

# Otniel-Bogdan Mercea

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## EDUCATION

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- **Max Planck Institute for Intelligent Systems and University of Tübingen** Tübingen, Germany  
*PhD in Computer Science (IMPRS-IS doctoral program)* May 2021 - Aug. 2024
  - **Thesis:** "Multimodal data efficient learning".
  - **Supervisors:** Prof. Zeynep Akata (TUM & Helmholtz Munich) and Prof. Andreas Geiger (University of Tübingen).
  - **Thesis committee:** Prof. Zeynep Akata, Prof. Andreas Geiger, Prof. Justus Thies (TU Darmstadt), Prof. Hildegard Kühne (University of Tübingen & MIT-IBM Watson AI Lab).
  - **Activities:** [EML website](#) admin, supervise MSc theses, teach, organize reading groups, and interview ELLIS candidates.
- **The University of Edinburgh** Edinburgh, Scotland  
*MSc in Artificial Intelligence; Distinction (Overall 76%)* Sept. 2019 - Aug. 2020
  - **Thesis:** "What Neural Networks can not learn?". **Supervisor:** Prof. Amos Storkey. **Mark:** Distinction (77%).
- **Politehnica University of Timisoara** Timisoara, Romania  
*BEng in Computers and Information Technology; Top 3% (Overall 9.70/10)* Oct. 2015 - June 2019
  - **Thesis:** "HybridAlpha-Reinforcement Learning on Resource-Constrained Systems". **Supervisor:** Prof. Calin-Adrian Popa. **Mark:** 10/10.
  - **Activities:** Hackathons, Competitive programming contests, Capture the flag competitions (Cybersecurity).
  - **Undergraduate Research Assistant at DSPLabs:** developed an interface for the [FENP real-time scheduling algorithm](#) (supervised by Cristina and Valentin Stangaciu), part of my work being featured in a tutorial on the [Litmus-RT page](#). Feb. 2017 - June 2018.

## RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

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- **Apple** Barcelona, Spain  
*Machine Learning Researcher* May 2025 - now
  - Keywords: *Python, PyTorch, multimodal learning.*
  - Research on multimodal learning.
- **Google DeepMind** Zürich, Switzerland  
*Research Intern* Sep. 2024 - Dec. 2024
  - Keywords: *Python, JAX, Video Segmentation, Object detection, Object tracking.*
  - Researching video segmentation with a focus on SAM 2, supervised by Stefano Pellegrini, Jasper Uijlings, and Cordelia Schmid.
  - Outcome: successfully enhanced SAM 2 with amodal perception, offering benefits for tracking and segmentation tasks.
- **Helmholtz Munich and Technical University of Munich** Munich, Germany  
*Guest PhD student* Jan./June 2024 - Aug. 2024
  - Keywords: *Python, PyTorch, NumPy, Multimodal large language models, Audio-visual learning, Zero-shot learning.*
  - Researched multimodal large-language models and audio-visual learning under Prof. Zeynep Akata and assisted in teaching a MSc seminar.
  - Outcome: a CVPR 2024 workshop paper, a preprint under submission, and a postdoctoral offer.
- **Google Research** Grenoble, France  
*Research Intern (4 months) + Student Researcher (4 months)* July 2023 - Mar. 2024
  - Keywords: *Python, JAX, Time, memory and parameter efficient learning, Video and image classification, Optimal adapter placement.*
  - Led research on efficient adaptation of large-scale models, supervised by Anurag Arnab, Alexey Gritsenko, and Cordelia Schmid.
  - Collaborated with Aleksandra Nowak, Utku Evci and Yann Dauphin on optimal adapter placement for transfer learning.
  - Outcome: a patent filing, a CVPR 2024 Highlight paper, a preprint, and a return internship offer at Google DeepMind.
- **Everseen** Timisoara, Romania  
*Machine Learning Researcher* Nov. 2020 - Apr. 2021
  - Keywords: *Python, PyTorch, NumPy, Real-time multi-object tracking, Object detection, Object re-identification.*
  - Researched ways of improving tracking systems in real-time multi-camera scenarios, such as drive-through and industrial warehouses.
  - Outcome: developed the company's first prototype for real-time multi-camera tracking system, leading to two US patent filings.
- **Presslabs** Timisoara, Romania  
*Junior Software Engineer* July 2018 - Sept. 2018
  - Keywords: *Go, Kubernetes, Development of website hosting platforms.*
  - Contributed to the development of the open-source MySQL operator (🐙 1057 ☆) for Kubernetes.
  - Outcome: successfully implemented new functionalities, fixed bugs, and conducted testing.
- **3Pillar Global** Timisoara, Romania  
*Junior Software Engineer* June 2017- Sept. 2017
  - Keywords: *TypeScript, JavaScript, HTML, CSS, React, Redux, Web development.*
  - Refactored and optimized critical components of the software and identified and resolved bugs to improve overall performance.
  - Outcome: a significantly more readable and easier to maintain codebase.

PATENTS

- **US 20230200569-A1:** *"System and method for adjusting a position of an order taking device"*. Ana Cristina Todoran, **O.-B. Mercea**, Razvan-Dorel Cioarga.
- **US 20230206466-A1:** *"System and method for tracking and identifying moving objects"*. Ana Cristina Todoran, **O.-B. Mercea**.

PUBLICATIONS

- **Arxiv 2024:** *"Towards Optimal Adapter Placement for Efficient Transfer Learning"*. Aleksandra I. Nowak, **O.-B. Mercea**, Anurag Arnab, Jonas Pfeiffer, Yann Dauphin, Utku Evci. 🏆
- **CVPR-W 2024:** *"Audio-Visual Generalized Zero-Shot Learning using Pre-Trained Large Multi-Modal Models"*. David Kurzendörfer\*, **O.-B. Mercea\***, A. Sophia Koepke, Zeynep Akata. (🏆 15 ☆)/🏆.
- **HIGHLIGHT @ CVPR 2024 (Top 3.60%):** *"Time-, Memory- and Parameter-Efficient Visual Adaptation"*. **O.-B. Mercea**, Alexey Gritsenko, Cordelia Schmid, Anurag Arnab. 🏆.
- **ORAL @ BMVC 2023:** *"Video-adverb retrieval with compositional adverb-action embeddings"*. Thomas Hummel, **O.-B. Mercea**, A. Sophia Koepke, Zeynep Akata. (🏆 6 ☆)/🏆.
- **DAGM GCPR 2023:** *"Text-to-feature diffusion for audio-visual few-shot learning"*. **O.-B. Mercea**, Thomas Hummel, A. Sophia Koepke, Zeynep Akata. (🏆 8 ☆)/🏆.
- **CoRL 2022:** *"Learning an Explainable Planner for Autonomous Driving"*. Katrin Renz, Kashyap Chitta, **O.-B. Mercea**, A. Sophia Koepke, Zeynep Akata, Andreas Geiger. (🏆 266☆)/🏆.
- **ECCV 2022:** *"Temporal and cross-modal attention for audio-visual zero-shot learning"*. **O.-B. Mercea\***, Thomas Hummel\*, A. Sophia Koepke, Zeynep Akata. (🏆 24 ☆)/🏆.
- **CVPR 2022:** *"Audio-visual Generalised Zero-shot Learning with Cross-modal Attention and Language"*. **O.-B. Mercea**, Lukas Riesch, A. Sophia Koepke, Zeynep Akata. (🏆 37 ☆)/🏆.

TALKS

- **Perception spotlight presentations**, Google Research, Mar. 2024. *"Time-, Memory- and Parameter-Efficient Visual Adaptation"*.
- **Video & Image Sense Lab**, The University of Amsterdam, May 2022. *"Audio-visual Generalised Zero-shot Learning"*.
- **IMPRS-IS symposium**, Tübingen Feb. 2021. *"Boosting autonomy: explainability, 3D vision and efficiency"* (acceptance rate 14%).

SELECTED ACHIEVEMENTS AND AWARDS

- **1st Prize** in the Kaggle competition "EEML 2019 - Electricity prediction".
- **Best Smart Mobility Project** awarded at UniHack 2019.
- **Honour Student** awarded in 2018 by the Romanian Academy, Timisoara City Council, and Association "Orizonturi Universitare" for outstanding achievements. Only one student from the faculty (BSc and MSc) receives this distinction annually.
- **Grand Prize** awarded at HackTM Sibiu 2018 edition. HackTm is the biggest software and hardware hackathon in South Eastern Europe.
- **Second place** awarded at the national competition "Java competition for universities 2018" organized by Oracle Academy.
- **Honors Diploma** awarded in 2015 by Sebis Town Hall for exceptional achievements in Informatics/Mathematics competitions and for enhancing the prestige of the high school and town.
- **International Contest of Mathematics and Informatics Caius Iacob.**
  - **Competitive programming section** : **Second place** in 2014 and **Mention** in 2015.
  - **Mathematics section** : **Second Place** in 2015.
- **Informatics Olympiad county phase:** **Mention** in 2014 and **Second place** in 2015.

SELECTED SCHOLARSHIPS

- **OxML Scholarship** offered for Oxford Machine Learning Summer School 2024 (all tracks). Declined due to inability to attend all tracks.
- **Google RS Conference Scholarship** awarded to cover all my conference-related travel expenses for CVPR 2024.
- **IMPRS-IS Scholarship** awarded in 2021 to the top 5.8% candidates (57 out of 968) for a fully-funded PhD program at IMPRS-IS.
- **Performance Scholarships** awarded every term during my undergraduate for excellent academic performance.
- **Special Scholarship** awarded in 2018, recognizing exceptional results in national contests.

SUPERVISION

- **MSc thesis:** *"Adapting to Misunderstandings of Communicating MLLMs on the Fly"*. **Student:** Yavuz Durmazkeser.
- **MSc thesis:** *"Audio-Visual Generalized Zero-Shot Learning using Large Pre-Trained Models"*. **Student:** David Kurzendörfer.

TEACHING

- **Teaching Assistant** for the seminar *"Advanced Topics in Vision-Language Models"* (MSc level) at Technical University of Munich in 2024.
- **Teaching Assistant** for the course *"Introduction to Machine Learning (INF 3151)"* (BSc level) at University of Tübingen in 2023.

REVIEWING

- CVPR 2022-2024, ECCV 2022-2024, ICCV 2023, NeurIPS 2023, TPAMI 2023, ICLR 2024, Best Romanian AI Thesis Awards 2024.

HIGHLY SELECTIVE COURSES AND SUMMER SCHOOLS

- **OxML:** Selected to attend OxML 2024, organized by Oxford University’s Deep Medicine Program, CIFAR, and AI for Global Goals.
- **EEML:** One of only 12 undergraduate students to attend EEML 2019, mainly organized by Google DeepMind (*21% acceptance rate*).
- **Bitdefender:** Learned to debug applications/malware in Assembly in a competitive course (*10% acceptance rate*). Received a job offer.
- **Microsoft:** Learned to develop applications in C# using Bing Maps in a highly selective course (*6.6% acceptance rate*).