
Agent-based Models for Exploring Social Complexity, with an Application of Network Analysis to Agents

SIMULTECH 2015, Colmar 21-23 July 2015

Pietro Terna

Collegio Carlo Alberto and University of Torino (retired professor)

web.econ.unito.it/terna, pietro.terna@unito.it

Accompanying material

Introductory:

- P. Terna (2013), A Complex Lens for Economics, or: About Ants and their Anthill, in “Spazio filosofico”, 7, pp. 167-177

<http://www.spaziofilosofico.it/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Terna-English.pdf>

- P. Terna (2013), Learning agents and decisions: new perspectives, in "Law and Computational Social Science", 1,

http://eco83.econ.unito.it/terna/materiale/terna_def.pdf

Technical/Advanced:

- R. Boero, M. Morini, M. Sonnessa and P. Terna (2015), Agent-based Models of the Economy – From Theories to Applications, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills,

<http://www.palgrave.com/page/detail/agentbased-models-of-the-economy-/?K=9781137339805>

Basics

A note: the slides contain several references; you can find them in a draft paper, on line at <http://goo.gl/ryhyF>

Artifacts of social systems

Leibniz (xi. *De scientia universalis seu calculo philosophico*): ...
*quando orientur controversiae, non magis disputatione opus erit
inter duos philosophos, quam inter duos computistas. Sufficiet
enim calamos in manus sumere sedereque ad abbacos et sibi
mutuo (...) dicere, calculemus*

Calculemus or ... *Simulemus*

... plus complexity, bounded rationality, chaos ...

*Rosenblueth and Wiener's 1945 paper, “The Role of Models in Science” ,
as a “manual” from the founders of cybernetics.*

(p. 317) A distinction has already been made between **material and formal or intellectual models**. A material model is the representation of a complex system by a system which is assumed simpler and which is also assumed to have some properties similar to those selected for study in the original complex system. A formal model is a symbolic assertion in logical terms of an idealized relatively simple situation sharing the structural properties of the original factual system.

Material models are useful in the following cases. **a)** They may **assist the scientist in replacing a phenomenon in an unfamiliar field by one in a field in which he is more at home.**

(...) **b)** A material model may enable the **carrying out of experiments under more favorable conditions** than would be available in the original system.

Rosenblueth and Wiener's 1945 paper, “The Role of Models in Science” , as a “manual” from the founders of cybernetics.

(p. 319) It is obvious, therefore, that the difference between open-box and closed-box problems, although significant, is one of degree rather than of kind. All scientific problems begin as closed-box problems, i.e., only a few of the significant variables are recognized. Scientific progress consists in a progressive opening of those boxes. The successive addition of terminals or variables, leads to gradually more elaborate theoretical models: hence to a hierarchy in these models, from relatively simple, highly abstract ones, to more complex, more concrete theoretical structures

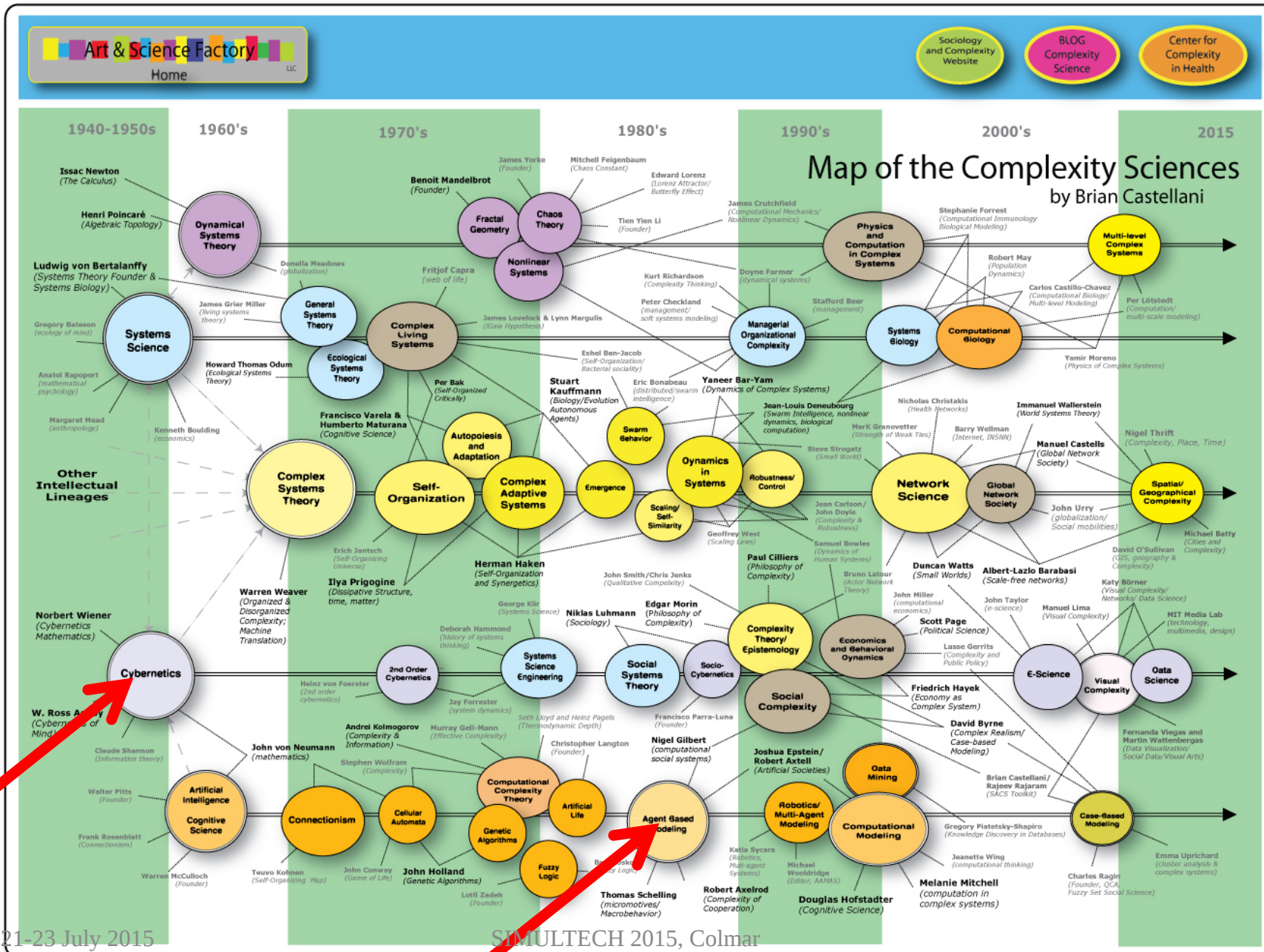
A comment: this is the main role of simulation models in the complexity perspective, **building material models as artifacts running into a computer**, having always in mind to go toward “more elaborate theoretical models”.

Finally, quoting another paper of the special issue referred above, that of prof. W. Brian Arthur

(...) a second theme that emerged was that of making models based on **more realistic cognitive behavior**. Neoclassical economic theory treats economic agents as perfectly rational optimizers. This means among other things that agents perfectly understand the choices they have, and perfectly assess the benefits they will receive from these.

(...) Our approach, by contrast, saw agents **not as having perfect information** about the problems they faced, or as generally knowing enough about other agents' options and payoffs to form probability distributions over these. This meant that agents need to cognitively structure their problems—as having to 'make sense' of their problems, as much as solve them.

A comment: So we need to include learning abilities into our agents.



Moving to models

We can now move to models:
in the traditional way

or in the *new* perspective of

the material models of cybernetics
founders

the computational artifacts of the
agent-based simulation models.

} quite
close

Following Ostrom (1988), and to some extent, Gilbert and Terna (2000), in social science, excluding material (analogue) models, we traditionally build models as simplified representations of reality, using:

- i. Verbal Argumentation and
- ii. Mathematical Equations, typically with Statistics and Econometrics

Now we have computational tools:

- Equilibrium Models
 - Game Theory
 - System Dynamics
- } close to ii.
- Serious Gaming
 - Agent-Based Simulation
- } iii.

Computer simulation (mainly agent-based one) can combine the extreme flexibility of a computer code – where we can create agents who act, make choices, and react to the choices of other agents and to modifications of their environment – and its intrinsic computability.

New model army

Economics after the crisis

Efforts are under way to improve macroeconomic models

Jan 19th 2013 | WASHINGTON, DC | From the print edition



The Economist, Jan
19th 2013

<http://www.economist.com/node/21569752>

Improving DSGE models is the obvious way to take the lessons of the crisis on board. But others exist too. “**Agent-based modelling**” tries to depict the transactions that might occur in an actual economy. These models are populated by millions of agents that gradually alter the economy as they interact with each other.

A common objection: reality is **intrinsically agent-based**. So, **why reproduce social structures in an agent-based way**, following (iii), **when science applies (ii)** to describe, explain, and forecast reality, which is, per se, too complicated to be understood? At a first glance, this is a strong criticism.

The reply is that we can, with agent-based models and simulation, produce **artifacts** (the 'material model') of actual systems and “play” with them, i.e., **showing the consequences of perfectly known ex-ante hypotheses and agent behavioral design and interaction**; then we can apply statistics and econometrics to the **outcomes of the simulation** and compare the results with those obtained by applying the same tests to **actual data**.

Quoting Hayek (1979), Law Legislation and Liberty, vol.3, Epilogue, p. 156: *Though the conception of conjectural history is somewhat suspect today, when we cannot say precisely how things did happen, to understand how they could have come about may be an important insight. (*)*

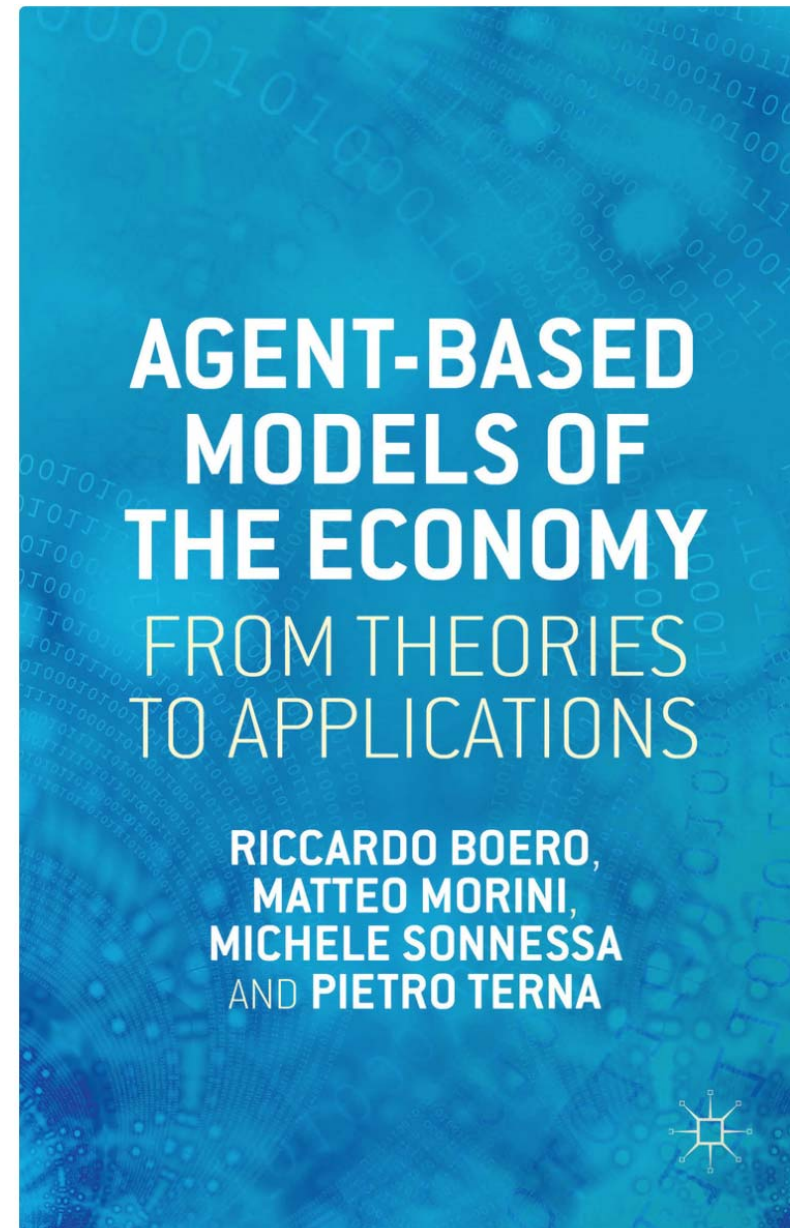
(*) I owe this quotation to a friend of mine, prof. Jack Birner.

Agent-based simulation models have severe **weaknesses**, primarily arising from:

- The difficulty of fully understanding them without **studying the program** used to run the simulation;
- The necessity of carefully **checking computer code** to prevent generation of inaccurate results from mere coding errors;
- The difficulty of **systematically exploring the entire set of possible hypotheses** in order to infer the best explanation. This is mainly due to **the inclusion of behavioral rules for the agents within the hypotheses**, which produces a space of possibilities that is difficult if not impossible to explore completely.

A few replies:

- [Swarm \(http://www.swarm.org\)](http://www.swarm.org) a project that started within the Santa Fe Institute (first release 1994) and that represents a milestone in simulation;
- Swarm has been highly successful, being its protocol intrinsically the basis of several recent tools; for an application of the Swarm protocol in Python, see my [SLAPP](https://github.com/terna/SLAPP/), Swarm Like Agent Protocol in Python at <https://github.com/terna/SLAPP/>
- Many other tools have been built upon the Swarm legacy, such as [Repast](#), [Ascape](#), [Mason](#), [JAS](#) and also by simpler, but important tools, such as [NetLogo](#) and [StarLogoTNG](#).



<http://www.palgrave.com/page/detail/agentbased-models-of-the-economy-/?K=9781137339805>

□

Technicalities:
Why Swarm, Python SLAPP and why NetLogo?

□

SLAPP, or Swarm-Like Agent Protocol in Python, is a simplified implementation of the original Swarm protocol (<http://www.swarm.org>), choosing Python as a simultaneously simple and complete object-oriented framework.

SLAPP contains AESOP



AESOP (Agents and Emergencies for Simulating Organizations in Python), written upon SLAPP as a simplified way to describe and generate interaction within artificial agents:

- . *bland* agents (simple, unspecific, basic, insipid, ...) doing basic actions;
- . *tasty* agents (specialized, with given skills, acting in a discretionary way, ...), playing specify roles into the simulation scenario.

.SLAPP is also useful:

- . for didactical reasons, applying a such rigorous and simple object oriented language as Python
- . to build models upon transparent code: Python does not have hidden parts or feature coming *from magic*, it has no obscure libraries
- . to leverage the **openness** of Python
- . to apply easily the **SWARM protocol**

SLAPP is a **demonstration that we can easily implement the Swarm protocol** [Minar, N., R. Burkhart, C. Langton, and M. Askenazi (1996), *The Swarm simulation system: A toolkit for building multi-agent simulations*. Working Paper 96-06-042, Santa Fe Institute, Santa Fe (*)] **in Python**
(*) <http://www.santafe.edu/media/workingpapers/96-06-042.pdf>

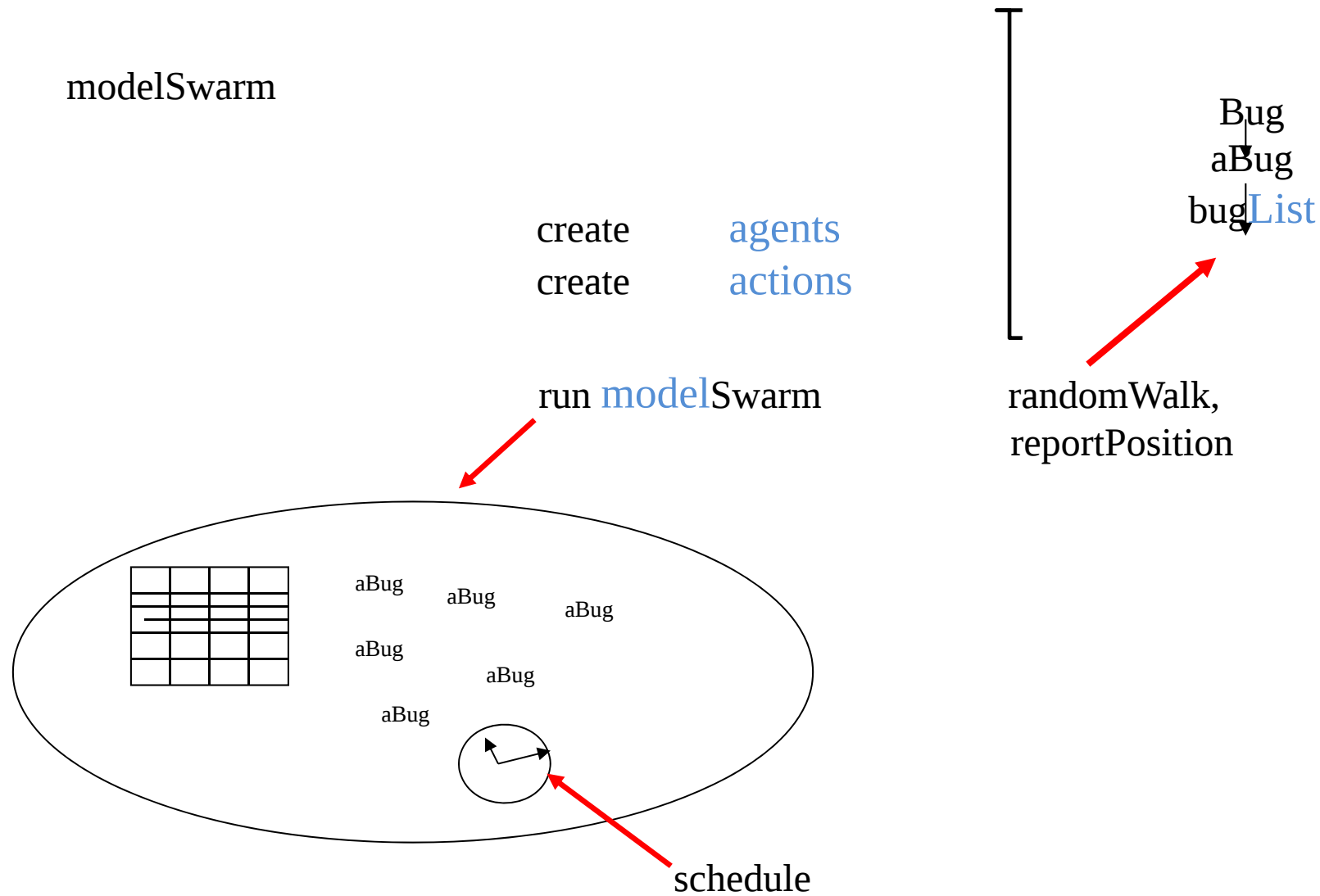
Key points (quoting from that paper):

.Swarm defines a structure for simulations, a framework within which models are built.

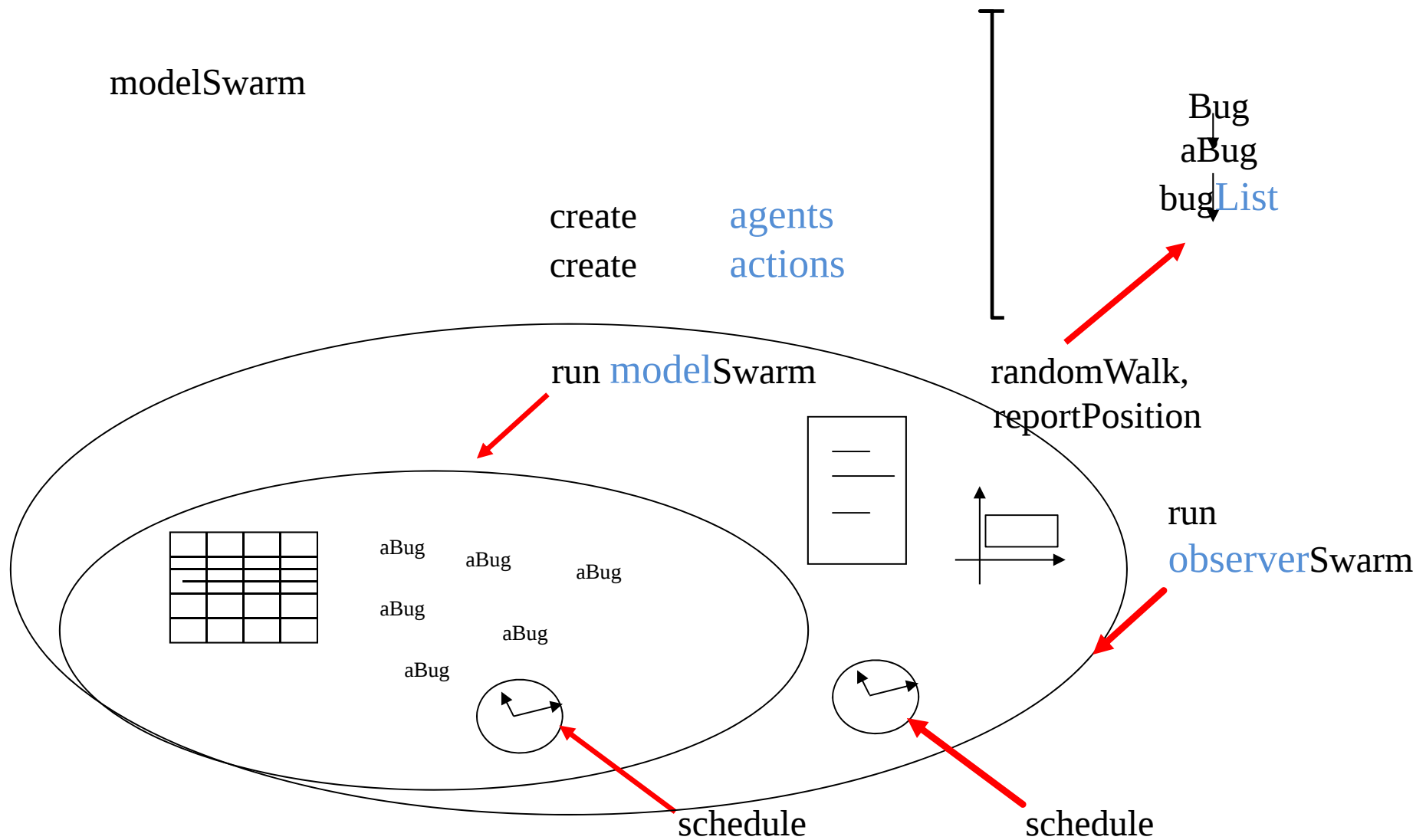
.The core commitment is to create a discrete-event simulation of multiple agents using an object-oriented representation.

.To these basic choices Swarm adds the concept of the "swarm," a collection of agents with a schedule of activity.

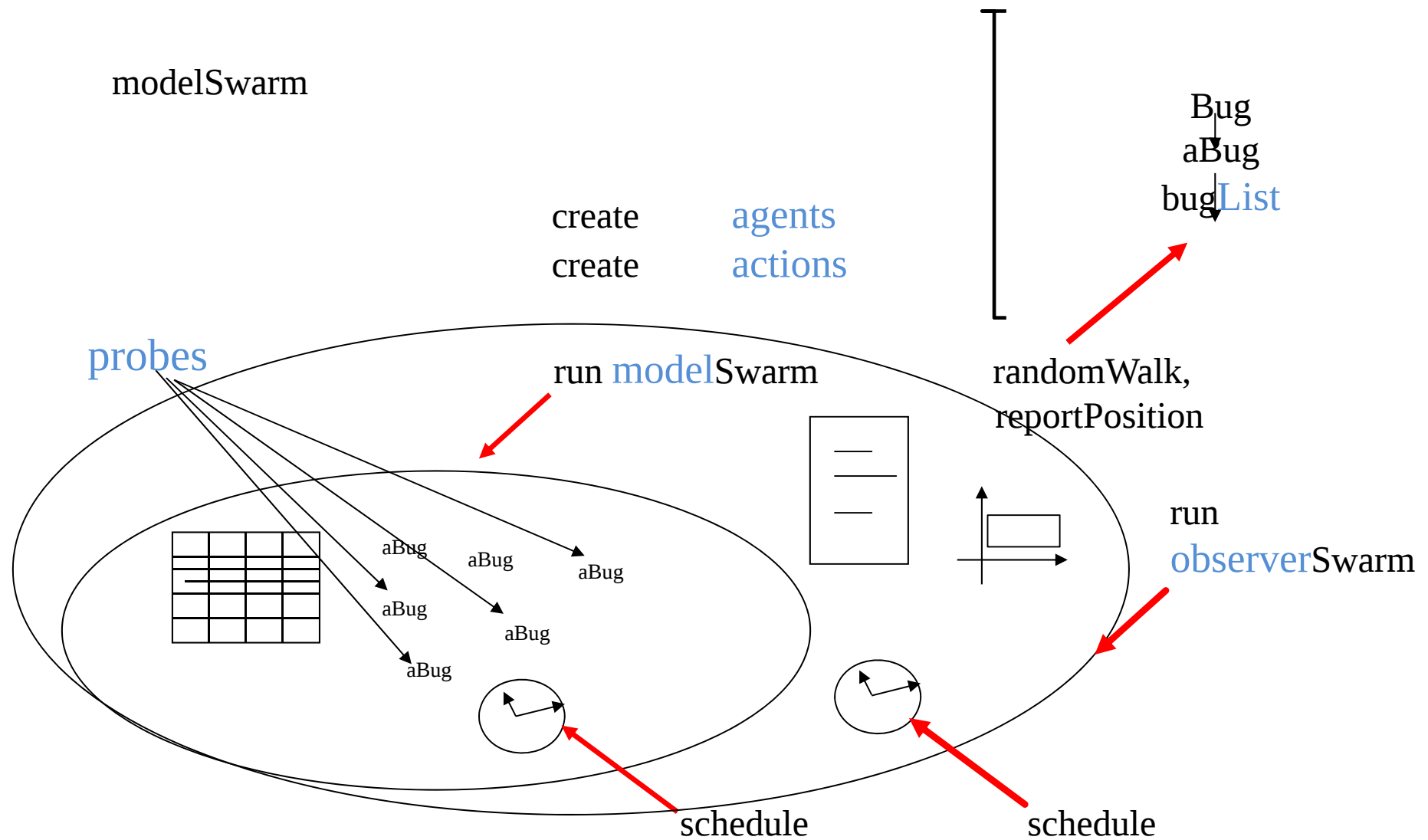
Swarm = a library of functions and a **protocol**



Swarm = a library of functions and a **protocol**



Swarm = a library of functions and a **protocol**



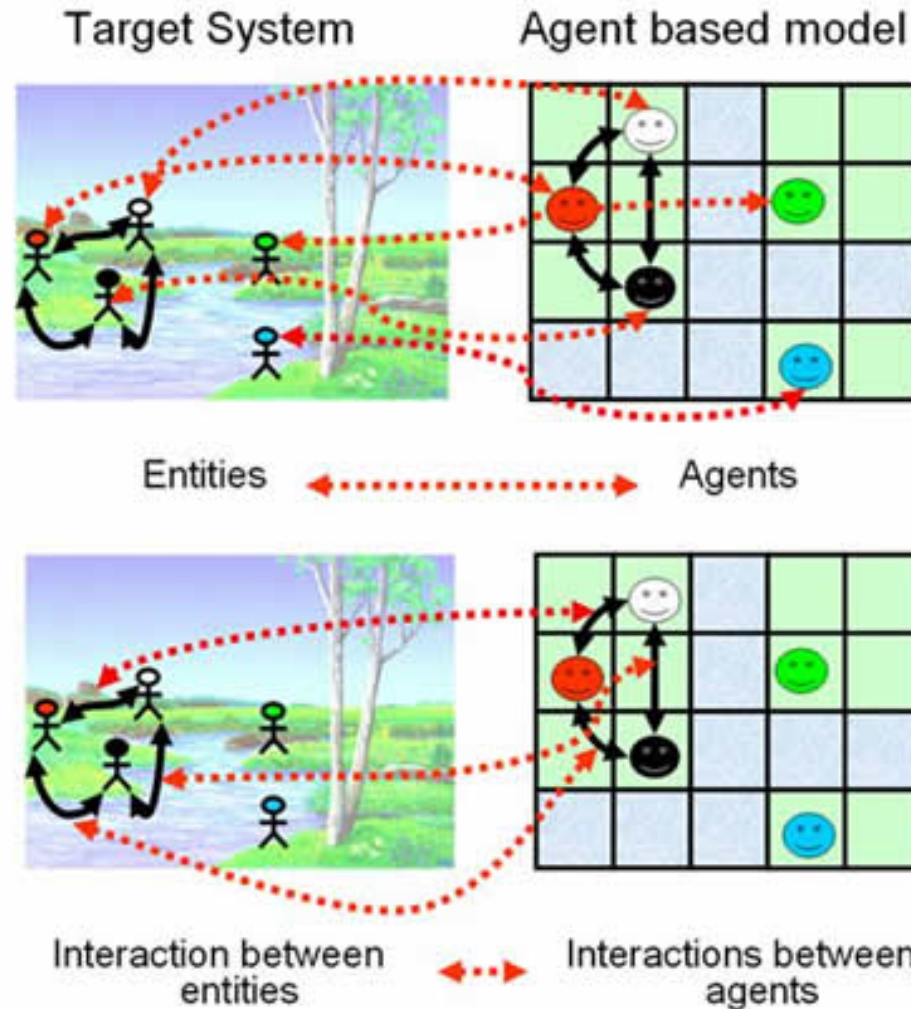
Always in technicalities ... why NetLogo?

NetLogo is highly diffusing as a rigorous and easy tool, especially useful for prototyping and when we need advanced graphical capabilities

Limits are in coping with the design of complex experiments (and with huge numbers of agents)

Moving to computation

From Bruce Edmonds, Agent-based social simulation

www.methods.manchester.ac.uk/methods/abss/

Finally, the importance of calculating: **our complex system models live mainly in their computational phase** and require calculating facilities more and more powerful.

Schelling model and random mutations

The well known segregation model from prof. Schelling has been initially solved moving dimes and pennies on a board.

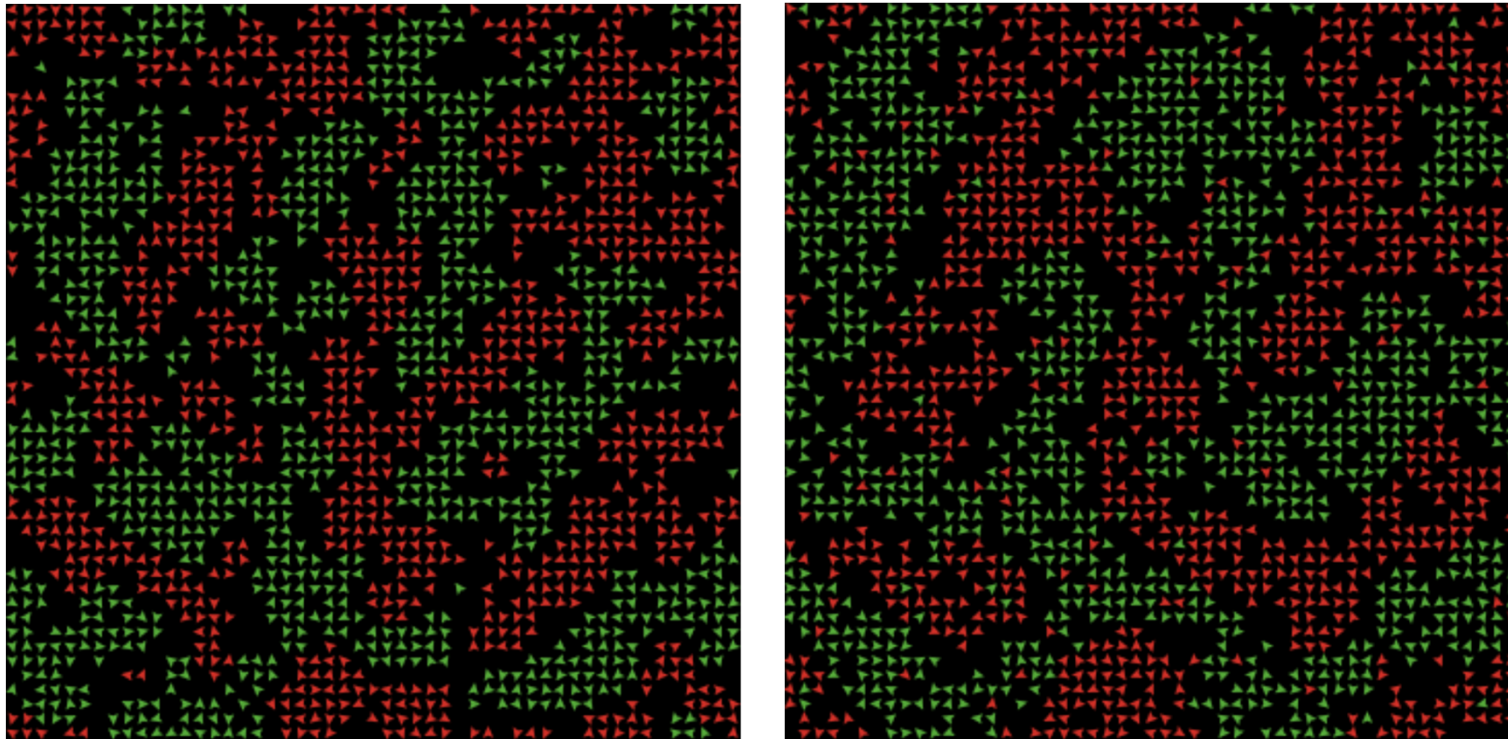
	#	@	#	@	#	@	
#	@	#	@	#	@	#	@
@	#	@	#	@	#	@	#
#	@	#	@	#	@	#	@
@	#	@	#	@	#	@	#
#	@	#	@	#	@	#	@
@	#	@	#	@	#	@	#
	@	#	@	#	@	#	

	#	@		@	#	@	
#	@	#	@	#	@	#	
@	#	@	#	@	#	@	#
#		#		#	@	#	
@		@	@	@	@	@	#
#	@		@	#	@	#	@
@			#				#
		@	@			@	

#	#		#		#	#	#
#	#	#		#		#	#
#	#	#	#	@	@		#
#	#	#	@	@	@	@	
@	@	@	@	@	@	@	@
	@	@	@	@	@	@	@
@						@	
		@	@			@	

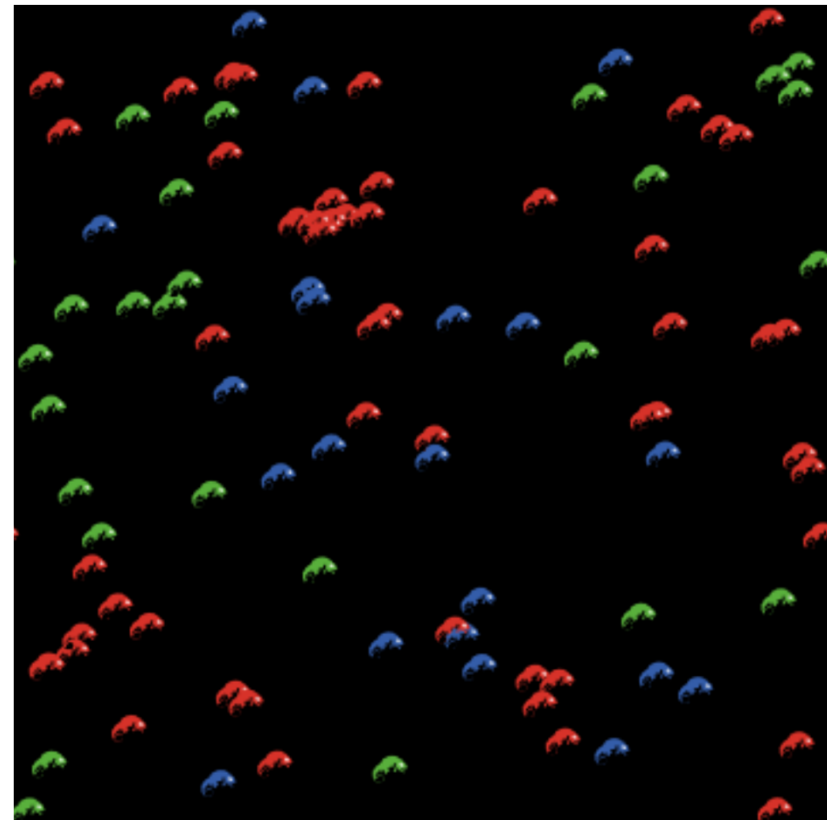
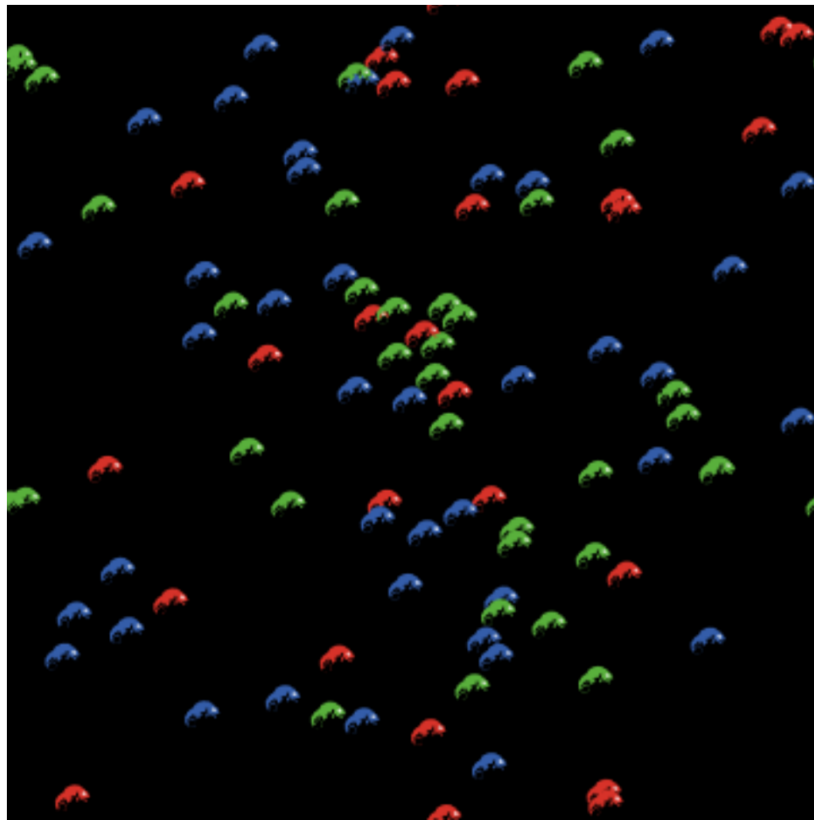
These pictures are from a presentation of Eileen Kraemer, <http://www.cs.uga.edu/~eileen/fres1010/Notes/fres1010L4v2.ppt>

However, if you want to check the survival of the color islands in the presence of random mutations in agents (from an idea of prof. Nigel Gilbert), you need to use a computer and a simulation tool (NetLogo, in this case).

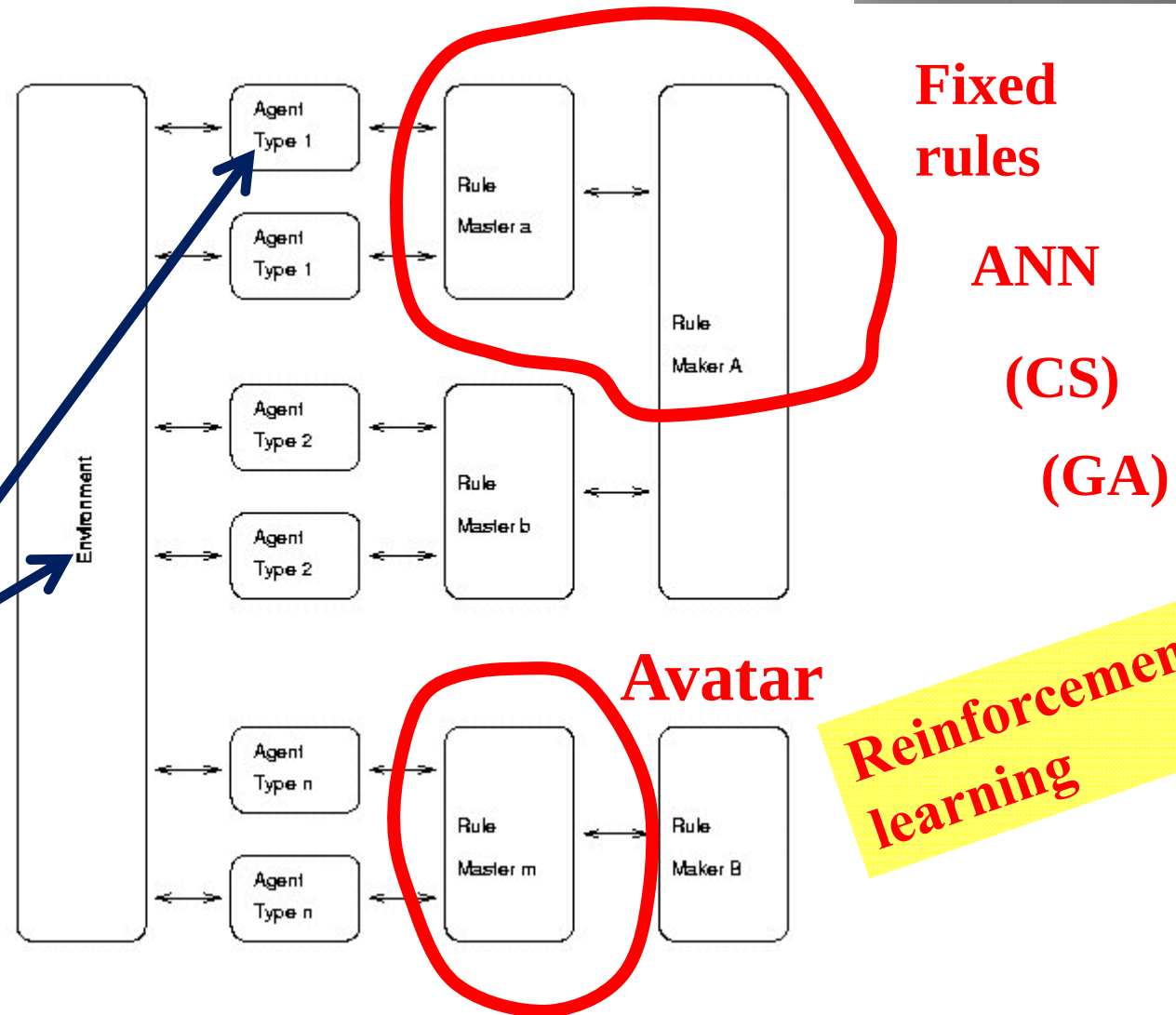


Learning chameleons (<http://goo.gl/W9nd8>)

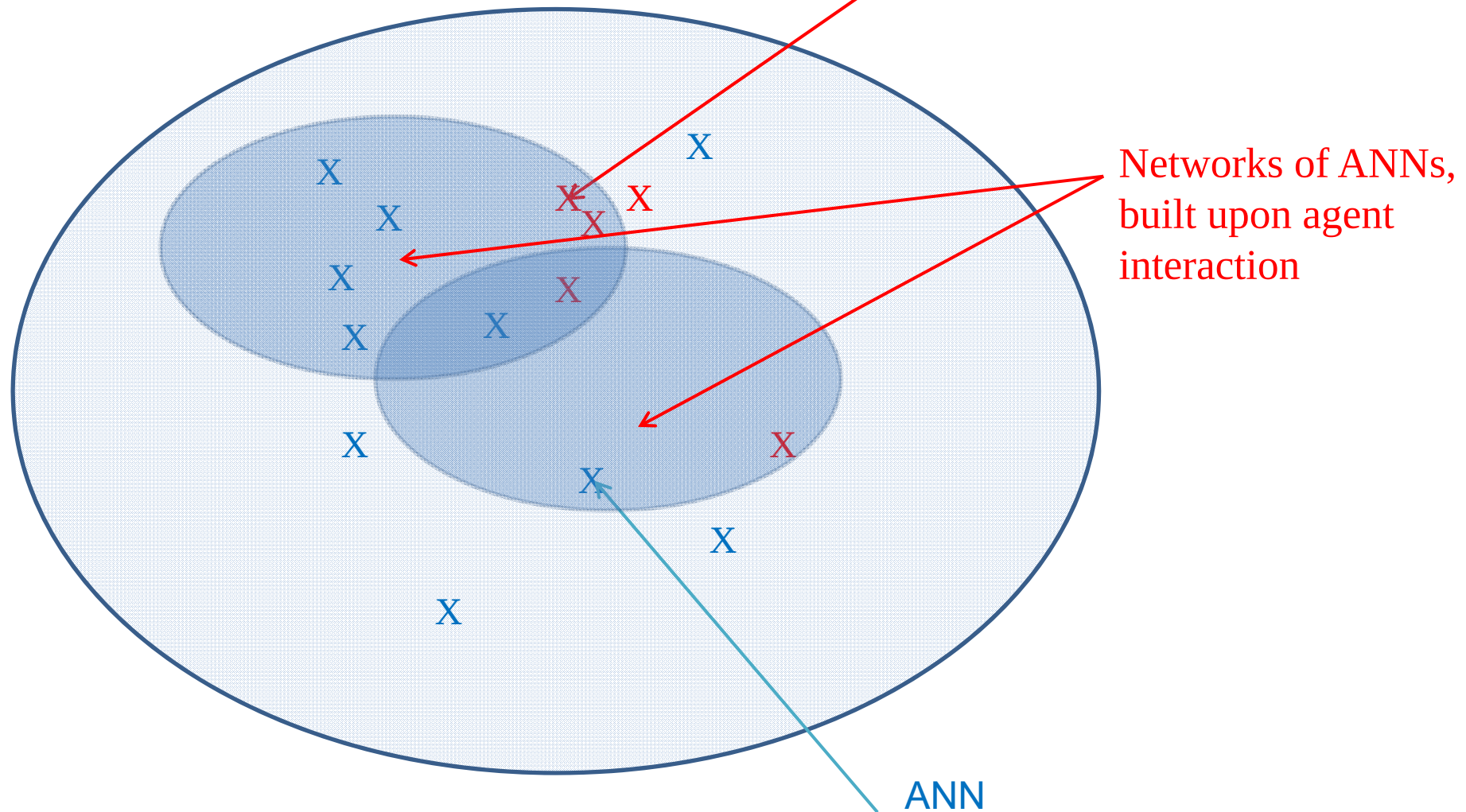
In a work of mine you can find, finally, agents requiring a lot of computational capability to learn and behave. They are chameleons changing color when getting in touch with other ones; they can learn strategies, via trials and errors procedures, to avoid that event.



**Microstructures,
mainly related to
time and
parallelism**



bland and **tas**ty agents can
contain an ANN



$$y = g(x, z) = f(B f(A (x', z'))')$$

(1) (n+m)

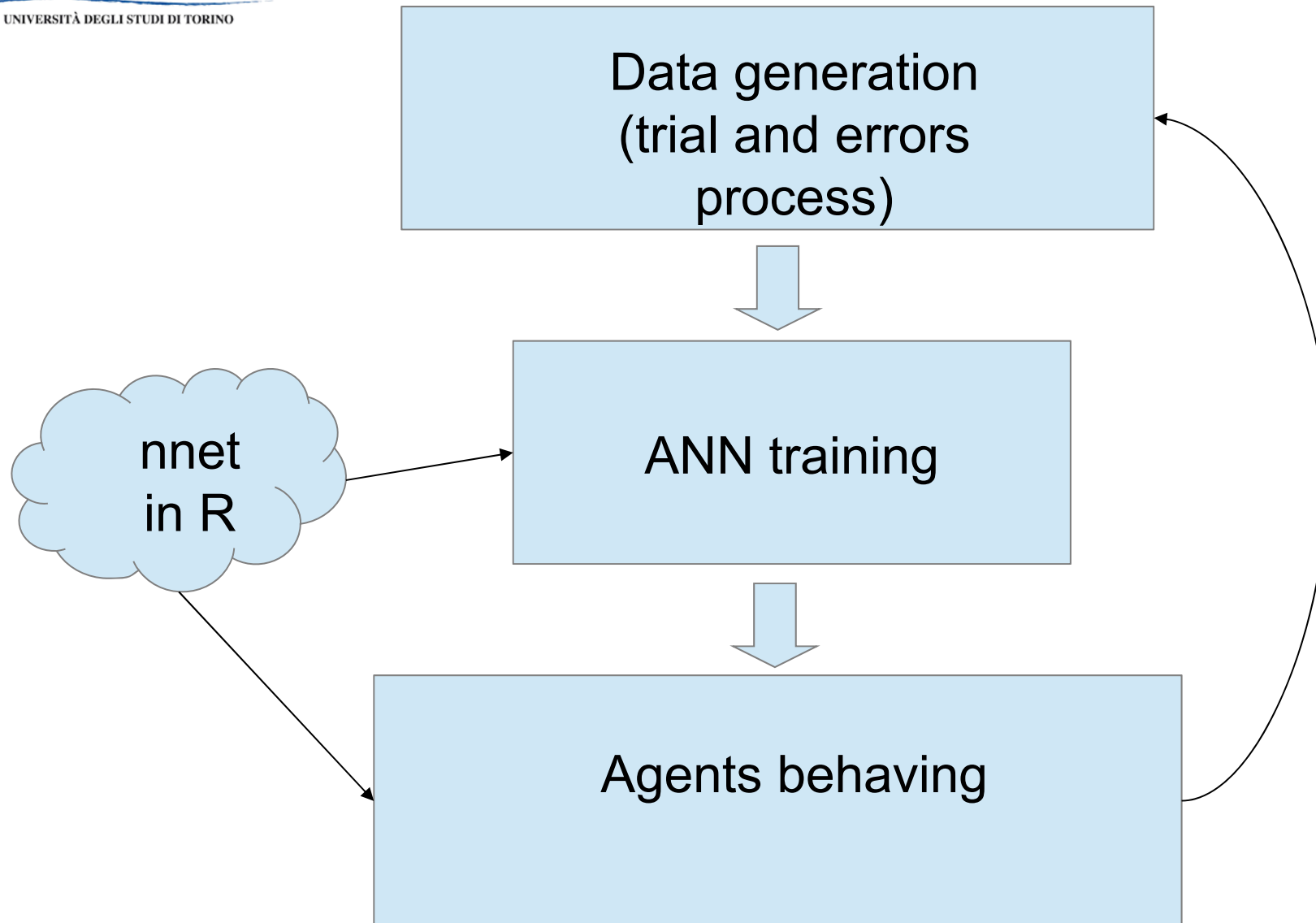
effect information action/s

or, if $z = \{z_1, z_2, \dots, z_m\}$

$$y = g_m(x, z) = f(B f(A (x)))$$

(m) (n)

an effect for each possible action



... and networks?

A step in the project: agents + networks

(Agent-based models meet network analysis: the policy-making perspective)

with Magda Fontana, University of Torino
magda.fontana@unito.it

Considering together the agent-based and network techniques, we have a further important possibility.

Being easier to have network data (i.e. social network data) than detailed behavioral individual information, we can try to understand the links between the dynamic changes of the networks emerging from agent-based models and the behavior of the agents.

As we understand these links, we can apply them to actual networks, to guess about the content of the behavioral black boxes of real-world agents.

How to generate emerging networks to experiment with them

recipeWorld is an agent-based model that simulates the emergence of network out of decentralized autonomous interaction.

The rationale behind it is to offer a few hints to find a framework and a grammar that are flexible and straightforward enough to encompass the widest possible range of purposeful and socially meaningful individual and organizational behavior.

The metaphor is that of a recipe, i.e. *a set of directions with a list of ingredients for making or preparing something, especially food* (as defined in the American Heritage dictionary).

Technically, recipes are sequences of numerical or alphanumerical codes, reported in vectors, and move from an agent to another determining the events and generating the edges of the emerging networks.

Recipes are coded as strings of numbers – their components. Each number (or, if you want, each label), is related to an act, a sub-routine, of the modeled action.

For instance:

[3 1 7 6] means:

execute step 3, then

execute step 1, then

...

Recipes can be of any length and can contain subpart with specific structural characteristics, such as:

[1 4 (3 4 5) 8]

where the instructions in round brackets have to be run in a parallel way; or

[7 4 {10} 9 2]

where the part in curly brackets has to be run putting together a batch of different recipes to be executed in the same time.

Examples in different fields can be suggested:

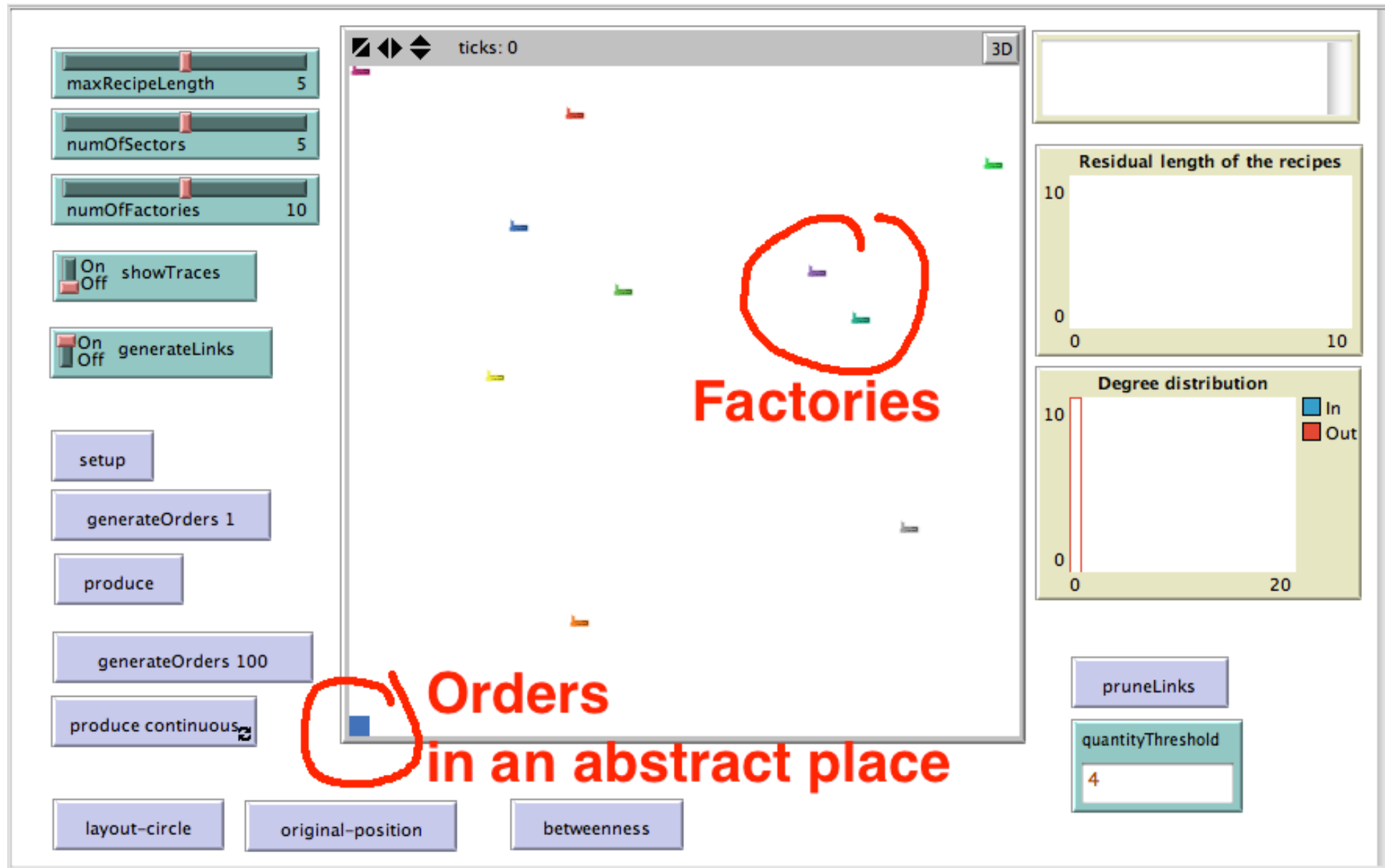
production,

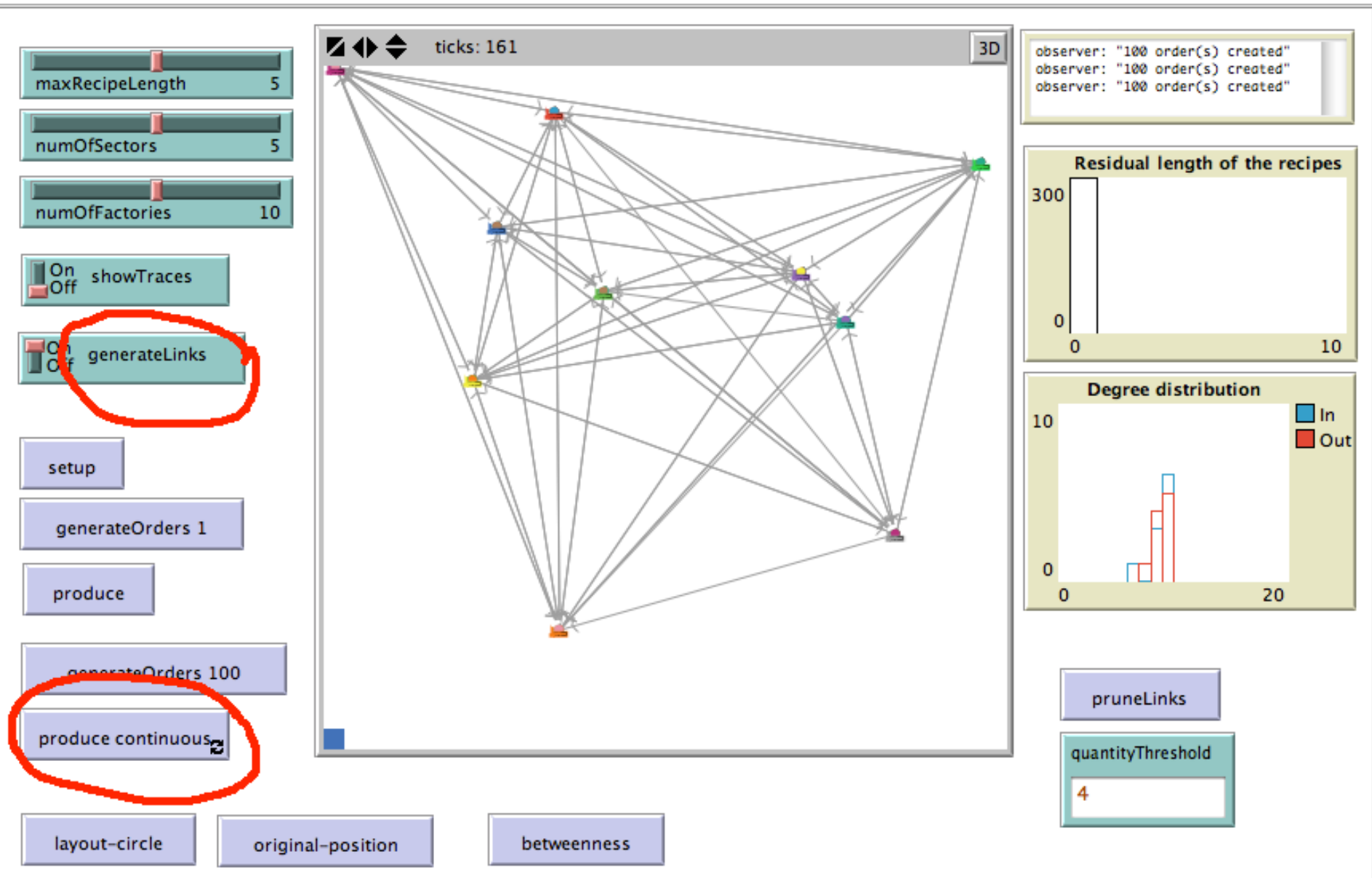
health-care scenarios,

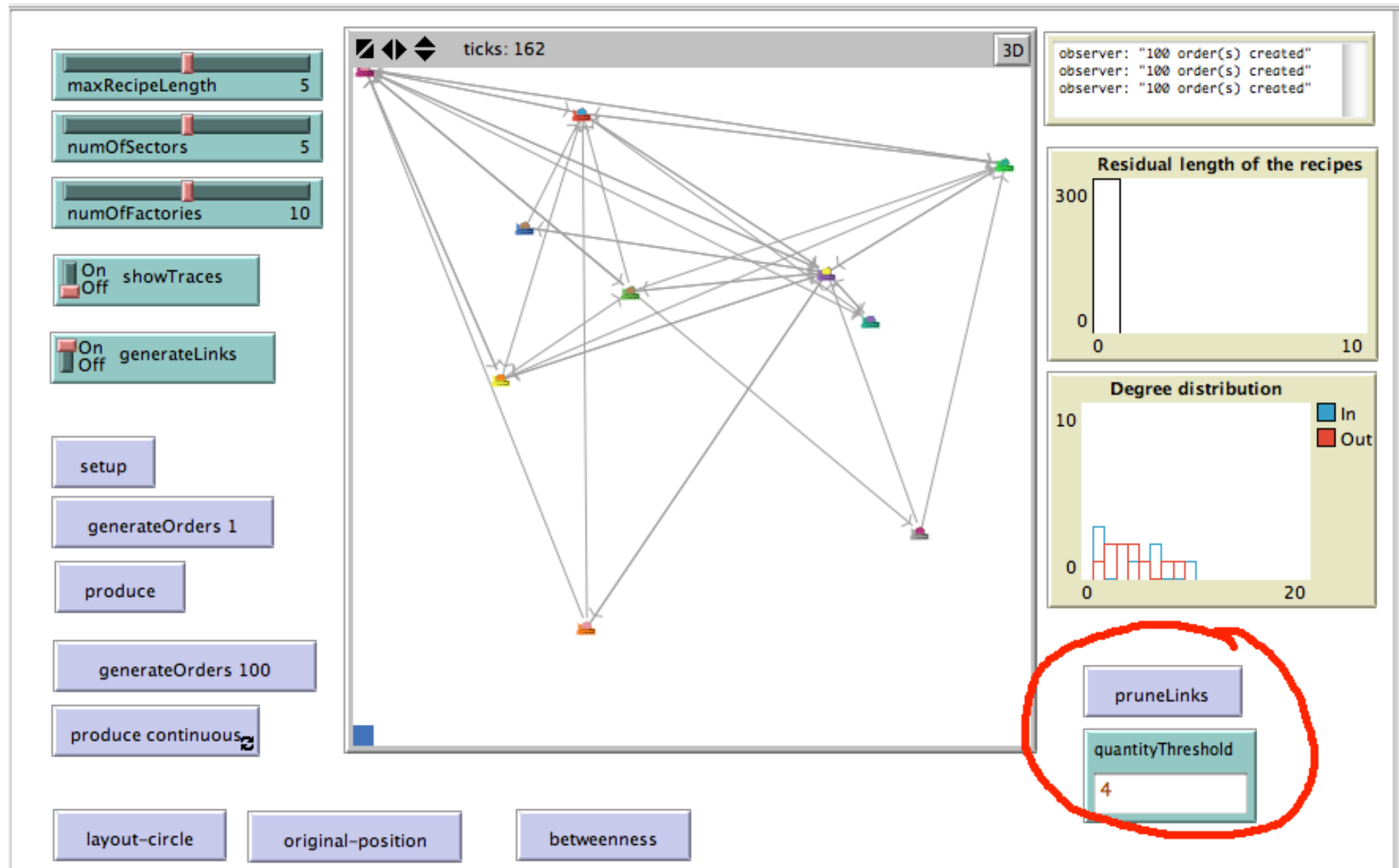
paper co-authorship,

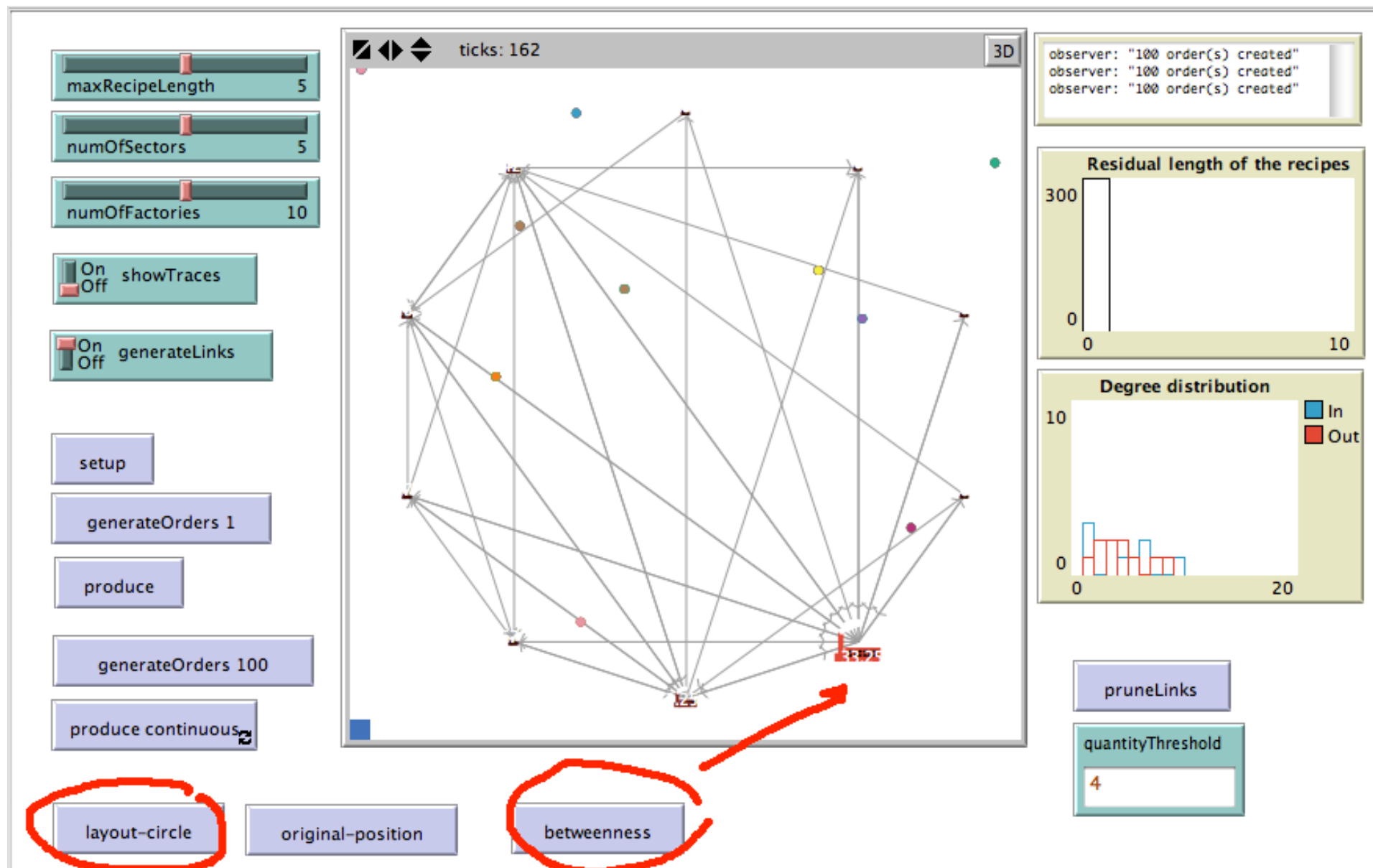
opinion spreading,

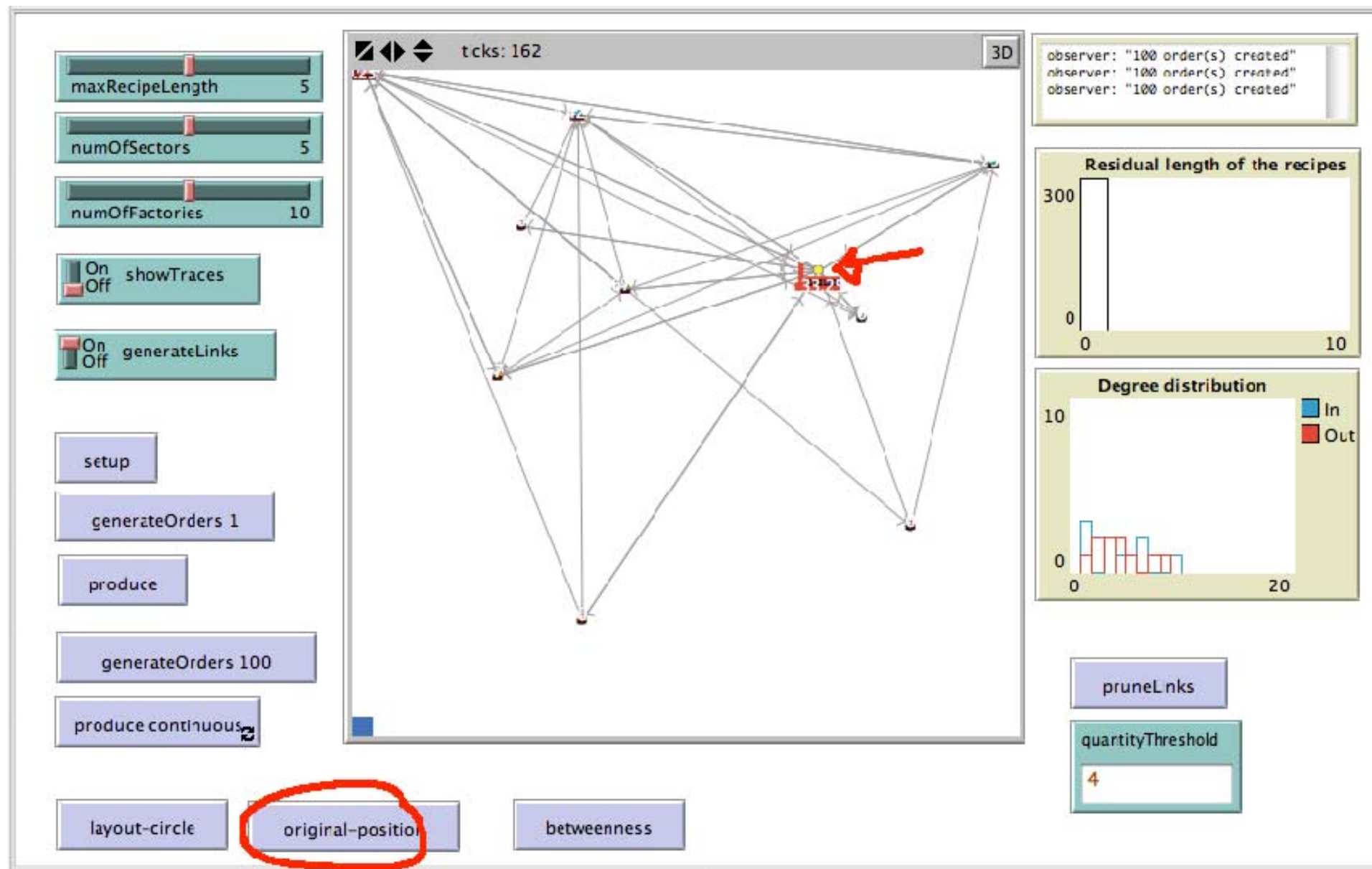
etc.











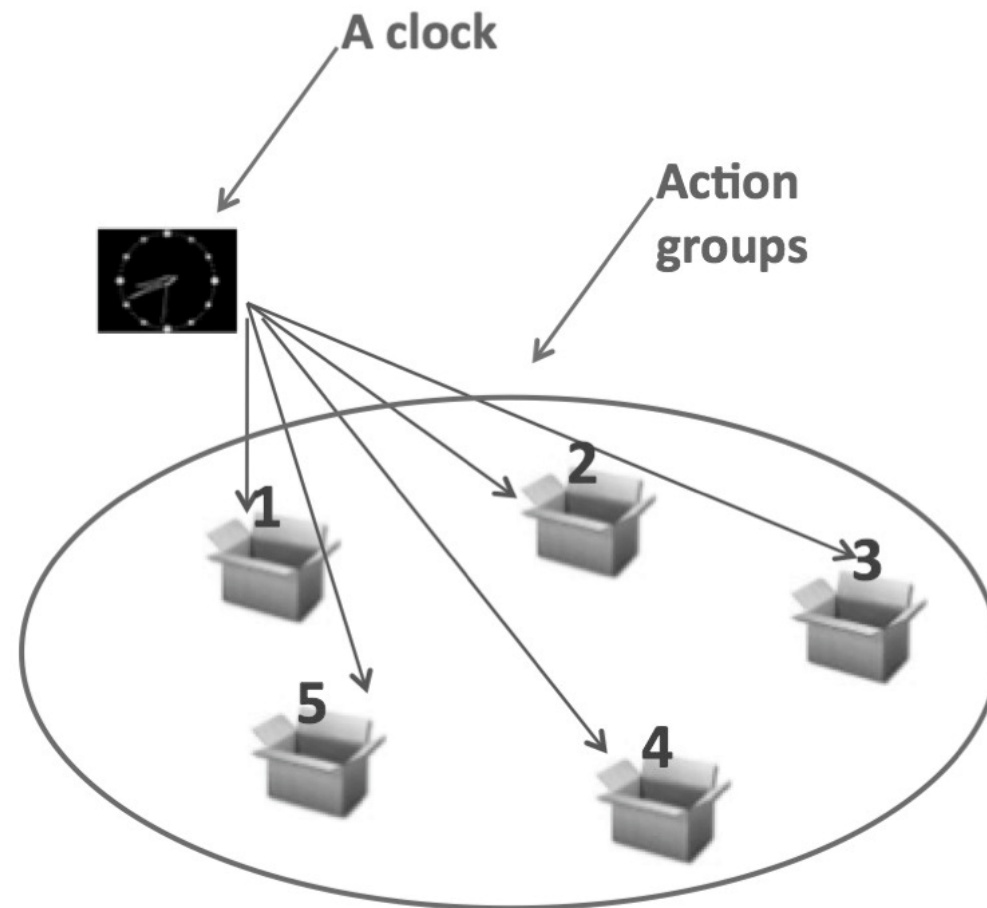
What is making “special” this result is that, in this context, **agents are activated** (following their internal rules and capabilities) **by the events**.

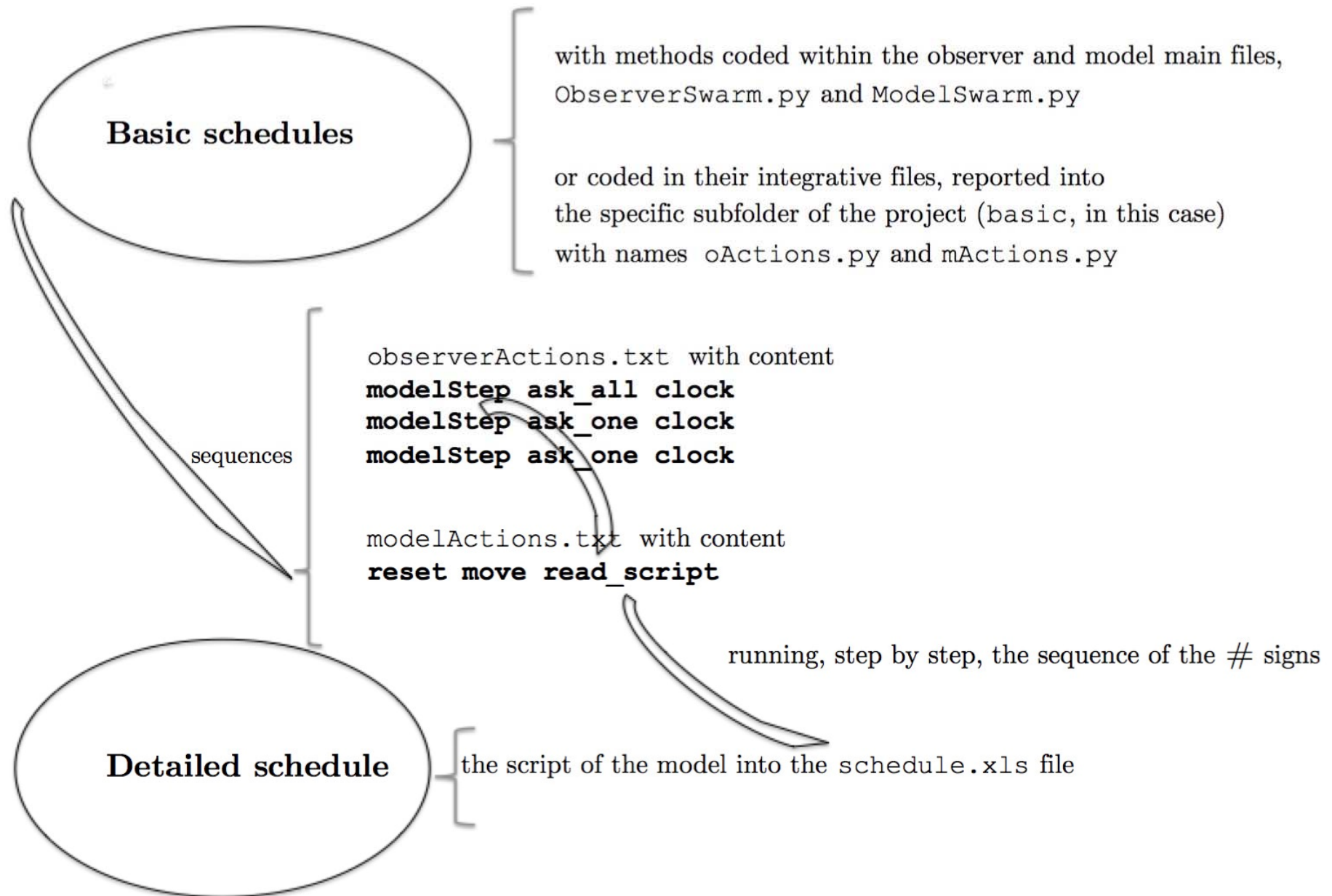
The network **emerges** as a side effect, as in the real world.

A quick look to SLAPP

Swarm-Like Agent Protocol in Python

A basic example to introduce the Schedule





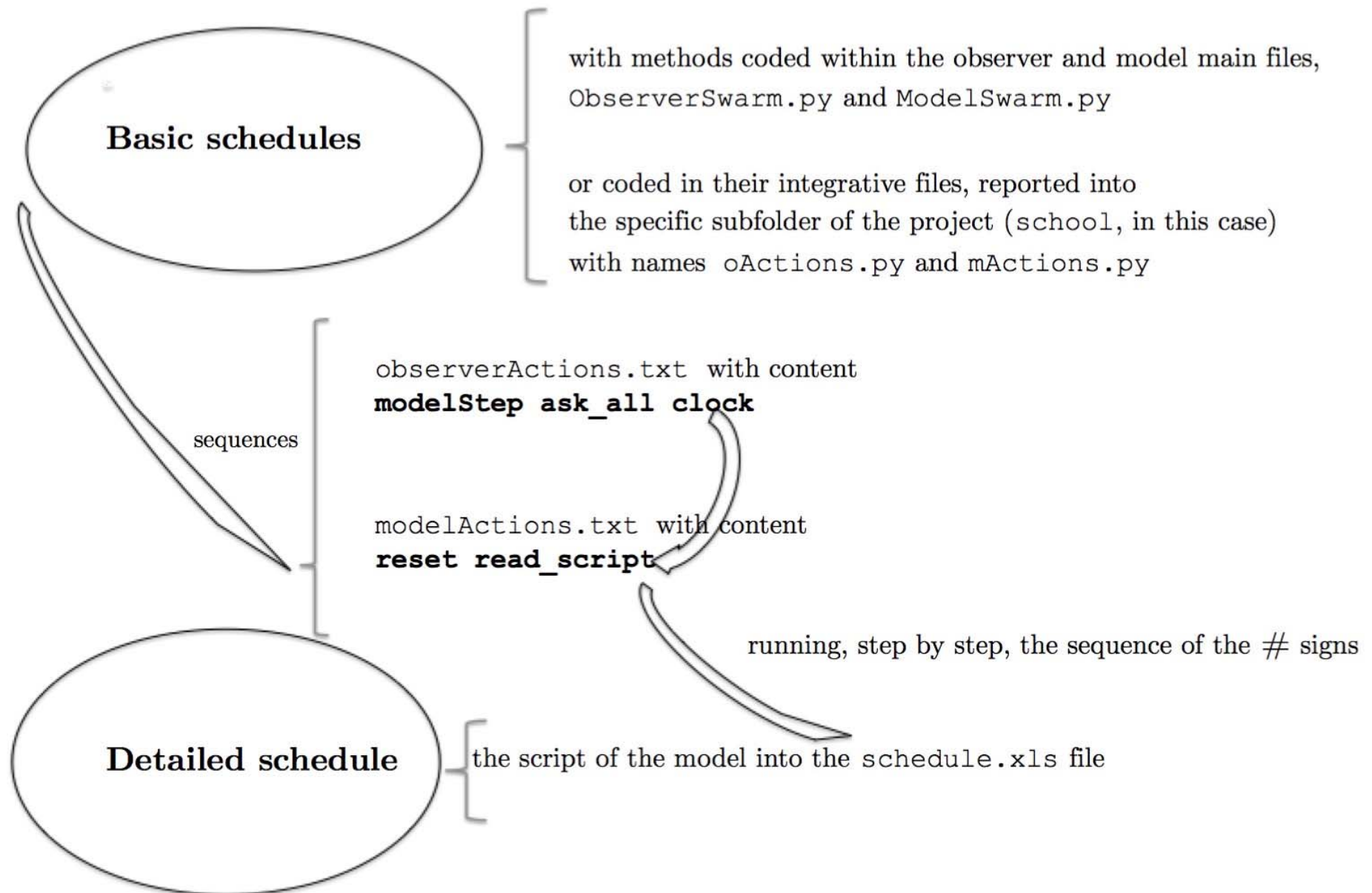
	A	B	C	D
1	#	1		
2	bland	eat		
3	bland	dance		
4	#	2		
5	#	4		
6	all	0.5	dance	
7	tasteC	eat		
8	#	5		
9	all	eat		
10	all	dance		
11	#	7		
12	tasteA	0.5	dance	
13	#	8		
14	tasteB	dance		
15				

School example (turtle based)

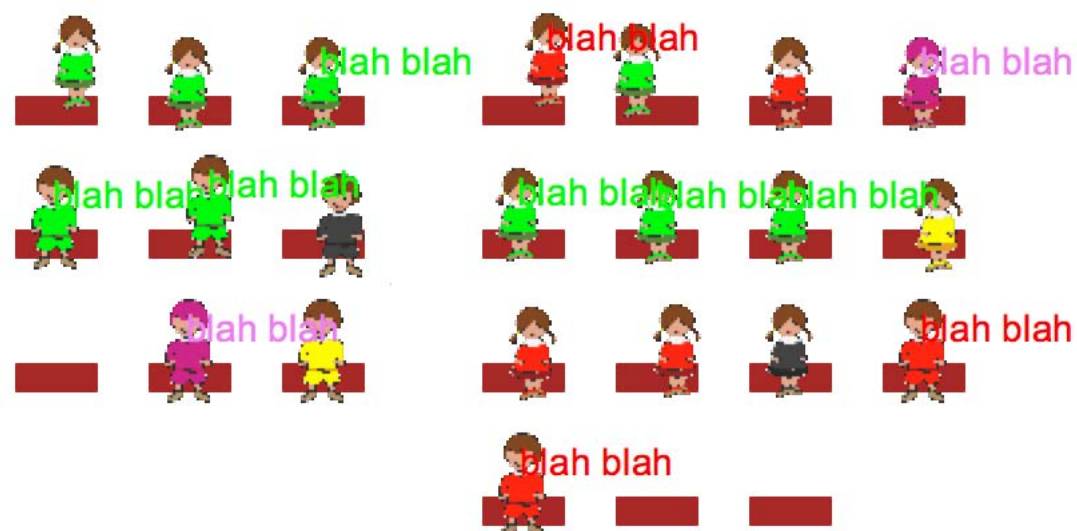
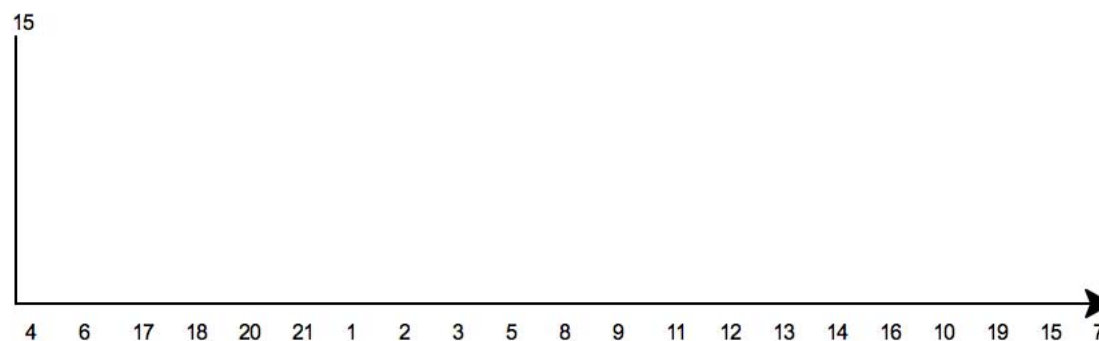
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1					the first sheet has to be named 'schedule', the other ones have the names of the macros that you are using			
2								
3	#	1						
4	macro	transitionPhase						
5	#	2						
6	macro	checkToObtainAttention						
7								

	A	B	C	
1	all	0.5	sitDownNotWell	
2	all	0.5	talk	
3				

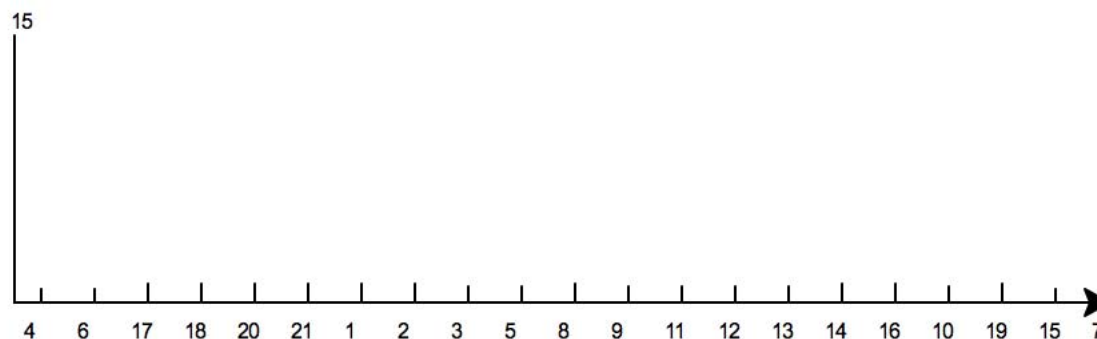
	A	B	C	
1	all	payAttention		
2	all	sitDownWell		
3	yellowPupil	sitDownNotWell		
4	greenPupil	-1	sitDownNotWell	
5	all	0.3	fidget	
6	saPupil	0.8	shake	
7	greenPupil	-1	shake	
8	threeGreen	talkClose		
9	r4r	talkClose		
10	saPupil	0.5	answerBad	
11	all	0.15	answerWell	
12				



Attention of each pupil

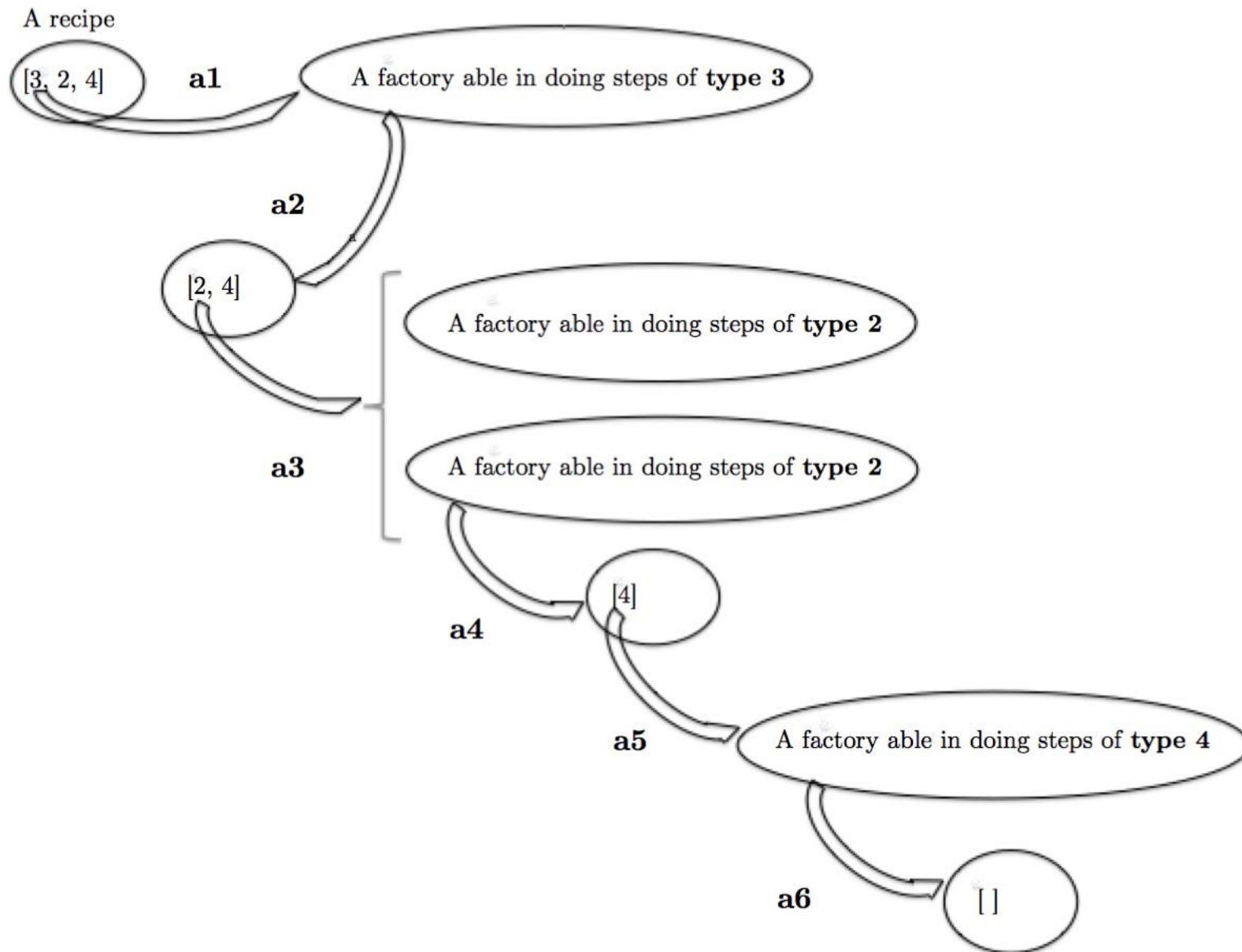


Attention of each pupil



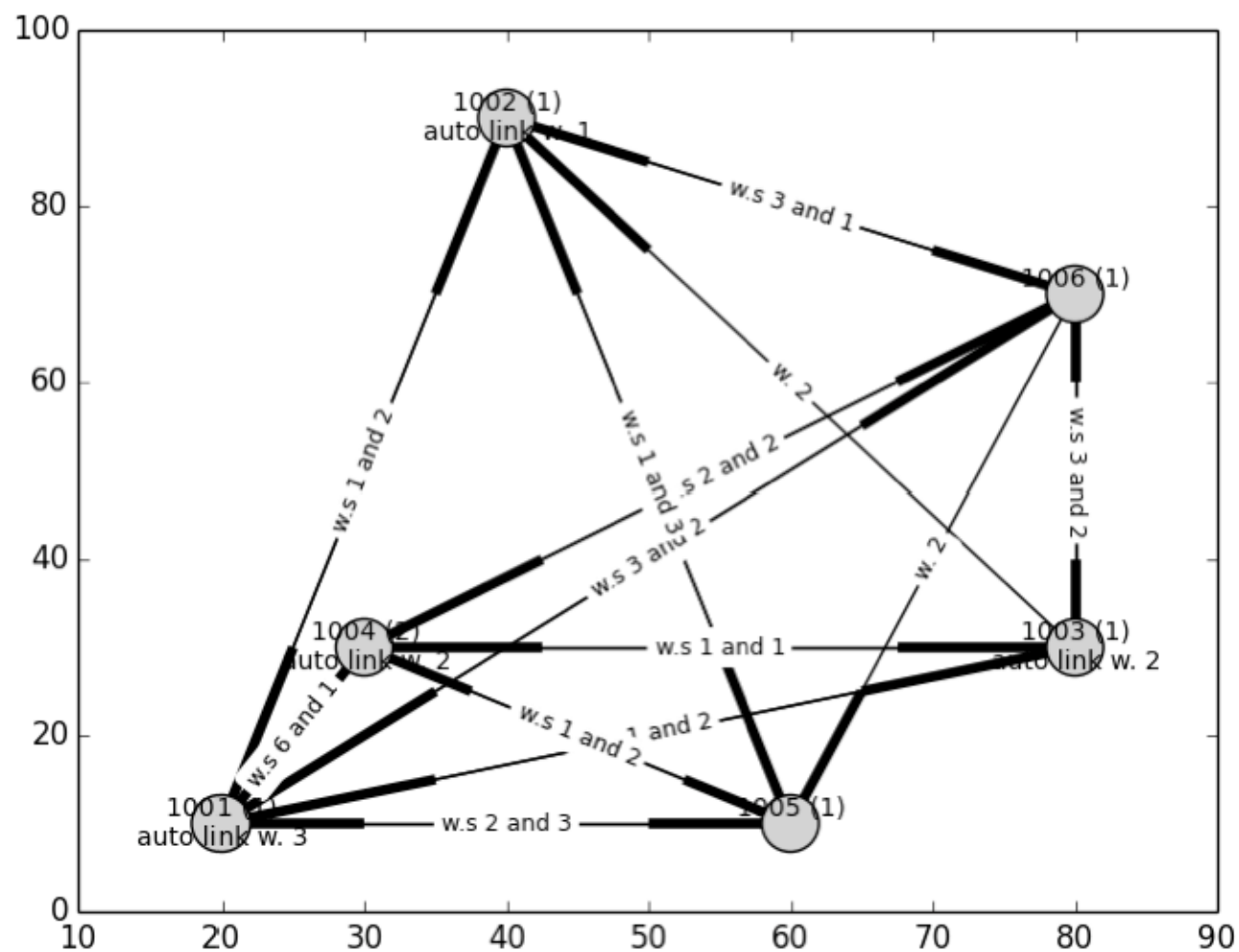
	A	B	C
1	all	payAttention	
2	all	sitDownWell	
3	yellowPupil	sitDownNotWell	
4	greenPupil	-1 sitDownNotWell	
5	all	0.3 fidget	
6	saPupil	0.8 shake	
7	verdePupil	-1 shake	
8	saPupil	shakelf_greenPupil	
9	threeGreen	talkClose	
10	r4r	talkClose	
11	saPupil	0.5 answerBad	
12	all	0.15 answerWell	
13			

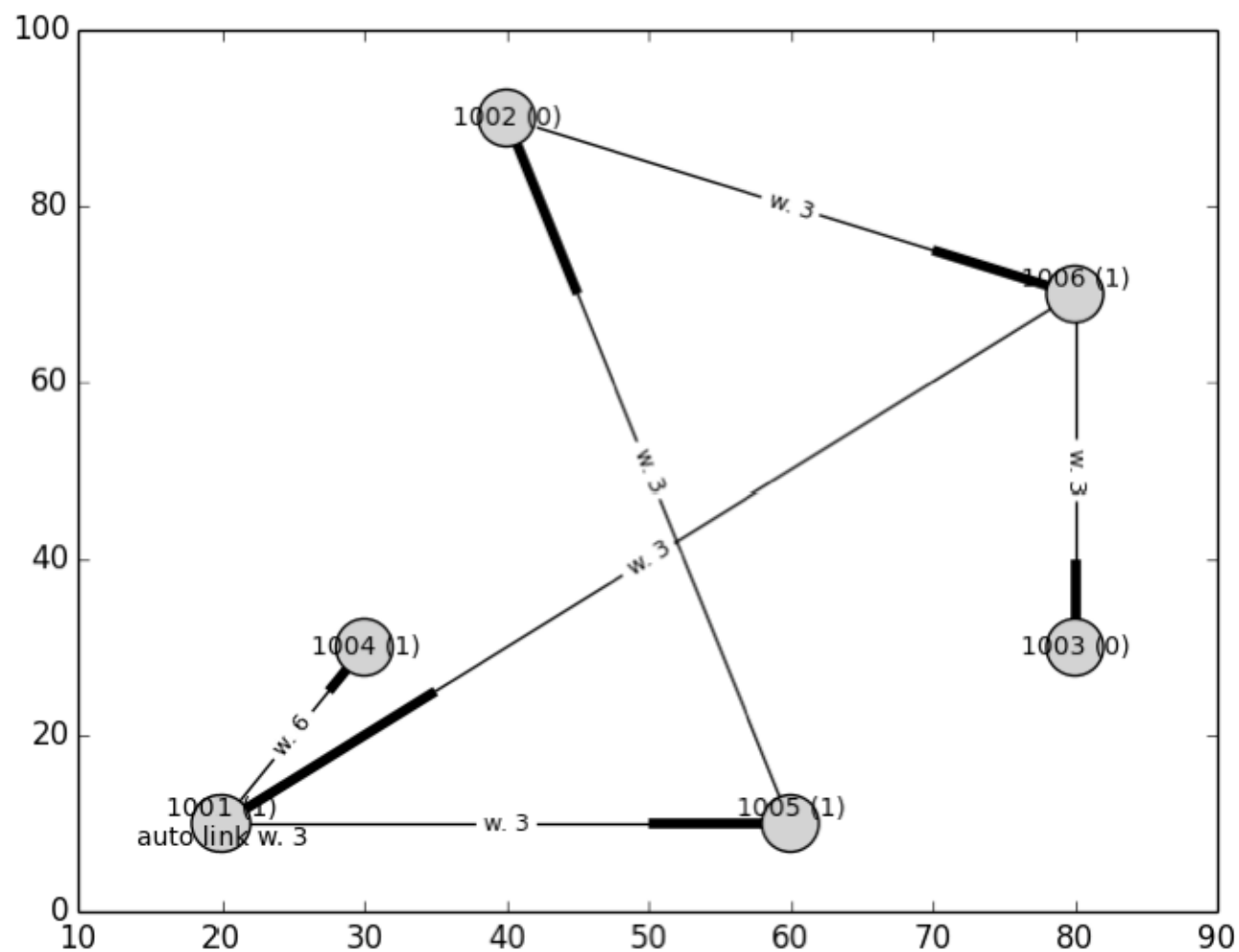
Production example (network analysis based)

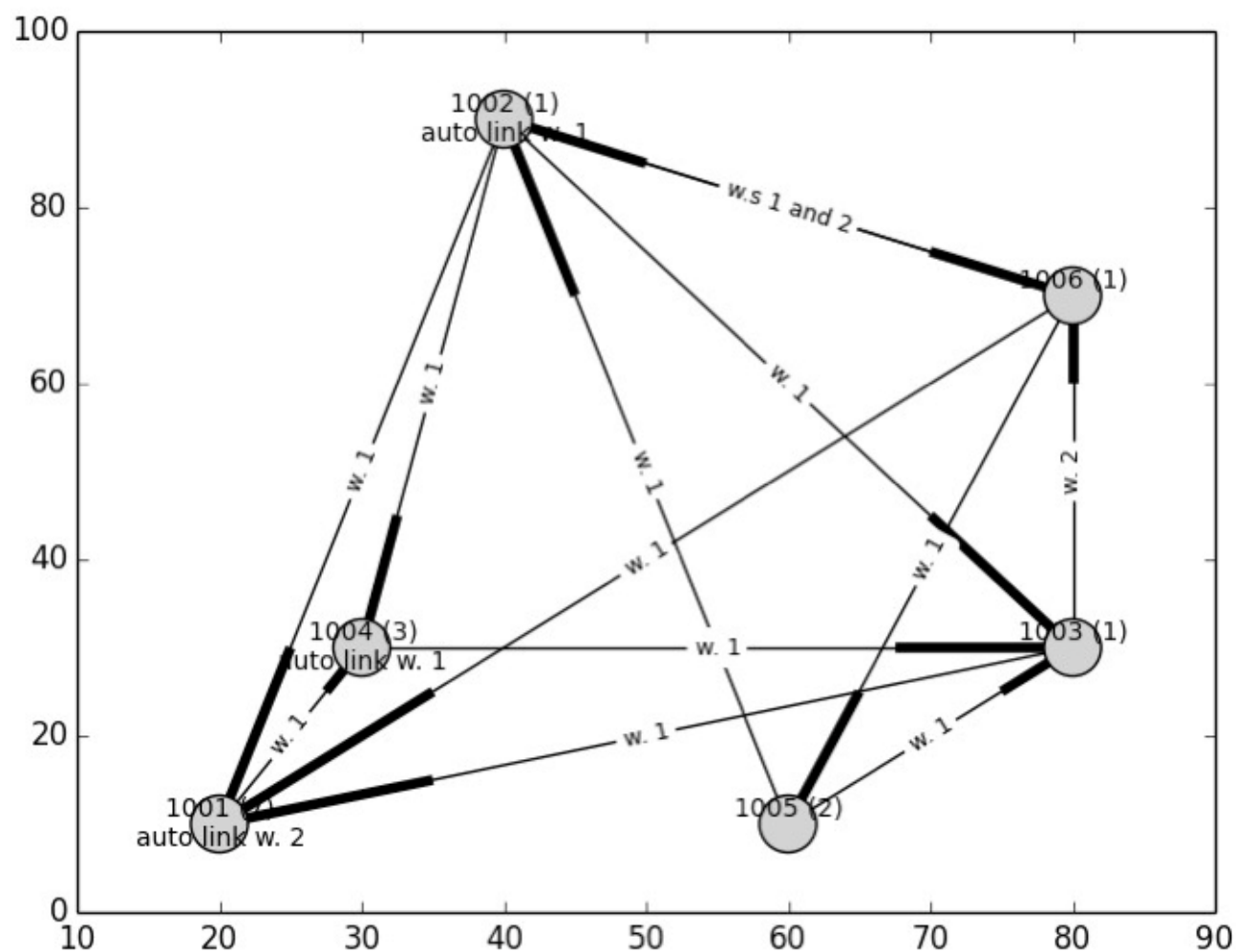


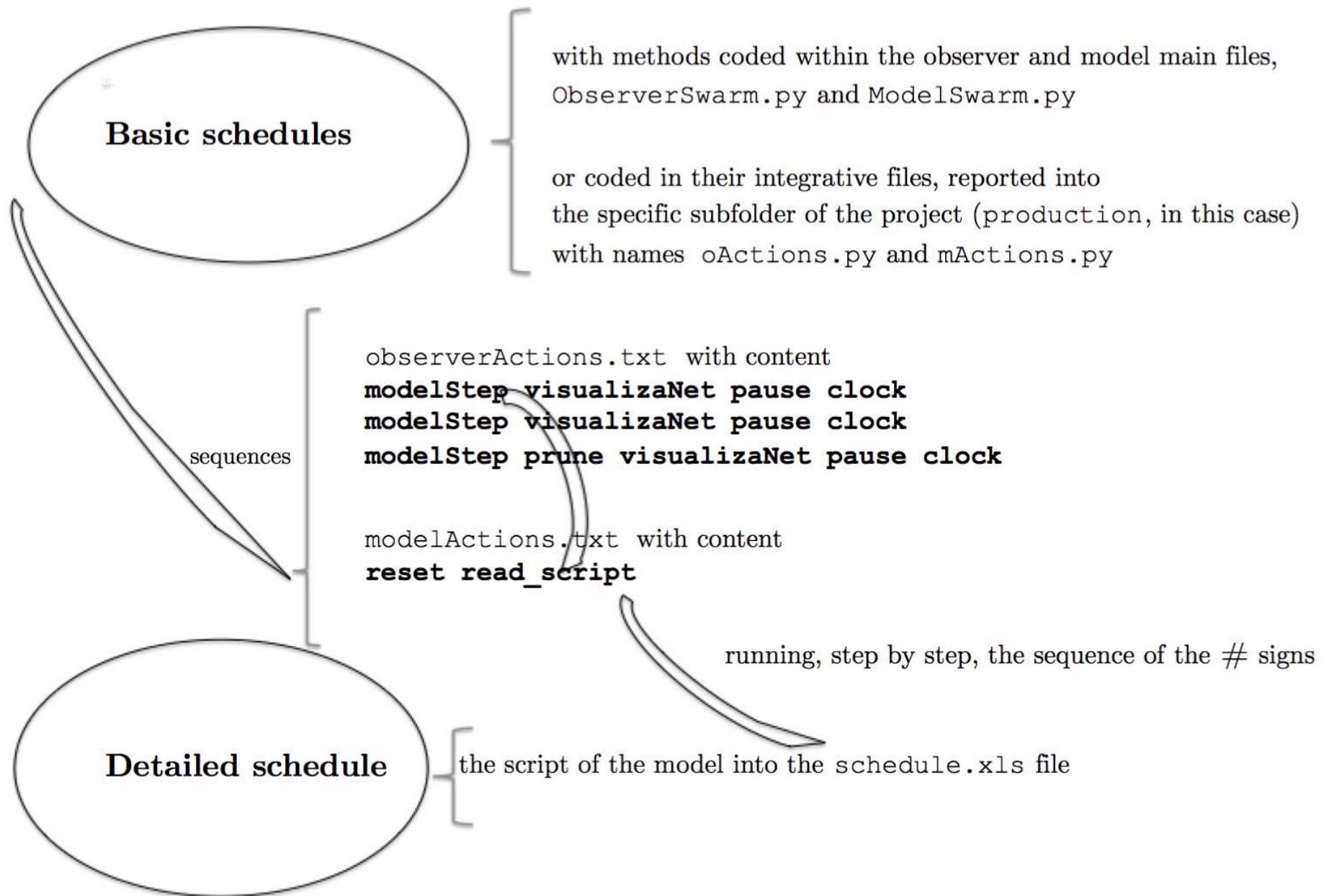
	A	B	C
1	#	1	20
2	recipes	setRecipeContent	
3	recipes	searchForSector	
4	factories	produce	
5			

	A	B	C
1	#	1	20
2	recipes	setRecipeContent	
3	recipes	searchForSector	
4	factories	0.2 produce	
5	sector2	produce	
6	sector5	produce	
7			





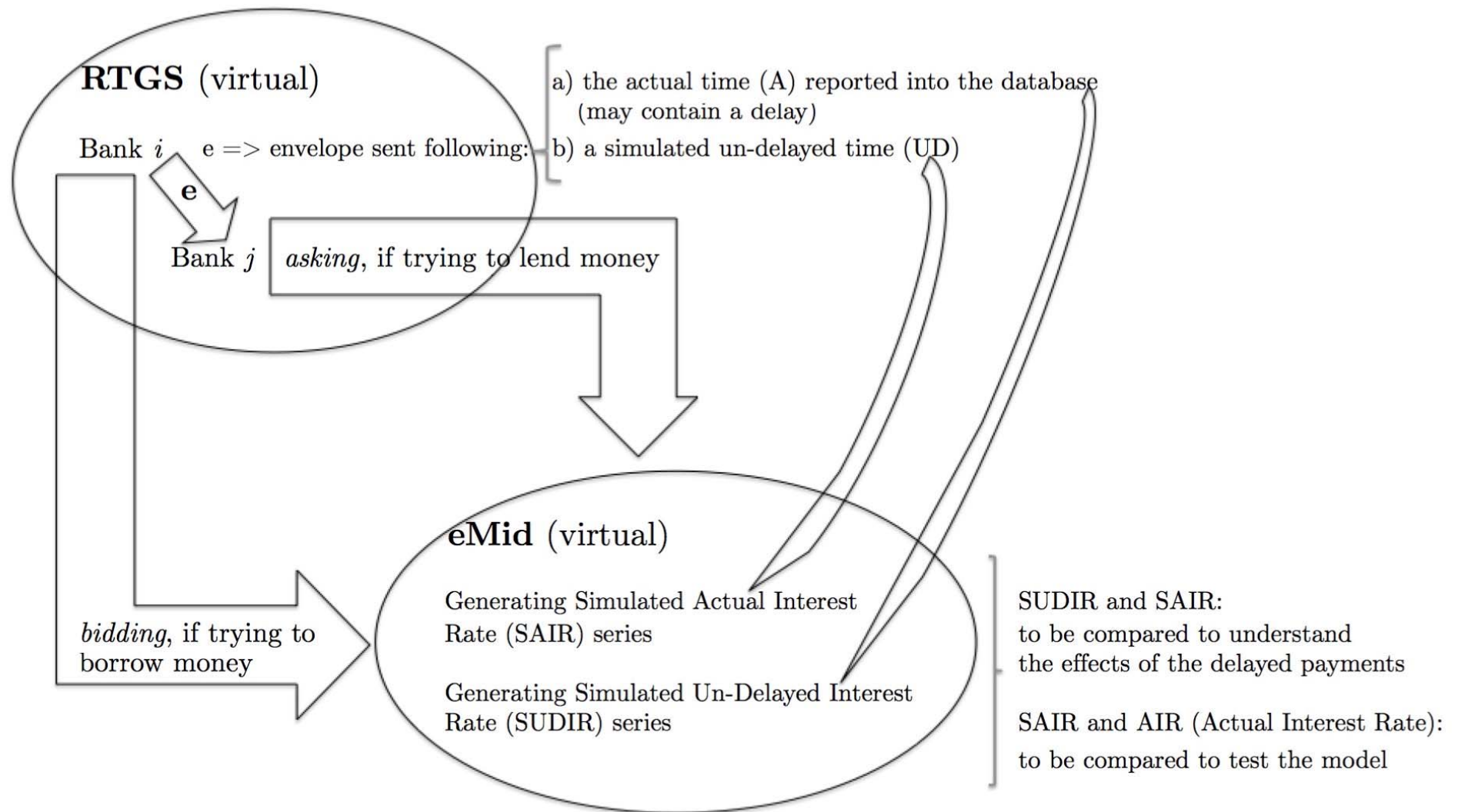


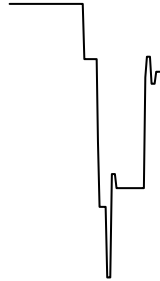


	A	B	C
1	macro	repeat	
2	#	3	
3	factories	-2	addAFactory
4	#	6	
5	factories	0,2	addAFactory
6	#	9	
7	factories	-3	removeItself
8			

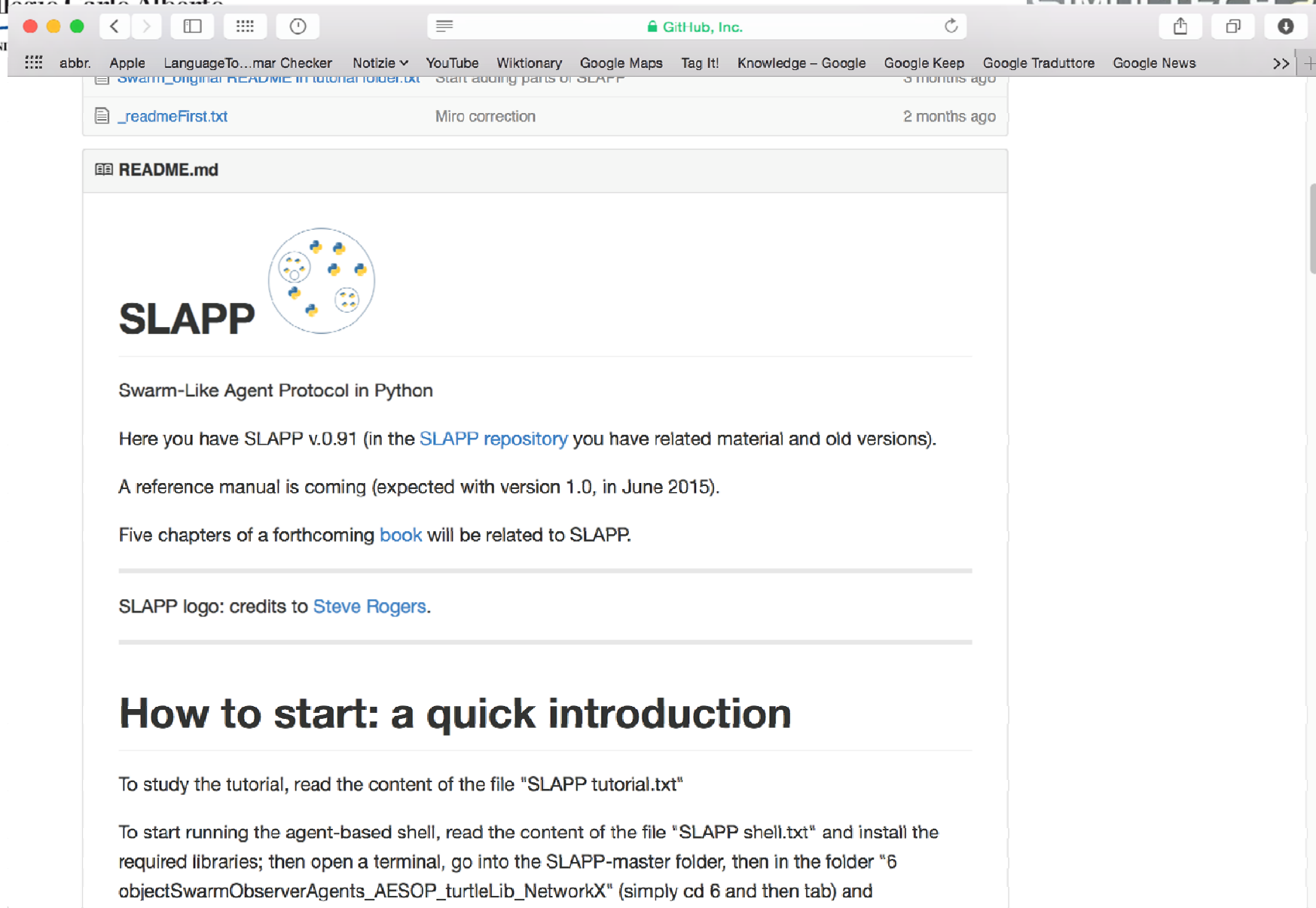
	A	B	C
1	#	1	20
2	recipes	setRecipeContent	
3	recipes	searchForSector	
4	factories	produce	
5			

Payments example (using R)





[**https://github.com/terna/SLAPP/**](https://github.com/terna/SLAPP/)



Swarm_Like Agent Protocol in Python

Here you have SLAPP v.0.91 (in the [SLAPP repository](#) you have related material and old versions).

A reference manual is coming (expected with version 1.0, in June 2015).

Five chapters of a forthcoming [book](#) will be related to SLAPP.

SLAPP logo: credits to [Steve Rogers](#).

How to start: a quick introduction

To study the tutorial, read the content of the file "SLAPP tutorial.txt"

To start running the agent-based shell, read the content of the file "SLAPP shell.txt" and install the required libraries; then open a terminal, go into the SLAPP-master folder, then in the folder "6 objectSwarmObserverAgents_AESOP_turtleLib_NetworkX" (simply cd 6 and then tab) and

Thanks

Pietro Terna
pietro.terna@unito.it