Understanding Computation with Computation

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… and many others

Algorithm synthesis

- Computer science: what can be automated?
- Can we ***automate our own work***?
- Can we outsource algorithm design to computers?
  - **input:** problem specification
  - **output:** asymptotically optimal algorithm

Verification and synthesis

- **Verification**:
  - given problem P and algorithm A
  - does A solve P ?
- **Synthesis**:
  - given problem P
  - find an algorithm A that solves P ?

Verification and synthesis

- Algorithm **verification** often difficult
  - easy to run into e.g. halting problem
- Algorithm **synthesis** is entirely hopeless?
- Not necessarily!
  - verifying ***arbitrary*** algorithms in model M
  - synthesising only "***nice***" algorithms in model M

Setting

- Our focus: **distributed algorithms**
  - multiple nodes working in parallel
  - complicated interactions between nodes
  - possibly also faulty nodes, adversarial behaviour
- Computational techniques in algorithm design can outperform human beings

Setting

- We do **theory**, not practice
- Desired outputs:
  - ***algorithm design & analysis***
  - ***lower-bound proofs***
- We want **provably correct algorithms**, not something that “seems to work”

Four success stories…

Success stories (1/4)

- **Fault-tolerant digital clock synchronisation**
  - nodes have to ***count clock pulses modulo c*** in agreement: all nodes say "this is pulse *k*"
  - ***self-stabilising algorithms***: reaches correct behaviour even if the starting state is arbitrary
  - ***Byzantine fault tolerance***: some nodes may be adversarial

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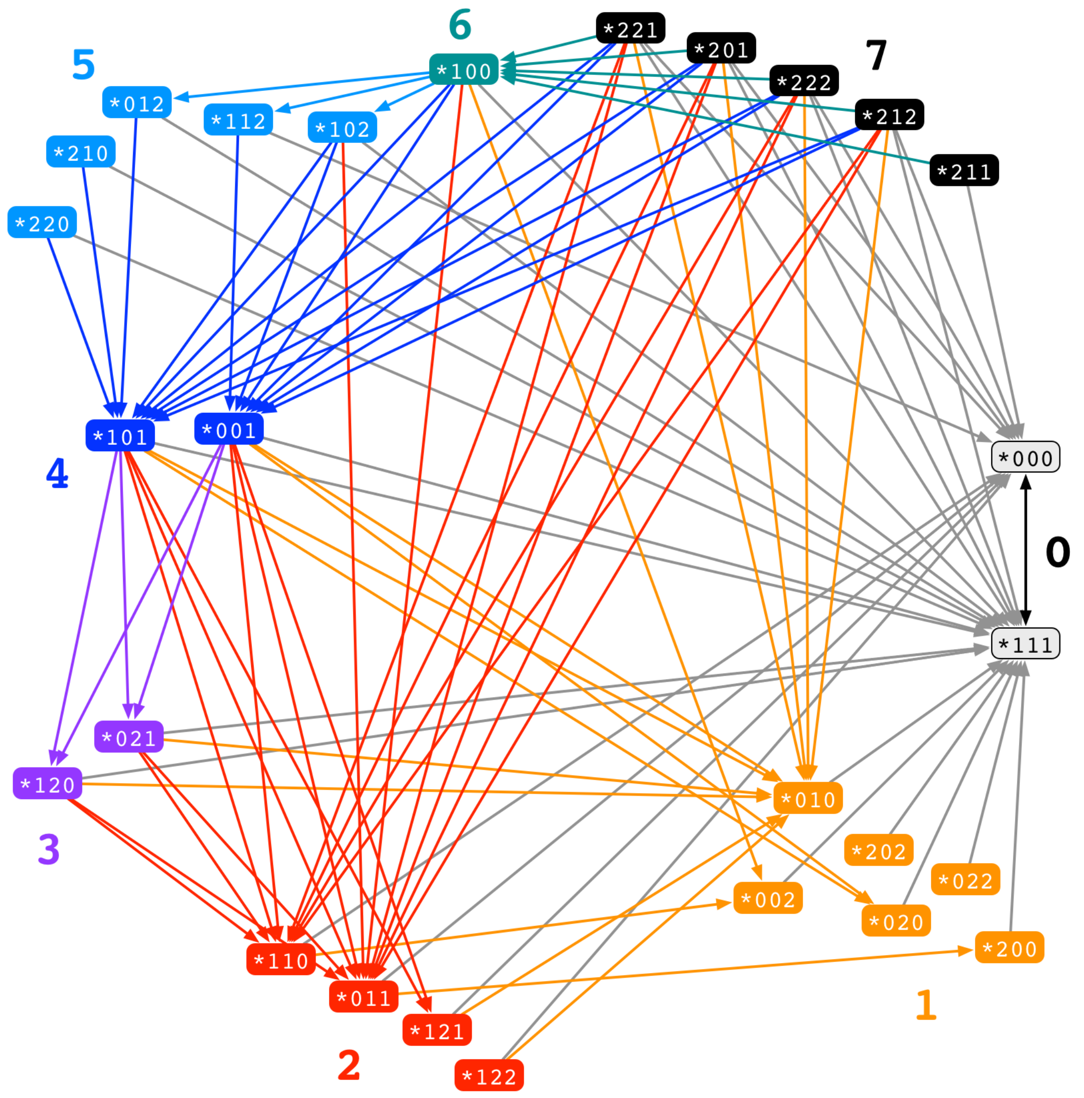
4 nodes

1 faulty node

3 states per node

always stabilises
in at most 7 steps



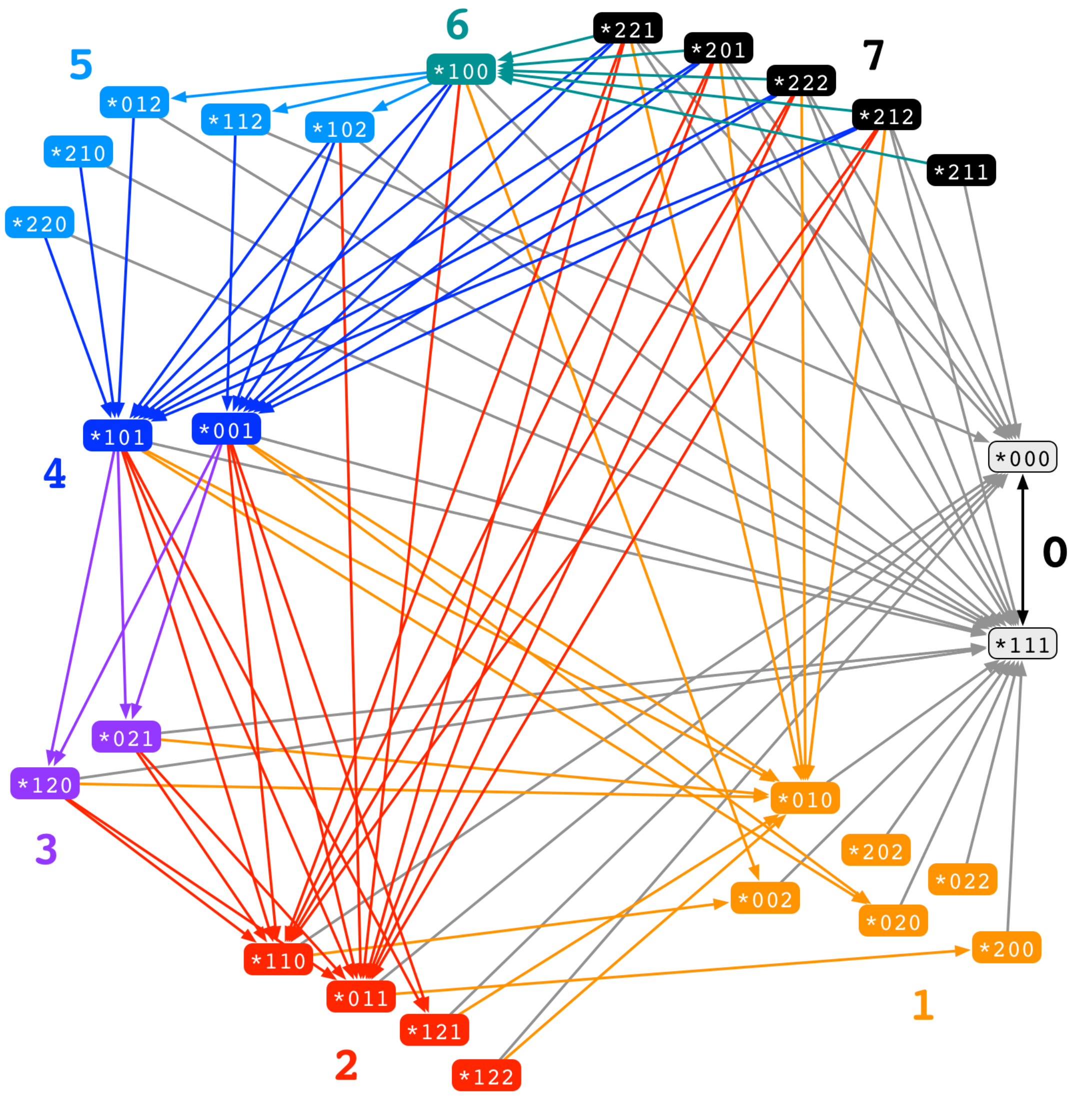
Efficient computer-designed solution for the ***base case***

+

human-designed ***recursive step***

=

efficient solution for the ***general case***

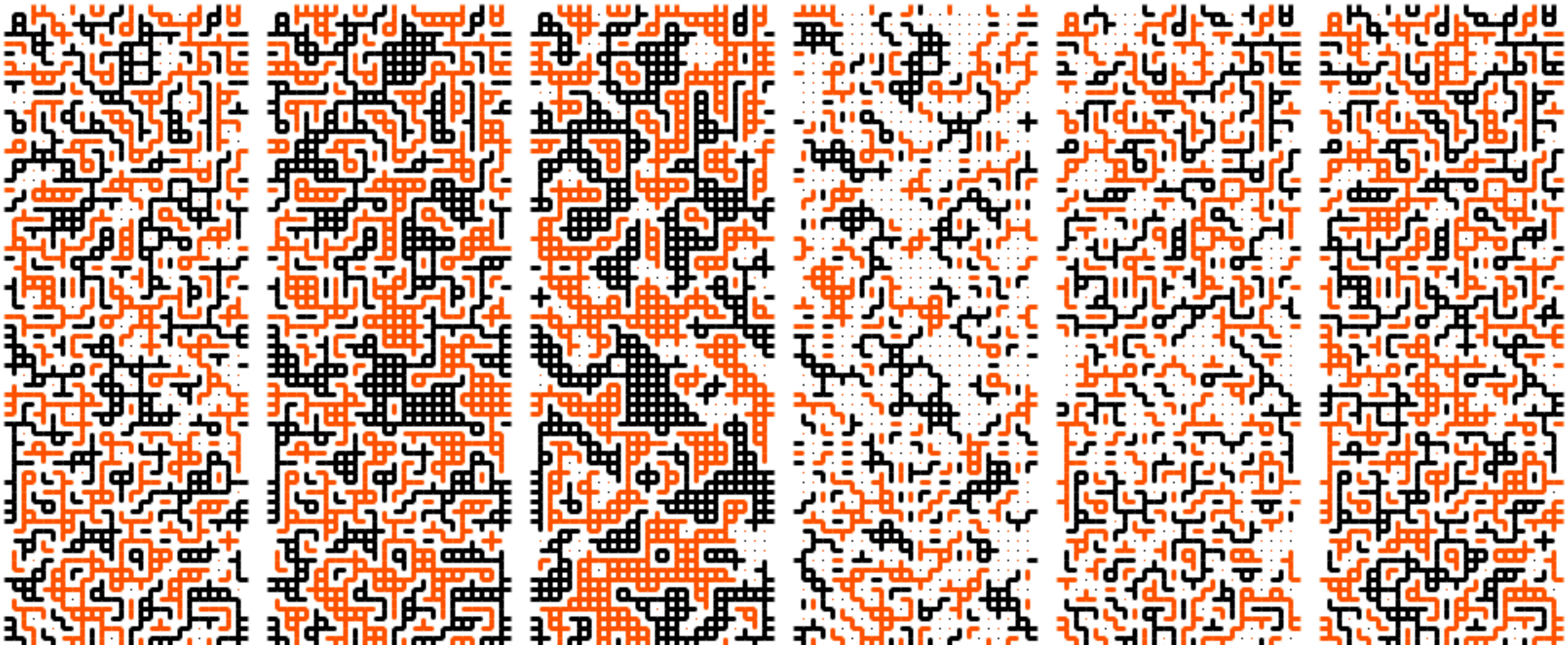


Success stories (2/4)

- **Theorem:** any triangle-free *d*-regular graph has a cut of size $\left(\frac{1}{2} + \frac{0.281}{\sqrt{d}}\right) m$
  - prior bound: $\left(\frac{1}{2} + \frac{0.177}{\sqrt{d}}\right) m$ (Shearer 1992)
- **Proof:** we design a ***simple randomised distributed algorithm*** that finds such cuts (in expectation)

Electronic Journal of Combinatorics 2017

Pick a random cut, change sides if at least $\left\lceil \frac{d+\sqrt{d}}{2} \right\rceil$ neighbours on the same side

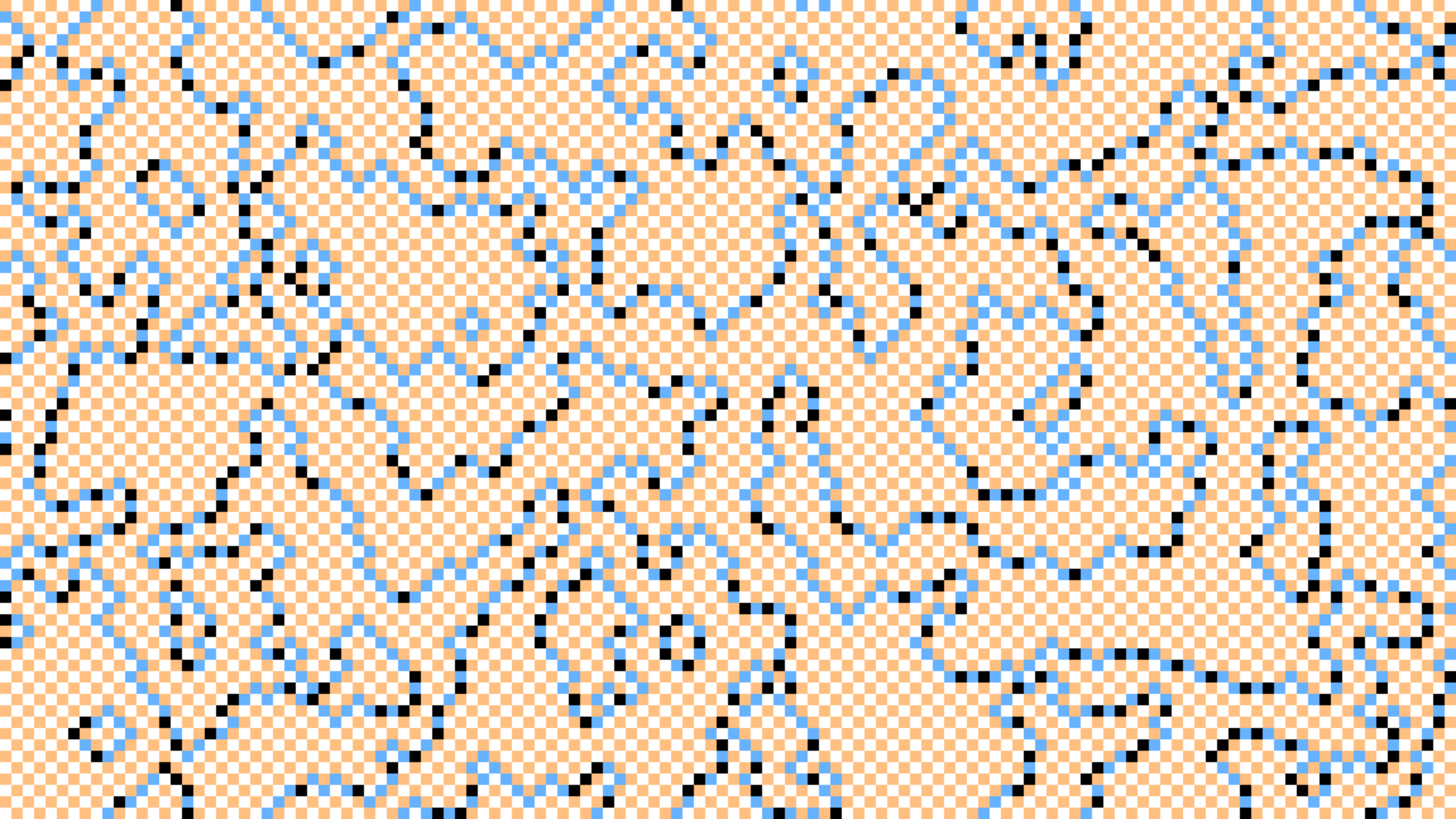


Success stories (3/4)

- Classical symmetry-breaking primitive:
  - input: directed path coloured with ***n* colours**
  - output: directed path coloured with **3 colours**
- Prior work: **½ log*(*n*) ± *O*(1)** rounds
- New result: exactly **½ log*(*n*)** rounds for infinitely many *n*

Success stories (4/4)

- Any **locally checkable labelling problem**
  - maximal independent set, colouring …
- Setting: cycles, 2-dimensional grids, …
- Complexity is $O(1)$, $\Theta(\log^* n)$, or $\Theta(n)$
- **Synthesis possible for class $\Theta(\log^* n)$**



Key challenges

Key challenges

- A combinatorial search problem
  - find an object *A* that satisfies these constraints…
- How to make the problem **finite**?
  - so that the problem is ***solvable at least in principle***
- How to solve it in **practice**?
  - how to avoid ***combinatorial explosion***

Key challenges

- Much easier to make the problem finite if we **fix some parameters**:
  - algorithm for $n = 10$ nodes?
  - algorithm for any n, but maximum degree $\Delta = 10$?
- How to **generalise**?

How to generalise

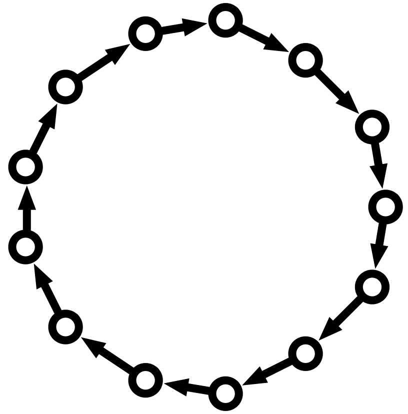
1. **Computer-inspired algorithms**
   - computer solves ***small cases***, generalise the idea
2. **Generalise by induction**
   - computer solves the ***base case***, prove inductive step
3. **Direct synthesis for the general case**
   - sit down and relax

How to generalise

1. **Computer-inspired algorithms**
   - example: ***large cuts***
2. **Generalise by induction**
   - example: ***clock synchronisation***
3. **Direct synthesis for the general case**
   - example: ***$O(\log^* n)$-time algorithms***

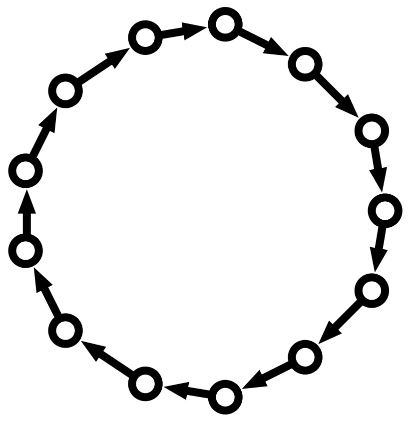
A simple example

LCLs on cycles



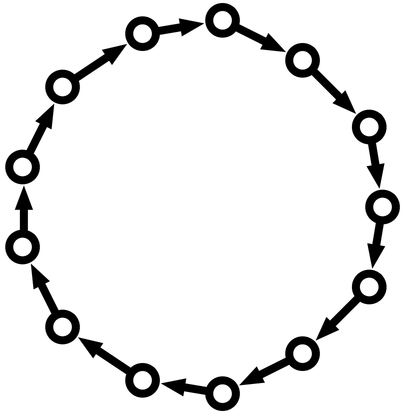
- Computer network = directed n-cycle
  - nodes labelled with **$O(\log n)$-bit identifiers**
  - each round: each node exchanges (arbitrarily large) **messages** with its neighbours and updates its state
  - each node has to output its **own part of the solution**
  - ***time = number of rounds*** until all nodes stop
  - equivalently: ***time = distance*** (how far to look)

LCLs on cycles



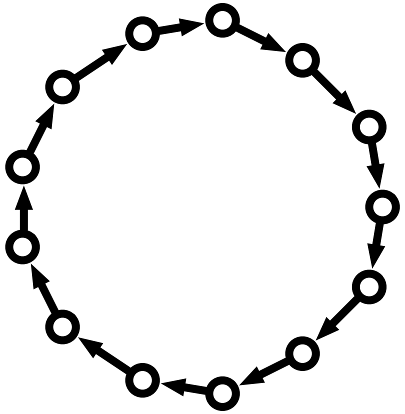
- LCL problems:
  - solution is globally good if it **looks good in all local neighbourhoods**
  - examples: vertex colouring, edge colouring, maximal independent set, maximal matching…
  - cf. class NP: solution ***easy to verify***, not necessarily easy to find

LCLs on cycles



- 2-colouring: inherently global
  - $\Theta(n)$ rounds
- 3-colouring: local
  - $\Theta(\log^* n)$ rounds

LCLs on cycles

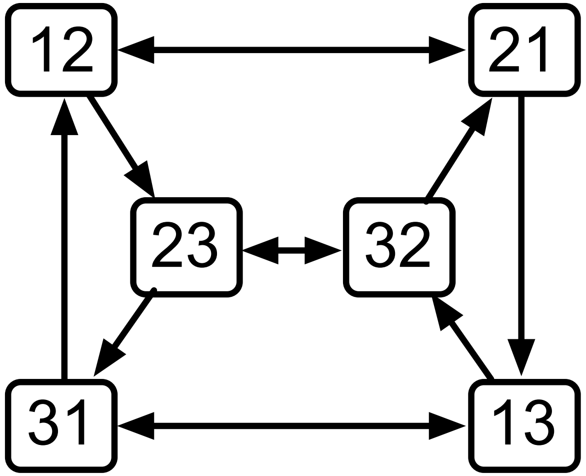


- Given an algorithm, it may be very difficult to **verify**
  - easy to encode e.g. halting problem
  - running time can be any function of n
- However, given an LCL problem, it is very easy to **synthesise** optimal algorithms!

LCLs on cycles

- LCL problem ≈ set of feasible local neighbourhoods in the solution
- Can be encoded as a graph:
  - node = neighbourhood
  - edge = “compatible” neighbourhoods
  - walk ≈ sliding window

3-colouring

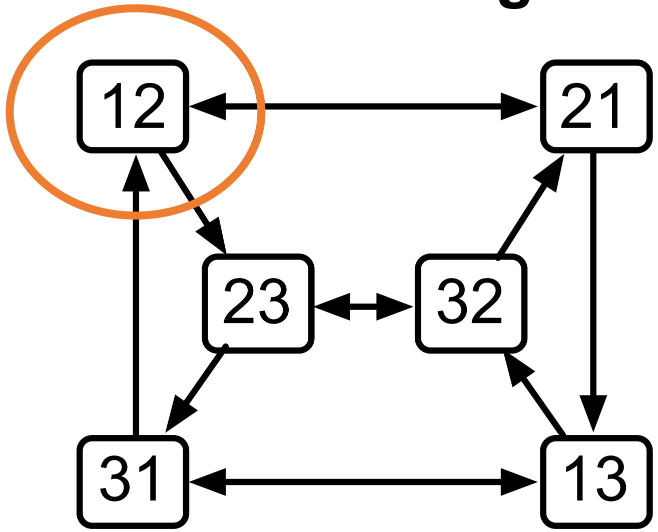


LCLs on cycles

Neighbourhood v is "***flexible***" if for all sufficiently large k there is **a walk $v \to v$ of length k**

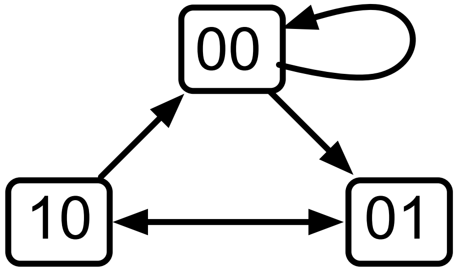
- equivalent: there are walks of coprime lengths
- "**12**" is flexible here, $k \geq 2$

3-colouring



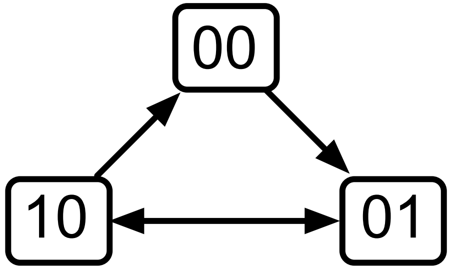
LCLs on cycles

independent set

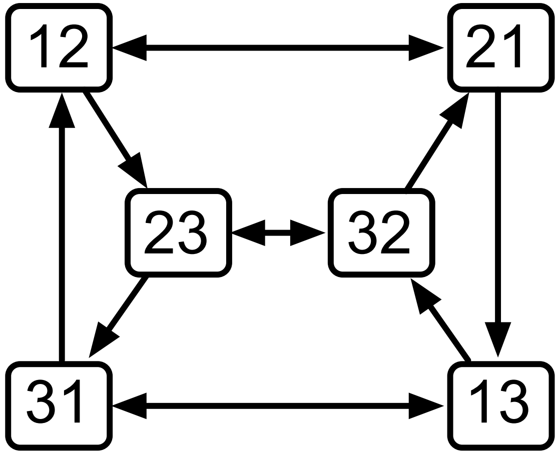


self-loops:
$O(1)$

maximal independent set

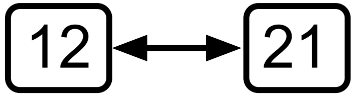


3-colouring



flexible states:
$\Theta(\log^* n)$

2-colouring



otherwise:
$\Theta(n)$

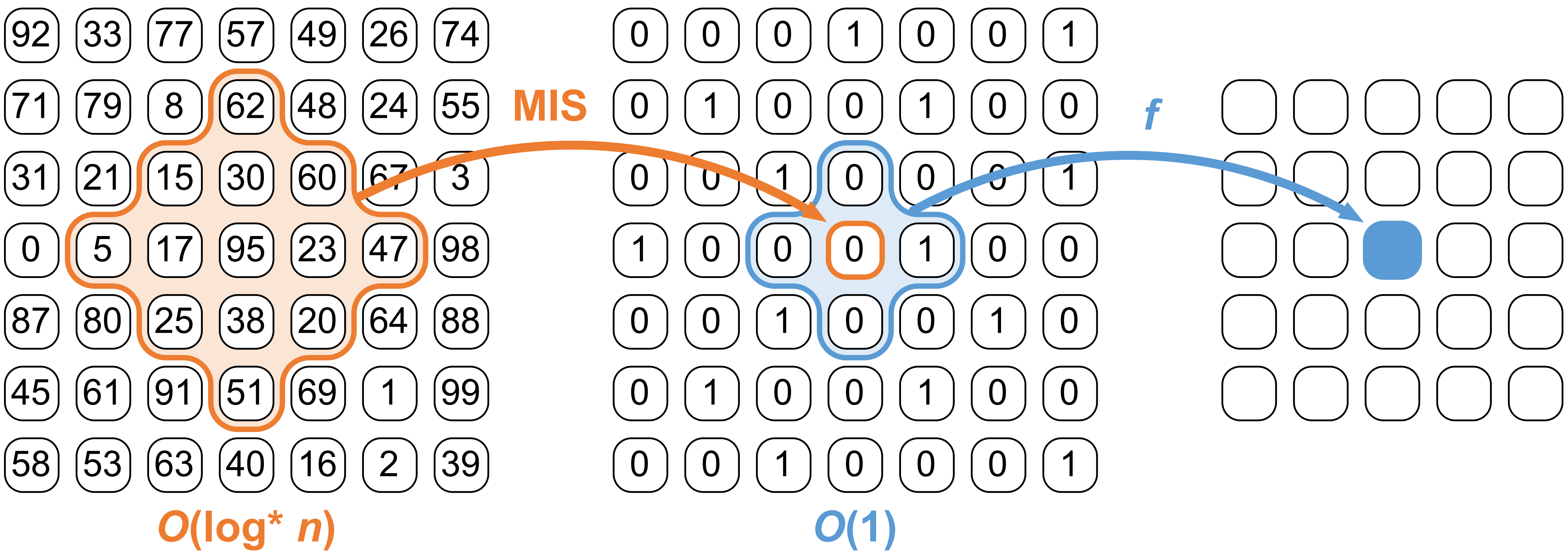
LCLs on cycles

- Verification hard but synthesis easy:
  - construct graph, analyse its structure
- "**Compactification**":
  - any LCL problem can be represented ***concisely*** as a graph
  - seemingly open-ended problem of finding an efficient algorithm is reduced to a simple graph problem

Beyond cycles

Beyond cycles

- Classification **undecidable** on 2D grids
  - "is this problem solvable in $O(\log^* n)$"
- But **1 bit of advice** is enough!
  - just tell me whether it is solvable in time $O(\log^* n)$
  - then I can find an optimal algorithm — at least in principle, but often also in practice
  - key insight: "***normal form***" for any such algorithm


92 33 77 57 49 26 74
71 79 8 62 48 24 55
31 21 15 30 60 67 3
0 5 17 95 23 47 98
87 80 25 38 20 64 88
45 61 91 51 69 1 99
58 53 63 40 16 2 39
MIS
0 0 0 1 0 0 1
0 1 0 0 1 0 0
0 0 1 0 0 0 1
1 0 0 0 1 0 0
0 0 1 0 0 1 0
0 1 0 0 1 0 0
0 0 1 0 0 0 1
f
O(log* n)
O(1)

Key tools

- Domain-specific part:
  - constructing the **concise representation**
  - algorithms for ***enumerating*** all possible "neighbourhoods", "configurations", etc.
- Generic part:
  - efficient **SAT solvers** (and other solvers)
  - e.g. ***lingeling***, ***picosat***, ***akmaxsat***

High-throughput algorithmics

- We can use computers to **mass-produce** data on computational complexity:
  - here are 2^{16} computational problems…
  - try to ***synthesise fast algorithms for all of them***!
  - see where computers fail
  - find a ***concise representation*** of unsolvable cases
  - excellent starting point for human beings

Future

- How far can we push these techniques?
  - immediate next steps: distributed algorithms in much more general graph families
- More focus on ***meta-algorithmics***?
  - how to design algorithms for designing algorithms
- Algorithms for ***lower bounds***?