Cache Coherency

Cache coherent processors

- most current value for an address is the last write
- all reading processors must get the most current value

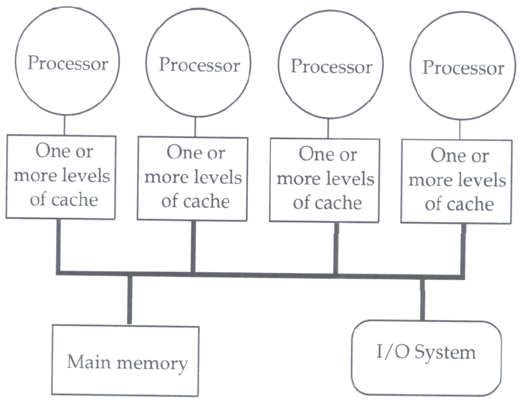
Cache coherency problem

- update from a writing processor is not known to other processors

Cache coherency protocols

- mechanism for maintaining cache coherency
- coherency state associated with a cache block of data
- bus/interconnect operations on shared data change the state
  - for the processor that initiates an operation
  - for other processors that have the data of the operation resident in their caches

A Low-end MP


Processor
Processor
Processor
Processor
One or more levels of cache
One or more levels of cache
One or more levels of cache
One or more levels of cache
Main memory
I/O System

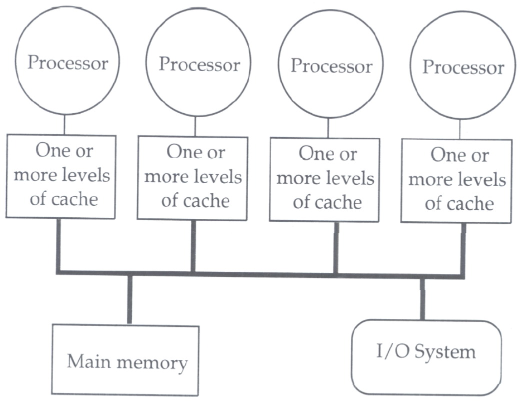
Cache Coherency Protocols

Write-invalidate

(Sequent Symmetry, SGI Power/Challenge, SPARCCenter 2000)

- processor obtains exclusive access for writes (becomes the "**owner**") by invalidating data in other processors' caches
- **coherency miss** (invalidation miss)
- **cache-to-cache transfers**
- good for:
  - multiple writes to same word or block by one processor
  - **migratory sharing** from processor to processor

A Low-end MP


Processor
Processor
Processor
Processor
One or more levels of cache
One or more levels of cache
One or more levels of cache
One or more levels of cache
Main memory
I/O System

Cache Coherency Protocols

Write-update

(SPARCCenter 2000)

- broadcast each write to actively shared data
- each processor with a copy snoops/takes the data
- good for **inter-processor contention**

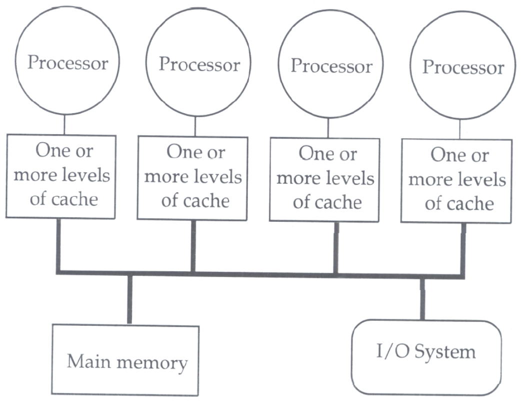
Competitive

(Alphas)

- switches between them

We will focus on write-invalidate.

A Low-end MP


Processor
Processor
Processor
Processor
One or more levels of cache
One or more levels of cache
One or more levels of cache
One or more levels of cache
Main memory
I/O System

Cache Coherency Protocol Implementations

Snooping

- used with low-end MPs
  - few processors
  - centralized memory
  - bus-based
- distributed implementation: responsibility for maintaining coherence lies with each cache

Directory-based

- used with higher-end MPs
  - more processors
  - distributed memory
  - multi-path interconnect
- centralized for each address: responsibility for maintaining coherence lies with the directory for each address

Snooping Implementation

A distributed coherency protocol

- coherency state associated with each cache block
- each snoop maintains coherency for its own cache

Snooping Implementation

How the bus is used

- broadcast medium
- entire coherency operation is atomic wrt other processors
  - **keep-the-bus protocol**: master holds the bus until the entire operation has completed
  - **split-transaction buses**:
    - request & response are different phases
    - state value that indicates that an operation is in progress
    - do not initiate another operation for a cache block that has one in progress

Snooping Implementation

Snoop implementation:

- snoop on the highest level cache
  - another reason L2 is physically-accessed
  - property of **inclusion**:
    - all blocks in L1 are in L2
    - therefore only have to snoop on L2
    - may need to update L1 state if change L2 state
- separate tags & state for snoop lookups
  - processor & snoop communicate for a state or tag change

An Example Snooping Protocol

Invalidation-based coherency protocol

Each cache block is in one of three states

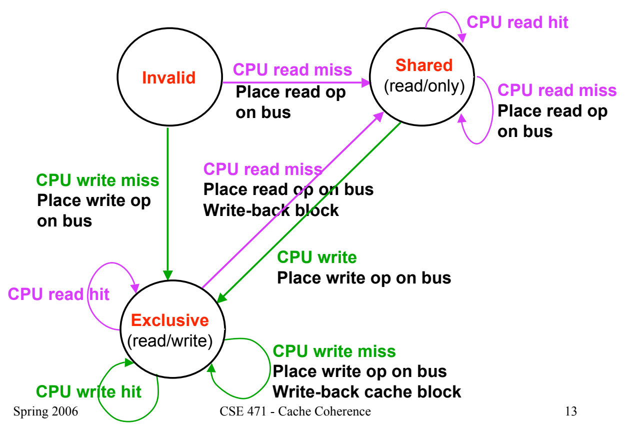
- **shared**:
  - clean in all caches & up-to-date in memory
  - block can be read by any processor
- **exclusive**:
  - dirty in exactly one cache
  - only that processor can write to it
- **invalid**:
  - block contains no valid data

State Transitions for a Given Cache Block

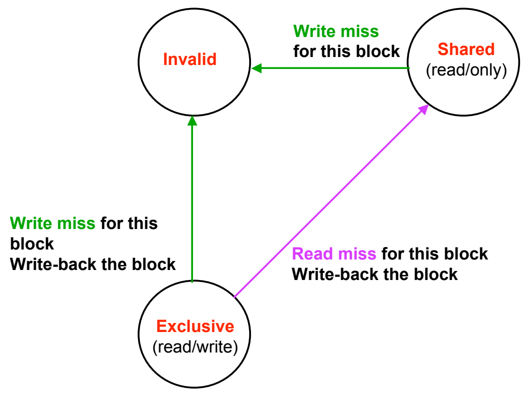
State transitions caused by:

- events caused by the **requesting processor**, e.g.,
  - read miss, write miss, write on shared block
- events caused by **snoops of other caches**, e.g.,
  - read miss by P1 makes P2's owned block change from exclusive to shared
  - write miss by P1 makes P2's owned block change from exclusive to invalid

State Machine (CPU side)



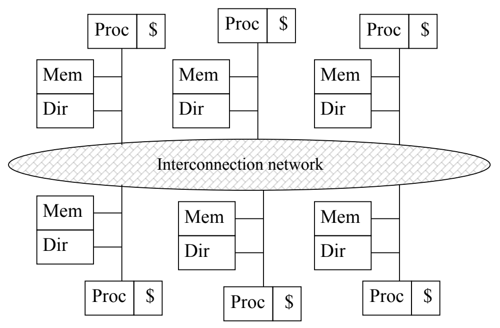
State Machine (Bus side: the snoop)



Directory Implementation

Distributed memory machine
- processor-memory pairs are connected via a multi-path interconnection network
  - **point-to-point communication**
  - snooping with broadcasting is wasteful of the parallel communication capability
- each processor (or cluster of processors) has its own memory
- a processor has fast access to its local memory & slower access to "remote" memory located at other processors
  - **NUMA** (non-uniform memory access) machines

A High-end MP



Coherence on High-end Machines

How cache coherency is handled
- no caches (Cray MTA)
- disallow caching of shared data (Cray 3TD)
- software coherence (research machines)
- hardware directories that record cache block state (most others)

Directory Implementation

Coherency state is associated with memory blocks that are the size of cache blocks
- directory tracks state of cache blocks
  - **shared**:
    - at least 1 processor has the data cached & memory is up-to-date
    - block can be read by any processor
  - **exclusive**:
    - 1 processor (the owner) has the data cached & memory is stale
    - only that processor can write to it
  - **invalid**:
    - no processor has the data cached & memory is up-to-date
- directory tracks shared memory blocks
  - bit vector in which 1 means the processor has cached the data
  - write bit to indicate if exclusive

Directory Implementation

Directories assign different uses to different processors

- **home** node: where the memory location of an address resides (and cached data may be there too)
- **local** node: where the memory request initiated
- **remote** node: an alternate location for the data if this processor has requested & cached it

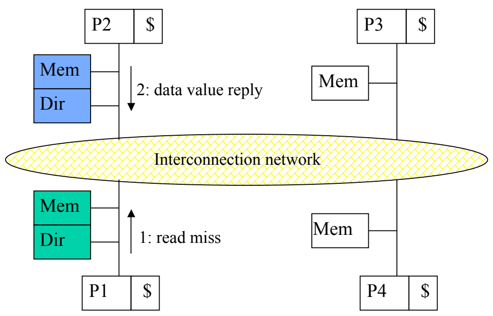
In satisfying a memory request:

- messages sent between the different nodes in point-to-point communication
- messages get explicit replies

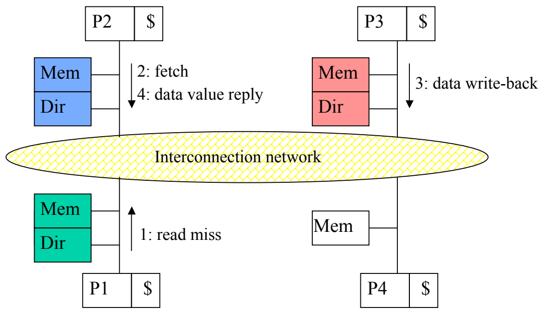
Some simplifying assumptions for using the protocol

- processor blocks until the access is complete
- messages processed in the order received

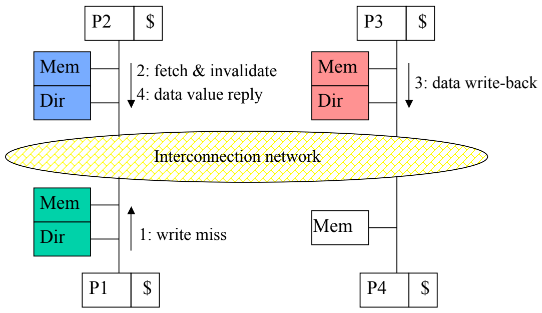
Read Miss for an Uncached Block



Read Miss for an Exclusive, Remote Block



Write Miss for an Exclusive, Remote Block



Directory Protocol Messages

Message type	*Source*	*Destination*	*Msg Content*
Read miss	Local cache	Home directory	P, A
– *Processor P reads data at address A; make P a read sharer and arrange to send data back*			
Write miss	Local cache	Home directory	P, A
– *Processor P writes data at address A; make P the exclusive owner and arrange to send data back*			
Invalidate	Home directory	Remote caches	A
– *Invalidate a shared copy at address A.*			
Fetch	Home directory	Remote cache	A
– *Fetch the block at address A and send it to its home directory*			
Fetch/Invalidate	Home directory	Remote cache	A
– *Fetch the block at address A and send it to its home directory; invalidate the block in the cache*			
Data value reply	Home directory	Local cache	Data
– *Return a data value from the home memory (read or write miss response)*			
Data write-back	Remote cache	Home directory	A, Data
– *Write-back a data value for address A (invalidate response)*			

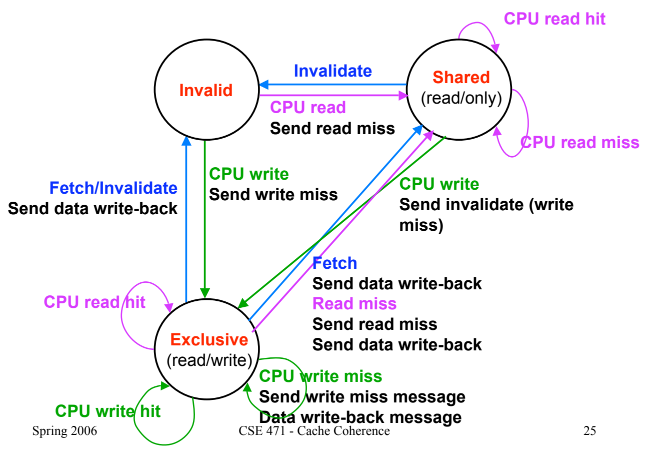
CPU FSM for a Cache Block

States identical to the snooping protocol

Transactions very similar

- read & write misses sent to home directory
- invalidate & data fetch requests to the node with the data replace broadcasted read/write misses

CPU FSM for a Cache Block



Directory FSM for a Memory Block

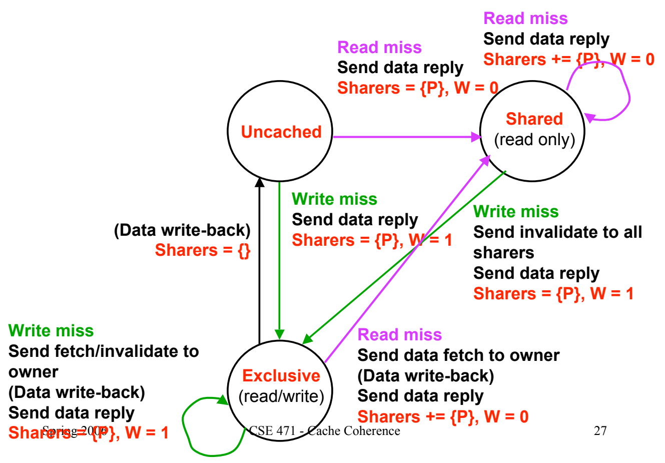
Same states and structure as for the cache block FSM

Tracks all copies of a memory block

Makes two state changes:

- update coherency state
- alter the number of sharers in the sharing set

Directory FSM for a Memory Block

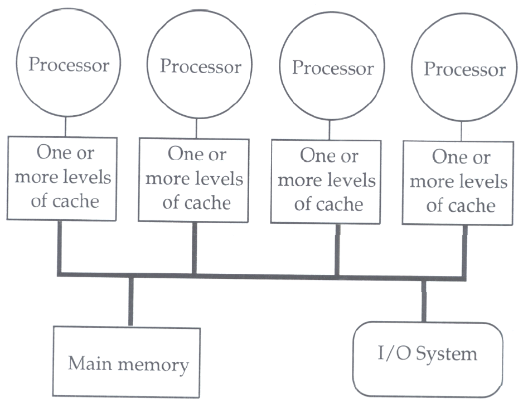


False Sharing

Processors read & write to ***different*** words in a shared cache block

- cache coherency is maintained on a cache block basis
  - processes share cache blocks, not data
  - block ownership bounces between processor caches

A Low-end MP


Processor
Processor
Processor
Processor
One or more levels of cache
One or more levels of cache
One or more levels of cache
One or more levels of cache
Main memory
I/O System

False Sharing

Impact aggravated by:

- block size: why?
- cache size: why?
- large miss penalties: why?

Reduced by:

- coherency protocols (state per subblock)
  - let cache blocks become incoherent as long as there is only false sharing
  - make them coherent if any processor true shares
- compiler optimizations (group & transpose, cache block padding)
- cache-conscious programming wrt initial data structure layout