Pink Noise Is All You Need

Colored Noise Exploration in Deep Reinforcement Learning

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AUTONOMOUS LEARNING
MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE
FOR INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS

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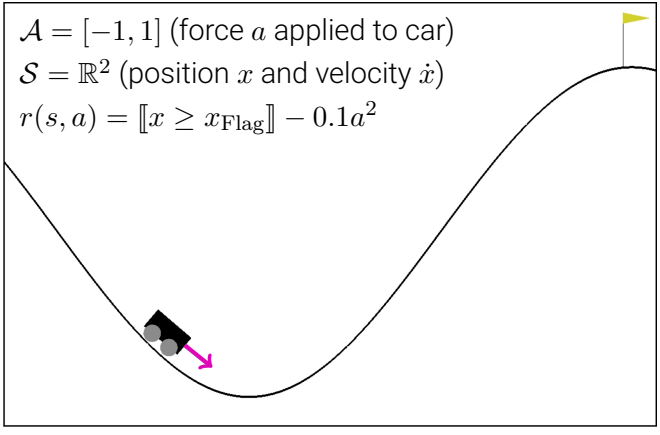
Introduction

- Setting: Reinforcement learning for continuous control
- Mountain-car problem: Why is exploration necessary?



White Noise Exploration

- Usual method for exploration: add some noise ε_t to actions
- If $\varepsilon_t \sim \mathcal{N}(0, I)$ independently at every time step, then $\varepsilon_{1:T}$ is called **white noise**
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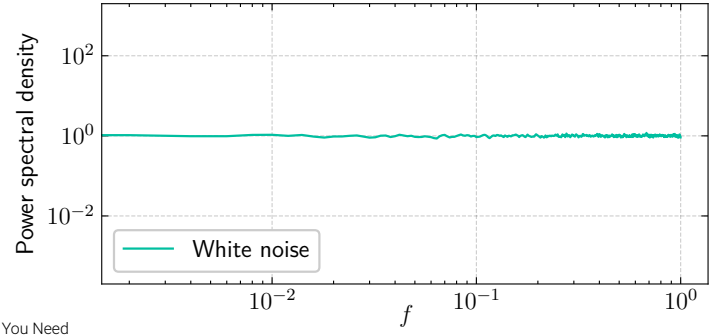
- The **power spectral density** (PSD) is defined for any signal $\varepsilon(t)$ as

$$|\hat{\varepsilon}(f)|^2 \quad \text{where} \quad \hat{\varepsilon}(f) = \mathcal{F}[\varepsilon(t)](f)$$



Temporal Correlation

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- Problem: Very strong temporal correlation $\rightarrow$ poor performance if not needed
- Idea: Use **intermediate temporal correlation** to get best of both worlds

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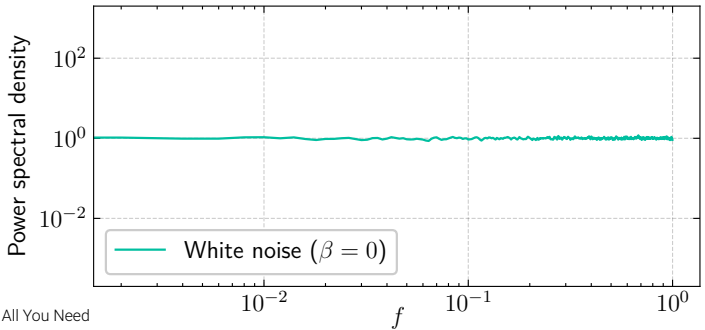

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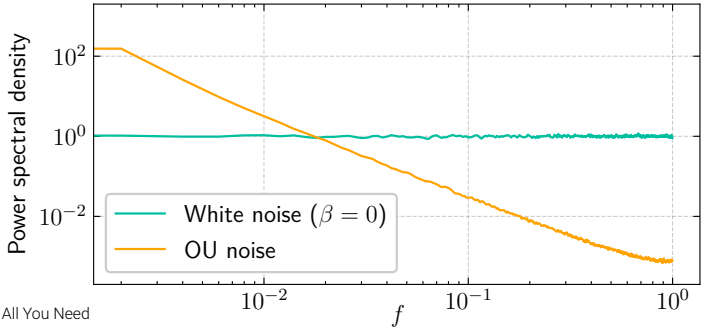
- OU noise is related to red noise (CN with $\beta = 2$)



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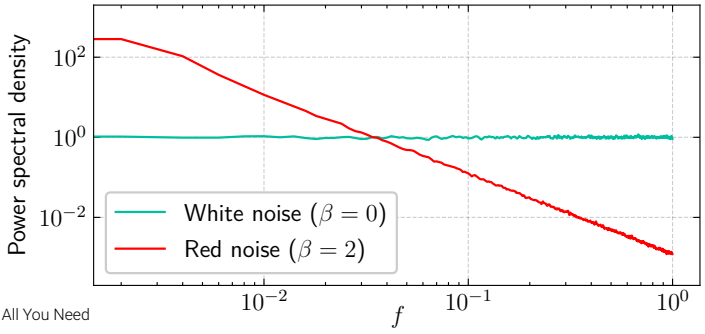

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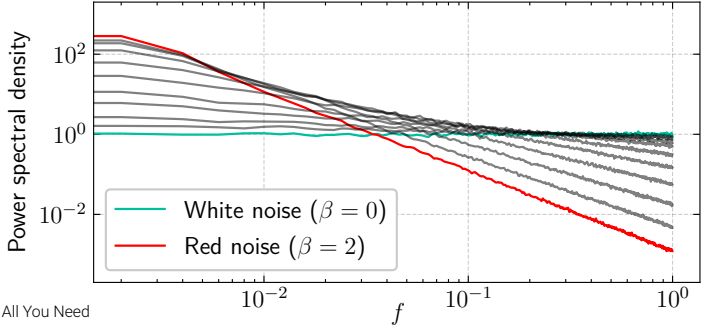

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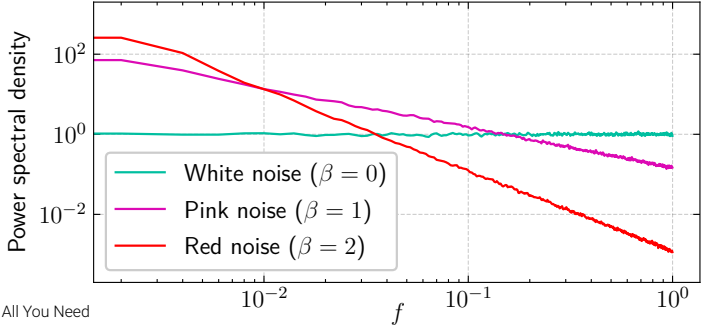
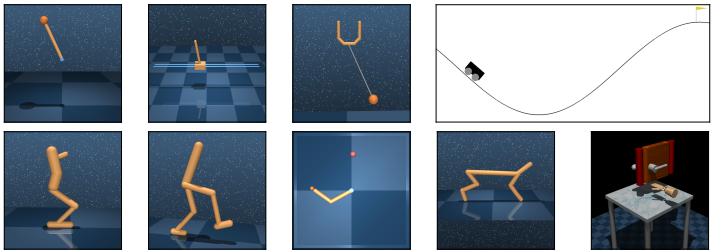


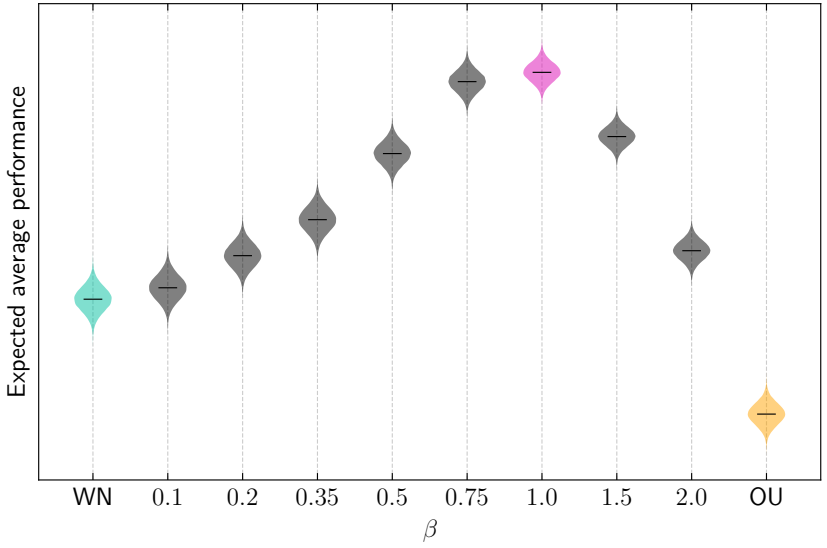
Experiments

- We perform experiments on a number of benchmark tasks using MPO and SAC

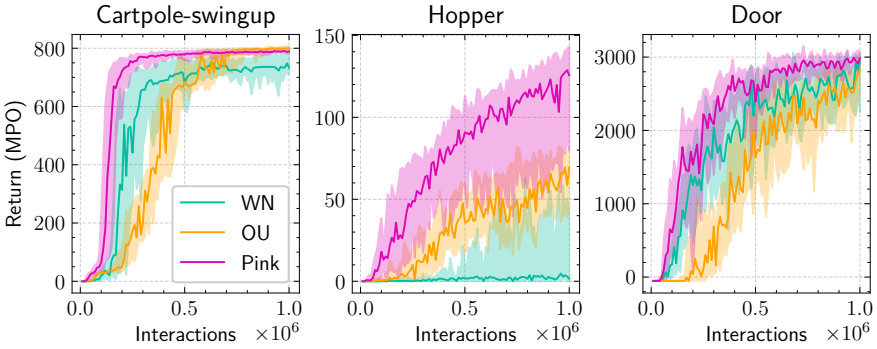


- Measure **average performance** (mean normalized performance across all tasks)
  - Default action noise should work well everywhere

Results


Expected average performance
WN
0.1
0.2
0.35
0.5
0.75
1.0
1.5
2.0
OU
β

Results



- Pink noise works well on **all** environments we tested
- Not true for white noise or OU noise!

Pink Noise

- Other experiments: β-schedules, random β selection, bandit β selection
- Pink noise performed better than all these methods

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Why does pink noise work so well as a default?

- Works very well on some environments
- Works well on all environments

A Bounded Integrator

- Simple 2-dimensional “bounded integrator” environment:

$$\boldsymbol{s}_{t+1} = \text{clip}(\boldsymbol{s}_t + \boldsymbol{a}_t, -c\mathbf{1}, +c\mathbf{1})$$

- Parameterized by its size (area = $4c^2$)

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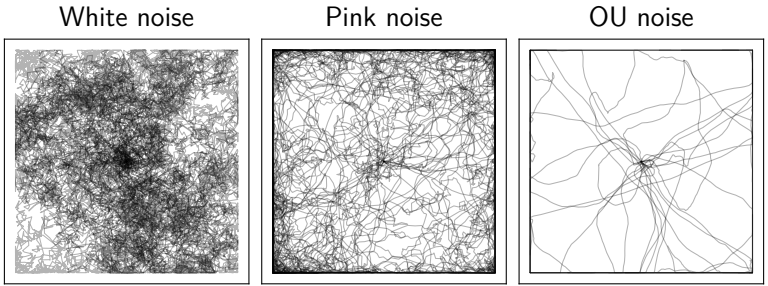

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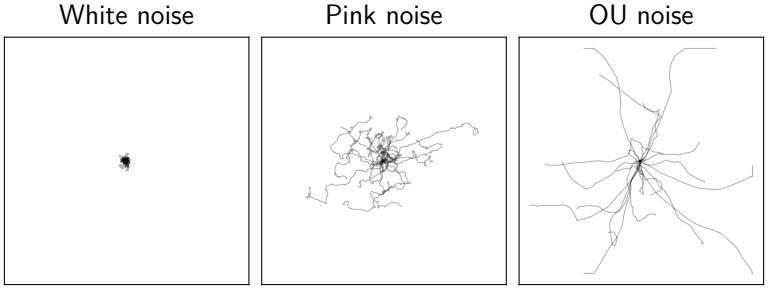

Large space ($c = 1000$)

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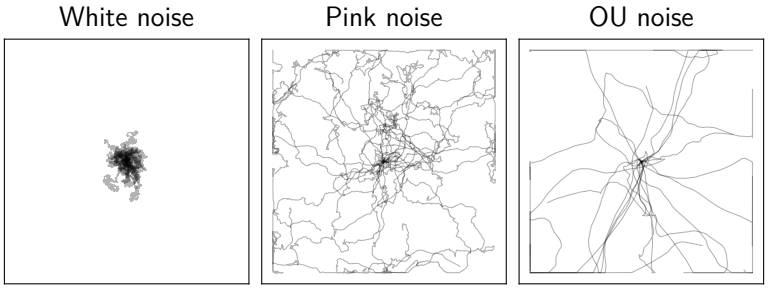

Medium space ($c = 250$)

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- Measure exploration by estimating state-visitation entropy
- Repeat for a large range of environment sizes

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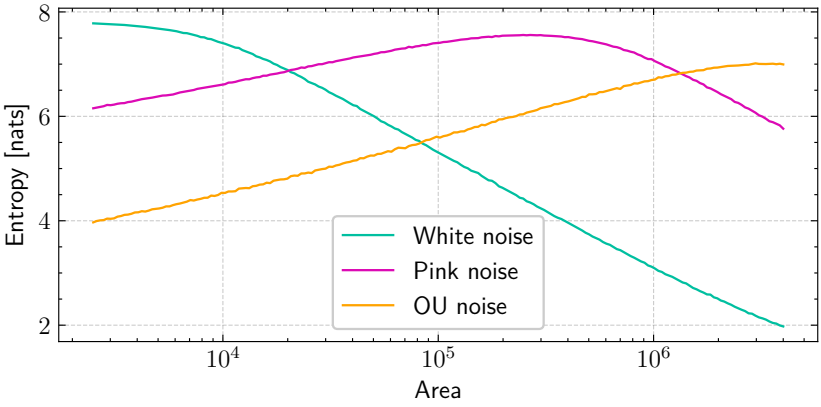

The Power of Pink

- Very similar results on a second simplified environment
- Pink noise is **general**: less sensitive to the environment parameterization
- Explains average performance results (benchmark experiments)
  - Many different tasks with different preferences $\rightarrow$ general noise preferable

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Takeaway

- Try **pink noise** as the default action noise

```
pip install pink-noise-rl
```

Thank you!

More Info:

`https://bit.ly/pink-noise-rl`