

Machine Learning in VLSI Computer-Aided Design

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Editors

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 Springer

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To Shaza, Adam, Ella, and Lily

Abe

To Peggy, Will, and Tom

Duane

To Karen and Thomas

Xin

Tell me and I forget.

Teach me and I remember.

Involve me and I learn.

Ben Franklin

Foreword

As an active branch of applied computer science, the field of VLSI computer-aided design (VLSI CAD) has always been at the technological forefront in incorporating cutting-edge algorithms in the software tools and methodologies that electronics engineers have used to weave the digital fabric of our world.

This book amply demonstrates that in line with its historical track record, VLSI CAD has also been at the leading edge in making good use of machine-learning technologies to further automate the design, verification, and implementation of the most advanced chips.

Machine learning and VLSI CAD have in common several main characteristics that may have greatly facilitated their interlock. The first is that they are both consumers of Big Data. In fact, Moore's law has essentially guaranteed that chip data grow exponentially big to the point that having tens of billions of transistors in a chip is now so common and almost taken for granted. The second characteristic that they have in common is a structured approach for controlling complexity. In machine learning, this approach is most apparent in the use of layered networks as inference and generalization engines. In VLSI CAD, complexity is controlled through a well-defined abstraction hierarchy, going from the transistor and its technology as raw data to the chip architecture as a model of processing and computation. The third common characteristic of the two fields is their focus on computational efficiency, be it to shorten turn-around time in chip design, as is the case in VLSI CAD, or to promptly detect patterns in time series as is the case in mission-critical cloud analytics. The fourth common characteristic is a focus on automated optimization and synthesis that VLSI CAD has spearheaded, and synthesis is now becoming an important trend for the design of neural networks in machine learning as well.

It is therefore almost natural to think of VLSI CAD engineers as the original data scientists who have been instrumental not only in dealing with big data in the context of chip design but also in enabling the very chips that have ushered the Big Data era and made it a social and business reality.

The various chapters of this timely and comprehensive book should give the reader a thorough understanding of the degree to which machine learning methods

have percolated into the various layers of the chip design hierarchy. From lithography and physical design to logic and system design, and from circuit performance estimation to manufacturing yield prediction, VLSI CAD researchers have already brought state-of-the-art algorithms from supervised, unsupervised, and statistical learning to bear on pressing CAD problems such as hotspot detection, design-space exploration, efficient test generation, and post-silicon measurement minimization.

Machine learning in VLSI CAD is expected to play an increasingly important role not only in improving the quality of the models used in *individual CAD tools* but also in enhancing the quality of chip designs that result from the execution of entire *CAD flows and methodologies*.

As the semiconductor industry embraces the rising swell of cognitive systems and edge intelligence, this book could serve as a harbinger and an example of the osmosis that will exist between our cognitive structures and methods, on the one hand, and the hardware architectures and technologies that will support them, on the other.

The value proposition of automation is that it compresses schedules, reduces costs, and eliminates human errors. In the case of VLSI CAD, the automation has achieved not only these objectives but also the infinitely more important outcome of a seamless implementation of a positive feedback loop whereby computers are used to design more powerful computers. This positive feedback loop is the invisible hand of Moore's law.

As we transition from the computing era to the cognitive one, it behooves us to remember the success story of VLSI CAD and to earnestly seek the help of the invisible hand so that our future cognitive systems are used to design more powerful cognitive systems. This book is very much aligned with this ongoing transition from computing to cognition, and it is with deep pleasure that I recommend it to all those who are actively engaged in this exciting transformation.

IBM T. J. Watson Research Center
Yorktown Heights, NY, USA
August 2018

Dr. Ruchir Puri
IBM Fellow, IBM Watson
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Abu Dhabi, UAE
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Durham, NC, USA
August 2018

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Contents

1	A Preliminary Taxonomy for Machine Learning in VLSI CAD	1
	Duane S. Boning, Ibrahim (Abe) M. Elfadel, and Xin Li	
1.1	Machine Learning Taxonomy	1
1.2	VLSI CAD Abstraction Levels	5
1.3	Organization of This Book	6
	References	15
 Part I Machine Learning for Lithography and Physical Design		
2	Machine Learning for Compact Lithographic Process Models	19
	J. P. Shiely	
2.1	Introduction	19
2.2	The Lithographic Patterning Process	20
2.3	Machine Learning of Compact Process Models	27
2.4	Neural Network Compact Patterning Models	47
2.5	Conclusions	66
	References	66
3	Machine Learning for Mask Synthesis	69
	Seongbo Shim, Suhyeong Choi, and Youngsoo Shin	
3.1	Introduction	69
3.2	Machine Learning-Guided OPC	70
3.3	Machine Learning-Guided EPC	78
3.4	Conclusions	91
	References	92
4	Machine Learning in Physical Verification, Mask Synthesis, and Physical Design	95
	Yibo Lin and David Z. Pan	
4.1	Introduction	95
4.2	Machine Learning in Physical Verification	96
4.3	Machine Learning in Mask Synthesis	101

4.4	Machine Learning in Physical Design	106
4.5	Conclusions	112
	References	113
Part II Machine Learning for Manufacturing, Yield, and Reliability		
5	Gaussian Process-Based Wafer-Level Correlation Modeling and Its Applications	119
	Constantinos Xanthopoulos, Ke Huang, Ali Ahmadi, Nathan Kupp, John Carulli, Amit Nahar, Bob Orr, Michael Pass, and Yiorgos Makris	
5.1	Introduction	119
5.2	Gaussian Process-Based Regression Models	123
5.3	Applications	145
5.4	Conclusions	169
	References	172
6	Machine Learning Approaches for IC Manufacturing Yield Enhancement	175
	Hongge Chen and Duane S. Boning	
6.1	Introduction	175
6.2	Background of the Manufacturing Process	177
6.3	Preliminaries	179
6.4	Learning Models	185
6.5	Experimental Results	191
6.6	Conclusions	198
	References	199
7	Efficient Process Variation Characterization by Virtual Probe	201
	Jun Tao, Wangyang Zhang, Xin Li, Frank Liu, Emrah Acar, Rob A. Rutenbar, Ronald D. Blanton, and Xuan Zeng	
7.1	Introduction	201
7.2	Virtual Probe	203
7.3	Implementation Details	212
7.4	Applications of Virtual Probe	219
7.5	Numerical Experiments	221
7.6	Conclusions	230
	References	230
8	Machine Learning for VLSI Chip Testing and Semiconductor Manufacturing Process Monitoring and Improvement	233
	Jinjun Xiong, Yada Zhu, and Jingrui He	
8.1	Introduction	233
8.2	Background	234
8.3	Machine Learning for Chip Testing and Yield Optimization	236
8.4	Hierarchical Multitask Learning for Wafer Quality Prediction ...	247

8.5 Co-clustering Structural Temporal Data from Semiconductor Manufacturing 253

8.6 Conclusions 261

References 261

9 Machine Learning-Based Aging Analysis 265

Arunkumar Vijayan, Krishnendu Chakrabarty, and Mehdi B. Tahoori

9.1 Introduction 265

9.2 Negative Bias Temperature Instability 267

9.3 Related Prior Work 268

9.4 Proposed Technique 271

9.5 Offline Correlation Analysis and Prediction Model Generation .. 271

9.6 Runtime Stress Monitoring 280

9.7 Results 281

9.8 Conclusions 286

References 287

Part III Machine Learning for Failure Modeling

10 Extreme Statistics in Memories 293

Amith Singhee

10.1 Cell Failure Probability: An Extreme Statistic 293

10.2 Extremes: Tails and maxima 296

10.3 Analysis of Tails and Extreme Values 300

10.4 Estimating the Tail: Learning the GPD Parameters from Data ... 305

10.5 Statistical Blockade: Sampling Rare Events 307

10.6 Conclusions 321

References 321

11 Fast Statistical Analysis Using Machine Learning 323

Rouwaida Kanj, Rajiv V. Joshi, Lama Shaer, Ali Chehab, and Maria Malik

11.1 Introduction: Logistic Regression-Based Importance Sampling Methodology for Statistical Analysis of Memory Design 323

11.2 Monte Carlo, Importance Sampling, and Variance Reduction Methods 325

11.3 Logistic Regression 329

11.4 Proposed Methodology 333

11.5 Application to State-of-the-Art FinFET SRAM Design 338

11.6 Conclusions 346

References 346

12 Fast Statistical Analysis of Rare Circuit Failure Events 349

Jun Tao, Shupeng Sun, Xin Li, Hongzhou Liu, Kangsheng Luo, Ben Gu, and Xuan Zeng

12.1 Introduction 349

12.2	Subset Simulation	352
12.3	Scaled-Sigma Sampling	362
12.4	Conclusions	372
	References	372
13	Learning from Limited Data in VLSI CAD	375
	Li-C. Wang	
13.1	Introduction	375
13.2	Iterative Feature Search	379
13.3	Assumptions in Machine Learning	382
13.4	Traditional Machine Learning	383
13.5	An Adjusted Machine Learning View	386
13.6	A SAT-Based Implementation	388
13.7	Incorporating Domain Knowledge	396
13.8	Conclusions	397
	References	398
 Part IV Machine Learning for Analog Design		
14	Large-Scale Circuit Performance Modeling by Bayesian	
	Model Fusion	403
	Jun Tao, Fa Wang, Paolo Cachecho, Wangyang Zhang, Shupeng Sun, Xin Li, Rouwaida Kanj, Chenjie Gu, and Xuan Zeng	
14.1	Introduction	403
14.2	Pre-silicon Validation	406
14.3	Post-silicon Tuning	416
14.4	Conclusions	420
	References	420
15	Sparse Relevance Kernel Machine-Based Performance	
	Dependency Analysis of Analog and Mixed-Signal Circuits	423
	Honghuang Lin, Asad Khan, and Peng Li	
15.1	Introduction	423
15.2	Feature Kernel Weighting	425
15.3	Sparse Relevance Kernel Machine	431
15.4	Experiments	437
15.5	Conclusions	445
	References	445
16	SiLVR: Projection Pursuit for Response Surface Modeling	449
	Amith Singhee	
16.1	Motivation	449
16.2	Prevailing Response Surface Models	451
16.3	Latent Variables and Ridge Functions	455
16.4	Approximation using ridge functions	460
16.5	Projection Pursuit Regression	464
16.6	SiLVR	473

16.7	Experimental Results	488
16.8	Conclusions	500
	References	501
17	Machine Learning-Based System Optimization and Uncertainty Quantification for Integrated Systems	505
	Hakki M. Torun, Mourad Larbi, and Madhavan Swaminathan	
17.1	Introduction	505
17.2	Optimization Oriented Design Flow	506
17.3	Black-Box Optimization	507
17.4	Two-Stage Bayesian Optimization	511
17.5	Co-optimization of Embedded Inductor and Integrated Voltage Regulator	519
17.6	Uncertainty Quantification	526
17.7	Uncertainty Quantification of the IVR Efficiency	530
17.8	Conclusions	534
	References	535
 Part V Machine Learning for System Design and Optimization		
18	SynTunSys: A Synthesis Parameter Autotuning System for Optimizing High-Performance Processors	539
	Matthew M. Ziegler, Hung-Yi Liu, George Gristede, Bruce Owens, Ricardo Nigaglioni, Jihye Kwon, and Luca P. Carloni	
18.1	Introduction	539
18.2	SynTunSys Architecture	541
18.3	The SynTunSys Decision Engine	548
18.4	SynTunSys Results	553
18.5	SynTunSys Enhancements and Future Work	559
18.6	Related Work	568
18.7	Conclusions	569
	References	569
19	Multicore Power and Thermal Proxies Using Least-Angle Regression	571
	Rupesh Raj Karn and Ibrahim (Abe) M. Elfadel	
19.1	Introduction	571
19.2	Preliminaries	573
19.3	Data Collection Platform	579
19.4	Power Proxies	581
19.5	Temperature Proxies	586
19.6	Proxies Incorporating Sleep States	591
19.7	Workload Signature	594
19.8	Core Scaling and Thread Assignment	598
19.9	Conclusions	606
	References	607

20 A Comparative Study of Assertion Mining Algorithms in GoldMine 609
Shobha Vasudevan, Lingyi Liu, and Samuel Hertz

20.1 Introduction 609

20.2 Summary of Comparison of Assertion Generation Algorithms in GoldMine 614

20.3 The GoldMine Principle: Statistics Meet Static 616

20.4 Background on GoldMine 617

20.5 Decision Tree-Based Learning 621

20.6 Best-Gain Decision Forest Algorithm 622

20.7 Coverage Guided Mining Algorithm..... 628

20.8 PRISM Algorithm 631

20.9 Experimental Results 633

20.10 Conclusions 642

References..... 642

21 Energy-Efficient Design of Advanced Machine Learning Hardware 647
Muhammad Abdullah Hanif, Rehan Hafiz, Muhammad Usama Javed, Semeen Rehman, and Muhammad Shafique

21.1 Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning 647

21.2 Software and Co-design Optimizations 652

21.3 Hardware-Level Techniques..... 658

21.4 Error Resilience Analysis: DNN-Specific Approximations for Low-Power Accelerators 663

21.5 Energy-Efficient Hardware Accelerator Design Methodology for Neural Networks 668

21.6 Efficient Machine Learning Architectures: Challenges and the Way Forward 671

References..... 675

Index..... 679

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