Iterative problem solving: The mapcode approach

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Motivation

- Basic Machinery: Discrete Flows
- Iterative Problem Solving
- **Problem Specification**
- Mapcode Machines
- Convergence
- Informal Example: Multiplication machine
- Invariant Functions and Correctness
- Examples: Multiplication (contd) and Factorial
- Conclusion

Computers are good at **repeatedly** doing a task.

- 1. They are fast.
- 2. They don't get tired.
- 3. They don't get bored.

Repeatedly doing a task is called **iteration**.

Computers are used to solve problems that take an instance and return an answer after iterating on a task.

But they need to be **instructed**:

- 1. Where to start
- 2. What to do
- 3. When to stop
- 4. How to report the answer

Anatomy of a computation: computing 3!



- -----
- 1. Where to start: ρ
- 2. What to do: F

- 3. When to stop: fixed point
- 4. How to report answer: π .

The structure of states and maps



- ρ : maps instances to states π : maps states to answers
- *F*: maps states to states

Multiplication using addition and decrement

$$\begin{array}{ccc} (3,4) & & 12 \\ \downarrow^{\rho} & & \pi^{\uparrow} \\ (3,4,0) \xrightarrow{F} (2,4,4) \xrightarrow{F} (1,4,8) \xrightarrow{F} (0,4,12) \end{array}$$

Our goal in these slides is to

- 1. Introduce a simple mathematical theory of iteration
- 2. Define iterative problem solving
- 3. Implement iterative problem solving in Python

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Definition 1 (Discrete Flow) A discrete flow *D* is a pair

$$\langle X, F : X \to X \rangle$$

where

- X is a set called the **state space** of D.
- *F* is a function called the **dynamical map** of *D*.

x' denotes the 'next' state.

$$x' = F(x)$$

Picture of a Discrete Flow



Exercise break: Examples & non-examples of Discrete Flow

Which of the following are discrete flows?

1.
$$X = \mathbb{N}$$
, $F_{inc} = x \mapsto x + 1$

2.
$$X=\mathbb{N}$$
, $F_{\mathsf{sqr}}=x\mapsto x^2$

3.
$$X = \mathbb{R}$$
, $F_{cos} = x \mapsto cosine(x)$

4.
$$X = \mathbb{R}, F_? = x \mapsto (x-1)/x$$

5.
$$X = \mathbb{N}$$
, $F_{countdown} = n \mapsto$

$$\begin{cases}
0 & \text{if } n = 0 \\
n - 1 & \text{otherwise}
\end{cases}$$

Definition 2 (F-closed sets) Let $D = (X, F : X \to X)$ be a discrete flow. A set S of X is *F*-closed if $F(S) \subseteq S$, i.e., for each $x \in S$, $F(x) \in S$. Let $D = (X, F : X \to X)$ be a discrete flow. The following subsets of X are closed:

1. X

2. Ø

Definition 3 (Trajectory, Orbit) Let $\langle X, F : X \to X \rangle$ be a discrete flow.

• The **trajectory** of an element $x \in X$ is the sequence

$$x, F(x), F^{2}(x), F^{3}(x), \ldots$$

• The **orbit** of *x* is the set

$$\{x, F(x), F^2(x), F^3(x), \ldots\}$$

- 1. orb(x) where $x \in X$
- 2. $orb(S) = \bigcup_{x \in S} orb(x)$ where S is any subset of X

Definition 4 (Subflow) Let $D = (X, F : X \to X)$ be a discrete flow. Let S be a subset X that is F-closed.

Then $D_S = (S, F|_S)$ is a discrete flow. ¹ D_S is called a **subflow of** D.

¹If $S \subseteq A$ and $F : A \to B$, then $F|_S : S \to B$ is the restriction of F to S.

Definition 5 (Generated Subflow) Let $(X, F : X \to X)$ be a flow. Let $x \in X$. Then $(orb(x), F|_{orb(x)})$ is a subflow **generated** by x.

If $S \subseteq X$, then $(orb(S), F|_{orb(S)})$ is the subflow **generated** by S.

Definition 6 (Fixed Point) Let $D = \langle X, F : X \to X \rangle$ be a discrete flow.

- $x \in X$ is a **fixed point** of F if x = F(x).
- **fix**(**F**): the set of fixed points of *F*.

- 1. (\mathbb{N}, F_{inc}) :
- 2. (\mathbb{N}, F_{sqr}) :
- 3. (\mathbb{R}, F_{cos}) : hint
- 4. (\mathbb{N} , $F_{countdown}$):

1. $\{x\}$, where x is a fixed point of F

2. fix(F)

Definition 7 (Transient Point) Let $D = \langle X, F : X \to X \rangle$ be a discrete flow.

• $x \in X$ is transient if $x \neq F(x)$.

Definition 8 (Reaches) Let $(X, F : X \to X)$ be a discrete flow.

Let x and y be states in X.

x reaches y, alternatively y is reachable from x, if, for some $i\in\mathbb{N},$

$$y = F^i(x)$$

Definition 9 (Convergent point) Let $D = \langle X, F : X \to X \rangle$ be a discrete flow.

- x ∈ X is a (F-) convergent point of F in X if it reaches a fixed point.
- $S \subseteq X$ is **convergent** if for each $x \in S$, x is convergent.
- con(F): the set of convergent points of F in X.

- 1. (\mathbb{N}, F_{inc}) :
- 2. (\mathbb{N}, F_{sqr}) :
- 3. (\mathbb{R}, F_{cos}) : hint
- 4. (\mathbb{N} , $F_{countdown}$):

```
\# Assumes x in con(F)
\# returns element in fix(F)
\# xprime ensures F(x) computed
# only once per iteration.
def loop(x,F):
    while True:
        x prime = F(x)
        if x == xprime: # fixed point!
             break
        else:
            x = x prime
    return x
```

Let $D = \langle X, F : X \to X \rangle$ be a discrete flow. The **limit map** of *F*, *F*-*infinity*, is the function

 $F^{\infty}: con(F) \to fix(F)$

```
# Limit Map
# takes a function F
# returns a function F_{-inf}.
\# F_inf takes an x in con(F)
# and returns an element in fix(F).
def limit_map(F):
    def F_{inf}(x): # assume: x in con(F)
        return loop(x, F)
    return F inf
```

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 $\begin{array}{l} \textbf{Definition 10 (Iterative Problem Solving)} \\ \text{An instance \mathcal{A} of computational problem solving is a pair $\mathcal{A}=\langle \mathcal{P}, \mathcal{M} \rangle$ consisting of $} \end{array}$

1. A problem specification \mathcal{P}

2. A mapcode machine specification $\ensuremath{\mathcal{M}}$

In what follows, we present the Mapcode Approach to Iterative Problem solving[?].

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A problem specification $\mathcal{P} = \langle \mathcal{F}, \mathcal{R}, \mathcal{N} \rangle$ consists of

- Functional Requirement Specification \mathcal{F} : What is the function that needs to be computed?
- Resource Specification \mathcal{R} : What are the primitive datatypes and operations on those datatypes available to compute the function?
- Non-functional Requirements Specification \mathcal{N} : What are the constraints on time, memory space, total cost, security, performance, and usability of the computational solution?

A functional specification $\mathcal{F} = \langle I, A, f \rangle$ consists of the following:

- Input Space I : The set of all possible inputs.
- Answer Space A : The set from which answers are drawn.
- Specification map $f : I \rightarrow A$, the function to be computed.

When constructing the specification map, one needs to be convinced that each problem input is indeed associated with a unique answer.

- **Existence**: For each problem input p : I, there is indeed a answer a : A.
- Uniqueness: If a_1 and a_2 are answers associated with a problem input p, then $a_1 = a_2$.

Compute the Greatest Common Divisor of two natural numbers.

- Input Space: $\mathbb{N}\times\mathbb{N}$
- Answer Space: \mathbb{N}
- Specification map: gcd : N² × N. For each pair of naturals (a, b), gcd(a, b) is the largest number that divides both a and b.
Let a, b be two naturals. Then

- Existence: The gcd is an element of all the common factors of *a* and *b*. This set is not empty, since clearly, 1 is a common factor for both *a* and *b*.
- Uniqueness: Let r₁ and r₂ be two gcd's of a and b. Then, since r₁ is the greatest common factor, r₁ ≥ r₂. By a similar argument, r₂ ≥ r₁. Hence r₁ = r₂.

1. Factorial

- 2. The maximum element in a list
- 3. Searching a given element in a list
- 4. Reversing a list
- 5. Sorting a list

- 1. Input space: $I = \mathbb{N}$ (natural numbers)
- 2. Answer space: $A = \mathbb{N}$ (natural numbers)
- 3. Specification map $f: I \to A$

4.
$$f(n) = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } n = 0 \\ \prod_{i=1}^{n} i & \text{if } n > 0 \end{cases}$$

Clearly f is a function. For n = 0, the answer is unique. For n > 0, the answer is unique because \prod is a total function.

Exercise solution: Functional Specification for List Search

- 1. Input space: $I = a : \alpha \times s : \text{List}[\alpha]$ (List of elements of type α).
- 2. Answer space: $A = \{ absent \} \cup \{ i : [0 ... |s|-1] \}.$
- 3. Specification map $f: I \to A$

4. $f(s) = \begin{cases} \text{absent} & \text{if } a \notin \underline{s} \\ \text{otherwise } i, & \text{where } i = \min\{j \in \mathbb{N} \mid s_j = a\} \end{cases}$ Clearly f is a function. For $a \notin \underline{s}$, the answer is unique. Otherwise, the number of indices where a occurs in s is non-zero. The

answer in that case is just the minimum index, which is unique.

- **Data Types**: What data types may be used in the problem and solution specification?
- **Operations**: What operations on the those data types are allowed?
- Identities: What identities hold between operations on the data types?

- Data types: natural numbers ${\mathbb N}$
- Operations:
 - $\bullet \ \ \mathsf{decrement} \ -: \mathbb{N}_+ \to \mathbb{N}$
 - multiplication $*:\mathbb{N}^2\to\mathbb{N}$
 - comparison =, \neq : $\mathbb{N}^2 \to \mathbb{N}$

- Data types: integers $\mathbb Z$
- Operations:
 - decrement $-: \mathbb{Z} \to \mathbb{Z}$
 - multiplication $*:\mathbb{Z}^2\to\mathbb{Z}$
 - comparison $=, \neq : \mathbb{Z}^2 \to \mathbb{Z}$

This resource specification is more common in programming languages that have $\mathbb Z$ but not $\mathbb N$ as primitive datatypes.

- Data types: natural numbers ${\mathbb N}$
- Operations:
 - subtraction $-: \mathbb{N}^2 \to \mathbb{N}$
 - comparison $=, \neq: \mathbb{N}^2 \to \mathbb{N}$

- Data types: natural numbers ${\mathbb N}$
- Operations:
 - division / : $\mathbb{N}\times\mathbb{N}_+\to\mathbb{N}$
 - comparison $=, \neq: \mathbb{N}^2 \to \mathbb{N}$

Standard data types and operations

- Booleans, Natural numbers, Integers, Rationals, enumerated types
- Boolean, Arithmetic and relational operations
- Finite sets and operations on finite sets
- Lists, Stacks, Queues, Finite Trees
- Tupling and projection operations

We will assume that all the above standard data types and operations are available as resources unless specified otherwise.

Sometimes there are also non-functional specification , e.g.,

- Time available for computation
- Memory space available for computation
- Security, Performance and usability of the solution

Assumption: no non-functional requirements.

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Definition 11 (Mapcode Machine) A mapcode machine is a tuple

$$\mathcal{M} = \langle I, A, X, \rho, F, \pi \rangle$$

consisting of

- an input set I • an *init map* $\rho: I \to X$,
- an *output set* A
- a state space X

- a program map $F: X \to X$
- an answer map $\pi: X \to A$

Definition 12 (Mapcode Algorithm) Let

$$\mathcal{M} = \langle I, A, X, \rho, F, \pi \rangle$$

be mapcode machine.

 $\ensuremath{\mathcal{M}}$ is an algorithm if

 $\rho(I) \subseteq con(F)$

Definition 13 (Map computed by a mapcode algorithm) Let

$$\mathcal{M} = \langle I, A, X, \rho, F, \pi \rangle$$

be a mapcode algorithm.

The map computed by $\ensuremath{\mathcal{M}}$ is the function

 $\pi \circ F^{\infty} \circ \rho$

Computing a function via a Mapcode Machine

Definition 14 (Computation of a function by a mapcode machine) Let $f : I_{\mathcal{F}} \to A_{\mathcal{F}}$ be a specification map. Let $\mathcal{M} = (I, A, X, \rho, F, \pi)$ be a mapcode machine.

 \mathcal{M} computes f if

- Signature: $I_{\mathcal{F}} = I$ and $A_{\mathcal{F}} = A$.
- Convergence: \mathcal{M} is an algorithm.
- **Partial Correctness:** Assuming M is an algorithm, the function computed by M is f:

$$\pi \circ F^{\infty} \circ \rho = f$$

Mapcode Commute Diagram



Algorithmic Problem Solving for mapcode

Definition 15 (Algorithmic Problem solving via Mapcode) Let $\mathcal{P} = \langle \mathcal{F}, \mathcal{R}, \mathcal{N} \rangle$ be a problem with functional specification

$$\mathcal{F} = \langle I_{\mathcal{F}}, A_{\mathcal{F}}, f : I_{\mathcal{F}} \to A_{\mathcal{F}} \rangle$$

A mapcode machine

$$\mathcal{M} = (I, A, X, \rho, F, \pi)$$

is a **solution** to \mathcal{P} if

- **Design:** \mathcal{M} computes f.
- Implementation: I, X and A are defined using the datatypes in R. ρ, π and F are defined using the operations in R.
- Quality: \mathcal{M} satisfies the non-functional requirements \mathcal{N} .

```
# Mapcode
# takes
#
 rho: I—>con(F)
\# F: X->X.
\# pi: fix (F)->A
# returns element in A
def mapcode(rho, F, pi):
    F_infty=limit_map(F)
    def f(v):
        return pi(F_infty(rho(v)))
    return f
```

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Let A be a set. Let < be a binary relation on A. (A, <) is well-founded if there are no infinite descending chains of the form:

 $\ldots < a_2 < a_1 < a_0$

Definition 16 (Bound Function) Let (W, <) be a well-founded relation. Let $D = \langle X, F \rangle$ be a discrete flow. A function $B : X \to W$ is a **bound function** for D if whenever $x \in X$ is transient, B(F(x)) < B(x).

Lemma 17 (Bound function implies convergence)

Let $D = (X, F : X \to X)$ be a discrete flow such that there exists a well-founded relation (W, \leq) and a bound function $B : X \to W$ for D. Then X is convergent and X = con(F).

- 1. Let $B: X \to W$ be a bound function for D.
- 2. Suppose X is not convergent. Then there is a trajectory $\{a_i\}$ where each $a_i = F^i(a_0)$ is transient.
- 3. Since B is a bound function and a_i is transient, $B(F(a_i)) = B(a_{i+1}) < B(a_i)$
- 4. Hence, we have an infinite descending chain

$$\dots B(a_2) < B(a_1) < B(a_0)$$

 But no such chain is possible since W is well-founded. Contradiction. Lemma 18 (Convergence for mapcode) Let $\mathcal{M} = (I, A, X, \rho, F, \pi)$ be a mapcode machine.

Consider the subflow generated by $\rho(I)$:

 $D_{\textit{orb}(\rho(I))} = (\textit{orb}(\rho(I)), F|_{\textit{orb}(\rho(I))})$ of (X, F) .

If there is a bound function for $D_{orb(\rho(I))}$, then $\rho(I) \subseteq con(F)$

Proof:

- 1. By Lemma 17, $orb(\rho(I))$ is convergent, i.e., $orb(\rho(I)) = con(F|_{\rho(I)}).$
- 2. But $con(F|_{\rho(I)}) \subseteq con(F)$
- 3. From steps 1 and 2,

$$\rho(I) \subseteq con(F)$$

To show that $\mathcal{M} = (I, A, \rho, X, F, \pi)$ is an algorithm, it suffices to demonstrate a bound function for the flow generated by $\rho(I)$.

Informally, some element of the state has to 'decrease' for each iteration.

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Informal presentation of requirement: Given two natural numbers, compute their product using addition.

- Functional Specification
 - $I = \mathbb{N}^2$: The input consists of two natural numbers.
 - $A = \mathbb{N}$: The answer is a natural number
 - $f_*: I \to A$ is the multiplication function: f(a, b) = a * b
- Resource specification
 - Data types: Natural Numbers
 - Operations: Comparison with zero, decrement and addition

Solution mapcode machine

$$\mathcal{M}_* = \langle \rho : I \to X, F : X \to X, \pi : X \to A \rangle$$

where

- State Space: $(x, y, z) \in X = \mathbb{N}^3$
- Init map: $\rho(x, y) = (x, y, 0)$
- Answer map: $\pi(x, y, z) = z$
- Dynamical map:

$$F(x, y, z) = \begin{cases} (x, y, z) & \text{if } x = 0\\ (x - 1, y, z + y) & \text{if } x > 0 \end{cases}$$

```
# computes m*n using mapcode
# by repeatedly adding
# n to 0, m times
```

```
def rho(i):
    [m,n] = i
    return [m, n, 0]
```

```
def pi(x):
    [m, n, a] = x
    return a
```

Multiplication with mapcode in Python: F and f

def F(x):
 [m,n,a] = x # m, n, a are naturals
 if m == 0:
 return x
 else:
 return [m-1, n, a+n]

multiply(m,n) computes m*n
def multiply(m,n): # m,n are naturals
f = mapcode(rho, F, pi)
return f([m,n])

Computing f(2,3):

$$(2,3) \qquad \qquad 6 \\ \downarrow^{\rho} \qquad \qquad \pi \uparrow \\ (2,3,0) \xrightarrow{F} (1,3,3) \xrightarrow{F} (0,3,6)$$

We wish to prove that

 $\rho(I) \subseteq con(F)$

Proof: It is easy to verify that $G: X \to \mathbb{N}$ where

$$G(x,y,z) \stackrel{\mathsf{def}}{=} x$$

is a bound function for $\langle X, F \rangle$:

1. Let $w = (x, y, z) \in X$ be transient.

2. Then x > 0 (by definition of *F*)

3.
$$G(F(x,y,z)) = x - 1 < x = G(x,y,z).$$

Correctness of \mathcal{M}_* (Informally)

We have

$$(x,y,0) \xrightarrow{F} (x-1,y,y) \xrightarrow{F} (x-2,y,2y) \xrightarrow{F} \dots \xrightarrow{F} (x-x,y,xy)$$
$$= (0,y,xy)$$

Hence, we may conjecture that

$$F^{\infty}(x,y,0) = (0,y,xy)$$

Then

$$\pi(F^{\infty}(\rho(x,y))) = \pi(F^{\infty}(x,y,0))$$
$$= \pi(0,y,xy)$$
$$= xy$$

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Definition 19 (Invariant Function)

- Let $D = (X, F : X \to X)$ be a discrete flow.
- Let *E* be any set.
- A function θ : X → E is an invariant function for D if, for each x ∈ X,

$$\theta(x) = \theta(F(x))$$

Lemma 20 (Invariant function and iterates) Let D = (X, F) be a discrete flow. Let $\theta : X \to E$ be an invariant function for D.

Then, for each $x \in X$ and for each $i \in \mathbb{N}$,

$$\theta(x) = \theta(F^n(x))$$

Corollary 21

If $x \in con(F)$, then

$$\theta(x) = \theta(F^{\infty}(x))$$

Theorem 22 (Partial Correctness via invariant function)

- Consider a specification map f : I → A and a mapcode algorithm M = (I, X, A, ρ : I → X, F : X → X, π : X → A)
- Let $\theta : X \to A$ be an invariant map for (X, F). Assume
 - init: $\theta(\rho(i)) = f(i)$ for each problem instance $i \in I$ and
 - answer: $\theta(x) = \pi(x)$ for each fixed point $x \in fix(F)$.
- Then, $\pi \circ F^{\infty} \circ \rho = f$.

Proof of partial correctness via invariant function (short version)

$$f(i) = \theta(\rho(i))$$
(1)
= $\theta(F^{\infty}(\rho(i)))$ (2)
= $\pi(F^{\infty}(\rho(i)))$ (3)

- \mathcal{M} algorithm: Given (4)
 - assumption (5)
 - from 'init': Given (6)
 - from 4 and 5 (7)
- from 7 and defn of F^{∞} (8)
- $\forall z \in fix(F)$, 'answer': Given (9)
 - from 8 and 9 (10)
 - since θ is invariant (11)
 - from 6 (12)

 $\rho(I) \subseteq con(F)$ $s \in I$ $\theta(\rho(s)) = f(s)$ $\rho(s) \in con(F)$ $F^{\infty}(\rho(s)) \in fix(F)$ $\pi(z) = \theta(z)$ $\pi(F^{\infty}(\rho(s))) = \theta(F^{\infty}(\rho(s)))$ $= \theta(\rho(s))$ = f(s)

To prove that a mapcode algorithm $\mathcal{M} = (I, A, X, \rho, F, \pi)$ computes a specification map, $f : I \rightarrow A$, it is sufficient to construct an invariant function $\theta : X \rightarrow E$ such that the init and answer conditions are met:

1.
$$heta(
ho(i)) = f(i)$$
 for each $i \in I$

2. $\theta(x) = \pi(x)$ for each $x \in fix(F)$

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For \mathcal{M}_* , $I = \mathbb{N}^2$, $A = \mathbb{N}$ and $X = \mathbb{N}^3$, $f_*(x, y) = xy$, $\rho(x, y) = (x, y, z)$ and $\pi(x, y, z) = z$.

Define

$$\theta(x,y,z) \stackrel{\mathrm{def}}{=} xy + z$$

Intuition:

- *z*: work already done
- *xy*: work yet to be done (*x* number of *y*'s need to be added)
- θ(x, y, z): total work derived by combining work done and work that needs to be done.

init: If $(x,y) \in I$, then $\theta(\rho(x,y)) = f_*(x,y)$

•
$$\theta(\rho(x,y)) = \theta(x,y,0) = xy + 0 = xy$$

•
$$f_*(x,y) = xy$$

answer: If $(x, y, z) \in fix(F)$, then $\pi(x, y, z) = \theta(x, y, z)$

• Since
$$(x, y, z) \in fix(F)$$
, $x = 0$

•
$$\pi(x, y, z) = z$$

•
$$\theta(x, y, z) = \theta(0, y, z) = 0 * y + z = z$$

- **Convergence:** $\rho(I) \subseteq con(F)$: verified by constructing suitable bound function in Slide 70.
- Partial Correctness: $\rho(I) \subseteq con(F) \implies \pi \circ F^{\infty}\rho = f_*$: verified by constructing suitable invariant function in Slide 80.

This proves

Total Correctness: \mathcal{M}_* computes f_* .

Example: Factorial

- The problem is $\mathcal{P} = \langle I = \mathbb{N}, A = \mathbb{N}, f(n) = !n, P = \{-, *\} \rangle$
- Mapcode machine:
 M₁ = ⟨ρ : I → X, F : X → X, π : X → A⟩ where
 1. X = N²

2.
$$\rho(n) = (n, 1)$$

3.
$$F(i,a) = \begin{cases} (i,a) & \text{if } i = 0\\ (i-1,a*i) & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

4. $\pi(i, a) = a$

$$G: X \to \mathbb{N}, G(i, a) \stackrel{\mathsf{def}}{=} i$$

is a bound function for $\langle X, F \rangle$. Verify:

- Let $(i, a) \in X$ be transient.
- Then, i > 0, and
- G(F(i,a)) = i 1 < i = G(i,a).

$$\theta(i,a) \stackrel{\mathsf{def}}{=} a * i!$$

• Let
$$x = (i, a) \in X$$

• case: $x \in fix(F)$, then clearly $\theta(x) = \theta(F(x))$.

• If
$$x \notin fix(F)$$
, then $i > 0$:

•
$$\theta(i,a) = a * i! = a * i * (i-1)! = \theta(F(i,a)).$$

- Init: $\theta(\rho(n)) = \theta(n, 1) = 1 * n! = n!$
- Answer: Let $(i, a) \in fix(F)$. Then i = 0
 - $\pi(0,a) = a$ and
 - $\theta(0, a) = a * 0! = a$

Partial Correctness: $\rho(I) \subseteq A \implies \pi \circ F^{\infty} \circ \rho = !$

- **Convergence:** $\rho(I) \subseteq con(F)$: Shown in Slide 85
- Partial Correctness: $\rho(I) \subseteq A \implies \pi \circ F^{\infty} \circ \rho = !$: Shown in Slide 87

Hence $\mathcal{M}_!$ computes !.

Exercise: Invariant functions and mapcode machines

- Summation: Define an invariant function.
- GCD: Define a mapcode machine to compute gcd.
- *max*: Define a mapcode machine to compute the maximum element of a nonempty list of natural numbers.

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References