

1 Computational Logic with Square Rings of 2 Nanomagnets

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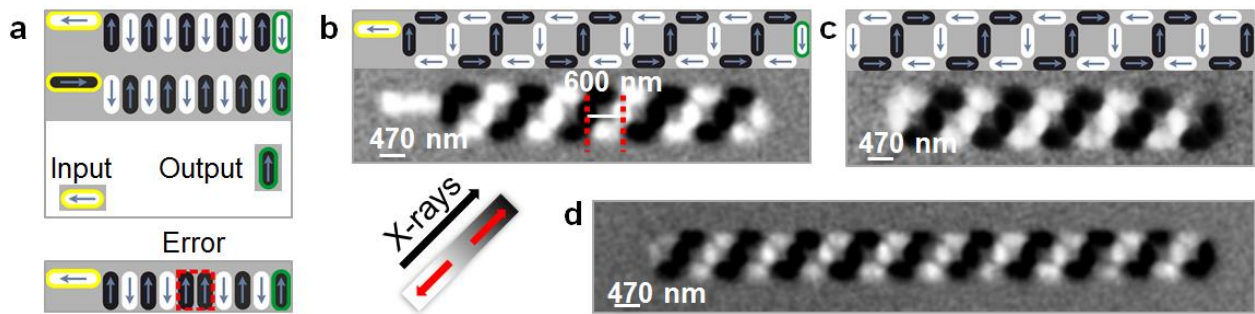
12 Nanomagnets are a promising low-power alternative to traditional computing. However, the
13 successful implementation of nanomagnets in logic gates has been hindered so far by a lack of
14 reliability. Here, we present a novel design with dipolar-coupled nanomagnets arranged on a
15 square lattice to (i) support transfer of information and (ii) perform logic operations. We
16 introduce a thermal protocol, using thermally active nanomagnets as a means to perform
17 computation. Within this scheme, the nanomagnets are initialized by a global magnetic field and
18 thermally relax on raising the temperature with a resistive heater. We demonstrate error-free
19 transfer of information in chains of up to 19 square rings and we show a high level of reliability
20 with successful gate operations of ~94% across more than 2000 logic gates. Finally, we present a
21 functionally complete prototype NAND/NOR logic gate that could be implemented for advanced
22 logic operations. Here we support our experiments with simulations of the thermally averaged
23 output and determine the optimal gate parameters. Our approach provides a new pathway to a
24 long standing problem concerning reliability in the use of nanomagnets for computation.

25

26 1. Introduction

27 A non-volatile building block that does not require any standby power, and has low operating
28 power, would be ideal for computing. A particularly promising approach for the design of such a
29 building block is based on nanomagnets, which have a magnetization that can be switched
30 between two stable states that can act as binary bits (corresponding to on and off operation of a
31 traditional transistor) [1-6]. In fact, propagation of information encoded in the magnetic states of
32 a linear chain of dipolar-coupled nanomagnets has recently been demonstrated at the picosecond
33 timescale, indicating that nanomagnet circuits have the possibility to compete with traditional
34 CMOS in terms of operational speed [7]. However, at present, applying nanomagnets to
35 computation faces a number of challenges, including: (i) preparing interconnects that can support
36 transfer of information across a given distance between different computational units and
37 (ii) realizing a reliable computational building block that performs Boolean algebra. Different
38 approaches to implementing computation using nanomagnets include the spin hall effect [8],
39 strain induced switching [9] and perpendicular magnetic logic (pNML) [10-12]. In addition, a
40 variety of fabrication techniques have gained attention in the field of nanomagnetic logic in
41 recent years. These include, focused electron beam induced deposition (FEBID) [13-15] and
42 nanostencil lithography [16]. It was recently demonstrated that the coercivity in nanomagnets
43 fabricated using FEBID can be fine-tuned to achieve better device performance [17]. In the
44 current work, we employ thermally-active dipolar-coupled Permalloy ($\text{Ni}_{80}\text{Fe}_{20}$) fabricated by
45 electron beam lithography. Up to now, designs of nanomagnets for information transfer have
46 consisted of dipolar-coupled nanomagnets arranged in a chain [2, 18] as shown in figure 1(a). In
47 such a scheme, the shape anisotropy dictates that the magnetic moments are parallel to the
48 nanomagnet long axis and the neighbouring nanomagnets in the chain are coupled with opposing
49 magnetic moments due to their interaction via magnetic stray fields. Defining an “input”
50 nanomagnet, which can be either in state “1” or “0” [upper panel of figure 1(a), shown in
51 yellow], determines the state of the N^{th} “output” nanomagnet [upper panel of figure 1(a), shown
52 in green]. However, experimentally such information transfer has so far been limited to chains
53 consisting of a few nanomagnets, where at some distance away from the input magnet – the
54 error-free chain length – the first magnetic error occurs [parallel alignment between
55 neighbouring nanomagnets, lower panel in figure 1(a)], introducing uncorrectable errors in the
56 information transfer. To counter issues with reliability, altering the shape of nanomagnets away

57 from the standard stadium-shaped nanomagnets have been proposed [19, 20]. For example, an
 58 additional hard axis was introduced in the nanomagnets that serve as an energy barrier to
 59 mitigate external influences such as fluctuations in temperature and surface roughness [21].
 60 Additionally, nanomagnets have been proposed for the realization of logic gate designs involving
 61 Boolean algebra [2, 18, 22]. However, similar to the chains, these devices suffer from erroneous
 62 operation. With an operating efficiency of 25% to 50% - corresponding to the percentage of
 63 gates with correct outputs - logic gates using nanomagnets have not been able to compete with
 64 existing technology.



66 **Figure 1.** Transfer of information using chains. (a) Schematics of linear chains with input
 67 nanomagnets (in yellow) and output nanomagnets (in green). The upper panel displays
 68 successful transfer of information, which is encoded in the magnetic states of the input
 69 nanomagnets and transferred through antiparallel alignment of the magnetic moments of adjacent
 70 nanomagnets (blue arrows). The lower panel demonstrates the appearance of errors (red dashed
 71 frame) leading to failure in the information transfer. Schematics and X-PEEM images of a chain
 72 of square rings (b) with and (c) without an input nanomagnet (in yellow). The output
 73 nanomagnet is in green. (d) X-PEEM image of the longest error-free chain of square rings we
 74 have imaged (19 square rings).

75 In the current work, we implemented a novel nanomagnetic logic design in the form of square
 76 ring structures for both information transfer and to perform logic operations. For information
 77 transfer, comparing chains of square rings [figures 1(b-d) and scanning electron microscope
 78 (SEM) image in Supplementary figure S1(a)] with linear chains [figure 1(a)], the closure of
 79 magnetic flux in a single square ring is supported by two additional horizontal nanomagnets.
 80 Within each square ring, the head-to-tail arrangement of nanomagnets, which can be either
 81 clockwise or counter clockwise loops, corresponds to a stable lowest-energy state. For a chain of
 82 square rings, the lowest-energy state comprising alternating clockwise and counter clockwise
 83 loops is therefore less susceptible to magnetic errors. Indeed, with this design and the application
 84 of a dedicated thermal protocol, we have observed that the error-free transfer length is improved

85 compared to previous work where the nanomagnets were not shape engineered [2, 18, 22]. It
86 should be noted that chains containing 19 square rings were the longest we tested, but we expect
87 that much longer error-free transfer lengths can be realized. In a next step, we constructed
88 rudimentary logic gates [figure 2(b)] to demonstrate the feasibility of performing Boolean
89 operations in a reliable manner using the square rings. We contend that our proposed design
90 provides an important step forward for the implementation of nanomagnets in logic circuits to
91 perform computation.

92

93 2. Methods

94 The magnetic nanostructures were fabricated from a Permalloy wedge film on a silicon
95 substrate using electron beam lithography. The nanomagnets have a length $L = 470$ nm, width
96 $W = 200$ nm, and the distance between the centres of two neighbouring parallel magnets
97 $a = 600$ nm [see figure 1(b)], which are similar to the dimensions of nanomagnets employed in
98 our previous work [23, 24]. Scalability of the nanomagnets to smaller sizes is feasible [25, 26],
99 with the smallest nanomagnet dimensions limited by the fabrication methods employed. The
100 thickness of the Permalloy film ranged from 1 to 15 nm over a distance of 3 mm, with a 2 nm-
101 thick aluminium capping layer. Both Permalloy and aluminium thin films were deposited in a
102 thermal evaporator at a base pressure of 2×10^{-6} mbar. The magnetic configuration of the
103 nanomagnets is determined predominantly by the shape anisotropy and thus the magnetic
104 moments can only point in one of two directions parallel to the magnet long axis. For the chains
105 of nanomagnets, input nanomagnets [figure 1(b), shown in yellow] were implemented to control
106 the magnetic state and have dimensions of $1 \mu\text{m} \times 200$ nm. The larger size provides a higher
107 energy barrier to switching than for the other nanomagnets in the array to ensure that the input
108 nanomagnet maintains the orientation of its magnetic moment, throughout the applied thermal
109 protocol, which allows thermal relaxation of the other nanomagnets to the lowest energy state.
110 The thermal protocol is based on our previous experiments on arrays of dipolar-coupled
111 nanomagnets with ultra-low thickness (~ 3 nm), where thermally induced moment reorientations
112 are accessible at room temperature [24]. Imaging of the magnetic configurations was performed
113 using X-ray photoemission electron microscopy (X-PEEM) at the SIM beamline, Swiss Light
114 Source of the Paul Scherrer Institute [27], making use of the resonant X-ray magnetic circular
115 dichroism (XMCD) effect at the Fe L_3 edge, which results in a magnetization and helicity

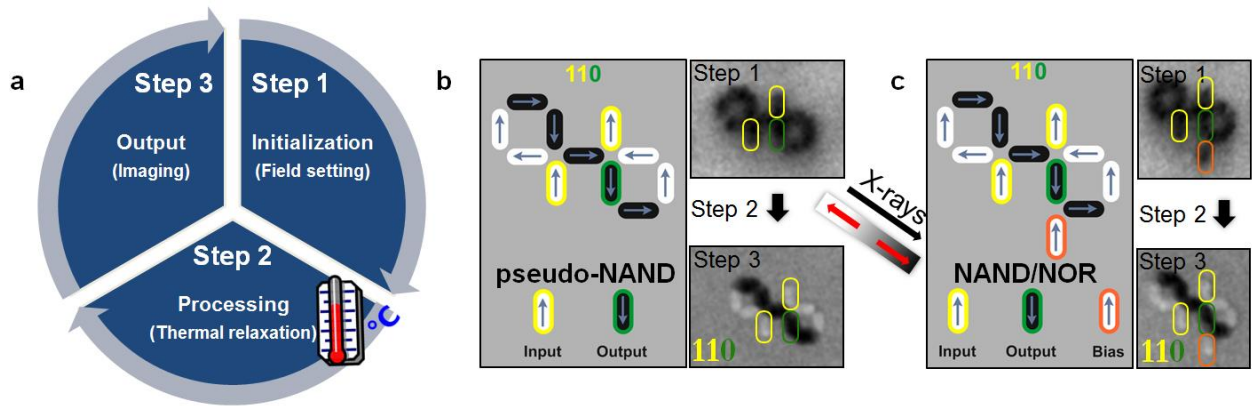
116 dependent intensity of the nanomagnets. Magnetic contrast maps are obtained by pixel-wise
117 division of two X-PEEM images recorded with circularly polarized X-rays of opposite helicity.
118 Bright and dark contrasts indicate moment orientations in the nanomagnets as shown in figure 1.
119 While other techniques, such as magnetic force microscopy [2, 18] and transmission electron
120 microscopy [28], could be used to probe the magnetic configuration of the nanomagnets, X-
121 PEEM has the advantage that one can track the evolution of the magnetic state of several
122 nanomagnets simultaneously and with high magnetic contrast.

123

124 3. Results and Discussion

125 We now describe our experiments involving transfer of information in a chain of square rings
126 and a schematic of the process cycle is shown in figure 2(a). First, the input state for the chains is
127 set at room temperature, using a global magnetic field to set the state of the nanomagnets so that
128 all horizontal nanomagnets have their moments pointing to the left and all the vertical
129 nanomagnets have their moments pointing down [Step 1, figure 2(a)]. Then, the system is heated
130 to a temperature at which the moments within the chain become thermally active so that their
131 moments can spontaneously switch (for a nanomagnet with a thickness of ~ 3.0 nm, the activation
132 temperature is ~ 70 °C). Since the input nanomagnet has an energy barrier that is higher than that
133 of the nanomagnets in the rest of the chain, it does not become thermally active during the
134 thermal protocol and thus defines the resulting output state of the system [Step 2, figure 2(a)].
135 Following thermal activation, the chains of nanomagnets relax to a minimum energy state that is
136 compatible with the orientation of the input nanomagnet while cooling the sample down to room
137 temperature. In particular, the input nanomagnet, which is thermally stable and acts as an
138 encoding source, determines the alignment of the moment in the neighbouring magnet. This, in
139 turn, determines the chirality of the moments in the neighbouring square ring, which circulate
140 clockwise (anticlockwise) when the magnetization in the input magnet points to the left (right).
141 This in turn establishes the (alternating) chirality of the square rings along the chain of thermally
142 active square building blocks, which finally determines the magnetic state of the output
143 nanomagnet [shown in green in figure 1(b)] in the most distant ring [Step 3, figure 2(a)]. Chains
144 with opposite chirality starting from the left are shown in figures 1(c) and 1(d), this time without
145 an input nanomagnet. We have tested a total of 40 chains consisting of 4, 9, 14 and 19 square
146 rings in two identical samples and observed a yield (total number of defect free chains when

147 compared to total number of chains) of 100%, 70%, 60% and 50% with increasing chain length.
 148 The drop in yield with increase in chain length correlates with the amount of time required for
 149 each chain to reach its minimum energy state. Therefore, a longer time (or higher temperature)
 150 during the course of the thermal protocol would lead to a higher yield of defect-free chains, as
 151 has been demonstrated for large arrays of square rings [23]. The largest chain of square rings
 152 where we observed an error-free transfer of information consists of 19 square rings and with a
 153 lattice constant of 600 nm, which corresponds to a propagation length of 11.4 μm [figure 1(d)].

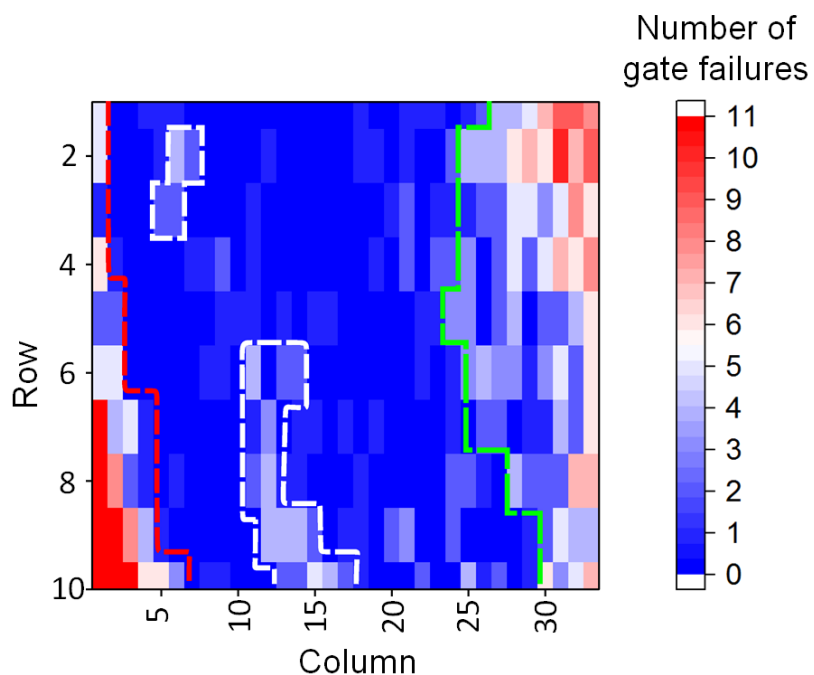


154
 155
 156 **Figure 2.** Logic using nanomagnet ring structures. (a) Schematic of the process cycle for logic
 157 operation starting with a global field, which sets the direction of all the magnetic moments
 158 (Step 1). This is followed by a thermal relaxation to the lowest-energy state (Step 2) and finally
 159 the outcome of a successful gate operation (Step 3). (b) A schematic of the pseudo-NAND gate
 160 shown along with X-PEEM images of the gate in operation. (c) Full NAND gate operation is
 161 obtained by biasing the output of the pseudo-NAND gate with an additional nanomagnet (in
 162 orange). The moment orientation of the bias determines if the gate functions as a NAND gate
 163 (moment down) or a NOR gate (moment up).
 164

165 To test the viability of ring structures for use in computation, we built logic gates with the
 166 design shown in figure 2(b), which we name a pseudo-NAND gate [an SEM image of the
 167 pseudo-NAND gate is shown in Supplementary figure S1(b)]. Each gate comprises two inputs
 168 (ii) and an output (o) defining the logic operation (iio), in which each “i” and “o” can be either
 169 zero or unity reflecting the moment orientation (down or up, respectively) of the input and output
 170 nanomagnets. In a functionally complete NAND logic gate with two inputs, the logic operations
 171 are (001), (110), (101) and (011) and in a functionally complete NOR logic gate, the logic
 172 operations are (001), (110), (100) and (010). Using the same protocol as for the chains
 173 [figure 2(a)], the states of the two input nanomagnets can be set by the direction of the initially
 174 applied external field to (00) or (11), and the state of the output nanomagnet is measured after the

175 thermal protocol. Such a procedure was initially performed on a sample containing 48 individual
176 logic gates where we observed that 46 of the gates displayed the correct logic operation. The two
177 failures can be attributed to factors such as surface roughness, variation in nanomagnet shape and
178 microstructural differences. The asymmetry in the design associated with the logic gates means
179 that a global field protocol to set the input nanomagnets would favour (>95%) the degenerate
180 state involving the logic gate operation of (110) over the (001) logic gate operation (additional
181 details are found in Supplementary figure S6). One way to access the other degenerate state is to
182 incorporate long nanomagnets as inputs so that they remain stable across the thermal protocol.
183 An example of a long input nanomagnet performing a logic operation of (001) is shown in
184 Supplementary figure S7. To statistically validate the operational reliability of our gates, we
185 fabricated and tested a second sample containing 3630 gates. A map of the logic gate failures is
186 shown in figure 3, in which each “pixel” corresponds to 11 logic gates and their associated
187 colour indicates the number of failed logic gates. The error map demonstrates an operational
188 window encompassing 2310 gates at thicknesses between ~ 2.2 nm and 4.5 nm where logic
189 operations involving nanomagnets are expected to perform optimally, resulting in either the state
190 (110) or (001). In summary, we experimentally observe a success of $\sim 94\%$, as shown with “red
191 diamond” markers on the plot in figure 4(a).

192



193
194

195 **Figure 3.** Map of logic gate failures. Logic gates are in a grid pattern where column values
 196 correspond to (approximately) varying thickness. Each “pixel” in the plot corresponds to 11 logic
 197 gates and is colour coded based on the total number of logic gate failures. Higher (lower) values
 198 of columns are associated with thinner (thicker) regions. Logic gate failures agree well with the
 199 variation in thickness of logic gates across the sample. The optimal operation of the gates, where
 200 the thermal activation energy of the nanomagnets is neither too high nor too low, is found in a
 201 thickness window between ~ 2.2 nm and ~ 4.5 nm. Thicker regions, consisting of nanomagnets
 202 with a higher thermal activation energy, and therefore frozen moments, are to the left of the red
 203 dashed line and thinner regions, consisting of nanomagnets with low thermal activation energy,
 204 and therefore moments fluctuating at timescales shorter than the measurement time, are to the
 205 right of the green dashed line. There are regions shown with a white dashed frame within the
 206 operational window where we observed increased errors, which are likely to be related to defects
 207 in the sample.

208
 209 In order to gain insight into the operation of the considered logic gates, a simplified model
 210 system is considered. In particular, each nanomagnet is approximated by a point-dipole, which
 211 interacts with all other point-dipoles via the dipolar interaction:

$$212 \quad V(r_{ij}, m_i, m_j) = -\left(\frac{\mu_0}{4\pi r_{ij}^3}\right) [3(m_i \cdot \hat{r}_{ij})(m_j \cdot \hat{r}_{ij}) - m_i \cdot m_j]$$

213 where r_{ij} is the distance vector separating the i^{th} and j^{th} point moments, m_i and m_j . The total
 214 energy of the system is therefore given by:

$$215 \quad E_{\text{total}} = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i,j=1}^N V(r_{ij}, m_i, m_j)$$

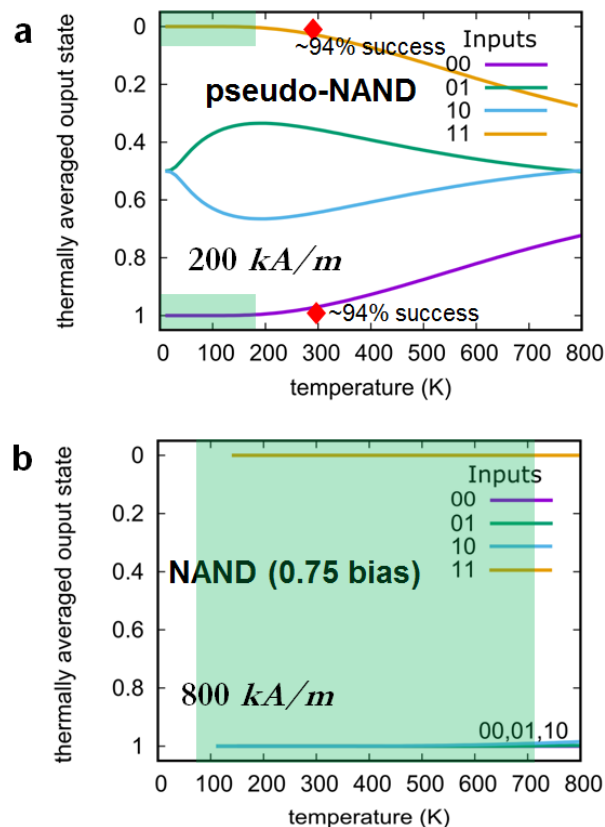
216 Here N is the number of nanomagnets in a considered logic gate. The dipole moment of each
 217 nanomagnet is given by the product $M_s L W d$ where M_s is the magnetization at saturation, L is the
 218 length, W is the width and d is the thickness of the nanomagnets. For the current simulations, we
 219 used values of $L=470$ nm, $W=200$ nm and $a=600$ nm, as in the experiment, with a thickness
 220 $d = 3$ nm and M_s ranging between 200 kA/m and 800 kA/m. Such a point dipolar approximation
 221 is found to describe the energetics and kinetics of the experimental system [24].

222 To calculate the thermal average of a given nanomagnet subject to chosen inputs, the discrete
 223 energy spectrum for a logic gate is first calculated. This gives the energies of the states, $E_1 \dots E_M$,
 224 where $M = 2^N$ is the total number of states admitted by the system. The thermal average for all
 225 the gate operations involving inputs of (00), (11), (10) and (01) are calculated within the
 226 framework of statistical mechanics using the reduced partition function: $Z = \prod_i^{M'} e_i^{-E_i/k_B T}$,
 227 where M' is the total number of gate operations for chosen input constraints.

228 In the simulation, when we consider an $M_s = 200$ kA/m for all nanomagnets in the pseudo-
229 NAND gate, we find that the gate operations of (110) and (001) are stable for temperatures
230 < 200 K (giving thermally averaged outputs of 0 and 1, respectively) and the operations involving
231 inputs of (10) and (01) show thermally averaged outputs of ~ 0.6 and ~ 0.4 , respectively [see
232 supplementary figure S2(a) and schematic of all possible pseudo-NAND logic operations shown
233 in supplementary figure S4]. Upon increasing the M_s to 800 kA/m, we find that the gate
234 operations of (110) and (001) are now stable for temperatures of up to 800 K and the gate
235 operations involving inputs of (10) and (01) yield a thermally averaged output of ~ 0.5
236 [Supplementary figure S2(b)]. Therefore our simulations show that, on increasing M_s , the gate
237 operations of (110) and (001) are stable at higher temperatures [29]. However, the failure of gate
238 operations (101) and (011) in the pseudo-NAND design implies that it does not in its current
239 form fulfil the NAND logic truth table and thus cannot be considered as a functionally complete
240 NAND logic gate.

241 In order, therefore, to create a functionally complete NAND logic gate, a bias nanomagnet can
242 be added to the design [see figure 2(c), SEM image in figure S1(c), and schematic of all possible
243 NAND logic operations in supplementary figure S5]. Depending on the orientation of the
244 magnetic moment in the bias nanomagnet, either a NAND or NOR gate can be constructed
245 (moment pointing down or up, respectively). The simulations for $M_s = 200$ kA/m demonstrate
246 that logic gates with the new design now perform all the NAND gate operations i.e. (11), (00),
247 (01) and (10) input operations give thermally averaged outputs of 0, 1, 1 and 1 for temperatures
248 < 50 K [Supplementary figure S2(c)]. In order to access correct gate operations at room
249 temperature, we increase the M_s and find that a value of 800 kA/m leads to a failure probability
250 of 10^{-2} [Supplementary figure S2(d)]. The failure probability can be significantly lowered by
251 lowering the M_s of the bias nanomagnet expressed as a bias factor, $b = \frac{M_s(\text{bias})}{M_s(\text{gate})}$. With
252 $M_s(\text{gate}) = 800$ kA/m, and for $b = 0.75$ [$M_s(\text{bias}) = 600$ kA/m], we obtain a failure probability
253 of $\sim 10^{-5}$ at room temperature [figure 4(b) and Supplementary figure S3(b)], thus improving the
254 reliability of the NAND gate by a factor of $\sim 10^3$, and we expect the same improvement in
255 reliability for the NOR gate. Further lowering of the failure probability, in order to directly
256 compete with CMOS [30], may be obtained by increasing the magnetization of each nanomagnet
257 either by increasing the volume of the nanomagnets or by using a magnetic material with a
258 higher magnetization. The failure probability was determined for the input operation of (10),

259 since it sets the baseline of failure probability for the entire NAND gate [Supplementary figure
 260 S2(d)], since it is the only output that varies with temperature. When we compare simulation
 261 results from the pseudo-NAND gate and NAND gate (figure 4), we can deduce that an
 262 experimentally realized NAND (and NOR) gate would operate with high success similar to our
 263 pseudo-NAND gate, since the experimentally observed success of logic gate operations agrees
 264 well with the simulation (red diamonds in figure 4). We include results from a NAND/NOR
 265 design test [figure 2(c)] that incorporated a bias nanomagnet with the same M_s as all other
 266 nanomagnets in the design. Within the operational thickness window, corresponding to a total of
 267 210 NAND/NOR logic gates, we observed that $>90\%$ of the gates performed a successful logic
 268 gate operation involving inputs of (11) and (00). Device realization of either the NAND or NOR
 269 gate can be achieved through a variety of means to set the moment of the bias nanomagnet in a
 270 specified direction, for example, with a current carrying nanowire providing a local Oersted field
 271 or by coupling the (ferromagnetic) bias nanomagnet to an antiferromagnetic layer to enforce
 272 exchange bias.
 273



274
 275 **Figure 4.** Simulated performance of pseudo-NAND and NAND gates as a function of

276 temperature. (a) Thermally averaged output of a pseudo-NAND gate. The lines are simulated
277 data. The red diamonds are the experimental data for gate operations of (001) and (110). (b)
278 Thermally averaged output of a functionally complete NAND gate with M_s (gate) = 800 kA/m
279 and M_s (bias) = 600 kA/m. The green shaded regions indicate the temperature range where the
280 gates are expected to be fully reliable [only for operations of (110) and (001) for the pseudo-
281 NAND gate].

282

283 4. Conclusion

284 We have demonstrated a new approach to computation with nanomagnets arranged in square
285 rings, which has the potential to support information transfer across varying distances and
286 perform logic operations with high success. While the current work utilizes a thermal protocol to
287 allow the nanomagnets to relax to the lowest energy-state, this relaxation may be performed by
288 other means, for example using a magnetic field-protocol [2], all-optical switching [31] or
289 thermal relaxation induced by laser pulses [32], and reducing power consumption by operating
290 the devices close to the Landauer limit [6]. The increased reliability additionally opens up
291 opportunities to explore other avenues of computation that do not involve the standard Boolean
292 schemes [33, 34].

293

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