

Learning from Simulated and Unsupervised Images through Adversarial Training

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Abstract

With recent progress in graphics, it has become more tractable to train models on synthetic images, potentially avoiding the need for expensive annotations. However, learning from synthetic images may not achieve the desired performance due to a gap between synthetic and real image distributions. To reduce this gap, we propose Simulated+Unsupervised (S+U) learning, where the task is to learn a model to improve the realism of a simulator's output using unlabeled real data, while preserving the annotation information from the simulator. We develop a method for S+U learning that uses an adversarial network similar to Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs), but with synthetic images as inputs instead of random vectors. We make several key modifications to the standard GAN algorithm to preserve annotations, avoid artifacts and stabilize training: (i) a 'self-regularization' term, (ii) a local adversarial loss, and (iii) updating the discriminator using a history of refined images. We show that this enables generation of highly realistic images, which we demonstrate both qualitatively and with a user study. We quantitatively evaluate the generated images by training models for gaze estimation and hand pose estimation. We show a significant improvement over using synthetic images, and achieve state-of-the-art results on the MPI-IGaze dataset without any labeled real data.

1. Introduction

Large labeled training datasets are becoming increasingly important with the recent rise in high capacity deep neural networks [4, 18, 44, 44, 1, 15]. However, labeling such large datasets is expensive and time-consuming. Thus the idea of training on synthetic instead of real images has become appealing because the annotations are automatically available. Human pose estimation with Kinect [32] and, more recently, a plethora of other tasks have been tackled using synthetic data [40, 39, 26, 31].

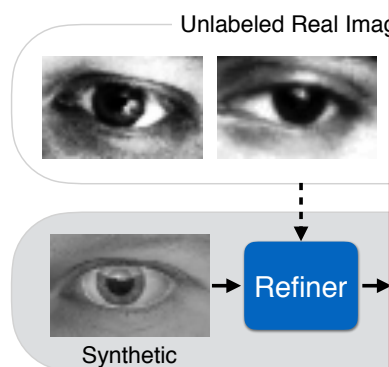


Figure 1. Simulated+Unsupervised (S+U) learning to learn a model that improves the realism from a simulator using unlabeled real data while preserving the annotation information.

However, learning from synthetic images is problematic due to a gap between synthetic and real image distributions – synthetic data is not realistic enough, leading the network to learn artifacts in synthetic images and fail to generate realistic images. One solution to closing this gap is to use the simulator. However, increasing the realism of the simulator is computationally expensive, the rendering process is a lot of hard work, and even top rendering engines may not model all the characteristics of real images. Of realism may cause models to overfit to details in the synthetic images.

In this paper, we propose Simulated+Unsupervised (S+U) learning, where the goal is to learn a model to improve the realism of synthetic images from a simulator using unlabeled real data. The improved realism of better machine learning models can be achieved without any data collection or human annotation. In addition to adding realism, S+U learning should preserve annotation information for training of machine learning models – e.g. the gaze direction in Figure 1 should be preserved. Moreover, since machine learning models can be sensitive to artifacts in the synthetic data, S+U learning should generate images without artifacts.

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loss. The generative networks focus on generating images using a random noise vector; thus, in contrast to our method, the generated images do not have any annota-

tion information that can be used for training a machine learning model.

Many efforts for various prediction tasks such as text detection and font recognition [25, 27]. Gaidon et al. [13] propose a pose estimation network in RGB-I scenes [28], and [25, 27]. Gaidon et al. [13] propose a neural network for performance. Our approaches, where using unlabeled

Ganin and L. domain adaptation are invariant to real images. V. Evolutionary Auto learn the lower-tor ConvNet. Zh. toencoder to rec synthetic data. I methods that ad prediction task, tributions throu allows us to gen used to train any multiple tasks.

2. S+U Learning

The goal of use a set of unlabeled images \tilde{x} to train a refiner $R_\theta(\tilde{x})$ that are the function denoted by \tilde{x} , the

The key requirement is to generate a refined image \tilde{x} while preserving the annotation information of the simulator.

To this end, a combination of

$$\mathcal{L}_R(\theta) = \sum_i$$

where \mathbf{x}_i is the input image, $\tilde{\mathbf{x}}_i$ is the corresponding refined image, ℓ_{real} is the realism loss, ℓ_{reg} is the regularization loss, ℓ_{sim} is the simulator loss, ℓ_{info} is the information loss, ℓ_{self} is the self-regularization loss, ℓ_{adv} is the adversarial loss, ℓ_{total} is the total loss. In the following sections, we expand

this formulation and provide an algorithm to optimize for θ .

2.1. Adversarial Loss with Self-Regularization

To add realism to the synthetic image, we need to bridge the gap between the distributions of synthetic and real images. An ideal refiner will make it impossible to classify a given image as real or refined with high confidence. This motivates the use of an adversarial discriminator network, D_ϕ , that is trained to classify images as real vs refined, where ϕ are the parameters of the discriminator network. The adversarial loss used in training the refiner network, R , is responsible for ‘fooling’ the network D into classifying the refined images as real. Following the GAN approach [7], we model this as a two-player minimax game, and update the refiner network, R_θ , and the discriminator network, D_ϕ , alternately. Next, we describe this intuition more precisely.

The discriminator network updates its parameters by minimizing the following loss:

$$\mathcal{L}_D(\phi) = - \sum_i \log(D_\phi(\tilde{\mathbf{x}}_i)) - \sum_j \log(1 - D_\phi(\mathbf{y}_j)). \quad (2)$$

This is equivalent to cross-entropy error for a two class classification problem where $D_\phi(\cdot)$ is the probability of the input being a synthetic image, and $1 - D_\phi(\cdot)$ that of a real one. We implement D_ϕ as a ConvNet whose last layer outputs the probability of the sample being a refined image. For training this network, each mini-batch consists of randomly sampled refined synthetic images $\tilde{\mathbf{x}}_i$ ’s and real images \mathbf{y}_j ’s. The target labels for the cross-entropy loss layer are 0 for every \mathbf{y}_j , and 1 for every $\tilde{\mathbf{x}}_i$. Then ϕ for a mini-batch is updated by taking a stochastic gradient descent (SGD) step on the mini-batch loss gradient.

In our implementation, the realism loss function ℓ_{real} in (1) uses the trained discriminator D as follows:

$$\ell_{\text{real}}(\theta; \tilde{\mathbf{x}}_i, \mathcal{Y}) = - \sum_i \log(1 - D_\phi(R_\theta(\mathbf{x}_i))). \quad (3)$$

By minimizing this loss function, the refiner forces the discriminator to fail classifying the refined images as synthetic. In addition to generating realistic images, the refiner network should preserve the annotation information of the simulator. For example, for gaze estimation the learned transformation should not change the gaze direction, and for hand pose estimation the location of the joints should not change. This is an essential ingredient to enable training a machine learning model that uses the refined images with the simulator’s annotations. To enforce this, we propose using a self-regularization loss that minimizes the image difference between the synthetic and the refined image. Thus, the overall refiner

Algorithm 1: Adversarial training of refiner network R_θ

Input: Sets of synthetic images $\mathbf{x}_i \in \mathcal{X}$, and real images $\mathbf{y}_j \in \mathcal{Y}$, max number of steps (T), number of discriminator network updates per step (K_d), number of generative network updates per step (K_g).

Output: ConvNet model R_θ .

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for  $t = 1, \dots, T$  do
  for  $k = 1, \dots, K_g$  do
    1. Sample a mini-batch of synthetic images  $\mathbf{x}_i$ .
    2. Update  $\theta$  by taking a SGD step on mini-batch loss  $\mathcal{L}_R(\theta)$  in (4).
  end
  for  $k = 1, \dots, K_d$  do
    1. Sample a mini-batch of synthetic images  $\mathbf{x}_i$ , and real images  $\mathbf{y}_j$ .
    2. Compute  $\tilde{\mathbf{x}}_i = R_\theta(\mathbf{x}_i)$  with current  $\theta$ .
    3. Update  $\phi$  by taking a SGD step on mini-batch loss  $\mathcal{L}_D(\phi)$  in (2).
  end
end
end

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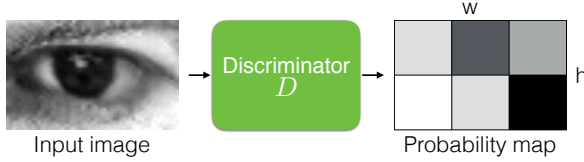


Figure 3. Illustration of local adversarial loss. The discriminator network outputs a $w \times h$ probability map. The adversarial loss function is the sum of the cross-entropy losses over the local patches.

loss function (1) used in our implementation is:

$$\mathcal{L}_R(\theta) = - \sum_i \log(1 - D_\phi(R_\theta(\mathbf{x}_i))) + \lambda \|R_\theta(\mathbf{x}_i) - \mathbf{x}_i\|_1, \quad (4)$$

where $\|\cdot\|_1$ is ℓ_1 norm. We implement R_θ as a fully convolutional neural net without striding or pooling. This modifies the synthetic image on a pixel level, rather than holistically modifying the image content as in e.g. a fully connected encoder network, and preserves the global structure and the annotations. We learn the refiner and discriminator parameters by minimizing $\mathcal{L}_R(\theta)$ and $\mathcal{L}_D(\phi)$ alternately. While updating the parameters of R_θ , we keep ϕ fixed, and while updating D_ϕ , we fix θ . We summarize this training procedure in Algorithm 1.

2.2. Local Adversarial Loss

Another key requirement for the refiner network is that it should learn to model the real image characteristics without introducing any artifacts. When we train a

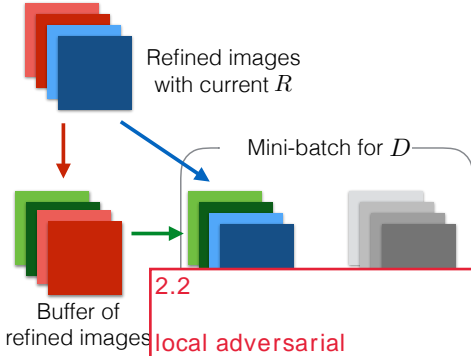


Figure 4. Illustration of the training process. See text for details.

single strong discriminator tends to over-emphasize the current discriminator's artifacts and producing artifacts. In this local patch we sample real images that have similar statistics to the current patch rather than defining a global receptive field, and hence the discriminator network, but also produces artifacts. Learning the discriminator's training of the refiner 'realism loss' value.

In our implementation, we use D to be a fully convolutional network of size h dimensional probability map, where w is the width of the image. While training, we use the cross-entropy loss as illustrated in Figure 3.

2.3. Updating Discriminator and Refined Images

Another problem is that the discriminator network only sees the current mini-batch of images. This may lead to artifacts during training, and (ii) the artifacts that the discriminator produces. Any refined image generated by the refiner at any time during the training should be able to be used for the discriminator. On this observation, we propose to maintain the stability of adversarial training by using a history buffer.

We slightly modify Algorithm 1 to have a buffer of refined images generated by previous networks. Let B be the size of the buffer and b be the mini-batch size used in Algorithm 1.

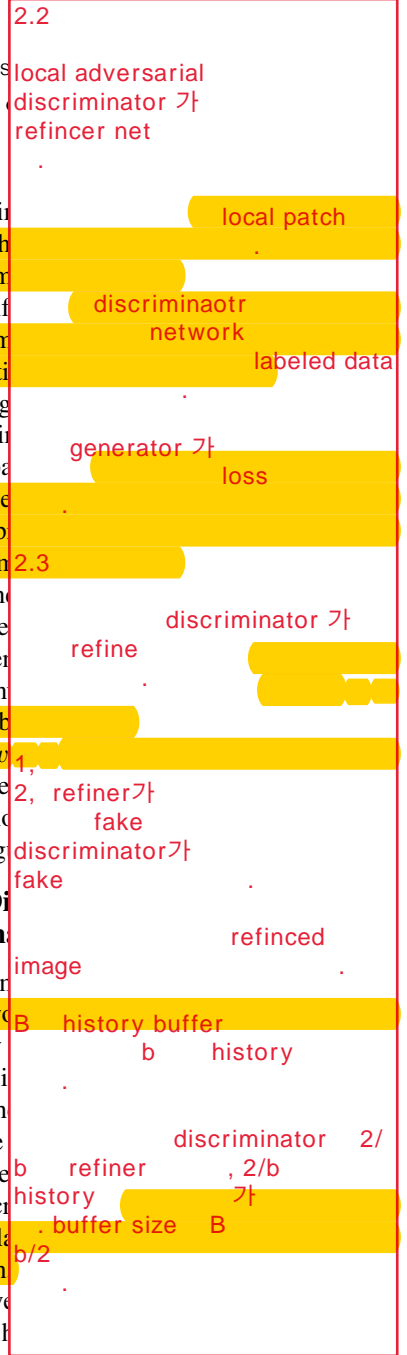




Figure 5. Example output of SimGAN for the UnityEyes gaze estimation dataset [40]. (Left) real images from MPIIGaze [43]. Our refiner network does not use any label information from MPIIGaze dataset at training time. (Right) refinement results on UnityEye. The skin texture and the iris region in the refined synthetic images are qualitatively significantly more similar to the real images than to the synthetic images. More examples are included in the supplementary material.

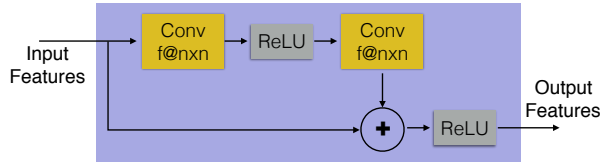


Figure 6. A ResNet block with two $n \times n$ convolutional layers, each with f feature maps.

At each iteration of discriminator training, we compute the discriminator loss function by sampling $b/2$ images from the current refiner network, and sampling an additional $b/2$ images from the buffer to update parameters ϕ . We keep the size of the buffer, B , fixed. After each training iteration, we randomly replace $b/2$ samples in the buffer with the newly generated refined images. This procedure is illustrated in Figure 4.

3. Experiments

We evaluate our method for appearance-based gaze estimation in the wild on the MPIIGaze dataset [40, 43], and hand pose estimation on the NYU hand pose dataset of depth images [35]. We use fully convolutional refiner network with ResNet blocks (Figure 6) for all our experiments.

3.1. Appearance-based Gaze Estimation

Gaze estimation is a key ingredient for many human computer interaction (HCI) tasks. However, estimating the gaze direction from an eye image is challenging, especially when the image is of low quality, *e.g.* from a laptop or a mobile phone camera – annotating the eye images with a gaze direction vector is challenging even for humans. Therefore, to generate large amounts of annotated data, several recent approaches [40, 43] train their models on large amounts of synthetic data. Here, we show that training with the refined synthetic images generated by SimGAN significantly outperforms the state-of-the-art for this task.

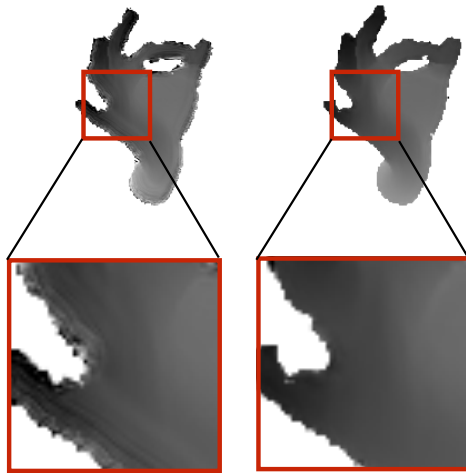
The gaze estimation dataset consists of 1.2M synthetic images from eye gaze synthesizer UnityEyes [40]

and 214K real images from the MPIIGaze dataset [43] – samples shown in Figure 5. MPIIGaze is a very challenging eye gaze estimation dataset captured under extreme illumination conditions. For UnityEyes we use a single generic rendering environment to generate training data without any dataset-specific targeting.

Qualitative Results: Figure 5 shows examples of synthetic, real and refined images from the eye gaze dataset. As shown, we observe a significant qualitative improvement of the synthetic images: SimGAN successfully captures the skin texture, sensor noise and the appearance of the iris region in the real images. Note that our method preserves the annotation information (gaze direction) while improving the realism.

‘Visual Turing Test’: To quantitatively evaluate the visual quality of the refined images, we designed a simple user study where subjects were asked to classify images as real or refined synthetic. Each subject was shown a random selection of 50 real images and 50 refined images in a random order, and was asked to label the images as either real or refined. The subjects were constantly shown 20 examples of real and refined images while performing the task. The subjects found it very hard to tell the difference between the real images and the refined images. In our aggregate analysis, 10 subjects chose the correct label 517 times out of 1000 trials ($p = 0.148$), which is not significantly better than chance. Table 1 shows the confusion matrix. In contrast, when testing on original synthetic images vs real images, we showed 10 real and 10 synthetic images per subject, and the subjects chose correctly 162 times out of 200 trials ($p \leq 10^{-8}$), which is significantly better than chance.

Quantitative Results: We train a simple convolutional neural network (CNN) similar to [43] to predict the eye gaze direction (encoded by a 3-dimensional vector for x, y, z) with l_2 loss. We train on UnityEyes and test on MPIIGaze. Figure 7 and Table 2 compare the performance of a gaze estimation CNN trained on synthetic data to that of another CNN trained on refined



Global adversarial loss Local adversarial loss

Figure 8. Importance of using a local adversarial loss. (Left) an example image that has been generated with a standard ‘global’ adversarial loss on the whole image. The noise around the edge of the hand contains obvious unrealistic depth boundary artifacts. (Right) the same image generated with a local adversarial loss that looks significantly more realistic.

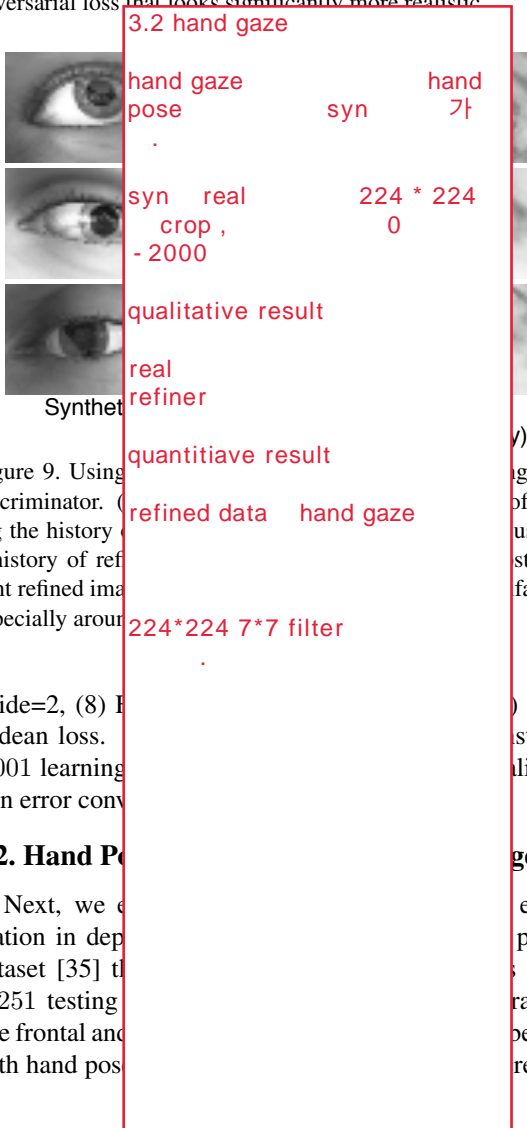


Figure 9. Using a discriminator. (Left) an example image that has been generated with a standard ‘global’ adversarial loss on the whole image. The noise around the edge of the hand contains obvious unrealistic depth boundary artifacts. (Right) the same image generated with a local adversarial loss that looks significantly more realistic.

stride=2, (8) Euclidean loss. 0.001 learning rate, 100000 iteration error conv

3.2. Hand Pose Estimation

Next, we evaluate the performance of the proposed method on the NYU hand pose dataset [35] the 8,251 testing images. We use one frontal and one side view with hand pose

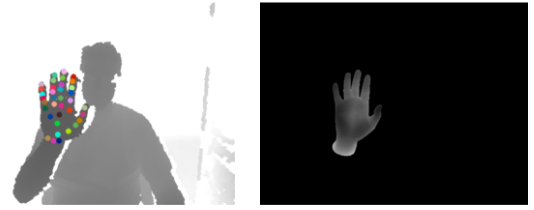


Figure 10. NYU hand pose dataset. (Left) depth frame; (right) corresponding synthetic image.

a synthetic depth image. Figure 10 shows one such example frame. We pre-process the data by cropping the pixels from real images using the synthetic images. The images are resized to 224×224 before passing them to the ConvNet. The background depth values are set to zero and the foreground values are set to original depth value minus 2000 (assuming that the background is at 2000 millimeters).

Qualitative Results: Figure 11 shows example output of SimGAN on the NYU hand pose test set. As is apparent from the figure, the main source of noise in real depth images is from depth discontinuity at the edges. SimGAN is able to learn to model this kind of noise without requiring any label information for the real images, resulting in more realistic-looking images for this domain as well.

Quantitative Results: We train a fully convolutional hand pose estimator CNN similar to Stacked Hourglass Net [22] on real, synthetic and refined synthetic images of the NYU hand pose training set, and evaluate each model on all *real* images in the NYU hand pose test set. We train on the same 14 hand joints as in [35]. Many state-of-the-art hand pose estimation methods are customized pipelines that consist of several steps. We use only a single deep neural network to analyze the effect of improving the synthetic images to avoid bias due to other factors. Figure 12 and Table 4 present quantitative results on NYU hand pose. Training on refined synthetic data – the output of SimGAN which does not require any labeling for the real images – significantly outperforms the model trained on real images with supervision, by 8.8%. The proposed method also outperforms training on synthetic data. We also observe a large improvement as the number of training examples is increased, which comes with zero annotation cost to us as we train on the output of a simulator – here 3x corresponds to training on all views.

Implementation Details: The architecture is the same as for eye gaze estimation, except the input image size is 224×224 , filter size is 7×7 , and 10 ResNet blocks are used. The discriminative net D_ϕ is: (1) Conv7x7, stride=4, feature maps=96, (2) Conv5x5, stride=2, feature maps=64, (3) MaxPool3x3, stride=2, (4) Conv3x3,

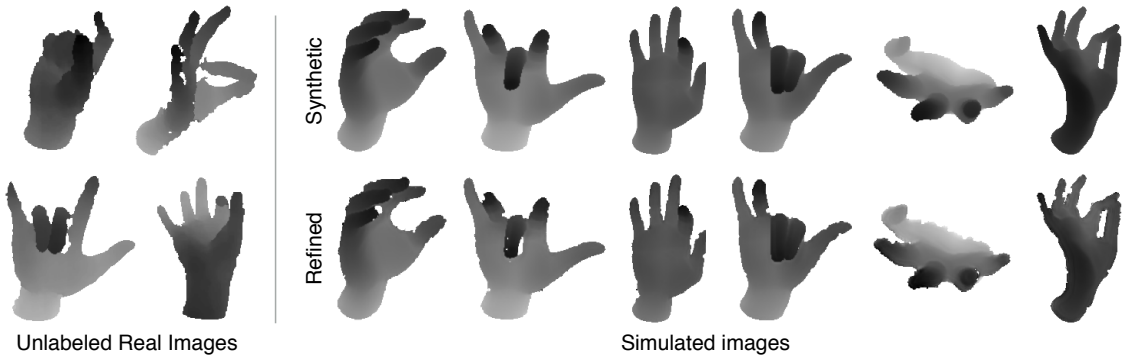


Figure 11. Example refined test images for the NYU hand pose dataset [35]. (Left) real images, (right) synthetic images and the corresponding refined output images from the refiner network. The major source of noise in the real images is the non-smooth depth boundaries. The refiner network learns to model the noise present in the real images, importantly without requiring any labels for the real images.

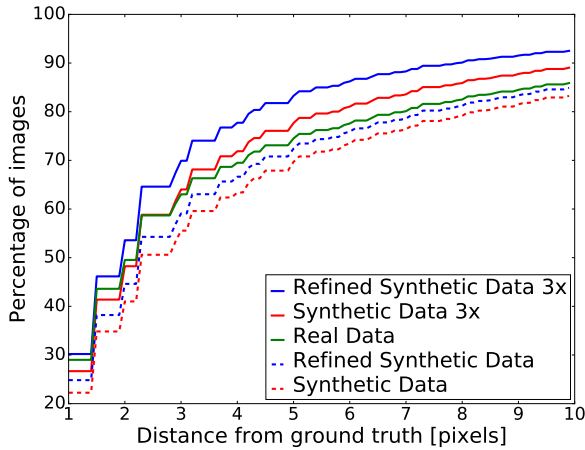


Figure 12. Quantitative results for hand pose estimation on the NYU hand pose test set of real depth images [35]. The plot shows cumulative curves as a function of distance from ground truth keypoint locations, for different numbers of training examples of synthetic and refined images. Training a pose estimator on the output of SimGAN significantly outperforms the same network trained on real images. Importantly, our refiner generative model does not require labeling for the real images.

Training data	% of images within d
Synthetic Data	69.7
Refined Synthetic Data	72.4
Real Data	74.5
Synthetic Data 3x	77.7
Refined Synthetic Data 3x	83.3

Table 4. Comparison of a hand pose estimator trained on synthetic data, real data, and the output of SimGAN. The results are at distance $d = 5$ pixels from ground truth. Training on the output of SimGAN outperforms training on supervised real data by 8.8%, without requiring any supervision.

stride=2, feature maps=32, (5) Conv1x1, stride=1, feature maps=32, (6) Conv1x1, stride=1, feature maps=2, (7) Softmax. We train the R_θ network first with just self-

regularization loss for 500 steps and D_ϕ for 200 steps; then, for each update of D_ϕ we update R_θ twice, *i.e.* K_d is set to 1, and K_g is set to 2 in Algorithm 1.

For hand pose estimation, we use the Stacked Hourglass Net of [22] 2 hourglass blocks, and an output heatmap size 64×64 . We augment at training time with random $[-20, 20]$ degree rotations and crops. All networks are trained until the validation error converges.

3.3. Analysis of Modifications to Adversarial Training

First we compare local vs global adversarial loss during training. A global adversarial loss uses a fully connected layer in the discriminator network, classifying the whole image as real vs refined. **The local adversarial loss removes the artifacts and makes the generated image significantly more realistic,** as seen in Figure 8.

Next, in Figure 9, we show result of using history of refined images, and compare it with standard adversarial training for gaze estimation. As shown in the figure, **using the buffer of refined images prevents severe artifacts in standard training,** *e.g.* around the corner of the eyes.

4. Conclusions and Future Work

We have proposed Simulated+Unsupervised learning to refine a simulator’s output with unlabeled real data. S+U learning adds realism to the simulator and preserves the global structure and the annotations of the synthetic images. We described SimGAN, our method for S+U learning, that uses an adversarial network and demonstrated state-of-the-art results without any labeled real data. In future, we intend to explore modeling the noise distribution to generate more than one refined image for each synthetic image, and investigate refining videos rather than single images.

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Additional Experiments

Qualitative Experiments for Appearance-based Gaze Estimation

Dataset: The gaze estimation dataset consists of 1.2M synthetic images from eye gaze synthesizer UnityEyes [40] and 214K real images from the MPIIGaze dataset [43] – samples shown in Figure 13. MPIIGaze is a very challenging eye gaze estimation dataset captured under extreme illumination conditions. For UnityEyes we use a single generic rendering environment to generate training data without any dataset-specific targeting.

Qualitative Results: In Figure 14, we show many examples of synthetic, and refined images from the eye gaze dataset. We show many pairs of synthetic and refined in multiple rows. The top row contains synthetic images, and the bottom row contains corresponding refined images. As shown, we observe a significant qualitative improvement of the synthetic images: SimGAN successfully captures the skin texture, sensor noise and the appearance of the iris region in the real images. Note that our method preserves the annotation information (gaze direction) while improving the realism.

Qualitative Experiments for Hand Pose Estimation

Dataset: Next, we evaluate our method for hand pose estimation in depth images. We use the NYU hand pose dataset [35] that contains 72,757 training frames and 8,251 testing frames. Each depth frame is labeled with hand pose information that has been used to create a synthetic depth image. We pre-process the data by cropping the pixels from real images using the synthetic images. Figure 15 shows example real depth images from the dataset. The images are resized to 224×224 before passing them to the refiner network.

Quantative Results: We show examples of synthetic and refined hand depth images in Figure 16 from the test set. We show our results in multiple pairs of rows. The top row in each pair, contains synthetic depth image, and the bottom row shows the corresponding refined image using the proposed SimGAN approach. Note the realism added to the depth boundary in the refined images, compare to the real images in Figure 15.

Convergence Experiment

To investigate the convergence of our method, we visualize intermediate results as training progresses. As shown in Figure 17, in the beginning, the refiner network learns to predict very smooth edges using only the self-regularization loss. As the adversarial loss is enabled,

the network starts adding artifacts at the depth boundaries. However, as these artifacts are not the same as real images, the discriminator easily learns to differentiate between the real and refined images. Slowly the network starts adding realistic noise, and after many steps, the refiner generates very realistic-looking images. We found it helpful to train the network with a low learning rate and for a large number of steps. For NYU hand pose we used $lr=0.0002$ in the beginning, and reduced to 0.00005 after 600,000 steps.



Figure 13. Example real images from MPIIGaze dataset.

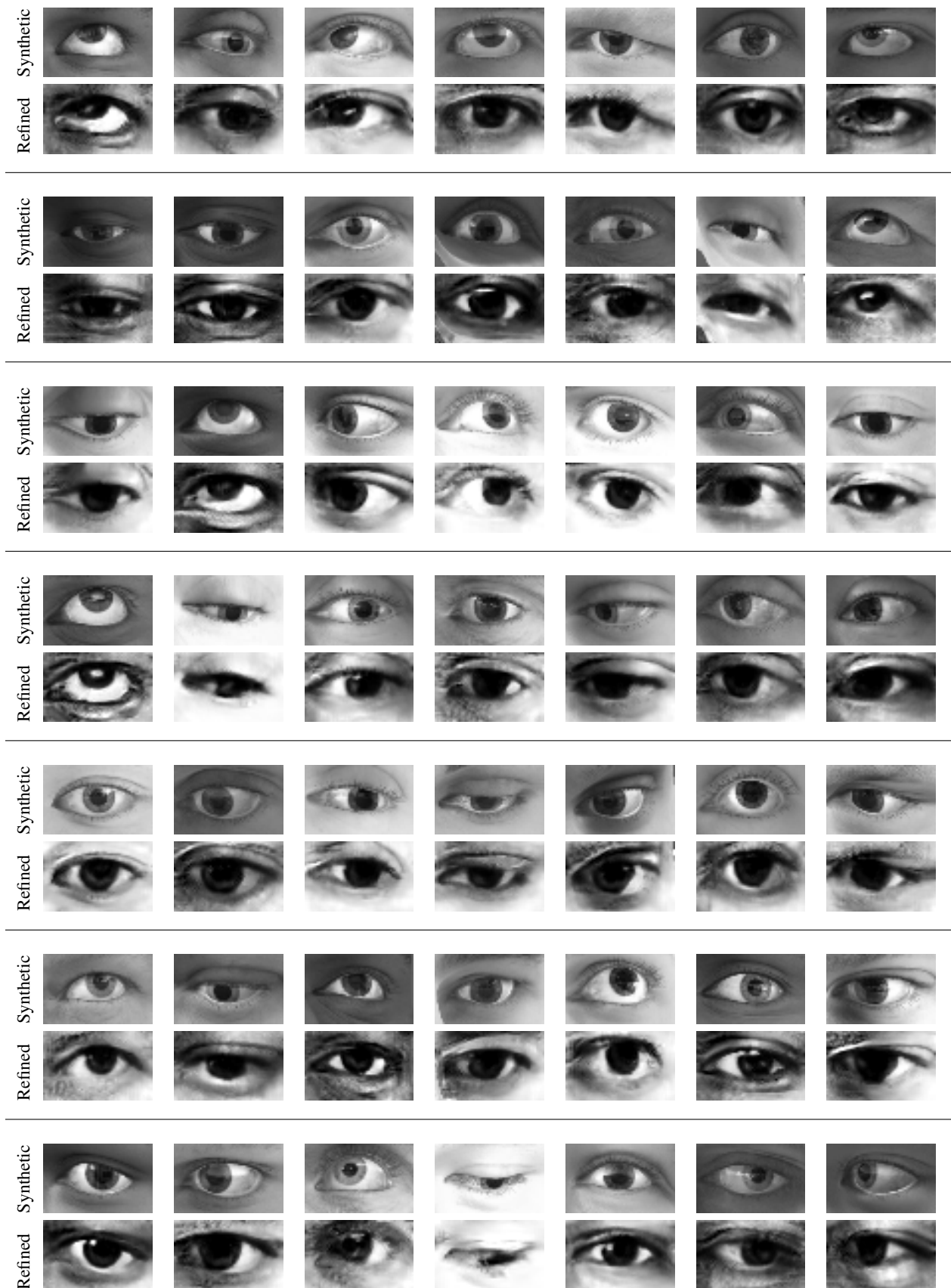


Figure 14. Qualitative results for automatic refinement of simulated eyes. The top row (in each set of two rows) shows the synthetic eye image, and the bottom row shows the corresponding refined image.



Figure 15. Example real test images in the NYU hand dataset.

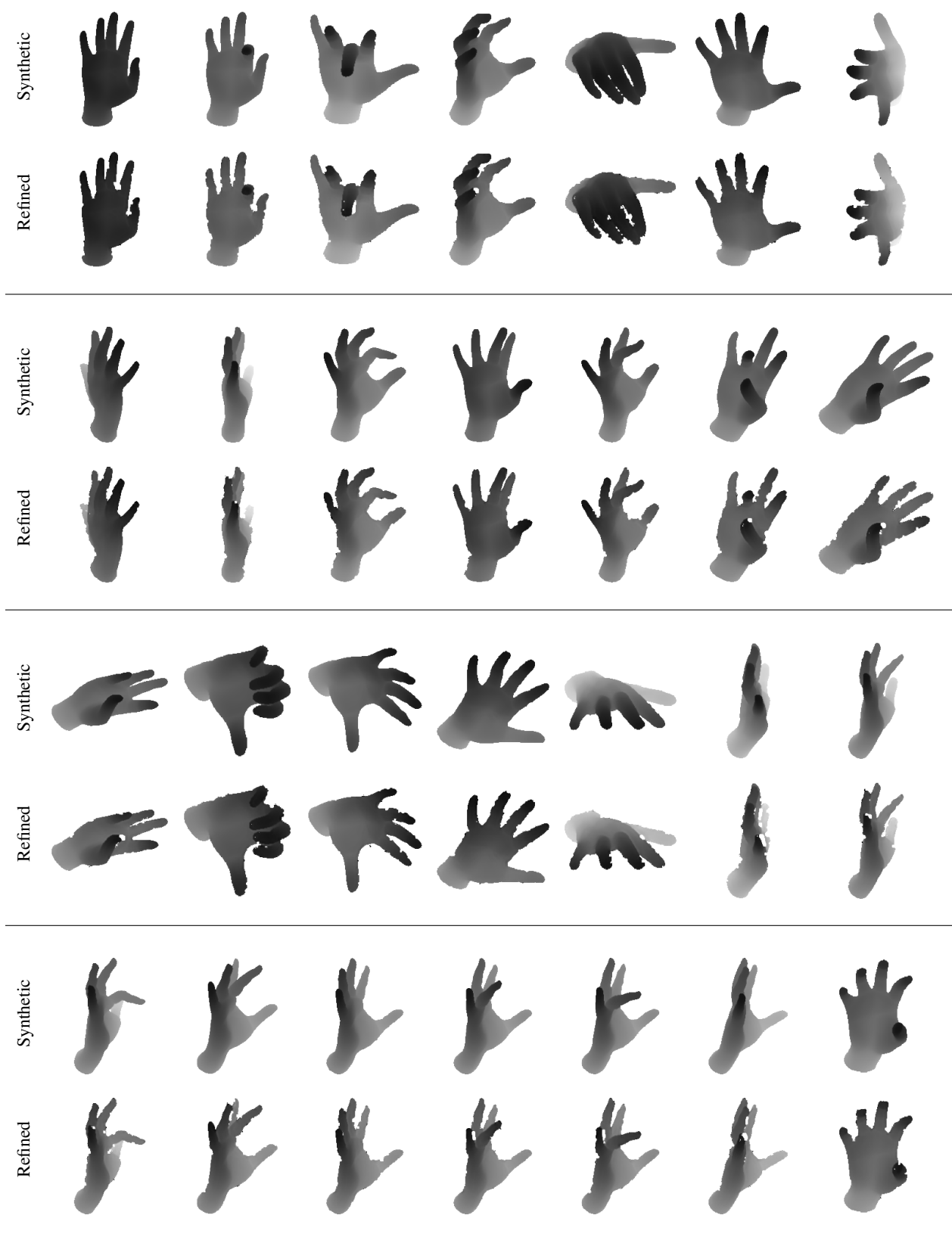


Figure 16. Qualitative results for automatic refinement of NYU hand depth images. The top row (in each set of two rows) shows the synthetic hand image, and the bottom row is the corresponding refined image. Note how realistic the depth boundaries are compared to real images in Figure 15.

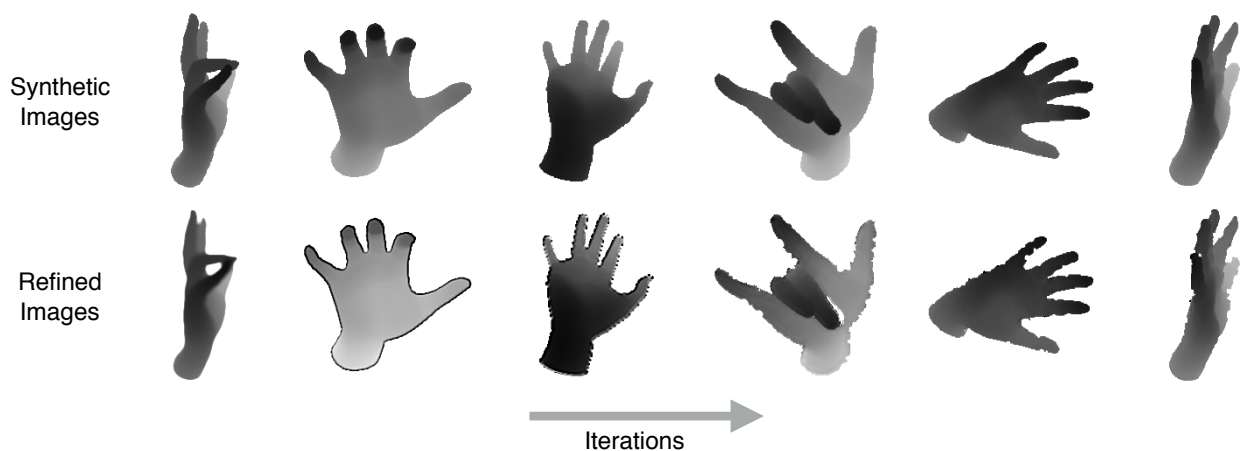


Figure 17. SimGAN output as a function of training iterations for NYU hand pose. Columns correspond to increasing training iterations. First row shows synthetic images, and the second row shows corresponding refined images. The first column is the result of training with ℓ_1 image difference for 300 steps; the later rows show the result when trained on top of this model. In the beginning the adversarial part of the cost introduces different kinds of unrealistic noise to try beat the adversarial network D_ϕ . As the dueling between R_θ and D_ϕ progresses, R_θ learns to model the right kind of noise.