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WebAssembly what? why? whither?

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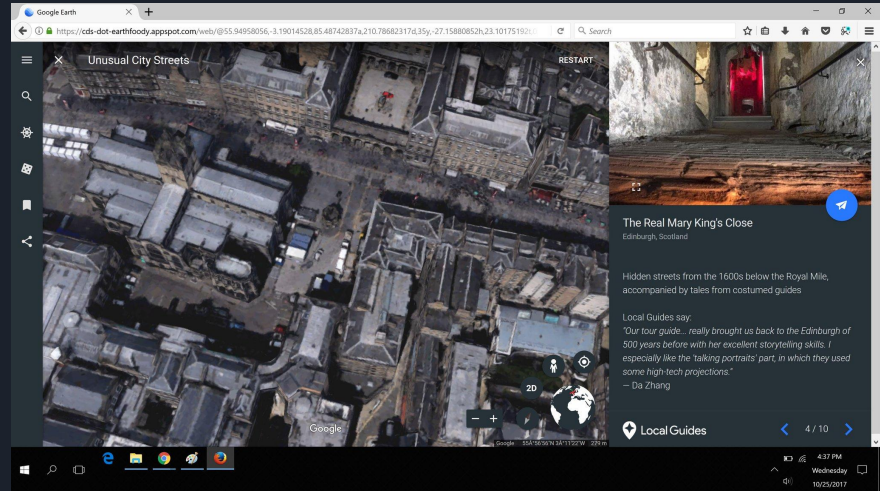
What is WebAssembly?

- A portable, compact, binary code format
 - Low-level execution model with native unboxed types
 - Suitable as a compilation target, e.g. for C++
- Natively supported in all major browsers
- Developed in the W3C WebAssembly Community Group
- Offers near-native performance for low-level code
- Integrates with the Web platform through JavaScript APIs



Users and potential users

- WebAssembly has grown fast since first browsers shipped in March 2017, with many prototypes and a lot of interest
 - Google Earth
 - Unity3d
 - Epic
 - AutoCAD
 - Figma
 - Farmville 2
 - Active Financial
 - Soundation
 - AmpedStudio
 - Twitch.tv

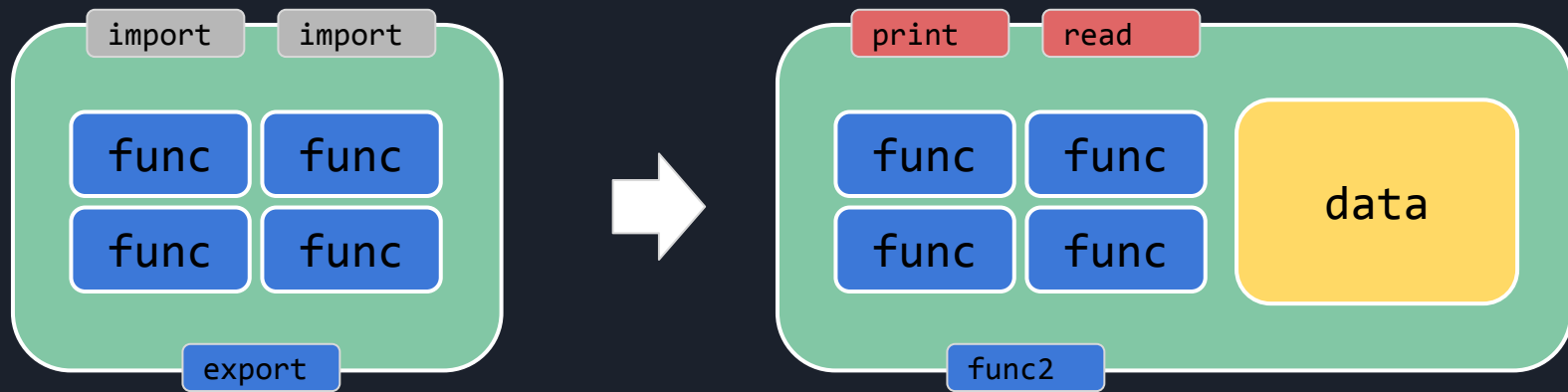




WebAssembly Basics - Modules

- WebAssembly code is organized into units called *modules*
- A module has a number of *functions*
 - Imports: for accessing explicitly granted host functionality
 - Locally defined functions: local computation
 - Exported functions: allows calls into the module
- A module has no *state*, but declares:
 - Size of memory
 - Global variables
 - Tables for indirect calls and host interaction
- A module is *instantiated* to create a stateful computation
 - An instance has a memory, variables, local execution stack, etc

WebAssembly Modules and Instances



Module

Instance



Binary Format Overview

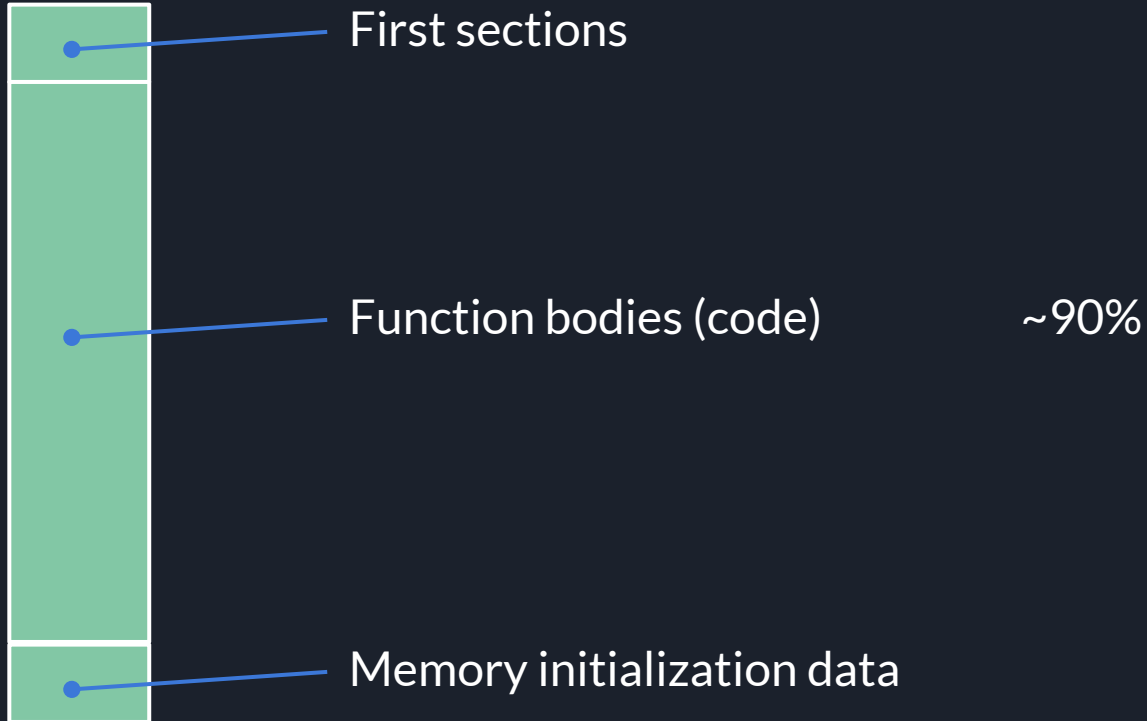
- Design:
 - A series of *sections* in a pre-defined order
 - Use of variable-length integers for future-proofing
 - Function body code is stack machine *bytecode*

Binary Format

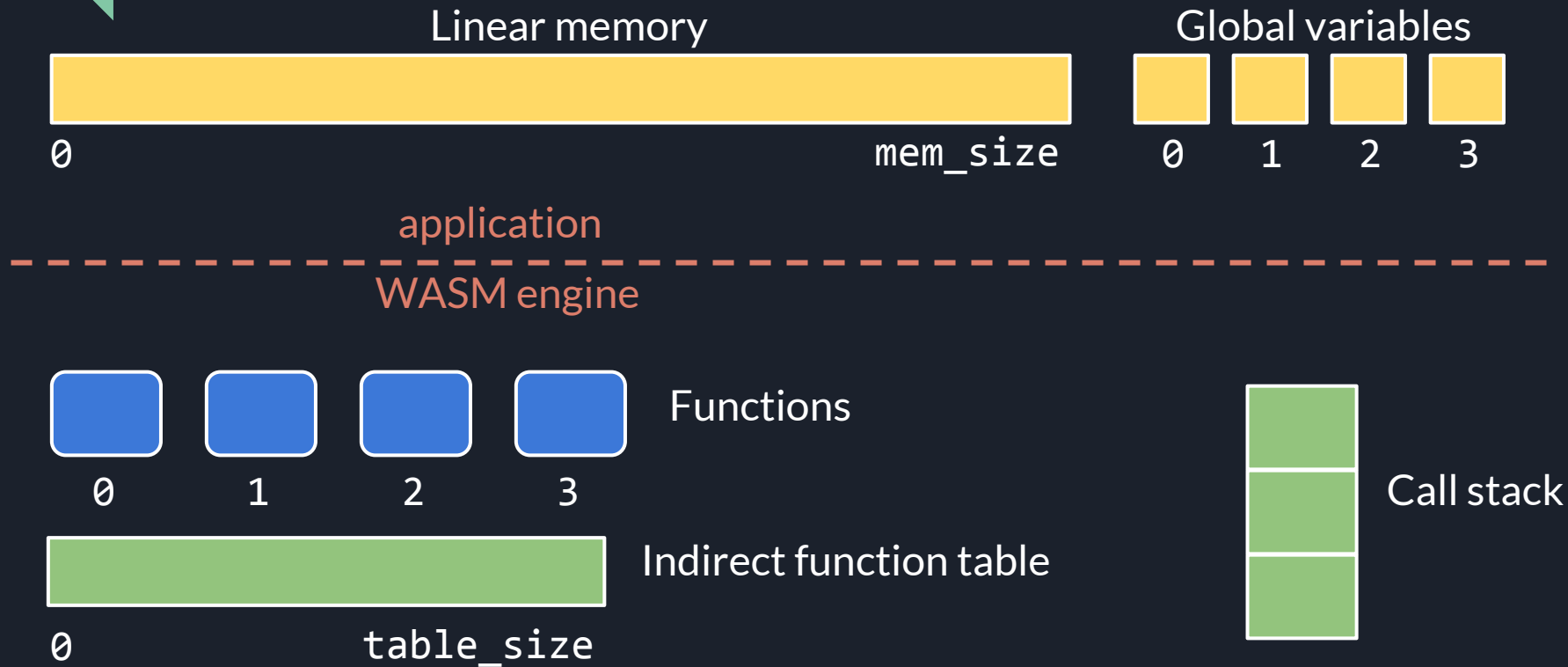


	Function signatures	code=0x01
	Imports	code=0x02
	Function declarations	code=0x03
	Indirect table	code=0x04
	Memory configuration	code=0x05
	Global declarations	code=0x06
	Exports	code=0x07
	Start function index	code=0x08
	Table initialization section	code=0x09
	Function bodies (code)	code=0x0a
	Memory initialization data	code=0x0b

Binary Format proportions



Execution Model



(Simplified) Instruction Set

Types

i32

i64

f32

f64

Instructions

i32.add

i64.add

f32.add

f64.add

call

block

i32.sub

i64.sub

f32.sub

f64.sub

call_indirect

if

i32.lt

i64.lt

return

loop

br

get_local

load_global

i32.load_mem

set_local

store_global

i32.store_mem

Instruction Example

Official text format

```
(func (export "add")
  (param $x i32)
  (param $y i32)
  (result i32)
  (i32.add
    (get_local $x)
    (get_local $y)))
```

Binary

```
+15: 60 02 7f 7f 01 7f
. . .
+27: 01 00
. . .
+48: 01 87 80 80 80 00
+54: 00 20 00 20 01 6a 0b
```

Types section

(int, int) -> int

Function declaration

1 function of type #0

Function body

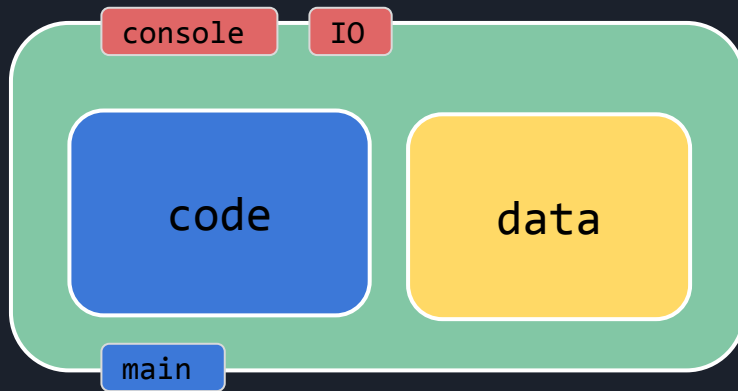
1 body of length 7
0 additional locals
get_local #0
get_local #1
i32.add
end



Embedding WebAssembly

- WebAssembly is not a complete platform, but is more like a virtual instruction set architecture, like X86
- Requires an *embedding* environment to provide:
 - Module loading and instantiation
 - Linking between modules (via imports and exports)
 - Host imported functions for interacting with the platform
- Most important embedding is within JavaScript, within the web
 - APIs for loading and instantiating modules
 - Provides access to JavaScript APIs
 - Callable from JavaScript
 - Offers no new “API surface” for the web

Embedding WebAssembly

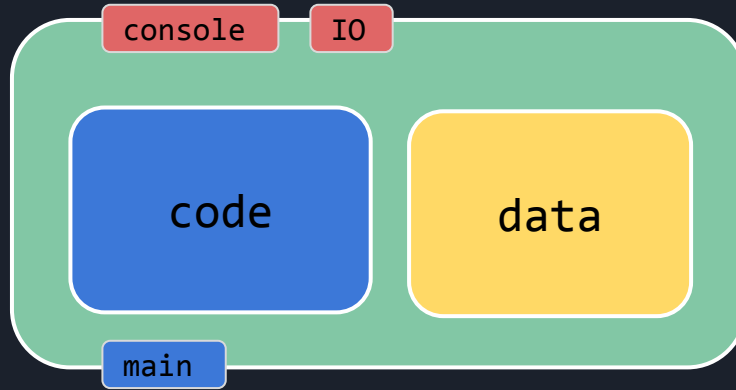


- WebAssembly instances can only interact with APIs that are provided by an embedder



Explicitly imported JavaScript functions

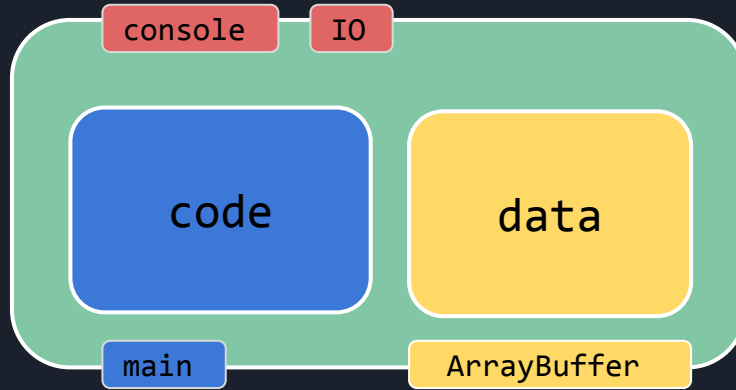
JavaScript API to
load, validate, and
instantiate
modules



Exported functions are called as
normal JavaScript functions

Explicitly imported JavaScript functions

JavaScript API to
load, validate, and
instantiate
modules



Exported functions are called as
normal JavaScript functions

The memory can optionally be
exported to JS as an array buffer



JavaScript API

- New `WebAssembly` object available in JavaScript outermost scope
 - `WebAssembly.Module` - opaque representation of decoded binary bytes
 - `WebAssembly.Instance` - instantiated module with state
 - `WebAssembly.Memory` - handle to low-level memory
 - `WebAssembly.Table` - used for indirect calls
- Synchronous and asynchronous API for compiling modules
 - As simple as `new WebAssembly.Module(bytes)` and `new WebAssembly.Instance(module, imports)`



Why WebAssembly?

High **performance**

Predictable performance

Empower **other languages** than JavaScript

Enable **features** that JavaScript can't provide

Supersede **asm.js** and **(P)NaCl**



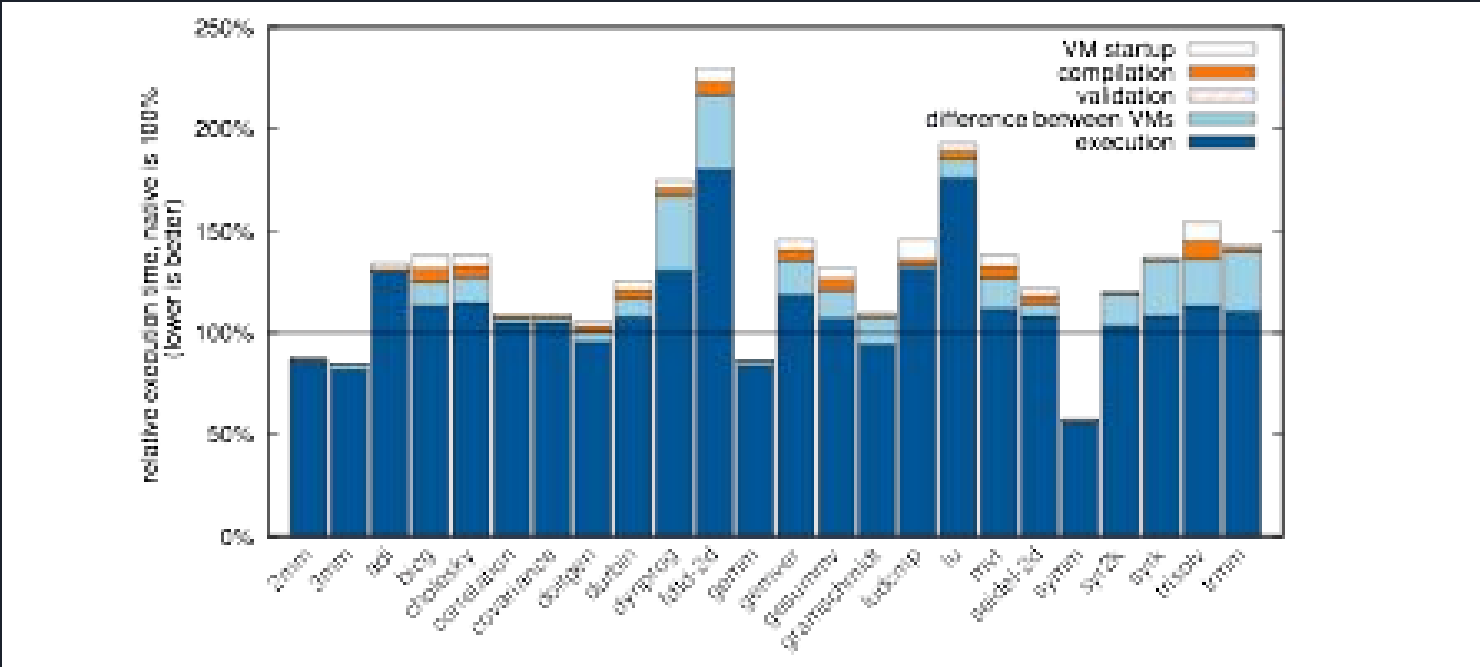
Goals & Constraints

Semantics

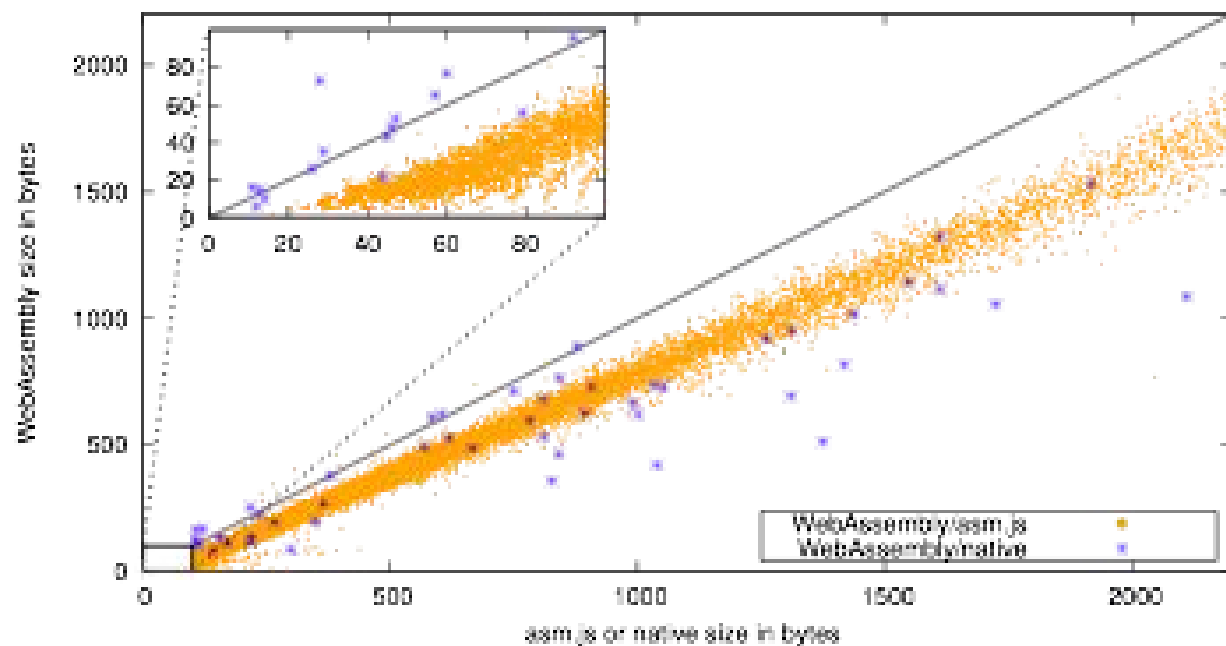
- Language-independent
- Platform-independent
- Hardware-independent
- Fast to execute
- Safe to execute
- Deterministic
- Easy to reason about

Representation

- Compact
- Easy to generate
- Fast to decode
- Fast to validate
- Fast to compile
- Streamable
- Parallelizable



Code Size



[PLDI 2017]



Implementation

WebAssembly is implemented *within* JavaScript engine

- Reuses sophisticated **optimising JIT**

- Fast calls from Wasm to JS and vice versa

- No need to reinvent garbage collection, code management, etc

Different implementation strategies

- Multiple **tiers**

- AOT compilation, JIT compilation, or interpretation as first tier

Additional optimisations

- Code specialisation, hardware traps, etc



Producing WebAssembly

Compiling from different languages

- C and C++ (via Emscripten)

- Rust

- AssemblyScript

- ... hopefully many more to come soon

Generating Wasm binaries at runtime

- Can implement source language JITs on top of Wasm

Designed to be language-independent!



Consuming WebAssembly

In the **browser**

- As part of the web platform

- Embedded into JavaScript

Other **embeddings** and **standalone** implementations

- Many potential use cases independent of the web or JavaScript

- Some already being build

- Stay tuned.

Designed to be **platform/embedding-independent!**



The Specification

Contract between producers and consumers

Setting a new bar for industrial languages!

Includes a complete **formal semantics**

- Declarative specification of **binary format, validation, execution**

- Using **state-of-the-art** techniques from research

- Led to **simpler and cleaner** design

Mechanised and **machine-verified** in theorem prover

- Proof of **type soundness**

- Absence of undefined behaviour, sandbox safety

(store)	s	::= {inst inst [*] , tab tabinst [*] , mem meminst [*] }
(instances)	inst	::= {func cl [*] , glob v [*] , tab i [*] , mem i [*] }
	tabinst	::= cl [*]
	meminst	::= b [*]
(closures)	cl	::= {inst i, code f} (where f is not an import and has all exports ex [*] erased)
(values)	v	::= t.const c
(administrative operators)	e	::= ... trap call cl label{t [*] ; e [*] } e [*] end local{i; v [*] } e [*] end
(local contexts)	L^0	::= v [*] [...] e [*]
	L^{k+1}	::= v [*] label{t [*] ; e [*] } L ^k end e [*]

Reduction	$s; v^*; e^* \mapsto s'; v'^*; e'^*$ $s; v^*; L^k[e^*] \mapsto s'; v'^*; L^k[e'^*]$	$s; v^*; e^* \mapsto s'; v'^*; e'^*$ $s; v_0^*; \text{local}\{i; v^*\} e^* \text{ end} \mapsto_{\beta_j} s'; v_0^*; \text{local}\{i; v'^*\} e'^* \text{ end}$	$s; v^*; e^* \mapsto s'; v'^*; e'^*$
	$(t.\text{const } c) \text{ t.unop}$ $(t.\text{const } c_1) (t.\text{const } c_2) \text{ t.binop}$ $(t.\text{const } c_1) (t.\text{const } c_2) \text{ t.binop}$ $(t.\text{const } c_1) (t.\text{const } c_2) \text{ t.testop}$ $(t.\text{const } c_1) (t.\text{const } c_2) \text{ t.relop}$ $(t_1.\text{const } c) t_2.\text{convert } t_1.\text{ax}^*$ $(t_1.\text{const } c) t_2.\text{convert } t_1.\text{ax}^*$ $(t_1.\text{const } c) t_2.\text{reinterpret } t_1$ unreachable nop v drop $v_1 \ v_2 \ (\text{i32.const } 0) \text{ select}$ $v_1 \ v_2 \ (\text{i32.const } k+1) \text{ select}$ $v^* \text{ block } \{t_1^* \rightarrow t_2^*\} e^* \text{ end}$ $v^* \text{ loop } \{t_1^* \rightarrow t_2^*\} e^* \text{ end}$ $(\text{i32.const } 0) \text{ if } t_1^* \text{ else } e_2^* \text{ end}$ $(\text{i32.const } k+1) \text{ if } t_1^* \text{ else } e_2^* \text{ end}$ label{t [*] ; e [*] } v [*] end label{t [*] ; e [*] } trap end label{t [*] ; e [*] } L ^k [v [*] (br j)] end $(\text{i32.const } 0) \text{ (br if } j)$ $(\text{i32.const } k+1) \text{ (br if } j)$ $(\text{i32.const } k) \text{ (br.table } j^* \ j^*)$ $(\text{i32.const } k+n) \text{ (br.table } j^* \ j^*)$ $s; \text{call } j$ $s; (\text{i32.const } j) \text{ call-indirect } t_j^*$ $s; (\text{i32.const } j) \text{ call-indirect } t_j^*$ $v^* \text{ (call cl)}$ local{i; v ₁ [*] } v [*] end local{i; v ₂ [*] } trap end local{i; v ₁ [*] } L ^{k+1} [return] end $v_1^* \ v_2^*; \text{get.local } j$ $v_1^* \ v_2^*; v^* \text{ (set.local } j)$ $v; \text{tee.local } j$ $s; \text{get.global } j$ $s; v \text{ (set.global } j)$ $s; (\text{i32.const } k) \text{ (t.load u } a)$ $s; (\text{i32.const } k) \text{ (t.load fp.ax } a)$ $s; (\text{i32.const } k) \text{ (t.load fp.ax } a)$ $s; (\text{i32.const } k) \text{ (t.const c) (t.store u } a)$ $s; (\text{i32.const } k) \text{ (t.const c) (t.store fp } a)$ $s; (\text{i32.const } k) \text{ (t.const c) (t.store fp } a)$ $s; \text{current-memory}$ $s; (\text{i32.const } k) \text{ grow-memory}$ $s; (\text{i32.const } k) \text{ grow-memory}$	$t.\text{const unop}_t(c)$ $t.\text{const } c$ trap $\text{i32.const testop}_t(c)$ $\text{i32.const relop}_t(c, c_2)$ $t_2.\text{const } c'$ trap $t_2.\text{const } \text{const}_{t_2}(\text{bits}_{t_1}(c))$ trap ϵ ϵ v_2 v_1 label{t ₁ [*] ; e ₁ [*] } v [*] end label{t ₁ [*] ; loop {t ₁ [*] → t ₂ [*] } e [*] end} v [*] v [*] end block {t ₁ [*] } e ₂ [*] end block {t ₁ [*] } e ₂ [*] end v [*] trap v [*] ϵ br j br j br j call $s_{\text{call}}(i, j)$ call $s_{\text{call}}(i, j)$ trap local{cl-inst; v [*] (t.const 0) ^k } block {e → t ₂ [*] } e [*] end end ... v [*] trap local{i; v ₁ [*] } L ^{k+1} [br k] end v v ₁ [*] v ₂ [*] ; ϵ v v (set.local j) $s_{\text{glob}}(i, j)$ $s; \epsilon$ t.const const _t (b [*]) t.const const _t (b [*]) trap s'; ϵ s'; ϵ trap i32.const $\lfloor s_{\text{mem}}(i, *) \rfloor / 64 \text{ Ki}$ s'; i32.const $\lfloor s_{\text{mem}}(i, *) \rfloor / 64 \text{ Ki}$ if s' = s with mem(i, *) = $s_{\text{mem}}(i, *) \{0\}^{k-64 \text{ Ki}}$ i32.const -1	if $c = \text{binop}_t(c_1, c_2)$ otherwise if $c' = \text{cv}_{t_1, t_2}(c)$ otherwise if $s_{\text{call}}(i, j)_{\text{code}} = (\text{func if local } t^* \text{ e}^*)$ otherwise if $s' = s$ with glob(i, j) = v if $s_{\text{mem}}(i, k + \alpha, t) = b^*$ if $s_{\text{mem}}(i, k + \alpha, tp) = b^*$ otherwise if s' = s with mem(i, k + α, t) = bits _t ⁹ (c) if s' = s with mem(i, k + α, tp) = bits _t ⁹ (c) otherwise

Figure 1. Small-step reduction rules

(contexts) $C ::= \{\text{func } t f^*, \text{global } t g^*, \text{table } n^l, \text{memory } n^l, \text{local } t^*, \text{label } (t^*)^*\}$

Typing Instructions

$C \vdash e^* : t f$

$$\begin{array}{c}
\frac{}{C \vdash t, \text{const } c : \epsilon \rightarrow t} \quad \frac{}{C \vdash t, \text{unop} : t \rightarrow t} \quad \frac{}{C \vdash t, \text{binop} : t \rightarrow t} \quad \frac{}{C \vdash t, \text{testop} : t \rightarrow \text{i32}} \quad \frac{}{C \vdash t, \text{relop} : t \rightarrow \text{i32}} \\
\frac{l_1 \neq l_2 \quad s x^* = \epsilon \leftrightarrow (l_1 = \text{in} \wedge l_2 = \text{in}' \wedge [l_1] < [l_2]) \vee (l_1 = \text{fn} \wedge l_2 = \text{fn}')} {C \vdash t_1, \text{convert } t_2, s x^* : t_2 \rightarrow t_1} \quad \frac{l_1 \neq l_2 \quad [l_1] = [l_2]} {C \vdash t_1, \text{reinterpret } t_2 : t_2 \rightarrow t_1} \\
\\
\frac{}{C \vdash \text{unreachable} : t_1^* \rightarrow t_2^*} \quad \frac{}{C \vdash \text{nop} : \epsilon \rightarrow \epsilon} \quad \frac{}{C \vdash \text{drop} : t \rightarrow \epsilon} \quad \frac{}{C \vdash \text{select} : t \rightarrow \text{i32} \rightarrow t} \\
\frac{t f = t_1^* \rightarrow t_2^* \quad C, \text{label } (t_2^*) \vdash e^* : t f}{C \vdash \text{block } t f \text{ } e^* \text{ end} : t f} \quad \frac{t f = t_1^* \rightarrow t_2^* \quad C, \text{label } (t_1^*) \vdash e^* : t f}{C \vdash \text{loop } t f \text{ } e^* \text{ end} : t f} \\
\frac{t f = t_1^* \rightarrow t_2^* \quad C, \text{label } (t_2^*) \vdash e_1^* : t f \quad C, \text{label } (t_1^*) \vdash e_2^* : t f}{C \vdash \text{if } t f \text{ } e_1^* \text{ else } e_2^* \text{ end} : t_1^* \rightarrow t_2^*} \\
\frac{C_{\text{label}}(i) = t^*}{C \vdash \text{br } i : t_1^* \rightarrow t_2^*} \quad \frac{C_{\text{label}}(i) = t^*}{C \vdash \text{br.if } i : t^* \rightarrow \text{i32} \rightarrow t^*} \quad \frac{(C_{\text{label}}(i) = t^*)^+}{C \vdash \text{br.table } i^* : t_1^* \rightarrow \text{i32} \rightarrow t_2^*} \\
\frac{C_{\text{label}}(|C_{\text{label}}| - 1) = t^*}{C \vdash \text{return} : t_1^* \rightarrow t_2^*} \quad \frac{C_{\text{label}}(i) = t f}{C \vdash \text{call } i : t f} \quad \frac{C_{\text{label}} = n \quad t f = t_1^* \rightarrow t_2^*}{C \vdash \text{call.indirect } t f : t_1^* \rightarrow \text{i32} \rightarrow t_2^*} \\
\\
\frac{C_{\text{label}}(i) = t}{C \vdash \text{get.local } i : \epsilon \rightarrow t} \quad \frac{C_{\text{label}}(i) = t}{C \vdash \text{set.local } i : t \rightarrow \epsilon} \quad \frac{C_{\text{label}}(i) = t}{C \vdash \text{tee.local } i : t \rightarrow t} \quad \frac{C_{\text{label}}(i) = \text{mut}^l t}{C \vdash \text{get.global } i : \epsilon \rightarrow t} \quad \frac{C_{\text{label}}(i) = \text{mut}^l t}{C \vdash \text{set.global } i : t \rightarrow \epsilon} \\
\frac{C_{\text{memory}} = n \quad 2^n < ([|tp| < |t|] \vee [tp.sx]^7 = \epsilon \vee t = \text{im})}{C \vdash t, \text{load } (tp, sx)^7 a v : \text{i32} \rightarrow t} \quad \frac{C_{\text{memory}} = n \quad 2^n < ([|tp| < |t|] \vee [tp]^7 = \epsilon \vee t = \text{im})}{C \vdash t, \text{store } tp^7 a v : \text{i32 } t \rightarrow \epsilon} \\
\frac{C_{\text{memory}} = n}{C \vdash \text{current.memory} : \epsilon \rightarrow \text{i32}} \quad \frac{C_{\text{memory}} = n}{C \vdash \text{grow.memory} : \text{i32} \rightarrow \text{i32}} \\
\frac{}{C \vdash \epsilon : \epsilon \rightarrow \epsilon} \quad \frac{C \vdash e_1^* : t_1^* \rightarrow t_2^* \quad C \vdash e_2^* : t_2^* \rightarrow t_3^*}{C \vdash e_1^* e_2^* : t_1^* \rightarrow t_3^*} \quad \frac{C \vdash e^* : t_1^* \rightarrow t_2^*}{C \vdash e^* : t^* \rightarrow t^* \rightarrow t_2^*}
\end{array}$$

Typing Modules

$$\begin{array}{c}
\frac{t f = t_1^* \rightarrow t_2^* \quad C, \text{local } t_1^* t^*, \text{label } (t_2^*) \vdash e^* : \epsilon \rightarrow t_2^*}{C \vdash \text{ex}^* \text{ func } t f \text{ } e^* : \text{ex}^* t f} \quad \frac{t g = \text{mut}^7 t \quad C \vdash e^* : \epsilon \rightarrow t \quad \text{ex}^* = \epsilon \vee t g = t}{C \vdash \text{ex}^* \text{ global } t g \text{ } e^* : \text{ex}^* t g} \\
\frac{(C_{\text{mem}}(i) = t f)^n}{C \vdash \text{ex}^* \text{ table } n \text{ } i^n : \text{ex}^* n} \quad \frac{}{C \vdash \text{ex}^* \text{ memory } n : \text{ex}^* n} \\
\\
\frac{t g = t}{C \vdash \text{ex}^* \text{ func } t f \text{ } i m : \text{ex}^* t f} \quad \frac{}{C \vdash \text{ex}^* \text{ global } t g \text{ } i m : \text{ex}^* t g} \quad \frac{}{C \vdash \text{ex}^* \text{ table } n \text{ } i m : \text{ex}^* n} \quad \frac{}{C \vdash \text{ex}^* \text{ memory } n \text{ } i m : \text{ex}^* n} \\
\\
\frac{(C \vdash f : \text{ex}_1^* t f)^* \quad (C \vdash \text{glob} : \text{ex}_2^* t g, i)^* \quad (C \vdash \text{tab} : \text{ex}_3^* n)^* \quad (C \vdash \text{mem} : \text{ex}_4^* n)^*}{(C \vdash \{\text{global } t g^{i-1}\})^* \quad C = \{\text{func } t f^*, \text{global } t g^*, \text{table } n^l, \text{memory } n^l\} \quad \text{ex}_1^* \text{ } \text{ex}_2^* \text{ } \text{ex}_3^* \text{ } \text{ex}_4^* \text{ } \text{distinct}} \\
\vdash \text{module } f^* \text{ glob}^* \text{ tab}^* \text{ mem}^*
\end{array}$$

Figure 1. Typing rules

[PLDI 2017]



What's Next?

More performance

More tools

More languages

More platforms

More features



Future Features

Threads

Instructions for atomic shared memory access

Ability to emulate pthreads for C++



Future Features

Exceptions

- “Zero-cost” exception handling

- Safe, cross-language

- Catch and possibly resume from traps



Future Features

SIMD (single instruction multiple data)

Exposing SIMD instruction set of modern CPUs

For the last 10% of performance in some apps



Future Features

Tail calls, multiple return values, ...

Better support for high-level languages and compilation techniques

Enable instructions with multiple results (e.g., arithmetics with carry)



Future Features

Managed data types

- Allow references to JS/DOM objects within Wasm

- Heap allocation of structured data types (structs, arrays)

- Built-in garbage collection



Future Features

Host bindings

- Annotating parameter transforms for calls from/to JavaScript
- Automatic generation of glue code by engine



What giveth?

Efficient, compact, safe, universal code format

Runs in all browsers and beyond



Rigorous design, specification and evolution process

A new world of possibilities...

webassembly.org

Please

**Remember to
rate this session**

Thank you!

