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Contents

Contents	iii
Preface	xxi
Donors	xxiv
NIPS foundation	xxv
Committees	xxvi
Reviewers	xxviii
Information-theoretic lower bounds on the oracle complexity of convex optimization , ALEKH AGARWAL, PETER BARTLETT, UC Berkeley, PRADEEP RAVIKUMAR, University of California, and MARTIN WAINWRIGHT, UC Berkeley	1
Streaming k-means approximation , NIR AILON, Google, RAGESH JAISWAL, and CLAIRE MONTELEONI, Columbia University	10
Complexity of Decentralized Control: Special Cases , MARTIN ALLEN, Connecticut College, and SHLOMO ZILBERSTEIN, University of Massachusetts at Amherst	19
Learning from Multiple Partially Observed Views - an Application to Multilingual Text Categorization , MASSIH AMINI, National Research Council Canada, NICOLAS USUNIER, Université Pierre et Marie Cur, and CYRIL GOUTTE, National Research Council Canada	28
Constructing Topological Maps using Markov Random Fields and Loop-Closure Detection , ROY ANATI, and KOSTAS DANILIDIS, University of Pennsylvania	37
Data-driven calibration of linear estimators with minimal penalties , SYLVAIN ARLOT, CNRS - ENS, and FRANCIS BACH, Ecole Normale Supérieure	46
On Learning Rotations , RAMAN ARORA, Univ. of Wisconsin-Madison	55
Polynomial Semantic Indexing , BING BAI, NEC Labs America, INC, JASON WESTON, NEC Labs America, DAVID GRANGIER, RONAN COLLOBERT, KUNIHICO SADAMASA, YANJUN QI, NEC Labs America, INC, CORINNA CORTES, Google Research, and MEHRYAR MOHRI, Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences and Google Research	64
Nonparametric Bayesian Models for Unsupervised Event Coreference Resolution , COSMIN BEJAN, University of Texas at Dallas, MATTHEW TITSWORTH, ANDREW HICKL, Language Computer Corporation, and SANDA HARABAGIU, University of Texas at Dallas	73

Group Sparse Coding , SAMY BENGIO, FERNANDO PEREIRA, YORAM SINGER, and DENNIS STRELOW, Google	82
Neurometric function analysis of population codes , PHILIPP BERENS, SEBASTIAN GERWINN, ALEXANDER ECKER, and MATTHIAS BETHGE, MPI for Biological Cybernetics & University of Tübingen	90
Slow, Decorrelated Features for Pretraining Complex Cell-like Networks , JAMES BERGSTRA, and YOSHUA BENGIO, University of Montreal ..	99
No evidence for active sparsification in the visual cortex , PIETRO BERKES, BEN WHITE, and JOZSEF FISER, Brandeis University	108
Manifold Regularization for SIR with Rate Root-n Convergence , WEI BIAN, NTU, and DACHENG TAO, Nanyang Technological University	117
Augmenting Feature-driven fMRI Analyses: Semi-supervised learning and resting state activity , MATHEW BLASCHKO, University of Oxford, JACQUELYN SHELTON, Universitaet Tuebingen, and ANDREAS BARTELS, MPI for Biological Cybernetics	126
Efficient Match Kernel between Sets of Features for Visual Recognition , LIEFENG BO, Toyota Technological Institute at Chicago (TTI-C), and CRISTIAN SMINCHISCU, U Bonn	135
Randomized Pruning: Efficiently Calculating Expectations in Large Dynamic Programs , ALEXANDRE BOUCHARD-CÔTÉ, UC Berkeley, SLAV PETROV, Google Research, and DAN KLEIN, University of California Berkeley	144
Unsupervised Feature Selection for the k-means Clustering Problem , CHRISTOS BOUTSIDIS, Rensselaer Polytechnic Instit., MICHAEL MAHONEY, Stanford University, and PETROS DRINEAS, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute	153
On Invariance in Hierarchical Models , JAKE BOUVRIE, MIT, LORENZO ROSASCO, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and TOMASO POGGIO, MIT	162
Nash Equilibria of Static Prediction Games , MICHAEL BRÜCKNER, and TOBIAS SCHEFFER, University of Potsdam	171
Optimal context separation of spiking haptic signals by second-order somatosensory neurons , ROMAIN BRASSELET, CNRS - University Pierre & Marie Curie Paris 6, ROLAND JOHANSSON, UMEA University, and ANGELO ARLEO, CNRS - University Pierre & Marie Curie Paris 6	180
Manifold Embeddings for Model-Based Reinforcement Learning under Partial Observability , KEITH BUSH, and JOELLE PINEAU, McGill University	189
Learning to Explore and Exploit in POMDPs , CHENGHUI CAI, XUEJUN LIAO, Duke University, and LAWRENCE CARIN, Duke ECE	198
Speaker Comparison with Inner Product Discriminant Functions , WILLIAM CAMPBELL, MIT Lincoln Laboratory, ZAHİ KARAM, MIT, and DOUGLAS STURIM, MIT Lincoln Laboratory	207
A Stochastic approximation method for inference in probabilistic graphical models , PETER CARBONETTO, University of Chicago, MATTHEW KING, University of British Columbia, and FIRAS HAMZE, D-Wave Systems	216

Bayesian Nonparametric Models on Decomposable Graphs, FRANCOIS CARON, INRIA Bordeaux, and ARNAUD DOUCET, Institute of Statistical Mathematics	225
Adaptive Design Optimization in Experiments with People, DANIEL CAVAGNARO, The Ohio State University, MARK PITT, and JAY MYUNG, Ohio State University	234
Efficient Bregman Range Search, LAWRENCE CAYTON, Max Planck Institute for Biological Cybernetics	243
Discriminative Network Models of Schizophrenia, GUILLERMO CECCHI, IRINA RISH, IBM T.J. Watson Research Center, BENJAMIN THYREAU, Neurospin, CEA-INSERM, BERTRAND THIRION, INRIA, MARION PLAZE, CEA-INSERM, MARIE-LAURE PAILLERE-MARTINOT, AP-HP, CATHERINE MARTELLI, Centre Hospitalier Paul Brousse, JEAN-LUC MARTINOT, INSERM - CEA - Univ. Paris Sud, and JEAN-BAPTISTE POLINE, Neurospin, CEA-INSERM	252
Learning with Compressible Priors, VOLKAN CEVHER, Rice University .	261
Exploring Functional Connectivities of the Human Brain using Multivariate Information Analysis, BARRY CHAI, Stanford, DIRK WALTHER, DIANE BECK, University of Illinois, and LI FEI-FEI, Princeton University	270
Generalization Errors and Learning Curves for Regression with Multi-task Gaussian Processes, KIAN MING CHAI, University of Edinburgh	279
Reading Tea Leaves: How Humans Interpret Topic Models, JONATHAN CHANG, JORDAN BOYD-GRABER, SEAN GERRISH, CHONG WANG, and DAVID BLEI, Princeton University	288
A Parameter-free Hedging Algorithm, KAMALIKA CHAUDHURI, YOAV FREUND, UC San Diego, and DANIEL HSU, University of California	297
An Online Algorithm for Large Scale Image Similarity Learning, GAL CHECHIK, Stanford university, URI SHALIT, The Hebrew University, VARUN SHARMA, and SAMY BENGIO, Google	306
Ranking Measures and Loss Functions in Learning to Rank, WEI CHEN, Chinese Academy of Sciences, TIE-YAN LIU, Microsoft Research Asia, YANYAN LAN, ZHI-MING MA, Chinese Academy of Sciences, and HANG LI, Microsoft Research Asia	315
Factor Modeling for Advertisement Targeting, YE CHEN, EBay Research Labs, MICHAEL KAPRALOV, Stanford University, DMITRY PAVLOV, Yandex Labs, and JOHN CANNY, University of California, Berkeley	324
The Ordered Residual Kernel for Robust Motion Subspace Clustering, TAT-JUN CHIN, HANZI WANG, and DAVID SUTER, The University of Adelaide	333
Kernel Methods for Deep Learning, YOUNGMIN CHO, University of California, San Diego, and LAWRENCE SAUL, University of California	342
Approximating MAP by Compensating for Structural Relaxations, ARTHUR CHOI, UCLA, and ADNAN DARWICHE, University of California	351

AUC optimization and the two-sample problem, STÉPHAN CLÉMENÇON, Telecom ParisTech, NICOLAS VAYATIS, ENS Cachan, and MARINE DEPECKER, Telecom ParisTech	360
Statistical Models of Linear and Nonlinear Contextual Interactions in Early Visual Processing, RUBEN COEN-CAGLI, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, PETER DAYAN, University College London, and ODELIA SCHWARTZ, Albert Einstein College of Medicine	369
fMRI-Based Inter-Subject Cortical Alignment Using Functional Connectivity, BRYAN CONROY, BEN SINGER, Princeton University, JAMES HAXBY, Dartmouth College, and PETER RAMADGE, Princeton University	378
Sensitivity analysis in HMMs with application to likelihood maximization, PIERRE-ARNAUD COQUELIN, Vekia, ROMAIN DEGUEST, Columbia University, and REMI MUNOS, INRIA	387
Learning Non-Linear Combinations of Kernels, CORINNA CORTES, Google Research, MEHRYAR MOHRI, Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences and Google Research, and AFSHIN ROSTAMIZADEH, Courant Institute, New York University	396
An Infinite Factor Model Hierarchy Via a Noisy-Or Mechanism, AARON COURVILLE, DOUGLAS ECK, and YOSHUA BENGIO, University of Montreal	405
Adaptive Regularization of Weight Vectors, KOBAYASHI, The Technion, ALEX KULESZA, University of Pennsylvania, and MARK DREDZE, Johns Hopkins University	414
Learning transport operators for image manifolds, BENJAMIN CULPEPPER, UC Berkeley, and BRUNO OLSHAUSEN, University of California, Berkeley	423
White Functionals for Anomaly Detection in Dynamical Systems, MARCO CUTURI, Princeton University, JEAN-PHILIPPE VERT, ParisTech, and ALEXANDRE D'ASPREMONT, Princeton University	432
L_1-Penalized Robust Estimation for a Class of Inverse Problems Arising in Multiview Geometry, ARNAK DALALYAN, and RENAUD KERIVEN, Université Paris-Est, ENPC	441
Distribution-Calibrated Hierarchical Classification, OFER DEKEL, Microsoft	450
A Smoothed Approximate Linear Program, VIJAY DESAI, Columbia University, VIVEK FARIAS, MIT Sloan, and CIAMAC MOALLEMI, Columbia University	459
Localizing Bugs in Program Executions with Graphical Models, LAURA DIETZ, Max Planck Institute for Infor, VALENTIN DALLMEIER, ANDREAS ZELLER, Saarland University, and TOBIAS SCHEFFER, University of Potsdam	468
The Infinite Partially Observable Markov Decision Process, FINALE DOSHI-VELEZ, Cambridge University, MIT	477
A Bayesian Model for Simultaneous Image Clustering, Annotation and Object Segmentation, LAN DU, Duke University, ECE Department, LU REN, Duke ECE, DAVID DUNSON, Duke, and LAWRENCE CARIN, Duke ECE	486

Efficient Learning using Forward-Backward Splitting, JOHN DUCHI, UC Berkeley, and YORAM SINGER, Google	495
A Data-Driven Approach to Modeling Choice, VIVEK FARIAS, MIT Sloan, SRIKANTH JAGABATHULA, and DEVAVRAT SHAH, MIT	504
Subject independent EEG-based BCI decoding, SIAMAC FAZLI, Technical University Berlin, CRISTIAN GROZEA, Fraunhofer Institute FIRST, MARTON DANOCZY, TU Berlin, BENJAMIN BLANKERTZ, Berlin Institute of Technology, FLORIN POPESCU, Fraunhofer FIRST, and KLAUS-ROBERT MULLER, Berlin Institute of Technology	513
Semi-Supervised Learning in Gigantic Image Collections, ROB FERGUS, New York University, YAIR WEISS, Hebrew University, and ANTONIO TORRALBA, Massachusetts Institute of Technology	522
Evaluating multi-class learning strategies in a generative hierarchical framework for object detection, SANJA FIDLER, MARKO BOBEN, and ALES LEONARDIS, University of Ljubljana	531
Orthogonal Matching Pursuit From Noisy Random Measurements: A New Analysis, ALYSON FLETCHER, University of California, Berkeley, and SUNDEEP RANGAN, Qualcomm, Inc.	540
Sharing Features among Dynamical Systems with Beta Processes, EMILY FOX, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, ERIK SUDDERTH, Brown University, MICHAEL JORDAN, UC Berkeley, and ALAN WILLSKY, MIT	549
An Additive Latent Feature Model for Transparent Object Recognition, MARIO FRITZ, UC Berkeley EECS and ICSI, MICHAEL BLACK, Brown University, GARY BRADSKI, Willow Garage, SERGEY KARAYEV, UC Berkeley, and TREVOR DARRELL, UC Berkeley EECS and ICSI .	558
An LP View of the M-best MAP problem, MENACHEM FROMER, and AMIR GLOBERSON, Hebrew University	567
Estimating image bases for visual image reconstruction from human brain activity, YUSUKE FUJIWARA, YOICHI MIYAWAKI, and YUKIYASU KAMITANI, ATR, JAPAN	576
Graph-based Consensus Maximization among Multiple Supervised and Unsupervised Models, JING GAO, FENG LIANG, UIUC, WEI FAN, IBM TJ Waston Research, YIZHOU SUN, and JIAWEI HAN, UIUC	585
Lattice Regression, ERIC GARCIA, and MAYA GUPTA, University of Washington	594
From PAC-Bayes Bounds to KL Regularization, PASCAL GERMAIN, ALEXANDRE LACASSE, Laval University, FRANCOIS LAVIOLETTE, MARIO MARCHAND, Université Laval, and SARA SHANIAN, Laval University	603
Perceptual Multistability as Markov Chain Monte Carlo Inference, SAMUEL GERSHMAN, Princeton University, ED VUL, and JOSHUA TENENBAUM, Massachusetts Institute of Technology	611
A joint maximum-entropy model for binary neural population patterns and continuous signals, SEBASTIAN GERWINN, PHILIPP BERENS, and MATTHIAS BETHGE, MPI for Biological Cybernetics & University of Tübingen	620

A Biologically Plausible Model for Rapid Natural Scene Identification, SENNAY GHEBREAB, STEVEN SCHOLTE, VICTOR LAMME, and ARNOLD SMEULDERS, University of Amsterdam	629
A Gaussian Tree Approximation for Integer Least-Squares, JACOB GOLDBERGER, Bar-Ilan U, and AMIR LESHEM, Bar-Ilan University	638
Measuring Invariances in Deep Networks, IAN GOODFELLOW, QUOC LE, ANDREW SAXE, and ANDREW NG, Stanford University	646
Region-based Segmentation and Object Detection, STEPHEN GOULD, TIANSHI GAO, and DAPHNE KOLLER, Stanford University	655
Posterior vs Parameter Sparsity in Latent Variable Models, JOAO GRACA, University of Lisbon, KUZMAN GANCHEV, University of Pennsylvania, BEN TASKAR, University of Pennsylvania, and FERNANDO PEREIRA, Google ...	664
A Fast, Consistent Kernel Two-Sample Test, ARTHUR GRETTON, Carnegie Mellon University and Max Planck Institute, KENJI FUKUMIZU, The Institute of Statistical Mathematics, ZAID HARCHAOUI, Carnegie Mellon University, and BHARATH SRIPERUMBUDUR, UC San Diego	673
Non-stationary continuous dynamic Bayesian networks, MARCO GRZEGORCZYK, Department of Statistics, TU Dortmund University, Germany, and DIRK HUSMEIER, Biomathematics and Statistics Scotland (BioSS), Edinburgh, UK	682
Label Selection on Graphs, ANDREW GUILLORY, and JEFF BILMES, University of Washington	691
Beyond Convexity: Online Submodular Minimization, ELAD HAZAN, IBM, and SATYEN KALE, Yahoo! Research	700
On Stochastic and Worst-case Models for Investing, ELAD HAZAN, IBM, and SATYEN KALE, Yahoo! Research	709
Robust Nonparametric Regression with Metric-Space Valued Output, MATTHIAS HEIN, Saarland University	718
Hierarchical Learning of Dimensional Biases in Human Categorization, KATHERINE HELLER, University of Cambridge, ADAM SANBORN, and NICK CHATER, University College London	727
Bayesian Sparse Factor Models and DAGs Inference and Comparison, RICARDO HENAO, and OLE WINTHER, Technical University of Denmark	736
Sparse and Locally Constant Gaussian Graphical Models, JEAN HONORIO, LUIS ORTIZ, DIMITRIS SAMARAS, Stony Brook University, NIKOS PARAGIOS, Ecole Centrale Paris, and RITA GOLDSTEIN, Brookhaven National Laboratory	745
Differential Use of Implicit Negative Evidence in Generative and Discriminative Language Learning, ANNE HSU, University of California Berkeley, and THOMAS GRIFFITHS, University of California, Berkeley	754
Periodic Step Size Adaptation for Single Pass On-line Learning, CHUN-NAN HSU, YU-MING CHANG, HANSHEN HUANG, IIS, Academia Sinica, and YUH-JYE LEE, Department of CSIE, National Taiwan University of Science and Technology	763

Multi-Label Prediction via Compressed Sensing, DANIEL HSU, University of California, SHAM KAKADE, Toyota Technological Institute, JOHN LANGFORD, Yahoo! Research, and TONG ZHANG, Rutgers University	772
Accelerated Gradient Methods for Stochastic Optimization and Online Learning, CHONGHAI HU, JAMES KWOK, and WEIKE PAN, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology	781
Reconstruction of Sparse Circuits Using Multi-neuronal Excitation (RESCUME), TAO HU, ANTHONY LEONARDO, Howard Hughes Medical Institute, Janelia Farm Research Campus, and DMITRI CHKLOVSKII, Janelia Farm Research Campus, Howard Hughes Medical Institute ..	790
Riffled Independence for Ranked Data, JONATHAN HUANG, and CARLOS GUESTRIN, Carnegie Mellon University	799
Learning Brain Connectivity of Alzheimer’s Disease from Neuroimaging Data, SHUAI HUANG, Arizona State University, JING LI, jing.li.8@asu.edu, LIANG SUN, JUN LIU, TERESA WU, Arizona State University, KEWEI CHEN, ADAM FLEISHER, ERIC REIMAN, Banner Alzheimer’s Institute and Banner PET Center, and JIEPING YE, Arizona State University	808
Discrete MDL Predicts in Total Variation, MARCUS HUTTER, Australian National University	817
Particle-based Variational Inference for Continuous Systems, ALEXANDER IHLER, ANDREW FRANK, and PADHRAIC SMYTH, UC Irvine	826
Modeling Social Annotation Data with Content Relevance using a Topic Model, TOMOHARU IWATA, NTT Communication Science Laboratories, TAKESHI YAMADA, NTT, and NAONORI UEDA, NTT Communication Science Laboratories	835
On the Algorithmics and Applications of a Mixed-norm based Kernel Learning Formulation, SAKETHA NATH JAGARLAPUDI, IIT-Bombay, DINESH G, RAMAN S, CHIRANJIB BHATTACHARYYA, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, AHARON BEN-TAL, Technion, Israel, and RAMAKRISHNAN K.R., Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore	844
Bayesian Belief Polarization, ALAN JERN, KAI-MIN CHANG, and CHARLES KEMP, Carnegie Mellon University	853
Regularized Distance Metric Learning:Theory and Algorithm, RONG JIN, Michigan State University, SHIJUN WANG, National Institutes of Health, and YANG ZHOU, Michigan State University	862
Local Rules for Global MAP: When Do They Work ?, KYOMIN JUNG, KAIST, PUSHMEET KOHLI, Microsoft, and DEVAVRAT SHAH, MIT	871
Potential-Based Agnostic Boosting, ADAM KALAI, Microsoft, and VARUN KANADE, Harvard University	880
Directed Regression, YI-HAO KAO, BENJAMIN VAN ROY, and XIANG YAN, Stanford University	889
Breaking Boundaries Between Induction Time and Diagnosis Time Active Information Acquisition, ASHISH KAPOOR, and ERIC HORVITZ, Microsoft Research	898

Multiple Incremental Decremental Learning of Support Vector Machines, MASAYUKI KARASUYAMA, and ICHIRO TAKEUCHI, Nagoya Institute of Technology	907
Submodularity Cuts and Applications, YOSHINOBU KAWAHARA, Osaka University, KIYOHITO NAGANO, Tokyo Institute of Technology, KOJI TSUDA, Advanced Industrial Science and Technology, and JEFF BILMES, University of Washington	916
Individuation, Identification and Object Discovery, CHARLES KEMP, ALAN JERN, Carnegie Mellon University, and FEI XU, University of California, Berkeley	925
Abstraction and Relational learning, CHARLES KEMP, and ALAN JERN, Carnegie Mellon University	934
Quantification and the language of thought, CHARLES KEMP, Carnegie Mellon University	943
Matrix Completion from Noisy Entries, RAGHUNANDAN KESHAVAN, ANDREA MONTANARI, and SEWOONG OH, Stanford University	952
Unsupervised Detection of Regions of Interest Using Iterative Link Analysis, GUNHEE KIM, Carnegie Mellon University, and ANTONIO TORRALBA, Massachusetts Institute of Technology	961
Clustering sequence sets for motif discovery, JONG KYOUNG KIM, and SEUNGJIN CHOI, POSTECH	970
Semi-supervised Regression using Hessian energy with an application to semi-supervised dimensionality reduction, KWANG IN KIM, Saarland University, FLORIAN STEINKE, Siemens Corporate Technology, Munich, Germany, and MATTHIAS HEIN, Saarland University	979
Replacing supervised classification learning by Slow Feature Analysis in spiking neural networks, STEFAN KLAMPFL, and WOLFGANG MAASS, Graz University of Technology	988
Efficient and Accurate Lp-Norm Multiple Kernel Learning, MARIUS KLOFT, Technical University of Berlin, ULF BREFELD, TU Berlin, SOEREN SONNENBURG, Friedrich Miescher Laboratory, Max Planck Society, PAVEL LASKOV, University of Tuebingen, KLAUS-ROBERT MÜLLER, Technical University of Berlin, and ALEXANDER ZIEN, LIFE Biosystems	997
Sparsistent Learning of Varying-coefficient Models with Structural Changes, MLADEN KOLAR, LE SONG, and ERIC XING, Carnegie Mellon University	1006
Skill Discovery in Continuous Reinforcement Learning Domains using Skill Chaining, GEORGE KONIDARIS, University of Massachusetts, and ANDREW BARTO, University of Massachusetts Amherst	1015
Fast, smooth and adaptive regression in metric spaces, SAMORY KPOTUFE, UCSD CSE	1024
Fast Image Deconvolution using Hyper-Laplacian Priors, DILIP KRISHNAN, and ROB FERGUS, New York University	1033
Learning to Hash with Binary Reconstructive Embeddings, BRIAN KULIS, UC Berkeley EECS & ICSI, and TREVOR DARRELL, UC Berkeley EECS and ICSI	1042

Learning a Small Mixture of Trees , M. PAWAN KUMAR, and DAPHNE KOLLER, Stanford University	1051
Ensemble Nystrom Method , SANJIV KUMAR, Google Research NY, MEHRVAR MOHRI, Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences and Google Research, and AMEET TALWALKAR, Courant Institute (NYU)	1060
Occlusive Components Analysis , JÖRG LÜCKE, FIAS, Goethe-University Frankfurt, RICHARD TURNER, Gatsby Computational Neuroscience Unit, UCL, MANEESH SAHANI, University College London, and MARC HENNIGES, FIAS, Goethe-University Frankfurt	1069
Monte Carlo Sampling for Regret Minimization in Extensive Games , MARC LANCTOT, University of Alberta, KEVIN WAUGH, Carnegie Mellon University, MARTIN ZINKEVICH, Yahoo!, and MICHAEL BOWLING, University of Alberta	1078
Inter-domain Gaussian Processes for Sparse Inference using Inducing Features , MIGUEL LAZARO-GREDILLA, and ANIBAL FIGUEIRAS-VIDAL, Universidad Carlos III Madrid	1087
Unsupervised feature learning for audio classification using convolutional deep belief networks , HONGLAK LEE, PETER PHAM, YAN LARGMAN, and ANDREW NG, Stanford University	1096
Functional network reorganization in motor cortex can be explained by reward-modulated Hebbian learning , ROBERT LEGENSTEIN, Graz University of Technology, STEVEN CHASE, Carnegie Mellon University, ANDREW SCHWARTZ, University of Pittsburgh, and WOLFGANG MAASS, Graz University of Technology	1105
An Integer Projected Fixed Point Method for Graph Matching and MAP Inference , MARIUS LEORDEANU, Carnegie Mellon University, MARTIAL HEBERT, CMU, and RAHUL SUKTHANKAR, Intel	1114
Probabilistic Relational PCA , WU-JUN LI, DIT-YAN YEUNG, HKUST, and ZHIHUA ZHANG, Zhejiang University	1123
Asymptotically Optimal Regularization in Smooth Parametric Models , PERCY LIANG, University of California, FRANCIS BACH, Ecole Normale Supérieure, GUILLAUME BOUCHARD, Xerox Research Centre Europe, and MICHAEL JORDAN, University of California	1132
Nonparametric Greedy Algorithms for the Sparse Learning Problem , HAN LIU, and XI CHEN, Carnegie Mellon University	1141
Grouped Orthogonal Matching Pursuit for Variable Selection and Prediction , AURELIE LOZANO, IBM T.J. Watson Research, GRZEGORZ SWIRSZCZ, IBM Research, and NAOKI ABE, IBM T. J. Watson Research Center	1150
Modeling the spacing effect in sequential category learning , HONGJING LU, Dept. of Psychology & Statistics, UCLA, MATTHEW WEIDEN, Dept. of Psychology, UCLA, and ALAN YUILLE, UCLA	1159
Whos Doing What: Joint Modeling of Names and Verbs for Simultaneous Face and Pose Annotation , JIE LUO, Idiap / EPF Lausanne, BARBARA CAPUTO, Idiap Research Institute, and VITTORIO FERRARI, ETH Zurich	1168
Variational Gaussian-process factor analysis for modeling spatio-temporal data , JAAKKO LUTTINEN, and ALEXANDER ILIN, Helsinki University of Technology	1177

Solving Stochastic Games , LIAM MAC DERMED, and CHARLES ISBELL, Georgia Inst. of Technology	1186
Bayesian estimation of orientation preference maps , JAKOB MACKE, SEBASTIAN GERWINN, MPI for Biological Cybernetics & University of Tübingen, LEONARD WHITE, Duke University Medical Center, MATTHIAS KASCHUBE, Princeton University, and MATTHIAS BETHGE, MPI for Biological Cybernetics & University of Tübingen	1195
Convergent Temporal-Difference Learning with Arbitrary Smooth Function Approximation , HAMID MAEI, CSABA SZEPESVARI, University of Alberta, SHALABH BHATNAGAR, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, India, DOINA PRECUP, McGill University, DAVID SILVER, and RICH SUTTON, University of Alberta	1204
Compressed Least-Squares Regression , ODALRIC MAILLARD, and REMI MUNOS, INRIA	1213
Beyond Categories: The Visual Memex Model for Reasoning About Object Relationships , TOMASZ MALISIEWICZ, and ALYOSHA EFROS, Carnegie Mellon University	1222
Efficient Large-Scale Distributed Training of Conditional Maximum Entropy Models , GIDEON MANN, RYAN McDONALD, Google, MEHRYAR MOHRI, Google Research, NATHAN SILBERMAN, Google Inc., and DAN WALKER, New York University	1231
Toward Provably Correct Feature Selection in Arbitrary Domains , DIMITRIS MARGARITIS, Iowa State University	1240
FACTORIE: Probabilistic Programming via Imperatively Defined Factor Graphs , ANDREW MCCALLUM, KARL SCHULTZ, and SAMEER SINGH, University of Massachusetts, Amherst	1249
Matrix Completion from Power-Law Distributed Samples , RAGHU MEKA, PRATEEK JAIN, University of Texas at Austin, and INDERJIT DHILLON, University of Texas	1258
Extending Phase Mechanism to Differential Motion Opponency for Motion Pop-out , YICONG MENG, and BERTRAM SHI, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology	1267
Nonparametric Latent Feature Models for Link Prediction , KURT MILLER, UC Berkeley, THOMAS GRIFFITHS, University of California, Berkeley, and MICHAEL JORDAN, University of California	1276
Accelerating Bayesian Structural Inference for Non-Decomposable Gaussian Graphical Models , BABACK MOGHADDAM, Caltech, BENJAMIN MARLIN, EMTIYAZ KHAN, and KEVIN MURPHY, University of British Columbia	1285
Large Scale Nonparametric Bayesian Inference: Data Parallelisation in the Indian Buffet Process , SHAKIR MOHAMED, DAVID KNOWLES, ZOUBIN GHAMRANI, University of Cambridge, and FINALE DOSHI-VELEZ, Cambridge University, MIT	1294
Which graphical models are difficult to learn? , ANDREA MONTANARI, and JOSE AYRES PEREIRA, Stanford University	1303
A Generalized Natural Actor-Critic Algorithm , TETSURO MORIMURA, IBM Research - Tokyo, EIJI UCHIBE, JUNICHIRO YOSHIMOTO, and KENJI DOYA, Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology	1312

Predicting the Optimal Spacing of Study: A Multiscale Context Model of Memory , MICHAEL MOZER, University of Colorado at Boulder, HAROLD PASHLER, UC San Diego, NICHOLAS CEPEDA, York University, ROBERT LINDSEY, University of Colorado, and ED VUL, Massachusetts Institute of Technology	1321
Statistical Analysis of Semi-Supervised Learning: The Limit of Infinite Unlabelled Data , BOAZ NADLER, Weizmann Institute of Science, NATHAN SREBRO, Toyota Technological Institute at Chicago, and XUEYUAN ZHOU, University of Chicago	1330
3D Object Recognition with Deep Belief Nets , VINOD NAIR, and GEOFFREY HINTON, University of Toronto	1339
A unified framework for high-dimensional analysis of M-estimators with decomposable regularizers , SAHAND NEGAHBAN, UC, Berkeley, PRADEEP RAVIKUMAR, MARTIN WAINWRIGHT, and BIN YU, University of California	1348
STDP enables spiking neurons to detect hidden causes of their inputs , BERNHARD NESSLER, MICHAEL PFEIFFER, and WOLFGANG MAASS, Graz University of Technology	1357
Noisy Generalized Binary Search , ROB NOWAK, University of Wisconsin, Madison	1366
Submanifold density estimation , ARKADAS OZAKIN, Georgia Tech Research Institute, and ALEXANDER GRAY, Georgia Institute of Technology	1375
Correlation Coefficients are Insufficient for Analyzing Spike Count Dependencies , ARNO ONKEN, Berlin Institute of Technology, STEFFEN GRÜNEWÄLDER, University College London, and KLAUS OBERMAYER, Berlin Institute of Technology	1383
Construction of Nonparametric Bayesian Models from Parametric Bayes Equations , PETER ORBANZ, University of Cambridge	1392
Learning from Neighboring Strokes: Combining Appearance and Context for Multi-Domain Sketch Recognition , TOM OUYANG, and RANDALL DAVIS, MIT CSAIL	1401
Zero-shot Learning with Semantic Output Codes , MARK PALATUCCI, Carnegie Mellon University, DEAN POMERLEAU, Intel Research, GEOFFREY HINTON, University of Toronto, and TOM MITCHELL, Carnegie Mellon University	1410
Conditional Neural Fields , JIAN PENG, LIEFENG BO, and JINBO XU, TTI-C	1419
Free energy score space , ALESSANDRO PERINA, MARCO CRISTANI, UMBERTO CASTELLANI, VITTORIO MURINO, University of Verona, and NEBOJSA JOJIC, Microsoft Research	1428
Maximum likelihood trajectories for continuous-time Markov chains , THEODORE PERKINS, Ottawa Hospital Research Inst.	1437
Robust Value Function Approximation Using Bilinear Programming , MAREK PETRIK, University of Massachusetts Amherst, and SHLOMO ZILBERSTEIN, University of Massachusetts at Amherst	1446

Exponential Family Graph Matching and Ranking, JAMES PETERSON, TIBERIO CAETANO, JULIAN MCAULEY, NICTA, and JIN YU, Nicta	1455
Know Thy Neighbour: A Normative Theory of Synaptic Depression, JEAN-PASCAL PFISTER, University of Cambridge, PETER DAYAN, University College London, and MATE LENGYEL, University of Cambridge	1464
Time-rescaling methods for the estimation and assessment of non-Poisson neural encoding models, JONATHAN PILLOW, University of Texas at Austin	1473
Bilinear classifiers for visual recognition, HAMED PIRSIAVASH, DEVA RAMANAN, and CHARLESS FOWLKES, UC Irvine	1482
Convex Relaxation of Mixture Regression with Efficient Algorithms, NOVI QUADRIANTO, SML-NICTA and RISE-ANU, TIBERIO CAETANO, NICTA, JOHN LIM, NICTA and ANU, and DALE SCHUURMANS, University of Alberta	1491
Distribution Matching for Transduction, NOVI QUADRIANTO, SML-NICTA and RISE-ANU, JAMES PETERSON, NICTA, and ALEX SMOLA, Yahoo!	1500
Locality-sensitive binary codes from shift-invariant kernels, MAXIM RAGINSKY, Duke University, and SVETLANA LAZEBNIK, University of North Carolina	1509
Multi-Label Prediction via Sparse Infinite CCA, PIYUSH RAI, and HAL DAUME, University of Utah	1518
Linear-time Algorithms for Pairwise Statistical Problems, PARIKSHIT RAM, Georgia Institute of Technolog, DONGRYEOL LEE, Georgia Institute of Technolog, WILLIAM MARCH, Georgia Tech, and ALEXANDER GRAY, Georgia Institute of Technolog	1527
Rank-Approximate Nearest Neighbor Search: Retaining Meaning and Speed in High Dimensions, PARIKSHIT RAM, Georgia Institute of Technolog, DONGRYEOL LEE, HUA OUYANG, and ALEXANDER GRAY, Georgia Institute of Technolog	1536
Asymptotic Analysis of MAP Estimation via the Replica Method and Compressed Sensing, SUNDEEP RANGAN, Qualcomm, Inc., ALYSON FLETCHER, University of California, Berkeley, and VIVEK GOYAL, Massachusetts Institute of Technolog	1545
Spatial Normalized Gamma Processes, VINAYAK RAO, and YEE WHYI TEH, Gatsby Computational Neuroscience Unit, UCL	1554
Lower bounds on minimax rates for nonparametric regression with additive sparsity and smoothness, GARVESH RASKUTTI, UC Berkeley, MARTIN WAINWRIGHT, and BIN YU, University of California	1563
A Game-Theoretic Approach to Hypergraph Clustering, SAMUEL ROTA BULÒ, Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia, and MARCELLO PELILLO, Università Ca Foscari di Venezia	1571
Segmenting Scenes by Matching Image Composites, BRYAN RUSSELL, INRIA - ENS Paris, ALYOSHA EFROS, Carnegie Mellon University,	

JOSEF SIVIC, INRIA ENS, BILL FREEMAN, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and ANDREW ZISSERMAN, University of Oxford	1580
Filtering Abstract Senses From Image Search Results, KATE SAENKO, MIT, and TREVOR DARRELL, UC Berkeley EECS and ICSI	1589
Learning in Markov Random Fields using Tempered Transitions, RUSLAN SALAKHUTDINOV, Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences and CSAIL MIT	1598
Replicated Softmax: an Undirected Topic Model, RUSLAN SALAKHUTDINOV, Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences and CSAIL MIT, and GEOFFREY HINTON, University of Toronto	1607
Learning models of object structure, JOSEPH SCHLECHT, and KOBUS BARNARD, University of Arizona	1615
Linearly constrained Bayesian matrix factorization for blind source separation, MIKKEL SCHMIDT, University of Cambridge	1624
Speeding up Magnetic Resonance Image Acquisition by Bayesian Multi-Slice Adaptive Compressed Sensing, MATTHIAS SEEGER, Saarland University and Max Planck Institute for Informatics	1633
Improving Existing Fault Recovery Policies, GUY SHANI, and CHRISTOPHER MEEK, Microsoft Research	1642
Positive Semidefinite Metric Learning with Boosting, CHUNHUA SHEN, JUNAE KIM, NICTA, LEI WANG, The Australian National University, and ANTON VAN DEN HENGEL, University of Adelaide	1651
Fast subtree kernels on graphs, NINO SHERVASHIDZE, and KARSTEN BORGFWARDT, MPIs Tuebingen	1660
Neural Implementation of Hierarchical Bayesian Inference by Importance Sampling, LEI SHI, UC Berkeley, and THOMAS GRIFFITHS, University of California, Berkeley	1669
Learning Label Embeddings for Nearest-Neighbor Multi-class Classification with an Application to Speech Recognition, NATASHA SINGH-MILLER, MIT, and MICHAEL COLLINS, Massachusetts Institute of Technology	1678
Semi-supervised Learning using Sparse Eigenfunction Bases, KAUSHIK SINHA, and MIKHAIL BELKIN, Ohio State University	1687
Hierarchical Modeling of Local Image Features through L_p-Nested Symmetric Distributions, FABIAN SINZ, MPI for Biological Cybernetics & University of Tübingen, EERO SIMONCELLI, New York University, and MATTHIAS BETHGE, MPI for Biological Cybernetics & University of Tübingen .	1696
A Sparse Non-Parametric Approach for Single Channel Separation of Known Sounds, PARIS SMARAGDIS, Adobe Systems Inc., MADHUSUDANA SHASHANKA, Mars Inc., and BHIKSHA RAJ, Carnegie Mellon University	1705
A Bayesian Analysis of Dynamics in Free Recall, RICHARD SOCHER, Stanford University, SAMUEL GERSHMAN, ADLER PEROTTE, PER SEDERBERG, DAVID BLEI, and KENNETH NORMAN, Princeton University	1714
Kernels and learning curves for Gaussian process regression on random graphs, PETER SOLLICH, Kings College London, MATTHEW URRY, King's College London, and CAMILLE COTI, INRIA Saclay-Ile de France	1723

Time-Varying Dynamic Bayesian Networks, LE SONG, MLADEN KOLAR, and ERIC XING, Carnegie Mellon University	1732
Code-specific policy gradient rules for spiking neurons, HENNING SPREKELER, GUILLAUME HENNEQUIN, and WULFRAM GERSTNER, Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne	1741
Kernel Choice and Classifiability for RKHS Embeddings of Probability Distributions, BHARATH SRIPERUMBUDUR, UC San Diego, KENJI FUKUMIZU, The Institute of Statistical Mathematics, ARTHUR GRETTON, Carnegie Mellon University and Max Planck Institute, GERT LANCKRIET, University of California, and BERNHARD SCHOELKOPF, MPI for Biological Cybernetics	1750
On the Convergence of the Concave-Convex Procedure, BHARATH SRIPERUMBUDUR, UC San Diego, and GERT LANCKRIET, University of California	1759
Fast Learning from Non-i.i.d. Observations, INGO STEINWART, Los Alamos National Laboratory, and ANDREAS CHRISTMANN, University of Bayreuth	1768
Structural inference affects depth perception in the context of potential occlusion, IAN STEVENSON, and KONRAD KOERDING, Northwestern University	1777
The Wisdom of Crowds in the Recollection of Order Information, MARK STEYVERS, MICHAEL LEE, University of California, BRENT MILLER, and PERNILLE HEMMER, University of California, Irvine	1785
Online Learning of Assignments, MATTHEW STREETER, Google, DANIEL GOLOVIN, Carnegie Mellon University, and ANDREAS KRAUSE, California Institute of Technology	1794
Entropic Graph Regularization in Non-Parametric Semi-Supervised Classification, AMARNAG SUBRAMANYA, and JEFF BILMES, University of Washington	1803
Efficient Recovery of Jointly Sparse Vectors, LIANG SUN, JUN LIU, JIANHUI CHEN, and JIEPING YE, Arizona State University	1812
Modelling Relational Data using Bayesian Clustered Tensor Factorization, ILYA SUTSKEVER, University of Toronto, RUSLAN SALAKHUTDINOV, Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences and CSAIL MIT, and JOSHUA TENENBAUM, Massachusetts Institute of Technology	1821
Adapting to the Shifting Intent of Search Queries, UMAR SYED, Princeton University, ALEKSANDRS SLIVKINS, and NINA MISHRA, Microsoft Research	1829
Indian Buffet Processes with Power-law Behavior, YEE WHYE TEH, and DILAN GORUR, Gatsby Computational Neuroscience Unit, UCL	1838
Nonlinear directed acyclic structure learning with weakly additive noise models, ROBERT TILLMAN, Carnegie Mellon University, ARTHUR GRETTON, Carnegie Mellon and MPI for Biological Cybernetics, and PETER SPIRITES, Carnegie Mellon	1847
Compositionality of optimal control laws, EMANUEL TODOROV, UW ..	1856

Maximin affinity learning of image segmentation, SRINIVAS TURAGA, MIT, KEVIN BRIGGMAN, MORITZ HELMSTAEDTER, WINFRIED DENK, Max-Planck Institute for Medical Research, and SEBASTIAN SEUNG, MIT	1865
Help or Hinder: Bayesian Models of Social Goal Inference, TOMER ULLMAN, CHRIS BAKER, OWEN MACINDOE, OWAIN EVANS, NOAH GOODMAN, and JOSHUA TENENBAUM, Massachusetts Institute of Technology	1874
Learning to Rank by Optimizing NDCG Measure, HAMED VALIZADEGAN, RONG JIN, Michigan State University, RUOFEI ZHANG, and JIANCHANG MAO, Yahoo!	1883
Streaming Pointwise Mutual Information, BENJAMIN VAN DURME, University of Rochester, and ASHWIN LALL, Georgia Institute of Technology	1892
Bayesian Source Localization with the Multivariate Laplace Prior, MARCEL VAN GERVEN, BOTOND CSEKE, ICIS, ROBERT OOSTENVELD, DCCN, and TOM HESKES, Radboud University Nijmegen	1901
Gaussian process regression with Student-t likelihood, JARNO VANHATALO, PASI JYLÄNKI, and AKI VEHTARI, Helsinki University of Technology	1910
Measuring model complexity with the prior predictive, WOLF VANPAEMEL, Kuleuven	1919
Structured output regression for detection with partial truncation, ANDREA VEDALDI, and ANDREW ZISSERMAN, University of Oxford	1928
Bootstrapping from Game Tree Search, JOEL VENESE, UNSW / NICTA, DAVID SILVER, University of Alberta, WILLIAM UTHUR, NICTA / University of New South Wales, and ALAN BLAIR, NICTA / UNSW	1937
Tracking Dynamic Sources of Malicious Activity at Internet Scale, SHOBHA VENKATARAMAN, AT&T Labs – Research, AVRIM BLUM, CMU, DAWN SONG, UC Berkeley, SUBHABRATA SEN, and OLIVER SPATSCHECK, AT&T Labs – Research	1946
Explaining human multiple object tracking as resource-constrained approximate inference in a dynamic probabilistic model, ED VUL, MICHAEL FRANK, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, GEORGE ALVAREZ, Dept. of Psychology, Harvard University, and JOSHUA TENENBAUM, Massachusetts Institute of Technology	1955
Fast Graph Laplacian Regularized Kernel Learning via Semidefinite Quadratic Linear Programming, XIAO-MING WU, ANTHONY MAN-CHO SO, ZHENGUO LI, and SHUO-YEN ROBERT LI, The Chinese University of Hong Kong	1964
Rethinking LDA: Why Priors Matter, HANNA WALLACH, DAVID MIMNO, and ANDREW MCCALLUM, University of Massachusetts Amherst	1973
Decoupling Sparsity and Smoothness in the Discrete Hierarchical Dirichlet Process, CHONG WANG, and DAVID BLEI, Princeton University	1982
Variational Inference for the Nested Chinese Restaurant Process, CHONG WANG, and DAVID BLEI, Princeton University	1990
Sufficient Conditions for Agnostic Active Learnable, LIWEI WANG, Peking University	1999

A Rate Distortion Approach for Semi-Supervised Conditional Random Fields, YANG WANG, GHOLAMREZA HAFFARI, Simon Fraser University, SHAOJUN WANG, Wright State University, and GREG MORI, Simon Fraser U	2008
Graph Zeta Function in the Bethe Free Energy and Loopy Belief Propagation, YUSUKE WATANABE, and KENJI FUKUMIZU, The Institute of Statistical Mathematics	2017
Strategy Grafting in Extensive Games, KEVIN WAUGH, NOLAN BARD, and MICHAEL BOWLING, University of Alberta	2026
Whose Vote Should Count More: Optimal Integration of Labels from Labelers of Unknown Expertise, JACOB WHITEHILL, PAUL RUVOLO, TING-FAN WU, JACOB BERGSMA, UCSD, and JAVIER MOVELLAN, University of California	2035
Training Factor Graphs with Reinforcement Learning for Efficient MAP Inference, MICHAEL WICK, KHASHAYAR ROHANIMANESH, SAMEER SINGH, and ANDREW MCCALLUM, University of Massachusetts, Amherst	2044
Sequential effects reflect parallel learning of multiple environmental regularities, MATTHEW WILDER, University of Colorado Boulder, MATT JONES, and MICHAEL MOZER, University of Colorado at Boulder	2053
A Neural Implementation of the Kalman Filter, ROBERT WILSON, Princeton University, and LEIF FINKEL, University of Pennsylvania	2062
Sparse Estimation Using General Likelihoods and Non-Factorial Priors, DAVID WIPF, and SRIKANTAN NAGARAJAN, UC San Francisco	2071
Robust Principal Component Analysis: Exact Recovery of Corrupted Low-Rank Matrices via Convex Optimization, JOHN WRIGHT, Microsoft Research, ARVIND GANESH, University of Illinois, SHANKAR RAO, HRL Laboratories, YIGANG PENG, Microsoft Research Asia, and YI MA, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	2080
Learning Bregman Distance Functions and Its Application for Semi-Supervised Clustering, LEI WU, Nanyang Technological University, RONG JIN, Michigan State University, STEVEN CHU-HONG HOI, Nanyang Technological University, JIANKE ZHU, ETH Zurich, and NENGHAI YU, University of Science and Technology of China	2089
Statistical Consistency of Top-k Ranking, FEN XIA, Institute of Automation, Chinese Academy of Sciences, TIE-YAN LIU, and HANG LI, Microsoft Research Asia	2098
Boosting with Spatial Regularization, ZHEN XIANG, Princeton University, YONGXIN XI, URI HASSON, and PETER RAMADGE, Princeton University	2107
Dual Averaging Method for Regularized Stochastic Learning and Online Optimization, LIN XIAO, Microsoft Research	2116
Adaptive Regularization for Transductive Support Vector Machine, ZENGLIN XU, CUHK, RONG JIN, Michigan State University, JIANKE ZHU, ETH Zurich, IRWIN KING, CUHK, MICHAEL LYU, The Chinese University of HK, and ZHIRONG YANG, CUHK,TKK	2125

Parallel Inference for Latent Dirichlet Allocation on Graphics Processing Units , FENG YAN, Purdue University, NINGYI XU, Microsoft Research Asia, and YUAN QI, Purdue University	2134
Dirichlet-Bernoulli Alignment: A Generative Model for Multi-Class Multi-Label Multi-Instance Corpora , SHUANG-HONG YANG, HONGYUAN ZHA, Georgia Tech, and BAO-GANG HU, Chinese Academy of Sciences	2143
Heterogeneous multitask learning with joint sparsity constraints , XIAOLIN YANG, SEYOUNG KIM, and ERIC XING, Carnegie Mellon University .	2151
Noise Characterization, Modeling, and Reduction for In Vivo Neural Recording , ZHI YANG, QI ZHAO, UC Santa Cruz, EDWARD KEEFER, UT Southwestern Medical Center, and WENTAI LIU, UC Santa Cruz .	2160
Heavy-Tailed Symmetric Stochastic Neighbor Embedding , ZHIRONG YANG, CUHK,TKK, IRWIN KING, ZENGLIN XU, CUHK, and ERKKI OJA, TKK	2169
Hierarchical Mixture of Classification Experts Uncovers Interactions between Brain Regions , BANGPENG YAO, Stanford University, DIRK WALTHER, DIANE BECK, University of Illinois, and LI FEI-FEI, Princeton University	2178
Multi-Step Dyna Planning for Policy Evaluation and Control , HENGSHUAI YAO, University of alberta, RICH SUTTON, University of Alberta, SHALABH BHATNAGAR, Indian Institute of Science, DONGCUI DIAO, South China Normal University, and CSABA SZEPESVARI, University of Alberta	2187
Conditional Random Fields with High-Order Features for Sequence Labeling , NAN YE, National University of Singapo, WEE SUN LEE, National University of Singapore, HAI LEONG CHIEU, DSO National Laboratories, and DAN WU, Singapore MIT Alliance	2196
Analysis of SVM with Indefinite Kernels , YIMING YING, COLIN CAMPBELL, University of Bristol, and MARK GIROLAMI, University of Glasgow	2205
Sparse Metric Learning via Smooth Optimization , YIMING YING, University of Bristol, KAIZHU HUANG, NLP, Institute of Automation, Chinese Academy of Sciences, and COLIN CAMPBELL, University of Bristol	2214
Nonlinear Learning using Local Coordinate Coding , KAI YU, NEC Laboratories, TONG ZHANG, Rutgers, and YIHONG GONG, NEC Laboratories America	2223
A General Projection Property for Distribution Families , YAO-LIANG YU, YUXI LI, DALE SCHUURMANS, and CSABA SZEPESVARI, University of Alberta	2232
Optimal Scoring for Unsupervised Learning , ZHIHUA ZHANG, and GUANG DAI, Zhejiang University	2241
Anomaly Detection with Score functions based on Nearest Neighbor Graphs , MANQI ZHAO, and VENKATESH SALIGRAMA, Boston University	2250
DUOL: A Double Updating Approach for Online Learning , PEILIN ZHAO, STEVEN CHU-HONG HOI, Nanyang Technological University, and RONG JIN, Michigan State University	2259

Optimizing Multi-Class Spatio-Spectral Filters via Bayes Error Estimation for EEG Classification, WENMING ZHENG, Southeast University, P.R. China, and ZHOUCHE LIN, Microsoft Research Asia, P.R. China	2268
Efficient Moments-based Permutation Tests, CHUNXIAO ZHOU, UIUC, HUIXIA JUDY WANG, North Carolina State University, and YONGMEI MICHELLE WANG, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	2277
Canonical Time Warping for Alignment of Human Behavior, FENG ZHOU, and FERNANDO DE LA TORRE, Carnegie Mellon University	2286
Non-Parametric Bayesian Dictionary Learning for Sparse Image Representations, MINGYUAN ZHOU, Duke ECE, HAOJUN CHEN, Duke University, JOHN PAISLEY, LU REN, Duke ECE, GUILLERMO SAPIRO, University of Minnesota, and LAWRENCE CARIN, Duke ECE	2295
Thresholding Procedures for High Dimensional Variable Selection and Statistical Estimation, SHUHENG ZHOU, ETH Zurich	2304
Nonparametric Bayesian Texture Learning and Synthesis, LONG ZHU, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, YUANHAO CHEN, UCLA, BILL FREEMAN, and ANTONIO TORRALBA, Massachusetts Institute of Technology	2313
Human Rademacher Complexity, XIAOJIN ZHU, TIMOTHY ROGERS, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and BRYAN GIBSON, University of Wisconsin	2322
Slow Learners are Fast, MARTIN ZINKEVICH, ALEX SMOLA, and JOHN LANGFORD, Yahoo!	2331
The "tree-dependent components" of natural scenes are edge filters, DANIEL ZORAN, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and YAIR WEISS, Hebrew University	2340
Subject Index	2349
Author Index	2353

Preface

This volume contains the papers presented at the twenty-third¹ annual conference on Neural Information Processing Systems (NIPS), held in British Columbia, Canada from December 7th through 10th, 2009. NIPS is a premier interdisciplinary conference that highlights information processing research from computational, biological, physical, and mathematical perspectives. This synthesis of backgrounds enables unique insights into learning processes, and we are pleased to present the exciting results in this volume.

The papers were accepted to NIPS following a thorough, highly competitive and rigorous review process. We had 1105 submissions of which only 263 were accepted to the conference. NIPS is a very selective and high-quality conference thanks to the outstanding efforts of the group of people who evaluate, select and improve the papers: the program chairs, the program committee, and the reviewers. Every paper was double-blind reviewed, initially by at least three reviewers who were assigned by the program committee. In cases where reviews were contradictory or the reviewers were uncertain, additional reviewers were assigned. After the initial reviews were entered into the system, the authors were given the opportunity to respond to the reviews, and an electronic discussion was initiated in which the reviewers and the program committee member responsible for that paper tried to resolve any differences of opinion regarding the paper. In case major disagreement still existed after the discussion, additional reviewers could be assigned to the paper. Finally, borderline papers were read by additional members of the program committee and the decisions were made based on discussions of the program committee members in August 2009.

As in previous years, the submissions covered a broad range of areas, including: supervised learning, probabilistic models and methods, unsupervised and semi-supervised learning, control and reinforcement learning, learning theory, optimization for learning algorithms, neuroscience, cognitive science, and applications of learning algorithms in vision, robotics, natural language, speech and signal processing, bio-informatics, and brain imaging. Authors were not forced to choose a single area with which to label their submission and, as could be expected from such an interdisciplinary meeting, the majority of submissions chose multiple areas.

These themes can also be seen in the five student-authored papers which received awards. In order to be eligible for an award, a paper had to be nominated by the student's advisor who confirmed that at least fifty percent of the research reported in the paper was performed by one or more student authors. Out of these nominated papers, the program committee generated a short list based on the comments of the paper's reviewers. Finally, a subcommittee read all papers on the short list and chose two papers for an outstanding paper award and three for an honorable mention. The two outstanding student paper awards went to: *An LP View of the M-best MAP problem*, by Menachem Fromer and Amir Globerson; and *Fast*

¹Using zero-based counting, this is volume 22.

subtree kernels on graphs, by Nino Shervashidze and Karsten Borgwardt. The three student paper honorable mentions went to: *Reading Tea Leaves: How Humans Interpret Topic Models*, by Jonathan Chang, Jordan Boyd-Graber, Sean Gerrish, Chong Wang, and David Blei; *Multi-Label Prediction via Compressed Sensing* by Daniel Hsu, Sham Kakade, John Langford, and Tong Zhang; and *Kernel Choice and Classifiability for RKHS Embeddings of Probability Distributions* by Bharath Sriperumbudur, Kenji Fukumizu, Arthur Gretton, Gert Lanckriet, and Bernhard Schölkopf.

In addition to submitted papers, NIPS had six invited talks at the plenary session. These invited speakers were chosen to highlight research in fields that are related to NIPS. Sergio Verdu of Princeton University talked about “Relative Entropy.” Geoffrey Hinton of the University of Toronto talked about the “Deep Learning with Multiplicative Interactions.” Mirta Hartmann of Northwestern University talked about “The Rat Vibrissal Array as a Model Sensorimotor System.” Yair Weiss of Hebrew University talked about “Learning and Inference in Low-Level Vision.” Persi Diaconis of Stanford talked about “Bayesian Analysis of Markov Chains.” Karl Deisseroth of Stanford talked about “Optogenetics: Development and Applications.” The talks by Geoffrey Hinton and Yair Weiss are part of the Ed Posner Memorial Lecture Series, in honor of the late Ed Posner, the first president of the NIPS Foundation.

As in previous years, the conference was preceded by a day of tutorials and followed by two days of workshops. The tutorials included presenters from a remarkably broad range of subjects. Gunnar Martinsson discussed “Making Very Large-Scale Linear Algebraic Computations Possible Via Randomization.” Antonio Torralba discussed “Understanding Visual Scenes.” Michael Littman discussed “Model-Based Reinforcement Learning.” Francis Bach discussed “Sparse Methods for Machine Learning: Theory and Algorithms.” Ronan Collobert and Jason Weston discussed “Deep Learning in Natural Language Processing.” Arnaud Doucet and Nando de Freitas discussed “Sequential Monte-Carlo Methods.” The workshops focused on more specialized subjects and fostered the lively, informal exchanges for which they are eagerly anticipated each year.

Putting together a conference of this scale is only made possible by the contributions of many people. We gratefully acknowledge our corporate sponsors: Air Force Office of Scientific Research, Artificial Intelligence, Google, Microsoft Research, IBM Research, D.E. Shaw & Co., Yahoo Labs, Alberta Ingenuity Center for Machine Learning, MITACS, Intel, Pascal, Toyota, and Springer. The NIPS board, headed by Terry Sejnowski, provided excellent guidance and continuity within the great tradition of NIPS. Mary Ellen Perry’s efforts on all matters having to do with NIPS were crucial in getting things to run smoothly. Our roles would have been impossible without the other members of the NIPS 2009 Organizing Committee: Yann LeCun, Richard Zemel, and Hans Peter Graf. We also wish to thank our workflow master Yucheng Low.

The NIPS 2009 Program Committee included: Jean-Yves Audibert, David Blei, Kwabena Boahen, Michael Bowling, Nicolo Cesa-Bianchi, Aaron Courville, Koby Crammer, Nathaniel Daw, David Dunson, Paolo Frasconi, Nir Friedman, Arthur Gretton, Matthias Hein, Aapo Hyvarinen, Thorsten Joachims, Mark Johnson, Charles Kemp, Wee Sun Lee, Tai Sing Lee, Jon McAuliffe, Yael Niv, Robert Nowak, Pascal Poupart, Carl Rasmussen, Erik Sudderth, Ben Taskar, Antonio Torralba, Bill Triggs, Sethu Vijayakumar, and Andrew Zisserman. It was a privilege to work with such a professional and hardworking group of scientists. We also thank the NIPS 2009 reviewers, listed in the following pages for their tireless efforts in providing objective evaluations of the papers submitted to the conference.

Finally, we wish to thank the people most responsible for this conference — you, the scientists who have shared your latest discoveries with this community. Your dedication to high-caliber scientific research has made organizing this conference a pleasant and educational task.

Yoshua Bengio, University of Montreal
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NIPS gratefully acknowledges the generosity of those individuals and organizations who have provided financial support for the NIPS 2009 conference. The financial support enabled us to sponsor student travel and participation, the outstanding student paper awards, the demonstration track and the opening buffet.

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FELIX AGAKOV
ALEKH AGARWAL
DEEPAK AGARWAL
EDO AIROLDI
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KARTEEK ALAHARI
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ANDREW BARTO
REGINA BARZILAY
SUMIT BASU
AARON BATISTA
CHRISTIAN BECKMANN
ULRIK BEIERHOLM
GILL BEJERANO
MIKHAIL BELKIN
ASA BEN HUR
SAM Y BENGIO
KRISTIN BENNETT
MATTHIAS BETHGE
BRETT BETHKE
JINBO BI
STEFFEN BICKEL
DANNY BICKSON
HORST BISCHOF
ANDREW BLAKE
GILLES BLANCHARD
MATHEW BLASCHKO
DAVID BLEI
KWABENA BOAHEN
KARSTEN BORWARDT
VIVEK BORKAR
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RUI CASTRO
GAVIN CAWLEY
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NICOLO CESA-BIANCHI
SOUMEN CHAKRABARTI
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KAMALIKA CHAUDHURI
GAL CHECHIK
LI CHENG
SONIA CHERNOVA
DAVID CHIANG
SILVIA CHIAPPA
HAI LEONG CHIEU
YEJIN CHOI
SUMIT CHOPRA
ANDREAS CHRISTMANN
KEN CHURCH
ANDRZEJ CICHOCKI
STEPHEN CLARK
MARK COATES
MICHAEL COLLINS
RONAN COLLOBERT
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GREG CORRADO
TIMOTHEE COUR
AARON COURVILLE
KOB Y CRAMMER
ANTONIO CRIMINISI
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FLORENCE D'ALCHE-BUC
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ARNAK DALALYAN
DAVID DANKS
ANIRBAN DASGUPTA
SANJOY DASGUPTA
DENVER DASH

HAL DAUME
NATHANIEL DAW
NANDO DE FREITAS
ROB DE RUYTER
VIRGINIA DE SA
DENNIS DeCOSTE
OFER DEKEL
OLIVIER DELALLEAU
INDERJIT DHILLON
THOMAS DIETTERICH
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CARLOS DIUK WASSER
ADRIAN DOBRA
EIZABURO DOI
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PIOTR DOLLAR
FINALE DOSHI
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INDIVERI GIACOMO
ANDREW GILPIN
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AMIR GLOBERSON
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JACOB GOLDBERGER
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MASATO INOUE
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TOMMI JAAKKOLA
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HERBERT JAEGER
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TONY JEBARA
STEFANIE JEGELKA
SHANE JENSEN
RONG JIN
THORSTEN JOACHIMS
MARK JOHNSON
NEBOJSA JOJIC
MICHAEL JORDAN
FREDERIC JURIE
BALÁZS KÉGL
MICHAEL KALISH
TAKAFUMI KANAMORI
TAKAFUMI KANAMORI
HYUN MIN KANG
TOMMY KAPLAN
BERT KAPPEN
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HISASHI KASHIMA
SAMUEL KASKI
SATHIYA KEERTHI
CHARLES KEMP
KRISTIAN KERSTING
JOSEPH KESHET
KEE-EUNG KIM
SERGEY KIRSHNER
JYRKI KIVINEN
STEFAN KLANKE
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JENS KOBER
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HUGO LAROCHELLE
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FRANCOIS LAVIOLETTE
NEIL LAWRENCE
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SVETLANA LAZEBNIK
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WEE SUN LEE
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VINCENT LEPETIT
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SAYAN MUKHERJEE
KLAUS-ROBERT MULLER
REMI MUNOS
NOBORU MURATA
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XUANLONG NGUYEN
DUY NGUYEN-TUONG
HANNES NICKISCH
ALEX NICULESCU-MIZIL
Yael Niv
WILLIAM NOBLE
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SEBASTIAN NOWOZIN
KLAUS OBERMAYER
UWE OHLER
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JAAKKO PELTONEN
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RAJAT RAINA
UMESH RAJASHEKAR
ALAIN RAKOTOMAMONJY
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TOBIAS SCHEFFER
BERNT SCHIELE
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MICHELE SEBAG
MATTHIAS SEEGER
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PEGGY SERIES
THOMAS SERRE
ROCCO SERVEDIO
FEI SHA
PATRICK SHAFTO
GREGORY SHAKHNAROVICH
OHAD SHAMIR
TATYANA SHARPEE
AMNON SHASHUA
JOHN SHAWE-TAYLOR
CHRISTIAN SHELTON
XIAOTONG SHEN
PRADEEP SHENOY
BERTRAM SHI
LIU SHIH-CHII
SHOHEI SHIMIZU
JONATHON SHLENS
LAVI SHPIGELMAN
ILYA SHPITSER
OREN SHRIKI
IVO SHTEREV
LEONID SIGAL
RICARDO SILVA
DAVID SILVER
EERO SIMONCELLI
OZGUR SIMSEK
VIKAS SINDHWANI
AMIT SINGER
YORAM SINGER
AARTI SINGH
TOMAS SINGLIAR
FABIAN SINZ

JOSEF SIVIC
NOAM SLONIM
CRISTIAN SMINCHISESCU
STELIOS SMIRNAKIS
NOAH SMITH
ALEX SMOLA
ED SNELSON
STEFANO SOATTO
PETER SOLLICH
FRITZ SOMMER
LE SONG
ALESSANDRO SPERDUTI
SUVRIT SRA
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BHARATH SRIPERUMBUDUR
DANIEL STEFANKOVIC
OLIVER STEGLE
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FLORIAN STEINKE
INGO STEINWART
MARK STEYVERS
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AMOS STORKEY
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AMARNAG SUBRAMANYA
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ILYA SUTSKEVER
CHARLES SUTTON
RICH SUTTON
UMAR SYED
CSABA SZEPESVARI
PRASAD TADEPALLI
PARTHA TALUKDAR
ERIK TALVITE
AMEET TALWALKAR
AMOS TANAY
TONG BOON TANG
MARSHALL TAPPEN
BEN TASKAR
SEKHAR TATIKONDA
GRAHAM TAYLOR
MATT TAYLOR
RUSS TEDRAKE
YEE WHYE TEH
JOSHUA TENENBAUM
CHOON HUI TEO
AMBUJ TEWARI
OLIVIER TEYTAUD
EVANGELOS THEODOROU
ROMAIN THIBAUX
MICHAEL THON
ROBERT TIBSHIRANI
ROBERT TILLMAN
JO-ANNE TING
MICHALIS TITSIAS
MICHAEL TODD

ANDREA TOLIAS
ANTONIO TORRALBA
MARC TOUSSAINT
KRISTINA TOUTANOVA
VOLKER TRESP
JOCHEN TRIESCH
BILL TRIGGS
JULIA TROMMERSHAUSER
JOEL TROPP
IVOR WAI-HUNG TSANG
IOANNIS TSOCHANTARIDIS
KOJI TSUDA
ZHUOWEN TU
TINNE TUYTELAARS
ELJI UCHIBE
NAONORI UEDA
LYLE UNGAR
RAQUEL URTASUN
WILL UThER
GIORGIO VALENTINI
ANTAL VAN DEN BOSCH
PATRICK VAN DER SMAGT
MARTIJN VAN OTTERLO
MARK VAN ROSSUM
JARNO VANHATALO
NUNO VASCONCELOS
GAURAV VEDA
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AKI VEHTARI
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ULRIKE VON LUXBURG
SLOBODAN VUCETIC
ED VUL
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HANNA WALLACH
LEI WANG
ZHUANG WANG
LARRY WASSERMAN
CHU WEI
KILLIAN WEINBERGER
DAVID WEISS
YAIR WEISS
MAX WELLING
WIM WIEGERINCK

ERIC WIEWIORA
REBECCA WILLETT
CHRIS WILLIAMS
ROBERT WILSON
DAVID WINGATE
JOHN WINN
OLE WINThER
PATRICK WOLFE
DANIEL WOLPERT
JENNIFER WORTMAN VAUGHAN
STEVE WRIGHT
MINGRUI WU
WEI WU
YING-NIAN WU
ERIC XING
LINLI XU
KATSU YAMANE
MING-HSUAN YANG
QIANG YANG
ZHIJUN YANG
CHEN YANOVER
JIEPING YE
SCOTT WEN-TAU YIH
YIMING YING
ELAD YOM-TOV
BYRON YU
CHUN-NAM YU
KAI YU
SHIPENG YU
STELLA YU
YISONG YUE
MIKHAIL ZASLAVSKIY
ASSAF ZEEVI
LUKE ZETTLEMOYER
HONGYUAN ZHA
DELL ZHANG
KUN ZHANG
ALICE ZHENG
LU ZHENG Dong
DING XUAN ZHOU
SHUHENG ZHOU
LONG ZHU
XIAOJIN ZHU
TODD ZICKLER
ANDREAS ZIEHE
MARTIN ZINKEVICH
ANDREW ZISSERMAN
ONNO ZOETER
BARBARA ZWICKNAGL

Subject Index

- Applications, 28, 324, 468, 1401, 1642, 1937, 1946, 2232
- Bioinformatics, 682, 970, 997, 1428, 1732, 2151
- Collaborative Filtering, 952, 1258
- Graphics, 1033
- Information Retrieval, 28, 64, 243, 306, 315, 1042
- Natural Language Processing, 73, 144, 664, 1249, 1973
- Systems Biology, 970
- Time Series Prediction, 432, 1006, 1473
- Web Applications, 243, 324, 835, 961, 1829

- Cognitive Science, 234, 611, 754, 853, 925, 934, 943, 1222, 1777, 1785, 1874, 1955
- Attention, 1955
- Development, 727
- Inference & Reasoning, 611, 853, 925, 1874, 2035, 2062
- Knowledge Representation & Acquisition, 727, 934, 943, 1159, 1321, 1785, 1874
- Language, 754
- Learning, 754, 925, 934, 943, 1159, 1321, 2322
- Memory, 234, 1321, 1714, 1785, 1955
- Model Comparison Methods, 234, 1919
- Perception, 611, 1669, 1777, 1919, 1955, 2062
- Reinforcement Learning, 1105
- Response Time Modeling, 2053
- Control and Reinforcement Learning, 1186, 1856, 2187
- Bayesian RL, 198, 477
- Control, 459, 1446, 1642, 2187
- Markov Decision Processes, 459, 1446
- Multi-Agent Systems and Game Theory, 19, 1078, 1186, 2026
- Planning and Decision Making, 1446, 2187
- Policy Search, 1312
- POMDPs, 19, 198, 477, 1642
- Reinforcement Learning, 189, 1015, 1186, 1204, 1312, 1446, 1642, 1741, 1937, 2044

- Hardware, 2134

- Neuroscience, 108, 180, 790, 808, 988, 1105, 1383, 1473
- Brain Imaging, 126, 252, 270, 378, 790, 808, 1195, 1410, 1633, 1901, 2107, 2178
- Brain-computer Interfaces & Neural Prostheses, 189, 513, 1105, 2160, 2268
- Computational Neural Models, 162, 369, 620, 808, 1105, 1267, 1357, 1473, 1669, 2062, 2160
- Cortex, 378, 1195
- Motor Control, 1105
- Neural Decoding, 90, 180, 576, 790, 1195, 1410, 1464, 2062, 2160
- Neural Populations, 90, 180, 620, 1195, 1267, 1383, 1669, 2062
- Plasticity, 1105, 1357, 1464
- Spiking Neurons, 180, 988, 1357, 1669, 1741, 2160

- Optimization, 495, 504, 1033, 1571, 1759, 1883, 2169, 2232
- Combinatorial Optimization, 10, 916, 1794
- Constrained Optimization, 55, 907, 1759
- Convergence Analysis, 495, 781, 862, 1759, 2205
- Convex Optimization, 1, 171, 243, 396, 495, 781, 997, 1051, 1651, 1759, 1964, 2080, 2116, 2205, 2214
- Gradient Methods, 1, 378, 387, 495, 763, 781, 952, 1937, 2205, 2214, 2331
- Non-convex Optimization, 378, 1033, 1759, 1883
- Stochastic Methods, 1, 763, 781, 2116, 2232

- Probabilistic Models and Methods, 387, 504, 567, 638, 799, 871, 1069, 1159, 1177, 1249, 1294,

1303, 1536, 1545, 1910, 2008, 2053, 2295
 Bayesian Methods, 73, 216, 225, 234, 405, 441, 468, 486, 549, 736, 799, 1069, 1276, 1294, 1392, 1464, 1518, 1554, 1615, 1624, 1633, 1714, 1723, 1777, 1838, 1901, 1973, 1982, 1990, 2071, 2295
 Belief Propagation, 37, 351, 826, 2017
 Causal Inference, 1847
 Density Estimation, 432, 1375, 1473, 1696, 2277
 Exact and Approximate Inference, 216, 351, 360, 567, 638, 799, 826, 871, 1114, 1294, 1437, 1545, 1892, 1910, 2277
 Gaussian Processes, 279, 1087, 1177, 1195, 1723, 1910
 Graphical Models, 225, 324, 351, 405, 468, 486, 664, 682, 745, 826, 835, 970, 1249, 1276, 1285, 1303, 1401, 1419, 1598, 1607, 1990, 2035, 2134, 2340
 Missing Data, 952, 1410, 2295
 Mixture Models, 225, 486, 1051, 1491
 Model Selection & Structure Learning, 682, 736, 745, 1006, 1285, 1303, 1615, 1642, 1732, 1847, 2304
 Monte Carlo Methods, 144, 216, 549, 826, 1294, 1536, 1554, 1598, 1615, 1624, 1982, 2134
 Structured and Relational Data, 934, 1123, 1249, 1276, 1455, 1821, 2143, 2178
 Temporal Models and Sequence Data, 189, 297, 432, 549, 1177, 1437, 1892, 2196, 2286
 Variational Methods, 216, 826, 1069, 1177, 1633, 1990, 2134
 Robotics
 Exploration & Map Building, 37
 Speech and Signal Processing, 207, 1096
 Signal Processing, 55, 378, 387, 540, 1812
 Source Separation, 1705
 Speaker Identification, 207
 Speech Recognition, 1678, 1803
 Supervised Learning, 28, 360, 513, 540, 603, 772, 1132, 1150, 1159, 2107
 Classification, 135, 171, 252, 360, 585, 603, 763, 880, 997, 1231, 1339, 1410, 1428, 1482, 1518, 1678, 1750, 1768, 1865, 2107, 2125, 2143, 2151, 2205, 2214, 2259
 Ensemble Methods and Boosting, 585, 880, 1150, 1231, 1651, 1883, 2107
 Kernel Methods, 46, 135, 333, 342, 396, 432, 673, 844, 907, 997, 1060, 1087, 1527, 1660, 1750, 1768, 1928, 2205, 2259
 Large Margin Methods, 414, 603, 997
 Learning with Structured Data, 315, 450, 718, 763, 772, 1419, 1455, 1660, 1678, 1865, 1928, 2008, 2044, 2098, 2107, 2143, 2196
 Model Selection, 46, 540, 1006, 1141, 1213
 Neural Networks, 64, 99, 342, 646, 763, 1339, 1865
 Regression, 46, 55, 261, 441, 540, 594, 718, 889, 1006, 1024, 1087, 1141, 1150, 1213, 1348, 1491, 1723, 1768, 1910, 1928, 2151
 Sparsity and Feature Selection, 46, 117, 252, 441, 540, 772, 916, 997, 1006, 1087, 1141, 1150, 1213, 1240, 1339, 1563, 1812, 2071, 2116, 2214
 Theory, 162, 261, 279, 441, 700, 709, 772, 817, 880, 1392, 1509, 1527, 1723, 1750, 1768, 2232
 Consistency, 360, 387, 673, 718, 1132, 1348, 1563, 1750, 2098, 2250
 Convergence Analysis, 117, 862, 1204, 1348, 1545, 1563, 1768
 Game Theory & Computational Economics, 171, 709, 1078, 2232
 Information Theory, 1, 180, 700, 709, 1563
 Online Learning, 10, 55, 297, 414, 495, 700, 709, 763, 781, 862, 1794, 1829, 1946, 2116, 2259,

2295, 2331
 Statistical Learning Theory, 1, 28, 46, 360, 450, 603, 718, 862, 889, 1213, 1348, 1366, 1410, 1563, 1750, 1768, 1999, 2223, 2304, 2322
 Unsupervised and Semi-supervised Learning, 10, 28, 82, 153, 243, 342, 522, 664, 691, 952, 1069, 1168, 1330, 1339, 1536, 1687, 1964, 2008, 2035, 2125, 2169, 2223
 Active Learning, 691, 898, 1633, 1999, 2035
 Anomaly Detection, 432, 2250
 Clustering, 10, 153, 225, 243, 333, 549, 585, 925, 970, 1159, 1571, 1821, 1964, 2089, 2169, 2241
 Embeddings and Manifold Learning, 117, 189, 423, 718, 979, 1042, 1509, 1964, 2169
 ICA, PCA, CCA & Other Linear Models, 117, 629, 1123, 1294, 1518, 2080, 2241, 2286
 Matrix Factorization, 135, 324, 1258, 1624, 1821
 Similarity and Distance Learning, 243, 306, 396, 1222, 1509, 1964, 2089, 2214
 Spectral Methods, 333, 522, 952, 1330
 Topic Models, 288, 324, 558, 835, 1589, 1607, 1714, 1973, 1982, 1990, 2143
 Transduction Learning, 585, 691, 979, 1500, 1964
 Vision, 135, 522, 655, 961, 1033, 1222, 1428, 2035, 2313
 3D Reconstruction, 441, 1865
 Biological Vision, 99, 108, 369, 1267, 1696
 Image Coding, 82, 576, 1509
 Image Segmentation, 655, 1580, 1865
 Machine Vision Applications, 37, 306, 1865
 Motion and Tracking, 55, 333, 441, 549
 Natural Scene Statistics, 369, 423, 629, 646, 1033, 2295, 2340
 Object Recognition, 135, 522, 531, 558, 655, 961, 1051, 1114, 1168, 1222, 1339, 1482, 1589, 1615, 1928
 Visual Features, 531, 558, 629, 1195, 2295
 Visual Perception, 369, 629, 961, 1222, 1267, 1777
 Visual Processing, 369, 629, 1267

Author Index

- Abe, Naoki, 1150
Agarwal, Alekh, 1
Ailon, Nir, 10
Allen, Martin, 19
Alvarez, George, 1955
Amini, Massih, 28
Anati, Roy, 37
Arleo, Angelo, 180
Arlot, Sylvain, 46
Arora, Raman, 55
Aytes Pereira, Jose, 1303
- Bach, Francis, 46, 1132
Bai, Bing, 64
Baker, Chris, 1874
Bard, Nolan, 2026
Barnard, Kobus, 1615
Bartels, Andreas, 126
Bartlett, Peter , 1
Barto, Andrew, 1015
Beck, Diane, 270, 2178
Bejan, Cosmin, 73
Belkin, Mikhail, 1687
Ben-Tal, Aharon, 844
Bengio, Samy, 82, 306
Bengio, Yoshua, 99, 405
Berens, Philipp, 90, 620
Bergsma, Jacob, 2035
Bergstra, James, 99
Berkes, Pietro, 108
Bethge, Matthias, 90, 620, 1195, 1696
Bhatnagar, Shalabh, 1204, 2187
Bhattacharyya, Chiranjib, 844
Bian, Wei, 117
Bilmes, Jeff, 691, 916, 1803
Black, Michael, 558
Blair, Alan, 1937
Blankertz, Benjamin, 513
Blaschko, Mathew, 126
Blei, David, 288, 1714, 1982, 1990
Blum, Avrim, 1946
Bo, Liefeng, 135, 1419
Boben, Marko, 531
Borgwardt, Karsten, 1660
Bouchard, Guillaume, 1132
Bouchard-Côté, Alexandre, 144
Boutsidis, Christos, 153
Bouvier, Jake, 162
Bowling, Michael, 1078, 2026
Boyd-Graber, Jordan, 288
- Brückner, Michael, 171
Bradski, Gary, 558
Brasselet, Romain, 180
Brefeld, Ulf, 997
Brigman, Kevin, 1865
Bush, Keith, 189
- Caetano, Tiberio, 1455, 1491
Cai, Chenghui, 198
Campbell, Colin, 2205, 2214
Campbell, William, 207
Canny, John, 324
Caputo, Barbara, 1168
Carbonetto, Peter, 216
Carin, Lawrence, 198, 486, 2295
Caron, Francois, 225
Castellani, Umberto, 1428
Cavagnaro, Daniel, 234
Cayton, Lawrence, 243
Cecchi, Guillermo, 252
Cepeda, Nicholas, 1321
Cevher, Volkan, 261
Chai, Barry, 270
Chai, Kian Ming, 279
Chang, Jonathan, 288
Chang, Kai-min, 853
Chang, Yu-Ming, 763
Chase, Steven, 1105
Chater, Nick, 727
Chaudhuri, Kamalika, 297
Chechik, Gal, 306
Chen, Haojun, 2295
Chen, Jianhui, 1812
Chen, Kewei , 808
Chen, Wei, 315
Chen, Xi, 1141
Chen, Ye, 324
Chen, Yuanahao, 2313
Chieu, Hai Leong, 2196
Chin, Tat-Jun, 333
Chklovskii, Dmitri, 790
Cho, Youngmin, 342
Choi, Arthur, 351
Choi, Seungjin, 970
Christmann, Andreas, 1768
Cléménçon, Stéphan, 360
Coen-Cagli, Ruben, 369
Collins, Michael, 1678
Collobert, Ronan, 64
Conroy, Bryan, 378

Coquelin, Pierre-Arnaud, 387
 Cortes, Corinna, 64, 396
 Coti, Camille, 1723
 Courville, Aaron, 405
 Crammer, Koby, 414
 Cristani, Marco, 1428
 Cseke, Botond, 1901
 Culpepper, Benjamin, 423
 Cuturi, Marco, 432

 D'Aspremont, Alexandre, 432
 Dai, Guang, 2241
 Dalalyan, Arnak, 441
 Dallmeier, Valentin, 468
 Daniilidis, Kostas, 37
 Danoczy, Marton, 513
 Darrell, Trevor, 558, 1042, 1589
 Darwiche, Adnan, 351
 Daume, Hal, 1518
 Davis, Randall, 1401
 Dayan, Peter, 369, 1464
 De la Torre, Fernando, 2286
 Deguest, Romain, 387
 Dekel, Ofer, 450
 van den Hengel, Anton, 1651
 Denk, Winfried, 1865
 Depecker, Marine, 360
 Desai, Vijay, 459
 Dhillon, Inderjit, 1258
 Diao, Dongcui, 2187
 Dietz, Laura, 468
 Doshi-Velez, Finale, 477, 1294
 Doucet, Arnaud, 225
 Doya, Kenji, 1312
 Dredze, Mark, 414
 Drineas, Petros, 153
 Du, Lan, 486
 Duchi, John, 495
 Dunson, David, 486

 Eck, Douglas, 405
 Ecker, Alexander, 90
 Efros, Alyosha, 1222, 1580
 Evans, Owain, 1874

 Fan, Wei, 585
 Farias, Vivek, 459, 504
 Fazli, Siamac, 513
 Fei-Fei, Li, 270, 2178
 Fergus, Rob, 522, 1033
 Ferrari, Vittorio, 1168
 Fidler, Sanja, 531
 Figueiras-Vidal, Anibal, 1087
 Finkel, Leif, 2062

 Fiser, Jozsef, 108
 Fleisher, Adam, 808
 Fletcher, Alyson, 540, 1545
 Fowlkes, Charless, 1482
 Fox, Emily, 549
 Frank, Andrew, 826
 Frank, Michael, 1955
 Freeman, Bill, 1580, 2313
 Freund, Yoav, 297
 Fritz, Mario, 558
 Fromer, Menachem, 567
 Fujiwara, Yusuke, 576
 Fukumizu, Kenji, 673, 1750, 2017

 G, Dinesh, 844
 Ganchev, Kuzman, 664
 Ganesh, Arvind, 2080
 Gao, Jing, 585
 Gao, Tianshi, 655
 Garcia, Eric, 594
 Germain, Pascal, 603
 Gerrish, Sean, 288
 Gershman, Samuel, 611, 1714
 Gerstner, Wulfram, 1741
 Gerwin, Sebastian, 90, 620, 1195
 Ghahramani, Zoubin, 1294
 Ghebreab, Sennay, 629
 Gibson, Bryan, 2322
 Girolami, Mark, 2205
 Globerson, Amir, 567
 Goldberger, Jacob, 638
 Goldstein, Rita, 745
 Golovin, Daniel, 1794
 Gong, Yihong, 2223
 Goodfellow, Ian, 646
 Goodman, Noah, 1874
 Gorur, Dilan, 1838
 Gould, Stephen, 655
 Goutte, Cyril, 28
 Goyal, Vivek, 1545
 Grünewälder, Steffen, 1383
 Graca, Joao, 664
 Grangier, David, 64
 Gray, Alexander, 1375, 1527, 1536
 Gretton, Arthur, 673, 1750, 1847
 Griffiths, Thomas, 754, 1276, 1669
 Grozea, Cristian, 513
 Grzegorzcyk, Marco, 682
 Guestrin, Carlos, 799
 Guillory, Andrew, 691
 Gupta, Maya, 594

 Haffari, Gholamreza, 2008
 Hamze, Firas, 216

Han, Jiawei, 585
 Harabagiu, Sanda, 73
 Harchaoui, Zaid, 673
 Hasson, Uri, 2107
 Haxby, James, 378
 Hazan, Elad, 700, 709
 Hebert, Martial, 1114
 Hein, Matthias, 718, 979
 Heller, Katherine, 727
 Helmstaedter, Moritz, 1865
 Hemmer, Pernille, 1785
 Henaou, Ricardo, 736
 Hennequin, Guillaume, 1741
 Henniges, Marc, 1069
 Heskes, Tom, 1901
 Hickl, Andrew, 73
 Hinton, Geoffrey, 1339, 1410, 1607
 Hoi, Steven Chu-Hong, 2089, 2259
 Honorio, Jean, 745
 Horvitz, Eric, 898
 Hsu, Anne, 754
 Hsu, Chun-Nan, 763
 Hsu, Daniel, 297, 772
 Hu, Bao-gang, 2143
 Hu, Chonghai, 781
 Hu, Tao, 790
 Huang, Hanshen, 763
 Huang, Jonathan, 799
 Huang, Kaizhu, 2214
 Huang, Shuai, 808
 Husmeier, Dirk, 682
 Hutter, Marcus, 817

 Ihler, Alexander, 826
 Ilin, Alexander, 1177
 Isbell, Charles, 1186
 Iwata, Tomoharu, 835

 Jagabathula, Srikanth, 504
 Jagarlapudi, Saketha Nath, 844
 Jain, Prateek, 1258
 Jaiswal, Ragesh, 10
 Jern, Alan, 853, 925, 934
 Jin, Rong, 862, 1883, 2089, 2125, 2259
 Johansson, Roland, 180
 Jojic, Nebojsa, 1428
 Jones, Matt, 2053
 Jordan, Michael, 549, 1132, 1276
 Jung, Kyomin, 871
 Jylänki, Pasi, 1910

 K.R., Ramakrishnan, 844
 Kakade, Sham, 772
 Kalai, Adam, 880

 Kale, Satyen, 700, 709
 Kamitani, Yukiyasu, 576
 Kanade, Varun, 880
 Kao, Yi-hao, 889
 Kapoor, Ashish, 898
 Kapralov, Michael, 324
 Karam, Zahi, 207
 Karasuyama, Masayuki, 907
 Karayev, Sergey, 558
 Kaschube, Matthias, 1195
 Kawahara, Yoshinobu, 916
 Keefer, Edward, 2160
 Kemp, Charles, 853, 925, 934, 943
 Keriven, Renaud, 441
 Keshavan, Raghunandan, 952
 Khan, Emtiyaz, 1285
 Kim, Gunhee, 961
 Kim, Jong Kyoung, 970
 Kim, Junae, 1651
 Kim, Kwang In, 979
 Kim, Seyoung, 2151
 King, Irwin, 2125, 2169
 King, Matthew, 216
 Klampfl, Stefan, 988
 Klein, Dan, 144
 Kloft, Marius, 997
 Knowles, David, 1294
 Koerding, Konrad, 1777
 Kohli, Pushmeet, 871
 Kolar, Mladen, 1006, 1732
 Koller, Daphne, 655, 1051
 Konidaris, George, 1015
 Kpotufe, Samory, 1024
 Krause, Andreas, 1794
 Krishnan, Dilip, 1033
 Kulesza, Alex, 414
 Kulis, Brian, 1042
 Kumar, M. Pawan, 1051
 Kumar, Sanjiv, 1060
 Kwok, James, 781

 Lücke, Jörg, 1069
 Lacasse, Alexandre, 603
 Lall, Ashwin, 1892
 Lamme, Victor, 629
 Lan, Yanyan, 315
 Lanckriet, Gert, 1750, 1759
 Lanctot, Marc, 1078
 Langford, John, 772, 2331
 Largman, Yan, 1096
 Laskov, Pavel, 997
 Laviolette, Francois, 603
 Lazaro-Gredilla, Miguel, 1087
 Lazebnik, Svetlana, 1509

Le, Quoc, 646
 Lee, Dongryeol, 1527, 1536
 Lee, Honglak, 1096
 Lee, Michael, 1785
 Lee, Wee Sun, 2196
 Lee, Yuh-Jye, 763
 Legenstein, Robert, 1105
 Lengyel, Mate, 1464
 Leonardis, Ales, 531
 Leonardo, Anthony, 790
 Leordeanu, Marius, 1114
 Leshem, Amir, 638
 Li, Hang, 315, 2098
 Li, Jing, 808
 Li, Shuo-Yen Robert, 1964
 Li, Wu-Jun, 1123
 Li, Yuxi, 2232
 Li, Zhenguo, 1964
 Liang, Feng, 585
 Liang, Percy, 1132
 Liao, Xuejun, 198
 Lim, John, 1491
 Lin, Zhouchen, 2268
 Lindsey, Robert, 1321
 Liu, Han, 1141
 Liu, Jun, 808, 1812
 Liu, Tie-Yan, 315, 2098
 Liu, Wentai, 2160
 Lozano, Aurelie, 1150
 Lu, Hongjing, 1159
 Luo, Jie, 1168
 Luttinen, Jaakko, 1177
 Lyu, Michael, 2125

 Müller, Klaus-Robert, 997
 Ma, Yi, 2080
 Ma, Zhi-Ming, 315
 Maass, Wolfgang, 988, 1105, 1357
 Mac Dermed, Liam, 1186
 Macindoe, Owen, 1874
 Macke, Jakob, 1195
 Maei, Hamid, 1204
 Mahoney, Michael, 153
 Maillard, Odalric, 1213
 Malisiewicz, Tomasz, 1222
 Mann, Gideon, 1231
 Mao, Jianchang, 1883
 March, William, 1527
 Marchand, Mario, 603
 Margaritis, Dimitris, 1240
 Marlin, Benjamin, 1285
 Martelli, Catherine, 252
 Martinot, Jean-Luc, 252
 McAuley, Julian, 1455

 McCallum, Andrew, 1249, 1973, 2044
 McDonald, Ryan, 1231
 Meek, Christopher, 1642
 Meka, Raghu, 1258
 Meng, Yicong, 1267
 Miller, Brent, 1785
 Miller, Kurt, 1276
 Mimno, David, 1973
 Mishra, Nina, 1829
 Mitchell, Tom, 1410
 Miyawaki, Yoichi, 576
 Moallemi, Ciamac, 459
 Moghaddam, Baback, 1285
 Mohamed, Shakir, 1294
 Mohri, Mehryar, 64, 396, 1060, 1231
 Montanari, Andrea, 952, 1303
 Monteleoni, Claire, 10
 Mori, Greg, 2008
 Morimura, Tetsuro, 1312
 Movellan, Javier, 2035
 Mozer, Michael, 1321, 2053
 Muller, Klaus-Robert, 513
 Munos, Remi, 387, 1213
 Murino, Vittorio, 1428
 Murphy, Kevin, 1285
 Myung, Jay, 234

 Nadler, Boaz, 1330
 Nagano, Kiyohito, 916
 Nagarajan, Srikantan, 2071
 Nair, Vinod, 1339
 Negahban, Sahand, 1348
 Nessler, Bernhard, 1357
 Ng, Andrew, 646, 1096
 Norman, Kenneth, 1714
 Nowak, Rob, 1366

 Obermayer, Klaus, 1383
 Oh, Sewoong, 952
 Oja, Erkki, 2169
 Olshausen, Bruno, 423
 Onken, Arno, 1383
 Oostenveld, Robert, 1901
 Orbanz, Peter, 1392
 Ortiz, Luis, 745
 Ouyang, Hua, 1536
 Ouyang, Tom, 1401
 OZAKIN, ARKADAS, 1375

 Paillere-Martinot, Marie-Laure, 252
 Paisley, John, 2295
 Palatucci, Mark, 1410
 Pan, Weike, 781
 Paragios, Nikos, 745

Pashler, Harold, 1321
 Pavlov, Dmitry, 324
 Pelillo, Marcello, 1571
 Peng, Jian, 1419
 Peng, Yigang, 2080
 Pereira, Fernando, 82, 664
 Perina, Alessandro, 1428
 Perkins, Theodore, 1437
 Perotte, Adler, 1714
 Petrik, Marek, 1446
 Petrov, Slav, 144
 Petterson, James, 1455, 1500
 Pfeiffer, Michael, 1357
 Pfister, Jean-Pascal, 1464
 Pham, Peter, 1096
 Pillow, Jonathan, 1473
 Pineau, Joelle, 189
 Pirsivash, Hamed, 1482
 Pitt, Mark, 234
 Plaze, Marion , 252
 Poggio, Tomaso , 162
 Poline, Jean-Baptiste, 252
 Pomerleau, Dean, 1410
 Popescu, Florin, 513
 Precup, Doina, 1204

 Qi, Yanjun, 64
 Qi, Yuan, 2134
 Quadrianto, Novi, 1491, 1500

 Raginsky, Maxim, 1509
 Rai, Piyush, 1518
 Raj, Bhiksha, 1705
 Ram, Parikshit, 1527, 1536
 Ramadge, Peter, 378, 2107
 Ramanan, Deva, 1482
 Rangan, Sundeep, 540, 1545
 Rao, Shankar, 2080
 Rao, Vinayak, 1554
 Raskutti, Garvesh, 1563
 Ravikumar, Pradeep, 1, 1348
 Reiman, Eric, 808
 Ren, Lu, 486, 2295
 Rish, Irina, 252
 Rogers, Timothy, 2322
 Rohanimanesh, Khashayar, 2044
 Rosasco, Lorenzo, 162
 Rostamizadeh, Afshin, 396
 Rota Bulò, Samuel, 1571
 Russell, Bryan, 1580
 Ruvolo, Paul, 2035

 S, Raman, 844
 Sadamasa, Kunihiko, 64

 Saenko, Kate, 1589
 Sahani, Maneesh, 1069
 Salakhutdinov, Ruslan, 1598, 1607,
 1821
 Saligrama, Venkatesh, 2250
 Samaras, Dimitris, 745
 Sanborn, Adam, 727
 Sapiro, Guillermo, 2295
 Saul, Lawrence, 342
 Saxe, Andrew, 646
 Scheffer, Tobias, 171, 468
 Schlecht, Joseph, 1615
 Schmidt, Mikkel, 1624
 Schoelkopf, Bernhard, 1750
 Scholte, Steven, 629
 Schultz, Karl, 1249
 Schuurmans, Dale, 1491, 2232
 Schwartz, Andrew, 1105
 Schwartz, Odelia, 369
 Sederberg, Per, 1714
 Seeger, Matthias, 1633
 Sen, Subhabrata, 1946
 Seung, Sebastian, 1865
 Shah, Devavrat, 504, 871
 Shalit, Uri, 306
 Shani, Guy, 1642
 Shanian, Sara, 603
 Sharma, Varun, 306
 Shashanka, Madhusudana, 1705
 Shelton, Jacquelyn, 126
 Shen, Chunhua, 1651
 Shervashidze, Nino, 1660
 Shi, Bertram, 1267
 Shi, Lei, 1669
 Silberman, Nathan, 1231
 Silver, David, 1204, 1937
 Simoncelli, Eero, 1696
 Singer, Ben, 378
 Singer, Yoram, 82, 495
 Singh, Sameer, 1249, 2044
 Singh-Miller, Natasha, 1678
 Sinha, Kaushik, 1687
 Sinz, Fabian, 1696
 Sivic, Josef, 1580
 Slivkins, Aleksandrs, 1829
 Smaragdīs, Paris, 1705
 Smeulders, Arnold, 629
 Sminchisescu, Cristian, 135
 Smola, Alex, 1500, 2331
 Smyth, Padhraic, 826
 So, Anthony Man-Cho, 1964
 Socher, Richard, 1714
 Sollich, Peter, 1723
 Song, Dawn, 1946

Song, Le, 1006, 1732
 Sonnenburg, Soeren, 997
 Spatscheck, Oliver, 1946
 Spirtes, Peter, 1847
 Sprekeler, Henning, 1741
 Srebro, Nathan, 1330
 Sriperumbudur, Bharath, 673, 1750, 1759
 Steinke, Florian, 979
 Steinwart, Ingo, 1768
 Stevenson, Ian, 1777
 Steyvers, Mark, 1785
 Streeter, Matthew, 1794
 Strelow, Dennis, 82
 Sturim, Douglas, 207
 Subramanya, Amarnag, 1803
 Sudderth, Erik, 549
 Sukthankar, Rahul, 1114
 Sun, Liang, 808, 1812
 Sun, Yizhou, 585
 Suter, David, 333
 Sutskever, Ilya, 1821
 Sutton, Rich, 1204, 2187
 Swirszcz, Grzegorz, 1150
 Syed, Umar, 1829
 Szepesvari, Csaba, 1204, 2187, 2232

 Takeuchi, Ichiro, 907
 Talwalkar, Ameet, 1060
 Tao, Dacheng, 117
 Taskar, Ben, 664
 Teh, Yee Whye, 1554, 1838
 Tenenbaum, Joshua, 611, 1821, 1874, 1955
 Thirion, Bertrand, 252
 Thyreau, Benjamin, 252
 Tillman, Robert, 1847
 Titsworth, Matthew, 73
 Todorov, Emanuel, 1856
 Torralba, Antonio, 522, 961, 2313
 Tsuda, Koji, 916
 Turaga, Srinivas, 1865
 Turner, Richard, 1069

 Uchibe, Eiji, 1312
 Ueda, Naonori, 835
 Ullman, Tomer, 1874
 Urry, Matthew, 1723
 Usunier, Nicolas, 28
 Uther, William, 1937

 Valizadegan, Hamed, 1883
 Van Durme, Benjamin, 1892
 Van Gerven, Marcel, 1901

 Van Roy, Benjamin, 889
 Vanhatalo, Jarno, 1910
 Vanpaemel, Wolf, 1919
 Vayatis, Nicolas, 360
 Vedaldi, Andrea, 1928
 Vehtari, Aki, 1910
 Veness, Joel, 1937
 Venkataraman, Shobha, 1946
 Vert, Jean-Philippe, 432
 Vul, Ed, 611, 1321, 1955

 Wainwright, Martin, 1, 1348, 1563
 Walker, Dan, 1231
 Wallach, Hanna, 1973
 Walther, Dirk, 270, 2178
 Wang, Chong, 288, 1982, 1990
 Wang, Hanzi, 333
 Wang, Huixia Judy, 2277
 Wang, Lei, 1651
 Wang, Liwei, 1999
 Wang, Shaojun, 2008
 Wang, Shijun, 862
 Wang, Yang, 2008
 Wang, Yongmei Michelle, 2277
 Watanabe, Yusuke, 2017
 Waugh, Kevin, 1078, 2026
 Weiden, Matthew, 1159
 Weiss, Yair, 522, 2340
 Weston, Jason, 64
 White, Ben, 108
 White, Leonard, 1195
 Whitehill, Jacob, 2035
 Wick, Michael, 2044
 Wilder, Matthew, 2053
 Willsky, Alan, 549
 Wilson, Robert, 2062
 Winther, Ole, 736
 Wipf, David, 2071
 Wright, John, 2080
 Wu, Dan, 2196
 Wu, Lei, 2089
 Wu, Teresa, 808
 Wu, Ting-fan, 2035
 WU, Xiao-Ming, 1964

 Xi, Yongxin, 2107
 Xia, Fen, 2098
 Xiang, Zhen, 2107
 Xiao, Lin, 2116
 Xing, Eric, 1006, 1732, 2151
 Xu, Fei, 925
 Xu, Jinbo, 1419
 Xu, Ningyi, 2134
 Xu, Zenglin, 2125, 2169

Yamada, Takeshi, 835
Yan, Feng, 2134
Yan, Xiang, 889
Yang, Shuang-Hong, 2143
Yang, Xiaolin, 2151
Yang, Zhi, 2160
Yang, Zhirong, 2125, 2169
Yao, Bangpeng, 2178
Yao, Hengshuai, 2187
Ye, Jieping, 808, 1812
Ye, Nan, 2196
Yeung, Dit-Yan, 1123
Ying, Yiming, 2205, 2214
Yoshimoto, Junichiro, 1312
Yu, Bin, 1348, 1563
Yu, Jin, 1455
Yu, Kai, 2223
Yu, Nenghai, 2089
Yu, Yao-Liang, 2232
Yuille, Alan, 1159

Zeller, Andreas, 468
Zha, Hongyuan, 2143
Zhang, Ruofei, 1883
Zhang, Tong, 772, 2223
Zhang, Zhihua, 1123, 2241
Zhao, Manqi, 2250
Zhao, Peilin, 2259
Zhao, Qi, 2160
Zheng, Wenming, 2268
Zhou, Chunxiao, 2277
Zhou, Feng, 2286
Zhou, Mingyuan, 2295
Zhou, Shuheng, 2304
Zhou, Xueyuan, 1330
Zhou, Yang, 862
Zhu, Jianke, 2089, 2125
Zhu, Long, 2313
Zhu, Xiaojin, 2322
Zien, Alexander, 997
Zilberstein, Shlomo, 19, 1446
Zinkevich, Martin, 1078, 2331
Zisserman, Andrew, 1580, 1928
Zoran, Daniel, 2340