

# Assignment 2

Steven Spiegel

2025-10-24

## Introduction

This project will apply a random forest classifier and neural network to two different point clouds derived from LiDAR scans. One of the scans is called **Toronto 3D** and consists of a mobile LiDAR scan of downtown Toronto (Tan et al. 2020). The dataset is split into four sections with approximately 20 million points in the training data. **L001** will be used for training and **L002** will be used for testing.

The other dataset is of a high altitude aerial scan of Illinois from the **Illinois Geospatial Data Clearing House** (“Illinois Height Modernization (ILHMP): LiDAR Data | Clearinghouse.isgs.illinois.edu” n.d.). The exact dataset is still to be decided but will be of one of the aerial scans with a fully classified point cloud.

## Data cleaning and Feature extraction

The goal of the project is to test two feature extraction methods for point clouds that are then applied to a classifier. A point cloud does not have any inherent features other than position in  $\mathbb{R}^3$ . Let  $C$  be a point cloud such that  $C \subset \mathbb{R}^3$ . There are a few things worth noting about  $C$ :

- $C$  is a finite subset.
- Each point  $p \in C$  has position  $(x, y, z)$  that represents some object in an environment.
- $C$  should be independent of translation and rotation. In other words, changing the raw coordinate data by applying rotations and translations does not fundamentally change the underlying objects that these points represent.

These three points present unique challenges to applying machine learning to point clouds that are not present in other data types. Indeed, the points themselves are somewhat arbitrary since they can be transformed to another coordinate system. This is common with this type geospatial data. It is necessary to use neighboring points to find underlying geometric structure. Hence, this project will use a common feature extraction method for point clouds by applying per point principal component analysis (PCA) with its neighbors. The eigenvalues and eigenvectors derived from PCA give information on the underlying geometric structure of the point cloud.

## Neighborhoods

It's important to understand what is meant by “neighborhood” when it comes to point clouds. A neighborhood  $N$  about a point  $p$  is the set of points that satisfies some neighborhood criteria. The most intuitive neighborhood is a point and radius. A set of neighbors of point  $p_o$  is defined as

$$N(p_o) = \{p \text{ s.t. } \|p_o - p\| \leq r\} \quad (1)$$

Other common definitions include  $k$  nearest neighbors and cylindrical neighbors. This paper will compare the radial and cylindrical neighborhood methods by using a multiscaling approach similar to (Thomas et al. 2018). This paper used a radial multiscaling and downsampling method followed by a random forest classifier.

It however only used the radial method on mobile and indoor point clouds. I will test the cylindrical and radial method on both mobile and aerial LiDAR scans.

## Data cleaning

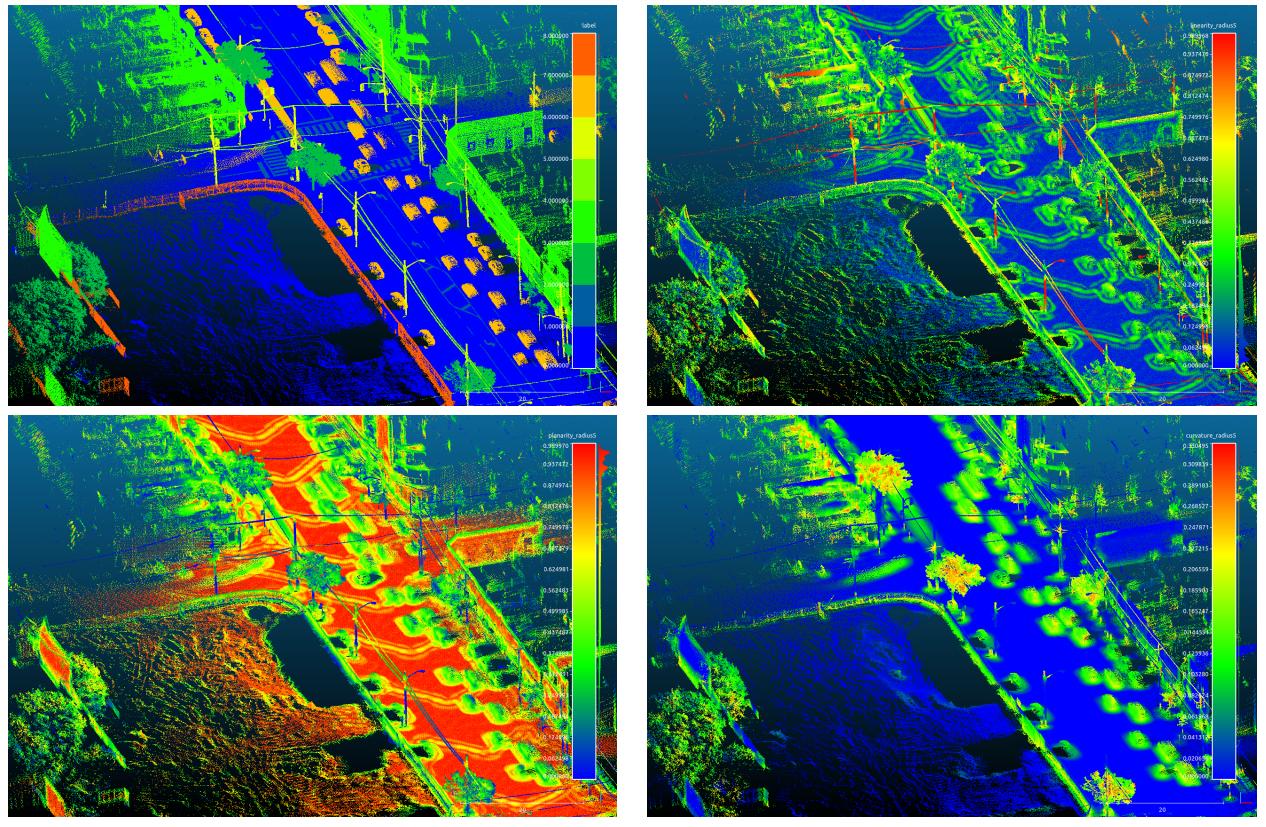
The point cloud is downsampled using a voxelization method. Voxels are 3 dimensional cubes that are similar to 2 dimensional pixels in images. The points are downsampled by taking the coordinate  $(x, y, z)$  that is the centroid of a voxel  $V$ . A downsampled point cloud is then defined as

$$C_v = \{(x_v, y_v, z_v) \text{ s.t. } (x_v, y_v, z_v) \text{ is the centroid of a voxel } V\} \quad (2)$$

Then the neighbors used to compute the corresponding covariance matrix of  $p \in C$  are

$$N(p_o) = \{p \text{ s.t. } \|p_o - p_v\| \leq r\} \quad (3)$$

where  $p_v \in C_v$ . This method is used to ensure computational efficiency without losing the important geometric features. This is done over a series of scales (i.e. voxel sizes) and radii. As the radii increases, so does the voxel size. A similar operation will be done with cylindrical neighbors.



The above image is a colorization of the point cloud. The point cloud is colorized by label, linearity, planarity, and curvature (starting clockwise from the top left). This is with a neighbor radius of 1.6 meters and a voxel size of 0.32 meters.

The calculated covariance matrix for a given point  $p \in C$  is

$$\text{Cov}(p) = \frac{1}{N} \sum ((p_v - \bar{p}_v)^T (p_v - \bar{p}_v)) \quad (4)$$

where  $p_v \in C_v$  and satisfies the neighborhood criteria about point  $p$ . Since  $Cov(p)$  is a symmetric matrix, it has 3 real-valued eigenvalues  $\lambda_1 \geq \lambda_2 \geq \lambda_3$  with corresponding eigenvectors  $(v_1, v_2, v_3)$ . These have geometric meaning as outlined by (Rusu 2010).

## Appendix

- “Illinois Height Modernization (ILHMP): LiDAR Data | Clearinghouse.isgs.illinois.edu.” n.d. Accessed October 24, 2025. <https://clearinghouse.isgs.illinois.edu/data/elevation/illinois-height-modernization-ilhmp>.
- Rusu, Radu Bogdan. 2010. “Semantic 3D Object Maps for Everyday Manipulation in Human Living Environments.” *KI - Künstliche Intelligenz* 24 (4): 345–48. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13218-010-0059-6>.
- Tan, Weikai, Nannan Qin, Lingfei Ma, Ying Li, Jing Du, Guorong Cai, Ke Yang, and Jonathan Li. 2020. “Toronto-3D: A Large-Scale Mobile LiDAR Dataset for Semantic Segmentation of Urban Roadways.” In *2020 IEEE/CVF Conference on Computer Vision and Pattern Recognition Workshops (CVPRW)*, 797–806. Seattle, WA, USA: IEEE. <https://doi.org/10.1109/CVPRW50498.2020.00109>.
- Thomas, Hugues, Francois Goulette, Jean-Emmanuel Deschaud, Beatriz Marcotegui, and Yann LeGall. 2018. “Semantic Classification of 3D Point Clouds with Multiscale Spherical Neighborhoods.” In *2018 International Conference on 3D Vision (3DV)*, 390–98. Verona: IEEE. <https://doi.org/10.1109/3DV.2018.00052>.