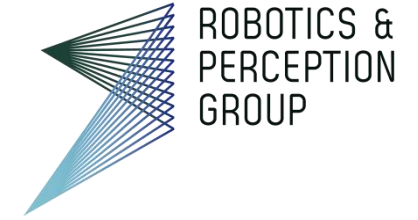




**University of  
Zurich<sup>UZH</sup>**



# Vision Algorithms for Mobile Robotics

Lecture 12c  
Deep Learning Tutorial

Leonard Bauersfeld

<https://rpg.ifi.uzh.ch>

# Outline

- Introduction
- Supervised Learning
- Unsupervised Learning
- Applications to Computer Vision
- Conclusions
- Machine Learning for Drones

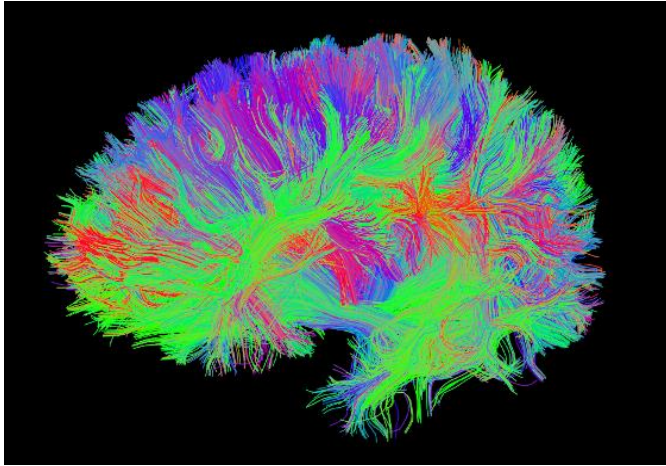
**Relevant for the exam**

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# The Deep Learning Revolution

Medicine



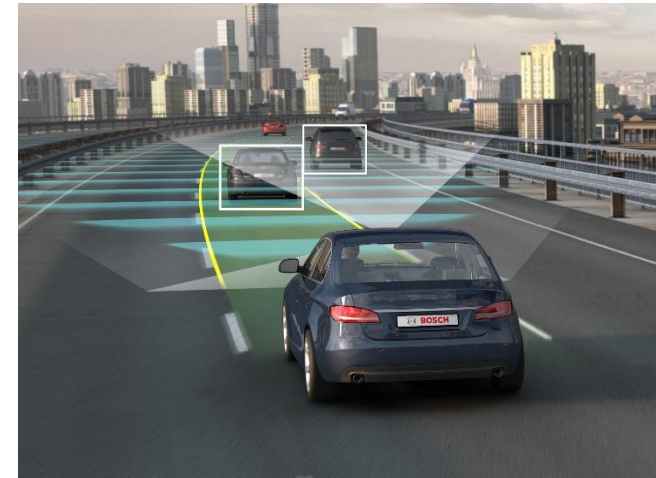
Media & Entertainment



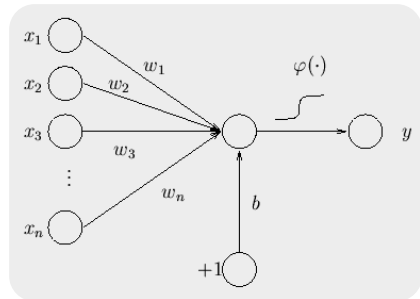
Surveillance & Security



Autonomous Driving

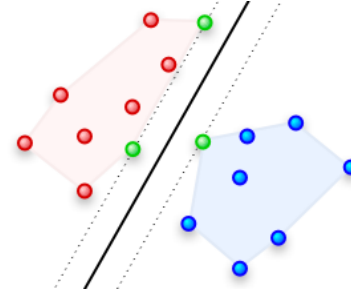


# Some History



Perceptron

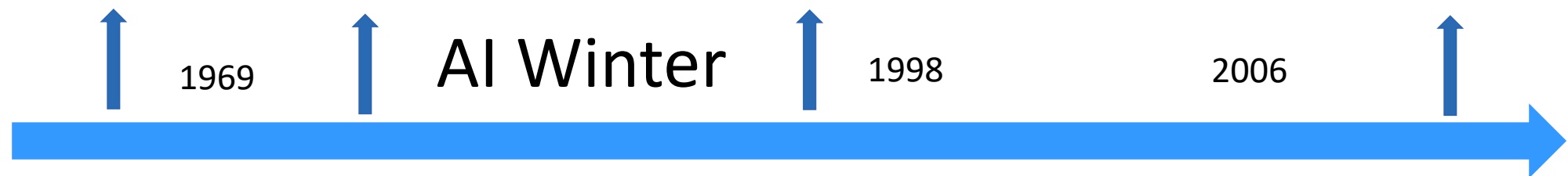
Back-  
Propagation



SVM

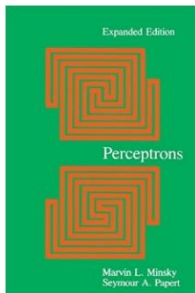


AlexNet



1958

Critics



1974

AI Winter

1995

Convolutional Neural  
Networks for Handwritten  
Digits Recognition



Restricted  
Boltzman  
Machines

2006

2012

# What changed?

1. Hardware Improvements



2. Big Data Available

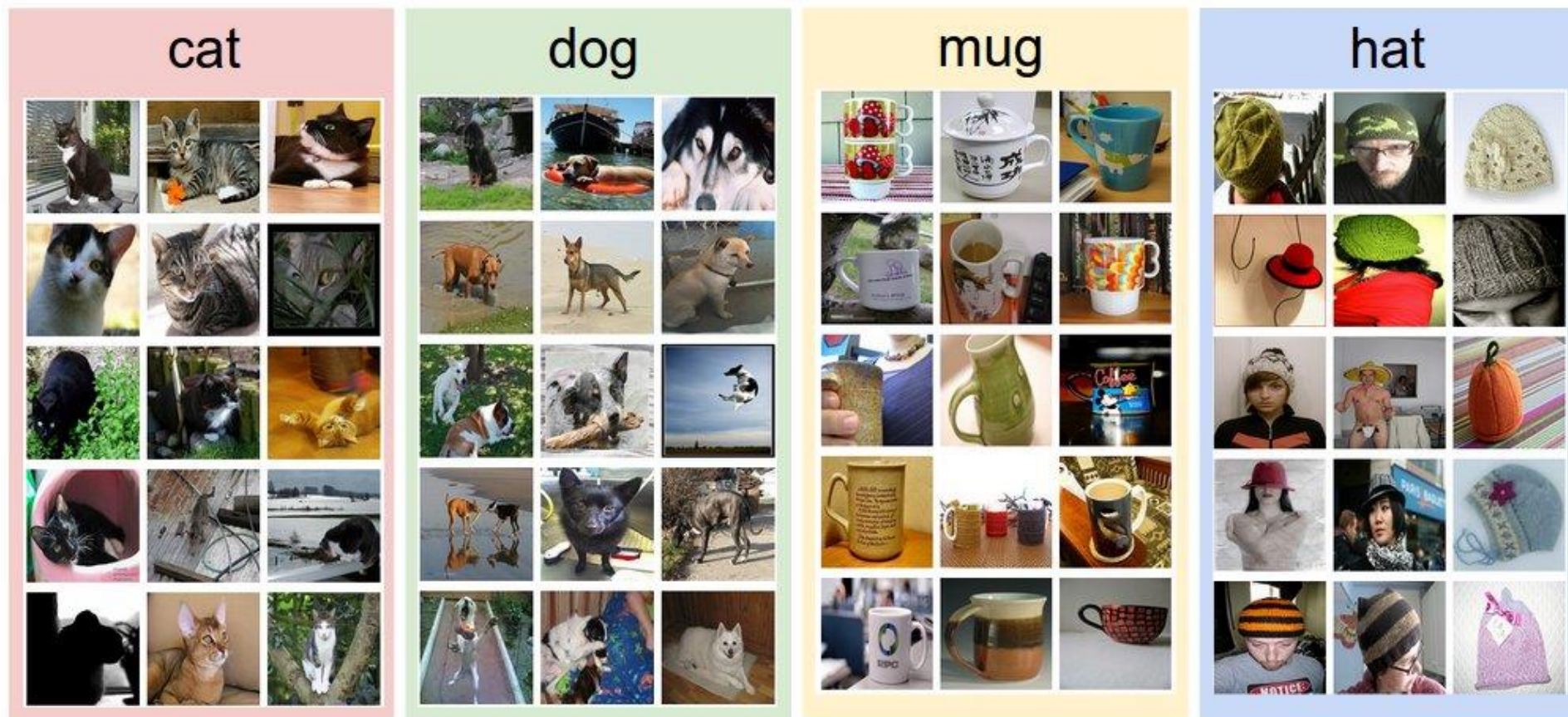


3. Algorithmic Progress



# Image Classification

Task of assigning an input image a label from a fixed set of categories.



# The semantic gap

What computers see compared to what we see

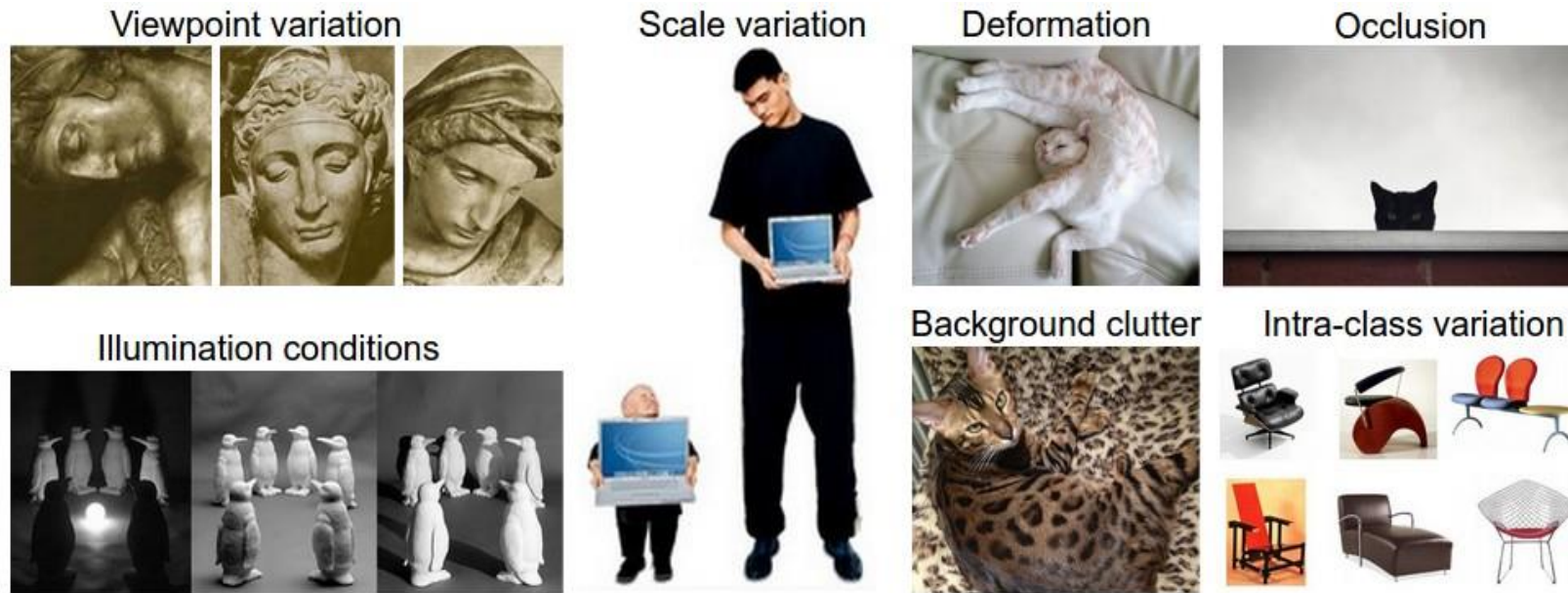


|     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 401 | 402 | 403 | 404 | 405 | 406 | 407 | 408 | 409 | 410 |
| 411 | 412 | 413 | 414 | 415 | 416 | 417 | 418 | 419 | 420 |
| 421 | 422 | 423 | 424 | 425 | 426 | 427 | 428 | 429 | 430 |
| 431 | 432 | 433 | 434 | 435 | 436 | 437 | 438 | 439 | 440 |
| 441 | 442 | 443 | 444 | 445 | 446 | 447 | 448 | 449 | 450 |
| 451 | 452 | 453 | 454 | 455 | 456 | 457 | 458 | 459 | 460 |
| 461 | 462 | 463 | 464 | 465 | 466 | 467 | 468 | 469 | 470 |
| 471 | 472 | 473 | 474 | 475 | 476 | 477 | 478 | 479 | 480 |
| 481 | 482 | 483 | 484 | 485 | 486 | 487 | 488 | 489 | 490 |
| 491 | 492 | 493 | 494 | 495 | 496 | 497 | 498 | 499 | 500 |



# Classification Challenges

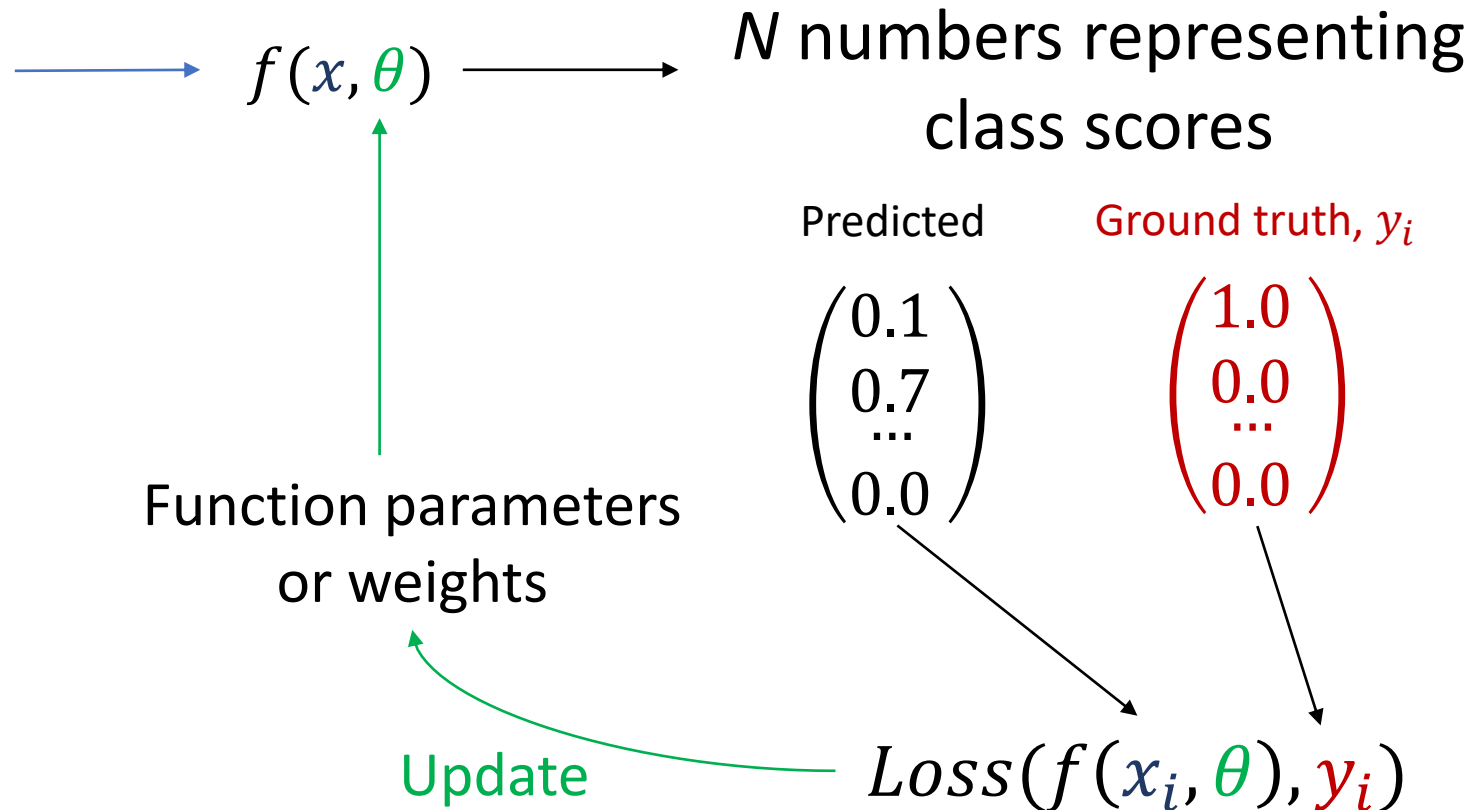
Directly specifying how a category looks like is impossible.



We need use a **Data Driven Approach**

# Supervised Learning

Find function  $f(x, \theta)$  that imitates a ground truth signal

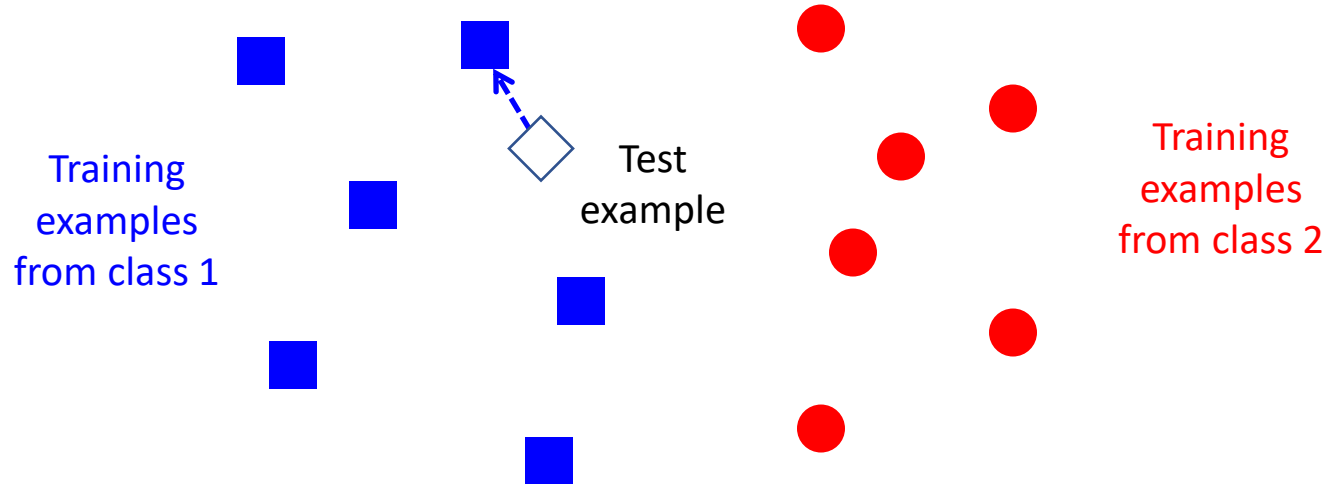


# Machine Learning Keywords

1. Loss: Quantify how good  $\theta$  are
2. Optimization: The process of finding  $\theta$  that minimize the loss
3. Function: Problem modelling  $\rightarrow$  Deep networks are highly non-linear  $f(x, \theta)$

# Classifiers: K-Nearest neighbor

Features are represented in the descriptor space



$f(\mathbf{x}, \theta) = \text{label of the } K \text{ training examples nearest to } \mathbf{x}$

How fast is training? How fast is testing?

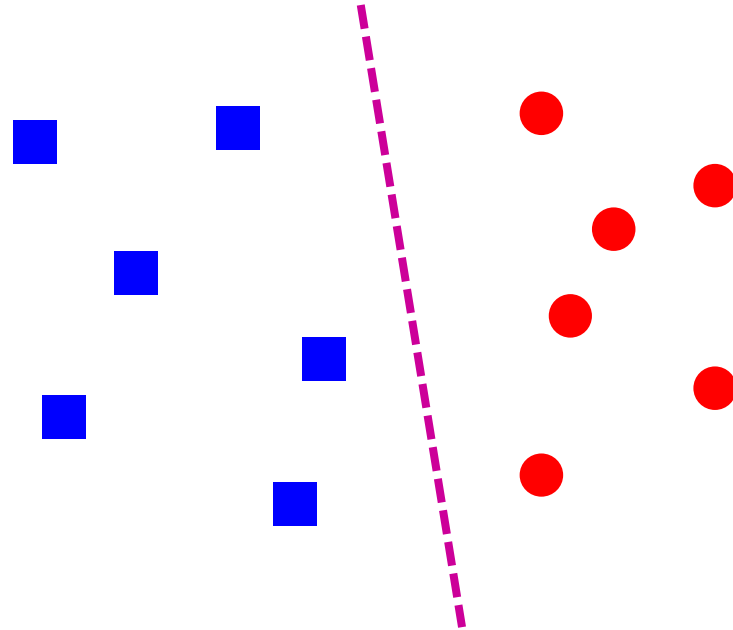
- $O(1)$ ,  $O(n)$

What is a good distance metric ? What  $K$  should be used? ☹️



# Classifiers: Linear

Find a *linear function* to separate the classes:

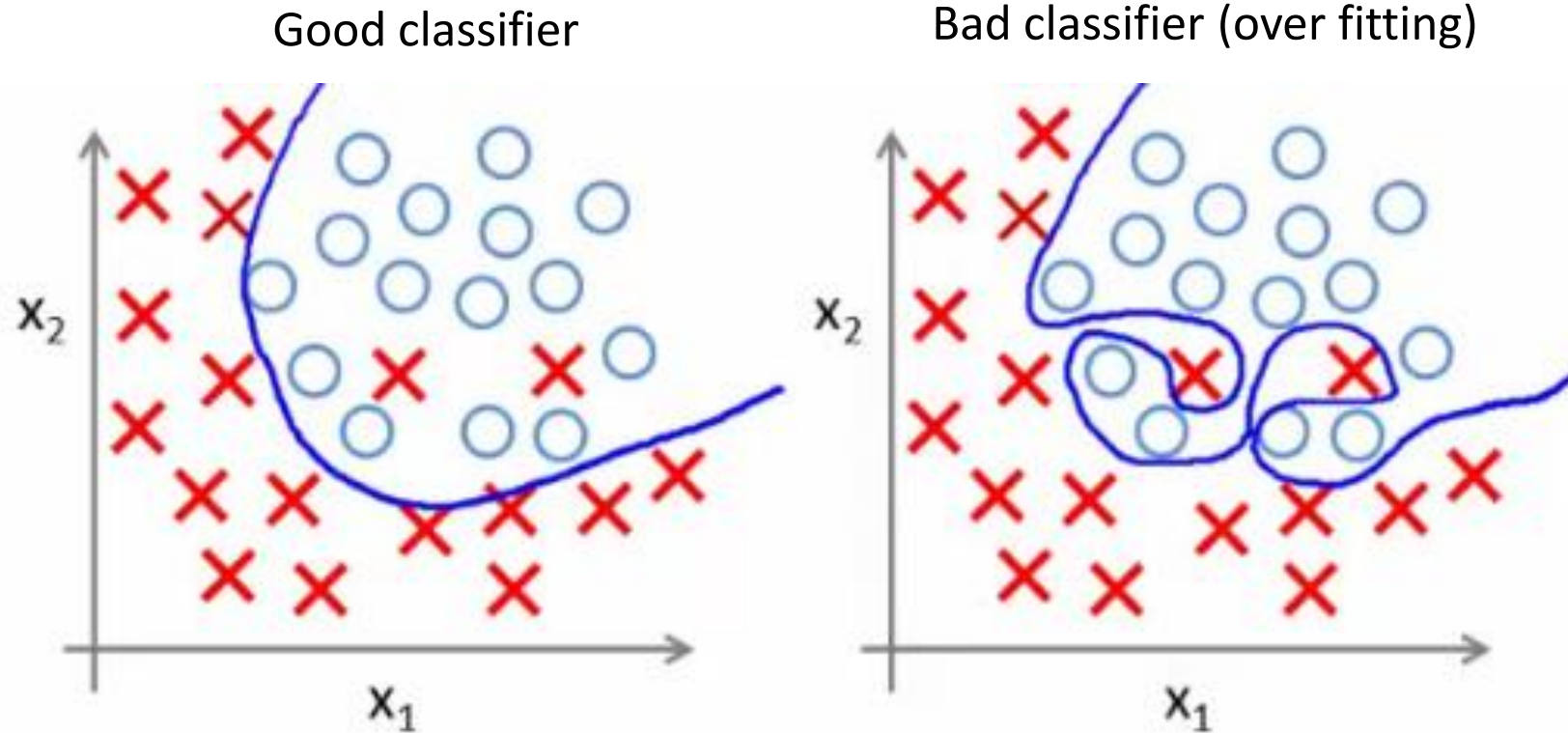


$$f(\mathbf{x}, \theta) = \text{sgn}(\theta \cdot \mathbf{x} + b)$$

What is  $\theta$ ? What is the dimensionality of images?

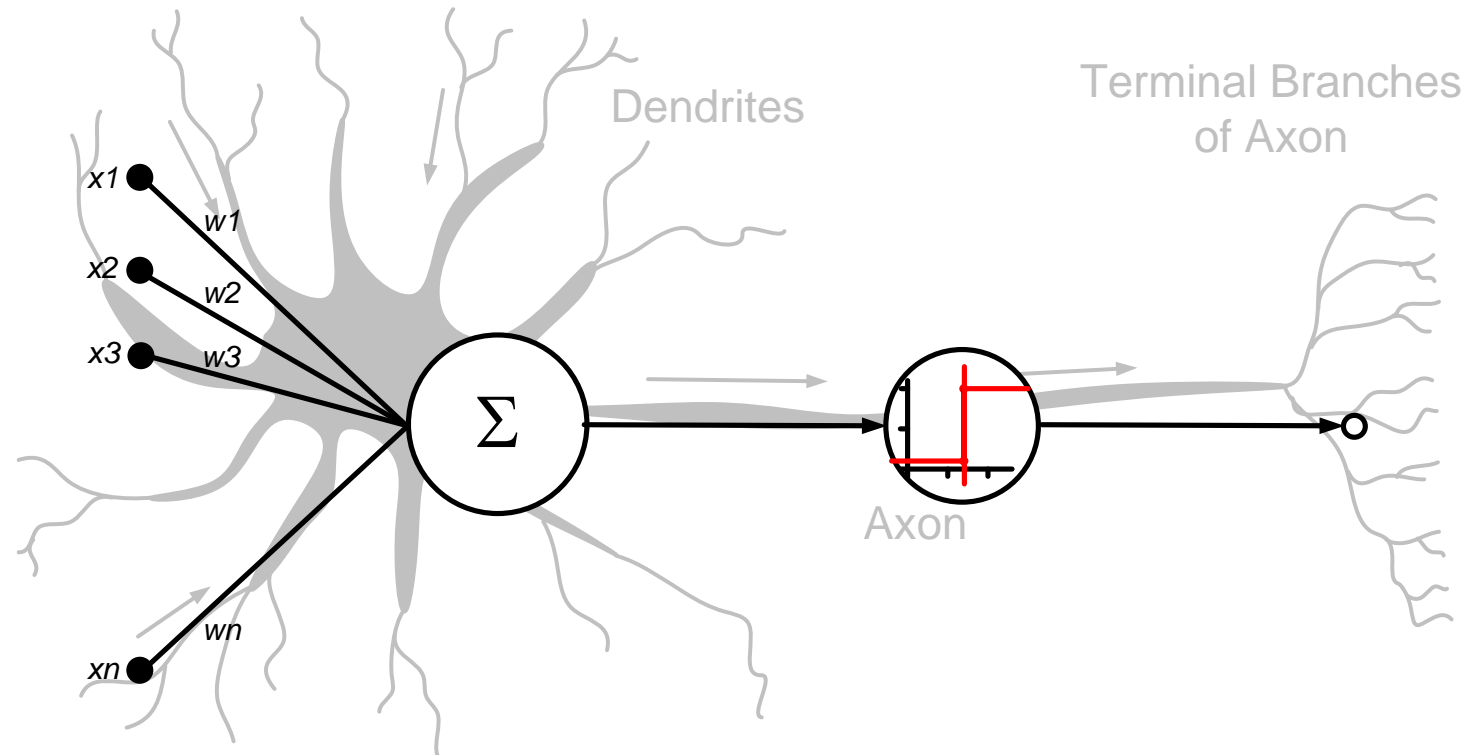
# Classifiers: non-linear

What is  $f(x, \theta)$  ?

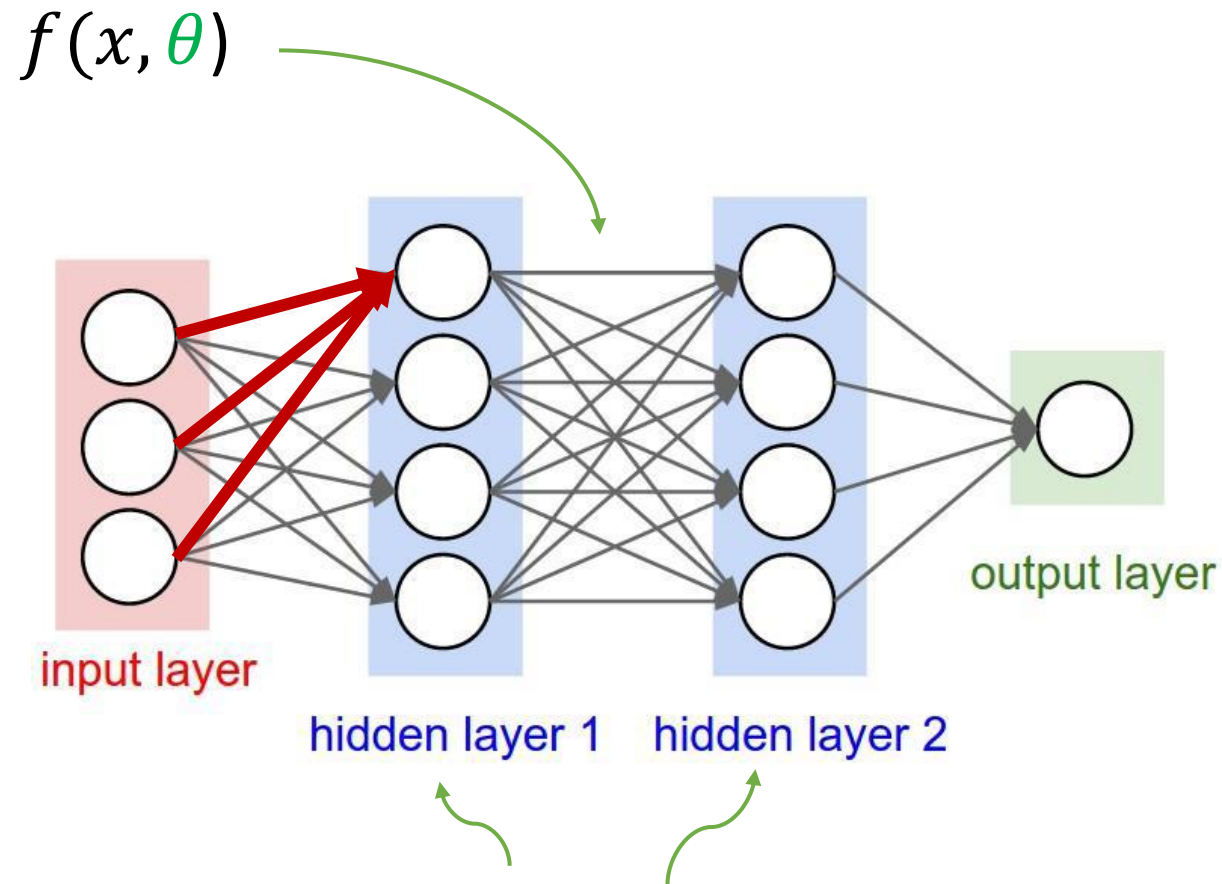


# Biological Inspiration

$f(x, \theta) = F(\theta x)$ ,  $F$  is a non-linear activation function (Step, ReLU, Sigmoid)



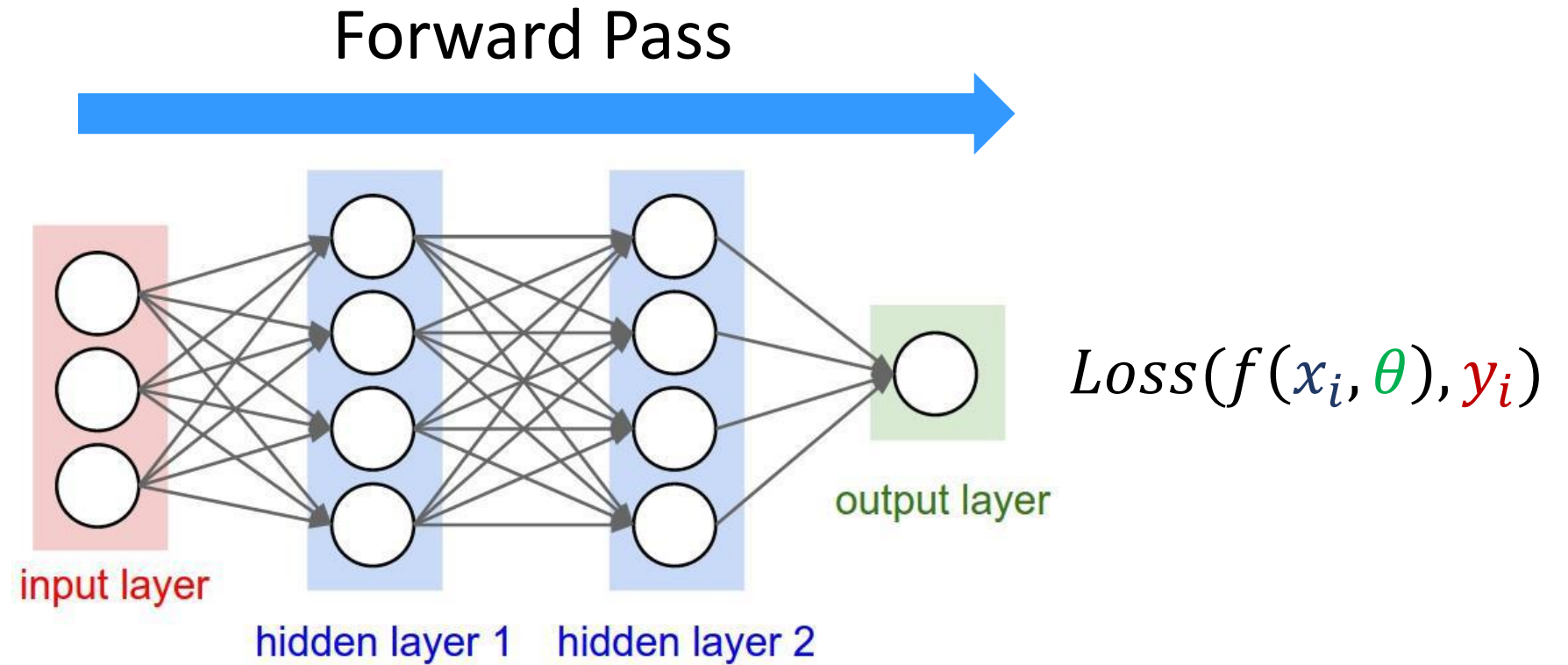
# Multi Layer Perceptron



Non-linear Activation functions (ReLU, sigmoid, etc.)



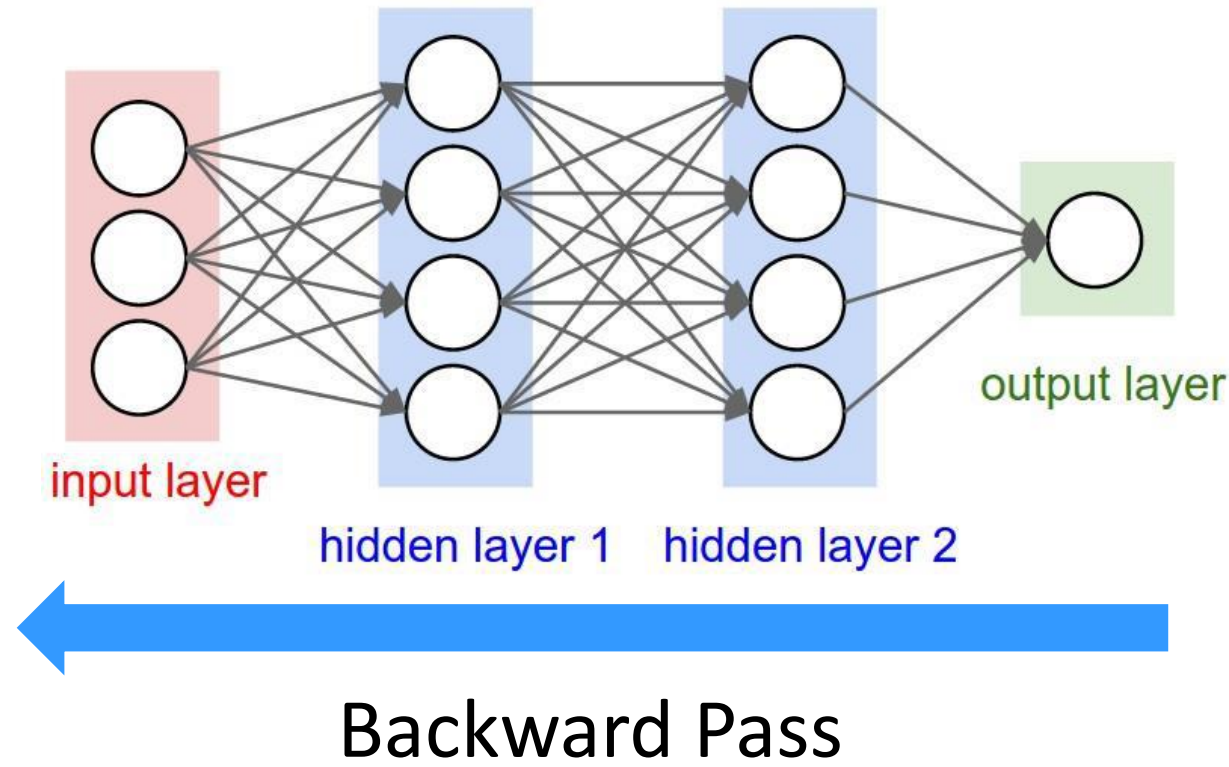
# Forward Propagation



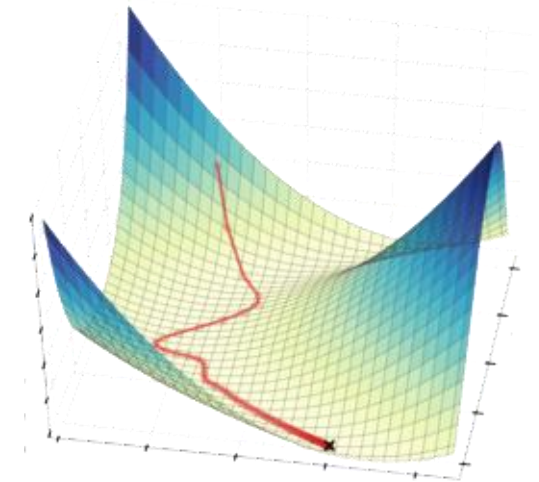
# Optimization: Back-propagation

**Compute gradients** with respect to all parameters and perform **gradient descent**

$$\theta_{new} = \theta_{old} - \mu \nabla_{\theta} Loss$$

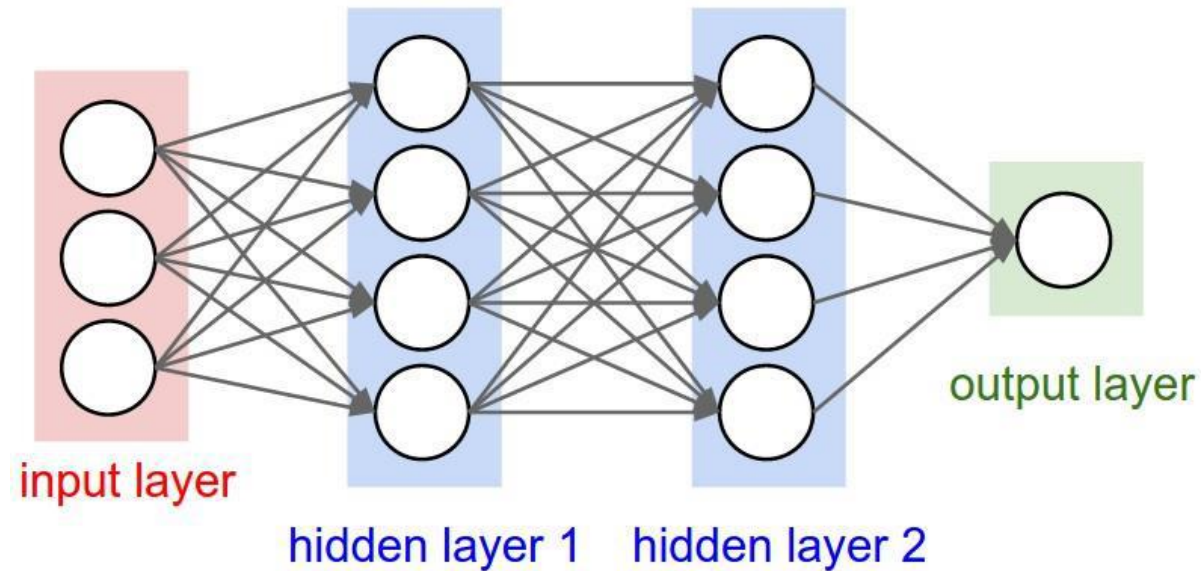


$$Loss(f(x_i, \theta), y_i)$$



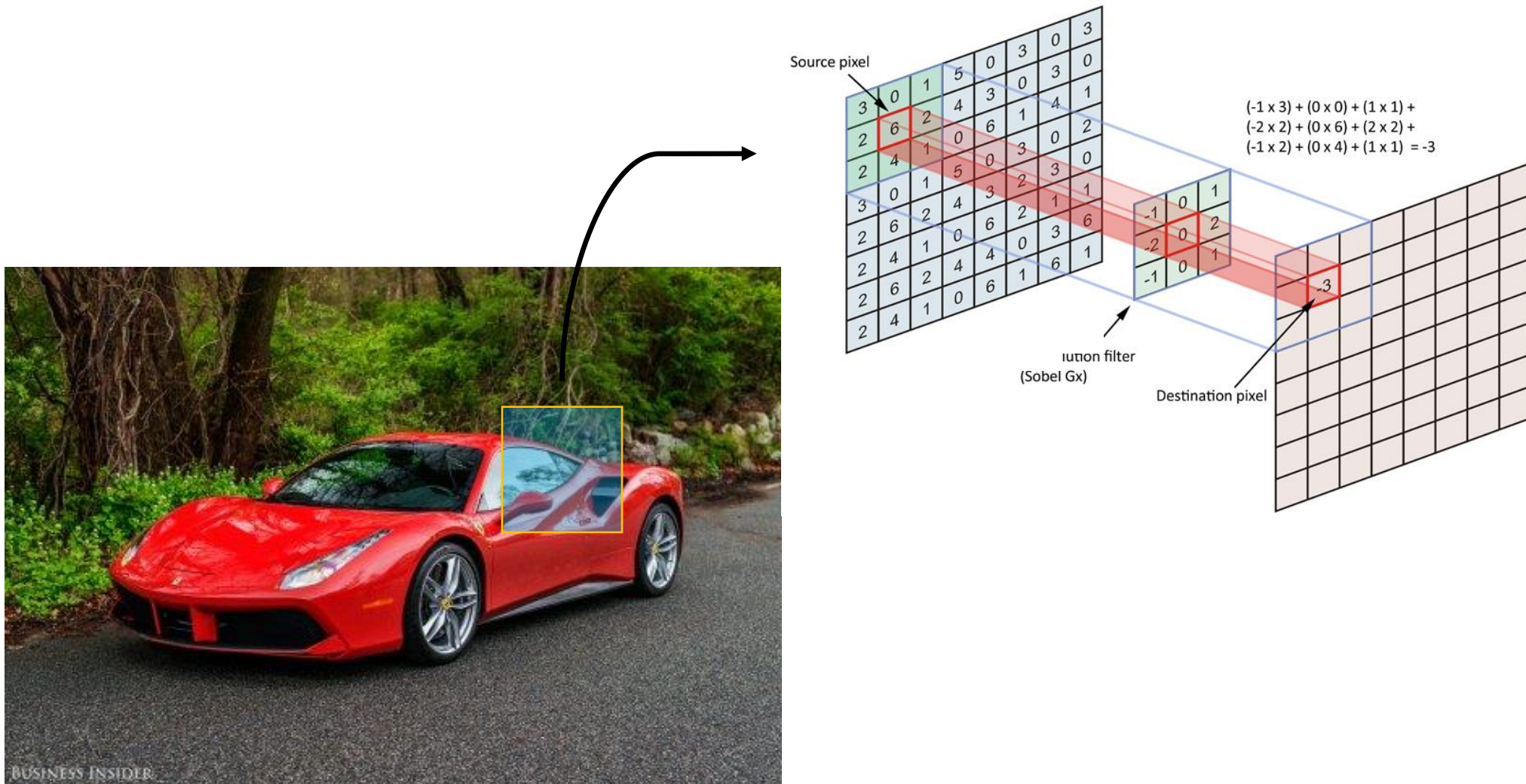
# Problems of fully connected network

Too many parameters → **possible overfitting**.



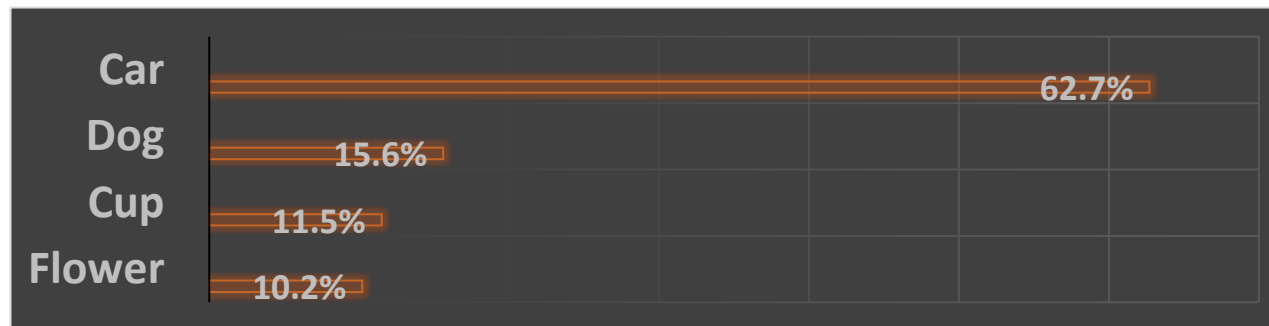
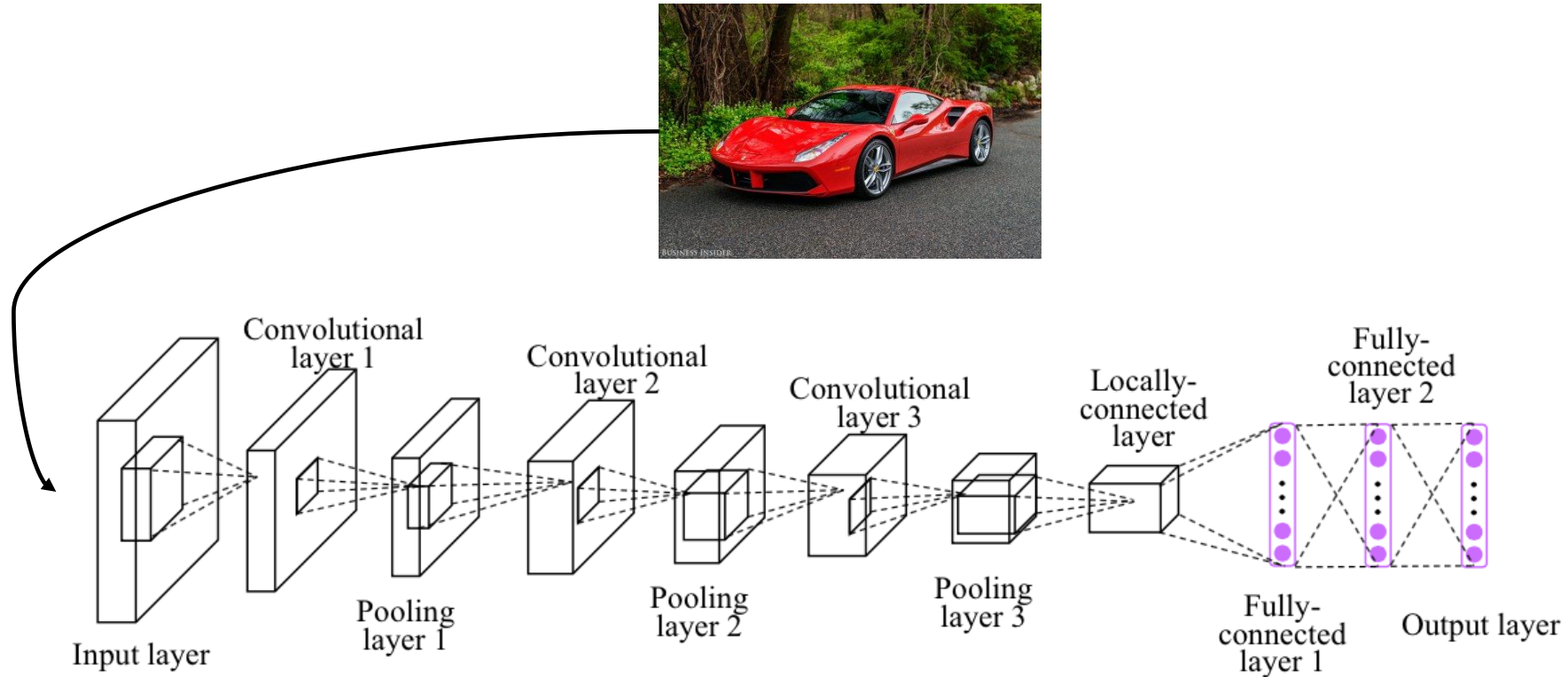
However, we are not using the fact that inputs are images!

# Convolutional Neural Networks



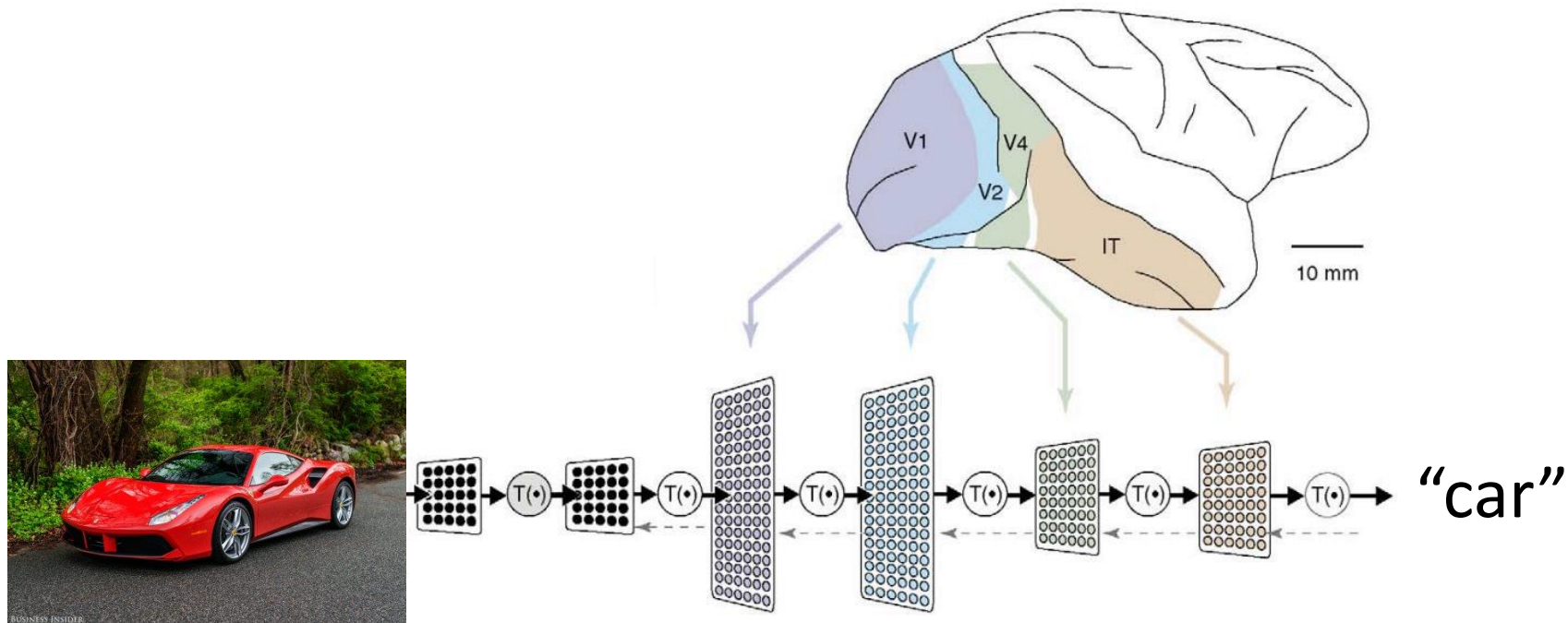


# Going Deep



# Why Deep?

1. Inspired by the **human visual system**
2. Learn **multiple layers** of transformations of input
3. Extract progressively more **sophisticated representations**

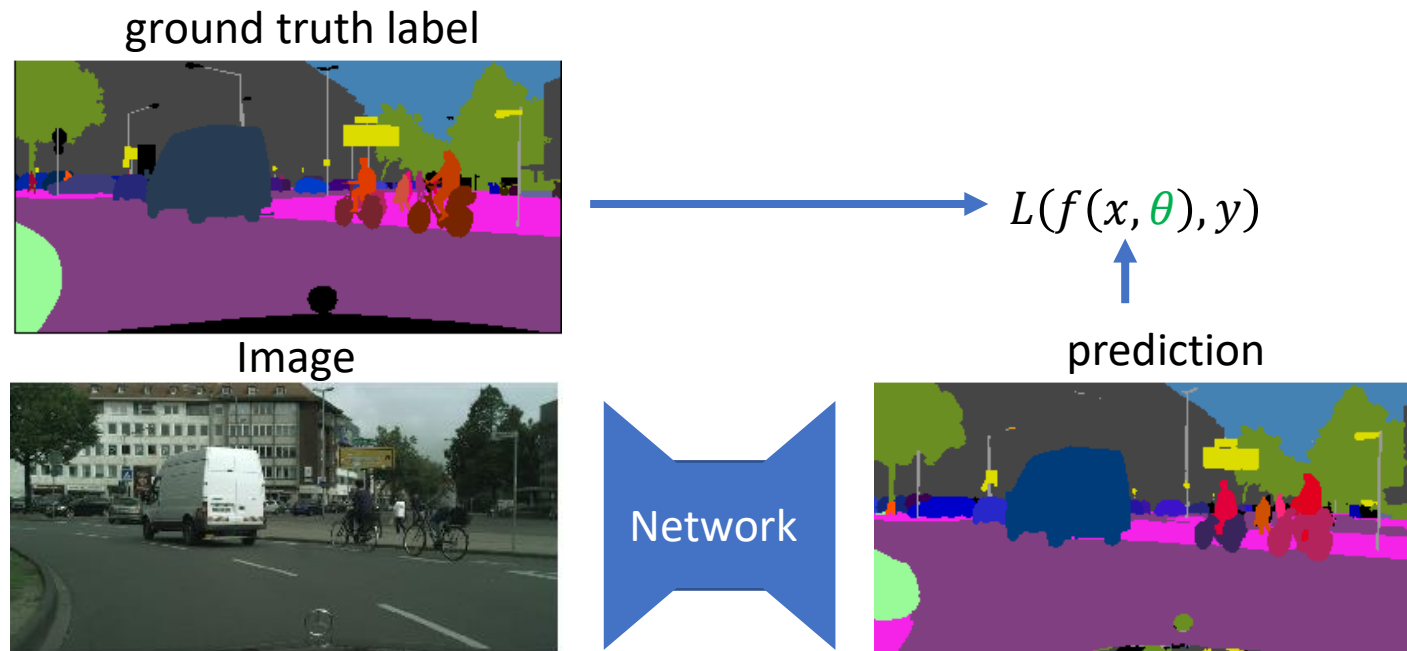


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# Supervised Learning

- In supervised learning we assume we have access to both input data or **images** and **ground truth labels**.
- Networks trained with supervision usually perform best
- However, getting ground truth is hard, since it often must be **hand-labelled**





# Supervised Learning

- Image Segmentation



[1] Long, Shelhamer, *Fully Convolutional Networks for Semantic Segmentation*, Conference of Computer Vision and Pattern Recognition (CVPR), 2015. [PDF](#)

# Supervised Learning

- Image Captioning



"little girl is eating piece of cake."



"baseball player is throwing ball in game."



"woman is holding bunch of bananas."



"black cat is sitting on top of suitcase."



"a young boy is holding a baseball bat."



"a cat is sitting on a couch with a remote control."



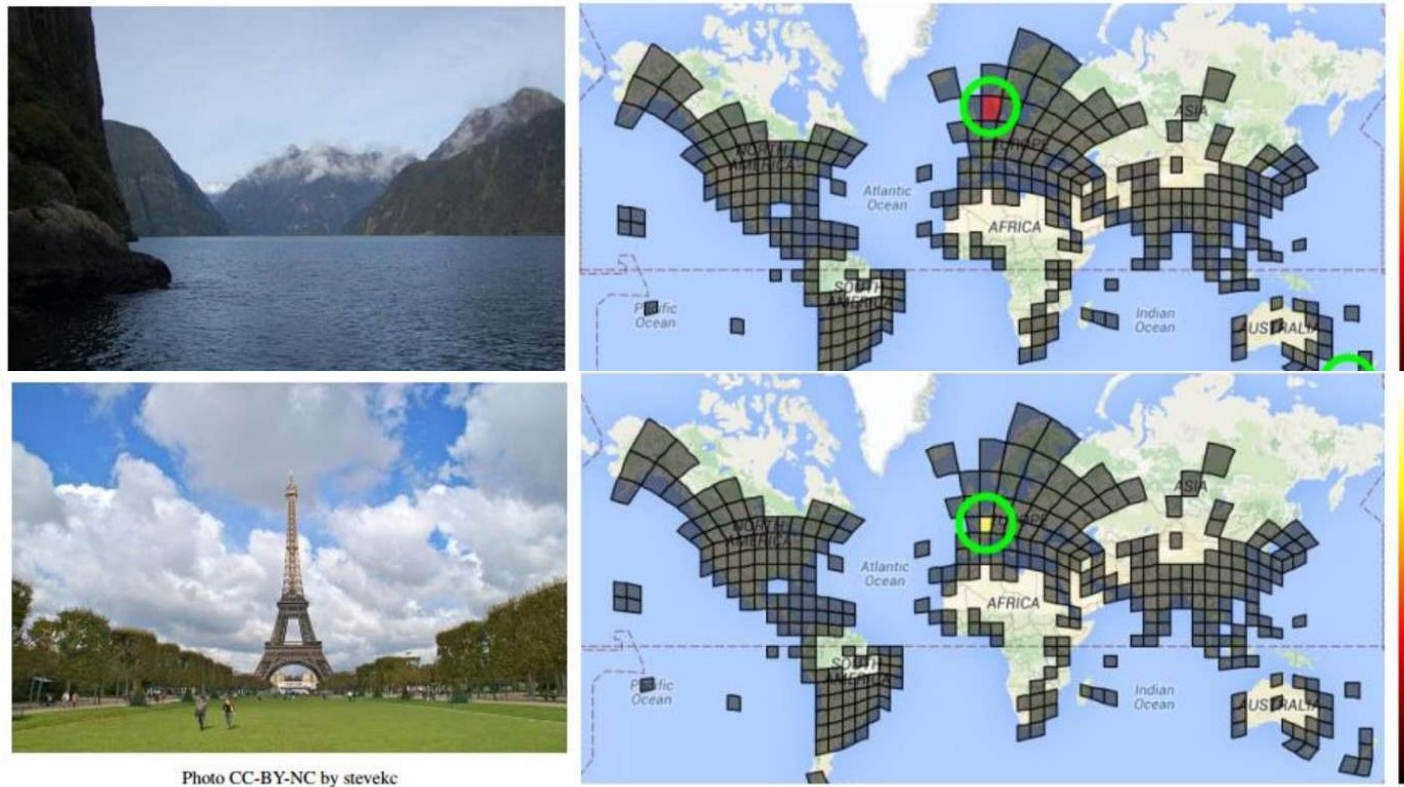
"a woman holding a teddy bear in front of a mirror."



"a horse is standing in the middle of a road."

# Supervised Learning

- Image Localization



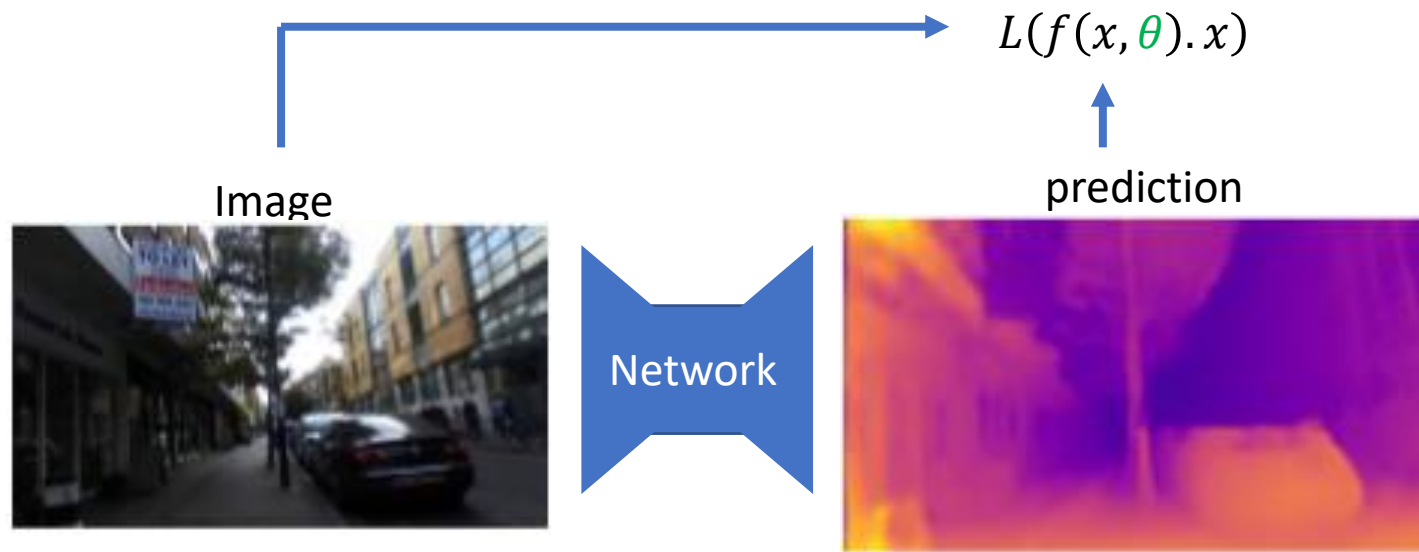


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# Unsupervised Learning

- In unsupervised learning we only have access to input data or **images**.
- Usually, these methods are more popular because they can use much larger datasets that do not need to be manually labelled.



# Unsupervised Learning

- Monocular Depth Estimation



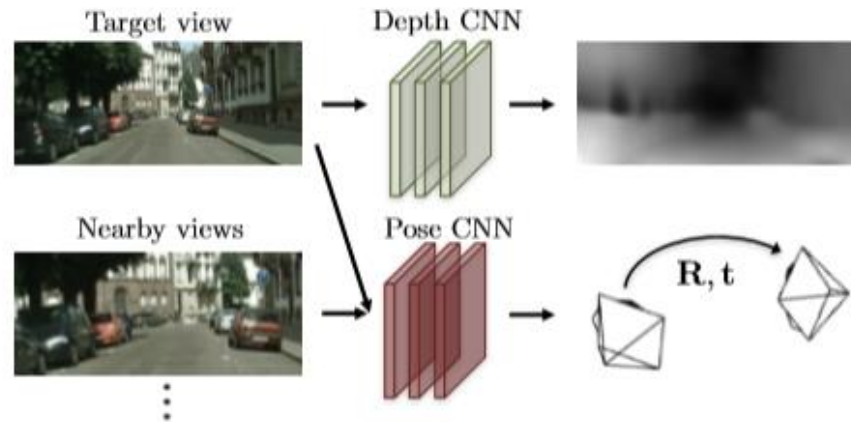


# Unsupervised Learning

- Structure from Motion



(a) Training: unlabeled video clips.

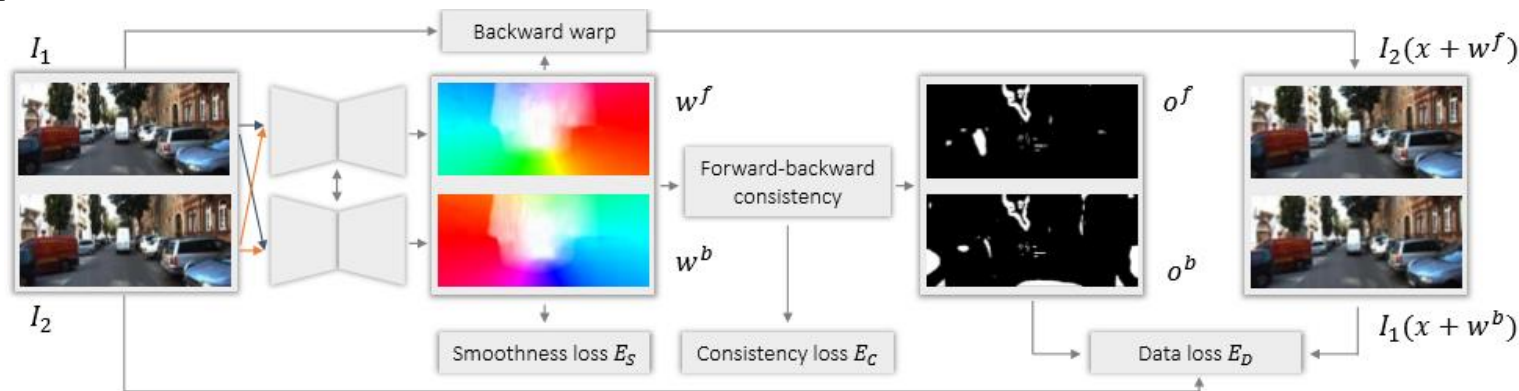


# Unsupervised Learning

- Dense Optical Flow

Characteristic of the learned flow:

- Robustness against light changes (Census Transform)
- Occlusion handling (Bi-directional Flow)
- Smooth flow



# Unsupervised vs. Supervised learning

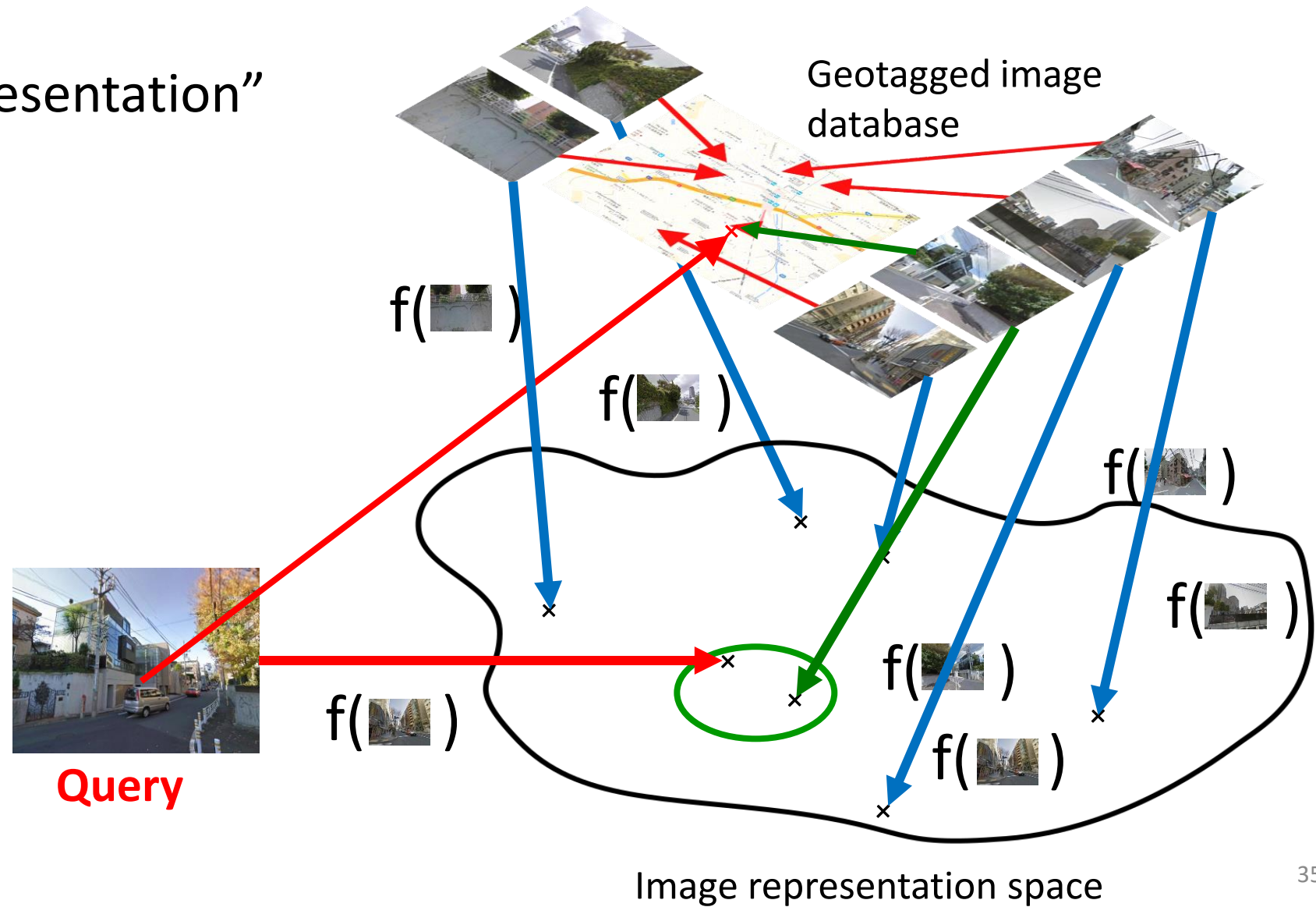
|                   | <b>Supervised</b>  | <b>Unsupervised</b>   |
|-------------------|--|---|
| Performance       | Usually better for the same dataset size.  | Usually worse, but can outperform supervised methods due to larger data availability. |
| Data availability | Low, due to manual labelling.  | High, no labelling required.  |
| Training          | Simple, ground truth gives a strong supervision signal.  | Sometimes difficult, loss functions have to be engineered to get good results.        |
| Generalizability  | Good, although sometimes the network learns to blindly copy the labels provided, leading to poor generalizability. | Better, since unsupervised losses often encode the task in a more fundamental way.    |

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# Place Recognition – NetVLAD

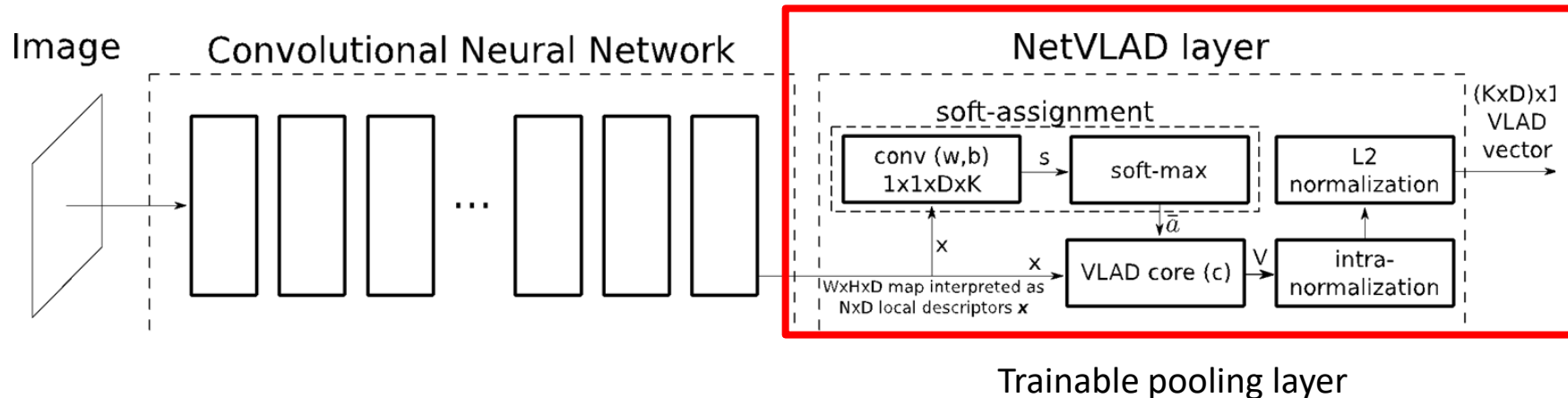
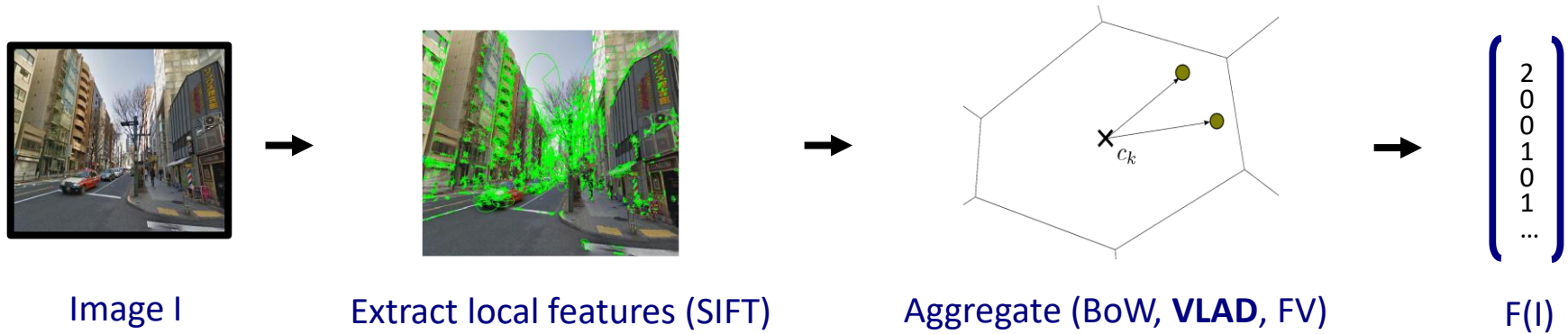
- Design an “image representation” extractor  $f(I, \theta)$





# NetVLAD – Method

- Mimic the classical pipeline with deep learning



# NetVLAD – Loss

- Triplet loss formulation

$$D_p = ||F_{\theta}(\text{img1}) - F_{\theta}(\text{img2})||^2 \longrightarrow \text{Matching samples}$$

$$D_n = ||F_{\theta}(\text{img1}) - F_{\theta}(\text{img3})||^2 \longrightarrow \text{Non matching samples}$$

$$L_{\theta} = \sum_{\text{samples}} \max(D_{p(\theta)} + \overset{\text{margin}}{\uparrow} m - D_{n(\theta)}, 0)$$

Disclaimer: The actual NetVlad loss is a slightly more complicated version of the one above

# NetVLAD – Results

- Code, dataset and trained network online: give it a try [here](#)!

Query



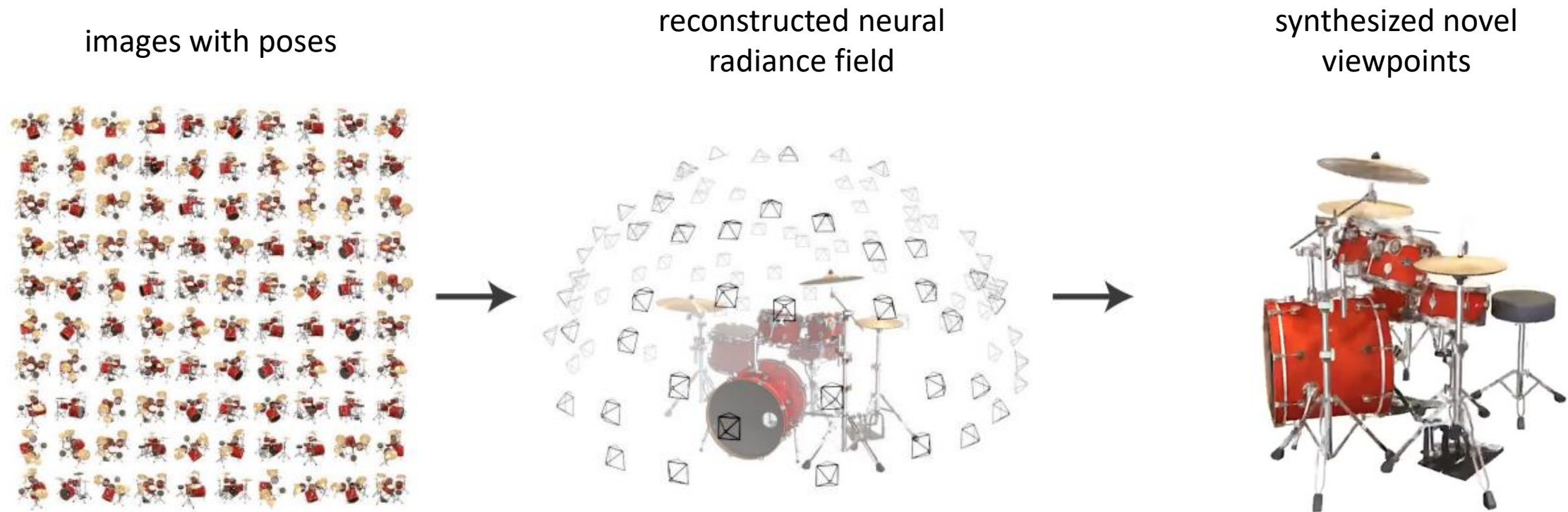
Top result



Green: Correct Red: Incorrect

# Novel View Synthesis – Neural Radiance Fields (NeRF)

Render new views from a set of images with corresponding poses.

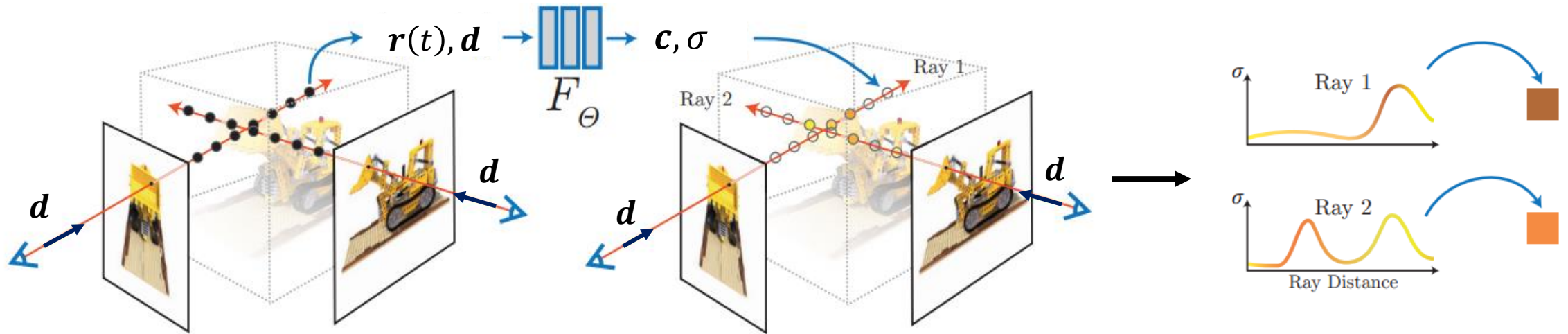


[1] Mildenhall, Srinivasan, Tancik, Barron, Ramamoorthi, Ng, *NeRF: Representing Scenes as Neural Radiance Fields for View Synthesis*, European Conference of Computer Vision (ECCV), 2020. [PDF](#)

[2] An overview and a reference for many follow-up works can be found [here](#)

# Neural Radiance Fields (NeRF): Method

Images are rendered by integrating *transmittance and color* along a ray both of which are modelled with a *multilayer perceptron*



Position along ray:  $\mathbf{r}(t) = \mathbf{o} + t\mathbf{d}$     Transmittance:  $T(t) = \exp\left(-\int_{t_n}^t \sigma(\mathbf{r}(s))ds\right)$   
Ray direction:  $\mathbf{d}$     Color:  $C(r) = \int_{t_n}^{t_f} T(t)\sigma(\mathbf{r}(t))\mathbf{c}(\mathbf{r}(t), \mathbf{d})dt$

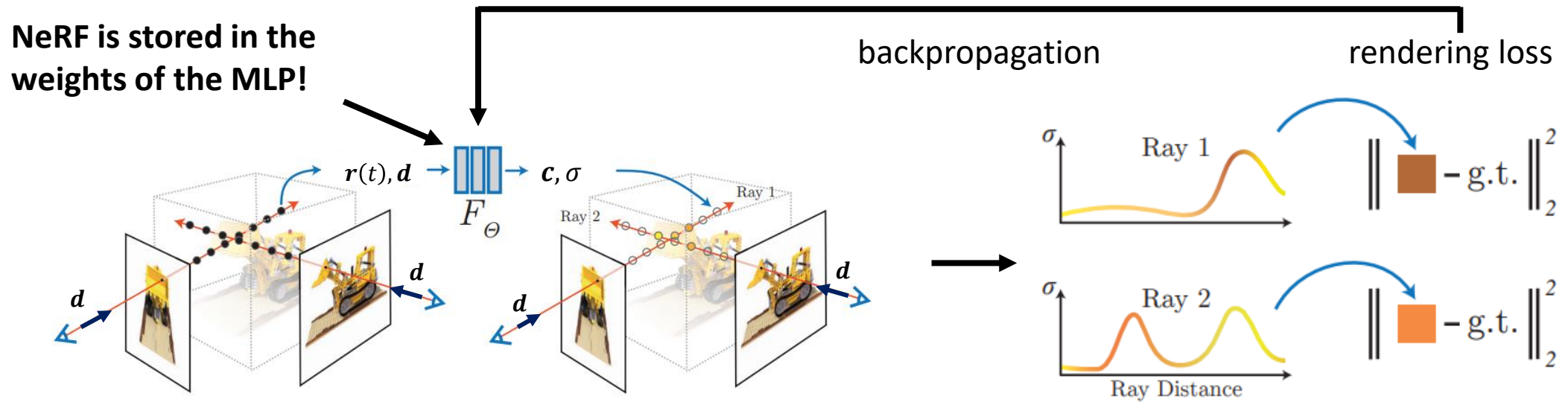
[1] Mildenhall, Srinivasan, Tancik, Barron, Ramamoorthi, Ng, *NeRF: Representing Scenes as Neural Radiance Fields for View Synthesis*, European Conference of Computer Vision (ECCV), 2020. [PDF](#)

[2] An overview and a reference for many follow-up works can be found [here](#)



# Neural Radiance Fields (NeRF): Training

We train this multilayer perceptron by minimizing the *rendering loss* on the input images, thereby effectively *overfitting*.



[1] Mildenhall, Srinivasan, Tancik, Barron, Ramamoorthi, Ng, *NeRF: Representing Scenes as Neural Radiance Fields for View Synthesis*, European Conference of Computer Vision (ECCV), 2020. [PDF](#)

[2] An overview and a reference for many follow-up works can be found [here](#)

# Neural Radiance Fields (NeRF): Results

Compared to previous approaches, NeRF generates highly photorealistic, and consistent novel views.



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# Conclusions

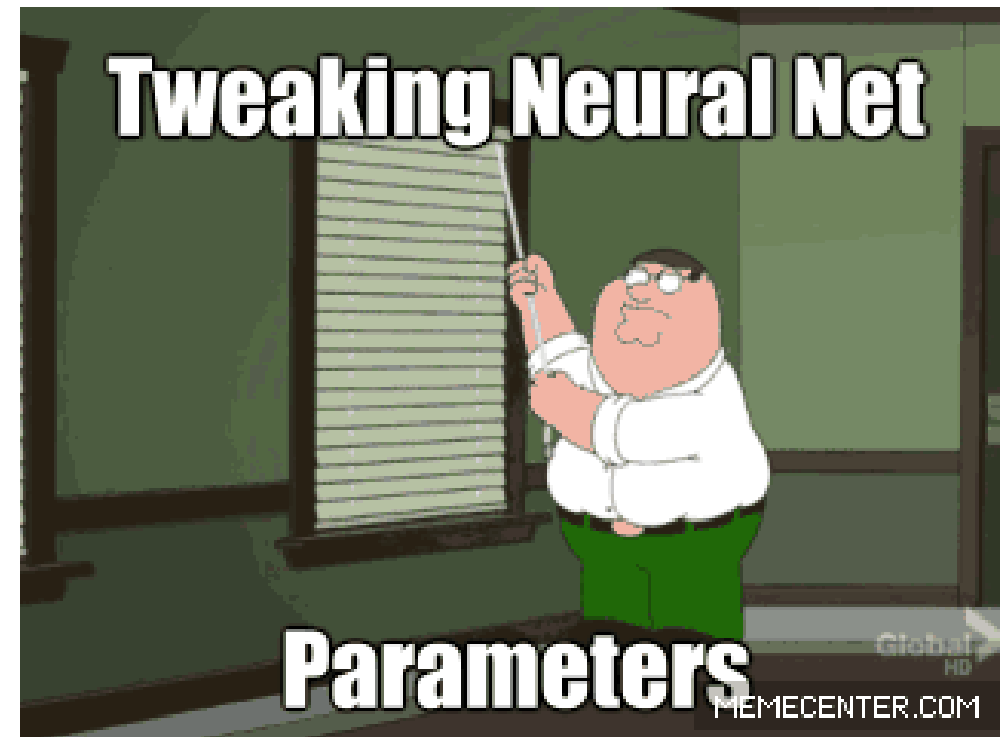
Deep learning, when applied in the correct circumstances, can achieve remarkable performance on a variety of tasks by *learning patterns from data*

It works especially well when

- Sufficient data is available
- All operations are differentiable

Make sure to avoid the following pitfalls:

- Make sure to optimize the correct metric
- Test your model to an inch of its life
- Always monitor generalization



# Additional Readings

- Nielsen, *Neural Networks and Deep Learning*, 2018. [PDF](#)
- Bengio, *Practical Recommendations for Gradient-Based Training of Deep Architectures*, 2012. [PDF](#)
- Goodfellow, Bengio, Courville, *Deep Learning*, 2016 [Website](#)

# Outline

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# The drone market is valued \$24 billions today

Inspection



Agriculture



Transport



Search and Rescue



Source: Swiss Drone Industry Report 2021, p. 22:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ljesolDoUu1-IVX14nqJRCT-wpEQB22/view>

# How are current commercial drones controlled?

- **By a human pilot**

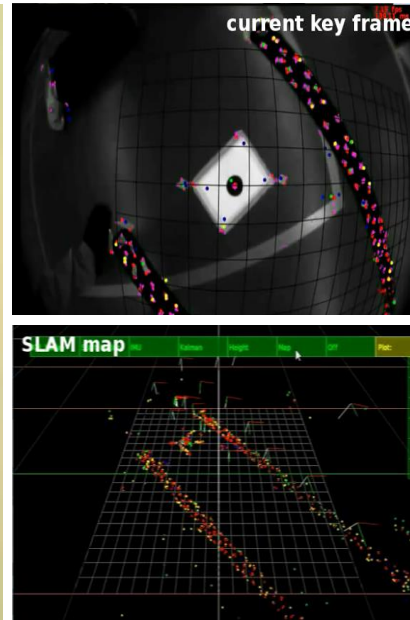
- requires **line of sight** or **video link**
- requires a **lot of training**

- **By an autopilot:** autonomous navigation

- **GPS:** doesn't work in GPS denied or degraded environments
- **Lidar** (e.g., Exyn): expensive, heavy, power hungry
- **Cameras** (e.g., Parrot, DJI, Skydio): cheap, lightweight, passive (i.e., low power)



# Last 10-years Progress on Autonomous Vision-based Flight



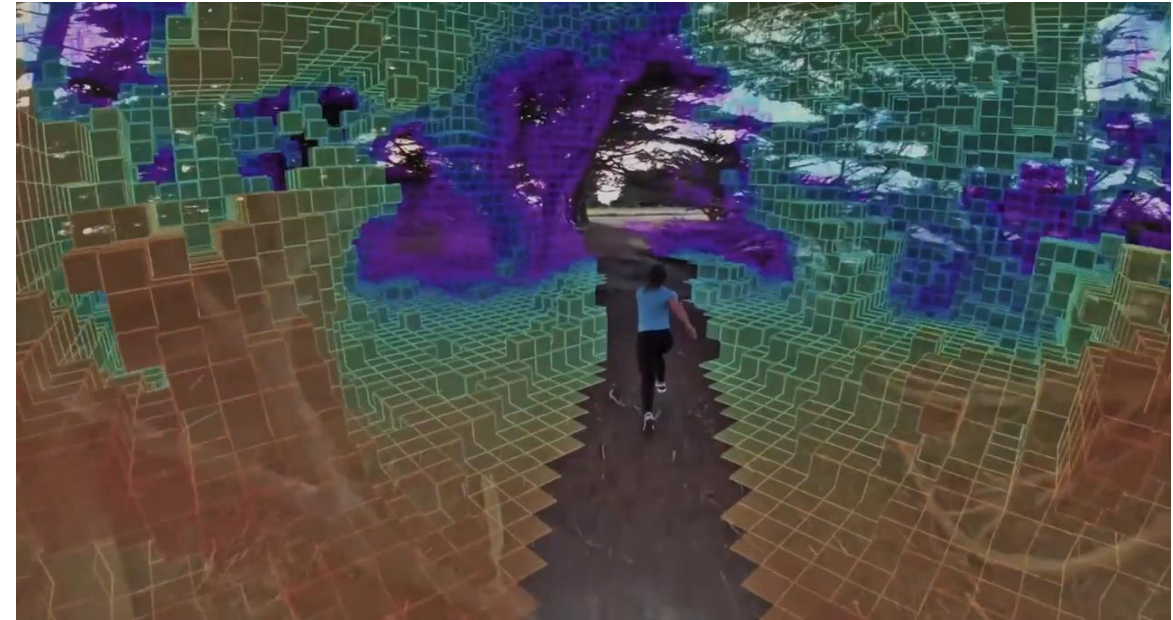
**2010**

**EU SFLY Project (2009-2012)**

[\[Bloesch, ICRA 2010\]](#)

**1<sup>st</sup> onboard goal-oriented  
vision-based flight**

(previous research focused  
on reactive navigation)

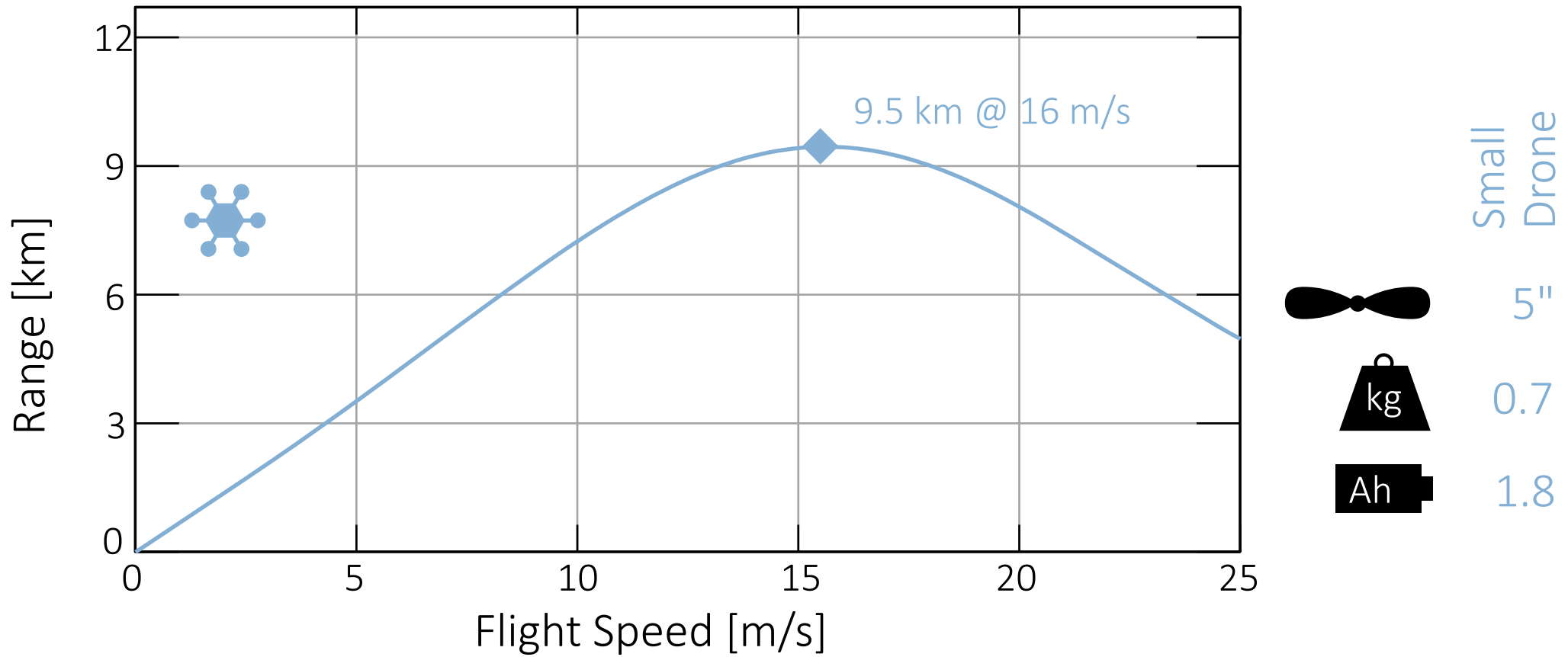


**2020**

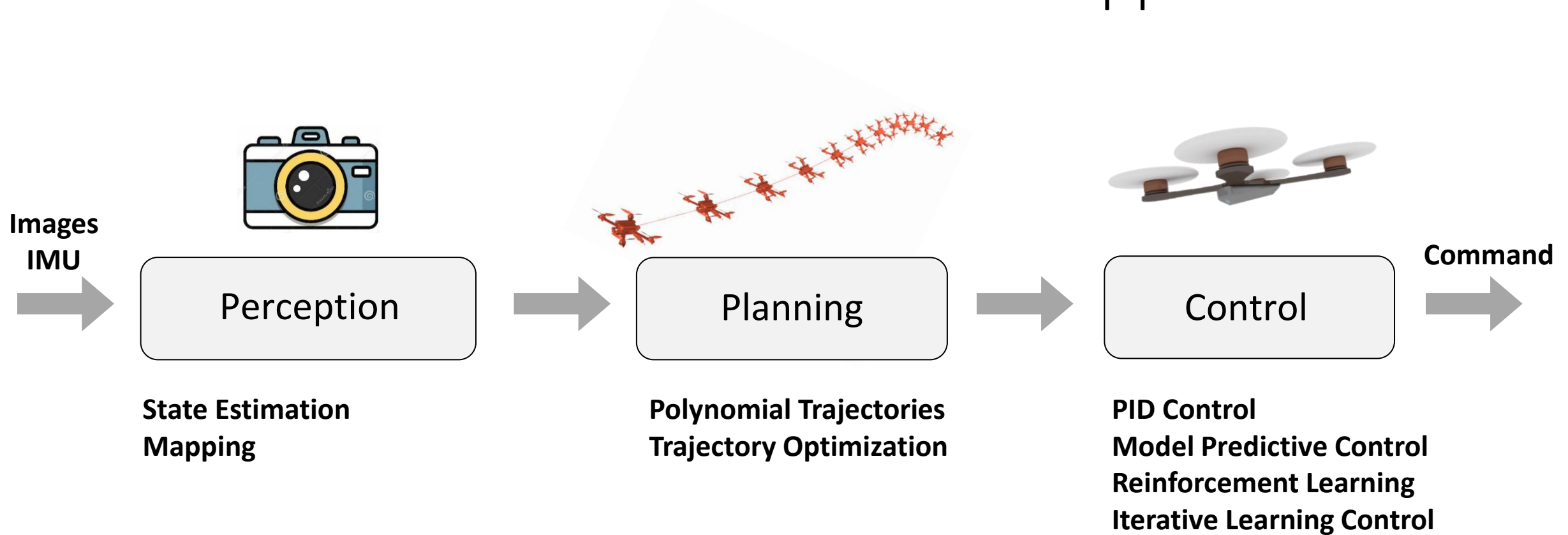
- **Skydio (2018-2020),**
- **DJI (2018-2020),**
- **NASA Mars Helicopter (2020)**

**1<sup>st</sup> products in the market  
or sent to another planet ☺**

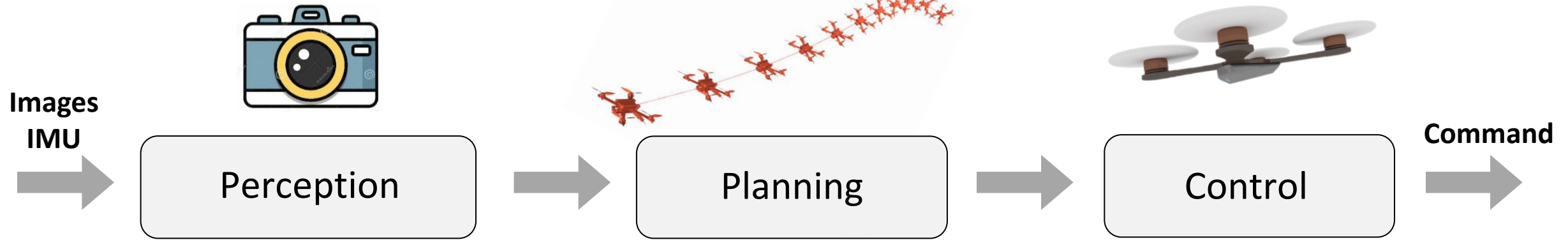
# Flying Fast to Fly Far



# Related Work: The Traditional Approach



# Related Work: The Problem



Mature Algorithms, but brittle during high speed due to motion blur.

Require strong assumptions about the environment (e.g, CAD of scene).

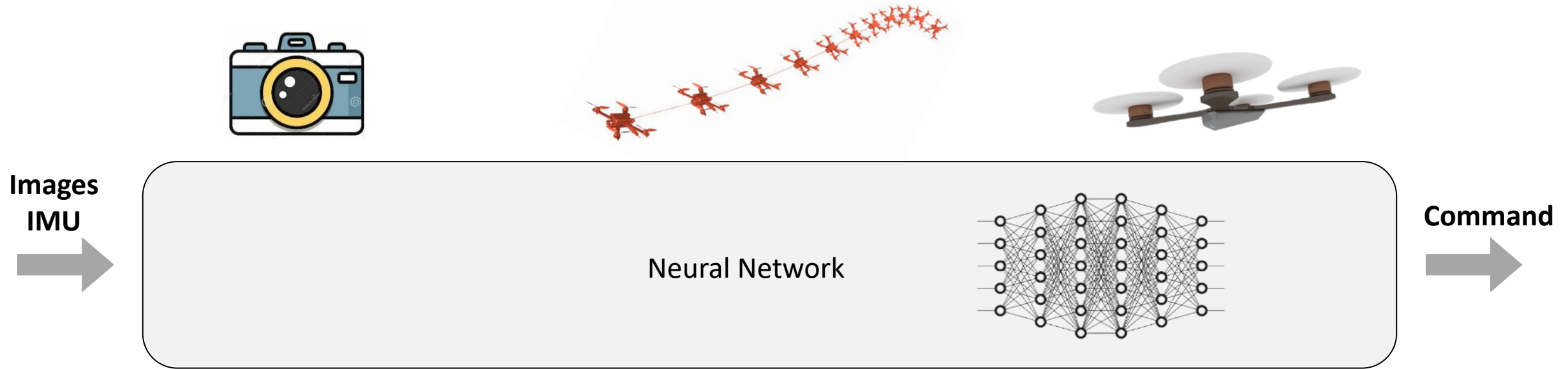
Needs significant tuning, especially at high speed.



This fine-grained modularity makes the robotic system fragile: The modules do not interact with each other.



# Related Work: End-to-End Learning



High-Level commands (forward, left, right)



Don't exploit the agile dynamics of the drone

Low-Level commands (collective thrust, bodyrates)



Too sample inefficient to be used on a physical drone. Only shown in Sim.

# Our Research



Augment the traditional robotic cycle  
with learning-based methods.

## **Hypothesis:**

Neural Networks can distill the knowledge of mature robotics algorithms into computationally efficient and robust sensorimotor policies.

# Projects

- Learning High-Speed Flight in the Wild



- NeuroBEM: Hybrid Aerodynamic Quadrotor Model

- Autonomous Drone Racing



# Learning High-Speed Flight in the Wild

What does it take to achieve similar **spatial awareness** to a human **with comparable sensing (and computing)** in the context of **high-speed flight**?

Assumptions:

- No external sensing or computing.
- Test environment not seen in advance.
- Possibly dynamic environment.

Available Information:

- Visual Feedback (multiple cameras).
- Inertial Feedback.
- An intention (e.g. fly straight).

Human pilots fly under similar assumptions!





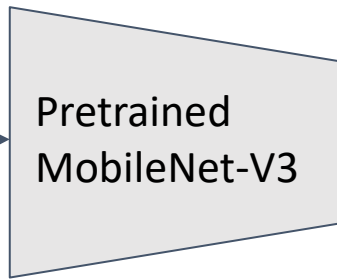
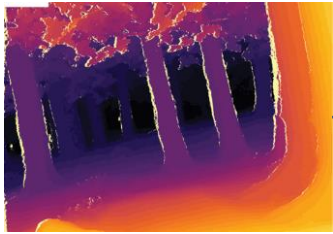


Loquercio, Kaufmann, Ranftl, Mueller, Koltun, Scaramuzza: Learning, High-Speed Flight in the Wild, Science Robotics, 2021. [PDF](#), [Video](#), [Code](#)

# Multiple-Hypothesis Action Prediction

We predict collision-free **receding-horizon trajectories** using a **neural network** with access to visual and inertial observations, as well as a reference velocity.

Stereo Depth

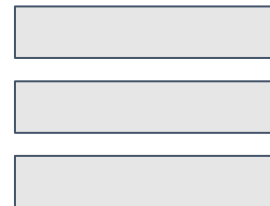


$M = 3$



$M \times 32$

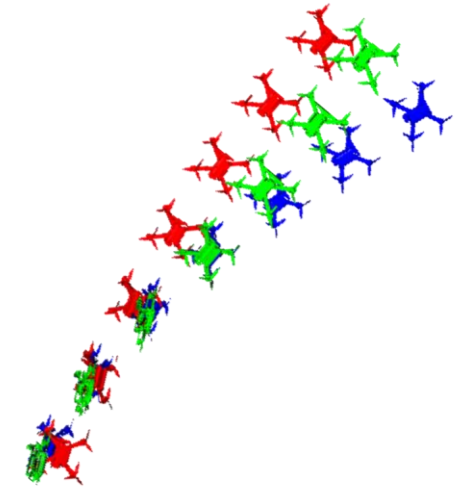
$M = 3$



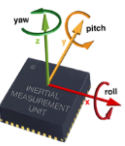
$M \times 32$



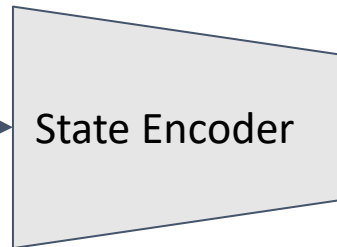
Shared Weights



Velocity and Attitude



Desired Direction





# Training Procedure

We follow the **privileged learning paradigm** to train the network **purely in simulation\***.

1. **Design an expert planner with access to full knowledge of the environment.**

This expert uses a fine-grained point-cloud of the scene to find collision-free trajectories with sampling.

2. **Distill the knowledge of the expert into a deep neural network.**

Basically do imitation learning from a set of expert demonstrations.

**This simple idea hides quite some challenges!**

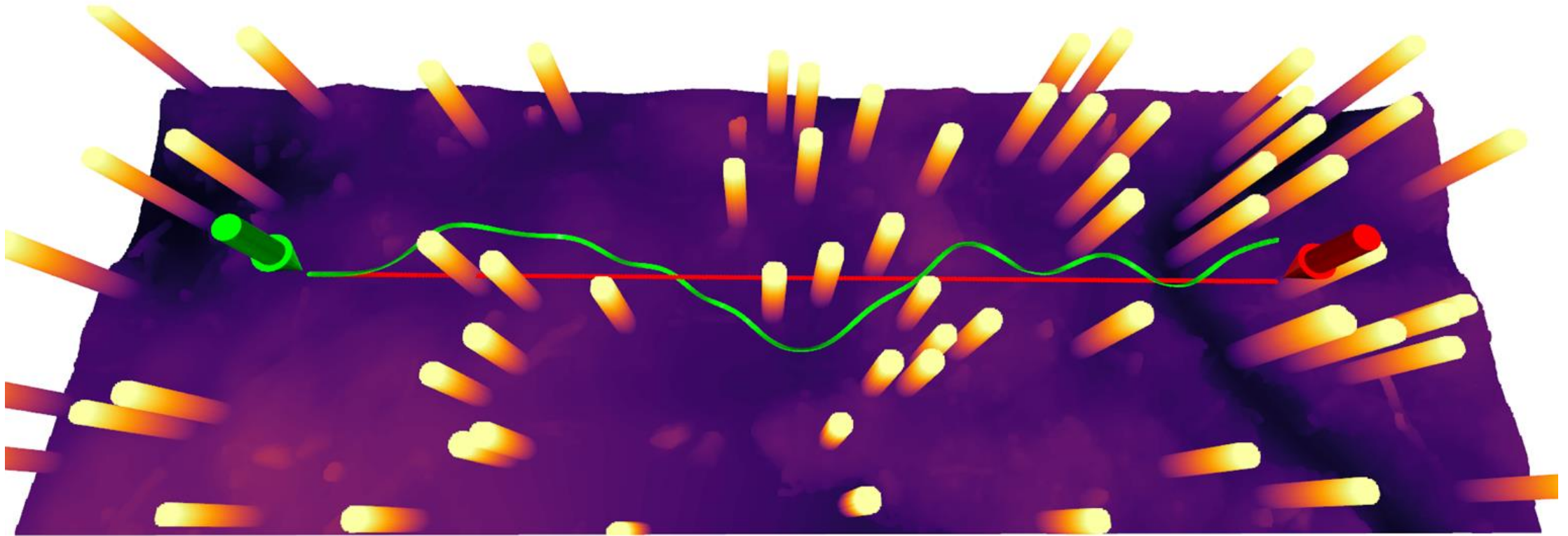
\* Impossible to collect a dataset of real-world demonstrations since it is not possible (or very expensive) to have a perfect map of the environment.



Loquercio, Kaufmann, Ranftl, Mueller, Koltun, Scaramuzza: Learning, High-Speed Flight in the Wild, Science Robotics, 2021. [PDF](#), [Video](#), [Code](#)

# Controlled Experiments

Evaluate on the task of reaching a goal with no prior knowledge about the scene.

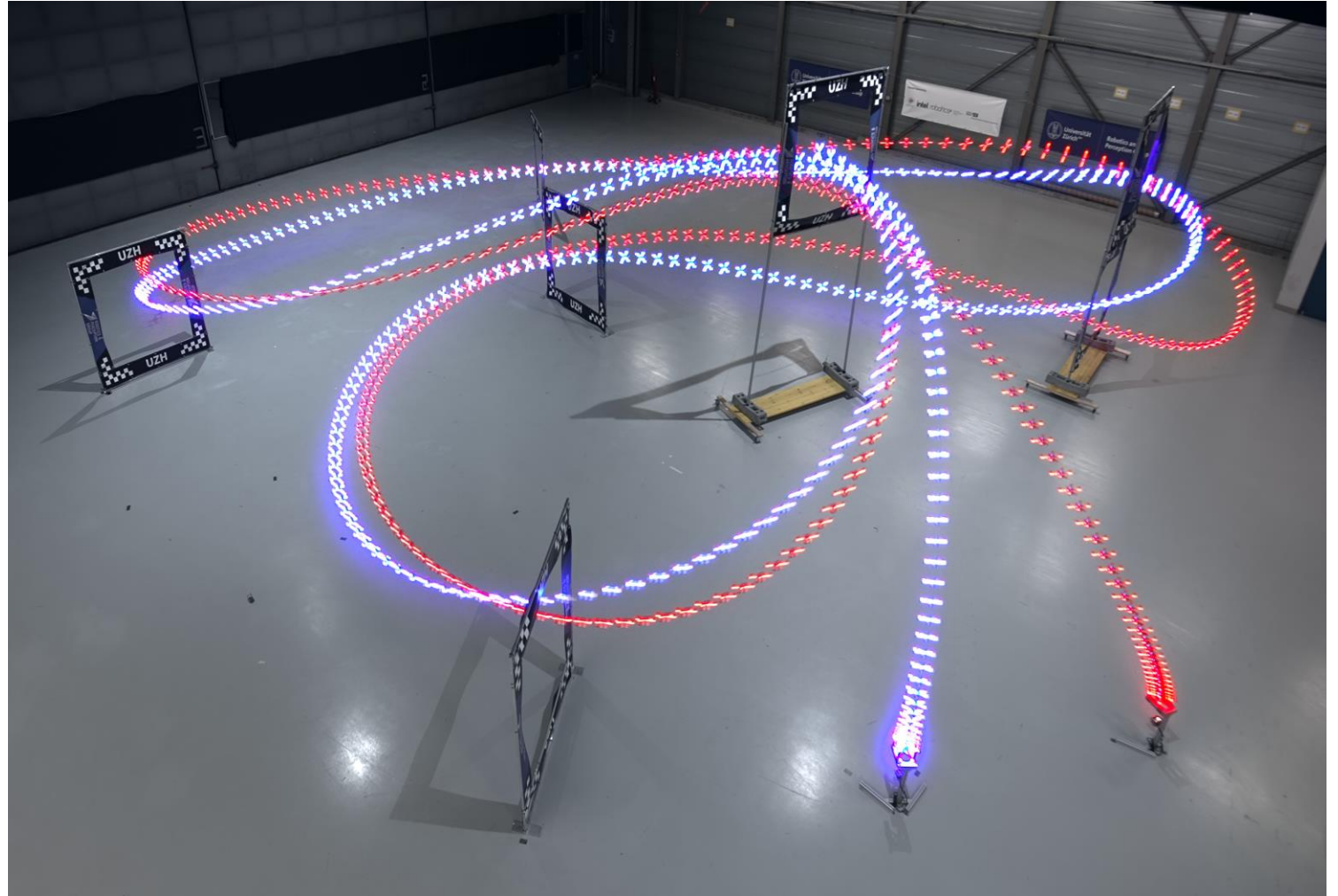






# Drone Racing – A Proxy Task

- pass a sequence of gates in the correct order
- fly a given number of laps in minimum time
- be quicker than the opponent





# Our “Swift” Drone

- Jetson TX2
- Realsense T265
  - Images
  - IMU/VIO
- Weight: 870g
- Thrust: 39N
- TWR: 4.5

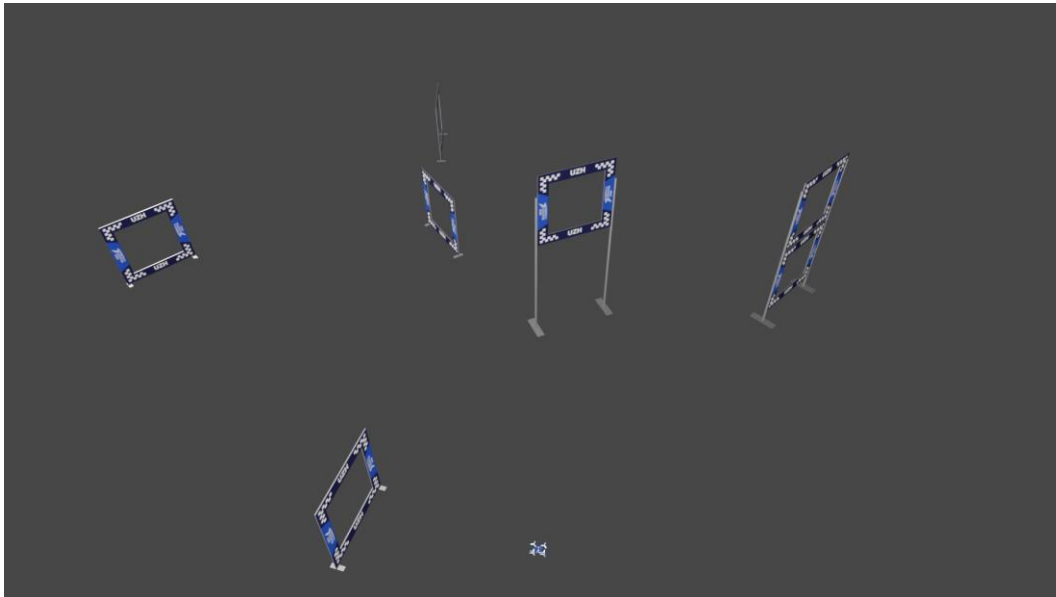




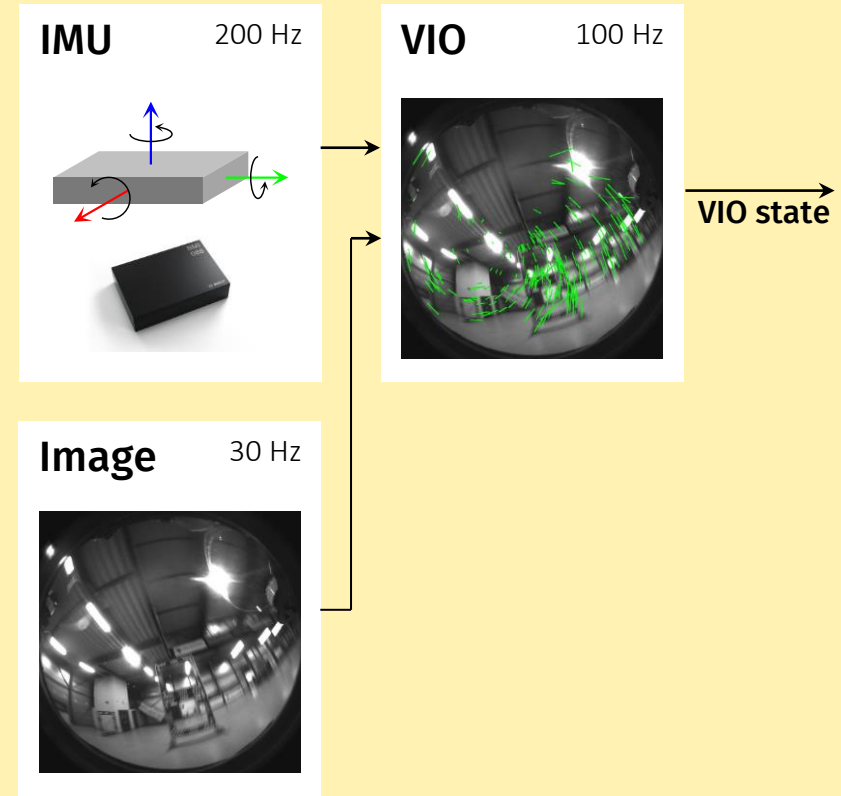
# Localization

## VIO Performance

- VIO drift accumulates over time
- no robust feature tracking
- IMU forward integration



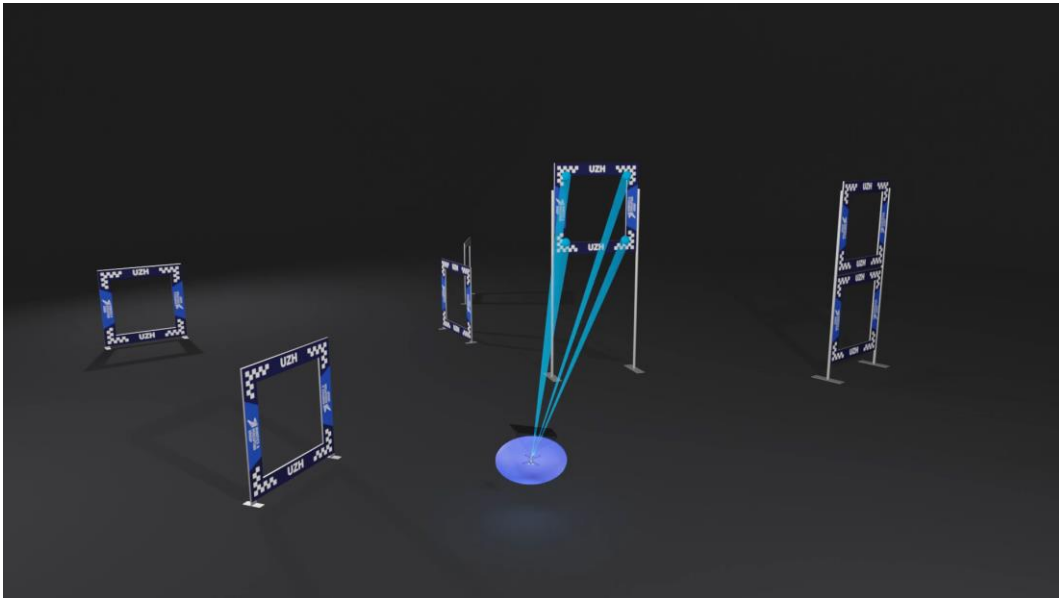
## Perception System



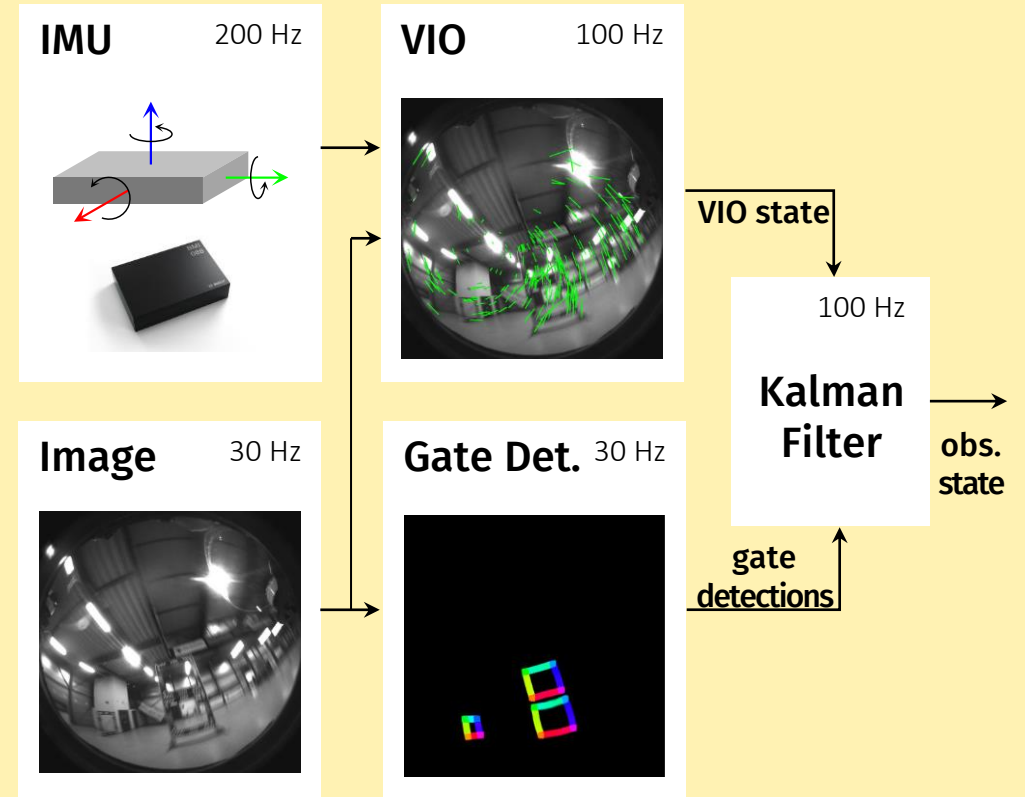
# Localization

## Gate Detections

- CNN-Unet detecting gates
- PnP for localization
- Kalman filter to fuse VIO+Gates



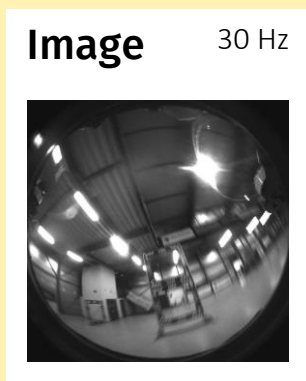
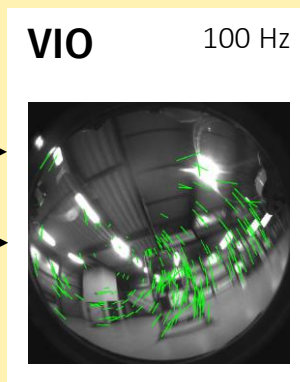
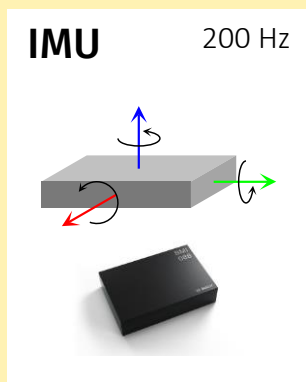
## Perception System



# RL Policy Training

## Real-World Operation

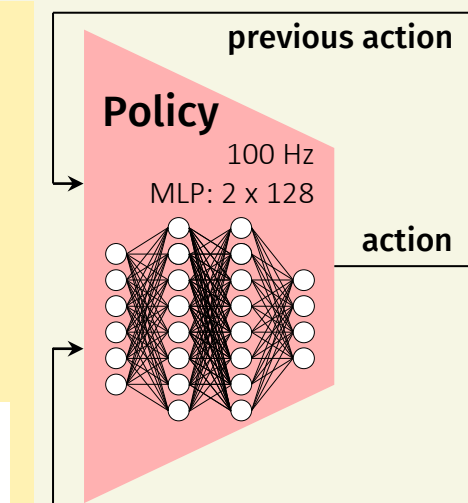
### Perception System



VIO state  
100 Hz

**Kalman Filter**

gate  
detections



### Real-World Deployment

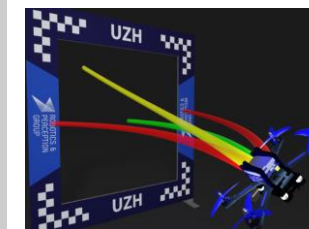


drone  
state

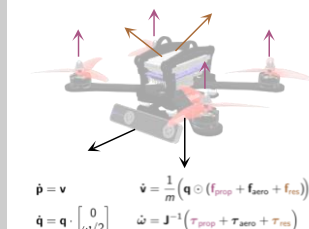
## RL Training Loop

### Simulation Environment

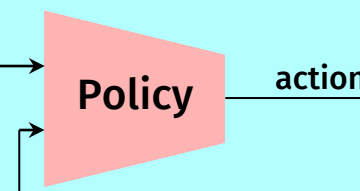
#### Reward



#### Physics



ground-truth  
state



# RL Policy Training

## Reward

- progress reward

$$r_t^{prog} = \lambda_1 (d_{t-1}^{Gate} - d_t^{Gate})$$

- perception reward

$$r_t^{perc} = \lambda_2 \exp(\lambda_3 \delta_{cam}^4)$$

- command reward

$$r_t^{cmd} = \lambda_4 |a_t^\omega| + \lambda_5 |a_t - a_{t-1}|^2$$

- crash penalty

$$r_t^{crash} = \begin{cases} -5.0, & \text{if crash} \\ 0, & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

## Training Details

- training with PPO

- 100M environment interactions
- 50 min wall-time
- 23 days sim-time

- value and policy network share architecture

- network:

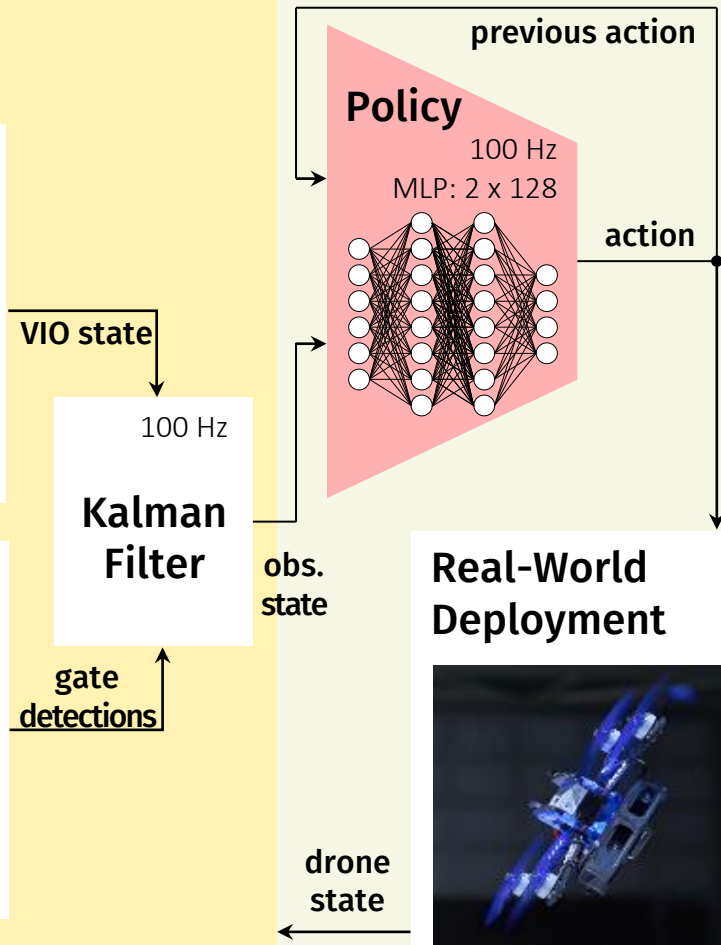
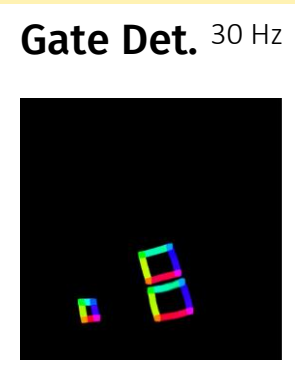
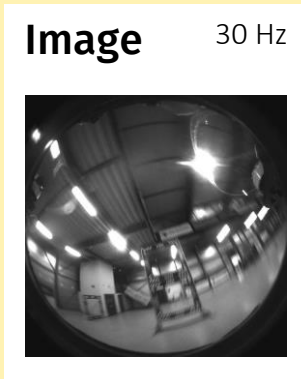
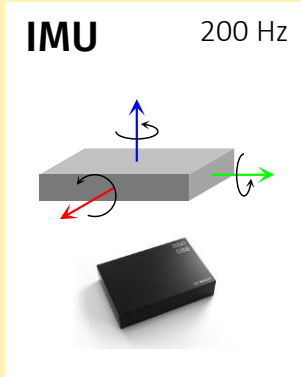
- 2 layer MLP
- 128 nodes per layer
- activation: LeakyReLU
- optimizer: Adam



# Is it good enough?

## Real-World Operation

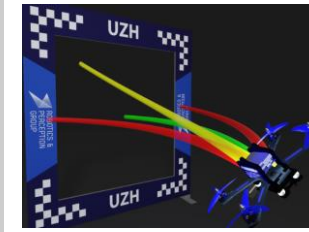
### Perception System



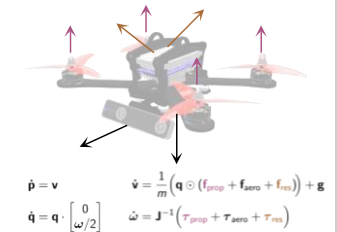
## RL Training Loop

### Simulation Environment

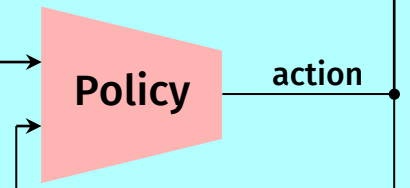
#### Reward



#### Physics



ground-truth state





# Residual Models

## Unmodelled Effects

- Aerodynamic effects
  - turbulence & downwash
  - ground effect
- Mechanical effects
  - soft dampers to shield IMU from motor vibrations
  - camera moves w.r.t. drone body
- Perception effects
  - illumination & background changes

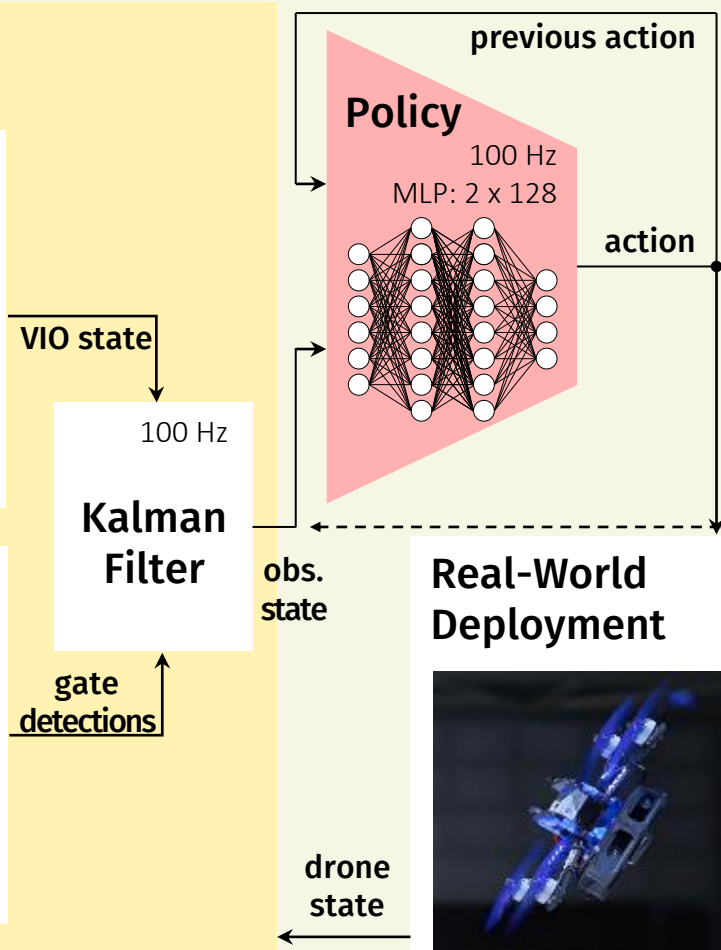
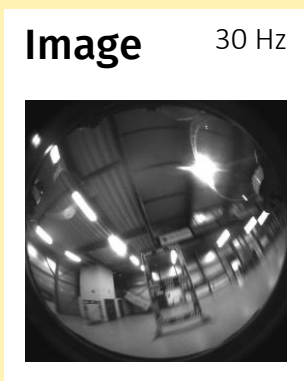
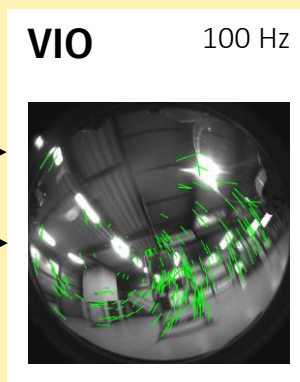
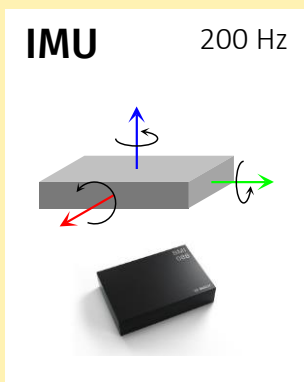
**need policy-specific models**



# The Swift System

## Real-World Operation

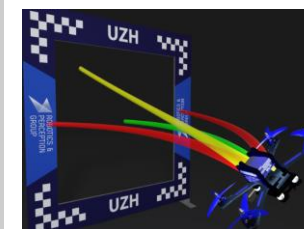
### Perception System



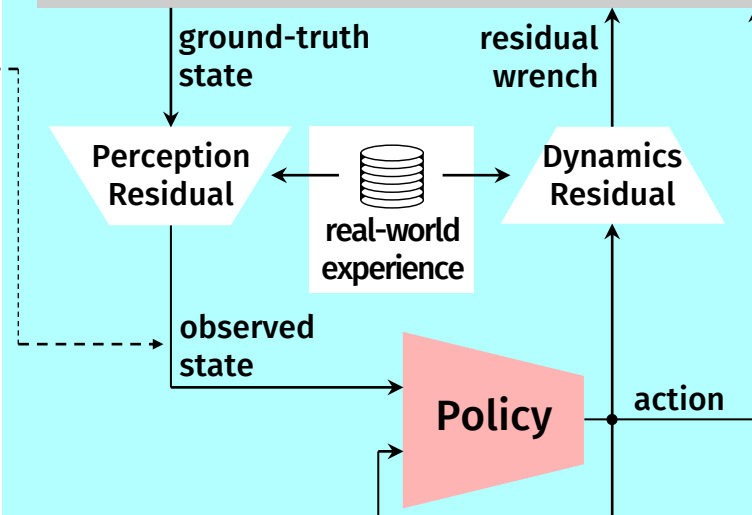
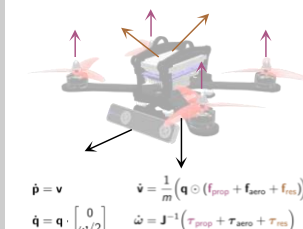
## RL Training Loop

### Simulation Environment

#### Reward



#### Physics



# Head-to-Head Race Results

|                        | Number of Races | Best time-to-finish | Wins | Losses | Win ratio |
|------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|------|--------|-----------|
| A. Vanover vs. Swift   | 9               | 17.956              | 4    | 5      | 0.44      |
| T. Bitmatta vs. Swift  | 7               | 18.746              | 3    | 4      | 0.43      |
| M. Schäpper vs. Swift  | 9               | 21.160              | 3    | 6      | 0.33      |
| Swift vs. human pilots | 25              | 17.465              | 15   | 10     | 0.60      |

A. Vanover



T. Bitmatta



M. Schäpper







# Conclusions and Takeaways

- Autonomous **vision-based agile flight** as a new research topic (at least 10 years to solve it)
  - **Pushes the limit of existing algorithms** in extreme situations
  - Raises **fundamental problems** for robotics **research**

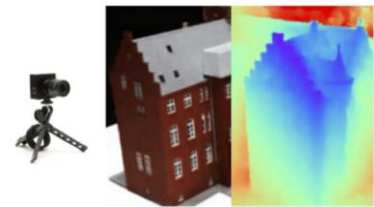




# Come over for projects in DL!

- Visit our webpage for projects! [http://rpg.ifi.uzh.ch/student\\_projects.php](http://rpg.ifi.uzh.ch/student_projects.php)

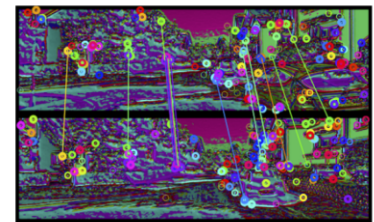
## Neural-based scene reconstruction and synthesis using event cameras - Available



**Description:** Purely learning-based methods leveraging implicit scene representations have shown impressive results in the reconstruction and synthesis of complex scenes from just a few images, largely surpassing those of traditional methods such as Structure-from-motion, photogrammetry, and image-based rendering. Due to their recent introduction, their advantages over traditional methods are still being explored in the field of computer vision. In particular, their use in conjunction with event-based cameras, bio-inspired sensors with improved

latency, temporal resolution, and dynamic range, is still under-explored.

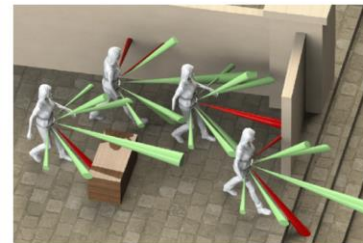
## Data-driven Keypoint Extractor for Event Data - Available



**Description:** Neuromorphic cameras exhibit several amazing properties such as robustness to HDR scenes, high-temporal resolution, and low power consumption. Thanks to these characteristics, event cameras are applied for camera pose estimation for fast motions in challenging scenes. A common technique for camera pose estimation is the extraction and tracking of keypoints on the camera plane. In the case of event cameras, most existing keypoint extraction methods are handcrafted manually. As a new promising direction, this project tackles the

keypoint extraction in a data-driven fashion based on recent advances in frame-based keypoint extractors.

## Developing Smart Vision Assistive Technology - Available



**Description:** More than 200 million people are estimated to have moderate or severe vision impairment in 2020. Their lack of autonomy limits the completion of many daily living activities. In this project, we will focus on applying robotics techniques, such as state estimation and path planning, to help visually impaired people to navigate unknown and unstructured environments. Image credits: Katzschmann et al. 2018.

## Adversarial Robustness in Event-Based Neural Networks - Available



**Description:** The robustness and reliability of neural networks are of utmost importance in several computer vision applications, especially in automotive applications where real-time predictions are crucial for safe and efficient operation.

In this context, event-based cameras, due to their unique property of capturing

changes in the scene, have shown impressive performance in low-latency prediction tasks such as object detection, tracking, and optical flow prediction. However, in order to be widely adopted in the real world, the robustness and reliability of such event-based networks have to be properly studied and verified. Until now, however, these aspects have been overlooked in the event-based literature. We look for students with strong programming (Python/Matlab) and computer vision background. Additionally, knowledge in machine learning frameworks (pytorch, tensorflow) is required.



# Check out our student projects!

- Visit our webpage: [https://rpg.ifi.uzh.ch/student\\_projects.php](https://rpg.ifi.uzh.ch/student_projects.php)

## Learning Rapid UAV Exploration with Foundation Models - Available



**Description:** In this project, our objective is to efficiently explore unknown indoor environments using UAVs. Recent research has demonstrated significant success in integrating foundational models with robotic systems. Leveraging these foundational models, the drone will employ learned semantic relationships from large-world-scale data to actively explore and navigate through unknown environments. While most prior research has focused on ground-based robots, this project aims to investigate the potential of integrating foundational models with aerial robots to introduce more agility and flexibility. Applicants should have a solid

understanding of mobile robot navigation, machine learning experience (PyTorch), and programming experience in C++ and Python.

## Bayesian Optimization for Racing Aerial Vehicle MPC Tuning - Available



**Description:** In recent years, model predictive control, one of the most popular methods for controlling constrained systems, has benefitted from the advancements of learning methods. Many applications showed the potential of the cross fertilization between the two fields, i.e., autonomous drone racing,

autonomous car racing, etc. Most of the research efforts have been dedicated to learn and improve the model dynamics, however, the controller tuning, which has a crucial importance, have not been studied much.

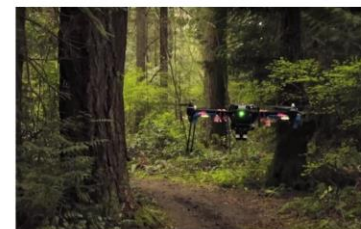
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autonomous car racing, etc. Most of the research efforts have been dedicated to learn and improve the model dynamics, however, the controller tuning, which has a crucial importance, have not been studied much.

## Efficient Learning-aided Visual Inertial Odometry - Available



**Description:** Recent works have shown that deep learning (DL) techniques are beneficial for visual inertial odometry (VIO). Different ways to include DL in VIO have been proposed: end-to-end learning from images to poses, replacing one/more block/s of a standard VIO pipeline with learning-based solutions, and include learning in a model-based VIO block. The project will start with a study of the current literature on learning-based VIO/SLAM algorithms and an evaluation of how/where/when DL is beneficial for VIO/SLAM. We will use the results of this

evaluation to enhance a current state-of-the-art VIO pipeline with DL, focusing our attention on algorithm efficiency at inference time. The developed learning-aided VIO pipeline will be compared to existing state-of-the-art model-based algorithms, with focus on robustness, and deployed on embedded platforms (Nvidia Jetson TX2 or Xavier).