Communicating Scala Objects (2016 Revision)

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Abstract. In this paper we introduce the core features of CSO (Communicating Scala Objects) – a notationally convenient embedding of the essence of occam in a modern, generically typed, object-oriented programming language that is compiled to Java Virtual Machine (JVM) code. Initially inspired by an early release of JCSP, CSO goes beyond JCSP expressively in some respects, including the provision of a unitary extended rendezvous notation and appropriate treatment of subtype variance in channels and ports. Similarities with recent versions of JCSP include the treatment of channel ends (we call them ports) as parameterized types. Ports and channels may be transmitted on channels (including inter-JVM channels), provided that an obvious design rule – the ownership rule – is obeyed. Significant differences with recent versions of JCSP include a treatment of network termination that is significantly simpler than the “poisoning” approach (perhaps at the cost of reduced programming convenience), and the provision of a family of type-parameterized channel implementations with performance that obviates the need for the special-purpose scalar-typed channel implementations provided by JCSP. On standard benchmarks such as Commstime, CSO communication performance is close to or better than that of JCSP and Scala’s Actors library.

This revision uses CSO notation compatible with the 2016-17 variant of CSO, and so section 5.2 has been changed. It supersedes a previous revision of section 5 of the paper published in the conference proceedings.

Keywords. occam model, concurrency, Scala, JCSP.

Introduction

On the face of it the Java virtual machine (JVM) is a very attractive platform for realistic concurrent and distributed applications and systems. On the other hand, the warnings from at least parts of the “Java establishment” to neophyte Java programmers who think about using threads are clear:

If you can get away with it, avoid using threads. Threads can be difficult to use, and they make programs harder to debug.

It is our basic belief that extreme caution is warranted when designing and building multi-threaded applications. ... use of threads can be very deceptive ... in almost all cases they make debugging, testing, and maintenance vastly more difficult and sometimes impossible. Neither the training, experience, or actual practices of most
programmers, nor the tools we have to help us, are designed to cope with the non-determinism ... this is particularly true in Java ... we urge you to think twice about using threads in cases where they are not absolutely necessary ...[8]

But over the years JavaPP, JCSP, and CTJ [7,3,4,1,2] have demonstrated that the occam programming model can be used very effectively to provide an intellectually tractable discipline of concurrent Java programming that is harder to achieve by those who rely on the lower level, monitor-based, facilities provided by the Java language itself.

So in mid-2006, faced with teaching a new course on concurrent and distributed programming, and wanting to make it a practical course that was easily accessible to Java programmers, we decided that this was the way to go about it. We taught the first year of this course using a Java 1.5 library that bore a strong resemblance to the current JCSP library.†

Our students’ enthusiastic reaction to the occam model was as gratifying as their distaste for the notational weight of its embedding in Java was dismaying. Although we discussed designs for our concurrent programs using a CSP-like process-algebra notation and a simplified form of ECSP [5,6], the resulting coding gap appeared to be too much for most of the students to stomach.

At this point one of our visiting students introduced us to Scala [9], a modern object-oriented language that generates JVM code, has a more subtle generic type system than Java, and has other features that make it very easy to construct libraries that appear to be notational extensions.

After toying for a while with the idea of using Scala’s Actor library [12,14], we decided instead to develop a new Scala library to implement the occam model independently of existing Java libraries, and of Scala’s Actor library. Our principal aim was to have a self-contained library we could use to support subsequent delivery of our course (many of whose examples are toy programs designed to illustrate patterns of concurrency), but we also wanted to explore its suitability for structuring larger scale Scala programs.

This paper is an account of the most important features of the core of the Communicating Scala Objects (CSO) library that emerged. We have assumed some familiarity with the conceptual and notational basis of occam and JCSP, but only a little familiarity with Scala.

Readers familiar with JCSP and Scala may be able to get a quick initial impression of the relative notational weights of Scala+CSO and Java+JCSP by inspecting the definitions of FairPlex multiplexer components defined on pages 13 and 20 respectively.

1. Processes

A CSO process is a value with Scala type PROC and is what an experienced object oriented programmer would call a stereotype for a thread. When a process is started any fresh threads that are necessary for it to run are acquired from a pool; they are returned to the pool when the process terminates.4

1.1. Process notation

Processes ($p : \text{PROC}$) are first-class Scala values, denoted by one of the following forms of expression:

†Notes appear on page 20.
1. \textbf{proc} \{ \textit{expr} \}
   A simple process (\textit{expr} must be a command, \textit{i.e.} have type \texttt{Unit})

2. \textit{p}_1 \parallel \textit{p}_2 \parallel ... \parallel \textit{p}_n
   A parallel composition of \textit{n} processes (each \textit{p}_i must have type \texttt{PROC})

3. \textit{collection}
   Parallel composition of a finite collection of \texttt{PROC} values.
   When \textit{collection} comprises \textit{p}_1...\textit{p}_n this is equivalent to \textit{p}_1 \parallel \textit{p}_2 \parallel ... \parallel \textit{p}_n.

A frequently-occurring pattern of this latter form of composition is one in which the collection
is an iterated form, such as: || \((\texttt{for} \ (i \leftarrow 0 \ \text{until} \ n) \ \texttt{yield} \ \textit{p}(i))\). This form denotes a process
equivalent to: \textit{p}(0) \parallel \textit{p}(1) \parallel ... \parallel \textit{p}(n - 1),

1.2. Starting and running processes

If \textit{p} is a process, then evaluation of the expression \textit{p}() runs the process.\textsuperscript{5} The following cases
are distinguished:

1. \textit{p} is \textbf{proc} \{ \textit{expr} \}
   - \textit{p}() causes \{ \textit{expr} \} to be evaluated in the current thread (\textit{i.e.} the thread that started the
evaluation of \textit{p}()).
   - The process as a whole terminates when the evaluation of \{ \textit{expr} \} terminates or throws
an (uncaught) exception.
   - The behaviour of the expression \textit{p}() cannot be distinguished from that of the expression
\{ \textit{expr} \}.

2. \textit{p} is \textit{p}_1 \parallel \textit{p}_2 \parallel ... \parallel \textit{p}_n
   - \textit{p}() causes all the processes \textit{p}_1...\textit{p}_n to be run concurrently.
   - Each of the processes except one is run in a new thread of its own; the remaining
process is run in the current thread.
   - The process as a whole terminates only when every component \textit{p}_i has terminated.
   But if one or more of the components terminated by throwing an uncaught exception
then \textit{when and only when they have all terminated} these exceptions are bundled into a
\texttt{ParException} which is re-thrown, \textit{unless they are all subtypes of \texttt{cso Stop}}; in which case
a single \texttt{cso Stop} is thrown.\textsuperscript{6}

2. Ports and Channels

2.1. Introduction

Following ECSP [5,6], CSO ports (akin to JCSP channel ends) are generically parameterized,
and we define the abbreviations \texttt{?[T]} and \texttt{! [T]} respectively for \texttt{InPort[T]} and \texttt{OutPort[T]}.

The most important method of an \texttt{! [T]} is its write method

! (\texttt{value : T})

and the most frequently-used methods of an \texttt{?[T]} are its read method

? () : T
and its \textit{read and evaluate} method

\[
\text{?
} \ [\mathcal{U}] \ (f : T \Rightarrow \mathcal{U}) : \mathcal{U}
\]

The expression \(\text{port?}(f)\) has exactly the same effect as \(f(\text{port?}())\), namely to read a datum from \(\text{port}\) (waiting, if necessary, for one to become available) then apply the function \(f\) to it.

The type \text{Chan}[T] is the interface implemented by all channels that carry values of type \(T\): it is declared by:

\[
\text{trait Chan}[T] \ extends \ \text{InPort}[T] \ with \ \text{OutPort}[T] \ { \cdots }\]

This makes \text{Chan}[T] a subtype of both \text{InPort}[T] and \text{OutPort}[T]. It makes sense to think of a \text{Chan} as embodying both an \text{InPort} and an \text{OutPort}.

The implicit contract of every conventional \text{Chan} implementation is that it transmits the data written at its output port to its input port in the order in which the data is written. Different implementations have different synchronization behaviours and different restrictions on the numbers of processes that may access (\textit{i.e.} use the principal methods of) their ports at any time. Channels may be closed in various ways, in which case they (eventually or immediately) cease to transmit data: see section 4 for a fuller discussion of this.

The CSO core comes with several predefined channel implementations, the most notable of which for our present purposes are:

- The \textit{synchronous} channels. These all synchronize termination of the execution of a \texttt{!} at their output port with the termination of the execution of a corresponding \texttt{?} at their input port.\(^7\)
  - \texttt{OneOne}[T] – no more than one process at a time may write to its output port or read from its input port.\(^8\) This is the classic \texttt{occam}-style point to point channel. The channel stops transmitting data when it has been closed for output or closed for input.
  - \texttt{N2N}[T](\texttt{writers} : \text{Int}, \texttt{readers} : \text{Int}) – several different processes at a time may write to its (shared) output port and likewise several may read from its (shared) input port. Each value that is read is read by only one of the processes. The channel stops transmitting data when it has been closed for output \texttt{writers} times or closed for input \texttt{readers} times.

- The \textit{buffered} channels:
  - \texttt{OneOneBuf}[T](n) – a one-to-one buffer of capacity \(n\). It stops transmitting data when it has been closed for input, or when it has been closed for output and no longer has any buffered data available to input.
  - \texttt{N2NBuf}[T](n, \texttt{Int}, \texttt{writers} : \text{Int}, \texttt{readers} : \text{Int}) – a buffer of capacity \(n\). It stops transmitting data when it has been closed for input \texttt{readers} times, or when it has been closed for output \texttt{writers} times and no longer has any buffered data available to input.

Access restrictions are enforced by a combination of:

- Type constraints that permit sharing requirements to be enforced statically.
  - All output port implementations that support shared access have types that are subtypes of \texttt{SharedOutPort}.
  - All input port implementations that support shared access have types that are subtypes of \texttt{SharedInPort}.
  - All channel implementations that support shared access to both their ports have types that are subtypes of \texttt{SharedChannel}.
def producer(i: int, ![T]) : PROC = ···
def consumer(i: int, ?[T]) : PROC = ···
def mux[T] (ins: Seq[?T], out: ![([int, T])]) : PROC = ···
def dmux[T](in: ?([int, T]), outs: Seq ![T]) : PROC = ···

val left, right =
  for (- ← 0 until n) yield OneOne[T] // 2 arrays of n channels
val mid = OneOne[([int, T])] // a channel

(  || (for (i ← 0 until n) yield producer(i, left(i)))
  || mux(left, mid)
  || dmux(mid, right)
  || || (for (i ← 0 until n) yield consumer(i, right(i))) )()

Program 1. A network of producers connected to consumers by a multiplexed channel

* Abstractions that need to place sharing requirements on port or channel parameters do so by declaring them with the appropriate type.9

• Run-time checks that offer partial protection against deadlocks or data loss of the kind that can could otherwise happen if unshareable ports were inadvertently shared.

  * If a read is attempted from a channel with an unshared input port before an earlier read has terminated, then an illegal state exception is thrown.
  * If a write is attempted to a channel with an unshared output port before an earlier write has terminated, then an illegal state exception is thrown.

These run-time checks are limited in their effectiveness because it is might be possible for a single writer process to work fast enough to satisfy illegitimately sharing reader processes without being detected by the former check, and for the dual situation to remain undetected by the latter check.

2.2. Examples

In program 1 we show how to connect a sequence of n producers to a sequence of n consumers using a single multiplexed channel that carries values accompanied by the index of their producer to a demultiplexer that dispatches these values to the corresponding consumer. Readers familiar with JCSP may find it useful to compare this with the network illustrated in section 1.5 of [4].

As observed in that paper this isn’t the most efficient way of connecting the producers to the consumers within a single JVM; and in program 2 we show a network in which producers and consumers are connected directly.

The signatures of the components producer, consumer, mux, and dmux in programs 1 and 2 specify the types of port (channel end) they require; but the subtype relation between channels and ports means that when connecting these components we can simply provide the connecting channels as parameters, and that the components take the required views of them. This means we needn’t name the ports explicitly, and significantly reduces the degree of formal clutter in the network description.10
def producer(i: int, ![T]) : PROC = ... 
def consumer(i: int, ?[T]) : PROC = ... 

val con = for (i ← 0 until n) yield OneOne[T] 

( || (for (i←0 until n) yield producer(i, con(i))) 
|| || (for (i←0 until n) yield consumer(i, con(i))) 
)

Program 2. A network in which producers are connected directly to consumers

def mux1[T] (ins : Seq[?T], out : ![Int, T]) : PROC = 
{ val mid = N2N[(Int, T)](0, 1) // Many writers; one reader 
  proc { 
  while(true) { out!(mid?) } } || 
  || (for (i←0 until ins.length) yield 
  proc { 
  while(true) ins(i) ? { v ⇒ mid!(i, v) } }) 
}

def mux2[T] (ins : Seq[?T], out : SharedOutPort[(Int, T)]) : PROC = 
|| (for (i←0 until ins.length) yield 
  proc { 
  while(true) { out!(i, ins(i)?) } }) 

def dmux[T](in : ![Int, T], outs : Seq[![T]]) : PROC = proc { 
  while (true) { 
  val (n, v) = in?(); outs(n)!v 
  } 
}

Program 3. Two multiplexers and a demultiplexer

In program 3 we show how to implement two (unfair) multiplexers and a demultiplexer of
the kind that might have been used in program 1.11

A multiplexer process generated by mux1 is the concurrent composition of a collection
of “labelling” processes, each of which outputs labelled copies of its input, via an N2N[(Int,T)]
channel, to a forwarding process that writes them to the out port. The forwarding process
is necessary because the type-signature of mux1 does not constrain the kind of port that is
passed to it as a parameter, so in programming mux1 we must assume that the port is not
shareable.

On the other hand, mux2 requires that its out parameter is shareable, so it composes a collection
of labelling processes that write directly to out.

The function dmux generates demultiplexer processes that forward labelled inputs to the appropriate output ports.

3. Extended Rendezvous

3.1. Introduction

As we explained earlier, the synchronous channel implementations ensure that termination of
a write (!) at their output port is synchronized with the termination of the corresponding read
 (?) at their input port. Although a standard read (or read-and-evaluate) terminates once the data is transferred between the writer and the reader process, an extended rendezvous read specifies that a computation on the transferred data is to take place in the reader process. It is only when this computation terminates that the read is considered to have terminated and the writing process is permitted to proceed.

The usual form of an extended rendezvous read from \( \text{in: } ?[T] \) is

\[
\text{in } ?? \{ \text{ bv } \Rightarrow \text{ body } \}
\]

It is evaluated by transferring a value, \( v \), from the process at the output end of the channel (if necessary waiting for one to become ready), then applying the (anonymous) function \( \{ \text{ bv } \Rightarrow \text{ body } \} \) to \( v \). The read is considered to have terminated when this application has been completely evaluated. At this point the writing process is permitted to proceed and the result of the application is returned from the read.

### 3.2. Example: monitoring interprocess traffic

An easily understood rationale for extended rendezvous is given in [3]. We are asked to consider how to monitor the interprocess traffic between a producer process connected to a consumer process via a simple channel without interfering with producer-consumer synchronization. We want to construct a process that is equivalent to

\[
\{ \text{ val mid = OneOne}[T] \\
\quad \text{producer(mid) } \mid \mid \text{ consumer(mid) } \}
\]

but which also copies traffic on mid to a monitor process of some kind.

A first approximation to such a process is

\[
\{ \text{ val left, mon, right = OneOne}[T] \\
\quad ( \text{ producer(left) } \\
\quad \mid \mid \text{ proc } \{ \text{ repeat } \{ \text{ val v = left?; mon!v; right!v } \} \\
\quad \mid \mid \text{ consumer(right) } \\
\quad \mid \mid \text{ monitor(mon) } \\
\quad \} ) \\
\}
\]

But this interferes with producer-consumer synchronization, because once \( \text{left?} \) has been executed, \( \text{producer} \) is free to proceed. More specifically, it is free to proceed before \( \text{consumer} \) reads from \( \text{right} \). If the context in which this network of process runs is tolerant of an additional degree of buffering this is not problematic; but if it is not, then we need to be able to synchronize the read from \( \text{right} \) with the write to \( \text{left} \).

The problem is solved by replacing the body of the copying process

\[
\{ \text{ val v = left?; mon!v; right!v } \}
\]

with a body in which the outputs to \( \text{mon} \) and \( \text{right} \) are part of an extended rendezvous with the producing process, namely:

\[
\{ \text{left ?? } \{ \text{v } \Rightarrow \{\text{mon!v; right!v}\} \} \}
\]
The extended rendezvous is executed by reading a value from `left`, then applying the function `{ v ⇒ {mon!v; right!v} }` to it. Termination of the write to `left` is synchronized with termination of the evaluation of the function body, so the producer writing to `left` cannot proceed until the consumer has read from `right`.

The extended rendezvous doesn’t terminate until `(mon!v; right!v)` has terminated, but delays the output to `right` until the output to `mon` has terminated. The following reformulation relaxes the latter constraint, thereby removing a potential source of deadlock:

```
{ left ?? { v ⇒ { (proc{mon!v} || proc{right!v})() } } }
```

It is a simple matter to abstract this into a reusable component:

```
def tap[T](in: ?[T], out: ![T], mon: ![T]) =
  proc {
    repeat { in ? { v ⇒ { (proc{mon!v} || proc{out!v})() } } } }
```

### 3.3. Example: simplifying the implementation of synchronous inter-JVM channels

Extended rendezvous could also be used to good effect in the implementation of synchronized inter-JVM or cross-network connections, where it can keep the overt intricacy of the code manageable. Here we illustrate the essence of the implementation technique, which employs the two “network adapter” processes.

```scala
def copyToNet[T](in: ?[T], net: ![T], ack: ?[Unit]) =
  proc {
    repeat { in ?? { v ⇒ { net!v; ack?() } } } }
```

and

```scala
def copyFromNet[T](net: ?[T], ack: ![Unit], out: ![T]) =
  proc {
    repeat { out!(net?()); ack!() } }
```

The effect of using the extended rendezvous in `copyToNet` is to synchronize the termination of a write to `in` with the reception of the acknowledgement from the network that the value written has been transmitted to `out`.

At the producer end of the connection, we set up a bidirectional network connection that transmits data and receives acknowledgements. Then we connect the producer to the network via the adapter:

```scala
def producer(out: ![T]) = ···
val (toNet, fromNet): (![T], ?[Unit]) = ···
val left = OneOne[T]
  ( producer(left) || copyToNet(left, toNet, fromNet) )()
```

At the consumer end the dual setup is employed

```scala
def consumer(in: ?[T]) = ···
val (toNet, fromNet): (![Unit], ?[T]) = ···
val right = OneOne[T]
  ( copyFromNet(fromNet, toNet, right) || consumer(right) )()
```
4. Closing Ports and Channels (clean termination)

4.1. Introduction

A port may be *closed* at any time, *including after it has been closed*. The trait `InPort` has method

```
closeIn: Unit
```

whose invocation embodies a promise *on the part of its invoking thread* never again to read from that port. Once it has been invoked, the method `canInput` will always yield false for that port. Similarly, the trait `OutPort` has method

```
closeOut: Unit
```

whose invocation embodies a promise *on the part of its invoking thread* never again to write to that port. Once it has been invoked, the method `canOutput` will always yield false for that port.

It can sometimes be appropriate to *forbid* a channel to be used for further communication, and the `Chan` trait has an additional method for that purpose, namely:

```
close: Unit
```

The important design questions that must be considered are:

1. What happens to a process that attempts, or is attempting, to communicate through a port whose peer port is closed, or which closes during the attempt?
2. What does it mean to close a *shared* port?

Our design can be summarised concisely; but we must first explain what it means for a channel to be closed:

*Definition:* A channel is *closed* if it has been closed by enough calls of `closeOut` at its `OutPort` or by enough calls of `closeIn` at its `InPort`, or by a call of its close method.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel type</th>
<th>Enough closeOut</th>
<th>Enough closeIn</th>
<th>Close takes effect on readers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OneOne</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>immediately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OneOneBuf(n)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>immediately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N2N(writers, readers)</td>
<td>writers</td>
<td>readers</td>
<td>immediately when drained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N2NBuf(n, writers, readers)</td>
<td>writers</td>
<td>readers</td>
<td>immediately when drained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ManyOne</td>
<td>∞</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>immediately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OneMany</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>∞</td>
<td>immediately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ManyMany</td>
<td>∞</td>
<td>∞</td>
<td>never</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above summarises what we mean by “enough” – using the notation `num` to mean `∞` when `num = 0` and `num` otherwise. For example an N2N channel specified with `writers > 0`, and `readers > 0` closes after either `writers closeOut` calls or `readers closeIn` calls; but if `writers = 0` then any number of calls of `closeOut` can be made without the channel closing.
def copy[T](in: ?[T], out: ![T]) = 
proc {
  repeat { out !(in?) } // copying
  (proc { out.closeOut } || proc { in.closeIn })() // close-down
}

Program 4. A terminating copy component

and if readers = 0 then any number of calls of closeIn can be made without the channel closing.

The rationale for this is that shared ports are used as "meeting points" for senders and receivers, and that the fact that one sender or receiver has undertaken never to communicate should not necessarily result in the right to do so being denied to others.\textsuperscript{13}

The effects of closing ports and/or channels now can be summarised as follows:

- **Writer behaviour**
  1. An attempt to write to a closed channel raises the exception Closed in the writing thread.
  2. Closing a channel whose OutPort is waiting in a write raises the exception Closed in the writing thread.

- **Reader behaviour**
  1. An attempt to read from a closed channel raises the exception Closed in the reading thread. If the channel is buffered then this exception is raised only once the last remaining buffered value has been read.
  2. Closing a channel whose InPort is waiting in a read raises the exception Closed in the reading thread.

### 4.2. Termination of networks and components

The Closed exception is one of a family of runtime exceptions, the Stop exceptions, that play a special role in ensuring the clean termination of networks of communicating processes.

The form \( \texttt{repeat} \{ \text{expr} \}_\text{guard} \{ \text{expr} \}_\text{body} \) behaves the same as \( \texttt{while} \{ \text{expr} \}_\text{guard} \{ \text{expr} \}_\text{body} \) except that the raising of a Stop exception during the execution of the \( \text{expr} \)_\text{body} causes it to terminate normally. The form \( \texttt{repeat} \{ \text{expr} \}_\text{body} \) is equivalent to \( \texttt{repeat} \{ \text{true} \} \{ \text{expr} \}_\text{body} \).

The behaviour of \( \texttt{repeat} \) simplifies the description of cleanly-terminating iterative components that are destined to be part of a network. For example, consider the copy component of program 4, which has an iterative copying phase followed by a close-down phase. It is evident that the copying phase terminates if the channel connected to the input port is closed before that connected to the output port. Likewise, if the channel connected to the output port is closed before (or within) a write operation that is attempting to copy a recently-read datum. In either case the component moves into its close-down phase, and this results in one of the channels being closed again while the other is closed anew. In nearly all situations this behaviour is satisfactory, but it is worth noticing that it can result in a datum being silently lost (in the implicit buffer between the in? and the out!) when a network is closed from “downstream”.\textsuperscript{14}

In section 1.2 we explained that on termination of all the components of a concurrent process: (a) if they all terminated normally then the concurrent process itself terminates normally; (b) if all components that terminated abnormally terminated with a Stop exception then the con-
current process itself terminates by throwing a Stop exception; (c) otherwise the concurrent
process terminates by throwing a ParException.

One consequence of (b) is that it is relatively simple to arrange to reach the closedown phase
of an iterated component that does concurrent reads and/or writes. For example, the tee com-
ponent below broadcasts data from its input port to all its output ports concurrently: if the
input port closes, or if any output port is closed before or during a broadcast, then the com-
ponent stops broadcasting and closes all its ports.

```scala
def tee[T](i n: ?[T], outs: Seq[!T]) =
    proc {
        var data = in · nothing // unspecified initial value
        val broadcast = ||
            for (out ← outs)
                yield proc {
                    out ! data
                }
        repeat {
            in ?? { d ⇒ {
                data = d;
                broadcast() } } } || in · closeIn ) ()

        (|| (for (out ← outs)
                yield proc {
                    out · closeOut
                }) || in · closeIn ) ()
    }
```

This is because closing in results in a Closed exception being thrown at the next in??; and
because closing an output port causes the corresponding out!data to terminate by throwing a
Closed, which is propagated in turn by the || when it terminates.15

Careful programming of the closedown phases of communicating components is needed in
order to assure the clean termination of networks of interconnected processes, and this is
facilitated by the Stop-rethrowing behaviour of ||, and the behaviour of repeat when its body
Stops.

5. Alternation

5.1. Introduction

Alternation constructs enable an input or output action to be performed after being selected
from those that are ready on one or more channels. The simplest form of an alt consists of a
collection of guarded events:16

```
alt ( (guard₃ && port₃) =?:> { bv₃ => cmd₃ } )
| ... 
| (guardₙ && portₙ) =?:> { bvₙ => cmdₙ }
```

An event of the form (guard & port) =?:> { bv => cmd }

- is said to be enabled, if port is open and guard evaluates to true
- is said to be ready if port is ready to read
- is fired by reading port, binding the value read to bv and then executing cmd.

The execution of an alt proceeds in principle17 in phases as follows:

1. All the event guards are evaluated, and then
2. The current thread waits until (at least one) enabled event is ready, and then
3. One of the ready events is chosen and fired.
If no events are enabled after phase 1, or if all the channels associated with the ports close while waiting in phase 2, then the **Abort** exception (which is also a form of **Stop** exception) is raised.

If `evs` is a collection of guarded events, then `serve(evs)` executes these phases repeatedly (until a **Stop** exception is thrown), but the choices made in phase 3 are made in such a way that if the same group of guards turn out to be ready during successive executions, they will be fired in turn.

For example, the method `tagger` below constructs a tagging multiplexer that ensures that neither of its input channels gets too far ahead of the other. The tagger terminates cleanly when its output port is closed, or if both its input channels have been closed.

```scala
def tagger[T](l: ?[T], r: ?[T], out: !(Int, T)) =
proc {
  var diff = 0
  serve {
    (diff < 5 && l) =? { x ⇒ out!(0, x); diff+=1 }
    | (diff > -5 && r) =? { x ⇒ out!(1, x); diff-=1 }
  }
  repeat { out!(0, l?()) }
  repeat { out!(1, r?()) }
  l.closeIn; r.closeIn; out.closeOut
}
```

Notice that the `serve` will also terminate if the “wrong” channel closes (for example `l` if `diff < 5`); but following such termination at most one of the subsequent `repeats` (the “right” one) can perform a successful read and write.

A **prialt** is formed in the same way as an **alt**, and is executed in nearly the same way, but the choice of which among several ready guards to fire always favours the earliest in the sequence. A **priserve** repeats a **prialt**.

### 5.2. Output-guarded events

In late 2008 the **outport guard** notation was added to CSO. Its simplest form is exemplified in the following implementation of a merging component that buffers no more than 20 inputs tagged with sequence numbers, and outputs them when there is demand from `out`.

```scala
def taggedMerge[T](l: ?[T], r: ?[T], out: !(Int, T)) =
proc {
  var seqn = 0 // sequence number
  var nbuf = 0 // number buffered
  val q = scala.collection.mutable.Queue[(Int, Int, T)]
  serve {
    (nbuf<20 && l) =? { x ⇒ q.enqueue((seqn+=1, 0, x)); nbuf+=1; }
    | (nbuf<20 && r) =? { x ⇒ q.enqueue((seqn+=1, 1, x)); nbuf+=1; }
    | (nbuf>0 && out) !=! { nbuf-=1; q.dequeue }
  }
  (proc {l.closeIn} || proc {r.closeIn} || proc {out.closeOut})()
}
```

The most general form of output-guarded event is

```
(guard&&port) =!> { expression } =>> { cmd }
```
It is ready if its guard is true and port is ready to be written. It is fired by evaluating expression (which can be a sequential composition) and writing its value (v, say) to port.\(^{18}\) When it has been written cmd (known as the epilogue) is executed.\(^{19}\)

If there is no need for an epilogue, the event can be written:

\[
(guard\&\&port) =!=> \{ \text{expression} \}
\]

The final guard of the taggedMerge serve loop could have been written with an epilogue, by doing the buffer-size accounting after the dequeued datum has been transmitted.

\[
| (\text{dbuf}\geq 0 \&\& \text{out}) =!=> \{ \text{q.dequeue} \} =!=> \{ \text{dbuf} = 1; \}
\]

5.3. Collections of guards

Alternations can be composed of collections of guards, as illustrated by the fair multiplexer defined below.\(^{20}\)

\[
\begin{align*}
def \text{fairPlex}[T](\text{ins}: \text{Seq}[?\[T]\], \text{out}: ![T]) &= \\
&\quad \text{proc} \{ \text{serve} (| (\text{for} (\text{in} \leftarrow \text{ins}) \text{yield} \text{in} =?\Rightarrow \{ \text{t} \Rightarrow \text{out}!\text{t} \}))) \}
\end{align*}
\]

They can also be composed by combining collections and single guards. For example, the following is an extract from a multiplexer than can be dynamically set to favour a specific range of its input ports. It gives priority to its range-setting channels.

\[
\begin{align*}
def \text{primux}[T](\text{MIN}: ?[\text{Int}], \text{MAX}: ?[\text{Int}], \text{ins}: \text{Seq}[?\[T]\], \text{out}: ![T]) &= \\
&\quad \text{proc} \{ \text{var} \text{max} = \text{ins}.\text{length} - 1 \} \\
&\quad \text{priserve} (| \text{MIN} =?\Rightarrow \{ \text{n} \Rightarrow \text{min} = \text{n} \}) \\
&\quad | \text{MAX} =?\Rightarrow \{ \text{n} \Rightarrow \text{max} = \text{n} \}) \\
&\quad | (\text{for} (\text{i} \leftarrow 0 \text{until} \text{ins}.\text{length}) \text{yield} \\
&\quad \quad (\text{max}\geq\text{i} \&\& \text{i}\geq\text{min} \&\& \text{ins}(\text{i})) =?\Rightarrow \{ \text{t} \Rightarrow \text{out}!\text{t} \})
\end{align*}
\]

5.4. Timed Alternation

An alternation may be qualified with a deadline and code to be executed in case of a timeout.\(^{21}\) We illustrate this feature with an extended example that defines the transmitter and receiver ends of an inter-JVM buffer that piggybacks “heartbeat” confirmation to the receiving end that the transmitting end is still alive.

First we define a Scala type Message whose values are of one of the forms Ping or Data(v).

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{trait Message} \\
\text{case object Ping} &\quad \text{extends Message} \{ \} \\
\text{case class Data}[T](\text{data}: T) &\quad \text{extends Message} \{ \}
\end{align*}
\]

The transmitter end repeatedly forwards data received from in to out, but intercalates Ping messages whenever it has not received anything for pulse nanoseconds.\(^{22}\)
def transmitter[T](pulse: long, in: ?[T], out: ![Message]) =
  proc
  { serve (in =?= { x ⇒ out! Data(x) } | after(pulse) ⇒ { out! Ping } ) }

The receiver end (whose deadline should be somewhat larger than the transmitter’s pulse) repeatedly reads from in, discarding Ping messages and forwarding ordinary data to out. If (in each iteration) a message has not been received before the current deadline, the receiver backs off a little more, but eventually a message is sent to the fail channel.

def receiver[T](pulse: long, in: ?[Message], out: ![T], fail: ![Unit]) =
  proc
  { var backoff = 10
    serve (in =?= { case Ping ⇒ backoff = (backoff+1) % 10
                     case Data(d:T) ⇒ out! d; backoff = (backoff+1) % 10
                     } | after(pulse+pulse / backoff) ⇒
          { if (backoff==1) fail!() else backoff -=1 } )
  }

Though timeout is cheap and safe to implement, the technique used above may not be suitable for use in components where there is a need for more subtle interplay between timing and channel input. But such components can always be constructed (and in a way that may be more familiar to occam programmers) by using periodic timers, such as the simple one shown in program 6.

For example, program 5 shows the definition of an alternative transmitter component that “pings” if the periodic timer ticks twice without an intervening input becoming available from in, and “pongs” every two seconds regardless of what else happens.

```
def transmitter2[T](pulse: long, in: ?[T], out: ![Message]) =
  proc
  { val tick = periodicTimer(pulse)
    val tock = periodicTimer(2*Sec)
    var ticks = 0
    priserve ( tock =?= { case () ⇒ out! Pong }
            | in =?= { case t ⇒ out! Data(t); ticks = 0 }
            | tick =?= { case () ⇒ ticks +=1; if (ticks >1) out! Ping }
      )
    tick . close
    tock . close
  }
```

Program 5. A conventionally-programmed transmitter

In the periodic timer of program 6 the fork method of a process is used to start a new thread that runs concurrently with the current thread and periodically writes to the channel whose input port represents the timer. Closing the input port terminates the repeat the next time the interval expires, and thereby terminates the thread.

5.5. Restrictions on alternation

For reasons of efficiency and to keep implementations simple at most one port of a channel may participate in an alternation construct at any one time.23
6. Port Type Variance

As we have seen, port types are parameterized by the types of value that are expected to be read from (written to) them. In contrast to Java, in which all parameterized type constructors are covariant in their parameter types, Scala lets us specify the variance of the port type constructors precisely. Below we argue that the InPort constructor should be covariant in its type parameter, and the OutPort constructor contravariant in its type parameter. In other words:

1. If \( T' \) is a subtype of \( T \), then a \(?[T] \) will suffice in a context that requires a \(?[T'] \); but not \( \text{vice-versa} \).
2. If \( T' \) is a subtype of \( T \), then a \(![T] \) will suffice in a context that requires a \(![T'] \); but not \( \text{vice-versa} \).

Our argument is, in effect, by contradiction. To take a concrete example, suppose that we have an interface Printer which has subtype BonjourPrinter that has an additional method, bonjour.

Suppose also that we have process generators:

```scala
def printServer (printers: ![Printer]) : PROC = ...
def bonjourClient(printers: ?[BonjourPrinter]) : PROC = ...
```

Then under the uniformly covariant regime of Java the following program would be type valid, but it would be unsound:

```scala
val connector = new OneOne[Bon jourP rint er](printServer(connector) || bonjourClient(connector))()
```

The problem is that the server could legitimately write a non-bonjour printer that would be of little use to a client that expects to read and use bonjour printers. This would, of course, be trapped as a runtime error by the JVM, but it is, surely, bad engineering practice to rely on this lifeboat if we can avoid launching a doomed ship in the first place! And we can: for under CSO’s contravariant typing of outports, the type of connector is no longer a subtype of \([![Printer])\], and the expression printServer(connector) would, therefore, be ill-typed.

7. Performance (written in 2008)

The Commstime benchmark has been used as a measure of communication and thread context-swap efficiency for a number of implementations of occam and occam-like languages and library packages. Its core consists of a cyclic network of three processes around which an integer value, initially zero, is circulated. On each cycle the integer is replaced by

```scala
def periodicTimer(interval: Long) : ?[Unit] =
{ val chan = OneOne[Unit]
  proc { repeat { sleep(interval); chan!() } } . fork
  return chan
}
```

Program 6. A simple periodic timer
its successor, and output to a fourth process, Consumer, that reads integers in batches of ten thousand, and records the time per cycle averaged over each batch.

The network is shown diagrammatically in figure 1. Its core components are defined (in two variants) with CSO in program 7, and with Actors in program 8. The SeqCommstime variant writes to Succ and Consumer sequentially. The ParCommstime variant writes to Consumer and Succ concurrently, thereby providing a useful measure of the overhead of starting the additional thread per cycle needed to implement ParDelta.

In table 1 we present the results of running the benchmark for the current releases of Scala Actors, CSO and JCSP using the latest available Sun JVM on each of a range of host types. The JCSP code we used is a direct analogue of the CSO code: it uses the specialized integer channels provided by the JCSP library. Each entry shows the range of average times per cycle over 10 runs of 10k cycles each.\(^\text{25}\)

7.1. Performance Analysis: CSO v. JCSP

It is worth noting that communication performance of CSO is sufficiently close to that of JCSP that there can be no substantial performance disadvantage to using completely generic

---

**Program 7.** Parallel and Sequential variants of the Commtime network defined with CSO

```scala
val a, b, c, d = OneOne[int]
val Prefix = proc { a!0; repeat { a!(b?) } }
val Succ = proc { repeat { b!((c+1)?) } }
val SeqDelta = proc { repeat { var n=a?; c!n; d!n } }
val SeqCommstime = (Prefix || SeqDelta || Succ || Consumer)
val ParDelta = proc { var n = a?;
  val out = proc{c!n} || proc{d!n}
  repeat { out(); n=a? } }
val ParCommstime = (Prefix || ParDelta || Succ || Consumer)
```

**Program 8.** The Commtime network defined with Actors

```scala
type Node = OutputChannel[int]
val Succ : Node = actor { loop { receive { case n:int ⇒ Prefix!(1+n) } } }
val Prefix : Node = actor { Delta!(0); loop { receive { case n:int ⇒ Delta!n } } }
val Delta : Node = actor { loop { receive { case n:int ⇒ {Succ!n; Consumer!n} } } }
```

---

**Figure 1.** The Commtime network
It is also worth noting that process startup overhead of CSO is somewhat higher than that of JCSP. This may well reflect the fact that the JCSP Parallel construct caches the threads used in its first execution, whereas the analogous CSO construct re-acquires threads from its pool on every execution of the parallel construct.

7.2. Performance Analysis: Actors v. Buffered CSO

At first sight it appears that performance of the Actors code is better than that of CSO and JCSP: but this probably reflects the fact that Actors communications are buffered, and communication does not force a context switch. So in order to make a like-for-like comparison of the relative communication efficiency of the Actors and CSO libraries we ran a modified benchmark in which the CSO channels are 4-buffered, and 4 zeros are injected into the network by Prefix to start off each batch. The CSO modifications were to the channel declarations and to Prefix – as shown in program 9; the Actors version of Prefix was modified analogously. The results of running the modified benchmark are provided in table 2.
8. Prospects

We remain committed to the challenge of developing Scala+CSO both as a pedagogical tool and in the implementation of realistic and efficient programs. Several small-scale and a few medium-scale case studies on networked multicore machines have given us some confidence that our implementation is sound, though we have neither proofs of this nor a body of successful (i.e. non-failed) model checks. The techniques pioneered by Welch and Martin in [10] show the way this could be done.

The open nature of the Scala compiler permits, at least in principle, a variety of compile-time checks on a range of design rules to be enforced. It remains to be seen whether there are any combinations of expressively useful Scala sublanguage and “CSO design rule” that are worth taking the trouble to enforce. We have started our search with an open mind but in some trepidation that the plethora of possibilities for aliasing might render it fruitless – save as an exercise in theory.

Over the last few years Andrew Bate has implemented a very high performance variant of CSO and has contributed much to the utility and prospects of CSO. We are actively (though not very quickly) working on making Andrew’s dialect and the dialect described here compatible at the source-code level.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Peter Welch, Gerald Hilderink and their collaborators whose early demonstration of the feasibility of using occam-like concurrency in a Java-like language inspired us in the first place. Also to Martin Odersky and his collaborators in the design and implementation of the Scala language.

Several of our students on the Concurrent and Distributed Programming course at Oxford helped us by testing the present work and by questioning the work that preceded and precipitated it. Itay Neeman drew Scala to our attention and participated in the implementation of a prototype of CSO. Dalizo Zuse and Xie He helped us refine our ideas by building families of Web-servers – using a JCSP-like library and the CSO prototype respectively.

Our colleagues Michael Goldsmith and Gavin Lowe (and more recently Andrew Bate) have been a constant source of technical advice and friendly skepticism; and Quentin Miller joined us in research that led to the design and prototype implementation of ECSP [5,6].

The anonymous referees’ comments on the first draft of this paper were both challenging and constructive; we are grateful for their help.

Last, but not least, we are grateful to Carsten Heinz and his collaborators for their powerful and versatile LaTeX listings package [15].
Appendix: Thumbnail Scala and the Coding of CSO

In many respects Scala is a conventional object oriented language semantically very similar to Java, though notationally somewhat different.\textsuperscript{27} It has a number of features that have led some to describe it as a \textit{hybrid} functional and object-oriented language, notably

- \textit{Case classes} make it easy to represent free datatypes and to program with them.
- \textit{Functions are first-class values}. The type expression \(T \Rightarrow U\) denotes the type of functions that map values of type \(T\) into values of type \(U\). One way of denoting such a function anonymously is \{ \textit{bv} \Rightarrow \textit{body} \} (providing \textit{body} has type \(U\)).\textsuperscript{28}

The principal novel features of Scala we used in making CSO notationally palatable were:

- \textit{Syntactic extensibility}: objects may have methods whose names are symbolic operators; and an object with an apply method may be “applied” to an argument as if it were a function.
- \textit{Call by Name}: a Scala function or method may have one or more parameters of type \(\Rightarrow T\), in which case they are given “call by name” semantics and the actual parameter expression is evaluated anew whenever the formal parameter name is mentioned.
- \textit{Code blocks}: an expression of the form \{\ldots\} may appear as the actual parameter corresponding to a formal parameter of type \(\Rightarrow T\).

The following extracts from the CSO implementation show these features used in the implementation of unguarded repetition and \texttt{proc}.

```scala
// From the CSO module: implementing unguarded repetition
def repeat (cmd : \Rightarrow Unit) : Unit =
{ var go = true;
  while (go) try { cmd }
  catch { case ox\cdot cso\cdot Stop(-,-) ⇒ go=false }
}

// From the CSO module: definition of proc syntax
def proc (body : \Rightarrow Unit) : PROC =
new Process (null) ( ( ) ⇒ body )
```

Implementation of the guarded event notation of section 5 is more complex. For example, the formation of an input event from the Scala expression \((\text{guard}\&\&\text{port})=?=\Rightarrow \text{rhs}\) takes place in two stages: first the evaluation of \((\text{guard}\&\&\text{port})\) yields an intermediate \texttt{GuardedInPort} object, \textit{ev}; then the evaluation of \textit{ev}=?=\Rightarrow \texttt{rhs} yields the \texttt{InPortEvent} that will be a candidate for selection and execution. An unguarded event is constructed as an \texttt{InPortEvent} in a simple step.
Appendix: JCSP Fair Multiplexer

Program 10 shows the JCSP implementation of a fair multiplexer component (taken from [3]) for comparison with the CSO implementation of the component with the same functionality in section 5.3.

```java
public final class FairPlex implements CSProcess {
    private final AltingChannelInput[] in;
    private final ChannelOutput out;
    public FairPlex ( AltingChannelInput[] in , ChannelOutput out ) {
        this.in = in ;
        this.out = out ;
    }
    public void run () {
        final Alternative alt = new Alternative ( in ) ;
        while ( true ) {
            final int i = alt.fairSelect () ;
            out.write ( in[i].read () ) ;
        }
    }
}
```

Program 10. Fair Multiplexer Component using JCSP

Notes

[1] This was derived from an earlier library, written in Generic Java, whose development had been inspired by the appearance of the first public edition of JCSP. The principal differences between that library and the JCSP library were the generically parameterized interfaces, InPort and OutPort akin to modern JCSP channel ends.

[2] Although Scala interoperates with Java, and we could easily have constructed Scala “wrappers” for the JCSP library and for our own derivative library, we wanted to have a pure Scala implementation both to use as part of our instructional material, and to ensure portability to the .NET platform when the Scala .NET compiler became available.

[3] The (admirably ingenious) Actor library implementation is complicated; its performance appears to scale well only for certain styles of use; and it depends for correct functioning on a global timestamp ([14] p183).

[4] The present pool implementation acquires new worker threads from the underlying JVM when necessary and “retires” threads that have remained dormant in the pool for more than a certain period.

[5] The expression run(p) has exactly the same effect as p(). The expression fork(p) runs p in a new thread concurrent with the thread that invoked fork, and returns a handle on the running process. The new thread is recycled when the process terminates.

[6] This is because cso.Stop exceptions signify anticipated failure, whereas other types of exception signify unexpected failure, and must be propagated rather than silently ignored. One useful consequence of the special treatment of cso.Stop exceptions is explained in section 4: Closing Ports and Channels.

[7] Other forms of synchronous channel, mostly now obsolete, are:

- ManyOne[T] – No more than one process at a time may access its input port; processes attempting to access its output port get access in nondeterministic order. The name is a contraction of “From Many possible writer processes to One reader process.” The other forms of synchronous channel are named using the same contraction convention.
- OneMany[T] – No more than one process at a time may access its output port; processes attempting to access its input port get access in nondeterministic order.
- ManyMany[T] – Any number of processes may attempt to access either port. Writing processes get access in nondeterministic order, as do reading processes.
The name is a contraction of “From One writer process to One reader process.”

See, for example, the component `mux2` defined in program 3.

The reduction of formal clutter comes at the cost of forcing readers to refer back to the component signatures to ascertain which ports they actually use. The JCSP designers made the tradeoff in the other direction.

We have used the plain form of read `(mid?)()` and its read-and-evaluate form `(ins(i)?v ⇒ mid!(i, v))` simply to give an example of the latter.

The most general form of extended rendezvous read is `in??f` where `f` denotes a function of type `T⇒U`. The type of `in??f` is then `U`.

This is a deliberate choice, designed to keep shared channel semantics simple. More complex channel-like abstractions – such as one in which a non-shared end is informed when all subscribers to the shared end have disappeared – can always be layered on top of it.

*i.e.* from the `out` direction. On the face of it it looks like this could be avoided by reprogramming the component with a stronger guard to the iteration, viz as: `repeat (out·canOutput) { out!(in?) }` but this is not so, because the `out·canOutput` test and the `out!` action are not joined atomically, so the channel associated with the output port could be closed between being polled in the guard and being written to in the body of the loop.

Although it is incidental to the theme of this example, it is worth noticing that we construct the concurrent process `broadcast` before starting the iteration. While this is not strictly necessary, it provides an improvement in efficiency over: `repeat { in ? { d ⇒ {|| (for (out←outs) yield proc { out!d })() } } }`. This is because the expression: `||(for (out←outs) ... )` that constructs the concurrent broadcast process is evaluated only once, rather than being evaluated once per broadcast.

Guard expressions must be free of side-effects, and a `(guard)` that is literally `(true)` may be omitted.

We say “in principle” because we wish to retain the freedom to use a much more efficient implementation than is described here, namely an adaptation of that described in [13].

An early version of CSO provided an even more general form, in which the epilogue was a function, and the value of the expression was passed to this function once it had been transmitted. This proved incompatible with the Scala type system.

The operator `⇒` that introduces the epilogue is pronounced “and then”.

It is perhaps worthwhile comparing this construction with that of the analogous JCSP component shown in program 10 (page 20).

The implementation of this feature employs a nonzero timeout for the wait in phase 2, and is not subject to any potential race conditions.

Nanosecond is now the unit of resolution of CSO time. It’s not yet realistic to measure delays or timeouts in small numbers of nanoseconds, so appropriate multipliers, such as `microSec`, `milliSec`, `Sec`, `Min`, `Hour`, `Day` are provided as part of the CSO package.

Gavin Lowe [16] worked with an earlier version of CSO to remove this restriction.

This difficulty is analogous to the well-known difficulty in Java caused by the covariance of the array constructor.

(Note added in 2014) improvements in the JV and Scala compilation techniques mean that these figures are on the high side – even on identical machines. What’s more, the release of CSO that is being prepared as this revision is being written performs dramatically better than this.

This result reinforces our feeling that the only solution of the scaleability problem addressed by the Actors library is a reduction in the cost of “principled” threading. We are convinced that this reduction could be achieved by (re-)introducing a form of lighter-weight (green) threads, and by providing OS-kernel/JVM collaboration for processor-scheduling.

The main distributed Scala implementation translates directly into the JVM; though another compiler translates into the .net CLR. The existence of the latter compiler encouraged us to build a pure Scala CSO library rather than simply providing wrappers for the longer-established JCSP library.
In some contexts fuller type information has to be given, as in: 

\[
\text{case } \text{bv}: \text{T } \Rightarrow \text{ body } \]

Functions may also be defined by cases over free types; for an example see the match expression within \text{receiver} in section 5.4

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