



ÉCOLE POLYTECHNIQUE
FÉDÉRALE DE LAUSANNE

Introduction: Why Actors?

Principles of Reactive Programming

Roland Kuhn

Where Actors came from

A selection of events in the history of Actors:

Carl Hewitt et al, 1973: Actors invented for research on artificial intelligence

Gul Agha, 1986: Actor languages and communication patterns

Ericsson, 1995: first commercial use in Erlang/OTP for telecommunications platform

Philipp Haller, 2006: implementation in Scala standard library

Jonas Bonér, 2009: creation of Akka

Threads

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- ▶ multiple execution cores within one chip, sharing memory
- ▶ virtual cores sharing a single physical execution core

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Programs running on the computer must feed these cores:

- ▶ running multiple programs in parallel (multi-tasking)
- ▶ running parts of the same program in parallel (multi-threading)

Example: Bank Account

```
class BankAccount {  
  
    private var balance = 0  
  
    def deposit(amount: Int): Unit =  
        if (amount > 0) balance = balance + amount  
  
    def withdraw(amount: Int): Int =  
        if (0 < amount && amount <= balance) {  
            balance = balance - amount  
            balance  
        } else throw new Error("insufficient funds")  
}
```

Example: Bank Account

```
def withdraw(amount: Int): Int = {  
    val b = balance  
    if (0 < amount && amount <= b) {  
        val newBalance = b - amount  
        balance = newBalance  
        newBalance  
    } else {  
        throw new Error("insufficient funds")  
    }  
}
```

	T1	T2
amount	50	40
balance	80	80
newBalance	30	40
balance	30	40

Executing this twice in parallel can violate the invariant and lose updates.

Synchronization

Multiple threads stepping on each others' toes:

- ▶ demarcate regions of code with “don’t disturb” semantics
- ▶ make sure that all access to shared state is protected



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In Scala every object has a lock: `synchronized(obj) { ... }`

Bank Account with Synchronization

```
class BankAccount {  
  
    private var balance = 0  
  
    def deposit(amount: Int): Unit = synchronized(this) {  
        if (amount > 0) balance += amount  
    }  
  
    def withdraw(amount: Int): Int = synchronized(this) {  
        if (0 < amount && amount <= balance) {  
            balance -= amount  
            balance  
        } else throw new Error("insufficient funds")  
    }  
}
```

Composition of Synchronized Objects

```
def transfer(from: BankAccount, to: BankAccount, amount: Int): Unit = {  
    synchronized(from) {  
        synchronized(to) {  
            from.withdraw(amount)  
            to.deposit(amount)  
        }  
    }  
}
```

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def transfer(from: BankAccount, to: BankAccount, amount: Int): Unit = {  
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            from.withdraw(amount)  
            to.deposit(amount)  
        }  
    }  
}
```

Introduces Dead-Lock:

- ▶ transfer(accountA, accountB, x) in one thread
- ▶ transfer(accountB, accountA, y) in another thread
- ▶ one lock taken by each, nobody can progress

We want Non-Blocking Objects

- ▶ blocking synchronization introduces dead-locks
- ▶ blocking is bad for CPU utilization
- ▶ synchronous communication couples sender and receiver