

From Projection to Perception: A Mathematical Exploration of Shadow-based Neural Reconstruction

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Abstract

This paper explores SHADOWNEUS [LWX23], a neural network that reconstructs 3D geometry from single-view camera images using shadow and light cues. Unlike traditional 3D reconstruction methods relying on multi-view cameras or sensors, SHADOWNEUS leverages a neural signed distance field (SDF) for accurate 3D geometry reconstruction. We analyze the training process and uncover its connections to projective geometry, spatial reasoning in \mathbb{R}^3 , and the neural network's learned geometric representation of space.

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1 Background

1.1 What is 3D Reconstruction from Images?

The goal of 3D reconstruction is to recover the structure of a 3D scene using only 2D images.

Definition 1.1 (3D Scene Representation).

A 3D scene is represented by a set of points $\mathbf{P} = [P_x, P_y, P_z]^\top \in \mathbb{R}^3$ in Euclidean space.

Definition 1.2 (Image Projection).

Each image I_n of the 3D scene records a set of pixel coordinates $\mathbf{p} = [p_x, p_y]^\top \in \mathbb{R}^2$.

The process of capturing a 3D point in a 2D image I_n can be modeled as a projection function π_n :

$$\pi_n : \mathbb{R}^3 \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^2, \quad [P_x, P_y, P_z]^\top \mapsto [p_x, p_y]^\top \quad (1)$$

This projection function represents how a camera maps a 3D point to a 2D pixel in the n -th image. To reconstruct the 3D scene, we need to solve the **inverse problem** π_n^{-1} :

$$\pi_n^{-1}(\mathbf{p}) = \{ \mathbf{P} \in \mathbb{R}^3 \mid \pi_n(\mathbf{P}) = \mathbf{p} \} \quad (2)$$

However, this inverse problem is typically **ill-posed**, as multiple 3D points may project to the same 2D pixel, leading to ambiguity. We will detail this in Section 1.4.

1.2 Information Encoded in 2D Images

A 2D image I_n can provide multiple types of information encoded as mathematical structures:

Information Available from an Image:

- (i) **Pixel coordinates:** $\mathbf{p} = [p_x, p_y]^\top \in \mathbb{R}^2$, represents the spatial location of each pixel
- (ii) **Color values:** $C_n(\mathbf{p}) = [r, g, b]^\top \in [0, 1]^3$, represents the RGB tristimulus values
- (iii) **RGB gradient matrix:**

$$\nabla I_n(\mathbf{p}) = \begin{bmatrix} \frac{\partial r}{\partial p_x} & \frac{\partial r}{\partial p_y} \\ \frac{\partial g}{\partial p_x} & \frac{\partial g}{\partial p_y} \\ \frac{\partial b}{\partial p_x} & \frac{\partial b}{\partial p_y} \end{bmatrix} \in \mathbb{R}^{3 \times 2} \quad (3)$$

This Jacobian matrix captures local intensity variations, indicating edges or texture information.

- (iv) **Learned feature embedding:** $\phi(I_n)(\mathbf{p}) \in \mathbb{R}^d$, represents high-dimensional features extracted via neural networks

These data structures result from projecting 3D geometry through camera optics, where $C_n(\mathbf{p})$ corresponds to visible surface reflectance and $\nabla I_n(\mathbf{p})$ encodes geometric boundaries.

1.3 The Forward Projection: From 3D World to 2D Image

We formalize the perspective projection process using homogeneous coordinates and transformation matrices.

Camera Parameter Matrices:

Definition 1.3 (Extrinsic Parameters).

The world-to-camera transformation is characterized by:

$$\text{Camera center: } \mathbf{C} = [C_x, C_y, C_z]^T \in \mathbb{R}^3 \quad (4)$$

$$\text{Rotation matrix: } \mathbf{R} = \begin{bmatrix} r_{11} & r_{12} & r_{13} \\ r_{21} & r_{22} & r_{23} \\ r_{31} & r_{32} & r_{33} \end{bmatrix} \in \text{SO}(3) \quad (5)$$

$$\text{Translation vector: } \mathbf{t} = -\mathbf{R}\mathbf{C} \in \mathbb{R}^3 \quad (6)$$

Definition 1.4 (Intrinsic Parameters).

The camera's internal geometry is encoded by:

$$\mathbf{K} = \begin{bmatrix} f_x & 0 & c_x \\ 0 & f_y & c_y \\ 0 & 0 & 1 \end{bmatrix} \in \mathbb{R}^{3 \times 3} \quad (7)$$

where (f_x, f_y) are focal lengths in pixels and (c_x, c_y) is the principal point.

Forward Projection Pipeline:

Proposition 1.1 (Perspective Projection Transform).

The complete forward projection involves three sequential transformations:

Step 1: World to camera coordinates

$$\mathbf{P}_{\text{cam}} = \mathbf{R}\mathbf{P} + \mathbf{t} \quad (8)$$

Step 2: Camera to image coordinates

$$\mathbf{P}_{\text{hom}} = \mathbf{K}\mathbf{P}_{\text{cam}} = \begin{bmatrix} p'_x \\ p'_y \\ z' \end{bmatrix} \quad (9)$$

Step 3: Perspective division

$$\mathbf{p} = \begin{bmatrix} p_x \\ p_y \end{bmatrix} = \frac{1}{z'} \begin{bmatrix} p'_x \\ p'_y \end{bmatrix}, \quad z' \neq 0 \quad (10)$$

The complete transformation matrix can be expressed as:

$$\boxed{\mathbf{P}_{\text{hom}} = \mathbf{K}[\mathbf{R} \mid \mathbf{t}] \begin{bmatrix} \mathbf{P} \\ 1 \end{bmatrix}, \quad \mathbf{p} = \frac{1}{z'} \begin{bmatrix} p'_x \\ p'_y \end{bmatrix}} \quad (11)$$

1.4 The Inverse Problem: From 2D Image to 3D World

We now tackle the fundamental challenge of inverting the projection function.

Lemma 1.1 (Camera Ray Parametrization).

Given a pixel $\mathbf{p} = [p_x, p_y]^\top$ and camera parameters (K, R, C) , the corresponding 3D points form a ray:

$$\boxed{\mathbf{P}(\lambda) = \mathbf{C} + \lambda \cdot \mathbf{d}, \quad \lambda > 0} \quad (12)$$

where the ray direction is:

$$\boxed{\mathbf{d} = R^{-1} K^{-1} \begin{bmatrix} p_x \\ p_y \\ 1 \end{bmatrix}} \quad (13)$$

Remark 1.1 (Normalization).

The direction vector \mathbf{d} can optionally be normalized to unit length for physical ray tracing but not strictly necessary for the ray parametrization.

Proof. Starting from the forward projection equation (11):

$$K(R\mathbf{P} + \mathbf{t}) = z' \begin{bmatrix} p_x \\ p_y \\ 1 \end{bmatrix} \quad (14)$$

$$R\mathbf{P} + \mathbf{t} = z' K^{-1} \begin{bmatrix} p_x \\ p_y \\ 1 \end{bmatrix} \quad (15)$$

$$\mathbf{P} = R^{-1} \left(z' K^{-1} \begin{bmatrix} p_x \\ p_y \\ 1 \end{bmatrix} - \mathbf{t} \right) \quad (16)$$

Since $\mathbf{t} = -R\mathbf{C}$, we have $-R^{-1}\mathbf{t} = \mathbf{C}$. Setting $\lambda = z'$:

$$\mathbf{P}(\lambda) = \mathbf{C} + \lambda \cdot R^{-1} K^{-1} \begin{bmatrix} p_x \\ p_y \\ 1 \end{bmatrix} \quad (17)$$

□

Proposition 1.2 (Ill-posed Nature of Single-View Reconstruction).

The inverse projection problem is fundamentally **ill-posed** because:

- (a) The depth parameter λ is undetermined
- (b) Each pixel \mathbf{p} defines a ray of infinitely many possible 3D points
- (c) Additional constraints are required for unique reconstruction

Remark 1.2 (Toward Well-posed Reconstruction).

To achieve unique reconstruction, we require additional information such as:

- **Stereo correspondence:** Multiple viewpoints providing triangulation
- **Depth sensors:** Direct measurement of λ
- **Shadow constraints:** Geometric relationships via light ray intersections

2 The ShadowNeuS Framework

2.1 Motivation for Shadow-based Learning

What are Shadows?

A shadow is a region of reduced illumination created when an opaque object blocks light from a source. Geometrically, shadows result from the intersection of light rays with surfaces, creating visibility constraints that encode rich 3D information.

Definition 2.1 (Shadow Formation).

Given a light source \mathbf{L} and surface \mathbb{S} , a point \mathbf{P} is in shadow if there exists a surface point $\mathbf{Q} \in \mathbb{S}$ such that \mathbf{Q} lies on the line segment $\overline{\mathbf{LP}}$.

2.2 Signed Distance Fields (SDFs)

2.3 Shadow Rays and Surface Visibility

2.4 Learning via Shadow Supervision

2.5 Optimization Process

2.6 Geometric Interpretation and Classical Analogs

References

- [LWX23] Jingwang Ling, Zhibo Wang, Feng Xu. *ShadowNeuS: Neural SDF Reconstruction by Shadow Ray Supervision*. arXiv: [2211.14086](#), 2023.