

Hacking the
radiofrequency
spectrum:
GNURadio as a
signal processing
prototyping tool

J.-M Friedt

Basics of
radiofrequency –
software defined
radio (SDR)

The GNURadio
environment

Write your own
processing block

Tuning fork

FMCW RADAR

Conclusion and
bibliography

Hacking the radiofrequency spectrum: GNURadio as a signal processing prototyping tool

J.-M Friedt

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All references available at <http://jmfriedt.free.fr>

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Why digital ? Why software ?

Software provides **flexibility, reconfigurability, reproducibility** ¹

- ① flexibility: use the same hardware for multiple purposes (analog/digital signal decoding) ⇒ no need for hardware modification
- ② flexibility: update processing parameters depending on the environment or the conditions (flight/landing/mission)
- ③ reproducibility: no drift of processing result as a function of aging or environment (temperature ?)

⇒ shift from hardware to software

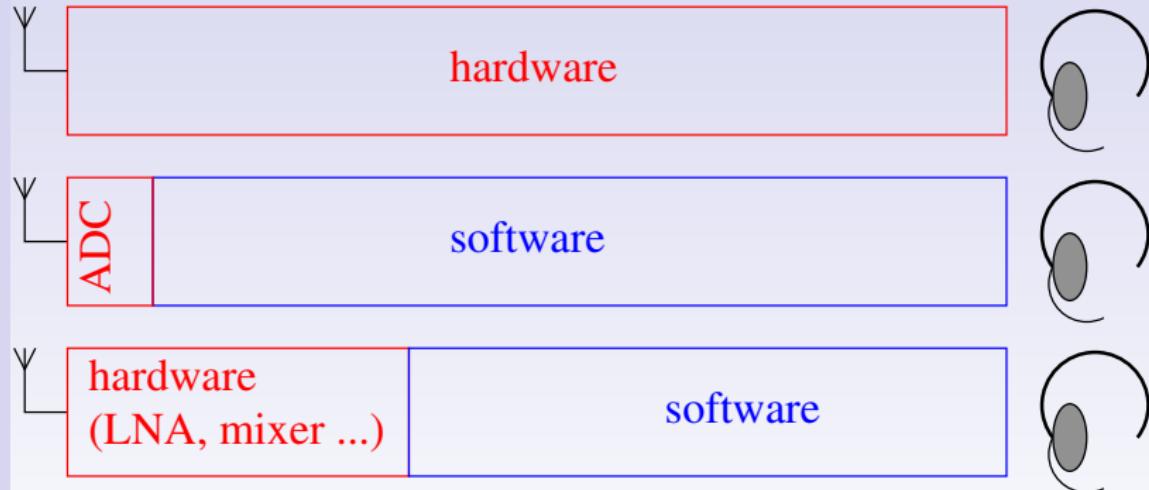
BUT limited bandwidth (cf SAW filters/correlators), and signal to noise/ratio + discretization ?

¹D.A. Mindell, *Digital Apollo – Human and Machine in Spaceflight*, MIT Press (2008)

E.C. Hall, *Journey to the Moon – the history of the Apollo Guidance Computer*, American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (1996)

Concepts of SDR

From all hardware receiver to a single front-end A/D converter (ADC)
followed by software digital signal processing
→ not applicable due to A/D bandwidth and memory usage ²



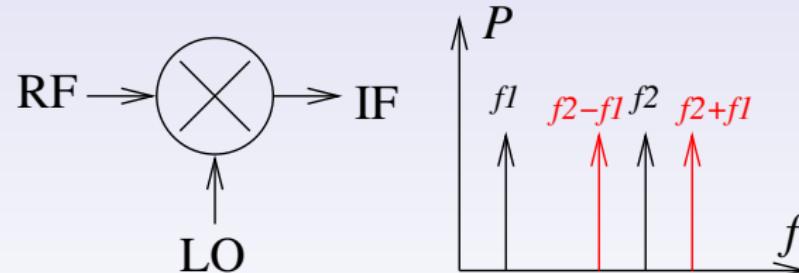
²K. Borre, D.M. Akos, N. Bertelsen, P. Rinder & S.H. Jensen, *A Software-Defined GPS and Galileo Receiver: A Single-Frequency Approach*, Birkhäuser Boston (2007) and slides at <http://kom.aau.dk/project/softgps/> and http://kom.aau.dk/project/softgps/GNSS_SummerSchool_DGC.pdf

Mixing sine waves

- Only **the bandwidth** of the signal matters in the digitization process, the carrier frequency is removed by mixing
- Core aspect of zero-IF receiver: frequency transposition

$$\cos(a) \cdot \cos(b) = \frac{1}{2} (\cos(a - b) + \cos(a + b))$$

$$\sin(a) \cdot \cos(b) = \frac{1}{2} (\sin(a - b) + \sin(a + b))$$



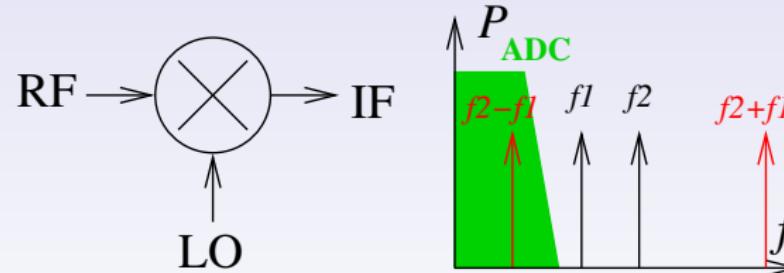
$$\cos(\omega_1 t) \cdot \cos(\omega_2 t) = \frac{1}{2} (\cos((\omega_1 - \omega_2)t) + \cos((\omega_1 + \omega_2)t))$$

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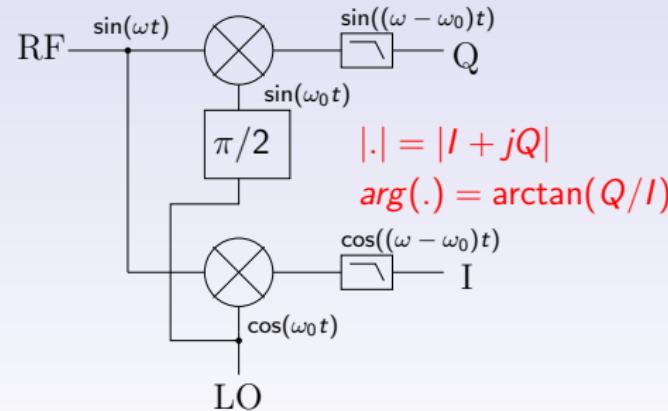
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$$\cos(\omega_1 t) \cdot \cos(\omega_2 t) = \frac{1}{2} (\cos((\omega_1 - \omega_2)t) + \cos((\omega_1 + \omega_2)t))$$

Consumer electronics for SDR

- Many sources of radiofrequency A/D converters, in our examples Elnec E4000 + Realtek RTL2832U³ and sound card for I/Q outputs⁴, but also radiomodems and DDS (USRP)
- sampling bandwidth up to 64 Msamples/s \Rightarrow zero-IF approach
- Raw information: stream of periodically sampled I and Q values (2.8 MS/s for E4k, 96 or 192 kS/s for sound card)



³<http://sdr.osmocom.org/trac/wiki/rtl-sdr>

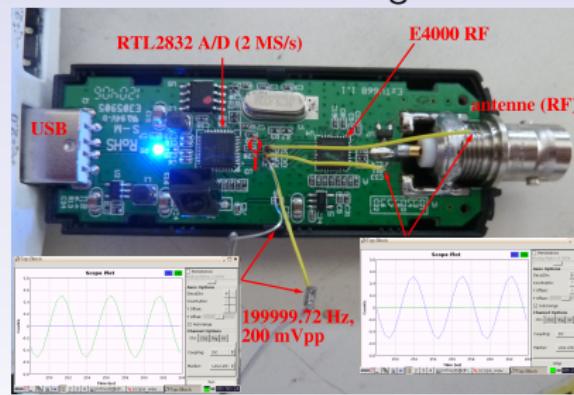
⁴Agilent, *Digital Modulation in Communications Systems – An Introduction*, Application Note 1298, or M. Steer, *Microwave and RF design – a systems approach*, SciTech Publishing, Inc (2010)

The GNURadio environment

Having obtained a stream of I/Q bytes, software processing blocks:

- input (USRP, DVB receiver, sound card, file ...)
- process
- output (file, audio stream, stdio, virtual oscilloscope/spectrum analyzer)

gnuradio-companion: GUI for assembling blocks and generator of Python file



- 8-bit ADC for high bandwidth (oversampling does not compensate for low resolution: ⁵) $1 \text{ bit}/(\text{sampling rate} \times 4) \Rightarrow 2800/92 \simeq 30 \Rightarrow 2.5 \text{ bits}$

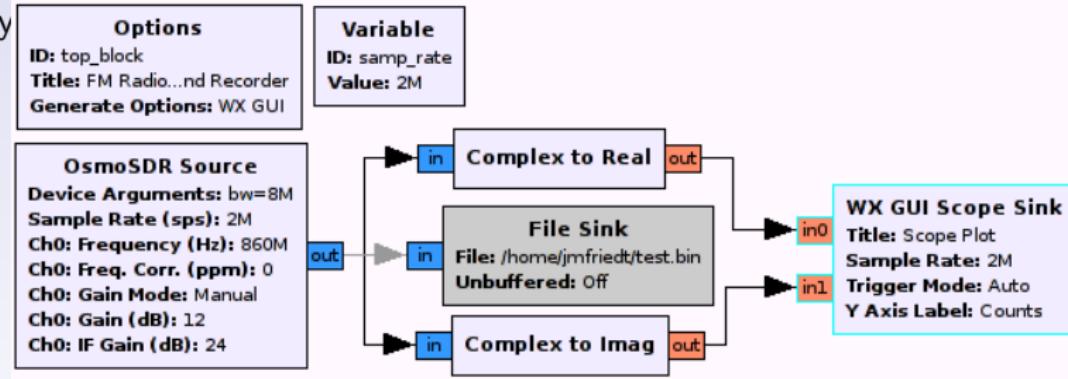
⁵ Application note AN2668, *Improving STM32F101xx and STM32F103xx ADC resolution by oversampling*, ST Microelectronics, 2008

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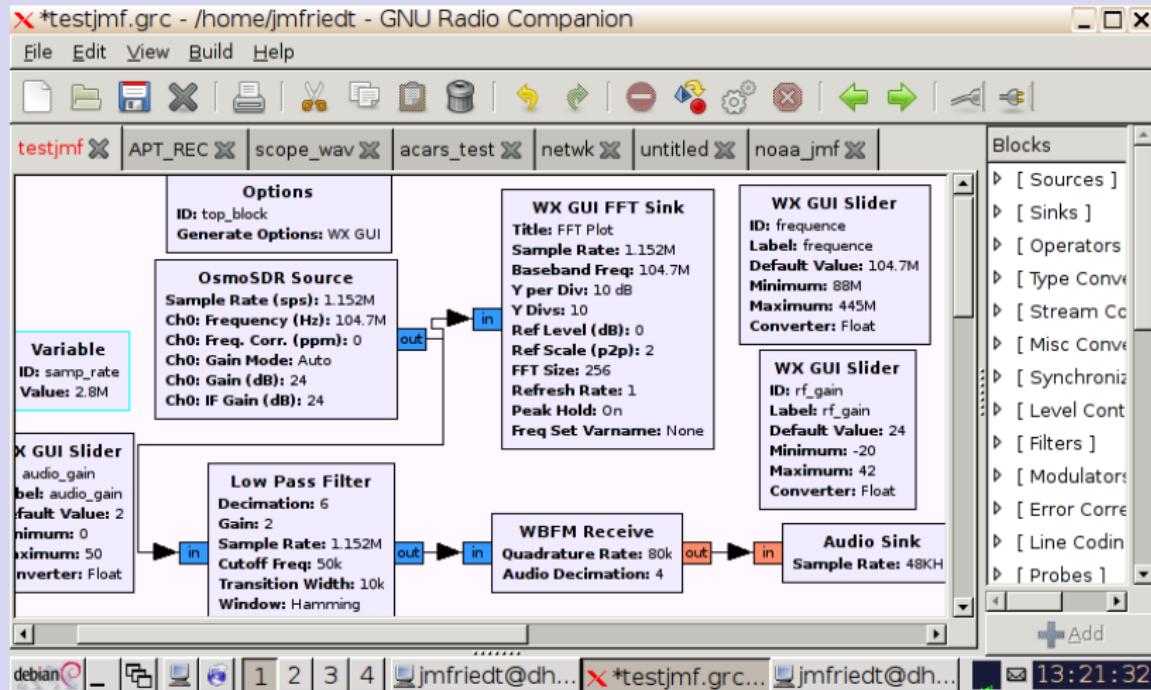
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WFM receiver !

GNURadio basic use



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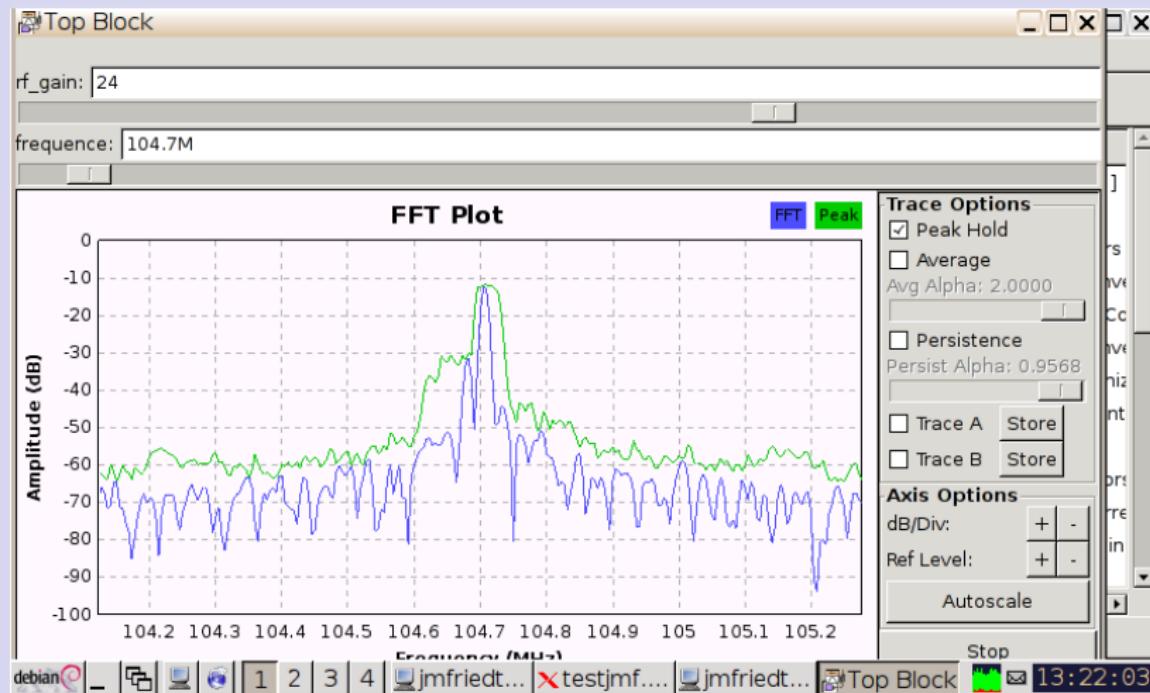
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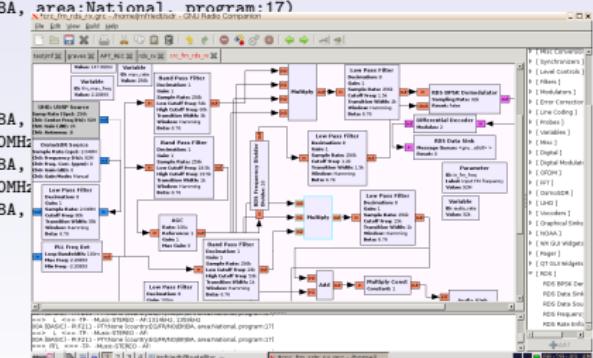
GNURadio basic use

WFM receiver !



- Most common analog demodulation schemes (AM, WFM) and digital datastream encoding
- digital signal decoding: FSK is the digital version of FM,
- one example of mixed analog-digital signal processing: RDS decoding⁶

```
00A (BASIC) - PI:F211 - PTY:None (country:EG/FR/NO/BY/BA, area:National, program:17)
==> RTL <== -TP- -Music-STEREO - AF:
00A (BASIC) - PI:F211 - PTY:None (country:EG/FR/NO/BY/BA, area:National, program:17)
==> RTL <== -TP- -Music-STEREO - AF:
00A (BASIC) - PI:F211 - PTY:None (country:EG/FR/NO/BY/BA, area:National, program:17)
00000 Lost Sync (Got 46 bad blocks on 50 total)
00000 Sync State Detected
00000 Lost Sync (Got 46 bad blocks on 50 total)
00000 Sync State Detected
00A (BASIC) - PI:F219 - PTY:None (country:EG/FR/NO/BY/BA,
==> IRL <== -TP- -Music-STEREO - AF:99.60MHz, 99.80MHz
00A (BASIC) - PI:F219 - PTY:None (country:EG/FR/NO/BY/BA,
==> IRL <== -TP- -Music-STEREO - AF:99.60MHz, 99.80MHz
00A (BASIC) - PI:F219 - PTY:None (country:EG/FR/NO/BY/BA,
==> VIRL N <== -TP- -Music-STEREO - AF:100.40MHz
```



⁶<https://cgran.org/wiki/RDS>

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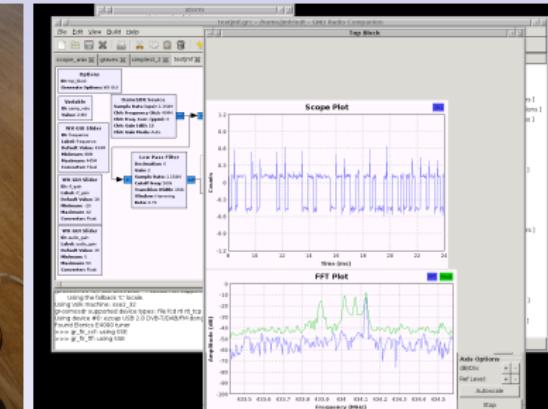
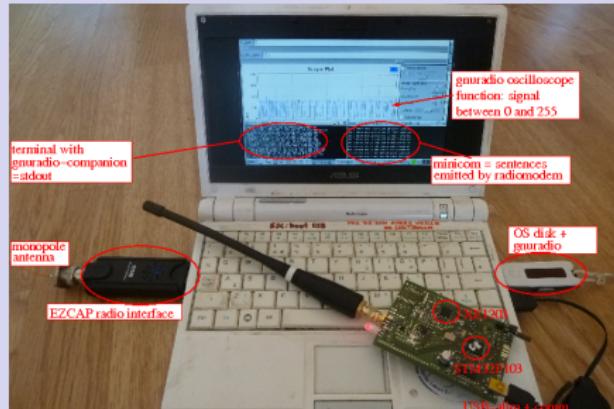
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FSK modulation: bits are visible as binary level on output of WFM demodulator

Knowing the baudrate of 4800 bauds:

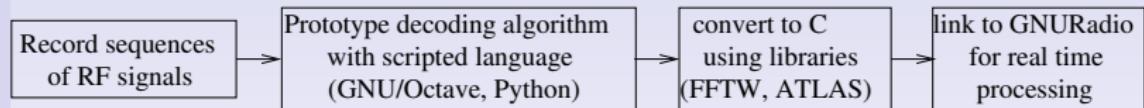
```
2 .0 0000 465 31 534 6 02109
2 .0 0000 558 31 500 7 02110
2 .0 0000 595 31 168 8 02110
2 .0 0000 637 31 426 9 02110
2 .0 0000 225 31 374 10 02110
2 .0 0000 333 31 324 12 02110
2 .0 0000 203 31 419 13 02111
2 .0 0000 367 31 246 14 02111
2 .0 0000 195 31 296 15 02111
2 .0 0000 284 31 305 17 02111
-> 2 .0 0000 201 31 325 18 02112
2 .0 0000 209 31 311 19 02112
2 .0 0000 336 31 341 20 02112
```

```
UUUU\bc\|e7\f8\822 .0 \fc000 465 31 534 6002109
\c\f8\|e0UUU\bc\|e7\93\82\fe .0 00\fc0 558 31 500 7 02110
\fc\c0UUU\bc\|e7\93\822 0 0000595 31 16\f9 8 02110
\|e0UUU\bc\|93\822 .0\fc0000 6\ff7 31 426 9 02110
\ff\|bE\|e0UUU\bc\|e7\93\fe2 .0 0700 225 31374 10 0210
\fc\|f0UUUU\bc\|e7\93\82\fe .0 000 333 31 24 12 02110
\ff\|f\|e\|c1UUU\bc\|e7\93\822 .0 0\bc00 203\bc31 419 13 02111
\ff\|5\|f\|f8\|c0U5UU\bc\|e7\93\822 .0 00\|e40 367 \|e71 246 14 02111
\|f8\|f0\|e0UUU\bc\|e7\93\822 .0 000\|94 195 3\|95 296 15 02111
\|f8\|f0UUUU\bc\|e7\93\822 \|fe0 0000\|fc284 31 30\fd 17 02111
\ff\|e0\|5\|f\|f0\|e0\|e0UUU\bc\|e7\93\822 .0 0000\|d02\|f09 31 311 \|859 02112
\ff\|e0\|f0\|f0\|e8\|e0UUU\bc\|e7\93\822 .0 0000 336 31 \|e741 20 021\|e52
```

Write your own processing block

However, neither decoder for digital protocol I am interested in (ACARS), nor tools for time & frequency analysis

GNURadio is opensource ⇒ add the missing blocks by learning from other's source code



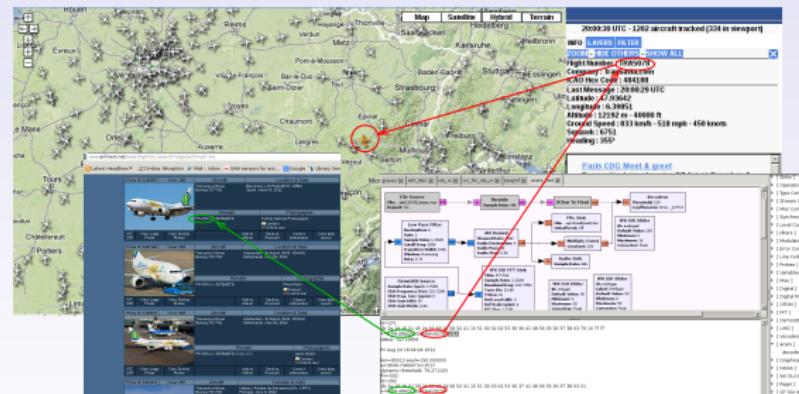
Development strategy:

- ① prototyping using GNU/Octave (Matlab compatible) on recorded datasets,
- ② convert to C(++) and test on the same recorded datasets,
- ③ comply with gnuradio-companion block description and test on recorded datasets but with chunks of unknown size,
- ④ apply to real time decoding.

Write your own processing block

Example of the ACARS protocol⁷, used on VHF band (131.725 MHz in Europe), AM modulated:

- ① encoding at **1200** (bit 0) and **2400** Hz (bit 1)⁸
- ② data rate of **2400** bps
- ③ header to tune AGC of RF frontend: stream of 2400 Hz data (≥ 13 periods)
- ④ data interpretation: 0 means the bit value changes, 1 means the bit value remains constant



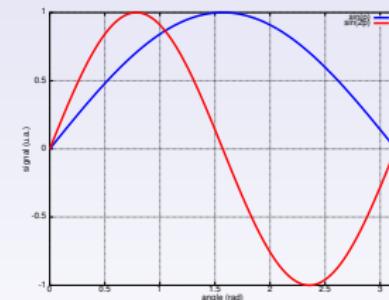
⁷<http://files.radioscanner.ru/files/download/file4094/acars.pdf>

⁸<http://www.tapr.org/aprsdoc/ACARS.TXT>

Write your own processing block

Bit identification: many means to an end

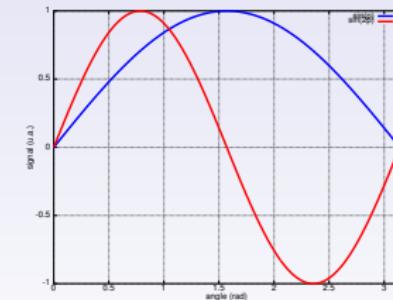
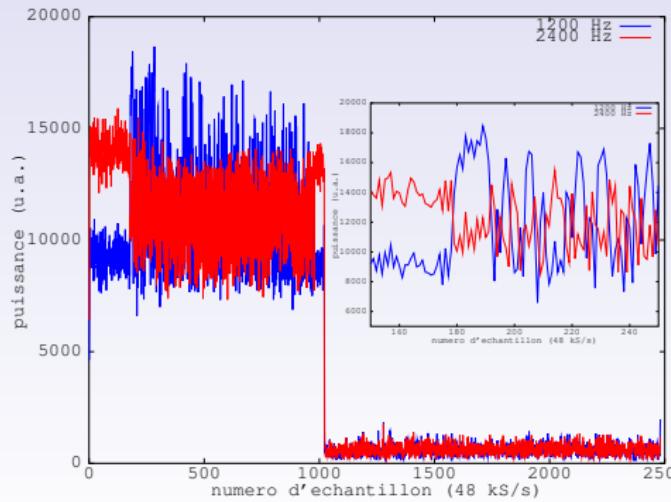
- time-domain band-pass filter (FIR) ... general purpose,
- convolution with the expected signals (1200 & 2400 Hz sine wave)
⇒ frequency domain (requires FFT),
- use at best the signal encoding properties
 - $\int_0^1 \sin(2\pi t) \sin(\pi t) dt \propto$
 $\int_0^1 (\cos(3\pi t) - \cos(\pi t)) dt =$
 $\sin(3\pi) - \sin(0) - (\sin(\pi) - \sin(0)) = 0$
 - $\int_0^1 \sin(2\pi t) \sin(2\pi t) dt =$
 $1/2 \times \int_0^1 (\cos(4\pi t) - \cos(0)) dt =$
 $1/2 \times (\sin(4\pi) - \sin(0) + 1) = 1/2$
 - $\int_0^1 \sin(\pi t) \sin(\pi t) dt =$
 $1/2 \times \int_0^1 (\cos(2\pi t) - \cos(0)) dt =$
 $1/2 \times (\sin(4\pi) - \sin(0) + 1) = 1/2$



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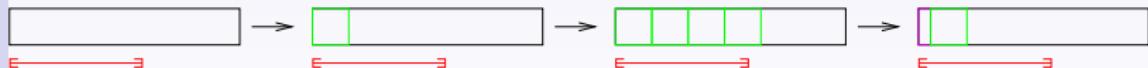


From GNU/Octave to C

- Manual conversion. Could it be optimized ? (proprietary Mathworks HDL Coder ?)
- Blocks can be written in Python \Rightarrow prototype using Scipy/Numpy rather than GNU/Octave
- FFT with different normalization convention \Rightarrow update threshold values
- From a complete (recorded) dataset to a stream of blocks of variable size

Solution:

- ① fill buffer until the required datasize has been accumulated, and process a given number of data
- ② Reinitialize the buffer with the remaining, unprocessed, data.



Complying with gnuradio-companion structure

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Comply with gnuradio-companion block structure:

- ① an XML configuration file describes input, output, callback functions (.xml),
- ② a library file defines the implementation (.cc)
- ③ a header file defines variables (.i)

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<block>
  <name>decodeur</name>
  <key>acars_decodeur</key>
  <category>acars</category>
  <import>import acars</import>
  <make>acars .decodeur( $seuil )</make>
  <param>
    <name>Threshold </name>
    <key>seuil </key>
    <type>real </type>
  </param>
  <sink>
    <name>in </name>
    <type>float </type>
  </sink>
</block>
```

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```
int counters_counters::general_work (int noutput_items,
                                      gr_vector_int &ninput_items,
                                      gr_vector_const_void_star &input_items,
                                      gr_vector_void_star &output_items)
{
    const float *in = (const float *) input_items[0];
    float *out = (float *) output_items[0];
    float min=500.,max=-500.;
    int k,N,cpt,debut,fin;

    N=noutput_items;
    for (k=_Ntot;k<_Ntot+N; k++) {_dm[k]=in[k-_Ntot];}
    _Ntot+=N;
    if (_Ntot>_tgate) // active compteur
        {printf("tgate=%d Ntot=%d N=%d ",_tgate,_Ntot,N);
         // compteur direct
         cpt=0;
         for (k=0;k<_tgate-1;k++)
             if ((_dm[k]>=_seuil)) && (_dm[k+1]<(_seuil))) cpt++;
         printf("freq=%f cpt=%d ",_freq,cpt);
         // compteur reciproque
         cpt=0; k=-1;
         do {k++;} while (!(( _dm[k]>=_seuil)) && (_dm[k+1]<(_seuil)));
         debut=k; k=debut+_tgate;
         do {k++;} while (!(( _dm[k]>=_seuil)) && (_dm[k+1]<(_seuil)));
         fin=k;
         for (k=debut+1;k<=fin ;k++)
             if (( _dm[k]>=_seuil)) && (_dm[k+1]<(_seuil))) cpt++;
         for (k=fin -1;k<_Ntot;k++) _dm[k-(fin -1)]=_dm[k];
         printf(" cpt=%d fin-deb=%d f=%f\n",cpt,fin-debut,( float )_samp_rate/( float )(fin-debut)*((→
             →float)cpt);
         _Ntot-=(fin -1);
     }
    consume_each (noutput_items);
    return noutput_items;
}
```

Processing sequence

- ① for each chunk of data, remove average and convolve with 13 periods of 2400 Hz sine wave ($FFT(a \otimes b) = FFT(a) \cdot FFT(b)$)
- ② threshold to detect whether a message is started
- ③ if so, wait to accumulate enough data to be sure one full message is recorded (max 300 characters)
- ④ convolution with one period of 2400 and 1200 sine waves, synchronized on initial message rising front (**very sensitive** to synchronization alignment)
- ⑤ identify most probable bit value (2400>?1200 Hz)
- ⑥ from the bit sequence, extract message (0 means bit change, 1 means bit propagate)
- ⑦ check header 0x2B 0x2A 0x16 0x16 0x01: if so, interpret sequence of bits as bytes (plane identifier, flight identifier, message sequence, message content)

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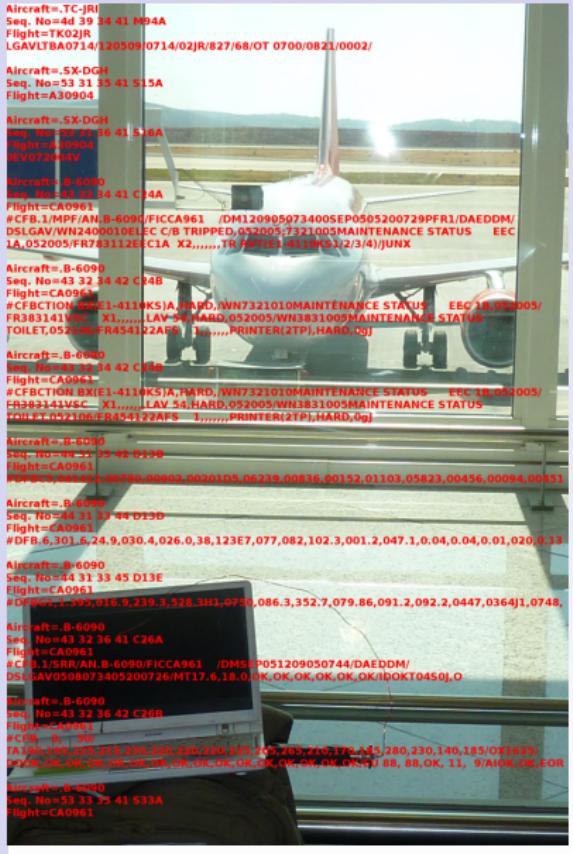
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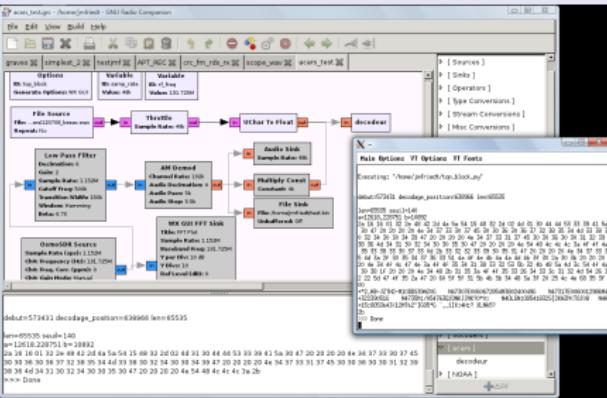
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Result: decoding a digital protocol

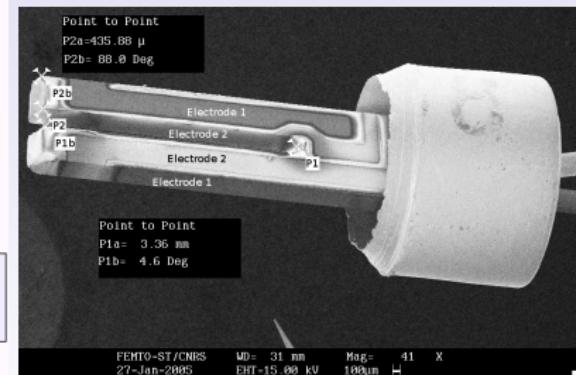
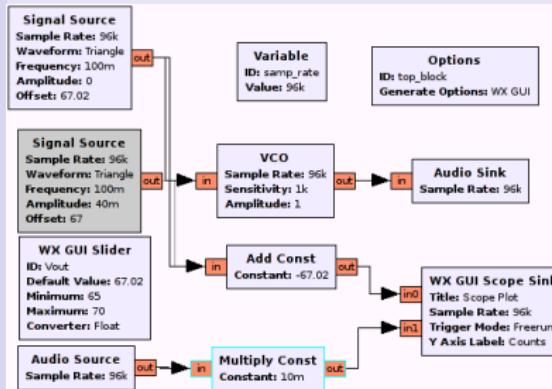
```
binaire=fft_decod('acars_orleans.wav',101001+2.15e6,  
101001+2.15e6+40000,7000);
```



<https://www.cgran.org/wiki/ACARS>

Network analyzer and tuning fork characterization

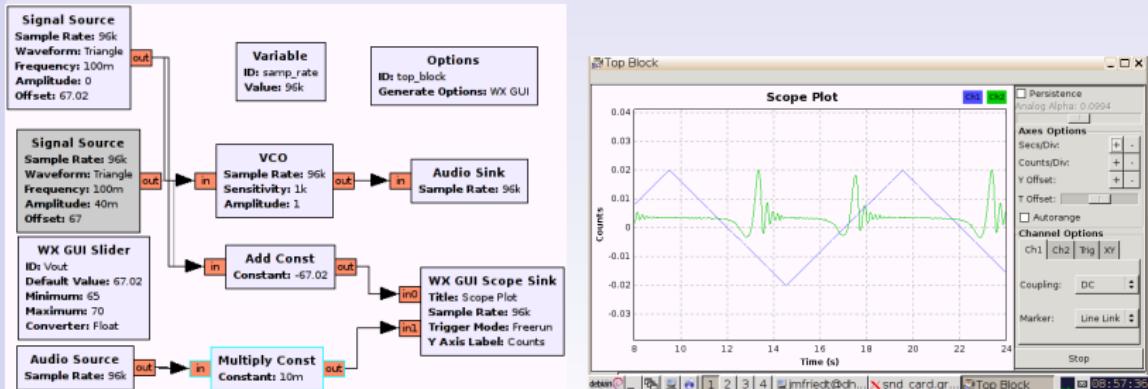
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- Current testing approach (getting started): use of the sound card as emitter and receiver. Full duplex \Rightarrow audio network analyzer
- Application to the quartz tuning fork (32768 Hz)



- Narrowband device (32768 ± 10 Hz) \Rightarrow comparator to convert sine to square & use 3rd overtone + amplitude detector (diode+LPF)

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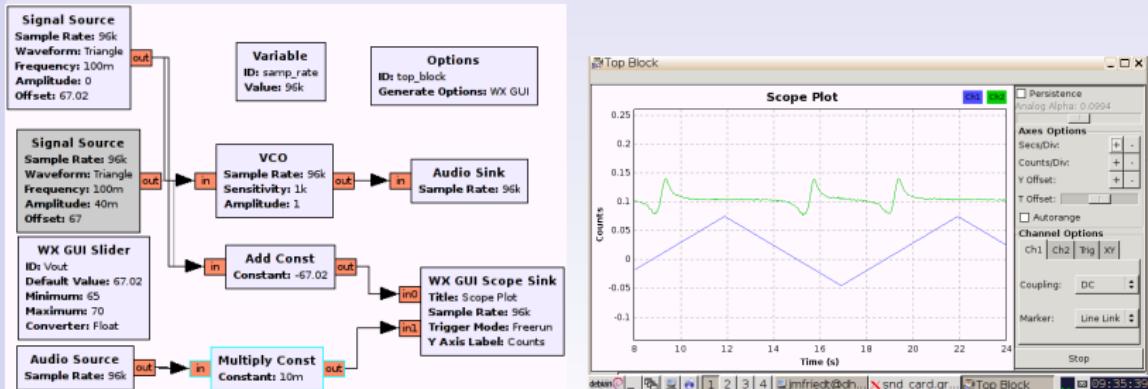
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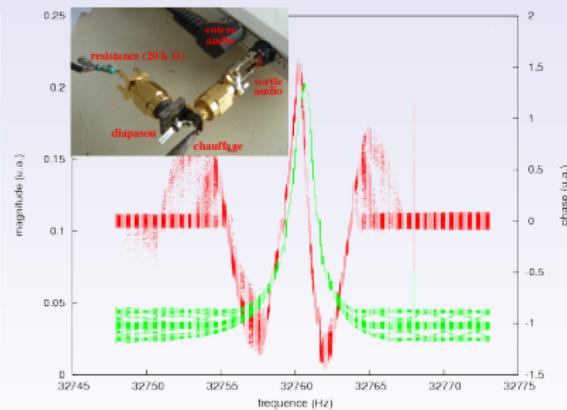
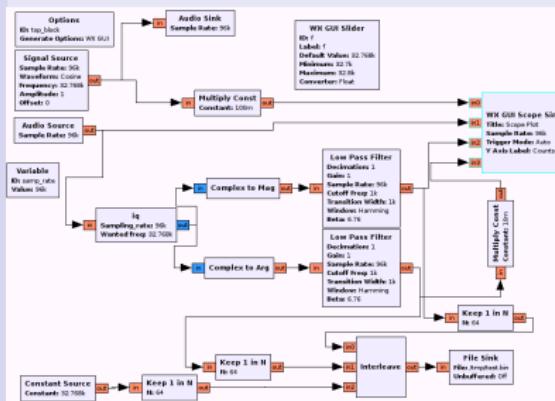
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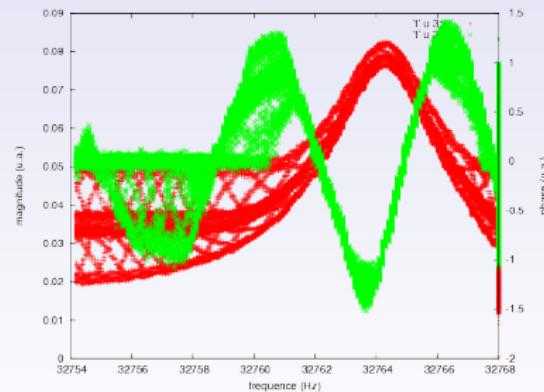
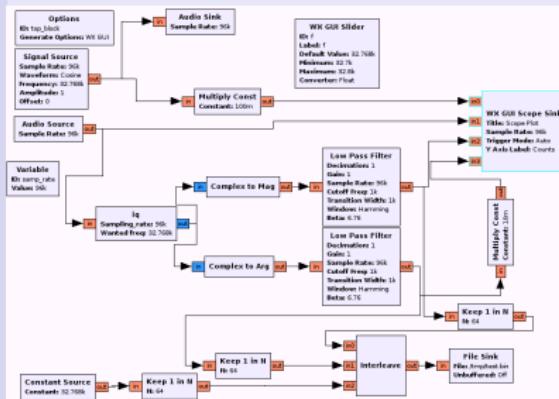
Audio-frequency network analyzer

- Digital implementation of the I/Q demodulator:
 $\cos(\omega t + \varphi(t)) \times \cos(\omega_0 t)$ and $\cos(\omega t + \varphi(t)) \times \sin(\omega_0 t)$ followed by sliding average to extract $\tan(\varphi(t)) = \frac{Q}{I}$
- If $\omega \neq \omega_0$, linear fit to remove the $\omega - \omega_0$ phase drift.
- DO NOT use $\cos(\omega_0 t)$: quickly diverges as $t \uparrow$. See
[gnuradio-core/src/lib/general/gr_nco.h](https://github.com/gnuradio/gnuradio-core/blob/src/lib/general/gr_nco.h): $\varphi_+ = 2\pi f / f_s [2\pi]$



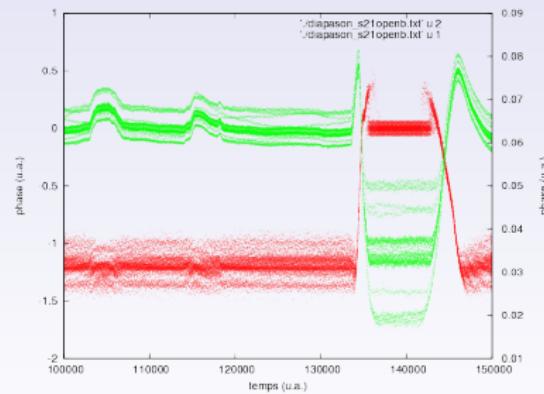
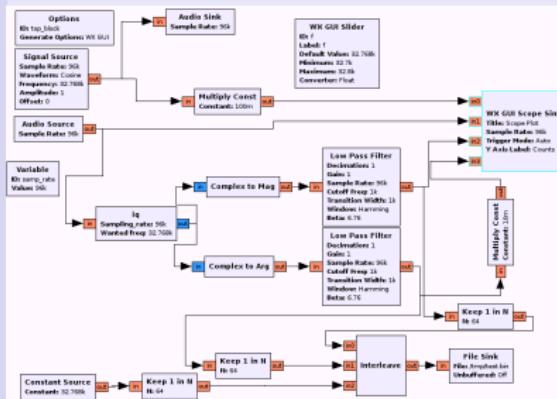
Audio-frequency network analyzer

- Digital implementation of the I/Q demodulator:
 $\cos(\omega t + \varphi(t)) \times \cos(\omega_0 t)$ and $\cos(\omega t + \varphi(t)) \times \sin(\omega_0 t)$ followed by sliding average to extract $\tan(\varphi(t)) = \frac{Q}{I}$
- If $\omega \neq \omega_0$, linear fit to remove the $\omega - \omega_0$ phase drift.
- DO NOT use $\cos(\omega_0 t)$: quickly diverges as $t \uparrow$. See gnuradio-core/src/src/lib/general/gr_nco.h: $\varphi+ = 2\pi f / f_s [2\pi]$



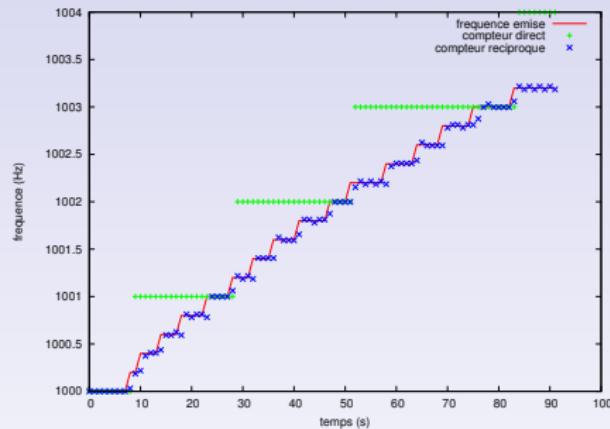
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Example of the frequency counter

Implementing the direct and reciprocal frequency counters (96 kHz sampling rate on the sound card)



Left: quartz tuning fork experimental setup

Right: synthesized signal

$\Delta f_i = 1/T_{gate} \rightarrow \Delta f_i = \frac{f_i}{f_r \times T_{gate}}$: resolution gain is f_r/f_i , or 48-fold if $f_r = 96$ kHz and $f_i \simeq 2$ kHz,

⇒ basic tool to assess the sampling rate to measured signal frequency influence on measurement resolution

FMCW RADAR

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software defined
radio (SDR)

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environment

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processing block

Tuning fork

FMCW RADAR

Conclusion and
bibliography

RADAR systems:

- ① pulsed RADAR: **high power**, short, pulse travels until it reaches a target, reflects and a **high bandwidth** (fast) receiver records the returned electromagnetic signal
- ② Frequency-Modulated Continuous Wave (FMCW) RADAR: continuous emission of a frequency-swept signal, and mixing between LO and RF provides audio-frequency output ⁹ ¹⁰

⁹G.L. Charvat, J.H. Williams, A.J. Fenn, S.Kogon, & J.S. Herd. RES. LL-003 *Build a Small Radar System Capable of Sensing Range, Doppler, and Synthetic Aperture Radar Imaging*, January IAP 2011. (Massachusetts Institute of Technology: MIT OpenCourseWare), <http://ocw.mit.edu> (Accessed 28 Jul, 2013).

¹⁰G.L. Charvat, A.J. Fenn, & B.T. Perry, *The MIT IAP radar course: Build a small radar system capable of sensing range, Doppler, and synthetic aperture (SAR) imaging*, IEEE Radar Conference (RADAR), 2012, pp. 0138–0144

FMCW RADAR: principle

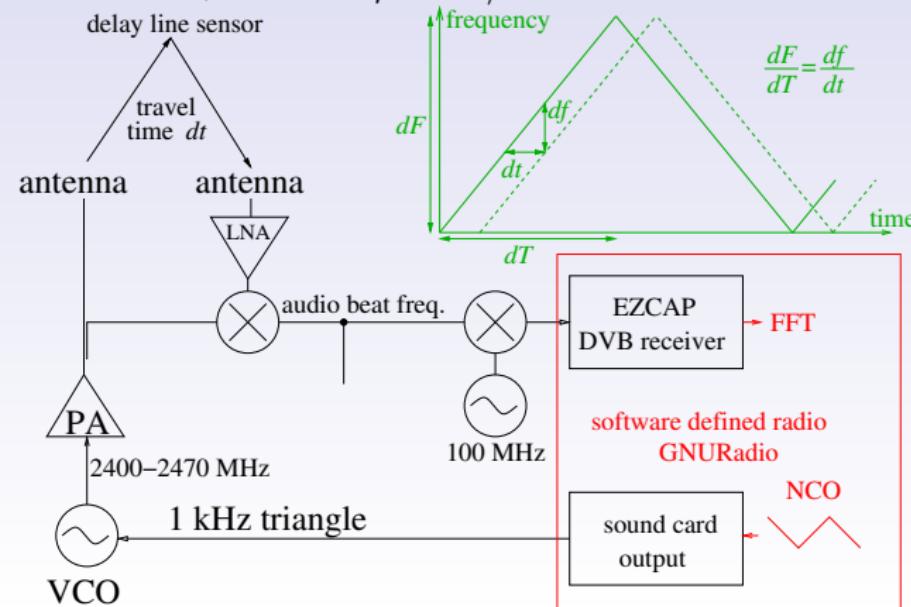
Degrees of freedom: frequency range dF and sweep rate dT

$$\frac{dF}{dT} = \frac{df}{dt}$$

when echo is located dt away

Numerical application: $df < 96$ kHz for $dt < (2 \times 15 \text{ m})/(3 \cdot 10^8 \text{ m/s})$

\Rightarrow if $dF = 50$ MHz, $dT > 52 \mu\text{s}$ or $1/dT < 19200$ Hz



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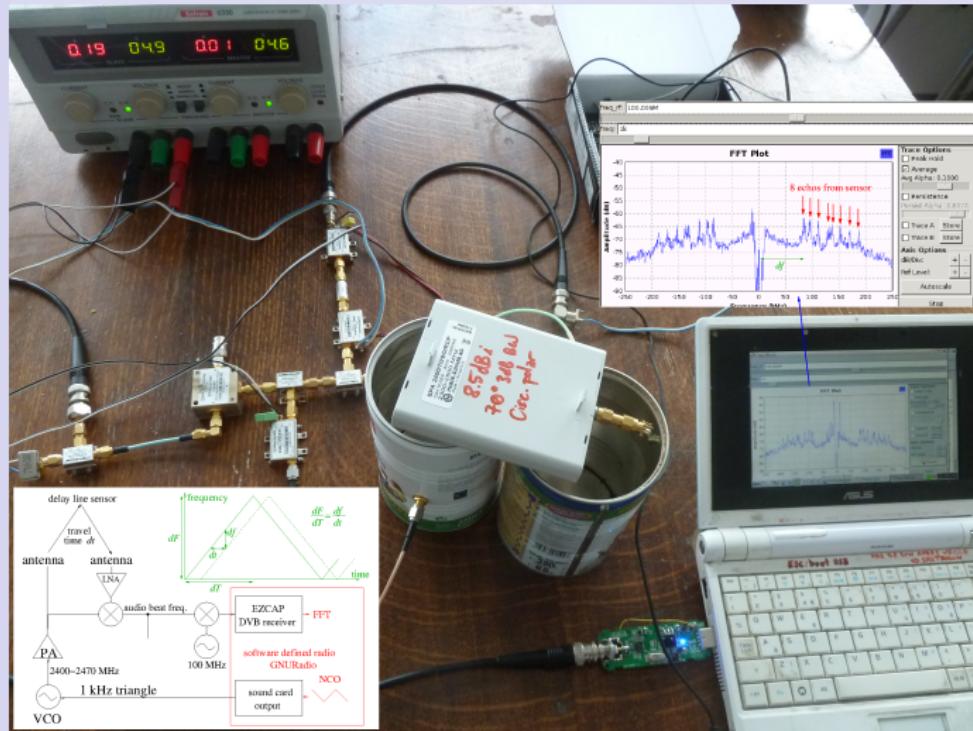
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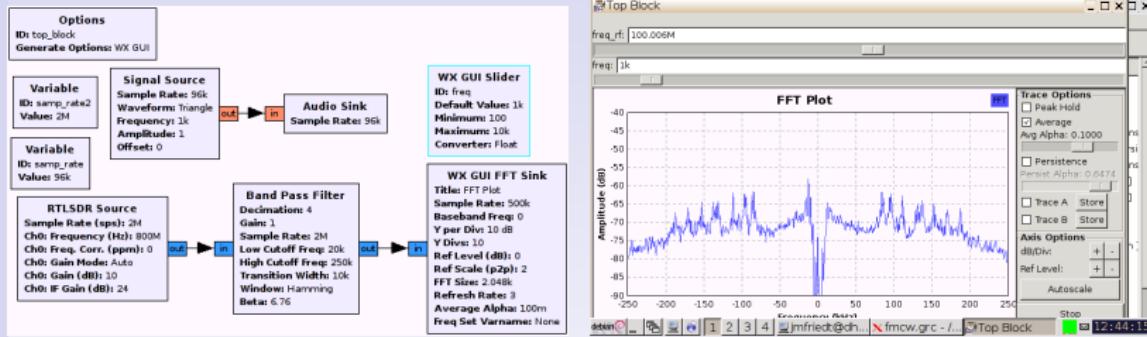
FMCW RADAR

- Audio out: adapt wave shape to linearize the VCO output (freq. vs voltage)
- Real time FFT for displaying echo distance



FMCW RADAR

- Audio out: adapt wave shape to linearize the VCO output (freq. vs voltage)
- Real time FFT for displaying echo distance



- 8-echoes are identified, located $1\text{--}4 \mu\text{s}$ (simulated echo generator using a *surface acoustic wave* delay line)
- increased sweep rate ($>400 \text{ Hz}$) for optimum sound card operating range
- DVB receiver for increased bandwidth ($4 \mu\text{s} \times 50 \text{ MHz} \times 400 \text{ Hz} = 80 \text{ kHz} \gg 48 \text{ kHz}$ accessible with a sound card)

Conclusion

Results:

- SDR: digital processing for improved **stability & flexibility** (software prototyping)
- **reusable** software through multiple sources
- part of an active **opensource** project
- **existing** basic processing blocks
- initial graphical user interface or Python programming
- **workflow** from decoder prototyping (offline) to GNURadio compatible block (inline processing)

Further activities:

- NOAA weather satellite reception¹¹
- GPS reception¹²
- add your own interfaces: DDS & radiomodem sinks, ADC and FTDI USB source (issue of data rate) – gnuradio-core/src/lib/io/gr_file_source.cc

¹¹<http://www.oz9aec.net/index.php/gnu-radio/gnu-radio-blog/477-noaa-apt-reception-with-gqrx-and-rtl-sdr>

¹²<http://www.gnss-sdr.org/> and specifically
<http://www.gnss-sdr.org/documentation/gnss-sdr-operation-realtek-rtl2832u-usb-dongle-dvb-t-receiver>

Selected bibliography

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English: http://jmfriedt.free.fr/en_sdr.pdf

French: http://jmfriedt.free.fr/lm_sdr.pdf

