



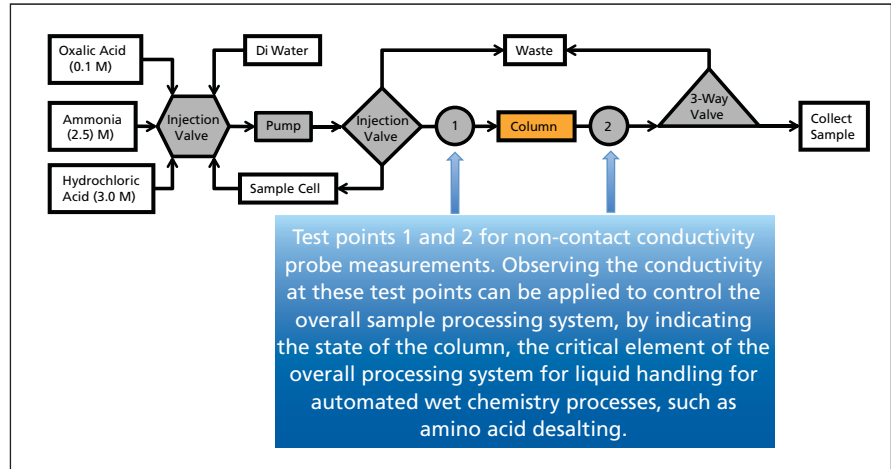
Non-Contact Conductivity Measurement for Automated Sample Processing Systems

Conductivity probes are used to control the process.

NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Pasadena, California

A new method has been developed for monitoring and control of automated sample processing and preparation especially focusing on desalting of samples before analytical analysis (described in more detail in "Automated Desalting Apparatus," (NPO-45428), NASA Tech Briefs, Vol. 34, No. 8 (August 2010), page 44). The use of non-contact conductivity probes, one at the inlet and one at the outlet of the solid phase sample preparation media, allows monitoring of the process, and acts as a trigger for the start of the next step in the sequence (see figure). At each step of the multi-step process, the system is flushed with low-conductivity water, which sets the system back to an overall low-conductivity state. This measurement then triggers the next stage of sample processing protocols, and greatly minimizes use of consumables.

In the case of amino acid sample preparation for desalting, the conductivity measurement will define three key conditions for the sample preparation process. First, when the system is neutralized (low conductivity, by washing with excess de-ionized water); second, when the system is acidified, by washing with a strong acid (high conductivity); and third, when the system is at a basic condition of high pH (high conductivity).



Test points 1 and 2 for non-contact conductivity probe measurements. Observing the conductivity at these test points can be applied to control the overall sample processing system, by indicating the state of the column, the critical element of the overall processing system for liquid handling for automated wet chemistry processes, such as amino acid desalting.

This System provides a new method of monitoring and control of automated sample processing and preparation.

When the system is acidified, by washing with a strong acid (high conductivity); and third, when the system is at a basic condition of high pH (high conductivity).

Taken together, this non-contact conductivity measurement for monitoring sample preparation will not only facilitate automation of the sample prepara-

tion and processing, but will also act as a way to optimize the operational time and use of consumables.

This work was done by Luther W. Beegle and James P. Kirby of Caltech for NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory. For more information, contact iaoffice@jpl.nasa.gov. NPO-47411

An MSK Radar Waveform

An increase in radar resolution results without the need for additional spectrum.

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The minimum-shift-keying (MSK) radar waveform is formed by periodically extending a waveform that separately modulates the in-phase and quadrature-phase components of the carrier with offset pulse-shaped pseudo noise (PN) sequences. To generate this waveform, a pair of periodic PN sequences is each passed through a pulse-shaping filter with a half sinusoid impulse response. These shaped PN waveforms are then offset by half a chip time and are separately modulated on the in-phase

and quadrature phase components of an RF carrier. This new radar waveform allows an increase in radar resolution without the need for additional spectrum. In addition, it provides self-interference suppression and configurable peak sidelobes.

Compared strictly on the basis of the expressions for delay resolution, mainlobe bandwidth, effective Doppler bandwidth, and peak ambiguity sidelobe, it appears that bi-phase coded (BPC) outperforms the new MSK wave-

form. However, a radar waveform must meet certain constraints imposed by the transmission and reception of the modulation, as well as criteria dictated by the observation. In particular, the phase discontinuity of the BPC waveform presents a significant impediment to the achievement of finer resolutions in radar measurements — a limitation that is overcome by using the continuous phase MSK waveform. The phase continuity, and the lower fractional out-of-band power of MSK, increases the al-

lowable bandwidth compared with BPC, resulting in a factor of two increase in the range resolution of the radar. The MSK waveform also has been demonstrated to have an ambiguity sidelobe structure very similar to BPC, where the sidelobe levels can be decreased by increasing the length of the m-sequence used in its generation.

This ability to set the peak sidelobe level is advantageous as it allows the sys-

tem to be configured to a variety of targets, including those with a larger dynamic range. Other conventionally used waveforms that possess an even greater spectral efficiency than the MSK waveform, such as linear frequency modulation (LFM) and Costas frequency hopping, have a fixed peak sidelobe level that is therefore not configurable, and can be exceeded by high contrast targets. Furthermore, in the case of a mul-

tistatic experiment observing a target in motion, self-interference from the transmitter to the receiver is mitigated by the MSK waveform. Waveforms that have delay Doppler coupling, such as LFM, provide no such protection.

This work was done by Kevin J. Quirk and Meera Srinivasan of Caltech for NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory. For more information, contact iaoffice@jpl.nasa.gov. NPO-48367

Telescope Alignment From Sparsely Sampled Wavefront Measurements Over Pupil Subapertures

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Alignment of two-element telescopes is a classic problem. During recent integration and test of the Space Interferometry Mission's (SIM's) Astrometric Beam Combiner (ABC), the innovators were faced with aligning two such telescope subsystems in the presence of a further complication: only two small subapertures in each telescope's pupil were accessible for measuring the wavefront with a Fizeau interferometer.

This meant that the familiar aberrations that might be interpreted to infer system misalignments could be viewed only over small sub-regions of the pupil, making them hard to recognize. Further, there was no contiguous surface of the pupil connecting these two subapertures, so relative phase piston information was lost; the underlying full-aperture aberrations therefore had an additional degree of ambiguity.

The solution presented here is to recognize that, in the absence of phase piston, the Zygo measurements primarily provide phase tilt in the subaperture windows of interest. Because these windows are small and situated far from the center of the (inaccessible) unobscured full aperture, any aberrations that are higher-order than tilt will be extremely high-order on the full aperture, and so not necessary or helpful to the alignment. Knowledge of the telescope's optical prescription allows straightforward evaluation of sensitivities (subap mode strength per unit full-aperture aberration), and these can be used in a predictive matrix approach to move with assurance to an aligned state.

The technique is novel in every operational way compared to the standard approach of alignment based on full-aper-

ture aberrations or searching for best rms wavefront. This approach is closely grounded in the observable quantities most appropriate to the problem. It is also more intuitive than inverting full phase maps (or subaperture Zernike spectra) with a ray-tracing program, which must certainly work in principle, but in practice met with limited success. Even if such classical alignment techniques became practical, the techniques reported here form a reassuringly transparent and intuitive check on the course of the alignment with very little computational effort.

This work was done by Eric. E. Bloemhof, Xin An, Gary M. Kuan, Douglas M. Moore, Joseph F. O'Shay, Hong Tang, and Norman A. Page of Caltech for NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory. For more information, contact iaoffice@jpl.nasa.gov. NPO-47814

Method to Remove Particulate Matter From Dusty Gases at Low Pressures

This method could be of use to the semiconductor industry to remove particles during low-pressure plasma processing.

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Future human exploration of Mars will rely on local Martian resources to reduce the mass, cost, and risk of space exploration launched from Earth. NASA's In Situ Resource Utilization (ISRU) Project seeks to produce mission consumables from local Martian resources, such as atmospheric gas. The Martian atmosphere, however, contains dust particles in the 2-to-10-micrometer range.

These dust particles must be removed before the Martian atmospheric gas can be processed. The low pressure of the Martian atmosphere, at 5 to 10 mbars, prevents the development of large voltages required for a standard electrostatic precipitator. If the voltage is increased too much, the corona transitions into a glow/streamer discharge unsuitable for the operation of a

precipitator. If the voltage is not large enough, the dust particles are not sufficiently charged and the field is not strong enough to drive the particles to the collector.

A method using electrostatic fields has been developed to collect dust from gaseous environments at low pressures, specifically carbon dioxide at pressures around 5 to 10 mbars. This method,