

[PAPER] Special Section on Solid-State Circuit Design—Architecture, Circuit, Device and Design Methodology

A Sub-100 mW Dual-Core HOG Accelerator VLSI for Parallel Feature Extraction Processing for HDTV Resolution Video

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SUMMARY This paper describes a Histogram of Oriented Gradients (HOG) feature extraction accelerator that features a VLSI-oriented HOG algorithm with early classification in Support Vector Machine (SVM) classification, dual core architecture for parallel feature extraction and multiple object detection, and detection-window-size scalable architecture with reconfigurable MAC array for processing objects of several shapes. To achieve low-power consumption for mobile applications, early classification reduces the amount of computations in SVM classification efficiently with no accuracy degradation. The dual core architecture enables parallel feature extraction in one frame for high-speed or low-power computing and detection of multiple objects simultaneously with low power consumption by HOG feature sharing. Objects of several shapes, a vertically long object, a horizontally long object, and a square object, can be detected because of cooperation between the two cores. The proposed methods provide processing capability for HDTV resolution video (1920×1080 pixels) at 30 frames per second (fps). The test chip, which has been fabricated using 65 nm CMOS technology, occupies $4.2 \times 2.1 \text{ mm}^2$ containing 502 Kgates and 1.22 Mbit on-chip SRAMs. The simulated data show 99.5 mW power consumption at 42.9 MHz and 1.1 V.

key words: HOG, object detection, low-power, HDTV

1. Introduction

Object detection from visual images is an important task for many computer vision applications such as surveillance, entertainment, automotive systems, and robotics. An important algorithm used in object detection systems, Histogram of Oriented Gradients (HOG) [1], has robustness to change of illumination and attains high computational accuracy in detection of variously textured objects.

Recent high-performance general-purpose processors can achieve real-time object detection, but at a heavy computational cost. The processor requires high power consumption and is therefore unsuitable for mobile systems under limited battery conditions. Consequently, a low-power and high-performance HOG feature extraction processor is necessary to widen the range of applications.

Figure 1 presents the image resolution versus frame rate for several published descriptions of HOG hardware. In the figure, a mark for each work denotes target application. A single circle signifies single-object detection. The double circle represents multiple object detection. Zhang et al. [2] proposed efficient object detection using GPGPU.

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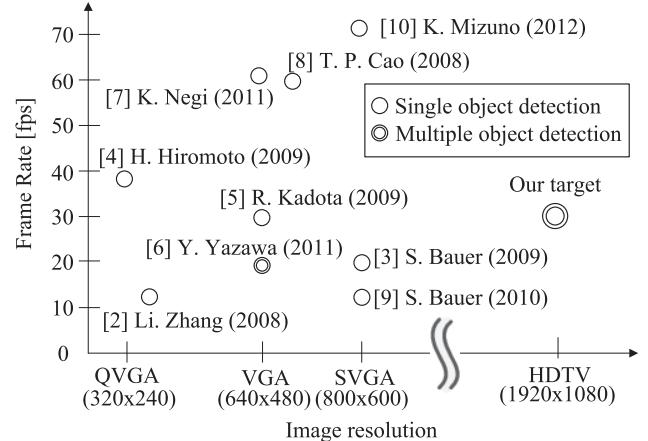


Fig. 1 Previous works of HOG feature extraction processor.

Some FPGA implementations [3]–[8] and an FPGA-GPU architecture [9] have been proposed for real-time applications. Yazawa et al. proposed a target-reconfigurable object detector for multiple object detection. However, classification data must be reloaded in other object detection so that multiple objects cannot be detected at the same time. Our previous work [10] realized an FPGA implementation with superior performance compared with that of other implementations. However, that study particularly targeted pedestrian detection. HOG features are adaptable to widely various applications. Consequently, next-generation HOG feature extraction processors must provide higher expandability and higher performance. Therefore, our goal is to develop design techniques for a real-time HOG feature extraction processor for use in multiple object detection from HDTV-resolution video.

Most conventional processors use a window-based approach, for which an amount of computations of 447.7 GOPS and memory bandwidth of 55 Gbps are necessary for HDTV resolution because of repetitive computations. Our previous work demonstrated that the amount of computations and memory bandwidth are greatly reduced by the reuse of calculated data or by adoption of efficient computation [10]. However, the power consumption is still high for mobile applications. Figure 2 shows the power consumption rate in our previous FPGA implementation. The most dominant part is cell histogram generation. The second is SVM classification. To achieve low-power object detection,

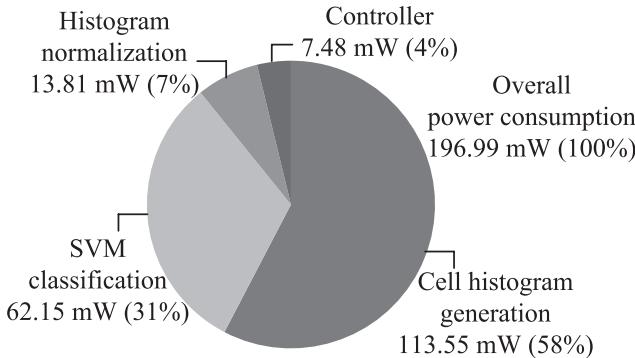


Fig. 2 Power consumption in the previous FPGA implementation.

the dominant two parts are necessary to improve power efficiency.

To achieve real-time and low-power HOG feature extraction for HDTV resolution video, we propose the following three techniques.

- Simplified HOG algorithm with early rejection and early detection in SVM classification.
- Dual core architecture for parallel feature extraction and multiple object detection with HOG feature sharing.
- Detection-window-size scalable architecture with reconfigurable MAC array for processing objects of several shapes.

As described in this paper, details of the simplified HOG algorithm are described in Sect. 2. The proposed architecture is addressed in Sect. 3. Then, these are followed by VLSI implementation in Sect. 4. Section 5 concludes this paper.

2. Algorithm

2.1 Algorithm Overview

Figure 3 portrays a flow diagram of object detection using the original HOG algorithm [1]. Scanning on the input image is based on the detection window. The window is divided into cells, for each cell accumulating a histogram of gradient orientations over the pixels of the cell. For better invariance to illumination, histogram normalization can be accomplished by accumulating a measure of the local histogram energy over blocks and using the results to normalize all cells in the block. The normalized histograms (HOG features) are collected over the detection window. The collected features are fed to a linear SVM for object/non-object classification.

2.2 Simplified HOG Algorithm for Hardware Implementation

A simplified HOG algorithm for hardware implementation is introduced in this subsection. This algorithm is based on our previous work [10]. Figure 4 portrays a flow diagram of object detection using the simplified HOG algorithm. This

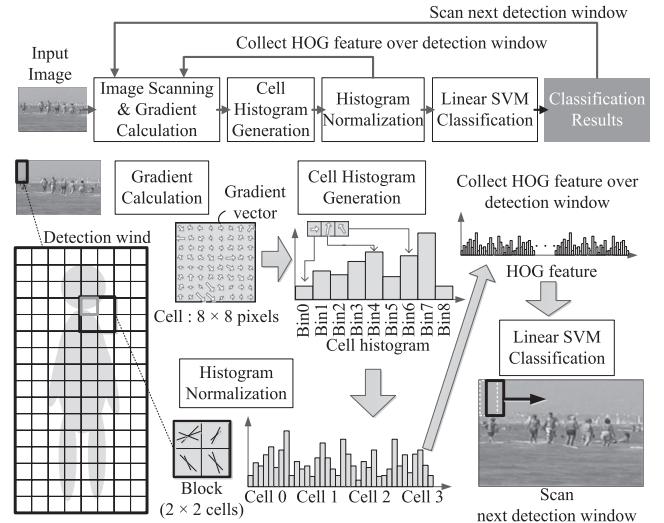


Fig. 3 Original HOG algorithm flow.

flow is modified from the original algorithm using the following seven techniques.

1. Cell-based scanning
Figure 4 shows cell-based scanning approach. HOG features are extracted from cell-based calculations. No cell overlaps with other cells. Sharing and reuse of a cell strongly affect memory bandwidth reduction.
2. Gradient calculation using CORDIC [11]
3. Approximation of weighted voting for spatial and orientation anti-aliasing
4. Newton method with approximated initial value
5. Simultaneous SVM calculation
Figure 4 presents simultaneous SVM calculations for cell-based processing. Partial HOG features belong to 105 windows maximally and are located at different positions in each window. Partial HOG features are multiplied and accumulated by the SVM coefficients of each window. The accumulation result is stored and reused in the subsequent SVM calculation. Simultaneous SVM calculation is suitable for parallel computing in hardware.
6. Early rejection and early detection
This technique is newly added in this paper. A partial sum of products is compared with early classification threshold. A target object is detected or rejected in early stage if the comparison condition is true. This technique is detailed in Sect. 2.3.
7. Parameter optimization

2.3 SVM Classification with Early Rejection and Early Detection

In Linear SVM classification, extracted features and SVM coefficients are simply multiplied and accumulated until the operations reach window level. Consequently, this is suitable for parallel computing in hardware. Sufficient parallelism reduces the required cycle count by 99%. However,

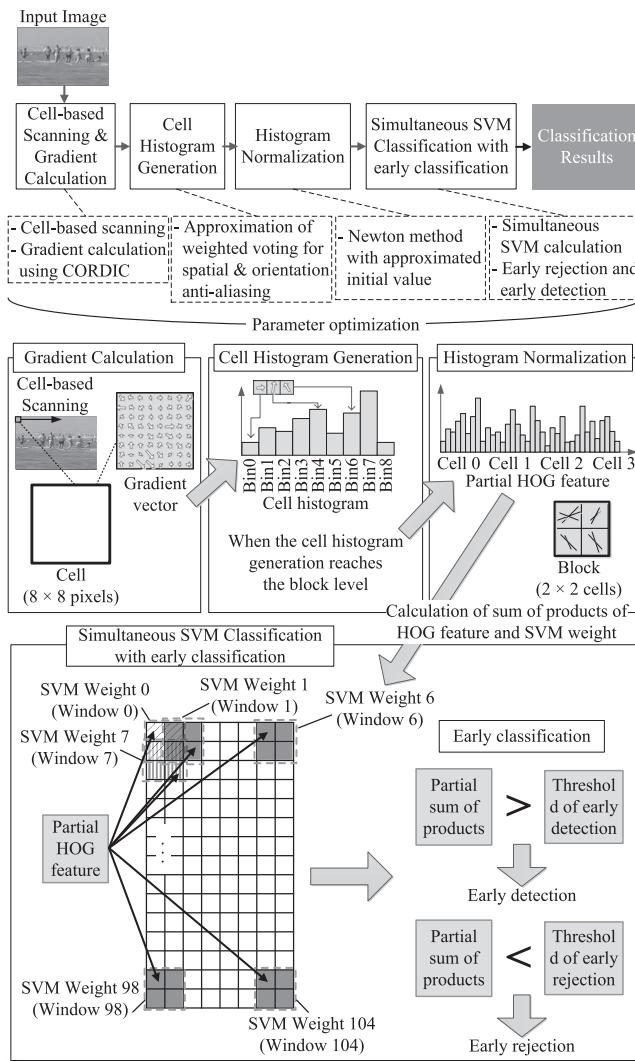


Fig. 4 Simplified HOG algorithm flow.

the amount of computations is 6.34 GOPS and large when compared to the other calculations in an HOG processor.

As described above, a summation of products of the entire HOG feature and its paired SVM coefficients are necessary for classification. However, by classification with a partial sum of products obtained sequentially by cell-based processing, subsequent calculations can be skipped. Consequently, both the amount of computations and power consumption on classification are reduced. Figure 5 shows a distribution of summations and of partial sums (2/3 of entire feature) of positive (human) and negative (non-human) sample images in the training dataset.

Figure 5 shows that positive and negative classes are separated sufficiently on the distribution of partial sums, compared to the distribution of summations of the entire feature. This permits early classification using a partial sum instead of the entire feature and summations.

Early classification with a single threshold degrades the classification performance, because the classes on an early stage are less separated than those on a later stage. Within

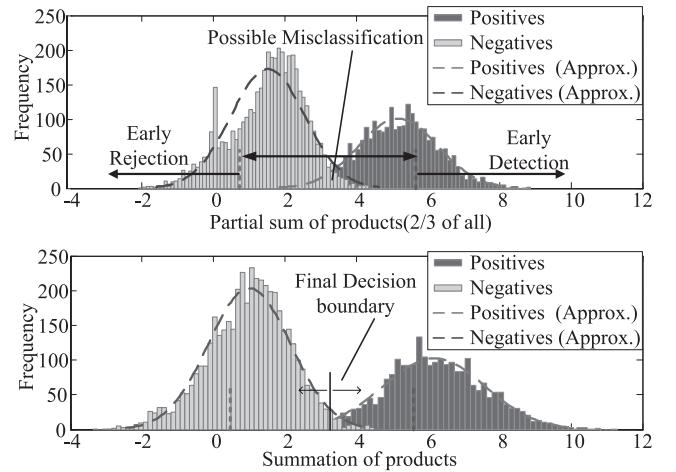


Fig. 5 Early rejection and early detection.

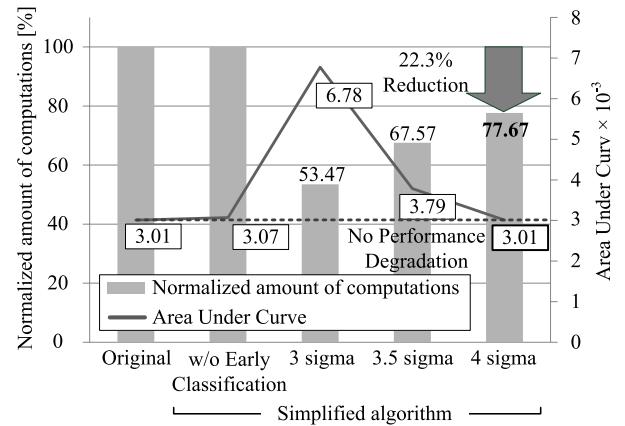


Fig. 6 Trade-off between the amount of computations and area under curve.

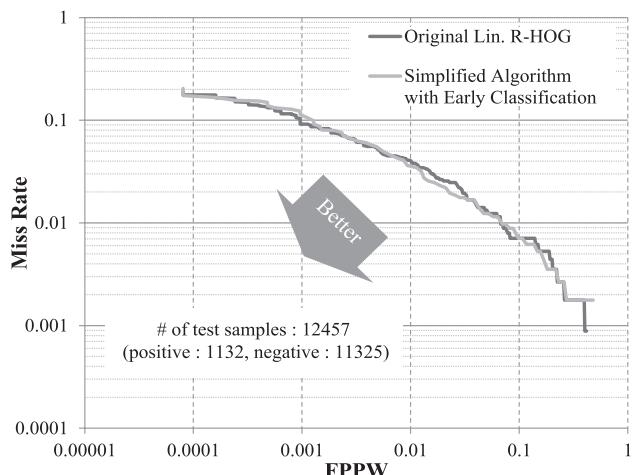
an overlapping area of the two classes, a misclassification occurs. To avoid performance degradation, we adopted a classification using two thresholds representing the interval causing misclassification. Estimating the interval approximating the distributions as a normal distribution, the incoming data are classified according to whether they are outside the interval. Data within the interval on the early stage are sent to the later stage and calculations are continued using subsequent partial features. Early classifications are evaluated 14 times per detection-window on every time after the partial HOG on a last row in the window is obtained.

The interval is learned preliminarily with training dataset. Then the early classification is applied to incoming image data. Classifying presumed data in the early stage permits skipping of subsequent calculations while avoiding classification performance degradation. However the amount-of-computations reductions and the performance degradation tradeoffs depend on the misclassification interval size.

Figure 6 shows a simulation result of the tradeoff between the amount of computations and area under curve

Table 1 Algorithm parameters.

Detection window size	64×128 pixels
Cell size	8×8 pixels
Block size	2×2 cells
Step stride	8 pixels, vertically and horizontally
# of orientation bins	9 bins (0-180)
Weight for orientation anti-aliasing	0.25
Normalization method	L2-norm
SVM coefficients and threshold	Default value in OpenCV
# of HOG features	$3780 = (7 \times 15 \text{ blocks}) \cdot (2 \times 2 \text{ cells}) \cdot (9 \text{ bins})$

**Fig. 7** Accuracy degradation using the employed algorithm.

(AUC) of trade-off curve between miss rate and false positives per window. The lower AUC represents better classification performance. Presuming that a positive class and negative class are both distributed normally, standard deviations σ_{pos} , σ_{neg} and means μ_{pos} , μ_{neg} are estimated. The misclassification intervals are set from $[\mu_{\text{pos}} - n\sigma_{\text{pos}}, \mu_{\text{neg}} + n\sigma_{\text{neg}}]$ as n varied from 3, 3.5, and 4. Simulation results show that the interval of $[\mu_{\text{pos}} - 4\sigma_{\text{pos}}, \mu_{\text{neg}} + 4\sigma_{\text{neg}}]$ reduced amount of computations to 22.3% with no degradation from the original classification method. Consequently, the early classification method reduces the amount of computations in SVM classification from 6.34 GOPS to 4.92 GOPS.

2.4 Simulation Results

Performance and accuracy degradation were confirmed by using software implementation for the simplified algorithm with early classification. The simplified algorithm is compared with original linear rectangular HOG (Lin. R-HOG) [1]. The algorithm parameters for the simulation are shown in Table 1. The development environment is Microsoft Visual C++ 2008 Express Edition (Microsoft Corp.) with the INRIA Person Dataset [12], which includes several people in various backgrounds. Figure 7 presents a graph of false positives per window (FPPW) versus the miss rate. The original algorithm shows worse results from original paper

[1] because our test condition is different from original one. The simulation results with the simplified algorithm and the optimized bit width show that no miss rate degradation occurs at 0.0001 FPPW. The algorithm that was used provides sufficient performance for general-purpose applications.

3. Architecture

3.1 Dual Core Architecture with Cell-Based Pipeline

Figure 8 depicts a block diagram of the dual core architecture and external peripherals. The proposed architecture comprises two HOG feature extraction cores, a CPU interface, and a memory interface. The HOG feature extraction core comprises a controller, address generators, cell histogram generation module, histogram normalization module, SVM classification module, and working SRAMs. The HOG feature extraction processor is controlled by an external CPU, and the input grayscale image is loaded to an internal SRAM from an external SRAM via a memory interface. The internal datapath modules process the input image and output a detection result. The CPU receives the detection result from HOG feature extraction processor; then it draws the result on a display.

Each core exchanges HOG feature and intermediate classification result with another core. This structure enables the HOG feature sharing described in Sect. 3.3 and detection-window-size scalable processing described in Sect. 3.4.

For cell histogram generation module and histogram normalization module, we used the same architecture as previously proposed in [10]. In cell histogram generation, four-way architecture is adopted because one cell is commonly used for four blocks maximally. Histogram normalization is two-stage architecture to implement L2-Hys normalization [13].

Our architecture adopts a cell-based pipeline flow, as presented in Fig. 9. The upper portion shows a relation between cells, blocks, windows, and a frame and the lower portion depicts a cell-based pipeline flow. The numbers in the left side are corresponding to the process explained below. C, B, H, and W are abbreviations of Cell, Block, HOG, and Window, respectively. Cell-based pipeline processing is conducted as follows:

1. A cell histogram is generated with cell-based scanning.
2. When the process described above reaches the block level, a block-level cell histogram is normalized; then the block-level HOG feature is extracted.
3. Block-level HOG features and SVM coefficients corresponding to each window are multiplied and accumulated.
4. A partial sum of products is compared with early classification threshold. The corresponding window is classified in early stage if the comparison condition is true.
5. An accumulation result of the window level is compared with the SVM threshold. Then the detection result is obtained.

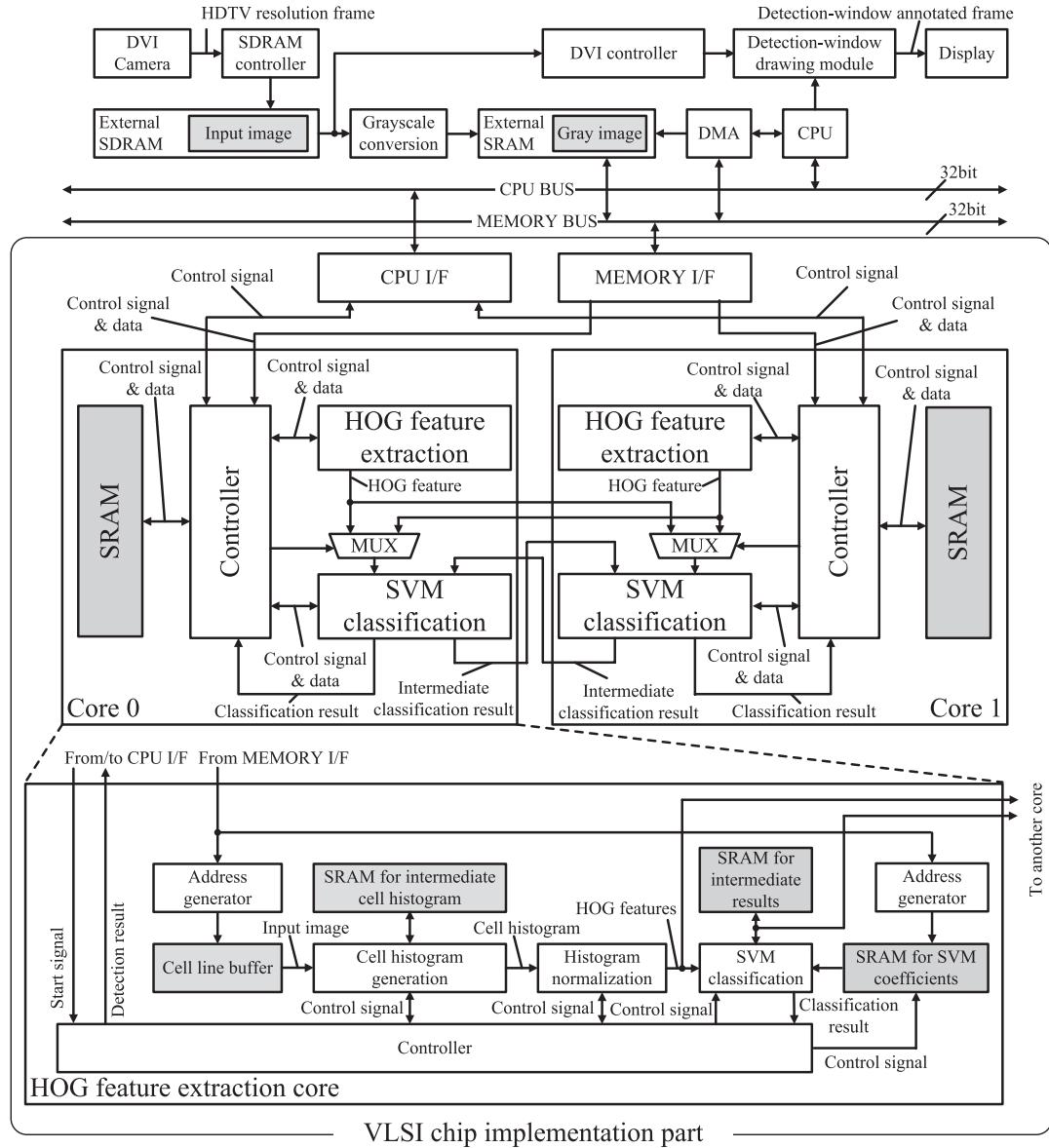


Fig. 8 Dual core architecture for parallel feature extraction.

The cell-based pipeline architecture greatly reduces the memory bandwidth because it prevents the reloading of input pixels in different detection windows. The window-based approach for HDTV resolution requires memory bandwidth of 55 Gbps. Our architecture reduces the memory bandwidth to 0.499 Gbps with circuit area overhead for extra SRAMs to store intermediate cell histograms and classification results.

3.2 Parallel Processing in One Frame

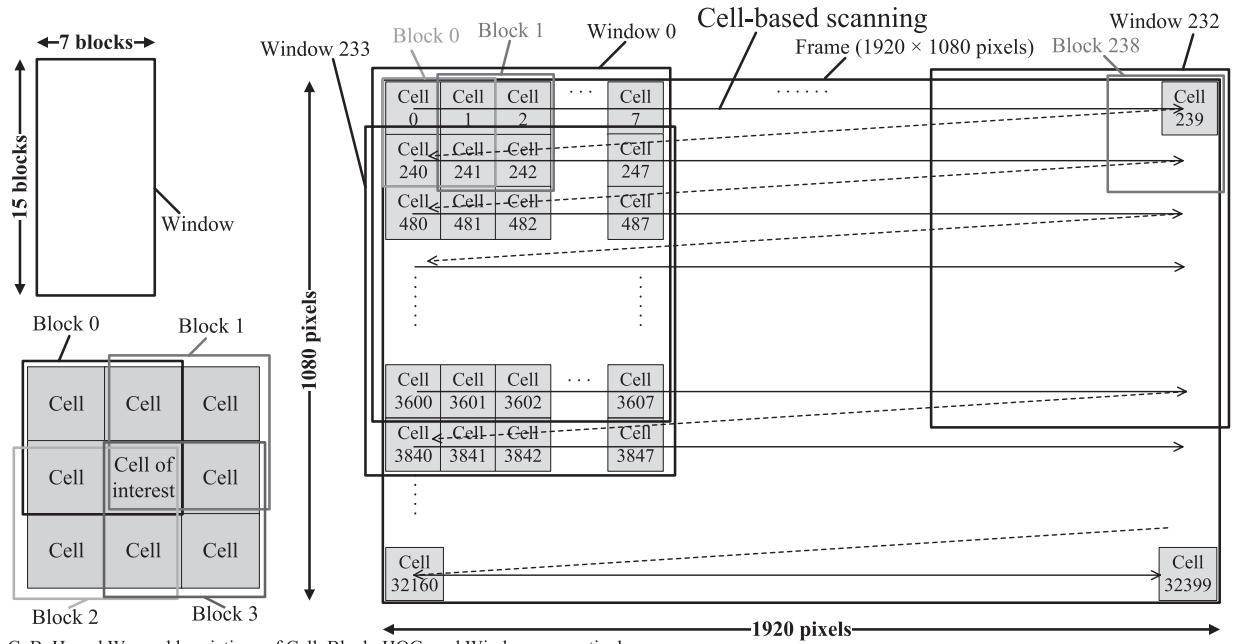
This subsection describes parallel processing methods for single object detection to reduce the required cycle count. In our architecture, two methods, horizontal division and vertical division, are adopted as presented in Fig. 10.

The HDTV resolution frame is divided into two frames of 1920×600 pixels in the horizontal division. Each frame

overlaps by 120 pixels for calculating HOG features in the border between the two frames. Horizontal division is a well-balanced method because each core manages the same number of pixels. The vertical division divides the frame into two frames of 992×1080 pixels and 984×1080 pixels. Each frame overlaps by 56 pixels. Each core can efficiently calculate HOG features because the pixel overlap between each frame is less than that of horizontal division. Therefore, the vertical division can provide more cycle reduction than the horizontal division. In the following section, two-core processing means the method using vertical division.

3.3 Parallel Processing for Multiple Object Detection

To detect multiple objects, conventional architecture requires independent processors corresponding to the number of target objects. However it dissipates power wastefully



C, B, H, and W are abbreviations of Cell, Block, HOG, and Window, respectively.

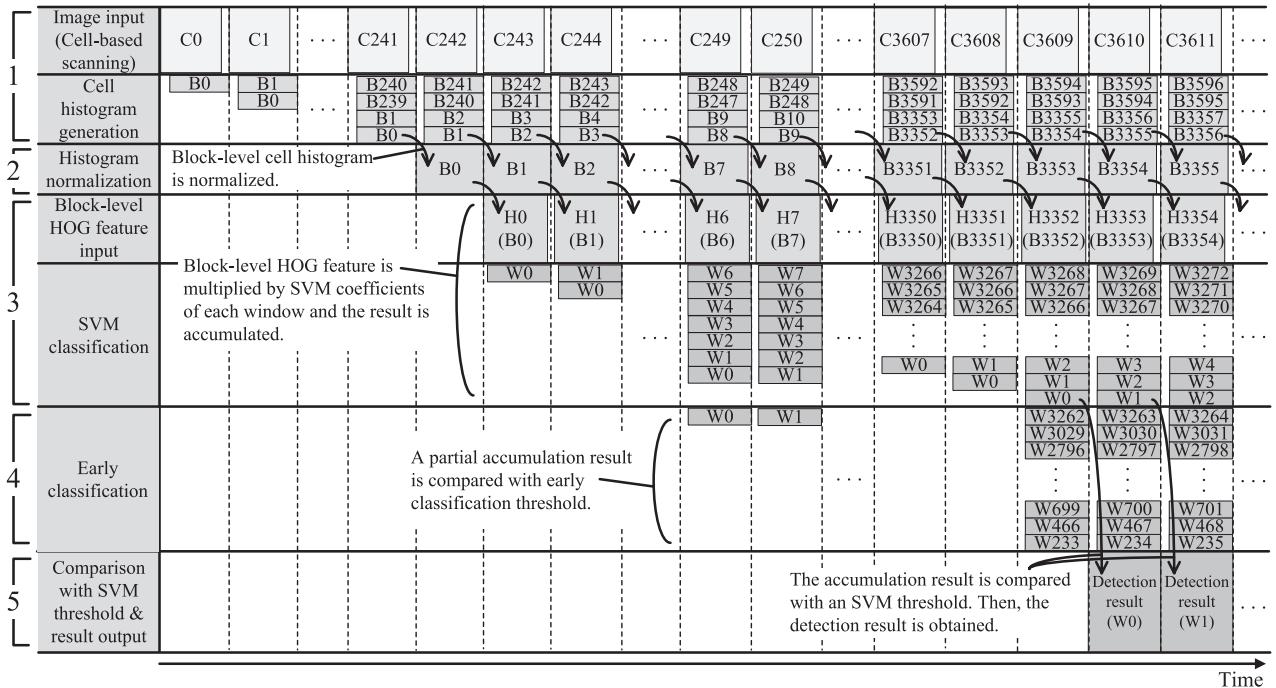


Fig. 9 Cell-based pipeline flow.

for extraction of the same HOG feature. HOG feature extraction is the dominant part of the object detection task, as described in Sect. 1. Consequently, calculation of the same features must be avoided if low power operation is to be achieved.

Our architecture can provide low-power operation in multiple object detection. Figure 11 shows the block diagram in multiple object detection. One SVM classification module is used for processing a single object. Each core contains an independent SRAM for SVM coefficients corresponding to a single object. In case of that different SVM

coefficients are loaded into the SRAM of each core, two different objects can be concurrently detected. Each core selects an internal HOG feature or external one. The HOG feature can be shared if the two cores process the same frame. Therefore, in one core, HOG feature extraction module, input image buffer, and working memory for HOG feature extraction are completely turned off to reduce power consumption.

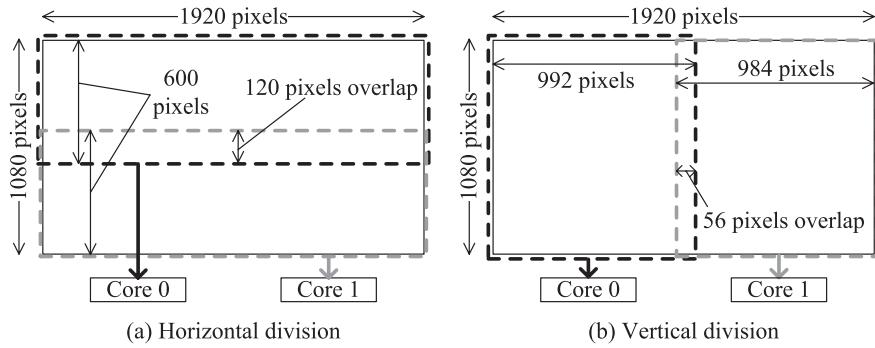


Fig. 10 Frame division methods for parallel processing.

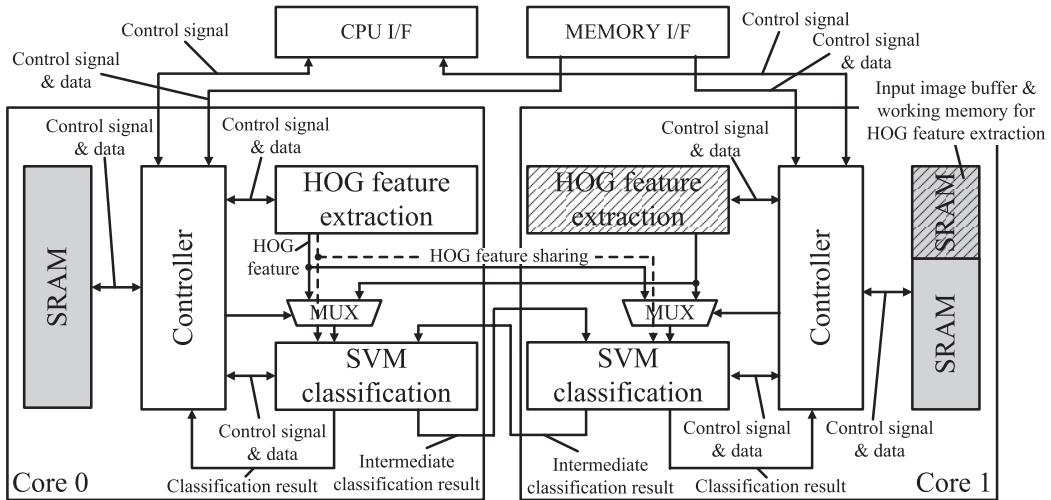


Fig. 11 Block diagram in multiple object detection.

3.4 Detection-Window-Size Scalable Architecture

Object detection for a single target is insufficient for recent advanced applications. For example, on-vehicle applications target pedestrian, cars, and traffic sign. Objects have various shapes such as vertically long, horizontally long, and square. Consequently, it is demanded that an object detection processor manages several target objects.

Our architecture provides object detection for the three shapes shown above. Figure 12 shows a block diagram of a reconfigurable SVM classification module for a vertically long object, a horizontally long one, and a square one. This module comprises a reconfigurable MAC array, which is reconfigured according to the shape of target objects. A vertically long object is processed if the MAC array is connected horizontally as presented in Fig. 12(b). It corresponds to the detection window of 64×128 pixels. A horizontally long object is detected if the MAC array is connected vertically as displayed in Fig. 12(c). The detection of a square object is conducted with cooperation of two processor cores as presented in Fig. 12(d). The classification core 0 in core 1 loads an intermediate result in classification core 7 in core 0 as the initial value. It enables classification with a detection

window of 128×128 pixels.

3.5 SVM Classification Module with Early Rejection and Early Detection

Figure 13 shows an SVM classification module with an early classification function described in Sect. 2.3. Early classification is conducted in the end of each classification core. A classification flag is enabled if an intermediate result is greater than an early detection threshold or less than an early rejection threshold. To reduce wasteful power for classification of non-target object, the classification flag controls whether each classification core runs. If a classification flag of a detection window is activated, the controller enables a clock gating of the MAC module corresponding to the detection window. The classification flag is stored to SRAM with an intermediate classification result.

3.6 Performance Evaluation

The number of cycle counts was estimated using a Verilog-HDL simulator. The proposed architecture was compared with our previous architecture [10] and architecture without parallelization. Estimation results are presented in Fig. 14,

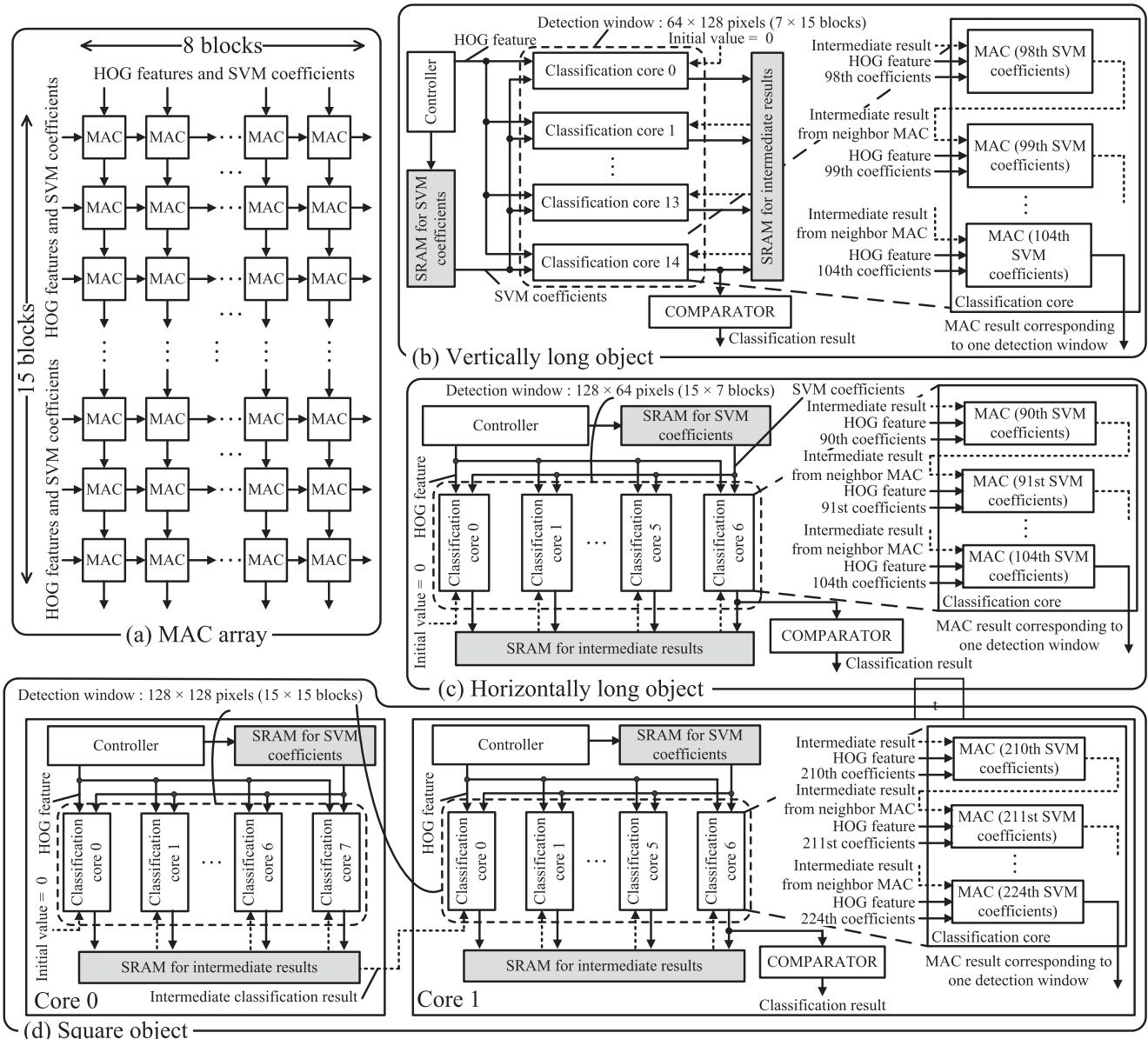


Fig. 12 Block diagrams of reconfigurable MAC array (a) and SVM classification module for (b) a vertically long object, (c) a horizontally long object, and (d) a square object.

which demonstrates the superiority of the proposed architecture for HDTV resolution. Results show that the number of cycle counts with two cores in cell histogram generation, histogram normalization, and SVM classification are lower by 48.5%, 42.5%, and 50%, respectively, than the number of cycle counts of our previous architecture. In the proposed two-core architecture, the overall process requires 1.43×10^6 cycles per frame. Therefore, it is inferred that the proposed architecture can accommodate HDTV resolution video at 30 fps with 42.9 MHz.

4. VLSI Implementation

A test chip of HOG feature extraction has been designed as presented in Fig. 15. The design includes the VLSI-

oriented algorithm and the dual core architecture. This chip, which was fabricated in 65nm CMOS technology, occupies 4.2×2.1 mm² containing 502 Kgates and 1.22 Mbit on-chip SRAMs. The static timing analysis after back annotation shows that 110 MHz operation is attained at nominal supply voltage of 1.1 V. The chip specifications are presented in Table 2.

Gate-level power estimation was conducted to clarify effects of our implementation. Here a commercial power estimation tool was used for the whole processor core circuit with physical parameters after place and routing. Figure 16 shows estimated data of power consumption in several operation modes. The data of our earlier FPGA implementation [10] are displayed for comparison. The FPGA implementation can process SVGA resolution video (800 × 600

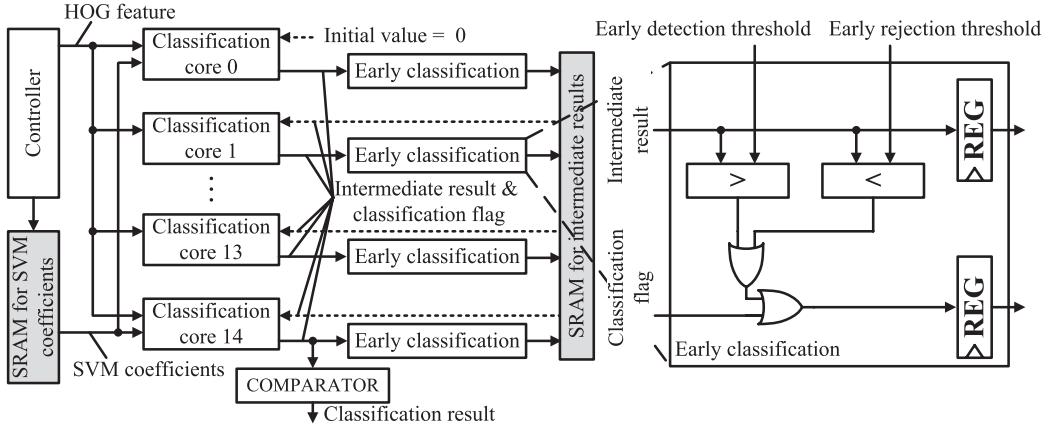


Fig. 13 Block diagram of SVM classification module with early rejection and early detection.

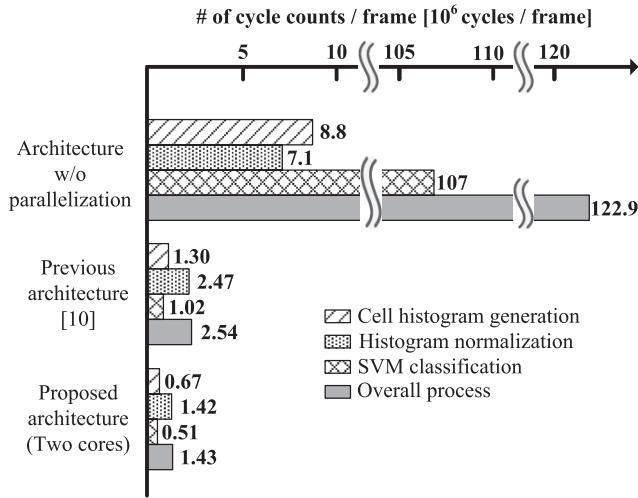


Fig. 14 Reduction of cycle count.

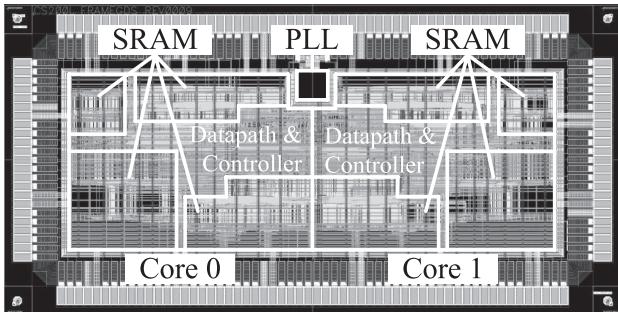


Fig. 15 Chip layout.

pixels) at 72 fps. On the other hand, the VLSI implementation targets HDTV resolution video (1920×1080 pixels) at 30 fps. The power consumption of the proposed architecture is estimated in several conditions, combinations of the number of cores, early classification described in Sect. 3.5, and feature sharing described in Sect. 3.3. To prevent miss-rate degradation, 4σ is adopted for the standard deviation in early classification. In general, supply voltage at 42.9 MHz

Table 2 Chip specifications.

Technology	65nm CMOS
Chip size	$4.2 \times 2.1\text{mm}^2$
Core size	$3.3 \times 1.2\text{mm}^2$
Power supply	1.1 V
Max frequency	110 MHz
Gate count	502 Kgates
Memory size	1.22 Mbit (610 Kbit for one core)
Image resolution	HDTV (1920×1080 pixels) @ 30fps
Power	99.52 mW @ 42.9 MHz 1.1 V 40.30 mW @ 42.9 MHz 0.7 V (min)

can be lowered than supply voltage at 83.4 MHz. According to past implementation result in same process technology [14], minimum supply voltages at 42.9 MHz and 83.4 MHz are 0.7 V and 0.9 V, respectively. Consequently, two-core configuration shows less power consumption than one-core configuration at minimum supply voltage. Two-core configuration with early classification and feature sharing consumes 99.52 mW at 42.9 MHz when a nominal supply voltage is 1.1 V, which attains real-time processing for HDTV resolution video with 30 fps frame rate.

Figure 17 portrays an example of real-time object detection by the proposed accelerator.

5. Conclusion

This paper presents a proposal of a novel architecture of real-time HOG feature extraction for parallel feature processing. The proposed method includes a simplified HOG algorithm with early classification, dual core architecture with a cell-based pipeline, and detection-window-size scalable architecture. The early classification method reduces the amount of computations in SVM classification from 6.34 GOPS to 4.92 GOPS with no accuracy degradation. The dual core architecture provides several modes of parallel processing for required cycle count reduction and power consumption reduction. In addition, the proposed architecture has high functionality for simultaneous multiple-object detection and detection-window-size scalability. Consequently, the proposed architecture is adaptable to recent ad-

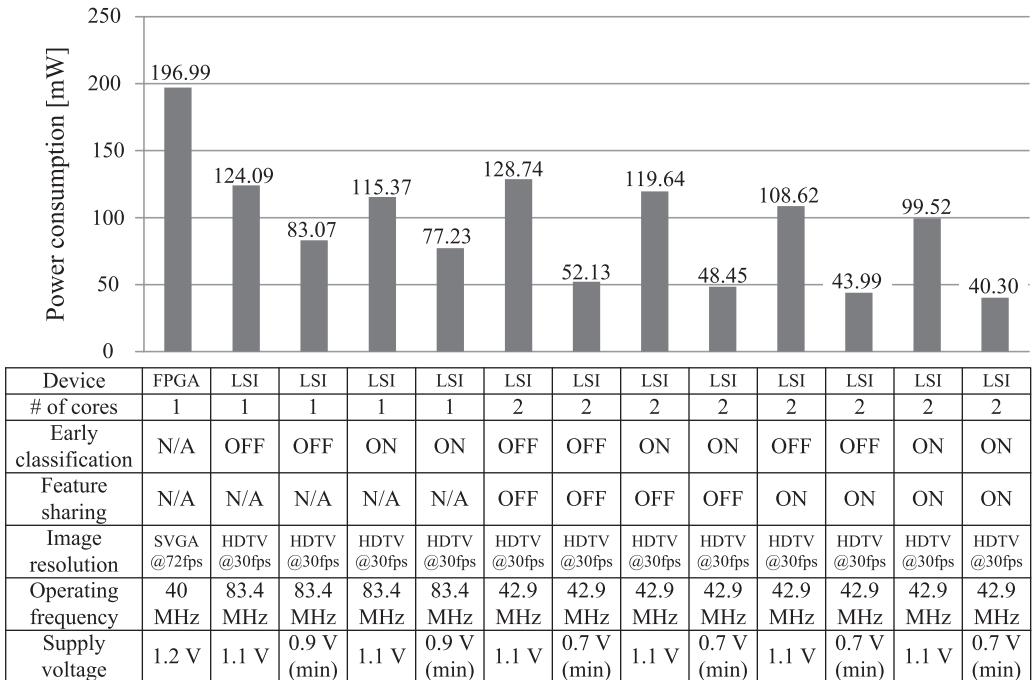


Fig. 16 Power consumption in several modes.

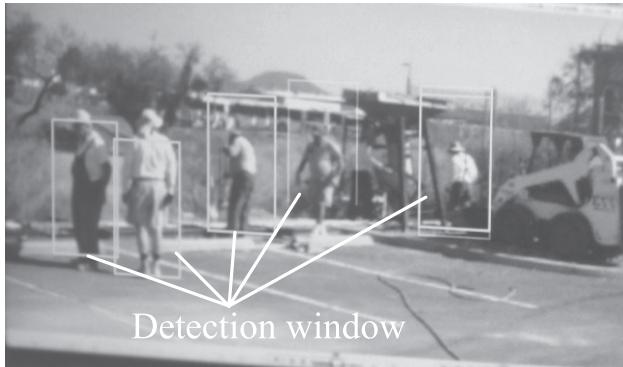


Fig. 17 Object detection by the proposed accelerator.

vanced applications such as on-vehicle application and intelligent robots. The VLSI implementation shows 49.5% power reduction with that of the conventional processor [10]. The design techniques described herein are anticipated for application to several image recognition applications. They are anticipated specifically for their great impact on mobile applications under limited battery conditions.

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