

Graph Learning

5. Heat Diffusion

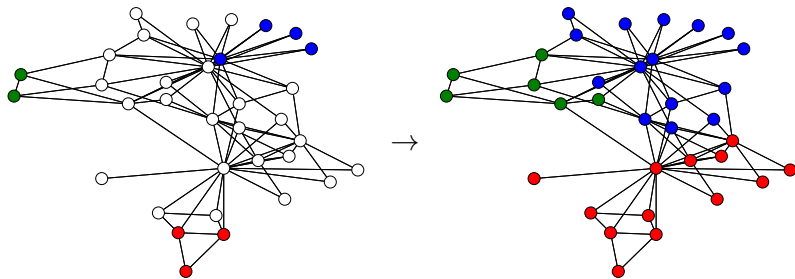
Thomas Bonald

2024– 2025



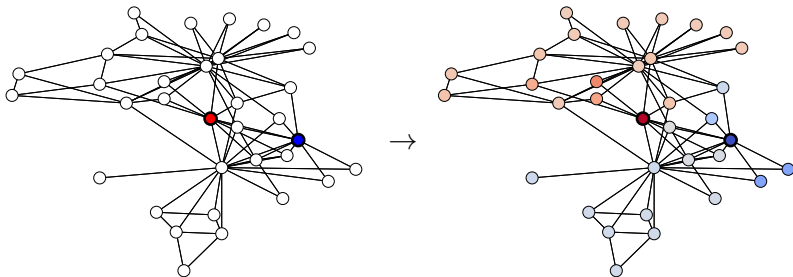
Motivation

Classification (semi-supervised learning)



Motivation

Contrastive ranking



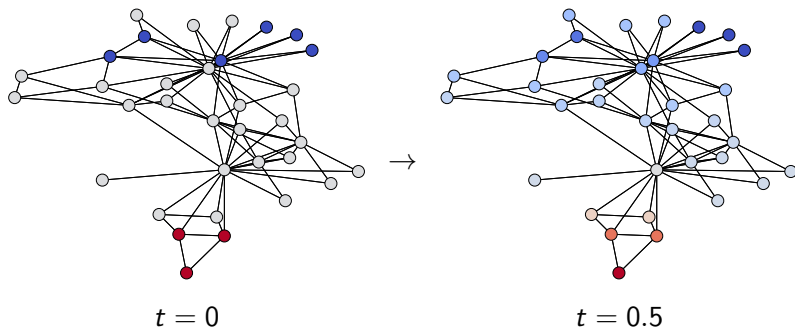
Outline

1. Heat diffusion
2. Dirichlet problem
3. Applications
4. Extensions

Heat diffusion (continuous time)

Evolution of the **temperature** T_i of each node i :

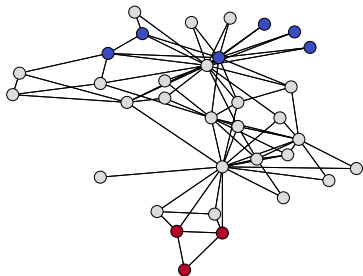
$$\frac{dT_i}{dt} = \sum_j A_{ij}(T_j - T_i)$$



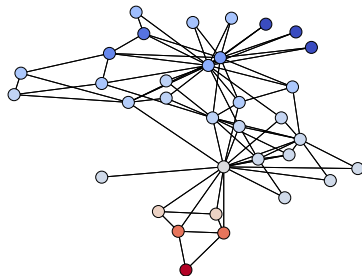
Heat equation (continuous time)

Vectorial representation:

$$\frac{dT}{dt} = - \underbrace{(D - A)}_L T$$



$t = 0$



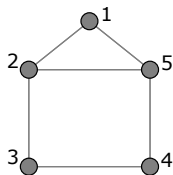
$t = 0.5$

Laplacian matrix

Definition

$$L = D - A \quad \text{with} \quad D = \text{diag}(A1)$$

Example:



$$L = \begin{bmatrix} 2 & -1 & & & -1 \\ -1 & 3 & -1 & & -1 \\ & -1 & 2 & -1 & \\ & & -1 & 2 & -1 \\ -1 & -1 & & -1 & 3 \end{bmatrix}$$

Laplacian matrix

Definition

$$L = D - A$$

Properties

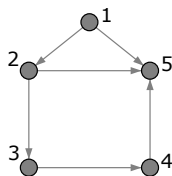
- ▶ Symmetric
- ▶ Positive semi-definite
- ▶ Discrete differential operator

$$L = \nabla^T \nabla$$

with ∇ the $m \times n$ **incidence matrix** of the graph

Incidence matrix

Given some arbitrary direction of the edges:



$$\nabla = \begin{bmatrix} -1 & 1 & & & \\ -1 & & & & 1 \\ & -1 & 1 & & \\ & -1 & & & 1 \\ & & -1 & 1 & \\ & & & -1 & 1 \end{bmatrix}$$

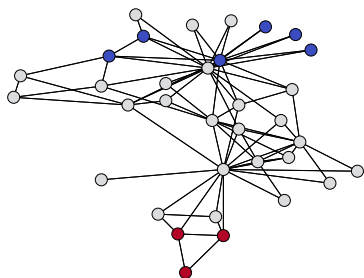
The incidence matrix applied to the vector T gives the temperature **difference** over the edges:

$$\nabla T = [T_j - T_i]_{i \rightarrow j}$$

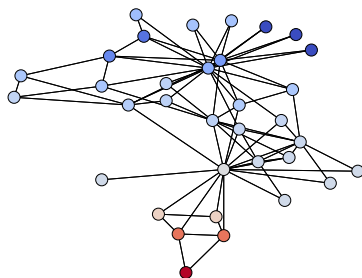
Heat diffusion (continuous time)

Solution to the heat equation:

$$\boxed{\frac{dT}{dt} = -LT} \quad \rightarrow \quad \boxed{T(t) = \underbrace{e^{-Lt}}_{\text{heat kernel}} T(0)}$$



$t = 0$



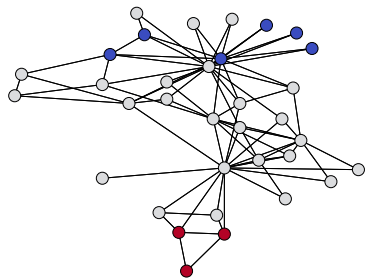
$t = 0.5$

Heat diffusion (continuous time)

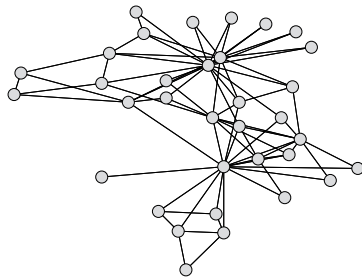
At equilibrium,

$$\boxed{\frac{dT}{dt} = 0} \rightarrow \boxed{\nabla T = 0}$$

This is **Laplace's equation**



$t = 0$



$t \rightarrow +\infty$

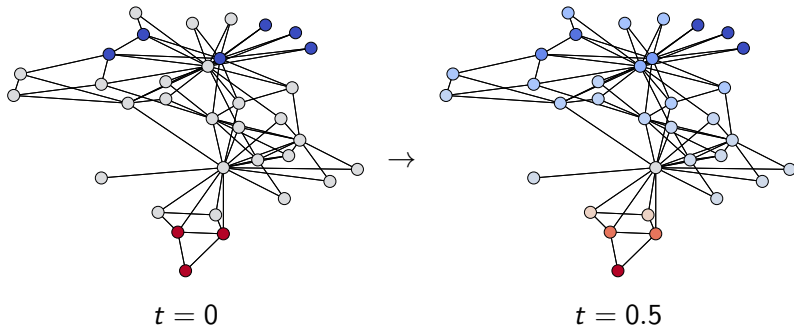
Conservation (continuous time)

The **average** temperature is constant:

$$\forall t \geq 0, \quad \bar{T}(t) = \bar{T}(0)$$

where

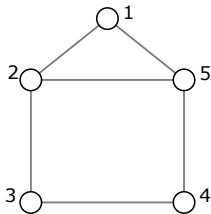
$$\bar{T}(t) = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n T_i(t)$$



Exercise

Give the **ranking** of nodes in terms of temperatures at time $t = 0^+$ after heat diffusion in continuous time

The initial vector of temperatures is $T(0) = \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 1 \\ 0 \\ 0 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}$



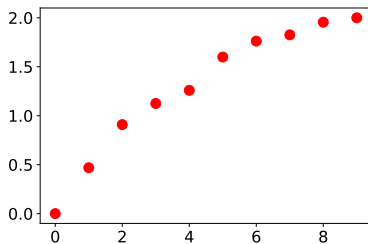
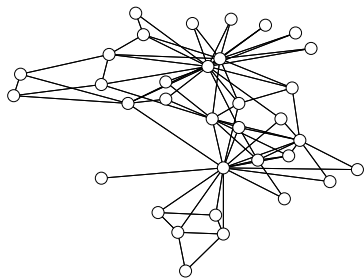
Hint: $e^{-Lt} = I - Lt + o(t)$

Spectral analysis

Spectral decomposition of the **Laplacian** matrix:

$$L = U\Lambda U^T$$

with $U^T U = I$, $\Lambda = \text{diag}(\lambda_1, \dots, \lambda_n)$, $\lambda_1 = 0 \leq \lambda_2 \leq \dots \leq \lambda_n$

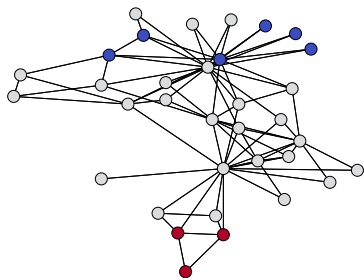


$$\lambda_1 = 0 \leq \lambda_2 \leq \dots \leq \lambda_{10} \leq \dots$$

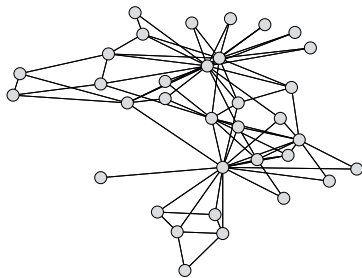
Convergence (continuous time)

If the graph is connected, then $0 = \lambda_1 < \lambda_2$ and the convergence is **exponential** at rate λ_2 :

$$e^{-Lt} = Ue^{-\Lambda t}U^T \rightarrow \frac{11^T}{n}$$



$t = 0$



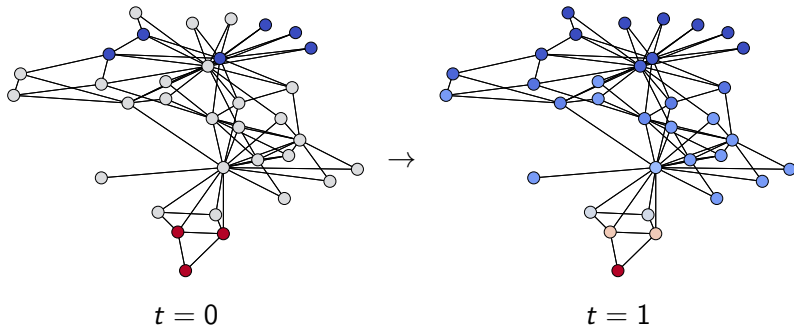
$t \rightarrow +\infty$

Heat diffusion (discrete time)

Evolution of **temperature** T_i of each node i :

$$\forall t = 0, 1, 2, \dots \quad T_i(t+1) = (1 - \alpha)T_i(t) + \frac{\alpha}{d_i} \sum_j A_{ij} T_j(t)$$

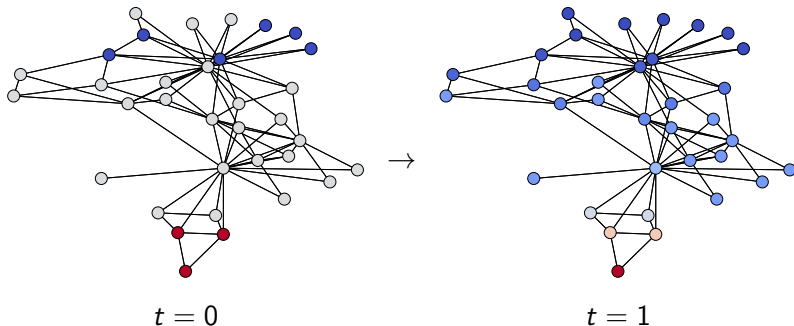
where $\alpha \in (0, 1)$ is some **damping factor**



Heat diffusion (discrete time)

Equivalently,

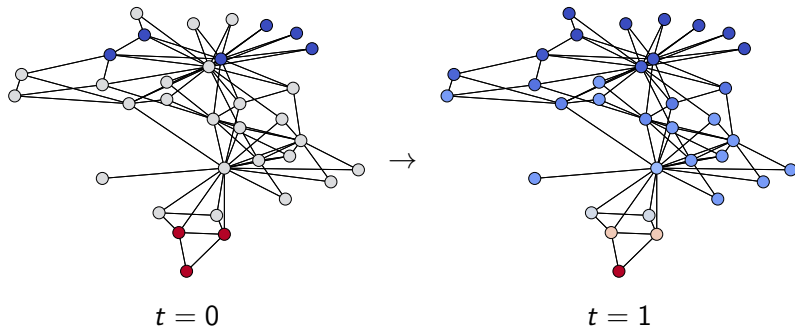
$$\forall t = 0, 1, 2, \dots \quad T_i(t+1) - T_i(t) = \frac{\alpha}{d_i} \sum_j A_{ij} (T_j(t) - T_i(t))$$



Heat equation (discrete time)

Vectorial representation:

$$\forall t = 0, 1, 2, \dots \quad T(t+1) = ((1 - \alpha)I + \underbrace{\alpha D^{-1}A}_P) T(t)$$

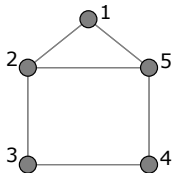


Transition matrix

Definition

$$P = D^{-1}A \quad \text{with} \quad D = \text{diag}(A1)$$

Example:



$$P = \begin{bmatrix} & \frac{1}{2} & & & \\ \frac{1}{3} & & \frac{1}{3} & & \frac{1}{2} \\ & \frac{1}{2} & & \frac{1}{2} & \\ \frac{1}{3} & \frac{1}{3} & & \frac{1}{3} & \\ & & \frac{1}{2} & & \frac{1}{2} \end{bmatrix}$$

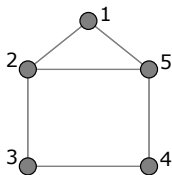
Impact of damping factor

Principle: Walk with probability α , stop with probability $1 - \alpha$

New transition matrix

$$P^{(\alpha)} = (1 - \alpha)I + \alpha P$$

Example: $\alpha = \frac{1}{2}$

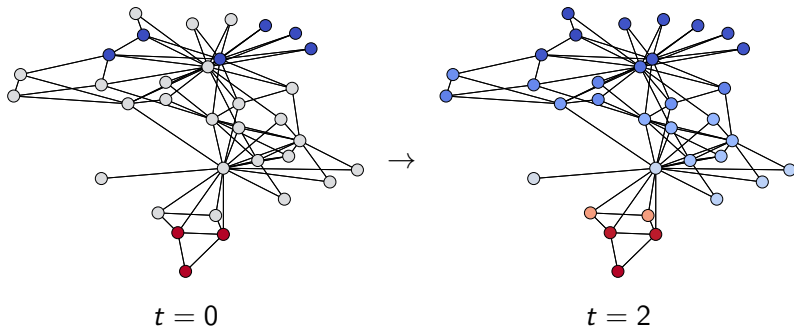


$$P^{(\alpha)} = \begin{bmatrix} \frac{1}{2} & \frac{1}{4} & & & \frac{1}{4} \\ \frac{1}{6} & \frac{1}{2} & & & \\ & \frac{1}{4} & \frac{1}{6} & & \\ & & \frac{1}{2} & \frac{1}{4} & \\ \frac{1}{6} & \frac{1}{6} & & \frac{1}{4} & \frac{1}{2} \end{bmatrix}$$

Heat diffusion (discrete time)

Solution to the heat equation:

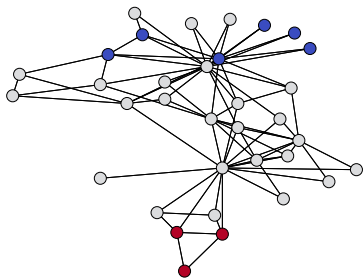
$$T(t) = ((1 - \alpha)I + \alpha P)^t T(0)$$



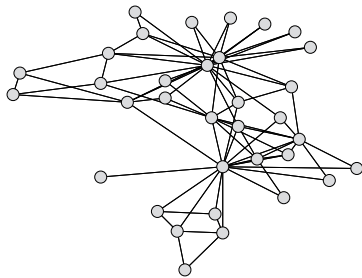
Heat diffusion (discrete time)

At equilibrium,

$$\boxed{((1 - \alpha)I + \alpha P)T = T} \rightarrow PT = T \rightarrow \boxed{\nabla T = 0}$$



$t = 0$



$t \rightarrow +\infty$

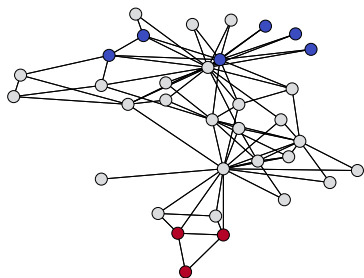
Conservation (discrete time)

The **weighted average** temperature is constant:

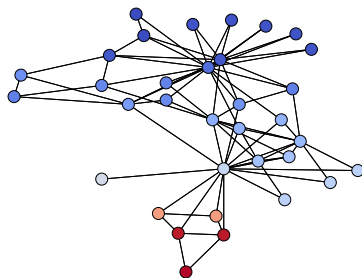
$$\forall t \geq 0, \quad \tilde{T}(t) = \tilde{T}(0)$$

where

$$\tilde{T}(t) = \frac{\sum_i d_i T_i(t)}{\sum_i d_i}$$



$t = 0$

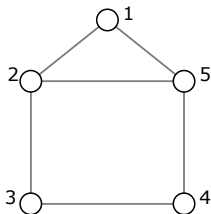


$t = 2$

Exercise

Give the **ranking** of nodes in terms of temperatures at time $t = 1$ after heat diffusion in discrete time, with $\alpha = \frac{1}{2}$

The initial vector of temperatures is $T(0) = \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 1 \\ 0 \\ 0 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}$

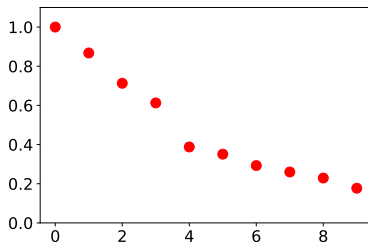
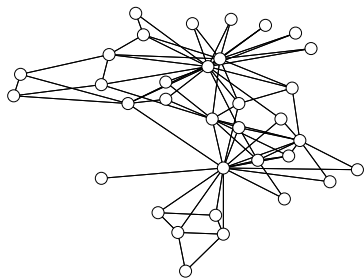


Spectral analysis

Spectral decomposition of the **transition** matrix:

$$P = V\Gamma V^T D$$

with $V^T D V = I$, $\Gamma = \text{diag}(\gamma_1, \dots, \gamma_n)$, $\gamma_1 = 1 \geq \gamma_2 \geq \dots \geq \gamma_n$



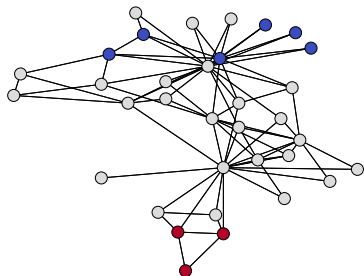
$$\gamma_1 = 1 \geq \gamma_2 \geq \dots \geq \gamma_{10} \geq \dots$$

Convergence (discrete time)

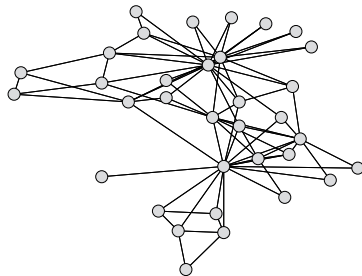
If the graph is connected and not bipartite,

$\gamma_1 = 1 > \gamma_2 \geq \dots \geq \gamma_n > -1$ and the convergence is **geometric**:

$$((1 - \alpha)I + \alpha P)^t = V((1 - \alpha)I + \alpha \Gamma)^t V^T D \propto_{t \rightarrow \infty} \mathbf{1} \mathbf{1}^T D$$



$t = 0$



$t \rightarrow +\infty$

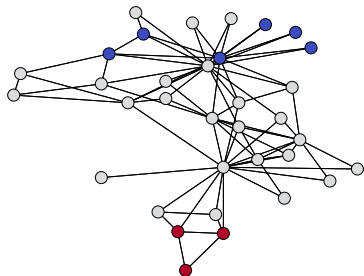
Outline

1. Heat diffusion
2. **Dirichlet problem**
3. Applications
4. Extensions

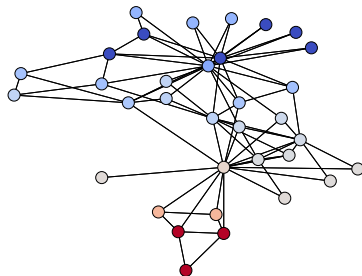
Diffusion with a boundary

Heat equation with **boundary** conditions:

$$\forall i \text{ free, } \frac{dT_i}{dt} = -(LT)_i$$



$t = 0$

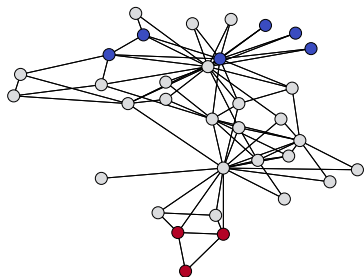


$t = 0.5$

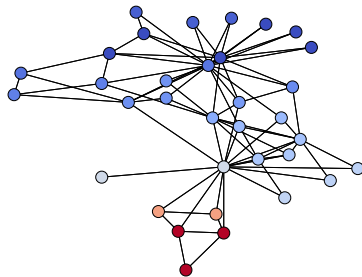
Dirichlet problem

Equilibrium with **boundary** conditions:

$$\forall i \text{ free, } (LT)_i = 0$$



$t = 0$



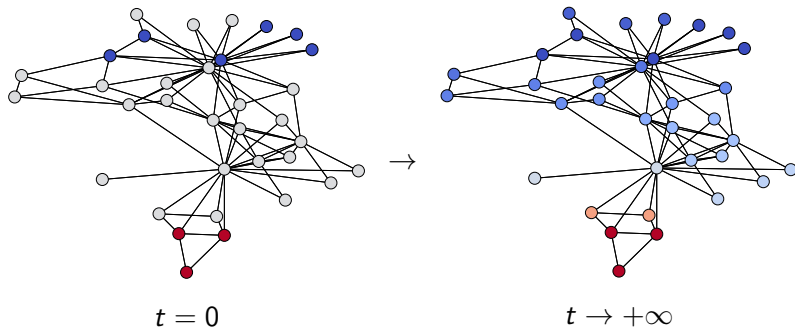
$t \rightarrow +\infty$

Dirichlet problem

At equilibrium, the temperature of each free node is the **average** of the temperatures of its neighbors:

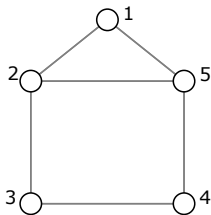
$$\forall i \text{ free, } T_i = (PT)_i$$

Note: Same solution in discrete time



Exercise

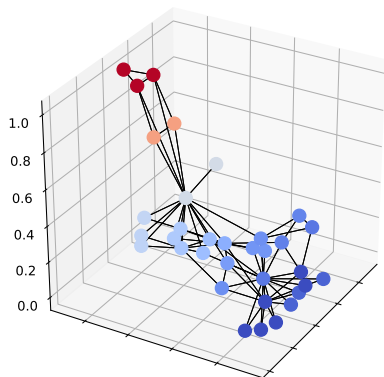
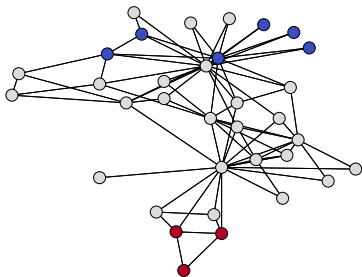
Solve the Dirichlet problem with $T_1 = 0$ and $T_4 = 1$.



A regression problem

The solution minimizes the **Dirichlet energy**:

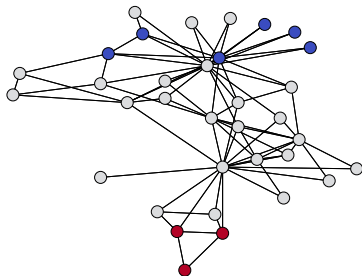
$$E = \frac{1}{2} T^T L T = \frac{1}{2} \|\nabla T\|^2$$



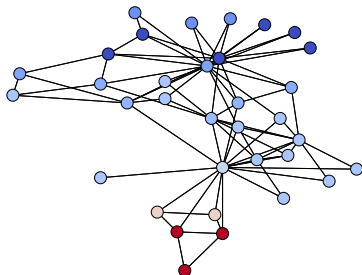
Computation

Power iteration with boundary condition:

$$\forall i \text{ free, } T_i \leftarrow (PT)_i$$



$t = 0$



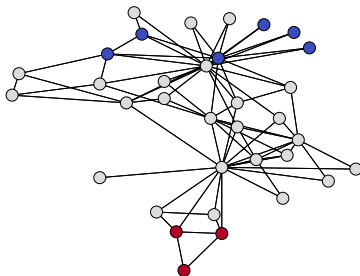
$t = 1$

Random walk

Consider a **random walk** starting from free node i

$$T_i = \sum_j P_{i \rightarrow j} T_j$$

where $P_{i \rightarrow j}$ is the probability to reach the boundary in j first

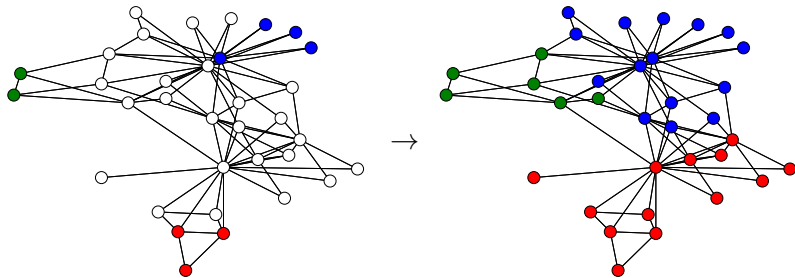


Outline

1. Heat diffusion
2. Dirichlet problem
3. **Applications**
4. Extensions

Classification

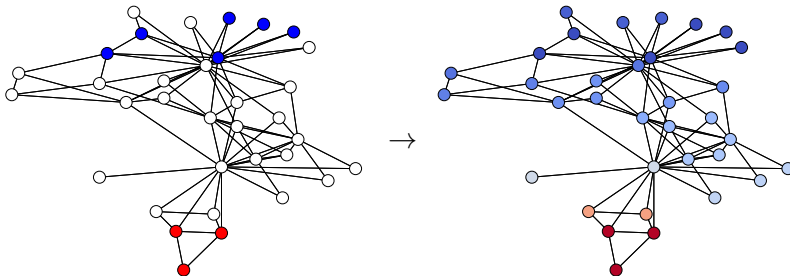
Given some nodes with **known labels**, how to **predict** the labels of the other nodes?



Binary classification

Binary classification by diffusion

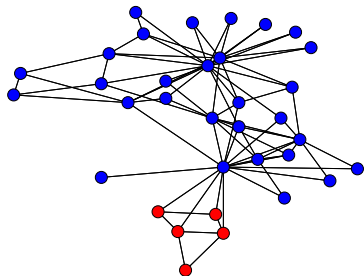
1. Solve the **Dirichlet problem** with boundary given by nodes with known labels
2. Classify nodes by some suitable **threshold** θ



Threshold

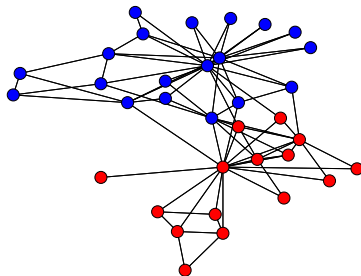
1. **Fixed** threshold

$$\theta = \frac{1}{2}$$



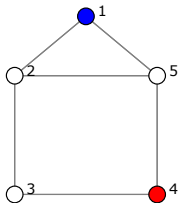
2. **Adaptive** threshold

$$\theta = \bar{T} \equiv \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n T_i$$



Exercise

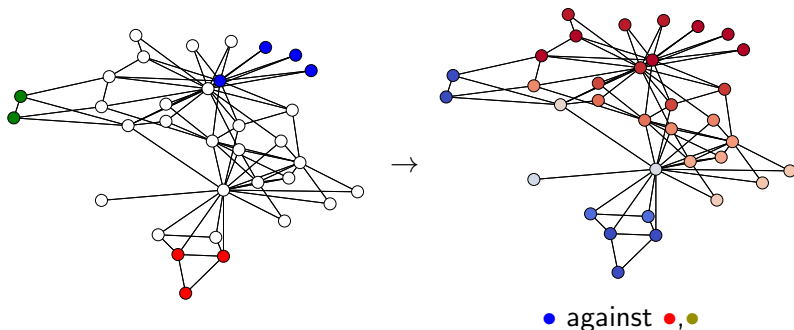
Give the labels of nodes 2, 3, 5 as predicted by diffusion.



General case

Classification by diffusion

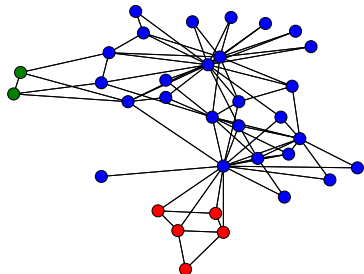
1. Solve one Dirichlet problem **per label** (one-against-others)
2. Classify nodes by selecting the solution of **highest** temperature



Centering

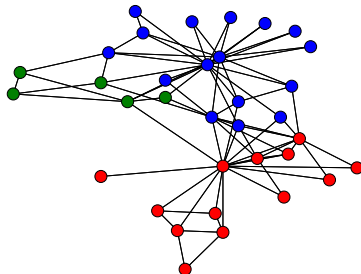
1. **Without** centering

$$\arg \max_k T_i^{(k)}$$



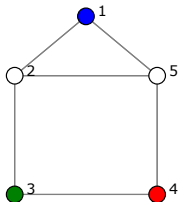
2. **With** centering

$$\arg \max_k (T_i^{(k)} - \bar{T}^{(k)})$$



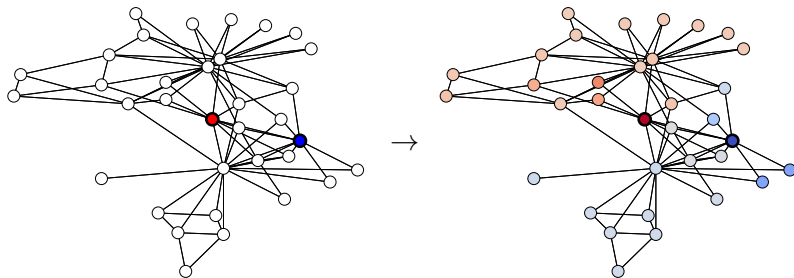
Exercise

Give the labels of nodes 2, 5 as predicted by diffusion.



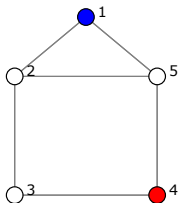
Contrastive ranking

How to rank nodes in the presence of **hot** nodes and **cold** nodes?
→ solution to the Dirichlet problem



Exercise

Give the ranking of nodes with 1 hot source (node 4) and 1 cold source (node 1).



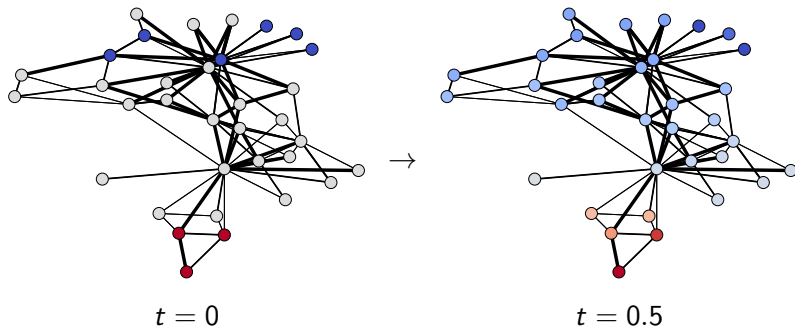
Outline

1. Heat diffusion
2. Dirichlet problem
3. Applications
4. **Extensions**

Case of weighted graphs

Evolution of **temperature** T_i of each node i :

$$\frac{dT_i}{dt} = \sum_j A_{ij}(T_j - T_i)$$

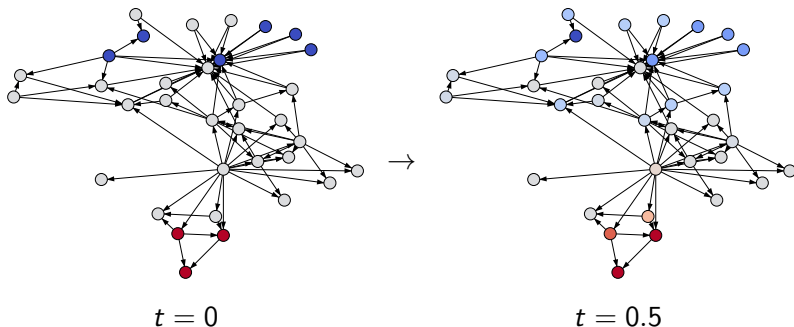


Case of directed graphs

Evolution of **temperature** T_i of each node i :

$$\frac{dT_i}{dt} = \sum_j A_{ij}(T_j - T_i)$$

Note: Heat is propagated in **backward** direction

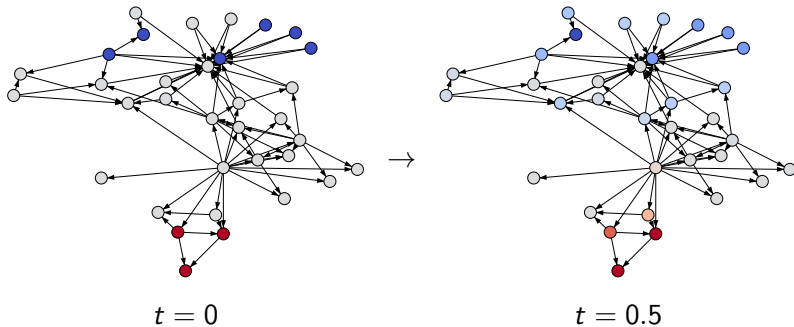


Heat equation (continuous time)

Evolution of the **vector** of temperatures:

$$\frac{dT}{dt} = -(D^+ - A)T$$

Note: The temperatures of **sinks** are constant.



Summary

Heat diffusion

- ▶ **Heat diffusion** $\frac{dT}{dt} = -LT$
- ▶ The **Dirichlet problem**
- ▶ Application to **classification** and **ranking**
- ▶ Applicable to **weighted**, **directed** and **bipartite** graphs

