Simplify development of software stacks for experimentation with NixOS-Compose

GDR RSD: Journées non thématiques 2023

Quentin GUILLOTEAU, Jonathan BLEUZEN, Millian POQUET, Olivier RICHARD

Université Grenoble Alpes, Inria, CNRS, Grenoble INP, LIG

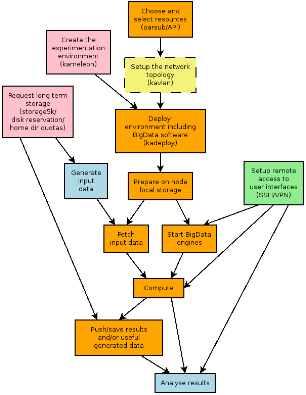
2023-01-27

Outline

1. Context & Motivation
2. NixOS Compose
3. Experimental Evaluation
4. Benefits, Limitations and Lessons
5. Conclusion & Perspectives

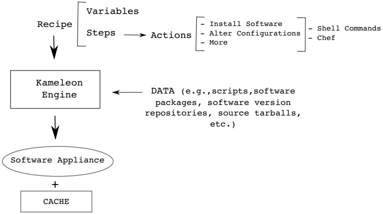
Experiment's Workflow and Some Issues

- Real experiment's workflow can be complex and tricky to develop and tune
- Reproducibility objective must be considered at the beginning
    - At mid and long terms: lot of time saved
- HPC and BigData stacks:
    - Complex pieces of software, lot of parameters
- Input Workloads
    - Too few HPC and BigData traces
    - Lot of hypothesis


Choose and select resources (oarsub/API)
Create the experimentation environment (kameleon)
Setup the network topology (kavlan)
Request long term storage (storage5k/ disk reservation/ home dir quotas)
Deploy environment including BigData software (kadeploy)
Generate input data
Prepare on node local storage
Setup remote access to user interfaces (SSH/VPN)
Fetch input data
Start BigData engines
Compute
Push/save results and/or useful generated data
Analyse results

Kameleon:A tool to generate *software appliancies* (image)

- How to build customized Grid'5000 image(s) ?



Recipe

Variables

Steps → Actions

- Install Software
- Alter Configurations
- More

- Shell Commands
- Chef

Kameleon Engine

DATA (e.g.,scripts,software packages, software version repositories, source tarballs, etc.)

Software Appliance

+

CACHE

- **Recipe** (high level) how the software appliance is going to be built. Meta-data in form of global variable and steps (mid and low-level)
- **Data** which is used as an input of all the build steps described in the recipe. It takes the form of prebuilt software packages, tarballs, configuration files, control version repositories and so on.
- **Kameleon engine**, which parses the recipe and carry out the process of building.

Kameleon approach: issues

Pro

- Overall it does the job
- All Linux distributions can be supported (Debian, Ubuntu, Centos)
- Comparable tool: Packer from Harsicorp

Limitations

- Development of recipe is tedious and error prone
- Build time can be/is huge $>$ 10 min
- During experiment's development some tests could be done on VMs or Containers
- Not adapted for frequent changes

The Problem

Setting up Distributed Environments for Distributed Experiments
↪ **Difficult**, **Time-consuming** and **Iterative** process

A moving target

I'M DONE WITH EXPERIMENTS.
WELL, THERE'S ONE MORE. BUT THEN I'LL BE DONE.
THE LAST THREE YEARS OF YOUR PH.D.
JORGE CHAM © 2016
PHDCOMICS.COM

⟹ **Does not encourage good reproducibility practices**

Nix and NixOS

The Nix Package Manager

- Functional Package Manager
- Nix Lang $\simeq$ json $+ \lambda$
- Nixpkgs (Nix expression of packages, OS...)
- Reproducible by design

The NixOS Linux Distribution

- Based on Nix
- Declarative approach
- Complete description of the system (kernel, services, pkgs, config)

How to store the packages?

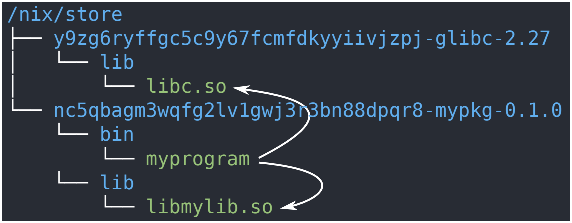
Usual approach: **Merge them all**

- Conflicts
- `PATH=/usr/bin`

```
/usr
├── bin
│   └── myprogram
└── lib
    ├── libc.so
    └── libmylib.so
```

Store approach: **Keep them separated**

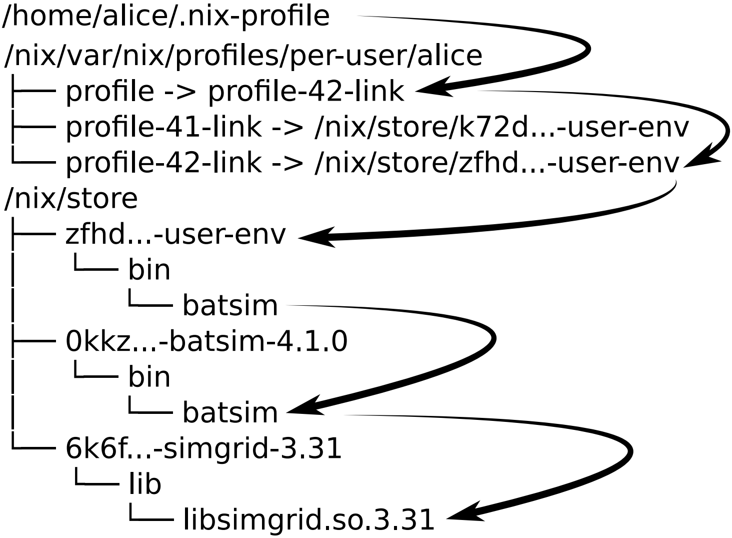
+ Pkg variation
+ Isolated
+ Well def. `PATH`
+ Use `RPATH`
+ Read-only



```
/nix/store
├── y9zg6ryffgc5c9y67fcmfdkyyiivjzpj-glibc-2.27
│   └── lib
│       └── libc.so
└── nc5qbagm3wqfg2lv1gwj3r3bn88dpqr8-mypkg-0.1.0
    └── bin
        └── myprogram
    └── lib
        └── libmylib.so
```

Nix Profiles 1/2

- User Profile



```
/home/alice/.nix-profile
/nix/var/nix/profiles/per-user/alice
├── profile -> profile-42-link
├── profile-41-link -> /nix/store/k72d...-user-env
└── profile-42-link -> /nix/store/zfhd...-user-env
/nix/store
├── zfhd...-user-env
│     └── bin
│           └── batsim
├── 0kkz...-batsim-4.1.0
│     └── bin
│           └── batsim
└── 6k6f...-simgrid-3.31
      └── lib
            └── libsimgrid.so.3.31
```

Nix Profiles 2/2

System Profile for NixOS

- Define the kernel, Init script, initrd ...
- Fstab (file systems table)...
- Services (via Systemd)
- Immutable (part) configurations in **/etc**

1 Context & Motivation

2 NixOS Compose

3 Experimental Evaluation

4 Benefits, Limitations and Lessons

5 Conclusion & Perspectives

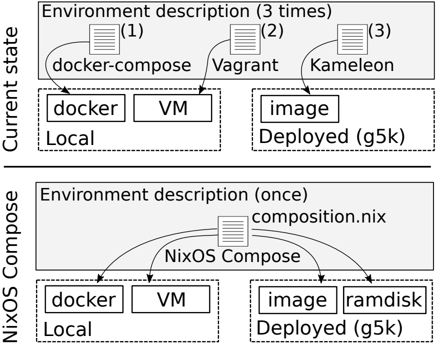
NixOS Compose - Introduction

Goal

Use Nix(OS) to reduce friction for the development of **reproducible distributed environments**

The Tool

- Python + Nix ($\simeq$ 6000 l.o.c.)
- an extension of **Nixos-Test**
- **One Definition**
  $\hookrightarrow$ Multiple Platforms
- Build and Deploy
- **Reproducible by design**



NixOS Compose - Terminology

Transposition

Capacity to deploy a **uniquely defined environment** on several platforms of different natures (flavours, see later).

Role

Type of configuration associated with the mission of a node.
Example: One Server and several Clients.

Composition

Nix expression describing the NixOS **configuration of every role** in the environment.

NixOS Compose - Composition Example: K3S

```
{ pkgs, ... }:
let k3sToken = "df54383b5659b9280aa1e73e60ef78fc";
in {
  roles = {
    server = { pkgs, ... }: {
      environment.systemPackages = with pkgs; [
        k3s gzip
      ];
      networking.firewall.allowedTCPPorts = [
        6443
      ];
      services.k3s = {
        enable = true;
        role = "server";
        package = pkgs.k3s;
        extraFlags = "--agent-token ${k3sToken}";
      };
    };
    agent = { pkgs, ... }: {
      environment.systemPackages = with pkgs; [
        k3s gzip
      ];
      services.k3s = {
        enable = true;
        role = "agent";
        serverAddr = "https://server:6443";
        token = k3sToken;
      };
    };
  };
}
```

Role

Packages

Ports

Services

NixOS Compose - Flavours = Target Platform + Variant

`docker` - local and virtual

Generate a `docker-compose` configuration.

`vm` - local and virtual

QEMU Virtual Machines.

`g5k-ramdisk` - distributed and physical

`initrds` deployed in memory without reboot on G5K (via `kexec`).

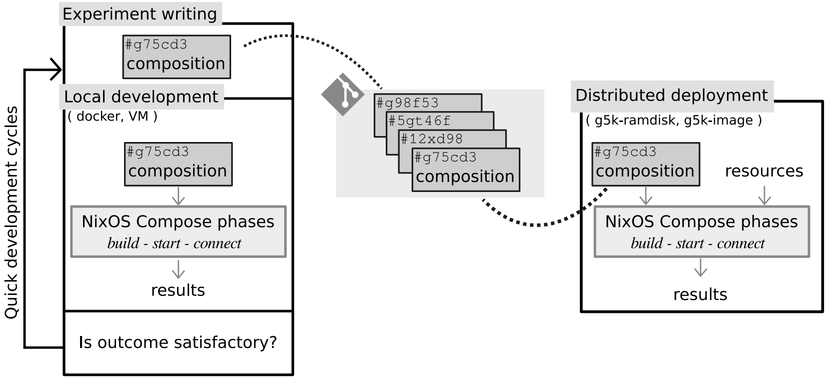
`g5k-nfs-store` - distributed and physical

Same as `g5k-ramdisk` but store accessed by nfs.

`g5k-image` - distributed and physical

Full system tarball images on G5K via Kadeploy.

NixOS Compose - Workflow



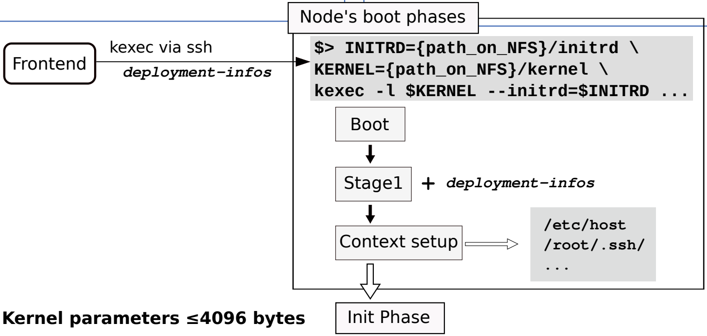
NixOS Compose - Technical Details (`g5k-ramdisk`)

Building

1. Eval. of the NixOS configuration (+firmware)
2. Generation of the kernel, image, initrd, store, one system profile per role

Deploying

1. Generate deployment info (contextualization data)
2. Run `kexec` on the nodes
3. Setup the info for the nodes (hostname, ssh keys, role)



```
$> INITRD={path_on_NFS}/initrd \
KERNEL={path_on_NFS}/kernel \
kexec -l $KERNEL --initrd=$INITRD ...
```

```
/etc/host
/root/.ssh/
...
```

Kernel parameters ≤4096 bytes

1 Context & Motivation

2 NixOS Compose

3 Experimental Evaluation

4 Benefits, Limitations and Lessons

5 Conclusion & Perspectives

Experimental Evaluation

Experimental Setup

- Grid'5000: dahu cluster
- 192 GiB of RAM
- Intel Xeon Gold 6130 (2 × 16 cores)
- 240 GB SSD SATA Samsung

Goal of Experiments

- Evaluate the (re)construction times of images **vs. Kameleon**
- Evaluate the size of the images generated **vs. Kameleon**
- Evaluate the deployment cycle **vs. EnOSlib**

↪ Will not evaluate the deployment times as we use third party tools.

Evaluation vs. Kameleon

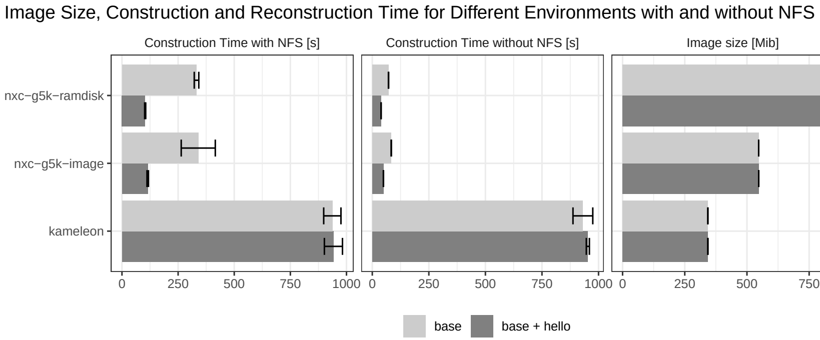
Experiment Goals

Eval. Images **Construction** and **Reconstruction** Times + Images **Sizes**

Protocol

1. Empty the `nix store` (no cache for Kameleon)
2. Create a `base` recipe with NXC and Kameleon
3. Build and measure the building time and the size of the image
4. Add the `hello` package to the recipe (`base + hello`)
5. Build the `base + hello` image and measure time and size

Evaluation vs. Kameleon - Results



- NXC **faster to build and even faster to rebuild** (> 10x)
- NXC produces larger images than Kameleon (modules, firmware)
- NFS introduces a overhead due to many reads/writes of Nix

1 Context & Motivation

2 NixOS Compose

3 Experimental Evaluation

4 **Benefits, Limitations and Lessons**

5 Conclusion & Perspectives

Benefits, limitations, lessons

- Use *FPM* (here Nix) to build/deploy distributed system for research purpose

Benefits

- **Reproducibiliy (reconstructability) by design**
- **Powerful framework** to describe all part of distritued system
- Accurate image generation (put only what you want/need)
- More pleasant experiment development (time, debugging, tranposition)
- Focus on **essential complexity** / less **accidental complexity** [a]
- Modification, variation, extension ... in more simpler way
- Simple to use by new comers (students)

[a] "No Silver Bullet—Essence and Accident in Software Engineering" F. Brook 86

Benefits, limitations, lessons

Limitations and issues

- Radical approach Nix/NixOS (exclude other Linux distributions)
- Switch **declarative and functional paradigm**
- *Advanced* Nix: **steep learning curve** (internships are short !)
- **Nix ecosystem** is very **huge** (80K packages, constant evolutions, experimental features, lot of peripheral projects)

Benefits, limitations, lessons

Lessons (for Nixos-Compose)

- As usual : The Devil is in the details (corner cases, robustness at scale...)
- Importance of user experience/interface (UX/UI)
  - Workflow fluidity (CLI / features)
  - Simple custumization must be simple to set up (source, parameter setting...)
- **Packaging non trivial tool/service is not a beginner task** (need good sysadmin skills)
- We need feedback for external (early) users

1 Context & Motivation

2 NixOS Compose

3 Experimental Evaluation

4 Benefits, Limitations and Lessons

5 Conclusion & Perspectives

Conclusion & Perspectives

Reminder

Objective: Reduce the friction for dvp of reproducible distributed envs
Approach: used Nix(OS) to build NXC: a tool for transposing envs defs

Takeaway

- Fast (more fluid) development cycles (containers, VM, ramdisk)
- **FPM** (Nix/Guix) very pleasant/suitable to manage complex setup

Perspectives

- **Stable Release**
- Target others platforms, Chameleon ...)
- Integration w/ EnOSlib (experiment orchestration)
- More examples/compositions

Questions ?

- Nixos-compose: https://gitlab.inria.fr/nixos-compose/nixos-compose
- Technical Paper: Cluster'22 https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-03723771/
- Tutorial https://nixos-compose.gitlabpages.inria.fr/tuto-nxc/
- Supported by the European Regale Project