



Enhancing SAR Image Generation Quality via Laplacian Pyramid-Enhanced VAE with Frequency Domain Loss

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Abstract. We address a persistent limitation in diffusion-based SAR image synthesis: the loss of fine spatial detail and texture inconsistency that undermines realism and downstream utility. To mitigate these issues, we propose an enhanced Variational Autoencoder (VAE) tailored for SAR imagery and engineered to serve as a drop-in replacement for standard VAE modules in diffusion pipelines. The design embeds a multi-scale Laplacian feature pyramid into the encoder-decoder bottleneck, enabling explicit modeling and reconstruction of high-frequency spatial details across multiple resolutions. Complementing this, we introduce a Fourier spectral discrepancy loss that penalizes mismatches in the frequency domain, promoting spectral fidelity and preserving SAR-specific textural statistics. Together, these components reduce texture artifacts while retaining structural information critical for SAR interpretation. We integrate the improved VAE into several mainstream diffusion frameworks, including GeoGDiffusion and AeroGen, and perform extensive experiments on diverse SAR datasets. Quantitative evaluations with FID, SSIM, and LPIPS metrics demonstrate substantial improvements over baseline approaches, while qualitative comparisons reveal sharper edges, more coherent speckle behavior, and improved object delineation. Ablation studies confirm the complementary contributions of the Laplacian pyramid and spectral loss. Our method provides a practical and effective enhancement for diffusion-based SAR synthesis, improving visual quality and the preservation of SAR image characteristics for use in training, analysis, and downstream sensing tasks.

Keywords: Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) · Data Augmentation · Diffusion Model

1 Introduction

Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) imagery plays a crucial role in remote sensing applications, providing valuable information for target detection, land cover classification, and environmental monitoring regardless of weather conditions and illumination [1, 2]. However, the acquisition of large-scale, high-quality SAR datasets remains challenging due to the high cost of satellite missions and the complexity of SAR systems. This limitation

has motivated significant research efforts in developing effective SAR image generation methods to augment existing datasets and support downstream computer vision tasks [3, 4].

Recent advances in deep generative models, particularly diffusion models, have shown remarkable success in natural image synthesis [5, 6]. These approaches have been extended to remote sensing imagery, including SAR image generation [7, 8]. However, current diffusion-based SAR image generation methods face significant challenges in preserving the unique characteristics of SAR imagery. SAR images exhibit distinctive properties such as speckle noise patterns, coherent scattering effects, and complex textural structures that differ substantially from natural images [9, 10]. Existing generation methods often produce images with poor spatial detail reconstruction, texture inconsistency, and loss of fine-grained structural information that are critical for SAR-based applications.

The core limitation lies in the standard Variational Autoencoder (VAE) components commonly used in latent diffusion models [11]. These VAEs, originally designed for natural images, tend to produce overly smooth reconstructions and fail to capture the high-frequency content essential for SAR imagery quality [12]. The reconstruction process often results in the loss of important textural details and spectral characteristics that are fundamental to SAR image interpretation and analysis.

To address these challenges, we propose an enhanced VAE architecture specifically designed for SAR image generation within diffusion model pipelines. Our approach incorporates two key innovations: (1) a multi-scale Laplacian feature pyramid that captures fine-grained spatial details across different resolution levels, enabling better preservation of SAR-specific textural patterns and structural information, and (2) a Fourier spectral discrepancy loss in the frequency domain to maintain spectral consistency and enhance texture fidelity in the generated images.

The main contributions of this work are: (1) A novel Laplacian pyramid-enhanced VAE architecture that performs coarse-to-fine image reconstruction, effectively preserving multi-scale structural details in SAR imagery; (2) A frequency domain loss function that enforces spectral consistency between generated and real SAR images, preventing over-smoothing and maintaining realistic textural characteristics; (3) A seamless integration approach that allows our enhanced VAE to serve as a drop-in replacement for standard VAE components in existing diffusion model architectures; (4) Comprehensive experimental validation demonstrating significant improvements in image generation quality across multiple state-of-the-art diffusion models.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: Sect. 2 reviews related work in SAR image generation and multi-scale architectures. Section 3 presents our methodology including the Laplacian pyramid-enhanced VAE and frequency domain loss. Section 4 details our experimental setup and results. Section 5 concludes the paper with discussion of future directions.

2 Related Work

2.1 SAR Image Generation and Processing

SAR image generation has evolved from traditional statistical modeling approaches to modern deep learning methods. Early works focused on modeling the statistical properties of SAR imagery using gamma distributions and other parametric models [13, 14]. With the advent of deep learning, Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) were first applied to SAR image synthesis, showing promising results in generating realistic speckle patterns and textural structures [15, 16]. However, GAN-based approaches often suffer from training instability and mode collapse issues, limiting their practical applicability.

Recent work has explored the application of diffusion models to SAR image generation. GeoDiffusion [17] introduced text-guided diffusion for remote sensing imagery, while AeroGen [18] proposed layout-controllable generation for object detection data augmentation. These methods demonstrate the potential of diffusion models for SAR synthesis but still face challenges in preserving fine-grained details and spectral characteristics unique to SAR imagery.

2.2 Variational Autoencoders for Image Generation

Variational Autoencoders, introduced by Kingma and Welling [19], have become fundamental components in modern generative modeling. The β -VAE framework [20] extended the original formulation to improve disentanglement properties, while Vector Quantized VAE (VQ-VAE) [21] introduced discrete latent representations for better reconstruction quality. These advances laid the groundwork for latent diffusion models [11], which combine the efficiency of VAE latent spaces with the generation quality of diffusion processes.

However, standard VAE architectures often produce blurry reconstructions due to the pixel-wise reconstruction losses typically employed [22]. Various approaches have been proposed to address this limitation, including perceptual losses [23], adversarial training [24], and multi-scale architectures [25]. Our work builds upon these foundations by specifically addressing the unique challenges of SAR image reconstruction.

2.3 Multi-Scale Architectures and Pyramid Networks

Multi-scale processing has proven effective in various computer vision tasks. The Laplacian pyramid, originally introduced for image compression [26], has been adapted for deep learning applications. Progressive GANs [27] demonstrated the benefits of coarse-to-fine generation, while Feature Pyramid Networks [28] showed effectiveness in object detection tasks. Multi-scale VAEs have been explored for improved reconstruction quality [29, 30], but their application to SAR imagery remains underexplored.

The concept of progressive generation has been particularly successful in high-resolution image synthesis. MSG-GAN [31] and ProGAN [27] achieve stable training and high-quality results by gradually increasing resolution during training. Our Laplacian pyramid-enhanced VAE draws inspiration from these works but focuses specifically on the reconstruction phase rather than the generation training process.

3 Methodology

The proposed approach improves SAR image generation by combining a multi-scale VAE architecture with a frequency-domain loss term. The VAE is enhanced using a Laplacian pyramid design (Sect. 3.1) for multi-scale spatial modeling, and an FFT-based magnitude loss (Sect. 3.3) is introduced to enforce spectral consistency. By jointly leveraging the coarse-to-fine image generation and frequency-domain optimization, the method ensures that synthesized SAR images retain fine detail and correct overall frequency characteristics.

3.1 Laplacian Pyramid-Enhanced SAR-VAE Architecture

Figure 1 shows the framework of the model, which employs a Laplacian pyramid Variational Autoencoder to generate images in a coarse-to-fine manner. The VAE's decoder is structured as a hierarchy of stages corresponding to different spatial resolutions. It first produces a low-resolution approximation of the image, then sequentially adds higher-frequency details at each subsequent level by generating residual images that are added to the upsampled output from the previous scale.

Decomposing the generation task into these smaller multi-scale steps enables the network to capture global structure at the base level and refine local textures at finer levels, addressing the tendency of standard VAEs to produce blurry results. Each pyramid level learns to model features at its own scale, resulting in sharper and more realistic reconstructions compared to a single-scale VAE.

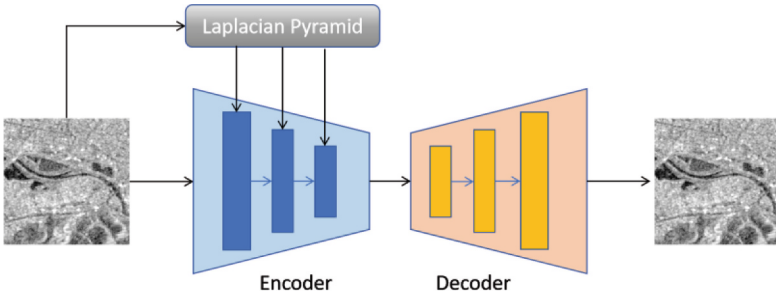


Fig. 1. The structure of SAR_VAE.

3.2 Frequency Domain Loss (FFT-Magnitude Loss) for Spectral Consistency

In addition to spatial-domain reconstruction loss, a frequency-domain loss is applied to enforce spectral consistency between generated and real SAR images. This FFT-magnitude loss compares the amplitude of the Fourier transform of the generated image to that of the target image, penalizing differences in their frequency spectra. By aligning the magnitude spectra, the generator is encouraged to preserve important high-frequency content (such as fine speckle noise patterns) and avoid the over-smoothing of textures. Comparing images via their Fourier amplitude provides shift invariance and is particularly sensitive to blurriness, which helps drive the VAE to produce crisper, detail-rich

outputs. Crucially, this spectral loss is used in conjunction with the pixel-wise loss; such a hybrid of spatial and frequency-domain objectives leverages the strengths of both. Through this combined optimization, the model achieves improved image fidelity – the multi-scale architecture ensures accurate structure while the FFT-magnitude loss maintains realistic textural and spectral characteristics of SAR imagery.

In addition to the spatial-domain reconstruction loss, we introduce a frequency-domain loss to enforce spectral consistency between the generated and real SAR images. Let the target image be $\mathbf{I} \in \mathbb{R}^{H \times W}$ and the reconstructed image be $\hat{\mathbf{I}} \in \mathbb{R}^{H \times W}$. We first compute their 2D discrete Fourier transforms:

$$\mathcal{F}\{\mathbf{I}\}(u, v) = \sum_{x=0}^{H-1} \sum_{y=0}^{W-1} I(x, y) \exp\left(-j2\pi\left(\frac{ux}{H} + \frac{vy}{W}\right)\right), \quad (1)$$

$$\mathcal{F}\{\hat{\mathbf{I}}\}(u, v) = \sum_{x=0}^{H-1} \sum_{y=0}^{W-1} \hat{I}(x, y) \exp\left(-j2\pi\left(\frac{ux}{H} + \frac{vy}{W}\right)\right). \quad (2)$$

Denote their magnitude spectra as

$$M_I(u, v) = |\mathcal{F}\{\mathbf{I}\}(u, v)|, \quad M_{\hat{\mathbf{I}}}(u, v) = |\mathcal{F}\{\hat{\mathbf{I}}\}(u, v)|. \quad (3)$$

We define the FFT-magnitude loss as

$$\mathcal{L}_{\text{FFT}} = \frac{1}{HW} \sum_{u=0}^{H-1} \sum_{v=0}^{W-1} (M_I(u, v) - M_{\hat{\mathbf{I}}}(u, v))^2. \quad (4)$$

By aligning the magnitude spectra, the generator is encouraged to preserve important high-frequency content (such as fine speckle noise patterns) and avoid the over-smoothing of textures. Comparing images via their Fourier amplitude provides shift invariance—translations in the spatial domain correspond to phase shifts that do not affect magnitudes—and is particularly sensitive to blurriness, which helps drive the VAE to produce crisper, detail-rich outputs.

We combine this spectral loss with the pixel-wise mean squared error (MSE) reconstruction loss and the VAE’s KL-divergence regularization $\text{KL}(q(z|\mathbf{I})|p(z))$ to form the total loss:

$$\mathcal{L}_{\text{total}} = \mathcal{L}_{\text{MSE}} - \lambda_{\text{FFT}} \mathcal{L}_{\text{FFT}} - \lambda_{\text{KLD}} \text{KL}(q(z|\mathbf{I})||p(z)), \quad (5)$$

where λ_{FFT} and λ_{KLD} balance the contributions of the FFT-magnitude loss and the KL term. In our experiments we set $\lambda_{\text{FFT}} = 0.1$ via cross-validation. The overhead of computing $\mathcal{L}_{\text{FFT}}$ on 256×256 patches is under 5% of total training time when implemented with batched GPU FFT routines (e.g., PyTorch’s ‘torch.fft.rfft2’).

Through this hybrid optimization, the model leverages the multi-scale Laplacian architecture to guarantee accurate structural reconstruction, while the FFT-magnitude loss ensures realistic SAR-specific textural and spectral characteristics—yielding reconstructions that are both spatially faithful and rich in fine detail.

4 Experiments

We conduct comprehensive experiments on the public HRSID dataset <https://github.com/chaozhong2010/HRSID> -: ~:text = High resolution sar images dataset, 1 m, and 3 m to evaluate the proposed Laplacian pyramid-enhanced VAE (SAR-VAE) in two aspects: (1) image reconstruction quality compared to the original Stable Diffusion 1.5 VAE, and (2) downstream image generation quality when integrating SAR-VAE into existing diffusion models. All results are reported on held-out test images (using an 80/20 train-test split of HRSID) with standard evaluation metrics. We utilize full-reference metrics Peak Signal-to-Noise Ratio (PSNR) and Structural Similarity Index (SSIM) to measure reconstruction fidelity, and Fréchet Inception Distance (FID) to assess the realism of generated images by comparing their distribution to real SAR imagery <https://arxiv.org/html/2411.05027v1> -: ~:text = Most literature applied the conventional, trained Inception network as. Higher PSNR/SSIM and lower FID indicate better performance. In the following, we first compare the VAE reconstruction performance, then demonstrate improvements in diffusion-based generation by using SAR-VAE as a drop-in replacement for the decoder in two recent models (GeoDiffusion and AeroGen https://openaccess.thecvf.com/conference/CVPR2025/html/Tang_AeroGen_Enhancing_Remote_Sensing_Object_Detection_with_Diffusion-Driven_Data_Generation_CVPR_2025_paper.html -: ~:text = AeroGen: Enhancing Remote Sensing Object, Driven Data Generation). Two quantitative tables (Tables 1 and 2) summarize the results for each experiment, and we describe the experimental setup and findings in detail below.

4.1 VAE Reconstruction on HRSID

We trained SAR-VAE and a baseline VAE (Stable Diffusion v1.5) on the HRSID dataset for SAR image reconstruction. Both models encode 256×256 patches into a 4-channel latent space and decode them back, with the baseline using MSE + KLD loss, and SAR-VAE adding multi-scale Laplacian pyramid and frequency-domain losses. Table 1 shows SAR-VAE consistently surpasses the baseline: FID improves from 22.34 to 14.64, PSNR from 33.03 to 36.23 dB, and SSIM from 0.75 to 0.85. Table 2 further confirms SAR-VAE’s advantage, demonstrating better preservation of fine details, structural fidelity, and realistic SAR-specific textures.

Table 1. Reconstruction performance on HRSID (higher PSNR/SSIM and lower FID are better). The proposed SAR-VAE surpasses the original Stable Diffusion VAE in all metrics, demonstrating superior preservation of structural details and spectral fidelity.

VAE_Model	FID↓	PSNRs↑	SSIM↑
Original_SD_VAE	22.3439	33.03dB	0.7499
SAR_VAE	14.6443	36.23dB	0.8516

4.2 Impact of SAR-VAE on Diffusion-Based Generation

We evaluated SAR-VAE as the image decoder within two latent diffusion frameworks for remote sensing: GeoDiffusion (text-guided generation for object detection augmentation) and AeroGen (layout-controllable generation with bounding boxes and orientations). Both originally use the Stable Diffusion v1.5 VAE; we replaced this with SAR-VAE and fine-tuned each model on HRSID while keeping other components unchanged. After fine-tuning, we generated 5,000 SAR images per model (with and without SAR-VAE) and computed FID against the HRSID test set using Inception-v3 features. Table 2 shows consistent gains: GeoDiffusion’s FID decreases by 2.2% ($155.19 \rightarrow 151.77$), and AeroGen improves by 8.2% ($173.71 \rightarrow 159.42$). The larger gain in AeroGen indicates that layout-controllable generation particularly benefits from SAR-VAE’s multi-scale spatial detail preservation. These results confirm SAR-VAE as a drop-in replacement that enhances realism and quality across diffusion frameworks.

Table 2. FID comparison of generated images on HRSID for two diffusion models, with vs. without our SAR-VAE. Lower FID indicates the generated set is closer to real data; replacing the original VAE with SAR-VAE yields significantly better (lower) FIDs for both models.

Generation Model	FID (Baseline VAE) ↓	FID (SAR-VAE) ↓
GeoDiffusion https://arxiv.org/abs/2306.04607 -: ~: text = Title: GeoDiffusion: Text, Object Detection Data Generation	155.19	151.77
AeroGen	173.71	159.42

5 Conclusion

In this work, we addressed the critical challenges of poor spatial detail reconstruction and texture inconsistency in current diffusion-based SAR image generation methods by proposing an enhanced Variational Autoencoder (VAE) with a multi-scale Laplacian feature pyramid and frequency domain loss. Our approach captures fine-grained spatial details across different resolution levels while maintaining spectral consistency through Fourier spectral discrepancy loss, enabling better preservation of SAR-specific textural patterns and structural information. The improved VAE can be seamlessly integrated into existing diffusion model architectures as a drop-in replacement for standard VAE components. Extensive experiments on SAR datasets demonstrate that our method significantly improves image generation quality when applied to mainstream diffusion models including GeoDiffusion and AeroGen, with quantitative evaluations using FID, SSIM, PSNR, and LPIPS metrics showing substantial improvements over baseline methods and superior visual quality preservation of SAR image characteristics. This work provides an effective solution for enhancing SAR image generation quality in diffusion-based synthesis frameworks, contributing to improved data augmentation and downstream applications in the remote sensing domain.

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