Unsupervised Fine-tuning of Optical Flow for Better Motion Boundary Estimation

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Keywords: Optical Flow, Unsupervised Learning, Fine-tuning, Motion Boundary, Deep Learning.

Abstract: Recently, convolutional neural network (CNN) based approaches have proven to be successful in optical flow estimation in the supervised as well as in the unsupervised training paradigms. Supervised training requires large amounts of training data with task specific motion statistics. Usually, synthetic datasets are used for this purpose. Fully unsupervised approaches are usually harder to train and show weaker performance, although they have access to the true data statistics during training. In this paper we exploit a well-performing pre-trained model and fine-tune it in an unsupervised way using classical optical flow training objectives to learn the dataset specific statistics. Thus, per dataset training time can be reduced from days to less than 1 minute. Specifically, motion boundaries estimated by gradients in the optical flow field can be greatly improved using the proposed unsupervised fine-tuning.

1 INTRODUCTION

Despite the advances in computation, optical flow estimation is still an open and active research area in computer vision. Optical flow can be considered as a variational optimization problem to find pixel correspondences between any two consecutive frames (Horn and Schunck, 1981). Research paradigms in this field have evolved from considering optical flow estimation as a classical problem (Brox and Malik, 2011), to more high-level approaches using machine learning, for example, convolutional neural networks (CNN) as state-of-the-art method (Dosovitskiy et al., 2015; Ilg et al., 2017; Wannenwetsch et al., 2017; Sun et al., 2018).

Training convolutional neural networks (CNN) to predict generic optical flow requires a massive amount of training data, big computational power e.g. Graphics Processing Units (GPU). However, obtaining ground truth for realistic videos which is very hard to achieve (Butler et al., 2012), and simply not available in some scenarios. To overcome this problem, unsupervised learning frameworks have been proposed. In such way, we can utilize the resources of unlabeled videos (Jason et al., 2016). The idea behind unsupervised methods is not to include ground truth optical flow in training convolutional neural network, nevertheless, using a photometric loss that measures the difference between the target image and the (inverse / forward) warped subsequent image based on a generated dense optical flow field predicted from the convolutional networks. Hence, an end-to-end convolutional neural network can be trained with any amount of unlabeled image pairs, which helps in overcoming the need of ground truth optical flow as training input.

Researchers have generated many pre-trained optical flow estimation models either in supervised or unsupervised way. The amount of effort and training time to produce such models is big. However, fine-tuning on existing pre-trained models for specific purpose datasets will help in reducing effort and time. The purpose of this paper is not to compete with supervised state-of-the-art approaches, where ground truth training data is available. In contrast, we aim to provide a method that facilitates fast fine-tuning of optical flow networks in scenarios where little to no training data is available. Thus, we are proposing an unsupervised fine-tuning approach for optical flow estimation with four main contributions: First, we introduce an unsupervised loss function based on classical, variational optical flow methods. Fine-tuning in an unsupervised way might address the lack of of ground truths. Also, it will work as catalyst for special purpose datasets specially in real life scenarios. Second, we reduce the time of training a CNN from scratch - needs couple of days - and benefit from the pre-trained models during fine-tuning which needs less

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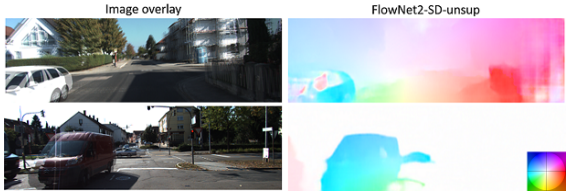

Figure 1: Qualitative results: Optical flow estimated on KITTI 2012 upper part, and KITTI 2015 bottom part using our method FlowNet2-SD-unsup. Right bottom corner shows optical flow color code used in this manuscript.

than 1 minute in our case. Our preliminary results indicate that this new unsupervised loss model might indeed be promising with regard to optical flow estimation and time needed. Third, we provide analysis of the effectiveness of classical optical flow optimization objectives in the context of CNNs. Forth, object appearances and statistics can be successfully learned from only few unsupervised training examples, which can be measured especially by our improvement in motion boundary estimates.

2 RELATED WORK

Motivated by the success of CNNs in various computer vision tasks, learning optical flow is gaining a lot of attention nowadays. Learning process could be divided into supervised and unsupervised learning. Supervised learning optical flow requires ground truth. Most researchers are using synthetic datasets (Dosovitskiy et al., 2015; Mayer et al., 2016) for training their networks. For example, Dosovitskiy *et al.* (Dosovitskiy et al., 2015) suggested two CNN networks: FlowNetSimple (FlowNetS) in which input images are stacked both together and then fed them through a generic network to decide how to process the image pair to extract the motion information. The second one is FlowNetCorr (FlowNetC) which includes a correlation layer that performs multiplicative patch comparisons between two feature maps. Their network succeeded in predicting optical flow at up to 10 image pairs per second.

By stacking several simple FlowNet models with some modification to some and introduce a fusion network, Ilg *et al.* (Ilg et al., 2017) achieved astonishing results using FlowNet2. On the other hand, a network smaller than FlowNet2 by 17 times PWC-Net (Sun et al., 2018) was designed via pyramidal processing, warping, and the use of a cost volume. They adopted DenseNet architecture (Huang et al., 2017), which directly connects each layer to every other layer in a feed forward fashion. Their results shows the advantage of combining deep learning with domain knowledge, while obtaining competitive results compared to other methods. Ranjan and Black (Ranjan and Black, 2017) introduced Spatial Pyramid Network (SPyNet) combined classical coarse-to-fine pyramid methods with deep learning for optical flow estimation. SPyNet is 96% smaller and faster than FlowNet, hence less memory is required which makes it promising for embedded and mobile applications. SPyNet learn to predict flow increment at each pyramid level rather than minimizing a classical objective function. LiteFlowNet has been developed by Hui *et al.* (Hui et al., 2018) which is 30 times smaller in the model size of FlowNet2 and 1.36 times faster in execution. They have drilled down the missed architectural details in FlowNet2. They have introduced an effective flow inference at each pyramid level through a lightweight cascaded network to improve optical flow estimation accuracy and permits seamless incorporation of descriptor matching in the network. Moreover, a flow regularization layer has been developed to ameliorate the issue of outliers and vague flow boundaries by using a feature-driven local convolution.

Another research paradigm for CNNs adopts unsupervised learning approach. FlowNet was adopted while equipped with unsupervised Charbonnier loss function to minimize photometric consistency which measures the difference between the first input image and the (inverse) warped subsequent image based on the predicted optical flow by the network (Jason et al., 2016; Ren et al., 2017). Alletto and Rigazio (Alletto and Rigazio, 2017) used energy based generative adversarial network (EbGAN) consists of two fully convolutional auto-encoders where the generator network is attached with the interpolation of the two input frames and outputs network is a pixel-level energy map instead of functioning as a binary classifier between true or false. Interpolating between frames was used by Long *et al.* (Long et al., 2016) to train CNNs for optical flow estimation. Zhu *et al.* (Zhu et al., 2017) argue that using optical flow estimators to generate proxy ground truth data for training CNNs could help in learn to estimate motion between image pairs as good as using true ground truth. In order to handle occlusion Wang *et al.* (Wang et al., 2018) proposed an end-to-end network consists of two copies of FlowNetS with shared parameters, one to produce forward optical flow while the other one generates backward warping which is used for occlusion mask. Loss function used includes occlusion predicted by motion. To tackle large motion estimation they have introduced histogram equalizer and occlusion map for the warped frame. Makansi *et al.* (Makansi et al., 2018) proposed an assessment network that can learn to predict the error form a set of optical flow fields

generated with various optical flow estimation techniques. Then, the assessment network is used as a proxy ground truth generator to train FlowNet. The later work is most related to our work except that we focus on the effectiveness of implementing classical optical flow optimization objectives in CNNs architecture. Janai *et al.* (Janai et al., 2018) learned optical flow and occlusions together via modeling a temporal relationship for three frames window by estimating past and future optical flow. They have used photometric loss function and explicitly reason about occlusions.

Many motion boundary estimation methods depends on optical flow (Papazoglou and Ferrari, 2013; Wang et al., 2013; Weinzaepfel et al., 2015; Ilg et al., 2018). Philippe Weinzaepfel *et al.* (Weinzaepfel et al., 2015) suggetsed a learning-based method for motion boundary detection based on random forests since motion boundaries in local patch tends to have similar patterns, static appearance and temporal features, color, optical flow, image warping and backward flow errors. In their work, Li *et al.* proposed an unsupervised learning approach for edge detection. This method utilizes two types of information as input: motion information in the form of noisy semi-dense matches between frames, and image gradients as the knowledge for edges. The performance of motion boundary estimation is limited by several issues like the removal of weak image edges as well as label noises.

We have adopted FlowNet2-SD architecture which is implemented in Caffe deep learning framework, and considered as subnet of Flownet2 (Ilg et al., 2017). FlowNet2-SD is a modified version of FlowNetS but more deeper to deal with small displacements. FlowNet2-SD architecture is illustrated in Figure 2. We have replaced the final and intermediate losses with unsupervised losses described in the following section.

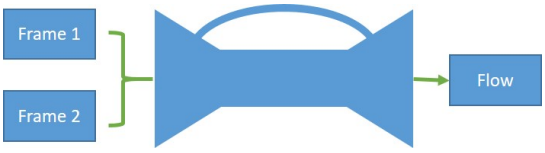

Figure 2: FlowNet2-SD architecture which takes two input images and produces optical flow (repainted from (Ilg et al., 2017)).

3 NETWORK ARCHITECTURE

Figure 3 shows our proposed unsupervised loss. Only one stage (resolution) is shown from multi-resolution optical flow architecture adopted from FlowNet2-SD.

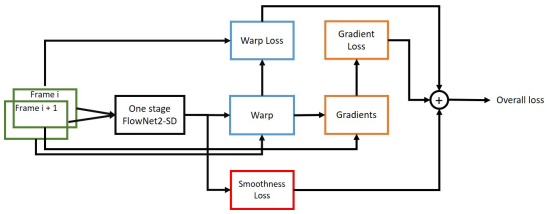

Figure 3: An overview of how unsupervised losses have been constructed. Only one stage(resolution) of producing flow from FlowNet2-SD is shown.

Stacking both input images together and feed them to the network, allows the network to decide itself how to process the image pair to extract the motion information. In each stage (resolution) the loss is constructed using calculating three main losses:

- Warp loss: is calculated when second frame is back warped with the produced optical flow and calculate the difference between the generated warped frame and frame one.
- Gradient loss: Calculate the difference between gradients of warped image and gradients of frame one.
- Smoothness loss: works as a penalizing term through calculating the variation of generated flow field in u and v directions.

3.1 Cost Functions

The cost function can be structured by combining color, gradient and smoothness terms where $I_1, I_2 : (\Omega \subset \mathbb{R}^2) \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^3$ are any two consecutive frames. Also, $x := (x,y)^T$ are the point in Ω domain, and $w := (u,v)^T$ is the optical flow field (Brox and Malik, 2011) as follows:

$$E(w) = E_{color} + \gamma E_{gradient} + \alpha E_{smooth} \quad (1)$$

Where the color energy E_{color} is an assumption that the corresponding points should have the same color:

$$E_{color}(w) = \int_{\Omega} \Psi(|I_2(x+w(x)) - I_1(x)|^2) dx \quad (2)$$

The gradient energy $E_{gradient}$ is a constrain which is invariant to additive brightness changes to deal with the illumination effect:

$$E_{gradient}(w) = \int_{\Omega} \Psi(|\nabla I_2 + w(x)) - \nabla I_1|^2) dx \quad (3)$$

Adding smoothness constrain E_{smooth} works as regularity term for penalizing the total variation of the flow field generated from 2 and 3:

$$E_{smooth}(w) = \int_{\Omega} \Psi(|\nabla u(x)|^2) - |\nabla v(x)|^2) dx \quad (4)$$

Table 1: Different combinations of cost function terms from Equation 1 and their references used in this research.

Terms	Reference
$E_{\|color\|_2} + \gamma E_{\|gradient\|_1} + \alpha E_{\|smooth\|_1}$	f_1
$E_{\|color\|_2} + \gamma E_{\|gradient\|_2} + \alpha E_{\|smooth\|_1}$	f_2
$E_{\|color\|_1} + \gamma E_{\|gradient\|_1} + \alpha E_{\|smooth\|_1}$	f_3
$E_{\|color\|_2} + \alpha E_{\|smooth\|_1}$	f_4
$E_{\|color\|_2}$	f_5
$\gamma E_{\|gradient\|_1} + \alpha E_{\|smooth\|_1}$	f_6
$\gamma E_{\|gradient\|_1}$	f_7

$\Psi(s)$ represents different metrics as follow:

$$\Psi(s) = \begin{cases} \|s\|_1, \\ s \in [E_{color}(w), E_{gradient}(w), E_{smooth}(w)] \\ \|s\|_2, \\ s \in [E_{color}(w), E_{gradient}(w), E_{smooth}(w)] \end{cases} \quad (5)$$

Where,

$$\|s\|_1 = \sum_{i=1}^{n} |y_i - f(x_i)| \quad (6)$$

and

$$\|s\|_2 = \sum_{i=1}^{n} (y_i - f(x_i))^2 \quad (7)$$

Equation 5 shows the non-local functions used in our approach. $L_1 norm$ 6 and $L_2 norm$ 7 were used for different combinations using color, gradient or smoothness terms.

4 EXPERIMENTS

4.1 Datasets

Three well known datasets have been used for unsupervised fine-tuning and testing predicted optical flow:

4.1.1 KITTI 2012

(Geiger et al., 2012) is a real-world computer vision benchmarks consists of 194 training image pairs and 195 image pairs for testing purposes.

4.1.2 KITTI 2015

(Menze and Geiger, 2015) is a benchmark containing of 200 training scenes and 200 test scenes (4 color images per scene, saved in loss less png format). Compared to KITTI 2012 benchmark, it covers dynamic scenes for which ground truth was established in a semi-automatic process.

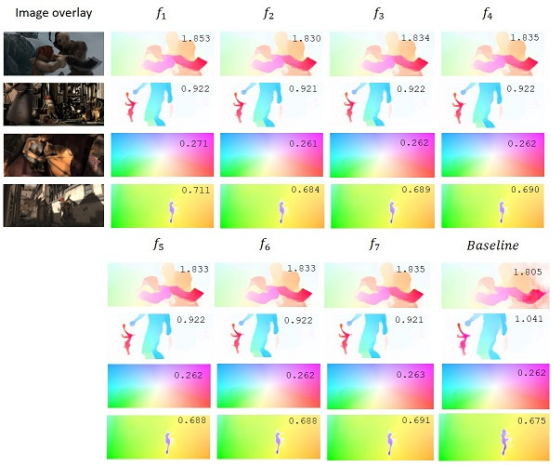

Figure 4: Examples of optical flow estimated using different combinations of cost functions based on Table 1 and EPE on different Sintel validation sets. f_{1-7} are the corresponding cost function line in the mentioned table.

4.1.3 Sintel

(Butler et al., 2012) is an open source synthetic dataset extracted from animated film produced by Ton Roosendaal and the Blender Foundation. It contains 1041 image pairs for training and 552 image pairs for testing both training and testing come with Clean and Final versions. Those versions been used to investigate when optical flow algorithms break, so each frame has been rendered in different pass: the Clean pass, which contains shading, but no image degradations, and the Final pass, which additionally includes motion blur, defocus blur, and atmospheric effects, and corresponds to the final movie (Wulff et al., 2012).

Since Sintel training dataset provides optical flow ground truth, which can be used for validating our approach, we have divided the training dataset into training (845 training image pairs) and validation (196 testing image pairs from alley_2, ambush_5, market_2 and sleeping_1 sequences) datasets for validating our method.

Flying Chairs (Dosovitskiy et al., 2015) was not used in this work since FlowNet2-SD model was trained on it, and to avoid over fitting while fine-tuning. Hence, we have decided not to include it.

4.2 Training Details

We have fine-tuned the pre-trained FlowNet2-SD model (Ilg et al., 2017) in an unsupervised way and called it FlowNet2-SD-unsup. Number of training (fine-tuning) iteration was up to 50 iterations which takes only 52 seconds on NVIDIA GeForce GTX 1080 Ti. Learning rate used was fixed to $1.0e^{-7}$.

Table 2: EPE results for optical flow generated by our method FlowNet2-SD-ft-unsup using different loss function as described in Table 1 and the FlowNet2-SD (Baseline) on various Sintel validation sequences.

		f_1	f_2	f_3	f_4	f_5	f_6	f_7	Baseline
alley_2	Clean	0.520	**0.517**	0.521	0.531	0.521	0.520	0.520	0.518
	Final	0.528	0.527	0.528	0.528	0.528	0.527	0.527	**0.525**
ambush_5	Clean	14.372	**14.366**	14.373	14.403	14.374	14.372	14.372	14.454
	Final	15.612	15.612	15.613	15.612	15.612	**15.611**	**15.611**	15.625
market_2	Clean	0.936	**0.935**	0.936	0.940	0.937	0.937	0.937	0.941
	Final	1.030	**1.029**	1.030	**1.029**	**1.029**	1.030	1.030	1.035
sleeping_1	Clean	0.237	**0.235**	0.238	0.246	0.237	0.237	0.237	**0.234**
	Final	0.250	0.250	0.250	0.249	0.249	0.250	0.250	**0.236**
Average	Clean	4.016	**4.013**	4.017	4.030	4.017	4.016	4.016	4.037
	Final	4.355	4.355	4.355	4.354	4.354	4.355	4.354	4.355

Table 3: EPE results for evaluating our method on the validation sets of Sintel training with comparison to FlowNet2-SD (Baseline).

Method	Sintel Clean	Sintel Final
FlowNet2-SD (Baseline)	4.036	4.354
FlowNet2-SD-ft-unsup	4.016	4.354

5 RESULTS

5.1 Evaluation

We have reported optical flow quantitative evaluation results with regard to average end point error (EPE) for for Sintel validation sets in Table 3 while provided only qualitative results for KITTI 2012, KITTI 2015 in Figure 1.

Quantitative results show that FlowNet-SD-unsup achieved good results with comparison to baseline. We are not in a situation to compete with fine-tuning in supervised way (ground truth available) and achieve better results, but to find a fast (in terms of training and execution) and reasonable method to produce competitive optical flow when ground truth is not given, i.e. real-world scenarios. Runtime for generating one optical flow file takes only $1.3e^{-4}$ seconds.

Evaluation for the validation dataset from Sintel based on different combination of cost function described in Table 1 fine-tuned on Sintel is shown in Table 3.

Table 3 results show a small variation in the EPE values for different settings. For example, using L_2norm for warping and gradient functions combined with L_1norm for smoothness achieved best results for alley_2 clean, ambush_5 clean, market_2 clean and sleeping_1 clean validation datasets. Baseline has outperformed our approach in some final validation sets with small margin. But, the average EPE for Final validation sets form both FlowNet2-SD-unsup and FlowNet2-SD is the same.

5.2 Motion Boundary Estimation

We have compared motion boundary estimation from our method (FlowNet2-SD-unsup) and the baseline (FlowNet2-SD). Our method outperform the baseline by large margin in Sintel clean, while it was almost the same for Sintel final, Table 4. There is an improvement also in quality of qualitative results which is visible in Figure 5. The variation in motion in different validation sequences have produced different F-measures in Table 4. One observation is that F-measure score is correlated with number and magnitude of produced motion boundaries.

5.3 Qualitative Results

Visualizations of some generated examples of optical flow are illustrated in Figure 4 for Sintel and in Figure 1 for KITTI 2012 and 2015. KITTI here represent real world data, while Sintel exemplify synthetic scenario. Our method succeeded in capturing fine structure results around edges, while FlowNet2-SD shows smooth results as shown in Figure 7.

5.4 Discussions

Defining the correct and optimum values of network parameters are crucial to obtain good results. Therefore, we have observed that it is not always the case to get good visualization for optical flow even if EPE results are minimal.

Another observation is reported in Table 2: during investigating our approach on the produced optical flow results form Sintel validation dataset, EPE results is vary among different validation sequences

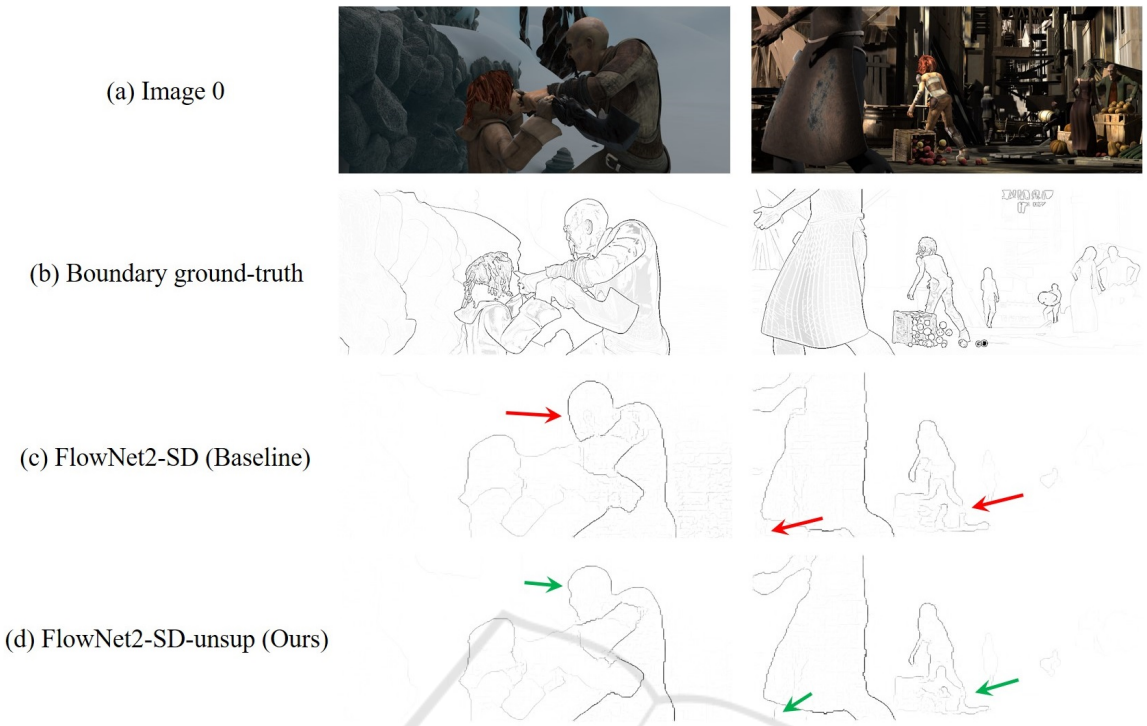

Figure 5: Visualization of motion boundaries from some Sintel validation sets. Our approach succeeds to detect more fine structures (see green arrows) compared to the baseline.

Table 4: F-measure comparison between our motion boundary estimation generated by our method FlowNet2-SD-ft-unsup using different loss function as described in Table 1 and the baseline on the Sintel train validation dataset.

		f_1	f_2	f_3	f_4	f_5	f_6	f_7	Baseline
alley_2	Clean	0.7741	0.774	0.7744	0.774	0.7741	0.7746	0.7745	0.7733
	Final	0.7736	0.7736	0.7736	0.7734	0.7735	0.7736	0.7736	0.7706
ambush_5	Clean	0.5029	0.5029	0.5027	0.5025	0.5027	0.503	0.5029	0.4675
	Final	0.4665	0.4665	0.4665	0.4665	0.4665	0.4665	0.4665	0.4981
market_2	Clean	0.7324	0.7323	0.7324	0.7327	0.7324	0.7324	0.7324	0.6784
	Final	0.6768	0.6767	0.6767	0.677	0.677	0.6768	0.6768	0.724
sleeping_1	Clean	0.2312	0.2318	0.231	0.2274	0.2309	0.2311	0.2312	0.2702
	Final	0.3194	0.3196	0.3197	0.3202	0.3202	0.3195	0.3198	0.197
Average	Clean	0.4077	**0.4082**	0.4078	0.403	0.4075	0.4078	0.4078	0.3435
	Final	0.3736	0.3731	0.3737	0.3735	0.3735	0.3735	0.3735	0.3796

(alley_2, ambush_5, market_2 and sleeping_1) and in some cases inside the same sequence Figure 6.

Figure 6 shows two different frames from ambush_5 validation dataset, their corresponding magnitude maps for $\vec{U}$ and $\vec{V}$ and histogram of optical flow magnitudes and EPE. The histogram of optical flow magnitudes for the above frame shows that most values have small magnitudes between -5 and 5 and the majority are around zero with EPE 1.09. On the other hand, the distribution of optical flow magnitudes in the below frame are between -10 and 10 with extended distribution to 20 with EPE 10.095. This denotes that our method is not able to capture big displacement in motion represented by high magnitude values.

6 CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, we have introduced an unsupervised loss function based on classical optical flow formula using deep learning. Our approach shows potential to minimize the need of ground truth for both optical flow estimation and motion boundary detection. Moreover, benefit from pre-trained models to reduce time via fast unsupervised fine-tuning. This work is opening the

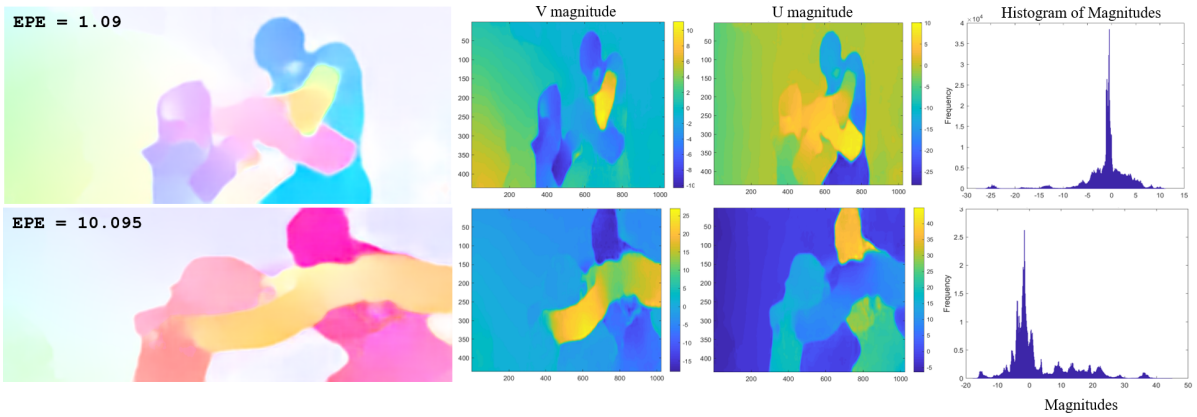

Figure 6: Two different images from validation sequence ambush_5 and their corresponding histograms of optical flow magnitudes and visualizations of magnitudes in U and V directions. It's obvious that higher EPE value has higher large frequencies.

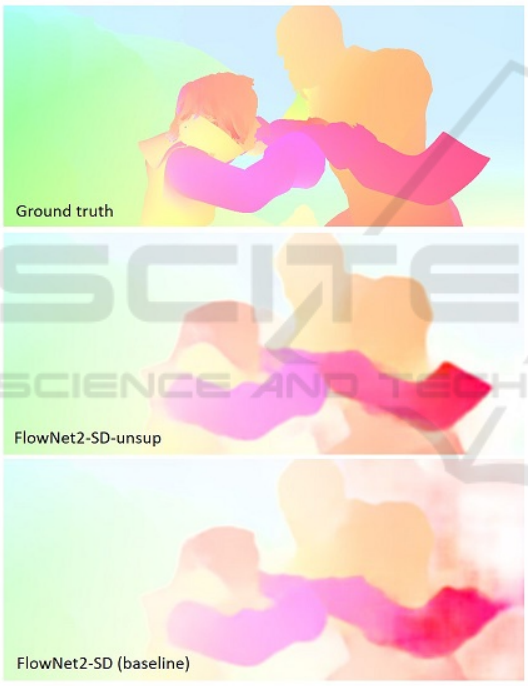

Figure 7: Qualitative results: We compare our results in the second row using FlowNet2-SD-unsup with ground truth in first row and the baseline generated from FlowNet2-SD in the third row. Our model produces better flow and capturing fine structures around boundaries.

opportunity to investigate more on how to enhance the results to compete with state-of-the-art approaches. One future work is handling large displacement which tends to be a common draw back in many optical flow estimators and reduce noise around edges.

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