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# What makes an object memorable?

Anonymous ICCV submission

Paper ID \*\*\*\*

## Abstract

Recent work by Isola et. al. (2011) has demonstrated that memorability is an intrinsic property of images that is consistent across viewers and can be predicted accurately with current computer vision techniques. Despite progress, a clear understanding of the specific components of an image that drive memorability are still unknown. While previous studies such as Khosla et. al. (2012) have tried to investigate computationally the memorability of image regions within individual images, no behavioral study has systematically explored which memorability of image regions. Here we study which region from an image is memorable or forgettable. Using a large image database, we obtained the memorability scores of the different visual regions present in every image. In our task, participants viewed a series of images, each of which were displayed for 1.4 seconds. After the sequence was complete, participants similarly viewed a series of image regions and were asked to indicate whether each region was seen in the earlier sequence of full images.

## 1. Introduction

Consider the image and its corresponding objects in Figure 1. Even though the person on the right is comparable in size to the left person, he is remembered far less by humans (indicated by their memorability scores of 0.18 and 0.64 respectively). People tend to remember the fish in the center and the person on the left, even after 30 minutes have passed (memorability score = 0.64). Interestingly, despite vibrant colors and considerable size, the boat is also remembered far less by humans (memorability = 0.18).

Just like aesthetics, interestingness, and other metrics of image importance, memorability quantifies something about the utility of a photograph toward our everyday lives. For many practical tasks, memorability is an especially desirable property to maximize. For example, this may be the case when creating educational materials, logos, advertisements, book covers, websites, and much more. Understanding memorability, and being able to automatically predict it,



Figure 1: **Memorability of different objects.** Memorability scores of objects for the image in the top row obtained from our pysophysics experiment.

lends itself to a wide variety of applications in each of these areas. **rewrite this to draw attention of reviewer to importance of image memorability.** Due to this, automatic prediction of intrinsic memorability of images using computer vision and machine learning techniques has received considerable attention in the recent years [5], [6], [4], [2], [7]. While these studies have shed light on what distinguishes the memorability of different images and the intrinsic and extrinsic properties that make those images memorable, the above example raises an interesting question: what exactly about an image is remembered? Despite progress in the computer vision literature on image memorability, a clear understanding of the memorability of the specific components of an image is still unknown. For example, not all objects in an image will be equally remembered by people and as the figure 1 seems to suggest, there exists significant and interesting differences in memorability of objects in an image. Furthermore, the memorability of complex images may be principally driven by the memorability of its objects. Can specific objects inside images be memorable to

108 all us and how can we better understand what makes those  
109 objects more memorable?

111 In this paper, we systematically explore the memorability  
112 of objects within individual images and shed light  
113 on the various factors and properties that drive object  
114 memorability by augmenting both the images and object  
115 segmentations in the 850 existing images from PASCAL  
116 2010 [3] dataset with memorability scores and class labels.  
117 By exploring the connection between object memorability,  
118 saliency, and image memorability, our paper makes several  
119 important contributions.

120 Firstly, we show that just like image memorability, object  
121 memorability is a property that is shared across subjects  
122 and objects remembered by one person are also likely  
123 to be remembered by others and vice versa. Secondly, we  
124 show that there exists a strong correlation between visual  
125 saliency and object memorability and demonstrate insights  
126 when can visual saliency directly predict object memorability  
127 and when does it fail to do so. While there have been  
128 have a few studies that explore the connection between image  
129 memorability and visual saliency [2], [11], our work is  
130 the first to explore the connection between object memorability  
131 and visual saliency. Third, we explore the connection  
132 between image memorability and object memorability  
133 and show that the most memorable object inside an image  
134 can be a strong predictor of image memorability in certain  
135 cases. Studying these questions, help not only understand  
136 visual saliency, image and object memorability in more detail,  
137 but it can also have important contributions to computer  
138 vision. For example, understanding which regions and objects  
139 in an image are memorable would enable us to modify  
140 the memorability of images which can have applications in  
141 advertising, user interface design etc. With this in mind,  
142 as shown in the section 4, our proposed dataset serves as  
143 a benchmark for evaluating object memorability model  
144 algorithms and can help usher in future algorithms that try to  
145 predict memorability maps.

## 146 1.1. Related works

147 **Image Memorability:** Describe Isola's first paper n  
148 some insights that have been raised on image memorability  
149 thus far. Also describe Khosla's comp model but we are  
150 the first work to actually describe what humans actually  
151 remember and don't

152 **Visual Saliency:** Talk about visual attention and models  
153 that have been proposed. Also, talk about Pascal-S and how  
154 it has helped reduce dataset bias

155 **Saliency and memorability:** discuss some results related  
156 to saliency and image memorability.

157 and talk about our work plans on connecting and shedding  
158 light on all these phenomena together.

## 159 2. Measuring Object Memorability

160 As a first step towards understanding memorability of  
161 objects, we built an image database containing a variety of  
162 objects from a diverse range of categories, and measured the  
163 probability that every object in each image will be remembered  
164 by a large group of subjects after a single viewing.  
165 This helps provide ground truth memorability scores for the  
166 objects inside the images and allows for a precise analysis  
167 of the memorable elements within an image. For this task,  
168 we utilized the PASCAL-S dataset [8], a fully segmented  
169 dataset built on the validation set of the PASCAL VOC  
170 2010 [3] segmentation challenge. For improved segmentation  
171 purposes, we manually cleaned up and refined the segmentations  
172 from this dataset. While building the improved  
173 ground-truth of full segmentation, we removed all homogeneous  
174 non-object or background segments such as ground,  
175 grass, floor, sky etc, as well as imperceptible object  
176 fragments and excessively blurred regions. All remaining object  
177 segmentations were tested for memorability. In the end, our  
178 final dataset consisted of 850 images and 3414 object  
179 segmentations i.e. on average each image consisted of approx-  
180 imately 4 segments for which we gathered the ground truth  
181 memorability on.

### 182 2.1. Memory Game: Measuring Object Memorability

183 To measure the memorability of individual objects from  
184 our dataset, we created an alternate version of the Visual  
185 Memory Game following the basic design in [5], with the  
186 exception of a few key differences. We administered the  
187 game and collected data through Amazon Mechanical Turk.  
188 In our game, participants first viewed a sequence of images  
189 one at a time, with a 1.5 second gap in between image pre-  
190 sentations. Subjects were asked to remember the contents  
191 and objects inside those images as much as they could. To  
192 ensure that subjects would not just only look at the salient  
193 or center objects, subjects had unlimited time to freely view  
194 the images. Once they were done viewing an image, they  
195 could press any key to advance to the next image. Following  
196 the initial image sequence, participants then viewed a se-  
197 quence of objects, their task then being to indicate through  
198 a key press which of those objects was present in one of  
199 the previously shown images. Each object was displayed  
200 for 1.5 second, with a 1.5 second gap in between the ob-  
201 ject sequences. Pairs of corresponding image and object  
202 sequences were broken up into 10 blocks. Each block con-  
203 sisted of 80 total stimuli (35 images and 45 objects), and  
204 lasted approximately 3 minutes. At the end of each block,  
205 the subject could take a short break. Overall, the experiment  
206 took approximately took 30 minutes to complete.

207 Unknown to the subjects, inside each block, each se-  
208 quence of images was pseudo-random and consisted of 3  
209 'target' images taken from the Pascal-S dataset whose ob-

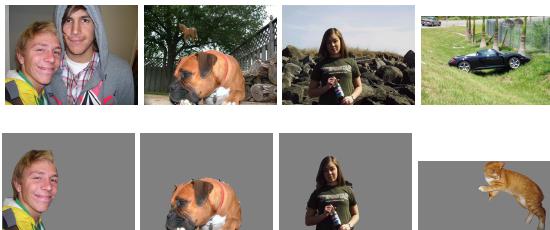
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Figure 2: Example stimuli from the memory game. Example filler, familiar, and control images and objects.

jects the participants were to later identify. The remaining images in the sequence consisted of 16 'filler' images and 16 'familiar' images. The 'filler' images were randomly selected from the DUT-OMRON dataset [12] and the 'familiar' images were randomly sampled from the MSRA dataset proposed in [10]. Similarly, the object sequence was also pseudo-random and consisted of 3 'target' objects (1 object taken randomly from each previously shown target image). The remaining objects in the sequence consisted of 10 'control' objects, 16 'filler' objects, and 16 'familiar' objects. The 'filler' objects were taken randomly from the 80 different object categories in the Microsoft COCO dataset [9] and the 'familiar' objects were the objects taken from the previously displayed 'familiar' images in the image sequence. The filler images and objects helped provide spacing between the target images and target objects, whereas the familiar images and objects allowed us to check if the subjects were paying attention to the task [1], [5]. While the fillers and familiars (both the images and objects) were taken from datasets resembling real world scenes and objects, the 'control' objects were artificial stimuli randomly sampled from the dataset proposed in [1] and helped serve as an additional control to test the attentiveness of the subjects. Repeats on targets i.e. the target images and target objects were spaced 70 – 79 stimuli apart, and repeats occurred on the familiars with a spacing of 1 – 79 stimuli (i.e. distance between familiar images and their objects). The images and objects appeared only once, and each subject was tested on only one object from each target image. Objects were centered within their parent frame and non-object pixels were set to grey. Participants were required to complete the entire task, which included 10 blocks (overall time approximately 30 minutes), and could not participate in the experiment a second time. After collecting the data, we assigned a 'memorability score' to each target object in our dataset, defined as the percentage of correct detections by subjects. In all our analysis, we removed all subjects whose accuracy on the control objects was below 75% and below 50% on familiar images/objects. A total of 2000 workers from Mechanical Turk (> 95% approval rate in Amazons system) performed the game and on average each object was scored by 20 subjects.

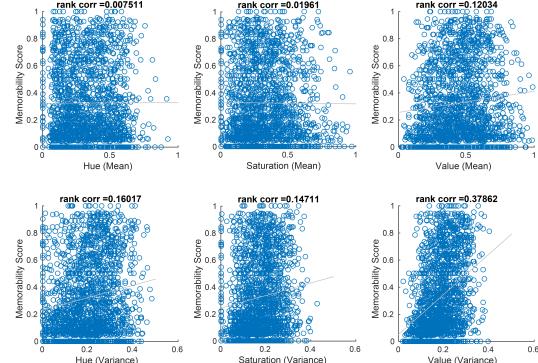


Figure 3: Correlations between simple color features and object memorability. Color features were computed from HSV representations of the objects.

## 2.2. Is object memorability a shared property across subjects?

Previous work on image memorability has found human consistency to be fairly high. That is, people tend to remember the same images, and exhibit similar performance in doing so. Despite variability due to individual differences and other sources of noise, this level of consistency provides evidence that memorability is an intrinsic property of images that can be predicted. In contrast to full images, this paper focuses primarily on the memorability of individual objects in an image, which may or may not exhibit the same level of human consistency as full images, which often contain complex arrangements of several objects. High consistency in object memorability would indicate that, like full images, objects can potentially be predicted with high accuracy. To assess human consistency in remembering objects, we repeatedly divided our entire subject pool into two equal halves and quantified the degree to which memorability scores for the two sets of subjects were in agreement using Spearmans rank correlation ( $\rho$ ). We computed the average correlation over 25 of these random split iterations, yielding a final value of 0.76. Such a result confirms that human consistency in remembering particular objects is at least as strong as that of images.

## 3. Understanding Object Memorability

In this section, we aim to better understand object memorability and the factors that make an object more memorable or forgettable to humans. We first investigate if simple color and geometric factors like simple object features like color etc can predict if an object would be memorable or not.

### 3.1. Can simple color features explain object memorability?

While simple image features are traditionally poor predictors of memorability in full images [Oliva, CVPR 2011],

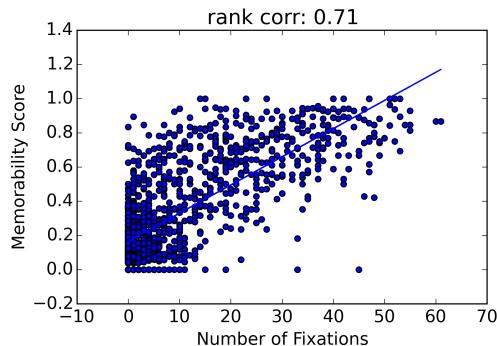
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324 and with good reason [cite [11] from Oliva, CVPR 2011]],  
 325 it is important to verify that this finding generalizes to  
 326 individual objects. To do this, we first examined a number  
 327 of simple color statistics. We decomposed each image into  
 328 its hue, saturation, and value components and calculated  
 329 the mean and standard deviation of each channel. Essentially  
 330 no relationship existed between memorability and either  
 331 mean hue ( $= 0$ ) or mean saturation ( $= 0.02$ ). This  
 332 deviates somewhat from the findings related to images that  
 333 show hue to be weakly predictive of memorability. How-  
 334 ever, this makes sense since the effect has been speculated to  
 335 be due to the blue and green outdoor landscapes being less  
 336 memorable than warmly colored human faces and indoor  
 337 scenes. While our dataset contained plenty of indoor ob-  
 338 jects and people, outdoor scene-related image regions such  
 339 as sky and ground were not included as objects. This may  
 340 explain why the effect was not present in our dataset. Look-  
 341 ing at the variance of each channel, we see that variance in  
 342 hue ( $= 0.16$ ) and saturation ( $= 0.15$ ) are weakly corre-  
 343 lated with memorability, while value has a medium corre-  
 344 lation ( $= 0.38$ ). This suggests that variation in the color  
 345 hue and color purity of an object contribute somewhat to  
 346 object memorability. This may be because people are mem-  
 347 orable regardless of the color of their clothing, or simply  
 348 that color inhomogeneity draws ones attention. The find-  
 349 ing that variation in value contributes considerably to object  
 350 memorability indicates that high contrast objects are more  
 351 memorable. Although the correlation seems high compared  
 352 to the performance of past simple features in past research,  
 353 the scatterplot in FIGURE X suggests that it may not pro-  
 354 duce reliable predictions. Next, we computed image size,  
 355 calculated by the number of pixels that make up the object  
 356 normalized by the total number of pixels in the parent im-  
 357 age. Not surprisingly, this metric correlated strongly with  
 358 object memorability ( $= 0.53$ ). This makes sense given that  
 359 large objects, especially that take up the majority of the par-  
 360 ent image frame, are more likely to be seen and identified.  
 361

### 3.2. What is the relationship between visual saliency 362 and object memorability?

363 Note: add in small intro about past work

364 To examine the relationship between visual saliency and  
 365 object memorability, we used two indexes of saliency to  
 366 describe each object. The first was calculated as the number  
 367 of unique fixation points within the area of each object. The  
 368 correlation between object memorability and number of fixa-  
 369 tions within those objects was quite high ( $= 0.71$ ). How-  
 370 ever, this correlation decreases significantly as the number  
 371 of total fixations within the object increases. In figure X,  
 372 we show the correlation between object memorability and  
 373 number of fixations for subsets of the objects that have at  
 374 least some minimum number of fixations. On the leftmost  
 375 side of the plot, the correlation is at its highest since the  
 376



377 Figure 4: Correlation between object memorability and number of  
 378 fixations. add-in later.

379 set of objects with a fixation count greater than or equal to  
 380 zero includes all objects and so the correlation is identical to  
 381 FIGURE FIX-CORR. However, as the minimum number of  
 382 fixations increases, we look only at objects that contain an  
 383 increasingly higher number of distinct fixation points, and  
 384 the correlation decreases. By the time we reach a minimum  
 385 fixation count of around 35, the correlation falls to around  
 386 0.2. This may mean that the predictive value of saliency de-  
 387 creases when there are many areas of interest within a single  
 388 object. (NOTE: We may want to show examples of images  
 389 with lots of fixation points that were not well predicted. We  
 390 could just plot the fixation locations as points on the image)  
 391 The reason for this decline may be that...[make arguments  
 392 here] Toward the right end of the plot, few objects contain  
 393 large numbers of fixations, and so the correlations become  
 394 sporadic. The red line marks the point for which the corre-  
 395 lations cease to be statistically significant, just at the end of  
 396 the main trend line. Alternatively, FIGURE Z shows a sim-  
 397 ilar relationship in which the correlation between mem-  
 398 orability and fixation count is plotted as a function of minimum  
 399 number of objects present in the parent image of the object.  
 400 In a similar pattern, we see that as the minimum number  
 401 of objects increases, the correlation between fixation count  
 402 and object memorability decreases. This follows from the  
 403 fact that fixation count and number of parent image objects  
 404 are negatively correlated ( $= -0.38$ ), meaning that if there  
 405 are more objects in an image, there are less fixation points  
 406 in any one object, which may a consequence of needing to  
 407 distribute attention across the objects in the scene. In both  
 408 scenarios, the ability to predict object memorability sharply  
 409 decreases.

410 The second metric we used... (put map method here?)

411 (NOTE: add alternate section that shows the decline in  
 412 terms of number of objects)

413 The second metric we used... (put map method here?)

414 (NOTE: add alternate section that shows the decline in  
 415 terms of number of objects)

416 The second metric we used... (put map method here?)

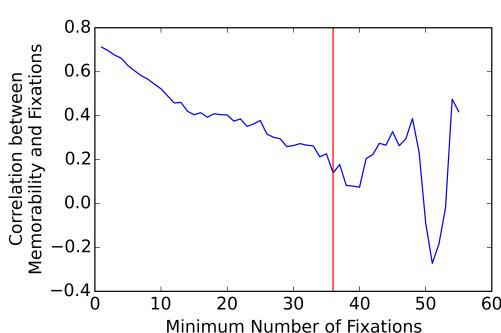


Figure 5: **Relationship between memorability and saliency by minimum number of fixations.** add-in later.

### 3.3. What is the relationship between object memorability and object categories?

In the previous sections, we showed that simple features have little predictive power over object memorability and there exists a weak relationship between visual saliency and object memorability. In this section, we show that object memorability is heavily influenced by its category and investigate the possible reasons behind the same.

#### 3.3.1 Are some object classes more memorable than others?

Our dataset contains 3414 object segmentations from the Pascal-S dataset. For this analysis, we first assigned three in-house annotators the task of assigning class labels to each object segmentation in our dataset. The annotators were given the original image (for reference) and the object segmentation and asked to assign 1 category to the segment out of 7 possible categories: animal, building, device, furniture, nature, person, and vehicle. We choose these high-level categories such that a wide range of object classes could be covered under these categories. For example, device included object segments like utensils, bottle, tv, computer etc, nature included segments like tree, mountain, flowers, and vehicle covered segments like car, bike, bus, aeroplane etc. **add a small table here which shows stats of the object classes n their frequency in the dataset.**

Figure 6 shows the average memorability score for the all 7 different object classes in our dataset. This visualisation gives a sense of how the memorability of different object classes differs. Animal, person, and vehicle are all highly memorable classes with each of them having an average memorability score greater than 0.5. Interestingly, all the other object categories have an average memorability score lower than 0.25 indicating that humans do not remember objects from these categories very well. In particular, furniture has an average memorability score of only 0.18 and is the least memorable object class. This could be possibly

Object Class	Memorability of top 20 objects
Animal	0.94
Building	0.65
Device	0.86
Furniture	0.63
Nature	0.67
Person	0.93
Vehicle	0.96

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Table 1: Average memorability of top 20 objects for each class

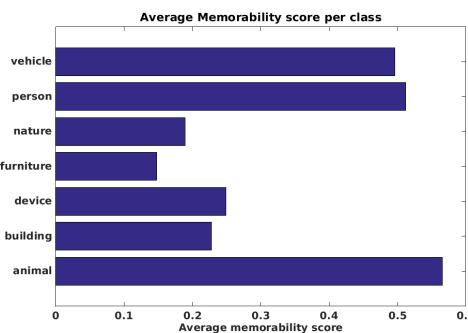


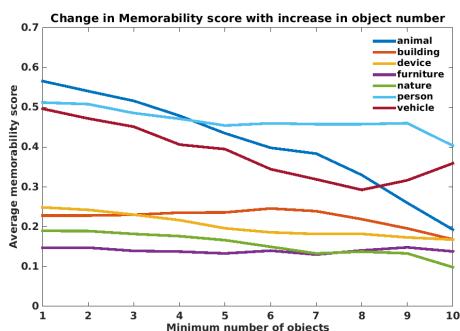
Figure 6: **Average memorability per object class.** Figure showing some object classes are more memorable than others.

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due to the fact that most objects from classes like furniture, nature, and building either appear mostly in the background or are occluded which could decrease their memorability significantly. On the contrary, objects from animal, person, and vehicle classes appear mostly in the foreground leading to a higher memorability score on average. Table 1 shows the average memorability of the top 20 most memorable objects for each object class. This analysis is particularly interesting as these top objects are not occluded and most of them tend to appear in the foreground. The top 20 most memorable objects from person, animal and vehicle have memorability higher than 0.90 whereas the average memorability of the top 20 objects from building, furniture, and nature is lesser than 0.70. While the differences in the memorability of different classes could be driven primarily due to factors like occlusion, size, background/foreground, the results in table 1 suggest that memorability could be an intrinsic property of an object class and some object classes like person, animal, vehicle are in general intrinsically more memorable than classes like furniture, nature etc.

#### 3.3.2 Why are some objects not memorable within a class?

As demonstrated above, some object classes like animal, person, vehicle are more than others either due to their



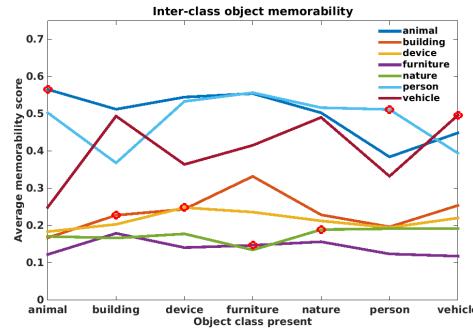
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Figure 8: Correlation between object class and number of objects.  
add-in later.

intrinsic property or external factors like occlusion, foreground/background etc. However, not all objects in a class are equally memorable. The examples in figure 7 show the most memorable and least memorable objects for each object class. A common property between these objects is that the least memorable objects within each object class tend to be occluded and obstructed by other objects. What other possible factors could influence the memorability of an object within a class?

**Relationship with number of objects in an image:** We first tested how the memorability of each object class is affected by the number of objects inside an image. We took in all images that had at least 'n' objects (where  $1 \leq n \leq 10$ ) inside them and computed the average memorability of each object class. Figure 8 shows the change in average memorability of the different object classes with respect to the increase in number of objects in an image. This figure shows that the number of objects present in an image is an important factor that results in the variation in the memorability of objects within a class. As the number of objects in an image increase, the memorability of the object classes decreases. In particular, the memorability of objects belonging to highly memorable classes like animal, person, and vehicle decreases significantly with the increase in number of objects in an image. Intuitively, this could mean that with an increase in number of objects, humans cannot concentrate on a single object in an image and have a difficulty remembering objects in those images. Thus, if a person, animal or vehicle is present in a highly cluttered image, humans can not remember those objects very well.

**Relationship of inter-class memorability:** While the previous analysis sheds light on how the memorability of an object class is effected by factors such as occlusion, and number of objects in an image, how does the presence of a particular object class effect the memorability of another object class? To investigate this, for each possible pair of object categories we took all images that contained at least one object from both the categories and computed the average memorability scores for the two object categories. This

way we were able to capture the relationship between pairs of object categories and how their presence effects their respective memorability scores. Figure 9 plots these results and for each object class, shows how it's memorability is effected in the presence of other object classes. The red mark on each line shows the over all average memorability of that class. Firstly, the memorability of low memorable classes i.e. nature, furniture, device, and building is not effected a lot in the presence of other object categories and their memorability tends to be low throughout. The memorability of person class also remains close to it's average memorability score and tends to be unaffected by the presence of most object categories. However, the memorability of person does get effected in the presence of buildings as the average memorability of person class drops below 0.4 for images containing both persons and buildings. This could be due to the fact that there exists images wherein the building is quite large and the persons in those images are usually smaller or less significant in contrast to the building (also illustrated in figure 10).



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Figure 9: inter-class object memorability relationship. add-in later.

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Figure 7: Qual Results. Figure showing top and bottom objects for each class.

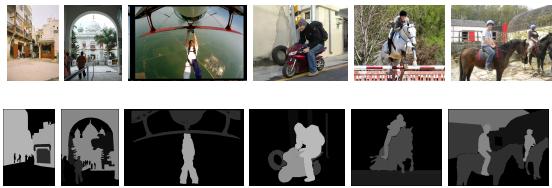


Figure 10: Qual Results. Figure showing top and bottom objects for each class.

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