Dr. Simon Cooksey

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Research

I study modern multi-processor computers to understand the behaviours admitted by their complex micro-architectural designs. My research has focussed particularly on so-called *weak memory behaviours*, which are exhibited on machines that allow out-of-order execution and caching.

These intricate behaviours present challenges for programmer reasoning. Formal models help to clarify precisely what is allowed, and my tools bridge the gap between mathematical formalisation and programmer intuition about computer behaviour. My tools make these formal models executable. This informs the development of the model by allowing quick refinement of definitions, and also permits a programmer to probe the behaviour of a model to grasp the precise meaning of a given program.

These models stand as cutting edge specifications for verification of concurrent programs executing on modern high-performance hardware.

Rust for Morello Rust is a safety-first systems programming language, which has taken lessons from academic literature about building modern reliably systems and applied that in a strong type system for systems programming. Morello is a prototype hardware platform which seeks to address common vulnerabilities in software by protecting memory accesses with hardware primitives to ensure all memory accesses are in-bounds, and that pointers cannot be spoofed. This projects unites these two views of memory safety by building a port of the Rust compiler which targets Morello.

Mixed-Proxy Extensions for NVIDIA PTX An extension of NVIDIA's PTX ISA to support mixing load and store operations that target different *proxies* of memory. This gives well-defined semantics to programs with both, for example, constant loads and generic stores to the same address. The memory model extension was built in the relational model checking tool, Alloy, and we showed that our extension to the PTX model is sound and complete with respect to the existing industrial model. *Appears in the proceedings of ISCA 2022.*

PwTer *Pomsets with Predicate Transformers* (PwT) is a recent fully denotational semantics for weak memory consistency. It captures program dependencies by embedding a logic into predicate transformers which compose to create proof burdens necessary to remove dependencies which are syntactic only from list of dependencies actually present in a program. I developed an OCaml tool to automatically evaluate PwT over a series of litmus tests. *Appears in the proceedings of POPL 2022.*

MRD and MRDer *Modular Relaxed Dependencies* (MRD) is a partially denotational semantics for weak memory consistency in C and C++. As well as helping to define the denotation, I built an evaluation tool (MRDer) in OCaml to enable fast calculation of the semantics against a corpus of litmus tests. Further, I proved meta-theoretic properties about the semantics with respect to industry standard models of C/C++. *Appears in the proceedings of ESOP 2020.*

PrideMM PrideMM is a tool written in OCaml which provides an API for building Second Order logical formulae and uses this API to express memory models. We use cutting edge *Quantified Boolean Formulae* (QBF) solvers to efficiently evaluate a new class of memory model which solve the thin-air problem. *Appears in the post-proceedings of TAPAS 2019.*

Education

The University of Kent	Canterbury, United Kingdom
Doctor of Philosophy, Computer Science	Sept. 2016 – Sept. 2021
Computer Science with a Year in Industry BSc (Hons), *First class*	Sept. 2012 – Jul. 2016

Internships & Employment

The University of Kent	Canterbury, United Kingdom
Research Fellow	Jul. 2022 – Present

I have a position to continue my PhD research with collaborators at Kent. This work will focus on the impact of memory systems on program correctness on novel hardware platforms. This position is funded by a series of successful grant applications to which I was a co-author, and later Researcher Co-Investigator.

Research Associate	Jul. 2020 – Jul. 2022

Working on the semantics of C/C++ on Capability hardware.

Assistant Lecturer	Sept. 2016 – Jun. 2020

I participated in teaching a selection of modules. This involved content delivery in seminars and terminals, as well as marking and providing feedback on student work.

NVIDIA	Santa Clara, California
Research Intern	Jul. 2018 – Dec. 2018

As an intern at NVIDIA I extended the Memory Consistency Model for NVIDIA's virtual instruction set (PTX) to support "memory proxies". The result of this work now forms public NVIDIA documentation in the PTX manual.

XMOS	Bristol, United Kingdom
Development Intern	Aug. 2014 – Aug. 2015

At XMOS I built tools, libraries, and test infrastructure for the XCORE series of multicore processors.

Skills

- **Rust.** Modifying the Rust compiler to target the new Morello platform.
- **OCaml.** Using OCaml to implement mathematical artefacts for mechanised evaluation.
- **Weak memory consistency.** Understanding and constructing mathematical models for multiprocessor systems, both in hardware and software.
- **Formal Hardware Specification.** Using internal hardware specifications and design manuals to capture a mathematical abstraction of machine behaviour, using *Alloy*.
- **Programming languages.** Regular user of C/C++, JavaScript, OCaml, and Python.

Publications

- *Rust for Morello: Always-on Memory Safety, Even in Unsafe Code*: To appear: 37th European Conference on Object-Oriented Programming, 2023. *Sarah Harris, Simon Cooksey, Michael Vollmer, Mark Batty*
- *Mixed-Proxy Extensions for the NVIDIA PTX Memory Consistency Model*: 49th IEEE/ACM International Symposium on Computer Architecture, 2022. *Daniel Lustig, Simon Cooksey, Olivier Giroux*
  ★ IEEE Micro Top Picks Honourable Mention
- *The Leaky Semicolon: Compositional Semantic Dependencies for Relaxed-Memory Concurrency*: 49th ACM SIGPLAN Symposium on Principles of Programming Languages, 2022. *Alan Jeffery, James Riely, Mark Batty, Simon Cooksey, Ilya Kaysin, Anton Podkopaev*
- *Modular Relaxed Dependencies in Weak Memory Concurrency*: 29th European Symposium on Programming, 2020. *Marco Paviotti, Simon Cooksey, Anouk Paradis, Daniel Wright, Scott Owens, Mark Batty*
- *P1780 Modular Relaxed Dependencies: A new approach to the Out-Of-Thin-Air Problem*: ISO C/C++ Standards Committee meeting, Cologne, 2019. *Mark Batty, Simon Cooksey, Scott Owens, Anouk Paradis, Marco Paviotti, Daniel Wright*
- *PrideMM: Second Order Model Checking for Memory Consistency Models*: 10th Workshop on Tools for Automatic Program Analysis, 2019. *Simon Cooksey, Sarah Harris, Mark Batty, Radu Grigore, and Mikoláš Janota*

Prizes

- **Kent Postgraduate Prize**: (July 2020) Recognising the significant impact of my research.

Grants

All £ values at 80% FEC, unless otherwise noted.

- **Embedded Rust for Defence Applications**: *Principal Investigator* (£87,763 100% FEC) Defence and Security Accelerator. Competition: CHERI within Defence and Security
- **Complementing Capabilities: Introducing Pointer-Safe Programming to DSbD Tech**: *Researcher Co-Investigator* (£494,770) UK Innovation Funding. ISCF digital security by design - software ecosystem development
- CAPC: **Capability C Semantics, Tools and Reasoning**: *Named Researcher and Grant Co-Author* (£596,634) UKRI: Digital Security by Design
- **Fixing the Thin-Air Problem: ISO Dissemination**: *Named Researcher and Grant Co-Author* (£60,455) UK Research Institute: Verified Trustworthy Software Systems

Conference Attendance

- **VeTSS Innagural Meeting, 2023**: Presenting the Rust for Morello work at the first new-VeTSS meeting.
- **DSbD All Hands, October 2022**: Catching up with other researchers working on the DSbD project.
- **High Integrity Systems, 2022**: Building industrial links for research collaboration.
- **CHERITech, 2022**: Presenting on-going work on porting Rust to Morello.
- **POPL, 2022**: Presenting *The Leaky Semicolon* with collaborators.
- **Aarhus Concurrency Workshop, 2017**: Explained the issues surrounding simulating the latest memory models and presented an early version of PrideMM.
- **PLMW/POPL, 2017**: Attended the Programming Languages Mentoring Workshop at POPL'17 in Paris with a grant from the ACM.

Professional Service

- **ISO C++ Standards Committee**: I attend SG1 to comment on and develop the concurrency specification of the C++ programming language.
- **DSbD Research Day**: Presenting progress on our research programme to DSbD stakeholders.

References

Available on request.