

# Energy and Time Determine Scaling in Biological and Computer Designs

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## Abstract

Metabolic rate in animals and power consumption in computers are analogous quantities that scale similarly with size. We analyze vascular systems of vertebrates and on-chip networks of microprocessors, where natural selection and human engineering respectively have produced optimized networks. Both network designs simultaneously reduce energy costs and increase flow rates. Using a simple network model, our analysis explains empirically observed trends in the scaling of metabolic rate in organisms and power consumption in chips across several orders of magnitude in size. This result suggests that a single principle governs the designs of complex systems that process energy, materials, and information. Just as fundamental shifts in metabolic energy have accompanied the evolutionary transitions in biology, our models suggest that energy efficiency will change as computer technology becomes more distributed and decentralized in the shift to multi-core and dispersed cyber-physical systems.

# 1 Introduction

Both organisms and computers have evolved from relatively simple beginnings into complex systems that vary by orders of magnitude in size and number of components. Evolution, by natural selection in organisms and by human engineering in computers, required critical features of architecture and function to be scaled up as size and complexity increased. In Biology, Kleiber's law describes the empirical relation between metabolic rate and many other traits, such as lifespan, heart rate, and number of offspring, with body size [11]. Similarly, computer architecture has Moore's law to describe scaling of transistor density and performance [16], Koomey's law for the energy cost per computation [12], and Rent's rule for the external communication per logic block [7].

We posit that these empirical patterns originate from a common principle: Networks that deliver resources are optimized to reduce energy dissipation and increase flow rates, expressed here as minimizing the energy-time product. That is, both living systems and computer chips are designed to maximize the rate at which resources are delivered to terminal nodes of a network and to minimize the energy cost in the network. In biology, the vascular network of vertebrate animals supplies oxygen and nutrients to every cell, fueling metabolism for maintenance, growth and reproduction. Since energy is a limited resource, we assume that organisms are selected to minimize the energy dissipated in the network [22]. Similarly, computation in microprocessors relies on a network of microscopic wires that transmits bits of information between transistors on a chip. In order to maximize computation speed and minimize power consumption, this network is designed to deliver the maximum information flow at the lowest possible energy cost.

Here, we model vertebrates as composed of regions of tissue that receive oxygen carried by blood via a hierarchical vascular network of pipes, and we model microprocessors as composed

of transistors that perform computation, exchanging information over a modular network of wires. As each system scales up in size, we consider: 1) the rate at which resources are delivered by the network and processed in the nodes; and 2) the energy dissipated during these processes. Despite the obvious differences between organisms and chips, we present a general model and derive energy and time scaling relations from physical principles applicable to each system. Using these relations, we express the optimal network design as a tradeoff between energy cost and processing speed.

Earlier models in biology have assumed either energy minimization, e.g., [22] or optimal resource delivery rate [2], but they have not formalized the tradeoffs between them, as we do here. This formalization helps explain how nature and engineering are able to produce designs that approach pareto-optimal along the energy-time tradeoff. Thus, in biology evolution has produced mammals ranging in size from mice to elephants, rather than converging on a single optimal size, and in computer architecture engineers have designed processors ranging from a few thousand transistors to several billion, each of which fills a specific computational niche.

In the rest of the paper, we first present the unified model of network scaling (Section 2) and the basic assumptions underlying the model (Section 2.1). We then use the model to derive a series of predictions about how time and energy scale with system size first for organisms (Section 3.1) and then for computers (Section 3.3). We then discuss new insights into previously analyzed scaling relationships in biology that we gain from the time-energy minimization framework, and we test scaling predictions with empirical power and performance data on computer chips. Finally, in Section 4 we discuss the implications of these results for evolutionary transitions in nature and engineering.

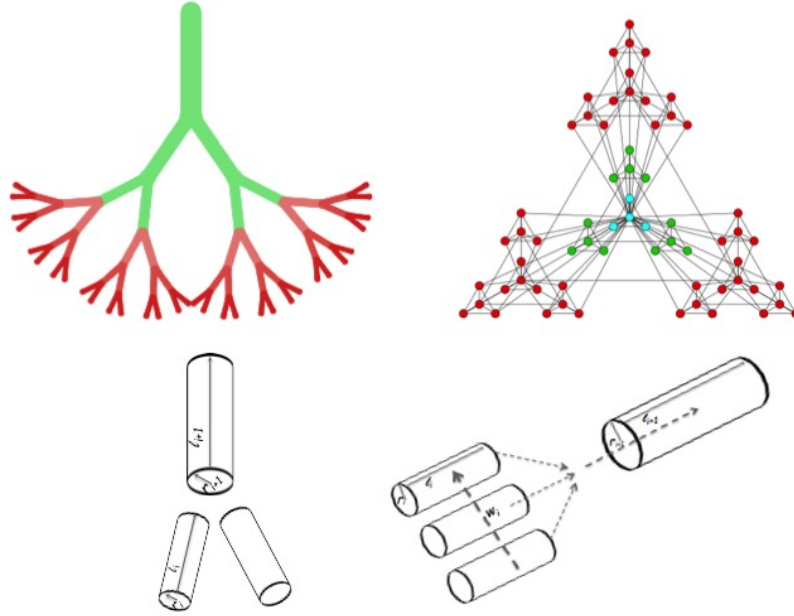


Figure 1: Panel a: idealized fractal branching model of the cardiovascular network. Explain  $D_l$ ,  $D_r$ ,  $\lambda$ ,  $H$ ,  $N$  and scaling by referring to the picture. Panel c illustrates the communication dimension,  $D_w$ , which measures how the ratio of internal (intra-module) communication per node to external (inter-module) communication per node scales with the level of the module in the hierarchy. Keep  $b$  and  $d$ ?

## 2 A Unified Model of Network Scaling

Vascular systems are hierarchical branching networks where blood vessels (pipes) become thicker and longer as hierarchy increases from the capillaries to the aorta. Similarly, microprocessor chips are organized hierarchically into a nested structure of modules and submodules, where wires become longer and thicker as the hierarchical level of a module increases (Figure 1). These wires are organized into metal layers, where short, thin wires are routed on the lowest layers, and long, thick wires are placed on the top layers. We model the scaling of length ( $l$ ) and thickness ( $r$ ) of both pipes and wires as

$$l_i = l_0 \lambda^{\frac{i}{D_l}} \quad (1)$$

and

$$r_i = r_0 \lambda^{\frac{i}{D_r}}, \quad (2)$$

where  $i$  is the hierarchical level of a branch or module,  $\lambda$  is the branching factor, and  $D_l$  and  $D_r$  are the length and thickness dimensions. This model is akin to the hierarchical pipe model of vascular systems proposed in [22],  $\lambda^{\frac{1}{D_r}}$  and  $\lambda^{\frac{1}{D_l}}$  correspond to West et al.'s  $\beta$  and  $\gamma$  respectively (note that in [22], the aorta or top of the network is labelled as level 0, while here the smallest branches, the capillaries, are labelled as level 0.) In vascular networks,  $r$  represents the radius of cylindrical pipes, and in computer interconnects,  $r$  represents the width of wires with aspect ratio 1.  $D_r$  describes the relative radius of pipes between successive hierarchical levels. The smallest edges occur at  $i = 0$ , and have constant radius,  $r_0$ , and length,  $l_0$ , that scales with system size [2].

The length parameter  $D_l$  determines the spatial dimension occupied by the nodes of the network [15]. For chips,  $D_l = 2$ , since transistors are placed on a single two-dimensional layer [10]. For three-dimensional organisms,  $D_l = 3$ .  $D_l$  describes both the relative length of pipe between successive hierarchical levels and the external dimension of the system.

Digital circuits scale in a third way in addition to length and radius, which has no direct analog in organisms. In vascular networks, each pipe branches at each hierarchical level (generally bifurcating so that  $\lambda = 2$  [?].) Chips have multiple wires per module, and their number increases with the hierarchical level. This difference arises from the fact that digital circuits are decentralized networks connecting multiple sources and destinations, while vascular networks are centralized, with blood flowing from a single heart. To account for this difference, we introduce a new equation, in which the communication (or number of wires) per module increases

with the hierarchical level as

$$w_i = w_0 \lambda^{i/D_w}, \quad (3)$$

where  $D_w$  is the communication dimension and  $w_0$  is the average number of wires per node. This hierarchical scaling of communication is a well-known pattern in circuit design called Rent's rule [7], where  $p = \frac{1}{D_w}$  is the Rent's exponent.\* This pattern is not unique to circuits and has been shown to occur in many biological networks [20, 3]. Vascular systems correspond to a special case where  $w_i = 1$  for all  $i$ .

## 2.1 Assumptions of the Unified Model

Before deriving scaling predictions from the model, we make explicit its assumptions and how they relate to earlier models, both in computation and biology:

1. **Time and energy are equally important constraints:** System designs seek to deliver the maximum amount of resource per unit time for the minimum amount of energy overhead. In computer architecture this relationship is expressed as the *energy-delay product*, which formalizes the insight that a chip that is ten times faster or ten times more energy efficient is ten times better.
2. **Steady state:** Resource supply matches processing demand [2]. That is, the network supplies resources continually to the terminal nodes and is always filled to capacity. This avoids network delays and the need to store resources in the system. Specifically,
  - (a) System designs balance network delivery rates with node processing speeds, so that resources are delivered at exactly the same rate that they are processed.

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\*Rent's rule is typically expressed as  $C(n) = kn^p$ , where  $C_n$  is the external communication of a module,  $n$  is the size of the module (number of nodes),  $k$  is the average external communication of a module with size 1, and  $p$  is the Rents exponent. For a hierarchy with branching factor of  $\lambda$ , the size of a module is given as  $n = \lambda^i$ , where  $i$  is the hierarchical level. Therefore, we can rewrite Rents rule as  $c_i = c_0 \times \lambda^{ip}$ , where  $c_0 = w_0$  and  $p = \frac{1}{D_w}$ .

(b) **Pipelining:** A concept from computer architecture in which resources, e.g., computer instructions, leave the source at the same rate that they are delivered to the terminal nodes, and the network is always full. In the hierarchical networks considered here, the source is the highest branch (root), and the principle holds within every level of the hierarchy. Consequently, resources flow through the network continually at maximum speed, and they do not accumulate at source, sink, or intermediate locations.

3. **Terminal units and service volumes:** In contrast to Ref. [22] we do not assume that terminal units have fixed size. In chips it is well known that transistor size has shrunk over many orders of magnitude. Previous scaling models of biology posit that the service volume (region served by terminal units of the network) actually increases with system size [22, 2]. Following Ref. [2], we assume that capillaries have fixed radius but that their length is proportional to the radius of the service volume. Similarly, the radius of the isochronic region (service volume) for chips scales proportionally with decreasing transistor size.

In addition to these general assumptions, we make the following refinements to accommodate salient differences between biology and computer architecture.

1. In biology, the energy processed by a service volume,  $E_{node}$ , is invariant with system size. That is, as the service volume increases with body size, the total amount of energy processed remains constant. We do not make this assumption for chips.
2. **Component packing:** In chips, we assume that total chip area is constant, and the number of transistors  $N$  is the square of the process size, i.e., the length of one side of a transistor.

In biology it is known that blood flow slows by several orders of magnitude as it travels from the aorta to the capillaries (CITE somebody). Scaling models have generally ignored this



slowing [22, 2], but we leave this variable in our equations to highlight where velocity affects time and energy scaling.

### 3 Predictions of the Model for Organisms and Computers

We define  $E_{net}$  and  $T_{net}$  respectively to be the energy dissipated and the time taken by the network to deliver a unit of resource to a node. For organisms the resource is oxygen (in mammals, carried by a unit volume of blood), and for computers the fundamental resource is a bit of information. Similarly, we define  $E_{node}$  and  $T_{node}$  as the energy dissipated and the time taken by a node to process that resource. For organisms, the node is the service volume corresponding to a region of tissue supplied by a single capillary, which corresponds to a volume of tissue containing a constant number of mitochondria, the organelles that process oxygen molecules to generate biologically useful energy in the form of ATP. (Citations needed: banavar? Jordan's paper, maybe Woodruff paper?) The node is defined as having a constant rate of delivery of oxygen and a constant ability to process oxygen, but the volume of the nodes vary across organism size.

$E_{net}$  is the energy required to deliver oxygen to the cells (as analyzed in [22]), and  $E_{node}$  is the energy dissipated by cells processing incoming oxygen.  $T_{net}$  and  $T_{node}$  are the time delay between delivering new resources to the cell and the time taken for the cell to process those resources respectively. From the steady-state assumption,  $T_{net} = T_{node}$ , i.e., supply matches demand as in [2].

For computers, the nodes are transistors, and  $E_{net}$  and  $E_{node}$  represent the energy dissipated as bits are delivered to transistors and the energy required to process the bits at the node, and  $T_{net}$  and  $T_{node}$  are the times required to deliver and process a bit at the node (i.e., network and transistor switching delay). In computers the time taken to deliver and process bits is bounded by the maximum of the communication time  $\max(T_{net}, T_{node})$ , i.e. a node cannot

process another bit until it is delivered, and a node cannot process a new bit until it is done processing the previous bit. In contrast to Biology, as we show below, the network delivery rate does not match the uptake rate at the nodes. Thus, for biology the total delay is defined as  $T_{sys} = T_{net} = T_{node}$  while for computers the total delay is defined as  $T_{sys} = \max(T_{net}, T_{node})$ . For both organisms and computers we define the total energy as the sum of energy dissipated in the network plus the energy dissipated in the nodes:  $E_{sys} = E_{net} + E_{node}$ .

In the following, we derive general scaling relationships between  $E_{net}$ ,  $T_{net}$ ,  $E_{node}$  and  $T_{node}$  and the number of nodes in the network  $N$ , under the condition that the energy time product is minimized.  $N$  is a measure of system size (i.e. the number of capillaries or services volumes in an organism and the number of transistors on a chip). In organisms, larger  $N$  implies larger organism volume and mass. For computer chips,  $N$  increases by shrinking components, and so increasing  $N$  does not imply increasing chip area, which we assume to be constant.

The goal of minimizing the energy time product means that system designs seek to deliver the maximum amount of resource per unit time for the minimum amount of energy overhead. This is equivalent to minimizing the energy dissipated to deliver and process a unit of resource, while simultaneously minimizing the time to deliver and process that resource. Assuming that time and energy are equally important, this quantity becomes the energy-time product, a well-known concept in computer architecture referred to as the energy-delay product.

We express the optimal network design as a constraint optimization problem in which the whole system's energy-time product is minimized:

$$\min_{D_r, D_w, D_l} (E_{sys} \times T_{sys}) \quad (4)$$

We derive expressions for  $E_{sys}$  and  $T_{sys}$  for organisms (Sec. 3.1) and computers (Sec. 3.3) in terms of the dimensions  $D_r$ ,  $D_w$ , and  $D_l$  where  $D_l$  is fixed by the external dimensions of the system.

### 3.1 Organisms

In this section, we derive general energy and time scaling relations for the network and nodes in organisms in order to minimize Eq. 4. We first define scaling relationships for the four key quantities  $E_{net}$ ,  $T_{net}$ ,  $E_{node}$  and  $T_{node}$ . We then show how they scale with  $N$ , in order to minimize Eq. 4. In contrast to computer scaling, biological scaling relationships have been examined in many different theoretical models (CITE lots of theoretical models). Two of those models [22, 2] determined scaling relationships by separately minimizing energy dissipation [22] and minimizing metabolic delivery time [2]. Here we emphasize the consequences of incorporating these approaches into the broader computational scaling framework of minimizing the energy time product.

$E_{net}$ : From basic principles of hydraulics, the energy dissipated to transport a constant volume of blood through the network is given by the loss in pressure from the aorta to the capillaries multiplied by the volume being transported. Pressure is the product between hydraulic resistance ( $R$ ) and flow ( $Q$ ), so the loss in pressure  $\Delta P = RQ$ . Thus  $E_{net} \propto \Delta P \propto RQ$ .

$E_{node}$ : Following [22] and (CITE mosesamnat08) we assume that the quantity of energy dissipated to metabolize a fixed quantity of oxygen in each node is constant so that the, energy summed over all nodes is  $E_{node} \propto N$ .

$T_{net}$ : The time to deliver a fixed number of oxygen molecules to the nodes is given by the volume of blood being transported divided by the flow ( $Q$ ). Since a constant volume is delivered to each node in parallel, we consider the volume being distributed per unit time to all nodes, giving  $T_{net} \propto N/Q$ .

We note that there is no distance term in the  $T_{net}$  equation because of the steady-state assumption.  $T_{net}$  is the time it takes to deliver the ‘next’ oxygen molecule from a capillary. Thus  $T_{net}$  is not the time it takes a single molecule to traverse the network (i.e. it is not  $\tau$  in [2], but rather the inverse of the rate of delivery of oxygen molecules, analogous to the inverse of

clock speed in computer chips.

$T_{node}$ : Following [2] and under the steady-state assumption that, on average, oxygen must be processed by mitochondria in the nodes at the same rate that it is delivered (i.e., supply matches demand):  $T_{node} = T_{net} \propto N/Q$ .

Substituting these relationships into Eq. 4 gives  $(RQ + N) \times (\frac{N}{Q})$  and the minimization simplifies to

$$\min(RN + \frac{N^2}{Q}) \quad (5)$$

where  $N$  is the number of terminal units.

We now show how  $R$  and  $Q$  scale with  $N$ . The resistance of a pipe is given by the well-known Hagen-Poiseuille's equation, where  $R$  at hierarchical level  $i$  is  $R_i = \frac{8\mu l_i}{\pi r_i^4}$ , where  $\mu$  is the viscosity constant. The total network resistance  $R$  is given by [22]:

$$R = \sum_{i=0}^H \frac{8\mu l_i}{\pi r_i^4} \frac{1}{n_i} = \frac{8\mu l_0}{\pi r_0^4} \lambda^{-H} \sum_{i=0}^H \lambda^{i(\frac{1}{D_l} - \frac{4}{D_r} + 1)} \quad (6)$$

where there are  $H + 1$  hierarchical levels, and  $n_i = \lambda^{H-i}$  is the total number of pipes at hierarchical level  $i$ .

We derive upper and lower bounds for  $D_r$  in the network given that the goal is to minimize the energy-time product (Equation 5). Recalling that  $\lambda^{-H} = N^{-1}$  and that  $D_l = 3$  for organisms, in the case where  $D_r \leq 3$ , the summation in Eq. 6 converges to a constant ( $\log(N)$  in the case of  $D_r = 3$ ), and  $R \propto l_0 N^{-1}$ . As  $D_r$  increases above 3,  $R$  increases from  $\propto l_0 N^{-1}$  to  $R \propto l_0 N^{\frac{1}{3} - \frac{4}{D_r}}$ . See Sec. 7 for details of the calculation.

Flow through a pipe is defined as  $Q = u\pi r^2$ , where  $u$  is the fluid velocity. Therefore, flow through the aorta equals  $Q = u_H \pi r_H^2$ , and substituting from Eq. 2,  $Q = u_0 \pi r_0^2 \lambda^{\frac{2H}{D_r}} = u_0 \pi r_0^2 N^{\frac{2}{D_r}}$ . We do not assume that  $u_H$  is independent of  $N$ , and therefore we include  $u_0$  in our

scaling equations. We assume  $Q$  is equal at all levels of the network (steady state assumption) giving:  $Q \propto u_0 N^{\frac{2}{D_r}}$ .

Having derived  $R$  and  $Q$  it is evident that  $E_{net}$  scales differently depending on the value of  $D_r$ :

**Case 1:**  $2 \leq D_r \leq 3$ :  $E_{net} \propto l_0 u_0 N^{\frac{2}{D_r}-1}$

We note that  $D_r < 2$  is physiologically unrealistic because the network would then be area decreasing, causing blood velocity to increase through the network rather than slowing down to allow oxygen absorption at the nodes. To accommodate the necessary slowing of blood in the capillaries  $D_r$  must be greater than 2 [22].

**Case 2:**  $3 \leq D_r \leq 12$ :  $E_{net} \propto l_0 u_0 N^{\frac{1}{3}-\frac{2}{D_r}}$

In Section 7, we show how the energy time product scales for all values of  $D_r$ . Here we show the case ( $D_r \leq 3$ ) that minimizes the scaling of the energy time product (Eq. 5):

$$\min_{D_r} \left( RN + \frac{N^2}{Q} \right) \propto l_0 + u_0^{-1} N^{2-\frac{2}{D_r}} \quad (7)$$

where  $N$  is the number of terminal units.

The energy time product is dominated by the second term in Eq. 7 which is minimized by setting  $D_r$  to its minimum possible value. Thus, minimizing the energy time product requires  $D_r = 2$ .

## 3.2 Biological Predictions

The analysis above shows that the area-preserving case in which  $D_r = 2$  results from minimizing the energy time product. This case is assumed by [2] and shown by [22] to lead to the canonical 3/4 power scaling of metabolic rate with body size. The optimal system that minimizes the

energy time product is the area preserving case. This contrasts with the West et al. prediction that  $R$  and therefore  $E_{net}$  are minimized by  $D_r = 3$  in the lower part of the network, where Eq. 6 dominates. This prediction, while true, does not account for delivery time, which slows dramatically as  $D_r$  increases from 2 to 3.<sup>†</sup>

However, the energy time product minimization does provide a prediction for how blood should slow in the lower region of the network. While slowing is suboptimal in terms of minimizing the energy time product, it is necessary for blood to slow by several orders of magnitude in order for oxygen to be dissociated from hemoglobin in the capillaries. This derivation in Section 7 provides a straightforward theoretical explanation for why  $D_r \leq 3$  in the lower region of the network by identifying a discontinuity in the scaling exponent at  $D_r = 3$ . For  $D_r > 3$  the energy time product increases much more rapidly than for  $D_r \leq 3$ .

[NEED TO TALK ABOUT WHY our Enet prediction LEADS TO THE J CURVE IN SCALING. The point is that by considering both Enet and Enode, simultaneously, we hopefully can predict why the initial curve is steeper in the kolokotronis data. If it works, it deserves a figure here.]

The final energy and time scaling relations for organisms are (NOTE: these will go in a table):

$E_{net} \propto RQ$  where  $R$  is Eq. 6,  $Q \propto N^{\frac{2}{D_r}}$  under the minimization condition that  $D_r \leq 3$ .

Substituting into Eq 6 gives:  $R \propto N^{-1}$  and

$$E_{net} \propto N^{-1} N^{\frac{2}{D_r}} \propto N^{\frac{2}{D_r}-1}$$

$$E_{node} \propto N$$

$$T_{net} \propto N/Q \propto N^{1-\frac{2}{D_r}}$$

$$T_{node} \propto N^{1-2/D_r} \text{ matching } T_{net}$$

Note:

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<sup>†</sup>To understand how pulsatile flow affects resistance in the upper part of the network, see [22], which shows that  $D_r = 2$ , i.e., the network is area preserving, in the upper pulsatile region.

$D_r = 2$  in the upper pulsatile area preserving part of the network giving

$$E_{net} \propto T_{net} \propto T_{node} \propto N^0 \text{ and } E_{node} \propto N.$$

So  $E_{sys} \propto N$ ,  $T_{sys} \propto N^0$ , and  $E_{sys} \times T_{sys} \propto N$

$D_r = 3$  in the lower Poiseuille area increasing part of the network giving

$$E_{net} \propto N^{-\frac{1}{3}} T_{net} \propto T_{node} \propto N^{\frac{1}{3}} \text{ and } E_{node} \propto N.$$

So  $E_{sys} \propto N^{-\frac{1}{3}} + N$ ,  $T_{sys} \propto N^{\frac{1}{3}}$ , and  $E_{sys} \times T_{sys} \propto N^{4/3}$

### 3.3 Computers

We now apply the same reasoning to computer chips. In computers, unlike biology, the nodes (transistors) are not of constant size and have shrunk by many orders of magnitude over 40 years of micro architecture evolution. During this time, chip area has grown much more slowly; we assume chip area to be constant for our calculations. Putting these two constraints together, the linear dimensions of transistors and wires decrease with transistor count as  $N^{-1/2}$  (or, more generally,  $N^{-1/D_l}$ ) [17]. This miniaturization process is well understood and is accurately modeled by Dennard's scaling theory [8]. Thus,  $r_0 \propto l_0 \propto N^{-\frac{1}{D_l}}$ . Intuitively, this means that the number of nodes increases by placing smaller transistors closer together and connecting them with smaller and shorter wires.

In the following, we assume that all wires carry the same flow and that information is transferred synchronously. We first calculate how  $E_{net}$  scales with  $N$ . From basic principles of electronics, the energy dissipated to transmit a bit over a wire is given by the formula  $\frac{CV^2}{2}$ , where  $C$  is capacitance and  $V$  is voltage. Although energy depends on  $V^2$ , voltage has remained approximately constant over the last four decades (decreasing only by a factor of five while transistor count increased by six orders of magnitude [18]), so we estimate that the total energy to transmit all bits over the network scales as  $C$  [5]. Ignoring fringe effects and for an aspect ratio of 1, wire capacitance is  $C_i = \epsilon l_i$  [23], where  $\epsilon$  is the dielectric constant. The net-

work capacitance is the sum of the capacitances of all wires, which is proportional to the total wire length of the network [9]:

$$C \propto Length \propto \sum_{i=0}^H l_i w_i n_i \propto l_0 w_0 \lambda^H \sum_{i=0}^H \lambda^i \left( \frac{1}{D_l} + \frac{1}{D_w} - 1 \right) \quad (8)$$

where  $l_i$  is the length of wire,  $w_i$  is the number of wires per module, and  $n_i$  is the number of modules, all at level  $i$ .

Recall that  $l_0 \propto N^{-1/D_l}$  and  $\lambda^H \propto N$  giving

$$C \propto N^{(1-\frac{1}{D_l})} \sum_{i=0}^H \lambda^i \left( \frac{1}{D_l} + \frac{1}{D_w} - 1 \right) \quad (9)$$

Similarly to energy scaling in organisms, how  $C$  scales depends on whether the exponent  $\frac{1}{D_l} + \frac{1}{D_w} - 1$  is positive or negative. If  $D_w \geq \frac{D_l}{D_l-1}$  the exponent is negative and the summand converges to a constant ( $\log(N)$  in the exact equality case), leaving  $E_{net} \propto N^{1-\frac{1}{D_l}}$ . When  $D_w < \frac{D_l}{D_l-1}$ ,  $C \propto N^{\frac{1}{D_w}}$ . See section 8 for details.

This indicates that  $E_{net}$  grows sub-linearly with the number of terminal units in the network. This makes sense intuitively because we assume chip area is constant, so that as  $N$  increases the distance between nodes is reduced. Additionally, Rent's rule, reflected in  $D_w$ , means that most bits move locally so that the distance between nearest nodes affects the average distance that bits are transmitted.

We now calculate the scaling of  $E_{node}$ . For a single node, computation energy is given by the transistor's (dynamic) energy dissipation as  $\frac{CV^2}{2}$ , and summing across all nodes,

$$E_{node} = N \frac{CV^2}{2} \propto NC_0 \propto Nl_0 \propto N^{1-\frac{1}{D_l}} \quad (10)$$

We now calculate how  $T_{net}$ , the time to transmit a bit over a wire scales with  $N$ .  $T_{net}$  is equivalent to the wire latency,  $L_i$ , in each wire at each level of the network. The delay in



delivering new bits in the network is bounded by the slowest level, implying:

$$T_{net} \propto \max_i L_i \quad (11)$$

This latency is proportional to the product of resistance and capacitance, usually referred to as the  $RC$  time constant [1], where  $R$  is the wire resistance. For wires with aspect ratio 1,  $R_i = \rho l_i / r_i^2$ , where  $\rho$  is the resistivity of the material. We can then calculate:

$$L_i = RC = \frac{\rho \epsilon l_i^2}{r_i^2} = \frac{\rho \epsilon l_0^2}{r_0^2} \lambda^i \left( \frac{2}{D_l} - \frac{2}{D_r} \right) \quad (12)$$

Here if  $D_r > D_l$  the largest latency will be at the top of the network  $L_H$  and  $T_{net} \propto N^{\frac{2}{D_l} - \frac{2}{D_r}}$ . However, it is unrealistic for the length of a wire to grow more slowly than its thickness. If  $D_r \leq D_l$  the highest latency will be at the bottom of the network, and  $T_{net} \propto \frac{l_0^2}{r_0^2} \propto N^0$ . Under our steady state assumption,  $D_r = D_l$ , so that all levels of the network have the same latency, and no time is wasted at any level. For more details see 8.

Computation time for a single node,  $T_{node}$ , is calculated as the transistor delay,  $\frac{CV}{I}$ , at the nodes [1].

$$T_{node} \propto C_0 \frac{V}{I} \propto N^{-1/D_l} \quad (13)$$

Summarizing the scaling relationships:

$$E_{net} \propto N^{1-1/D_l}$$

$$E_{node} \propto N^{1-1/D_l}$$

$$T_{net} \propto N^0$$

$$T_{node} \propto N^{-1/D_l}$$

Thus, for 2 dimensional chips in which  $D_l = 2$ , three components of the energy time product ( $E_{net}$ ,  $E_{node}$ , and  $T_{node}$ ) scale sub linearly (as  $N^{1/2}$  and  $N^{-1/2}$ ) but  $T_{net}$  is constant with

respect to  $N$ .

Putting it all together,

$$E_{sys} = E_{net} + E_{node} \propto N^{1-1/D_l} \propto N^{1/2}$$

$$T_{sys} = \max(T_{net}, T_{node}) \propto N^0.$$

$$E_{sys} \times T_{sys} \propto N^{\frac{1}{2}}$$

## 4 Results and Discussion

The optimal network design is area preserving, i.e., when the aggregate cross-sectional area of pipes is the same at all hierarchical levels. Various derivations show that this design leads to the 3/4 power scaling of metabolic rate known as Kleiber's law (e.g., [22, 2]).

The model predicts that, for the optimal network design (i.e.,  $D_l = 3$  and  $D_r = 2$ ), the system's energy-time product scales with  $l_0$  and  $N$ . This result has important implications for the energetic basis of fitness. Some have proposed that biological fitness maximizes metabolic power (energy/time) [14, 19], whereas others have proposed that it minimizes biological times (e.g., generation times, which is equivalent to maximizing vital rates) [13, 21]. The invariance of the energy-time product is consistent with the fact that fitness of organisms is largely independent of body mass. Organisms of all sizes, from small, fast, low-power microbes to large, slow, powerful mammals, coexist and, therefore, are likely nearly equally fit. This implies a direct trade-off between maximizing metabolic power and minimizing generation times that holds over the many orders of magnitude variation in body mass. The energy-time product reflects powerful geometric, physical and biological constraints on the evolution of organism designs.

Talk about  $D_r = 3$  for slowing!

For computers, minimizing the energy time product is trivial: also leading to  $D_l = D_r = D_w = 2$ . This result corresponds to ideal scaling, as suggested by Dennard [8], where the linear dimensions of transistors and wires scale at the same rate, and wire delay is constant and

the Rent's exponent is  $1/2$ , consistent with observations (NEED citations.)

From this result, we make two important predictions. First, power consumption in chips (total energy dissipated per unit of time) scales as  $Power = (N \cdot E_{sys})/T_{sys} \propto N^{1/2}$ . Performance is given by the number of computations executed per unit of time, or throughput. Second, assuming that a constant fraction of the transistors is active at each cycle, throughput is predicted to scale linearly with  $N$ , i.e.  $Throughput \propto N/T_{sys} \propto N$ .

We compared the predictions for power consumption with data obtained for 523 different microprocessors over a range of approximately 6 orders of magnitude in transistor count. The data are shown in Figure 2, where the measured exponent was 0.495, which agrees closely with the prediction of 0.5. Consistent data on performance across many technology generations is difficult to obtain because the standards have changed over the years and their adoption by different vendors is not uniform. We were able to obtain normalized performance data for 16 Intel processors from different generations over a range of 6 orders of magnitude in transistor count. The exponent obtained for these data was 1.0, as shown in Figure 3, which agrees exactly with the predictions from our analysis. This suggests that engineered designs approach the theoretical optimal defined by the model. The final energy-time product predicted by the model scales as  $N^{-1/2}$ , showing that, unlike organisms, as size increases, the energy-delay product decreases systematically. This is a consequence of process technology improvement, since newer, larger processors use hardware that is smaller, faster and more energy efficient.

Why performance is linear with  $N$

The steady miniaturization of transistors and wires under Moores Law has led to predictable increases in performance. As transistors get smaller, more can be packed into the same space. Figure XX shows that performance increases linearly with the number of transistors. This is somewhat counter-intuitive. Given that transistor switching times have decreased dramatically as size has decreased, one might expect performance to increase as the product of clock speed

and transistor number ( $N$ ). This is not the case. Our analysis suggests that the network is the bottleneck the network delivers bits to the transistors at a constant rate per transistor (see Eqn XX), so performance has only increased linearly with transistor number. Thus, although in principle transistors could process information more quickly, the network prevents this.

As in biology, performance can not be understood without understanding the constraints of the network.

[Add above] Not all transistors are computing on every clock tick because transistor activity is determined by the logic that controls the computation.

[maybe somewhere] Although resting transistors do consume power (leakage power), the data is only active power.

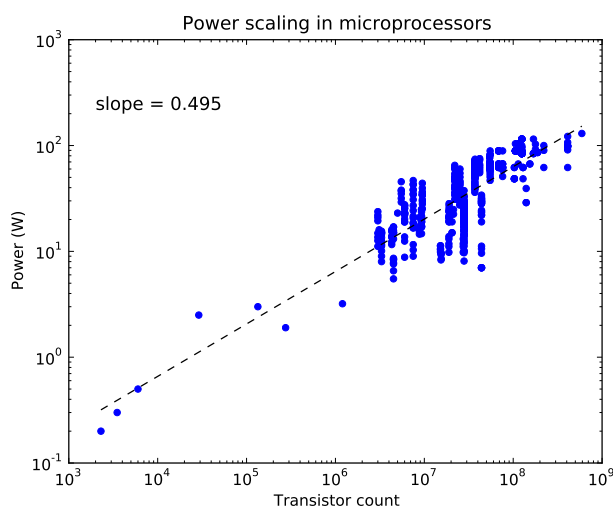


Figure 2:

Our model provides a simple theoretical explanation for the scaling of power and performance in computers over 40 years of microprocessor technology improvements. The excellent agreement between the theoretical optimal and experimental data suggests that through successive generations of trial-and-error, innovation and optimization, engineered designs are highly successful, approaching the theoretical limit predicted by the model.

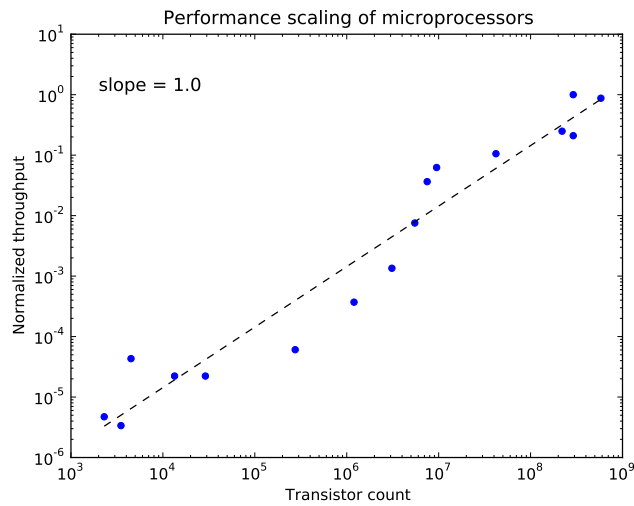


Figure 3:

## EVOLUTIONARY TRANSITIONS TEXT

Scaling analyses provide a framework for identifying invariants and understanding constraints on both biological and computational systems over enormous size ranges. Delong et al demonstrate that metabolic scaling slopes and intercepts change at the evolutionary transitions: prokaryote (bacteria) metabolism is superlinear with size, unicellular protist metabolism is linear, and multicellular animal metabolism is sublinear, converging toward the canonical  $3/4$  exponent. They hypothesize that these shifts arise from organisms overcoming a series of constraints, and then facing new constraints, as they increase in size.

Larger bacteria acquire increased metabolic capacity with size as additional genes allow increased use of metabolic substrates, but eventually the cell surface area limits metabolic processing. Unicellular protists internalize the metabolic machinery into respiratory organelles (ie mitochondria that turn oxygen into the biologically useful energy in the form of ATP). The number of mitochondria increases linearly with cell size until internal transport constraints limit the rate of metabolic processing. Multi-cellular animals develop internal networks that speed the delivery of metabolites, subject to sublinear network scaling effects. Delong et al high-

light the fundamental importance of both time and energy both in the network (ie minimizing time to deliver metabolites) and in the nodes (maximizing the capacity of nodes). They also note significant decreases in energetic efficiency at each evolutionary transition when absolute measures of time and energy increase. The explanations that they hypothesize are directly relevant to understanding how energy-time minimization affects the ongoing evolution of computer hardware.

1. Evolution of single core chips: The chip scaling we describe above shows how time and energy dissipation have decreased while performance increased as larger numbers of shrinking transistors have been packed onto each chip. During this period, similar to bacterial evolution that incorporates new genes to exploit new metabolic niches, technological innovations have emerged, for example, new materials, switching methods, etching processes and cooling technologies have pushed physical boundaries, allowing transistors to shrink and more of them to be packed onto each chip. Like bacteria, these innovations have optimized physical constraints, but ultimately a maximum is reached. There are no elephant-sized bacteria and there will be no silicon based single core chips with quadrillions (?) of transistors.

2. Until recently, chip development has also mimicked the evolution of single celled protists. Chip performance (calculations per second, figure 3?) increases linearly with system size ( $N$ ). Unicellular protists show linear increases in metabolic rate with size as more energy processing nodes (mitochondria) are packed into larger cells. However, like protists, this regime will also end due to physical constraints. It is evident from the analysis above that the internal transport network constrains the processing speed of the system. Further, the requirement to dissipate heat over a fixed surface area constrains both cells and chips. Computer chips are now undergoing a transition to multi-core, resembling the biological transition to multicellularity.

3. Our unified scaling framework suggests future scenarios for multicore chips. Similarly to multicellular organisms, we expect that as the number of cores grows, an increasing fraction of

chip power will be devoted to ever larger networks (Network-on-Chip, NoC) connecting more cores. In contrast to single core chips which have remained nearly constant in area, multi-core chips will require more physical area to accommodate more transistors. Thus NoCs that connect them will face the same decreasing returns as in biology (FIXME).

Larger networks will require more power to drive them, and it will take more time to traverse them, ultimately making time-energy minimization increasingly difficult as chips increase in size. It is however noteworthy that communication locality, as governed by the Rents exponent (and  $D_w$  above), has the potential to result in a more favorable scaling in multi-core computation than in multi-cellular biology.

4. PULL TEXT from BEYOND Biology. Breaking out of the centralized distribution network –

Should the Rents exponent describe locality traffic in cities; communication in ants; decentralized modular communication (the communication dimension) . Possible that these rents exponents will help us understand the scaling behavior of biology after the

Transition to sociality and distributed systems. DeLong et al does not address scaling relationships in the most recent evolutionary transition to social animals. Sociality is an important evolutionary transition, reflected in the ecological dominance of humans and ants, two social species whose networked systems exchange energy and information. These social species have captured extraordinary fractions of the available energy on earth (citations 40% globally for humans, 50% of biomass energy in the amazon by ants) and dispersed over vast territories. Recent evidence suggests that ant colonies and human societies follow similar scaling relationships as individual organisms (citations). Similarly, computational power has grown in large part by networking. This trend is likely to accelerate as computers are not only networked on the internet, but the internet of things and embedded devices in cyber physical systems promise trillions of networked computers that will vary in their size, power and degree of dependence on the larger

network.

CUT: 5. The strong similarity in the scaling of computational and biological systems results from the fundamental dependence of both systems of the number of nodes (transistors in computation and the number of membrane-bound respiratory complexes that synthesize ATP from oxygen) and the geometric constraints on transport distances. Computers over the last 35 years have replicated the same evolutionary transitions that occurred over billions of years in biology: through integrated circuits, innovations in materials and other technological tricks, synchronizing clock trees, multi-core chips and internetworked and distributed computers have happened almost simultaneously, but their trajectories mimic the transition from simple unicellular bacteria to the largest and most powerful animals and societies on earth. Engineer vs natural selection.

Coupling with physical devices makes it closer to biological scaling

## **5 Additional possible Discussion points**

- Technological evolution is undergoing a major evolutionary transition as distributed computing changes the metabolic landscape of technology and its interaction with the environment. [MERGE above]
- By unifying time and energy into a single model, the model accounts for the wide variation in size of organisms and computers, e.g., mouse to elephant and arm to multi-core. [MAJOR POINT, and the constancy with Dr 2] We propose the joule-second as a new fundamental unit of life and information.
- We provide an explanation for Koomey's Law (p. 13). These results also provide an explanation for Koomey's Law, which states roughly: "The number of computations per joule of energy dissipated has been doubling approximately every 1.57 years." This fol-



lows directly from minimizing the energy time product and Moore's Law, the empirical observation that the number of transistors ( $N$ ) doubles every 2 years. NEED a figure that combines data from Fig 2 and Fig 3 to show this?

- The model shows why computers have given up on reducing clock speeds and gone to multi-core. Once you reach a minimum component size, then you are at a transition and a new scaling regime. What is the regime and why is biology the guide? – MAKE sure this is hit above, don't recapitulate
- Theoretical explanation for well-known empirical patterns in computer architecture.
- Nature dealt with network design constraints by slowing metabolism as animal size increases. Computer architecture, at least until recently, focused on increase clock speeds by minimizing component size and increasing energy per chip. Also, using the third dimension to accommodate more wires,
- Computer transitions: transistors; transistors to integrated circuits; single core to multi-core; desk tops to data centers. Multicore is an evolutionary transition. IBM currently making 10 nm chips which are the limit for silicon. IBM recently announced a 7 nm transistor (more than 1000 times smaller than the diameter of a red blood cell) and only three times larger than a strand of DNA, using silicon germanium targeting a 50% power improvement. NYT July 9, 2015. Then going to carbon nanofibers.

Optical networks Josh's point

## 6 Conclusion

Our analysis provides a unifying explanation for the origin of scaling laws in biology and computing. Despite obvious differences in form and function, the scaling of organisms and comput-

ers is governed by the same simple principle. By minimizing the energy-time product, whether through natural selection or engineering, existing designs manage the trade-off between cost and performance, leading to general scaling patterns observed over several orders of magnitude in size. Moreover, power laws as a function of size are not unique to organisms and computers but are widely observed across a large variety of complex systems in nature, society and technology. The scaling of white and grey matter in the brain [24], of energy use and GDP in countries [6], and the pace of life and population in cities [4] are additional examples where a unifying explanation is still lacking. Because cost and performance, i.e., energy and time, impose universal constraints, we suggest that a common design principle governs the scaling of complex systems that process energy, materials and information.

Add an Evolutionary Transition sentence

## 7 Appendix A: Details of Scaling in Organisms

In this section we give a detailed analysis of the derivation of the scaling of the total network resistance discussed in Sec. 3.1. Recall that  $D_l = 3$  for 3 dimensional organisms and that  $\lambda^{-H} = N^{-1}$ . Using these values and simplifying, equation 6 is transformed.

$$R = \frac{8\mu l_0}{\pi r_0^4} N^{-1} \sum_{i=0}^H \lambda^{i(\frac{4}{3} - \frac{4}{D_r})} \quad (14)$$

Let the summand  $S = \sum_{i=0}^H \lambda^{i(\frac{4}{3} - \frac{4}{D_r})}$ .  $R \propto N^{-1}S$ . How  $S$  scales with  $N$  is dependent on the exponent  $\frac{4}{3} - \frac{4}{D_r}$ , and reduces to four different cases:

**Case 1:**  $D_r = 3$ : In this case the exponent is equal to 0, and the  $S = H + 1 \propto \log(N)$ , and  $R \propto \frac{\log(N)}{N}$ , because  $\log(N)$  in this case grows much more slowly than  $N$ , it is reasonable to conclude that  $R \propto N^{-1}$

**Case 2:**  $D_r < 3$ : Here (and in subsequent cases) we can use the geometric series to calculate the exact value of  $S$ . In particular

$$\begin{aligned}
S &= \frac{(1 - \lambda^{(\frac{4}{3} - \frac{4}{D_r})(H+1)})}{1 - \lambda^{\frac{4}{3} - \frac{4}{D_r}}} \\
&= \frac{1 - (\lambda^H)^{(\frac{4}{3} - \frac{4}{D_r})} \lambda^{(\frac{4}{3} - \frac{4}{D_r})}}{1 - \lambda^{\frac{4}{3} - \frac{4}{D_r}}} \\
&= \frac{1 - N^{(\frac{4}{3} - \frac{4}{D_r})} \lambda^{(\frac{4}{3} - \frac{4}{D_r})}}{1 - \lambda^{\frac{4}{3} - \frac{4}{D_r}}}
\end{aligned}$$

If we let  $c = \lambda^{(\frac{4}{3} - \frac{4}{D_r})}$  we see that

$$S = \frac{1 - cN^{(\frac{4}{3} - \frac{4}{D_r})}}{1 - c} \quad (15)$$

Because  $\frac{4}{3} - \frac{4}{D_r} < 0$  is negative in this case and  $N$  is large in practice,  $cN^{(\frac{4}{3} - \frac{4}{D_r})}$  is small, and  $S$  is proportional to a constant ( $S \approx \frac{1}{1-c}$ ). This implies that  $R \propto N^{-1}$ .

**Case 3:**  $3 < D_r < 12$ : In this case the exponent in  $S$  is positive, meaning that  $S$  scales directly with  $N$ . Note that  $c > 1$  in this case and we can write

$$S = \frac{cN^{(\frac{4}{3} - \frac{4}{D_r})} - 1}{c - 1} \quad (16)$$

This means that  $S \propto N^{(\frac{4}{3} - \frac{4}{D_r})}$ . This implies that  $R \propto N^{-1}S \propto N^{(\frac{1}{3} - \frac{4}{D_r})}$ . This means that resistance still scales inversely with size, but at a faster rate than if  $D_r \leq 3$ .

**Case 4:**  $D_r \geq 12$ : This final case is analogous to the one above, except that now resistance scales positively with  $N$ , implying that the energy in the network would scale positively with  $N$ . This is likely a non-physical possibility, but we include it here for completeness.

## 8 Appendix B: Details of Scaling in Electronics

In this section we give a detailed analysis of the derivation of the scaling of the network capacitance and network latency discussed in Sec. 3.3.

### 8.1 Capacitance

Recall that  $D_l = 2$  for 2 dimensional computer chips and that  $\lambda^{-H} = N^{-1}$ . We can then calculate capacitance as:

$$C \propto N^{(1-\frac{1}{D_l})} \sum_{i=0}^H \lambda^{i(\frac{1}{D_l} + \frac{1}{D_w} - 1)} \quad (17)$$

Similar to how we handled organisms we are interested in whether the exponent  $\frac{1}{D_l} + \frac{1}{D_w} - 1$  is positive or negative.

Let the summand  $S = \sum_{i=0}^H \lambda^{i(\frac{1}{D_l} + \frac{1}{D_w} - 1)}$ .  $C \propto N^{1-\frac{1}{D_l}} S$ .

**Case 1:**  $D_r = \frac{D_l}{D_l-1}$ : In this case the exponent is equal to 0, and the  $S = H + 1 \propto \log(N)$ , and  $C \propto \log(N) N^{1-\frac{1}{D_l}}$ , because  $\log(N)$  in this case grows much more slowly than  $N^{1-\frac{1}{D_l}}$  and we know  $D_l = 2$  for 2 dimensional chips, it is reasonable to conclude that  $C \propto N^{\frac{1}{2}}$

**Case 2:**  $D_r > \frac{D_l}{D_l-1}$ : Here (and in subsequent cases) we can use the geometric series to calculate the exact value of  $S$ , using a similar approach to ???. In this case the exponent is negative and  $S$  is a small constant, leaving  $C \propto N^{\frac{1}{2}}$

**Case 3:**  $D_r < \frac{D_l}{D_l-1}$ : In this case the exponent in  $S$  is positive, meaning that  $S$  scales directly with  $N$ . Now the summand contributes an  $N^{\frac{1}{D_l} + \frac{1}{D_w} - 1}$  and  $C \propto N^{\frac{1}{D_w}}$ .

### 8.2 Network Delay

Recall that we wish to determine the network latency  $L$  which is defined as:

$$T_{net} \propto \max_i L_i \quad (18)$$

with

$$L_i \propto RC = \frac{\rho \epsilon l i^2}{r_i^2} = \frac{\rho \epsilon l_0^2}{r_0^2} \lambda^{i(\frac{2}{D_l} - \frac{2}{D_r})} \quad (19)$$

$L_i$  will scale differently depending on the relative values of  $D_r$  and  $D_l$ .

**Case 1:**  $D_r > D_l$ : In this case the fraction in the exponent is greater than 0 and the latency will be highest when  $i = H$ , resulting in  $L \propto N^{\frac{2}{D_l} - \frac{2}{D_r}}$ .

**Case 2:**  $D_r < D_l$ : In this case the exponent is negative and the highest latency occurs at the bottom of the network  $i = 0$ , leaving  $L \propto \frac{l_0^2}{r_0^2} \propto N^0$

**Case 3:**  $D_r = D_l$ : In this case the exponent is 0 and there is equal latency at all levels and  $L \propto N^0$ .

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## Figure legends

**Figure 1:** Log-log plot of power consumption as a function of transistor count for 523 computer microprocessors from different vendors and technological generations. The linear regression slope is 0.495 with correlation coefficient of 0.81. A regression that removes the first seven data points and focuses on the main cloud of more modern chips produces a slope of 0.487.

**Figure 2:** Log-log plot of normalized throughput as a function of transistor count for 16 Intel microprocessors from different technological generations. The linear regression slope is 1.0 with correlation coefficient of 0.97.