



## **Schloss Dagstuhl 2000 Seminar Report**

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Points from talks attended at Schloss Dagstuhl (June 26<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup>, Germany).

### **Evolvable Hardware (EHW), Xin Yao**

- EHW can be thought of as:
  - The application of evolutionary computation techniques to circuit synthesis.
  - Hardware that is capable of on-line adaptation.
  - Hardware that changes architecture and behaviour depending on environment.
- Can be thought of as an optimisation algorithm for a hardware system.
- Direct Evolution
  - Evolvable algorithm to select and optimise component values in a circuit e.g. the value of a resistor.
- Indirect Evolution
  - Evolves an intermediate representation (e.g. trees) which specify hardware circuitry.
  - Structured Functional Description Language (SFL) circuits can be evolved e.g. 4 bit adder successfully evolved.
- Can evolve simultaneously:
  1. Circuit topology.
  2. Number of components.
  3. Component values.
- However, how do you represent as a chromosome? Create a circuit constructing primitive and network has variable size.
- Idea of this work is to show that evolution can be used to generate working circuits.
- Gate level approach runs into scaling problems.
- Advantages:
  - Explores a larger design space.

- Does not assume priori knowledge.
- Does not require exact specification - can design complete systems.
- Constraints and special requirements can be imposed on evolution i.e. system must have a specific frequency response.
- Some analogue circuits are too difficult or costly to design by humans.
- Challenges
  - Scalability is an issue. Time complexity of evolutionary algorithm for evolvable hardware.
  - Time is crucial since size of chromosome scales complexity in a polynomial manner.
- If we evolve hardware when do we stop evolution.
- This system is good at generalisation - dealing with new environments.
- Disaster prevention in fitness evaluation during on-line adaptation.
- Finally, EHW is good at discovering novel circuits that would not normally be designed.

### **Reconfigurable Computers in Space, Neil Bergman**

- Reconfigurable computing has no killer applications terrestrially - but it does in space.
- Advantages:
  - After launch, spacecraft electronics are unavailable for physical upgrade or repair.
  - New circuit configurations can overcome design faults or change functionality.
  - The same circuitry can be used for different tasks reducing weight and power requirements.
  - Routing can be performed around failed parts.
  - FPGAs allow generic spacecraft circuit boards to be constructed rather than a series of specific ones.
- Disadvantages:
  - Ionising radiation can flip EPROM or SRAM bits.
  - Links to spacecraft are low bandwidth and high error rate. Can be a problem when downloading 1Mbit configuration files.
  - Limited by on-board configuration storage's susceptibility to radiation.

- Problems could be solved by triple redundancy voting circuits or CRC checking techniques.
- Need space friendly FPGAs - such parts are usually 10 years behind current technology.
- Space Friendly definition:
  - Can check themselves for errors.
  - Have special diagnostic logic.
  - Techniques needed to avoid "dodgy" circuitry.
  - Thin substrate needed - less volume for radiation interference.
  - Error detecting logic, fault secure logic or complementary logic required.
  - Single chip/MCM combination of FPGA, micro controller and flash memory.

### **Fault Tolerant Reconfigurable Computing, Heiko Schröder**

- Due to radiation:
  - Single event upsets (common).
  - Latches stuck (need extra hardware).
  - Total loss (rare at 800km above Earth's surface).
- Methods used for fault tolerance:
  - Shadow processors.
  - Majority voting schemes.
  - Byzantine systems.
- Component grade hierarchy:
  - Industrial
  - Military
  - Radiation Tolerant
  - Radiation Hardened

### **Self Organisation of Reconfigurable Architectures, Uwe Tangen**

- Hardware evolution:
  - Simulation of evolving hardware.
  - Instantiated hardware optimisation.

- Biological evolution.
- DNA or RNA can be considered as just a bit string.
- Enzymes are the circuits.
- The problem is difficult to solve:
  - Combinatorial explosion of  $2^{2^n}$ .
  - Mismatch between coding length and power.
  - Inflexibility of routing.
- Conclusions:
  - Self organisation in Si is possible.
  - Coding seems to be a central issue.

### **Experiences with Reconfigurable Computing and Further Work, Tobias Oppold**

- Java is used to produce an object oriented breakdown of the system either in SW (micro controller) or in HW (FPGA).
- Java to VHDL to Netlist to Configuration Data.
- Tensilica: Xtensa processor - <http://www.tensilica.com/>
- Omnipath Processor (NEC) - Something in between a parallel processor and programmable logic. Multiple contexts with a switching time of ~2ns between contexts e.g. in one context an element is an adder, in another a XOR gate.

### **The Third Way - Neither Hard Nor Soft Ware, Gordon Brebner**

- Hardware connotations: Logic, processors, datapaths, computer architectures, fixed I/O etc.
- Software connotations: Programs, scripts, GUIs, algorithms etc.: i.e. flexible.
- Alternative phrase: Run time reconfigurable systems.
- New technological influences:
  - System level integrated chips.
  - Configurable logic arrays.
  - Photonic technologies.
- Future
  - Networks of diverse programmable information handling components from chip level upwards.

- Communication is the key problem.
- Death to the bus.
- Expressing diverse programmability:
  - 'Architecture' is the programmable thing.
  - 'Algorithm' refers to the programming.
- What is the optimal level of abstraction?
- Towards the third way:
  - Resist existing abstractions - could be too abstract.
  - Investigate incremental stepping stones towards future system design - don't solve everything too soon.
  - Invent new information handling models and system design processes.
- The barriers between computing, electronics and Photonics must be broken down.
- Many potential from the "disappearing computer" in the appliance or location.

### **Makimoto's Wave, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Design Crisis and the Future of Reconfigurable Computing, Reiner Hartenstein**

- Microprocessor provides the most functionality, however the most silicon is used in accelerators.
- "Tail wagging the dog".
- Why not make accelerators reconfigurable.
- Logic synthesis i.e. hardware design by mapping onto a strange platform using CAD.
- Makimoto's Law: "Mainstream silicon application is changing every 10 years."

### **I2K-Microprocessors and Reconfiguration, Klaus Waldschmidt**

- Core of modern analogue and digital circuits.
- Size 'wall' of 0.1 $\mu$ m technology.
- Supply cannot be reduced under 1V.
- In semiconductors light propagates with one tenth of the speed it does in a vacuum.
- Memory capacity scales with the square of chip size. Access time is not increasing in the same way.

- Superscalar architectures use out of order processing.
- Complexity Effective Superscalar processor: Splits related processes instructions into FIFO pipelines. (Ref. Norman P. Jouppi).
- Prediction
  - To branch or not to branch.
  - Early estimation of control flow decisions.
- Configuration flow-cache for reconfiguration of functional units.
- Parallelism: co-operative load balancing at run time. Medium or coarse grain parallelism e.g. threads or microthreads.
- Configuration by programming language and compilers. Add circuit descriptions in (for example) VHDL using code.

### **Configurable System on Chip, Reiner Kress**

- Configurable SoCs from Infineon AG.
- Designers need:
  - Configurable DSP instruction set.
  - Configurable SoC architecture.

### **Infrastructure of PCI Pamette, Mark Shand**

- The Pamette is a reconfigurable memory mapped PCI board.
- Oriented to I/O and interfacing applications.
- PAM: Programmable Active Memory.
- Architecture has no processor on board - the system must have a host processor anyway.
- Compiler designed. Wanted to write code and not draw designs.
- Protect system against user misuse or program crash so it doesn't bring the host down.
- Bitstream compression works well (don't listen to Xilinx). Just try using gzip.
- <http://www.research.digital.com/SRC/pamette>

### **Asynchronous Run-Time Reconfiguration (RTR), Simon Taylor**

- Problems: Lack of tools and difficult designs.
- Asynchrony - can split circuit across multiple FPGAs.

- Conventional FPGAs have problems that make asynchrony difficult. Asynchronous architectures are therefore required.
- 'Montage' can run synchronously or asynchronously.
- PGA-STC uses a programmable delay element to satisfy local timing constraints.
- STACC designed for implementation of self-timed reconfigurable systems.
- Clock is replaced by an array of timing cells. The advantage is that timing cells can be optimised for a specific task.

### **Embedding Express Graphs into Networks, Manfred Kunde**

- Reducing the diameter of a network.
- Diameter is the longest distance between nodes i.e. maximum hop count.
- Motivated by ATM networks.
- First structure considered was ring. Can reduce average hops of  $N$  to  $2.81\sqrt{N}$ .
- Can also be used on mesh topology, H-tree or 3D H-tree.
- Graphs with Hamiltonian cycles allow you make full use of the ring concept.
- Must space node links evenly for optimal usage.

### **Using Optoelectronic Interconnects for Run-Time Reconfigurable Arrays, Dietmar Fey**

- Motivation:
  - Increase in chip density  $\alpha = 2$ .
  - Increase in chip size  $\beta = 2$ .
  - Before:  $5 \times 5$  elements. After:  $5 \times 5 \times 2^2 \times 2^2 = 400$  elements.
- MQWs can also be used as detectors.

### **Prototyping Environment for Reconfigurable Processors, Serjei Savitzki**

- Reconfigurable processors: PRISC, nP, Spyder, OneChip, Garp, CoMPARE, NAPA1000, Proteus.
- Approaches to prototyping:
  - Dedicated environment multi-FPGA boards with on-board memory (\$10,000 to \$100,000).

- Commercial multi-FPGA boards that operate inside computer using dedicated software (\$1,000 to \$10,000).
- Evaluation module - available from manufacturer only with specific card tools (<\$1,000).
- Requirements for test environment:
  - Flexibility - Reconfiguration times should be kept short.
  - Scalability - Unsatisfactory mapping as it scales.
  - Observability - Can watch what the FPGA is doing at various stages: i.e. state information.

### **Evaluating DSPs with Dynamically Reconfigurable Processing Units, Steffen Köhler**

- Processing of streaming data efficiently done by application specific DSP.
- DSP only suitable for a narrow range of applications.
- Performance enhancements only possible through hardware exchange.
- Could increase number of processing units (PUs), improve clock rate or introduce new computational topologies.
- RPU: Reconfigurable Processing Units.

### **The P2NC Project or How Much Parallelism is There?, Yosi Ben-Asher**

- Consider the problem of speedup in sequential programs by means of parallelism.
- P2NC compiles sequential programs into boolean circuits and then executes them in parallel using a probabilistic algorithm.
- Parallelism is best exposed when programs are compiled into circuits.
- Modern processors are based on instruction level parallelism (ILP).
- Goals:
  - To produce upper bounds on parallelism when using ILP.
  - Evaluate potential improvement for compilation to circuits.
  - Probabilistic method used by P2NC can lead to new type of architecture that is not von-Neumann based.
- Metrics:
  - Depth of parallelism (DP) - the ratio between the size of a circuit and its depth.
  - Potential speedup (PS) - ability to speedup.



- Execution of a program using probabilistic methods to evaluate the circuit.
- The circuit evaluation problem (CVP) is P complete and even its approximation is known to be hard.
- Expose parallelism by:
  - Loop unrolling.
  - Compiler/hardware scheduling where compiler/hardware groups independent instructions.
  - False memory dependencies.
  - Branch prediction - speculative execution of iterations based on predictions of the branch that will be taken.
  - Pipeline parallelism - not relevant as there is no load/fetch/decode. Everything is in one circuit.

### **Acceleration of Satisfiability Algorithms by Reconfigurable Hardware, Marco Platzner**

- Application areas:
  - CAD of digital circuits, synthesis, optimisation, test pattern generation and verification.
  - Cryptography (encoding and decoding).
- Problem is NP complete.
- Software solves by using a backtracking tree search algorithm.
- Hardware does not change asymptotic runtime complexities.
  - Less powerful strategies than software.
  - Fast deduction by exploiting parallelism in problem instances.
- Instance specific reconfiguration - new hardware for each problem instance. Circuit generation and FPGA configuration at runtime.
- Required application characteristics:
  - Fine grained parallelism instance.
  - Long runtimes with each new instantiation.
- Optimisations:
  - Order variables.
  - Choose assignment order.
  - Check for special cases.

**Cellular Automata with Reconfigurable Busses, Thomas Worsch**

- Cellular Automata: Finite state machine operating on data and interconnected using some architecture to one of its neighbours.

**Why and How Should We Use FPGAs to Run Mobile Code, Frederic Raimbault**

- Specialised virtual configurable arrays (SVCA).
- Dynamically reconfigurable virtual machine (DRVM).
  - Improves runtime for mobile code.
- Mobile code - an evolving concept.
  - Transferred in place - client/server model (SQL).
  - Loaded on demand (HTML, applets).
  - Autonomous agents (Aglets, Odessey, Voyager).
- Mobile code is useful for:
  - Reducing network load.
  - Disconnected (off-line) network mode.
- Already used in e-commerce and telecommunications runtime services.
- Java (OO and Java virtual machine) benefits:
  - Dynamic classes and safe memory handling.
- Java drawbacks:
  - Software complexity (installation is 70MB).
  - Resource hungry.
  - Performance: 10-100 times slower.
  - Raised security problem - executed on host.
  - Runtime rigidity - monolithic core, complex entangled data structures.
- Solution: put code on runtime reconfigurable hardware.

**Specialised Virtual Configurable Arrays, Dominique Lavenier**

- Just ideas, still no implementation.
- Wish to design "hardware" support that is independent of FPGA family architecture.
- Use CLBs as routing resources.

**Hardware/Software Elements, Bernard Pottier**

- Hardware resources are increasing faster and faster - design cost remains linear to this increase.
- Design time is critical.
- Main idea is homogeneous use of object models.
- Redesigning everything down to hardware with one methodology is attractive because:
  - No loss of semantics due to software layering.
  - Avoid layer instability.
  - Zero black box operation.
- Portability on reconfigurable parts is key.
- C model does not fit on-chip multiprocessing and has complex syntax.

**Lava, Satnam Singh**

- Synthesis not possible with Lava - only a structured definition tool.
- No CLB locations - a little bit of architecture independence.
- Gives you back the composite circuit.
- Humans better at placing (layout) than the computer.
- Computer better at routing.

**The FURI Runtime Reconfigurable Environment, Adam Donlin**

- The ultimate RISC (URISC).
- Single instruction processor - move memory to memory.
- Migrate compute elements to system bus.
- Flexible URISC (FURI).
- Exploit dynamicism - expand and contract system bus.
- Self modifying circuitry: memory mapped configuration SRAM. Self modification considered a taboo in modern systems.
- Must be able to configure on-line - partially reconfigurable architectures are essential.
- Non-technical requirement - open architecture FPGA.
- Can be static (predefined configuration schedule) or dynamic (primitive operating system).
- Offline store of circuitry available on request.

### **Reconfigurable Functionality - The OS Perspective, Michael Dales**

- Add configurable units to CPU ALU.
- OS needs to be altered to support addition so no processes reconfigure units being used by other processes.
- Single large resource is bad.
- Resource management - divide the available resources.
- Loading circuits - what happens in an interrupt occurs?
  - Delay interrupt?
  - Back off and restart?
- Checkpoints during loading to handle interrupts.

### **Operating Systems Support for Dynamically Reconfigurable Architectures, Oliver Diessel**

- Motivation:
  - Growing size of reconfigurable logic resource.
  - Growing range and integration of applications.
  - Orientation towards real time tasks.
- How do you manage and support logic resources in a multitasked environment.
  - Space/time.
  - Fixed/variable partitioning.
- Fixed partition size advantages:
  - Easy to design for.
  - Fault tolerant.
  - Manageable.
  - Location independent.
- Fixed partition size disadvantages:
  - Task performance can suffer.
  - Fragmentation.
- Variable partition size advantages:
  - Optimal performance i.e. right amount of resource allocated.
  - Better utilisation.

- Variable partition size disadvantages:
  - Scheduling complexity to cope with dynamic resource availability.
  - External fragmentation.
- Coping with variable size tasks:
  - Wait for or pre-empt executing tasks.
  - Move executing tasks to free up space (garbage collection).
  - Adapt incoming task to space available at runtime. Requires fast partitioning, placement and routing.
- Long term goals are to develop accurate and efficient indicators to accept or reject a task.

### **Task Rearrangement of Partially Reconfigurable FPGAs With Restricted Buffer, Martin Middendorf**

- Examines the placement of tasks in a reconfigurable array.
- Total Reconfiguration: All tasks stopped and rearranged.
- Partial Reconfiguration: Single tasks relocated while others execute.
- Input data streams of the suspended tasks must be buffered.
- Use genetic algorithm to schedule tasks.

### **Devil's Advocate - The Von-Neumann Bottleneck and Other Myths, Mark Shand**

- Reconfigurable can do real time i.e. nanoseconds to 10s of microseconds.
- Reconfigurable usually thought of as power efficient - but watch out though for the Transmeta.
- Right granularity is important: Bit, functional unit, CPU, multiprocessor.
- Instruction set is market driven.

### **Dynamically Reconfigurable Logic and System on Chip, Patrick Lysaght**

- Dynamically reconfigurable: Devices that can be selectively reconfigured while running.
- In other words, the floor plan is a function of time.
- With more logic and more tasks on an FPGA it is less likely that all tasks execute simultaneously.
- Difference between adjacent logic families in FPGAs is increasing.
- Deep sub-micron (DSM) is a device with a transistor pitch  $<0.5\mu\text{m}$ .

- DPCS: Delay and power calculation system.

### **Associative Parallel Processing for Logic Event-Driven Simulation (APPLES), Damian Dalton**

- Minimise support tasks.
- Identify essential element operations.
- Retain functionality.
- Normally only 5-10% of gates in a circuit are active.
- Current simulators evaluate all gates and therefore have 90-95% redundancy.
- Problem lies in active gate identification.

### **Cyclic Cutwidth of Meshes, Ondrej Šýkora**

- Motivation for meshes:
  - Natural data structure in many problems (e.g. the matrix).
  - Constant degree.
  - Many algorithms developed.
  - As parallel or distributable computing systems: implementable with short wires therefore little signal propagation delay.

Keith J. Symington



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