Page Segmentation using Fully Convolutional Networks

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Bio

Seth Stewart works as an MS student with Dr. Bill Barrett at Brigham Young University, joining his lab in the Fall of 2015. He began his machine learning research as an intern at FamilySearch working on digital newsprint transcription. He loves to find and preserve family history gems for posterity.

Problem Statement

Many historical documents are forms such as those shown in Figure 1a and 1c, and include birth, death and marriage certificates, census records, etc. While layouts vary greatly, they typically consist of machine print, handwriting, dotted lines, solid lines, and stamps. In order to perform meaningful tasks such as handwriting recognition, OCR, and partitioning a form into zones, rows or columns to associate information, it is necessary to understand which pixels represent handwriting, which are machine-printed text, which are form lines and which are unrelated content.

Methods

We use a fully convolutional neural network (FCN) to peel apart a given document image into semantically distinct layers (i.e. machine print, handwriting, solid lines, dotted lines, stamps, etc.), at the pixel level, preparing it for subsequent intelligent recognition and content association. The process of classifying document components is referred to in literature as *page segmentation* [3]. We show that an FCN can accurately segment new document images when trained on a single representative pixel-labeled document image, even when layouts differ dramatically (see Figure 1).

Many previous methods in document page segmentation assumed large, contiguous rectangular or polygonal content regions without occlusions or overlapping content [1], [2]. These assumptions do not work well on form images. The tight, mixed layouts and frequent stroke overlap in these documents require a new paradigm of document content segmentation. Fortunately, FCNs naturally support pixel-level prediction. Also, in contrast to many existing segmentation approaches [4], we allow multiple labels to be predicted per pixel location, which allows for recovery of overlapped content; see Figure 2. Precise pixel labels enable layerwise content reconstruction at unprecedented levels of detail; see Figure 3. Given our pixel-level content labeling, we show potential for improvements in OCR and handwritten text recognition, and for associating semantically related document components (e.g. machine print and related handwriting) for contextually constrained recognition.

References

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- [3] SHAFAIT, F., KEYSERS, D., AND BREUEL, T. Performance evaluation and benchmarking of six-page segmentation algorithms. *IEEE Transactions on Pattern Analysis and Machine Intelligence 30*, 6 (June 2008), 941–954.
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(a) Ohio death record

(b) Ground truth labels for (a)

(c) Birth certificate

(d) Classification results on birth certificate in (c)

Figure 1: A CNN trained on a single hand-annotated form image (a),(b) generalizes well to recognizing pixel-level content on a never-seen-before type of document image (c), (d)



Figure 2: Overlap of content types is extremely common. Traditional classification approaches would segment this content destructively by assigning each overlapped region to only one class, making OCR and handwriting recognition very difficult.

Form V. S. No. 11-50M-8-20-17	STATE OF OHIO BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS			
PLACE OF DEATH.	CERTIFICATE OF DEATH			
County of Autoria	1	Huron		
Township of Mourally Registration District	No. 626 File No. 11899	nowalk	626	11809
or Village of Primary Registration	District No. 4934 Registered No. 26	roway	103 (
OF	[If death occurred in		4934	26
City of	(If death coverred in a second			
= FULL NAME VF redrich Martin		IF redrick Martin		
PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS	MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH			
SEX COLOR OR RACE Single Manuel	10 DATE OF DEATH	2.		
male White (WINGERD mid	(Month) (Day) (Year)	male & hite marries	7.6	- 24 9
ODATE OF BIRTH	17 I HEREBY CERTIFY. That I attended deceased	where if pere		(f _1) (f_1)
May 12, 1878	from 74 20 , 1919 , to 24 , 1919 ,	May 1st 89	18 Fed 20 0	24 .
(Month) (Day) (Year) TAGE If LESS than	that I last saw fina alive on 744 23 , 1919 ,	the second se	100-20 9	74 23 6
70 9 22 at 1 day	and that death occurred, on the date stated above, at		~	14
s OCCUPATION	The CAUSE OF DEATH* was as follows:	70 9 22 -	in the second se	
(a) Trade, profession, or Retired Laborers	, Right Lobar Theumoura	Retired Laborer	1) Right Lobar	Preumoura
(b) General nature of industry, business, or establishment in which employed (or employer)	/ /	of course of a course		
which employed (or employer)		/ AP/		a the second strategy and
(State or country)	(Duration) yrs. mon 7 ds.	cpe. Y		1 the H
PATHER D - ' C	(SECONDARY)	Chio	Valoudar	had lesion
Patrick Martin	(Duration) yrs mos ds.	Patrick martin		
OF FATHER	(Signed) I Mayne I. M.P.	occorred repetited	977	nayne 1 h
(State or country) Qreland 13 MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER	416 27, 1917 (Address) Proversity only	2 Ireland	71624 9	proveren ous
1) BIRTHPLACE (Sate or country) Qreland (Sate or country) Qreland (Sate or country) OF MOTHER OF MOTHER Frances Vestor	*State the DISEASE AUSING DEATE, or, in deaths from VIOLENT CAUSES, state (1) MEANS OF INJURY; and (2) whether ACCIDENTAL, SUICIDAL, or HOMICIDAL.	Frances yestor		
13 BIRTHPLACE	18 LENGTH OF RESIDENCE (For Hospitals, Institutions, Transients, or Recent Residents)	1 1 1		
(State or country)	At place In the of death yrs, mos. ds. State yrs, mos. ds.	Ireland		
14 THE ABOVE IS TRUE TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE	Where was disease contracted, If not at place of death?	1 0		
(Informant) Jarah Martin	Former or usual residence	Sarah Martin		
(Address) Norgalk C	19 PLACE OF BURIAL OR REMOVAL DATE OF BURIAL	- nongalk a	40	-
10 21 16 11 2	20 UNDERTAKER ADDRESS	21 th	At Maryole	~ -25 9
Piled 74 , 1919 OtoA. Master Registrar	Railles Brade Mounder	Fit a Slott Mastin	Failex Bra.	dy Norwalk Q
11-3184 Registrar	i y i y i coman o		Man - a Manua	my - comany

(a) Form Image

(b) Handwriting masked using predicted handwriting pixels by FCN

Figure 3: An FCN enables automatic pixel-level isolation of content types, which will facilitate tasks like handwriting recognition.