Architectural Support for Operating Systems

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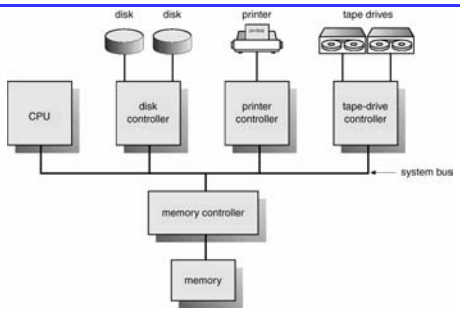
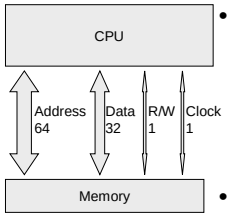
OS and Architectures

- What an OS can do is dictated, at least in part, by the architecture.
- Architecture support can greatly simplify (or complicate) OS tasks
- Example: PC operating systems have been primitive, in part because PCs lacked hardware support (e.g., for VM)

Computer-System Architecture

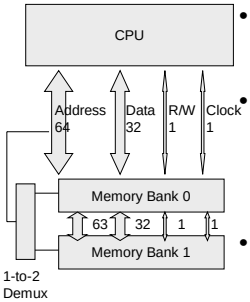


Building a Computer System



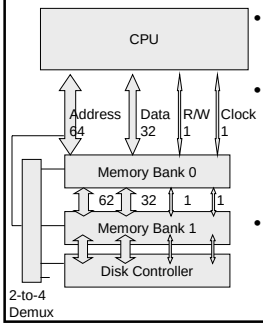
- System Bus
  - A short interconnect for system components
  - *Synchronous,* all components share the same clock
  - Has *Data*, *Address*, *R/W* lines for choosing memory locations
- What happens when the memory chip capacity is less than 2^{64} (100 exabytes) ?

Building a Computer System



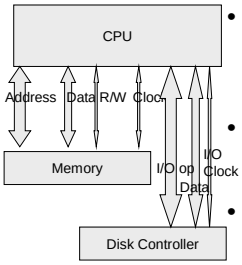
- We can divide memory into banks, and select each bank using a demultiplexer
- Use the higher order address bits to differentiate between memory banks, and enable the right bank
- How do we interface I/O devices to the CPU ?

Building a Computer System



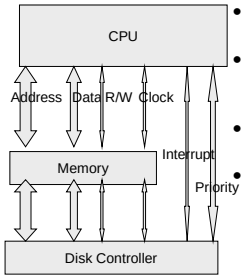
- *Memory-mapped I/O*: I/O devices appear to the CPU as regular memory addresses
- Reading and writing certain locations in memory have special semantics
  - E.g. location 0xf000 may hold the rotational speed of the disk, 0xf0001 the disk head position, …
- Regular loads and stores control I/O devices

Building a Computer System



- *Programmed I/O*: a.k.a. "*I/O-mapped I/O*": The CPU has a special, separate bus for I/O operations
- Special instructions control the operations issued on the I/O bus
- Not very common, most computer systems use memory-mapped I/O

Building a Computer System



- I/O devices operate independently of the CPU
- CPU can check the status of the device by *polling,* but this may be inefficient
- Need mechanism to *interrupt* the CPU
- Typically:
  - A line to alert the CPU
  - A set of lines to specify priority

Direct Memory Access (DMA)

- Used for high-speed I/O devices able to transmit information at close to memory speeds.
- Device controller transfers blocks of data from buffer storage directly to main memory without CPU intervention.
- Only one interrupt is generated per block, rather than one interrupt per byte.

Computer-System Operation

- I/O devices and the CPU can execute concurrently.
- Each device controller is in charge of a particular device type.
- Each device controller has a local buffer.
- CPU moves data from/to main memory to/from local buffers
- I/O id to/from the device to local buffer of controller.

Problem

- You work at Wintel Corp. as an OS designer. The architects unveil their latest chip design, the Septium. They have reengineered the entire instruction set. The Septium runs at 50 GHz, and costs $5.
  - They have only tested it with a matrix multiply program. The results are impressive.
  - The new Septium instruction set only supports arithmetic, jumps/branches, loads/stores.
  - The Septium has no *interrupts*, *traps* or *exceptions*, supports only *physical addressing and* uses only *programmed I/O.*
  - The technical writers are really happy as well, because the design specification fits on a single page.
- Your task is to come up with a list of features they will need to add to the chip design to support a modern PC operating system. Note that a modern PC OS will at least guarantee the integrity of users' data in the face of multiple, potentially malicious users and concurrent applications.

Architectural Support for OSes

- **Features that directly support OS needs include:**
  - 1. Protected instructions
  - 2. System calls
  - 3. Synchronization (atomic instructions)
  - 4. Memory protection
  - 5. I/O control and operation
  - 6. Interrupts and exceptions
  - 7. Timer (clock) operation

Protected Instructions

- **Some instructions need to be restricted to the O.S.**
  - Users cannot be allowed direct access to some hardware resources
  - Direct access to I/O devices like disks, printers, etc.
  - Must control instructions that manipulate memory management state (page table pointers, TLB load, etc.)
  - Setting of special mode bits
  - Halt instruction

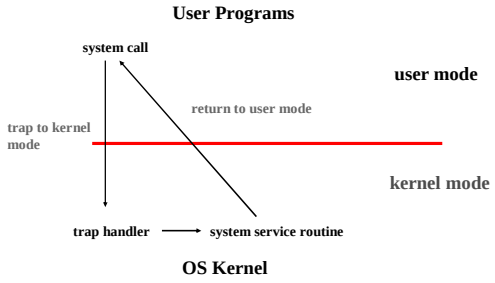
OS Protection

- **How do we restrict users from issuing such instructions ?**
  - Hardware supports a scheme that allows us to tell apart the trusted programmer (operating system designer) from untrusted programmers (regular users).
  - Most architectures support at least two modes of operation: *kernel* mode and *user* mode
  - The OS executes in kernel mode, user programs execute in user mode
  - Mode is indicated by a status bit in a protected processor register
- **Protected instructions can only be executed in kernel mode.**

Crossing Protection Boundaries

- **For a user to do something "privileged" (e.g., I/O) it must call an OS procedure.**
- **How does a user-mode program call a kernel-mode service?**
- **There must be a system call instruction that switches from user to kernel mode**
- **The system call instruction usually does the following:**
  - causes an exception, which vectors to a kernel handler
  - passes a parameter, saying which system routine to call
  - saves caller's state (PC, SP, other registers, etc.) so it can be restored
  - arch must permit OS to verify caller's parameters
  - must provide a way to return to user mode when done

Protection Modes and Crossing

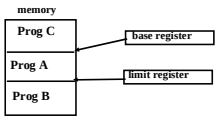


Partitioning Functionality

- Problem: The user-kernel mode distinction poses a performance barrier
  - Crossing this hardware barrier is costly. System calls take 10x to 1000x more time than a procedure call
- Solution: Perform some system functionality in user mode
  - *Libraries (DLLs)* can reduce the number of system calls, e.g. by caching results (getpid) or buffering operations (open/read/write vs. fopen, fread, fwrite).

Memory Protection

- **Need to protect a user program from accessing the data in other user programs**
- **Need to protect the OS from user programs**
- **Simplest scheme is base and limit registers:**



base and limit registers are loaded by the OS before starting a program

- **Virtual memory and segmentation are similar**

Traps and Exceptions

- **Traps and exceptions are initiated by the application**
- **Hardware must detect special conditions: page fault, write to a read-only page, overflow, trace trap, odd address trap, privileged instruction trap...**
- **Must transfer control to handler within the O.S.**
- **Hardware must save state on fault (PC, etc) so that the faulting process can be restarted afterwards**
- **Modern operating systems use VM traps for many functions: debugging, distributed VM, garbage collection, copy-on-write...**
- **Exceptions are a performance optimization, i.e., Conditions could be detected by inserting extra instructions in the code (at high cost)**

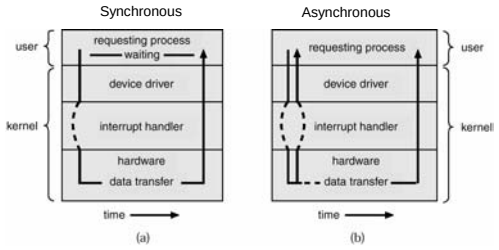
Interrupts

- Interrupts are device-initiated
- Interrupts transfer control to the interrupt service routine, through the *interrupt vector*, which contains the addresses of all the service routines.
- Interrupt architecture must save the machine context at the interrupted instruction.
- Incoming interrupts are often *disabled* while another interrupt is being processed to prevent a *lost interrupt*.
- Most operating systems are *interrupt* driven.

I/O Structure

- I/O issues:
  - how to start an I/O (special instructions or memory-mapped I/O)
  - I/O completion (interrupts)
- Synchronous I/O: After I/O starts, control returns to user program only upon I/O completion.
  - wait instruction idles the CPU until the next interrupt
  - wait loop (contention for memory access).
  - At most one I/O request is outstanding at a time, no simultaneous I/O processing.
- Asynchronous I/O: After I/O starts, control returns to user program without waiting for I/O completion.
  - *System call* – request to the operating system to allow user to wait for I/O completion.
  - *Device-status table* contains entry for each I/O device indicating its type, address, and state.
  - Operating system indexes into I/O device table to determine device status and to modify table entry to include interrupt.

Two I/O methods



I/O Control (cont)

device interrupts

↓

CPU stops current operation, switches to kernel mode, and saves current PC and other state on kernel stack

↓

CPU fetches proper vector from vector table and branches to that address (the routine to handle interrupt)

↓

interrupt routine examines device database and performs action required by interrupt

↓

handler completes operation, restores saved (interrupted state) and returns to user mode (or calls scheduler to switch to another program)

Timer Operation

- **How does the OS prevent against runaway user programs (infinite loops)?**
- **A timer can be set to generate an interrupt in a given time.**
- **Before it transfers to a user program, the OS loads the timer with a time to interrupt.**
- **When the time arrives, the executing program is interrupted and the OS regains control.**
- **This ensures that the OS can get the CPU back even if a user program erroneously or purposely continues to execute past some allotted time.**
- **The timer is privileged: only the OS can load it.**

Synchronization

- Interrupts cause potential problems because an interrupt can occur at any time -- causing code to execute that interferes with code that was interrupted
- OS must be able to synchronize concurrent processes
- This requires guaranteeing that certain instruction sequences (read-modify-write) execute atomically
- One way to guarantee this is to turn off interrupts before the sequence, execute it, and re-enable interrupts; CPU must have a way to disable interrupts
  - When would this not be sufficient
- Another is to have special instructions that can perform a read/modify/write in a single bus transaction, or can atomically test and conditionally set a bit, based on its previous value