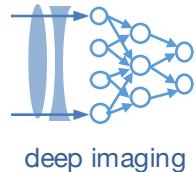


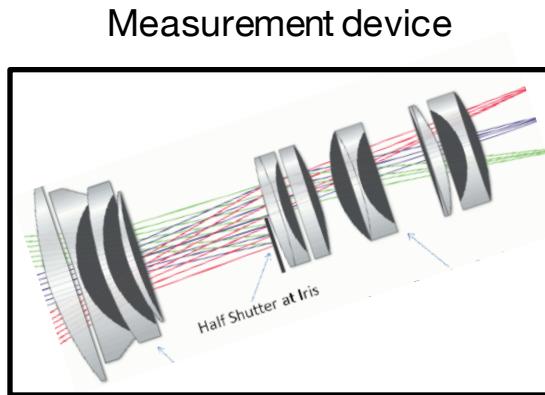
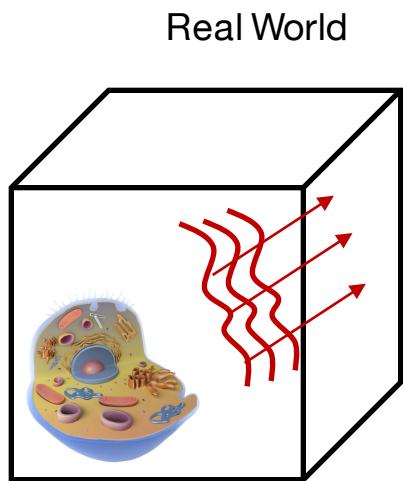
# Lecture 5: A gentle introduction to optimization

Machine Learning and Imaging

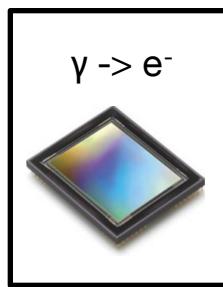
BME 590L  
Roarke Horstmeyer



# ML+Imaging pipeline

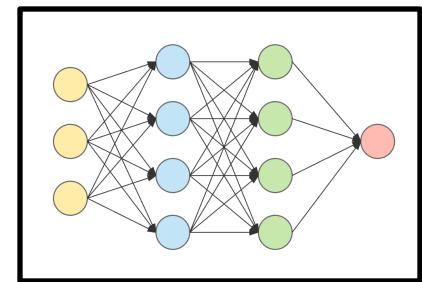


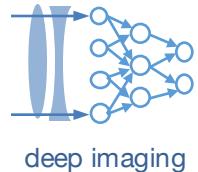
Digitization



Last Class

Machine Learning





## Discrete convolution

$$V(x_o) = \int_{-\infty}^{\infty} U(x_i) h(x_o - x_i) dx_i$$



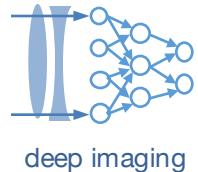
$$v[x_0] = \sum_{x_i=-M}^{M} u[x_i] h[x_o - x_i]$$

## Discrete 2D convolution

$$V(x_o, y_o) = \iint_{-\infty}^{\infty} U(x_i, y_i) h(x_o - x_i, y_o - y_i) dx_i dy_i$$

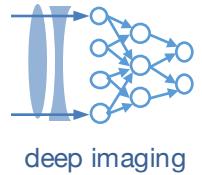


$$v[x_0, y_o] = \sum_{y_i=-L}^{L} \sum_{x_i=-M}^{M} u[x_i, y_i] h[x_o - x_i, y_o - y_i]$$



## Convolutions as a big matrix multiplication

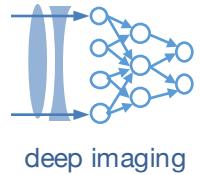
$$(u * h)[x] = \sum_{m=0}^{N+M-2} u[m]h[x-m] \longrightarrow y = u * h = \begin{bmatrix} h_1 & 0 & \dots & 0 & 0 \\ h_2 & h_1 & \dots & \vdots & \vdots \\ h_3 & h_2 & \dots & 0 & 0 \\ \vdots & h_3 & \dots & h_1 & 0 \\ h_{m-1} & \vdots & \dots & h_2 & h_1 \\ h_m & h_{m-1} & \vdots & \vdots & h_2 \\ 0 & h_m & \dots & h_{m-2} & \vdots \\ 0 & 0 & \dots & h_{m-1} & h_{m-2} \\ \vdots & \vdots & \vdots & h_m & h_{m-1} \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & \dots & h_m \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} u_1 \\ u_2 \\ u_3 \\ \vdots \\ u_n \end{bmatrix}$$



## Last thing – matrix and vector derivatives

$$\mathbf{u} = \mathbf{W}\mathbf{v}$$

$$\frac{d\mathbf{u}}{d\mathbf{v}} =$$



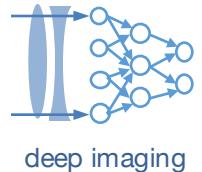
## Last thing – matrix and vector derivatives

$$\mathbf{u} = \mathbf{W}\mathbf{v}$$

$$\frac{d\mathbf{u}}{d\mathbf{v}} =$$

$$\mathbf{u}_3 = W_{3,1}v_1 + W_{3,2}v_2 + \dots + W_{3,M}v_M$$

$$\frac{\partial u_3}{\partial v_2} = \frac{\partial}{\partial v_2}(W_{3,1}v_1 + W_{3,2}v_2 + \dots + W_{3,M}v_M) = \frac{\partial}{\partial v_2}W_{3,2}v_2 = W_{3,2}$$



## Last thing – matrix and vector derivatives

$$\mathbf{u} = \mathbf{W}\mathbf{v}$$

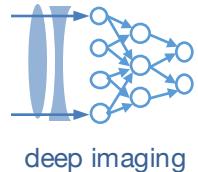
$$\frac{d\mathbf{u}}{d\mathbf{v}} =$$

$$\mathbf{u}_3 = W_{3,1}v_1 + W_{3,2}v_2 + \dots + W_{3,M}v_M$$

$$\frac{\partial u_3}{\partial v_2} = \frac{\partial}{\partial v_2}(W_{3,1}v_1 + W_{3,2}v_2 + \dots + W_{3,M}v_M) = \frac{\partial}{\partial v_2}W_{3,2}v_2 = W_{3,2}$$

$$\frac{\partial u_i}{\partial v_j} = W_{i,j}$$

$$\frac{d\mathbf{u}}{d\mathbf{v}} = \mathbf{W}$$



## Last thing – matrix and vector derivatives

$$\mathbf{u} = \mathbf{W}\mathbf{v}$$

$$\frac{d\mathbf{u}}{d\mathbf{v}} =$$

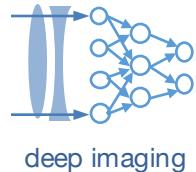
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$$\frac{\partial u_i}{\partial v_j} = W_{i,j}$$

$$\frac{d\mathbf{u}}{d\mathbf{v}} = \mathbf{W}$$

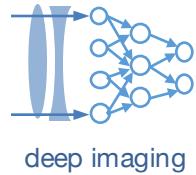
- When confused, write out one entry, solve derivative and generalize
- Use dimensionality to help (if  $\mathbf{x}$  has N elements, and  $\mathbf{y}$  has M, then  $d\mathbf{y}/d\mathbf{x}$  must be NxM)
- Take advantage of *The Matrix Cookbook*:
  - <https://www.math.uwaterloo.ca/~hwolkowi/matrixcookbook.pdf>



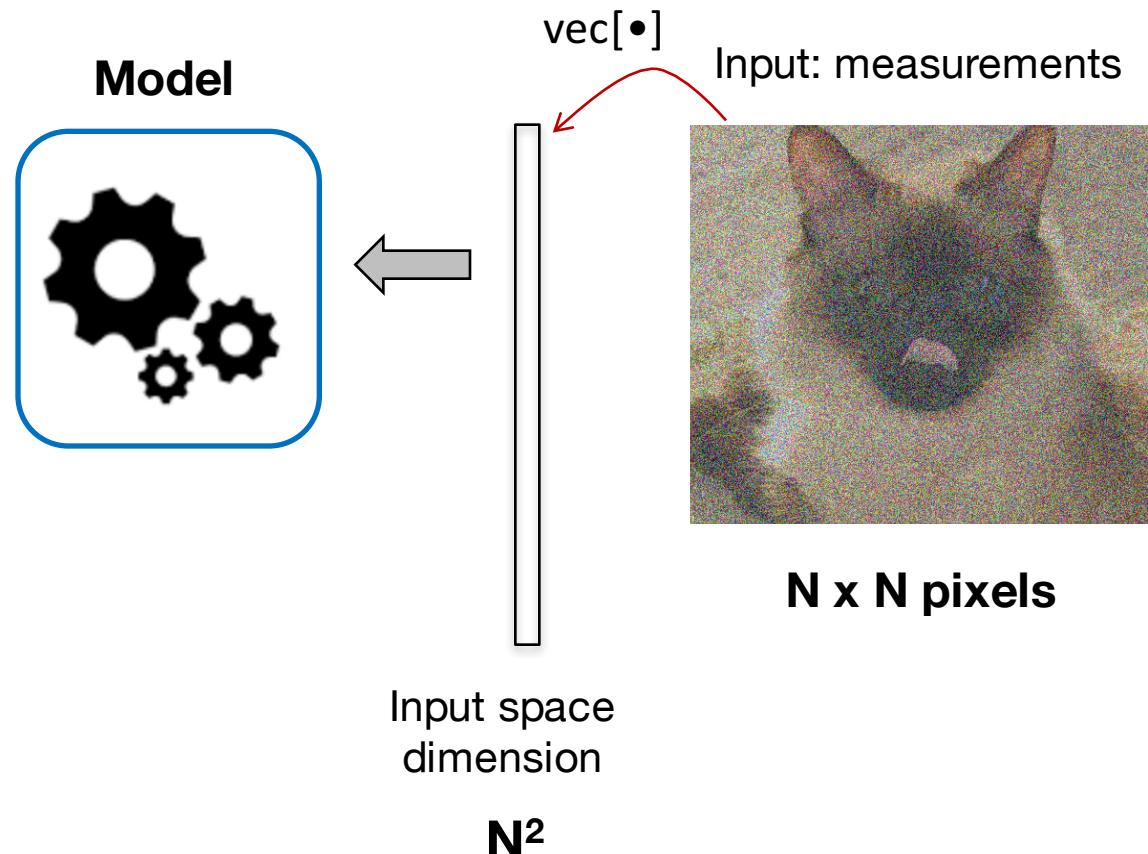
**Mathematical Optimization:** "Selection of a **best element** (with regard to some **criterion**) from **a set of available alternatives**"

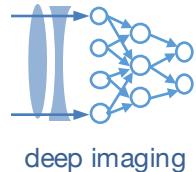
### 3 elements:

- 1) Your desired output (a better image, a clean signal, a classification of "cat" or "dog", etc.)
- 2) A model of what you are looking for - how you form the desired output from your measured data
- 3) A cost function, to measure how close you're getting to the answer (the cost function minimum)

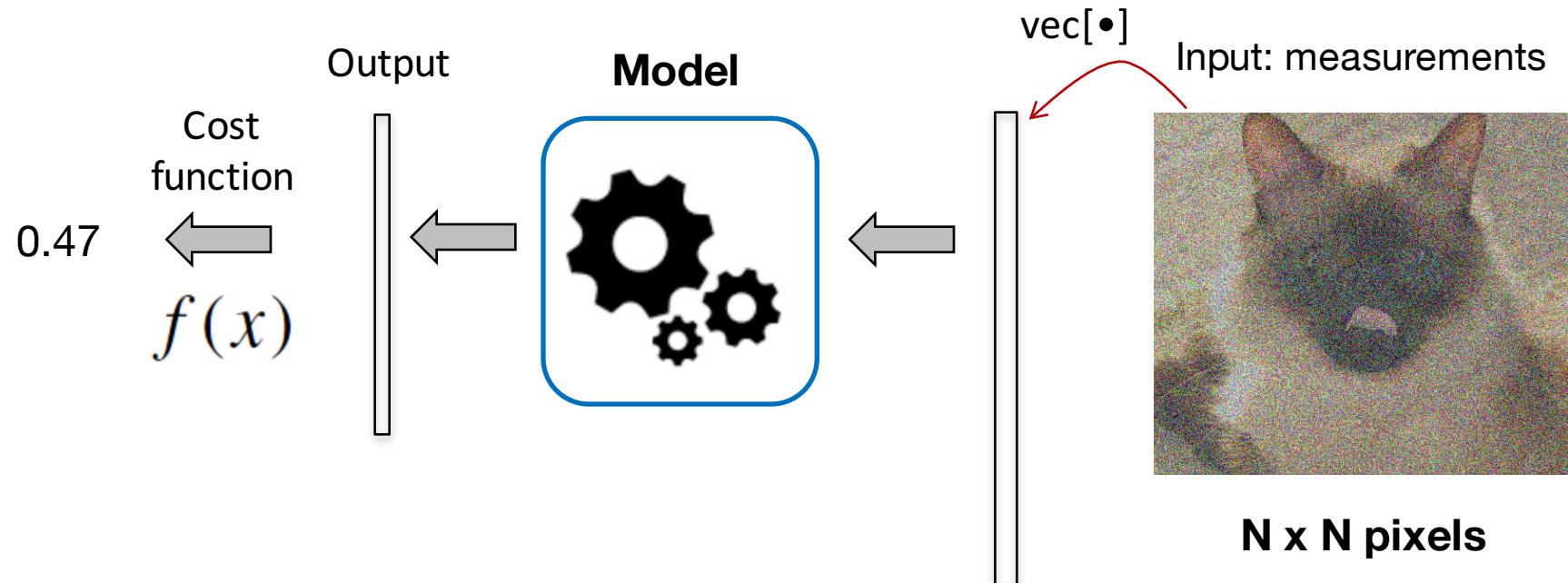


## Generalized optimization pipeline

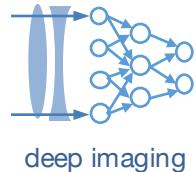




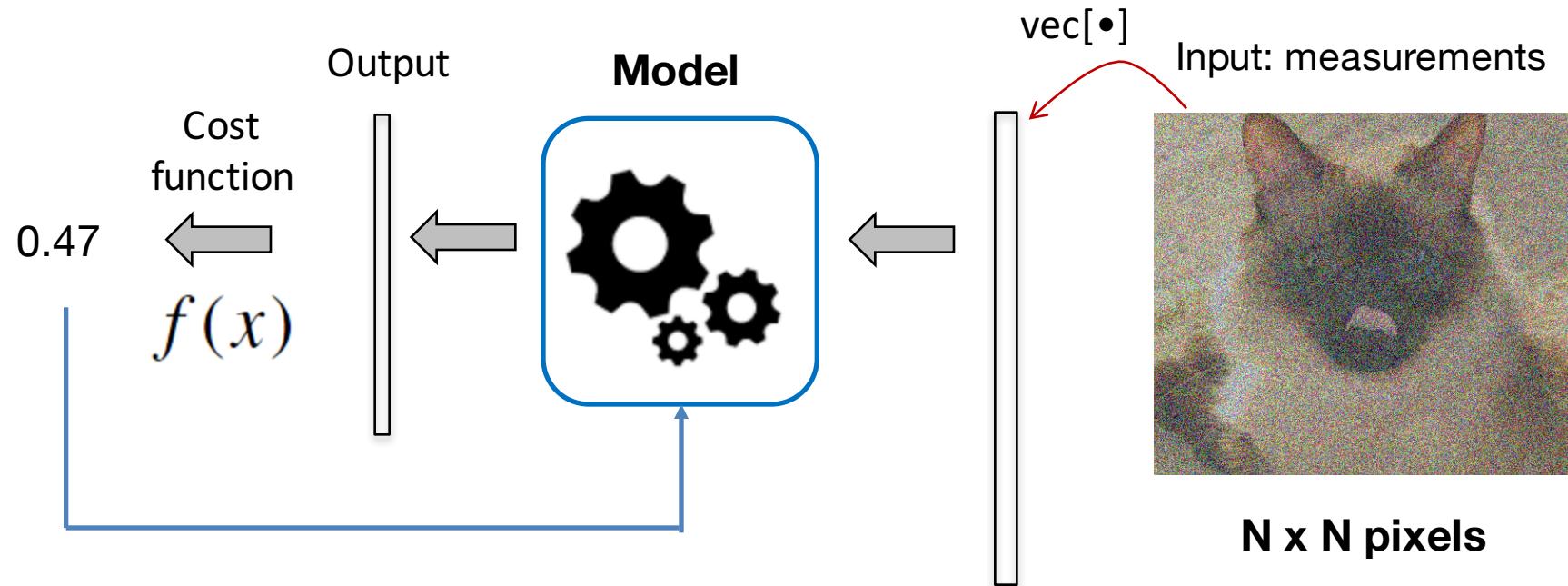
## Generalized optimization pipeline



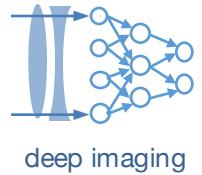
How well did  
we do?



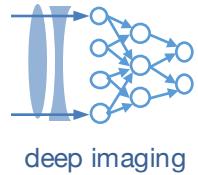
## Machine learning: update model to decrease error



How well did  
we do?



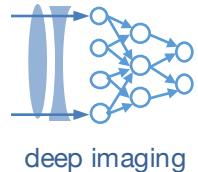
De-noising: "What is the closest image to what I detected, except without so many fluctuations"?



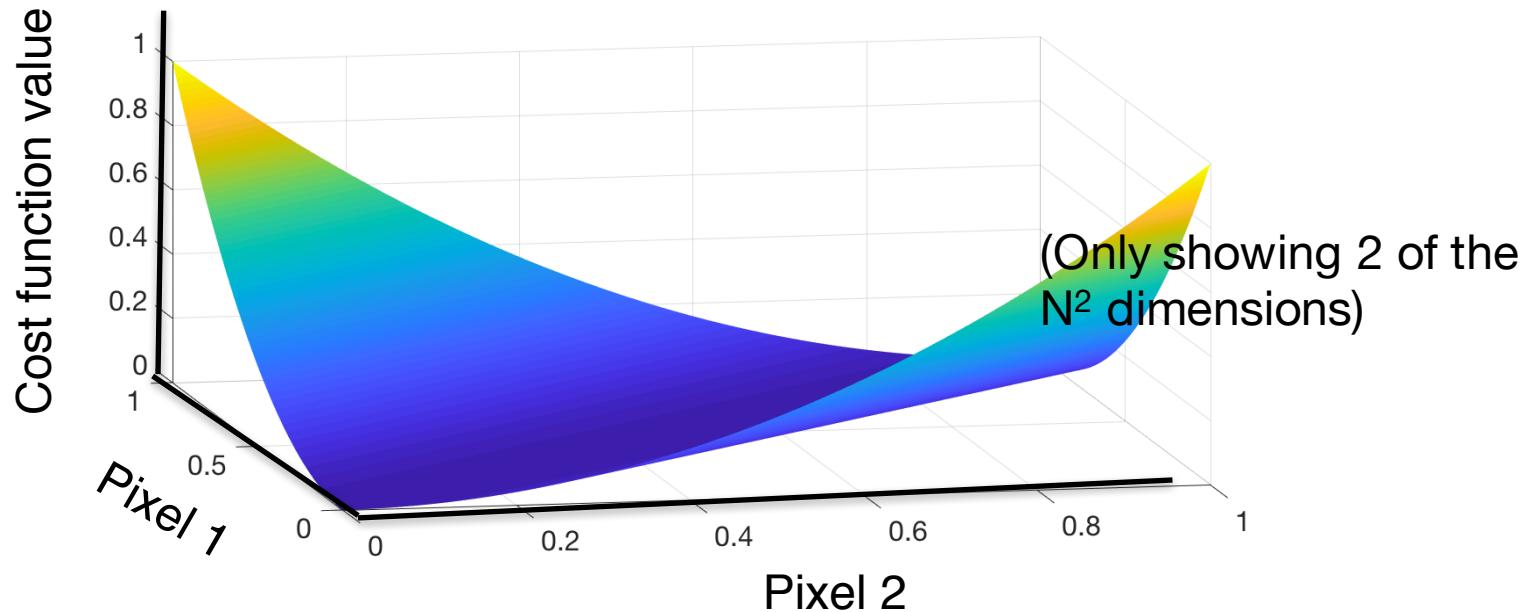
Input dimension:  $N \times N$  image

Output dimension:  $N \times N$  image

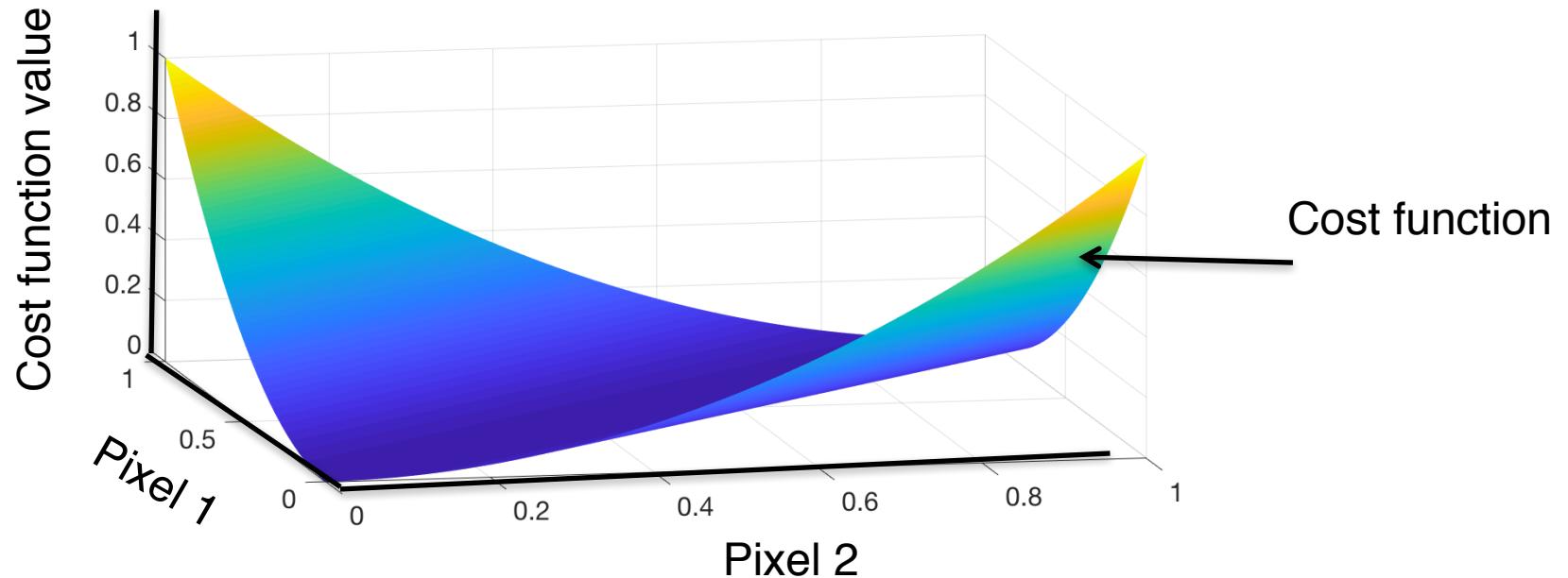
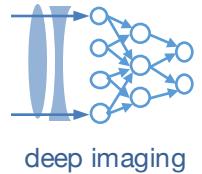
De-noising: "What is the closest image to what I detected, except without so many fluctuations"?



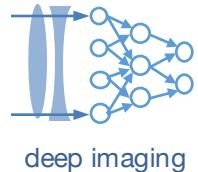
Cost function: "Don't let nearby pixels vary around too much"



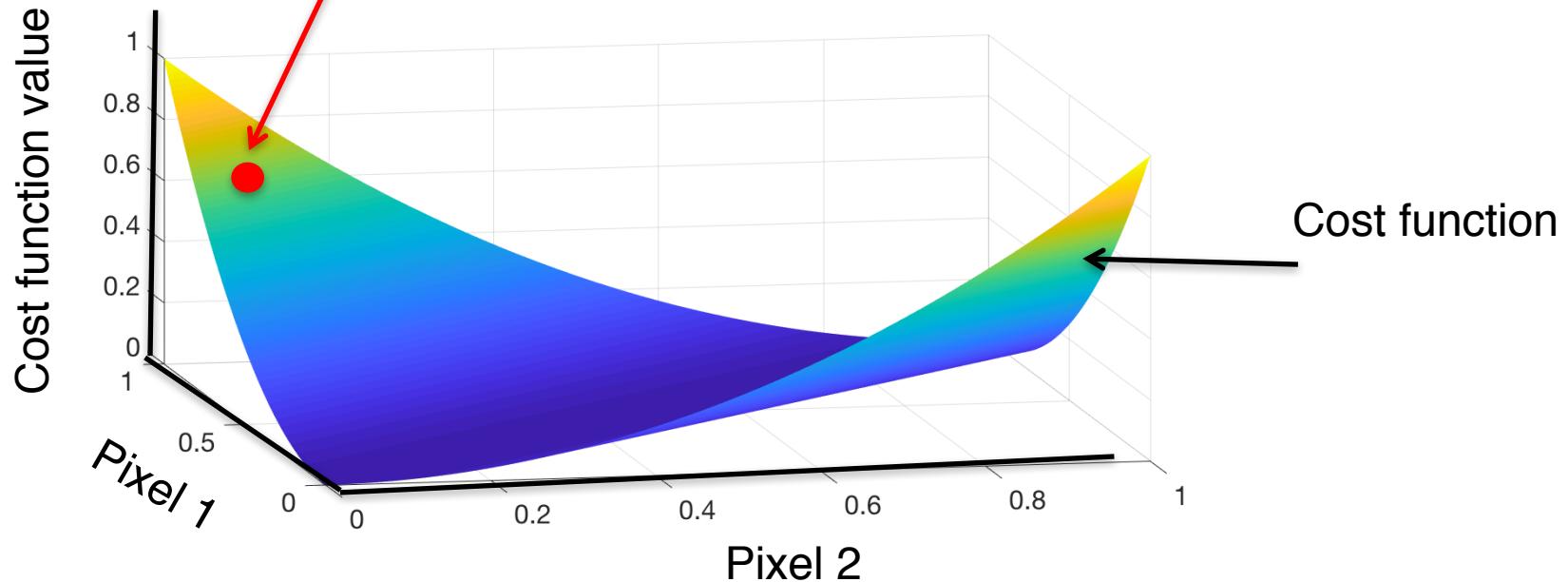
De-noising: "What is the closest image to what I detected, except without so many fluctuations"?



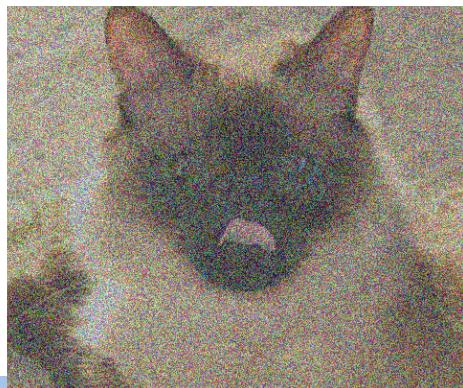
De-noising: "What is the closest image to what I detected, except without so many fluctuations"?



Start with a guess

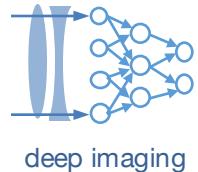


Noisy image

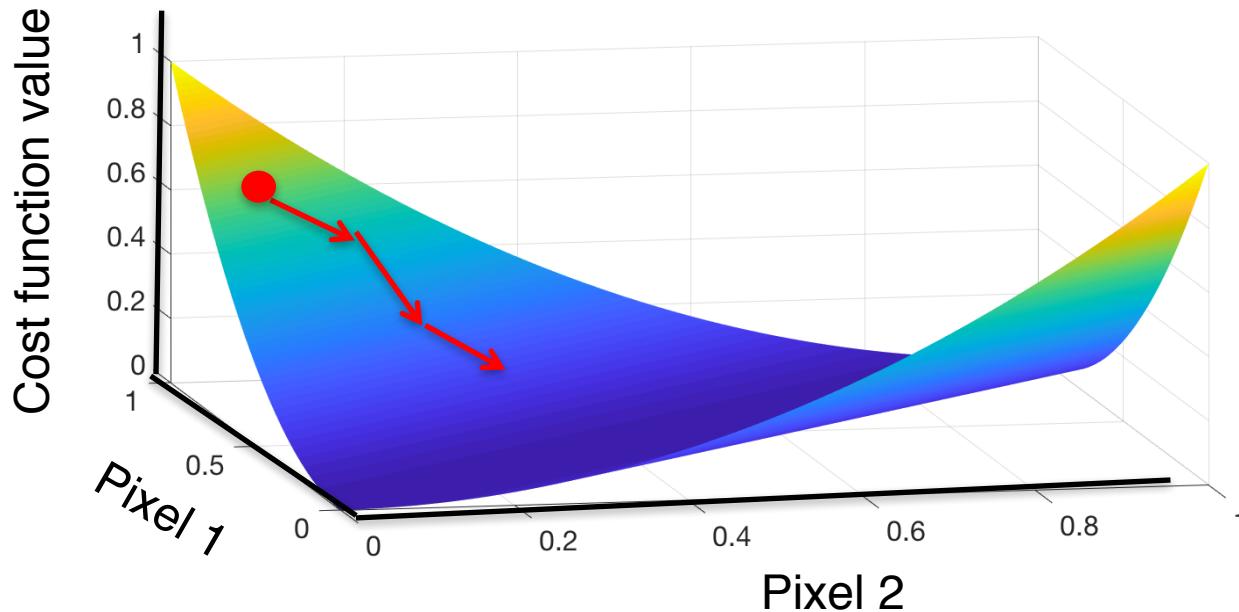


Pixel value 1  
Pixel value 2

:

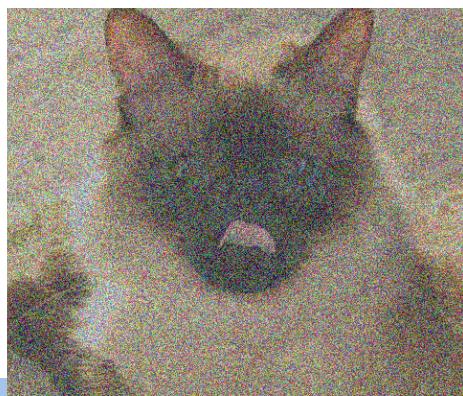


"Descend" to minimize cost function  
(tweak values of each pixel)

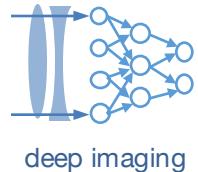


Note: This part  
computers are  
really good at!

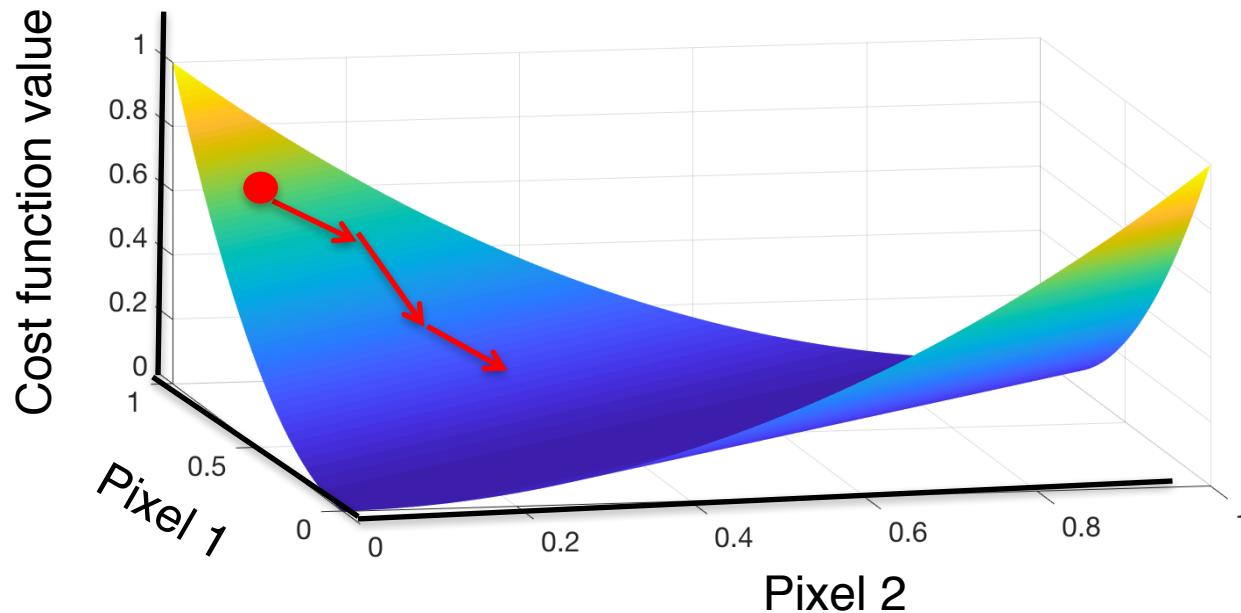
Noisy image



Pixel value 1  
Pixel value 2  
⋮

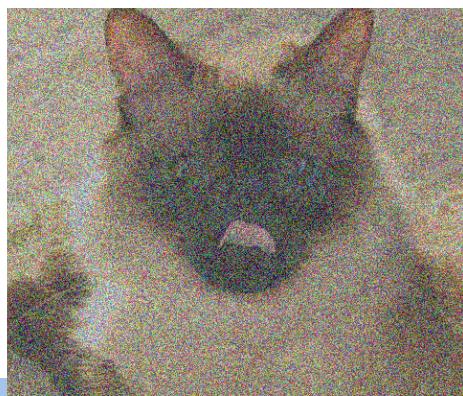


"Descend" to minimize cost function  
(tweak values of each pixel)



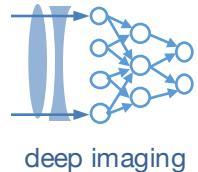
Note: This part  
computers are  
really good at!

Noisy image

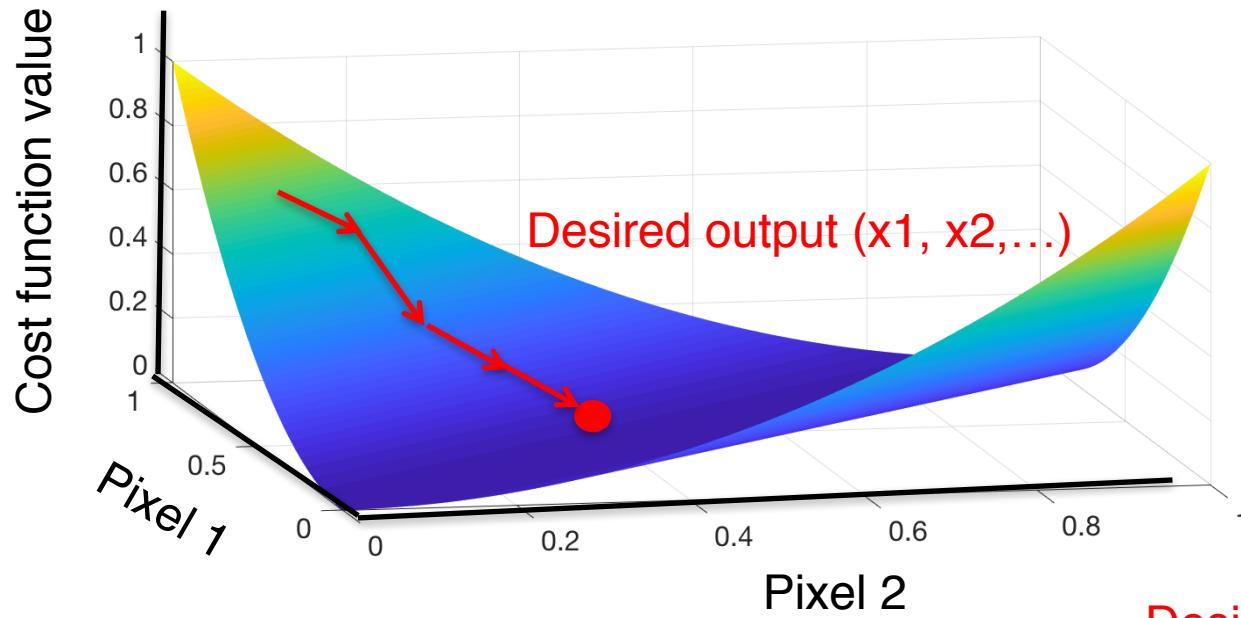


Pixel value 1  
Pixel value 2

:

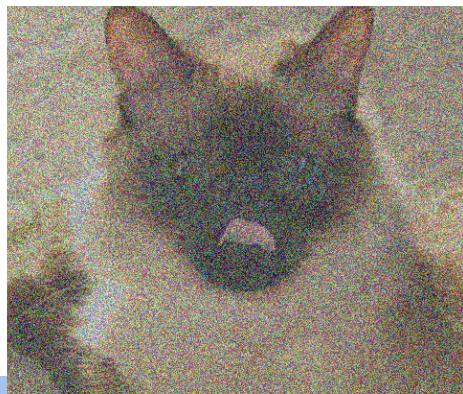


"Descend" to minimize cost function  
(tweak values of each pixel)



Note: This part  
computers are  
really good at!

Noisy image



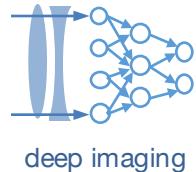
Pixel value 1  
Pixel value 2  
⋮



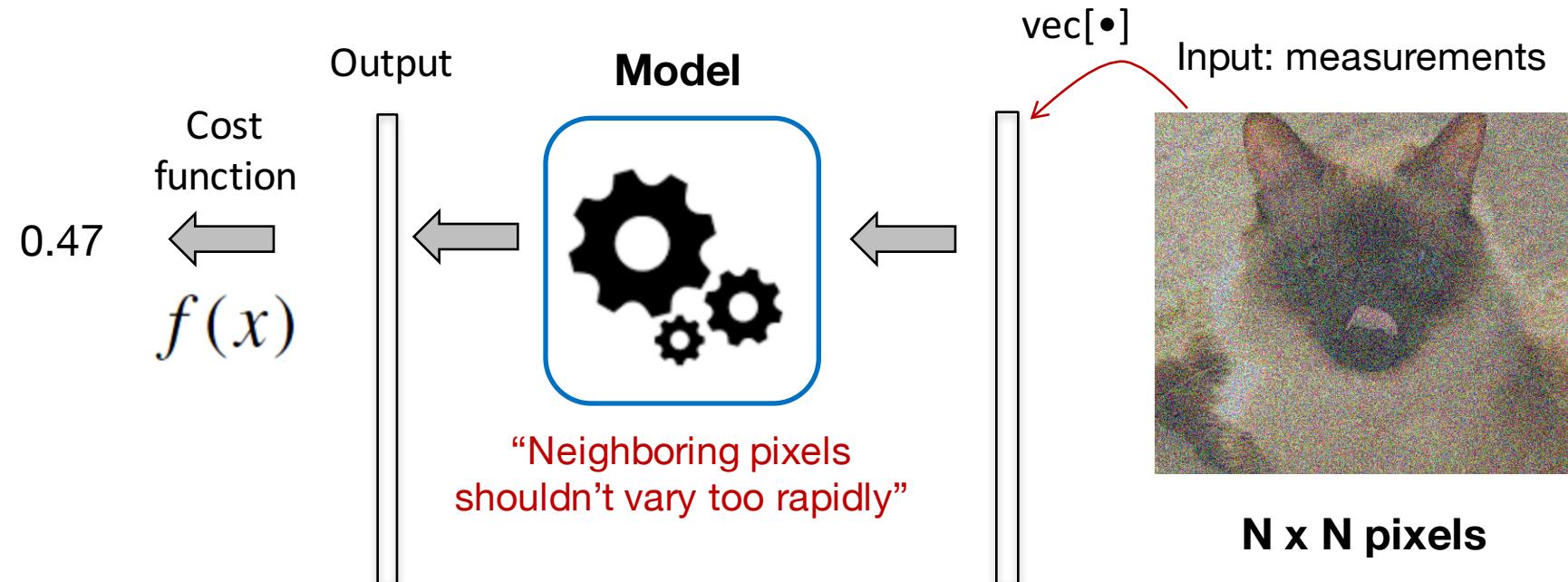
Desired output



$x_1$   
 $x_2$   
⋮



## Optimization pipeline for denoising



Performance measure

Mean-squared error

Output space dimension  $N^2$



Input space dimension  $N^2$

$N \times N \text{ pixels}$

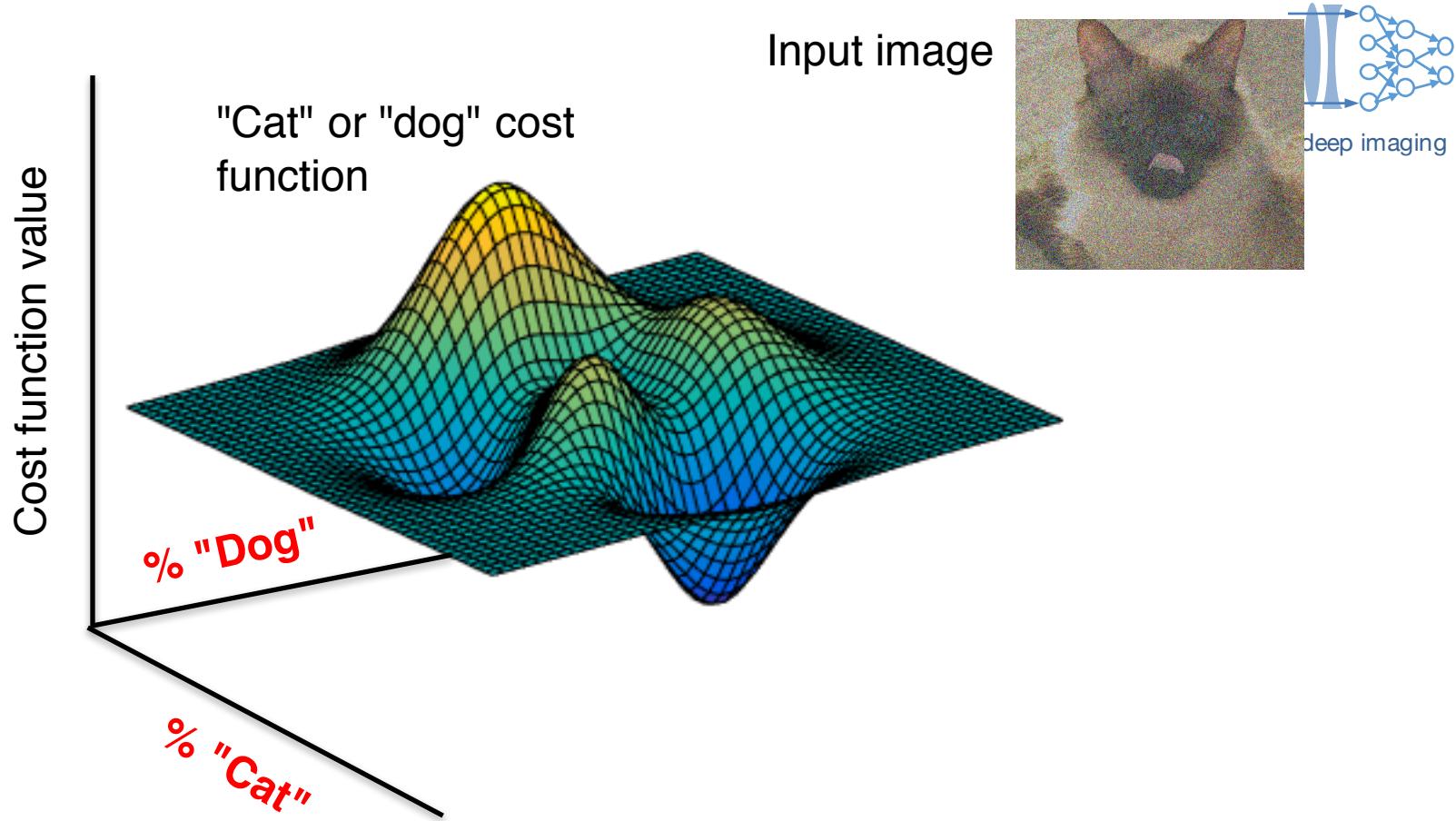
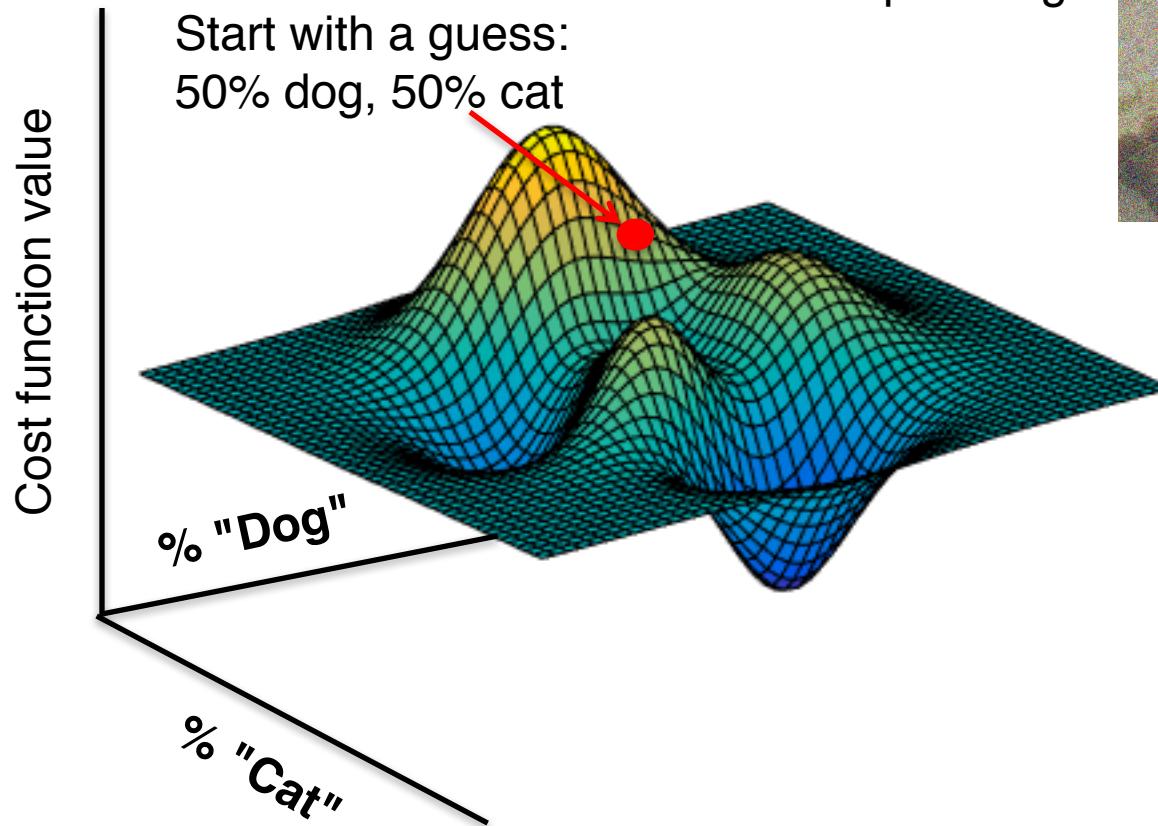
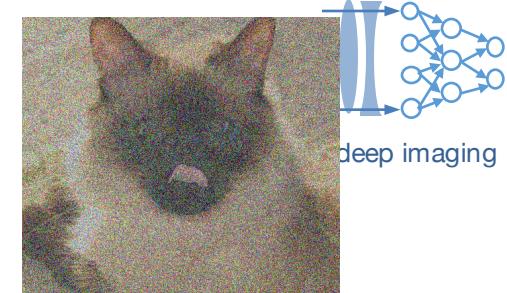
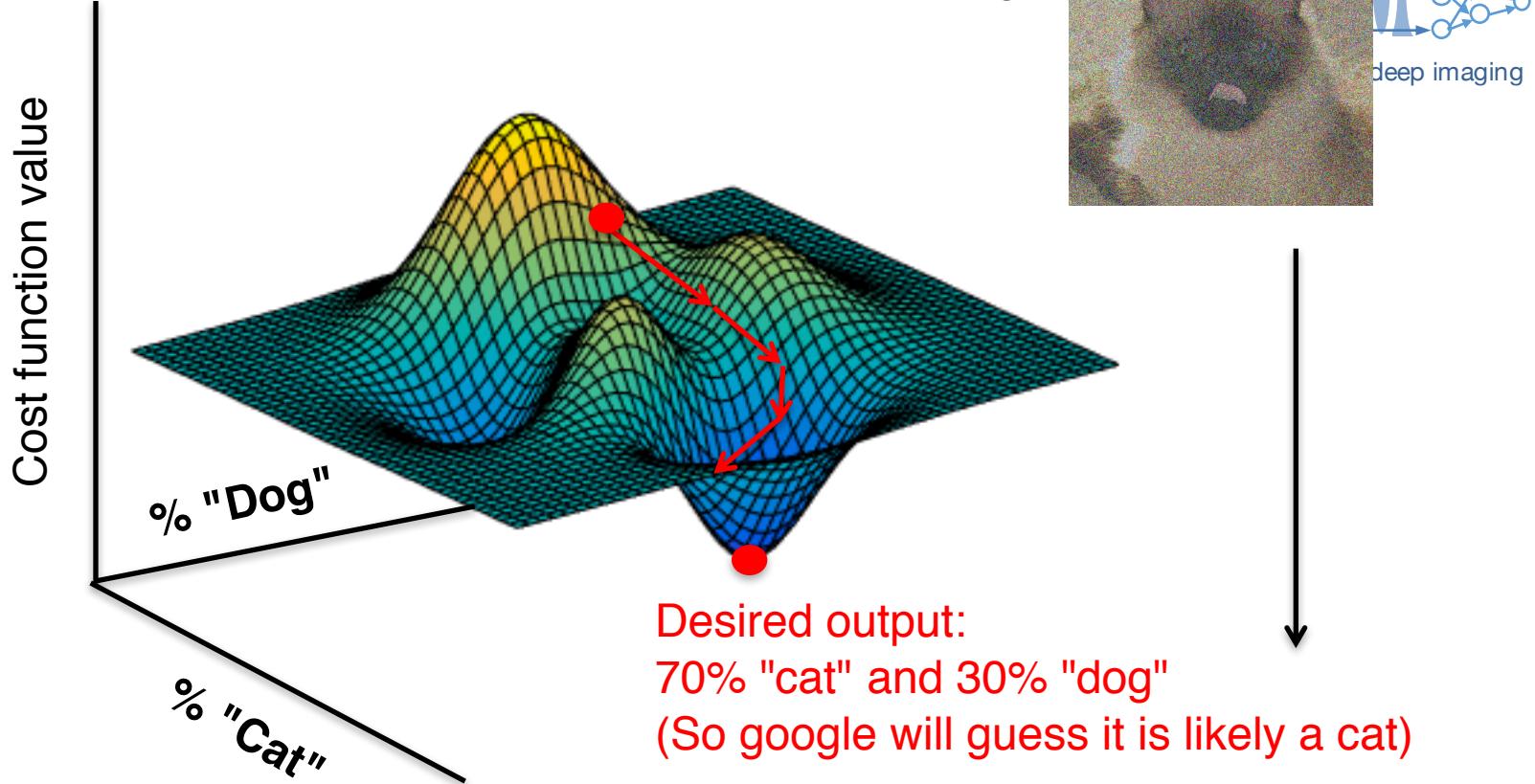


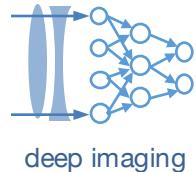
Image Classification: "Is the image of a dog or a cat"?



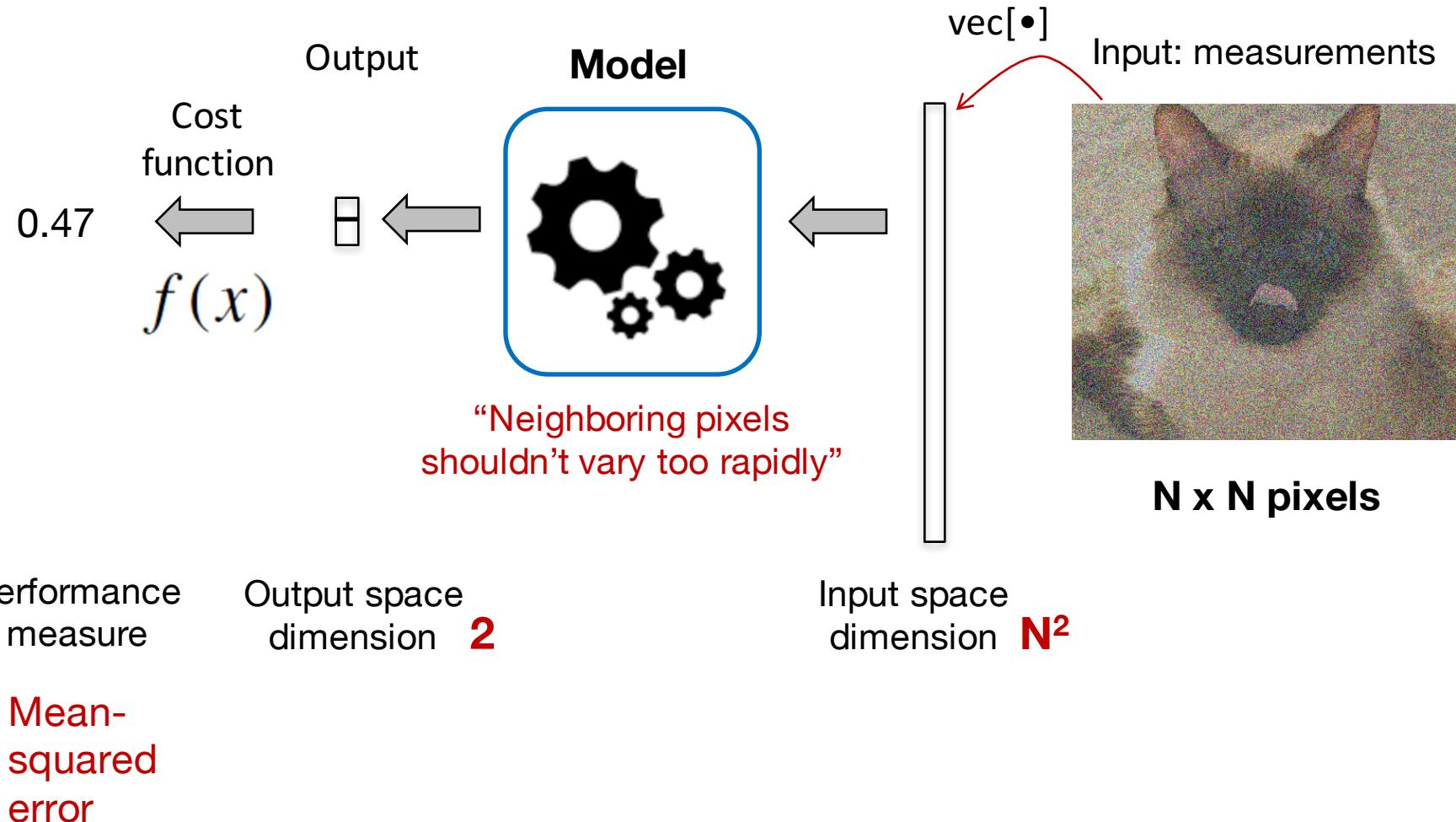
Input image

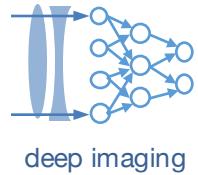






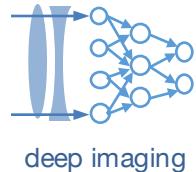
## Optimization pipeline for classification





## A simple example: spectral unmixing

(For whatever reason, whenever I get confused about optimization, I think about this example...it's a good one)

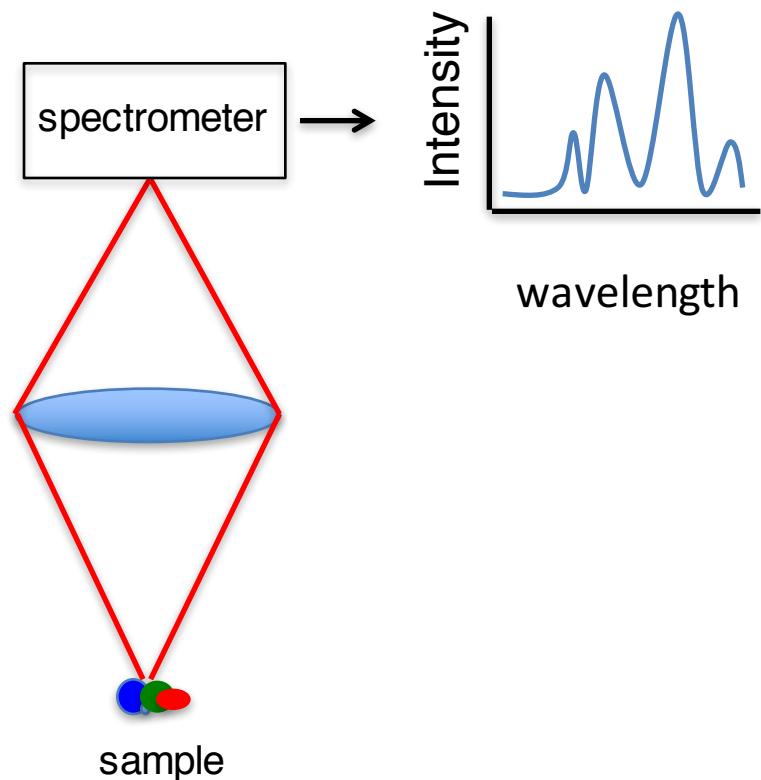


# A simple example: spectral unmixing

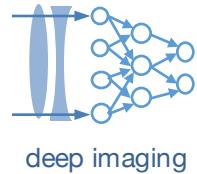
(For whatever reason, whenever I get confused about optimization, I think about this example...it's a good one)

## The setup:

- measure the color (spectral) response of a sample (e.g., how much red, green and blue there is, or several hundred measurements of its different colors).
- You know that the sample can only contain 9 different fluorophores.
- What % of each fluorophores is in your sample?

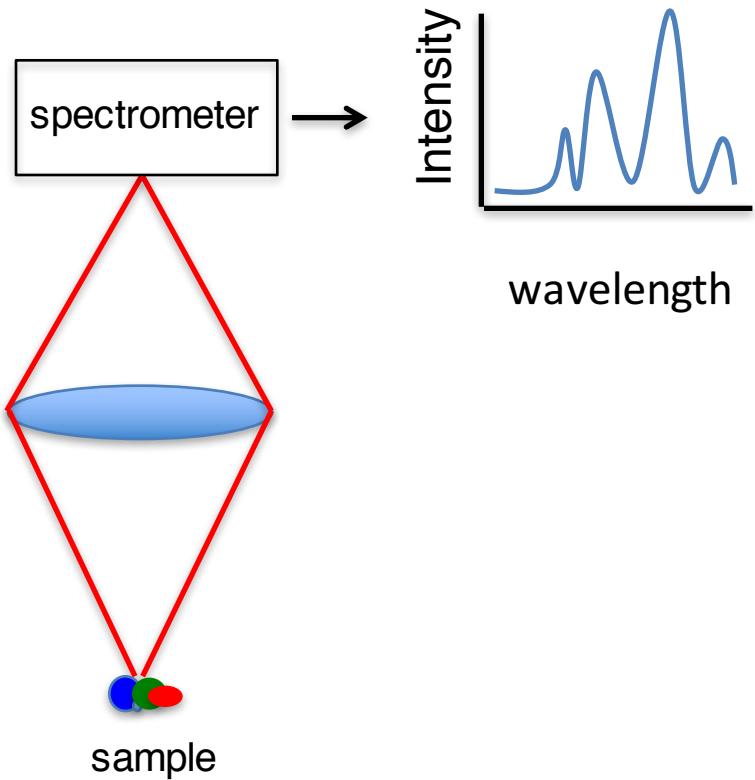


# A simple example: spectral unmixing



## 3 elements of optimization:

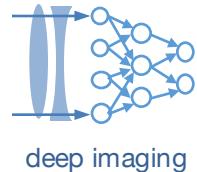
1) Desired output



2) The model

3) The cost function

# A simple example: spectral unmixing



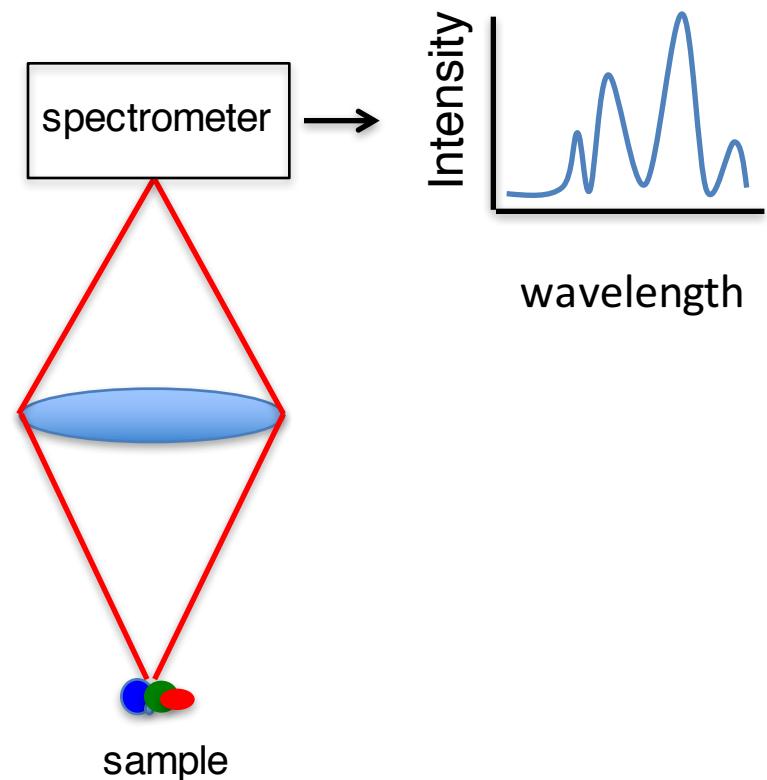
## 3 elements of optimization:

1) Desired output

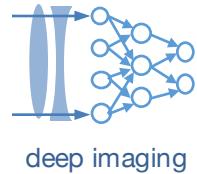
What % of each of the 9 fluorophores

2) The model

3) The cost function



# A simple example: spectral unmixing



## 3 elements of optimization:

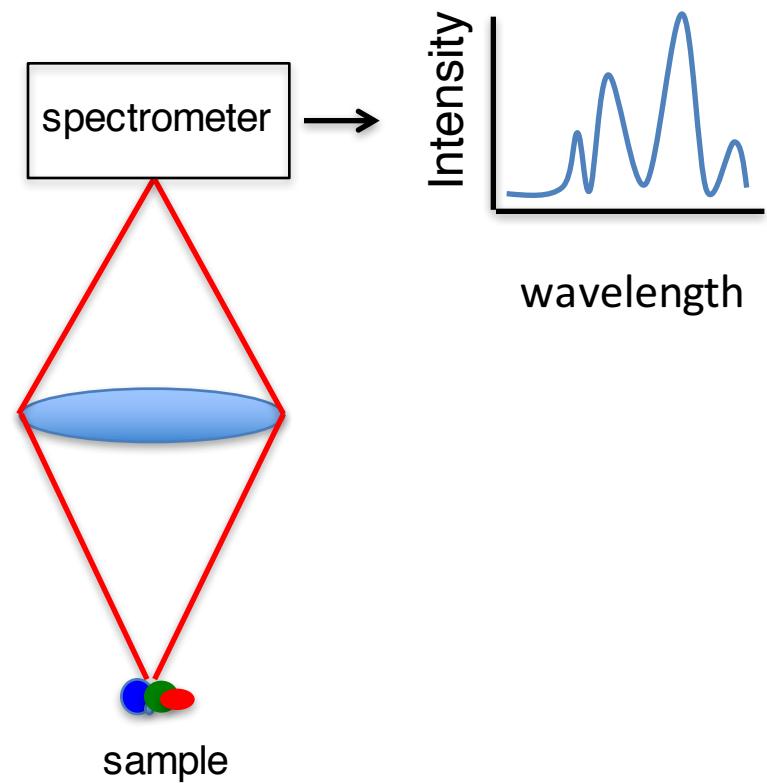
1) Desired output

What % of each of the 9 fluorophores

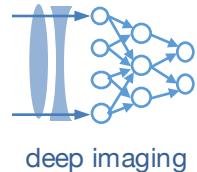
2) The model

"Dictionary" of the 9 different spectra

3) The cost function



# A simple example: spectral unmixing



## 3 elements of optimization:

1) Desired output

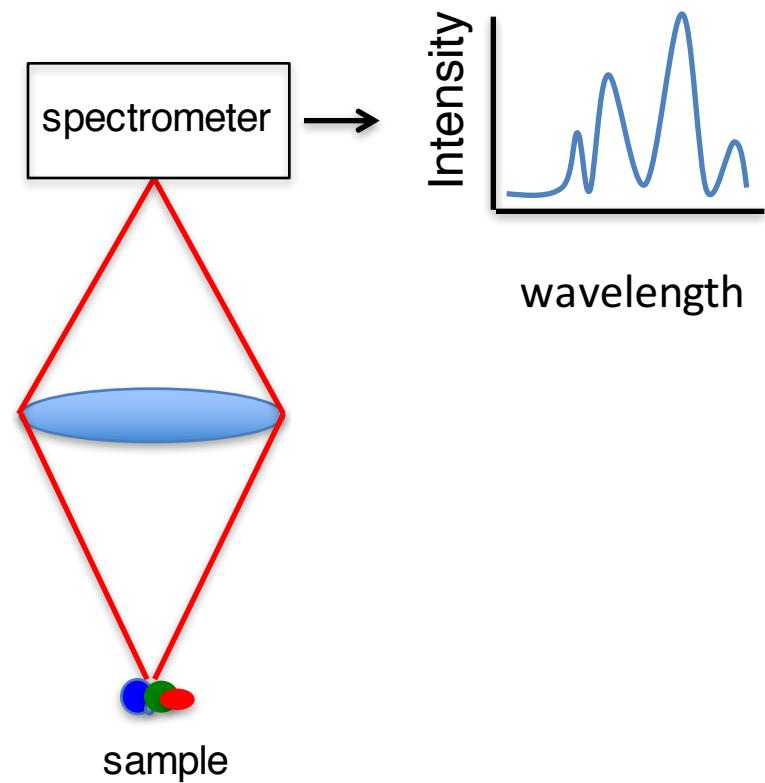
What % of each of the 9 fluorophores

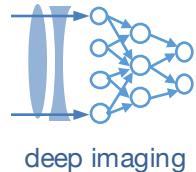
2) The model

"Dictionary" of the 9 different spectra

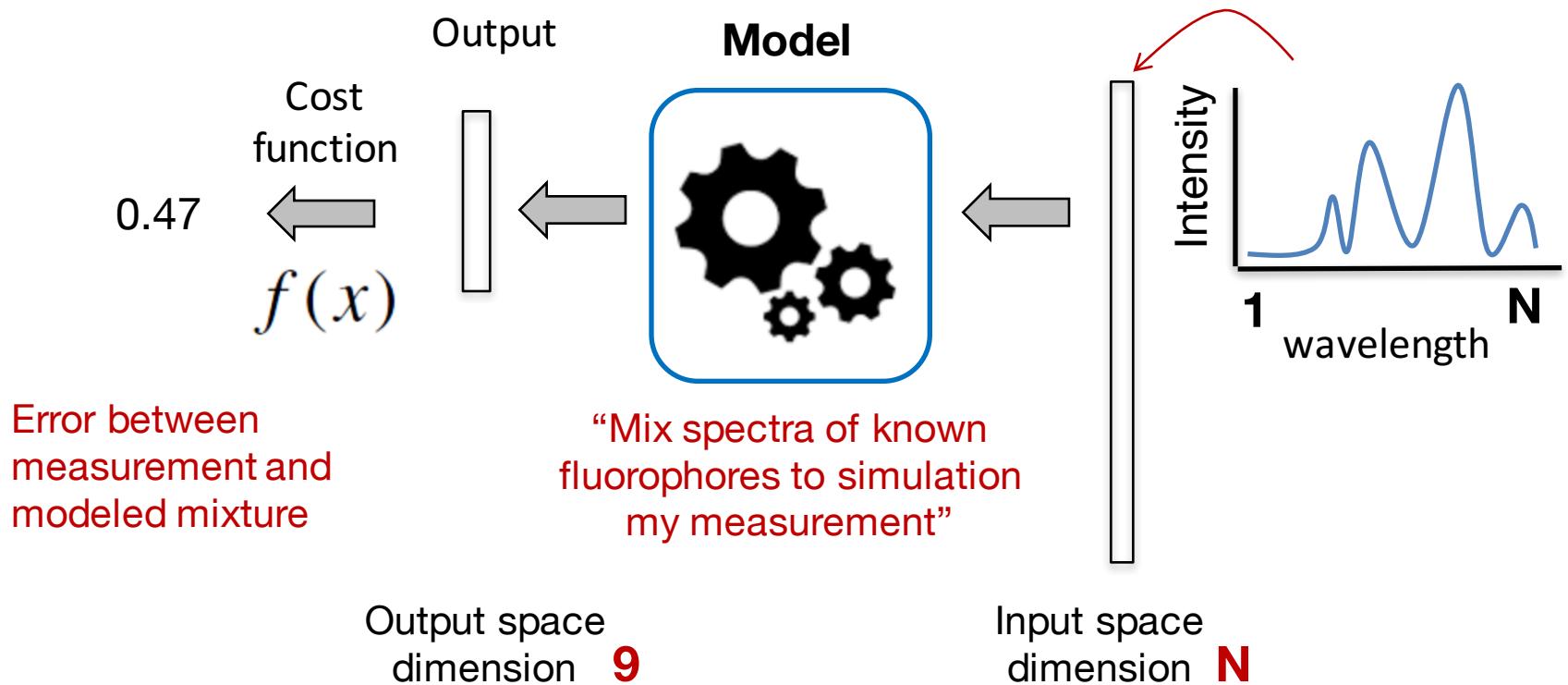
3) The cost function

Minimum mean squared error (to start)



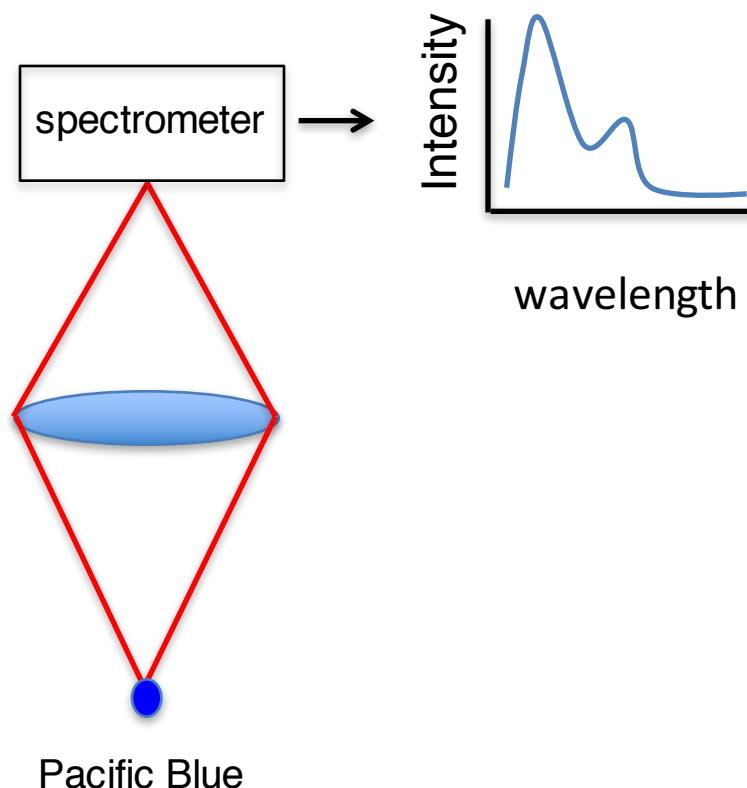


## Optimization pipeline for spectral unmixing



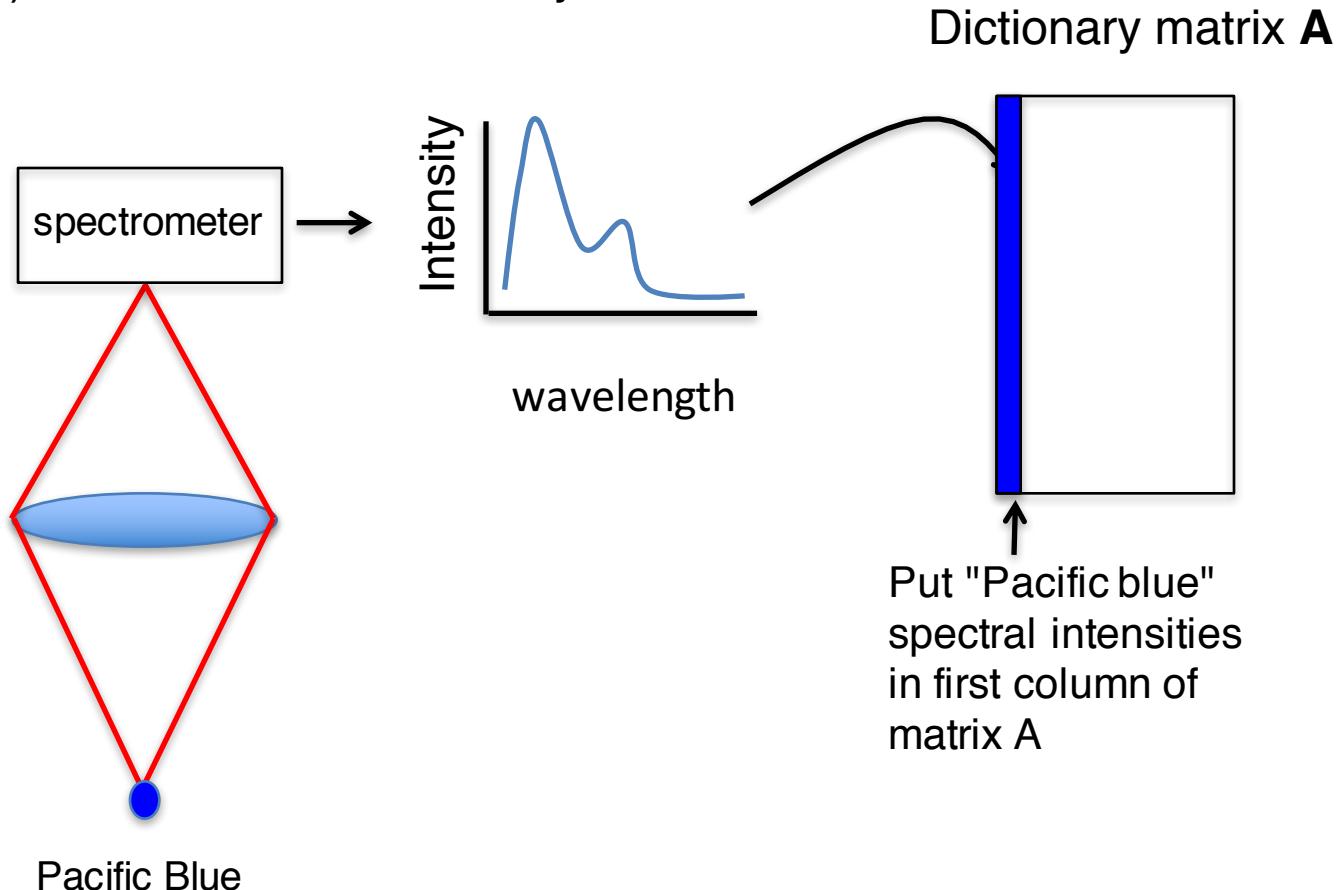
# Mathematical model for spectral unmixing

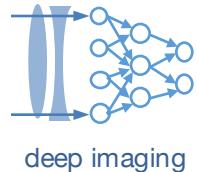
a) First make the "dictionary":



# Mathematical model for spectral unmixing

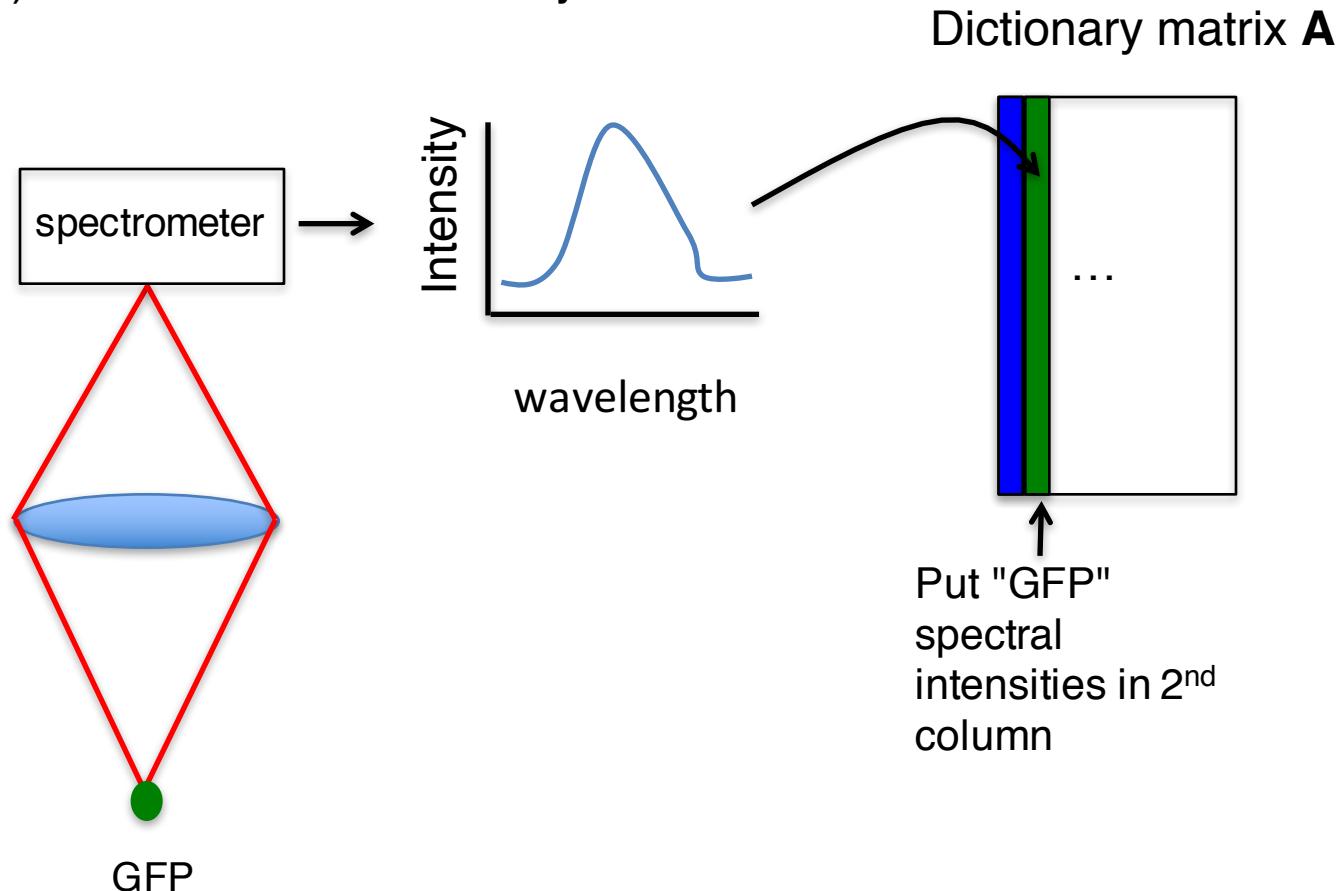
a) First make the "dictionary":

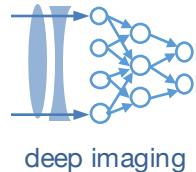




# Mathematical model for spectral unmixing

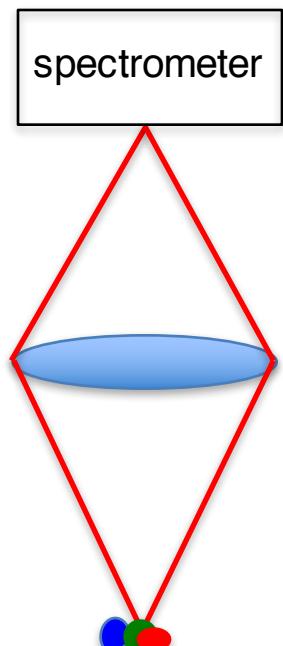
a) First make the "dictionary":





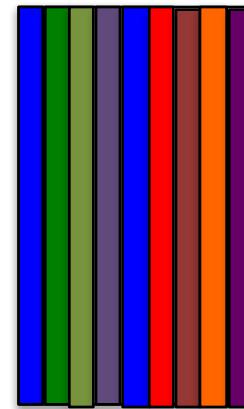
# Mathematical model for spectral unmixing

b) Model the unknown sample %'s  
(the desired output)



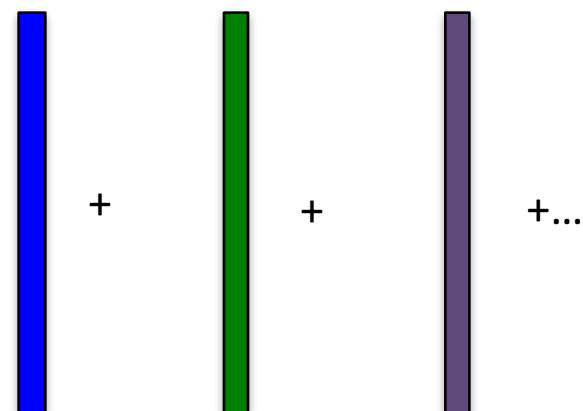
**Unknown sample  $y$**

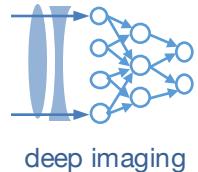
Dictionary matrix  $A$



9 possible spectra

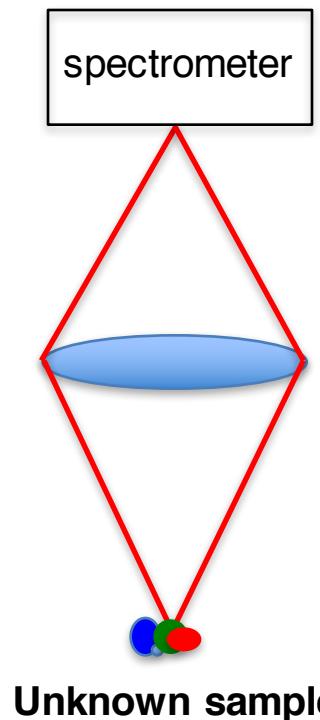
Some mixture...





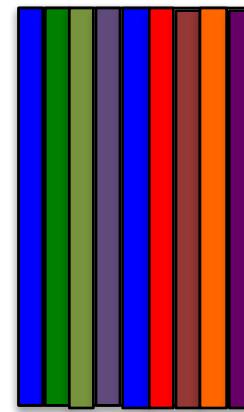
# Mathematical model for spectral unmixing

b) Model the unknown sample %'s  
(the desired output)

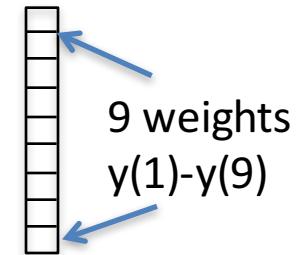


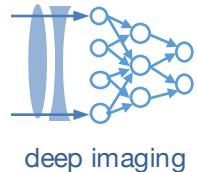
Each weight  
in  $x$  is  
percentage:

Dictionary matrix  $A$   
Unknown  
sample %'s  $y$



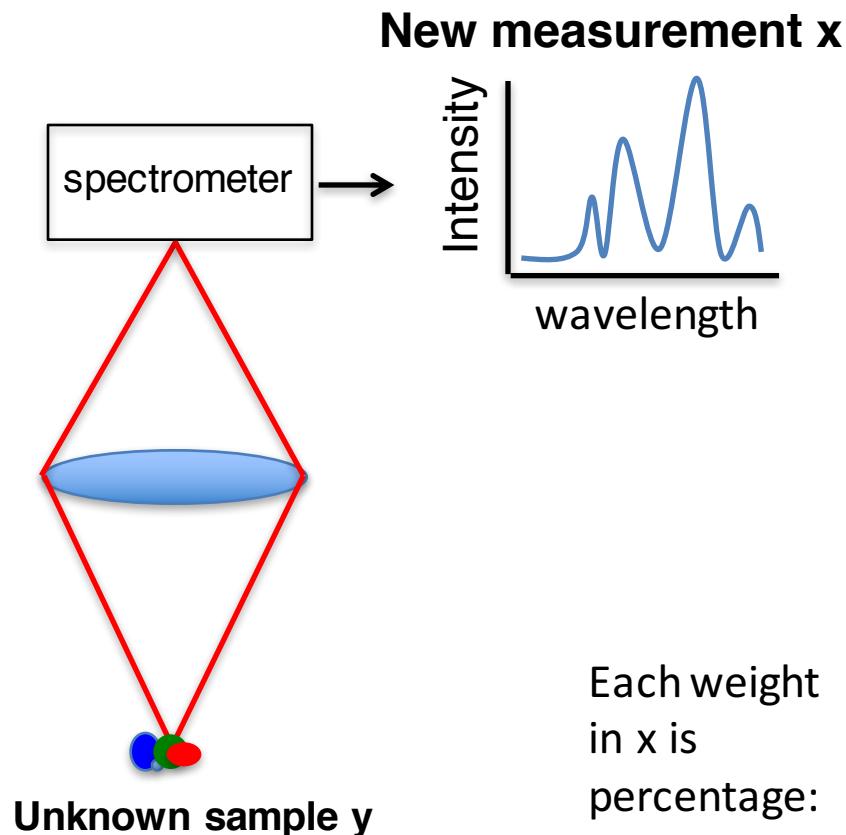
$$y(1) + y(2) + y(3) + \dots$$





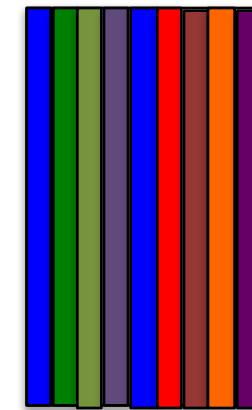
# Mathematical model for spectral unmixing

b) Model the unknown sample %'s

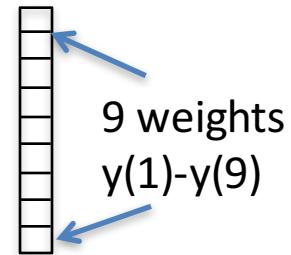
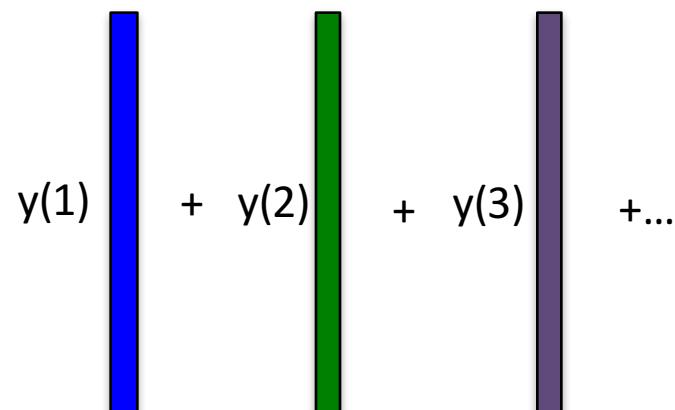


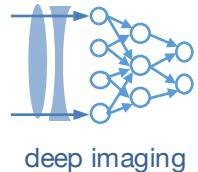
Dictionary matrix **A**

Unknown sample %'s **y**

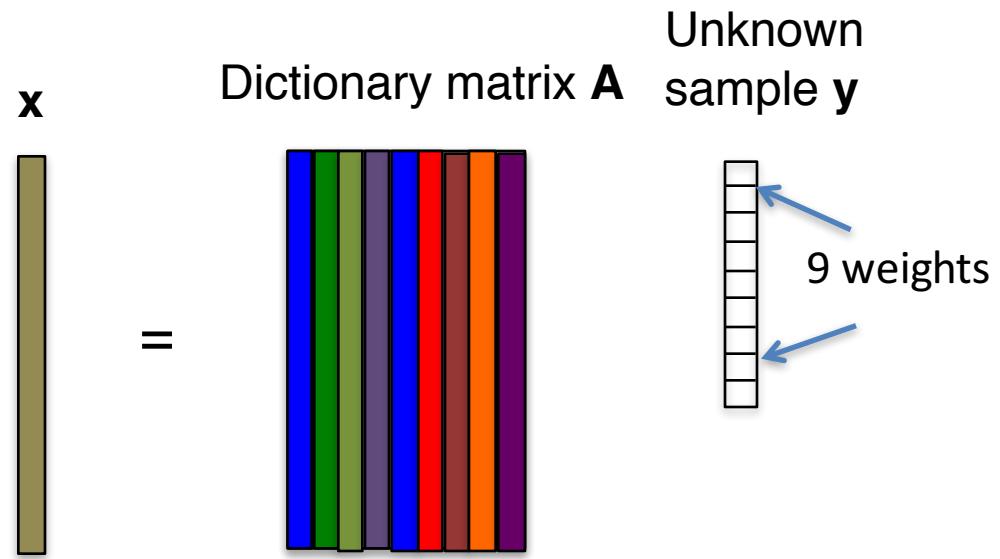
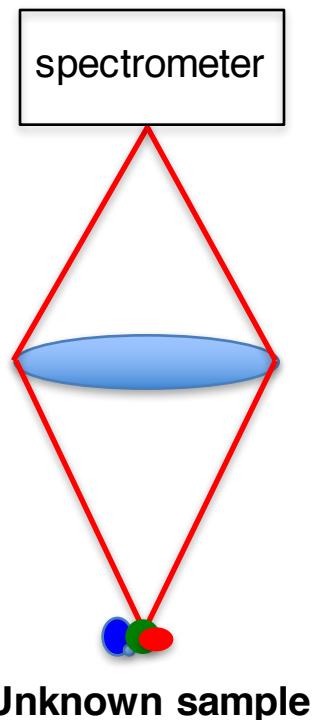


9 possible spectra





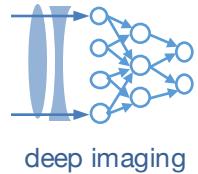
# Mathematical model for spectral unmixing



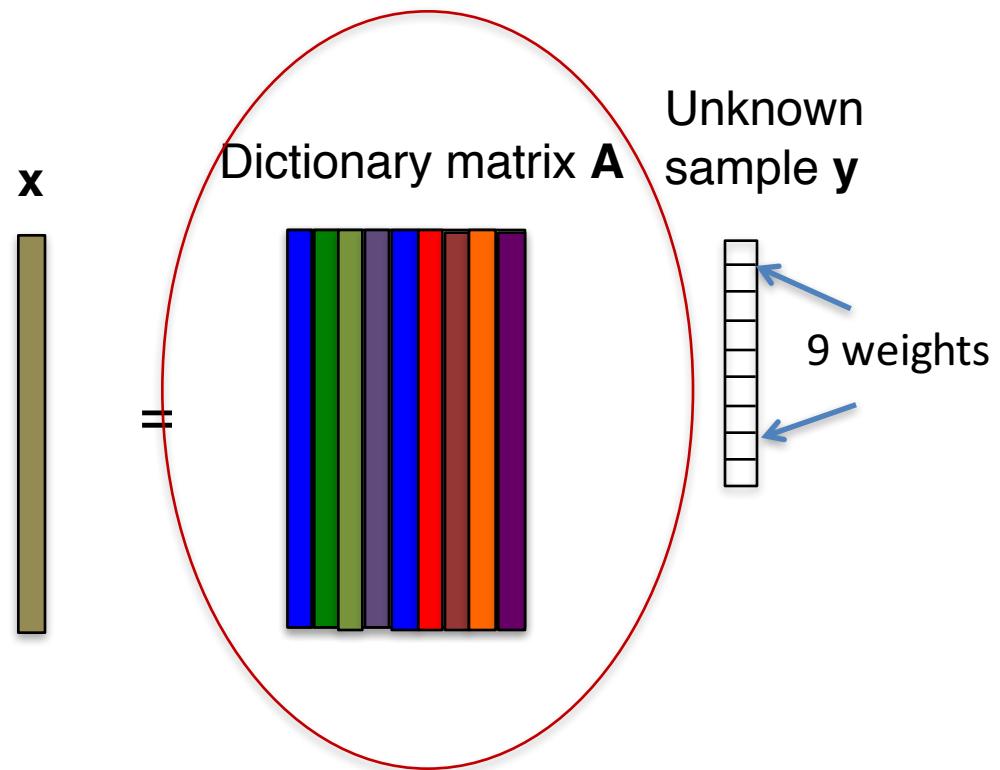
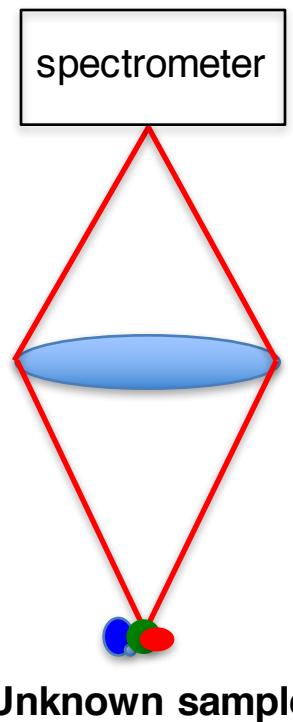
Matrix equation:  $x = Ay$

This is your model!

Goal: Given  $A$  and  $x$ , find  $y$

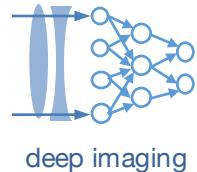


# Mathematical model for spectral unmixing



Data in **A** can be thought of , in some sense, as “training data”

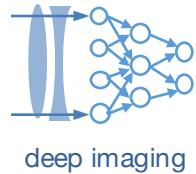
# Cost function for spectral unmixing



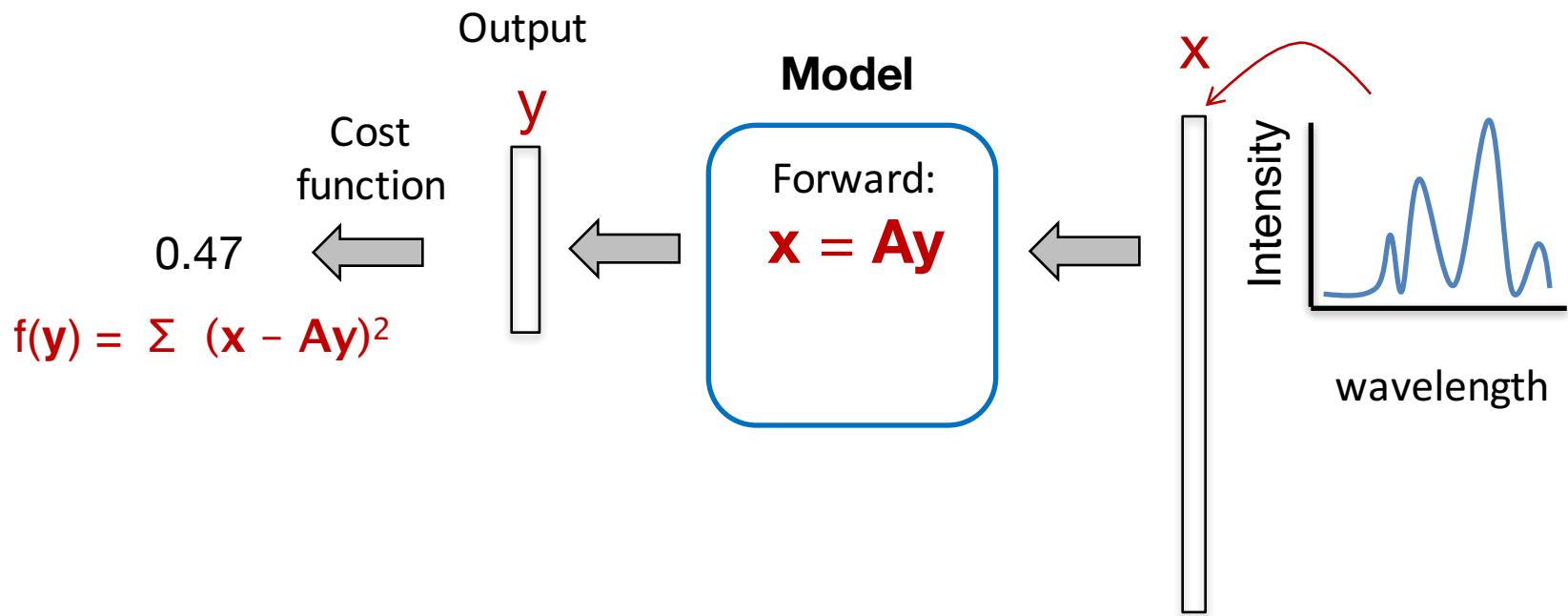
$\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{Ay}$  won't always be true, due to noise (actually,  $\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{Ay} + \mathbf{n}$ )

Common cost function is minimum mean-squared error:

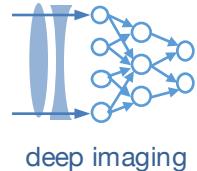
$$\text{Cost function } f(\mathbf{y}) = \sum_{\text{spectral measurements}} (\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{Ay})^2$$



## Optimization pipeline for denoising



# Cost function for spectral unmixing



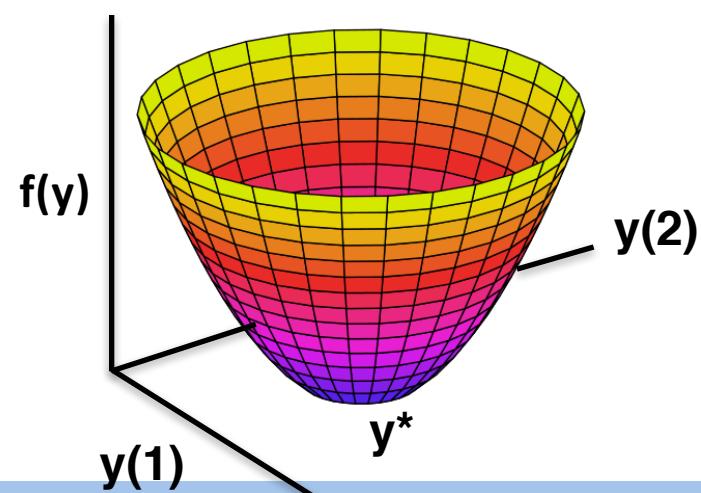
$\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{A}\mathbf{y}$  won't always be true, due to noise (actually,  $\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{A}\mathbf{y} + \mathbf{n}$ )

Common cost function is minimum mean-squared error:

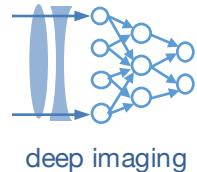
$$\text{Cost function } f(\mathbf{y}) = \sum_{\text{spectral measurements}} (\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{A}\mathbf{y})^2$$

Find mixture  $\mathbf{y}$  of known spectra  $\mathbf{A}$  that is as close as possible to measurement  $\mathbf{x}$

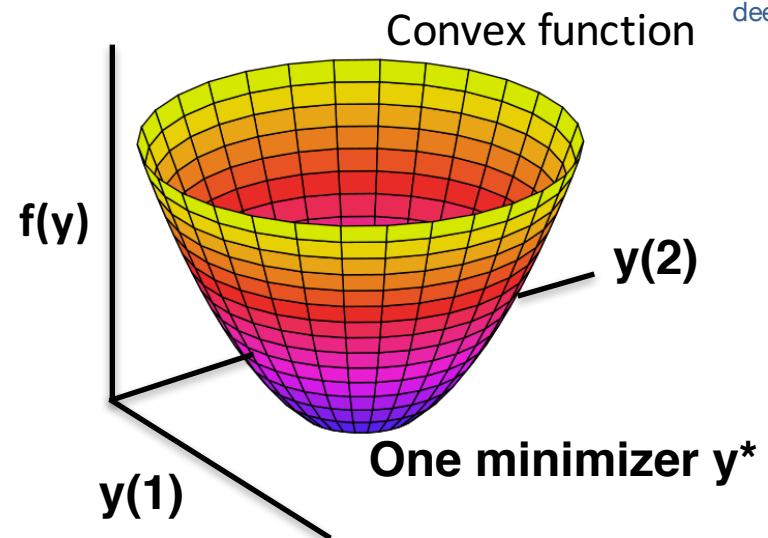
$$\mathbf{y}^* = \text{minimize } f(\mathbf{y})$$



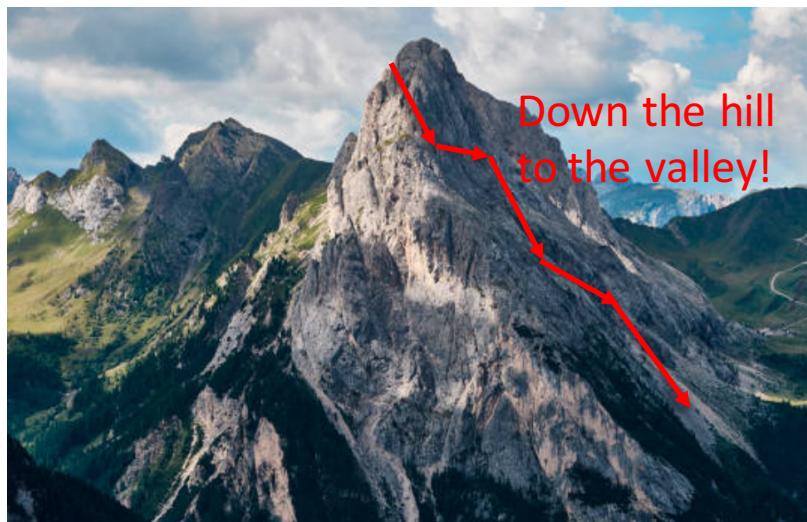
# Cost function for spectral unmixing



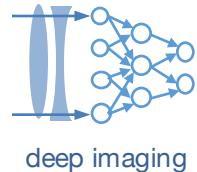
$$f(\mathbf{y}) = \sum_{\text{spectral measurements}} (\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{A}\mathbf{y})^2$$



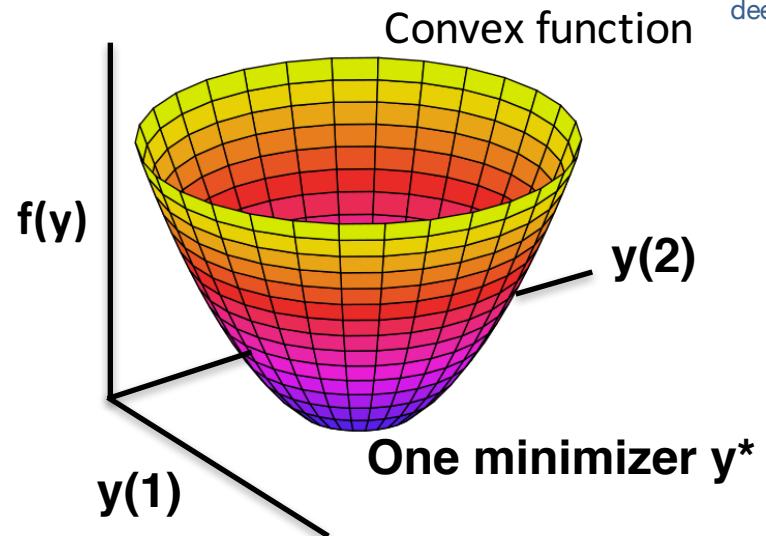
$f(\mathbf{y})$  is convex, so finding  $\mathbf{y}^*$  is easy via its gradient:



# Cost function for spectral unmixing



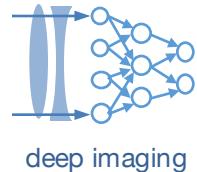
$$f(\mathbf{y}) = \sum_{\text{spectral measurements}} (\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{A}\mathbf{y})^2$$



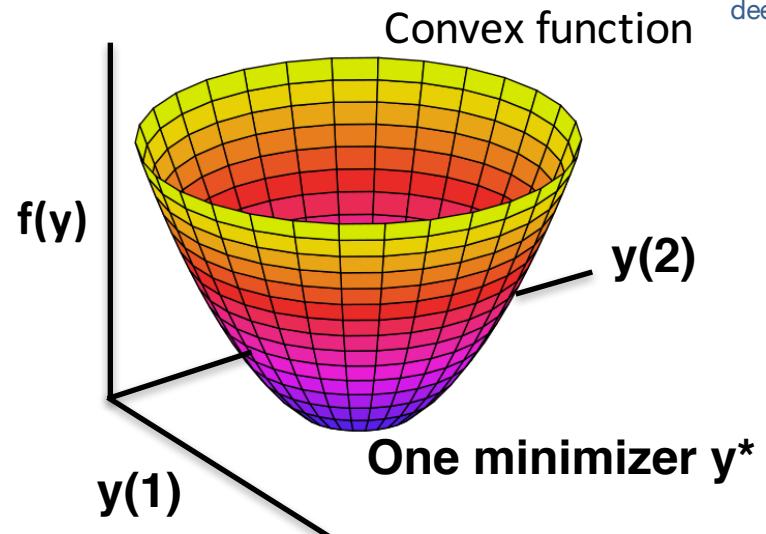
$f(\mathbf{x})$  is convex, so finding  $\mathbf{x}^*$  is easy via its gradient:

$$\frac{d}{d\mathbf{y}} f(\mathbf{y}) = \frac{d}{d\mathbf{y}} \sum (\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{A}\mathbf{y})^2$$

# Cost function for spectral unmixing



$$f(\mathbf{y}) = \sum_{\text{spectral measurements}} (\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{A}\mathbf{y})^2$$

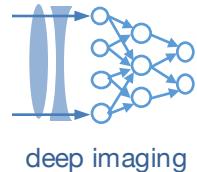


$f(\mathbf{x})$  is convex, so finding  $\mathbf{x}^*$  is easy via its gradient:

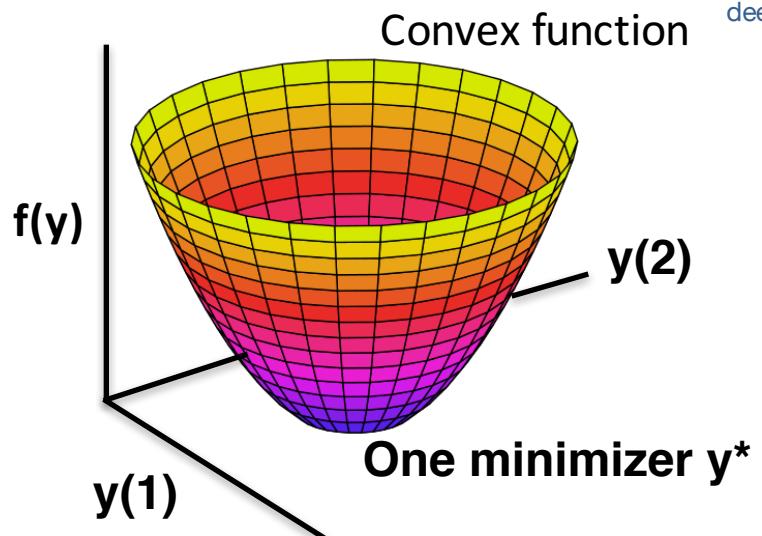
$$\frac{d}{d\mathbf{y}} f(\mathbf{y}) = \frac{d}{d\mathbf{y}} \sum (\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{A}\mathbf{y})^2$$

$$df/d\mathbf{y} = \sum d/d\mathbf{y} (\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{A}\mathbf{y})^2$$

# Cost function for spectral unmixing



$$f(\mathbf{y}) = \sum_{\text{spectral measurements}} (\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{A}\mathbf{y})^2$$



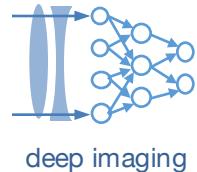
$f(\mathbf{x})$  is convex, so finding  $\mathbf{x}^*$  is easy via its gradient:

$$\frac{d}{d\mathbf{y}} f(\mathbf{y}) = \frac{d}{d\mathbf{y}} \sum (\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{A}\mathbf{y})^2$$

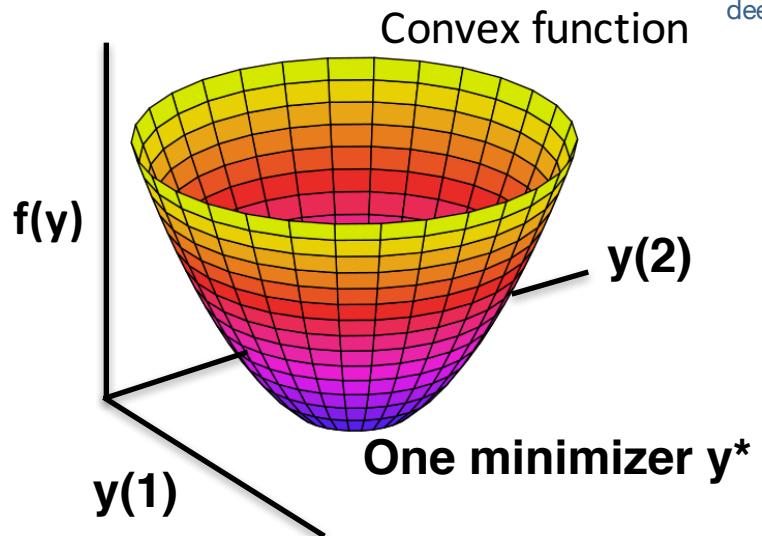
$$df/d\mathbf{y} = \sum d/d\mathbf{y} (\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{A}\mathbf{y})^2$$

$$df/d\mathbf{y}[j] = \sum 2 (\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{A}\mathbf{y}) \cdot^* \mathbf{a}(:,j)$$

# Cost function for spectral unmixing



$$f(\mathbf{y}) = \sum_{\text{spectral measurements}} (\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{A}\mathbf{y})^2$$



$f(\mathbf{x})$  is convex, so finding  $\mathbf{x}^*$  is easy via its gradient:

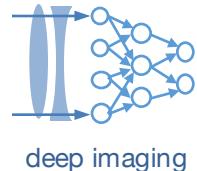
$$\frac{d}{d\mathbf{y}} f(\mathbf{y}) = \frac{d}{d\mathbf{y}} \sum (\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{A}\mathbf{y})^2$$

$$df/d\mathbf{y} = \sum d/d\mathbf{y} (\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{A}\mathbf{y})^2$$

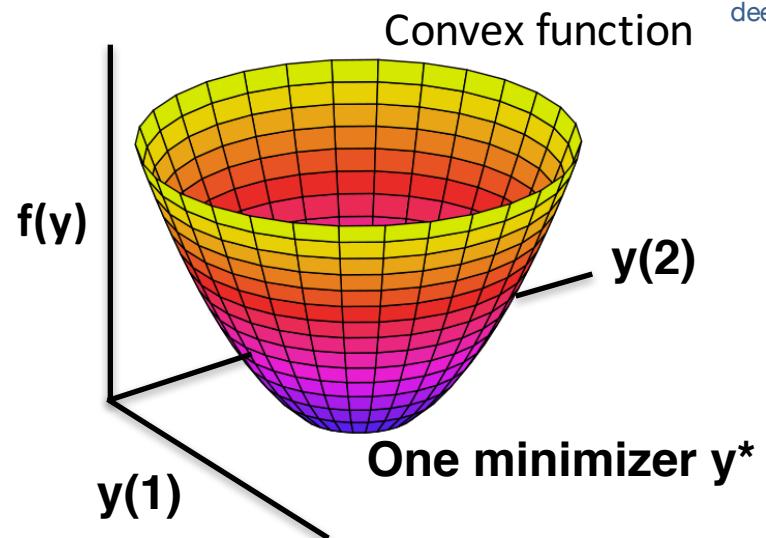
$$df/d\mathbf{y}[j] = \sum 2 (\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{A}\mathbf{y}) \cdot^* \mathbf{a}(:,j)$$

$$df/d\mathbf{y} = \mathbf{A}^T (\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{A}\mathbf{y}^*)$$

# Cost function for spectral unmixing



$$f(\mathbf{y}) = \sum_{\text{spectral measurements}} (\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{A}\mathbf{y})^2$$



Method 1: *Gradient descent* – follow gradient downhill to solution  $\mathbf{y}^*$

---

**Algorithm 4.1** An algorithm to minimize  $f(\mathbf{x}) = \frac{1}{2} \|\mathbf{Ax} - \mathbf{b}\|_2^2$  with respect to  $\mathbf{x}$  using gradient descent, starting from an arbitrary value of  $\mathbf{x}$ .

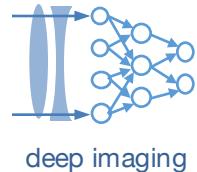
---

Set the step size ( $\epsilon$ ) and tolerance ( $\delta$ ) to small, positive numbers.

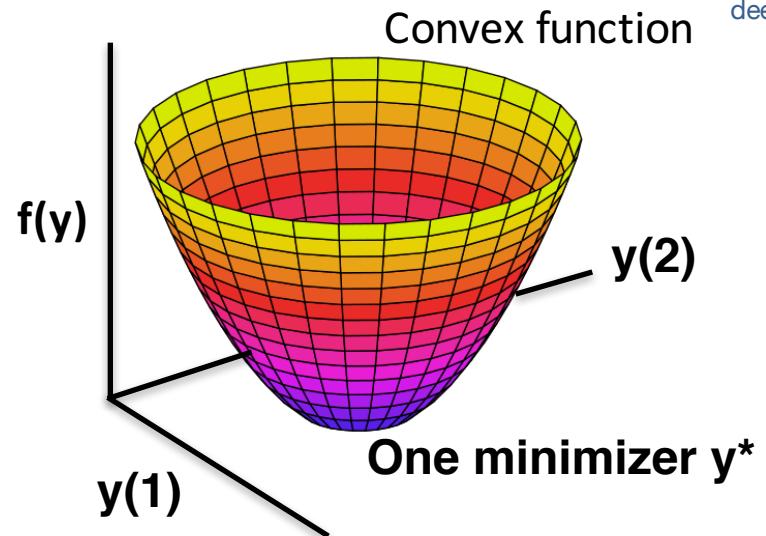
```
while  $\|\mathbf{A}^\top \mathbf{Ax} - \mathbf{A}^\top \mathbf{b}\|_2 > \delta$  do
     $\mathbf{x} \leftarrow \mathbf{x} - \epsilon (\mathbf{A}^\top \mathbf{Ax} - \mathbf{A}^\top \mathbf{b})$ 
end while
```

---

# Cost function for spectral unmixing



$$f(\mathbf{y}) = \sum_{\text{spectral measurements}} (\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{A}\mathbf{y})^2$$



Method 2: *Direct solution* – set derivative to 0 to find  $\mathbf{y}^*$  directly

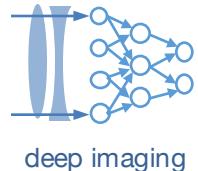
$$\frac{df}{d\mathbf{y}} = \mathbf{A}^T (\mathbf{b} - \mathbf{A}\mathbf{y}^*) = 0 \quad \xleftarrow{\text{---}} \text{---} \quad \mathbf{y}^* \text{ is where gradient of } f(\mathbf{y}) \text{ is zero}$$

$$\mathbf{A}^T \mathbf{x} = \mathbf{A}^T \mathbf{A} \mathbf{y}^* \quad \longrightarrow$$

$$(\mathbf{A}^T \mathbf{A})^{-1} \mathbf{A}^T \mathbf{x} = \mathbf{y}^*$$

"Moore-Penrose Pseudo-inverse"

(Note: setting gradient to 0 and solving is hard to do for non-linear problems...)



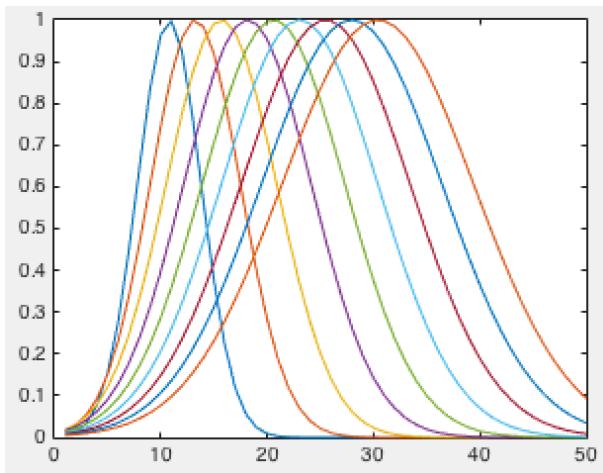
# Example unmixing with the pseudo-inverse

Moore-Penrose Pseudo-inverse:

$$\mathbf{y}^* = (\mathbf{A}^T \mathbf{A})^{-1} \mathbf{A}^T \mathbf{x}$$

## Example dictionary A

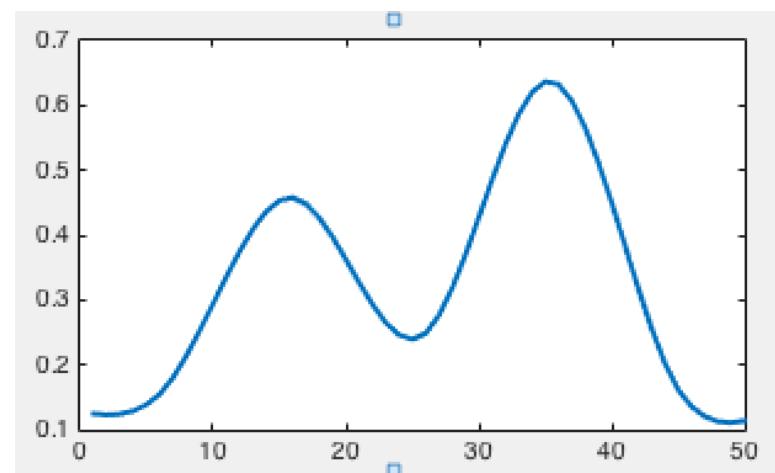
9 spectra



Example y,  
compute Ay

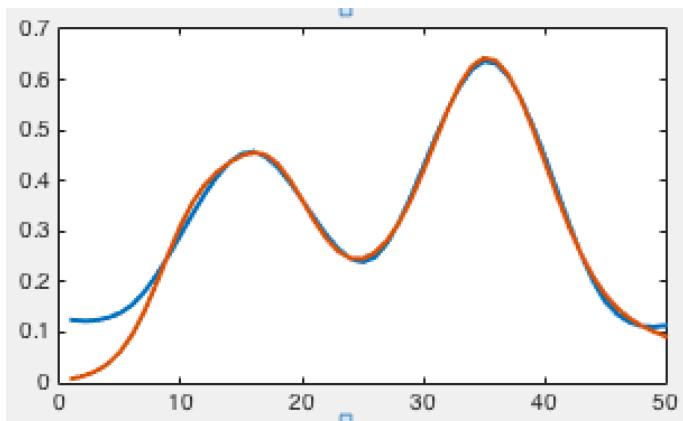


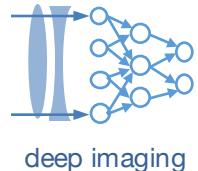
## Example detected spectra x



Compute  
pseudo-inverse,  
 $\mathbf{x}^* = \mathbf{A}\mathbf{y}^*$  is red  
curve:

Good fit!





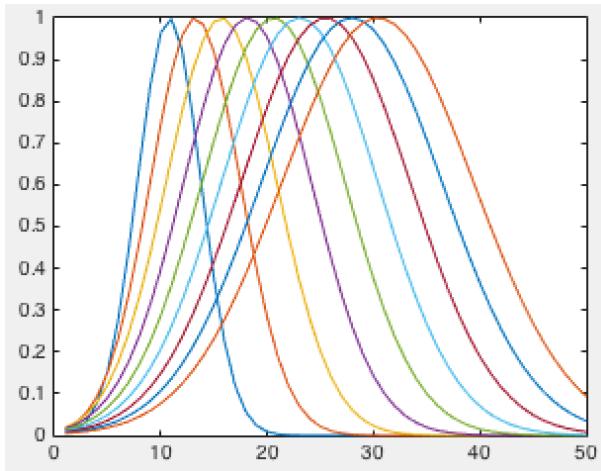
# Example unmixing with the pseudo-inverse

Moore-Penrose Pseudo-inverse:

$$\mathbf{y}^* = (\mathbf{A}^T \mathbf{A})^{-1} \mathbf{A}^T \mathbf{x}$$

## Example dictionary A

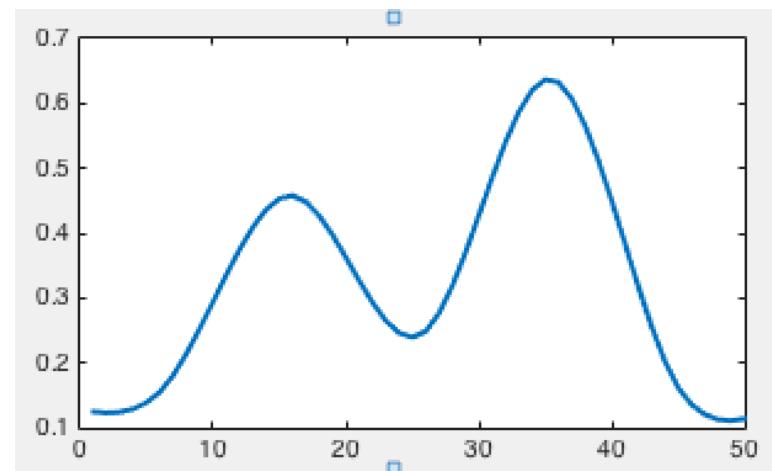
9 spectra



Example y,  
compute Ay

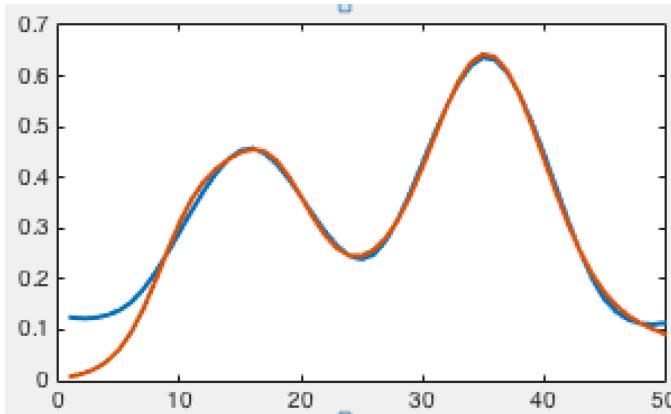


## Example detected spectra x



Compute  
pseudo-inverse,  
 $\mathbf{x}^* = \mathbf{A}\mathbf{y}^*$  is red  
curve:

Good fit!



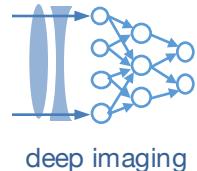
## PROBLEM:

$$\mathbf{y}^* = [0.2, -1.1, -1.6, \dots]$$

Solution has negative weights!

Not physically possible...

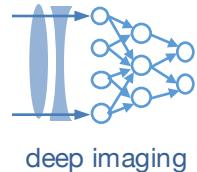
# Example unmixing with the pseudo-inverse



Moore-Penrose Pseudo-inverse: 
$$\mathbf{y}^* = (\mathbf{A}^T \mathbf{A})^{-1} \mathbf{A}^T \mathbf{x}$$

```
n = 50; %number of pixels
m = 9; %number of spectral
A=zeros(n,m); %known dictionary of spectra
for j=1:m
    A(:,j) = exp(-(linspace(-1,1,n)+.5-.1*j+.2).^2/(.03*j));
end
%Simulate some spectra
b = imresize(rand([5,1]),[n 1]);
x_opt = A\b;      ← Pseudo-inverse = one line
%Show results
figure;plot(b); hold all; plot(A*x_opt);
```

# Spectral un-mixing with a positivity constraint



## Option 1: Add a constraint

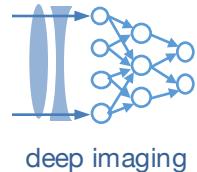
Minimize  $f(\mathbf{x}) = \sum (\mathbf{b} - \mathbf{Ax})^2$  Convex cost function

Subject to  $\mathbf{x} \geq 0$  Convex constraint

\*When you have constraints, can use **CVX**, convex toolbox for Matlab

<http://cvxr.com/cvx/>

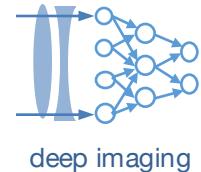
# Spectral un-mixing with a positivity constraint



## Option 1: Add a constraint

```
%%%%%
addpath '/users/Roarke/Documents/Matlab/cvx'; cvx_setup;
cvx_begin
    variable xc(m);
    minimize( norm(A*xc-b) );
    subject to
        xc  $\geq 0$ ;
cvx_end
%Show results
figure;plot(b); hold all; plot(A*xc);
%%%%%
```

# Spectral un-mixing with a positivity constraint



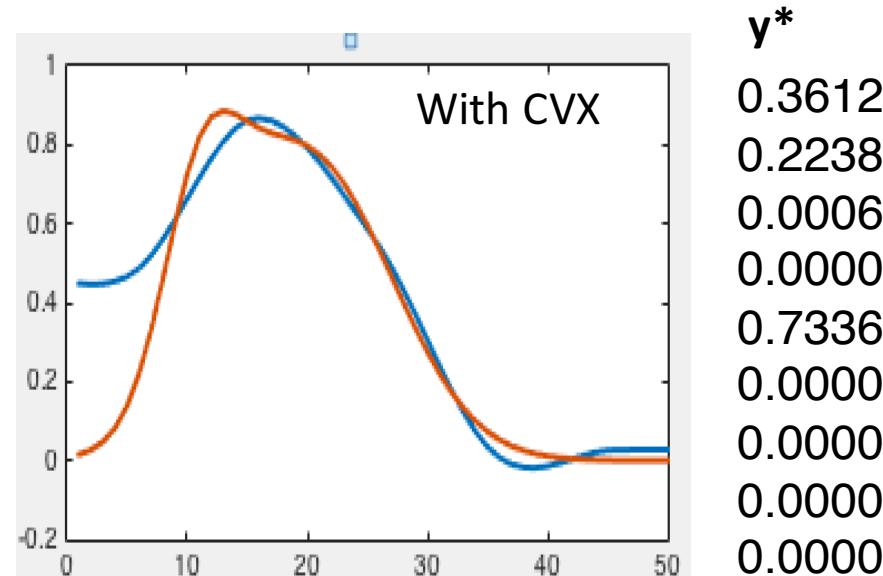
## **Option 1: Add a constraint**

$$\text{Minimize } f(\mathbf{y}) = \sum (x - \mathbf{A}\mathbf{y})^2 \quad \text{Convex cost function}$$

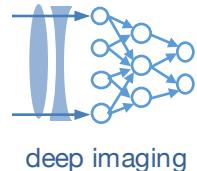
Subject to  $y \geq 0$  Convex constraint

\*When you have constraints, can use **CVX**, convex toolbox for Matlab

<http://cvxr.com/cvx/>



# Spectral un-mixing with a positivity constraint



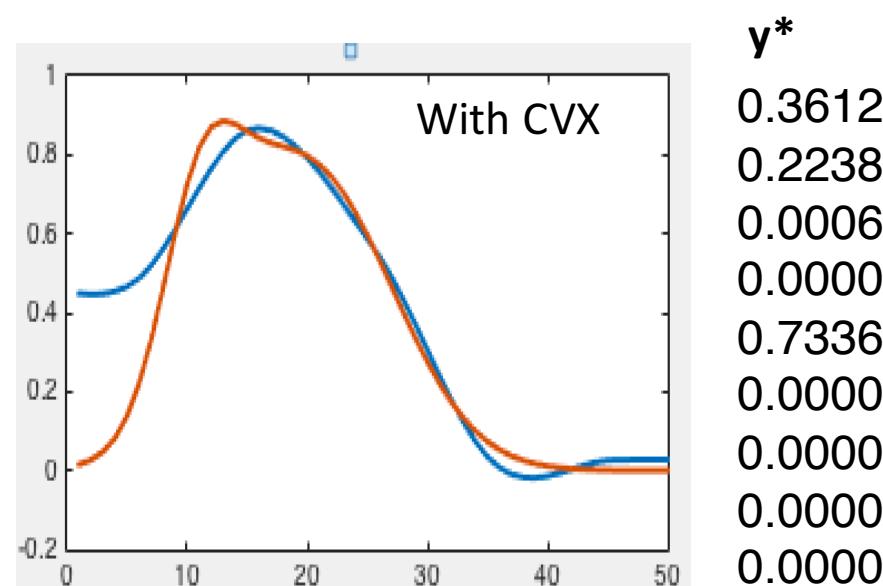
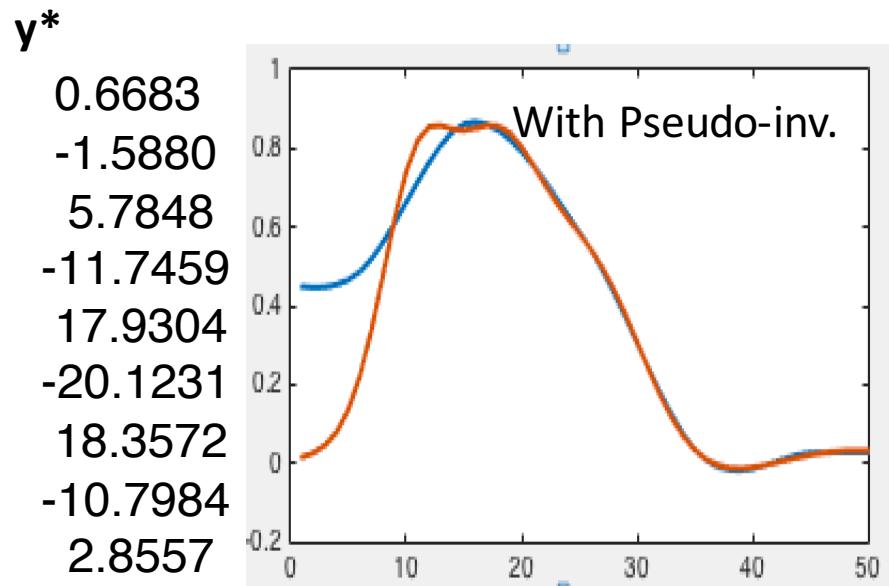
## Option 1: Add a constraint

Minimize  $f(\mathbf{y}) = \sum (\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{Ay})^2$  Convex cost function

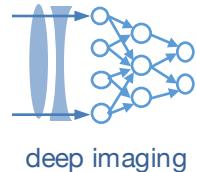
Subject to  $\mathbf{y} \geq 0$  Convex constraint

\*When you have constraints, can use **CVX**, convex toolbox for Matlab

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# Spectral un-mixing with a positivity constraint



## Option 2: Modify cost function

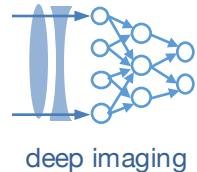
$$\text{Minimize } f(\mathbf{z}) = \sum (\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{Az}^2)^2$$

$\mathbf{z}^2 = \mathbf{y}$  is dummy variable, will change cost function and gradient

\*When you don't have constraints but can find the gradient, use **Minfunc**

<https://www.cs.ubc.ca/~schmidtm/Software/minFunc.html>

# Spectral un-mixing with a positivity constraint



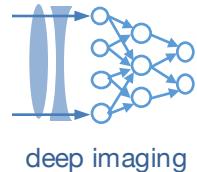
## Option 2: Modify cost function

$$\text{Minimize } f(\mathbf{z}) = \sum (\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{Az}^2)^2$$

$\mathbf{z}^2 = \mathbf{y}$  is dummy variable, will change cost function and gradient

```
%%%%%
%3. Minfunc
addpath '/users/Roarke/Documents/Matlab/minFunc_2012';
startVec = ones(m,1);
spectrum_anonymous = @(startVec)spectrum(startVec, b, A);
%Evaluate with minfunc
[xm, msevalue, moreinfo] = minFunc(@(startVec)spectrum_anonymous(startVec), startVec, options);
figure; plot(b); hold all; plot(A*abs(xm).^2);
```

# Spectral un-mixing with a positivity constraint



## Option 2: Modify cost function

$$\text{Minimize } f(\mathbf{z}) = \sum (\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{Az}^2)^2$$

$\mathbf{z}^2 = \mathbf{y}$  is dummy variable, will change cost function and gradient

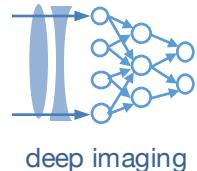
```
%%%%%
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[xm, msevalue, moreinfo] = minFunc(@(startVec)spectrum_anonymous(startVec), startVec, options);
figure;plot(b); hold all; plot(A*abs(xm).^2);
```

```
function [err_function, grad_function] = spectrum(input_vec, b, A)

%for direct pseudo-inverse - no constraints or dummy
%err_function = norm(A*input_vec - b);
%grad_function = A'*(A*input_vec - b);

err_function = norm(A*abs(input_vec).^2 - b);
grad_function = A'*((A*abs(input_vec).^2 - b) .* conj(A*input_vec));
```

# Spectral un-mixing with a positivity constraint



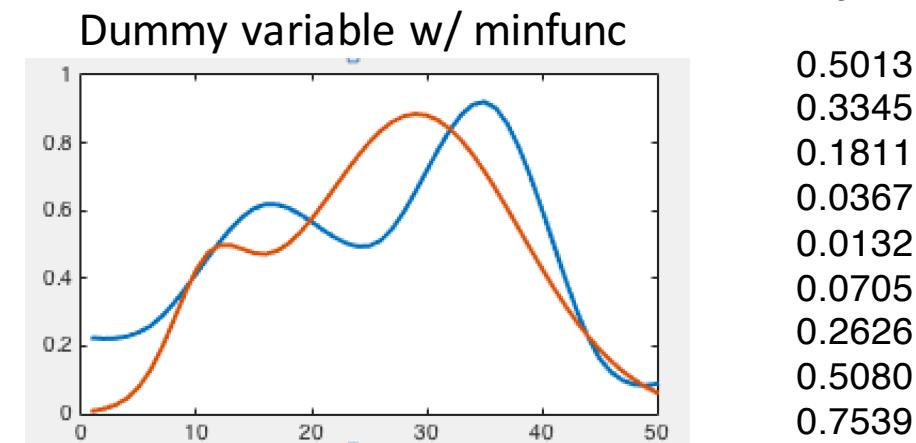
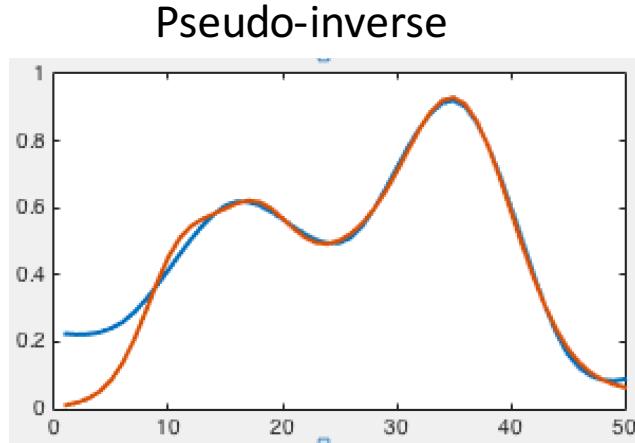
## Option 2: Modify cost function

$$\text{Minimize } f(\mathbf{z}) = \sum (\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{A}\mathbf{z})^2$$

$\mathbf{z}^2 = \mathbf{y}$  is dummy variable, will change cost function and gradient

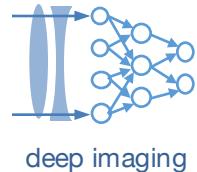
\*When you don't have constraints but can find the gradient, use **Minfunc**

<https://www.cs.ubc.ca/~schmidtm/Software/minFunc.html>



Not working too well, gradient could be wrong?

# Other bells and whistles



1) Sometimes see solutions where  $x$  values get really big

Fix this with a "*regularizer*":

$$\text{Minimize } f(\mathbf{x}) = \sum (\mathbf{b} - \mathbf{Ax})^2 + C^* \sum (\mathbf{x})^2$$

"Don't let  $x$  vary too much"

Choose constant  $C$  appropriately

2) If you think your signal is "sparse", then it probably has mostly zeros.  
Can include this in your model with an "L1" cost function:

$$\text{Minimize } f(\mathbf{x}) = \sum | \mathbf{b} - \mathbf{Ax} |$$

- An extremely simple modification with pretty strong implications