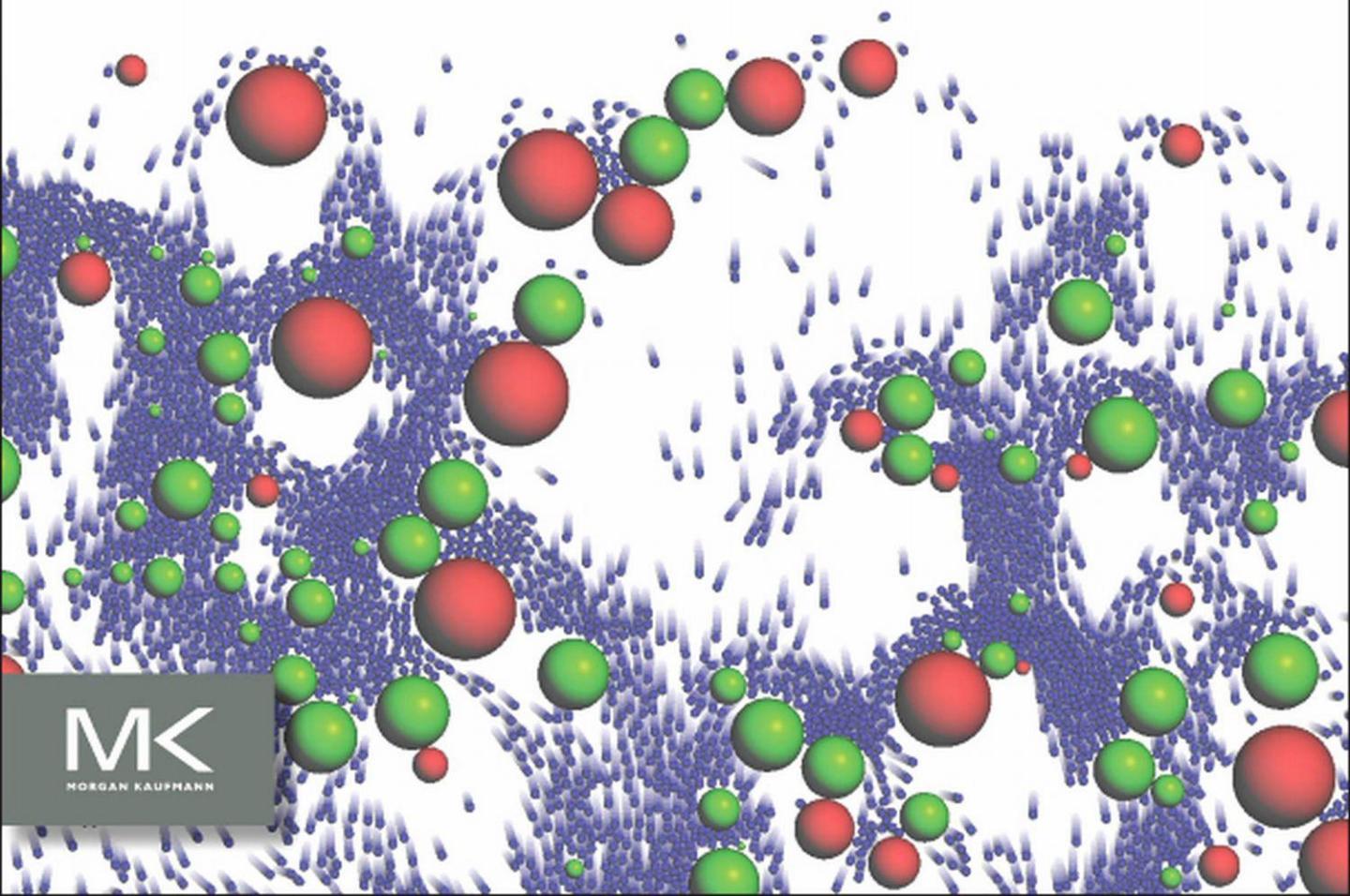


Benedict R. Gaster Lee Howes David Kaeli  
Perhaad Mistry Dana Schaa

# Heterogeneous Computing with **OpenCL**



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**Benedict Gaster**

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# Foreword

For more than two decades, the computer industry has been inspired and motivated by the observation made by Gordon Moore (A.K.A “Moore’s law”) that the density of transistors on die was doubling every 18 months. This observation created the anticipation that the performance a certain application achieves on one generation of processors will be doubled within two years when the next generation of processors will be announced. Constant improvement in manufacturing and processor technologies was the main drive of this trend since it allowed any new processor generation to shrink all the transistor’s dimensions within the “golden factor”, 0.3 (ideal shrink) and to reduce the power supply accordingly. Thus, any new processor generation could double the density of transistors, to gain 50% speed improvement (frequency) while consuming the same power and keeping the same power density. When better performance was required, computer architects were focused on using the extra transistors for pushing the frequency beyond what the shrink provided, and for adding new architectural features that mainly aim at gaining performance improvement for existing and new applications.

During the mid 2000s, the transistor size became so small that the “physics of small devices” started to govern the characterization of the entire chip. Thus frequency improvement and density increase could not be achieved anymore without a significant increase of power consumption and of power density. A recent report by the International Technology Roadmap for Semiconductors (ITRS) supports this observation and indicates that this trend will continue for the foreseeable future and it will most likely become the most significant factor affecting technology scaling and the future of computer based system.

To cope with the expectation of doubling the performance every known period of time (not 2 years anymore), two major changes happened (1) instead of increasing the frequency, modern processors increase the number of cores on each die. This trend forces the software to be changed as well. Since we cannot expect the hardware to achieve significantly better performance for a given application anymore, we need to develop new implementations for the same application that will take advantage of the multicore architecture, and (2) thermal and power become first class citizens with any design of future architecture. These trends encourage the community to start looking at heterogeneous solutions: systems which are assembled from different subsystems, each of them optimized to achieve different optimization points or to address different workloads. For example, many systems combine “traditional” CPU architecture with special purpose FPGAs or Graphics Processors (GPUs). Such an integration can be done at different levels; e.g., at the system level, at the board level and recently at the core level.

Developing software for homogeneous parallel and distributed systems is considered to be a non-trivial task, even though such development uses well-known paradigms and well established programming languages, developing methods, algorithms, debugging tools, etc. Developing software to support general-purpose

heterogeneous systems is relatively new and so less mature and much more difficult. As heterogeneous systems are becoming unavoidable, many of the major software and hardware manufacturers start creating software environments to support them. AMD proposed the use of the Brook language developed in Stanford University, to handle streaming computations, later extending the SW environment to include the Close to Metal (CTM) and the Compute Abstraction Layer (CAL) for accessing their low level streaming hardware primitives in order to take advantage of their highly threaded parallel architecture. NVIDIA took a similar approach, co-designing their recent generations of GPUs and the CUDA programming environment to take advantage of the highly threaded GPU environment. Intel proposed to extend the use of multi-core programming to program their Larrabee architecture. IBM proposed the use of message-passing-based software in order to take advantage of its heterogeneous, non-coherent cell architecture and FPGA based solutions integrate libraries written in VHDL with C or C++ based programs to achieve the best of two environments. Each of these programming environments offers scope for benefiting domain-specific applications, but they all failed to address the requirement for general purpose software that can serve different hardware architectures in the way that, for example, Java code can run on very different ISA architectures.

The Open Computing Language (OpenCL) was designed to meet this important need. It was defined and managed by the nonprofit technology consortium Khronos. The language and its development environment “borrows” many of its basic concepts from very successful, hardware specific environments such as CUDA, CAL, CTM, and blends them to create a hardware independent software development environment. It supports different levels of parallelism and efficiently maps to homogeneous or heterogeneous, single- or multiple-device systems consisting of CPUs, GPUs, FPGA and potentially other future devices. In order to support future devices, OpenCL defines a set of mechanisms that if met, the device could be seamlessly included as part of the OpenCL environment. OpenCL also defines a run-time support that allows to manage the resources, combine different types of hardware under the same execution environment and hopefully in the future it will allow to dynamically balance computations, power and other resources such as memory hierarchy, in a more general manner.

This book is a text book that aims to teach students how to program heterogeneous environments. The book starts with a very important discussion on how to program parallel systems and defines the concepts the students need to understand before starting to program any heterogeneous system. It also provides a taxonomy that can be used for understanding the different models used for parallel and distributed systems. Chapters 2 – 4 build the students’ step by step understanding of the basic structures of OpenCL (Chapter 2) including the host and the device architecture (Chapter 3). Chapter 4 provides an example that puts together these concepts using a not trivial example.

Chapters 5 and 6 extend the concepts we learned so far with a better understanding of the notions of concurrency and run-time execution in OpenCL (Chapter 5) and the dissection between the CPU and the GPU (Chapter 6). After building the basics,

the book dedicates 4 Chapters (7-10) to more sophisticated examples. These sections are vital for students to understand that OpenCL can be used for a wide range of applications which are beyond any domain specific mode of operation. The book also demonstrates how the same program can be run on different platforms, such as Nvidia or AMD. The book ends with three chapters which are dedicated to advanced topics.

No doubt that this is a very important book that provides students and researchers with a better understanding of the world of heterogeneous computers in general and the solutions provided by OpenCL in particular. The book is well written, fits students' different experience levels and so, can be used either as a text book in a course on OpenCL, or different parts of the book can be used to extend other courses; e.g., the first two chapters are well fitted for a course on parallel programming and some of the examples can be used as a part of advanced courses.

**Dr. Avi Mendelson**

*Microsoft R&D Israel*

*Adjunct Professor, Technion*

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# Preface

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## OUR HETEROGENEOUS WORLD

Our world is heterogeneous in nature. This kind of diversity provides a richness and detail that is difficult to describe. At the same time, it provides a level of complexity and interaction in which a wide range of different entities are optimized for specific tasks and environments.

In computing, heterogeneous computer systems also add richness by allowing the programmer to select the best architecture to execute the task at hand or to choose the right task to make optimal use of a given architecture. These two views of the flexibility of a heterogeneous system both become apparent when solving a computational problem involves a variety of different tasks. Recently, there has been an upsurge in the computer design community experimenting with building heterogeneous systems. We are seeing new systems on the market that combine a number of different classes of architectures. What has slowed this progression has been a lack of standardized programming environment that can manage the diverse set of resources in a common framework.

---

## OPENCL

OpenCL has been developed specifically to ease the programming burden when writing applications for heterogeneous systems. OpenCL also addresses the current trend to increase the number of cores on a given architecture. The OpenCL framework supports execution on multi-core central processing units, digital signal processors, field programmable gate arrays, graphics processing units, and heterogeneous accelerated processing units. The architectures already supported cover a wide range of approaches to extracting parallelism and efficiency from memory systems and instruction streams. Such diversity in architectures allows the designer to provide an optimized solution to his or her problem—a solution that, if designed within the OpenCL specification, can scale with the growth and breadth of available architectures. OpenCL’s standard abstractions and interfaces allow the programmer to seamlessly “stitch” together an application within which execution can occur on a rich set of heterogeneous devices from one or many manufacturers.

---

## THIS TEXT

Until now, there has not been a single definitive text that can help programmers and software engineers leverage the power and flexibility of the OpenCL programming standard. This is our attempt to address this void. With this goal in mind, we have not attempted to create a syntax guide—there are numerous good sources in which programmers can find a complete and up-to-date description of OpenCL syntax.

Instead, this text is an attempt to show a developer or student how to leverage the OpenCL framework to build interesting and useful applications. We provide a number of examples of real applications to demonstrate the power of this programming standard.

Our hope is that the reader will embrace this new programming framework and explore the full benefits of heterogeneous computing that it provides. We welcome comments on how to improve upon this text, and we hope that this text will help you build your next heterogeneous application.

# Acknowledgments

We thank Manju Hegde for proposing the book project, BaoHuong Phan and Todd Green for their management and input from the AMD and Morgan Kaufmann sides of the project, and Jay Owen for connecting the participants on this project with each other. On the technical side, we thank Jay Cornwall for his thorough work editing much of this text, and we thank Joachim Deguara, Takahiro Harada, Justin Hensley, Marc Romanekewicz, and Byunghyun Jang for their significant contributions to individual chapters, particularly the sequence of case studies that could not have been produced without their help. Also instrumental were Jari Nikara, Tomi Aarnio, and Eero Aho from the Nokia Research Center and Janne Pietiäinen from the Tampere University of Technology.

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# About the Authors

**Benedict R. Gaster** is a software architect working on programming models for next-generation heterogeneous processors, particularly examining high-level abstractions for parallel programming on the emerging class of processors that contain both CPUs and accelerators such as GPUs. He has contributed extensively to the OpenCL's design and has represented AMD at the Khronos Group open standard consortium. He has a Ph.D. in computer science for his work on type systems for extensible records and variants.

**Lee Howes** has spent the past 2 years working at AMD and currently focuses on programming models for the future of heterogeneous computing. His interests lie in declaratively representing mappings of iteration domains to data and in communicating complicated architectural concepts and optimizations succinctly to a developer audience, both through programming model improvements and through education. He has a Ph.D. in computer science from Imperial College London for work in this area.

**David Kaeli** received a B.S. and Ph.D. in electrical engineering from Rutgers University and an M.S. in computer engineering from Syracuse University. He is Associate Dean of Undergraduate Programs in the College of Engineering and a Full Professor on the ECE faculty at Northeastern University, where he directs the Northeastern University Computer Architecture Research Laboratory (NUCAR). Prior to joining Northeastern in 1993, he spent 12 years at IBM, the last 7 at T. J. Watson Research Center, Yorktown Heights, NY. He has co-authored more than 200 critically reviewed publications. His research spans a range of areas, including micro-architecture to back-end compilers and software engineering. He leads a number of research projects in the area of GPU computing. He currently serves as the Chair of the IEEE Technical Committee on Computer Architecture. He is an IEEE Fellow and a member of the ACM.

**Perhaad Mistry** is a Ph.D. candidate at Northeastern University. He received a B.S. in electronics engineering from the University of Mumbai and an M.S. in computer engineering from Northeastern University. He is currently a member of the Northeastern University Computer Architecture Research Laboratory (NUCAR) and is advised by Dr. David Kaeli. He works on a variety of parallel computing projects. He has designed scalable data structures for the physics simulations for GPGPU platforms and has also implemented medical reconstruction algorithms for heterogeneous devices. His current research focuses on the design of profiling tools for heterogeneous computing. He is studying the potential of using standards such as OpenCL for building tools that simplify parallel programming and performance analysis across the variety of heterogeneous devices available today.

**Dana Schaa** received a B.S. in computer engineering from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, and an M.S. in electrical and computer engineering from Northeastern University, where he is also currently a Ph.D. candidate. His research interests include parallel programming models and abstractions, particularly for GPU architectures. He has developed GPU-based implementations of several medical imaging research projects ranging from real-time visualization to image reconstruction in distributed, heterogeneous environments. He married his wonderful wife, Jenny, in 2010, and they live together in Boston with their charming cats.

# Introduction to Parallel Programming

# 1

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## INTRODUCTION

Today's computing environments are becoming more multifaceted, exploiting the capabilities of a range of multi-core microprocessors, central processing units (CPUs), digital signal processors, reconfigurable hardware (FPGAs), and graphic processing units (GPUs). Presented with so much heterogeneity, the process of developing efficient software for such a wide array of architectures poses a number of challenges to the programming community.

Applications possess a number of workload behaviors, ranging from control intensive (e.g., searching, sorting, and parsing) to data intensive (e.g., image processing, simulation and modeling, and data mining). Applications can also be characterized as compute intensive (e.g., iterative methods, numerical methods, and financial modeling), where the overall throughput of the application is heavily dependent on the computational efficiency of the underlying hardware. Each of these workload classes typically executes most efficiently on a specific style of hardware architecture. No single architecture is best for running all classes of workloads, and most applications possess a mix of the workload characteristics. For instance, control-intensive applications tend to run faster on superscalar CPUs, where significant die real estate has been devoted to branch prediction mechanisms, whereas data-intensive applications tend to run fast on vector architectures, where the same operation is applied to multiple data items concurrently.

---

## OPENCL

The Open Computing Language (OpenCL) is a heterogeneous programming framework that is managed by the nonprofit technology consortium Khronos Group. OpenCL is a framework for developing applications that execute across a range of device types made by different vendors. It supports a wide range of levels of parallelism and efficiently maps to homogeneous or heterogeneous, single- or multiple-device systems consisting of CPUs, GPUs, and other types of devices limited only by the imagination of vendors. The OpenCL definition offers both a device-side language and a host management layer for the devices in a system.

The device-side language is designed to efficiently map to a wide range of memory systems. The host language aims to support efficient plumbing of complicated concurrent programs with low overhead. Together, these provide the developer with a path to efficiently move from algorithm design to implementation.

OpenCL provides parallel computing using task-based and data-based parallelism. It currently supports CPUs that include x86, ARM, and PowerPC, and it has been adopted into graphics card drivers by both AMD (called the Accelerated Parallel Processing SDK) and NVIDIA. Support for OpenCL is rapidly expanding as a wide range of platform vendors have adopted OpenCL and support or plan to support it for their hardware platforms. These vendors fall within a wide range of market segments, from the embedded vendors (ARM and Imagination Technologies) to the HPC vendors (AMD, Intel, NVIDIA, and IBM). The architectures supported include multi-core CPUs, throughput and vector processors such as GPUs, and fine-grained parallel devices such as FPGAs.

Most important, OpenCL's cross-platform, industrywide support makes it an excellent programming model for developers to learn and use, with the confidence that it will continue to be widely available for years to come with ever-increasing scope and applicability.

---

## THE GOALS OF THIS BOOK

This book is the first of its kind to present OpenCL programming in a fashion appropriate for the classroom. The book is organized to address the need for teaching parallel programming on current system architectures using OpenCL as the target language, and it includes examples for CPUs, GPUs, and their integration in the accelerated processing unit (APU). Another major goal of this text is to provide a guide to programmers to develop well-designed programs in OpenCL targeting parallel systems. The book leads the programmer through the various abstractions and features provided by the OpenCL programming environment. The examples offer the reader a simple introduction and more complicated optimizations, and they suggest further development and goals at which to aim. It also discusses tools for improving the development process in terms of profiling and debugging such that the reader need not feel lost in the development process.

The book is accompanied by a set of instructor slides and programming examples, which support the use of this text by an OpenCL instructor. Please visit <http://heterogeneouscomputingwithopencl.org/> for additional information.

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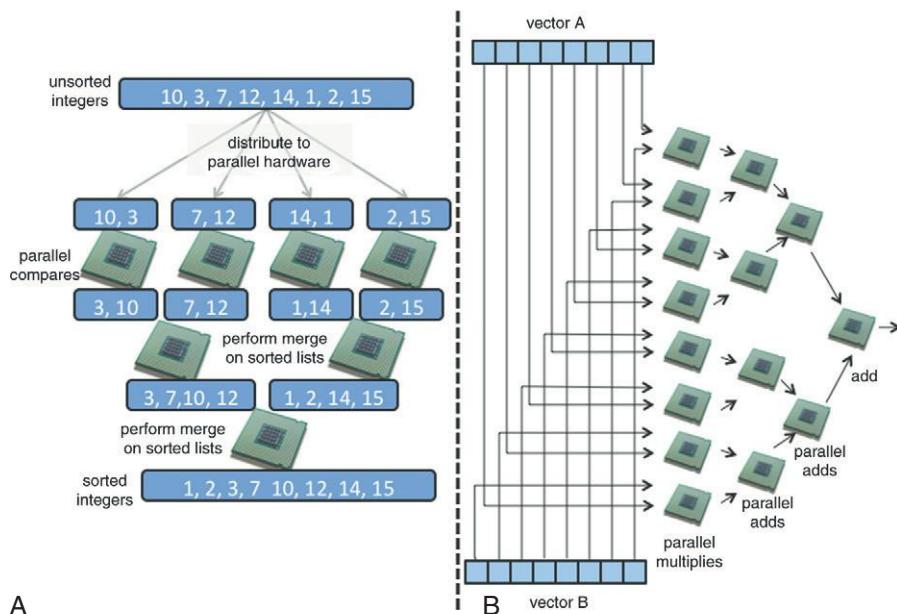
## THINKING PARALLEL

Most applications are first programmed to run on a single processor. In the field of high-performance computing, classical approaches have been used to accelerate computation when provided with multiple computing resources. Standard approaches

include “divide-and-conquer” and “scatter–gather” problem decomposition methods, providing the programmer with a set of strategies to effectively exploit the parallel resources available in high-performance systems. Divide-and-conquer methods iteratively break a problem into subproblems until the subproblems fit well on the computational resources provided. Scatter–gather methods send a subset of the input data set to each parallel resource and then collect the results of the computation and combine them into a result data set. As before, the partitioning takes account of the size of the subsets based on the capabilities of the parallel resources. [Figure 1.1](#) shows how popular applications such as sorting and a vector–scalar multiply can be effectively mapped to parallel resources to accelerate processing.

The programming task becomes increasingly challenging when faced with the growing parallelism and heterogeneity present in contemporary parallel processors. Given the power and thermal limits of complementary metal-oxide semiconductor (CMOS) technology, microprocessor vendors find it difficult to scale the frequency of these devices to derive more performance and have instead decided to place multiple processors, sometimes specialized, on a single chip. In doing so, the problem of extracting parallelism from an application is left to the programmer, who must decompose the underlying algorithms in the applications and map them efficiently to a diverse variety of target hardware platforms.

In the past 5 years, parallel computing devices have been increasing in number and processing capabilities. GPUs have also appeared on the computing scene and



**FIGURE 1.1**

(A) Simple sorting and (B) dot product examples.

are providing new levels of processing capability at very low cost. Driven by the demand for real-time three-dimensional graphics rendering, a highly data-parallel problem, GPUs have evolved rapidly as very powerful, fully programmable, task and data-parallel architectures. Hardware manufacturers are now combining CPUs and GPUs on a single die, ushering in a new generation of heterogeneous computing. Compute-intensive and data-intensive portions of a given application, called kernels, may be offloaded to the GPU, providing significant performance per watt and raw performance gains, while the host CPU continues to execute nonkernel tasks.

Many systems and phenomena in both the natural world and the man-made world present us with different classes of parallelism and concurrency:

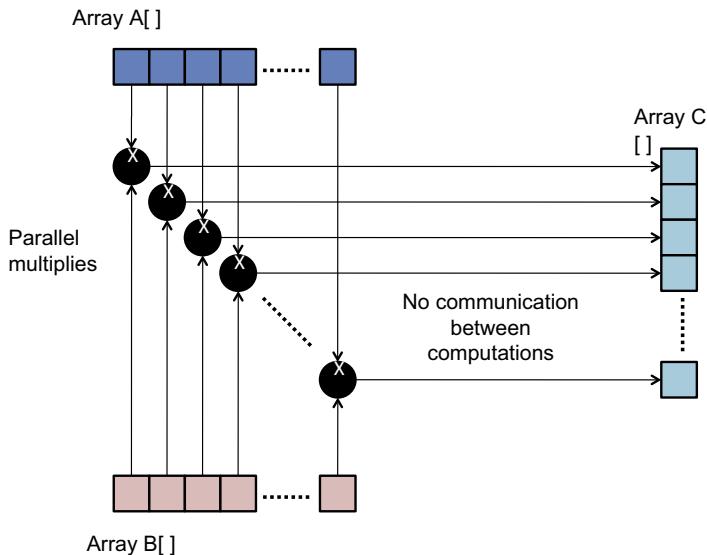
- Molecular dynamics
- Weather and ocean patterns
- Multimedia systems
- Tectonic plate drift
- Cell growth
- Automobile assembly lines
- Sound and light wave propagation

Parallel computing, as defined by [Almasi and Gottlieb \(1989\)](#), is “a form of computation in which many calculations are carried out simultaneously, operating on the principle that large problems can often be divided into smaller ones, which are then solved concurrently (i.e., in parallel).” The degree of parallelism that can be achieved is dependent on the inherent nature of the problem at hand (remember that there exists significant parallelism in the world), and the skill of the algorithm or software designer is to identify the different forms of parallelism present in the underlying problem. We begin with a discussion of two simple examples to demonstrate inherent parallel computation: vector multiplication and text searching.

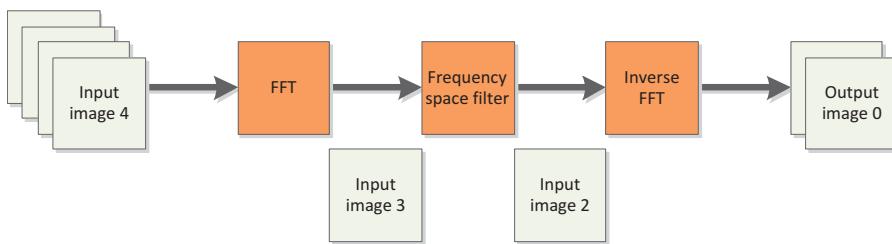
Our first example carries out multiplication of the elements of two arrays  $A$  and  $B$ , each with  $N$  elements, storing the result of each multiply in a corresponding array  $C$ . [Figure 1.2](#) shows the computation we would like to carry out. The serial C++ program for code would look as follows:

```
for (i=0; i<N; i++)
    C[i] = A[i] * B[i];
```

This code possesses significant parallelism but very little arithmetic intensity. The computation of every element in  $C$  is independent of every other element. If we were to parallelize this code, we could choose to generate a separate execution instance to perform the computation of each element of  $C$ . This code possesses significant data-level parallelism because the same operation is applied across all of  $A$  and  $B$  to produce  $C$ . We could also view this breakdown as a simple form of task parallelism where each task operates on a subset of the same data; however, task parallelism generalizes further to execution on pipelines of data or even more sophisticated parallel interactions. [Figure 1.3](#) shows an example of task parallelism in a pipeline to support filtering of images in frequency space using an FFT.

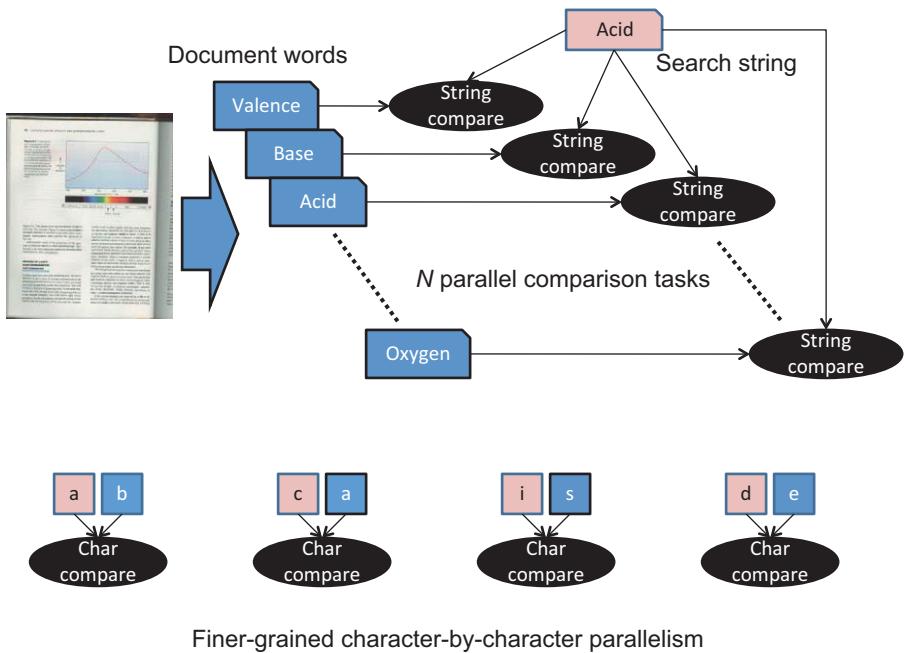
**FIGURE 1.2**

Multiplying two arrays: This example provides for parallel computation without any need for communication.

**FIGURE 1.3**

Filtering a series of images using an FFT shows clear task parallelism as a series of tasks operate together in a pipeline to compute the overall result.

Let us consider a second example. The computation we are trying to carry out is to find the number of occurrences of a string of characters in a body of text (Figure 1.4). Assume that the body of text has already been parsed into a set of  $N$  words. We could choose to divide the task of comparing the string against the  $N$  potential matches into  $N$  comparisons (i.e., tasks), where each string of characters is matched against the text string. This approach, although rather naïve in terms of search efficiency, is highly parallel. The process of the text string being compared against the set of potential words presents  $N$  parallel tasks, each carrying out the same

**FIGURE 1.4**

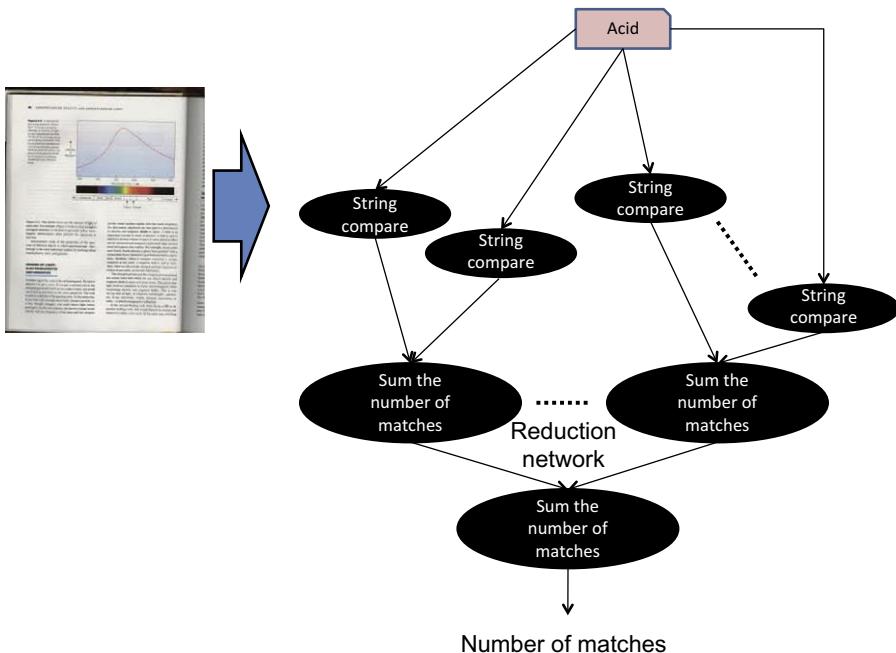
An example of both task-level and data-level parallelism. We can have parallel tasks that count the occurrence of string in a body of text. The lower portion of the figure shows that the string comparison can be broken down to finer-grained parallel processing.

set of operations. There is even further parallelism within a single comparison task, where the matching on a character-by-character basis presents a finer-grained degree of parallelism. This example exhibits both data-level parallelism (we are going to be performing the same operation on multiple data items) and task-level parallelism (we can compare the string to all words concurrently).

Once the number of matches is determined, we need to accumulate them to provide the total number of occurrences. Again, this summing can exploit parallelism. In this step, we introduce the concept of “reduction,” where we can utilize the availability of parallel resources to combine partial sums in a very efficient manner. Figure 1.5 shows the reduction tree, which illustrates this summation process in  $\log N$  steps.

## CONCURRENCY AND PARALLEL PROGRAMMING MODELS

Here, we discuss concurrency and parallel processing models so that when attempting to map an application developed in OpenCL to a parallel platform, we can select the right model to pursue. Although all of the following models can be supported in OpenCL, the underlying hardware may restrict which model will be practical to use.

**FIGURE 1.5**

After all string comparisons are completed, we can sum up the number of matches in a combining network.

Concurrency is concerned with two or more activities happening at the same time. We find concurrency in the real world all the time—for example, carrying a child in one arm while crossing a road or, more generally, thinking about something while doing something else with one's hands.

When talking about concurrency in terms of computer programming, we mean a single system performing multiple tasks independently. Although it is possible that concurrent tasks may be executed at the same time (i.e., in parallel), this is not a requirement. For example, consider a simple drawing application, which is either receiving input from the user via the mouse and keyboard or updating the display with the current image. Conceptually, receiving and processing input are different operations (i.e., tasks) from updating the display. These tasks can be expressed in terms of concurrency, but they do not need to be performed in parallel. In fact, in the case in which they are executing on a single core of a CPU, they cannot be performed in parallel. In this case, the application or the operating system should switch between the tasks, allowing both some time to run on the core.

Parallelism is concerned with running two or more activities in parallel with the explicit goal of increasing overall performance. For example, consider the following assignments:

```

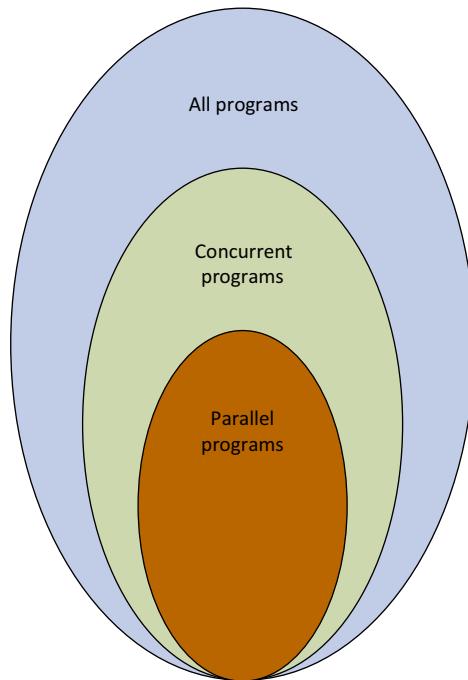
step 1) A = B + C
step 2) D = E + G
step 3) R = A + D

```

The assignments of A and D in steps 1 and 2 (respectively) are said to be independent of each other because there is no data flow between these two steps (i.e., the variables E and G on the right side of step 2 do not appear on the left side of step 1, and vice versa, the variables B and C on the right sides of step 1 do not appear on the left side of step 2.). Also the variable on the left side of step 1 (A) is not the same as the variable on the left side of step 2 (D). This means that steps 1 and 2 can be executed in parallel (i.e., at the same time). Step 3 is dependent on both steps 1 and 2, so cannot be executed in parallel with either step 1 or 2.

Parallel programs must be concurrent, but concurrent programs need not be parallel. Although many concurrent programs can be executed in parallel, interdependencies between concurrent tasks may preclude this. For example, an interleaved execution would still satisfy the definition of concurrency while not executing in parallel. As a result, only a subset of concurrent programs are parallel, and the set of all concurrent programs is itself a subset of all programs. [Figure 1.6](#) shows this relationship.

In the remainder of this section, some well-known approaches to programming concurrent and parallel systems are introduced with the aim of providing a foundation before introducing OpenCL in Chapter 2.



**FIGURE 1.6**

---

Parallel and concurrent programs are subsets of programs.

## Threads and Shared Memory

A running program may consist of multiple subprograms that maintain their own independent control flow and that are allowed to run concurrently. These subprograms are defined as *threads*. Communication between threads is via updates and access to memory appearing in the same address space. Each thread has its own pool of local memory—that is, variables—but all threads see the same set of global variables. A simple analogy that can be used to describe the use of threads is the concept of a main program that includes a number of subroutines. The main program is scheduled to run by the operating system and performs necessary loading and acquisition of system and user resources to run. Execution of the main program begins by performing some serial work and then continues by creating a number of tasks that can be scheduled and run by the operating system concurrently using threads.

Each thread benefits from a global view of memory because it shares the same memory address space of the main program. Threads communicate with each other through global memory. This can require synchronization constructs to ensure that more than one thread is not updating the same global address.

A memory consistency model is defined to manage load and store ordering. All processors see the same address space and have direct access to these addresses with the help of other processors. Mechanisms such as locks/semaphores are commonly used to control access to shared memory that is accessed by multiple tasks. A key feature of the shared memory model is the fact that the programmer is not responsible for managing data movement, although depending on the consistency model implemented in the hardware or runtime system, some level of memory consistency may have to be enforced manually. This relaxes the requirement to specify explicitly the communication of data between tasks, and as a result, parallel code development can often be simplified.

There is a significant cost to supporting a fully consistent shared memory model in hardware. For multiprocessor systems, the hardware structures required to support this model become a limiting factor. Shared buses become bottlenecks in the design. The extra hardware required typically grows exponentially in terms of its complexity as we attempt to add additional processors. This has slowed the introduction of multi-core and multiprocessor systems at the low end, and it has limited the number of cores working together in a consistent shared memory system to relatively low numbers because shared buses and coherence protocol overheads become bottlenecks. More relaxed shared memory systems scale further, although in all cases scaling shared memory systems comes at the cost of complicated and expensive interconnects.

Most multi-core CPU platforms support shared memory in one form or another. OpenCL supports execution on shared memory devices.

## Message-Passing Communication

The message-passing communication model enables explicit intercommunication of a set of concurrent tasks that may use memory during computation. Multiple tasks can reside on the same physical device and/or across an arbitrary number of devices.

Tasks exchange data through communications by sending and receiving explicit messages. Data transfer usually requires cooperative operations to be performed by each process. For example, a send operation must have a matching receive operation.

From a programming perspective, message-passing implementations commonly comprise a library of hardware-independent routines for sending and receiving messages. The programmer is responsible for explicitly managing communication between tasks. Historically, a variety of message-passing libraries have been available since the 1980s. MPI is currently the most popular message-passing middleware. These implementations differ substantially from each other, making it difficult for programmers to develop portable applications.

## Different Grains of Parallelism

In parallel computing, granularity is a measure of the ratio of computation to communication. Periods of computation are typically separated from periods of communication by synchronization events. The grain of parallelism is constrained by the inherent characteristics of the algorithms constituting the application. It is important that the parallel programmer selects the right granularity in order to reap the full benefits of the underlying platform because choosing the right grain size can help to expose additional degrees of parallelism. Sometimes this selection is referred to as “chunking,” determining the amount of data to assign to each task. Selecting the right chunk size can help provide for further acceleration on parallel hardware. Next, we consider some of the trade-offs associated with identifying the right grain size.

- Fine-grained parallelism
  - Low arithmetic intensity.
  - May not have enough work to hide long-duration asynchronous communication.
  - Facilitates load balancing by providing a larger number of more manageable (i.e., smaller) work units.
  - If the granularity is too fine, it is possible that the overhead required for communication and synchronization between tasks can actually produce a slower parallel implementation than the original serial execution.
- Coarse-grained parallelism
  - High arithmetic intensity.
  - Complete applications can serve as the grain of parallelism.
  - More difficult to load balance efficiently.

Given these trade-offs, which granularity will lead to the best implementation? The most efficient granularity is dependent on the algorithm and the hardware environment in which it is run. In most cases, if the overhead associated with communication and synchronization is high relative to the time of the computation task at hand, it will generally be advantageous to work at a coarser granularity. Fine-grained parallelism can help reduce overheads due to load imbalance or memory delays (this is particularly true on a GPU, which depends on zero-overhead fine-grained thread

switching to hide memory latencies). Fine-grained parallelism can even occur at an instruction level (this approach is used in very long instruction word (VLIW) and superscalar architectures).

## Data Sharing and Synchronization

Consider the case in which two applications run that do not share any data. As long as the runtime system or operating system has access to adequate execution resources, they can be run concurrently and even in parallel. If halfway through the execution of one application it generated a result that was subsequently required by the second application, then we would have to introduce some form of synchronization into the system, and parallel execution—at least across the synchronization point—becomes impossible.

When writing concurrent software, data sharing and synchronization play a critical role. Examples of data sharing in concurrent programs include

- the input of a task is dependent on the result of another task—for example, in a producer/consumer or pipeline execution model; and
- when intermediate results are combined together (e.g., as part of a reduction, as in our word search example shown in [Figure 1.4](#)).

Ideally, we would only attempt to parallelize portions of an application that are void of data dependencies, but this is not always possible. Explicit synchronization primitives such as barriers or locks may be used to support synchronization when necessary. Although we only raise this issue here, later chapters revisit this question when support for communication between host and device programs or when synchronization between tasks is required.

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## STRUCTURE

The remainder of the book is organized as follows:

Chapter 2 presents an introduction to OpenCL, including key concepts such as kernels, platforms, and devices; the four different abstraction models; and developing your first OpenCL kernel. Understanding these different models is critical to fully appreciate the richness of OpenCL’s programming model.

Chapter 3 presents some of the architectures that OpenCL does or might target, including x86 CPUs, GPUs, and APUs. The text includes discussion of different styles of architectures, including single instruction multiple data and VLIW. This chapter also covers the concepts of multi-core and throughput-oriented systems, as well as advances in heterogeneous architectures.

Chapter 4 introduces basic matrix multiplication, image rotation, and convolution implementations to help the reader learn OpenCL by example.

Chapter 5 discusses concurrency and execution in the OpenCL programming model. In this chapter, we discuss kernels, work items, and the OpenCL execution and memory hierarchies. We also show how queuing and synchronization work in OpenCL such that the reader gains an understanding of how to write OpenCL programs that interact with memory correctly.

Chapter 6 shows how OpenCL maps to an example architecture. For this study, we choose a system comprising an AMD Phenom II CPU and an AMD Radeon HD6970 GPU. This chapter allows us to show how the mappings of the OpenCL programming model for largely serial architectures such as CPUs and vector/throughput architectures such as GPUs differ, giving some idea how to optimize for specific architectural styles.

Chapter 7 presents a case study that accelerates a convolution algorithm. Issues related to memory space utilization and efficiency are considered, as well as work item scheduling, wavefront occupancy, and overall efficiency. These techniques are the foundations necessary for developing high-performance code using OpenCL. Chapter 8 presents a case study targeting video processing, utilizing OpenCL to build performant image processing effects that can be applied to video streams. Chapter 9 presents another case study examining how to optimize the performance of a histogramming application. In particular, it highlights how careful design of workgroup size and memory access patterns can make a vast difference to performance in memory-bound applications such as histograms.

Chapter 10 discusses how to leverage a heterogeneous CPU–GPU environment. The target application is a mixed particle simulation (as illustrated on the cover of this book) in which work is distributed across both the CPU and the GPU depending on the grain size of particles in the system.

Chapter 11 shows how to use OpenCL extensions using the device fission and double precision extensions as examples.

Chapter 12 introduces the reader to debugging and analyzing OpenCL programs. The right debugging tool can save a developer hundreds of wasted hours, allowing him or her instead to learn the specific computer language and solve the problem at hand.

Chapter 13 provides an overview and performance trade-offs of WebCL. WebCL is not yet a product, but imagine what could be possible if the web were powered by OpenCL. This chapter describes example OpenCL bindings for JavaScript, discussing an implementation of a Firefox plug-in that allows web applications to leverage the powerful parallel computing capabilities of modern CPUs and GPUs.

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# Introduction to OpenCL

# 2

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## INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces OpenCL, the programming fabric that will allow us to weave our application to execute concurrently. Programmers familiar with C and C++ should have little trouble understanding the OpenCL syntax. We begin by reviewing the OpenCL standard.

### The OpenCL Standard

Open programming standards designers are tasked with a very challenging objective: arrive at a common set of programming standards that are acceptable to a range of competing needs and requirements. The Khronos consortium that manages the OpenCL standard has done a good job addressing these requirements. The consortium has developed an applications programming interface (API) that is general enough to run on significantly different architectures while being adaptable enough that each hardware platform can still obtain high performance. Using the core language and correctly following the specification, any program designed for one vendor can execute on another's hardware. The model set forth by OpenCL creates portable, vendor- and device-independent programs that are capable of being accelerated on many different hardware platforms.

The OpenCL API is a C with a C++ Wrapper API that is defined in terms of the C API. There are third-party bindings for many languages, including Java, Python, and .NET. The code that executes on an OpenCL device, which in general is not the same device as the host CPU, is written in the OpenCL C language. OpenCL C is a restricted version of the C99 language with extensions appropriate for executing data-parallel code on a variety of heterogeneous devices.

### The OpenCL Specification

The OpenCL specification is defined in four parts, called models, that can be summarized as follows:

1. Platform model: Specifies that there is one processor coordinating execution (the *host*) and one or more processors capable of executing OpenCL C code (the *devices*). It defines an abstract hardware model that is used by programmers when writing OpenCL C functions (called *kernels*) that execute on the devices.
2. Execution model: Defines how the OpenCL environment is configured on the host and how kernels are executed on the device. This includes setting up an OpenCL context on the host, providing mechanisms for host–device interaction, and defining a concurrency model used for kernel execution on devices.
3. Memory model: Defines the abstract memory hierarchy that kernels use, regardless of the actual underlying memory architecture. The memory model closely resembles current GPU memory hierarchies, although this has not limited adoptability by other accelerators.
4. Programming model: Defines how the concurrency model is mapped to physical hardware.

In a typical scenario, we might observe an OpenCL implementation executing on a host x86 CPU, which is using a GPU device as an accelerator. The platform model defines this relationship between the host and device. The host sets up a kernel for the GPU to run and instantiates it with some specified degree of parallelism. This is the execution model. The data within the kernel is allocated by the programmer to specific parts of an abstract memory hierarchy. The runtime and driver will map these abstract memory spaces to the physical hierarchy. Finally, hardware thread contexts that execute the kernel must be created and mapped to actual GPU hardware units. This is done using the programming model. Throughout this chapter, these ideas are discussed in further detail.

This chapter begins by introducing how OpenCL kernels are written and the parallel execution model that they use. The OpenCL host API is then described and demonstrated using a running example—vector addition. The full listing of the vector addition example is given at the end of the chapter.

## Kernels and the OpenCL Execution Model

Kernels are the parts of an OpenCL program that actually execute on a device. The OpenCL API enables an application to create a context for management of the execution of OpenCL commands, including those describing the movement of data between host and OpenCL memory structures and the execution of kernel code that processes this data to perform some meaningful task.

Like many CPU concurrency models, an OpenCL kernel is syntactically similar to a standard C function; the key difference is a set of additional keywords and the execution model that OpenCL kernels implement. When developing concurrent programs for a CPU using OS threading APIs or OpenMP, for example, the programmer considers the physical resources available (e.g., CPU cores) and the overhead of

creating and switching between threads when their number substantially exceeds the resource availability. With OpenCL, the goal is often to represent parallelism programmatically at the finest granularity possible. The generalization of the OpenCL interface and the low-level kernel language allows efficient mapping to a wide range of hardware. The following discussion presents three versions of a function that performs an element-wise vector addition: a serial C implementation, a threaded C implementation, and an OpenCL implementation.

The code for a serial C implementation of the vector addition executes a loop with as many iterations as there are elements to compute. Each loop iteration adds the corresponding locations in the input arrays together and stores the result into the output array:

```
// Perform an element-wise addition of A and B and store in C.  
// There are N elements per array.  
void vecadd(int *C, int* A, int *B, int N) {  
    for(int i = 0; i < N; i++) {  
        C[i] = A[i] + B[i];  
    }  
}
```

For a simple multi-core device, we could either use a low-level coarse-grained threading API, such as Win32 or POSIX threads, or use a data-parallel model such as OpenMP. Writing a coarse-grained multithreaded version of the same function would require dividing the work (i.e., loop iterations) between the threads. Because there may be a large number of loop iterations and the work per iteration is small, we would need to chunk the loop iterations into a larger granularity (a technique called *strip mining*, (Cooper and Torczon, 2011)). The code for the multithreaded version may look as follows:

```
// Perform an element-wise addition of A and B and store in C.  
// There are N elements per array and NP CPU cores.  
void vecadd(int *C, int* A, int *B, int N, int NP, int tid) {  
    int ept = N/NP; // elements per thread  
    for(int i = tid*ept; i < (tid+1)*ept; i++) {  
        C[i] = A[i] + B[i];  
    }  
}
```

OpenCL is closer to OpenMP than the threading APIs of Win32 and POSIX, supporting data-parallel execution but retaining a low level of control. The unit of concurrent execution in OpenCL C is a *work-item*. As with the two previous examples, each work-item executes the kernel function body. Instead of manually strip mining the loop, we will often map a single iteration of the loop to a work-item. We tell the OpenCL runtime to generate as many work-items as elements in the input and output arrays and allow the runtime to map those work-items to the underlying

hardware, and hence CPU or GPU cores, in whatever way it deems appropriate. Conceptually, this is very similar to the parallelism inherent in a functional “map” operation (c.f., mapReduce) or a data-parallel for loop in a model such as OpenMP. When an OpenCL device begins executing a kernel, it provides intrinsic functions that allow a work-item to identify itself. In the following code, the call to `get_global_id(0)` allows the programmer to make use of the position of the current work-item in the simple case to regain the loop counter:

```
// Perform an element-wise addition of A and B and store in C
// N work-items will be created to execute this kernel.
__kernel
void vecadd(__global int *C, __global int* A, __global int *B) {
    int tid = get_global_id(0); // OpenCL intrinsic function
    C[tid] = A[tid] + B[tid];
}
```

Given that OpenCL describes execution in fine-grained work-items and can dispatch vast numbers of work-items on architectures with hardware support for fine-grained threading, it is easy to have concerns about scalability. The hierarchical concurrency model implemented by OpenCL ensures that scalable execution can be achieved even while supporting a large number of work-items. When a kernel is executed, the programmer specifies the number of work-items that should be created as an *n-dimensional range* (NDRange). An NDRange is a one-, two-, or three-dimensional index space of work-items that will often map to the dimensions of either the input or the output data. The dimensions of the NDRange are specified as an *N*-element array of type `size_t`, where *N* represents the number of dimensions used to describe the work-items being created.

In the vector addition example, our data will be one-dimensional and, assuming that there are 1024 elements, the size can be specified as a one-, two-, or three-dimensional vector. The host code to specify an ND Range for 1024 elements is as follows:

```
size_t indexSpaceSize[3] = {1024, 1, 1};
```

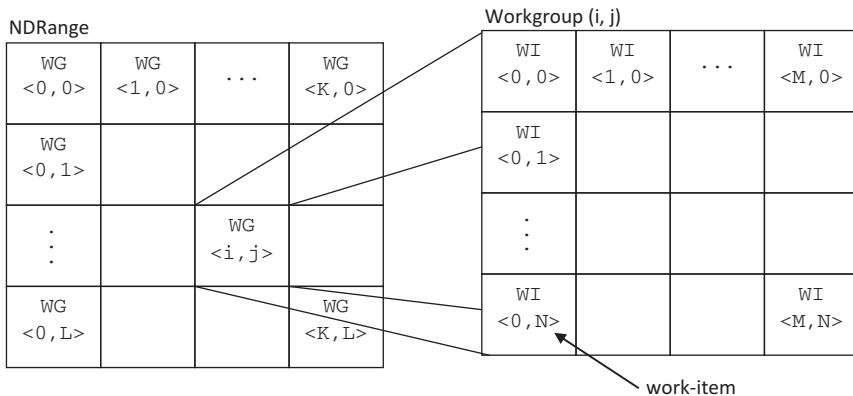
Achieving scalability comes from dividing the work-items of an NDRange into smaller, equally sized workgroups ([Figure 2.1](#)). An index space with *N* dimensions requires workgroups to be specified using the same *N* dimensions; thus, a three-dimensional index space requires three-dimensional workgroups.

Work items within a workgroup have a special relationship with one another: They can perform barrier operations to synchronize and they have access to a shared memory address space. Because workgroup sizes are fixed, this communication does not have a need to scale and hence does not affect scalability of a large concurrent dispatch.

For the vector addition example, the workgroup size might be specified as

```
size_t workGroupSize[3] = {64, 1, 1};
```

If the total number of work-items per array is 1024, this results in creating 16 workgroups (1024 work-items/(64 work-items per workgroup) = 16 workgroups). Note

**FIGURE 2.1**

Work-items are created as an **NDRange** and grouped in workgroups.

that OpenCL requires that the index space sizes are evenly divisible by the workgroup sizes in each dimension. For hardware efficiency, the workgroup size is usually fixed to a favorable size, and we round up the index space size in each dimension to satisfy this divisibility requirement. In the kernel code, we can specify that extra work-items in each dimension simply return immediately without outputting any data.

For programs such as vector addition in which work-items behave independently (even within a workgroup), OpenCL allows the local workgroup size to be ignored by the programmer and generated automatically by the implementation; in this case, the developer will pass `NULL` instead.

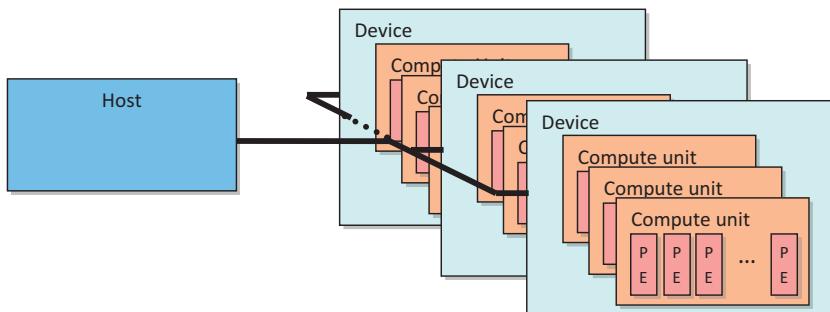
## PLATFORM AND DEVICES

The OpenCL platform model defines the roles of the host and devices and provides an abstract hardware model for devices.

### Host–Device Interaction

In the platform model, there is a single host that coordinates execution on one or more devices. Platforms can be thought of as vendor-specific implementations of the OpenCL API. The devices that a platform can target are thus limited to those with which a vendor knows how to interact. For example, if Company A's platform is chosen, it cannot communicate with Company B's GPU.

The platform model also presents an abstract device architecture that programmers target when writing OpenCL C code. Vendors map this abstract architecture to the physical hardware. With scalability in mind, the platform model defines a

**FIGURE 2.2**

The platform model defines an abstract architecture for devices.

device as an array of *compute units*, with each compute unit functionally independent from the rest. Compute units are further divided into *processing elements*. [Figure 2.2](#) illustrates this hierarchical model.

The platform device model closely corresponds to the hardware model of some GPUs. For example, the AMD Radeon 6970 graphics card comprises 24 SIMD cores (compute units), with each SIMD core containing 16 lanes (processing elements). Because each SIMD lane on the 6970 executes a four-way very long instruction word (VLIW) instruction, this OpenCL device allows us to schedule execution of up to 1536 instructions at a time.

The API function `clGetPlatformIDs()` is used to discover the set of available platforms for a given system:

```
cl_int
clGetPlatformIDs(cl_uint num_entries,
                 cl_platform_id *platforms,
                 cl_uint *num_platforms)
```

`clGetPlatformIDs()` will often be called twice by an application. The first call passes an `unsigned int` pointer as the `num_platforms` argument and `NULL` is passed as the `platforms` argument. The pointer is populated with the available number of platforms. The programmer can then allocate space to hold the platform information. For the second call, a `cl_platform_id` pointer is passed to the implementation with enough space allocated for `num_entries` platforms. After platforms have been discovered, the `clGetPlatformInfo()` call can be used to determine which implementation (vendor) the platform was defined by. Step 1 in the full source code listing at the end of the chapter demonstrates this process.

The `clGetDeviceIDs()` call works very similar to `clGetPlatformIDs()`. It takes the additional arguments of a platform and a device type but otherwise the same three-step process occurs. The `device_type` argument can be used to limit the devices to GPUs only (`CL_DEVICE_TYPE_GPU`), CPUs only (`CL_DEVICE_TYPE_CPU`), all devices (`CL_DEVICE_TYPE_ALL`), as well as other options. As with platforms,

`clGetDeviceInfo()` is called to retrieve information such as name, type, and vendor from each device. Discovering devices is illustrated in step 2 in the full source code listing at the end of the chapter:

```
cl_int  
clGetDeviceIDs(cl_platform_id platform,  
               cl_device_type device_type,  
               cl_uint num_entries,  
               cl_device_id *devices,  
               cl_uint *num_devices)
```

The `CLInfo` program in the AMD APP SDK uses the `clGetPlatformInfo()` and `clGetDeviceInfo()` commands to print detailed information about the OpenCL supported platforms and devices in a system. Hardware details such as memory sizes and bus widths are available using these commands. A snippet of the output from the `CLInfo` program is shown here:

```
$ ./CLInfo  
Number of platforms: 1  
Platform Profile: FULL_PROFILE  
Platform Version: OpenCL 1.1 AMD-APP-SDK-v2.4  
Platform Name: AMD Accelerated Parallel Processing  
Platform Vendor: Advanced Micro Devices, Inc.  
Number of devices: 2  
Device Type: CL_DEVICE_TYPE_GPU  
Name: Cypress  
Max compute units: 20  
Address bits: 32  
Max memory allocation: 268435456  
Global memory size: 1073741824  
Constant buffer size: 65536  
Local memory type: Scratchpad  
Local memory size: 32768  
Device endianess: Little  
  
Device Type: CL_DEVICE_TYPE_CPU  
Max compute units: 16  
Name: AMD Phenom(tm) II X4 945 Processor  
...
```

---

## THE EXECUTION ENVIRONMENT

Before a host can request that a kernel be executed on a device, a context must be configured on the host that enables it to pass commands and data to the device.

## Contexts

In OpenCL, a *context* is an abstract container that exists on the host. A context coordinates the mechanisms for host–device interaction, manages the memory objects that are available to the devices, and keeps track of the programs and kernels that are created for each device.

The API function to create a context is `clCreateContext()`. The properties argument is used to restrict the scope of the context. It may provide a specific platform, enable graphics interoperability, or enable other parameters in the future. Limiting the context to a given platform allows the programmer to provide contexts for multiple platforms and fully utilize a system comprising resources from a mixture of vendors. Next, the number and IDs of the devices that the programmer wants to associate with the context must be supplied. OpenCL allows user callbacks to be provided when creating a context that can be used to report additional error information that might be generated throughout its lifetime. Step 3 in the full source code listing at the end of the chapter demonstrates the creation of a context:

```
cl_context
clCreateContext (const cl_context_properties *properties,
                cl_uint num_devices,
                const cl_device_id *devices,
                void (CL_CALLBACK *pfn_notify)(
                    const char *errinfo,
                    const void *private_info,
                    size_t cb,
                    void *user_data),
                void *user_data,
                cl_int *errcode_ret)
```

The OpenCL specification also provides an API call that alleviates the need to build a list of devices. `clCreateContextFromType()` allows a programmer to create a context that automatically includes all devices of the specified type (e.g., CPUs, GPUs, and all devices). After creating a context, the function `clGetContextInfo()` can be used to query information such as the number of devices present and the device structures.

In OpenCL, the process of discovering platforms and devices and setting up a context is tedious. However, after the code to perform these steps is written once, it can be reused for almost any project.

## Command Queues

Communication with a device occurs by submitting commands to a *command queue*. The command queue is the mechanism that the host uses to request action by the device. Once the host decides which devices to work with and a context is created, one command queue needs to be created per device (i.e., each command queue is associated with only one device). Whenever the host needs an action to be performed by a device, it will submit commands to the proper command queue. The API

`clCreateCommandQueue()` is used to create a command queue and associate it with a device:

```
cl_command_queue  
clCreateCommandQueue(  
    cl_context context,  
    cl_device_id device,  
    cl_command_queue_properties properties,  
    cl_int* errcode_ret)
```

The `properties` parameter of `clCreateCommandQueue()` is a bit field that is used to enable profiling of commands (`CL_QUEUE_PROFILING_ENABLE`) and/or to allow out-of-order execution of commands (`CL_QUEUE_OUT_OF_ORDER_EXEC_MODE_ENABLE`). Profiling is discussed in Chapter 12. With an in-order command queue (the default), commands are pulled from the queue in the order they were received. Out-of-order queues allow the OpenCL implementation to search for commands that can possibly be rearranged to execute more efficiently. If out-of-order queues are used, it is up to the user to specify dependencies that enforce a correct execution order. Step 4 in the full source code listing at the end of the chapter creates a command queue.

Any API that specifies host-device interaction will always begin with `clEnqueue` and require a command queue as a parameter. For example, the `clEnqueueReadBuffer()` command requests that the device send data to the host, and `clEnqueueNDRangeKernel()` requests that a kernel is executed on the device. These calls are discussed later in this chapter.

## Events

Any operation that enqueues a command into a command queue—that is, any API call that begins with `clEnqueue`—produces an *event*. Events have two main roles in OpenCL:

1. Representing dependencies
2. Providing a mechanism for profiling

In addition to producing event objects, API calls that begin with `clEnqueue` also take a “wait list” of events as a parameter. By generating an event for one API call and passing it as an argument to a successive call, OpenCL allows us to represent dependencies. A `clEnqueue` call will block until all events in its wait list have completed. Chapter 5 provides examples of representing dependencies using events.

OpenCL events can also be used to profile, using associated timers, commands enqueued. Chapter 12 describes how to use OpenCL events for profiling.

## Memory Objects

OpenCL applications often work with large arrays or multidimensional matrices. This data needs to be physically present on a device before execution can begin.

In order for data to be transferred to a device, it must first be encapsulated as a *memory object*. OpenCL defines two types of memory objects: *buffers* and *images*. Buffers are equivalent to arrays in C, created using `malloc()`, where data elements are stored contiguously in memory. Images, on the other hand, are designed as opaque objects, allowing for data padding and other optimizations that may improve performance on devices.

Whenever a memory object is created, it is valid only within a single context. Movement to and from specific devices is managed by the OpenCL runtime as necessary to satisfy data dependencies.

### **Buffers**

Conceptually, it may help to visualize a memory object as a pointer that is valid on a device. This is similar to a call to `malloc`, in C, or a C++'s `new` operator. The API function `clCreateBuffer()` allocates the buffer and returns a memory object:

```
cl_mem clCreateBuffer(
    cl_context context,
    cl_mem_flags flags,
    size_t size,
    void *host_ptr,
    cl_int *errcode_ret)
```

Creating a buffer requires supplying the size of the buffer and a context in which the buffer will be allocated; it is visible for all devices associated with the context. Optionally, the caller can supply flags that specify that the data is read-only, write-only, or read-write. Other flags also exist that specify additional options for creating and initializing a buffer. One simple option is to supply a host pointer with data used to initialize the buffer. Step 5 in the full source code listing at the end of the chapter demonstrates the creation of two input buffers and one output buffer.

Data contained in host memory is transferred to and from an OpenCL buffer using the commands `clEnqueueWriteBuffer()` and `clEnqueueReadBuffer()`, respectively. If a kernel that is dependent on such a buffer is executed on a discrete accelerator device such as a GPU, the buffer may be transferred to the device. The buffer is linked to a context, not a device, so it is the runtime that determines the precise time the data is moved.

The API calls for reading and writing to buffers are very similar. The signature for `clEnqueueWriteBuffer()` is

```
cl_int
clEnqueueWriteBuffer (
    cl_command_queue command_queue,
    cl_mem buffer,
    cl_bool blocking_write,
    size_t offset,
    size_t cb,
    const void *ptr,
```

```
cl_uint num_events_in_wait_list,  
const cl_event *event_wait_list,  
cl_event *event)
```

Similar to other enqueue operations, reading or writing a buffer requires a command queue to manage the execution schedule. In addition, the enqueue function requires the buffer, the number of bytes to transfer, and an offset within the buffer. The `blocking_write` option should be set to `CL_TRUE` if the transfer into an OpenCL buffer should complete before the function returns—that is, it will block until the operation has completed. Setting `blocking_write` to `CL_FALSE` allows `clEnqueueWriteBuffer()` to return before the write operation has completed. Step 6 in the full source code listing at the end of the chapter enqueues commands to write input data to buffers on a device, and step 12 reads the output data back to the host.

### Images

Images are a type of OpenCL memory object that abstract the storage of physical data to allow for device-specific optimizations. They are not required to be supported by all OpenCL devices, and an application is required to check, using `clGetDeviceInfo()`, if they are supported or not; otherwise, behavior is undefined. Unlike buffers, images cannot be directly referenced as if they were arrays. Furthermore, adjacent data elements are not guaranteed to be stored contiguously in memory. The purpose of using images is to allow the hardware to take advantage of spatial locality and to utilize hardware acceleration available on many devices. The architectural design and trade-offs for images are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Images are an example of the OpenCL standard being dependent on the underlying hardware of a particular device, in this case the GPU, versus the other way around. The elements of an image are represented by a format descriptor (`cl_image_format`). The format descriptor specifies how the image elements are stored in memory based on the concept of channels. The *channel order* specifies the number of elements that make up an image element (up to four elements, based on the traditional use of RGBA pixels), and the *channel type* specifies the size of each element. These elements can be sized from 1 to 4 bytes and in various different formats (e.g., integer or floating point).

Creating an OpenCL image is done using the command `clCreateImage2D()` or `clCreateImage3D()`. Additional arguments are required when creating an image object versus those specified for creating a buffer. First, the height and width of the image must be given (and a depth for the three-dimensional case). In addition, an image pitch<sup>1</sup> may be supplied if initialization data is provided.

---

<sup>1</sup>Pitch is the number of bytes between the start of one image row and the start of the next.

```

cl_mem
clCreateImage2D(
    cl_context context,
    cl_mem_flags flags,
    const cl_image_format *image_format,
    size_t image_width,
    size_t image_height,
    size_t image_row_pitch,
    void *host_ptr,
    cl_int *errcode_ret)

```

There are also additional parameters when reading or writing an image. Read or write operations take a three-element origin (similar to the buffer offset) that defines the location within the image that the transfer will begin and another three-element region parameter that defines the extent of the data that will be transferred.

Within a kernel, images are accessed with built-in functions specific to the data type. For example, the function `read_imagef()` is used for reading floats and `read_imageui()` for unsigned integers. When data is read from an image, a sampler object is required. Samplers specify how out-of-bounds image accesses are handled, whether interpolation should be used, and if coordinates are normalized. Writing to a location in an image requires manual conversion to the proper storage data format (i.e., storing in the proper channel and with the proper size). Chapter 4 provides an example of an OpenCL program that uses images.

## Flush and Finish

The flush and finish commands are two different types of barrier operations for a command queue. The `clFinish()` function blocks until all of the commands in a command queue have completed; its functionality is synonymous with a synchronization barrier. The `clFlush()` function blocks until all of the commands in a command queue have been removed from the queue. This means that the commands will definitely be in-flight but will not necessarily have completed.

```

cl_int clFlush(cl_command_queue command_queue);
cl_int clFinish(cl_command_queue command_queue);

```

## Creating an OpenCL Program Object

OpenCL C code (written to run on an OpenCL device) is called a *program*. A program is a collection of functions called kernels, where kernels are units of execution that can be scheduled to run on a device.

OpenCL programs are compiled at runtime through a series of API calls. This runtime compilation gives the system an opportunity to optimize for a specific device. There is no need for an OpenCL application to have been prebuilt against the AMD, NVIDIA, or Intel runtimes, for example, if it is to run on devices produced by

all of these vendors. OpenCL software links only to a common runtime layer (called the ICD); all platform-specific SDK activity is delegated to a vendor runtime through a dynamic library interface.

The process of creating a kernel is as follows:

1. The OpenCL C source code is stored in a character string. If the source code is stored in a file on a disk, it must be read into memory and stored as a character array.
2. The source code is turned into a program object, `cl_program`, by calling `clCreateProgramWithSource()`.
3. The program object is then compiled, for one or more OpenCL devices, with `clBuildProgram()`. If there are compile errors, they will be reported here.

The precise binary representation used is very vendor specific. In the AMD runtime, there are two main classes of devices: x86 CPUs and GPUs. For x86 CPUs, `clBuildProgram()` generates x86 instructions that can be directly executed on the device. For the GPUs, it will create AMD's GPU intermediate language (IL), a high-level intermediate language that represents a single work-item but that will be just-in-time compiled for a specific GPU's architecture later, generating what is often known as ISA (i.e., code for a specific instruction set architecture). NVIDIA uses a similar approach, calling its intermediate representation PTX. The advantage of using such an IL is to allow the GPU ISA itself to change from one device or generation to another in what is still a very rapidly developing architectural space.

One additional feature of the build process is the ability to generate both the final binary format and various intermediate representations and serialize them (e.g., write them out to disk). As with most objects, OpenCL provides a function to return information about program objects, `clGetProgramInfo()`. One of the flags to this function is `CL_PROGRAM_BINARIES`, which returns a vendor-specific set of binary objects generated by `clBuildProgram()`.

In addition to `clCreateProgramWithSource()`, OpenCL provides `clCreateProgramWithBinary()`, which takes a list of binaries that matches its device list.

The binaries are previously created using `clGetProgramInfo()`.

## The OpenCL Kernel

The final stage to obtain a `cl_kernel` object that can be used to execute kernels on a device is to extract the kernel from the `cl_program`. Extracting a kernel from a program is similar to obtaining an exported function from a dynamic library. The name of the kernel that the program exports is used to request it from the compiled program object. The name of the kernel is passed to `clCreateKernel()`, along with the program object, and the kernel object will be returned if the program object was valid and the particular kernel is found.

A few more steps are required before the kernel can actually be executed. Unlike calling functions in regular C programs, we cannot simply call a kernel by providing a list of arguments.

Executing a kernel requires dispatching it through an enqueue function. Due both to the syntax of the C language and to the fact that kernel arguments are persistent (and hence we need not repeatedly set them to construct the argument list for such a dispatch), we must specify each kernel argument individually using the function `clSetKernelArg()`. This function takes a kernel object, an index specifying the argument number, the size of the argument, and a pointer to the argument. When a kernel is executed, this information is used to transfer arguments to the device. The type information in the kernel parameter list is then used by the runtime to unbox (similar to casting) the data to its appropriate type. The process of setting kernel arguments is illustrated in step 9 in the full source code listing at the end of the chapter.

After any required memory objects are transferred to the device and the kernel arguments are set, the kernel is ready to be executed. Requesting that a device begin executing a kernel is done with a call to `clEnqueueNDRangeKernel()`:

```
cl_int
clEnqueueNDRangeKernel(
    cl_command_queue command_queue,
    cl_kernel kernel,
    cl_uint work_dim,
    const size_t *global_work_offset,
    const size_t *global_work_size,
    const size_t *local_work_size,
    cl_uint num_events_in_wait_list,
    const cl_event *event_wait_list,
    cl_event *event)
```

Look at the signature for the function. A command queue must be specified so the target device is known. Similarly, the kernel object identifies the code to be executed. Four fields are related to work-item creation. The `work_dim` parameter specifies the number of dimensions (one, two, or three) in which work-items will be created. The `global_work_size` parameter specifies the number of work-items in each dimension of the NDRange, and `local_work_size` specifies the number of work-items in each dimension of the workgroups. The parameter `global_work_offset` can be used to provide global IDs to the work-items that do not start at 0. As with all `clEnqueue` commands, an `event_wait_list` is provided, and for non-NULL values the runtime will guarantee that all corresponding events will have completed before the kernel begins execution. The `clEnqueueNDRangeKernel()` call is asynchronous: it will return immediately after the command is enqueued in the command queue and likely before the kernel has even started execution. Either `clWaitForEvents()` or `clFinish()` can be used to block execution on the host until the kernel completes. The code to configure the work-items for the vector addition kernel is shown in step 10 in the full source code listing at the end of the chapter, and the command to enqueue the vector addition kernel is shown in step 11.

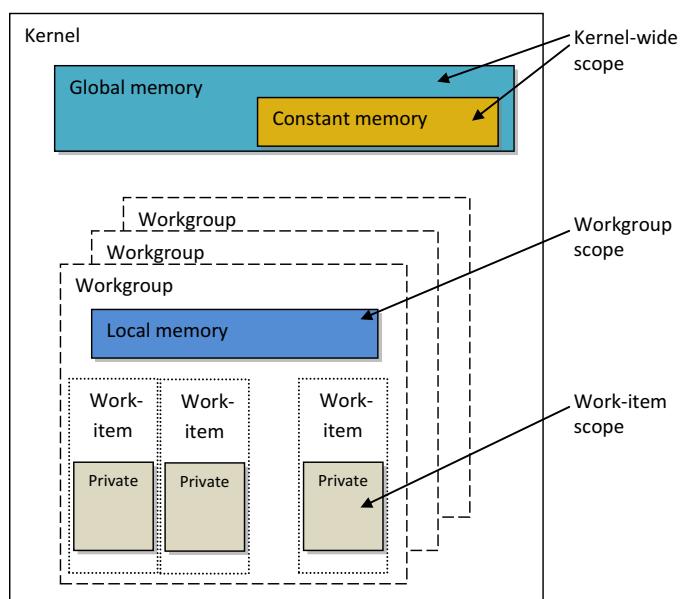
At this point, we have presented all of the required host API commands needed to enable the reader to run a complete OpenCL program.

## MEMORY MODEL

In general, memory subsystems vary greatly between computing platforms. For example, all modern CPUs support automatic caching, although many GPUs do not. To support code portability, OpenCL's approach is to define an abstract memory model that programmers can target when writing code and vendors can map to their actual memory hardware. The memory spaces defined by OpenCL are discussed here and shown in [Figure 2.3](#).

These memory spaces are relevant within OpenCL programs. The keywords associated with each space can be used to specify where a variable should be created or where the data that it points to resides.

*Global memory* is visible to all compute units on the device (similar to the main memory on a CPU-based host system). Whenever data is transferred from the host to the device, the data will reside in global memory. Any data that is to be transferred back from the device to the host must also reside in global memory. The keyword `_global` is added to a pointer declaration to specify that data referenced by the pointer resides in global memory. For example, in the OpenCL C code at the end of the chapter `_global float* A`, the data pointed to by `A` resides in global memory (although we will see that `A` actually resides in private memory).



**FIGURE 2.3**

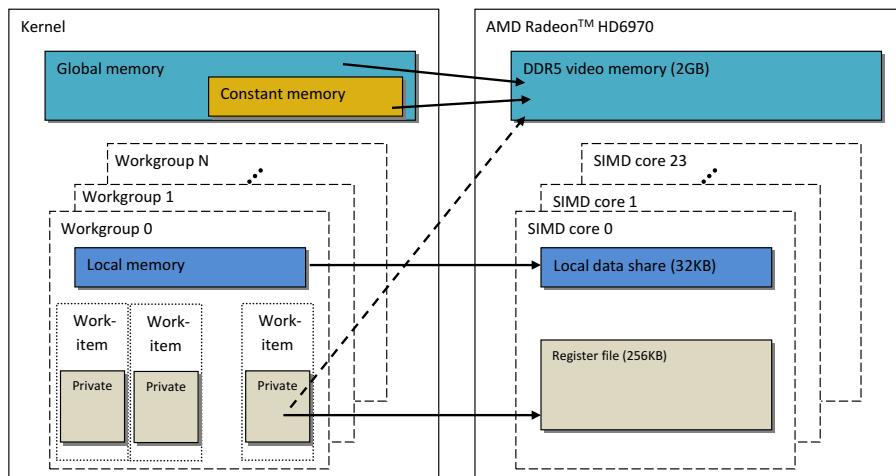
The abstract memory model defined by OpenCL.

*Constant memory* is not specifically designed for every type of read-only data but, rather, for data where each element is accessed simultaneously by all work-items. Variables whose values never change (e.g., a data variable holding the value of  $\pi$ ) also fall into this category. Constant memory is modeled as a part of global memory, so memory objects that are transferred to global memory can be specified as constant. Data is mapped to constant memory by using the `_constant` keyword.

*Local memory* is a scratchpad memory whose address space is unique to each compute device. It is common for it to be implemented as on-chip memory, but there is no requirement that this be the case. Local memory is modeled as being shared by a workgroup. As such, accesses may have much shorter latency and much higher bandwidth than global memory. Calling `c1SetKernelArg()` with a size, but no argument, allows local memory to be allocated at runtime, where a kernel parameter is defined as a `_local` pointer (e.g., `_local float* sharedData`). Alternatively, arrays can be statically declared in local memory by appending the keyword `_local` (e.g., `_local float[64] sharedData`), although this requires specifying the array size at compile time.

*Private memory* is memory that is unique to an individual work-item. Local variables and nonpointer kernel arguments are private by default. In practice, these variables are usually mapped to registers, although private arrays and any spilled registers are usually mapped to an off-chip (i.e., long-latency) memory.

The memory spaces of OpenCL closely model those of modern GPUs. Figure 2.4 details the relationship between OpenCL memory spaces and those found on an AMD 6970 GPU.



**FIGURE 2.4**

Mapping from the memory model defined by OpenCL to the architecture of an AMD Radeon 6970 GPU. Simple private memory will be stored in registers; complex addressing or excessive use will be stored in DRAM.

---

## WRITING KERNELS

As previously described, OpenCL C kernels are similar to C functions and can be thought of as instances of a parallel map operation. The function body, like the mapped function, will be executed once for every work-item created. We utilize the code for the OpenCL kernel `cache` kernel to illustrate how this mapping is accomplished.

Kernels begin with the keyword `__kernel` and must have a return type of `void`. The argument list is as for a C function with the additional requirement that the address space of any pointer must be specified. Buffers can be declared in global memory (`__global`) or constant memory (`__constant`). Images are assigned to global memory. Access qualifiers (`__read_only`, `__write_only`, and `__read_write`) can also be optionally specified because they may allow for compiler and hardware optimizations.

The `__local` qualifier is used to declare memory that is shared between all work-items in a workgroup. This concept is often one of the most confusing for new OpenCL programmers. When a local pointer is declared as a kernel parameter, such as `__local float*sharedData`, it is a pointer to an array shared by the entire workgroup. In other words, only one 64-element array will be created per workgroup, and all work-items in the workgroup can access it.

An alternative approach for declaring local memory allocations is to declare a variable at a kernel-scope level:

```
__kernel void aKernel(...){  
    // Shared by all work-items in the group  
    __local float sharedData[32];  
    ...  
}
```

This appears to have kernel textual scope, but the same named entity is shared by all work-items in an entire workgroup, just as is the `__local` parameter, and the approaches are equivalent. Although it is important to note that a `__local` parameter can be set to a different size for each dispatch, a `__local` declaration within a kernel is fixed at compilation time.

When programming for OpenCL devices, particularly GPUs, performance may increase by using local memory to cache data that will be used multiple times by a work-item or by multiple work-items in the same workgroup (i.e., data with temporal locality). When developing a kernel, we can achieve this with an explicit assignment from a global memory pointer to a local memory pointer, as shown in the following example code:

```
__kernel void cache(  
    __global float* data,  
    __local float* sharedData) {  
    int globalId = get_global_id(0);
```

```

int localId = get_local_id(0);
// Cache data to local memory
sharedData[localId] = data[globalId];
...
}

```

Once a work-item completes its execution, none of its state information or local memory storage is persistent. Any results that need to be kept must be transferred to global memory.

## FULL SOURCE CODE EXAMPLE FOR VECTOR ADDITION

The following example listing is the complete host code for implementing the vector addition example discussed in this chapter:<sup>2</sup>

```

// This program implements a vector addition using OpenCL

// System includes
#include <stdio.h>
#include <stdlib.h>

// OpenCL includes
#include <CL/cl.h>

// OpenCL kernel to perform an element-wise
// add of two arrays
const char* programSource =
“__kernel
“void vecadd(__global int *A,
“           __global int *B,
“           __global int *C)
“{
“
“   // Get the work-item’s unique ID
“   int idx = get_global_id(0);
“
“   // Add the corresponding locations of
“   // ’A’ and ’B’, and store the result in ’C’.
“   C[idx] = A[idx] + B[idx];
“}
“;
int main() {
    // This code executes on the OpenCL host
    // Host data

```

<sup>2</sup>Error checking has been omitted from this code for simplicity. For correctness, status should be checked after each call for CL\_SUCCESS and any errors dealt with.

```
int *A = NULL; // Input array
int *B = NULL; // Input array
int *C = NULL; // Output array

// Elements in each array
const int elements = 2048;

// Compute the size of the data
size_t datasize = sizeof(int)*elements;

// Allocate space for input/output data
A = (int*)malloc(datasize);
B = (int*)malloc(datasize);
C = (int*)malloc(datasize);
// Initialize the input data
for(int i=0; i < elements; i++) {
    A[i] = i;
    B[i] = i;
}

// Use this to check the output of each API call
cl_int status;

//-----
// STEP 1: Discover and initialize the platforms
//-----

cl_uint numPlatforms = 0;
cl_platform_id *platforms = NULL;

// Use clGetPlatformIDs() to retrieve the number of
// platforms
status = clGetPlatformIDs(0, NULL, &numPlatforms);

// Allocate enough space for each platform
platforms =
    (cl_platform_id*)malloc(
        numPlatforms*sizeof(cl_platform_id));

// Fill in platforms with clGetPlatformIDs()
status = clGetPlatformIDs(numPlatforms, platforms,
    NULL);

//-----
// STEP 2: Discover and initialize the devices
//-----

cl_uint numDevices = 0;
cl_device_id *devices = NULL;
// Use clGetDeviceIDs() to retrieve the number of
// devices present
status = clGetDeviceIDs(
```

```
platforms[0],  
CL_DEVICE_TYPE_ALL,  
0,  
NULL,  
&numDevices);  
  
// Allocate enough space for each device  
devices =  
    (cl_device_id*)malloc(  
        numDevices*sizeof(cl_device_id));  
  
// Fill in devices with clGetDeviceIDs()  
status = clGetDeviceIDs(  
    platforms[0],  
    CL_DEVICE_TYPE_ALL,  
    numDevices,  
    devices,  
    NULL);  
  
//  
// STEP 3: Create a context  
//  
  
cl_context context = NULL;  
  
// Create a context using clCreateContext() and  
// associate it with the devices  
context = clCreateContext(  
    NULL,  
    numDevices,  
    devices,  
    NULL,  
    NULL,  
    &status);  
  
//  
// STEP 4: Create a command queue  
//  
  
cl_command_queue cmdQueue;  
// Create a command queue using clCreateCommandQueue(),  
// and associate it with the device you want to execute  
// on  
cmdQueue = clCreateCommandQueue(  
    context,  
    devices[0],  
    0,  
    &status);  
  
//  
// STEP 5: Create device buffers  
//
```

```
cl_mem bufferA; // Input array on the device
cl_mem bufferB; // Input array on the device
cl_mem bufferC; // Output array on the device

// Use clCreateBuffer() to create a buffer object (d_A)
// that will contain the data from the host array A
bufferA = clCreateBuffer(
    context,
    CL_MEM_READ_ONLY,
    datasize,
    NULL,
    &status);

// Use clCreateBuffer() to create a buffer object (d_B)
// that will contain the data from the host array B
bufferB = clCreateBuffer(
    context,
    CL_MEM_READ_ONLY,
    datasize,
    NULL,
    &status);

// Use clCreateBuffer() to create a buffer object (d_C)
// with enough space to hold the output data
bufferC = clCreateBuffer(
    context,
    CL_MEM_WRITE_ONLY,
    datasize,
    NULL,
    &status);

//-----
// STEP 6: Write host data to device buffers
//-----

// Use clEnqueueWriteBuffer() to write input array A to
// the device buffer bufferA
status = clEnqueueWriteBuffer(
    cmdQueue,
    bufferA,
    CL_FALSE,
    0,
    datasize,
    A,
    0,
    NULL,
    NULL);

// Use clEnqueueWriteBuffer() to write input array B to
// the device buffer bufferB
status = clEnqueueWriteBuffer(
    cmdQueue,
```

```
bufferB,
CL_FALSE,
0,
datasize,
B,
0,
NULL,
NULL);

//_____
// STEP 7: Create and compile the program
//_____

// Create a program using clCreateProgramWithSource()
cl_program program = clCreateProgramWithSource(
    context,
    1,
    (const char**)&programSource,
    NULL,
    &status);

// Build (compile) the program for the devices with
// clBuildProgram()
status = clBuildProgram(
    program,
    numDevices,
    devices,
    NULL,
    NULL,
    NULL);

//_____
// STEP 8: Create the kernel
//_____

cl_kernel kernel = NULL;

// Use clCreateKernel() to create a kernel from the
// vector addition function (named "vecadd")
kernel = clCreateKernel(program, "vecadd", &status);

//_____
// STEP 9: Set the kernel arguments
//_____

// Associate the input and output buffers with the
// kernel
// using clSetKernelArg()
status = clSetKernelArg(
    kernel,
    0,
```

```
    sizeof(cl_mem),
    &bufferA);
status |= clSetKernelArg(
    kernel,
    1,
    sizeof(cl_mem),
    &bufferB);
status |= clSetKernelArg(
    kernel,
    2,
    sizeof(cl_mem),
    &bufferC);

//-----
// STEP 10: Configure the work-item structure
//-----

// Define an index space (global work size) of work
// items for
// execution. A workgroup size (local work size) is not
// required,
// but can be used.
size_t globalWorkSize[1];
// There are 'elements' work-items
globalWorkSize[0] = elements;

//-----
// STEP 11: Enqueue the kernel for execution
//-----

// Execute the kernel by using
// clEnqueueNDRangeKernel().
// 'globalWorkSize' is the 1D dimension of the
// work-items
status = clEnqueueNDRangeKernel(
    cmdQueue,
    kernel,
    1,
    NULL,
    globalWorkSize,
    NULL,
    0,
    NULL,
    NULL);

//-----
// STEP 12: Read the output buffer back to the host
//-----

// Use clEnqueueReadBuffer() to read the OpenCL output
```

```
// buffer (bufferC)
// to the host output array (C)
clEnqueueReadBuffer(
    cmdQueue,
    bufferC,
    CL_TRUE,
    0,
    datasize,
    C,
    0,
    NULL,
    NULL);

// Verify the output
bool result = true;
for(int i = 0; i < elements; i++) {
    if(C[i] != i+i) {
        result = false;
        break;
    }
}
if(result) {
    printf("Output is correct\n");
} else {
    printf("Output is incorrect\n");
}

//_____
// STEP 13: Release OpenCL resources
//_____

// Free OpenCL resources
clReleaseKernel(kernel);
clReleaseProgram(program);
clReleaseCommandQueue(cmdQueue);
clReleaseMemObject(bufferA);
clReleaseMemObject(bufferB);
clReleaseMemObject(bufferC);
clReleaseContext(context);

// Free host resources
free(A);
free(B);
free(C);
free(platforms);
free(devices);
}
```

---

## SUMMARY

In this chapter, we provided an introduction to the basics of using the OpenCL standard when developing parallel programs. We described the four different abstraction models defined in the standard and presented examples of OpenCL implementations to place some of the abstraction in context.

In Chapter 3, we discuss OpenCL device architectures, including a range of instruction set styles, threading issues, and memory topics.

---

## Reference

Cooper, K., & Torczon, L. (2011). *Engineering a Compiler*. Burlington, MA: Morgan Kaufmann.

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# OpenCL Device Architectures

# 3

---

## INTRODUCTION

OpenCL has been developed by a wide range of industry groups to satisfy the need to standardize on programming models that can achieve good or high performance across the range of devices available on the market. Each of these companies has specific goals in mind for OpenCL and targets for what features OpenCL should have to be able to run correctly on a specific architecture. To this end, OpenCL has a range of features that attempt to allow detection of unique hardware capabilities. For example, OpenCL has a relaxed consistency block-based parallelism model intended to run relatively efficiently on serial, symmetric multiprocessing (SMP), multithreaded, and single instruction multiple data (SIMD) or vector devices. In this chapter, we discuss some of these devices and the overall design space in which they sit.

Although OpenCL is designed to be a platform-independent applications programming interface (API), at the algorithm level and consequently at the level of kernel implementation, true platform independence in terms of performance is still a goal (versus a reality). As developers, we need to understand the potential advantages of different hardware features, the key runtime characteristics of these devices, and where these devices fit into the different classes of computer architectures. Once the reader is equipped with this deeper understanding of the targeted hardware, he or she can make informed choices when designing parallel algorithms and software. The reader should also better appreciate the philosophy behind OpenCL's design in terms of programming, memory, and runtime models.

---

## HARDWARE TRADE-OFFS

Given the history of OpenCL and its early use for graphics APIs and pixel shaders, it is easy to understand how OpenCL has developed as a leading language targeted for GPU programming. OpenCL has become a popular programming API for the high-performance computing market. However, as the number of platforms supporting OpenCL grows (particularly in the embedded systems space), the overall impact of OpenCL should increase substantially.

What is not necessarily clear from this discussion is what a GPU really is and how it differs from these “other devices.” When we develop general-purpose code for a GPU, what makes the device still a “graphics processor?” Is this any more than the graphics-specific logic that the device still carries?

More questions arise when we try to think about this question in any detail. How many cores does a GPU have? To answer that question, we have to decide on a definition of “core.” What is a “many-core” device, and is it significantly different from a “multi-core” device? In general, different architectures choose different approaches to increase performance for a given power/transistor budget. Rather than simply being a raw compute power/electrical power/area trade-off, hardware developers have always also had to consider programming effort. The trade-off between these factors has created a wide divergence in designs.

Multi-core CPUs allow us to maintain the same frequency and complexity of control while adding more cores as transistor sizes reduce. With careful design, power consumption can be kept within reasonable limits. SIMD and very long instruction word (VLIW) architectures attempt to further increase the amount of useful work being performed by improving the ratio of arithmetic operations to control logic. In such cases, it can be difficult to generate workloads to keep the arithmetic logic units (ALUs) satisfied. Multithreading approaches this from a different angle. Rather than increasing the ratio of useful to computation to control logic, it increases the amount of useful work available to occupy computation logic to cover periods in which indirectly useful work is occupying noncompute logic such as memory pipelines. Thereby multithreading increases the utilization of the device we already have. Threading can be seen from the software side, in which case it can apply to multi-core chips as much as to single core designs, but it can also be viewed in terms of single cores managing multiple software threads. Caches and memory system trade-offs allow different architectures to target different data access patterns while trading off transistors for different uses.

In all these cases, we can apply the trade-offs to an individual core or a set of cores, depending on our definition of core. However, we do not need to apply the same trade-off across an entire device. Heterogeneity can enable hardware optimizations for multiple types of algorithm running simultaneously, giving better performance on both and hence overall. The traditional common example of this at the system level is the GPU + CPU combination we see in modern PCs (along with other lower performance processors scattered throughout the system). The latest generations of high-performance processors combine these two aspects into a single device, something that AMD calls the accelerated processing unit (APU).

In reality, we see combinations of these factors in different designs with different target markets, application, and price points. In this section, we examine some of these architectural features and discuss to what degree different common architectures apply them.

## Performance Increase by Frequency, and Its Limitations

The easiest way, as a developer, to think about code we are writing is to create software that executes linearly: Perform one task, complete that task, perform another task. It is considerably more difficult for a developer to write parallel code, this is true even for limited SIMD or vector parallelism as is common in graphics. While multi-component pixels make this simple, in other applications extracting SIMD operations can be substantially more difficult. For this reason, architectures have historically aimed to increase the performance of a single thread of execution before moving to parallelism, with parallelism relegated to high-performance specialist machines in particular markets.

Shrinking of CMOS circuitry has allowed distances between transistors to scale fairly consistently for an extended period of time. The shrinking of distances and reduction in size of the capacitors allowed hardware architects to clock circuits at a higher rate. In turn, this led to Gordon Moore's famous self-fulfilling prophecy about transistor density and its misinterpretations into the realm of execution frequency and overall performance. Certainly, increasing frequency allowed the performance of nonparallel code to increase consistently during that time, such that it became an expectation for software developers until the early 21st century.

However, during the past decade, it has become obvious that continued scaling of clock frequencies of CPUs is not practical, largely due to power and heat dissipation constraints. The reason for this is that power consumption is dependent on frequency in a nonlinear manner. CMOS dynamic power consumption is approximated by the combination of dynamic and static power:

$$P = ACV^2F + VI_{\text{leak}}$$

where

$A$  is the activity factor, or fraction of the number of transistors in the circuit that are switching;

$C$  is the capacitance of the circuit;

$V$  is the voltage applied across the circuit;

$F$  is the switching frequency; and

$I_{\text{leak}}$  is an estimate of the current due to leakage of transistors.

It appears from this equation that power is linear with frequency. In reality, to increase the frequency, one has to increase the rate of flow of charge into and out of the capacitors in the circuit. This requires a comparable increase in voltage, which both scales the dynamic term and also increases the latter, static, term in the equation. For a long time, voltages could reduce with each process generation such that frequency scaling would not increase the power consumption uncontrollably. However, as process technology has reached the small sizes we see today, we can no longer scale the voltage down without increasing the error rate of transistor switching and hence frequency scaling requires voltage increases. The increase in power from any increase in frequency is then substantial.

As a second problem, increasing clock frequency on-chip requires either increasing off-chip memory bandwidth to provide data fast enough to not stall the linear workload running through the processor or increasing the amount of caching in the system.

If we are unable to continue increasing the frequency with the goal of obtaining higher performance, we require other solutions. The heart of any of these solutions is to increase the number of operations performed on a given clock cycle.

## Superscalar Execution

Superscalar and, by extension, out-of-order execution is one solution that has been included on CPUs for a long time; it has been included on x86 designs since the beginning of the Pentium era. In these designs, the CPU maintains dependence information between instructions in the instruction stream and schedules work onto unused functional units when possible. An example of this is shown in [Figure 3.1](#).

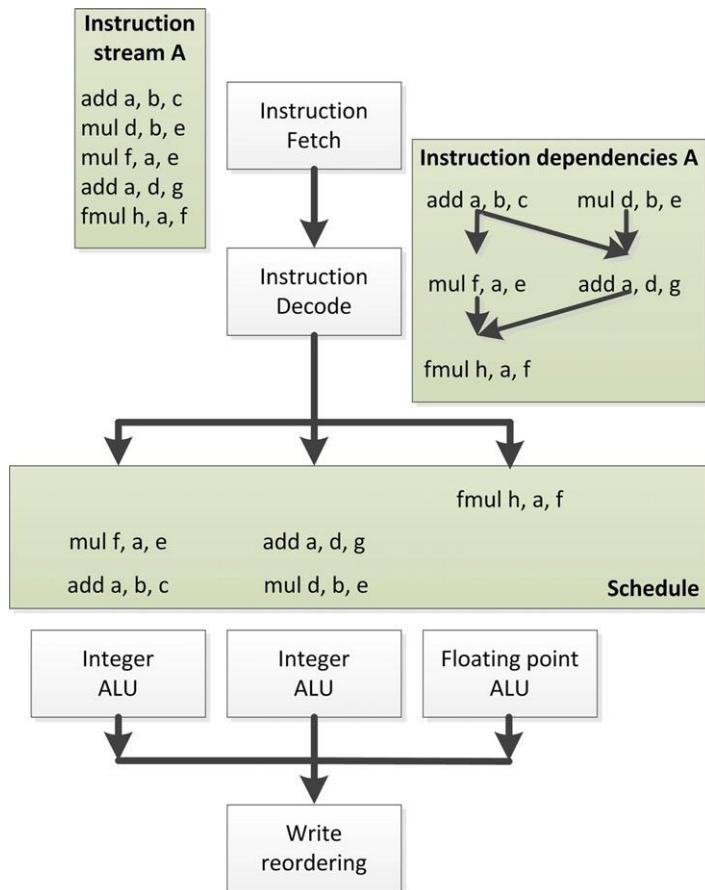
The major advantage of out-of-order logic lies with the software developer. By extracting parallelism from the programmer's code automatically within the hardware, serial code performs faster without any extra developer effort. Indeed, superscalar designs predate frequency scaling limitations by a decade or more, even in popular mass-produced devices, as a way to increase overall performance superlinearly. However, it is not without its disadvantages.

Out-of-order scheduling logic requires a substantial area of the CPU die to maintain dependence information and queues of instructions to deal with dynamic schedules throughout the hardware. In addition, speculative instruction execution necessary to expand the window of out-of-order instructions to execute in parallel results in inefficient execution of throwaway work. As a result, out-of-order execution in a CPU has shown diminishing returns; the industry has taken other approaches to increasing performance as transistor size has decreased, even on the high-performance devices in which superscalar logic was formerly feasible. On embedded and special-purpose devices, extraction of parallelism from serial code has never been as much of a goal, and such designs have historically been less common in these areas.

Good examples of superscalar processors are numerous, from Seymour Cray's CDC 6600 to numerous RISC designs in the 1990s. Currently, high-end CPUs are mostly superscalar. Many GPUs also show superscalar capabilities.

## VLIW

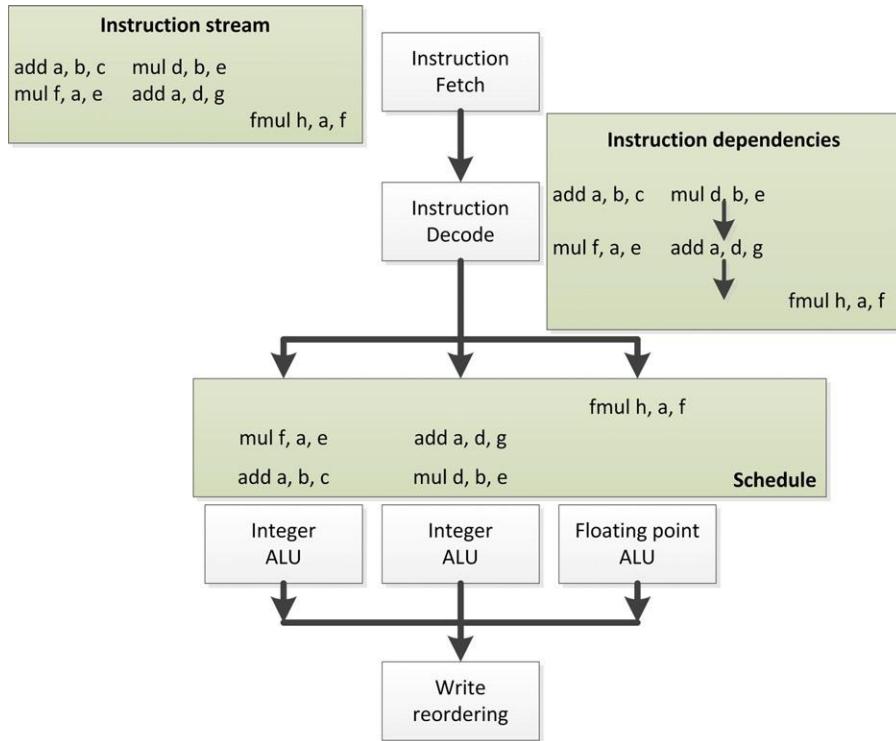
VLIW is a heavily compiler-dependent method for increasing instruction-level parallelism in a processor. Rather than depending entirely on complex out-of-order control logic that maintains dependences in hardware, as we saw when discussing superscalar execution, VLIW moves this dependence analysis work into the compiler. Instead of providing a scalar instruction stream, each issued instruction in a VLIW processor is a long instruction word comprising multiple instructions intended

**FIGURE 3.1**

Out-of-order execution of an instruction stream of simple assembly-like instructions. Note that in this syntax, the destination register is listed first. Add a, b, c is  $a = b + c$ .

to be issued in parallel. This instruction will be mapped directly to the execution pipelines of the processor.

An example of VLIW execution is shown in [Figure 3.2](#). This is the same set of instructions as we saw in [Figure 3.1](#), but rather than being fetched serially, they are fetched in three horizontally arranged packets of up to three instructions. We now see that the dependence structure of this instruction stream is linear, and the hardware will treat it that way rather than extracting and tracking a more complicated dependence graph. The VLIW instruction packets are decoded, and each individual part of the instruction stream maps to a given computation unit in the processor for execution. In some VLIW designs, as in this example, the computation units are

**FIGURE 3.2**

VLIW execution based on the out-of-order diagram in [Figure 3.1](#).

heterogeneous and hence some instructions will only ever be scheduled into a given lane of the VLIW packet stream. Other architectures present more homogeneous hardware such that any instruction can be issued in any location and only dependence information limits the possibilities.

In the example in [Figure 3.2](#), we see that the instruction schedule has gaps: The first two VLIW packets are missing a third entry, and the third is missing its first and second entries. Obviously, the example is very simple, with few instructions to pack, but it is a common problem with VLIW architectures that efficiency can be lost due to the compiler's inability to fully fill packets. This can be due to limitations in the compiler or simply due to an inherent lack of parallelism in the instruction stream. In the latter case, the situation will be no worse than for out-of-order execution but more efficient as the scheduling hardware is reduced in complexity. The former case would end up as a trade-off between efficiency losses from unfilled execution slots and gains from reduced hardware control overhead. In addition, there is an extra cost in compiler development to take into account when performing a cost/benefit analysis for VLIW execution over hardware schedule superscalar execution.

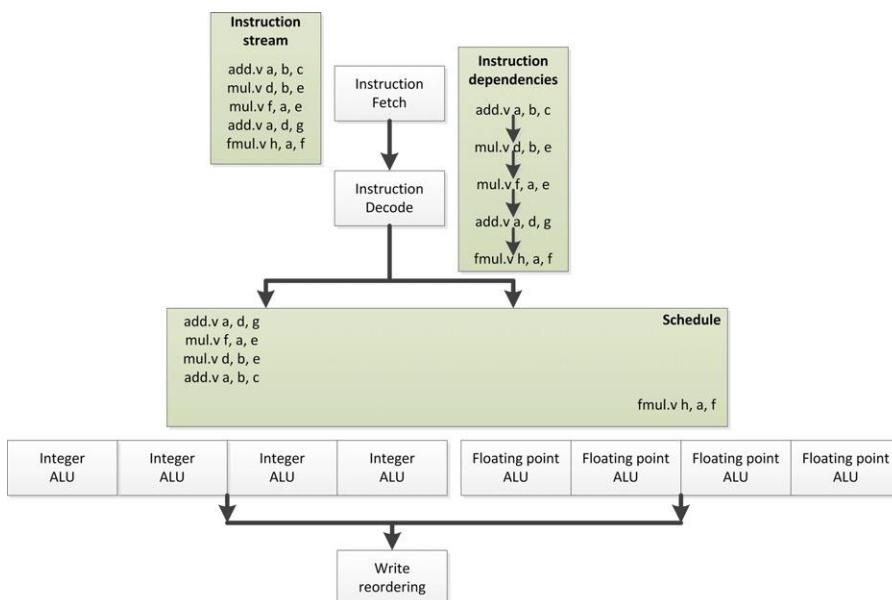
VLIW designs commonly appear in DSP chips. High-end consumer devices currently include the Intel Itanium line of CPUs (known as Explicitly Parallel Instruction Computing) and AMD's R600 GPUs.

## SIMD and Vector Processing

SIMD and its generalization in vector parallelism approach improved efficiency from a slightly different angle compared with the former concepts. Whereas VLIW and hardware-managed superscalar both address extracting independent instruction parallelism from unrelated instructions in an instruction stream, SIMD and vector parallelism directly allow the hardware instructions to target data parallel execution.

Rather than specifying a scalar operation, a single SIMD instruction encapsulates a request that the same operation be performed on multiple data elements—conceptually a short vector operation. Vector computation generalizes this and usually works over long vectors, often pipelining computations over the data rather than executing on all elements simultaneously, and more generally supports gathered read and scattered write operation to and from memory.

If we again look at a variation on the running example as seen in [Figure 3.3](#), we can see that the instruction stream is now issued linearly rather than out of order. However, each of these instructions now executes over a vector of four ALUs at



**FIGURE 3.3**

SIMD execution where a single instruction is scheduled in order but executes over multiple ALUs at the same time.

the same time. The integer instructions issue one by one through the four-way integer vector ALU on the left, and the floating point instructions issue similarly through the four-way floating point ALU on the right. Note that although in this example we are issuing the instructions linearly, there is no reason to assume that we cannot perform these operations within a superscalar or VLIW pipeline, and we will see architectures that do just that in later discussion.

The advantage of SIMD execution is that relative to ALU work, the amount of scheduling and instruction decode logic can both be decreased. We are now performing four operations with a single instruction and a single point in the dependence schedule.

Of course, as with the previous proposals, there are trade-offs. A significant amount of code is not data parallel, and hence it is not possible to find vector instructions to issue. In other cases, it is simply too difficult for the compiler to extract data parallelism from code. For example, vectorization of loops is an ongoing challenge, with little success in anything but the simplest cases. In these cases, we end up with unutilized ALUs and thus transistor wastage.

Vector processors originate in the supercomputer market, but SIMD designs are common in many market segments. CPUs often include SIMD pipelines with explicit SIMD instructions in a scalar instruction stream, including the various forms of Streaming SIMD Extension (SSE) and AVX on x86 chips, the AltiVec extensions for PowerPC, and ARM's NEON extensions. GPU architectures historically included explicit SIMD operations to support pixel vectors, and many modern GPUs also execute over wide implicit SIMD vectors, where the scalar instruction stream describes a single lane. Indeed, such machines can be considered vector machines because in many cases the vector is logical. For example, AMD's Radeon HD6970 architecture executes 64-wide SIMD operations, where each lane has a 128-bit vector register file. These wide vector instructions are pipelined over multiple cycles through a 16-lane SIMD unit.

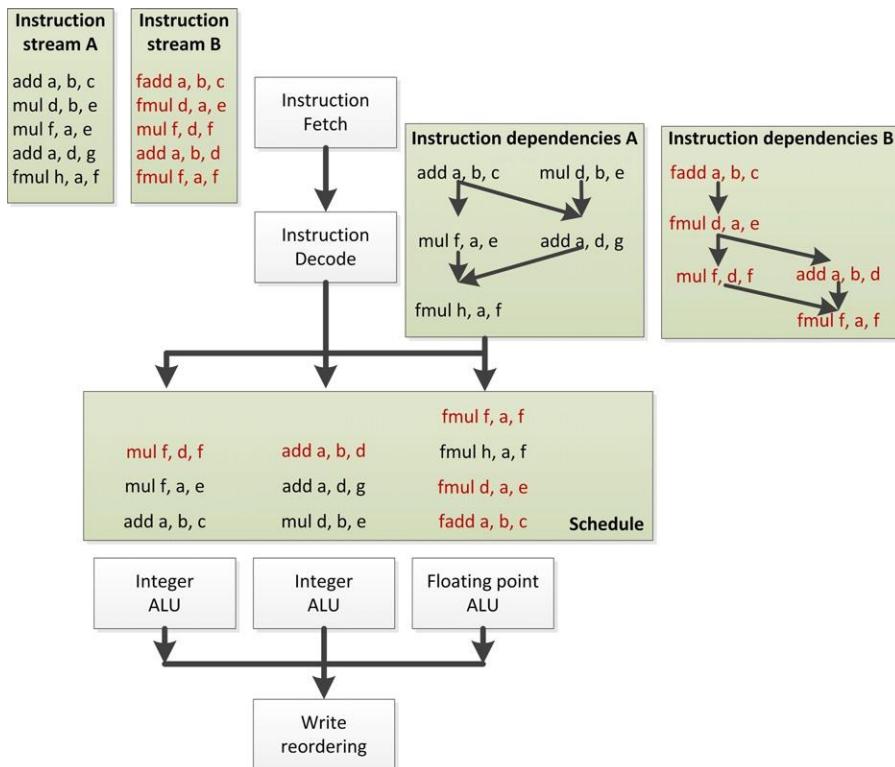
## Hardware Multithreading

The third common form of parallelism after instruction and data is thread parallelism, or the execution of multiple independent instruction streams. Clearly, this form is heavily used on large, parallel machines, but it is also useful within a single CPU core. As previously discussed, extracting independent instructions from an instruction stream is difficult, in terms of both hardware and compiler work, and it is sometimes impossible. Extracting such instruction parallelism from two independent threads is trivial because those threads already guarantee independence. The difficulty in terms of hardware shifts to managing the additional instruction stream and the state that a second instruction stream requires in terms of registers and cache.

There are two main ways to apply on-chip multithreading:

Simultaneous multithreading

Temporal multithreading

**FIGURE 3.4**

The out-of-order schedule seen in [Figure 3.1](#) combined with a second thread and executed simultaneously.

Simultaneous multithreading (SMT) is visualized in [Figure 3.4](#). In this approach, instructions from multiple threads are interleaved on the execution resources by an extension to the superscalar scheduling logic that tracks both instruction dependencies and source threads. The goal is for the execution resources to be more effectively utilized, and in the figure that is the case. A higher proportion of execution slots are occupied with useful work. The cost of this approach is that the instruction dependence and scheduling logic becomes more complicated as it manages two distinct sets of dependencies, resources, and execution queues.

[Figure 3.5](#) shows the simpler time-sliced version of chip multithreading. In this case, each thread is executed in consecutive execution slots in round-robin fashion. For the purposes of simplification, the diagram shows a single shared ALU.

The following are advantages of this approach:

- The logic to handle the scheduling is simple.
- Pipeline latency can be covered by scheduling more threads, reducing the amount of forwarding logic.

**FIGURE 3.5**

Two threads scheduled in time slice fashion.

- Stalls of a single thread due to a cache miss, waiting for a branch to be computed, or similar events can be covered by changing the order of thread execution and running more threads than necessary to cover pipeline latency.

This last case is the most useful in scaling to complicated problems. Many architectures are able to run more threads than necessary. When a thread reaches some sort of stall, it can be removed from the ready queue such that only threads in the ready queue are scheduled for execution. Once the stall ends, the thread can be placed back in the ready queue. In this manner, although a single thread might execute more slowly than on an out-of-order machine, the total throughput of the machine is kept

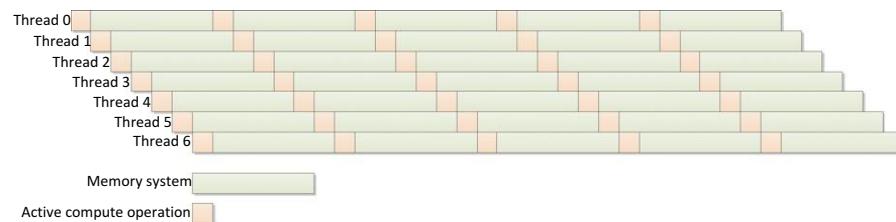
high and utilization of compute resources can be maintained without overcomplicating the control logic. Taken to an extreme, this sort of heavy multithreading can be viewed as throughput computing: maximizing throughput at the possible expense of latency. The principle is shown in [Figure 3.6](#).

Both forms of chip multithreading are common. The MTA design from Tera is a classic time-sliced multithreading supercomputer. The MTA design was difficult to manufacture; however, Cray's subsequent implementation, the MTA-2 design, utilized 128 register sets per CPU using fast thread switching between threads within this state and skipping stalled threads. The XMT design extends this further to fit multithreaded processors in standard AMD Opteron-based Cray systems. Sun's Niagara series of chips implements a multi-core multithreaded design (8 per core) to achieve low power and high throughput on data-center workloads. Intel's Pentium 4 and Nehalem/Sandy Bridge designs implement a form of SMT known as "hyper-threading." Modern GPU designs run numerous threads in a temporal fashion on each core, where the number is generally resource limited: On the current generation of AMD GPUs, this is usually 8–10 threads per core to cover latency and stalls.

## Multi-Core Architectures

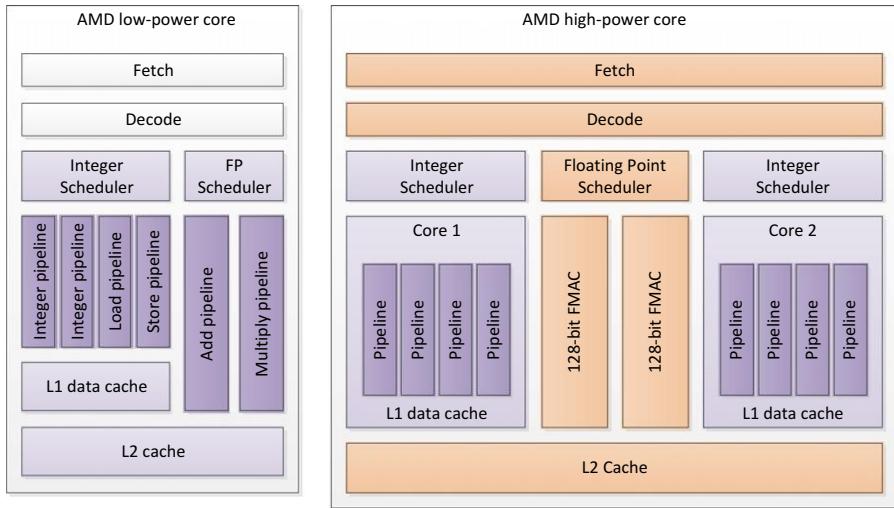
Conceptually at least, the simplest approach to increasing the amount of work performed per clock cycle is to simply clone a single core multiple times on the chip. In the simplest case, each of these cores executes largely independently, sharing data through the memory system, usually through a cache coherency protocol. This design is at its simplest a scaling down of traditional multisocket server SMP systems that have been used to increase performance for decades, in some cases to extreme degrees.

However, multi-core systems come in different guises, and it can be very difficult to define a core. For example, a mainstream CPU, at the high end, generally includes a wide range of functional blocks such that it is independent of other cores on the chip, barring interfacing logic, memory controllers, and so on that would be unlikely to count as cores. However, AMD's "Bulldozer" (high-power core) design shown



**FIGURE 3.6**

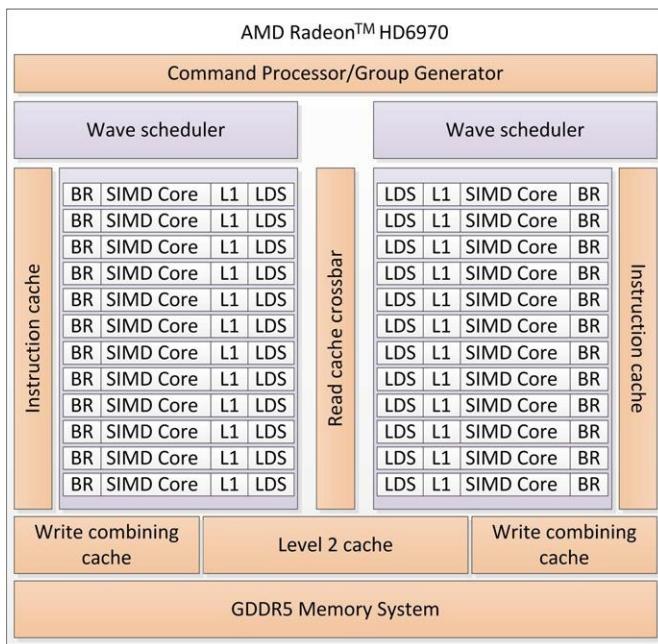
Taking temporal multithreading to an extreme as throughput computing: A large number of threads interleave execution to keep the device busy, whereas each individual thread takes longer to execute than the theoretical minimum.

**FIGURE 3.7**

The AMD Bobcat and Bulldozer high-level designs (not shown to any shared scale). Bobcat (left) follows a traditional approach mapping functional units to cores, in a low-power design. Bulldozer (right) combines two cores within a module, offering sharing of some functional units. The two shades in the Bulldozer diagram show the difference between functional blocks that are shared between cores and those that are not.

alongside the simpler “Bobcat” (low-power core) design in [Figure 3.7](#) shares functional units between pairs of cores in a replicable unit termed a module, in which a single thread will run on each core in a traditional fashion with the hardware interleaving floating point instructions onto the shared floating point pipelines. The aim of such a design is to raise efficiency by improving occupancy of functional units.

In a similar manner, GPU designs show a different definition of core. Modern GPUs have tens of cores—at the current high end, between 16 and 32 varying levels of complexity. However, if we look at the AMD Radeon HD 6970 high-level diagram shown in [Figure 3.8](#), we see a similar approach to Bulldozer taken to an extreme. Although the device has 24 SIMD cores, by looking at the execution units in the fairest way to compare with traditional CPUs, those SIMD cores only execute ALU operations—both floating point and integer. Instruction scheduling, decode, and dispatch are executed by the wave scheduler units. The wave schedulers are so named because the unit of scheduling is a wide SIMD thread context known as a wavefront. Indeed, on the 6970, there are two of these to prevent overly high complexity, whereas lower capability parts in the series use only one and scale the number of SIMD cores. This is another example of efficiency by splitting into multiple cores. Memory operations on the 6970 are passed from the wave scheduler directly to the memory system without executing on the SIMD cores such that memory work is shared between cores much as the floating point units are shared on the Bulldozer design.



**FIGURE 3.8**

The AMD Radeon™ HD6970 GPU architecture. The device is divided into two halves where instruction control: scheduling and dispatch is performed by the level wave scheduler for each half. The 24 16-lane SIMD cores execute four-way VLIW instructions on each SIMD lane and contain private level 1 caches and local data shares (LDS).

## Integration: Systems-on-Chip and the APU

In the embedded space, a more heterogeneous approach to multi-core design is common. To achieve low power, embedded developers have constructed complicated systems-on-chip (SoCs) combining varied components into a compact and cost-effective design. Combining specialized components in this way allows devices to be optimized for a particular use case and power envelope, which is particularly important in markets such as the design of mobile phones.

Benefits from SoCs are the following:

- Combining multiple elements into a single device allows for a single manufacturing process and a single product to deal with, allowing for lower manufacturing costs.
- The smaller number of packages takes up less space in a final device, allowing for lower device cost and smaller form factor, which are vital in markets such as mobile telephony.
- Smaller distances mean less power used during communication and easier sharing of data through a single memory system.

- Lower communication latencies can lead to improved turnaround times for workloads dispatched to coprocessors.

Good examples of this approach in the mobile phone space are the Snapdragon SoC from Qualcomm and the OMAP series from Texas Instruments. Designs such as these combine an implementation of the ARM ISA, a mobile GPU, memory controllers, and various wireless and media processing components.

At the higher performance end of the market, Sony, Toshiba, and IBM developed the Cell Broadband engine processor that combines a number of small, high-performance but simple cores with a main traditional full-capability core with the aim of improving the performance/Watt characteristics. AMD and Intel have both developed combined CPU/GPU SoCs termed APUs by AMD, enabling high-performance graphics and CPU power in a more efficient single chip package.

## Cache Hierarchies and Memory Systems

Whereas in the early years of supercomputers memory bandwidth and latency were such that CPUs could always access the data they needed when it was needed, it has been a long time since this has been the case. Currently, it is not unusual that the latency between a memory request on the CPU and the data being returned from memory is hundreds or even thousands of CPU cycles. On a single threaded CPU, out-of-order logic would be impossibly complicated to cover that much latency.

Fortunately, most applications do not make entirely independent memory accesses. In general, memory access patterns express some degree of locality, which will be either of the following:

- Spatial: Two or more memory accesses read or write addresses that are near each other, by some measure, in memory.
- Temporal: Two or more memory accesses read or write the same address (i.e., the same read is performed at different times).

These two forms of locality lead to the conclusion that if we can store a value read from memory and its neighbors, later reads will be able to reuse that data. As a result, CPU designers have added complicated layers of intermediate memory caches to support this optimization.

Caches come in varied designs, but they can be divided into two general categories that are applied dependent on the workload. CPU caches tend to be designed to minimize latency. To achieve this, caches are large with complicated hierarchies to move as much of the data as close to the CPU core as possible. Out-of-order logic can only cover a limited amount of latency, so the fewer cycles to access data, the better. In addition, keeping data close to the execution units minimizes power consumption: Long-distance data movement is a significant component of CPU power usage.

Throughput processors are more latency tolerant, using threading to cover the cycles between request and data return. In these designs, the goal of caching is less

to minimize latency, so the large multilevel hierarchy is less common, and more to reduce traffic across the limited memory buses. Smaller caches that allow neighboring accesses to be caught but are concerned less with very long periods of reuse are often seen in these situations, acting more as spatial filters. Wide SIMD units and programming models aim for efficient coalesced memory access to increase the size of memory transactions issues. The result is that dedicating logic to arithmetic units becomes a better use of transistors. In addition, higher latency, higher bandwidth memory interconnects allow this design to work more efficiently, although system-level issues such as pin availability and necessity to allow swapping of memory chips are equally important in this decision. One extension of this bias toward spatial locality that we often see in GPU design is to lay memory out such that two-dimensional accesses are efficiently cached.

Some designs including GPUs and the cell processor include software-managed scratchpad memory spaces as well as or in place of cache hierarchies. These buffers enable higher performance at a given power and area budget, but they require more complicated programming.

The reality of any given design is that it balances caching levels and features based on the expected workloads for the processor. Unfortunately, there is no right answer for all processor design/workload combinations.

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## THE ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN SPACE

In the real world, we do not see many architectures that fit cleanly into just one of the previously mentioned categories. The reality is that computer architecture is a huge design space with enormous variation in all directions. Common current architectures sit in that design space at various points.

This is most important in helping us realize that some of the publicly held viewpoints of today's architectures can be overly simplistic. For example, in the domain of GPUs, we often encounter statements such as the following:

- CPUs are serial, GPUs are parallel.
- CPUs have a small number of cores, GPUs have hundreds.
- GPUs run thousands of threads, CPUs run one (or two).

The reality of any design is far more complicated than that, with wide variation in internal buffers, number of pipelines, type of pipelines, and so on. The theme of this chapter is to show that the difference between GPUs and CPUs, or indeed most modern architectures, is not fundamental. The majority of the visible architectural differences we commonly see today are simply points on a sliding scale, a set of parameterization knobs applied to basic designs. These are the differences the average programmer needs to understand: Only the expert need be concerned with ratios between buffer sizes and arranging instructions for hardware co-issue.

In this section, we discuss several real architectures and where they fit in the design space trading off some of the features we discussed previously. It is hoped that

this will help to give a more nuanced feel for architectural trade-offs and help develop views on what algorithms may or may not work well on real architectures. [Figure 3.9](#) gives a graphical hint toward some of the architectural trade-offs while ignoring caching to keep the diagram somewhat simple. In the design, we limit ourselves to extreme simplifications. The goal is to show that the wide SIMD and state storage design of GPUs is a long way along a spectrum from simple CPUs in terms of use of area, and that maximum performance and ease of achieving good performance depend on these design choices.

## CPU Designs

The devices that most people are used to developing on can be loosely described as “CPUs.” Even within this space, there is considerable variation in how different forms of parallelism are utilized.

### ***Low-Power CPUs***

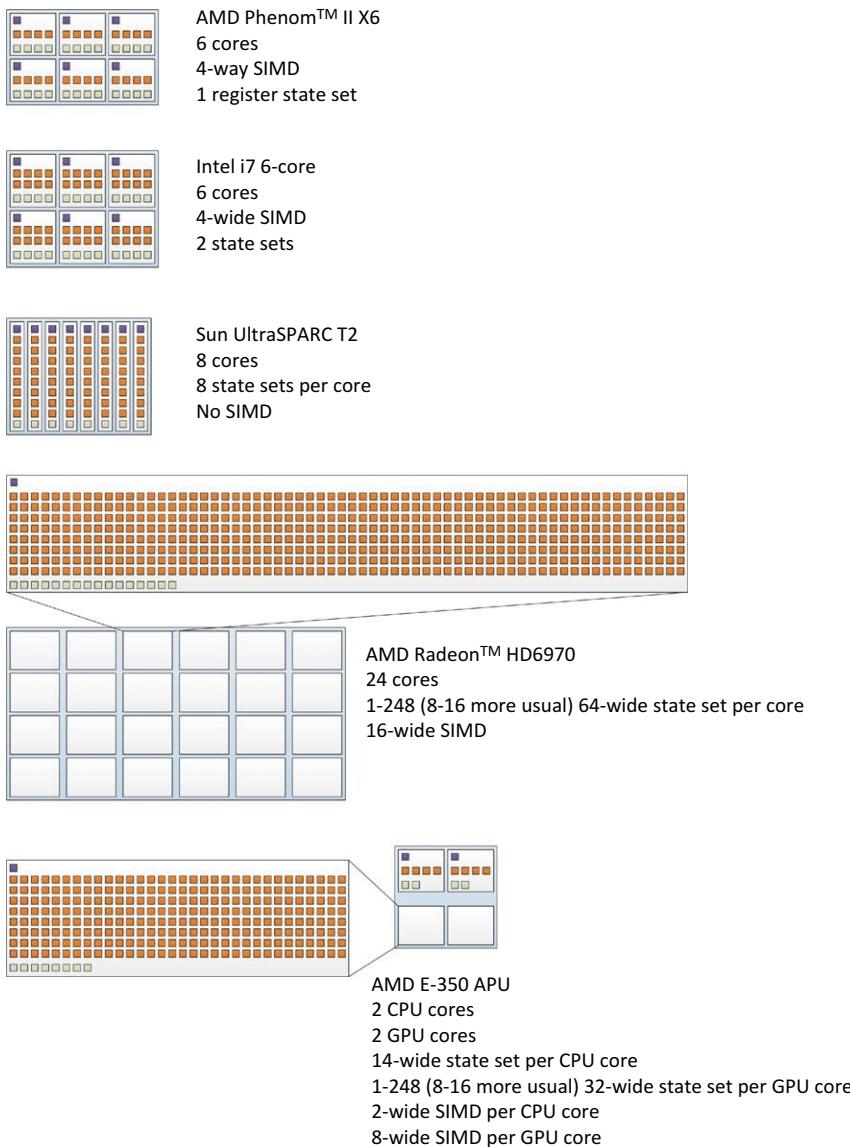
At the very lowest end of the power spectrum, CPU cores are very simple, in-order cores. At this level, power consumption is the most important factor in design, with performance a secondary consideration. Such designs often do not support floating point operations and have no need for parallelism.

Currently, the most widespread low-power CPU ISA is the ARM ISA developed in IP form by ARM Holdings. The ARM architecture originated in the Acorn RISC machine concept from Acorn Computers as a desktop architecture, but recently the simplicity of the architecture has made it dominant in the mobile and embedded markets, with a foray into Acorn’s own desktop projects from 1996 to 1998 as the DEC-manufactured StrongARM. ARM designs come in a wide variety of forms because the ISA IP is licensed to manufacturers who are at liberty to design their own cores. Usually, ARM cores are combined within SoCs with other units such as cellular modems, embedded graphics processors, video accelerators, and similar devices.

Most variants on the ARM ISA have been in-order cores with three to seven pipeline stages. The Cortex-A8, -A9, and -A15 cores, based on the ARMv7 ISA, are superscalar and multi-core with up to four symmetric cores. The ARMv7-based cores may also support the Neon SIMD instructions, giving 64- and 128-bit SIMD operations in each core.

The AMD Bobcat CPU core that was shown in [Figure 3.7](#) is the low-power core in AMD’s current CPU lineup designed for a power range of 1–10 W. To achieve the low-power figures, Bobcat cores are clocked more slowly than the high-end parts as well as being carefully designed to reduce overhead—at the cost of lower peak performance. Bobcat is a 64-bit design, supports two-way out-of-order issue, and also has a 64-bit SIMD unit that can multicycle SSE operations.

Intel’s Atom design takes a slightly different approach to performance compared with AMD’s Bobcat. Atom does not support out-of-order execution, and as a result, single threaded performance suffers. However, Atom does support a form

**FIGURE 3.9**

A selection of the architectures discussed in this section giving a graphical hint toward their trade-offs in use of silicon area. Note, in particular, the preference for state storage in the GPU designs compared with the CPU designs. Note that the definition of “ALU” in this diagram is somewhat flexible. We are counting both integer ALUs and floating point ALUs but not necessarily counting separate multiplication and addition ALUs as distinct even when they can dual issue. The important factor is the rough ratio to state, not the precise numbers for a given device.

of temporal multithreading executing two threads at once. This allows Atom's performance on multithreaded workloads to be competitive in some circumstances.

In general, these low-power CPUs support in-order or narrow out-of-order execution with relatively narrow SIMD units. Variation in the number of cores can be used to scale to varied power/performance points in multithreaded situations. In all cases, these features are kept simple compared with desktop CPUs as a method for reducing power consumption.

### **Mainstream Desktop CPUs**

Mainstream desktop CPUs from AMD and Intel do not look much different from the Bobcat design. In each case, they slightly increase the complexity of each element.

The AMD Phenom II represents AMD's current mainstream CPUs and is a constituent of the Llano APU that we discuss later. The Phenom II as sold has up to 6 cores (with the dual die Magny–Cours design having 12), allowing a high degree of parallel execution. The CPUs have large caches, up to 512 kB L2/core and 6MB L3 shared.

Each core carries a full 128-bit SSE unit that can issue add, multiply, and miscellaneous instructions simultaneously. It has a wide L1 cache interface (128 bits/cycle) and decodes, fetches, and issues six integer operations in parallel. Thus, the superscalar design has a wider capability than seen in the Bobcat core, which, along with increases in caches and branch predictor logic and a much higher clock frequency target, accounts for its higher performance, higher power consumption market segment.

Intel's Sandy Bridge microarchitecture occupies a similar market segment. Like Phenom, Sandy Bridge supports full 128-bit SSE operations through multiple pipelines and issues up to six operations of mixed types in parallel. In addition, Sandy Bridge supports 256-bit Advanced Vector Extensions (AVX) operations, allowing up to 16 single precision floating point operations per cycle. As with Atom, Intel added hardware multithreading support to Nehalem, Sandy Bridge's predecessor, and maintained this in Sandy Bridge. In this case, it is true SMT: Each core can mix operations from a pair of threads in the execution units. This increase in scheduling complexity is traded against the increased utilization of the functional units.

AMD's Bulldozer core, seen in [Figure 3.7](#), increases parallel thread execution by taking a middle ground between increasing core count and increasing threads per core. Rather than increasing core count as in earlier AMD designs, which results in large per-core overhead, or using true SMT as in Sandy Bridge, with its high degree of scheduling complexity, Bulldozer takes a middle ground.

The approach used in Bulldozer is to create a second independent integer core with its own set of private ALUs, state and scheduler. However, the floating point ALUs are shared between pairs of cores, as are the fetch and decode blocks and the level 2 cache. The goal of this design is to only share functional units that are not likely to be overly heavily contended in real workloads.

Each core supports out-of-order execution through four ALU pipelines. The shared floating point ALU is a pair of 128-bit (SSE) SIMD units that can combine

to execute AVX instructions. Bulldozer relies on multi-core execution to increase its thread count. However, each core is a relatively small area, so a higher core density should be possible compared with the Phenom design.

With mainstream CPUs, then, we see wide multi-issue out-of-order hardware, high clock speeds, and large caches—all features intended to maintain high single threaded performance with reasonably high power draw. In-core multithreading is kept minimal or nonexistent, and SIMD units are set at a width that does not waste too much area when not in use.

### ***Intel Itanium 2***

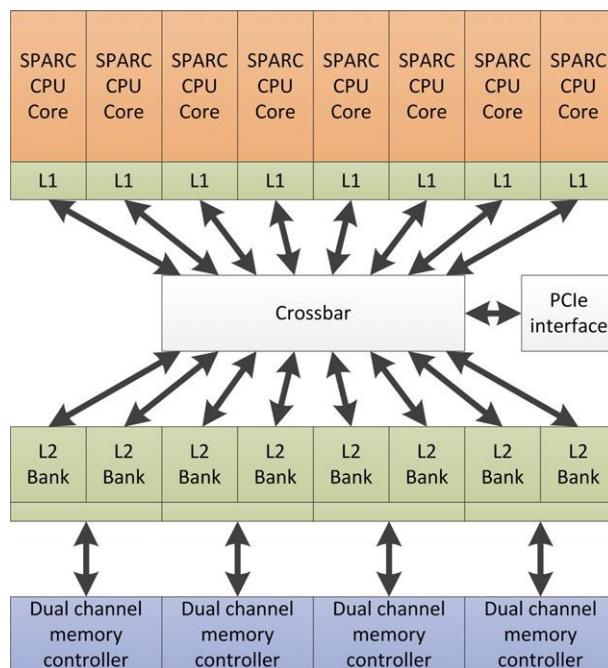
Intel's Itanium architecture and its more successful successor, the Itanium 2, represent an interesting attempt to make a mainstream server processor based on VLIW techniques. The Itanium architecture includes a large number of registers (128 integers and 128 floating points). It uses a VLIW approach known as EPIC, in which instructions are stored in 128-bit three-instruction bundles. The CPU fetches two bundles per cycle from L1 cache and hence executes six instructions per clock cycle. There are two 64-bit SIMD units on each core, and the processor is designed to be efficiently combined into multi-core and multi-socket servers.

The goal of EPIC is to move the problem of exploiting parallelism from runtime to compile time based. It does this by feeding back information from execution traces into the compiler. It is the task of the compiler to package instructions into the VLIW/EPIC packets, and as a result, performance on the architecture is highly dependent on compiler capability. To assist with this numerous masking, dependence flags between bundles, pre-fetch instructions, speculative loads, and rotating register files are built into the architecture. To improve the throughput of the processor, Itanium 2 implementations support two-way temporal multithreading, switching threads on certain events such as memory accesses that are likely to have long latency.

### ***Niagara***

The Niagara design ([Figure 3.10](#)), originally from Sun and under continuing development at Oracle, takes a throughput computing multithreaded approach to server workloads. Workloads on many servers, particularly transactional and web workloads, are often heavily multithreaded, with a large number of lightweight integer threads using the memory system. The Niagara, or UltraSPARC T series (with the T3 now just SPARC T3), is designed to efficiently execute a large number of such threads to maximize overall work throughput with minimal power consumption. Each of the cores is designed to be simple and efficient, with no complex out-of-order execution logic. Each core is designed to interleave operations from eight threads through two execution units. [Figure 3.9](#) shows how much state is present compared with decode logic or ALUs, showing a clear preference for latency hiding and simplicity of logic compared with the mainstream x86 designs.

To support these threads, the design requires multiple sets of registers but as a trade-off requires less speculative register storage than a superscalar design. In addition, coprocessors allow acceleration of cryptographic operations, and an on-chip

**FIGURE 3.10**

Diagrammatic representation of the Niagara 2 CPU from Sun/Oracle. The design intends to make a high level of threading efficient: Note its relative similarity to the GPU design seen in Figure 3.8. Given enough threads, we can cover all memory access time with useful compute without extracting ILP through complicated hardware techniques.

Ethernet controller improves network throughput. The UltraSPARC T2 ([Grohoski, 2006](#)) has 8 cores with eight threads each. The SPARC T3 expands this to 16 cores, with eight threads each.

## GPU Architectures

Like CPUs, GPU architectures come in a wide variety of options. Here, we briefly discuss several before going into more depth about OpenCL programming for the AMD architecture. GPUs tend to be heavily multithreaded with sophisticated hardware task management because the graphics workloads they are designed to process consist of complex vertex, geometry, and pixel processing task graphs. These tasks and the pixels they process are highly parallel, which gives a substantial amount of independent work to process for devices with multiple cores and highly latency-tolerant multithreading. It is important to understand that barring sophisticated mechanisms to manage task queues, or to hide SIMD execution behind hardware

management systems, GPUs are simply multithreaded processors with their parameterization aimed at processing large numbers of pixels very efficiently.

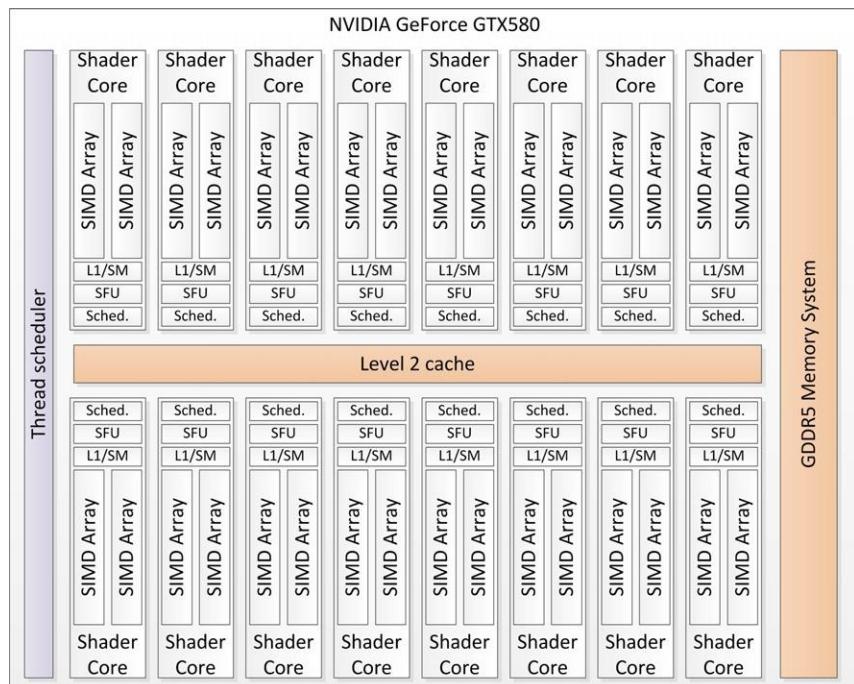
### ***Handheld GPUs***

Handheld GPUs have only recently started to gain general-purpose capabilities, with ARM and Imagination Technologies, in particular, discussing fully OpenCL-compliant IP to be released in the near future. At this scale, GPUs consist of a small number of cores, typically one to four, where each executes a large number of individual threads on a small pixel-size SIMD unit not entirely dissimilar to an SSE vector pipeline. For example, ARM's Mali-T604 architecture uses three types of computation pipeline in each of up to four cores. Intercore task management supports managing workloads across the cores: Much GPU threading in general is hardware controlled rather than exposed to the operating system. An embedded design such as the Mali-T604 can share the same global memory as embedded CPUs, reducing the need to copy data across memory spaces; in the ARM design, this data is fully cached.

### ***At the High End: AMD Radeon HD6970 and NVIDIA GTX580***

High-end desktop GPUs and their derivatives aim more for performance than maximal power efficiency. To achieve high memory bandwidth, a large number of pins are dedicated to memory traffic and GDDR5 memory is used to increase the per-pin memory bandwidth at the cost of higher latency. These devices use a mixture of features to improve compute throughput. These include wide SIMD arrays to maximize arithmetic throughput for a given number of issued instructions. The AMD Radeon HD6970 architecture seen in [Figure 3.8](#) has 16 SIMD lanes in hardware and uses vector pipelining to execute a 64-long vector over four cycles. The NVIDIA GTX580 architecture ([Figure 3.11](#)) also uses a 16-wide SIMD unit and executes a 32-long vector over two cycles. Both devices are multithreaded, supporting numerous wide SIMD threads on each core. On the AMD architecture, for example, up to 32 active wide SIMD threads called wavefronts require state stored on the SIMD core (248 per wave scheduler), which can be selected from for execution on each cycle. In both cases, the number of wavefronts able to be active on a core depends on the resource constraints of the wavefronts in terms of register and local memory requirements. As a result, the effective number that can be active is lower than this, likely 4–8 wavefronts.

In both architectures, the intermediate language that programs the device is a lanewide SIMD model such that an instruction stream represents a single lane of the SIMD unit, so that each SIMD unit is visible, rather than vectorwide instructions as with x86 SSE or AVX instructions. Program counters are managed per SIMD vector such that a hardware thread is really a wide vector. The single-lane programs are grouped together using some degree of hardware vectorization, which allows efficient management of divergent branches, and stacks of masks to support predicated execution. To enable instruction-level parallelism, the AMD architectures use VLIW instruction streams in each lane extracted by the low-level shader compiler from the intermediate language. In the HD5xxx designs and most of the HD6xxx designs, this

**FIGURE 3.11**

The NVIDIA GTX580 architecture. This device has 16 cores, with two SIMD arrays of 16 lanes in each core. Each core includes a shared memory/level one cache and a separate array of special function units to perform more complicated operations. The fine-grained scheduler chooses hardware threads, or “warps,” to map to each SIMD array as they are available to execute.

is a five-wide VLIW instruction, where all lanes are capable of most arithmetic instructions but the fifth is capable of specialized instructions such as efficient sine and cosine. In the Radeon HD6970 architecture, the VLIW is four-wide, with four identical VLIW lanes. The NVIDIA design in the GTX580 architecture achieves instruction-level parallelism by co-issuing two threads at once over two execution pipelines. Both designs are superscalar in that execution resources can issue memory access, arithmetic, and other operations from threads running on the same core, if not necessarily from the same thread.

Like the mobile GPUs on the market, the high-end AMD and NVIDIA models comprise multiple cores. Defining a core as the closest reasonable mapping to the equivalent in a CPU architecture, the AMD design has 24 cores and the NVIDIA design has 16.

Each of these cores includes a scratchpad memory buffer, which takes area on the chip and as a result is excluded from many handheld designs. This scratchpad memory, known as local data share on the AMD architecture, is used to store the OpenCL

local memory structures. Local memory is allocated per workgroup and fixed for the execution of those groups, so this physical structure limits the amount of concurrency if each workgroup uses a significant amount of local allocation. This memory is directly mapped to each executing group, is very fast, and consumes relatively little power compared with hardware-managed caches.

The Radeon HD6970 example in [Figure 3.9](#) shows just how much register state GPUs support in comparison with CPU designs: There are many threads (eight in the diagram, which is typical), each of which is 64 wide on the AMD architecture.

## APU and APU-Like Designs

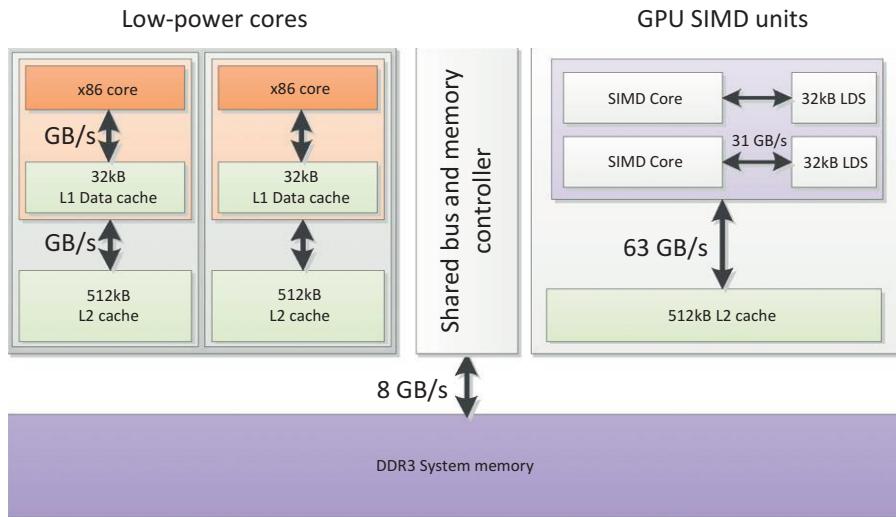
SoCs have been common in embedded markets for a long time. Currently, there is a move toward SoCs being used for much higher performance systems and applications. Such fused processors, most obviously combining CPU and GPU designs, begin to encroach on the netbook, notebook, and low-end desktop spaces. It is easy to imagine such designs moving into high-end desktops. In this space we might see the power saving capabilities of integration combined with the substantial compute capability of a discrete GPU.

Currently, the three major architectures in this market are AMD's Bobcat-based and Phenom II-based Fusion products ([Advanced Micro Devices, 2011](#)) and Intel's Sandy Bridge range.

The AMD designs targeted at low-end netbook and subnotebook machines with a 9–18 W power budget are known as Ontario or Zacate and are based on the low-power Bobcat CPU core combined with a low-end GPU. These components are produced together on a single silicon die on a 40-nm process. The highest spec model in the range is shown in [Figure 3.12](#). In this case, the GPU is an eight-wide SIMD unit based on the five-way VLIW of the 5xxx GPU generation from which the architecture is derived. The two Bobcat cores have two-way SIMD units, each allowing SSE instructions to be issued from each core over two cycles. AMD's higher performance APU, Llano, is based on the Phenom II core and a significantly higher performance GPU.

Intel's Sandy bridge APU design ([Figure 3.13](#)) is based on four cores of the Sandy Bridge CPU core discussed previously. The GPU is part of the ongoing development of Intel's in-house embedded GPU design, which currently does not support OpenCL but does enable the efficient graphics support expected from these fused processor architectures.

The APU architectures offer scope for sharing data structures between GPU and CPU cores such that the major communication bottleneck of many GPU compute workloads is alleviated. This means that latency can be improved for workloads dispatched to the GPU and more tightly integrated algorithms between GPU and CPU cores can be created that are currently not practical due to performance constraints arising from the latency of the PCI express bus. This improvement comes at the cost of CPU-style memory bandwidth shared between both devices, losing the very high-bandwidth exotic memory interfaces of discrete GPUs. It is likely that this trade-off is advantageous in the wide range of algorithms that are inefficient when



**FIGURE 3.12**

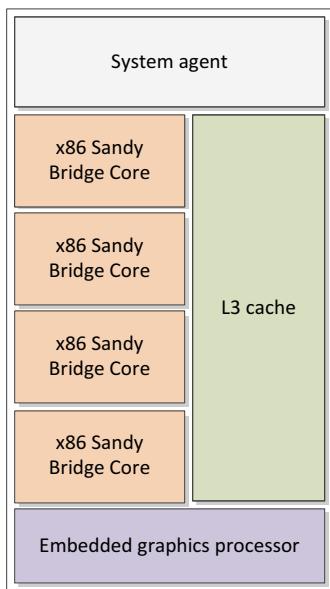
The E350 “Zacate” AMD APU consists of two 8-wide SIMD cores with five-way VLIW units and two “Bobcat” low-power x86 cores connected via a shared bus and a single interface to DRAM.

implemented purely on the GPU, due to the GPU throughput-based design being sub-optimal for serial code, and in those algorithms in which communication is the performance bottleneck.

## SUMMARY

In this chapter, we discussed the types of architecture that OpenCL might run on and the trade-offs in the architectural design space that these architectures embody. After examining OpenCL more closely, in Chapter 6 we discuss how the OpenCL model maps to a specific architecture in the form of a combination of AMD Phenom II CPU and HD6970 GPU.

The content of this chapter will benefit from further reading; however, for many of the specific devices, concise references can be difficult to find. The fourth edition of *Computer Organization and Design* (Patterson and Hennessy, 2008) discusses many architectural issues in-depth, including the AMD Opteron, Intel Nehalem (pre-decessor to Sandy Bridge, sharing many features), UltraSPARC T2, and various other designs. It also contains a section on NVIDIA’s GPU architecture. The fifth edition of *Computer Architecture* (Hennessy and Patterson, 2011) extends these concepts. NVIDIA released a white paper on its Fermi architecture in 2009 (NVIDIA, 2009). Chapter 2 of the Itanium 2 processor manual (Intel, 2002) gives a reasonably high-level overview of the EPIC implementation and processor pipeline.



**FIGURE 3.13**

The Intel Sandy Bridge design. Although not termed an “APU” by Intel, the concept is the same as the devices under that category from AMD. Intel combines four Sandy Bridge x86 cores with an improved version of its embedded graphics processor.

---

## References

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- Grohoski, G. (2006). *Niagara-2: A Highly Threaded Server-on-a-Chip*. 18th Hot Chips Symposium, August.
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# Basic OpenCL Examples

# 4

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## INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 2, we discussed the OpenCL specification and how it can be used to implement programs for heterogeneous platforms. Chapter 3 covered the architecture of some possible OpenCL targets. In this chapter, we discuss a few more complex examples, which build on the simple examples such as vector addition discussed in Chapter 2. We cover the implementation of both the host and the device code in a methodical manner.

The aim of this chapter is to give the reader more intuition of how OpenCL can be used to write data-parallel programs. The implementations in this chapter are complete OpenCL examples. However, they have not been tuned to take advantage of any particular device architecture. The aim is to provide the user with implementation guidelines for OpenCL applications and to discuss implementations that can serve as a baseline for the architecture-specific optimization of applications in later chapters.

---

## EXAMPLE APPLICATIONS

In this section, we discuss the implementation of some example OpenCL applications. The examples covered here include image rotation, matrix multiplication, and image convolution.

### Simple Matrix Multiplication Example

A simple serial C implementation of matrix multiplication is shown here (remember that OpenCL host programs can be written in either C or using the OpenCL C++ Wrapper API). The code iterates over three nested `for` loops, multiplying Matrix A by Matrix B and storing the result in Matrix C. The two outer loops are used to iterate over each element of the output matrix. The innermost loop will iterate over the individual elements of the input matrices to calculate the result of each output location.

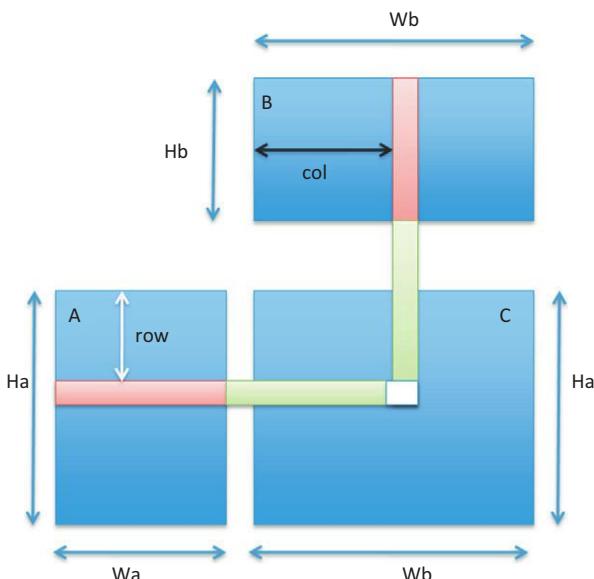
```

// Iterate over the rows of Matrix A
for(int i = 0; i < heightA; i++) {
    // Iterate over the columns of Matrix B
    for(int j = 0; j < widthB; j++) {
        C[i][j] = 0;
        // Multiply and accumulate the values in the current row
        // of A and column of B
        for(int k = 0; k < widthA; k++) {
            C[i][j] += A[i][k] * B[k][j];
        }
    }
}

```

It is straightforward to map the serial implementation to OpenCL, as the two outer *for-loops* work independently of each other. This means that a separate work-item can be created for each output element of the matrix. The two outer for-loops are mapped to the two-dimensional range of work-items for the kernel.

The independence of output values inherent in matrix multiplication is shown in [Figure 4.1](#). Each work-item reads in its own row of Matrix A and its column of Matrix B. The data being read is multiplied and written at the appropriate location of the output Matrix C.



**FIGURE 4.1**

Each output value in a matrix multiplication is generated independently of all others.

```
// widthA = heightB for valid matrix multiplication
__kernel void simpleMultiply(
    __global float* outputC,
    int widthA,
    int heightA,
    int widthB,
    int heightB,
    __global float* inputA,
    __global float* inputB) {

    //Get global position in Y direction
    int row = get_global_id(1);
    //Get global position in X direction
    int col = get_global_id(0);

    float sum = 0.0f;

    //Calculate result of one element of Matrix C
    for (int i = 0; i < widthA; i++) {
        sum += inputA[row*widthA+i] * inputB[i*widthB+col];
    }

    outputC[row*widthB+col] = sum;
}
```

Now that we have understood the implementation of the data-parallel kernel, we need to write the OpenCL API calls that move the data to the device. The implementation steps for the rest of the matrix multiplication application are summarized in [Figure 4.2](#). We need to create a context for the device we wish to use. Using the context, we create the command queue, which is used to send commands to the device. Once the command queue is created, we can send the input data to the device, run the parallel kernel, and read the resultant output data back from the device.

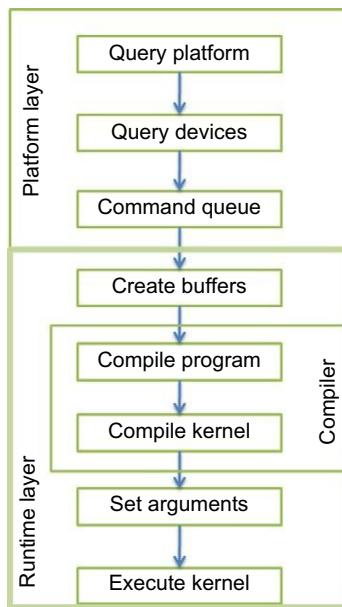
### **Step 1: Set Up Environment**

In this step, we declare a context, choose a device type, and create the context and a command queue. Throughout this example, the `ciErrNum` variable should always be checked to see if an error code is returned by the implementation.

```
cl_int ciErrNum;

// Use the first platform
cl_platform_id platform;
ciErrNum = clGetPlatformIDs(1, &platform, NULL);

// Use the first device
cl_device_id device;
ciErrNum = clGetDeviceIDs(
    platform,
    CL_DEVICE_TYPE_ALL,
    1,
    &device,
    NULL);
```

**FIGURE 4.2**


---

Programming steps to writing a complete OpenCL application.

```

cl_context_properties cps[3] = {
    CL_CONTEXT_PLATFORM, (cl_context_properties)platform, 0};

// Create the context
cl_context ctx = clCreateContext(
    cps,
    1,
    &device,
    NULL,
    NULL,
    &ciErrNum);

// Create the command queue
cl_command_queue myqueue = clCreateCommandQueue(
    ctx,
    device,
    0,
    &ciErrNum);

```

### **Step 2: Declare Buffers and Move Data**

Declare buffers on the device and enqueue copies of input matrices to the device. Also declare the output buffer.

```
// We assume that A, B, C are float arrays which
// have been declared and initialized

// Allocate space for Matrix A on the device
cl_mem bufferA = clCreateBuffer(
    ctx,
    CL_MEM_READ_ONLY,
    wA*hA*sizeof(float),
    NULL,
    &ciErrNum);

// Copy Matrix A to the device
ciErrNum = clEnqueueWriteBuffer(
    myqueue,
    bufferA,
    CL_TRUE,
    0,
    wA*hA*sizeof(float),
    (void *)A,
    0,
    NULL,
    NULL);

// Allocate space for Matrix B on the device
cl_mem bufferB = clCreateBuffer(
    ctx,
    CL_MEM_READ_ONLY,
    wB*hB*sizeof(float),
    NULL,
    &ciErrNum);

// Copy Matrix B to the device
ciErrNum = clEnqueueWriteBuffer(
    myqueue,
    bufferB,
    CL_TRUE,
    0,
    wB*hB*sizeof(float),
    (void *)B,
    0,
    NULL,
    NULL);

// Allocate space for Matrix C on the device
cl_mem bufferC = clCreateBuffer(
    ctx,
    CL_MEM_READ_ONLY,
    hA*wB*sizeof(float),
    NULL,
    &ciErrNum);
```

***Step 3: Runtime Kernel Compilation***

Compile the program from the kernel array, build the program, and define the kernel.

```
// We assume that the program source is stored in the variable
// 'source' and is NULL terminated
cl_program myprog = clCreateProgramWithSource (
    ctx,
    1,
    (const char**)&source,
    NULL,
    &ciErrNum);

// Compile the program. Passing NULL for the 'device_list'
// argument targets all devices in the context
ciErrNum = clBuildProgram(myprog, 0, NULL, NULL, NULL, NULL);

// Create the kernel
cl_kernel mykernel = clCreateKernel(
    myprog,
    "simpleMultiply",
    &ciErrNum);
```

***Step 4: Run the Program***

Set kernel arguments and the workgroup size. We can then enqueue kernel onto the command queue to execute on the device.

```
// Set the kernel arguments
clSetKernelArg(mykernel, 0, sizeof(cl_mem), (void *)&d_C);
clSetKernelArg(mykernel, 1, sizeof(cl_int), (void *)&wA);
clSetKernelArg(mykernel, 2, sizeof(cl_int), (void *)&hA);
clSetKernelArg(mykernel, 3, sizeof(cl_int), (void *)&wB);
clSetKernelArg(mykernel, 4, sizeof(cl_int), (void *)&hB);
clSetKernelArg(mykernel, 5, sizeof(cl_mem), (void *)&d_A);
clSetKernelArg(mykernel, 6, sizeof(cl_mem), (void *)&d_B);

// Set local and global workgroup sizes
//We assume the matrix dimensions are divisible by 16
size_t localws[2] = {16,16} ;
size_t globalws[2] = {wC, hC};

// Execute the kernel
ciErrNum = clEnqueueNDRangeKernel(
    myqueue,
    mykernel,
    2,
    NULL,
    globalws,
    localws,
    0,
    NULL,
    NULL);
```

### Step 5: Obtain Results to Host

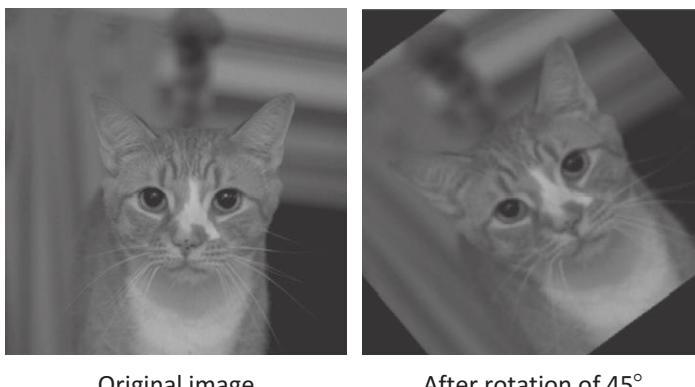
After the program has run, we enqueue a read back of the result matrix from the device buffer to host memory.

```
// Read the output data back to the host
ciErrNum = clEnqueueReadBuffer(
    myqueue,
    d_C,
    CL_TRUE,
    0,
    wC*hC*sizeof(float),
    (void *)C,
    0,
    NULL,
    NULL);
```

The steps outlined here show an OpenCL implementation of matrix multiplication that can be used as a baseline. In later chapters, we use our understanding of data-parallel architectures to improve the performance of particular data-parallel algorithms.

### Image Rotation Example

Image rotation is a common image processing routine with applications in matching, alignment, and other image-based algorithms. The input to an image rotation routine is an image, the rotation angle  $\theta$ , and a point about which rotation is done. The aim is to achieve the result shown in [Figure 4.3](#). For the image rotation example, we use OpenCL's C++ Wrapper API.



**FIGURE 4.3**

An image rotated by  $45^\circ$ . The output is the same size as the input, and the out of edge values are dropped.

The coordinates of a point  $(x_1, y_1)$  when rotated by an angle  $\theta$  around  $(x_0, y_0)$  become  $(x_2, y_2)$ , as shown by the following equation:

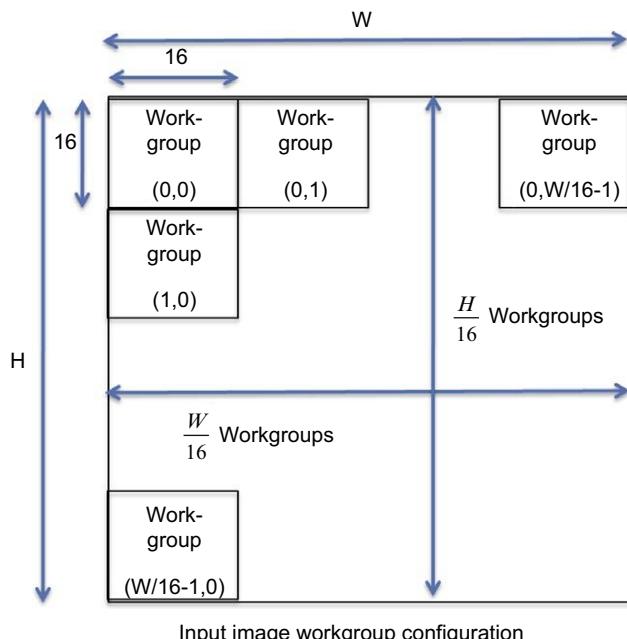
$$\begin{aligned}x_2 &= \cos(\theta) * (x_1 - x_0) + \sin(\theta) * (y_1 - y_0) \\y_2 &= -\sin(\theta) * (x_1 - x_0) + \cos(\theta) * (y_1 - y_0)\end{aligned}$$

By rotating the image about the origin  $(0, 0)$ , we get

$$\begin{aligned}x_2 &= \cos(\theta) * (x_1) + \sin(\theta) * (y_1) \\y_2 &= -\sin(\theta) * (x_1) + \cos(\theta) * (y_1)\end{aligned}$$

To implement image rotation with openCL, we see that the calculations of the new  $(x, y)$  coordinate of each pixel in the input can be done independently. Each work-item will calculate the new position of a single pixel. In a manner similar to matrix multiplication, a work-item can obtain the location of its respective pixel using its global ID (as shown in [Figure 4.4](#)).

The image rotation example is a good example of an input decomposition, meaning that an element of the input (in this case, an input image) is decomposed into a work-item. When an image is rotated, the new locations of some pixels may be outside the image if the input and output image sizes are the same (see [Figure 4.3](#), in



**FIGURE 4.4**

Each element of the input image is handled by one work-item. Each work-item calculates its data's coordinates and writes image out.

which the corners of the input would not have fit within the resultant image). For this reason, we need to check the bounds of the calculated output coordinates.

```
__kernel void img_rotate(
    __global float* dest_data, __global float* src_data,
    int W, int H, //Image Dimensions
    float sinTheta, float cosTheta ) //Rotation Parameters
{
    //Work-item gets its index within index space
    const int ix = get_global_id(0);
    const int iy = get_global_id(1);

    //Calculate location of data to move into (ix,iy)
    //Output decomposition as mentioned
    float xpos = ((float)ix)*cosTheta + ((float)iy)*sinTheta;
    float ypos = -1.0*((float)ix)*sinTheta + ((float)iy)*cosTheta;

    //Bound Checking
    if(((int)xpos>=0) && ((int)xpos< W) &&
       ((int)ypos>=0) && ((int)ypos< H))
    {
        // Read (ix,iy) src_data and store at (xpos,ypos) in
        // dest_data
        // In this case, because we rotating about the origin
        // and there is no translation, we know that (xpos,ypos)
        // will be unique for each input (ix,iy) and so each
        // work-item can write its results independently
        dest_data[(int)ypos*W+(int)xpos]= src_data[iy*W+ix];
    }
}
```

As seen in the previous kernel code, image rotation is an *embarrassingly parallel* problem, in which each resulting pixel value is computed independently. The main steps for the host code are similar to those in [Figure 4.2](#). For this example's host code, we can reuse a substantial amount of code from the previous matrix multiplication example, including the code that will create the context and the command queue.

To give the developer wider exposure to OpenCL, we write the host code for the image rotation example with the C++ bindings for OpenCL 1.1. The C++ bindings provide access to the low-level features of the original OpenCL C API. The C++ bindings are compatible with standard C++ compilers, and they are carefully designed to perform no memory allocation and offer full access to the features of OpenCL, without unnecessary masking of functionality.

---

More details about the OpenCL 1.1 specification's C++ Wrapper API can be found at [www.khronos.org/registry/cl/specs/opencl-cplusplus-1.1.pdf](http://www.khronos.org/registry/cl/specs/opencl-cplusplus-1.1.pdf).

---

The C++ header for OpenCL is obtained by including the header `cl.hpp`. The steps are shown in a similar manner to the matrix multiplication example in order to illustrate the close correspondence between the C API and the more concise C++ bindings.

### **Step 1: Set Up Environment**

```
// Discover platforms
cl::vector<cl::Platform> platforms;
cl::Platform::get(&platforms);

// Create a context with the first platform
cl_context_properties cps[3] = {CL_CONTEXT_PLATFORM,
    (cl_context_properties)(platforms[0])(), 0};

// Create a context using this platform for a GPU type device
cl::Context context(CL_DEVICE_TYPE_ALL, cps);

// Get device list from the context
cl::vector<cl::Device> devices =
    context.getInfo<CL_CONTEXT_DEVICES>();

// Create a command queue on the first device
cl::CommandQueue queue = cl::CommandQueue(context,
    devices[0], 0);
```

### **Step 2: Declare Buffers and Move Data**

```
// Create buffers for the input and output data ("W" and "H"
// are the width and height of the image, respectively)
cl::Buffer d_ip = cl::Buffer(context, CL_MEM_READ_ONLY,
    W*H* sizeof(float));
cl::Buffer d_op = cl::Buffer(context, CL_MEM_WRITE_ONLY,
    W*H* sizeof(float));

// Copy the input data to the device (assume that the input
// image is the array "ip")
queue.enqueueWriteBuffer(d_ip, CL_TRUE, 0, W*H*
    sizeof(float), ip);
```

### **Step 3: Runtime Kernel Compilation**

```
// Read in the program source
std::ifstream sourceFileName("img_rotate_kernel.cl");

std::string sourceFile(
    std::istreambuf_iterator<char>(sourceFileName),
    (std::istreambuf_iterator<char>()));

cl::Program::Sources rotn_source(1,
    std::make_pair(sourceFile.c_str(),
        sourceFile.length() + 1));
```

```
// Create the program
cl::Program rotn_program(context, rotn_source);

// Build the program
rotn_program.build(devices);

// Create the kernel
cl::Kernel rotn_kernel(rotn_program, "img_rotate");
```

#### **Step 4: Run the Program**

```
// The angle of rotation is theta
float cos_theta = cos(theta);
float sin_theta = sin(theta);

// Set the kernel arguments
rotn_kernel.setArg(0, d_op);
rotn_kernel.setArg(1, d_ip);
rotn_kernel.setArg(2, W);
rotn_kernel.setArg(3, H);
rotn_kernel.setArg(4, cos_theta);
rotn_kernel.setArg(5, sin_theta);

// Set the size of the NDRange and workgroups
cl::NDRange globalws(W,H);
cl::NDRange localws(16,16);

// Run the kernel
queue.enqueueNDRangeKernel(rotn_kernel, cl::NullRange,
    globalws, localws);
```

#### **Step 5: Read Result Back to Host**

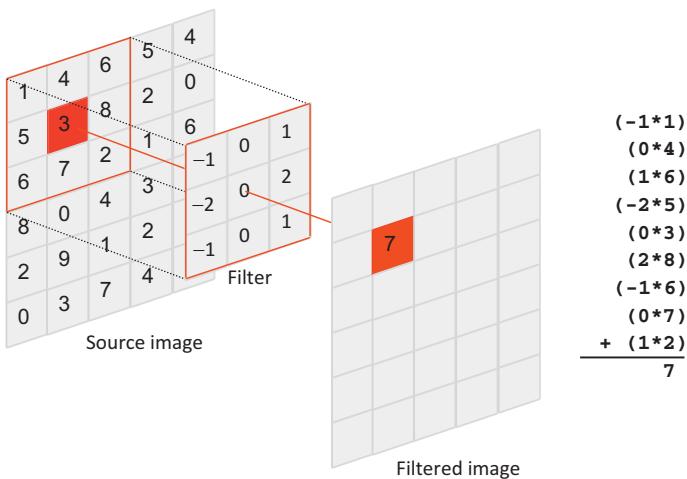
```
// Read the output buffer back to the host
queue.enqueueReadBuffer(d_op, CL_TRUE, 0, W*H*sizeof(float), op);
```

As seen from the previous code, the C++ bindings maintain a close correspondence to the C API.

## **Image Convolution Example**

In image processing, convolution is a commonly used algorithm that modifies the value of each pixel in an image by using information from neighboring pixels. A convolution kernel, or *filter*, describes how each pixel will be influenced by its neighbors. For example, a blurring kernel will take the weighted average of neighboring pixels so that large differences between pixel values are reduced. By using the same source image and changing only the filter, effects such as sharpening, blurring, edge enhancing, and embossing can be produced.

A convolution kernel works by iterating over each pixel in the source image. For each source pixel, the filter is centered over the pixel and the values of the filter

**FIGURE 4.5**

Applying a convolution filter to a source image.

multiply the pixel values that they overlay. A sum of the products is then taken to produce a new pixel value. [Figure 4.5](#) provides a visual for this algorithm. [Figure 4.6B](#) shows the effect of a blurring filter and [Figure 4.6C](#) shows the effect of an edge-detection filter on the same source image seen in [Figure 4.6A](#).

The following code performs a convolution in C. The outer two loops iterate over the source image, selecting the next source pixel. At each source pixel, the filter is applied to the neighboring pixels.

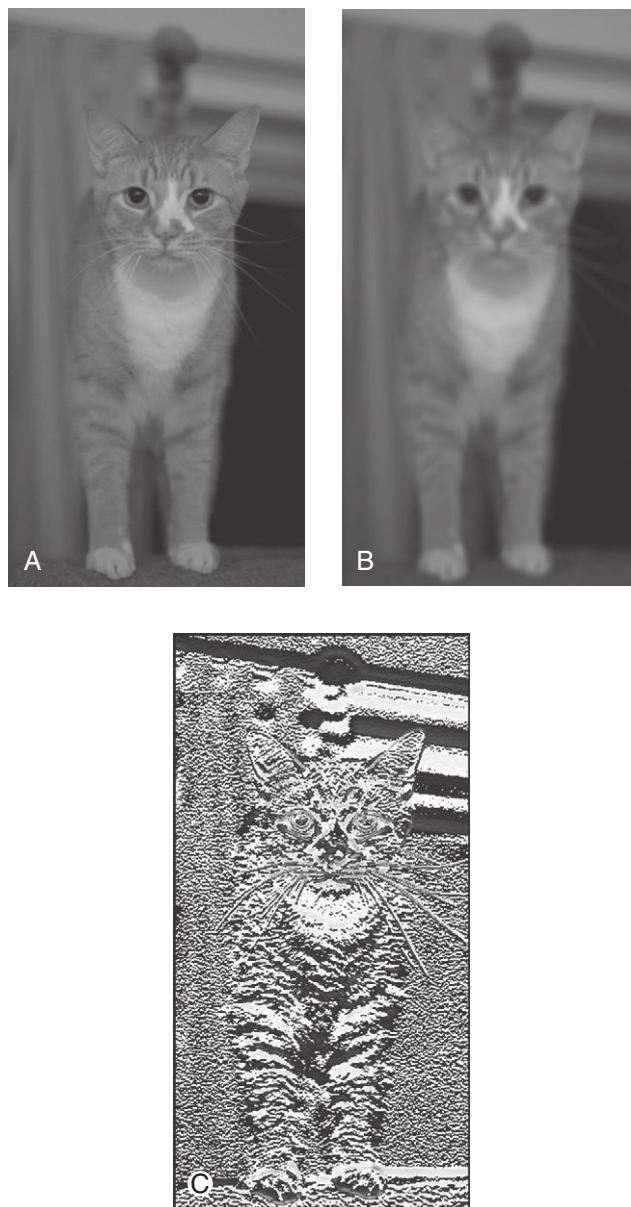
```

// Iterate over the rows of the source image
for(int i = halfFilterWidth; i < rows - halfFilterWidth; i++) {
    // Iterate over the columns of the source image
    for(int j = halfFilterWidth; j < cols - halfFilterWidth; j++) {
        sum = 0; // Reset sum for new source pixel
        // Apply the filter to the neighborhood
        for(int k = - halfFilterWidth; k <= halfFilterWidth; k++) {
            for(int l = - halfFilterWidth; l <= halfFilterWidth; l++) {
                sum += Image[i+k][j+l] *
                    Filter[k+halfFilterWidth][l+halfFilterWidth];
            }
        }
        outputImage[i][j] = sum;
    }
}

```

### **Step 1: Create Image and Buffer Objects**

This example implements convolution using OpenCL images for the data type of the source and output images. Using images to represent the data has a number of advantages. For the convolution, work-items representing border pixels may read

**FIGURE 4.6**

The effect of a blurring filter and a vertical edge-detecting filter applied to the same source image. (A) The original image. (B) Blurring filter. (C) Vertical edge-detecting filter.

out-of-bounds. Images supply a mechanism to automatically handle these accesses and return meaningful data.

The code begins by assuming that a context (`context`) and command queue (`queue`) have already been created, and that the source image (`sourceImage`), output image (`outputImage`), and filter (`filter`) have already been initialized on the host. The images both have dimensions `width` by `height`.

The first task is to allocate space for the source and output images and the filter on the device. Images require a format descriptor, `cl_image_format`, to define the size and type of data that they store and the channel layout that they use to store it. The `image_channel_order` field of the descriptor is where the channel layout is specified. Recall from Chapter 2 that every element of an image stores data in up to four channels, with each channel specified by RGBA, respectively. An image that should hold four values in every image element should use `CL_RGBA` for the channel order. However, if each work-item will only access a single value (e.g., a pixel from a grayscale image or an element of a matrix), the data can be specified to only use a single channel using `CL_R`. This example assumes grayscale data and so only uses a single channel. The type of data is in the `image_channel_data_type` field of the descriptor. Integers are specified by a combination of signedness and size. For example, `CL_SIGNED_INT32` is a 32-bit signed integer, and `CL_UNSIGNED_INT8` is the equivalent of an unsigned character in C. Floating point data is specified by `CL_FLOAT`, and this is the type of data used in the example.

After creating the image format descriptor, memory objects are created to represent the images using `clCreateImage2D()`. A buffer is created for the filter and will eventually be used as constant memory.

```
// The convolution filter is 7x7
int filterWidth = 7;
int filterSize = filterWidth*filterWidth; // Assume a square kernel

// The image format describes how the data will be stored in memory
cl_image_format format;
format.image_channel_order = CL_R;      // single channel
format.image_channel_data_type = CL_FLOAT; // float data type

// Create space for the source image on the device
cl_mem bufferSourceImage = clCreateImage2D(
    context,
    0,
    &format,
    width,
    height,
    0,
    NULL,
    NULL);

// Create space for the output image on the device
cl_mem bufferOutputImage = clCreateImage2D(
```

```
    context,
    0,
    &format,
    width,
    height,
    0,
    NULL,
    NULL);

// Create space for the 7x7 filter on the device
cl_mem bufferFilter = clCreateBuffer(
    context,
    0,
    filterSize*sizeof(float),
    NULL,
    NULL);
```

### **Step 2: Write the Input Data**

The call to `clEnqueueWriteImage()` copies an image to a device. Unlike buffers, copying an image requires supplying a three-dimensional offset and region, which define the coordinates where the copy should begin and how far it should span, respectively.

The filter is copied using `clEnqueueWriteBuffer()`, as seen in previous examples.

```
// Copy the source image to the device
size_t origin[3] = {0, 0, 0}; // Offset within the image to copy from
size_t region[3] = {width, height, 1}; // Elements to per dimension
clEnqueueWriteImage(
    queue,
    bufferSourceImage,
    CL_FALSE, origin,
    region,
    0,
    0,
    sourceImage,
    0,
    NULL,
    NULL);

// Copy the 7x7 filter to the device
clEnqueueWriteBuffer(
    queue,
    bufferFilter,
    CL_FALSE,
    0,
    filterSize*sizeof(float),
    filter,
```

```
0,
NULL,
NULL);
```

### **Step 3: Create Sampler Object**

In OpenCL, samplers are objects that describe how to access an image. Samplers specify the type of coordinate system, what to do when out-of-bounds accesses occur, and whether or not to interpolate if an access lies between multiple indices. The format of the `clCreateSampler()` API call is as follows:

```
cl_sampler clCreateSampler (
    cl_context context,
    cl_bool normalized_coords,
    cl_addressing_mode addressing_mode,
    cl_filter_mode filter_mode,
    cl_int *errcode_ret)
```

The coordinate system can either be normalized (i.e., range from 0 to 1) or use standard indices. Setting the second argument to `CL_TRUE` enables normalized coordinates. Convolution does not use normalized coordinates, so the argument is set to `FALSE`.

OpenCL also allows a number of addressing modes to be used for handling out-of-bounds accesses. In the case of the convolution example, we use `CL_ADDRESS_CLAMP_TO_EDGE` to have any out-of-bounds access return the value on the border of the image, if the access went out-of-bounds. If `CL_ADDRESS_CLAMP` is used, the value produced by an out-of-bounds access is 0 for channels RG and B, and it returns either 0 or 1 for channel A (based on the image format). Other options are available when normalized coordinates are used.

The filter mode can be set to either access the closest pixel to a coordinate or interpolate between multiple pixel values if the coordinate lies somewhere in between.

```
// Create the image sampler
cl_sampler sampler = clCreateSampler(
    context,
    CL_FALSE,
    CL_ADDRESS_CLAMP_TO_EDGE,
    CL_FILTER_NEAREST,
    NULL);
```

### **Step 4: Compile and Execute the Kernel**

The steps to create and build a program, create a kernel, set the kernel arguments, and enqueue the kernel for execution are identical to those in the previous example. Unlike the reference C version, the OpenCL code using images should create as many work-items as there are pixels in the image. Any out-of-bounds accesses due to the filter size will be handled automatically, based on the sampler object.

### Step 5: Read the Result

Reading the result back to the host is very similar to writing the image, except that a pointer to the location to store the output data on the host is supplied.

```
// Read the output image back to the host
clEnqueueReadImage(
    queue,
    bufferOutputImage,
    CL_TRUE,
    origin,
    region,
    0,
    0,
    outputImage,
    0,
    NULL,
    NULL);
```

### The Convolution Kernel

The kernel is fairly straightforward if the reference C code is understood—each work-item executes the two innermost loops. Data reads from the source image must be performed using an OpenCL construct that is specific to the data type. For this example, `read_imagef()` is used, where  $f$  signifies that the data to be read is of type single precision floating point. Accesses to an image always return a four-element vector (one per channel), so `pixel` (the value returned by the image access) and `sum` (resultant data that gets copied to the output image) must both be declared as a `float4`. Writing to the output image uses a similar function, `write_imagef()`, and requires that the data be formatted correctly (as a `float4`). Writing does not support out-of-bounds accesses. If there is any chance that there are more work-items in either dimension of the NDRange than there are pixels, bounds checking should be done before writing the output data.

The filter is a perfect candidate for constant memory in this example because all work-items access the same element each iteration. Simply adding the keyword `_constant` in the signature of the function places the filter in constant memory.

```
__kernel
void convolution(
    __read_only image2d_t sourceImage,
    __write_only image2d_t outputImage,
    int rows,
    int cols,
    __constant float* filter,
    int filterWidth,
    sampler_t sampler)
{
    // Store each work-item's unique row and column
```

```
int column = get_global_id(0);
int row = get_global_id(1);

// Half the width of the filter is needed for indexing
// memory later
int halfWidth = (int)(filterWidth/2);

// All accesses to images return data as four-element vector
// (i.e., float4), although only the 'x' component will contain
// meaningful data in this code
float4 sum = {0.0f, 0.0f, 0.0f, 0.0f};

// Iterator for the filter
int filterIdx = 0;

// Each work-item iterates around its local area based on the
// size of the filter
int2 coords; // Coordinates for accessing the image
// Iterate the filter rows
for(int i = -halfWidth; i <= halfWidth; i++) {
    coords.y = row + i;

    // Iterate over the filter columns
    for(int j = -halfWidth; j <= halfWidth; j++) {
        coords.x = column + j;

        float4 pixel;
        // Read a pixel from the image. A single channel image
        // stores the pixel in the 'x' coordinate of the returned
        // vector.
        pixel = read_imagef(sourceImage, sampler, coords);
        sum.x += pixel.x * filter[filterIdx++];
    }
}

// Copy the data to the output image if the
// work-item is in bounds
if(myRow < rows && myCol < cols) {
    coords.x = column;
    coords.y = row;
    write_imagef(outputImage, coords, sum);
}
```

---

## COMPILING OPENCL HOST APPLICATIONS

To run a program on a GPU, an OpenCL-supported graphics driver is required. OpenCL programs using AMD's implementation can be run on x86 CPUs without the installation of any hardware drivers but still require the OpenCL runtime.

Compiling an OpenCL program is similar to compiling any application that uses dynamic libraries. Vendors distribute their own OpenCL library that must be used when compiling and linking an OpenCL executable. To compile an OpenCL program, an include path must be set to locate the OpenCL headers (`cl.h` or `cl.hpp`). The linker must know how to locate the OpenCL library (`OpenCL.lib` for Windows and `libOpenCL.a` on Linux). That's it!

Assuming that the OpenCL SDK is installed at `$(AMDAPPSDKROOT)`, an example compilation on Linux might be as follows:

```
$ g++ -o prog -I$(AMDAPPSDKROOT)/include -L$(AMDAPPSDKROOT)/lib/  
x86_64 -lOpenCL prog.cpp
```

We see that most of the steps are similar across applications, allowing us to reuse a lot of “boiler plate” code. Applications using the C++ Wrapper API are compiled in the same manner. The C++ header file will usually be located in the same directory as the C headers.

---

## SUMMARY

In this chapter, we discussed implementations of some well-known data-parallel algorithms. We studied the use of OpenCL buffer and image objects. We also used the C++ Wrapper API for the image rotation example.

In each example, a work-item computes the result of a single output element for the problem, although the input data requirements vary. The image rotation example is a case in which only one input element is needed. In matrix multiplication, a whole row and a whole column of the input matrices are needed by each work-item to calculate the result of one element of the output matrix. Convolution requires a neighborhood of input pixels to compute a result.

Although the examples discussed in this chapter are correct data-parallel OpenCL programs, their performance can be drastically improved. Optimizing performance based on specific hardware platforms is the goal of subsequent chapters.

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# Understanding OpenCL's Concurrency and Execution Model

# 5

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## INTRODUCTION

As discussed in Chapter 3, there is a wide range of devices supported by OpenCL. To achieve such wide support, it is vital that the memory and execution models for OpenCL are defined in such a way that we can achieve a high level of performance across a range of architectures without extraordinary programming effort. In this chapter, we delve deeper into these models, and in Chapter 6 we show how they map to a specific architecture that supports OpenCL.

---

## KERNELS, WORK-ITEMS, WORKGROUPS, AND THE EXECUTION DOMAIN

OpenCL execution is centered on the concept of a kernel. A kernel is a unit of code that represents a single executing instance as written in the OpenCL C language. A kernel instance is at first sight similar to a C function: In the OpenCL C language, a kernel looks like C, it takes a parameter list, and has “local” variables (in a private address space, as we shall see) and standard control flow constructs. This single kernel instance is known as a work item in OpenCL terminology.

What makes the OpenCL kernel different from a C function is its parallel semantics. Any given kernel instance or work item defines just one sliver of a large parallel execution space. A kernel dispatch, initiated when the runtime processes the entry in an execution queue created by a call to `enqueueNDRange` on a queue object, consists of a large number of work items intended to execute together to carry out the collective operations specified in the kernel body. As the enqueue call suggests, this dispatch creates an `NDRange` (an  $n$ -dimensional range) worth of work items. An `NDRange` defines a one-, two-, or three-dimensional grid of work items, providing a simple and straightforward structure for parallel execution. When mapped to the hardware model of OpenCL, each work item runs on a unit of hardware abstractly known as a processing element, where a given processing element may process multiple work items in turn.

Within a kernel dispatch, each work item is independent. In OpenCL, synchronization between work items is not defined. This relaxed execution model allows OpenCL to scale on devices possessing a large number of cores. However, this kind of hardware actually provides a hierarchy of execution devices, particularly a hierarchy of memory structures.

To flexibly support these sorts of devices, OpenCL divides the global execution space into a large number of equally sized one-, two-, or three-dimensional sets of work items called workgroups. Within each workgroup, some degree of communication is allowed. The OpenCL specification defines that an entire workgroup can run concurrently on an element of the device hierarchy known as a compute unit. This form of concurrent execution is vital to allow synchronization. Workgroups allow for local synchronization by guaranteeing concurrent execution, but they also limit communication to improve scalability. An application that involves global communication across its execution space is challenging to parallelize to multi-core devices with OpenCL. To satisfy global communications, the compute unit will be mapped onto a single core.

By defining larger dispatches than can execute concurrently, OpenCL kernels can scale onto larger and more heavily threaded devices on which more groups and more work items can execute at once. However, for performance reasons (just as with APIs such as OpenMP and MPI), it may make more sense to only issue enough work that you know can run and more directly control optimization.

As discussed in Chapter 2, OpenCL work items attempt to express parallelism that could be expressed using Win32 or POSIX threads or a more abstract mapping to threads such as OpenMP. The design of OpenCL takes that a step further, however, because the set of work items within a workgroup can be efficiently grouped into a smaller number of hardware thread contexts. This can be viewed as a generalization of single instruction multiple data (SIMD) or pipelined vector execution where long logical vectors execute over multiple cycles, but in the OpenCL case, subvectors can maintain their own program counters until synchronization points. The best example of this is on the GPU, where as many as 64 work items execute in lock step as a single hardware thread on a SIMD unit: On AMD architectures, this is known as a *wavefront*, and on NVIDIA architectures it is called a *warp*. The result is SIMD execution via lanewise programming, an arguably simpler development model than explicit use of SIMD instructions as developers are used to when using SSE intrinsics on x86 processors. Because of this SIMD execution, it is often noted that for a given device, an OpenCL dispatch should be an even multiple of that device's SIMD width. This value can be queried through the `getInfo` functionality of the runtime as the parameter `CL_KERNEL_PREFERRED_WORK_GROUP_SIZE_MULTIPLE` to the `clGetKernelWorkGroupInfo` function.

OpenCL defines functions callable from within a kernel to obtain the position of a given work item in the execution range. Some of these functions take a dimension value, listed here as `uint dimension`. This refers to the 0th, 1st, or 2nd dimension in the iteration space as provided in the multidimensional `NDRange` parameters to the kernel enqueue:

- `uint get_work_dim()`: Returns the number of dimensions in use in the dispatch.
- `uint get_global_size(uint dimension)`: Returns the global number of work items in the dimension requested.
- `uint get_global_id(uint dimension)`: Returns the index of the current work item in the global space and in the dimension requested.
- `uint get_local_size(uint dimension)`: Returns the size of workgroups in this dispatch in the requested dimension.
- `uint get_local_id(uint dimension)`: Returns the index of the current work item as an offset from the beginning of the current workgroup.
- `uint get_num_groups(uint dimension)`: Returns the number of workgroups in the specified dimension of the dispatch. This is `get_global_size` divided by `get_local_size`.
- `uint get_group_id(uint dimension)`: Returns the index of the current workgroup. That is, the global index of the first work-item in the workgroup, dividing by the workgroup size.

As an example of execution of a simple kernel, take the following trivial kernel that executes over a two-dimensional execution space, multiplies an input array by 2, and then assigns it to the output. Figure 5.1 shows how this executes in practice. We can see that the calls to `get_global_id` and `get_global_size` return different values for each work item that refer to different points in the iteration space. In this trivial example, we use the position in the space to directly map to a two-dimensional data structure. In real examples, much more complicated mappings are possible, depending on the input and output structures and the way an algorithm will process the data.

```
__kernel void simpleKernel(
    __global float *a,
    __global float *b)
{
```

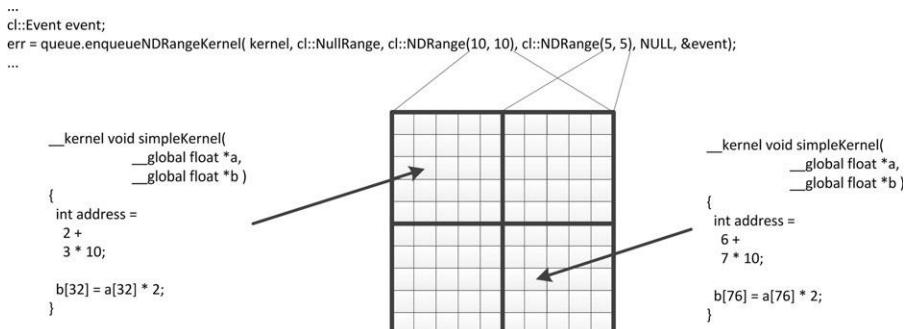


FIGURE 5.1

Executing a simple kernel showing kernel instances in the grid.

```

int address =
    get_global_id(0) +
    get_global_id(1) * get_global_size(0);

b[address] = a[address] * 2;
}

```

---

## OPENCL SYNCHRONIZATION: KERNELS, FENCES, AND BARRIERS

In the OpenCL model at its simplest, individual work items execute independently. A write performed in one work item has no ordering guarantee with a read performed in another work item. Rather, OpenCL has both a relaxed synchronization model and a relaxed memory consistency model. Although the reality of hardware means that certain guarantees will be met, in a cross-platform API no such guarantee can be made. The solution is that OpenCL explicitly defines synchronization points where the programmer knows with certainty what the state of some part of the system is and can rely on that information to obtain expectations of behavior.

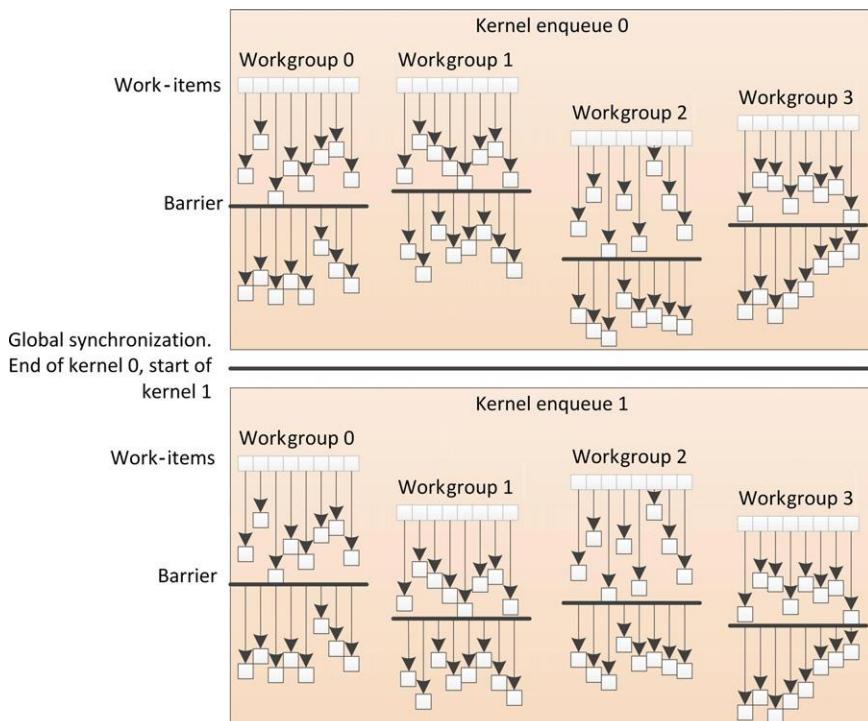
Because OpenCL runs on devices in which threading is managed by hardware, such as GPUs, in addition to operating system-managed threading models such as mainstream x86 CPUs, further care is taken to enable full concurrency. In an x86 thread, it is possible to attempt to lower a semaphore and block if the semaphore is unavailable, knowing that the operating system will remove the thread from execution and is free to schedule anything in its place with little in the way of resource constraints. On a GPU, applying the same trick in the GPU equivalent of a thread, the *wavefront* on AMD hardware, is problematic because the resources occupied are fixed. For example, removing one wavefront from execution does not free its resources, so it is possible to reach a situation in which a wavefront that is not yet able to fit on the device is required to free the semaphore before one that is already on the device is able to continue. Because the wavefronts on the device are waiting on that semaphore, they never get to execute and so the system deadlocks.

To circumvent this eventuality, OpenCL only defines global synchronization at kernel boundaries. That is, between one work item and another, there is no specified method of ensuring an ordering if those two work items are in different workgroups of the same kernel execution. To support sharing of data, mainly in local memory, between work items in the same workgroup, OpenCL specifies the `barrier` operation within the workgroup. A call to `barrier` within a work item requires that that work item cannot continue past the barrier until all work items in the group have also reached the barrier. This is a program-counter level restriction, which means that each barrier in the code is treated as a different execution barrier. As a result, when a workgroup barrier is placed within control flow in the kernel, all work items within the group must encounter that barrier. The net effect of this is that behavior of barriers within control flow that diverges between different work items in the group is

undefined: On many devices, this leads to deadlock as work items wait for others that will never reach the barrier.

A simple example of OpenCL synchronization is shown in [Figure 5.2](#). In this diagram, we see an initial kernel enqueue with four workgroups of eight work items each. Under the loosest interpretation of the OpenCL spec (i.e., ignoring hardware implementations), the work items in each workgroup proceed at varying rates. On issuing the barrier instruction, the most advanced work item waits for all others to catch up, only continuing after all have reached that point. Different workgroups and specifically work items in other workgroups proceed with a schedule completely unrelated to that of the first workgroup until the end of the kernel. Between kernel dispatches, all work is guaranteed to be complete and all memory consistent. Then, the next kernel launches, with the same semantics.

If we assume that the kernels enqueued as 0 and 1 are produced from the same kernel object, the following kernel code and API calls could be expected to



**FIGURE 5.2**

Synchronization behavior in OpenCL. Within a single kernel dispatch, synchronization is only guaranteed within workgroups using barriers. Global synchronization is maintained by completion of the kernel and the guarantee that on a completion event all work is complete and memory content as expected.

produce the behavior seen in [Figure 5.2](#). In this case, the behavior we see from the work items is a simple wrapping neighborwise addition of elements in local memory, where availability of the data must be guaranteed before neighbors can be read. Note from this example that kernel arguments assigned to a kernel object are persistent and hence do not need to be repeatedly set. This is true of both the C and C++ APIs.

```
// Host code
...
cl_mem input = clCreateBuffer(
    context,
    CL_MEM_READ_ONLY,
    10*sizeof(float),
    0,
    0);
cl_mem intermediate = clCreateBuffer(
    context,
    CL_MEM_READ_ONLY,
    10*sizeof(float),
    0,
    0);
cl_mem output = clCreateBuffer(
    context,
    CL_MEM_WRITE_ONLY,
    10*sizeof(float),
    0,
    0);
clEnqueueWriteBuffer(
    queue,
    input,
    CL_TRUE,
    0,
    10*sizeof(int),
    (void *)hostInput,
    0,
    NULL,
    NULL);
clSetKernelArg(kernel, 0, sizeof(cl_mem), (void *)&input);
clSetKernelArg(kernel, 1, sizeof(cl_mem), (void *)&intermediate);
clSetKernelArg(kernel, 2, 2*sizeof(float), 0);

size_t localws[1] = {2};
size_t globalws[1] = {10};

clEnqueueNDRangeKernel(
    queue,
    kernel,
    1,
    NULL,
```

```
globalws,
localws,
0,
NULL,
NULL);

clSetKernelArg(kernel, 0, sizeof(cl_mem), (void*)&intermediate);
clSetKernelArg(kernel, 1, sizeof(cl_mem), (void*)&output);

clEnqueueNDRangeKernel(
    queue,
    kernel,
    1,
    NULL,
    globalws,
    localws,
    0,
    NULL,
    NULL);
clEnqueueReadBuffer(
    queue,
    output,
    CL_TRUE,
    0,
    10*sizeof(float),
    (void*)&hostOutput,
    0,
    NULL,
    NULL);

...
// Kernel
__kernel void simpleKernel(
    __global float *a,
    __global float *b,
    __local float *l )
{
    l[get_local_id(0)] = a[get_global_id(0)];
    barrier(CLK_LOCAL_MEM_FENCE);
    unsigned int otherAddress =
        (get_local_id(0) + 1) % get_local_size(0);
    b[get_local_id(0)] = l[get_local_id(0)] + l[otherAddress];
}
```

## QUEUEING AND GLOBAL SYNCHRONIZATION

OpenCL is based on a task-parallel, host-controlled model, in which each task is data parallel. This is maintained through the use of thread-safe command queues attached to each device. Kernels, data movement, and other operations are not simply executed by the user calling a runtime function. These operations are enqueued onto a specific queue using an asynchronous enqueue operation, to be executed at some point in the future.

The commands enqueued into OpenCL's command queues can be as follows:

- Kernel execution commands
- Memory commands
- Synchronization commands

All kernel execution and synchronization commands are enqueued asynchronously. Completion of a command from the point of view of the host program is only guaranteed at a synchronization point. The following are the primary synchronization points:

- A `clFinish` command that blocks until an entire queue completes execution
- Waiting on the completion of a specific event
- Execution of a blocking memory operation

The last option is the simplest, often used in simple OpenCL demos. The following is a program fragment that asynchronously enqueues a sequence of commands and requires a blocking memory operation to perform synchronization with the host:

```
// Perform setup of platform, context and create buffers
...
// Create queue leaving parameters as default so queue is in-order
queue = clCreateCommandQueue( context, devices[0], 0, 0 );
...
clEnqueueWriteBuffer(
    queue,
    bufferA,
    CL_TRUE,
    0,
    10 * sizeof(int),
    a,
    0,
    NULL,
    NULL);
clEnqueueWriteBuffer(
    queue,
    bufferB,
    CL_TRUE,
    0,
    10 * sizeof(int),
    b,
```

```
    0,  
    NULL,  
    NULL);  
  
    // Set kernel arguments  
    ...  
  
    size_t localws[1] = {2}; size_t globalws[1] = {10};  
    clEnqueueNDRangeKernel(  
        queue,  
        kernel,  
        1,  
        NULL,  
        globalws,  
        localws,  
        0,  
        NULL,  
        NULL);  
  
    // Perform blocking read-back to synchronize  
    clEnqueueReadBuffer(  
        queue,  
        bufferOut,  
        CL_TRUE,  
        0,  
        10 * sizeof(int),  
        out,  
        0,  
        0,  
        0);
```

The second parameter to `enqueueReadBuffer` reads `CL_TRUE`. This parameter makes the read buffer asynchronous, such that it will block until the data has been copied back. To correctly copy back, all activities in the queue before the copy must have completed to correctly generate the data. Had we set that parameter to `CL_FALSE`, a further synchronization operation would have been needed. The simplest approach would have been to insert a `cl finish` operation on the queue:

```
    clEnqueueReadBuffer(  
        queue,  
        bufferOut,  
        CL_FALSE,  
        0,  
        10 * sizeof(int),  
        out,  
        0,  
        0,  
        0);  
    clFinish(queue);
```

## Memory Consistency in OpenCL

OpenCL synchronization applies not only to completion of work but also to correct visibility of memory. OpenCL follows a relaxed memory consistency model that allows it to be more efficiently mapped to a wide range of devices. In the OpenCL model, any memory object that is shared between multiple enqueued commands is guaranteed to be consistent only at synchronization points. This means that between two commands, consistency, and hence correctness of communication, is guaranteed at the minimum between elements in an in-order queue or on a communicated event from one command that generates the event to another that waits on it.

Even in this case, memory object consistency will be maintained only within the runtime, not visibly to the host API. To achieve host API correctness, the user must use one of the discussed blocking operations. For example, `clFinish` will block until all operations in the specified queue have completed and hence guarantee memory consistency of any buffers used by operations in the queue.

Between devices, the same consistency issues arise. Because memory objects are associated with contexts rather than devices, it is the responsibility of the OpenCL runtime to ensure that such objects are consistent across devices when data is shared and appropriate events occur. Data is moved from one device to another such that if a kernel is to be executed on a second device, any results generated on the first will be available when necessary. The completion of an event on the first data structure is the guarantee that the data is OK to move and no separate buffer copy operation is needed.

## Events

Note that the command queue is constructed ignoring the final two parameters, which are left as default. One of the properties available for this bit field is to enable out-of-order execution of the queue (`CL_QUEUE_OUT_OF_ORDER_EXEC_MODE_ENABLE`). Thus, although the queue in the previous example is in-order, it is possible for a queue to execute out-of-order.

An out-of-order queue has no default ordering of the operations defined in the queue. If the runtime decides that it has, for example, a DMA engine that can execute in parallel with compute units, or that the device can execute multiple kernels at once, it is at liberty to schedule those operations in parallel with no guarantee that one completes before another starts. Similarly, if the runtime has multiple queues whether on the same device or, more obviously, on multiple devices, there is no default assumption about order of execution of elements of these multiple queues.

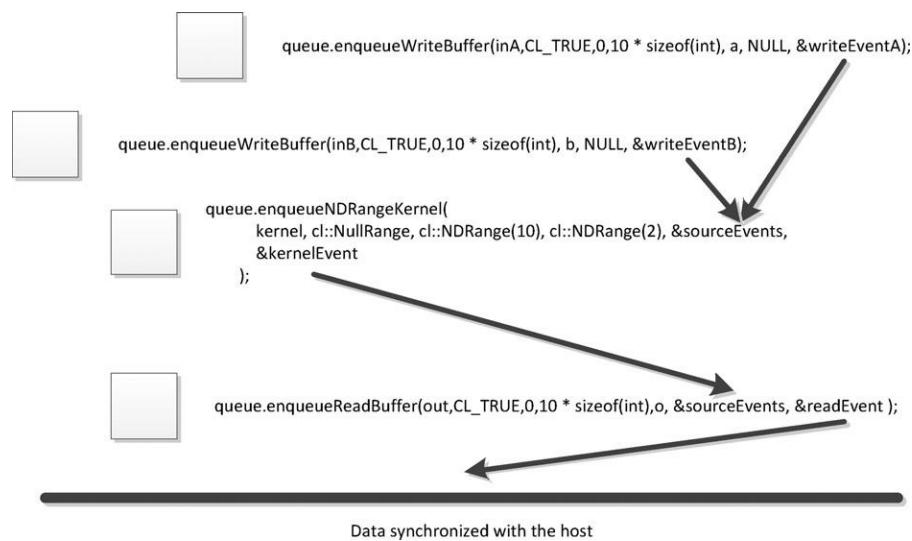
In either case, to correctly execute such a structure requires the construction of a task graph. In OpenCL, task graph creation is through event objects. OpenCL's event model allows the construction of complicated graphs linking the tasks enqueued in any of the command queues associated with a given OpenCL context. A single event can be passed as the final parameter to the enqueue functions, and this event encapsulates the state of that enqueued command. Most important, the event registers the

completion of the task along with the guarantee that all memory referenced by the task is consistent. A list of events can be passed to an enqueue function as a dependence list. This means that the command will not begin executing until all of the input events have completed. The following code is a repeat of the previous example, with an out-of-order queue and all dependencies explicitly defined. Figure 5.3 represents the same command sequence diagrammatically. As one can see in the example, a third approach for synchronizing with the host is to use an event directly. In this case, we see that we have called `wait()` on the read event:

```
// Perform setup of platform, context and create buffers
...
// Create queue leaving parameters as default so queue is in-order
queue = clCreateCommandQueue( context, devices[0], 0, 0 );
...

cl_event writeEventA;
cl_event writeEventB;
cl_event kernelEvent;
cl_event readEvent;

clEnqueueWriteBuffer(
    queue,
    bufferA,
    CL_TRUE,
    0,
```



**FIGURE 5.3**

One enqueued command can depend on a set of enqueued commands through the events passed to the respective enqueue functions.

```
    10 * sizeof(int),
    a,
    0,
    NULL,
    &writeEventA);
clEnqueueWriteBuffer(
    queue,
    bufferB,
    CL_TRUE,
    0,
    10 * sizeof(int),
    b,
    0,
    NULL,
    &writeEventB);

// Set kernel arguments
...
size_t localws[1] = {2}; size_t globalws[1] = {10};

// Wait on both writes before executing the kernel
cl_event eventList[2];
eventList[0] = writeEventA;
eventList[1] = writeEventB;
clEnqueueNDRangeKernel(
    queue,
    kernel,
    1,
    NULL,
    globalws,
    localws,
    2,
    eventList,
    &kernelEvent);
// Decrease reference count on events
clReleaseEvent(writeEventA);
clReleaseEvent(writeEventB);

// Read will wait on kernel completion to run
clEnqueueReadBuffer(
    queue,
    bufferOut,
    CL_TRUE,
    0,
    10 * sizeof(int),
    out,
    1,
    &kernelEvent,
    &readEvent);
```

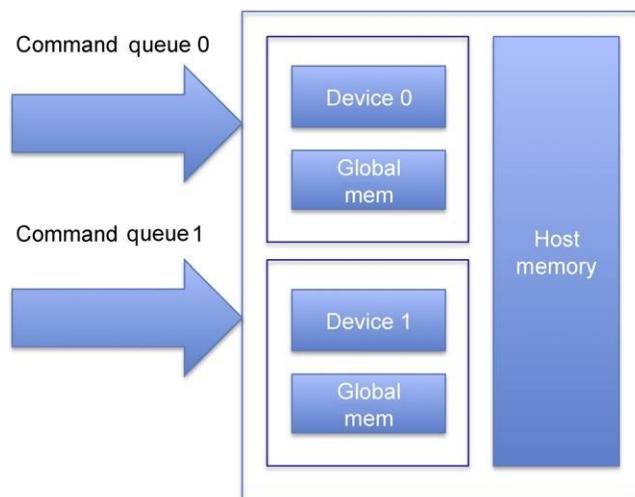
```
clReleaseEvent(kernelEvent);  
// Block until the read has completed  
clWaitForEvents(1, &readEvent);  
clReleaseEvent(readEvent);
```

### **Command Queues to Multiple Devices**

Understanding the synchronization capabilities and the host memory model of OpenCL is necessary for the management of multiple command queues. Multiple queues can be mapped to the same device to overlap execution of different commands or overlap commands and host-device communication. If we have multiple devices in a system (e.g., a CPU and a GPU or multiple GPUs), each device needs its own command queue.

Figure 5.4 shows an OpenCL context with two devices. Separate command queues are created to access each device. The following code shows how two command queues can be created within the same context. It is important to note that synchronization using OpenCL events can only be done for commands within the same context. If separate contexts were created for different devices, then synchronization using events would not be possible, and the only way to share data between devices would be to use `clFinish` and then explicitly copy data between buffer objects.

```
cl_uint num_devices;  
cl_device_id devices[2];  
cl_context ctx;  
  
//Obtain devices of both CPU and GPU types
```



**FIGURE 5.4**

Multiple command queues created for different devices declared within the same context.

```

err_code = clGetDeviceIDs(
    NULL,
    CL_DEVICE_TYPE_CPU,
    1,
    &devices[0],
    &num_devices);
err_code = clGetDeviceIDs(
    NULL,
    CL_DEVICE_TYPE_GPU,
    1,
    &devices[1],
    &num_devices);
//Create a context including two devices
ctx = clCreateContext(0, 2, devices, NULL, NULL, &err);
cl_command_queue queue_cpu, queue_gpu;

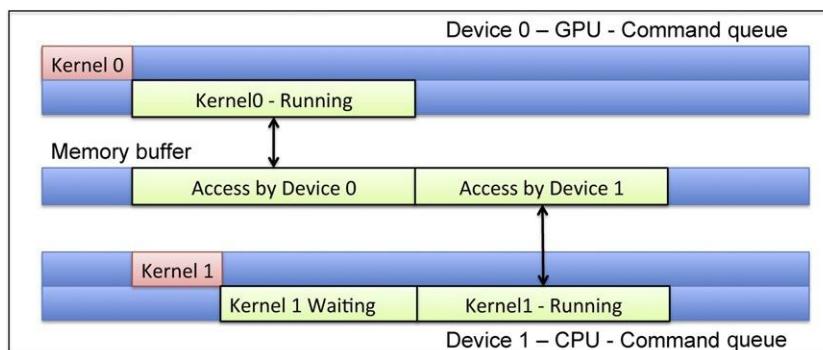
//Create queues to each device
queue_cpu = clCreateCommandQueue(context, devices[0], 0, &err);
queue_gpu = clCreateCommandQueue(context, devices[1], 0, &err);

```

Multiple device programming with OpenCL can be summarized with two execution models usually seen in parallel programming for heterogeneous devices:

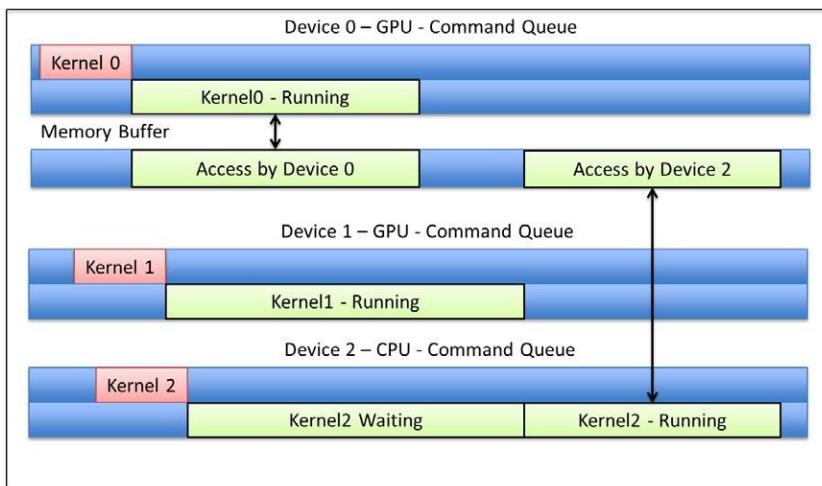
- Two or more devices work in a pipeline manner such that one device waits on the results of another, shown in [Figure 5.5](#).
- A model in which multiple devices work independently of each other, shown in [Figure 5.6](#).

In the following code, the wait list orders execution such that the kernel on the GPU queue will complete before the CPU queue begins executing the kernel:



**FIGURE 5.5**

Multiple devices working in a cooperative manner on the same data. The CPU queue will wait until the GPU kernel is finished.

**FIGURE 5.6**

Multiple devices working in a parallel manner. In this scenario, both GPUs do not use the same buffers and will execute independently. The CPU queue will wait until both GPU devices are finished.

```

//! A collaborative - pipelined model of multidevice execution
//! The enqueued kernel on the GPU command queue waits for the kernel on
the CPU
//! command queue to finish executing
cl_event event0_cpu, event1_gpu;

// Starts as soon as enqueued
err = clEnqueueNDRangeKernel(
    queue_gpu,
    kernel1_gpu,
    2,
    NULL,
    global,
    local,
    0,
    NULL,
    &event_gpu);

// Starts after event_gpu is on CL_COMPLETE
err = clEnqueueNDRangeKernel(
    queue_cpu,
    kernel2_cpu,
    2,
    NULL,
    global,
    local,
    1,

```

```
    &event_gpu,
    &event_cpu);
clFlush(queue_cpu);
clFlush(queue_gpu);
```

The following code shows an execution model in which the kernels are executed on different devices in parallel. A parallel multidevice example is shown in [Figure 5.6](#), in which two GPUs process kernels independently. Separate buffers are required for the two devices because they can only execute in parallel if they do not share buffers.

```
// Parallel multidevice execution
// We would need to create 3 command queues in this case
// 2 queues for 2 GPUs and 1 queue for the CPU
// The enqueued kernel on the CPU command queue waits
// for the kernels on the GPU command queues to finish

cl_event event_gpu[2];

// Both the GPU devices can execute concurrently as soon as they have
// their respective data since they have no events in their waitlist
err = clEnqueueNDRangeKernel(
    queue_gpu_0,
    kernel_gpu,
    2,
    NULL,
    global,
    local,
    0,
    NULL,
    &event_gpu[0]);
err = clEnqueueNDRangeKernel(
    queue_gpu_1,
    kernel_gpu,
    2,
    NULL,
    global,
    local,
    0,
    NULL,
    &event_gpu[1]);

// The CPU will wait till both GPUs are done executing their kernels
// Two events in the CPU's waitlist
err = clEnqueueNDRangeKernel(
    queue_cpu,
    kernel_cpu,
    2,
    NULL,
    global,
```

```
local,
2,
event_gpu,
NULL);

clFlush(queue_gpu_0);
clFlush(queue_gpu_1);
clFlush(queue_cpu);
```

### ***Event Uses beyond Synchronization***

Due to the asynchronous nature of the OpenCL API, there is no good way for individual API calls to return error conditions or profiling data that relates to the execution of the OpenCL command rather than the setup of the queue performed by the enqueue function. Whereas the API calls can return error conditions relating to their parameters, error conditions relating to the execution of the OpenCL command itself can be queried through the event the command returns. Indeed, completion can be considered a condition similar to any other.

Event queries are performed through the `getInfo` function on an event. The following concepts can be queried through `getInfo`:

- `CL_EVENT_COMMAND_QUEUE`: Returns the command queue associated with the event (useful if events are being passed around a complicated program).
- `CL_EVENT_CONTEXT`: Returns the context associated with the event.
- `CL_EVENT_COMMAND_TYPE`: Returns the command associated with the event. This can be one of a list of types, including `CL_COMMAND_NDRANGE_KERNEL` and `CL_COMMAND_READ_BUFFER`.
- `CL_EVENT_COMMAND_EXECUTION_STATUS`: Returns the status of the command associated with the event. `CL_COMPLETE` is the event we wait on with `event.wait()`, but the command can be queued, submitted, or running as well. A negative integer value in this field is the method by which error codes that only arise when the command tries to execute are returned.

If the context was created with profiling enabled, `event.getProfilingInfo` allows the developer to obtain timing information from the command. Profiling with events is discussed in Chapter 12.

### ***User Events***

User events are OpenCL's method for allowing the user to enqueue commands that depend on the completion of some arbitrary task. The user event can be passed to OpenCL enqueue functions like any other event, but the execution status of the event is set explicitly.

For example, to ensure that a buffer is not overwritten by an asynchronous OpenCL read operation until the buffer is no longer in use, we could do something such as the following:

```
cl_event userEvent = clCreateUserEvent( context 0 );
clEnqueueReadBuffer(
```

```

        queue,
        bufferOut,
        CL_TRUE,
        0,
        10 * sizeof(int),
        out,
        1,
        &userEvent,
        0);

// Do other things
...

// Make sure that the host pointer bufferOut is safe to overwrite
// at this point because it has been used on the host side
clSetUserEventStatus( userEvent, CL_COMPLETE );

// Now the read buffer operation can continue because
// its dependencies are satisfied

```

## Event Callbacks

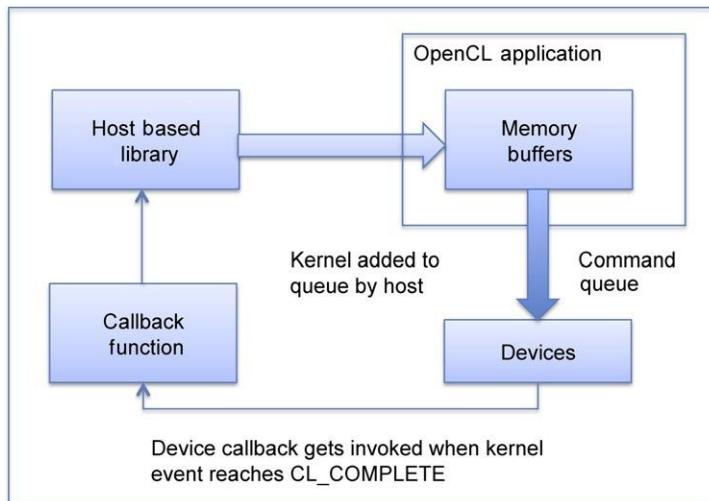
OpenCL allows a user to define callbacks invoked when events reach specific states. The callback function will be invoked for a specified execution status of a command in the queue. Event callbacks can be used to enqueue new commands. Callbacks can also be used to invoke host functions such as specialized CPU libraries. The `clSetEventCallback` function call is used to set a callback for an event:

```

// Function call to set an event callback
cl_int clSetEventCallback (
    //OpenCL event
    cl_event event,
    //Event Status which invokes callback
    cl_int command_exec_callback_type,
    //Function pointer - parameter type shown
    void (CL_CALLBACK *pfn_event_notify)
        (cl_event event,
         cl_int event_command_exec_status,
         void *user_data),
    //Pointer to user data which is used by callback
    void *user_data )

```

A usage scenario of OpenCL callbacks ([Figure 5.7](#)) includes applications in which the host CPU interacts tightly with a device such as a GPU. In such applications, usually the host would have to wait while the device is executing. This could reduce the system's efficiency. An alternative method would be to set a callback to a stub host function. The host could improve its efficiency by doing other work instead of spinning while waiting on the GPU.

**FIGURE 5.7**

Using callbacks to enqueue data to device.

The location of the `clSetEventCallback` is key in the following code segment. The function call is required after the `clEnqueueNDRangeKernel` because the `clSetEventCallback` function requires a valid event object that gets populated by the runtime.

The following code will return with an invalid event error code because the runtime has not populated an event with valid information when the callback is being set up:

```

cl_event completionEvent;
// Wrong location to set callback in
errcode = clSetEventCallback(
    completionEvent,
    CL_COMPLETE,
    myCallback,
    (void *)&ipargs);
// clSetEventCallback will return an invalid event error code
errcode = clEnqueueNDRangeKernel(command_queue,
    kernel,
    2,
    0,
    globalworksize,
    localworksize,
    &completionEvent);
  
```

Callbacks should be used with caution for the following reasons, as highlighted by the OpenCL specification:

- There is no guarantee that the callback functions registered for multiple execution status for the same event will be called in the exact order that the execution status of a command changes.

- The callback should be thread-safe and will be called asynchronously.
- The behavior of calling expensive system routines, or blocking OpenCL API calls such as `clFinish` from the callback function is undefined.

For these reasons, callbacks should be lightweight stubs, which call more complicated functions. The following is an example of setting a callback:

```
// The callback can only get a single void* user_data pointer.  
// As a work around, a programmer can pass multiple  
// arguments by wrapping them within a structure as shown  
struct arg_block{  
    data_type arg0;  
    data_type arg1;  
};  
cl_event completionEvent;  
  
//! Simple example showing declaration of a callback  
//! The callback function can only have the signature shown below  
void CL_CALLBACK  
callbackFunction(  
    cl_event event,  
    cl_int cmd_exec_status,  
    void *user_data) {  
    //Use this function to invoke a host Library  
    arg_block * ipargs = (arg_block * )user_data;  
    //Call host function  
    host_function(ipargs->arg0, ipargs->arg1);  
}  
  
//!Start Device computation  
errcode = clEnqueueNDRangeKernel(  
    command_queue,  
    kernel,  
    2,  
    0,  
    globalworksize,  
    localworksize,  
    0,  
    NULL  
    &completionEvent);  
  
// Set the callback such that callbackFunction is called when  
// completionEvent indicates that the kernel  
// has completed (CL_COMPLETE)  
errcode = clSetEventCallback(  
    completionEvent,  
    CL_COMPLETE,  
    callbackFunction,  
    (void *)&ipargs);
```

One of the primary benefits of using the event-handling capabilities of OpenCL is that application-level behavior and synchronization requirements can be handled in a consistent manner on both CPU and GPU for multiple vendor implementations. This restricts device-specific tuning to only the compute kernels.

### ***Native Kernels***

An alternative to callbacks that is more cleanly integrated into the OpenCL execution model is to use native kernels. Native kernels allow standard C functions compiled with a traditional compiler rather than the OpenCL compiler flow to be executed within the OpenCL task graph, be triggered by events, and trigger further events.

The difference between enqueueing a native kernel and enqueueing a kernel is that rather than taking a `cl_kernel` object as an argument, the native kernel enqueue function, `clEnqueueNativeKernel`, takes a function pointer to a standard C function. The argument list is provided separately along with its size. Because OpenCL uses buffer and image objects, these are passed as kernel arguments, and it is useful to be able to pass these to native functions. This process is called unboxing, and it is handled by passing in a list of memory objects, in the argument `mem_list`, and a list of pointers, `args_mem_loc`, mapping into `args` where the unboxed memory pointers will be placed.

To illustrate the point, consider the following example, in which a native function expects an argument list containing five values, where the 0 and 2 indexes are set to integers 5 and 8, respectively, and the 1, 3, and 4 indexes are two buffer objects and an image object. This is shown in [Figure 5.8](#). The corresponding code is as follows:

```
cl_command_queue queue = clCreateCommandQueue(...);
cl_mem buffer1      = clCreateBuffer(...);
cl_mem buffer2      = clCreateBuffer(...);
cl_mem image        = clCreateImage2D(...);

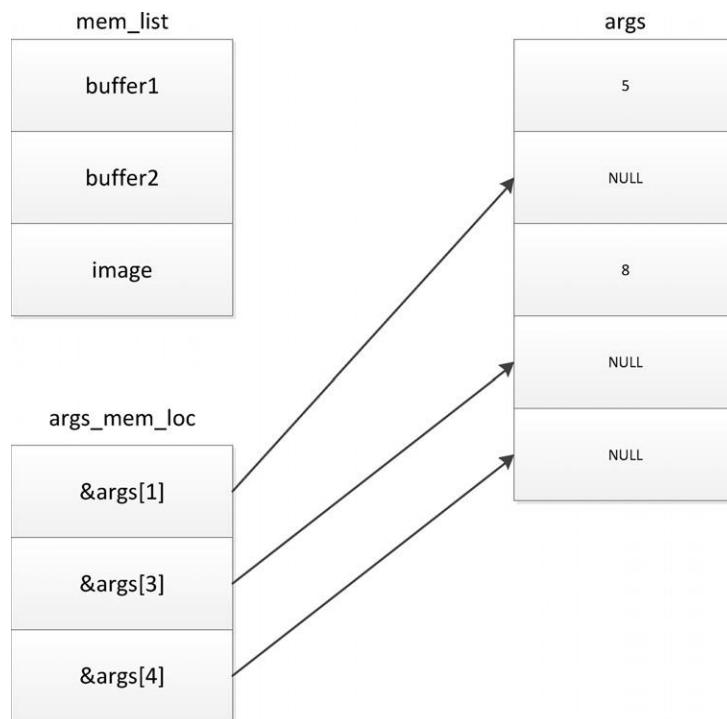
// initialize buffers, images, and so on

size_t cb_args = 5;
num_mem_objects = 3;
void *args[5] = { (void *)5, NULL, (void *)8, NULL, NULL };

cl_mem mem_list[3] = { buffer1, buffer2, image };
void * args_mem_loc[3] = { &args[1], &args[3], &args[4] };
```

Finally, given a native function `void foo(void * args)`, we can call `clEnqueueNativeKernel`:

```
clEnqueueNativeKernel(
    queue,
    foo,
    args,
    cb_args,
```

**FIGURE 5.8**

Example showing OpenCL memory objects mapping to arguments for `clEnqueueNativeKernel`.

```
num_mem_objects,
mem_list,
args_mem_loc,
0,
NULL,
NULL);
```

## Command Barriers and Markers

An alternative method of synchronizing in an out-of-order queue is similar to the approach for synchronizing within a workgroup. In both cases, a barrier operation causes anything executing from the queue before the barrier to complete until activities after the queue can continue. A barrier includes no state and does not support an event of its own but sits in a queue guaranteeing ordering. Conceptually, this means that a barrier has an implicit event list including the returned event from every preceding entry in the queue and an implicit output event that is included in the input event list of every later command. A barrier is similar to an asynchronous `clFinish`.

Markers, enqueued using the `enqueueMarker`, are related to barriers but do not block execution. Rather, when all preceding commands have completed, the marker completes: It has an implicit input event list with events from all preceding commands. The output event of a marker is explicit and can be used to trigger further activity. This could be useful if there is some event (or some host activity) that has to wait for a given set of queue entries to complete but that is not bothered if other commands outside that set also execute.

The final synchronization primitive is `waitForEvents`, which is the opposite of a marker. Rather than triggering an event on completion, it holds execution of the queue for a specific set of triggering events to have completed.

Between these synchronization commands and the more general use of events, OpenCL provides the ability to produce sophisticated and complicated task graphs enabling highly complicated behaviors.

---

## THE HOST-SIDE MEMORY MODEL

OpenCL devices such as GPUs and other accelerators frequently operate with memory systems separate from the main memory associated with the computer's primary CPUs. In addition, OpenCL's concurrency model supports a relaxed consistency in which global synchronization of memory is only defined on the completion of events and local synchronization on barrier operations. To support both of these features, OpenCL's memory objects are defined to be in a separate space from the host CPU's memory. Any movement of data in and out of OpenCL memory objects from a CPU pointer must be performed through API functions. It is important to note that OpenCL's memory objects are defined on a context and not on a device. That is, in general, moving data in and out of a buffer need not move data to any specific device. It is the job of the runtime to ensure that data is in the correct place at the correct time.

OpenCL's memory objects are divided into two types, where specific placement, layout, and format of these two types are defined by parameters. The two types of objects defined in the OpenCL specification are buffers and images.

Buffer objects are one-dimensional arrays in the traditional CPU sense and similar to memory allocated through `malloc` in a C program. Buffers can contain any scalar data type, vector data type, or user-defined structure. The data stored in a buffer is sequential, such that the OpenCL kernel can access it using pointers in a random access manner familiar to a C programmer.

Image objects take a different approach. Because GPUs are designed for processing graphics workloads, they are heavily optimized for accessing image data. This works in three main ways:

- GPU cache hierarchies and data flow structures are designed to optimize access to image-type data.

- GPU drivers optimize data layouts to support the hardware in providing efficient access to the data, particularly when using two-dimensional access patterns.
- Image access hardware supports sophisticated data conversions that allow data to be stored in a range of compressed formats.

The data layout transformations involved in optimizing image access make it difficult to define pointer access to this data because the relationship of one memory location to another becomes opaque to the developer. As a result, image structures are completely opaque not only to the developer but also to the kernel code, accessible only through specialized access functions.

## Buffers

Buffer objects map very easily to the standard array representation that people expect in the host C program. Consider the following host code, which is legal C:

```
float a[10], b[10];
for( int i = 0; i < 10; ++i ){
    *(a+i) = b[i];
}
```

The example shows that we can access *a* and *b* either through pointers or using array access syntax. This is important because it implies that data is allocated sequentially, such that the *i*th element *a*[*i*] of array *a* is stored at location (*a* + *i*).

We can use `sizeof` operations on array elements to calculate offsets into arrays cast to pointers of different types. In low-level code, it is useful to have these features, and it is a natural expectation for a C-derived language. For example, the following OpenCL kernel code, taken from the Bullet physics SDK, allows us to perform flexible output into a vertex buffer by parameterizing with base pointer and strides. The position and normal arrays we receive are `float4` in structure, and the output is a structure containing the position and normal information as well as other content that the kernel need not know about.

```
__kernel void OutputToVertexArray(
    const int startNode,
    const int numNodes,
    __global float*g_vertexBuffer,
    const int positionOffset,
    const int positionStride,
    const __global float4* g_vertexPositions,
    const int normalOffset,
    const int normalStride,
    const __global float4* g_vertexNormals ){

    int nodeID = get_global_id(0);
    float4 position = g_vertexPositions[nodeID + startNode];
    float4 normal = g_vertexNormals[nodeID + startNode];
```

```

int positionDestination =
    nodeID * positionStride + positionOffset;
g_vertexBuffer[positionDestination] = position.x;
g_vertexBuffer[positionDestination+1] = position.y;
g_vertexBuffer[positionDestination+2] = position.z;

int normalDestination = nodeID * normalStride + normalOffset;
g_vertexBuffer[normalDestination] = normal.x;
g_vertexBuffer[normalDestination+1] = normal.y;
g_vertexBuffer[normalDestination+2] = normal.z;
}

```

### ***Manipulating Buffer Objects***

Buffer objects are similar to malloc'd arrays, so their creation is relatively simple. At the simplest level, creation requires a size, a context in which to create the buffer, and a set of creation flags:

```

cl_mem clCreateBuffer(
    cl_context context,
    cl_mem_flags flags,
    size_t size,
    void *host_ptr,
    cl_int *err)

```

The function returns a buffer object, where the error code is returned through a variable passed by reference as the last parameter. The flags allow for various combinations of read-only/write-only data and allocation options. For example, in the following code, we create a read-only buffer that will be stored directly in a source array *a*, which is of the same size as the buffer. Note that memory in OpenCL is only guaranteed to be consistent at completion events of enqueued operations. As a result, when *CL\_MEM\_USE\_HOST\_PTR* is used, the runtime is still able to copy the data to the device, execute, and return it on completion because the data is guaranteed to have been synchronized after the kernel completion event. Any error value will be returned in *err*, which can be any of a range of error conditions defined in the specification. *CL\_SUCCESS* is returned by any of the OpenCL functions when they complete successfully.

```

cl_int err;
int a[16];
cl_mem newBuffer = clCreateBuffer(
    context,
    CL_MEM_READ_ONLY | CL_MEM_USE_HOST_PTR,
    16*sizeof(int),
    a,
    &err);
if( err != CL_SUCCESS ) {
    // Do whatever error test is necessary
}

```

After creation, access to buffer objects is achieved through access functions. These functions are intended, like the rest of the OpenCL API, to be used asynchronously. That is, if we call `clEnqueueReadBuffer`, we cannot expect to be able to read the data from the target host array until we know—through the event mechanism, a `clFinish` call, or by passing `CL_TRUE` to `clEnqueueReadBuffer` to make it a blocking call—that the read has completed. Thus, for example, the following host code sequence does not guarantee that the two `printf` calls A and B generate different values even if `outputBuffer`'s content would suggest that it should. The `printf` of C is the only point in the code where the printed value is guaranteed to be that copied from `outputBuffer`.

```

int returnedArray[16];
cl_buffer outputBuffer;
cl_event readEvent;

// Some code that fills returned Array with 0s and invokes kernels
// that generates a result in outputBuffer

printf( "A: %d\n", returnedArray[3] );
clEnqueueReadBuffer(
    commandQueue,
    outputBuffer,
    CL_FALSE,
    0,
    sizeof(int)*16,
    returnedArray,
    0,
    0,
    &readEvent );
printf( "B: %d\n", returnedArray[3] );
clWaitForEvents(1, &readEvent);
printf( "C: %d\n", returnedArray[3] );

```

This is a vital point about the OpenCL memory model. Changes to memory are not guaranteed to be visible, and hence memory is not guaranteed to be consistent, until an event reports that the execution has completed. This works both ways: In a transfer between a host buffer and a device buffer, you cannot reuse a host buffer until you know that the event associated with the asynchronous copy moving data into the device buffer has completed. Indeed, a careful reading of the OpenCL specification suggests that because buffers are associated with the context and not a device, a `clEnqueueWriteBuffer` enqueue, even on completion, does not guarantee to have moved the data to the device, only that it be moved out of the host pointer:

*If `blocking_write` is `CL_TRUE`, the OpenCL implementation copies the data referred to by `ptr` and enqueues the write operation in the command-queue. The memory pointed to by `ptr` can be reused by the application after the `clEnqueueWriteBuffer` call returns*

*OpenCL programming guide section 5.2.2*

However, unlike other API calls in OpenCL, the read and write buffer calls allow us to specify synchronous execution. Had we replaced the previous call with

```
c1EnqueueReadBuffer(  
    commandQueue,  
    outputBuffer,  
    CL_TRUE,  
    0,  
    sizeof(int)*16,  
    returnedArray,  
    0,  
    0,  
    &readEvent );
```

execution of the host thread would stall at the read buffer call until all execution had completed and the copy had been correctly performed.

OpenCL also defines the context of sub-buffer objects that allow us to divide a single buffer into multiple smaller buffers that may overlap and that can be read, written, copied, and used in much the same way as their parent buffer objects. Note that overlapping sub-buffers and the combination of sub-buffers and their parent buffer objects constitutes aliasing, and behavior is undefined in these circumstances.

## Images

Images differ from buffers in three ways. Images are

- opaque types that cannot be viewed directly through pointers in device code;
- multidimensional structures; and
- limited to a range of types relevant to graphics data rather than being free to implement arbitrary structures.

Image objects exist in OpenCL to offer access to special function hardware on graphics processors that is designed to support highly efficient access to image data. These special function units do not always support the full range of access modes necessary to enable buffer access, but they may provide additional features such as filtering in hardware in a highly efficient manner. Filtering operations enable efficient transformations of image data based on collections of pixels. These operations would require long instruction sequences with multiple read operations and can be very efficiently performed in dedicated hardware units.

Image data is accessed through specialized access functions in the kernel code, as discussed later. Access to images from the host is not significantly different from access to buffers, except that all functions are expanded to support addressing in multiple dimensions. Thus, for example, `c1EnqueueReadImage` is more like `c1EnqueueReadBufferRect` than `c1EnqueueReadBuffer`.

The major difference between buffers and images from the host is in the formats images can support. Whereas buffers support the basic OpenCL types and structures made from them, Image formats are more subtle.

Image formats are a combination of a channel order and a channel type. Channel order defines the number of channels and the order in which they occur—for example, `CL_RGB`, `CL_R`, or `CL_ARGB`. Channel type is selected from a wide range of storage formats from `CL_FLOAT` to less storage-hungry formats such as `CL_UNORM_SHORT_565`, which packs into a single 16-bit word in memory. When accessed from kernel code, reading from any of these formats results in upconversion to a standard OpenCL C type. The list of image formats can be queried by the API call `clGetSupportedImageFormats`.

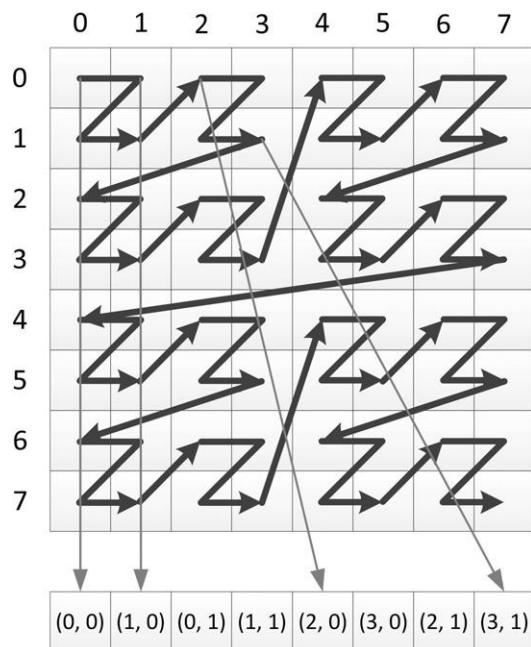
Images offer an additional feature that enables optimizations in the runtime system and hardware that buffers may often not support. Whereas image data can be mapped to the host using the `clEnqueueMapImage` API call, and hence image data must have a certain format when viewed through the mapped host pointer, the semantics of the map operation allow for format conversion. This feature of OpenCL data structures enables the runtime system to perform transformations on data that it controls.

Image objects cannot be accessed through pointers on the device and cannot be both read and write within the same kernel. As a result, the transformations that the runtime system performs can be entirely opaque to the kernels executing on the OpenCL device: Transformations can significantly improve performance without affecting code correctness. This feature of images also removes the possibility of aliased data, allowing the hardware to cache images in situations in which buffers cannot be safely cached.

Take one common optimization as an example. Any given multidimensional data structure, of which an image is an example, must be mapped to a single dimensional memory address at some point. The obvious method, and indeed the method applied to multidimensional arrays in most programming languages, is a dictionary order in either column-major or row-major pattern. That is,  $(x, y)$  comes before  $(x+1, y)$ , which comes long before  $(x, y+1)$ , and so on. The long distance in memory between  $(x, y)$  and  $(x, y+1)$  means that an access of consecutive addresses in the  $y$ -dimension stride inefficiently through memory hitting a large number of cache lines. In contrast, the fact that  $(x, y)$  is adjacent to  $(x+1, y)$  means consecutive accesses in  $x$  stride efficiently (and cause memory accesses to coalesce).

Z-order or Morton order memory layouts apply a mapping that preserves spatial locality of data points. [Figure 5.9](#) shows that the data is stored in order  $(0, 0), (1, 0), (0, 1), (1, 1), (2, 0)$  and so on. By storing data according to its position in a Z-ordered mapping, we may hit the same cache line repeatedly when performing a vertical read. If we go further by laying out our computational work in a two-dimensional layout (as we see with the quads created in the graphics pipeline), we further improve this data locality. This sort of optimization is only possible transparently (and hence different optimizations can be performed on different architectures) if we offer the kernel programmer no guarantees about the relative locations of memory elements.

We can go a step further with this approach. If we are executing on an architecture that does not have vector registers and does not perform vector reads from memory, we might wish `float4 a = read_imagef( sourceImage, imageSampler, location )`



## FIGURE 5.9

Applying the Z-order mapping to a two-dimensional memory space.

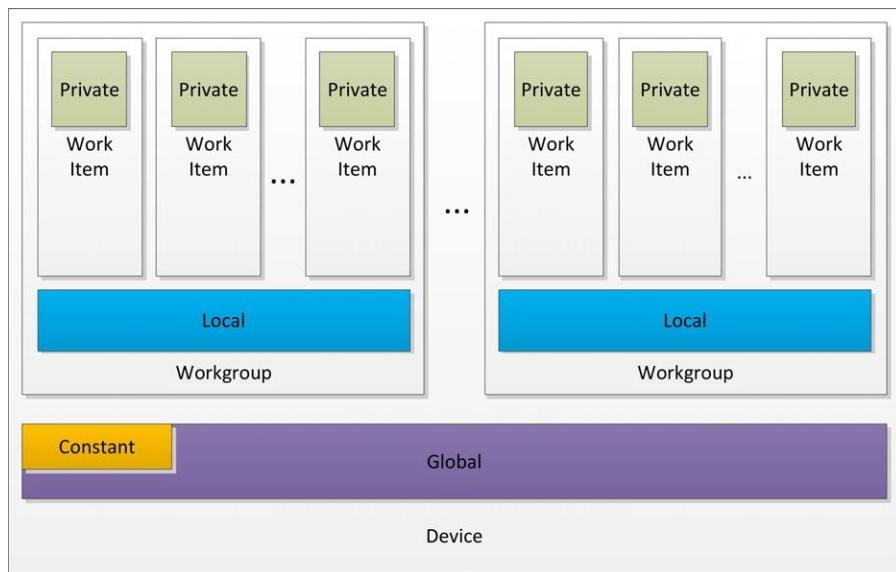
to compile down to four scalar reads instead of a single vector read. In these circumstances, it might be a more efficient use of the memory system to read from the same offset into four separate arrays instead of four times from the single array because the data in each separate array would exhibit better locality on each individual read operation.

## THE DEVICE-SIDE MEMORY MODEL

On OpenCL devices, the memory space is classified into four primary categories:

- Global memory
  - Local memory
  - Constant memory
  - Private memory

These memory spaces are visualized in Figure 5.10. As discussed in Chapter 3, OpenCL is designed to run on a range of architectures. The purpose of arranging a memory hierarchy of this form is to allow OpenCL to perform efficiently on such architectures. The actual meaning of each memory space in terms of a hardware mapping is very much implementation dependent. However they are mapped to hardware, as a

**FIGURE 5.10**

The OpenCL memory spaces available on an OpenCL device.

programming construct, these memory spaces are disjoint. Furthermore, as shown in Figure 5.10, local and private are divided into disjoint blocks across compute units and work items. By defining separate layers of address space in this way, the mapping to hardware can efficiently use anything from relaxed memory consistency models with programmatically controlled scratchpad buffers as seen on most GPU devices to fully coherent memory systems such as x86-based architectures.

The default address space for function arguments and local variables within a function or block is `private`. Pointer arguments to functions can be placed in one of the other address spaces depending on where the data comes from or where it is to be used. Note that the pointer itself is always in the `private` address space wherever the data lies.

The address spaces are strictly disjoint when used through pointers. Casting from one address space to another is not legal because this would imply either that the data lives at a globally accessible address or that the compiler would have to generate a copy to go with the cast, which is not feasible in practice. Image arguments to functions always live in the `global` address space, so we discuss images in those terms.

### Device-Side Relaxed Consistency

OpenCL's relaxed consistency model applies within the kernel as well as between dispatches. Writes to memory are not guaranteed to be visible until the end of the kernel execution unless fence operations are used. As a result, we have a hierarchy of consistency:

- Within a work item, memory operations are ordered predictably: Any two reads and writes to the same address will not be reordered by hardware or the compiler.
- Between work items and within a workgroup, memory is only guaranteed to be consistent at a barrier operation.
- Between workgroups, there are no guarantees about memory consistency until completion of the kernel execution—that is, when the event reports completion.

Given the previous hierarchy, there is no requirement for the compiler to make anything but the last write to a given address visible outside a given work item. To allow some level of communication between work items within and between workgroups, OpenCL provides a set of fence operations. Even with these fences, there are no guarantees of ordering between work items.

Fences come in read, write, and read/write versions:

- `read_mem_fence( cl_mem_fence_flags flags )`
- `write_mem_fence( cl_mem_fence_flags flags )`
- `mem_fence( cl_mem_fence_flags flags )`

In each case, the fence is parameterized with flags specifying the address space it is fencing. The value of these flags is some combination of `CLK_LOCAL_MEM_FENCE` and `CLK_GLOBAL_MEM_FENCE`. The fence ensures that loads and/or stores issued before the fence will complete before any loads and/or stores issued after the fence. No synchronization is implied by the fences alone. The `barrier` operation supports a read/write fence in one or both memory spaces as well as blocking until all work items in a given workgroup reach it.

An alternative approach to ensuring that memory operations are correctly communicated between work items is to use atomic operations. These are particularly useful because they guarantee not only that a write update occurs but also that a read and write combined with some operation on the data occur without interruption from another work item. However, they are only defined on integer data due to the complexity (both in implementation and in comprehension) of performing floating point atomics in most hardware. Atomic operations may be arithmetic operations, such as `int atomic_add( volatile __global int *p, int val )`, and data-only, such as `int atomic_xchg( volatile __global int *p, int val )`. In all cases, the atomic operation returns the original data that was at the memory location. Note that if the return value is ignored, the compiler is at liberty to use nonreturning atomic operations, which are far more efficient on many architectures.

## Global Memory

Global memory, defined in OpenCL C code by a pointer with the type qualifier `__global` (or `global`), or by one of the image types `image2d_t` or `image3d_t`, refers to data in a memory space consistently addressable by all compute units in the device. The two types of object differ in their scope and use cases.

The `__global` address space qualifier refers to a pointer referencing data in a buffer object. As noted previously, a buffer can carry any scalar data type, vector

data type, or user-defined structure. Whatever the type of buffer, it is accessed at the end of a pointer and can be read/write accessible as well as read-only. Thus, for example, the following trivial operation code is an example of valid use of a buffer:

```
typedef struct AStructure {
    float a;
    float b;
} AStructure;

__kernel void aFunction( __global AStructure *inputOutputBuffer ) {
    __global AStructure* inputLocation =
        inputOutputBuffer + get_global_id(0);
    __global AStructure* outputLocation =
        inputOutputBuffer + get_global_size(0) + get_global_id(0);

    outputLocation->a = inputLocation->a * -1;
    outputLocation->b = (*inputLocation).b + 3.f;
}
```

Image objects, although conceptually in the `__global` memory space, are treated differently from buffers and are not mappable to `__global` pointers. Image objects can be two-dimensional or three-dimensional and created using the `image2d_t` or `image3d_t` type qualifiers. Unlike buffers, images can be either read-only or write-only but never both within the same kernel. This is a result of the design of GPU hardware supporting very high-performance caching and filtering. Within kernel code, we specify which form of access we are using with the `__read_only` and `__write_only` access qualifiers on kernel image parameters.

Images are opaque memory objects. Although we can read or write the data based on addresses, we do not really know the relative memory locations of two different values in the image. As a result, and to support parameterization of the style of read, rather than accessing images through pointers, we use a set of built-in functions: `read_imagef`, `read_imagei`, `read_imageui`, `write_imagef`, and so on. Each of the image read functions takes three parameters:

```
float4 read_imagef(
    image2d_t image,
    sampler_t sampler,
    float2 coord)
```

The final address parameter can optionally be an `int2` (or `int4` if the image is of type `image3d_t`), and the precise meaning of the returned data depends on the image format. The OpenCL specification lists these options in full.

The first and third parameters to the read functions are self-explanatory, being the image object itself and the coordinate of the read. The second parameter is more complicated. This is a sampler object that defines how the image is interpreted by the hardware or runtime system. The sampler can be defined either by declaring a constant variable of `sampler_t` type within the OpenCL C source or by passing as a kernel

parameter a sampler created in host code using the `clCreateSampler` function. The following is an example of the use of a constant-variable-declared sampler:

```
__constant sampler_t sampler =
    CLK_NORMALIZED_COORDS_TRUE | CLK_FILTER_LINEAR;
__kernel void samplerUser(
    __read_only image2d_t sourceImage,
    __global float *outputBuffer ) {
    float4 a = read_imagef(
        sourceImage,
        sampler,
        (float2)(
            (float)(get_global_id(0)),
            (float)(get_global_id(1)) ) );
    outputBuffer[
        get_global_id(1) * get_global_size(0) +
        get_global_id(0)] = a.x + a.y + a.z + a.w;
}
```

The value returned in the `float4` vector depends on the image format specified on image creation. A `CL_R` image, for example, would only contain data in the `x` channel with 1.0 in the `w` (alpha) channel.

The write functions take a similar set of parameters, replacing the sampler with the value to write:

```
float4 write_imagef(image2d_t image, float2 coord, float4 color)
```

## Local Memory

A subset of the architectures supported by OpenCL, including many of the GPUs and the Cell broadband engine, possess small scratchpad memory buffers distinct from the primary DRAM and caching infrastructure. Local memory in these cases is disjoint from global memory and often accessed using separate memory operations. As a result, data must be copied in and out of it programmatically. Depending on the architecture, this occurs either through DMA transfers (most efficiently accessed using the `async_work_group_copy` function) or by memory-to-memory copies. Local memory is also supported in CPU implementations, but it sits in standard cacheable memory; in such cases, use of local memory can still be beneficial because it encourages cache-aware programming.

Local memory is most useful because it provides the most efficient method of communication between work items in a workgroup. Any allocated local memory buffer can be accessed at any location by an entire workgroup and hence writes to the local array will be visible to other work items. Remember that OpenCL work items are conceptually, if not literally, executed independently.

Local memory is defined by the `__local` address space qualifier and can be defined either locally in the kernel or as a parameter. Both examples are shown in the following code:

```

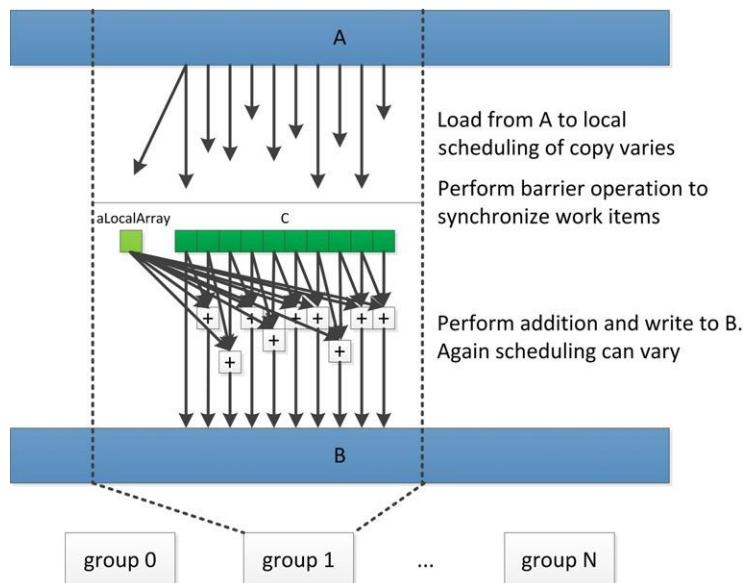
__kernel void localAccess(
    __global float* A,
    __global float* B,
    __local float* C )
{
    __local float aLocalArray[1];

    if( get_local_id(0) == 0 ) {
        aLocalArray[0] = A[0];
    }
    C[get_local_id(0)] = A[get_global_id(0)];
    barrier( CLK_LOCAL_MEM_FENCE );

    float neighborSum = C[get_local_id(0)] + aLocalArray[0];
    if( get_local_id(0) > 0 )
        neighborSum = neighborSum + C[get_local_id(0)-1];
    B[get_global_id(0)] = neighborSum;
}

```

Figure 5.11 shows a diagrammatic representation of the data flow in the previous code sample. Note that data will be read from global memory and written to the two local arrays *C* and *aLocalArray* at unpredictable times as the work items execute independently in an undefined order. The reality will be slightly more predictable on



**FIGURE 5.11**

The pattern of data flow for the example shown in the “localAccess” code.

a given device because implementations will map to hardware in predictable ways. For example, on the AMD GPUs, execution occurs in lock-step over a wide SIMD vector, meaning that the read and write operations will have an ordering guarantee over the entire vector in the same way that they would over a single work item. However, this feature does not apply generally. In the general case, we must insert the barrier operation: Only at this barrier can we guarantee that all writes to local arrays, and the global memory reads that feed them, will have been completed across the workgroup such that the data is visible to all work items. Beyond this barrier, the data can be used by the entire workgroup as shown in the lower part of the diagram.

`aLocalArray` is at function scope lexically but is visible to the entire workgroup. That is, there is only one 32-bit variable in local memory per workgroup, and any work item in the group using the name `aLocalArray` has access to the same 32-bit value. In this case, after the barrier we know that work item 0 has written to `aLocalArray` and hence all work items in the group can now read from it.

The alternative method for creating local arrays is through a kernel parameter, as we see for array `C`. This version is created by a runtime API call. To allocate the memory, we call `clSetKernelArg` as we would for passing a global array to the kernel, but we leave the final pointer field as 0. We therefore allocate a per-workgroup amount of memory based on the third parameter but with no global object to back it up so it sits in local memory:

```
ciErrNum = clSetKernelArg(  
    kernel object,  
    parameter index,  
    size in bytes,  
    0);
```

## Constant Memory

The constant address space, described by the `__constant` qualifier, intends to cleanly separate small sets of constant values from the global address space such that the runtime can allocate caching resources or efficient constant memory banks if possible. Data allocated in the constant address space is passed to the kernel using `clSetKernelArg` and can be accessed through a pointer from within the kernel. Architectures differ in how they treat this data. For example, the AMD Radeon™ HD 6970 is designed to support three types of constant data:

- Direct address: The address of the data is constant and can be embedded into the instruction. This is very fast, 16 bytes/cycle/core, because data can be placed in hardware constant buffers.
- Same index: The address is the same across an entire wavefront; 4 bytes/cycle/core.
- Varying index: Treated as global memory and may be cached through L1.

OpenCL defines a limited number of constant arguments for each device that, along with the constant buffer size, can be queried with `CL_DEVICE_MAX_CONSTANT_ARGS` and `CL_DEVICE_MAX_CONSTANT_BUFFER_SIZE` arguments to `clDeviceInfo` arguments.

To pass a `__constant` buffer to a kernel, the buffer must be allocated using the `CL_MEM_READ_ONLY` flag.

## Private Memory

Private memory refers to all variables not declared with an address space qualifier, all variables within nonkernel functions, and all function arguments that are not pointers. In principle, private data may be placed in registers, but due to either a lack of capacity spilling or an inability for the hardware to dynamically index register arrays, data may be pushed back into global memory. The amount of private memory allocated directly impacts on the number of registers used by the kernel.

Like local memory, a given architecture will have a limited number of registers. The performance impact of using too large a number will vary from one architecture to another.

x86 CPUs have a relatively small number of registers. However, due to large caches, the operations of pushing these registers to memory on the stack and returning them to registers later often incur little overhead. Variables can be efficiently moved in and out of scope, keeping only the most frequently used data in registers.

GPUs do not generally have the luxury of using a cache in this way. Many devices do not have read/write caches, and those that do may be limited in size and hence spilling registers from a large number of work items would rapidly lead to filling this cache, leading to stalling on a miss when the data is required again. Spilling to DRAM on such a device causes a significant performance degradation and is best avoided.

When not spilling registers, the capacity of the register bank of a GPU trades against the number of active threads in a similar manner to that of LDS. The AMD Radeon HD 6970 architecture has 256 kB of registers on each compute unit. This is 256 four-vector (128-bit) registers per work item in a 64-wide wavefront. If we use 100 registers per work item, only two waves will fit on the hardware, which is not enough to cover anything more than instruction latency. If we use 49 registers per work item, we can fit five waves, which helps with latency hiding.

Moving data into registers may appear to improve performance, but if the cost is that one fewer wavefront can execute on the core, less latency hiding occurs and we may see more stalls and more wasted GPU cycles.

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## SUMMARY

In this chapter, we discussed the consistency, concurrency, and synchronization of OpenCL programs. OpenCL follows a relaxed execution and consistency model to aid efficient implementation on as wide a range of architectures as possible. In later chapters, we consider how the execution model maps to some specific architectures and then discuss case studies that give some idea of how to optimize an OpenCL program to use the hardware efficiently.

# Dissecting a CPU/GPU OpenCL Implementation

# 6

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## INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 3, we discussed trade-offs present in different architectures, many of which support the execution of OpenCL programs. The design of OpenCL is such that the model maps capably to a wide range of architectures, allowing for tuning and acceleration of kernel code. In this chapter, we discuss OpenCL's mapping to a real system in the form of a high-end AMD CPU combined with an AMD Radeon HD6970 GPU. Although AMD systems have been chosen to illustrate this mapping and implementation, each respective vendor has implemented a similar mapping for NVIDIA GPUs, Intel/ARM CPUs, and any OpenCL-compliant architecture.

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## OPENCL ON AN AMD PHENOM II X6

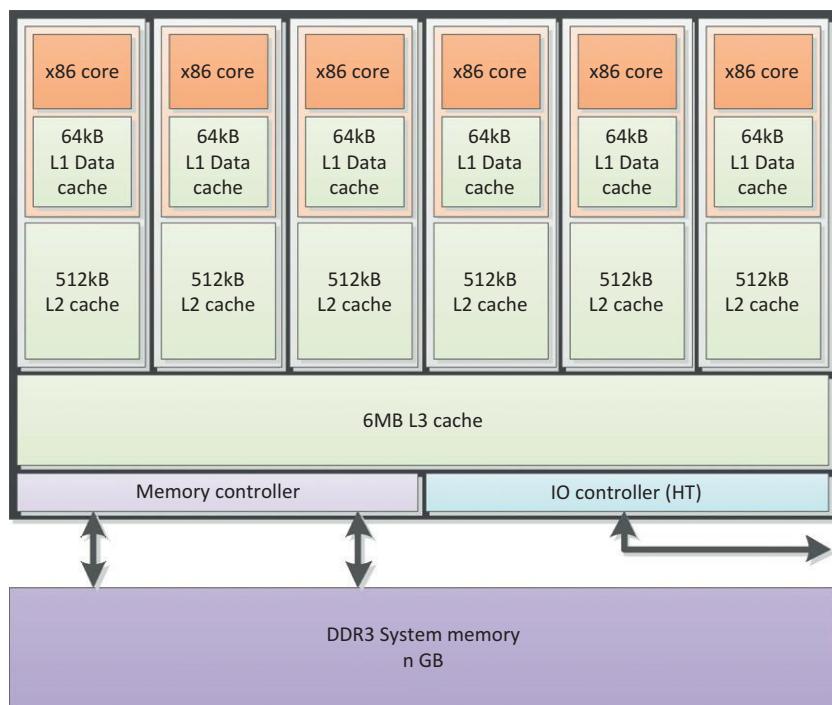
AMD's OpenCL implementation is designed to run on both AMD GPUs and AMD's x86 CPUs in an integrated manner. All host code executes as would be expected on the general-purpose x86 CPUs in a machine, along with operating system and general application code. However, AMD's OpenCL implementation is also capable of compiling and executing OpenCL C code on x86 devices using the queuing mechanisms provided by the OpenCL runtime.

OpenCL can run on each of the six cores of an AMD Phenom II X6 chip within the larger system. [Figure 6.1](#) shows a diagram of the AMD Phenom II X6 design.

In [Figure 6.2](#), OpenCL is mapped onto this architecture. The entire chip is consumed by the OpenCL runtime as a single device that is obtained using `clGetDeviceIDs` and is passed to `clCreateContext` and `clBuildProgram`. The CPU device requires the `CL_DEVICE_TYPE_CPU` flag to be passed to the device types parameter of `clGetDeviceIDs`.

By treating the entire CPU as a single device, parallel workloads can be spread across the CPU cores from a single queue, efficiently using the parallelism present in the system. It is possible to split the CPU into multiple devices using the device fission extension that is discussed in a later chapter.

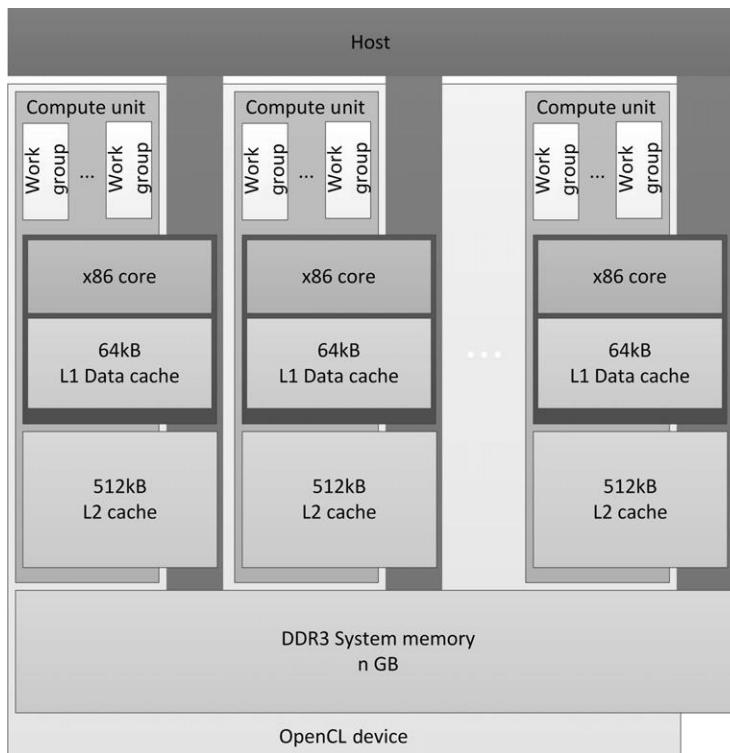
The OpenCL CPU runtime creates a thread to execute on each core of the CPU as a work pool to process OpenCL kernels as they are generated. These threads are

**FIGURE 6.1**

AMD Phenom II X6: six cores and a large level 3 cache.

passed work by a core management thread for each queue that has the role of removing the first entry from the queue and setting up work for the worker threads. Any given OpenCL kernel may comprise thousands of workgroups for which arguments must be appropriately prepared, memory allocated, and, if necessary, initialized and work queues generated.

OpenCL utilizes barriers and fences to support fine-grained synchronization. On a typical CPU-based system, in which the operating system is responsible for managing interthread communication, the cost of interacting with the operating system is a barrier to achieving efficient scaling of parallel implementations. In addition, running a single workgroup across multiple cores could create cache-sharing issues. To alleviate these issues, the OpenCL CPU runtime executes a workgroup within a single operating system thread. The OpenCL thread will run each work item in the workgroup in turn before moving onto the next work item. After all work items in the workgroup have finished executing, the worker thread will move on to the next workgroup in its work queue. As such, there is no parallelism between multiple work items within a workgroup, although between workgroups multiple operating system threads allow parallel execution when possible.

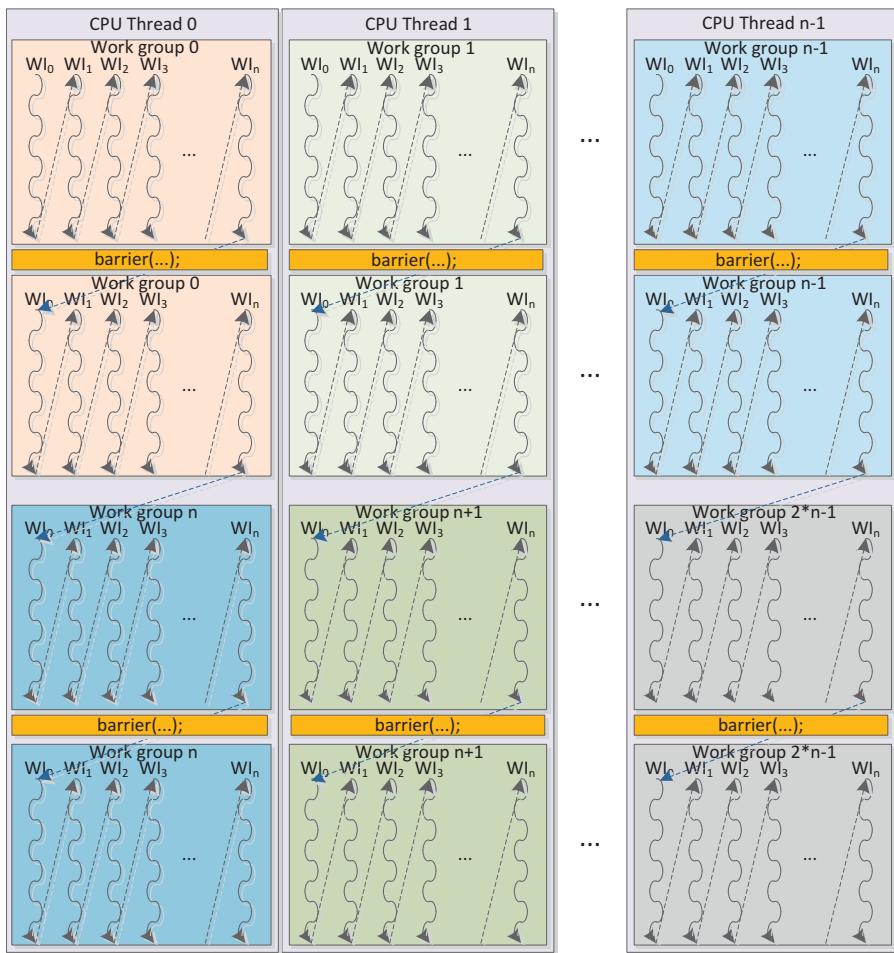


**FIGURE 6.2**

The OpenCL mapping to the Phenom II X6 chip. Note that the host runs on the same cores that represent the OpenCL device's compute units.

In the presence of barrier synchronization, OpenCL work items within a single workgroup execute concurrently. Each work item in the group must complete the section of the code that precedes the barrier operation, wait for other work items to reach the barrier, and then continue execution. At the barrier operation, one work item must terminate and another continue; however, it is impractical for performance reasons to let the operating system handle this with *thread preemption* (i.e., interrupting one thread to allow another to run). In AMD's OpenCL CPU runtime, barrier operations are supported using `setjmp` and `longjmp`. `setjmp` stores system state and `longjmp` restores it by returning to the system state at the point where `setjmp` was called (Gummaraju *et al.*, 2010). In the AMD OpenCL runtime, custom versions of these two functions are provided because they need to work in cooperation with the hardware branch predictor and maintain proper program stack alignment.

An example of using a barrier in kernel `foo()` is shown in Figure 6.3. Note that although a CPU thread executes multiple workgroups, it will complete one

**FIGURE 6.3**

An OpenCL worker thread processes an entire workgroup one work item at a time. At a barrier or the end of the kernel, the thread transitions to the next work item.

workgroup at a time before moving on to the next. When a barrier is involved, it will execute every work item of that group up to the barrier, then every work item after the barrier, hence providing correct barrier semantics.

```
__kernel foo(){
    ...
    barrier(CLK_GLOBAL_MEM_FENCE);
    ...
}
```

The AMD Phenom II microarchitecture includes 128-bit vector registers and operations from various Streaming SIMD Extension (SSE) versions.<sup>1</sup> OpenCL C includes a set of vector types: `float2`, `float4`, `int4`, and other data formats. Mathematical operations are *overloaded*<sup>2</sup> on these vector types, enabling the following operations:

```
float4 a = input_data[location];
float4 b = a + (float4)(0.f, 1.f, 2.f, 3.f);
output_data[location] = b;
```

These vector types are stored in vector registers and operations on them compile to SSE instructions on the AMD Phenom architecture. This offers an important performance optimization. Vector load and store operations, as we also see in our low-level code discussions, improve the efficiency of memory operations. Currently, access to SSE vectors is entirely explicit within a single work item: We will see how this model differs when we discuss a GPU in the next section.

The AMD Phenom II design does not provide dedicated hardware for scratchpad memory buffers. CPUs typically provide multiple levels of memory caching in order to hide main memory access latency. The data localization provided by local memory supports efficient mapping onto the CPU cache hierarchy and allows the kernel developer to improve cache performance even in the absence of a true hardware scratchpad. To improve cache locality, local memory regions are allocated as an array per CPU thread and reused for each workgroup executed by that thread. For a sequence of workgroups, barring any data races or memory conflicts, there is then no need for this local memory to generate further cache misses and, as an additional benefit, there is no overhead from repeated calls to memory allocation routines. Figure 6.4 shows how we would map local memory to the AMD Phenom II cache.

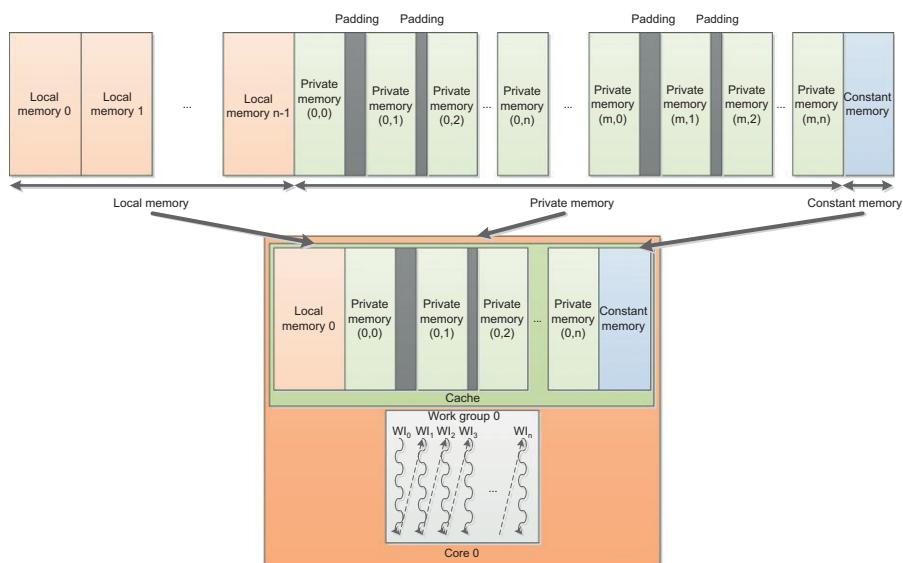
Work item data stored in registers is backed into a work item stack in main memory during the `setjmp` call. This memory is carefully laid out to behave well in the cache, reducing cache contention and hence conflict misses and improving the utilization of the cache hierarchy. In particular, the work item stack data is staggered in memory to reduce the chance of conflicts, and data is maintained in large pages to ensure contiguous mapping to physical memory and to reduce pressure on the CPU's translation lookaside buffer.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>SSE is a SIMD instruction set extension to the x86 architecture. Both AMD and Intel have introduced multiple generations of SSE instruction set extensions since 1999.

<sup>2</sup>Overloading is a form of polymorphism that supports reuse of the same function name over multiple parameter types, simplifying code such that only intent is required in the function name rather than intent and parameter type.

<sup>3</sup>A translation lookaside buffer is a hardware table on the CPU that caches virtual to physical memory address translations.

**FIGURE 6.4**

Regions of local, private, and constant memory are stored contiguously for each workgroup and work item. This data will be loaded into the cache hierarchy as contiguous blocks, maintaining cache locality as much as possible while a given workgroup is executing.

## OPENCL ON THE AMD RADEON HD6970 GPU

A GPU is a significantly different target for OpenCL code compared with the CPU. The reader must remember that a graphics processor is primarily designed to render three-dimensional graphics efficiently, such that the underlying architecture is significantly different from a CPU's architecture. On current GPUs, this difference comes down to a few main features, of which the following three were discussed in Chapter 3:

- Wide single instruction multiple data (SIMD) execution: Multiple execution units execute the same instruction on different data items.
- Heavily multithreading: Support for a large number of concurrent thread contexts.
- Hardware scratchpad memory: Physical memory buffers purely under the programmer's control.

The following are additional differences that are more subtle but interesting because they create opportunities to provide improvements in terms of latency of work dispatch and communication:

- Hardware synchronization support: Supporting fine-grained communication between concurrent hardware threads

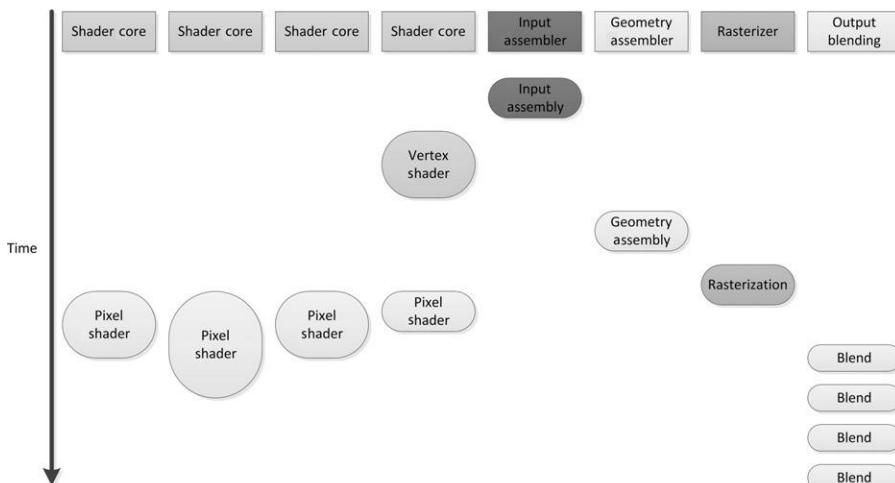
- Hardware managed tasking and dispatch: Work queue management and load balancing in hardware

Hardware synchronization support reduces the overhead of synchronizing execution of multiple thread contexts on a given SIMD core, enabling fine-grained communication at low cost.

GPUs provide extensive hardware support for task dispatch because of their deep roots in the three-dimensional graphics world. Gaming workloads involve managing complicated task graphs arising from interleaving of work in a graphics pipeline. As shown in the high-level diagram of the AMD Radeon HD6970 in Figure 3.8, the architecture consists of a command processor and group generator at the front that passes constructed groups to a pair of hardware schedulers. These two schedulers arrange compute workloads onto the 24 SIMD cores spread throughout the device. For graphics workloads, AMD includes a further set of hardware accelerator blocks below the command processor:

- Tesselator: Tessellation is the process of generating smaller triangles from larger ones to scale model complexity at runtime.
- Geometry assembler: Packages geometric information for processing by shaders.
- Rasterizer: Transforms vector data into a raster format.
- Hierarchical Z processor: Maintains a hierarchical representation of the scene depth to reduce load by providing the ability to reject pixels early based on depth.

Together, these units allow the hardware to schedule workloads as shown in [Figure 6.5](#). To obtain the high degrees of performance acceleration associated with



**FIGURE 6.5**

A hardware-managed schedule for the set of tasks performed on a small unit of GPU work. When many of these work loads are scheduled together, the hardware can be very efficiently utilized.

GPU computing, scheduling must be very efficient. Thread scheduling overhead needs to remain low because the chunks of work assembled by the input assembly may be very small—for example, a single triangle consisting of a few pixels. This amount of work alone would not keep the machine utilized, but remember that the full graphics pipeline is very quickly assembling, rasterizing and shading a large number of triangles concurrently, as shown in the schedule in [Figure 6.5](#) (note that the unutilized compute time depicted by whitespace in the figure will fill out easily when multiple triangles are being processed concurrently). This presents a good example of why the GPU is designed for high-throughput processing and, hence, why workloads need to map properly to the underlying hardware to attain good performance.

In terms of OpenCL, much of this rasterization and assembly hardware is not necessary because dispatches are predefined and need only be simply assembled into work wavefronts for dispatch. However, the optimizations necessary to support this work with a deeply pipelined command processor and work generator mean that to attain good performance on a GPU of this design, we need to do the following:

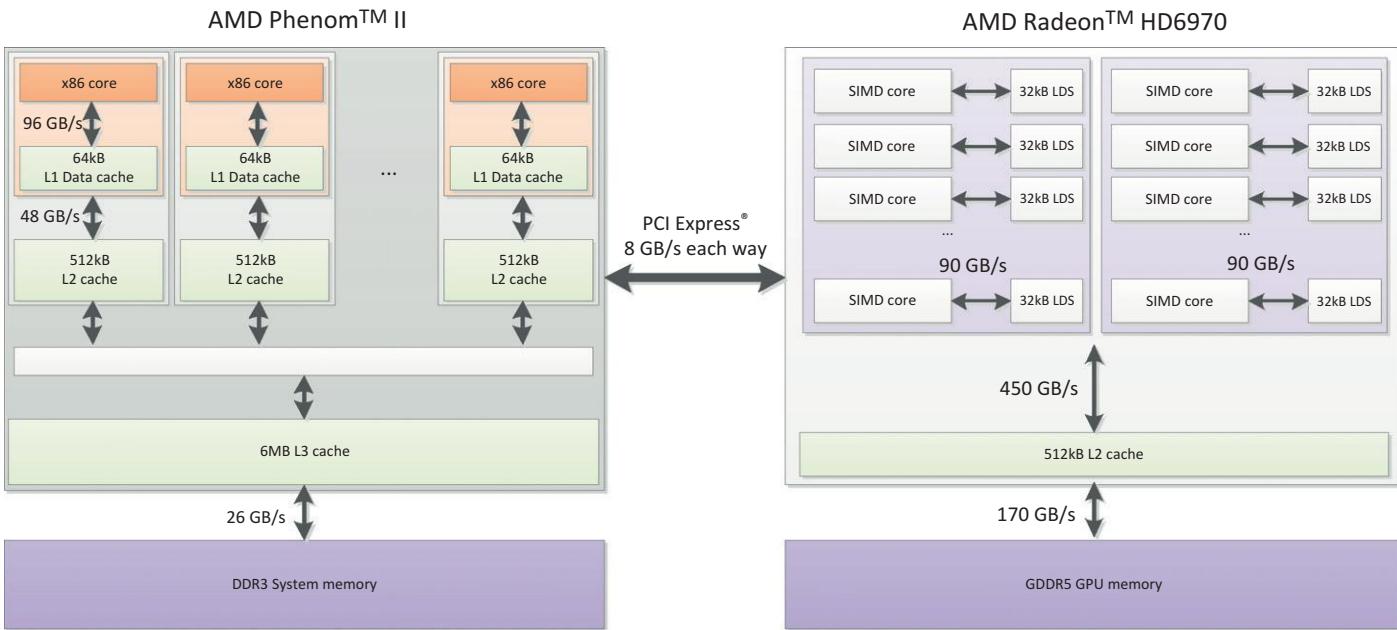
- Provide a lot of work for each kernel execution
- Batch jobs together

By providing a sufficient amount of work in each kernel, we ensure that the group generation pipeline is kept occupied so that it always has more work to give to the wave schedulers and the schedulers always have more work to push onto the SIMD units. In essence, we wish to create a large number of threads to occupy the machine: As discussed previously, the GPU is a throughput machine.

The second point refers to OpenCL's queuing mechanism. When the OpenCL runtime chooses to process work in the work queue associated with the device, it scans through the tasks in the queue, selecting an appropriately large chunk to process. From this set of tasks, it constructs a command buffer of work for the GPU to process in a language understood by the command processor at the front of the GPU's pipeline. This process of (1) constructing a queue, (2) locating it somewhere in memory, (3) telling the device where it is, and (4) asking the device to process it takes time. In particular, as the GPU runs behind a driver running in kernel space, this process requires a number of context switches into and out of kernel space to allow the GPU to start running. As in the case of the CPU, where context switches between threads would become a significant overhead, switching into kernel mode and preparing queues for overly small units of work is inefficient. There is a fairly constant overhead for dispatching a work queue and further overhead for processing depending on the amount of work in it. This constant overhead must be overcome through adequate work in one or more kernels.

## Threading and the Memory System

[Figure 6.6](#) shows an approximation of the memory hierarchy of a system containing an AMD Phenom II CPU and an AMD Radeon HD6970 GPU. The CPU cache hierarchy in this setup is arranged to reduce latency of a single memory access stream:

**FIGURE 6.6**

Approximate bandwidth numbers for the various levels of memory hierarchy on both the AMD Phenom II CPU and the AMD Radeon HD6970 GPU. Note particularly the low bandwidth of the PCI express bus compared with the other levels, particularly the caches, on both sides of the interface.

Any significant latency will cause that stream to stall and reduce execution efficiency. Because the design of the GPU cores uses threading and wide SIMD to maximize throughput at the cost of latency, the memory system is similarly designed to maximize bandwidth to satisfy that throughput, with some latency cost.

The limited caching associated with high-bandwidth GDDR5 on the Radeon design is made possible by the following:

- Local data shares (LDS)
- A high level of on-chip multithreading
- Coalescing through read-only and write-only caches

LDS allows for high bandwidth and low latency programmer-controlled read/write access. This form of programmable data reuse is less wasteful and also more area/power efficient than hardware-controlled caching. The reduced waste data access (data that is loaded into the cache but not used) means that the LDS can be smaller than a cache per unit area and make fewer unnecessary transfers from higher cache levels.

Hardware-controlled multithreading in the SIMD cores allows the hardware to cover latency to memory. To perform a memory access, a thread running on a SIMD unit is switched off that unit and into a separate memory controller. The thread does not resume on the SIMD until the memory access returns. To reach high levels of performance and utilization, a sufficiently large number of threads must be running. Four or 8 wavefronts (hardware thread contexts of 64 work items) per SIMD core are sufficient in many cases, although the theoretical maximum is 32 with up to eight OpenCL workgroups in flight per SIMD unit. This must be balanced against register and LDS use.

The read-only and write-only caches that are present in the system provide a filtering mechanism to combine complicated gathered read and scattered write access patterns in vector memory operations into the largest possible units. The large vector reads that often result are far more efficient for a DRAM-based system, requiring less temporal caching than the time-distributed smaller reads arising from x86 code.

The diagram in [Figure 6.6](#) shows the PCI Express bus. All traffic between the CPU, and hence main memory, and the GPU must go through this pipe. Because PCI Express bandwidth is significantly lower than access to DRAM and even lower than the capabilities of on-chip buffers, this can become a significant bottleneck on a heavily communication-dependent application. In an OpenCL application, we need to minimize the number and size of memory copy operations relative to the kernels we enqueue. It is difficult to achieve good performance in an application that is expected to run on a discrete GPU if that application has a tight feedback loop involving copying data back and forth across the PCI Express bus.

## Clause-Based SIMD Execution

The current AMD GPU architectures feature a form of decoupled execution that makes the overall design highly parallel (and, indeed, superscalar) in operation. To program such a decoupled execution, the ISA-level program forms an interesting

clause-based format. In this context, a clause is a software-controlled unit of machine scheduling that divides execution into blocks with defined types for executing on distinct superscalar execution units. Having a reasonable understanding of assembly code for the GPU architecture is helpful in optimizing OpenCL code in the same way that visualizing how many SSE instructions appear in x86 assembly code can help show performance issues there. The following is a simple example of code written for the Radeon HD6970 architecture:

```
; ----- Disassembly -----
00 ALU_PUSH_BEFORE: ADDR(32) CNT(5) KCACHEO(CB0:0-15)
    0 x: LSHL      ___, R1.x, (0x00000007, 9.809089250e-45f).x
    1 y: ADD_INT   RO.y, RO.x, PVO.x
    2 z: SETGT_UINT RO.z, KCO[0].y, PV1.y
    3 x: PREDNE_INT ___, RO.z, 0.of UPDATE_EXEC_MASK UPDATE_PRED
01 JUMP POP_CNT(1) ADDR(15)
02 ALU: ADDR(37) CNT(1) KCACHEO(CB0:0-15)
    4 w: ADD_INT   RO.w, RO.y, KCO[0].x
03 TEX: ADDR(80) CNT(1)
    5 VFETCH R4.x___, RO.w, fc1
        FETCH_TYPE(NO_INDEX_OFFSET)
04 ALU_PUSH_BEFORE: ADDR(38) CNT(1)
    6 x: PREDGT    ___, R4.x, 0.of UPDATE_EXEC_MASK UPDATE_PRED
05 JUMP POP_CNT(2) ADDR(15)
06 ALU: ADDR(39) CNT(2)
    7 z: LSHL      RO.z, RO.w, 1
        w: MOV       R4.w, 0.0f
07 TEX: ADDR(82) CNT(2)
    8 VFETCH RO.xy___, RO.z, fc0      FORMAT(32_32_FLOAT)
        FETCH_TYPE (NO_INDEX_OFFSET)
    9 VFETCH R1.x___, RO.w, fc2
        FETCH_TYPE(NO_INDEX_OFFSET)
08 ALU: ADDR(41) CNT(3)
    10 x: LSHL     R7.x, RO.y, (0x00000002, 2.802596929e-45f).x
        w: LSHL     RO.w, RO.x, (0x00000002, 2.802596929e-45f).x
09 TEX: ADDR(86) CNT(4)
    11 VFETCH R3.xyz___, RO.w, fc154 FORMAT(32_32_32_FLOAT)
        FETCH_TYPE(NO_INDEX_OFFSET)
    12 VFETCH R6.xyz___, R7.x, fc154 FORMAT(32_32_32_FLOAT)
        FETCH_TYPE(NO_INDEX_OFFSET)
    13 VFETCH R2.x___, RO.x, fc3
        FETCH_TYPE(NO_INDEX_OFFSET)
    14 VFETCH RO.x___, RO.y, fc3
        FETCH_TYPE(NO_INDEX_OFFSET)
10 ALU: ADDR(44) CNT(25) KCACHEO(CB0:0-15)
    15 x: ADD      R5.x, -R3.x, R6.x
        y: ADD      RO.y, -R3.y, R6.y
```

```

          z: ADD      R0.z, -R3.z,   R6.z
          w: MOV      R8.w,  0.0f
16   x: DOT4_e   ___, PV15.x,  PV15.x
          y: DOT4_e   ___, PV15.y,  PV15.y
          z: DOT4_e   ___, PV15.z,  PV15.z
          w: DOT4_e   ___, (0x80000000, -0.0f).x, 0.0f
17   y: ADD      ___, R1.x,    PV16.x
          z: ADD      T0.z,  R1.x,    -PV16.x
18   x: MOV      R1.x,    R0.w
          y: MOV      R1.y,    R0.w
          z: MOV      R1.z,    R0.w
          w: MUL_e    ___, R4.x,    PV17.y
19   x: RCP_e    ___, PV18.w
          y: RCP_e    ___, PV18.w
          z: RCP_e    ___, PV18.w
20   z: MUL_e    ___, T0.z,    PV19.x
21   y: MUL_e    ___, KCO[0].z, PV20.z
22   x: MUL_e    ___, R2.x,    PV21.y
          w: MUL_e    R0.w,  R0.x,    PV21.y  VEC_120
23   x: MULADD_e R4.x,  -R5.x,  PV22.x,  R3.x
          y: MULADD_e R4.y,  -R0.y,  PV22.x,  R3.y
          z: MULADD_e R4.z,  -R0.z,  PV22.x,  R3.z
11 MEM_RAT_CACHELESS_STORE_DWORD_NI: RAT(0)[R1], R4, ARRAY_SIZE(4)
          MARK VPM
12 ALU: ADDR(69) CNT(6)
24   x: MULADD_e R8.x,  R5.x,  R0.w,  R6.x
          y: MULADD_e R8.y,  R0.y,  R0.w,  R6.y
          z: MULADD_e R8.z,  R0.z,  R0.w,  R6.z
25   x: MOV      R7.x,  R7.x
          y: MOV      R7.y,  R7.x
          z: MOV      R7.z,  R7.x
13 MEM_RAT_CACHELESS_STORE_DWORD_NI: RAT(0)[R7], R8, ARRAY_SIZE(4)
          MARK VPM
14 POP (2) ADDR(15)
15 NOP NO_BARRIER
16 END
END_OF_PROGRAM

```

The leftmost code at 00, 01, 02, and so on at the leftmost indentation level is a control flow program. This code executes on the wave scheduler unit, interleaved between any of the wavefronts running on that scheduler's half of the device. This program, and hence the scheduler, handles all branching and mask management, using values returned from ALU workloads. The latency of executing each control flow instruction is relatively high, on the order of 40 or more cycles between executing one clause from a given wavefront and executing the next. This latency is easily covered if the code contains a lot of ALU work and there are enough wavefronts to execute while the first is returning to the scheduler for control flow execution.

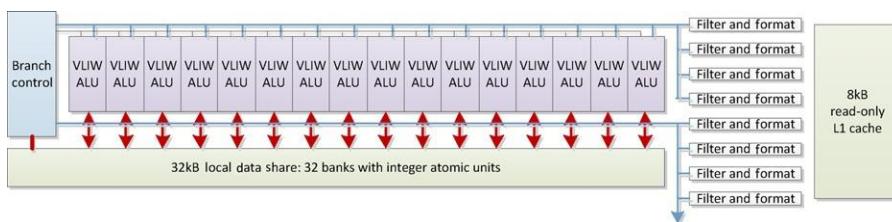
A glance at the ISA code gives some idea of how efficiently it will schedule if combined with enough wavefronts.

Lines 02, 04, etc. are ALU operations within the control flow program. These statements initiate ALU clauses. At these points, the scheduler passes control to one of the SIMD units whereby that SIMD unit will process the ALU operations within the clause. Once an ALU clause starts on a SIMD engine, it runs to completion, with no more control flow occurring internally. Note two important features of these ALU clauses, although only the first is directly apparent in the code:

- This is a single-lane instruction stream; that is, they are not wide SIMD instructions.
- The clauses contain VLIW instructions, visible as  $x, y, z, w$  entries.

The idea of programming a SIMD architecture using a lanewise model was discussed previously. In this case, the ISA code seen here is just one kernel instance representing exactly what we would see in the OpenCL kernel that generated it. The SIMD engine executes 64-wide logical SIMD entities called wavefronts. Each wavefront utilizes a single instruction decode and has its own instruction stream and can be viewed as a separate hardware thread context. The 64 work items within the wavefront execute over four clock cycles over a 16-lane hardware SIMD unit. Different wavefronts execute at different points in their instruction streams. All branching is performed at this wavefront granularity. Any sub-wavefront branching will require replaying of the clauses within the wave scheduler until all combinations have correctly executed and hence this divergence creates inefficiency. The same issues arise when developing for competing architectures such as NVIDIA's GTX580 design and are inherent in software production for wide vector architectures, whether manually vectorized or hardware vectorized as are these architectures.

A diagram of the SIMD unit that executes this code is shown in [Figure 6.7](#). Each SIMD unit contains a 32-ported LDS with a four-operation latency and atomic units on its interface. These atomic units mean that non-returning atomic operations can be executing on the LDS at the same time as ALU operations executing within the



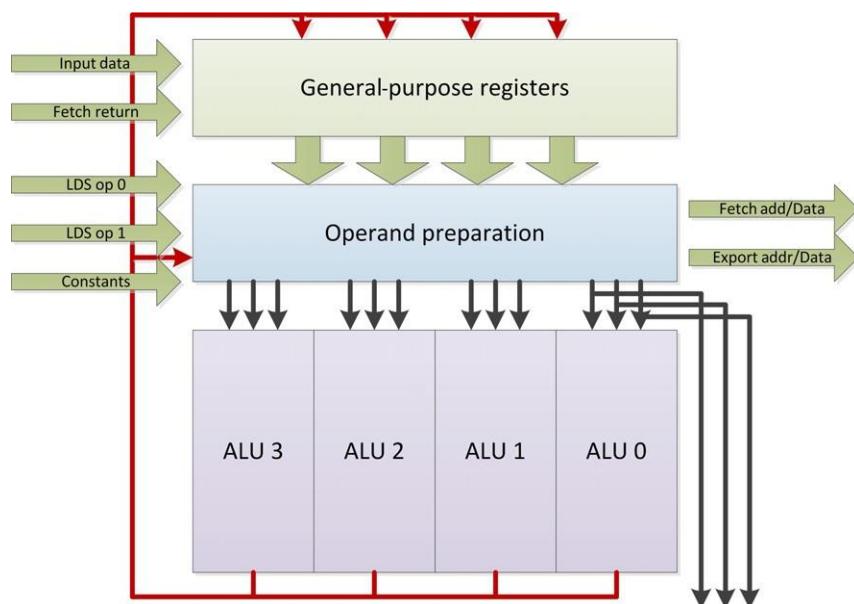
**FIGURE 6.7**

A SIMD core on the Radeon HD6970 architecture. The 16 SIMD lanes execute two 64-wide wavefronts at one time interleaved over eight cycles. Each SIMD unit has 32 kB of local data store on board.

ALUs, offering further parallelism. Colliding reads or writes to LDS are replayed over multiple cycles until the operation is complete. For reads, this can cause the ALUs to stall.

The VLIW packets that the architecture can execute are very flexible, running through four near-identical ALUs, as can be seen in Figure 6.8. Each way of the VLIW unit can execute full 32-bit floating point operations, 24-bit integer operations (using the floating point mantissa), and 32-bit integer adds. These operations need not be identical, as is apparent in packet 15 in the code, in which three floating point addition operations and a single move execute in the same VLIW packet. VLIW ways can combine resources in various combinations to execute a wider range of double precision and integer operations with fewer than four per packet. For example, one double precision floating point multiply can be executed per cycle, giving double precision multiplication a 4:1 slowdown compared with single precision multiplication.

VLIW execution leads to a high level of efficiency from the architecture where a significant ALU capacity requires little control logic to go with it. However, the



**FIGURE 6.8**

One lane of the SIMD unit showing the VLIW format of the execution hardware that can be seen within the ALU clauses in the instruction stream. The four VLIW units can perform the basic arithmetic operations in various combinations. For example, across the four units, four 32-bit floating point multiply add or fused multiply-add, one 64-bit version, two 64-bit floating point additions, one 32-bit floating point special operations (sin, log, etc.).

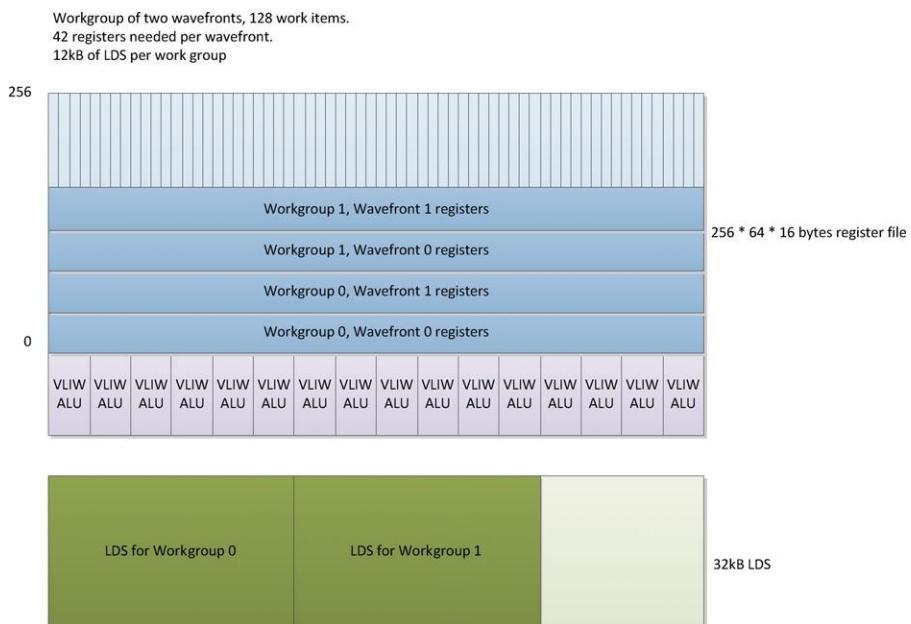
necessity for the compiler to extract VLIW packets leads to a significant reduction in efficiency in most cases, and in the code example we can see that only four ALU packets are completely full of operations. Where a VLIW packet executes with fewer than four slots filled, the hardware is wasting possible execution resources. The compiler is fairly good at extracting VLIW packets from code if there are no dependencies, and as a result, unrolled loops or, even better, vectorization of code allow for the best utilization because they provide the compiler with as many independent instructions as possible. In this way, we see that unlike the AMD CPU implementation of OpenCL that was entirely explicitly vectorized, the code for the AMD Radeon HD6970 architecture is both implicit and explicit. It is implicit in that it programs a vector architecture lanewise, relying on hardware vectorization to map the individual work items represented by the ISA code to hardware. It is explicit because small-scale source vectorization assists filling VLIW packets, maximizing memory bandwidth and utilizing the per-lane vector register file.

Line 07 initiates a texture clause. Within a texture clause, memory read operations execute within the texture fetch hardware. This execution is independent of ALU work executing on the SIMD unit and hence a memory operation can be executing from one wavefront while an ALU operation is executing on another.

## Resource Allocation

Each SIMD unit on the GPU includes a fixed amount of register and LDS storage space. There are 256 kB of registers on each SIMD unit, available as 256 128-bit vector registers for each work item across a 64-element wavefront. These registers will be divided based on the number of wavefronts executing on the SIMD unit. There are 32 kB of LDS on each SIMD unit, accessible as a random access 32-bank SRAM with two ports per work item for read and write. The LDS is divided between the number of workgroups executing on the SIMD unit, based on the local memory allocation requests made within the kernel and through the OpenCL runtime parameter-passing mechanism.

When executing a single kernel on each SIMD unit, as is the standard mapping when running an OpenCL program, we might see a resource bottleneck, as seen in [Figure 6.9](#). In this diagram, we see two workgroups each containing two wavefronts, where each work item (and hence wavefront scaled up) needs 42 registers and the workgroup needs 12 kB of LDS. This allocation of four wavefronts per SIMD is limited by the LDS requirements of the workgroup and is near the minimum number of wavefronts we need to run on the device to hide memory latency. The minimum number of wavefronts to cover instruction latency and utilize the SIMD unit is three—two in ALU clauses in the two instruction slots on the SIMD unit and one performing memory accesses. In realistic conditions, three is insufficient due to control flow. If we can increase the number of wavefronts running on the SIMD unit to

**FIGURE 6.9**

Allocating the resources of a single SIMD core to OpenCL workloads. Given a workgroup of 128 work items that requires 12 kB of LDS and where each work item requires 42 registers, we can fit two workgroups, and hence four wavefronts, on each SIMD unit: We are limited by the availability of LDS.

six or more, we have a better chance of hiding control flow and, particularly, memory latency, where the more threads running, the better our latency hiding. Because we are LDS limited in this case, increasing the number of wavefronts per workgroup to three would be a good start if this is practical for the algorithm. Alternatively, reducing the LDS allocation would allow us to run a third workgroup on each core, which is very useful if one wavefront is waiting on barriers or memory accesses and hence not on the SIMD unit at the time.

Each workgroup runs on a single SIMD core and stays on that core until completion. The reason for this should be clear when seeing the amount of state storage required by that group: In this case, we see 12 kB of LDS and 84 kB of registers per workgroup. This would be a significant amount of data to have to flush to memory and move to another core. As a result, when control flow code is executing in the wave scheduler, if there is not another wavefront with ALU work to perform ready to be scheduled onto the SIMD unit, hardware will lie idle.

---

## MEMORY PERFORMANCE CONSIDERATIONS IN OPENCL

### OpenCL Global Memory

Issues related to memory in terms of temporal and spatial locality were discussed in Chapter 3. Obtaining peak performance from an OpenCL program depends heavily on utilizing memory efficiently. Unfortunately, efficient memory access is highly dependent on the particular device on which the OpenCL program is running. Access patterns that may be efficient on the GPU may be inefficient when run on a CPU. Even when we move an OpenCL program to GPUs from different manufacturers, we can see substantial differences. However, there are common practices that will produce code that performs well across multiple devices.

In all cases, a useful way to start analyzing memory performance is to judge what level of throughput a kernel is achieving. A simple way to do this is to calculate the memory bandwidth of the kernel:

$$\text{EB} = (B_r + B_w)/T$$

where

$\text{EB}$  is the effective bandwidth;

$B_r$  is the number of bytes read from global memory;

$B_w$  is the number of bytes written to global memory; and

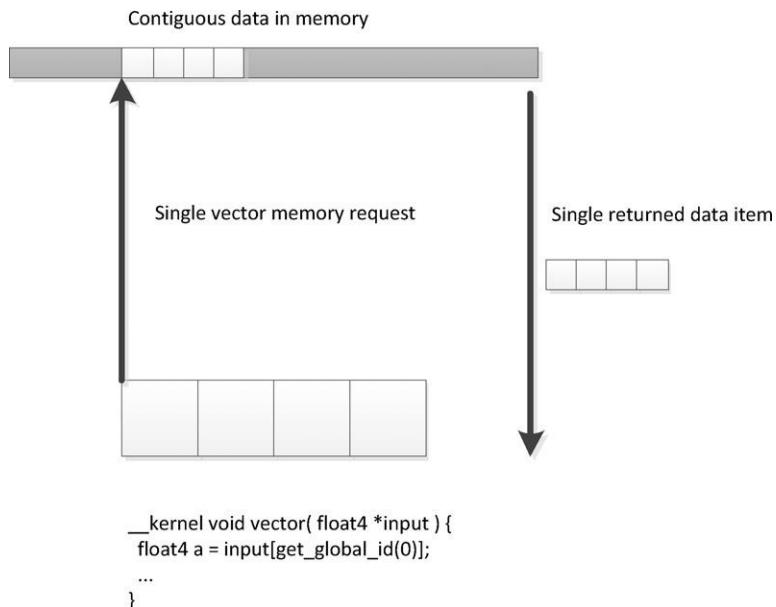
$T$  is the time required to run the kernel.

$T$  can be measured using profiling tools such as the AMD Stream Profiler (which is discussed in Chapter 11).  $B_r$  and  $B_w$  can often be calculated by multiplying the number of bytes each work item reads or writes by the global number of work items. Of course, in some cases, this number must be estimated because we may branch in a data-dependent manner around reads and writes.

Once we know the bandwidth measurement, we can compare it with the peak bandwidth of the execution device and determine how far away we are from peak performance: The closer to peak, the more efficiently we are using the memory system. If our numbers are far from peak, then we can consider restructuring the memory access pattern to improve utilization.

Spatial locality is an important consideration for OpenCL memory access. Most architectures on which OpenCL runs are vector based at some level (whether SSE-like vector instructions or lanewise programmed hardware-vectorized such as AMD IL or NVIDIA PTX), and their memory systems benefit from issuing accesses together across this vector. In addition, localized accesses offer caching benefits.

On most modern CPUs, there is a vector instruction set; the various versions of SSE and the AVX are good examples. For efficient memory access, we want to design code such that full, aligned, vector reads are possible using these instruction sets. Given the small vector size, the most efficient way to perform such vector reads is to give the compiler as much information as possible by using vector data types such as `float4`. Such accesses make good use of cache lines, moving data between the cache

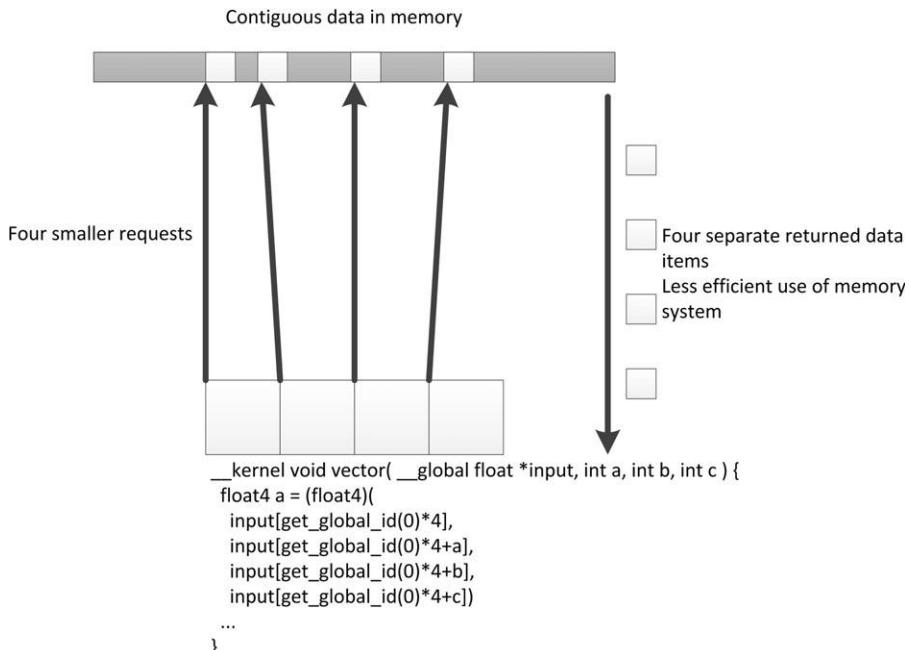
**FIGURE 6.10**

Using vector reads, we give more opportunities to return data efficiently through the memory system.

and registers as efficiently as possible. However, on these CPUs, caching helps cover some of the performance loss from performing smaller, unaligned, or more randomly addressed reads. Figures 6.10 and 6.11 provide a simple example of the difference between a single contiguous read and a set of four random reads. Not only do the narrower reads hit multiple cache lines (creating more cache misses if they do not hit in the cache) but they also cause less efficient transfers to be passed through the memory system.

GPU memory architectures differ significantly from CPU memory architectures, as discussed in Chapter 3. GPUs use multithreading to cover some level of memory latency and are biased in favor of ALU capability rather than caching and sophisticated out-of-order logic. Given the large amounts of compute resources available on typical GPUs, it becomes increasingly important to provide high bandwidth to the memory system if we do not want to starve the GPU. Many modern GPU architectures, particularly high-performance desktop versions such as the latest AMD Radeon and NVIDIA GeForce designs, utilize a wide-SIMD architecture. Imagine the loss of efficiency in Figure 6.11 scaled to a 64-wide hardware vector, as we see in the AMD Radeon HD6970 architecture.

Efficient access patterns differ even among these architectures. For an x86 CPU with SSE, we would want to use 128-bit float4 accesses, and we would want as many accesses as possible to fall within cache lines to reduce the number of cache misses.



**FIGURE 6.11**

If we transfer the same four floats as in [Figure 6.10](#) but with a more random pattern, we return smaller chunks of memory through the memory system less efficiently.

For the AMD Radeon HD6970 GPU architecture, 16 consecutive work items will issue a memory request at the same time. These requests will be delayed in the memory system if they cannot be efficiently serviced. For peak efficiency, each of these 16 should issue a 128-bit read such that the reads form a contiguous 256-byte memory region so that the memory system can create a single large memory request. To achieve reasonable portability across different architectures, a good general solution is to compact the memory accesses as effectively as possible, allowing the wide vector machines (AMD and NVIDIA GPUs) and the narrow vector machines (x86 CPUs) to both use the memory system as efficiently as possible. To achieve this, we should access memory across a whole workgroup starting with a base address aligned to  $\text{workgroupSize} * \text{loadSize}$ , where  $\text{loadSize}$  is the load issued per work item, and which should be reasonably sized—preferably 128 bits on x86 CPUs and AMD GPU architectures and expanding to 256 bits on AVX-supported architectures.

Further complications arise when dealing with the specifics of different memory systems, such as reducing conflicts on the off-chip links to DRAM. For example, let us consider the way in which the AMD Radeon HD6970 architecture allocates its addresses. [Figure 6.12](#) shows that the low 8 bits of the address are used to select the byte within the memory bank; this gives us the cache line and sub-cache line read

31:15	14:11 bank	10:8 channel	7:0 address
-------	------------	--------------	-------------

**FIGURE 6.12**

The meaning of the bits comprising the address of a global memory byte on the Radeon HD6970 architecture.

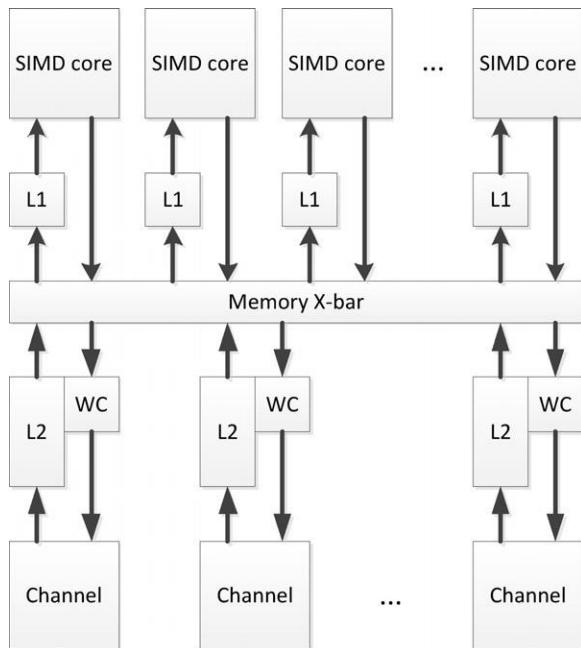
locality. If we try to read a column of data from a two-dimensional array, we already know that we are inefficiently using the on-chip buses. It also means that we want multiple groups running on the device simultaneously to access different memory channels and banks. Each memory channel is an on-chip memory controller corresponding to a link to an off-chip memory (Figure 6.13). We want accesses across the device to be spread across as many banks and channels in the memory system as possible, maximizing concurrent data access. However, a vector memory access from a single wavefront that hits multiple memory channels (or banks) occupies those channels, blocking access from other wavefronts and reducing overall memory throughput. Optimally, we want a given wavefront to be contained with a given channel and bank, allowing multiple wavefronts to access multiple channels in parallel. This will allow data to stream in and out of memory efficiently.

To avoid using multiple channels, a single wavefront should access addresses from within a 64-word region, which is achievable if all work items read 32 bits from consecutive addresses. The worst possible situation is if each work item in multiple wavefronts reads an address with the same value above bit 8: Each one hits the same channel and bank, and accesses are serialized, achieving a small fraction of peak bandwidth. More details on this subject for AMD architectures can be found in AMD’s OpenCL programming guide ([Advanced Micro Devices, Incorporated, 2011](#)). Similar information is provided to cover the differences in competing architectures from the respective vendors—for example, NVIDIA’s CUDA programming guide ([NVIDIA Corporation, 2010](#)).

## Local Memory as a Software-Managed Cache

Most OpenCL-supporting devices have some form of cache support. Due to their graphics-oriented designs, many GPUs have read-only data caches that enable some amount of spatial reuse of data.

The easiest way to guarantee this use on the widest range of devices is to use Images (discussed in Chapter 5). Images map data sets to the texture read hardware and, assuming that complicated filtering and two-dimensional access modes are not needed, improve memory efficiency on the GPU. However, GPU caches are small compared with the number of active thread contexts reading data. Programmer-controlled scratchpad memory in the local address space is an efficient approach for caching read data with less overhead from wasted space than hardware-controlled caches, better power efficiency, and higher performance for a given area. It is also

**FIGURE 6.13**

The HD6970 memory system showing how multiple SIMD cores can collide on the same channels, and hence banks, through the crossbar.

useful as a way to exchange data with other work items in the same workgroup with a very low and, more important, guaranteed access latency.

The code in Figure 5.11 shows a simple example of this approach. The code loads a range of data from A into C and then accesses multiple values from it, avoiding a second read from DRAM. At the same time, the code loads a single value from `aLocalArray` just once and reuses it across all work items in the group, thereby considerably reducing the memory traffic. In some CPU hardware implementations, some of this reuse occurs in the cache, whereas sometimes all of it occurs in the cache (especially on x86 processors). Given that we have knowledge of the underlying memory access patterns, we can control how much reuse of data is present in the application.

Of course, there are trade-offs when considering how best to optimize data locality. In some cases, the overhead of the extra copy instructions required to move data into local memory and then back out into the ALU (possibly via registers) will sometimes be less efficient than simply reusing the data out of cache. Moving data into local memory is most useful when there are large numbers of reads and writes reusing the same locations, when the lifetime of a write is very long with a vast number of reads using it, or when manual cache blocking offers a way to correct for conflict misses that can often be problematic in two-dimensional data access patterns.

In the case of read/write operations, the benefit of local memory becomes even more obvious, particularly given the wide range of architectures with read-only caches. Consider, for example, the following relatively naive version of a prefix sum code:

```

void localPrefixSum(
    __local unsigned *prefixSums,
    unsigned numElements ) {

    // Run through levels of tree halving sizes of the element set
    // performing reduction phase
    int offset = 1;
    for( int level = numElements/2; level > 0; level /= 2 ) {
        barrier(CLK_LOCAL_MEM_FENCE);

        for( int sumElement = get_local_id(0);
            sumElement < level;
            sumElement += get_local_size(0) ) {

            int ai = offset*(2*sumElement+1)-1;
            int bi = offset*(2*sumElement+2)-1;

            prefixSums[bi] = prefixSums[ai] + prefixSums[bi];
        }

        offset *= 2;
    }
    barrier(CLK_LOCAL_MEM_FENCE);

    // Need to clear the last element
    if( get_local_id(0) == 0 ) {
        prefixSums[ numElements-1 ] = 0;
    }

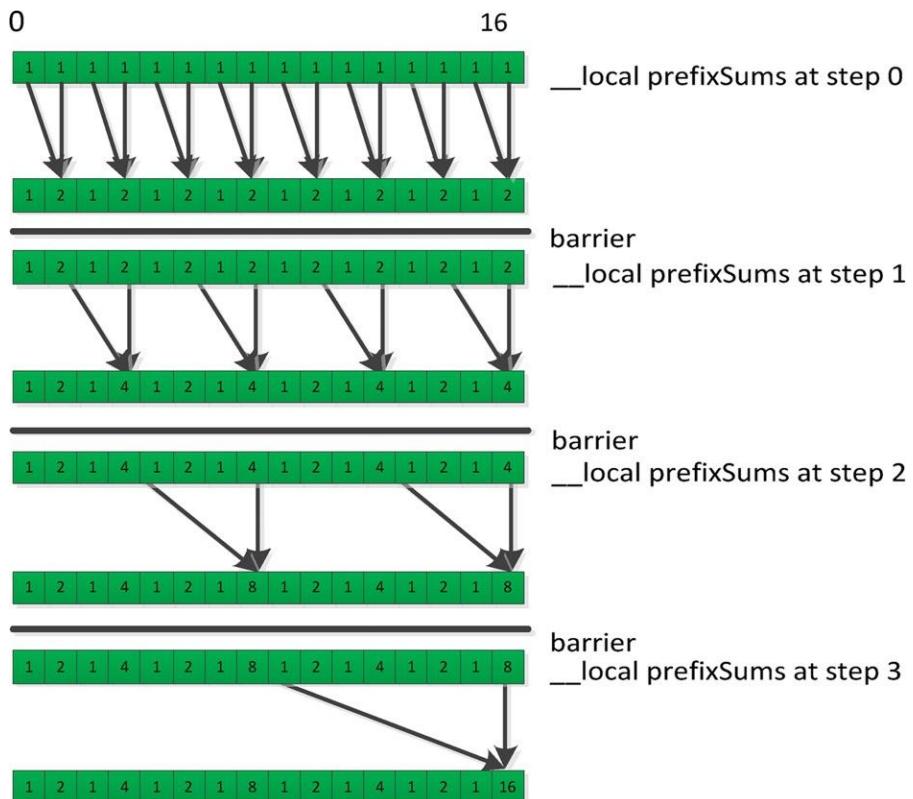
    // Push values back down the tree
    for( int level = 1; level < numElements; level *= 2 ) {
        offset /= 2;
        barrier(CLK_LOCAL_MEM_FENCE);

        for( int sumElement = get_local_id(0);
            sumElement < level;
            sumElement += get_local_size(0) ) {

            int ai = offset*(2*sumElement+1)-1;
            int bi = offset*(2*sumElement+2)-1;

            unsigned temporary = prefixSums[ai];
            prefixSums[ai] = prefixSums[bi];
            prefixSums[bi] = temporary + prefixSums[bi];
        }
    }
}

```

**FIGURE 6.14**

The accumulation pass of a prefix sum over 16 elements operating in local memory using eight work items. The accumulation phase would be followed by a propagation phase that pushes results back down the tree to give a correct prefix value in each location.

Although the previous code is not optimal for many architectures, it does effectively share data between work items using a local array. The data flow of the first loop (`level = numElements>>1 to 0`) is shown in [Figure 6.14](#). Note that each iteration of the loop updates a range of values that a different work item will need to use on the next iteration. Note also that the number of work items collaborating on the calculation decreases on each iteration. The inner loop masks excess work items off to avoid diverging execution across the barrier. To accommodate such behavior, we insert barrier operations to ensure synchronization between the work items and so that we can guarantee that the data will be ready for the execution of the next iteration.

The prefix sum code discussed previously uses local memory in a manner that is inefficient on most wide SIMD architectures, such as high-end GPUs. As mentioned

in the discussion on global memory, memory systems tend to be banked to allow a large number of access ports without requiring multiple ports at every memory location. As a result, scratchpad memory hardware (and caches, similarly) tends to be built such that each bank can perform multiple reads or concurrent reads and writes (or some other multiaccess configuration), whereas multiple reads will be spread over multiple banks. This is an important consideration when we are using wide SIMD hardware to access memory. An AMD GPU can issue four instructions, including up to two load instructions simultaneously through the VLIW unit in each of the 16 SIMD lanes on a given clock cycle. As a result, it performs as many as 32 reads or writes from the local memory buffer (LDS) on a single cycle when local memory instructions are issued in a VLIW packet. If each bank supports a single access port, then we can only achieve this throughput if all accesses target different memory banks because each bank can only provide one value. On this architecture, because each work item can perform two reads or writes per cycle, the local data share is constructed of 32 banks. Similar rules arise on competing architectures; NVIDIA's Fermi architecture, for example, also has a 32-banked local memory.

The problem for local memory is not as acute as that for global memory. In global memory, we saw that widely spread accesses would incur latency because they might cause multiple cache line misses. In local memory, at least on architectures with true scratchpads, the programmer knows when the data is present because he or she put it there manually. The only requirement is that the 16 accesses we issue as part of that read or write instruction hit different banks.

[Figure 6.15](#) shows a simplification for comparison—step 2 of the prefix sum in [Figure 6.14](#) accessing a local memory with eight memory banks, where each work item can perform a single local memory operation per cycle. In this case, our local memory buffer can return up to eight values per cycle from memory. What result do we obtain when performing the set of accesses necessary for step 1 of the prefix sum?

Note that our 16-element local memory (necessary for the prefix sum) is spread over two rows. Each column is a bank, and each row is an address within a bank. Assuming (as is common in many architectures) that each bank is 32 bits wide, our memory address would break down as shown at the top of [Figure 6.15](#). Two consecutive memory words will reside in separate banks. As with global memory, a SIMD vector that accesses consecutive addresses along its length will efficiently access the local memory banks without contention. In [Figure 6.15](#), however, we see a different behavior. Given the second access to local memory, the read from `prefixSums[bi]` in

```
prefixSums[bi] = prefixSums[ai] + prefixSums[bi];
```

tries to read values from locations 3, 7, 11, and 15. As shown in [Figure 6.15](#), 3 and 11 both sit in bank 3; 7 and 15 both sit in bank 7. There is no possible way to read two rows from the same bank simultaneously, so these accesses will be serialized on GPUs by the hardware, incurring a read delay. For good performance, we might wish to restructure our code to avoid this conflict. One useful technique is to add *padding* to the addresses, and an example of this is shown in [Figure 6.16](#). By shifting

Memory address:

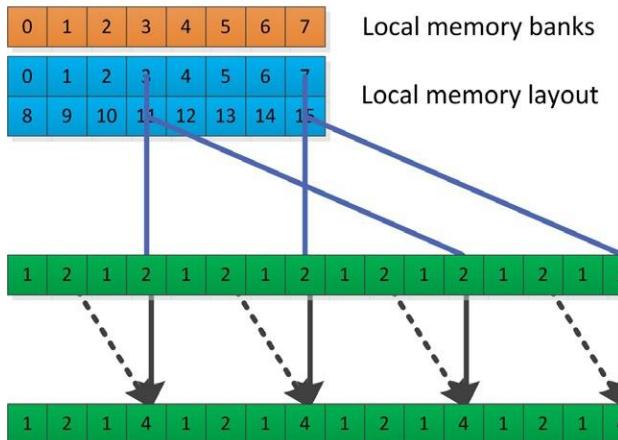
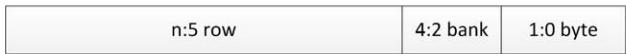


FIGURE 6.15

Step 1 of Figure 6.14 showing behavior with a local memory of eight banks and one access per work item per cycle.

Memory address:

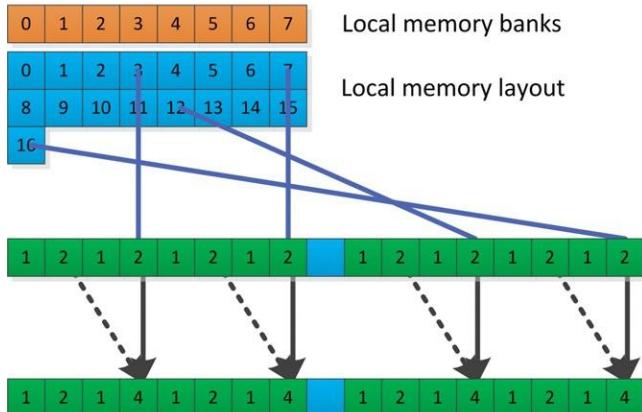


FIGURE 6.16

Figure 6.15 with padding added in the data structures showing how it removes the conflict in this case.

addresses after the first set (aligning to banks), we can change evenly strided accesses to avoid conflicts. Unfortunately, this adds address computation overhead, which can be more severe than the bank conflict overhead; hence, this trade-off is an example of architecture-specific tuning.

Local memory should be carefully rationed. Any device that uses a real scratchpad region that is not hardware managed will have a limited amount of local memory. In the case of the AMD Radeon HD6970 GPU, this space is 32 kB, following OpenCL minimum requirements. It is important to note that this 32 kB is shared between all workgroups executing simultaneously on the core. Also, because the GPU is a latency hiding throughput device that utilizes multithreading on each core, the more workgroups that can fit, the better the hardware utilization is likely to be. If each workgroup uses 16 kB, then only two can fit on the core. If these workgroups contain a small number of wavefronts (one or two), then there will only barely be enough hardware threads to cover latency. Therefore, local memory allocation will be needed to balance efficiency gains from sharing and efficiency losses from reducing the number of hardware threads to one or two on a multithreaded device.

The OpenCL API includes calls to query the amount of local memory the device uses, and this can be used to parameterize kernels before the programmer compiles or dispatches them. The first call in the following code queries the type of the local memory so that it is possible to determine if it is dedicated or in global memory (which may or may not be cached; this can also be queried), and the second call returns the size of each local memory buffer:

```
cl_int err;
cl_device_local_mem_type type;
err = clGetDeviceInfo(
    deviceId,
    CL_DEVICE_LOCAL_MEM_TYPE,
    sizeof(cl_device_local_mem_type),
    &type,
    0 );
cl_ulong size;
err = clGetDeviceInfo(
    deviceId,
    CL_DEVICE_LOCAL_MEM_SIZE,
    sizeof( cl_ulong ),
    &size,
    0 );
```

---

## SUMMARY

The aim of this chapter was to show a very specific mapping of OpenCL to an architectural implementation. In this case, it was shown how OpenCL maps slightly differently to a CPU architecture and a GPU architecture. The core principles of this

chapter apply to competing CPU and GPU architectures, but significant differences in performance can easily arise from variation in vector width (32 on NVIDIA GPUs, 32/64 on AMD GPUs, and much smaller on CPUs), variations in thread context management, and instruction scheduling. It is clear that in one book we cannot aim to cover all possible architectures, but by giving one example, it is hoped that further investigation through vendor documentation can lead to efficient code on whatever OpenCL device is being targeted.

---

## References

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- Association for Computing Machinery. (2010). *PACT'10: Proceedings of the Nineteenth International Conference on Parallel Architectures and Compilation Techniques: September 11–15, 2010, Vienna, Austria*. Association for Computing Machinery.
- Gummaraju, J., Morichetti, L., Houston, M., Sander, B., Gaster, B. R., & Zheng, B. (2010). *Twin Peaks: A Software Platform for Heterogeneous Computing on General-Purpose and Graphics Processors*. New York: Association for Computing Machinery.
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# OpenCL Case Study: Convolution

# 7

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## INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 4, we introduced a basic convolution example using OpenCL images. Images provided the benefit of automatically handling out-of-bounds accesses (by clamping or wrapping accesses), which simplified the coding that would have been required for the cases in which the convolution filter accessed data outside of the image. Thus, image support may reduce control flow overhead and provide caching and data access transformations that improve memory system performance. When targeting GPUs, the automatic caching mechanism provided for images is much better than not caching. In many circumstances, however, it can be outperformed by efficient use of local memory. In this chapter, we use a convolution filter to provide some intuition on how to make good use of local memory. We encourage the reader to compare the two different implementation choices and judge which would be best for a particular use case.

---

## CONVOLUTION KERNEL

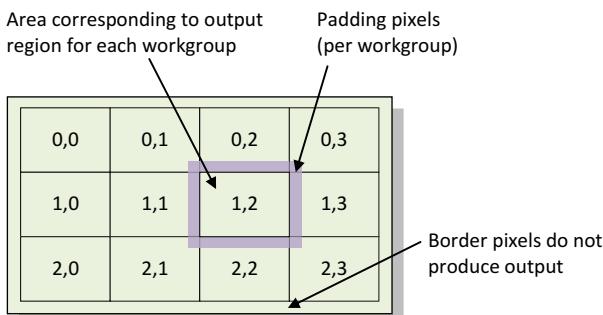
The OpenCL convolution kernel can be naturally divided into three sections: (1) the caching of input data from global to local memory, (2) performing the convolution, and (3) the writing of output data back to global memory. This chapter focuses on the first task, optimizing data caching for the underlying memory system. Loop unrolling is also discussed in the context of performing the convolution. The write back stage is straightforward and will not be discussed in detail. During the discussion, a  $7 \times 7$  filter is considered when concrete examples facilitate the discussion of optimizations, although the principles should generalize to different filter configurations. Optimizations for the OpenCL kernel are presented inline throughout the chapter, along with any relevant host code. The complete reference implementations are provided in Code Listings.

### Selecting Workgroup Sizes

Recall that when performing a convolution, each work-item accesses surrounding pixels based on the size of the filter. The filter *radius* is the number of pixels in each direction that are accessed, not including the current pixel. For example, a  $7 \times 7$  filter

accesses three additional pixels in each direction, so the radius is 3. From Figure 4.5, it is easy to see that adjacent output points have two-dimensional locality for data accesses. Each work region also involves a wide data halo of padding pixels due to the size of the input filter. This tells us that for efficiency, we should use two-dimensional access regions, and a square minimizes the ratio of the halo dimensions to the output data size and hence the input:output efficiency. For this example, we consider a mapping of work-items using a single work-item per output approach, leaving multi-output optimizations to be considered in a histogram example in Chapter 9. [Figure 7.1](#) shows the padding pixels required for a given work region and hence an OpenCL workgroup.

In OpenCL, work-item creation and algorithm design must be considered simultaneously, especially when local memory is used. For convolution, the size of the workgroups and the algorithm for caching data to local memory are closely related. There are two obvious approaches for caching data. The first approach is to create the same number of work-items as there are data elements to be cached in local memory. That is, create as many work-items as there are in the combined number of output and padding pixels. Using this approach, each element would simply copy one pixel from global to local memory, and then the work-items representing the border pixels would sit idle during the convolution. The limitations of this approach are that larger filter sizes will not allow many output elements to be computed per workgroup, and when targeting GPUs, wavefronts may be fragmented, causing ALU cycles to be wasted. Alternatively, the second approach is to create as many work-items as will be performing the convolution. In this approach, there will be fewer work-items than pixels to be cached, so some work-items will have to copy multiple elements and none will sit idle during the convolution. This approach is obviously much better suited for large filters because the number of padding elements will not limit the number of work-items that generate output pixels. For this example, the second approach to work-item creation is used because it is better suited for OpenCL targeting GPUs.



**FIGURE 7.1**

Workgroups have a unique output region for which they produce values. Each workgroup caches values from the source image corresponding to its output location as well as padding pixels determined by the filter radius.

Taking this optimization approach a step further, we might like to create fewer work-items than output pixels in a group. The reader can easily infer such an approach from the algorithm discussed and may like to experiment with this trade-off. Finding the optimal combination can mean exploring a large design space.

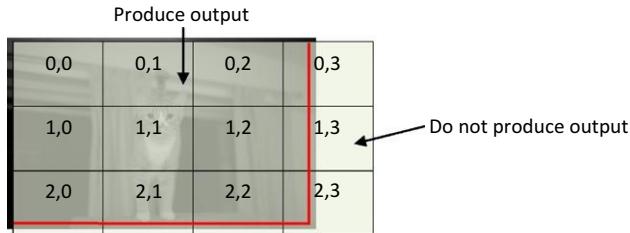
Selecting an efficient workgroup size requires consideration of the underlying memory architecture. Chapter 5 described that when vector processors are targeted, particularly the AMD 6970 GPU, it is important to ensure that many consecutive work-items issue a collaborative memory access. Sixteen consecutive work-items issuing 128-bit reads on an aligned address can come closest to fully utilizing the memory bus bandwidth. The most favorable memory transactions on NVIDIA platforms come from 32 work-items issuing a combined request that is 128 bytes in size and 128-byte aligned ([NVIDIA, 2009](#)). This means 32 work-items will access consecutive 4-byte elements, beginning at a 128-byte aligned address boundary, which is the most ideal access pattern. Transactions of 64 and 32 bytes are also supported. For this example, creating workgroups of either 32 or 16 items in width offers us a good chance for creating efficient memory requests regardless of platform. The Y-dimension of the workgroup does not affect memory access performance. On AMD GPUs, the workgroup size limit is 256 work-items, so choosing a width of 32 produces a height of 8, and a width of 16 produces a height of 16. With NVIDIA, larger workgroup sizes are possible, although the “ideal” size is really determined by the interplay between hardware resources. The workgroup size that performs best will be a trade-off between the efficiency of the memory accesses and the efficiency of the computation. For the code and analysis presented in this chapter, we use  $16 \times 16$  workgroups to perform the convolution.

When performing reads from global to local memory, each workgroup needs to copy twice the filter radius additional work-items in each dimension. For a  $7 \times 7$  filter, this would mean an additional six pixels in each dimension. When computing the NDRange size, one filter radius of border pixels around the image (i.e., 3 for a  $7 \times 7$  filter) will not compute output values because they would cause out-of-bounds accesses for the filter.<sup>1</sup> For an image with dimensions `imageWidth` and `imageHeight`, only  $(\text{imageWidth}-2*\text{filterRadius}) \times (\text{imageHeight}-2*\text{filterRadius})$  work-items are needed in each dimension, respectively. Because the image will likely not be an exact multiple of the workgroup size, additional workgroups must be created in both the X- and Y-dimensions ([Figure 7.2](#)). These last workgroups in each dimension may not be fully utilized, and this must be accounted for in the OpenCL kernel. A function that takes a value (e.g., the image width) and rounds it up to a multiple of another value (e.g., the workgroup width) is shown here:

```
// This function takes a positive integer and rounds it up to
// the nearest multiple of another provided integer
unsigned int roundUp(unsigned int value, unsigned int multiple) {
```

---

<sup>1</sup>The algorithm could be modified to have the border pixels produce output values by detecting out-of-bounds accesses and returning valid values.

**FIGURE 7.2**

The last workgroups in each dimension may contain out-of-bounds pixels. The work-items representing these locations will need to be handled in the kernel.

```
// Determine how far past the nearest multiple the value is
unsigned int remainder = value % multiple;

// Add the difference to make the value a multiple
if(remainder != 0) {
    value += (multiple-remainder);
}

return value;
}
```

The code to compute the NDRange size for an image with dimensions `imageWidth` and `imageHeight` is as follows:

```
// Selected workgroup size is 16x16
int wgWidth = 16;
int wgHeight = 16;

// When computing the total number of work-items, the
// padding work-items do not need to be considered
int totalWorkItemsX = roundUp(imageWidth-paddingPixels,
    wgWidth);
int totalWorkItemsY = roundUp(imageHeight-paddingPixels,
    wgHeight);

// Size of a workgroup
size_t localSize[2] = {wgWidth, wgHeight};
// Size of the NDRange
size_t globalSize[2] = {totalWorkItemsX, totalWorkItemsY};
```

## Caching Data to Local Memory

Caching data in local memory first requires allocating space in local memory—either statically by hard coding the values into the OpenCL kernel or dynamically by specifying a size and passing it as a kernel argument. Because the program will have to cache a different amount of data based on the filter size, the following dynamically allocates local memory space and passes it as the seventh argument (the argument at index 6) to the OpenCL kernel:

```

int localWidth = localSize[0] + paddingPixels;
int localHeight = localSize[1] + paddingPixels;
size_t localMemSize = (localWidth * localHeight *
    sizeof(float));
...
// Dynamically allocate local memory (per workgroup)
clSetKernelArg(kernel, 6, localMemSize, NULL);

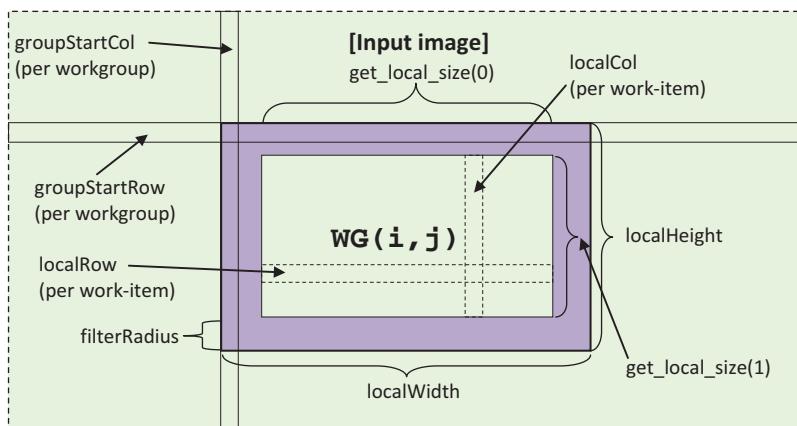
```

The process of copying data from global memory to local memory often requires the most thought and is often the most error-prone operation when writing a kernel. The work-items first need to determine where in global memory to copy from and then ensure that they do not access a region that is outside of their working area or out of bounds for the image. The following code identifies each work-item locally and globally and then performs the copy from global memory to local memory. [Figure 7.3](#) provides an illustration of the variables used to perform the copy in this example:

```

__kernel
void convolution(__global float* imageIn,
                 __global float* imageOut,
                 __constant float* filter,
                 int rows,
                 int cols,
                 int filterWidth,
                 __local float* localImage,
                 int localHeight,
                 int localWidth) {
    // Determine the amount of padding for this filter
    int filterRadius = (filterWidth/2);
    int padding = filterRadius * 2;

```



**FIGURE 7.3**

Illustration of the variables required for identifying a work-item's read location within the input image.

```

// Determine where each workgroup begins reading
int groupStartCol = get_group_id(0)*get_local_size(0);
int groupStartRow = get_group_id(1)*get_local_size(1);

// Determine the local ID of each work-item
int localCol = get_local_id(0);
int localRow = get_local_id(1);

// Determine the global ID of each work-item. work-items
// representing the output region will have a unique
// global ID
int globalCol = groupStartCol + localCol;
int globalRow = groupStartRow + localRow;

// Cache the data to local memory

// Step down rows
for(int i = localRow; i < localHeight; i +=
    get_local_size(1)) {

    int curRow = groupStartRow+i;

    // Step across columns
    for(int j = localCol; j < localWidth; j +=
        get_local_size(0)) {

        int curCol = groupStartCol+j;

        // Perform the read if it is in bounds
        if(curRow < rows && curCol < cols) {
            localImage[i*localWidth + j] =
                imageIn[curRow*cols+curCol];
        }
    }
}

barrier(CLK_LOCAL_MEM_FENCE);

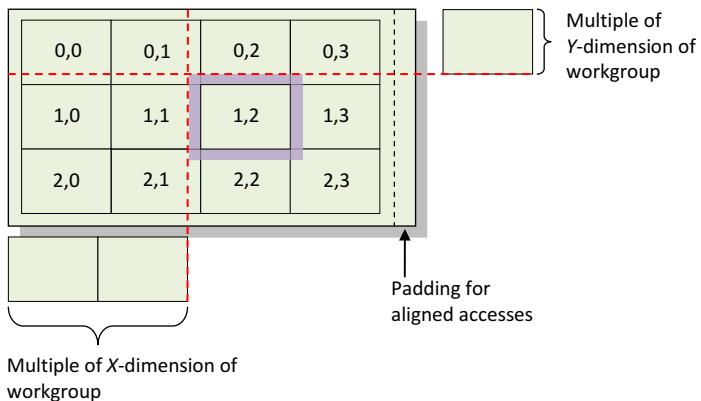
// Perform the convolution
...

```

The barrier at the end of the copy is required because work-items will finish with their data transfers at different times, and no work-item in the group should begin with the convolution step until all transfers are complete.

### ***Aligning for Memory Accesses***

Performance on both NVIDIA and AMD GPUs benefits from data alignment in global memory. Particularly for NVIDIA, aligning accesses on 128-byte boundaries and accessing 128-byte segments will map ideally to the memory hardware. However, in this example, the 16-wide workgroups will only be accessing 64-byte segments, so data should be aligned to 64-byte addresses. This means that the first column that each workgroup accesses should begin at a 64-byte aligned address.

**FIGURE 7.4**

The first padding pixel read by each workgroup will be a multiple of the workgroup size in each dimension. Padding the image and sizing the  $X$ -dimension of the workgroup appropriately ensures aligned accesses.

In this example, the choice to have the border pixels not produce values determines that the offset for all workgroups will be a multiple of the workgroup dimensions (i.e., for a  $16 \times 16$  workgroup, workgroup  $\langle N, M \rangle$  will begin accessing data at column  $N*16$ ). An example of the offset of each workgroup is presented in [Figure 7.4](#). To ensure that each workgroup aligns properly, the only requirement then is to pad the input data with extra columns so that its width becomes a multiple of the  $X$ -dimension of the workgroup.

Manually padding a data array on the host can be complicated, time-consuming, and sometimes infeasible. To avoid such tedious data fixup, OpenCL has introduced a command called `clEnqueueWriteBufferRect()` to copy a host array into the middle of a larger device buffer. When creating the buffer, the number of columns used to determine the size should be the number of elements required to provide the desired alignment. For a  $16 \times 16$  workgroup, the number of columns should be rounded up to the nearest multiple of 16. The call to `clEnqueueWriteBufferRect()` that copies the host data into the padded device buffer is listed here:

```
// Pad the number of columns (assuming 16x16 workgroup)
int deviceWidth = roundUp(imageWidth, 16);
// No padding needed for rows
int deviceHeight = imageHeight;

// Copy the input data on the host to the padded buffer
// on the device
clEnqueueWriteBufferRect(queue, d_inputImage, CL_TRUE,
    buffer_origin, host_origin, region,
    deviceWidth*sizeof(float), 0, imageWidth*sizeof(float),
    0, inputImage, 0, NULL, NULL);
```

By aligning data to a 64-byte boundary, performance improved by 10% on a Radeon 6970 GPU. The NVIDIA Fermi architecture automatically caches memory transactions on-chip in L1 memory, and because nonaligned reads get turned into an additional access (which is usually used in the following read anyway), negligible performance gains can be achieved on a GTX 480. On the GT200 series architecture, automatic caching is not supported, so memory alignment plays a more significant role. Using the NVIDIA Visual Profiler and a GTX 285 GPU, we see that aligning to a 64-byte address boundary results in fewer memory transactions, each of a larger size, producing an 8% improvement in memory performance over the original version of the code.

### ***Improving Efficiency with Vector Reads***

AMD GPUs are optimized for 128-bit read operations per SIMD lane and therefore see performance gains from performing vector reads (i.e., reading `float4` data allows us to come closer to achieving peak memory bandwidth than reading `float` data). Although it is not intuitive to perform the convolution using a vector type, if the width of the data being cached from global memory to local memory is a multiple of four, vector types should be used for the data transfer portion of the algorithm. Furthermore, if a filter has radius of 8 or less (i.e., the filter is at most  $17 \times 17$ ), a  $16 \times 16$  workgroup can copy all of the padding and output pixels with only a single `float4` read per work-item.

The first step is to resize the local memory allocation to include the extra pixels required to support the `float4` data type:

```
int localWidth = roundUp(localSize[0]+padding, 4);
int localHeight = localSize[1]+padding;
size_t localMemSize = (localWidth*localHeight*sizeof(float));
```

The code to perform the vector transfer of data from global memory to local memory is listed next. To employ a vector read and still use scalar data for the convolution, the input image is given the type `float4`, and the local memory cache is given the data type `float`. When the read is performed, a temporary `_local float4` pointer is set to the desired location in local memory and is used to read the data. By using `float4` as the data type of the input image, the width (number of columns) of the image is divided by four because each column stores four values. The number of rows in the image does not change.

```
__kernel
void convolution_read4(__global float4* imageIn,
                      __global float* imageOut,
                      __constant float* filter,
                      int rows,
                      int cols,
                      int filterWidth,
                      __local float* localImage,
                      int localHeight,
                      int localWidth) {
```

```

// Vector pointer that will be used to cache data
// scalar memory
__local float4* localImage4;

// Determine the amount of padding for this filter
int filterRadius = (filterWidth/2);
int padding = filterRadius * 2;

// Determine where each workgroup begins reading
int groupStartCol = get_group_id(0)*get_local_size(0)/4;
int groupStartRow = get_group_id(1)*get_local_size(1);

// Flatten the localIds 0-255
int localId = get_local_id(1)*get_local_size(0) +
    get_local_id(0);
// There will be localWidth/4 work-items reading per row
int localRow = (localId / (localWidth/4));
// Each work-item is reading 4 elements apart
int localCol = (localId % (localWidth/4));

// Determine the row and column offset in global memory
// assuming each element reads 4 floats
int globalRow = groupStartRow + localRow;
int globalCol = groupStartCol + localCol;

// Set the vector pointer to the correct scalar location
// in local memory
localImage4 = (__local float4*)
    &localImage[localRow*localWidth+localCol*4];
// Perform all of the reads with a single load
if(globalRow < rows && globalCol < cols/4 &&
    localRow < localHeight) {
    localImage4[0] = imageIn[globalRow*cols/4+globalCol];
}
barrier(CLK_LOCAL_MEM_FENCE);

// Perform the convolution
...

```

On the AMD Radeon 6970, a significant performance gain is achieved by using vector reads. Compared to the initial implementation of the algorithm, a 42% improvement in memory performance was seen when using the `float4` data type with aligned memory accesses. The memory hardware on NVIDIA GPUs benefits less from 128-bit reads, and the extra register pressure can decrease overall performance; thus, even though the overall number of memory transactions decreased using the vector type, a slight performance degradation was seen in this example.

## Performing the Convolution

Now that the data is stored in local memory, it can be efficiently accessed to perform the convolution. The following code provides an implementation of the algorithm that corresponds to the C version in Chapter 4. Each work-item represents an output location and applies the filter by performing multiply-accumulate operations in a neighborhood around its location. No output is produced for pixels that would need to access out-of-bounds locations in the original image due to the filter size. For a  $7 \times 7$  filter, the first valid output pixel will be located at index (3,3), and issue accesses to the padding pixels beginning at index (0,0). Because we want all work-items to produce output data, the work-item with global index (0,0) will produce the output value at (3,3). In other words, each work-item's output value will be offset from its global ID by the filter radius in both the X and Y directions. The following code performs the convolution:

```
// Only allow work-items mapping to valid locations in
// the output image to perform the convolution
if(globalRow < rows - padding && globalCol < cols - padding) {
    // Each work-item will filter around its start location
    // (starting from the filter radius left and up)
    float sum = 0.0f;
    int filterIdx = 0;

    // The convolution loop
    for(int i = localRow; i < localRow+filterWidth; i++) {
        int offset = i*localWidth;
        for(int j = localCol; j < localCol+filterWidth; j++) {
            sum += localImage[offset+j] * filter[filterIdx++];
        }
    }

    // Write the data out
    imageOut[(globalRow+filterRadius)*cols +
              (globalCol+filterRadius)] = sum;
}
}
```

## Improving Performance with Loop Unrolling

Using the AMD APP Profiler, we are able to see that the ALU packing in the VLIW units for this kernel is low (only 43%). This means that less than half of the ALU units are being utilized, and it is a sign that the compiler cannot find sufficient instructions to fill the VLIW units. For the convolution kernel, the tight computation loops are the likely culprit. If we know that the filter size will be static (i.e., at compile time), we can unroll the inner loop to increase the ratio of ALU to branching instructions.

```

// Only allow work-items mapping to valid locations in
// the output image to perform the convolution
if(globalRow < rows - padding && globalCol < cols - padding) {
    // Each work-item will filter around its start location
    // (starting from the filter radius left and up)
    float sum = 0.0f;
    int filterIdx = 0;

    // Inner loop unrolled
    for(int i = localRow; i < localRow+filterWidth; i++) {
        int offset = i*localWidth+localCol;
        sum += localImage[offset++] * filter[filterIdx++];
        sum += localImage[offset++] * filter[filterIdx++];
    }

    // Write the data out
    imageOut[(globalRow+filterRadius)*cols +
              (globalCol+filterRadius)] = sum;
}
}
}

```

On an AMD Radeon 6970, using a  $7 \times 7$  filter and a  $600 \times 400$  image, unrolling the innermost loop provided a  $2.4\times$  speedup and increased the ALU packing efficiency to 79%. The GTX 285 and 480 saw similar performance gains— $2.6\times$  and  $2.2\times$  speedups, respectively.

Completely unrolling both inner and outer loops of the convolution increases the code size and may not be possible for large filtering kernels. However, in general, loop unrolling produces a substantial speedup on both AMD and NVIDIA GPU devices. With a  $7 \times 7$  filter, the Radeon 6970 achieved a  $6.3\times$  speedup over the non-unrolled version. The GTX 285 and 480 saw speedups of  $3.2\times$  and  $2.9\times$ , respectively, over the non-unrolled version.

Using the memory optimizations and loop unrolling described in this chapter, both the Radeon 6970 and the GTX 480 are able to perform the convolution at a rate of approximately 2 billion pixels per second while using a  $7 \times 7$  filter.

---

## CONCLUSIONS

This chapter discussed a classical computational kernel, convolution, that is used in many machine vision, statistics, and signal processing applications. We presented how to approach optimization of this OpenCL kernel when targeting either AMD or NVIDIA GPUs. We explored the benefits of different memory optimizations

and showed that performance is heavily dependent on the underlying memory architecture of the different devices. However, for all devices considered, significant performance improvements were obtained in the computational portions of the algorithm by giving up the generality of the double convolution loops and unrolling for specific kernel sizes. In general, many performance optimizations will depend on the specifics of the underlying device hardware architecture. To obtain peak performance, the programmer should be equipped with this information.

---

## CODE LISTINGS

### Host Code

```
#define WGX 16
#define WGY 16

// Uncomment each of these to run with the corresponding
// optimization
#define NON_OPTIMIZED
//#define READ_ALIGNED
//#define READ4

// This function takes a positive integer and rounds it up to
// the nearest multiple of another provided integer
unsigned int roundUp(unsigned int value, unsigned int multiple) {

    // Determine how far past the nearest multiple the value is
    unsigned int remainder = value % multiple;

    // Add the difference to make the value a multiple
    if(remainder != 0) {
        value += (multiple - remainder);
    }

    return value;
}
int main(int argc, char** argv) {

    // Set up the data on the host

    // Rows and columns in the input image
    int imageHeight;
    int imageWidth;

    // Homegrown function to read a BMP from file
    float* inputImage = readImage("input.bmp", &imageWidth,
        &imageHeight);

    // Size of the input and output images on the host
    int dataSize = imageHeight * imageWidth * sizeof(float);

    // Pad the number of columns
```

```
#ifdef NON_OPTIMIZED
    int deviceWidth = imageWidth;
#else // READ_ALIGNED || READ4
    int deviceWidth = roundUp(imageWidth, WGX);
#endif
    int deviceHeight = imageHeight;
    // Size of the input and output images on the device
    int deviceDataSize = imageHeight*deviceWidth*sizeof(float);

    // Output image on the host
    float* outputImage = NULL;
    outputImage = (float*)malloc(dataSize);
    for(int i = 0; i < imageHeight; i++) {
        for(int j = 0; j < imageWidth; j++) {
            outputImage[i*imageWidth+j] = 0;
        }
    }

    // 45 degree motion blur
    float filter[49] =
    {0,      0,      0,      0,      0, 0.0145,      0,
     0,      0,      0,      0, 0.0376, 0.1283, 0.0145,
     0,      0,      0, 0.0376, 0.1283, 0.0376,      0,
     0,      0, 0.0376, 0.1283, 0.0376,      0,      0,
     0, 0.0376, 0.1283, 0.0376,      0,      0,      0,
     0.0145, 0.1283, 0.0376,      0,      0,      0,
     0, 0.0145,      0,      0,      0,      0,      0};

    int filterWidth = 7;
    int filterRadius = filterWidth/2;
    int paddingPixels = (int)(filterWidth/2) * 2;

    // Set up the OpenCL environment

    // Discovery platform
    cl_platform_id platform;
    clGetPlatformIDs(1, &platform, NULL);

    // Discover device
    cl_device_id device;
    clGetDeviceIDs(platform, CL_DEVICE_TYPE_ALL, 1, &device,
                   NULL);

    // Create context
    cl_context_properties props[3] = {CL_CONTEXT_PLATFORM,
                                     (cl_context_properties)(platform), 0};
    cl_context context;
    context = clCreateContext(props, 1, &device, NULL, NULL,
                            NULL);

    // Create command queue
    cl_command_queue queue;
```

```
queue = clCreateCommandQueue(context, device, 0, NULL);

// Create memory buffers
cl_mem d_inputImage;
cl_mem d_outputImage;
cl_mem d_filter;
d_inputImage = clCreateBuffer(context, CL_MEM_READ_ONLY,
    deviceDataSize, NULL, NULL);
d_outputImage = clCreateBuffer(context, CL_MEM_WRITE_ONLY,
    deviceDataSize, NULL, NULL);
d_filter = clCreateBuffer(context, CL_MEM_READ_ONLY,
    49*sizeof(float),NULL, NULL);

// Write input data to the device
#ifndef NON_OPTIMIZED
    clEnqueueWriteBuffer(queue, d_inputImage, CL_TRUE, 0,
        deviceDataSize,
        inputImage, 0, NULL, NULL);
#else // READ_ALIGNED || READ4
    size_t buffer_origin[3] = {0,0,0};
    size_t host_origin[3] = {0,0,0};
    size_t region[3] = {deviceWidth*sizeof(float),
        imageHeight, 1};
    clEnqueueWriteBufferRect(queue, d_inputImage, CL_TRUE,
        buffer_origin, host_origin, region,
        deviceWidth*sizeof(float), 0, imageWidth*sizeof(float), 0,
        inputImage, 0, NULL, NULL);
#endif

// Write the filter to the device
clEnqueueWriteBuffer(queue, d_filter, CL_TRUE, 0,
    49*sizeof(float), filter, 0, NULL, NULL);

// Read in the program from file
char* source = readSource("convolution.cl");

// Create the program
cl_program program;

// Create and compile the program
program = clCreateProgramWithSource(context, 1,
    (const char**)&source, NULL, NULL);
cl_int build_status;
build_status = clBuildProgram(program, 1, &device, NULL, NULL,
    NULL);

// Create the kernel
cl_kernel kernel;
#ifndef NON_OPTIMIZED || defined READ_ALIGNED
    // Only the host-side code differs for the aligned reads
    kernel = clCreateKernel(program, "convolution", NULL);
```

```
#else // READ4
    kernel = clCreateKernel(program, "convolution_read4", NULL);
#endif

    // Selected workgroup size is 16x16
    int wgWidth = WGX;
    int wgHeight = WGY;

    // When computing the total number of work-items, the
    // padding work-items do not need to be considered
    int totalWorkItemsX = roundUp(imageWidth-paddingPixels,
        wgWidth);
    int totalWorkItemsY = roundUp(imageHeight-paddingPixels,
        wgHeight);

    // Size of a workgroup
    size_t localSize[2] = {wgWidth, wgHeight};
    // Size of the NDRange
    size_t globalSize[2] = {totalWorkItemsX, totalWorkItemsY};

    // The amount of local data that is cached is the size of the
    // workgroups plus the padding pixels
#ifndef NON_OPTIMIZED || defined READ_ALIGNED
    int localWidth = localSize[0]+paddingPixels;
#else // READ4
    // Round the local width up to 4 for the read4 kernel
    int localWidth = roundUp(localSize[0]+paddingPixels, 4);
#endif
    int localHeight = localSize[1]+paddingPixels;

    // Compute the size of local memory (needed for dynamic
    // allocation)
    size_t localMemSize = (localWidth * localHeight *
        sizeof(float));

    // Set the kernel arguments
    clSetKernelArg(kernel, 0, sizeof(cl_mem), &d_inputImage);
    clSetKernelArg(kernel, 1, sizeof(cl_mem), &d_outputImage);
    clSetKernelArg(kernel, 2, sizeof(cl_mem), &d_filter);
    clSetKernelArg(kernel, 3, sizeof(int), &deviceHeight);
    clSetKernelArg(kernel, 4, sizeof(int), &deviceWidth);
    clSetKernelArg(kernel, 5, sizeof(int), &filterWidth);
    clSetKernelArg(kernel, 6, localMemSize, NULL);
    clSetKernelArg(kernel, 7, sizeof(int), &localHeight);
    clSetKernelArg(kernel, 8, sizeof(int), &localWidth);

    // Execute the kernel
    clEnqueueNDRangeKernel(queue, kernel, 2, NULL, globalSize,
        localSize, 0, NULL, NULL);

    // Wait for kernel to complete
```

```

    clFinish(queue);

    // Read back the output image
#ifndef NON_OPTIMIZED
    clEnqueueReadBuffer(queue, d_outputImage, CL_TRUE, 0,
        deviceDataSize, outputImage, 0, NULL, NULL);
#else // READ_ALIGNED || READ4
    // Begin reading output from (3,3) on the device
    // (for 7x7 filter with radius 3)
    buffer_origin[0] = 3*sizeof(float);
    buffer_origin[1] = 3;
    buffer_origin[2] = 0;

    // Read data into (3,3) on the host
    host_origin[0] = 3*sizeof(float);
    host_origin[1] = 3;
    host_origin[2] = 0;

    // Region is image size minus padding pixels
    region[0] = (imageWidth-paddingPixels)*sizeof(float);
    region[1] = (imageHeight-paddingPixels);
    region[2] = 1;

    // Perform the read
    clEnqueueReadBufferRect(queue, d_outputImage, CL_TRUE,
        buffer_origin, host_origin, region,
        deviceWidth*sizeof(float), 0, imageWidth*sizeof(float), 0,
        outputImage, 0, NULL, NULL);
#endif

    // Homegrown function to write the image to file
    storeImage(outputImage, "output.bmp", imageHeight,
        imageWidth);

    // Free OpenCL objects
    clReleaseMemObject(d_inputImage);
    clReleaseMemObject(d_outputImage);
    clReleaseMemObject(d_filter);
    clReleaseKernel(kernel);
    clReleaseProgram(program);
    clReleaseCommandQueue(queue);
    clReleaseContext(context);

    return 0;
}

```

## Kernel Code

```

__kernel
void convolution(__global float* imageIn,
    __global float* imageOut,

```

```
__constant float* filter,
    int rows,
    int cols,
    int filterWidth,
    __local float* localImage,
    int localHeight,
    int localWidth) {

// Determine the amount of padding for this filter
int filterRadius = (filterWidth/2);
int padding = filterRadius * 2;

// Determine the size of the workgroup output region
int groupStartCol = get_group_id(0)*get_local_size(0);
int groupStartRow = get_group_id(1)*get_local_size(1);

// Determine the local ID of each work-item
int localCol = get_local_id(0);
int localRow = get_local_id(1);

// Determine the global ID of each work-item. work-items
// representing the output region will have a unique global
// ID
int globalCol = groupStartCol + localCol;
int globalRow = groupStartRow + localRow;

// Cache the data to local memory

// Step down rows
for(int i = localRow; i < localHeight; i +=
    get_local_size(1)) {

    int curRow = groupStartRow+i;

    // Step across columns
    for(int j = localCol; j < localWidth; j +=
        get_local_size(0)) {

        int curCol = groupStartCol+j;

        // Perform the read if it is in bounds
        if(curRow < rows && curCol < cols) {
            localImage[i*localWidth + j] =
                imageIn[curRow*cols+curCol];
        }
    }
}

barrier(CLK_LOCAL_MEM_FENCE);

// Perform the convolution
if(globalRow < rows-padding && globalCol < cols-padding) {
    // Each work-item will filter around its start location
```

```

    //((starting from the filter radius left and up)
    float sum = 0.0f;
    int filterIdx = 0;

    // Not unrolled
    for(int i = localRow; i < localRow+filterWidth; i++) {
        int offset = i*localWidth;
        for(int j = localCol; j < localCol+filterWidth; j++){
            sum += localImage[offset+j] *
                  filter[filterIdx++];
        }
    }

    /*
    // Inner loop unrolled
    for(int i = localRow; i < localRow+filterWidth; i++) {
        int offset = i*localWidth+localCol;
        sum += localImage[offset++] * filter[filterIdx++];
        sum += localImage[offset++] * filter[filterIdx++];
    }
    */

    // Write the data out
    imageOut[(globalRow+filterRadius)*cols +
              (globalCol+filterRadius)] = sum;
}

return;
}
__kernel
void convolution_read4(__global float4* imageIn,
                      __global float* imageOut,
                      __constant float* filter,
                      int rows,
                      int cols,
                      int filterWidth,
                      __local float* localImage,
                      int localHeight,
                      int localWidth) {

    // Vector pointer that will be used to cache data
    // scalar memory
    __local float4* localImage4;

    // Determine the amount of padding for this filter
    int filterRadius = (filterWidth/2);
    int padding = filterRadius * 2;
}

```

```

// Determine where each workgroup begins reading
int groupStartCol = get_group_id(0)*get_local_size(0)/4;
int groupStartRow = get_group_id(1)*get_local_size(1);

// Flatten the localIds 0-255
int localId = get_local_id(1)*get_local_size(0) +
    get_local_id(0);
// There will be localWidth/4 work-items reading per row
int localRow = (localId / (localWidth/4));
// Each work-item is reading 4 elements apart
int localCol = (localId % (localWidth/4));

// Determine the row and column offset in global memory
// assuming each element reads 4 floats
int globalRow = groupStartRow + localRow;
int globalCol = groupStartCol + localCol;

// Set the vector pointer to the correct scalar location
// in local memory
localImage4 = (__local float4*)
    &localImage[localRow*localWidth+localCol*4];

// Perform all of the reads with a single load
if(globalRow < rows && globalCol < cols/4 &&
    localRow < localHeight) {
    localImage4[0] = imageIn[globalRow*cols/4+globalCol];
}
barrier(CLK_LOCAL_MEM_FENCE);

// Reassign local IDs based on each work-item processing
// one output element
localCol = get_local_id(0);
localRow = get_local_id(1);

// Reassign global IDs for unique output locations
globalCol = get_group_id(0)*get_local_size(0) + localCol;
globalRow = get_group_id(1)*get_local_size(1) + localRow;
// Perform the convolution
if(globalRow < rows-padding && globalCol < cols-padding) {

    // Each work-item will filter around its start location
    // (starting from half the filter size left and up)
    float sum = 0.0f;
    int filterIdx = 0;

    // Not unrolled
    for(int i = localRow; i < localRow+filterWidth; i++) {
        int offset = i*localWidth;
        for(int j = localCol; j < localCol+filterWidth; j++){
            sum += localImage[offset+j] *
                filter[filterIdx++];
        }
    }
/*

```

```
// Inner loop unrolled
for(int i = localRow; i < localRow+filterWidth; i++) {
    int offset = i*localWidth+localCol;

    sum += localImage[offset++] * filter[filterIdx++];
    sum += localImage[offset++] * filter[filterIdx++];

}

*/
/*
// Completely unrolled
int offset = localRow*localWidth+localCol;

sum += localImage[offset+0] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+1] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+2] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+3] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+4] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+5] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+6] * filter[filterIdx++];

offset += localWidth;

sum += localImage[offset+0] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+1] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+2] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+3] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+4] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+5] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+6] * filter[filterIdx++];

offset += localWidth;

sum += localImage[offset+0] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+1] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+2] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+3] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+4] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+5] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+6] * filter[filterIdx++];

offset += localWidth;

sum += localImage[offset+0] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+1] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+2] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+3] * filter[filterIdx++];
```

```

sum += localImage[offset+4] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+5] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+6] * filter[filterIdx++];

offset += localWidth;

sum += localImage[offset+0] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+1] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+2] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+3] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+4] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+5] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+6] * filter[filterIdx++];

offset += localWidth;

sum += localImage[offset+0] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+1] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+2] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+3] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+4] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+5] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+6] * filter[filterIdx++];

offset += localWidth;

sum += localImage[offset+0] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+1] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+2] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+3] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+4] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+5] * filter[filterIdx++];
sum += localImage[offset+6] * filter[filterIdx++];

*/
// Write the data out
imageOut[(globalRow+filterRadius)*cols +
           (globalCol+filterRadius)] = sum;
}
return;
}

```

---

## Reference

NVIDIA Corporation. (2009). *NVIDIA OpenCL Programming Guide for the CUDA Architecture*. Santa Clara, CA: NVIDIA Corporation.

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# OpenCL Case Study: Video Processing

# 8

---

## INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we discuss an interesting application that allows us to explore a range of aspects of OpenCL. The application is a video processor that takes a video stream and performs image processing operations (*effects*) on its content using OpenCL. The resulting output is a video stream that can be presented to the display in real time. The application usage can scale when applying multiple effects to a video stream or when multiple input video streams are enhanced to combine multiple video streams together to produce a single output stream.

To accomplish this task, we consider various important techniques, including specialty hardware decoding with the OpenVideo Decode API, different methods to transfer decoded video frames to the compute device, advanced compute dependencies handled with event lists, gathering different performance metrics, and the sharing of buffers between OpenCL and OpenGL to display the video. This final sharing of buffers between APIs we term *interoperability*.

Performance is a core objective in this example as we examine the different ways to accomplish the task at hand. Tuning the performance for this application can be challenging because there are many aspects that can be made faster. However, the output rate of our video stream is our benchmark, with the goal of playing it back in real time.

---

## GETTING VIDEO FRAMES

Before we discuss the OpenCL example, we first need to fulfill the input requirements of our video processor by providing an input video to the video processor. Here, we address the case in which the input video exists as a file on the computer in a compressed form. Once input data is read from disk, one frame of video in RGB format feeds each effect and processed output results. To go from the compressed video to our desired RGB format, the file must be decoded.

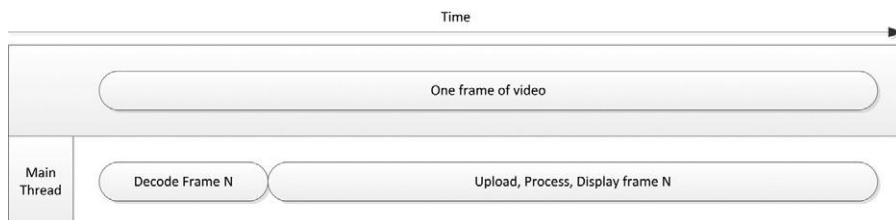
## Decoding on the CPU

Many decoding libraries exist for the various platforms supporting video decode using the power of the CPU. Assuming one is using a GPU as an OpenCL compute device, which is common in a system in which video display is the final goal, we can choose to decode the video on the CPU and perform the processing of video effects on the GPU. This choice lends itself to a very simple form of heterogeneous computing shown in [Figure 8.1](#), in which the partitioning of the work falls on the task boundary. One limitation inherent in adopting this style of heterogeneous computing is that performance will be limited by either the task's entire performance or the cost of transferring results from one device to another.

For this example, we choose to use the libvlc library from the VLC project. This library is not only well established, widely used, and high performance but also available on Linux, Windows, and OS X and it removes dependences on a particular platform. Working in OpenCL also has the benefit that the open standard has been implemented in Linux, Windows, and OS X. Later, we will see that the OpenCL code for this example will be the same on all three platforms (with a minor exception for the display code). The last major component of this example is the display of the output video to the user, and we use OpenGL for this purpose, continuing the use of open standards.

To decode a frame of video, we must first initialize the decoding framework and request that it open the file. The decode framework will then decode a frame of video in the designated format. The framework may have different methods for requesting a frame, the most basic of which is a straightforward blocking call approach that returns control to the caller once the frame is ready. Alternatively, the decoding framework may rely on callback functions that are issued after the decoded frame is ready and support asynchronous decode requests.

Using a callback methodology can provide benefits compared to a blocking call. However, regardless of the method selected, it is important to think about performance and how decoding can affect the time left for processing the video. If a programmer were to write this application as a single thread with a main loop, then the callback methodology would allow for some overlapping of video decoding and other work, only alerting our program when the data was ready. The main loop would follow by performing a minimal amount of work, optimally just copying the decoded



**FIGURE 8.1**

Processing video by decoding on the CPU and then processing and displaying on the GPU.

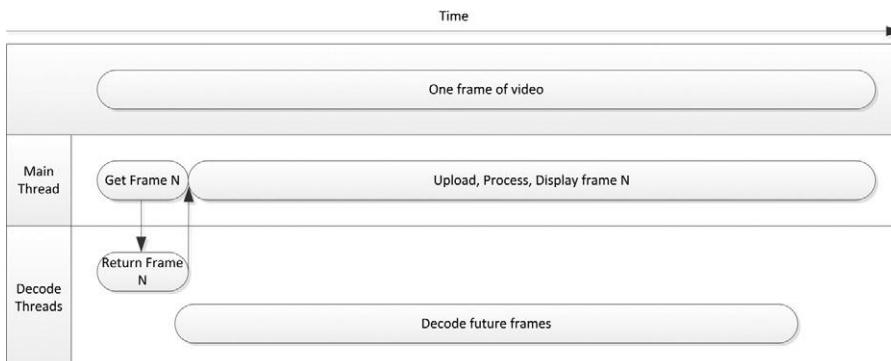
frame. If, however, the application uses a blocking method, then the main loop must issue a call to the decoding library and block until the next frame is decoded. This blocking reduces the amount of work that can be carried out in parallel with decoding—a problem particularly acute if disk input or output is required to obtain the video frames.

### Multithreading Decoding

Given that the goal is to maximize performance, even doing minimal work for decoding in the main loop is more expensive than doing none. To remove all the decoding work from the main loop, we create worker threads to do the work. A worker thread is spawned for each input video to be decoded, and the asynchronous decoding and execution of other work are achieved through application-level threads rather than API callbacks. Instead of blocking, the application focuses on having everything ready for the main loop. To keep the main loop running and not stalled waiting on any worker threads, our example code uses a simple first in, first out (FIFO) buffer of decoded frames as its method to feed the main loop. The decoding helper threads monitor the FIFO queue and attempt to keep it full, whereas the size of the FIFO is designed to be large enough to account for the maximum latency on the decoding side (Figure 8.2).

### Decoding Video on the GPU

Many modern GPUs include fixed function hardware that is available to decode video for certain formats. This feature is designed to enable users to watch video with extended battery life by reducing the power consumption of the CPU (or GPU) due to the higher efficiency of specialty decoding hardware compared with general-purpose computation. This hardware is known by many names: AMD refers to this feature as Unified Video Decode, NVIDIA uses the term PureVideo, and it can also be found in



**FIGURE 8.2**

Decoding a video using helper threads in addition to the main application thread.

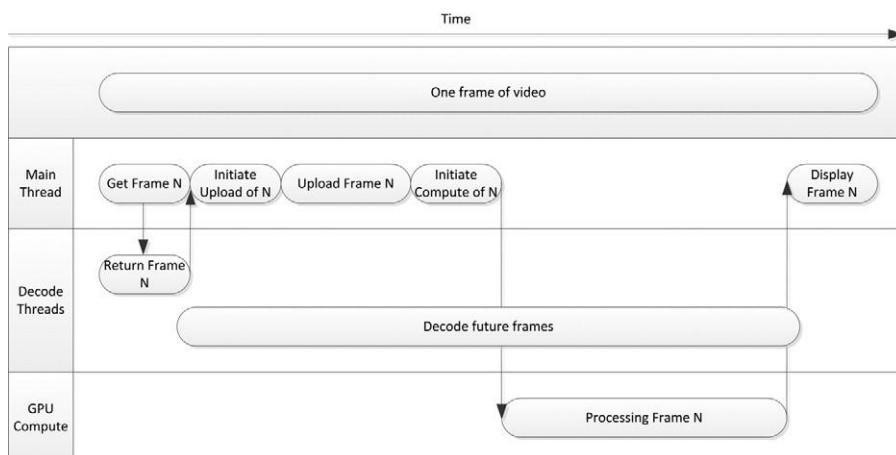
some Intel graphics devices. The Microsoft Windows's DXVA API is commonly used to access this hardware on Windows.

The mechanics of using the video decode hardware is that the compressed video data stream is transferred to the GPU device, where it is decoded, and the decompressed video frame is written into the GPU memory (Figure 8.3). To use the decompressed video frame in OpenCL, we need to map the frame into OpenCL's memory space. This is true even if it is already in the GPU memory because different APIs manage memory in different ways. The alternative method would be to copy the decoded frame back from GPU memory to system memory and then upload that frame to the OpenCL device. This latter method may often be more expensive due to the multiple copies across system buses that it requires; thus, it is preferable to have the decoded video data directly accessible to OpenCL.

### ***OpenVideo Decode***

To benefit from the fixed function decoding hardware in this example while avoiding jumping through hoops to access the memory of the decode frame, the example uses the OpenVideo Decode API. This API supports access to the decoded video frames from OpenCL. The API is written in such a way that it operates on a platform-independent context that has been acquired from a separate API domain such as OpenCL.

Before using the OpenVideo Decode API, we need to check the capabilities of the device and the video format to ensure that they are compatible. In OpenCL, this is achieved by checking that the device capabilities include `c1_amd_open_video` to interoperate with OpenVideo. In OpenVideo, we can check the results of `OVDecodeGetDeviceInfo()` and `OVDecodeGetDeviceCap()` to determine what video accelerators are available and what they are capable of handling.



**FIGURE 8.3**

Using the GPU to perform processing in parallel with further decoding of frames.

```

if ( !(ret = OVDecodeGetDeviceInfo(&numDevices, 0)) {
    //handle getting device info not succeeded
}

if(numDevices == 0){
    //handle no devices being available
}

ovdecode_device_info *deviceInfo =
    newovdecode_device_info[numDevices];
ret = OVDecodeGetDeviceInfo(&numDevices, deviceInfo);

for(unsignedint i = 0; i < numDevices; i++){
    ovdecode_cap *caps =
        newovdecode_cap[deviceInfo[i].decode_cap_size];
    ret = OVDecodeGetDeviceCap(
        deviceInfo[i].device_id,
        deviceInfo[i].decode_cap_size, caps);
    ...
}

```

Next, we start the coordination between OpenCL and OpenVideo by first creating an OpenCL context and then creating a decode session in OpenVideo passing the OpenCL context to the `OVDecodeCreateSession()` function.

We must create a decode session for each video stream to be decoded. Furthermore, the application must coordinate the memory that is used and shared by OpenCL and OpenVideo. This is achieved by creating memory objects in OpenCL and then turning them into platform-independent handles using `clGetPlatformMemHandle()`. From now on, both OpenCL and OpenVideo will have handles to this memory and will need to synchronize accesses.

```

OPContextHandleovdContext = clCreateContext(
    properties,
    1,
    &clDeviceID,
    0,
    0,
    &err);
ov_session session = OVDecodeCreateSession (
    ovdContext,
    ovDeviceID,
    profile,
    output_Format,
    output_Width,
    output_Height);

```

With the basic setup described and a link forged between the OpenCL and OpenVideo APIs, we next consider the main decoding loop using OpenVideo's decode functionality. To synchronize the memory accesses, the application first acquires the memory object from OpenVideo Decode using `OVDecodeAquireObject()`,

which enables access such that the decoded video can be written into that memory. For the decode to take place, `OVDecodePicture()` is used to pass in the compressed video stream, which is fed in from a parsed bitstream, along with the parameters for the decode. Creating the parsed bitstream takes intimate knowledge of the compressed video format; therefore, a third-party library is used for this task. After decoding is complete, the memory object is released from OpenVideo so that the OpenCL runtime can acquire it in its domain and perform memory accesses on the decoded frame. Finally, the memory object can be released when this is complete. We iterate this loop of memory access synchronization, decoding, and accessing the decoded video continue until the video is finished.

The following is the sequence of required commands:

```

OVresult OVAcquireObject (
    session,
    unsignedintnum_handle,
    ov_handle *decode_handle,
    1,
    &pre_event,
    &acquire_event);

res = OVDecodePicture(
    session,
    &picture_parameter,
    &pic_parameter_2,
    pic_parameter_2_size,
    &bitstream_data,
    bitstream_data_read_size,
    slice_data_control,
    slice_data_control_size,
    output_surface,
    1,
    &acquire_event,
    &eventRunVideoProgram,
    0);

ret = OVReleaseObject (
    session,
    unsignedintnum_handle,
    ov_handle *decode_handle,
    1 /*num_event_in_wait_list*/,
    &decode_event,
    &release_event);

status = clEnqueueNDRangeKernel(...);

```

Although overhead is introduced due to synchronization of the memory object accesses, using the fixed function hardware for video decoding frees up compute resources and reduces the need to pass the decompressed video back and forth. This also reduces the amount of traffic on the bus linking the GPU to the system because

only the compressed video needs to be transferred. However, there are limitations to doing decode this way due to the nature of the fixed function decode hardware. The number of video streams that the hardware is designed to decode simultaneously is usually limited. Most high-end systems decode two streams simultaneously (covering picture-in-picture scenarios). Because of this limitation, we must provide a CPU decoding fallback path.

---

## PROCESSING A VIDEO IN OPENCL

Assuming we can access the input data, we next discuss how to process the data in OpenCL. The video processing performed in this example uses a single frame of video as input and a single frame as output. It allows for different parameters to be set to control the effect. The video processing parameters are communicated through setting the arguments for the kernel.

A few features of OpenCL make accessing image data easier. First, vector types such as `<type>4` (e.g., `char4`, `int4`, and `float4`) map well to a four-color (red, green, blue, alpha (RGBA)) pixel. There is also support for vectors of length three that map even better to RGB, YUV, etc. pixel data.

Another useful way to access image data from OpenCL is to use OpenCL Images. OpenCL Buffers are intended to be used for general-purpose data stored contiguously in memory in the same way as arrays in C. Images not only make access to two- and three-dimensional data easier but also provide support for the data to be stored in various formats and add the ability to perform sampling on that data. For example, image access functions can efficiently perform linear or bi-cubic interpolation. The format of an image can be queried and set, but once the data is in the image, a call to `read_image[u,f]()` in an OpenCL kernel can produce the data in various output formats.

The video processing example uses images as the data format to store the video frames, and we demonstrate this using a simple effect. The chosen effect darkens or lightens the frame in a linear manner (versus using a gamma correction) with a single parameter. The OpenCL kernel has three parameters: the input video frame, the output video frame, and a floating point scalar representing brightness. When the brightness value is set to 1.0f, there is no change in the output frame. A value greater than 1.0f causes the output to brighten, and a value less than 1.0f darkens the output.

```
__kernel void
brighten(
    read_only image2d_t in,
    write_only image2d_t out,
    float brightness)
{
    float4val;
    int2 coordinate = (int2)(get_global_id(0), get_global_id(1));
    const sampler_t sampler =
```

```

CLK_NORMALIZED_COORDS_FALSE |
CLK_ADDRESS_NONE |
CLK_FILTER_NEAREST;

val = read_imagef(in, sampler, coordinate);
val *= (float4)(brightness, brightness, brightness, 1.0f);
write_imagef(val, coordinate);
}

```

Although the video frame may be in RGBA format with 8 bits per channel, the brightness parameter is a float to allow for fine adjustments. Because we use OpenCL Images in this example, it is sufficient to call the `read_imagef()` function to return a `float4` of each pixel and apply the brightness correction before writing the output pixel back with `write_imagef()`.

After the input video frame is uploaded to an image, we create the special effect OpenCL kernel and apply it to the input data. To apply the special effect, the application compiles the kernel and sets the kernel's arguments accordingly. In the base case of applying just one filter, the output frame is written to a location that is most convenient for display.

## PROCESSING MULTIPLE VIDEOS WITH MULTIPLE SPECIAL EFFECTS

To process multiple special effects, we follow the same set of steps that we followed for processing a single video and single special effect, except that now we chain effects together. One could imagine an intermediate image, output by one effect and used as input to the next. Because each effect must wait for the previous effect to finish before it can start executing, the use of an intermediate buffer can be removed and we can use the video frame buffer directly instead. There are some issues with this approach if the algorithm depends on values of other pixels to compute the current pixel (so-called gather algorithms) or when the output pixel is used to alter output pixels (so-called spreading algorithms). In such cases, intermediate buffers may be necessary. However, to work as efficiently as possible and remove unneeded copies between intermediate buffers, the goal is to eliminate the need for intermediate buffers whenever possible.

### Event Chaining

The OpenCL command queue model used for scheduling work uses events to capture information about enqueued work. These events allow chains of dependencies to be created such that completion of one command is ensured before the start of the next. In addition, these events can be used by an application to query the status of the queue. Each event is normally created with a call to `c1Enqueue(*)`, and a list of event dependencies can be given to the `c1Enqueue(*)` operations. The runtime will check

that each dependency is fulfilled before starting the work (or, specifically, submitting the work) that is enqueued. However, because `clEnqueue(*)` is creating the event, we cannot put a dependency on a future `clEnqueue(*)` call because that event has not yet been created.

Following the example of the single video in which we enqueued multiple effects that included dependencies, the same method can be applied to multiple video streams. Because the video processor could have an effect that takes two or more video streams as input, one must ensure that these streams have already finished processing and previously enqueued effects before combining new effects. The OpenCL runtime can handle the ordering dependencies by using the generated events.

The other consideration necessary when working with multiple streams is having intermediate buffers into which processed video frames can be handed off. As in the case of a single video containing multiple effects, we render the output to the video frame buffer of the target stream, thus removing the requirement for intermediate buffers.

---

## DISPLAY TO SCREEN OF FINAL OUTPUT

At the end of the processing chain, the goal is to present the processed video to the user through display on the screen. Conceptually, displaying a processed video frame is simply a matter of copying the data to a frame buffer or other data structure that interacts with the display. For portability, our example uses OpenGL as an input to which the output video is moved into a double-buffered texture. The texture is rendered by drawing it onto a quad (rectangle) that displays on top of and with the size of the output window.

Before OpenGL can draw the textured quad, the output data must be copied (at least logically) from OpenCL into the texture in OpenGL.

### OpenCL/OpenGL Interoperability

OpenCL provides an optional extension to share memory objects between OpenCL and OpenGL. OpenCL extensions, described in detail in Chapter 10, allow the addition of features that are beyond the scope of the core specification. Because these features are optional, an application must test for their availability before assuming they can use any particular extension. Using the OpenCL C++ Wrapper API, a particular extension can be queried using the `getInfo()` method of the `cl::Device` classes, returning information for the `CL_DEVICE_EXTENSIONS` parameter. The resulting string can be tested to determine if OpenGL sharing is supported, comparing it to the specified string value.

```
//check that the device supports OpenGL/CL interop
if(devices[0].getInfo<CL_DEVICE_EXTENSIONS>().find(
    "cl_khr_gl_sharing") == std::string::npos) {
    //OpenCL/GL interop is not available
}
```

Because the sharing model for memory objects is defined in a context, we create a context with parameters describing which OpenGL context should be used to support sharing. The method for obtaining an OpenGL context is different across different operating systems, and this is where the slight loss of portability mentioned previously arises. This difference is due to the property name, which changes across context. The following code creates an OpenCL context with OpenGL sharing under Windows:

```

cl_context_properties props[7] =
{
    CL_CONTEXT_PLATFORM,
    (cl_context_properties) amdplatform(),
    CL_GL_CONTEXT_KHR,
    (intptr_t) wglGetCurrentContext(),
    CL_WGL_HDC_KHR,
    (intptr_t) wglGetCurrentDC(), //HDC handle of the display
    0
};

context = cl::Context(devices, props, NULL, NULL, &err);
if (CL_SUCCESS != err){
    std::cerr << "Creating context failed with value "
    << err << std::endl;
}

```

Once the OpenCL Context with OpenGL sharing is created, the application must create a texture or buffer in OpenGL that will be used to create an image or buffer in OpenCL. It follows that the video processing application uses images because an OpenGL texture is required.

```

glGenTextures(1, &texture);
 glBindTexture(GL_TEXTURE_2D, texture);
 glTexParameteri(
    GL_TEXTURE_2D,
    GL_TEXTURE_MIN_FILTER,
    GL_LINEAR);
 glTexParameteri(
    GL_TEXTURE_2D,
    GL_TEXTURE_MAG_FILTER,
    GL_LINEAR);
 glTexParameteri(
    GL_TEXTURE_2D,
    GL_TEXTURE_WRAP_S,
    GL_CLAMP);
 glTexParameteri(
    GL_TEXTURE_2D,
    GL_TEXTURE_WRAP_T,
    GL_CLAMP);
 glTexEnvf(

```

```

GL_TEXTURE_ENV,
GL_TEXTURE_ENV_MODE,
GL_DECAL);
glEnable(GL_TEXTURE_2D);

```

Using the `cl::Image2DGL` class, we create the OpenCL Image2D memory object based on this texture.

```

gImageBuffer = cl::Image2DGL(
ctx->getContext(),
CL_MEM_READ_WRITE,
GL_TEXTURE_2D,
0,
texture,
&err);

```

The resulting image can be used just like any other image, with the exception that synchronization must be performed so that both OpenCL and OpenGL do not access stale data (as with the OpenVideo Decode API). This synchronization is performed with `enqueueAcquireGLObjects()` and `enqueueReleaseGLObjects` functions called on the queue object. These commands have access to the full OpenCL event architecture because they are enqueued in the same way as any other. When making these synchronization calls, the application needs to ensure that all writes to the memory objects are completed before the call. Enforcing this class of barrier synchronization is implemented in OpenGL using `glFinish()` and on the OpenCL side by waiting on the resultant event from the command writing to the memory object. The following code eliminates the check of the return values or use of events for brevity (instead assuming an in-order queue):

```

std::vector<cl::Memory> mem_objs;
mem_objs.push_back(gImageBuffer[buffer_idx]);
ret = cq.enqueueAcquireGLObjects(&mem_objs, NULL, NULL);
ret = cq.enqueueWriteImage(
    ImageBuffer[buffer_idx],
    CL_FALSE,
    origin,
    size,
    0,
    0,
    data,
    NULL,
    NULL);
ret = cq.enqueueReleaseGLObjects(&mem_objs, NULL, NULL);

```

## SUMMARY

In this chapter, we discussed the use of the OpenVideo Decode API, as well as interoperability of OpenCL and OpenGL image structures. The OpenVideo Decode API supports efficient decoding of video streams without significantly impacting power usage. Interoperability between OpenGL and OpenCL enables efficient data sharing, avoiding duplication of data structures when they are already present in a given device's memory. This chapter provides yet another opportunity to leverage the power of the OpenCL framework.

# OpenCL Case Study: Histogram

# 9

---

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses specific optimizations for a memory-bound kernel. The kernel we choose for this chapter is an image histogram operation. The source data for this operation is an 8-bit-per-pixel image with a target of counting into each of 256 32-bit histogram bins.

The principle of the histogram algorithm is to perform the following operation over each element of the image:

```
for( many input values ) {  
    histogram[ value ]++;  
}
```

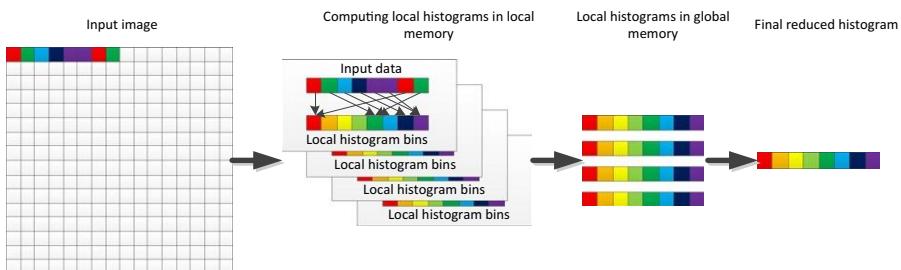
This algorithm performs many scattered read-modify-write accesses into a small histogram data structure. On a CPU, this application will use the cache, although with a high rate of reuse of elements. On a GPU, these accesses will be resolved in global memory, which will produce a worst-case scenario in terms of performance.

To address the high degree of contention of access in global memory, the algorithm chosen parallelizes the histogram over a number of workgroups, each of which summarizes its block of source data into a number of sub-histograms stored in on-chip local memory. These local histograms are finally reduced into a single global histogram, storing the result for the overall image. The overview of the algorithm is shown in [Figure 9.1](#).

---

## CHOOSING THE NUMBER OF WORKGROUPS

When we begin to map an OpenCL kernel to target hardware, we may encounter some constraints on the number of work-items and workgroups that follow from the design of the algorithm, the target architecture, and the size of the various memory regions distributed throughout the target machine. Local memory is shared within a workgroup, and a given group summarizes data into a sub-histogram stored in a region within local memory. This allows many work-items to contribute to the same local memory area, collaborating to reduce memory overhead. Given that the final stage of the histogram computation is a global reduction with a separate local region

**FIGURE 9.1**

Computing the histogram involves first producing local histograms from the input image and then exporting those to global memory and performing a global reduction operation to produce the final histogram.

per workgroup, creating too many workgroups would transfer more local data into global memory, increasing memory usage and require a larger reduction operation.

To most efficiently use local memory and to reduce the overhead of global memory transactions, the number of workgroups should be as close as possible to the number of compute units, or SIMD cores, in the device. The local memory resources exist physically on a per-SIMD core basis in AMD and NVIDIA GPUs and are intended in the OpenCL specification to support access at least as efficient as global memory. It is important to make maximal use of the high bandwidth to such dedicated memory regions and that we use as many local memory spaces as possible to maximise parallel memory access. As just noted, we should avoid creating many more workgroups than the actual number of SIMD cores because this wastes global memory bandwidth.

Through the OpenCL API, we can query the number of compute units on the device at runtime:

```
clGetDeviceInfo(..., CL_DEVICE_MAX_COMPUTE_UNITS, ...);
```

Note that in this case, using the naive single work-item per input pixel is highly inefficient. This is due largely to the low number of pixels mapping to a single histogram bin and hence generates a higher cost during the reduction phase. This inefficiency is also caused by per-work-item and per-group execution costs becoming significant due to high work-item counts.

## CHOOSING THE OPTIMAL WORKGROUP SIZE

The optimal workgroup size for a given algorithm can be difficult to identify. At a minimum, workgroup sizes should be selected to be an even multiple of the width of the hardware scheduling units. Because targeted architectures are often vector based, it is inefficient to use half vectors for scheduling OpenCL work-items. On AMD GPUs, the hardware scheduling unit is a wavefront—a logical vector of 32 or 64

work-items that runs on a hardware SIMD unit. OpenCL workgroups execute as sets of wavefronts.

A single wavefront per compute unit is inadequate to fully utilize the machine. The hardware schedules two wavefronts at a time interleaved through the ALUs of the SIMD unit, and it schedules additional wavefronts to perform memory transactions. An absolute minimum to satisfy the hardware and fill instruction slots on an AMD GPU is then three wavefronts per compute unit, or 196 work-items on high-end APU GPUs. However, to enable the GPU to perform efficient hiding of global memory latency in fetch-bound kernels, at least seven wavefronts are required per SIMD.

We cannot exceed the maximum number of work-items that the device supports in a workgroup, which is 256 on current AMD GPUs. At a minimum, we need 64 work-items per group and at least three groups per compute unit. At a maximum, we have 256 work-items per group, and the number of groups that fit on the compute unit will be resource limited. There is little benefit to launching a very large number of work-items. Once enough work-items to fill the machine and cover memory latency have been dispatched, nothing is gained from scheduling additional work-items, and there may be additional overhead incurred. Within this range, it is necessary to fine-tune the implementation to find the optimal performance point.

---

## OPTIMIZING GLOBAL MEMORY DATA ACCESS PATTERNS

A histogram is a highly memory-bound operation: Very few arithmetic operations are needed per pixel of the input image. We cannot rely on the often extensive floating point capabilities of OpenCL devices to attain high performance. Instead, we must make as efficient use of the memory system as possible, optimizing memory accesses when moving from one type of device to another.

For the histogram operation, the order of reads from global memory is order independent. This means that we can freely optimize the access pattern without concerns about correctly ordering reads with respect to each other.

The memory subsystems of both AMD GPUs and CPUs are optimized to perform 128-bit read operations, matching the common four-component pixel size of four 32-bit floats. On the GPU, single reads are inefficient because of the availability of vector hardware that can hold up to 64 work-items, so multiples of this 128-bit read allow the memory system to take full advantage of wide and high-speed data paths to memory. The ideal read pattern is for all simultaneously executing work-items to read adjacent 128-bit quantities, forming a 256-byte read burst across the 16 work-items executing in parallel on a given core and directly mapping to a GPU memory channel.

The result is that we transform memory accesses as follows. Each work-item reads unsigned integer quantities, packed into four-wide vectors (unit4), starting at the global work-item index and continuing with a stride that is equal to the total number of work-items to be read.

An efficient access pattern for reading input data is shown in the following code and in Figure 9.2:

```
uint gid    = get_global_id(0);
uint Stride = get_global_size(0);

for( i=0, idx = gid; i < n4VectorsPerWorkItem; i++, idx += Stride ) {
    uint4 temp = Image[idx];
    ...
}
```

Although the similar code shown in Figure 9.3 is a less efficient implementation when run on the GPU (in which each work-item reads serially), this implementation is perfect for a CPU, in which the total number of work-items in the system should not significantly exceed the number of cores.

```
uint gid = get_global_id(0);  
  
for( i=0, idx = gid * n4VectorsPerWorkItem;  
    I < n4VectorsPerWorkItem;  
    i++, idx++) {  
  
    uint4 temp = Image[idx];  
    ...
```

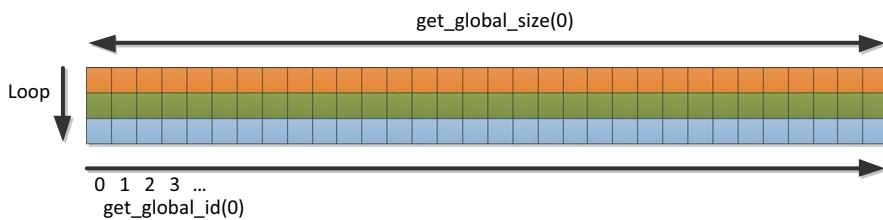
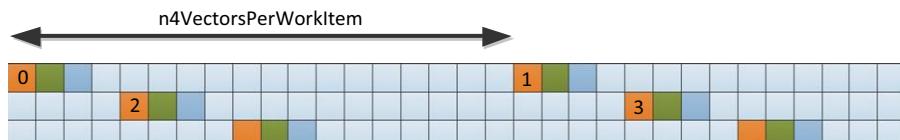


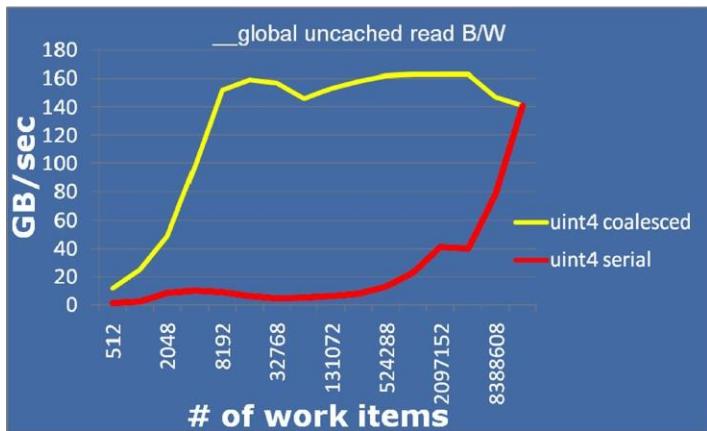
FIGURE 9.2

An efficient read pattern for the GPU in which work-items read consecutive addresses and stride through memory to find the next data item to read.



**FIGURE 9.3**

Serial reads in which each work item reads a series of locations in a contiguous section of memory and the next work item starts some distance through memory are more efficient for the CPU, in which temporal locality in a single work-item is more of a benefit than coalesced reading between serially executed work-items.

**FIGURE 9.4**

Serial coalesced trade-off: A graph of memory system throughput scalar and vector serial and coalesced reads against the number of work-items on the AMD Radeon HD™6970 GPU. Note that when the number of work-items becomes very large as the data set size is fixed, the two read styles converge to be the same coalesced read; hence, they have identical performance. The graph assumes a data set size of 256 MB.

We can see how the difference between these trades off as a function of the number of work-items in [Figure 9.4](#). A clear performance benefit initially, but as we increase the number of work-items performing coalesced reads, performance declines because too many work-items are active in the system. Serial performance is very poor when strides are long, but as strides reduce, cache line reuse and coalescing benefits in the memory system improve performance until the two types of reads converge when they become identical with one data element read per work-item.

## USING ATOMICS TO PERFORM LOCAL HISTOGRAM

When we execute this application on a CPU, we execute a workgroup with a single thread and hence have no read-after-write hazards. When targeting an AMD Radeon™ GPU, we can use a wide SIMD vector and provide for fine-grained threading. The combination of these features means that many work-items execute in parallel (16 work-items on high-end GPUs), and we can potentially interleave instruction execution from multiple executing wavefronts. As a result, we cannot guarantee the ordering of read-after-write dependencies on our local histogram bins.

To address this issue, we could reproduce the histogram bins multiple times, but this would require a copy of each bin for each work-item in the group (we do not know what order they will execute in). The resulting memory pressure would be too great.

The alternative solution is to use hardware atomics. As discussed in Chapter 6, the hardware atomics on the AMD Radeon HD6970 architecture are associated with each lane of the local data storage and can improve performance significantly. We can rely on these atomics with little concern about the overhead for our algorithm.

Performing the histogram operation in a local memory buffer becomes as simple as the following code. Note that because we have performed a 128-bit read of 16 pixels simultaneously (where each pixel is really a single 8-bit channel), we repeat this code in the core loop for each channel and use masks and shifts to extract this data. Performing the mask and shift operations explicitly on a `uint4` vector maps efficiently to the underlying hardware architecture.

```
for( int i=0, idx=gid; i<n4VectorsPerWorkItem; i++, idx += Stride ) {
    uint4 temp = Image[idx];
    uint4 temp2 = (temp & mask);

    (void) atomic_inc( subhists + temp2.x );
    (void) atomic_inc( subhists + temp2.y );
    (void) atomic_inc( subhists + temp2.z );
    (void) atomic_inc( subhists + temp2.w );

    temp = temp >> 8;
    temp2 = (temp & mask);
    ...
}
```

---

## OPTIMIZING LOCAL MEMORY ACCESS

Directly targeting histogram bins in global memory is a recipe for a nonscalable algorithm (i.e., the performance will not scale when we introduce additional hardware resources to the execution). There is a severe bottleneck when performing binning operations, whether using atomic functions or multiple bins per group, through the DRAM interface that will limit performance due to a significant increase in the total amount of memory traffic.

To avoid this issue, we choose to use separate small histograms for each workgroup using local memory buffers. These local memories are very high bandwidth, whether we are running on a CPU or a GPU. Using small histograms guarantees cache independence on a CPU and effective use of the dedicated high-bandwidth scratchpad memories on many GPUs. Although we are able to map to the scratchpad memory on a GPU, given that we are using wide SIMD vectors to access this memory, care must be taken to access this local data efficiently. Taking the local memory structure on the AMD Radeon 6970 GPU as an example (i.e., local data shares (LDS)), we have an SRAM array with 32 banks addressed using bits 2–7 of the address. Bank conflicts occur if we have multiple work-items from a 16-wide parallel SIMD issue attempt to read or write the same LDS bank.

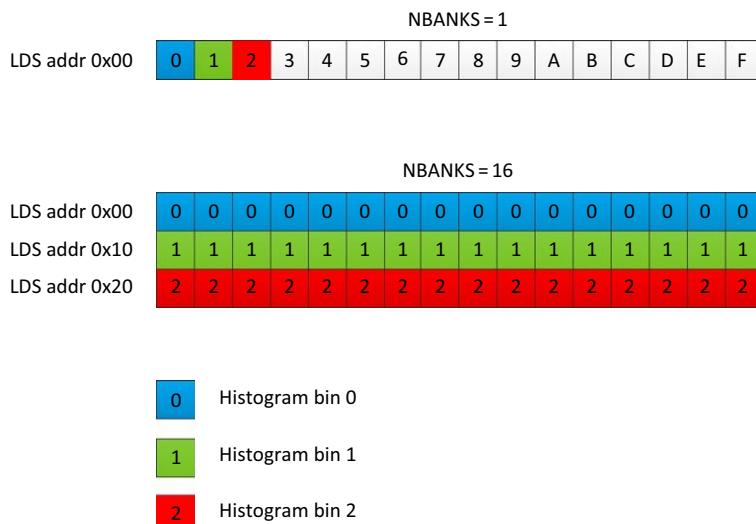
Because we are limiting ourselves to a small number of workgroups relative to the amount of input data, we know that each work-item will process a significant

number of input pixels. We already know that this reduces the size of the final reduction and concentrates work into local memory, localizing memory traffic and hence improving performance. It also gives us a further advantage in that we can afford to expand our local memory buffer slightly, such that instead of a single histogram for the entire workgroup, we use a subset of histograms and perform a reduction at the end. Given the large number of pixels per work-item, the overhead of the reduction stage should be negligible.

The benefit of using multiple histogram bins is apparent if we are careful with our layout. [Figure 9.5](#) shows how we can reproduce the histogram multiple times to reduce bank conflicts. The AMD hardware has 32 memory banks in LDS and a single set of histogram bins. To attempt to increment the same histogram bin (guaranteed in a single color image) or sets of histogram bins that map to the same bank, sets of 16 work-items are dispatched in a single SIMD instruction. Any collisions will cause the application to stall.

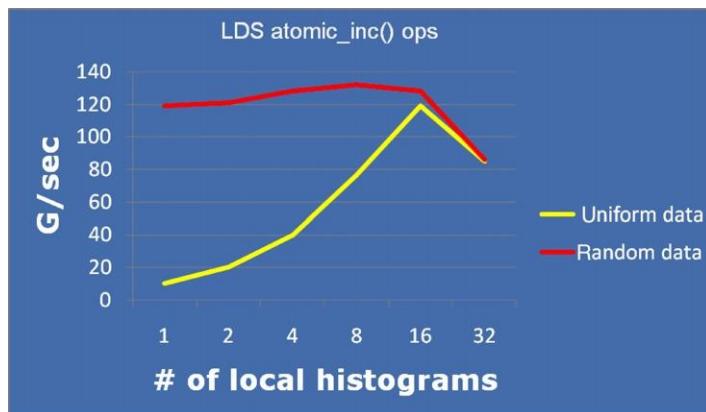
To avoid these stalls, we can reproduce the entire set of histogram bins such that each work-item is guaranteed, whichever histogram bin it aims to use, to access the same bank. In this way, we can guarantee that a single bank will be used per work-item, and no two work-items will use the same bank. The cost is an increase in local memory use per workgroup and the addition of a local reduction stage to the computation.

[Figure 9.6](#) shows the impact of this trade-off when accessing a random data set, where conflicts were few, so the overhead of the reduction is more noticeable. A uniform data set created a significant number of bank conflicts when using a single set of histogram bins and so benefits immediately when increasing the number of copies.



**FIGURE 9.5**

With a single set of histogram bins and 16 hardware banks, every 16th bin will map to the same hardware bank, causing conflicts if for any two work-items in a single SIMD vector address two histogram bins  $a$  and  $b$ , where  $a \% 16 = b \% 16$ . By reproducing the histogram for each work item, we alleviate these collisions.

**FIGURE 9.6**

Trading off the number of banks. As we increase the number of copies of the local histogram in a given workgroup, we reduce the number of conflicts at the cost of introducing a local reduction operation and, eventually, reducing concurrent execution in the system due to resource constraints.

Realistic data sets would lie between these two extremes. Note that the peak is found at 16 banks, even though this evaluation is performed on the Radeon HD6970 device with 32 banks in total. Only 16 work-items issue in a given SIMD vector, and atomic operations are limited to 32-bit per SIMD lanes, so we can only use a maximum of 16 banks; the other 16 are unused.

We next modify the previous code to compute offsets based on the number of copies of the local histogram we described previously:

```
#define NBANKS 16

uint offset = (uint) lid % (uint) (NBANKS);

for( int i=0, idx=gid; i<n4VectorsPerWorkItem; i++, idx += Stride ) {
    uint4 temp = Image[idx];
    uint4 temp2 = (temp & mask) * (uint4) NBANKS + offset;
    (void) atomic_inc( subhists + temp2.x );
    (void) atomic_inc( subhists + temp2.y );
    (void) atomic_inc( subhists + temp2.z );
    (void) atomic_inc( subhists + temp2.w );
    ...
}
```

## LOCAL HISTOGRAM REDUCTION

Before we conclude the local histogram kernel discussion, we must reduce the data across the copies we created and output this to global memory. We can mask out work-items in the group higher numbered than the number of bins. We can

alternatively iterate through bins (if there are more bins than work-items) and then, for each bin histogram, copy the bins and output this to global memory.

```

barrier( CLK_LOCAL_MEM_FENCE );
for( int binIndex = lid;
    binIndex < NBINS;
    binIndex += get_local_size(0) ) {

    uint bin = 0;

    for( int i=0; i<NBANKS; i++ ) {
        bin += subhists[
            (lid * NBANKS) + ((i + lid) % NBANKS) ];
    }

    globalHistogram[
        (get_group_id(0) * NBINS) + binIndex ] = bin;
}

```

Note that in the previous code, we modify the code to avoid bank conflicts within the summation loop, as we otherwise guarantee NBANKS-way conflicts.

## THE GLOBAL REDUCTION

The final step necessary in our histogram algorithm is to reduce the local bins. Because we have carefully limited the number of workgroups, the work to perform the global reduction is minor. Accordingly, we can avoid performing complicated tree-based reductions and multipass algorithms. Instead, we enqueue a single summation kernel similar to the reduction used for the local histograms:

```

__kernel void reduceKernel(
    __global uint * globalHistogram,
    uint nSubHists ) {

    uint gid = get_global_id(0);
    uint bin = 0;

    for( int i=0; i < nSubHists; i++ )
        bin += globalHistogram[ (i * NBINS) + gid ];
    globalHistogram[ gid ] = bin;
}

```

## FULL KERNEL CODE

```

__kernel __attribute__((reqd_work_group_size(NBINS,1,1)))
void histogramKernel(__global uint4 *Image,
                     __global uint *globalHistogram,
                     uint n4VectorsPerWorkItem){

```

```

__local uint subhists[NBANKS * NBINS];

uint gid      = get_global_id(0);
uint lid      = get_local_id(0);
uint Stride   = get_global_size(0);
uint4 temp, temp2;
const uint shift = (uint) NBITS;
const uint mask = (uint) (NBINS-1);
uint offset = (uint) lid % (uint) (NBANKS);

uint localItems = NBANKS * NBINS;
uint localItemsPerWorkItem;
uint localMaxWorkItems;

// parallel LDS clear

// first, calculate work-items per data item,
// at least 1:
localMaxWorkItems = min( 1, get_local_size(0) / localItems );
// but no more than we have items:
localMaxWorkItems = max( 1, localMaxWorkItems / localItems );
// calculate threads total:
localMaxWorkItems = localItems / localMaxWorkItems;
// but no more than LDS banks:
localMaxWorkItems = min( get_local_size(0), localMaxWorkItems );

localItemsPerWorkItem = localItems / localMaxWorkItems;

// now, clear LDS
__local uint *p = (__local uint *) subhists;

if( lid < localMaxWorkItems ) {
    for(i=0, idx=lid;
        i < localItemsPerWorkItem;
        i++, idx+=localMaxWorkItems)
    {
        p[idx] = 0;
    }
}

barrier( CLK_LOCAL_MEM_FENCE );

// read & scatter phase

for( int i=0, idx=gid;
     i < n4VectorsPerWorkItem;
     i++, idx += Stride ) {

    temp = Image[idx];
    temp2 = (temp & mask) * (uint4) NBANKS + offset;

    (void) atomic_inc( subhists + temp2.x );
    (void) atomic_inc( subhists + temp2.y );
    (void) atomic_inc( subhists + temp2.z );
}

```

```
(void) atomic_inc( subhists + temp2.w );

temp = temp >> shift;
temp2 = (temp & mask) * (uint4) NBANKS + offset;

(void) atomic_inc( subhists + temp2.x );
(void) atomic_inc( subhists + temp2.y );
(void) atomic_inc( subhists + temp2.z );
(void) atomic_inc( subhists + temp2.w );

temp = temp >> shift;
temp2 = (temp & mask) * (uint4) NBANKS + offset;

(void) atomic_inc( subhists + temp2.x );
(void) atomic_inc( subhists + temp2.y );
(void) atomic_inc( subhists + temp2.z );
(void) atomic_inc( subhists + temp2.w );

temp = temp >> shift;
temp2 = (temp & mask) * (uint4) NBANKS + offset;

(void) atomic_inc( subhists + temp2.x );
(void) atomic_inc( subhists + temp2.y );
(void) atomic_inc( subhists + temp2.z );
(void) atomic_inc( subhists + temp2.w );
}

barrier( CLK_LOCAL_MEM_FENCE );

// reduce __local banks to single histogram per work-group
for( int binIndex = lid;
      binIndex < NBINS;
      binIndex += get_local_size(0) ) {

    uint bin = 0;

    for( int i=0; i<NBANKS; i++ ) {
        bin += subhists[
            (lid * NBANKS) + ((i + lid) % NBANKS) ];
    }

    globalHistogram[
        (get_group_id(0) * NBINS) + binIndex ] = bin;
}
}

__kernel void reduceKernel(
    __global uint *globalHistogram,
    uint nSubHists ) {

    uint gid = get_global_id(0);
    uint bin = 0;
```

```
// Reduce work-group histograms into single histogram,  
// one work-item for each bin.  
  
for( int i=0; i < nSubHists; i++ )  
    bin += globalHistogram[ ( i * NBINS ) + gid ];  
  
globalHistogram[ gid ] = bin;  
}
```

---

## PERFORMANCE AND SUMMARY

Combining these activities, we can process a significant amount of input data with very high performance. As measured on the AMD Radeon HD6970 architecture with 256 histogram bins, we can achieve the following:

1. 158 GB/s of input data performing only reads from global memory into registers
2. 140 GB/s of input data adding scattering into local histograms to 1
3. 139 GB/s adding the local reduction operation to 1 and 2
4. 128 GB/s adding the final global reduction, requiring enqueueing a second kernel, to 1–3

In this chapter, we focused on the steps needed to optimize a memory-bound algorithm. We discussed how to restructure reads and to use local memory to reduce access overhead. We showed that we can improve application throughput when performing a full histogram compared with reading data only. We also showed that compared with reading data only, performing a full histogram need only marginally reduce application throughput if implemented efficiently. Techniques to reduce local memory bank conflicts and to improve global memory performance have wide application in other algorithms.

# OpenCL Case Study: Mixed Particle Simulation

# 10

---

## INTRODUCTION

This case study examines leveraging both the CPU and the GPU to implement a mixed-sized particle simulation. Without a loss of generality, this example is restricted to two dimensions to keep the kernels easily understandable. In addition, this case study leverages OpenCL's ability to share data between the CPU and the GPU, which is beneficial on highly integrated devices such as AMD's APUs.

Implementing a simple simulation with uniform particle sizes on data-parallel devices such as GPUs is relatively straightforward in OpenCL. Unfortunately, the efficiency of the simulation decreases if the assumption breaks (i.e., the particle size varies). The inefficiency results from the non-uniform granularity of the computation, especially for the collision detection, which is the most expensive part in a particle simulation. If there is a single large particle and many small particles, the number of collisions detected on the large particle can be significantly more than the number detected on the small particles. This difference can cause inefficiency because most GPUs execute in SIMD manner over wide vectors. If a GPU SIMD engine executes small particles for most SIMD lanes and in a single lane computes the result for a large particle, the “large” lane runs for longer than the “small” lanes. This means that the lanes computing collisions for small particles have to wait for the large lane to finish. This results in load imbalance and poor utilization of the hardware as the vector width increases. However, the CPU has no problem dealing with this variation in the granularity of computation. Accordingly, the approach we present here is to use the CPU for the collision of large particles, whereas the GPU is used only for the collision of the uniformly sized small particles. This chapter discusses how to realize the collaboration of the GPU and the CPU for a mixed-sized particle simulation using OpenCL.

## OVERVIEW OF THE COMPUTATION

Figure 10.1 is a screen shot from the simulation. You can see a large number of small particles rendered in blue interacting with varying-sized particles rendered in green and red. The green and the red colors represent dynamic and static particles, respectively. The collisions between the particles are classified into three types: small–small, large–small, and large–large. The granularity of the small–small collision is uniform, so the work is dispatched to the GPU. However, as discussed previously, the granularity of large–small and large–large is varying, so the CPU is better suited for performing these computations. If there are no large–small interactions, the two simulations are completely disjoint, so the GPU simulates the small particles and the CPU simulates the large particles. The mixed-sized particle simulation is implemented as an extension of the two disjoint computations. The challenge is to efficiently realize the interaction between the simulations because the physical properties of small particles live in GPU memory, whereas those of large particles live in CPU memory. If the memories are allocated without care, the data on the GPU has to be read back to the host every time it calculates the interaction. By using OpenCL buffers that are shared between and accessed by both the CPU and the GPU, the read back is no longer necessary.

Figure 10.2 shows an overview of the algorithm and the interaction between the GPU manager thread and the CPU work thread, both of which run on the host CPU. There are three major phases of computation per iteration: (1) data structure construction (2) computation of forces resulting from (3) collisions and force integration.

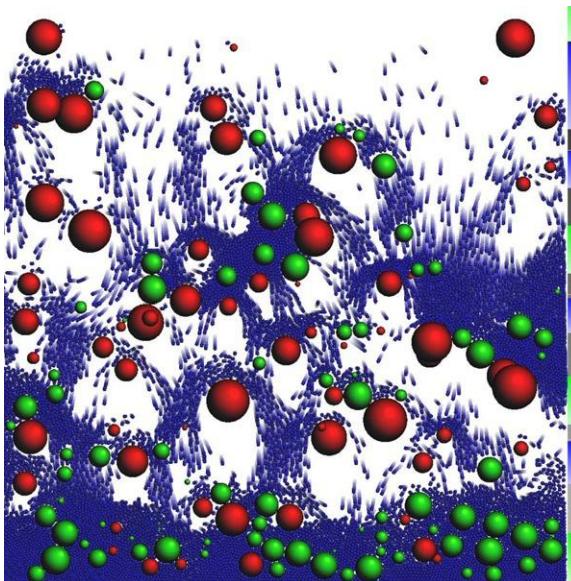
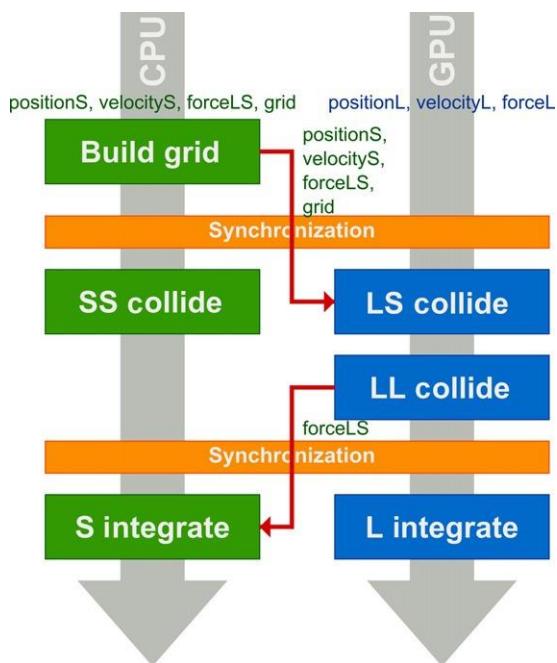


FIGURE 10.1

A screen shot from the mixed particle simulation. (Please see front cover of the book)

**FIGURE 10.2**

Overview of the computation for a single iteration.

First, the GPU kernel data structure is built. Then the GPU and CPU are synchronized to guarantee that the computation of the new data structure is complete and we can share the updated data and physical properties of the small particles with the CPU thread. After the first synchronization, threads start processing collisions. The GPU performs the small–small collisions, and the CPU performs the large–small and large–large collisions. To accelerate the collision detection of small particles against large particles, the data structure built on the GPU is also used on the CPU. The output from the collisions is a set of forces on particles. Two force buffers are prepared for the small particles: One is filled with small–small forces, resulting from the small–small collisions, and the other is shared with the CPU, which fills the buffer with the forces resulting from the large–small collisions. After the collisions are completed, the GPU and CPU threads are synchronized again so that the CPU is known to have finished writing to the force buffer, which is going to be used in the integration stage. Then, the GPU integrates forces on small particles, and the CPU integrates forces on large particles. Note that there are no write conflicts between the CPU and the GPU for the shared buffer. The CPU only writes to the shared buffer during the large–small collision phase. The buffer is only accessed by the GPU during the integration after the synchronization.

---

## GPU IMPLEMENTATION

### Buffer Creation

First, the buffers have to be created so that the runtime has the option of sharing data between the GPU and the CPU. A shared buffer can be created with the `CL_MEM_ALLOC_HOST_PTR` flag, which indicates the CPU will access the buffer. If the buffer is created with this flag, the runtime must return a location in host memory where data can be accessed between map and unmap function calls. We have the option of maintaining the data in host memory permanently (although this is not a requirement).<sup>1</sup> If this data is located permanently in host memory, the map and unmap operations applied to the buffer will introduce little execution overhead, requiring only synchronization overhead. However, this benefit does not come for free on a discrete GPU. Because the memory is stored in the CPU memory, whenever the GPU accesses the buffer the request must utilize the PCI Express bus. This transfer can result in larger latency compared with memory allocated on the GPU. On AMD's Fusion APU architecture and similar heterogeneous multiprocessors-on-a-chip where the GPU and the CPU share memory, we avoid the overhead of using the PCI Express bus. Removing this bottleneck leads to better performance. The following code shows an allocation of a shared buffer.

Note that we are passing the `CL_MEM_ALLOC_HOST_PTR` flag as an argument:

```
buffer = clCreateBuffer(
    context,
    CL_MEM_READ_WRITE | CL_MEM_ALLOC_HOST_PTR,
    bufferSize,
    0,
    &status );
```

Although this buffer is created to be shared between the CPU and the GPU, we cannot access the data from the buffer pointer because the memory space is not unified in OpenCL. To access the data from the CPU, the buffer has to be mapped:

```
ptr = clEnqueueMapBuffer(
    commandQueue,
    buffer,
    false,
    CL_MAP_READ | CL_MAP_WRITE,
    0,
    bufferSize,
    0,
    0,
    0,
    &status );
```

---

<sup>1</sup>Note that `CL_MEM_ALLOC_HOST_PTR` guarantees that when `map` is called on the buffer, the passed pointer becomes the host pointer returned by `map`. Data is still only valid at the host pointer between calls to `map` and `unmap`.

The `clEnqueueMapBuffer` call returns a pointer to the buffer data. If a buffer is created without the flag being mapped, the data will be copied over from the device to the host, and the map operation is expensive. However, the map is almost free when a buffer is created using the flag and combined with appropriate runtime and hardware support, the buffer then lives in the host memory.

## Building the Acceleration Structure

For accelerating the collision detection of particles, we use a uniform grid (a grid with a spatially invariant cell size) with a fixed capacity for each cell. Fast build and query are properties of a uniform grid that make it well suited for collision detection in a particle simulation, if the simulation does not have to extend to infinite space. The uniform grid has two buffers: a counter buffer storing cell counters and an index buffer storing particle indices or cell data. A work-item assigned to a particle fetches the particle position from global memory to a register and converts the world space position to a grid space coordinate. The work-item reads from the counter buffer the number of particles stored in the cell and adds the particle index to the index buffer. Care must be taken when accessing the counter because there can be several particles that fall into the same cell. In that case, several work-items try to read and write to the same counter. To guarantee the success of the memory access, we use an atomic operation as shown here:

```
for( all particles ) {
    idx = convertToGridIdx( particle[i] );
    count = atomic_inc( grid_count[idx] );
    grid[ calcAddr( idx, count ) ] = I;
}
```

The code listed under Kernels for Simulation has some additional logic to handle the boundary conditions and to prevent too many particles from being stored in a single cell.

## Computing Collisions

This step calculates the force on each particle from the colliding particles. The uniform grid is used to efficiently locate the colliding particles associated with each particle. The particle position is converted to a grid coordinate system, which is used to calculate the address in memory of the grid cell. Because the size of each cell is defined to be equal to the diameter of the particles, potential colliding particles are only in the  $3^2$  grid cells (in three dimensions,  $3^3$ ) around the cell to which the particle belongs. Note that the granularity of the computation is uniform because the particles we are calculating have a uniform diameter, so all work-items check nine cells without any exceptions. A work-item iterates over the nine cells and reads the number of particles and particle indices stored in each cell to calculate the force on the particle. This force is a function of the colliding particle positions and velocities. After

interparticle collision, each work-item checks for particle collisions with the boundary. These forces are accumulated and then written out to a force buffer.

```

for( all particles ) {
    force = 0;

    // compute particle interaction
    for( neighborhood ) {
        for( particles in grid cell[n] ) {
            j = getStoredParticleIdx();
            force += calcForce( particle[i], particle[j] );
        }
    }
    // compute boundary interaction
    force += calcForce( particle[i], top );
    force += calcForce( particle[i], bottom );
    force += calcForce( particle[i], left );
    force += calcForce( particle[i], right );
    forceOut[i] = force;
}

```

## Integration

After the forces are computed on the CPU and GPU, a kernel is used to update the particles' positions and velocities via a process called integration. The velocity is computed as the sum of the forces resulting from the small–small particle interactions and the forces resulting from the large–small particle interactions. The particle position is updated based on the resulting particle velocity multiplied by the time step,  $dt$ . Finally, the buffer used to share force data with the CPU is zeroed for the next iteration. This kernel pseudo-code is fairly simple:

```

for( all particles ) {
    vel[i] += forceSmallSmall[i] + forceLargeSmall[i];
    pos[i] += vel[i]*dt;

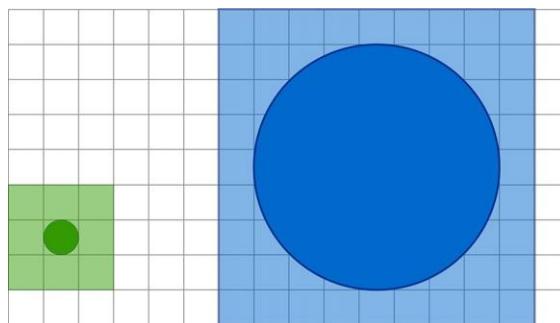
    // zero forces for the CPU side
    forceBigParticles[i] = 0;
}

```

---

## CPU IMPLEMENTATION

The CPU implementation does not differ much from the GPU version, but it runs in scalar rather than vector fashion. The collisions of particles are serialized so that we do not have to worry about the granularity. The collision of a large particle with small particles is performed using the uniform grid that was built on the GPU and shared with the CPU. It first calculates the extent of the large particle in the grid space and looks up all the cells in the extent. Figure 10.3 illustrates overlapping cells for a large particle. As the reader can see from this figure, the large particle overlaps many cells,



**FIGURE 10.3**

---

Small and large particles as mapped to the uniform grid.

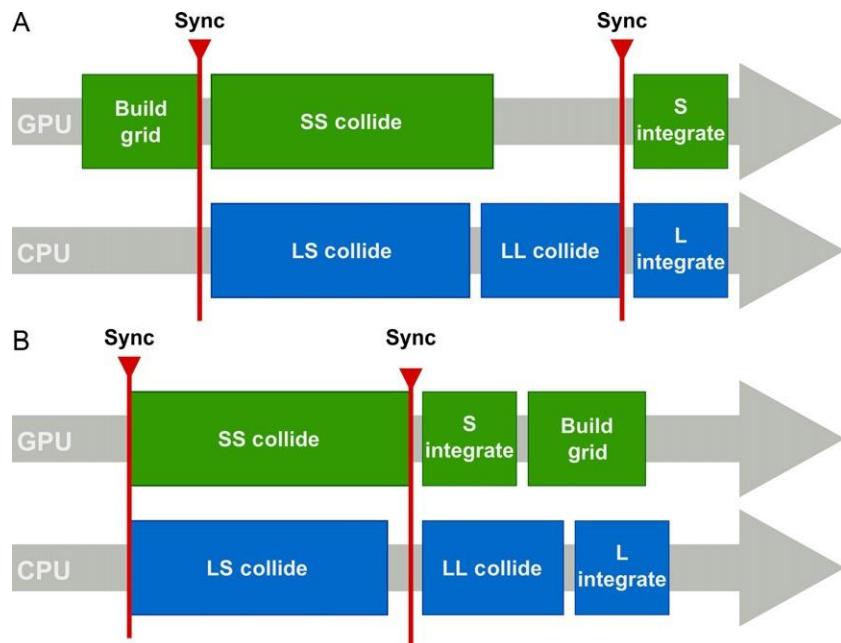
whereas a small particle does not. If this code were to be executed on the GPU, it would waste many cycles as SIMD lanes were masked out.

---

## LOAD BALANCING

Although we have shown the flow of the simulation using two threads in [Figure 10.2](#), our implementation suffers from pool imbalance in terms of computation between the workloads. This imbalance results in low utilization of CPU threads. Of course, the degree of imbalance depends on the numbers of small and large particles present. Looking at the CPU work thread, it is easy to see that the large–small and large–large collisions are more expensive than the integration. Thus, the time between the first and the second synchronization is the largest amount of time. On the other hand, the most expensive part of the GPU execution is the small–small collision computation, followed by the construction of the uniform grid. Although the GPU is a powerful processor, the cost of building the uniform grid is not negligible. If the simulation is executed as shown in [Figure 10.2](#), a thread has to wait before the first synchronization and the other has to wait before the second synchronization, which we can see more clearly in [Figure 10.4A](#).

The computations can be reordered to improve load imbalance. [Figure 10.2](#) shows the flow of a single iteration, but it is not necessary for grid creation to be the first step if we assume that particles do not move between the end of the previous iteration and the start of the current iteration. This is generally true unless a particle is directly moved, likely through user interaction, which is relatively rare. From this observation, grid creation can be moved to the end of the previous iteration. This modification makes two big blocks for the GPU thread, but the CPU's thread workload only involves the integration of particles (which is inexpensive). If we can move some computation to the CPU thread from the first half to the second half, then this should also ease load imbalance. Careful observation of the data flow of the pipeline shows that the second synchronization is necessary only for the buffer containing

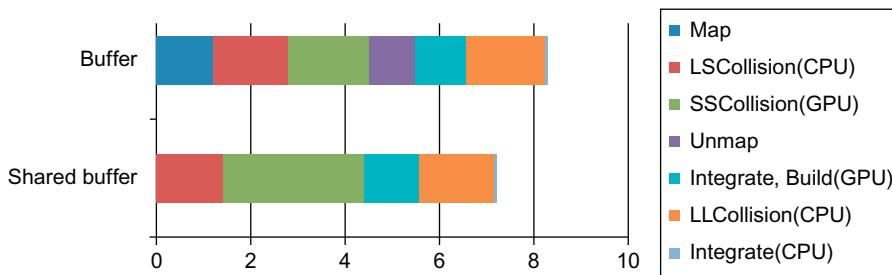
**FIGURE 10.4**

Load balancing.

forces for the small particles that were filled by the CPU. As a result, the large–large collision does not have to be performed during the first half given the removal of any data dependencies with the next GPU computation. This means that the large–large collision can be moved to the second half of the computation (as shown in Figure 10.4B). In this way, we improve the load balance on the CPU threads, which results in a reduction in total simulation time.

## PERFORMANCE AND SUMMARY

Figure 10.1 is a screen shot from the mixed particle simulation with approximately 8200 small particles and 150 large particles running on an AMD A-series Fusion APU, on which the CPU and GPU are integrated on-chip. The bar at the right of the figure shows the computation times on two threads (one column per thread). The full height of the column is equal to 1/60 of a second. The blue and green blocks correspond to the time spent on the GPU and the CPU, respectively. Because there are four iterations per time step, one iteration takes approximately 4 ms in this simulation. The first four blocks are for the first iterations. As can be seen, the threads synchronize after the first GPU computation. The CPU work thread is waiting for the GPU thread to finish, producing the gap between the first green block and the synchronization.

**FIGURE 10.5**

Breakdown of the simulation times.

If a buffer is created without the `CL_MEM_ALLOC_HOST_PTR` flag, the data has to be copied when the buffer is mapped and unmapped. The effect of the map operation is quantitatively compared between a simulation with a normal buffer and a simulation with a shared buffer. Figure 10.5 is the breakdown of the times. Although the simulation itself is the same, one can see a clear difference between the two versions with and without data sharing. The comparison shows a clear advantage of using a shared buffer. However, notice the extra execution time for the GPU-side small–small collision phase when using data sharing: This is due to the extra latency of accesses over the shared memory interface.

In this chapter, we discussed an implementation of a particle simulation that handles variably sized particles by leveraging the best features of both the CPU and the GPU. In addition, by sharing memory between the CPU and the GPU on tightly integrated devices such as AMD’s Fusion APU architecture, the efficiency of the computation improved by eliminating wasteful memory copies. Although this example is designed to be simple to understand, the same technique can be applicable to more complicated applications.

---

## KERNEL FOR UNIFORM GRID CREATION

```

typedef struct
{
    float4 m_max;
    float4 m_min;
    int4 m_nCells;
    float m_gridScale;
    u32 m_maxParticles;
}ConstBuffer;

__kernel
void GridConstructionKernel(
    __global float4* gPosIn,

```

```

__global int* gridG,
__global int* gridCounterG,
ConstBuffer cb )
{
    int gIdx = get_global_id(0);
    if( gIdx >= cb.m_maxParticles ) {
        return;
    }

    float4 iPos = gPosIn[gIdx];

    int4 gridCrd = ugConvertToGridCrd(
        iPos - cb.m_min, cb.m_gridScale );

    if( gridCrd.x < 0 || gridCrd.x >= cb.m_nCells.x
        || gridCrd.y < 0 || gridCrd.y >= cb.m_nCells.y ) {
        return;
    }

    int gridIdx = ugGridCrdToGridIdx(
        gridCrd,
        cb.m_nCells.x,
        cb.m_nCells.y,
        cb.m_nCells.z );

    int count = atom_add(&gridCounterG[gridIdx], 1);

    if( count < MAX_IDX_PER_GRID ) {
        gridG[ gridIdx*MAX_IDX_PER_GRID + count ] = gIdx;
    }
}

```

---

## KERNELS FOR SIMULATION

```

typedef struct
{
    float4 m_g;
    int m_numParticles;
    float m_dt;
    float m_scale;
    float m_e;

    int4 m_nCells;
    float4 m_spaceMin;
    float m_gridScale;
} ConstBuffer;

__kernel
void CollideGridKernel(
    __global float4* posIn,

```

```
__global float4* velIn,
__global int* grid,
__global int* gridCounter,
__global float4* forceOut,
ConstBuffer cb)
{
    int gIdx = get_global_id(0);
    if(gIdx >= cb.m_numParticles ) {
        return;
    }

    int4 nCells = cb.m_nCells;
    float4 spaceMin = cb.m_spaceMin;
    float gridScale = cb.m_gridScale;
    float dt = cb.m_dt;
    float e = cb.m_e;

    float4 f = make_float4(0,0,0,0);

    float4 x_i = posIn[ gIdx ];
    float4 v_i = velIn[ gIdx ];

    float sCoeff, dCoeff;
    calcCoeffs(v_i.w, v_j.w, sCoeff, dCoeff);

    int4 iGridCrd = ugConvertToGridCrd( x_i-spaceMin, gridScale );

    //1. collide particles
    for(int i=-1;i<=1;i++) for(int j=-1;j<=1;j++) {
        int4 gridCrd = make_int4(
            iGridCrd.x+i,
            iGridCrd.y+j,
            iGridCrd.z+k,
            0);

        if( gridCrd.x < 0 || gridCrd.x >= nCells.x
            || gridCrd.y < 0 || gridCrd.y >= nCells.y ) {
            continue;
        }

        int gridIdx = ugGridCrdToGridIdx(
            gridCrd,
            nCells.x,
            nCells.y,
            nCells.z);

        int numElem = gridCounter[ gridIdx ];
        numElem = min(numElem, MAX_IDX_PER_GRID);

        for(int ie=0; ie<numElem; ie++) {
            int jIdx = grid[ MAX_IDX_PER_GRID*gridIdx + ie ];
```

```
    if( jIdx == gIdx ) {
        continue;
    }
    float4 x_j = posIn[jIdx];
    float4 v_j = velIn[jIdx];
    f += calcForce(
        x_i,
        x_j,
        v_i,
        v_j,
        x_i.w,
        x_j.w,
        v_i.w,
        v_j.w,
        dt,
        sCoeff,
        dCoeff );
}
}

//2. collide with boundary
{
    float sCoeff, dCoeff;
    calcCoeffs(v_i.w, sCoeff, dCoeff);

    float4 planes[4];
    planes[0] = make_float4(0,1,0,cb.m_scale);
    planes[1] = make_float4(-1,0,0,cb.m_scale);
    planes[2] = make_float4(1,0,0,cb.m_scale);
    planes[3] = make_float4(0,-1,0,cb.m_scale);

    for(int j=0; j<4; j++) {
        float4 eqn = planes[j];
        float dist = dot3wl( x_i, eqn );
        f += calcForceB(
            x_i,
            v_i,
            x_i.w,
            dist,
            eqn,
            dt,
            sCoeff,
            dCoeff );
    }
}
forceOut[ gIdx ] = f;
}
```

```
__kernel
void IntegrateKernel(
    __global float4* pos,
    __global float4* vel,
    __global float4* forceSS,
    __global float4* forceLS,
    ConstBuffer cb)
{
    int gIdx = get_global_id(0);
    if( gIdx >= cb.m_numParticles ) {
        return;
    }

    float4 x = pos[gIdx];
    float4 v = vel[gIdx];

    v += (forceSS[gIdx]+ forceLS[gIdx])*cb.m_dt/v.w+cb.m_g;
    x += v*cb.m_dt;

    pos[gIdx] = make_float4(x.x, x.y, x.z, pos[gIdx].w);
    vel[gIdx] = make_float4(v.x, v.y, v.z, vel[gIdx].w);
    forceLS[gIdx] = make_float4(0,0,0,0);
}
```

intentionally left blank

# OpenCL Extensions

# 11

---

## INTRODUCTION

Similar to most programming languages and frameworks, the OpenCL specification provides support for optional extensions. They represent a small but important set of OpenCL extensions. In this chapter, we discuss a number of these extensions that can provide programmers an extended set of tools to implement OpenCL applications.

---

## OVERVIEW OF EXTENSION MECHANISM

OpenCL defines three types of extensions:

- KHR extension: Formally ratified by the OpenCL working group and comes with a set of conformance tests that any application claiming to support the extension must have passed. All KHR extensions are included as part of the OpenCL specification. In general, the goal is to keep the set of KHR extensions small to avoid differences between implementations. Unfortunately, in some cases, a feature must be an extension because it is not possible to support on all platforms. DirectX interoperability is a good example because it is only relevant to OpenCL implementations that support Microsoft Windows. A KHR extension is assigned a unique string name of the form `cl_khr_<name>`, where `name` is the name given to the particular extension.
- EXT extension: Developed by one or more of the OpenCL working group members, but it has not been formally approved. There is no requirement for an EXT feature to pass conformance tests. An EXT extension is often used to provide early access to features being worked on by a subgroup of the OpenCL working group, many of which will appear in the specification core or as a KHR at a later date. An EXT extension is assigned a unique string name of the form `cl_ext_<name>`, where `name` is the name given to the particular extension.
- Vendor extension: Developed by a single vendor, most likely to expose some feature that is only accessible on the vendor's hardware or platform (and thus would

not be of general application). An example is AMD’s Device Attribute Query, which allows the developer to query additional information specific to AMD devices. A Vendor extension is assigned a unique string name of the form `cl_<vendor>_<name>`, where `vendor` is a given vendor-defined string (e.g., `amd` is used by AMD), and `name` is the name given to the particular extension.

Extensions can be associated with a given OpenCL platform and in those cases are likely to be always enabled. For example, AMD’s Event Callback extension (`cl_amd_event_callback`) is always enabled. Other extensions can be specific to a particular set of devices (e.g., double precision support (`cl_khr_fp64`)).

In general, the application must query either the platform or a particular device to determine what extensions are supported. Using the C++ Wrapper API, the following code demonstrates how to query both the platform and a device for the extension information:

```
std::vector<cl::Platform> platforms;
cl::Platform::get(&platforms);
std::string platformExts = platforms[0]. getInfo<CL_PLATFORM_EXTENSIONS>();

cl_context_properties cprops[] = {
    CL_CONTEXT_PLATFORM, (cl_context_properties)platforms[1](), 0};

cl::Context context(devType, cprops);
std::vector<cl::Device> devices = context.getInfo<CL_CONTEXT_DEVICES>();

// Check that double is supported
std::string deviceExts = devices[0]. getInfo<CL_DEVICE_EXTENSIONS>();
```

Of course, because we now have a value of type `std::string` for platform and device extensions, we can simply use the method `find()`. For example, to check that a device supports 64-bit Atomics (defined with the name `cl_khr_int64_base_atomics`), you could use the following code:

```
bool has64Atomics = deviceExts.find("cl_khr_int64");
```

Because extensions are optional, there is no requirement for an implementation to provide any externally defined symbols that the host application can call. Accordingly, a host program cannot be statically linked against any extension APIs. Instead, we can query the particular function’s address equipped with the following API:

```
void * clGetExtensionFunctionAddress(const char *funcname);
```

This returns the address of the extension function named by `funcname`. The pointer returned can be cast to a function pointer of the expected type. Typedefs for each

function pointer are declared for all extensions that add API entry points. For example, the EXT extension Atomic Counters, exposed in the OpenCL extension header `cl_ext.h`, provides low-latency atomic append/consume counters and defines the following:

```
typedef CL_API_ENTRY cl_counter_ext (CL_API_CALL * clCreateCounterEXT_fn)(  
    cl_context /* context */,  
    cl_counter_flags_amd /* flags */,  
    cl_uint /* value */,  
    cl_int * /* error_ret */) CL_API_SUFFIX__VERSION_1_0;
```

Then, assuming that a particular OpenCL device supports the extension `cl_ext_atomic_counters`, the following call will set `clCreateCounterEXT_pfn` to a non-NULL value:

```
clCreateCounterEXT_fn clCreateCounterEXT_pfn =  
    clGetExtensionFunctionAddress("clCreateCounterEXT");
```

In practice, it is often useful to use the following macro to enable quick allocation of these functions:

```
#define __INIT_CL_EXT_FCN_PTR(name) \  
    if(!##name_fn) { \  
        ##name_pfn = (##name_fn) \  
            clGetExtensionFunctionAddress(#name); \  
        if(!##name_pfn) { \  
            } \  
    }
```

To get the same behavior as the function pointer definition previously, we can write the following:

```
__INIT_CL_EXT_FCN_PTR(clCreateContextEXT)
```

The examples presented later in this chapter go a step further and use the OpenCL C++ Wrapper API, which, if a particular extension is enabled, directly exposes a class interface and implicitly takes care of allocating and querying function pointers (as required).

Once an application has verified that a particular extension is supported by a device and has allocated any required API function addresses, it can then use any corresponding OpenCL C source extensions. However, these extension must also be enabled, this time in the OpenCL C source itself. These features are controlled using a pragma directive. The pragma is of the form

```
#pragma OPENCL EXTENSION extension_name : behavior
```

where `extension_name` is the corresponding name of the extension being enabled or disabled, such as `cl_khr_int64`, and `behavior` can be either `enable` or `disable`. The impact of enabling or disabling an extension follows from the position in the source

code of the last seen pragma for a given extension. For example, to enable 64-bit atomics in an OpenCL C source program, the following code would do the job:

```
#pragma OPENCL EXTENSION cl_khr_int64 : enable
```

Images are the one exception to the rules described previously. To check if a device supports this feature (which is optional), a separate device query is required:

```
bool hasImages = devices[0].getInfo<CL_DEVICE_IMAGE_SUPPORT>;
```

If the result of this call is true, then images are supported by the device in question and the OpenCL C source is not required to explicitly enable this feature.

There are many KHR, EXT, and vendor extensions—too many to discuss in detail in this chapter. The remainder of this chapter discusses two important extensions in wide use today:

- Device fission—the ability for some devices to be divided into smaller subdevices
- Double precision—the ability for some devices to support double as well as float data types

## DEVICE FISSION

The EXT extension Device Fission ([Bellows et al., 2010](#)) provides an interface for subdividing an OpenCL device into multiple subdevices. As an example, consider an AMD six-core Istanbul x86 CPU shown symbolically in [Figure 11.1A](#). We view all six cores as a single OpenCL device by default, as shown in [Figure 11.1B](#). Using Device Fission, the six cores can be subdivided into six OpenCL devices as shown in [Figure 11.1C](#), each capable of supporting one or more command queues. Because these command queues are asynchronous and run in their own threads, it is possible to use Device Fission to build a portable and powerful threading application based on task parallelism. To date, Device Fission is supported only on CPU-like devices, but in the future this functionality will spread across all devices in the platform, including GPUs. Next, we motivate and describe the basic use of Device Fission through an example.

An interesting application of Device Fission is to use it to build and study concurrent runtimes, similar to Microsoft’s Concurrent Runtime (ConcRT) ([Microsoft, 2010](#)) and Intel’s Threading Building Blocks (TBB) ([Intel, 2011](#)). We present a case study of building a simple C++ class that supports a parallel *for* construct that distributes work across a set of devices created using Device Fission. Although this example has little in common with the kind of production functionality provided by runtimes such as ConcRT and TBB, it provides enough to show that with only a small amount of effort we can build portable, scalable, parallel applications that go beyond basic data-parallel computations. For this example, the goal is to implement a simple class `Parallel` that provides a `parallelFor` method to distribute work across x86

cores, each having a corresponding OpenCL device generated by Device Fission. The class `Parallel` has the following public interface:

```
class Parallel
{
public:
    Parallel();
    static unsigned int atomicAdd(
        unsigned int inc,
        volatile unsigned int *dest);
    bool parallelFor(int range, std::function<void (int i)> f);
};
```

We demonstrate its use with a simple application that counts the number of prime numbers in an input array of randomly generated integers. The implementation uses the OpenCL C++ Wrapper API ([Gaster, 2010](#)). To enable Device Fission, we simply need to define `USE_CL_DEVICE_FISSION` and include `cl.hpp`:<sup>1</sup>

```
#define USE_CL_DEVICE_FISSION 1
#include <CL/cl.hpp>
```

As described previously, we encapsulate the parallel features of our simple runtime in the class `Parallel`. All OpenCL state for the program is held in the private part of this class definition. The default constructor initializes OpenCL and divides the CPU device into single core subdevices. As is standard with all OpenCL initialization, we need to first query a platform, then create a context (in this case, using `CL_DEVICE_TYPE_CPU`), and finally inspect the list of devices (as shown in [Figure 11.1B](#), this will always be presented as a single element):

```
std::vector<cl::Platform> platforms;
cl::Platform::get(&platforms);

cl_context_properties properties[] =
{
    CL_CONTEXT_PLATFORM,
    (cl_context_properties)(platforms[1])(),
    0
};
context_ = cl::Context(CL_DEVICE_TYPE_CPU, properties);

std::vector<cl::Device> devices =
    context_.getInfo<CL_CONTEXT_DEVICES>();
```

Before we can use the Device Fission extension, the program must check that it is an exported extension for the device:

---

<sup>1</sup>We also enable C++ exceptions for OpenCL as shown in the full program source, given in [Listing 11.1](#).

```

if (devices[0].getInfo<CL_DEVICE_EXTENSIONS>().find(
    "cl_ext_device_fission") == std::string::npos) {
    std::cout << "Required that device support "
    << "cl_ext_device_extension"
    << std::endl;
    exit(-1);
}

```

Given an OpenCL `cl::Device`, in this case `devices[0]`, the method `createSubDevices` creates subdevices,

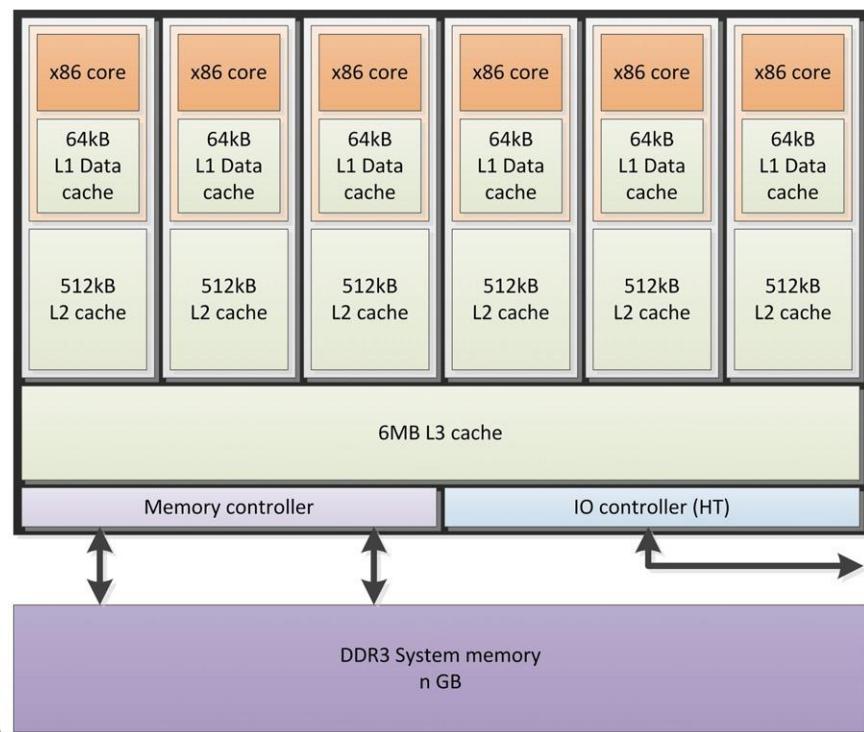
```

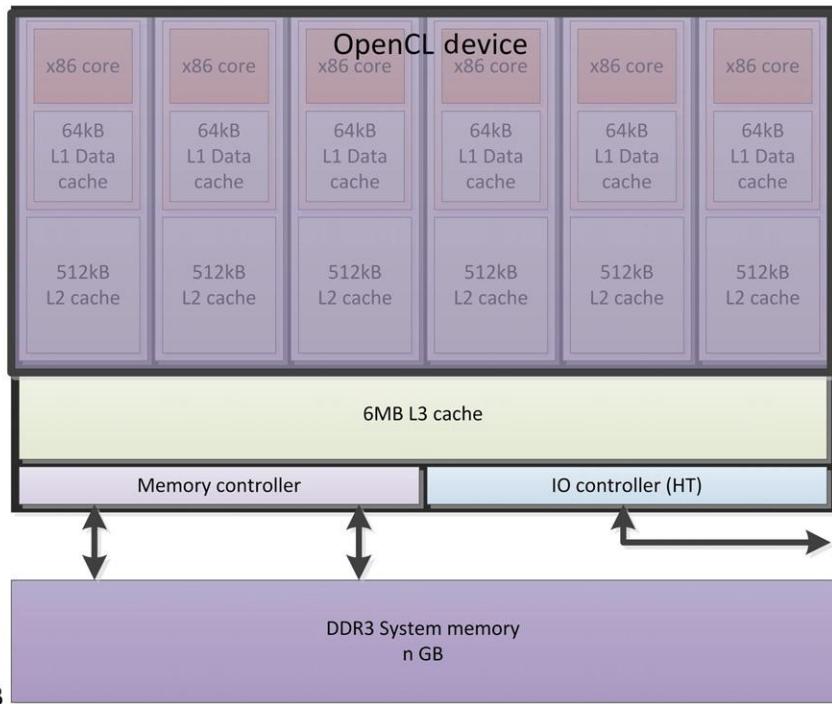
cl_int createSubDevices(
    const cl_device_partition_property_ext * properties,
    VECTOR_CLASS<Device>* devices)

```

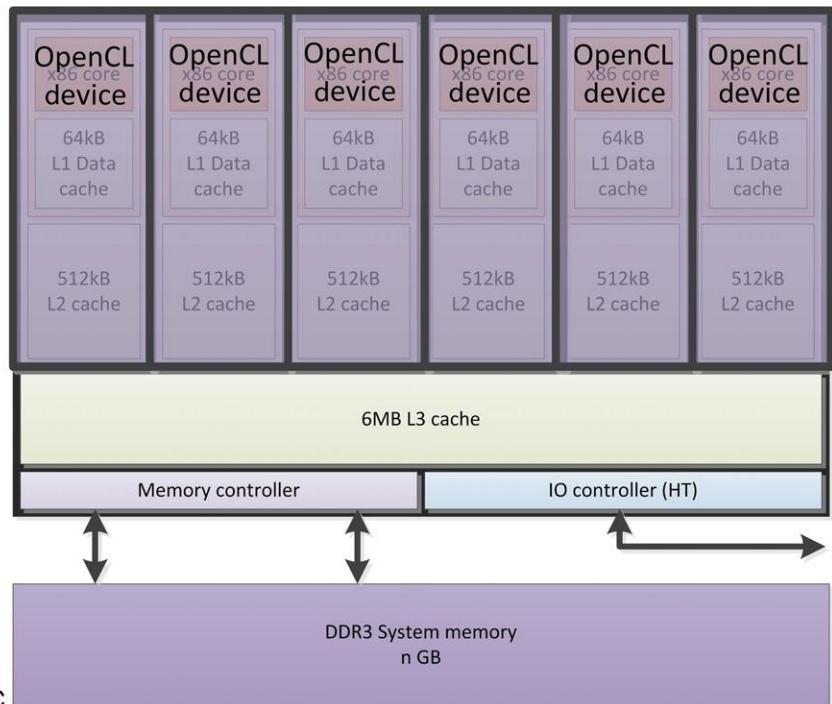
which, given a list of partition properties (as defined in [Table 11.1](#)), creates a set of subdevices, returned in the parameter `devices`.

The following code then creates the subdevices, using the partition `CL_DEVICE_PARTITION_EQUALLY_EXT` to equally subdivide (in this case), producing a one-to-one mapping between subdevice and core:





B



**FIGURE 11.1**

CPU as seen by OpenCL with and without device fission. (A) Phenom II 6 core. (B) Phenom II 6 core represented as a single OpenCL device for all cores. (C) Phenom II 6 core represented as an OpenCL device for each core.

**Table 11.1** Subdevice Partition Properties

<b>cl_device_partition_property_ext</b>	<b>Description</b>
CL_DEVICE_PARTITION_EQUALLY_EXT	Split the aggregate device into as many smaller devices as can be created, each containing $N$ compute units. The value $N$ is passed as the value accompanying this property. If $N$ does not divide evenly into CL_DEVICE_MAX_COMPUTE_UNITS, then the remaining compute units are not used.
CL_DEVICE_PARTITION_BY_COUNTS_EXT	This property is followed by a CL_PARTITION_BY_COUNTS_LIST_END_EXT terminated list of compute unit counts. For each non-zero count $M$ in the list, a subdevice is created with $M$ compute units in it. CL_PARTITION_BY_COUNTS_LIST_END_EXT is defined to be 0.
CL_DEVICE_PARTITION_BY_NAMES_EXT	This property is followed by a list of compute unit names. Each list starts with a CL_PARTITION_BY_NAMES_LIST_END_EXT terminated list of compute unit names. Compute unit names are integers that count up from zero to the number of compute units less 1. CL_PARTITION_BY_NAMES_LIST_END_EXT is defined to be -1. Only one subdevice may be created at a time with this selector. An individual compute unit name may not appear more than once in the subdevice description.
CL_DEVICE_PARTITION_BY_AFFINITY_DOMAIN_EXT	Split the device into smaller aggregate devices containing one or more compute units that all share part of a cache hierarchy. The value accompanying this property may be drawn from the following CL_AFFINITY_DOMAIN list: CL_AFFINITY_DOMAIN_NUMA_EXT—Split the device into subdevices composed of compute units that share a NUMA band. CL_AFFINITY_DOMAIN_L4_CACHE_EXT—Split the device into subdevices composed of compute units that share a level 4 data cache. CL_AFFINITY_DOMAIN_L3_CACHE_EXT—Split the device into subdevices composed of compute units that share a level 3 data cache. CL_AFFINITY_DOMAIN_L2_CACHE_EXT—Split the device into subdevices composed of compute units that share a level 2 data cache. CL_AFFINITY_DOMAIN_L1_CACHE_EXT—Split the device into subdevices composed of compute units that share a level 1 data cache. CL_AFFINITY_DOMAIN_NEXT_FISSIONABLE_EXT—Split the device along the next fissionable CL_AFFINITY_DOMAIN. The implementation shall find the first level along which the device or subdevice may be further subdivided in the order NUMA, L4, L3, L2, L1, and fission the device into subdevices composed of compute units that share memory subsystems at this level. The user may determine what happened by calling clGetDeviceInfo(CL_DEVICE_PARTITION_STYLE_EXT) on the subdevices.

```

cl_device_partition_property_ext subDeviceProperties[] =
{
    CL_DEVICE_PARTITION_EQUALLY_EXT,
    1,
    CL_PROPERTIES_LIST_END_EXT,
    0
};

devices[0].createSubDevices(subDeviceProperties, &subDevices_);
if (subDevices_.size() <= 0) {
    std::cout << "Failed to allocate sub-devices" << std::endl;
    exit(-1);
}

```

The following code concludes the default constructor definition by iterating through the list of subdevices, creating a command queue for each one:

```

for (auto i = subDevices_.begin(); i != subDevices_.end(); i++) {
    queues_.push_back(cl::CommandQueue(context_, *i));
}

```

**Figure 11.2** shows each CPU core paired with its corresponding command queue. It is important to note that commands submitted via each queue run asynchronously and concurrently with each other.

The implementation for `atomicAdd` is straightforward and is provided later. Here, we focus on the definition of `parallelFor`, which takes two arguments. The first argument represents the bounds of the iteration space, and the second argument is a function object that will be applied to each index across this space. This second argument is a native C++ function object,<sup>2</sup> but OpenCL `clEnqueueNDRangeKernel` operations are valid only for OpenCL C kernels, and so we need another approach to support native C++ functions. Fortunately, OpenCL has just such a function, `clEnqueueNativeKernel`, which can enqueue a C function. With some careful marshaling, this can also be made to work for a C++ function. Native kernels were described in Chapter 5.

Using `clEnqueueNativeKernel`, the definition of `parallelFor` is straightforward.<sup>3</sup>

```

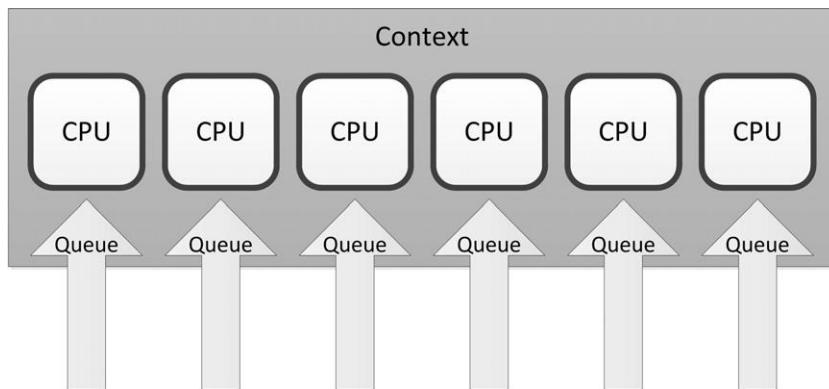
bool parallelFor(int range, std::function<void (int i)> f)
{
    std::vector<cl::Event> events;
    size_t args[2];
    args[0] = reinterpret_cast<size_t>(&f);

```

---

<sup>2</sup>The term native is used to imply that the function in question has been compiled by the host compiler and not the OpenCL C compiler.

<sup>3</sup>Note that we use the OpenCL C++ Wrapper API (rather than the `clEnqueueNativeKernel` from the C API), as described previously.

**FIGURE 11.2**

OpenCL subdevices with associated command queues.

```
int index = 0;
for (int x = 0; x < range; x++) {

    int numQueues =
        range - x > queues_.size() ? queues_.size() : range - x;

    cl::Event event;
    while(numQueues > 0) {

        args[1] = static_cast<size_t>(index++);
        queues_[numQueues-1].enqueueNativeKernel(
            funcWrapper,
            std::make_pair(
                static_cast<void *>(args),
                sizeof(size_t)*2),
            NULL,
            NULL,
            NULL,
            &event);

        events.push_back(event);

        numQueues--;
        x++;
    }
    cl::Event::waitForEvents(events);
}
return true;
}
```

The first part of the function sets up the argument, which in this case is the actual function we want to run. This is required because it is a C++ function object (often called a functor), and OpenCL is expecting a C function. Thus, we provide a wrapper function called `funcWrapper` that takes as an argument a pointer to the functor. The wrapper function “unboxes” it and calls the function object when executed. The main body of the function is the loop executing the functor for the  $0 \dots$  range, with the inner loop mapping some subset of this to the number of actual subdevices. Note that these are all submitted asynchronously, and each call returns an event that we wait on at the end of each set of submissions. A more optimized version might wait until a large number of submissions have happened and control a finer grain of control using `queue.flush()` and so on. We leave this as an exercise for the reader.

Finally, we put this all together in [Listing 11.1](#), which shows the complete implementation of our primes checking example, including the main function. One interesting and important aspect of this example is that no OpenCL C device code is used, and it is simply using the OpenCL runtime as a portable threading library.

---

### **Listing 11.1**

```
// Enable OpenCL C++ exceptions
#define __CL_ENABLE_EXCEPTIONS

// Enable Device Fission
#define USE_CL_DEVICE_FISSION 1

#include <CL/cl.hpp>

#include <cstring>
#include <cstdlib>
#include <cassert>
#include <cmath>
#include <iostream>
#include <fstream>
#include <vector>

#include <functional>
#include <memory>

class Parallel
{
private:
    cl::Context context_;
    std::vector<cl::Device> subDevices_;
    cl::CommandQueue queue_;
    std::vector<cl::CommandQueue> queues_;

    static void CL_CALLBACK funcWrapper(void * a)
    {
        size_t * args = static_cast<size_t *>(a);

        std::function<void (int i)> * f =
            reinterpret_cast<std::function<void (int i)>*>(args[0]);
    }
};
```

```

        (*f)(static_cast<int>(args[1]));
    }
public:
    Parallel()
    {
        std::vector<cl::Platform> platforms;
        cl::Platform::get(&platforms);

        cl_context_properties properties[] =
        {
            CL_CONTEXT_PLATFORM,
            (cl_context_properties)(platforms[1])(),
            0
        };

        context_ = cl::Context(CL_DEVICE_TYPE_CPU, properties);

        std::vector<cl::Device> devices =
            context_.getInfo<CL_CONTEXT_DEVICES>();

        // Check that device fission is supported
        if (devices[0].getInfo<CL_DEVICE_EXTENSIONS>().find(
            "cl_ext_device_fission") == std::string::npos) {
            std::cout << "Required that device support "
                  << "cl_ext_device_extension"
                  << std::endl;
            exit(-1);
        }

        cl_device_partition_property_ext subDeviceProperties[] =
        {
            CL_DEVICE_PARTITION_EQUALLY_EXT,
            1,
            CL_PROPERTIES_LIST_END_EXT,
            0
        };

        devices[0].createSubDevices(subDeviceProperties, &subDevices_);
        if (subDevices_.size() <= 0) {
            std::cout << "Failed to allocate sub-devices" << std::endl;
            exit(-1);
        }

        for (auto i = subDevices_.begin(); i != subDevices_.end(); i++) {
            queues_.push_back(cl::CommandQueue(context_, *i));
        }

        std::cout << "Number of sub-devices "
              << subDevices_.size()
              << std::endl;
    }

    static unsigned int atomicAdd(
        unsigned int inc,
        volatile unsigned int *dest)
{

```

```
#if defined(_MSC_VER)
    return (unsigned int)_InterlockedExchangeAdd(
        (volatile long*)dest,
        (long)inc);
#else
    return __sync_fetch_and_add(dest, inc);
#endif
}

bool parallelFor(int range, std::function<void (int i)> f)
{
    std::vector<cl::Event> events;

    size_t args[2];

    args[0] = reinterpret_cast<size_t>(&f);

    int index = 0;
    for (int x = 0; x < range; x++) {

        int numQueues =
            range - x > queues_.size() ? queues_.size() : range - x;

        cl::Event event;
        while(numQueues > 0) {

            args[1] = static_cast<size_t>(index++);

            queues_[numQueues-1].enqueueNativeKernel(
                funcWrapper,
                std::make_pair(
                    static_cast<void*>(args),
                    sizeof(size_t)*2),
                NULL,
                NULL,
                NULL,
                &event);

            events.push_back(event);

            numQueues--;
            x++;
        }

        cl::Event::waitForEvents(events);
    }

    return true;
};

const unsigned int numNumbers = 1024;
```

```
int
main(int argc, char** argv)
{
    volatile unsigned int numPrimes = 0;
    int * numbers = new int[numNumbers];
    ::srand(2009);

    // Random initialize
    for (size_t i = 0; i < numNumbers; ++i) {
        numbers[i] = ::rand();
    }

    try {
        Parallel parallel;
        parallel.parallelFor(numNumbers, [numbers, &numPrimes]
        (int x) {

            auto isPrime = [] (unsigned int n) -> bool {
                if (n == 1 || n == 2) {
                    return true;
                }
                if (n % 2 == 0) {
                    return false;
                }

                for (unsigned int odd = 3;
                     odd <= static_cast<unsigned int>(
                         sqrtf(static_cast<float>(n)));
                     odd += 2) {

                    if (n % odd == 0) {
                        return false;
                    }
                }
                return true;
            };

            if (isPrime(numbers[x])) {
                Parallel::atomicAdd(1, &numPrimes);
            }
        });
        std::cout << "Number of primes found = " << numPrimes <<
        std::endl;
    }
    catch (cl::Error err) {
        std::cerr
            << "ERROR: "
            << err.what()
            << "("
            << err.err()
            << ")"
    }
}
```

```
        << std::endl;
    return EXIT_FAILURE;
}
delete[] numbers;
return EXIT_SUCCESS;
}
```

---

## DOUBLE PRECISION

Floating point formats were created to allow programmers to work with very large and very small non-integral data values. For many applications, single precision floating point does not provide enough range for the targeted application. Many applications (particularly in science and engineering) require part or all of a particular computation to use double precision. OpenCL does not require that a particular compute device support double precision. For critical applications in which double precision is required, OpenCL provides the optional `cl_khr_fp64` extension. This is enabled by including the following directive before any double precision use in an OpenCL C program:

```
#pragma cl_khr_fp64 : enable
```

Once enabled, the double precision support provides access to the following data types:

Type	Description
Double	Double precision floating point number
double2	2-component double vector
double3	3-component double vector
double4	4-component double vector
double8	8-component double vector
double16	16-component double vector

The double type conforms to the IEEE 754 double precision storage format.

There is a one-to-one mapping with the corresponding single precision float types. On an AMD CPU, when the OpenCL device is `CL_DEVICE_TYPE_CPU`, vector types are mapped directly to SSE and AVX packed registers. In the case in which a vector type is larger than the underlying hardware vector, the resulting implementation is expanded into multiples of the hardware width. All of the conversion rules defined by the OpenCL specification for float types are also defined for doubles. The built-in math functions provided for float have been extended to include

appropriate versions that work on double, double2, double3, double4, double8, and double16 as arguments and return values.

As a simple example, Listing 11.2 shows OpenCL C code to implement a block matrix multiple using double precision. Note that the first line of the OpenCL source file enables the extension.

---

### Listing 11.2

```
#pragma OPENCL EXTENSION cl_khr_fp64 : enable
#include "matrixmul.h"

#define AS(i, j) As[(j) * BLOCK_SIZE + (i)]
#define BS(i, j) Bs[(j) * BLOCK_SIZE + (i)]

__kernel void
matrixMul(
    __global double* C,
    __global double* A,
    __global double* B,
    int wA,
    int wB,
    __local double* As,
    __local double* Bs)
{
    // Block index
    int bx = get_group_id(0);
    int by = get_group_id(1);

    int tx = get_local_id(0);
    int ty = get_local_id(1);

    // Index of the first sub-matrix of A processed by the block
    int aBegin = wA * BLOCK_SIZE * by;

    // Index of the last sub-matrix of A processed by the block
    int aEnd = aBegin + wA - 1;

    // Step size used to iterate through the sub-matrices of A
    int aStep = BLOCK_SIZE;

    // Index of the first sub-matrix of B processed by the block
    int bBegin = BLOCK_SIZE * bx;

    // Step size used to iterate through the sub-matrices of B
    int bStep = BLOCK_SIZE * wB;

    // Csub is used to store the element of the block sub-matrix
    // that is computed by the thread
    double Csub = 0;

    // Loop over all the sub-matrices of A and B
    // required to compute the block sub-matrix
    for (int a = aBegin, b = bBegin;
         a <= aEnd;
```

```

        a += aStep, b += bStep) {

    // Load the matrices from device memory
    // to local memory; each work-item loads
    // one element of each matrix
    AS(ty, tx) = A[a + wA * ty + tx];
    BS(ty, tx) = B[b + wB * ty + tx];

    // Synchronize to make sure the matrices are loaded
    barrier(CLK_LOCAL_MEM_FENCE);

    // Multiply the two matrices together;
    // each work-item computes one element
    // of the block sub-matrix
    for (int k = 0; k < BLOCK_SIZE; ++k)
        Csub += AS(ty, k) * BS(k, tx);

    // Synchronize to make sure that the preceding
    // computation is done before loading two new
    // sub-matrices of A and B in the next iteration
    barrier(CLK_LOCAL_MEM_FENCE);
}
// Write the block sub-matrix to device memory;
// each work-item writes one element
int c = wB * BLOCK_SIZE * by + BLOCK_SIZE * bx;
C[c + wB * ty + tx] = Csub;
}

```

---

The host OpenCL program, written using the OpenCL C++ Wrapper API, is given in [Listing 11.3](#), with the shared header, `matrixmul.h`, given in [Listing 11.4](#). The example is straightforward, but two points are worth discussing further. First, to avoid unexpected runtime errors, the application must check that the device supports the extension `cl_khr_fp64`, and this is achieved with the following code:

```

if (devices[0].getInfo<CL_DEVICE_EXTENSIONS>().find("cl_khr_fp64")
== std::string::npos) {

    std::cout << "Required that device support cl_khr_fp64" << std::
endl;
    exit(-1);
}

```

In this case, if the device does not support the extension, then the application simply exits. A more robust solution might drop back to the host to perform the computation if necessary. Second, this example uses the profiling API for command queues to collect information on the time to execute the matrix multiple.

---

**Listing 11.3**

```
#include <CL/cl.hpp> // C++ Wrapper API (no need to include cl.h)

#include <cstring>
#include <cstdlib>
#include <cassert>
#include <cmath>
#include <iostream>
#include <fstream>
#include <vector>
#include <matrixmul.h>

template <size_t X, size_t Y>
class Matrix
{
private:
    cl_double data_[X * Y];

public:
    template <typename Functor>
    Matrix(Functor init) { init(data_, X, Y); }
    Matrix() { ::memset(data_, '\0', X * Y * sizeof(cl_double)); }

    Matrix<X,Y> operator -= (const Matrix<X,Y>& rhs)
    {
        for (size_t i = 0; i < (X * Y); ++i) {
            data_[i] -= rhs.data_[i];
        }
        return *this;
    }

    Matrix<X,Y> operator - (const Matrix<X,Y>& rhs)
    {
        Matrix<X,Y> result = *this;
        return result -= rhs;
    }

    bool operator == (const Matrix<X,Y>& rhs)
    {
        for (size_t i = 0; i < (X * Y); ++i) {
            if (data_[i] != rhs.data_[i]) {
                return false;
            }
        }
        return true;
    }

    bool operator != (const Matrix<X,Y>& rhs)
    {
        return !(*this == rhs);
    }
}
```

```

bool compareL2fe(const Matrix<X,Y>& reference, cl_double epsilon)
{
    cl_double error = 0.0f;
    cl_double ref = 0.0f;

    for (size_t i = 0; i < (X * Y); ++i) {
        cl_double diff = reference.data_[i] - data_[i];
        error += diff * diff;
        ref += reference.data_[i] * reference.data_[i];
    }

    cl_double normRef = ::sqrt((double) ref);
    if (::fabs((double) ref) < 1e-7f) {
        return false;
    }
    cl_double normError = ::sqrtf((double) error);
    error = normError / normRef;

    return error < epsilon;
}

void printOn(std::ostream& out)
{
    for (size_t y = 0; y < Y; ++y) {
        for (size_t x = 0; x < X; ++x) {
            out << data_[y * X + x] << " ";
        }
        out << "\n";
    }
}

cl_double* data() { return data_; }
size_t size() const { return X * Y * sizeof(cl_double); }
};

static void
randomInit(cl_double* data, size_t width, size_t height)
{
    for (size_t i = 0; i < width*height; ++i) {
        data[i] = ::rand() / (double) RAND_MAX;
    }
}

static void
nop(cl_double*, size_t, size_t)
{
}

static void
computeGold(
    cl_double* C, const cl_double* A, const cl_double* B,
    cl_uint hA, cl_uint wA, cl_uint wB)
{
    for (cl_uint i = 0; i < hA; ++i) {

```

```

        for (cl_uint j = 0; j < wB; ++j) {
            cl_double sum = 0;
            for (cl_uint k = 0; k < wA; ++k) {
                cl_double a = A[i * wA + k];
                cl_double b = B[k * wB + j];
                sum += a * b;
            }
            C[i * wB + j] = (cl_double)sum;
        }
    }

int
main(int argc, char** argv)
{
    cl_device_type devType = CL_DEVICE_TYPE_CPU;
    cl_int err, err1, err2, err3;
    ::srand(2009);

    Matrix<WA,HA> A(&randomInit);
    Matrix<WB,HB> B(&randomInit);

    // Initialize the OpenCL runtime.
    std::vector<cl::Platform> platforms;
    cl::Platform::get(&platforms);

    cl_context_properties cprops[] = {
        CL_CONTEXT_PLATFORM, (cl_context_properties)platforms[1]
        (), 0 };

    cl::Context context(devType, cprops);
    std::vector<cl::Device> devices = context.getInfo<CL_CONTEXT_DEVICES>();
    if (devices.size() == 0) {
        std::cerr << "Device not available\n";
        return EXIT_FAILURE;
    }

    // Check that double is supported
    if (devices[0].getInfo<CL_DEVICE_EXTENSIONS>().find("cl_khr_fp64") ==
        std::string::npos) {
        std::cout << "Required that device support cl_khr_fp64"
        << std::endl;
        exit(-1);
    }

    std::ifstream file("matrixmul_kernels.cl");
    if (!file.is_open()) {
        std::cerr << "We couldn't load CL source code\n";
        return EXIT_FAILURE;
    }

    std::string prog(

```

```

    std::istreambuf_iterator<char>(file),
    (std::istreambuf_iterator<char>()));

cl::Program::Sources source(
    1,
    std::make_pair(prog.c_str(), prog.length() + 1));

cl::Program program(context, source);

err = program.build(devices, "-I.");
if (err != CL_SUCCESS) {
    std::string str;
    str = program.getBuildInfo<CL_PROGRAM_BUILD_LOG>(devices[0]);
    std::cout << "Program Info: " << str;
    exit(1);
}

cl::Kernel matrixMul(program, "matrixMul", &err);
if (err != CL_SUCCESS) {
    std::cerr << "Could not create kernel \\"matmult\\"\\n";
    return EXIT_FAILURE;
}

cl::Buffer in0(context, CL_MEM_USE_HOST_PTR, A.size(), A.data(),
    &err1);
cl::Buffer in1(context, CL_MEM_USE_HOST_PTR, B.size(), B.data(),
    &err2);
cl::Buffer out(context, CL_MEM_ALLOC_HOST_PTR,
    WC * HC * sizeof(cl_double), NULL, &err3);
if (err1 != CL_SUCCESS || err2 != CL_SUCCESS || err3 != CL_SUCCESS) {
    std::cerr << "Could not create memory objects\\n";
    return EXIT_FAILURE;
}

err = matrixMul.setArg(0, out);
err |= matrixMul.setArg(1, in0);
err |= matrixMul.setArg(2, in1);
err |= matrixMul.setArg(3, WA);
err |= matrixMul.setArg(4, WB);
const size_t localSize = sizeof(double[BLOCK_SIZE][BLOCK_SIZE]);
err |= matrixMul.setArg(5, cl::__local(localSize));
err |= matrixMul.setArg(6, cl::__local(localSize));
if (err != CL_SUCCESS) {
    std::cerr << "Could not set matrixMul's args\\n";
    return EXIT_FAILURE;
}

cl_command_queue_properties properties = CL_QUEUE_PROFILING_ENABLE;
cl::CommandQueue queue(context, devices[0], properties, &err);
if (err != CL_SUCCESS) {
    std::cerr << "Could not create the command queue\\n";
    return EXIT_FAILURE;
}

```

```

    }

    cl::Event event;
    err1 = queue.enqueueNDRangeKernel(
        matrixMul, cl::NullRange,
        cl::NDRange(WC, HC),
        cl::NDRange(BLOCK_SIZE, BLOCK_SIZE),
        NULL,
        &event);

    Matrix<WC,HC> C(&nop);
    err2 = queue.enqueueReadBuffer(out, CL_TRUE, 0, C.size(), C.data
        ());
    if (err1 != CL_SUCCESS || err2 != CL_SUCCESS) {
        std::cerr << "matrixMul execution failed\n";
        return EXIT_FAILURE;
    }

    Matrix<WC, HC> reference(&nop);
    computeGold(reference.data(), A.data(), B.data(), HA, WA, WB);

    if (!C.compareL2fe(reference, 1e-6f)) {
        Matrix<WC, HC> difference = reference - C;
        difference.printOn(std::cout);
        std::cout << "FAILED\n";
        return EXIT_FAILURE;
    }
    if ((properties & CL_QUEUE_PROFILING_ENABLE) != 0) {
        cl_long start = event.getProfilingInfo<CL_PROFILING_COMMAND_
            START>();
        cl_long end = event.getProfilingInfo<CL_PROFILING_COMMAND_
            END>();
        std::cout << "Elapsed time: "
            << (double)(end - start) / 1e6
            << "ms\n";
    }

    std::cout << "PASS!\n";
    return EXIT_SUCCESS;
}

```

---

### Listing 11.4

```

// Thread block size
#define BLOCK_SIZE 16

// Matrix dimensions
// (chosen as multiples of the thread block size for simplicity)
#define WA (3 * BLOCK_SIZE) // Matrix A width
#define HA (5 * BLOCK_SIZE) // Matrix A height
#define WB (8 * BLOCK_SIZE) // Matrix B width

```

```
#define HB WA // Matrix B height  
#define WC WB // Matrix C width  
#define HC HA // Matrix C height
```

---

---

## References

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- Intel. (2011). *Threading Building Blocks 3.0 for Open Source*. <http://threadingbuildingblocks.org>.
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# OpenCL Profiling and Debugging

# 12

---

## INTRODUCTION

Our motivation for writing programs in OpenCL is not limited to writing isolated high-performance kernels but to speed up parallel applications. Previous chapters discussed how we can optimize kernels running on OpenCL devices by targeting features of the architecture. In this chapter, we discuss how we can study the interaction between the computational kernels on the device and the host. We need to measure the performance and study an application as a whole to understand bottlenecks.

An OpenCL application can include kernels and a large amount of input/output (IO) between the host and device. Profiling such an application can help us to improve performance by answering some of the following questions regarding an application:

- Which kernel should be optimized when multiple kernels exist in an application?
- How much time is spent by the kernels waiting in command queues versus actually executing?
- What is the ratio between execution time and the time spent initializing the OpenCL runtime and compiling kernels for an application?
- What is the ratio of time spent in host device IO to computation time for an application?

The first two sections of this chapter examine how the OpenCL API provides some basic features for application profiling and how operating system APIs can be used for timing sections of code, respectively. The following two sections discuss two tools from AMD that can help with profiling an application for performance:

- AMD Accelerated Parallel Processing (APP) Profiler is a performance analysis tool that gathers data from the OpenCL runtime and AMD Radeon GPUs during the execution of an OpenCL application.
- AMD Accelerated Parallel Processing (APP) KernelAnalyzer is a static analysis tool to compile, analyze, and disassemble an OpenCL kernel for AMD Radeon GPUs.

Each of these four different approaches to profiling can help a developer quickly determine why an application is not performing as expected and, in combination with the debugging features described in Chapter 13, can greatly improve the development process.

We conclude this chapter by discussing debugging OpenCL code. Debugging of parallel programs is traditionally more complicated than conventional serial code due to subtle bugs such as race conditions, which are difficult to detect and reproduce. We give a brief overview of gDEBugger, which is an OpenCL debugging and profiling tool. We also briefly explain the `printf` extension provided by AMD, which allows us to view kernel data.

## PROFILING WITH EVENTS

OpenCL supports 64-bit timing of commands submitted to command queues using `clEnqueueXX()` commands, such as `clEnqueueNDRangeKernel()`. Generally, commands are enqueued into a queue asynchronously, and as described in previous chapters, the developer uses events to keep track of a command's status as well as to enforce dependencies. Events provide a gateway to a command's history: They contain information detailing when the corresponding command was placed in the queue, when it was submitted to the device, and when it started and ended execution. Access to an event's profiling information is through the following API `clGetEventProfilingInfo`, which provides an interface for queuing timing information:

### Enabling Profiling

Profiling of OpenCL programs using events has to be enabled explicitly on a per command queue basis. Profiling is enabled when creating a command queue by setting the `CL_QUEUE_PROFILING_ENABLE` flag.

Once a command queue has been created, it is not possible to turn event profiling on and off.

```
cl_int clGetEventProfilingInfo (
    cl_event event,
    cl_profiling_info param_name,
    size_t param_value_size,
    void *param_value,
    size_t *param_value_size_ret)
```

The first argument, `event`, is the event being queried, and the second argument is an enumeration value describing the query. Valid values for the enumeration are given in the following table:

<b>CL_PROFILING</b>	<b>Return Type</b>	<b>Information Returned in param_value</b>
CL_PROFILING_COMMAND_QUEUED	cl_ulong	A 64-bit value that describes the current device time counter in nanoseconds when the command identified by <i>event</i> is enqueued in a command queue by the host.
CL_PROFILING_COMMAND_SUBMIT	cl_ulong	A 64-bit value that describes the current device time counter in nanoseconds when the command identified by the event that has been enqueued is submitted by the host to the device associated with the command queue.
CL_PROFILING_COMMAND_START	cl_ulong	A 64-bit value that describes the current device time counter in nanoseconds when the command identified by <i>event</i> starts execution on the device.
CL_PROFILING_COMMAND_END	cl_ulong	A 64-bit value that describes the current device time counter in nanoseconds when the command identified by <i>event</i> has finished execution on the device.

As discussed previously, OpenCL command queues work asynchronously—that is, the functions return as soon as the command is enqueued. For this reason, querying an OpenCL event for timestamps after a kernel enqueue necessitates a `clFinish` call or other event synchronization before the call to `clGetEventProfilingInfo` to ensure that the task associated with the event has completed execution.

Event profiling information is not enabled by default and instead is enabled on a per command queue basis. To explicitly enable a command queue for event profiling, the following bit-field value is passed at creation:

```
CL_QUEUE_PROFILING_ENABLE
```

Once a command queue has been created, it is not possible to turn event profiling on and off.

The following is a simple example of the use of events to profile a kernel execution:

```
// Sample Code that can be used for timing kernel execution duration
// Using different parameters for cl_profiling_info allows us to
// measure the wait time
cl_event timing_event;
cl_int err_code;
```

```

//! We are timing the clEnqueueNDRangeKernel call and timing information will be
//! stored in timing_event
err_code = clEnqueueNDRangeKernel (
    command_queue, kernel,
    work_dim,
    global_work_offset,
    global_work_size,
    local_work_size,
    0,
    NULL,
    &timing_event);
clFinish(command_queue);

cl_ulong starttime;
cl_ulong endtime;
err_code = clGetEventProfilingInfo(
    timing_event,
    CL_PROFILING_COMMAND_START,
    sizeof(cl_ulong),
    &starttime,
    NULL);

kerneltimer = clGetEventProfilingInfo(
    timing_event,
    CL_PROFILING_COMMAND_END,
    sizeof(cl_ulong),
    &endtime,
    NULL);

unsigned long elapsed = (unsigned long)(endtime - starttime);

printf("Kernel Execution\t%ld ns\n", elapsed);

```

---

## AMD ACCELERATED PARALLEL PROCESSING PROFILER

The AMD Accelerated Parallel Processing (APP) Profiler is a performance analysis tool that gathers data from the OpenCL runtime and AMD Radeon GPUs during the execution of an OpenCL application. We can then use this information to discover bottlenecks in an application and find ways to optimize the application's performance for AMD platforms. Hereafter, we refer to the AMD APP Profiler as the profiler.

The profiler can be installed as part of the AMD APP SDK installation or individually using its own installer package. You can download the profiler from the AMD developer website at <http://developer.amd.com>.

In this section, we describe the major features in Version 2.2 of the profiler with the described version is included with Version 2.4 of the AMD APP SDK. Because the profiler is still being rapidly developed, please consult the profiler documentation for the latest features of the tool.

The profiler supports two usage models:

1. As a Microsoft Visual Studio 2008 or 2010 plug-in
2. As a command line utility tool for both Windows and Linux platforms

Using the profiler as a Visual Studio plug-in is the recommended usage model because one can visualize and analyze the results in multiple ways. To start the profiler in the Visual Studio plug-in, simply load a solution into Visual Studio. Select a C/C++ project as the startup project, and click on the Collect Application Trace or Collect GPU Performance Counters button on the APP Profiler Session Explorer panel. By default, the APP Profiler Session Explorer panel will be docked in the same window panel as the Visual Studio Solution Explorer panel. No code or project modifications are required to profile the application. The profiler will query Visual Studio for all the project settings required to run the application. When the application completes, the profiler will generate and display the profile information.

The command line utility tool is a popular way to collect data for applications for which the source code is not available. The output text files generated by the profiler can be analyzed directly, or they can be loaded by the Visual Studio plug-in to be visualized.

Two modes of operation are supported by the profiler: collecting OpenCL application traces and collecting OpenCL kernel GPU performance counters.

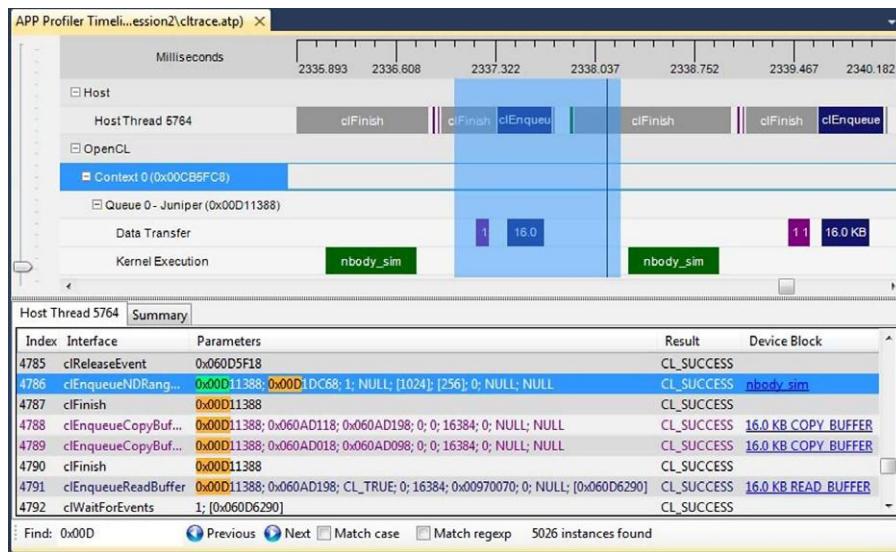
## Collecting OpenCL Application Trace

The OpenCL application trace lists all the OpenCL API calls made by the application. For each API call, the profiler records the input parameters and output results. In addition, the profiler also records the CPU timestamps for the host code and device timestamps retrieved from the OpenCL runtime. The output data is recorded in a text-based AMD custom file format called an Application Trace Profile file. Consult the tool documentation for the specification. This mode is especially useful in helping to understand the high-level structure of a complex application.

From the OpenCL application trace data, we can do the following:

- Discover the high-level structure of the application with the Timeline View. From this view, we can determine the number of OpenCL contexts and command queues created and the relationships between these items in the application. The application code, kernel execution, and data transfer operations are shown in a timeline.
- Determine if the application is bound by kernel execution or data transfer operations, find the top 10 most expensive kernel and data transfer operations, and find the API hot spots (most frequently called or most expensive API call) in the application with the Summary Pages View.
- View and debug the input parameters and output results for all API calls made by the application with the API Trace View.

The Timeline View ([Figure 12.1](#)) provides a visual representation of the execution of the application. Along the top of the timeline is the time grid, which shows the

**FIGURE 12.1**

The Timeline and API Trace View of AMD APP Profiler in Microsoft Visual Studio 2010.

total elapsed time of the application when fully zoomed out, in milliseconds. Timing begins when the first OpenCL call is made by the application and ends when the final OpenCL call is made. Directly below the time grid, each host (OS) thread that made at least one OpenCL call is listed. For each host thread, the OpenCL API calls are plotted along the time grid, showing the start time and duration of each call. Below the host threads, the OpenCL tree shows all contexts and queues created by the application, along with data transfer operations and kernel execution operations for each queue. We can navigate in the Timeline View by zooming, panning, collapsing/expanding, or selecting a region of interest. From the Timeline View, we can also navigate to the corresponding API call in the API Trace View and vice versa.

The Timeline View can be useful for debugging your OpenCL application. The following are examples:

- You can easily confirm that the high-level structure of your application is correct. By examining the timeline, you can verify that the number of queues and contexts created match your expectations for the application.
- You can also gain confidence that synchronization has been performed properly in the application. For example, if kernel A execution is dependent on a buffer operation and outputs from kernel B execution, then kernel A execution should appear after the completion of the buffer execution and kernel B execution in the time grid. It can be difficult to find this type of synchronization error using traditional debugging techniques.

- Finally, you can see that the application has been utilizing the hardware efficiently. For example, the timeline should show that nondependent kernel executions and data transfer operations occur simultaneously.

### **Summary Pages View**

The Summary Pages View shows various statistics for your OpenCL application. It can provide a general idea of the location of the application's bottlenecks. It also provides useful information such as the number of buffers and images created on each context, the most expensive kernel call, etc.

The Summary Pages View provides access to the following individual pages:

- API Summary page: This page shows statistics for all OpenCL API calls made in the application for API hot spot identification.
- Context Summary page: This page shows the statistics for all the kernel dispatch and data transfer operations for each context. It also shows the number of buffers and images created for each context. This is shown in [Figure 12.2](#).
- Kernel Summary page: This page shows statistics for all the kernels that are created in the application.
- Top 10 Data Transfer Summary page: This page shows a sorted list of the 10 most expensive individual data transfer operations.
- Top 10 Kernel Summary page: This page shows a sorted list of the 10 most expensive individual kernel execution operations.

From these summary pages, it is possible to determine whether the application is bound by kernel execution or data transfer (Context Summary page). If the application is bound by kernel execution, we can determine which device is the bottleneck. From the Kernel Summary page, we can find the name of the kernel with the highest total execution time. Or, from the Top 10 Kernel Summary page, we can find the individual kernel instance with the highest execution time. If the kernel execution on a GPU device is the bottleneck, the GPU performance counters can then be used

Context ID	# of Buffers	# of Images	# of Kernel Dispatch - CPU_Device	Total Kernel Time(ms) - CPU_Device	# of Kernel Dispatch - Juniper	Total Kernel Time (ms)	# of Memory Transfer	Total Memory Time (ms)	# of Read	Total Read Time (ms)	Size of Read	# of Write	Total Write Time (ms)	Size of Write	# of Map	Total Map Time (ms)	Size of Map	# of Copy	Total Copy Time (ms)	Size of Copy
0	2	0	1	67.43930	1	15.86929	2	1.21196	0	0	0 Byte	2	1.21196	512.00 KB	0	0	0 Byte	0	0 Byte	
1	2	0	1	36.10200	NA	NA	1	0.13787	0	0	0 Byte	1	0.13787	256.00 KB	0	0	0 Byte	0	0 Byte	
2	2	0	NA	NA	1	1.38887	1	1.71825	0	0	0 Byte	1	1.71825	256.00 KB	0	0	0 Byte	0	0 Byte	
3	2	0	1	36.32298	NA	NA	1	0.13444	0	0	0 Byte	1	0.13444	256.00 KB	0	0	0 Byte	0	0 Byte	
4	2	0	NA	NA	1	1.38915	1	1.66952	0	0	0 Byte	1	1.66952	256.00 KB	0	0	0 Byte	0	0 Byte	
Total	10	0	3	139.86428	3	18.64731	6	4.87205	0	0	0 Byte	6	4.87205	1.50 MB	0	0	0 Byte	0	0 Byte	

**FIGURE 12.2**

The Context Summary Page View of AMD APP Profiler in Microsoft Visual Studio 2010.

to investigate the bottleneck inside the kernel. We describe the GPU performance counters view later in this chapter.

If the application is bound by the data transfers, it is possible to determine the most expensive data transfer type (read, write, copy, or map) in the application from the Context Summary page. We can investigate whether we can minimize this type of data transfer by modifying the algorithm if necessary. With help from the Timeline View, we can investigate whether data transfers have been executed in the most efficient way—that is, concurrently with a kernel execution.

### ***API Trace View***

The API Trace View ([Figure 12.1](#)) lists all the OpenCL API calls made by the application.

Each host thread that makes at least one OpenCL call is listed in a separate tab. Each tab contains a list of all the API calls made by that particular thread. For each call, the list displays the index of the call (representing execution order), the name of the API function, a semicolon delimited list of parameters passed to the function, and the value returned by the function. When displaying parameters, the profiler will attempt to dereference pointers and decode enumeration values to give as much information as possible about the data being passed in or returned from the function. Double-clicking an item in the API Trace View will display and zoom into that API call in the Host Thread row in the Timeline View.

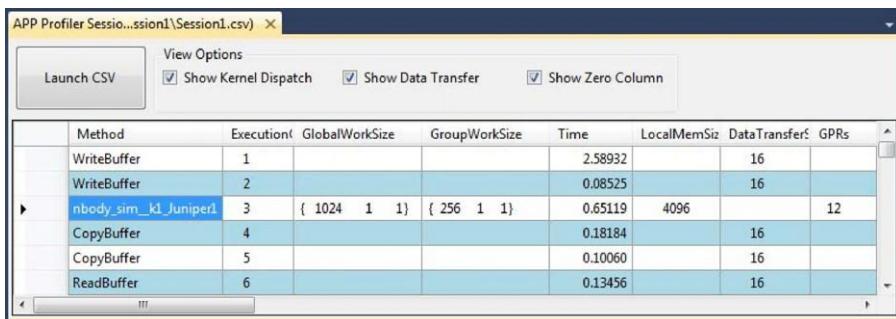
The view allows us to analyze and debug the input parameters and output results for each API call. For example, we can easily check that all the API calls are returning `CL_SUCCESS` or that all the buffers are created with the correct flags. We can also identify redundant API calls using this view.

### **Collecting OpenCL GPU Kernel Performance Counters**

The GPU kernel performance counters can be used to find possible bottlenecks in the kernel execution. You can find the list of performance counters supported by AMD Radeon GPUs in the tool documentation.

Once we have used the trace data to discover which kernel is most in need of optimization, we can collect the GPU performance counters to drill down into the kernel execution on a GPU device. Using the performance counters, we can do the following:

- Find the number of resources (General Purpose Registers, Local Memory size, and Flow Control Stack size) allocated for the kernel. These resources affect the possible number of in-flight wavefronts in the GPU. A higher number of wavefronts better hides data latency.
- Determine the number of ALU, global, and local memory instructions executed by the GPU.
- Determine the number of bytes fetched from and written to the global memory.

**FIGURE 12.3**

The Session View of AMD APP Profiler in Microsoft Visual Studio 2010.

- Determine the utilization of the SIMD engines and memory units in the system.
- View the efficiency of the Shader Compiler in packing ALU instructions into the VLIW instructions used by AMD GPUs.
- View any local memory (Local Data Share (LDS)) bank conflicts where multiple lanes within a SIMD unit attempt to read or write the same LDS bank and have to be serialized, causing access latency.

The Session View (Figure 12.3) shows the performance counters for a profile session. The output data is recorded in a comma-separated-variable (csv) format. You can also click on the kernel name entry in the “Method” column to view the OpenCL kernel source, AMD Intermediate Language, GPU ISA, or CPU assembly code for that kernel.

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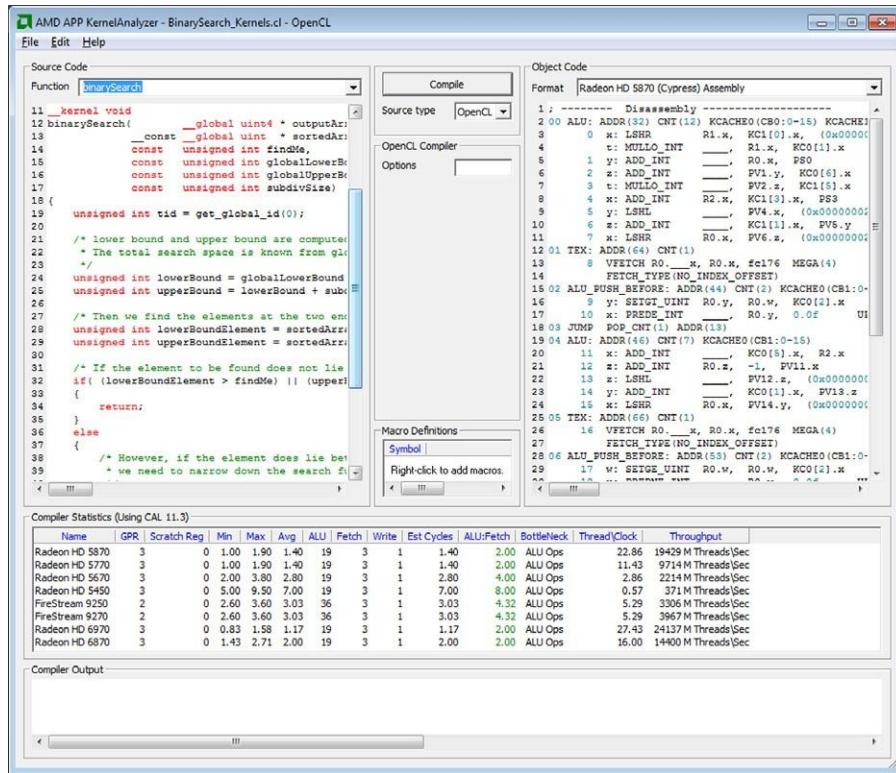
## AMD ACCELERATED PARALLEL PROCESSING KERNELANALYZER

The AMD APP KernelAnalyzer is a static analysis tool to compile, analyze, and disassemble an OpenCL kernel for AMD Radeon GPUs. It can be used as a graphical user interface tool for interactive tuning of an OpenCL kernel or in command line mode to generate detailed reports. Hereafter, we refer to this tool as the KernelAnalyzer.

The KernelAnalyzer can be installed as part of the AMD APP SDK installation or individually using its own installer package. You can download the KernelAnalyzer package from the AMD developer website at <http://developer.amd.com>.

To use the KernelAnalyzer, the AMD OpenCL runtime is required to be installed on the system. However, no GPU is required in the system.

To compile an OpenCL kernel in the KernelAnalyzer, simply drop the source containing the OpenCL kernel anywhere within the KernelAnalyzer’s main window (Figure 12.4). We do not require the entire OpenCL application to compile or analyze the OpenCL kernel.

**FIGURE 12.4**

AMD APP KernelAnalyzer.

With the KernelAnalyzer, we can do the following:

- Compile, analyze, and disassemble the OpenCL kernel for multiple Catalyst driver versions and GPU device targets.
- View any kernel compilation errors and warnings generated by the OpenCL runtime.
- View the AMD Intermediate Language code generated by the OpenCL runtime.
- View the ISA code generated by the AMD Shader Compiler. Typically, device-specific kernel optimizations are performed by analyzing the ISA code.
- View various statistics generated by analyzing the ISA code.
- View General Purpose Registers and spill registers allocated for the kernel.

Because the KernelAnalyzer can quickly compile a kernel for multiple GPU device targets, it is very useful for rapid prototyping of OpenCL kernels.

---

## WALKING THROUGH THE AMD APP PROFILER

In this section, we walk through the usage of AMD APP Profiler to profile the MatrixMultiplication application from the AMD APP SDK Version 2.4 samples.

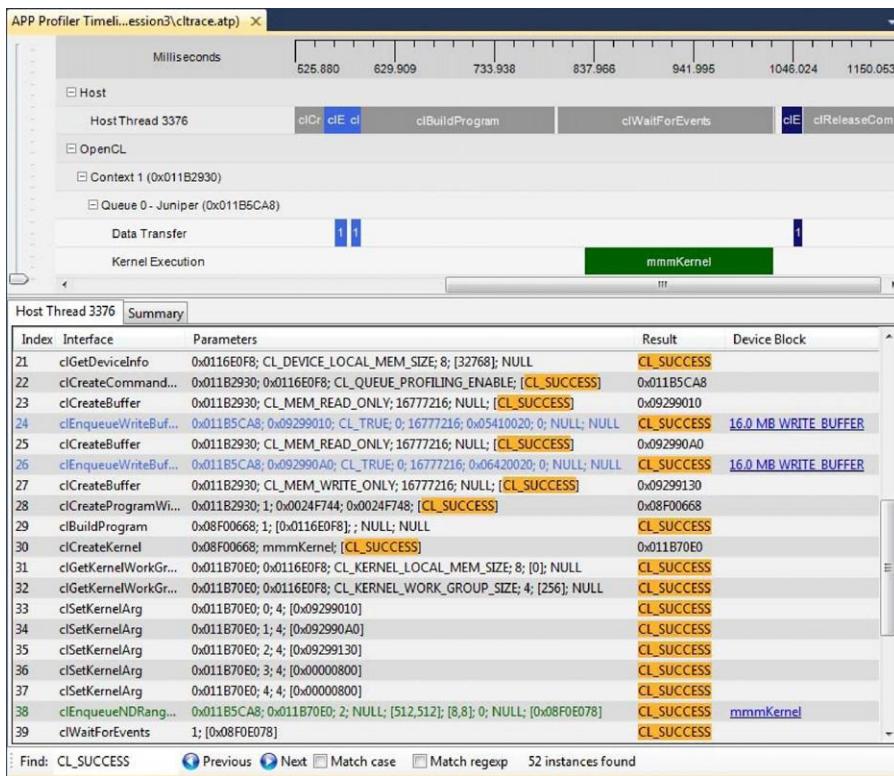
We show you a step-by-step process that includes running the AMD APP Profiler, using the generated data to find a bottleneck in the application, and improving the performance of the application.

### Starting the AMD APP Profiler

1. Load the AMD APP SDK samples solution file (`OpenCLSamplesVS10.sln`) in Microsoft Visual Studio.
2. Set the MatrixMultiplication project as the start-up project.
3. Confirm that the project can compile and run normally.
4. Confirm that the APP Profiler has been installed properly.
  - a. From the Visual Studio main menu bar, select the `Help -> About Microsoft Visual Studio` menu item. Under the `Installed products`, you should see an AMD APP Profiler entry. If you do not see this entry, please re-install the profiler.
  - b. Check that the APP Profiler Session Explorer is docked in the same window panel as the Visual Studio Solution Explorer. If you do not see the APP Profiler Session Explorer panel, enable it by selecting `View -> Other Windows -> APP Profiler Session Explorer` from the Visual Studio main menu bar.

### Using the Application Trace to Find the Application Bottleneck

1. On the APP Profiler Session Explorer, click on the `Collect Application Trace` button to start collecting a trace for the application.
2. After the trace has been completed, the APP Profiler Timeline ([Figure 12.5](#)) will be shown and docked in the same window panel as the Visual Studio editor window.
  - a. From the API Trace View in [Figure 12.5](#), we can confirm that the application runs successfully without generating any errors from the OpenCL runtime by verifying that all return error codes of the API calls are `CL_SUCCESS`. From this view, we can also inspect the input arguments and output results of each API call. For example, the first two buffers are created with a `CL_MEM_READ_ONLY` flag, and the third buffer is created with a `CL_MEM_WRITE_ONLY` flag. These buffers are of size 16 MB.
  - b. From the Timeline View in [Figure 12.5](#), we can learn the following facts about the application:
    - The application contains one OpenCL context and one command queue.
    - The command queue is created for a GPU device called Juniper, which is the internal name for the AMD Radeon HD5770 GPU.

**FIGURE 12.5**

The APP Profiler Timeline and API Trace View of the MatrixMultiplication application.

- The application contains three data transfer operations: Two input buffers are sent to the device, and one output buffer is read from the device.
  - There is one kernel execution on the GPU device.
  - The application likely has correct dependency for the data transfers and kernel operations. Two input buffers are sent to the device prior to the start of the kernel execution operation, and the output buffer is read from the device after the completion of the kernel execution. Short of exhaustive testing or model checking, this is good support for correct implementation of the intent.
3. Click on the Summary tab (Figure 12.5) to view the Summary Pages View.
- a. Navigate to the Context Summary page (Figure 12.6; the default view after you click on the Summary tab) by selecting the Context Summary from the drop-down combo box on the Summary Pages View.
- From this page, we find that the kernel operation on the GPU device is the bottleneck. The total kernel execution on the GPU device takes 195 ms compared to the total data transfer operations, which take 32 ms.

- b. Navigate to the Top10 Kernel Summary page (Figure 12.7) by selecting the Top10 Kernel Summary from the drop-down menu.
- Using this page, we can find the kernel instance (`mmmKernel`) that is in most need of optimization. In this example, however, there is only one kernel instance.

## Using the GPU Performance Counters to Find the Bottleneck in the Kernel

Once we have discovered the kernel instance that is in most need of optimization, we can collect the GPU performance counters (click the Collect GPU Performance Counters button on the APP Profiler Session Explorer panel) to guide us in finding the possible bottlenecks in the kernel.

Figure 12.8 shows the resulting GPU performance counters of multiplying two matrices of size  $2048 \times 2048$  together using three different methods:

Context ID	# of Buffers	# of Images	# of Kernel Dispatch - Juniper	Total Kernel Time(ms)	# of Memory Transfer	Total Memory Time (ms)	# of Read	Total Read Time (ms)	Size of Read	# of Write	Total Write Time (ms)	Size of Write	Total Map Time (ms)	Size of Map	# of Copy	Total Copy Time (ms)	Size of Copy
1	3	0	1	195.90927	3	32.11332	1	9.13647	16.00 MB	2	22.97685	32.00 MB	0	0	0 Byte	0	0 Byte
Total	3	0	1	195.90927	3	32.11332	1	9.13647	16.00 MB	2	22.97685	32.00 MB	0	0	0 Byte	0	0 Byte

FIGURE 12.6

The Context Summary page of the MatrixMultiplication application.

Kernel Name	Context ID	Command Queue	Device Name	Duration (ms)	Global Work Size	Group Work Size	Thread ID	Call Index
<code>mmmKernel</code>	1	0	Juniper	195.90927	{512,512}	{8,8}	3376	38

FIGURE 12.7

The Top10 Kernel Summary page of the MatrixMultiplication application.

Method	Time	GPRs	Wavefronts	ALUInsts	FetchInsts	WriteInsts	LDSFetchInsts	LDSWriteInsts	ALUBusy	ALUPacking	CacheHit	FetchUnitBusy	FetchUnitStalled	LDSBankConflict
<code>mmmKernel</code>	195.90927	17	4096	15383	4096	4	0	0	13.32	77.31	0	98.10	42.28	0
<code>mmmKernel_local</code>	114.16687	20	4096	20577	2804	4	4096	512	30.87	82.45	0	97.67	43.69	20.74
<code>mmmKernel_image</code>	21.40209	31	2048	21008	6144	8	0	0	83.78	84.83	69.31	98.09	0.09	0

FIGURE 12.8

The resulting GPU performance counters for three different methods of multiplying two matrices of size  $2048 \times 2048$ . The first row employs a method of using only the global memory, whereas the second row adds the usage of local memory. The third method uses OpenCL image objects.

1. Row 1 is the result from the MatrixMultiplication sample: This method uses the global memory to store the matrices.
  - a. The result shows that the kernel uses 17 general-purpose registers (GPRs). This is good because it is less likely that the number of wavefronts in-flight will be limited by the GPR usage. There are 4096 wavefronts generated. With a maximum of 24 SIMD cores on current devices, this is at least 170 wavefronts per core—far more than the device resources can run concurrently and easily enough to keep the device busy.
  - b. From the low value of `ALUBusy` and high value of `FetchUnitBusy` and `FetchUnitStalled` counters, we can conclude that the kernel is bottlenecked by fetching data from the global memory.
2. Row 2 is the result from the MatrixMultiplication sample with a `mmmKernel_local` kernel: This method uses the global memory to store the matrices but also utilizes the local memory to cache the results.
  - a. The result shows that we have improved the kernel running time from 195 to 114 ms (a 42% improvement) by utilizing the local memory to reduce the pressure of fetching data from the global memory. The shader compiler is also doing a slightly better job of packing the VLIW instructions (`ALUPacking` counter).
3. Row 3 is the result from the MatrixMulImage sample: This method uses the OpenCL image objects to store the matrices.
  - a. The result shows that the kernel running time has been significantly improved (down to 21 ms—an 89% improvement over Method 1 using only the global memory). From the performance counters, we can see that the value of the `FetchUnitStalled` counter is now near 0%. The value of `FetchUnitBusy` is still very high; this shows that this kernel is still bottlenecked over the data fetching from the global memory. However, using the image objects helps due to the support for data caching of image objects (69% cache hit for the `CacheHit` counter). The value of the `ALUBusy` counter is now quite high, signifying that the SIMDs are now utilized properly.

From these three methods, we have seen that the MatrixMultiplication kernel is bottlenecked by fetching data from the global memory. The second and third methods try to address this problem by utilizing the local memory and image buffer objects to cache the results from the global memory.

---

## DEBUGGING OPENCL APPLICATIONS

From the previous sections, we have seen how we can optimize performance of our OpenCL code. However, the paramount requirement is correctness. In this section, we discuss debugging in a heterogeneous environment and give an overview of the tools provided.

Debugging of parallel programs is traditionally more complicated than conventional serial code due to subtle bugs such as race conditions, which are difficult to detect and reproduce. The difficulties of debugging parallel applications running on

heterogeneous devices are exacerbated by the complexity and “black box” nature of the accelerated parallel platform.

The developer works on top of an API that hides the parallel platform’s implementation. Debuggers and profilers transform the developer’s view into a “white box” model, letting the developer peer into OpenCL to see how individual commands affect the parallel computing system. This allows developers to find bugs caused by incorrect OpenCL usage and optimize their applications for the system on which it runs. In the remainder of this chapter, we give a brief overview of gDEBugger, which is an advanced debugger and profiler for OpenCL, and we explain (briefly) the `printf` extension provided by AMD, a simpler but sometimes effective alternative to a full debugger.

## OVERVIEW OF GDEBUGGER

gDEBugger is an OpenCL and OpenGL debugger, profiler, and memory analyzer. It helps developers find bugs and optimize OpenCL performance and memory consumption.

gDEBugger consists of the following components:

- gDEBugger Visual Studio plug-in—a plug-in that adds advanced OpenCL and OpenGL debugging capabilities into Microsoft’s Visual Studio
- gDEBugger (stand-alone)—a stand-alone product that offers advanced OpenCL and OpenGL debugging and profiling capabilities over multiple platforms (Windows, Linux, and Mac)

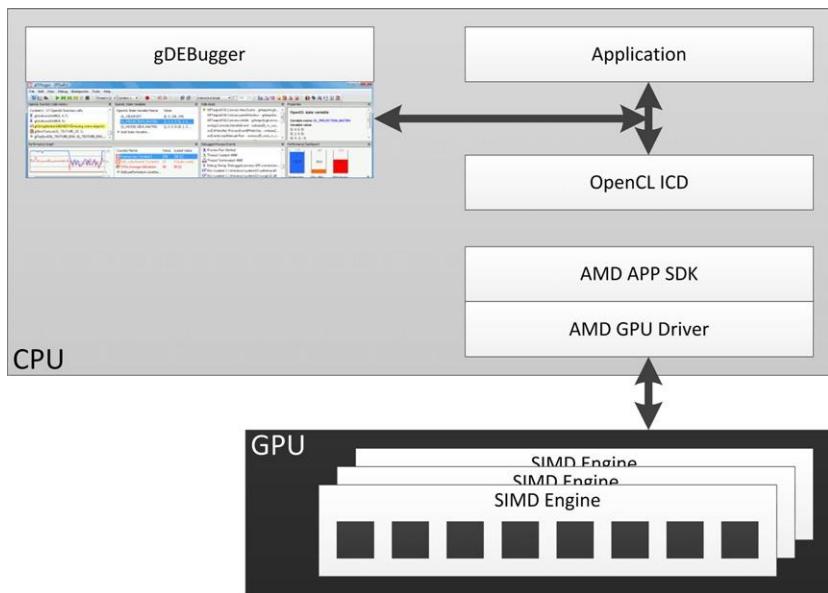
[Figure 12.9](#) shows a simplified high-level overview of how gDEBugger interacts with OpenCL devices. It shows some of the important modules/components. When gDEBugger is used, it intercepts the API calls between the Application and the OpenCL Installable Client Driver. This enables gDEBugger to log all API calls, identify all used OpenCL objects, and gather data on these objects. In addition, gDEBugger can actively modify some of the API calls, add calls to query additional information, and can eliminate some calls to help the developer analyze the performance bottlenecks.

In the following sections, we briefly describe the debugging capabilities of gDEBugger to advocate its usage in development environments.

## Debugging Parallel OpenCL Applications with gDEBugger

As previously discussed, there are two distinct regions of code in heterogeneous applications:

1. API-level code (`clEnqueue` calls, `clCreateBuffer`, etc.), which runs on the host
2. Compute kernel (run on devices) code

**FIGURE 12.9**

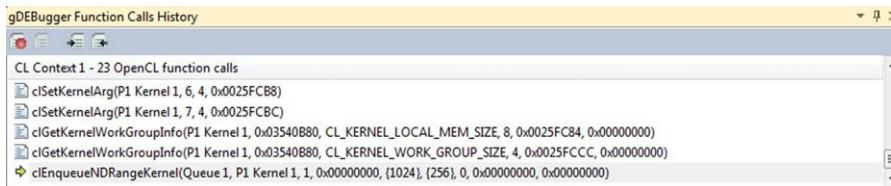
A high-level overview of where gDEBugger links to the application and OpenCL.

We give brief details about the debugging capabilities of gDEBugger for both the API-level code and compute kernels.

### ***API-Level Debugging***

API-level debugging is provided by gDEBugger to view the parameters that a run-time function is called with. The following are features provided by API-level debugging:

- API function breakpoints: gDEBugger will break the debugged application before the function is executed. This allows viewing the call stack that led to the function call, as well as the function's parameters.
- Record the OpenCL API call history: When the debugged process is suspended, gDEBugger shows us the last OpenCL function call (and its parameters) made in the currently selected context. [Figure 12.10](#) shows how gDEBugger provides a back-trace of the OpenCL commands invoked by the program.
- Program and kernel information: OpenCL contexts contain multiple program and kernel objects within them. gDEBugger allows us to verify which programs are associated with each context. If the program was created using `clCreateProgramWithSource`, we can also view the source code passed to this function.
- Image and buffers' data: An OpenCL context will contain buffers and images. gDEBugger allows us to view the object's data. For Image types, gDEBugger allows us to see the image data visualized in the “Image view.”

**FIGURE 12.10**

gDEBugger function call history.

- Memory checking: gDEBugger allows us to view the memory consumption for a specific context's buffers. The memory checking functionality provided by gDEBugger can be used to trace memory leaks and unneeded objects that were created or were not released in time, consuming device memory and making debugging more difficult.
- API usage statistics: gDEBugger shows statistical information about the currently selected context's API usage. By viewing a breakdown of the OpenCL API calls made in this context by various categories, we can see the number of times a function is called. This allows us to understand the performance of different runtime functions for different implementations and devices.

### ***Kernel Debugging***

gDEBugger also enables debugging within the compute kernel that is executing on the device. There are two ways to start debugging an OpenCL kernel with gDEBugger:

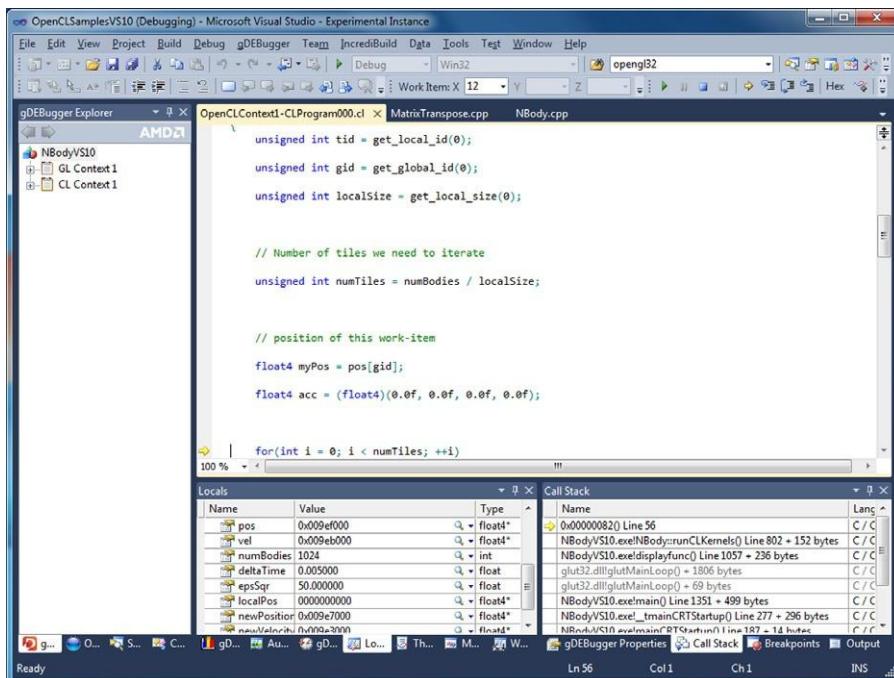
1. Setting a breakpoint in the kernel code
2. Stepping into the kernel execution from its corresponding `clEnqueueNDRangeKernel` call

A common concern when debugging an OpenCL application is keeping track of state in the presence of a large number of work items. A kernel on a GPU device will commonly be launched with many thousands of work items. gDEBugger assists the developer by allowing us to focus on a particular active work item by displaying the work item's variable's values and enforcing possible breakpoints for the work item. [Figure 12.11](#) shows the appearance of OpenCL kernel code while debugging with gDEBugger.

---

## **AMD PRINTF EXTENSION**

The AMD `printf` extension is another useful debugging tool. The `printf` extension is enabled by adding the line `#pragma OPENCL EXTENSION cl_amd_printf : enable` to the kernel source code. OpenCL extensions were described in detail in Chapter 11.

**FIGURE 12.11**

Kernel source view seen in gDEBugger for an application kernel.

The pragma lets the OpenCL compiler know about the possible usage of the `printf` function within a kernel body.

As seen in the following vector addition code, the usage of `printf` for OpenCL kernels is similar to its usage in C/C++ programming. Note that `printf` outputs the results of the format string for every work item of the NDRange on which it will be executed.

```
#pragma OPENCL EXTENSION cl_amd_printf : enable

//! Simple example showing usage of printf in a vector add kernel.
__kernel void vec_add(__global float * d_ip1, __global float * d_ip2,
__global float d_op, int N)
{
    int tid = get_global_id(0)
    if (tid < N)
```

```
{  
    float value_0 = d_ip0[tid];  
    float value_1 = d_ip0[tid];  
    //This line will print out the format string below 'N' times.  
    printf("Values read in %f\t %f\n", value_0, value_1);  
    d_op[tid] = value_0 + value_1;  
}  
}
```

---

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we examined different OpenCL profiling and debugging tools. OpenCL tools such as the APP Profiler and the KernelAnalyzer help us to understand the location of performance bottlenecks in our code. gDEBugger helps us to debug our programs.

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# WebCL

# 13

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## INTRODUCTION

The World Wide Web has several advantages over traditional software platforms. An application or service that is hosted on the web can be accessed from any device at any time, does not have to be installed, is always up-to-date, and facilitates flexible sharing of data and computation between the client and the server. As a result, an increasing number of applications are being developed for, and migrated to, the web.

At the same time, web applications are also becoming more complex, more interactive, and more visual. This creates demand for high-performance computing in a browser environment. Browser vendors have been able to meet this demand by improving the performance of JavaScript execution by orders of magnitude during the past few years. However, JavaScript engines are still unable to match the performance of native code, and they will continue to lag in performance due to the inherent properties of the language. In particular, JavaScript is not designed to exploit the multithreaded data-parallel computing capabilities available on modern GPUs, CPUs, and digital signal processors.

OpenCL, by contrast, is explicitly designed for that purpose. WebCL is a set of JavaScript bindings for OpenCL that aim to provide access to such capabilities from within a JavaScript application. This allows web developers to tackle computationally intensive tasks such as image processing and physics simulation from an environment that they are used to. These classes of applications are prohibitively slow when developed and run in JavaScript alone. To some degree, WebCL ([Khronos Group, n.d.](#)) already meets many of these needs, but this is only partially true: WebGL shaders are severely constrained compared to OpenCL kernels, are heavily biased toward three-dimensional graphics, and can only be executed on the GPU.

This chapter discusses preliminary work on using OpenCL in client-side web applications. The version of WebCL described here has been implemented as a Firefox 4.0 extension, mimicking WebGL in the API design. The WebCL version discussed is available at <http://webcl.nokiaresearch.com>. The system works on multiple platforms and can provide orders of magnitude speed-up over JavaScript when running compute-intensive workloads such as image processing. However, significant

challenges remain in the areas of security, robustness, portability, interoperability with WebGL, interfacing to JavaScript engines, and the availability of OpenCL support in the underlying platforms.

---

## DESIGNING THE FRAMEWORK

The ultimate goal of WebCL is to effectively use all of the underlying computing resources for client-side web applications. Therefore, to reserve and initialize the resources as well as control the execution, we also need a general-purpose framework, a language to describe the processing, and a library to manage the processing.

The approach should be capable of supporting a wide range of device capabilities. For example, mobile and embedded devices typically include a large degree of heterogeneity, with powerful execution environments supported by limited support for programming frameworks. Consequently, the programming language used to describe the computation should be widely and commonly supported by as many platforms as possible, as well as being well known and widely used from a developer's viewpoint.

C is a well-known, widely used, and widely supported language. However, C does not inherently possess any features that support parallel programming and would need enhancements to provide such support. When beginning to consider creating a parallel processing management library, the design suddenly starts to resemble the OpenCL framework. To develop a WebCL framework, this resemblance motivates us to leverage the established approach used for WebGL: a thin layer on top of native drivers, where the native API is bound to JavaScript by following the original API as closely as possible ([Table 13.1](#)). The thin layer approach presents us with several benefits: (1) That the adaptation layer has been developed to be as “lightweight” as possible provides for ease of maintenance; (2) porting OpenCL code to WebCL requires minimal effort; and (3) additional abstraction on the native side might restrict the usage, whereas abstracted user-friendly JavaScript utility libraries can be designed on top of this implementation.

Web usage would require that the approach be specified using generic semantics for portability. The programmer should not need to make choices based on the target platform. The framework should not assume binary compatibility nor depend on a fixed set of system libraries. The framework must therefore exclude OpenCL native and binary kernels. Moreover, host pointers are not supported because there is no intuitive mechanism to implement them in JavaScript and because host pointers could be exploited to expose a possible security hole.

In OpenCL, error management is based on checking return codes that come in the form of either return values or output parameters. The status of each operation must be checked individually. JavaScript utilizes exceptions for error handling, enabling the developer to encase a block of code in a try-catch construct.

**Table 13.1** WebCL Abstractions in Relation to OpenCL

OpenCL Abstract Data Type	WebCL Class
cl_command_queue	WebCLCommandQueue
cl_context	WebCLContext
—	WebCLDataObject
cl_device_id	WebCLDevice
cl_event	WebCLEvent
cl_kernel	WebCLKernel
cl_mem	WebCLMemoryObject
cl_platform_id	WebCLPlatform
cl_program	WebCLProgram
cl_sampler	WebCLSampler
—	WebCLUtils

---

## WEBCL PILOT IMPLEMENTATION

The WebCL API is provided as a Mozilla Firefox browser extension. The framework discussed previously serves as the starting point for this implementation. WebCL is designed to work together with other state-of-the-art web technologies, some of which, such as WebGL, have been recently introduced or are still under development. The Firefox extension gives us a good experimental starting point.

### Firefox Extension

A number of implementation approaches were evaluated for WebCL, including direct modification of Mozilla sources, an NPAPI plug-in, and a browser extension. The approach chosen for WebCL is a Firefox extension, implemented as a native code XPCOM (Cross Platform Component Object Model) component, enabling it to be developed independently from the Mozilla code base. This approach enables the implementation to be demonstrated and promoted without requiring the user to install and run a custom-built browser. Although NPAPI would have provided an attractive path for implementing WebCL (targeting a wide range of existing browsers), it is not well suited to providing APIs such as WebCL for use in a JavaScript context.

Mozilla Firefox is built on top of the Mozilla application framework. The user interface of the application is written in XUL, Mozilla's XML user interface markup language. The internals largely utilize XPCOM. XPCOM components are relatively separate functional units that utilize and provide services for other components. XPCOM provides a set of core functionalities, components, and classes, such as component management, file abstraction, object message passing, and memory management. Components can be written in a variety of languages. To facilitate access to

**FIGURE 13.1**


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Basic block diagram of WebCL implementation.

the native code OpenCL library, C++ was chosen (despite the fact that JavaScript is more common and actually encouraged for extensions by Mozilla).

WebCL is implemented in two layers as shown in [Figure 13.1](#): WebCL and the CLWrapper. The layer providing the actual WebCL API is called simply WebCL, and it contains all the browser-specific functionality, the XPCOM component, and JavaScript interoperability. WebCL builds on top of the CLWrapper layer, which is essentially a pure C++ wrapper for the OpenCL C API enabling WebCL to be ported for other browsers written in C++ by simply implementing a new WebCL layer. In addition, CLWrapper provides object life cycle management and a type-based mechanism for retrieving information parameters as well as setting kernel arguments.

## Connecting JavaScript and OpenCL

One of the most significant differences between C/C++ and JavaScript environments is JavaScript's support for resource management. In C and C++, dynamically allocated memory must be explicitly released by the programmer when the memory block is no longer needed. In JavaScript, the memory used by a variable is released by an automatic memory management system, known as *garbage collection*, once the system detects that the memory is no longer in use. However, the garbage collection overhead can be high and is not usually activated immediately, counting on the runtime system to determine when to release this memory. This can lead to unexpected and undesirable behavior from an application's perspective because performance can be heavily affected by a garbage collection. Moreover, if the garbage collection is extended to the task of resource management in general, any limited resource may not be released in a timely manner.

Some OpenCL resources can be very limited, such as the number of simultaneous OpenCL contexts. OpenCL memory buffers can allocate a large chunk of device memory, again setting an upper limit for the number of objects allocated simultaneously. In an environment using garbage collection, it may not be possible to ensure that these resources are deterministically released, leading to application errors that are difficult to reproduce and correct.

As the WebCL API makes an attempt to follow the characteristics of a standard JavaScript API, the implementation relies heavily on garbage collection. Therefore,

applications should avoid re-creating many WebCL objects but instead reuse them for as long as possible. It is likely that an option to explicitly release OpenCL-related resources will be added in the future, even though it would make the WebCL API slightly more complex and less subject to problems.

In many situations, the OpenCL API uses a void pointer for arbitrary data, and the data type is tied to the context. This is an unfortunate result of C's limited type system. For example, `clGetDeviceInfo` takes an argument called `param_name`, an enumeration denoting the actual piece of requested device information, and a void pointer argument called `param_value`, denoting the memory buffer to which the resulting value should be written. The enumeration assigns context and interpretation to the data written through the void pointer.

Given that JavaScript does not have pointers, and the type system is dynamic instead of static, a similar approach is obviously not achievable. Thus, type information needs to be added to certain calls, such as `clGetDeviceInfo` or `clSetKernelArg`. Sometimes, the type can be omitted because it can be deduced from the given value, when the value is an object of specific type. This is possible, for example, in the case of memory objects.

Many WebCL use cases (e.g., imaging and signal processing) require large amounts of data to be transferred between a JavaScript context and OpenCL buffers. In general terms, the type and nature of the data are only known by the OpenCL kernel code and cannot be determined by the WebCL API. Whereas the OpenCL C API uses a raw void pointer type and requires that the library handle copying the data to device memory, employing this approach with JavaScript does not work because the language has no void pointers. JavaScript arrays are an obvious choice, but they are inherently inefficient due to the need to copy the data item by item. Perhaps even more important, an array representation of the data imposes a certain structured interpretation on the data that may not be valid in all cases and is (in some cases) more limiting than using an arbitrary binary blob referenced through a void pointer.

An ideal solution would be to use an object that is able to hold a buffer of arbitrary sized data while providing multiple different views or interpretations for assigning meaning to the data. Such an object exists in the form of the data types `TypedArray` and `ArrayBuffer`, which are already supported in the WebGL API. However, these are not universally supported at this time. Although there is an implementation in the upcoming release of Mozilla Firefox, the support is only partial. For example, XPCOM interface definitions are missing, which makes using `TypedArrays` from browser extensions complicated.

Although in the future WebCL should use `TypedArray` directly, in this implementation we introduced an extra level of abstraction to keep the API and the implementation clean and to allow users to create implementations for browsers not supporting `TypedArray`. This abstraction is called `WebCLDataObject`. This becomes the data object used in the WebCL API, whereas OpenCL would use a void pointer in relation to memory objects. In addition, the data object provides certain utilities to support processing image data within a canvas element, which is important to support the examples discussed in the following sections.

---

## WEBCL HANDS-ON

The usage of WebCL resembles OpenCL coding. The difference from native coding is the host code that is now JavaScript code in web applications. Naturally, the different environments, JavaScript versus C, introduce several differences from the application standpoint, but these differences are not discussed in detail in this chapter. Also, we choose to omit checks that are normally essential when developing quality applications. The emphasis in these examples is on highlighting the differences between OpenCL and WebCL.

In the following, WebCL syntax is demonstrated by comparing it with an OpenCL implementation of gray scale conversion of a color image. The complete and additional WebCL examples can be found at <http://webcl.nokiaresearch.com>. The kernel assumes the input image is provided in a pixel format of RGBA color components, with a byte for each color component, and returns the gray scale image in the same format. As mentioned previously, the kernel source code is written in OpenCL C, and it can be identical for both OpenCL and WebCL.

Kernel source:

```
__kernel void desaturate(
    __global uchar4* src,
    __global uchar4* dst,
    uint width,
    uint height) {

    int x = get_global_id(0);
    int y = get_global_id(1);
    int i = y * width + x;

    uchar4 color = src[i];
    uchar lum =
        (uchar)(0.30f * color.x + 0.59f * color.y + 0.11f * color.z);
    dst[i] = (uchar4)(lum, lum, lum, 255);
}
```

The host source codes for both OpenCL and WebCL implementations are presented on the following pages. The implementations are compared in parallel as the reader is introduced to the application in logical steps. First, an OpenCL context must be set up. The default device of the first available platform is chosen without discrimination in order to keep the example simple.

The following source code illustrates how information retrieval from the OpenCL API is simplified in WebCL. In native OpenCL, it is necessary to first obtain the number of platforms, allocate necessary memory buffers, and, finally, retrieve the platform information and store it in the allocated buffer. WebCL implements this as a simple return value. A `property array` is delivered as a plain JavaScript array, and constants, as well as certain high-level functionality such as retrieving platforms and creating contexts, are accessed via a global WebCL object. A notable difference

is the omission of error reporting/handling code. Error handling on WebCL is implemented using the exception mechanism of JavaScript (callbacks may be implemented as well in the future).

**OpenCL:**

```
cl_uint numPlatforms;
cl_int status = clGetPlatformIDs(0, NULL, &numPlatforms);
cl_platform_id* platforms =
    (cl_platform_id*)malloc(sizeof(cl_platform_id)*numPlatforms);
status = clGetPlatformIDs(numPlatforms, platforms, NULL);
cl_context_properties clProperties[3] = {
    CL_CONTEXT_PLATFORM,
    (cl_context_properties)platforms[0],
    0 };
cl_context ctx = clCreateContextFromType(
    clProperties,
    CL_DEVICE_TYPE_DEFAULT,
    NULL,
    NULL,
    &status);
```

**WebCL:**

```
var platforms = WebCL.getPlatformIDs();
var ctx = WebCL.createContextFromType(
    [WebCL.CL_CONTEXT_PLATFORM, platforms[0]],
    WebCL.CL_DEVICE_TYPE_DEFAULT);
```

The next step is to set up buffers. The size of both the input and the output buffers, `bufSize`, is the size of the image pixel data in bytes (i.e., the number of pixels on the image multiplied by the number of bytes per pixel). Because WebCL utilizes an object-oriented programming paradigm, `createBuffer` is called as a member function of the `ctx` object, instead of `ctx` being given as a parameter. Host pointers are omitted in WebCL.

**OpenCL:**

```
cl_mem bufIn = clCreateBuffer(
    ctx,
    CL_MEM_READ_ONLY,
    bufSize,
    NULL,
    &status);
cl_mem bufOut = clCreateBuffer(
    ctx,
    CL_MEM_WRITE_ONLY,
    bufSize,
    NULL,
    &status);
```

**WebCL:**

```
var bufIn = ctx.createBuffer(WebCL.CL_MEM_READ_ONLY, bufSize);
var bufOut = ctx.createBuffer(WebCL.CL_MEM_WRITE_ONLY, bufSize);
```

Next, the OpenCL program needs to be created from kernel sources and then built. Native OpenCL takes the source code as an array of pointers to C strings. This array offers the opportunity to divide the string into multiple parts. In WebCL, the need for dividing the source string is not recognized and so the count parameter can be removed as well.

**OpenCL:**

```
cl_program program = clCreateProgramWithSource(
    ctx,
    1,
    (const char **)&kernelSrc,
    &kernelLength,
    &status);
size_t devicesLen;
status = clGetContextInfo(
    ctx,
    CL_CONTEXT_DEVICES,
    0,
    NULL,
    &devicesLen);
cl_device_id* devices = (cl_device_id *)malloc(devicesLen);
status = clGetContextInfo(
    ctx,
    CL_CONTEXT_DEVICES,
    devicesLen,
    devices,
    NULL);
status = clBuildProgram(program, 0, NULL, NULL, NULL, NULL);
```

**WebCL:**

```
var program = ctx.createProgramWithSource(kernelSrc);
var devices = ctx.getContextInfo(WebCL.CL_CONTEXT_DEVICES);
try {
    program.buildProgram(devices, "");
} catch(e) { ... }
```

We create the kernel and set its arguments in the following source lines. The actual types of kernel arguments must be known for proper WebCL type conversions. In JavaScript, variable typing is dynamic and thus very different from C. Because the kernel code expects data of an exact size and type, the JavaScript value must be correctly converted. WebCL objects, such as memory objects `bufIn` and `bufOut` in the example, do not require the type because there is no room for interpretation in this case, so `bufOut` is used without specifying an explicit type as in the example.

**OpenCL:**

```
cl_kernel kernel = clCreateKernel(program, "desaturate",
    &status);
status |= clSetKernelArg(kernel, 0, sizeof(cl_mem),
    (void*)&bufIn);
status |= clSetKernelArg(kernel, 1, sizeof(cl_mem),
    (void*)&bufOut);
status |= clSetKernelArg(kernel, 2, sizeof(cl_uint),
    (void*)&width);
status |= clSetKernelArg(kernel, 3, sizeof(cl_uint),
    (void*)&height);
```

**WebCL:**

```
var kernel = program.createKernel("desaturate");
kernel.setKernelArg(0, bufIn, WebCL.types.MEMORY_OBJECT);
kernel.setKernelArg(1, bufOut);
kernel.setKernelArg(2, width, WebCL.types.UINT);
kernel.setKernelArg(3, height, WebCL.types.UINT);
```

Finally, we require a command queue, into which we enqueue a write command to copy source data, the execution of the kernel, and a read command to copy the result data. In relation to OpenCL memory objects, the data pointer (`pixels`) is replaced by the use of a `WebCLDataObject` in WebCL that wraps the binary data without using a JavaScript array, as discussed previously.

**OpenCL:**

```
cl_command_queue cmdQueue = clCreateCommandQueue(
    ctx,
    devices[0],
    0,
    &status);

status = clEnqueueWriteBuffer(
    cmdQueue,
    bufIn,
    CL_FALSE,
    0,
    bufferSize,
    pixels,
    0,
    NULL,
    NULL);
status = clEnqueueNDRangeKernel(
    cmdQueue,
    kernel,
    2,
    NULL,
    globalWS,
```

```

localWS,
0,
NULL,
NULL);
status = clEnqueueReadBuffer(
    cmdQueue,
    bufOut,
    CL_FALSE,
    0,
    bufSize,
    pixels,
    0,
    NULL,
    NULL);
status = clFinish(cmdQueue);

```

**WebCL:**

```

var cmdQueue = ctx.createCommandQueue (devices[0], 0);

cmdQueue.enqueueWriteBuffer (bufIn, false, 0, bufSize,
dataObject, []);
cmdQueue.enqueueNDRangeKernel(kernel, globalWS.length, [],
globalWS, localWS, []);
cmdQueue.enqueueReadBuffer (bufOut, false, 0, bufSize, dataObject,
[]);
cmdQueue.finish ();

```

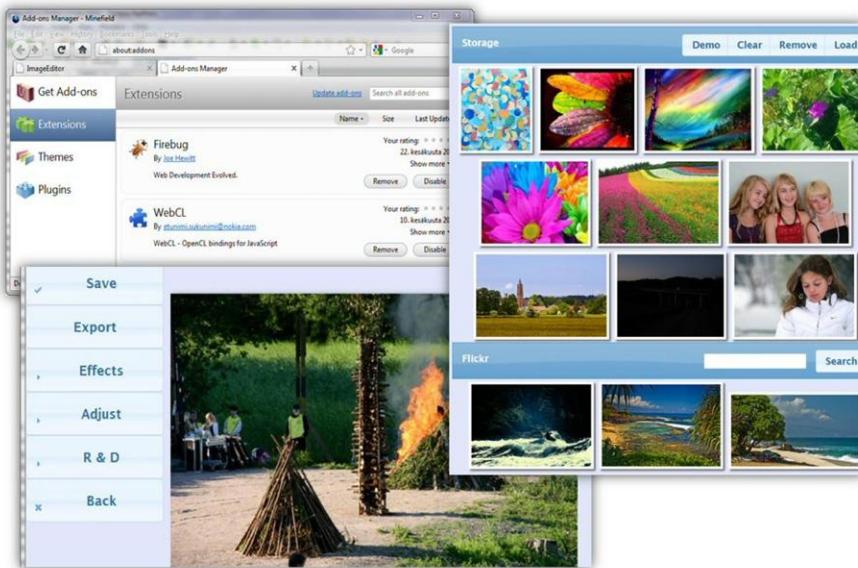
In WebCL, the resulting data is now available on the data object and can be utilized further by the application.

**WEB PHOTO EDITOR**

To test and benchmark WebCL in a realistic application scenario, we provide a web-based photo editor prototype, which is shown in [Figure 13.2](#). The editor is available for testing at <http://webcl.nokiaresearch.com>.

The Web Photo Editor example features a touch screen optimized user interface with buttons and sliders and also an experimental set of image processing operators. The operators include basic adjustments such as cropping, scaling, and rotation, as well as red-eye removal, blurring, smoothing, edge enhancement, distortion, and other special effects. The application runs entirely in the browser, without any server-side processing.

Due to WebGL and WebCL, most of the image processing operators are able to process dozens or even hundreds of megapixels per second on a regular laptop computer. This makes for a smooth, interactive editing experience that would remain a

**FIGURE 13.2**

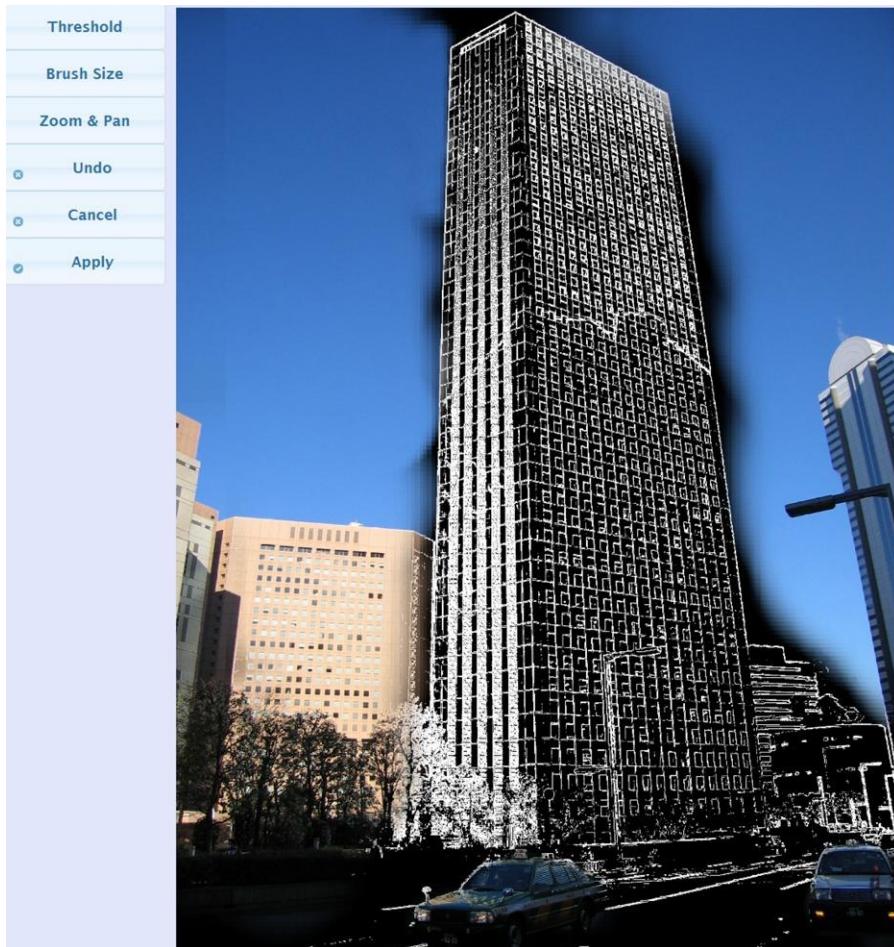
Prototype photo editor based on WebCL, WebGL, and HTML5.

distant dream without being able to harness the parallel processing power of modern GPUs and multi-core, vector-accelerated CPUs.

At the heart of the editing experience lies the painting mode. This mode allows image processing operators to be applied interactively on selected parts of the image using a paintbrush (Figure 13.3). To identify the main subject in a photo, you could first apply a global blur filter and then “paint in” the desired parts from the original image.

When the user selects an image for editing, four WebGL textures are allocated: (1) a source texture for storing the original image, (2) a temporary texture for storing intermediate results, (3) an alpha mask texture for the interactive paint mode, and (4) a destination texture for storing the processed and painted final image. The roles of the source and destination textures are reversed each time the user decides to “Apply” the pending edits. All the textures are the same size as the original image.

Most of the processing time in the photo editor is spent in WebGL shaders, WebCL kernels, and moving data back and forth. A WebGL shader is invoked every time the canvas needs to be redrawn, whether due to zooming, panning, painting, resizing the window, or other activities. Because all shaders and kernels operate on full-size images, the computational load, as well as the amount of data transferred back and forth between the CPU and the GPU, can be very high. Most of the data traffic is in fact redundant, stemming from the current restriction on sharing of textures between WebGL and WebCL.

**FIGURE 13.3**

Interactive painting in the photo editor. The user can apply an image processing operator, such as the Sobel edge detector in this example, on selected parts of the image by painting with a circular brush. The “Threshold” button on the left brings up a slider for adjusting the sensitivity of the edge detector.

---

## DISCUSSION

The WebCL implementation utilizes and works together with several novel technologies that are still under development. This makes the setup relatively unstable for commercial adoption at this time. However, to evaluate the performance opportunities provided by WebCL, we provide early performance data in [Table 13.2](#). In this setup, a 2.5 MPix RGB image was filtered using the previously described grayscaling

**Table 13.2** Measurement Data of Preliminary Experiments, Speedup Compared to JavaScript

Filter	JavaScript	WebCL@CPU	WebCL@GPU
Grayscale	1.0	1.5	2.5
Bilateral filtering	1.0	20	200

filter and bilateral filter. The bilateral filter is implemented according to the straight bilateral definition. The numbers depict the achieved improvement in performance compared to a JavaScript implementation. The results depend heavily on execution environment, and we intend these results to be an indication of performance rather than to be fully defined.

When WebCL applications are written, or existing code utilizing OpenCL is ported to WebCL, it is essential to realize that specific characteristics of the target environment can have a major impact on the quality and the usefulness of the result. Because WebCL is built on top of the OpenCL API, there will be unavoidable overhead (especially when data is being moved between the JavaScript context and native code). For this reason, it is generally best to avoid frequent data transfers. Once the data is pushed to the native side, it is best to keep it there until it is required in the JavaScript application.

During application development, no assumptions should be made about the underlying platform. Modern web applications should be expected to be run on a wide variety of devices ranging from desktops and mobile devices to game consoles. When executed in a native environment, it is more likely that an application will be specialized to take advantage of a specific type of platform, such as desktop workstations or AMD GPUs. Web applications should take care to gather a sufficient amount of information about the execution environment before performing any specialization. For example, kernel compilation times can be expected to be much higher when running on a mobile device. Also, as with native OpenCL applications, the kernel execution parameters should be set so that maximum values are retrieved as information parameters are honored.

As discussed previously, memory management in WebCL is based on the garbage collector built into the JavaScript runtime. Moreover, because limited OpenCL hardware and runtime resources are also associated with this mechanism through the WebCL API, overuse can lead to problems. Therefore, careful thought must be given to resource use throughout the application. Resource-heavy objects, such as contexts or memory objects, should be created once and reused as much as possible.

Algorithms used in kernels should be designed to be fast and efficient. However, any optimizations should be meaningful and evaluated against the fact that the web context is easily dominated by JavaScript speed (or lack thereof) and garbage collection overhead. Also, the web favors cross-platform solutions, so any designs sacrificing this should be avoided.

In the future, we hope to see more widespread support for the `TypedArray` data type in HTML and JavaScript. For example, the `canvas` element would benefit from

the ability to read and write the complete image pixel data with a `TypedArray` type versus using the currently supported pixel-by-pixel approach. In addition, WebCL inputs and outputs should ideally be bound to WebGL textures and buffers without any intermediate buffers. Unfortunately, because the current prototype is a Firefox add-on (as opposed to an integral part of the browser), our WebCL extension currently has no means to access WebGL resources. This can be remedied by either integrating WebCL into the browser engine or persuading the browser vendors to expose the necessary C/C++ APIs to extensions.

In the web environment, any API that the browser exposes to the outside world will, without exception, be attacked by malware. WebCL must therefore be designed with the assumption that every piece of host code or kernel code is potentially hostile. If the underlying OpenCL driver or platform is not sufficiently secure and robust, then the WebCL implementation must either put the driver/platform combination on a blacklist or provide additional safeguards via process isolation, memory protection, kernel code analysis, or other means. Unfortunately, the current-generation OpenCL hardware does not support context switches and, hence, driver controls for misbehaving code tend to be harsh and intrusive.

Writing performance portable OpenCL C can be very challenging. Moreover, most laptop and desktop computers, in addition to smartphones or other portable devices, do not yet ship with OpenCL drivers preinstalled. To make WebCL prevalent, it may be necessary to ship a CPU implementation of OpenCL with the browser.

---

## SUMMARY

In this chapter, we described an early implementation of WebCL as a Firefox extension, which provides a JavaScript API corresponding to the OpenCL API. The extension works on top of native OpenCL drivers, and OpenCL C kernel descriptions are passed as such to the OpenCL driver.

This approach to developing WebCL is promising, although there remain open issues, with security being the most obvious. Nevertheless, WebCL takes web applications to the next level by introducing remarkable performance. GPUs are already accessible through WebGL, but WebCL would further the use of GPUs for web-based execution. For the computation kernels, the CPU gave up to 20 $\times$  and the GPU up to 200 $\times$  performance compared to plain JavaScript on a modern laptop. These results show that the approach provides good performance in use cases that would otherwise be completely outside of JavaScript scope.

---

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