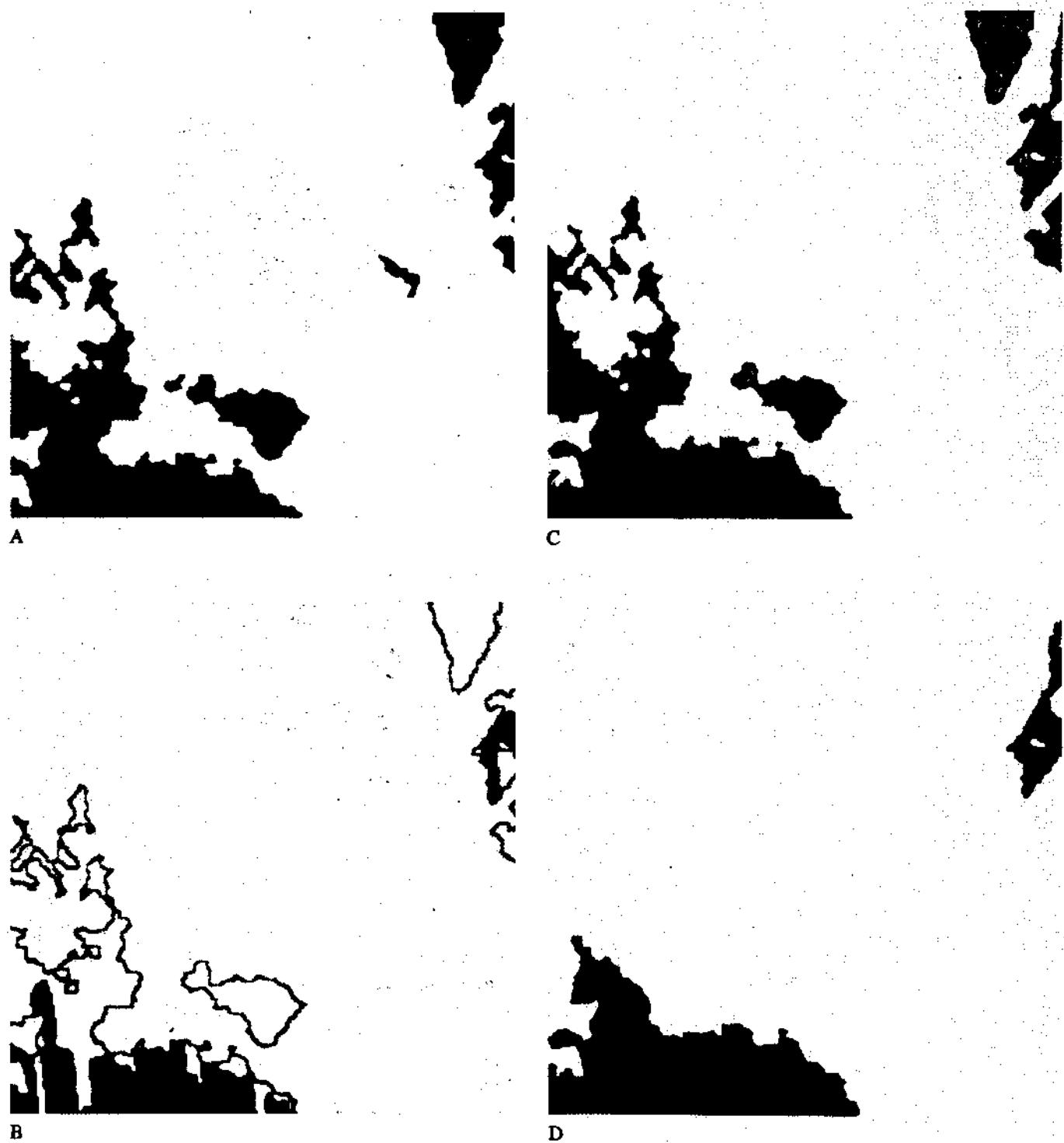
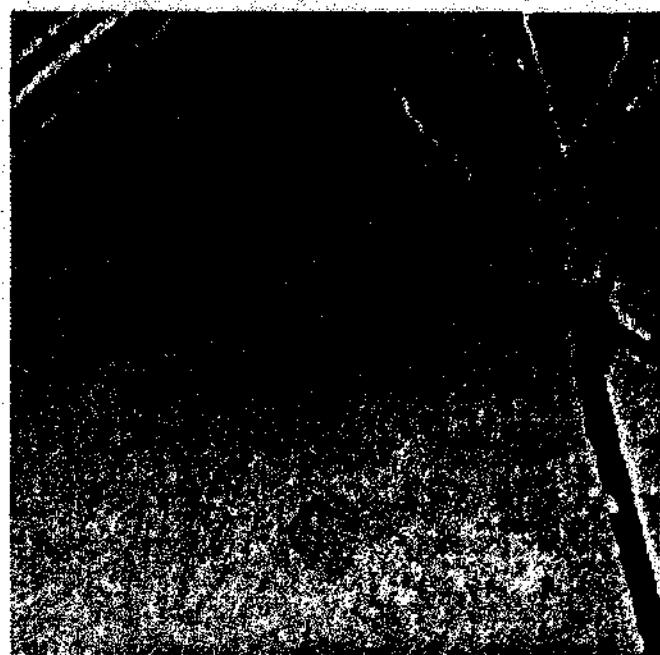


Fig. 9. Recognized grasslands. Some regions are recognized as crop field and forest area as well as

grassland. These conflicts are resolved by the system. (From Nagao and Matsuyama 1980.)

Fig. 10. Major roads isolated by program. (From Nagao and Matsuyama 1980.)



Rules for the plan are unary properties of objects and binary relations between objects. The plan manager computes a correctness value for every applicable rule applied to applicable regions in the plan image. Evaluation of relations takes place only after labels of regions are assigned.

In the top-down phase, each rule applied to each applicable region produces a score and an action to be registered on the agenda. At each step of analysis, the action with the highest score is executed and the database is changed. The agenda controls activation of production rules according to changes in the database. The agenda is updated whenever the database is changed. Each time, the number of tests is (the number of regions) times (the number of surfaces), that is, several hundreds times several tens, a total of thousands. In order to decrease computation, a coarse-to-fine analysis is made in a scene phase and an object phase. When a keypatch is labeled, the agenda activates the scene phase to reexamine keypatches that have not been interpreted. When a patch of an object is labeled, the agenda activates the object phase for that object to examine

patches touching the patch just labeled. As a result, the number of tests at each stage is several tens.

Each rule has a condition and an action. The condition is a fuzzy predicate. There are TO-DONE and IP-DONE rules, corresponding to antecedent and consequent theorems of PLANNER (Hewitt 1968). Since only one region at a time is examined, there is a problem with global shape involving multiple regions. The system uses three mechanisms: the plan image; sets of patches retrieved from the database; and special rules (e.g., extracting the shape of a building).

The world model is a network of knowledge blocks that define objects, materials, and concepts. Production rules are divided into subsets stored in particular knowledge blocks; the subset for scene-level analysis is stored in the block SCENE, the subset to analyze objects is stored with the object.

Results are shown for several scenes. Patches with area greater than 300 pixels are keypatches. There were 57 rules in total. Figures 18-23 show examples of three scenes processed. A region of the building is initially assigned a high correctness value for SKY

Fig. 11. Recognized cars.
(From Nagao and Matsuyama 1980.)

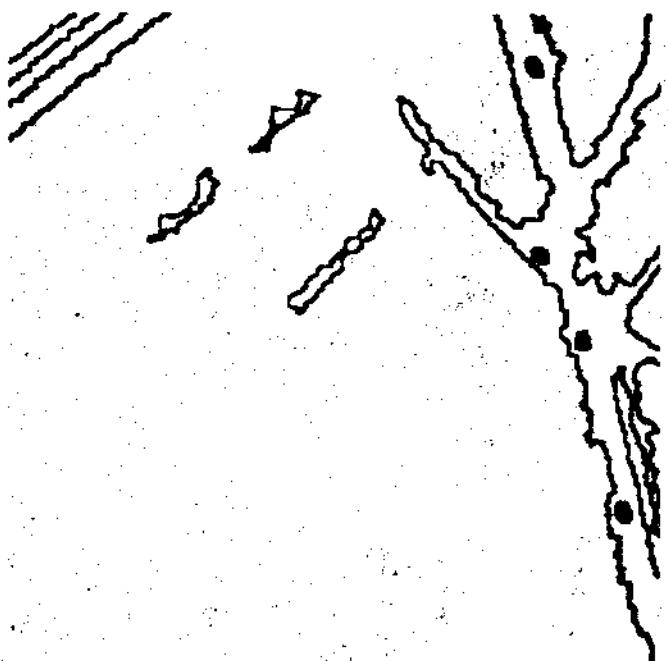


Figure 11

Fig. 12. Candidates for residential areas. (From Nagao and Matsuyama 1980.)

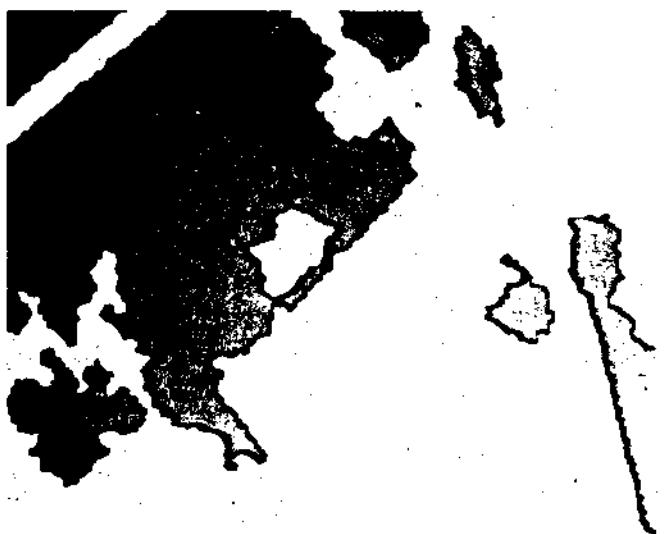


Figure 12

Fig. 13. Residential areas.
(From Nagao and Matsuyama 1980.)

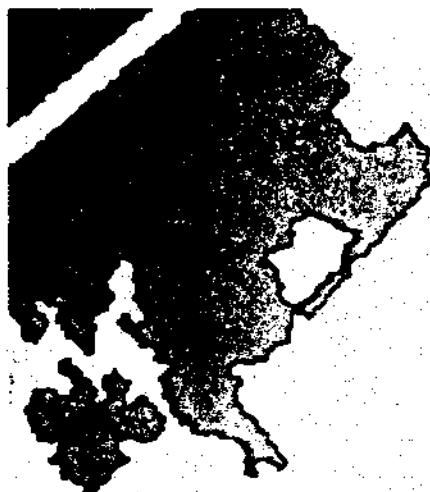


Figure 13

Fig. 14. Houses recognized by the HOUSE1 subsystem.
Since the conditions are very strict, only about half the houses are recognized.
(From Nagao and Matsuyama 1980.)

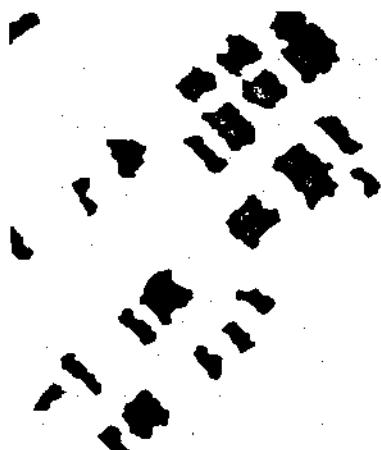


Figure 14

Fig. 15. Houses newly recognized by the HOUSE2 subsystem, using the multispectral properties of the already recognized houses (see Fig. 14). (From Nagao and Matsuyama 1980.)

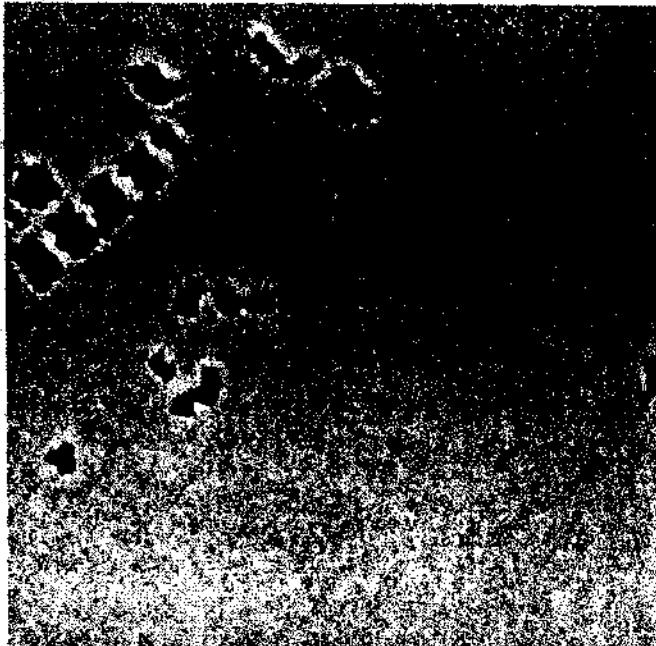


Figure 15

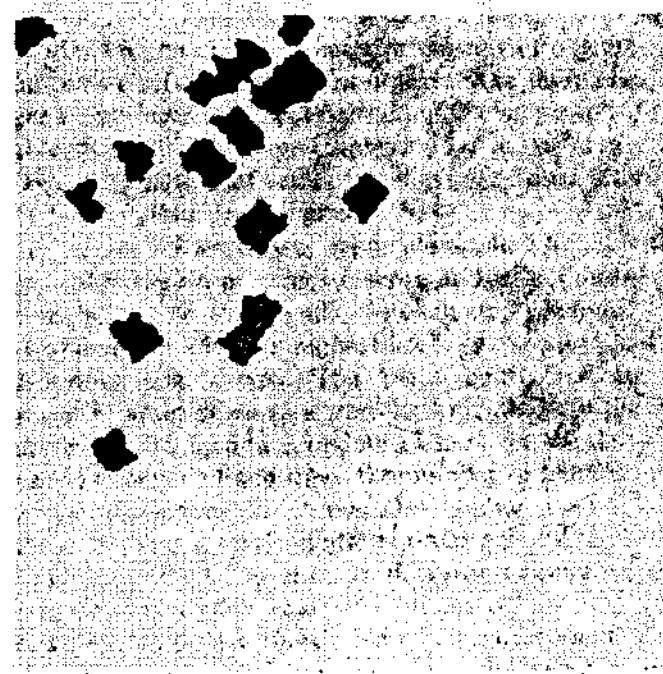


Figure 16

Fig. 16. Houses newly recognized by the HOUSE3 subsystem. Two adjacent roofs of a house are merged into one region. (From Nagao and Matsuyama 1980.)

Fig. 17. Houses newly recognized by the HOUSE4 subsystem. "Missing houses" in the large residential area are recognized. (From Nagao and Matsuyama 1980.)

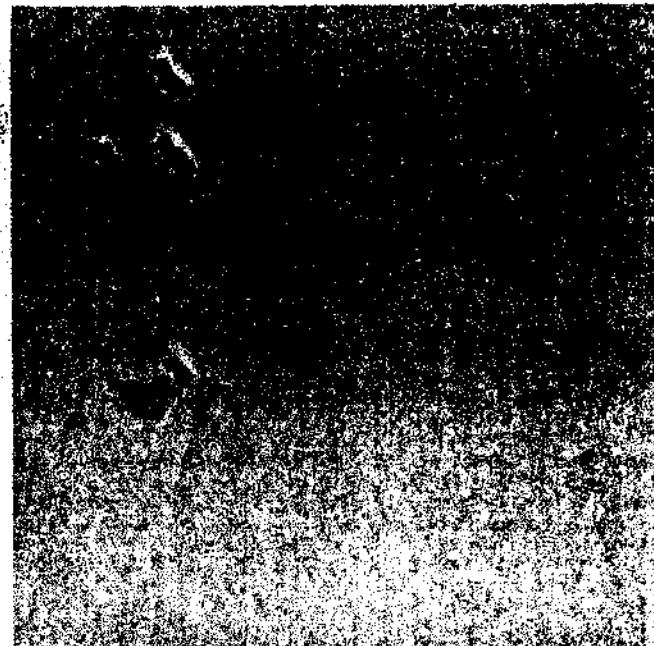


Figure 17

because it is bright and gray. In the revised plan, it has a high correctness value for BUILDING because of the relation between building and sky. Horizon is detected by a production rule. The horizon appears to be found as the lower bound of the sky by distinguishing SKY from ROAD.

The system does well overall. It demonstrates one of a few examples of reasonable performance on scenes of moderate complexity for a handful of rather different images. Ohta's thesis does not describe the rules themselves, except by a listing, or help very much in analyzing the system's performance and expected limitations. There are only a few objects in the model.

Models for analysis follow. The ROAD model has subobjects: car, shadow. It is made of asphalt, concrete. It has properties: horizontally long, touching lower edge of picture. It has relations: below horizon. The CAR in the ROAD model is horizontally long, dark, and above the ROAD. The SKY model has properties: not touching lower edge, shining, blue or gray, not texture, and touching upper edge. It has relations: linear boundary on the lower side. TREE is made of leaves. It has properties: in the

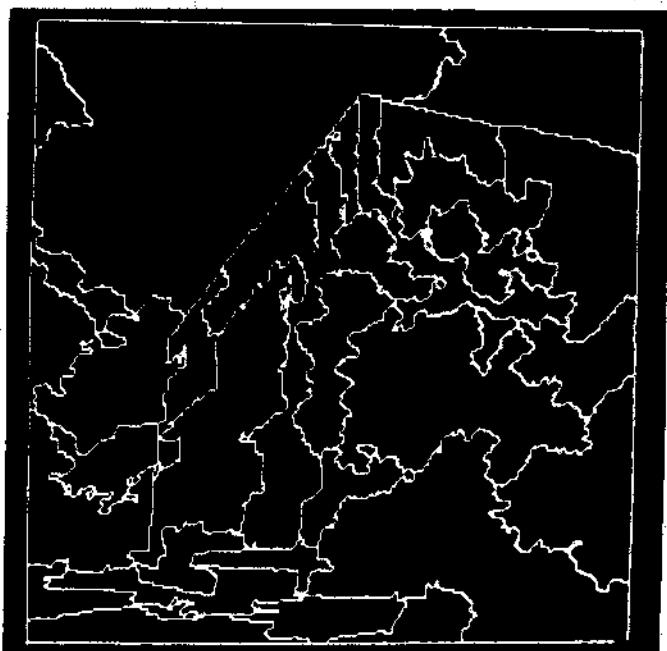
*Fig. 18. Result of the rule-based analysis: example 1.
A. Digitized input scene,
basis for identifications*



A

*shown in Fig. 19. B. Result
of preliminary segmentation.
C. Plan image. D. Re-
sult of meaningful segmen-*

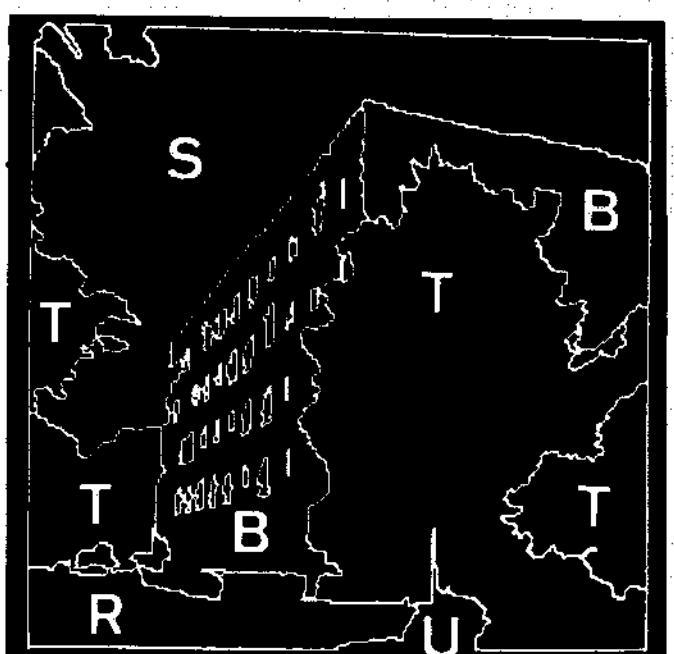
*tation. S = sky; T = tree;
R = road; B = building;
U = unknown. (From Ohta
1980.)*



C



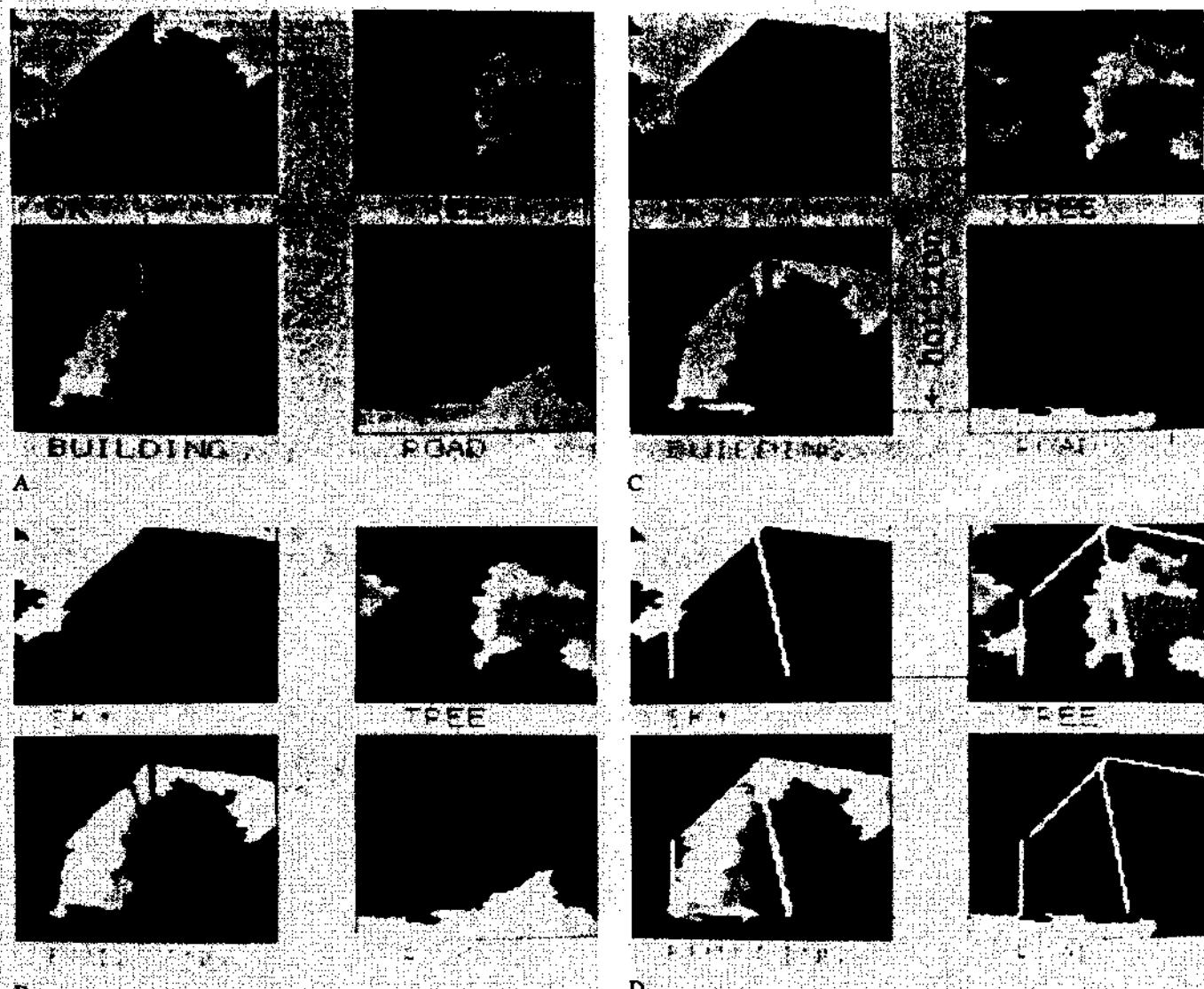
B



D

Fig. 19. Plans generated for the scene in Fig. 18. **A.** First plan, obtained by using only the property rules. **B.** Plan obtained after using the relation rules. **C.** Plan obtained after extracting the horizon by the top-down analysis. **D.** Outlines of the building

extracted by the top-down analysis. (From Ohta 1980.)



middle of the picture, heavy texture. The BUILDING is made of concrete, tile, or brick. It has subobjects: WINDOW. Its properties are in the middle of the picture, many holes, many straight lines, hole straight lines. It has a relation of linear upper boundary with the sky.

Some limitations of Ohta's system follow. The quality of segmentation is weak. Thin linear features that do not show up in histograms are important (e.g., in identification of cars). The description of texture is weak. The organization of relations among patches is weak. For example, colinearity of window

boundaries is not determined. Interpretation is image-dependent. Models are image-dependent. The model for road (touching the bottom edge of the picture) is too specific to be useful. Models are weak. The model for car depends on a car being on the road. It has the relation that the car appears dark relative to the road, which is not adequate even for this domain. It makes weak use of shape. A human would identify the car's make in many cases; the system's performance is inferior. There are models for few objects. The assumption that a single region contains only one object is not realistic. The ap-

Fig. 20. Result of the rule-based analysis: example 2.
A. Digitized input scene.



A

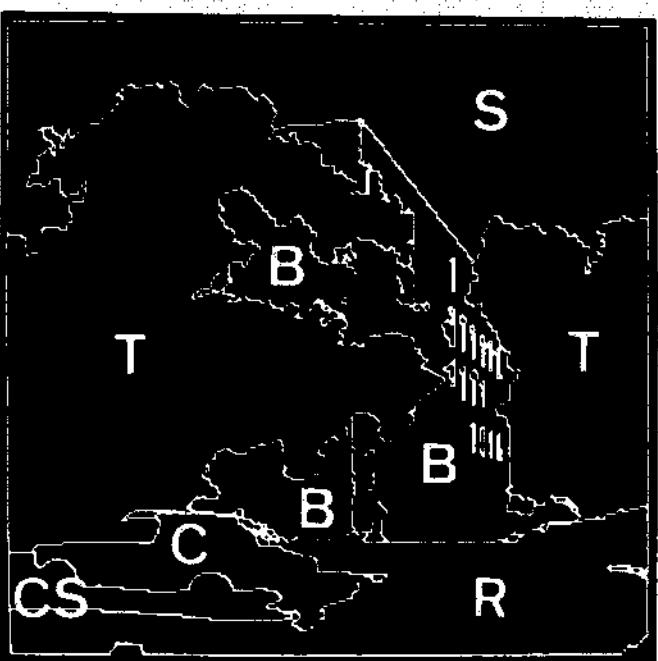
mentation. C. Plan image.
D. Result of meaningful

segmentation. S = sky;
T = tree; B = building;

R = road; C = car; CS =
car shadow. (From Ohta

1980.)

C



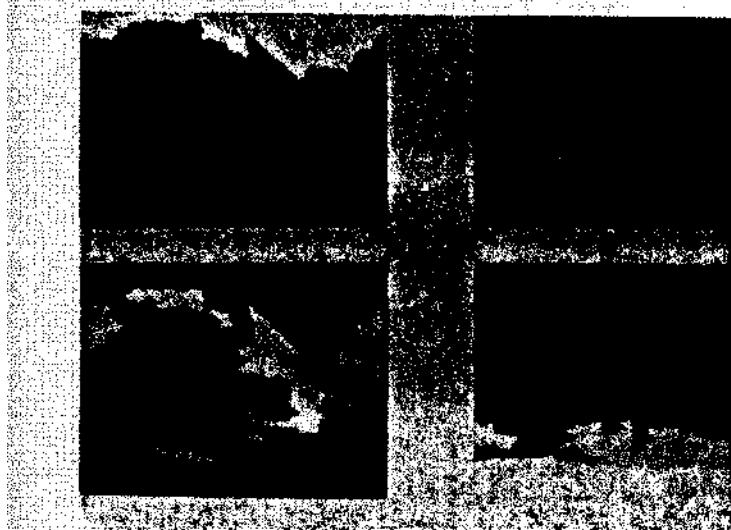
D

Binford

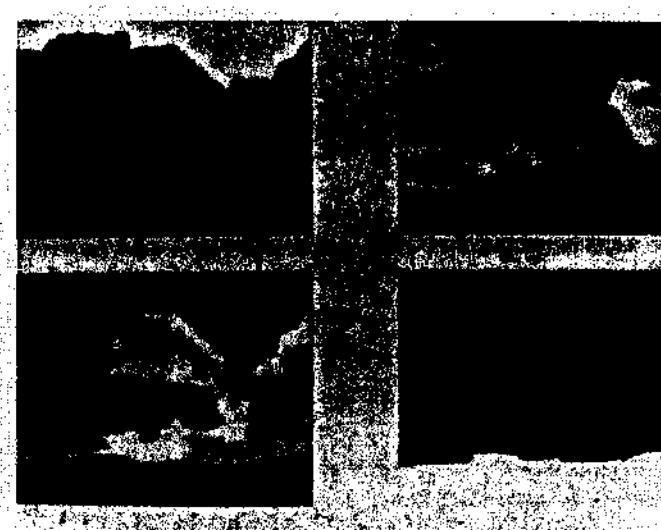
Fig. 21. Plans generated for the scene in Fig. 20.
A: First plan, obtained using only the property rules. **B:**

plan obtained using the relation rules. **C:** Plan obtained after extracting the horizon from the top-down

analysis. **D:** Outlines of the building extracted by the top-down analysis. (From Ohta 1980.)



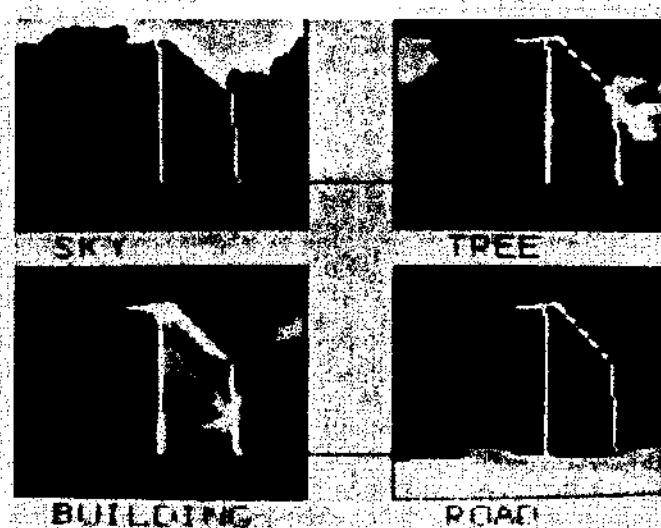
A



B



C



D

approach is ineffective in many situations in which fine details determine object labels.

2.4. ACRONYM-BROOKS

ACRONYM (Brooks 1981) is an implemented interpretation system containing a substantial core of fundamental mechanisms that are powerful and general.

Its performance demonstrated thus far depends on domain-independent capabilities, not on special domain-dependent tricks. ACRONYM as it stands is a large system that is part of a larger scheme for a general vision system. I am biased by my enthusiasm for ACRONYM, which is meant to be a general vision system. This objective requires an enormous effort involving all levels of a vision system—an effort beyond the state of the art. Substantial progress

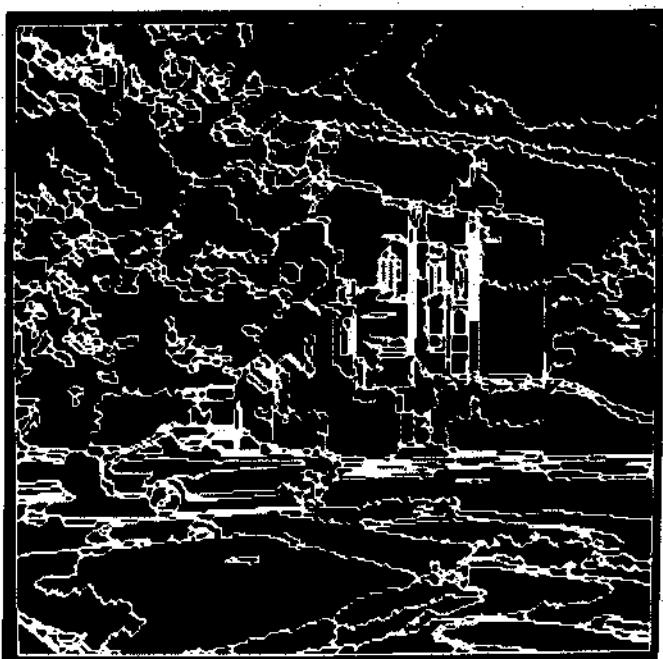
Fig. 22. Result of the rule-based analysis: example 3.
A. Digitized input scene.
B. result of preliminary seg-

mentation. C. Plan image.
D. Result of meaningful
segmentation. S = sky;
T = tree; B = building;

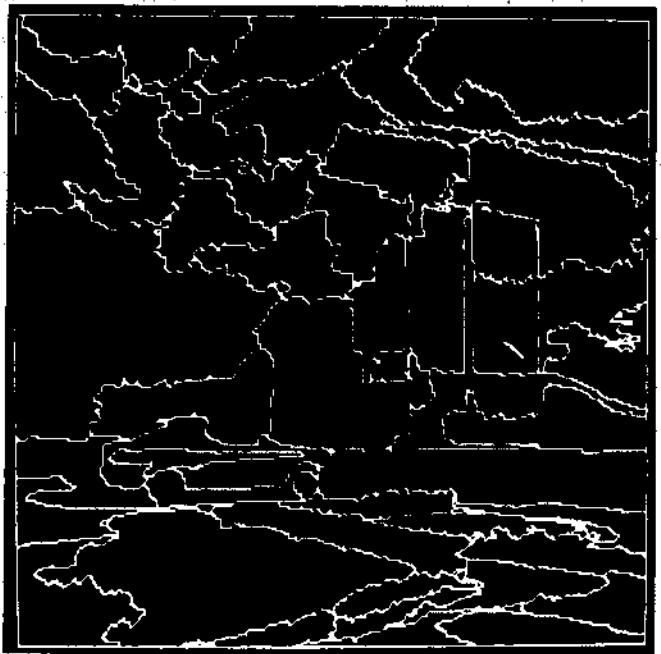
R = road; C = car; U =
unknown; CS = car
shadow. (From Ohta
1980.)



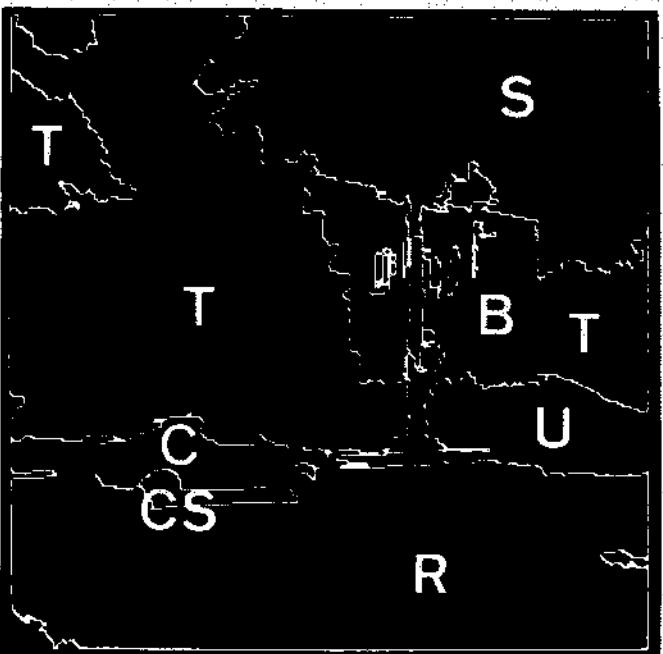
A



B



C

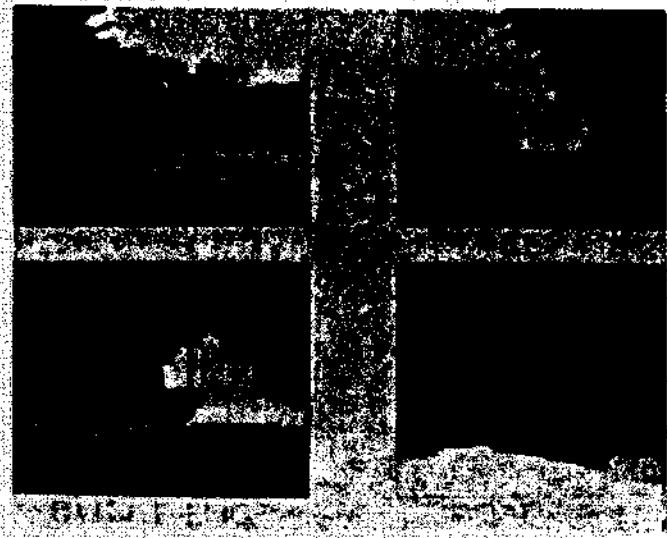


D

Fig. 23. Plans generated for the scene in Fig. 22.
A. First plan, obtained using only the property rules. **B.**

Plan obtained after using the relation rules. C. Plan obtained after extracting the horizon by the top-

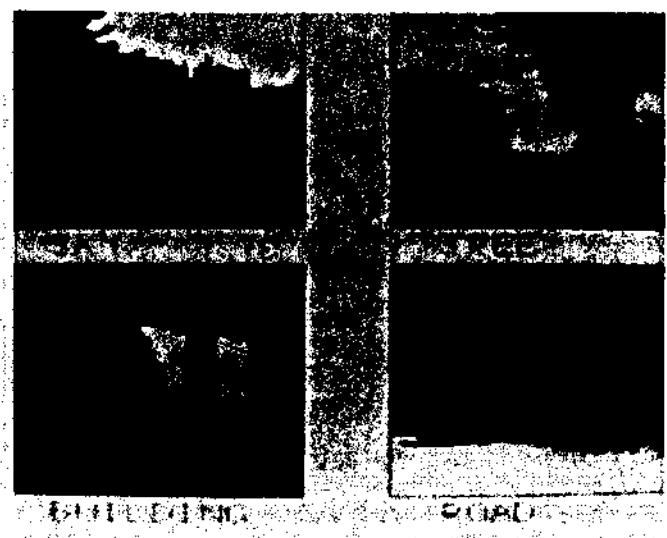
down analysis. D. Outlines of the building extracted by the top-down analysis.
(From Ohta 1980.)



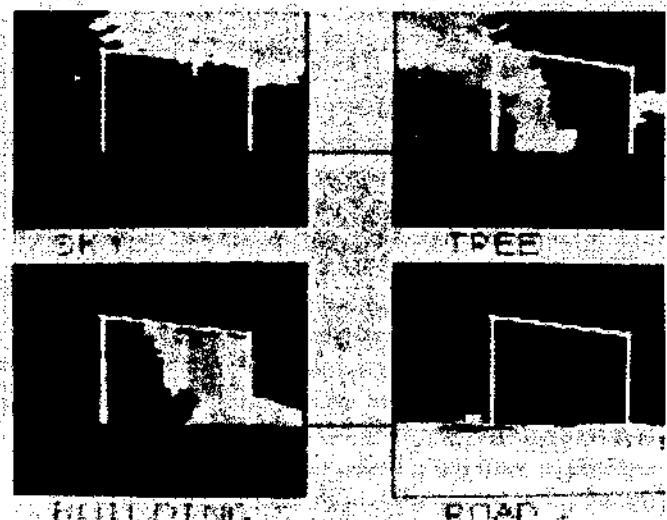
A



C



B



D

has been achieved. Immediate plans call for mechanisms that will greatly increase ACRONYM's power and breadth.

Objectives for ACRONYM include the attainment of three-dimensional interpretation, a rigorous scientific basis, and high performance. Important applications are typically difficult. Carefully built high-performance modules enable generality. It is intended to provide an option for a standard system,

with a user base providing technology transfer. It has a large general core of powerful capabilities on which to base applications. Interpretation is generic with respect to object class, providing commonality of programs for similar applications and providing a means for inspection to distinguish essential from cosmetic flaws. Interpretation is generic with respect to observation, that is, ACRONYM is insensitive to viewpoint and flexible with varied sensor inputs.

Mechanisms use special-case information and data. ACRONYM is complete. In the sense that interpretation makes use of total information, data, and knowledge, including multisensor data, knowledge of experts, geometric models of objects, and prediction of expectations. It incorporates powerful use of shape in modules for edges, texture and image organization, depth, shape from shading, and shape from shape. It incorporates mathematics and physics. The system is a critical mass effort over a continuing period, during which collaboration and applications are sought. It is engineered for easy use, facilitating input in the form of geometric models and rule bases, automatic programming, and user aids.

A user should program ACRONYM using geometric models and geometric task specifications, a common language natural to both user and ACRONYM. The user refers to models in a geometric database and shows examples of typical members of the object class. ACRONYM should infer specific and generic properties of the object class and contexts, especially causal relations. ACRONYM constructs perceptual programs to carry out the assigned task. ACRONYM should be general and generalizable in the sense that problem-specific information can be embedded in general, problem-independent mechanisms that provide for a natural decomposition of problems into physically meaningful elements. A core built up from a few problem domains should cover most capabilities required for other domains.

ACRONYM has been shown to be successful on a few images of aircraft in aerial images but not enough to warrant a claim of generality. Figure 24 shows an example with high resolution. Figure 25 shows an example with poor resolution. The ribbon finder has problems with the poor-resolution image, but ACRONYM recognizes the three aircraft for which ribbons are reasonable. In another image like Fig. 25, the ribbon finder did not turn up any adequate ribbon descriptions.

In a real sense, ACRONYM reasons from first principles. ACRONYM has a general core in that its rules implement algebra and projective geometry. There are no special rules for aerial images or aircraft. There is no profound reason why ACRONYM could not recognize aircraft in images taken at ground level, although it will probably break when

tested on such images because of bugs or missing capabilities that were not exercised previously. For example, at ground level the fuselage appears more or less the same as from above. Wings are less observable, but engine pods and tail are more prominent. The rule base will need to be extended considerably in dealing with varied object classes, (e.g., manufactured parts, vehicles, and buildings).

ACRONYM has viewpoint-independent, three-dimensional object models in the form of part/whole graphs, in terms of generalized cylinder primitives. ACRONYM represents object classes, for which subclasses and specific objects are represented as restrictions, by constraints in the form of symbolic expressions with numeric type.

ACRONYM searches for instances of models in images. It employs geometric reasoning in the form of a rule-based, problem-solving system. Geometry is the key, while the rule-based system is simply a way of implementing geometry. A formal representation of geometry is probably necessary to make a compact and coherent set of rules in order to get additivity and consistency in a rule base. Despite claims to the contrary, it seems clear that a rule-based system in itself does not aid in making additivity and consistency of reasoning. Building a vision system is 1% a system effort of the sort familiar in computer science and 99% basic science.

ACRONYM predicts appearances of models in terms of ribbons and ellipses. It uses an edge finder to make observations of ribbons and ellipses in images. ACRONYM finds observed ribbons consistent with predicted ribbons and restricts interpretations to those which are parts of clusters consistent with predicted structures of ribbons. It interprets in three dimensions by enforcing constraints of the three-dimensional model. Thus, to identify aircraft it matches observed ribbons to predicted ribbons for wings and fuselage, then finds clusters of ribbons that are consistent with the combined wings and fuselage of a three-dimensional aircraft model.

ACRONYM makes predictions that are viewpoint-insensitive in the form of symbolic constraint expressions with variables. One mechanism of viewpoint-insensitive prediction is the use of observables that are invariant and quasi-invariant over large ranges of viewing angle. ACRONYM does not generate all

Fig. 24. Illustration of ACRONYM's performance on a high-resolution image. (From Brooks 1981.)

ACRONYM's task was to identify the aircraft.

ACRONYM's output was:

ACRONYM found the aircraft.

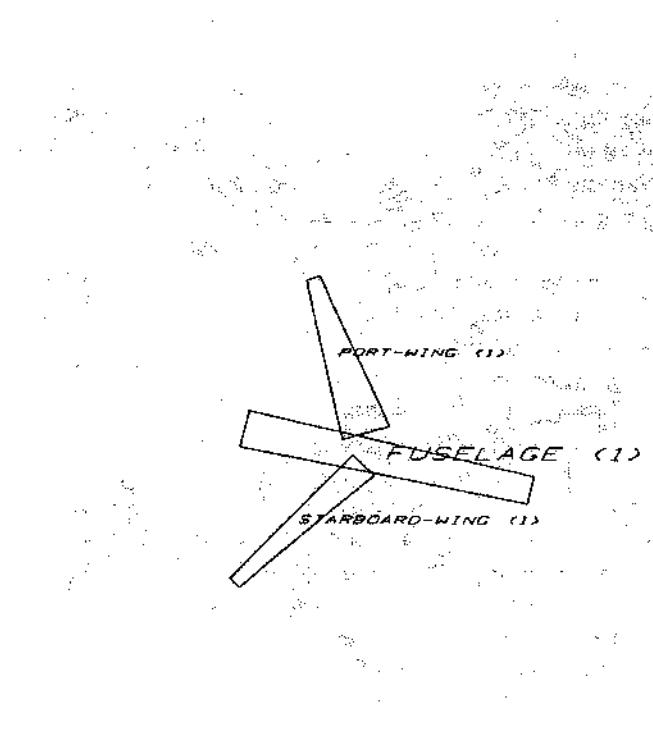
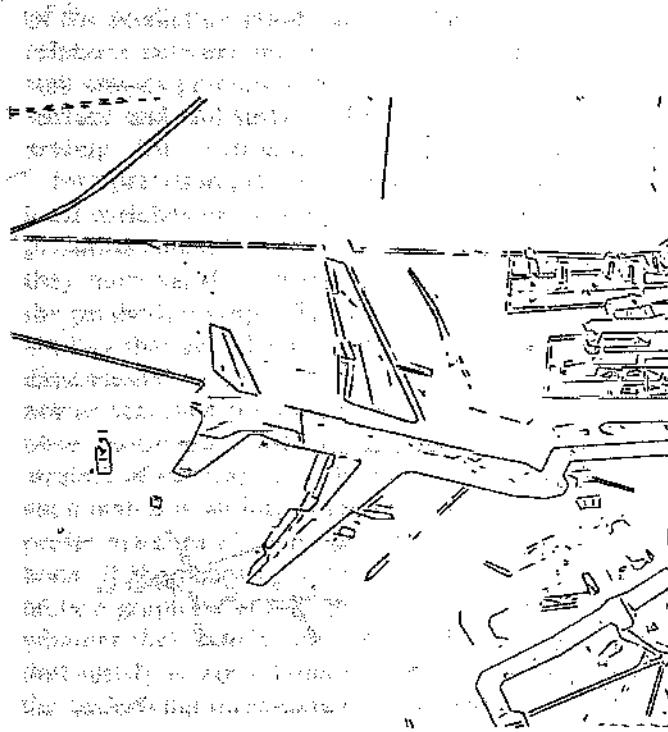
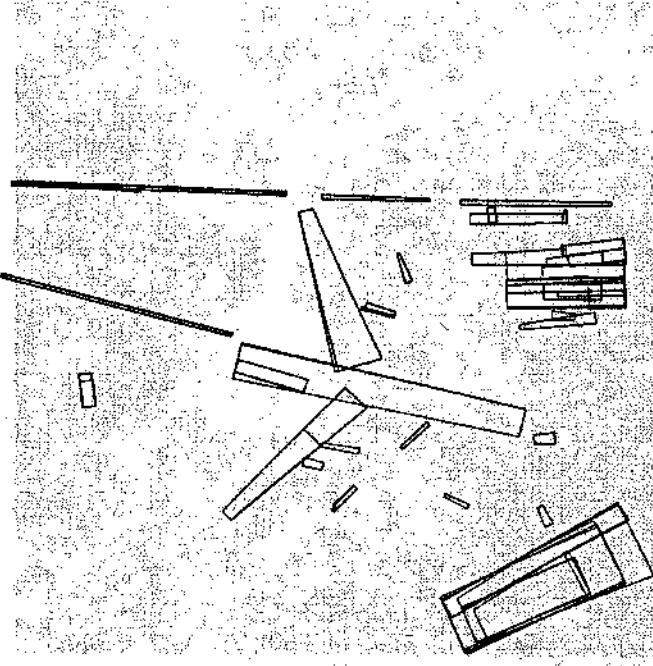
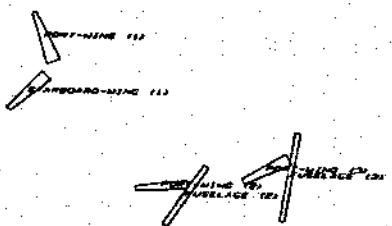
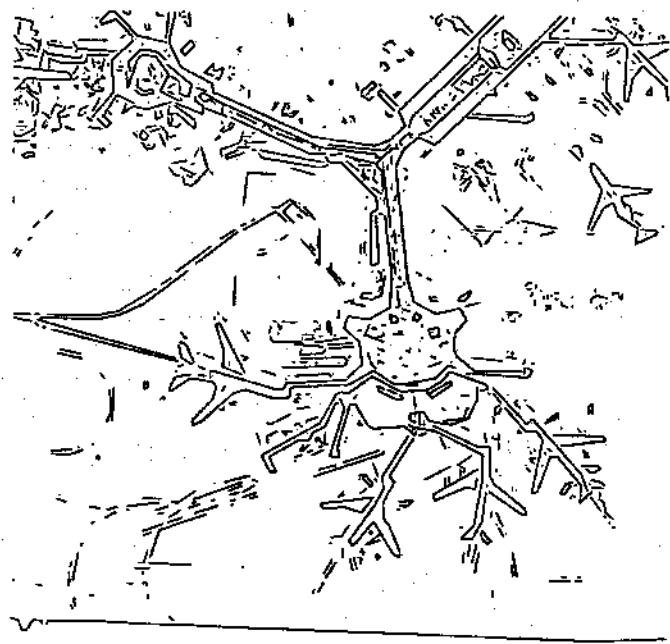
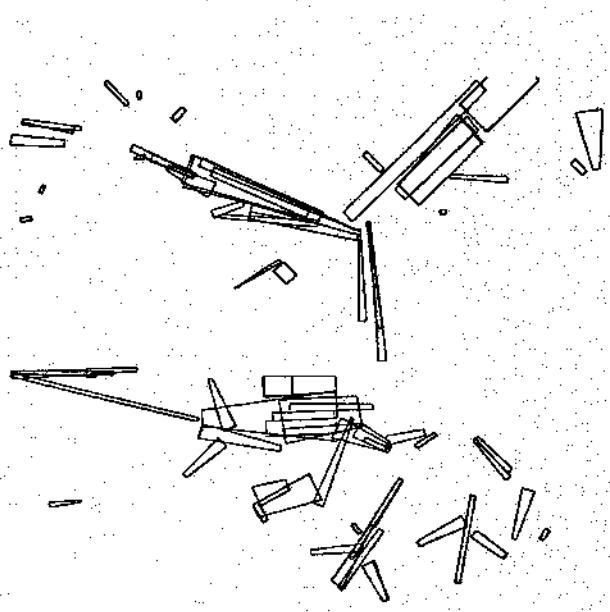


Fig. 25. ACRONYM's performance on a low-resolution image. (From Brooks 1981.)



possible views of an object. Total prediction has combinatorial complexity. For a polyhedron with n distinct faces, there are 2^n views. Instead, ACRONYM predicts partial views for individual faces of which there are of order n . Coherence of several features comes from merging constraints. The image-shape descriptors are invariant under image rotation. To generate predictions, ACRONYM starts with models in their coordinate frames. All contours of faces that might be visible are identified. They are transformed into the camera's coordinate frame, with symbolic translations and rotations represented by variables. The system simplifies the corresponding expressions and makes a projective transformation. Visible contours are identified. Relations between these contours are predicted, and the shape of the contour is predicted. Back constraints that relate image observables to model parameters are generated. Relations between ribbons are generated. Each ribbon provides a number of back constraints that combine to constrain model parameters. ACRONYM automatically determines ribbons and ellipses for parts of the object that it determines are most observable. Predictions of feature shapes are nodes of the prediction graph; arcs of the graph are image relations between features. Arcs relate multiple feature shapes predicted for a single cone. The swept surface and end surface of a cone are predicted separately. A prediction is made that they are coincident.

Interpretation proceeds by the combination of local matches of ribbons into clusters. Global interpretations must be consistent in two ways. First, they must satisfy constraints specified by the arcs of the prediction graph. Second, accumulated constraints that each local match imposes on the three-dimensional model must be satisfiable. The interpreter searches for maximum subgraphs of the observation graph that are consistent with constraints of subgraphs of the prediction graph. Each such match is an interpretation graph. The interpreter matches ribbons against predictions of ribbons. It then tries to instantiate arcs of the prediction graph by checking pairs of regions to see whether they satisfy relations predicted. For pairs that satisfy image relations, it merges constraints on the underlying three-dimensional model.

ACRONYM has been used as the basis for a simulator for robot systems and for automated grasping of objects, with a rule base for determining which surfaces are accessible in the initial position, which surfaces are accessible in the final position, and ways to grasp with maximum stability.

The top-down paradigm is only one part of the ACRONYM design. A top-down system is far from general. It is believed that this paradigm can provide only a small part of human performance, even though prediction has been made relatively powerful in ACRONYM by use of predictions that are generic with respect to object class and that are viewpoint-insensitive. The way to a general vision system lies in spatial understanding, as opposed to image understanding. That is, prediction of images and matching at the level of images is inherently limited (a convenient expedient reflecting the weakness of our descriptive mechanisms) but it is not a fundamental approach. Instead, the major part of interpretation is not at the image level but at the level of volumes. Descriptive mechanisms that generate volume descriptions are essential combined with prediction and interpretation at the level of volumes. Certainly stereo, motion parallax, and object motion are important observation capabilities, together with shading. Recent theoretical work on monocular interpretation of surfaces from images (Binford 1981; Lowe and Binford 1981) appear to promise that general mechanisms for generating spatial observations from images will be developed soon to support general vision systems.

Limitations of ACRONYM as a general system follow. ACRONYM has weak segmentation. The ribbon finder determines spurious ribbons. It misses small ribbons. Grouping of ribbons is not done in segmentation, only in interpretation. The line finder and ribbon finder perform badly with texture.

Interpretation is limited. Image prediction and matching are not sufficiently general for scenes with many objects. Interpretation has been tried with only a few objects, and the system models for very few. It tests all pairs of ribbons in establishing relations, ignoring proximity. It has been tried on only a single viewpoint. The top-down paradigm is inadequate for complex scenes.

2.5. SHIRAI

In Shirai's system (1978), obvious edges are found in the entire scene. They are described by straight lines or ellipses. Edge points are found, using one-dimensional profiles; edge points are classified into three types. Averaging is done over small areas, typically 3×3 . The direction of the edge is determined from the gradient. An *edge kernel* is determined by a set of edge points of the same type with similar gradient directions. Continuations of edge kernels must have the same edge type. The tracking phase predicts an edge element and verifies it. Tracking may insert a fictitious edge point at the predicted position. Tracking proceeds in both directions until both ends terminate by connecting to another end. Some edges are extended to fill small gaps.

Curve description has two phases, segmentation and curve fitting. *Segmentation* uses curvature versus arc length along the curve, while *curvature* is defined as the angle difference at a center point between chords a fixed distance on either side (approximately the difference of tangents). The routine finds sequences of high curvature to place knots. It tries to classify curves: if sagitta is large, it is a curve; if angle change is small, it is a line. It tries to merge adjacent undefined or curved segments. A method symmetric in x and y is used to fit curves. Curves are fit with ellipses. If the search does not converge, the number of parameters is decreased, successively fitting a circle and straight line.

Analysis of the scene starts from the most obvious object and proceeds to the next most obvious. For object recognition, it finds the most obvious feature, then finds a secondary feature to verify identity and determine object range. It then finds other lines on the object. For recognition of a lamp, the program locates the lamp shade, then looks for the trunk of the lamp, which supports the shade, then the lamp base.

The objects in Fig. 26 include a lamp, a book stand, a cup, a telephone, and small objects. For the lamp, the primary feature is a bright elongated strip for the shade. Secondary features are a pair of vertical edges corresponding to the trunk and the contour of the lamp base. The primary feature for the book stand is a cluster of long vertical lines in a rec-

tangular region. Secondary features are lines connected to the verticals. The cup has a pair of vertical edges; secondary features include the ends of the cup connected to the verticals. The telephone has an ellipse for the dial and one outside the numerals; secondary features include features surrounding the ellipses. Small objects have shape and size of contour as primary features; secondary features are shape details and light intensity of the surface.

Small objects such as pens or erasers are tried after large objects are found or many edges are obtained. Otherwise, a small object might be confused with part of a large object. The system finds more edges by decreasing the reliability level and looking in delimited areas. The system may take a close-up image where necessary.

Experiments have been conducted successfully with a range of positions and orientations of objects and varied lighting conditions.

As with previous systems, this system has substantial limitations as a general vision system. The edge finder is adequate for this task, but it would not perform well in complex scenes; the system cannot deal effectively with texture; and the system has no organization of related edges. Interpretation is likewise limited. There are only image models, not object models; there are only few objects; and the analysis is top-down, which is reasonable for few objects.

2.6. BALLARD, BROWN, AND FELDMAN

Ballard, Brown, and Feldman (1978) use image models in locating ships at docks and in locating ribs in chest x-rays. Geometric constraints are used. The system is oriented to answering queries; the level of detail is determined by the query. Only a portion of the image is interpreted. The system is structured in three levels: (1) the model; (2) the sketchmap synthesized during image analysis (it relates the model and the image); and (3) image data structures, including images at different resolutions and spectral components, texture images, and edge images.

The structure is similar to that of VISIONS (see below). Perhaps the main difference is that in VISIONS, segmentation is made to a level determined by the model so that the image will be understood as

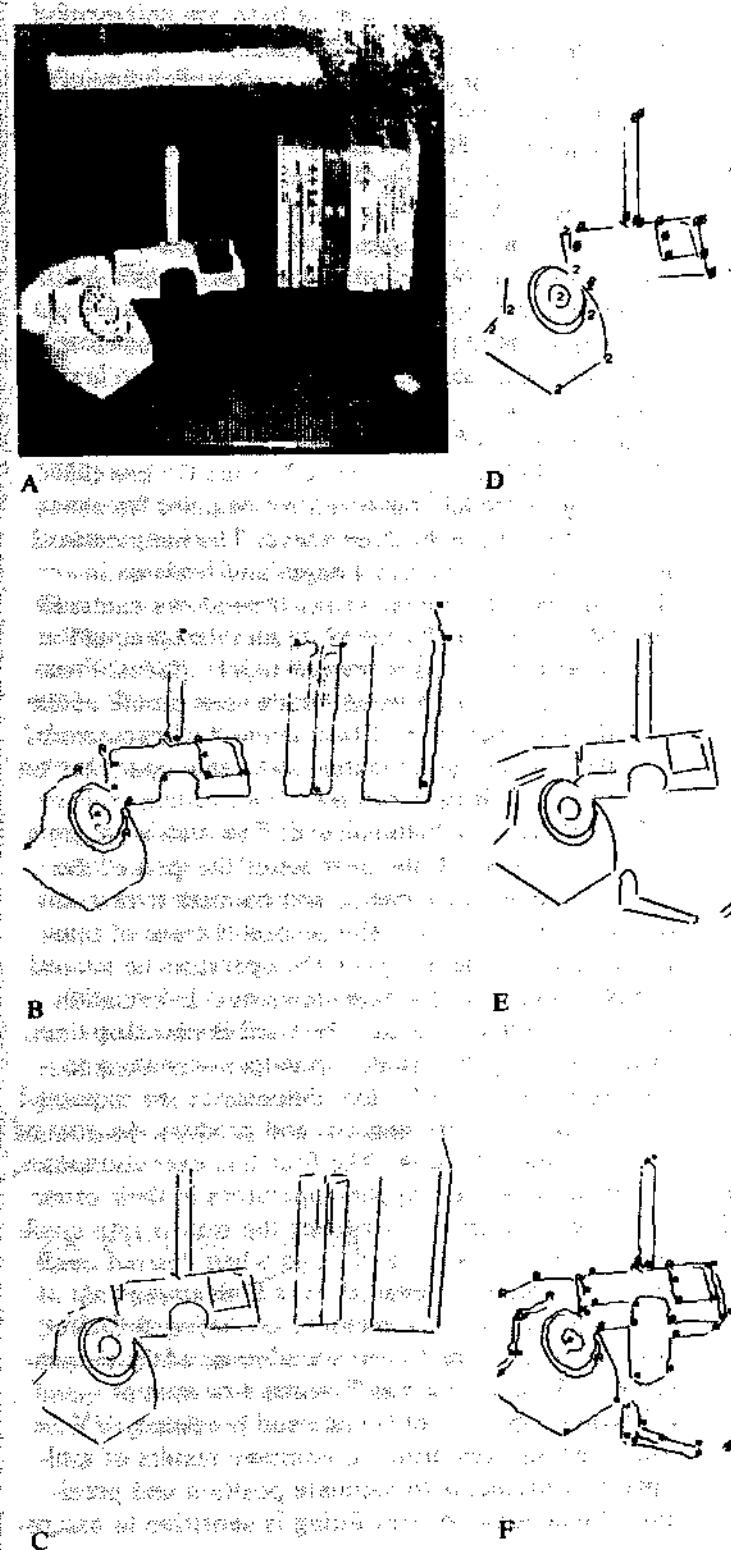
Fig. 26. An example of the recognition process: A. Original scene. B. Edges found in cycle 1. C. Description. D. Recogni-

tion. E. Description in cycle 2. F. Edges found in cycle 4. G. Recognition. 0 = lamp; 1 = book stand; 2 = telephone; 3 = cup; 4 =

pipe; 5 = pen, pencil, ball-point pen, felt-tip pen.

process. (From Shirai 1978.)

H. Description of edges found without feedback from the recognition



fully as possible. Here, the query determines the level of detail.

Links encode constraint relations. They include the probability that the relationship holds and include the expected value of the relationship. For example, SHIP ADJACENT DOCK is a constraint with a probability and an expected distance. A node may have a cost for evaluation, depending on its operand nodes. This allows cost-benefit analysis. Locations are delimited by union and intersection. Constraints are two-dimensional.

Control involves synthesis of a sketchmap. Queries take the form of user-written executive programs. Procedure invocation is based on a description of a procedure's capabilities, together with preconditions and postconditions. The executive decides which procedure to run based on cost-benefit, that is, the lowest cost procedure that meets preconditions. Procedure descriptions include slots that must be filled, slots the procedure can fill, cost and accuracy of the procedure, and the a priori reliability of the procedure.

The user program is responsible for "strategic" resource allocation beyond the executive level. No single domain-independent problem solving is used.

One example is discovering the location of docked ships. A photo with matching map is used; registration is done manually. The constraint is used that ships are parallel to docks at half a ship's width. Template matching was the only visual technique; the center is estimated midway between the locations at which correlation goes above threshold and goes below threshold.

In finding ribs in chest x-rays, only lower edges of ribs are found. There are procedures to locate parabolic rib segments, to translate and verify adjacent ribs, and to translate without verifying.

The representations used are (1) straight lines: ordered list of points, list of segments, circular lists of points, and (2) region boundaries: y list consisting of a y value followed by x values for entering and exiting region.

The operators included are correlation template matching, Hough, Hueckel, distance of point from segment, segment parallel to segment, union and intersection of regions.

The system is special-case and not intended to be a general vision system. Its limitations as a general vision system are many.

2.7. THE VERIFICATION VISION SYSTEM·BOLLES

The verification vision (VV) system (Bolles 1976) uses object models and image models. It is intended for inspection and visual control in repetitive manufacturing tasks. The VV system makes use of three-dimensional models, but it requires that sensed images be very similar to image models. Thus, for a camera that is 1 m from an object, the position of the object may vary by about ± 1 cm, and its orientation may vary by $\pm 15^\circ$, but there may not be major shifts in appearance or major changes in occlusion. The major reason for that restriction is that VV's primary visual operator is area correlation of small windows of an image with reference windows (Moravec 1980).

An object model contains a set of point features and their locations in three space. The image model includes a set of training images and features in those images. Features are small windows centered around elements determined by an interest operator (Moravec 1980). This is a weak object model. From the training set, the system builds an estimate of the variations of locations of features and an estimate of the effectiveness of its feature detection operators on the designated image features.

Four stages are distinguished. The first is programming time, in which the user states the goal of the task, calibrates the camera, and chooses potential operator/feature pairs. The second is training time, in which the system applies the operators to several sample pictures and gathers statistical information about their effectiveness. The third is planning time, in which the system ranks operators according to their expected contribution, determines the expected number of operators needed, and predicts the cost of accomplishing the task. The fourth is execution time, in which the system applies operators in their order of cost-effectiveness, combines the results into confidences and precision, and stops when desired confidence has been achieved or cost limit exceeded.

The goal of the task includes achieving sufficient confidence of correct correspondence, adequate precision of location, and sufficiently low cost of achieving required confidence and precision. VV uses least-squares fitting to combine results of multiple measurements to estimate position and precision. Since least-squares fitting is sensitive to assign-

ment errors, a Bayesian estimation scheme is used to choose assignments with few errors. Two sorts of information are used in making correct matches of image features to reference features: (1) confidences obtained from values returned by operators, and (2) relative image position of subsets of features. Because of combinatorics, the second method must be used with small subsets of features. Later, a search for maximal cliques consistent in three-space separations was used. The latter approach is much more satisfying conceptually, since relative image distances are not invariant, and their errors are not predictable without use of a three-dimensional model. Two types of features were studied: (1) cornerlike features obtained by an interest operator and matched by a binary-search correlator (Moravec 1980) and (2) curve features predicted by a geometric model of the object (Miyamoto and Binford 1975) and determined by a curve-verification procedure based on the Hueckel edge operator (Hueckel 1973). The latter were not integrated into the VV system.

The programming of VV problems was automated considerably. The program produces a set of features. The programmer filters out suggested features that are judged unreliable. In gathering statistics, VV displays a reference picture side by side with a training picture, with matching features marked. The system makes its best assignments according to consistent subsets. It asks the user for confirmation. It ranks operators according to an ad hoc quality measure. In execution, it applies operators in order of the measure.

The system is limited in that it primarily depends on small correlation windows as features. Thus, it is restricted in viewpoint. It was intended for a few objects. It uses three-dimensional models of objects, but they are point models and without shape relations.

2.8. FAUGERAS AND PRICE

In the system described by Faugeras and Price (1980), the input is a network of segments from procedures for region-based image segmentation and linear feature extraction. There are about 100–200 total segments of both types. Properties of segments

include average color, simple texture measures, position, orientation, and simple shape measures. Relations between image segments include adjacency, proximity, and relative position. The model description is identical to the network of image segments. If a relation occurs in the model, it is expected to occur in the image description. The model is not a complete description of the scene, but apparently an image model.

Matching is a graph endomorphism. It is solved by stochastic matching (relaxation). Initial compatibilities are computed without relations because labels are not known; they combine weighted differences, taking up to 30 possible labels, or those with compatibility greater than $1/10$ of the best, whichever is fewer. The compatibility measure with relations is computed only with the most likely assignments for the second object (usually only one assignment). Compatibilities are computed as needed. The compatibility measure is the dot product $\mathbf{p} \cdot \mathbf{q}$, where \mathbf{p} is the probability vector $(p(11), p(12), \dots)$ and \mathbf{q} is the prediction vector $(q(11), q(12), \dots)$ for labels li .

It becomes a constrained optimization approached by steepest descent. Macro-iterations of steps are composed in order to make decisions to assign names to units with high probability (above 80%).

It is hard to tell what its performance is for the two images shown by the authors. The system has image-dependent models and is strongly restricted in viewpoint. Segmentation is relatively weak.

2.9. GARVEY

The function of the system described by Garvey (1976) is to locate objects in an office environment in which it is assumed that all objects are known. The system has as input measurements of range, reflectivity at one wavelength, and three color images. The system's strategy is to acquire image samples that might belong to the object, to validate the hypothesis, and to bound the image of the object. The system uses simple, local features rather than structured shape descriptions. It uses contextual relations, for example, a telephone is on a desk, to decrease search and to minimize the set of possibly

ambiguous objects. The approach follows a belief that in a sufficiently restricted environment, a set of local distinguishing features can be found that are effective in initial screening for candidate matches. This depends on having models for all objects and not having many objects.

The system searches for cost-effective strategies of sequences of operators. In acquisition, it chooses an appropriate limited-search window of the image, sampling the image at a density determined by the object's size, maximum range, and least favorable orientation. Estimates are made of the cost of search with various operators and of the likelihood that the operator will be successful and correct. Which operators are effective depends on all objects in the image.

The system is programmed interactively. Objects are shown to the system by outlining them in an image. Objects are automatically characterized by conjunctions of histograms of local surface attributes such as hue, orientation, range and height, and relationships between surfaces. These characterizations provide ingredients for strategies for object finding.

In experiments, this system's performance rests strongly on having depth data and surface orientation derived from depth. To be found, a desk must have a desktop 2.5 ft high and horizontal orientation. For a door, height, orientation, and hue are not enough. Its size and location, together with a vertical rectangle characterization, are essential.

Regions are represented as lists of samples; as a list of vertices of a closed polygon boundary, by a bounding rectangle; and by vertical and horizontal bounding rectangles in space. Objects are represented by distributions of attributes of surfaces, with shape of surfaces and relations between surfaces.

Some limitations of the system follow from the approach of distinguishing features. In choosing simple features that distinguish regions corresponding to objects of interest, it is assumed that there are few objects and that all are known. The interpretation is strongly dependent on depth data and probably would not achieve similar performance without depth data. Shape, other than that obtained from depth, is used in a weak way. Also, the top-down approach does not go far in a world of many objects.

2.10. LEVINE

Levine (1978) describes a three-level system, of which the first two levels have been implemented. The first level segments pictures into regions without scene context. The second level has a local phase and a global phase. The local phase matches image templates with observed image regions, using A* graph search. It performs global optimization using dynamic programming to merge regions and assign labels to them. The highest-level design includes a standard relational database and a system similar to production rules.

The system is implemented using MIPS, an interactive image processing system. Two data types are used uniformly throughout: image arrays and feature vectors. Low-level region analysis obtains about 200 regions from a 256×256 image, a reduction of about 300 to 1 in items, not necessarily in storage.

The intermediate level deals with standard views. The output of the intermediate level is an ordered list of interpretations for each region. The local intermediate-level process is a form of template matching of object descriptions. It is model-driven and uses heuristic graph search to match shape, color, and texture. The second process is global, also model-driven. It incorporates spatial relations as a global optimization problem solved by dynamic programming. Model input for this level comes from interactive designation of regions and objects, computing features, and updating the database. Symbolic information in the form of text is also a form of input.

The high-level system design includes a vision-production system with relational database.

Low-level segmentation is based on regions found by a shared, nearest-neighbor clustering modified by connectivity. Processing is approximately in order of decreasing size, using a pyramidal data structure. The edge pyramid has edges from a gradient operator. The pyramid thickens edges until, at the top level, all regions have been extinguished. Areas of the picture that are farthest from edges tend to be extinguished high in the pyramid. From a starting region, projecting down to the next level involves expanding 1 pixel into 4 pixels. Those marked as

edges are not examined at this level but are looked at in the next level down. At this level, those not marked as edges are marked for clustering, using the nearest-neighbor algorithm.

Local template matching is used to match collections of adjacent regions against all stored object prototypes. Features are stored in three classes, according to decreasing importance in reducing search time. The first class includes the MBR and its area. "Intrinsic" features make up the second category: intensity, hue, saturation, and texture. The third category includes six moment invariants as a rough measure of shape and detailed shape from a set of Fourier coefficients for the outline, used only in final template evaluation.

The A* algorithm is used for graph search with an evaluation function. Nodes are regions, while arcs are region adjacency. The estimate of the cost to node n is the number of nodes expanded from the start.

Relational information is used in the optimal search stage, done with dynamic programming. Regions may be ordered either according to region area or decreasing maximal confidence value among interpretations. The orderings of model and data do not necessarily correspond; no mention is made of whether the algorithm accounts for the difference in order. The transition function is a linear weighting of differences between structural relations in the image model and observed relations. Relations include LEFT-OF, RIGHT-OF, ABOVE, BELOW, ADJACENT-TO, CONTAINS, and CONTAINED-BY.

The knowledge database or long-term memory (LTM) in the high-level system design is a management-type relational database with accessing operations that constitute a relational algebra. Operations such as JOIN, PROJECT, INTERSECT, UNION, and RESTRICT are available. The high-level system will be a data-driven production system. Thus far, it only deals with images, not three-dimensional scenes. The LTM has subworlds for outdoor scenes, office scenes, and so on. Objects in LTM have associated actions to be taken under conditions of the short-term memory (STM). A STM contains a list of regions and their interpretations. It resembles the "blackboard" of HEARSAY. Regions

are interpreted sequentially, unless an action is involved that alters the sequence. For each region, there is a list ordered by decreasing confidence. Implicit actions are invoked by the system when a region matches an object in the LTM with a confidence above threshold. Explicit actions are invoked if there is only one interpretation for a region.

Limitations of this system are found throughout. Some come from the segmentation process, which relies on a gradient operator, with all its weaknesses. The intermediate level is viewpoint-dependent. Apparently, the top level will be built upon the intermediate level, and will also be viewpoint-dependent.

2.11. PARMA, HANSON, AND RISEMAN

Parma, Hanson, and Riseman (1980) take a color image of an outdoor scene and an image model with three-dimensional relations and build a symbolic model of the three-dimensional world shown in the image, in the form of names of objects and weak relations in three space.

The model contains image locations of objects, uncertainty radii, and size radii. They emphasize representation of knowledge structures and control of knowledge sources (KSs). Their knowledge structures are schema for a scene concept, (e.g., road scene or house scene), with control for invoking a subset of KSs. They believe that schemas provide a bridge between general-purpose and special-purpose systems. They raise two issues of control: (1) the basis for invoking KSs; and (2) the use of alternative hypotheses provided by KSs. The basis for invoking KSs is top-down control driven by schema. They identify a set of six experiments with varying generality. The first is a specific scene schema from a known viewpoint. Specific two-dimensional schema can be obtained; the example in this report was a particular house from a known viewpoint. The second is a general scene schema with known viewpoint. This is confusing. How can viewpoint be known for nonspecific scenes? The third is a specific scene schema with unknown viewpoint. The fourth is a general scene schema that is known, with an unknown viewpoint. In the fifth experiment, the general scene schema is unknown. The fifth has no

scene schema. A partial three-dimensional surface/volume description is constructed. This is a subset of the general vision problem, since it does not use familiar information.

Two forms of segmentation were described: edge relaxation and region relaxation using histograms. Both were implemented in a simulation of "processing cones." Both use two complementary relaxation labeling processes: boundary formation, local differences; region formation, and global similarities. Edge relaxation finds local discontinuities in a feature (intensity or color) along horizontal and vertical edges between pixels. Iterative relaxation on small neighborhoods forms boundary segments. Region analysis proceeds by cluster detection of peaks in the histogram of one feature or in the joint density function of pairs of features. Connected sets of pixels are determined as regions.

Eleven modular KSs are included, implemented in a graph processing language built in ALISP. They include inference net KS; two-dimensional curve-fitting KS; two-dimensional shape KS; occlusion KS; spectral attribute matcher KS; three-dimensional shape KS; perspective KS; horizon KS; object size KS.

The authors use a database that includes a LTM of world knowledge that is not image-specific and that is organized into schemas, objects, volumes, surfaces, regions, line segments, and vertices (RSV: regions, segments, vertices). Nodes are those levels; arcs are relations, primarily AND/OR. Interlevel arcs exist. Interpretation is viewed as a set of instantiations of nodes in LTM put into STM. Short-term memory is image-specific; it is used for constructing an interpretation. Initially, it contains only the RSV levels.

Two-dimensional curve fitting uses splines with knots determined by places of high curvature measured as angle from a point to k-neighbors on either side. If straight line segments fit, they are used, else quadratic, else cubic.

In the system, two-dimensional shape classification is hierarchical. For straight line segments, quadrilaterals include trapezoids and parallelograms, which include rectangle and rhombus. Quadratics are used for ellipses and circles. Other types of curves are labeled as *blobs*.

Occlusion depends on continuous curve generalization of T junctions. It is not clear that it is used in the experiment described later.

Some natural objects have relatively invariant color and texture. Many objects, such as manufactured objects, vary in spectral characteristics. It will sometimes be right to guess which among the class of target objects have invariant spectra. In the example, below, of 21 regions assigned on the basis of color, 11 were correct. Of the remaining, 5 were wall assigned as sky, and 2 were roof assigned as grass (Table 1).

The authors describe problems with inference nets. Probabilities are assigned to nodes and conditional probabilities to arcs, providing weighted paths by which implications of local hypotheses may be propagated up and down through the layered network. They point out problems in consistency and loops when generalizing.

The three-dimensional shape KS uses blending functions of cubic splines, defining "quilted solids." It is stated that three-dimensional shape has not been integrated into the system used in the experiment described by Parma, Hanson, and Riseman. A specific three-dimensional schema can be transformed into a specific point of view and projected onto the corresponding image plane, with hidden lines removed. Those facilities were not available at the time of the experiment, but were available when the experiment was completed. Specific two-dimensional schema were used.

Two-dimensional schema and three-dimensional schema have for each region a centroid of the expected location of its center and a radius representing decreased likelihood of the region center appearing at that location.

The perspective KS assumes a horizontal ground plane, with surfaces either vertical or horizontal. The camera model includes angle of inclination, image distance, and height above the ground. It deals with elevation, height, width, and range. The assumption is sometimes made that an object stands on the ground. If the ground is planar, objects are on the ground, and if objects are identical, the horizon line can be determined. It is in the ground plane. Tilt is given by the angle of the horizon from the center of the image. If tilt of the observer were zero, the

Table 1.

Object	Spectral Character	Texture	Location	Shape	Size
Tree	Green	?irregular*	Above horizon	Tall	
Bush	Green	?irregular	Above bush	Low	
Grass	Green	?irregular	Below horizon Above grass	Flat	
Sky	Light blue	?uniform	Below horizon		Large
House walls		?uniform	Above all		Large
Roof		?regular	Above and below horizon ?adjacent roof	Vertical trapezoid	Large
Shutter		?uniform	?adjacent grass Above horizon ?adjacent walls	Trapezoid Straight lines	Large Small
			Above and below horizon In walls	Trapezoid	Known

* Question marks indicate properties and relations that Parma, Hanson, and Riseman (1980) do not use. They apparently do not use house walls adjacent to roof, house walls vertical, shutters symmetric, shutters inside house. They do not use occlusion or texture analysis.

horizon would fall in the center of the image. Range of objects is determined by projected distance to their feet. If other objects are the same height as the camera (e.g., eyes of other people) a third plane is defined by a least-root-mean-square fit; the plane goes through the horizon. It is not clear from the report whether those capabilities were implemented. Sky regions cannot be below the horizon line; grass regions cannot be above the horizon line. The ground is assumed to be planar, the horizon a level line in the horizon KS.

If the perspective KS gives an estimate of object size in three space, the object-size KS generates a list of object hypotheses ordered by confidence based on the region size. Perspective KS returns computed size and range of size. Default range is 5%.

There are sometimes boundaries with known characteristics (e.g., long and straight, bounding roof). Top-down control of KSs directs matching of schema regions to image regions and some schema line segments to image line segments. A heuristic weighted evaluation function is left unspecified.

Experiment one matches color and texture attributes to improve a fragmented segmentation, by the

rule of merging adjacent regions with the same object labels. A spectral attribute matcher is used to get a list of object types for a region. The experiment uses only regions obtained from the region segmenter. The system uses local schema regions to direct semantic merging, including adjacent regions. That is, it uses spectral properties and location. The result is to merge tree regions together, bush regions together, and grass regions together.

The system uses long straight lines in two-dimensional schema, placing a rectangular mask around the selected schema edge. The system selects lines within the mask within tolerance of slope of schema line as candidates. It merges all colinear segments within the mask and matches all resulting segments to the schema line. It matches on slope, length, distance between center, and rms error. In the example, the procedure matches three sides of the roof. The roof region now matches a parallelogram.

Symbolic region shapes are matched via two-dimensional schemata. Some schema regions have distinctive two-dimensional shapes, including trapezoid, rectangle, and ellipse. Properties for matching include size, aspect ratio, and color (Table 1).

The system does reasonably well in making a crude segmentation of the image. Tree, roof, grass, bush, shutter, and sky are labeled appropriately. Major regions not labeled include much of the house and trees in the background.

The perspective KS uses the knowledge that bushes are vertical and stand on the ground plane to estimate the range of the bush and its size. Bush adjacent to grass implies that bush is probably not occluded. Computed size partially validates identification as bush.

The system has several interesting capabilities that belong in a general system. Its segmentation is limited. The quality of edges and regions holds back interpretation. Texture description is weak. Because it uses locations in an image, the system described is not only viewpoint-dependent but dependent on the specific scene. This system's capabilities seem better than that. The authors imply that general vision can be achieved by having many special schemata and selecting among them. I disagree.

2.12. RUBIN

ARGOS uses color, texture, adjacency, occlusion, location, size, and shape factors. It generates two-dimensional models of the scene from various views. It attempts to generalize parts of the network.

Search is a form of dynamic programming with restricted transitions. Its first task is to find the view angle. Then it should name objects from known view. Without segmentation, its images were 75×100 pixels, with 7,500-level-deep search. Experiments shown are with hand-drawn segments. The system also uses Shafer's version of Ohlander's segmentation (Ohlander 1975; Shafer and Kanade 1980). View angle is determined to 51° .

ARGOS uses "adjacency first-order" Markov evaluation, which relates all surrounding nodes to the node under consideration. ARGOS has units called *primitive picture elements* (PPEs) that may be segments from Shafer and Kanade's system (1980) or that may be individual pixels. A PPE may be thought of as the largest region that is homogeneous in both signal and symbol. Both image models and test images are in the form of PPEs.

ARGOS mostly relies on adjacency relations. For example, images of Pittsburgh will have mountains between sky and buildings. There may be vertical or horizontal adjacency nodes between PPEs. PPEs may have within relations, but without a containment hierarchy. All relations are single-level and explicit. Networks tend to be large.

Much depends on spectral labeling. Median of blue gives 44% correct labeling. Rubin ends up choosing median red, median blue, median green, contrast red, contrast green, and contrast blue, where contrast is from Tamura, Mori, and Yamawaki 1977). ARGOS uses a weighted-Euclidean distance, weighted by an adjusted standard deviation. Statistics are obtained by computing mean and standard deviation for pixels in regions segmented by humans.

ARGOS uses locus search. It has a forward pass, keeping paths with values near the maximum value. Pruning heuristics are important. Since there is no unique order (two-dimensional), paths are recombed, using maximum over neighbors. The pruning threshold is dynamic, relative to the best value at a given depth. Transition likelihoods are the network knowledge constraints. They have only three values, 0.0, 0.1, 0.9. Likelihoods at a PPE (pixel) are normalized once computed.

In the backtrace, multiple beam pointers from the forward pass may disagree because the problem is two-dimensional. Some heuristics for conflict resolution were tried: throw a pixel away; carry along pointers when a pixel is left out; reject some possibilities based on adjacency rules; select by voting.

The internal model is a three-dimensional model of the city that is used to generate all possible views. A network of relations (predominantly adjacency relations) is constructed by multiple views. A region that appears in different views may be merged into one PPE, depending on adjacencies.

ARGOS does not segment; it labels. It works with pixels or regions. It can use absolute image location (i.e., mountains are usually found in the top of images). Each region has an MBR along horizontal and vertical axes. Proximity of MBRs is used to decide on merging two regions. Image location is used. Shape knowledge is difficult to incorporate, since segments may combine along self-transitions in the

network. Four shape measures were used: fractional fill, compactness, orientation, and elongation.

ARGOS was found to work better without size knowledge (image size) than with size. No advantage was found in making a hierarchy of knowledge sources.

Rubin discusses some extensions to other city scenes and to noncity scenes. None of these has been implemented. Image knowledge should be divided into the scene level or schema level, viewpoint level, and object level. ARGOS does not address automatic model generation. It is assumed that all models are built by hand. Rubin discusses a knowledge hierarchy for use of more general schema, starting at the most general end of the hierarchy. He observes that lower levels of the knowledge hierarchy look alike.

Fifteen pictures taken from five different vantage points around Pittsburgh were segmented and labeled by untrained workers. Human labeling was done to define ground truth. Seven pictures were chosen as a training set and the remainder as a test set.

The networks were reduced to 10%. Weights for terms were determined on the training set. The beam size was 25 entries. Data were smoothed in three ways: (1) simple smoothing (i.e., clustering, changing labels of surrounded pixels); (2) throwing out any region with less than 8 pixels; and (3) filling unlabeled holes in regions.

The system was correct in 71% of labeled cells for the test set. The author does not say what fraction are labeled. Hand-segmented data were used to determine view angle; root mean square error was 41°. Accuracy of labels was 67%. Automatically segmented data gave view angle error of 60° and accuracy of labeling of 59%.

A priori, the system would not generalize for both close-up and distant pictures. Since it depends on horizontal and vertical dimensions, these are inversely proportional to distance. To include both, a very large range of dimensions would be necessary, which would make very weak dimension constraints. Adjacencies also change, for example, buildings obscure mountains. Image location is not at all general. In summary, the system uses these types of information: spectral; adjacency; horizontal

and vertical image dimensions; and absolute image location. Only spectral information is viewpoint-independent. The system has little potential as a general vision system.

3. Applications

A few projections for applications of vision systems for the short term, for the mid term (2-3 years), and for the long term (3-5 years) follow.

Industrial vision systems for the short term have a small market. Whether there is a profitable evolutionary niche or not remains to be seen. I believe that the major obstacle is not the lack of knowledge of users, although that is a factor, but the lack of capability of current industrial vision systems, which use a technology that is at least 15 years old. They use thresholding to obtain binary images, two-dimensional models, and trivial global descriptors such as moments of the boundary. Now, researchers are beginning to use local descriptors such as holes and corners to deal with obscuration. Adaptive thresholding is being developed to increase the flexibility of such systems, but that is greatly inadequate. As a consequence of thresholding, few features can be obtained, lighting must be carefully engineered, and the system is not rugged at all. In most cases, industrial vision systems do not work at all. If they do work, their applicability is limited and special-case engineering is required, raising costs and risks for users.

In the mid term, attaining larger markets is an important objective that involves going from an evolutionary niche to a major impact at the 10% level in automation. To achieve the objective, systems must be much more capable, lessening the extent of custom engineering needed. They must distinguish many kinds of flaws in inspection, especially cosmetic from essential flaws. Systems can accomplish those objectives by incorporating several mechanisms, including structured light, which begins to lead to three-dimensional vision systems. Gray-scale segmentation allows more internal detail and less sensitivity to lighting. Greater speed and better shape discrimination will improve two-dimensional systems to a useful level.

In the long term, three-dimensional systems for warehousing, handling unoriented parts, and inspection of nonlaminar parts will be important. The programming of vision problems will be a major issue; thus, a single system for many applications will be essential. While a system may deal with only one object at a time, over a large company and over many companies a system will require the generality to deal with many parts. Teaching and part programming will be difficult, requiring the ability to work from data bases of geometric models. Learning may also become important.

In cartography, current applications use automated stereo for terrain. These systems work only partially for terrain. Stereo mapping is very labor-intensive. As resolution requirements are increased by a factor x , the volume of effort increases by a factor of x^2 .

For the mid term in cartography, automated stereo mapping for complex cultural sites is expected in research situations and subsequently in production prototypes. Limited feature classification of linear features may be demonstrated. Aids for measurement of dimensions and data entry are expected to be important.

For the long term, automated feature classification is expected to make a major impact in mapping.

In photointerpretation in the mid term, monitoring of selected objects in restricted situations such as aircraft, vehicles on roads, and rail traffic is expected to be demonstrated to be feasible for classification, identification, counting, and measurement.

In the long term, classification of a greater variety of objects with broader context and much greater detail is expected to be demonstrated.

Many other applications appear, some bordering on science fiction. They include guidance, medical image analysis for diagnosis, laboratory analysis, and aids to handicapped. There are a number of hazardous tasks and environments in which robots with vision are expected to be used, including (1) space craft servicing; (2) communications equipment servicing in space; (3) undersea oil exploration, mineral exploitation, and naval operations; (4) firefighting; (5) servicing nuclear reactors and other power generators; (6) servicing electric lines; (7) carrying TV cameras into hazardous environments for news; and (8) the battlefield.

My own favorite is the home robot for cooking and cleaning. The home environment is complex. I do not expect to see home robots for decades.

There are important applications in psychology in determining perceptual mechanisms. Perceptual mechanisms are important in epistemology—in determining what people can know and the limits of human perception. They also have potential applications in education—in determining how to teach people in ways that make greatest use of their natural perceptual mechanisms.

4. Objectives

The summary of applications leads to six objectives for a vision system: that it demonstrate high performance; that it be general, complete, intelligent, and easy to use; and that there be system support.

High performance relates to complex scenes with many objects and applications requirements for detail, accuracy, resolution, and speed.

Generality implies that the system should be generic with respect to object class. (i.e., it should easily handle similar applications such as a mix of models of small electric motors). Generality also implies that it be generic with respect to observation (i.e., viewpoint-insensitive and sensor-insensitive). A three-dimensional system is a primary means of achieving this objective. Generality also implies a standard system for research and applications, with a large, general core plus mechanisms for special-case implementations.

Completeness means spanning all applications tasks. Completeness can be achieved by integration of all data, knowledge, and information, including multisensor data, expert knowledge, geometric models, prediction mechanisms, mathematics, and physics. It also implies powerful perceptual mechanisms for observation, including strong use of shape, edge segmentation, texture and image organization, depth and stereo, shape from shading, and shape from shape.

Intelligent implies reasoning in the domains of images and surfaces (i.e., geometric reasoning), like a human observer or analyst. Mechanisms that make a system easy to use include standard user aids from

computer science, an intelligent editor, automatic program synthesis, geometric models as a natural mode of communication common to human and machine, natural system structure to make the system intuitively clear to users at the system level, and bridges to natural language.

System support requires the existence of a large, critical mass effort with continuing development and a user base with collaborations.

5. System Design

Vision systems should integrate results of many image operators: region and edge segmentation; texture segmentation; surfaces from stereo, from motion parallax, and from object motion; shape from shape; surface interpolation; and shape from shading. Vision systems should combine such descriptions with general and domain-specific knowledge. Knowledge and observations relate geometric entities, including image, edges, structures of edges, surfaces, structures of surfaces, and objects. Thus, vision systems integrate inputs from many sources, relating several geometric types. In computer systems terms, integration requires matching input/output formats of procedures, which becomes clearer conceptually when defined in terms of data types. But vision involves geometric types with well-defined transformation properties, not just data types. Representations for geometric structures provide the basis for integrating these different data and knowledge included in images, image structures, surfaces, and objects. The fundamental scientific basis of vision systems is representation.

In building a vision system, whether through evolution or by design of a computer system, attempts are made to eliminate duplication, choose clean structures of data and control to eliminate inefficiencies of storage and computation, share data structures, and merge and streamline data types. These efforts go to decrease the size of the system (biological or computer), to increase its speed, and usually to simplify its conceptual and physical structure. The primary concern is with achieving adequate perceptual performance within limits of computational structure and power. In the human, these

limits are imposed by wiring limitations, size, and power consumption. There are corresponding limits for computers. Adequate performance can be related to completeness of representation and completeness of perceptual maps, within complexity limits. These concerns for adequacy, simplicity, and efficiency are similar to those of the mathematician, who is concerned with completeness and equivalence of mathematical types or their simplest axiomatization, or who generalizes mathematical structures to treat many types uniformly; or to the worker in analysis of algorithms, who determines worst-case computational complexity. Not only is adequate representation a means of making efficient and manageable systems, but adequate representation allows the solving of hard problems by compact restatement with constructs that expose inherent complexity rather than apparent complexity. Any program or biological system is a formal system. The concepts are defined; they may not be general or well organized. The point is that analysis of generality and organization makes an important practical difference.

6. Representation

It is often useful to assume that in biological evolution there has been time for considerable optimization of the sort just described, for well-structured representations. A good starting place for exploring biological perception is from the standpoint of representation.

Representation means different things to different people. Much work deals with domain-independent representation, largely concerned with properties relevant to typed set theory, such as inheritance. Set theory is inadequate for vision and probably inadequate for most domains of artificial intelligence. Set theory or logic is general, but weak. Logic is valuable as a framework for embedding systems, but very little can actually be accomplished with such a weak theory. For vision, strong theories with limited domain are valid, for example, topology and geometry. If geometric proofs and calculations are formulated in logic or in informal reasoning systems based on set theory (e.g., production rules), their statement becomes clumsy and proofs are very long unless

intermediate levels of mathematical theories are built up. Proofs are long and difficult because the language is weak. Mathematics is a compact and powerful language for expressing geometric concepts. It is important to represent these mathematical structures by building up an appropriate hierarchy of mathematical types.

In representation, we must concentrate on the problem domain and the task at hand. That does not mean that there is a separate representation for each domain and for each task. In physics, a small set of mathematical types and mathematical operations for solutions (a few hundred) is sufficient. Vector spaces, for example, are useful in many physics domains. Representation depends on the purpose, but a single representation may serve many purposes, and a few hundred representations serve all. There are few independent (inequivalent) mathematical structures and few independent (inequivalent) mathematical problems. Representations are open-ended and hierarchical, built from a few primitives and a few composition rules. Primitives at one level are compounded to become primitives one level higher. Applications tasks are built from a few fundamental mathematical tasks by composition. This promises a countable set of constructs, but not many have been constructed, and there are generalizing and compacting forces at work. Mathematics is concerned with equivalence of systems, an antidote to the process of inventing representations and names that turn out to be equivalent to other representations. Most representations are minor variations of others. A neat hierarchy has largely been defined by mathematicians.

In artificial intelligence, representation is a central concern. If representations are compounds, what are the fundamental representations that ultimately form their basis in a reductionist schema? I believe that the bases are fundamental mathematical, physical, and perceptual primitives. This does not mean mathematics and physics as taught in schools, but intuitive models that everyone apparently possesses to varying extent. Education does provide better models for some people but, on the whole, formal mathematics and physics depend on primitive, intuitive concepts. It is my belief that other domains are described by analogy with mathematics and physics.

A current view is that language determines perception, a view largely discredited by experiment. The counter view is more tenable: that the representations of language are determined by perception.

Mathematicians use *representation* to mean a map from a codomain A of some mathematical structure onto a domain of type B, a map that preserves the structure of A. Frequently, the map is from an abstract to a more concrete type; for example, representation of the rotation group by the group of orthogonal matrices as transformations in Cartesian three space. This example is a homomorphism of a group onto the group of linear transformations of a vector space, hence matrices. More generally, a representation may map a group onto the transformation group of a vector space preserving composition. In artificial intelligence, the term *representation* refers to a map of any kind, regardless of structure of codomain and domain and regardless of whether the map preserves structure (even when there is obvious structure and when standard mathematical terminology might be used).

The central theme here is *structural isomorphism*. One important representation is the shape of structural elements of objects relevant to a task. At a crude level, an artist structures a human figure as torso, arms, legs, and head and represents these parts as ellipsoids or with slightly better approximations for parts. At this level, the artist focuses on describing gross body shape with regard to part/whole structure and articulation. For a more lifelike rendering of individual parts, the artist focuses on muscles and bones and their structural elements. Muscles are laminae that flex and extend. Since there are only a dozen or so muscles per limb, the representation at this level of detail is only slightly more complex than at the coarser level; that is, total complexity is only a small multiple of the complexity of the coarser level of detail. Representation of muscles is an obvious structure for the heart. At a tissue level, muscle fibers are natural structural elements. For biological objects, structure may be related to development. For manufactured objects, structural representations may be closely connected with fabrication and mechanical construction operations, which include milling: translation and turning; screw; extrusion; translation; and assembly.

operations, including insertion and screwing. Generalized cylinders are determined by the principle of generalized translational invariance related to many such fabrication operations.

In structural representations, it is important that form equal function. Generalized cylinders were intended to provide suitable abstractions of shape to make compact, well-defined representations of function. It is a tenet that object classes are defined in two ways: by function and by abstractions from perception. Both definitions of object class are typified by abstract shape; that is, generic shape elements and relations. Structural representations thus cover a very large part of relevant representation.

7. Criteria for Shape Representation

Criteria for three-dimensional shape representation were formulated in developing generalized cylinders and were described by Thomas and Binford 1974. Generalized cylinders were initially intended for use in visual interpretation of complex objects as a means for a natural semantics for part/whole segmentation. The idea of a segmentation is not new, but the choice of primitive element determines whether the resulting segmentation into parts is useful. Also, they were intended for a compact representation of complex shapes from which symbolic relations between surfaces could be computed easily. The criteria for three-dimensional shape representation apply, with appropriate changes, to the representation of surface and image elements. The design criteria that led to the formulation of generalized cones are described in the paragraphs that follow.

A representation of shape should aid in describing a very large possible class of objects, including many we have never seen. The representation should be locally generated, like splines from local primitives. It is not reasonable to enumerate rigid primitives like cube, sphere, cylinder. Part/whole segmentation describes one form of generation, but the primitives that go into the part/whole description must be locally generated. Volumes and surfaces should be determined from samples or boundary conditions, with interpolation and extrapolation constrained by general principles.

Defining senses of similarity is a central issue of perception. Each representation introduces a sense of similarity that is natural in the representation. Generalized cylinders were introduced in order to represent locally generated constructions from fundamental geometrical operations, for example, sweeping (Binford 1971). Generalized cylinders were to be augmented by spheres, which characterize constructions based on rotations. One interpretation of the phrase *natural semantic interpretation* is in terms of these fundamental operations. A representation of shape should aid in describing similarities of classes of similar objects, that is, it should be a generic representation. Each representation introduces a sense of similarity that is natural in the representation. Generalized cylinders were based on generalized translational invariance, which defines similarity in terms of a hierarchy of congruence transformations mapping one slice of a generalized cylinder into another (Binford 1971). Congruence transformations determine the set of similarities of parts, while part/whole relations define global similarity. Thus, in this framework, a stick is similar to a snake or a ring and, in another sense, to a screw.

A representation of shape should aid in symbolic, generic prediction of appearances—generic with respect to object class and generic with respect to observation (i.e., valid over a broad range of viewpoints, illumination, and so on). A representation of shape should aid in inferring volume description from image information. More generally, it should aid in symbolic, generic description—generic with respect to object class and with respect to observation.

A representation of shape should define levels of detail, coarse to fine, by defining a natural semantic segmentation, a part/whole decomposition intuitively natural to human beings. Parts should be part/whole structures themselves. This condition helps the system "communicate" with humans, which can help them debug programs and create understandable systems. Parts should be defined by continuity. A surface is not a part in "natural semantics" (e.g., a cube has six surfaces, yet a cube is thought of by most people as a single part). If we define parts by surface continuity, then only separate objects are parts, and a man standing on a floor is not

separate from the floor. If, on the other hand, we define parts by surface tangent plane continuity, then a cube has six "parts." Parts are volumes. Primitive parts should be generated from elements that are disjoint and for which a small, finite set gives a good approximation. This adds intuitive clarity in description and in model building. Generalized cylinders correspond to stacking volume elements like slices of bread. Ribbon surfaces correspond to stacking surface elements. A representation should be local. If we want to describe an arm of a volume, we want to limit our attention to that part of the shape. Some splines have that property. The covering by a finite set implies that the elements are volumes. In the Blum transform (Blum 1967), which is a covering by a minimal set of maximal interior disks, the elements are overlapping circles, that is, not disjoint. In the Fourier representation, components or eigenfunctions form an overlapping set. Eigenfunctions for aircraft are roughly overlapping aircraft-shaped elements additively combined. It is much more natural to make disjoint combination of parts like fuselage, wings, and tail. The Fourier transform of a shape is global. Local changes have global consequences.

Parts should be locally realizable; that is, they should be closed and nonintersecting. Surfaces must be investigated totally before closure and intersection can be tested.

At the Stanford University Artificial Intelligence Laboratory, we aim to represent elements by mathematical entities and to relate these entities by maps within and between levels. Several of the levels correspond to entities of three dimensions (volumes), two dimensions (surfaces), one dimension (curves), and zero dimensions (points) embedded in spaces of three dimensions, two dimensions, and one dimension. We have maps that decrease dimension (projections) and maps that raise dimension (sweeping operations).

Our work has been based on the following paradigm. Descriptions are made of geometric entities formed by two processes. The first is grouping by a few geometric relational operations that are more or less independent of the geometric entity and that are common to all levels. These grouping operations correspond to neighborhoods of approximately uniform shape, elongated narrow neighborhoods in all direc-

tions corresponding to longitudinal projection, and transverse projection (Nevatia and Binford 1977). The second process is segmentation by tight constraints that are specific to the geometric entity.

8. Interpretation

One paradigm for interpretation is template matching of images. This assumes image invariance and has little place in three-dimensional image analysis. Template matching requires enormous computation for three-space scenes. Even that computational inefficiency is a minor fault compared to the fatal flaw: it produces a very weak sense of identity of objects. Another interpretation paradigm is graph endomorphism, or finding an embedding of a model element in a description of an image, where both are expressed as a graph of nodes and relations.

A distinction is made between total and local representations and between total and local matching. A further distinction is made between arbitrary and semantic segmentations. Key issues are (1) generic interpretation in terms of object classes, insensitive to viewpoint; (2) semantic interpretation, that is, an evaluation function that accounts for details of the scene and observation process; and (3) semantic search in matching, using semantic segmentations and indexing.

8.1. TOTAL IMAGE MATCHING

Most recognition schemes rely on total image matching and complete image congruence. The problem posed is to match one image with another, invariant to translation and rotation. This assumes image invariance; there must be no systematic differences between images. Any systematic differences between images will result in large, unpredictable biases in location of best match. The limitations of total image matching schemes do not depend on whether they match intensities or Fourier transforms or coefficients of other orthogonal expansions or eigenvalues of such expansions. These schemes sound more relevant than they are in reality, since they refer to plane figures as "objects," which im-

plies three-space elements. The usual approach is to store a dense set of possible views (or coefficients describing them) so that any sensed image is "near enough" to one of the dense set of views. That rapidly becomes unmanageable. Consider three-space, articulated objects in arbitrary positions, orientations, and articulations. Assume that we do not know their shape exactly (the next person we see will be unlike any other). Objects are painted with irregular patterns that we do not know exactly either (people wear different clothes; different dogs have different spots). They will be in uneven illumination that we do not know exactly (this depends on atmospheric conditions and reflections from nearby objects), with shadows and obscurations. Images depend on many things, even on position within the retina, because of photometric and geometric non-uniformity (distortions and design). Sensors may have unusual response (SAR, infrared). One approach is to store a dense set of views of all possible combinations of objects in all positions, orientations, and articulations, with all possible illumination for all possible sensors. Any of these systematic effects can cause large, systematic errors in position of best match and interfere with estimation of accuracy. The complexity for three-dimensional objects with articulation and obscuration may be related to the power set of the plane with a certain granularity. We know a great deal about familiar objects and familiar scenes, but this is not the way to use that knowledge. Humans perceive scenes on postcards with ease without knowing surface pigmentation, illumination, or sensor characteristics. In a sense, humans are always seeing objects they have never seen before.

Even if total image matching could be made to work, it has little value, even for two-dimensional scenes, because it gives a trivial sense of object. Distinct views of an object in three space are separate and unrelated in such a scheme, linked only by their object name. This is not a useful sense of object. In two dimensions, any plane figure is a separate figure unrelated to any other. These schemes cannot identify shared image elements (i.e., partial image congruence), which they must do to perceive family relations.

8.2. LOCAL IMAGE MATCHING

Some concepts are defined here:

1. *Total representations* of an image depend on the full image, for example, Fourier transforms of an image are defined on the whole image. Total representations over a domain are defined on the total domain.
2. *Local or partial representations* are defined on proper subsets of the domain represented, for example, B splines are defined on a few adjacent nodes of a surface mesh. Locally generative representations like splines can be parameterized locally and composed globally to satisfy criteria such as continuity.
3. *Semantically segmented representations* of an image are local representations defined on image domains that are specific to image content. An example is a set of extended edges in an image. Semantically segmented representations of a domain (e.g., curve, surface) are local representations specific to the content of the domain. Another example is an approximation of curves by a B spline basis where nodes are chosen for optimal fit, corresponding to cusps. Local representations defined on an arbitrary tessellation of the domain are arbitrary segmented representations.
4. *Part/whole representations* are structured, semantically segmented representations with disjoint elements.
5. *Matching* is a map from two descriptions to a third description. The third description is usually a real number (distance or probability). In our work, we emphasize matches whose results are structured descriptions.
6. *Local matching* is a map from two local descriptions to a third local description.

One important generalization of interpretation is local image matching of semantically segmented descriptions that identify shared semantic image components, especially those which are locally generative like curves and ribbons in images. Local representations may be used for total matches, for example, least-squares matching of all observed curves

to all model curves. There is little gain. Local or partial matching allows for identification in the presence of obscuration or physical differences between model and image. Some requirements of local matching include (1) sufficient support of local matching to generate adequate constraints and (2) semantic segmentations to limit combinatorics of matching.

For physical reasons, curves are a useful structural element in images. Many image curves and groupings of curves correspond to surface edges and inherent surface markings. Some correspond to illumination discontinuities that are also interesting. Curves are also useful for describing many strictly two-dimensional forms, for example, characters and drawings.

I suggest this principle for interpretation: incorporate models with explicit representation isomorphic to the domain of variation. In pattern recognition, this approach reduces cluster size by explicitly accounting for effects of "nuisance" variables. If the actual domain of variation is a subset of a larger domain, then representations of the larger domain can be restricted (e.g., we can find simplified special cases such as when objects are viewed in a few stable states from restricted viewpoints). Partial image matching can relate common image structure of distinctly different figures, but interprets different poses of a three-space object as different objects. If the principle just set forth is followed, three things will be represented explicitly in our models: three-space objects; the observation process; and illumination. Of course, if objects or viewpoint are restricted, then the representation is simplified. Use of image curves in image matching directly reduces some image variation caused by photometric effects (i.e., illumination, sensor differences, and sensor inhomogeneities). It is surprising how little we can do with image curves and structures of curves without three-space interpretation. Obscurations, surface markings, and edges of surfaces are three-space concepts. Image curve descriptions are compact and provide substantial reduction of combinatorics, however.

8.3. THREE-SPACE MATCHING

In total three-space matching schemes, different articulations of a doll are separate objects, related only by their object name. Structured, partial matches do relate different articulations of an object as different aspects of the same object. While they seem gloriously general, partial three-space matches are not adequate either. Our usual sense of object is not determined by a three-dimensional shape but by a class of three-dimensional shapes. While this may seem a hopelessly general paradigm for perception, it is the usual perceptual problem, and mechanisms for generic interpretation are feasible. Interpretation by partial three-space matching would recognize different configurations of a Boeing 747 as distinct, unrelated objects; also different configurations of an F4 with different radar, fuel tanks, or armament; or a truck with different loads. It would have no idea that a 747B resembled a 747SP more than a truck. Without generic perception, there would be no cognitive basis for concepts of truck, vehicle, or passenger aircraft. Coffee cups vary from conical styrofoam throwaways to ceramic handcrafted treasures, from minimum forms to the extravagant. Chairs have great variety. We have not seen all such possible forms, we cannot enumerate all possible prototypes, and if we see another that is distinctly different, we probably will interpret it correctly. Similarity, not spatial congruence, is the paradigm of interpretation in nature. As stated above, humans are always seeing objects they have never seen before. No one has ever seen me before as I am now (in the sense of spatial congruence). They may have seen me as I was on one occasion yesterday or two years ago. That is the central perceptual problem. The paradigm is recognizing a friend after 10 years' aging, a 10-lb weight loss, in different clothes, and with less hair, or recognizing a tiger from verbal descriptions and warnings about them without having seen one before, even though no two tigers are identical. We have similar motivation for incorporating generic mechanisms for applications in manufacturing or photointerpretation to deal with the problem of programming a class of related tasks. Here, object classes may be generated by a variation of a design

or manufacturing process, for example, a small motor product mix. Variation may be small within one task, but among a class of tasks the objects form a class with considerable variability yet strong similarity.

One usual approach is to characterize a class as a prototype with a distance measure or as the union of such classes or as some membership function on such sets, but that approach induces a weak sense of object class. Given fixed metrics based on three-dimensional distance for typical object classes, we conjecture that we can choose elements of these object classes that are very far apart in the metric, such that if the class diameter is relaxed to include usual members of the class, then it fails to discriminate against nonmembers.

The essential definition of object class is functional. Manufactured objects are designed for a function and living things have a teleology. Object classes have an associated three-dimensional form: form equals function. That is, an object's function is to be its form. Which aspect of its form? An object's function is often a geometric function. The function of a room is to be an enclosing volume. The function of a chair, desk, or table is to be a flat surface at a comfortable height for sitting, writing, eating. An object's function may constrain the choice of materials for its fabrication (e.g., a mattress versus a desk). Cost and available fabrication processes may constrain otherwise free choices. For example, a runway has its minimum length constrained by its function in the takeoff and landing of a class of aircraft and its maximum length constrained by cost. An important issue for interpretation is to identify which geometric parameters are causally determined such that their distributions are not just biases of the sample population (e.g., runway length). These essential characteristics enable tight discrimination, which is not possible if properties are treated only as statistical distributions. Causal relations come from function. Such reasoning allows classifying elements into natural subgroups. For example, runways can be classified according to the types of aircraft they serve, even when insufficient statistical information or none is available. This capability is important, since cases in which all distributions can be determined are probably few.

There is no great mystery about generic capability. The relevant geometric description may be at an abstract level. We must differentiate object form from function in suitable abstractions, extract descriptions of form in abstractions, and find a set of equivalences. Because there are only a few descriptors of generalized cones and thus only a few levels of abstractions, this scheme is feasible.

With statistical approaches, it is assumed that the choice of features and class definitions may be given externally; they concentrate on the manipulation of a priori and observed probabilities. I am passionately concerned about just what defines specific classes and which specific features should be used. In the light of our paradigm, general vision requires strong description and weak classification, since a central problem is defining object classes dynamically in a complex visual environment, that is, creating new object classes while living.

Because of computational limits and information limits we have limits on perception. Because of computational limits, we compute only the simplest few of the enormously many possible functions on an image. Because of information limits, we can consider only relatively simple underlying object interpretations for observations. These models represent a commitment or preconception to perceive what we can within those limits. Observations are represented as instantiations of these models.

A purely statistical approach, as opposed to a causal, structural approach, has limits that follow from those information limits. The number of possible scenes far exceeds the number of measurements: The number of possible parameter combinations also far exceeds the number of possible measurements. Some simplifications are essential. Locality and decomposability into primitives are central in structural approaches. In a sense, generalized cylinders are singly curved, hence separable in internal coordinates. By contrast, the Fourier transform is separable in external coordinates.

8.4. AN APPROACH TO INTERPRETATION

One approach to the formalization of interpretation—to finding the "best match" between

an observation and models—is graph embedding. In graph embedding, an isomorphism of one or more models with a subset of the observation is found (Barrow et al. 1977). This implies that models and observations have equivalent representations; for example, image models are compared with image observations (the most usual) or volume models are compared with volume observations. The chief problem lies in defining criteria for inexact matching, for which the usual approach is syntactic. For example, the best match has the fewest differences. This increases complexity of search greatly, but it also is a very unsatisfying match. In some cases we expect differences, for example, when limbs are obscured or not observable by the sensor used. Interpretation of significance of these differences is specific to the scene, to the observation process, to object class, and to articulation of the object.

Once a hypothesis has been made, predictions and measurements provide new information for the decision. Thus, the decision is not necessarily made on a fixed database; interpretation becomes a problem of knowledge acquisition. This raises the concept of "perceptual overkill." It does not seem a useful heuristic to determine the minimum information for classification as an approximation to the maximum-utility problem. In biological systems, many of the perceptual mechanisms are parallel, and there is nothing to be gained in ignoring them. In machine perception, overwhelming verification of a correct hypothesis is typically inexpensive compared to the computation required to get to the right hypothesis. These factors shift the utility balance toward getting data needed for a highly constrained decision. Very strong, relevant data are available if descriptive mechanisms can abstract them and interpretation mechanisms can use them. Object classes likewise have strong functional characterizations. A few structural relations characterize the class. Each relation can be tested.

The interpretation process is usually defined as statistical. Here, the definition is structural, detailed verification of criteria descriptions of class characteristics. All of this falls within the scope of decision theory, but usual applications of decision theory to interpretation trivialize the models from which conditional probabilities follow. The approach can be

regarded as making explicit dependencies that might be glossed over in a statistical analysis. Noise is only one issue; systematic differences are primary.

The match of an observation to a model is the set of transformations necessary to map an abstract model to make it congruent to an abstracted, observed, and semantically segmented description, both specified at the level of essential volume or surface elements. Multiple interpretations are resolved when possible by new observations as required. Essential and optional characteristics are confirmed by new observations so that all criterial structures are verified. The mapping of a structured match to a real number (probability) can often be postponed; at a final decision, a real number is usually convenient to characterize an acceptable subspace, but there are many other ways to characterize a subspace. The distance of the class of transformations can be evaluated in the semantic evaluation sense described above.

This approach is closely related to the one Evans (1968) uses in solving analogy problems. It also follows directly the fundamental definition of generalized cylinders by generalized translational invariance. Generalized cylinders are not defined by a distance function but rather by a congruence map. This approach of a metric on transformations was pursued (Nevatia 1974). The outline of a simple distance measure can be specified based on some obvious semantics that are not complete or satisfactory. The distance measure is applied to the congruence transformation, which includes articulation, scaling, rotation, obscuration, observation errors, and object variations (growth, aging, missing parts). The cost assigned to variations is highly context-dependent. For example, articulations corresponding to usual postures and gaits have low cost. Articulations outside comfortable ranges have high cost. An obscuration interpretation must be consistent with observations of obscuring objects.

In summary, a key paradigm is similarity (not spatial congruence) and the matching of objects that are similar but not identical. There are several important mechanisms: (1) description of three-space form in terms of generic shared structural elements and their abstractions; (2) inference of causally determined parameters; (3) characterization of object classes; (4)

indexing of subclasses of similar forms; and (5) distance functions evaluated in context from congruence maps.

8.5. THE SEARCH PROCESS

The search process in matching is important because potential for complexity is high. Search for graph endomorphism has high complexity for graphs of moderate size. There must be semantic simplifications. It is not reasonable in general vision to match against all models in visual memory. At Stanford, we introduced some concepts for indexing into subsets of objects similar to observed objects (Nevatia 1974). Those techniques were aimed at perception with a relatively large visual memory, even though we worked with only six objects. These indexing techniques relied on imposing a size (attachment) hierarchy on stick figures (i.e., on the part/whole graph). The reasoning for this was that small parts are attached to large parts. This led to comparisons with similar structures (e.g., comparison of a description of a doll with models of the class of objects that have two limbs at one end and three at the opposite end). Object classes were indexed by hash coding. We have considered a similar scheme in which object structures are arranged in a graph (based on topological and metric properties of stick figures) to be referenced by traversing the graph. These are mechanisms for generating hypotheses for subsequent verification. We focus on hypothesis generation because in vision it is a crucial step. In earlier work (Nevatia 1974), an attachment hierarchy allowed the structuring of model graphs and description graphs to facilitate indexing into a subset of similar shapes. Comparison of individual graphs was much abbreviated. This approach provides some capability for identification within a large visual memory.

It is my belief that general vision systems depend on the building of three-dimensional descriptions and that prediction, description, and interpretation take place largely in three dimensions. A recent article describes constraints that lead in the direction of incorporating these capabilities in ACRONYM (Binford 1981).

One paradigm for intelligent systems is *prediction-hypothesis-verification*. The paradigm can be useful or ineffectual, depending on how adequately prediction, hypotheses generation, and verification are conceived. We refer to hypotheses as descriptive maps, cueing, or bottom-up maps. Mapping occurs upward among structures in a geometric hierarchy, from image curves to surface edges, from structures of curves to surfaces, and from structures of surfaces to objects. We use the same terms to refer to prediction maps or top-down maps. We normally think of vision hypotheses as great leaps from images to objects and predictions as great leaps from object models to images. Those are not useful starting points. Vision systems have primarily been built on this basis, with only two levels of representation, name level and image level. *Image level* includes observations extracted from images and appearances of objects. This is too shallow a geometric structure. Instead, we have long thought of hypothesis-prediction-verification loops as steps between any two levels in a well-defined geometric hierarchy—a hierarchy that is deep, with small steps between levels. Hypothesis-prediction-verification relate nearby levels, especially, from image curve elements, to extended curves, to structures of curves (image organization, one level of Gestalt organization), to surfaces, through levels of surface organization. Each loop of prediction-hypothesis-verification is at once bottom-up and top-down. We claim an essential unity of bottom-up and top-down operations. If strong context and weak visual data are available in a situation, a system appears top-down; if the system has strong visual data and weak contextual information, it appears bottom-up. Usually, both context and visual data are available. Prediction is as effective at low levels of the geometric hierarchy as at the high level. Prediction is as general as description. If we have weak contextual information, if we do not know what objects are in the scene and we do not know our viewing conditions, we still know that we can represent objects by locally generative shape primitives (e.g., part/whole graphs of generalized cylinders), and we know that we can make generic predictions of the appearances of generalized cylinders, predictions that are insensitive to viewpoint, illumination, and sensor, general conditions on

image areas and image curves corresponding to surfaces, limbs, and edges of surfaces. I remarked above that prediction-hypothesis-verification loops link primarily nearby levels in the geometric hierarchy. The nearer the levels, the more plausible the hypothesis. In ACRONYM, cueing (i.e., hypothesis generation) is based on powerful shape descriptions, image ribbons, surface ribbons, and generalized cylinders. We originally devised generalized cylinders as a natural way to use image cues about surfaces.

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Low Level Image Segmentation: An Expert System

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Reprinted from *IEEE Transactions on Pattern Analysis and Machine Intelligence*, Volume PAMI-6, Number 5, September 1984, pages 555-577. Copyright © 1984 by The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, Inc.

Abstract—A major problem in robotic vision is the segmentation of images of natural scenes in order to understand their content. This paper presents a new solution to the image segmentation problem that is based on the design of a rule-based expert system. General knowledge about low level properties of processes employ the rules to segment the image into uniform regions and connected lines. In addition to the knowledge rules, a set of control rules are also employed. These include metarules that embody inferences about the order in which the knowledge rules are matched. They also incorporate focus of attention rules that determine the path of processing within the image. Furthermore, an additional set of higher level rules dynamically alters the processing strategy. This paper discusses the structure and content of the knowledge and control rules for image segmentation.

Index Terms—Artificial intelligence, computer vision, expert systems, image segmentation, rule-based systems.

I. INTRODUCTION

A PRIMARY objective in contemporary computer vision research is the ability to analyze images originating from three-dimensional scenes in order to understand their content. This may be done by assigning appropriate interpretations to objects within the scene. Accordingly, an image must first be segmented into regions that roughly correspond to objects, surfaces, or parts of objects in the scene represented by that image. Two steps are thus apparent, the low level processing stage mainly concerned with segmentation, and the high level stage devoted to the interpretation of the segmented result.

The hierarchy suggested here assumes that a low level process that has no *a priori* knowledge about the objects in a scene, would be able to deliver a "plausible" output to the high level process. However, the option of receiving feedback from the latter for further processing in order to resolve high level ambiguities is left open. This research is concerned with the low level stage of an image understanding system, and is closely related to previous work on high level image interpretation [7]. It should be noted that the distinction between the two levels of analysis is primarily in terms of the knowledge available to each. Whereas the interpretation system uses domain specific knowledge about the contents of a scene, the low level segmentation stage employs general purpose models [25] that contain knowledge about images and grouping

Manuscript received June 21, 1983; revised January 4, 1984. This work was supported in part by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada under Grant A4156, and by an FCAC Grant awarded by the Department of Education, Province of Quebec, under Grant EQ-633.

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criteria that are independent of the class of scenes under analysis.

This paper presents a new paradigm for image segmentation, namely, the use of an expert rule-based system. Such a solution was motivated by a number of issues that needed to be addressed and studied. They can be classified under the following headings.

- 1) The presence of a large number of segmentation heuristics in the literature. A method is required for evaluating and organizing these to function together.
- 2) The absence of an explicit scheme for representing the knowledge embodied by these segmentation heuristics.
- 3) The lack of quantitative evaluations of a segmentation.
- 4) The need for a better understanding of the methods by which the segmentation heuristics should be applied to an image.

Following is a discussion of these issues and how the proposed solution affects each.

1) Integration of Knowledge Sources: Approaches to image segmentation in the past have relied on procedural algorithms for boundary detection and region growing [19]. These processes used different heuristics in their analysis, with varying degrees of success in obtaining output partitions that are compatible with human expectations. The diversity in the data structures, knowledge sources, and control mechanisms presents difficulties in finding a general framework that can integrate these efforts. A primary goal of this research was to design a complex system that not only is flexible enough to accommodate the wide variety of segmentation heuristics, but would also be capable of evaluating and selecting the best heuristics for different data situations. For example, both region analysis for grouping pixels based on the similarity of their features, and boundary analysis for partitioning the image based on discontinuities in the features, have been suggested as valid methods for segmenting an image. The proposed system is capable of doing both, with the additional potential of allowing interactions between these knowledge sources. Such an exchange of information between the various segmentation heuristics leads to a substantial improvement in the output delivered to the high level interpretation processes.

2) Explicit Knowledge Representation: The design of an expert segmentation system that blends knowledge from a wide variety of sources faces the problem of finding a suitable knowledge representation scheme. In vision systems developed so far, "explicit representations of knowledge have been reserved mainly for application domain knowledge, while general visual knowledge has been buried away in procedures" [22]. What is needed is a flexible mechanism capable of experiment-

ing with different processing methodologies, and an expressive coding scheme that can accommodate all possible knowledge sources. The rule-based approach to control, which is proposed here, satisfies both requirements. Knowledge is detached from the application processes and coded into rules, which are modular entities that can be modified without affecting the structure of a system. An additional goal of this research was to investigate the use of the rule-based approach in general purpose image segmentation. This includes addressing control issues such as conflict resolution and focus of attention, as well as structural issues like the symbolic coding of segmentation heuristics into production rules.

3). Output Evaluation: Another aspect of the image segmentation problem is the nonuniqueness of the solution. Ideally, a complete segmentation should correspond to the objects to be interpreted. However, low level processes can only produce partitions on a nonsemantic basis, and these may not necessarily correspond to describable objects. Such partial segmentations are not unique even for humans examining a scene. This problem may not be of particular importance if the ultimate goal is to perform high level analysis with top-down feedback. Nevertheless, a method for evaluating the output is required. It provides the means for designing a system that produces the most appropriate partition, and hence minimizes the need for intervention by the high level stage. Therefore, another goal of this research was to establish design measures that indicate the distance from a known reference. The latter is taken to be a manually generated segmentation that corresponds to the objects in the image. These measures can then be used within the context of the rule-based system to "tune" the model by evaluating the rules and the control mechanisms.

The development of design measures has prompted us to search for other measures that estimate the quality of the output without the need for a reference partition. Consequently, these new measures can be used during actual processing and will be referred to as "real-time measures." Low level segmentation can now be posed as an optimization problem in which the goal is to maximize a set of performance parameters. By comparing an output partition to the input image, the real-time measures are used to modify the processing methodology in order to incrementally improve that output.

4). The Definition of a Control Strategy: For a system that employs a large number of heuristics to segment an image, two control issues must be addressed: the order in which different heuristics are applied, and the path within the image along which they are tested. Thus, a control strategy for image segmentation consists of rule ordering and path selection components. Different strategies are available, and the best strategy to apply varies during processing. It depends on the state of the output segmentation at any given time. Consequently, a dynamic selection mechanism is used to execute the best strategy based on the data.

One of the early attempts at addressing these issues was not actually in image understanding, but rather studied the symbolic representation of visual images by humans [14]. In a system called VIS, Moran compiled a set of rules that simulated the behavior of a human describing a sequence of simple visual events. The first effort at using production systems in image

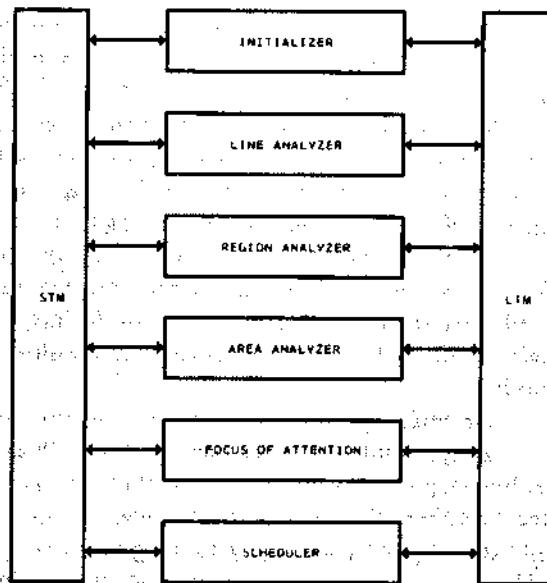


Fig. 1. The system block diagram.

understanding was reported in Sloan's [20]. The rule-based structure was limited to the interpretation stage and was clearly separated from the low level region analysis. Other interesting systems are reported in [1], [2], [10]. All the approaches have concentrated on the high level aspects of the vision problem. The rules represent specific domain knowledge that is application-dependent. What is also needed is a representational mechanism that can encompass general purpose knowledge about image formation and the laws of preceptual grouping. These information sources are independent of the specific application and the semantic content of the images. Such a formulation fills the gap between the procedural operators that measure and detect features in the image and the high level expert systems that interpret the results. This paper discusses the structure and type of low level knowledge implemented by such a rule-based system for image segmentation.

II. SYSTEM OVERVIEW

The system is designed in the form of a modular set of processes and two associative memories, as shown in Fig. 1. The input image, the segmentation data, and at the end of processing, the output, are stored in a short term memory (STM). A long term memory (LTM) embodies the model representing the system knowledge about low level segmentation, as well as control strategies. Each of the system processes has access to the information stored in the LTM, and can also read and modify the data stored in the STM. In fact, this is the only way it can communicate with the other system processes. Thus any change in the data stored in the STM, brought about by one of the system processes, will be instantaneously available to the other system processes.

The basic control structure is that of a production system, in which general knowledge about independent low level properties of an image is formulated into condition-action rules. A system process matches rules in the LTM against the data stored in the STM, and when a match occurs, the rule fires. This triggers an action that is performed by that process, and usually involves modification of the data.

The segmentation of an image is defined by a set of regions that are connected and nonoverlapping, so that each pixel in the image acquires a unique region label that indicates the region it belongs to. In addition to the regions, discontinuities in the image array are defined by lines that are also connected and nonoverlapping. In this case, pixels in the image can either have a line label indicating the line they belong to, or they can have null labels to indicate that there is no line passing through them. This approach simultaneously uses both region information, based primarily on uniformity criteria in the image array, as well as line information, that represents discontinuity criteria in that array.

Initially, the image gradient is computed and thresholded. The resulting edge points are then grouped into lines to produce an initial line map for that image. An initial region map is also computed by either selecting an arbitrary segmentation of the image into regions, or by executing a fast region growing algorithm. The image array, its gradient, and the initial region and line maps are all stored in the STM. Low level features are then extracted and stored in the STM. These include the average color features for regions and lines, position features, and spatial relationships. The latter include ADJACENCY among regions, and relationships of IN FRONT OF, BEHIND, and PARALLEL TO involving lines. Regions to the LEFT and RIGHT OF a line, and lines TOUCHING OR INTERSECTING a region, describe spatial relationships between lines and regions.

Other important data entries maintained and stored in the STM are the focus of attention areas. These are areas in the image defined primarily by their position and size. An area may correspond to a region, a line, or groups of regions and/or lines in the image segmentation. These areas are used for the purpose of directing the attention of the system to the more interesting and worthwhile parts of the image, in terms of processing need and richness of segmentation information. Three types of areas are defined: smooth, textured, and areas created by long lines that close, or almost close, forming loops. The latter are referred to as bounded areas. Initially, the process responsible for generating areas computes them on the basis of the segmentation data stored in the STM. Because the resulting areas would usually not cover the entire image, a subset of the regions and lines will not belong to a specific area. These are assigned to a default area which encompasses the balance of the image less the detected areas.

The information stored in the STM is continuously updated during processing, so that it reflects the state of the segmentation of the image at any point in time. The regions, lines, areas, plus their features at the end of processing, represent the output of the low level stage to be delivered to the high level interpretation system. The higher the correspondence between regions in the output segmentation and objects in the scene, the easier the task of the high level process. Lines corresponding to major discontinuities in the image, as well as smooth and textured areas, can also be used to guide the interpretation process.

Six processes are involved in producing actions, as shown in Fig. 1. The INITIALIZER generates the initial region and line maps, and uses them to produce initial focus of attention areas. It also computes and stores the features of these initial

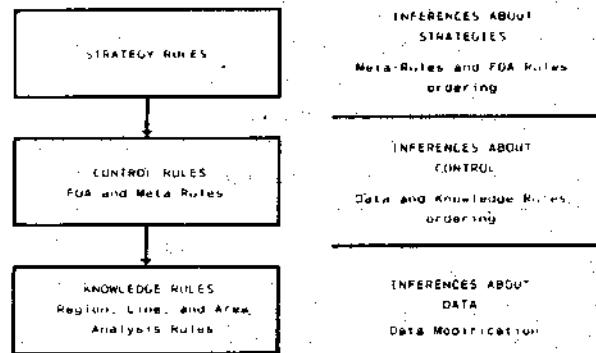


Fig. 2. Three levels of rules.

data elements in the STM. The REGION, LINE, and AREA ANALYZERS are the three main processing modules of the system. They are responsible for rule matching and data modification on their respective entities. The LINE ANALYZER, for example, matches the line analysis rules in the LTM to the data in the STM. If a rule fires, it will execute the action specified by that rule on the current line under analysis. The same applies to the REGION and AREA ANALYZERS. The FOCUS OF ATTENTION module matches its own rules to execute a defined path strategy that brings various data items to the attention of the system, in a particular order. Thus, when a focus of attention action is executed, this means that the current region, line, or area will be replaced by a new region, line, or area whose identity depends on the action specified by that rule. Finally, the SUPERVISOR acts as a monitor for system control purposes. It matches the strategy rules to select the appropriate control strategy. Consequently, a set of metarules is used to determine which set of knowledge rules, if any, is to be tested next.

III. THE RULE-BASED MODEL

The model stored in the LTM is composed of three levels of production rules, as shown in Fig. 2. At the first level, the knowledge rules encode the information about properties of regions, lines, and areas in the form of sets of situation-action pairs. Each situation is coded into a number of logical predicates that compose the conditions of a rule. The latter are either logical comparisons or evaluations on the features of regions, lines, and areas in the segmented image. The conditions are ANDED together, so that when a specific situation occurs within the image, all the conditions will be met. In this case, a match is said to have occurred, and the rule fires. The rule action is then executed. This might be splitting of a region or merging of two regions, an addition, deletion, or extension of a line, a merging of two lines, or a creation or modification of a focus of attention area. Knowledge rules are classified by their actions, so that there are region analysis rules, line analysis rules, and area analysis rules. A region rule, for example, will contain conditions that match on features of regions, lines, and areas, but will always execute its action on the current region under analysis.

The second level of rules in the LTM contains the control rules, which can be further classified into two categories. First the focus of attention rules, which are responsible for finding the next data entry to be considered. They have actions that

bring to the attention of the system a next region, next line, or an entire area. Using these rules, a strategy for visiting regions and lines within a focus of attention area, and for alternating from one area to another, can be defined and executed. This strategy will be data-driven since the conditions of these rules are also logical predicates evaluated on the STM data.

The second type of control rules are actually inferences about sets of knowledge rules, or in the spirit of a production system, they are termed metarules [3]. They differ from other rules, in that their actions do not modify the data in the STM. Instead, the metarules alter the matching order of different knowledge rule sets. Each process in the system is associated with a specific set of rules. The conditions of the metarules examine the data in the STM, and their actions specify the next process to be activated (and hence the next knowledge rule set). The metarules are also responsible for evaluating the stopping criteria of the system, and consequently terminating the processing. This approach renders the whole control process to be data-driven.

Control rules execute the system control strategy: focus of attention rules define the method by which data are selected for processing; the metarules specify the order in which the rule sets are matched. The system's control strategy is comprised of six basic elements, each of which can assume more than one specific state. The first three elements are the region path strategy, the line path strategy, and the region and line updating strategy. They determine the order in which the respective data items are tested and updated by the rules. Different path strategies are implemented by employing the appropriate set of focus of attention rules. The next three elements define strategies for determining process priority, region rule priority, and line rule priority. The first specifies the order in which the different rule sets are matched. The last two order the rules within the two processes. Each strategy state is achieved by invoking a specific set of control rules. Thus, one can effectively "program" the system into executing a desired strategy by putting together the appropriate combination of focus of attention rules and metarules.

The third and highest rule level in Fig. 2 contains the strategy rules. Their function is to select, based on the data, the set of control rules (focus of attention rules and metarules) that executes the most appropriate control strategy. Strategy determination is formulated as a dynamic decision-making process which results in the assignment of a specific state to each of the strategy elements.¹ In order to make this selection, a set of performance measurements is computed for each focus of attention area in the image [9]. These include values for the average uniformity of the regions within the area, the average contrast across these regions, the connectivity of the lines, and the average contrast across time. For example, if an area had regions of low average uniformity, the region rule priorities would be set so that rules which split regions were given priority over merging rules. Other constraints define the relation between the performance measurements and all the elements of

strategy. The latter will therefore change with time, as well as spatially from one area to another.

To summarize, the system control strategy is defined by the strategy rules and executed by the control rules. Focus of attention rules specify the next data item to be tested, and metarules select the next rule set to be matched. Strategy rules, on the other hand, have actions that dynamically adjust the priorities of the metarules and the focus of attention rules.

The remaining sections of this paper describe the knowledge and control rules in more detail. The strategy rules and the dynamic strategy determination process are addressed separately in [9]. A more detailed account of the three rule levels is given in [16]. Before discussing the rules in detail, we will first define their basic structure in the next section.

IV. THE STRUCTURE OF THE RULES

Knowledge representation will largely depend on the composition of the rules constituting the model. A rule has the following format:

CONDITION AND CONDITION AND CONDITION ACTIONS

(1)

The left-hand side is composed of a set of CONDITIONS evaluated on the data. The ACTIONS on the right-hand side specify particular modifications to the data. The logical AND's indicate that the action of the rule will only be performed if ALL its conditions are satisfied. Note that there is no provision for a logical OR within a rule. This is because the latter can be accounted for by including another rule that encompasses the alternative situation.

Each rule depicts a certain situation that might be present in the data. A process will match a rule on the features of the regions, lines, or areas, or on some other data item stored in the STM. This is accomplished by a search conducted in the STM for the data configuration portrayed by the rule. If the search is successful, the rule will fire, and its actions will be executed. For this reason, rules have been termed situation-response tuples, or condition-action sets.

A RULE INTERPRETER interfaces the LTM rules to the processing modules, as well as to the experimenter. This two-way communication channel allows a designer to modify the rules, and provides the means for the rules to control the processing modules. As an input channel of the LTM, the INTERPRETER receives commands from a user to edit the rule-based model, adding, deleting, changing, and examining the rules. It monitors the formulation of the model, and signals any illegal syntactic combinations to ensure an error-free rule set. The output channel then translates the rules for the processing modules. The conditions are analyzed in order to specify the type of evaluations to be performed and identify the data items and features to be tested. The processing module then performs the matching operation accordingly. If a match occurs, the INTERPRETER provides pointers to the specific procedures that implement the rule actions. Fig. 3 is a schematic of the signal flow in and out of the model. The conditions and actions will now be discussed in more detail.

¹Actually, the rule priorities associated with each of the possible states for each strategy element are adjusted.

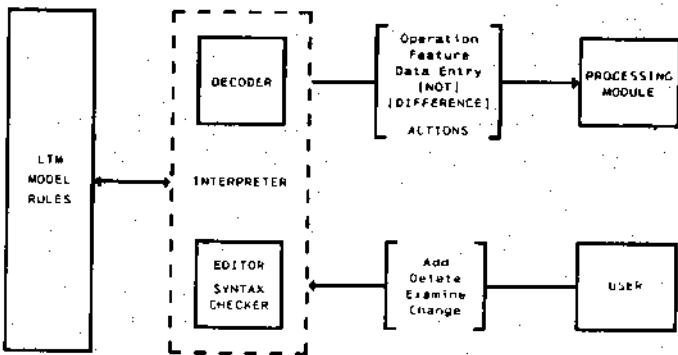


Fig. 3. The functions of the RULE INTERPRETER.

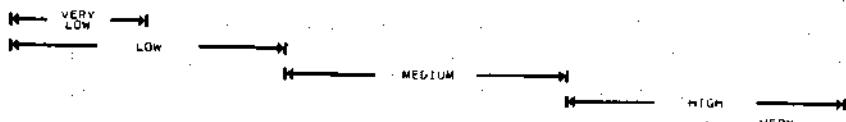


Fig. 4. Relative ranges of symbolic qualifiers.

A. The Rule Conditions

The conditions of a rule are logical entities, or equivalently, binary valued variables that can be instantiated to be either TRUE or FALSE. They correspond to logical evaluations or comparisons on the data. Each condition is composed of a logical predicate that may be preceded by the qualifier NOT, a reference to the logical complement of that predicate. The STM contains mostly numerical variables representing features of regions, lines, and areas in the image segmentation. The size of a region and the length of a line are typical examples. Some nonnumerical data are also stored. Examples of these include labels that indicate the presence or absence of a certain feature, and those that qualitatively describe a data entry (a line as being a loop, or an area as smooth).

In [16] the four classes of logical predicates that can exist in a rule condition were defined. These were classified according to the nature of the logical operation performed, as well as the type of variable that is tested. They are summarized as follows:

1) Logical comparisons on numerical variables.

LOWER LINE GRADIENT
EQUAL LINE DIRECTIONS
HIGHER REGION SIZE

2) Logical comparisons on nonnumerical variables.

SAME REGION LEFT

3) Logical evaluations on numerical variables.

VERY LOW REGION VARIANCE
MEDIUM REGION ADJACENCY
HIGH LINE LENGTH

Five symbols define different ranges over the scale of each feature. If the value of a feature lies in a given range, the corresponding logical evaluation will be TRUE. The relative position of the different ranges of symbols is represented schematically in Fig. 4. Note that the ranges for LOW and HIGH include the ranges for VERY LOW and VERY HIGH, respectively. This seems to conform with the linguistic definition of these qualifiers. Other ranges using the scale of Fig. 4 are

accessible through combinations of qualifiers and the addition of the NOT qualifier (e.g., NOT LOW; HIGH AND NOT VERY HIGH). The choice of these symbolic qualifiers, their number, and their ranges are discussed in detail in [16].

4) Logical evaluations on non-numerical variables.

LINE IS LOOP

AREA IS NOT SMOOTH

PREVIOUS PROCESS WAS REGIONS

IS (ARE) and WAS in the examples above represent the keywords that distinguish this condition type.

Note that the employment of the qualifier NOT increases the flexibility of the four operations described above. Examples include NOT LOWER, NOT SAME, NOT VERY HIGH, and WAS NOT.

One aspect that relates to the numerical variables in type 1 and 3 conditions is the addition of a DIFFERENCE qualifier. This enables the system to perform all the logical operations cited above on differences in the values of two variables, instead of on the values themselves. Thus "LOW DIFFERENCE IN REGION FEATURE 1" indicates that the difference in the values of the first color feature (average red intensity level) of two regions must be in the LOW range for the condition to be satisfied (the predicate to be TRUE). Each numerical feature must thus have an additional scale as per Fig. 4, in order to specify the range of the symbolic qualifiers on the differences in that feature. For example, a line length of less than 50 pixels might be considered LOW. On the other hand, the limit for a LOW DIFFERENCE in the length of two lines will necessarily be less than that, maybe 10 pixels. The selection of these ranges is also discussed in [16].

We can now summarize the conditions of our rules and show that they include the following basic items.

1) A symbolic qualifier that depicts the type of logical operation to be performed on the data. The type of qualifier will depend on the type of feature to be examined, according to the classification given above.

2) A symbol denoting the data entry on which the condition is to be matched. By default, it refers to the current

TABLE I
POSSIBLE DATA ENTRIES

DATA ENTRY	SYMBOL
Current Region	REG
Current Line	LINE
Current Area	AREA
Region ADJACENT to current region	REGA
Region to the LEFT OF current line	REGL
Region to the RIGHT OF current line	REGR
Line NEAR current line	LINEN
Line IN FRONT OF current line	LINEF
Line BEHIND current line	LINES
Line PARALLEL TO current line	LINEP
Line INTERSECTING current region	LINEI

TABLE II
THE FEATURES IN A CONDITION

NUMERICAL DESCRIPTIVE FEATURES		
Feature 1	Feature 2	Feature 3
Variance 1	Variance 2	Variance 3
Intensity	Intensity Variance	Gradient
Gradient Variance	X-Centroid	Y-Centroid
Minimum X	Minimum Y	Maximum X
Maximum Y	Starting X	Starting Y
Ending X	Ending Y	Starting Direction
Ending Direction	Average Direction	Length
Start-End Distance	Size	Perimeter
Histogram Bimodality	Circularity	Aspect Ratio
Uniformity 1	Uniformity 2	Uniformity 3
Region Contrast 1	Region Contrast 2	Region Contrast 3
Line Contrast 1	Line Contrast 2	Line Contrast 3
Line Connectivity	Number of Regions	Number of Lines
Number of Areas		
NUMERICAL SPATIAL FEATURES		
Number of ADJACENT Regions	Adjacency Values	
Number of INTERSECTING Lines	Line Content between Regions	
Distance to Line IN FRONT	Nearest Point on Line IN FRONT	
Distance to Line BEHIND	Nearest Point on Line BEHIND	
Distance to PARALLEL Line	Number of PARALLEL Points	
Adjacency of LEFT Region	Adjacency of RIGHT Region	
Number of Lines IN FRONT	Number of Lines BEHIND	
Number of PARALLEL Lines	Number of Regions to the LEFT	
Number of Regions to the RIGHT		
LOGICAL FEATURES		
Histogram is bimodal	Region is bisected by line	
Line is open	Line is closed	
Line is loop	Line end is open	
Line start is open	Line is clockwise	
Area is smooth	Area is textured	
Area is bounded	Area is new	
One region to the LEFT	One region to the RIGHT	
Same region to the LEFT and RIGHT OF line		
Same region LEFT OF line 1 and line 2		
Same region RIGHT OF line 1 and line 2		
Same region to the LEFT OF line 1 and RIGHT OF line 2		
Same region to the RIGHT OF line 1 and LEFT OF line 2		
Two lines are touching (8 connected)		
Areas are absent	Regions are absent	
Lines are absent	System is starting	
Process was Regions	Process was Lines	
Process was Areas	Process was Focus	
Process was Generate Areas	Process was active	

region, line, or area considered by the system, as specified by the **FOCUS OF ATTENTION** module. This symbol can be omitted provided that no ambiguities result.² Other entries that are spatially related to the current ones may also be tested; for example, the features of an ADJACENT region or a PARALLEL line. Table I lists all such possible entries, together with the symbols that are used to express them.

3) A pointer to the feature pertaining to the data entry discussed above (e.g., size, length, and gradient). The value of that feature (a number or a label) is the operand of the logical operation. All possible features are listed in Table II. A detailed description of these is given in [16].

4) An optional NOT qualifier that negates the effect of the condition.

5) An optional DIFFERENCE qualifier that applies the operation to differences in feature values.

Fig. 5 summarizes the structure of a condition. Values in

²The tested operand can only belong to a region, a line, or an area; e.g., line length.

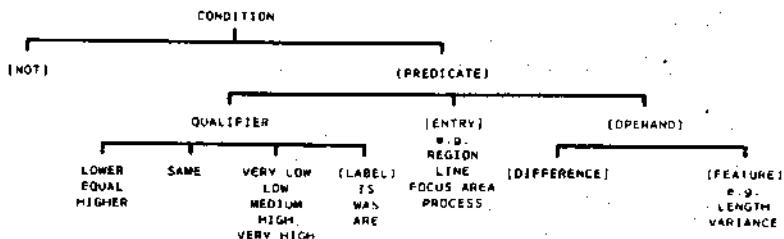


Fig. 5. The structure of a condition.

TABLE III
THE RULE ACTIONS

AREA ANALYZER ACTIONS		
Create Smooth Area	Add to Smooth Area	Save Smooth Area
Create Texture Area	Add to Texture Area	Save Texture Area
Create Bounded Area	Add to Bounded Area	Save Bounded Area
Relabel Area to Smooth	Relabel Area to Texture	
Relabel Area to Bounded	Delete Area	
REGION ANALYZER ACTIONS		
Split a Region by Histogram	Merge Two Regions	
Split Region at Lines		
LINE ANALYZER ACTIONS		
Extend Line Forward	Extend Line Backward	
Join Lines Forward	Join Lines Backward	
Insert Line Forward	Insert Line Backward	
Merge Lines Forward	Merge Lines Backward	
Delete Line		
FOCUS OF ATTENTION ACTIONS		
Region with Highest Adjacency	Largest ADJACENT Region	
Region with Lowest Adjacency	Smallest ADJACENT Region	
Region with Higher Label	Next Scanned Region	
Region to the LEFT OF Line	Region to the RIGHT OF Line	
Closest Line IN FRONT	Closest Line BEHIND	
Closest PARALLEL Line	Shortest Line that is near	
Longest Line that is Near	Strongest Line that is near	
Weakest Line that is Near	Line with Higher Label	
Next Scanned Line	Line INTERSECTING Region	
Defocus (Focus on Whole Image)	Focus on Areas	
Clear Region List	Clear Line List	
Freeze Area	Next Area (any)	
Next Smooth Area	Next Texture Area	
Next Bounded Area		
SUPERVISOR ACTIONS		
Initialize Regions	Initialize Lines	Generate Areas
Match Region Rules	Match Line Rules	Match Area Rules
Match Focus Rules	Start	Stop

square brackets are optional, while those in parentheses are (variables) to be instantiated. Certain combinations of symbols are illegal, and these are flagged by the RULE INTERPRETER.

B. The Rule Actions

Each rule specifies to a processing module the action to be executed when all its conditions are met. Actions are selected from a finite list that represents the union of the capabilities of the processing modules in modifying the data in the STM. They provide the means for classifying the rules into sets according to the data entry on which each action is performed. A detailed description of how each action is accomplished is given in [16]. Table III provides a complete list of the actions

sorted into classes. Following are brief definitions of the actions within each class.

1) *Actions on Areas:* Some actions create new areas, add regions to existing areas, and compute and store the features of the created areas. Three such actions are defined for each area type. Other actions performed by the AREA ANALYZER include changing the type of an area when its characteristics alter during processing, and deleting areas that are of no further use to the focus of attention mechanism.

2) *Actions on Regions:* The REGION ANALYZER can either merge two regions into one, or split a region into several. Two different methods for splitting a region are given. The first selects a threshold from the histogram of a feature, and finds

the connected pixels that are above and below that value. The second bisects a region spatially along the lines that intersect it.

3) Actions on Lines: Actions on lines are more diverse. A line can be extended forward from its last point along the highest local gradient. The same can be done backwards from the line's starting point. Alternatively, a line could be extended forward (or backward) by joining it to another line that is IN FRONT OF (or BEHIND) it. A third method for extending lines forward (or backward) is by inserting the label of the line at pixels that are at the boundary of two regions. Two lines can be merged into one line with the same label in two ways: a forward merge will combine the current line with another IN FRONT OF it, and a backward merge will do the same for the current line and one that is BEHIND it. The two lines must be touching each other. The final action deletes a line completely from the segmentation.

4) Focus of Attention Actions: The focus of attention module possesses different methods for replacing the current region and line by others. The actions listed in Table III are self-explanatory. They should be interpreted as obtaining the next region (or line) that exhibits the particular feature with respect to a current region (or line). This includes, for example, fetching the region that is to the left of the current line, or the line that intersects the current region. Actions that focus on the next area execute a selection strategy that is discussed in detail in [9], [16]. These can be limited to a specific area type, or they can be selected from any of the available areas.

5) Supervisor Actions: The actions of the metarules are different from all of the others in that they do not modify the segmentation data in the STM. They specify which set of rules is to be matched next on the data, and thus indirectly activate the different processing modules. Other commands include those that trigger the initialization, commence processing, and halt the analysis.

Having described the structure of the rules and reviewed the available conditions and actions, we will now discuss the different types of rules that constitute the model for low level image segmentation.

V. THE KNOWLEDGE RULES

The criteria that specify how an image should be segmented are at the heart of our rule-based model. Information about image intensities, region properties, and the existence of lines guide the analysis into creating an output that is in accordance with the model. By coding these knowledge sources into rules, and applying them to the data, a structured and uniform methodology will result. Other approaches to segmentation use a small number of heuristics in the analysis, as is evident by the abundance of efforts in the field, but rather because of the limitations imposed by the extremely rigid format in which the knowledge has been cast. A line detection program, for example, that is built on locating the discontinuities of features in the image array, will hardly produce a perfect (or even acceptable) line drawing. Clearly other heuristics are needed in order to account for deficiencies in the procedure. Methods for improving on the output of the above have been

investigated, but they require the execution of other programs that apply new transformations to the image. One may imagine the application of several cascaded procedures to an image, with each one accounting for some knowledge heuristic that was found to enhance the output. This is not an efficient method of analysis. In the course of improving the result, previous accomplishments may be destroyed. Even if this does not happen, we still have to contend with a large number of image transformations that yield incremental results which are usually highly localized.

The answer to this problem is to combine all useful processing heuristics into a model, and use it to guide the analysis. This is what a rule-based system accomplishes. The appropriate piece of information can be brought into the analysis when it is most needed. Thus, a specific heuristic will only be used to update that part of the image to which it is applicable. Any number of knowledge sources can be used. The model can easily be tuned by testing, modifying, deleting, and adding information. In fact, the main question becomes which heuristics to encode into the rules? Guidelines are needed for selecting the knowledge. Almost half a century ago, psychologists described a set of principles for human visual perception. What has become known as the Gestalt principles amounts to a set of general rules for perceptual grouping [5]. Although intended for high level cognitive events, these premises also have their consequences in low level context-free applications. One of the factors that has so far limited the use of Gestalt psychology in computer vision is the lack of a framework to represent these logical assertions. The rule-based vision system provides the required mechanism. By modeling the rules after the Gestalt laws, we define guidelines for creating the former and a mechanism for testing the latter. The five basic principles for grouping visual entities are: similarity, proximity, uniform destiny, good continuity, and closure. Other related, although less general factors, include simplicity, symmetry, equilibrium, and good shape. For details on each, the reader is referred to [5], [6], [24]. Our main concern is to encode these logical grouping assertions into the low level model. Each of the segmentation rules may represent some or more of the above principles. In this section, we will present typical examples of each of the three types of knowledge rules, and discuss how the Gestalt criteria are incorporated into the model.

A. Region Analysis Rules

Rules belonging to this set are concerned with modifying the regions in a segmentation in order to conform with certain criteria. The REGION ANALYZER module applies these rules to the regions stored in the STM. When a match occurs, the process is instructed to either split a region, or merge it with an ADJACENT one. Thus, the function of this rule set is to specify the merging and splitting criteria to be applied to the present region configuration in order to produce a better partition of the image.

The dominant principles in region analysis are those of proximity and similarity. Pixels that are adjacent and have similar intensity (or color) features are grouped into regions. This is the basic principle behind most region growing pro-

grams [13]. A general rule merges two ADJACENT regions (each of which can be a single pixel) as follows [15]:

RULE (801):

- IF: (1) There is a LOW DIFFERENCE in REGION FEATURE 1
- (2) There is a LOW DIFFERENCE in REGION FEATURE 2
- (3) There is a LOW DIFFERENCE in REGION FEATURE 3

THEN: (1) MERGE the two REGIONS

This implies that a low difference in the average values of all three color features between the two regions must exist. This region growing rule is responsible for most of the merging that takes place. Alone however, it cannot account for all the data situations that require region merging. Analyzing an image using only this rule as the merging criterion produces many incorrect data configurations. These result when nonuniform scene characteristics such as boundaries, shadows, and highlights are subjected to noise, as well as sampling and quantization errors during the image formation process. Based on our understanding of these phenomena, new rules can be added to deal with them on a case-by-case basis. Consider the following rule:

RULE (802):

- IF: (1) The REGION SIZE is VERY LOW
- (2) The ADJACENCY with another REGION is HIGH
- (3) The DIFFERENCE in REGION FEATURE 1 is NOT HIGH
- (4) The DIFFERENCE in REGION FEATURE 2 is NOT HIGH
- (5) The DIFFERENCE in REGION FEATURE 3 is NOT HIGH

THEN: (1) MERGE the two REGIONS

The first two conditions describe the situation when a region is of very small size and is mostly surrounded (or totally contained) by an ADJACENT region. This is an indication that the first region resulted from some noise source. Therefore a relaxation of the merging criteria in Rule (801) is called for. The last three conditions provide the loosened version that restricts the differences in features to be of low or medium value.

Another aspect to be accounted for is the formation of "hybrid" regions at the boundary between two regions that have high differences in their average intensities (or colors). Due to the graded quantized transition, pixels in the middle acquire a range of intensities that does not allow them to merge with either of their neighbors. Because they are at a boundary, these intermediate regions exhibit a high average gradient, and therefore will be split longitudinally in a direction parallel to the border. This will result in very thin regions along some of the boundaries. Such regions are characterized by low size, a very high (or very low) aspect ratio, and a high average gradient. The merging criteria are again relaxed to

eliminate these residual regions, as shown by the following rules.

RULE (803):

- IF: (1) The REGION SIZE is LOW
- (2) The REGION AVERAGE GRADIENT is HIGH
- (3) The DIFFERENCE in REGION FEATURE 1 is NOT HIGH
- (4) The DIFFERENCE in REGION FEATURE 2 is NOT HIGH
- (5) The DIFFERENCE in REGION FEATURE 3 is NOT HIGH

THEN: (1) MERGE the two REGIONS

RULE (804):

- IF: (1) The REGION SIZE is LOW
- (2) The REGION ASPECT RATIO is VERY HIGH
- (3) The DIFFERENCE in REGION FEATURE 1 is NOT HIGH
- (4) The DIFFERENCE in REGION FEATURE 2 is NOT HIGH
- (5) The DIFFERENCE in REGION FEATURE 3 is NOT HIGH

THEN: (1) MERGE the two REGIONS

A similar rule, Rule (805), exists for very low aspect ratio.

Because of the limited resolution of the image, faulty regions may also occur if a large number of regions intersect at the same spot. Rule (806) will abolish such errors allowing a merge with the most similar larger region.

RULE (806):

- IF: (1) The REGION SIZE is LOW
- (2) The NUMBER of ADJACENT regions is HIGH
- (3) The DIFFERENCE in REGION FEATURE 1 is NOT HIGH
- (4) The DIFFERENCE in REGION FEATURE 2 is NOT HIGH
- (5) The DIFFERENCE in REGION FEATURE 3 is NOT HIGH
- (6) The ADJACENT REGION SIZE is NOT LOW

THEN: (1) MERGE the two REGIONS

TWO ADJACENT regions of very small size are also allowed to merge more easily because of diminished contrast sensitivity. The following rule portrays this concept.

RULE (807):

- IF: (1) The REGION SIZE is VERY LOW
- (2) The ADJACENT REGION SIZE is VERY LOW
- (3) The DIFFERENCE in REGION FEATURE 1 is NOT HIGH
- (4) The DIFFERENCE in REGION FEATURE 2 is NOT HIGH
- (5) The DIFFERENCE in REGION FEATURE 3 is NOT HIGH

THEN: (1) MERGE the two REGIONS

The Gestalt principle of similarity is the main factor that motivates the splitting of a region. Then, the resulting regions must consist of pixels that are more similar to each other than the pixels belonging to the original region. Histograms of features are strong indicators of the presence of subgroups of pixels. A multimodal histogram signals the need for splitting to achieve a uniform unimodal distribution of the features in the resulting partition [23]. In [16], a method was introduced for determining whether a histogram is (at least) bimodal, and to what degree. The corresponding action to split the region was also described. The following pair of rules combine the measurement with the action.

RULE (901):

IF: (1) The REGION HISTOGRAM IS BIMODAL

THEN: (1) SPLIT the REGION according to the HISTOGRAM

RULE (902):

IF: (1) The REGION HISTOGRAM BIMODALITY IS NOT LOW

THEN: (1) SPLIT the REGION according to the HISTOGRAM

The second rule is seen to be more restrictive since it establishes a lower limit on the degree of bimodality below which splitting will not be allowed. The following rules take into account the size of a region in addition to its histogram:

RULE (903):

IF: (1) The REGION SIZE IS HIGH

(2) The REGION HISTOGRAM BIMODALITY IS HIGH

THEN: (1) SPLIT the REGION according to the HISTOGRAM

RULE (904):

IF: (1) The REGION SIZE IS MEDIUM

(2) The REGION HISTOGRAM BIMODALITY IS NOT LOW

THEN: (1) SPLIT the REGION according to the HISTOGRAM

The two rules are examples of how the different ranges of symbolic features can be utilized in knowledge representation. Rule (903) demands a highly bimodal histogram for large regions, while the restriction is eased in Rule (904) for medium size regions. Histogram splitting is unreliable (and therefore not allowed) for regions with small (LOW) size because of the increasing effect of the region boundary.

There are other indicators that a region should be split. Rule (905) depicts the case when the variance of the color features is large, indicating a large spread in the feature values from the average.

RULE (905):

IF: (1) The REGION VARIANCE 1 IS HIGH
 (2) The REGION VARIANCE 2 IS HIGH
 (3) The REGION VARIANCE 3 IS HIGH
 (4) The REGION HISTOGRAM IS BIMODAL

THEN: (1) SPLIT the REGION according to the HISTOGRAM

The histogram must still be bimodal, although no restriction is made on the degree of bimodality. This implies that a small dip in the histogram will be sufficient. In fact, the dip is required by the rule action, since a threshold must be determined for histogram splitting. The next two rules are seen to use the average gradient over a region as the guide for splitting. A large gradient may be due to a large variance of the features, which is the case already covered by Rule (905). On the other hand, it may be caused by a local discontinuity in the feature values that might not reflect itself in the variances.

RULE (906):

IF: (1) The REGION SIZE IS HIGH
 (2) The REGION AVERAGE GRADIENT IS NOT LOW
 (3) The REGION HISTOGRAM IS BIMODAL

THEN: (1) SPLIT the REGION according to the HISTOGRAM

RULE (907):

IF: (1) The REGION SIZE IS NOT LOW
 (2) The REGION AVERAGE GRADIENT IS HIGH
 (3) The REGION HISTOGRAM IS BIMODAL

THEN: (1) SPLIT the REGION according to the HISTOGRAM

Lines may provide evidence for region splitting. Pixels bearing the same region label, but falling on opposite sides of a line passing through, may in fact belong to different regions. The REGION ANALYZER provides an action that splits a region along the lines that intersect it. Rule (908) illustrates how line information is used in processing regions.

RULE (908):

IF: (1) The REGION SIZE IS NOT LOW
 (2) REGION IS BISECTED BY LINE
 (3) The LINE LENGTH IS NOT LOW
 (4) The LINE AVERAGE GRADIENT IS HIGH

THEN: (1) SPLIT the REGION at LINES

The use of line information in region analysis is again exemplified in Rule (909). Merging two regions can be inhibited by the presence of a line at their common boundary, even if they have identical average features. This is accomplished by adding another condition to Rule (801) to produce the following:

RULE (809):

- IF: (1) There is a LOW DIFFERENCE in REGION FEATURE 1
- (2) There is a LOW DIFFERENCE in REGION FEATURE 2
- (3) There is a LOW DIFFERENCE in REGION FEATURE 3
- (4) The value of LINES BETWEEN REGIONS is LOW

THEN: (1) MERGE the two REGIONS

Condition 4) above refers to the fraction of common boundary between the two regions that is covered by lines. The same condition can be added to other region merging rules. The next section introduces the rules used by the LINE ANALYZER.

B. Line Analysis Rules

Lines by their nature, provide a wider variety of data situations. They are also subject to a larger number of actions. In this section, we present examples of various line analysis rules. Unlike regions, similarity is not the main issue here. Instead, other Gestalt principles take on a more prominent role; namely, continuity and good closure. Proximity is of equal importance for lines as it was for regions.

These rules are attempting to enhance the initial line configuration that results from detecting the discontinuities in the image intensities. The latter usually produces incomplete lines, as well as faulty lines that are possibly due to noise and therefore must be eliminated. The task is then to discard illegitimate lines and to improve genuine ones. An important clue to both is the presence of a line with one (or both) ends open. Factors of both continuity and closure dictate the necessity to either expand the open end of a line until it encounters another line, or if this is not possible, delete the line.

A credible way to complete lines is by joining an open line to another that is closely IN FRONT of or BEHIND it. The situation is depicted by the following two rules.

RULE (1501):

- IF: (1) The LINE END point is OPEN
- (2) The DISTANCE to the LINE IN FRONT is LOW

THEN: (1) JOIN the LINES by FORWARD expansion

RULE (1601):

- IF: (1) The LINE START point is OPEN
- (2) The DISTANCE to the LINE BEHIND is LOW

THEN: (1) JOIN the LINES by BACKWARD expansion

The distance constraint is relaxed if the average gradient of the line is not low, or if both lines are colinear (have the same average direction). The corresponding rules are:

RULE (1502):

- IF: (1) The LINE END point is OPEN
- (2) The DISTANCE to the LINE IN FRONT is NOT HIGH
- (3) The LINE AVERAGE GRADIENT is NOT LOW

THEN: (1) JOIN the LINES by FORWARD expansion

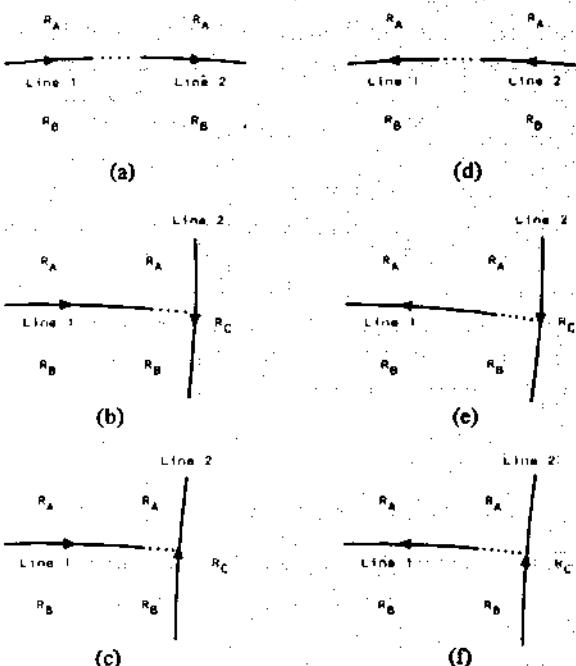


Fig. 6. Joining lines using region information.

RULE (1503):

- IF: (1) The LINE END point is OPEN
- (2) The DISTANCE to the LINE IN FRONT is NOT HIGH
- (3) The LINES have EQUAL AVERAGE DIRECTION

THEN: (1) JOIN the LINES by FORWARD expansion

Similar rules exist for joining a line by backward expansion to a line that is BEHIND it.

Region information is also used to aid the joining of two lines. Other constraints can be relaxed if the lines share the same regions to their left and right. This is a strong indication that both lines are part of the same boundary. The following three rules correspond to the data configurations shown in Fig. 6.

RULE (1504): [Fig. 6(a)]

- IF: (1) The LINE END point is OPEN
- (2) The LINE GRADIENT is NOT VERY LOW
- (3) The DISTANCE to the LINE IN FRONT is NOT VERY HIGH
- (4) The two LINES have the SAME REGION to the LEFT
- (5) The two LINES have the SAME REGION to the RIGHT

THEN: (1) JOIN the LINES by FORWARD expansion

RULE (1505): [Fig. 6(b)]

- IF: (1) The LINE END point is OPEN
- (2) The LINE GRADIENT is NOT VERY LOW
- (3) The DISTANCE to the LINE IN FRONT is NOT VERY HIGH
- (4) SAME REGION LEFT OF LINE 1 and RIGHT of LINE 2

RULE (5) The two LINES have the SAME REGION to the RIGHT

THEN: (1) JOIN the LINES by FORWARD expansion

RULE (1506): [Fig. 6(c)]

- IF: (1) The LINE END point is OPEN
- (2) The LINE GRADIENT is NOT VERY LOW
- (3) The DISTANCE to the LINE IN FRONT is NOT VERY HIGH
- (4) The two LINES have the SAME REGION to the LEFT
- (5) SAME REGION RIGHT of LINE 1 and LEFT of LINE 2

THEN: (1) JOIN the LINES by FORWARD expansion

Joining by backward expansion produces three analogous rules for the cases in Fig. 6(d)-(f).

In the absence of a close neighbor, an open line can still be extended forward or backward by expanding the appropriate end point along the maximum local gradient at that position in the image. For this to happen, however, a single open line must exhibit strong survival characteristics, both in length and in strength (average gradient). The following rules represent the above situation.

RULE (1507):

- IF: (1) The LINE END point is OPEN
- (2) The LINE AVERAGE GRADIENT is HIGH

THEN: (1) EXTEND the LINE FORWARD

RULE (1508):

- IF: (1) The LINE END point is OPEN
- (2) The LINE AVERAGE GRADIENT is NOT LOW
- (3) The LINE LENGTH is NOT LOW

THEN: (1) EXTEND the LINE FORWARD

Rules for extending a line backward from its starting point follow easily from the above.

The local gradient is also used to expand an open line that has a large number of regions on both sides, as shown in Fig. 7. The line is considered to be at the boundary of two textured areas, and the maximum local gradient is used to define the border. The rule that detects this situation is given by:

RULE (1509):

- IF: (1) The LINE END point is OPEN
- (2) The LINE GRADIENT is NOT LOW
- (3) The NUMBER of REGIONS to the LEFT is NOT LOW
- (4) The NUMBER of REGIONS to the RIGHT is NOT LOW

THEN: (1) EXTEND the LINE FORWARD

Rule (1609) will provide for the backward extension in a similar manner.

ADJACENT region information is also used to expand a line

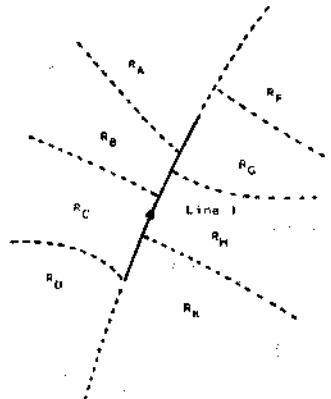


Fig. 7. Line at the boundary of two textured areas.

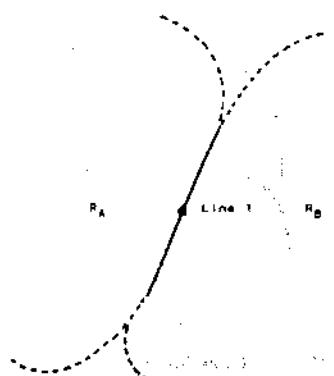


Fig. 8. Line at the boundary of two large regions.

by inserting additional points between two bordering regions. The configuration portrayed in Fig. 8 illustrates how the presence of two different regions, one on each side of an incomplete line, is a strong indication that the line is indeed part of a larger boundary. The following rule is based on this hypothesis.

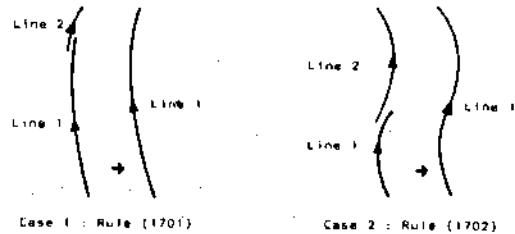
RULE (1510):

- IF: (1) The LINE END point is OPEN
- (2) The LINE LENGTH is NOT LOW
- (3) There is ONE REGION to the LEFT of the LINE
- (4) There is ONE REGION to the RIGHT of the LINE
- (5) REGIONS to the LEFT and RIGHT are NOT the SAME

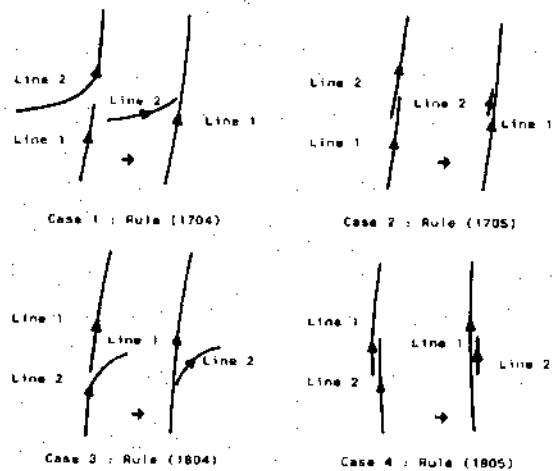
THEN: (1) Expand the LINE by INSERTING FORWARD

Points are inserted at the starting point of an open line if similar conditions exist.

As a result of applying the previous rules, incomplete lines will be extended, and will meet other lines. The resulting junctions may suggest the merging of two lines into one. This happens when both represent different parts of the same boundary, as shown in Fig. 9(a). In other cases, merging produces two new lines that form a more appropriate configuration in terms of the good continuity principle. This situation is depicted in Fig. 9(b). Rules may be constructed to perform forward and backward line merging, examples of which are:



(a)



(b)

Fig. 9. Rules for merging lines.

RULE (1701): [Fig. 9(a), case 1]

- IF:** (1) The LINE LENGTH is NOT LOW
 (2) The LENGTH of the LINE IN FRONT is LOW
 (3) The LINES are TOUCHING
 (4) The closest POINT IN FRONT is LOW

THEN: (1) MERGE the LINES FORWARD

RULE (1702): [Fig. 9(a), case 2]

- IF:** (1) The LINE LENGTH is NOT LOW
 (2) The LENGTH of the LINE IN FRONT is NOT LOW
 (3) The LINES are TOUCHING
 (4) The closest POINT IN FRONT is VERY LOW

THEN: (1) MERGE the LINES FORWARD

The previous two rules represent the situation in Fig. 9(a) where the closest point on the second line (the line IN FRONT) is near (or at) its starting point. The two rules account for different second line lengths, so that the constraint on the position of the closest point is more stringent if the line length is high.³ A line can also be merged with one that is BEHIND it according to the following rules.

RULE (1801):

- IF:** (1) The LINE LENGTH is NOT LOW
 (2) The LENGTH of the LINE BEHIND is LOW

³Note that the position of a point on the line is given as a fraction of the line length.

- (3) The LINES are TOUCHING
 (4) The closest POINT BEHIND is HIGH

THEN: (1) MERGE the LINES BACKWARD

RULE (1802):

- IF:** (1) The LINE LENGTH is NOT LOW
 (2) The LENGTH of the LINE BEHIND is NOT LOW
 (3) The LINES are TOUCHING
 (4) The closest POINT BEHIND is VERY HIGH

THEN: (1) MERGE the LINES BACKWARD

Merging based on similarity of lines is made possible by the following rule.

RULE (1703):

- IF:** (1) The LINES are TOUCHING
 (2) The closest POINT IN FRONT is NOT HIGH
 (3) The LINE IN FRONT has a HIGH GRADIENT VARIANCE
 (4) There is a LOW DIFFERENCE in LINE FEATURE 1
 (5) There is a LOW DIFFERENCE in LINE FEATURE 2
 (6) There is a LOW DIFFERENCE in LINE FEATURE 3

THEN: (1) MERGE the LINES FORWARD

An analogous rule exists for merging a line with another that is BEHIND it. Note that condition 3) above justifies the splitting of the second line in order to merge part (or all) of it with the first.

Merging to improve the continuity of lines, as in Fig. 9(b), is achieved through the following rules.

RULE (1704): [Fig. 9(b), case 1]

- IF:** (1) The LINES are TOUCHING
 (2) The closest POINT IN FRONT is MEDIUM
 (3) The LINES END DIRECTIONS are EQUAL
 (4) START and END DIR. of LINE IN FRONT are NOT EQUAL

THEN: (1) MERGE the LINES FORWARD

RULE (1705): [Fig. 9(b), case 2]

- IF:** (1) The LINES are TOUCHING
 (2) The LENGTH of the LINE IN FRONT is NOT LOW
 (3) The LINE START and END DIRECTIONS are EQUAL
 (4) LINE IN FRONT START and END DIRECTIONS are EQUAL
 (5) The closest POINT IN FRONT is LOW
 (6) The DIFFERENCE in AVERAGE DIRECTION is VERY LOW

THEN: (1) MERGE the LINES FORWARD

RULE (1804): [Fig. 9(b), case 3]

- IF: (1) The LINES are TOUCHING
- (2) The closest POINT BEHIND is MEDIUM
- (3) The LINES START DIRECTIONS are EQUAL
- (4) START and END DIR. of LINE BEHIND are NOT EQUAL

THEN: (1) MERGE the LINES BACKWARD

RULE (1805): [Fig. 9(b), case 4]

- IF: (1) The LINES are TOUCHING
- (2) The LENGTH of the LINE BEHIND is NOT LOW
- (3) The LINE START and END DIRECTIONS are EQUAL
- (4) The LINE BEHIND START and END DIRECTIONS are EQUAL
- (5) The closest POINT BEHIND is HIGH
- (6) The DIFFERENCE in AVERAGE DIRECTION is VERY LOW

THEN: (1) MERGE the LINES BACKWARD

There are a number of cases in which a line should be deleted from the segmentation. The simplest case is when the properties of the line do not justify its existence. Very short line segments that are not connected to any other lines and that exhibit a weak gradient value are considered to be due to noise factors and are consequently removed. This represents an indirect application of the principle of closure since lines are rarely assumed to end abruptly in an open space. In other words, if a line is not supported by others, and if it does not behave as a plausible independent entity, it will be deleted, as seen from the following rules.

RULE (1401):

- IF: (1) The LINE LENGTH is VERY LOW
- (2) The LINE AVERAGE GRADIENT is LOW

THEN: (1) DELETE the LINE

RULE (1402):

- IF: (1) The LINE LENGTH is LOW
- (2) The LINE AVERAGE GRADIENT is VERY LOW

THEN: (1) DELETE the LINE

RULE (1403):

- IF: (1) The LINE is OPEN
- (2) The LINE LENGTH is LOW
- (3) The LINE AVERAGE GRADIENT is LOW

THEN: (1) DELETE the LINE

A line is also deleted if there is evidence of a multiple representation of a boundary. This commonly occurs in images of natural scenes where the edge between two regions can be several pixels wide. As a result, the process of edge location and boundary tracking will produce a number of PARALLEL lines at the position of the graded boundary. The following rule will eliminate such multiple line occurrences.

RULE (1404):

- IF: (1) The LINE has LOWER LENGTH
- (2) There is a LOW DIFFERENCE in the LINES GRADIENT
- (3) The PARALLEL DISTANCE is VERY LOW

THEN: (1) DELETE the LINE

Thus, the shorter of two PARALLEL lines that are very close to each other will be deleted. Note that this rule does not apply to skewed lines (lines that are physically parallel, but have opposite directions). These lines result from the existence of a thin object on a darker or lighter background, and therefore, should not be eliminated.

The configuration of regions in the neighborhood of a line may dictate its removal. This is particularly true when the line falls within a large uniform region, and has a low local gradient as well. A rule that embodies this situation is given by:

RULE (1405):

- IF: (1) The LINE is OPEN
- (2) The LINE GRADIENT is LOW
- (3) The SAME REGION to the LEFT and RIGHT

THEN: (1) DELETE the LINE

The third class of knowledge rules, those that analyze areas, is discussed in the next section.

C. Area Analysis Rules

These include rules that generate areas of attention, and others that update them during processing. The following three rules detect, add to, and save smooth areas in an image segmentation.

RULE (401):

- IF: (1) The REGION SIZE is HIGH
- (2) The REGION has a LOW VARIANCE 1
- (3) The REGION has a LOW VARIANCE 2
- (4) The REGION has a LOW VARIANCE 3

THEN: (1) CREATE SMOOTH AREA

RULE (402):

- IF: (1) The AREA is SMOOTH
- (2) The REGION ADJACENCY is NOT VERY LOW
- (3) The REGION SIZE is NOT LOW
- (4) The REGION has a LOW VARIANCE 1
- (5) The REGION has a LOW VARIANCE 2
- (6) The REGION has a LOW VARIANCE 3

THEN: (1) ADD REGION TO SMOOTH AREA

RULE (403):

- IF: (1) The AREA is SMOOTH
- (2) The AREA SIZE is NOT LOW

THEN: SAVE SMOOTH AREA

Rule (401) will create the nucleus of a new smooth area from the first large smooth region encountered. Subsequent smooth ADJACENT regions (if any) are added to the area by Rule

(402). Finally, Rule (403) will save the area for further reference during processing, if its size is large enough.

Textured areas are detected in a similar fashion using the following set of rules.

RULE (501):

IF: (1) The REGION SIZE IS LOW

THEN: (1) CREATE A TEXTURE AREA

RULE (502):

IF: (1) The AREA IS TEXTURE

- (2) The REGION ADJACENCY IS NOT VERY LOW
- (3) The REGION SIZE IS LOW

THEN: (1) ADD REGION TO TEXTURE AREA

RULE (503):

IF: (1) The AREA IS TEXTURE

- (2) The AREA SIZE IS NOT LOW
- (3) The NUMBER OF REGIONS IS NOT LOW
- (4) The AREA VARIANCE 1 IS NOT LOW
- (5) The AREA VARIANCE 2 IS NOT LOW
- (6) The AREA VARIANCE 3 IS NOT LOW

THEN: (1) SAVE TEXTURE AREA

The first two rules create a search for clusters of small ADJACENT regions. If the size of a cluster is large enough, and if it exhibits sufficient feature variance, it is saved as a texture area.

Bounded areas are generated by testing the lines in a segmentation. Long lines that close (or almost close) on themselves are sought in order to examine the encircled areas. Following are three criteria for detecting such occurrences.

RULE (601):

IF: (1) The LINE IS LOOP

- (2) The LINE LENGTH IS NOT LOW

THEN: (1) SAVE BOUNDED AREA

RULE (602):

IF: (1) The LINE LENGTH IS HIGH

- (2) The START-END DISTANCE IS LOW

THEN: (1) SAVE BOUNDED AREA

RULE (603):

IF: (1) The LINE LENGTH IS MEDIUM

- (2) The START-END DISTANCE IS VERY LOW

THEN: (1) SAVE BOUNDED AREA

Other area analysis rules monitor existing areas in order to modify their classification according to variations in their properties. Changes are brought about by the merging and splitting of regions, and the addition and deletion of lines. Since the boundaries of an area can be altered during processing, its physical properties may also change. It is the function of these rules to ensure that areas are consistently categorized according to their features. Examples of rules that change an area's type are:

RULE 701:

IF: (1) The AREA IS SMOOTH

- (2) The AREA VARIANCE 1 IS NOT LOW
- (3) The AREA VARIANCE 2 IS NOT LOW
- (4) The AREA VARIANCE 3 IS NOT LOW

THEN: (1) RELABEL AREA TEXTURE

RULE (702):

IF: (1) The AREA IS TEXTURE

- (2) The AREA VARIANCE 1 IS LOW
- (3) The AREA VARIANCE 2 IS LOW
- (4) The AREA VARIANCE 3 IS LOW

THEN: (1) RELABEL AREA SMOOTH

Areas are locked out of processing if they are found to be stable enough, in terms of their performance characteristics [9]. This allows the system to concentrate on those areas that require further processing. Examples of rules that "freeze" areas are:

RULE (703):

IF: (1) The AREA IS SMOOTH

- (2) The NUMBER OF REGIONS IS VERY LOW
- (3) LINES ARE ABSENT
- (4) REGION UNIFORMITY 1 IS HIGH
- (5) REGION UNIFORMITY 2 IS HIGH
- (6) REGION UNIFORMITY 3 IS HIGH

THEN: (1) FREEZE AREA

RULE (704):

IF: (1) The AREA IS TEXTURE

- (2) REGION CONTRAST 1 IS HIGH
- (3) REGION CONTRAST 2 IS HIGH
- (4) REGION CONTRAST 3 IS HIGH
- (5) LINE CONNECTIVITY IS HIGH

THEN: (1) FREEZE AREA

RULE (705):

IF: (1) The AREA IS BOUNDED

- (2) LINE IS CLOCKWISE
- (3) ONE REGION RIGHT OF LINE
- (4) REGION UNIFORMITY 1 IS HIGH
- (5) REGION UNIFORMITY 2 IS HIGH
- (6) REGION UNIFORMITY 3 IS HIGH

THEN: (1) FREEZE AREA

An analogous rule to Rule (705) exists for a counterclockwise line that has one region to its left. Note that a frozen area is still available to provide information about the part of image it represents (e.g., smooth or textured). An area is deleted from the STM only if it no longer carries useful segmentation information. The following rules will eliminate such areas.

RULE (707):

- IF: (1) The AREA IS SMOOTH
 (2) The NUMBER OF REGIONS IS HIGH
 (3) The AREA SIZE IS NOT HIGH
 (4) REGION CONTRAST 1 IS HIGH
 (5) REGION CONTRAST 2 IS HIGH
 (6) REGION CONTRAST 3 IS HIGH

THEN: (1) DELETE AREA

RULE (708):

- IF: (1) The AREA IS TEXTURE
 (2) The NUMBER OF REGIONS IS LOW
 (3) The AREA SIZE IS NOT HIGH
 (4) The REGION UNIFORMITY 1 IS HIGH
 (5) The REGION UNIFORMITY 2 IS HIGH
 (6) The REGION UNIFORMITY 3 IS HIGH

THEN: (1) DELETE AREA

RULE (709):

- IF: (1) The AREA IS BOUNDED
 (2) The NUMBER OF LINES IS HIGH
 (3) The LINE CONTRAST 1 IS HIGH
 (4) The LINE CONTRAST 2 IS HIGH
 (5) The LINE CONTRAST 3 IS HIGH

THEN: (1) DELETE AREA

Regions and lines within an area are reassigned if that area is deleted. They are considered as belonging to a single area which does not include any of the specific focus of attention areas.

This concludes our discussion of the knowledge rules for low level image segmentation. From the analysis, we can conclude that the Gestalt principle of similarity plays an important role in region processing. On the other hand, closure and continuity are more prominent in line processing. Proximity is an essential factor in grouping both regions and lines. The knowledge rules presented in this section are typical examples of those used by the system. A complete listing of the knowledge rules is given in [16].

VI. THE CONTROL RULES

The focus of attention and the metarules differ from the knowledge rules in that they do not directly modify the segmentation data. Yet, their presence is essential to the functioning of the system. These control rules specify both the order in which the different sets of knowledge rules are matched, as well as the specific data entries to be tested. There exist numerous ways in which to execute any of these tasks. Each method corresponds to a particular control strategy. Elsewhere, we discuss a data-driven method for dynamically selecting the appropriate control strategy [9]. In this section, we describe how the focus of attention rules and the metarules are used to implement various strategies.

A. The FOCUS OF ATTENTION Rules

The FOCUS OF ATTENTION process performs two levels of data selection, as shown in Fig. 10. An area is selected, and

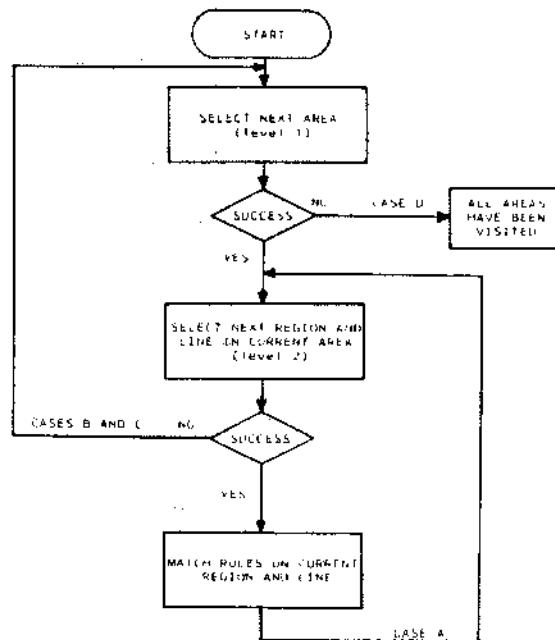


Fig. 10. Levels of data selection.

then the regions and lines within the area are chosen. When all have been visited, the process will move to a new area. The whole procedure is repeated until all the areas generated by the AREA ANALYZER are selected. When these are exhausted, the regions and lines in the image that do not belong to specific focus of attention areas are visited. This data selection method corresponds to a single pass over all the regions and lines in the image.

The transition from one area to the next is accomplished when the FOCUS OF ATTENTION process fails to select a new region or line in the current area. This failure is recorded by the system as part of the history stored in the STM. This particular cycle is then marked as INACTIVE. When this happens, the FOCUS OF ATTENTION process must be invoked again to obtain a new area. If a failure is repeated, this will signal that all the areas have been visited. An option is provided to either stop the processing, or revisit the areas.

By examining the history of processing in the previous two cycles (stored in the STM), different conclusions can be arrived at. Table IV lists the different cases and their interpretations (N/A correspond to don't care conditions). These are also indicated in Fig. 10.

In case A, the FOCUS OF ATTENTION process is invoked after a knowledge module has matched its rules on the current region or line. Therefore, a new region or line must now be fetched. This is accomplished by matching the following rule.

RULE ("1XX"):

- IF: (1) The PREVIOUS PROCESS WAS NOT FOCUS
- THEN: (1) "GET THE NEXT REGION"
 (2) "GET THE NEXT LINE"

The quotations in the rule number and in the actions indicate that they are variables to be instantiated. Actions that correspond to different methods of obtaining the next region and the next line are listed in Table III. A specific strategy

TABLE IV
INTERPRETATION OF PROCESSING HISTORY

Case	Cycle	Process	State	Interpretation
A	Previous	NOT FOCUS	N/A	A knowledge module was invoked.
	Next Previous	NOT FOCUS	N/A	A knowledge module was invoked.
B	Previous	FOCUS	INACTIVE	Could not fetch a new region or line in current area.
	Next Previous	FOCUS	ACTIVE	A new area was fetched.
C	Previous	FOCUS	INACTIVE	None of the lines or regions in new area is selected.
	Next Previous	FOCUS	INACTIVE	No more region or lines in current area.
D	Previous	FOCUS	INACTIVE	No new area.

must select the method that is most suitable for the properties of the current area [9].

Cases *B* and *C* in Table IV correspond to the situation where the current area cannot contribute any new regions or lines, and therefore a new area is now called for. The following two rules are seen to be in accordance with the two cases

RULE (101): (Case *B*)

- IF: (1) The PREVIOUS PROCESS was FOCUS
- (2) The PREVIOUS PROCESS was NOT ACTIVE
- (3) The NEXT PREVIOUS PROCESS was NOT FOCUS

THEN: (1) GET THE NEXT AREA

RULE (102): (Case *C*)

- IF: (1) The PREVIOUS PROCESS was FOCUS
- (2) The PREVIOUS PROCESS was NOT ACTIVE
- (3) The NEXT PREVIOUS PROCESS was FOCUS
- (4) The NEXT PREVIOUS PROCESS was ACTIVE

THEN: (1) GET THE NEXT AREA

The selection of the next area is also based on a data-driven decision-making methodology [9].

Case *D* in Table IV occurs when all the areas in the image have been visited. The next rule allows for an additional pass over the areas by erasing the history lists that record the regions and lines visited in the first path.

RULE (103): (Case *D*)

- IF: (1) The PREVIOUS PROCESS was FOCUS
- (2) The PREVIOUS PROCESS was NOT ACTIVE
- (3) The NEXT PREVIOUS PROCESS was FOCUS
- (4) The PREVIOUS PROCESS was NOT ACTIVE

THEN: (1) CLEAR REGION LIST
(2) CLEAR LINE LIST

In the next section, we will describe a metarule that uses the same conditions to terminate processing.

The previous rules permit the execution of a specific strategy for visiting the areas, regions, and lines in the image. In addition, other rules can override these and fetch a region or line other than those specified by the existing strategy. This is particularly useful when an interesting data configuration is detected that requires immediate investigation. The following is an example of such a rule.

RULE (201):

- IF: (1) The LINE GRADIENT is HIGH
- (2) The LINE LENGTH is HIGH
- (3) SAME REGION LEFT and RIGHT of the LINE

THEN: (1) GET the REGION to the LEFT of the LINE

In this rule, a line that has a high gradient and length intersects a region. Thus, the latter should be examined to determine whether it should be split. Another interesting case occurs when a line encircles a region, as given by the following two rules.

RULE (202):

- IF: (1) The LINE is LOOP
- (2) The LINE is CLOCKWISE
- (3) The RIGHT REGION ADJACENCY is HIGH

THEN: (1) GET the REGION to the RIGHT of the LINE

RULE (203):

- IF: (1) The LINE is LOOP
- (2) The LINE is NOT CLOCKWISE
- (3) The LEFT REGION ADJACENCY is HIGH

THEN: (1) GET the REGION to the LEFT of the LINE

If the average gradient of a large region is high, this may be due to a line passing through it. The following rule brings any such line to the attention of the system.

RULE (204):

IF: (1) The REGION SIZE IS HIGH
(2) The REGION AVERAGE GRADIENT IS HIGH
THEN: (1) GET the LINE that INTERSECTS the REGION
PARALLEL lines also provide a configuration worth investigating, as is evident from the next rule.

RULE (205):

IF: (1) The PARALLEL DISTANCE IS NOT VERY LOW
THEN: (1) GET the PARALLEL LINE

PARALLEL lines that are very close are subject to deletion according to Rule (1404) (see Section V-B).

Rules (201)-(205) are given higher priority than Rule ("1XX") in fetching the next region or line. If none of them matches, the strategy specified by Rule ("1XX") is executed.

B. The Metarules

In addition to specifying the method for data selection, the SUPERVISOR in Fig. 1 uses the metarules to coordinate the activities of all the other processing modules. The conditions of these meta-rules are matched against the processing history stored in the STM. Their actions establish the flow of control by specifying the next process to be activated. Because each process is associated with a particular rule set, the metarules effectively select the set of rules to match against the data. The simplest examples of metarules are those that ensure proper initialization, as follows:

METARULE (1):

IF: (1) REGIONS ARE ABSENT
THEN: (1) INITIALIZE REGIONS

METARULE (2):

IF: (1) LINES ARE ABSENT
THEN: (1) INITIALIZE LINES

METARULE (3):

IF: (1) AREAS ARE ABSENT
THEN: (1) GENERATE AREAS

METARULE (4):

IF: (1) The previous PROCESS WAS GENERATE AREAS
(2) The previous PROCESS WAS ACTIVE
THEN: (1) GENERATE AREAS

METARULE (5):

IF: (1) The previous PROCESS WAS GENERATE AREAS
(2) The previous PROCESS WAS NOT ACTIVE
THEN: (1) Match the FOCUS OF ATTENTION rules.

The first two rules will initialize the region and line maps according to specific procedures [16]. Areas of attention are generated when Metarule (3) matches. Metarule (4) will allow for the creation of all possible areas in the image, based on the

initial region and line configurations, and the rules discussed in Section V. Metarule (5) specifies the action to be taken when all possible areas have been generated.

A complete set of control strategies are defined by the user and stored in the STM.⁴ For example, the following sequence of three metarules alternatively invoke region analysis and the focus of attention

METARULE (9):

IF: (1) Previous PROCESS was FOCUS
(2) Previous PROCESS was ACTIVE
THEN: (1) Match the REGION analysis rules.

METARULE (10):

IF: (1) Previous PROCESS was REGIONS
(2) Previous PROCESS was ACTIVE
THEN: (1) Match the REGION analysis rules.

METARULE (11):

IF: (1) Previous PROCESS was REGIONS
(2) Previous PROCESS was NOT ACTIVE
THEN: (1) Match the FOCUS OF ATTENTION rules.

The effect of these is to successively match the region rules on all the regions in the current area of attention. A different strategy can be created by interchanging the processes in Metarules (9)-(11).

During processing, different metarules will invoke the FOCUS OF ATTENTION process whenever a new data entry is sought for examination. Because of the two levels of data selection (see Fig. 10), the FOCUS OF ATTENTION process must fail twice before the system can conclude that all data entries have been exhausted. This corresponds to case D in Table IV. Accordingly, Metarule (6) provides a default stopping criterion for the system.

METARULE (6):

IF: (1) Previous PROCESS was FOCUS
(2) Previous PROCESS was NOT ACTIVE
(3) Next previous PROCESS was FOCUS
(4) Next previous PROCESS was NOT ACTIVE
THEN: (1) STOP

Otherwise, a single failure of the FOCUS OF ATTENTION process to obtain a new entry signals the exhaustion of the regions and lines within the current area. The following rules are used to reinvoke the focus of attention rules in order to obtain a new area.

METARULE (7):

IF: (1) Previous PROCESS was FOCUS
(2) Previous PROCESS was NOT ACTIVE

⁴For automatic strategy determination, the system selects specific states for each strategy element. This results in the implementation of one of the stored control strategies. Dynamic strategy selection is based on measuring system performance at any point in time [9].

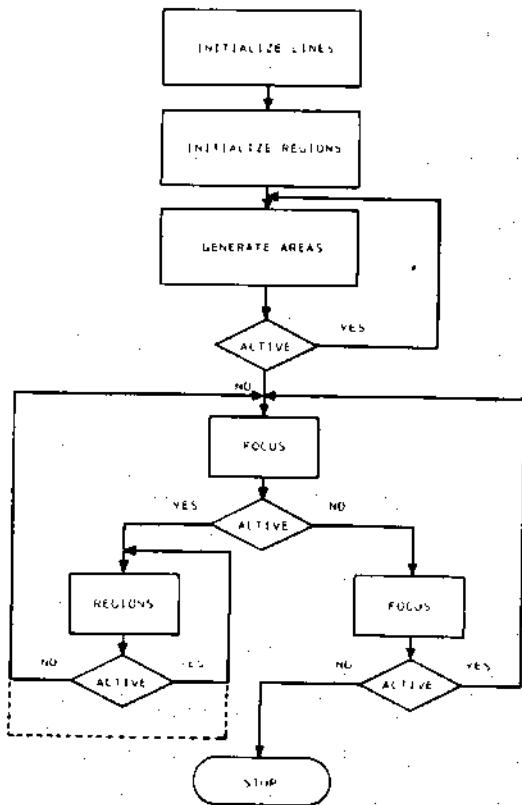


Fig. 11. The flowchart of a system strategy.

(3) Next previous PROCESS was NOT FOCUS

THEN: (1) Match the FOCUS OF ATTENTION rules.

METARULE (8):

- IF: (1) Previous PROCESS was FOCUS
- (2) Previous PROCESS was NOT ACTIVE
- (3) Next previous PROCESS was FOCUS
- (4) Next previous PROCESS was ACTIVE

THEN: (1) Match the FOCUS OF ATTENTION rules.

The previous three metarules are essential for the proper functioning of the system, irrespective of the processing strategy.

A specific control strategy can be represented by a flowchart, as shown in Fig. 11. Metarules (1)-(11) implement the particular strategy described in Fig. 11. Each region is successively modified by all the rules before moving to other regions. Replacing the crossed line by the dotted line in Fig. 11 results in an alternative strategy. In this case, the system moves to another region after a single modification of the current region by the first rule to fire. This is accomplished by replacing Metarule (10) by:

METARULE (12):

- IF: (1) Previous PROCESS was REGIONS
- (2) Previous PROCESS was ACTIVE

THEN: (1) Match the FOCUS OF ATTENTION rules.

As illustrated in the example of Fig. 11, strategy alteration is achieved by the substitution of metarules. This is an essential factor in implementing a dynamic strategy. The elements

that constitute the system processing strategy and the choice of a particular strategy are discussed in detail in [16]. The same reference contains examples of other combinations of metarules that execute different strategies.

VII. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

To demonstrate the advantages of using the rule-based system, it was compared to earlier approaches to segmentation. The segmentation outputs of the rule-based system were computed using an optimal set of rules [10] and dynamic strategy selection [11]. Two algorithms were chosen: Ohlander's histogram splitting method [18] and the split-and-merge algorithm [21]. The first method was chosen to represent the class of region splitting algorithms that is based on histogram analysis. The second method was selected because it employs both region merging and splitting, albeit in a very restricted data structure. Whereas cluster analysis in feature space is the basis for the first method, the second method uses a structural approach based on similarity grouping.

A number of parameters must be selected to employ these methods. For histogram segmentation, a fixed set of numerical criteria is used to define the peaks within the histogram. The split-and-merge algorithm requires the instantiation of two variables. The starting level of the "initial cutset" refers to the resolution of the square grid that forms the initial region partition. The second parameter is a tolerance level that defines the allowable range of grey level features within one region.

The region partitions that resulted from applying the three methods to an outdoor scene is shown in Fig. 12 and to a "blocks world" scene, in Fig. 13. Quantitatively, the latter is seen to exhibit a superior partition that corresponds more closely to the original objects. A quantitative analysis of the results using the segmentation error measures discussed in [9] confirms this.

The histogram splitting method is seen to produce high overmerging errors that correspond to the large regions of the image which are not segmented. This is because although these regions satisfy other criteria for splitting (such as high gradient or variance), their histograms fail to meet the necessary conditions for peak selection defined in [18]. This method is clearly more suitable for extracting contrasting objects from their background than it is for general purpose segmentation.

On the other hand, the split-and-merge algorithm produces low overmerging errors, but at the expense of high undermerging components. For example, in order to detect the top face of the upper block in Fig. 11(d) the tolerance level within regions had to be lowered. This produced too much detail in the foreground. This parameter dependency became evident when other images were segmented and the values used to obtain best results varied widely. The second parameter for the split-and-merge algorithm was the starting level within the pyramid data structure. The best partitions were obtained when processing started at the highest resolution level, so that no splitting took place. In addition to being more time consuming, this contradicted the original purpose of the algorithm, because it was now reduced to a simple region grower.



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

Fig. 12. Segmentation of a natural scene. (a) Digitized color image of the scene. (b) Rule-based segmentation. (c) Histogram splitting. (d) Split-and-merge.

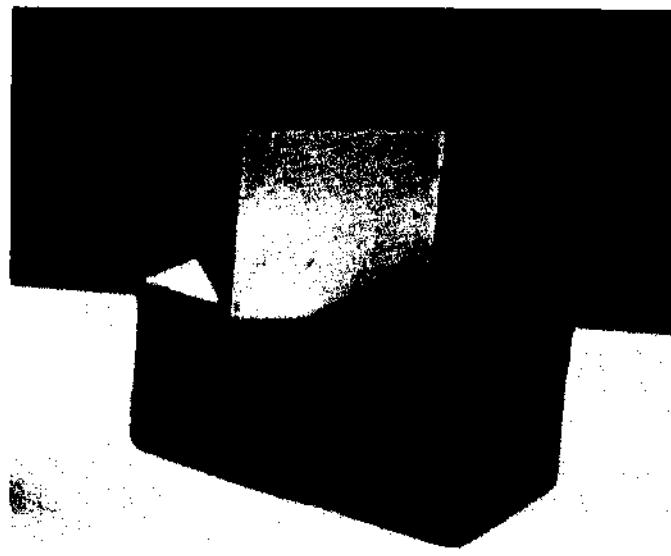
The split-and-merge algorithm was consistently faster than the others with an average cpu time of 370 s (Digital VAX 11/780). This is compared to 840 s for histogram segmentation and 1824 s for rule-based segmentation (an approximate ratio of 1:2.25:5). The rigidity of the data structure, the ease of applying the merging and splitting criteria, and the simplicity of the two basic actions were all factors that contributed to the speed of the split-and-merge process.

As the data structure becomes more flexible, more time is needed to compute and analyze the histograms of arbitrarily shaped regions and then split them accordingly. The rule-based system combined histogram analysis with other region and line analysis techniques in a formulation that maintained flexibility of data and control. In addition, its output conforms more closely to the human expectations of low level segmentation, with almost no over-merging errors and few undermerged regions. However, a price was paid in terms of the increased computation time required for its test and modify cycles.

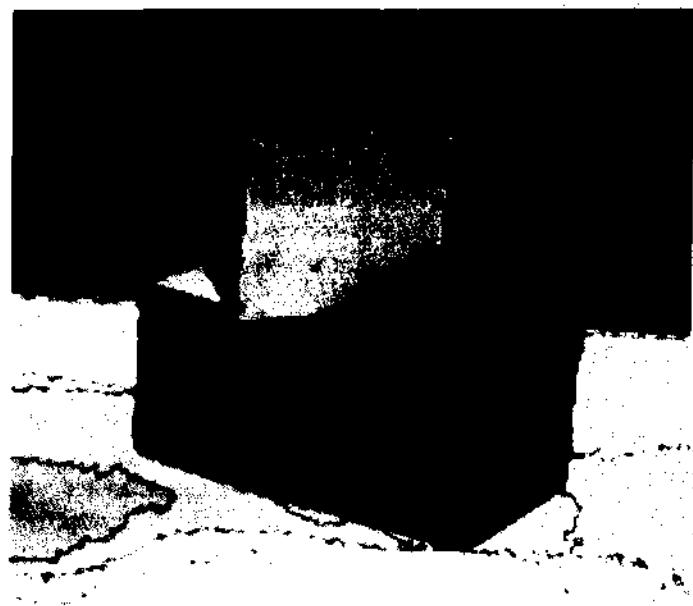
VIII. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This section highlights the major accomplishments of the rule-based system.

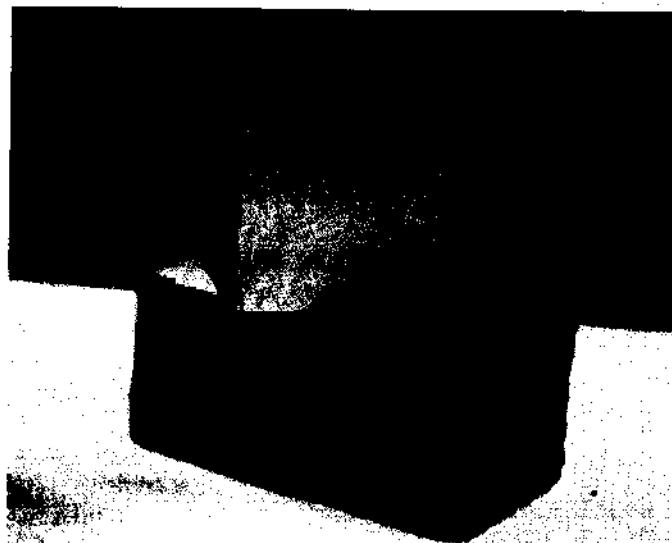
1) Overall System Structure: The basic system structure follows closely that of the high level interpretation system of [7] in that it is composed of a modular set of independent processes that communicate and interact through a common database. What was presented as a single low level process in [7] is expanded to include the set of processes shown in Fig. 1. Whereas the high level model consisted mainly of a set of constraints that drive a relaxation labeling process, the basic control paradigm for the low level segmenter is that of a production system. In fact, the system presented here introduces the rule-based approach to the image segmentation problem. Previous vision systems limited the use of explicit knowledge to the semantic interpretation level. Consequently, the heuristics used for low level image segmentation were always implemented in procedural form. The approach discussed in this paper is the first to employ domain independent



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

Fig. 13. Segmentation of a "blocks world" image. (a) The original image. (b) Rule-based segmentation. (c) Histogram splitting. (d) Split-and-merge.

knowledge in an explicit form. Knowledge is separated from processing modules by coding it into production rules which are stored in the LTM. In addition, system control is made more accessible by introducing a set of control rules into the model. This allows a user (or the system SUPERVISOR in Fig. 1) to interactively (or automatically) program different processing strategies. The separability of knowledge and control represents a unique approach to solving the segmentation problem.

2) *Data Structure*: Two new aspects are introduced into the data structure. First, regions and lines are combined and are simultaneously used in the analysis. Although other systems have employed both [4], each was processed separately, and

the results combined only at the end. In this system, regions and lines share the same data structure and have common spatial features. The model includes rules that manipulate combinations of regions and lines. This allows uniformity and discontinuity information to blend together and cooperate in producing a better output. Experiments with the system prove that this type of interaction is beneficial.

The second aspect is the introduction of focus of attention areas as groupings of regions and lines that represent interesting parts of an image. In addition to providing valuable information such as texture to a high level process, these areas play an important role in the analysis by providing spatial boundaries across which the processing strategy is adjusted. This allows

the system to execute the best strategy based on the individual properties of each area.

3) The Rule-Based Model: A multitude of segmentation criteria are coded in the rules. Heuristics that formed the basis of earlier segmentation techniques in the literature were extracted and organized within a uniform representation. In addition, new general purpose knowledge sources were employed, such as those driving from Gestalt principles for perceptual grouping.

The system also introduces a general symbolic coding scheme for the rules. The conditions are logical predicates evaluated on the STM data by using an automatic scaling mechanism [16], [17]. Low level symbolic processing is a step towards reducing the dependency of previous segmentation methods on numerical parameters. Thus, model learning through rule modification replaces the more ad hoc process of interactive parameter tuning.

The actions of the rules are independent entities that are carried out by the processing modules. They are designed to modify the regions, lines, and areas in finite ways, yet they have the flexibility to permit changes in different directions (e.g., merging and splitting of regions).

The conditions and actions create a "segmentation language" that provides for a wide range of data manipulation and modification. The ability to modify and expand the knowledge base is an important contribution that is a result of the symbolic coding scheme and the rule-based structure. The testing and tuning of the model [16] was only possible because of this powerful experimental feature. Furthermore, future additions and testing of new segmentation heuristics require minimum user interaction.

4) Measures of Segmentation: A primary concern of this research is the ability to evaluate intermediate and final output partitions. A set of error measures was devised that dynamically computes the distance between a test partition and a reference segmentation [8]. These are used to build the model by testing different rule combinations and selecting those that are the most effective in reducing the errors.

A second set of measures are unlike any developed so far in that they do not require a reference segmentation [9]. Performance is judged by comparing the segmentation to the original image. This enables the system to maintain "real-time" estimates of the segmentation as the processing evolves. These performance measures behaved consistently with the segmentation error measures throughout a wide variety of experiments with the system.

5) The Control Mechanism: Using the rule-based expert system discussed in this paper, a strategy determination process that varies with time and with image area has been introduced elsewhere [9], [11], [16]. The elements of control strategy were defined and their dependence on the real-time performance measures was experimentally verified. The experiments tested the effect of using different control strategies on the performance of the system, in terms of output quality and efficiency of computation. Analysis of the results led to conclusions about the best strategies to apply for different ranges of performance measures [16]. Such constraints are used in executing the dynamic strategy selection process.

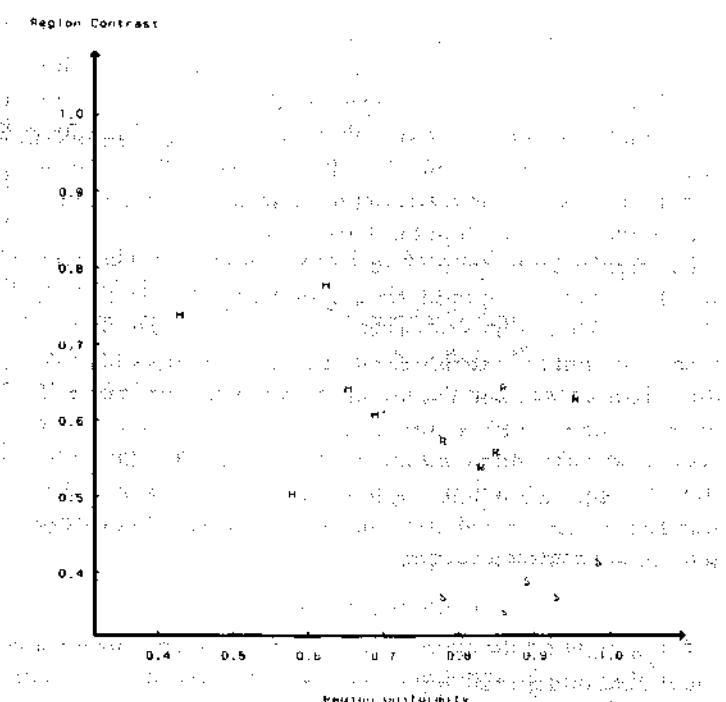


Fig. 14. Comparison of performance measures for three approaches to segmentation. *S*: Split-and-merge. *H*: Histogram splitting. *R*: Rule-based segmentation.

This dynamic strategy mechanism presents solutions to two control issues. First, for rule-based processing, conflict resolution is achieved by implementing a dynamic data-driven rule reordering process. Second, a focus of attention mechanism is created that is capable of adjusting its path of processing within the image according to the data. These factors result in a system that can select the most suitable segmentation heuristics and apply them to the parts of the image where they are most needed.

6) Experimental Results: The ability to quantitatively measure performance allowed us to conduct experiments with various knowledge rule combinations. A ranking of the rules was then established based on their effectiveness in maximizing the performance measures and their frequency of firing. The contribution of these experiments is the selection of an optimal set of rules over a large collection of segmentation heuristics [10], [16].

The performance of the system operating with dynamic strategy setting and the optimal set of rules was compared to other segmentation methods in the literature. The results show a considerable improvement in the quality of the output, in the segmentation error measures, and in the performance measures. The graph in Fig. 14 summarizes these results. It indicates the range of performance parameters measured on the final output partitions of several images for three different segmentation approaches. Algorithms that employ grouping based on similarity result in partitions that are highly uniform. Histogram-based partitions exhibit high contrast between the regions. Each sacrifices one measure to enhance the other. On the other hand, rule-based segmentation produces partitions that simultaneously maximize uniformity and contrast. The details of these results are presented in [16].

In this paper, we have described the knowledge and control

rules of our rule-based segmentation system. The structure of the rules was analyzed. The conditions and actions that define our "segmentation language" were listed. The three types of knowledge rules were reviewed, showing how various segmentation heuristics are coded. Finally, the role of the focus of attention rules and the metarules in designing and implementing system control strategies was described.

This segmentation system is seen to be both knowledge-based and data-driven. The production system approach to control allows for knowledge separability, and thus provides an easy means for "tuning" the model used for low level segmentation. Rule classification, and the use of focus of attention rules and metarules permit easy access to the control mechanisms of the system, without compromising its modularity. A main objective of using such a design approach, is to assist us in understanding the nature and effect of various low level knowledge sources and control strategies.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to thank W. Hong for implementing the split-and-merge algorithm used in the experiments.

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Chapter 8: Applications

Many of the computer vision techniques described in Chapters 1 through 7 were developed primarily to meet the needs of specific applications. The large variety of applications in which computer vision techniques have been used prevents us from mentioning all of these applications here. Instead, we identify in this chapter a representative set of papers in which applications of computer vision techniques are emphasized. These papers are not reprinted here, but are reprinted, by topic, in Chapter 8 of the companion book, *Computer Vision: Advances and Applications*. The five major topics are

- (1) Aerial image analysis;
- (2) Document image analysis;
- (3) Medical image analysis;
- (4) Industrial inspection and robotics; and
- (5) Autonomous navigation.

Additional references covering these applications can be found in the Bibliography, which is also organized into these five topics. We would like to emphasize again that even the Bibliography for this chapter is far from being comprehensive. Readers still wanting additional references are advised to consult application-oriented journals (such as *Machine Vision and Applications*); the proceedings of several machine-vision-related conferences organized by SPIE (The Optical Engineering Society) and IAPR (International Association for Pattern Recognition); and application-oriented special issues of journals (such as *IEEE Transactions on Pattern Analysis and Machine Intelligence*, January and May 1988).

A list by topic of the papers that are reprinted in Chapter 8 of the companion book, *Computer Vision: Advances and Applications*, appears below.

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Autonomous navigation

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Epilogue

Computer vision has been a very active research field in the last two decades. Because of both a better understanding of the important issues in the field and the tremendous growth in the availability of sensors and computing power, significant advances in this field have been made. Many new applications have been successful and many new application areas are emerging. The last few years have shown some new trends in computer vision research. In this section, we discuss some of these trends and the direction of research in computer vision.

The availability of range cameras encouraged many researchers to start addressing problems in surface characterization using explicit depth information. Though many early approaches were direct extensions of work in other areas, today researchers are studying differential-geometry-based approaches to better understand surface characteristics and to use them in segmentation. In many industries, these approaches will be increasingly applied to inspection and metrology of surfaces. In the near future, surface characterization techniques will be applied to data acquired using many different types of sensors. An encouraging trend in this direction is the increasing attention being given to the use of geometric models in computer vision. In the last few years, many new research projects have started to emphasize the role of geometric models in object recognition and inspection, although explicit three-dimensional reasoning using geometric models is still not very common.

Although the role of indexing in recognizing objects from a large set has been clear to researchers for at least two decades, it has not been given much attention. The problem of feature-based indexing will receive more attention in the near future. This indexing will be useful not only for recognizing objects, but also for organizing large image databases, such as those encountered in Earth Observation Systems (EOS).

The idea of integrating information from multiple sensors or multiple operators seems to be slowly maturing. After struggling with simple-minded approaches that try to combine information in image space, researchers are now starting to build incremental models in three dimensions. Volumetric approaches that represent voxel properties have become quite common in medical imaging and visualization. These techniques will become very common in computer vision. Techniques that try to combine information from multiple sources and sensors in three dimensions are likely to be very common soon. Some intrinsic surface characteristics are finally getting careful attention. Some activity in understanding color has occurred in the last few years; activity in understanding other images is also increasing. The near future will see increasing activity in these areas.

In the first few years of research in dynamic vision, papers addressed problems related to many aspects of dynamic vision. Later, for almost one complete decade, most effort was on myopic problems, such as recovering structure using a minimum number of frames or determining optical flow using two frames. Many other techniques in this area were based on first and second derivatives of optical flow and thus required a third derivative of intensity values; these techniques led to ineffective methods for real images. Some recent work on image sequence processing shows that many seemingly complex problems can be solved by using appropriate techniques—borrowed from systems engineering—that do not appear powerful when considered locally. Generally, more attention is being given to the analysis of long sequences of images to solve problems in dynamic vision. Techniques based on surface characterization and differential geometry in spatio-temporal space may facilitate motion detection, characterization of object and observer motion, and even determination of three-dimensional structure of objects in a sequence of images acquired by either a stationary or a moving camera.

Systems are now being considered that acquire images based on what needs to be done next. Although these systems do not do much reasoning yet, they represent a step in the right direction. Reasoning-based approaches are likely to pervade all aspects of computer vision systems in the next decade. A major hurdle in this direction is the explicit representation of knowledge about the operators used in different stages. Such knowledge will become increasingly available as researchers start more rigorous characterization of their operators by experimenting with images of disparate scenes acquired under different, but possibly controlled, conditions.

Increasing attention has been given to qualitative vision in the last few years. Approaches based on qualitative reasoning are a step towards analyzing phenomena that can only be captured at a qualitative level. Many current approaches try to recover very precise quantitative information; such approaches are very sensitive to noise. Many of these approaches are capable of giving good qualitative information about the scene. The effectiveness of these approaches in object recognition and navigation will result in their increasing acceptance and popularity.

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Chapter 3: Feature Extraction and Matching

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Chapter 4: Constraint Exploitation and Recovery of Shape

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Chapter 7: Knowledge-based Vision Selected Bibliography

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Computer magazine: An authoritative, easy-to-read magazine containing tutorials and in-depth articles on topics across the computer field, plus news, conference reports, book reviews, calendars, calls for papers, interviews, and new products.

Periodicals: The society publishes six magazines and five research transactions. For more details, refer to our membership application or request information as noted above.

Conference proceedings, tutorial texts, and standards documents: The IEEE Computer Society Press publishes more than 100 titles every year.

Standards working groups: Over 100 of these groups produce IEEE standards used throughout the industrial world.

Technical committees: Over 30 TCs publish newsletters, provide interaction with peers in specialty areas, and directly influence standards, conferences, and education.

Conferences/Education: The society holds about 100 conferences each year and sponsors many educational activities, including computing science accreditation.

Chapters: Regular and student chapters worldwide provide the opportunity to interact with colleagues, hear technical experts, and serve the local professional community.