Hardware Memory Models: x86-TSO

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**Agenda**

- **So far**
  - hardware organization
    - multithreading
    - cores
    - caches
  - overview of memory models

- **Today: hardware implementation of TSO memory model**
  - Sewall et al. x86-TSO: a rigorous and usable programmer's model for x86 multiprocessors. CACM 53(7):89-97. [http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/1785414.1785443](http://doi.acm.org/10.1145/1785414.1785443)
Requirements for Multithreaded HW

• Reliable, high-performance parallel code
  — operating system kernel
  — libraries
    – language runtime systems
    – synchronization primitives
    – concurrent data structures

• Compilers for concurrent languages
Challenges - 1

- Multiprocessors typically do not provide sequentially consistent memory
  - *why? optimizations for performance!*
    - e.g., store buffers to hide write latency, speculative execution

- Multithreaded codes often observe a relaxed memory model
  - threads have only loosely consistent views of shared memory
    - e.g., visible evidence of store buffering on x86

- Understanding relaxed models is necessary for writing correct parallel software

Figure credit: [1]

Figure 5: Caches With Store Buffers

Figure credit: [2]
Store Buffers and Store Forwarding

Problem: without store forwarding a memory location may appear to have multiple values

Figure 5: Caches With Store Buffers

Figure 6: Caches With Store Forwarding

Figure credit: [2]
Challenges - II

- Different processor families use different relaxed models
- Commodity vendors often specify memory models in ambiguous, informal prose
  - poor medium for loose specifications
    - inevitably ambiguous
    - sometimes wrong
  - example: Intel SDM rev. 22 Nov 2006: “processor ordering”
    - no examples
  - cause for confusion: spin lock optimization? (LKM 1999)
- Major and subtle differences between processor families
  - what non-SC behaviors they permit
  - memory barriers and synchronization instructions they provide
Architectural Specifications

- Specify what programmers can rely upon
- Architectural specifications are “loose” to cover past and future implementations
Memory Models for x86 Processors

• Problem: some prior Intel and AMD specifications
  — contain serious ambiguities
  — are arguably too weak for writing programs
  — are simply unsound with respect to actual hardware
  — provide no basis for formally reasoning about programs

• Contribution: new x86-TSO programmer’s model
  — TSO = total store order
  — suffers from none of the aforementioned problems
  — provides intuitive abstract machine, accessible to programmers
  — is mathematically precise: rigorously defined in HOL4
    — memory model + semantics for machine instructions enables formal reasoning about program behavior

• How is this useful?
  — guides intuition of systems programmers developing software for multithreaded systems
x86 Fences

• Definitions
  — LFENCE: load fence
  — SFENCE: store fence
  — MFENCE: memory fence (strongest x86 memory barrier)

• Operation
  — reads cannot pass LFENCE and MFENCE instructions
  — writes cannot pass SFENCE and MFENCE instructions
Causal Consistency

- Processes in a system agree on the relative ordering of operations that are causally related
  - memory ordering obeys causality
  - respects transitive visibility

- Defined by
  - program order
  - writes into order

- Use of causal consistency
  - Intel White Paper, August 2007
    - allows causal consistency implicitly
    - allows causal consistency explicitly
Causal Consistency

Because there may be multiple writes of a value to a location, there may be more than one writes-into order. A writes-into order $\rightarrow$ on $H$ is any relation with the following properties:

- if $o_1 \rightarrow o_2$, then there are $x$ and $v$ such that $o_1 = w(x)v$ and $o_2 = r(x)v$;
- for any operation $o_2$, there is at most one $o_1$ such that $o_1 \rightarrow o_2$;
- if $o_2 = r(x)v$ for some $x$ and there is no $o_1$ such that $o_1 \rightarrow o_2$, then $v = \perp$; that is, a read with no write must read the initial value.

A causality order $\sim$ induced by $\rightarrow$ for $H$ is a partial order that is the transitive closure of the union of the history’s program order and the order $\rightarrow$. In other words, $o_1 \sim o_2$ if and only if one of the following cases holds:

- $o_1 \rightarrow_{i} o_2$ for some $p_i$ ($o_1$ precedes $o_2$ in $L_i$);
- $o_1 \rightarrow o_2$ ($o_2$ reads the value written by $o_1$); or
- there is some other operation $o'$ such that $o_1 \sim o' \sim o_2$.

(If the relation $\sim$ is cyclic, then it is not a causality order.) If $o_1$ and $o_2$ are two operations in $H$ such that, for causality order $\sim$, $o_1 \not\rightarrow o_2$ and $o_2 \not\rightarrow o_1$, we say that $o_1$ and $o_2$ are concurrent with respect to $\sim$. Definition credit: [4]
Causal Consistency (IWP/AMD3.14/x86-CC)

CC:
mov x 1 must precede the mov eax that reads it  (writes into order)
mov y 2 must precede mov x 2  (program order)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Proc 0</th>
<th>Proc 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MOV [x]←1</td>
<td>MOV [y]←2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOV EAX←[x]</td>
<td>MOV [x]←2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOV EBX←[y]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Allowed Final State: Proc 0:EAX=1 ∧ Proc 0:EBX=0 ∧ [x]=1

—how?

- P1 write of [y]=2 is buffered
- P0 buffers its write of [x]=1, reads [x]=1 from its store buffer, and reads [y]=0 from main memory
- P1 buffers its [x]=2 write, flushes its buffered [y]=2, [x]=2 writes to memory
- P0 flushes its [x]=1 write to memory.

Figure credit: [1]
Causal Consistency (IWP/AMD3.14/x86-CC)

- **Problem:** causal consistency is too weak for programmers
  - admits the following inconsistent view of independent writes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IRIW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proc 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOV [x] ← 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOV EBX ← [y]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


- ordering inconsistencies can arise if store buffers are shared between some but not all threads
- would need to use LOCK instead of MFENCE to recover SC
- appears looser than behavior of implemented processors

Figure credit: [1]
Store buffers are FIFO, a reading thread must read its most recent buffered write, or if none present, value from memory.

MFENCE flushes a thread’s store buffer.

LOCK’d instruction (LOCK is a modifier that applies to other instructions)
—thread must obtain global lock
—after instruction, thread flushes its store buffer
—no other thread can read while global lock is held

A buffered write can propagate to memory at any time, except when another thread holds the global lock.
Scope of x86-TSO

- Programs using cacheable, write-back memory
- Without
  - exceptions
  - misaligned accesses
  - non-temporal operations (which avoid updating L1 cache)
  - self-modifying code
  - page table changes
x86-TSO Allowable Behaviors

Example 8–1. Stores Are not Reordered with Other Stores.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proc 0</th>
<th>Proc 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MOV [x] ← 1</td>
<td>MOV EAX ← [y]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOV [y] ← 1</td>
<td>MOV EBX ← [x]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Forbidden Final State: Proc 1:EAX = 1 ∧ Proc 1:EBX = 0

This test implies that the writes by Proc 0 are seen in order by Proc 1’s reads, which also execute in order. x86-TSO forbids the final state because Proc 0’s store buffer is FIFO, and Proc 0 communicates with Proc 1 only through shared memory.
Example 8–2. Stores Are Not Reordered with Older Loads.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proc 0</th>
<th>Proc 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MOV EAX ← [x]</td>
<td>MOV EBX ← [y]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOV [y] ← 1</td>
<td>MOV [x] ← 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Forbidden Final State: Proc 0: EAX=1 ∧ Proc 1: EBX=1

x86-TSO forbids the final state because reads are never delayed.
EXAMPLE 8–3. LOADS MAY BE REORDERED WITH OLDER STORES. This test is just the SB example from Section 1, which x86-TSO permits.

**SB**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proc 0</th>
<th>Proc 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MOV [x]←1</td>
<td>MOV [y]←1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOV EAX←[y]</td>
<td>MOV EBX←[x]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Allowed Final State: Proc 0:EAX=0 ∧ Proc 1:EBX=0

EXAMPLE 8–5. INTRA-PROCESSOR FORWARDING IS ALLOWED. This test is similar to Example 8–3.
Example 8-4. Loads Are Not Reordered With Older Stores to the Same Location.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Proc 0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MOV [x] ← 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOV EAX ← [x]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required Final State: Proc 0:EAX=1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

x86-TSO requires the specified result because reads must check the local store buffer.
**Example 8–6. Stores Are Transitively Visible.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proc 0</th>
<th>Proc 1</th>
<th>Proc 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MOV [x] ← 1</strong></td>
<td><strong>MOV EAX ← [x]</strong></td>
<td><strong>MOV EBX ← [y]</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>MOV [y] ← 1</strong></td>
<td>MOV ECX ← [x]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Forbidden Final State:** Proc 1:EAX=1 ∧ Proc 2:EBX=1 ∧ Proc 2:ECX=0

x86-TSO forbids the given final state because otherwise the Proc 2 constraints imply that y was written to shared memory before x. Hence the write to x must be in Proc 0’s store buffer (or the instruction has not executed), when the write to y is initiated. Note that this test contains the only mention of “transitive visibility” in the Intel SDM, leaving its meaning unclear.
Example 8–7. Stores are seen in a consistent order by other processors. This test rules out the IRIW behavior as described in Section 2.2. x86-TSO forbids the given final state because the Proc 2 constraints imply that \( x \) was written to shared memory before \( y \) whereas the Proc 3 constraints imply that \( y \) was written to shared memory before \( x \).

IRIW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proc 0</th>
<th>Proc 1</th>
<th>Proc 2</th>
<th>Proc 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MOV ([x] ← 1)</td>
<td>MOV ([y] ← 1)</td>
<td>MOV EAX ← ([x])</td>
<td>MOV ECX ← ([y])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOV EAX ← ([x])</td>
<td>MOV EBX ← ([y])</td>
<td>MOV EDX ← ([x])</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 8-8. Locked Instructions Have a Total Order. This is the same as the IRIW Example 8-7 but with LOCK’d instructions for the writes; x86-TSO forbids the final state for the same reason as above.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IRIW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Table" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figure credit: [1]
**Example 8–9. Loads Are not Reordered with Locks.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proc 0</th>
<th>Proc 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>XCHG [x] ← EAX</td>
<td>XCHG [y] ← ECX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOV EBX ← [y]</td>
<td>MOV EDX ← [x]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Initial state: Proc 0:EAX=1 \(\land\) Proc 1:ECX=1 (elsewhere 0)

Forbidden Final State: Proc 0:EBX=0 \(\land\) Proc 1:EDX=0

This test indicates that locking both writes in Example 8–3 would forbid the nonsequentially consistent result. x86-TSO forbids the final state because LOCK’d instructions flush the local store buffer. If only one write were LOCK’d (say the write to x), the Example 8–3 final state would be allowed as follows: on Proc 1, buffer the write to y and execute the read x, then on Proc 0 write to x in shared memory then read from y.
**Example 8–10. Stores Are not Reordered with Locks.** This is implied by Example 8–1, as we treat the memory writes of LOCK’d instructions as stores.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Proc 0</th>
<th>Proc 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MOV [x] ← 1</td>
<td>MOV [y] ← 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MFENCE</td>
<td>MFENCE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOV EAX ← [y]</td>
<td>MOV EBX ← [x]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Forbidden Final State: Proc 0:EAX = 0 ∧ Proc 1:EBX = 0

**Test AMD5.**

For x86-TSO, this test has the same force as Example 8.8, but using MFENCE instructions to flush the buffers instead of LOCK’d instructions. The tenth AMD test is similar. None of the Intel litmus tests include fence instructions.

In x86-TSO adding MFENCE between every instruction would clearly suffice to regain sequential consistency (though obviously in practice one would insert fewer barriers), in contrast to IWP/x86-CC/AMD3.14.
Semantics of Linux Spin Locks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instruction</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>acquire: LOCK; DEC [EAX]</td>
<td>LOCK’d decrement of [EAX]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JNS enter</td>
<td>branch if [EAX] was ≥ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spin: CMP [EAX],0</td>
<td>test [EAX]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JLE spin</td>
<td>branch if [EAX] was ≤ 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JMP acquire</td>
<td>try again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enter:</td>
<td>the critical section starts here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>release: MOV [EAX] ← 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• **Question about Linux spin locks: is it OK to have the MOV in release as an unlocked operation?**
  
  — lets releasing thread continue without flushing write buffer

• **Answer: YES!**
  
  — by TSO, the stores within the critical section will all drain from the store buffer before the write that releases the spinlock
Take Away Points

- Looser HW memory models improve performance
  - operation latency can be overlapped with other operations
- HW memory models today are loose in many ways
  - operations within a thread may appear out of order
  - operations by different threads may only be partially ordered
- The x86-TSO model provides an understandable model for programming x86 systems
  - better than prior specifications, which were wrong in different ways

