



**Universidade do Minho**  
Escola de Engenharia  
Departamento de Informática

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## **Study on FFT on the GPU**

January 2022



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## **Study on FFT on the GPU**

Master dissertation

Integrated Master's in Informatics Engineering

Dissertation supervised by

**Supervisor**

**Co-supervisor (if any)**

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## ABSTRACT

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KEYWORDS    keywords, here, comma, separated.

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## RESUMO

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE    palavras, chave, aqui, separadas, por, vírgulas

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## INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 CONTEXTUALIZATION

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### 1.2 MOTIVATION

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### 1.3 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this dissertation is to provide efficient FFT alternatives in GLSL compared with dedicated tools for high performance of FFT computations like NVIDIA cuFFT library, while analysing the intrinsic of a good Fast Fourier Transform implementation on the GPU. To accomplish the main objective there are two stages taken in consideration, "*Analysis of CUDA and GLSL kernels*" to be well settled in their differences and to have a reference for the second stage "Analysis of cuFFT and GLSL FFT" which will cluster the study's main objective.

To compose a final verdict conclusion, we will use as case of study applications with implementation of the FFT in the field of Computer Graphics that require realtime performance.

### 1.4 DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION

This dissertation is organized in N chapters. Firstly, the [chapter 1](#) exposes the main introduction to the subject of this dissertation with the respective background information and defines objectives including contextualization and this document organization section.

To give a state of the art overview of the theory and practice associated with Fourier Transforms, [chapter 2](#) covers most of basic understandings and algorithms needed for later chapters, this will only take simple approaches to each concept to give intuitive insight and empirical explanations without proving it formally.

Following the state of the art, chapter 3 will build a in depth analysis of FFT computation comparisons having several conditions in mind and comparing tradeoffs in different implementations, since this chapter will in only focus on raw FFT computations most of the application driven alternatives will be pushed to the next chapter

Finally, to culminate the past chapters, the chapter 4 is going to provide application driven implementations with performance-wise approaches, with a real application scenario where its performance is critical.

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## STATE OF THE ART

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### 2.1 FOURIER TRANSFORM

#### 2.1.1 What is Fourier Transform

The **Fourier Transform** is a mathematical method to transform the domain referred to as *time* of a function, to the *frequency* domain, intuitively the Inverse Fourier Transform is the corresponding method to reverse that process and reconstruct the original function from the one in *frequency* domain representation.

Although there are many forms, the Fourier Transform key definition can be described as:

$$X(f) = \int_{-\infty}^{+\infty} x(t)e^{-ift} dt \quad (1)$$

$$x(t) = \frac{1}{2\pi} \int_{-\infty}^{+\infty} X(f)e^{-ift} df \quad (2)$$

- $x(t), \forall t \in \mathbb{R} \rightarrow$  function in *time* domain representation with real  $t$ .
- $X(f), \forall f \in \mathbb{R} \rightarrow$  function in *frequency* domain representation with real  $f$ , also called the Fourier Transform of  $x(t)$
- $i \rightarrow$  imaginary unit  $i = \sqrt{-1}$

This formulation shows the usage of complex-valued domain since the imaginary unit  $i$  doesn't represent a value in the set of real numbers, making the fourier transform range from real to complex values, one complex coefficient per frequency  $X : \mathbb{R} \rightarrow \mathbb{C}$

If we take into account the Euler's formula, we can replace the Fourier Transform for an equivalent, fragmenting the euler constant for a sine and cosine pair.

$$e^{ix} = \cos x + i \sin x \quad (3)$$

$$X(f) = \int_{-\infty}^{+\infty} x(t)(\cos(-ft) + i \sin(-ft))dt \quad (4)$$



Hence, we can break the Fourier Transform apart into two formulas that give each coefficient of the sine and cosine components as functions without dealing with complex numbers.

$$\begin{aligned} X_a(f) &= \int_{-\infty}^{+\infty} x(t) \cos(ft) dt \\ X_b(f) &= \int_{-\infty}^{+\infty} x(t) \sin(ft) dt \end{aligned} \quad (5)$$

The above definition of the Fourier Integral [Equation 1](#) can only be valid if the integral exists for every value of the parameter  $f$ . This model of the fourier transform applied to infinite domain functions is called **Continuous Fourier Transform** and its targeted to the calculation of the this transform directly to functions with only finite discontinuities in  $x(t)$ .

### 2.1.2 Where it is used

It's noticable the presence of Fourier Transforms in a great variety of apparent unrelated fields of application, even the FFT is often called ubiquitous<sup>1</sup> due to its effective nature of solving a great hand of problems for the most intended complexity time. Some of the fields of application include Applied Mechanics, Signal Processing, Sonics and Acoustics, Biomedical Engineering, Instrumentation, Radar, Numerical Methods, Electromagnetics, Computer Graphics and more [Brigham \(1988\)](#).

One of the most well known cases of application is **Signal Analysis**, the Fourier Transform is probably the most important tool for analyzing signals, when representing a signal with amplitude as function of time, a signal can be translated to the frequency domain, a domain that consists of signals of sines and consines waves of varied frequencies, as demonstrated in [1](#), but to calculate the coefficients of those waves we need to use the Fourier Transform.

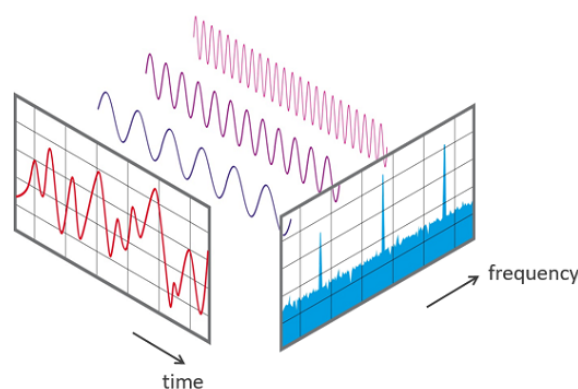


Figure 1: Time to frequency signal decomposition **Source:** [Audio](#)

<sup>1</sup> present, appearing, or found everywhere.

Since the sines and cosines waves are in simple waveforms they can then be manipulated with relative ease. This process is constantly present in communications since the transmission of data over wires and radio circuits through signals and most devices nowadays perform it frequently

And much more applications such as polynomial multiplication [Jia \(2014\)](#), numerical integration, time-domain interpolation, x-ray diffraction ...

## 2.2 DISCRETE FOURIER TRANSFORM

The Fourier Transform of a finite sequence of equally-spaced samples of a function is called the **Discrete Fourier Transform** (DFT), it converts a finite set of values in *time* domain to *frequency* domain representation. It's the most important type of transform since it deals with a discrete amount of data and has the popular algorithm in which is the center of attention of fourier transforms, which can be implemented in machines and be computed by specialized hardware.

$$X_k = \sum_{n=0}^{N-1} x_n \cdot e^{-\frac{i2\pi}{N}kn} \quad (6)$$

$$x_n = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{k=0}^{N-1} X_k \cdot e^{\frac{i2\pi}{N}kn} \quad (7)$$

Notably, the discrete version of the Fourier Transform has some obvious differences since it deals with a discrete time sequence, the first difference is that the sum covers all elements of the input values instead of integrating the infinite domain of the function, but we can also notice that the exponential, similar to the aforesaid, divides the values by  $N$  ( $N$  being the total number of elements in the sequence) due to the inability to look at frequency and time  $ft$  continuously we instead take the  $k$ 'th frequency over  $n$ .

We can have a more simplified expansion of this formula with:

$$X_k = x_0 + x_1 e^{\frac{i2\pi}{N}k} + \dots + x_{N-1} e^{\frac{i2\pi}{N}k(N-1)}$$

Having this sum simplified we then only need to resolve the complex exponential, and we can do that by replacing the  $e^{\frac{i2\pi}{N}kn}$  by the euler formula as mentioned before to reduce the maths to a simple summation of real and imaginary numbers.

$$X_k = x_0 + x_1(\cos b_1 + i \sin b_1) + \dots + x_{N-1}(\cos b_{N-1} + i \sin b_{N-1}) \quad (8)$$

$$\text{where } b_n = \frac{2\pi}{N}kn$$

Finally we'll be left with the result as a complex number

$$X_k = A_k + iB_k$$

EXAMPLE Let us now follow an example of calculation of the DFT for a sequence  $x$  with  $N$  number of elements.

$$x = [1 \quad 0.707 \quad 0 \quad -0.707 \quad -1 \quad -0.707 \quad 0 \quad 0.707]$$

$$N = 8$$

With this sequence we now want to transform it into the frequency domain, and for that we need to apply the Discrete Fourier Transform to each element  $x_n \rightarrow X_k$ , thus, for each  $k$ 'th element of  $X$  we apply the DFT for every element of  $x$ .

$$X_0 = 1 \cdot e^{-\frac{i2\pi}{8} \cdot 0 \cdot 0} + 0.707 \cdot e^{-\frac{i2\pi}{8} \cdot 0 \cdot 1} + \dots + 0.707 \cdot e^{-\frac{i2\pi}{8} \cdot 0 \cdot 7}$$

$$= (0 + 0i)$$

$$X_1 = 1 \cdot e^{-\frac{i2\pi}{8} \cdot 1 \cdot 0} + 0.707 \cdot e^{-\frac{i2\pi}{8} \cdot 1 \cdot 1} + \dots + 0.707 \cdot e^{-\frac{i2\pi}{8} \cdot 1 \cdot 7}$$

$$= (4 + 0i)$$

...

$$X_7 = 1 \cdot e^{-\frac{i2\pi}{8} \cdot 7 \cdot 0} + 0.707 \cdot e^{-\frac{i2\pi}{8} \cdot 7 \cdot 1} + \dots + 0.707 \cdot e^{-\frac{i2\pi}{8} \cdot 7 \cdot 7}$$

$$= (4 + 0i)$$

And that will produce our complex-valued output in frequency domain, as simple as that.

$$X = [0i \quad 4 + 0i \quad 0i \quad 0i \quad 0i \quad 0i \quad 0i \quad 4 + 0i]$$

### 2.2.1 Matrix multiplication

The example shown above is done sequentially as if each frequency bin is computed individually, but there's a way to calculate the same result by using matrix multiplication [Rao and Yip \(2018\)](#). Since the operations are done equally without any extra step we can group all analysing function sinusoids ( $e^{-\frac{i2\pi}{N}kn}$ ), also referred to as twiddle factors.

$$W = \begin{bmatrix} \omega_N^{0 \cdot 0} & \omega_N^{1 \cdot 0} & \dots & \omega_N^{(N-1) \cdot 0} \\ \omega_N^{0 \cdot 1} & \omega_N^{1 \cdot 1} & \dots & \omega_N^{(N-1) \cdot 1} \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ \omega_N^{0 \cdot (N-1)} & \omega_N^{1 \cdot (N-1)} & \dots & \omega_N^{(N-1) \cdot (N-1)} \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 1 & \dots & 1 \\ 1 & \omega & \dots & \omega^{(N-1)} \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ 1 & \omega^{(N-1)} & \dots & \omega^{(N-1) \cdot (N-1)} \end{bmatrix}$$

$$\text{where } \omega_N = e^{-\frac{i2\pi}{N}}$$

The substitution variable  $\omega$  allows us to avoid writing extensive exponents.

The symbol  $W$  represents the transformation matrix of the Discrete Fourier Transform, also called DFT matrix, and its inverse can be defined as.

$$W^{-1} = \frac{1}{N} \cdot \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 1 & \dots & 1 \\ 1 & \omega_N & \dots & \omega_N^{(N-1)} \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ 1 & \omega_N^{(N-1)} & \dots & \omega_N^{(N-1) \cdot (N-1)} \end{bmatrix}$$

$$\text{where } \omega_N = e^{-\frac{i2\pi}{N}}$$

By using this matrix multiplication form we can have a more efficient way to compute the DFT in hardware.

$$X = W \cdot x$$

$$x = W^{-1} \cdot X$$

Moreover we might also want to normalize the matrix by  $\sqrt{N}$  for both Matrix DFT and IDFT instead of just normalizing the IDFT by  $N$ , that will make  $W$  a unitary matrix [Horn and Johnson \(2012\)](#). The advantage of using a unitary matrix is that we only need to reassign the constant substitution variable  $\omega_N$  to be able to invert the dft, the matrix multiplication stays the same for both DFT and IDFT. Nevertheless later we will verify that the use of sqrt function isn't desirable for the implementation of any dft.

**EXAMPLE** Continuing the example [2.2](#), we can adapt the application of the DFT to the matrix multiplication form.

$$W = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 1 & \dots & 1 \\ 1 & \omega_8 & \dots & \omega_8^7 \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ 1 & \omega_8^7 & \dots & \omega_8^{49} \end{bmatrix}$$

$$\text{where } \omega_8 = e^{\frac{i2\pi}{8}}$$

$$X = W \cdot x = W \cdot \begin{bmatrix} 1 \\ 0.707 \\ \vdots \\ 0.707 \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} 0 \\ 4 + 0i \\ \vdots \\ 4 + 0i \end{bmatrix}$$

It's conspicuous that the complexity time for each multiplication of every singular term of the sequence with the

complex exponential value is  $O(N^2)$ , hence, the computation of the Discrete Fourier Transform rises exponentially as we use longer sequences. Therefore, over time new algorithms and techniques were developed to increase the performance of this transform due to its usefulness.

## 2.3 FAST FOURIER TRANSFORM

The Fast Fourier Transform (FFT) is a family of algorithms that effectively compute the Discrete Fourier Transform (DFT) of a sequence and its inverse. These algorithms essentially compute the same result as the DFT but the direct usage of the DFT formulation is too slow for its applications. Thus, FFT algorithms exploit the DFT matrix structure by employing a divide-and-conquer approach [Chu and George \(1999\)](#) to segment its application.

Over time several variations of the algorithms were developed to improve the performance of the DFT and many aspects were rethought in the way we apply and produce the resulting transform, in this section we'll cover at some of those variations.

There are many algorithms and approaches on the FFT family such as the well known Cooley-Tukey, known for its simplicity and effectiveness to compute any sequence with size as a power of two, but also Rader's algorithm [Rader \(1968\)](#) and Bluestein's algorithm [Bluestein \(1970\)](#) which both deal prime sized sequences, and even the Split-radix FFT [Yavne \(1968\)](#) that recursively expresses a DFT of length  $N$  in terms of one smaller DFT of length  $N/2$  and two smaller DFTs of length  $N/4$ .

We'll focus for now on the Cooley-Tukey algorithm, most specifically the radix-2 decimation-in-time (DIT) FFT and radix-2 decimation-in-frequency (DIF) FFT, which assume that the input sequence is a power of two sized.

### 2.3.1 Radix-2 Decimation-in-Time FFT

The Radix-2 Decimation-in-Time FFT algorithm rearranges the original Discrete Fourier Transform (DFT) formula into two subtransforms, one as a sum over the even indexed elements and other as a sum over the odd indexed elements. The [Equation 9](#) describes this procedure with already simplified math, and hints the recursive decomposition of the DFT of size  $N/2$ .

$$X_k = \sum_{n=0}^{\frac{N}{2}-1} x_{2n} \cdot \omega_{N/2}^{k(2n)} + \omega_N^k \sum_{n=0}^{\frac{N}{2}-1} x_{2n+1} \cdot \omega_{N/2}^{k(2n+1)} \quad (9)$$

$$\text{where } \omega_N = e^{\frac{j2\pi}{N}}$$

This formulation successfully segments the full sized DFT into two  $N/2$  sized DFT's of the even and odd indexed elements where the later is multiplied by a twiddle factor  $\omega_N^k$ .

This algorithm is a Radix-2 Decimation-in-Time in the sense that the time values are regrouped in 2 subtransforms, and the decomposition reduces the time values to the frequency domain, since the understanding of this algorithm can be applied recursively, the [Figure 2](#) illustrates the basic behaviour and represents the  $N/2$

subtransforms with boxes that can be filled by the recursive application of this algorithm to produce the frequency domain sequence.

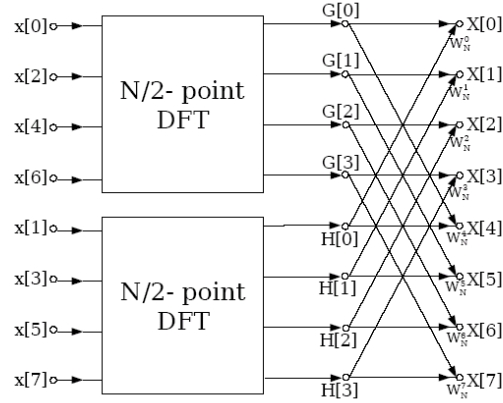


Figure 2: Radix-2 Decimation-in-Time FFT **Source:** Jones (2014)

Effectively, this smaller DFT's are recursively reduced by this algorithm until there's only the computation of a length-2 DFT where it's only applied the basic butterfly operation illustrated in Figure 3.

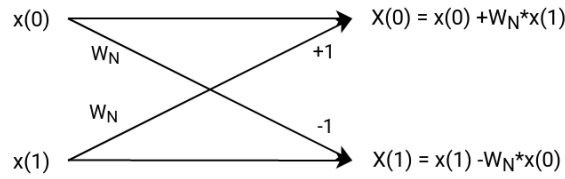


Figure 3: Cooley-Tukey butterfly

The complexity work within the algorithm is distributed with the DIT approach which decomposes each DFT by 2 having  $\log N$  stages Smith (2007) while there are approximately  $N$  complex multiplications needed for each stage of the DIT decomposition, therefore the multiplication complexity for a  $N$  sized DFT is reduced from  $O(N^2)$  to  $O(N \log N)$  without any programming specific optimizations.

### 2.3.2 Radix-2 Decimation-in-Frequency FFT

The Radix-2 Decimation-in-Frequency FFT algorithm, just like the Decimation in Time does, rearranges the original Discrete Fourier Transform (DFT) formula into two subtransforms, one as a sum over the even indexed elements and other as a sum over the odd indexed elements; as in this simplified formulation Equation 10.

$$X_k = \sum_{n=0}^{\frac{N}{2}-1} x_{2n} \cdot \omega_{N/2}^{k(2n)} + \omega_N^k \sum_{n=0}^{\frac{N}{2}-1} x_{2n+1} \cdot \omega_{N/2}^{k(2n+1)} \quad (10)$$

---

**Algorithm 1:** Radix-2 Decimation-in-Time FFT

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**Data:**  $n \geq 0$

**Result:**  $y = x^n$

$y \leftarrow 1;$

$X \leftarrow x;$

$N \leftarrow n;$

**while**  $N \neq 0$  **do**

**if**  $N$  is even **then**

$X \leftarrow X \times X;$

$N \leftarrow \frac{N}{2}$

**else**

**if**  $N$  is odd **then**

$y \leftarrow y \times X;$

$N \leftarrow N - 1;$

**end**

**end**

**end**

---

### 2.3.3 2D and 3D transforms

Although we've already gone through a lot of information ... its still unclear how these primitive functions on multidimensional targets, such as images and.

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## 2.4 RELATED WORK

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### 2.4.1 cuFFT

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### 2.4.2 Fast Computation of general Fourier Transforms on GPUS

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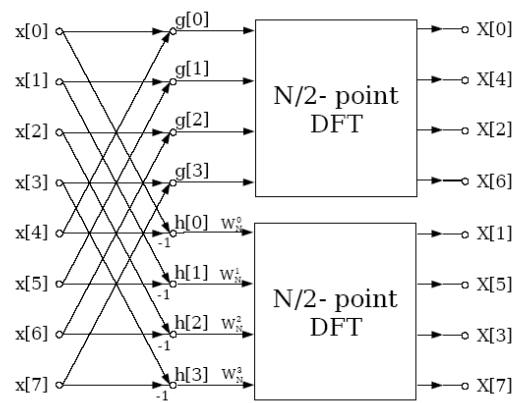


Figure 4: Radix-2 Decimation-in-Frequency FFT **Source:** Jones (2014)



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