Delft University of Technology
Master's Thesis in Embedded Systems

Computational Imaging for Earth Surveillance

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Computational Imaging for Earth Surveillance

Master's Thesis in Embedded Systems

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Abstract

TODO ABSTRACT

Preface

TODO MOTIVATION FOR RESEARCH TOPIC

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Problem Statement

The history of cameras go back to 13th century when Aristotle first noticed how light passing through a small hole in a darkened room produced an image of the sun on the wall. Throughout the centuries, the basic design of cameras have been continuously changing with different versions of the 'camera obscura' with a single pinhole being developed by different civilisations. In a pinhole camera, light passes through the pinhole and forms an image on the sensor/image plane. As the size of the pinhole increased, the quality of image formed on the plane decreased and as the pinhole size became smaller, lesser light was allowed which resulted in decreased field of view. With the development of science and due to the limitations of the pinhole, lenses were introduced to increase the size of the aperture, the sharpness of the image and the light throughput. As humanity progressed with the rapid pace in technology, we were able to capture images and store them on a film. With the digital explosion in early 1990s, the thin films were replaced by Charged Couple Devices(CCD). Then came the cameras based on Complementary Metal Oxide Semiconductors(CMOS). CCD and CMOS sensors reduced the size of cameras considerably and it was possible to develop low cost cameras in a large number. However, cameras have retained the lens throughout the years. Cameras are used for various applications and one such application is the space exploration domain. Delfi Space is the small satellite program of TU Delft that is mainly meant for education and technology demonstration in very small sized satellites. Delfi-PQ programme is a sub-programme of the Delfi Space programme that aims at developing extremely small but highly capable PocketQube satellites. PocketQubes are an order of magnitude smaller than the well known CubeSat standard which formed the basis of previous Delfi satellite projects. The dimensions of a PocketQube satellite would be 50mm * 50mm * 178mm and their volume would be approximately eight times smaller than CubeSats.

One of the advanced payload that would be part of the Delfi-PQ would be an imager/camera that consumes extremely low power and would fit into the dimensions and power specified by the Delfi-PQ team.

In order to reduce the size of a camera, it would be necessary to remove the lens from the camera as the thinnest lens based mobile camera is 5mm thick. The primary focus of a lens would be to focus light from distant objects onto the CMOS sensor. Light from distant objects reach the sensor even without the lens except that the light is incoherent and the CMOS sensor would not be able to form the object properly without a lens. However, the lens could also be replaced by coded apertures. Coded Apertures have been used in the late 20th century to image X-Ray sources of light. Lensless coded aperture cameras can be as small as $100\mu m$ thick. By using lensless cameras, we could potentially reduce the form-facto multiple times to suit the requirements of Delfi-PQ. However, the thesis would focus on the broader applications of lensless camera in satellites and would also make an attempt at addressing the power and computational requirements of the Delfi-PQ.

The thesis would be addressing the following research questions:

- Would it be possible to design a lensless camera to capture astronomical objects in the visible range of light spectrum?
- What would be the minimum possible form-factor that would be achievable and the effects of different factors such as diffraction effects, mask-to-sensor distance and reconstruction algorithms?
- If possible, how would the lensless camera compare with the conventional lens based cameras used currently?
- Would it be possible to design a lensless camera that would fit the power and size constraints of the Delfi-PQ?

Chapter 2

Literature Survey and Trade-off Analysis

In this chapter, a state-of-the art study will be presented that could assist in design of the lensless imager with specifications mentioned in the previous chapter.

2.1 Camera Computational Pipeline

In order to design a lensless imaging system, we must first look at the computational imaging pipeline of existing cameras. Since the lensless camera basically uses computation to reconstruct images, it is important to understand the computational pipeline of existing camera systems and make necessary modification in the design of the existing pipeline to suit the system. The computational imaging pipeline of existing camera systems is shown figure 2.1[3]. As shown in figure 2.1, there are five main components

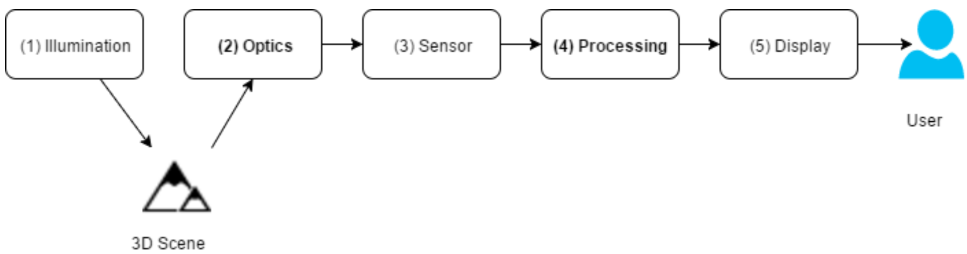


Figure 2.1: Computational Pipeline of Existing cameras

that can be controlled computationally in existing systems. Illumination of the scene can be controlled to produce an enhanced picture. Optics could be controlled to limit the amount of light entering the scene and thereby controlling the image produced on the sensor. The sensor can also computationally modify the date it receives to de-noise, adjust the blackness/white in an image. Post-processing can also be done on the image produced by the sensor to improve the image produced by the sensor. Finally, a display can also be modified computationally to produce certain effects on the user. And of course, the user can control any of these components to produce the effect he desires. But in the case of the lensless imaging system, we would be modifying the optics and the processing components of the pipeline to reduce the size of the camera.The components to be modified are are darkened in figure 2.1.

2.2 Satellite Imaging Architectures

Since the camera is going to be capturing pictures of the earth, it would be required to study the existing imaging architectures currently being used in satellites and how the design of the lensless camera would fit into the existing imaging architectures. We will first look into the terminology commonly used in space instrumentation. As the imager is carried along the orbit of the earth, it images a strip on the surface of the earth. The width of the strip is called the 'swath'. The direction along which the satellite moves or images is called the 'along-track' direction and the direction perpendicular to it is called the cross-track direction[1]. Figure 2.2 describes these terminology and some other terms as well. Three major types of scanning architectures

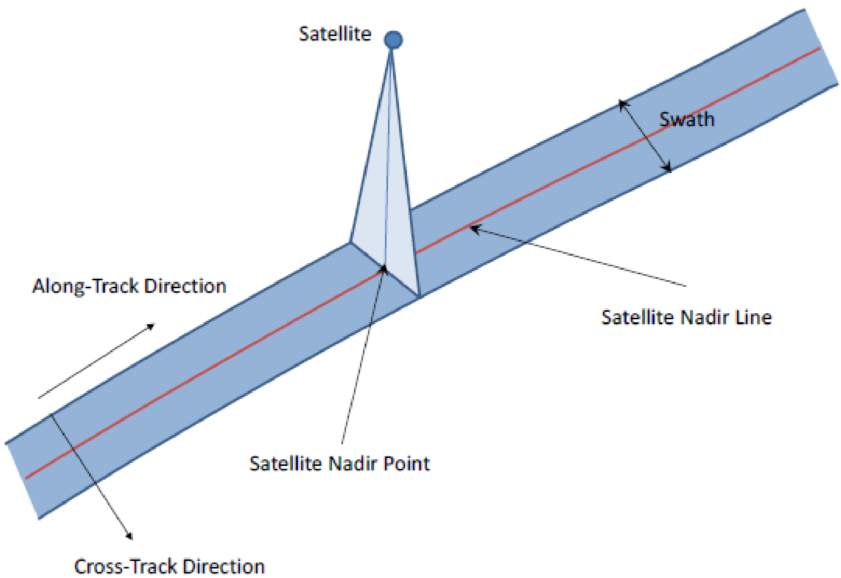


Figure 2.2: Various Imaging Terms[1]

are employed in space instruments, namely:

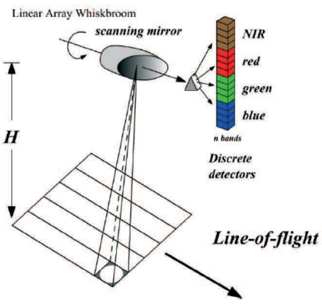
- Whiskbroom Line Scanner: In this type of scanning architecture, a detector element detects it's instantaneous field of view which is projected onto a pixel element. In this scanning type the surface of the earth is scanned in lines. A scanning mirror would project a very small area of the earth onto the single pixel element. The scanning mirror would then rotate to project the next element of the line onto the next pixel. Depending on the motion of the satellite, the next line of the detector is scanned and projected on to the next line on the surface of the earth. An advantage of this type of detector is that it would be possible to obtain a very large field of view. However, it also comes with disadvantage that a very high sampling frequency is required to get decent resolutions. Typically, an earth observation satellite would move at 6.5 km per second. In order to get a resolution of 100 meters per pixel, it would be required to sample atleast 65 lines per second. For a swath of 1000 pixels it would be required to sample at 65000 elements per second. Apart from this, there is very limited time for each detector element which would result in low spatial resolution[5]. Another main disadvantage is that mechanical components would be required to project different parts of the surface of the earth on to the detector element. This type of scanner is also called as along-track scanner. Mathematically, the measurement of the detector element (X, Y) can be described using

$$(X, Y) = f(t_x, t_y)$$

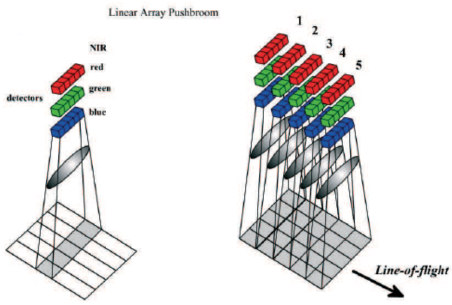
  where t_x and t_y is the time at which the image is captured in the corresponding location

- Pushbroom Line Scanner : In this type of architecture, the orbital motion of the sensor is used to image the swath instead of using a mirror as in the case of whiskbroom scanner. The field of view in the cross-track direction is imaged by the corresponding line detector array. Successive lines are imaged and sampled by the multiplexer as the sensor moves across the surface. The time between sampling two successive lines can be the time it takes for the satellite to move that distance. The most commonly used detector for a pushbroom scanner is Charge Coupled Devices(CCD). One of the main advantages of this type of scanner is that it requires no moving parts. Due to this, it is possible to obtain very high scanning rates(¡ 1μ second). This also leads to lower noise in the received signal[5]. The disadvantage is that large number of detectors are required to image a large piece of area. In addition to this, it requires an optical arrangement that could obtain a wide field of view. Mathematically, the measurement of the detector element (X, Y) can be described using

$$(X, Y) = f(x), f(t_y)$$



(a) WhiskBroom Scanning



(b) Pushbroom Scanning

Figure 2.3: A figure with two subfigures

where $f(x)$ represents the sensor output and $f(t_y)$ represents the time at which the subsequent rows are imaged.

- Staring Array : Staring arrays use 2-d CCD/CMOS detectors to capture an entire area on the surface of the earth. These are also called as framing cameras. This provides speed-up and step-and-stare mechanism is employed wherein observations are made intermittently after a certain number of steps in the cross-track direction. The advantage is that moderate field of view optics is only required in this case[5]. Mathematically, the measurement of the detector element (X, Y) can be described using

$$(X, Y) = f(x), f(y)$$

where $f(x)$ and $f(y)$ represents the sensor output.

2.3 Trade-off Analysis

2.3.1 Camera Sensor

The camera sensor is the core of the Delfi-PQ Imager. The performance of a camera is mainly limited by the image sensor that it uses[4]. The camera sensor can be off two types namely, CCD(charge coupled device) or CMOS(Complimentary Metal Oxide Semiconductor). Both the types of CMOS sensors have their own advantages and disadvantages. To understand the challenges that each type of sensor poses, we must understand how the sensors are designed.

The following factors have been chosen to make a trade-off between the different CMOS sensors:

1. Resolution : When rating a camera, the first thing that comes to the mind is the resolution of the camera. The resolution of a camera is directly dependent on the number of pixels in the image sensor of the camera.

2. Power Consumption : In the design of the PQ-Camera, the most important factor is the power consumption of the entire imager. The majority of the power consumption by the imager is dependent on the power consumption of the CMOS sensor.

3. Availability : Even though there are innumerable number of CMOS sensors in the world, availability of CMOS sensors is quite low when it comes to small-scale. Many CMOS manufacturers require large scale orders.

4. Quantum Efficiency(QE) : Quantum Efficiency is the measure of efficiency of the camera sensor to convert incoming photons into electrons. The ratio of electrons generated during the digitization process to photons is called quantum efficiency.

5. Pixel Size : Pixel size is the size of each pixel unit in the CMOS camera. It is also an important factor considering that the signal produced by the CMOS sensor depends on the pixel size as well.

$$Signal = LightDensity * (PixelSize)^2 * QE$$

6. Electronic Interface : The electronic interface that can be used to retreive data from the CMOS sensor also plays an important role. Since the project uses a low-power microcontroller that has limited communication capabilities, it would be wise to chose an interface that is supported by the microcontroller. Recently available chips use LVDS/MIPI interface to send data. These interfaces are not supported by the microcontroller that is being used as an on-board computer. The on-board computer uses an I2C based interface and that the electronic interface would be an important factor as it would reduce the complexity of the system and also reduce the power consumption by removing the addidional circuitry necessary for interfacing with the onboard computer.

7. Dynamic Range : Dynamic Range and SNR are used interchangeably in CMOS sensors. The only difference is that dynamic range considers only the temporal dark noise while SNR includes the root mean square of the shot noise as well.

8. Shutter Type : Camera sensors use different types of shutters namely, global shutter and rolling shutter. Global shutter reduces the distortions due to fast moving artefacts while increasing the dark current. Rolling shutter has more distortions in the case of imaging moving artefacts, but also has lesser dark noise compared to global shutter.

9. Voltage Level : Voltage level also has to be taken into account while choosing the sensor because if the CMOS sensor needs a voltage level higher than that of the main satellite bus voltage, then additional circuitry has to be introduced to step up the voltage level which in turn increases the overall system power.

10. Operating Temperature : Operating temperature is an important factor to take into account when choosing an imaging sensor. Since the camera is going to operate in space, it is better if the CMOS sensor has a higher operating range of temperature.

11. Overall Size and Weight : As the imager has to fit within specific dimensions, the overall size and weight of the CMOS sensor also needs to be taken into account.

12. Frame Rate: Even though, it is not required to have a camera sensor that is capable of high frame rates, it is an added advantage and higher frame rate camera could help in imaging larger areas of the earth if required.

13. Price: While there are no specific cost constraints in the project, price has also been taken into account.

In [6], a survey of camera modules for a CubeSat space Mission has already been carried. However, we also consider image sensors(not same as camera modules) as we are fundamentally changing the design of a camera.

The following candidates have been chosen for analysis. These candidates are chosen based on [6] and also on the latest CMOS sensors available on the market.

(a) IDS UI- 1646LE USB 1.3MP

(b) C3188A

(c) PC67XC-2 CCD

(d) MicroCam TTL

(e) PB-MV40

(f) Omnivision OV7670

(g) Sony ICX285AL

(h) Omnivision OV5642

(i) Omnivision OV2740

(j) MCM20027

Table 2.1: Comparison of Different Image Sensor Candidates

Factors \ Candidates	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)	(g)	(h)	(i)	(j)
Optical Parameters										
Resolution	++	+	+	-	++	+	++	++	++	++
Pixel Size	+	++	X	++	++	+	++	+	+	++
Shutter type	-	-	X	-	-	+	+	+	+	-
Frame Rate	+	+	+	+	+++	+	+	+	+	+
Electrical and other parameters										
Power Consumption	- -	- -	- - -	++	-	++	-	- - -	- -	- -
Availability	-	+	- - -	- - -	- - -	++	- -	++	- -	- - -
Electronic Interface	+	+	- - -	++	- -	++	- -	++	-	+
DR and SNR	X	+	X	++	+	++	+	++	+	+
Voltage	+	+	- - -	++	+	++	+	++	-	+
Operating Temperature	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Overall Size and Weight	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Price	-	+	X	X	- - -	++	X	+	X	X
Points	2	8	-8	8	0	18	5	13	2	4

2.3.2 Compression Algorithms

2.3.3 Reconstruction Algorithms

The simplest lensless imaging system is the pinhole camera. However, since the quality of the image depends on the size of the pinhole, that restricts the amount of light that can enter the imaging system.

Chapter 3

System Modelling and Design

INTRODUCTION TEXT TO THIS CHAPTER IN WHICH ALL SECTIONS ARE DESCRIBED ROUGHLY (1 SENTENCE EACH).

This chapter describes the ... In Section 5.1, examples are given of how to use tables and figures in MSc theses.

3.1 SECTION TITLE

Every caption of a table (or figure) should start with a capital letter, and should end with a period. References to tables are given with a capital letter for table, as in "(see Table 5.1)" or "in Table 5.1, ...".

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Table 3.1: Complete sentence describing the tabular data.

References to figures are given with a capital letter for figure, as in "(see Figure 5.1)" or "in Figure 5.1, ...".

[?] [?]

Figure 3.1: Complete sentence describing the figure thoroughly.

Chapter 4

Implementation

4.1 Embedded Software of Camera

One of the main reasons behind choosing the OV2640 CMOS sensor is that it has a ready electronic interface that can be used t interface with standard 8-bit/16-bit microcontrollers, The OV2640 is one of the sensors that is available as a part of Arducam hardware. Arducam is an open source camera that comes along with open-source hardware and software that is needed to capture images using the CMOS sensor. However, using the camera comes with its own advantages and disadvantages. The main advantage behind using this platform is that the platform has open-source libraries that could be used to interface with ATMEGA328P, an 8-bit microcontroller. In space-missions, it would not be possible to send high-powered microprocessors, and microcontroller is used as an on-board computer. Arducam has standard software libraries that can be used to interface with Arduino making the cumbersome and lengthy job of writing an interface software to a CMOS sensor way more easier. A disadvantage of the hardware module is the on-board memory that it has to capture an image. The OV2640 Arducam mini camera module can capture upto 1600*1200 resolution images with or without any form of compression. However due to the limitation of the on-board OV2640 FIFO memory AL422B it would be possible to capture only compressed images and not full resolution RAW images. The AL422B on-board FIFO has only 384KB of memory and that is not enough to obtain a full-resolution RAW image. However, we would like to have the RAW unprocessed image from the sensor. One of the other disadvantages is that custom code needs to be written to obtain various controls that we need for our camera. We have to write our own camera control software if we need to control factors such as exposure time, ISO, etc. as the default software uses automatic exposure control to enhance the image quality. The camera module architecture is shown in Figure 4.1.

The system for experiments is as shown in Figure 4.2. The Arduino is

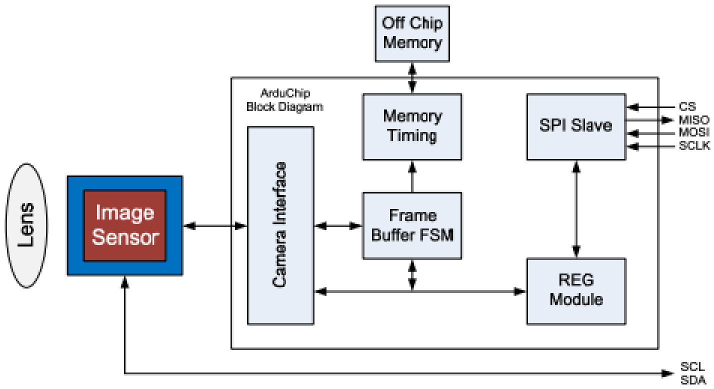


Figure 4.1: Camera Architecture of Arducam Mini OV2640 Camera Module

connected to the camera module through an I2C interface. Using the I2c interface it possible to set registers that control the functioning of the camera such as the output format, digital signal processing, etc. SPI interface is used to transfer the image data from the camera module to the Arduino. The Arduino upon receiving the image data either writes it to an SD card or sends it to the software on the PC through the USB connection.

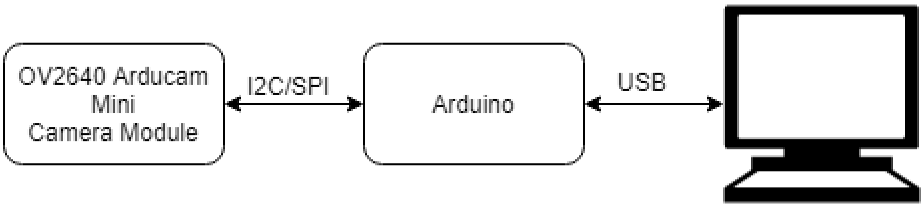


Figure 4.2: Implementation Setup

4.1.1 Exposure Control of OV2640

In order to do experiments, it was required to control the exposure of the camera. In the default driver that was provided by the vendor, the exposure was automatically set using the Automatic Exposure Control (AEC) feature in the sensor. So, a modification was needed in the driver software. Fortunately, the driver is open source and the there were libraries that could assist in setting the on-board registers through the I2C interface on the Arduino. First, let us have a look at how exposure control works in an OV2640 camera. All rolling shutter image sensors including OV2640 exposure the sensor one-line at a time i.e. pixels in the same line are exposed at the same time and different pixels in different lines are exposed at a different time. So, the minimum exposure time would be one line time and the maximum exposure time would be the frame time. This is illustrated in Figure 4.3.

By default the pixel clock is set at 36MHz. We can calculate the minimum line time using the following equation:

$$MinimumExposureTime = 1/PixelClock * PixelClockesperline$$

As shown in Figure 4.4, one line consists of 1922 pixel clocks(1600 for pixel data and 322 clocks of horizontal blanking). So the minimum exposure time would be 53.39μseconds and the maximum exposure time would be the frame time(multiply line time by 1200 + 44 lines of vertical blanking) which would be 66.63ms[2]. In order to control the exposure of the camera it is necessary to modify registers of address 4, 10, 13, 45. So, these registers were modified according the the required exposure time value. The driver software on the Arduino was modified to obtain different exposure times.

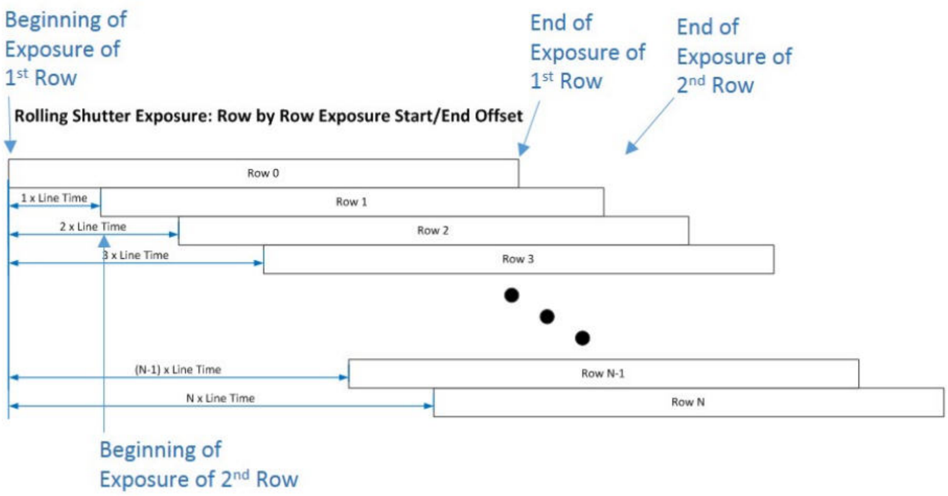


Figure 4.3: Rolling Shutter Operation on OV2640[2]

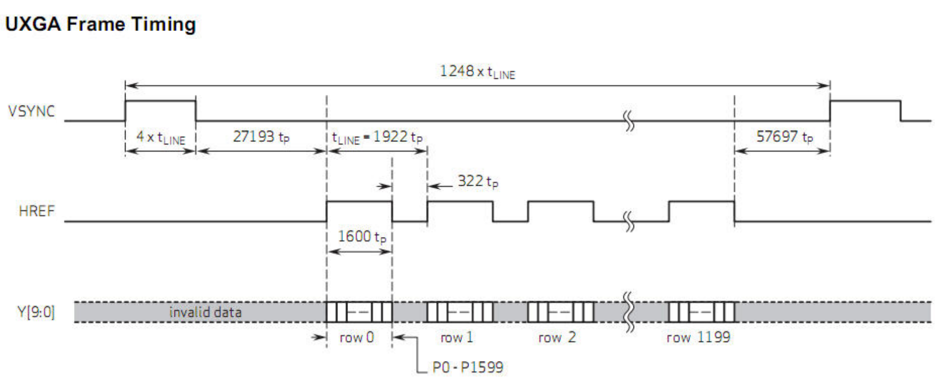
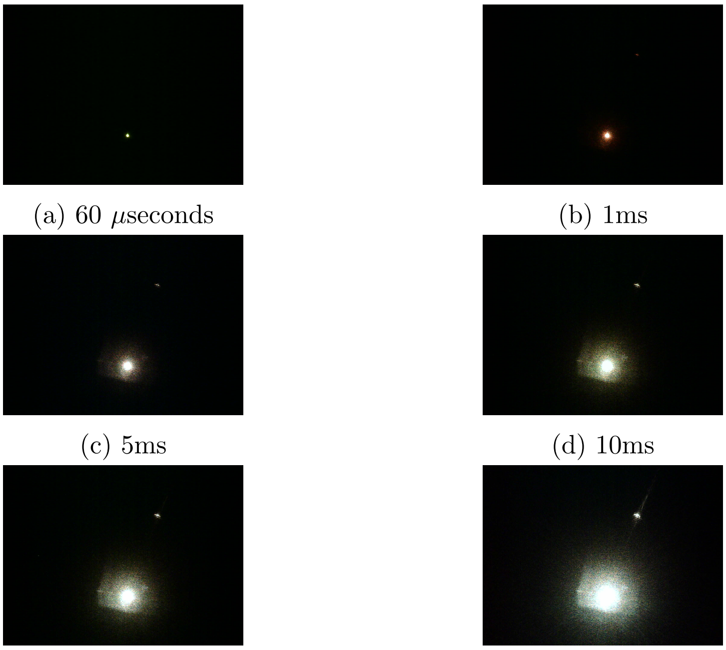


Figure 4.4: Shutter Timing Diagram of OV2640[2]



(a) 60 μseconds (b) 1ms

(c) 5ms (d) 10ms

(e) 20ms (f) 60ms

Figure 4.5: Images of a laser beam caught in different exposure times(with lens)

Chapter 5

Experimentation and Validation

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[?] [?]

Figure 5.1: Complete sentence describing the figure thoroughly.

Chapter 6

Conclusions and Future Work

6.1 Conclusions

TODO CONCLUSIONS

6.2 Future Work

TODO FUTURE WORK

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