

Automated Architecture Recovery and Consistency Checking for Stream-Based Systems

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Abstract—Big data architectures have been gaining momentum in the last few years. For example, Twitter uses complex Stream topologies featuring frameworks like Storm to analyse and learn trending topics from billions of tweets per minute. However, verifying the consistency of said topologies often requires deployment on multi-node clusters and can be expensive as well as time consuming. As an aid to designers and developers evaluating their Stream topologies at design-time, we developed OSTIA, that is, “On-the-fly Static Topology Inference Analysis”. OSTIA allows reverse-engineering of Storm topologies so that designers and developers may: (a) use previously existing model-driven verification&validation techniques on elicited models; (b) visualise and evaluate elicited models against consistency checks that would only be available at deployment and run-time; (c) tackle the occurrence of common anti-patterns across considered topologies. We illustrate the uses and benefits of OSTIA on three real-life industrial case studies.

I. INTRODUCTION

Big data applications process vast amounts of data [1] for the purpose of gaining key business intelligence through complex analytics such as machine-learning [2]. Said applications are receiving increased attention in the last few years given their ability to yield competitive advantage by direct investigation of user needs and trends hidden in the enormous quantities of data produced daily by the average internet user. Gartner predicts¹ that said business intelligence and analytics applications will remain top focus for CIOs until at least 2017-2018. However, there are many costs and complexities behind harnessing said applications ranging from very high infrastructure costs to steep learning curves for the many frameworks involved in designing and developing applications for Big data, e.g., Apache Storm², Apache Spark³ or Hadoop⁴ to name a few.

In our own experience with designing and developing for Big Data, we observed that a key complexity lies in evaluating the effectiveness of architectures, or better, *topologies* - in the Big data jargon. Effectiveness in Big data terms means being able to deploy architectures/topologies consistently with restrictions from necessary Big data frameworks involved (e.g.,

Spark, Storm, etc.). A very trivial example of said restrictions consists in the need for the topology to represent a Directed-Acyclic-Graph (DAG), a key constraint of the Storm and Spark frameworks. We argue that such effectiveness can be maintained at design time thus easing deployability of Big data topologies and saving the time and effort of running trial-and-error experiments while setting up expensive infrastructure needs as well as while fine-tuning complex framework setup options.

In an effort to tackle the above complexity, we developed OSTIA, that stands for: “On-the-fly Static Topology Inference Analysis”. OSTIA allows designers and developers to infer the application topology through reverse-engineering and architecture recovery [3]. During this inference, OSTIA analyses the inferred topology to make sure it is consistent with restrictions from the necessary Big data frameworks at hand. Currently, OSTIA focuses on Storm, i.e., one of the most famous and established real-time stream processing Big data engine [4]. OSTIA hardcodes intimate knowledge on the development and framework dependence structure necessary for correct Storm topologies for two purposes: (a) realising a visual representation for said topologies; (b) checking said topologies against framework restrictions that would only become evident during infrastructure setup and runtime; (c) checking that said topologies do not show any anti-patterns [5] that may lower performance and limit executability; (d) finally, export said topologies for further analysis, e.g., through verification techniques [6].

This paper outlines OSTIA, elaborating its major usage scenarios and its benefits while properly discussing and addressing its limitations. Also, we evaluate OSTIA on three industrial case-studies from an open-source social-sensing application to show that OSTIA yields valuable design and development insights using an inference analysis of the three static topologies for said application. Finally, we elaborate on how OSTIA helps the quality evaluation of recovered topologies by means of valuable verification techniques. We conclude that OSTIA does in fact provide valuable insights for software engineers to increase quality of their Big data design and development featuring Storm so that expedite deployment can take place.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section II

¹<http://www.gartner.com/newsroom/id/2637615>

²<http://storm.apache.org/>

³<http://spark.apache.org/>

⁴<https://hadoop.apache.org/>

outlines our research problem, research questions and our approach at tackling them. Section III outlines OSTIA, discussing its typical usage scenarios and outlining the main benefits we perceived in using it. Section IV elaborates further on the benefits by providing an actual evaluation of OSTIA using three cases from industrial practice. Section V-B discusses the results and evaluation, also outlining OSTIA limitations and potential threats to its validity. Finally, Sections VI and VII outline related work and conclude the paper.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN

The work we elaborated in this paper is stemming from the following research question:

“Can we improve the structural quality of Big-Data streaming designs?”

The results contained in this paper in response to this research question were initially elaborated within a free-form focus group [7] involving three experienced practitioners and researchers on Big data streaming technology such as Storm. Following the focus group, through self-ethnography [8] and brainstorming we designed OSTIA and identified the series of consistency checks as well as anti-patterns that can now be evaluated through OSTIA while recovering an architectural representation for Storm topologies. The prototype thus developed, was refined incrementally through a series of case-studies [9] involving an industrial partner. Finally, we applied well established verification approaches to integrate the value and benefits behind using OSTIA.

- elaborate on the case-study partner
- elaborate on the case at hand for that partner
- elaborate on the origin of the application and how it uses social-sensor
- also, elaborate on the case by NETF which starts and stems from KILLRWEATHER
- should we elaborate on something else?

TODO: @anyone, feel free to elaborate more!!

III. RESEARCH SOLUTION

@Pooyan,Andrea: here we should probably elaborate on OSTIA’s architecture and the design principles that led us to define it as such... also we might want to elaborate on its components, the structure I’m suggesting below is merely tentative but it will give us ahead start!!

- OSTIA Architecture
- we should probably elaborate the architecture part (or on a separate “implementation” part or paragraph) with a link to the downloadable technology - @Andrea: can we bundle it up as plugin for Eclipse? E.g., somehow using RCP?
- OSTIA Antipatterns Module
- OSTIA Visualisation Module
- OSTIA extensibility
- OSTIA explanation of use and simple usage scenario

IV. EVALUATION

@Marcello,Francesco: we should also probably elaborate on the kind of verification technique we are using and how that can help in evaluating the topology.. remember here we do not have the DICE restriction so we can mention any kind of analysis that it would be possible to run, also analyses that are currently in the hands of other DICE partners!!

- we can use the ATC case study as much as we want - that yields already three topologies that we can infer
- ATC has agreed that we can mention their role in this exercise, I also showed them the topology that we elicited basically with OSTIA and they already made considerations on how to improve it
- in the evaluation we should also comment on how OSTIA can help you in visualizing the application topology that you may be considering to use by reusing a big-data application for something else... visualising the application topology and analysing it may allow you to improve it while you are using it as a starting point for your application
- another application that we can use is the one that NETF is considering for their own scenario, KILLRWEATHER - <https://github.com/killrweather/killrweather>
- any additional case that we can run?
- what do the results show? do we have a way to quickly quantify the time that is saved by using this approach? e.g., the time that is saved in setting up and running the infrastructure and how much would that time saved have costed these could be valuable evaluation insights

V. DISCUSSION

A. Findings and Quality-Improvement Insights

- we should probably enumerate the many issues we have found with the work in WP2 and WP3 to allow some good insights for the people using OSTIA
- also we could discuss the benefits one by one using some usage-scenarios

B. Approach Limitations and Threats to Validity

- here we could elaborate on the limitations of addressing only storm and why we are addressing storm (e.g., the main technology for streaming currently)
- we should probably discuss the fact that the tech is still eclipse-based and how this is not really a limitation after all
- are there any threats to validity? we should probably discuss this as well

VI. PREVIOUS AND RELATED WORK

The work behind OSTIA stems from the EU H2020 Project called DICE⁵ where we are investigating the use of model-driven facilities to support the design and quality enhancement of Big-Data applications. In the context of DICE,

⁵<http://www.dice-h2020.eu/>

much previous work has been done to support the design, development and deployment of Big-Data applications. For example, we have been developing a series of ad-hoc technological specifications, i.e., meta-model packages that contain all concepts, constructs and constraints needed to develop and operate Big-Data applications for the frameworks coded into the technological specifications. These specifications can be used, for example, to instantiate Big-Data components following standard Model-Driven procedures, without the need to learn said frameworks at all. OSTIA uses insights gained in developing and using said frameworks to apply consistency checks in the context of recovering Big-Data architectures, specifically, for Storm. Much similarly to the DICE effort, the IBM Stream Processing Language (SPL) initiative [10] provides an implementation language specific to programming streams management (e.g., Storm jobs) and related reactive systems based on the Big-Data paradigm. Although SPL is specific to WebSphere and IBM technology, its attempt at providing a relatively abstract language to implement for streams management and processing is remarkably related to OSTIA, since one of its aims is to improve quality of streams management by direct codification of higher order concepts such as streams declarations.

In addition, there are several work close to OSTIA in terms of their foundations and type of support.

First, from a quantitative perspective, much literature discusses quality analyses of Storm topologies, e.g., from a performance [11] or reliability point of view [12]. Said works use complex math-based approaches to evaluating a number of Big data architectures, their structure and general configuration. However, although novel, these approaches do not suggest any significant design improvement method or pattern to make the improvements *deployable*. With OSTIA, we make available a tool that automatically elicits a Storm topology and, while doing so, analyses said topology to evaluate it against a number of consistency checks that make the topology consistent with the framework it was developed for (Storm, in our case). As previously introduced, a very trivial example of said checks consists in evaluating whether the topology is indeed a Directed-Acyclic-Graph (DAG), as per constraints of the Storm framework. To the best of our knowledge, no such tool exists to date.

@Andrea, Pooyan: I think here could be a good idea to cite one or two of your previous works, e.g., with optimising Storm topologies

Second, from a modelling perspective, approaches such as StormGen [13] offer means to develop Storm topologies in a model-driven fashion using a combination of generative techniques based on XText and heavyweight (meta-)modelling, based on EMF, the standard Eclipse Modelling Framework Format. Although the first of its kind, StormGen merely allows the specification of a Storm topology, without applying any consistency checks or without offering the possibility to *recover* said topology once it has been developed. By means of OSTIA, designers and developers can work hand in hand while refining their Storm topologies, e.g., as a

consequence of verification or failed checks through OSTIA. As a consequence, tools such as StormGen can be used to assist the preliminary development of quick-and-dirty Storm topologies, e.g., to be further processed and improved with the aid of OSTIA.

Third, from a verification perspective, ...

@Marcello, Francesco: here we should probably elaborate on what kind of verification approach we are using and what other verifications may be done, e.g., using some related work at this point... e.g., is there any other verification attempt considering JSON as an interchange format? I would discuss these and compare them to OSTIA as a whole

In addition, several deployment modelling technologies may be related to OSTIA since their role is to model the deployment structure represented by Big data architectures so that it can actually be deployed using compliant orchestrators. One such example is Celar⁶, a deployment modelling technology based on the TOSCA OASIS Standard⁷. Celar and related technologies (e.g., Alien4Cloud⁸) may be used in combination with OSTIA since their role is that of representing the infrastructure needed by modelled (Big data) applications so that they can be deployed. This representation is realised by means of infrastructure blueprints to be run by compliant orchestrators. The role of OSTIA in this scenario, is that of helping the quality refinement of an application topology to represent the very infrastructure needed for its run-time environment.

VII. CONCLUSION

Big data applications are rapidly gaining interest and momentum by small to big players on the market, even beyond the IT corner. Applications that may heavy use of Big data application frameworks require intensive reasoning on design aspects typically around the topology of basic operations to be applied while manipulating the data. In this paper we presented OSTIA, a tool to assist designers and developers in this reasoning campaign. OSTIA helps designers and developers improving the quality of their big data topologies by recovering and analysing the architectural topology on-the-fly. The analyses that OSTIA is able to apply focus on checking for the compliance to essential consistency rules specific to targeted big data frameworks. Also, OSTIA allows to check whether the recovered topologies contain occurrences of key anti-patterns we elicited and studied in our own experience and previous work. In addition, OSTIA allows to export the recovered topology using a common JSON format to encourage further verification using known verification and validation technology. By running a case-study with a partner organization, we observed that OSTIA assists designers and developers in establishing and improving the quality of topologies behind big data applications. In the future we plan to further our understanding of the anti-patterns that may

⁶<https://github.com/CELAR/c-Eclipse>

⁷<https://www.oasis-open.org/apps/org/workgroup/tosca/>

⁸<http://alien4cloud.github.io/>

emerge across big data topologies, e.g., learning said anti-patterns by using graphs analysis techniques inherited from social-networks analysis. Also, we plan to expand OSTIA to support further technologies beyond the most common application framework for streaming, i.e., Storm. Finally, we plan to further evaluate OSTIA using more ad-hoc empirical evaluation campaigns in industry.

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