The future of commodity computing and many-core versus the interests of HEP software

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CERN openlab
Agenda

1. Why co-design is important
2. Hardware landscape today (x86)
3. Major trends and “napkin calculations”
4. Possible directions and related tradeoffs
5. Recommendations and outlook

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Co-design

- Two philosophies
  1. Design software independently of the hardware
  2. Optimize software for the hardware
- The two aren’t mutually exclusive
- Today, functionality and programmability considerations rule. The result is inoptimal scalability which will get relatively worse.
- A consistent enforcement of option 1 has brought us here today so that synergies with option 2 can be examined
  - What can be gained?
  - What are, realistically, the available options?
- Hardware is still non-negotiable
- Procurement plays a role
Hardware landscape

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Omnipresent multiplicative parallelism

- systems
- sockets
- cores
- hardware threading
- instruction level (superscalar)
- pipelining
- vectors

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Where are we now? (software)

- **Large C++ frameworks with millions of lines of code**
  - Thousands of shared libraries in a distribution, gigabytes of binaries
  - Low number of key players but high number of brief contributors
- **Large regions of memory read only or accessed infrequently**
- **Characteristics:**
  - Significant portion of double precision floating point (10%+)
  - Loads/stores up to 60% of instructions
  - Unfavorable for the x86 microarchitecture (even worse for others)
    - Low number of instructions between jumps (<10)
    - Low number of instructions between calls (several dozen)
- **For the most part, code not fit for accelerators in its current shape**
Where are we now? (hardware)

• Very limited or no vectorization
  – Online has somewhat better conditions to vectorize
• Sub-optimal instruction level parallelism (CPI at >1)
• Hardware threading unused, but often beneficial
• Cores used well through multiprocessing – bar the stiff memory requirements
  – However, systems put in production with delays
• Sockets used well
• Multiple systems used very well
• Relying on in-core improvements and # cores for scaling
Where are we now?

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Using a low single digit percentage of raw machine power available today

_Write your percentage here_

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Hardware trends (1)

- Pricing follows market pressure, not technology
- Vectors – growing substantially
  - AVX: 256 bits, designed for more
  - AVX: new execution units
  - LRBni (Intel MIC): 512 bits, new vector instructions, FMA, 3-4op
- **x86 microarchitecture**
  - steady, but limited improvements (<10% per “tock”)
  - increasingly advanced features – can HEP benefit?
- **Frequency** – very modest changes, if any
- **IO, disk and memory do not progress at the same rate as compute power**
  - bytes/FLOP decreasing
  - pJ/FLOP decreasing
Hardware trends (2)

- # of cores “at home” grows arithmetically
  - various reasons, most linked to the way people use their computers
- # of cores in the enterprise space still grows geometrically
- The number of cores in the datacenter grows between the two, will slow down in the long run
  - The trend is important, not the end amount
- Sockets – slight growth with a limit, ultimately impacts core count per platform
- Two factors to consider:
  - Enterprise and HPC-targeted developments “trickle down” to support datacenter developments (where cost effective)
  - Heterogeneous architectures – cross platform, cross socket, hybrid CPUs, accelerators, split into throughput and classic computing
Intel KNC

• The Knights Corner accelerator card builds on the findings of the “Knights Ferry” and “Larrabee” projects
• PCI express format
• >50 x86 cores, 8 GB memory
• 512-bit wide vectors
• Standard Intel software toolchain
• Projected end of 2012 release, unknown cost
• Promising, but is it indicative of future architectures?
Raw platform performance is expanding in multiple dimensions simultaneously
Projections for HEP software

• Assuming current course without a major change:
  – No vectorization
  – No change in ILP
  – Hardware threading (SMT/HT) turned on
  – No change in procurement strategy
  – Upper dimensions used at the same level of efficiency as today
Where will we be tomorrow?

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Corollary

Need to program for tomorrow’s hardware today
The parallel technology stack

Algorithm

Parallel model

Implementation technology

Hardware architecture
The Hype Cycle

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Tradeoffs in software development (with focus on hardware)

- Flexibility and programmability vs. performance
  - Impacts the choice of the programming language, technologies etc
- Revamp vs. iterative improvement
- Homogeneous vs. heterogeneous processing model
- Single/multi process vs. multi-threaded
- Data-centric software design or not?
- Kernels vs. heavy code
- Program for specific architectures or not?
Key aspects in any choice

- Is the choice realistic?
- Is it necessary?
- Is it achievable?
- Preceding scientific evaluation
- Longevity
- Openness & external support
- Maturity

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The complexity of a large software project

- Strategy and hardware-related requirements are a must when the hardware is a variable
- Hard to plan for unknowns, but easier to plan for changes
- Software middle-men threaten scalability
- Long time to produce and stabilize
  - Consequently: faraway targets should be considered, not current
How to program for a moving target?

• The question is not “whether” to take advantage of parallelism, but “how?” and “who will take care of it”?
  – Should the Physicist be oblivious to the hardware (in particular, parallelism), or not?
  – Are the hardware vendors lagging behind in support for developers?

• Is many-core and the return of vectors THE revolution or does something else await?

• Memory issues – present and future

• In any case, for various reasons HEP is several years late to the game
Recommendations

- introduce a systematized R&D program focused on parallelism with deliverables
- restate the real needs of the HEP community starting with a tabula rasa
- setting clear, realistic, contextualized goals for development in line with the real needs of the HEP community
- devising better metrics for performance and taxing for violations
- implementing a scalability process focused on rapid response
- promoting joint work across stakeholders to share the load
- a careful embrace of emerging technology
- a conscious consideration of where any performance gains should be reinvested (e.g. reduced cost, improved raw performance, accuracy etc)
THANK YOU

Q & A
Backup: About openlab

- CERN openlab is a framework for evaluating and integrating cutting-edge IT technologies in partnership with the industry: http://cern.ch/openlab
- The Platform Competence Center (PCC) of the CERN openlab has worked closely with Intel for the past decade and focuses on:
  - many-core scalability
  - performance tuning and optimization
  - benchmarking and thermal optimization
  - teaching