Reversibility for Efficient Computing

(Manuscript, Based on Ph.D. Thesis)

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Working version of
Dec. 20, 1999

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Abstract

Today's computers are based on *irreversible* logic devices, which have been known to be fundamentally energy-inefficient for several decades. Recently, alternative *reversible* logic technologies have improved rapidly, and are now becoming practical.

In traditional models of computation, pure reversibility seems to decrease overall computational efficiency; I provide a proof to this effect. However, traditional models ignore important physical constraints on information processing.

This thesis gives the first analysis demonstrating that in a realistic model of computation that accounts for thermodynamic issues, as well as other physical constraints, the judicious use of reversible computing can strictly *increase* asymptotic computational efficiency, as machine sizes increase. I project real benefits for supercomputing at a large (but achievable) scale in the fairly near term. And with proposed future computing technologies, I show that reversibility will benefit computing at all scales.

Next, the thesis demonstrates that reversible computing techniques do not make computer design much more difficult. I describe how to design asymptotically efficient processors using an "adiabatic" reversible electronic logic technology that can be built with today's microprocessor fabrication processes. I describe a simple universal reversible parallel processor chip that our group recently fabricated, and a reversible instruction set for a more traditional RISC-style uniprocessor.

Finally, I describe techniques for programming reversible computers. I present a high-level language and a compiler suitable for coding efficient reversible algorithms, and I describe a variety of example algorithms, including efficient reversible sorting, searching, arithmetic, matrix, and graph algorithms. As an example application, I present a linear-time, constant-space reversible program for simulating the Schrödinger wave equation of quantum mechanics.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I am enduringly grateful to my advisor Tom Knight and also to Norm Margolus, for taking me into their fold, for their extensive and wise guidance in all areas of this research, for the many things I learned from them, and for providing an exceptionally supportive and stimulating work environment. Thanks very much also to the other readers Gill Pratt and Gerry Sussman, for kindly agreeing to serve on my thesis committee and lend their expertise to the evaluation of this work.

I would also like to thank the Pendulum group's head graduate student, Carlin Vieri, for inventing the Pendulum architecture, which provided the context for much of this work; for taking it upon himself to do most of the project's administrative chores; and for the fun we had working together on the nuts and bolts of various aspects of the project such as the Pendulum ISA and the FlatTop chip. (Also, thanks for all the Nolios!)

I should also thank a number of other MIT students: Matt DeBergalis created many helpful software tools, such as the Pendulum assembler and emulator. Josie Ammer assisted with chip design, and made important contributions to the theory and algorithms work. Scott Rixner and Nicole Love were my primary design partners on the Tick and FlatTop processors, respectively. Matt Becker often popped into my office for a friendly greeting and an interesting conversation.

Prof. Michael Sipser deserves thanks for his informal but very helpful guidance during the development of the proof in §3.4. I am also grateful to Alain Tapp and Pierre McKenzie of the University of Montreal, for providing much helpful feedback on that result, and for inviting me to visit their lab. Thanks also to Prof. Tom Leighton for communicating the reversible shortest-path algorithm, and to both him and Prof. Charles Leiserson for feedback on the scaling results of chapter 6.

Finally, I would like to thank Carl R. Witty and Warren D. Smith for helpful editorial comments on drafts of this document, my family and my wife Lori for their love, and all my friends throughout my years at MIT for their companionship and encouragement.

This research was supported by DARPA (the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency of the United States of America) as part of the Scalable Computing Systems research program [43], under contract number DABT63-95-C-0130.

to my father, Patrick Gene Frank

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