What makes an object memorable?

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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 it's 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 $= 0.18$).

NOTE: Big picture way to think about this (rough): A currently massive goal in computer science and artificial intelligence is to model the data driven inference processes that humans make use of for solving vision problems, such as object recognition and scene understanding. A subset of these processes make use of nearly all of the information in the scene, much of which is use implicitly but others are dependent on more explicitly remembered information in

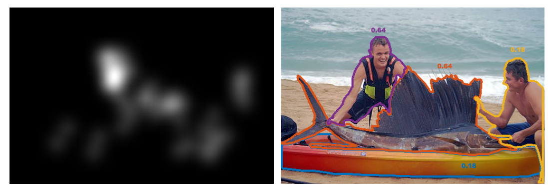

Figure 1: **Not all objects are equally remembered.** Memorability scores of objects for the image in the top row obtained from our pysophysics experiment.

a scene, that is, the information that the brain has deemed worthy to create special storage for. For example, the recognition of edges in a scene is learned and used automatically, but if we ask a person to report the important information in a scene, only a few high level things are reported. More specifically, humans can only make judgements about elements of an image that they can remember...

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, 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], [7], [4], [2], [8]. 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 it's objects. Can specific objects inside images be memorable to all us and how can we better understand what makes those objects more memorable?

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

Firstly, we show that just like image memorability, object memorability is a property that is shared across subjects and objects remembered by one person are also likely to be remembered by others and vice versa. Secondly, we show that there exists a strong correlation between visual saliency and object memorability and demonstrate insights when can visual saliency directly predict object memorability and when does it fail to do so. While there have been have a few studies that explore the connection between image memorability and visual saliency [2], [13], our work is the first to explore the connection between object memorability and visual saliency. Third, we explore the connection between image memorability and object memorability and show that the most memorable object inside an image can be a strong predictor of image memorability in certain cases. Studying these questions, help not only understand visual saliency, image and object memorability in more detail, but it can also have important contributions to computer vision. For example, understanding which regions and objects in an image are memorable would enable us to modify the memorability of images which can have applications in advertising, user interface design etc. With this in mind, as shown in the section 4, our proposed dataset serves as a benchmark for evaluating object memorability model algorithms and can help usher in future algorithms that try to predict memorability maps.

1.1. Related works

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

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

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

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

2. Measuring Object Memorability

As a first step towards understanding memorability of objects, we built an image database containing a variety of objects from a diverse range of categories, and measured the probability that every object in each image will be remembered by a large group of subjects after a single viewing. This helps provide ground truth memorability scores for the objects inside the images and allows for a precise analysis of the memorable elements within an image. For this task, we utilized the PASCAL-S dataset [10], a fully segmented dataset built on the validation set of the PASCAL VOC 2010 [3] segmentation challenge. For improved segmentation purposes, we manually cleaned up and refined the segmentations from this dataset. We removed all homogenous non-object or background segments such as ground, grass, floor, sky etc, as well as imperceptible object fragments and excessively blurred regions. All remaining object segmentations were tested for memorability. In the end, our final dataset consisted of 850 images and 3412 object segmentations i.e. on average each image consisted of approximately 4 object segments for which we gathered the ground truth memorability on.

2.1. Object Memory Game

To measure the memorability of individual objects from our dataset, we created an alternate version of the Visual Memory Game through Amazon Mechanical Turk following the basic design in [5], with the exception of a few key differences. In our game, participants first viewed a sequence of images one at a time, with a 1.5 second gap in between image presentations. Subjects were asked to remember the contents and objects inside those images as much as they could. To ensure that subjects would not just only look at the salient or center objects, subjects had unlimited time to freely view the images. Once they were done viewing an image, they could press any key to advance to the next image. Following the initial image sequence, participants then viewed a sequence of objects, their task then being to indicate through a key press which of those objects was present in one of the previously shown images. Each object was displayed for 1.5 second, with a 1.5 second gap in between the object sequences. Pairs of corresponding image and object sequences were broken up into 10 blocks. Each block consisted of 80 total stimuli (35 images and 45 objects), and lasted approximately 3 minutes. At the end of each block, the subject could take a short break. Overall, the experiment took approximately took 30 minutes to complete.

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

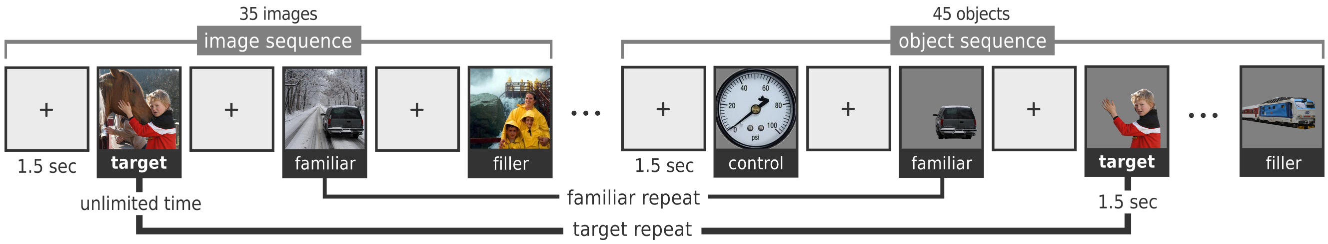

Figure 2: **Main task.** add-in later.

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 [14] and the 'familiar' images were randomly sampled from the MSRA dataset proposed in [12]. 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 [11] and the 'familiar' objects were the objects taken from the previously displayed 'familiar' images in the image sequence. The fillers and familiars helped provide spacing between the target images and target objects, whereas the control 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 a control to test the attentiveness of the subjects. The target images and the respective target objects were spaced $70 - 79$ stimuli apart, and familiar images and their respective objects were spaced $1 - 79$ stimuli apart. All 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 70%. In the end, our analysis was performed on a total of 1823 workers from Mechanical Turk ($> 95\%$ approval rate in Amazons system). On average, each object was scored by 16 subjects and the average memorability score was 33% ($SD = 28\%$).

2.2. Consistency Analysis

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 (ρ). We computed the average correlation over 25 of these random split iterations, yielding a final value of 0.76. This high consistency in object memorability indicates that, like full images, object memorability is a shared property across subjects. People tend to remember (and forget) the same objects in images, and exhibit similar performance in doing so. Thus memorability of objects in images can potentially be predicted with high accuracy. In the next section, we study the various factors that possibly drive object memorability in 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 the role that simple color features play in determining object memorability.

3.1. Can simple features explain memorability?

While simple image features are traditionally poor predictors of memorability in full images [5], and with good reason [9], do they play any role in determining object memorability? We decomposed each image into it's hue, saturation, and value components and calculated the mean and standard deviation of each channel. Mean value ($\rho = 0.1$) and variance in value ($\rho = 0.25$) were weakly correlated with object memorability suggesting that brighter and higher contrast objects may be more memorable (Figure 3). On the other hand, essentially no relationship was found between memorability and either hue or saturation (Figure 3). This deviates slightly from the findings in [5] that showed mean hue to be weakly predictive of image memorability. However, this makes sense since the effect was speculated to be due to the blue and green outdoor landscapes being less memorable than warmly colored human faces and indoor scenes. While our dataset contained plenty of indoor objects and people, outdoor scene-related image

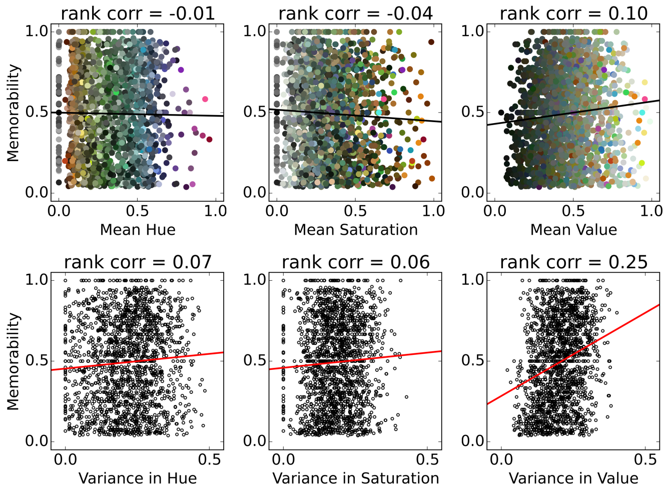

Figure 3: **Correlations between simple color features and object memorability.** Color features were computed from HSV representations of the objects.

regions such as sky and ground were not included as objects. Taken together, these results show that, like image memorability, basic pixel statistics do not play a significant role in determining the memorability of objects in images.

3.2. What is the role of saliency in memorability?

Intuitively, the regions within an image that are most salient are likely to have a higher probability of being remembered, since they will draw the attention of viewers and a majority of a viewers eye fixations will be spent looking at those regions.. On the other hand, it is conceivable that some visually appealing regions will not be memorable, especially since aesthetic images are known to be less memorable [5], [4]. When can visual saliency predict object memorability and what are the possible differences between these two phenomena? Quantifying the precise relationship between saliency and memorability will be paramount towards understanding object memorability in greater depth.

To this aim, we utilized the eye fixation dataset made available for the Pascal-S dataset in [10]. With this dataset in hand, we first calculated the number of unique fixation points within the area of each object and computed the correlation between this metric and the objects memorability score (Figure 5 a). We found this correlation to be positive and considerably high ($\rho = 0.71$), suggesting that fixation count and visual saliency may drive object memorability considerably. However, the large concentration of points on the bottom left part of scatter plot in Figure 5 a suggests that part of the reason for this high correlation is that objects that have not been viewed at all have essentially no memorability. Indeed, only objects that have been seen can be remembered. In addition, the points toward the top left appear to decrease in trend. Looking deeper, Figure 4 plots

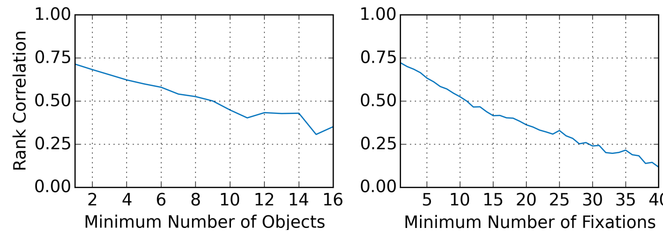

Figure 4: **Correlation between object memorability and number of fixations.** add-in later.

the change in correlation between object memorability and fixations as the minimum number of fixations inside objects increases. The downward monotonic trend indicates that as the number of fixations inside an object increases, the predictive ability diminishes significantly. In addition, Figure 4 plots the correlation between object memorability and number of fixations as a function of total number of objects in an image. Similar to the previous trend, as the number of objects in an image increases, the correlation between saliency i.e. number of fixations and memorability score decreases sharply. This finding is in agreement with the two remaining scatter plots in Figure 5 b (shows that the memorability of an object decreases in the presence of many other objects) and Figure 5 c (shows that number of fixations decreases with the number of objects). This makes intuitive sense since people have more to look at in an image when more objects are present, and so they may look less at any one object, especially if they compete for saliency, and therefore may have a more difficult time remembering those objects.

To sum up, saliency is a surprisingly good index of object memorability in simple contexts where there are few objects in the image, or when an object has few interesting points, but it is a much weaker predictor of object memorability in complex scenes containing multiple objects that have many points of interest.

Center Bias: Figure 6 elucidates another example where saliency and memorability diverge. While previous studies related to visual saliency have showed that saliency is heavily influenced by center bias [6], [15], Figure 6 shows that memorability exhibits comparatively less center bias

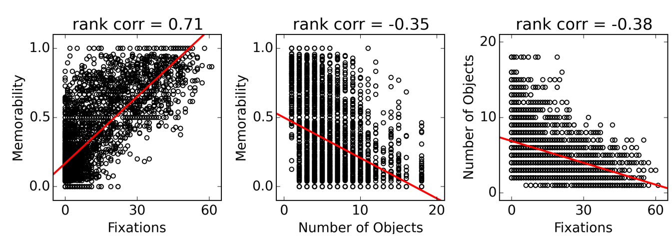

Figure 5: **Correlation between object memorability and number of fixations.** add-in later.

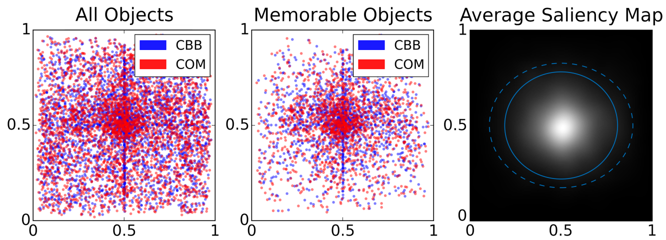

Figure 6: **Positions.** add-in later.

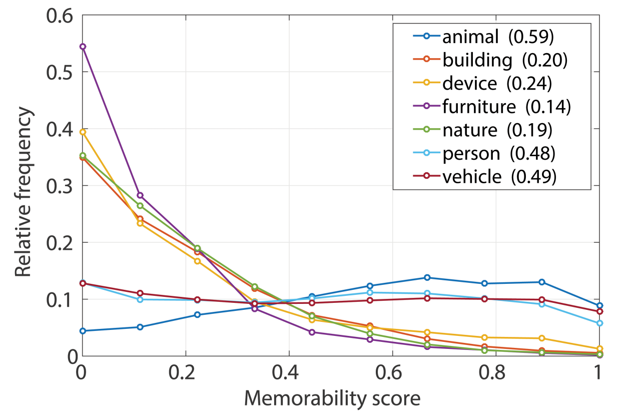

Figure 7: **Average memorability per object class.** Figure showing some object classes are more memorable than others.

than saliency. This is most apparent when considering the difference in the solid ellipse in the right plot (shows where 95% of fixation positions are located), and the dashed ellipse (shows where the 95% of the above-median memorable objects are located).

3.3. How do object categories effect memorability?

In the previous sections, we showed that simple features have little predictive power over object memorability and explored the relationship between visual saliency and object memorability. In this section, we explore how the category of an object influences the probability that the object will be remembered.

3.3.1 Are some classes more memorable than others?

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 a single 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 such as utensils, bottles, televisions, computers etc, nature included segments like trees, mountains, flowers, and vehicle contained segments like cars, bikes, buses, airplanes etc.

Figure 7 shows the distribution of the memorability scores for all 7 object classes in our dataset. This visualisation gives a sense of how the memorability changes across different object categories. Animal, person, and vehicle are all highly memorable classes each associated with an average memorability score greater than or close to 0.5. Interestingly, all 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 is the least memorable object class with an average memorability score of only 0.14. This could be possibly due to the fact that most objects from classes like furniture, nature, and building either appear mostly in the background or are occluded which likely decreases their memorability significantly. By contrast, objects from the animal, person, and vehicle classes appear mostly in the foreground, leading to a higher memorability score on average. Interestingly, the topmost memorable objects from building, furniture, and nature tend to have an average memorability score in the range of $0.4 - 0.8$, whereas the topmost memorable objects from classes person, animal and vehicle have an average memorability higher than 0.90. This is particularly interesting as these top objects are not occluded and most of them tend to appear in the foreground. While the differences in the memorability of different classes could be driven primarily due to factors like occlusion, size, background/foreground, or photographic bias, the distribution in figure 7 suggests that humans remember some object classes such as person, animal, and vehicle irrespective of external nuisance factors and these object classes are *intrinsically* more memorable than others.

3.3.2 Why are some objects not memorable within a class?

As demonstrated above, some object classes (i.e. animal, person, vehicle) are more memorable than others. However, not all objects in a class are equally memorable. The examples in figure **??** show the most memorable and least memorable objects for each object class. Across classes, non-memorable objects tend to be those that are occluded and obstructed by other objects. What other possible factors could influence the memorability of an object within a class? Among the various possible factors, we explored how object memorability within a particular class is influenced by a) the number of objects in an image and b) the presence of other object classes.

Number of objects: We first examined how the memorability of each object class is affected by the number of objects inside an image. Figure 8 shows the change in average memorability of the different object classes with respect

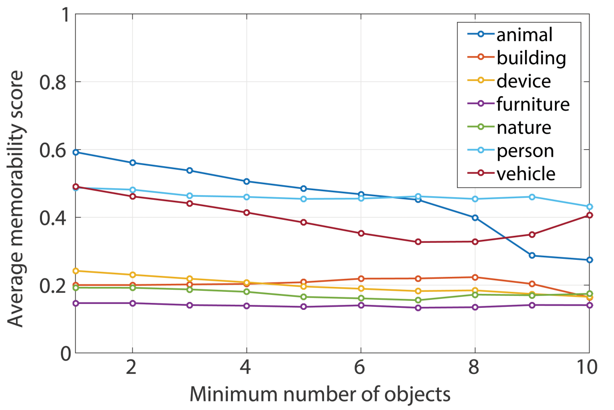

Figure 8: **Correlation between object class and number of objects.** add-in later.

to the increase in number of objects in an image. Results indicate that the number of objects present in an image is an important factor in determining memorability. For example, as the number of objects in an image increases, the memorability animals and vehicles decreases sharply, likely as a result of competition for attention, or decreased spotlight on a single subject of the composition. Interestingly, the memorability of the person class does not change significantly with an increase in number of objects. This suggests that people are not only one of the most memorable object classes, but are also more robust to the presence of clutter in images.

Inter-class memorability: How does the presence of a particular object class influence the memorability of another object class? For all pairwise combinations of object category, we gathered all images that contained at least one object from both categories and computed the change in the average memorability scores for the two object categories. Figure 9 plots these data and visualizes how the memorability of each object class is affected in the presence of all other object classes. The first thing to note is that the values of low-memorability classes (i.e. nature, furniture, device, and building) are not greatly affected by the presence of other object categories. Instead, their memorability tends to remain low in all contexts. The memorability of the animal class remains close to its high average memorability score in presence of most classes, but drops significantly in the presence of vehicles and people. The memorability of people also remains close to its average memorability score and tends to be unaffected by the presence of most object categories, as found previously. However, the memorability of people decreases in the presence of vehicles and buildings. This could be due to the fact that people in images containing vehicles or buildings are usually zoomed out and are usually smaller in size (also illustrated in figure 10). The memorability of the vehicle class is strongly affected by the presence of other object categories. In particular, its memorability drops significantly in the presence of people and animals. Taken together, when an animal, vehicle or a person is present in the same image, the memorability of all three classes usually goes down. However, this pattern of change in memorability varies by class, leading to interesting results. For example, when a vehicle or an animal co-occurs with a person, the person is generally more memorable. When a vehicle and animal are present in the same image, the animal is generally more memorable. even though the memorability of both of these classes drops significantly. Refer to Figure 10 for further examples of inter-class memorability effects.

3.4. What is the relationship between object and image memorability?

Now that we know what objects people remember and the factor that influence their memorability, how does the memorability of objects effect the overall image memorability? In particular, if an image is highly memorable, what happens to memorability of objects inside those images (and vice versa)? To shed light on the relationship between image memorability and object memorability, we conducted another large-scale experiment on Amazon Mechanical turk for the images in our dataset to gather their respective image memorability scores. For this experiment, we followed the exact paradigm as the memory game experiment proposed in [5]. [add details about the fillers, add

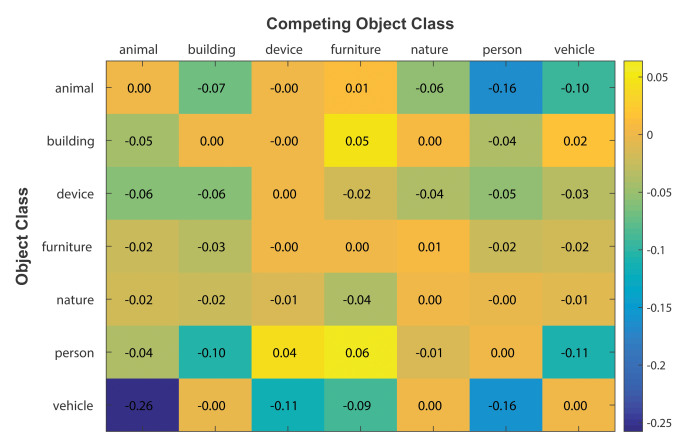

Figure 9: **inter-class object memorability relationship.** add-in later.

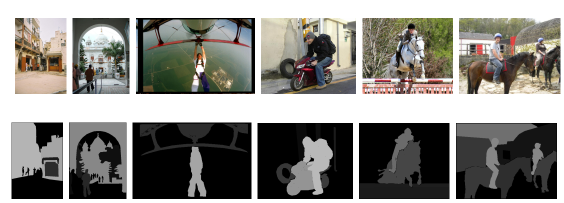

Figure 10: **Qual Results.** Figure showing how memorability of different classes is effected in presence of other classes. Bottom row is the memorabilty map

Animal	Building	Device	Furniture	Nature	Person	Vehicle	All
0.38	0.22	0.47	0.53	0.64	0.54	0.3[illegible]	0.40

Table 1: **Max object memorability and image memorability.** add-in later.

details about the experiment including number of workers, number of times each image was viewed by workers and explain the consistency analysis]

For each image, we computed the maximum object memorability and correlated that with the image memorability scores. We found that the correlation was moderately high ($\rho - 0.4$) which suggests that the memorability of the most highly memorable object in the image plays an important role in determining the image memorability. To investigate further, we performed the same analysis by taking the topmost 100 memorable images and the bottommost 100 memorable images from the dataset. The correlation between maximum object memorability and image memorability for these images increased significantly ($\rho = 0.62$) which shows that maximum object memorability serves as a strong features in predicting if an image is highly memorable or not. Images that are highly memorable contain at least one highly memorable object and images with low memorability usually do not contain a single highly memorable object [refer to qual figure].

We explored this further by studying how this correlation changes when the most memorable object belongs to different classes (Table 1).

4. Predicting Object Memorability

here the benchmarking and baseline code comes up

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