

Convolutional Neural Networks with Fixed Weights

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Abstract: Improved computational power has enabled artificial neural networks to achieve great success through deep learning. However, visual classification is brittle; networks can be easily confused when a small amount of noise is added to an image. This position paper raises the hypothesis that using all the pixels of an image is wasteful of resources and unstable. Biological neural networks achieve greater success, and the outline of their architecture is well understood and reviewed in this paper. It would behoove deep learning network architectures to take additional inspiration from biology to reduce the dimensionality of images and video. Pixels strike the retina, but are convolved before they get to the brain. It has been demonstrated that a set of five filters retains key visual information while achieving compression by an order of magnitude. This paper presents those filters. We propose that images should be pre-processed with a fixed weight convolution that mimics the filtering performed in the retina and primary visual cortex. Deep learning would then be applied to the smaller filtered image.

1 INTRODUCTION

The human brain has always been compared to the dominant technology of the time (Daugman 1990). The brain has been likened to clockwork, the telegraph, a telephone switchboard or a digital computer. It is none of these things. Inspiration from biology dates to the early years of computing (McCulloch and Pitts 1943) (von Neuman 1945, 1958). An artificial neuron, the perceptron, was formulated in 1958 (Rosenblatt 1958). It attracted much interest until 1969 with the publication of *Perceptrons* showing that a single layer neural network was only capable of doing linear classifications (Minsky and Papert 1969). The authors noted that it would be possible to extend the perceptron to multiple layers, but the mathematics for error backpropagation was not available and they conjectured that the extension would be sterile. Ironically, the multilayer backpropagation problem was solved in the same year, but in a different context (Bryson and Ho, 1975).

Neural networks were reborn in the 1980s (Hopfield 1982), (Hinton 1987) (Rumelhart and

McClelland 1986). The difficulty of visual processing was not appreciated until a rigorous analysis of the problem was given (Marr 1982). Neural networks were effective in some areas, but hand-crafted algorithms remained more effective for computer vision until the emergence of computation systems that can fully exploit machine learning.

Increased computation power has enabled deep learning systems to outperform hand-crafted algorithms in several cases. Tensor Flow and other specialized systems have enabled neural network systems with more than a dozen layers to perform well in image classification, recognition and segmentation tasks (Badrinarayanan et al, 2016) (Rasouli 2020) (Elgendy 2020). The outputs of a network layer may be fully connected to the next layer, or they may be convolutional, in which outputs from adjacent neurons are clustered. In deep learning systems, the network weights may start from random and be adjusted for maximum performance on a given task. Alternatively, a network may start with weights that work well for a specific application and be modified to perform another task.

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However, it is difficult to verify that a neural network has really learned what was intended to be taught. The usual procedure is to train a network on a set of images, and then present it with images that it has not seen to test whether it generalizes. A 1000x1500 colour image contains 36,000,000 bits. Only a small fraction of the 36 million possible images can be tested.

Introducing a small amount of noise to an image produces an image that looks identical to a human. However, it can cause a neural network to wildly misclassify it. Images that are meaningless to a human may be classified with high confidence by a deep neural network (Szegedy et al. 2014) (Nguyen et al. 2015). Images contain much redundant data. Classification errors may be reduced by filtering the image to eliminate noise and clutter.

Artificial neural networks are loosely based on the processing in biological systems but with significant simplifications. The mammalian visual system has evolved successful strategies for understanding visual information. It applies filters to the visual stimuli. Machine vision could benefit from a closer look at biological vision.

This paper first gives a review of some of the signal processing techniques used in biological systems for image understanding. It then examines the workings of a non-pixel machine vision algorithm. We present the filters used by this algorithm, which appears to retain relevant image features while discarding noise and reducing dimensionality by an order of magnitude. It is suggested that images be pre-processed by the filters used by this algorithm before being input to a deep learning system.

2 BACKGROUND: BIOLOGICAL VISION

One of the most striking differences from biology is that machine vision is based on pixels. Pixels never make it out of the eye. All vision in the brain is based on signals that have been convolved to a pixel-less representation. When these signals reach the primary visual cortex, they undergo a second convolution. All visual processing appears to be based on signals that have undergone this transformation.

We suggest that there is no need for a neural network to relearn the basic convolutions performed by the eye and primary visual cortex. The first one or two convolutional layers of vision are fixed in biological systems and have no plasticity beyond

infanthood. Using fixed weights in the initial layer reduces the dimensionality of the image by an order of magnitude without sacrificing useful information.

Some of the relevant points of mammalian vision are given below

2.1 Receptive Fields

Hubel and Wiesel received the Nobel prize for demonstrating that individual neurons in the cat retina responded to a difference in contrast in a small circular region of the visual field (Hubel and Wiesel, 1977). This transformation can be modelled as a circular difference of Gaussians (DOG) or by several other models.

There are five types of neurons in the retina, starting with the rod and cone photoreceptors and culminating in the ganglion cells. A receptive field of a retinal ganglion cell is defined to be that area of the visual field in which a change of illumination will result in a change in the signal transmitted by the nerve cell. Retinal receptive fields have two antagonistic subfields. A bright spot striking the centre may result in an increased output, while increased illumination in the outer annular region will result in a decreased signal. The DOG model represents the inner region as a Gaussian with a narrow extent and the outer region as a Gaussian with a wider extent.

The axons of retinal ganglion cells form the optic nerve over which visual information is transmitted to the brain. If a receptive field has uniform contrast, it transmits no signal. The brain gets strong signals from areas of high contrast.

2.2 Cortical Transformations

Upon reaching the primary visual cortex (V1) the retinal signals are again convolved to be sensitive to oriented edges, disparity and speed (Kandel et al., 2013). These patterns are largely invariant across individuals and across species.

This convolution can be modelled by a Gabor function, which is a sine wave modulated by a circularly rotated Gaussian. A Gabor function is shown in Figure 1. Several other models fit the data.

The receptive field corresponding to a simple cortical cell is selective for step edges or bars. The response will vary based on the position, orientation, contrast, width, motion or binocular disparity of the stimulus.

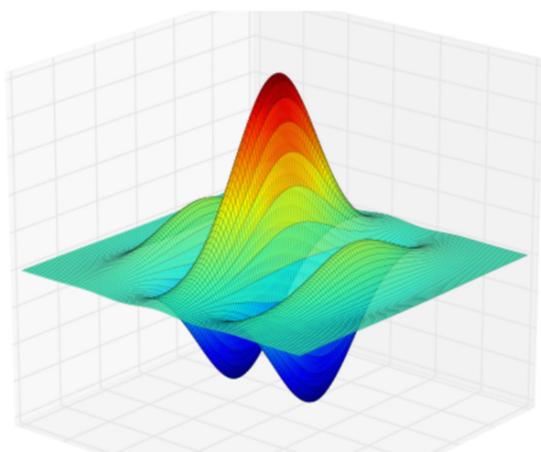


Figure 1: Gabor Function.

2.3 Simple and Complex Cells

Primary visual cortex contains both linear simple cells and non-linear complex cells (Antolik and Bednar 2011). The simple cells respond to different phases of a sine grating, but the complex cells do not. The complex cells are independent of the exact position of the stimulus to which they respond. The function of simple cells is better understood than that of complex cells.

2.4 Retinotopic Maps

Signals that are close together in the visual field remain close together at higher layers of brain processing. Cells are precisely organized into modules (Miikkulainen, 2005). Retinotopic brain organization extends to higher levels (Gattass et al., 2005). This idea is replicated in the layouts commonly used for convolutional neural networks (CNN). The strength of a signal from a neuron may be amplified or attenuated based on lateral inhibition or excitation from adjacent neurons (Nabet & Pinter 1991).

2.5 Image Compression

The retina has 87 million rods and 4.6 million cones (Lamb 2015). These are processed in the eye and leave as the axons of the ganglion cells that form the optic nerve. The optic nerve has only 1 million fibres (Levine, 1985).

2.6 Separate Paths

The optic nerve goes to the lateral geniculate nucleus (LGN) of the thalamus and then travels to the primary

visual cortex (V1). At the thalamus, the signals separate into a parvocellular path, which is largely devoted to form, detail and colour, and a magnocellular path, which is largely devoted to motion. These paths remain separate through V1, V2 and V3. The parvocellular path splits off to V3a, V4 (which also receives magnocellular data) and the Inferior Temporal area. From V3 the magnocellular path goes to V5, Posterior Parietal, and frontal eye fields (Kandel et al., 2013).

Cell specialization in the brain may extend to the retina. Three different types of ganglion cells have been identified in the cat: X, Y and W cells (Levine & Shefner 1991). Y cells are largest and most often encountered by electrodes, but they make up only 4%. Like the complex cells, Y cells are nonlinear and give a transient response to stimuli. The linear X cells make up 55%. Both X and Y cells project to the thalamus.

The W cells make up the remaining 41% but do not go to the cortex of the brain. Instead, they go to the brain stem and are thought to not be part of conscious vision. Their role seems to be detecting the most salient features of the image and directing unconscious eye movements to concentrate on these features.

2.7 Expected Input

The cells of V1 receive input from the eye. However, they have more inputs from higher centres of the brain, whose function appears to be making an expected image more likely (Kandel et al. 2013). Psychologists distinguish the sensation that is input to the senses from the perception of what the data represents. There appears to be a strong feedback mechanism in which an expected model of the phenomenon helps drive what is perceived.

2.8 Non-uniform Representation

The retinotopic organization is extremely dense at the fovea, and less so on the periphery. The distribution can be modelled as log-polar (Zhang, 2006). The eye makes constant non-voluntary micro-motions (saccades) to examine relevant areas. Spatial filtering ensures that the visual system does not respond to noise (Wilson et al. 1990).

2.9 Colour

Most of an image's information is in the grey scale; colour makes a minor contribution. Human cones are sensitive to three wavelengths, peaking at 558

(yellow-green), 531 (green) and 420 nm (blue). Only 5% of the cones are sensitive to blue and the eye is much less sensitive to an equiluminance image that differs only in chrominance.

JPEG and MPEG image compression is largely directed to the luminance content of the image, with reduced emphasis on the chrominance (Rabbani 2002). Images are commonly stored in a compressed format, but then put into a full RGB format with redundant data before processing.

As demonstrated by Land's famous experiment, colour is a psychological construct, not a physical one (Land 1985). The same wavelength of light can be perceived as different colours.

Other species have different wavelength sensitivity. Birds may have four different cone types. Warm blooded animals cannot make effective use of the infrared spectrum, but this limitation does not apply to cold blooded animals. Ultraviolet light tends to damage the eye and is avoided by animals. Some insect eyes are sensitive to light polarization.

Biological restrictions do not apply to silicon photoreceptors which tend to be sensitive to infrared. Considerable ingenuity has been applied to circuits to make them mimic human vision. Machine vision has superhuman capabilities which can be exploited. Multispectral imaging is common in satellite land observation systems.

2.10 Early Learning

There is not enough information in the DNA to fully specify brain connections. Animals wire their brains in utero or in early life. Kittens raised in a visually deprived environment never develop normal vision. Humans take five years to reach full visual acuity (Van Sluyters et al. 1990). However, once the fundamental connections for the eye and primary visual cortex has been learned, there does not appear to be further plasticity.

2.11 Selective Cells

At higher layers of cortex in macaque monkey there are single cells that respond strongly to a particular feature, such as a face or hand, at any position. (Goldstein and Brockmole, 2014). Such cells may respond to only to faces or to hands. Some seem to encode facial parts such as eyes or mouth. Some cells are specific for responding to the face of an individual monkey or human.

² The digitized filter would be 7x7 less three pixels at each corner or 37 pixels.

2.12 Shallow Computation

Cell processing speeds are on the order of a millisecond in neurons, but a nanosecond in silicon. Despite a million to one speed disadvantage, human vision is superior to machine vision. This performance is achieved through massive parallelism. A human can perceive a visual stimulus and react to it in less than a second. This implies that the computational process is done in under 1000 steps.

3 PROPOSED METHOD

It is proposed that deep learning start with a fixed convolution that mimics the signal transformations performed by the retina and simple cells of primary visual cortex. This reduces the dimensionality of the image by an order of magnitude without sacrificing relevant detail. It removes the computational burden of needing to find weights for the initial layers. The initial image transformation would be handled by an overlapping hexagonal grid of receptive fields. The size of the receptive fields can be either fixed or set dynamically. Recommended minimum size is seven pixels in diameter; maximum about 20 to 30. Dynamic resizing of receptive field size is possible, mimicking the attention to areas of high curvature achieved by saccades. This processing is done on monochrome images, with lower resolution chrominance components handled by a different path.

3.1 Quadrature Disambiguation

The system hypothesizes that at the scale of interest, the contents of a receptive field represent a straight line at an unknown position and orientation with uniform contrast on either side. Note that the receptive fields are circular; not square. A receptive field of diameter 7 covers 38 pixels ($\pi \cdot 3.5^2$);² a diameter of 20 covers 340 pixels. After convolution, either of these fields can be reduced to five numbers. This is compression 7:1 to 68:1 for a monochrome image, though with overlap image compression would be about half that. A colour image would be represented by the five monochrome filters plus two more for colour. Without accounting for overlap, colour image compression ranges from 16:1 to 145:1.

An algorithm called Quadrature Disambiguation has been developed that can process these five numbers to detect the exact orientation of the edge,

though the equation needs to be solved numerically (Folsom and Pinter, 1998). Knowing the orientation, the convolutional outputs can be steered to predict the results of convolving with a quadrature pair of filters exactly aligned to the image orientation. From their phase, the edge position can be determined to sub-pixel resolution. Edge contrast can be computed. If the contrast is low, the receptive field is judged to have no feature.

Having detected an edge at a particular position and orientation, the system can compute what the filter outputs would have been had the hypothesis been true that the receptive field contained only an ideal edge. The difference of the ideal filters from the actual ones can be processed by the same algorithm to find a secondary edge. If the residual edge has low contrast, the receptive field feature is classified as an edge. Otherwise, it is a corner or point of inflection. The intersection of the two edges gives the corner location and angle.

Steerability means that under certain circumstances, the response of an oriented filter can be interpolated from a small number of filters (Adelman and Adelson, 1991). The five convolution filters used above consist of a pair of orthogonal even functions and three orientations of odd functions. These have a similar appearance to filters often found in convolutional neural networks, but have the desirable properties of compact support, smoothness and steerability.

Researchers have detected simple cell neurons in V1 that are responsive to oriented edges; other cells respond to bars. These have been called edge detectors and bar detectors. It may be that the “bar detectors” are the conjugate phase of an edge detector. By looking at the phase difference of a properly oriented edge detector and its conjugate, one can determine the position of the edge within the receptive field.

Figure 2 gives an example for a coarse tiling of an image. It uses slightly overlapped receptive fields of diameter 20 pixels, arranged in a 12 by 21 hexagonal grid. Five filters at the 252 locations of the grey-scale image means that the 83,349-pixel image has been reduced to 1260 numbers. These numbers are then processed to find the locations and orientations of edges. The more prominent edges are visualized by red and blue segments in Figure 3. It should be noted that edge detection in image processing produces a binary image of edge locations which requires further processing to fit lines. By contrast, the output from Quadrature Disambiguation is a list of edge locations, orientations and contrast. The information could be further processed to draw a cubic spline outlining

features. Lateral inhibition and excitation can be used to dynamically change the contrast threshold for edge recognition, filling in phantom lines. Grouping edgelets together to form polylines has been done for stereo depth perception (Folsom 2007).

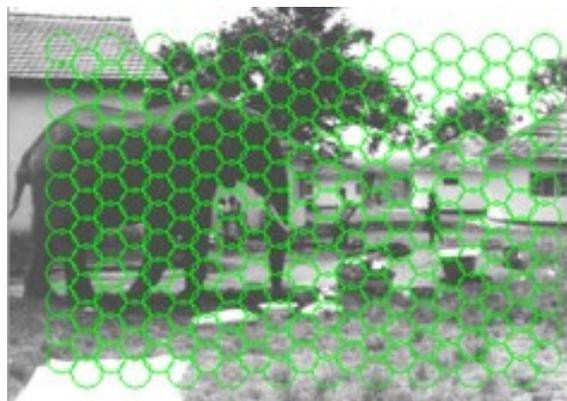


Figure 2: Green circles give an image tiling.

This example is a coarse tiling leading to coarse edge detection. Finer results can be obtained by decreasing the diameter of the receptive fields and increasing their overlap. Using a diameter of 12 pixels would give a 37 by 22 grid for a total of 874 locations. A diameter of 8 would give 1972 locations.



Figure 3: Visualization of detected edges.

It has been shown algorithmically that it is possible to extract the key information in an image after systematic convolution by filters with fixed weights. Pixels are not required. This paper is not advocating using the Quadrature Disambiguation algorithm. Instead, it is pointing out that since the information is contained in the convolved image, it is discoverable by deep learning.

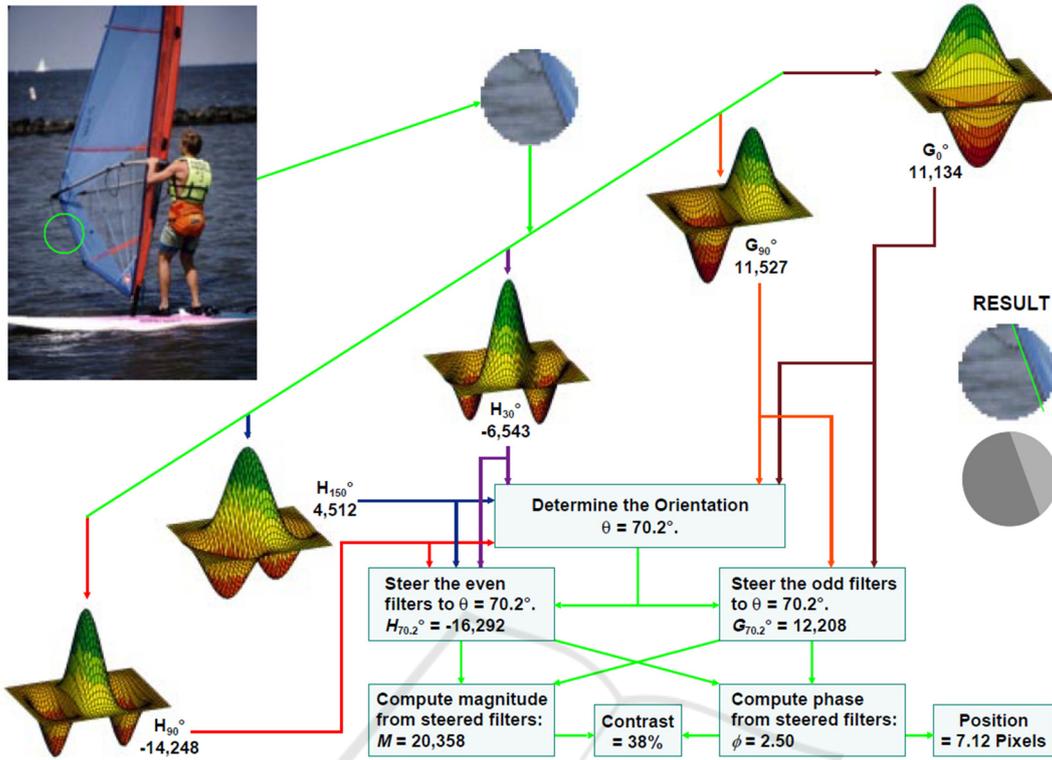


Figure 4: Filters for image simplification (Folsom and Pinter 1998).

3.2 Filters

Figure 4 illustrates how five filters can be used to find the orientation, position and contrast of the dominant edge in a receptive field. These filters are windowed by a circularly symmetric function that resembles a Gaussian but has compact support and is infinitely differentiable. For a filter of diameter d , centred at c , the window is given by rotating

$$w(x) = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{for } x = c \\ \frac{1}{4} e^{1 - \left(\frac{5d}{8(x-c)}\right)^2} & \text{for } c < |x| < c + \frac{5d}{8} \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \quad (1)$$

Outside the radius of $d/2$, $w(x)$ does not exceed 0.0082, and it is zero outside a radius of $5d/8$.

The even filters are set to

$$G(x) = w(x) \left(1 - 2 \left[\frac{\alpha}{d}(x - c)\right]^2\right) \quad (2)$$

The parameter α is set to 5.665 so that the filter gives zero response to a blank receptive field. The two even filters are rotated to be orthogonal to each other, resulting in the two filters G_{0° and G_{90° .

Odd filters are given by

$$H(x) = w(x) \gamma \left(\frac{\alpha}{d}(x - c) - \beta \left[\frac{\alpha}{d}(x - c) \right]^3 \right) \quad (3)$$

Maximum phase linearity is achieved by setting $\gamma=2.205$ and $\beta=0.295$. The three odd filters are rotated to form H_{30° , H_{90° and H_{150° . For a colour RGB image, these five filters would be applied to monochrome pixels formed by $(R+G+B)/3$. These five numbers would be supplemented by a red chrominance filter C_R produced by applying $w(x)$ to pixels formed from $(R-G)/2$ and a blue filter C_B from convolving pixels $(2B-R-G)/4$ with $w(x)$.

In order to produce the fixed weights to be used on the first stage of the convolutional neural network, perform the following tasks:

- Select a pixel diameter.
- Arrange the receptive fields in a grid that tiles the image.
- For the given diameter, compute the filter coefficients G_{0° and G_{90° from equations (1) and (2).
- Compute the filter coefficients H_{30° , H_{90° and H_{150° from equations (1) and (3).
- Compute C_R and C_B from equation (1).
- Apply the filters to the grey-scale or coloured pixels as appropriate.

- All subsequent layers of the CNN will learn weights from these numbers and will have no access to the original image.

A variant would be to select two or more scales for diameters.

In summary, a circular region of an image is reduced to the seven numbers G_{0° , G_{90° , H_{30° , H_{90° , H_{150° , C_R and C_B . An overlapping circular grid processed to extract these numbers contains the key information that deep learning needs for image understanding. On a colour image with diameter d set to 9, and with 50% overlap, image compression is 13:1. For a less detailed analysis, setting d to 30 gives compression of 150:1.

Code to implement these filters is on <https://github.com/elcano/QDED> in file Features.c.

3.3 Deep Learning

The following architecture is proposed:

- The input image undergoes a fixed convolution. Each receptive field is reduced to five numbers, plus two additional numbers for red-green and blue-yellow colour contrast. This layer corresponds to V1 simple cells (V1S). The neural network has no access to the image feeding V1S.
- Network layers connected to the V1S input layer should be convolutional and grouped modularly. They may be organized into separate paths to recognize form, motion and colour.
- V1S may feed to V1C, which corresponds to the ability of the complex cells to find features over a wider range (Chen et al. 2013).
- Modules should be connected in a fashion that allows lateral excitation or inhibition of a feature based on its presence in neighbouring cells (Jerath et al., 2016).
- There should be feedback from the final classification outputs back to V1S to bias perception in favour of the expected result.
- A shallow learning network should implement an alphabet for visual recognition. This might include generic faces, hands, letters or geometric shapes. The trained network should be included as a building block for most models.

4 RESULTS

This is not a research paper; rather it is a position paper arguing that CNN would benefit from an image pre-processing step that reduces the dimensionality of images without discarding useful information. The technique has not been implemented in deep learning systems. Animals have used these techniques for millennia. Even tiny-brained creatures have developed visual systems superior to most machine vision systems.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Pixels are not the fundamental visual element. Fixing the weights for the first network layer reduces its size. Since the initial convolution has been shown to include key image features, image sizes can be compressed by an order of magnitude without information loss. The reduced image size leads to faster deep learning. Filtering produces a more stable system with better noise immunity. It protects the network from learning weird filters for its first stage. It may be the solution to the problem of networks that produce wildly different classifications for images that look identical to humans.

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