

Nash Equilibria in Symmetric Games with Partial Observation

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We investigate a model for representing large multiplayer games, which satisfy strong symmetry properties. This model is made of multiple copies of an arena; each player plays in his own arena, and can partially observe what the other players do. Therefore, this game has partial information and symmetry constraints, which make the computation of Nash equilibria difficult. We show several undecidability results, and for bounded-memory strategies, we precisely characterize the complexity of computing pure Nash equilibria (for qualitative objectives) in this game model.

1 Introduction

Multiplayer games. Games played on graphs have been intensively used in computer science as a tool to reason about and automatically synthesize interacting reactive systems [10]. Consider a server granting access to a printer and connected to several clients. The clients may send requests to the server, and the server grants access to the printer depending on the requests it receives. The server could have various strategies: for instance, never grant access to any client, or always immediately grant access upon request. However, it may also have constraints to satisfy (which define its winning condition): for instance, that no two clients should access the printer at the same time, or that any request must eventually be granted. A strategy for the server is then a policy that it should apply in order to achieve these goals.

Until recently, more focus had been put on the study of purely antagonistic games (a.k.a. zero-sum games), which conveniently represent systems evolving in a (hostile) environment: the aim of one player is to prevent the other player from achieving his own objective.

Non-zero-sum games. Over the last ten years, computer scientists have started considering games with non-zero-sum objectives: they allow for conveniently modelling complex infrastructures where each individual system tries to fulfill its own objectives, while still being subject to uncontrollable actions of the surrounding systems. As an example, consider a wireless network in which several devices try to send data: each device can modulate its transmitting power, in order to maximize its bandwidth or reduce energy consumption as much as possible. In that setting, focusing only on optimal strategies for one single agent is too narrow. Game-theoreticians have defined and studied many other solution concepts for such settings, of which Nash equilibrium [11] is a prominent one. A Nash equilibrium is a strategy profile where no player can improve the outcome of the game by unilaterally changing his strategy. In other terms, in a Nash equilibrium, each individual player has a satisfactory strategy. Notice that Nash equilibria need not exist or be unique, and are not necessarily optimal: Nash equilibria where all players lose may coexist with more interesting Nash equilibria. Finding constrained Nash equilibria (*e.g.*, equilibria in which some players are required to win) is thus an interesting problem for our setting.

Networks of identical devices. Our aim in this paper is to handle the special case where all the interacting systems (but possibly a few of them) are identical. This encompasses many situations involving

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computerized systems over a network. We propose a convenient way of modelling such situations, and develop algorithms for synthesizing a single strategy that, when followed by all the players, leads to a global Nash equilibrium. To be meaningful, this requires symmetry assumptions on the arena of the game (the board should look the same to all the players). We also include *imperfect observation* of the other players, which we believe is relevant in such a setting.

Our contributions. We propose a convenient model for representing large interacting systems, which we call *game structure*. A game structure is made of multiple copies of a single arena (one copy per player); each player plays on his own copy of the arena. As mentioned earlier, the players have imperfect information about the global state of the game (they may have a perfect view on some of their “neighbours”, but may be blind to some other players). In *symmetric* game structures, we additionally require that any two players are in similar situations: for every pair of players (A, B) , we are able to map each player C to a corresponding player D with the informal meaning that ‘player D is to B what player C is to A ’. Of course, winning conditions and imperfect information should respect that symmetry. We present several examples illustrating the model, and argue why it is a relevant model for computing symmetric Nash equilibria.

We show several undecidability results, in particular that the parameterized synthesis problem (aiming to obtain one policy that forms a Nash equilibrium when applied to any number of participants) is undecidable. We then characterize the complexity of computing (constrained) pure symmetric Nash equilibria in symmetric game structures, when objectives are given as LTL formulas, and when restricting to memoryless and bounded-memory strategies. This problem with no memory bound is then proven undecidable.

Related work. Game theory has been a very active area since the 1940’s, but its applications to computer science *via* graph games is quite recent. In that domain, until recently more focus had been put on zero-sum games [10]. Some recent works have considered multi-player non-zero-sum games, including the computation of (constrained) equilibria in turn-based and in concurrent games [5, 14, 2] or the development of temporal logics geared towards non-zero-sum objectives [4, 6].

None of those works distinguish symmetry constraints in strategy profiles nor in game description. Still, symmetry has been studied in the context of normal-form games [12, 7]: in such a game, each player has the same set of actions, and the utility function of a player only depends on his own action and on the number of players who played each action (it is independent on ‘who played what’). Finally, let us mention that symmetry was also studied in the context of model checking, where different techniques have been developed to deal with several copies of the same system [9, 8, 1].

By lack of space, most of the technical developments could not be included in this extended abstract. They are available in the technical report [3].

2 Symmetric concurrent games

2.1 Definitions

For any $k \in \mathbb{N} \cup \{\infty\}$, we write $[k]$ for the set $\{i \in \mathbb{N} \mid 0 \leq i < k\}$ (in particular, $[\infty] = \mathbb{N}$). Let $s = (p_i)_{i \in [n]}$ be a sequence, with $n \in \mathbb{N} \cup \{\infty\}$ being the length $|s|$ of s . Let $j \in \mathbb{N}$ s.t. $j - 1 < n$. The j th element of s , denoted s_{j-1} , is the element p_{j-1} (so that a sequence $(p_i)_{i \in [n]}$ may be named p when no ambiguity arises). The j th prefix $s_{<j}$ of s is the finite sequence $(p_i)_{i \in [j]}$. If s is finite, we write $\text{last}(s)$ for its last element $s_{|s|-1}$.

Definition 1 An arena is a tuple $\langle \text{States}, \text{Agt}, \text{Act}, \text{Mov}, \text{Tab} \rangle$ where *States* is a finite set of states; *Agt* is a finite set of agents (also named players); *Act* is a finite set of actions; *Mov*: $\text{States} \times \text{Agt} \rightarrow 2^{\text{Act}} \setminus \{\emptyset\}$ is the set of actions available to a given player in a given state; *Tab*: $\text{States} \times \text{Act}^{\text{Agt}} \rightarrow \text{States}$ is a transition function that specifies the next state, given a state and an action of each player.

The evolution of such a game is as usual: at each step, the players propose a move, and the successor state is given by looking up this action vector in the transition table. A path is a sequence of states obtained this way; we write Hist for the set of finite paths (or *histories*).

Let $A \in \text{Agt}$. A *strategy* for A is a mapping $\sigma_A : \text{Hist} \rightarrow \text{Act}$ such that for any $\rho \in \text{Hist}$, $\sigma_A(\rho) \in \text{Mov}(\text{last}(\rho), A)$. Given a set of players $C \subseteq \text{Agt}$, a strategy for C is a mapping σ assigning to each $A \in C$ a strategy for A (we write σ_A instead of $\sigma(A)$ to alleviate notations). As a special case, a strategy for Agt is called a *strategy profile*. A path π is *compatible* with a strategy σ of coalition C if, for any $i < |\pi|$, there exists a move $(m_A)_{A \in \text{Agt}}$ such that $\text{Tab}(\rho_{i-1}, (m_A)_{A \in \text{Agt}}) = \rho_i$ and $m_A = \sigma_A(\rho_{<i})$ for all $A \in C$. The set of *outcomes* of σ from a state s , denoted $\text{Out}(s, \sigma)$, is the set of plays from s that are compatible with σ .

Let \mathcal{G} be a game. A *winning condition* for player A is a set Ω_A of plays of \mathcal{G} . We say that a play $\rho \in \Omega_A$ yields payoff 1 to A , and a play $\rho \notin \Omega_A$ yields payoff 0 to A . A strategy σ of a coalition C is *winning* for A from a state s if $\text{Out}(s, \sigma) \subseteq \Omega_A$. A strategy profile σ is a *Nash equilibrium* if, for any $A \in \text{Agt}$ and any strategy σ'_A , if σ is losing for A , then so is $\sigma[A \mapsto \sigma'_A]$. In other terms, no player can individually improve his payoff.

Remark 2 *In this paper, we only use purely boolean winning conditions, but our algorithms could easily be extended to the semi-quantitative setting of [2], where each player has several (pre)ordered boolean objectives. We omit such extensions in this paper, and keep focus on symmetry issues.*

The model we propose is made of a one-player arena, together with an observation relation. Intuitively, each player plays in his own copy of the one-player arena; the global system is the product of all the local copies, but each player observes the state of the global system only through the observation relation. This is in particular needed for representing large networks of systems, in which each player may only observe some of his neighbours.

Example 3 *Consider for instance a set of identical devices (e.g. cell phones) connected on a local area network. Each device can modulate its emitting power. In order to increase its bandwidth, a device tends to increase its emitting power; but besides consuming more energy, this also adds noise over the network, which decreases the other players' bandwidth and encourages them to in turn increase their power. We can model a device as an m -state arena (state i corresponding to some power p_i , with $p_0 = 0$ representing the device being off). Any device would not know the exact state of the other devices, but would be able to evaluate the surrounding noise; this can be modelled using our observation relation. Based on this information, the device can decide whether it should increase or decrease its emitting power (knowing that the other devices play the same strategy as it is playing), resulting in a good balance between bandwidth and energy consumption.*

Definition 4 *An n -player game network is a tuple $\mathcal{G} = \langle G, (\equiv_i)_{i \in [n]}, (\Omega_i)_{i \in [n]} \rangle$ s.t. $G = \langle \text{States}, \{A\}, \text{Act}, \text{Mov}, \text{Tab} \rangle$ is a one-player arena; for each $i \in [n]$, \equiv_i is an equivalence relation on States^n (extended in a natural way to sequences of states of States^n). Two \equiv_i -equivalent configurations are indistinguishable to player i . This models imperfect information for player i ; for each $i \in [n]$, $\Omega_i \subseteq (\text{States}^n)^\omega$ is the objective of player i . We require that for all $\rho, \rho' \in (\text{States}^n)^\omega$, if $\rho \equiv_i \rho'$ then ρ and ρ' are equivalently in Ω_i .*

The semantics of this game is defined as the ‘‘product game’’ $\mathcal{G}' = \langle \text{States}', [n], \text{Act}, \text{Mov}', \text{Tab}', (\Omega_i)_{i \in [n]} \rangle$ where $\text{States}' = \text{States}^n$, $\text{Mov}'((s_0, \dots, s_{n-1}), i) = \text{Mov}(s, i)$, and the transition table is defined as

$$\text{Tab}'((s_0, \dots, s_{n-1}), (m_i)_{i \in [n]}) = (\text{Tab}(s_0, m_0), \dots, \text{Tab}(s_{n-1}, m_{n-1})).$$

An element of States^n is called a *configuration* of \mathcal{G} . The equivalence relation \equiv_i induces equivalence classes of configurations that player i cannot distinguish. We call these equivalence classes *information*

sets and denote \mathcal{I}_i the set of information sets for player i . Strategies should respect these information sets: a strategy σ_i for player i is \equiv_i -realisable whenever for all $\rho, \rho' \in \text{Hist}$, $\rho \equiv_i \rho'$ implies $\sigma_i(\rho) = \sigma_i(\rho')$. A strategy profile $\sigma = (\sigma_i)_{1 \leq i \leq n}$ is said *realisable in \mathcal{G}* whenever σ_i is \equiv_i -realisable for every $i \in [n]$.

Remark 5 We assume that each equivalence relation \equiv_i is given compactly using templates whose size is independant of n . As an example, for $P \subseteq \text{Agt}$, the relation $\text{Id}(P)$ defined by $(t, t') \in \text{Id}(P)$ iff $t[i] = t'[i]$ for all $i \in P$ encodes perfect observation of the players in P , and no information about the other players.

Example 6 Consider the cell-phone game again. It can be modelled as a game network where each player observes everything (i.e., the equivalence relations \equiv_i are the identity). A more realistic model for the system can be obtained by assuming that each player only gets precise information about his close neighbours, and less precise information (only an estimation of the global noise in the network), or no information at all, about the devices that are far away.

Despite the global arena being described as a product of identical arenas, not all games described this way are symmetric: the observation relation also has to be *symmetric*. We impose extra conditions on that relation in order to capture our expected notion of symmetry. Given a permutation π of $[n]$, for a configuration $t = (s_i)_{i \in [n]}$ we let $t(\pi) = (s_{\pi(i)})_{i \in [n]}$; for a path $\rho = (t_j)_{j \in \mathbb{N}}$, we let $\rho(\pi) = (t_j(\pi))_{j \in \mathbb{N}}$.

Definition 7 A game network $\mathcal{G} = \langle G, (\equiv_i)_{i \in [n]}, (\Omega_i)_{i \in [n]} \rangle$ is symmetric whenever for any two players $i, j \in [n]$, there is a permutation $\pi_{i,j}$ of $[n]$ such that $\pi_{i,j}(i) = j$ and satisfying the following conditions for every $i, j, k \in [n]$:

1. $\pi_{i,i}$ is the identity, and $\pi_{k,j} \circ \pi_{i,k} = \pi_{i,j}$; hence $\pi_{i,j}^{-1} = \pi_{j,i}$.
2. the observation made by the players is compatible with the symmetry of the game: for any two configurations t and t' , $t \equiv_i t'$ iff $t(\pi_{i,j}^{-1}) \equiv_j t'(\pi_{i,j}^{-1})$;
3. objectives are compatible with the symmetry of the game: for every play ρ , $\rho \in \Omega_i$ iff $\rho(\pi_{i,j}^{-1}) \in \Omega_j$.

In that case, $\pi = (\pi_{i,j})_{i,j \in [n]}$ is called a symmetric representation of \mathcal{G} .

The mappings $\pi_{i,j}$ define the symmetry of the game: $\pi_{i,j}(k) = l$ means that player l plays vis-à-vis player j the role that player k plays vis-à-vis player i . We give the intuition why we apply $\pi_{i,j}^{-1}$ in the definition above, and not $\pi_{i,j}$. Assume configuration $t = (s_0, \dots, s_{n-1})$ is observed by player i . The corresponding configuration for player j is $t' = (s'_0, \dots, s'_{n-1})$ where player- $\pi_{i,j}(k)$ state should be that of player k in t . That is, $s'_{\pi_{i,j}(k)} = s_k$, so that $t' = t(\pi_{i,j}^{-1})$.

These mappings also define how symmetry must be used in strategies: let \mathcal{G} be a symmetric n -player game network with symmetric representation π . We say that a strategy profile $\sigma = (\sigma_i)_{i \in [n]}$ is *symmetric* for the representation π if it is realisable (i.e., each player only plays according to what he can observe) and if for all $i, j \in [n]$ and every history ρ , it holds $\sigma_i(\rho) = \sigma_j(\rho(\pi_{i,j}^{-1}))$.

The following lemma characterizes symmetric strategy profiles:

Lemma 8 Fix a symmetric representation π for \mathcal{G} . If σ_0 is an \equiv_0 -realisable strategy for player 0, then the strategy profile σ defined for all $i > 0$ by $\sigma_i(\rho) = \sigma_0(\rho(\pi_{i,0}^{-1}))$ is symmetric.

Example 9 Consider a card game tournament with six players, three on each table. Here each player has a left neighbour, a right neighbour, and three opponents at a different table. To model this, one could assume player 0 knows everything about himself, and has some informations about his right neighbour (player 1) and his left neighbour (player 2). But he knows nothing about players 3, 4 and 5.

Now, the role of player 2 vis-à-vis player 1 is that of player 1 vis-à-vis player 0 (he is his right neighbour). Hence, we can define the symmetry as $\pi_{0,1}(0) = 1$, $\pi_{0,1}(1) = 2$, $\pi_{0,1}(2) = 0$, and $\pi_{0,1}(\{3, 4, 5\}) =$

$\{3, 4, 5\}$ (any choice is fine here). As an example, the observation relation in this setting could be that player 0 has perfect knowledge of his set of cards, but only knows the number of cards of players 1 and 2, and has no information about the other three players. Notice that other observation relations would have been possible (for instance, giving more information about the right player).

In this paper we are interested in computing (symmetric) Nash equilibria in symmetric game networks:

Problem 1 (Constrained existence of (symmetric) NE) *The constrained existence problem asks, given a symmetric game network \mathcal{G} , a symmetric representation π , a configuration t , a set $L \subseteq [n]$ of losing players, and a set $W \subseteq [n]$ of winning players, whether there is a (symmetric) Nash equilibrium σ in \mathcal{G} from t for the representation π , such that all players in L lose and all players in W win. If L and W are empty, the problem is simply called the existence problem. If $W = [n]$, the problem is called the positive existence problem.*

We first realise that even though symmetric Nash equilibria are Nash equilibria with special properties, they are in some sense at least as hard to find as Nash equilibria. This can be proved by seeing the individual game structure as a product of n disconnected copies of the original individual structure. This way, the strategy played by one player on one copy imposes no constraints on the strategy played by another player on a different copy.

Proposition 10 *From a symmetric game network \mathcal{G} we can construct in polynomial time a symmetric game network \mathcal{H} such that there exists a symmetric Nash equilibrium in \mathcal{H} if, and only if, there exists a Nash equilibrium in \mathcal{G} . Furthermore the construction only changes the arena, but does not change the number of players nor the objectives or the resulting payoffs.*

3 Our results

Undecidability with non-regular objectives. Our games allow for arbitrary boolean objectives, defined for each player as a set of winning plays. As can be expected, this is too general to get decidability of our problems even with perfect information, since it can be used to encode the runs of a two-counter machine:

Theorem 11 *The (constrained) existence of a symmetric Nash equilibrium for non-regular objectives in (two-player) perfect-information symmetric game networks is undecidable.*

Undecidability with a parameterized number of players. Parameterized synthesis of Nash equilibria (that is, synthesizing a single strategy that each player will apply, and that yields a Nash equilibrium for any number of players) was one of our targets in this work. We show that computing such equilibria is not possible, even in rather restricted settings.

Theorem 12 *The (positive) existence of a parameterized symmetric Nash equilibrium for LTL objectives in symmetric game networks is undecidable (even for memoryless strategies).*

This is proved by encoding a Turing machine as a game network with arbitrarily many players, each player controlling one cell of the tape. The machine halts if there exists a number n of players such that the play reaches the halting state. We use LTL formulas to enforce correct simulation of the Turing machine.

From positive existence to existence. Because of the previous result, we now fix the number n of players. Before turning to our decidability results, we begin with showing that positive existence of Nash equilibria is not harder than existence. Notice that this makes a difference with the setting of turn-based games, where Nash equilibria always exist.

Proposition 13 *Deciding the (symmetric) existence problem in (symmetric) game networks is always at least as hard as deciding the positive (symmetric) existence problem. The reduction doubles the number of players and uses LTL objectives, but does not change the nature of the strategies (memoryless, bounded-memory, or general).*

Bounded-memory strategies.

Theorem 14 *The (positive, constrained) existence of a bounded-memory symmetric Nash equilibrium for LTL objectives in symmetric game networks is EXPSPACE-complete.*

The EXPSPACE-hardness results are direct consequences of the proof of Theorem 12 (the only difference is that we restrict to a Turing machine using exponential space).

The algorithm for memoryless strategies is as follows: it first guesses a memoryless strategy for one player, from which it deduces the strategy to be played by the other players. It then looks for the players that are losing, and checks if they alone can improve their payoff. If they cannot improve the guessed strategy yields a Nash equilibrium, otherwise it does not yield an equilibrium.

The first step is to guess and store an \equiv_0 -realisable memoryless strategy σ_0 for player 0, which we then prove witnesses the existence of a symmetric Nash equilibrium. Such a strategy is a mapping from States^n to Act. We intend player 0 to play according to σ_0 , and any player i to play according to $\sigma_0(\pi_{i,0}^{-1}(s_0, \dots, s_{n-1}))$ in state (s_0, \dots, s_{n-1}) . From Lemma 8 we know that all symmetric memoryless strategy profiles can be characterized by such an \equiv_0 -realisable memoryless strategy for player 0.

The algorithm then guesses a set W of players (which satisfies the given constraint), and checks that under the strategy profile computed above, the players in W achieve their objectives while the players not in W do not. This is achieved by computing the non-deterministic Büchi automata for ϕ_i if $i \in W$ and for $\neg\phi_i$ if $i \notin W$, and checking that the outcome of the strategy profile above (which is a lasso-shaped path and can easily be computed from strategy σ_0) is accepted by all those automata.

It remains to check that the players not in W cannot win if they deviate from their assigned strategy. For each player i not in W , we build the one-player game where all players but player i play according to the selected strategy profile. The resulting automaton contains all the plays that can be obtained by a deviation of player i . It just remains to check that there is no path satisfying ϕ_i in that automaton. If this is true for all players not in W , then the selected strategy σ_0 gives rise to a memoryless symmetric Nash equilibrium.

Regarding (space) complexity, storing the guessed strategy requires space $O(|\text{States}|^n)$. The Büchi automata have size exponential in the size of the formulas, but can be handled on-the-fly using classical constructions, so that the algorithm only requires polynomial space in the size of the formula. The lasso-shaped outcome, as well as the automata representing the deviations of the losing players, have size $O(|\text{States}|^n)$, but can also be handled on-the-fly. In the end, the whole algorithm runs in exponential space in the number of players, and polynomial in the size of the game and in the size of the LTL formulas.

The above algorithm can be lifted to bounded-memory strategies: given a memory bound m , it guesses a strategy σ_0 using memory m , and does the same computations as above. Storing the strategy now requires space $O(m \cdot |\text{States}|^n)$, which is still exponential, even if m is given in binary.

Remark 15 *Notice that the algorithms above could be adapted to handle non-symmetric equilibria in non-symmetric game networks: it would just guess all the strategies, the payoff, and check the satisfaction of the LTL objectives in the product automaton obtained by applying the strategies.*

The algorithm could also be adapted, still with the same complexity, to handle richer objectives, in particular in the semi-quantitative setting of [2], where the players have several (pre)ordered objectives. Instead of guessing the set of winners, the algorithm would guess, for each player, which objectives are satisfied, and check that no individual improvement is possible. The latter can be achieved by listing all possible improvements and checking that none of them can be reached.

General strategies. We already mentioned an undecidability result in Theorem 11 for two-player games and perfect information when general strategies are allowed. However, the objectives used for achieving the reduction are quite complex. On the other hand, imperfect information also leads to undecidability for

LTL objectives with only 3 players. To show this, we can slightly alter a proof from [13]. Here, synthesis of distributed reactive systems (corresponding to finding sure-winning strategies) with LTL objectives is shown undecidable in the presence of imperfect information. The situation used in the proof can be modelled in our framework and by adding a matching-penny module in the beginning and slightly changing the LTL objectives, we can obtain undecidability of Nash equilibria instead of sure-winning strategies.

Theorem 16 *The existence of a (symmetric) Nash equilibrium for LTL objectives in symmetric game networks is undecidable for $n \geq 3$ players.*

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