Identifying Surprising Events in Video Using Bayesian Topic Models

Avishai Hendel, Daphna Weinshall, and Shmuel Peleg

Hebrew University of Jerusalem
http://cs.huji.ac.il

Abstract. In this paper we focus on the problem of identifying interesting parts of the video. To this end we employ the notion of Bayesian surprise, as defined in [1, 2], in which an event is considered surprising if its occurrence leads to a large change in the probability of the world model. We propose to compute this abstract measure of surprise by first modeling a corpus of video events using the Latent Dirichlet Allocation model. Subsequently, we measure the change in the Dirichlet prior of the LDA model as a result of each video event's occurrence. This leads to a closed form expression for an event's level of surprise. We tested our algorithm on a real world video data, taken by a camera observing an urban street intersection. The results demonstrate our ability to detect atypical events, such as a car making a U-turn or a person crossing an intersection diagonally.

Keywords: video understanding, surveillance, Bayesian surprise, topic models

1 Introduction

1.1 Motivation

The availability and ubiquity of video from security and monitoring cameras has increased the need for automatic analysis and classification. One urging problem is that the sheer volume of data renders it impossible for human viewers, the ultimate classifiers, to watch and understand all of the displayed content. Consider for example a security officer who may need to browse through the hundreds of cameras positioned in an airport, looking for possible suspicious activities - a laborious task that is error prone, yet may be life critical. In this paper we address the problem of unsupervised video analysis, having applications in various domains, such as the inspection of surveillance videos, examination of 3D medical images, or cataloging and indexing of video libraries.

A common approach to video analysis serves to assist human viewers by making video more accessible to sensible inspection. In this approach the human judgment is maintained, and video analysis is used only to assist viewing. Algorithms have been devised to create a compact version of the video, where only certain activities are displayed [3], or where all activities are displayed using video summarization [4].

We would like to go beyond summarization; starting from raw video input, we seek an automated process that will identify the unusual events in the video, and reduce the load on the human viewer. This process must first extract and analyze activities in the video, followed by establishing a model that characterizes these activities in a manner that permits meaningful inference. A measure to quantify the significance of each activity is needed as a last step.

1.2 Our Approach

We present a generative probabilistic model that accomplishes the tasks outlined above in an unsupervised manner, and test it in a real world setting of a webcam viewing an intersection of city streets.

The preprocessing stage consists of the extraction of video activities of high level objects (such as vehicles and pedestrians) from the long video streams given as input. Specifically, we identify a set of video events (video tubes) in each video sequence, and represent each event with a 'bag of words' model. We introduce the concept of 'transition words', which allows for a compact, discrete representation of the dynamics of an object in a video sequence. Despite its simplicity, this representation is successful in capturing the essence of the input paths. The detected activities are then represented using a latent topic model, a paradigm that has already shown promising results [5–8].

Next, we examine the video events in a rigorous Bayesian framework, to identify the most interesting events present in the input video. Thus, in order to differentiate intriguing events from the typical commonplace events, we measure the effect of each event on the observer's beliefs about the world, following the approach put forth in [1, 2]. We propose to measure this effect by comparing the prior and posterior parameters of the latent topic model, which is used to represent the overall data. We then show that in the street camera scenario, our model is able to pick out atypical activities, such as vehicle U-turns or people walking in prohibited areas.

2 Activity Representation

2.1 Objects as Space Time Tubes

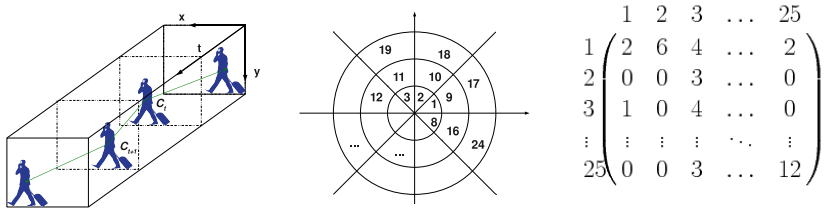
The fundamental representation of objects in our model is that of 'video tubes' [9]. A tube is defined by a sequence of object masks carved through the space time volume, assumed to contain a single object of interest (e.g., in the context of street cameras, it may be a vehicle or a pedestrian). This localizes events in both space and time, and enables the association of local visual features with a specific object, rather than an entire video.

A modification of the 'Background Cut' method [10] is used to distinguish foreground blobs from the background. The blobs are then matched by spatial proximity to create video tubes that extend through time.

2.2 Trajectories

An obvious and important characteristic of a video tube is its trajectory, as defined by the sequence of its spatial centroids. A preferable encoding in our setting should capture the characteristic of the tube's path in a compact and effective way, while considering location, speed and form.

Of the numerous existing approaches, we use a modification of the method suggested in [11]. The process is summarized in Fig. 1. The displacement vector of the object's centroid between consecutive frames is quantized into one of 25 bins, including a bin for zero displacement. A transition occurrence matrix, indicating the frequency of bin transitions in the tube is assembled, and regarded as a histogram of 'transition words', where each word describes the transition between two consecutive quantized displacement vectors. The final representation of a trajectory is this histogram, indicating the relative frequency of the 625 possible transitions.



(a) (b) (c)

Fig. 1: Trajectory representation: the three stages of our trajectory representation: (a) compute the displacement of the centroids of the tracked object between frames, (b) quantize each displacement vector into one of 25 quantization bins, and (c) count the number of different quantization bin transitions in the trajectory into a histogram of bin transitions.

3 Modeling of Typical Activities Using LDA

We use the *Latent Dirichlet Allocation* (LDA) model as our basis for the representation of the environment and events present in the input video. The model, which was first introduced in the domain of text analysis and classificiation [12] has been successfully applied recently to computer vision tasks, where the text topics have been substituted by scenery topics [7] or human action topics.

As noted above, each tube is represented as a histogram of transition words taken from the trajectory vocabulary $V = \{w_{1-1}, w_{1-2}, ..., w_{25-24}, w_{25-25}\}, |V| = 625$. A set of video tubes $T = \{T_1, T_2, ..., T_m\}$ is given as input to the standard LDA learning procedure, to obtain the model's parameters α and β. These parameters complete our observer's model of the world.

The Dirichlet prior α describes the common topic mixtures that are to be expected in video sequences taken from the same source as the training corpus. A specific topic mixture θ_t determines the existence of transitions found in the trajectory using the per-topic word distribution matrix β. The actual mixture of an input tube is intractable, but can be approximated by an optimization problem that yields the posterior Dirichlet parameter γ_t^*.

4 Surprise Detection

The notion of surprise is, of course, human-centric and not well defined. Surprising events are recognized as such with regard to the domain in question, and background assumptions that can not always be made explicit. Thus, rule based methods that require manual tuning may succeed in a specific setting, but are doomed to failure in less restricted settings. Statistical methods, on the other hand, require no supervision. Instead, they attempt to identify the expected events from the data itself, and use this automatically learned notion of typicality to recognize the extraordinary events.

Such framework is proposed in the work by Itti [1] and Schmidhuber [2]. Dubbed 'Bayesian Surprise', the main conjecture is that a surprising event from the viewpoint of an observer is an event that modifies its current set of beliefs about the environment in a significant manner. Formally, assume an observer has a model M to represent its world. The observer's belief in this model is described by the prior probability of the model $p(M)$ with regard to the entire model space $\mathcal{M}$. Upon observing a new measurement t, the observer's model changes according to Bayes' Law:

$$p(M \mid t) = \frac{p(M)p(t \mid M)}{p(t)} \tag{1}$$

This change in the observer's belief in its current model of the world is defined as the surprise experienced by the observer. Measurements that induce no or minute changes are not surprising, and may be regarded as 'boring' or 'obvious' from the observer's point of view. To quantify this change, we may use the KL divergence between the prior and posterior distributions over the set $\mathcal{M}$ of all models:

$$S(t, M) = KL(p(M), p(M \mid t)) = \int_{\mathcal{M}} p(M) log \frac{p(M)}{p(M \mid t)} dM \tag{2}$$

This definition is intuitive in that surprising events that occur repeatedly will cease to be surprising, as the model is evolving. The average taken over the model space also ensures that events with very low probability will be regarded as surprising only if they induce a meaningful change in the observer's beliefs, thus ignoring noisy incoherent data that may be introduced.

Although the integral in Eq. (2) is over the entire model space, turning this space to a parameter space by assuming a specific family of distributions may allow us to compute the surprise measure analytically. Such is the case with

the Dirichlet family of distributions, which has several well known computational advantages: it is in the exponential family, has finite dimensional sufficient statistics, and is conjugate to the multinomial distribution.

5 Bayesian Surprise and the LDA Model

As noted above, the LDA model is ultimately represented by its Dirichlet prior α over topic mixtures. It is a natural extension now to apply the Bayesian surprise framework to domains that are captured by LDA models.

Recall that video tubes in our 'bag of words' model are represented by the posterior optimizing parameter γ^*. Furthermore, new evidence also elicits a new Dirichlet parameter for the world model of the observer, $\widehat{\alpha}$. To obtain $\widehat{\alpha}$, we can simulate one iteration of the variational EM procedure used above in the model's parameters estimation stage, where the word distribution matrix β is kept fixed. This is the Dirichlet prior that would have been calculated had the new tube been appended to the training corpus. The Bayesian Surprise formula when applied to the LDA model can be now written as:

$$S(\alpha, \widehat{\alpha}) = KL_{DIR}(\alpha, \widehat{\alpha}) \tag{3}$$

The Kullback - Leibler divergence of two Dirichlet distributions can be computed as [13]:

$$KL_{DIR}(\alpha, \widehat{\alpha}) = log\frac{\Gamma(\boldsymbol{\alpha})}{\Gamma(\widehat{\boldsymbol{\alpha}})} + \sum_{i=1}^{k} log\frac{\Gamma(\widehat{\alpha}_i)}{\Gamma(\alpha_i)} + \sum_{i=1}^{k}[\alpha_i - \widehat{\alpha}_i][\psi(\alpha_i) - \psi(\boldsymbol{\alpha})] \tag{4}$$

where

$$\boldsymbol{\alpha} = \sum_{i=1}^{k} \alpha_i \quad \text{and} \quad \widehat{\boldsymbol{\alpha}} = \sum_{i=1}^{k} \widehat{\alpha}_i$$

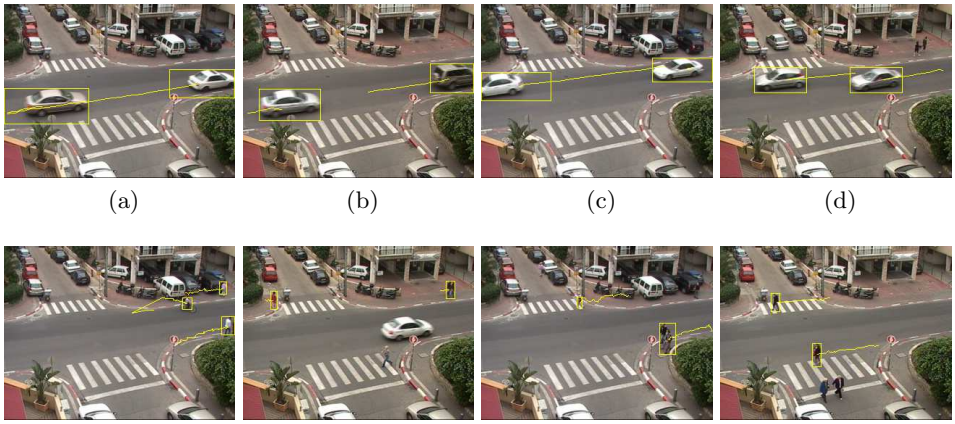
and Γ and ψ are the gamma and digamma functions, respectively.

Thus each video event is assigned a surprise score, which reflects the tube's deviation from the expected topic mixture. In our setting, this deviation may correspond to an unusual trajectory taken by an object, such as 'car doing a U-turn', or 'person running across the road'. To obtain the most surprising events out of a corpus, we can select those tubes that receive a surprise score that is higher than some threshold.

6 Experimental Results

6.1 Dataset

We test our model on data obtained from a real world street camera, overlooking an urban road intersection. This scenario usually exhibits structured events, where pedestrians and vehicles travel and interact in mostly predefined ways, constrained by the road and sidewalk layout. Aside from security measures, intersection monitoring has been investigated and shown to help in reducing pedestrian and vehicle conflicts, which may result in injuries and crashes [14].



(a) (b) (c) (d)

(e) (f) (g) (h)

Fig. 2: Trajectory classifications: (a,b) cars going left to right, (c,d) cars going right to left, (e,f) people walking left to right, and (g,h) people walking right to left.

6.2 Trajectory Classification

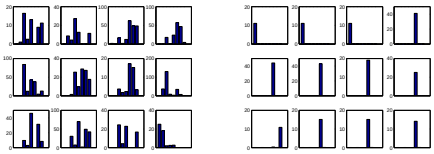
The first step in our algorithm is the construction of a model that recognizes typical trajectories in the input video. We fix k, the number of latent topics to be 8. Fig. 2 shows several examples of classified objects from four of the eight model topics, including examples from both the training and test corpora.

Note that some of the topics seem to have a semantic meaning. Thus, on the basis of trajectory description alone, our model was able to automatically catalog the video tubes into semantic movement categories such as 'left to right', or 'top to bottom', with further distinction between smooth constant motion (normally cars) and the more erratic path typically exhibited by people. It should be noted, however, that not all latent topics correspond with easily interpretable patterns of motion as depicted in Fig. 2. Other topics seem to capture complicated path forms, where pauses and direction changes occur, with one topic representing 'standing in place' trajectories.

6.3 Surprising Events

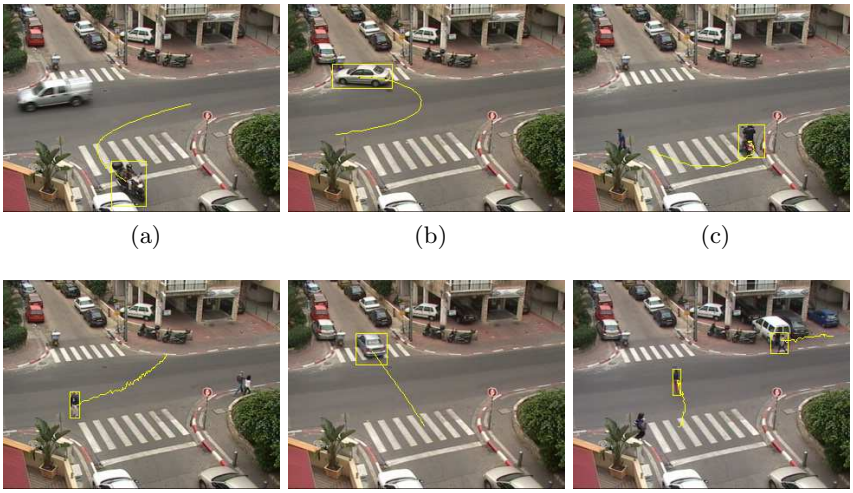
To identify the atypical events in the corpus, we look at those tubes which have the highest surprise score. Several example tubes which fall above the 95th percentile are shown in Fig. 4. They include such activities as a vehicle performing a U-turn, or a person walking in a path that is rare in the training corpus, like crossing the intersection diagonally.

In Fig. 3 the γ^* values of the most surprising and typical trajectories are shown. It may be noted that while 'boring' events generally fall into one of



(a) (b)

Fig. 3: Posterior Dirichlet parameters γ^* values for the most surprising (a) and typical (b) events. Each plot shows the values of each of the $k = 8$ latent topics. Note that the different y scales correspond to different trajectory lengths (measured in frames).



(a) (b) (c)

(d) (e) (f)

Fig. 4: Surprising events: (a) a bike turning into a one-way street from the wrong way, (b) a car performing a U-turn, (c) a bike turning and stalling over pedestrian crossing, (d) a man walking across the road, (e) a car crossing the road from bottom to top, (f) a woman moving from the sidewalk to the middle of the intersection.

the learned latent topics exclusively (Fig. 3b), the topic mixture of surprising events has massive counts in several topics at once (Fig. 3a). This observation is verified by computing the mean entropy measure of the γ^* parameters, after being normalized to a valid probability distribution:

$$\overline{H}(\gamma_{surprising}) = 1.2334, \quad \overline{H}(\gamma_{typical}) = 0.5630$$

7 Conclusions

In this work we presented a novel integration between the generative probabilistic model LDA and the Bayesian surprise framework. We applied this model to real world data of urban scenery, where vehicles and people interact in natural ways. Our model succeeded in automatically obtaining a concept of the normal behaviors expected in the tested environment, and in applying these concepts in a Bayesian manner to recognize those events that are out of the ordinary. Although the features used are fairly simple (the trajectory taken by the object), complex surprising events such as a car stalling in its lane, or backing out of its parking space were correctly identified, judged against the normal paths present in the input.

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