System-level design for efficient execution of CNNs at the edge
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Chapter 2

Background

In this chapter, we present an overview of concepts essential to understand the contributions of this thesis. In Section 2.1, we present the CNN model used to represent a CNN in this thesis. In Section 2.2, we describe the CNN deployment and inference at the Edge, briefly introduced in Section 1.3 because in this thesis, we study and propose novel methodologies for efficient CNN deployment and inference at the Edge. In Section 2.3, we introduce a typical edge platform used to execute CNNs inference. Namely, we introduce the well-known and state-of-the-art NVIDIA Jetson TX2 platform [71], used to perform experiments in this thesis. In Section 2.4, we explain the task- and data-level parallelism available in a CNN. We exploit the aforementioned types of parallelism to ensure efficient inference of CNNs at the Edge. In Section 2.5, we briefly describe the Cyclo-Static Data Flow (CSDF) [10] and the Synchronous Data Flow (SDF) [57] models of computation, widely used in the Embedded Systems community to represent applications executed at the Edge. Unlike the CNN model, introduced in Section 2.1, the SDF model and the CSDF model explicitly specify the parallelism, available within an application (or a part of an application such as a CNN), and enable for modelling of various manners of application execution. In this thesis, we use the CSDF model and the SDF model to represent an augmented design point (i.e., a CNN, executed in a specific manner) briefly introduced in Section 1.5. Finally, in Section 2.6, we describe the basic concepts of a Genetic Algorithm (GA): a well-known heuristic approach, widely used for finding optimal solutions for complex Design Space Exploration (DSE) problems. Some of the methodologies, presented in this thesis, are based on a GA.
2.1 CNN model

A Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) is commonly represented as a directed acyclic computational graph \( CNN(L, E) \) with a set of nodes \( L \), also called layers, and a set of edges \( E \). An example of a CNN model with a set of layers \( L = \{l_1, l_2, l_3, l_4, l_5\} \) and a set of edges \( E = \{e_{12}, e_{23}, e_{34}, e_{45}\} \) is shown in Figure 2.1.

![Figure 2.1: CNN model](image)

The CNN model specifies transformations over the CNN input data (e.g., an image), that result into the CNN output data (e.g., an image classification result). The transformations are specified by the set of layers \( L \). Edges in the set \( E \) specify data dependencies between the layers and determine the flow of data in a CNN. The detailed explanation and formal definition of a layer \( l_i \in L \) and an edge \( e_{ij} \in E \) of the CNN model are given in Section 2.1.1 and Section 2.1.2, respectively.

2.1.1 Layer in the CNN model

Every layer \( l_i \) in the CNN model represents part of the CNN functionality. It accepts as an input some data, produced by other layers, transforms this data using a mathematical operator, and provides output data. Formally, we define layer \( l_i \) as a set of attributes, summarized in Table 2.1. Column 1 lists the attributes; Column 2 provides a description of each attribute; Column 3 lists limitations, posed on the attribute by the CNN model; Column 4 shows the default value of an attribute, i.e., the value assigned to the attribute which is not defined explicitly. We note that some of the attributes (e.g., attributes \( I_i \) and \( O_i \) shown in Rows 4 to 5 in Table 2.1) only take the default value. Below, we explain the attributes of layer \( l_i \), summarized in Table 2.1, using as an example layer \( l_2 \) shown in Figure 2.1.

Attributes \( type_i \) and \( op_i \) (Rows 2 to 3 in Table 2.1) specify the type and performed operator of layer \( l_i \), respectively [4]. These attributes determine the main difference between the layers of a CNN. The most common types of
Table 2.1: Attributes of layer $l_i$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>attribute $i$</th>
<th>description</th>
<th>limitations</th>
<th>default value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$type_i$</td>
<td>layer type</td>
<td>supported by the CNN model (see Table 2.2)</td>
<td>for known $op_i$ see Table 2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$op_i$</td>
<td>operator</td>
<td>restricted by $type_i$ (see Table 2.2)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$I_i$</td>
<td>input edges</td>
<td>$I_i \subseteq E : \forall e_{ji} \in E, e_{ji} \in I_i$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$O_i$</td>
<td>output edges</td>
<td>$O_i \subseteq E : \forall e_{ij} \in E : e_{ij} \in O_i$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$X_i$</td>
<td>input data</td>
<td>see Equation 2.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$Y_i$</td>
<td>output data</td>
<td>see Equation 2.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Theta_i$</td>
<td>sliding window</td>
<td>has smaller or equal size compared to $X_i$</td>
<td>window of size $kh_i \times kw_i$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$kh_i$</td>
<td>kernel height</td>
<td>$0 &lt; kh_i \leq X_i.h$; typically $kh_i = kw_i$; $kh_i = X_i.h$ if $type_i \in {data, FC}$</td>
<td>$X_i.h$ if $type_i \in {data, FC}$, else 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$kw_i$</td>
<td>kernel width</td>
<td>$0 &lt; kw_i \leq X_i.w$; typically $kw_i = kh_i$; $kw_i = X_i.w$ if $type_i \in {data, FC}$</td>
<td>$X_i.w$ if $type_i \in {data, FC}$, else 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$s_i$</td>
<td>stride</td>
<td>$s_i = 1$ if $op_i \notin {conv, max\ \text{pool}, \ \text{average pool}}$</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$pad_i$</td>
<td>padding</td>
<td>an array of four integer numbers</td>
<td>$[0,0,0,0]$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$par_i$</td>
<td>(trainable) parameters</td>
<td>a set of parameters, specific for CNN layer [4]</td>
<td>$\emptyset$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2: Most common CNN layer types and operators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>layer type</th>
<th>operators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>convolutional</td>
<td>conv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pooling</td>
<td>(global) max pool, (global) average pool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>activation</td>
<td>ReLU, thn, sigmoid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>data</td>
<td>input, output</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fully connected (FC)</td>
<td>GEMM, MatMUL, dot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>loss</td>
<td>softmax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>normalization</td>
<td>BatchNormalization, LRN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arithmetic</td>
<td>add</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transformation</td>
<td>concat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
layers and operators performed by layers of these types are shown in Table 2.2. For example, layer $l_2$ shown in Figure 2.1 has type $2 = \text{convolutional}$ and performs operator $op_2 = \text{conv}$. Operator $op_2$ performed by layer $l_2$ is explicitly specified in Figure 2.1, thus the type of layer $l_2$ is determined using Table 2.2.

Attributes $I_i$ and $O_i$ (Rows 4 to 5 in Table 2.1) specify the input and output edges of layer $l_i$, respectively. For example, layer $l_2$ shown in Figure 2.1 has input edges $I_2 = \{e_{12}\}$ and output edges $O_2 = \{e_{23}\}$.

Attributes $X_i$ and $Y_i$ (Rows 6 to 7 in Table 2.1) specify the input and output data of layer $l_i$, respectively. These attributes always take the default value, computed using Equation 2.1 and Equation 2.2.

$$X_i = \begin{cases} e_{ji}.\text{data} : e_{ji} \in I_i & \text{if } |I_i| = 1 \\ \{e_{ji}.\text{data}\}, \forall e_{ji} \in I_i & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$ (2.1)

$$Y_i = \begin{cases} e_{ij}.\text{data} : e_{ij} \in O_i & \text{if } |O_i| > 0 \\ \emptyset & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$ (2.2)

The value of attribute $X_i$ is computed using Equation 2.1, where $e_{ji}.\text{data}$ is the data accepted by layer $l_i$ and associated with input edge $e_{ji} \in I_i$ of layer $l_i$; $|I_i|$ is the total number of input edges of layer $l_i$. Typically, layer $l_i$ has one input edge, i.e., $|I_i| = 1$. In this case, input data $X_i$ of layer $l_i$ is the data $e_{ji}.\text{data}$, associated with the only input edge $e_{ji}$ of layer $l_i$. For example, layer $l_2$ shown in Figure 2.1 has one input edge $e_{12}$, and has input data $X_2 = e_{12}.\text{data}$. However, some layers may accept as an input data coming from multiple input edges (e.g., layers performing operator $\text{concat}$ [4]) or accept no input data (e.g., layers performing the operator $\text{input}$ [4]). Layers that accept no input data have $|I_i| = 0$ and $X_i = \emptyset$.

Analogously, the value of attribute $Y_i$ is computed using Equation 2.2, where $e_{ij}.\text{data}$ is the data produced by layer $l_i$ and associated with output edge $e_{ij} \in O_i$ of layer $l_i$; $|O_i|$ is the total number of output edges of layer $l_i$. Typically, layer $l_i$ has at least one output edge and produces data $Y_i \neq \emptyset$, broadcasted to every output edge of layer $l_i$. For example, layer $l_2$ shown in Figure 2.1 produces output data $Y_2 = e_{23}.\text{data}$ onto its output edge $e_{23}$. However, some layers (e.g., layers performing the operator $\text{input}$ [4]) do not produce data. These layers have $|O_i| = 0$ and $Y_i = \emptyset$.

Attributes $\Theta_i$, $kh_i$, $kw_i$, $s_i$, and $pad_i$ (Rows 8 to 12 in Table 2.1) are the hyper-parameters of layer $l_i$ [4]. These attributes, obtained during the CNN design, specify how the layer processes its input data. To process its input data $X_i$, layer $l_i$ moves along $X_i$ with sliding window $\Theta_i$ and stride $s_i$, applying operator $op_i$ to the area of $X_i$, covered by $\Theta_i$. The sliding window $\Theta_i$ has
smaller or equal size, compared to \( X_i \). The height and width of window \( \Theta_i \) are typically equal to the kernel height \( kh_i \) and kernel width \( kw_i \) of layer \( l_i \), while the number of channels of \( \Theta_i \) is typically equal to the number of channels of \( X_i \) \[4\]. The areas, covered by \( \Theta_i \), can overlap. Figure 2.2 shows an example, where layer \( l_2 \) shown in Figure 2.1 processes its input data by four parts, covered by sliding window \( \Theta_2 \) of size 3 x 3 x 3 pixels, and stride \( s_2 = 1 \) pixel.

Before processing its input data, layer \( l_i \) may crop or extend its input data \( X_i \) to data \( X'_i \) with padding \[4\]. Typically, this is done to ensure that the input data of layer \( l_i \) can be covered by sliding window \( \Theta_i \) of layer \( l_i \) integer number of times \[4\]. We specify the padding of layer \( l_i \) as attribute \( pad_i \) (Row 12 in Table 2.1). \( pad_i \) is an array of four integer numbers. Elements of \( pad_i \), referred as \( pad_i[0], pad_i[1], pad_i[2] \), and \( pad_i[3] \), respectively, specify the crop/extension of the height and width of data \( X_i \) as given in Equation 2.3 and Equation 2.4, respectively.

\[
X'_i.w = pad_i[0] + X_i.w + pad_i[2] \tag{2.3}
\]

\[
X'_i.h = pad_i[1] + X_i.h + pad_i[3] \tag{2.4}
\]

By default, layer \( l_i \) has \( pad_i = [0,0,0,0] \), which means that layer \( l_i \) does not crop or extend its input data \( X_i \) before processing. Figure 2.3 shows an example where layer \( l_2 \) crops (see Figure 2.3 (a)) and extends (see Figure 2.3 (b)) its input data \( X_i \) with padding \( pad_2 = [0,0,-1,-1] \) and \( pad_2 = [1,1,1,1] \), respectively.

Beside the hyper-parameters, layer \( l_i \) has (trainable) parameters such as weights and biases \[4\], specified as attribute \( par_i \) (Row 13 in Table 2.1). As mentioned in Chapter 1, these parameters of layer \( l_i \) are obtained during the
CNN training and are used by operator $op_i$ of layer $l_i$. For example, layer $l_2$ has parameters $par_2$ composed of weights $W_2$ and biases $B_2$, used to perform $op_2 = \text{conv}$.

### 2.1.2 Edge in the CNN model

Every edge $e_{ij} \in E$ in the CNN model specifies a data dependency between layers $l_i$ and $l_j$ of a CNN, such that the data produced by layer $l_i$ is accepted as an input by layer $l_j$. Formally, we define edge $e_{ij}$ as a tuple $(l_i, l_j, data)$, where $data$ is the data produced by layer $l_i$, accepted by layer $l_j$, and associated with edge $e_{ij}$. The data associated with edge $e_{ij}$ is stored in a multidimensional array called tensor [4]. In this thesis, every data tensor has the shape $[\text{batch}, h, w, ch]$, where $\text{batch}, h, w, ch$ are the batch size [4], the height, the width, and the number of channels of the tensor, respectively. An example of edge $e_{12} = (l_1, l_2, data)$ is shown in Figure 2.1. Edge $e_{12}$ represents the data dependency between layers $l_1$ and $l_2$, where layer $l_2$ accepts as an input the data produced by layer $l_1$. Edge $e_{12}$ is annotated with shape $[1,4,4,3]$. This means that the data tensor, exchanged between layers $l_1$ and $l_2$, and associated with edge $e_{12}$ has batch size $= 1$, height and width $= 4$, and number of channels $= 3$.

### 2.2 CNN deployment and inference at the Edge

The CNN inference is a process of applying the CNN to real-world data (e.g., images) and obtaining the CNN output (e.g., results of the input images classification). Nowadays, the CNN inference can be performed on a wide variety of hardware platforms. In this thesis, we concentrate on the CNN inference performed on edge (mobile and embedded) platforms, presented in Section 2.3.
Before the CNN inference can start, the CNN is *deployed* on a target platform, i.e., some memory of the platform is allocated to the CNN. The total amount of memory (in bytes), allocated to a CNN is computed as:

\[ m = m_{\text{par}} + m_{\text{buf}} \]  \hspace{1cm} (2.5)

where \( m_{\text{par}} \) is the memory, required to store the CNN parameters (weights and biases) and computed using Equation 2.6; \( m_{\text{buf}} \) is the memory, required to store the CNN intermediate computational results and computed using Equation 2.7.

\[ m_{\text{par}} = \sum_{i \in [1,|L|]} |\text{par}_i| \times \text{par\_size} \]  \hspace{1cm} (2.6)

In Equation 2.6, \( |\text{par}_i| \) is the total number of parameters, associated with layer \( l_i \in L \) of the CNN; \( \text{par\_size} \) is the size of one parameter in bytes;

\[ m_{\text{buf}} = \sum_{B_k \in B} B_k.\text{size} \]  \hspace{1cm} (2.7)

In Equation 2.7, \( B \) is a set of buffers, i.e., the memory segments, allocated to store the intermediate computational results of a CNN [76]. Every buffer \( B_k \in B \) has one or several CNN edges \( e_{ij} \) allocated to it. Buffer \( B_k \) stores data \( e_{ij}.\text{data} \), exchanged between CNN layers \( l_i \) and \( l_j \) during the CNN inference and is characterized with size (in bytes) computed as:

\[ B_k.\text{size} = \max_{e_{ij} \in B_k.\text{edges}} \{|e_{ij}.\text{data}| \times \text{token\_size}\} \]  \hspace{1cm} (2.8)

In Equation 2.8, \( e_{ij} \in B_k.\text{edges} \) is an edge, storing data in buffer \( B_k \); \( |e_{ij}.\text{data}| \) is the total number of data elements (tokens), exchanged through edge \( e_{ij} \); \( \text{token\_size} \) is the size of one token in bytes.

A CNN deployed on an edge platform can start its inference phase when the CNN can utilize the memory and the computational resources available on the platform to perform the CNN functionality, i.e., to execute all the layers in the CNN. Every layer can be executed on processors, such as CPUs, GPUs and/or FPGAs [17], available in the platform. If a platform has parallel processors (accelerators), such as GPUs or FPGAs, computations within the layer can be represented as one or multiple kernels [17] and offloaded on these accelerators by the CPUs. Otherwise, these computations are performed on the CPUs. If the computations within a CNN layer are offloaded on an accelerator with local memory, e.g., a GPU, the CNN layer input data and parameters, required to perform the computations, are copied from the main memory into
the local memory of the accelerator and the results of the computation are copied back to the main memory.

The layers of a CNN are executed in a specific order, determined by the data dependencies within the CNN and the manner the CNN is executed. Typically, the CNN layers are executed in a **sequential manner**, where the CNN execution is represented as $|L|$ computational steps and at every $i$-th computational step, CNN layer $l_i \in L$ is executed. However, as it will be explained in Section 2.4, a CNN can also be executed in **alternative (non-sequential) manners**, that involve exploitation of task-level (pipeline) parallelism, where the layers of the CNN are executed in parallel (pipelined) fashion. In this thesis, we consider both sequential and non-sequential manners of CNN execution. To represent a CNN, executed in a specific manner, we use the CSDF and SDF models of computation, presented in Section 2.5.

### 2.3 Edge platform used for CNN inference

Modern edge platforms used to execute the CNN inference are complex systems that host a large number of specific hardware components: processors, memory, power supply elements, sensors and others [32, 109]. Figure 2.4 shows a simplified structure of the NVIDIA Jetson TX2 edge platform [71]: one of the best-known edge platforms used to execute CNNs.

To perform computations within a CNN, an edge platform may host multiple heterogeneous processors such as central processing units (CPUs), graphics processing units (GPUs), field-programmable gate arrays (FPGAs), and/or Tensor Processing Units (TPUs) [32, 109]. For example, the Jetson TX2 platform shown in Figure 2.4 hosts a double-core Denver 2 CPU and a...

![Figure 2.4: Jetson TX2 edge platform](image-url)
2.4 Task- and data-level parallelism available in a CNN

As a computational model the CNN model is characterized with large amount of available parallelism. This parallelism can be exploited to speed-up the CNN inference and to efficiently utilize computational resources of an edge platform, where the CNN is executed.

The most widely exploited type of parallelism available within CNNs is the data-level parallelism, illustrated in Figure 2.5. This type of parallelism involves the same computation, e.g., Convolution, performed by a CNN layer over the CNN layer input data partitions. Efficient utilization of data-level parallelism allows to speed-up the inference of a CNN by accelerating the execution of individual CNN layers. This type of parallelism is exploited by the majority of existing Deep Learning (DL) frameworks, such as Keras [19], Pytorch [75], Tensorlow [1], TensorRT [72] and others [74]. The data-level parallelism, available within layer $l_i$ of a CNN can be explicitly expressed by decomposition of the layer input data tensor $X_i$ into a set of $K$ sub-tensors $\{X_{i1}, X_{i2}, ..., X_{iK}\}$, where: 1) all sub-tensors $X_{ik}, k \in [1, K]$ can be processed in parallel by operator $op_i$. When layer $l_i$ applies operator $op_i$ to $X_{ik}$, it produces
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Figure 2.5: data-level parallelism

Sub-tensor $Y_{ik}$ of output data $Y_i$; 2) elements (pixels) within every $X_{ik}$ can be processed in parallel. Figure 2.5 illustrates the data-level parallelism, available within convolutional layer $l_2$, shown in Figure 2.1 and explained in Section 2.1. In Figure 2.5, input data tensor $X_2$ of layer $l_2$ is decomposed into $K = 4$ overlapping sub-tensors $X_{2k}, k \in [1, 4]$ that can be processed in parallel. When layer $l_2$ processes sub-tensor $X_{2k}$ with operator $op_2 = \text{conv}$, it produces sub-tensor $Y_{2k}$ of output data $Y_2$, such that $Y_2 = \bigcup_{k=1}^{4} Y_{2k}$. Every sub-tensor $X_{2k}$ shown in Figure 2.5 is subsequently decomposed into a set of pixels, where every pixel can be processed in parallel.

Another type of parallelism available in a CNN is known as task-level parallelism or pipeline parallelism [67, 101] among the CNN layers. This type of parallelism is related to the streaming nature of a CNN-based application, where the application accepts different input frames (images) from an input data stream. When a CNN is executed on a platform with multiple processors, the frames from the input data stream can be processed in a pipelined fashion by different layers of the CNN deployed on different processors.
Figure 2.6 shows an example where the CNN shown in Figure 2.1 and explained in Section 2.1 is executed in a pipelined fashion on a platform with two processors: a CPU and a GPU. The layers of the CNN, representing computations within the CNN, are distributed over the platform processors: layers $l_1$ and $l_2$ are executed on the GPU, while layers $l_3$, $l_4$, and $l_5$ are executed on the CPU. The distributed layers form two CNN sub-graphs also referred as partitions [67, 101], annotated as $\text{Subnet}_1$ and $\text{Subnet}_2$. Partition $\text{Subnet}_1$ accepts frames from the application input data stream, processes these frames as specified by layers $l_1$ and $l_2$ and stores the results into a buffer associated with edge $e_{23}$. Partition $\text{Subnet}_2$ accepts the frames processed by partition $\text{Subnet}_1$ from edge $e_{23}$, further processes these frames and produces the output data of the example CNN. Partitions $\text{Subnet}_1$ and $\text{Subnet}_2$ are executed on different processors in the platform and do not compete for the platform computational resources. Thus, when applied to different data (i.e., different frames), the partitions can be executed in parallel. In Figure 2.6, partitions $\text{Subnet}_1$ and $\text{Subnet}_2$ process frames $\text{frame 2}$ and $\text{frame 1}$ in parallel. This leads to overlapping execution of layers belonging to different partitions and enables for faster inference of the CNN, compared to conventional layer-by-layer (sequential) execution. However, pipelined CNN execution involves memory overheads. As shown in Figure 2.6, edge $e_{23}$ of the example CNN is duplicated between the partitions $\text{Subnet}_1$ and $\text{Subnet}_2$ (see edges $e_{23}^{(1)}$ and $e_{23}^{(2)}$ and the corresponding buffers). Such duplication, called the double-buffering [37], is necessary for execution of the CNN as a pipeline. It prevents competition for memory (buffers) between the partitions when accessing data associated with edge $e_{23}$. If the double buffering is not enabled the CNN partitions compete...
for access to edge $e_{23}$, thereby creating stalls in the pipeline and reducing the CNN throughput.

It is worth noting that the parallelism available in a CNN is not explicitly specified in the CNN model, introduced in Section 2.1. The number of parallel tasks, executed to perform the CNN model functionality, and the exact communication and synchronization mechanisms between these tasks are internally determined by the utilized DL framework, and can vary for different frameworks. For example, the well-known DL frameworks [1, 75] represent the functionality of every CNN layer $l_i$ as multiple tasks, where the total number of tasks depends on the number of CPUs available on the target edge platform. The frameworks [94, 101] represent the functionality of the same layer $l_i$ as one task or part of a task. Therefore, the task-level parallelism is not explicitly specified in the CNN model. Analogously, the data-level parallelism is not explicitly defined in the CNN model because the number of input/output data sub-tensors $K$, the number of elements within sub-tensors $X_{ik}$ and $Y_{ik}$, and other decomposition parameters are determined by every design framework individually, can vary for different frameworks, and even within one framework. For example, the TensorRT framework [72] is capable of representing the $\text{conv}$ operator as: 1) the $\text{GEMM}$ operator, so for every Convolutional layer $K = 1$; 2) a direct convolution where $K >= 1$ is computed from the attributes of a layer, performing the $\text{conv}$ operator.

### 2.5 CSDF and SDF models of computation

The CSDF model [10] is a well-known dataflow model of computation, widely used for model-based design in the embedded systems community. An application modelled as a CSDF is a directed graph $G(A, C)$ with set of nodes $A$, also called actors, communicating with each other through a set of communication FIFO channels $C$. Figure 2.7 shows an example of a CSDF model $G(A, C)$, where $A = \{a_1, a_2, a_3, a_4, a_5\}$ and $C = \{c_{12}, c_{22}, c_{23}, c_{34}, c_{45}\}$.

Every actor $a_i \in A$ in the CSDF model represents a certain functionality of the application, modelled as a CSDF graph, and performs an execution sequence $F_i = [f_i(1), f_i(2), \ldots, f_i(P_i)]$ of length $P_i$, where $p \in [1, P_i]$ is called a phase of actor $a_i$. At every phase actor $a_i$ executes function $f_i(((p - 1)\mod P_i) + 1)$. An example of CSDF actor $a_2$ is shown in Figure 2.7. Actor $a_2$ performs execution sequence $F_2 = [\text{conv}, \text{conv}]$, shortly written as $[2 * \text{conv}]$, meaning actor $a_2$ has $P_2 = 2$ phases and performs function $f_2(p) = \text{conv}$ at each of its phases $p \in [1, 2]$.

Every FIFO communication channel $c_{ij} \in C$ represents a data dependency
Every $c_{ij} \in C$ has production sequence $U_{ij}$ and consumption sequence $V_{ij}$. Production sequence $U_{ij} : [u_{ij}(1), u_{ij}(2), \ldots, u_{ij}(P_i)]$ of length $P_i$ specifies the production of data tokens into channel $c_{ij}$ by its source actor $a_i$. Analogously, consumption sequence $V_{ij} : [v_{ij}(1), v_{ij}(2), \ldots, v_{ij}(P_j)]$ of length $P_j$ specifies the consumption of data tokens from channel $c_{ij}$ by its sink actor $a_j$. An example of communication channel $c_{22}$ is shown in Figure 2.7. For communication channel $c_{22}$, actor $a_2$ is a source and a sink actor. The production sequence $U_{22} : [24, 0]$, formally written as $U_{22} : [1 * 24, 1 * 0]$ specifies, that at phase $p = 1$ actor $a_2$ produces 24 tokens to channel $c_{22}$, and at phase $p = 2$ actor $a_2$ produces 0 tokens to channel $c_{22}$. Analogously, the consumption sequence $V_{22} : [1 * 0, 1 * 24]$, specifies that during phase $p = 1$ actor $a_2$ consumes 0 tokens from channel $c_{22}$, and at phase $p = 2$ actor $a_2$ consumes 24 tokens from channel $c_{22}$.

A special case of the CSDF model, where every actor has only one phase, is called Synchronous Data Flow (SDF) model [57]. An example of a SDF model is shown in Figure 2.8.

At every firing, actor $a_i \in A$ of the SDF model consumes $v_{ki}(1)$ data tokens, executes function $f_i(1)$ and produces $u_{ij}(1)$ data tokens. For example, actor $a_2$ shown in Figure 2.8, at every firing consumes 48 data tokens from channel $c_{12}$, executes function $f_2(1) = conv$ and produces 8 data tokens to channel $c_{23}$. For simplicity, we omit the number of phases while annotating the execution.

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**Figure 2.7: CSDF model of computation**

**Figure 2.8: SDF model of computation**
sequence, the production sequence, and the consumption sequence of the SDF model. For example, the consumption sequence of actor $a_2$ shown in Figure 2.8 is annotated simply as $[48]$ instead of $[1 \times 48]$.

2.6 Genetic Algorithm (GA)

Genetic Algorithm (GA) [83] is a well-known heuristic approach, widely used for finding optimal solutions for complex Design Space Exploration (DSE) problems. In a GA, a population of candidate solutions to an optimization problem is evolved toward better solutions. A GA has two important problem-specific attributes: a chromosome and a fitness function.

A chromosome is a genetic representation of the solution. Typically, a chromosome is defined as a set of parameters (genes), joined into a string. An example of a chromosome is shown in Figure 2.9 This chromosome shows a distribution (mapping) of the computations within the layers of the CNN shown in Figure 2.1 and explained in Section 2.1 onto the computational resources of the Jetson TX 2 edge platform shown in Figure 2.4 and explained in Section 2.3. The chromosome shown in Figure 2.9 is a string of 5 genes, where every $i$-th gene, $i \in [1, 5]$, specifies a processor of the Jetson TX 2 platform which performs computations within layer $l_i$ of the CNN. For example, the chromosome specifies that computations within layer $l_1$ of the CNN are performed on the GPU of the Jetson TX 2 platform.

A fitness function is a special function, which evaluates the quality of GA solutions, represented as chromosomes, and guides the GA-based search for (pareto) optimal solutions. During the search, the fitness function should be minimized or maximized. For example, a fitness function can estimate the throughput of inference of the CNN, shown in Figure 2.1 and executed on the Jetson TX2 platform as specified in the chromosome shown in Figure 2.9.

\[ l_1 \ l_2 \ l_3 \ l_4 \ l_5 \]

\[ GPU \ \text{cpu}_1 \ \text{cpu}_1 \ \text{cpu}_3 \ \text{cpu}_3 \]

**Figure 2.9: Chromosome**

\[ l_1 \ l_2 \ l_3 \ l_4 \ l_5 \]

\[ GPU \ \text{cpu}_1 \ \text{cpu}_1 \ \text{cpu}_3 \ \text{cpu}_3 \]

**Figure 2.10: Single-gene mutation**

\[ l_1 \ l_2 \ l_3 \ l_4 \ l_5 \]

\[ GPU \ \text{cpu}_1 \ \text{cpu}_3 \ \text{cpu}_3 \]

**Figure 2.11: Simple two-parent recombination (cross-over)**
If this fitness function is maximized during a GA-based search, it will guide the search towards finding chromosomes that ensure high CNN inference throughput.

Once the chromosome and the fitness function are defined, a GA can proceed to perform evolution, i.e., search for optimal solutions. The evolution is an iterative process. It starts from a population of randomly generated chromosomes. At each iteration, the fitness of every chromosome in the population is evaluated using the fitness function. Then, the chromosomes with the best score are selected from the population and are subjected to two genetic operators, called recombination (cross-over) and mutation. During the recombination two selected chromosomes exchange parts (typically, halves) to produce a new chromosome. During the mutation, one or multiple genes of the chromosome randomly change their values. In this thesis, we use a standard two-parent crossover and a single-gene mutation as proposed in [83] and illustrated in Figure 2.11 and Figure 2.10, respectively. The new population of candidate chromosomes, generated using the recombination and mutation, is used in the next iteration of the GA-based search. The GA-based search terminates when either a maximum number of iterations or a termination condition (e.g., satisfactory fitness level) has been reached.

Beside the two problem-specific attributes, mentioned above, a GA also has a number of parameters such as the maximum number of GA iterations, the number of individuals in the initial population, the probability of mutation in the chromosomes and others [83]. These parameters are typically user-defined.