Diagnosis of UAV Pitot Tube Defects Using Statistical Change Detection

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles need a large degree of tolerance to faults. One of the most important steps towards this is the ability to detect and isolate faults in sensors and actuators in real time and make remedial actions to avoid that faults develop to failure. This paper analyses the possibilities of detecting faults in the pitot tube of a small unmanned aerial vehicle, a fault that easily causes a crash if not diagnosed and handled in time. Using as redundant information the velocity measured from an onboard GPS receiver, the air-speed estimated from engine throttle and the pitot tube based airspeed, the paper analyses the properties of residuals. A dedicated change detector is suggested that works on pre-whitened residuals and a generalised likelihood ratio test is derived for a Cauchy probability density, which the residuals are observed to have. A detection scheme is obtained using a threshold that provides desired quantities of false alarm and detection probabilities. Fault detectors are build based on raw residual data and on a whitened edition of these. The two detectors are compared against recorded telemetry data of an actual event where a pitot tube defect occurred.