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# Parallel and pseudorandom discrete event system specification vs. networks of spiking neurons: Formalization and preliminary implementation results

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**Abstract**—Usual Parallel Discrete Event System Specification (P-DEVS) allows specifying systems from modeling to simulation. However, the framework does not incorporate parallel and stochastic simulations. This work intends to extend P-DEVS to parallel simulations and pseudorandom number generators in the context of a spiking neural network. The discrete event specification presented here makes explicit and centralized the parallel computation of events as well as their routing, making further implementations more easy. It is then expected to dispose of a well defined mathematical and computational framework to deal with networks of spiking neurons.

**Index Terms**—Spiking neuron networks, discrete event system specification, pseudorandomness, parallel simulation, multithreading.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Discrete events allow faithfully implementing spike exchanges between biological neurons. Discrete event spiking neurons have been widely implemented in several software environments [5]. However, as far as we know, there is no attempt to embed these works into a common mathematical framework that would allow further theoretical and practical developments between biology and computer science. To achieve this goal the Parallel Discrete Event System Specification (P-DEVS) [3], [23] is used here. This framework provides well defined structures for the formal and computational specifications of a general dynamic system structure.

From the neuronal nets perspective, DEVS has been used mainly for: the proposition of original neuron models [21], the specification of dynamic structure neurons [19], the abstraction of neural nets [22] and for the specification of continuous spike models [13]. The previous works do not consider explicitly spiking neurons in the context of DEVS parallel and stochastic modeling and simulation. *From a parallel and distributed simulation perspective*, the completeness of DEVS (germinating from mathematical proofs until simulator architectures) seems to bias researches either to formal aspects [7] or to simulator structures integrating both parallel and distributed aspects [1]. Furthermore, although the parallel occurrence of discrete events has been formally tackled [7], there are few solutions

dealing exclusively with parallelism at abstract simulator level (as in [20]) and no work at network level. Modeling spiking neurons often requires stochasticity. The use of stochasticity at simulation level implies using good practices to deal with the parallelization and distribution of random streams [9]. While pseudorandom generators have been formalized in [23], the definition is generalized here and extended to parallel random streams and random graphs. Except in DEVS, discrete events have been used successfully at each level of modeling and simulation of neuronal nets: at modeling level [18], [5], simulation level [10], [17], [5], [15], and at hardware level with, e.g., the new IBM neurosynaptic chips improving both energy consumption [14] and computation times [4]. The latter hardware developments raise the question of the usage pertinence of general-purpose computers (based on Von Neumann architecture) for the parallel simulation of neural nets.

The inherent nature of a neuronal spiking models leads to a parallel implementation of the simulation. Parallel distributed simulation (PADS) has been extensively studied for various applications domains [16]. In this active research field, optimistic time management has been introduced a long time ago by Jefferson's team [11] with some modern implementations at Georgia Tech (Georgia Tech Time Warp). The approach proposed here retains a *conservative approach with a thread programming model*.

However, P-DEVS cannot be used as is. In the context of networks of spiking neurons, using P-DEVS requires first the development of:

- New (general) formal structures to capture explicitly and unambiguously the parallel and stochastic aspects of spiking neural networks.
- New simple and abstract algorithms for the parallelization of discrete event computations and exchanges.

Although this work is still a first step, our goal is to provide a full (hierarchical) formalization from models to implementations. With such a framework, it will be for example possible

to compare mathematically different hardware solutions (see e.g. [24] for such modeling analysis). Also, from an application perspective, any dynamic system based on (random) graphs (agents, computer networks, gene networks, etc.) is a further potential application of this work.

This study aims at answering the following questions: What are the main computational loops to be parallelized in a DEVS simulator? How to manage rigorously the stochastic aspects of these parallel simulations? What are the corresponding mathematical structures? How these elements can be used to simulate networks of spiking neurons?

More precisely, we propose here:

- A formalization of networks as parallel discrete event system specifications using pseudorandom generators for the generation of stochastic trajectories and network structures,
- A simple parallelization technique of events in P-DEVS simulators,
- An application of all these concepts to random networks of spiking neurons.

The manuscript is organized as follows. In section 2, the formal model, simulator and executor algorithms are presented. In section 3, stochastic, parallel and pseudorandom generator structures are defined. In section 4, a spiking neuronal network model and its discrete event system specification are presented. In section 5, simulation process and results are presented and discussed. Finally, conclusion and perspectives are provided.

## II. MODELING AND SIMULATION FRAMEWORK

The architecture for modeling, simulation and execution is an extension of the usual model/simulator separation [3] to hardware interfacing through an *executor* entity. The architecture consists of: (i) the *model*, which specifies the elements of the dynamic system for digital computers, (ii) the *simulator*, which generates the behavior of the model, and (iii) the *executor*, which runs the simulation computations on each available processor (or core). In the next subsections each element of the architecture is detailed.

### A. Model

A discrete event network model is composed of basic (atomic) models. Each model interacts through external input/output discrete events changing the states of basic models. Internal discrete events can be scheduled autonomously by basic models to change internal state. Time advance is achieved by each basic component. Hereafter are provided the definitions of both basic and network models.

**Definition 1.** A basic Parallel Discrete Event System Specification (P-DEVS) is a mathematical structure

$$P\text{-DEVS} = (X, Y, S, \delta_{ext}, \delta_{int}, \delta_{con}, \lambda, ta)$$

Where,  $X$  is the set of input events,  $Y$  is the set of output events,  $S$  is the set of partial states,  $\delta_{ext} : Q \times X^b \rightarrow S$  is the external transition function with  $Q = \{(s, e) \mid s \in S, 0 \leq e \leq ta(s)\}$  the set of total states with  $e$  the elapsed time since the

last transition,  $\delta_{int} : S \rightarrow S$  is the internal transition function,  $\delta_{con} : S \times X^b \rightarrow S$  is the confluent transition function, where  $X^b$  is a bag of input events,  $\lambda : S \rightarrow Y^b$  is the output function, where  $Y^b$  is a bag of output events, and  $ta : S \rightarrow \mathbb{R}_{\infty}^{0,+}$  is the time advance function.

The modeler controls/decides the behavior in case of event collisions, when the basic system, at the same simulation time, is concerned by both internal and external events. To do so, the modeler defines the confluent transition function  $\delta_{con}$ .

### Example 2. Simple P-DEVS dynamics

In Figure 1, it is considered that at time  $t_2$ , there is no collision between external event  $x_0$  and the internal event scheduled at time  $ta(s_1) = t'_2$ , with  $t'_2 > t_2$ , thus leading to an external transition function  $\delta_{ext}(s_1, e_1, x_0) = s_2$ . At time  $ta(s_3) = t_4$  where there is a collision between external event  $x_1$ , occurring at time  $t_4$ , and the internal event scheduled at the same time thus leading to a confluent transition function:  $\delta_{con}(s_3, x_1) = s_4$ .

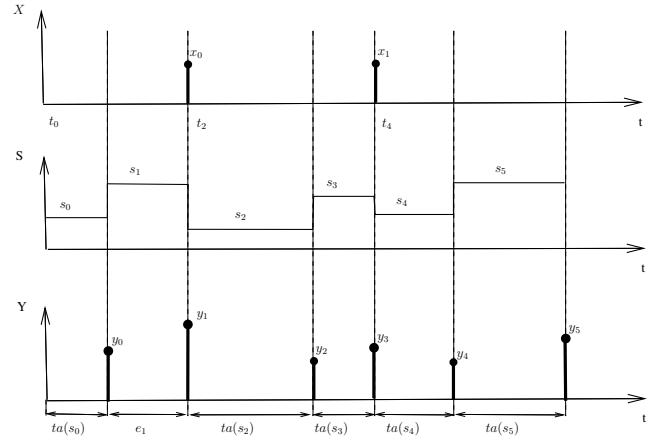


Figure 1. Simple P-DEVS trajectories.

**Definition 3.** A P-DEVS network is a mathematical structure

$$N = (X, Y, D, \{M_d\}, \{I_d\}, \{Z_{i,d}\})$$

Where,  $X$  is the set of input events,  $Y$  is the set of output events,  $D$  is the set of component names, for each  $d \in D$ ,  $M_d$  is a basic or network model,  $I_d$  is the set of influencers of  $d$  such that  $I_d \subseteq D$ ,  $d \notin I_d$  and, for each  $i \in I_d$ ,  $Z_{i,d}$  is the  $i$ -to- $d$  output translation, defined for: (i) external input couplings:  $Z_{self,d} : X_{self} \rightarrow X_d$ , with  $self$  the self network name, (ii) internal couplings:  $Z_{i,j} : Y_i \rightarrow X_j$ , and (iii) external output couplings:  $Z_{d,self} : Y_d \rightarrow Y_{self}$ .

### B. Simulator

Based on P-DEVS structures, different specifications can be achieved. Then, it should be possible to simulate each of these models re-using the same algorithm. It is the purpose of abstract simulators [3]. We generalize these algorithms here to parallel and/or sequential transitions under processor

supervision<sup>1</sup>.

Algorithm 1 describes the main simulation loop of a P-DEVS model. The hierarchical structure (i.e., the composition of nested network models finally composed of basic models) is made implicit here by manipulating the set of component names (referring to all the components present in the hierarchy). This is made possible because a P-DEVS network is closed under coupling, i.e., the behavior of a P-DEVS network is equivalent to the behavior of a P-DEVS basic model resultant. In the main-loop algorithm, as in a usual discrete event simulation, simulation time advance is driven by the (last and next) times of occurrence of events. Three component sets allow focusing concisely and efficiently on active components at each time step of the simulation: (i) the *imminent set*  $IMM(s)$  (the set of components that achieve both an output computation and an internal function transition), (ii) the *sender set*  $SEN(s)$  (the set of components that *actually* send output events to the components they are connected with), and (iii) the *receiver set*  $REC(s)$  (the set of components that receive output events). The **Executor** is in charge of the execution of: initialization, outputs, routing, and confluent, external and internal transitions; as well as the determination of the set of the next times of event occurrences and the imminent set.

The algorithm sequence consists of: (i) initializations of: the global time of last event  $t_l$  to 0, executor's variables (cf. Algorithm 2 for Executor procedures), components' states, the set of times of next events  $TNEXT(s)$ , the global time of next event  $t_n$  to the minimum time in  $TNEXT(s)$ ; (ii) main simulation loop: imminent components (about to achieve a transition) are collected, their output is executed, outputs are routed to final basic receivers, the set of active components is computed as the union of receivers and imminents, their transition function is executed, finally global times are updated and times of next event of components are collected. The main simulation loop is executed until global time of simulation time  $t_{end}$  is reached. Notice that  $t_{end}$  can be equal to infinity meaning that all times of next event of components are infinite.

### C. Executor

The executor acts as an interface between the simulation and the hardware execution. As described in Algorithm 2, the executor is called within the simulator and implements the execution of  $TASKS$  (i.e., functions over components) attributing each of them to an available lightweight process  $lwp \in LWP$  (here a thread). If the simulator deals with simulation time  $t$ , models and simulator nodes, the executor deals with *execution time*  $t_{exec}$ , lightweight processes and *logical cores* (or processors). The set  $TASKS$  implements functions *init*, *get-TN*, *compute-outputs*, *route* and *compute-transitions* (implemented as procedures) for each component  $d \in D$ . Except the set of initialization functions (tasks) that depends statically on every component  $d \in D$ , the set of other

functions evolves *dynamically* - from the *simulation* point of view. On the other hand, from the *parallelization* point of view, the number of number of lightweight processes  $n_{LWP}$  is *static*. The execution can be sequential ( $n_{LWP} = 1$ ) or parallel ( $n_{LC} \geq n_{LWP} > 1$ ). The algorithm described here remains deliberately abstract. Many implementation choices can be done. An implementation choice is detailed in section V.

In *self-init* procedure, if the *number of lightweight processes*  $n_{LWP}$  is greater than the *number of logical cores*,  $n_{LC}$ , of the machine, then  $n_{LWP} = n_{LC}$ <sup>2</sup>. In *init-components* procedure, the *init* procedure of every component is called. This procedure initializes the state and time of next event of the component. The *run* procedure of the executor is generic. The procedure takes a set of specified *tasks* as argument and returns a **result-Set** whose content depends on the procedure that is calling (a set of times for *get-TN*, of imminents for *get-imminents*, of senders for *compute-outputs*, etc.) This procedure attributes each *task* to available lightweight process  $lwp \in LWP$ , locks  $TASKS$  set, waits a maximum time  $t_{exec}^{max}$  for each process to terminate and returns the result set. The *get-TN* procedure calls in parallel each component procedure *getTn* and returns  $TNEXT(s)$  set. The *get-imminents* procedure calls in parallel each component procedure *testTn*, adds the component to the imminent set  $IMM(s)$  if its time of next event  $t_{n,d}$  is equal to the global time of next event  $t_n$ , and finally returns  $IMM(s)$ . The *compute-outputs* procedure calls in parallel each *computeOutput* procedure ( $\lambda_{imminent}$ ) of each component *imminent*  $\in IMM(s)$ , adds the component to the sender set  $SEN(s)$ , and finally returns  $SEN(s)$ . The *route* procedure routes in parallel each output event ( $y_{sender} \in Y_{sender}$ ) of each component *sender*  $\in SEN(s)$  to the final receiver, and returns the receiver set  $REC(s)$ . Finally, the *compute-transitions* procedure calls in parallel each *computeDelta* procedure ( $\delta_{int,active}, \delta_{ext,active}, \delta_{con,active}$ ) of each component *active*  $\in ACTIVE(s)$ .

## III. STOCHASTIC DISCRETE EVENT SYSTEM SPECIFICATION

The formal structures reflecting the discreteness of the computations achieved by digital computers are presented here. First, a general generator definition based on sequential machines is presented. Based on this definition, a structure for pseudorandom number generators is proposed and linked to the definition of pseudorandom variables. Using a pseudorandom number generator, a pseudorandom variate generator is used for computing the realizations of pseudorandom variables. A pseudorandom and parallel event execution is specified in P-DEVS. At structural level, large numbers of connections and components in a network are captured using a pseudorandom graph definition. The latter is finally compared to the P-DEVS network structure definition.

<sup>1</sup>Corresponding source code has been implemented in GRADES (Graph-based and RAndom DiscrEte-event Simulator), which is accessible at <https://redmine.i3s.unice.fr/projects/compsys>.

<sup>2</sup>Otherwise the parallelization will be inefficient. Also it is expected then that the operating system assigns available cores to available lightweight processes.

### A. Pseudorandom variables and number generators

**Definition 4.** A generator is an autonomous sequential machine  $G = (S, s_0, \gamma)$ , where  $S$  is the set of states,  $s_0$  is the initial state and  $\gamma : S \rightarrow S$  is the state generation function.

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**Algorithm 1** Main simulation loop of Root Coordinator.

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**Variables:**

$t_l$ : Global time of last event  
 $t_n$ : Global time of next event  
 $t_{end}$ : Global time of simulation end  
 $s = (\dots, (s_d, e_d), \dots)$ : Global state  
 $TNEXT(s) = \{t_{n,d} \mid d \in D\}$ : set of times of next events  
 $IMM(s) = \{d \in D \mid t_{n,d} = t_n\}$ : set of imminents  
for next output/internal transition  
 $SEN(s) = \{d \in D \mid \lambda_d(s_d) \neq \emptyset\}$ : set of senders  
 $REC(s) = \{d \in D \mid i \in I_d \wedge i \in IMM(s) \wedge x_d^b \neq \emptyset \wedge Z_{i,d}(x_d^b) \neq \emptyset\}$ : set of receivers  
 $n_{LWP}$ : number of lightweight processes

**Begin**

$t_l \leftarrow 0$   
 $Executor.self-init(n_{LWP})$   
 $Executor.init-components(D)$   
 $TNEXT(s) \leftarrow Executor.get-TN(D)$   
 $t_n \leftarrow \min(TNEXT(s))$   
**while**  $t_n < t_{end}$  **do**  
 $IMM(s) \leftarrow Executor.get-imminents(D, t_n)$   
 $SEN(s) \leftarrow Executor.compute-outputs(IMM(s), t_n)$   
 $REC(s) \leftarrow Executor.route(SEN(s))$   
 $ACTIVE(s) \leftarrow IMM(s) \cup REC(s)$   
 $Executor.compute-transitions(ACTIVE(s), t_n)$   
 $t_l \leftarrow t_n$   
 $TNEXT(s) \leftarrow Executor.get-TN(D)$   
 $t_n \leftarrow \min(TNEXT(s))$   
**end while**

**End**

---

**Definition 5.** A pseudorandom number generator (RNG) (cf. [23], p.132, whose definition is extended here) is defined as  $RNG = (S_P, s_{P_0}, \gamma_P)$ , with  $S_P = R$  the generator state set with  $R \subset \mathbb{R}_{[0,1]}$  the finite set of pseudorandom numbers (with each pseudorandom number a realization of a uniformly distributed random variable, i.e.,  $r \sim \mathcal{U}(0,1)$ ),  $\gamma_P : R \rightarrow R$  the pseudorandom number generation map, and  $s_{P_0} = r_0$  the initial status (or seed for old generators). A stream (i.e., a sequence) of independent and identically distributed (i.i.d.) pseudorandom numbers of length period  $l$ , noted  $(r_i)_{i=0}^{l-1} = r_0, r_1, \dots, r_{l-1}$ , for  $i = 0, 1, \dots, l-1$ , is defined by  $\gamma_P(r_i) = r_{i+1}$  and with  $\gamma_P(r_{l+i}) = r_i$ .

**Definition 6.** A pseudorandom variate generator (RVG) is defined as  $RVG = (RNG, S_V, s_{V_0}, \gamma_V)$ , with  $S_V = V$  the generator variate set,  $V \subset \mathbb{R}$  the finite set of pseudorandom variates (with each random variate  $v \in V$  being a realization of a random variable with inverse non-uniform cumulative function distribution  $\gamma_V$ ),  $\gamma_V : R \rightarrow V$  the pseudorandom

variate generation map, and  $s_{V_0}$  the initial pseudorandom variate. A stream of pseudorandom variates follows exactly the sequence of the pseudorandom numbers generated by RNG and is of equal length  $l$ , i.e., for  $(r_i)_{i=0}^{l-1} = r_0, r_1, \dots, r_{l-1}$ , there exists  $(v_i)_{i=0}^{l-1} = v_0, v_1, \dots, v_{l-1}$ .

**Definition 7.** A pseudorandom variable consists of the map  $\gamma_V : R \rightarrow V$  of a pseudorandom variate generator  $RVG = (RNG, S_V, s_{V_0}, \gamma_V)$ , where  $R \subset \mathbb{R}_{[0,1]}$  is a finite set of uniformly distributed pseudorandom numbers. Every time a random variate  $v_i \in V$  of the pseudorandom variable  $\gamma_V(r_i)$  is obtained, the next pseudorandom number is generated through  $r_{i+1} = \gamma_P(r_i)$ .

**Example 8.** For a pseudorandom variable following an exponential law  $\gamma_{exp} \sim Exp(\lambda)$ , each realization (pseudorandom variate) is obtained by  $\gamma_{exp}(r) = \frac{-\ln(1-r)}{\lambda} = v$  (i.e., inverting the cumulative distribution function of the exponential law).

**Example 9.** For a pseudorandom variable following a Bernoulli distribution  $\gamma_B \sim \mathcal{B}(p)$  of probability  $p$ , each realization (pseudorandom variate) is obtained by  $\gamma_B(r) = v = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } r \leq p \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$ .

### B. Pseudorandom Parallel Discrete Event System Specification

As previously defined, randomness is simulated at the computer level using a pseudorandom number generator modeled as a deterministic sequential machine. Corresponding pseudorandom variables are maps taking the generated pseudorandom numbers in argument and generating corresponding pseudorandom variates. At formal P-DEVS level, the set of pseudorandom variates  $V$  can be embedded as part of the partial state.

**Definition 10.** A basic Pseudorandom Parallel Discrete Event System Specification (PP-DEVS) is a structure

$$PP-DEVS = (X, Y, S, \delta_{ext}, \delta_{int}, \delta_{con}, \lambda, ta)$$

Where,  $X$  and  $Y$  defined previously,  $S \supseteq V$  is the set of sets of global pseudorandom variates  $V = \prod_{i=1}^n V_i$  with  $n$  the number of pseudorandom variables. Each set  $V_i$  contains the pseudorandom variates of a stream  $(v_i)_{i=0}^{l-1} = v_0, v_1, \dots, v_{l-1}$  generated by a corresponding pseudorandom variate generator  $RVG_i = (RNG_i, S_{V_i}, s_{V_i,0}, \gamma_{V_i})$  (cf. Definition 6), thus defining a pseudorandom variable  $\gamma_{V_i} : R_i \rightarrow V_i$ . At each transition function execution the next state is computed deterministically based on a global pseudorandom variate  $v \in V$  and a partial state  $s \in S$ , i.e.,  $\delta_{int}(s, v) = s'$ ,  $\delta_{ext}(q, x, v) = s'$ , and  $\delta_{con}(s, x, v) = s'^3$ .

<sup>3</sup>The same reasoning can be done based on each pseudorandom number  $r_i \in R_i$ , such that the set of sets of (global) pseudorandom numbers is  $R = \prod_{i=1}^n R_i$ , with  $n$  the number of pseudorandom numbers. Then, at each transition function execution the next state of  $P-DEVS_R$  is computed based on each global pseudorandom number  $r \in R$ , i.e.,  $\delta_{int,R}(s, r) = s'$ ,  $\delta_{ext}(q, x, r) = s'$ , and  $\delta_{con}(s, x, r) = s'$ .

---

**Algorithm 2** Variables, procedures and functions of Executor.

---

**Variables:**

$LWP = \{lwp \mid n_{LWP} \leq n_{LC}\}$ : set of lightweight processes

$n_{LWP}$ : number of lightweight processes

$n_{LC}$ : number of logical cores

$TASKS = \{f_d \mid d \in D\}$ : set of tasks

with  $f_d$  a function to execute over  $d \in D$

$t_{exec}^{max}$ : maximum execution time of a process

**Begin**

**procedure** SELF-INIT( $n_{LWP}$ )

$n_{LC} \leftarrow getNbOfLogicalCores()$

**if**  $n_{LWP} > n_{LC}$  **then**

$n_{LWP} \leftarrow n_{LC}$

**end if**

**end procedure**

**procedure** INIT-COMPONENTS( $D$ )

**set**  $TASKS = \{(d, init(0)) \mid d \in D\}$

$run(TASKS)$

**end procedure**

**function** RUN( $TASKS$ )

**In parallel**  $\forall task \in TASKS$  **do**

**run**  $task$  on available  $lwp \in LWP$

**add** possibly result **to** ResSet

**end In parallel**

**lock**  $TASKS$

**wait**  $t_{exec}^{max}$  for each  $lwp \in LWP$  to terminate

**return** ResSet

**end function**

**function** GET-TN( $D$ )

$TASKS = \{(d, getTn()) \mid d \in D\}$

$TNEXT(s) \leftarrow run(TASKS)$

**return**  $TNEXT(s)$

**end function**

**function** GET-IMMINENTS( $D, t_n$ )

**set**  $TASKS = \{(d, testTn()) \mid d \in D\}$

$IMM(s) \leftarrow run(TASKS)$

**return**  $IMM(s)$

**end function**

**function** COMPUTE-OUTPUTS( $IMM(s), t_n$ )

**set**  $TASKS = \{(imminent, computeOutput(t_n)) \mid imminent \in IMM(s)\}$

$SEN(s) \leftarrow run(TASKS)$

**return**  $SEN(s)$

**end function**

**function** ROUTE( $SEN(s)$ )

$TASKS = \{(sender, route()) \mid sender \in SEN(s)\}$

$REC(s) \leftarrow run(TASKS)$

**return**  $REC(s)$

**end function**

**procedure** COMPUTE-TRANSITIONS( $ACTIVE(s), t_n$ )

$TASKS = \{(active, computeDelta(t_n)) \mid active \in ACTIVE(s)\}$

$run(TASKS)$

**end procedure**

---

**End**

---

The use of pseudorandom numbers in deterministic sequential DEVS models has been discussed in the context of probability spaces [6]. This work pinpointed cases where the previous definition may show inconsistencies as well as convergence issues (when elements are not measurable or corresponding sets infinite). However, our goal here is not to redefine a new formalism at continuous system specification level but rather to specify the deterministic foundations of the stochastic simulations achieved at computer level and how this can be modeled in P-DEVS as a first step. This does not prevent to achieve further mathematical extensions, as done in [6].

### C. Pseudorandom graph-based network

A pseudorandom directed graph generator generates a set of simple directed graphs with the same coupling probability and the same number of vertices.

**Definition 11.** A *Pseudorandom Generator of Directed Graphs (RGG)* is a structure  $RGG = (\mathcal{G}^{n,p}, S_G, s_{G_0}, \gamma_G)$ , where  $\mathcal{G}^{n,p}$  is the set of all pseudorandomly generated directed graphs such that  $\mathcal{G}^{n,p} = \mathcal{G}\{n, P(\text{arrow}) = p\}$ , with  $n$  the number of vertices and  $p \in \mathbb{R}_{[0,1]}$  the probability of choosing an arrow. Each graph  $G(U, A) \in \mathcal{G}^{n,p}$  is described by  $U = \{1, 2, \dots, n\}$  the set of vertices and  $A$  a set of (ordered pairs) arrows;  $S_G = A \times V_{coupling} = U^2 \times \mathbb{B}$  with  $V_{coupling}$  the set of coupling pseudorandom variates obtained by sampling corresponding (Bernouilli) coupling pseudorandom variable  $\gamma_{coupling} \sim \mathcal{B}(p)^4$ ;  $s_{G_0} = v_{coupling,0}$  is the initial coupling pseudorandom variate; Last map  $\gamma_G : \mathcal{G}^{n,p} \times S_G \rightarrow \mathcal{G}^{n,p}$  is the directed graph generation map using the coupling pseudorandom variates  $V_{coupling}$  to construct a graph  $G(U, A) \in \mathcal{G}^{n,p}$ .

### Example 12. Simple graph generation

A graph  $G \in \mathcal{G}^{n,p}$  can be iteratively constructed by a pseudorandom generator of directed graphs  $RGG = (\mathcal{G}^{n,p}, S_G, s_{G_0}, \gamma_G)$ , with  $S_G, s_{G_0}, \mathcal{G}^{n,p}$  as defined previously and  $\gamma_G(G_i, v_i) = G_{i+1}$ , with  $G = \cup_i G_i$ ,  $G_0(U, A = \emptyset)$  (here the initial graph has all vertices but no edges), for  $i = 0, 1, \dots, n^2 - 1$ . The length period  $n^2$  is due to the algorithmic testing of edges, i.e., for each vertex, each arrow to each other vertex is tested.

**Example 13.** A directed graph  $G_1(U_1, A_1) \in \mathcal{G}^{n_1,p_1}$  can be connected to another directed graph  $G_2(U_2, A_2) \in \mathcal{G}^{n_2,p_2}$  with probability  $p$ , leading to a pseudorandom directed graph  $G(U, A) \in \mathcal{G}^{n,p}$  with  $U = \{U_1, U_2\}$ ,  $A = \{A_1, A_2, A_3\}$  and  $p$  the probability of choosing an arrow in  $A_3$  from vertices in  $U_1$  to vertices in  $U_2$ . Algorithmically, graphs  $G_1$  and  $G_2$  are generated and finally  $G$  is generated coupling  $G_1$  and  $G_2$  with probability  $p$ .

Once the graph structure has been generated, the graph can be transformed into a network where to each node corresponds

<sup>4</sup>Pseudorandom variates in  $S_G$  are generated by a pseudorandom variate generator  $RV_{G_{coupling}} = (RNG_{coupling}, V_{coupling}, v_{coupling,0}, \gamma_{coupling})$ .

a P-DEVS component and to each arrow a coupling.

**Definition 14.** A *Graph-to-P-DEVS Network Transformer* (GNT) is a structure  $GNT = (G, N, \{m_{i,j}\})$ , where  $G$  is a *directed graph*,  $N$  is a *P-DEVS network*,  $m_{i,j}$  is a *one-to-one map* (from the elements of  $G$  to the elements of  $N$ ) defined for: (i) *vertices-to-components*  $m_{u,c} : U \rightarrow D$ , (ii) *arrows-to-couplings*  $m_{a,c} : U \times U \rightarrow D \times D$  with  $D \times D = \{(a, Z_{a,b}(a)) \mid a \in I_b\}$  the *influencer-to-influencee pairs*, and (iii) *arrows-to-influencers*  $m_{a,i} : U \times U \rightarrow \{I_i\}$  with  $m_{a,i}(u, u') \in I_{u'}$  the *selection of the influencer of  $u'$* .

#### IV. SPIKING NEURAL NETWORK MODEL

Mathematical modeling of a random spiking neural network is presented here. The model is specified after using the main mathematical structures presented in previous sections.

##### A. Biological neuron

Figure 2 depicts a single biological neuron. Most commonly, inputs from other neurons are received on *dendrites*, at the level of *synapses*. The circulation of neuronal activity (electric potentials) is due to the exchange through the neuron *membrane* of different kinds of ions. Dendrites integrate locally the variations of electric potentials, either excitatory or inhibitory, and transmit them to the *cell body*. There, the genetic material is located into the *nucleus*. A new pulse of activity (an *action potential*) is generated if the local electric potential reaches a certain threshold at the level of the *axon hillock*, the small zone between the cell body and the very beginning of the axon. If emitted, action potentials continue their way through the axon in order to be transmitted to other neurons. Action potentials, once emitted, are "all or nothing" phenomena: 0, 1. The propagation speed of action potentials can be increased by the presence of a *myelin* sheath, produced by *Schwann cells*. This insulating sheath is not continuous along the axon. There is no myelin at the level of the *nodes of Ranvier*, where ionic exchanges can still occur. When action potentials reach the tip of the axon, they spread over all *terminals* with the same amplitude, up to synapses. The neuron can then communicate with other following neurons. Notice that a focus on electrical signals (without dealing with chemical signals) is achieved here.

##### B. Model

At the model level, the network structure and the behavior of the neurons are described here. While definitions provided here are general, they are mapped in next subsection to the mathematical structures provided in subsections III-B and III-C.

The structure presented here consists of: an input layer of independent firing neurons, an intermediate layer embedding a pseudorandomly generated directed graph of neurons, an output layer of independent receiving neurons.

**Definition 15.** The structure (cf. Figure 3)

Let  $I, B, O$  be 3 finite sets with respective cardinality  $n, M$  and  $N$ . It is always assumed that  $M \geq N$ . Let  $(p_i)_{i \geq 0}$

denote real numbers in  $[0, 1]$ . For any  $(i, j) \in B^2$ , assume that there exists an arrow  $i \rightarrow j$  with probability  $p_0$ , for any  $i \in I$  and  $j \in B$ , assume that there exists an arrow  $i \rightarrow j$  with probability  $p_1$  and for any  $i \in B$  and  $j \in O$ , assume that there exists an arrow  $i \rightarrow j$  with probability  $p_2$ .

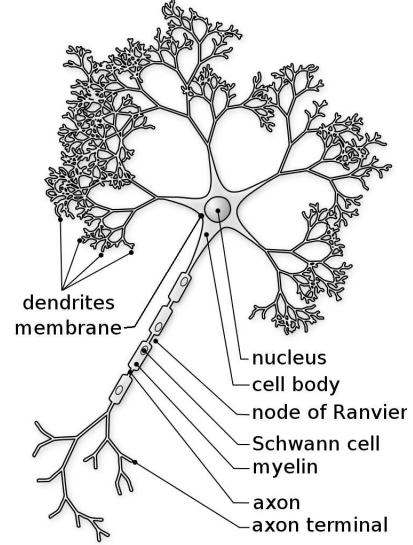


Figure 2. Sketch of a neuron (adapted from <http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neurone>).

The dynamics in each layer is provided in next definition. In input layer, neurons fire randomly while neurons in both intermediate and output layers follow a deterministic behavior.

**Definition 16.** The dynamics

Assume that the activities  $(X_t(i))_{i \in I, t \in \mathbb{N}}$  of the sites in  $I$  and time  $t$  are i.i.d.  $\mathcal{B}(p_3)$ . Let  $a$  be a positive real number. For all  $(i, j, t) \in (B \cup O)^2 \times \mathbb{N}$ , we choose i.i.d. thresholds  $\tau_i \sim \mathcal{N}(m, \mathcal{S}^2)$ , i.i.d.  $w_{i,j} = 1$  with probability  $1 - p_4$  and  $-a$  with probability  $p_4$ . Then, the *membrane potential*  $P_i(t)$  of a neuron  $i$ , initially null is updated thanks to the following rule

$$P_i(t) = (rA_i(t-1) + \sum_{i \sim j} w_{i,j}A_j(t-1))(1 - A_i(t-1))$$

Where,  $r \in (0, 1)$  is the *activity remaining from time  $t - 1$* ,  $\sum_{i \sim j} w_{i,j}A_j(t-1)$  is the *activity received from other neurons at time  $t - 1$* ,  $(1 - A_i(t-1))$  reflects a *refractory period* of 1 (if the neuron fired at time  $t - 1$  it cannot fire at time  $t$ ), and the *activity of a neuron  $i$*  is provided by

$$A_i(t) = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } P_i(t-1) \geq \tau_i \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$



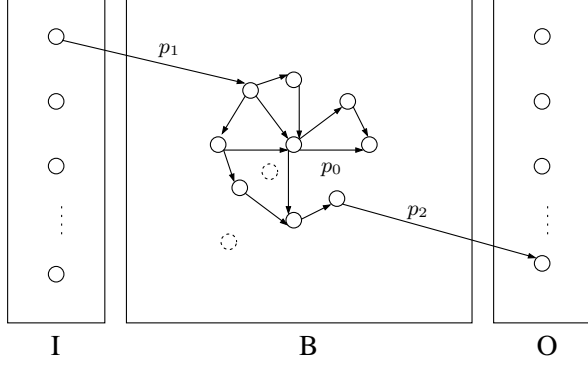


Figure 3. Structure of the neuron model.

### C. Specification in PP-DEVS

The structure of Definition 15 can be set by a pseudorandom generator of directed graphs (RGG) (cf. Definition 11). The coupling of the different layers is based on Example 13 with each layer being a directed graph (with both input and output layers having no internal connections). The resulting coupled graph is finally mapped to a P-DEVS network through a *Graph-to-P-DEVS Network Transformer* (GNT) (cf. Definition 14).

From a dynamical point of view, each neuron  $i \in I$  of Definition 16 is specified as a PP-DEVS reduced to internal transitions as

$$M_i = (Y_i, S_i, \delta_{int,i}, \lambda_i, ta_i)$$

Where,  $Y_i = \{\emptyset, 1\}$ , with null event  $\emptyset$  (resp. 1) if the neuron is non-firing (resp. firing),  $S_i = V_{firing} = \mathbb{B}$  with  $V_{firing}$  the set of firing pseudorandom variates, *internal transition function*  $\delta_{int,i}(s, v_{firing})$  samples the pseudorandom variable  $\gamma_{firing} \sim \mathcal{B}(p_3)$  indicating the activity of the neuron depending on probability  $p_3$ , output function  $\lambda_i(v_{firing})$  sends an unitary event if the neuron is active and *time advance function*  $ta_i(s) = 1$  ensures the discrete time sampling of  $\gamma_{firing}$ .

Neurons in  $B$  and  $O$  of Definition 16 are P-DEVS models specified as

$$M_j = (X_j, Y_j, S_j, \delta_{ext,j}, \delta_{int,j}, \delta_{con,j}, \lambda_j, ta_j)$$

Where,  $X_j = \{\emptyset, 1\}^n = \{\emptyset, 1\} \times \dots \times \{\emptyset, 1\}$  (with  $n$  the number of inputs),  $Y_j = \{\emptyset, 1\}$ ,  $S_j = \{\{w_k\}, c, a, p, phase = \{firing, active, inactive\}\}$  with  $w_j$  the weight of corresponding input  $k$ ,  $c$  (resp.  $c'$ ) the sum of received inputs at a time step  $t$  (resp. at a time step  $t+1$ ),  $a$  (resp.  $a'$ ) the activity of the neuron at a time step  $t$  (resp. at time step  $t+1$ ),  $p$  (resp.  $p'$ ) the membrane potential of the neuron at a time step  $t$  (resp. at time step  $t+1$ ), *external transition function*  $\delta_{ext}(q, x)$  collects the inputs received at time  $t$ , computes the next phase and the next membrane potential  $p'$  and activity  $a'$ , and after call for a next internal transition at time  $t+1$ , *internal transition function*  $\delta_{int}(s)$  updates  $p \leftarrow p'$  and  $a \leftarrow a'$  and reset inputs ( $c \leftarrow 0$ ), if the neuron is in phase active or firing and receives an input the confluent transition function is called as  $\delta_{con}(s, x) = \delta_{ext}(\delta_{int}(s), 0, x)$ , i.e., first update variables and after collect

inputs, and finally *time advance function*  $ta_j(s) = 1$  if the neuron is in phase active or firing and  $ta_j(s) = \infty$  if the neuron is in phase inactive.

## V. SIMULATION PROCESS AND RESULTS

Model generation and simulation process are introduced first here. After, the speedup results are presented and discussed. The goal of this speedup analysis is only an application proof of the whole hierarchy developed here. Gaining genericity has usually a cost. It is not our purpose here to prove the supremacy of this approach at the parallel implementation level but rather to prove completeness and applicability.

### A. Environment infrastructure and graphical outputs

The steps and the elements of the process of generation and simulation of the model consist of the following sequence: (i) Initialization of all models, (ii) Graph generation using a model *RGG*, (iii) Graph-to-network transformation (*GNT*), which generates a PP-DEVS network from the graph, and (iv) Simulation.

Notice that as defined previously, each object uses one *RNG* for each pseudorandom variable. This ensures: (i) the statistical independence between pseudorandom variables, and (ii) the reproducibility of pseudorandom simulations [8].

Figure 4 depicts a snapshot of the graph corresponding to neurons of set  $B$ . Notice how dense is the graph connection making it difficult to differentiate edges.

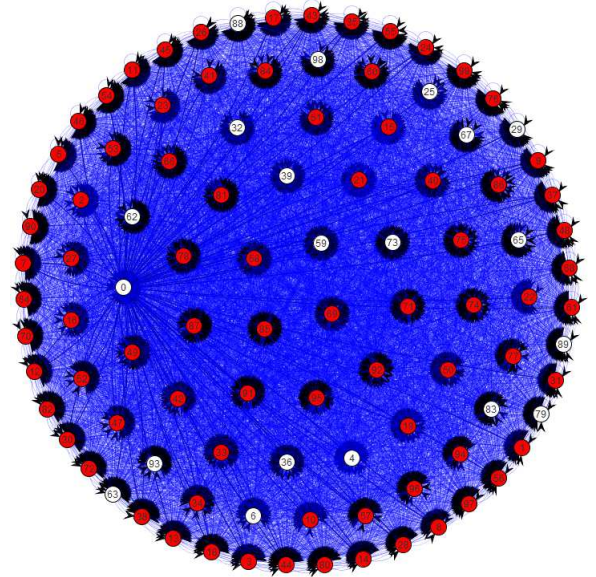


Figure 4. Graph snapshot of  $B$  set.

Simulations have been performed on a Symmetric Multiprocessing (SMP) machine with 80 physical cores and 160 logical cores, 8 processors Intel(R) Xeon(R) CPU E7-8870@2.40GHz<sup>5</sup>, and 1Tb RAM. Figure 5 presents the firing of neurons for neurons of each set  $I$ ,  $O$ , and  $B$ .

<sup>5</sup>stepping: 2, cpu: 1064 MHz, cache size: 30720 KB.

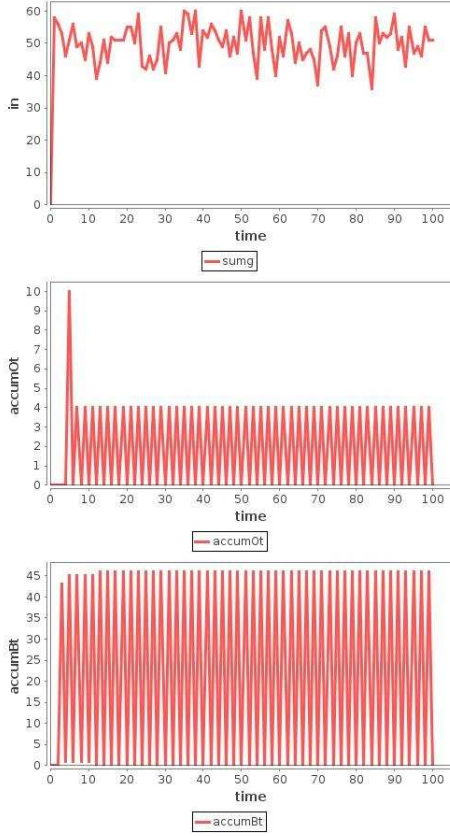


Figure 5. Firing outputs in sets  $I$ ,  $O$ , and  $B$ .

### B. Speed-up results

In [25], an interesting perspective is drawn concerning the usage of clusters with low latency communication capabilities. Our idea here is to assume (even at abstract simulator level) that all the computations are centralized on a single computer, a Symmetric Multiprocessing (SMP) machine<sup>6</sup>. The latter allows sharing memory and minimizing the latency of communications. Besides, centralizing all the computations facilitates the control of their executions and their synchronization at each time step. Different sizes of neural networks are simulated here for different numbers of threads.

Input parameters are set to values:  $p_0 = p_1 = p_2 = 0.9$ ,  $p_3 = 0.5$ ,  $p_4 = 0.2$ ,  $a = r = 1$ , each threshold  $\tau_i \sim \mathcal{N}(m, S^2)$ , with  $m = 250$  and  $S = 1$ . The whole simulation has been implemented in Java programming language.

The *sequential execution time of methods*  $t_{methods}$  has been considered as the sum of the execution times for methods: *initialization* ( $t_{init}$ ), *output* ( $t_{out}$ ), *routing* ( $t_{rout}$ ), and *transi-*

<sup>6</sup>Simulations have been performed on a Symmetric Multiprocessing (SMP) machine with 80 physical cores and 160 logical cores, 8 processors Intel(R) Xeon(R) CPU E7-8870@2.40GHz (stepping: 2, cpu: 1064MHz, cache size: 30720KB), and 1Tb RAM. Each Java class main has been executed in command line using the `exec-maven-plugin-1.2.1`. Execution times correspond to the total (processor) time information provided by Maven. Finally, although when running the simulations the machine was possibly executing other simulations (launched by other users), the number of available threads has been verified at each simulation time and 30 replications of each simulation have been achieved showing a good confidence interval of the results obtained.

tions ( $t_{trans}$ ) (cf. Algorithm 1), for different sizes of networks. Considering  $t_{total}$  as the *total parallelizable execution time*, and  $t_{seq}$  as the *sequential execution time that cannot be parallelized*, it has been noticed that most of the execution times of a simulation is due to the execution of these methods, i.e.,  $\frac{t_{total}}{t_{methods}} = 93.2\%$  for 140 neurons, increasing quickly to 99.3% for 240 neurons. This shows the high parallelizability of P-DEVS simulations. Besides, it has also been noticed that most of the execution time is due to the execution of atomic output and transition functions, i.e.,  $\frac{t_{total}}{t_{trans} + t_{out}} = 91.51\%$  for 140 neurons increasing quickly to 99.08% for 240 neurons.

Figure 6 presents the speedup obtained for different sizes of networks according to different numbers of threads (implemented in a pool<sup>7</sup>). Each replication has been replicated 30 times leading to a total number of  $19 \times 30 \times 4 = 2280$  simulations. It can be seen that in each simulation, the speedup reaches a maximum which remains constant (cf. Figure 6.c and Figure 6.d) or decreases (cf. Figure 6.a and Figure 6.b).

Each best average speedup obtained in Figure 6 is presented in Figure 7. The optimal number of pool threads is: 20 for 140 neurons, 60 for 240 neurons, 100 for 340 neurons and 50 for 440 neurons. Increasing the number of neurons the average best speedup decreases and a practical maximum speedup of 23.5 is achieved.

Finally, to investigate the parallelizability of our simulation model, let's consider Amdahl's law [2] as  $S(n) = \frac{1}{\tau_{seq} + \frac{1}{n}(1 - \tau_{seq})}$  with the *maximum theoretical speed up*  $S(n)$  (considering no parallelization overhead) for a *number of threads*  $n$ , and the *fraction of total execution time as strictly sequential* as  $\tau_{seq} = \frac{t_{seq}}{t_{total}}$ . Having  $n = 80$  physical cores on the SMP machine used, for 140 neurons, the theoretical maximum speedup is  $S(80) = 14.3$  (while the practical speedup is 5.14) and for 240 neurons, the theoretical maximum speedup is  $S(80) = 53$  (while the practical maximum speedup is 22.2). Practical maximum speedup is less than half of theoretical maximum speedup, suggesting great further potential speedup.

<sup>7</sup>Notice that for each simulation the Java Virtual Machine added also 16 threads for garbage collection and specific to the libraries used in the simulator.

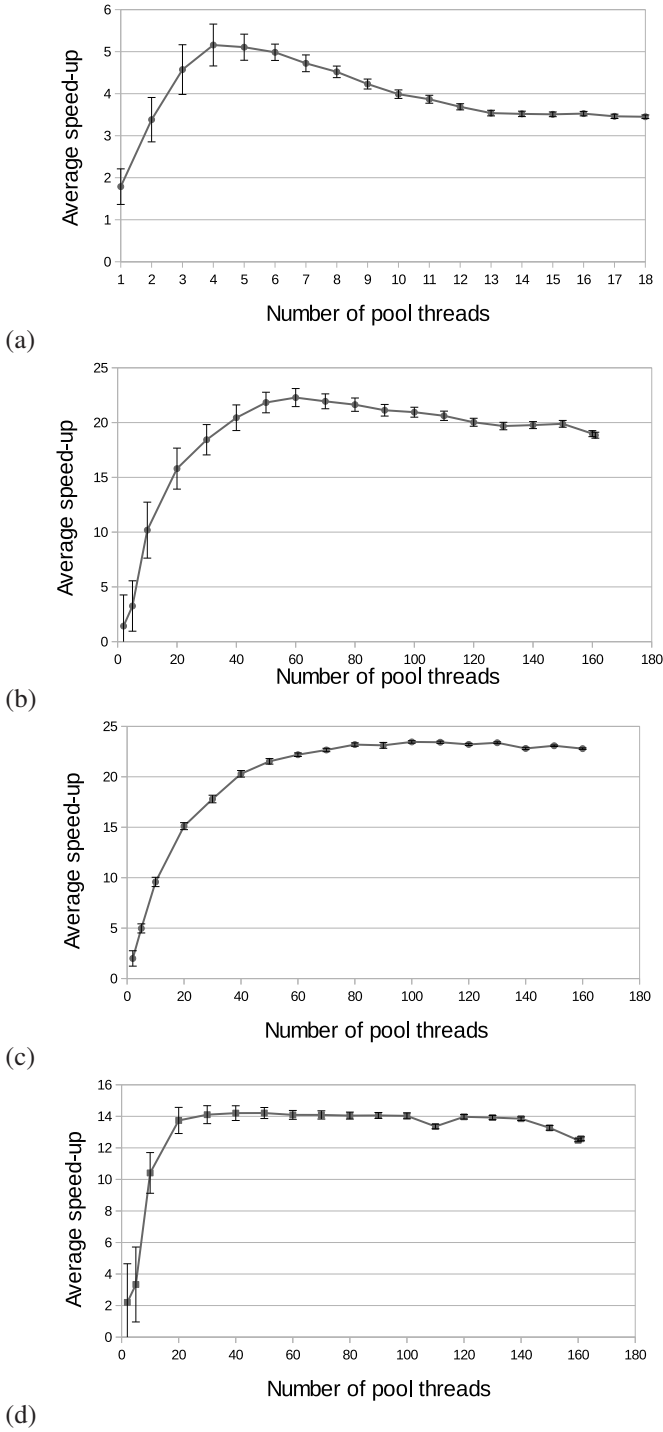


Figure 6. Comparison of execution time results for an increasing number of pool threads and: (a) 140 neurons, (b) 240 neurons, (c) 340 neurons, and (d) 440 neurons.

The cap speedup obtained (while increasing the number of threads) can be explained by JVM intrinsic limitations. In [12], different very basic experiments have been implemented in parallel for different numbers of threads (quicksort, calculation of  $\pi$  value by Monte Carlo method, Fast Fourier transform, discrete cosine transform, etc.) Platform consisted of an Intel Xeon Phi Coprocessor 5100 accelerator with a memory size of

8GB DDR5, an L2 cache size of 30MB, 60 cores, and a base processor frequency of 1.1GHz. For quicksort and Monte Carlo experiments, the speedup obtained shows the same cap with no improvement respectively above 30 and 60 threads. For other experiments, the results are even worse showing a decrease of the speedup above 60 threads. Furthermore, JVM opacity makes difficult further investigations of both load balancing and memory access (to test a possible memory bandwidth issue). For example, when writing these lines we were not able to find any good quality profiling software for analysing Java parallel simulation results. This is why, although we believe that better speedup results can be obtained, we recommend further investigations to use another programming language (e.g., C++).

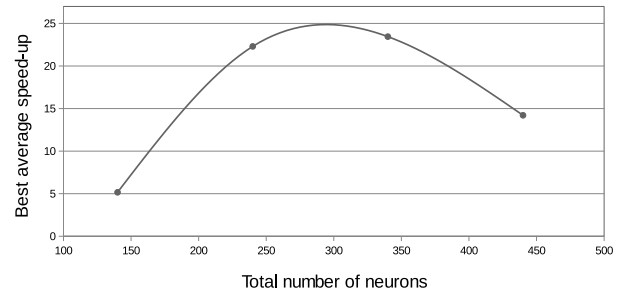


Figure 7. Best average execution-time speedup for each total number of neurons.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND PERSPECTIVES

This article presented a first formal bridge between computational discrete event systems and networks of spiking neurons. Parallel and stochastic aspects (and their relationship) have been defined explicitly. In P-DEVS a simple way of parallelizing simulations and a link between P-DEVS and (pseudo)random graphs/generators/variables have been proposed. Finally all these structures have been applied to a network of spiking neurons. From a simulation point of view, it can be seen that most of the sequential execution times (more than 90%) can be reduced theoretically. In practice, the simplicity obtained by centralizing most of the computations at the same place requires a strong optimization at software level and a suitable solution at hardware level.

In conclusion, although further technical investigations need to be achieved, it is believed that: the formal structures provided here allow mathematical reasoning at (computational) system level and that the simplicity of the parallel (reproducible<sup>8</sup>) implementation technique should allow further (more efficient) parallelization developments, based on our theoretical maximum speedup results.

<sup>8</sup>Parallelizing the discrete event execution of a scheduler, at each time step, and encapsulating each stream of random numbers in corresponding pseudorandom variable (in their turn encapsulated in atomic models) simply preserves simulation reproducibility [8]. Furthermore, the technique has also the advantage to do not require any control over the order of execution of threads (that is not guaranteed by some programming languages, e.g. Java) to preserve simulation reproducibility.

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