Human-Robot Collaboration in Industry 5.0

Research Internship Project

General Context and Challenges

Human-Robot collaboration aims at combining the advantages of robots, like high speed and good repeatability, with the flexibility and adaptability of human workers. Robots can support humans when performing physically challenging tasks and at the same time allow automation in scenarios previously considered unfeasible. As a result, complex manufacturing processes can be carried out even though shortage of skilled labor continues to rise. The use of collaborative robots could consequently contribute to social and economic sustainability of industry.

Recently, the European Commission started a complementary approach to Industry 4.0, called Industry 5.0. It is a transformative vision of the European industry, moving toward more sustainable, human-centric, and resilient systems [1]. In this new paradigm, human-robot collaboration refers to environments, where humans and robots work in proximity, sharing their workspaces, resources, or even their tasks [2]. In such working setup new challenges arise that are related to the productivity, but also to the safety of human workers. Safety aspects are of utmost importance for the acceptance of this technology [3] and for the commissioning of such systems, various normative requirements must be met [4] [5].

Machine vision in human-robot collaboration

Although machine learning and artificial intelligence have allowed considerable advances in computer science, its industrial adoption in the domain of robotics is still in its early stages. A review of recent achievements is available in [6]. A few elementary tasks remain open: distinguishing background and objects, identifying moving objects, identifying partially covered objects, recognizing changing shapes or articulation or understanding the position and orientation of objects. All these tasks are required to enable the following paradigms:

- safety – collision avoidance (with humans and obstacles)
- coexistence – the robot capability of sharing the workspace with other workers
- collaboration – capability of performing robot tasks with direct human interaction and coordination

The presence of humans in the workspace or the random presence of objects to be manipulated introduces uncertainty that requires sensor inputs for robot control. Three sensory modalities have become dominant: vision, touch and distance, see e.g. [7]. The sensing can be used for actuation, servoing, trajectory planning, and security [8]. Sensors can be mounted on the robot or fixed in the workspace (referred to as “eye-in-hand” and “eye-to-hand” visual servoing, respectively). The sensor inputs are translated to servoing commands via the classic inverse kinematic problem [9] or recently, using reinforcement learning.

Objectives of the project

1) Make a literature survey on the state of the art to identify existing solutions and identify current technological barriers for ensuring the safety and enabling the collaboration.
2) 3D space perception can be provided to the robot using low-cost sensors such as RGB+D (e.g. the Kinect). Convenient datasets [10] with humans are available.
3) Train a model to detect presence of humans and determination of position of all human body parts in the space [11]. Train a model to segment and identify principal parts of the body – head, arms, hands, legs and feet and provide 3D position in space for all.
4) Create a demonstrator using a chosen sensor and a real-time, data-processing application illustrating the concept.

Project Advisor

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Pre-requisities: image analysis skills, AI coding skills (tensorflow, pytorch)

Literature:

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