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TITLE: **Interaction with Meaningful State: Implementing Dependency on Digital Computers**

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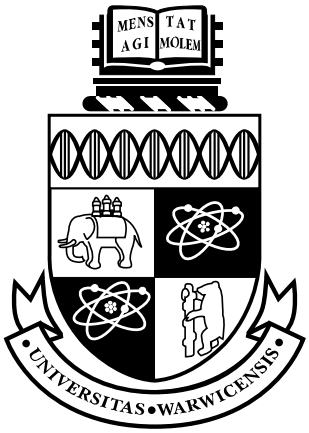

Interaction with Meaningful State: Implementing Dependency on Digital Computers

by

Ashley Thomas Ward

Thesis

Submitted to the University of Warwick

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Computer Science

May 2004

THE UNIVERSITY OF
WARWICK

To Uncle Adam, Uncle Colin,
Mr Cheal, Mikki Larcombe
and Meurig with thanks

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Acknowledgements

Most of all, I would like to thank my supervisor Meurig Beynon for his trust, patience and inspiration. Mine has been a wonderful apprenticeship. Steve Russ has also played a major part in my supervision and I am deeply grateful for his thoughtful advice.

Many other people have also assisted with this thesis, directly and indirectly.

I would like to thank the selection of previous EM researchers whose work I have had the pleasure of studying closely for this thesis. If I criticise their work, I do so only in an attempt to stand on their shoulders. In chronological order of their contribution: Y.W. 'Edward' Yung, Samia Meziani, Mike Slade, Y.P. 'Simon' Yung, Dominic Gehring, James Allderidge, Pi-Hwa 'Patrick' Sun and Richard Cartwright. I am also very grateful to Richard for introducing me to this area.

I am pleased to acknowledge Russell Boyatt, Chris Brown, Ben Carter, "the other" Ashley Chaloner, Josie Clement, Richard Cunningham, Carlos Fischer, Nathan Griffiths, Antony Harfield, Tim Heron, Mark Lloyd, Ria Lloyd, Izellah Macintosh, Jon McHale, Rod Moore, Roger Packwood, Chris Roe, Chris Rose, Dorian Rutter, Stuart Valentine and Paul Williamson for technical assistance related to this thesis. I also thank my other fellow EM-ers for many thought-provoking seminars and models, as well as Abhir Bhalerao, Peter Forbrig, Katie Lucas, Steve Matthews, Simon Rawles, Hans Roeck, Matt Street and Rob West for useful input.

I would especially like to thank Chris Roe for his companionship as we explored this landscape together. Many thanks also to my trusted friend Benjohn Barnes for many wide-ranging discussions over the course of this work.

Since May 2002 I have been working part-time on this thesis — my Teaching Fellow 'day job' has involved the teaching of Computer Organisation and Architecture (COA). I am indebted to my COA colleagues Chang-Tsun Li, Franc Buxton, Gerry Biggs and TRM, RAP, SGV, RC, PW already mentioned above. I also thank my other colleagues and friends in the department. I particularly appreciate the generosity and trust of Graham Nudd.

I am extremely grateful to my family and friends for moral support. Thanks to Mum and Dad for (amongst many other things), instilling organisational skills and encouraging me to ask 'why'.

Finally, thank you, Linda, for the unconditional love and support, providing the stability without which this thesis would never have been completed.

Thanks to my external examiners Mike Holcombe and Jean Bacon for the timely viva and helpful comments.

Declaration

This thesis is presented in accordance with the regulations for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It has been composed by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree. The work in this thesis has been undertaken by myself except where otherwise stated. All quoted text remains the copyright of the original attributed author. I have taken the liberty of correcting typographical errors, spelling and grammar where necessary. All trademarks are acknowledged.

None of the material in this thesis has been previously published, but some of the motivating ideas have appeared in joint work published in [BCSW99, BWM+00, BCH+01, BRWW01, BBRW03].

Interaction with Meaningful State:
Implementing Dependency on Digital Computers

Abstract

A perception of an agent as follows — that the act of changing the value of one observable indivisibly entails a predictable accompanying change in that of another — can be termed a *dependency*. Indivisibility in change allows us, as agents, to make our experience of interaction with the 'world' meaningful.

Empirical Modelling (EM) is the name we have given at Warwick to the activity of building artefacts to embody patterns of observables, dependencies and agent actions that are encountered in experience. EM involves the progressive development of understanding through interaction, whereby meaning is continually refined in the light of additional experience. An EM artefact can be physical (*cf.* the Phillips machine [Phi00]) or computer-based (*cf.* spreadsheets).

This thesis investigates how dependency can be effectively implemented on a digital computer through the critical evaluation of three contrasting tools to support EM developed at Warwick over the last 16 years. The thesis contribution has three aspects: conceptual insight; critical, historical and empirical review; and technical and practical development.

Slade's original Abstract Definitive Machine (ADM) concept [Sla90] and its implementations are reviewed and linked to the original motivation for its development — animating LSD accounts. The main emphasis of the ADM is on agency. Subtleties and inconsistencies in the way in which the ADM concept has developed over time are exposed and an algorithm for an 'Authentic' ADM (AADM) is proposed.

Cartwright's design and implementation of the Definitive Assembly Maintainer (DAM) machine [Car99] is analysed and critiqued. The DAM machine emphasises only dependency. The DAM machine is extended to allow lower-level interaction using a special-purpose code and to exploit the video hardware to create dependency at a very low level.

The primary tool of the EM research group, EDEN [Yun93, Yun90], successfully combines both dependency and agency. Its development is reviewed in its historical context and various extensions, including novel interfacing, are described. The first exposition of EDEN's internal operation is given.

The analysis of existing EM tools motivates the examination of some problematic issues regarding concurrency, moding and higher-order dependency. Some proposals for design and implementation to address these issues are described.

Throughout the thesis, consideration of technical issues is motivated by the possibility that human engagement with computers can have qualities similar to engagement with 'real-world' artefacts, manifest in interaction with meaningful state that is at all times intelligible to the human interpreter, unlike the typically meaningless intermediate states that are generated in the execution of a conventional program. The insights that exploring this possibility brings may be significant in producing programs that are more robust under change.

Abbreviations

AADM	Authentic ADM
ADM	Abstract Definitive Machine [Sla90]
AOP	Agent-Oriented Parser [Har02, Bro01]
ARCA	A definitive notation named after Arthur Cayley (1821–1895), which "might be charitably regarded as 'An Aid for the Realisation of Combinatorial Artefacts'" [Bey83]
BRA	Block Redefinition Algorithm [Car99] (my abbreviation)
CADNO[1]	Computer-Aided Design Notation ([Bey89b], first named in [Bey89a])
DAM machine	Definitive Assembly Maintainer machine [Car99]
DAMscript	A type of Low Level Definitive Notation used to program the DAM machine
DM	Dependency Maintainer
DMM	Dependency Maintainer Model [Car99]
!Donald	An implementation of DoNaLD running on the DAM machine
DoNaLD	Definitive Notation for Line Drawing [BABH86]
`dtkeden`	An implementation of EDEN that allows distributed communication [Sun99]
EDDI	Eden Definition Database Interpreter [Tru96]
EDEN	Engine for DEfinitive Notations [Yun90] — in this thesis, upper case 'EDEN' denotes an implementation
Eden	The language implemented by EDEN [Yun89]
EM	Empirical Modelling

[1] Also Welsh for "fox".

empublic	A local directory containing our tools installation and collected archive of models, partially accessible via the web [WRB]
FV	Formula Variable [Yun90] (in Eden)
HOD	Higher Order Dependency/Definition
ISM	Interactive Situation Model [Sun99]
LLDN	Low Level Definitive Notation [Car99] (my abbreviation)
LSD	Language for Specification and Description [Bey87a]
RWV	Read-Write Variable [Yun90] (in Eden)
S, $S*$, S' states	States before, during and after a transition
Sasami	A definitive notation for EDEN allowing use of 3D graphics, implemented using OpenGL [Car00]
SCOUT	SCreen layOUT — a definitive notation [Yun93]
`tkeden`	An implementation [Yun93] of EDEN with a graphical user interface implemented using Tcl/Tk [Ous94]
`ttyeden`	An implementation of EDEN with a terminal-based 'curses' interface
UNITY	Unbounded Nondeterministic Iterative Transformations — a computational model and proof system [CM88]
VM	Virtual Machine