

# Foundation Models for Decision Making

Problems, Methods, and Applications

Sherry Yang



Berkeley  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Google DeepMind

# Machine Learning Advances in Vision and Language



Text to image / video

Language generation

J

What are Foundation Models?



Foundation models are large pre-trained neural networks used in machine learning and natural language processing. They form the foundation for various tasks and are trained on extensive internet text data, enabling them to grasp a wide range of knowledge and language patterns. Prominent examples include OpenAI's GPT series and Google's BERT model.

# Behind These Advances: Foundation Models

JI

What are Foundation Models?



Foundation models are large pre-trained neural networks used in machine learning and natural language processing. They form the foundation for various tasks and are trained on extensive internet text data, enabling them to grasp a wide range of knowledge and language patterns. Prominent examples include OpenAI's GPT series and Google's BERT model.

Response from GPT-4

# Modeling the Data is Not Enough

**Issue:** Not enough data

- Scientific discoveries
- Rare events, safety



**Issue:** Want better than data

- Failed robot executions
- Faster programs



# Promises of Sequential Decision Making

**Issue:** Not enough data

**Issue:** Want better than data

**Solution:** Collect more data

**Solution:** Optimize actions



# Promises of Sequential Decision Making

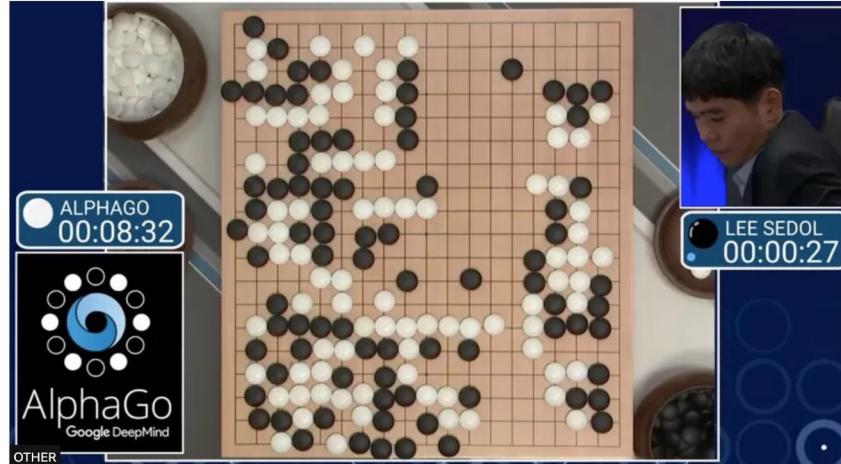
**Issue:** Not enough data

**Solution:** Collect more data

- Reinforcement learning
- Planning, search
- Control, optimization

**Issue:** Want better than data

**Solution:** Optimize actions



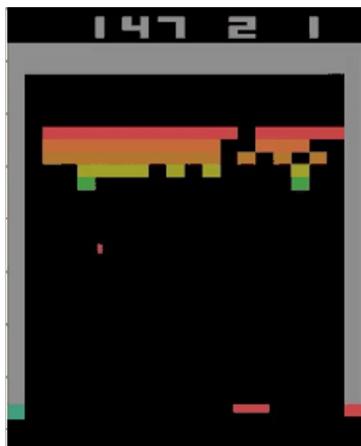
# Challenges of Sequential Decision Making

**Solution:** Collect more data

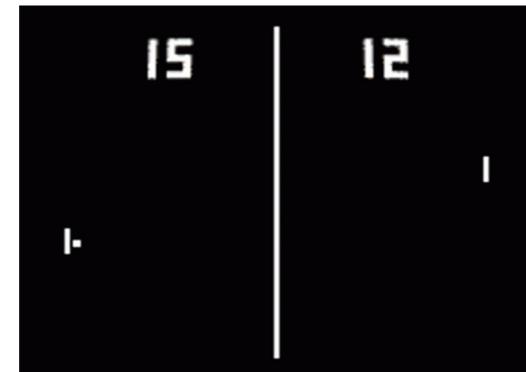
**Solution:** Optimize actions

**Challenge:** Sample Efficiency

**Challenge:** Generalization



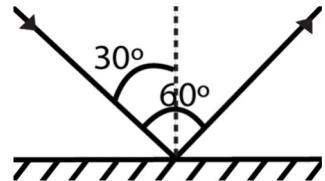
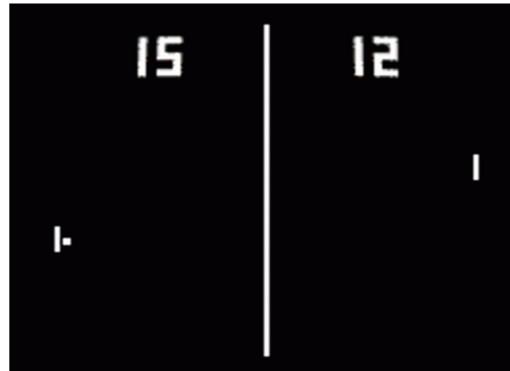
- RL: 38 days
- Human: mins



[1] Minh et al. Human-Level Control through Deep Reinforcement Learning. Nature 2015.

[2] Zhang et al. A Study on Overfitting in Deep Reinforcement Learning. arXiv 2018.

# Sequential Decision Making Lacks Broad Knowledge



Physics

“Bounce the  
ball back.”



Language

Vision

# How Foundation Models Acquire Broad Knowledge

## Representation Learning

- Contrastive learning (SimCLR, CLIP)
- Denoising autoencoding (BERT, MAE)

## Reasoning

Input



Intermediate steps



Output

## Internet Data



WIKIPEDIA



- [1] Chen et al. A Simple Framework for Contrastive Learning of Visual Representations. PMLR 2020.
- [2] Radford et al. Learning Transferable Visual Models From Natural Language Supervision. PMLR 2021.
- [3] Devlin et al. BERT: Pre-training of Deep Bidirectional Transformers for Language Understanding. NAACL 2019.
- [4] He et al. Masked Autoencoders are Scalable Vision Learners. CVPR 2022.
- [5] Brown et al. Language Models are Few-Shot Learners. NeurIPS 2020.
- [6] Wei et al. Chain-of-Thought Prompting Elicits Reasoning in Large Language Models. 2022.

# Today's Talk: Foundation Models for Decision Making

## Representation Learning

From **suboptimal** data



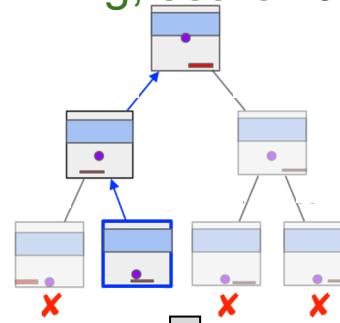
[[ICML21](#), [NeurIPS21](#),  
[ICLR22](#), [ICML22](#)]

## Reasoning

State



Planning, search algos



Action

[[NeurIPS22](#)]

## Internet Data



[[NeurIPS23](#), [arXiv23](#), [arXiv23](#)]

# Today's Talk: Foundation Models for Decision Making

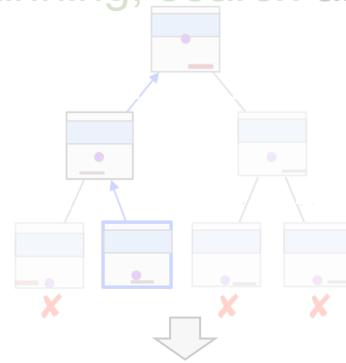
## Representation Learning

From **suboptimal** data



[[ICML21](#), [NeurIPS21](#),  
[ICLR22](#), [ICML22](#)]

Reasoning  
Input  
↓  
Planning, search algos



Output  
[[NeurIPS22](#)]

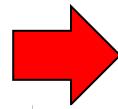
## Internet Data



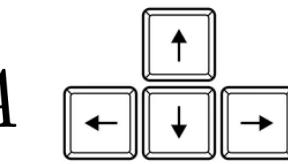
[[NeurIPS23](#), [arXiv23](#), [arXiv23](#)]

# Learning from Expert Demonstrations

Imitation learning:  $S$



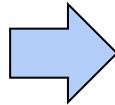
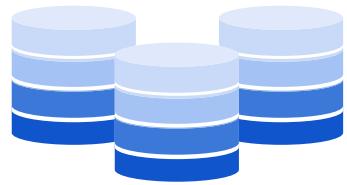
$\pi$



$\pi_*$  Optimal policy

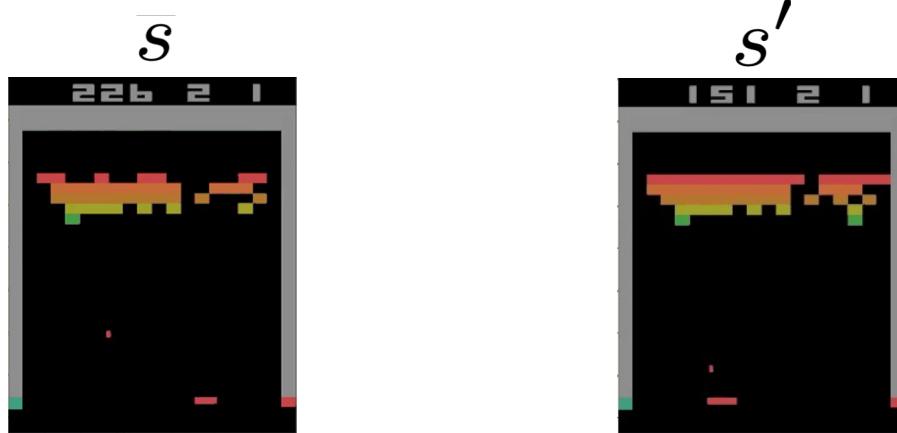
# Representation Learning from Suboptimal Data

Suboptimal data



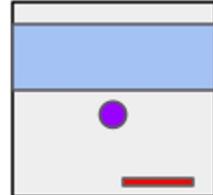
Pretraining

$$\phi : S$$



$$\downarrow D_{\text{KL}}(\mathcal{P}(s, a) \parallel \mathcal{P}_Z(\phi(s), a))$$

Z



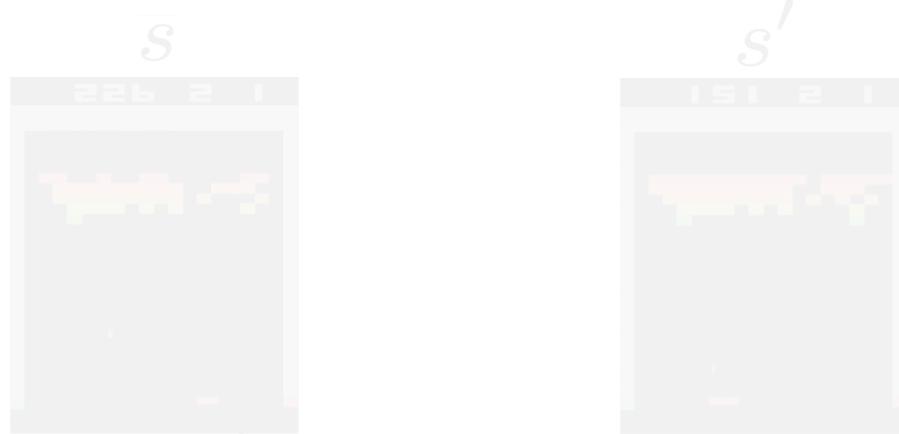
# Representation Learning from Suboptimal Data

Suboptimal data



$$\phi : S$$

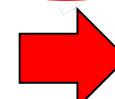
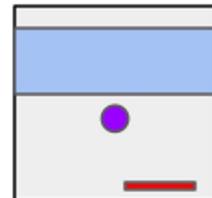
Pretraining



$$D_{KL}(\phi(s), a \mid \pi_*(s), a))$$

Imitation with  
representations:

$Z$



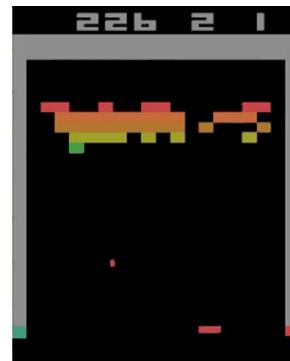
$A$

$\pi_Z$

# Intuition: Why Representation Learning Helps

Imitation learning:

$S$



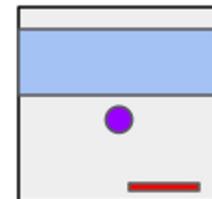
$A$

$\pi$

- Smaller hypothesis space.
- Need fewer expert demos.

Imitation with  
representations:

$Z$



$A$

$\pi_Z$

# Performance Difference with Representations

**Theorem:** For any expert policy  $\pi^*$ , representation  $\phi$ , and policy  $\pi_Z$ ,  $\text{PerfDiff}(\pi_Z, \pi^*)$  is bounded

$$\text{PerfDiff}(\pi_Z, \pi_*) \leq (1 + D_{\chi^2}(\text{red cylinder} \| \text{blue cylinder})^{\frac{1}{2}}) \cdot \epsilon_{R,T} + C \sqrt{\frac{1}{2} \mathbb{E}_{z \sim d_Z^{\pi_*}} [D_{\text{KL}}(\pi_{*,Z}(z) \| \pi_Z(z))]}.$$

Learning Goal

$$\propto D_{\text{KL}}(\mathcal{P}(s, a) \| \mathcal{P}_Z(\phi(s), a))$$

Approx. dynamics

$$= \text{const}(\pi_*, \phi) + J_{\text{BC}, \phi}(\pi_Z)$$

Sample complexity  $\propto |Z|$

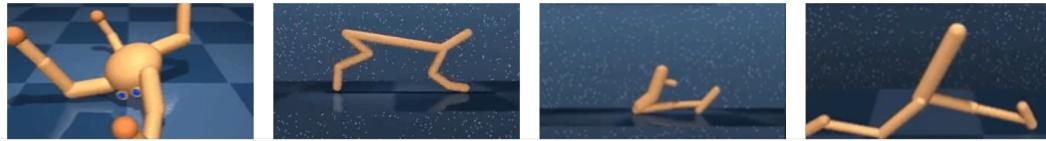
Downstream imitation in



- Expect improvement when  $\epsilon_{R,T}$  and  $|Z|$  are small.
- Vanilla BC corresponds to  $\epsilon_{R,T} = 0$  and  $|Z| = |S|$ .

# Empirical Results on Continuous Control

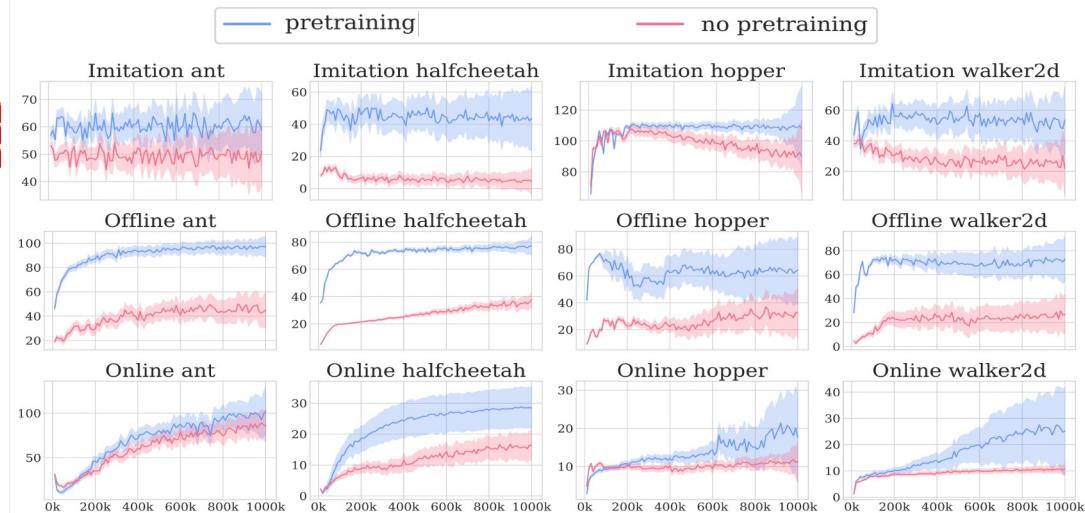
Suboptimal  
data



Imitation

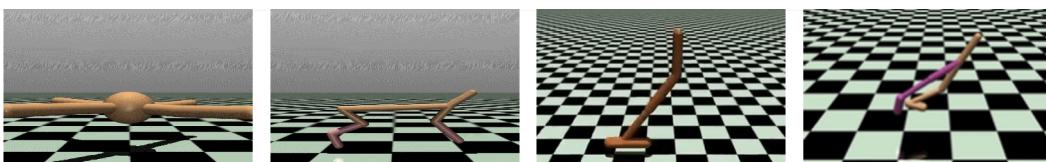


Offline RL



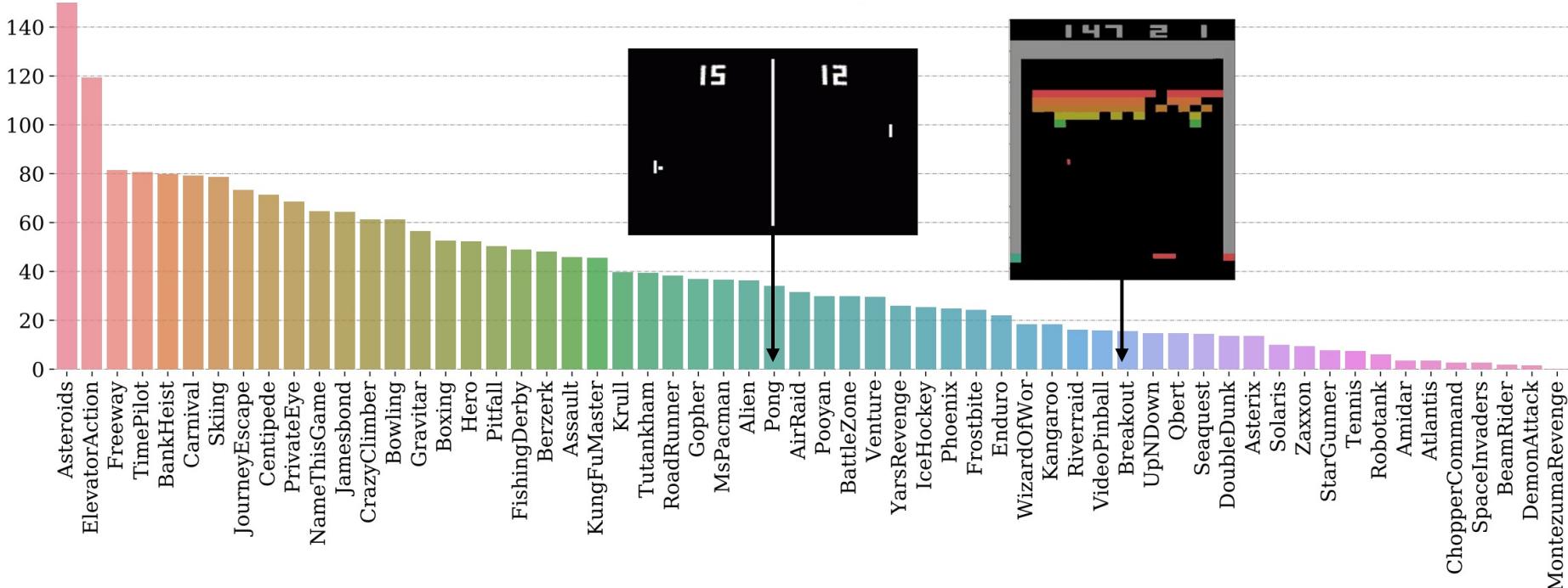
Online RL

With representation



# Empirical Results on Atari Games

Improvement % over Behavioral Cloning (BC) without representation learning



# Additional Work

## Representation Learning



- [1] Nachum and **Yang**. Provable Representation Learning for Imitation. NeurIPS 2021.
- [2] **Yang** and Nachum. Offline Pretraining for Sequential Decision Making. ICML 2021.
- [3] **Yang** et al. Near-Optimal Imitation with Suboptimal Data. ICLR 2022.
- [4] Zhang, Ren, **Yang**, et. al. Linear MDPs via Contrastive Representations. ICML 2022.

# Takeaways

## Representation Learning



- Use suboptimal data for representation learning.

# Takeaways

## Representation Learning



- Use suboptimal data for representation learning.
- Contrastive learning and denoising autoencoding for learning approximate dynamics models.

$$\mathcal{P}_Z(\phi, a))$$

$$s, a, \underline{s'} \xrightarrow{\phi} \underline{s'}$$

# Today's Talk: Foundation Models for Decision Making

## Representation Learning

From suboptimal data



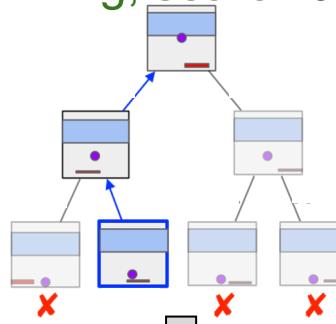
[[ICML21](#), [NeurIPS21](#),  
[ICLR22](#), [ICML22](#)]

## Reasoning

Input



Planning, search algos



Output

[[NeurIPS22](#)]

## Internet Data

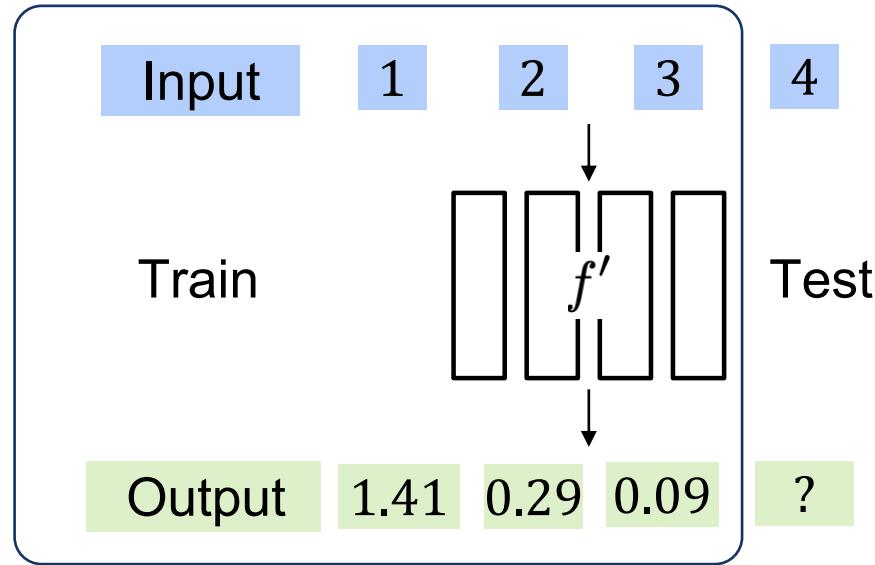


[[NeurIPS23](#), [arXiv23](#), [arXiv23](#)]

# Teach Models to Do Math

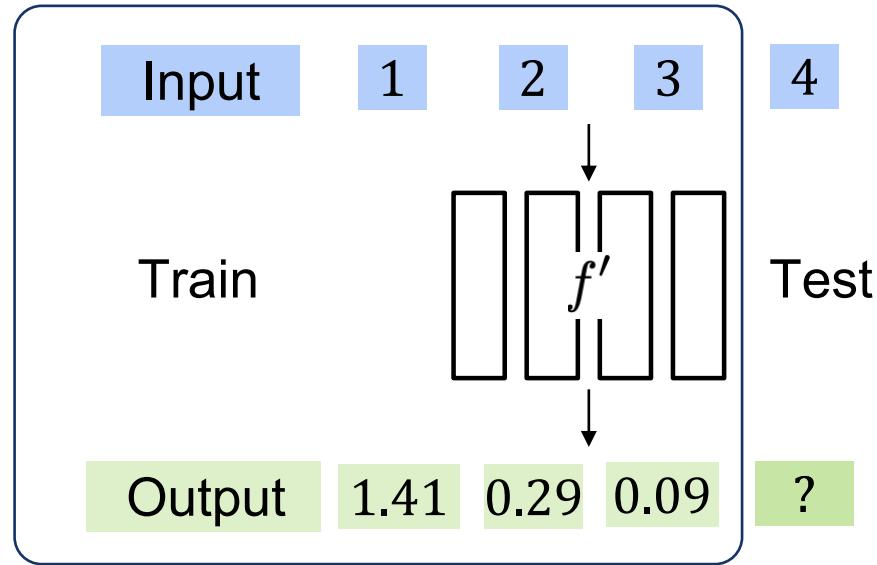
$$f(x) = \frac{x^2 - 1}{x\sqrt{x^2 + 1}}$$
$$f'(x) ?$$

Seems hard!



# How Did We Learn Math in School?

$$f(x) = \frac{x^2 - 1}{x\sqrt{x^2 + 1}}$$
$$f'(x) ?$$



# How Did We Learn Math in School?

$$f(x) = \frac{x^2 - 1}{x\sqrt{x^2 + 1}}$$
$$f'(x) ?$$

Quotient rule:  $f'(x) = \frac{(x^2 - 1)'x\sqrt{x^2 + 1} - (x^2 - 1)(x\sqrt{x^2 + 1})'}{x^2(x^2 + 1)}$

Product rule:  $\frac{d}{dx}x\sqrt{x^2 + 1} = x\frac{d}{dx}\sqrt{x^2 + 1} + \sqrt{x^2 + 1}.$

Chain rule:  $\frac{d}{dx}\sqrt{x^2 + 1} = \frac{d}{dx}(x^2 + 1)^{1/2} = \frac{1}{2}(x^2 + 1)^{-1/2}(2x) = \frac{x}{\sqrt{x^2 + 1}}.$

# Teach Language Models to Do Math

$$f(x) = \frac{x^2 - 1}{x\sqrt{x^2 + 1}}$$

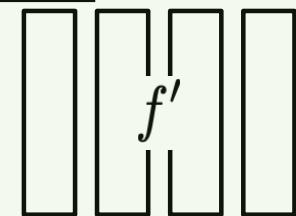
4

Intermediate reasoning steps

↓ Test

Quotient rule:

$$f'(x) = \frac{(x^2 - 1)'x\sqrt{x^2 + 1} - (x^2 - 1)(x\sqrt{x^2 + 1})'}{x^2(x^2 + 1)}$$

Product rule:  $\frac{d}{dx}x\sqrt{x^2 + 1} = x\frac{d}{dx}\sqrt{x^2 + 1} + \sqrt{x^2 + 1}.$ Chain rule:  $\frac{d}{dx}\sqrt{x^2 + 1} = \frac{d}{dx}(x^2 + 1)^{1/2} = \frac{1}{2}(x^2 + 1)^{-1/2}(2x) = \frac{x}{\sqrt{x^2 + 1}}.$  $f'(x)$ 

Understand. Do not memorize.

0.04

# How is Math Related to Decision Making?

$$f(x) = \frac{x^2 - 1}{x\sqrt{x^2 + 1}}$$

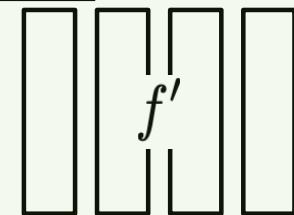
4

Intermediate reasoning steps

↓ Test

Quotient rule:

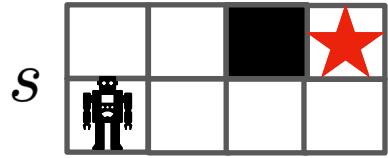
$$f'(x) = \frac{(x^2 - 1)'x\sqrt{x^2 + 1} - (x^2 - 1)(x\sqrt{x^2 + 1})'}{x^2(x^2 + 1)}$$

Product rule:  $\frac{d}{dx}x\sqrt{x^2 + 1} = x\frac{d}{dx}\sqrt{x^2 + 1} + \sqrt{x^2 + 1}.$ Chain rule:  $\frac{d}{dx}\sqrt{x^2 + 1} = \frac{d}{dx}(x^2 + 1)^{1/2} = \frac{1}{2}(x^2 + 1)^{-1/2}(2x) = \frac{x}{\sqrt{x^2 + 1}}.$  $f'(x)$ 

Understand. Do not memorize.

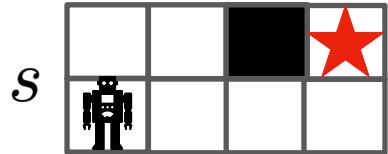
0.04

# Teach Models to Search

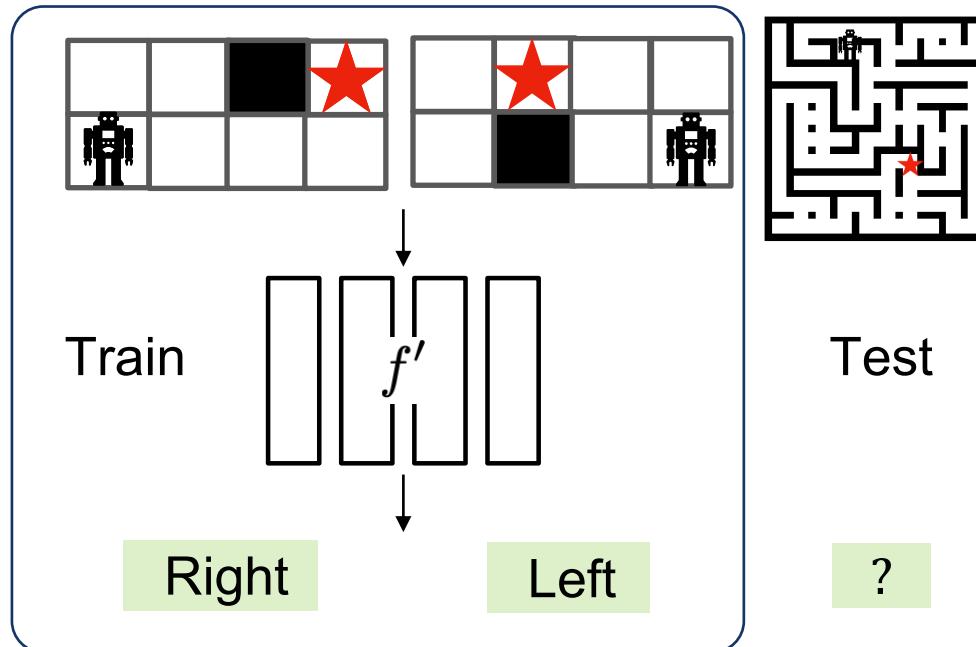


$a?$

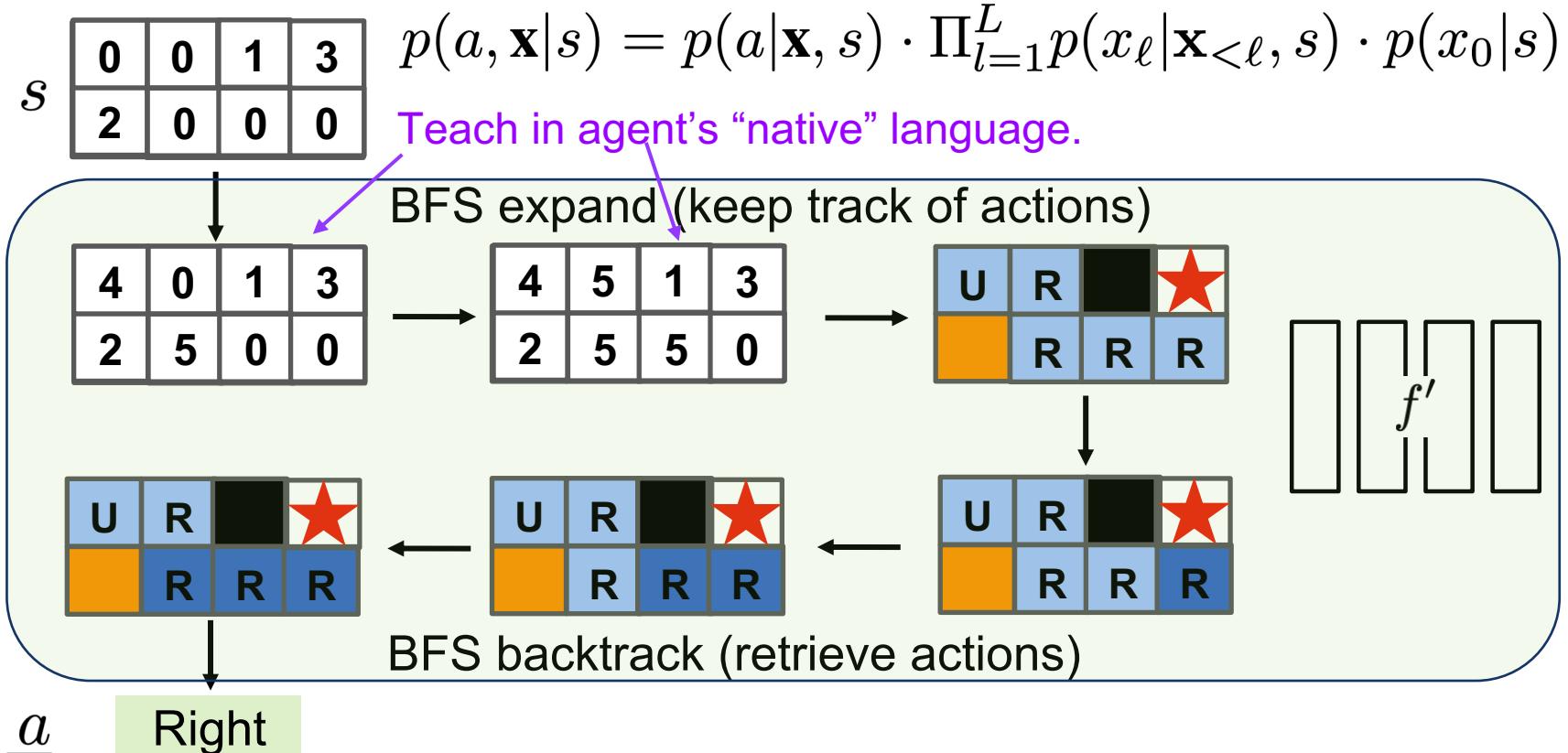
# Teach Models to Search via Behavioral Cloning



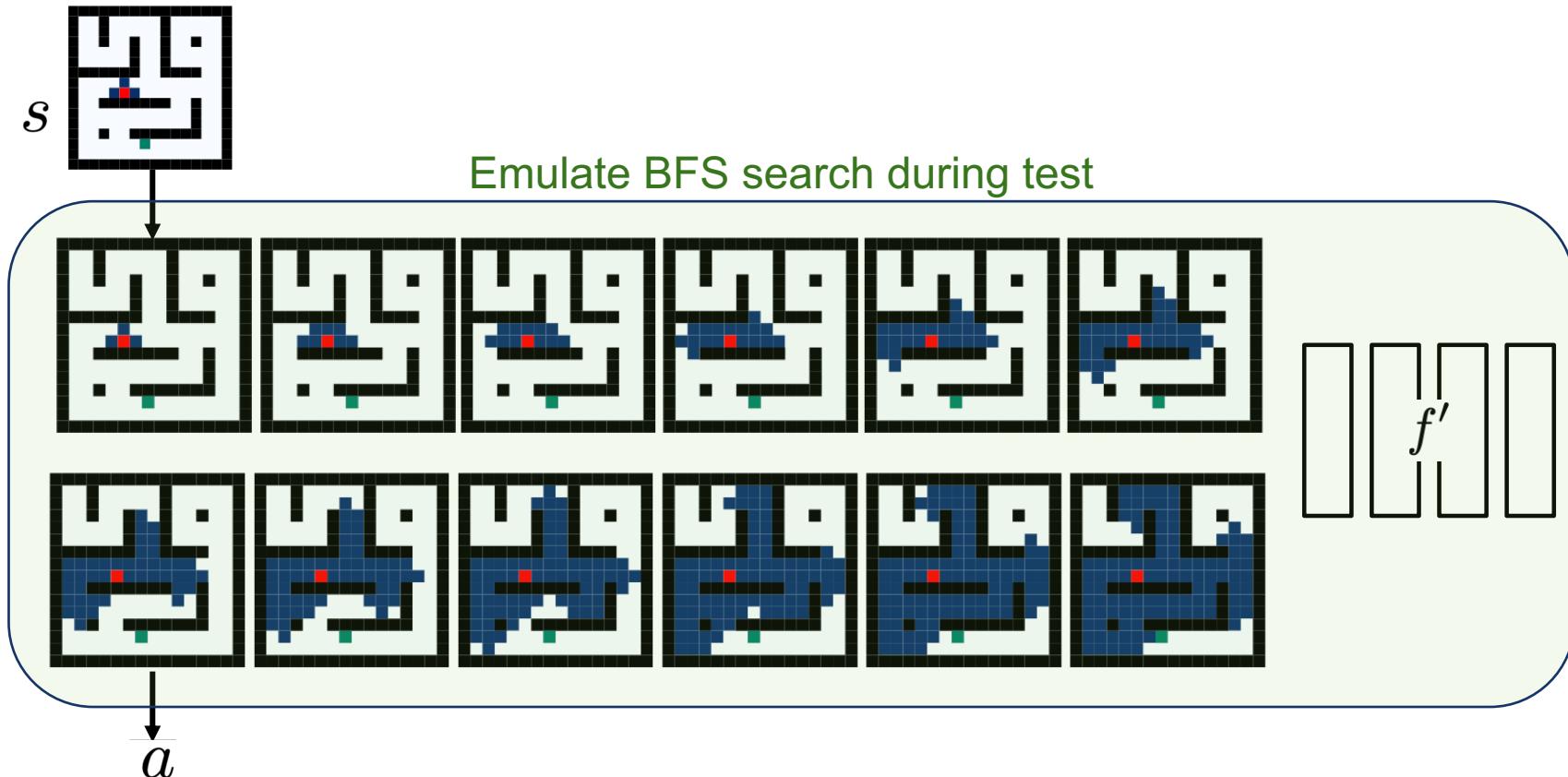
$a?$



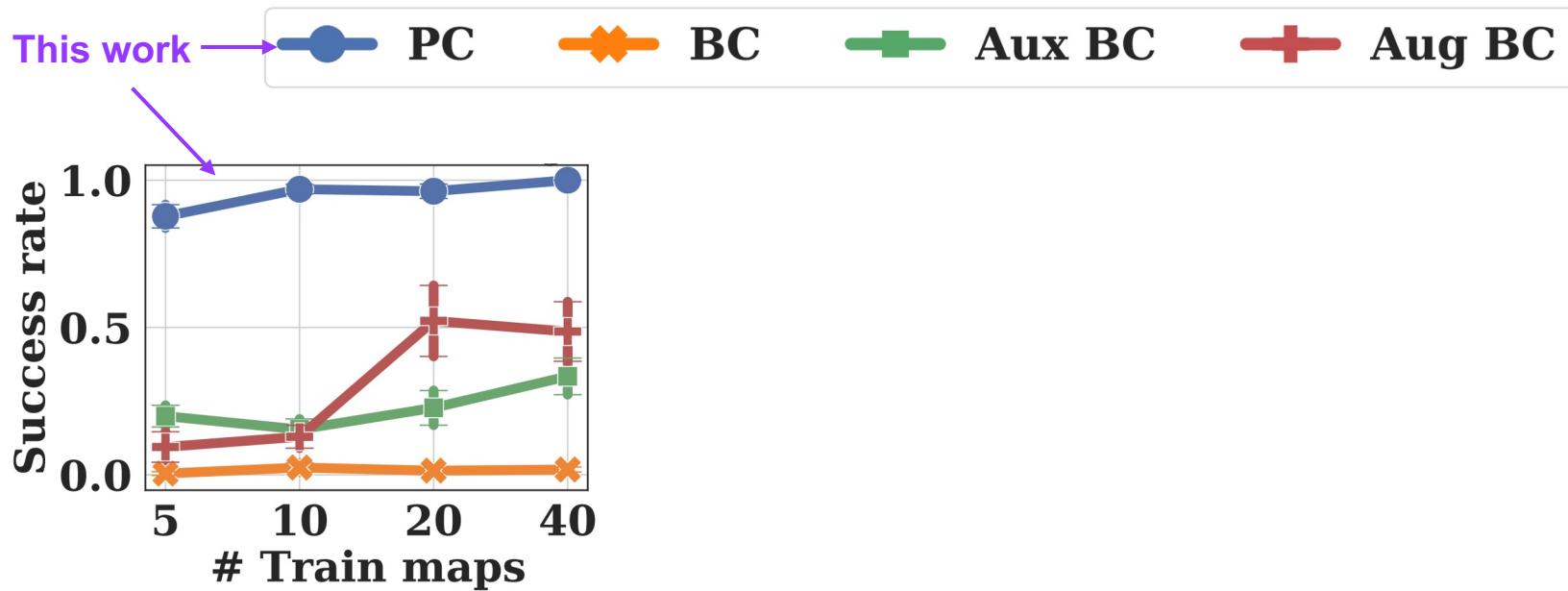
# Teach Models to Search via Procedure Cloning



# Teach Models to Search via Procedure Cloning

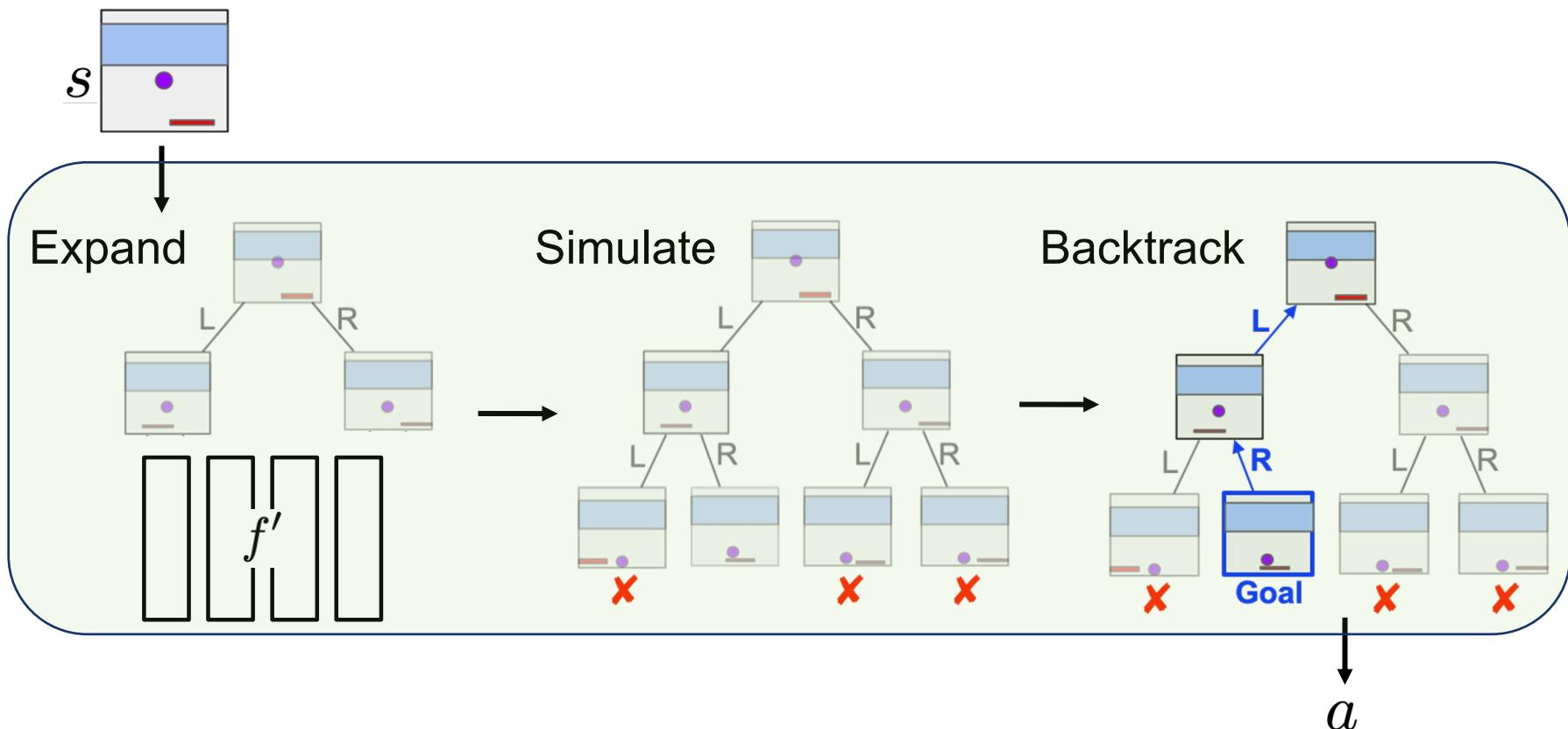


# Empirical Performance of Procedure Cloning

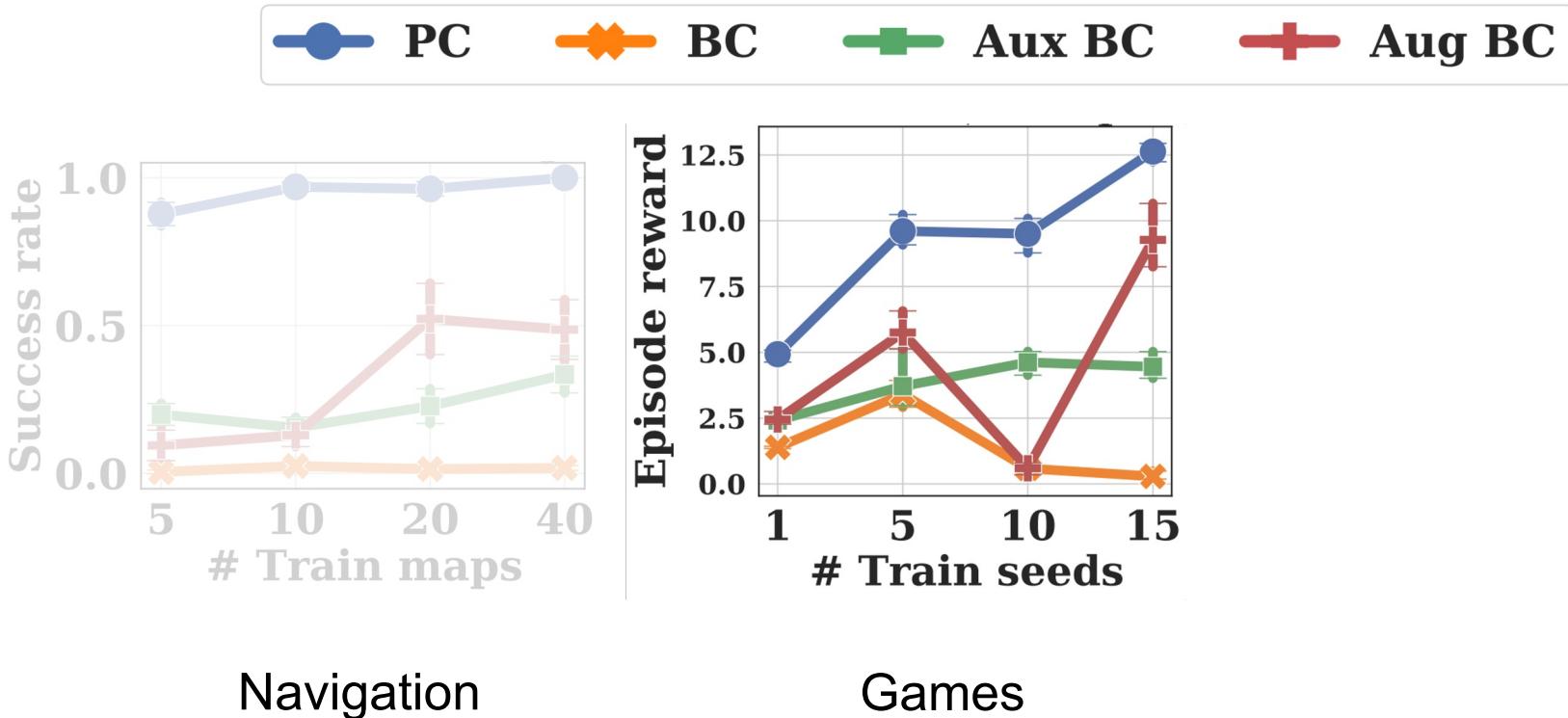


Navigation

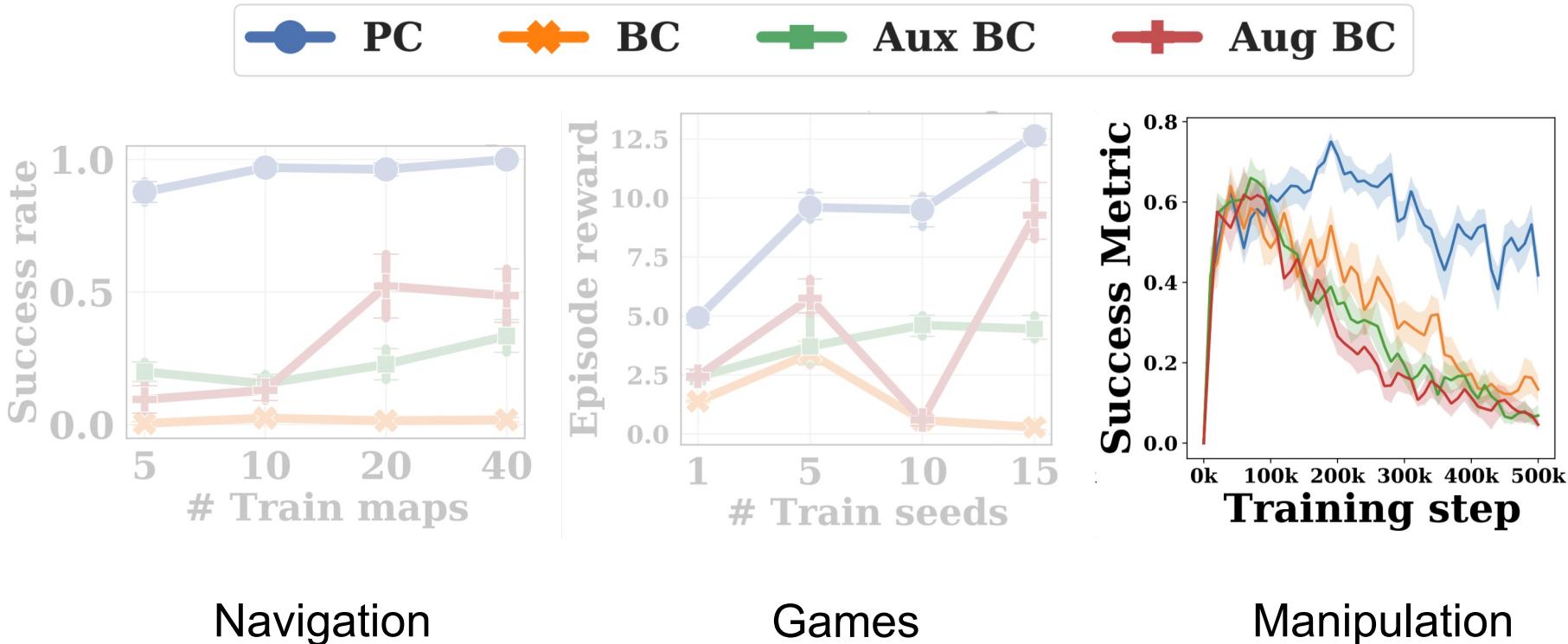
# Procedure Cloning is General: MCTS



# Empirical Performance of Procedure Cloning



# Empirical Performance of Procedure Cloning



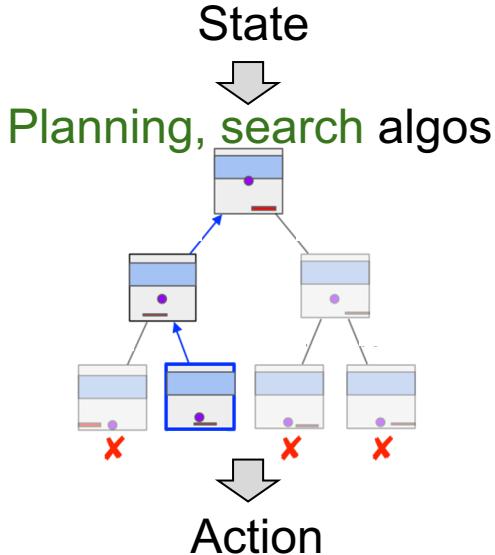
Navigation

Games

Manipulation

# Takeaways

**Reasoning in Agents** ➤ Teach intermediate computations.



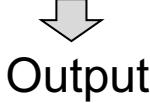
# Takeaways

## Reasoning in LLMs

Input



Natural language steps



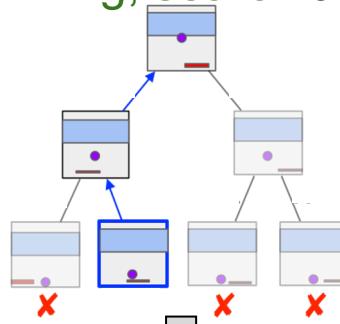
Output

## Reasoning in Agents

State



Planning, search algos



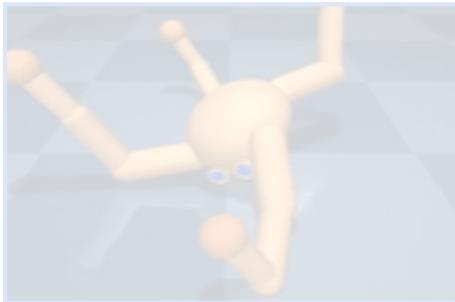
Action

- Teach intermediate computations.
- Don't need to teach in human language. Teach in machine language.

# Today's Talk: Foundation Models for Decision Making

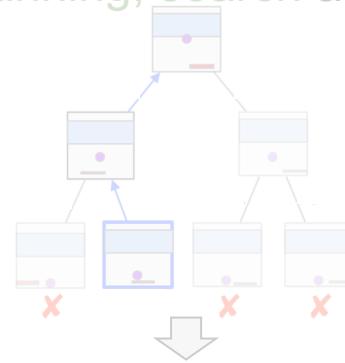
## Representation Learning

From suboptimal data



[[ICML21](#), [NeurIPS21](#),  
[ICLR22](#), [ICML22](#)]

Reasoning  
Input  
↓  
Planning, search algos



Output  
[NeurIPS22]

## Internet Data



[[NeurIPS23](#), [arXiv23](#), [arXiv23](#)]

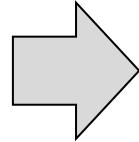
# Human-Like Chatbot from Internet Language Data

Internet language data



WIKIPEDIA

Common Crawl



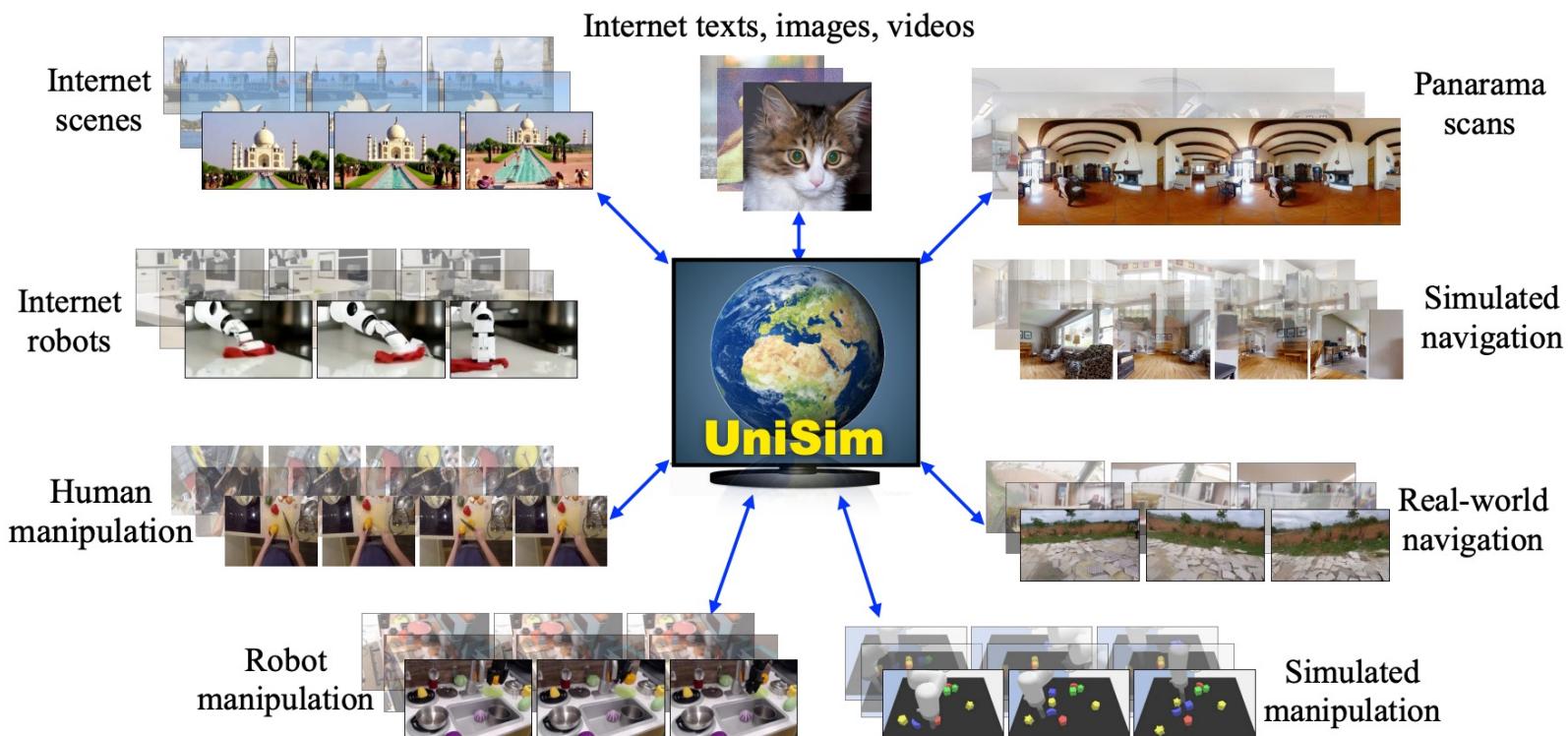
Human-like chatbot

JI What are Foundation Models?

Foundation models are large pre-trained neural networks used in machine learning and natural language processing. They form the foundation for various tasks and are trained on extensive internet text data, enabling them to grasp a wide range of knowledge and language patterns. Prominent examples include OpenAI's GPT series and Google's BERT model.

# World-Like Simulator from Internet Multimodal Data?

Different state action spaces.



# Video and Text as Universal State and Action

Human  
manipulation

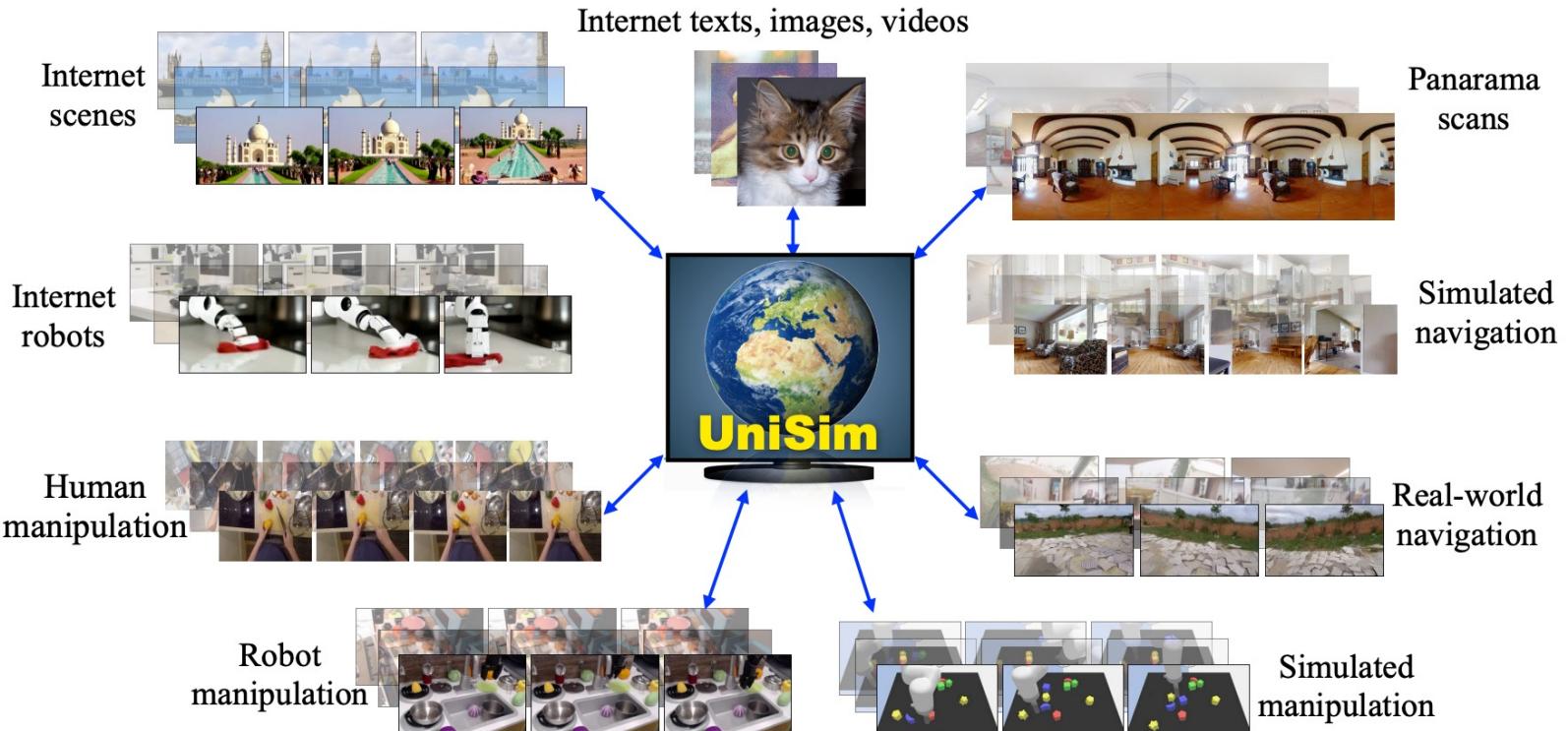


*s*

Subtitles: “Cut the pepper with knife.”

*a*

# Video and Text as Universal State and Action



# Video and Text as Universal State and Action

Internet texts, images

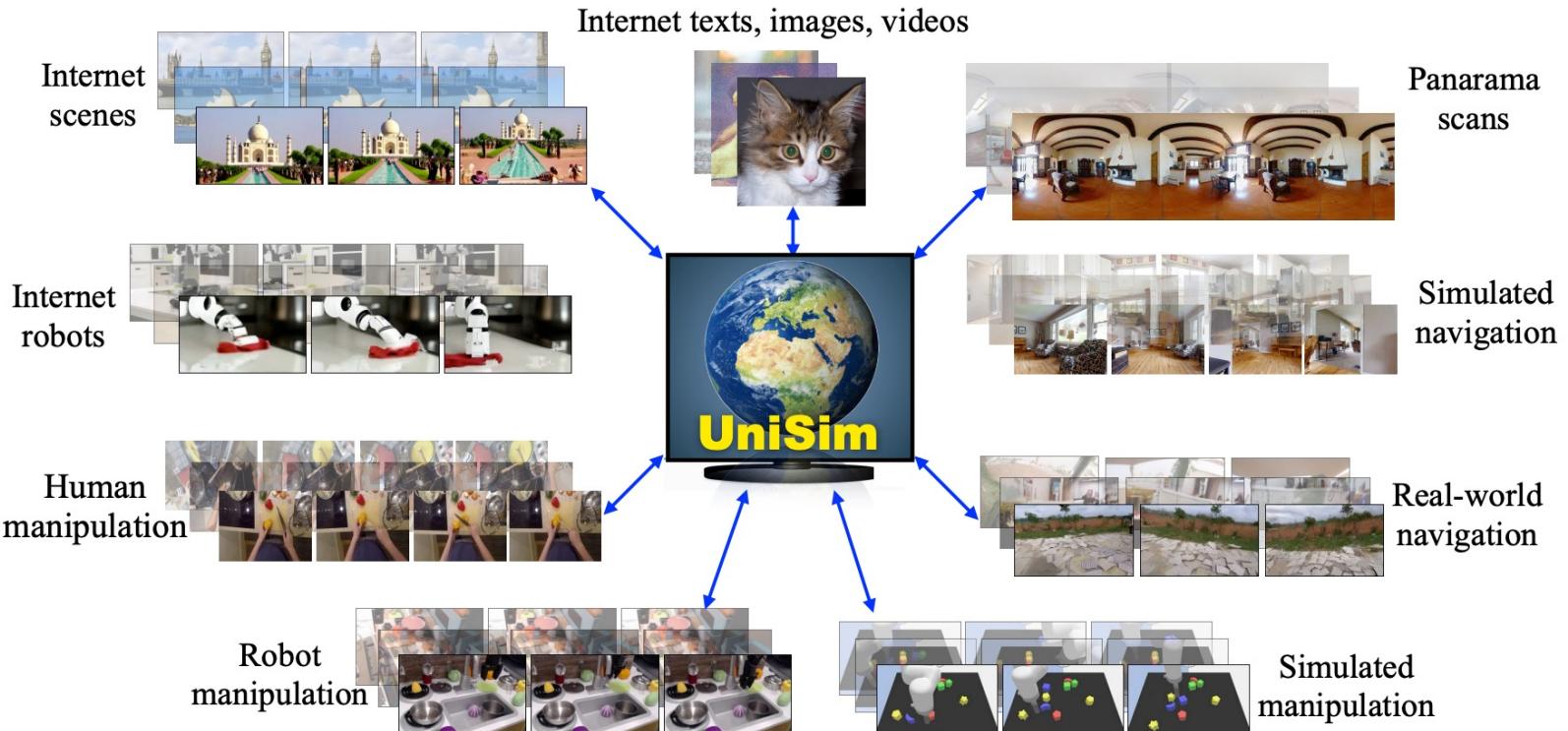


*s*

Caption: “A cat **staring** straight.”

*a*

# Video and Text as Universal State and Action



# Video and Text as Universal State and Action



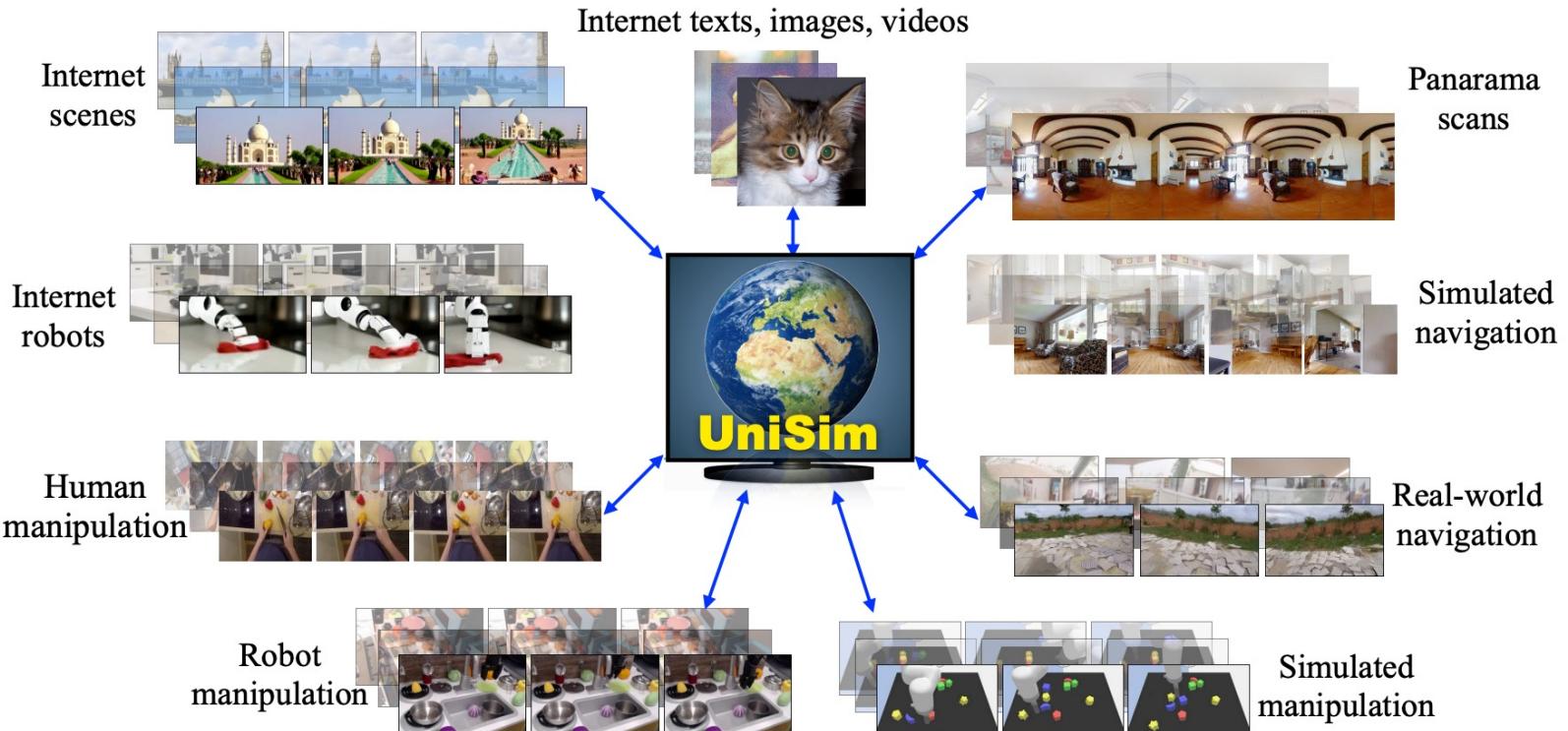
Panarama  
scans

*s*

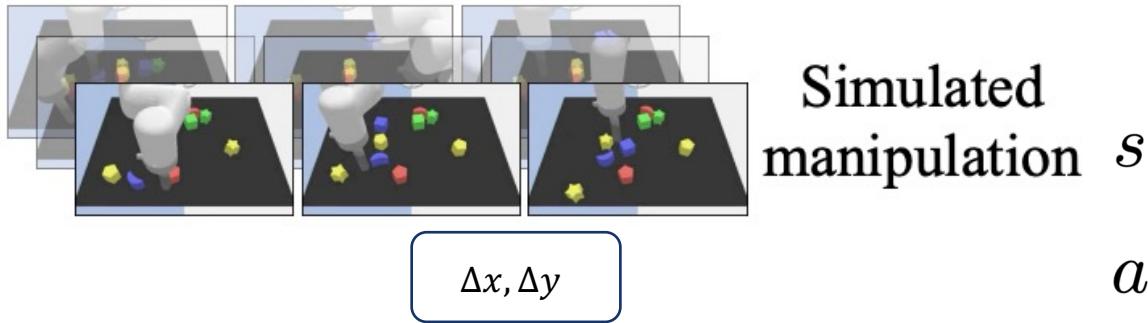
<camera> 90°, <zoom> 1.5

*a*

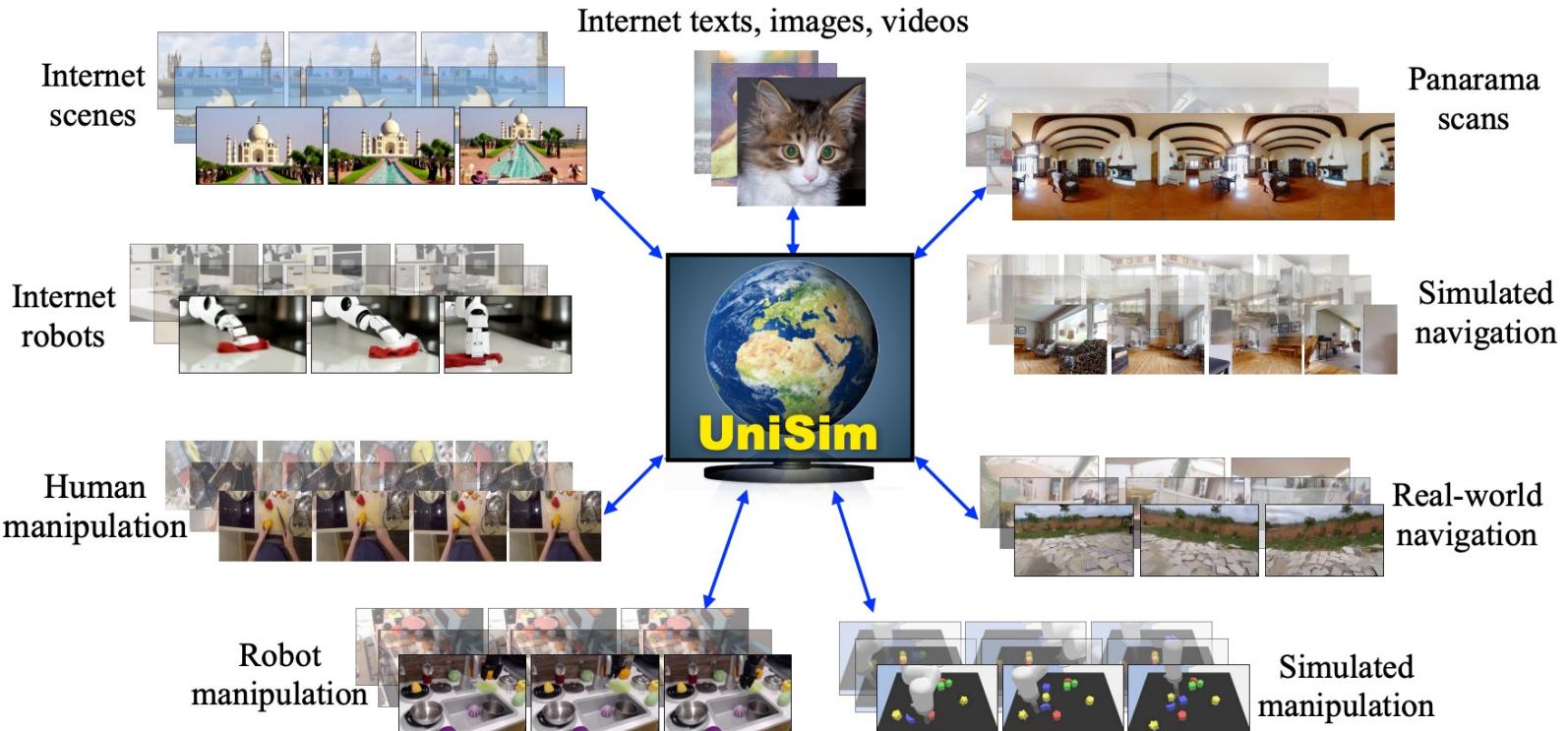
# Video and Text as Universal State and Action



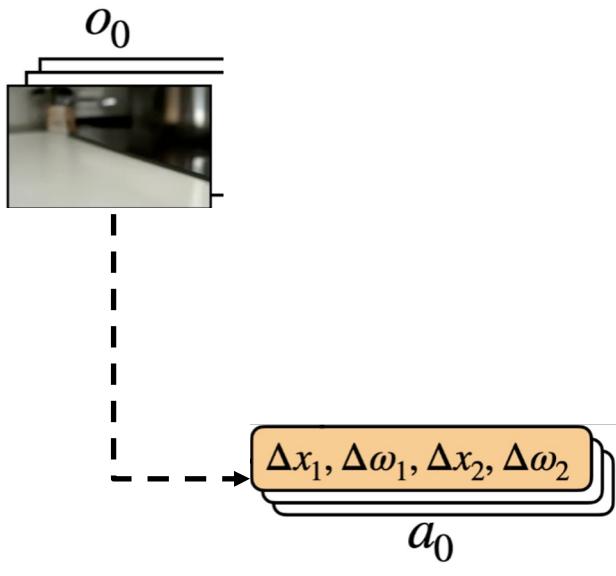
# Video and Text as Universal State and Action



# Video and Text as Universal State and Action



# Text-to-Video Generation as a Universal Simulator



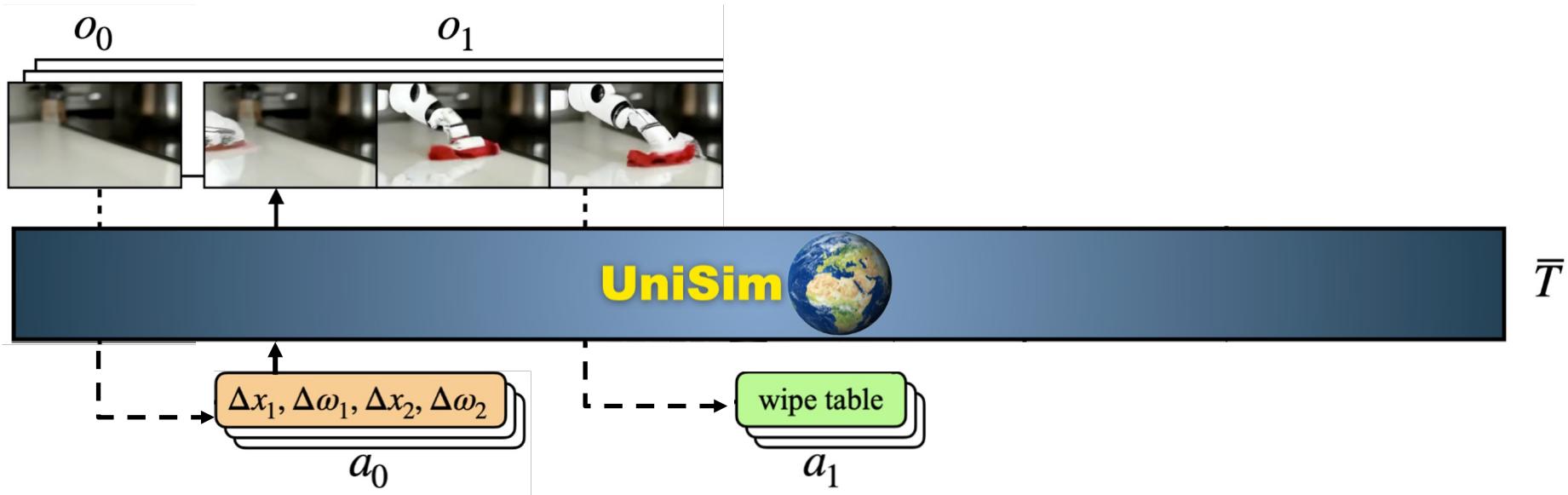
# Text-to-Video Generation as a Universal Simulator



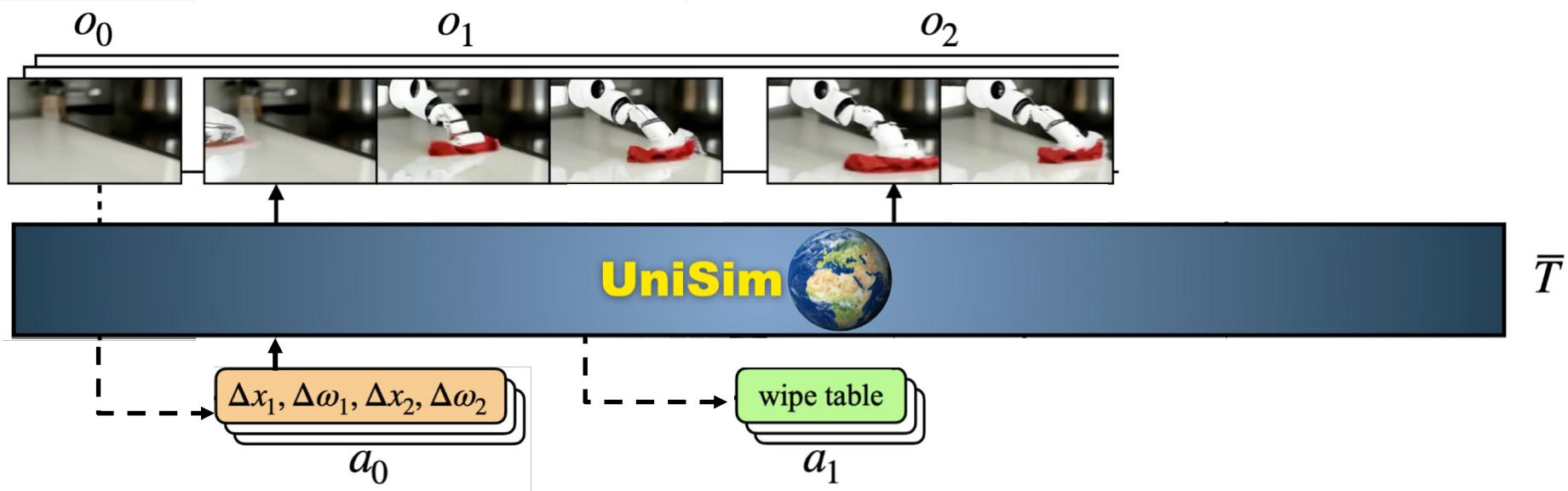
# Text-to-Video Generation as a Universal Simulator



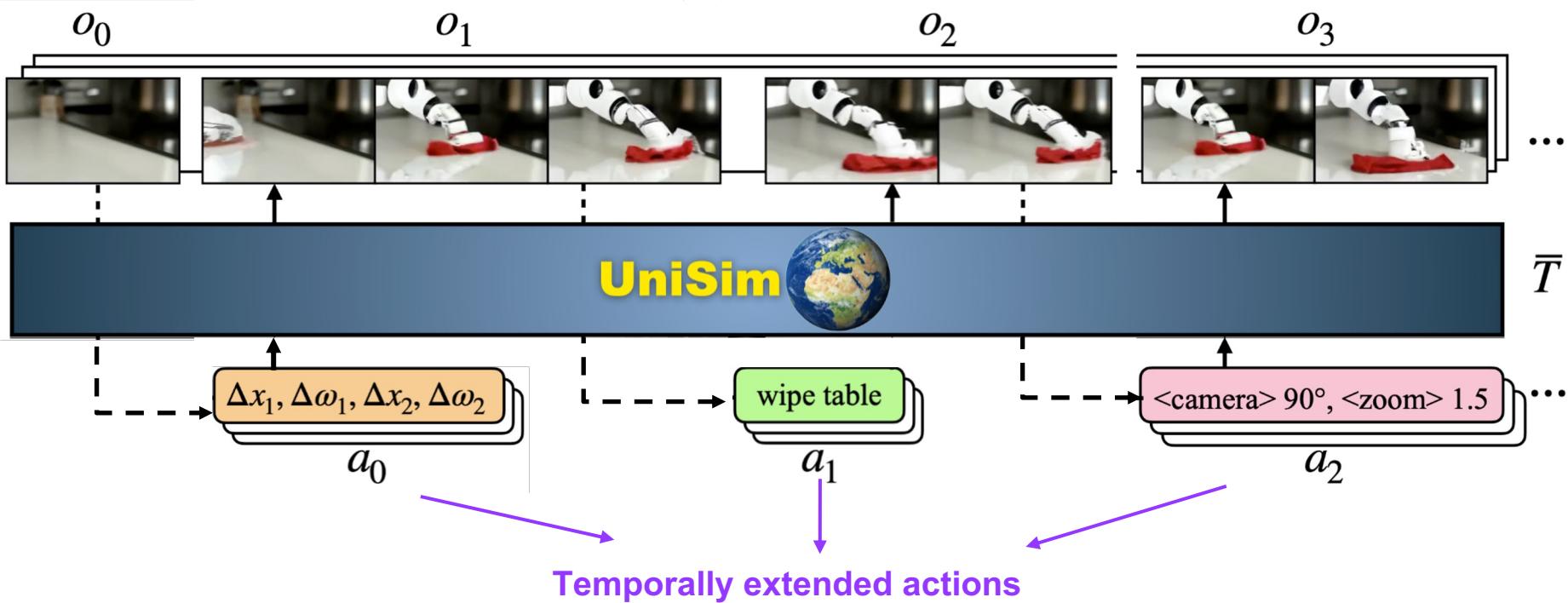
# Text-to-Video Generation as a Universal Simulator



# Text-to-Video Generation as a Universal Simulator



# Text-to-Video Generation as a Universal Simulator



# UniSim Demos

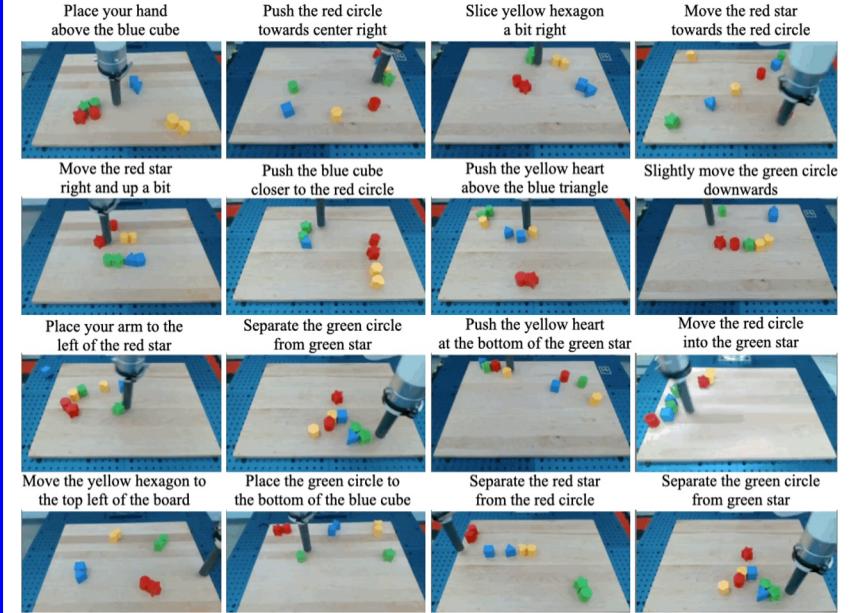
[Demo Link](#)

# Application: Large-Scale “Online” RL

## Challenge: Sample Efficiency



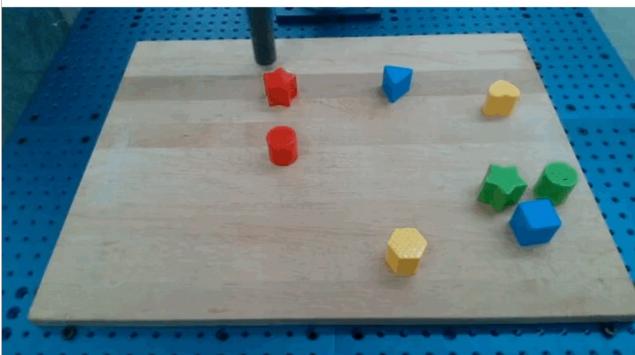
## Challenge: Universal Simulator



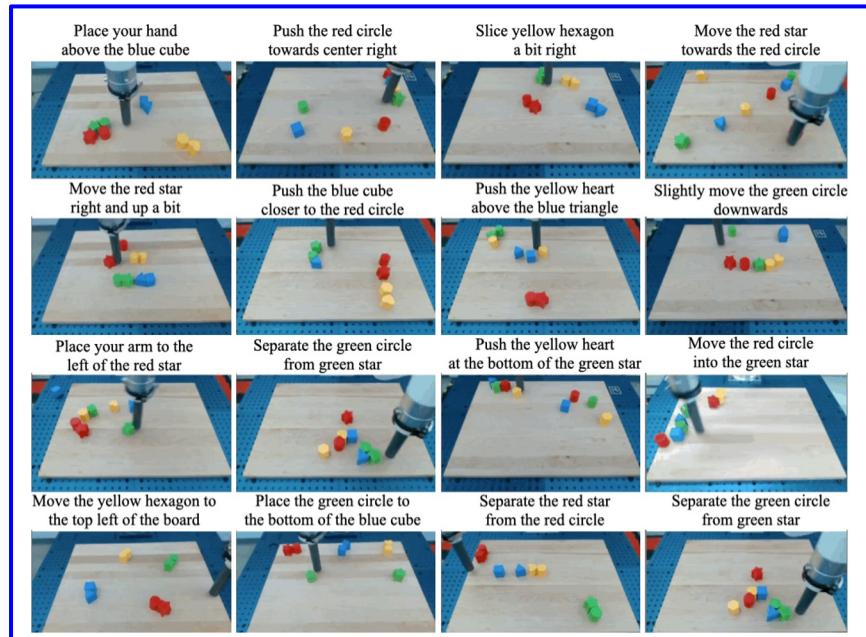
# Application: Large-Scale “Online” RL

## Zero-shot real-world transfer

Put red star towards blue cube



## Universal Simulator



# Application: Search and Planning

## Search and planning in simulation

 Put the fruits into  
the top drawer



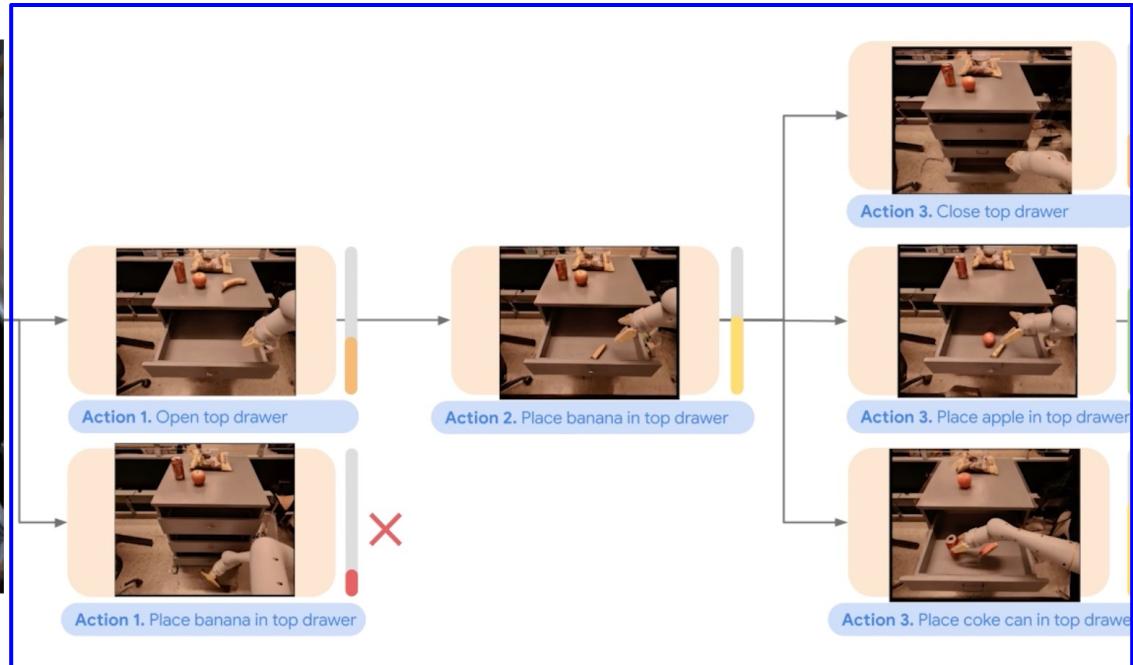
- [1] Du\*, Yang\* et al. Learning Universal Policies via Text-Guided Video Generation. NeurIPS 2023.
- [2] Du, Yang, et al. Video Language Planning. arXiv2023.

# Application: Search and Planning

Zero-shot real-world transfer



Search and planning in simulation



[1] Du\*, Yang\* et al. Learning Universal Policies via Text-Guided Video Generation. NeurIPS 2023.

[2] Du, Yang, et al. Video Language Planning. arXiv2023.

# Takeaways

- Rich interactive data on the internet to improve decision making.

## Internet Data



# Takeaways

- Rich interactive data on the internet to improve decision making.
  - LLMs, VLMs, text-to-video models parametrize different components of MDPs.

# Internet Data



# Takeaways

- Rich interactive data on the internet to improve decision making.
  - LLMs, VLMs, text-to-video models parametrize different components of MDPs.
  - Large-scale “online” access through generative modeling for RL, search, planning.

# Internet Data



# Foundation Models for Control and Embodiment

## Representation Learning

From **suboptimal** data

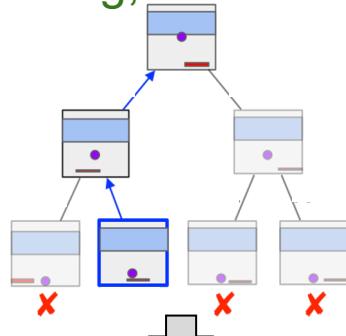


## Reasoning

Input



Planning, search algos



Output

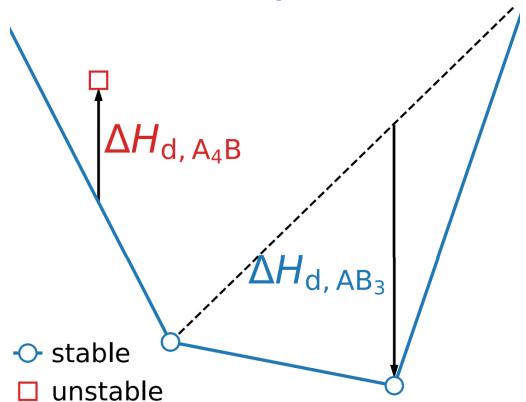
## Internet Data



# Foundation Models for Materials Discovery

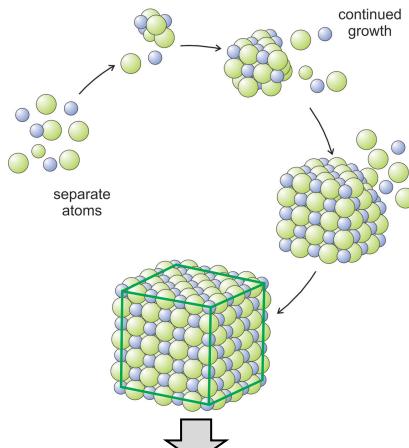
## Representation Learning

From **suboptimal** data



## Reasoning

Input



Output

## Internet Data



# Big Picture: The Past and Future of FMDM

**Algorithm:** RL, planning, control, optimization.



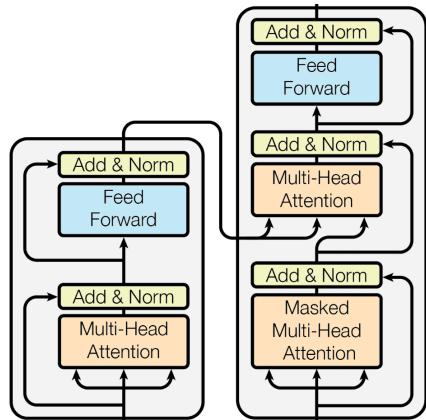
- [1] Yang\*, Nachum\*, Dai\* et al. Off-Policy Evaluation via the Regularized Lagrangian. NeurIPS 2020.
- [2] Yang\*, Dai\*, Nachum\* et al. Offline Policy Selection under Uncertainty. AISTATS 2022.

# Big Picture: The Past and Future of FMDM



# Big Picture: The Past and Future of FMDM

**Model:** Attention, transformers, autoregressive, diffusion.



Transformer agent



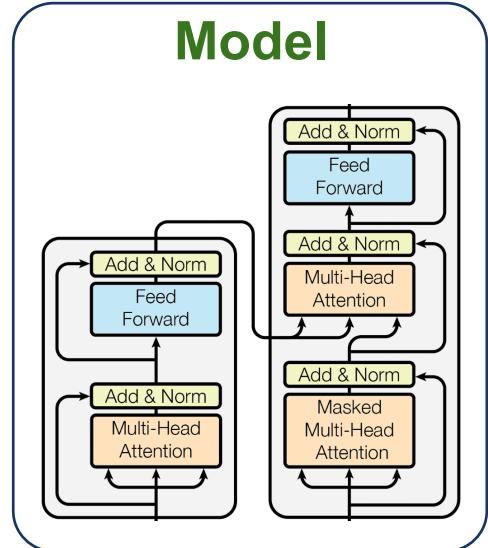
Multi-task environments

[1] Lee\*, Nachum\*, **Yang** et al. Multi-Game Decision Transformers. NeurIPS 2022.

[2] **Yang** et al. Dichotomy of Control. ICLR 2023.

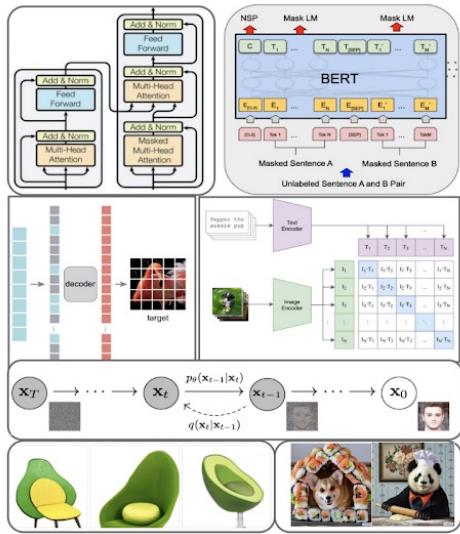
[3] Venuto\*, **Yang**\*, et al. Multi-Environment Pretraining Enables Transfer to Action Limited Datasets

# Big Picture: The Past and Future of FMDM



# Big Picture: The Past and Future of FMDM

**Data:** Internet text, image, video, action.



Foundation agent model

[1] Yang et al. Learning Interactive Real-World Simulators. arXiv 2023.

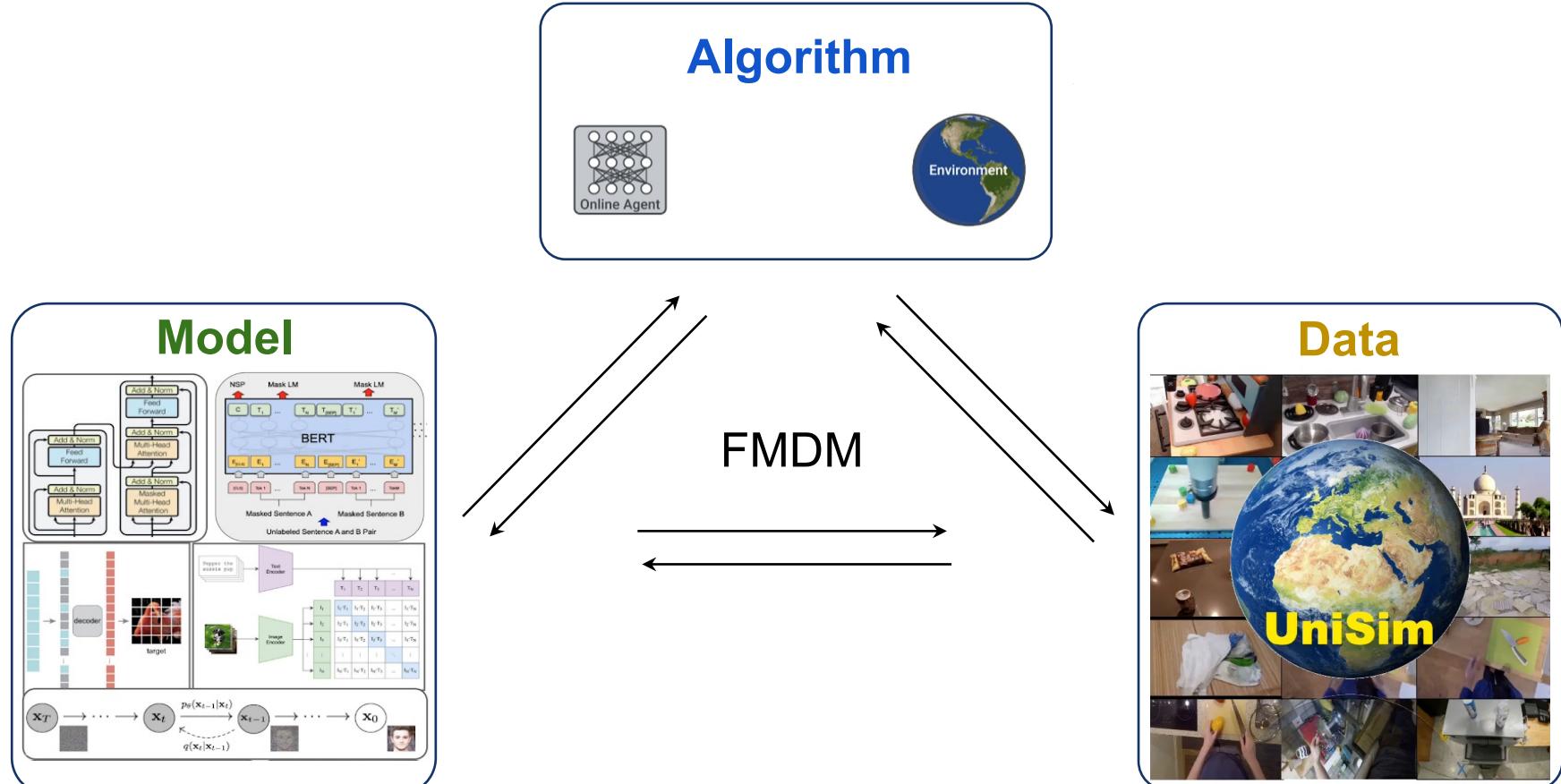
[2] Du\*, Yang\* et al. Learning Universal Policies via Text-Guided Video Generation. NeurIPS 2023.

[3] Du, Yang, et al. Video Language Planning. arXiv2023.



Foundation world model

# Big Picture: The Past and Future of FMDM



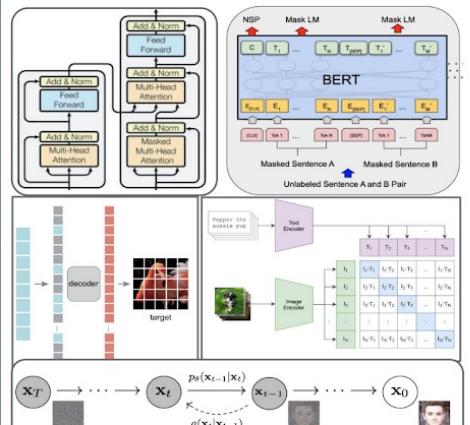
# Big Picture: The Past and Future of FMDM

## Algorithm

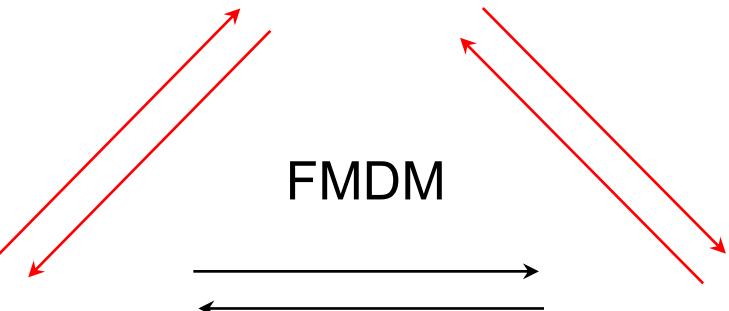


➤ Algorithm guarantees relies on assumptions of modelling flexibility and data coverage.

## Model



FMDM

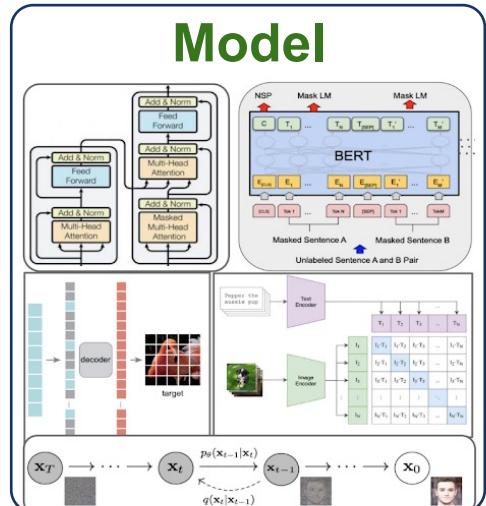


## Data

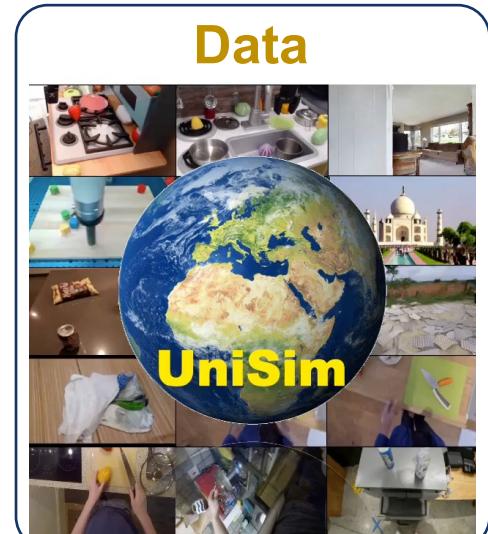


# Big Picture: The Past and Future of FMDM

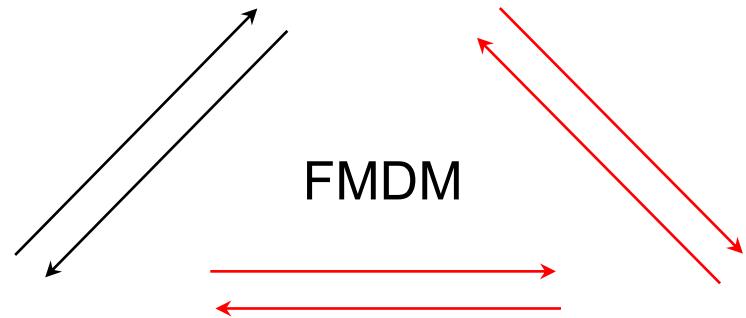
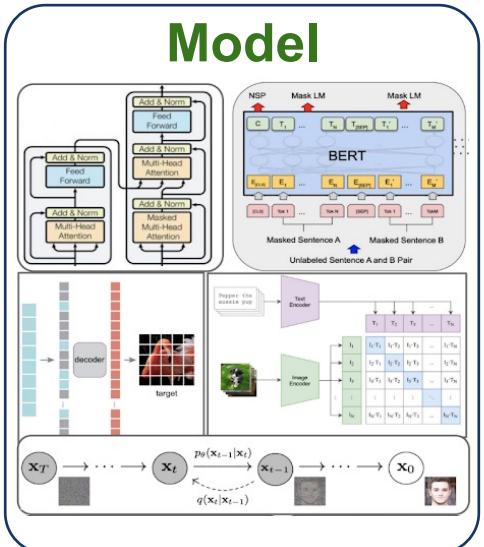
- Models are improved by algorithms (RLHF) and interactive data.



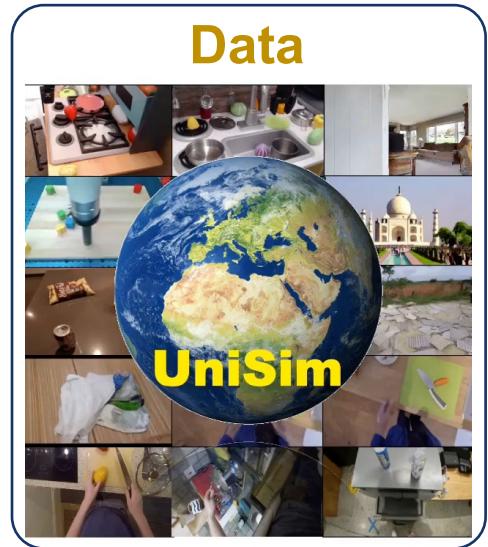
FMDM



# Big Picture: The Past and Future of FMDM



- New data are produced / generated by deploying **models** and running **algorithms**.

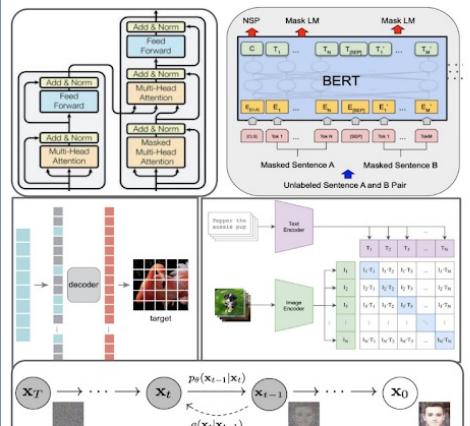


# Thank You

## Algorithm



## Model



FMDM

## Data



# Summary

## Representation Learning

- Learn **dynamics** and state **representations**.

## Reasoning

- Learn **intermediate steps** of algorithms.

## Internet Data

- Learn large-scale **agents** and **simulators**.

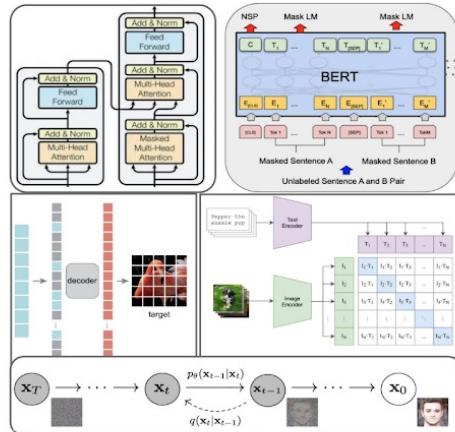
# Outlook

## Algorithm

➤ RL, search, planning.

## Model

➤ MLPs, RNNs.  
➤ Transformers,  
foundation models



## Data

➤ (Single) task-specific.  
➤ Multi-task, internet



# Technical Details

- Representation learning
  - [Sample efficiency](#)
  - [Contrastive learning and random Fourier features](#)

# Representation Learning Sample Efficiency

**Lemma 11.** Let  $\rho \in \Delta(\{1, \dots, k\})$  be a distribution with finite support. Let  $\hat{\rho}_n$  denote the empirical estimate of  $\rho$  from  $n$  i.i.d. samples  $X \sim \rho$ . Then,

$$\mathbb{E}_n[D_{\text{TV}}(\rho \| \hat{\rho}_n)] \leq \frac{1}{2} \cdot \frac{1}{\sqrt{n}} \sum_{i=1}^k \sqrt{\rho(i)} \leq \frac{1}{2} \cdot \sqrt{\frac{k}{n}}. \quad (66)$$

**Lemma 12.** Let  $\mathcal{D} := \{(s_i, a_i)\}_{i=1}^n$  be i.i.d. samples from a factored distribution  $x(s, a) := \rho(s)\pi(a|s)$  for  $\rho \in \Delta(S), \pi : S \rightarrow \Delta(A)$ . Let  $\hat{\rho}$  be the empirical estimate of  $\rho$  in  $\mathcal{D}$  and  $\hat{\pi}$  be the empirical estimate of  $\pi$  in  $\mathcal{D}$ . Then,

$$\mathbb{E}_{\mathcal{D}}[\mathbb{E}_{s \sim \rho}[D_{\text{TV}}(\pi(s) \| \hat{\pi}(s))]] \leq \sqrt{\frac{|S||A|}{n}}. \quad (67)$$

**Theorem 4.** Consider the setting described above. Let  $\phi_M := \mathcal{OPT}_\phi(\mathcal{D}_M^{\text{off}})$  and  $\pi_{N,Z}$  be the policy resulting from BC with respect to  $\phi_M$ . Then we have,

$$\mathbb{E}_{\mathcal{D}^{\pi_*}}[\text{PerfDiff}(\pi_{N,Z}, \pi_*)] \leq (1 + D_{\chi^2}(d^{\text{off}} \| d^{\pi_*})^{\frac{1}{2}}) \cdot \epsilon_{\text{R,T}}(\phi_M) + \boxed{C \cdot \sqrt{\frac{|Z||A|}{N}}}, \quad (15)$$

where  $C = \frac{2R_{\max}}{(1-\gamma)^2}$

# Contrastive Learning and Random Fourier Features

$$\text{PerfDiff}(\pi_Z, \pi_*) \leq (1 + D_{\chi^2}(\text{red cylinder} \| \text{blue cylinder})^{\frac{1}{2}}) \cdot \boxed{\epsilon_{R,T}} + C \sqrt{\frac{1}{2} \underbrace{\mathbb{E}_{z \sim d_Z^{\pi_*}} [D_{\text{KL}}(\pi_{*,Z}(z) \| \pi_Z(z))]}_{\text{Approx. dynamics model}}} = \text{const}(\pi_*, \phi) + J_{\text{BC},\phi}(\pi_Z)$$

$$D_{\text{KL}}(\mathcal{P}(\text{[image of a screen with a score 226 2 1]}, a) \| \mathcal{P}_Z(\text{[image of a screen with a dot and a red bar]}, a))$$

$\overline{P}(s'|s, a) \propto \rho(s') \exp\{-\|\phi(s) - g(s', a)\|^2\}$  Define approx. dynamics model as EBM.



Minimizing KL reduces to contrastive learning.

$$D_{\text{KL}}(P(s, a) \| \overline{P}(s, a)) = \mathbb{E}_{s' \sim P(s, a)} [\|\phi(s) - g(s', a)\|^2] + \log \mathbb{E}_{\tilde{s}' \sim \rho} \exp\{-\|\phi(s) - g(\tilde{s}', a)\|^2\}$$

$$\overline{P}(s'|s, a) \propto \rho(s') \exp\{-\|\phi(s) - g(s', a)\|^2\} \boxed{\approx \rho(s') \cdot \varphi(\phi(s))^\top \varphi(g(s', a))}$$

Recover linearization via random Fourier features.

# Contrastive Learning and Random Fourier Features

**Theorem:** For any target policy  $\pi^*$ , representation  $\phi$ , policy  $\pi_\theta(z) := \text{softmax}(\theta^\top z)$  and model error  $\epsilon_{R,T}$  measured with **linear** dynamics models:

$$\text{PerfDiff}(\pi_\theta, \pi_*) \leq \underbrace{(1 + D_{\chi^2}(d^{\pi^*} \| d^{\text{off}})^{\frac{1}{2}}) \cdot \epsilon_{R,T}}_{\text{Learning Goal}} + \underbrace{C \cdot \left\| \frac{\partial}{\partial \theta} J_{\text{BC},\phi}(\pi_\theta) \right\|_1}_{\text{Downstream Imitation Learning}}$$

**Offline Representation Learning**

Previous theorem:

$$\text{PerfDiff}(\pi_Z, \pi_*) \leq (1 + D_{\chi^2}(d^{\pi^*} \| d^{\text{off}})^{\frac{1}{2}}) \cdot \epsilon_{R,T} + C \sqrt{\underbrace{\frac{1}{2} \mathbb{E}_{z \sim d_Z^{\pi^*}} [D_{\text{KL}}(\pi_{*,Z}(z) \| \pi_Z(z))]}_{= \text{const}(\pi_*, \phi)} + J_{\text{BC},\phi}(\pi_Z)}$$

Only need to minimize gradient of the objective, not objective itself.