
Early version, also known as pre-print

Link to publication record in Explore Bristol Research
PDF-document

University of Bristol - Explore Bristol Research
General rights

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the reference above. Full terms of use are available: http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-policy/pure/user-guides/ebr-terms/
Scalable data abstractions for distributed parallel computations

James Hanlon, Simon J Hollis and David May
Department of Computer Science
University of Bristol
Bristol, UK
\{hanlon, simon, dave\}@cs.bris.ac.uk

Abstract—The ability to express a program as a hierarchical composition of parts is an essential tool in managing the complexity of software and a key abstraction this provides is to separate the representation of data from the computation. Many current parallel programming models use a shared memory model to provide data abstraction but this doesn’t scale well with large numbers of cores due to non-determinism and access latency. This paper proposes a simple programming model that allows scalable parallel programs to be expressed with distributed representations of data and it provides the programmer with the flexibility to employ shared or distributed styles of data-parallelism where applicable. It is capable of an efficient implementation, and with the provision of a small set of primitive capabilities in the hardware, it can be compiled to operate directly on the hardware, in the same way stack-based allocation operates for subroutines in sequential machines.

Keywords—Parallel programming, composability, parallel subroutines, data-parallelism, distributed memory, compilation techniques.

I. INTRODUCTION

When developing a program of any complexity, the ability to express it in terms of a simpler set of components is essential. A component presents a simple interface that allows its implementation to be considered independently, and when combined with other components, the internal details can be ignored and its functionality treated in an abstract way. This allows a program to be constructed using modules, ranging from small functions to libraries, and for any component to be substituted with another that adheres to the same interface. The importance of abstraction as a tool in computer programming was recognised by Turing in the 1940s [1] and was formalised in the 1970s by the structured programming methodology [2]. This aimed to improve the quality of programs and productivity of programmers through judicious use of hierarchical structuring and subroutines. These principles have been foundational for modern sequential programming languages.

A key issue with composability is separating the representation of data from the structure of a computation. Mainstream CPU and general-purpose GPU (GPGPU) parallel programming models are based on a shared memory model, where data are globally accessible. This is the form of parallel random access machine (PRAM) [3] and the related bulk-synchronous parallel (BSP) [4] model. Shared memory parallelism allows sequential approaches to data abstraction and conventional data structures to be employed, but it does not scale well with large numbers of cores. Access latency can vary significantly and unpredictably due to the physical distribution of data across a machine. This makes it difficult to exploit locality, which is essential for scaling a computation, and poses problems for barriers which are delayed by the slowest participant. Additionally, when accesses are made to shared data they can incur latency from collisions, and when they are updating it, behaviour can become non-deterministic.

There are a number of issues related to the implementation of a shared memory system that pose further problems for this type of data abstraction. Mainstream parallel processors take the form of symmetric multi-processors (SMPs) and these have brought about a number of parallel programming approaches such as the Cilk [6] language, OpenMP [7] and Intel’s Threaded Building Blocks (TBB) [8]. These employ a multi-threaded execution model where a number of threads are managed by a scheduler, but problems can arise with programs that combine parallel components. Performance can be affected significantly by threads competing for execution, causing unnecessary context-switches, and idling within a component due to a load imbalance, causing under utilisation. The effects of this are dependent on combinations of program components and result in unpredictable execution time, exacerbating non-deterministic behaviour. OpenCL [9] is emerging into the mainstream and is designed to support the programming of heterogeneous systems. These are typically comprised of CPUs and GPGPUs. It uses a shared memory model but exposes distinct address spaces and in order to compose components operating in different ones, variables must be explicitly transferred between them [11].

Parallelism is now the primary means of sustaining growth in computational performance [12] and the shared memory model will continue to be useful. However, it looks certain that future systems will involve large numbers of processors and it will not be effective in delivering performance on them. Therefore, it is necessary that parallel programming models, as well as supporting shared memory approaches, also support composable representations of distributed data.

This paper proposes a simple distributed programming model that builds on the approach of the occam programing.
ming language [13] with notations to control the distribution of parallelism and a server construct that is active only in response to requests. Arrays of servers can be combined to construct distributed data structures, independently from the computational aspects of a program, providing access for shared or distributed styles of data-parallelism. This gives the programmer flexibility to employ the most appropriate data representation for the purposes of the program and scalability. Server-based data structures can be composed with similar scoping rules to conventional variable declarations to simplify the task of building scalable programs by allowing them to be composed in a modular way. With the provision of a small set of primitive capabilities in the hardware, the model can be compiled with a fixed allocation of processors. This is so it can operate efficiently and directly on the hardware, without the use of dynamic allocation mechanisms. The idea is similar to stack-based allocation for subroutines in sequential machines.

The following specific contributions are made:
1) A server construct that can be used to express composable representations of distributed data structures with arrays of server processes, for both shared memory and message passing distributed memory style parallel computations.
2) An efficient implementation of distributed parallelism based on a compile-time allocation of processors.
3) An implementation of server processes that allows many-to-one client connections to be established efficiently and without deadlock.
4) Demonstration of the proposed notations with three example programs that are characteristic of general-purpose applications and employ different styles of parallelism.

The rest of this paper is organised as follows. Section II overviews related work; Section III presents the proposed programming model and notations in terms of a conceptual machine model; Section IV describes the requirements of a target architecture and the compilation scheme for it; Section V discusses how several example programs that require distinct styles of parallelism can be expressed in the model; Section VI concludes.

II. RELATED WORK

Distributed memory architectures are most common in high performance computing (HPC) systems and the Message Passing Interface (MPI) [14] is the standard programming approach. MPI provides features for the construction of modular components such as libraries [15] with features to name groups of processes and provide scoping for operations within them, but it does not allow a separation of data because of its SPMD (single program multiple data) model. The success of MPI can be attributed to its simple compilation and execution model, which provides predictable execution that allows programmers to make efficient use of a machine. Other more dynamic languages push resource allocation and management into runtime components that require significant overheads in execution time and storage, and result in less predictable execution of program components.

Dynamic process creation was introduced in MPI-2, and in particular, a server construct, similar to the proposal in this paper, was introduced to address the need to support groups of reactive processes that accept connections from other groups [14 Sect. 10.4]. The problem with this is that the location of processes is not known at compile-time. To quote the specification directly "Almost all of the complexity in MPI client/server routines addresses the question "how does the client find out how to contact the server?". This issue also lies at the heart this work, but the solution is simplified by the choice of notations, the restrictions placed on them and support required in the architecture.

Partitioned global address space (PGAS) languages such as UPC [16], Chapel [17] and X10 [13] are based on globally accessible variables that are divided into logical segments to provide a clean composition of distributed data and computation. These segments have affinity with particular processes to provide a notion of locality for fast memory accesses, and global accesses are compiled into message passing communications. These languages include a range of distributed data types with high level notations for operating on them. Static distributions can be compiled into message passing programs, although it is not yet clear how efficient they are compared to manually crafted MPI equivalents, and as yet PGAS languages have not had widespread adoption.

Charm [19] is another HPC-orientated language but takes a different approach. Parallelism is expressed with arrays of objects and communication is performed with remote method calls. A runtime system is responsible for dynamically mapping objects onto processors and scheduling communication. As is the case with dynamic processes in MPI, this requires all communications to be directed through proxy processes aware of object locations. Although Charm encourages modular development, it does not directly support composable representations of distributed data.

Occam [13] and its descendant XC [20] are message passing languages for distributed memory architectures. Predicable execution is a key principle of them and this is achieved primarily with a compile-time allocation of memory by prohibiting recursion and dynamically sized arrays. Implementations require the allocation of processors to be specified statically in a mapping file and program components cannot employ distributed parallelism internally. Developments as part of the occam 3 specification introduced the concept of a server component [21 Chapt. 13]. The proposed notation builds on this with a distributed execution model and relaxed communication constraints.
III. PROPOSAL

A. Architectural model

The proposed programming model is based on a simple conceptual architecture where, to a first order approximation, there is an infinite array of processors. Each processor has a relatively small private memory, but the ability to communicate with any other processor via a network in a constant amount of time, independent of the processor locations. This is an idealised view held by the programmer to simplify programming.

A realistic parallel machine can provide a good approximation to this with a fixed number of processors and a logarithmic-diameter, high-capacity network such as a Clos/fat tree [22] or hypercube [23]. Networks such as meshes do not provide these properties and programs must be carefully mapped to preserve locality to obtain good performance.

This model is analogous to the random access machine (RAM) model of computation [24] which models the essential aspects of a conventional sequential computer. It consists of a program that operates on an infinite capacity memory where accesses take a constant amount of time, independent of the address. In practical sequential computers, memory size is limited and access incurs a latency related to capacity, also by a logarithmic scaling.

B. Notations

The following is an informal description of the proposed language notations. An imperative block-structured syntax is used and the basic features of this are based on the ocam programming language [13]. It includes sequential and parallel composition, replication and channel-based communication and provides a platform for the main contributions of this paper: notations to express local and distributed parallelism and a server construct. Local parallelism relates to concurrent threads that access a shared memory and distributed relates to distinct memories. Diagrams are included throughout to provide an intuition for the programming model and behaviour of the notations in isolation and in composition.

1) Composition: A program is built as a hierarchical collection of processes that can be composed in sequence or in parallel. Sequential composition is denoted by the ‘;’ separator and causes a set of processes to be executed one after another. If \( P, Q \) and \( R \) are processes, then the process

\[
\text{seq} \ i=1 \text{ for } n \text{ do } P(i) \; \text{seq} \ i=1 \text{ for } n \text{ do } Q(i) \; \text{seq} \ i=1 \text{ for } n \text{ do } R(i)
\]

is equivalent when \( n = 4 \) to

\[
P(0) \; P(1) \; P(2) \; P(3)\.
\]

Parallel composition causes the component processes to start simultaneously and the execution can be directed to occur locally or distributed over an array of processors. Local parallel execution is denoted by the ‘|’ separator. The process

\[
P \; Q \; R.
\]

causes the component processes \( P, Q \) and \( R \) to start simultaneously on a processor \( p_k \), where \( k \) is the identifier (ID) of a processor, and it terminates when all component processes have terminated.

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{par} \ i=1 \text{ for } m \text{ do } P(i) \|
\text{par} \ i=1 \text{ for } m \text{ do } Q(i)\
\end{array}
\]

Distributed composition can be replicated to produce a number of similar parallel processes and can be thought of as declaring a process array. The process

\[
\text{par} \ i=1 \text{ for } n \text{ do } P(i)
\]

is equivalent when \( n = 4 \) to

\[
P(0) \; P(1) \; P(2) \; P(3)\.
\]

Processes in distributed composition are allocated on consecutively numbered processors as this simplifies the task of establishing communication channels with them because they can be addressed with a base and offset. This property of the notation also allows correspondences to be established between different arrays. For example, replication, combined with local composition can be used to layer arrays of parallel processes on the same array of processors. The process

\[
\text{par} \ i=1 \text{ for } m \text{ do } P(i) \|\text{par} \ i=1 \text{ for } n \text{ do } Q(i)
\]

for \( m = n \) causes each processor \( p_k, p_{k+1}, \ldots, p_{k+n-1} \) to execute \( P(x) \) and \( Q(x) \) for some \( x \).
for \( \ell \) replicators to implement distributed structures that can be
which act on it and can be used in conjunction with
separating a representation of data from the computations
programmer to move easily between them.

This is a significant capability as it allows a
and distributed memory style parallelism to be expressed in
accessed concurrently. Furthermore, it allows both shared
response to
clients
which behave in the same way as conventional procedure
calls, except the parameters and results are transferred to
and from the server so that execution of the call occurs
at the server. Fig. 1 illustrates a single server with a set of
calls, except the parameters and results are transferred to
the distributed composition of the same replicators
be larger and allocated over more processors. In contrast,

The result of this is a direct correspondence between \( P \) and \( Q \) with the same index and any communication between
them will be performed locally. For \( m \neq n \), one array will
be larger and allocated over more processors. In contrast,

allocates both process arrays on disjoint sets of processors

\[
\begin{array}{c|c|c|c}
\text{par } i=1 \text{ for } m \text{ do } P(i) & \text{par } i=1 \text{ for } n \text{ do } Q(i) \\
\end{array}
\]
for \( \ell \geq k + n \).

2) Servers: The server notation provides a simple way of
separating a representation of data from the computations
which act on it and can be used in conjunction with replicators to implement distributed structures that can be
accessed concurrently. Furthermore, it allows both shared
and distributed memory style parallelism to be expressed in
a similar way. This is a significant capability as it allows a
programmer to move easily between them.

A server is a special kind of process that is only active in
response to clients. The interface to a server is a set of calls,
which behave in the same way as conventional procedure
calls, except the parameters and results are transferred to
and from the server so that execution of the call occurs
at the server. Fig. 1 illustrates a single server with a set of
clients. This mechanism is known generally as a remote
procedure call (RPC) [25] and is attractive because it provides

A server definition specifies a set of potential calls and
provides responses to them. Its only action while running
is to repeatedly serve calls and it terminates when its scope
terminates. Local state can be initialised by a special initial-
isation process and a corresponding termination process can
be used to finalise the server upon termination. In object-
orientated programming, this relates directly to the concept
of an object with a constructor that takes an initial value and
methods that operate on the private attributes.

As an example, Process 1 defines a server to provide
access to an array. When it initialises, each element of the
array is set to an initial value, specified as a parameter
(init), and when the server is running, calls can be made
to read or write to specific locations.

**Process 1**

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{server } & \text{Store(val init)} \\
\text{interface} & (\text{val i, var v}) \\
\text{call} & \text{read(val i, var v),} \\
\text{call} & \text{write(val i, val v)) to} \\
\{ & \text{var data[N];} \\
\text{initial} & \{ \text{var i;} \\
\text{seq} & \text{i} = 0 \text{ for } N \text{ do} \\
\text{data[i]} & := \text{init} \\
\} \\
\text{accept} & \{ \text{read ? (val i, var v)} \\
& \text{v := data[i]} \\
& \text{write ? (val i, val v)} \\
& \text{data[i]} := v \\
\} \\
\text{final} & \{ \}
\end{align*}
\]

The following specifies an instance of the Store server
with the name \( s \), for use with an anonymous client process
that executes in parallel and makes calls to write to each
store location.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{server } & s \text{ is } \text{Store(0) & seq i} = 0 \text{ for } n \text{ do s.write(i, i)}
\end{align*}
\]

Servers can be replicated with a similar notation to a
conventional array declaration. For example the server array

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{server } & s \text{ is } \text{Store(0)[n] \\
& \cdot }
\end{align*}
\]
creates \( n \) instances of the store server, with each initialised
by the same parameters, in this case 0. A call to a particular
server is made by specifying a server with an array subscript
such as \( s[0] \).

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{par } i=1 \text{ for } m \text{ do } P(i) & \& \\
\text{par } i=1 \text{ for } n \text{ do } Q(i) & \\
\end{align*}
\]

for \( \ell \geq k + n \).

C. Expressing data-parallelism

With the proposed notations for controlling distribution
and creating arrays of servers that can be accessed by
collections of clients, it is possible to express both shared
and distributed memory forms of data-parallel computations.
processes. The storage is distributed over a disjoint array of processors, hence \( \ell \geq k + n \).

1) \textit{Shared memory:} A shared memory, distributed over an array of processors, can be expressed with two server arrays, one to act as a store and the other to provide an access abstraction. For example, Process 2 provides an access server (Access which has the same interface as Store) to each of the \( m \) client processes. The access and client processes

\[
\begin{align*}
    \text{Process 2} & \quad \text{server } s \text{ is } \text{Store}(0)[n] \& \text{server } a \text{ is } \text{Access}(s)[m] \mid \\
    & \quad \text{par } i=0 \text{ for } m \text{ do} \quad \{ \cdots ; a[i].write(\cdot, \cdot) ; \cdots \} 
\end{align*}
\]

are layered over the same processors so interaction between these is local. Each access server holds a reference to the array of \( n \) storage servers and takes read and write requests from the client and performs them over this array. Fig. 2 illustrates the layout and structure of this.

To avoid uneven distribution of accesses and load on particular servers, which would result in increased access latency, the access servers could select storage servers by some appropriate hash function. This is the form of a PRAM and the memory system of a BSP machine. For the most general concurrent-read concurrent-write (CRCW) form of memory, read combining could also be used to avoid excessive access collisions [26].

2) \textit{Distributed memory:} A distributed representation of data can be expressed in a similar way, without an access abstraction and with the server and client processes distributed over the same set of processors. Process 3 is similar to Process 2 except clients are co-located with a storage server and access it directly. Since there is a local correspondence between servers and clients, this call will not incur any overhead due to the underlying interconnection network.

\[
\begin{align*}
    \text{Process 3} & \quad \text{server } s \text{ is } \text{Store}(0)[n] \mid \\
    & \quad \text{par } i=0 \text{ for } n \text{ do} \quad \{ \cdots ; a[i].write(\cdot, \cdot) ; \cdots \}
\end{align*}
\]

Data stored with other server or client processes could be accessed with server calls, but race conditions can arise from concurrent access to shared data and synchronisation is required to avoid this. Instead, synchronised message passing communication avoids these issues and is widely used for scalable algorithms, typically in large systems such as supercomputers. In general, simple scalable structures such as pipelines, grids and trees are used [27] which are easily expressed in occam and hence are composable with server-based representations of data. This is demonstrated with the matrix multiplication example in Section V-A.

Shared and distributed memory forms of data-parallelism lend themselves to different applications and the ability of the proposed programming model to cleanly support both is significant. It provides the programmer with the flexibility to employ a notation that best suits a given application.

IV. Compilation

The choice of notations and their restrictions allow for an efficient implementation. This does however depend on the provision of certain functionality to support the execution of a collection of communicating parallel processes and, in particular, many-to-one patterns of communication. These are described first, as an architectural target for the compilation scheme.

A. Architectural target

The following defines the basic requirements of the proposed language notations, independent of a specific hardware or software implementation.

1) \textbf{Processor addressing.} Each processor in a system of \( p \) processors has a unique integer ID in the range 0 to \( p - 1 \) identifying it.

2) \textbf{Multi-threading.} A processor has the ability to support multiple concurrent \textit{threads} of execution and any thread has the ability to create additional threads.

3) \textbf{Point-to-point communication.} Any two threads can communicate by passing messages over bidirectional point-to-point \textit{channels}. A channel is composed of two \textit{channel ends} that are each local to a thread. A channel end has an ID that combines a local unique ID with the processor’s ID so that it can be uniquely identified in a system. Before a process \( p \) can send a message to another process \( q \), it must set the destination of a
local channel end to be the channel end ID of \( q \), that \( q \) is using to receive messages. It is not necessary for \( q \) to specify \( p \) as the source unless it sends a message in return to \( p \). All messages are delivered in-order.

4) **Many-to-one connections.** A channel end may be specified as a destination by multiple senders. In this case, a sender must be able to establish a connection to ensure other messages from different senders cannot be delivered and interrupt a communication sequence.

These requirements are based on the INMOS transputer \([28]\) and related XMS XS1 \([29]\) architectures, which provide low-level or hardware support for them. Other larger-scale message passing architectures such as BlueGene/L \([30]\) and BlueGene/Q \([31]\) realise similar concepts in their software point-to-point messaging layer.

**B. Scheme**

1) **Compile-time process allocation:** As the size of all process arrays (both replicated processes and servers) can be determined at compile-time, it is possible to determine a complete static schedule for the allocation of processes to processors. This maps process arrays to contiguous blocks of processors and logically adjacent processes to the same processor. For example, the runtime use (and reuse) of processors by Process 4 is illustrated by Fig. 4. This dynamic behaviour is analogous to the allocation of stack frames in memory for procedure calls.

**Process 4**

```plaintext
 server a is A(⋯)[n] &
 { P; Q; R;
   { server b is B(⋯)[m] | server c is C(⋯)[m] |
     { X; Y }
   }
 }
```

Allocation is performed by initialising a base processor \( b \) to be ID 0. A process is then assigned to processor \( b \) and for each distributed parallel composition that it contains, \( n \) component processes of it are assigned to processors \( b, b + 1, \ldots, b + n - 1 \). The allocation is then applied recursively to each component process with \( b \) set to \( b + n \). Parallel composition with local distribution is compiled into thread-based execution with instruction sequences to perform initialisation, start execution and synchronise before termination.

2) **Server communication:** A single server is addressed by its processor ID and local channel end ID. This can be packed into a single word and passed as a reference. An array of servers are addressed by a base processor ID, common local channel end ID and an offset. This allows a normal server call \( s.c(\cdots) \) or subscripted call \( s[i].c(\cdots) \), where \( s \) is the server reference, to exactly specify a particular server.

The set of calls for a server are implemented with this single channel and each call is assigned an ID unique to the server. Let \( a_0, a_1, \ldots, a_{n-1} \) be a set of actual parameters and \( P \) be a process making a call \( c \) to a server \( s \) of the form

\[ s.c(a_0, a_1, \ldots, a_{n-1}). \]

Then, for a channel end \( c \) local to \( P \), it is compiled as the sequence:

1) set the destination of \( c \) to be the channel end of \( s \);
2) connect to \( s \);
3) send the channel end ID for \( c \);
4) send the call ID for \( s \);
5) send each actual parameter \( a_i \);
6) receive each referenced actual \( a'_i \) and set \( a_i \leftarrow a'_i \);
7) disconnect from \( s \).

Once the client has connected to the server, it sends the identity of its channel end so that the server can make the necessary corresponding responses to the above sequence. By establishing a connection with the server, calls made by other clients will block until the server becomes free. In this sense, server calls are atomic.

A key issue in the implementation of servers is to guarantee that calls always complete. In a simple implementation, there is potential for deadlock to occur. This is caused by a situation where multiple clients are waiting for a busy server. If to service a call the server must perform communication, it might not be possible to establish a route in the network due to waiting requests holding network resources. To avoid this, a server must always be able to consume requests so that a call is always guaranteed to complete. In practice, the number of clients accessing any one server is likely to be small and a small queue, with a size logarithmically related to the number of clients, will probably suffice for most programs. To avoid deadlock when the queue becomes full, clients can reattempt to connect, at a rate according to an exponential backoff, similar to the Ethernet protocol. Alternatively, two separate physical or logically partitioned

---

**Figure 4.** Illustration of the runtime use of processors according to the compile-time allocation for Process 4. ‘step’ relates to the sequence of execution.
networks could be used, one for server calls and the other for general communication. This way, queued calls would never interfere with any external communication a server makes.

3) Process distribution: The processor allocation is known for each process at compile-time. At run time, the instruction sequence constituting a process must be available at a processor that is scheduled to execute it. There are two approaches that can be taken to this. With static distribution, compilation would produce a set of $p$ binary images for a $p$ processor system, with each binary containing all the processes that will be executed by the given processor. This requires each processor to have a large enough memory to store every process that it will execute over the course of a program, in addition to the memory requirements of each process. For large $p$, the size of the binary package could also be significant. With dynamic distribution, processes are loaded onto processors at runtime, before they are executed. Compilation produces two binaries, a master image that contains all the program and a slave image that waits to receive processes to execute. The benefit of this is a smaller per-processor memory requirement and binary package independent of the size of a system. Dynamic distribution can be made efficient by employing recursion [32].

In addition to a component parallel process being available at a processor, execution on a remote processor also requires the complete lexical environment, i.e. all of the variables it uses that are external to its scope. This can be determined at compile-time and message passing sequences generated both to supply these variables and to receive any updates to them when the process terminates.

V. EXAMPLES

This section presents three example programs to demonstrate the proposed notations: matrix multiplication, a ray tracer and a compiler. The choice of these is based on general-purpose applications that require different styles of parallelism.

A. Matrix multiplication

Matrix multiplication is widely used in scientific programs. It is inherently data-parallel and the most scalable parallel formulations employ message passing structures. Cannon’s algorithm [33] is a simple distributed algorithm that is structured as a 2D grid.

For an $n \times n$ grid of processes, this can be expressed as Process 5. It takes three arrays of sub-matrix servers (a, b and c) as parameters that represent the input and result matrices. The subroutine proceeds by creating a 2D array of nodes with each node connected by channels in four directions and assigned a single sub-matrix server. The node process performs computations on the local sub matrices sends and receives sub-matrices in each direction according to the algorithm. This subroutine encapsulates the algorithm, separating the message passing implementation from the distributed representation of the matrices. The layout of this is illustrated in Fig. 5.

A subroutine like this will most likely be employed as a component of a more complex program, but even included in a program that does nothing else, it requires additional components for the initialisation of the input matrices and a way to output the result. A simple way to do this is to directly read or write values to the distributed matrices in a global initialisation phase. Process 6 for example, iterates over each sub matrix and performs initialisation directly. A similar process could be conducted to output the result. A complete minimal program to perform matrix multiplication could then be composed as Process 7 where the three matrices are declared as server arrays with a layered distribution. The client process sequentially loads the input matrices, performs the multiplication and outputs the result. Fig. 5 illustrates the distribution of processes and communication patterns for the load and multiply phases of the algorithm.

Process 5

```
proc multiply(
    server Matrix[n][n] a,
    server Matrix[n][n] b,
    server Matrix[n][n] c, val n) is
  { chan[n][n+1] h;
    chan[n][n+1] v;
    var x, y;
    par y = 0 for n do
      par x = 0 for n do
        node(a[x][y], b[x][y], c[x][y],
            v[x][y], v[x][(y+1) rem n],
            h[y][x], h[y][(x+1) rem n])
  }
```

Process 6

```
proc loadMatrix(
    server Matrix[n][n] m, val n) is
  { var i, j;
    seq i=0 for n do
      seq j=0 for n do
        loadSubMatrix(m[i][j])
  }
```

Process 7

```
server a is Matrix(M, M)[n][n] |
server b is Matrix(M, M)[n][n] |
server c is Matrix(M, M)[n][n] |
  { loadMatrix(a, n);
    loadMatrix(b, n);
    multiply(a, b, c, n);
    output(c, n) }
```
B. Ray tracing

Ray tracing is a technique for generating realistic 2D images from 3D scenes. It is highly parallelisable as the calculation of each pixel, based on intersecting a ray with a world model, can be performed independently. When the world model is small enough to fit into the memory of a single processor, a parallel scheme requires only the communication of work and results. When it is larger than a single memory, it has to be distributed and accessible by all processes calculating ray intersections.

A distributed world model has a simple form with the same structure as the shared memory in Process 2. Work is distributed in a task farm structure, by a master process to a collection of worker processes. This is outlined in Process 8 and illustrated in Fig. 6. Process 8 includes separate initialisation and output phases, similar to the ones described for the matrix multiply program (Process 6).

**Process 8**

```plaintext
server master is Master() &
server objs is ObjectStore()[n] &
{
  server access is WorldAccess(objs)[m] |
  { var i;
    loadWorldModel(access);
    par i=0 for m do
      worker(master, access);
    output(master)
  }
}
```

Each of the m workers can access the world model (distributed over n servers) via a specific server and will do so frequently during the computation. In addition to optimising the implementation of shared memory, it is necessary to reduce the number and latency of accesses to obtain a scalable ray tracing algorithm. To do this, each access server can maintain a summary structure, usually a bounding volume hierarchy (BVH), to minimise ray-object intersection tests; it can also cache objects. With existing parallel programming models, this functionality would be implemented as part of the worker, but in Process 8 it is encapsulated in the representation of the data, allowing a simple world model interface to be presented to the workers.

C. Compiler

Compilers are complex programs that employ many different algorithmic techniques and data structures. This makes them a canonical example of a general-purpose piece
of software and a non-trivial test case for mapping realistic sequential applications to a parallel architecture. Due to this, there has been little work on parallel compilation, although there are opportunities to, particularly during the optimisation and code generation phases [35]. In particular, many optimisations can be applied locally at an expression, statement, block or procedure level, and hence may be performed independently and in parallel over different parts of a parse tree or intermediate representation.

The structure of a simple compiler is given in Process 9

```
Process 9

server store is TreeStore()[n] &
server tree is TreeAccess(store)[m] &
server symbols is Table() &
{
    parse(tree[0], symbols);
    semantics(tree[0], symbols, m);
    optimise(tree, symbols, m);
    { server store is BufStore()[l] |
      server buffer is BufAccess(store) |
      generateInsts(tree[0], buffer);
    }
}
```

Two server arrays `store` and `tree` provide a concurrently accessible parse tree, using the same principle as Process 2 initially, parsing and semantic analysis phases operate sequentially on the parse tree, using a single access server. Local optimisations, as part of the `optimise` subroutine, can be performed in parallel on the parse tree and this will also require concurrent access to the symbol table. Finally, instructions are output sequentially to a distributed buffer. This buffer is declared in a separate scope to demonstrate it could be included as part of the `generateInsts` subroutine.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper proposes a simple programming model for expressing scalable parallel programs. A server construct can be used in combination with notations for expressing local and distributed parallelism to build abstractions for distributed data structures with both shared and distributed access structures. This gives the programmer the flexibility to move between shared and distributed forms of data parallelism, depending on the structure of the program and scalability requirements. Server-based data structures can be composed with other program components in a similar way to conventional variable declarations and have similar scoping rules. This allows them to be operated on by sequences of potentially parallel subroutines, simplifying the task of developing a complex parallel program.

The distribution model allows a compile-time allocation of processing resources, to produce a static schedule. This provides efficient runtime performance and predictable timing, which are essential for building programs that scale to large numbers of cores. The compilation scheme requires support from the architecture, in particular to provide bounded low latency communications, to support the distribution model and general patterns of communication between program components and servers, and in message passing structures such as pipelines, grids and trees.

The example programs demonstrate how the proposed notations can be used to compose computational components that require varied forms of parallelism with distributed data structures, in a clear and concise way.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work was funded by EPSRC grant SB1933.

REFERENCES


