

# Concurrent Programming

## Actors, SALSA, Coordination Abstractions

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## Advantages of concurrent programs

- **Reactive programming**
  - User can interact with applications while tasks are running, e.g., stopping the transfer of a big file in a web browser.
- **Availability of services**
  - Long-running tasks need not delay short-running ones, e.g., a web server can serve an entry page while at the same time processing a complex query.
- **Parallelism**
  - Complex programs can make better use of multiple resources in new multi-core processor architectures, SMPs, LANs or WANs, e.g., scientific/engineering applications, simulations, games, etc.
- **Controllability**
  - Tasks requiring certain preconditions can suspend and wait until the preconditions hold, then resume execution transparently.

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## Disadvantages of concurrent programs

- **Safety**
  - « *Nothing bad ever happens* »
  - Concurrent tasks should not corrupt consistent state of program
- **Liveness**
  - « *Anything ever happens at all* »
  - Tasks should not suspend and indefinitely wait for each other (deadlock).
- **Non-determinism**
  - Mastering exponential number of interleavings due to different schedules.
- **Resource consumption**
  - Threads can be expensive. Overhead of scheduling, context-switching, and synchronization.
  - Concurrent programs can run *slower* than their sequential counterparts even with multiple CPUs!

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## Overview of concurrent programming

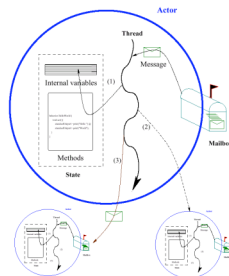
- There are four basic approaches:
  - **Sequential programming** (no concurrency)
  - **Declarative concurrency** (streams in a functional language)
  - **Message passing** with active objects (Erlang, SALSA)
  - **Atomic actions** on shared state (Java)
- The atomic action approach is the *most difficult*, yet it is the one you will probably be most exposed to!
- But, if you have the choice, which approach to use?
  - Use the simplest approach that does the job: sequential if that is ok, else declarative concurrency if there is no observable nondeterminism, else message passing if you can get away with it.

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## Actors/SALSA

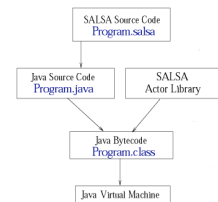
- **Actor Model**
    - A reasoning framework to model concurrent computations
    - Programming abstractions for distributed open systems
- G. Agha, *Actors: A Model of Concurrent Computation in Distributed Systems*. MIT Press, 1986.
- **SALSA**
    - Simple Actor Language System and Architecture
    - An actor-oriented language for mobile and internet computing
    - Programming abstractions for internet-based concurrency, distribution, mobility, and coordination
- C. Varela and G. Agha, "Programming dynamically reconfigurable open systems with SALSA", *ACM SIGPLAN Notices, OOPSLA 2001*, 36(12), pp 20-34.



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## SALSA and Java



- SALSA source files are compiled into Java source files before being compiled into Java byte code.
- SALSA programs may take full advantage of the Java API.

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## Hello World Example

```
module examples.helloworld;
behavior HelloWorld {
  void act( String[] args ) {
    standardOutput <- print( "Hello" ) @
    standardOutput <- println( "World!" );
  }
}
```

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## Hello World Example

- The `act( String[] args )` message handler is similar to the `main(...)` method in Java and is used to bootstrap SALSA programs.
- When a SALSA program is executed, an actor of the given behavior is created and an `act( args )` message is sent to this actor with any given command-line arguments.
- References to `standardOutput`, `standardInput` and `standardError` actors are available to all SALSA actors.

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## SALSA Support for Actors

- Programmers define *behaviors* for actors.
- Messages are sent asynchronously.
- State is modeled as encapsulated objects/primitive types.
- Messages are modeled as potential method invocations.
- Continuation primitives are used for coordination.

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## Reference Cell Example

```
module examples.cell;
behavior Cell {
  Object content;

  Cell(Object initialContent) {
    content = initialContent;
  }

  Object get() { return content; }

  void set(Object newContent) {
    content = newContent;
  }
}
```

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## Actor Creation

- To create an actor:

```
TravelAgent a = new TravelAgent();
```

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## Message Sending

- To create an actor:

```
TravelAgent a = new TravelAgent();
```

- To send a message:

```
a <- book( flight );
```

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## Causal order

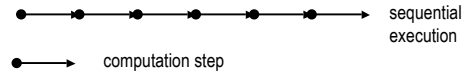
- In a sequential program all execution states are totally ordered
- In a concurrent program all execution states of a given actor are totally ordered
- The execution state of the concurrent program as a whole is partially ordered

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## Total order

- In a sequential program all execution states are totally ordered

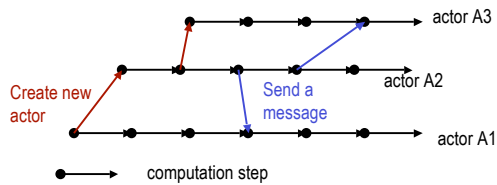


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## Causal order in the actor model

- In a concurrent program all execution states of a given actor are totally ordered
- The execution state of the concurrent program is partially ordered



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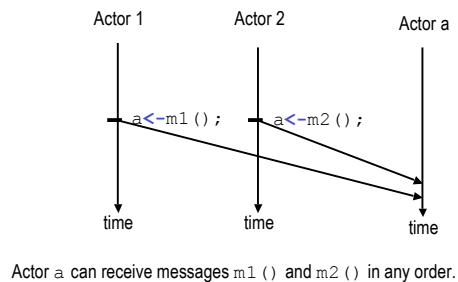
## Nondeterminism

- An execution is nondeterministic if there is a computation step in which there is a choice what to do next
- Nondeterminism appears naturally when there is asynchronous message passing
  - Messages can arrive or be processed in an order different from the sending order.

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## Example of nondeterminism



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## Coordination Primitives

- SALSA provides three main coordination constructs:
  - **Token-passing continuations**
    - To synchronize concurrent activities
    - To notify completion of message processing
    - Named tokens enable arbitrary synchronization (data-flow)
  - **Join blocks**
    - Used for barrier synchronization for multiple concurrent activities
    - To obtain results from otherwise independent concurrent processes
  - **First-class continuations**
    - To delegate producing a result to a third-party actor

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## Token Passing Continuations

- Ensures that each message in the continuation expression is sent after the previous message has been **processed**. It also enables the use of a message handler return value as an argument for a later message (through the token keyword).

- Example:

```
a1 <- m1() @
a2 <- m2( token );
```

Send *m1* to *a1* asking *a1* to forward the result of processing *m1* to *a2* (as the argument of message *m2*).

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## Named Tokens

- Tokens can be named to enable more loosely-coupled synchronization

- Example:

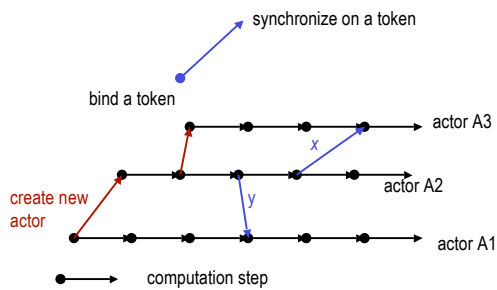
```
token t1 = a1 <- m1();
token t2 = a2 <- m2();
token t3 = a3 <- m3( t1 );
token t4 = a4 <- m4( t2 );
a <- m(t1,t2,t3,t4);
```

Sending *m(...)* to *a* will be delayed until messages *m1()*, *m2()*, *m3()*, *m4()* have been processed. *m1()* can proceed concurrently with *m2()*.

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## Causal order in the actor model



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## Cell Tester Example

```
module examples.cell;
behavior CellTester {
void act( String[] args ) {
Cell c = new Cell("Hello");
standardOutput <- print( "Initial Value:" ) @
c <- get() @
standardOutput <- println( token ) @
c <- set("World") @
standardOutput <- print( "New Value:" ) @
c <- get() @
standardOutput <- println( token );
}
}
```

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## Join Blocks

- Provide a mechanism for synchronizing the processing of a set of messages.
- Set of results is sent along as a *token* containing an array of results.

- Example:

```
Actor[] actors = { searcher0, searcher1,
                 searcher2, searcher3 };
join {
for (int i=0; i < actors.length; i++){
actors[i] <- find( phrase );
}
} @ resultActor <- output( token );
```

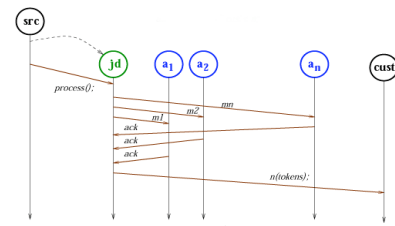
Send the *find( phrase )* message to each actor in *actors[]* then after all have completed send the result to *resultActor* as the argument of an *output( ... )* message.

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## Example: Acknowledged Multicast

```
join{ a1 <- m1(); a2 <- m2(); ... an <- mn(); } @
cust <- n(token);
```



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## Lines of Code Comparison

	Java	Foundry	SALSA
Acknowledged Multicast	168	100	31

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## First Class Continuations

- Enable actors to delegate computation to a third party independently of the processing context.
- For example:

```
int m(...) {
  b <- n(...) @ currentContinuation;
}
Ask (delegate) actor b to respond to this message m on behalf of current actor (self) by processing its own message n.
```

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## Delegate Example

```
module examples.fibonacci;
behavior Calculator {
  int fib(int n) {
    Fibonacci f = new Fibonacci(n);
    f <- compute() @ currentContinuation;
  }
  int add(int n1, int n2) {return n1+n2;}
  void act(String args[]) {
    fib(15) @ standardOutput <- println(token);
    fib(5) @ add(token,3) @
    standardOutput <- println(token);
  }
}
```

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## Fibonacci Example

```
module examples.fibonacci;
behavior Fibonacci {
  int n;
  Fibonacci(int n) { this.n = n; }
  int add(int x, int y) { return x + y; }
  int compute() {
    if (n == 0) return 0;
    else if (n <= 2) return 1;
    else {
      Fibonacci fib1 = new Fibonacci(n-1);
      Fibonacci fib2 = new Fibonacci(n-2);
      token x = fib1->compute();
      token y = fib2->compute();
      add(x,y) @ currentContinuation;
    }
  }
  void act(String args[]) {
    n = Integer.parseInt(args[0]);
    compute() @ standardOutput <- println(token);
  }
}
```

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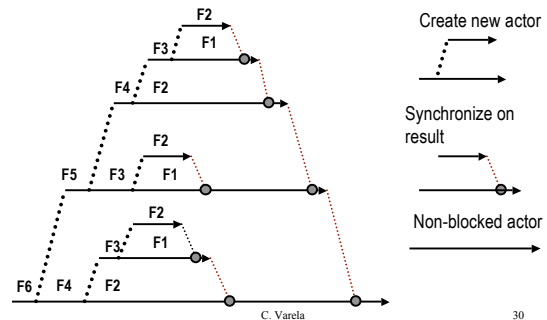
## Fibonacci Example 2

```
module examples.fibonacci2;
behavior Fibonacci {
  int add(int x, int y) { return x + y; }
  int compute(int n) {
    if (n == 0) return 0;
    else if (n <= 2) return 1;
    else {
      Fibonacci fib = new Fibonacci();
      token x = fib <- compute(n-1);
      compute(n-2) @ add(x,token) @ currentContinuation;
    }
  }
  void act(String args[]) {
    int n = Integer.parseInt(args[0]);
    compute(n) @ standardOutput <- println(token);
  }
}
```

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## Execution of salsa Fibonacci 6



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## Exercises

1. How would you implement the join continuation linguistic abstraction in terms of message passing?
2. Download and execute the `CellTester.salsa` example.
3. Write a solution to the Flavius Josephus problem in SALSA. A description of the problem is at Van Roy and Haridi's textbook Section 7.8.3 (page 558).