# Supervised versus Self-supervised Assistant for Surveillance of Harbor Fronts

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- Keywords: Safety, Drowning, Surveillance, Thermal Imaging, Deep Learning, Human Detection, Anomaly Detection.
- Abstract: Drowning in harbors and along waterfronts is a serious problem, worsened by the challenge of achieving timely rescue efforts. To address this problem, we propose a privacy-friendly assistant surveillance system for identifying potentially hazardous situations (human activities near the water's edge) in order to give early warning. This will allow lifeguards and first responders to react proactively with a basis in accurate information. In order to achieve this, we develop and compare two vision-based solutions. One is a supervised approach based on the popular object detection framework, which allows us to detect humans in a defined area near the water's edge. The other is a self-supervised approach where anomalies are detected based on the reconstruction error from an autoencoder. To best comply with privacy requirements both solutions rely on thermal imaging captured in an active harbor environment. With a dataset having both safe and risky scenes, the two solutions are evaluated and compared, showing that the detector-based method wins in terms of performances, while the autoencoder-based method has the benefit of not requiring expensive annotations.

# **1 INTRODUCTION**

More than 40 people drown every hour of every day. Drownings typically occur when children fall into ponds, pools or wells; passengers or workers fall overboard or sink with ships; as a consequence of floods or when people are drunk in the vicinity of water (WHO, 2014). Clearly, the causes of drowning accidents are many, as are the solutions. Here, we specifically want to address the deaths that can be prevented in urban spaces and industrial areas that are associated with harbor fronts.

A drowning person must be rescued within a few minutes. Unfortunately, it takes around 6 minutes from the authorities being alerted till a rescue boat is in the water (TrygFonden et al., 2018). This means the chance of a successful rescue is greatly improved by early preparations and accurate knowledge of the person's position. This calls for a precautionary surveillance system to provide early warnings for hazardous situations in critical areas like Figure 1 shows.

Such a surveillance system is mostly fulfilled by manual video surveillance now. However, continuously monitoring large areas of waterfronts manu-



Figure 1: Thermal surveillance imaging for detecting potentially dangerous situations and alerting authorities. An alert should be raised when someone crosses the red line.

ally is inefficient. If the operators who monitor the streams can be assisted by an intelligent system, the efficiency will be much higher. Like a human, the assistant system should be able to understand what is safe vs. risky or normal vs. abnormal. In order to grasp the ability, the system must rely on cues correlated with drowning accidents, among which the most important cue is human activity near the water's edge. Relying on this cue, we investigate two alternative solutions based on computer vision and deep learning:

• Supervised human detection: A person's location and thus distance to the harbor's edge is used to determine whether the surveillance operator should be notified.

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• Self-supervised anomaly detection: Scenes near the harbor's edge are classified as either normal or abnormal using the reconstruction loss from an autoencoder. In our case we consider a scene with any human activity in it to be unsafe, which should be classified as an anomaly. This solution is based on the fact that human activity near the water's edge is very rare.

The contributions in this work can be summarized as: An assistant surveillance system realized by two practical solutions (supervised vs. self-supervised) is proposed to detect potential drowning accidents from harbor fronts. The two solutions are evaluated and analysed with respect to strengths and weaknesses.

# 2 RELATED WORK

Although most methods, databases, and benchmarks on detecting people, activities, and anomalies differ in various ways from our harbor scenario, it is likely that many of their findings will be useful and can be transferred from RGB images to thermal images. For this reason we give an overview of related work.

### 2.1 Object Detection

With the advent of convolutional neural networks (CNN), object detection has grown rapidly. A modern detector usually consists of a backbone which is pretrained on large databases like ImageNet (Deng et al., 2009), a neck composed of several top-down connects or down-top connects to reuse extracted features, and a head predicting the objects' class and bounding box coordinates. The effectiveness of many mainstream detectors such as Faster R-CNN (Ren et al., 2015), SSD (Liu et al., 2016), YOLO (Redmon et al., 2016; Redmon and Farhadi, 2017; Redmon and Farhadi, 2018; Bochkovskiy et al., 2020; Ultralytics, 2020), and RetinaNet (Lin et al., 2017b) has been proven in benchmarks such as MS COCO (Lin et al., 2014) and PASCAL VOC (Everingham et al., 2010).

Besides working on these general object detection benchmarks, the detectors are applied to specific situations, like analyzing soccer matches by detecting players (Mazzeo et al., 2008), detecting stalled vehicles from moving vehicles to prevent traffic accidents (Shine et al., 2019), detecting pedestrians in autonomous driving context (Guo et al., 2019), monitoring social distance by human detection to stop the spread of epidemics (Punn et al., 2020). Note that the above applied scenarios are all in RGB mode and the detectors' application to thermal mode remains underexplored.

### 2.2 Anomaly Detection

Anomalies are generally defined as incidents that are unusual and rare. This makes it difficult to gather a large balanced database to train a binary normal vs. abnormal classifier using supervised learning. Interestingly, with self-supervised learning the unbalanced nature of the problem can be turned into an advantage. For this reason, techniques such as autoencoders are popular for anomaly detection (Hasan et al., 2016; Chong and Tay, 2017; Nguyen and Meunier, 2019; Duman and Erdem, 2019; Song et al., 2019; Deepak et al., 2020).

An autoencoder consists of an encoder and a decoder. The encoder learns to produce a compressed representation of the input, ending in a bottleneck. The bottleneck is the input to the decoder whose task is to reconstruct the original input from the compressed bottleneck representation. Both networks are trained by minimizing the difference between the input and its reconstruction. The core idea of selfsupervised anomaly detection using autoencoders is to use normal data to train the autoencoder. This results in the autoencoder learning to faithfully reconstruct normal data while performing poorly with abnormal data. In this way, the reconstruction error can be used to recognize anomalies, and the unbalanced nature of the data becomes an advantage.

This kind of methods for anomaly detection have been applied to datasets such as UCSD (Mahadevan et al., 2010) and Avenue (Lu et al., 2013). With the UCSD dataset, the aim is to classify the occurrence of carts, wheelchairs, skaters, and bikers as anomalies. With the Avenue dataset, anomalies include running and walking in the wrong direction as well as walking with bicycles. Again, note that these datasets are in RGB mode and the application of anomaly detection using autoencoders is unexplored when it comes to thermal mode datasets.

# **3 CHALLENGES**

In order to realize an assistant surveillance system for raising alarms to prevent drowning accidents, a range of challenges must be considered. These challenges include concerns such as privacy, challenges specific to thermal imaging, and a long tail of rare events.

### **3.1** Sensitive Data

According to the European general data protection regulation (GDPR) (Voigt and Von dem Bussche, 2017), personal data should be protected from being



Figure 2: (a) Animal. (b) Reflection.

invaded and abused. To best comply with this set of rules, privacy-friendly thermal cameras are used, making it difficult to recognize a person in captured images.

## 3.2 Thermal Imaging

The use of thermal cameras is associated with benefits and drawbacks compared with RGB cameras. Thermal cameras can be used to capture people both day and night without the need of light sources. As thermal cameras rely on thermal radiation, temperature changes in the scene will influence the imaging. For instance, during warm days, the environment temperature will approach the temperature of the human body, resulting in a loss of contrast between the foreground (people) and the background.

The insulating properties of clothing also impact the appearance of people in thermal images, thus constituting a significant source of variation. Weatherinduced phenomena such as wind, rain, and ice may also impact cameras installed outside. Moreover, the spatial resolution of thermal cameras is lower than visible light RGB cameras, which leads to the challenge of applying methods intended for high resolution RGB images to low resolution thermal images where the size of humans is relatively small.

## 3.3 Rare Phenomena

Rare and disturbing phenomena pose a challenge when developing an intelligent system since it is difficult to anticipate them. Figure 2 provides two examples from the harbor area: Figure 2(a) shows a red box around a dog which may be mistaken as a child; reflections due to water on the ground introduce false detections, as indicated by the two red boxes in Figure 2(b). Besides, as the same with other scenes, a person whose body is occluded severely or a person cluttered with a very similar background will make it difficult for any detector to work.

## **4 APPLIED METHODS**

As mentioned before, we believe both object detection and anomaly detection are worth pursuing for an assistant precaution system. This section will describe these two methods in detail. The approach based on object detection is illustrated in Figure 3(a). It processes frames individually as input and locate people in the image. If a detection is made on the water side of the red boundary, an alarm is raised. Figure 3(b) illustrates the autoencoder-based approach, where pixels from the water side of the red boundary are passed through the autoencoder and an alarm is raised if the input is poorly reconstructed, signifying an anomaly—human activity near the water's edge.

### 4.1 Supervised Human Detection

To detect a human from a long distance a successful detector should have the ability to tackle small objects, and we value three aspects that matter to this ability: anchor boxes, feature reuse, and scales, which are well designed in YOLOv5 (Ultralytics, 2020)—the applied detector in the harbor scenario.

An anchor box gives the initial size of an object, and the predicted bounding box is the updated version of the anchor box that the object corresponds to. Therefore, the definition of anchor boxes is critical in a detector because an improper anchor box (either too large or too small) not only increases the prediction time but also leads to missing objects as this anchor box may have a very low intersectionover-union (IoU) with any ground truth box. For instance, to get a satisfactory performance on COCO database, YOLOv3 (Redmon and Farhadi, 2018) uses k-means clustering algorithm on COCO training set to define 9 anchors boxes, which emphasizes the importance of database-adaptive anchor boxes. That's why YOLOv5 is utilized here. Its capacity to dynamically define the amount and sizes of anchor boxes according to the training set is of great benefits.

To accurately localize an object, appearance information from lower layers of a CNN is greatly helpful. But this information may vanish after passing through multiple layers in a deep network thus increasing the difficulty of object detection, especially for small objects. Feature reuse can address this problem by top-down or down-top bypass connections to combine features from both lower layers and deeper layers. It is to be noted that if the additional bypass itself has to go through deep layers, the efficiency of feature reuse will be reduced. YOLOv5 solves this reduced efficiency problem by introducing PANet (Liu



Figure 3: (a) Object detector where alerts are raised when people are detected on the risky side of the red boundary. (b) Autoencoder where the reconstruction error is used as an indicator of anomalies.



Figure 4: Alarm region defined as the area between the red line and the water.

et al., 2018) instead of FPN (Lin et al., 2017a) as its network neck.

A detector with predictions at only one scale often fails for objects with different sizes. To address this issue, a detector should work on several scales, a way to avoid missing detections of small objects whose information may disappear in deeper layers. Therefore, small objects are detected with larger feature maps while large objects are detected with smaller feature maps. YOLOv5 predicts outputs on three scales which have different spatial resolutions, making it a good human detector for our task.

### Safe vs. Risky Classification

If a person is detected, his/her relative location to the harbor's edge is the key to determine whether an alarm should be raised. Therefore, an alarm region near the water is predefined empirically. In Figure 4, the red line represents the alarm boundary expressed by Equation 1, and the points p1 = (67, 180)and p2 = (170, 23) are the two endpoints of the line segment. For a person detected in the *xy* coordinate system of the image, if any coordinate  $(x_p, y_p)$  within the bounding box results in a  $z_p$  in Equation 2 smaller than 0, the person is deemed inside the alarm region.

$$1.53x + y - 283 = 0 \tag{1}$$

$$z_p = 1.53x_p + y_p - 283 \begin{cases} \ge 0, & safe \\ < 0, & risky \end{cases}$$
(2)

### 4.2 Self-supervised Anomaly Detection

In order to measure human activities in regions near the water, we train an autoencoder formed by a standard 9-layer CNN structure, where the 5-layer encoder and 5-layer decoder share a bottleneck having 8 channels. In the encoder the convolutional filters increase in numbers (32, 64, 128, 256) while the feature maps decrease in sizes along with layers going deeper. Inversely, the decoder consists of transposed convolutions where the filters decreases in numbers (256, 128, 64, 32) and feature maps increase in sizes as the network approaches the output. With exception of the penultimate layer of the decoder, the output of each layer is batch-normalized and uses a LeakyReLU activation function. And the autoencoder is trained using normal images consisting of the background with the Mean Squared Error (MSE) as its loss function  $^{1}$ .

#### **Reconstruction Error as a Measure of Activity**

In order to explore the usefulness of reconstruction error as a measure of human activity, we use a square region (of size  $64 \times 64$ ) near the water's edge. From this region 35,809 thermal images with very limited or no human activities are collected across hours and then used as normal frames to train an autoencoder. After training, a continuous sequence of 1250 thermal images, with significant human activities in some frames, is fed into the autoencoder to explore the change in reconstruction error over time.

This exploration is illustrated in Figure 5, where the four images in Figure 5(a) are samples from the 4 locations represented by the red lines in Figure 5(c), and Figure 5(b) shows the reconstructions by the au-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>Code at https://github.com/JinsongCV/Supervised-Versus-Self-supervised-Assistant-for-Surveillance-of-Harbor-Fronts.



Figure 5: (a) Input patches from the region near the water's edge. (b) Corresponding reconstructions from the autoencoder. (c) The blue graph illustrates the reconstruction loss as across the sequence and the vertical red lines correspond to the samples shown in Figure 5(a) in the same order.

to encoder for their corresponding inputs in Figure 5(a). From Figure 5(b), it is clear that the autoencoder fails to reconstruct humans. This results in a high reconstruction error represented by the blue graph in Figure 5(c). As more people enter the area, the error increases further. This exploration proves the potential for monitoring human activity and detecting anomalies by self-supervised learning with the reconstruction error as a measurement.

### Normal vs. Abnormal Classification

A threshold, as defined in Equation 3, can be used to classify the data as normal (safe) or abnormal (risky). It can be determined either manually or automatically. If determined manually, the threshold will be based on the tacit knowledge and experience of the human operator. An automatic threshold can be determined from a small labeled dataset, where the threshold reaching the desired balance between precision and recall for anomaly alarms is chosen.

$$\begin{cases} MSE < threshold, \quad normal(safe) \\ MSE \ge threshold, \quad abnormal(risky) \end{cases}$$
(3)

To enable comparison with the detector-based method, an alarm region is defined between the red line segment from Section 4.1 and the edge of the harbor (see Figure 6). This region is transformed to a



Figure 6: Region for anomaly detection by the autoencoder.

rectangle (of size  $64 \times 192$ ) as the input to the antoencoder by using OpenCV's warpPerspective function.

## **5 EXPERIMENTS**

This section gives the dataset information and experiments to prove the feasibility of both solutions.

The thermal camera is placed below the bridge to cover a popular walking path. To evaluate the two methods, the videos (of size  $384 \times 288$ ) from February 3, 2020 to March 3, 2020 were collected by an authorized computer which protects the data from invasions. Different types of weather (rainy days, snowy days, windy days, and sunny days) occurred during this period, making the database more diverse and less biased. To consider the challenges of contrast, weather, and rare phenomena mentioned before, we manually selected and annotated 2358 images, which were then divided into the training set (1715), validation set (143), and test set (500). Note that this manual annotation means labeling bounding boxes for human detection. Besides, to fairly compare both solutions, autoencoder-based anomaly detection also uses the same 2358 images for training and evaluation. The experimental platform consists of a machine equipped with a NVIDIA GeForce RTX 2080Ti, Ubuntu 16.04 LTS, CUDA 9.2, Python 3.7.0, and Pytorch 1.6.0.

### 5.1 Supervised Surveillance Assistant

YOLOv5s (Ultralytics, 2020) is fine-tuned by stochastic gradient descent with momentum 0.9 from a pretrained model on COCO dataset. The learning rate is set as 0.001. The training phase stops at 120th epoch where the network has converged. Other settings remain the same with the original YOLOv5s.

In the testing phase, the best model on the validation set is used to do detection on the test set, achieving an average precision (AP<sub>50</sub>) of 97.70%. Besides AP<sub>50</sub>, the accuracy of true alarms for risky situations is also measured. Among the 500 test images, 91 of them have persons existing in the alarm region defined



Figure 7: A failed case which should have raised an alarm. The red box refers to the undetected person.

in Section 4.1. Based on the human locations predicted by YOLOv5s and Equation 2, 85 out of the 91 images are classified as risky situations and no false alarms are raised, indicating a recall of 93.41% and a precision of 100%. All the 6 failed cases are related to undetected persons having very small sizes. One example is shown in Figure 7 where the red box refers to the undetected person. As YOLOv5s is applied to frames from videos, it is likely that the undetected person will be detected in the earlier or later frames. As a whole, no matter with AP<sub>50</sub> or with alarm rates, human detection-based method works well.

# 5.2 Self-supervised Surveillance Assistant

In order to produce comparable results to the supervised surveillance assistant, the alarm region defined in Figure 6 is cropped and transformed from the same training set and test set used for the human detector. The autoencoder is trained from scratch for 200 epochs using the Adam optimizer with a learning rate of 0.0005. The experiments regarding anomaly detection using an autoencoder includes: (1) Automatically determining a threshold. (2) Investigating the sensitivity to abnormal data in the training set.

### **Finding a Suitable Threshold**

As mentioned in Section 4.2, a threshold for the reconstruction error can either be determined manually or automatically. Here, we suggest computing the threshold by optimizing the F1 score on the training dataset (including 1628 normal images and 87 abnormal images). With the maximal F1 score of 0.917 this leads to a threshold at 0.000597 MSE.

### Sensitivity to Abnormal Training Data

It is labor-intensive to make sure that the training set contains only normal patterns. For this reason we want to investigate the sensitivity of the method to



Figure 8: Distribution of normal (green dot) and abnormal (red dot) samples along with the decision threshold (red line). 21 False Positives (FP), 9 False Negatives (FN), 82 True Positives (TP), 388 True Negatives (TN).

small amounts of abnormal data. We compare training with two datasets, one consists of 1628 normal patterns, the other consists of 1715 in total (1628 normal and 87 abnormal images). Table 1 shows the two versions' performances on the test set, expressed as the area under the precision-recall curve (AUC). The slightly lower performance with the inclusion of abnormal images demonstrates the method's sensitivity to abnormal training data and supports the suspected conclusion that the occurrence of abnormal data is detrimental in the training set.

Table 1: Performance comparison between two models trained on different datasets. "Normal" is trained on 1628 normal images. "Normal+abnormal" is trained on a set containing an additional 87 abnormal images.

Model	AUC
Normal	0.929
Normal+abnormal	0.904

#### **Distribution of Normal and Abnormal Samples**

With a threshold at the MSE of 0.000597, the best performing model achieves a recall of 90.11% and a precision of 79.61% on the test set. Figure 8 shows the distribution of normal and abnormal samples in the test set along with the threshold found using the F1 score. We expect normal frames (green dot) to generally be placed underneath the red line and abnormal frames (red dot) to be placed above the line.

To further investigate the failures in Figure 8, 4 cases are selected (two correctly and two wrongly classified) shown in Figure 9. Specifically, Figure 9(a) is a normal image mis-classified as abnormal due to the higher heat absorption and reflection of the harbor's concretes and metals; Figure 9(c) is an abnormal



Figure 9: (a) A normal image with loss of 0.00095. (b) A normal image with loss of 0.00006. (c) An abnormal image with loss of 0.00029. (d) An abnormal image with loss of 0.02281.

image mis-classified as normal because of the low signal of human activity as a person is just entering the scene from the right side. This indicates the challenge of providing a reasonable standard of anomaly especially when a person has just entered the region. As a contrast, Figure 9(b) and (d) are classified correctly.

Table 2: Performance comparison on the test set having no entering images. "Normal" and "Normal+abnormal" correspond to the models in Table 1. "Normal+ clean abnormal" is trained on the training set without entering images.

Model	AUC
Normal	0.995
Normal+abnormal	0.974
Normal+clean abnormal	0.975

This person-entering problem originates from a simple automatic annotation based on human locations. Any coordinate (within a ground truth bounding box of a person) located in the alarm region results in a labeling as abnormal. To reduce the unfair influence of such entering phenomena, we manually sort both the 1715 training set and the 500 test set, resulting in an additional "entering" category that will be disregarded. Therefore, the training set is now composed of 1628 normal images and 30 abnormal images, without 57 entering images; the new test set is composed of 409 normal images and 79 abnormal images, without 12 entering images. The experiment mentioned in Table 1 is redone with the new datasets, and the results can be seen in Table 2, where "Normal" and "Normal+abnormal" are the same models from Table 1. Because the entering images are removed, the AUC is much better on the reduced test set (409+79). "Normal+clean abnormal" means that the model is trained on the new training set (1628+30)without entering images.

# **6 DISCUSSION**

**Failure Modes.** The object detector is prone to FN due to unconventional appearance, occlusion, and clutter. The autoencoder on the other hand benefits from unconventional appearance but suffers from FP due to unusual backgrounds such as higher heat reflections.

**Training Effort.** The object detector requires a large number of annotations. If this can be achieved, a detector can perform well in the vast majority of scenes without additional fine-tuning or reconfiguration. The autoencoder on the other hand requires retraining for each scene. In return, it requires no labeling or very limited labeling, which means it can be adapted to a specific problem with little effort.

**Future Work.** In future we want to consider temporal information and depth information for better differentiation of activities and image homography to remove perspective influences. Besides, the two approaches will have to be evaluated using a much larger and more diverse dataset to ensure that these solutions are workable all year across multiple locations.

# 7 CONCLUSION

We compare two alternative vision-based methods for assisting the surveillance of harbor fronts with high risk of drowning accidents. One method utilizes object detection to detect people in low resolution thermal images and to raise warnings when people are detected inside a risky area. The detector is able to perform this task with perfect precision and a high recall of 93.41%. It fails in situations with occlusion and clutter. The other method uses an autoencoder and measures human activity based on the reconstruction error between input frames and the autoencoder's reconstructions. The autoencoder-based approach achieves a recall of 90.11% and a precision of 79.61%. It fails due to unusual background phenomena such as heat reflections and people only partially entering the monitored region. Given that the two methods have different strengths and weaknesses, one or the other might be more appropriate depending on the application.

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