

# New sequential exact Euclidean distance transform algorithms based on convex analysis

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## Abstract

We present several sequential exact Euclidean distance transform algorithms. The algorithms are based on fundamental transforms of convex analysis: The Legendre Conjugate or Legendre–Fenchel transform, and the Moreau envelope or Moreau–Yosida approximate. They combine the separability of the Euclidean distance with convex properties to achieve an optimal linear-time complexity.

We compare them with a Parabolic Envelope distance transform, and provide several extensions. All the algorithms presented perform equally well in higher dimensions. They can naturally handle grayscale images, and their principles are generic enough to apply to other transforms.

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## 1. Introduction

Consider an  $n \times m$  binary image IMG stored as a 0–1 matrix. Its squared Euclidean distance transform is an  $n \times m$  image where each pixel  $p \in \{1, \dots, n\} \times \{1, \dots, m\}$  has the value

$$DT^2(p) = \min_q \{\|p - q\|^2; \text{IMG}(q) = 0\}.$$

In other words, the EDT computes a new image in which the value at each pixel is equal to the Euclidean distance from that pixel to the background. To avoid unnecessary floating point operations, the square EDT, which we denote  $DT^2$ , is usually computed. For example, the  $DT^2$  of the binary image in Fig. 1 is displayed in Fig. 2. If you consider the upper right pixel (5,1), its value in the transformed

image becomes its square distance to the background pixel (3,3):  $(5 - 3)^2 + (1 - 3)^2 = 8$ . The value of each pixel is computed similarly.

A distance transform algorithm takes advantage of the fact that the values for all the pixels have to be computed (and there are relations between adjacent pixels) to speed up the computation Fig. 3a shows a binary image and Fig. 3b shows its distance image.

Distance transforms have long been recognised for their importance [1–3], and their applications [4–7]. Starting from non-Euclidean metrics like the city-block distance, and Chamfer distances, several algorithms have been proposed. Computational algorithms for the exact Euclidean distance transform (EDT) appeared later [4,8–14], and several linear-time algorithms are now known. Current research focuses on providing simpler algorithms, now that we have a better understanding of the properties of the EDT, and on extending the distance transform to a more general setting [6,10,13–20].

The three algorithms presented are optimal. They do not rely on complex data structure like polygonal chain [14]

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$$\text{IMG} = \begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|c|} \hline 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 \\ \hline 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 \\ \hline 1 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 1 \\ \hline 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 \\ \hline 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

Fig. 1. Example of a binary image IMG. The value 0 is associated with the background of the image.

$$\text{DT}^2 = \begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|c|} \hline 8 & 5 & 4 & 5 & 8 \\ \hline 5 & 2 & 1 & 2 & 5 \\ \hline 4 & 1 & 0 & 1 & 4 \\ \hline 5 & 2 & 1 & 2 & 5 \\ \hline 8 & 5 & 4 & 5 & 8 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

Fig. 2. The Square Euclidean Distance transform of IMG. The value of each pixel is now its square Euclidean distance to the closest background pixel with value 0.

or on other concept like Voronoï diagram [8,10]. They manipulate one-dimensional arrays and are easily parallelizable since the computation on one row only depends on that row and not on values in adjacent rows contrary to for example [11].

Additionally, we consider an extension to the Euclidean distance transform to handle grayscale images instead of binary images. Our framework draws from convex analysis as developed in [21–23]. Following standard convex analysis formulations, we rewrite the constrained optimization problem defining  $\text{DT}^2$  with an infinite penalization

$$\text{DT}^2(p) = \min_q \{ \|p - q\|^2 + I(q) \},$$

where  $I(q) = 0$  if  $q$  is a background pixel ( $\text{IMG}(q) = 0$ ) and  $+\infty$  otherwise ( $I$  is called the indicator function of the set

$\{q; \text{IMG}(q) = 0\}$ ). In that formulation, a natural extension is to consider a general function  $f$  instead of the indicator function  $I$ . The problem then becomes

$$\text{DT}^2(p) = \min_q \{ \|p - q\|^2 + f(q) \}. \quad (1)$$

The function  $f$  could be naturally chosen as the graylevel of the image for example. The resulting extended function Eq. (1), which we still denote  $\text{DT}^2$ , is well known in convex analysis as the Moreau envelope (also named Moreau–Yosida approximate, or Moreau–Yosida regularisation). The difference between our first formulation of  $\text{DT}^2$  and the Moreau envelope Eq. (1) is that the minimum is taken over all the  $\mathbb{R}^2$  plane in the later while it is taken only over the pixel defining the image in the former.

Going back to the work of Yosida [24], the Moreau envelope regularisation properties have been studied extensively in convex and variational analysis [25–27,22]. Computing the Moreau envelope is equivalent to computing another fundamental transform in convex duality: The Legendre conjugate (also called Legendre–Fenchel conjugate, or Legendre–Fenchel transform)

$$f^*(s) = \sup_{x \in \mathbb{R}^2} [\langle s, x \rangle - f(x)], \quad (2)$$

where  $\langle \cdot, \cdot \rangle$  denotes the standard dot product in  $\mathbb{R}^2$ . Historically, its computation was first motivated by the study of Hamilton–Jacobi equations, and gave birth to several numerical algorithms [28–32], and later to a linear-time algorithm [33], with applications in numerous fields: numerical simulation of Burger’s equation (see for example [34–37]), robotics [38], network communication [39], pattern recognition [40], numerical simulation of multiphase flows [41], and analysis of the distribution of chemical compounds in the atmosphere [42].

The algorithms presented here rely on convex analysis properties to achieve a worst-case linear computation time. They either compute the Fenchel conjugate Eq. (2) or (equivalently) the Moreau envelope Eq. (1). They include the Linear-time Legendre Transform (LLT) [33], the parabolic envelope (PE) [12,13,20], and the non-expansive proximal mapping (NEP) [20]. The algorithms were imple-

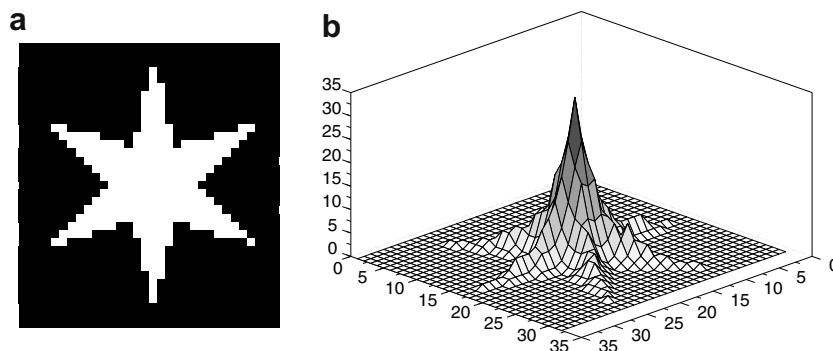


Fig. 3.  $35 \times 32$  binary image of a star and its distance transform. (a) Binary image of a star. Background pixels are in black. (b) Distance transform of the image in (a).

mented in Scilab to allow for future comparison with known distance transform algorithms such as those available in the Scilab Image Processing toolbox (SIP) [43].

### 2. The LLT algorithm

We summarise the algorithm detailed in [40] to compute  $DT^2$  the square EDT using the LLT algorithm. We write

$$DT^2(p) = \|p\|^2 - 2g^*(p) \tag{3}$$

where  $g^*(p) = \max_q [p, q] - g(q)$  is the Legendre conjugate of the function  $g(q) = \|q\|^2/2 + I(q)$ , and  $\langle \cdot, \cdot \rangle$  is the standard scalar product. So the algorithm amounts to computing  $g$  for all pixels  $q$ , then applying the LLT algorithm to obtain  $g^*$  for all pixels  $p$ , and finally deducing  $DT^2$  at all pixels  $p$  by Eq. (3).

The LLT algorithm uses convexity to obtain a linear running time. First, it factors the two-dimensional conjugate as several one-dimensional conjugates, which amounts to processing rows in a first pass, and columns in a second pass. Next, the computation of each one-dimensional transform involves computing the lower convex envelope of the function in linear time using the Beneath-Beyond algorithm, and then merging two increasing sequences. More precisely, to compute

$$g^*(p_1, p_2) = \max_{q_1} [p_1 q_1 + \max_{q_2} [p_2 q_2 - g(q_1, q_2)]]$$

in linear time, we only need to be able to compute  $u^*$  the conjugate of a convex real-valued function  $u$  in linear time, which can be achieved using the following property [33, Lemma 3]: Assume  $u$  is a convex univariate function, and define the finite difference slopes  $c_i = (u(x_{i+1}) - u(x_i)) / (x_{i+1} - x_i)$ . Then if  $c_{i-1} < p_1 < c_i$ , the maximum is attained at  $x_i$ , and if  $c_i = p_1$ , the maximum is attained at both  $x_i$  and  $x_{i+1}$ . Since  $u$  is convex the sequence  $c_i$  is non-decreasing, so computing  $u^*$  at all the  $x_i$ , amounts to merging the sequences  $c_i$  and  $x_i$ .

Figs. 4–9 illustrate the LLT algorithm and its partial computations. The binary image is transformed first into another (binary) image with pixel values in  $\{0, +\infty\}$ , then each background pixel  $(i, j)$  (pixels with value 0) is set to the value  $(i^2 + j^2)/2$ . The Fenchel conjugate is then applied to the resulting image first row by row, then column by column. Finally Formula Eq. (3) is used to deduced  $DT^2$ .

As noted in [40] there is no need to compute the lower convex envelope of the function  $g$  due to the particular

|   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

Fig. 4. The binary image IMG (the background pixels have value 0).

|          |          |          |          |          |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ |
| $\infty$ | 0        | $\infty$ | 0        | $\infty$ |
| $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ |
| $\infty$ | $\infty$ | 0        | $\infty$ | $\infty$ |
| $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ |

Fig. 5. The function  $f$  generated from IMG by replacing any non-background pixel with  $+\infty$ .

|          |          |          |          |          |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ |
| $\infty$ | 4        | $\infty$ | 10       | $\infty$ |
| $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ |
| $\infty$ | $\infty$ | 12.5     | $\infty$ | $\infty$ |
| $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ |

Fig. 6. The function  $g$  generated by replacing the value of any background pixel  $(i, j)$  with the value  $(i^2 + j^2)/2$ .

|          |          |          |          |          |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ |
| 2        | 0        | -2       | -6       | -10      |
| $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ |
| 9.5      | 6.5      | 3.5      | 0.5      | -2.5     |
| $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ |

Fig. 7. The partial conjugate of  $g$  computed by applying the one-dimensional conjugate to the image row by row.

|      |      |      |      |      |
|------|------|------|------|------|
| 0    | 2    | 4    | 8    | 12   |
| 2    | 4    | 6    | 10   | 14   |
| 4    | 6    | 8.5  | 12   | 16   |
| 6.5  | 9.5  | 12.5 | 15.5 | 18.5 |
| 10.5 | 13.5 | 16.5 | 19.5 | 22.5 |

Fig. 8. The full conjugate of  $g$  obtained by applying the conjugacy operation to the partial conjugate column by column.

structure of  $g$  (it is the sum of a quadratic and an indicator function, so the vertices of its convex envelope are the points where  $g$  is finite). However, the convex envelope of the partial conjugate has to be computed along each columns, which can be done in linear time since the points  $(i, g(i, j))_i$  are naturally sorted along the first coordinate.

The complexity of computing  $DT^2$  using the LLT algorithm is linear. The LLT algorithm requires a two-pass scan of the image in addition to computing the function  $g$  and applying Eq. (3).

|   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 4 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| 5 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 |

Fig. 9. The resulting square Euclidean distance transform  $DT^2$  obtained using Eq. (3): multiply the image in Fig. 8 by  $-2$ , then at each pixel  $(i,j)$ , add  $(i^2 + j^2)$ .

|   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

Fig. 10. Binary image IMG.

The LLT algorithm can be easily extended to non-indicator functions i.e. to compute the Moreau envelope Eq. (1) for any real-valued function  $f$ . For example, the function  $f$  can be defined as the gray level in a grayscale image. It also naturally extends to higher dimensions: When the data is  $d$ -dimensional, the LLT complexity is  $O(dN)$ , where  $N$  is the number of points in the grid ( $N = n^2$  for an  $n \times n$  image).

### 3. The NEP algorithm

The Non Expansive Proximal mapping (NEP) algorithm relies on the non-expansiveness<sup>1</sup> of the proximal mapping  $P$  defined by

$$P(p) = \text{Argmin}_q \{ \|p - q\|^2 + f(q) \}. \quad (4)$$

The mapping  $P$  associates the closest background pixel to each pixel of the image (computing the distance between the two pixels gives the distance transform).

The non-expansiveness property holds when the function  $f$  is finite at some point, lower semi-continuous, and convex. When  $f$  is an indicator function of a binary image, it amounts to the object in the image (pixels with zero value) being convex. In that case, the NEP algorithm is extremely simple: Perform two scans first on the rows then on the columns, so we only compute  $P$  on  $\{1, \dots, n\}$  and not on the two-dimensional grid. On each scan, we perform a linear search to compute  $P(1)$ . Then a single loop returns all the values of  $P$  since under the assumptions above

$$0 \leq P(i+1) - P(i) \leq i+1 - i = 1$$

<sup>1</sup> A function  $P$  is non-expansive if for any  $x, y$ ,  $\|P(x) - P(y)\| \leq \|x - y\|$ .

|          |          |          |          |          |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ |
| $\infty$ | 0        | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ |
| $\infty$ | $\infty$ | 0        | $\infty$ | $\infty$ |
| $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ |
| $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ |

Fig. 11. The function  $f$  obtained by substituting the value  $+\infty$  at each pixel with value 1.

|   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| 5 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| 5 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |

Fig. 12. The partial transform  $Pp$  obtained by applying the operator  $P$  to the image in Fig. 11 row by row (only row 2 and 3 are relevant).

|          |          |          |          |          |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ |
| 1        | 0        | 1        | 4        | 9        |
| 4        | 1        | 0        | 1        | 4        |
| $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ |
| $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ |

Fig. 13. The partial distance transform associated with the partial transform in Fig. 12.

|   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 |
| 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| 2 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |

Fig. 14. The image resulting from applying the operator  $P$  to Fig. 13 column by column.

i.e. the value of  $P$  at the next pixel  $i+1$  is either  $P(i)$  or  $P(i)+1$ . The convexity assumption reduces the global search to a very narrow local search.

We illustrate the algorithm on Figs. 10–15. First Fig. 10 is converted to Fig. 11 by replacing the value of non-background pixels (pixels with value 1) with  $+\infty$ . Next each row of Fig. 11 is considered independently. The value of each pixel becomes the index in the row to the closest background pixel. For example, for the second row there is only one background pixel at column 2, so all the pixels in that

|   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 8 |
| 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| 2 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| 5 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| 8 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 8 |

Fig. 15. The resulting  $DT^2$  computed from Figs. 14 and 13 column by column.

row take the value 2. Note that rows 1, 4, and 5 do not have any background pixel. In that case, the algorithm assigns arbitrary values (when the image is considered column by column, there will always be a pixel with a lower value on that column and the arbitrary values will be superseded by a relevant value).

Finally, starting from the partial distance transform in Fig. 13, the algorithm is applied column by column. Again, the value of each pixel becomes the index of the closest background pixel in that column. Consider the second column. Pixel 2 is closest to pixel 1, so the value of pixel 1 becomes 2. Now the value of pixel 2 is either 2 or 3, and a simple comparison gives it the value 2. Similarly, the value of pixel 3 is either 2 or 3, and after comparison it is assigned value 3. The full  $DT^2$  in Fig. 15 is obtained by reading Figs. 14 and 13 column by column and assigning to each pixel  $(i,j)$  with value  $P_{i,j}$  in Fig. 14 and value  $D_{i,j}$  in Fig. 13 the value  $(P_{i,j} - i)^2 + D_{i,j}$ .

When the data is not convex like the example in Fig. 4, the algorithm fails as Fig. 16 shows: Line 2 of the partial feature transform  $Pp$  cannot return the index 4 since its distance to the previous value is more than 1. Hence  $DT^2$  returns errors as shown by Fig. 17 (the right answer is shown in Fig. 9).

|   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| 5 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| 5 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 6 |

Fig. 16. Partial feature transform  $Pp$  of the image in Fig. 4.

|    |   |    |    |    |
|----|---|----|----|----|
| 2  | 1 | 2  | 5  | 10 |
| 1  | 0 | 1  | 4  | 9  |
| 2  | 1 | 2  | 5  | 10 |
| 5  | 4 | 5  | 8  | 13 |
| 10 | 9 | 10 | 13 | 18 |

Fig. 17. Erroneous  $DT^2$  computed from Fig. 16. Fig. 9 shows the right answer.

The NEP principle extends to any transform having a non-expansive argmin or argmax. In effect, the NEP principle reduces a global search to a local search. As soon as the distance between the pixels realising the minimum is bounded by a constant, a linear-time algorithm exists.

#### 4. The PE algorithm

To initiate comparison with other distance transform algorithms, we recall the parabolic envelope (PE) algorithm [12,13,20]. It reduces computation to one dimension and uses properties of parabolas to obtain a linear-time algorithm. Namely, given two parabolas  $p_1 = (. - i)^2 + j$  and  $p_2 = (. - i')^2 + j'$ , we can compute their intersection in constant time  $O(1)$ . So computing the lower envelope of the family of parabolas  $(. - i)^2 + j$  takes linear time. The algorithm is a two-pass scan. The first pass considers each row and computes the parabolic envelope, then evaluates the distance transform on that parabolic envelope. The second pass performs the same operations on the columns resulting from the first pass.

For the binary image shown in Fig. 4, Fig. 18 shows the results of the algorithm after the first pass: The parabolic envelope computed for each row is evaluated on the grid. Fig. 19 shows the resulting exact square EDT.

The PE algorithm runs in linear time. When the data are  $d$  dimensional, its complexity becomes  $O(dN)$ , for a grid containing  $N$  points (for an  $n \times m$  binary picture  $N = nm$ ). Its underlying principle is applicable to the computation of any family of functions provided the intersection of two such functions can be computed in constant time. Felzenszwalb [13] gave several examples of such

|          |          |          |          |          |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ |
| 1        | 0        | 1        | 0        | 1        |
| $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ |
| 4        | 1        | 0        | 1        | 4        |
| $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ | $\infty$ |

Fig. 18. Partial  $DT^2$  resulting from applying the PE algorithm to the rows of Fig. 4.

|   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 4 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| 5 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 |

Fig. 19.  $DT^2$  computed by applying the PE algorithm column by column to Fig. 18.

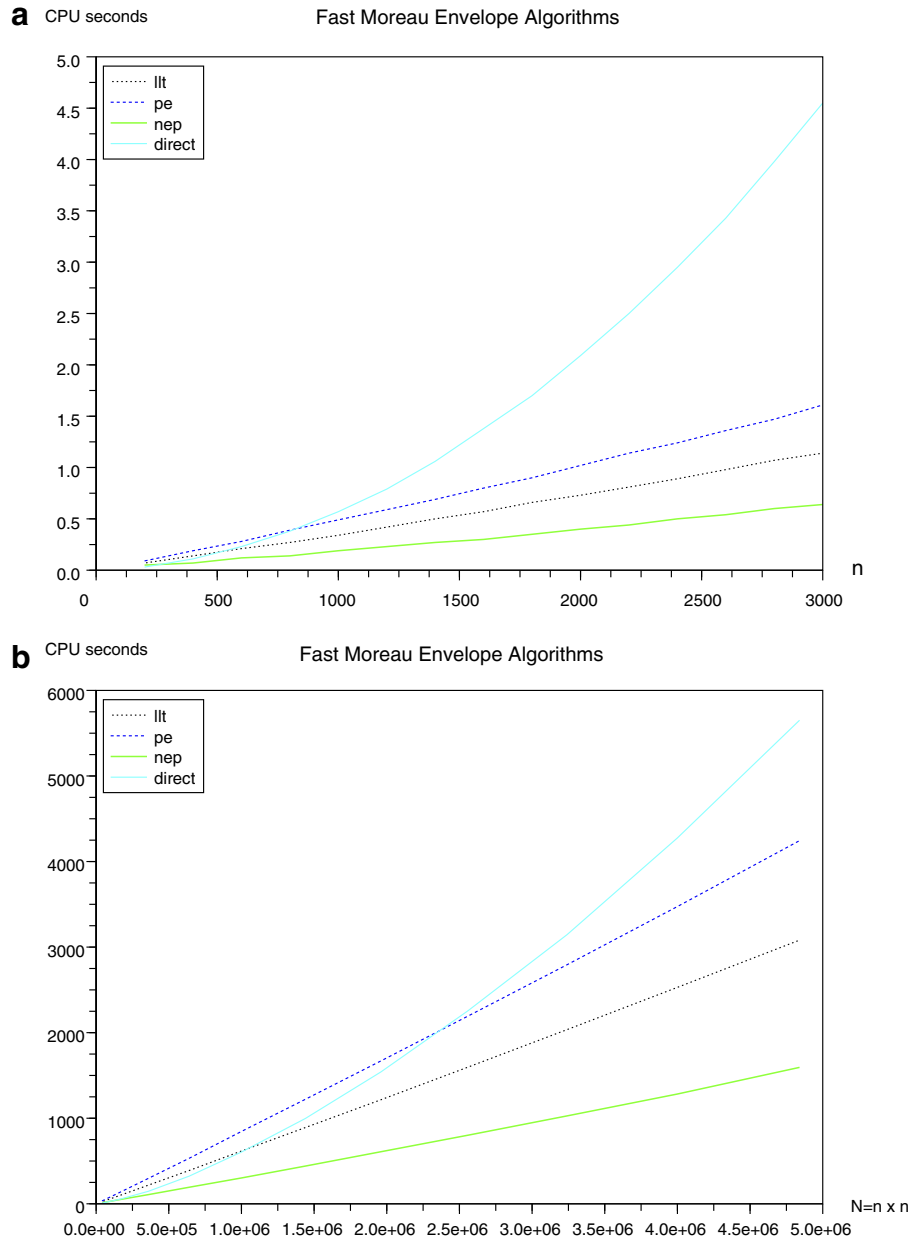


Fig. 20. Numerical validation of the linear-time complexity of the LLT, NEP, and PE algorithms. (a) Complexity for one-dimensional data. (b) Complexity for two-dimensional data such as distance transforms.

cases, including replacing the Euclidean distance with the  $l_1$  distance.

Note that no assumption is made on the function  $f$ , all assumptions are on the distance function.

While the PE algorithm considers a family of parabolic functions, one can consider a family of affine functions and apply the same principle as the PE algorithm to compute the lower envelope. The resulting envelope is the lower convex envelope of the points. Hence, the LLT algorithm can be seen as following the same princi-

ple for the family of affine functions going through two consecutive pixels of the image. The only difference lies in how much computation is performed during each pass.

## 5. Numerical comparisons and complexity

Computing the EDT of an  $n \times n$  binary image having  $N = n^2$  pixels can be achieved by brute force at an  $O(N^2) = O(n^4)$  cost as the following function shows.



```

0 function M = brute2d (Xr, Xc, f, Sr, Sc)
1   [n1,n2]=size(f);
2   m1=length(Sr);m2=length(Sc);
3   M=zeros(m1,m2);
4   for p1=1:m1
5     for p2=1:m2
6       t1 = (Xr-Sr(p1)).^2 * ones(1,n2);
7       t2 = ones(n1,1) * ((Xc-Sc(p2)).^2)';
8       t = t1 + t2 + f;
9       M(p1,p2) = min(t); // O(n^2) cost
10      end;
11    end;
12  endfunction

```

Using the fact the Euclidean distance is a separable function (it can be written as the sum of two one-dimensional functions) one can build a direct computation algorithm with complexity  $O(N^{3/2}) = O(n^3)$ . Compare the following with the `brute2d` function above (the function `me_direct(X,f,S)` is the one-dimensional brute force computation and runs in  $O(n^2)$  when  $X$  and  $S$  have size  $n$ ).

```

0 function M = direct2d (Xr, Xc, f, Sr, Sc)
1   for i=1:length(Xr)
2     F = me_direct(Xc, f(i,:), Sc);
3     rl(i,:) = F';
4   end
5   M = ones(size(Sr, 1), size(Sc, 1));
6   for i=1:size(Sc, 1)
7     M(:,i) = me_direct(Xr, rl(:,i), Sr);
8   end
9   endfunction

```

Fig. 20(a) numerically validates the linear-time complexity of the algorithms for the univariate quadratic function  $f(x) = x^2$  while Fig. 20(b) illustrates the same algorithms for two-dimensional data such as computing the EDT. In the later figure, the brute force algorithm is not represented since its cost is too prohibitive.

## 6. Conclusion

We have presented new exact Euclidean Distance Transform (EDT) algorithms for binary images which all share an optimal linear-time complexity of  $\Theta(N) = \Theta(n^2)$  for an  $n \times n$  image. By taking advantage of the separability of the Euclidean distance, and using convex properties, the algorithms reduce to simple calculations on a line. In addition to scaling to higher dimension and being trivially parallelizable, all the algorithms compute the more general Moreau envelope, of which the distance transform is a special case.

The principles used in each algorithm can be applied to different transforms. The LLT algorithms uses convex properties, the NEP algorithm uses non-expansiveness, and the PE algorithm uses a  $O(1)$  intersection cost. The last

two properties are easy to identify and are sufficient to guarantee a linear-time algorithm.

Our implementation of the algorithms show that the NEP algorithm is generally faster than the LLT algorithm, which is faster than the PE algorithm. So if one has an image with a convex object in the background, the NEP algorithm is indicated. In the absence of convexity, the LLT algorithm performs quite well even though it introduces intermediate steps. However, the intermediate steps are very quick to perform in a matrix-optimized language such as Scilab. Another implementation in a non matrix-optimized language will probably find the PE algorithm very competitive.

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