

# Introduction

MPRI 2–6: Abstract Interpretation,  
application to verification and static analysis

Antoine Miné

Year 2022–2023

Course 0  
19 September 2022



# Formal Verification: Motivation

---

# Historic example: Ariane 5, Flight 501



Maiden flight of the Ariane 5 Launcher, 4 June 1996.  
Cost of failure estimated at more than 370 000 000 US\$<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>M. Dowson. "The Ariane 5 Software Failure". Software Engineering Notes 22 (2): 84, March 1997.

# Cause of Ariane 5 failure

**Cause:** software error<sup>2</sup>

- **arithmetic overflow** in unprotected data conversion from 64-bit float to 16-bit integer types<sup>3</sup>

```
P.M_DERIVE(T.ALG.E.BH) :=
  UC_16S_EN_16NS (TDB.T_ENTIER_16S
    ((1.0/C.M_LSB_BH) * G.M_INFO_DERIVE(T.ALG.E.BH)));
```

- software **exception not caught**  
 ⇒ computer switched off
- all backup computers run the same software  
 ⇒ all computers switched off, no guidance  
 ⇒ rocket **self-destructs**

A “simple” error...

<sup>2</sup>J.-L. Lions et al., Ariane 501 Inquiry Board report.

<sup>3</sup>J.-J. Levy. Un petit bogue, un grand boum. Séminaire du Département d'informatique de l'ENS, 2010.

# How can we avoid such failures?

- Choose a safe programming language.

C (low level) / Ada, Java, OCaml (high level)

yet, Ariane 5 software is written in Ada

- Carefully design the software.

many software development methods exist

yet, critical embedded software follow strict development processes

- Test the software extensively.

yet, the erroneous code was well tested... on Ariane 4

⇒ **not sufficient!**

# How can we avoid such failures?

- Choose a safe programming language.

C (low level) / Ada, Java, OCaml (high level)

yet, Ariane 5 software is written in Ada

- Carefully design the software.

many software development methods exist

yet, critical embedded software follow strict development processes

- Test the software extensively.

yet, the erroneous code was well tested... on Ariane 4

⇒ **not sufficient!**

We should use **formal methods**.

provide rigorous, mathematical insurance of correctness

may not prove everything, but give a precise notion of what is proved

**This case triggered the first large scale static code analysis**

PolySpace Verifier, using abstract interpretation

# Verification: compromises

**Undecidability:** correctness properties are undecidable!

no program can automatically and precisely separates all correct programs from all incorrect ones

Compromises: **lose** automation, or completeness, or soundness, or generality

- **Test, symbolic execution:** complete and automatic, but unsound
- **Theorem proving**
  - proof essentially manual, but checked automatically
  - powerful, but very steep learning curve and large effort required
- **Deductive methods**
  - automated proofs for some logic fragments (SAT, SMT)
  - still requires some program annotations (contracts, invariants)
- **Model checking**
  - check a (often hand-crafted) model of the program
  - finite or regular models, expressive properties (LTL)
  - automatic and complete (wrt. model)
- **Static analysis** (next slide)

# Verification by static analysis

## source

```
int search(int* t, int n) {
  int i;
  for (i=0; i<n; i++) {
    if (t[i]) break;
  }
  return t[i];
}
```

⇒

## analysis result

```
int search(int* t, int n) {
  int i;
  for (i=0; i<n; i++) {
    //  $0 \leq i < n$ 
    if (t[i]) break;
  }
  //  $0 \leq i \leq n \vee n < 0$ 
  return t[i];
}
```

✓  
✗

- work directly on the **source code**
- **infer** properties on **program executions**
- **automatically** (cost effective)
- by constructing dynamically a **semantic abstraction** of the program
- to deduce program **correctness**, or raise **alarms** if it cannot  
implicit specification: absence of RTE; or (simple) user-defined properties: contracts
- with **approximations** (incomplete: efficient, but possible false alarms)
- **soundly** (no false positive)



# Verification in practice: Example of avionics software

Critical avionics software is subject to **certification**:

- **70%** of the development cost (in 2015)
- regulated by **international standards** (DO-178)
- mostly based on massive test campaigns & intellectual reviews

## Current trend:

use of **formal methods** now acknowledged (DO-178C, DO-333)

- at the binary level, to replace testing
- at the **source level**, **to replace intellectual reviews**
- at the **source level**, **to replace testing**  
provided that the correspondence with the binary is also certified

⇒ **formal methods can improve cost-effectiveness!**

**Caveat: soundness is required by DO standards**

# Verification in practice: Formal verification at Airbus

## Program proofs: deductive methods

- **functional** properties of **small sequential** C codes
- replace unit testing
- **not fully automatic**
- **Caveat / Frama-C** tool (CEA)

## Sound static analysis:

- **fully** automated on **large** applications, **non functional** properties
- worst-case execution time and stack usage, on binary **aiT**, **StackAnalyzer** (AbsInt)
- absence of run-time error, on **sequential** C code **Astrée analyzer** (AbsInt)

## Certified compilation:

- allows **source-level** analysis to **certify sequential binary code**
- **CompCert** C compiler, certified in **Coq** (INRIA)

# Another example bug: Heartbleed



Vulnerability in OpenSSL cryptographic library  
all versions from 2012 to 2014

OpenSSL is used by 66% of WEB servers for <https>  
(also: email encryption, VPN, etc.)

Cause: **buffer overflow** in “heartbeat” protocol.

Consequence:<sup>4</sup>

- leak of private information, such as private keys
- no way to actually know what has been extracted  
⇒ need to renew all keys after correcting the bug!
- very high economic cost!

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://heartbleed.com>

# Improving software quality

Recent study from [Consortium for Information & Software Quality](#):<sup>5</sup>

- \$607 billions spent finding and fixing bugs
- \$1.56 trillion cost for software failure
- just for 2020, just for the US!

⇒ even non-critical domains could use **formal methods**!

## Challenges:

- keep up with scalability on critical software
- go beyond critical software (larger, more complex)
- more complex languages and programming models (C++, JavaScript, Python, ...)
- go beyond absence of run-time errors and towards functional properties
- while still being sound!

---

<sup>5</sup> Herb Krasner. The cost of poor software quality in the US: A 2020 report. <https://www.it-cisq.org/pdf/CPSQ-2020-report.pdf>, 2021. Accessed: 2021-08.

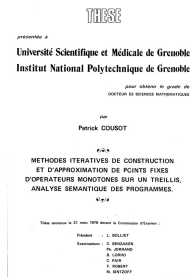
# Overview of abstract interpretation

---

# Abstract interpretation



Patrick Cousot<sup>6</sup>



General theory of the approximation and comparison of program semantics:

- unifies existing semantics
- guides the design of static analyses that are **correct by construction**

<sup>6</sup>P. Cousot. "Méthodes itératives de construction et d'approximation de points fixes d'opérateurs monotones sur un treillis, analyse sémantique des programmes." Thèse És Sciences Mathématiques, 1978.

# Concrete collecting semantics

$(\mathcal{S}_0)$

assume X in [0,1000];

$(\mathcal{S}_1)$

I := 0;

$(\mathcal{S}_2)$

while  $(\mathcal{S}_3)$  I < X do

$(\mathcal{S}_4)$

I := I + 2;

$(\mathcal{S}_5)$

$(\mathcal{S}_6)$

program

## Concrete collecting semantics

 $(\mathcal{S}_0)$ assume  $X$  in  $[0, 1000]$ ;  $\mathcal{S}_i \in \mathcal{D} = \mathcal{P}(\{I, X\} \rightarrow \mathbb{Z})$  $(\mathcal{S}_1)$  $\mathcal{S}_0 = \{ (i, x) \mid i, x \in \mathbb{Z} \} = \top$  $I := 0;$  $\mathcal{S}_1 = \{ (i, x) \in \mathcal{S}_0 \mid x \in [0, 1000] \} = F_1(\mathcal{S}_0)$  $(\mathcal{S}_2)$  $\mathcal{S}_2 = \{ (0, x) \mid \exists i, (i, x) \in \mathcal{S}_1 \} = F_2(\mathcal{S}_1)$ while  $(\mathcal{S}_3)$   $I < X$  do $\mathcal{S}_3 = \mathcal{S}_2 \cup \mathcal{S}_5$  $(\mathcal{S}_4)$  $\mathcal{S}_4 = \{ (i, x) \in \mathcal{S}_3 \mid i < x \} = F_4(\mathcal{S}_3)$  $I := I + 2;$  $\mathcal{S}_5 = \{ (i + 2, x) \mid (i, x) \in \mathcal{S}_4 \} = F_5(\mathcal{S}_4)$  $(\mathcal{S}_5)$  $\mathcal{S}_6 = \{ (i, x) \in \mathcal{S}_3 \mid i \geq x \} = F_6(\mathcal{S}_3)$  $(\mathcal{S}_6)$ 

program

semantics

Concrete semantics  $\mathcal{S}_i \in \mathcal{D} = \mathcal{P}(\{I, X\} \rightarrow \mathbb{Z})$ :

- strongest program properties (inductive invariants)
- set of reachable environments, at each program point
- smallest solution of a system of equations
- well-defined solution, but not computable in general

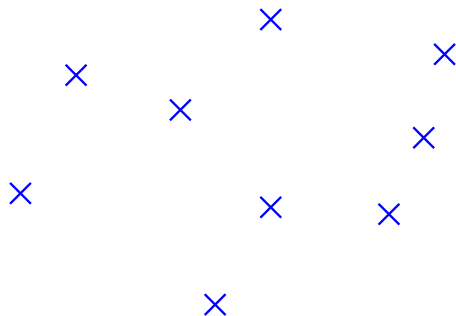


# Abstracting

Principle: be tractable by reasoning at an **abstract level**

# Abstracting

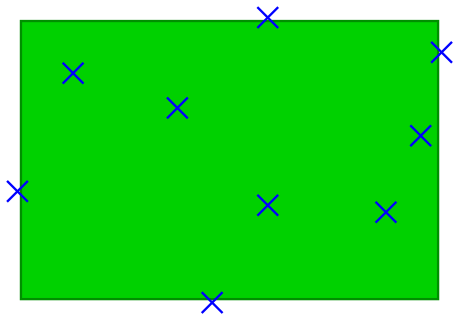
Principle: be tractable by reasoning at an **abstract level**



concrete executions :  $\{(0, 3), (5.5, 0), (12, 7), \dots\}$  (not computable)

# Abstracting

Principle: be tractable by reasoning at an **abstract level**

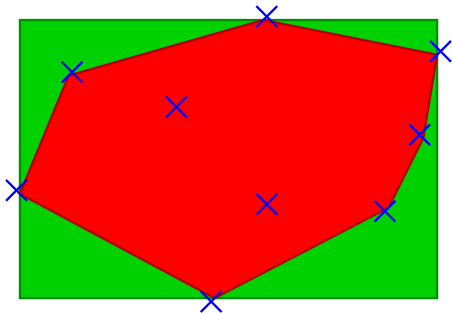


concrete executions :  $\{(0, 3), (5.5, 0), (12, 7), \dots\}$  (not computable)

box domain :  $X \in [0, 12] \wedge Y \in [0, 8]$  (linear cost)

# Abstracting

Principle: be tractable by reasoning at an **abstract level**



concrete executions :	$\{(0, 3), (5.5, 0), (12, 7), \dots\}$	(not computable)
box domain :	$X \in [0, 12] \wedge Y \in [0, 8]$	(linear cost)
polyhedra domain :	$6X + 11Y \geq 33 \wedge \dots$	(exponential cost)

many abstractions: trade-off cost vs. precision and expressiveness

# From concrete to abstract semantics

 $(S_0)$ 

assume X in [0,1000];

$$S_i \in \mathcal{D} \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \mathcal{P}(\{I, X\} \rightarrow \mathbb{Z})$$

 $(S_1)$ 

I := 0;

$$S_0 = \{ (i, x) \mid i, x \in \mathbb{Z} \}$$

$$S_1 = \llbracket X \in [0, 1000] \rrbracket (S_0)$$

 $(S_2)$ while  $(S_3)$  I < X do

$$S_2 = \llbracket I \leftarrow 0 \rrbracket (S_1)$$

$$S_3 = S_2 \cup S_5$$

 $(S_4)$ 

I := I + 2;

$$S_4 = \llbracket I < X \rrbracket (S_3)$$

$$S_5 = \llbracket I \leftarrow I + 2 \rrbracket (S_4)$$

 $(S_5)$ 

$$S_6 = \llbracket I \geq X \rrbracket (S_3)$$

 $(S_6)$ 

program

concrete semantics

Concrete semantics  $S_i \in \mathcal{D} = \mathcal{P}(\{I, X\} \rightarrow \mathbb{Z})$ :

- $\llbracket X \in [0, 1000] \rrbracket$ ,  $\llbracket I \leftarrow 0 \rrbracket$ , etc. are transfer functions
- strongest program properties
- set of reachable environments, at each program point
- not computable in general

# From concrete to abstract semantics

 $(S_0)$ 

assume X in [0,1000];

$$\mathcal{S}_i^\# \in \mathcal{D}^\#$$

 $(S_1)$ 

I := 0;

$$\mathcal{S}_0^\# = \top^\#$$

$$\mathcal{S}_1^\# = \llbracket X \in [0, 1000] \rrbracket^\# (\mathcal{S}_0^\#)$$

 $(S_2)$ while  $(S_3)$  I < X do

$$\mathcal{S}_2^\# = \llbracket I \leftarrow 0 \rrbracket^\# (\mathcal{S}_1^\#)$$

$$\mathcal{S}_3^\# = \mathcal{S}_2^\# \cup^\# \mathcal{S}_5^\#$$

 $(S_4)$ 

I := I + 2;

$$\mathcal{S}_4^\# = \llbracket I < X \rrbracket^\# (\mathcal{S}_3^\#)$$

$$\mathcal{S}_5^\# = \llbracket I \leftarrow I + 2 \rrbracket^\# (\mathcal{S}_4^\#)$$

 $(S_5)$  $(S_6)$ 

$$\mathcal{S}_6^\# = \llbracket I \geq X \rrbracket^\# (\mathcal{S}_3^\#)$$

program

abstract semantics

Abstract semantics  $\mathcal{S}_i^\# \in \mathcal{D}^\#$ :

- $\mathcal{D}^\#$  is a subset of properties of interest  
semantic choice + machine representation
- $F^\# : \mathcal{D}^\# \rightarrow \mathcal{D}^\#$  over-approximates the effect of  $F : \mathcal{D} \rightarrow \mathcal{D}$  in  $\mathcal{D}^\#$   
abstract operators proved sound + effective algorithms

# Abstract operator examples

In the polyhedra domain:

- Abstract assignment

$\llbracket X \leftarrow X + 1 \rrbracket^\#$

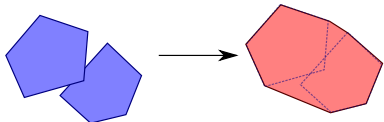
translation (exact)



- Abstract union

$\cup^\#$

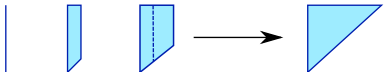
convex hull (approximate)



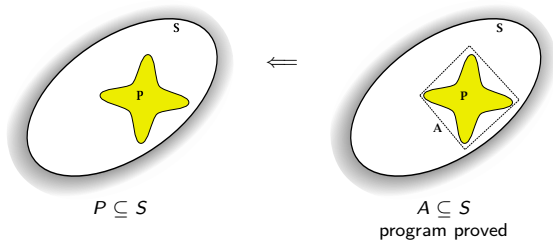
- Solving the equation system

by iteration

using extrapolation to terminate



# Soundness and false alarms



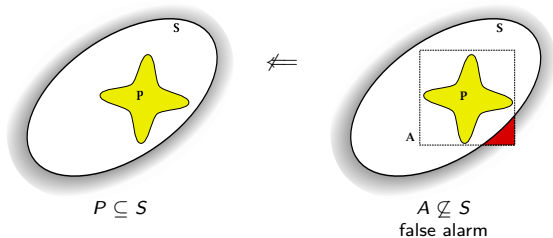
Goal: prove that a program  $P$  satisfies its specification  $S$

We collect the reachable states  $P$  and compare to  $S$

A **polyhedral abstraction**  $A$  can prove the correctness



# Soundness and false alarms



Goal: prove that a program  $P$  satisfies its specification  $S$

We collect the reachable states  $P$  and compare to  $S$

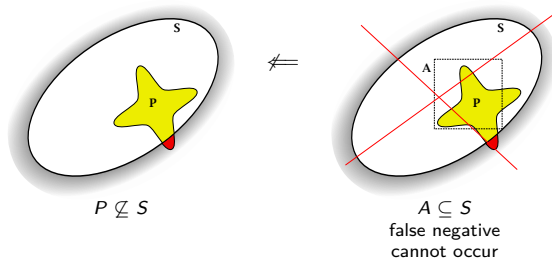
A **polyhedral abstraction**  $A$  can prove the correctness

A **box abstraction** cannot prove the correctness

$\implies$  false alarm

(especially since the analysis may not output the tightest box / polyhedron!)

# Soundness and false alarms



Goal: prove that a program  $P$  satisfies its specification  $S$

We collect the reachable states  $P$  and compare to  $S$

A **polyhedral abstraction**  $A$  can prove the correctness

A **box abstraction** cannot prove the correctness

$\implies$  false alarm

(especially since the analysis may not output the tightest box / polyhedron!)

The analysis is **sound**: no false negative reported!

# Getting it right? eBPF example

## eBPF:

- a virtual machine inside the Linux kernel
- can **run arbitrary code in kernel mode**
- very low-level, can perform arbitrary pointer arithmetic (flat memory model)
- run **sandboxed** to protect against bugs and attacks

## In theory:

- a **static analysis** checks bytecode safety before execution
- includes an interval analysis for pointers

# Getting it *not* right! eBPF example

Bound computation for bit-shift >>:<sup>7</sup>

```

case BPF_RSH:
  if (min_val < 0 || dst_reg->min_value < 0)
    dst_reg->min_value = BPF_REGISTER_MIN_RANGE;
  else
    dst_reg->min_value = (u64)(dst_reg->min_value) >> min_val;
  if (dst_reg->max_value != BPF_REGISTER_MAX_RANGE)
    dst_reg->max_value >>= max_val;
  break;

```

Due to **large amount of bugs** in the static analysis,  
 a dynamic analysis has been added...  
 which exploits the (unsound) results from the static analysis...

## Lesson

Use abstract interpretation to make analyses sound by construction!

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.zerodayinitiative.com/blog/2021/1/18/zdi-20-1440-an-incorrect-calculation-bug-in-the-linux-kernel-ebpf-verifier>

# Example tools

---

## Astrée

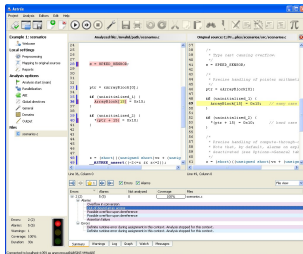
**Astrée:** developed at ENS & INRIA by P. Cousot & al.

- analyzes embedded critical **C** software  
subset of C, no memory allocation, no recursivity → simpler semantics
- checks for run-time errors  
arithmetic overflows, array overflows, divisions by 0, pointer errors, etc. → non-functional
- specialized for **control / command software**  
with **zero false alarm** goal  
application domain specific abstractions



Airbus A380

2001–2004: **academic** success  
**proof of absence of RTE**  
on flight command



2009: **industrialization**



# Infer.AI

Infer: <http://fbinfer.com/>

- developed at Facebook (team formerly at Monoidics)
- **Infer.AI** is an analysis framework **based on abstract interpretation**
- **open-source** since 2015
- analyzes Java, C, C++, and Objective-C
- checks ThreadSafety (Java), Initialisation Order (C++), etc.
- **modular**, bottom-up interprocedural analysis
- targets the analysis of **merge requests** (small bits at a time)
- **favors speed over soundness**  
pragmatic choices, based on “what engineers want”  
no requirements for certification, unlike the avionics industry...
- used in production

# Frama-C

**Frama-C:** <https://frama-c.com/>

- developed at CEA
- open-source
- analyzes C
- combines **abstract interpretation** and **deductive methods**
- has a specification language (ACSL) for functional verification
- used in industrial applications



# Example research project: MOPSA

Modular Open Platform For Static Analysis

developed at Sorbonne University: <https://mopsa.lip6.fr/>

An abstract interpreter **prototype tool** for research and education

- **extendable** to new properties and new languages
- help developing, reusing, combining abstractions
- **open-source**: <https://gitlab.com/mopsa/mopsa-analyzer>

Currently available: (not fully scalable!)

- C analysis for run-time error detection
- Python analysis (supports a large subset of Python 3, and a small subset of its library)
- analysis of programs mixing C and Python

On-going research: (not public yet, various level of maturity)

- patch and portability analysis for C
- analysis of smart-contracts (Michelson language for the Tezos blockchain)
- security-related properties

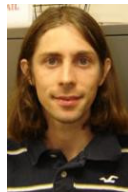
# Course organisation

---

# Teaching team



Caterina Urban



Jérôme Feret



Antoine Miné



Xavier Rival

# Syllabus and exams

<https://www-apr.lip6.fr/~mine/enseignement/mpri/2022-2023>

Visit **regularly** for:

- **latest information on course dates and modalities**
- course material (slides)
- optional course assignments and reading
- internship proposals

## Exams:

- 50%: **written** mid-term exam (3h)
- 50%: **oral** final exam  
(read a scientific article, present it, answer questions)

# Course material

Available on the web page:

- main material: [slides](#)
- [course notes](#)

cover mainly foundations and numeric abstract domains  
based on:

[A. Miné. \*Tutorial on Static Inference of Numeric Invariants by Abstract Interpretation\*. In \*Foundations and Trends in Programming Languages\*, 4\(3–4\), 120–372. Now Publishers.](#)

- recommended reading on theory and applications:

[J. Bertrane, P. Cousot, R. Cousot, J. Feret, L. Mauborgne, A. Miné, X. Rival. \*Static analysis and verification of aerospace software by abstract interpretation\*. In \*Foundations and Trends in Programming Languages\*, 2\(2–3\), 71–190, 2015. Now Publishers.](#)

# Course assignments (self-evaluation)

On the web page, **highly recommended** homework

- **exercises**: prove a theorem, solve a former exam, etc.
- **reading assignments**: an article related to the course
- **experiments**: use a tool

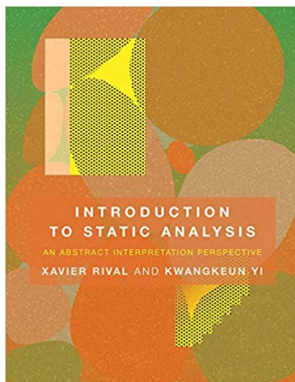
Also:

- previous exams, with correction
- example programming project  
(abstract interpreter for a toy language in OCaml)

Principle: self-evaluation

- no credit
- not corrected by the teachers

# Books!

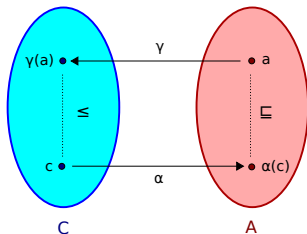


- 1 P. Cousot. Principles of Abstract Interpretation. 832 pages. The MIT Press. Sept. 2021.
- 2 X. Rival and K. Yi. Introduction to Static Analysis: An Abstract Interpretation Perspective. 320 pages. The MIT Press. Feb, 2020.

# Course plan (1/8)

## Foundations of abstract interpretation: (courses 1 & 2)

- mathematical background: **order theory** and **fixpoints**
- formalization of **abstraction**, soundness
- program **semantics** and program **properties**
- **hierarchy** of collecting semantics

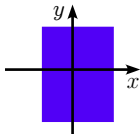




# Course plan (2/8)

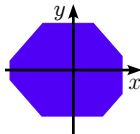
## Bricks of abstraction: numerical domains

simple domains



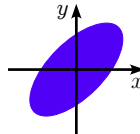
Intervals  
 $x \in [a, b]$

relational domains

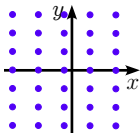


Octagons  
 $\pm x \pm y \leq c$

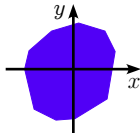
specific domains



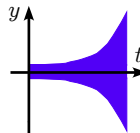
Ellipsoids  
 digital filters



Congruences  
 $x \in a\mathbb{Z} + b$



Polyhedra  
 $\sum_i \alpha_i x_i \leq \beta$

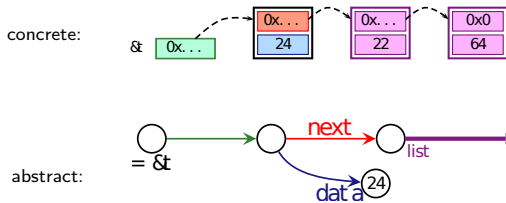


Exponentials  
 rounding errors

# Course plan (3/8)

## Bricks of abstraction: memory abstractions

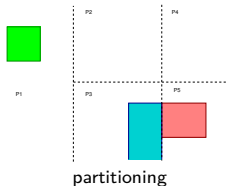
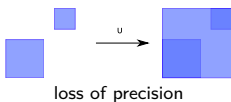
- beyond numeric: reason on **arrays**, **lists**, **trees**, **graphs**, ...
- challenges: variety of structures, destructive updates
- logical tools:
  - **separation logics** (a logic tailored for describing memory)
  - **parametric three valued logics** (representing arbitrary graphs)
- **abstract domains** based on these logics



# Course plan (4/8)

## Bricks of abstraction: partitioning abstractions

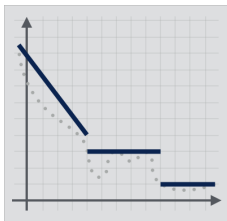
- most abstract domains are **not distributive**  
 $\implies$  reasoning over disjunctions **loses precision**
- first solution: **add disjunctions** to any abstract domain  
 $\implies$  expressive but costly
- second solution: **partitioning**  
 conjunctions of implications as logical predicates  
 (partitioning may be based on many semantic criteria)



# Course plan (5/8)

## Analyses: abstract interpretation for liveness properties

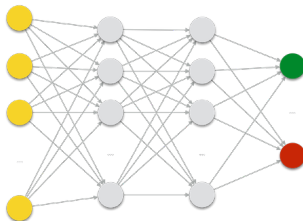
- beyond safety (e.g., absence of errors)  
we prove that **programs (eventually) do something good**
- abstract domains to reason about **program termination**  
inference of **ranking functions**



- generalization to **other liveness properties**  
(e.g., expressed in **CTL**)

# Course plan (6/8)

## Analyses: static analysis of neural networks

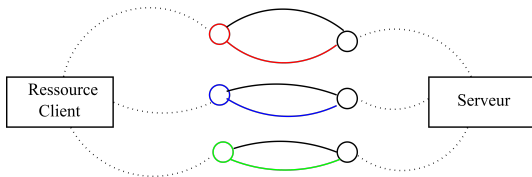


- verification of **local robustness** against **adversarial examples**
- **fairness** certification  
(special case of **global robustness** verification)
- verification of **functional properties**

# Course plan (7/8)

## Analyses: analysis of mobile systems

- dynamic creation of components and links
- analyze the links between components
  - distinguish between recursive components
  - abstractions as **sets of words**
- bound the number of components  
using numeric relations



# Course plan (8/8)

## Analyses: static analysis for security

- challenge: security properties are **diverse**  
from information leakage to unwanted execution of malicious code  
and **more complex than safety** and liveness
- the framework of **hyperproperties** can express security
- apply abstract interpretation to reason over **non-interference**

# Internship proposals

Possibility of **Master 2 internships** at **ENS** or **Sorbonne Université**.

## Example topics:

- Automatic inference of **input data assumptions**
- **Fairness** certification of **machine-learned software**
- Static analysis of **medical data processing software**
- **Incremental** static analysis
- Static analysis for **multi-language** programs
- ...

Formal proposals will be available on the **course page**  
and discussed during the courses  
also: **discuss with your teachers** for tailor-made subjects.