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# On Factor Universality in Symbolic Spaces

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**Abstract.** The study of factoring relations between subshifts or cellular automata is central in symbolic dynamics. Besides, a notion of intrinsic universality for cellular automata based on an operation of rescaling is receiving more and more attention in the literature. In this paper, we propose to study the factoring relation up to rescalings, and ask for the existence of universal objects for that simulation relation.
In classical simulations of a system $S$ by a system $T$, the simulation takes place on a specific subset of configurations of $T$ depending on $S$ (this is the case for intrinsic universality). Our setting, however, asks for every configurations of $T$ to have a meaningful interpretation in $S$. Despite this strong requirement, we show that there exists a cellular automaton able to simulate any other in a large class containing arbitrarily complex ones. We also consider the case of subshifts and, using arguments from recursion theory, we give negative results about the existence of universal objects in some classes.

## 1 Introduction and definitions

Tilings and cellular automata are two paradigmatic models often considered in the fields of complex systems and natural computing. They are complementary —one is static and non-deterministic and the other is dynamic and deterministic— but they are both formally simple and both related to symbolic spaces. Moreover, many links are now established between the two models (see for instance [10,9]) so it is natural to consider them together.

Both are known to be Turing-powerful since their introduction in the mid-20th century [23,17]. However, analyzing their ability to process information only through translations into the Turing world is very restrictive. Such models of natural computing deserve a natural and intrinsic notion of reduction to compare their objects one to each other. Following this line of thought, several notions of simulations were proposed recently which are intrinsic to each model, and lead to corresponding intrinsic notions of universality [18,22,14,5]: a system is universal if it is able to simulate any other from the same class.

Intrinsic universality for cellular automata is probably the most studied of such notions [19,20,15,2,6]. The underlying relation of simulation uses uniform

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encodings working at the level of blocks of cells. More precisely, S simulates T if S, when restricted to a suitable subset of 'correct' configurations, is isomorphic to T via such an encoding. Our approach is different and uses redundancy of information instead of restriction to a subset of configurations. In our setting, S simulates T if there is a uniform way of projecting *the whole* phase space of S onto the phase space of T (a precise definition is given below). The question addressed by this paper is the existence of universal objects with respect to that simulation relation, we call them *factor universal* objects.

The first contribution of this paper is the formalism based on the well-known mathematical notion of action: it allows to encompass both subshifts and cellular automata, it gives a new look at the notion of cell grouping which is the root of the simulation relation used in intrinsic universality, and it establishes connections with the work of Hochman [8] where the use of sub-actions is crucial. Our main result is that, although factor-universal objects do not generally exist (theorem 1), it can still be constructed for some large class like the set of cellular automata having a persistent state (theorem 2).

***Basic definitions.*** Given a finite set $Q$ and an integer $d \geq 1$, the *symbolic space* of *dimension* $d$ over *alphabet* $Q$ is the set $Q^{\mathbb{Z}^d}$. It can be seen as an infinite set of cells arranged as a lattice $\mathbb{Z}^d$ and each carrying a value from $Q$. An element of $Q^{\mathbb{Z}^d}$ is called a *configuration*. $Q^{\mathbb{Z}^d}$ is naturally equipped with the compact Cantor topology [13] which is the product topology of the discrete topology on $Q$ (it can also be defined via a metric).

Another key notion in the context of symbolic spaces is that of *finite patterns* that may occur in infinite configurations. For our purpose, rectangular patterns will be enough. Given $\boldsymbol{z} = (z_1, \cdots, z_d) \in \mathbb{Z}^d$ with $z_i > 0$ for all $i$, the hyperrectangle $\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z}}$ is the set of vectors $\boldsymbol{z'} = (z'_1, \cdots, z'_d) \in \mathbb{Z}^d$ such that $0 \leq z'_i < z_i$ for all $i$. A $Q$-pattern of shape $\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z}}$ is a coloring of $\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z}}$ by $Q$, that is an element of $Q^{\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z}}}$. Given a configuration $c \in Q^{\mathbb{Z}^d}$, the pattern of shape $\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z_s}}$ extracted from $c$ at position $\boldsymbol{z_p} \in \mathbb{Z}^d$, denoted by $\mathcal{P}^{\boldsymbol{z_s}}_{\boldsymbol{z_p}}(c)$, is simply the coloring:

$$z \in \mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z_s}} \mapsto c(z_p + z).$$

The objects we study (subshifts and cellular automata) share the property of being uniform, *i.e.* invariant by translations. Formally, given $z \in \mathbb{Z}^d$ the translation of vector $z$, denoted $\sigma_z$, is the function mapping a configuration $c \in Q^{\mathbb{Z}^d}$ to the configuration $\sigma_z(c)$ such that $\forall z' \in \mathbb{Z}^d$, $\sigma_z(c)(z') = c(z' + z)$.

A *subshift* is a subset of $Q^{\mathbb{Z}^d}$ which is both translation invariant and closed for the Cantor topology. Equivalently, a subshift is a set $\Sigma_L$ of configurations avoiding any occurrence of any finite pattern from a given language of patterns $L$:

$$\Sigma_L = \left\{ c \in Q^{\mathbb{Z}^d} \,:\, \forall z, z' \in \mathbb{Z}^d,\ \mathcal{P}^{\boldsymbol{z}}_{\boldsymbol{z'}}(c) \notin L \right\}.$$

A subshift of *finite type* is a subshift of the form $\Sigma_L$ where $L$ is finite. There are strong connections between subshifts of finite type in dimension 2 and sets of tilings generated by a set of wang tiles. In particular, due to Berger's theorem [1], it is undecidable, given a finite $L$, to determine whether $\Sigma_L$ is empty or not.

A *cellular automaton* is a local and uniform map on a symbolic space. Formally, it is given as a 4-tuple by its dimension $d$, its alphabet $Q$, its *neighborhood* $V \subseteq \mathbb{Z}^d$ (finite) and its *local transition map* $f : Q^V \to Q$. To that formal object we associate a *global map* $F$ acting on $Q^{\mathbb{Z}^d}$ as follows:

$$\forall c \in \mathbb{Z}^d, \forall z \in \mathbb{Z}^d,\ F(c)(z) = f\big(z' \in V \mapsto c(z+z')\big).$$

The fundamental theorem of Curtis-Lyndon-Hedlund [7] states that global maps of cellular automata are exactly continuous maps on symbolic spaces which commute with translations.

***Actions and rescalings.*** Let $(\mathbb{M}, +)$ be a monoid (a set equipped with an associative law and a neutral element). An $\mathbb{M}$-*action* on a space $X$ is a function $\Psi : \mathbb{M} \times X \to X$ such that $\Psi(0, x) = x$ (for all $x \in X$ and 0 being the neutral element of $\mathbb{M}$) and

$$\forall x \in X, \forall m, m' \in \mathbb{M},\ \Psi(m + m', x) = \Psi\big(m, \Psi(m', x)\big).$$

We will use the formalism of action to study both subshifts and cellular automata:

- if $\Sigma \subseteq Q^{\mathbb{Z}^d}$ is a subshift, we canonically associate to it the $\mathbb{Z}^d$-action $\Psi_\Sigma$ on $\Sigma$ defined by $\Psi_\Sigma(z, x) = \sigma_z(x)$;
- if $F$ is a cellular automaton on the space $Q^{\mathbb{Z}^d}$, we canonically associate to it the $\mathbb{N} \times \mathbb{Z}^d$-action $\Psi_F$ on $Q^{\mathbb{Z}^d}$ defined by $\Psi_F\big((t, z), x\big) = \sigma_z \circ F^t(x)$.

If $\mathbb{M}'$ is a sub-monoid of $\mathbb{M}$, $\Psi$ induces a $\mathbb{M}'$-action by restriction to the domain $\mathbb{M}' \times X$. $\mathbb{M}$ and $\mathbb{M}'$ can be isomorphic or not and both cases might be interesting. For instance, studying a cellular automaton $F$ as a classical dynamical system consists in forgetting the spacial component of $\Psi_F$ and focusing on the pure temporal action of $F$. This point of view was often adopted in the literature (*e.g.*, topological dynamics of cellular automata [13]) but, interestingly enough, recent work of Sablik [21] tends to re-incorporate the spacial component of actions to better study the dynamics of cellular automata.

In this paper, we will only consider the case where $\mathbb{M}$ and $\mathbb{M}'$ are isomorphic. More precisely, in our context, $\mathbb{M}$ will be of the form $\mathbb{Z}^d$ or $\mathbb{N} \times \mathbb{Z}^d$ and we will consider sub-monoids of the form $\mathbb{M}' = t_0\mathbb{N} \times z_1\mathbb{Z} \times \cdots \times z_d\mathbb{Z}$, with $t_0 > 0$ and $z_i > 0$ for all $i$. In this case, passing from the $\mathbb{M}$-action to the $\mathbb{M}'$-action can be seen as a neutral change of point of view on the system that we call *rescaling* in the sequel. The intuition is that we change the discrete units of time and space, passing from 1 to $t_0$ in time and 1 to $z_i$ in direction $i$. Given a subshift or a cellular automaton, a *scaled action* is simply the restriction of their canonical action to some sub-monoid of the form $\mathbb{M}'$. It is worth noticing that a scaled action associated to a subshift (resp. a cellular automaton) on the alphabet $Q$ is always isomorphic to the canonical action of a subshift (resp. a cellular automaton) on an alphabet of the form $Q^k$. More concretely, this isomorphism comes from the natural one-to-one map from $Q^{\mathbb{Z}^d}$ to $\big(Q^{\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z_s}}}\big)^{\mathbb{Z}^d}$,

where $\boldsymbol{z_s} = (z_1, \ldots, z_d)$, which maps a configuration $c$ to: $z \mapsto \mathcal{P}^{\boldsymbol{z_s}}_{\boldsymbol{z} \times \boldsymbol{z_s}}(c)$, where the operation $\times$ on $\mathbb{Z}^d$ denotes coordinate-wise multiplication. Our notion of rescaling for cellular automata is similar to the one in [18,22] which is the basic ingredient to define intrinsic universality.

***Factors.*** One of the central notion in symbolic dynamics is that of *factor*. Intuitively, a factor is a uniform continuous projection. This notion has also been used with success in the study of expansive cellular automata [16] and more generally as a classification tools for cellular automata [12,3]. As we study both multi-dimensional subshifts and cellular automata, we give a unified definition using the formalism of actions.

**Definition 1** *Let $\mathbb{M}$ and $\mathbb{M}'$ be isomorphic monoids via $i : \mathbb{M} \to \mathbb{M}'$. We say a $\mathbb{M}'$-action $\phi'$ on $X'$ is a* factor *of a $\mathbb{M}$-action $\phi$ on $X$ if there is a continuous onto map $\pi : X \to X'$ such that: $\forall x \in X, \forall m \in \mathbb{M},\ \pi\big(\phi(m, x)\big) = \phi'\big(i(m), \pi(x)\big)$.*

Two key points are that: (1) any orbit in $(\phi, X)$ projects onto some orbit of $(\phi', X')$ via $\pi$, and (2) any orbit of $\phi'$ can be realized as such a projection. In a word, the simulation of $(\phi', X')$ by $(\phi, X)$ is *everywhere meaningful* and *complete*.

## 2 Factor Universality

At this point, we could compare subshifts or cellular automata through the factoring relation between their canonical actions, saying that system $S$ factors onto system $T$ if the canonical action of $S$ factors onto that of $T$. However, this gives an excessive importance to the alphabet and forbid the existence of universal objects due to entropy considerations (factoring cannot increase entropy). In [8], this limitation is bypassed via dimension changes: a $d$-dimensional system is compared to $k$-dimensional systems ($k < d$) via its $k$-dimensional sub-actions. Our point of view is different. We always work at constant dimension, but we use another kind of sub-actions: *scaled actions* defined above. For a fixed dimension monoids of scaled actions are all isomorphic and we will consider only canonical component-wise isomorphisms between them. We can now formulate the central definition of the paper.

**Definition 2** *Let $S$ and $T$ be two $d$-dimensional subshifts (resp. CA). We say that $T$ is simulated by $S$, denoted $T \preccurlyeq S$, if some scaled action of $S$ factors onto some scaled action of $T$.*

As usual when working on symbolic spaces, continuity and uniformity implies locality (Curtis-Lyndon-Hedlund theorem [7]). In our context of rescalings, the locality is no longer expressed at the level of cells, but at the level of groups of cells. More precisely, we say that a map $\phi : Q_1^{\mathbb{Z}^d} \to Q_2^{\mathbb{Z}^d}$ is *local* if there exist: $r \in \mathbb{N}$ (locality radius), two shapes $\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z_1}}$ and $\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z_2}}$ (source and destination scales), and a local function $f : Q_1^{\mathcal{R}_{(2r+1)\boldsymbol{z_1}}} \to Q_2^{\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z_2}}}$ such that

$$\forall c \in Q_1^{\mathbb{Z}^d}, \forall z \in \mathbb{Z}^d,\ \mathcal{P}^{\boldsymbol{z_2}}_{\boldsymbol{z} \times \boldsymbol{z_2}}(\phi(c)) = f\big(\mathcal{P}^{(2r+1)\boldsymbol{z_1}}_{\boldsymbol{z} \times \boldsymbol{z_1} - r\boldsymbol{z_2}}(c)\big).$$

To fix ideas, if $d = z_1 = z_2 = 1$ and $Q_1 = Q_2$, $f$ is just the local map of a cellular automaton of radius $r$ and $\phi$ is its corresponding global map.

**Proposition 1** *Fix a dimension $d$. Let $\Sigma_1$ and $\Sigma_2$ be two $d$-dimensional subshifts and let $F_1$ and $F_2$ be two $d$-dimensional CA of alphabet $Q_1$ and $Q_2$ respectively. Then we have:*

- *$\Sigma_2 \preccurlyeq \Sigma_1$ if and only if there is a local map $\phi$ such that $\phi(\Sigma_1) = \Sigma_2$;*
- *$F_2 \preccurlyeq F_1$ if and only if there is an onto local map $\phi$ from $Q_1^{\mathbb{Z}^d}$ to $Q_2^{\mathbb{Z}^d}$ and integers $t_1, t_2 \in \mathbb{N}$ such that $\phi \circ F_1^{t_1} = F_2^{t_2} \circ \phi$.*

Besides the work of Hochman [8], notions of simulations similar to $\preccurlyeq$ have already been considered for tilings [14] or for cellular automata [22,4]. Each time, one of the main concern is the existence of universal objects: this is precisely the central point of the present paper.

**Definition 3** *Let $\mathcal{C}$ be a class of subshifts (resp. cellular automata). A subshift (resp. cellular automaton) $U$ is* $\mathcal{C}$-universal *if $U \in \mathcal{C}$ and $X \preccurlyeq U$ for any $X \in \mathcal{C}$.*

Whatever the fixed dimension, there is no universal subshift for cardinality reasons: there are uncountably many subshifts but for a given subshift $U$ there are at most countably many different subshifts $\preccurlyeq$-simulated by $U$ (by proposition 1). The following theorem uses recursion theoretic arguments to yield other negative results concerning universality (similar arguments where used in [18,8] in different settings).

**Theorem 1** *Fix a dimension $d \geq 2$. Then there is no universal subshift of finite type of dimension $d$ and there is no universal surjective CA of dimension $d$.*

## 3 A Large Class with a Universal Object

In this section, we restrict to dimension 1 to make a clear exposition of the main result (theorem 2). There is no doubt that with some additional technical effort our construction can be extended to higher dimensions.

**Definition 4** *A CA $\mathcal{A}$ is said to be persistent if there is a state $q_0 \in Q_A$ such that for any configuration $c \in {Q_A}^{\mathbb{Z}}$ if $c(i) = q_0$ then $\mathcal{A}(c)\ (i) = q_0$.*

*We denote by $\mathbb{P}$ the set of all persistent CA.*

Note that for any CA, you may add an extra persistent state and obtain a CA in $\mathbb{P}$ containing the dynamics of the first one.

**Theorem 2** *There exists a $\mathbb{P}$-universal cellular automaton.*

Since any CA of $\mathbb{P}$ is easily $\preccurlyeq$-simulated by a CA of $\mathbb{P}$ with radius 1, it is enough to construct a CA able to $\preccurlyeq$-simulate any persistent CA with radius 1. In the following, we describe a $\mathbb{P}$-universal CA. More precisely, for any $\mathcal{A} \in \mathbb{P}$ with radius 1, we exhibit an onto local map $\phi_{\mathcal{A}}$ from ${Q_U}^{\mathbb{Z}}$ to ${Q_A}^{\mathbb{Z}}$ and an integer $\tau_{\mathcal{A}}$ such that $\mathcal{U}^{\tau_{\mathcal{A}}} \circ \phi_{\mathcal{A}} = \phi_{\mathcal{A}} \circ \mathcal{A}$. To do so, for each $\mathcal{A}$, we introduce an integer $l_{\mathcal{A}}$ and a dichotomy on words of ${Q_U}^{l_{\mathcal{A}}}$.

- on the one side we have what we call $\mathcal{A}$-*correct macrocells* (or $\mathcal{A}$-macrocells). They encode informations about a current state $x \in Q_A$, about the local rule of $\mathcal{A}$, and a machinery used to compute the new state according to this rule. In almost any case, they will be interpreted through $\phi_{\mathcal{A}}$ as $x$.
- on the other side we have all the other patterns, we call them $\mathcal{A}$-*incorrect* and they will be interpreted as the persistent state of $\mathcal{A}$.

The local rule of $\mathcal{U}$ will make every $\mathcal{A}$-macrocell determine if it is surrounded by other $\mathcal{A}$-macrocells. If this is the case, then interaction is possible, following the rule of $\mathcal{A}$. Else, the $\mathcal{A}$-macrocell evolves considering incorrect neighbors as persistent state macrocells. The difficulty is that although correctness is related to the particular CA being simulated, every configuration must evolve correctly for every possible CA.

To make the construction of $\mathcal{U}$ readable, we describe its state set as a superposition of several layers: the main layer $M$ which contains most of the information about the simulation, *signals* layers are used to manage the evolution of the main layer, and *clock* layers guaranty synchronizations. The proof of universality uses the combination of two key properties: on one hand, correct patterns remain correct and evolves according to the rule being simulated, even if not surrounded by correct patterns (lemma 4); on the other hand, incorrect patterns are interpreted as the persistent state and never become correct (lemma 5).

**Correct patterns description** In the following we consider a simulated CA $\mathcal{A}$ with radius 1 and state set $Q_A$ of size $n$. We use a canonical binary enumeration of the state set, in which the first word $(0^{\lceil log(n) \rceil})$ represents a persistent state of $\mathcal{A}$, denoted $p_{\mathcal{A}}$. Our macrocells will have length $l_{\mathcal{A}}$ and follow the pattern

$$\#\ C_i\ |Transition\ table|\ |State|\ |memory|\ \#$$

- # are delimiters they never appear or disappear during the computation
- $C_i$ is the *control state* used to control the successive steps of computation.
- $|Transition\ table|$ is the binary description of the transition table of $\mathcal{A}$.
- $|State|$ contains two information: the binary value of the current state of the macrocell and the binary value of the maximal state of $Q_A$. Those informations are superposed. And if the current state value is bigger than the maximal state value, the current state *is the maximal state*.
- $|memory|$ is a binary area which will be used to keep the values of the neighbors' current states before computing the new current state of the macrocell.

$|Transition\ table|$, $|State|$ and $|memory|$ are encoded with disjoint binary alphabets. A cell whose state belong to one of those alphabet will never change alphabet. Moreover, the states of the transition table's cells and the value of the maximal state value are never modified.

The current state description needs $\lceil log(n) \rceil$ bits. In the transition table, images are ordered canonically, so the length of the description is simply $n^3 \lceil log(n) \rceil$. The memory should be at least $2\lceil log(n) \rceil$ long in order to contain the two neighbors current state values. But in order to simplify some proofs, we ask the

function $\mathcal{A} \to l_{\mathcal{A}}$ to be one-to-one, and we increase the size of the memory to half the total size of the macrocell.

Most of the computation will happen on those very constrained patterns. In the next definition, we add an extra constraint on the control state to obtain $\mathcal{A}$-correct macrocells. Moreover, the sub-alphabets of this layer are stable, and the transition table or maximal state values never change. However the current state value may be modified by erratic signals, this is why the computation begins with a signal (namely $s_1$ in the next section) erasing all other signals. Modifications on the main layer may occur before $s_1$ reaches the end of the macrocell, that is to say before $l_{\mathcal{A}}$ steps. The following definition take this into account to determine a notion of reliable *state value*.

**Definition 5** *A word $u \in {Q_U}^{l_{\mathcal{A}}}$ of length $l_{\mathcal{A}}$ is said to be a $\mathcal{A}$-correct macrocell, denoted by $u \in \mathcal{C}_{\mathcal{A}}$, if its main layer follows the structure defined above (correct sub-alphabets for each cell, and correct transition table of $\mathcal{A}$), and if its control state is in $C_0$.*

*For each such $\mathcal{A}$-correct macrocell $u$, we define its associated state value $v(u) \in Q_A$, which is the state described by its current state value after the $l_{\mathcal{A}}$ steps.*

Note that since the size of the memory is bigger than the distance from the control state to the end of the current state, $s_1$ will destroy any signal coming from the outside of $u$ before it modifies the current state value: the value $v(u)$ only depends on $u$. By extension we may sometime call $\mathcal{A}$-macrocells words following the general pattern, even with non-$C_0$ control state, in particular when they are images of a $\mathcal{A}$-correct macrocell.

**The local rule** Starting on an initial correct $\mathcal{A}$-macrocell, the local rule will first determine which neighbors it may interact with (*Checking of the neighbor's length and synchronization*, and *Transition table and state encoding check*), and then compute its new current state according to the rule of $\mathcal{A}$ and eventually the value of those neighbors (*New current state computation*).

In order to guaranty the synchronization of each $\mathcal{A}$-macrocell, we specify the duration of each step, and even of some sub-steps. It is done by a clock, which use specific layers of states, and the existence of which is proved by the following lemma:

**Lemma 1** *For any $k, h \in \mathbb{N} \setminus \{1\}$, there exists a CA, and two states $q_s$, and $q_f$ such that the leftmost cell of an area delimited by two # separated by $l-2$ cells turns to state $q_f$ at some time $t > k.l^2 + h.l$ iff this cell was in state $q_s$ exactly $k.l^2 + h.l$ steps before. Moreover, this property is guarantied independently of what is outside the two #.*

At the beginning of each step, the control state will change, initiate the corresponding clock, and initiate some signals which will manage the evolution. Those signals are distinct states propagating on upper layers of the configuration, and interacting with the main layer and eventually other signals.

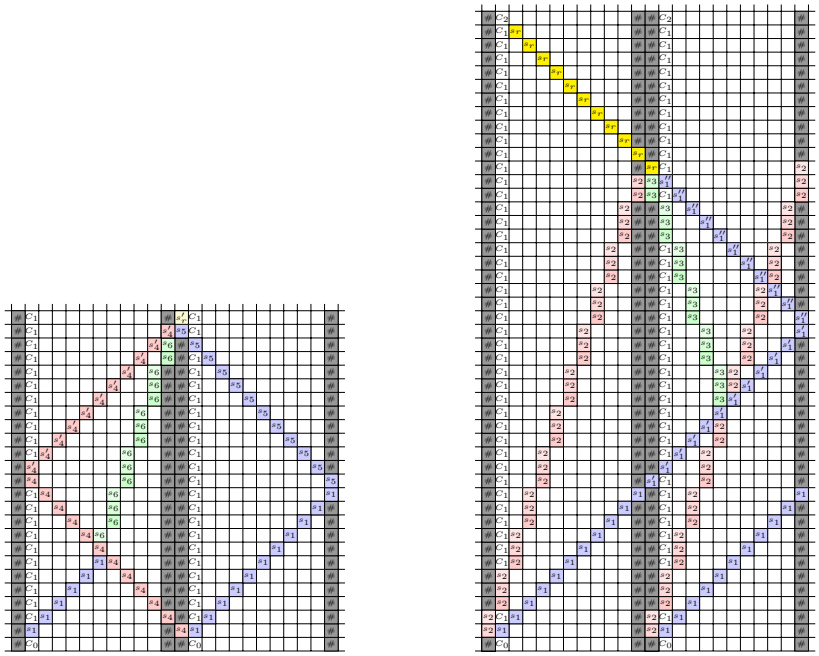

**Fig. 1.** Left and right neighbor tests (mix of main and signal layers for easier reading)

We say that a signal *belongs* to a macrocell if it was generated in this macrocell's area, between the two #. And, thanks to our evolution rule, a signal always knows if it is in its cell or in the area to the right or left of its cell. It is also useful sometimes to make signals carry one extra bit of information. As always, it is simple to do it, using distinct states, since the number of bits is bounded.

***Checking of the neighbor's length and synchronization.*** $C_0 \to C_1$ (that is to say that when the control cell's state is $C_0$ it becomes $C_1$):

Recall that are interested to the behavior in the case of an $\mathcal{A}$-correct macrocell. When $C_0$ becomes $C_1$, it initializes two bits with value 0, in the main layer of the control cell, and it launches signals. Since the construction is classical, we illustrate the desired behavior by figure 1. Those two pictures illustrate the signal machinery in the case of respectively left and right neighbors of same length and with state $C_0$ appearing simultaneously (what we call synchronized). Every transition whose image is one of the signal involved in this checking appears on those pictures. We also recall that the first signals $s_1$ and $s_4$ are erasing all signals belonging to our macrocell.

Note that if the neighbors have same length and are synchronized, this whole step takes 4 times the length of the macrocell, $l_{\mathcal{A}}$. After $4.l_{\mathcal{A}}$ steps, the control state $C_1$ becomes $C_2$, and if it did not receive a positive result from one side, it concludes that the involved neighbor is incorrect. This is managed using a clock

signal (with $h = 2$ and $k = 0$ in lemma 1) initialized by $C_0$ on a specific layer. When $q_f$ is raised on this layer, $C_1$ becomes $C_2$. The important point is that we ensure the following property.

**Lemma 2** *The control state of a $\mathcal{A}$-correct macrocell becomes $C_2$ exactly $4.l_{\mathcal{A}}$ steps after $C_0$ appeared. At this step each bit of the control state has turned to* 1 *iff the corresponding neighboring macrocell has same length and had its $C_0$ state generated at the same step than the considered macrocell.*

The proof of this lemma is direct for the length but asks to enter into some more (simple but fastidious) details for the synchronization part.

***Transition table and state encoding check.*** $C_2 \to C_3$ :

In this step, for each neighboring pattern with same length and synchronization, the macrocell checks whether the transition table and the maximal state are identical to its own (same length end content) or not. From now on, we mainly give the ideas and avoid the technical details of the signals.

When $C_2$ appears it launches the following test for each neighbor whose corresponding bit was 1, and initializes two fresh bits to 0. First, a signal is generated and puts a *mark* (that is to say a non-moving signal) on the first cell of the transition table of its macrocell, and another mark on the first cell of the transition table of the neighbor it checks. Then signals are exchanged between those two marks that will each time carry the binary state of the cell pointed by one mark to the next unchecked cell of the other macrocell and push the mark by two cells. If both marks reach the end of the transition tables simultaneously, a correctness signal is sent to the control state.

After the transition table has been checked, the same mechanism is used to check that the current state encoding areas have same length and maximal state. At the end of those tests, the results are sent to the control cell which again keeps the information on two bits of the main layer. For each cell of the transition table or the current state, checking takes $2.l_{\mathcal{A}}$ steps. So checking a whole neighbor takes less than $2.l_{\mathcal{A}}^2$. Again, a clock is used to make this test last exactly $2.l_{\mathcal{A}}^2$ steps. Then the control cell is turned to $C_4$.

**Lemma 3** *The control state of our macrocell becomes $C_4$ exactly $2.l_{\mathcal{A}}^2$ steps after $C_0$ appeared. At this step each bit of the control state has turned to* 1 *iff the corresponding neighboring pattern has same length, synchronization, and if the length and content of the transition tables and maximal states are equal. In this case we say that this pattern is* compatible *with our $\mathcal{A}$-macrocell.*

The proof of this lemma is straightforward. Keep in mind that some signals erased all erratic signals that could interact with our cell at a previous step.

***New current state computation.*** $C_4 \to C_5$ :

After all the tests have been done, the new state has to be computed. We need to explicit how we consider the neighboring pattern. In the following, what we call *detected state* of one such pattern by our macrocell will be: either the

persistent state if the neighbor is non-compatible with our $\mathcal{A}$-macrocell, or the maximal state if this is a compatible macrocell but with a current state greater than the maximal state, or the actual state in the remaining case.

At first, the detected states of the left and right neighbors are written to the memory. It is written in the binary memory alphabet. Each detected state is written on $\lceil log(n) \rceil$ cells. If one neighbor is compatible, we copy the minimum of its current and maximal state layers to the memory (which is done on the go), using marks and signals similarly to the previous step. If it is not compatible, we write $0^{\lceil log(n) \rceil}$, the length being the same as the current state area. We add a clock to specify that copies last exactly $2.l_{\mathcal{A}}^2$ steps, the neighbor being correct or not.

After $2.l_{\mathcal{A}}^2$ additional steps, the search for the image transition in the transition table starts. It consists in reading the binary word formed by the three image states (the current state of the cell followed by the two detected states copied in the memory), and turning it into a unary position in the transition table. We need again to consider the minimum of the current and maximal state layers instead of considering directly the current state. It is then possible to place a mark at this position, and finally copy this pointed state in the current state area. We make the reading of the position last $4.l_{\mathcal{A}}^2$ steps. And copying the new state lasts $2.l_{\mathcal{A}}^2$. After the whole computation step, which lasts $7.l_{\mathcal{A}}^2$, the control state turns to $C_5$.

Finally one step of simulation is completed after exactly $\tau_{\mathcal{A}} = 9.l_{\mathcal{A}}^2 + 4.l_{\mathcal{A}}$ steps. After this time the control state turns to $C_5$.

To become $C_0$ again, and launch a new step of computation, we add another condition. We ask a clock launched exactly $\tau_{\mathcal{A}}$ steps before to raise a flag. And obviously this clock may only be launched by $C_0$. It is realized using again signals of the lemma 1 computing on one more layer.

The state set of the universal CA is given by $Q_U = M \times S \times C \cup \{C_f\}$ with

- $M$ the main layer : $M = \{C_0, C_5\} \cup \{C_i\}_{i \in \{1,..,4\}} \times \{0,1\}^2 \cup \{0_i, 1_i\}_{i \in \{tt,cs,m\}}$
- $S$ the signals layers :
  $S = \times_{i \in I}\{s_i\} \times \times_{j \in J}(\{s_j\} \times \{0,1\})$
- $C$ the clocks layers (defined following lemma 1), one for each duration needed.
  $C = (\{0,1\} \times \{s_i\}_{i \in I_c})^4$
- $C_f$ is a single persistent state ensuring that $\mathcal{U} \in \mathbb{P}$

Yet, the transition rule of $\mathcal{U}$ is partially specified, we call correct transitions those defined up to now, in the case of correct macrocells. But the other transitions may not be chosen arbitrarily. We specify the following behaviors:

- $C_f$ is never modified by any transition
- the main layer is never modified by a non-correct transition they act as the identity on the main layer.
- concerning the signal layer, apart from the collisions corresponding to the behavior described in the previous steps, all signals may cross each other (each kind of signal is evolving on its own layer). However, except for transitions involved in the behavior described above, any signal that crosses a # is destroyed.

**Interpretation** We now describe the continuous onto map $\phi_{\mathcal{A}} : {Q_U}^{\mathbb{Z}} \to {Q_A}^{\mathbb{Z}}$ associated to $\mathcal{A}$. This map is induced by a local map $\psi_{\mathcal{A}}$ from patterns of shape $l_{\mathcal{A}}$ to individual states of $\mathcal{A}$. More precisely, using notation from proposition 1, we have $r = 0$, $z_1 = l_{\mathcal{A}}$, $z_2 = 1$, $t_2 = 1$ and $t_1 = \tau_{\mathcal{A}}$.

If $p_{\mathcal{A}}$ is the persistent state of $\mathcal{A}$, the local map $\psi_{\mathcal{A}}$ is defined as follows:

1. $\forall u \notin \mathcal{C}_{\mathcal{A}}, \psi_{\mathcal{A}}(u) = p_{\mathcal{A}}$
2. $\forall u \in \mathcal{C}_{\mathcal{A}}, \psi_{\mathcal{A}}(u) = v(u)$, with $v(u)$ the value from definition 5

**Proof of theorem 2** The proof of the theorem relies on the two following lemmas. The first is a consequence of the construction and the intermediate lemmas.

**Lemma 4** *$\forall c \in {Q_U}^{\mathbb{Z}}, \forall t_0 \in \mathbb{N}$, if $\mathcal{U}^{t_0}(c)_{[0,l_{\mathcal{A}}-1]} \in \mathcal{C}_{\mathcal{A}}$ , then $v = \mathcal{U}^{t_0+\tau_{\mathcal{A}}}(c)_{[0,l_{\mathcal{A}}-1]} \in \mathcal{C}_{\mathcal{A}}$, and $\psi_{\mathcal{A}}(v) = \delta_A(\psi_{\mathcal{A}}(c_{[-l_{\mathcal{A}},-1]}), \psi_{\mathcal{A}}(c_{[0,l_{\mathcal{A}}-1]}), \psi_{\mathcal{A}}(c_{[l_{\mathcal{A}},2.l_{\mathcal{A}}-1]}))$ .*

**Lemma 5** *If $\exists\ t \geq \tau_{\mathcal{A}}$, $c \in {Q_U}^{\mathbb{Z}}$ and $x \in \mathbb{Z}$ such that $u = \mathcal{U}^t(c)_{[x,x+l_{\mathcal{A}}-1]} \in \mathcal{C}_{\mathcal{A}}$ then $v = \mathcal{U}^{t-\tau_{\mathcal{A}}}(c)_{[x,x+l_{\mathcal{A}}-1]} \in \mathcal{C}_{\mathcal{A}}$.*

We can finally prove our main claim: $\forall \mathcal{A} \in \mathbb{P}$, $\mathcal{A} \preccurlyeq \mathcal{U}$. We use the characterization of proposition 1. Let $\mathcal{A} \in \mathbb{P}$ with radius 1. The associated length $l_{\mathcal{A}}$ and function $\phi_{\mathcal{A}}$ are defined as explained before. First, $\phi_{\mathcal{A}}$ is local (by definition) and onto because correct macrocells are enough to encode any state of $\mathcal{A}$ and thus concatenations of correct macrocells allows to encode any configuration of $\mathcal{A}$. Second, we have $\phi_{\mathcal{A}} \circ \mathcal{U}^{\tau_{\mathcal{A}}} = \mathcal{A} \circ \phi_{\mathcal{A}}$. To see this we discuss on the pattern of shape $\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{l_{\mathcal{A}}}}$ at position 0 and the rest follows by translation. If this pattern is not in $\mathcal{C}_{\mathcal{A}}$ its image after $\tau_{\mathcal{A}}$ steps remains out of $\mathcal{C}_{\mathcal{A}}$ (lemma 5). If conversely this central word belongs to $\mathcal{C}_{\mathcal{A}}$, lemma 4 gives the desired property.

## 4 Perspectives

A natural extension of our work could be to generalize the construction to cellular automata having an equicontinuous point. The idea would be to use blocking words as a replacement for the persistent state. But it seems much harder, if not impossible.

Besides, the main open question leaved by this paper is the existence of universal CA. We conjecture that they don't exist and more precisely that no CA can simulate all products of shifts. A possible way to obtain this negative result would be to study limit sets: by a compacity argument, one can show that a universal CA must have a universal limit set. The main obstacle is that subshifts that are limit sets of CA are not well characterized.

Finally, we also leave open the existence of universal SFT and universal surjective CA in dimension 1.

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## A Proofs from section 2

*Proof (Proposition 1).* First, an onto local map from $\Sigma_1$ to $\Sigma_2$ with shapes $\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z_1}}$ and $\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z_2}}$ induces a factoring relation from the $\mathbb{M}$-scaled action of $\Sigma_1$ onto the $\mathbb{M}'$-scaled action of $\Sigma_2$ with

$$\mathbb{M} = (\boldsymbol{z_1})_1\mathbb{Z} \times \cdots (\boldsymbol{z_1})_d\mathbb{Z}$$

and

$$\mathbb{M}' = (\boldsymbol{z_2})_1\mathbb{Z} \times \cdots (\boldsymbol{z_2})_d\mathbb{Z}.$$

Conversely, suppose that the relation $\Sigma_1 \preccurlyeq \Sigma_2$ is realized by a factor map $\pi$ from the $\mathbb{M}$-scaled action of $\Sigma_1$ onto the $\mathbb{M}'$-scaled action of $\Sigma_2$ with

$$\mathbb{M} = (\boldsymbol{z_1})_1\mathbb{Z} \times \cdots (\boldsymbol{z_1})_d\mathbb{Z}$$

and

$$\mathbb{M}' = (\boldsymbol{z_2})_1\mathbb{Z} \times \cdots (\boldsymbol{z_2})_d\mathbb{Z}.$$

Consider now each pattern $p \in Q_2^{\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z_2}}}$. Since the cylinder $C_p$ defined by

$$C_p = \{c \in Q_2^{\mathbb{Z}^d} : \mathcal{P}_{\boldsymbol{0}}^{\boldsymbol{z_2}}(c) = p\}$$

is both open and closed, so is $\pi^{-1}(C_p)$. By compacity, and since cylinders form a basis of the topology, we get that $\pi^{-1}(C_p)$ is a finite union of cylinders of $Q_1^{\mathbb{Z}^d}$. We can suppose without loss of generality that they are all of shape $\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{(2r+1)z_1}}$ for some large enough $r$ (finite unions of cylinders of small shape can always be defined as finite unions of cylinders of larger shapes). Doing this with the same value of $r$ for all $p$, we get a (possibly partial) function $f$ from $Q_1^{\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{(2r+1)z_1}}}$ to $Q_2^{\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z_2}}}$. By eventually completing $f$ and by definition of the factoring $\pi$ between $\mathbb{M}$ and $\mathbb{M}'$-scaled actions, $f$ induces a local map from $Q_1^{\mathbb{Z}^d}$ to $Q_2^{\mathbb{Z}}$ associated with shapes $\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z_1}}$ and $\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z_2}}$. It is onto because $\pi$ is onto.

For cellular automata, the reasoning is similar and adding the temporal component in actions translates exactly into the desired property of weak commutation between the global maps of cellular automata and the onto map between configuration spaces. □

*Proof (Theorem 1).* For the case of surjective CA, it is enough to notice that surjectivity is preserved by the relation $\preccurlyeq$. Indeed, if $F \preccurlyeq G$ we have

$$\phi \circ G^{t_1} = F^{t_2} \circ \phi$$

for some onto map $\phi$. Therefore $F$ must be surjective if $G$ is surjective.

Then the proof follows from Kari's theorem [11] establishing that surjective CA are not recursively enumerable. Indeed, given a surjective universal CA $U$, we could enumerate thanks to the local presentation of factors (proposition 1) all CA F such that $F \preccurlyeq U$: they are all surjective (surjectivity is preserved by

factor) and all surjective CA are among them (universality).

We consider now the case of subshifts of finite type. Without loss of generality, any subshift of finite type can be presented as a subshift $\Sigma_L$ where $L$ is a finite set of patterns having all the same shape $\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z}}$ for some $z$. By Berger's theorem [1] the set of such $L$ verifying that $\Sigma_L$ is not empty can not be recursively enumerated. We show below that the existence of a universal subshift of finite type implies the existence of an algorithm of enumeration of all $L$ of the form above such that $\Sigma_L$ is empty.

So suppose that there exists some universal subshift of finite type $\Sigma_{L_U}$ where $L_U$ is a set of $Q_U$-patterns of shape $\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z_U}}$. Obviously, $\Sigma_{L_U}$ must be non-empty. For any $L$ and any pattern $p$ of larger shape, we say that $p$ is $L$-valid if it contains no occurrence of any pattern from $L$ (occurrence requires that one shape is completely included into the other).

Let $L$ be a set of $Q$-patterns of shape $\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z}}$ and $\psi$ be a local map from $Q_U^{\mathbb{Z}^d}$ to $Q^{\mathbb{Z}^d}$ associated to shapes $\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z_1}}$ and $\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z_2}}$. Consider the minimal shape $\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z_+}}$ containing both $\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z}}$ and $\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{2z_2}}$. Since $\psi$ is local, one can check in finite time the following property called *validity property*: any pattern $p$ of shape $\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z_+}}$ which has a $L_U$-valid preimage via $\psi$ is $L$-valid (the size of preimages of finite patterns depends on the radius $r$ associated to $\psi$ but details don't matter here). By the definition of local maps and the hypothesis on shapes, this property implies that $\psi(\Sigma_{L_U}) \subseteq \Sigma_L$ and therefore $\Sigma_L \neq \emptyset$ (the choice of shape $\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{2z_2}}$ ensures that validity is checked inside blocks of shape $\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z_2}}$ but also across the boundary between two such adjacent blocks).

It follows that we can recursively enumerate couples $(L, \psi)$ having the property above. More precisely, maps $\psi$ are enumerated via their local presentation (shapes, radius and local function). This way, we can enumerate a list of finite languages $L$ such that $\Sigma_L$ is not empty. To conclude the proof it is sufficient to show that all $L$ such that $\Sigma_L \neq \emptyset$ are present in the list. Suppose by contradiction that some $L$ over alphabet $Q$ with $\Sigma_L \neq \emptyset$ is such that no local map from $Q_U^{\mathbb{Z}^d}$ to $Q^{\mathbb{Z}^d}$ verifies the validity property above. By universality of $\Sigma_{L_U}$, there exists a local map $\psi$ sending $\Sigma_{L_U}$ to $\Sigma_L$. Let $r$, $\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z_1}}$ and $\mathcal{R}_{\boldsymbol{z_2}}$, and local function $f$, be the parameters associated to $\psi$. For any $k \geq 0$ we can define the same map $\psi$ with another presentation by increasing artificially the radius $r$ to $kr$ and changing the local function $f$ accordingly (shapes are kept unchanged). We call it the k$^{th}$ presentation of $\psi$. Since, by hypothesis on $L$, no such presentation has the validity property, we deduce that there must exist some finite pattern $p$ which is not $L$-valid and such that, for any $k$, $p$ has a $L_U$-valid preimage under the k$^{th}$ presentation of $\psi$. Therefore, by a simple compacity argument, there exists $c \in \Sigma_{L_U}$ such that $\psi(c)$ has an occurrence of $p$. Hence, $\psi(c) \notin \Sigma_L$ which is a contradiction. $\square$

## B Proofs from section 3

*Proof of lemma 1:* We first build a CA that satisfies our lemma for $k = 2$, $h = 0$. Its state set will be made of one binary layer, and a signal layer. The behavior is simple: when $q_s$ appears it generates a signal that will keep oscillating between the #. When the signal is generated for the first time, it initialize the area, turning the first binary cell to 1 and the other one to 0s. Then, the signal keep moving from right to left and back between the #. Each time it goes to the right, it turns one more binary cell to 1. And when the rightmost cell's binary layer is finally turned to 1 a new special signal is sent to the left which will generate the $q_f$.

If two or more signals crosses, one of them may survive. If one of them is initializing it will survive.

So, in $2.l$ steps of computation, the total number of 1s may be non increasing only in the following cases:

- if there is no signal at all
- if all cell's binary layer is already 1 and in this case a $q_f$ was generated
- if an initialization signal has been sent.

In particular, if a $q_f$ appears at some step, then in the previous $4.l$ steps, a 1 was generated. And in each previous $2.l$ step, at least a 1 was generated.

Thus, in the previous $2.l^2$ steps, at least one initialization signal was launched and a $q_s$ has appeared. But by construction, after a $q_s$ state appears, the first $q_f$ state appears only exactly $2.l^2$ steps later.

It concludes the proof of the clock lemma in case $k = 2$, $h = 0$. For other values of $k$, simply slow down the signal going right to left. For other values of $h$, after the end of the quadratic part, launch a signal that will go right with speed 1 and come back left with speed $1/(h-1)$ before raising $q_f$. □

*Proof of lemma 5:*

By definition of a correct pattern, $u$ is given by:

$$\#\ C_0\ |Transition\ table|\ |State|\ |memory|\ \#$$

First of all, the # are never created or destroyed. The transition table and maximal state information are never modified, so they are the same in $u$ and in $v$. And the sub-alphabet corresponding to control state, current state and memory alphabets are stable. The structure of $v$ is the same as this of $u$. To prove our lemma it remains to prove that the second letter in $v$ is $C_0$, and that the current state value is smaller than the maximal value.

But, to make $C_0$ appear, at step $t$, a signal $q_f$ was raised by the global clock, which implied, using the clock lemma, that the second letter of $v$ is $C_0$.

Thus all tests are launched. □