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# Cerise: Program Verification on a Capability Machine in the Presence of Untrusted Code

AÏNA LINN GEORGES, Aarhus University, Denmark

ARMAËL GUÉNEAU, Aarhus University, Denmark

THOMAS VAN STRYDONCK, KU Leuven, Belgium

AMIN TIMANY, Aarhus University, Denmark

ALIX TRIEU, Aarhus University, Denmark

DOMINIQUE DEVRIESE, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium

LARS BIRKEDAL, Aarhus University, Denmark

A capability machine is a type of CPU allowing fine-grained privilege separation using *capabilities*, machine words that represent certain kinds of authority. We present a mathematical model and accompanying proof methods that can be used for formal verification of functional correctness of programs running on a capability machine, even when they invoke and are invoked by unknown (and possibly malicious) code. We use a program logic called Cerise for reasoning about known code, and an associated logical relation, for reasoning about unknown code. The logical relation formally captures the capability safety guarantees provided by the capability machine. The Cerise program logic, logical relation, and all the examples considered in the paper have been mechanized using the Iris program logic framework in the Coq proof assistant.

The methodology we present underlies recent work of the authors on formal reasoning about capability machines [Georges et al. 2021; Skorstengaard et al. 2019a; Van Strydonck et al. 2021], but was left somewhat implicit in those publications. In this paper we present a pedagogical introduction to the methodology, in a simpler setting (no exotic capabilities), and starting from minimal examples. We work our way up to new results about a heap-based calling convention and implementations of sophisticated object-capability patterns of the kind previously studied for high-level languages with object-capabilities, demonstrating that the methodology scales to such reasoning.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

A capability machine is a type of CPU that enables fine-grained memory compartmentalization and privilege separation through the use of *capabilities*. This type of hardware architecture has been studied since the 60ies [Dennis and Van Horn 1966; Levy 1984], and in particular more recently as part of the CHERI project [Watson et al. 2020]. Capability machines offer fine-grained and scalable

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Authors' addresses: Aïna Linn Georges, ageorges@cs.au.dk, Aarhus University, Denmark; Armaël Guéneau, armael@cs.au.dk, Aarhus University, Denmark; Thomas Van Strydonck, thomas.vanstrydonck@cs.kuleuven.be, KU Leuven, Belgium; Amin Timany, timany@cs.au.dk, Aarhus University, Denmark; Alix Trieu, alix.trieu@cs.au.dk, Aarhus University, Denmark; Dominique Devriese, dominique.devriese@vub.be, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium; Lars Birkedal, birkedal@cs.au.dk, Aarhus University, Denmark.

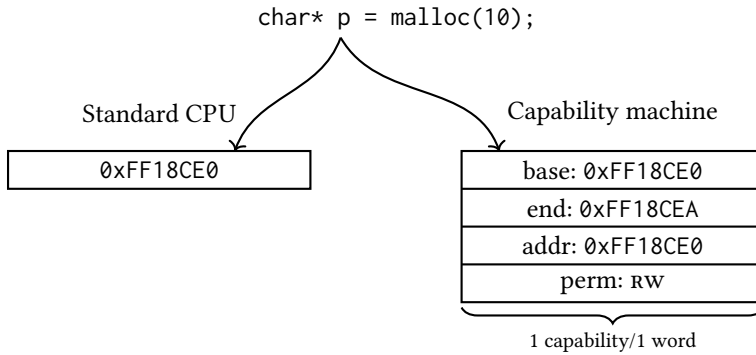
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62 Fig. 1. Representation of a pointer in a standard architecture vs. a capability machine. A capability is similar  
63 to a pointer with extra meta-data.  
64  
65

66 privilege separation at the hardware level and they are a compelling target for secure compilation  
67 [Chisnall et al. 2017; El-Korashy et al. 2020; Skorstengaard et al. 2019b; Van Strydonck et al. 2019].

68 Capability machines distinguish, at the level of hardware, between machine integers and capabil-  
69 ities; and a capability can be understood as a pointer with associated metadata, cf. Fig 1. A machine  
70 word containing an integer value can only be used for numerical computations and cannot be used  
71 as a pointer to access memory. On the other hand, a machine word containing a capability can be  
72 used to access a given portion of memory, depending on the metadata contained in the capability.  
73 We also say that the capability *has authority over* some fragment of memory.

74 A capability thus corresponds to a native machine value, and can be stored in a CPU register  
75 or in memory. While this might seem wasteful due to the amount of extra metadata that needs to  
76 be carried around, for realistic capability machines a lot of work has been dedicated to the design  
77 of compressed representations for capabilities, see, e.g., [Carter et al. 1994; Woodruff et al. 2019].  
78 In this paper, we will abstract from these details and represent capabilities in their uncompressed  
79 form, as a tuple carrying the metadata.

80 A capability machine guarantees the integrity of capabilities: one cannot create fresh capabilities  
81 out of thin air or modify the metadata of existing capabilities in arbitrary ways. For instance, CHERI  
82 associates tags to machine words to identify whether they represent a capability or an integer.  
83 Such a tag bit is checked and set by the machine, and is not directly accessible by software. More  
84 generally, new capabilities can only be derived from existing capabilities using a restricted set of  
85 operations provided by the machine. As such, all capabilities on the system are recursively derived  
86 from the full-authority capabilities that are initially provided to software at boot time. Intuitively,  
87 the machine ensures that a given program cannot forge capabilities and obtain more authority than  
88 it held previously, a property sometimes referred to as capability monotonicity [Nienhuis et al.  
89 2020].

90 Capabilities therefore allow a piece of code to interact securely with untrusted third-party  
91 code, even within the same address space, by restricting the set of capabilities the untrusted code  
92 (transitively) has access to. In a system composed of mutually untrusted components (which might  
93 even contain malicious code), capabilities provide a way of enforcing that the overall system  
94 nevertheless satisfies some security properties.

95 Note, however, that capabilities are low-level, flexible, building blocks, which operate at the level  
96 of the machine code and whose metadata “just” triggers some additional runtime checks by the  
97 machine. This means that the *properties* we can actually enforce using capabilities crucially depend  
98

99 on how we *use* capabilities: the variety of properties that can be enforced stems from how one can  
100 use and combine capabilities.

101 In this paper we show how we can formally *prove* that security properties are enforced for some  
102 known verified code, *even when* that code is linked with unverified untrusted third-party code.  
103 Our model of interaction between the known and unknown code is very simple: we assume the  
104 code is in the same address space and that control is transferred from one to the other using an  
105 ordinary jump instruction. We focus on a restricted subset of the capabilities present in the CHERI  
106 architecture (using only “normal” read/write capabilities and a kind of so-called sentry capabilities,  
107 which provide a basic form of encapsulation, see Section 2.4). Because the security properties we  
108 consider hold even in the presence of unverified unknown code, they are sometimes referred to  
109 as *robust safety* properties [Swasey et al. 2017]. The security properties we focus on are centered  
110 around memory compartmentalization, in particular, local state encapsulation. We consider a  
111 range of examples, starting with very basic examples (sharing a buffer with some unknown code),  
112 through implementations of closures with encapsulated state, and end up with a quite sophisticated  
113 low-level implementation of an interval library, for which we show that certain representation  
114 invariants are preserved, even when interacting with unknown code.

115 We proceed as follows:

- 116 • We first explain informally how one can program with capabilities and use capabilities to  
117 enforce memory compartmentalization (Section 2).
- 118 • We then introduce the formal operational semantics of a simple capability machine with  
119 sentry capabilities (Section 3).
- 120 • We define the Cerise program logic which can be used to formally verify the correctness of  
121 programs running on the capability machine. Our program logic is defined by instantiating  
122 the Iris framework [Jung et al. 2018], which provides an expressive separation logic with  
123 powerful reasoning principles, including, in particular, the notion of a *logical invariant*  
124 (Section 4).
- 125 • We define, using our program logic, the specification of what a “safe” capability and a “safe”  
126 program is. Intuitively, a capability (respectively, a program) is “safe” if it cannot be used  
127 to invalidate an invariant at the logical level. Hence, safe capabilities can be shared freely  
128 with unknown code. Safety of a capability is defined in the program logic as a unary logical  
129 relation (Section 5).
- 130 • We show that if a program only has access to “safe” values, then running the program itself  
131 is also “safe”. This is a global property of the capability machine, expressing its capability  
132 safety: it is not possible to increase one’s authority beyond what was available initially,  
133 independently of the sequence of instructions that one executes (Section 5). Concretely,  
134 the theorem takes the form of a contract that holds for arbitrary code,<sup>1</sup> and which can be  
135 combined in the program logic with manual proofs for trusted code. The last piece of the  
136 puzzle is then a so-called Adequacy theorem (Section 4), which relates invariants established  
137 in the program logic to the operational semantics of the machine. Given a concrete scenario  
138 (typically, a complete system mixing known verified code with unknown untrusted code),  
139 this makes it possible to obtain a theorem about the execution of the system which only  
140 depends on the operational semantics of the machine (not on the program logic).
- 141 • In Section 6 we then return to the examples from Section 2 and show how to use Cerise to  
142 formally prove that the desired memory compartmentalization results really do hold.
- 143 • In Section 7 we consider more sophisticated examples, which involve dynamic memory  
144 allocation. We focus on the low-level implementation of ML-like programs, and introduce  
145

146 <sup>1</sup>Because it holds for arbitrary code, we sometimes refer to this as a *universal contract*.  
147



(a) Scenario 1: passing control to untrusted code

(b) Scenario 2: being called by untrusted code (possibly many times)

Fig. 2. Two scenarios where a (trusted) component interacts with its (untrusted) context. The trusted component is represented with a plain background, while the untrusted context is represented with a red dotted background.

a heap-based calling convention for closures implementing ML functions. We extend the earlier Adequacy theorem to account for dynamically allocated memory.

- In Section 8 we demonstrate how to use our methodology to establish correctness of object capability patterns (OCPs) from the literature. In particular, we consider the OCP of dynamic sealing, as presented by [Swasey et al. 2017] in the context of a high-level language and we demonstrate that Cerise can be used to prove similar results about a low-level implementation of their example.
- Section 9 offers some perspectives on the relevance of our technical contributions and how we envision them being used in the development of secure systems.
- Finally, we discuss related work in Section 10.

This paper pedagogically introduces and explains the methodology underlying a sequence of recent research papers [Georges et al. 2021; Skorstengaard et al. 2018, 2019a; Van Strydonck et al. 2021], in the form of the Cerise program logic, but also contributes new material. The operational semantics, program logic and logical relation discussed in Sections 3, 4 and 5 are based on those used by [Georges et al. 2021] (but we have removed local and uninitialized capabilities as well as Kripke indexing for simplicity and instead added much more extensive explanations and proofs). Sections 2 and 6 are new; they provide a clear and accessible introduction to capability machine programming and our reasoning tools. The examples in Sections 7-8 are also new and represent a non-trivial verification effort.

The results and examples presented here have been fully formalized in Coq, and are available online: <https://github.com/logsem/cerise>. The development can also be viewed online at <https://logsem.github.io/cerise/journal/>; we use circled numbers such as ① to link directly to corresponding Coq formal statements in the following.

## 2 PROGRAMMING WITH CAPABILITIES

Let us give a taste of how one might use capabilities when writing programs with the goal of enforcing some additional memory protection or encapsulation guarantees. We consider a fairly simple but quite general adversarial model, where we wish to verify the correctness of a *known component* interacting with a possibly adversarial *third-party component* whose code is unverified and untrusted.

In this section we detail two concrete example programs, which use capabilities in two different scenarios. In the first scenario, illustrated in Figure 2a, we consider a program that eventually passes control to the untrusted third-party code, but uses capabilities to protect a region of memory

197 containing some secret data from being accessed by the untrusted code. In the second scenario  
 198 (Figure 2b), we consider the case of a verified component being called by the third-party code. The  
 199 goal is then for the verified component to use capabilities to protect (or “encapsulate”) a piece of  
 200 private memory, which it may access during its execution, but which should remain inaccessible to  
 201 the unverified code.

## 202 2.1 Anatomy of a capability (in our model)

203 We are interested in a subset of the capabilities available in a CHERI capability machine. We thus  
 204 work with a simplified machine model, featuring basic capabilities that are used to give access  
 205 to a range of memory, as well as so-called “sealed entry” capabilities (abbreviated as “sentry”  
 206 capabilities [Watson et al. 2020, §3.8]) that provide encapsulation features. The sentry capabilities  
 207 were also called “enter” capabilities in earlier work, e.g., in the M-Machine by [Carter et al. 1994].  
 208

209 Concretely, we model capabilities as 4-tuples  $(p, b, e, a)$ . In actual hardware, capabilities are  
 210 encoded as fixed-size binary words, but here we abstract over their concrete representation.

211 Capability:  $(p, b, e, a)$

212		
213	$p \in \{O, RO, RX, RW, RWX, E\}$	permission
214	$b \in Addr$	base address
215	$e \in Addr$	end address
216	$a \in Addr$	current address

217 A capability  $(p, b, e, a)$  represents a machine word that can be used to access memory within the  
 218 region  $[b, e)$  delimited by its base address  $b$  and end address  $e$ . The permission  $p$  specifies what is  
 219 possible to do within this memory range: permission  $O$  specifies that the capability actually gives  
 220 no access rights,  $RO$  grants read-only access to memory,  $RX$  grants the right to read and execute the  
 221 contents of the memory,  $RW$  gives read and write access, and  $RWX$  gives read, write, and execute  
 222 access. Capabilities with permission  $E$  behave a bit differently (they are used to provide a form of  
 223 encapsulation), and will be explained later in Section 2.4.

224 A capability is meant to be used as a pointer, and thus additionally points to a specific address  $a$   
 225 (typically, but not necessarily, belonging to the range  $[b, e)$ ). Each time the capability is used to  
 226 access memory, the machine will automatically check that  $a$  is between bounds  $b$  and  $e$ , and that the  
 227 access is permitted according to  $p$ . From a capability  $(p, b, e, a)$  it is easy to derive another capability  
 228  $(p, b, e, a')$  pointing to a different address  $a'$  also within range  $[b, e)$  – in other words, while a  
 229 capability points to a specific address, it really holds authority over the whole region delimited by  
 230 its beginning and end address.

231 Note that, on a capability machine, machine words can represent not only binary-encoded  
 232 capabilities, but also traditional fixed-size integers. However, unlike on a traditional computer  
 233 architecture, integers cannot be used as pointers. In other words, without holding a capability, one  
 234 cannot access memory at all. In this paper, we rely on difference in notation to distinguish between  
 235 capabilities and integers. In actual hardware, this is done by associating an extra one-bit tag to each  
 236 word to distinguish capabilities from integers.

## 237 2.2 Sometimes, failure is a good thing

238 It is worth pointing out a sometimes counter-intuitive aspect of reasoning about security of  
 239 programs running on a capability machine, especially for readers with a background in reasoning  
 240 about safety in higher-level languages. For a high-level language, program safety can be seen  
 241 as the absence of undefined behavior or runtime errors. For instance, an out-of-bounds array  
 242 access is undefined behavior in C, and it leads to a runtime error, such as raising an exception, in  
 243

246 memory-safe languages such as Rust or OCaml. We are instead interested in *security* properties for  
 247 which a runtime failure can actually be considered a good thing.

248 Generally speaking, a low-level machine has many cases where it can fail at runtime, stopping  
 249 the normal course of execution. In a standard (non-capability) machine, this can happen, e.g., if  
 250 the machine attempts to execute an invalid instruction which cannot be decoded. The addition  
 251 of capabilities only adds more possibilities for runtime faults: each time a capability is used, the  
 252 capability machine will check that it has adequate permission and bounds, and raise a runtime  
 253 fault otherwise.

254 Now, the point is that, from a security perspective, these additional runtime faults are a good  
 255 thing. Using these additional checks, the capability machine turns dangerous behavior (out-of-  
 256 bounds accesses leading to buffer overflow attacks, etc.) into proper faults before they can cause  
 257 damage. Thus, for our purposes, it is always safe for the machine to fail: it means that an illegal  
 258 operation may have been attempted, and the execution has been stopped in response.

259 Of course, when writing concrete programs, we will typically want to verify that we do not  
 260 involuntarily trigger faults, as this would make our programs less useful. But when interacting  
 261 with adversarial code, this is a possibility that we have to take into account anyway: we cannot  
 262 prevent unknown code from shooting itself in the foot, e.g. by trying to access memory it does not  
 263 have a valid capability for, or by decoding illegal instructions.

264 To sum up, in this work we reason about security properties that are not violated in the case of  
 265 machine failure. This includes, for example, integrity of private data: no data can be compromised  
 266 if the machine stops running. It is therefore useful to keep in mind that we consider failure to be  
 267 trivially safe!

268

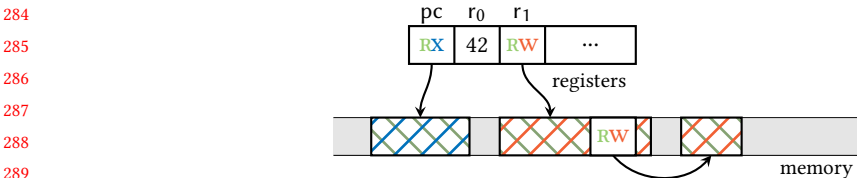
### 269 2.3 Restricting access to memory by constraining available capabilities

270 Consider Scenario 1 from Figure 2a: how can one write a program which passes control to untrusted  
 271 code while protecting some secret data? That is, we wish to write a program that sets up capabilities  
 272 so that its secrets are preserved even after it runs untrusted code.

273 The key intuition is that, at any point of the execution, one can only access the part of memory  
 274 that is accessible using the currently available capabilities. In other words, the authority of a  
 275 running program comes from the set of capabilities which are transitively reachable from the  
 276 CPU registers.

277 This is illustrated below, in a scenario where the pc register (“program counter”) contains a  
 278 capability with permission RX pointing to some memory region (containing the code of the program  
 279 being executed), and register  $r_1$  contains a capability with permission RW, pointing to a region of  
 280 memory, which itself contains a RW capability pointing to another memory region. The collection  
 281 of the “hatched” memory regions corresponds to the overall subset of memory accessible by the  
 282 program.  
 283

284



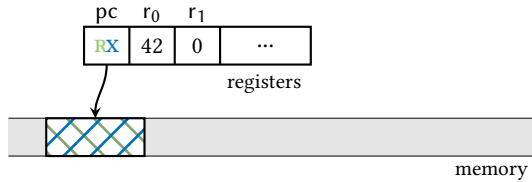
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291 If one wishes to reduce the set of available memory or its associated access rights—for instance to  
 292 protect secrets from being leaked to an adversary—then it is enough to constrain the capabilities  
 293 currently available. This can be done in a few different ways.

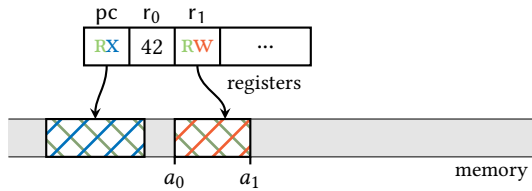
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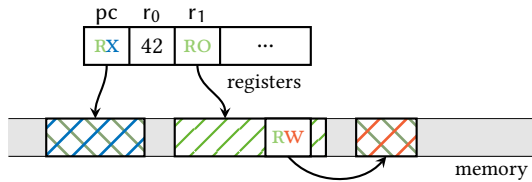
First, one can simply remove a capability from registers in order to remove access to the memory it was giving access to. For instance, after executing the instruction “mov r1 0”, which overwrites the contents of register r1 with the integer 0, one loses access to the memory regions which were previously accessible from the capability stored in that register.



Alternatively, it is possible to restrict the range of a capability to point to a smaller memory region. This changes the set of accessible memory to a subset of what was previously available. For instance, starting from our initial scenario and running the instruction “subseg r1 a0 a1” will change the range of the capability stored in register r1 to  $[a_0, a_1]$ . (The machine will check that  $[a_0, a_1]$  is indeed included in the range of the original capability.) In our example scenario (illustrated below), we then only keep the beginning of the region accessible from r1, and this entails that the third region of memory becomes inaccessible, since it was only reachable from a capability stored at the end of the region accessible from r1.



Finally, one can restrict the permission of a capability to a permission that grants less access rights. For instance, running the instruction “restrict r1 R0” in our initial scenario modifies the capability stored in r1 to only grant read-only access to its corresponding memory region. Note that we still have read-write access to the last memory region, as we can still read the capability (with permission rw) pointing to it.



*Example: sharing a sub-buffer with unknown code.* Using some of the mechanisms detailed above, we can implement a very simple program that shares a buffer with unknown, possibly adversarial, code while using capabilities to protect some data that would otherwise be vulnerable to buffer overflow attacks.

The assembly code for the program is shown in Figure 3. It consists of a code section containing the instructions of the program, followed by some data which (for simplicity) we simply assume to be statically allocated. The data section holds the zero-terminated string “Hi”, which we wish to share with the untrusted code, and the integer 42 which represents our secret data.

Initially, we assume the program counter to contain a rwx capability for the whole region holding our program. This capability serves two purposes: it allows the machine to execute our



```

344 ; initially, PC = (RWX, code, end, code)
345 ;           r0 = (unknown) pointer to the continuation
346 code:
347   mov r1 PC           ; r1 = (RWX, code, end, code)
348   lea r1 [data-code] ; r1 = (RWX, code, end, data)
349   subseg r1 [data] [data+3] ; r1 = (RWX, data, data+3, data)
350   jmp r0              ; jump to unknown code: we give it read-write
351                       ; access to the first 3 words of the data,
352                       ; but not the secret value
353 data:
354   ; the first 3 data words contain public data that will be passed
355   ; to the unknown code (the "Hi" string)
356   'H', 'i', 0,
357   ; they are followed by secret data (the integer 42)
358   42
359 end:

```

Fig. 3. Program sharing a buffer with possibly adversarial code.

program, but can also be manipulated by the program itself to derive a capability pointing to its own data. By convention, the register  $r_0$  is assumed to contain a pointer to the continuation of the program, i.e. other code that the program will pass control to after it is done executing. As no assumption is made about the contents of  $r_0$ , it is conservatively assumed to point to unknown, arbitrary code.

Our program executes as follows: it first loads the capability held by the program counter into register  $r_1$ . Then, using the `lea` instruction, it changes the “current address” of the capability to point to the `data` label (`lea` modifies a capability by adding an offset to its “current address”). In assembly programs, we use the brackets notation `[...]` to denote an arithmetic expression that is computed statically when assembling the program.

At this point, the capability held in  $r_1$  points to the start of the “Hi” string, but has (RWX) authority over the whole code and data section. This capability would be unsafe to share with the untrusted code, as they could simply use `lea` to increment the capability’s current address past the end of the string, and obtain a valid capability to the secret value (thus performing a basic “buffer overflow” attack). To prevent this from happening, we use the `subseg` instruction to obtain a capability whose range of authority is restricted to the sub-buffer holding the “Hi” string. Finally, we pass control to the untrusted code by using the `jmp` instruction, loading the contents of register  $r_0$  into `pc`.

This example illustrates that even a basic mode of use of capabilities (restricting them appropriately) can easily prevent buffer overflow attacks. In Section 6.1, we show how we can formally prove that, for any untrusted code, the value of the secret data will be equal to 42 at every step of the execution, including after control has been passed to the untrusted code. We have also developed a relational model, which can be used to prove that the secret value cannot even be read by the unknown code, but the details of this relational model are out of scope of this paper.

## 2.4 Securely encapsulating code and private capabilities

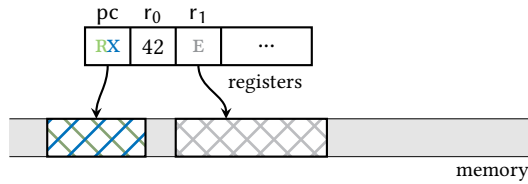
The previous example illustrates how to restrict available capabilities to prevent an adversary from accessing secret data. However, what if we additionally want our program to be called back by the

393 untrusted code, as in Scenario 2b? In that case, when the trusted code gets invoked again we would  
 394 like to recover access to the capabilities it previously had to its private state.

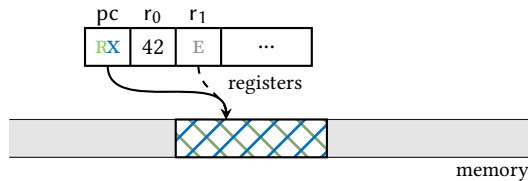
395 This is unfortunately not achievable with the capabilities that we have described so far. If we  
 396 remove capabilities to private memory before passing control to untrusted code, then there is  
 397 no way for us to get them back later on: the only capabilities we will get access to in a further  
 398 invocation are capabilities the untrusted code itself has access to.

399 *Sentry capabilities* provide this missing feature. They implement a form of encapsulation that  
 400 resembles the use of closures with encapsulated local state in high-level languages, and they allow  
 401 implementing *compartments* which encapsulate private state and capabilities but can be called  
 402 from untrusted code. From a security perspective, sentry capabilities allow setting up protection  
 403 boundaries: the code executing before and after an invocation of a sentry capability has different  
 404 authority and thus represent distrusting components. We denote sentry capabilities with permission  
 405 E (for “Enter”, a terminology originating from the M-machine [Carter et al. 1994]).

406 One typically creates a sentry capability pointing to a region of memory describing a compartment  
 407 containing executable code and local state (or private capabilities to that local state). A sentry  
 408 capability is opaque: it cannot be used to read or write to the memory region it points to, and  
 409 it cannot be modified using *restrict* or *subseg*. It can thus be safely shared with untrusted  
 410 third-parties: they will not be able to access the encapsulated code and data. In the figure below,  
 411 the memory region pointed to by  $r_1$  (hatched in gray) is not accessible for either reading or writing.



419 The only possible operation is to “invoke” the sentry capability using the *jmp* instruction, thus  
 420 passing control to the code held in the region pointed to by the capability (in other words, “running”  
 421 the compartment). When *jmp* is called on a sentry capability, it turns the capability into a capability  
 422 with permission read-execute (RX) over the same memory region, and puts it into the program  
 423 counter register *pc*. This simultaneously runs the encapsulated code, and gives access to the data  
 424 and capabilities stored there, which were previously inaccessible. Running instruction *jmp r1*  
 425 on the scenario of the previous figure leads to the machine state shown below.



433 Register *pc* now contains an RX capability to the previously opaque region, meaning that code  
 434 contained in that region can execute. Furthermore, it may access other capabilities stored in that  
 435 region, which can in turn be used to transitively access other private regions of memory.

437 *Example: a counter compartment.* To illustrate the use of sentry capabilities, let us consider the  
 438 example of a simple secure compartment implementing a counter. An instance of the counter holds  
 439 a private memory cell containing the current (integer) value of the counter. Every time the code  
 440 in the counter’s compartment is invoked, it increases the value stored in the memory cell. Using

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442 ; initially, PC = (RWX, init, end, init)
443 ;           r0 = (unknown) pointer to the context
444 init:
445   mov r1 PC           ; r1 = (RWX, init, end, init)
446   lea r1 [data-init] ; r1 = (RWX, init, end, data)
447   mov r2 r1          ; r2 = (RWX, init, end, data)
448   lea r2 1           ; r2 = (RWX, init, end, data+1)
449   store r1 r2        ; mem[data] <- (RWX, init, end, data+1)
450   lea r1 [code-data] ; r1 = (RWX, init, end, code)
451   subseg r1 [code] [end] ; r1 = (RWX, code, end, code)
452   restrict r1 E      ; r1 = (E, code, end, code)
453   mov r2 0           ; r2 = 0
454   jmp r0             ; jump to unknown code: we only give it access
455                       ; to an enter capability pointing to 'code'
456 ; when 'code' gets executed from the E capability,
457 ;   PC = (RX, code, end, code)
458 ;   r0 = (unknown) return pointer to the continuation
459 code:
460   mov r1 PC           ; r1 = (RX, code, end, code)
461   lea r1 [data-code] ; r1 = (RX, code, end, data)
462   load r1 r1          ; r1 = (RWX, init, end, data+1)
463   load r2 r1          ; r2 = <counter value>
464   add r2 r2 1         ; r2 = <counter value> + 1
465   store r1 r2        ; mem[data+1] <- <counter value> + 1
466   mov r1 0           ; r1 = 0
467   jmp r0             ; return to unknown code
468 data:
469   0xFFFF, ; will be overwritten with (RWX, init, end, data+1), i.e.
470           ; a read-write capability to the counter value
471   0       ; our private data: the current value of the counter
472 end:
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```

Fig. 4. Program implementing a secure counter

a sentry capability, one can expose the counter to an untrusted context, without giving it direct access to the counter value.

It is worth pointing out that this is similar to the use of closures encapsulating local state in high-level languages. Typically, a similar counter program could be implemented in a high-level language as follows, using a function closure to encapsulate a reference holding the counter value.

$$\text{let } x = \text{ref } 0 \text{ in } (\lambda(). x := !x + 1; !x)$$

As before, our actual counter program is implemented in assembly, and its code appears in Figure 4. Its implementation is divided into two parts. First, the code starting at label `init` (and ending at `code`) is used to set up the counter compartment; it is intended to run only once at the beginning of the program. Then, the region between `code` and `end` corresponds to the contents of the counter compartment itself, including its executable code (between `code` and `data`) and private data (between `data` and `end`).

491 The role of the initialization code is to create a sentry capability encapsulating the `code`–`end`  
492 region, and then pass control to the (untrusted) context, giving it access to the newly created sentry  
493 capability. Additionally, the initialization code stores at address `data` a capability giving read-write  
494 access to the compartment’s region, and pointing to the counter’s value at address `data+1`.

495 One might wonder why we have this extra indirection to the counter’s value through the  
496 capability in `data`. Recall that after calling `jmp` on a sentry capability, the program counter is only  
497 provisioned with an `RX` capability. For the counter code to be able to actually increment the counter  
498 value (at address `data+1`), it needs to have write access to it. The additional `RWX` capability stored at  
499 address `data` by the initialization code is thus used to “promote” read access on the compartment’s  
500 region into read-write access to that same region.

501 The code of the counter’s compartment can then run many times, once each time the context  
502 chooses to invoke the sentry capability it got from the initialization code. At each invocation, the  
503 counter’s implementation (at address `code`) reads the `RWX` capability stored in the data section,  
504 uses it to increment the value of the counter, and passes control back to its caller.

505 Let us walk through the details of the code. The initialization code is assumed to run starting with  
506 a program counter giving `RWX` access over the whole program region. The first four instructions  
507 derive, from the program counter, `RWX` capabilities pointing to addresses `data` and `data+1`. Then,  
508 using the `store` instruction, the capability (`RWX`, `init`, `end`, `data+1`) is stored at address `data`. Next,  
509 after using `lea` and `subseg` to adjust the address and bounds of the capability, a sentry capability  
510 is created pointing to the compartment’s region [`code`, `end`). This is done using the `restrict`  
511 instruction, turning a capability with permission `RWX` into a capability with permission `E`. Register  
512 `r2` is then cleared, to make sure that the `RWX` capability pointing to the counter value is not leaked  
513 to the context. Finally, the initialization code jumps to the pointer in `r0`, which by convention points  
514 to the context.

515 The compartment’s code (starting at address `code`) then gets executed each time the context  
516 invokes the sentry capability. Because we have only shared a sentry capability (`E`, `code`, `end`, `code`)  
517 with the context, we know that when the compartment gets executed, the program counter must  
518 contain (`RX`, `code`, `end`, `code`). By reading the program counter, the first two instructions of the  
519 code then derive an `RX` capability pointing to address `data`, and use it (with `load`) to read the  
520 capability that was stored there, granting `RWX` access to `data+1`. The subsequent `load`, `add` and  
521 `store` instructions use this second capability to increment the value of the counter. Finally, before  
522 returning to the context by jumping to `r0`, the program takes care of clearing register `r1`, overwriting  
523 its contents with 0. This is quite crucial, as otherwise an `RWX` capability would be leaked to the  
524 context, giving it direct access to the counter’s private state!

525 To sum up, our example program carefully selects which capabilities it shares with unknown  
526 code, and leverages the encapsulation properties of sentry capabilities provided by the machine.  
527 Consequently, it should seem clear, at least informally, that the integrity of the counter’s value  
528 is guaranteed through the execution. More precisely, we should be able to formally prove some  
529 invariant about it: for instance, that it is nonnegative at every step of the execution, for any un-  
530 trusted context. In Section 6.2, we show in more detail how to formally establish this property.

531  
532 In this section, we have showcased how one might program with capabilities in order to obtain  
533 security guarantees, and make it possible to interact with adversarial code while protecting private  
534 data and invariants.

535 In the rest of this paper, we show how we can make the intuitions that we have developed so far  
536 more precise, and formally prove capability safety for machine code programs that interact with  
537 untrusted code. Namely:

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- 540 • We expect to have some concrete known code, which has some private data and invariants,  
541 and interacts with untrusted code.
- 542 • We formally define the operational semantics of the capability machine that we consider  
543 (Section 3). This precisely defines the behavior of the machine on which the rest of our  
544 framework is built.
- 545 • Then we develop (Section 4) a program logic which supports formally verifying correctness  
546 properties about known code. Given some verified known code, we would then like to be  
547 able to conclude some result about a complete execution of the machine, when it runs a  
548 combination of the known code and some arbitrary untrusted code.
- 549 • To that end we need a way of formally capturing the fact that the machine effectively  
550 restricts the behavior of arbitrary code at runtime, by limiting the capabilities it has access  
551 to. We do this (Section 5) by defining a logical relation capturing “capability safety” of  
552 arbitrary code.
- 553 • By combining the Adequacy theorem of our program logic and the Fundamental theorem  
554 of our logical relation, we can prove safety of concrete examples (Section 6) and obtain  
555 theorems about complete executions of the machine.

### 556 3 OPERATIONAL SEMANTICS OF A CAPABILITY MACHINE

557 The very basis of our framework is a formal description of the capability machine we consider:  
558 which instructions it supports, and its behavior when it runs and executes programs. Technically  
559 speaking, this description corresponds to the operational semantics of the machine, upon which  
560 the program logic described next in Section 4 is built.

561 Our capability machine draws inspiration from CHERI [Watson et al. 2020], albeit in a simplified  
562 form, and only covers a subset of the features found in CHERI machines. Compared to a realistic  
563 CHERI machine, we consider a number of simplifications: our instruction set is minimal, our machine  
564 does not have virtual memory or different privilege levels, machine words can store unbounded  
565 integers, every instruction can be encoded in a single machine word, we do not consider memory  
566 alignment issues, and we abstract away from the binary encoding of capabilities. Nevertheless, our  
567 semantics does capture many of the aspects that make reasoning about machine code programs  
568 challenging: our machine has a finite amount of memory, a fixed number of registers, and there are  
569 no distinctions between code and data nor structured control flow for programs, owing to the fact  
570 that program instructions are simply encoded and stored in memory as normal integers.

571 Figure 5 gives the basic definitions that will play a role in the operational semantics of machine  
572 instructions. The set of memory addresses  $\text{Addr}$  is finite, and corresponds to the integer range  
573  $[0, \text{AddrMax}]$ . A memory word  $w \in \text{Word}$  is either an (unbounded) integer or a capability  $c$ .  
574 Capabilities are of the form  $(p, b, e, a)$ , giving access to the memory range  $[b, e)$  with permission  $p$ ,  
575 while currently pointing to  $a$ . The permissions  $p$  are ordered according to the lattice appearing at  
576 the top-right of the figure, inducing a bottom-to-top partial order  $\leq$  on permissions. There are six  
577 different permissions; the null (o), read-only (RO), enter (E), read-write (RW), read-execute (RX) and  
578 read-write-execute (RWX) permissions.

579 The state of the machine is modeled by the semantics as a pair of an execution state  $s$  and  
580 a configuration  $\varphi$ . An execution state  $\text{flag}$  indicates whether the machine is presently running  
581 (Running), has successfully halted (Halted), or has stopped execution by raising an error (Failed). A  
582 configuration  $\varphi$  contains the state of the registers  $\varphi.\text{reg}$  and the memory  $\varphi.\text{mem}$ . A register file  $\text{reg}$   
583 consists of a map from register names  $r$  to machine words, while the memory  $m$  maps addresses to  
584 words.

585 Next, Figure 5 shows the list of instructions of our machine. An instruction  $i$  typically operates  
586 on register names  $r$ , but can also sometimes take integer values as parameters;  $\rho$  denotes an  
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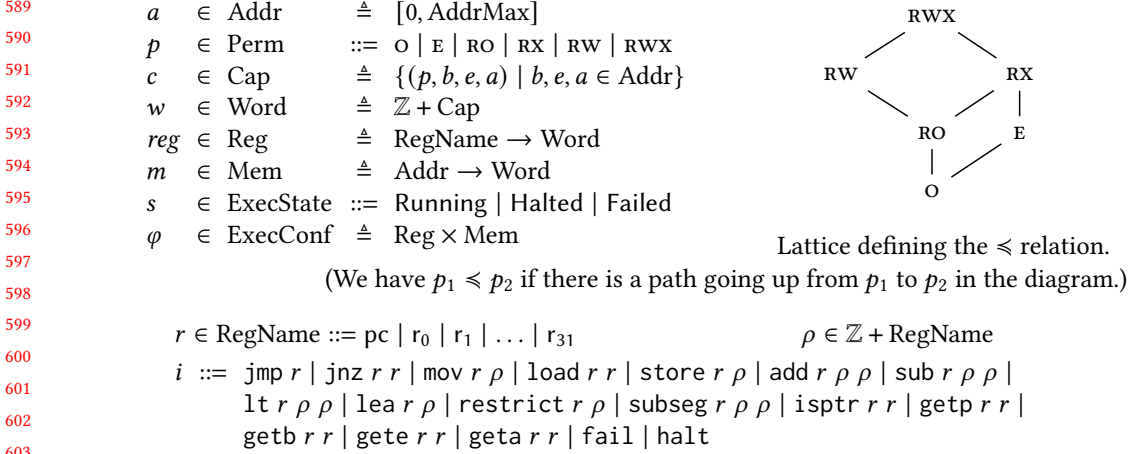


Fig. 5. Base definitions for the machine's words, state, and instructions.

instruction parameter which can be either a register name or a constant integer. Our machine features general purpose registers ( $r_0 - r_{31}$ ), on top of the pc register, which points to the address in memory where the currently executing instruction is stored. (Technically speaking, pc must point to a memory cell containing an integer which can be successfully decoded into an instruction.) pc should therefore always contain a capability with at least permission rx; in any other case, the machine fails immediately.

Figure 6 defines the small-step operational semantics for the capability machine. The rule EXEC\_SINGLE describes how a single instruction gets executed. An execution step requires an executable and in-bounds capability in the pc register, and fails otherwise. It expects the memory cell pointed to by the capability to store an integer  $z$ , decodes it into an instruction and executes the instruction on the current state  $\varphi$ ; the new configuration is denoted  $\llbracket \text{decode}(z) \rrbracket(\varphi)$ . The table making up most of Figure 6 defines the operational behavior  $\llbracket i \rrbracket(\varphi)$  for each instruction  $i$  of the machine.

Most instructions use the auxiliary function updPC to increment the pc register after their proper operations. Because the address space is finite, pointer arithmetic such as incrementing pc can result in illegal addresses. To avoid notational clutter, we will always write as if arithmetic operations succeed, and consider that otherwise the machine transitions to a Failed state. The auxiliary function getWord is used to get the value corresponding to the argument  $\rho$  of an instruction: either its corresponding integer value if it is an immediate integer, or the contents of the corresponding register if it is a register name. The auxiliary function updatePcPerm is used in the definition of the behavior of the jmp and jnz instructions to unseal sentry capabilities. As mentioned previously, an additional effect of these jump instructions is to unseal sentry ( $\text{E}$ ) capabilities into rx capabilities.

We now describe the semantics of the instructions of the machine, as formally defined in the table of Figure 6. The fail and halt instructions stop the execution of the machine, in the Failed and Halted state respectively. mov  $r \rho$  copies  $\rho$  (either an immediate value or the contents of the corresponding register name) into register  $r$ . The instructions load and store allow reading and writing memory: load  $r_1 r_2$  reads the value pointed to by the capability in  $r_2$  provided it has the permission R and points within its bounds; store  $r \rho$  stores  $\rho$  to the location pointed to by the capability in  $r$  provided it has the w permission and points within bounds. The jmp and

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EXEC SINGLE

$$(\text{Running}, \varphi) \rightarrow \begin{cases} \llbracket \text{decode}(z) \rrbracket(\varphi) & \text{if } \varphi.\text{reg}(\text{pc}) = (p, b, e, a) \wedge b \leq a < e \wedge \\ & p \in \{\text{RX}, \text{RWX}\} \wedge \varphi.\text{mem}(a) = z \\ (\text{Failed}, \varphi) & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

$i$	$\llbracket i \rrbracket(\varphi)$	Conditions
fail	(Failed, $\varphi$ )	
halt	(Halted, $\varphi$ )	
mov $r \rho$	updPC( $\varphi[\text{reg}.r \mapsto w]$ )	$w = \text{getWord}(\varphi, \rho)$
load $r_1 r_2$	updPC( $\varphi[\text{reg}.r_1 \mapsto w]$ )	$\varphi.\text{reg}(r_2) = (p, b, e, a)$ and $w = \varphi.\text{mem}(a)$ and $b \leq a < e$ and $p \in \{\text{RO}, \text{RX}, \text{RW}, \text{RWX}\}$
store $r \rho$	updPC( $\varphi[\text{mem}.a \mapsto w]$ )	$\varphi.\text{reg}(r) = (p, b, e, a)$ and $b \leq a < e$ and $p \in \{\text{RW}, \text{RWX}\}$ and $w = \text{getWord}(\varphi, \rho)$
jmp $r$	(Running, $\varphi[\text{reg}.pc \mapsto \text{newPc}]$ )	$\text{newPc} = \text{updatePcPerm}(\varphi.\text{reg}(r))$
jnz $r_1 r_2$	if $\varphi.\text{reg}(r_2) \neq 0$ , then (Running, $\varphi[\text{reg}.pc \mapsto \text{newPc}]$ ) else updPC( $\varphi$ )	$\text{newPc} = \text{updatePcPerm}(\varphi.\text{reg}(r_1))$
restrict $r \rho$	updPC( $\varphi[\text{reg}.r \mapsto w]$ )	$\varphi.\text{reg}(r) = (p, b, e, a)$ and $p' = \text{decodePerm}(\text{getWord}(\varphi, \rho))$ and $p' \leq p$ and $w = (p', b, e, a)$
subseg $r \rho_1 \rho_2$	updPC( $\varphi[\text{reg}.r \mapsto w]$ )	$\varphi.\text{reg}(r) = (p, b, e, a)$ and for $i \in \{1, 2\}$ , $z_i = \text{getWord}(\varphi, \rho_i)$ and $z_i \in \mathbb{Z}$ and $b \leq z_1$ and $0 \leq z_2 \leq e$ and $p \neq \text{E}$ and $w = (p, z_1, z_2, a)$
lea $r \rho$	updPC( $\varphi[\text{reg}.r \mapsto w]$ )	$\varphi.\text{reg}(r) = (p, b, e, a)$ and $z = \text{getWord}(\varphi, \rho)$ and $p \neq \text{E}$ and $w = (p, b, e, a + z)$
add $r \rho_1 \rho_2$	updPC( $\varphi[\text{reg}.r \mapsto z]$ )	for $i \in \{1, 2\}$ , $z_i = \text{getWord}(\varphi, \rho_i)$ and $z_i \in \mathbb{Z}$ and $z = z_1 + z_2$
sub $r \rho_1 \rho_2$	updPC( $\varphi[\text{reg}.r \mapsto z]$ )	for $i \in \{1, 2\}$ , $z_i = \text{getWord}(\varphi, \rho_i)$ and $z_i \in \mathbb{Z}$ and $z = z_1 - z_2$
lt $r \rho_1 \rho_2$	updPC( $\varphi[\text{reg}.r \mapsto z]$ )	for $i \in \{1, 2\}$ , $z_i = \text{getWord}(\varphi, \rho_i)$ and $z_i \in \mathbb{Z}$ and if $z_1 < z_2$ then $z = 1$ else $z = 0$
getp $r_1 r_2$	updPC( $\varphi[\text{reg}.r_1 \mapsto z]$ )	$\varphi.\text{reg}(r_2) = (p, \_, \_, \_)$ and $z = \text{encodePerm}(p)$
getb $r_1 r_2$	updPC( $\varphi[\text{reg}.r_1 \mapsto b]$ )	$\varphi.\text{reg}(r_2) = (\_, b, \_, \_)$
gete $r_1 r_2$	updPC( $\varphi[\text{reg}.r_1 \mapsto e]$ )	$\varphi.\text{reg}(r_2) = (\_, \_, e, \_)$
geta $r_1 r_2$	updPC( $\varphi[\text{reg}.r_1 \mapsto a]$ )	$\varphi.\text{reg}(r_2) = (\_, \_, \_, a)$
isptr $r_1 r_2$	updPC( $\varphi[\text{reg}.r_1 \mapsto z]$ )	if $\varphi.\text{reg}(r_2) = (\_, \_, \_, \_)$ then $z = 1$ else $z = 0$
_	(Failed, $\varphi$ )	otherwise

$$\text{updPC}(\varphi) = \begin{cases} (\text{Running}, \varphi[\text{reg}.pc \mapsto (p, b, e, a + 1)]) & \text{if } \varphi.\text{reg}(\text{pc}) = (p, b, e, a) \\ (\text{Failed}, \varphi) & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

$$\text{getWord}(\varphi, \rho) = \begin{cases} \rho & \text{if } \rho \in \mathbb{Z} \\ \varphi.\text{reg}(\rho) & \text{if } \rho \in \text{RegName} \end{cases}$$

$$\text{updatePcPerm}(w) = \begin{cases} (\text{RX}, b, e, a) & \text{if } w = (\text{E}, b, e, a) \\ w & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

Fig. 6. Operational semantics: execution of a single instruction.



687 `jnz` instructions correspond to an unconditional and conditional jump respectively, thus loading  
 688 the provided capability into `pc`. Using `updatePcPerm`, in the case of a sentry ( $\epsilon$ ) capability, they  
 689 unseal it into a `rx` capability first. Three instructions allow deriving new capabilities from existing  
 690 ones. `restrict r  $\rho$`  allows restricting the permission of a capability (where  $\rho$  provides an integer  
 691 encoding of the desired permission), provided it is less permissive than the current permission  
 692 according to  $\leq$ . `subseg r  $\rho_1$   $\rho_2$`  restricts the range of authority of the capability stored in `r`, provided  
 693 it is a subset of the current range of the capability. `lea r  $\rho$`  modifies the current address of the  
 694 capability in `r`, by adding to it the integer offset  $\rho$ . As should be expected, `subseg` and `lea` fail for  
 695 sentry capabilities. Arithmetic operations are provided by the `add`, `sub` and `lt` instructions, which  
 696 implement addition, subtraction, and comparison on integers, respectively. Finally, a number of  
 697 instructions allow inspecting machine words and capabilities. `isptr` can be used to query whether  
 698 a machine word is an integer or a capability, and `getp`, `getb`, `gete`, and `geta` return the different  
 699 parts of a capability (permission, bounds and address). (More precisely, `getp` returns an integer  
 700 encoding the permission, as given by `encodePerm`.) If any of the capability checks for an instruction  
 701 are not satisfied, the machine fails.

702 An important aspect of our operational semantics is how it explicitly accounts for errors: when  
 703 a capability check fails (for instance when a program tries to use a capability outside of its range),  
 704 the semantics does not get stuck (meaning that it would not be able to reduce): instead, it explicitly  
 705 transitions to a state with the Failed execution state flag.

706

707

#### 4 PROGRAM LOGIC

708 The operational semantics presented in the previous section formally define the behavior of our  
 709 machine when it runs and executes code. Based on that, we expect to be able to formally verify  
 710 concrete programs running on the machine.

711 The most direct approach would be to manually establish properties of sequences of reduction  
 712 steps, based on the sole definition of the operational semantics. We do not follow this approach,  
 713 because it would quickly become very tedious even for simple programs.

714 Instead, we draw from previous research in program logics and separation logic, and define  
 715 Cerise: a program logic which provides a convenient framework in which to modularly reason  
 716 about programs running on our machine. Indeed:

717

- 718 • It is typically more convenient to devise a system of proof rules for programs, rather  
 719 than work directly at the level of abstraction provided by the bare operational semantics.  
 720 Such rules form a program logic, which can be proved sound according to the operational  
 721 semantics, and then can be used to verify properties of concrete programs.

722

- 723 • Separation logic, a family of program logics, has been widely used to reason about programs  
 724 manipulating shared mutable state (such as memory). On our capability machine, not only  
 725 do all programs access a mutable shared memory, but programs are themselves represented  
 726 as unstructured data in memory; so the use of separation logic is particularly called for.  
 727 Separation logic enables modular reasoning about programs that operate only on a sub-part  
 728 of the global state, allowing them to be freely composed with programs that operate on a  
 disjoint part of the state.

729 The first step is to consider what part of the machine state should be described by separation  
 730 logic assertions. Here, the machine state consists of both the machine memory and the machine  
 731 registers. Indeed, it is useful to modularly reason about programs operating on both a subset of  
 732 memory and a subset of the available registers.

733 Technically speaking, we build the Cerise program logic on top of the Iris framework [Jung et al.  
 734 2018], which provides us with additional useful features, such as invariants. In the following we

735

$P, Q \in iProp ::=$		
True   False   $\forall x. P$   $\exists x. P$   ...		higher-order logic
$P * Q$   $P \multimap Q$   $[\phi]$   $\Box P$   $\triangleright P$		separation logic
$a \mapsto w$   $r \mapsto w$   $\vec{a} \mapsto \vec{l}$		machine resources
$\boxed{P}$		invariants
$\langle P \rangle \rightarrow \langle s. Q \rangle$   $\{P\} \rightsquigarrow \{s. Q\}$   $\{P\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet$		program logic

Fig. 7. The syntax of our program logic.

introduce both the basic separation logic assertions describing the machine state and additional features inherited from Iris (Section 4.1). Then, we describe the rules that are used to specify the execution of machine instructions and programs (Section 4.2).

Note that the program logic is, in a sense, only a technical device. The end goal is to obtain theorems that only refer to reductions in the operational semantics of our machine. To that end, we present (Section 4.3) an Adequacy theorem for our logic, which allows us to “extract” a correctness theorem expressed in terms of the operational semantics of the machine from a proof established in the program logic.

#### 4.1 Basic resources

Figure 7 shows the syntax of our Cerise program logic based on Iris. We write  $iProp$  for the universe of propositions. These feature the standard connectives of higher-order logic and separation logic, including the separating conjunction  $*$  and the magic wand  $\multimap$  (read as an implication). The proposition  $[\phi]$  asserts that the pure proposition  $\phi$  holds, where  $\phi$  is a proposition from the meta logic.

Iris assertions can be divided in two categories: *ephemeral* assertions and *persistent* assertions. Ephemeral assertions describe facts or resources that are available at a given point but might become false or unavailable later. Persistent assertions describe facts that never cease to be true. The assertion  $\Box P$ , read “persistently  $P$ ”, is persistent, and asserts ownership over resources whose duplicable part satisfies  $P$ . In other words,  $\Box P$  is like  $P$  except that it does not assert any exclusive ownership over resources. As the knowledge associated with a persistent assertion can never be invalidated, persistent assertions can be freely duplicated.

The modality  $\triangleright P$  expresses (roughly) that the assertion  $P$  holds after one “logical step” of execution. In this paper, we mainly use it to define recursive predicates using guarded recursion. It is not necessary to understand how the modality behaves in detail and the reader can safely ignore it for the most part and just recall that it supports an abstract accounting of execution steps.

Our logic includes resources (predicates) that describe parts of the current state of the machine. The assertion  $a \mapsto w$  expresses that the memory cell at address  $a$  contains the machine word  $w$ . Furthermore, this assertion should be read as giving *unique ownership* over location  $a$ , giving the right to freely read and update the corresponding memory cell. Similarly, the assertion  $r \mapsto w$  asserts ownership of a CPU register  $r$  containing the word  $w$ . We write  $\vec{a} \mapsto \vec{l}$  for the ownership of contiguous memory cells at addresses  $\vec{a}$  containing  $\vec{l}$ .

A key feature of the logic is the notion of an invariant. The assertion  $\boxed{P}$  asserts that  $P$  should hold at all times, now and for every future step of the execution (where  $P$  can be any separation logic assertion). An invariant is a persistent assertion. An invariant  $\boxed{P}$  can be created (or “allocated”) by handing over the resources for  $P$ , turning them into  $\boxed{P}$ . Then, whenever we know that  $\boxed{P}$  holds, we can get access to the resources  $P$  held in the invariant, but only for the duration of one

785 program step. Indeed, since the invariant must hold at every step of the execution, when accessing  
 786 its resources, one needs to show that it holds again no later than one program step after. A more  
 787 precise rule for accessing invariants is given next in Section 4.2 (rule Inv).  
 788

## 789 4.2 Program specifications

790 The predicates for machine resources we just presented allow describing the state of the machine.  
 791 Our logic, moreover, includes assertions that can be used to specify machine executions, similar  
 792 to *Hoare triples* used in program logics for high-level languages. Because we work with a low-  
 793 level machine (where code is located in memory), we distinguish between three different types of  
 794 program specifications:

795	$\langle P \rangle \rightarrow \langle s. Q \rangle$	single instruction
796	$\{P\} \rightsquigarrow \{s. Q\}$	code fragment
797	$\{P\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet$	complete safe execution.
798		

799 In each case,  $P$  and  $Q$  are separation logic assertions describing the state of the machine (reg-  
 800 isters and memory).  $P$  corresponds to a pre-condition,  $Q$  a post-condition, and  $s$  binds in  $Q$  the  
 801 corresponding execution state (of type `ExecState`, see Figure 5).  
 802

803 Informally,  $\langle P \rangle \rightarrow \langle s. Q \rangle$  holds if, starting from a machine state satisfying  $P$ , the machine can  
 804 execute one step of computation, and reach a state satisfying  $Q$  in an execution state  $s$ . The predicate  
 805  $\{P\} \rightsquigarrow \{s. Q\}$  holds if, starting from a state satisfying  $P$ , then the machine can diverge (i.e. loop) or  
 806 reach a state satisfying  $Q$  in an execution state  $s$ . This is typically used to describe the execution  
 807 of a code fragment. Finally,  $\{P\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet$  holds if, starting from a machine state satisfying  $P$ , then the  
 808 machine loops forever or runs until completion, ending in either a Halted or Failed state. In this  
 809 case, we say that the initial configuration described by  $P$  is *safe*. (Not every configuration is safe:  
 810 the resources in  $P$  describing registers and memory must suffice for the machine to run and execute  
 811 the code pointed to by `pc`: we do not have  $\{pc \Rightarrow w\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet$  in general.)

812 Additionally, these three specifications *require the logical invariants to be preserved at every step of*  
 813 *the execution*. This requirement is implicit in the definition of invariants, but it is a crucial reasoning  
 814 principle that we will leverage.

815 Echoing back to Section 2.2, note that our program specification for a complete safe execution  
 816 allows the program to fail (or diverge). Indeed, we will capture the preservation of security properties  
 817 by preserving *invariants* throughout execution and having the machine fail is both fine (invariants  
 818 are trivially preserved when the machine ends up in a failure state) and unavoidable (we cannot  
 819 prevent unknown code from triggering a capability check failure). Similar considerations apply for  
 820 divergence.

821 *Notations.* In the rest of the paper, we will rely on a couple of additional notations when writing  
 822 program specifications. Because we often want to reason about the case where an instruction  
 823 (or program fragment) does not fail, we write  $\langle P \rangle \rightarrow \langle Q \rangle$  (respectively  $\{P\} \rightsquigarrow \{Q\}$ ) to denote a  
 824 resulting execution state equal to `Running`:

$$825 \quad \langle P \rangle \rightarrow \langle Q \rangle \triangleq \langle P \rangle \rightarrow \langle s. [s = \text{Running}] * Q \rangle$$

$$826 \quad \{P\} \rightsquigarrow \{Q\} \triangleq \{P\} \rightsquigarrow \{s. [s = \text{Running}] * Q\}.$$

827  
 828 When writing pre- and post-conditions, we will often need to include a points-to resource  
 829 describing the contents of the `pc` register. We introduce a short-hand notation for that purpose,  
 830 and write  $w; P$  to assert  $P$  and additionally that `pc` is set to  $w$ :

$$831 \quad w; P \triangleq pc \Rightarrow w * P$$

Using these two notations, the specification for a single instruction, in a case where it does not fail, is written as  $\langle w_0; P \rangle \rightarrow \langle w_1; Q \rangle$  (typically, we have  $w_1 = w_0 + 1$ , except in the case of the `jmp` and `jnz` instructions, or when explicitly writing to the `pc` register).

*Properties.* Our program specifications satisfy the well-known “frame rule” of separation logic, which permits local reasoning, and asserts that it is always possible to extend a specification by adding arbitrary resources not accessed by the program.

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \text{FRAGFRAME} & \text{STEPFRAME} & \text{FULLFRAME} \\ \frac{\{P\} \rightsquigarrow \{s. Q\}}{\{P * R\} \rightsquigarrow \{s. Q * R\}} & \frac{\langle P \rangle \rightarrow \langle s. Q \rangle}{\langle P * R \rangle \rightarrow \langle s. Q * R \rangle} & \frac{\{P\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet}{\{P * R\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet} \end{array}$$

Program specifications can also be composed using sequencing rules. In order to establish a specification of the form  $\{P\} \rightsquigarrow \{s. Q\}$ , one typically uses single-instructions rules ( $\langle R \rangle \rightarrow \langle s. S \rangle$ ) in a sequence, one for each instruction of the relevant code block. Specifications for two program fragments that follow each other can also be combined to obtain a specification for the sequence of the two fragments. We prove general sequencing rules for our three kind of specifications; for simplicity, we only reproduce here restricted rules that deal with successful executions (relying on the notations introduced before):

$$\begin{array}{cc} \text{SEQFRAG} & \text{SEQFULL} \\ \frac{\{P\} \rightsquigarrow \{Q\} \quad \{Q\} \rightsquigarrow \{R\}}{\{P\} \rightsquigarrow \{R\}} & \frac{\{P\} \rightsquigarrow \{Q\} \quad \{Q\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet}{\{P\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet} \\ \\ \text{STEPFULL} & \text{STEPFRAG} \\ \frac{\langle P \rangle \rightarrow \langle Q \rangle \quad \{Q\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet}{\{P\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet} & \frac{\langle P \rangle \rightarrow \langle Q \rangle \quad \{Q\} \rightsquigarrow \{R\}}{\{P\} \rightsquigarrow \{R\}} \end{array}$$

When reasoning about a single execution step, one can additionally access resources held in known invariants. This is done using the `INV` rule, given below:<sup>2</sup>

$$\frac{\text{INV} \quad \langle P * \triangleright R \rangle \rightarrow \langle s. Q * \triangleright R \rangle}{\boxed{R} \vdash \langle P \rangle \rightarrow \langle s. Q \rangle}$$

*Example specifications.* As illustrative examples, Figure 8 shows specifications for the `subseg`, `load` and `store` instructions, as well as the `rclear` macro which is used to clear the contents of a number of specified registers. The first rule shows a specification for the `subseg` instruction. It states that if the program counter contains a capability pointing to a memory location  $a_{pc}$ , if that location contains an integer  $n$  which decodes into `subseg`  $r \ z_1 \ z_2$ , and if the register  $r$  contains a capability, then assuming that the program counter is valid (`ValidPC(...)`) and that  $z_1$  and  $z_2$  are valid new bounds (`ValidSubseg(...)`), the machine successfully increments the program counter and restricts the capability held in register  $r$  with new bounds  $z_1$  and  $z_2$ .

The second rule is also a specification for `subseg`, but in a case where it fails a bound check, i.e. `ValidSubseg(p, b, e, z1, z2)` does not hold. (For instance, when the new bounds  $z_1$  and  $z_2$  would allow accessing more memory than what is available through the original capability.) Then, the rule does give us a specification for an execution step, but with a resulting execution state of `Failed`, meaning that the execution cannot continue afterwards.

<sup>2</sup>For clarity of the presentation, we choose to omit additional details related to Iris invariant namespaces and masks. We refer to the Coq development for the full details [\(2\)](#).

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\end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{c}
\text{ValidPC}(p_{pc}, b_{pc}, e_{pc}, a_{pc}) \quad \text{ValidSubseg}(p, b, e, z_1, z_2) \quad \text{decode}(n) = \text{subseg } r \ z_1 \ z_2 \\
\hline
\langle (p_{pc}, b_{pc}, e_{pc}, a_{pc}) ; \quad a_{pc} \mapsto n * r \Rightarrow (p, b, e, a) \rangle \rightarrow \\
\langle (p_{pc}, b_{pc}, e_{pc}, a_{pc} + 1) ; \quad a_{pc} \mapsto n * r \Rightarrow (p, z_1, z_2, a) \rangle \\
\hline
\text{ValidPC}(p_{pc}, b_{pc}, e_{pc}, a_{pc}) \quad \neg \text{ValidSubseg}(p, b, e, z_1, z_2) \quad \text{decode}(n) = \text{subseg } r \ z_1 \ z_2 \\
\hline
\langle (p_{pc}, b_{pc}, e_{pc}, a_{pc}) ; \quad a_{pc} \mapsto n * r \Rightarrow (p, b, e, a) \rangle \rightarrow \\
\langle s. [s = \text{Failed}] * ((p_{pc}, b_{pc}, e_{pc}, a_{pc}) ; \quad a_{pc} \mapsto n * r \Rightarrow (p, b, e, a)) \rangle \\
\hline
\text{ValidPC}(p_{pc}, b_{pc}, e_{pc}, a_{pc}) \quad \text{ValidLoad}(p, b, e, a) \quad \text{decode}(n) = \text{load } dst \ src \\
\hline
\langle (p_{pc}, b_{pc}, e_{pc}, a_{pc}) ; \quad a_{pc} \mapsto n * dst \Rightarrow - * src \Rightarrow (p, b, e, a) * a \mapsto w \rangle \rightarrow \\
\langle (p_{pc}, b_{pc}, e_{pc}, a_{pc} + 1) ; \quad a_{pc} \mapsto n * dst \Rightarrow w * src \Rightarrow (p, b, e, a) * a \mapsto w \rangle \\
\hline
\text{ValidPC}(p_{pc}, b_{pc}, e_{pc}, a_{pc}) \quad \text{ValidStore}(p, b, e, a) \quad \text{decode}(n) = \text{store } dst \ src \\
\hline
\langle (p_{pc}, b_{pc}, e_{pc}, a_{pc}) ; \quad a_{pc} \mapsto n * dst \Rightarrow (p, b, e, a) * src \Rightarrow w * a \mapsto - \rangle \rightarrow \\
\langle (p_{pc}, b_{pc}, e_{pc}, a_{pc} + 1) ; \quad a_{pc} \mapsto n * dst \Rightarrow (p, b, e, a) * src \Rightarrow w * a \mapsto w \rangle \\
\hline
\forall i \in [0, n), \text{ValidPC}(p, b, e, a_i) \quad n = \text{length}(\text{rclear\_instrs } l) \\
\hline
\{ (p, b, e, a_0) ; *_{r \in l} r \Rightarrow - * *_{i \in [0, n)} a_i \mapsto (\text{rclear\_instrs } l)[i] \} \rightsquigarrow \\
\{ (p, b, e, a_n) ; *_{r \in l} r \Rightarrow 0 * *_{i \in [0, n)} a_i \mapsto (\text{rclear\_instrs } l)[i] \} \\
\hline
\text{ValidPC}(p_{pc}, b_{pc}, e_{pc}, a_{pc}) \quad \triangleq \quad \text{RX} \leq p_{pc} \wedge b_{pc} \leq a_{pc} < e_{pc} \\
\text{ValidSubseg}(p, b, e, z_1, z_2) \quad \triangleq \quad p \neq E \wedge b \leq z_1 \wedge 0 \leq z_2 \leq e \\
\text{ValidLoad}(p, b, e, a) \quad \triangleq \quad \text{RO} \leq p \wedge b \leq a < e \\
\text{ValidStore}(p, b, e, a) \quad \triangleq \quad \text{RW} \leq p \wedge b \leq a < e \\
\text{rclear\_instrs } l \quad \triangleq \quad \text{map } (\lambda r. \text{encode}(\text{move } r \ 0)) \ l
\end{array}$$

Fig. 8. Specifications for the machine instructions `subseg`, `load` and `store` and for the `rclear` macro that sets a given list of registers to zero. Changes to the machine state are highlighted in red.

The third and fourth rules give specifications for the `load` and `store` instructions (in non-failing cases). The specification for `load` states that `load dst src` loads a word from memory pointed to by a capability in register `src` and stores its contents in register `dst`. The specification for `store` states that `store dst src` reads a word from the `src` register and writes it into the memory location pointed to by the capability in `dst`.

Note that these specifications for `subseg`, `load` and `store` are not in fact the most general specifications for these instructions. They assume that some side-conditions hold, and specify the behavior of the instruction in the case of either a “normal” successful execution, or a failing one. These specifications are typically useful for reasoning about the correctness of a concrete program. We have also proved in Coq (e.g., ③ for the `subseg` instruction) “most general” specifications, covering in one lemma all possible cases for a given instructions. These are useful for deriving the more specific rules shown previously. Furthermore, we use them directly in the proof of the Fundamental Theorem (Theorem 2), for specifying the behavior of arbitrary instructions that might or might not fail.

The last rule of Figure 8 shows a derivable specification for a program composed of several instructions, the `rclear` macro. This macro (meaning, a small program that is typically inserted inline as part of a larger program) clears a number of registers by setting their content to 0. It is

parameterized by a list  $l$  of register names, and its code consists of a sequence of instructions `move`  $r$  0  
 for each register name  $r$  in  $l$ . We state `rclear`'s specification using the program specification for  
 code fragments. This specification is provable using the basic reasoning rules for `move`. It requires  
 that the body of the macro (“`rclear_instrs l`”) is laid out contiguously in memory range  $[a_0, a_n)$ ,  
 while the program counter initially points to  $a_0$ . When the program counter eventually points to  
 $a_n$ , the address immediately after the macro's instructions, then all the registers in  $l$  have been  
 cleared and now contain 0. (The “big star”  $*$  denotes an iterated separating conjunction, here over  
 the registers  $r$  in list  $l$ .)

### 4.3 Adequacy theorem

After establishing program specifications and properties at the level of our program logic, we  
 ultimately want to transfer these results into properties of a program execution at the level of the  
 operational semantics of the bare machine. Generally speaking, we prove using the rules of the Iris  
 logic a statement of the form  $\boxed{P} \vdash Q$ , where  $P$  and  $Q$  are Iris propositions (read “ $Q$  holds assuming  
 invariant  $P$ ”). From this, we want to deduce that some mathematical proposition  $\Phi$  holds (as a Coq  
 proposition, in our case), where  $\Phi$  describes some property of the machine execution expressed in  
 terms of its operational semantics.

Because we are interested in establishing *invariants* about a program execution, we typically  
 want to obtain in  $\Phi$  that at every step of the execution, the state of the machine satisfies an invariant  
 corresponding to the Iris assertion  $P$ .

Deriving mathematical facts from Iris proof derivations is made possible thanks to the so-called  
*adequacy* theorem of Iris ④. This theorem has a very general but intricate statement. In this section,  
 we describe a simpler but more specialized adequacy theorem for our capability machine, which  
 we can use to reason about the examples introduced in Section 2. (We also describe in Section 7 a  
 more advanced adequacy theorem, suitable for reasoning about programs such as the case study  
 of Section 8.) This specialized adequacy theorem is itself established on top of the general Iris  
 adequacy theorem. When it applies, it is more convenient to use; but in the general case, it is always  
 possible to directly leverage the general adequacy theorem.

We now present our specialized adequacy theorem. We first define a notion of *memory invariant*  
 (Definition 1), which corresponds to a predicate over a finite subset of the machine memory.  
 Typically, we will consider predicates of the form: “the value at this specific memory address holds a  
 positive integer” (for instance, the value of the counter of Section 2.4). A memory invariant is given  
 by a predicate  $I$  over machine memory and a set of addresses  $D$  (the “domain” of the invariant); we  
 then require that  $I$  is not impacted by changes outside of  $D$ .

DEFINITION 1 (MEMORY INVARIANT ⑤). *We say that  $I$  is a memory invariant over  $D$  if  $I$  is a  
 predicate over machine memory,  $D$  a finite set of addresses, and:*

$$\forall m m'. (\forall a \in D. m(a) = m'(a)) \implies I(m) \Leftrightarrow I(m').$$

We now present the statement of our specialized adequacy theorem; we explain the ingredients  
 in the theorem statement below. Given a memory invariant  $I$  over a set  $D$ , our adequacy theorem  
 (Theorem 1) can be used to show that  $I$  indeed holds of the memory at every step of the execution,  
 provided we can show that it holds as an invariant in Iris.

THEOREM 1 (ADEQUACY ⑥). *Given a memory invariant  $I$  over  $D$ , a memory fragment  $\text{prog} : [b, e) \rightarrow \text{Word}$ , a memory fragment  $\text{adv} : [b_{\text{adv}}, e_{\text{adv}}) \rightarrow \text{Word}$ , an initial memory  $\text{mem}$ , and an initial register file  $\text{reg}$ , assuming that:*



981 (1) the initial state of memory  $mem$  satisfies:

$$982 \quad prog \uplus adv \subseteq mem \quad D \subseteq \text{dom}(prog) = [b, e]$$

983 (2) invariant  $I$  holds of the initial memory:

$$984 \quad I(mem)$$

985 (3) the adversary region contains no capabilities:

$$986 \quad \forall a \in \text{dom}(adv). \text{adv}(a) \in \mathbb{Z}$$

987 (4) the initial state of registers  $reg$  satisfies:

$$988 \quad reg(pc) = (RWX, b, e, b), \quad reg(r_0) = (RWX, b_{adv}, e_{adv}, b_{adv}), \quad reg(r) \in \mathbb{Z} \text{ otherwise}$$

989 (5) the proof in Iris that the initial configuration is safe given invariant  $I$ :

990  $\forall reg,$

$$991 \quad \boxed{\exists m, *_{(a,w) \in m} a \mapsto w * [\text{dom}(m) = D] * [I(m)]}$$

$$992 \quad \vdash \left\{ \begin{array}{l} (RWX, b, e, b); \\ *_{(r,v) \in reg, r \neq \{pc, r_0\}} r \mapsto z * [z \in \mathbb{Z}] * \\ *_{(a,z) \in adv} a \mapsto z * [z \in \mathbb{Z}] * \\ *_{\substack{(a,w) \in prog, \\ a \neq D}} a \mapsto w \end{array} \right\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet$$

1000 Then, for any  $reg', mem'$ , if  $(reg, mem) \longrightarrow^* (reg', mem')$ , then  $I(mem')$ .

1001 Theorem 1 establishes that, starting from an initial machine state  $(reg, mem)$ , any subsequent machine state  $(reg', mem')$  satisfies  $I(mem')$ . This is subject to a number of conditions, in particular about the initial state of the machine.

1002 First, the initial memory must be provisioned with relevant code and data. This means that the program that we wish to verify (both its code and data) given by memory fragment  $prog : [b, e] \rightarrow \text{Word}$  should be included in the initial memory. Moreover, some additional “adversarial code” given by  $adv : [b_{adv}, e_{adv}] \rightarrow \text{Word}$  should be included in the initial memory. Indeed, we are not only interested in reasoning about the execution of our verified program in isolation, but also its interaction with unverified, possibly adversarial code. The initial memory  $mem$  should therefore include  $prog$  and  $adv$ , in disjoint regions. Furthermore, the domain of the invariant  $I$  should be included in the program’s region  $[b, e]$ . The intent is that  $I$  specifies an invariant about some private data of the verified program, and thus should not depend on other parts of memory.

1003 Second, as should be expected, the invariant  $I$  must hold of the initial memory  $mem$ .

1004 Third, the adversary memory  $adv$  is required not to contain any capabilities. This conservatively ensures that  $adv$  does not contain any “rogue” capability that would give undesired access to the verified program’s private state. No further assumption is made about  $adv$ , which is thus free to contain arbitrary code (i.e. instructions encoded as integers). Furthermore, note that the absence of capabilities in  $adv$  does not mean that code in  $adv$  will not be able to access memory at all: at runtime, it will still get access to a capability to its own region through the program counter  $pc$ .

1005 Then, the initial register file  $reg$  should be provided with a  $rwX$  capability to the verified program in  $pc$  (meaning that it executes first), and a capability to the unverified code in register  $r_0$  (as we have seen in Section 2, by convention  $r_0$  holds the pointer to a program’s continuation). Other registers are conservatively required not to contain any capabilities.

1006 Finally, one needs to establish at the level of the program logic that the program is safe to run under invariant  $I$ . Concretely, one needs to prove a specification for a complete safe execution (of



1030 the form  $\{P\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet$ ), given “points-to” resources in the pre-condition that correspond to the initial  
 1031 state of registers and memory. In particular, we get access to points-to resources for the adversary  
 1032 region (along the fact that they contain integers) and points-to resources for the region containing  
 1033 the program to execute.

1034 Note that no resources are given for the domain of  $I$  as part of the initial resources for the  
 1035 complete-execution specification. Instead, these resources are part of the logical invariant under  
 1036 which the specification must be established (inside  $\boxed{\dots}$ ). This corresponds to the intuition that  
 1037 these resources should only be modified in a way that preserves invariant  $I$ . This logical invariant  
 1038 therefore specifies that there exists a subset of memory  $m$ , which covers the memory region defined  
 1039 by  $D$ , such that the invariant holds the corresponding points-to resources and such that  $I(m)$  holds,  
 1040 i.e. the memory invariant  $I$  holds of this memory subset. (Recall from Section 4.1 that  $\lceil \phi \rceil$  denotes  
 1041 an Iris proposition that asserts that the mathematical proposition  $\phi$  holds.)

1042 The reader may be surprised to notice that the region containing “adversarial” code has no  
 1043 special status. Indeed, it simply corresponds to a memory region containing (a priori unknown)  
 1044 integers. Nevertheless, remember that we ultimately want our program to be able to pass control  
 1045 to the unknown adversary code by jumping to the capability in  $r_0$ , as we have seen our example  
 1046 programs do. This means we need to have a way of reasoning about “what it will do”, at least to  
 1047 ensure that it will not break our program’s invariants.

1048 In the next section, we show how to reason about whether unknown code can be considered  
 1049 “safe to execute”, so that we can pass control to it while preserving previously established invariants.

1050

## 1051 5 REASONING ABOUT UNTRUSTED CODE IN CERISE

1052 Code running on a capability machine is constrained by the set of capabilities it has access to. This  
 1053 is a crucial idea for reasoning about adversarial code. Whatever code the machine is running, if  
 1054 this code does not have access to a capability for, e.g., writing to a memory region, then it will not  
 1055 be able to modify memory in that region. In other words, one can prove a theorem describing the  
 1056 behavior of arbitrary code depending only on the capabilities it has access to.

1057 One major technical contribution of this work is to formulate and mechanize such a theorem.  
 1058 Specifically, we are concerned with the preservation of invariants established in the program logic.  
 1059 We will thus give a definition of which machine words that are “safe” to share with unknown code.  
 1060 Informally, a word is safe if it cannot be used to break any previously established logical invariants.  
 1061 We will then prove that, as long as some arbitrary code only has access to safe machine words, its  
 1062 execution indeed preserves logical invariants.

1063 Interestingly, we can establish this result while staying within the framework of the Cerise  
 1064 program logic exposed in the previous section. This illustrates the generality of said program logic:  
 1065 verifying specifications for known programs or specifying the behavior of arbitrary code are only  
 1066 two of its possible applications.

1067

### 1068 5.1 Logical Relation

1069 Our formal definition of what makes a machine word *safe*, meaning “safe to share with unknown  
 1070 code”, appears in Figure 9. It takes the form of a unary logical relation, defining simultaneously  
 1071 the notions of a machine word that is “safe to share” ( $\mathcal{V}$ ) and “safe to execute” ( $\mathcal{E}$ ). The names  $\mathcal{V}$   
 1072 and  $\mathcal{E}$  originate from the tradition of logical relations, corresponding respectively to the “value  
 1073 relation” and the “expression relation”, although this interpretation is perhaps less obvious in the  
 1074 setting of low-level machine code. We explain the definition in detail below. The intuition is that:

- 1075 • A value which is safe to share only gives transitive access to other values that are safe to  
 1076 share, or code that is safe to execute (in the case of a sentry capability).

1078

$$\begin{aligned}
1079 \quad \mathcal{V}(w) & \begin{cases} \mathcal{V}(z), \mathcal{V}(o, -, -, -) \triangleq \text{True} \\
1080 \quad \mathcal{V}(\varepsilon, b, e, a) \triangleq \triangleright \square \mathcal{E}(\text{RX}, b, e, a) \\
1081 \quad \mathcal{V}(\text{RW}/\text{RWX}, b, e, -) \triangleq \star_{a \in [b, e]} \boxed{\exists w, a \mapsto w * \mathcal{V}(w)} \\
1082 \quad \mathcal{V}(\text{RO}/\text{RX}, b, e, -) \triangleq \star_{a \in [b, e]} \exists P, \boxed{\exists w, a \mapsto w * P(w)} * \triangleright \square (\forall w, P(w) \multimap \mathcal{V}(w)) \end{cases} \\
1083 \\
1084 \quad \mathcal{E}(w) & \triangleq \forall \text{reg}, \{w; \star_{(r, v) \in \text{reg}, r \neq \text{pc}} r \Rightarrow v * \mathcal{V}(v)\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet. \\
1085 \\
1086
\end{aligned}$$

Fig. 9. Logical relation defining “safe to share” and “safe to execute” values.

- A value which is safe to execute allows the machine to run while preserving logical invariants (by definition of  $\{ \cdot ; \cdot \} \rightsquigarrow \bullet$ ), provided the registers contain safe values.

Technically speaking, this informal definition is circular. Luckily, we can define it properly with the help of the “later” modality  $\triangleright$ . Iris provides us with a fixed-point operator that only requires recursive occurrences to be guarded under a  $\triangleright$ , and we use that to formally define  $\mathcal{V}$  and  $\mathcal{E}$ . Except for this technical requirement, the reader can in practice ignore the use of  $\triangleright$  here.

Let us more closely examine the definition of  $\mathcal{V}$ , which is defined by case analysis on the shape of the given machine word  $w$ . If  $w$  is an integer ( $z$ ), then it is always safe to share, since it cannot be used to access memory. Similarly, opaque capabilities with permission  $o$  are always safe as they also do not give access to memory.

A sentry capability  $\varepsilon$  is safe to share if the code it encapsulates is safe to execute. Such a capability can be invoked at any moment and possibly several times: this is expressed through the use of the persistently modality  $\square$ . Technically speaking, this means that the property  $\mathcal{E}(\text{RX}, b, e, a)$  must be established by only relying on persistent resources (typically, logical invariants) that will remain “available” throughout the entire execution.

A read-write capability  $\text{RW}$  or  $\text{RWX}$  gives read and write access to the memory region in its range. It is therefore safe as long as the words stored in the corresponding memory region are safe, and continue to be so when the memory gets modified. We thus say that it is safe when we have an invariant for each memory cell in the capability’s region, which asserts ownership over the corresponding memory points-to resource, and asserts validity of its contents.

Finally, a capability with permission  $\text{RO}/\text{RX}$  cannot be used by unknown code to modify the memory words in its range. Therefore, these words can obey any property  $P$  as long as it entails safety ( $\mathcal{V}$ ). Intuitively, the words in the interval have to be safe to share, because the adversary can read them. But since the adversary cannot modify them, it is possible to guarantee a stronger invariant about them. For instance,  $P(w)$  could be the predicate “ $w = 42$ ”, describing that a value in the range stays equal to the integer 42.

Notice that this definition of safety does not distinguish between capabilities with permission  $\text{RO}$  and  $\text{RX}$ , or  $\text{RW}$  and  $\text{RWX}$ . This seems to strangely imply that permissions with the execute bit  $x$  have no additional expressive power over permissions without the execute bit. And indeed, *in terms of our model*—which “only” captures the ability to break memory invariants—their expressive power is the same!<sup>3</sup> The crux of our main theorem (presented in the next sub-section) is that executing arbitrary code does not produce capabilities with more access to memory than was available before. Thus, being able to execute code within a memory region does not yield additional access to memory compared to what was available by simply reading the memory region (it only leads to additional machine behaviors).

<sup>3</sup>Having read-only permission over a region also allows one to simply copy the contents of the region into any other read-execute region and execute them here.

1128 *Is this definition of safety trivial?* One might wonder whether the definition in Figure 9 is trivial,  
 1129 meaning that any machine word  $w$  will in fact be considered safe. This is thankfully not the case; let  
 1130 us illustrate concrete cases where a memory word  $w$  is *not* considered safe to share with unknown  
 1131 code.

1132 At a high level,  $\mathcal{E}$  is not trivial because establishing  $\mathcal{E}(w)$  requires proving that a full execution  
 1133 of the machine, starting from  $w$ , *preserves logical invariants*. This requirement is not explicit in the  
 1134 definition, but comes from the definition of the Cerise program logic. The definition of  $\mathcal{V}(w)$  is also  
 1135 not trivial because, e.g., in the case of an RW capability, it requires the memory points-to  $a \mapsto -$   
 1136 predicate to be part of a specific invariant,  $\boxed{\exists w, a \mapsto w * \mathcal{V}(w)}$ . Since the resource “ $a \mapsto -$ ” is  
 1137 not duplicable, there can be only one resource  $a \mapsto -$ , which cannot be simultaneously part of two  
 1138 different invariants. Memory cells whose contents evolve according to an invariant more specific  
 1139 (less permissive) than the one above thus cannot be associated with a safe capability (according to  
 1140  $\mathcal{V}$ ).

1141 What is a concrete example of a capability which is *not* safe? Let us consider a memory cell  
 1142 at address  $x$  initialized to 0. Let us assume the following Iris invariant:  $\boxed{x \mapsto 0}$ . This invariant  
 1143 expresses that  $x$  will contain the integer 0 for the rest of the execution. Then, a capability  $(\text{RW}, x, x +$   
 1144  $1, x)$  is not safe to share with an adversary. Indeed, an adversary could use such a capability to  
 1145 write an arbitrary value at address  $x$ , thus invalidating the Iris invariant. (However,  $(\text{RO}, x, x + 1, x)$   
 1146 would be safe.) A bit more formally speaking, it is not possible to prove  $\mathcal{V}(\text{RW}, x, x + 1, x)$ , because  
 1147 it is not possible to create the invariant  $\boxed{\exists w, x \mapsto w * \mathcal{V}(w)}$ , as the resource for the memory cell  
 1148  $x$  is already part of the invariant  $\boxed{x \mapsto 0}$ , and cannot be extracted to create a different invariant.

1149 Similarly, one cannot prove  $\mathcal{E}$  for a code fragment that writes another value than 0 at address  $x$   
 1150 (after getting access to it through the pc register), because the proof would not be able to guarantee  
 1151 that the Iris invariant related to  $x$  is preserved at every step.

## 1152 5.2 Fundamental Theorem

1154 The Fundamental Theorem of our Logical Relation (Theorem 2) (hereafter, FTLR) establishes that  
 1155 any capability that is “safe to share” (in  $\mathcal{V}$ ) is in fact “safe to execute” (in  $\mathcal{E}$ ). In other words, if  
 1156 a capability only gives transitive access to safe capabilities, then it is safe to use it as a program  
 1157 counter capability and execute it: it will not be able to gain extra authority over memory or break  
 1158 any invariants. Importantly, this theorem is independent of the code that the capability points to,  
 1159 even though it is this code that will be executed. Hence the result applies to arbitrary code and we  
 1160 sometimes refer to it as a *universal contract* because of this.

1161 THEOREM 2 (FTLR ⑦). *Let  $p \in \text{Perm}$ ,  $b, e, a \in \text{Addr}$ . If  $\mathcal{V}(p, b, e, a)$ , then  $\mathcal{E}(p, b, e, a)$ .*

1163 This is a non-trivial theorem, the proof of which requires checking all the possible cases of the  
 1164 semantics of each instruction of the machine. Indeed, one needs to check that there is no way for  
 1165 some machine instruction to create capabilities with further authority than what was available.  
 1166 This could, for example, happen if some runtime checks were missing, making it possible to create  
 1167 a capability  $(\text{RW}, b, e + 1, a)$  from a capability  $(\text{RW}, b, e, a)$ . One can imagine how this would break  
 1168 expected security guarantees, and reveal a design or implementation bug of the machine. Therefore,  
 1169 another informal interpretation of the fundamental theorem is that it expresses that the capability  
 1170 machine “works well” or that it is *capability safe*.

1171 The fundamental theorem provides a universal security property satisfied by unknown code, and  
 1172 gives us a way of verifying the correctness of known code that includes calls to possibly malicious  
 1173 code. To sum up, our logical relation characterizes the interface between a piece of verified code  
 1174 which wishes to preserve invariants on some internal state, and “external” arbitrary code whose  
 1175 accessible, safe capabilities have been sufficiently restricted.

1176

It is important to note that the distinction between “known” and “adversary” code only exists at the logical level: there is no such distinction at runtime. We can have two components that have been verified separately, and that do not mutually trust each other. In this case, from the point of view of each component, the other component is considered as being the adversary.

*Rules for program verification.* From the general statement of the FTLR, we can derive two corollaries, which can be used to instantiate our adequacy theorem (Theorem 1) with a program that passes control to an unknown adversarial code region.

COROLLARY 1 (UNKNOWN INTEGERS ARE SAFE ⑧). For  $m : [b, e] \rightarrow \text{Word}$ ,

$$\bigstar_{(a,z) \in m} a \mapsto z * [z \in \mathbb{Z}] \text{ --- } \mathcal{V}(p, b, e, a)$$

Corollary 1 can be used to trade ownership over a memory region of integers to the knowledge that a capability over this region is safe.<sup>4</sup> Since integers can encode program instructions, we can typically use this rule to reason about a memory region containing an (unknown) program. The rule follows directly from the definition of  $\mathcal{V}$  for values of  $p$  different from  $\mathbf{E}$ ; when  $p = \mathbf{E}$ , an additional application of the FTLR (Theorem 2) is required.

Notice that the pre-condition of the rule matches the resources that one gets in the Adequacy theorem (Theorem 1) for the adversary region. When using the Adequacy theorem, we will thus be able to conclude that capabilities pointing to the adversary region are safe.

COROLLARY 2 (JUMP TO A SAFE WORD ⑨).

$$\mathcal{V}(w) \text{ --- } \triangleright \forall \text{reg}. \{ \text{updatePcPerm}(w); \bigstar_{(r,v) \in \text{reg}, r \neq \text{pc}} r \mapsto v * \mathcal{V}(v) \} \rightsquigarrow \bullet$$

Corollary 2 gives us a specification for the execution of the machine after a jump to an unknown word  $w$ , assuming that  $w$  is safe. Recall that  $\text{updatePcPerm}(w)$  corresponds to the value of the program counter after jumping to  $w$  (see the machine semantics in Figure 6). The full execution specification in the conclusion of the rule requires that the machine registers contain safe values: indeed, we must only share safe words with unknown code.

An important application of Corollary 2 is to reason about the last instruction of a program encapsulated in a sentry ( $\mathbf{E}$ ) capability, where it “returns” and passes control to its caller by calling `jmp` on the (unknown but safe) return pointer held in  $r_0$ . In this scenario, the return pointer provided by the caller is unknown but safe, so Corollary 2 gives us a specification for the continuation of the program.

Additionally, Corollary 2 is typically used in combination with Corollary 1 when instantiating the Adequacy theorem. Indeed, in order to prove the complete safe execution specification required by the theorem, one typically needs to justify that one can `jmp` and pass control to an adversary region, given the resources granted by the Adequacy theorem.

### 5.3 Proving the fundamental theorem

To give a more in-depth perspective of the ideas behind the Fundamental Theorem, we detail in this sub-section one of the interesting cases of its proof. This sub-section can be safely skipped on a first read.

PROOF. (FTLR) We begin by unfolding the definition of  $\mathcal{E}$ .

$$\forall \text{reg}. \{ (p, b, e, a); \bigstar_{(r,v) \in \text{reg}, r \neq \text{pc}} r \mapsto v * \mathcal{V}(v) \} \rightsquigarrow \bullet$$

<sup>4</sup>We simplify the presentation here a bit and omit a view shift from the statement of Corollary 1. See the Coq development for the exact formal statement ⑧.

We proceed by Löb induction. The Löb rule is a powerful reasoning principle, which Cerise inherits from Iris, and which states that (in any context  $Q$ ), if from  $\triangleright P$  we can derive  $P$ , then we can also derive  $P$  without any assumptions.

$$\frac{\text{Löb} \quad Q \wedge \triangleright P \vdash P}{Q \vdash P}$$

The idea of the rule is that “after we do some work”, we will be able to remove the  $\triangleright$  modality from the assumption, and reach the conclusion. In our case, this means reasoning about one step of execution, for one instruction. Intuitively, if we show that our property holds for the execution of one arbitrary instruction, then it must hold for a sequence of many instructions.

We thus let:

$$\text{IH} \triangleq \forall p, b, e, a. \mathcal{V}(p, b, e, a) \multimap \forall \text{reg}. \{(p, b, e, a); *_{(r,v) \in \text{reg}, r \neq \text{pc}} r \mapsto v * \mathcal{V}(v)\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet$$

and assume  $\triangleright \text{IH}$ ; we then wish to show  $\text{IH}$ .

First, we consider the case where  $(p, b, e, a)$  is not a valid program counter (for instance, if it contains a non-executable capability, or an integer). Then the machine configuration will step into a Failed configuration. In that case, any full execution specification  $(\{\cdot; \cdot\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet)$  trivially holds, and we are done.

In the case where  $(p, b, e, a)$  is a valid program counter, we will have to execute the next instruction of the program, pointed to by  $a$ . For  $(p, b, e, a)$  to be a valid program counter, the following needs to hold:

$$p \in \{\text{RX}, \text{RWX}\} \quad (1)$$

$$b \leq a < e \quad (2)$$

From (1), we can infer that  $\mathcal{V}(p, b, e, a)$  will unfold to (at least) the following:

$$*_{a \in [b, e]} \exists P, \boxed{\exists w, a \mapsto w * P(w)} * \triangleright \square \forall w, P(w) \multimap \mathcal{V}(w)$$

Since we know that  $a$  is an address in the range  $[b, e]$  (2), we can in particular infer that there exists a predicate  $P$  such that  $\triangleright \square \forall w, P(w) \multimap \mathcal{V}(w)$ , for which the following invariant holds:

$$\boxed{\exists w, a \mapsto w * P(w)} \quad (3)$$

Ownership over  $a \mapsto w$  is in fact required in order to apply any rule of the program logic (we need to be able to access memory for the instruction pointed to by  $\text{pc}$ ). We will therefore first open the invariant (3) to get access to that resource.

Recall the invariant opening rule  $\text{INV}$  (Section 4.2). According to that rule, we can get access to the resources held inside the invariant *now*, as long as we give them back *after one execution step*. Since we wish here to reason about the execution of a single instruction, this is a perfectly good deal.

Once the invariant has been opened, the following propositions are added to our assumptions, for some word  $w$  (technically speaking, the Iris context also tracks the fact that these facts come from an invariant and must be given back next, but we choose to hide these details):<sup>5</sup>

$$a \mapsto w \quad (4)$$

$$\triangleright P(w) \quad (5)$$

Because  $\text{pc}$  points to  $a$ , and address  $a$  contains the word  $w$ ,  $w$  should correspond to the (encoding of the) instruction to execute now. We thus reason by case analysis on  $\text{decode}(w)$ .

<sup>5</sup>Notice that we directly get  $a \mapsto w$  rather than  $\triangleright a \mapsto w$ , due to the fact that memory points-to are timeless.

This leads to as many cases as there are instructions in the machine. We will now detail a sub-case for the load instruction, which is one of the interesting cases. Many of the other cases are similar in nature.

**Case:**  $\text{decode}(w) = \text{load } r_{dst} \ r_{src}$ .

We consider here the case where  $r_{dst}$  and  $r_{src}$  are two different registers, both different from  $pc$ . We also only consider the case where  $r_{src}$  contains a capability, which we are permitted to load from. In other words, our goal is as follows:<sup>6</sup>

$$\begin{aligned} & \triangleright \text{IH} * a \mapsto w * \triangleright P(w) \\ & \vdash \left\{ \begin{array}{l} *_{(r,v) \in \text{reg}, r \neq pc, r_{dst}, r_{src}} r \mapsto v * \mathcal{V}(v) \\ * r_{dst} \mapsto w' * \mathcal{V}(w') \\ * r_{src} \mapsto (p', b', e', a') * \mathcal{V}(p', b', e', a') \end{array} \right\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet \end{aligned}$$

As stated, we assume that  $(p', b', e', a')$  permits us to load from  $a'$ . We can thus infer the following two properties:

$$p' \in \{\text{RO}, \text{RX}, \text{RW}, \text{RWX}\} \quad (6)$$

$$b' \leq a' < e' \quad (7)$$

Just like before, we can from  $\mathcal{V}(p', b', e', a')$  conclude that the following invariant holds, where  $P'$  is a predicate such that  $\triangleright \square \forall w, P'(w) \multimap \mathcal{V}(w)$ :

$$\boxed{\exists w, a' \mapsto w * P'(w)} \quad (8)$$

We consider the (more interesting) case where  $a \neq a'$ . We can thus open the invariant (since it has not been opened already), meaning that we have for some word  $w_{src}$  the following (again, plus some invariant-tracking resources not shown here):

$$a' \mapsto w_{src} \quad (9)$$

$$\triangleright P'(w_{src}) \quad (10)$$

With these assumptions, we now have all the necessary resources to take a step in the program logic, using the rule for the load instruction (Figure 8). A feature of single-instruction rules of our program logic is that they include a built-in  $\triangleright$  modality. In other words, after applying a single-instruction rule, we are “one execution step later”, and we can remove one occurrence of  $\triangleright$  for each assumption of our context. In particular, this means that we can turn  $\triangleright \text{IH}$  into  $\text{IH}$ , and similarly for  $P(w)$  and  $P'(w_{src})$ . We now have to show:

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{IH} * a \mapsto w * P(w) * a' \mapsto w_{src} * P'(w_{src}) \\ & \vdash \left\{ \begin{array}{l} *_{(r,v) \in \text{reg}, r \neq pc, r_{dst}, r_{src}} r \mapsto v * \mathcal{V}(v) \\ * r_{dst} \mapsto w_{src} \\ * r_{src} \mapsto (p', b', e', a') * \mathcal{V}(p', b', e', a') \end{array} \right\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet \end{aligned}$$

We now have direct access to  $\text{IH}$  (our initial goal) as an assumption, so the proof is nearly done. Before we can invoke  $\text{IH}$  and conclude the goal, we must do two things: (a) close all the open invariants (as required by the invariant opening rule), and (b) show that the contents of all registers satisfies  $\mathcal{V}$  (required by the definition of  $\text{IH}$ ). (We actually need to show (b) *before* addressing (a), as we will make use of resources from the open invariants.)

Addressing (b), we already know that the contents of registers satisfy  $\mathcal{V}$  for all registers except for  $r_{dst}$ —the only register whose contents were changed by the instruction. We must thus prove  $\mathcal{V}(w_{src})$ . Luckily,  $w_{src}$  is not a completely arbitrary word: it was accessible from available memory,

<sup>6</sup>We again omit details involving masks and update modalities, and refer to the Coq formalization for the full details.



so it must be safe as well. More precisely, from the invariant about  $a'$  (previously opened), we know that  $P'(w_{src})$  holds, and furthermore we know that:

$$\Box \forall w, P'(w) \multimap \mathcal{V}(w)$$

Owing to the fact that  $\mathcal{V}(\cdot)$  is persistent, we can shave off the  $\Box$  modality, and conclude that  $\mathcal{V}(w_{src})$  holds, concluding the proof of (b).

Finally, addressing (a) is straightforward, since we did not change the contents of memory at either address  $a$  or  $a'$ . We can therefore close the invariants again, by giving up the same resources as we initially got from opening them, concluding the proof of (a) and thus the case of the proof for `load`.

In the proof sketch above, we followed one specific subcase of the proof for the `load` instruction. In the complete proof, we must go through all the possible cases of the semantics for the instruction. In some cases, the machine fails which terminates the proof easily (for instance, if the capability in  $r_{src}$  does not in fact allow reading memory, or if  $r_{src}$  does not in fact contain a capability). In some other cases, the machine does not fail, and the proof is similar to the case highlighted here but slightly different (for instance when  $r_{dst}$  and  $r_{src}$  are the same register).

The proofs for the other instructions of the machine follow a similar pattern. In particular, in the `store` case, the register state is not modified except for the `pc` register, but memory is modified. As such, closing the invariants is not as easy since we need to establish that the stored word is at least safe. This is established by using the fact that we assumed that the register only contains safe words. The case of the `restrict`, `subseg` and `lea` instructions require showing that a capability with smaller authority remains in the value relation  $\mathcal{V}$ , and the `jmp`, `jnz` and `mov` cases show that `pc` (or other registers) can be updated with arbitrary safe words. The other remaining cases are rather trivial, as they all only change a register state to an integer, which is always safe.  $\square$

## 6 REASONING WITH CAPABILITIES: TWO EXAMPLES

In this section, we return to the motivational examples introduced in Section 2, and show how to prove that they enforce the desired properties, using Cerise's reasoning tools, laid out in the previous sections.

### 6.1 Sharing a sub-buffer with an unknown adversary

Let us recall (on the right) the code for our buffer-sharing program, previously introduced in Figure 3. The labels `code`, `data`, `secret` and `end` denote addresses in memory. We wish to prove formally that the program can share the data between addresses `data` and `secret` (excluded), while protecting the integrity of the data at address `secret`.

Using the reasoning rules from our program logic, we can first prove a specification for the program, specifying its behavior from its first instruction up until the final `jmp`. The corresponding specification is as follows, where `code_instrs` is the list of integers corresponding to the encoded instructions of the program, i.e., `code_instrs = map encodeInstr [mov r1 pc; ...; jmp r0]`.

```
code: mov r1 PC
      lea r1 [data-code]
      subseg r1 [data] [data+3]
      jmp r0
data: 'H', 'i', 0, ; public
secret: 42 ; secret
end:
```



LEMMA 1 (PROGRAM SPECIFICATION [10](#)).

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} (RWX, \text{code}, \text{end}, \text{code}); \quad r_0 \Rightarrow w_{adv} * r_1 \Rightarrow - * \\ \quad \quad \quad [code, data] \mapsto code\_instrs \end{array} \right\} \rightsquigarrow$$

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{updatePcPerm}(w_{adv}); \quad r_0 \Rightarrow w_{adv} * r_1 \Rightarrow (RWX, \text{data}, \text{secret}, \text{data}) * \\ \quad \quad \quad [code, data] \mapsto code\_instrs \end{array} \right\}$$

One can read from the specification that executing the program will store in  $r_1$  an  $RWX$  capability to the memory segment between addresses `data` and `secret` (our “buffer”), and pass control to the word  $w_{adv}$  found in register  $r_0$ .

Proving this specification is easy: it is enough to successively apply the program logic rule of each individual instruction found in the program.

This specification shows that the program ultimately jumps to the word initially passed in register  $r_0$ , but does not describe what happens after, in the case where this word points to a region containing unknown code. For this, we use the reasoning principles from Section 5.2 (built on top of the Fundamental Theorem), and derive a specification for a complete execution of the machine, see Lemma 2 below. The lemma specifies that, starting by executing our program, and given that  $r_0$  contains a capability to a region containing unknown integers, then the machine is safe to run. Notice that we do not assume a points-to resource for the secret data: instead, this points-to will be part of an invariant—specifying that it contains the same secret value at every step—and we do not need to access that here.

LEMMA 2 (FULL EXECUTION SPECIFICATION [11](#)).

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} r_0 \Rightarrow (RWX, b_{adv}, e_{adv}, b_{adv}) * \\ r_1 \Rightarrow - * \\ *_{(r,v) \in reg, r \neq \{pc, r_0, r_1\}} r \Rightarrow z * [z \in \mathbb{Z}] * \\ (RWX, \text{code}, \text{end}, \text{code}); \quad [code, data] \mapsto code\_instrs * \\ \quad \quad \quad [data, secret] \mapsto [‘H’; ‘i’; 0] * \\ *_{(a,z) \in adv} a \mapsto z * [z \in \mathbb{Z}] \end{array} \right\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet$$

PROOF. By Lemma 1, the frame rule `FRAGFRAME` and the sequence rule `SEQFULL`, it suffices to show the following goal, which corresponds to a specification about the execution of the machine after the execution of the verified code:

$$\text{Goal: } \left\{ \begin{array}{l} r_0 \Rightarrow (RWX, b_{adv}, e_{adv}, b_{adv}) * \\ r_1 \Rightarrow (RWX, \text{data}, \text{secret}, \text{data}) * \\ *_{(r,v) \in reg, r \neq \{pc, r_0, r_1\}} r \Rightarrow z * [z \in \mathbb{Z}] * \\ *_{(a,z) \in adv} a \mapsto z * [z \in \mathbb{Z}] * \\ (RWX, b_{adv}, e_{adv}, b_{adv}); \quad [code, data] \mapsto code\_instrs * \\ \quad \quad \quad [data, secret] \mapsto [‘H’; ‘i’; 0] \end{array} \right\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet$$

We now rely on the reasoning rules derived from the Fundamental Theorem (Section 5.2). First, from the fact that the adversary region  $adv$  does not contain capabilities, we get using Corollary 1 that any capability on that region is safe, in particular we have  $\mathcal{V}(RWX, b_{adv}, e_{adv}, b_{adv})$ . Then, from Corollary 2 we get a specification for the execution of the machine starting from  $\mathcal{V}(RWX, b_{adv}, e_{adv}, b_{adv})$  (recall that `updatePcPerm` is the identity on non- $E$  capabilities):

$$\text{Fact: } \quad \forall reg. \left\{ (RWX, b_{adv}, e_{adv}, b_{adv}); *_{(r,v) \in reg, r \neq pc} r \Rightarrow v * \mathcal{V}(v) \right\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet$$

From this fact, we can prove our goal provided that we show that the contents of all machine registers satisfy  $\mathcal{V}$ . For registers other than  $r_0$  and  $r_1$ , this holds by definition of  $\mathcal{V}$ , as we know they only contain integers. Register  $r_0$  contains a capability to the adversary region, which we have already proved to be safe using Corollary 1. Finally, register  $r_1$  contains the capability pointing to the public buffer. We can again leverage Corollary 1 to obtain  $\mathcal{V}(\text{RWX}, \text{data}, \text{secret}, \text{data})$  from the memory points-to for the buffer ( $[\text{data}, \text{secret}] \mapsto [\text{'H';' i'; 0}]$ ), thus concluding the proof.  $\square$

Finally, from Lemma 2, established in the program logic, we wish to obtain a final result in terms of the operational semantics of the machine. The toplevel end-to-end theorem that we obtain is shown in Theorem 3. We consider a machine whose memory is initially loaded with our program and unknown adversarial code, and that starts by executing our verified code. The theorem establishes that the adversary will not be able to tamper with the value held at address secret: at every step of the execution, it will be unchanged and equal to 42.

**THEOREM 3 (END-TO-END THEOREM: INTEGRITY OF THE SECRET DATA IS PRESERVED (12)).** *Starting from an initial state of the machine  $(\text{reg}, \text{mem})$  where:*

- $\text{prog} \uplus \text{adv} \subseteq \text{mem}$ , for  $\text{adv} : [b_{\text{adv}}, e_{\text{adv}}) \rightarrow \text{Word}$  and  $\text{prog} : [\text{code}, \text{end}) \rightarrow \text{Word}$
- the contents of  $\text{prog}$  correspond to the encoded instructions and program data;
- the adversary memory contains no capabilities:  $\forall a. \text{adv}(a) \in \mathbb{Z}$ ;
- the initial state of registers satisfies:
  - $\text{reg}(\text{pc}) = (\text{RWX}, \text{code}, \text{end}, \text{code})$ ,
  - $\text{reg}(r_0) = (\text{RWX}, b_{\text{adv}}, e_{\text{adv}}, b_{\text{adv}})$ ,
  - $\text{reg}(r) \in \mathbb{Z}$  otherwise;

Then, for any  $\text{reg}'$ ,  $\text{mem}'$ , if  $(\text{reg}, \text{mem}) \longrightarrow^* (\text{reg}', \text{mem}')$ , then  $\text{mem}'(\text{secret}) = 42$ .

**PROOF.** We first invoke Theorem 1, choosing the memory invariant  $I$  and its domain  $D$  to be the invariant  $I_{\text{buf}}$  and domain  $D_{\text{buf}}$  defined below, asserting that the value at address secret is equal to 42:

$$I_{\text{buf}} \triangleq \lambda m. m(\text{secret}) = 42$$

$$\text{and } D_{\text{buf}} = \{\text{secret}\}.$$

Most side-conditions of the adequacy theorem can be easily discharged. What remains is the following specification in Iris:

$$\text{Goal: } \vdash \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \exists m, *_{(a,w) \in m} a \mapsto w * \left[ \text{dom}(m) = D_{\text{buf}} \right] * \left[ I_{\text{buf}}(m) \right] \\ \left( \text{RWX}, \text{code}, \text{end}, \text{code} \right); \left. \begin{array}{l} r_0 \mapsto (\text{RWX}, b_{\text{adv}}, e_{\text{adv}}, b_{\text{adv}}) * \\ *_{(r,v) \in \text{reg}, r \mapsto z * [z \in \mathbb{Z}] * \\ r \notin \{\text{pc}, r_0\}} \\ *_{(a,z) \in \text{adv}} a \mapsto z * [z \in \mathbb{Z}] * \\ *_{(a,w) \in \text{prog}, a \mapsto w} \\ a \notin D_{\text{buf}} \end{array} \right\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet$$

We can simplify this goal by unfolding the definition of  $I_{buf}$ ,  $D_{buf}$ ,  $prog$  and massaging the goal to extract relevant points-to resources. The goal then becomes:

$$Goal: \vdash \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \boxed{\text{secret} \mapsto 42} \\ (RWX, code, end, code); \\ \left. \begin{array}{l} r_0 \Rightarrow (RWX, b_{adv}, e_{adv}, b_{adv}) * \\ r_1 \Rightarrow - * \\ *_{(r,v) \in reg, r \neq \{pc, r_0, r_1\}} r \Rightarrow z * [z \in \mathbb{Z}] * \\ [code, data] \mapsto code\_instrs * \\ [data, secret] \mapsto [H'; i'; 0] * \\ *_{(a,z) \in adv} a \mapsto z * [z \in \mathbb{Z}] \end{array} \right\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet$$

Note how the points-to resource for the secret address is held as part of the invariant, asserting that it contains the value 42 at each step. This simplified goal now follows from the full execution specification established earlier in Lemma 2 by applying the rule FULLFRAME, which concludes the proof.  $\square$

## 6.2 Creating a closure around local state

Let us now come back to the example introduced in Section 2.4, whose code is reproduced below. In this example, the control flow is somewhat more involved, as we have two separate pieces of known code that run at different times. The initialization code between `init` and `code` runs first, and creates a sentry capability before passing control to the unknown code. The code and data located between `code` and `end` are encapsulated in the sentry capability created by the initialization code. Because the sentry capability is exposed to the unknown code, the code it encapsulates may be invoked several times, incrementing the value of the counter each time.

We wish to prove formally that the value of the counter is correctly encapsulated. We prove that it remains non-negative at every step: starting from zero, it can only get incremented by the code routine encapsulated in the sentry capability.

```

1500  init:                                code:
1501      mov r1 PC                          mov r1 PC
1502      lea r1 [data-init]                 lea r1 [data-code]
1503      mov r2 r1                          load r1 r1
1504      lea r2 1                            load r2 r1
1505      store r1 r2                        add r2 r2 1
1506      lea r1 [code-data]                 store r1 r2
1507      subseg r1 [code] [end]             mov r1 0
1508      restrict r1 E                      jmp r0
1509      mov r2 0                            data:
1510      jmp r0                              ; will be:
1511                                          ; (RWX, init, end, data+1)
1512                                          0xFFFF,
1513                                          0 ; counter value
1514      end:

```

Using the rules of our program logic, we can first prove a specification for the initialization code, shown in Lemma 3. This specification describes the behavior of the code between `init` and `code`, where `init_instrs` denote the corresponding list of encoded instructions.

LEMMA 3 (SPECIFICATION FOR THE INITIALIZATION CODE (13)).

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} (RWX, \text{init}, \text{end}, \text{init}); \quad r_0 \Rightarrow w_{adv} * r_1 \Rightarrow - * r_2 \Rightarrow - * \\ \text{data} \mapsto - * [\text{init}, \text{code}] \mapsto \text{init\_instrs} \end{array} \right\} \rightsquigarrow$$

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{updatePcPerm}(w_{adv}); \quad r_0 \Rightarrow w_{adv} * r_1 \Rightarrow (E, \text{code}, \text{end}, \text{code}) * r_2 \Rightarrow 0 * \\ \text{data} \mapsto (RWX, \text{init}, \text{end}, \text{data} + 1) * [\text{init}, \text{code}] \mapsto \text{init\_instrs} \end{array} \right\}$$

From this specification, one can read that running the initialization code will store in register  $r_1$  a sentry capability to  $[\text{code}, \text{end})$ , and write at address  $\text{data}$  an  $\text{RWX}$  capability pointing to the location holding the counter value. The initialization code then passes control to the unknown word  $w_{adv}$  stored in  $r_0$ .

We can also use the program logic rules to prove a specification for the code routine in  $[\text{code}, \text{data})$  which increments the counter, and which will run each time the sentry capability is invoked. The specification appears in Lemma 4, where  $\text{code\_instrs}$  refers to the list of encoded instructions for the routine.

LEMMA 4 (SPECIFICATION FOR THE INCREMENT ROUTINE (14)).

$$\boxed{[\text{code}, \text{data}] \mapsto \text{code\_instrs}},$$

$$\boxed{\text{data} \mapsto (RWX, \text{init}, \text{end}, \text{data} + 1)}, \quad \boxed{\exists n. (\text{data} + 1) \mapsto n * [n \geq 0]}$$

$$\vdash \left\{ \begin{array}{l} (RX, \text{code}, \text{end}, \text{code}); \quad r_0 \Rightarrow w_{cont} * r_1 \Rightarrow - * r_2 \Rightarrow - \\ \text{updatePcPerm}(w_{cont}); \quad \exists n. r_0 \Rightarrow w_{cont} * r_1 \Rightarrow 0 * r_2 \Rightarrow n \end{array} \right\} \rightsquigarrow$$

This specification assumes a number of Iris invariants, describing the contents of the  $[\text{code}, \text{end})$  memory region. Indeed, because the increment routine is invoked by unknown code, it cannot make many assumptions about the state of the machine. The only thing that it can assume is that previously established invariants still hold (because, by definition, capability-safe unknown code has to preserve invariants).

The specification thus assumes, as invariants: 1) that the region  $[\text{code}, \text{data})$  contains the code of the routine; 2) that  $\text{data}$  contains the  $\text{RWX}$  capability to the counter value previously stored there by the initialization code, and finally 3) that the counter value (at address  $\text{data} + 1$ ) is a non-negative integer.

The specification asserts that the routine can run, starting with  $\text{pc}$  containing an  $\text{RX}$  capability to the  $[\text{code}, \text{end})$  region, while preserving the invariants. (In particular, this means that incrementing the counter indeed preserves the fact that it is a non-negative integer.) Recall that the  $\text{RX}$  permission in  $\text{pc}$  corresponds to what one gets after jumping to a sentry capability.

Finally, we prove as before a specification proving safety of complete executions, starting from the initialization code, then followed by the execution of unknown code, including its possible invocations of the sentry capability. This specification appears below in Lemma 5.

LEMMA 5 (FULL EXECUTION SPECIFICATION (15)).

$$\boxed{\exists n. (\text{data} + 1) \mapsto n * [n \geq 0]}$$

$$\vdash \left\{ \begin{array}{l} r_0 \Rightarrow (RWX, b_{adv}, e_{adv}, b_{adv}) * r_1 \Rightarrow - * r_2 \Rightarrow - * \\ *_{(r,v) \in \text{reg}. \quad r \Rightarrow z * [z \in \mathbb{Z}]} * \\ \quad r \notin \{\text{pc}, r_0, r_2\} \\ (RWX, \text{init}, \text{end}, \text{init}); \quad [\text{init}, \text{code}] \mapsto \text{init\_instrs} * \\ [\text{code}, \text{data}] \mapsto \text{code\_instrs} * \text{data} \mapsto - * \\ *_{(a,z) \in \text{adv}} a \mapsto z * [z \in \mathbb{Z}] \end{array} \right\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet$$

PROOF. By using Lemma 3 (the specification for the initialization code), the frame rule FRAGFRAME and sequence rule SEQFULL, it is enough to show the following goal, which specifies the execution

of the machine after the initialization code has run:

$$\begin{array}{l}
 1569 \\
 1570 \\
 1571 \\
 1572 \\
 1573 \\
 1574 \\
 1575 \\
 1576 \\
 1577 \\
 1578 \\
 1579
 \end{array}
 \text{Goal: } \vdash \left( \boxed{\exists n. (\text{data} + 1) \mapsto n * \lceil n \geq 0 \rceil} \left\{ \begin{array}{l} r_0 \mapsto (\text{RWX}, b_{adv}, e_{adv}, b_{adv}) * \\ r_1 \mapsto (\text{E}, \text{code}, \text{end}, \text{code}) * r_2 \mapsto 0 * \\ *_{(r,v) \in \text{reg}, r \mapsto z * \lceil z \in \mathbb{Z} \rceil *} \\ \quad r \notin \{\text{pc}, r_0..r_2\} \\ [\text{init}, \text{code}] \mapsto \text{init\_instrs} * \\ [\text{code}, \text{data}] \mapsto \text{code\_instrs} * \\ \text{data} \mapsto (\text{RWX}, \text{init}, \text{end}, \text{data} + 1) * \\ *_{(a,z) \in adv} a \mapsto z * \lceil z \in \mathbb{Z} \rceil \end{array} \right\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet$$

We then allocate two new invariants, one containing the code of the sentry capability, the other the points-to resource at address data.

$$\begin{array}{l}
 1582 \\
 1583 \\
 1584 \\
 1585 \\
 1586 \\
 1587 \\
 1588 \\
 1589
 \end{array}
 \text{Goal: } \vdash \left( \boxed{[\text{code}, \text{data}] \mapsto \text{code\_instrs}}, \boxed{\text{data} \mapsto (\text{RWX}, \text{init}, \text{end}, \text{data} + 1)}, \boxed{\exists n. (\text{data} + 1) \mapsto n * \lceil n \geq 0 \rceil} \left\{ \begin{array}{l} r_0 \mapsto (\text{RWX}, b_{adv}, e_{adv}, b_{adv}) * \\ r_1 \mapsto (\text{E}, \text{code}, \text{end}, \text{code}) * r_2 \mapsto 0 * \\ *_{(r,v) \in \text{reg}, r \mapsto z * \lceil z \in \mathbb{Z} \rceil *} \\ \quad r \notin \{\text{pc}, r_0..r_2\} \\ [\text{init}, \text{code}] \mapsto \text{init\_instrs} * \\ *_{(a,z) \in adv} a \mapsto z * \lceil z \in \mathbb{Z} \rceil \end{array} \right\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet$$

From Corollary 1 and the fact that the adversary region  $adv$  does not contain capabilities, we get that any capability on that region is safe, and therefore that  $\mathcal{V}(\text{RWX}, b_{adv}, e_{adv}, b_{adv})$  holds. From Corollary 2, we get that a full execution starting from  $(\text{RWX}, b_{adv}, e_{adv}, b_{adv})$  is safe:

$$\begin{array}{l}
 1594 \\
 1595
 \end{array}
 \text{Fact: } \quad \forall \text{reg}. \{ (\text{RWX}, b_{adv}, e_{adv}, b_{adv}); *_{(r,v) \in \text{reg}, r \neq \text{pc}} r \mapsto v * \mathcal{V}(v) \} \rightsquigarrow \bullet$$

In combination with rule FULLFRAME, this fact allows us to conclude the proof, *provided we can prove safety of values stored in all registers*. We have already proved the capability in  $r_0$  to be safe. Registers  $r_2$  to  $r_{31}$  contain integers, so they are safe by definition of  $\mathcal{V}$ . Safety of the sentry capability created by the initialization code and stored in  $r_1$  remains to be proven.

$$\begin{array}{l}
 1600 \\
 1601 \\
 1602 \\
 1603
 \end{array}
 \text{Goal: } \frac{\boxed{[\text{code}, \text{data}] \mapsto \text{code\_instrs}}, \boxed{\text{data} \mapsto (\text{RWX}, \text{init}, \text{end}, \text{data} + 1)}, \boxed{\exists n. (\text{data} + 1) \mapsto n * \lceil n \geq 0 \rceil}}{\vdash \mathcal{V}(\text{E}, \text{code}, \text{end}, \text{code})}$$

By definition of  $\mathcal{V}$  and  $\mathcal{E}$ , this goal unfolds to the following:

$$\begin{array}{l}
 1605 \\
 1606 \\
 1607 \\
 1608
 \end{array}
 \text{Goal: } \frac{\boxed{[\text{code}, \text{data}] \mapsto \text{code\_instrs}}, \boxed{\text{data} \mapsto (\text{RWX}, \text{init}, \text{end}, \text{data} + 1)}, \boxed{\exists n. (\text{data} + 1) \mapsto n * \lceil n \geq 0 \rceil}}{\vdash \triangleright \square \forall \text{reg}. \{ (\text{RX}, \text{code}, \text{end}, \text{code}); *_{(r,v) \in \text{reg}, r \neq \text{pc}} r \mapsto v * \mathcal{V}(v) \} \rightsquigarrow \bullet}$$

For technical reasons, we can shave off the later modality ( $\triangleright$ ) in front of the goal (we refer to the Coq formalization for more details). The persistent modality ( $\square$ ) is more interesting: it expresses the fact that safety of the callback should only depend on persistent assumptions. This corresponds to the fact that the callback may be invoked several times, in future execution states and because of this it cannot rely on non-persistent assumptions that only hold at the callback's creation time. Fortunately, invariants are persistent, so they remain available for proving the callback's safety.

Then, let us name  $w_0$  the contents of register  $r_0$ : we get to assume  $\mathcal{V}(w_0)$  (as for the contents of other registers). By using Lemma 4 (the specification for the increment routine) with rules

1617

FRAGFRAME and SEQFULL, it is enough to prove the following goal, which asserts safety of the execution *after* passing control back to unknown code by jumping to  $w_0$ :

$$\text{Goal: } \vdash \left\{ \text{updatePcPerm}(w_0); \begin{array}{l} \exists n. r_0 \Rightarrow w_0 * r_1 \Rightarrow 0 * r_2 \Rightarrow n * \\ *_{(r,v) \in \text{reg}, r \notin \{\text{pc}, r_0, r_1, r_2\}} r \Rightarrow v * \mathcal{V}(v) \end{array} \right\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet$$

Informally, the increment routine returns to the unknown code by passing control to some unknown word provided in  $r_0$ : it is safe to do so, since such word can be assumed to be itself safe. Formally speaking, we know  $\mathcal{V}(w_0)$ , so we apply Corollary 2 which concludes the proof.  $\square$

Similarly to the previous example, we derive from Lemma 5 a toplevel theorem which only refers to the operational semantics of the machine, shown below in Theorem 4. We consider a machine initially loaded with our program and unknown adversarial code. The theorem establishes that the value of the counter is properly encapsulated: at every step of the execution, it will be a non-negative integer.

**THEOREM 4 (END-TO-END THEOREM: INTEGRITY OF THE COUNTER VALUE IS PRESERVED (16)).** *Starting from an initial state of the machine (reg, mem) where:*

- $\text{prog} \uplus \text{adv} \subseteq \text{mem}$ , for  $\text{adv} : [b_{\text{adv}}, e_{\text{adv}}) \rightarrow \text{Word}$  and  $\text{prog} : [\text{init}, \text{end}) \rightarrow \text{Word}$
- the contents of  $\text{prog}$  correspond to the encoded instructions and program data;
- the adversary memory contains no capabilities:  $\forall a. \text{adv}(a) \in \mathbb{Z}$ ;
- the initial state of registers satisfies:
  - $\text{reg}(\text{pc}) = (\text{RWX}, \text{init}, \text{end}, \text{init})$ ,
  - $\text{reg}(r_0) = (\text{RWX}, b_{\text{adv}}, e_{\text{adv}}, b_{\text{adv}})$ ,
  - $\text{reg}(r) \in \mathbb{Z}$  otherwise;

*Then, for any  $\text{reg}'$ ,  $\text{mem}'$ , if  $(\text{reg}, \text{mem}) \longrightarrow^* (\text{reg}', \text{mem}')$ , then  $\text{mem}'(\text{data} + 1) \geq 0$ .*

**PROOF.** We invoke Theorem 1, with invariant and domain  $I_{\text{cnt}}$  and  $D_{\text{cnt}}$  defined as follows:

$$I_{\text{cnt}} \triangleq \lambda m. m(\text{data} + 1) \geq 0 \\ \text{and } D_{\text{cnt}} = \{\text{data} + 1\}$$

The main step of the proof is to show that the full execution specification for the initial machine configuration holds, as stated by the theorem. After some basic unfolding of definitions, it is easy to show that it follows from the specification we previously established in Lemma 5.  $\square$

## 7 DYNAMIC MEMORY ALLOCATION AND CLOSURES

In the previous sections, we have shown how to use capabilities for memory protection and compartmentalization in the setting of relatively simple scenarios. In particular, the examples that we have presented so far only relied on memory allocated statically as part of the initial program region.

We now investigate how we can use and reason about more complicated programming patterns. More precisely, we show how we can implement features found in higher-level languages, such as dynamic memory allocation and function calls which guarantee encapsulation of local variables. Additionally, we implement an `assert` routine which we use to formally express properties about dynamically allocated memory.

This section focuses on presenting the aforementioned higher-level building blocks (§7.1–7.3), an updated adequacy theorem that incorporates the use of these components (§7.4), then followed by a simple illustrative example (§7.5). In Section 8, we then apply them to build a larger, more significant case study, demonstrating how these building blocks can work at scale.

## 7.1 Dynamic memory allocation as a library routine

We show how dynamic memory allocation can be implemented as a library, for which: 1) we prove an Iris specification making it usable from verified code, and 2) we show that it is safe to share with untrusted code, so that an adversary can also use the library to allocate memory for its own uses.

Note that this task is made easier by the fact that we do not attempt to provide a way of deallocating memory. As such, memory provided by the allocation routine is never reclaimed. We leave deallocation for future work, as it likely requires a significantly more complex runtime mechanism to ensure that no dangling capabilities remain pointing to previously allocated memory regions [Filardo et al. 2020; Xia et al. 2019].

Concretely, we implement our allocator library as a simple bump-pointer allocator. The library provides a `malloc` entry point, to be called with an integer argument  $n$ , which works as follows:

- (1) the routine encapsulates a contiguous region of memory  $[b, e)$ , as well as a capability  $(\text{RWX}, b, e, a)$  where the interval  $[b, a)$  represents already allocated memory, and  $[a, e)$  represents memory that can still be allocated;
- (2) the routine checks that the input size  $n$  is strictly positive;
- (3) if  $a + n$  is greater than  $e$ , the routine fails (there is not enough memory available);
- (4) otherwise, it then records that memory has been allocated by updating its internal capability to  $(\text{RWX}, b, e, a + n)$ , and returns to the caller the capability  $(\text{RWX}, a, a + n, a)$ .

Figure 10 outlines the code for our simple `malloc` implementation. The code assumes that it is stored in memory in an interval  $[b_m, b_{mid})$  and that  $b_{mid}$  points to a capability  $(\text{RWX}, b_{mid}, e_m, a)$  giving access to: itself (so it can be updated), and the memory pool (between address  $b_{mid} + 1$  and  $e_m$ ). For simplicity, we assume that the non-allocated memory is already initialized to 0. These requirements are represented by the following invariant (17):

$$\text{mallocInv}(b_m, e_m) \triangleq \boxed{\begin{array}{l} \exists b_{mid}, a, [b_m, b_{mid}) \mapsto \text{malloc\_instrs} * \\ b_{mid} \mapsto (\text{RWX}, b_{mid}, e_m, a) * \\ [a, e_m) \mapsto [0 \cdots 0] * \\ [b_{mid} < a \leq e_m] \end{array}}$$

The core property of our safe `malloc` is that it does not hand out the same addresses across multiple dynamic allocations. This can be expressed elegantly in separation logic, by specifying that `malloc` hands out points-to resources for the allocated memory. Indeed, points-to resources  $(a \mapsto w)$  express full ownership over the data at address  $a$ : possessing a resource  $a \mapsto w$  guarantees that one is the only owner of address  $a$ .

Consequently, remark that the invariant holds memory points-to for the region corresponding to non-allocated memory (between  $a$  and  $e_m$ ), but not for the memory that has already been allocated (between  $b_{mid} + 1$  and  $a$ ): these resources have been handed out to previous callers of the library.

We show below the specification for `malloc` (18). First, note that because `malloc` can fail if it runs out of memory or is given a wrong size, the specification documents that the resulting execution state is either Running or Failed. In the case where it does not fail, we can read that `malloc` hands out points-to resources for the allocated range in its post-condition: this expresses the fact that no



```

1716    ;; r1: integer determining the number          geta r1 r2
1717    ;; of words to allocate                       mov r4 r2
1718    ;;                                           subseg r4 r3 r1
1719    ;; malloc fails if size <= 0 or if it        sub r3 r3 r1
1720    ;; does not have enough space left          lea r4 r3
1721    ;;                                           mov r3 r2
1722    ;; returns in r1 a capability to the        sub r1 0 r1
1723    ;; allocated memory                         lea r3 r1
1724    bm:                                          getb r1 r3
1725    lt r3 0 r1 ;; check that size > 0          lea r3 r1 ;; r3 = (RWX, bmid, em, bmid)
1726    mov r2 pc ;; jmp after fail if             store r3 r2 ;; bmid <- (RWX, bmid, em, a+size)
1727    lea r2 4 ;; yes; continue and             mov r1 r4 ;; r1 = (RWX, a, a+size, a)
1728    jnz r2 r3 ;; fail if not                  mov r2 0
1729    fail                                        mov r3 0
1730    xm:                                        mov r4 0
1731    mov r2 pc                                  jmp r0
1732    lea r2 [bmid - xm]                         bmid: (RWX, bmid, em, a)
1733    ;; r2 = (RWX, bm, em, bmid)                ;; ... already allocated memory ...
1734    load r2 r2 ;; r2 = (RWX, bmid, em, a)      a:
1735    geta r3 r2                                 ;; ... free memory ...
1736    lea r2 r1                                  em:
1737    ;; r2 = (RWX, bmid, em, a+size)

```

Fig. 10. A simple malloc subroutine

1740 piece of code but the caller of malloc can access the newly allocated memory.

$$\begin{array}{l}
1741 \quad \boxed{\text{mallocInv}(b_m, e_m)} \\
1742 \\
1743 \quad \vdash \left\{ \begin{array}{l} (RX, b_m, e_m, b_m); \quad r_0 \Rightarrow w_0 * r_1 \Rightarrow n * \\ r_2, r_3, r_4 \Rightarrow - \end{array} \right\} \rightsquigarrow \\
1744 \\
1745 \quad \left\{ \begin{array}{l} [s = \text{Running}] * pc \Rightarrow \text{updatePcPerm}(w_0) * \\ \quad \exists b_a, e_a, [b_a + n = e_a] * \\ \quad r_0 \Rightarrow w_0 * \\ \quad r_1 \Rightarrow (RWX, b_a, e_a, b_a) * \\ \quad *_{a \in [b_a, e_a]} a \mapsto 0 * \\ \quad r_2, r_3, r_4 \Rightarrow 0 \end{array} \right\} \\
1746 \\
1747 \\
1748 \\
1749 \\
1750 \\
1751 \quad \left. \begin{array}{l} s. \\ \vee [s = \text{Failed}] \end{array} \right\}
\end{array}$$

1753 The malloc routine can furthermore be encapsulated using a sentry capability, which can be  
1754 shown to be safe to share with an adversary (Lemma 6).

1755 LEMMA 6 (malloc IS SAFE (19)).  $\text{mallocInv}(b_m, e_m) \multimap \mathcal{V}(E, b_m, e_m, b_m)$

1757 The proof is comparable to the proof that  $\mathcal{V}(E, \text{code}, \text{end}, \text{code})$  on page 33. It relies on the  
1758 malloc specification and the fundamental theorem.

## 1760 7.2 Runtime checks: an assert routine

1761 The final end-to-end theorems presented so far in Section 6 rely on establishing that a certain  
1762 memory location satisfies a given invariant. This requires the relevant location is statically allocated  
1763 in memory and thus known in advance, thus making it easy to tie it to an Iris invariant.

However, when using our `malloc` routine, we typically wish to enforce properties about the contents of dynamically allocated memory locations, whose address is, by definition, not known in advance. To address this issue, we implement an `assert` routine, to be linked alongside programs relying on `malloc`. One can invoke `assert` to dynamically test whether the contents of two registers are equal; if the test fails, `assert` sets a flag “assert has failed” at a fixed location in memory.

The idea is then that, to assert that some property holds about a piece of dynamically allocated memory, one can check dynamically whether it holds using `assert`. Then, one can *prove* that each `assert` check succeeds (meaning that the property indeed holds). Consequently, as a property of the whole execution, one gets that, at every step, the `assert` flag (initialized at 0) remains at 0 and is never set to 1 by `assert`.

The private memory of the `assert` routine is described by the following invariant (20):

$$\text{assertInv}(b_a, e_a, a_{\text{flag}}) \triangleq \boxed{\begin{array}{l} \exists a_{\text{cap}}, [b_a, a_{\text{cap}}] \mapsto \text{assert\_instrs} * \\ a_{\text{cap}} \mapsto (\text{RW}, a_{\text{flag}}, a_{\text{flag}} + 1, a_{\text{flag}}) * \\ [a_{\text{cap}} + 1 = a_{\text{flag}} \wedge a_{\text{flag}} + 1 = e_a] \end{array}}$$

The address  $a_{\text{flag}}$  denotes the address of the “assert flag”, which is initialized to 0 and set to 1 by the routine in case of failure. As we are interested in using `assert` in programs where we can prove that the equality check succeeds, we establish the following specification (21), which asserts in a separate invariant that  $a_{\text{flag}}$  remains at 0. Registers  $r_4$  and  $r_5$  contain the two integers which are compared by the routine; we thus require that they are equal.

$$\boxed{\text{assertInv}(b_a, e_a, a_{\text{flag}})}, \boxed{a_{\text{flag}} \mapsto 0} \\
 \vdash \left\{ \begin{array}{l} r_0 \Rightarrow w_0 * \\ (\text{RX}, b_a, e_a, b_a); \quad r_4 \Rightarrow n * \\ r_5 \Rightarrow n \end{array} \right\} \rightsquigarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{updatePcPerm}(w_0); \quad r_0 \Rightarrow w_0 * \\ r_4, r_5 \Rightarrow 0 \end{array} \right\}$$

Note that, as opposed to `malloc`, the `assert` routine should only be shared with *verified* code, which calls it according to the specification above. Were `assert` shared with an unknown adversary, the adversary could simply call the routine with two different integers, setting the flag to 1, thus invalidating any guarantees established by verified code. Technically speaking, we cannot prove safety of the `assert` routine from the specification above: if we try to prove  $\mathcal{V}(E, b_a, e_a, b_a)$ , then we get that registers  $r_4$  and  $r_5$  contain two unknown (valid) words, which could be two different integers. In that case, we cannot use the specification above, as we would violate the invariant specifying that  $a_{\text{flag}}$  stays at 0.

### 7.3 A secure heap-based calling convention

We define a heap-based calling convention that uses `malloc` to dynamically allocate activation records. An activation record is encapsulated in a closure that reinstates its caller’s local state, and continues execution from its point of creation. Conceptually, our heap-based calling convention can be seen as a continuation-passing style calling convention (one passes control to the callee, giving it a continuation for returning to the caller). This is similar to the calling convention that was used for instance in the SML/NJ compiler to implement an extension of Standard ML with `call/cc` [Appel 1992] (in the setting of a traditional computer architecture).

In the setting of a capability machine, our calling convention is furthermore *secure* in the sense that it enforces local state encapsulation. In other words, one can use it to pass control to unknown adversarial code, while protecting local data of the caller, thanks to the use of sentry capabilities to implement the continuation. Note that this calling convention does not enforce well-bracketed

```

1814 ; initially, PC = (RWX, code, end, a)
1815 ;           target = register containing the address to jump to
1816 ;           locals, params = lists of register names
1817 ; locals, params and target are parameters of the macro;
1818 ; they are in practice instantiated with concrete values
1819 code:
1820 ...
1821 a:
1822   malloc (length locals)           ; 1. allocate and store local state
1823   store_locals r1 locals
1824   mov r6 r1
1825   malloc 7                         ; 2. allocate region for activation record
1826   mov r0 r1
1827   store act_instr1                 ; store the activation code
1828   lea r0 1
1829   ...
1830   store act_instr5
1831   lea r0 1
1832   store r0 r6                       ; store the capability to locals
1833   lea r0 1
1834 x:
1835   mov r1 pc                         ; prepare and store the continuation
1836   lea r1 [cont - x]
1837   store r0 r1
1838   lea r0 -6                         ; 3. create the return capability
1839   restrict r0 E
1840   rclear RegName\{PC,r0,r1} U params ; 4. clear all registers except parameters
1841   jmp target                         ; 5. jump to target
1842 cont:
1843   restore_locals r1 locals           ; 6. reinstate local state
1844   ...
1845 data:
1846   (R0, table, end, table)           ; environment table
1847 table:
1848   (E, bm, em, bm)                   ; entry point to the malloc subroutine
1849   ...                                 ; possibly other routines
1850 end:

```

Fig. 11. Heap-based calling convention, with `a` the first instruction in the call macro

control flow (another desirable property); see [Georges et al. 2021; Skorstengaard et al. 2019a,b] for stack-based calling conventions that do.

We provide a `call` macro implementing the calling convention, invoked as `call target locals params`, where `target` is the name of the register containing a pointer to the code to invoke, `locals` is the list of registers whose content corresponds to the local state to reinstate upon return, and `params` is the list of registers containing the parameters to the call (passed to the callee). Its implementation appears in Figure 11, and a representation of the corresponding memory layout in Figure 12. (Because `call` is defined as a macro, its code is used inline as part of a bigger program, here stored between addresses `code` and `end`.)

Before passing control to the callee, the call macro does the following:

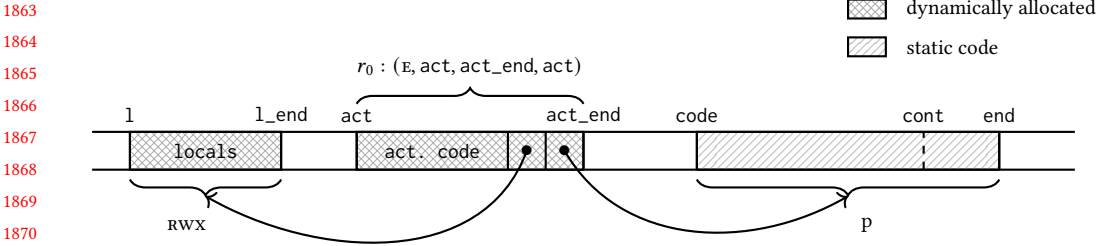


Fig. 12. Memory layout dynamically created by the calling convention

- (1) Invoke `malloc` to dynamically allocate a region of memory  $[l, l_{end})$  to store the local state from the registers specified in *locals*.
- (2) Allocate a region of memory  $[act, act_{end})$  to store the activation record, composed of: activation code, a capability to the region  $[l, l_{end})$ , and a capability to the instruction of the program following the call.
- (3) Create a sentry capability  $(\epsilon, act, act_{end}, act)$  encapsulating the activation record; this is capability for returning to the caller which is passed to the callee.
- (4) Clear all registers except those in *params*.
- (5) Jump to *target*.

When the callee passes back control to the caller by jumping to the continuation, the code stored in the activation run first. It loads the capability pointing to local state, and returns to the old program counter set up by the call macro. As the last step, the macro will finally:

6. Restore the local state into the relevant registers from the activation record.

We show below the specification for the code of the macro up to step 5 (the jump to the target address) (22). Since the `malloc` routine is invoked by the macro, the specification relies on the corresponding invariant for `malloc`. The parameters of the macro are *params*, *locals* and *target*, respectively denoting the list of registers containing the parameters to the call, the list of registers containing local state, and the register containing the capability to jump to. The list of (encoded) instructions *act\_instrs* denote the concrete instructions making up the activation code (in Figure 11 they are written as *act\_instr1...act\_instr5* (23)), which are not shown here for simplicity.

The post-condition of the specification describes the state immediately after the jump, where: the activation record has been allocated and initialized in  $[act, act_{end})$ ; register  $r_0$  contains an enter capability pointing to the activation record, and the local data has been copied to a newly allocated region  $[l, l_{end})$ .

$$\begin{array}{l}
1912 \\
1913 \\
1914 \\
1915 \\
1916 \\
1917 \\
1918 \\
1919 \\
1920 \\
1921 \\
1922 \\
1923 \\
1924 \\
1925 \\
1926 \\
1927 \\
1928
\end{array}
\quad
\begin{array}{l}
\boxed{\text{mallocInv}(b_m, e_m)} \\
\vdash \left\{ \begin{array}{l}
[a, \text{cont}] \mapsto \text{call\_instrs} * \\
\text{data} \mapsto (\text{RO}, \text{table}, \text{end}, \text{table}) * \text{table} \mapsto (\text{E}, b_m, e_m, b_m) * \\
\text{params} \Rightarrow pws * \text{locals} \Rightarrow lws * \text{target} \Rightarrow w_{adv} * \\
* \begin{array}{l}
(r, v) \in \text{reg}, \quad r \Rightarrow v \\
r \notin \{\text{pc}, \text{target}\} \\
r \notin \text{params} \cup \text{locals}
\end{array}
\end{array} \right\} \rightsquigarrow \\
\left\{ \begin{array}{l}
\exists \text{act}, \text{act}_{end}, l, l_{end}, \text{reg}', \\
r_0 \Rightarrow (\text{E}, \text{act}, \text{act}_{end}, \text{act}) * \\
\text{data} \mapsto (\text{RO}, \text{table}, \text{end}, \text{table}) * \text{table} \mapsto (\text{E}, b_m, e_m, b_m) * \\
\text{params} \Rightarrow pws * \text{target} \Rightarrow w_{adv} * [l, l_{end}] \mapsto lws * \\
\text{updatePcPerm}(w_{adv}); [\text{act}, \text{act}_{end}] \mapsto \text{act\_instrs} ++ [(\text{RWX}, l, l_{end}, l_{end}); \\
\quad (p, \text{code}, \text{end}, \text{cont})] * \\
* \begin{array}{l}
(r, v) \in \text{reg}', \quad r \Rightarrow v \\
r \notin \{\text{pc}, \text{target}, r_0\} \\
r \notin \text{params}
\end{array}
\end{array} \right\}
\end{array}$$

1929 It is then up to the user of the call macro to establish that the capability in  $r_0$  is safe to share  
1930 with the (possibly unknown) callee. This can be done with the help of the specification for the  
1931 activation code (24), shown next:

$$\begin{array}{l}
1932 \\
1933 \\
1934 \\
1935 \\
1936 \\
1937 \\
1938 \\
1939 \\
1940
\end{array}
\quad
\begin{array}{l}
\vdash \left\{ \begin{array}{l}
r_1 \Rightarrow - * r_2 \Rightarrow - * \\
(\text{RX}, \text{act}, \text{act}_{end}, \text{act}); [\text{act}, \text{act}_{end}] \mapsto \text{act\_instrs} ++ \\
\quad [(\text{RWX}, l, l_{end}, l_{end}); \\
\quad (p, \text{code}, \text{end}, \text{cont})]
\end{array} \right\} \rightsquigarrow \\
\left\{ \begin{array}{l}
r_1 \Rightarrow - * r_2 \Rightarrow (\text{RWX}, l, l_{end}, l) * \\
(p, \text{code}, \text{end}, \text{cont}); [\text{act}, \text{act}_{end}] \mapsto \text{act\_instrs} ++ \\
\quad [(\text{RWX}, l, l_{end}, l_{end}); \\
\quad (p, \text{code}, \text{end}, \text{cont})]
\end{array} \right\}
\end{array}$$

1941 One can read from this specification that the activation code passes control back to the caller (at  
1942 address cont), while loading in register  $r_2$  a capability to the region holding the local state, which  
1943 can be then loaded back into the corresponding registers by the restore\_locals macro (step 6,  
1944 which we do not detail here).

1945 To sum up, the calling convention presented here allows one to make a “function call” as one  
1946 would do in a higher-level language, while protecting local data of the caller. The code invoked  
1947 this way can be completely untrusted: in particular, it does not need to implement the calling  
1948 convention itself for the local state encapsulation guarantees to hold. (But of course it might never  
1949 “return” and pass control back to the caller.)

1950 In Section 7.5, we demonstrate the use of this heap-based calling convention on a simple example,  
1951 showing the interaction of its local state encapsulation guarantees with read-only capabilities.

## 1952 7.4 Adequacy in the Presence of Dynamically Allocated Memory

1953 We can now provide an updated version of the adequacy theorem (Theorem 1) which directly incor-  
1954 porates the malloc and assert library routines. Instead of establishing that a memory invariant is  
1955 always preserved at each step, the new adequacy theorem establishes that the flag held by assert  
1956 is never modified.

1957 Theorem 5 assumes that the malloc and assert routines are loaded in memory disjoint from  
1958 both prog and adv. Furthermore, the assert routine must have its flag initialized to 0. The verified  
1959

1961 **THEOREM 5 (UPDATED ADEQUACY (25)).** Given memory fragments  $prog : [b, e) \rightarrow \text{Word}$ ,  $malloc :$   
 1962  $[b_m, e_m) \rightarrow \text{Word}$ ,  $assert : [b_a, e_a) \rightarrow \text{Word}$ , and for any memory fragment  $adv : [b_{adv}, e_{adv}) \rightarrow$   
 1963  $\text{Word}$ , assuming that:

1964 (1) the initial state of memory  $mem$  satisfies:

$$1965 \quad prog \uplus malloc \uplus assert \uplus adv \subseteq mem$$

1966 (2)  $[b_m, e_m)$  contains the `malloc` routine;

1967 (3)  $[b_a, e_a)$  contains the `assert` routine and its flag at address  $a_{flag}$ ;

1968 (4) the assertion flag is initially set to 0:

$$1969 \quad mem(a_{flag}) = 0$$

1970 (5)  $prog$  contains a table linking to `malloc` and `assert`:

$$1971 \quad \exists data, table, mem(data) = (RO, table, table + 2, table)$$

$$1972 \quad mem(table) = (E, b_m, e_m, b_m)$$

$$1973 \quad mem(table + 1) = (E, b_a, e_a, b_a)$$

1974 (6) the adversary region contains no capabilities except for a table linking to `malloc`:

$$1975 \quad \exists data_{adv}, table_{adv}, \forall a \in \text{dom}(adv) \setminus \{data_{adv}, table_{adv}\},$$

$$1976 \quad adv(a) \in \mathbb{Z}$$

$$1977 \quad adv(data_{adv}) = (RO, table_{adv}, table_{adv} + 1, table_{adv})$$

$$1978 \quad adv(table_{adv}) = (E, b_m, e_m, b_m)$$

1979 (7) the initial state of registers  $reg$  satisfies:

$$1980 \quad reg(pc) = (RWX, b, e, b), \quad reg(r_0) = (RWX, b_{adv}, e_{adv}, b_{adv}), \quad reg(r) \in \mathbb{Z} \text{ otherwise}$$

1981 (8) the proof in the program logic that the initial configuration is safe given the invariants:

1982  $\forall reg,$

$$1983 \quad \left( \boxed{mallocInv(b_m, e_m)}, \boxed{assertInv(b_a, e_a, a_{flag})}, \boxed{a_{flag} \mapsto 0} \right)$$

$$1984 \quad \left( \left( RWX, b, e, b \right); \left. \begin{array}{l} r_0 \mapsto (RWX, b_{adv}, e_{adv}, b_{adv}) * \\ *_{\substack{(r,v) \in reg, r \mapsto z * [z \in \mathbb{Z}] * \\ r \notin \{pc, r_0\}}} \\ *_{\substack{(a,w) \in prog, a \mapsto w * \\ a \notin \{data, table, table+1\}}} \\ data \mapsto (RO, table, table + 2, table) * \\ table \mapsto (E, b_m, e_m, b_m) * \\ table + 1 \mapsto (E, b_a, e_a, b_a) * \\ *_{\substack{(a,z) \in adv, a \mapsto z * [z \in \mathbb{Z}] * \\ a \notin \{data_{adv}, table_{adv}\}}} \\ data_{adv} \mapsto (RO, table_{adv}, table_{adv} + 1, table_{adv}) * \\ table_{adv} \mapsto (E, b_m, e_m, b_m) \end{array} \right) \rightsquigarrow \bullet$$

1985 Then, for any  $reg', mem'$ , if  $(reg, mem) \longrightarrow^* (reg', mem')$ , then  $mem'(a_{flag}) = 0$ .



```

2010 ; initially, PC = (RWX, code, end, code)
2011 ;          r1 = (unknown) pointer to adversary function
2012 code:
2013   malloc 1                ; r1 = (RWX, b, b+1, b) where b is fresh
2014   mov r3 r1                ; r3 = (RWX, b, b+1, b)
2015   mov r4 r1                ; r4 = (RWX, b, b+1, b)
2016   store r3 1              ; b <- 1
2017   restrict r4 RO          ; r4 = (RO, b, b+1, b)
2018   call r1 [r3] [r4]       ; call macro that jumps to r1, keeps r3 as local
2019                           ; state and passes r4 as parameter
2020   load r1 r3              ; r1 = 1, as long as b was not changed during call
2021   mov r2 1
2022   assert r1 r2           ; assert (r1 = 1)
2023   halt
2024 data:
2025   (RO, table, end, table) ; environment table
2026 table:
2027   (E, bm, em, bm)        ; entry point to the malloc subroutine
2028   (E, ba, ea, ba)        ; entry point to the assert subroutine
2029 end:
2030
2031
2032
2033

```

Fig. 13. Program passing a read-only capability to unknown callee

program *prog* is given access to both the `malloc` and `assert` routines. The adversary program *adv* is given access to `malloc`. We assume that *prog* contains the code and a table that has been filled by a linker with capabilities giving access to the two routines. Likewise, we assume that *adv* contains its program (arbitrary integers) and a table filled by the linker with the capability to the `malloc` routine. Similarly to the first adequacy theorem, the theorem states that if the capability machine starts with the capability pointing to *prog* in the program counter, and if it has been proved in the program logic that the machine can run until completion, then the assertion flag is *never* modified.

In what follows, Lemma 5 will thus allow us to prove end-to-end theorems saying that the assertion flag will still be unset after a full execution. This corresponds to the end-to-end theorems of Swasey et al. [2017] which are also phrased in terms of an `assert` primitive (albeit in a high-level language) that untrusted code does not get access to. Of course, such results remain a bit artificial: ultimately, in real systems, we are not directly interested in the contents of assertion flags in the system’s memory, but rather in the system’s interaction with the outside world: network communication, the content of displays etc. Our approach can be extended to reason about such properties, but we don’t go into details here. Instead, we refer to Van Strydonck et al. [2021], where we have done exactly this extension, by adding MMIO and external event traces to our operational semantics and using Iris invariants and ghost state to reason about them. This results in end-to-end theorems that prove security properties about the external event traces of a system, which we regard as a more realistic end goal of a verification effort.

## 7.5 Application: read-only sharing of dynamically allocated memory

We now present an example program sharing a read-only capability with adversary code, showcasing the combined use of the `malloc` (Section 7.1) and `assert` (Section 7.2) routines, the secure calling convention (Section 7.3), and exercising our updated adequacy theorem (Section 7.4).

Figure 13 shows the implementation of our program of interest. The program dynamically allocates a region of size 1, into which it stores the integer 1. Next, it creates a copy of the newly created capability, which is then restricted to read-only (RO). This restricted capability is shared with an unknown callee, while the original copy is kept as local state. Upon return, an assert statement checks that the region indeed still contains 1. We then wish to prove that the final assertion always succeeds.

Notice that in this example, control is passed to untrusted code, corresponding to the first scenario in Figure 2a. However, we also allow the callee to return, i.e. jump to a callback. This is achieved using our calling convention to create a secure two-way boundary between known code and the unknown callee.

In order to prove that the assert statement succeeds, we rely on two facts. First, the heap-based calling convention guarantees the encapsulation of  $(RWX, b, b + 1, b)$ . Second, sharing  $(RO, b, b + 1, b)$  with unknown code does not threaten the integrity of  $b$ , since RO capabilities cannot be used to write to memory. These two facts are key when proving the following specification:

LEMMA 7 (FULL EXECUTION SPECIFICATION (26)).

$$\boxed{\text{mallocInv}(b_m, e_m)}, \boxed{\text{assertInv}(b_a, e_a, a_{flag})}, \boxed{a_{flag} \mapsto 0} \\ \vdash \left\{ \begin{array}{l} r_1 \Rightarrow w_{adv} * \mathcal{V}(w_{adv}) * \\ *_{(r,v) \in \text{reg}, r \notin \{pc, r_1\}} r \Rightarrow w * \\ (RWX, \text{data}, \text{end}, \text{code}); [\text{code}, \text{end}] \mapsto \text{code\_instrs} * \\ \text{data} \mapsto (RO, \text{table}, \text{table} + 2, \text{table}) * \\ [\text{table}, \text{table} + 2] \mapsto [(E, b_m, e_m, b_m); (E, b_a, e_a, b_a)] \end{array} \right\} \rightsquigarrow \bullet$$

PROOF. We begin by applying program logic rules until we make it to the call to unknown code. At that point, a (fresh) region has been dynamically allocated and initialized to 1, and thus we have the following Separation Logic resources:

$$r_2 \Rightarrow (RWX, b, b + 1, b) * b \mapsto 1$$

At the call site, the calling convention creates an activation record, and sets up a sentry capability as the return pointer in  $r_0$ . (The “...” on the second line below stands for the address of the continuation after the call.)

$$r_0 \Rightarrow (E, \text{act}, \text{act}_{\text{end}}, \text{act}) * \quad (11)$$

$$[\text{act}, \text{act}_{\text{end}}] \mapsto \text{act\_instrs} ++ [(RWX, l, l + 1, l); (RWX, \text{code}, \text{end}, \dots)] *$$

$$l \mapsto (RWX, b, b + 1, b) *$$

$$r_2 \Rightarrow 0 *$$

$$r_3 \Rightarrow (RO, b, b + 1, b) \quad (12)$$

Note in particular how the  $RWX$  capability pointing to  $b$  (part of the “local state”) is only reachable from the capability (pointing to  $l$ ) stored in the activation record, while the RO copy is available in register  $r_3$ .

The call macro then passes control to the adversary by jumping to  $w_{adv}$ . To reason about this jump, we apply Corollary 2 (assuming  $w_{adv}$  is safe). This requires us to show that all parameters in the current register state are valid. In particular, we must show that the sentry capability set up by the calling convention (11) is safe to execute, and that the read-only capability (12) is safe to share.

The latter is done by allocating an appropriate invariant, which is allowed to be *stronger* than the value relation itself, since the capability in question is read-only. To this end, we will allocate

an invariant that remembers the current integer pointed to by  $b$ , namely 1.

$$\boxed{\exists w, b \mapsto w * w = 1}$$

That same invariant is then used to prove that (11) is safe to execute, in particular to show that the assert statement succeeds, and hence does not change the assert flag.  $\square$

From this functional specification, we can instantiate our updated adequacy theorem (Theorem 5) to then derive the following end-to-end theorem about our program.

**THEOREM 6 (END-TO-END THEOREM: THE READ-ONLY PERMISSION GUARANTEES INTEGRITY (27)).**  
*Starting from an initial state of the machine ( $reg, mem$ ) assuming that:*

- $prog \uplus adv \uplus malloc \uplus assert \subseteq mem$ , where:  
 $adv : [b_{adv}, e_{adv}] \rightarrow \text{Word}$ ,  $prog : [\text{code}, \text{end}] \rightarrow \text{Word}$   
 $malloc : [b_m, e_m] \rightarrow \text{Word}$  and  $assert : [b_a, e_a] \rightarrow \text{Word}$ ;
- the contents of  $prog$  correspond to the encoded instructions and program data (i.e. table with capabilities to the  $malloc$  and  $assert$  subroutines);
- the adversary memory contains no capabilities except a table with a capability to the  $malloc$  subroutine;
- $malloc$  contains the implementation of the  $malloc$  subroutine;
- $assert$  contains the implementation of the  $assert$  subroutine, with its flag at address  $a_{flag}$ , initialized to 0;
- the initial state of registers satisfies:  
 $reg(\text{pc}) = (RX, \text{code}, \text{end}, \text{code})$ ,  
 $reg(r_1) = (RWX, b_{adv}, e_{adv}, b_{adv})$ .

Then, for any  $reg', mem'$ , if  $(reg, mem) \longrightarrow^* (reg', mem')$ , then  $mem'(a_{flag}) = 0$ .

**PROOF.** We apply the updated adequacy theorem (Theorem 5), using the specification proved in Lemma 7. All that remains is to prove the validity of the adversary capability:  $\mathcal{V}(RWX, b_{adv}, e_{adv}, b_{adv})$ . This is done in two steps. First, the adversary linking table is proved valid by applying validity of the  $malloc$  subroutine (Lemma 6). Next, the rest of the adversary region is proved valid through the assumption that it does not contain any other capabilities. The full proof can be found in the Coq mechanisation.  $\square$

## 8 CASE STUDY: A LIBRARY IMPLEMENTING DYNAMIC SEALING AND A CLIENT

We have presented so far a variety of smaller examples enforcing interesting encapsulation properties while interacting with adversarial code. In this section, we demonstrate that our approach scales up to the verification of a larger case study, involving not only the building blocks of Section 7, but using them to build and modularly verify a number of libraries built on top of each other.

We take inspiration from the literature on *object capability patterns* (OCPs) from high-level languages, a technique that enables programmers to protect the private state of their objects from corruption by untrusted code. More precisely, we consider the *dynamic sealing* OCP as presented by [Swasey et al. 2017]. Dynamic sealing enforces a form of data abstraction in the absence of static types. It can be implemented as a library providing pairs of seal/unseal functions, allowing their clients to “seal” private data into opaque objects which can be safely shared with untrusted code, and later unsealed in order to get back the original data.

In the context of a high-level language, [Swasey et al. 2017] present a formally verified implementation of dynamic sealing, equipped with a specification that captures the abstraction guarantees it provides. The authors then use this dynamic sealing library to build and verify a library of abstract integer intervals, where the integrity of an interval value (representing a range  $[i, j]$ ) with

```

2157     interval(28) = λ_, let (seal, unseal) = makeseal() in
2158                   let makeint = λ z1 z2, let x = malloc(2) in
2159                               x ← {min(z1, z2); max(z1, z2)};
2160                               seal(x)
2161                   in
2162                   let imin = λ i, unseal(i)[0] in
2163                   let imax = λ i, unseal(i)[1] in
2164                   (makeint, imin, imax)
2165
2166
2167     client(29) = let (makeint, imin, imax) = interval() in
2168                let checkint = λ i, assert(imin(i) ≤ imax(i)) in
2169                (checkint, makeint, imin, imax)
2170
2171
2172
2173

```

Fig. 14. High-level pseudo-code for the implementation of the interval library and its client.

2174  $i \leq j$ ) is protected using dynamic sealing. Finally, the authors use their verified integer library  
2175 to establish *robust safety* of a simple client program checking integrity of intervals, establishing  
2176 that an untrusted context cannot violate the internal invariants of the program and its underlying  
2177 libraries.

2178 We implement and verify low-level variants of the dynamic sealing OCP, interval library, and  
2179 their robustly safe client. This represents a non-trivial amount of code: our implementation of those  
2180 three components adds up to 632 machine instructions. Nevertheless, despite the fact that those  
2181 libraries are implemented in low-level assembly code, we are able to give them specifications at a  
2182 level of abstraction similar to their high-level counterparts.

2183 For ease of reading, we will keep the explanations fairly high-level. We will first show high-level  
2184 pseudo-code for the implementation of the interval library and its client, and informally discuss  
2185 what kind of properties should be enforced. Then, we will present the key ideas for implementing  
2186 dynamic sealing on a capability machine, and then for reasoning about it, in particular how to  
2187 instantiate its specification to be able to verify the interval library.

## 2188 8.1 Interval Library and Client

2190 The interval library implements an abstract data type representing intervals. An interval has a  
2191 lower and upper bound, which can be extracted via two functions; `imin` and `imax`. An interval is  
2192 created via a function `makeint` that takes as input two integers, and chooses the smallest input as  
2193 the lower bound, and the largest input as the upper bound. Crucially, the internal representation of  
2194 an interval must stay hidden so as to guarantee its integrity.

2195 We thus use *dynamic sealing* ([Sumii and Pierce 2004]) to dynamically enforce data abstraction  
2196 for the intervals representation. We detail our implementation of seals in Section 8.2. For now, it  
2197 suffices to know that a seal is a pair of functions, `seal` and `unseal`, where the former hides the  
2198 internal representation of some value, such that only the latter can expose it.

2199 An interval can be represented as an ordered pair of integers. On the capability machine, we  
2200 implement such a pair as a dynamically allocated region of size two, storing the lower and upper  
2201 bound of the interval. Then, an interval itself consists of a capability with read/write authority over  
2202 the corresponding region of size two. In Figure 14, we depict the high-level implementation of our  
2203 interval library. Note that the library implements closures around a fresh seal-unseal pair, used to  
2204 seal the aforementioned internal representation of intervals. The low-level implementation that we  
2205

2206 formally reason about can be thought of as the result of compiling the high-level implementation  
 2207 shown in Figure 14.

2208 The same figure also depicts a client of the interval library. The client exposes four entry points  
 2209 to the environment: in addition to entries to `makeInt`, `imin` and `imax` from a fresh instance of the  
 2210 interval library, the client also exposes an encapsulated `checkInt` function that, given an interval,  
 2211 dynamically asserts that the expected representation invariant holds for the interval, that is, that  
 2212 the minimum of the interval is indeed smaller than or equal to the maximum of the interval.

2213 When formally verifying the interval library and its client, we will need an invariant to keep  
 2214 track of each interval created by `makeInt`. The invariant should capture the properties enforced by  
 2215 the implementation of the interval library. We can already list the internal properties of an interval  
 2216 intuitively. First and foremost, the lower bound of an interval must be less than or equal to its  
 2217 upper bound. A perhaps more subtle property is that intervals are immutable. Thus, we will need  
 2218 to define an invariant that represents each interval as a dynamically allocated region of size two,  
 2219 which stores the lower and upper bound, and is immutable. The `seal-unseal` pair encapsulated  
 2220 by the library will be used only to seal intervals that adhere to this representation (satisfy this  
 2221 invariant). Keeping this intuition in mind, let us now explore the technical implementation of seals.

## 2222 8.2 Dynamic Sealing

2224 Dynamic sealing makes it possible to support data abstraction dynamically. The function `makeSeal`  
 2225 creates a pair of functions, `seal` and `unseal`, where `seal` is used to seal a word  $w$  into a fresh  
 2226 sealed word  $\sigma$ . We will also refer to  $\sigma$  as the key to  $w$ . The only way to extract the word  $w$  from  $\sigma$   
 2227 is with `unseal`. The key point is that this `seal-unseal` pair supports data abstraction by *sealing*  
 2228 *away* or *hiding* the internal representation of some value, only known and available to the owner  
 2229 of the associated `unseal` function.

2230 Although capability machines such as CHERI include seals as a language primitive, we show  
 2231 here how we can implement seals in software, as a low-level library. The library is implemented  
 2232 via a data structure that stores each word sealed through `seal`, associating each sealed word with a  
 2233 key. A key in itself does not reveal any details about the word it is hiding. However, it can provide  
 2234 access to that word, granted one has the proper authority to unseal it. Only a valid key should  
 2235 grant access to a sealed word. Keys, and the data structure that uses them, should intuitively satisfy  
 2236 two properties; (1) the unforgeable nature of keys and (2) the unique association between a key  
 2237 and the word it seals.

2238 The `seal` and `unseal` subroutines respectively perform insertions and lookups in this underlying  
 2239 data structure. `seal` takes a word as input, generates a fresh key, and adds the key value association  
 2240 to the data structure. `unseal` takes a key as input, checks that the key is associated to a value in  
 2241 the data structure, in which case it returns the value.

2242 **8.2.1 Reasoning about dynamic sealing.** A shared `seal-unseal` pair can be used to seal any word.  
 2243 In practice, one typically encapsulates a `seal-unseal` pair within a library, performing additional  
 2244 checks and thus ensuring that words that are sealed always satisfy a specific property. Then,  
 2245 whenever one successfully unseals a given key, one gets that the corresponding word satisfies the  
 2246 chosen property. For instance, the interval library enforces that each sealed word is a region of size  
 2247 2, storing the ordered bounds of an interval.

2248 When reasoning about code invoking the dynamic sealing library, one will need to pick, for  
 2249 each `seal-unseal` pair, an *representation invariant*  $\Phi : \text{Word} \rightarrow iProp$  describing the values to  
 2250 be sealed/unsealed by the pair<sup>7</sup>. Then, each `seal-unseal` pair maintains an Iris invariant `sealInv`  
 2251 describing the state of the pair itself, namely the data structure storing the key-values for all sealed  
 2252

2253 <sup>7</sup>An analogous representation invariant is used in the [Swasey et al. 2017]

$$\begin{array}{l}
2255 \quad \text{SEAL SPEC } \textcircled{30} \\
2256 \quad \left\{ \begin{array}{l} [b_s, e_s] \mapsto \text{seal} * \\ (-, b_s, e_s, -); \text{sealInv } ds \Phi * \\ r_1 \Rightarrow v * \Phi(v) * \dots \end{array} \right\} \rightsquigarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{l} [s = \text{Running}] * \\ \text{isSealedWord } k v * \\ r_1 \Rightarrow k * \dots \\ \vee [s = \text{Failed}] \end{array} \right\} \\
2257 \\
2258 \\
2259 \\
2260 \\
2261 \quad \text{UNSEAL SPEC } \textcircled{31} \\
2262 \quad \left\{ \begin{array}{l} [b_u, e_u] \mapsto \text{unseal} * \\ (-, b_u, e_u, -); \text{sealInv } ds \Phi * \\ r_1 \Rightarrow k * \dots \end{array} \right\} \rightsquigarrow \left\{ \begin{array}{l} [s = \text{Running}] * \\ \text{isSealedWord } k v * \\ r_1 \Rightarrow v * \Phi(v) * \dots \\ \vee [s = \text{Failed}] \end{array} \right\} \\
2263 \\
2264 \\
2265 \\
2266 \\
2267 \\
2268
\end{array}$$

Fig. 15. Specifications of seal and unseal

entries. Additionally, this invariant stores the information that each sealed value satisfies  $\Phi$ .

$$\text{sealInv } ds \Phi \textcircled{32} \triangleq \boxed{\begin{array}{l} \exists wvals, \text{dataStructure } ds \ wvals \\ * *_{(-, w) \in wvals} \Phi(w) \end{array}}$$

We require that  $\Phi$  is persistent, since the representation invariant of a sealed word should always hold once sealed. The `dataStructure` predicate describes the state of the data structure internal to the seal library (see Section 8.2.2 for a formal definition). It asserts that  $ds$  can be used to access a data structure storing the key value pairs denoted by  $wvals$  (a sequence of pairs in  $\text{Addr} \times \text{Word}$ ). In other words,  $wvals$  is the complete list of all words that have been sealed so far, each paired with their associated key.

A sealed word is sealed forever. It is thus possible to persistently remember that a particular word is an element of  $wvals$ . The predicate `isSealedWord`  $k v$  states that the key  $k$  is uniquely associated with the sealed word  $v$ . We present the formal definition of `isSealedWord` in Section 8.2.2.

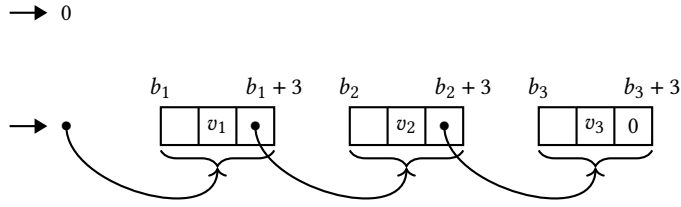
The functional specifications of the `seal` and `unseal` subroutines depend on an instance of the seal invariant `sealInv`, for a specific user-provided predicate  $\Phi$ . Then, `seal` can only be applied to words for which the representation predicate  $\Phi$  holds. `unseal` can fail if a given key is not valid, or if it is not associated with any sealed word, however if it succeeds, it will return a word for which  $\Phi$  holds. The specification of `makeSeal` allocates a fresh `sealInv` instance, for any  $\Phi$  chosen by the client of the library. Figure 15 shows specifications for `seal` and `unseal` (where we omits low-level administrative details).

**8.2.2 Implementing a low level seal library.** We now present the data structure used to implement the low-level seal library. We implement it as a linked associative list with a twist, next referred to as a *linked list dictionary*. The trick is to take advantage of the unforgeable nature of capabilities, and use the capability to (a subrange of) a list node as a key to that node; the corresponding value being then stored in the node.

Figure 16 shows the in-memory representation of a linked list dictionary storing three key-value pairs. Each node is implemented as a region of size three, where the bottom address acts as the key address. To avoid access to sealed values, it is important that a key does not provide authority over the other parts of a node (the value and the next pointer). For instance, the value  $v_i$  is uniquely associated to the capability  $(\text{RWX}, b_i, b_i + 1, -)$ .

The linked list dictionary library contains two subroutines, `findB`  $\textcircled{33}$  and `append`  $\textcircled{34}$ . `findB` expects as input an integer  $b$ , searches the linked list for a node of the form  $(\text{RWX}, b, b + 3, -)$  and returns the value that the associated node stores. It fails if no such node exists. `append` expects a





2313 Fig. 16. In-memory representation of an empty dictionary linked list and a dictionary linked list with three  
 2314 values  $v_1$ ,  $v_2$  and  $v_3$ .

2316 word as input, invokes `malloc` to dynamically allocate a new node of size three, stores the input  
 2317 word in the second position of that node, and then stores that node as the new tail of the linked list.  
 2318 Finally a key can then be derived from the newly created node; we now explain in more detail how  
 2319 that is done.

2320 A fresh instance of a seal-unseal pair is created by calling the `make_seal` subroutine, which  
 2321 returns a pair of closures encapsulating a new empty linked list dictionary. Sealing a word  $w$  adds it  
 2322 to the dictionary, and returns a *restricted* capability representing the key to the linked list dictionary  
 2323 entry. Say for instance that the input word  $w$  is appended to the list in a fresh node  $(\text{rwx}, b, b+3, b)$ .  
 2324 The seal subroutine will then return the key  $(\text{rwx}, b, b+1, -)$  (the address pointed to does not  
 2325 matter, and is here omitted for clarity).

2326 Recall that in the enclosed linked list dictionary,  $w$  will be stored at address  $b+1$ , for which the  
 2327 returned sealed value, or key, does not have authority. This sealed value is *unforgeable*. The only  
 2328 way to create it would be to derive it from a capability  $(\text{rwx}, b', e', -)$  where  $[b, b+1] \subseteq [b', e')$ .  
 2329 However, this is impossible since the appended node is freshly allocated using a safe `malloc`  
 2330 subroutine, which is guaranteed to hand out fresh regions upon invocation. Only seal has access  
 2331 to such a capability, and thus sealed values cannot be forged.

2332 In turn, the `unseal` subroutine expects a `rwx` capability of range 1 as input. It reads its lower  
 2333 bound, searches the enclosed linked list for a node with matching lower bound, and returns the  
 2334 associated word. Let us consider a continuation of the previous example. Say that `unseal` receives  
 2335  $(\text{rwx}, b, b+1, -)$  as input. It begins by authenticating the key by dynamically verifying its permission  
 2336 to be `rwx`, and its size to be 1. Upon validating its permission and range, it then runs `findB`  
 2337 on the enclosed linked list dictionary with the integer  $b$ , and returns the word stored within the  
 2338 node  $(\text{rwx}, b, b+3, -)$  at address  $b+1$ , namely the previously sealed word  $w$ . The authentication  
 2339 guarantees that a key has the same unforgeable authority as when it was created.

2340 In summary, the seal and unseal subroutines are implemented as follows:

- 2341
- 2342 ● seal:
- 2343 (1) append the input to the enclosed linked list dictionary
- 2344 (2) restrict the range of the fresh node capability to bottom address of node
- 2345 (3) return resulting restricted capability
- 2346 ● unseal:
- 2347 (1) check that permission of input is `rwx`
- 2348 (2) check that the range of input is 1
- 2349 (3) get the lower bound of input
- 2350 (4) find the node in the linked list dictionary with same lower bound
- 2351 (5) return the stored word at that node (fail if no such node exists)
- 2352



We now have enough ingredients to revisit the predicates used in the previous section to define the seal invariant. Recall that the `dataStructure` predicate represents the state of the data structure internal to the seal library (now defined to be a linked list dictionary), and that the `isSealedWord` predicate describes a persistently known association between a sealed word and its key.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{dataStructure } ds \ wvals &\triangleq \exists hd, ds \mapsto hd \\ &* \text{isList } hd \ wvals \\ &* \text{Exact } wvals \\ \text{isSealedWord } k \ v &\triangleq \exists wvals, \text{Pref } wvals * [(k, v) \in wvals]^8 * \mathcal{V}(\text{RWX}, k, k + 1, -) \end{aligned}$$

The head of the linked list dictionary is stored in location `ds`. `isList` corresponds to a standard inductive separation logic predicate for linked lists. Since the list monotonically grows, it is useful to persistently remember any prefix of the linked list dictionary. `Exact wvals` (the authoritative view of the list state) roughly states that `wvals` is the full state of the data structure. `Pref wvals` (the local fragment view) states that `wvals` is a prefix of the data structure. `isSealedWord k v`, a persistent predicate, states that the word `v` has been sealed with a key; a capability with lower bound `k`. This key is safe to share, hence  $\mathcal{V}(\text{RWX}, k, k + 1, -)$  holds.

In the next section, we describe how we use the reasoning principles about seal-unseal to verify our interval library.

### 8.3 Verifying the Interval Library and its Client

The first key step is to formally define the representation invariant for an interval. Recall the intuitive description given in Section 8.1: an interval is a capability with authority over a region of size 2, storing the lower and upper bounds of an interval, and which is immutable.

A first thought might be that one can define the representation invariant using two points-to predicates for the region. However, this does not capture the immutability of intervals, nor is it persistent. Instead, we use *persistent* points-to predicates ([Vindum and Birkedal 2021]). A persistent points-to predicate  $a \hookrightarrow w$  asserts that address `a` stores the word `w`. It can be used to read from address `a`, but not write to it, and as such, is a persistent resource. This is exactly what we need for our immutable invariants. We formally define the representation invariant `isInterval` as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{isIntervalInt } z_1 \ z_2 \ w &\stackrel{(35)}{\triangleq} \exists a, [w = (\text{RWX}, a, a + 2, a)] * a \hookrightarrow z_1 * (a + 1) \hookrightarrow z_2 * [z_1 \leq z_2] \\ \text{isInterval } &\stackrel{(36)}{\triangleq} \lambda w, \exists z_1 \ z_2, \text{isIntervalInt } z_1 \ z_2 \ w \end{aligned}$$

(Note, in particular, that the invariant also captures the property that the lower bound is less than or equal to the upper bound.) Using properties of persistent points-to predicates, we can prove the following lemma:

$$\text{LEMMA 8 (37). } \text{isIntervalInt } z_1 \ z_2 \ w \rightarrow \text{isIntervalInt } z_3 \ z_4 \ w \rightarrow [z_1 = z_3 \wedge z_2 = z_4].$$

Because `isInterval` is persistent, we can use it as the representation predicate for a seal-unseal pair, which will thus operate over the following invariant:

$$\text{sealInv } ll \ \text{isInterval}$$

This seal invariant is allocated by the specification for `makeSeal`, which is invoked during the creation of an interval library closure.

When sealing a new interval using `makeInt`, we must establish `isInterval` for the newly created interval. This requires us to transform the regular points-to predicates handed out by the `malloc` specification into persistent points-to predicates, and assert that indeed  $\text{min}(z_1, z_2) \leq \text{max}(z_1, z_2)$ .

<sup>8</sup>In the Coq mechanization, `wvals` associates the word `w` to `k + 1` rather than `k`, for technical reasons. This small discrepancy has otherwise no impact on the rest of the proof.

2402 Specifications for `imin` and `imax` return the respective lower and upper bound of a sealed interval.  
 2403 The seal invariant guarantees that the sealed word is an interval according to the representation  
 2404 invariant `isInterval`. In other words, if `imin` or `imax` succeeds for some word  $w$ , we know that  $w$  is  
 2405 the key to some associated capability pointing to the bounds of an interval  $[l, r]$ ; specifically that  
 2406 `isIntervalInt l r w` holds.

2407 During the verification of `checkint`, the specification for `imin` gives us some value  $l$  and predicate  
 2408 `isIntervalInt l r w`. Similarly, the specification for `imax` gives us some value  $r'$  and predicate  
 2409 `isIntervalInt l' r' w`. Notice that the bounds may be different, but the sealed word  $w$  is the same in  
 2410 each instance. We can thus apply Lemma 8 on the two given instances of `isIntervalInt`, and use the  
 2411 definition of `isInterval` to conclude that the given `assert` statement succeeds, namely that  $l \leq r$ .

2412 Finally, all that remains is to apply adequacy and prove the following final end-to-end theorem:

2413  
 2414 **THEOREM 7 (END-TO-END THEOREM: THE INTERVAL CLIENT DOES NOT TRIGGER AN ASSERTION**  
 2415 **FAILURE (38)).** *Starting from an initial state of the machine  $(reg, mem)$  in which regions reserved for*  
 2416 *the interval library, the seal library, `malloc`, the `assert` flag, the client and the adversary are all disjoint,*  
 2417 *and initialized as expected, we have that, for any  $reg', mem'$ , if  $(reg, mem) \rightarrow^* (reg', mem')$  then*  
 2418  *$mem'(a_{flag}) = 0$ .*

2419

## 2420 9 DISCUSSION AND PERSPECTIVES

2421 In this paper we have introduced Cerise, a program logic for reasoning about a low-level capability  
 2422 machine. Moreover, we have shown how Cerise can be used to define a logical relation for  
 2423 reasoning about unknown code. Thanks to the logical relation and the fundamental theorem from  
 2424 Section 5, Cerise can be used for *robust verification* [Sammler et al. 2020; Swasey et al. 2017], i.e., to  
 2425 verify correctness of software that interacts with unverified components. The Cerise program logic  
 2426 is the culmination of ideas used in a sequence of earlier papers [Georges et al. 2021; Skorstengaard  
 2427 et al. 2018, 2019a; Van Strydonck et al. 2021] and this paper is intended to give an accessible  
 2428 and didactic introduction to Cerise and the application of Cerise to program verification in the  
 2429 presence of untrusted code, accompanied with new results on a heap-based calling convention and  
 2430 implementations of sophisticated object-capability patterns.

2431 Throughout the paper we have introduced increasingly complex examples, which demonstrate  
 2432 how fine-grained abstractions can be implemented on a capability machine and reasoned about  
 2433 using Cerise. Our examples from Section 7 and Section 8 are modeled after examples from a paper  
 2434 about a high-level object capability language [Swasey et al. 2017]. Because of the more low-level  
 2435 nature of our capability machine, we had to implement some abstractions ourselves (such as the  
 2436 calling convention in Section 7.3) but we think it is otherwise fair to say that our examples faithfully  
 2437 represent the examples used by Swasey et al., using the same granularity of encapsulation and  
 2438 attacker interaction. As such, this paper demonstrates that the low-level security primitives offered  
 2439 by our capability machine are expressive enough to implement high-level language abstractions,  
 2440 despite the stronger attacker model of a low-level adversary. At the same time, the examples show  
 2441 that Cerise is expressive enough to reason about these abstractions.

2442 Cerise is the first instantiation of the Iris framework to such a low-level language and thus this  
 2443 work also demonstrates that the key features of Iris (such as guarded recursion, ghost state, and  
 2444 invariants) are equally applicable in this low-level setting as in the high-level settings they were  
 2445 originally intended for.

2446 Of course, while we implement and reason about our examples directly in the capability machine  
 2447 assembly language, we are not proposing that real software should all be developed in that way. On  
 2448 the contrary, we think this is only realistic for low-level code in compiler back-ends [Georges et al.  
 2449 2021; Skorstengaard et al. 2019a], operating systems and low-level security measures [Van Strydonck  
 2450

2451 et al. 2021]. Other software should be developed and reasoned about in a more abstract setting,  
2452 which suggests the need for a secure compiler that preserves high-level security guarantees in a  
2453 low-level environment. In the context of capability machines, such compilers have been investigated  
2454 already, both formally [El-Korashy et al. 2020; Van Strydonck et al. 2019], and practically [Chisnall  
2455 et al. 2017; Richardson 2020]. While we in this work have shown how to implement and reason  
2456 about some high-level programming patterns at a low level, much interesting work remains to be  
2457 done to further explore the design of a high-level language whose security abstractions map well  
2458 to those offered by a capability machine.

2459 An important aspect of the universal contract provided by our logical relation and fundamental  
2460 theorem is that it formalizes the security guarantee of our capability machine without overspecifying  
2461 implementations of the ISA. The contract specifies an authority bound that suffices to reason about  
2462 adversarial code, but does not overly constrain future extensions or optimized implementations  
2463 of the ISA. This is similar to how the ISA itself is designed to specify expected behavior that is  
2464 sufficient for software authors to reason about their code without preventing CPU designers from  
2465 constructing optimized or extended implementations. In fact, we believe universal contracts offer a  
2466 general and powerful approach for formalizing ISA security guarantees. Such security guarantees  
2467 are informally stated in informal ISA specifications but they have not yet been incorporated in  
2468 formal definitions of ISAs [Armstrong et al. 2019; Bourgeat et al. 2021]. As such, a promising  
2469 application of universal contracts like the one from Section 5 is to incorporate them into the ISA  
2470 definition to formalize intended ISA security guarantees.

2471 Finally, it is worth acknowledging that in this paper, we only describe a minimal capability  
2472 machine that lacks many features from realistic capability machine ISAs. Our approach has been  
2473 extended to support some additional features in the literature (e.g., local and uninitialized capabilities  
2474 [Georges et al. 2021], and MMIO [Van Strydonck et al. 2021]), but other features are still missing  
2475 for now (e.g. sealing, interrupts, virtual memory, etc.). In terms of reasoning, the unary model we  
2476 have described only supports reasoning about integrity properties. However, we have implemented  
2477 a binary model in our Coq development which can be used to reason about relational properties  
2478 (e.g., confidentiality).

2479

## 2480 10 RELATED WORK

2481 We now discuss several lines of work related to ours. First, we discuss earlier variants of Cerise  
2482 by the authors and colleagues. Then, we discuss work on verifying object capability patterns in  
2483 *high-level* languages, verification of ISA properties in *CHERI*, and other applications of *universal*  
2484 *contracts* in the literature.

2485

### 2486 10.1 Earlier variants of Cerise

2487 Earlier variants of Cerise focused on showing how capabilities can be used to implement a *secure*,  
2488 *stack-based calling convention* [Georges et al. 2021; Skorstengaard et al. 2019a,b] and *nested security*  
2489 *wrappers* [Van Strydonck et al. 2021].

2490 [Skorstengaard et al. 2019a] were the first to show that capabilities can be used to implement a  
2491 secure stack-based calling convention, i.e., a calling convention where the security guarantees of  
2492 function calls at the machine code level are faithful to the high-level notion of a function call. They  
2493 employed an additional kind of “local” capabilities and stack clearing to achieve security. Their work  
2494 follows a similar methodology as the one described here, that is, they define a logical relation which  
2495 characterizes a notion of safety. However, their proofs were not mechanized and the logical relation  
2496 was defined using a non-trivial concrete model; in contrast we use the Cerise program logic to define  
2497 and prove properties about our logical relation, which means that our development is done at a  
2498 higher-level of abstraction and thus we, e.g., do not have to solve any recursive domain equations. In  
2499

2499

2500 follow-up non-mechanized work, [Skorstengaard et al. 2019b] achieved similar security guarantees  
2501 with a novel calling convention based on so-called “linear” capabilities; capabilities that can never  
2502 be duplicated. Although this calling convention avoids the stack clearing required in the previous  
2503 work, linear capabilities come with certain architectural restrictions [see e.g. Skorstengaard et al.  
2504 2019b, §6.2]. An efficient implementation of linear capabilities has so far not been demonstrated.

2505 The subsequent work by [Georges et al. 2021] introduced a new type of capabilities (called  
2506 “uninitialized”) to avoid most of the stack clearing from Skorstengaard et al.’s first calling convention,  
2507 thereby improving runtime efficiency. Importantly, uninitialized capabilities do not come with the  
2508 same architectural hurdles as linear capabilities. As a second contribution, Georges et al. used Iris  
2509 to formulate safety as a logical relation and mechanized their proofs of security.

2510 The aforementioned logical relations of both Skorstengaard et al. and Georges et al. are more  
2511 expressive and therefore significantly more complicated than the one presented here: they permit  
2512 reasoning about revocation of local/linear/uninitialized capabilities and well-bracketedness prop-  
2513 erties of machine-code “function calls”, on top of local-state encapsulation. In our present work,  
2514 object capabilities ensure local state encapsulation, but we do not enforce calls and returns to be  
2515 well-bracketed. In particular, we do not prevent an adversary from invoking a return pointer several  
2516 times, or storing return pointers for later use. In other words, our calling convention implements the  
2517 kind of function calls one has in a high-level language with control operators (e.g., call/cc), where  
2518 calls and returns are not necessarily well-bracketed. (It is well-known that models of well-bracketed  
2519 function calls are more involved than models of not-necessarily-well-bracketed function calls, see,  
2520 e.g., [Abramsky et al. 1998; Dreyer et al. 2012], and here we opted for the latter, to present a more  
2521 accessible model, which suffices for a heap-based calling convention and for studying low-level  
2522 implementations of object-capability patterns.)

2523 In a different line of work, Van Strydonck et al. [2021] employed a capability machine and  
2524 logical relations model similar to the one presented here, but with additional support for MMIO, to  
2525 verify safety properties for small, nestable wrappers around security-critical devices on a capability  
2526 architecture. As part of the verification effort, multiple end-to-end security theorems were proven,  
2527 which state that safety predicates of interest hold over the trace of IO events admitted by the  
2528 machine. Here we have instead focused on demonstrating how a core model (without MMIO  
2529 support) can be used to reason about low-level implementations of object-capability patterns.

## 2531 10.2 Verifying object capability patterns in high-level languages

2532 A number of high-level programming languages allow for programming patterns similar to object  
2533 capabilities, that enable preserving local state while interacting with unknown code. Examples are  
2534 closures, and high-level objects in capability safe languages.

2535 [Devriese et al. 2016] pioneered the use of a logical relation to give a semantic characterization  
2536 of capability safety (earlier work used a more conservative syntactic approach based on whether  
2537 or not objects contain references to each other and ignored the behaviour of objects). [Devriese  
2538 et al. 2016] focused on capability safety for a core calculus of Javascript, including a notion of  
2539 observable effects, and used an explicit construction of their logical relation (not a program logic),  
2540 which was the inspiration for the capability model by [Skorstengaard et al. 2019a] mentioned above  
2541 and for the work by [Swasey et al. 2017], who presented a program logic which allows reasoning  
2542 modularly about object capability patterns in a high-level language. The methodology of [Swasey  
2543 et al. 2017] is close to the one presented here, but in contrast to [Swasey et al. 2017] we reason  
2544 about object capabilities on a low-level machine. For instance, Swasey et al. define two predicates to  
2545 describe a reference: a predicate for “high integrity” locations ( $\ell \hookrightarrow v$ ), and one for “low integrity”  
2546 locations (lowloc  $\ell$ ). The first predicate grants exclusive access to the corresponding reference, and  
2547 is therefore not safely shareable with an adversary. The second is shareable with an adversary, but  
2548

2549 can only be used to read and write “low integrity” values. In our setting, “high integrity” directly  
 2550 corresponds to the predicate  $a \mapsto w$  for a memory location, and “low integrity” corresponds to  
 2551 the invariant used in the definition of  $\mathcal{V}$ :  $\boxed{\exists w, a \mapsto w * \mathcal{V}(w)}$ . Correspondingly, our definitions  
 2552 satisfy similar reasoning rules to the ones established by Swasey et al. In particular, we believe that  
 2553 the various object capability patterns they verify can be implemented and verified in a similar way  
 2554 in the setting of a capability machine, using the principles presented in this paper. We demonstrated  
 2555 one such implementation by adapting their dynamic sealing example in Section 8. Additionally, the  
 2556 robust safety theorem of [Swasey et al. 2017] is related to our template adequacy theorem with  
 2557 malloc and assert (Theorem 5); our assert flag plays a role similar to the OK flag in [Swasey et al.  
 2558 2017].

2559

### 2560 10.3 Verifying ISA properties in CHERI

2561 [Nienhuis et al. 2020] formally verify a number of “architectural” properties of CHERI capability  
 2562 machines. This constitutes a significant mechanization effort: the authors tackle the full generality  
 2563 of a realistic operational semantics for CHERI, which is significantly more complex than the minimal  
 2564 machine we consider here. The approach followed by Nienhuis et al. is different from ours: they  
 2565 state the properties they establish as trace properties, over a trace of “abstract actions” describing  
 2566 the various capabilities transiting through the machine during the execution. This approach makes  
 2567 it possible to state the desired properties in a very explicit and concrete fashion. For instance, the  
 2568 authors state and prove a property of “capability monotonicity”: during the execution, the authority  
 2569 of available capabilities cannot increase (in other words, the machine does not allow forging new  
 2570 authority). Intuitively, this seems like a very reasonable property, required for proper operation  
 2571 of the capability machine. However, in practice it is more subtle: calls between components (in  
 2572 our case, jumping to an e-capability) do allow for some restricted form of non-monotonicity. The  
 2573 property proved by Nienhuis et al. is thus restricted to trace fragments that do not include calls  
 2574 to a different component. Our methodology is less explicit, but more expressive. In our setting,  
 2575 the fundamental theorem can be understood as expressing that “the machine works well”. Its very  
 2576 extensional statement is admittedly harder to understand in terms of the operational semantics of  
 2577 the machine, but it enables deriving correctness statements in terms of the operational semantics  
 2578 that do apply to a full execution of the machine, including calls between an arbitrary number of  
 2579 components.

2580

### 2581 10.4 Other applications of universal contracts

2582 As mentioned, our fundamental theorem constitutes a universal contract for arbitrary code, i.e., it  
 2583 allows deriving the guarantee that *any* adversarial capability is safe to execute, given validity of said  
 2584 capability. This safety is typically obtained by syntactically restricting the adversarial capability;  
 2585 e.g., requiring that the addressed memory only contains integers.<sup>9</sup> Similar notions of universal  
 2586 contracts have been used for high-level languages (explicitly or implicitly) in the literature. The  
 2587 aforementioned work of Skorstengaard et al. [2019a,b], and Swasey et al. [2017] all used a version  
 2588 of universal contracts, and placed varying syntactic restrictions on adversaries. The semantic type  
 2589 systems of Jung et al. [2017] and Sammler et al. [2020] permit similar reasoning about untrusted  
 2590 code based on a syntactic well-typedness restriction. The back-translation in the full-abstraction  
 2591 proof by Van Strydonck et al. [2019] involved an explicit, universal separation logic contract for  
 2592 a C-like language with capabilities. Generally, whenever a semantic model is used to describe  
 2593 semantic guarantees satisfied by arbitrary code (possibly subject to syntactic restrictions), and  
 2594

2595

2596 <sup>9</sup>Note that instructions are encoded in memory as integers.

2597



2598 when these guarantees are used in the manual verification of other code, this can be regarded as an  
 2599 application of a universal contract.

2600  
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