

# Graph Convolutional Neural Networks for Position Reconstruction in the XENON1T Experiment

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# Introduction

Dark matter constitutes 85% of the matter in our Universe and was made evident by observations on galaxy formation, gravitational lensing, and the cosmic microwave background [3]. However, detecting dark matter experimentally is exceedingly difficult with particle physics detectors. These particles are suspected to be weakly interacting [2] such that any detection attempt would need to be sensitive to recoils at keV levels of energy.

The XENON1T detector operated as the most sensitive dark matter detector [1], and the soon-to-be-active XENONnT detector plans to overtake that title [4]. In these detectors, there are two important elements that need to be reconstructed: energy and position. By reconstructing these key elements, we are able to accept or reject numerous observations if the reconstructed position is within the detector’s fiducial volume and if the reconstructed energy is within a rejection threshold [2].

Previous machine learning implementations for position reconstruction perform well enough [6], but still run into issues with reconstruction outside the bounds of the detector as well as having an inward reconstruction bias. Finding the type of machine learning algorithm that is the most appropriate for these problems is essential for the best use of the detector’s fiducial volume. This project produced the first application of graph convolutional neural networks (GCNNs) for position reconstruction in the dark-matter field, and one of the first applications of a GCNN for use in regression.

## Background

### Dark Matter

The effects of dark matter are apparent through a few observations. The most notable come from observed galaxy formation, gravitational lensing, and the missing power seen in the cosmic microwave background power spectrum [3]. Aside from these large scale observations, dark matter is extremely difficult to detect experimentally with no known exact form. Current theory introduced two popular candidates: axions and weakly interacting massive particles (WIMPs) [3]. The XENON Collaboration aimed to directly detect WIMPs using the XENON1T experiment. The collaboration has moved on to the successor XENONnT, but the topics discussed here will with regard to XENON1T.

## XENON1T Detector

The XENON1T detector is a dual phase xenon time projection chamber (TPC) located in the *Laboratori Nazionali del Gran Sasso* (LNGS) in central Italy. It was a requirement for the detector to be sensitive to keV energy levels in order to detect WIMPs, so the detector's placement in LNGS, use of xenon, and water shielding were all necessary components to the experiment [1]. It contains a fiducial mass of  $\sim 1.3$  tons of liquid xenon and a fiducial volume with a maximum radius of 42.84 cm [2]. The detector features 258 photomultiplier tubes (PMTs): 127 on the top array and 121 on the bottom array. There is a constant electric field of 116.7 V/cm that causes electrons to drift towards the liquid-gas interface at the top of the detector, where they are extracted by a stronger electric field and produces a proportional scintillation signal [1].

An event in the detector occurs when a particle scatters off xenon atoms. The recoil energy results in a scintillation and ionization from these xenon atoms. The scintillation is observed by the PMTs and regarded as the S1 signal. The signal produced by the ionization at the liquid-gas interface is regarded as the S2 signal. Using the light pattern of the S2 signal from the top array of PMTs, we are able to reconstruct the  $(x, y)$  position of the event in reference to the plane of the PMTs. This process is referred to as *position reconstruction*.

Using the reconstructed positions, we're able to filter out terabytes of data by excluding events that are outside the fiducial volume. However, implementations of position reconstruction, such as maximum PMT, weighted sum position, multilayer perceptron, have pitfalls of reconstructing outside the detector, being inaccurate, or both [6]. For us to get accurate results, we want an algorithm to have a standard deviation for the Euclidean distance between reconstructed position and true position to be less than the space between PMTs (0.35 cm).

## Machine Learning

The maximum PMT and weighted sum position algorithms were two cases that did well to keep reconstructions within the detector walls. However, these algorithms did not do well for their overall accuracy. One of the initial machine learning algorithms that was applied a neural network. Recently, this neural network takes the form of a multilayer perceptron. These neural networks have performed significantly better in terms of their overall accuracy, but have difficulty keeping the reconstructions within the bounds of the detector. It is difficult to encode the detector walls into the neural network while also maintaining their good accuracy. This difficulty at the walls is due to the hard cut off of information. There are no more PMTs and thus there is no information present to inform the network that nothing is occurring outside the detector. At the same time, experimental data will hold

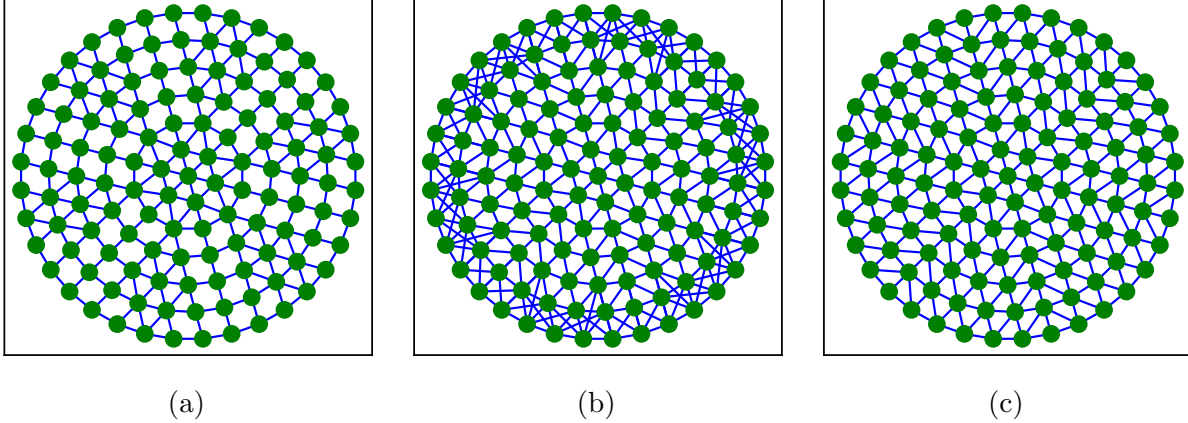


Figure 1: Three of the considered graph structures: Radius  $R = 10$  cm neighbors (a),  $k$ -nearest-neighbors  $k = 6$  (b), Delaunay triangulation neighbors (c). Each node here is a photomultiplier tube in the top array of the XENON1T detector. The positions of each tube in the detector was used for each of the explored graph structure approaches.

many problems. The observed S2 signal is not clean, as in background events are present within the S2 signal. Over the course of the experiment, PMTs will break and the signal they would see can no longer be used.

## Neural Networks

Recent experiments have been collecting a significant amount of data. Machine learning has become a very useful tool when processing this data. A neural network is one section of machine learning that is heavily based off the structure of animal brains. Where an animal brain is able to learn by activating specific neurons for thoughts and actions, the neurons in a machine learn in a similar vein through various kernels and learnable parameters. These sets of neurons are divided into layers and generally show up as an input layer, some amount of hidden layers, and an output layer. For our problem, the input layer will be the signal seen by the photomultiplier tubes in the top array of the detector, and the output layer will be the  $(x, y)$  position of the interaction. We are mainly concerned with graph convolutional neural networks (GCNNs) which are a result of the success with convolutional neural networks (CNNs).

## Convolutional Neural Networks

A convolutional neural network is a specific kind of neural network that features a convolution layer. The input to a CNN typically comes in the form of a matrix where there

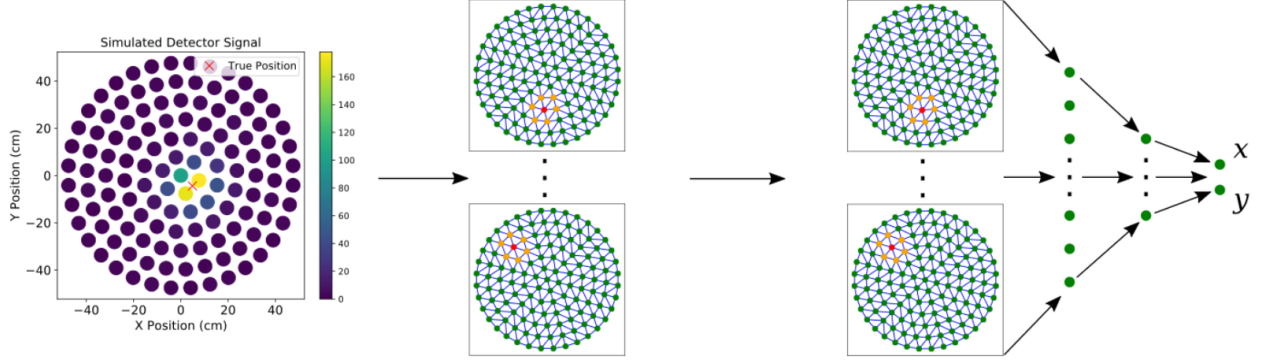


Figure 2: The graph convolutional neural network structure that the results of this paper are based on. The final structure features the signal input layer, two propagation (graph convolution) layers, two fully connected layers, and a final output layer for the  $(x, y)$  position of the interaction. Between each layer is a ReLU activation function. There are a total of 57,486 trainable parameters.

TODO: Replace the image with a sharper PDF version with less white space between the first propagation layer and the second.

is a locality between the elements in the matrix. The convolution layer makes use of a kernel that takes information from submatrices of the input matrix and summarizes the values within these submatrices. These summaries maintain the locality of the information for the respective submatrices. However, the structure of our dataset does not have a form that can be easily made into a matrix. Therefore, we would need an algorithm that is capable of making use of datasets with any possible structure.

## Graph Convolutional Neural Networks

The design of the graph convolutional neural network (GCNN) came by considering how a convolution could be applied to a graph structured dataset [5]. The graph convolution layer that we use and that was proposed by Kipf and Welling propagates the values of nodes according to the edges [5]. The value of connected nodes will increase according to the values of the connected nodes while nodes that are disconnected will see no change. The exact propagation rule is given by the equation:

$$H^{(l+1)} = \sigma \left( \tilde{D}^{-1/2} \tilde{A} \tilde{D}^{-1/2} H^{(l)} W^{(l)} \right) \quad (1)$$

where  $H^{(0)}$  will be our initial input signal,  $\tilde{A}$  and  $\tilde{D}$  are respectively modified, unweighted adjacency and modified degree matrices,  $W^{(l)}$  is the trainable weights matrix for the  $l^{\text{th}}$  layer, and  $\sigma(\cdot)$  is an activation function [5]. The modified adjacency and degree matrices are to include self-loops. This means that nodes will connect to themselves and propagate values to

113 themselves when passed through the graph convolution layers. The modified adjacency and  
 114 degree matrices take the form:

$$\begin{aligned}\tilde{A} &= A + I_N \\ \tilde{D} &= D + I_N\end{aligned}$$

115 where  $I_N$  is a  $N \times N$  identity matrix where  $N$  is the number of nodes.

116 We considered the PMTs of the XENON1T detector as our nodes and their quantity of  
 117 light collected as their primary value. We also included the  $(x, y)$  position of the PMT at the  
 118 top of the detector as addition values. When translating to equation (1), the matrices take  
 119 the form:

$$\begin{aligned}\tilde{A}, \tilde{D} &\in \mathbb{R}^{127 \times 127} \\ H^{(0)} &\in \mathbb{R}^{127 \times 3} \\ H^{(1)}, W^{(0)} &\in \mathbb{R}^{127 \times w}\end{aligned}$$

120 where  $w$  will depend on our choice of network structure. We chose to use rectified linear  
 121 units (ReLU) as our activation function for all layers.

122 With regard to the network structure, we were influenced by the success of image  
 123 classifiers, such as AlexNet. However, convolutional neural networks of this structure and  
 124 graph convolutional neural networks in general are more often used for classification, while  
 125 we have a regression problem. Our reasoning to use a GCNN for predicting the position of  
 126 interactions came from being able to encode the local structure of the XENON1T detector  
 127 into the dataset. By treating the nodes of our graph as the PMTs at the top of the detector,  
 128 we understood that the connections or edges that we put in place would maintain the local  
 129 structure if done carefully. We considered several graph structures shown in Figure 1. We  
 130 ultimately chose the Delaunay Triangulated graph for it's consistent connection density  
 131 throughout the graph: only PMTs that are immediately near each other are connected and  
 132 resulted in most nodes having 6 edges. Only nodes that represent PMTs near the wall of  
 133 the detector had degrees less than 6. There is potential for finding the graph structure that  
 134 describes the detector's data best, but for this we chose to go with a heuristic approach.

## Results

### During Training

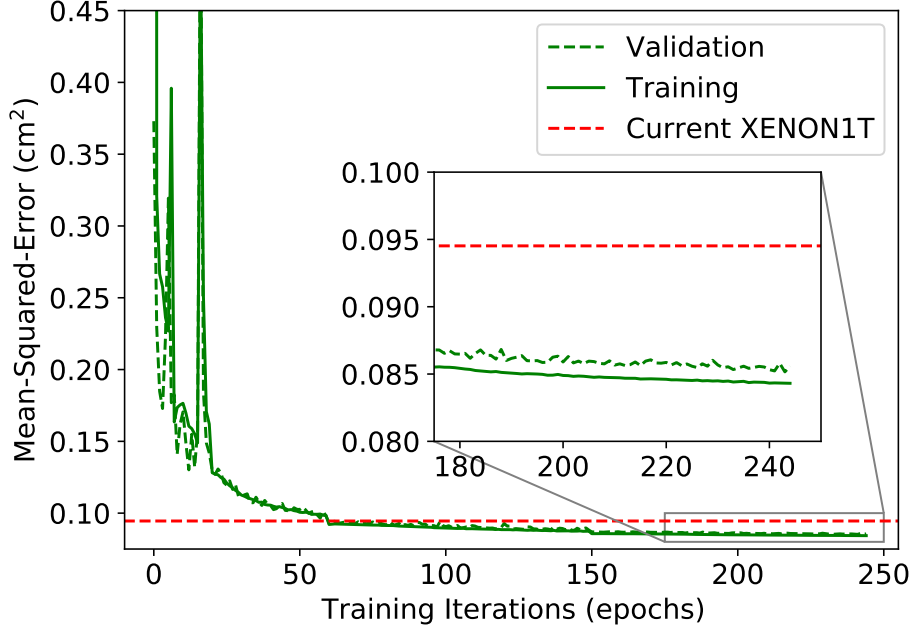


Figure 3: Mean-Squared-Error (MSE) in square centimeters of our algorithm for the training set and validation set during the training process. The minimum MSE for the current state-of-the-art is given in red at  $0.0945 \text{ cm}^2$ . This is the benchmark that our algorithm had to pass during training. Spikes within the first 20 epochs occur due to large step size during gradient descent. Learning rate was lowered at epochs 20, 60, and 150. The minimum MSE achieved by our GCNN on the validation set is  $0.0852 \text{ cm}^2$ .

The performance of our algorithm was compared to the current state-of-the-art in XENON1T during training as a benchmark and early warning system. If the GCNN did not approach a comparable performance to that of the state-of-the-art swiftly enough, training would typically stagnate and not surpass this benchmark. By not performing better here, it was generally indicative that the GCNN would also perform worse when we gave attention to our performance metrics. After a few iterations of this, we chose to only look at the performance metrics if the GCNN model produced a lower mean-squared-error during training and would restart training in cases where it was clear that the current iteration would not perform better within a reasonable number of epochs. An example of when it was clear a prospective model would not do better is if the mean-squared-error was not below  $0.25 \text{ cm}^2$  within the first 50 epochs.



147

148 We used an optical Monte Carlo simulation  
 149 of 989,875 events for training as an at-  
 150 tempt to assume a “perfect” detector. This is  
 151 to say that no spurious events, such as single  
 152 electrons, dark counts, or PMT after-pulses,  
 153 were within our simulation. The observa-  
 154 tions by the PMTs are as if every part of  
 155 the detector ran perfectly. By using a sim-  
 156 ulation like this, we were able to input the  
 157 data into our model without normalization  
 158 or standardization.

159 Our algorithm was able to outperform the  
 160 state-of-the-art in training, which is a good  
 161 indicator for the overall performance. Much  
 162 of the work for this stage was in optimizing  
 163 the learning rate used for gradient descent.  
 164 Our solution was to lower the learning rate  
 165 at specific epochs based on the performance  
 166 of previous results. Specifically, the learning  
 167 rate was lowered at epochs 20, 60, and 150. This caused notable dips within Figure 3 and  
 168 resulted in a much smoother curve after epoch 20. However, a better solution would have the  
 169 learning rate lower based on the model’s performance during training instead of milestones  
 170 set by the attentive user.

## 171 Validation Set Performance

172 As previously stated, the two performance metrics we focused on are to have no recon-  
 173 structions outside the detector and to minimize the number of reconstructions that are 1 cm  
 174 away from the true position. For best practice in machine learning, we focused on the results  
 175 of the validation set which is made of 197,975 simulated events.

176 Since we are hard set on having no reconstructions outside of the detector, this was the  
 177 first metric we would check. As it turned out, we counted zero reconstructions outside of  
 178 the detector for our latest version of the GCNN. At this point, our algorithm has success-  
 179 fully surpassed the state-of-the-art training benchmark and made no exceedingly erroneous  
 180 reconstructions, a rule that previous implementations had difficulty passing.

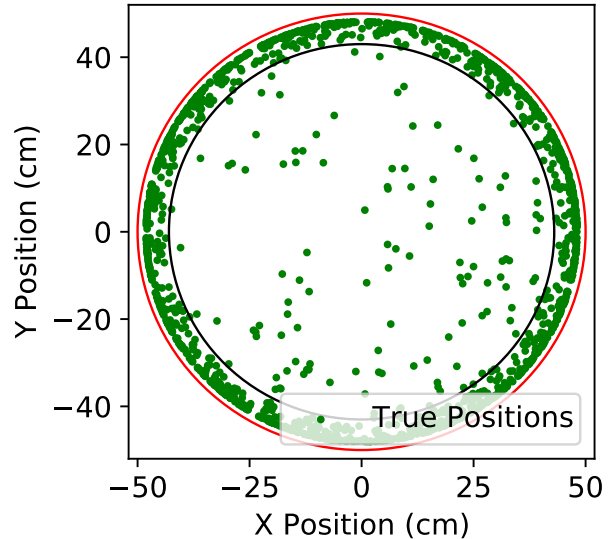


Figure 4: True positions of GCNN mis-reconstructions. 1,680 of the 197,975 simulated events were mis-reconstructed and are shown here. Red circle is the wall of the detector (50 cm); black circle is the largest radius of the fiducial volume (43 cm). 123 of the 1680 mis-reconstructions are within the fiducial volume.

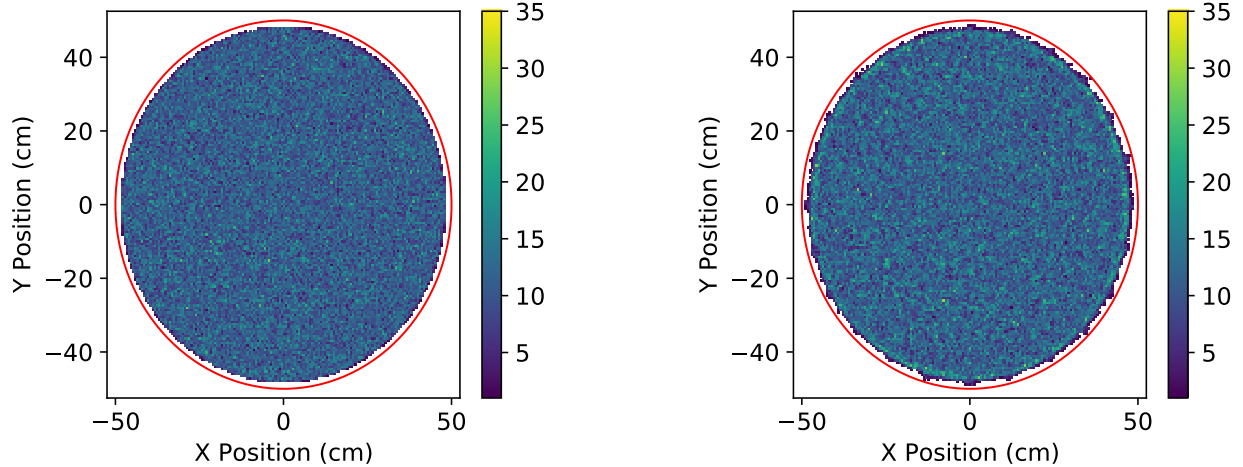


Figure 5: 2D histograms of the true positions (left) and reconstructed (right) positions at 150 bins. Red circle is the wall of the detector (50 cm). The edge of the reconstructed positions is noticeably more jagged.

As for the further than 1 cm reconstructions, these too performed well. Of the 197,975 events, 1,680 were reconstructed at greater than 1 cm away from the true position, about 0.85% of the validation set. As can be seen in Figure 4, many of the mistakes are made along the walls of the detector and explains the jagged edge found in Figure 5. If we reduce the area we count on to the maximum radius of the fiducial volume ( $R = 43$  cm), we find only 123 of the 197,975 events mis-reconstructed, 0.06% of the validation set.

The last important performance check, as for any experiment, is to produce the most accurate measurements or reconstructions, in our case. For this we use the resolution metrics  $\Delta X$ ,  $\Delta Y$ , and  $\Delta R$ :

$$\begin{aligned}\Delta X &\equiv X_{\text{Reconstructed}} - X_{\text{Simulated}}, & \Delta Y &\equiv Y_{\text{Reconstructed}} - Y_{\text{Simulated}}, \\ \Delta R &\equiv \sqrt{\Delta X^2 + \Delta Y^2}\end{aligned}$$

where  $X$  and  $Y$  are the  $x$  and  $y$  positions of the reconstructions and the associated simulation. The means and standard deviations produced by our algorithm are shown in Figure 6. This too outperformed the state-of-the-art which had standard deviations greater than 3 cm. From previous observations of the results of our GCNN, the mean and standard deviation of  $\Delta R$  follows suit with what we expect: most of the reconstructions are within 1 cm of the true, simulated position. At the same time, the approximately-Gaussian curves of  $\Delta X$ ,  $\Delta Y$ , and radius difference further confirms the positive performance of our GCNN.

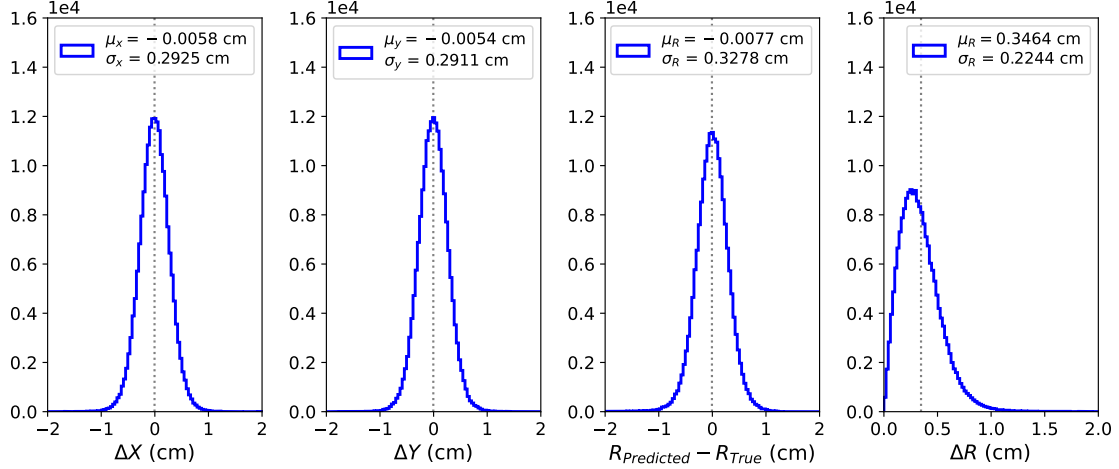


Figure 6: 1D histograms of the reconstructed position minus the true positions. There are 100 bins between -2 cm and 2 cm on  $\Delta X$ ,  $\Delta Y$ ,  $(R_{\text{Predicted}} - R_{\text{True}})$  and 100 bins between 0 cm and 3 cm on  $\Delta R$ . The left three histograms are near Gaussian curves of the same statistics.

## Conclusion & Future Work

We presented one of the first applications of a graph neural network – more specifically a graph *convolutional* neural network – in particle physics as well as one of the first regression applications of such a network. Our algorithm worked well enough to compete with the state-of-the-art position reconstruction algorithm for XENON1T. However, we do not think that this algorithm is the best approach to take in the future. We suspect that a broader graph neural network would work better for position reconstruction for the upcoming XENONnT experiment. The use of a graph neural network has shown the ability to maintain locality between PMTs, our graph’s nodes, but is not attributed to the use of convolutions. We believe there is a better approach that can be more specific to the XENON1T detector that does not necessarily use convolutions. The problem we realized when applying to experimental data is the overbearing presence of background events. **The graph convolutions compound the presence of these background events and create more difficulties than initially anticipated.**

We have shown that graph neural networks are applicable to particle physics detectors. They are able to preserve the locality of sensors in the detector when necessary for the application. Constructing these graphs will be unique for the problem to be solved and the detector itself, and creates a potential area of research to find the most optimal graph structure. We have shown that graph neural networks can be applied as both classifiers and regressors with significant effectiveness.

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