



Design Verification Conference and Exhibition

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Experiencing Checkers for a Cache Controller Design

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**VhdlCohen
Publishing**



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Purpose of Study

- **Are checkers useful?**
 - Easy to use?
 - Create, instantiate, Intuitive results, Easy debug
- **What was our experience?**
 - Process of using checkers
 - Application issues
 - Tool issues
 - Conclusions

Checkers are COOL!



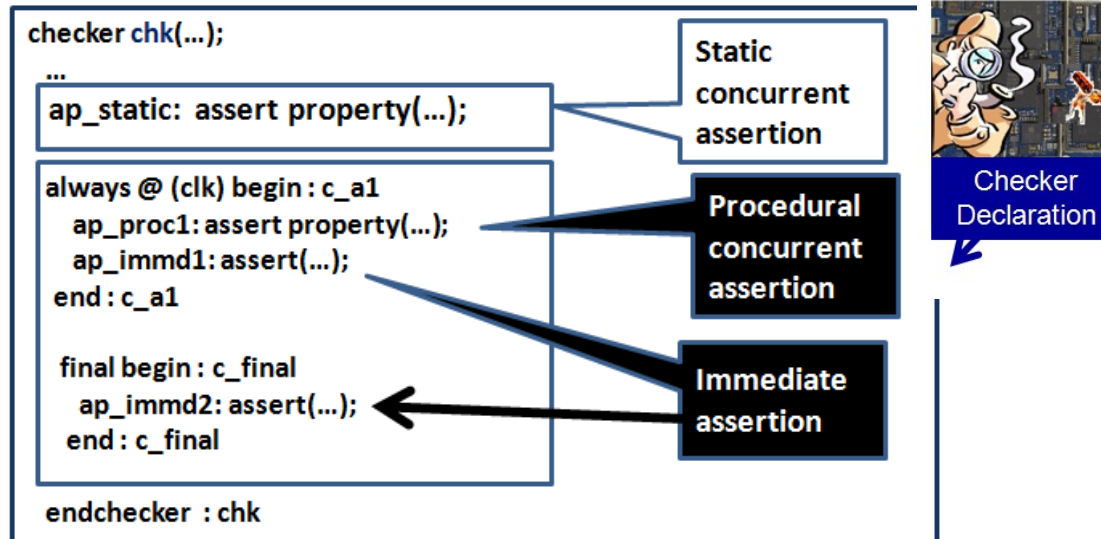


Agenda

- **Classification of assertions**
- **Classification of checker instantiations**
- **The cache controller model**
- **Example of checker declaration and instantiation**
- **Design experience**
 - **Without checkers**
 - **With checkers**
- **Impressions and conclusions**



Classification of Checkers Assertions and Instances

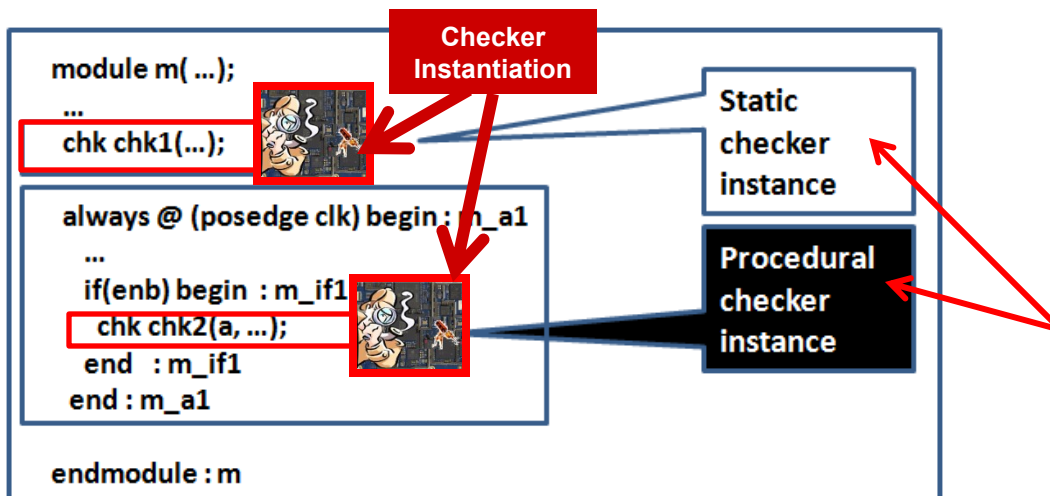


Assertion

- Static
- procedural

Checker instance

- Static
- Procedural

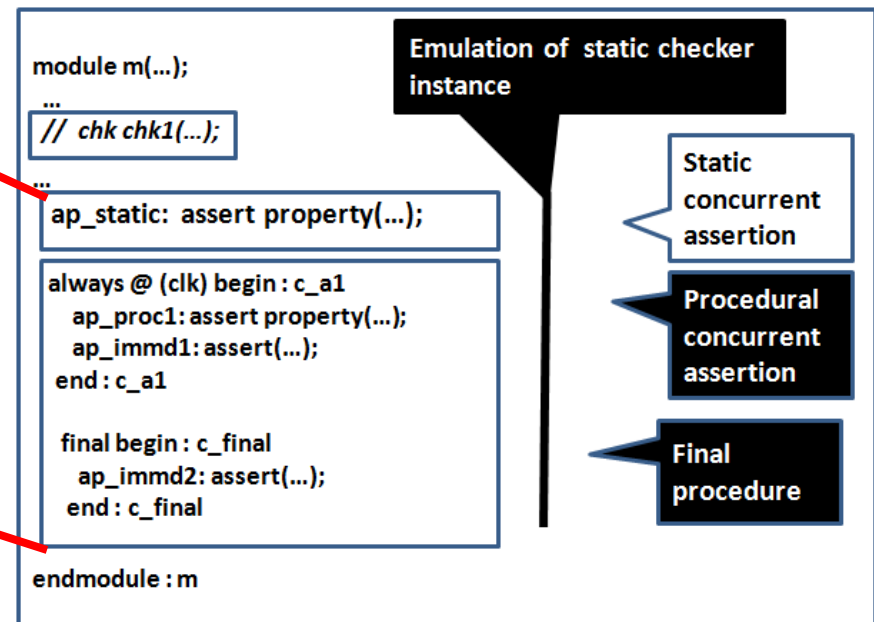
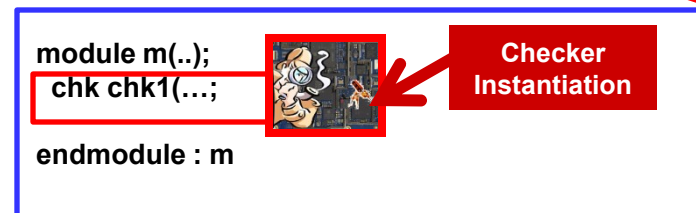
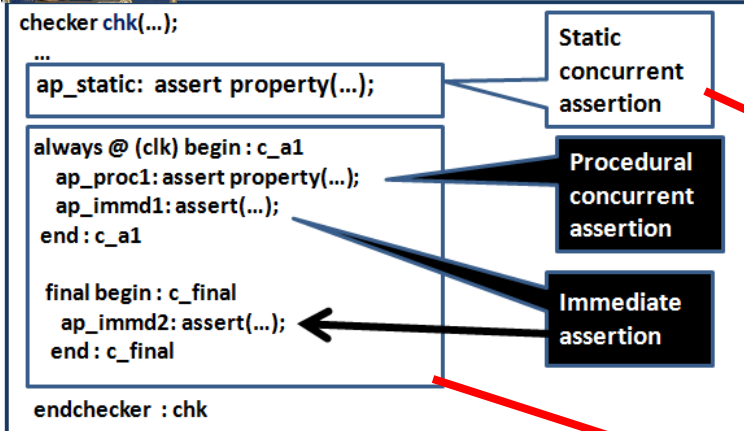




Emulation of Static Checker Instance (*chk1*) in a Module



EMULATION



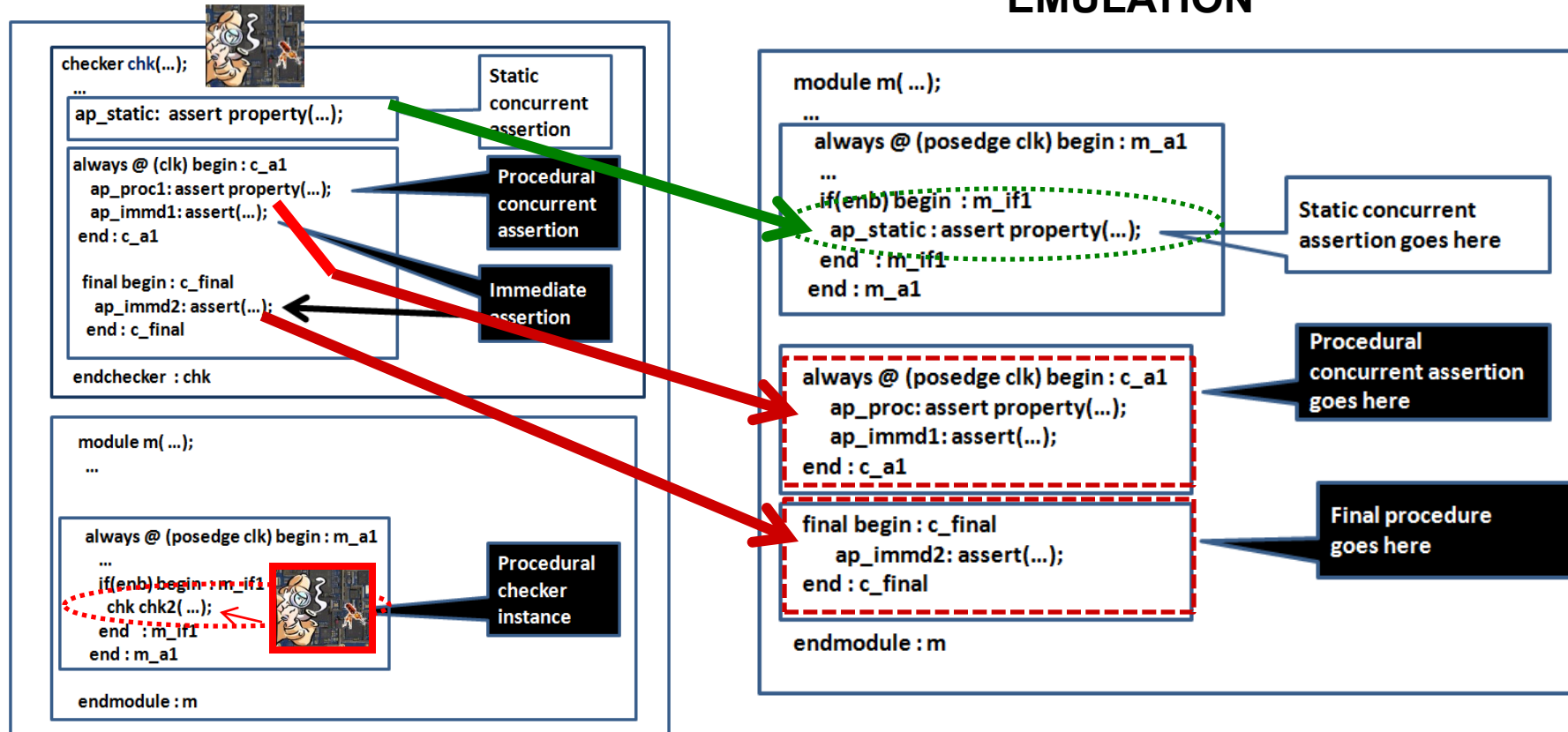
Static instantiation is identical to module instantiation

When a checker is instantiated as a static checker instance, all of its code behaves as if it were instantiated directly in the module after the proper argument associations are made.



Emulation of Procedural Checker Instance in a Module

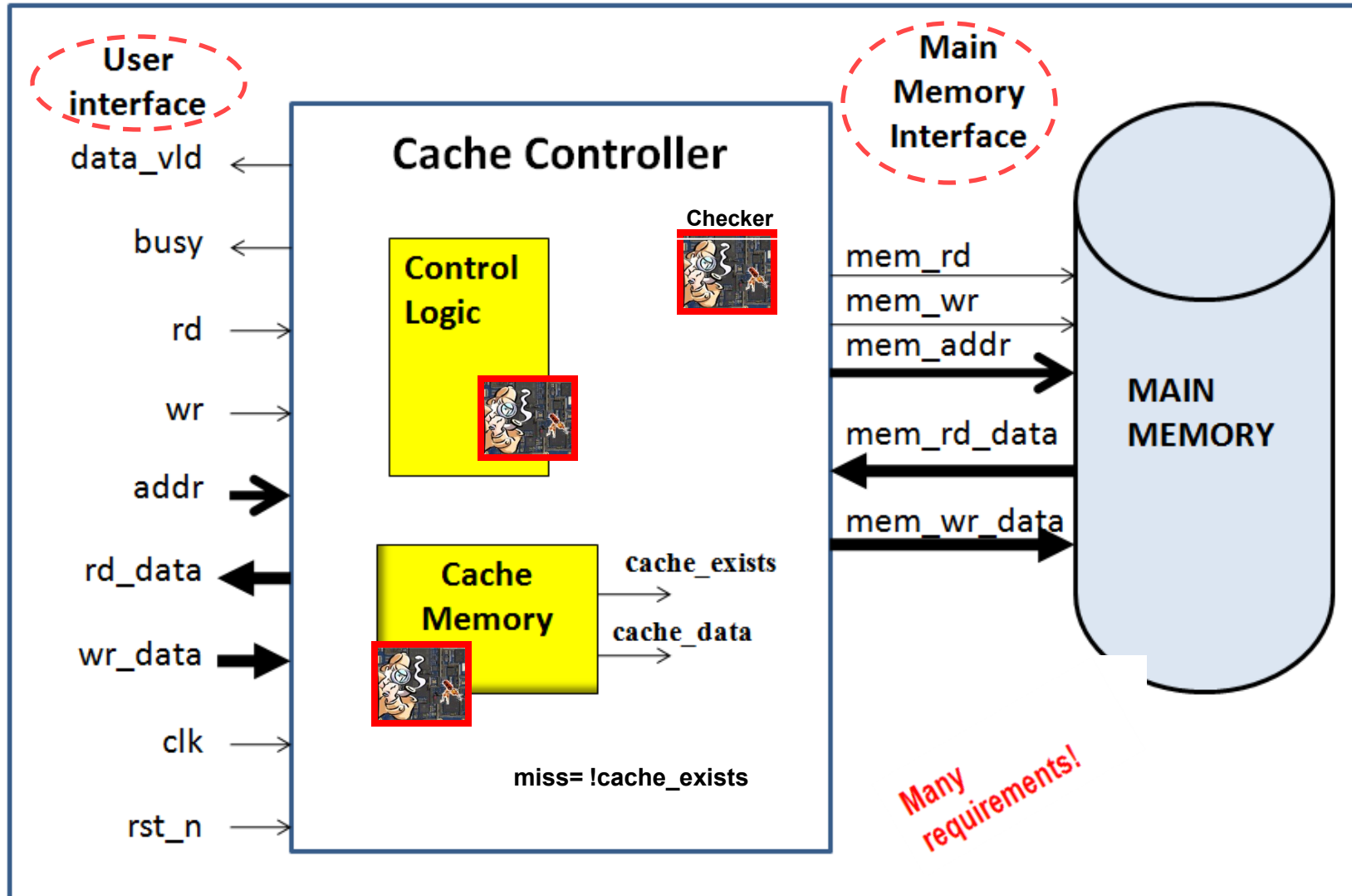
EMULATION



- **Procedural concurrent assertions of checker instanced procedurally behave in-block.**
- **Static assertions of that checker behave inline to where instanced**



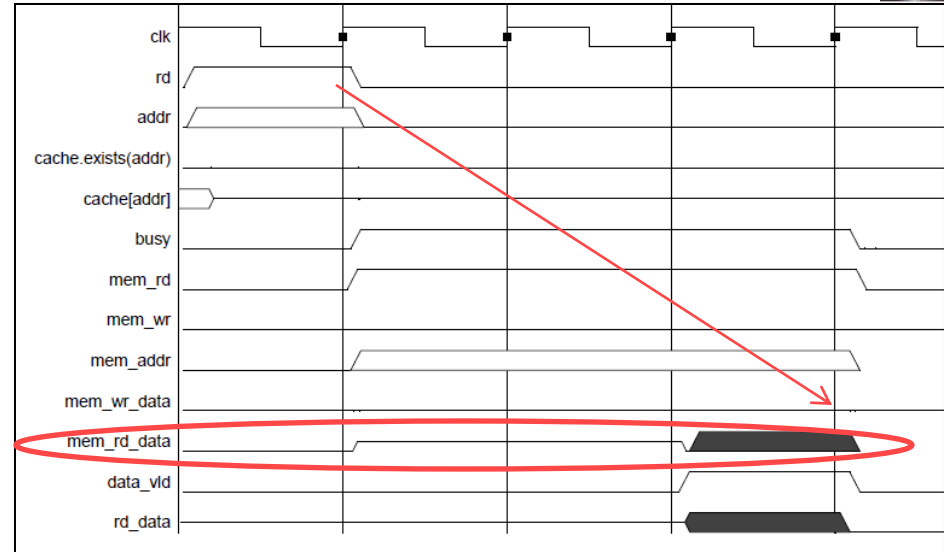
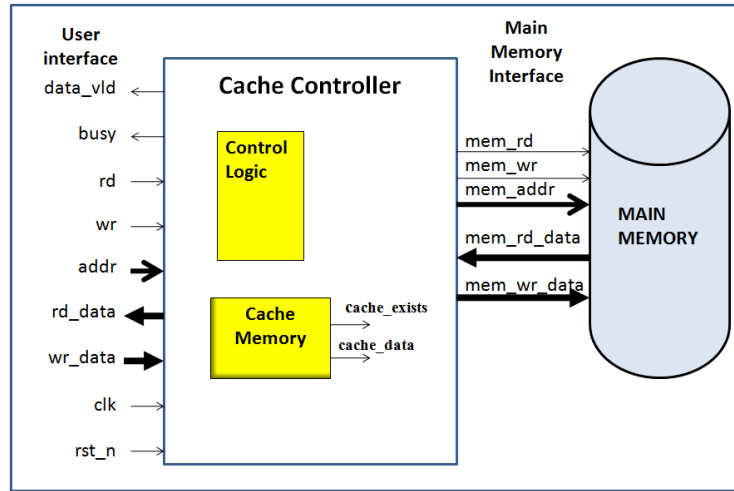
The Model – Cache Controller



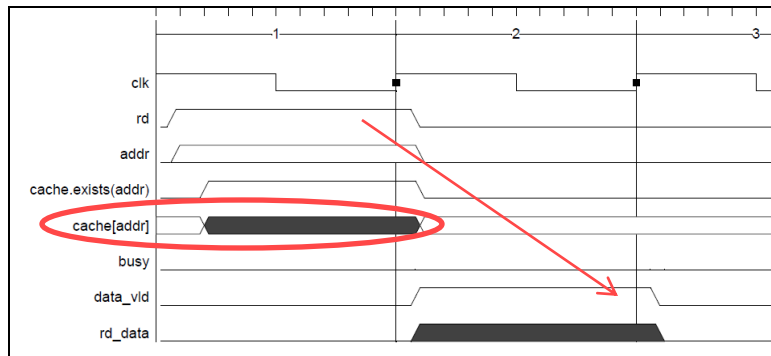


Cache Controller Timing

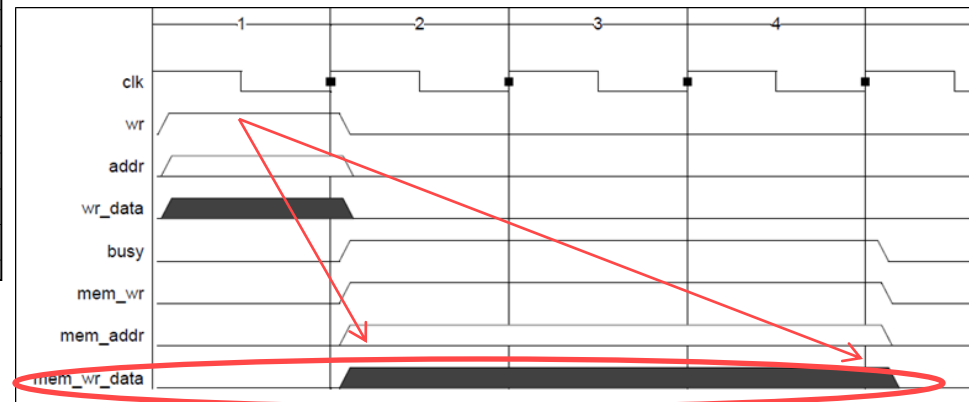
read and write-through cache



Main Memory Read with Cache Miss



Read with data in Cache

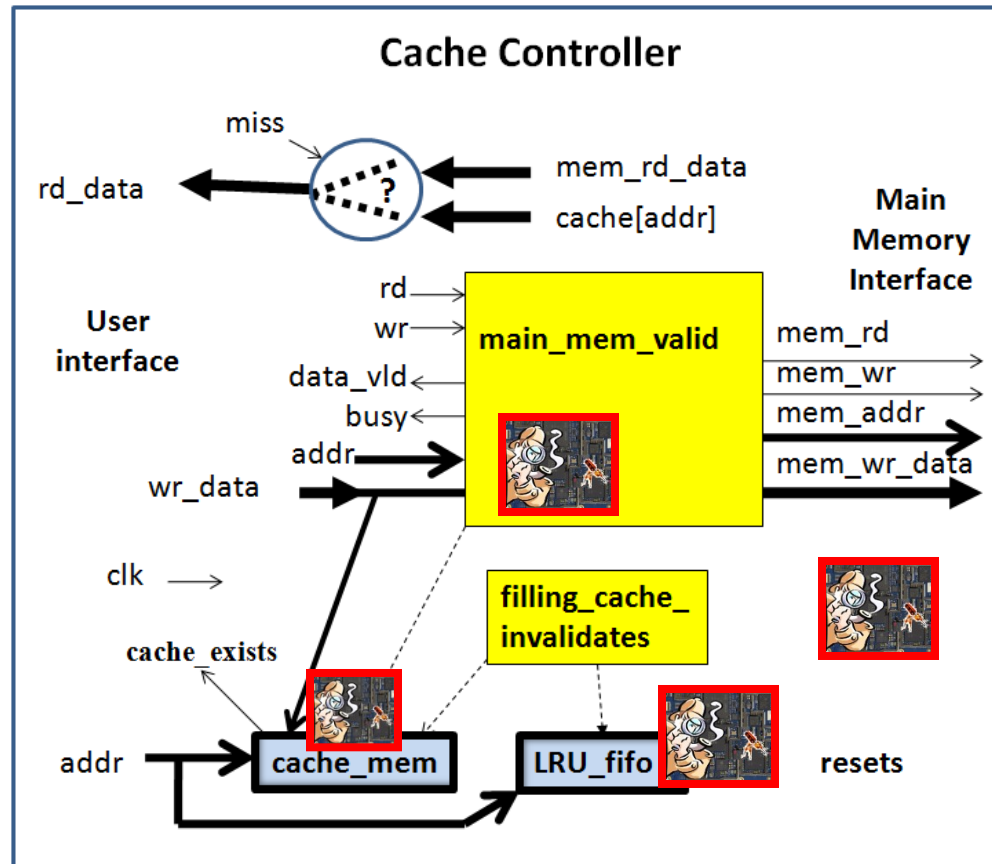


User Interface Write

Memory rd/wr access parameterized



Cache Controller Architecture



Checker

chk_immd.
chk_rd_cntrl.
chk_rd_wr_cntlr
chk_wr_cntrl.
chk_reset.
chk_fifo

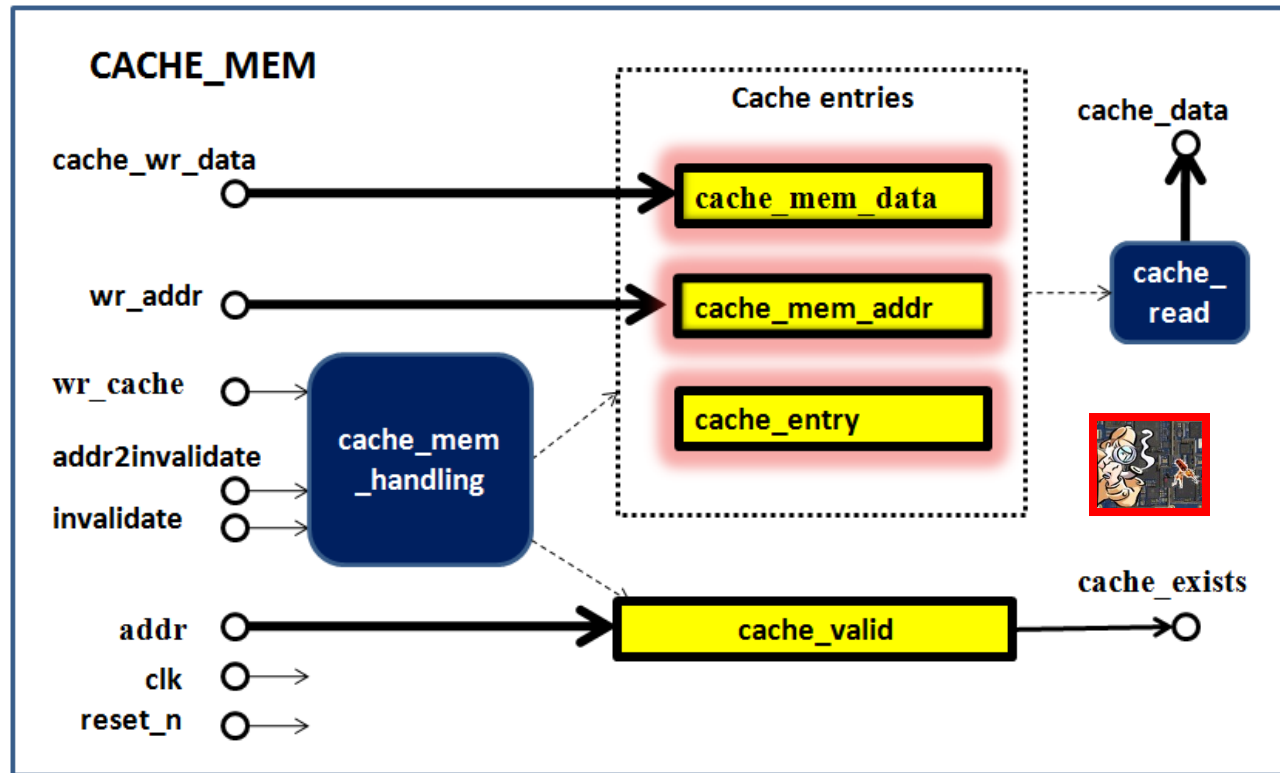
Function

Inline assertions, *instantiated procedurally*
Read miss/hit, *instantiated statically*
RD/WR miscellaneous, *instantiated statically*
Write through and cache, *instantiated statically*
Reset, *instantiated statically*
LRU Fifo assertions, *instantiated statically*

**Lots to check
and cover!**



Cache Memory Architecture



Checker

chk_invalidate.
chk_immd.

Function

Cache invalidates, *instantiated procedurally*
Inline assertions, *instantiated procedurally*

*Lots to check
and cover!*



Example of a Checker Declaration

```
import cache_ctl_pkg::*;
checker chk_invalidate(
    logic [0: 2**MAIN_MEM_ADDRESS_WIDTH-1] cache_valid,
    logic [MAIN_MEM_ADDRESS_WIDTH-1 : 0]
        [0 : (CACHE_SIZE-1)] cache_mem_addr,
    logic [CACHE_SIZE-1: 0] cache_entry,
    logic [MAIN_MEM_ADDRESS_WIDTH-1:0] addr2invalidate,
    logic found_existing_entry,
    logic clk, rst_n);
timeunit 1ns; timeprecision 100ps;
if (CACHE_SIZE > 1024) $error("cache size is too large");
default clocking default_clk @ (posedge clk); endclocking
default disable iff !rst_n;
```



**Formal
arguments**

*Can also be property,
sequence, event*

*Elaboration
time check*

Defaults



Example of a Checker Declaration

```
function logic check_cache_entry4MT();
  automatic logic success = 0; // If==1 then it was not invalidated
  automatic int i;
  for (i=0; i <= CACHE_SIZE -1; i++) begin : for1
    if(cache_entry[i]==1 && cache_mem_addr[i] == addr2invalidate) begin : if_1
      success = 1; // found cache line
      break;
    end : if_1
  end : for1
  if (success) check_cache_entry4MT = 0; // was not invalidated
  else check_cache_entry4MT = 1; // was invalidated
endfunction : check_cache_entry4MT

// static concurrent assertion
ap_invalidate : assert property( // Static assertion
  ##1 cache_valid[addr2invalidate] ==0 && check_cache_entry4MT());
// static concurrent assertion
ap_nothing2invalidate: assert property (found_existing_entry)
  else $error("nothing to invalidate");
endchecker : chk_invalidate
```

Function --
Must
return a
single
value

Function
used here

To be
instantiated
procedurally



Example of a Checker Instantiation (*cache_mem.sv*)

```

always @ (posedge clk) begin : cache_mem_handling
    automatic logic success, found_existing_entry, found_empty_line;
    automatic int i, j, found_index;
    success =0; found_existing_entry =0;
    found_index =0; found_empty_line =0;
    if (invalidate) begin : if1
        cache_valid[addr2invalidate]<= 1'b0;
        for (int j=0; j<= CACHE_SIZE-1; j=j+1) begin : for1
            if(cache_entry[j]==1 && cache_mem_addr[j] == addr2invalidate) begin : if2
                found_existing_entry= 1'b1;
                found_index= j;
                success=1;
                if (found_existing_entry) cache_entry[j] <=1'b0; // empty line
                break;
            end : if2
        end : for1
        chk_invalidate chk_invalidate_1(.*); // checks for invalidates
    end : if1

```

```

checker : chk_invalidate
    ap_invalidate : assert property( ...);
    ap_nothing2invalidate: assert property (..);
endchecker : chk_invalidate

```





Example of a checker application

```
checker chk_immd(logic the_what,  
                 string msg,  
                 logic clk);
```



Need a static concurrent assertion to enable inline behavior.
Immediate assertion is a concurrent assertion

```
// static concurrent assertion
```

```
ap_test_now: assert property(@ (posedge clk) the_what) else  
    $error("msg, the_what=%b at %t", the_what, $time);
```

```
endchecker : chk_immd
```

```
// cache_controller
```

```
always @ (posedge clk) begin : main_mem_accesses
```

```
...
```

```
if (wr) begin : wr_2main // Start of a write
```

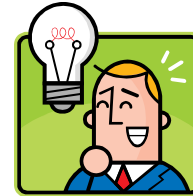
```
    chk_immd chk_immd_wr_cycle_timer_not_0(  
        .the_what(wr_cycle_timer==0),  
        .msg("wr signal when memory counter !=0"),  
        .clk(clk));
```





Potential Use Model of Checkers

- Marks the need of checks during RTL design definition
- Not yet know what is in the checker
 - but feel that there should be something
 - The what's in the checker can be defined later
- Example :



```
module dut(..);
```

```
...
```

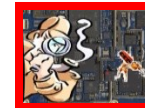
```
always @ (posedge clk) begin
```

```
  if (rd && mode==FAST) begin
```

```
    some_code;
```

```
    chk_rd_mode_fast chk_rd_mode_fast_1 (.*);
```

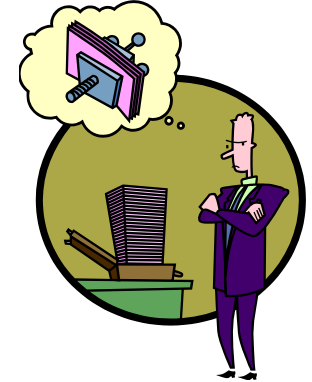
```
...
```

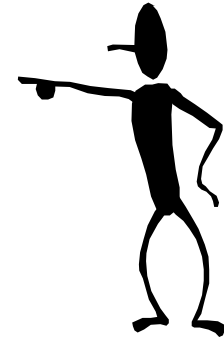




Design Experience with Checkers

- **Started with a single checker declared within the module**
 - Because requirements were too loose
 - Single checker became too complex
- **Reconsidered the use model**
 - Smaller targeted checkers
 - As design matured:
 - More checkers created
 - More static concurrent assertions within a checker
 - More elaboration time checks
 - Less clutter in RTL
 - Assertions challenge the design and requirements !
 - Clarify requirements and ease RTL design
 - Even if assertions are correctly or incorrectly written
 - Review of assertions helped the RTL design and debug





Incorrect Assertions yield False Sense of Security

Assertions collocated in checkers help in the review process

```
sequence q_wr_wr;
int v_addr;
@ (posedge clk) ($rose(wr), v_addr=addr) ##[1:$] wr && addr==v_addr;
endsequence : q_wr_wr
```

```
property p_wr_rd;
int v_addr, v_data;
disable iff(q_wr_wr.triggered)
($rose(wr), v_addr=addr, v_data=wr_data) |->
##[1:$] rd && addr==v_addr ##[1:3] rd_data==v_data;
endproperty : p_wr_rd
ap_wr_rd : assert property(@ (posedge clk) p_wr_rd);
```

INCORRECT
ASSERTION



Data read
must be
same as
what was
written




```
property p_wr_rd;
int v_addr, v_data;
first_match(($rose(wr), v_addr=addr, v_data=wr_data) ##1
!(wr && addr==v_addr)[*1:$] ##1 rd && addr==v_addr) |->
##[1:MEM_CYCLES] rd_data==v_data;
endproperty : p_wr_rd
always @ (posedge clk)
ap_wr_rd : assert property(p_wr_rd);
```

Correct
assertion



Checker / Code Ratio

- **cache_controller** ~ 200 lines with some comments
 - Includes checker instantiations ~ 18 lines
- **cache_mem** ~140 lines with some comments
 - Includes checker instantiations ~ 9 lines
- **fifo_mem** ~100 lines
 - Includes ~100 lines
- **Checkers** 
 - chk_rd_cntrl ~60 lines
 - chk_invalidate ~38 lines
 - chk_immd ~ 7 lines
 - chk_wr_cntrl ~90 lines
 - chk_rd_wr_cntrl ~30 lines
 - chk_fifo ~90 lines
 - chk_reset ~ 7 lines

Checkers	
LOC	330
Assertions	34
Cover property	6
Declarations	7
Instantiations	10

DUT	
LOC	440

LOC: checker/DUT ~ 75%
Checker instances/DUT < 3%



Checker Impressions -1

Clear demarcation between RTL and verification code

- **Verification and supporting code outside RTL code**

- Reduced clutter in RTL

Supporting code (signal / functions)

- No concern about interference or confusion with the RTL

- Organized and structured solution

- Amenable to building small to medium verification units



- **Instantiated statically or procedurally within RTL**

- If instantiated procedurally, then must differentiate

- static assertions => behave inline

- procedural assertions => in-block

- Must be careful in using static concurrent vs procedural concurrent assertions



- **Collocate common assertions statements**

- Otherwise multiple instantiations will cause duplicate assertions





Checker Impressions -2

- **Facilitates reviews**
Verification code is collocated
- **Adopts a higher level view of verification**
Each checker envelops a related aspect of verification
- **Configuration checks at elaboration time are useful**
Elaboration checks can be included in checkers
- **Shorter code**
CLK & reset inference
- **Ignored by synthesis tools**





Checker Impressions -3

- **Limitations – Not a big issue**
 - But ... Must understand the rules
- **Limitations on what can be declared**
 - What's **not** in the body of a checker
 - parameter, localparam and specparam
 - Module, interface, program, class
 - task, void functions, blocking assignments,
 - Functions with side effects
 - if, for, case (in always, initial procedures)
 - hierarchical references
- **Limitations on where instantiated**
 - Wherever a concurrent assertion may appear
 - Statically or procedurally in always, initial, final
 - Illegal in *fork...join, fork...join_any, or fork...join_none blocks*





Conclusions --1

- **Are checkers useful?**

- Yes, group related code and assertions into single entities
- Can be instantiated inline with RTL or statically
- Significantly reduces LOC of RTL
- Eases review process of verification code

- **What was our experience?**

- Process of using checkers:
 - Easy & like it; checkers are cousins of modules
 - Procedural concurrent assertions: useful for in-block behavior when instantiated
 - Different style than normal
 - static concurrent assertions: useful for inline behavior when instantiated procedurally
- Tool issues
 - Very few vendors support checkers, as of December 2009
- Conclusions
 - Checkers represent a good addition to IEEE 1800-2009
 - Checkers should be used in design and verification





Questions?

And, yes, you can stuff many assertions into one checker !



Slides and code can be downloaded from
<http://SystemVerilog.us/DvCon2010/>



Backup slides

- To be used only if questions arise



Checkers Illegal constructs

- Those include:
 - a) Parameter, localparam and specparam
 - b) Module, interface, program, class
 - c) Task, void functions, blocking assignments,
 - d) Functions with side effects
 - e) **if, for, while, case** statements (in **always**, and **initial** procedures)
 - f) All hierarchical referencing, into or out of a checker, is disallowed



Checkers Illegal constructs

```
checker chk_rdhit(
    logic data_vld, busy, rd, wr, cache_exists, clk, reset_n);
always @ (posedge clk) begin : a1

    if(rd) begin : rd1 // Illegal in a checker
        assert(wr == 1'b0);
        if ($past(cache_exists)) // if is illegal in a checker
            assert (busy==1'b0);
        end : rd1
    end: a1
```



If, for, case are
not allowed here

```
function logic rd_cache(logic rd, wr, cache_exists, busy);
    if(rd && !wr && cache_exists & !busy)
        rd_cache = 1'b1;
    else
        rd_cache = 1'b0;
endfunction : rd_cache
```

if, for, while, case
allowed in functions



```
ap_rd_hit: assert property(@ (posedge clk)
    rd_noWr(rd, wr, cache_exists, busy));
ap_rd_hit2: assert property(@ (posedge clk)
    rd && cache_exists |-> !wr ##1 !busy);
endchecker : chk_rdhit
```





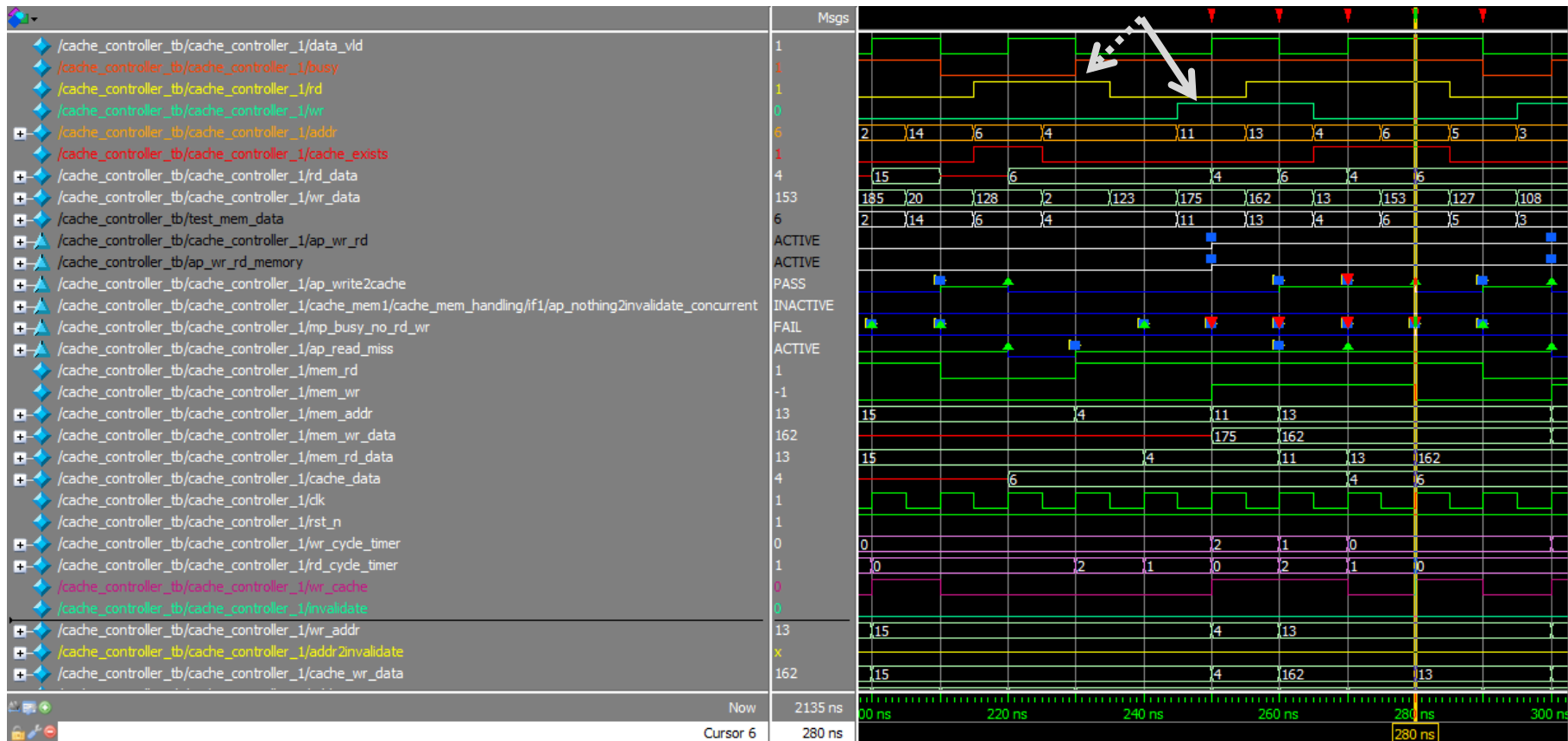
Checkers Illegal Instantiations

- It is illegal to instantiate checkers in
 - **fork...join,**
 - **fork...join_any,** or
 - **fork...join_none** blocks



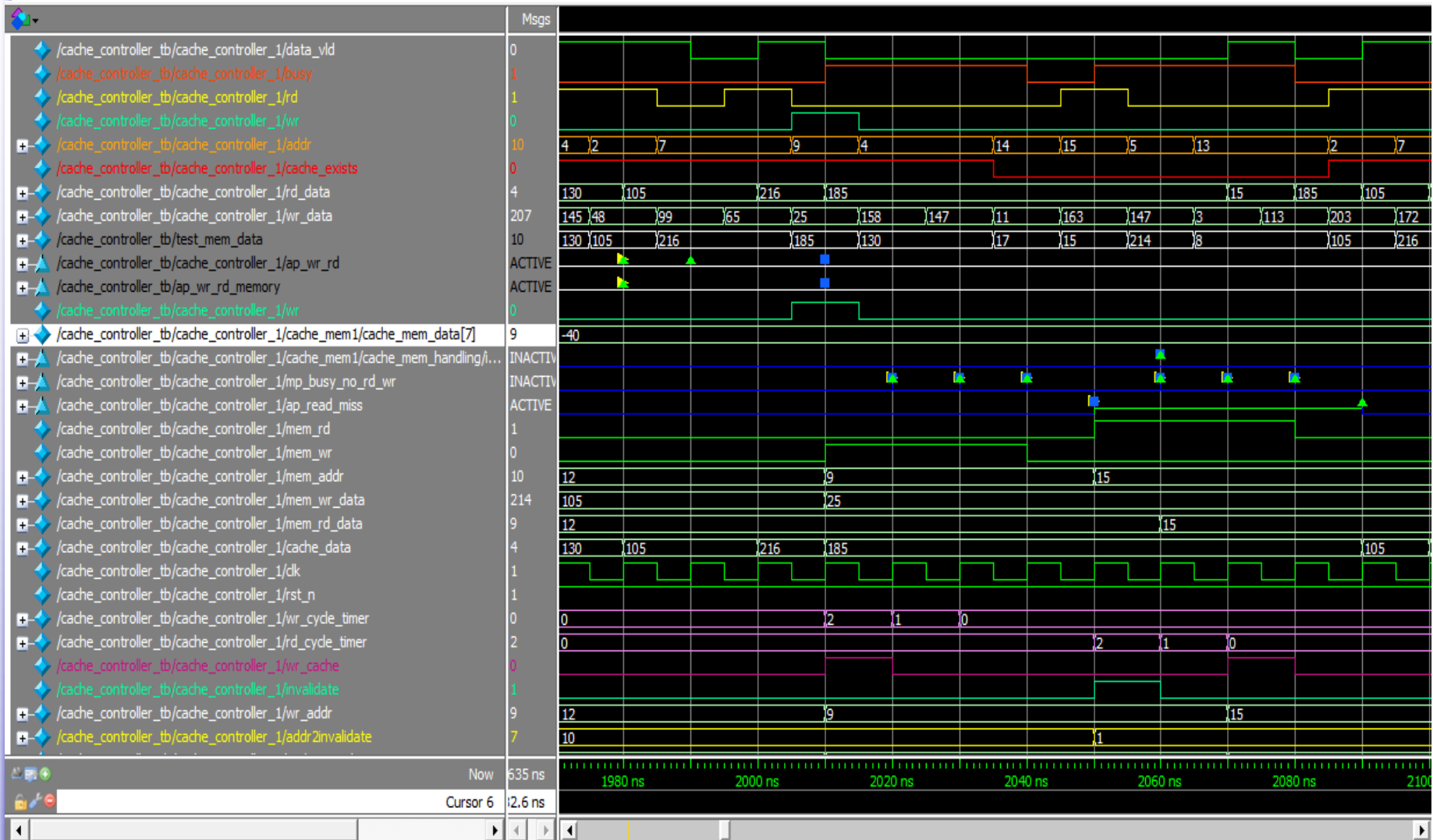
mp_busy_no_rd_wr

wr when busy



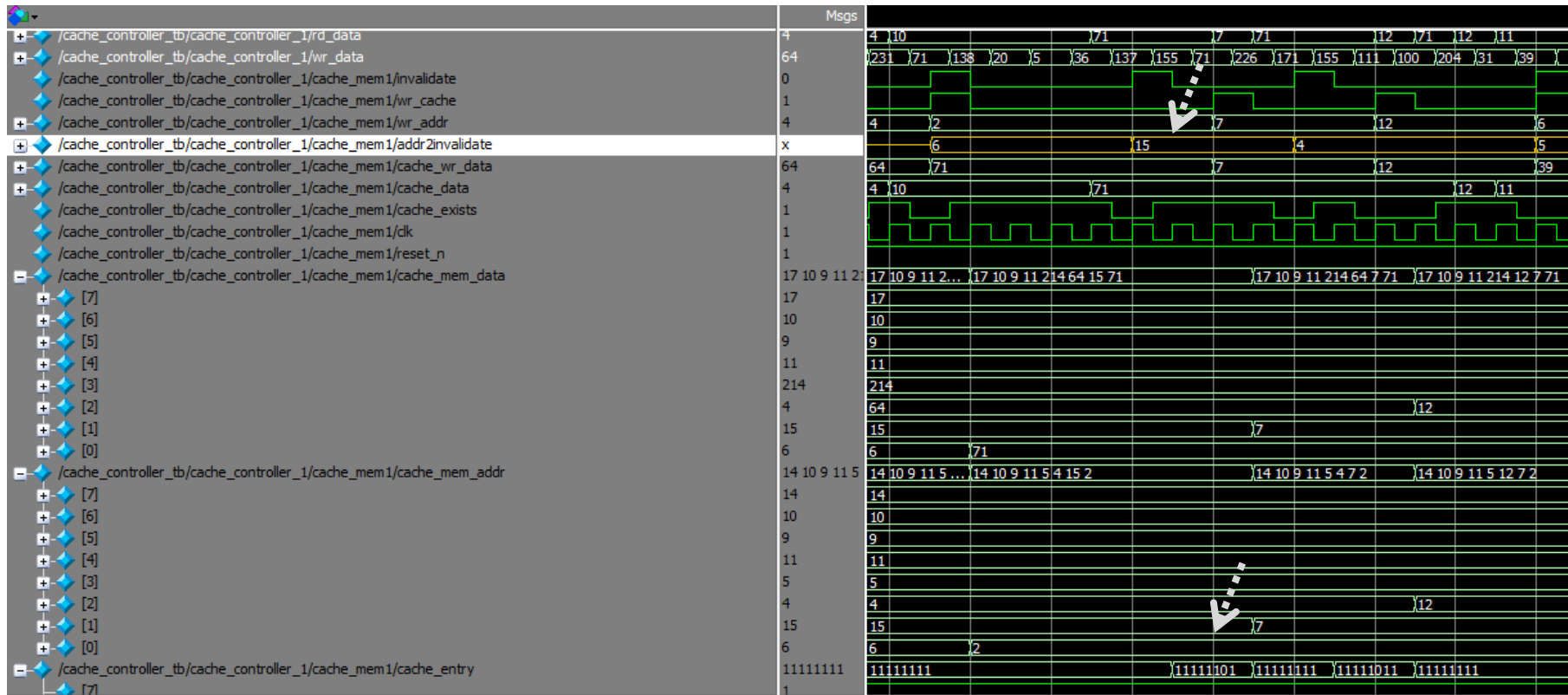
Read hit and miss

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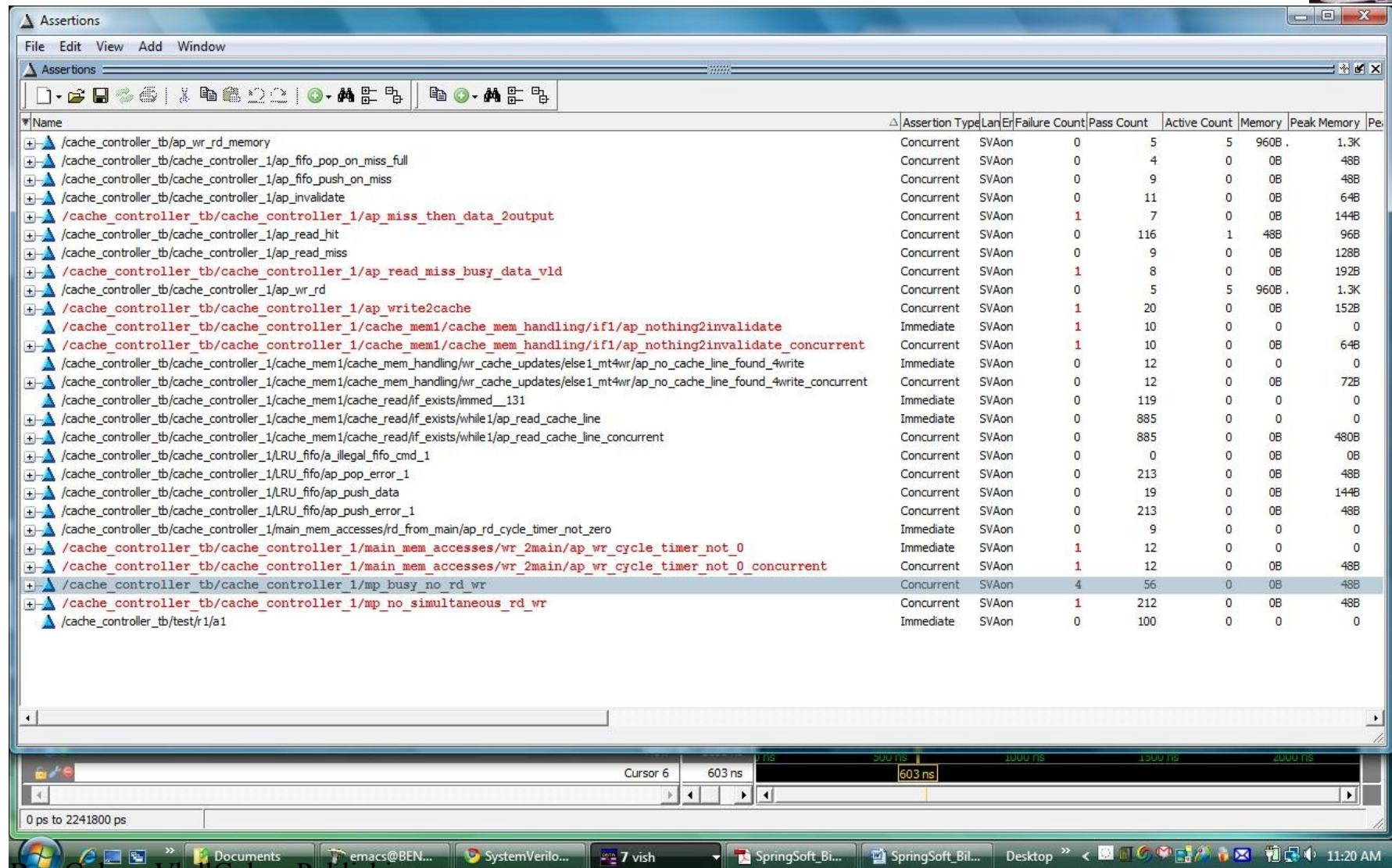
Good invalidate

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Assertion Report with forced failures

VhdlCohen
 Publishing

The screenshot shows a software window titled "Assertions" with a menu bar (File, Edit, View, Add, Window) and a toolbar. Below the toolbar is a table listing various assertions. The table has columns for Name, Assertion Type, Lan, Er, Failure Count, Pass Count, Active Count, Memory, Peak Memory, and Pe. The assertions are listed with their full paths, and some are highlighted in red, indicating failures. The bottom of the window shows a timeline with a cursor at 603 ns and a range from 0 ps to 2241800 ps.

Name	Assertion Type	Lan	Er	Failure Count	Pass Count	Active Count	Memory	Peak Memory	Pe
/cache_controller_tb/ap_wr_rd_memory	Concurrent	SVAon		0	5	5	960B	1.3K	
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/ap_fifo_pop_on_miss_full	Concurrent	SVAon		0	4	0	0B	48B	
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/ap_fifo_push_on_miss	Concurrent	SVAon		0	9	0	0B	48B	
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/ap_invalidate	Concurrent	SVAon		0	11	0	0B	64B	
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/ap_miss_then_data_2output	Concurrent	SVAon		1	7	0	0B	144B	
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/ap_read_hit	Concurrent	SVAon		0	116	1	48B	96B	
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/ap_read_miss	Concurrent	SVAon		0	9	0	0B	128B	
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/ap_read_miss_busy_data_vld	Concurrent	SVAon		1	8	0	0B	192B	
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/ap_wr_rd	Concurrent	SVAon		0	5	5	960B	1.3K	
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/ap_write2cache	Concurrent	SVAon		1	20	0	0B	152B	
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/cache_mem1/cache_mem_handling/1f1/ap_nothing2invalidate	Immediate	SVAon		1	10	0	0	0	
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/cache_mem1/cache_mem_handling/1f1/ap_nothing2invalidate_concurrent	Concurrent	SVAon		1	10	0	0B	64B	
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/cache_mem1/cache_mem_handling/wr_cache_updates/else1_mt4wr/ap_no_cache_line_found_4write	Immediate	SVAon		0	12	0	0	0	
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/cache_mem1/cache_mem_handling/wr_cache_updates/else1_mt4wr/ap_no_cache_line_found_4write_concurrent	Concurrent	SVAon		0	12	0	0B	72B	
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/cache_mem1/cache_read/if_exists/immed_131	Immediate	SVAon		0	119	0	0	0	
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/cache_mem1/cache_read/if_exists/while1/ap_read_cache_line	Immediate	SVAon		0	885	0	0	0	
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/cache_mem1/cache_read/if_exists/while1/ap_read_cache_line_concurrent	Concurrent	SVAon		0	885	0	0B	480B	
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/LRU_fifo/a_illegal_fifo_cmd_1	Concurrent	SVAon		0	0	0	0B	0B	
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/LRU_fifo/ap_pop_error_1	Concurrent	SVAon		0	213	0	0B	48B	
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/LRU_fifo/ap_push_data	Concurrent	SVAon		0	19	0	0B	144B	
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/LRU_fifo/ap_push_error_1	Concurrent	SVAon		0	213	0	0B	48B	
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/main_mem_accesses/rd_from_main/ap_rd_cycle_timer_not_zero	Immediate	SVAon		0	9	0	0	0	
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/main_mem_accesses/wr_2main/ap_wr_cycle_timer_not_0	Immediate	SVAon		1	12	0	0	0	
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/main_mem_accesses/wr_2main/ap_wr_cycle_timer_not_0_concurrent	Concurrent	SVAon		1	12	0	0B	48B	
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/mp_busy_no_rd_wr	Concurrent	SVAon		4	56	0	0B	48B	
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/mp_no_simultaneous_rd_wr	Concurrent	SVAon		1	212	0	0B	48B	
/cache_controller_tb/test/r1/a1	Immediate	SVAon		0	100	0	0	0	

Assertion Report with no forced failures

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Assertions								
Name	Assertion Type	Language	Error	Failure Count	Pass Count	Active Count	Memory	Peak Memory
+ /cache_controller_tb/ap_wr_rd_memory	Concurrent	SVAon		0	68	7	1.3K	1.7K
+ /cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/ap_fifo_pop_on_miss_full	Concurrent	SVAon		0	104	0	0B	48B
+ /cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/ap_fifo_push_on_miss	Concurrent	SVAon		0	109	0	0B	48B
+ /cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/ap_invalidate	Concurrent	SVAon		0	150	0	0B	64B
+ /cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/ap_miss_then_data_2output	Concurrent	SVAon		0	109	0	0B	72B
+ /cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/ap_read_hit	Concurrent	SVAon		0	102	0	0B	96B
+ /cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/ap_read_miss	Concurrent	SVAon		0	109	0	0B	128B
+ /cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/ap_read_miss_busy_data_vld	Concurrent	SVAon		0	109	0	0B	144B
+ /cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/ap_wr_rd	Concurrent	SVAon		0	68	7	1.3K	1.7K
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/cache_mem1/cache_mem_handling/if1/ap_nothing2invalidate	Immediate	SVAon		0	150	0	0	0
+ /cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/cache_mem1/cache_mem_handling/if1/ap_nothing2invalidate_concurrent	Concurrent	SVAon		0	150	0	0B	64B
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/cache_mem1/cache_mem_handling/wr_cache_updates/else1_mt4wr/ap_no_cache_line_found_4write	Immediate	SVAon		0	112	0	0	0
+ /cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/cache_mem1/cache_mem_handling/wr_cache_updates/else1_mt4wr/ap_no_cache_line_found_4write_concurrent	Concurrent	SVAon		0	112	0	0B	72B
/cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/cache_mem1/cache_read/if_exists/immed__131	Immediate	SVAon		0	159	0	0	0
+ /cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/cache_mem1/cache_read/if_exists/while1/ap_read_cache_line	Immediate	SVAon		0	722	0	0	0
+ /cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/cache_mem1/cache_read/if_exists/while1/ap_read_cache_line_concurrent	Concurrent	SVAon		0	722	0	0B	480B
+ /cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/LRU_fifo/a_illegal_fifo_cmd_1	Concurrent	SVAon		0	0	0	0B	0B
+ /cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/LRU_fifo/ap_pop_error_1	Concurrent	SVAon		0	1163	0	0B	48B
+ /cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/LRU_fifo/ap_push_data	Concurrent	SVAon		0	158	0	0B	72B
+ /cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/LRU_fifo/ap_push_error_1	Concurrent	SVAon		0	1163	0	0B	48B
+ /cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/main_mem_accesses/rd_from_main/ap_rd_cycle_timer_not_zero	Immediate	SVAon		0	109	0	0	0
+ /cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/main_mem_accesses/wr_2main/ap_wr_cycle_timer_not_0	Immediate	SVAon		0	106	0	0	0
+ /cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/main_mem_accesses/wr_2main/ap_wr_cycle_timer_not_0_concurrent	Concurrent	SVAon		0	106	0	0B	48B
+ /cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/mp_busy_no_rd_wr	Concurrent	SVAon		0	645	0	0B	48B
+ /cache_controller_tb/cache_controller_1/mp_no_simultaneous_rd_wr	Concurrent	SVAon		0	1163	0	0B	48B
/cache_controller_tb/test/begin_4wr/a0	Immediate	SVAon		0	4	0	0	0
/cache_controller_tb/test/r1/a1	Immediate	SVAon		0	1050	0	0	0