

Threaded programming

Lecture 10: Memory model, flush and atomics

Why do we need a memory model?

- On modern computers code is rarely executed in the same order as it was specified in the source code.
- Compilers, processors and memory systems reorder code to achieve maximum performance.
- Individual threads, when considered in isolation, exhibit *as-if-serial* semantics.
- Programmer's assumptions based on the memory model hold even in the face of code reordering performed by the compiler, the processors and the memory.

Example

- Reasoning about multithreaded execution is not that simple.

T1	T2
x=1;	int r1=y;
y=1;	int r2=x;

- If there is no reordering and *T2* sees value of *y* on read to be 1 then the following read of *x* should also return the value 1. If code in *T1* is reordered we can no longer make this assumption.

OpenMP Memory Model

- OpenMP supports a **relaxed-consistency** shared memory model.
 - Threads can maintain a **temporary view** of shared memory which is not consistent with that of other threads.
 - These temporary views are made consistent only at certain points in the program.
 - The operation which enforces consistency is called the **flush operation**

Flush operation

- Defines a sequence point at which a thread is guaranteed to see a consistent view of memory
 - All previous read/writes by this thread have completed and are visible to other threads
 - No subsequent read/writes by this thread have occurred
 - A flush operation is analogous to a **fence** in other shared memory API's

Flush and synchronization

- A flush operation is implied by OpenMP synchronizations, e.g.
 - at entry/exit of parallel regions
 - at implicit and explicit barriers
 - at entry/exit of critical regions
 - whenever a lock is set or unset
-
- (but not at entry to worksharing regions or entry/exit of master regions)

Example: producer-consumer pattern

Thread 0

```
a = foo();  
flag = 1;
```

Thread 1

```
while (!flag);  
b = a;
```

- This is incorrect code
- The compiler and/or hardware may re-order the reads/writes to a and flag, or flag may be held in a register.
- OpenMP has a **flush** directive which specifies an explicit flush operation
 - can be used to make the above example work

```
!$omp flush
```

```
#pragma omp flush
```

Using flush

- In order for a write of a variable on one thread to be guaranteed visible and valid on a second thread, the following operations must occur in the following order:
 1. Thread A writes the variable
 2. Thread A executes a flush operation
 3. Thread B executes a flush operation
 4. Thread B reads the variable

Example: producer-consumer pattern

Thread 0

```
a = foo();  
#pragma omp flush  
flag = 1;  
#pragma omp flush
```

First flush ensures **flag** is written after **a**

Second flush ensures **flag** is written to memory

Thread 1

```
#pragma omp flush  
while (!flag){  
#pragma omp flush  
}  
#pragma omp flush  
b = a;
```

First and second flushes ensure **flag** is read from memory

Third flush ensures correct ordering of flushes

Using flush

- Using flush correctly is difficult and prone to subtle bugs
 - extremely hard to test whether code is correct
 - may execute correctly on one platform/compiler but not on another
 - bugs can be triggered by changing the optimisation level on the compiler
- Don't use it unless you are 100% confident you know what you are doing!
 - and even then.....

Other atomic forms

- Sometimes we may wish to enforce atomic behaviour for operations other than updates

```
#pragma omp atomic read  
    v = x;
```

```
!$omp atomic read  
    v = x
```

```
#pragma omp atomic write  
    x = expr;
```

```
!$omp atomic write  
    x = expr
```

```
#pragma omp atomic capture  
{v = x; x binop= expr;}
```

```
!$omp atomic capture  
    v = x  
    x = x op expr  
!$omp end atomic
```

Example: producer-consumer pattern

Thread 0

```
a = foo();  
#pragma omp flush  
#pragma omp atomic write  
flag = 1;  
#pragma omp flush
```

Thread 1

```
#pragma omp flush  
while (!myflag){  
    #pragma omp flush  
    #pragma omp atomic read  
        myflag = flag;  
}  
#pragma omp flush  
b = a;
```

To be strictly correct we should use atomics to avoid the race condition on **flag**.

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