Image Retrieval: Ideas, Influences, and Trends of the New Age

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We have witnessed great interest and a wealth of promise in content-based image retrieval as an emerging technology. While the last decade laid foundation to such promise, it also paved the way for a large number of new techniques and systems, got many new people involved, and triggered stronger association of weakly related fields. In this paper, we survey almost 300 key theoretical and empirical contributions in the current decade related to image retrieval and automatic image annotation, and discuss the spawning of related sub-fields in the process. We also discuss significant challenges involved in the adaptation of existing image retrieval techniques to build systems that can be useful in the real-world. In retrospect of what has been achieved so far, we also conjecture what the future may hold for image retrieval research.

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1. INTRODUCTION

What Niels Henrik David Bohr exactly meant when he said “Never express yourself more clearly than you are able to think” is anybody’s guess. In light of the current discussion, one thought that this well-known quote evokes is that of subtle irony; there are times and situations when we imagine what we desire, but are unable to express this desire in precise wording. Take, for instance, a desire to find the perfect portrait from a collection. Any attempt to express what makes a portrait ‘perfect’ may end up undervaluing the beauty of imagination. In some sense, it may be easier to find such a picture by looking through the collection and making unconscious ‘matches’ with the one drawn by imagination, than to use textual descriptions that fail to capture the very essence of perfection. One way to appreciate the importance of visual interpretation of picture content for indexing and retrieval is this.

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Our motivation to organize things is inherent. Over many years we learned that this is a key to progress without the loss of what we already possess. For centuries, text in different languages has been set to order for efficient retrieval, be it manually in the ancient *Bibliotheke*, or automatically as in the modern digital libraries. But when it comes to organizing pictures, man has traditionally outperformed machines for most tasks. One reason which causes this distinction is that text is man's creation, while typical images are a mere replica of what man has seen since birth, concrete descriptions of which are relatively elusive. Add to this the theory that the human vision system has evolved genetically over many centuries. Naturally, the interpretation of what we see is hard to characterize, and even harder to teach a machine. Yet, over the past decade, ambitious attempts have been made to make computers learn to understand, index and annotate pictures representing a wide range of concepts, with much progress.

Content-based image retrieval (CBIR), as we see it today, is any technology that in principle helps organize digital picture archives by their visual content. By this definition, anything ranging from an image similarity function to a robust image annotation engine falls under the purview of CBIR. This characterization of CBIR as a field of study places it at a unique juncture within the scientific community. While we witness continued effort in solving the fundamental open problem of robust image understanding, we also see people from different fields, e.g., computer vision, machine learning, information retrieval, human-computer interaction, database systems, Web and data mining, information theory, statistics, and psychology contributing and becoming part of the CBIR community [Wang et al. 2006]. Moreover, a lateral bridging of gaps between some of these research communities is being gradually brought about as a by-product of such contributions, the impact of which can potentially go beyond CBIR. Again, what we see today as a few cross-field publications may very well spring into new fields of study in the foreseeable future.

Amidst such marriages of fields, it is important to recognize the shortcomings of CBIR as a real-world technology. One problem with all current approaches is the reliance on visual similarity for judging semantic similarity, which may be problematic due to the *semantic gap* [Smeulders et al. 2000] between low-level content and higher-level concepts. While this intrinsic difficulty in solving the core problem cannot be denied, we believe that the current state-of-the-art in CBIR holds enough promise and maturity to be useful for real-world applications, if aggressive attempts are made. For example, Google™ and Yahoo!® are household names today, primarily due to the benefits reaped through their use, despite the fact that robust text understanding is still an open problem. Online photo-sharing has become extremely popular with Flickr [Flickr 2002] which hosts hundreds of millions of pictures with diverse content. The video sharing and distribution forum YouTube has also brought in a new revolution in multimedia usage. Of late, there is renewed interest in the media about potential real-world applications of CBIR and image analysis technologies [ScientificAmerican 2006; Discovery 2006; CNN 2005]. We envision that image retrieval will enjoy a success story in the coming years. We also sense a paradigm shift in the goals of the next-generation CBIR researchers. The need of the hour is to establish how this technology can reach out to the common man the way text-retrieval techniques have. Methods for visual similarity, or even semantic similarity (if ever perfected), will remain techniques for building systems. What the average end-user can hope to gain from using such a system is a different question altogether. For some applications, visual similarity may in fact be more critical than semantic similarity. For others, visual similarity may have little significance. Under what scenarios a typical user feels the need for a CBIR system, what the user sets out to achieve with the system, and how she expects the system to aid in this process, are some of the key questions that need to be answered in order to produce a successful system design. Unfortunately, user studies of this nature have been scarce so far.

Comprehensive surveys exist on the topic of CBIR [Aigrain et al. 1996; Rui et al. 1999; Smeulders et al. 2000; Snoek and Worring 2005], all of which deal primarily with work prior to the year 2000. Surveys also exist on closely related topics such as relevance feedback [Zhou and Huang 2003], high-dimensional indexing of multimedia data [Bohm et al. 2001], face recognition [Zhao et al. 2003] (useful for face based image retrieval), applications of CBIR to medicine [Muller et al. 2004], and applications to art and cultural imaging [Chen et al. 2005]. Multimedia information retrieval, as a broader research area covering video, audio, image, and text analysis has been extensively surveyed [Sebe et al. 2003; Lew et al. 2006]. In our current survey, we restrict the discussion to image-related research only.

One of the reasons for writing this survey is that CBIR, as a field, has grown tremendously after the year 2000 in terms of the people involved and the papers published. Lateral growth has also occurred in terms of the associated research questions addressed, spanning various fields. To validate the hypothesis about growth in publications, we conducted a simple exercise. We searched for publications containing the phrases "Image Retrieval" using Google Scholar [Google Scholar 2004] and the digital libraries of ACM, IEEE and Springer, within each year from 1995 to 2005. In order to account for (a) the growth of research in computer science as a whole and (b) Google's yearly variations in indexing publications, the Google Scholar results were normalized using the publication count for the word "computer" for that year. A plot on another young and fast-growing field within pattern recognition, support vector machines (SVM), was generated in a similar manner for comparison. The results can be seen in Fig. 1. Not surprisingly, the graph indicates similar growth patterns for both fields, although SVM has had faster growth. These trends indicate, given the implicit assumptions, a roughly exponential growth in interest in image retrieval and closely related topics. We also observe particularly strong growth over the last five years, spanning new techniques, support systems, and application domains.

In this paper, we comprehensively survey, analyze, and quantify current progress and future prospects of image retrieval. A possible organization of the various facets of image retrieval as a field is shown in Fig. 2. Our paper follows a similar structure. Note that the treatment is limited to progress mainly in the current decade, and only includes work that involves visual analysis in part or full. For the purpose of completeness, and better readability for the uninitiated, we have introduced key contributions of the earlier years in Sec. 1.1. Image retrieval purely on the basis of textual meta-data, Web link structures, or linguistic tags is excluded. The rest of

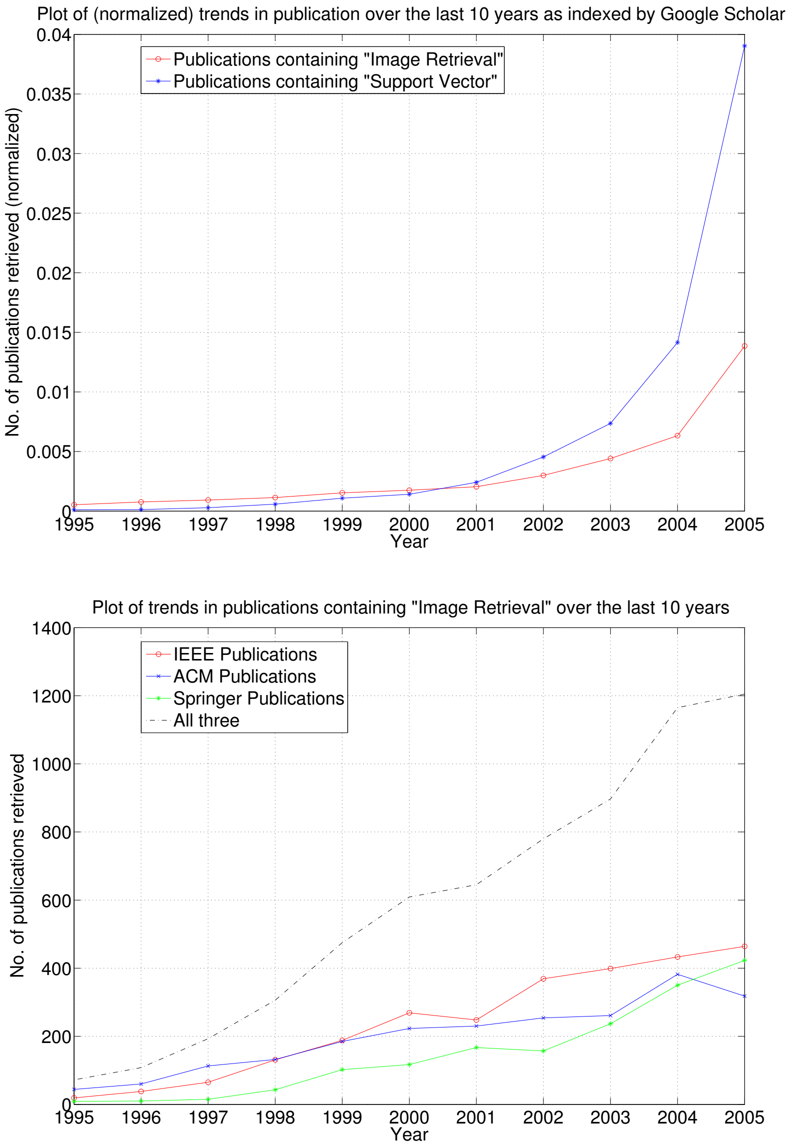


Fig. 1. A study of post-1995 publications in CBIR. *Top:* Normalized trends in publications containing phrases “image retrieval” and “support vector” in them. *Bottom:* Publisher wise break-up of publication count on papers containing “image retrieval” in them.

this paper is arranged as follows: For a CBIR system to be useful in the real-world, a number of issues need to be taken care of. Hence, the *desiderate* of real-world image retrieval systems, including various critical aspects of their design, are discussed in Sec. 2. Some key approaches and techniques of the current decade are presented in details, in Sec. 3. Core research in CBIR has given birth to new problems, which

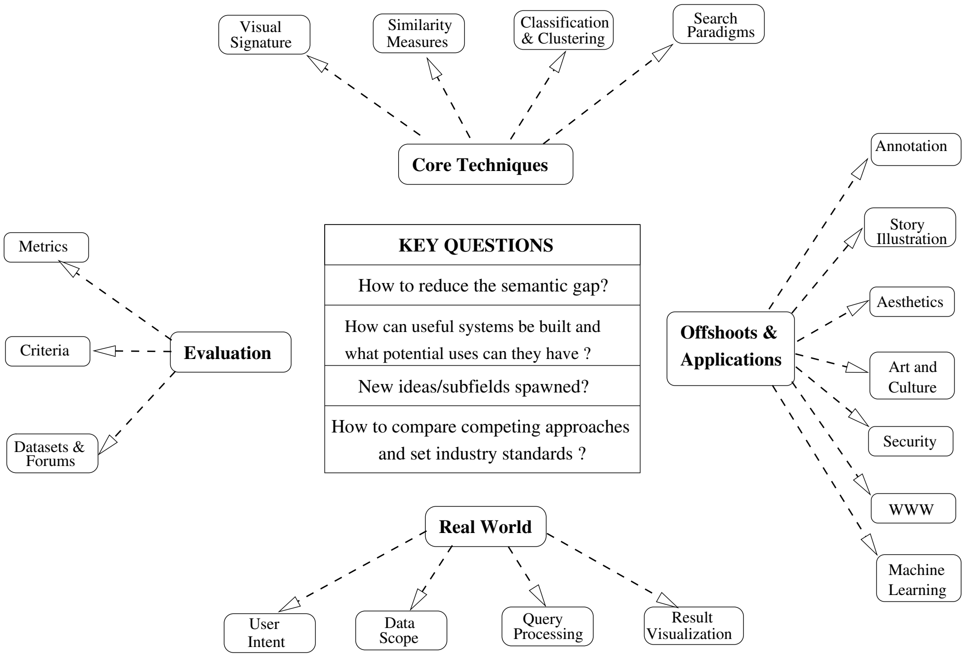


Fig. 2. Our view of the many facets of image retrieval as a field of research. The view is reflected in the structure of this paper.

we refer to here as CBIR offshoots. These are discussed in Sec. 4. When distinct solutions to a problem as open-ended as CBIR are proposed, a natural question that arises is how to make a fair comparison among them. In Sec. 5, we present current directions in the evaluation of image retrieval systems. We conclude in Sec. 6.

1.1 The Early Years

The years 1994-2000 can be thought of as the initial phase of research and development on image retrieval by content. The progress made during this phase was lucidly summarized at a high-level in [Smeulders et al. 2000], which has had a clear influence on progress made in the current decade, and will undoubtedly continue to influence future work. Therefore, it is pertinent that we provide a brief summary of the ideas, influences, and trends of the early years (a large part of which originate in that survey) before describing the same for the new age. In order to do so, we first quote the various *gaps* introduced there that define and motivate most of the related problems:

—The *sensory gap* is the gap between the object in the world and the information in a (computational) description derived from a recording of that scene.

—The *semantic gap* is the lack of coincidence between the information that one can extract from the visual data and the interpretation that the same data have for a user in a given situation.

While the former makes recognition from image content challenging due to limitations in recording, the latter brings in the issue of a user's interpretations of pictures and how it is inherently difficult for visual content to capture them. We continue briefly summarizing key contributions of the early years that deal with one or more of these gaps.

In [Smeulders et al. 2000], the domains for image search were classified as *narrow* and *broad*, and to date this remains an extremely important distinction for the purpose of system design. As mentioned, narrow image domains usually have limited variability and better-defined visual characteristics (e.g., aviation related pictures [Airliners.Net 2005]), which makes content-based image search a tad bit easier to formulate. On the other hand, broad domains tend to have high variability and unpredictability for the same underlying semantic concepts (e.g., Web Images), which makes generalization that much more challenging. As recently noted in [Huijsmans and Sebe 2005], narrow and broad domains pose a problem in image search evaluation as well, and appropriate modifications must be made to standard evaluation metrics for consistency. The survey also lists three broad categories of image search, (1) *search by association*, where there is no clear intent at a picture, but instead the search proceeds by iteratively refined browsing , (2) *aimed search*, where a specific picture is sought, and (3) *category search*, where a single picture representative of a semantic class is sought, for example, to illustrate a paragraph of text, as introduced in [Cox et al. 2000]. Also discussed are different kinds of domain knowledge that can help reduce the sensory gap in image search. Notable among them are concepts of syntactic similarity, perceptual similarity, and topological similarity. The overall goal therefore remains to bridge the semantic and sensorial gaps using the available visual features of images and relevant domain knowledge, to support the varied search categories, ultimately to satiate the user. We discuss and extend some of these ideas from new perspectives, in Sec. 2.

In the survey, extraction of visual content from images is split into two parts, namely image processing and feature construction. The question to ask here is what features to extract that will help perform meaningful retrieval. In this context, search has been described as a specification of *minimal invariant conditions* that model the user intent, geared at reducing the sensory gap due to accidental distortions, clutter, occlusion, etc. Key contributions in color, texture, and shape abstraction have then been discussed. Among the earliest use of color histograms for image indexing was that in [Swain and Ballard 1991]. Subsequently, feature extraction in systems such as QBIC [Flickner et al. 1995], Pictoseek [Gevers and Smeulders 2000], and VisualSEEK [Smith and Chang 1997b] are notable. Innovations in color constancy, the ability to perceive the same color amidst environmental changes, were made by including specular reflection and shape into consideration [Finlayson 1996]. In [Huang et al. 1999] color correlograms were proposed as enhancements to histograms, that take into consideration spatial distribution of colors as well. Gabor filters were successfully used for local shape extraction geared toward matching and retrieval in [Manjunath and Ma 1996]. Daubechies' wavelet transforms were used for texture feature extraction in the WBIIS system [Wang et al. 1998]. Viewpoint and occlusion invariant local features for image retrieval [Schmid and Mohr 1997] received significant attention as a means to bridge the sensorial gap. Work on local patch-based salient features [Tuytelaars and van Gool 1999] found prominence in areas such as image retrieval and stereo matching. Perceptual grouping of images, important as it is for identifying objects in pictures, is also a very challenging problem. It has been categorized in the survey as strong/weak segmentation (data-driven grouping), partitioning (data-independent grouping, e.g., fixed image blocks), and sign location (grouping based on a fixed template). Significant progress had been made in field of image segmentation, e.g., [Zhu and Yuille 1996], where snake and region growing ideas were combined within a principled framework, and [Shi and Malik 2000], where spectral graph partitioning was employed for this purpose. From segments come shape and shape matching needs. In [Del Bimbo and Pala 1997], elastic matching of images was successfully applied to sketch-based image retrieval. Image representation by multi-scale contour models were studied in [Mokhtarian 1995]. The use of graphs to represent spatial relationships between objects, specifically geared toward medical imaging, was explored in [Petrakis and Faloutsos 1997]. In [Smith and Chang 1997a], 2D-strings [Chang et al. 1987] were employed for characterizing spatial relationships among regions. A method for automatic feature selection was proposed in [Swets and Weng 1996]. In [Smeulders et al. 2000], the topic of visual content description was concluded with a discussion on the advantages and problems of image segmentation, along with approaches that can avoid strong segmentation but still characterize image structure well enough for image retrieval. In the current decade, many region-based methods for image retrieval have been proposed that do not depend on strong segmentation. We discuss these and other new innovations in feature extraction in Sec. 3.1.

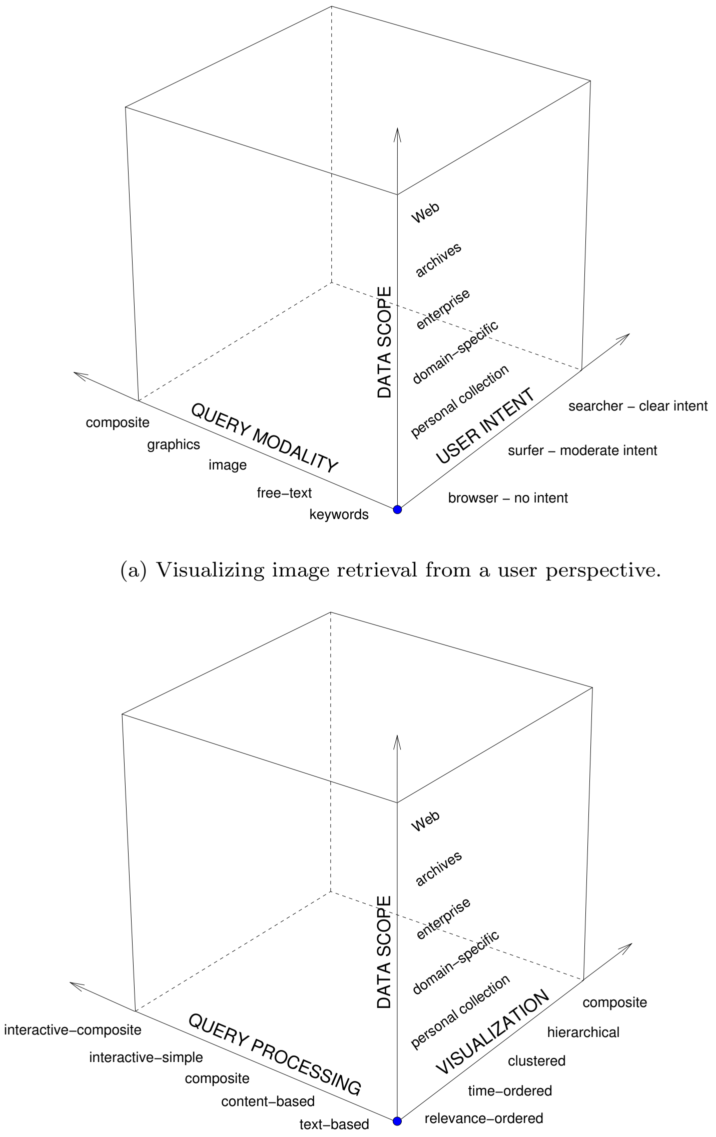
Once image features were extracted, the question remained as to how they could be indexed and matched against each other for retrieval. These methods essentially aimed to reduce the semantic gap as much as possible, sometimes reducing the sensorial gap as well in the process. In [Smeulders et al. 2000], similarity measures were grouped as feature-based matching (e.g., [Swain and Ballard 1991]), object silhouette based matching (e.g., [Del Bimbo and Pala 1997]), structural feature matching (hierarchically ordered sets of features, e.g., [Wilson and Hancock 1997]), salient feature matching (e.g., geometric hashing [Wolfson and Rigoutsos 1997]), matching at the semantic level (e.g., [Fagin 1997]), and learning based approaches for similarity matching (e.g., [Wu et al. 2000a] and [Webe et al. 2000]). Closely tied to the similarity measures are how they emulate the user needs, and more practically, how they can be modified stepwise with feedback from the user. In this respect, a major advance made in the user interaction technology for image retrieval was relevance feedback (RF). Important early work that introduced RF into the image retrieval domain included [Rui et al. 1998], which was implemented in their MARS system [Rui et al. 1997]. Methods for visualization of image query results were explored, for example, in [Flickner et al. 1995; Chang et al. 1997]. Content-based image retrieval systems that gained prominence in this era were, e.g., IBM QBIC [Flickner et al. 1995], VIRAGE [Gupta and Jain 1997], and NEC AMORE [Mukherjea et al. 1999] in the commercial domain, and MIT Photobook [Pentland et al. 1994], Columbia VisualSEEK and WebSEEK [Smith and Chang 1997b], UCSB NeTra [Ma and Manjunath 1997], and Stanford WBIIS [Wang et al. 1998] in the academic domain. In [Smeulders et al. 2000], practical issues such as system implementation and architecture, their limitations and how to overcome them, the user in the loop, intuitive result visualization, and system evaluation were discussed, and suggestions were made. Innovations of the new age based on these suggestions and otherwise are covered extensively in our survey in Sec. 2, Sec. 3, and Sec. 5.

2. IMAGE RETRIEVAL IN THE REAL-WORLD

Invention of the digital camera has given a common man the privilege to capture his world in pictures, and conveniently share them with others. One can today generate volumes of images with content as diverse as family get-togethers and national park visits. Low-cost storage and easy Web hosting has fueled the metamorphosis of a common man from a passive consumer of photography in the past, to an active producer. Today, searchable image data exists with extremely diverse visual and semantic content, spanning geographically disparate locations and is rapidly growing in size. All these factors have created innumerable possibilities and hence considerations for real-world image search system designers.

As far as technological advances are concerned, growth in content-based image retrieval has been unquestionably rapid. In the recent years, there has been significant effort put into understanding real-world implications, applications, and constraints of the technology. Yet, real-world application of the technology is currently limited. We devote this section to understanding image retrieval in the real-world and discuss user-expectations, system constraints and requirements, and research effort to make image retrieval a reality not-so-far in the future.

Designing an omnipotent real-world image search engine capable of serving all categories of users requires understanding and characterizing user-system interaction and image search from both user and system points of view. In Fig. 3, we propose one such dual characterization, and attempt representing all known possibilities of interaction and search. From a *user perspective*, embarking on an image search journey involves considering and taking decisions on the following fronts: (1) clarity of the user about what she wants, (2) where does the user want to search, and (3) in what form does the user have her query. In an alternative view from an image retrieval *system perspective*, a search translates to making arrangements as per the following factors: (1) how does the user wish the results to be presented, (2) where does the user desire to search, (3) what is the nature of user input/interaction. These factors, with their respective possibilities form our axes for Fig. 3. In the proposed user and system spaces, real-world image search instances can be considered as isolated points or point clouds, and search sessions can consist of trajectories while search engines can be thought of as surfaces. The intention of drawing cubes versus free 3-D cartesian spaces is to emphasize that the possibilities are indeed bounded by the size of the Web, the nature of user, and ways of user-system interaction. We believe that the proposed characterization will be useful for designing context-dependent search environments for real-world image retrieval systems.



(a) Visualizing image retrieval from a user perspective.

(b) Visualizing image retrieval from a system perspective.

Fig. 3. Our views of image retrieval from a user and system perspective.

2.1 User Intent

We augment the search type based classification proposed in [Smeulders et al. 2000] with a user intent based classification. When users search for pictures, their intent or clarity about what they desire may vary. We believe that clarity of intent plays a key role in a user's expectation from a search system and the nature of her interaction. It can also act as a guideline for system design. We broadly characterize a user by clarity of her intent as follows:

—Browser: A user browsing for pictures with no clear end-goal. A browser's session would consist of a series of unrelated searches. A typical browser would jump across multiple topics during the course of a search session. Her queries would be incoherent and diverse in topic.

—Surfer: A user surfing with a moderate clarity of an end-goal. A surfer's actions may be somewhat exploratory in the beginning with a difference that subsequent searches are expected to increase the surfer's clarity of what she wants from the system.

—Searcher: A user who is very clear about what she is searching for in the system. A searcher's session would typically be short with coherent searches leading to an end-result.

A typical browser values ease of use and manipulation. A browser usually has plenty of time at hand and expects surprises and random search hints to elongate her session (e.g., picture of the day, week, etc.). On the other hand, a surfer would value a search environment which facilitates clarity of her goal. A surfer planning a holiday would value a hint such as "pictures of most popular destinations". At the other extreme, the searcher views an image retrieval system from a core utilitarian perspective. Completeness of results and clarity of representation would usually be the most important factors. The impact of real-world usage from user viewpoint has not been extensively studied. One of the few studies categorizes users as *experts* and *novices* and studies their interaction patterns with respect to a video library [Christel and Conescu 2005]. In [Armitage and Enser 1997], an analysis of user needs for visual information retrieval was conducted. In the cited work, a categorization schema for user queries was proposed with a potential to be embedded in the visual information retrieval system.

Discussion. In the end, all that matters to an end user is her interaction with the system, and the corresponding response. The importance of building human-centered multimedia systems has been expressed lately [Jaimes et al. 2006]. In order to gain wide acceptance, image retrieval systems need to acquire a human-centered perspective as well.

2.2 Data Scope

Understanding the nature and scope of image data plays a key role in the complexity of image search system design. Factors such as the diversity of user-base and expected user traffic for a search system also largely influence the design. Along this dimension, we classify search data into the following categories:

—Personal collection: A largely homogeneous collection generally small in size, accessible primarily to its owner, and usually stored on a local storage media.

—Domain-specific collection: A homogeneous collection providing access to controlled users with very specific objectives. The collection may be large and be hosted on distributed storage, depending upon the domain. Examples of such a collection are biomedical and satellite image databases.

—Enterprise collection: A heterogeneous collection of pictures accessible to users within an organization's Intranet. Pictures may be stored in many different locations. Access may be uniform or non-uniform depending upon the Intranet design.

—Archives: These are usually of historical interest and contain large volumes of structured or semi-structured homogeneous data pertaining to specific topics. Archives may be accessible to most people on the internet, with some control on usage. Data is usually stored in multiple disks or large disk arrays.

—Web: World Wide Web pictures are accessible to practically everyone with an Internet connection. Current WWW image search engines such as Google images and Yahoo! images have a key crawler component which regularly updates their local database to reflect on the dynamic nature of the Web. Image collection is semi-structured, non-homogeneous, and massive in volume and is usually stored in large disk arrays.

An image retrieval system designed to serve a personal collection should focus on features such as personalization, flexibility of browsing, and display methodology. For example, Google's Picasa system [Picasa 2004] provides a chronological display of images taking a user on a journey down memory lane. Domain specific collections may impose specific standards for presentation of results. Searching an archive for content discovery could involve long user search sessions. Good visualization and a rich query support system should be the design goal. A system designed for the Web should be able to support massive user traffic. One way to supplement software approaches for this purpose is to provide hardware support to the system architecture. Unfortunately, very little has been explored in this direction, partly due to the lack of agreed-upon indexing and retrieval methods. The notable few include an FPGA implementation of a color histogram based image retrieval system [Kotoulas and Andreadis 2003], an FPGA implementation for sub-image retrieval within an image database [Nakano and Takamichi 2003], and a method for efficient retrieval in a network of imaging devices [Woodrow and Heinzelman 2002].

Discussion. Regardless of the nature of the collection, as the expected user-base grows, factors such as concurrent query support, efficient caching, and parallel and distributed processing of requests become critical. For futuristic real-world image retrieval systems, both software and hardware approaches to address these issues are essential. More realistically, dedicated specialized servers, optimized memory and storage support, and highly parallelizable image search algorithms to exploit cluster computing powers are where the future of large scale image search hardware support lies.

2.3 Query Modalities and Processing

In the realm of image retrieval, an important parameter to measure user-system interaction level is the complexity of queries supported by the system. From a user perspective, this translates to the different modalities she can use to query a system. We describe below the various querying modalities, their characteristics, and the system support required thereof.

—Keywords: User poses a simple query in the form of a word or a bigram. This is currently the most popular way to search images, e.g., the Google and Yahoo! image search engines.

—Free-text: User frames a complex phrase, a sentence, a question, or a story about what she desires from the system.

—Image: User wishes to search for an image similar to a query image. Using an example image is perhaps the most representative way of querying a CBIR system in the absence of reliable meta-data.

—Graphics: A hand-drawn or computer-generated picture or graphics could be presented as query.

—Composite: These are methods that involve using one or more of the above modalities for querying a system. This also covers interactive querying such as in relevance feedback systems.

The above query modalities require different processing methods and/or support for user interaction. The processing becomes more complex when visual queries and/or user interactions are involved. We next broadly characterize query processing from a system perspective.

—Text-based: Text based query processing usually boils down to performing one or more simple keyword based searches and retrieving matching pictures. Processing a free-text could involve parsing, processing, and understanding the query as a whole. Some form of natural language processing may also be involved.

—Content-based: Content based query processing lies at the heart of all CBIR systems. Processing of query (image or graphics) involves extraction of visual features and/or segmentation and search in the visual feature space for similar images. An appropriate feature representation and a similarity measure to rank pictures, given a query, are essential here. These will be discussed in detail in Sec. 3.

—Composite: Composite processing may involve both content and text-based processing in varying proportions. An example of a system which supports such processing is the story picturing engine [Joshi et al. 2006].

—Interactive-simple: User interaction using a single modality needs to be supported by a system. An example is a relevance feedback based image retrieval system.

—Interactive-composite: User may interact using more than one modality (e.g., text and images). This is perhaps the most advanced form of query processing that is required to be performed by an image retrieval system.

Processing text-based queries involves keyword matching using simple set-theoretic operations and therefore response can be generated very quickly. However in very large systems, working with millions of pictures and keywords, efficient indexing methods may be required. Indexing of text has been studied in database research for decades now. Efficient indexing is critical to building and functioning of very large text-based databases and search engines. Research on efficient ways to index images by content has been largely overshadowed by research on efficient visual representation and similarity measures. Most of the methods used for visual indexing are adopted from text-indexing research. In [Petrakis et al. 2002], R-trees are used for indexing images represented as attributed relational graphs (ARG).

Retrieval of images using wavelet coefficients as image representations and R^* trees for indexing has been studied in [Natsev et al. 2004]. Visual content matching using graph based image representation and an efficient metric indexing algorithm has been proposed in [Berretti et al. 2001]. More details of techniques for content based indexing of pictures can be found in [Marsicoi et al. 1997; Bimbo 1999].

Composite querying methods provide the users with more flexibility for expressing themselves. Some recent innovations in querying include sketch-based retrieval of color images [Chalechale et al. 2005]. Querying using 3-D models [Assfalg et al. 2002] has been motivated by the fact that 2-D image queries are unable to capture the spatial arrangement of objects within the image. In another interesting work, a multi-modal system involving hand-gestures and speech for querying and relevance feedback has been presented in [Kaster et al. 2003]. Certain new interaction based querying paradigms which statistically model user's interest [Fang et al. 2005a] or help the user refine her queries by providing cues and hints [Jaimes et al. 2004; Nagamine et al. 2004] have been explored for image retrieval.

Use of mobile devices has become widespread lately. Mobile users have limited querying capabilities due to inherent scrolling and typing constraints. Relevance feedback has been explored for quickly narrowing down search to such user needs. However, mobile users can be expected to provide only limited feedback. Hence it becomes necessary to design intelligent feedback methods to cater to users with small displays. Performances of different relevance feedback algorithms for small devices have been studied and compared in [Vinay et al. 2004; 2005]. In the cited work, a tree structured representation for all possible user-system actions was used to determine an upper bound on performance gains that such systems can achieve.

Discussion. A prerequisite for supporting text-based query processing is the presence of reliable meta-data with pictures. However, pictures rarely come with reliable human tags. In recent years, there has been effort put into building interactive, public domain games for large-scale collection of high-level manual annotations. One such game (ESP game) has become very popular and has helped accumulate human annotations for about a hundred thousand pictures [von Ahn and Dabbish 2004]. Collection of manual tags for pictures has dual advantages of (1) facilitating text-based querying, and (2) building reliable training datasets for content-based analysis and automatic annotation algorithms. As explored in [Datta et al. 2007], it is possible to effectively bridge the paradigms of keyword and content-based search through a unified framework to provide the user the flexibility of both, without losing out on the search scope.

2.4 Visualization

Presentation of search results is perhaps one of the most important factors in the acceptance and popularity of an image retrieval system. We characterize common visualization schemes for image search as follows:

—Relevance-ordered: The most popular way to present search results, as adopted by Google and Yahoo! for their image search engine. Results are ordered by some numeric measure of relevance to the query.

—Time-ordered: Pictures are shown in a chronological ordering rather than by relevance. Google's Picasa system [Picasa 2004] for personal collections provides an option to visualize a chronological time-line using pictures.

—Clustered: Clustering of images by their meta-data or visual content has been an active research topic for several years (discussed in Sec. 3). Clustering of search results, besides being an intuitive and desirable form of presentation, has also been used to improve retrieval performance [Chen et al. 2005].

—Hierarchical: If meta-data associated with images can be arranged in a tree order (e.g., WordNet topical hierarchies [Miller 1995]), it can be a very useful aid in visualization. Hierarchical visualization of search results is desirable for archives especially for educational purposes.

—Composite: Combining one or more of the above forms of visualization schemes especially for personalized systems. Hierarchical clustering and visualization of concept graphs are examples of composite visualizations.

In order to design interfaces for image retrieval systems, it helps to understand factors like how people manage their digital photographs [Rodden and Wood 2003] or frame their queries for visual art images [Cunningham et al. 2004]. In [Rodden et al. 2001], user studies on various ways of arranging images for browsing purposes are conducted, and the observation is that both visual feature based arrangement and concept-based arrangement have their own merits and demerits. Thinking beyond the typical grid-based arrangement of top matching images, spiral and concentric visualization of retrieval results have been explored in [Torres et al. 2003]. For personal images, innovative arrangements of query results based on visual content, time-stamps, and efficient use of screen space add new dimensions to the browsing experience [Huynh et al. 2005].

Portable devices such as personal digital assistants (PDA) and vehicle communications and control systems are becoming very popular as client side systems for querying and accessing remote multimedia databases. A portable device user is often constrained in the way she can formulate her query and interact with a remote image server. There are inherent scrolling and browsing constraints which can constrict user feedback. Moreover, there are bandwidth limitations which need to be taken into consideration, when designing retrieval systems for such devices. Some additional factors which become important here are size and color depth of display. Personalization of search for small displays by modeling interaction from the gathered usage data has been proposed in [Bertini et al. 2005]. An image attention model for adapting images based on user attention for small displays has been proposed in [Chen et al. 2003]. Efficient ways of browsing large images interactively, e.g., those encountered in pathology or remote sensing, using small displays over a communication channel are discussed in [Li and Sun 2003]. A user log based approaches to smarter ways of image browsing on mobile devices have been proposed in [Xie et al. 2005].

Image transcoding techniques, which aim at adapting multimedia (image and video) content to the capabilities of the client device, have been studied extensively in the last several years [Shanableh and Ghanbari 2000; Vetro et al. 2003; Bertini et al. 2003; Cucchiara et al. 2003]. A class of methods known as semantic transcoding aim at designing intelligent transcoding systems which can adapt "semantically" to user requirements [Bertini et al. 2003; Cucchiara et al. 2003].

For achieving this, classes of relevance are constructed and transcoding systems are programmed differently for different classes.

Discussion. Study of organizations which maintain image management and retrieval systems has been found to reveal useful insights into system design, querying, and visualization. In [Tope and Enser 2000], case studies on design and implementation of many different electronic retrieval systems have been reported. The final verdict of acceptance/rejection for any visualization scheme comes from end-users. While simple intuitive interfaces such as grid-based displays have become mostly acceptable to search engine users, advanced visualization techniques could still be in the making. It becomes critical for visualization designers to ensure that the added complexity does not become an overkill.

2.5 Real-world Image Retrieval Systems

Not many image retrieval systems are deployed for public usage, save for Google Images or Yahoo! Images (which are based primarily on surrounding meta-data such as filenames and HTML text). Recently, a public domain search engine *Riya* (Fig. 4) has been developed which incorporates image retrieval and face recognition for searching pictures of people and products on the Web. It is also interesting to note that CBIR technology is being applied to domains as diverse as family album management, Botany, Astronomy, Mineralogy, and Remote sensing [Zhang et al. 2003; Wang et al. 2002; Csillaghy et al. 2000; Painter et al. 2003; Schroder et al. 2000]. A publicly available similarity search tool [Wang et al. 2001] is being used for an on-line database of over $800,000$ airline-related images [Airliners.Net 2005; Slashdot 2005] (Fig. 4), the integration of similarity search functionality to a large collection of art and cultural images [GlobalMemoryNet 2006], and the incorporation of image similarity to a massive picture archive [Terragalleria 2001] of the renowned travel photographer Q.-T. Luong.

Automatic linguistic indexing of pictures - real-time (ALIPR), an automatic image annotation system [Li and Wang 2006a] has been recently made public for people to try and have their pictures annotated. As mentioned earlier, presence of reliable tags with pictures are necessary for text-based image retrieval. As part of ALIPR search engine, an effort to automatically validate computer generated tags with human given annotation is being made to build a very large collection of searchable images (Fig. 5). Another work-in-progress is a Web image search system [Joshi et al. 2006] that exploits visual features and textual meta-data using state-of-the-art algorithms, for a comprehensive search experience.

Discussion. Image analysis and retrieval systems have received widespread public and media interest of late [ScientificAmerican 2006; Discovery 2006; CNN 2005]. It is reasonable to hope that in the near future, the technology will diversify to many other domains. We believe that the future of real-world image retrieval lies in exploiting both text-based and content-based search technologies. While the former is considered more reliable from a user view point, there is immense potential to combine the two to build robust image search engines that make the 'hidden' part of the Web images accessible, in the years to come.

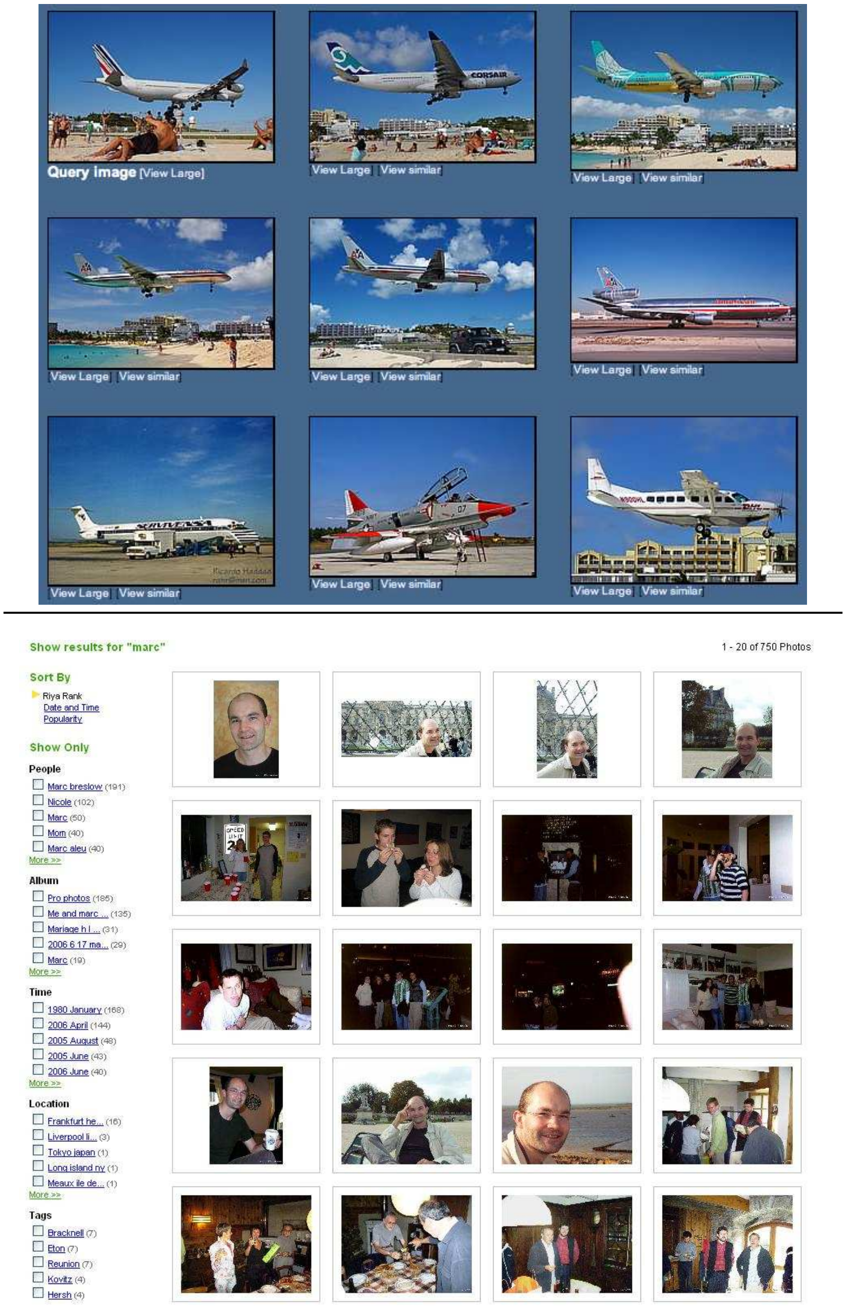
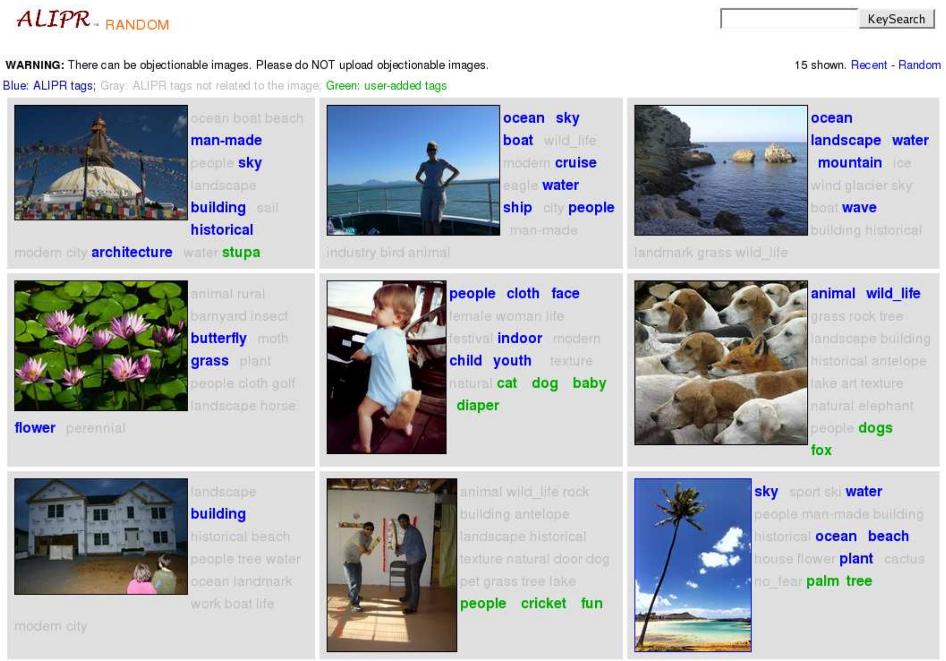


Fig. 4. Real-world use of content-based image retrieval using color, texture, and shape matching. *Top*: `http://airliners.net`, is a photo-sharing community with more than a million airplane-related pictures. *Bottom*: `http://riya.com` is a collection of several million pictures.



WARNING: There can be objectionable images. Please do NOT upload objectionable images.

15 shown. Recent - Random

Blue: ALIPR tags; Gray: ALIPR tags not related to the image; Green: user-added tags

ALIPR RANDOM
KeySearch
ocean boat beach man-made people sky landscape building sail historical modern city architecture water stupa
ocean sky boat wild_life modern cruise eagle water ship city people man-made industry bird animal
ocean landscape water mountain ice wind glacier sky boat wave building historical landmark grass wild_life
animal rural barnyard insect butterfly moth grass plant people cloth golf landscape horse flower perennial
people cloth face female woman life festival indoor modern child youth texture natural cat dog baby diaper
animal wild_life grass rock tree landscape building historical antelope lake art texture natural elephant people dogs fox
landscape building historical beach people tree water ocean landmark work boat life modern city
animal wild_life rock building antelope landscape historical texture natural door dog pet grass tree lake people cricket fun
sky sport ski water people man-made building historical ocean beach house flower plant cactus no_fear palm tree

Fig. 5. Real-world use of *automatic image annotation*, `http://alipr.com`. The screenshot shows a random set of uploaded pictures and the annotations given by ALIPR (shown in blue and gray) and by users (shown in green).

3. IMAGE RETRIEVAL TECHNIQUES: ADDRESSING THE CORE PROBLEM

Despite the effort made in the early years of image retrieval research (Sec. 1.1), we do not yet have a universally acceptable algorithmic means of characterizing human vision, more specifically in the context of interpreting images. Hence, it is not surprising to see continued effort in this direction, either building up on prior work, or exploring novel directions. Considerations for successful deployment of CBIR in the real-world are reflected by the research focus in this area.

By the nature of its task, the CBIR technology boils down to two intrinsic problems: (a) how to mathematically describe an image, and (b) how to assess the similarity between a pair of images based on their abstracted descriptions. The first issue arises because the original representation of an image, which is an array of pixel values, corresponds poorly to our visual response, let alone semantic understanding of the image. We refer to the mathematical description of an image for retrieval purposes as its *signature*. From the design perspective, the extraction of signatures and the calculation of image similarity cannot be cleanly separated. The formulation of signatures determines to a large extent the realm for definitions of similarity measures. On the other hand, intuitions are often the early motivating factors for designing similarity measures in a certain way, which in turn puts requirements on the construction of signatures.

In comparison with pre-2000 work in CBIR, a remarkable difference of recent years has been the increased diversity of image signatures. Advances have been made in both the derivation of new features, e.g., shape, and the construction of signatures based on these features, with the latter type of progress being more pronounced. The richness in the mathematical formulation of signatures grows together with the invention of new methods for measuring similarity. In the rest of this section, we will first address the extraction of image signatures, and then the methods for computing image similarity based on the signatures. In terms of methodology development, a strong trend which has emerged in recent years is the employment of statistical and machine learning techniques in various aspects of the CBIR technology. Automatic learning, mainly clustering and classification, is used to form either fixed or adaptive signatures, to tune similarity measures, and even to serve as the technical core of certain searching schemes, e.g., relevance feedback. We thus not only discuss the influence of learning while addressing fundamentals issues of retrieval but also devote a subsection on clustering and classification, presented in the context of CBIR. Finally, we review different paradigms of searching with emphasis on relevance feedback. An actively pursued direction in image retrieval is to engage human in the searching process, i.e., to include *human in the loop.* Although in the very early days of CBIR, several systems were designed with detailed user preference specifications, the philosophy of engaging users in recent work has evolved toward more interactive and iterative schemes by leveraging learning techniques. As a result, the overhead for a user in specifying what she is looking for at the beginning of a search is much reduced.

3.1 Extraction of Visual Signature

Most CBIR systems perform feature extraction as a pre-processing step. Once obtained, visual features act as inputs to subsequent image analysis tasks such as similarity estimation, concept detection, or annotation. Figure 6 illustrates the procedure of generating image signatures and the main research problems involved. Following the order typical in feature extraction and processing, we present below the prominent recent innovations in visual signature extraction. The current decade has seen great interest in region-based visual signatures, for which segmentation is the quintessential first step. While we begin discussion with recent progress in image segmentation, we will see in the subsequent section how there is significant interest in segmentation-free techniques to feature extraction and signature construction.

Image Segmentation. To acquire a region-based signature, a key step is to segment images. Reliable segmentation is especially critical for characterizing shapes within images, without which the shape estimates are largely meaningless. We described above a widely used segmentation approach based on k-means clustering. This basic approach enjoys a speed advantage, but is not as refined as some recently developed methods. One of the most important new advances in segmentation employs the Normalized Cuts criterion [Shi and Malik 2000]. The problem of image segmentation is mapped to a weighted graph partitioning problem where the vertex set of the graph is composed of image pixels and edge weights represent some perceptual similarity between pixel pairs. The normalized cut segmentation method in [Shi and Malik 2000] is also extended to textured image segmentation by using cues of contour and texture differences [Malik et al. 2001], and to incorporate known partial grouping priors by solving a constrained

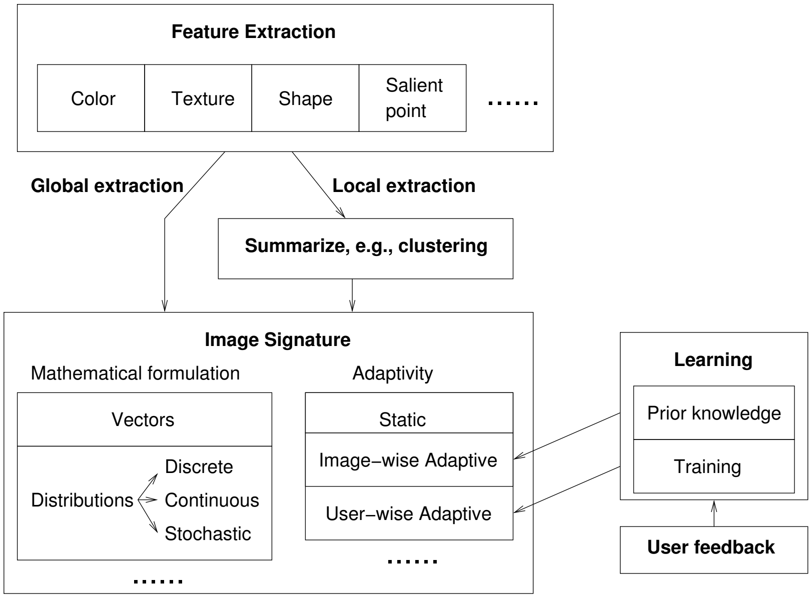


Fig. 6. An overview on image signature formulation.

optimization problem [Yu and Shi 2004]. The latter has potential for incorporating real-world application-specific priors, e.g., location and size cues of organs in pathological images.

Searching of medical image collections has been an increasingly important research problem of late, due to the high-throughput, high-resolution, and high-dimensional imaging modalities introduced. In this domain, 3D brain magnetic resonance (MR) images have been segmented using Hidden Markov Random Fields and the Expectation-Maximization (EM) algorithm [Zhang et al. 2001], and the spectral clustering approach has found some success in segmenting vertebral bodies from sagittal MR images [Carballido-Gamio et al. 2004]. Among other recent approaches proposed are segmentation based on the mean shift procedure [Comaniciu and Meer 2002], multi-resolution segmentation of low depth of field images [Wang et al. 2001], a Bayesian framework based segmentation involving the Markov chain Monte Carlo technique [Tu and Zhu 2002], and an EM algorithm based segmentation using a Gaussian mixture model [Carson et al. 2002], forming *blobs* suitable for image querying and retrieval. A sequential segmentation approach that starts with texture features and refines segmentation using color features is explored in [Chen et al. 2002]. An unsupervised approach for segmentation of images containing homogeneous color/texture regions has been proposed in [Deng and Manjunath 2001].

While there is no denying that achieving good segmentation is a major step toward image understanding, some issues plaguing current techniques are computational complexity, reliability of good segmentation, and acceptable segmentation quality assessment methods. In the case of image retrieval, some of the ways of getting around this problem have been to reduce dependence on reliable segmentation [Carson et al. 2002], to involve every generated segment of an image in the matching process to obtain *soft* similarity measures [Wang et al. 2001], or to characterize spatial arrangement of color and texture using block-based 2-D multi-resolution hidden Markov models (MHMM) [Li et al. 2000; Li and Wang 2003]. Another alternative is to use perceptual grouping principles to hierarchically extract image structures [Iqbal and Aggarwal 2002]. In [Datta et al. 2007], probabilistic modeling of class-wise color segment interactions has been employed for the purpose of image categorization and retrieval, to reduce sensitivity to segmentation.

Major Types of Features. A feature is defined to capture a certain visual property of an image, either globally for the entire image, or locally for a small group of pixels. Most commonly used features include those reflecting color, texture, shape, and salient points in an image, which will be discussed one by one shortly. In global extraction, features are computed to capture overall characteristics of an image. For instance, in a color layout approach, an image is divided into a small number of sub-images and the average color components, e.g., red, green, and blue intensities, are computed for every sub-image. The overall image is thus represented by a vector of color components where a particular dimension of the vector corresponds to a certain sub-image location. The advantage of global extraction is the high speed for both extracting features and computing similarity. However, as evidenced by the rare use of color layout in recent work, global features are often too rigid to represent an image. Specifically, they can be over sensitive to location and hence fail to identify important visual characteristics. To increase the robustness to spatial transformation, the second approach to form signatures is by local extraction and an extra step of feature summarization.

In local feature extraction, a set of features are computed for every pixel using its neighborhood, e.g., average color values across a small block centered around the pixel. To reduce computation, an image may be divided into small non-overlapping blocks, and features are computed individually for every block. The features are still local because of the small block size, but the amount of computation is only a fraction of that for obtaining features around every pixel. Let the feature vectors extracted at block or pixel location (i, j) be $x_{i,j}$, $1 \leq i \leq m$, $1 \leq j \leq n$, where the image size $m \times n$ can vary. To achieve a global description of an image, various ways of summarizing the data set $\{x_{i,j}, 1 \leq i \leq m, 1 \leq j \leq n\}$ have been explored, leading to different types of signatures. A common theme of summarization is to derive a distribution for $x_{i,j}$ based on the data set.

Exploration of color features was active in the nascency of CBIR, with emphasis on exploiting color spaces (e.g., LUV) that seem to coincide better with human vision than the basic RGB color space. In recent years, research on color features has focused more on the summarization of colors in an image, that is, the construction of signatures out of colors. A set of color and texture descriptors tested for inclusion in the MPEG-7 standard, and well suited to natural images and video, is described in [Manjunath et al. 2001]. These include histogram-based descriptors, spatial color descriptors and texture descriptors suited for retrieval.

Texture features are intended to capture the granularity and repetitive patterns of surfaces within in a picture. For instance, grass land, brick walls, teddy bears, and flower petals differ in texture by smoothness as well as patterns. Their role in domain-specific image retrieval, such as in aerial imagery and medical imaging, is particularly vital due to their close relation to underlying semantics in these cases. Texture features have been studied for long in image processing, computer vision, and computer graphics [Haralick 1979], such as multi-orientation filter banks [Malik and Perona 1990] and wavelet transforms [Unser 1995]. In image processing, a popular way to form texture features is by using the coefficients of a certain transform on the original pixel values or more sophisticatedly, statistics computed from those coefficients. Examples of texture features using the *wavelet transform* and the discrete cosine transform can be found in [Do and Vetterli 2002; Li et al. 2000]. In computer vision and graphics, advances have been made in fields such as texture synthesis, where Markov statistical descriptors based on pairs of wavelet coefficients at adjacent location/orientation/scale in the images are used [Portilla and Simoncelli 2000]. Among the earliest work on the use of texture features for image retrieval are [Manjunath and Ma 1996]. Texture descriptors, apt for inclusion in the MPEG-7, were broadly discussed in [Manjunath et al. 2001]. Such descriptors encode significant, general visual characteristics into standard numerical formats, that can used for various higher-level tasks. A *thesaurus* for texture, geared toward aerial image retrieval, has been proposed in [Ma and Manjunath 1998]. The texture extraction part of this thesaurus building process involves the application of a bank of Gabor filters [Jain and Farrokhnia 1990] to the images, to encode statistics of the filtered outputs as texture features. Advances in textured region descriptors have been made, such as affine and photometric transformation invariant features that are also robust to the shape of the region in question [Schaffalitzky and Zisserman 2001]. While the target application is the more traditional stereo matching, it has been shown to have potential for textured image matching and segmentation as well. Advances in affine-invariant texture feature extraction, designed for texture recognition, have been made in [Mikolajczyk and Schmid 2004], with the use of interest point detection for sparsity. Texture features at a point in the image are meaningful only as a function of its neighborhood, and the (effective) size of this neighborhood can be thought of as a *scale* at which these features are computed. Because a choice of scale is critical to the meaningfulness of such features, it has been explored as an automatic scale selection problem in [Carson et al. 2002], specifically to aid image retrieval.

Shape is a key attribute of segmented image regions, and its efficient and robust representation plays an important role in retrieval. Synonymous with shape representation is the way such representations are matched with each other. Here we discuss both shape representations and the particular forms of shape similarities used in each case. In general, over the years we have seen a shift from global shape representations, e.g., in [Flickner et al. 1995], to more local descriptors, e.g., in [Mehrotra and Gary 1995; Berretti et al. 2000; Petrakis et al. 2002], due to the typical modeling limitations. Representation of shape using discrete curve evolution to simplify contours is discussed in [Latecki and Lakamper 2000]. This contour simplification helps remove noisy and irrelevant shape features from consideration. A new shape descriptor for similarity matching, referred to as *shape context*, is proposed which is fairly compact yet robust to a number of geometric transformations [Belongie et al. 2002]. In [Berretti et al. 2000], curves are represented by a set of segments or *tokens*, whose feature representations (curvature and orientation) are arranged into a metric tree [Ciaccia et al. 1997] for efficient shape matching and shape-based image retrieval. A dynamic programming (DP) approach to shape matching is proposed in [Petrakis et al. 2002], where shapes are approximated as sequences of concave and convex segments. One problem with this approach is that computation of Fourier descriptors and moments is slow, although pre-computation may help produce real-time results. Continuing with Fourier descriptors, exploitation of both the amplitude and phase, and the use of Dynamic Time Warping (DTW) distance instead of Euclidean distance is shown to be an accurate shape matching technique in [Bartolini et al. 2005]. The rotational and starting point invariance otherwise obtained by discarding the phase information is maintained here by adding compensation terms to the original phase, thus allowing its exploitation for better discrimination.

Closely associated are approaches that model spatial relations among local image entities for retrieval. Much of the approaches to spatial modeling and matching have been influenced by earlier work on *iconic indexing* [Chang et al. 1987; Chang et al. 1988] based on the theory of symbolic projections. Here, images are represented based on orthogonal projections of constituent entities, by encoding the corresponding bi-directional arrangement on the two axes as a *2D string* of entities and relationships. This way, image matching is effectively converted from a spatial matching problem to a one-dimensional matching one. Many variants of the 2D string model have been proposed since. In recent years, extensions such as 2D Be-string [Wang 2003] have been proposed, where the symbolic encoding has been extended to represent entity locations more precisely, and avoid cutting entities along their bounding rectangles for improved complexity. Another work on iconic indexing can be found in [Petraglia et al. 2001], where a symbolic representation of real images, termed *virtual image* is proposed, consisting of entities and the binary spatial relations among them. Compared to traditional iconic representations and their variants, this approach allows more explicit scene representation and more efficient retrieval, once again without requiring the entities to be cut. In [Berretti et al. 2003], a novel alternative to the previously discussed class of spatial models, *weighted walkthroughs*, is proposed. This representation allows quantitative comparison (which is challenging for purely Boolean relationships) of entities, by incorporating the spatial relationships among each pair of pixels from the two entities. These quantitative relations allow images to be represented by attributed relational graphs (ARG), which essentially makes the retrieval problem one of graph comparison, resulting in improved retrieval performance over other representations. This idea has been extended to spatial modeling of 3D objects, in [Berretti and Del Bimbo 2006]. Other image models that capture spatial arrangements between local features such as interest points, are discussed in the following paragraph.

Features based on local invariants such as *corner points* or *interest points*, traditionally used for stereo matching, are being used in image retrieval as well. Scale and affine invariant interest points that can deal with significant affine transformations and illumination changes have been shown effective for image retrieval [Mikolajczyk and Schmid 2004]. In similar lines, wavelet-based *salient points* have been used for retrieval [Tian et al. 2001]. In more recent work, the earth mover's distance [Rubner et al. 2000] has been used for matching locally invariant features in [Grauman and Darrell 2005], for the purpose of image matching. The significance of such special points lies in their compact representation of important image regions, leading to efficient indexing and good discriminative power, especially in object-based retrieval. In this domain, there has been a paradigm shift from global feature representations to local descriptors, as evidenced by a large number of recent publications. Typically, object categories or visual classes are represented by a combination of local descriptors and their spatial distributions, sometimes referred to collectively as part-based models. Variations usually arise out of the 'prior' on the geometry imposed on the spatial relationship between the local parts, with extremes being fully independent (bag of features, each representing a part or region), and fully connected (constellation model, [Fergus et al. 2003]). A fully connected model essentially limits the number of parts that can be modeled, since the algorithm complexity grows exponentially with it. As a compromise, sparser topologies have been proposed, such as the star topology [Fergus et al. 2005], a hierarchy, with the lowest levels corresponding to local features [Bouchard and Triggs 2005], and a geometry where local features are spatially dependent on their nearest neighbors [Carneiro and Lowe 2006]. Model learning and categorization performance achieved in [Fergus et al. 2003] has been improved upon, particularly in learning time, using contextual information and *boosting*, in [Amores et al. 2004; Amores et al. 2005]. A recent work [Zhang et al. 2006] uses segmentation to reduce the number of salient points for enhanced object representation. A discussion on the pros and cons of different types of color interest points used in image retrieval can be found in [Gouet and Boujemaa 2002], while a comparative performance evaluation of the various proposed interest point detectors is reported in [Mikolajczk and Schmid 2003]. The application of salient point detection for related feature extraction has also been explored. For example, interest point detectors have been employed for sparse texture representation, for the purpose of texture recognition, in [Lazebnik et al. 2003].

Construction of Signatures from Features. In Fig. 6, according to mathematical formulations, we summarize the types of signatures roughly into vectors and distributions. As will be discussed in details below, histograms and region-based signatures can both be regarded as sets of weighted vectors, and when the weights sum up to one, these sets are equivalent to discrete distributions(discrete in the sense that the support is finite). Our discussion will focus on region-based signature and its mathematical connection with histograms because it is the most exploited type of image signature. We note however, that distributions extracted from a collection of local feature vectors can be of other forms, for instance, a continuous density function [Do and Vetterli 2002], or even a spatial stochastic model [Li and Wang 2004]. A continuous density in general is more precise to describe a collection of local feature vectors than a discrete distribution with finitely many support vectors. A stochastic model moves beyond a continuous density by taking into account spatial dependence among local feature vectors. For special kinds of images, we may need these sophisticated statistical models to characterize them. For instance, in [Li and Wang 2004], it is noted that spatial relationship among pixels is crucial for capturing Chinese ink painting styles. On the other hand, more sophisticated statistical models are computationally costly and less intuitive, a probable reason why their usage is limited.

In earlier work, histogram was a widely used form of distribution. Suppose the feature vectors are denoted by $x_{i,j} \in \mathcal{R}^d$, the d-dimensional Euclidean space. To form a basic histogram, $\mathcal{R}^d$ is divided into fixed bins and the percentage of $x_{i,j}$'s falling into each bin is calculated. Suppose there are k bins. A histogram can then be treated as a k-dimensional vector $(f_1, f_2, ..., f_k)^t$, where f_l is the frequency of the l-th bin. Improvements over the basic histogram signature have been actively pursued. In [Hadjidemetriou et al. 2004], a multi-resolution histogram, together with its associated image matching algorithm, is shown to be effective in retrieving textured images. Computation of histograms at multiple resolutions continues to have the simplicity and efficiency of ordinary histograms, but it additionally captures spatial variations across images. In [Jeong et al. 2004], Gaussian mixture vector quantization (GMVQ) is used to extract color histograms and shown to yield better retrieval than uniform quantization and vector quantization with squared error.

The disadvantages of treating histograms simply as vectors of frequencies are noted in [Rubner et al. 1998]. The main issue is that the vector representation ignores the location of bins used to generate the histogram. For measuring the closeness of distributions, the locations of histogram bins are vital. The Earth Movers Distance (EMD) is proposed in [Rubner et al. 1998] to take into consideration bin locations. When EMD is used, histogram is mathematically a collection of feature vector and frequency pairs: $\{(z_1, f_1), (z_2, f_2), ..., (z_k, f_k)\}$, where $z_l \in \mathcal{R}^d$ is the center or location of the l-th bin. It is shown in [Levina and Bickel 2001] that EMD, when applied to probability frequencies, is equivalent to the Mallows Distance proposed in the early 1970's [Mallows 1972], which is a true metric for general probability measures. A histogram is a special distribution in the sense that it is discrete, i.e., it takes only countably many different values (for practical interest, finitely many). Moreover, histograms for different images are usually derived using a fixed set of bins.

Once the histogram is viewed as $\{(z_1, f_1), (z_2, f_2), ..., (z_k, f_k)\}$, a weighted set of vectors, a natural question to raise is why we have to employ a fixed set of bins located at z_1, ..., z_k. A direct extension from histogram is to adpatively generate z_l and f_l together and also let the number of bins k depend on the image being handled. This is essentially the widely used region-based signature, as used in [Deng et al. 2001; Wang et al. 2001]. Consider the data set $\{x_{i,j}, 1 \leq i, 1 \leq j\}$. Applying a clustering procedure, e.g., k-means, to the data set groups the feature vectors $x_{i,j}$ into $\tilde{k}$ clusters such that the feature vectors in the same clusters tend to be tightly packed. Let the mean of $x_{i,j}$'s in the same cluster l be z'_l. We thus have acquired a summary of the data set: $\{(z'_1, f'_1), ..., (z'_{k'}, f'_{k'})\}$, where f'_l is the percentage of $x_{i,j}$'s grouped into cluster l. The collection of pixels (i, j) for which $x_{i,j}$'s are in the same cluster forms a relatively homogeneous region because the common cluster forces closeness between the visual features in $x_{i,j}$'s. This is why clustering of local feature vectors is a widely used method to segment images, and also why we call the signature $\{(z'_1, f'_1), ..., (z'_{k'}, f'_{k'})\}$ region-based.

With fixed bins, histograms of image feature vectors tend to be sparse in multi-dimensional space. In comparison, the region-based signature provides more compact description of images because it allows the representative vectors z_l' to adapt to images. In [Deng et al. 2001; Wang et al. 2001], it is argued that region-based signature is more efficient computationally for retrieval, and it also gets around drawbacks associated with earlier propositions such as dimension reduction and color moment descriptors. Strictly speaking, a region-based signature is not merely a dynamic histogram representation, and despite the mathematical connections made above, is not necessarily motivated by the intention of generalizing histograms. The motivation for using region-based signature, as argued in [Wang et al. 2001], is that a relatively homogeneous region of color and texture is likely to correspond to an object in an image. Therefore, by extracting regions, we obtain, in a crude way, a collection of objects, and with objects in an image listed, it is easier to engage intuitions for defining similarity measures. Moreover, although we have z_l', the mean of $x_{i,j}$'s in region l as a natural result of clustering, the description of the region can be expanded to include features not contained in z_l', for instance, shape, which can only be meaningfully computed after the region has been formed.

Adaptive Image Signature. It is quite intuitive that the same set of visual features may not work equally well to characterize, say, computer graphics and photographs. To address this issue, learning methods have been used to tune signatures either based on images alone or by learning on-the-fly from user feedback. In Fig. 6, we categorize image signatures according to their adaptivity into static, image-wise adaptive, and user-wise adaptive. Static signatures are generated in a uniform manner for all the images.

Image-wise adaptive signatures vary according to the classification of images. The term semantic-sensitive coined in [Wang et al. 2001] reflects such a mechanism to adjust signatures, and is a major trait of the SIMPLIcity system in comparison to the predecessors. Specifically, images are classified into several types first, and then signatures are formed from different features for these types. Despite the appeal of semantic-sensitive retrieval as a general framework, the classification conducted in SIMPLIcity only involves a small number of pre-selected image types (graph vs. photograph, textured vs. non-textured). The classification method relies on prior knowledge rather than training, and hence is not set up for extension. More recently, semantic-sensitive features are also employed in a physics-motivated approach [Ng et al. 2005], where images are distinguished as either photo-realistic rendering or photograph.

Care must be taken to ensure that the added robustness provided by heterogeneous feature representation does not compromise on the efficiency of indexing and retrieval. When a large number of image features are available, one way to improve generalization and efficiency is to work with a feature subset or impose different weights on the features. To avoid a combinatorial search, an automatic feature subset selection algorithm for SVMs is proposed in [Weston et al. 2000]. Some of the other recent, more generic feature selection propositions involve boosting [Tieu and Viola 2004], evolutionary searching [Kim et al. 2000], Bayes classification error [Carneiro and Vasconcelos 2005], and feature dependency/similarity measures [Mitra et al. 2002]. An alternative way of obtaining feature weights based on user logs has been explored in [Muller et al. 2004]. A survey and performance comparison of some recent algorithms on the topic can be found in [Guyon and Elisseeff 2003].

Discussion. The various methods for visual signature extraction come with their share of advantages and limitations. While global features give the "big picture", local features represent the details. Therefore, depending on the scale of the key content or pattern, an appropriate representation should be chosen. In this sense, hybrid representations may sometimes be more attractive but this may come at additional complexity. While segmentation is intended to recognize objects in a scene, precise segmentation still remains an open problem. Therefore, alternative approaches to characterize structure may be more suitable. However, such a representation may lose the charm of clear interpretability. Among different approaches to segmentation, there is often a trade-off between quality and complexity, which might lead to a difference in eventual search performance and speed. Hence, a choice on the image signature to be used should depend on the desirability of the system.

In contrast with the early years (Sec. 1.1), we have witnessed a major shift from global feature representations for images such as color histograms and global shape descriptors to local features and descriptors, such as salient points, region-based features, spatial model features, and robust local shape characterizations. It is not hard to imagine that this shift was triggered by a realization that the image domain was too deep for global features to reduce the semantic gap. Local features often correspond with more meaningful image components such as rigid objects and entities, which make association of semantics with image portions straightforward. The future in image feature or signature representation resides both in theory and practise. Many years of research has made it clear that emulating human vision is very challenging, but instead, practical approaches can help build useful systems. While the endeavor to characterize vision will likely continue, particularly in the core field of computer vision, practical approaches, e.g., fusion of local and global representations for top-down as well as a bottom-up representations, will potentially improve retrieval performance and user satisfaction in such systems. The availability of three dimensional image data and stereo image data, whenever obtainable, should be exploited to extract features more coherent with the human vision system. In summary, reducing the sensorial gap in tandem with the semantic gap should continue be a goal for the future.

3.2 Image Similarity using Visual Signature

Once a decision on the choice of image signatures is made, how to use them for accurate image retrieval is the next concern. There has been a large number of fundamentally different frameworks proposed in the recent years. Some of the key motivating factors behind the design of the proposed image similarity measures can be summarized as follows:

- agreement with semantics
- robustness to noise (invariant to perturbations)
- computational efficiency (ability to work real-time and in large-scale)

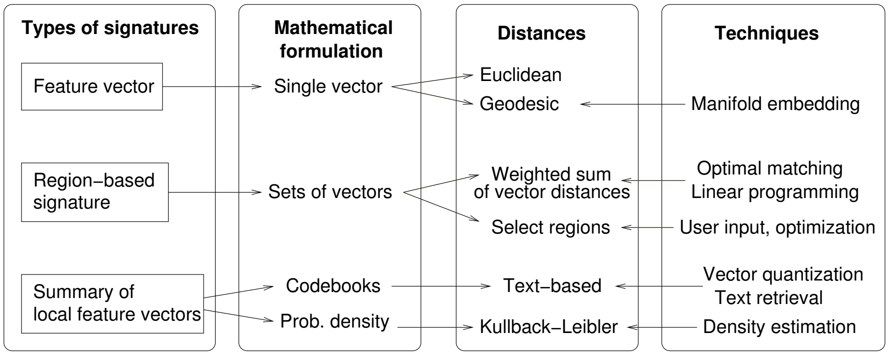


Fig. 7. Different types of image similarity measures, their mathematical formulations and techniques for computing them.

— invariance to background (allowing region-based querying)
— local linearity (i.e., following triangle inequality in a neighborhood)

The various techniques can be grouped according to their design philosophies, as follows:

— treating features as vectors, non-vector representations, or ensembles
— using region-based similarity, global similarity, or a combination of both
— computing similarities over linear space or non-linear manifold
— role played by image segments in similarity computation
— stochastic, fuzzy, or deterministic similarity measures
— use of supervised, semi-supervised, or unsupervised learning

Leaving out those discussed in [Smeulders et al. 2000], here we focus on some of the more recent approaches to image similarity computation.

Figure 7 shows the basic types of signatures, distances ('dissimilarity measures') exploited, and underlying techniques needed to calculate these distances. For each type of signatures, we also elucidate on its mathematical representation, which to a large extent determines the choice of distances and the employment of related methodologies. We will start discussion on the region-based signature since its widespread use occurred in the current decade. The technical emphasis on region-based signature is the definition of distance between sets of vectors, which is not as obvious as defining distance between single vectors. Research on this problem is further enriched by the effort to optimally choose a subset of regions pertaining to users' interests and by that to increase robustness against inaccurate segmentation. Although global feature vectors had already been extensively used in the early years of CBIR, advances were achieved in recent years by introducing state-of-the-art learning techniques, e.g., manifold embedding. Research efforts have been made to search for nonlinear manifolds in which the geodesic distances may correspond better to human perception. Instead of describing an image by a set of segmented regions, summaries of local feature vectors such as codebook and probability density functions have been used as signatures. Codebooks are generated by vector quantization, and the codewords are sometimes treated symbolically with text retrieval techniques applied to them. An effective way to obtain a density estimation is by fitting a Gaussian mixture model [Hastie et al. 2001], and the Kullback-Leibler distance is often used to measure the disparity between distributions.

First consider an image signature in the form of a weighted set of feature vectors $\{(z_1, p_1), (z_2, p_2), ..., (z_n, p_n)\}$, where z_i's are the feature vectors and p_i's are the corresponding weights assigned to them. The region-based signature discussed above bears such a form, so a histogram can be represented in this way. Let us denote two signatures by $I_m = \{(z_1^{(m)}, p_1^{(m)}), (z_2^{(m)}, p_2^{(m)}), ..., (z_{n_m}^{(m)}, p_{n_m}^{(m)})\}$, $m = 1, 2$. A natural approach to defining a region-based similarity measure is to match $z_i^{(1)}$'s with $z_i^{(2)}$'s and then combine the distances between these vectors as a distance between sets of vectors.

One approach to matching [Wang et al. 2001] is by assigning a weight to every pair $z_i^{(1)}$ and $z_j^{(2)}$, $1 \leq i \leq n_1$, $1 \leq j \leq n_2$, and the weight $s_{i,j}$ indicates the significance of associating $z_i^{(1)}$ with $z_j^{(2)}$. One motivation for the soft matching is to reduce the effect of inaccurate segmentation on retrieval. The weights are subject to constraints, the most common ones being $\sum_i s_{i,j} = p_j^{(2)}$ and $\sum_j s_{i,j} = p_i^{(1)}$. Once the weights are determined, the distance between I_1 and I_2 is aggregated from the pair-wise distances between individual vectors:

$$D(I_1, I_2) = \sum_{i=1}^{n_1} \sum_{j=1}^{n_2} s_{i,j} d(z_i^{(1)}, z_j^{(2)}) \,, \tag{1}$$

where the vector distance $d(\cdot, \cdot)$ can be defined in diverse ways depending on the system. Other matching methods include the Hausdorff distance, where every $z_i^{(1)}$ is matched to its closest vector in I_2, say $z_{i'}^{(2)}$, and the distance between I_1 and I_2 is the maximum among all $d(z_i^{(1)}, z_{i'}^{(2)})$. The Hausdorff distance is symmetrized by computing additionally the distance with the role of I_1 and I_2 reversed and choosing the larger one of the two distances:

$$D_H(I_1, I_2) = \max\left(\max_i \min_j d(z_i^{(1)}, z_j^{(2)}),\ \max_j \min_i d(z_j^{(2)}, z_i^{(1)})\right) \,. \tag{2}$$

The Hausdorff distance is used for image retrieval in [Ko and Byun 2002].

One heuristic to decide the matching weights $s_{i,j}$ for the pair $(z_i^{(1)}, z_j^{(2)})$ is to seek $s_{i,j}$'s such that $D(I_1, I_2)$ in (1) is minimized subject to certain constraints on $s_{i,j}$. Suppose $\sum_i p_i^{(1)} = 1$ and $\sum_j p_j^{(2)} = 1$. This can always be made true by normalization as long as there is no attempt to assign one image an overall higher signficance than the other. In practice, $p_i^{(1)}$'s (or $p_j^{(2)}$'s) often correspond to probabilities and automatically yield unit sum. Since $p_i^{(1)}$ indicates the significance of region $z_i^{(1)}$ and $\sum_j s_{i,j}$ reflects the total influence of $z_i^{(1)}$ in the calculation of $D(I_1, I_2)$, it is natural to require $\sum_j s_{i,j} = p_i^{(1)}$, for all i, and similarly $\sum_i s_{i,j} = p_j^{(2)}$, for all j. Additionally, we have the basic requirement $s_{i,j} \geq 0$ for all i, j. The definition of the distance is thus

$$D(I_1, I_2) = \min_{s_{i,j}} \sum_{i=1}^{n_1} \sum_{j=1}^{n_2} s_{i,j} d(z_i^{(1)}, z_j^{(2)}) \,, \tag{3}$$

subject to $\sum_j s_{i,j} = p_i^{(1)}$, for all i, $\sum_i s_{i,j} = p_j^{(2)}$, for all j, and $s_{i,j} \geq 0$ for all i, j. This distance is precisely the Mallows distance in the case of discrete distributions [Mallows 1972].

The Earth Mover's Distance [Rubner et al. 2000] (EMD) proposed early in the decade represents another soft matching scheme for signatures in the form of sets of vectors. The measure treated the problem of image matching as one of "moving" components of the color histograms of images from one to the other, with minimum effort, synonymous with moving earth piles to fill holes. When p_i and p'_j are probabilities, EMD is equivalent to the Mallows distance. Another useful matching based distance is the IRM (integrated region matching) distance [Li et al. 2000]. The IRM distance uses the most similar highest priority (MSHP) principle to match regions. The weights $s_{i,j}$ are subject to the same constraints as in the Mallows distance, but $D(I_1, I_2)$ is not computed by minimization. Instead, the MSHP criterion entails that a pair of regions across two images with the smallest distance among all the region pairs ought to be given the highest priority in matching, that is, to be assigned with a maximum valid weight $s_{i,j}$. The matching is conducted recursively until all the region weights are consumed, i.e., $\sum_j s_{i,j} = p_i^{(1)}$ and $\sum_i s_{i,j} = p_j^{(2)}$ have been achieved for all i and j. IRM is significantly faster to compute than the Mallows distance and has been found to be not inferior if not better in terms of retrieval results.

Improvements over the basic matching idea have been made from different perspectives. These include tuning features according to image types, choosing region weights in more sophisticated ways, improving robustness against inaccurate segmentation, and speeding up retrieval. In the SIMPLIcity system [Wang et al. 2001], a preliminary categorization (e.g., graph vs. photograph, textured vs. non-textured) is applied to images and different sets of features are used for each category. Region based image retrieval, under the assumption of a hidden semantic concept underlying image generation, is explored in [Zhang and Zhang 2004]. Here, a uniform, sparse region-based *visual dictionary* is obtained using self-organizing map (SOM) based quantization, and images/regions are assumed to be *generated* probabilistically, conditional on hidden or latent variables that reflect on their underlying semantics. A framework for region-based image retrieval, with particular focus on efficiency, is proposed in [Jing et al. 2004a]. Here, vector quantization (VQ) is employed to build a region codebook from training images, each entry sparsely or compactly represented, with distinct advantages of efficiency and effectiveness in each case. To further speed up retrieval, a tree-structured clustering is applied to images to narrow down the search range [Du and Wang 2001]. The system first uses a relatively simple signature, specifically a vector, to decide which cluster an image belongs to, and then uses the region-based signature and the IRM distance to compare the query with images in the chosen cluster.

A variation of IRM is attempted in [Chen and Wang 2002] to employ fuzziness to account for inaccurate segmentation to a greater extent. A new representation for object retrieval in cluttered images, without relying on accurate segmentation is proposed in [Amores et al. 2004]. Here, image model learning and categorization is improved upon using contextual information and boosting algorithms. A windowed search over location and scale is shown more effective in object-based image retrieval than methods based on inaccurate segmentation [Hoiem et al. 2004]. A hybrid approach involves the use of rectangular blocks for coarse foreground/background segmentation on the user's query region-of-interest (ROI), followed by a database search using only the foreground regions [Dagli and Huang 2004].

Without user input, image similarity measures usually attempt to take all the regions in an image into consideration. This may not be the best practice when users' interest is more specifically indicated than an example query image. For instance, if the query is a sketch drawn by a user, it may be meaningless to let the left out areas in the sketch affect image comparison. It can be more desirable to match the sketch to only a relevant subset of regions automatically determined by the retrieval system, as explored in [Ko and Byun 2002].

Even if the user starts searching with an example query image, it is sometimes assumed that he or she is willing to specify a portion of the image as of interest. This argument has led to the concept of region-based querying. The Blobworld system [Carson et al. 2002], instead of performing image to image matching, lets users select one or more homogeneous color-texture segments or *blobs*, as region(s) of interest. For example, if one or more segmented blobs identified by the user roughly correspond to a typical "tiger", then her search becomes equivalent to searching for the "tiger" object within images. For this purpose, the pictures are segmented into blobs using the E-M algorithm, and each blob b_i is represented as a color-texture feature vector $\mathbf{v_i}$. Given a query blob b_i, and every blob b_j in the database, the most similar blob has score

$$\mu_i = \max_j \exp\left(\frac{(\mathbf{v_i} - \mathbf{v_j})^{\mathbf{T}}\mathbf{\Sigma}(\mathbf{v_i} - \mathbf{v_j})}{2}\right), \tag{4}$$

where matrix $\mathbf{\Sigma}$ corresponds to user-adjustable weights on specific color and texture features. The similarity measure is further extended to handle compound queries using fuzzy logic. While this method can lead to more precise formulation of user queries, and can help users understand the computer's responses better, it also requires greater involvement from and dependence on them. For finding images containing scaled or translated versions of query objects, retrieval can also be performed without any explicit involvement of the user [Natsev et al. 2004].

As discussed previously, regions are obtained by segmenting images using local feature vectors. Roughly speaking, region-based signatures can be regarded as a result of summarizing these feature vectors. Along the line of using a summary of local feature vectors as the signature, there are other approaches explored. For instance, in [Iqbal and Aggarwal 2002], primitive image features are hierarchically and perceptually grouped and their inter-relationships are used to characterize structure [Iqbal and Aggarwal 2002]. Another approach is the use of vector quantization (VQ) on image blocks to generate *codebooks* for representation and retrieval, taking inspiration from data compression and text-based strategies [Zhu et al. 2000]. For textured images, segmentation is not critical. Instead, distributions of the feature vectors are estimated and used as signatures. Methods for texture retrieval using the Kullback-Leibler (K-L) divergence have been proposed in [Do and Vetterli 2002; Mathiassen et al. 2002]. The K-L divergence, also known as the *relative entropy*, is an asymmetric information theoretic measure of difference between two distributions $f(\cdot)$ and $g(\cdot)$, defined as

$$K(f,g) = \int_{-\infty}^{+\infty} f(x) log \frac{f(x)}{g(x)} dx, \qquad K(f,g) = \sum_x f(x) log \frac{f(x)}{g(x)} \tag{5}$$

in the continuous and discrete cases respectively. Fractal block code based image histograms have been shown effective in retrieval on texture databases [Pi et al. 2005]. The use of the MPEG-7 content descriptors to train self-organizing maps (SOM) for image retrieval is explored in [Laaksonen et al. 2002].

When images are represented as single vectors, many authors note the apparent difficulty in measuring perceptual image distance by metrics in any given *linear* feature space. One approach to tackle this issue is to search for a non-linear manifold in which the image vectors lie, and to replace the Euclidean distance by the geodesic distance. The assumption here is that visual perception corresponds better with this non-linear subspace than the original linear space. Computation of similarity may then be more appropriate if performed non-linearly along the manifold. This idea is explored and applied to image similarity and ranking in [He 2004; Vasconcelos and Lippman 2005; He et al. 2004; He et al. 2004a; Zhou et al. 2003]. Typical methods for learning underlying manifolds, which essentially amount to non-linear dimension reduction, are Locally-linear Embedding (LLE), Isomap, and multi-dimensional scaling (MDS) [de Silva and Tenenbaum 2003].

Distance Measure	**Input**	**Computation**	**Complexity**	**Metric**	**Comments**
Euclidean (L^2norm)	$\vec{X}_a, \vec{X}_b \in \mathbb{R}^n$ (vectors)	$\vec{X}_a \cdot \vec{X}_b$	$\Theta(n)$	Yes	Popular, fast, L^1 also used
Weighted Euclidean	$\vec{X}_a, \vec{X}_b \in \mathbb{R}^n$ $W \in \mathbb{R}^n$ (vec. + wts.)	$\vec{X}_a^T [W] \vec{X}_b$ $[\cdot] \leftarrow$ diagonalize	$\Theta(n)$	Yes	Allows features to be weighted
Hausdorff	Vector sets: $\{\vec{X}_a^{(1)}, .., \vec{X}_a^{(p)}\}$ $\{\vec{X}_b^(1), .., \vec{X}_b^{(q)}\}$	See Eqn. 2	$\Theta(pqn)$ $(d(\cdot,\cdot) \leftarrow L^2$ norm)	Yes	Sets corr. to image segments
Mallows	Vector sets: $\{\vec{X}_a^{(1)}, .., \vec{X}_a^{(p)}\}$ $\{\vec{X}_b^(1), .., \vec{X}_b^{(q)}\}$ Signific.: S	See Eqn. 3	$\Theta(pqn)$ + variable part	Yes	The EMD is its special case
IRM	Vector sets: $\{\vec{X}_a^{(1)}, .., \vec{X}_a^{(p)}\}$ $\{\vec{X}_b^(1), .., \vec{X}_b^{(q)}\}$ Signific.: S	See Eqn. 3	$\Theta(pqn)$ + variable part	No	Much faster than Mallows computation in practise
K-L divergence	$\vec{F}, \vec{G} \in \mathbb{R}^m$ (histograms)	$\sum_x F(x) \log \frac{F(x)}{G(x)}$	$\Theta(m)$	No	Asymmetric, compares distributions

Table I. Popular distances measures used for similarity computation in image retrieval.

The different distance measures discussed so far have their own advantages and disadvantages. While simple methods lead to very efficient computation, which in turn make image ranking scalable - a quality that greatly benefits real-world applications, they often are not effective enough to be useful. Depending on the specific application and on the image signatures constructed, a very important step in the design of an image retrieval system is the choice of distance measure. Factors that differ across various distance measures include type of input, method of computation, computational complexity, and whether the measure is a metric or not. In table I, we summarize the distance measures according to these factors, for ease of comparison.

In the previous subsection, we discussed tuning image signatures by categorizing images or by learning from user preferences. A tightly related issue is to tune image similarity measures. It is in fact impossible to completely set apart the two types of adaptivity since tuning signatures ultimately results in the change of similarity. Referring a tuning method in one way or the other is often merely a matter of whichever is easier to understand. Automatic learning of image similarity measures with the help of contextual information has been explored in [Wu et al. 2005]. In the case that a valid pairwise image similarity metric exists despite the absence of an explicit vectored representation in some metric space, *anchoring* can be used for ranking images [Natsev and Smith 2002]. Anchoring involves choosing a set of representative *vantage* images, and using the similarity measure to map an image into a vector. Suppose there exists a valid metric $d(F_i, F_j)$ between each image pair, and a chosen set of K vantage images $\{A_1, ..., A_K\}$. A *vantage space transformation* $V : F \rightarrow \mathcal{R}^K$ then maps each image F_i in the database to a vectored representation $V(F_i)$ as follows:

$$V(F_i) =< d(F_i, A_1), ..., d(F_i, A_K) > . \tag{6}$$

With the resultant vector embedding, and after similarly mapping a query image in the same space, standard ranking methods may be applied for retrieval. When images are represented as ensembles of feature vectors, or underlying distributions of the low-level features, visual similarity can be ascertained by means of non-parametric tests such as Wald-Wolfowitz [Theoharatos et al. 2005] and K-L divergence [Do and Vetterli 2002]. When images are conceived as bags of feature vectors corresponding to regions, multiple-instance learning (MIL) can be used for similarity computation [Zhang et al. 2002].

A number of probabilistic frameworks for CBIR have been proposed in the last few years [Jin and Hauptmann 2002; Vasconcelos and Lippman 2000b]. The idea in [Vasconcelos and Lippman 2000b] is to integrate feature selection, feature representation, and similarity measure into a combined Bayesian formulation, with the objective of minimizing the probability of retrieval error. One problem with this approach is the computational complexity involved in estimating probabilistic similarity measures. The complexity is reduced in [Vasconcelos 2004] using VQ to approximately model the probability distribution of the image features.

Discussion. As shown in Fig. 7, similarity computation can be performed with feature vectors, region-based signatures, or summarized local features. The main advantage of single vector representing an image is that algebraic and geometric operations can be performed efficiently and in a principled fashion. However, many such representations lack the necessary detail to represent complex image semantics. For example, a picture of two cups on a plate by the window sill cannot easily be mapped to a finite vector representation, simply because the space of component semantics is extremely large, in practice. Instead, if a concatenation of region descriptors is used to represent a picture, it is more feasible to map component semantics (e.g., cup, window) to the image regions. On the other hand, extracting semantically coherent regions is in itself very challenging. Probabilistic representations can potentially provide an alternative, allowing rich descriptions with limited parametrization.

The early years (Sec. 1.1) showed us the benefits as well as the limitations of feature vector representations. They also paved the way for the new breed of region-based methods, which have now become more standard than ever before. The idea of region-based image querying also gained prominence in the last few years. Many new salient feature based spatial models were introduced, particularly for recognizing objects within images, building up mostly on pre-2000 work. The idea that image similarity is better characterized by geodesic distances over a non-linear manifold embedded in the feature space has improved upon earlier notions of a linear embedding of images. A number of systems have also been introduced for public usage in the recent years. The future of image similarity measures lie in many different avenues. The subjectivity in similarity needs to be incorporated more rigorously into image similarity measures, to achieve what can be called *personalized* image search. This can also potentially incorporate ideas beyond the semantics, such as aesthetics and personal preferences in style and content. Extensions of the idea of non-linear image manifolds to incorporate the whole spectrum of natural images, and to allow adaptability for personalization, are avenues to look at. While development of useful systems continues to remain critical, the ever-eluding problem of reducing the semantic gap needs concerted attention.

3.3 Clustering and Classification

Over the years it has been observed that it is too ambitious to expect a single similarity measure to produce robust perceptually meaningful ranking of images. As an alternative, attempts have been made to augment the effort with learning-based techniques. In table II, for both clustering and classification, we summarize the augmentations to traditional image similarity based retrieval, the specific techniques exploited, and the limitations respectively.

Image classification or categorization has often been treated as a pre-processing step for speeding up image retrieval in large databases and improving accuracy, or performing automatic image annotation. Similarly, in the absence of labeled data, unsupervised clustering has often been found to be useful for retrieval speedup as well as improved result visualization. While image clustering inherently depends on a similarity measure, image categorization has been performed by varied methods that neither require nor make use of similarity metrics. Image categorization is often followed by a step of similarity measurement, restricted to those images in a large database that belong to the same visual class as predicted for the query. In such cases, the retrieval process is intertwined, whereby categorization and similarity matching steps together form the retrieval process. Similar arguments hold for clustering as well, due to which, in many cases, it is also a fundamental 'early' step in image retrieval.

In the recent years, a considerable amount of innovations have been accomplished for both clustering and classification, with tremendously diverse target applications.

Augmentation (User Involvement)	**Purpose**	**Techniques**	**Drawbacks**
Clustering (minimal)	Meaningful result visualization, faster retrieval, efficient storage	Side-information, kernel mapping, k-means, hierarchical, metric learning [Chen and Wang 2004] [Hastie et al. 2001] [Sebe et al. 2000] [Wu et al. 2005]	Same low-level features, poor user adaptability
Classification (requires prior training data, not interactive)	Pre-processing, fast/accurate retrieval, automatic organization	SVM, MIL, statistical models, Bayesian classifiers, k-NN, trees [Zhang et al. 2002] [Hastie et al. 2001] [Panda and Chang 2006]	Training introduces bias, many classes unseen
Relevance Feedback (significant, interactive)	Capture user and query specific semantics, refine rank accordingly	Feature re-weighting, region weighting, active learning, memory/mental retrieval, boosting [Hastie et al. 2001] [Rui et al. 1998] [Jaimes et al. 2004] [Fang and Geman 2005]	Same low level features, increased user involvement

Table II. Comparison of three different learning techniques in their application to image retrieval.

It is not our intention here to provide a general review of these technologies. We refer to [Hastie et al. 2001] for basic principles and a more comprehensive review. We will restrict ourselves to new methods and applications appeared in image retrieval and closely related topics.

Unsupervised clustering techniques are a natural fit when handling large, unstructured image repositories such as the Web. Figure 8 summarizes clustering techniques according to the principles of clustering and shows the applicability of different methods when the mathematical representation of learning instances varies. Again, we divide the instances to be clustered into three types: vectors, sets of vectors, and stochastic processes (including distributions), which are consistent with the categorization of image signatures discussed in the previous subsection. From the perspective of application, clustering specifically for Web images has received particular attention from the multimedia community, where meta-data is often available for exploitation in addition to visual features [Wang et al. 2004; Gao et al. 2005; Cai et al. 2004].

Clustering methods fall roughly into three types: pair-wise distance based, optimization of an overall clustering quality measure, and statistical modeling. The pair-wise distance based methods, e.g., linkage clustering and spectral graph partitioning, are of general applicability since the mathematical representation of the instances becomes irrelevant. They are particularly appealing in image retrieval because image signatures often have complex formulation. One disadvantage, however, is the high computational cost because we need to compute an order of n^2 pair-wise distances, where n is the size of the data set. In [Zheng et al. 2004], a locality preserving spectral clustering technique is employed for image clustering in a way that unseen images can be placed into clusters more easily than with traditional methods. In CBIR systems which retrieve images ranked by relevance to the query image only, similarity information among the retrieved images is not considered. In this respect, [Chen et al. 2005] proposes the use of a new spectral clustering [Shi and Malik 2000] based approach to incorporate such information into the retrieval process. In particular, clusters are dynamically generated, tailored specifically to the query image each time, to improve retrieval performance.

Clustering based on the optimization of an overall measure of the clustering quality is a fundamental approach explored since the early days of pattern recognition. The immensely popular method, k-means clustering, is one example. In k-means, the merit of a clustering result is measured by the sum of within-cluster distances between every vector and its cluster centroid. This criterion ensures that clusters generated are tight, a heuristic generally accepted. Here, if the number of clusters is not specified, a simple method to determine this number is to gradually increase it until the average distance between a vector and its cluster centroid is below a given threshold. A more sophisticated way to determine the number of clusters is the competitive agglomeration algorithm, with application to image clustering [Saux and Boujemaa 2002]. In [Gordon et al. 2003], an unsupervised clustering approach for images has been proposed using the Information Bottleneck (IB) principle. The proposed method works for discrete (histograms) as well as continuous (Gaussian mixture) image representations. Clustering based on the IB principle [Tishby et al. 1999] can be summarized as follows: given two variables A (which we try to compress/cluster) and B (which contains relevant information), and their joint distribution $Pr(A, B)$, we seek to perform soft partitioning of A by a probabilistic mapping V, i.e., $Pr(V|A)$, in a way that the mutual information among A and V is minimized, while the relevant information among B and V is maximized.

In k-means clustering, a centroid vector is computed for every cluster. This centroid vector is chosen to minimize the sum of within-cluster distances. When the Euclidean distance is used, it can easily be shown that the centroid ought to be the average of the vectors in a cluster. For non-vector data, the determination of the centroid can be challenging. The extension of k-means to instances represented by sets of weighted vectors is made in [Li and Wang 2006b], namely, the D2-clustering algorithm. The Mallows distance is used for region-based image signatures represented as sets of weighted arbitrary vectors. When the weights assigned to the vectors are probabilities, this representation is essentially a discrete distribution. The centroid for every cluster is also a discrete distribution, for which both the probabilities and the vectors in the support domain need to be solved. Although D2-clustering share the same intrinsic criterion of clustering as k-means, computationally, it is much more complex due to the complexity of the instances

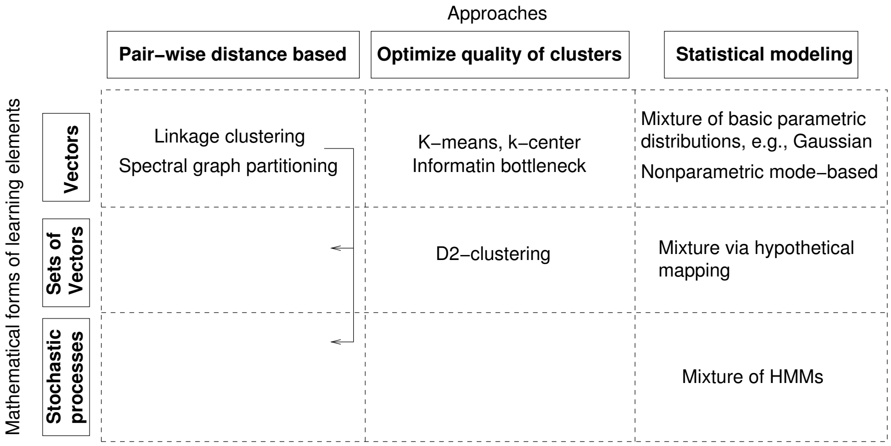


Fig. 8. Paradigms of clustering methods and their scopes of applications.

themselves. Large-scale linear programming is used for the optimization in D2-clustering. Another algorithm for clustering sets of vectors is developed using the IRM distance [Li 2005]. As compared with D2-clustering, this algorithm is similar in principle and significantly faster, but it has weaker optimization properties.

Statistical modeling is another important paradigm of clustering. The general idea is to treat every cluster as a pattern characterized by a relatively restrictive distribution, and the overall data set is thus a mixture of these distributions. For continuous vector data, the most used distribution of individual vectors is the Gaussian distribution. By fitting a mixture of Gaussians to a data set, usually by the EM algorithm [McLachlan and Peel 2000], we estimate the means and covariance matrices of the Gaussian components, which correspond to the center locations and shapes of clusters. One advantage of the mixture modeling approach is that it not only provides a partition of data but also yields an estimated density, which sometimes is itself desired [Do and Vetterli 2002]. The component in a mixture model is not always a multivariate distribution. For instance, in [Li and Wang 2004], the objects to be clustered are large areas of images, and every cluster is characterized by a 2-D MHMM. As long as a probability measure can be set up to describe a cluster, the mixture modeling approach applies seamlessly. When it is difficult to form a probability measure in a certain space, a mixture model can be established by clustering the data and mapping each cluster to a distance-preserving Euclidean space [Li and Wang 2006b]. In this case, the mixture model is not used to yield clustering but to better represent a data set and eventually result in better classification.

Image categorization (classification) is advantageous when the image database is well-specified, and labeled training samples are available. Domain-specific collections such as medical image databases, remotely sensed imagery, and art and cultural image databases are examples where categorization can be beneficial. Classification is typically applied for either automatic annotation, or for organizing unseen images into broad categories for the purpose of retrieval. Here we discuss the latter. Classification methods can be divided into two major branches:

discriminative modeling and generative modeling approaches. In discriminative modeling, classification boundaries or posterior probabilities of classes are estimated directly, e.g., SVM and decision trees. In generative modeling, the density of data within each class is estimated and the Bayes formula is then used to compute the posterior. Discriminative modeling approaches are more direct at optimizing classification boundaries. On the other hand, the generative modeling approaches are easier to incorporate prior knowledge and can be used more conveniently when there are many classes.

Bayesian classification is used for the purpose of image retrieval in [Vailaya et al. 2001]. A textured/non-textured and graph/photograph classification is applied as a pre-processing to image retrieval in [Wang et al. 2001]. Supervised classification based on SVMs has been applied to images in [Goh et al. 2001]. A more recent work describes an efficient method for processing multimedia queries in an SVM based supervised learning framework [Panda and Chang 2006]. SVMs have also been used in an MIL framework in [Chen and Wang 2004]. In the MIL framework, a set of say l training images for learning an image category are conceived as labeled bags $\{(B_1, y_1), ..., (B_l, y_l)\}$, where each bag B_i is a collection of instances $v_{ij} \in \mathbf{R}^m$. Each instance v_{ij} corresponds to a segmented region j of a training image i, and $y_i \in \{-1, +1\}$ indicating negative or positive example with respect to the category in question. The key idea is to map these bags into a new feature space where SVMs can be trained for eventual classification. Image classification based on a generative model for the purpose of retrieval is explored in [Datta et al. 2007].

Discussion. Clustering is a hard problem with two unknowns, i.e., the number of clusters, and the clusters themselves. In image retrieval, clustering helps in visualization and retrieval efficiency. The usual problems of clustering based applications appear here as well, whereby the clusters may not be representative enough or accurate for visualization. While supervised classification is more systematic, the availability of comprehensive training data is often scarce. In particular, the veracity of "ground truth" in image data itself is a subjective question.

Clustering and classification for the purpose of image retrieval received relatively less attention in the early years. The spotlight was on feature extraction and similarity computation. With the need for practical systems that scale well to billions of images and millions of users, practical hacks such as pre-clustering and fast classification have become critical. The popularization of new information-theoretic clustering methods and classification methods such as SVM and Boosting, have led to their extensive use in the image retrieval domain as well. New generative models such as Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) and 2D-MHMM have made their way into image modeling and annotation. The future, in our opinion, lies in supervised and unsupervised generative models for characterizing the various facets of images and meta-data. There is often a lot of structured and unstructured data available with the images that can be potentially exploited through joint modeling, clustering, and classification. It is difficult to guess how much these methods can help bridge the semantic or sensorial gap, but one thing is for sure: system implementations can greatly benefit in various ways from the efficiency that these learning-based methods can produce.

3.4 Relevance Feedback based Search Paradigms

The approach to search has an undeniable tie with the underlying core technology because it defines the goals and the means to achieve them. One way to look at the types of search is the modality (e.g., query by keyword/keyphrase, by example images, or a combination of both, as discussed in Sec. 2). Other ways to characterize search is by the nature and level of human and system interaction involved, and the user intent (Sec. 2). In this section, we concentrate on the latter categorization, exploring the different search paradigms that affect how humans interact and systems interpret/respond.

Relevance feedback (RF) is a query modification technique which attempts to capture the user's precise needs through iterative feedback and query refinement. It can be thought of as an alternative search paradigm, complementing other paradigms such as keyword based search. Ever since its inception in the CBIR community [Rui et al. 1998], a great deal of interest has been generated. In the absence of a reliable framework for modeling high-level image semantics and subjectivity of perception, the user's feedback provides a way to learn case-specific query semantics. While a comprehensive review can be found in [Zhou and Huang 2003], here we present a short overview of recent work in RF, and the various ways these advances can be categorized. We group them here based on the nature of the advancements made, resulting in (possibly overlapping) sets of techniques that have pushed the frontiers in a common domain, which include (a) learning-based advancements, (b) feedback specification novelties, (c) user-driven methods, (d) probabilistic methods, (e) region-based methods, and (f) other advancements.

Learning-based Advancements. Based on the user's relevant feedback, learning based approaches are typically used to appropriately modify the feature set or the similarity measure. However, in practise, a user's RF results in only a small number of labeled images pertaining to each high-level concept. This, along with other unique challenges pertinent to RF have generated interest in novel machine learning techniques to solve the problem, such as *one-class* learning, *active* learning, and *manifold* learning. To circumvent the problem of learning from small training sets, a discriminant-EM algorithm is proposed to make use of unlabeled images in the database for selecting more discriminating features [Wu et al. 2000b]. One the other hand, it is often the case that the positive examples received due to feedback are more consistently located in the feature space than negative examples, which may consist of any irrelevant image. This leads to a natural formulation of *one-class* SVM for learning relevant regions in the feature space from feedback [Chen et al. 2002]. Let $\{\mathbf{v_1}, ..., \mathbf{v_n}\}$, $\mathbf{v_i} \in \mathbf{R}^d$ be a set of n positive training samples. The idea is to find a mapping $\Phi(\mathbf{v}_i)$ such that most samples are tightly contained in a hyper-sphere of radius R in the mapped space subject to regularization. The primal form of the objective function is thus given by

$$\min_{R,e,c} \left(R^2 + \frac{1}{kn} \sum_i e_i \right) \text{ subject to } ||\Phi(\mathbf{v_i}) - c||^2 \leq R^2 + e_i, e_i \geq 0, i \in \{1, ..., n\}. \quad (7)$$

Here, c is the hyper-sphere center in the mapped space, and $k \in [0, 1]$ is a constant that controls the trade-off between radius of the sphere and number of samples it can hold. Among other techniques, a principled approach to optimal learning from

RF is explored in [Rui and Huang 2000]. We can also view RF as an *active learning* process, where the learner chooses an appropriate subset for feedback from the user in each round based on her previous rounds of feedback, instead of choosing a random subset. Active learning using SVMs was introduced into RF in [Tong and Chang 2001]. Extensions to active learning have also been proposed [Goh et al. 2004; He et al. 2004b]. In [He et al. 2004], it is conceived that image features reside on a manifold embedded in the Euclidean feature space. Under this assumption, relevant images to the query provided by RF, along with their nearest neighbors, are used to construct a sub-graph over the images. The geodesic distances, i.e., the shortest path on the graph between pairs of vertices representing image pairs, are then used to rank images for retrieval.

Feedback Specification Novelties. Traditionally, RF has engaged the user in multiple rounds of feedback, each round consisting of one set each of positive and negative examples in relation to the intended query. However, recent work has introduce other paradigms of query specification that have been found to be either more intuitive, or more effective. Feedback based directly on image semantics characterized by manually defined image labels, and appropriately termed *semantic feedback*, is proposed in [Yang et al. 2005b]. A well-known issue with feedback solicitation is that multiple rounds of feedback test the user's patience. To circumvent this problem, user logs on earlier feedback can be used in query refinement, thus reducing the user engagement in RF, as shown in [Hoi and Lyu 2004b]. Innovation has also come in the form of the nature by which feedback is specified by the user. In [Kim and Chung 2003], the notion of a multi-point query, where multiple image examples may be used as query and in intermediate RF step, is introduced. At each round of the RF, clusters of images found relevant based on the previous feedback step are computed, whose representatives form the input for the next round of RF. It is well known that there is generally an asymmetry between the sets of positive and negative image examples presented by the user. In order to address this asymmetry during RF when treating it as a two-class problem, a biased discriminant analysis based approach has been proposed in [Zhou and Huang 2001b]. While most algorithms treat RF as a two-class problem, it is often intuitive to consider multiple groups of images as relevant or irrelevant [Hoi and Lyu 2004a; Nakazato et al. 2003; Zhou and Huang 2001a]. For example, a user looking for *cars* can highlight groups of *blue* and *red* cars as relevant, since it may not be possible to represent the concept *car* uniformly in a visual feature space. Another novelty in feedback specification is the use of multi-level relevance scores, to indicate varying degrees of relevance [Wu et al. 2004].

User-driven Methods. While much of the past attempt at RF has focused on the machine's ability to learn from the user feedback, the user's point of view in providing the feedback has largely been taken for granted. Of late, there has been some interest in design RF paradigms aimed to help users. In some new developments, there have been attempts at tailoring the search experience by providing the user with cues and hints for more specific query formulation [Jaimes et al. 2004; Nagamine et al. 2004]. While the approach may still involve RF from the system point of view, it is argued that the human memory can benefit from cues provided, for better query formulation. A similar search paradigm proposed in [Fang and Geman 2005; Fang et al. 2005b] models successive user response using a Bayesian, information-theoretic framework. The goal is to 'learn' a distribution over the image database representing the mental image of the user and use this distribution for retrieval. Another well-known issue with human being in the loop is that multiple rounds of feedback are often bothersome for the user, which have been alleviated in [Hoi and Lyu 2004b] by making use of logs that contain earlier feedback given by that user. Recently, a manifold learning technique to capture user preference over a *semantic manifold* from RF is proposed in [Lin et al. 2005].

Probabilistic Methods. Probabilistic models, while popular in early years of image retrieval for tackling the basic problem, have found increasing patronage for performing RF in the recent years. Probabilistic approaches have been taken in [Cox et al. 2000; Su et al. 2003; Vasconcelos and Lippman 2000a]. In [Cox et al. 2000], the PicHunter system is proposed, where uncertainty about the user's goal is represented by a distribution over the potential goals, following which the Bayes' rule helps select the target image. In [Su et al. 2003], RF is incorporated using a Bayesian classifier based re-ranking of the images after each feedback step. The main assumption used here is that the features of the positive examples, which potentially reside in the same semantic class, are all generated by an underlying Gaussian density. The RF approach in [Vasconcelos and Lippman 2000a] is based on the intuition that the system's belief at a particular time about the user's intent is a *prior*, while the following user feedback is *new* information obtained. Together, they help compute the new belief about the intent, using the Bayes' rule, which in turn becomes the prior for the next feedback round.

Region-based Methods. With increased popularity of region-based image retrieval [Carson et al. 2002; Wang et al. 2001; Ko and Byun 2002], attempts have been made to incorporate the *region* factor into RF. In [Jing et al. 2004a], two different RF scenarios are considered, and retrieval is tailored to support each of them through query point modification and SVM-based classification respectively. In this feedback process, the region importance (RI) for each segmented region is learned, for successively better retrieval. This core idea, that of integrating region-based retrieval with relevance feedback, has been further detailed for the two RF scenarios in [Jing et al. 2004b].

Other Advancements. Besides the set of methods grouped together, there have been a number of isolated advancements covering various aspects of RF. For example, methods for performing RF using visual as well as textual features (meta-data) in unified frameworks have been reported in [Lu et al. 2000; Zhou and Huang 2002; Amores et al. 2004; Jing et al. 2005]. A tree-structured SOM has been used as an underlying technique for RF [Laaksonen et al. 2001] in a CBIR system [Laaksonen et al. 2002]. A well-known RF problem with query specification is that after each round of user interaction, the top query results need to be recomputed following some modification. A way to speed up this *nearest-neighbor* search is proposed in [Wu and Manjunath 2001]. The use of RF for helping capture the relationship between low-level features and high-level semantics, a fundamental problem in image retrieval, has been attempted using logs of user feedbacks, in [Han et al. 2005].

Discussion. Relevance feedback provides a compromise between a fully automated, unsupervised system and one based on the subjective user needs. While query refinement is an attractive proposition when it comes to a very diverse user base, there is also the question of how well the feedbacks can be utilized for refinement. Whereas a user would prefer shorter feedback sessions, there is an issue as to how much feedback is enough for the system to learn the user needs. One issue which has been largely ignored in past RF research is that the user's needs might evolve over the feedback steps, making the assumption of a fixed target weaker. New approaches such as [Jaimes et al. 2004; Fang and Geman 2005] have started incorporating this aspect of the user's mind in the RF process.

Relevance feedback was introduced into image retrieval at the fag end of the previous decade (Sec. 1.1). Today, it is a more mature field, spanning many different sub-topics and addressing a number of practical concerns keeping in mind the user in the loop. While this has happened, one issue is that we do not see many real-world implementations of the relevance feedback technology either in the image or in the text retrieval domain. This is potentially due to the feedback process that the users must go through, that tests the user's patience. New ideas such as memory retrieval, that actually provide the user with benefits in the feedback process, may possibly be one answer to popularizing RF. The future of this field clearly lies in its practical applicability, focusing on how the user can be made to go through least effort to convey the desired semantics. The breaking points of the utility derived out of this process, at which the user runs out of patience and at which she is satisfied with the response, must be studied for better system design.

3.5 Multimodal Fusion and Retrieval

Media relevant to the broad area of multimedia retrieval and annotation includes, but is not limited to, images, text, free-text (unstructured, e.g., paragraphs), graphics, video, and any conceivable combination of them. Thus far, we have encountered a multitude of techniques for modeling and retrieval of images, and text associated with those images. While not covered here, the reader may be aware of equally broad spectrums of techniques for text, video, music, and speech retrieval. In many cases, these independent, media-specific methods do not suffice to satiate the needs of users who are seeking what they can best describe only by a combination of media. Therein lies the need for multimodal fusion as a technique for satisfying such user queries. We consider this as one of the 'core' techniques because in principal, it is distinct from any of the methods we have discussed so far. Even with very good retrieval algorithms available independently for two different media, effectively combining them for multimodal retrieval may be far from trivial. Research in fusion learning for multimodal queries therefore attempts to learn optimal combination strategies and models.

Fortunately (for researchers) or unfortunately (for users), precious little multimodal fusion has been attempted in the context of image retrieval and annotation. This opens avenues for exploring novel user interfaces, querying models, and result visualization techniques pertinent to image retrieval, in combination with other media. Having said that, we must point out that multimodal fusion has indeed been attempted in the more obvious problem settings within *video retrieval*. With this field as an example, we briefly expose readers to multimodal fusion, in the hope that it motivates image retrieval research that takes advantage of these techniques. We believe that the need for mutimodal retrieval in relation to images will soon grow in stature.

When video data comes with closed-captions and/or associated audio track, these can prove to be useful meta-data for retrieval as well. One of the key problems faced in video retrieval research is therefore combination or fusion of responses from these multiple modalities. It has been observed and reported that multimodal fusion almost always enhances retrieval performance for video [Hauptmann and Christel 2004]. Usually, fusion involves learning some kind of combination rules across multiple decision streams (ranked lists or classifier response) using a certain amount of data with ground truth as validation set. This is also referred to as late fusion. Alternative approaches to fusion involve classifier re-training. In [Wu et al. 2004], multimodal fusion has been treated as a two-step problem. The first step involves finding statistically independent modalities, followed by super-kernel fusion to determine their optimal combination. Fusion approaches have been found to be beneficial for important video applications such as detection of documentary scene changes [Velivelli et al. 2004] and story segmentation [Zhai et al. 2005]. Fusion learning has been found to outperform naive fusion approaches as well as the oracle (best performer) for TRECVID 2005 query retrieval task. [Joshi et al. 2007].

Discussion. Fusion learning is an off-line process while fusion application at real-time is computationally inexpensive. Hence multimodal fusion is an excellent method to boost retrieval performance at real-time. However, special care needs to be taken to ensure that the fusion rules do not overfit the validation set used for learning them. Usually, data resampling techniques such as bagging are found to help avoid overfitting to some extent. Fusion techniques can also be used to leverage classifiers built for numerous concepts with possible semantic coherence, whether the underlying data is image or video.

Fusion for image retrieval is a fairly novel area, with very little achieved in the early ages. The ideas of fusion go hand in hand with practical, viable, system development, which is critical for the future of image retrieval research. We live in a truly multi-media world, and we as humans always take the benefit of each media for sensory interpretation (see, hear, smell, taste, touch). There is no reason why advantage of all available media (images, video, audio, text) should not be taken for building useful systems. The future lies in harnessing as many channels of information as possible, and fusing them in smart, practical ways to solve real problems. Principled approaches to fusion, particularly probabilistic ones, can also help provide performance guarantees, which in turn convert to quality standards for public-domain systems.

4. CBIR OFFSHOOTS: PROBLEMS AND APPLICATIONS OF THE NEW AGE

Smeulders et al. [Smeulders et al. 2000] surveyed CBIR at the end of what they referred to as early years. The field was presented as a natural successor to certain existing disciplines such as computer vision, information retrieval and machine learning. However, in the last few years, CBIR has evolved and emerged as a mature research effort in its own right. A significant section of the research community is now shifting attention to certain problems which are peripheral, yet of immense significance to image retrieval systems, directly or indirectly. Moreover, newly discovered problems are being solved with tools that were intended for image retrieval. In this section, we discuss some such directions. Note that much of these peripheral ideas are in their infancy, and have likelihood of breaking into adulthood if sufficiently nurtured by the relevant research communities. Owing to the exploratory nature of the current approaches to these problems, a discussion on where these sub-fields are heading and what opportunities lie ahead in the future for innovation is necessary.

4.1 Words and Pictures

While at the problem of understanding picture content, it was soon learned that in principle, associating those pictures with textual descriptions was only one step ahead. This led to the formulation of a new but closely associated problem called *automatic image annotation*, often referred to as *auto-annotation* or *linguistic indexing*. The primary purpose of a practical content-based image retrieval system is to discover images pertaining to a given concept in the absence of reliable meta-data. All attempts at automated concept discovery, annotation, or linguistic indexing essentially adhere to that objective. Annotation can facilitate image search through the use of text. If the resultant automated mapping between images and words can be trusted, text-based image searching can be semantically more meaningful than search in the absence of any text. Here we discuss two different schools of thought which have been used to address this problem.

4.1.1 *Joint Word-Picture Modeling Approach.* Many of the approaches to image annotation have been inspired by research in the text domain. Ideas from text modeling have been successfully imported to jointly model textual and visual data. In [Duygulu et al. 2002], the problem of annotation is treated as a *translation* from a set of image segments to a set of words, in a way analogous to linguistic translation. A multi-modal extension of a well known hierarchical text model is proposed. Each word, describing a picture, is believed to have been generated by a node in a hierarchical concept tree. This assumption is coherent with the hierarchical model for nouns and verbs adopted by Wordnet [Miller 1995]. This *translation model* is extended [Jin et al. 2005] to eliminate uncorrelated words from among those generated, making used of the Wordnet ontology. In [Blei and Jordan 2003], the Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) model is proposed for modeling associations between words and pictures.

In all such approaches, images are typically represented by properties of each of their segments or *blobs*. Once all the pictures have been segmented, quantization can be used to obtain a finite vocabulary of blobs. Thus pictures under such models are treated as bags of words and blobs, each of which are assumed to have been generated by *aspects*. Aspects are hidden variables which spawn a multivariate distribution over blobs and a multinomial distribution over words. Once the joint word-blob probabilities have been learned, the annotation problem for a given image is reduced to a likelihood problem relating blobs and words. The spatial relationships between blobs is not directly captured by the model. However, this is expected to be implicitly modeled in the generative distribution. Most of these techniques rely on precise segmentation, which is still challenging. Despite the limitations, such modeling approaches remain popular.

Cross-Media relevance models models have been used for image annotation in [Jeon et al. 2003; Lavrenko et al. 2003]. A closely related approach involves coherent language models, which exploits word-to-word correlations to strengthen annotation decisions [Jin et al. 2004]. All the annotation strategies discussed so far model visual and textual features separately prior to association. A departure from this trend is seen in [Monay and Gatica-Perez 2003], where probabilistic latent semantic analysis (PLSA) is used on uniform vectored data consisting of both visual features and textual annotations. This model is extended to a *nonlinear* latent semantic analysis for image annotation in [Liu and Tang 2005].

4.1.2 *Supervised Categorization Approach.* An alternative approach is to treat image annotation as a supervised categorization problem. Concept detection through supervised classification, involving simple concepts such as city, landscape, and sunset is achieved with high accuracy in [Vailaya et al. 2001]. More recently, image annotation using a novel structure-composition model, and a WordNet-based word saliency measure has been proposed in [Datta et al. 2007]. One of the earliest attempts at image annotation can be found in [Li and Wang 2003]. The system, ALIP (Automatic Linguistic Indexing of Pictures) uses a 2-D multi-resolution hidden Markov models based approach to capture inter-scale and intra-scale spatial dependencies of image features of given semantic categories. Models for individual categories are learned independently and stored. The annotation step involves calculating likelihoods of the query image given each learned model/category, and choosing annotations with bias toward statistically salient words corresponding to the most likely categories. A real time image annotation system ALIPR (Automatic Linguistic Indexing of Pictures - Real Time) has been recently proposed in [Li and Wang 2006a]. ALIPR inherits its high level learning architecture from ALIP. However, the modeling approach is simpler, hence leading to real-time computations of statistical likelihoods. Being the first real time image annotation engine, ALIPR has generated considerable interest for real-world applications [Alipr 2006].

Learning concepts from user's feedback in a dynamically changing image database using Gaussian mixture models is discussed in [Dong and Bhanu 2003]. An approach to *soft* annotation, using Bayes Point machines, to give images a confidence level for each trained semantic label is explored in [Chang et al. 2003]. This vector of confidence labels can be exploited to rank relevant images in case of a keyword search. A confidence based dynamic ensemble of SVM classifiers is used for annotation in [Li et al. 2003]. Multiple instance learning based approaches have been proposed for semantic categorization of images [Chen and Wang 2004] and to learn the correspondence between image regions and keywords [Yang et al. 2005a]. Concept learning based on a fusion of complementary classification techniques with limited training samples is proposed in [Natsev et al. 2005]. Annotating images in dynamic settings (e.g., Yahoo! Flickr), where images and publicly generated tags arrive into a system asynchronously over time, has been explored using a meta-learning framework in [Datta et al. 2007].

Discussion: Automated annotation is widely recognized as an extremely difficult question. We humans segment objects better than machines, having learned to associate over a long period of time, through multiple viewpoints, and literally through a "streaming video" at all times, which partly accounts for our natural segmentation capability. The association of words and *blobs* becomes truly meaningful only when blobs isolate objects well. Moreover, how exactly our brain does this association is unclear. While Biology tries to answer this fundamental question, researchers in information retrieval tend to take a pragmatic stand in that they aim to build systems of practical significance. Ultimately, the desire is to be able to use keyword queries for all images regardless of any manual annotations that they may have. To this end, a recent attempt at bridging the retrieval-annotation gap has been made [Datta et al. 2007].

4.2 Stories and Pictures

While the association between words and pictures is fairly well studied, deciding on an appropriate picture set for a given story is a relatively new problem. Attempts at tackling this problem are made in [Barnard et al. 2003; Joshi et al. 2006]. By a story, we refer to a descriptive piece of text suitable for illustration in a practical sense. Possible applications of such systems could be automatic illustration of news articles at news agencies, or educational story illustration in textbooks.

The problem, however, poses several challenges. **(1)** People might attach different levels of importance to ideas, concepts, and places discussed in a story. This subjectivity is hard to quantify and may be a result of past experiences, dislikes, and prejudices. **(2)** Any illustration system is constrained by the image repository from which the system selects pictures. An automated system may misperform if relevant pictures are not present or poorly represented in the repository. **(3)** Certain concepts might be over-represented in the repository. Choosing a few representative pictures would then require a ranking scheme to discriminate among relevant pictures by some means. It is not easily perceived what this discrimination should be based on.

A practical system which performs this task would require some way of identifying relevant keywords in a story and using a ranking scheme to determine representative pictures. In [Barnard et al. 2003], the idea of auto-illustration is introduced as an inverse problem of auto-annotation. In [Joshi et al. 2006], image importance with respect to a story is quantified by the use of mutual reinforcement principle. Given an annotated image database, pairwise reinforcement is based on both visual similarity as well as Wordnet-based lexical similarity. This importance criteria is then used for choosing elite pictures to illustrate the story in question.

Discussion: Evidently, work in this direction has been very limited, even though the problem is one of practical importance. One reason for this could be that goals of auto-illustration or story-picturing are not as clearly defined as CBIR or image annotation. This brings us to the question of evaluation - how do we differentiate good illustrations from poor ones? The approach taken in [Joshi et al. 2006] is that of user studies to determine agreement of human preference and automatic selection of pictures. Other better approaches to evaluation may be possible. One thing is clear though - a concrete formulation to the problem and an acceptable evaluation strategy for solutions are essentially two sides of the same coin.

4.3 Aesthetics and Pictures

Thus far, the focus of CBIR has been on semantics. There have been numerous discussion on the semantic gap. Imagine a situation where this gap has been bridged. This would mean, for example, finding all 'dog' pictures in response to a 'dog' query. In text-based search engines, a query containing 'dog' will yield millions of Web pages. The smart search engine will then try to analyze the query to rank the best matches higher. The rationale for doing so is that of predicting what is most desirable based on the query. What, in CBIR, is analogous to such ranking, given that a large subset of the images are determined to be semantically relevant? This question has been recently addressed in [Datta et al. 2006].

We conjecture that one way to distinguish among images of similar semantics is by their *quality*. Quality can be perceived at two levels, one involving concrete image parameters like size, aspect ratio and color depth, and the other involving higher-level perception, which we denote as *aesthetics*. While it is trivial to rank images based on the former, the differences may not be significant enough to use as ranking criteria. On the other hand, aesthetics is the kind of emotions a picture arouses in people. Given this vague definition, and the subjectivity associated with emotion, it is open to dispute how to aesthetically distinguish pictures. As discussed below, current attempts to model aesthetics have had limited success, and the limitation arises primarily from the inability to extract information related to perceived emotions from pixel information. In a sense, this is analogous to the concept of semantic gap [Smeulders et al. 2000] in the domain of aesthetics inference, and probably a wider one at this moment. To formalize this analogy, we propose to define what we call the *aesthetics gap*, as follows:

> *The aesthetics gap is the lack of coincidence between the information that one can extract from low-level visual data (i.e., pixels in digital images) and the interpretation of emotions that the visual data may arouse in a particular user in a given situation.*

Despite the challenge in dealing with this gap, in our opinion, modeling aesthetics of images is an important open problem that will only get more prominent as time passes. Given a feasible model, a new dimension to image understanding will be added, benefiting CBIR and allied communities.

Discussion: The question remains how this problem can be approached. Given the high subjectivity of aesthetics, it may help to re-define the goal as a model that can characterize aesthetics *in general*. One way to model aesthetics in general is to study photo rating trends in public photo-sharing communities such as [Photo.Net 1993], an approach that has been followed in [Datta et al. 2006]. The site supports peer-rating of photographs based on aesthetics. This has generated a large database of ratings corresponding to the over one million photographs hosted. A discussion on the significance of these ratings, and aesthetic quality in general, can be found in [Photo.Net(RatingSystem) 1993]. Another attempt [Ke et al. 2006] at distinguishing high-quality images from low-quality ones has found similar levels of success with data obtained from yet another peer-rated photo contest oriented Website [DPChallenge.com 2002]. The idea of learning to assess visual aesthetics from such training data has been further pursued for the purpose of selecting high-quality pictures and eliminating low-quality ones from image collections, in [Datta et al. 2007]. *One caveat:* Uncontrolled publicly collected data are naturally inclined to noise. When drawing conclusions about the data, this assumption must be kept in mind. Alternatively, ways to get around the noisy portions must be devised.

4.4 Art, Culture, and Pictures

Art and culture have always played an important role in human lives. Over the centuries, hundreds of museums and art galleries have preserved our diverse cultural heritage and served as important sources of education and learning. However, of late, concerns are being expressed to archive all ancient historical and cultural materials in digital form for posterity [Chen et al. 2005]. This is particularly important for two reasons:

— Computers have become and will remain the primary medium for learning and education in the years to come. Hence, digital representation of cultural artifacts and pictures is bound to increase their popularity. Moreover, accessing digital archives is effortless and can practically be done from any corner of the world.

— As opposed to digital media, cultural artifacts and old paintings are subject to wear with time, prone to disasters and vandalism [Chen et al. 2005].

In such a scenario, a key application of CBIR technology is to help preserve and analyze our history, in digital media form. Growing research interest in the field is evident from the fact that in the year 2004, *IEEE Transactions on Image Processing* organized a special issue to discuss state-of-the-art in image processing applications for cultural heritage [IEEE(TIP) 2004]. The main focus of this issue was on modeling, retrieval, and authentication of cultural heritage images. Besides facilitating search and retrieval in large art/cultural image databases, statistical learning techniques have also been proposed to capture properties of brush strokes of painters [Li and Wang 2004; Melzer et al. 1998; Sablatnig et al. 1998; Lyu et al. 2004; Berezhnoy et al. 2005]. Such techniques can potentially be used to study similarities and differences among artists across countries, cultures, and time. Comprehensive surveys on latest advances in art imaging research can be found in [Martinez et al. 2002; Maitre et al. 2001; Barni et al. 2005; Chen et al. 2005].

Discussion: While it is tough to say that automatic image analysis techniques can match the experience of art *connoisseurs*, they can definitely be used to complement human expertise. Statistical methods can sometime capture subtle characteristics of art which even a human eye can miss [Lyu et al. 2004].

4.5 Web and Pictures

The Web connects systems to systems, systems to people, and people with other people. Hosting a system on the Web is significantly different from hosting it in a private network or a single machine. What makes things different is that we can no longer make assumptions about the users, their understanding of the system, their way of interacting, their contributions to the system, and their expectations from the system. Moreover, Web-based systems muster support of the masses only as long as they are useful to them. Without support, there is no meaning to such a system. This makes the creation of Web-based CBIR systems more challenging than the core questions of CBIR, aggravated further by the fact that multimedia searching is typically more complex than generic searching [Jansen et al. 2003]. Thankfully, the problem has recently received a lot of attention from the community, enough to have a survey dedicated specifically to it [Kherfi et al. 2004].

While we cannot make assumptions about generic Web-based CBIR systems, those designed keeping in mind specific communities can be done with some assumptions. Web-based CBIR services for copyright protection, tourism, entertainment, crime prevention, research, and education are some domain-specific possibilities, as reported in [Kherfi et al. 2004]. One of the key tasks of Web image retrieval is crawling images. A smart Web-crawler that attempts to associate captions with images to extract useful meta-data in the crawling process is reported in [Rowe 2002].

There have been many algorithms proposed for image search based on surrounding text, including those implemented in Google and Yahoo! image search. Here we discuss work that exploits image content in part or full for retrieval. One of the earlier systems for Web-based CBIR, *iFind*, incorporating relevance feedback was proposed in [Zhang et al. 2000]. More recently, *Cortina*, a combined content and meta-data based image search engine is made public [Quack et al. 2004]. Other approaches to Web-based image retrieval include mutual reinforcement [Wang et al. 2004], bootstrapping for annotation propagation [Feng et al. 2004], and nonparametric density estimation with application to an art image collection [Smolka et al. 2004]. Image grouping methods such as unsupervised clustering are extremely critical for heterogeneous repositories such as the Web (as discussed in Sec. 3.3), and this is explored in [Wang et al. 2004; Gao et al. 2005; Cai et al. 2004; Jing et al. 2006]. More recently, rank fusion for Web image retrieval from multiple online picture forums has been proposed [Zhang et al. 2006]. Innovative interface designs for Web image search have been explored in [Yee et al. 2003; Li et al. 2004]. The SIMPLIcity system [Wang et al. 2001] has been incorporated into popular Websites such as Airliners.net [Airliners.Net 2005], Global Memory Net [GlobalMemoryNet 2006], and Terragalleria [Terragalleria 2001].

Discussion: The impact of CBIR can be best experienced through a Web-based image search service that gains popularity to the proportion of its text-based counterparts. Unfortunately, at the time of writing this survey, this goal is elusive. Having said that, the significant progress in CBIR for the Web raises hopes for such systems in the coming years.

4.6 Security and Pictures

The interactions between CBIR and information security had been non-existent, until recently, when new perspectives emerged to strengthen the ties. Two such perspectives are human interactive proofs (HIPs), and the enforcement of copyright protection.

While on one hand, we are constantly pushing the frontiers of science to design intelligent systems that can imitate human capabilities, we cannot deny the inherent security risks associated with extremely smart computer programs. One such risk is when Websites or public servers are attacked by malicious programs that request service on massive scale. Programs can be written to automatically consume large amount of Web resources or bias results in on-line voting. The HIPs, also known as CAPTCHAs, are a savior in these situations. These are interfaces designed to differentiate between humans and automated programs, based on the response to posed questions. The most common CAPTCHAs use distorted text, as seen in public Websites such as Yahoo!, MSN, and PayPal. Recently, a number of OCR-based techniques have been proposed to break text-based CAPTCHAs [Mori and Malik 2003]. This has paved the way for natural image based CAPTCHAs, owing to the fact that CBIR is generally considered a much more difficult problem than OCR. The first formalization of image based CAPTCHAs is found in [Chew and Tygar 2004], where pictures chosen at random are displayed and questions asked, e.g., what does the picture contain, which picture is the odd one out conceptually, etc. A problem with this approach is the possibility that CBIR and concept learning techniques such as [Barnard et al. 2003; Li and Wang 2003] can be used to attack image based CAPTCHAs. This will eventually lead to the same problem faced by text-based CAPTCHAs. To alleviate this problem, a CBIR system is used as a validation technique in order to distort images before being presented to users [Datta et al. 2005]. The distortions are chosen such that probabilistically, CBIR systems find it difficult to grasp the image concepts and hence are unable to simulate human response.

The second issue is image copy protection and forgery detection. Photographs taken by one person and posted online are often copied and passed on as someone else's artistry. Logos and Trademarks of well-established organizations have often been duplicated by lesser-known firms, with or without minor modification, and with a clear intention to mislead patrons. While plagiarism of this nature is a world-wide phenomenon today, protection of the relevant copyrights is a very challenging task. The use of CBIR to help identify and possible enforce these copyrights is a relatively new field of study. In the case of exact copies, detecting them is trivial: extraction and comparison of a simple file signature is sufficient. However, when changes to the pictures or logos are made, image similarity measures such as those employed in CBIR are necessary. The changes could be one or more of down-sampling, lowering of color-depth, warping, shearing, cropping, decolorizing, palette shifting, changing contrast/brightness, image stamping, etc. The problem then becomes one of *near-duplicate detection*, in which case the similarity measures must be robust to these changes. Interest point detectors for generating localized image descriptors robust to such changes have been used for near-duplicate detection in [Ke et al. 2004]. A part-based image similarity measure that is derived from the stochastic matching of Attributed Relational Graphs is exploited for near-duplicate detection in [Zhang and Chang 2004].

Discussion: Much of security research is on anticipation of possible attack strategies. While image-based CAPTCHA systems anticipate the use of CBIR for attacks, near-duplicate detectors anticipate possible image distortion methods a copyright infringer may employ. Whether CBIR proves useful to security is yet to be seen, but dabbling with problems of this nature certainly helps CBIR grow as a field. For example, as noted in [Zhang and Chang 2004], near-duplicate detection also finds application in weaving news stories across diverse video sources for news summarization. The generation of new ideas as offshoots, or in the process of solving other problems is the very essence of this section.

4.7 Machine Learning and Pictures

While more often than not machine learning has been used to help solve the fundamental problem of image retrieval, there are instances where new and generic machine learning and data mining techniques have been developed in attempts to serve this purpose. The correspondence-LDA [Blei and Jordan 2003] model, proposed for joint word-image modeling, has since been applied to problems in bioinformatics [Zheng et al. 2006]. Probabilistic graphical models such as 2-D multiresolution hidden Markov models [Li and Wang 2003] and cross-media relevance models [Jeon et al. 2003], though primarily used for image annotation applications, are contributions to machine learning research. Similarly, multiple instance learning research has benefited by work on image categorization [Chen and Wang 2004]. Active learning using SVMs were proposed for relevance feedback [Tong and Chang 2001] and helped popularize active learning in other domains as well.

Automatic learning of a similarity metric or distance from ground-truth data has been explored for various task such as clustering and classification. One way to achieve this is to learn a generalized Mahalanobis distance metric, such as those general-purpose methods proposed in [Xing et al. 2003; Bar-hillel et al. 2005]. On the other hand, kernel-based learning of image similarity, using context information, with applications to image clustering was explored in [Wu et al. 2005]. This could potentially be used for more generic cases of metric learning given side-information. In the use of a Mahalanobis metric for distance computation, an implicit assumption is that the underlying data distribution is Gaussian, which may not always be appropriate. An important work uses a principled approach to determine appropriate similarity metrics based on the nature of underlying distributions, which is determined using ground-truth data [Sebe et al. 2000]. In a subsequent work, a boosting approach to learning a *boosted distance* measure that is analogous to the weighted Euclidean norm, has been applied to stereo matching and video motion tracking [Yu et al. 2006] and classification/recognition tasks on popular datasets [Amores et al. 2006].

Discussion: When it comes to recognizing pictures, even humans undergo a learning process. So it is not surprising to see the synergy between machine learning and image retrieval, when it comes to training computers to do the same. In fact, the challenges associated with learning from images have actually helped push the scientific frontier in machine learning research in its own right.

4.8 Epilogue

While Sections 2 and 3 discussed techniques and real-world aspects of CBIR, in this section, we have described applications that employ those techniques. In Table III we present a qualitative requirement analysis of the various applications, involving a mapping from the *aspects* (techniques and features) to these applications. The entries are intended to be interpreted in the following manner:

—Essential - Aspects that are *required* in all scenarios.

—Optional - Aspects that *may/may not* be critical depending on the specific goals.

—Desirable - Aspects that are *likely to add value* to the application in all cases.

Applications & Offshoots	*Similarity measure*	*User feedback*	*Machine learning*	*Visualization*	*Scalability*
Automatic annotation	optional	optional	essential	optional	optional
Story illustration	essential	desirable	essential	desirable	desirable
Image-based CAPTCHA	essential	essential	optional	essential	essential
Copy detection	essential	desirable	optional	desirable	essential
Visual aesthetics	optional	desirable	essential	desirable	optional
Web image search	essential	optional	optional	essential	essential
Art image analysis	optional	desirable	essential	desirable	desirable

Table III. A qualitative requirement analysis of various CBIR offshoots and applications.

The distinction between classifying an aspect as 'optional' or 'desirable' can be understood by the following examples. Scalability for automatic annotation is termed 'optional' here because such an application can serve two purposes: (1) to be able to quickly tag a large number of pictures in a short time, and (2) to be able to produce accurate and consistent tags to pictures or to refine existing noisy tags, perhaps as an off-line process. Because of the compromise made in these two goals, their scalability requirement may be different. As a second example, consider that in art image analysis, having an expert user to be involved in every step of the analysis is highly 'desirable', unlike in large scale image annotation, where a user validation at each step may be infeasible.

5. EVALUATION STRATEGIES

Whenever there are multiple competing products in the market, customers typically resort to statistics, reviews, and public opinions in order to make a well-informed selection. A direct analogy can be drawn for CBIR. With the numerous competing techniques and systems proposed and in operation, evaluation becomes a critical issue. Even from the point of view of researchers, a benchmark for evaluation of CBIR would allow them choose from many different proposed ideas and to test new approaches against older ones. For any information retrieval system, a strategy for evaluation involves determining the following:

—An appropriate dataset for evaluation: The dataset should be general enough to cover a large range of semantics from a human point of view. Also, the dataset should be large enough for the evaluation to be statistically significant.

—A ground truth for relevance for the problem at hand: Ground truth is a very subjective issue, especially for multimedia. Usually, people associate a given picture with a wide range of high level semantics.

—An appropriate metric and criteria for evaluating competing approaches: The evaluation criteria should try to model human requirements from a population perspective.

Moreover, it is desirable to have a forum or gathering at regular intervals for discussing different approaches, their respective performances, and shortcomings with the evaluation strategy. The problem of CBIR evaluation, however, is very challenging. The above mentioned points often make it very difficult to decide upon an evaluation dataset and obtain reliable ground-truth for it. Deciding on a metric and evaluation criteria is another difficult problem. An objective evaluation of results could be unfair and incomplete since CBIR technology is eventually expected to satisfy the needs of people who use it. In spite of these challenges, researchers have agreed upon certain evaluation datasets, benchmarks, and forums for multimedia retrieval evaluation. These are described as follows.

5.1 Evaluation Metrics

CBIR is essentially an information retrieval problem. Therefore, evaluation metrics have been quite naturally adopted from information retrieval research. Two of the most popular evaluation measures are:

—*Precision*: The percentage of retrieved pictures that are relevant to the query.

—*Recall*: The percentage of all the relevant pictures in the search database which are retrieved.

Notice that when the query in question is a picture, relevance is extremely subjective. Information retrieval research has shown that precision and recall follow an inverse relationship. Precision falls while recall increases as the number of retrieved pictures, often termed as *scope*, increases. Hence, it is typical to have a high numeric value for both precision and recall. Traditionally, results are summarized as *precision-recall* curves or *precision-scope* curves. A criticism for precision stems from the fact that it is calculated for the entire retrieved set and is unaffected by the respective rankings of the relevant entities in the retrieved list.

A measure which addresses the above problem and is very popular in CBIR community is *average-precision* (AP). In a ranked list of retrieved entities with respect to a query, if precision is calculated at the depth of every relevant entity obtained, then average precision is given as the mean of all the individual precision scores. As is obvious, this metric is highly influenced by high-ranked relevant entities and not so much by those toward the bottom of the ranked list. The arithmetic mean of average precision calculated over a number of different queries is often reported as mean average precision (MAP) and is one of the evaluation measures used by the TRECVID community [TRECVID 2001]. A comprehensive overview and discussion on performance measures for CBIR has been presented in [Huijsmans and Sebe 2005]. The authors of the cited work discuss the influence of individual class sizes to these measures, in a CBIR system. The importance of normalization of performance measures with respect to *scope* and class-sizes has been emphasized.

5.2 Evaluation Criteria

As observed in [Shirahatti and Barnard 2005], CBIR is meaningful only in its service to human users. At the same time, it is difficult to quantify user requirements as objective relevance based scores. As discussed in Sec. 2, users may be classified into several types based on their clarity of intent and search patterns. Depending upon the end goal, a user may value different features of a CBIR system.

An interesting user driven evaluation criteria has been proposed in [Shirahatti and Barnard 2005]. The authors construct a mapping of various retrieval algorithm scores to human assessment of similarity. As a consequence of this, different retrieval algorithms can be evaluated against the same user determined scale. Another work studies user information needs with respect to image retrieval using American memory photo archives [Choi and Rasmussen 2002]. It has been observed that users of an image retrieval system value several important criteria such as image quality, clarity, and associated meta-data besides image semantics.

5.3 Evaluation Datasets and Forums

Traditionally, in the absence of benchmarks, Corel Stock Photos and Caltech101 [Caltech101 2004] have been used for CBIR evaluation. The authors of Caltech101 have released a new version of their dataset called Caltech256 including 256 picture categories. The pitfalls of using Corel pictures have been discussed in [Muller et al. 2002], and a more rigorous CBIR benchmarking is suggested. The Benchathlon Project [Benchathlon 2005; Gunther and Beratta 2001] was initiated to get the CBIR community come together for formulating evaluation strategies. ImageCLEF [ImageCLEF 2006], a track as part of a cross-language evaluation forum, focuses on evaluation strategies for CBIR. Another important effort in this direction is the ImagEVAL workshop [ImagEVAL 2005] where the importance of user-oriented evaluation has been emphasized. The ImagEVAL effort stresses on criteria such as the quality of user-interface, response time, and adaptiveness of a CBIR system to a new domain. The TRECVID benchmark is very popular in the CBIR community to validate their search and retrieval algorithms [TRECVID 2001; Smeaton and Over 2003]. The TRECVID workshop conducted yearly by the National Institute of Science and Technology (NIST) attracts research teams from all over the world into addressing competitive problems in content based video search and retrieval. A comprehensive overview of benchmarking in CBIR can be found in [Muller et al. 2001].

5.4 Discussion

From the current trends and the effort being put into benchmarking in CBIR, the following design goals emerge:

— *Coverage*: Benchmarks should ideally cover the entire spectrum of cases expected in real-world scenarios. This should affect the choice of evaluation datasets.

— *Unbiasedness*: Benchmarks should not show any bias toward particular algorithms or methodologies. In particular, factors such as accuracy, speed, compatibility, and adaptiveness should be given as much importance as required for the target application.

— *User-focus*: General purpose CBIR applications are designed for use by human users. A fair benchmark for such applications should adequately reflect user interest and satisfaction.

Evaluation is critical for CBIR as well as its offshoot research areas. Ideally, evaluation should be subjective, context-specific, and community-based. For example, Web-based image retrieval is best judged by a typical sampling of Internet users whereas evaluation of retrieval for biomedical applications will require users with domain knowledge and expertise. Automated annotation is best evaluated in the context of what detail the systems are aiming at. Depending on application, it may or may not be sufficient to label a rose as a flower. Illustration of stories can be best appreciated by how readers receive them.

In summary, evaluation is a vital component of system design that needs to be performed keeping in mind the end-users. CBIR and its offshoots are no exceptions. Developing user-centric benchmarks is a next generation challenge for researchers in CBIR and associated areas. However, it is important to maintain a balance between exploring new and exciting research problems and developing rigorous evaluation methods for the existing ones [Wang et al. 2006].

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

We have presented a comprehensive survey, highlighting current progress, emerging directions, the spawning of new fields, and methods for evaluation relevant to the young and exciting field of image retrieval. We have contrasted early years of image retrieval with the progress in the current decade, and conjectured specific future directions alongside. We believe that the field will experience a paradigm shift in the foreseeable future, with the focus being more on application-oriented, domain-specific work, generating considerable impact in day-to-day life.

As part of an effort to understand the field of image retrieval better, we compiled research trends in image retrieval using Google Scholar's search tool and its computed citation scores. Graphs for publication counts and citation scores have been generated for (1) sub-fields of image retrieval, and (2) venues/journals relevant to image retrieval research. Further analysis has been made on the impact that image retrieval has had in merging interests among different fields of study, such as multimedia (MM), machine learning (ML), information retrieval (IR), computer vision (CV), and human-computer interaction (HCI). Firstly, the trends indicate that the field is extremely diverse, and can only grow to be more so in the future. Second, we note that image retrieval has likely been the cause for quite a few otherwise-unrelated fields of research being brought close together. Third, interesting facts have emerged, such as: Most of the MM, CV, and AI work related to image retrieval have been published in information related venues and received high citations. At the same time, AI related work published in CV venues have generated considerable impact. At a higher level, the trends indicate that while systems, feature extraction, and relevance feedback have received a lot of attention, application-oriented aspects such as interface, visualization, scalability, and evaluation have traditionally received lesser consideration. We feel that for all practical purposes, these aspects should also be considered equally important. Due to the dynamic nature of this information, we have decided to host it externally, and update it from time to time, at `http://wang.ist.psu.edu/ survey/analysis`.

The quality (resolution and color depth), nature (dimensionality), and throughput (rate of generation) of images acquired have all been on an upward growth path in the recent times. With the advent of very large scale images (e.g., Google and Yahoo! aerial maps), biomedical and astronomical imagery which are typically of high resolution/dimension and are often captured at high throughput, pose yet new challenges to image retrieval research. A long term goal of research should therefore also include the ability to make high-resolution, high-dimension, and high-throughput images searchable by content. Meanwhile, we do hope that the quest for robust and reliable image understanding technology will continue. The future of CBIR depends a lot on the collective focus and overall progress in each aspect of image retrieval, and how much the average individual stands to benefit from it.

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