PointNet: Deep Learning on Point Sets for 3D Classification and Segmentation

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Abstract

Point cloud is an important type of geometric data structure. Due to its irregular format, most researchers transform such data to regular 3D voxel grids or collections of images. This, however, renders data unnecessarily voluminous and causes issues. In this paper, we design a novel type of neural network that directly consumes point clouds, which well respects the permutation invariance of points in the input. Our network, named PointNet, provides a unified architecture for applications ranging from object classification, part segmentation, to scene semantic parsing. Though simple, PointNet is highly efficient and effective. Empirically, it shows strong performance on par or even better than state of the art. Theoretically, we provide analysis towards understanding of what the network has learnt and why the network is robust with respect to input perturbation and corruption.

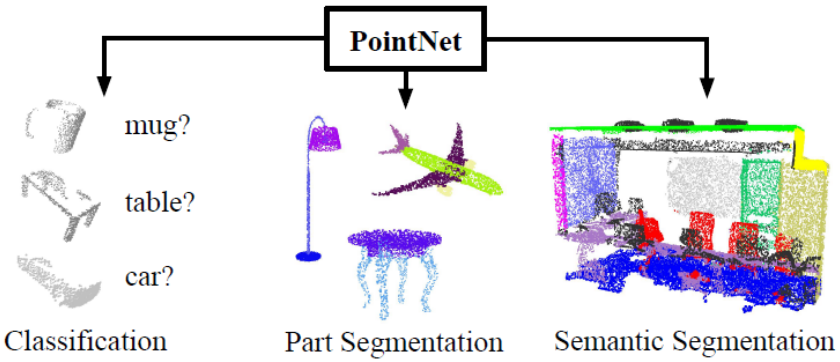


Figure 1. **Applications of PointNet.** We propose a novel deep net architecture that consumes raw point cloud (set of points) without voxelization or rendering. It is a unified architecture that learns both global and local point features, providing a simple, efficient and effective approach for a number of 3D recognition tasks.

still has to respect the fact that a point cloud is just a set of points and therefore invariant to permutations of its members, necessitating certain symmetrizations in the net computation. Further invariances to rigid motions also need

The key contributions of our work are as follows:

- We design a novel deep net architecture suitable for consuming unordered point sets in 3D;
- We show how such a net can be trained to perform 3D shape classification, shape part segmentation and scene semantic parsing tasks;
- We provide thorough empirical and theoretical analysis on the stability and efficiency of our method;
- We illustrate the 3D features computed by the selected neurons in the net and develop intuitive explanations for its performance.

Key to our approach is the use of a single symmetric function, max pooling. Effectively the network learns a

4.1. Properties of Point Sets in $\mathbb{R}^n$

Our input is a subset of points from an Euclidean space. It has three main properties:

- Unordered. Unlike pixel arrays in images or voxel arrays in volumetric grids, point cloud is a set of points without specific order. In other words, a network that consumes N 3D point sets needs to be invariant to $N!$ permutations of the input set in data feeding order.
- Interaction among points. The points are from a space with a distance metric. It means that points are not isolated, and neighboring points form a meaningful subset. Therefore, the model needs to be able to capture local structures from nearby points, and the combinatorial interactions among local structures.
- Invariance under transformations. As a geometric object, the learned representation of the point set should be invariant to certain transformations. For example, rotating and translating points all together should not modify the global point cloud category nor the segmentation of the points.

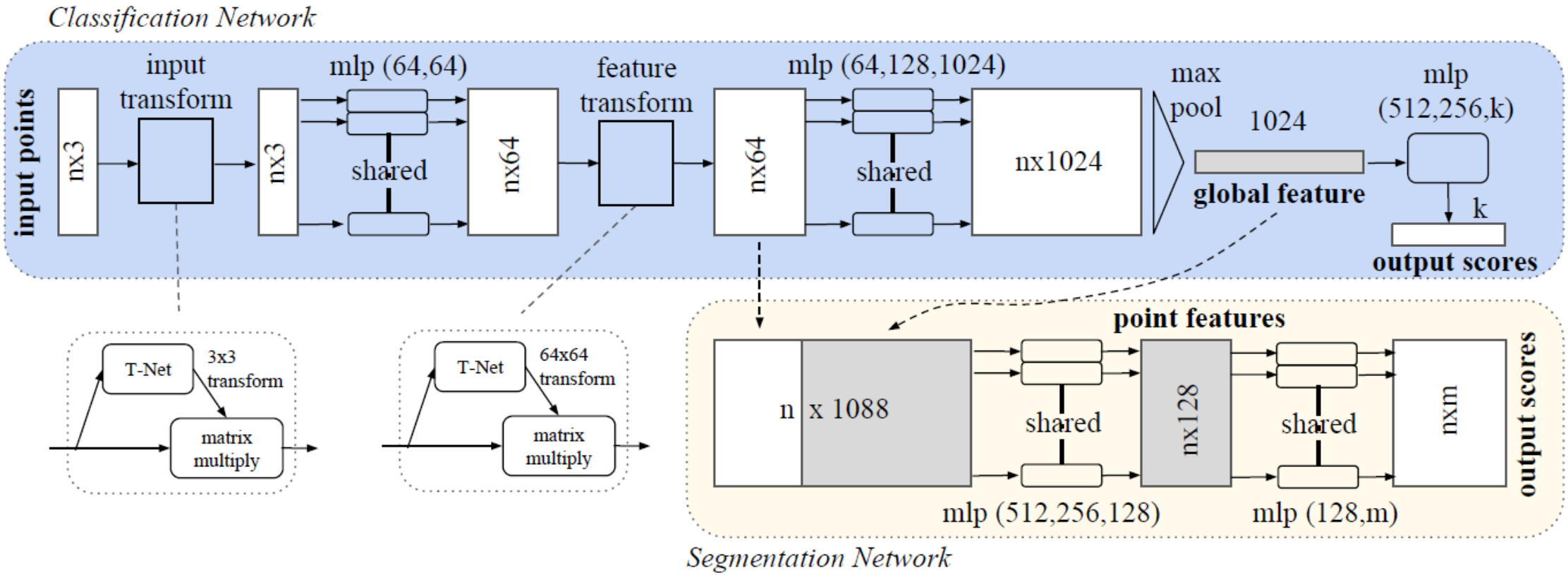


Figure 2. **PointNet Architecture.** The classification network takes n points as input, applies input and feature transformations, and then aggregates point features by max pooling. The output is classification scores for k classes. The segmentation network is an extension to the classification net. It concatenates global and local features and outputs per point scores. "mlp" stands for multi-layer perceptron, numbers in bracket are layer sizes. Batchnorm is used for all layers with ReLU. Dropout layers are used for the last mlp in classification net.

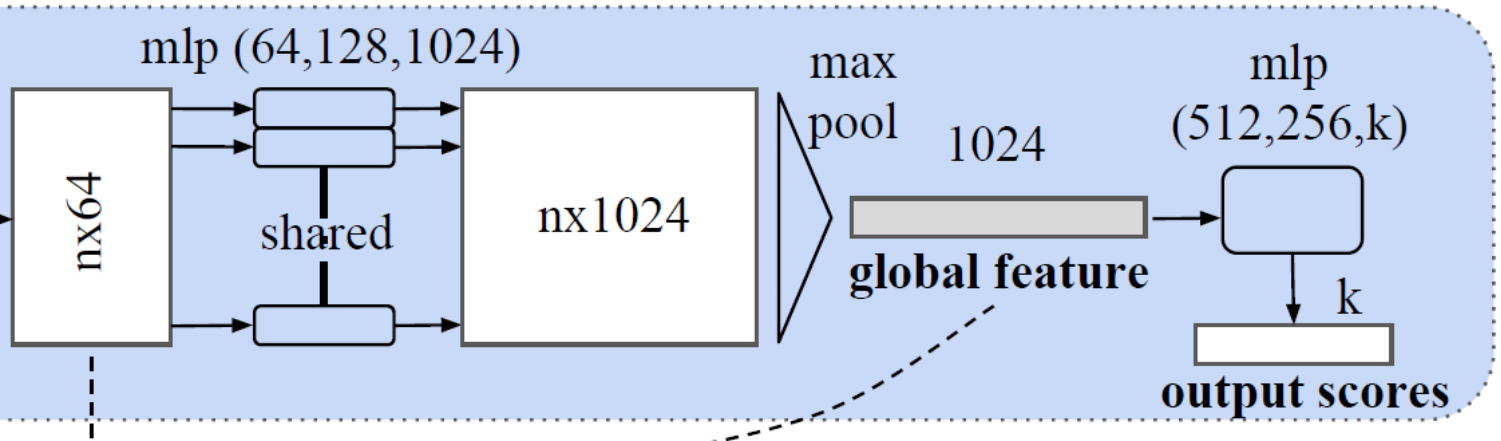
Symmetry Function for Unordered Input In order to make a model invariant to input permutation, three strategies exist: 1) sort input into a canonical order; 2) treat the input as a sequence to train an RNN, but augment the training data by all kinds of permutations; 3) use a simple symmetric function to aggregate the information from each point. Here, a symmetric function takes n vectors as input and outputs a new vector that is invariant to the input order. For example, $+$ and $*$ operators are symmetric binary functions.

Our idea is to approximate a general function defined on a point set by applying a symmetric function on transformed elements in the set:

$$f(\{x_1, \ldots, x_n\}) \approx g(h(x_1), \ldots, h(x_n)), \qquad (1)$$

where $f : 2^{\mathbb{R}^N} \to \mathbb{R}$, $h : \mathbb{R}^N \to \mathbb{R}^K$ and $g : \underbrace{\mathbb{R}^K \times \cdots \times \mathbb{R}^K}_{n} \to \mathbb{R}$ is a symmetric function.

Empirically, our basic module is very simple: we approximate h by a multi-layer perceptron network and g by a composition of a single variable function and a max pooling function. This is found to work well by experiments. Through a collection of h, we can learn a number of f's to capture different properties of the set.



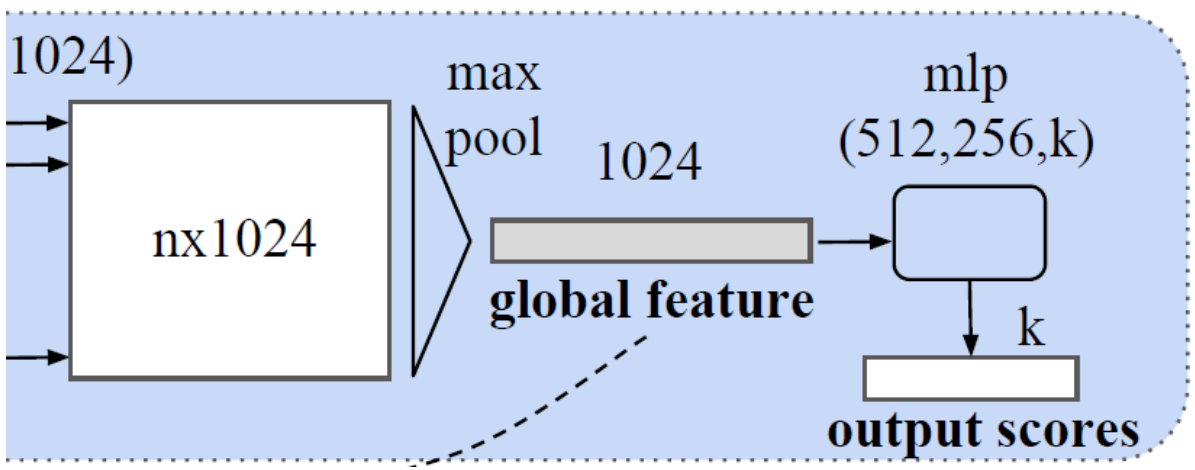
Theorem 2. *Suppose* $\mathbf{u} : \mathcal{X} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^K$ *such that* $\mathbf{u} = \underset{x_i \in S}{MAX}\{h(x_i)\}$ *and* $f = \gamma \circ \mathbf{u}$. *Then,*

(a) $\forall S, \exists\, \mathcal{C}_S, \mathcal{N}_S \subseteq \mathcal{X}$, $f(T) = f(S)$ *if* $\mathcal{C}_S \subseteq T \subseteq \mathcal{N}_S$;

(b) $|\mathcal{C}_S| \leq K$

Combined with the continuity of h, this explains the robustness of our model w.r.t point perturbation, corruption and extra noise points. The robustness is gained in analogy to the sparsity principle in machine learning models. **Intuitively, our network learns to summarize a shape by a sparse set of key points.** In experiment section we see that the key points form the skeleton of an object.

We explain the implications of the theorem. (a) says that $f(S)$ is unchanged up to the input corruption if all points in $\mathcal{C}_S$ are preserved; it is also unchanged with extra noise points up to $\mathcal{N}_S$. (b) says that $\mathcal{C}_S$ only contains a bounded number of points, determined by K in (1). In other words, $f(S)$ is in fact totally determined by a finite subset $\mathcal{C}_S \subseteq S$ of less or equal to K elements. We therefore call $\mathcal{C}_S$ the *critical point set* of S and K the *bottleneck dimension* of f.



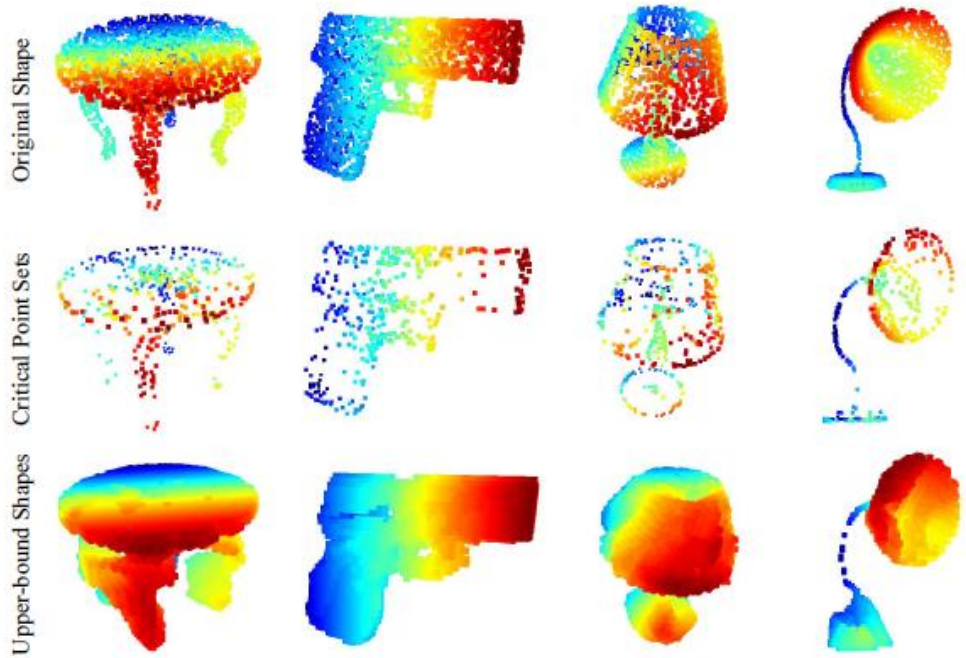


Figure 7. **Critical points and upper bound shape.** While critical points jointly determine the global shape feature for a given shape, any point cloud that falls between the critical points set and the upper bound shape gives exactly the same feature. We color-code all figures to show the depth information.

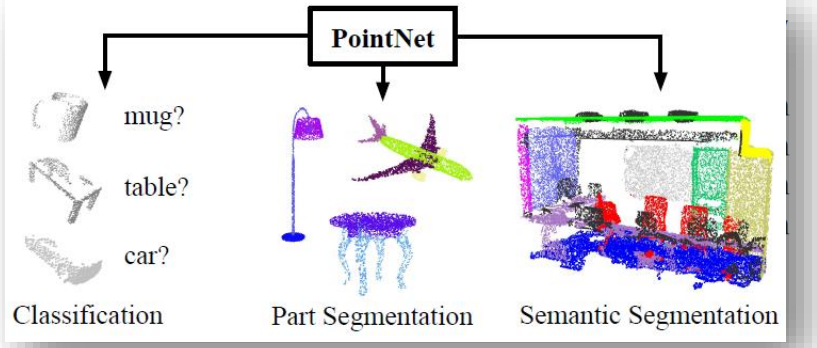
In Fig 7, we visualize *critical point sets* $\mathcal{C}_S$ and *upper-bound shapes* $\mathcal{N}_S$ (as discussed in Thm 2) for some sample shapes S. The point sets between the two shapes will give exactly the same global shape feature $f(S)$.

We can see clearly from Fig 7 that the *critical point sets* $\mathcal{C}_S$, those contributed to the max pooled feature, summarizes the skeleton of the shape. The *upper-bound shapes* $\mathcal{N}_S$ illustrates the largest possible point cloud that give the same global shape feature $f(S)$ as the input point cloud S. $\mathcal{C}_S$ and $\mathcal{N}_S$ reflect the robustness of PointNet, meaning that losing some non-critical points does not change the global shape signature $f(S)$ at all.

The $\mathcal{N}_S$ is constructed by forwarding all the points in a edge-length-2 cube through the network and select points p whose point function values $(h_1(p), h_2(p), \cdots, h_K(p))$ are no larger than the global shape descriptor.

3D Object Classification Our network learns global point cloud feature that can be used for object classification. We evaluate our model on the ModelNet40 [28] shape classification benchmark. There are 12,311 CAD models from 40 man-made object categories, split into 9,843 for

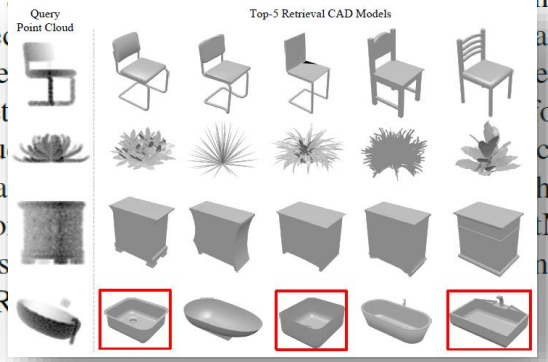
3D Object Part Segmentation Part segmentation is a challenging fine-grained 3D recognition task. Given a 3D



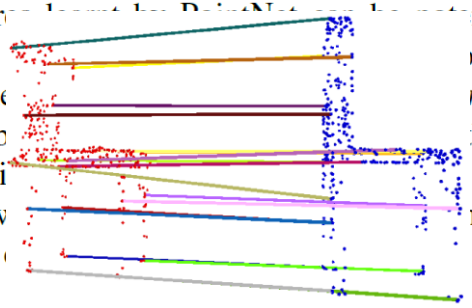
Semantic Segmentation in Scenes Our network on part segmentation can be easily extended to semantic scene segmentation, where point labels become semantic object classes instead of object part labels.

We experiment on the Stanford 3D semantic parsing data set [1]. The dataset contains 3D scans from Matterport scanners in 6 areas including 271 rooms. Each point in the scan is annotated with one of the semantic labels from 13 categories (chair, table, floor, wall etc. plus clutter).

Model Retrieval from Point Cloud Our PointNet learns a global shape signature for every given input point cloud. We expe ar global signature e on the shape ret or every given qu compute its globa he score predictio Net and retrieve s eighbor search. R



Shape Correspondence In this section, we show that point featur ntially used to compute shapes, we compute th *ritical point sets* C_S's b hat activate the same di Fig 13 and Fig 14 shov nce between two similar



Normal Estimation
local point features a
in order to provide
it's unclear whether
concatenation. In this
by showing that our s
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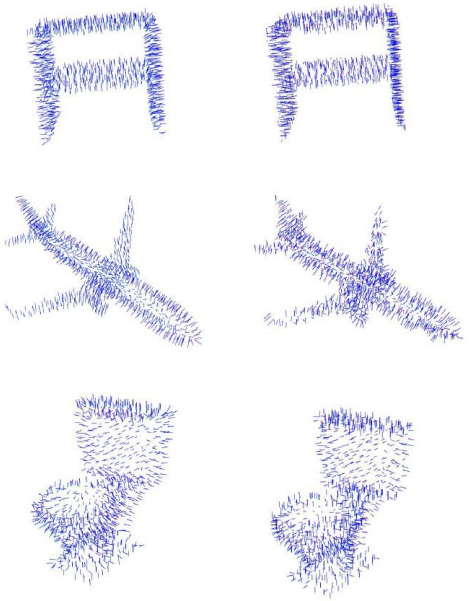
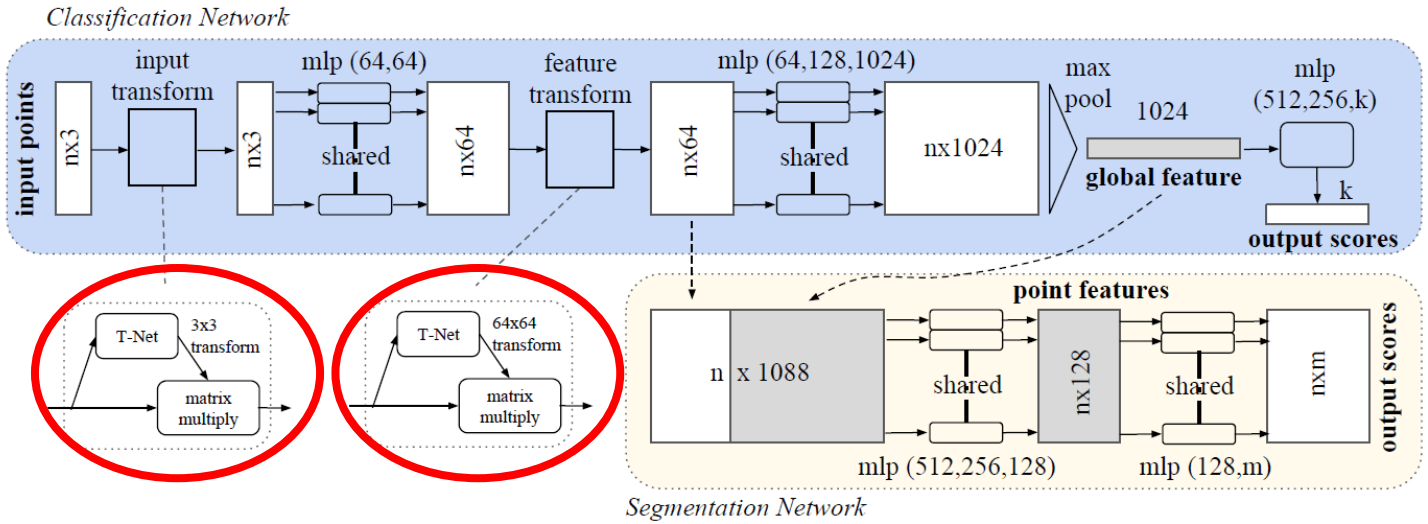


	input	#views	accuracy avg. class	accuracy overall
SPH [11]	mesh	-	68.2	-
3DShapeNets [28]	volume	1	77.3	84.7
VoxNet [17]	volume	12	83.0	85.9
Subvolume [18]	volume	20	86.0	**89.2**
LFD [28]	image	10	75.5	-
MVCNN [23]	image	80	**90.1**	-
Ours baseline	point	-	72.6	77.4
Ours PointNet	point	1	86.2	**89.2**

Table 1. **Classification results on ModelNet40.** Our net achieves state-of-the-art among deep nets on 3D input.

etc.). Our model achieved state-of-the-art performance among methods based on 3D input (volumetric and point cloud). With only fully connected layers and max pooling, our net gains a strong lead in inference speed and can be easily parallelized in CPU as well. There is still a small gap between our method and multi-view based method (MVCNN [23]), which we think is due to the loss of fine geometry details that can be captured by rendered images.



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Transform	accuracy
none	87.1
input (3x3)	87.9
feature (64x64)	86.9
feature (64x64) + reg.	87.4
both	**89.2**

Table 5. **Effects of input feature transforms.** Metric is overall classification accuracy on ModelNet40 test set.

	#params	FLOPs/sample
PointNet (vanilla)	0.8M	148M
PointNet	3.5M	440M
Subvolume [18]	16.6M	3633M
MVCNN [23]	60.0M	62057M

Table 6. **Time and space complexity of deep architectures for 3D data classification.** PointNet (vanilla) is the classification PointNet without input and feature transformations. FLOP stands for floating-point operation. The "M" stands for million. Subvolume and MVCNN used pooling on input data from multiple rotations or views, without which they have much inferior performance.