Robotics report

1 - Line Following

1.1 - Approaching the problem

To create the line following algorithm we first looked at different potential approaches towards the problem. The first approach we considered was using a Convolutional neural network. This would involve using a neural network to identify the rope in order for the robot to follow it. This would be effective as it means that the colour of the rope wouldn't matter since the Artificial Intelligence (AI) could identify any colour of rope. However this could cause issues with the robot losing the rope on the ground misidentifying other objects as rope.

A second solution is to use an edge detection algorithm and then apply various filters to isolate the rope. However, this is a very complicated solution and would be very slow to run as well as being prone to the same misidentifying problems as the AI approach. This approach does have the benefit of being applicable to any colour rope since it would be detecting the shape of the rope and not the colour.

Another approach is using an image processing pipeline to identify the rope by colour. This approach would be beneficial as it is fast to run and doesn't require any training unlike the AI methods. However, the drawback of this approach is it would not work on other colour ropes and has to be set to detect each colour individually as well as being affected by noise in the image. As a result, for this technique to be successful in any path-following environment, it would be essential to program the robot with the ability to recognise a wide range of colours and select and appropriate mask to create the final, thresholded image. However, for this project, it is only required that the robot can recognise a blue and yellow line. This is the method we decided to go with.

One final approach is to combine these approaches together. This would consist of image processing on the image along with edge detection. This new image could then be used as input for the AI to identify the rope. This would be a very effective strategy since it would identify the rope reliably and be less effected by noise. However this would be very slow and would also be prone to all the problems associated with each solution.

1.2 - Image Processing Pipeline

The image is first blurred to remove any noise in the image and reduce the error that would arise through detection on a noisy image. The blurred image is then converted to a Hue, Saturation, Value (HSV) colour representation. We then create a mask for the specified colour range in HSV. The colour range for blue is (90, 80, 25) to (105, 255,255) and the colour range for yellow is (15, 25, 25) to (50, 255,255). This mask is then applied to the image which removes all colours that aren't in this range. We then convert this image to grayscale and finally perform thresholding on the image to leave a final image as a series of white pixels.

These conversions are done in the get yellow and get blue functions. This functions take an image as input and returns the results of this process.

This image then has the top of it converted to black since the robot is only concerned with what is in front of it. And this removes any background objects that could influence the image and give the program an unnecessary amount of data to process.

1.3 - Moving the Robot

To have the robot follow the line we first need to identify what colour the line is. This is done by passing each frame into both of the image processors (yellow and blue) and then setting the current line colour to the one with the most white pixels. However, noise in the image can cause the robot to switch between thinking the rope is blue and thinning the rope is yellow. To reduce this issue a running poll of the last nine frames is taken and the majority vote for these frames is then used to set the line colour. This running poll is done within the camera class.

We then take the thresholded image from the output of the believed line colour and if there is more than a set number of white pixels in the middle of the image, then the robot moves forward. This can be viewed as the robot determining that there is a straight line of rope in front of it. If there are more than a set number of white pixels on the left of the image the robot will begin to turn left and the same is true for the white. This movement is done through a movement loop in which the state of the robot’s current view is re-evaluated at regular intervals to give an up-to-date model of the environment.

1.4 – Program Flowchart

A screenshot of a diagram

Description automatically generated

1.5 – Testing the robot

To test the robot we first test to see if the robot is identifying the rope as the correct colour. This can be seen by looking at the image output of the image processing pipeline. If the image is a solid white line then the robot has correctly identified and converted the input image. One of the main challenges that arose from this section is getting the image processing system to ignore any noise or objects that weren’t the line. For example, when detecting the blue line, the thresholding algorithm had to be very accurately tuned so that it didn’t mistake the floor for a line. Additionally, in sunny environments, the image returned after processing contained numerous patches of white where the sun has been mistaken for the yellow line. For this case, the gaussian filter used for blurring had to be intensified, followed by a change in the accepted values of the yellow mask. This ensured that the whiter light of the sun was ignored, leaving only the line in the final image.

We then test whether the robot can adapt to the change of line colour by picking it up and moving it to the other line. If it quickly changes the running poll is updating correctly as it should update within the 9 frame length of the poll.

We then test if the robot can follow and turn with the line. This is done by observing the movement. If the movement is too jittery tit means that the robot is trying to turn too rapidly or is trying to follow a path that is too narrow. Furthermore, the tests included picking the robot up to slightly or greatly reduce it’s current positioning on the line. This was done to determine the robot’s ability to adjust by taking in its current environment and turning so that it can travel forwards again. This also examined the ways in which the robot performs when traveling around the path in the other direction to ensure it can work well with a wide range of different turn angles.

1.6 – Results



For the first pipeline test the can reasonably reliably identify the rope in the image. This can be seen in the output to the right. This could be improved by narrowing down the exact colour needed for the mask. This would allow the robot to better identify the whole rope and would remove any excess noise.

When it comes to the colour changing test, the robot reliably changes colour in a short amount of time. This is a result of the running poll. Using a running poll allows the robot to update to view the line colour in real time. One way to improve the time it takes to transfer from one line to another is to reduce the size of the poll. This would allow the robot to look at less frames to change the colour and thus speed up changeover time. However the issue with this is while it would improve the changeover time, it would also introduce more uncertainty in the line identification process. This could be mitigate by improving the image processing pipeline to more accurately identify the colour of the rope.

The result of the final test of the robot’s movement is that the robot can move around the track at a reasonably fast rate. This is good, however, the robot will often stop and turn left or right slightly while on the rope. This is because when the robot turns at the corners it does not give an exact turn. This leads to the robot being slightly misaligned to the rope. This could be mitigated by adding in a new option in the movement process where instead of just left right and forward, the robot could also move forward left and forward right where the turn is gradual. This would allow the robot to fix misalignment issues while it is moving instead of having to stop and adjust.