

# System-Level Safety Monitoring and Recovery for Perception Failures in Autonomous Vehicles

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**Abstract**—The safety-critical nature of autonomous vehicle (AV) operation necessitates development of task-relevant algorithms that can reason about safety at the system level and not just at the component level. To reason about the impact of a perception failure on the entire system performance, such task-relevant algorithms must contend with various challenges: complexity of AV stacks, high uncertainty in the operating environments, and the need for real-time performance. To overcome these challenges, in this work, we introduce a Q-network called SPARQ (abbreviation for Safety evaluation for Perception And Recovery Q-network) that evaluates the safety of a plan generated by a planning algorithm, accounting for perception failures that the planning process may have overlooked. This Q-network can be queried during system runtime to assess whether a proposed plan is safe for execution or poses potential safety risks. If a violation is detected, the network can then recommend a corrective plan while accounting for the perceptual failure. We validate our algorithm using the NuPlan-Vegas dataset, demonstrating its ability to handle cases where a perception failure compromises a proposed plan while the corrective plan remains safe. We observe an overall accuracy and recall of 90% while sustaining a frequency of 42Hz on the unseen testing dataset. We compare our performance to a popular reachability-based baseline and analyze some interesting properties of our approach in improving the safety properties of an AV pipeline.

Website: [kaustavk.github.io/sparq](https://kaustavk.github.io/sparq)

## I. INTRODUCTION

Safety of autonomous vehicles (AVs) heavily relies on the correctness of perception systems. This has spurred a plethora of work in developing monitors aimed at detecting perception failures [1]–[4]. However, triggering a fail-safe maneuver for every detected perception error is impractical and detrimental to the AV’s navigation goals. Not all perception failures are equal; some bear no impact on the AV’s safety (e.g., missed parked vehicle far off from the AV’s motion plan), while others can be catastrophic (e.g., missed pedestrian along the AV’s motion plan); the latter are referred to as task-relevant (or system-level) perception failures [5]. Identifying task-relevant perception failures and reacting to them poses significant challenges: First, the AV operates in highly uncertain environments, making it difficult to assess the system-level impact of perception failures. Second, these monitors must assess the system-level impact of complex AV stacks at run-time, ideally at a much higher



Fig. 1: We propose SPARQ, a run-time system-level safety monitor to detect and mitigate task-relevant perception failures. Here, the perception suite failed to detect the red car. This resulted in AV (the green car) planning an unsafe trajectory (blue line). SPARQ flags the planned trajectory as unsafe and suggests a corrective safe plan (cyan line) that accounts for the perception failure.

frequency than the AV stack. Finally, even if the perception failure is detected, there might not be enough time to replan a safe motion accounting for the perception errors. In this work, we address these challenges by developing a Q-network-based monitor called SPARQ (abbreviation for Safety evaluation for Perception And Recovery Q-network) that, in real-time, detects task-relevant perception failures and generates corrective recovery plans. We envision a task-relevant perception monitoring and recovery pipeline that has four main blocks: a component-level *perception monitor* that identifies the failure mode that is occurring, a *plausible scene generator* which produces plausible scenes accounting for the perception failure, a *safety monitor* which quantifies how risky it is to execute a given motion plan in the plausible scenes while accounting for the uncertain future predictions of other agents, and finally, a *recovery planner* which generates a recovery maneuver in the event of a task-relevant perception failure (see Fig. 2 for the block diagram). Unfortunately, perception monitors have very stringent compute requirements and need to run at frequencies much higher than that of the AV stack, which makes it infeasible to run such an intricate monitoring pipeline online – indeed, the slow speed of the modular monitoring pipeline was something we observed in our previous work [5] as well. SPARQ resolves this problem by learning a neural approximation of the last three blocks, providing run-time capabilities for our task-relevant perception monitoring and recovery pipeline.

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## **Table of Contents Failures Level 14**

1. Understanding the eBook Failures Level 14
  - The Rise of Digital Reading Failures Level 14
  - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
2. Identifying Failures Level 14
  - Exploring Different Genres
  - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
  - Determining Your Reading Goals
3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
  - Popular eBook Platforms
  - Features to Look for in an Failures Level 14
  - User-Friendly Interface
4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from Failures Level 14
  - Personalized Recommendations
  - Failures Level 14 User Reviews and Ratings
  - Failures Level 14 and Bestseller Lists
5. Accessing Failures Level 14 Free and Paid eBooks
  - Failures Level 14 Public Domain eBooks
  - Failures Level 14 eBook Subscription Services
  - Failures Level 14 Budget-Friendly Options

6. Navigating Failures Level 14 eBook Formats
  - ePub, PDF, MOBI, and More
  - Failures Level 14 Compatibility with Devices
  - Failures Level 14 Enhanced eBook Features
7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience
  - Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of Failures Level 14
  - Highlighting and Note-Taking Failures Level 14
  - Interactive Elements Failures Level 14
8. Staying Engaged with Failures Level 14
  - Joining Online Reading Communities
  - Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
  - Following Authors and Publishers Failures Level 14
9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books Failures Level 14
  - Benefits of a Digital Library
  - Creating a Diverse Reading Collection Failures Level 14
10. Overcoming Reading Challenges
  - Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
  - Minimizing Distractions
  - Managing Screen Time
11. Cultivating a Reading Routine Failures Level 14
  - Setting Reading Goals Failures Level 14
  - Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time
12. Sourcing Reliable Information of Failures Level 14
  - Fact-Checking eBook Content of Failures Level 14
  - Distinguishing Credible Sources
13. Promoting Lifelong Learning
  - Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development
  - Exploring Educational eBooks
14. Embracing eBook Trends
  - Integration of Multimedia Elements

- Interactive and Gamified eBooks

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