

1.1.- BASIC BEHAVIOUR

The microcoded machine (μ M) is built around a register bank and an 8-bit ALU with registered operands T1 and T2. It performs all its operations in two cycles, so I have divided it in two stages: an *operand stage* and an *ALU stage*. This is nothing more than a 2-stage pipeline.

In the *operand stage*, registers T1 and T2 are loaded with either the contents of the register bank (RB) or the input signal DI.

In the *ALU stage*, the ALU output is written back into the RB or loaded into the output register DO. Besides, flags are updated according to μ I.

Every microinstruction (μ I) controls the operation of the operand stage and the succeeding ALU stage; that is, the execution of a μ I extends over 2 succeeding clock cycles, and microinstructions overlap each other. This means that the part of the μ I that controls the 2nd stage has to be pipelined; in the VHDL code, I have divided the μ I in a *field_1* and a *field_2*, the latter of which is registered (pipelined) and controls the 2nd μ M stage (ALU).

Many of the control signals are encoded in the microinstructions in what I have improperly called *flags*. You will see many references to flags in the following text (**#end**, **#decode**, etc.). They are just signals that you can activate individually in each μ I, some are active in the 1st stage, some in the 2nd. They are all explained in a separate section.

Note that microinstructions are *atomic*: both stages are guaranteed to execute in all circumstances. Once the 1st stage of a μ I has executed, the only thing that can prevent the execution of the 2nd stage is a reset.

It might have been easier to design the machine so that microinstructions executed in one cycle, thus needing no pipeline for the μ I itself. I arbitrarily chose to 'split' the microcode execution, figuring that it would be easier for me to understand and program the microcode; in hindsight it may have been a mistake but in the end, once the debugging is over, it makes little difference.

The core as it is now does not support wait states: it does all its external accesses (memory or i/o, read or write) in one clock cycle. It would not be difficult to improve this with some little modification to the micromachine, without changes to the microcode.

The register bank reads asynchronously, while writes are synchronous. This is the standard behaviour of a Spartan LUT-based RAM. The register bank holds all the 8080 registers, including the accumulator, plus temporary, 'hidden' registers (x,y,w,z). Only the PSW register is held out of the register bank, in a DFF-8 register.

1.2.- MICROMACHINE CONTROL

1.2.1.- Microcode operation

There is little more to the core than what has already been said; all the CPU operations are microcoded, including interrupt response, reset and instruction opcode fetch. The microcode source code can be seen in file *ucode/light8080.m80*.

The microcode table is a synchronous ROM with 512 32-bit words, designed to fit in a Spartan 3 block ram. Each 32-bit word makes up a microinstruction. The microcode 'program counter' (*uc_addr* in the VHDL code) thus is a 9-bit register.

Out of those 512 words, 256 (the upper half of the table) are used as a jump-table for instruction decoding. Each entry at 256+NN contains a 'JSR' μ I to the start of the microcode for the instruction whose opcode is NN. This seemingly inefficient use of RAM is in fact an optimization for the Spartan-3 architecture to which this design is tailored - and works well enough in other architectures. The jump table is built automatically by the microcode assembler, as explained later.

The upper half of the table can only be used for decoding; JSR instructions can only point to the lower half, and execution from address 0x0ff rolls over to 0x00 (or would; the actual microcode does not use this 'feature').

The micromachine supports one level of micro-subroutine calls; it can also return from those calls; The *uc_addr* gets loaded with some constant values upon reset, intr or instruction fetch. And finally, there is the decoding jump table mentioned above, so these are the possible sources of *uc_addr* each cycle:

1. Constant value of 0x0001 at reset (see VHDL source for details).
2. Constant value of 0x0003 at the beginning (fetch cycle) of every instruction.
3. Constant value of 0x0007 at interrupt acknowledge.
4. *uc_addr* + 1 in normal microinstruction execution
5. Some 8-bit value included in JSR microinstructions (calls).
6. The return value preserved in the last JSR (used when flag **#ret** is raised)

All of this is readily apparent, I hope, by inspecting the VHDL source. Note that there is only one jump microinstruction (JSR) which doubles as 'call'; whenever a jump is taken the the 1-level-deep 'return stack' is loaded with the return address (address of the μ I following the jump). You just have to ignore the return address when you don't need it (e.g. the jumps in the decoding

jump table). I admit this scheme is awkward and inflexible; but it was the first I devised, it works and fits the area budget: more than enough in this project.

A list of all predefined, 'special' microcode addresses follows.

0x001 - reset

After reset, the μ I program counter (*uc_addr* in the VHDL code) is initialized to 0x00. The program counter works as a pre-increment counter when reading the microcode rom, so the μ I at address 0 never gets executed (unless 'rolling over' from address 0x0ff, which the actual microcode does not). Reset starts at address 1 and takes 2 microinstructions to clear PC to 0x0000. It does nothing else. After clearing the PC the microcode runs into the fetch routine.

0x003 - fetch

The fetch routine places the PC in the address output lines while post-incrementing it, and then enables a memory read cycle. In doing so it relies on T2 being 0x00 (necessary for the ADC to behave like an INC in the oversimplified ALU), which is always true by design. After the fetch is done, the **#decode** flag is raised, which instructs the micromachine to take the value in the DI signal (data input from external memory) and load it into the IR and the microcode address counter, while setting the high address bit to 1. At the resulting address there will be a JSR μ I pointing to the microcode for the 8080 opcode in question (the microcode assembler will make sure of that). The **#decode** flag will also clear registers T1 and T2.

0x007 - halt

Whenever a HALT instruction is executed, the **#halt** flag is raised, which when used in the same μ I as flag **#end**, makes the the micromachine jump to this address. The μ I at this address does nothing but raise flags **#halt** and **#end**. The micromachine will keep jumping to this address until the halt state is left, something which can only happen by reset or by interrupt. The **#halt** flag, when raised, sets the *halt* output signal, which will be cleared when the CPU exits the halt state.

1.2.2.- Conditional jumps

There is a conditional branch microinstruction: TJSR. This instruction tests certain condition and, if the condition is true, performs exactly as JSR. Otherwise, it ends the microcode execution exactly as if the flag **#end** had been raised. This microinstruction has been made for the conditional branches and returns of the 8080 CPU and is not flexible enough for any other use.

The condition tested is encoded in the register IR, in the field *ccc* (bits 5..3), as encoded in the conditional instructions of the 8080 - you can look them up in any 8080 reference. Flags are updated in the 2nd stage, so a TJSR

cannot test the flags modified by the previous μ I. But it is not necessary; this instruction will always be used to test conditions set by previous 8080 instructions, separated at least by the opcode fetch μ Is, and probably many more. Thus, the condition flags will always be valid upon testing.

1.2.3.- Implicit operations

Most micromachine operations happen only when explicitly commanded. But some happen automatically and have to be taken into account when coding the microprogram:

- Register IR is loaded automatically when the flag **#decode** is raised. The microcode program counter is loaded automatically with the same value as the IR, as has been explained above. From that point on, execution resumes normally: the jump table contains normal JSR microinstructions.
- T1 is cleared to 0x00 at reset, when the flag **#decode** is active or when the flag **#clrt1** is used.
- T2 is cleared to 0x00 at reset, when the flag **#decode** is active or when the flag **#end** is used.
- When flag **#end** is raised, execution continues at μ code address 0x0003.
- When both flags **#halt** and **#end** are raised, execution continues at μ code address 0x0007, unless there is an interrupt pending.
- When flag **#ret** is raised, execution continues in the address following the last JSR executed. If such a *return* is tried before a JSR has executed since the last reset, the results are undefined - this never happens with the microcode source as it is now.

Notice that both T1 and T2 are cleared at the end of the opcode fetch, so they are guaranteed to be 0x00 at the beginning of the instruction microcode. And T2 is cleared to at the end of the instruction microcode, so it is guaranteed clear for its use in the fetch microcode. T1 can be cleared if a microinstruction so requires. Refer to the section on *microinstruction flags*.

1.3.- Microinstructions

The microcode for the CPU is a source text file encoded in a format described below. This 'microcode source' is assembled by the microcode assembler (described later) which then builds a microcode table in VHDL format. There's nothing stopping you from assembling the microcode by hand directly on the VHDL source, and in a machine this simple it might have been preferable.

1.3.1.- Microcode source format

The microcode source format is more similar to most early assembly languages than to other microcode sources you may have seen. Each non-blank, non-comment line of code contains a single microinstruction in the format informally described below:

```
<microinstruction line> :=
    [<label>] | (*1)
    <operand stage control> ; <ALU stage control> [; [<flag list>]] |
    JSR <destination address>|TJSR <destination address>

<label> := {':' immediately followed by a common identifier}
<destination address> := {an identifier defined as a label anywhere in the file}
<operand stage control> := <op_reg> = <op_src> | NOP
<op_reg> := T1 | T2
<op_src> := <register> | DI | <IR register>
<IR register> := {s}|{d}|{p}0|{p}1 (*3)
<register> := _a|_b|_c|_d|_e|_h|_l|_f|_a|_ph|_pl|_x|_y|_z|_w|_sh|_sl|
<ALU stage control> := <alu_dst> = <alu_op> | NOP
<alu_dst> := <register> | DO
<alu_op> := add|adc|sub|sbb| and|orl|not|xrl| rla|rra|rlca|rrca| aaa|
            t1|rst|daa|cpc|sec|psw
<flag list> := <flag> [, <flag>...]
<flag> := #decode|#di|#ei|#io|#auxcy|#clrt1|#halt|#end|#ret|#rd|#wr|#setacy (*2)
            #ld_al|#ld_addr|#fp_c|#fp_r|#fp_rc

*1 Labels appear alone by themselves in a line
*2 There are some restrictions on the flags that can be used together
*3 Registers are specified by IR field
```

Please bear in mind that this is just an informal description; I just made it up from my personal notes and the assembler source. The ultimate reference is

the microcode source itself and the assembler source.

Due to the way that flags have been encoded (there's less than one bit per flag in the microinstruction), there are restrictions on what flags can be used together. See the section on flags.

The assembler will complain if the source does not comply with the expected format; but syntax check is somewhat weak.

In the microcode source you will see words like `__reset`, `__fetch`, etc. which don't fit the above syntax. Those were supposed to be assembler pragmas, which the assembler would use to enforce the alignment of the microinstructions to certain addresses. I finally decided not to use them and align the instructions myself. The assembler ignores them but I kept them as a reminder.

The 1st part of the μ I controls the ALU operand stage; we can load either T1 or T2 with either the contents of the input signal DI, or the selected register from the register bank. Or, we can do nothing (NOP).

The 2nd part of the μ I controls the ALU stage; we can instruct the ALU to perform some operation on the operands T1 and T2 *loaded by this same instruction, in the previous stage*; and we can select where to load the ALU result, either in the output register DO or in the register bank. Or we can do nothing of the above (NOP).

The write address for the register bank used in the 2nd stage has to be the same as the read address used in the 1st stage; that is, if both μ I parts use the RB, both have to use the same address (the assembler will enforce this restriction). This is due to an early, silly mistake that I chose not to fix: there is a single μ I field that holds both addresses.

This is a very annoying limitation that unduly complicates the microcode and wastes many microcode slots for no saving in hardware; the only reason not to improve this and use two independent field addresses is my personal design style of 'no major changes until design is finished and working'. In fact, as you can see in the VHDL source, the machine is prepared to use 2 independent address fields with little modification. I may do this improvement and others in a later version, but only when I deem the design 'finished' (since the design as it is already exceeds my modest performance target).

1.3.2.- Microcode ALU operations

| Operation | encoding | result | notes |
|-----------|----------|--------------|-------|
| ADD | 001100 | T2 + T1 | |
| ADC | 001101 | T2 + T1 + CY | |
| SUB | 001110 | T2 - T1 | |
| SBB | 001111 | T2 - T1 - CY | |
| AND | 000100 | T1 AND T2 | |

| | | | |
|------|--------|--|-----------------|
| ORL | 000101 | T1 OR T2 | |
| NOT | 000110 | NOT T1 | |
| XRL | 000111 | T1 XOR T2 | |
| RLA | 000000 | 8080 RLC | |
| RRA | 000001 | 8080 RRC | |
| RLCA | 000010 | 8080 RAL | |
| RRCA | 000011 | 8080 RAR | |
| T1 | 010111 | T1 | |
| RST | 011111 | 8*IR(5..3), as per RST instruction | |
| DAA | 101000 | DAA T1 (but only after executing 2 in a row) | |
| CPC | 101100 | UNDEFINED | CY complemented |
| SEC | 101101 | UNDEFINED | CY set |
| PSW | 110000 | PSW | |

Notice that ALU operation DAA takes two cycles to complete; it uses a dedicated circuit with an extra pipeline stage. So it has to be executed twice in a row before taking the result - refer to microcode source for an example.

The PSW register is updated with the ALU result at every cycle, whatever ALU operation is executed - though every ALU operation computes flags by different means, as it is apparent in the case of CY. Which flags are updated, and which keep their previous values, is defined by a microinstruction field named *flag_pattern*. See the VHDL code for details.

1.3.3.- Microcode binary format

| POS | NAME | PURPOSE |
|------------|-------------|--|
| 31..29 | uc_flags1 | Encoded flag of group 1 (see section on flags) |
| 28..26 | uc_flags2 | Encoded flag of group 2 (see section on flags) |
| 25 | load_addr | Address register load enable (note 1) |
| 24 | load_al | AL load enable (note 1) |
| 23 | load_t1 | T1 load enable |
| 22 | load_t2 | T2 load enable |
| 21 | mux_in | T1/T2 source mux control (0 for DI, 1 for reg bank) |
| 20..19 | rb_addr_sel | Register bank address source control (note 2) |
| 18..15 | ra_field | Register bank address (used both for write and read) |

| <i>POS</i> | <i>NAME</i> | <i>PURPOSE</i> |
|------------|--------------------|--|
| 14 | (unused) | Reserved |
| 13..10 | (unused) | Reserved for write register bank address, unused yet |
| 11..10 | uc_jump_addr(7..6) | JSR/TJSR jump address, higher 2 bits |
| 9..8 | flag_pattern | PSW flag update control (note 3) (<i>pipelined signal</i>) |
| 7 | load_do | DO load enable (note 4) (<i>pipelined signal</i>) |
| 6 | we_rb | Register bank write enable (<i>pipelined signal</i>) |
| 5..0 | uc_jump_addr(5..0) | JSR/TJSR jump address, lower 6 bits |
| 5..0 | (several) | Encoded ALU operation |

Note 1: *load_al*

AL is a temporary register for the lower byte of the external 16 bit address. The memory interface (and the IO interface) assumes external synchronous memory, so the 16 bit address has to be externally loaded as commanded by *load_addr*.

Note that both halves of the address signal load directly from the register bank output; you can load AL with PC, for instance, in the same cycle in which you modify the PC - AL will load with the pre-modified value.

Note 2 : *rb_addr_sel*

A microinstruction can access any register as specified by *ra_field*, or the register fields in the 8080 instruction opcode: S, D and RP (the microinstruction can select which register of the pair). In the microcode source this is encoded like this:

```
{s}  -> 0 & SSS
{d}  -> 0 & DDD
{p}0 -> 1 & PP & 0  (HIGH byte of register pair)
{p}1 -> 1 & PP & 1  (LOW byte of register pair)
```

SSS = IR(5 downto 3) (source register)

DDD = IR(2 downto 0) (destination register)

PP = IR(5 downto 4) (register pair)

Note 3 : *flag_pattern*

Selects which flags of the PSW, if any, will be updated by the microinstruction:

* When *flag_pattern*(0)='1', CY is updated in the PSW.

* When `flag_pattern(1)='1'`, all flags other than CY are updated in the PSW.

Note 4 : `load_do`

DO is the data output register that is loaded with the ALU output, so the load enable signal is pipelined.

Note 5 : `JSR-H` and `JSR-L`

These fields overlap existing fields which are unused in JSR/TJSR instructions (fields which can be used with no fear of secondary effects).

1.3.4 Flags

Flags is what I have called those signals of the microinstruction that you assert individually in the microcode source. Due to the way they have been encoded, I have separated them in two groups. Only one flag in each group can be used in any instruction. These are all the flags in the format they appear in the microcode source:

*** Flags from group 1: use only one of these**

- #decode** : Load address counter and IR with contents of data input lines, thus starting opcode decoding.
- #ei** : Set interrupt enable register.
- #di** : Reset interrupt enable register.
- #io** : Activate io signal for 1st cycle.
- #auxcy** : Use aux carry instead of regular carry for this μ I.
- #clrt1** : Clear T1 at the end of 1st cycle.
- #halt** : Jump to microcode address 0x07 without saving return value, when used with flag **#end**, and only if there is no interrupt pending. Ignored otherwise.

*** Flags from group 2: use only one of these**

- #setacy** : Set aux carry at the start of 1st cycle (used for ++).
- #end** : Jump to microinstruction address 3 after the present m.i.
- #ret** : Jump to address saved by the last JST or TJSR m.i.
- #rd** : Activate rd signal for the 2nd cycle.
- #wr** : Activate wr signal for the 2nd cycle.

*** Independent flags: no restrictions**

#ld_al : Load AL register with register bank output as read by opn. 1
(used in memory and io access).

#ld_addr : Load address register (H byte = register bank output as read
by operation 1, L byte = AL).

Activate vma signal for 1st cycle.

*** PSW update flags: use only one of these**

#fp_r : This instruction updates all PSW flags except for C.

#fp_c : This instruction updates only the C flag in the PSW.

#fp_rc : This instruction updates all the flags in the PSW.

1.4.- NOTES ON THE MICROCODE ASSEMBLER

Please refer to the comments in *util/uasm.pl* for a reference on the usage of the assembler.

I will admit up front that the microcode source format, and the assembler program itself, are a mess. They were hacked in a few low quality hours, and then often retouched but never redesigned, in order to avoid the 'never ending project' syndrome.

Please note that use of the assembler, and the microcode assembly source, is optional and perhaps overkill for this simple core. All you need to build the microcode is in the vhdl source file.

During the testing phase of the project, after the design was deemed finished, I caught a grand total of 26 bugs. Of those 26, 15 were in the perl assembler program itself. Though the assembler certainly saved me a lot of mistakes in the hand-assembly of the microcode, a half-cooked assembler like this one may do more harm than good. I expect that the program now behaves correctly; I have done numerous modifications to the microcode source for testing purposes and I have not found any more bugs in the assembler. But you have been warned: don't trust the assembler too much (in case someone actually wants to mess with these things at all).

The assembler is a Perl program (*util/uasm.pl*) that will read a microcode source file and write to stdout a microcode table in the form of a chunk of VHDL code. You are supposed to capture that output and paste it into the VHDL source (Actually, I used another perl script to do that, but I don't want to overcomplicate an already messy documentation).

The assembler can do some other operations on the source. The invocation options are documented in the program source.

Perl is included in all the flavors of Unix that I am aware of, and is readily available for Windows. You don't need any extra modules or libraries, any distribution of Perl 5 will do - earlier versions might not, I haven't tested. The windows distribution I used (ActivePerl) installs itself with little user interaction and is ready to use with no configuration at all, even in Vista.

2.- CPU DETAILS

2.1.- Synchronous memory and i/o interface

The core is designed to connect to external synchronous memory similar to the internal fpga ram blocks found in the Spartan series. It can be used with asynchronous ram provided that you add the necessary registers (I have used it with external SRAM included on a development board with no trouble).

Signal 'vma' is the master read/write enable. It is designed to be used as a synchronous rd/wr enable. All other memory/io signals are only valid when vma is active. Read data is sampled in the positive clock edge following deassertion of vma. That is, the core expects external memory and io to behave as an internal fpga block ram would.

I think the interface is simple enough to be fully described by the comments in the header of the VHDL source file.

2.2.- Interrupt response

Interrupt response has been greatly simplified, but it follows the outline of the original procedure. The most conspicuous difference is that *inta* is active for the entire duration of the instruction, and not only the opcode fetch cycle.

Whenever a high value is sampled in line *intr* in any positive clock edge, an *interrupt pending* flag is internally raised. After the current instruction finishes execution, the interrupt pending flag is sampled. If active, it is cleared, interrupts are disabled and the processor enters an *inta* cycle. If inactive, the processor enters a fetch cycle as usual.

The *inta* cycle is identical to a fetch cycle, with the exception that *inta* signal is asserted high.

The processor will fetch an opcode during the first *inta* cycle and will execute it normally, except the PC *increment* will not happen and *inta* will be high for the duration of the instruction. Note that though pc increment is inhibited while *inta* is high, pc can be explicitly changed (*rst*, *jmp*, etc.).

After the special *inta* instruction execution is done, the processor resumes normal execution, with interrupts disabled.

The above means that any instruction (even XTHL, which the original 8080 forbids) can be used as an interrupt vector and will be executed normally. The core has been tested with *rst*, *lxi* and *inr*, for example.

Since there's no M1 signal available, feeding multi-byte instructions as interrupt vectors can be a little complicated. It is up to you to deal with this situation.

2.3.- Instruction timing

This core is slower than the original in terms of clocks per instruction. Since the original 8080 was itself one of the slowest micros ever, this does not say much for the core. Yet, one of these clocked at 50MHz can outperform a 8080 at 30 Mhz, which is fast enough for many control applications.

A comparative table follows.

| <i>Opcode</i> | <i>Intel 8080</i> | <i>Light8080</i> | <i>Opcode</i> | <i>Intel 8080</i> | <i>Light8080</i> |
|----------------|-------------------|------------------|---------------|-------------------|------------------|
| MOV r1, r2 | 5 | 6 | XRA M | 7 | 9 |
| MOV r, M | 7 | 9 | XRI data | 7 | 9 |
| MOV M, r | 7 | 9 | ORA r | 4 | 6 |
| MVI r, data | 7 | 9 | ORA M | 7 | 9 |
| MVI M, data | 10 | 12 | ORI data | 7 | 9 |
| LXI rp, data16 | 10 | 14 | CMP r | 4 | 6 |
| LDA addr | 13 | 16 | CMP M | 7 | 9 |
| STA addr | 13 | 16 | CPI data | 7 | 9 |
| LHLD addr | 16 | 19 | RLC | 4 | 5 |
| SHLD addr | 16 | 19 | RRC | 4 | 5 |
| LDAX rp | 7 | 9 | RAL | 4 | 5 |
| STAX rp | 7 | 9 | RAR | 4 | 5 |
| XCHG | 4 | 16 | CMA | 4 | 5 |
| ADD r | 4 | 6 | CMC | 4 | 5 |
| ADD M | 7 | 9 | STC | 4 | 5 |
| ADI data | 7 | 9 | JMP | 10 | 15 |
| ADC r | 4 | 6 | Jcc | 10 | 12/16 |
| ADC M | 7 | 9 | CALL | 17 | 29 |

| <i>Opcode</i> | <i>Intel 8080</i> | <i>Light8080</i> | <i>Opcode</i> | <i>Intel 8080</i> | <i>Light8080</i> |
|---------------|-------------------|------------------|---------------|-------------------|------------------|
| ACI data | 7 | 9 | Ccc | 11/17 | 12/30 |
| SUB r | 4 | 6 | RET | 10 | 14 |
| SUB M | 7 | 9 | Rcc | 5/11 | 5/15 |
| SUI data | 7 | 9 | RST n | 11 | 20 |
| SBB r | 4 | 6 | PCHL | 5 | 8 |
| SBB M | 7 | 9 | PUSH rp | 11 | 19 |
| SBI data | 7 | 9 | PUSH PSW | 11 | 19 |
| INR r | 5 | 6 | POP rp | 10 | 14 |
| INR M | 10 | 13 | POP PSW | 10 | 14 |
| INX rp | 5 | 6 | XTHL | 18 | 32 |
| DCR r | 5 | 6 | SPHL | 5 | 8 |
| DCR M | 10 | 14 | EI | 4 | 5 |
| DCX rp | 5 | 6 | DI | 4 | 5 |
| DAD rp | 10 | 8 | IN port | 10 | 14 |
| DAA | 4 | 6 | OUT port | 10 | 14 |
| ANA r | 4 | 6 | HLT | 7 | 5 |
| ANA M | 7 | 9 | NOP | 4 | 5 |
| ANI data | 7 | 9 | | | |
| XRA r | 4 | 6 | | | |