Concurrent Programming with Actors
(PDCS 9, CPE 5*)
Support for the actor model in SALSA and Erlang

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October 12, 2021

* Concurrent Programming in Erlang, by J. Armstrong, R. Virding, C. Wikström, M. Williams

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1. Extend a functional language (call-by-value λ calculus + if s and pairs) with actor primitives.

2. Define an operational semantics for actor configurations.

3. Study various notions of equivalence of actor expressions and configurations.

4. Assume fairness:
   - Guaranteed message delivery.
   - Individual actor progress.
\(\lambda\)-Calculus as a Model for Sequential Computation

Syntax:

\[
e \ ::= \ v \quad \text{variable} \\
| \quad \lambda v. e \quad \text{function} \\
| \quad e(e) \quad \text{application}
\]

Example of beta-reduction:

\[
\lambda x. x^2(3) \rightarrow x^2\{3/x\}
\]

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Actor Primitives

- **send**(a, v)
  - Sends value v to actor a.

- **new**(b)
  - Creates a new actor with behavior b (a λ-calculus functional abstraction) and returns the identity/name of the newly created actor.

- **ready**(b)
  - Becomes ready to receive a new message with behavior b.
AMST Actor Language
Examples

\[ b_5 = \text{rec}(\lambda y. \lambda x. \text{seq}(\text{send}(x, 5), \text{ready}(y))) \]
receives an actor name \( x \) and sends the number 5 to that actor, then it becomes ready to process new messages with the same behavior \( y \) \((b_5)\).

Sample usage:
\[ \text{send}(\text{new}(b_5), a) \]

A \textit{sink}, an actor that disregards all messages:
\[ \text{sink} = \text{rec}(\lambda b. \lambda m. \text{ready}(b)) \]
Operational Semantics for AMST Actor Language

- Operational semantics of actor model as a labeled transition relationship between actor configurations:

  \[ k_1 \xrightarrow{[\text{label}]} k_2 \]

- Actor configurations model open system components:
  - Set of individually named actors
  - Messages “en-route”
Actor Configurations

\[ k = \alpha \parallel \mu \]

\( \alpha \) is a function mapping actor names (represented as free variables) to actor states.

\( \mu \) is a multi-set of messages “en-route.”
Reduction contexts and redexes

Consider the expression:

\[ e = \text{send}(\text{new}(b5),a) \]

- The redex \( r \) represents the next sub-expression to evaluate in a left-first call-by-value evaluation strategy.
- The reduction context \( R \) (or *continuation*) is represented as the surrounding expression with a *hole* replacing the redex.

\[ \text{send}(\text{new}(b5),a) = \text{send}(☐,a) \gg \text{new}(b5) \ll \]

\[ e = R \gg r \ll \quad \text{where} \]

\[ R = \text{send}(☐,a) \]

\[ r = \text{new}(b5) \]
Operational Semantics of Actors

\[
\begin{align*}
\frac{e \rightarrow \lambda e'}{\alpha, [R \triangleright e \triangleright]_{a} \parallel \mu} & \quad \frac{[\text{fun}:a]}{\alpha, [R \triangleright e' \triangleright]_{a} \parallel \mu} \\
\alpha, [R \triangleright \text{new}(b) \triangleright]_{a} \parallel \mu & \quad \frac{[\text{new}:a,a']}{\alpha, [R \triangleright a' \triangleright]_{a}, [\text{ready}(b)]_{a'} \parallel \mu} \quad a' \text{ fresh} \\
\alpha, [R \triangleright \text{send}(a', v) \triangleright]_{a} \parallel \mu & \quad \frac{[\text{snd}:a]}{\alpha, [R \triangleright \text{nil} \triangleright]_{a} \parallel \mu \cup \{\langle a' \leftarrow v \rangle\}} \\
\alpha, [R \triangleright \text{ready}(b) \triangleright]_{a} \parallel \{\langle a \leftarrow v \rangle\} \cup \mu & \quad \frac{[\text{rcv}:a,v]}{\alpha, [b(v)]_{a} \parallel \mu}
\end{align*}
\]
Operational semantics example (1)

\[ k_0 = [\text{send}(\square, a) \Rightarrow \text{new}(b5) \Leftarrow ]_a \ || \ \{\} \]
\[ k_1 = [\text{send}(b, a)]_a, [\text{ready}(b5)]_b \ || \ \{\} \]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{k}_0 \\
\text{[new:} a, b]\text{]} \\
\rightarrow \\
\text{k}_1 \\
\end{array}
\]

\[ k_2 = [\text{nil}]_a, [\text{ready}(b5)]_b \ || \ \{< b \leq a >\} \]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
k_1 \\
\text{[snd:} a]\text{]} \\
\rightarrow \\
k_2 \\
\end{array}
\]

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**Operational semantics example (2)**

\[ k_2 = [\text{nil}]_a, \ [\text{ready}(b5)]_b \ || \ \{ < b \leq a > \} \]

\[ k_3 = [\text{nil}]_a, \]
\[ [\text{rec}(\lambda y. \lambda x. \text{seq}(\text{send}(x, 5), \text{ready}(y)))(a)]_b \]
\[ || \ \{ \} \]

\[ k_2 \xrightarrow{[\text{rcv}:b,a]} k_3 \]

\[ k_4 = [\text{nil}]_a, \ [\text{seq}(\text{send}(a, 5), \text{ready}(b5)))]_b \]
\[ || \ \{ \} \]

\[ k_3 \xrightarrow{[\text{fun}:b]} k_4 \]

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Operational semantics example (3)

\[
k_4 = [\text{nil}]_a, \\
[\text{seq}(\square, \text{ready}(b5)) \triangleright \text{send}(a, 5) \triangleleft ]_b \\
\parallel \{\}
\]

\[
k_4 \xrightarrow{\text{snd}: a, 5} k_5
\]

\[
k_5 = [\text{nil}]_a, [\text{seq}(\text{nil}, \text{ready}(b5))]_b \\
\parallel \{< a \leq 5 >\}
\]
\[ k_5 = \begin{array}{l} [\text{nil}]_a, \quad [\text{seq}(\text{nil,ready(b5))}]_b \\ \mid \quad \{ < a \leq 5 > \} \end{array} \]

\[ k_6 = \begin{array}{l} [\text{nil}]_a, \quad [\text{ready(b5)}]_b \\ \mid \quad \{ < a \leq 5 > \} \end{array} \]

\[ k_5 \xrightarrow{[\text{fun}:b]} k_6 \]
This sequence of (labeled) transitions from $k_0$ to $k_6$ is called a *computation sequence*. 

$k_0 = [\text{send(new(b5),a)}]_a \parallel \{\}$

$k_6 = [\text{nil}]_a, [\text{ready(b5)}]_b \parallel \{< a <= 5 >\}$

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cell =
rec(\lambda b. \lambda c. \lambda m. if(get?(m),
    seq(send(cust(m),c),
        ready(b(c))),
    if(set?(m),
        ready(b(contents(m))),
        ready(b(c)))))

Using the cell:
let a = new(cell(0)) in seq(send(a,mkset(7)),
    send(a,mkset(2)),
    send(a,mkget(c)))
Asynchronous communication

\[ k_0 = [\text{ready(cell(0))}]_a \]
\[ \parallel \{<a<=s(7)>, <a<=s(2)>, <a<=g(c)>\} \]

Three receive transitions are enabled at \( k_0 \).

Multiple enabled transitions can lead to \textit{nondeterministic} behavior.

The set of all computations sequences from \( k_0 \) is called the \textit{computation tree} \( \tau(k_0) \).
Nondeterministic behavior (1)

\[ k_0 = \left[ \text{ready(cell(0))} \right]_a \]
\[ \| \{ <a<=s(7)>, <a<=s(2)>, <a<=g(c)> \} \]

\[ k_1 \rightarrow^* \left[ \text{ready(cell(7))} \right]_a \]
\[ \| \{ <a<=s(2)>, <a<=g(c)> \} \]

Customer \( c \) will get 2 or 7.

\[ k_1' \rightarrow^* \left[ \text{ready(cell(2))} \right]_a \]
\[ \| \{ <a<=s(7)>, <a<=g(c)> \} \]

\[ k_1" \rightarrow^* \left[ \text{ready(cell(0))} \right]_a \]
\[ \| \{ <a<=s(7)>, <a<=s(2)>, <c<=0> \} \]

Customer \( c \) will get 0.
Nondeterministic behavior (2)

\[ k_0 = [\text{ready}(\text{cell}(0))]a \]
\[ \| \{<a<=s(7)>, <a<=s(2)>, <a<=g(c)>\} \]

Order of three receive transitions determines final state, e.g.:

\[ \begin{align*}
  k_0 & \xrightarrow{[\text{rcv}:a,g(c)]} k_1 \\
  k_1 & \xrightarrow{[\text{rcv}:a,s(7)]} k_2 \\
  k_2 & \xrightarrow{[\text{rcv}:a,s(2)]} k_3
\end{align*} \]

\[ k_f = [\text{ready}(\text{cell}(2))]a \| \{<c<=0>\} \]

Final cell state is 2.
Nondeterministic behavior (3)

\[ k_0 = \left[ \text{ready} \right. \left( \text{cell} (0) \right) \]_a
\| \{ <a<=s(7)> , <a<=s(2)> , <a<=g(c)> \}

Order of three receive transitions determines final state, e.g.:

\[ \begin{align*}
  k_0 & \xrightarrow{[\text{rcv}:a,s(2)]} k_1 \xrightarrow{[\text{rcv}:a,g(c)]} k_2 \xrightarrow{[\text{rcv}:a,s(7)]} k_3
\end{align*} \]

\[ k_f = \left[ \text{ready} \right. \left( \text{cell} (7) \right) \]_a \| \{ <c<=2> \}

Final cell state is 7.
Erlang support for Actors

- Actors in Erlang are modeled as *processes*. Processes start by executing an arbitrary *function*. Related functions are grouped into *modules*.

- Messages can be any Erlang *terms*, *e.g.*, atoms, tuples (fixed arity), or lists (variable arity). Messages are sent asynchronously.

- State is modeled implicitly with function arguments. Actors explicitly call receive to get a message, and must use tail-recursion to get new messages, *i.e.*, control loop is explicit.
Reference Cell in Erlang

-module(cell).
-export([cell/1]).

cell(Content) ->
    receive
        {set, NewContent} -> cell(NewContent);
        {get, Customer} -> Customer ! Content,
                            cell(Content)
    end.
Reference Cell in Erlang

-module(cell).
-export([cell/1]).

cell(Content) ->
    receive
      {set, NewContent} -> cell(NewContent);
      {get, Customer} -> Customer ! Content, cell(Content)
    end.

Encapsulated state Content.

Message handlers

State change.

Explicit control loop: Actions at the end of a message need to include tail-recursive function call. Otherwise actor (process) terminates.
Reference Cell in Erlang

```erlang
-module(cell).
-export([cell/1]).

cell(Content) ->
    receive
        {set, NewContent} -> cell(NewContent);
        {get, Customer} -> Customer ! Content, cell(Content)
    end.
```

Content is an argument to the cell function.

{set, NewContent} is a tuple pattern. set is an atom. NewContent is a variable.

Messages are checked one by one, and for each message, first pattern that applies gets its actions (after ->) executed. If no pattern matches, messages remain in actor’s mailbox.
Cell Tester in Erlang

-module(cellTester).
-export([main/0]).

main() -> C = spawn(cell,cell,[0]),
            C!{set,7},
            C!{set,2},
            C!{get,self()},
            receive
                Value ->
                    io:format("~w~n",[Value])
            end.
Cell Tester in Erlang

-module(cellTester).
-export([main/0]).

main() ->
  C = spawn(cell, cell, [0]),
  C!{set, 7},
  C!{set, 2},
  C!{get, self()},
  receive
    Value ->
      io:format("~w~n", [Value])
  end.

Actor creation (spawn)
Message passing (!)
receive waits until a message is available.
-module(cellTester).
-export([main/0]).

main() -> C = spawn(cell, cell, [0]),
            C!{set,7},
            C!{set,2},
            C!{get,self()},
            receive
            Value ->
                io:format("~w~n", [Value])
            end.

[0] is a list with the arguments to the module's function. General form:

spawn(module, function, arguments)

Function calls take the form:

module: function(args)

self() is a built-in function (BIF) that returns the process id of the current process.
Actors/SALSA

• Actor Model
  – A reasoning framework to model concurrent computations
  – Programming abstractions for distributed open systems

• 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
SALSA support for Actors

• Programmers define behaviors for actors. Actors are instances of behaviors.

• Messages are modeled as potential method invocations. Messages are sent asynchronously.

• State is modeled as encapsulated objects/primitive types.

• Tokens represent future message return values. Continuation primitives are used for coordination.
module cell;

behavior Cell {
    Object content;

    Cell(Object initialContent) {
        content = initialContent;
    }

    Object get() { return content; }

    void set(Object newContent) {
        content = newContent;
    }
}
module cell;

behavior Cell {
    Object content;

    Cell(Object initialContent) {
        content = initialContent;
    }

    Object get() { return content; }

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

Encapsulated state content.

Actor constructor.

Message handlers.

State change.
module cell;

behavior Cell {  
    Object content;

    Cell(Object initialContent) {
        content = initialContent;
    }

    Object get() { return content; }

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

return asynchronously sets token associated to get message.

Implicit control loop: End of message implies ready to receive next message.
Cell Tester Example

module cell;

behavior CellTester {

    void act( String[] args ) {

        Cell c = new Cell(0);
        c <- set(7);
        c <- set(2);
        token t = c <- get();
        standardOutput <- println( t );
    }
}

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Cell Tester Example

module cell;

behavior CellTester {

    void act( String[] args ) {
        Cell c = new Cell(0);
        c <- set(7);
        c <- set(2);
        token t = c <- get();
        standardOutput <- println( t );
    }
}

Actor creation (new)
Message passing (<-)
println message can only be processed when token t from c’s get() message handler has been produced.
Cell Tester Example

module cell;

behavior CellTester {
    void act( String[] args ) {
        Cell c = new Cell(0);
        c <- set(7);
        c <- set(2);
        token t = c <- get();
        standardOutput <- println( t );
    }
}
SALSA compiles to 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.
Join Continuations

Consider:

\[
\text{treeprod} = \text{rec}(\lambda f. \lambda \text{tree}. \\
\quad \text{if}(\text{isnat}(\text{tree}), \\\n\quad \quad \text{tree,} \\\n\quad \quad f(\text{left}(\text{tree}))*f(\text{right}(\text{tree}))))
\]

which multiplies all leaves of a tree, which are numbers.

You can do the “left” and “right” computations concurrently.
Tree Product Behavior in AMST

\[ B_{\text{treeprod}} = \]
\[
\text{rec}(\lambda b. \lambda m. \]
\[
\text{seq}(\text{if}(\text{isnat}(\text{tree}(m))), \]
\[
\text{send}(\text{cust}(m), \text{tree}(m)), \]
\[
\text{let newcust=}\text{new}(B_{\text{joincont}}(\text{cust}(m))), \]
\[
\text{lp = new}(B_{\text{treeprod}}), \]
\[
\text{rp = new}(B_{\text{treeprod}}) \text{ in} \]
\[
\text{seq}(\text{send}(\text{lp}, \]
\[
\text{pr}(\text{left}(\text{tree}(m)), \text{newcust})), \]
\[
\text{send}(\text{rp}, \]
\[
\text{pr}(\text{right}(\text{tree}(m)), \text{newcust}))), \]
\[
\text{ready}(b))) \]
Join Continuation in AMST

\[ B_{\text{joincont}} = \lambda \text{cust.} \lambda \text{firstnum.} \text{ready}(\lambda \text{num.}
\quad \text{seq}(\text{send}(\text{cust}, \text{firstnum} \ast \text{num}),
\quad \text{ready}(\text{sink}))) \]
Sample Execution

(a) \( f(\text{tree}, \text{cust}) \)

(b) \( f(\text{left(tree)}, \text{JC}) \)  \( f(\text{right(tree)}, \text{JC}) \)
Sample Execution

\[ f(\text{left(tree)}, \text{JC}) \]

(c)

(d)
Sample Execution

(e)

(f)

num

JC

Cust

firstnum

Cust

firstnum * num

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module(treeprod).
-export([treeprod/0,join/1]).

treeprod() ->
    receive
        {{Left, Right}, Customer} ->
            NewCust = spawn(treeprod,join,[Customer]),
            LP = spawn(treeprod,treeprod,[]),
            RP = spawn(treeprod,treeprod,[]),
            LP!{Left,NewCust},
            RP!{Right,NewCust};
        {Number, Customer} ->
            Customer ! Number
    end,
    treeprod().

join(Customer) -> receive V1 -> receive V2 -> Customer ! V1*V2 end end.
2> TP = spawn(treeprod, treeprod, []).  
<0.40.0>
3> TP ! {{{{5,6},2},{3,4}},self()}.  
{{{{5,6},2},{3,4}},<0.33.0>}
4> flush().
Shell got 720
ok
5>
This code uses token-passing continuations (@,token), a join block (join), and a first-class continuation (currentContinuation).
Tree Product Tester

module treeprod;
import tree.Tree;

behavior TreeProductTester {
    void act(String[] args) {
        Tree t = new Tree(new Tree(new Tree(5, 6), new Tree(2)),
                          new Tree(3, 4));
        TreeProduct tp = new TreeProduct();
        tp <- compute(t) @ standardOutput <- println(token);
    }
}

Use as follows:
% javac tree/Tree.java
% salsac treeprod/*
% salsa treeprod/TreeProductTester
720
Summary

- Actors are concurrent entities that react to messages.
  - State is completely encapsulated. There is no shared memory!
  - Message passing is asynchronous.
  - Actor run-time has to ensure fairness.
- AMST extends the call by value lambda calculus with actor primitives. State is modeled as function arguments. Actors use `ready` to receive new messages.
- Erlang extends a functional programming language core with processes that run arbitrary functions. State is implicit in the function’s arguments. Control loop is explicit: actors use `receive` to get a message, and tail-form recursive call to continue.
- SALSA extends an object-oriented programming language (Java) with universal actors. State is encapsulated in instance variables. Control loop is implicit: ending a message handler, signals readiness to receive a new message.
41. Define pairing primitives (pr, 1st, 2nd) in the pure lambda calculus.

42. PDCS Exercise 4.6.1 (page 77).

43. Modify the treeprod behavior in Erlang to reuse the tree product actor to compute the product of the left subtree. (See PDCS page 63 for the corresponding tprod₂ behavior in AMST.)

44. PDCS Exercise 9.6.1 (page 203). Modify your code as in Exercise 43.

45. Create a concurrent fibonacci behavior in Erlang using join continuations, and in SALSA using a join block.