Fundamentals of Generic Programming

James C. Dehnert and Alexander Stepanov

Silicon Graphics, Inc.
dehnertj@acm.org, stepanov@attlabs.att.com

Abstract. **Generic programming depends on the decomposition of programs into components which may be developed separately and combined arbitrarily, subject only to well-defined interfaces. Among the interfaces of interest, indeed the most pervasively and unconsciously used, are the fundamental operators common to all C++ built-in types, as extended to user-defined types, e.g. copy constructors, assignment, and equality. We investigate the relations which must hold among these operators to preserve consistency with their semantics for the built-in types and with the expectations of programmers. We can produce an axiomatization of these operators which yields the required consistency with built-in types, matches the intuitive expectations of programmers, and also reflects our underlying mathematical expectations.**