

# Introduction to Digital System Design

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# Outline

1. Why Digital?
2. Device Technologies
3. System Representation
4. Abstraction
5. Development Tasks
6. Development Flow

# 1. Why Digital

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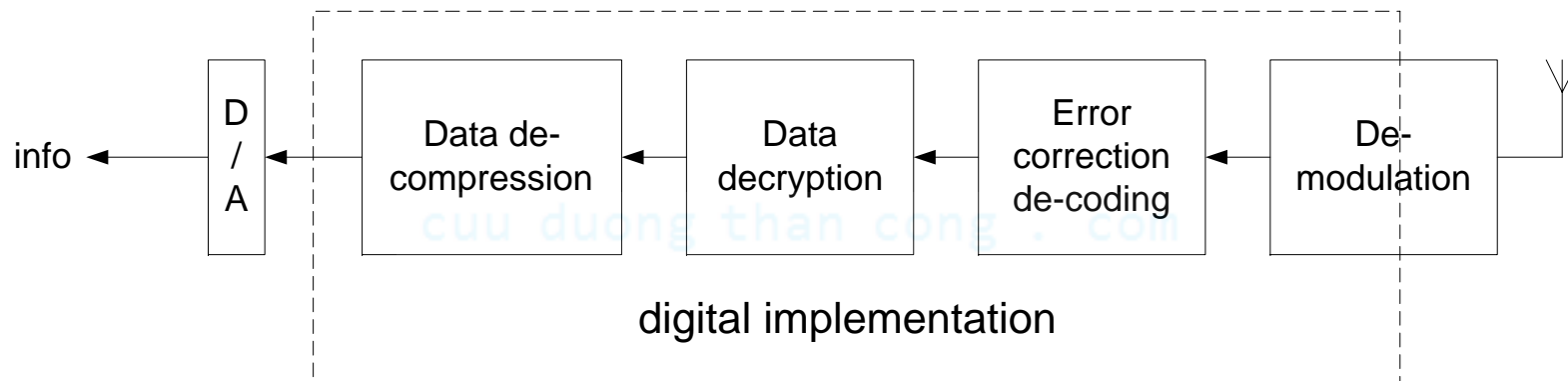
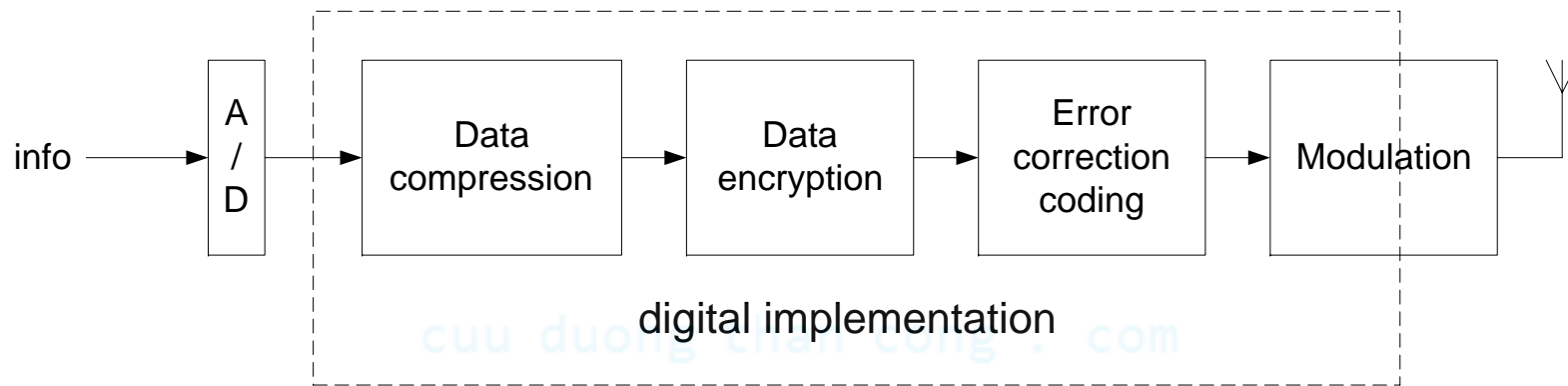
# Advantages

- Advantage of digital devices
  - Reproducibility of information
  - Flexibility and functionality: easier to store, transmit and manipulate information
  - Economy: cheaper device and easier to design
- Moore's law
  - Transistor geometry
  - Chips double its density (number of transistor) in every 18 months
  - Devices become smaller, faster and cheaper
  - Now a chip consists of hundreds of million gates
  - And we can have a “wireless-PDA-MP3-player-camera-GPS-cell-phone” gadget very soon

# Applications of digital systems

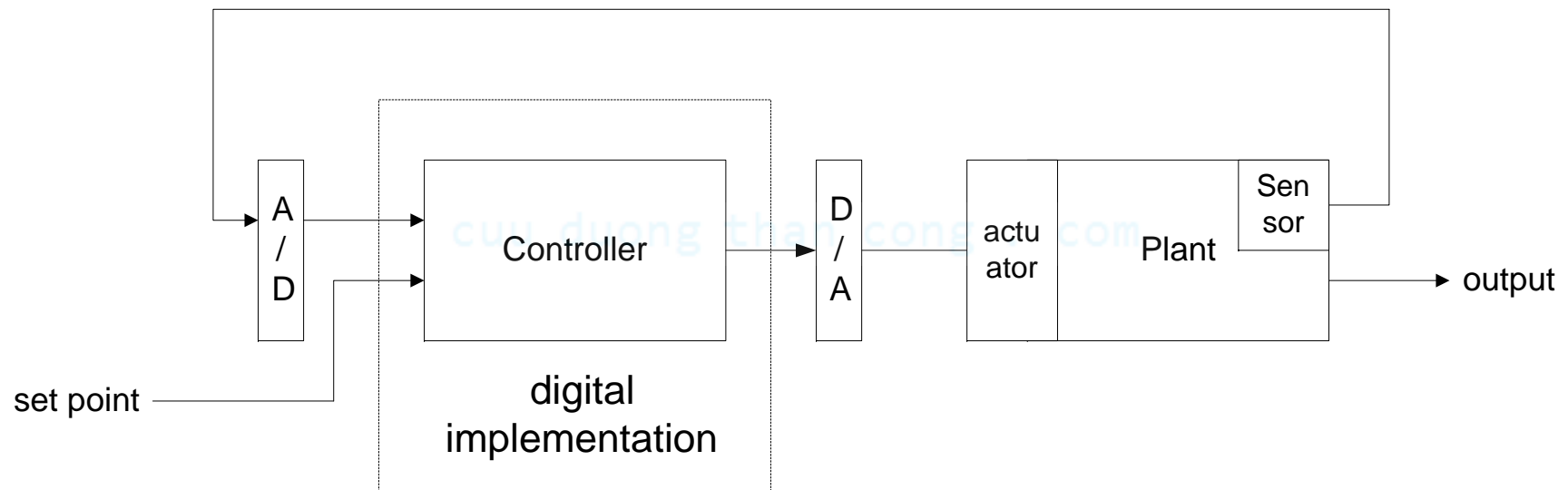
- “Digitization” has spread to a wide range of applications, including information (computers), telecommunications, control systems etc.
- Digital circuitry replaces many analog systems:
  - Audio recording: from tape to music CD to MP3 (MPEG Layer 3) player
  - Image processing: from silver-halide film to digital camera
  - Telephone switching networks
  - Control of mechanical system: e.g., “flight-by-wire”

# e.g, digital circuit in a wireless communication system



**receiver**  
Chapter 1

# e.g, digital circuit in a control system



# How to implement a digital system

- No two applications are identical and every one needs certain amount of customization
- Basic methods for customization
  - “General-purpose hardware” with custom software
    - General purpose processor: e.g., performance-oriented processor (e.g., Pentium), cost-oriented processor (e.g., PIC micro-controller)
    - Special purpose processor: with architecture to perform a specific set of functions: e.g., DSP processor (to do multiplication-addition), network processor (to do buffering and routing), “graphic engine” (to do 3D rendering)



- Custom hardware
- Custom software on a custom processor (known as hardware-software co-design)
- Trade-off between Programmability, Coverage, Cost, Performance, and Power consumption
- A complex application contains many different tasks and use more than one customization methods

## 2. Device Technologies

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# Fabrication of an IC

- Transistors and connection are made from many layers (typical 10 to 15 in CMOS) built on top of one another
- Each layer has a special pattern defined by a mask
- One important aspect of an IC is the length of a smallest transistor that can be fabricated
  - It is measured in micron ( $\mu\text{m}$ ,  $10^{-6}$  meter)
  - E.g., we may say an IC is built with  $0.50\ \mu\text{m}$  process
  - The process continues to improve, as witnessed by Moore's law
  - The state-of-art process approaches less than a fraction of  $0.1\ \mu\text{m}$  (known as deep sub-micron)

# Classification of device technologies

- Where customization is done:
  - In a fab (fabrication facility): ASIC (Application Specific IC)
  - In the “field”: non-ASIC
- Classification:
  - Full-custom ASIC
  - Standard cell ASIC
  - Gate array ASIC
  - Complex field programmable logic device
  - Simple field programmable logic device
  - Off-the-shelf SSI (Small Scaled IC)/MSI (Medium Scaled IC) components

# Full-custom ASIC

- All aspects (e.g., size of a transistor) of a circuit are tailored for a particular application.
- Circuit fully optimized
- Design extremely complex and involved
- Only feasible for small components
- Masks needed for all layers

# Standard-Cell ASIC

- Circuit made of a set of pre-defined logic, known as standard cells
- E.g., basic logic gates, 1-bit adder, D FF etc
- Layout of a cell is pre-determined, but layout of the complete circuit is customized
- Masks needed for all layers

# Gate array ASIC

- Circuit is built from an array of a single type of cell (known as base cell)
- Base cells are pre-arranged and placed in fixed positions, aligned as one- or two-dimensional array
- More sophisticated components (macro cells) can be constructed from base cells
- Masks needed only for metal layers (connection wires)

# Complex Field Programmable Device

- Device consists of an array of generic logic cells and general interconnect structure
- Logic cells and interconnect can be “programmed” by utilizing “semiconductor fuses or switches”
- Customization is done “in the field”
- Two categories:
  - CPLD (Complex Programmable Logic Device)
  - FPGA (Field Programmable Gate Array)
- No custom mask needed



# Simple Field Programmable Device

- Programmable device with simple internal structure
- E.g.,
  - PROM (Programmable Read Only Memory)
  - PAL (Programmable Array Logic)
- No custom mask needed
- Replaced by CPLD/FPGA

# SSI/MSI components

- Small parts with fixed, limited functionality
- E.g., 7400 TTL series (more than 100 parts)
- Resource (e.g., power, board area, manufacturing cost etc.) is consumed by “package” but not “silicon”
- No longer a viable option

# Three viable technologies

- Standard Cell ASIC
- Gate Array ASIC
- FPGA/CPLD

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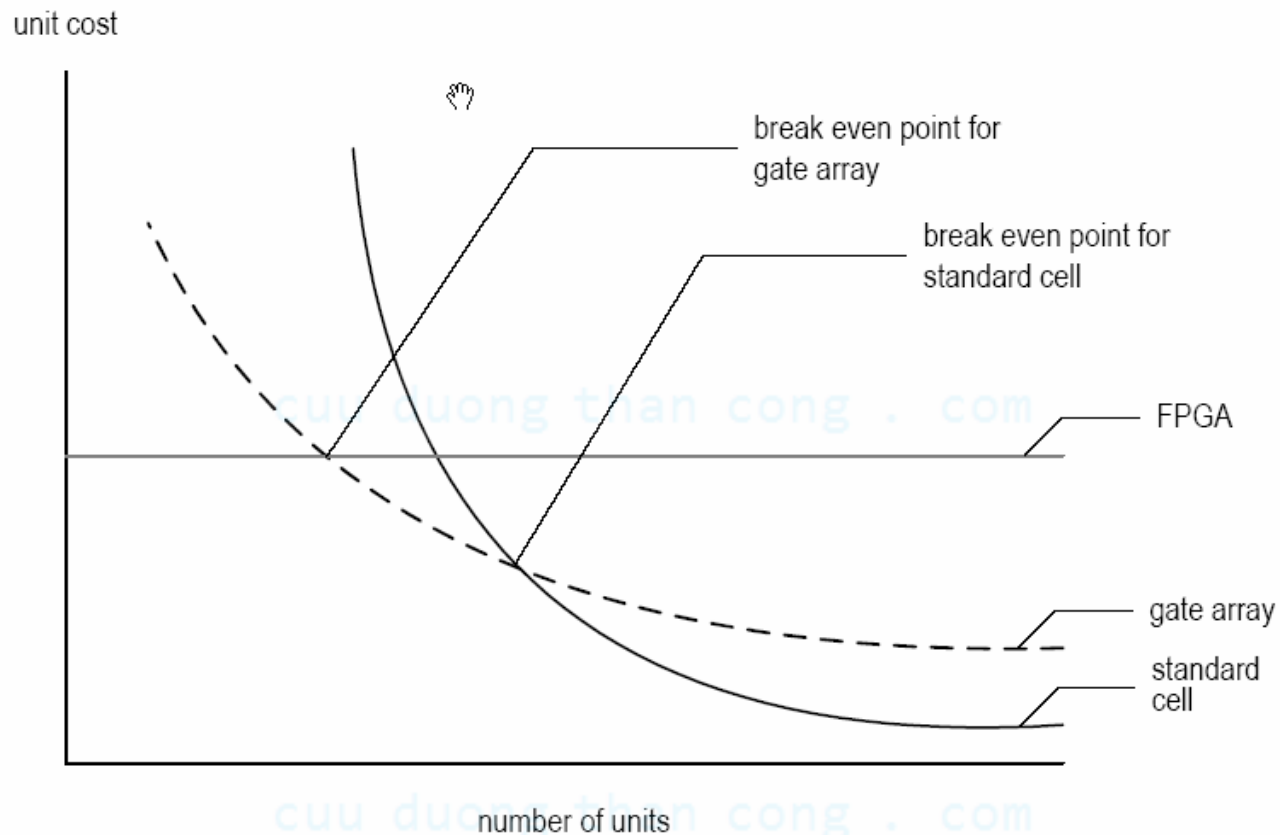
# Comparison of technology

- Area (Size): silicon “real-estate”
  - Standard cell is the smallest since the cells and interconnect are customized
  - FPGA is the largest
    - Overhead for “programmability”
    - Capacity cannot be completely utilized
- Speed (Performance)
  - Time required to perform a task
- Power
- Cost

# Cost

- Types of cost:
  - NRE (Non-Recurrent Engineering) cost: one-time, per-design cost
  - Part cost: per-unit cost
  - Time-to-market “cost” loss of revenue
- Standard cell: high NRE, small part cost and large lead time
- FPGA: low NRE, large part cost and small lead time

# Graph of per-unit cost



$$C_{per\_unit} = C_{per\_part} + \frac{C_{nre}}{\text{units produced}}$$

# Summary of technology

	FPGA	Gate array	Standard cell
<b>tailored masks</b>	0	3 to 5	15 or more
<b>area</b>			best (smallest)
<b>speed</b>			best (fastest)
<b>power</b>			best (minimal)
<b>NRE cost</b>	best (smallest)		
<b>per part cost</b>			best (smallest)
<b>design cost</b>	best (easiest)		
<b>time to market</b>	best (shortest)		
<b>per unit cost</b>		depend on volume	

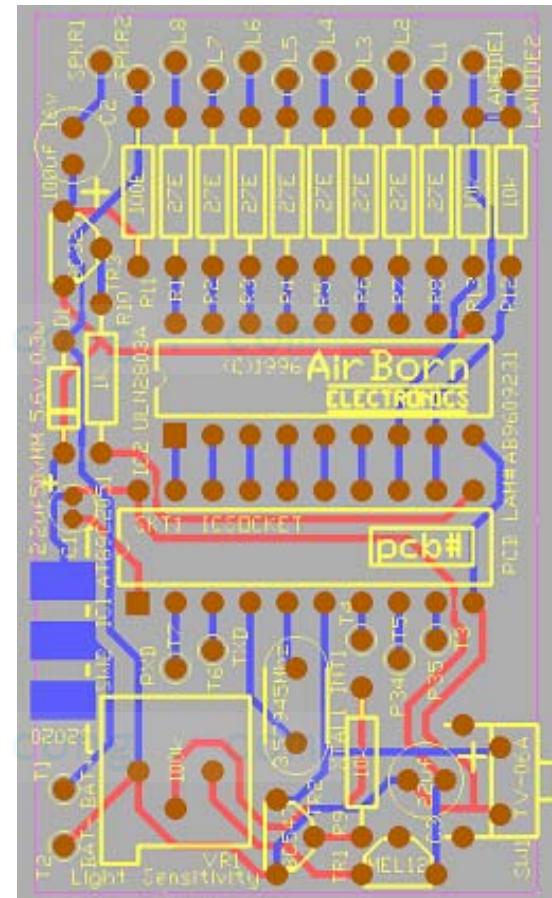
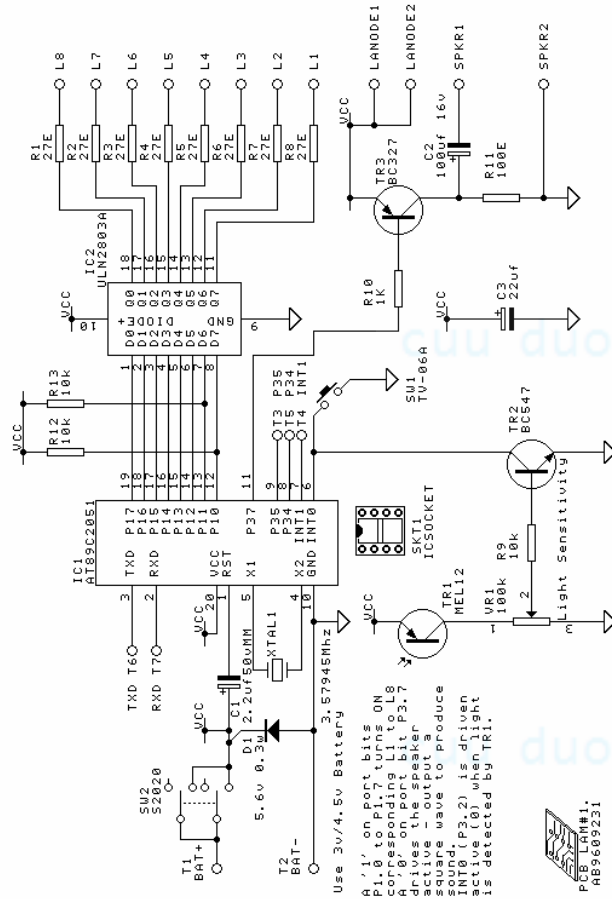
- Trade-off between optimal use of hardware resource and design effort/cost
- No single best technology

# 3. System Representation (View)



- View: different perspectives of a system
- Behavioral view:
  - Describe functionalities and i/o behavior
  - Treat the system as a black box
- Structural view:
  - Describe the internal implementation (components and interconnections)
  - Essentially block diagram
- Physical view:
  - Add more info to structural view: component size, component locations, routing wires
  - E.g., layout of a print circuit board

e.g., structural and physical view

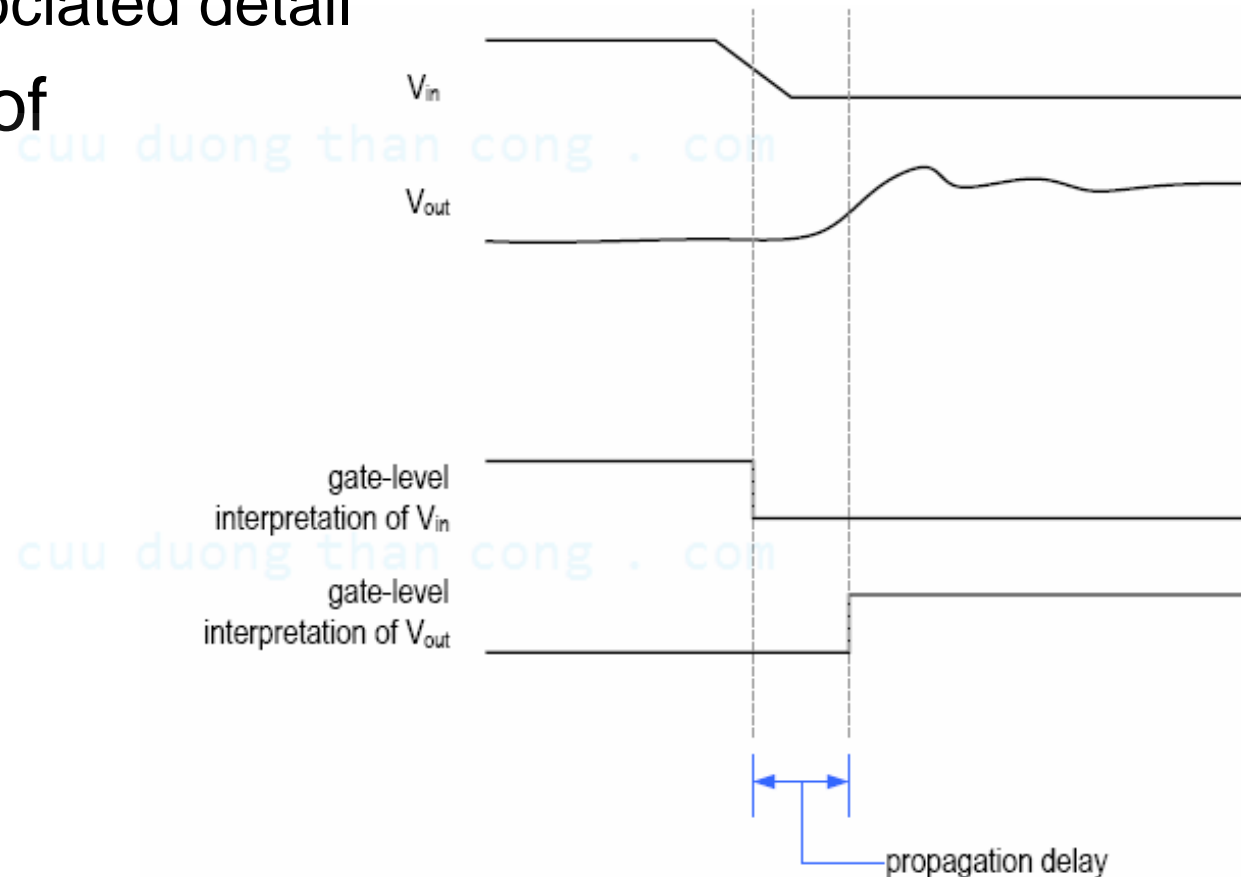


# 4. Abstraction

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- How to manage complexity for a chip with 10 million transistors?
- Abstraction: simplified model of a system
  - show the selected features
  - Ignore associated detail
- E.g., timing of an inverter



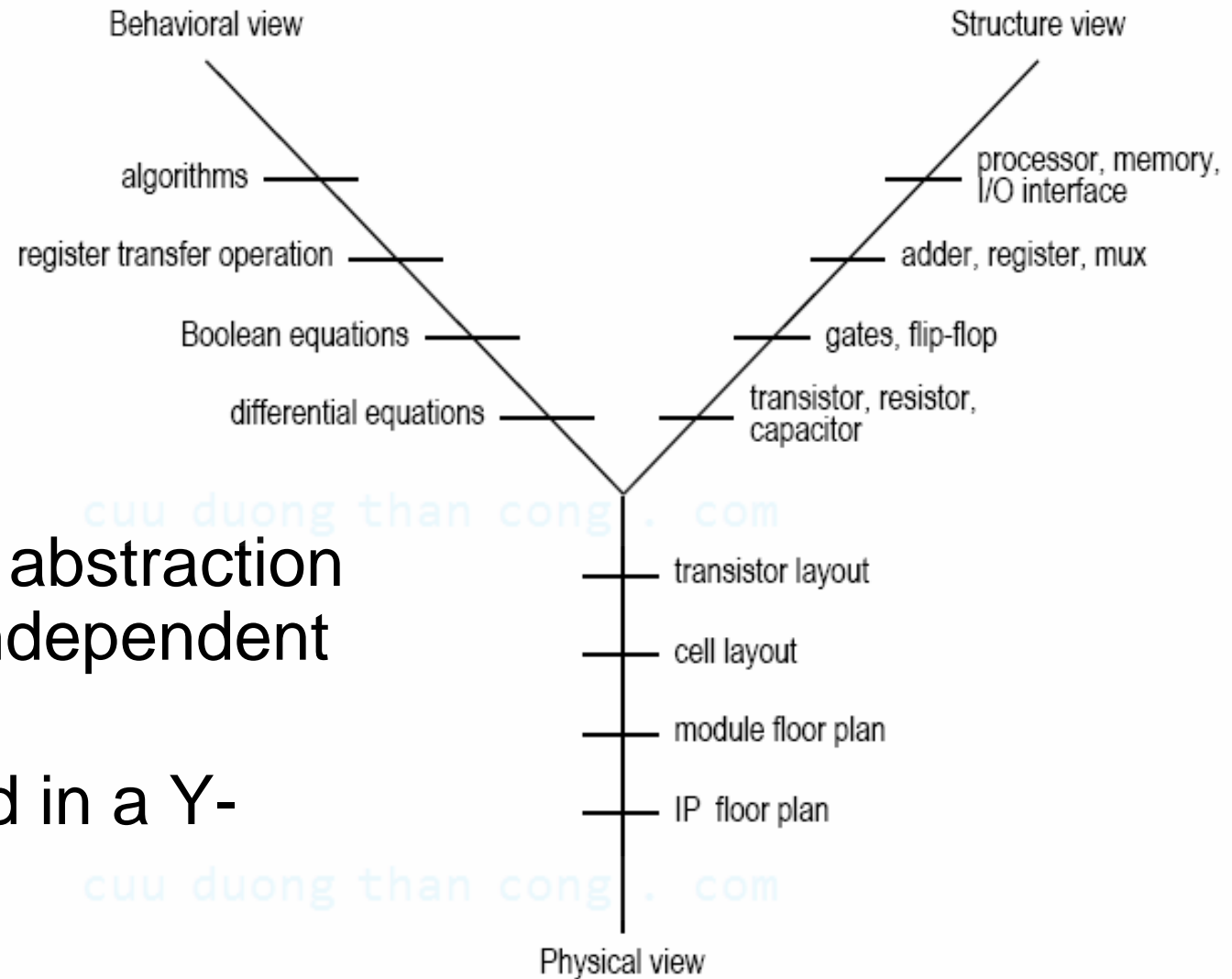
- Level of abstractions
  - Transistor level
  - Gate level
  - Register transfer (RT) level
  - Processor level
- Characteristics of each level
  - Basic building blocks
  - Signal representation
  - Time representation
  - Behavioral representation
  - Physical representation.

# Summary

	typical blocks	signal representation	time representation	behavioral description	physical description
<b>transistor</b>	transistor, resistor	voltage	continuous function	differential equation	transistor layout
<b>gate</b>	and, or, xor, flip-flop	logic 0 or 1	propagation delay	Boolean equation	cell layout
<b>RT</b>	adder, mux, register	integer, system state	clock tick	extended FSM	RT level floor plan
<b>processor</b>	processor, memory	abstract data type	event sequence	algorithm in C	IP level floor plan

# RT level

- RT (Register Transfer) is a misleading term
- Should use “module-level”
- Two meanings:
  - Loosely: represent the module level
  - Formally: a design methodology in which the system operation is described by how the data is manipulated and moved among registers



- View and abstraction are two independent aspects.
- Combined in a Y-chart



# 5. Development Tasks

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- Developing a digital system is a refining and validating process
- Main tasks:
  - Synthesis
  - Physical design
  - Verification
  - Testing

# Synthesis

- A refinement process that realizes a description with components from the lower abstraction level.
- The resulting description is a structural view in the lower abstraction level
- Type of synthesis:
  - High-level synthesis
  - RT level synthesis
  - Gate level synthesis
  - Technology mapping

# Physical Design

- Placement and routing
  - Refining from structural view to physical view
  - Derive lay out of a netlist
- Circuit extraction:
  - Determine the wire resistance of capacitance
- Others
  - Derivation of power grid and clock distribution network, assurance of signal integrity etc.

# Verification

- Check whether a design meets the specification and performance goals.
- Concern the correctness of the initial design and the refinement processes
- Two aspects
  - Functionality
  - Performance (timing)

# Method of Verification

- Simulation
  - spot check: cannot verify the absence of errors
  - Can be computation intensive
- Timing analysis
  - Just check delay
- Formal verification
  - apply formal math techniques determine its property
  - E.g, equivalence checking
- Hardware emulation

# Testing

- Testing is the process of detecting physical defects of a die or a package occurred at the time of manufacturing
- Testing and verification are different tasks.
- Difficult for large circuit
  - Need to add auxiliary testing circuit in design
  - E.g., built-in self test (BIST), scan chain etc.

# Limitation of EDA software

- EDA (Electronic Design Automation)
- EDA software can automate some tasks
- Can software replace human hardware designer? (e.g., C-program to chip)
- Synthesis software
  - should be treated as a tool to perform transformation and local optimization
  - cannot alter the original architecture or convert a poor design into a good one

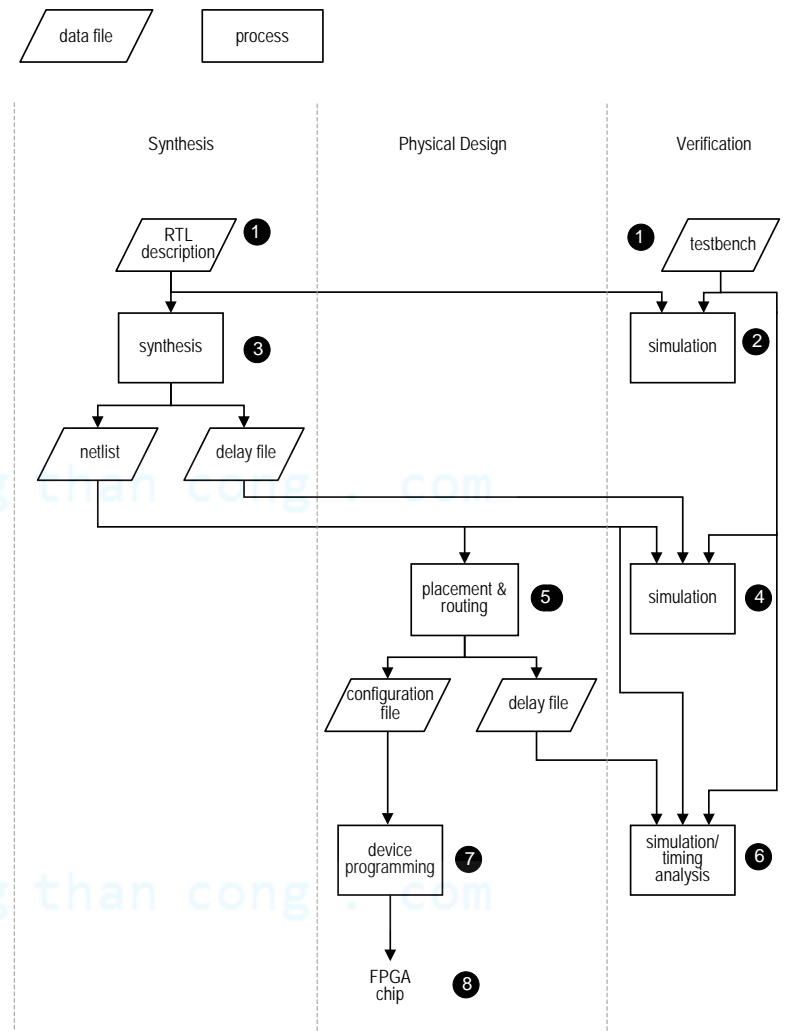


# Development Flow

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- Medium design targeting FPGA
- Circuit up to 50,000 gates



# Additional tasks

- Large design targeting FPGA
  - Design partition
  - More verification
- Large design targeting ASIC
  - Thorough verification
  - Testing
  - Physical design

# Goal of this course

- Goal:
  - Systematically develop efficient, portable RT level designs that can be easily integrated into a larger system
- Design for efficiency
- Design for “large”
  - Large module, large system, overall development process
- Design for portability
  - Device independent, software dependent, design reuse