




# Minimal Indirect Thread Code Forth

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the inner interpreter

*“: NEXT IP )+ W MOV W )+ ) JMP ;*

*Now Forth was complete. And I knew it.”*

*Charles H. Moore, “Forth - The Early Years”, PDP-11*

The *inner* interpreter is Forth's *heartbeat*.

The dictionary is the Forth's *DNA*.

# the dictionary

*Ideally, there are two types of words (thread code):*

*primitive, that contains only machine code without calls*

*compound, that contains only references to words*

*and all words have header, first-word, parameters, last-word.*

*first-word: DOCODE for primitive and DOCOLON for compound*

*parameters: could be pure code or a list of references*

*last-word: EXIT for primitive and SEMIS for compound*

# the classic indirect thread code ITC

*compound:* ; a NEST and a UNNEST

```
+-----+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+
| LINK | 6 | D | O | U | B | L | E | 0 | NEST | DUP | PLUS | UNNEST |
+-----+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---+---
```

*primitive:* ; a DOCODE (jump to *self*) and a *EXIT* (jump to NEXT)

```
+-----+---+---+---+---+---+-----+self---+-----+-----+-----+
| LINK | 3 | D | U | P | DOCODE | code | ... .. | code | EXIT |
+-----+---+---+---+---+---+-----+-----+-----+-----+-----+
```

- aka, NEST is DOCOL and UNNEST is SEMIS

# the ITC code

## *NEXT:*

Fetch the address pointed by IP onto WR  
Increment IP by address (cell) size  
Jump to address at WR

## *NEST:* (aka DOCOLON, at start of words)

Push IP onto call stack  
Copy WR to IP  
Execute *NEXT*

## *UNNEST:* (aka SEMMIS, at end of words)

Pull IP from call stack  
Execute *NEXT*

## *EXIT:* (at end of code)

Execute *NEXT*

PS: non optimized pseudo code

# ITC details

All compound words, does a push and three jumps. (A call is a push and a jmp)

All primitive words, does three jumps.

Any call or jump could cause a pipeline refill.

Also, in optimized implementations, NEXT is placed between UNNEST and NEST, and executed two times.

Using the term 'Execute' because could be implemented as a inline macro or a 'Jump to'.

A proposal of  
minimal indirect  
thread code

# the minimal indirect thread code

*compound:* ; a *UNNEST*, (where did *NEST* go ?)

```
+-----+---+-----+---+-----+---+-----+---+-----+---+-----+
| LINK  | 6 | D | O | U | B | L | E | 0 | DUP | PLUS | UNNEST |
+-----+---+-----+---+-----+---+-----+---+-----+---+-----+
+-----+---+-----+---+-----+---+-----+---+-----+---+-----+
```

*primitive:* ; a *NULL* and a jump, (where did self reference go ?)

```
+-----+---+-----+---+-----+---+-----+---+-----+---+-----+
+
| LINK  | 3 | D | U | P | NULL | code | code | code | LINK |
+-----+---+-----+---+-----+---+-----+---+-----+---+-----+
+
+-----+---+-----+---+-----+---+-----+---+-----+---+-----+
```

PS. NULL is 0x000H, UNNEST is a primitive, LINK is 'jump \_unnest'



# the MITC code

*NEXT:*

```
Fetch the address pointed by IP onto WR  
Increment IP by address (cell) size  
if WR is NULL, then Execute JUMP  
else Execute NEST
```

*NEST:* (aka DOCOLON)

```
Push IP onto call stack  
Copy WR to IP  
Execute NEXT
```

*UNNEST:* (aka DOSEMIS)

```
Pull IP from call stack  
Execute NEXT
```

PS: non optimized pseudo code

# the MITC code

*JUMP:*

*Jump to address in IP*

*LINK:* (*Link is same as Exit*)

*Execute UNNEST*

*;*

*; both could also be hooks for debug*

*; IP and WR are free for any use*

*;*

PS: non optimized pseudo code

# Details

*The above code only performs a jump to a primitive word, whose header is NULL (0x0000).*

*Does only a compare per Forth word, to decide if executes a NEST or a JUMP.*

*All compound word references are placed and removed, onto the return stack, do not executing any jump.*

*All references are passed by return stack.*

*Uses 'jump and link' concept, as modern RISC-V processors does, and which C. H. Moore used in 60's*

# Small side effect

*Small side effect, transparent inside implementation:*

*>R must put value into second position on return stack*

*R> must get value from second position on return stack*

*R@ must copy the value at second position on return stack*

*(Because first position is itself the return address for those)*

*All words must **only** use >R R> R@ to access the return stack*

*No need to keep IP or WR, all references are into return stack*

```

header "UNNEST", "UNNEST"
    .word 0x0 ; nop

_unnest: // .pull
    lw s6, 0(s5) // ITC
    addi s5, s5, 1*CELL
    // jal zero, _next

_next: // .cast
    lw s9, 0(s6)
    addi s6, s6, CELL
    beq s9, zero, _jump
    // jal zero, _next

_nest: // .push
    addi s5, s5, -1*CELL
    sw s6, 0(s5) // ITC
    add s6, s9, zero
    jal zero, _next

```

```

_jump: // .pass
    // insert debug info
    jalr zero, s6, 0

_link: // .next
    // insert debug info
    jal zero, _unnest

// not optimized :)

```

A **inner**  
example  
with  
RISC-V

RISC-V, R32i, word is 32 bit cell, inner interpreter

Extended Indirect Thread Code

s5, return stack (RS), ~ reserved

s6, next reference (IP), ~ free for use outside

s9, temporary (WK), ~ free for use outside

zero, r0 register, is always zero, hardware wired

CELL is cell size in bytes

only 12 instructions for Forth inner interpreter

# Conclusions

Using MITC,

The functionality of the classic ITC implementation is maintained.

The interpreter becomes more effective, because it only performs 'jump and link' to the primitive words.

The dictionary becomes more compact, it uses one less reference in all the compound words.

# Ideas

In microcontrollers with Harvard architecture, a vocabulary with primitives words (machine code) stay in rom/flash, and vocabularies with compound words (pure references) stay in sram.

Could use a "trampoline" function for jump to a list of primitives as "token table". Use the number of primitives instead NULL for check for a primitive.

Vocabularies with compound words could be compiled and shared as relocatable libraries, because references 'tokens' to primitives words.

# Small Notes

*"Thou shalt not PICK; and Thou shalt never ROLL."*

In the examples, the names NEXT, NEST, UNNEST, EXIT are classic names for Forth inner interpreter. JUMP and LINK are traditional.

In the dictionary view as a tree, a primitive word is a leaf and a compound word is a branch.

Fig-Forth, cmForth and e-Forth implementations are used as public resources.

Prefer do not mix references and code inside a word

A compound word is *where two or more words merge to form a new one.*



# Some references

[http://www.forth.org/fig-forth/fig-forth\\_6502.pdf](http://www.forth.org/fig-forth/fig-forth_6502.pdf)

[http://www.forth.org/fig-forth/fig-forth\\_PDP-11.pdf](http://www.forth.org/fig-forth/fig-forth_PDP-11.pdf)

<https://www.bradrodriguez.com/papers/moving1.htm>

[http://www.forth.org/OffeteStore/1010\\_SystemsGuideToFigForth.pdf](http://www.forth.org/OffeteStore/1010_SystemsGuideToFigForth.pdf)

[http://www.forth.org/OffeteStore/1013\\_eForthAndZen.pdf](http://www.forth.org/OffeteStore/1013_eForthAndZen.pdf)

[http://www.forth.org/OffeteStore/1003\\_InsideF83.pdf](http://www.forth.org/OffeteStore/1003_InsideF83.pdf)

<https://muforth.nimblemachines.com/>

<https://muforth.nimblemachines.com/call-versus-branch-and-link/>

*: NEXT IP )+ W MOV W )+ ) JMP ;*

*IP )+ W MOV    is    W = (IP), IP++*

*W )+ ) JMP        is    jump (W), W++*

*<https://github.com/agseb/immu>*

*[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Threaded\\_code](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Threaded_code)*

digital

pdp11/70

RSA  
ERR

ADDR  
ERR

RUN

PAUSE

MASTER

USER

SUPER

KERNEL

DATA

ADDRESSING  
16 22

ADDRESS

POWER  
LOCK

OFF

PARITY  
HIGH LOW

DATA

21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0

USER D USER I

SUPER D SUPER I

KERNEL D KERNEL I

CONS PHY PROG PHY

DATA  
PATHS

BUS REQ

II ADR  
TRP CPU

DISPLAY  
REGISTER

LONG  
ADDR

EXAM

IMP

CONT

HALT

5. INT

5. BUS  
FULL

STOP