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ETAPS DAILY INTERVIEWS HOLGER HERMANNS

Modeling of grids

You talked about the growing importance of quantitative modeling and stochastic model-checking tools. Could you outline the possible ways how this research could influence our everyday lives in the near future (or perhaps is doing so already today)?

Let me be serious here. The design of next generation Networks on Chips are being optimised with these techniques as we speak. This happens in the headquarters of Europe’s largest chip manufacturer, STMicroelectronics. They likely run your next Smartphone.

You also pointed out that your research has shown that legislations meant to increase the stability of power grids can actually have reverse effects. Do you have any other examples of interest where stochastic model-checking has been able to discover surprising effects?

I should first admit that this very observation is not overly surprising if one has some basic insight in distributed control. So, it is confirmed by our studies. Another surprising insight — made by Marielle Stoelinga already back in 1999 — is that the IEEE Firewire protocol can run faster by using an unfair coin in the initialisation phase. Then, it is still perfectly surprising to me that bikes brake even without wires.

ETAPS DAILY INTERVIEWS FRANÇOIS BODIN

Directives

You made the case that directive-based approaches are currently the most promising (or one or the most promising) tracks for heterogeneous many-cores. Surely you must also be aware of potential pitfalls and bottlenecks. Which are they?

There are, I believe, two main pitfalls. The first one is that, if misused, they may break the code semantics. Code generation is done under the control of the programmer and the compiler may not be able to point out mistakes. The second one is that starting from a serial code this is limited by the expressiveness of what you can easily construct. It is OK for data parallelism coming from loop nests, but it is not so obvious for more complex forms of parallelism.

You emphasized auto-tuning. How do you see should one systematically go about it? (You stressed the need for a ”standard interface”.)

The idea we are defending is that the programmer should provide (maybe with the help of some tools) the range of code transformations to look at and this exploration should be performed automatically according to the available computing resources (e.g., a cluster). So there are two components here: 1) the programming directives that should allow the programmer to specify code transformations, 2) the interface/callbacks the compiler generates, so that exploration tools (e.g., Periscope) can connected to at execution time to achieve some optimization objectives (e.g., execution time or energy consumption).

The workshops tomorrow and the day after will be held at the Tallinn University of Technology campus, Building X (Akadeemia tee 3), as were the pre-conference workshops, mostly on the 4th floor; this is also where the registration and coffee breaks will be. For instructions about how to get to the workshops place, please see the programme book.