

On the Correctness, Optimality and Precision of Static Probabilistic Timing Analysis

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Abstract—In this paper, we investigate Static Probabilistic Timing Analysis (SPTA) for single processor systems that use a cache with an evict-on-miss random replacement policy. We show that previously published formulae for the probability of a cache hit can produce results that are optimistic and unsound when used to compute probabilistic Worst-Case Execution Time (pWCET) distributions.

We investigate the correctness, optimality, and precision of different approaches to SPTA. We prove that one of the previously published formulae for the probability of a cache hit is optimal with respect to the limited information that it uses. We improve upon this formulation by using extra information about cache contention. To investigate the precision of various approaches to SPTA, we introduce a simple exhaustive method that computes a precise pWCET distribution, albeit at the cost of exponential complexity. Further, we integrate this precise approach, applied to small numbers of frequently accessed memory blocks, with imprecise analysis of other memory blocks, to form a combined approach that improves precision, without significantly increasing its complexity. The performance of the various approaches are compared on benchmark programs.

I. INTRODUCTION

Real-time systems such as those deployed in space, aerospace, automotive and railway applications require guarantees that the probability of the system failing to meet its timing constraints is below an acceptable threshold (e.g. a failure rate of less than 10^{-9} per hour). Advances in hardware technology and the large gap between processor and memory speeds, bridged by the use of cache, make it difficult to provide such guarantees without significant over-provision of hardware resources. The use of deterministic cache replacement policies means that pathological worst-case behaviours need to be accounted for, even when in practice they may have a vanishingly small probability of actually occurring. Further, the quality of deterministic worst-case execution time estimates for such systems can be highly sensitive to missing information, making them overly pessimistic [2]. The use of cache with random replacement policies can negate the effects of these pathological worst-case behaviours while still achieving efficient average-case performance, hence providing a way of increasing guaranteed performance in hard real-time systems.

The timing behaviour of programs running on a processor with a random cache replacement policy can be determined using Static Probabilistic Timing Analysis (SPTA). SPTA computes an upper bound on the probabilistic Worst-Case Execution Time (pWCET) in terms of an exceedance function (1 - cumulative distribution function (CDF)). This exceedance function gives the probability, as a function of all possible values for an execution time budget x , that the execution time of the

program will not exceed that budget on any single run. (See [6] for examples of pWCET distributions, and [3] for a detailed discussion of what is meant by a pWCET distribution and the important difference between that and a probabilistic Execution Time (pET) distribution).

SPTA comprises two main steps [6]: First, a probability function is required that can be used to compute an estimate of the probability of a cache hit for each memory access. This probability function is *valid* if it provides a lower bound on the probability of a cache hit. Typical probability functions used in SPTA are a function of the cache associativity and the *reuse distance*, defined as the number of intervening memory accesses that could cause an eviction, since the memory block was last accessed. The probability function is used to obtain a pWCET distribution for each instruction. Second, SPTA computes the pWCET distribution for a sequence of instructions by convolving the distributions obtained for individual instructions. For convolution to give correct results, the pWCET distributions obtained for the different instructions must be *independent*. By *independent*, we mean that the estimate of the probability of a cache hit for a given memory access remains a valid lower bound irrespective of the behaviour of other memory accesses. We note that the precise probability of a cache hit for a given memory access is rarely independent, it typically depends strongly on the history of previous accesses (i.e. whether or not they were cache hits). Thus care needs to be taken in the derivation of a suitable probability function to ensure that independence is obtained.

SPTA has been developed for single processor systems assuming evict-on-miss [9], [8], and evict-on-access [4], [2] random replacement policies. This initial work assumed single path programs and no pre-emption. Subsequently, Davis et al. [6] provided analysis for both evict-on-miss and evict-on-access policies for single and multi-path programs, along with a method of accounting for cache related pre-emption delays. As the evict-on-miss policy dominates evict-on-access we focus on the former in this paper.

Despite the intensive research in this area over the past few years, it remains an open problem [5] how to accurately and efficiently compute the pWCET distributions for individual instructions and sequences of them. In particular, prior approaches gave little information about the correctness and precision of the pWCET distributions obtained.

In this paper, we re-visit the probability functions that form the fundamental building blocks of SPTA. We show that convolution of the probability functions given in [8] and [9] is unsound (optimistic), as these probability functions do not provide lower bounds on the probability of a cache hit that are *independent* of the behaviour of previous memory accesses. By

contrast, we show that the probability function derived in [6] provides a valid lower bound that is independent of the behaviour of previous memory accesses, enabling the calculation of sound pWCET distributions via convolution. We prove that this probability function is *optimal* with respect to the limited information (reuse distances and the cache associativity) that it employs, in the sense that no further improvement is possible without considering additional information.

As well as correctness and optimality, we also investigate the precision of SPTA. Despite claims to the contrary in the conclusions of [4], SPTA does not provide a precise pWCET distribution for a sequence of instructions when based on the convolution of simple pWCET distributions for each instruction. Instead, precise analysis requires that the probabilities of all possible sequences of cache hits and cache misses are considered, leading to exponential complexity. Previous work [2, 4, 8, 9] provides little indication of the precision of existing SPTA techniques, while [6] provides some comparisons with simulation.

In this paper, we improve the precision of SPTA in two ways. First, we refine the probability function given in [6] using the concept of *cache contention*. Second, we describe a simple approach that exhaustively enumerates all cache states that may occur for a given sequence of memory accesses. This provides precise analysis at the cost of complexity that is exponential in the number of pairwise distinct memory blocks. Nevertheless, this approach enables us to quantify the precision of various approaches to SPTA for small programs. We also introduce a combined approach which integrates precise analysis of the most important memory accesses (those made most frequently), with imprecise analysis of the remaining memory accesses, using a simple probability function. We show that this combined technique is effective in improving the accuracy of SPTA while avoiding the exponential increase in complexity that exhaustive analysis brings.

A. Random Cache Replacement

A cache with the evict-on-miss random replacement policy operates as follows: whenever a memory block is requested and is not found in the cache, then a randomly chosen cache line is evicted and the requested block is loaded into the evicted location. We assume an N -way associative cache, and so the probability of any cache line being evicted on a miss is $1/N$.

Prior work considered mostly instruction cache only and no data cache; however, this restriction is unnecessary for the theoretical foundations of our analysis. We therefore define traces as sequences of memory blocks directly (independent of the content of the memory blocks) instead of sequences of instructions as was done in [6]. Further, the restriction to a fully-associative cache can be easily lifted, as a set-associative cache with s cache sets can be analysed as s parallel and independent fully-associative caches.

B. Traces and Reuse Distance

A trace T of size n is an ordered sequence of n memory blocks $[e_1, \dots, e_n]$. The set of all traces is denoted by \mathbb{T} , and \mathbb{E} denotes the set of all elements. The reuse distance $\text{rd}(e)$ of an element e is the maximum number of evictions since the last access to the same element, with reuse distance ∞ in the case that there is no prior access to that memory block.

$$\text{rd}(e_l, [e_1, \dots, e_{l-1}]) = \begin{cases} l-j & \text{if } \exists e_j: e_j = e_l \wedge \forall_{j < i < l}: e_i \neq e_l \\ \infty & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \quad (1)$$

We typically represent the reuse distance k using a superscript and omit all infinite reuse distances. For example,

$$a, b, a^1, c, d, b^3, c^2, f, a^5, c^5$$

We denote the event of a cache hit at memory block e_i as e_i^{hit} and $P(e_i^{\text{hit}})$ the corresponding probability, with e_i^{miss} and $P(e_i^{\text{miss}})$ being the equivalent for a cache miss. Further, we use \hat{P} to denote the approximations to distinguish them from the actual values.

C. Review of prior Approaches

In this section, we present the different approaches that have been proposed to compute the probability of cache hits and misses and thus the pWCET distribution.

Zhou [10] proposed using the reuse-distance to compute the probability $P(e^{\text{hit}})$ of a cache hit at access e with reuse distance k :

$$\hat{P}^Z(k) = \left(\frac{N-1}{N} \right)^k \quad (2)$$

where N is the associativity of the cache. The rationale behind (2) is that the second access to e can only be a hit, if all intermediate cache misses evict cache lines other than the one element e occupies. Equation (2) is not precise, but a lower bound on the *individual* probability of a cache hit. Remember that the reuse distance was defined as the *maximum* number of evictions, and not the actual number. Therefore $\hat{P}^Z(\text{rd}(e)) < P(e^{\text{hit}})$ holds for some access sequences.

In 2009, Quinones et al. [9] proposed to derive the pWCET distribution of a single path program via convolution of the pWCET distributions of individual accesses obtained from (2). However, (2) is only valid if considered in isolation and the convolution for independent events cannot be used due to a dependency stemming from the finite size of the cache (see [6]). To correct (2), Davis et al. [6] proposed an independent lower bound on the probability of a cache hit:

$$\hat{P}^D(k) = \begin{cases} \left(\frac{N-1}{N} \right)^k & N > k \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \quad (3)$$

The drawback of (3) is that all accesses with reuse distance higher than the associativity are considered to be cache misses.

In 2013, Kosmidis et al. [8] proposed the following formula

$$\hat{P}^K(e^{\text{hit}}) = \left(\frac{N-1}{N} \right)^{\sum P(e_j^{\text{miss}})} \quad (4)$$

where the summation in the exponent is over the probabilities of misses of the intervening memory accesses. (We note that a similar formula was also given by Zhou [10] as an approximation). Equation (4) may over-estimate the actual probability of a cache hit as noted in [5], and thus lead to a pWCET distribution that is optimistic.

Using one of the above estimates of the probability of a cache hit, the Probability Mass Function (PMF) \mathcal{I}_i of element e_i is defined as follows:

$$\mathcal{I}_i = \begin{pmatrix} \text{hit-delay} & \text{miss-delay} \\ P(e_i^{\text{hit}}) & P(e_i^{\text{miss}}) \end{pmatrix} \quad (5)$$

with $P(e_i^{\text{miss}}) = 1 - P(e_i^{\text{hit}})$ and *hit-delay* (*miss-delay*) denoting the execution time for a cache hit (cache miss). The pWCET distribution is then derived by computing the convolution \otimes of the probability mass function of each memory access e_i :

$$pWCET = \bigotimes \mathcal{I}_i \quad (6)$$

Under the assumption of constant hit- and miss-delays,

computing the distribution of cache-hits and cache-misses is sufficient to derive the pWCET distribution. We will therefore concentrate only on the former, the latter can be obtained by multiplying the constant delays by the number of hits and misses.

II. CORRECTNESS CONDITIONS AND OPTIMALITY

As stated in [6], the probability that a single access is a cache hit/miss is not independent of prior events. This means that in general, the convolution for independent events cannot be soundly applied, as it is only valid for independent events. What can be done instead, however, is to provide a lower bound approximation \hat{P} to the actual probability of a cache hit for which we can soundly apply the basic convolution for independent events. Sound in this context means that for any sequence of cache accesses $[e_1, \dots, e_n]$, the approximation \hat{P} (i) does not over-estimate the probability of a cache hit, and (ii) the value obtained from convolution of the approximated probabilities for any subset of a trace T describing the probability that all elements in the subset are a hit, is at most the precise probability of such an event occurring:

- (i) $\forall e \in [e_1, \dots, e_n]: P(e^{hit}) \geq \hat{P}(e^{hit})$,
- (ii) $\forall E \subseteq [e_1, \dots, e_n]: P(\bigwedge_{e \in E} e^{hit}) \geq \prod_{e \in E} \hat{P}(e^{hit})$.

A. Counterexamples to Equation (2) and Equation (4)

Of the different approaches presented in Section I, only (3) provides a valid and sound lower-bound. Equation (2) does not fulfil (ii) and (4) fulfils neither (i) nor (ii) as shown below.

To show that (4) over-estimates (i) the probability of an individual cache hit, we use the access sequence

$$a, b, c, d, a^3, b^3$$

and a cache with associativity 2.

Equation (4) computes the probability of a cache hit for the second access to a of $(1/2)^3 = 0.125$, which is correct and precise. For the second access to b , however, (4) results in $(1/2)^{2+0.875} \geq 0.1363$ which is optimistic as the correct probability of a cache hit is $(1/2)^3 = 0.125$ in this case. (This can be seen by enumerating the possible cache states that could exist after the second access to a ; out of 16 possibilities each with probability 0.0625, only two contain b).

To show that (ii) does not hold using (4) we use an example derived from that given in [5], we assume the access sequence

$$a, b, a^1, b^1$$

and a cache with associativity of 100. Further, we assume that the latency of a cache hit is 1 and the latency of a cache miss is 10. The first two accesses are certain misses, so using (4), the probability distributions for the first three instructions are as follows:

$$\begin{pmatrix} 1 & 10 \\ 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 10 \\ 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix}, \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 10 \\ 0.99 & 0.01 \end{pmatrix} \quad (7)$$

According to (4), the probability of the 4th access being a cache hit is then: $\hat{P}^K(e^{hit}) = 0.99^{0.01} = 0.9998995$. (Note this value is rounded down slightly, which is a safe assumption). So the overall pWCET is

$$\begin{aligned} & \begin{pmatrix} 10 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix} \otimes \begin{pmatrix} 10 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix} \otimes \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 10 \\ 0.99 & 0.01 \end{pmatrix} \otimes \begin{pmatrix} 1 & 10 \\ 0.9998995 & 0.0001005 \end{pmatrix} \\ &= \begin{pmatrix} 22 & 31 & 40 \\ 0.989900505 & 0.01009849 & 1.005e^{-6} \end{pmatrix} \quad (8) \end{aligned}$$

However, the correct pWCET is

$$\begin{pmatrix} 22 & 31 & 40 \\ 0.99 & 0.0099 & 0.0001 \end{pmatrix} \quad (9)$$

This is easily seen by considering the scenarios that result in a total of two and four cache misses respectively. (Recall that the first accesses to a and b are certain to be cache misses). If the first access to b does not evict a (probability 0.99), then the second access to a can only be a cache hit, which in itself does not evict b , and so in this scenario, which has a probability of occurring of 0.99, there are two cache misses in total. Alternatively, if the first access to b evicts a (probability 0.01), then the second access to a is *certain* to be a cache miss, which in turn has a probability of 0.01 of evicting b and so making the second access to b a cache miss. Hence the only scenario with four cache misses in total has a probability of occurring of 0.0001.

In this example, using (4) results in a pWCET distribution that under-estimates the probability of obtaining four cache misses and hence an execution time of 40, by two orders of magnitude. This is a highly optimistic and unsound result.

To show that (2) also contradicts constraint (ii), we assume an associativity of 4 and the access sequence:

$$a, b, c, d, e, a^4, b^4, c^4, d^4, e^4$$

By construction, all probabilities of a cache hit $\hat{P}^Z(e^{hit})$ for the last five accesses are non-zero. Hence, the combined probability of five hits is also non-zero, which contradicts the fact that at most 4 elements can be stored simultaneously in the cache.

B. Optimality of Equation (3)

We can derive an estimate of the probability of a cache hit that is more precise than (3) as we can simply enumerate all possible cache states and the associated probabilities; however, this solution is computationally intractable, as we will explain in Section IV. If we aim at an estimate using only the reuse distances and on which we can apply the convolution for independent events, then (3) is optimal in the sense that there is no function of k and N that is valid and returns any larger value.

Proof: We assume that $\hat{P}'(k)$ is a probability function such that $\hat{P}'(k)$ is more precise than $\hat{P}^D(k)$. Hence:

$$\exists k: \hat{P}'(k) = \hat{P}^D(k) + \epsilon \quad (10)$$

for some $\epsilon > 0$. We assume that the only input to \hat{P}^D and \hat{P}' is the reuse distance k which must be valid for any sequence of accesses $[e_1, \dots, e_n]$, and the associativity N . We make a case distinction on k :

Case $k < N$: Assume the following ordered sequence with accesses to k pairwise distinct elements

$$[e_x, e_1, e_2, e_3, \dots, e_{k-1}, e_k, e_x]$$

and an initially empty cache. The reuse distance of the second access to e_x is k . Each access to any of the other elements results in a cache miss, the probability of a cache hit $P(e_x^{hit})$ is exactly $\hat{P}^D(k)$ and the assumption that $\epsilon > 0$ contradicts (i).

Case $k \geq N$: Assume the access pattern

$$[e_1, e_2, e_3, \dots, e_{k-1}, e_k, e_1, e_2, e_3, \dots, e_{k-1}, e_k]$$

for each second access to e_i , the reuse distance is k . Since the cache can store at most N elements and $k > N$, we know that the probability of k hits

is 0, i.e. $P(\bigwedge_{e_i} e_i^{hit}) = 0$. However, since $\epsilon > 0$ and $\hat{P}^D(k) \geq 0$, we can conclude that $\prod_{e \in E} \hat{P}'(e^{hit}) > 0$, which contradicts (ii).

Hence, we can construct for any k and any N , an access sequence where \hat{P}^D is optimal in the sense that it provides the largest valid value of any function relying only on the reuse distance and the associativity. ■

III. PROBABILITY OF A CACHE HIT USING CACHE CONTENTION

Equation (3) provides a tight lower bound on the probability of a cache hit, but it is imprecise even for simple access sequences. If we consider for instance a random cache with associativity 4 and the following access sequence,

$$a, b, c, d, f, a^4, b^4, c^4, d^4, f^4$$

all accesses are considered cache misses. The reason for this is that for each of the last five accesses, the probability of a cache hit is set to 0 to ensure correctness with respect to constraint (ii), i.e. that the probability of the last five access all being hits is zero. However, this can also be ensured by considering the probability of a cache hit for the preceding accesses. To this end, we define the concept of the *cache contention* con of a memory block e which denotes the number of memory accesses within the reuse distance of e that are considered possible hits by \hat{P} (i.e. have a non-zero probability):

$$\begin{aligned} con: \mathbb{E} \times \mathbb{T} &\rightarrow \mathbb{N} \\ con(e_l, [e_1, e_2, \dots, e_{l-1}]) &= \\ \left\{ \left[e_i \in [e_1, \dots, e_{l-1}] \mid l - rd(e_l, [e_1, \dots, e_{l-1}]) \leq i \wedge \hat{P}(e_i^{hit}) \neq 0 \right] \right\} \end{aligned} \quad (11)$$

We only need to set the probability of a cache hit for an access e to zero when the cache contention is greater than or equal to the associativity N .

$$\hat{P}^N(e^{hit}) = \begin{cases} 0 & con(e_l, T) \geq N \\ \left(\frac{N-1}{N}\right)^k & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \quad (12)$$

The cache contention con and the probability \hat{P}^N are mutually dependent; but the cache contention of an element e depends only on the probability of a cache hit for the preceding elements, which enables con and \hat{P}^N to be computed efficiently.

Table I presents the probability \hat{P}^N for the elements of the example sequence. In contrast to (3), only one of the five elements with finite reuse distance is assumed to have zero probability of being a cache hit.

	a ,	b ,	c ,	d ,	f ,	a ,	b ,	c ,	d ,	f
rd	∞	∞	∞	∞	∞	4	4	4	4	4
con	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	3	4
\hat{P}^D	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
\hat{P}^N	0	0	0	0	0	$(\frac{3}{4})^4$	$(\frac{3}{4})^4$	$(\frac{3}{4})^4$	$(\frac{3}{4})^4$	0

TABLE I. PROBABILITIES \hat{P}^N AND \hat{P}^D FOR THE ACCESS SEQUENCE $a, b, c, d, f, a, b, c, d, f$, WITH REUSE DISTANCES (rd) AND CACHE CONTENTIONS (con).

IV. EXHAUSTIVE STATE-ENUMERATION

We now describe a simple analysis to compute the exact probability distribution of cache hits. This analysis is orthogonal to the approaches presented in previous sections. Here, we exhaustively enumerate all cache states that may occur during the execution of a given trace.

The domain of the analysis is a set of cache states defined as follows: A cache state CS is a triple (E, P, D) consisting of a set of memory blocks $E \subseteq \mathbb{E}$, a probability $P \in \mathbb{R}$ and a distribution

of cache misses $D: (\mathbb{N} \rightarrow \mathbb{R})$. A cache state $CS = (E, P, D)$ has the following meaning: the cache contains exactly the elements E with probability P , and D denotes the distribution of cache misses when the cache is in this state. The set of all cache states is denoted by \mathbb{CS} . Note that we model a distribution by the function $\mathbb{N} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ which assigns each possible number of cache hits a probability. We start with an initially empty cache, i.e. $CS_{init} = (\emptyset, 1, D)$ with

$$D(x) = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } x = 0 \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

Hence, our initial state space is the set containing the initially empty cache: $\{CS_{init}\}$.

The update function u describes the cache update when accessing element e for a single cache state as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} u: \mathbb{CS} \times \mathbb{E} &\rightarrow 2^{\mathbb{CS}} \\ u((E, P, R), e) &= \begin{cases} \{(E, P, D)\} & \text{if } e \in E \\ miss((E, P, D), e) & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \end{aligned} \quad (13)$$

If the accessed element e is a cache hit, then the cache state remains unchanged, and the output is the set containing the input cache state. However, if the accessed element e is a cache miss, then the update function generates a set of possible cache states as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} miss((E, P, D), e) &= \{(E \setminus e' \cup \{e\}, P \cdot 1/N, D') \mid e' \in E\} \\ &\cup \{(E \cup \{e\}, P \cdot (N - |E|)/N, D') \mid |E| < N\} \end{aligned} \quad (14)$$

with $D'(0) := 0$ and $\forall x > 0: D'(x) = D(x - 1)$.

Each element e' from the set E may be evicted from the cache with probability $1/N$ and the element e , which is now cached, is added to E . In the case that the set E is smaller than the associativity of the cache, an empty cache line or a cache line with unknown content will be evicted with probability $(N - |E|)/N$. In either case, the miss-distribution will be shifted by one to account for the additional cache miss.

In order to reduce the state space, we merge two cache states if they contain exactly the same memory blocks. We thus define the join operation for cache states as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \sqcup: \mathbb{CS} \times \mathbb{CS} &\rightarrow 2^{\mathbb{CS}} \\ (E_1, P_1, D_1) \sqcup (E_2, P_2, D_2) &= \\ \left\{ \begin{aligned} &\{(E_1, P_1 + P_2, (\frac{P_1}{P_1+P_2} \cdot D_1) \oplus (\frac{P_2}{P_1+P_2} \cdot D_2))\} & \text{if } E_1 = E_2 \\ &\{(E_1, P_1, D_1), (E_2, P_2, D_2)\} & \text{otherwise} \end{aligned} \right\} \end{aligned} \quad (15)$$

where \oplus denotes the summation of two distributions (i.e. $D_1 \oplus D_2 := \lambda x. D_1(x) + D_2(x)$) and $p \cdot D$ denotes the multiplication of each element in D by p (i.e. $p \cdot D := \lambda x. p \cdot D(x)$). This step is necessary to weight each distribution by its probability.

We can lift the function u from single cache states to a set of cache states as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} U: 2^{\mathbb{CS}} \times \mathbb{E} &\rightarrow 2^{\mathbb{CS}} \\ U(S, e) &= \bigsqcup \{u(CS, e) \mid CS \in S\} \end{aligned} \quad (16)$$

The set of cache states S_{res} generated by a trace $T = [e_1, \dots, e_n]$ executed on the initial cache state CS_{init} is thus given by the composition of U :

$$S_{res} := U(\dots(U(U(CS_{init}, e_1), e_2), \dots), e_n)) \quad (17)$$

The final distribution of all cache states in S_{res} is then given by the summation of all individual distributions of each cache

state weighted by their probabilities:

$$D_{res} = \bigoplus \{D \cdot P | (E, P, D) \in S_{res}\} \quad (18)$$

See Figure 1 for an example of the exhaustive enumeration of all cache states, for a cache with associativity 4. Here, we assume an initially empty cache. The access to block a leads with probability 1 to the next cache state (where only a is cached). The next access to b evicts memory block a with probability $1/4$ or is stored in a different cache line to a with probability $3/4$, and so on.

Unfortunately, a complete enumeration of all possible cache states is computationally intractable. Due to the behaviour of the random replacement policy, each element that was cached once, may still be cached. Thus the number of different cache states grows exponentially.

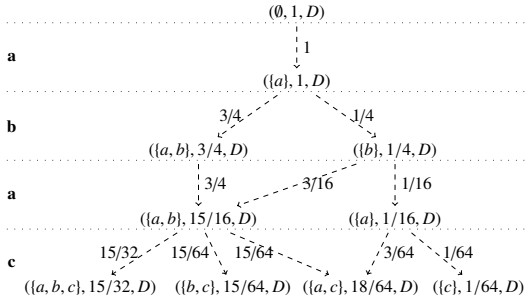


Fig. 1. The first four steps of exhaustive enumeration of all cache states for the access sequence $a, b, a, c, d, b, c, f, a, c$. The dotted arrows show the evolution of the different cache states, annotated with the corresponding probability.

V. COMBINED APPROACH

So far, we presented two approaches, one precise but computationally intractable, the other imprecise yet efficient. In this section, we show how these approaches can be combined to form a new approach with scalable precision. The idea is to use the precise approach for a small subset of *relevant* memory blocks, while using the imprecise approach for the remaining blocks. So, instead of enumerating all possible cache states, we abstract the set of cache states and focus only on the m most important memory blocks, where m can be chosen to control both the precision and the runtime of the analysis. In this way, we effectively reduce the complexity of the precise component of the analysis for a trace with l distinct elements from 2^l to 2^m (typically with $m \ll l$). We use the number of occurrences of a memory block e within a trace T as a simple heuristic indicating relevance. We therefore order the memory blocks within a trace T by the number of occurrences and select the m blocks with the highest frequency. Let $R \subseteq \mathbb{E}$ be the set of these m blocks. For the access sequence

$$a, b, a, c, d, b, c, f, a, c$$

and $m = 2$, $R = \{a, c\}$. Thus, the state exploration conceptually computes a precise probability distribution for the sequence

$$a, _, a, c, _, _, c, _, a, c$$

while the imprecise calculation is used to compute the probability of cache hits for the sequence

$$_, b, _, _, d, b, _, f, _, _$$

We have to change the update function of the analysis (see (13)) such that only elements from the set R are represented explicitly, i.e. $\forall (E, P, D) \in \mathbb{CS}: E \subseteq R$. Each access to a

memory block e which is not contained in the set R will be considered a cache miss; however, e will not be added to the set E (to ensure that $E \subseteq R$). Further, as we use (12) to compute the probability of a hit for access e , and include the distribution for e via convolution, we do not increase the miss counts of the cache states in respect of e , i.e., we do not update the miss-distributions D of a cache state (E, P, D) .

$$u: \mathbb{CS} \times \mathbb{E} \rightarrow 2^{\mathbb{CS}}$$

$$u((E, P, D), e) = \begin{cases} \{(E, P, D)\} & \text{if } e \in E \\ \text{miss}((E, P, D), e) & \text{if } e \notin E \wedge e \in R \\ \text{miss}'((E, P, D)) & \text{if } e \notin R \end{cases} \quad (19)$$

with

$$\text{miss}'((E, P, D)) = \{(E \setminus e', P \cdot 1/N, D) | e' \in E\} \cup \{(E, P \cdot (N - |E|)/N, D) | \text{if } |E| < N\} \quad (20)$$

The function miss' computes the resulting set of cache states in the case of a miss, without inserting the accessed element e as it is not an element of R . Figure 2 shows the reduced cache state exploration on the example sequence with $R = \{a, c\}$.

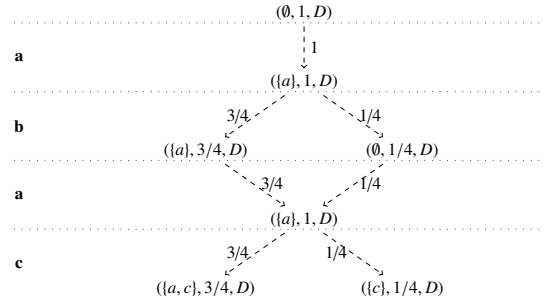


Fig. 2. The first four steps of the reduced cache state enumeration for the access sequence $a, b, a, c, d, b, c, f, a, c$ with $R = \{a, c\}$. The dotted arrows show the evolution of the different cache states, annotated with the corresponding probability. The access to memory block b is considered as cache miss, but this block is not added to the cache states, since $b \notin R$.

We also have to update the definition of cache contention (11) to consider all memory blocks of R as potentially cached:

$$\text{con}(e_l, T) = |R| + \left| \left\{ e_i \in T \mid |l - \text{rd}(e_l, T)| \leq i < l \wedge \hat{P}(e_i^{\text{hit}}) \neq 0 \wedge e_i \notin R \right\} \right| \quad (21)$$

Table II presents the probability \hat{P}^N for the elements of the example sequence, assuming $N = 4$.

	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h
rd	∞	∞	∞	∞	4	∞	∞	∞
con	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	4
\hat{P}^N	0	0	0	0	$(\frac{3}{4})^4$	0	0	0

TABLE II. PROBABILITIES \hat{P}^N FOR THE ACCESS SEQUENCE $a, b, a, c, d, b, c, f, a, c$ AND $R = \{a, c\}$, WITH REUSE DISTANCES (rd) AND CACHE CONTENTIONS (con).

In the last step, we convolve the resulting distributions of both approaches to obtain the final distribution of cache misses.

VI. EVALUATION

In this section, we compare the precision of the various approaches presented. Due to the limited space, here we only give results for two benchmarks from the Mälardalen Benchmark Suite [7] (binary search and insertion sort). An extended evaluation covering 6 additional benchmarks, including 4 with much longer traces, and an assessment of the tractability (run-

time) of the combined approach can be found in the technical report [1].

The selected benchmarks are simple but allow us to clearly focus on the code characteristics that impact the precision of the results: (i) the number of distinct memory blocks and (ii) the overall number of memory accesses. We assumed a fully-associative instruction-only cache with an associativity of 16 and a block-size of 8.

To derive an approximation to the actual performance of the random cache, and thus a baseline for our experiments, we performed 10^9 simulations of the cache behaviour for each benchmark (red line). The other lines on the graphs are the imprecise approach using only the reuse distance (3) (light blue line), the cache-contention approach (12) (black line), and the combined approach using 4, 8 and 12 relevant memory blocks (green, dark blue and pink lines respectively).

When the number of distinct memory blocks is smaller than or close to the cache associativity, then the cache-contention approach results in no improvement or only a slight improvement over the imprecise approach using only the reuse distance. This was the case with insertion sort (see Figure 3). Yet, the combined approach with 8 blocks reduces the over-approximation by 50% to 60% and with 12 blocks results in exact or nearly exact results. When the number of distinct memory blocks exceeds the associativity of the cache as with binary search (see Figure 4), the cache-contention approach significantly improves upon the imprecise approach using only the reuse distance, which predicts hardly any cache hits.

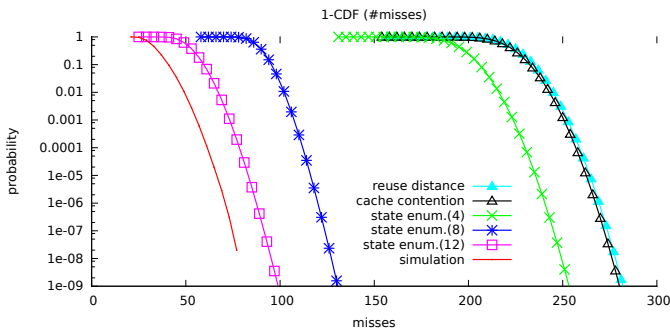


Fig. 3. Insertion Sort. 707 memory accesses in total, 21 distinct memory blocks.

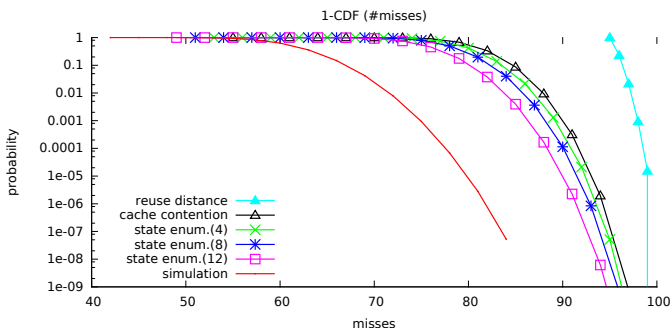


Fig. 4. Binary Search. 132 memory accesses in total, 25 distinct memory blocks.

The experiments have a short runtime when the number of relevant blocks is small (less than one minute for 8 blocks or less) but the runtime quickly grows to about 15 minutes for 12 blocks (on a 2.3 GHz CPU) and several hours for a complete

state-enumeration; even for these simple programs (see [1] for a detailed evaluation of tractability (runtime)).

VII. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

In this paper, we investigated the correctness, optimality and precision of Static Probabilistic Timing Analysis (SPTA) for systems that use a cache with an evict-on-miss random replacement policy.

The main contributions of this paper are: (i) Showing that the formula for the probability of a cache hit (previously published in DATE 2013 [8]) is not sound for use in SPTA, since it can produce results in the form of probabilistic Worst-Case Execution Time (pWCET) distributions that are optimistic by orders of magnitude and thus unsafe. (ii) Proving the optimality of the probability function given in [6] with respect to the limited information (reuse distance and associativity) that it uses, and deriving an improved probability function that uses information about cache contention. (iii) Introducing an approach with scalable precision, combining precise analysis for frequently used memory blocks with imprecise analysis for those memory blocks that are used less often. Evaluation shows that this technique is effective in reducing pessimism in SPTA without the problems of exponential complexity inherent in an exhaustive cache state exploration.

In future, we intend to investigate how our combined approach may be extended from traces to multi-path programs, improvements that may be obtained by dividing a trace into independent sub-traces (see the technical report [1] for initial work in this area), and explore other heuristics and methods of choosing which memory blocks to select for precise analysis.

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