SCOUT: A PATH-BASED OPERATING SYSTEM

by

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ABSTRACT

Scout is a new operating system architecture that is designed specifically to accommodate the needs of communication-centric systems. An important class of such systems is formed by information appliances, which, broadly speaking, are devices whose primary task is to facilitate communication. Appliances are typically relatively small, special-purpose, and often mobile devices such as remote controls, personal information managers, network-attached disks, cameras, displays, or dedicated file-servers.

Scout has a modular structure that is complemented by a new abstraction called the *path*. The modular structure enables the efficient building of systems that are tailored precisely to the requirements of a particular appliance. Paths address issues related to the performance and quality with which a communication service is rendered. A path can be visualized as a vertical slice through a layered system or viewed abstractly as a bidirectional flow of data. As such, a path typically traverses multiple modules in a Scout system. This means that paths provide additional context to the modules that process data that is being communicated through the system. This context often makes it possible to implement data processing more efficiently or to improve the quality with which resource management, such as CPU scheduling or memory allocation, is realized.

This dissertation develops the path abstraction from first principles and then introduces the various aspects of the Scout architecture. Aside from the path abstraction, Scout uses a novel approach for network packet classification. With the Scout architecture defined, two studies are presented that provide an in-depth look at how to use Scout and its path abstraction. The first study employs the path abstraction to reduce processing latency in the networking subsystem. Evaluating these path optimizations also provides important insights on the performance behavior of networking subsystems on modern RISC machines. The second study employs the path abstraction to improve resource management for an information appliance that involves a networked TV displaying MPEG encoded video.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A ship in port is safe,
but that is not what ships are for.
Sail out to sea and do new things.
– Admiral Grace Hopper, Computer Pioneer

Computer systems are continuing to evolve at a rapid pace. Based on SPECint95 reports, system performance has doubled in the past seven years roughly once every twenty months [96]. In 1965, Moore predicted that the transistor density of semiconductor chips would double roughly every twelve to eighteen months and his prediction has largely held true ever since [90, 69].[1] To put this in perspective, the first microprocessor, the Intel 4004, was implemented using only 2,300 transistors in a 16-pin package. Twenty-seven years later, the DEC Alpha 21264 contains about 15.2 million transistors in a single 588-pin PGA package. Despite this breathtaking pace, fundamental changes in the way we interact with these systems are exceedingly rare. As we argue later in this chapter, one such fundamental paradigm shift occurred when time-sharing replaced batch-oriented systems. Paradigm shifts imply deep changes in the way we perceive problems, the languages we use to express them, and the infrastructure we employ to solve them. A central tenet of this dissertation is that the world is facing another paradigm shift that will lead us into the age of information appliances. The aim of this work is to anticipate the changes required to support the new appliance paradigm and to propose, discuss, and evaluate an operating system infrastructure that will serve well the needs of such appliances. Before going into more detail, it is illustrative to give a brief history of operating systems to this date.

[1] The 1965 prediction called for a doubling each year for the next ten years. In 1975, Moore adjusted the rate to one doubling every eighteen months.

1.1 From Mainframes To Personal Computers

The first operating systems started to appear with the arrival of second generation computers in the mid-fifties to early sixties. At that time, computers had reached a level of complexity that made it no longer possible to write every program from scratch. The solution was to abstract commonly encountered tasks into a set of routines that could be used by any program. These routines were typically provided as part of the runtime system of a programming language such as FORTRAN. While this avoided having to write each *program* from ground-up, it still resulted in much duplicated efforts in writing each *runtime system*. Abstracting and factoring the common functionality present in each runtime system led to language-independent run-time systems, which were arguably the first, albeit primitive, operating systems. The noteworthy point is that the boundary between the *operating system* and the *application* does not follow from any kind of natural law, but instead is a contrived entity. Consequently, the study of operating systems not only involves the study of *how* the desired operating system services should be provided, but also *what* services should be present in the first place.

Not surprisingly, the what and how of operating systems changed over the decades as computers became ever more powerful. For example, with the arrival of batch-oriented systems, job-control languages were added to the operating systems. These job-control languages made it possible to specify the requirements and actions of a compute-job off-line, thus leading to greatly increased utilization of the expensive central processing unit (CPU). Utilization was further improved by the introduction of multi-programming. Multi-programming allowed the system to keep multiple jobs in the core-memory so the idle-time of a job that arises from its input/output requests and other synchronization constraints could be filled with computation from other jobs. This improved utilization, but unfortunately also increased job completion time. In 1962, the CTSS operating system introduced time-sharing to alleviate this problem [21]. Time-sharing made it possible give short jobs higher priority than long-running batch jobs. This preserved the high utilization of batch-processing while greatly reducing the job completion time for short jobs. More importantly, however, time-sharing made it possible for the first time to have multiple users work with a computer interactively. This fundamentally changed how programmers and users perceived computer systems.

The evolution of time-sharing systems culminated in the development of MULTICS, a system designed to support hundreds of simultaneous users [22]. MULTICS aimed to be everything to everybody and its extant complexity caused repeated and excessive delays. Even though it eventually shipped to a few customers, it was widely considered a commercial failure. Nevertheless, it laid the foundation for much of the operating system research of the coming thirty years. There continued to be dramatic technological advances, such as the introduction of the mini-computers, then micro- and personal-computers (PCs), but the fundamental structure of operating systems has remained remarkably unchanged since. To be sure, all modern operating systems support networking and are, in a sense, part of a world-wide distributed system, but the fundamental abstraction of these systems was, and is, the *process*—an abstraction that *computes*.

1.2 The Advent of the Information Appliance

In the light of recent events, such as the popularization of the Internet, it is reasonable to wonder whether the continued focus on *computation* is appropriate. The increasing emphasis on networking may indicate that *communication*, as opposed to computation will soon be the raison d'être of computers. As a matter of fact, a NIST report on the National Information Infrastructure (NII) rejected the term *computer* on the grounds that it puts too much emphasis on computation [71]. The report suggested the term *information appliances* be used instead for systems that support communication, information storage, and user interactions.

Intuitively, appliances are small, special-purpose, and often mobile devices such as remote controls, personal information managers, network-attached disks, cameras, displays, set-top boxes, embedded web-servers, and dedicated file-servers. Since there is no widely-accepted exact definition of the term *information appliance*, the remainder of this section conveys our vision of what the realm of appliances might be. The following section will then use this vision to make some predictions on the potential impact of the appliance paradigm on operating system design.

First, we observe that the ubiquity of communication networks is fueling an explosion in the number of appliances. Already, there are many network-attached devices such as printers, disks, thermometers, cameras, and filers (special purpose network file servers). A result of this explosive growth is that some appliances are taking over jobs that were traditionally served by general purpose machines. However, this is not to say that traditional computers will disappear completely: appliances serve a purpose that is mostly orthogonal to that of existing general purpose computers. The latter will therefore continue to have their place. Nevertheless, it is not unimaginable that the market penetration of information appliances will reach such a magnitude that, relatively speaking, traditional computer systems may look like niche products.

Another aspect that refines the realm of appliances is ease-of-use. To paraphrase Joel Birnbaum [9]: just like automobiles, telephones, or television sets, information appliances are more noticeable by their absence than their presence. Without a doubt, the ease-of-use of general purpose computers has improved significantly over the past decade, but it is not even close to the point where general purpose computers could be considered appliances. Besides the ease-of-use aspect of appliances, there are technical characteristics that set them apart from traditional, general-purpose computers:

- **Communication:** Information appliances are communication-oriented. Computation may still occur but it is incidental to moving data through the system. The main task of information appliances is to facilitate locating, accessing, and moving around data. The move to a communication-centric world also implies a shift away from the traditional application-oriented thinking. In a communication-oriented system, it is often the entire data-path that forms the "application." For example, when shopping via the world-wide web, is it the browser that is the application? Or is it the server data-base that provides the product information? Or the web server that presents the information? Or the Internet routers that faithfully deliver the data? The user most likely perceives the web browser to be the application, but in reality, it is all components taken together that form the application. Indeed, *service* may be a better term in this context.

- **Specialization:** Each individual appliance serves a well-defined purpose. A file server does not turn into a remote control over night. Having a well-defined purpose does not necessarily imply that an appliance supports just a single service. A relatively general system, such as a web-browser with builtin Java-support, is certainly in the realm of the information appliance. However, compared to general-purpose computers, the breadth of generality for appliances is substantially smaller.

  Unlike for traditional computers, the software installed in deployed appliances will change infrequently. This is both a consequence of the ease-of-use requirement of appliances and their ubiquity. Who would want to worry about upgrading the software in their light-switches? With dozens of appliances per house-hold, even moderate rates of (manual) upgrades could impose an undue burden on the owner or maintainer. Some appliances will want to make provisions for executable content, e.g., by providing a secure virtual machine, but even so the native software of an appliance remains relatively fixed.

- **Diversity:** While each individual appliance is specialized, their union spans a wide range of functionality. As indicated above, appliances cover the spectrum from remote controls, SmartCards, all the way to dedicated servers.

  For example, at one end of the spectrum, a remote control unit may employ a commodity 4-bit processor with a reasonably large read-only memory (ROM) but only a few bytes of random-access memory (RAM). On the other end of the spectrum, a dedicated web-server may employ a high-performance CPU with several gigabytes of RAM and a terabyte disk-subsystem for caching-purposes.

  Just as important, appliances will employ a wealth of different input/output (I/O) devices. Some appliances will use a relatively low-resolution touch-sensitive screen as the primary user-interaction device, others a traditional keyboard/monitor combination, while still others may have no user-interaction devices at all since they are controlled and operated completely through the communication network.

- **Predictability:** Proper operation of an appliances often requires meeting certain realtime constraints. Since most appliances are consumer-devices, these constraints are typically *soft*, that is, missing a realtime constraint causes a degradation in the perceived quality of the service but does not cause a life-threatening situation.

1.3 The Need for Configurable and Modular Operating Systems

The previous section presented our vision of what an information appliance is. It is now time to turn attention to what implications this vision might have on system design.

First, the diversity of appliances implies that performance and cost requirements may differ widely between any pair of information appliances. Of course, there have been differences before, say between PCs and workstations, but in the appliance arena, differences of order-of-magnitude scale exist and need to be accommodated. Given this variety, it is clear that a *one size fits all* approach would not be able to do justice to all information appliances. Instead, what is needed is an infrastructure that represents the least common denominator among all information appliances. That infrastructure can then be extended to provide the exact functionality required by a particular appliance. In the traditional sense, this least-common denominator represents the operating system, but since the least common denominator is probably small, the usefulness of such an operating system is also very limited. Indeed, if it were necessary to build each appliance directly on top of this infrastructure, not much were gained relative to writing the system from scratch.

A key requirement for an appliance-oriented system is, therefore, that it must facilitate the building of reusable higher-level software in an easy and flexible manner. This can be achieved by structuring the higher-level software in a *modular* fashion. A modular design supports a mix-and-match approach that allows building the software for a particular appliance by simply selecting and combining the modules that implement the required functionality.

In the ideal case, building a new appliance should be a simple matter of *configuration* without involving any costly or time-consuming programming. A modular approach also meshes well with the fact that, due to the diverse nature of appliances, the rate at which new products are introduced will be high. A modular approach makes it possible to adopt a new appliance simply by programming the smallest delta that is required to go from the next closest appliance to the new one. Typically, this would involve programming device drivers for the few devices that were added or changed in the new appliance and maybe the addition of a few other modules that extend or enhance the functionality of the new appliance.

Modularity also implies configurability. The question is *when* configurability needs to be supported. In the extreme case, a system can be reconfigured on the fly at run-time. However, since appliances are expected to be of relatively stable nature, it seems that supporting configurability only at system build time might be versatile enough. Limiting appliances to static configuration reduces the complexity of the resulting systems and also simplifies building highly efficient appliances. Note that static configurability does not mean that appliances cannot be upgraded. It just means that an upgrade will typically involve replacing the entire system software, rather than performing an incremental upgrade.

The specialized and unchanging nature of appliances also reduces the need for separate address spaces. In traditional systems, address spaces serve two roles: they provide fault-domains that protect competing and mistrusting processes from each other and they simplify the loading and unloading of programs at run-time. The native code in an appliance is available to the system builder, so mistrust is usually not an issue. Similarly, the various services in an appliance are normally of a collaborative, rather than competitive nature. That is, the traditional incentives for multiple address spaces exist to a much smaller degree. This is not to say that multiple address spaces never make sense for an appliance, but it is fully expected that many, if not most appliances will not fundamentally depend on them. Since some appliances may need fault-isolation, but not dynamic loading of programs, the two issues should be kept separate. Doing so makes it possible to employ light-weight protection techniques such as software fault-isolation (SFI) or type-safe languages such as Modula-3, Java, or Limbo when protection is all that is desired [109, 7, 4, 102].

As appliances are likely to be realized in a single address space, the distinction between application and operating system becomes fuzzy. There is nothing wrong with this. In fact, this is in line with the realization that, in a communication-oriented system, it is difficult or meaningless to attempt to pin-point the application. It is much more appropriate to view an appliance as being composed of a collection of modules that are more or less simple filters. Some of these filters certainly can be complex (such as an MPEG video codec) and some may even exhibit characteristics of traditional applications, but whenever reasonably possible, it will be advantageous to employ the filter-view when building modules for an appliance.

1.4 Performance Implications of Modular Systems

The benefit of modular systems stems from the fact that each module is developed independently and without making any assumptions about the context in which it will be used. This enables system builders to combine modules in ways not anticipated by the programmer, subject to only one constraint: that modules be connected in a compatible and meaningful fashion. But this very benefit is also a disadvantage: many performance optimizations are either difficult or impossible to employ in the absence of the full context in which a module is being used. Aside from impacting performance, modularity also makes it difficult to solve problems that require global context, such as guaranteeing a certain quality-of-service or optimal resource management.

The alternative to modular systems is to build systems in a *vertically integrated* fashion. With this approach, a system is programmed from the ground up and tailored exactly to the problem that it is designed to solve. By definition, the entire context of a system is known and available at the time the system is programmed. Given enough time and effort, this is guaranteed to lead to a system with the best possible performance. On the other hand, since modularity is given up, this approach is complex, time-consuming, and expensive. In other words, it is justifiable only when the lifetime or market for that one particular appliance is so large that the development costs can be amortized.

It would be interesting to quantitatively compare the two approaches. This is surprisingly difficult because hardly ever is one and the same functionality (product) implemented both ways and then compared in an objective and direct manner. There are a few exceptions to this rule, however. Network file system servers are commercially important enough that there are several companies that build vertically integrated servers. For example, Network Appliance manufactures what can be reasonably considered vertically integrated file servers, whereas Digital Equipment is manufacturing relatively modular, UNIX based servers.[2] By comparing the SPEC file server benchmark [111] results for one file server from each company, we can provide at least one data-point that directly quantifies the cost of modularity. A price/performance ratio would be easiest to interpret, but prices for computer systems are notoriously volatile and pricing strategies also vary greatly between different companies. Thus, instead of comparing a price/performance ratio, we use the SPEC result and the amount of hardware required to achieve that result as a performance metric. Table 1.1 lists the SPEC file server benchmark results and hardware configurations for two comparable systems: a Network Appliance F540 and a Digital AlphaServer 2000 4/275. The table shows that for a response time of around 7.7ms, the F540 delivers more than five times the throughput of the AlphaServer. This is particularly remarkable when comparing the hardware configurations. As the table shows, the AlphaServer has much more raw hardware power than the F540; it has twice the number of CPUs, twice the amount of second level cache, four times the memory capacity, and almost twice the number of disks of the F540!

To be fair, the performance differential is not entirely due to modularity. Although no quantitative results are available, the fact that UNIX is a general user environment likely accounts for a good portion of the performance gap. What we can say with confidence, however, is that the above comparison demonstrates that a vertically integrated system greatly outperforms a relatively modular and general system. In the remainder of this section, we provide more direct evidence that modularity can have a significant cost on performance.

[2] Note that modularity is independent of whether a system is monolithic or not. Even though UNIX uses a monolithic kernel, it is relatively modular in that it has well-defined kernel-internal interfaces that make it easy to add new file systems, network protocols, or device drivers.

	F540 [97]	**AlphaServer 2000** [98]
SPECnfs_A93	2,230 ops/sec @ 7.7ms	404 ops/sec @ 7.6ms
CPU	275MHz 21064A Alpha	275 MHz 21064 Alpha
Number of CPUs	1	2
Second-level cache	2MB	4MB
Other cache	8MB NVRAM	Prestoserve
Memory	256MB	1024MB
Number of disks	14	25

Table 1.1: SPECnfs Results and System Configurations

1.4.1 Potential For Performance Improvements

Since it is rare to find systems that exist both in a modular and a vertically integrated version, it is necessary to look for other metrics that help quantifying the cost of modularity. A useful metric is the performance improvement that can achieved when (manually) optimizing the performance of a modular system. There are many examples of this in the literature, of which we now discuss a few.

1.4.1.1 Code Synthesis

Code synthesis, also known as run-time code-generation, has been used in the Synthesis kernel to optimize code across module boundaries [86, 60]. The two main-techniques involved factoring invariants and collapsing layers, which are forms of partial evaluation. In extreme cases, such as reading a single byte from a memory pseudo-device (`/dev/mem` in UNIX), these techniques achieved order-of-magnitude improvements compared to regular UNIX kernels [89]. Similar techniques were applied in a later project called Synthetix. While less aggressive, it was more practical in that it applied code synthesis to an existing commercial operating system, namely HP-UX. The results reported in [85] indicate speedups in the range from 1.12 to 3.61 for the UNIX `read` system-call compared to the regular HP-UX version.

1.4.1.2 Integrated Layer Processing

The fundamental observation behind Integrated Layer Processing (ILP) [16, 1] is that as a network packet passes through various protocol processing steps, its data may be traversed multiple times. For example, an Ethernet driver may first copy the data from the network adapter to main-memory, then UDP may compute a checksum and, finally, a Remote Procedure Call (RPC) protocol may swap the byte order of the data. This is suboptimal since more or less the same data is accessed multiple times. This a causes larger-than-necessary overhead per data byte, and worse, results in a poor memory access pattern since the same data is moved from the memory to the CPU and then back to the memory multiple times. A system that uses ILP collapses all data processing into a single loop. That is, the data is brought into the CPU only once, thus greatly improving the efficiency of the memory system. Indeed, Abbott and Peterson [1] report communication bandwidth improvements in the range of 10 to 30% due to ILP.

1.4.1.3 PathIDs

PathIDs [56] is a mechanism that allows substituting the implementation of a specific network protocol stack with hand-optimized, vertically integrated code. The mechanism essentially involves inserting an additional network header right above the link-layer. This extra header indicates which, if any, optimized code should be used to process an incoming network packet. In a test-implementation, PathIDs helped reduce one-byte UDP latency between a pair of FDDI-connected Alpha workstations running UNIX from 759μs to 578μs; a 23 percent reduction. It should be noted that PathIDs optimize the receive-side of protocol processing only. That is, a large fraction of the 578μs of the optimized time is due to fixed costs such as time on the wire and sender-side processing. In this light, a 23 percent improvement is very significant.

1.4.1.4 Single-Copy TCP/IP

Banks and Prudence [6] present what amounts to a vertically integrated networking stack. The stack under consideration was a typical UNIX networking stack consisting of a socket-layer, TCP and IP layers [83, 82], and a network driver layer. The vertical integration ensured that both on the outgoing and incoming side, network data is copied only once. This involved combining the copy routine with the checksumming routine, changing the socket layer so that outgoing data is placed in appropriately sized chunks of network-adapter memory, changing the network driver processing so incoming packets are split into headers and data, and changing TCP to properly handle delayed acknowledgements that arise from the fact that the checksum of received packets can be computed only when the user-level process is ready to receive the packet's data. Clearly, creating this vertically integrated version was not without difficulties, but the resulting performance improvements were impressive: communication bandwidth increased from about 7,500 to 11,600 kilobytes per second. This corresponds to a 66 percent improvement in bandwidth.

1.4.2 Implications on Quality-of-Service and Predictability

The preceding examples show that modularity can have a tremendous impact on performance. Researchers were able to achieve speedups in the range from twenty to several hundred percent by applying various verticalization techniques to otherwise purely modular systems. But modularity also has a negative effect that cannot be quantified easily: resource-management problems such as quality-of-service or predictability are often difficult, if not impossible, to solve in purely modular systems. The key issue is that sometimes a reasonable combination of modules has unwanted behavior, even though the modules themselves work according to their specifications.

For example, consider a simple filter that takes as input a message (sequence of data bytes) and produces as output a message that contains the run-length encoded data of the input message. Suppose this filter were used as part of a networking stack through which a mix of different packets may flow, some of which may have realtime constraints associated. Unfortunately, since the filter does not know which packets have realtime constraints, it cannot schedule the CPU appropriately. As a result some of realtime packets may miss their deadlines needlessly. Rather than fixing the filter to make it aware of what packets have realtime constraints, a better solution would be to simply recognize that there are resource management issues that are associated with the data, rather than with the particular module that is currently processing it. Once we recognize that fact, we can look for a more general solution that would make it possible to use unmodified filters, such as the run-length encoder, while retaining the ability to perform proper resource management.

Note that such resource management problems can occur not just for CPU scheduling but also for memory management and indeed for any resource in a computer system. In the memory management realm, consider that some applications may require hard guarantees on the availability of memory. For example, paging over the network requires that the networking subsystem can guarantee that it does not run out of memory while processing a packet related to paging. Otherwise, the pager itself may deadlock when attempting to free up memory by paging out over the network. Again, one might be able to solve this problem by modifying each module in the networking subsystem, but a more general solution would certainly be preferable.

To summarize, since a module by definition does not concern itself with the context in which it is being used, modular systems by themselves cannot accommodate applications that need to provide global service guarantees such as the processing of a data-item within a given deadline or without running out of memory.

1.5 Beyond Modularity: The Path Abstraction

Despite its disadvantages, modularity is a fundamental structuring technique with a long and successful history in system design. From early work on layered operating systems and networking architectures [44, 114], to more recent advances in stackable systems [88, 49, 46, 108], modularity has played a central role in managing complexity, isolating failure, and enhancing configurability. Clearly, it is not something that can be discarded lightly. So the question is whether it is possible to avoid the disadvantages of modularity without giving up on its strengths. It is our contention that this is indeed the case: we propose a new abstraction, called *path*, that is complementary to, but equally fundamental as layering in a modular system. Whereas layering is typically used to manage complexity, paths are applied to modular systems to improve their performance and to solve problems that require global context.

Paths have many faces and we defer a detailed description to Chapters 2 and 3. For now, we appeal to the reader's intuition that a path is a vertical slice through a layered system that provides the context that is ordinarily unavailable in a modular system. For example, a path could represent the dataflow that occurs when transferring a file from a disk to a network adapter through the Internet file-transfer protocol (FTP). In a sense, paths are like small, or localized, vertically integrated systems. With this view, purely modular systems and purely vertically integrated systems represent extreme cases in the design spectrum illustrated in Figure 1.1. With the addition of paths, it becomes possible to pick intermediate points in this spectrum: those parts of a system that are not performance critical can be realized in a purely modular fashion, whereas performance critical parts can be realized as optimized paths, giving performance close to that of a vertically integrated system, but keeping cost and complexity down as only performance sensitive parts need to be verticalized. Furthermore, with a well-designed path architecture, it should be possible to carry out this verticalization in a structured and mostly automatic fashion. Ideally, a system designer could specify in a declarative manner what parts of the system are performance critical, and the path infrastructure would use this specification to automatically translate modular code into an optimized path implementation. If the critical path has particular resource-management needs, such as a specific quality-of-service requirement, the same declarative specification could be used to associate appropriate resource-management policies with the path.

The degree to which this ideal case can be achieved will of course vary from appliance to appliance and also depends on the quality of the tools that are available in the path infrastructure. Realistically, a system with paths will always require slightly more effort to build than a purely modular system and is unlikely to completely reach the performance or resource-management potential of a fully vertically integrated system. But paths provide the ability to start out quickly with an almost purely modular system and then optimize performance for the parts that warrant the extra effort. In this sense, paths provide an additional degree of freedom: the set of modules in a system and the manner in which

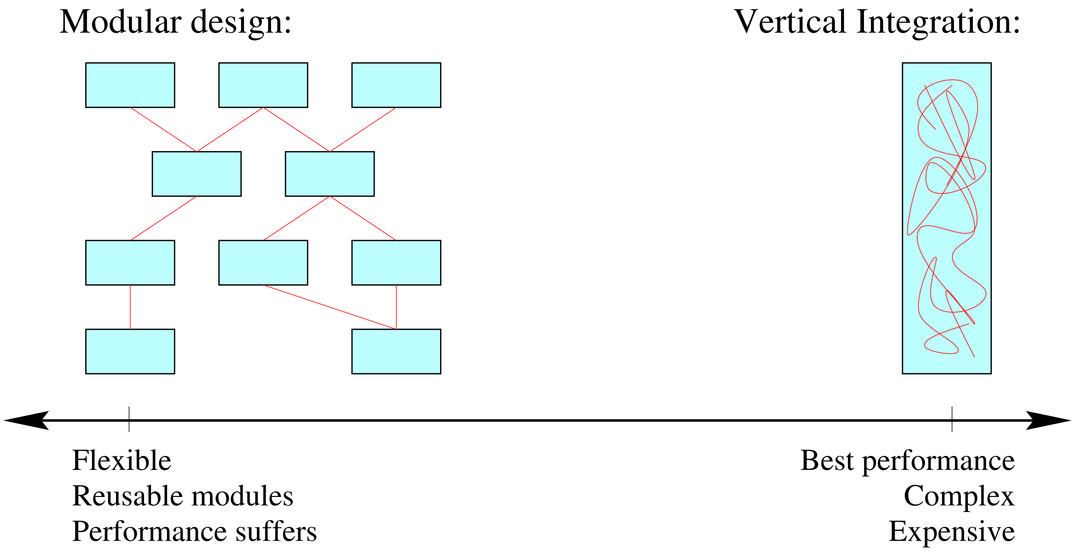

Figure 1.1: System Design Spectrum: the left-hand side represents a modular system with a set of modules (boxes) and explicit dependencies (lines between boxes). The right-hand side represents a vertically integrated system with intricate and arbitrary dependencies throughout the system (spaghetti line inside box).

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they are connected determine the *functionality* of an appliance, where as the degree to which optimized paths are employed controls the *performance*, *quality-of-service*, and *predictability* attainable in the system.

1.6 Thesis Statement and Contributions

This dissertation contributes to the area of pure experimental computer science. Specifically, it introduces novel thinking and techniques to the fields of operating systems, networking systems, and experimental systems research in general. The primary objective of this dissertation is to test the hypothesis that:

1. information appliances require and benefit from novel operating system concepts designed to exploit their characteristics,

2. paths can be evolved into an abstraction that is fundamental to communication-oriented systems, and that

3. a path abstraction can be defined that is both useful and general enough to build any information appliance.

It should be noted that it is not possible to formally prove the correctness or falsehood of this hypothesis. Instead, this dissertation is limited to providing, hopefully strong, evidence for or against its validity. It does so by introducing a new operating system, called Scout, and two Scout-based demonstrations.

Scout is designed specifically for information appliances and has been implemented from ground up to avoid inappropriate concessions to or influences from traditional, computation-oriented systems. Founded on a modular infrastructure that can cope well with the diversity of information appliances, Scout provides a fertile ground for novel solutions.

Chapters 2 and 3 present the Scout architecture. Chapter 2 begins with developing a path model from first principles. As part of this development, many design-rationales and trade-offs are exposed and discussed. With the path-model articulated, Chapter 3 proceeds to outline the overall architecture: Scout is modular to provide the layering abstractions needed to cope with the diversity of information appliance. This modular foundation is complemented by a concrete path architecture as a means to go beyond the limits of purely modular systems. In particular, the use of paths in Scout enables it to achieve better performance and better resource management than has been possible in the past. The chapter also introduces a packet-classification scheme that is modular, has low overhead, and avoids duplication of work.

After establishing the Scout architecture, Chapter 4 is a first evaluation that involves studying a networking subsystem employing TCP/IP and remote-procedure call (RPC) stacks. While not an appliances in and of itself, the communication-oriented nature of appliances implies that the networking subsystem will be an essential aspect of many appliances. Understanding this subsystem with respect to its behavior and its suitability towards path-based optimizations is thus both important and interesting. Consequently, the chapter presents a detailed analysis of the performance and behavior of the TCP/IP stack when running on a modern 64-bit RISC architecture. Results for Scout are contrasted with those for a traditional, DEC UNIX based implementation. After establishing the performance base-line, three path-based techniques are proposed and their effectiveness evaluated. A fourth, compiler-based technique aimed at improving the predictability of network processing is studied as well. All four techniques were applied to both the TCP/IP and RPC stacks so as to provide insight into how they behave on networking stacks with radically different design and implementation strategies. The three major contributions from this study are that:

1. when processing small, latency-sensitive packets, the memory system can be the primary bottleneck on a modern RISC machine,

2. the three path-techniques resulted in significant performance improvements, and

3. the fourth technique works in principle, but did not measurably affect performance or predictability.

The first result is surprising: while it has long been known that the memory system is a primary bottleneck for large, throughput-sensitive packets, it was generally assumed that latency-sensitive processing is cache-friendly and thus bottlenecked by the CPU. This study refutes that assumption at least for a large class of machines. The second result implies that for the appliance under study, paths are useful to improving the performance of latency sensitive processing. The third result is disappointing in the sense that the compiler-based technique failed to improve predictability, but in analyzing the reasons for its failure, a better understanding of the technique is obtained. With this improved understanding, it is possible to enumerate the scenarios in which the technique might be employed beneficially.

Chapter 5 introduces a demonstration appliance consisting of a networked TV that displays MPEG-encoded video streams [54, 67] through a windowing system on a graphics frame-buffer. This appliance emphasizes the resource management aspects of paths. In contrast to the networking study, almost all execution time is spent in the MPEG decoder, hence the fact that modular code does not provide the best possible code-path hardly matters. Since video-display is a soft realtime application, proper resource management (in particular proper CPU scheduling) is essential. Using paths and application-level framing

[16], the Scout appliance is able to run multiple video streams and non-realtime background loads all without causing unnecessary interference. Specifically, paths avoid priority inversion by allowing early segregation of work belonging to different streams, they allow to schedule the entire processing of a video-packet according to the bottleneck queue, and they provide the ability to account memory and CPU usage on a per-stream basis. Chapter 6 presents a summary of the dissertation work, an outline of future research directions, and some concluding remarks.

As a final remark, it is important to acknowledge that much of the inspiration and motivation for this work derived from the vision of the future of information appliances. In the end, it is this vision that provided the guiding framework. However, it is equally important to understand that many of the results and techniques developed in this work are not limited to the appliance context. For example, path-based code optimizations are likely to be relevant to all modular and communication-intensive environments. The results of the networking study provide insights into the behavior of communication subsystems that are interesting in their own right. Similarly, the considerations with respect to resource managment are likely to be applicable to other multimedia-oriented systems. Thus, even though appliances are used to motivate this dissertation, its impact is likely to transcend beyond that specific environment.

CHAPTER 2

PATH ABSTRACTION

Our way is not soft grass,
it's a mountain path with lots of rocks.
But it goes upward, forward, toward the sun.

– Ruth Westheimer

This chapter establishes the vocabulary and fundamental concepts required to understand the path-architecture of Scout. As motivated in the previous chapter, paths are intended to facilitate tackling problems that are difficult or impossible to solve in purely modular systems.

The systems research community has long harbored an intuitive notion of what a path is. For example, it often refers to the *fast path* through a system [85, 73, 2, 112], implying that the most commonly executed sequence of instructions have been optimized. As another example, it sometimes talks about optimizing the *end-to-end path* [17, 15] meaning the focus is on the global performance of the system (e.g., from I/O source to sink), rather than on the local performance of a single component. As a final example, it sometimes distinguishes between a system's *control path* and its *data path*, with the former being more relevant to latency and the latter more concerned with throughput [27, 84]. But the wide-spread use of this term has so far not been translated into a well-defined abstraction that could serve as a foundation of system design. The reason for this is probably two-fold: first, the recognition that many path-like techniques could be unified with an explicit path-abstraction has been missing in the past, and, second, even once the usefulness of a unified path abstraction is recognized, it is non-trivial to define and explain an abstraction that is, on the one hand, general enough to be widely applicable and, on the other hand, specific enough to facilitate the various path-based optimizations and resource management benefits.

2.1 Communication Network Analogy

The path abstraction proposed in this dissertation derives from an analogy between communication networks and modular systems. Consider the example communication network depicted in Figure 2.1. It consists of hosts at the edge of the network and of routers in the interior of the network. The hosts and routers are connected by point-to-point links.

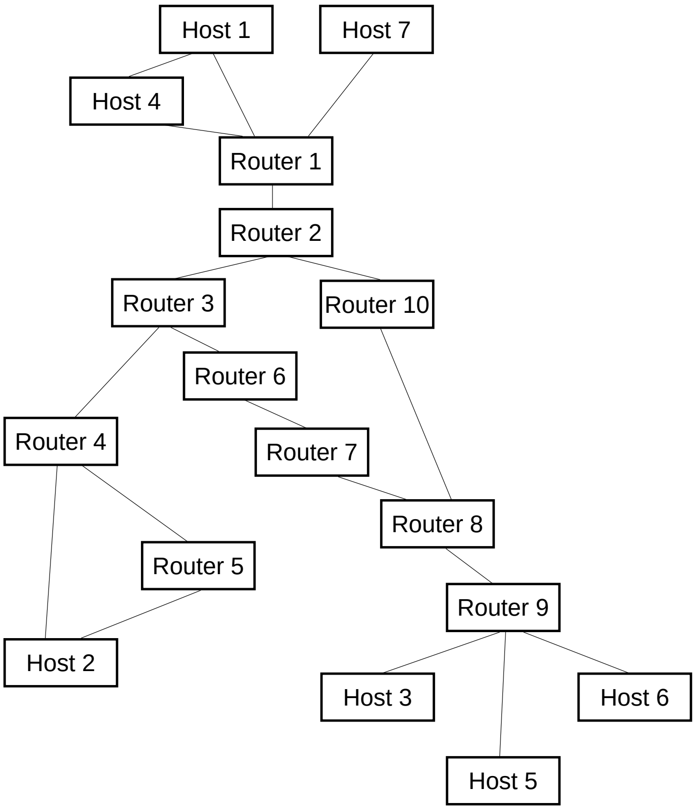

Figure 2.1: Example Communication Network

How does a pair of hosts, say host 1 and 3, communicate in such a network? If we assume a datagram-oriented network [100, 76], such as the Internet, then host 1 would prepare a message, append the network address of host 3 to the message, and then inject this datagram into the network by sending it to router 1. Router 1 would forward it to router 2 which has a choice between router 3 and 10. Consulting its routing table, it might decide that router 10 provides a better (e.g., shorter) path to host 3, so it may decide to forward the datagram to router 10. This process continues through router 8 and 9 where the datagram is eventually delivered to host 3.

Purely datagram-oriented networks work fine, but make it difficult to solve certain tasks, such as transmitting data with quality-of-service guarantees such as a maximum latency or a minimum throughput. Also, such networks require a routing decision per router and per packet. If a sequence of packets is transmitted between a pair of hosts, this results in a needlessly large overhead.

An alternative to the datagram style of communication is a connection-oriented style. With a network of this type, if host 1 desires to communicate with host 3, it has to setup a virtual circuit first. It can do so by sending a connection request message to the network which causes the virtual circuit to be established (if possible). Once the virtual circuit exists, host 1 can send data to host 3 simply by injecting messages into the virtual circuit—no address information is required, since all the necessary routing information is already present in the virtual circuit. This means that a routing decision has to be made only once per router, independent of whether one or a million messages are eventually transmitted. In this sense, a virtual circuit can be interpreted as a sequence of *fixed routing decisions*. Virtual circuits also make it relatively easy to support quality-of-service policies on a per-connection basis. On the negative side, connection-oriented networks require explicit connection setup and tear-down phases (both of which take time) and each virtual circuit ties up some resources in each router (such as memory buffers).

Interestingly, the goals and features of virtual circuits are not unlike those desired for paths. The extra routing overhead in a purely datagram-oriented network loosely corresponds to extra call-overhead in a purely modular system. Similarly, datagram-oriented networks and purely modular systems have difficulty providing quality-of-service guarantees for the same reason: data is processed independently, without regards to the context in which the data appears. Indeed, a modular system can be viewed quite naturally as a network: Figure 2.2 illustrates a modular system (on a single host) that has a structure that is isomorphic to the communication network shown in Figure 2.1. In Figure 2.2, instead of hosts and routers there are modules. The function of these modules is summarized in Table 2.1. One can see that at the edge of the network are modules that represent devices.

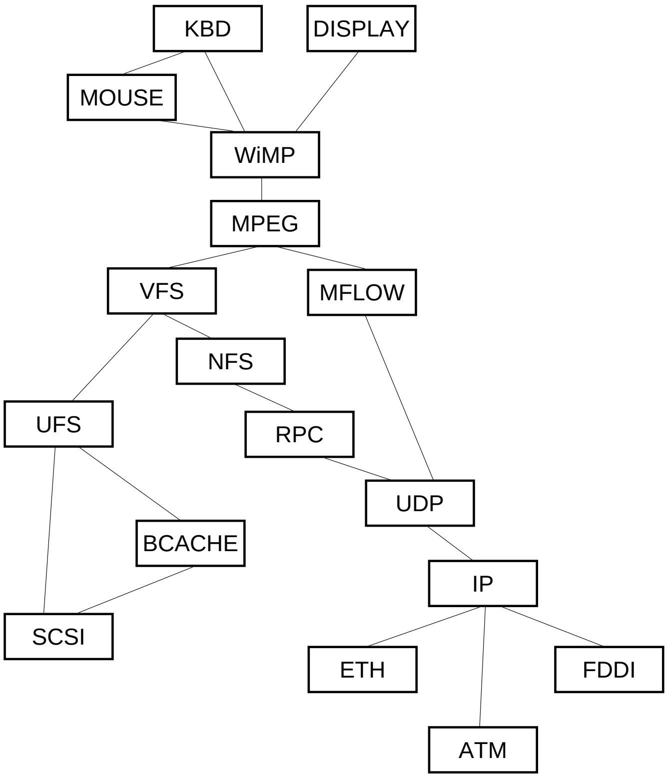

Figure 2.2: Example Modular System

For example, module KBD represents a keyboard. Interior modules represent data filters, e.g., MPEG is an MPEG video codec. The modules are connected according to the dependencies between them. For example, as is apparent from the figure, module UFS interacts directly with modules VFS, BCACHE, and SCSI.

2.2 Path Model

This section uses the communication network analogy as a guide in developing a path model from first principles. The model is developed while largely ignoring the details of the various applications of paths that have been discussed on Chapter 1. This approach allows us to derive a path model without getting overwhelmed by the sometimes conflicting details of specific applications of paths. Once the path model has been developed, its usability is discussed and evaluated in Section 2.4 based on several sample applications.

Module:	Description:	Module:	Description:
KBD	Keyboard driver	MOUSE	Mouse driver
DISPLAY	Graphics adapter driver	WiMP	Window manager
MPEG	MPEG codec	VFS	Virtual File System
UFS	UNIX File System	BCACHE	Buffer cache
SCSI	SCSI driver	MFLOW	Multimedia flowcontrol
NFS	Network File System	RPC	Remote Procedure Call
UDP	User Datagram Protocol	IP	Internet Protocol
ETH	Ethernet driver	ATM	ATM driver
FDDI	FDDI driver		

Table 2.1: Module Descriptions

2.2.1 Basic Path

Abstractly, a virtual circuit is a dataflow between two end-points. Thus, to a first approximation, we can model a path as a dataflow that starts at a source device and ends at a destination device. Since, respectively, the arrival and departure rates at the source and destination device may not always match with the rate at which data is processed by the path, the input and output devices are decoupled from the path by an input and output queue. These queues loosely correspond to the socket queues of a virtual circuit.

For paths to be general, arbitrary processing must be supported as part of moving data from the input to the output queue of a path. For example, if a path is used to receive a file on an Ethernet network adapter and save it to a disk, then the processing might involve TCP/IP and FTP protocol processing, as well as file system and SCSI related processing to save the file on disk. In essence, this processing would transform a sequence of network packets into a sequence of SCSI disk blocks. This arbitrary processing can be represented by a function g. If the input data (message) is m, then the output data deposited in the output queue is $g(m)$. Note that this general processing in a path is in contrast to that of virtual circuits, where the processing function g is restricted to $g(m) = m$ (ignoring packet losses and/or corruptions).

The basic path as discussed so far is illustrated in Figure 2.3. Devices are represented as circles; the path is shown in the center of the figure with its input and output queues, and the processing function g.

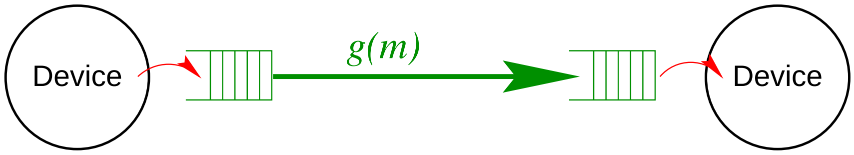

Figure 2.3: Simple Path

The input and output queues are needed to accommodate transients in the arrival and departure rates at the devices. However, the existence of those queues also implies that there is flexibility (within certain bounds) in choosing the time at which a data-item is moved from the path's input queue to its output queue. That is, the time at which $g(m)$ is evaluated is under explicit control of a *path scheduler*. Path scheduling loosely corresponds to the queue service discipline used in the routers that are crossed by a virtual circuit.

Note that there is no one-to-one correspondence between paths and device-pairs. The same device-pair can be connected by zero, one, or several paths. Using multiple paths between the same device-pair may be sensible since either the $g(m)$ or the scheduler may differ between the paths.

2.2.2 Path Processing

As alluded to earlier, the processing function g of a path can be arbitrarily complex. The question of what exactly determines g is best discussed with an example. Figure 2.4 repeats the modular system from Figure 2.2 but also shows a sample path as a bold line starting at module FDDI, passing through IP, UDP, MFLOW, MPEG, WiMP, and finally arriving at DISPLAY (for simplicity, the path queues are not shown).

Presumably, each module processes data in a well-defined manner. For example, when receiving input data m, module IP might apply standard IP processing. This would result in output data $g_{\mathrm{IP}}(m)$ which is the input data with the IP header stripped off. If we assume similar partial processing functions can be defined for the other modules along the path, then the processing that occurs along the path is equivalent to the composite of the

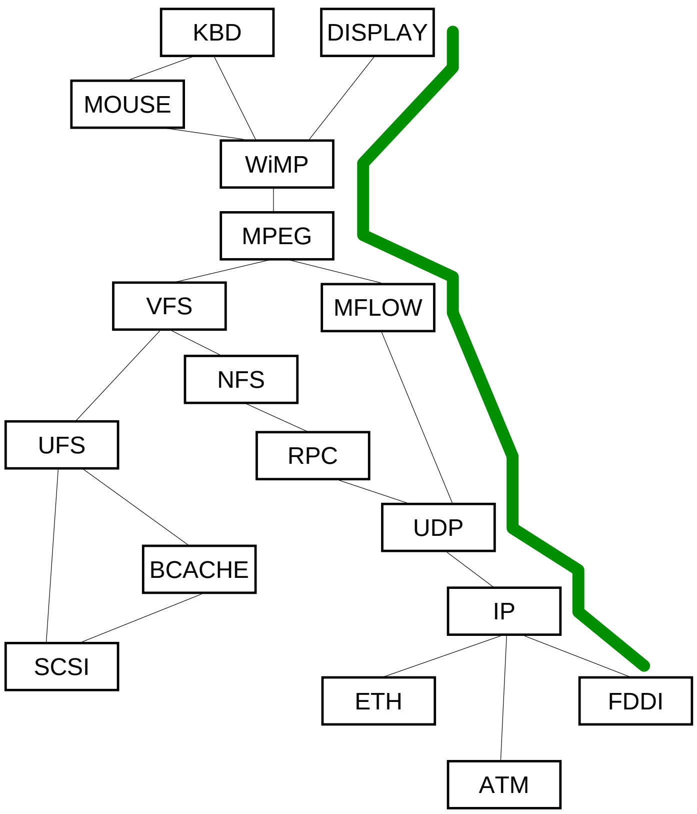

Figure 2.4: Example Path in Modular System

application of the partial functions along the path:

$$g(m) = g_{\text{DISPLAY}}(g_{\text{WiMP}}(g_{\text{MPEG}}(g_{\text{MFLOW}}(g_{\text{UDP}}(g_{\text{IP}}(g_{\text{FDDI}}(m)))))))$$

Note that the right-hand side corresponds exactly to what would happen in a purely modular system without paths. An advantage of paths is that the sequence of partial functions is known and fixed once the path has been created. Using a semicolon (;) as the functional infix operator denoting function composition [66], the path processing function g can be expressed as:

$$g = g_{\text{FDDI}}; g_{\text{IP}}; g_{\text{UDP}}; g_{\text{MFLOW}}; g_{\text{MPEG}}; g_{\text{WiMP}}; g_{\text{DISPLAY}}$$

This concisely demonstrates one of the fundamental benefits of paths: they make it possible to express g independent of the input data m. Among other things, this enables optimizing g by reducing or simplifying the functional composite. For example, suppose g consists of the composition $g_0; g_1; g_2; g_3$. If it turns out that g_2 is the inverse of function g_1, then g can be reduced to $g_0; g_3$.[1] In general, g can be partially evaluated. If, for example, one partial function depends on a part of the input data that has been added by another partial function and that part is constant, then it may be possible to significantly simplify the partial function that depends on this constant.

Note that our functional approach to defining a path's semantics should not be mistaken to imply a particular implementation. It is certainly possible to realize the partial processing functions as individual procedures in a programming language such as C, but it would be equally legitimate to construct a path from a sequence of basic blocks, for example.

2.2.3 Path Creation

A critical missing piece of the path model defined so far is how and when paths are created. In many cases it is beneficial to exploit information that is available at runtime only. For this reason, paths need to be created and destroyed dynamically at runtime. For example, to distinguish between a video stream requiring realtime service and a video stream requiring best-effort service only, it is typically necessary to take some runtime information into account to be able to distinguish the two. If the video streams arrive over the network, then the port-number of the corresponding network connections may furnish this information.

The issue of how to create a path is rather interesting. There are two possible approaches:

1. paths are pre-specified (externally), or

2. paths are created (discovered) incrementally.

[1] This example is more practical than it may seem at first glance: oftentimes, a network connection is local, meaning that the source and destination communicate through a loop-back device. Since the network protocol processing above the loop-back layer will cancel out, that protocol processing can, at least in principle, be removed from the path processing.

This division corresponds to the two sources of information that influence path creation: global (system-wide) and local (module-specific). Considering that a primary goal of paths is to exploit global information, it may seem like pre-specifying paths is the right solution. In such a case, the system would provide a table that translate the properties of the desired path into a sequence of modules that the path needs to traverse to satisfy these properties. Consider the example system shown in Figure 2.4. In this system, there could be a mapping that says that a path to display MPEG-encoded video on a graphics display must start at module FDDI, go through IP etc., and stops at module DISPLAY. In other words, the mapping would specify the path shown as the bold line in the figure.

Unfortunately, there are serious problems realizing this approach in practice. Pre-specifying a path often requires detailed knowledge of the internal workings of the modules encountered along a path. For example, whether the path in Figure 2.4 should go from IP to FDDI or to ATM will typically depend on the host that is sending the video and the routing information that is managed by the IP protocol. It certainly is imaginable to embed such detailed knowledge in the part of the system that would manage paths, but it is our contention that a much better solution is to follow the second approach, i.e., to create paths incrementally. With this approach, IP itself can make the decision whether or not the path should extend to ATM or FDDI.

Of course, when creating paths incrementally, there is the problem that path optimizations that depend on knowing the full path cannot be implemented this way. For this reason, incremental path creation must (in general) be followed by a second phase that takes the incrementally created path and transforms it into a globally optimized version. More on this later.

With these considerations in mind, we can now explain the path creation process in the proposed path model. When creating a path, it is first necessary to describe the kind of path that is desired. This description is in the form of name/value pairs. These pairs express information about the path that is guaranteed to remain true throughout the lifetime of the path. In other words, with respect to the lifetime of the path, these name/value pairs express *invariants*. In general, the more invariants are specified for a path, the better the quality of the path. This can be understood intuitively since we would expect that the more is known about a path, the easier it should be to create a well-optimized path.

Given a set of invariants, path creation is initiated at the module that is to form one end of the path. This module uses the invariants to make a *routing decision*, that is, a decision as to which module a path with the specified invariants must traverse next. Path creation is then forwarded to that next module. This process repeats itself until either there is no next module (i.e., the edge of the module graph has been reached) or until a module is reached that, based on the specified invariants, cannot make a definite routing decision. As part of making a routing decision, a module is free to update the invariants since new invariants may become available in that module or old invariants may be invalid beyond that module. Note that this does not contradict the requirement that invariants must hold true for the lifetime of the path. It simply means that there can be invariants that hold true only for a certain portion of a path.

2.2.3.1 Short Paths

An artifact of creating paths incrementally is that if the specified invariants are weak, the created path may be short. For example, with the module graph shown in Figure 2.4, UDP might create a path through IP specifying that *any* remote host is allowed to send packets to this path. In such a case, IP could not make a unique routing decision because packets could arrive through ETH, ATM, or FDDI. The resulting path would be short as it would go from UDP to IP only.

In the path model, paths therefore cannot be restricted to connecting device pairs. Instead, a path may connect any pair of modules. What are the implications of this? When a path is created, the creator expects a certain service from that path. That service must be rendered independent of whether the path happens to be short or long, although the quality or efficiency with which the service can be rendered may certainly be affected. In the previous example, IP would be responsible to ensure that packets for the short UDP-to-IP path are received independent of the remote host and it would also be responsible to forward such packets to the UDP-to-IP path. In other words, when a path terminates at a certain module, it is the responsibility of that module to ensure that data arriving on this path is continued to be processed appropriately. If the module is an interior module, this typically means that the module must make a *dynamic* routing decision that may lead to the data being forwarded to another (possibly also short) path. This case is illustrated in Figure 2.5. It depicts an interior module with a path that ends at this module and two paths that start at the module. When data arrives from the path above the module, it must make a dynamic routing decision to determined whether the data needs to be forwarded to the path at the lower left or the path at the lower right.

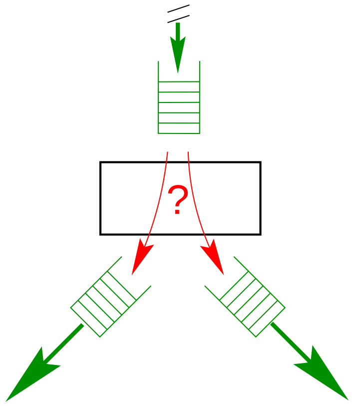

Figure 2.5: Dynamic Routing Decision

In the extreme case, a path may be so short that it simply connects a pair of neighboring modules. Of course, such degenerate paths do not help in avoiding the problems of purely modular systems, but the flip side of this coin is that the path model allows us to approximate a purely modular system with little extra complexity. In other words, for applications that are not performance sensitive and place no stringent demands on the quality of resource management they receive, it is possible to use short paths. This property also allows building prototypes quickly and optimize performance and behavior later, when the system is better understood.

2.2.3.2 Extending Paths

One difficulty that remains with the previously described path creation scheme is that it forces path creation to start at the end of a path. This can be illustrated easily in our running example from Figure 2.4. Let us consider how a user might specify the playback of a video in the illustrated system. Most likely, the user would issue a command instructing playing the video located at, e.g., http://www.mpeg1.de/movies/maze.mpg on, for example, the graphics display of the machine (as opposed to saving the video to a local disk). Thus, one end of the path is implicitly determined by the address of the video server (http://www.mpeg1.de/) and the other end by the specification of the output device (the graphics display). The entity creating the path can and should specify the video source and output devices as path invariants, but it should not have to know how to translate those names into the modules that will terminate the path.

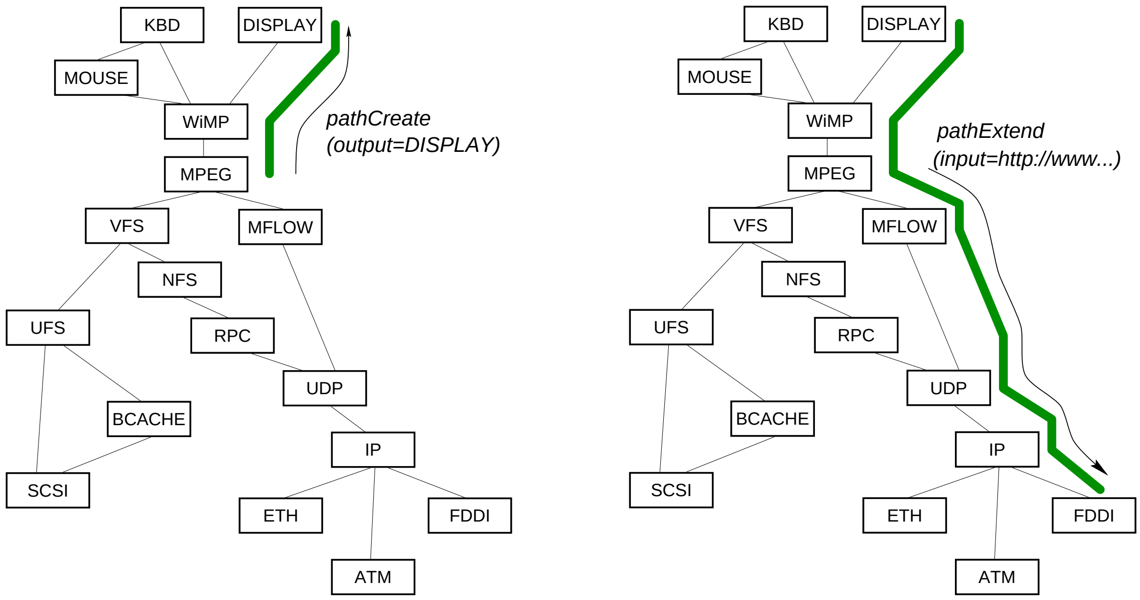

Figure 2.6: Path Creation Using `pathExtend`

An elegant solution is to split up path creation: when a command is received to display an MPEG encoded video, it is clearly necessary that the path contains the MPEG module.[2] Hence, path creation could start there and, in a first step, a (short) path from MPEG to the output device (DISPLAY) could be created. Then the path can be *extended* from MPEG to the module that provides the video source (FDDI, in our example). The

[2]One possible mechanism to determine the starting module will be presented later in Chapter 5.

first step can already by realized using the path creation operation with an invariant specifying the output device (see left hand side of Figure 2.6). For the second step, we need to add to the model a path extension operation. This operation works in the exact same way as path creation, except that, rather than being invoked on a module, it is invoked on the end of an existing path. The invariants specified for the path extension will of course be different from those specified for the path creation operation (though some may remain the same). In our example, the path extension operation would be invoked with an invariant specifying the URL of the video to be displayed. This is illustrated in the right hand side of Figure 2.6.

In such a scenario, there is not much point in applying global path optimizations right after creating a path that will be extended. Doing so would not cause incorrect behavior but it would most likely be wasteful. For this reason, it is best to keep global path optimization separate from path creation and extension. This also makes it possible to skip global path optimizations for paths that are not worth the added time or memory required to build an optimized path.

An alternative to path extension would be to first create two independent paths which are then combined at their common endpoint (at module MPEG, in the example). This solution was rejected since it would either necessitate transforming the identity of one path into that of the other or changing the path model to allow a hierarchical structure that can contain sub-paths. A change of identity might also necessitate moving resources reserved for one path to the other path, which is complex at best and impossible at worst. Hierarchical paths are undesirable as well since that would sacrifice the simple structure of paths. Both solutions would also suffer from the problem that a path combining operator would allow creation of nonsensical paths, such as circular paths. The path extension operator defined above suffers from none of these problems.

2.2.3.3 Optimization Phase

As explained earlier, paths are created incrementally, which results in maximum-length, though not necessarily optimal, paths. To obtain optimal paths, path transformations (optimizations) need to be applied in a second phase of path creation.

Abstractly, optimizing a path involves transformation rules which consist of $\langle$*guard*, *transformation*$\rangle$ pairs. If **Path** denotes the set of all possible paths, then the type signatures of the guard and the transformation functions are:

$$\begin{aligned} \mathit{guard} &: \mathbf{Path} \rightarrow \mathbf{Boolean} \\ \mathit{transformation} &: \mathbf{Path} \rightarrow \mathbf{Path} \end{aligned}$$

The idea of a transformation rule is that given a path p, $\mathit{guard}(p)$ is first evaluated. If true, p is replaced by $p' \leftarrow \mathit{transformation}(p)$, otherwise, $p' \leftarrow p$ (i.e., the path is used unmodified). Since a path represents a maximum length sequence of modules and all other information pertinent to the operation of the path, transformation rules have as much context available as is possible. The quality of path optimization is therefore limited only by how long the path is (some paths may be shorter than one would like ideally) and by the quality of the transformation itself. Since it is applied at runtime, the amount of time available to the transformation is certainly bounded and in most cases limited to relatively short time-spans. Since the transformation needs to operate within a limited time budget, it is often advantageous to precompute expensive parts of the transformation off-line. Examples of such transformations will be discussed in Chapter 4.

A real system is expected to employ many path transformation rules. When multiple rules exist, they are applied repeatedly and in no particular order. The optimization phase stops when no rule can be found whose guard evaluates to true. Note that this is a conceptual model. An actual implementation would likely attempt to exploit the structure that may be present in the guards of the rules. For example, rather than evaluating guards linearly, it may be possible to build a decision tree that reduces the number of guards that need to be checked for a newly created path.

2.2.3.4 Invariants

Invariants form the backbone of path creation and it is therefore worthwhile to discuss them in more detail. First, observe that invariants are essentially the vehicle that allows communicating information (knowledge) between modules. As such, the meaning of each name of an invariant must be universally agreed upon. Of course, each module does not have to know about all possible invariants, but it must be assured that if it uses an invariant of a given name, then every other module in the system must understand that invariant in the same way.

One question that arises is what a module should do if it encounters an invariant whose meaning it does not understand. It could either remove that invariant when passing on the path creation request, or it could leave it in the invariant set. The former is guaranteed to be safe, since it simply means that the path being constructed may end up being shorter than ideally would be the case. However, there are cases of important invariants that are known to be pervasive throughout the path. In such a case, it is desirable to tunnel such invariants through modules that do not understand their meaning. For this reason, two classes of invariants are defined: *limited* invariants that are removed when encountered by a module that does not understand them, and *pervasive* invariants that are passed through such modules unchanged. Finer-grained classifications are of course imaginable, but our experience is that this two-class scheme works well in practice.

At this point it may be helpful to discuss some concrete examples of invariants. Since invariants affect routing decisions, any kind of address information is typically specified as an invariant. For example, the path name of a datafile could be specified by an invariant named FILENAME. Similarly, the network address of a remote host that one wants to communicate with could be specified using an invariant called PARTICIPANT. Another kind of invariant that is often useful provides information about the data that will traverse the path. For example, if possible, it is often useful to specify a lower and upper bound on the size of a single data-item. Such an invariant obviously belongs to the class of limited invariants, since a module that does not understand this invariant may still change the size of any data-item passing through it. Thus, if the invariant were not limited, the module might unknowingly cause it to be violated. Data access patterns can also often be exploited, so specifying them as invariants is useful as well. For example, if a file is accessed in a strictly sequential fashion and its size is known, a cache module might be able to tell whether it is likely to be worthwhile to cache the file or whether it is better to leave the file uncached so other, already cached data does not get displaced. An example of a pervasive invariant may be one that indicates that the created path is intended to be used in a realtime environment. This property will be true independent of whether an intermediate module understands it or not.

This discussion should make it clear that there is a dependency between the invariants that can be usefully exploited and the invariants that can be specified. If the creator of a path does not know about the existence of some type of invariant, then it clearly cannot specify that invariant, even if it happens to be true for the path. Conversely, if a module does not know about the existence of an invariant, it cannot exploit it, even though it might be easy to do so if it had known about the invariant. Since it is not really possible to solve this dilemma perfectly, an iterative process seems appropriate. As will be discussed later on, Scout defines a (small) initial set of invariant names that are considered useful in exploiting various path benefits. As experience is collected and new means to exploit paths are invented, this set is bound to grow. This is unfortunate since it may require changing existing code to fully exploit new invariants (this is never required for correctness), but the hope is of course that this process will eventually converge on a manageable number and stable set of invariants.

2.2.3.5 Who Creates Paths?

The final question that needs to be answered with respect to path creation is: what is the entity that creates paths? In the path model we are proposing, this works as follows. When a system starts up, the constituent modules are initialized in some order. As part of its initialization, a module may elect to create one or more initial paths. After module initialization is complete, new paths may be created as a side effect of execution of other, already existing, paths. In other words, once the system is initialized, paths create paths.

For example, a networking service would typically create a path for its well-known address while its module is being initialized. Then, whenever it receives a new connection request, the service may elect to create a new path to handle the new connection. Similarly, a command-line interpreter is likely to create a path to the input device (e.g., the keyboard) during initialization. New paths are then created as a side-effect of handling key-strokes.

2.2.4 Generalized Paths

As defined so far, paths are simple and highly predictable: a data-item arrives at the input queue, the path is scheduled for execution, and the transformed data is deposited in the output queue. While this simplicity is ideal for the purpose of optimization, it also severely limits the usefulness of paths. It is thus necessary to extend paths to make them more widely applicable. The challenge is in doing this in a way that does not destroy the properties that make the path abstraction attractive in the first place.

2.2.4.1 Directionality

Basic paths are essentially unidirectional dataflows. To be able to communicate in both directions (source to destination and vice versa), it would therefore be necessary to create two paths. This is a workable solution in many cases, but is not sufficient in others. In particular, for request-response like applications, it is typically necessary to guarantee that a reply returns along the exact same path through which the corresponding request arrived. Just as important, from the point of a user of a path, it is more convenient if the path used to send a request is also the one that will yield the reply.

In other cases, the two dataflow directions are mutually dependent. For example, in networking protocols it is often convenient and more efficient to piggy-back information about the state of the receiver on packets produced by the sender. If the two directions were handled by separate paths, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to communicate the necessary information from the receiver path to the sender path. As a final argument, consider resource consumption. Unidirectional paths consume less resources (memory, primarily) in a system where most paths are unidirectional, but they would use more resources in a system where many path pairs are needed to emulate bidirectional path. This argues neither for nor against bidirectional paths. However, it seems much easier to optimize bidirectional paths that are used in a unidirectional manner only than it would be to optimize a path-pair, since the latter consists of two independent entities. Based on this slight advantage and the other considerations that suggest bidirectional paths, it appears that extending the path model to support bidirectional dataflows is appropriate.

To support bidirectional dataflows, the path model can be extended as follows. Each extended path has four queues—an input and an output queue for each of the two directions. Also, the path function g is extended to take a second argument d that gives the direction (*forward* or *backward*) in which the path should be traversed. The module specific partial processing functions are extended analogously.

The reason the two directions are called *forward* and *backward* is that a path may wind its way up and down through a module graph. Thus, terms commonly used in layered systems, such as *above* and *below* or *top* and *bottom* are meaningless for paths. Forward and backward are more neutral terms but it is important to understand that these are just labels—the two directions are completely symmetric as far as the path model is concerned.

2.2.4.2 Complex Processing

So far, the path model assumes that the path processing is *work conserving* in the sense that for every input data-item, there is exactly one output data-item.[3] This is limiting since it means that certain common operations cannot be accommodated. For example, it is not unusual for a module to consume multiple input data-items before producing output data. Conversely, some modules may respond with multiple output data-items for each input item. Finally, in some cases a module may generate a data-item spontaneously, e.g., in response to the expiration of an internal timeout.

For these reasons, it is necessary to loosen the evaluation rule for paths as follows. Suppose path processing consists of the composition of functions $g_1, \ldots, g_n$. With the new evaluation rule, a data-item may be injected at any one of these sub-functions and the invocation of g_i may result either in g_{i-1} or in g_{i+1} being invoked. That is, these sub-functions can be invoked in any order, subject to the restriction that only neighboring functions are invoked, or that the data be enqueued at an output queue. Note that in the extreme, this allows for a data-item to loop endlessly inside a path. Of course, few,

[3] *Work conserving* is often used in the context of queueing theory, but that use is only indirectly related to the way we employ the term here. The commonality is that in both contexts, the term means that no additional work is created inside a system itself.

if any, useful paths would do this. However, the fact that the path model allows for endless looping is analogous to universal (Turing-complete) programming languages [24] which must allow for the possibility of infinite looping even though most useful programs terminate in a finite amount of time.

2.3 Summary and Discussion

In summary, a path is created by invoking a create operation on a module and specifying a set of invariants. The invariants describe the properties of the desired path, and are used to determine a next module that must be traversed by data traveling along the path. The process of determining the next module is called *making a routing decision*, since it affects the route that the path takes through the module graph of the system. Routing decisions are made repeatedly until the path reaches its maximum length. This occurs either when the invariants are no longer strong enough to make a unique routing decision or when the edge of the module graph is reached. Each module that is traversed by a path supplies a partial processing function g_i that implements the semantics of the module for the path under construction. A detailed view of a path that traverses three modules is shown in Figure 2.7. In addition to path creation, there is a path extension operation that allows creating paths when only an interior instead of an endpoint module of the path is known.

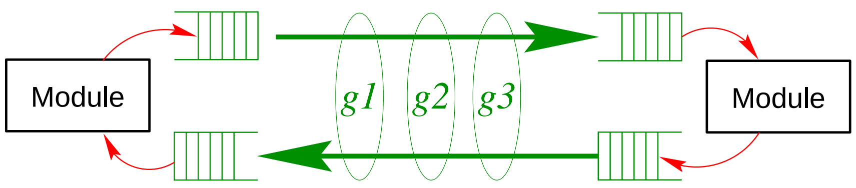

Figure 2.7: Example Path

Once a path has been created, the path optimization operation can be invoked on it. During this phase, transformation rules are applied repeatedly until none of the rules can be applied any longer. This allows to exploit optimizations that require the full context of the path for proper operation.

Path execution is decoupled from the data arrival and departure processes at the end-point modules by four queues. For each of the two directions of dataflow, there is an input and an output queue. Typically, path execution involves dequeuing data from an input queue and evaluating the g_i functions in sequence until the other end of the path is reached. However, for generality, a message may get absorbed in the middle of a path, or be turned around, or a new message may be created spontaneously inside a path.

2.3.1 Policy Issues

The path model defines a *mechanism* and avoids policy issues to the degree possible. Nevertheless, it is necessary to discuss the policy issues that arise as a result of this model.

Paths create a two-dimensional policy space. One dimension could be labelled *length* and the other *width*. The length of a path is related to how many modules it crosses. The width of a path is related to how specialized a path is. A highly specialized path would be considered narrow, whereas a general path would be considered wide. For example, a wide path may process data from many different remote hosts, whereas a narrow path may be tailored for the processing of data from one particular host.

It might seem that it is always desirable to create long and narrow paths. A long path has much of the global context available that is needed to achieve good performance. And a narrow path is specialized which further simplifies the task of creating a well-optimized path. But in reality, paths have costs: it takes both time and space to create them and having many paths means that each path will be used less often, meaning that there is less locality of use. Thus, the choice of whether a path should be long and/or narrow depends completely on the intended use of the path. Tasks that are not performance critical are usually best realized with short and wide paths, whereas performance critical tasks would most likely be realized with long, and possibly narrow, paths.

Since the path model is claimed to be policy-free, what parts of a path-based system do implement policy? Ultimately, it is the invariants that determine the route of a path and its width. Thus the creator of a path realizes policy by specifying more or fewer invariants. Similarly, a module making a routing decision is affecting policy by choosing to either honor or ignore a specified invariant. This means that path policy is not implemented in a well-defined, separate entity but instead is scattered throughout the various modules. This is not surprising since the width and length of a path cannot be specified without taking into account the semantics of each module that is traversed by the path. Of course, it would be possible to define an invariant that specifies the desired length of a path. Limiting a path's length is always possible, but forcing a minimum length is not, since an intermediate module may not be able to make a unique routing decision based on the specified invariants.

2.3.2 Intuitive Models

When reasoning about paths, it is often helpful to focus on one of the several aspects that make up a path. As a result, paths have many faces. Depending on the context in which they are being discussed or used, a path can be viewed as:

- a bidirectional dataflow,
- a processing pipe-line.
- a path of execution,
- a resource account, or
- a locus of identity.

When dealing with processing efficiency concerns, one of the first three views is typically employed, whereas for resource management problems, the latter two views are more helpful. Note that neither view is the correct one since no single view adequately captures all of the various aspects of paths.

2.3.3 Limitations

A limitation of the proposed path model is that it does not directly support any form of fan-in/fan-out or multicasting, loosely speaking. In the path model, this would be approximated either by several point-to-point paths or by a single path that covers the

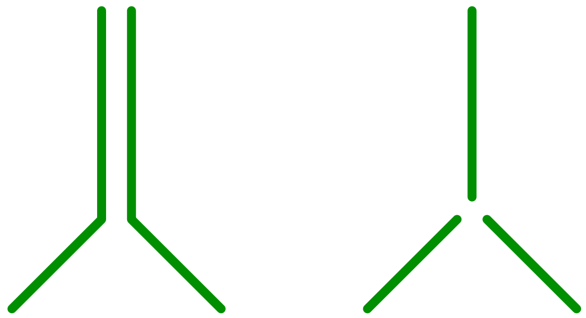

Figure 2.8: Approximating Fan-In/Fan-Out With Multiple Paths

common parts and then several small paths that cover the independent parts. The former solution is illustrated in the left hand side of Figure 2.8, the latter in the right hand side.

The absence of direct support for fan-in or fan-out is a limitation but at the same time a feature of paths. With multiple input or output points, code optimization techniques such as ILP could not always be realized because at path branching points, it would not be clear what module would be entered next. Similarly, for resource management it is often useful to know what the exact source or the destination of a data-item is. With fan-in and fan-out, this question could not be answered for all paths and would thus largely defeat the purpose of paths.

2.4 Applications

With the path model in place, it is time to discuss a few specific applications of paths. The goal of this section is provide a more concrete idea of how paths are used, and at the same time, argue that many ideas and techniques that have been implemented in an ad hoc fashion in the past, can be realized in a straight-forward manner using paths. In that sense, the path model is believed to be a unifying abstraction. However, this discussion should not be taken to mean that paths are limited to the specific examples given below. Rather, the path model should be considered a framework that simplifies realizing the specific examples and that should enable development of other path-based techniques that have yet to be discovered.

Broadly speaking, paths can provide two kinds of benefits: (1) they can improve code quality, and (2) they can improve resource management. The two kinds of benefits are typically independent, and hence, additive.

2.4.1 Code Optimizations

Paths can help improving the code quality by virtue of the fact that they allow partial evaluation of the path processing function, as explained in Section 2.2. A few specific examples follow below.

2.4.1.1 Code Synthesis

Pu et al. propose a runtime code synthesis technique that involves collapsing layers to avoid the overhead that is typically caused by crossing module or layer boundaries [86]. The technique allows further optimization of the collapsed code through factoring of invariants and elimination of data copying. For this technique to be applicable, it is necessary to know the invariants that are true for the code-path through the system that is to be optimized. In addition, it is necessary to know the sequence of functions that need to be collapsed. The path model proposed in this chapter provides both kinds of information and thus makes this technique readily applicable.

2.4.1.2 Integrated Layer Processing

For this technique (see Section 1.4.1.2) to be applicable, it is necessary to know the sequence of data-processing steps that a network packet will follow. The path model can trivially support this kind of application since the sequence of modules being traversed is known and fixed for the lifetime of a path. A combination of the language-based ILP approach presented by Abbott and Peterson [1] and paths should therefore enable making ILP a truly practical technique.

2.4.1.3 PathIDs

The PathID approach (see Section 1.4.1.3) consists of a combination of two techniques: a mechanism to efficiently find the path for a network packet and a highly sophisticated partial evaluator—namely a human being. The issue of how paths are located is not part of the path model proper, but as will be discussed in Section 3.4, a solution to this problem is needed in any path-based system, and as such, the PathID technique is applicable. More interesting to the path model is the way the hand-optimized (partially evaluated) code is employed. This could be done by specifying a path transformation rule that matches the sequence of network protocols that were manually optimized. If a path contains a sequence for which hand-optimized code exists, the old (unoptimized) code in the path can be replaced with this manually optimized version.

2.4.1.4 Single-Copy TCP/IP

As far as the path model is concerned, the single-copy TCP/IP technique discussed in Section 1.4.1.4 is almost identical to PathIDs. Again, unoptimized code is replaced by highly tuned, manually written code.

2.4.1.5 Summary

The four examples discussed above all depend on being able to associate optimized code with a particular path. They all differ in what type of partial evaluation they apply, but fundamentally they are all quite similar in that they exploit the linear structure that is often present in the performance critical code. The defined path model therefore is ideally suited for this kind of code-related optimizations.

2.4.2 Resource Management

The second kind of benefits that the path model affords is related to improved resource management. A discussion of three applications that exploit this follows.

2.4.2.1 Fbufs

Fbufs [29] are a path-oriented buffer management mechanism designed to efficiently move data across multiple modules that are in different protection domains. This technique depends on knowing the sequence of modules that will be traversed by a data-item. In addition, it requires a provision for path-specific memory allocators. Both requirements can be accommodated easily in the proposed path model.[4]

2.4.2.2 Migrating/Distributed Threads

Migrating (distributed) threads [19, 45, 37] address the issue of anonymity of processing that often poses problems in modular systems. Typically, when data enters a new module, information on whose behalf the data is being processed is lost. Since, in the path model, all execution is in the context of paths, they can serve the same purpose as distributed threads. In essence, this application uses paths as an account that can be charged for resources (e.g., memory or CPU cycles) that are consumed as part of the data processing.

2.4.2.3 Segregation of Work

The dataflow view of paths is important when building systems that require offering distinct quality-of-service (QoS) to different data streams (applications). In a modular system, lower layers often mix processing of different data streams. This multiplexing makes it difficult to provide differentiated service. Paths force a segregation of work on a per-path basis. Thus, as long as each service class is represented by a separate path, even lower layer modules can easily distinguish between the needs of different streams and provide service accordingly. For example, when processing data with a realtime constraint, the deadline by which the data needs to be processed could be associated with the path. This makes the deadline accessible and visible to all modules along the path as well as to the path scheduler itself.

[4] Note that the Scout implementation of the path model that will be presented in Chapter 3 does not support protection domains. But this does not mean that the path model could not be applied to systems with multiple protection domains.

2.5 Related Work

At the surface, paths are similar to UNIX pipes [89] and Pilot streams [87]. While all three have in common a linear sequence of *components* (processes in UNIX, Mesa modules in Pilot, modules in the path model), neither pipes nor streams provide any global context to the individual components. Neither do they attempt to optimize the code along a path. It is also the case that UNIX pipes are more coarse-grain and unidirectional.

The system that is, at least terminology-wise, close to the proposed path model is Da CaPo [40]. Da CaPo stands for *dynamic configuration of protocols* and defines an infrastructure for building multimedia protocols. It has an explicit notion of paths, but there are important differences to our proposed path model at all levels. At lowest level, Da CaPo paths are unidirectional and the partial processing functions have restricted semantics (they are essentially non-blocking event-handlers). As a result, Da CaPo is not universal or even powerful enough to accommodate all but the most basic tasks that arise from network protocol processing. Another important difference is that path creation is left completely to an external *configuration manager*. As pointed out in Section 2.2.3, this means that in any reasonably complex system, the configuration manager will be burdened by detailed knowledge of the internal workings of particular modules. In contrast, the path model makes it easy to exploit both local and global information during path creation. At a higher level, Da CaPo focuses completely on *automatically selecting* appropriate protocol functionality; performance and resource management appear to be lesser issues to Da CaPo.

CORDS is a communication subsystem by the Open Group (formerly Open Software Foundation) that is based on the *x*-kernel [49]. It employs a path abstraction that is based on early work that lead to the path model proposed here. As such, paths as presented in [105] are limited in several ways. First, they are applicable in the communication subsystem only. Second, they do not admit path-oriented code optimizations as discussed in Section 2.4.1. Third, they do not admit paths that are shorter than anticipated or desired. Indeed, it is not clear whether CORDS would be able to detect and handle such cases. A final, and arguably the most significant, difference is that in CORDS, paths are defined as an add-on abstraction that is often in conflict with other abstractions (e.g., session objects in the *x*-kernel). In contrast, the path model proposed here provides a unifying and general path abstraction.

In addition to the above mentioned work, there is a wealth of research on mechanisms that offer point-solutions to the more general problem of exploiting paths, both as a code optimization and resource management framework. Examples of code, or fast-path optimizations include Synthesis [60], Synthetix [85], PathIDs [56], Protocol Accelerators [107], and integrated layer processing [16, 1]. Examples in the second category include processor capacity reserves [64], distributed/migrating threads [19, 37], and Rialto activities [52]. These related works do not attempt to define an explicit and universal path abstraction, but are a source of interesting examples of how paths can be employed.

The work on Synthetix is also interesting in that it introduces the notion of *quasi-invariants*. Quasi-invariants are similar to invariants as discussed in Section 2.2.3.4 but differ in that they may become invalid during the lifetime of a path. The idea behind quasi-invariants is that, in some cases, invariants are likely to be true for a long time-span, but there is a chance that they may become invalid at any point in time. Supporting quasi-invariants enables exploiting such almost invariants and thus allow for more aggressive optimization. They also introduce more complexity in the path model, since invalidation of a quasi-invariant will require corrective actions. There is no reason to believe that the proposed model could not be extended to accommodate quasi-invariants, but this avenue of research has not been explored as part of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 3

SCOUT ARCHITECTURE

Nobody trips over mountains.
It is the small pebble that causes you to stumble.
Pass all the pebbles in your path and
you will find you have crossed the mountain.

– Unknown

This chapter describes the most important aspects of the Scout architecture, which includes its modular system, its path implementation, how it demultiplexes (classifies) data onto paths, and its execution model. The goal of this chapter is to motivate and discuss architectural issues of Scout that are interesting and novel. For a comprehensive and detailed description of the various programming interfaces, the reader is referred to the Scout manual [101].

3.1 Overview

Scout is an operating system designed for information appliances such as set-top boxes, or file- and web-servers. It is implemented in C [57], founded on a modular structure and built around the path abstraction which makes it suitable for the communication-oriented nature of appliances. The current system supports both best-effort and soft realtime scheduling. It is optimized for the needs of appliances and, at present, does not support multiple address spaces, protection domains, or shared-memory multiprocessors.

The reason for limiting the initial realization of Scout to simple uniprocessors is twofold. First, we expect that many appliances will not require more than what is currently provided by Scout. This is a direct consequence of the characteristics of appliances: they are specialized and often relatively small. Thus, shared memory multiprocessors and multiple protection domains are unlikely to be a requirement of many appliances.

Second, simplifying the structure of Scout allows us to focus on the intrinsic issues of communication-oriented systems. For example, it allows designing the path abstraction without worrying about how well it would be supported by the protection mechanisms of current hardware. This is a valid approach since it may be desirable and reasonable to change current hardware abstractions in response to the needs of communication-oriented systems. On the other hand, this approach bears the danger of conjuring up abstractions that have no hope of ever being able to run efficiently in a more complex system. While this danger exists, we have no reason to believe that this is the case for the Scout system presented in this chapter. Indeed, as the system is developed, informal arguments are presented as to why and how it could be extended to more complex environments.

With the above considerations in mind, it should be no surprise that conformance with standard programming interfaces, such as POSIX [94], is not a primary goal of Scout. An understanding of how existing interfaces support or interfere with the needs of a communication-oriented system could be useful, but is a secondary issue. In contrast to the internal programming interfaces, the external communication protocols are considered a given. This is not to say that existing protocols are sufficient or that they could not be improved upon, but it does mean that Scout must be capable of supporting existing, wide-spread protocols such as the Internet's TCP and IP protocols.

3.1.1 Scout Epochs

Before going into the details of Scout, it is useful to discuss the various epochs in a Scout system that are illustrated in Figure 3.1. The first epoch occurs when individual modules are implemented by a programmer. At a later time, the system designer decides what kind of paths are likely to be important to system performance. For those, path transformations can be implemented as described in Chapter 2. Once these are realized, the desired functionality for a particular information appliance is chosen by selecting the appropriate modules and connecting them into a module graph. At the same time, the designer can also specify complete path transformation rules (i.e., pick the appropriate path transformations and associate them with the proper guards). When this is all done, the system (kernel) is built. All steps mentioned so far are considered to occur during *build* *time*. In contrast, *runtime* covers all the steps that occur after the system has been booted on the target machine. During that time, paths may be created, used, and destroyed.

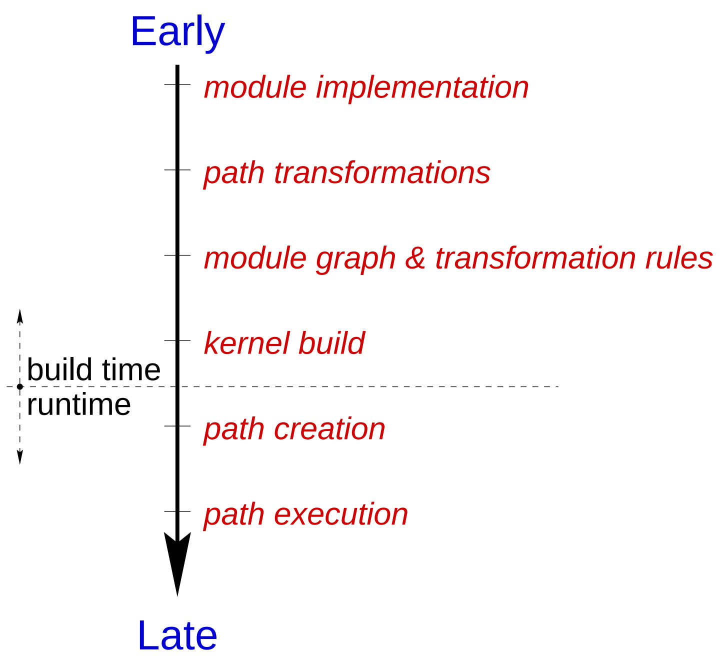

Figure 3.1: Scout Development Timeline

3.2 Modularity

Modules are the unit of program development in Scout. In the Scout implementation, modules are actually called *routers* to encourage thinking of them as entities that route data through the system and also to avoid the overloaded term *module*. The flip-side of this convention is, of course, that the term *router* sometimes causes confusion when speaking of Scout in the context of communication networks that employ conventional network routers. Independent of the implementation, this dissertation continues to use the term *module* for the sake of consistency.

3.2.1 Module Granularity

The choice of the granularity of modules is important since modularity is not free of costs. First, modularity often causes runtime overhead. Sometimes, the overhead is due to the limited context that is available when building the modules. For example, the programmer may not know in what context the module will be used and therefore is forced to implement the most general case, or independent compilation limits the context available to the compiler's optimizer, making it difficult to optimize across module boundaries. Second, modularity implies the use of standardized interfaces. These interfaces ensure that a large number of module pairs can be connected to form new and interesting systems. However, adhering to these relatively strict and difficult-to-change interfaces forces implementing modules in a way that is often suboptimal. For example, auxiliary data sometimes needs to be packaged into abstract data types to communicate them across module boundaries. Consequently, dividing up a system into the smallest possible modules is generally not a good idea. On the other hand, the extreme case of not using modules at all is certainly not ideal either since that would be equivalent to building a vertically integrated system.

Out of these considerations, a Scout module is expected to provide a well-defined and independent functionality. Well-defined means that there usually is either a standard, interface specification, or other existing practice that defines the exact functionality of a module. Independent means that each single module should, by itself, provide a useful, independent service. That is, the module should not depend on there being other specific modules connected to it. While Scout does not enforce these rules, they are assumed in the design. As a result, Scout works best when modules have an intermediate level of granularity. Typical examples are modules that implement networking protocols, such as IP, UDP, or TCP; modules that implement storage system components, such as VFS, UFS, or SCSI; and modules that implement drivers for the various device types in the system. Examples of modules that, for Scout, are likely too fine-grained include the IP fragmentation algorithm, the MPEG inverse discrete cosine transform, or the UDP checksumming algorithm.

Given that Scout claims to be able to avoid the disadvantages of modularity by using paths, it may be surprising that it does not advocate modules of the smallest possible granularity. The reason for this is two-fold. First, paths primarily address inefficiencies due to limited optimization context. It is distinctly more difficult to automatically avoid overhead that arises due to interface mismatches. Of course, it would be possible to manually implement an optimized path that avoids interface mismatches, but whenever possible, it is preferable that efficient paths be created automatically from the underlying modules. Second, there is also a third cost to modularity: the act of decomposing a system into modules takes time and consideration. If the resulting modules are so small that they can be used in only one possible module configuration (i.e., they cannot be reused), then nothing is gained. In other words, there is no advantage to going below a certain level of granularity.

3.2.2 Module Structure

Abstractly, a Scout module implements a certain functionality and provides access to this functionality through *services*. Each service provides access to one aspect of the module's functionality. For example, modules often provide filter-like functionality, which could be realized by a pair of services: one service representing the filter's input, the other the filter's output. However, the number of services provided is not limited to two, but is determined by the module. In the degenerate case, a module might not have any services at all, though such an isolated module would not be very interesting as it could not be connected to any other module. More typically, modules provide on the order of two or three services. The services in an module are assigned unique names to make it possible to reference and distinguish them. Other than the requirement that the names are unique, they can be arbitrary strings. Since services are accessed by other modules, they also have a type associated that specifies the protocol (language) that the service uses to communicate. The exact meaning of this type will be discussed later in this chapter. For now, it is sufficient to know that each service has a name and type associated with it.

An example module is shown in Figure 3.2. The big box represents a run-length compression filter [91]. The two nested boxes represent services: `plain` provides access to the plain, uncompressed data and `compr` provides access to the run-length compressed

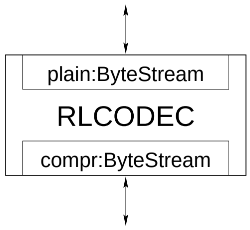

Figure 3.2: Module With Two Services

data. Both services are of type `ByteStream`. As shown in the figure, it is customary in Scout to separate the service name from its type by a colon (a convention adopted from Pascal-like languages [20]). Suppose `ByteStream` represents a bidirectional stream of data bytes. In this case, data sent into the `plain` service would be run-length encoded and sent out through the `compr` service. Conversely, data sent into the `compr` service would be run-length decoded and then passed on through the `plain` service. This is the reason the module is called RLCODEC: it provides both run-length encoding and decoding functionality.

Concretely, a Scout module is implemented as a collection of C source files. Each module is described by a so-called *spec* file that lists the names of the C source files that belong to the module and the services that the module provides. The syntax for spec files is shown below:

```
module name {
    files = {filename, ...};
    service = {[<]name:type, ...};
}
```

As indicated, a service name may optionally be preceded by a less-than marker (<). This is used to constrain module-initialization order and is discussed in detail in Section 3.2.3.2. For the run-length codec module in Figure 3.2, the *spec* file might look as shown here:

```
module RLCODEC {
  files = {rl-encoder.c, rl-decoder.c, rlcodec.h};
  service = {plain:ByteStream, compr:ByteStream};
}
```

The spec file completely defines a module: it specifies its functionality (semantics) by listing the C files that belong to the module and it defines the external interface to the module by listing the names and types of each service. Each module *m* is expected to export a global C function called *m*`Create`. This function is used to create a module at runtime, as explained later in this section.

3.2.3 Module Graph

To form a complete system, individual modules need to be connected into a module *graph*. A module graph consists of a collection of modules whose services are connected in a (hopefully) meaningful manner. For example, to build a network-attached camera whose video data should be run-length encoded before being sent out on the network, one could use the module graph shown in Figure 3.3. In this graph, RLCODEC represents the run-length codec introduced earlier in this chapter, CAMERA is the device driver for the camera, MONITOR is a device driver for the small monitoring display of the camera, and NETWORK is the module implementing network support (in reality, the networking subsystem is likely to consist of multiple modules). Recall that a `ByteStream` is a bidirectional data streams, so in this simplistic example, commands that are sent from the network to the camera would have to be run-length encoded as well.

In Scout, the module graph of a system is described by the file `config.graph`. This file consists of a list of module declarations, followed by a list of connections. The two lists are separated by an at-sign (`@`). The syntax of this file is illustrated below:

```
name=iname module=mname; ...
@
iname1.sname1<>iname2.sname2; ...
```

In this description, *iname* represents an *instance* name, *mname* a module name, and *sname* a service name. The graph description distinguishes between the instance name and the module name to allow using the same functionality (module) in multiple places in the module graph. Instance names can be arbitrary strings as long as they are unique within a module graph. To keep the discussions in this dissertation simple, we generally will not distinguish between a module (a given functionality implemented by a collection of

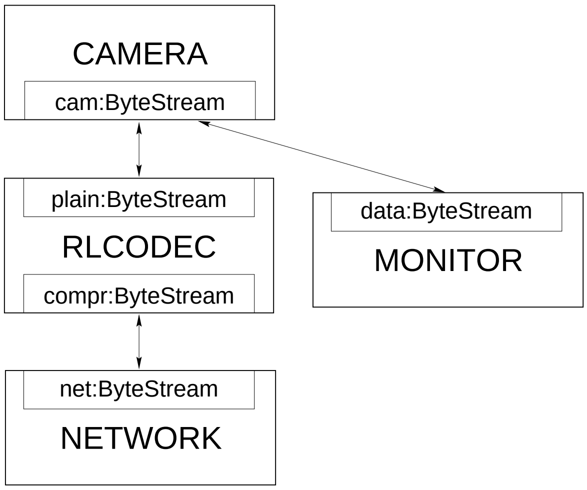

Figure 3.3: Modular Graph for Network-Attached Camera

C files) and the instantiation of a module (the type of object that the module graph is composed of). Analogously, if the instance name of a module is omitted in a graph description file, the module name is used by default. In the graph description file, the binary operator <> represents a connection between the module/service pair mentioned on the left hand side, and the module/service pair on the right hand side.

```
module=CAMERA; module=RLCODEC; module=NETWORK;
module=MONITOR;
@
CAMERA.cam<>RLCODEC.plain;
RLCODEC.compr<>NETWORK.net;
CAMERA.cam<>MONITOR.data;
```

Figure 3.4: Graph Description File for Network-Attached Camera

The graph shown in Figure 3.3 could be implemented by the graph description file shown in Figure 3.4. Most of the connections in this graph are straight-forward. Note, however, that the `cam` service of module CAMERA has been connected twice: once to the `plain` service of RLCODEC and once to the `data` service of MONITOR. In general, the number of connections allowed is both service and module dependent. The current implementation of Scout does not provide the means to express such constraints in the module's spec file, but modules can ensure at runtime that the correct number of connections have been made. This is the most flexible solution since the logic verifying the connection count can take into account all of the information available at runtime; e.g., the number of expected connections may very well depend on the number of connections made to another service of the same module. On the other hand, the experience gained so far suggests that most services expect either at most one, exactly one, at least one, or an arbitrary number of connections. Thus, supporting these constraints in the spec file would seem like a good idea since that would help to catch most configuration errors at system build time instead of at runtime. Moreover, this solution would not sacrifice flexibility: in the case where none of the four proposed constraints is perfectly appropriate, the service could specify *arbitrary number of connections* as the constraint in the spec file and perform the actual verification at runtime, as is presently done.

The semantics of multiply connecting the same service is also module dependent. In the case of the CAMERA module, it presumably would mean that video data is sent to both connections and that commands are accepted from either one. Multiple connections are commonly used by modules that do some form of multiplexing and demultiplexing among multiple data streams. Such modules essentially *route* data through the module.

Finally, as Figure 3.3 shows, a module graph often represents a layered system. That is, higher-level modules provide services that are implemented in terms of other, lower-level services. For reasons of flexibility, Scout does not, however, enforce strict layering. Cyclic module graphs are admissible as long as there is a partial (non-cyclic) order in which the modules can be initialized; more on this later.

3.2.3.1 Compatibility

A pair of services can be connected in the module graph only if they are compatible. For the purpose of compatibility testing, a service consists of a pair of interface names: the first element specifies the name of the interface that the service *provides* and the second element specifies the name of the interface that the service *expects*. Interfaces are explained in detail in Section 3.3, but for the purpose of this discussion, it is sufficient to think of an interface as a collection of (typed) routines that can be called by the user of the interface.

A pair of services is considered compatible if the interface *provided* by one service is compatible with the interface *expected* by the other service and vice versa. Suppose the `ByteStream` service had been declared like this:

```
service ByteStream = <ByteStreamIface, ByteStreamIface>
```

This would mean that a service of type `ByteStream` provides an interface of type `ByteStreamIface` and also expects an interface of the same type. This implies that a `ByteStream` service can be connected to any other `ByteStream` service. Asymmetric services are of course possible. The most common asymmetric case is where a service provides an interface but does not expect any interface (or vice versa). This is used for connections in which communication can be initiated in one direction only.

The current Scout implementation does not check for compatibility in a module graph. Supporting this would again catch more configuration errors early in the lifetime of a system, namely during build time.

3.2.3.2 Runtime Representation and Module Initialization

During build time, the module graph exists in the form of the `config.graph` description. Scout also provides an explicit representation of the module graph at runtime. This makes it possible to address connections in the graph by names that are computable at runtime (the names are actually integer indices). For example, the CAMERA module described earlier needs to send out the video data on all connections to its `cam` service. With a runtime representation of the graph, this can be achieved with a simple `for`-loop.

Each module *m* exports a global function called *m*`Create` that creates and returns an object representing the module. The prototype for these functions is shown below:

```
Module mCreate (String n, int c[]);
```

Formal argument `n` specifies the instance name of the module and `c` is an array that specifies how many times each service has been connected to other services. The module creation function can verify the connection counts and, if correct, return the newly created module, or if incorrect, return `NULL`. The module creation functions are called by the Scout runtime system at boot time. The order in which the modules are created is unspecified.

The value returned by the module creation function is a pointer to a C structure of the following type:

```
typedef struct Module {
  String          name;
  String          module_name;
  long            (*init)(Module m);
  CreateStageFunc createStage;
  DemuxFunc       demux;
  struct ModuleLink {
    Module        module;
    int           service;
  }               links[][];
} * Module;
```

The members `name` and `module_name` hold the instance and module name of the module, respectively. Function pointer `init` is used to initialize the module. It is called once the entire module graph has been built, that is, after all modules have been created and connected according to the module graph description. The `createStage` and `demux` members are function pointers that are used in conjunction with path creation and demultiplexing, respectively. These will be described later. The last member, `links`, is a two-dimensional array of connections to other services. The first dimension in the array is indexed by the service name and the second dimension is indexed by the instance number. For example, for the graph in Figure 3.3, `links[cam][0].module` would point to the object representing module RLCODEC and `links[cam][0].service` would be the index that corresponds to the `plain` service. Similarly, `links[cam][1].module` would point to the object representing module MONITOR and expression `links[cam][1].service` would evaluate to the index that corresponds to the `data` service of that module. The mapping from service names to integers is performed automatically by the Scout infrastructure. It ensures that the service indices of a module with *n* services will be unique and in the range from $0 \ldots n-1$. Other than that, the mapping is arbitrary. The analogous applies to the numbering of service connections.

As alluded to in the previous paragraph, the module initialization functions are called once the runtime version of the module graph has been created. To a first approximation, the order in which these functions are called is arbitrary. However, it is not uncommon that initialization of a module requires the invocation of services provided by other modules. In support of this, the initialization order can be constrained using the less-than marker described in 3.2.2. When a module is initialized, it is guaranteed that all modules connected through services that are marked in this way have already been initialized. In other words, the less-than marker imposes a partial order on module initialization. A valid module graph may not contain any cyclic dependencies in the module initialization order constraints.

3.2.4 Discussion

An interesting question is whether the choice of C as the implementation language complicates the problem of realizing a modular system. If that were the case, then clearly a more appropriate language would be desirable. However, there is little reason to believe this to be true. For example, consider object-oriented languages. The main feature of Scout's module infrastructure is that it moves the point at which external interfaces are bound from the time a module is implemented to the time a system is configured (cf., Figure 3.1). With an object-oriented language, the same can be achieved by realizing each type of service as a separate class. Assuming modules are represented by their own class, then a module could be instantiated by passing one service object for each connection in the module graph. But in effect, this is just a slightly different implementation from the modular system described earlier. In other words, object-oriented languages do not, by themselves, provide a form of modularity that would be sufficient for Scout.

Just as important, a key challenge to building modular systems is to find and define an appropriate set of interfaces. There are two conflicting goals in selecting interfaces. On the one hand, an interface should be well-suited to the needs of a module. Otherwise, using the interface might be cumbersome and cause additional overhead for the module. On the other hand, if this were followed to the extreme, then every module might end up using its own interface, meaning that they could not connected in to a useful module graph. Note that this issue, too, is completely independent of the implementation language.

So, in summary, there seem to be few and only minor disadvantages to using a relatively low-level language such as C. A major advantage of C, as far as systems programming, is concerned is the transparency it affords: since it operates at such a low level, it is generally easy to guess what kind of machine code a given piece of source code translates into. This reduces the likelihood of small changes in the source code inadvertently leading to large performance differences. In this sense, using a language such as C improves predictability at the programming level. The biggest disadvantage of using C is likely to be found not in convenience-of-use issues, but in suitability for optimization. For example, high level functional languages such as SML are more amenable to aggressive optimization than C [8]. But the high level of abstraction that enables these aggressive optimizations is also the reason that makes such languages difficult to compile into code as efficient as C. As long as there is a performance differential on the order of a factor of two or more, C appears to be a more practical choice.

Another modularity issue worth discussing is that the Scout module graph is presently configured at build time and, hence, it is not possible to extend the graph at runtime. However, it is straight-forward to add a dynamic module-loading facility to Scout. The biggest issue in doing so is the security issue, not the actual dynamic loading. An alternative to extending the module graph at runtime would be to configure a virtual machine module into the graph that would allow interpreted code to be downloaded and executed inside Scout [39, 25].

3.3 Paths

This section describes how paths are realized in Scout. Scout paths closely follow the model presented in Chapter 2. Since paths make frequent use of lists of name/value pairs, this section begins with a description of *attributes*—the Scout representation of name/value pairs.

Each path is represented by several nested C objects. Since they recursively depend on each other, they cannot be described in a linear fashion without forward references. Thus, the approach taken here is to first present an overview of the objects involved, then to discuss each of them individually in more detail. The descriptions of the objects is followed by an introduction to path dynamics, which involves issues such as how paths are created, used, and destroyed. The section concludes with a brief evaluation and discussion of paths as implemented in Scout.

3.3.1 Attributes

In Scout, an attribute is a name/value pair. The corresponding C type is called `Attr`. The name of an attribute is a (unique) integer index that is usually written in the form of a manifest constant. In contrast, the value can be of arbitrary type. The name of the attribute implies the type of the value. In this sense, an attribute can be thought of as a tagged union variable. Since the association between attribute name and the attribute's value type is by convention, it is not explicitly represented in the implementation. For example, the attribute with name MAX_SIZE might (by convention) have a value of type integer. Similarly, the attribute with name PEER_ADDR might have a value that is a pointer to a network address.

Sets of attributes are implemented in Scout by an abstract type called `Attrs`. A variable of this type can hold an arbitrary number of attributes. The operations supported on attribute sets include insertion, and removal of attributes, enumeration of the attributes present in the set, and membership test.

Why are attributes so important in Scout? They basically serve two different, but equally fundamental roles. During path creation, attributes convey path invariants. In this case, they are primarily a substitute for the variable length argument list support that is missing in the C language (varargs are not defined by the *language*, but by the *runtime system*). But it is more than that. Attribute lists turn argument lists into first class objects, that is, they make it possible to enumerate all elements in an argument list under program control, and to dynamically add and remove elements in it.

The second role of attributes is in serving as information repositories that allow mutually anonymous parties to communicate through a third, common party. Consider a path that requires realtime scheduling. For such a path, there typically exists a deadline by which a task has to be completed. The entity that can compute the deadline may be somewhere in the middle of the path, but a device driver that enqueues newly arrived data for the path may need to know what the current deadline is, so it can schedule the path in an appropriate manner. This problem can be solved easily by using an attribute stored in the path. All that is required is that the users of attributes agree that, for example, attribute DEADLINE specifies a task deadline in units of micro-seconds. This attribute attached to the path allows communicating the deadline from the middle of the path to the device driver at the edge of the path. Note that this communication is anonymous: the producer of the deadline does not know who makes use of the attribute and conversely, the consumer does not know who produced the attribute. Also, the path object holding the attributes does not have to understand the meaning of the attributes stored in it.

3.3.2 Visual Overview of a Scout Path

Figure 3.5 presents an enlarged view of the path and module graph originally presented in Figure 2.4. The path is shown as the big rectangular box in the right half of the figure. For space reasons, the middle of the path has been cut out of the figure. Internally, the path contains four queues, shown near the top and bottom of the box representing the path. It also contains several smaller boxes called *stages*. As indicated, there is one stage per module that the path traverses. Inside stages there are various labelled arrows. The exact meaning of these arrows will be described in Section 3.3.4. Aside from the queues and the stages, the path contains other minor objects which have been omitted in the figure for the sake of clarity.

The stages inside the path are created by the modules along the path; e.g., the figure suggests that the bottom-most stage was created by FDDI. Stages provide a place to store information that is path-specific, but private to the modules. For example, the stage created by module IP might contain a pre-formatted IP-header that is used when sending data from the path to the network. Since no other module along the path needs to know about IP headers, it is best to store it in the stage created by module IP.

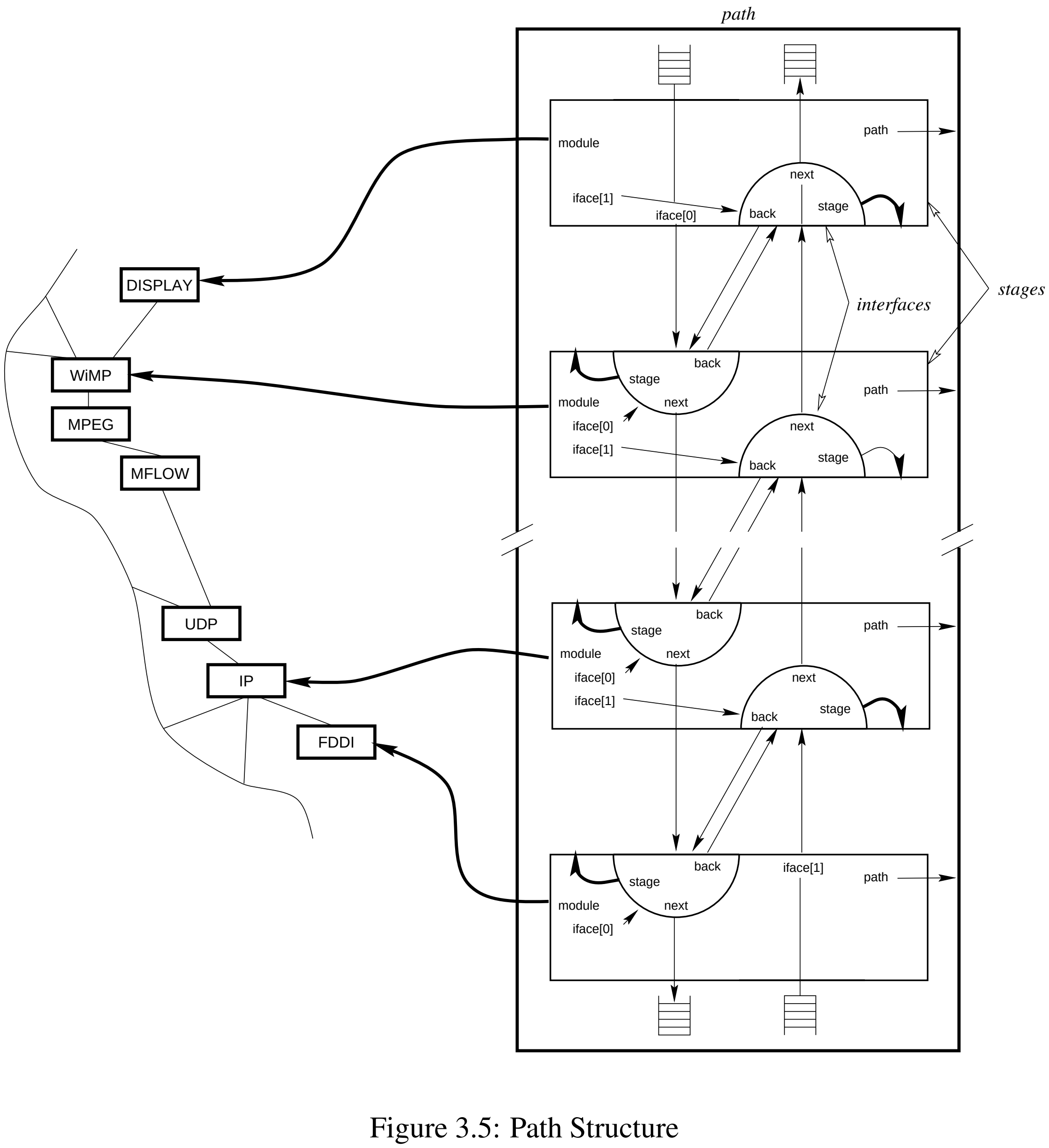

Figure 3.5: Path Structure

The figure also shows that stages contain semi-circular shapes, called *interfaces*. An interface provides a controlled (type-checked) way to move data from one stage to the next one. Interior stages typically have a pair of interfaces (one per direction) whereas stages at the ends of the path typically contain just one interface.

The figure further shows that interfaces are chained together. The interfaces in the left half of the path are used to move data from the top end of the path towards the bottom, whereas the interfaces in the right half are used to move data from the bottom end towards the top. As discussed in Chapter 2, it is sometimes necessary to turn around the direction in which data flows. This is supported by the arrows in the interfaces that are labelled *back*. That is, when data arrives at an interface, it is possible to continue moving it in the same direction by passing it along the arrow labelled *next*, or it can be turned around and passed along the arrow labelled *back*.

3.3.3 Path Object

The most important elements of the actual Scout path object are shown in the C structure below. In addition to the members shown, the Scout path object contains state that assists the creation, extension and destruction of paths. That state has been omitted since it is not relevant to the discussions presented here.

```
typedef struct Path {
  long         pid;
  Stage        end[2];
  PathQueue    q[4];
  struct Attrs attrs;
  bool         realtime;
  u_long      prio;
} * Path;
```

Every path has a unique integer associated that is called the *path id*. This id is stored in member `pid`, and permits accounting resources on a per-path basis. The id is guaranteed to be unique, but is otherwise arbitrary. In particular, if n paths exist in the system, it is *not* guaranteed that the path id is in the range $0..n-1$.

The stages at the extreme ends of the path are pointed to by `end[0]` and `end[1]`. For an unextended path, `end[0]` refers to the stage created first, whereas `end[1]` refers to the stage created last. If a path is extended at the end pointed to by `end[0]`, then, once path extension is complete, `end[0]` will point to the last stage created during extension. The corresponding applies for path extension applied to `end[1]`. In other words, `end[0]` and `end[1]` are guaranteed to point to the stages at the opposing ends of the path—which expression points to which end is, in general, difficult to say. As explained in Section 2.2.4.1, this is due to the fact that paths are completely symmetric as far as the two data-transmission directions are concerned.

The four path queues can be accessed through array `q`. The path queues are implemented in the stages at the ends of the path, so array `q` consists of pointers to the actual queues. If a stage does not implement a particular queue, then the corresponding pointer in `q` is `NULL`. The mapping between the queue index and the function of the queue is given in the following table:

expression	functions as...	in direction...
`q[0]`	source	forward (`end[0]`→`end[1]`)
`q[1]`	sink	forward (`end[0]`→`end[1]`)
`q[2]`	source	backward (`end[1]`→`end[0]`)
`q[3]`	sink	backward (`end[1]`→`end[0]`)

To leave the stages flexibility in choosing the implementation for each path queue, only two queue operations are globally defined: one to determine the maximum length of the queue and another to determine the current length of the queue. These operations tend to be sufficient to assist in making resource management decisions since they allow computing the percentage to which a queue is full. Other operations that could prove useful in the future are certainly imaginable, however. One example is an operation that would allow resizing the path queue.

The attribute set `attrs` provides a place to associate arbitrary information with the path. In essence, it provides the means to dynamically (at runtime) expand the path object. This is useful to communicate information between different stages in the path and also encourage exploring new, path-related ideas. The latter is true since the attribute set makes it possible to associate new state with a path without requiring compile-time modifications the path object type. Also, path attributes are useful for performance measurements. It is often the case that the measurements are performed in one part of the path, but reported in another, or that measurements need to be accumulated over a certain period of time. Both cases can be accommodated easily using attributes to store performance statistics in the path object.

The last two members listed in the structure are `realtime` and `prio`. These represent the scheduling parameters of the path and will be described in more detail later in Section 3.5.

3.3.4 Stage

Figure 3.5 shows that path-interior stages essentially represent fixed routing decisions: data enters the stage, which is then processed by code specific to the module that created the stage, and, eventually, leaves the stage through the other side. In a traditional system without paths, the module-specific processing would also require a routing decision to determine where to send the data next. In contrast, interior stages have these decisions pre-made (builtin). However, the stages at the ends of the path are special. They do not represent fixed routing decisions. Instead they simply serve as hooks into the modules at which the path terminates. These are the modules that will need to make dynamic routing decisions to find out where to send the data next. In the ideal case, a path terminates at modules at the edge of the module graph, where data is simply passed on to the appropriate device. For this case, all dynamic routing decisions can be avoided.

The C structure that implements the stage object in Scout is shown below:

```
typedef struct Stage {
  Iface  iface[2];
  Path   path;
  Module module;
  long   (*establish)(Stage s, Attrs a);
  void   (*destroy)(Stage s);
  Stage  nextStage;
} * Stage;
```

The elements of array `iface` are pointers to the interfaces in the stage. If such an interface does not exist, the corresponding element is `NULL`. Expression `iface[0]` refers to the interface on the side of the stage through which the creation request for this path arrived (see Section 3.3.6). For an unextended path, this is equivalent to the interface in the forward direction of the path. Expression `iface[1]` refers to the other interface in the stage. For an unextended path, this is equivalent to the interface in the backward direction of the path. For stages that were created as part of a path extension, this simple and direct relationship between the elements in array `iface` and the path direction does not hold, however.

The path to which the stage belongs is pointed to by `path`. Similarly, the module that created the stage can be accessed through member `module`. The function pointers `establish` and `destroy` are used during path creation and destruction and are explained in detail later in this section. The final member, `nextStage`, is part of a chain that lists all of a path's stages in the order in which they were created. Due to path extension, this chain does not necessarily correspond to a linear traversal of the path and hence is typically used during path creation and destruction only.

3.3.5 Interface

As mentioned in the overview, interfaces are used to move data from one stage to the next one. The simplest possible interface has the structure shown below:

```
typedef struct Iface {
  Iface next;
  Iface back;
  Stage stage;
} * Iface;
```

In words, the most primitive interface simply consists of a `next` pointer that refers to the next interface in the current direction of the path, a `back` pointer that refers to the next interface in the opposite direction, and a `stage` pointer that refers to the stage that the interface belongs to. This is simple, but does not provide any way to deliver data to the interface. Thus, all useful interfaces are expanded versions of this primitive interface. That is, Scout uses single inheritance for interfaces [38]. For example, the interface that is commonly used to pass a *message* (a sequence of data bytes) to an interface is called `AioIface` (asynchronous I/O interface). This interface looks the same as the basic `Iface`, except that it additionally declares a function pointer that can be used to deliver a message:

```
typedef struct AioIface {
  struct Iface i;
  long         (*deliver)(Iface i, Msg m);
} * AioIface;
```

To deliver message `m` to the asynchronous I/O interface `i`, one would simply invoke `i->deliver (i, m)`.

Since interfaces provide for single inheritance, the service compatibility rules presented in Section 3.2.3.1 can be slightly relaxed: if a service requires an interface of type T, then any interface type that is equal to or a subtype of T can be used to satisfy this requirement. For example, if interface type `Iface` were required, then an interface of type `AioIface` could be used instead. This is sensible since any asynchronous I/O interface is also a plain interface. A more interesting example involves TCP since, to a first approximation, TCP provides a bytestream, it clearly would be desirable if it were possible to connect TCP to any other module that requires a bytestream. However, a sophisticated user of TCP might want to adjust its flow-control window sizes, so it would be useful if TCP provided functions to do so. With single inheritance, TCP can use a subtype of `AioIface` that provides the additional functions needed to adjust the window sizes. Suppose that subtype was called `WindowedAioIface`. With this arrangement, a sophisticated user that depends on being able to control window sizes could specify a service that requires an interface of type `WindowedAioIface`, whereas naive users could continue to connect to TCP as if it were a regular asynchronous I/O interface.

Technically, Scout can support an arbitrary number of interface types. However, the more interface types there are, the less likely that any given pair of services can be connected. Thus, the intent is to keep this number as small as possible. At present, there are about eight different interface types that are relatively stable and in frequent use. In addition to those, there are another eight interface types related to the disk subsystem.

Since that subsystem is still being evolved, its interfaces are not as well factored and stable as the others. The simplest useful interface, asynchronous I/O, is employed by many data filters and almost all modules related to networking. The most complicated interface so far is a window management system interface that defines more than thirty distinct operations.

The decision as to whether a new module should be coerced into using existing interface types or whether a new interface type should be defined instead is sometimes not easy. It should be guided by the semantics of the operation involved and by performance considerations. Semantics must be taken into consideration to ensure that compatible services really result in meaningful behavior when connected. If performance were not taken into account, there would be no reason to support multiple interfaces, since everything could be built based on a universal data-delivery function such as the `deliver` function in the asynchronous I/O interface.

3.3.6 Creation

Now that all parts of the Scout path have been described, it is possible to explain the details of path creation. Scout provides a single `pathCreate` function for this purpose. Its C prototype is given by:

```
Path pathCreate (Module m, Attrs a);
```

As the prototype suggests, a path is created by invoking the function on a module `m` with an attribute set `a`. The attribute set describes the kind of path that is desired. That is, the invariants discussed in Chapter 2 are passed in this set.

The call to `pathCreate` eventually results in an invocation of the `createStage` function in module *m* (see Section 3.2.3.2). The `createStage` function has the following type:

```
Stage (*CreateStageFunc)(Module m, int s, Attrs a,
                         ModuleLink* n);
```

In the prototype, argument `m` is the module on which `pathCreate` was invoked and `s` is the index of the service through which the path being created entered the module. Since `m` is the first module in the path, there is no such service, so a value of -1 is passed (which is not a valid service index). Argument `a` is the set of attributes that was passed to the `pathCreate` function. In response to this invocation, the `createStage` function is expected to allocate and initialize a stage and the interfaces contained therein. As part of this processing, the function may also update the attribute set as new information about the path may become available in the module or existing information may become obsolete. After creating the new stage, the module attempts to make a routing decision based on the attributes (invariants) that were passed to it. If the module can decide where the path has to go next, it sets `*n` to point to the module and service index of that next point. If no routing decision can be made based on the attributes, then path creation stops at this module and `*n` is set to `NULL`.

If the call to `createStage` returned a non-`NULL` value in `*n`, then path creation continues at the point given by `*n`. This is done by invoking `createStage` on the module indicated by `*n` and with argument `s` set to the service index specified in `*n`. The attribute set `a` is the possibly updated set returned by the previous `createStage` invocation. The reason the service index `s` is passed to the stage creation routine is because stages usually need to be created differently depending on the service through which the path entered the module. In a sense, the service index is a very short-lived path invariant, but since it changes so frequently (with every stage creation call), it is more efficient and more convenient to pass it as a separate function argument. Given the service index and the current attribute set, a new stage is created and a routing decision made and stored in `*n`, if possible. This process repeats until the path reaches its full length which happens either when it reaches a leaf module or when the attributes are too weak for a module to make a static routing decision.

Once the path has reached its full length, a sequence of stages exists. At this point, the `pathCreate` function creates the actual path object, inserts the stages into it, and establishes the various chains through the path structure. In a third step, the `establish` callbacks in the stage objects are invoked in the order in which the stages were created. The establish callbacks are necessary since some stages cannot be fully initialized until the entire path structure exists. The first argument passed to the `establish` callback is a self-reference to the stage being established and the second argument is an attribute set. This attribute set is initialized to the empty set before invoking the first callback. The establish callbacks may use and modify this attribute set as necessary and then pass it on to the next establish callback. The purpose of this attribute set is to allow passing auxiliary information between neighboring stages. This can be done safely since neighboring stages are known to be compatible in the sense defined in Section 3.2.3.1. An example for such auxiliary information is attribute `PREVIOUS_DEMUX_NODE`, which will be described in Section 3.4.3. Note that the attribute set used in the establish callbacks has nothing in common with path invariants or the attribute set passed to `pathCreate`.

3.3.7 Extension

The path extension function operates analogously to the path creation function. The only difference is that path extension is invoked at the end of an existing path, rather than on a module. The prototype for this function is shown below:

```
long pathExtend (Stage s, Attrs a);
```

The first argument, stage `s`, points to the end of the path that should be extended. If path *p* is being extended, this must be either *p*`->end[0]` or *p*`->end[1]`. If `s` points to any other stage, path extension will fail. The second argument, attribute set `a`, is the set of invariants that are true for the path extension operation.

If path extension fails for any reason (e.g., because the system runs out of memory), then the path being extended is destroyed as well. This fate sharing is reasonable since an extended path is still just one path; it does not consist of two independent sub-paths. It is therefore only logical that if path extension fails, then the entire path creation should be considered to have failed.

For path extension to make sense, the attribute set must be consistent with the one specified in the `pathCreate` call and those specified during previous calls to `pathExtend` (if any). Scout does not have a formal model for path invariants. Thus, it is not possible to give a formal procedure to test whether a pair of attribute sets is consistent. Informally, it is easier to discuss cases that make attribute set pairs inconsistent. For example, if the first set contains the invariant that the path needs to be scheduled using a realtime scheduler and the second set contains an invariant that request a best-effort scheduler, then the attribute sets are inconsistent. Such direct contradictions are relatively easy to detect. More subtle are inconsistencies that arise from *not* specifying invariants; e.g., the first attribute set may contain an invariant that says no single data-item (message) is going to be larger than 100 bytes, while the second attribute set may not have any invariants related to the size of messages, so even though there is no direct contradiction in the invariants, the attribute sets may be inconsistent.

The reason we introduced the issue of attribute set consistency here is that the problem is most apparent with path extension. However, it is not limited to this operator. Since the create-stage functions may update the attribute set, consistency problems may arise within a single path creation operation. Note that prohibiting stage creation from updating the invariant set is not a solution since modules do process and modify data, and as a result, invariants may have to be updated to reflect those changes.

3.3.8 Optimization

The current incarnation of Scout does not employ an explicit `pathOptimize` function to apply the path transformations described in Chapter 2. Instead, path transformations are applied in an ad hoc fashion. This certainly will not be sufficient in the long run, but does have the advantage of providing maximum flexibility in experimenting with path transformations. A sample path transformation designed to improve processing speed inside will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

While no explicit path optimization routine exists, it is important to point out that it is straight-forward to replace the code of a path with a more optimized version. This is because interfaces contain function pointers, not actual code. Hence, to replace the code used by a path, all that needs to be done is change the function pointers in the interfaces to make them point to the optimized versions.

3.3.9 Destruction

The final path-related operation allows one to destroy a path when it is no longer needed. The C prototype for this operation is shown below:

```
void pathDelete (Path p);
```

Invocation of this function will eventually cause path `p` to be destroyed. However, before this happens, the `destroy` callbacks in the path's stages are called in the order in which the stages were created. The only argument passed to this callback is the stage (and, implicitly, the path) that is being destroyed. The destroy callback of a stage needs to ensure that all resources held by the stage are relinquished. Once all callbacks have been executed, the resources held by the path are relinquished and the path ceases to exist.

3.3.10 Evaluation and Discussion

As implemented in Scout, paths are light-weight. For example, a path to transmit and receive UDP network packets consists of six stages. Creating such a path on a first-generation, 21064A 300MHz Alpha takes on the order of 200μs (not including the application of any potential path optimization transformations). The path object itself is about 300 bytes long and each stage is on the order of 150 bytes in size, including all the interfaces. In total, each UDP path takes about 1200 bytes. Since interfaces consist of pointers to functions, creating a path does not cause any code duplication. Code duplication can occur only as a result of path transformations.

The current Scout architecture does not support multiple protection domains. However, extending Scout paths to multiple protection domains should be straight-forward. Indeed, paths raise the interesting opportunity to use protection not just between *layers* (horizontal partitioning) but also between *paths* (vertical partitioning). With horizontal partitioning, layers are protected from each other, whereas with vertical partitioning the paths are protected from each other. Depending on the needs of a system (e.g., debugging of a new layer versus ensuring the integrity of the data sent through a path), one or the other or even a combination of the two may be appropriate.

For horizontal partitioning, note that all communication between stages is through a pair of interfaces. Splitting a path at such a boundary into two protection domains would therefore be rather natural and easy. Another concern is that the actual path object needs to be accessible from all protection domains that a path crosses. Different solutions are conceivable. One would involve caching the path object in the different domains. Another would involve keeping the path object in a protection domain that is accessible by all other domains. A third would involve accessing the path object through a system call-like interface. Most likely, an actual implementation would use a combination of the three proposed solutions, but the key point is that there do not seem to be any unusual difficulties in defining paths that cross multiple protection domains.

Vertical partitioning does not appear to be problematic either. The entire path would be contained in its own protection domain and the domain would have to be crossed only when moving from a module into a path or vice versa. Ideally, paths directly connect modules representing device pairs, so the number of domain crossings for moving data from a source device to sink device would be two, just as is the case with a traditional, monolithic kernel based system [95].

3.4 Demultiplexing

So far, we have not discussed the issue of how the appropriate path is found for a given message. In many cases, this is trivial. For example, a path is often used like a file descriptor, a window handle, or a socket descriptor. In these cases, paths are created specifically for communicating a certain kind of data and the appropriate path is known from the context in which it is being used. In other cases, however, there is no such context and the appropriate path is implicitly determined by the data itself. The most notable area where this is the case is for the networking subsystem. Networking protocols typically require hierarchical demultiplexing for arriving network packets. For example, when a network packet arrives at an Ethernet adapter [65], the Ethernet type field needs to be looked up to determine whether the packet happens to be, e.g., an IP packet or an ARP packet. If it is an IP packet, it is necessary to look up the protocol field to determine whether it is a UDP or TCP packet, and so on. This hierarchical demultiplexing is suboptimal since as more knowledge becomes available with each demultiplexing step, another path might become more suitable to process that packet.

3.4.1 Scout Packet Classifier

To alleviate the hierarchical demultiplexing problem, Scout uses a packet classifier that factors all demultiplexing operations to the earliest possible point. This lets Scout pick a path and start processing a packet only after as many demultiplexing decisions as possible have been made. Of course, a solution that would be better still (as far as Scout is concerned) would be to modify the header of the lowest layer protocol to include a field that can store the path id [56]. That way, demultiplexing could be reduced to a simple table lookup. However, since Scout needs to be able to interoperate with existing networking infrastructure, this is not always an option.

The factoring of demultiplexing decisions is best explained with an example. Suppose a UDP packet were received by an Ethernet adapter. The processing that would occur with hierarchical demultiplexing is shown on the left, with a classifier on the right:

Without Classifier:	**With Classifier:**
Ethernet processing	**Ethernet demux $\Rightarrow$ it's an IP packet**
Ethernet demux $\Rightarrow$ it's an IP packet	**IP demux $\Rightarrow$ it's a UDP packet**
IP processing	Ethernet processing
IP demux $\Rightarrow$ it's a UDP packet	IP processing
UDP processing	UDP processing
$\vdots$	$\vdots$

As the left half of the table shows, without a classifier, processing would have to occur in a layer by layer fashion since each layer is decoupled by a demultiplexing step (shown in bold). In contrast, the right half of the table shows that with a classifier, all demultiplexing operations are performed first, which makes it possible to execute all protocol processing steps inside a single, long path. Note that the total amount of work is same: there are two demultiplexing steps and three processing steps in both cases. What the table does not show is that the demultiplexing steps are usually much shorter than the processing steps, so the actual time spent in the classifier is typically much smaller than the time spent in the processing steps.

3.4.2 The Role of Classifiers

The way packet classifiers are used in Scout is unique and therefore worth discussing in some more detail. In particular, their role with respect to dynamic routing decisions is interesting. Consider Figure 3.6. It would be preferable to process every incoming packet destined for UDP using path p1. Unfortunately, this ideal case cannot always be achieved. For example, the UDP packets may have been fragmented by IP, or IP might have employed a non-trivial data transformation, such as encryption or compression. In all three cases, some protocol headers may not be available to the classifier. Scout copes with this problem by employing short paths as necessary. In the example, an IP fragment would have to be processed first by path p2 and then by path p4, even though this would be less optimal than processing with p1.

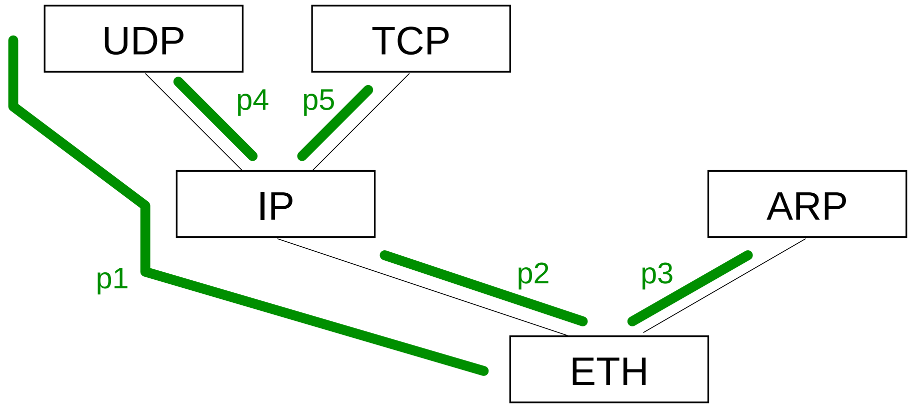

Figure 3.6: Paths Versus Classifiers

The specifics of how the partial classification problem is solved in Scout are explained next. As previously suggested, the Ethernet module (ETH) employs a classifier to decide whether a packet should be processed using path p1, p2, or p3. Suppose an IP fragment that does not contain the higher-level headers arrives at the Ethernet adapter. Without higher-level headers, the best the classifier may be able to do is to determine that path p2 is appropriate for processing the fragment.[1] Once IP receives the fragment through p2, it will buffer the fragment until the entire datagram has been reassembled. At that point, IP needs to make a dynamic routing decision to find out where to send the complete datagram

[1]Note that, strictly speaking, since the UDP protocol identifier is stored in the IP header, in this particular example it would be possible to classify the packet to path p1, but this is only because the example is artificially simple. In a more realistic scenario, path p1 would extend beyond UDP, meaning that the fragment could not be classified to p1.

next. IP can do this by running its *own* classifier on the complete datagram, which, with a UDP packet, will tell IP that p4 should be used.

This example shows that, in Scout, a classifier is not something specific to network drivers, but instead is a mechanism that can be employed by any module that needs to make a dynamic routing decision based on the contents of the data being communicated. Typically, each network device driver uses a classifier which is invoked when a packet receive interrupt is processed, but other modules may use their own classifiers if necessary.

3.4.3 Realizing the Scout Classifier

Since Scout is a modular system, we would like to be able to express classification in a modular fashion as well. That way, the complete classifier can be built automatically from partial classification algorithms that are specified by the module that appear along a path. Note that a modular specification of the classifier does not necessarily imply a modular implementation, though this is true for the current Scout implementation.

As discussed earlier, classifiers are used in Scout by any module that may need to make a dynamic routing decision based on the contents of a message. The task of a classifier can therefore be described as: given a module m and a message, determine a path that is appropriate for processing the given message. Since it is module m that is making the routing decision, the path must start at that module.

The classification task can be implemented in an iterative fashion using partial classifiers of the following form: given a set of paths and a message, determine the subset of paths that qualify for the processing of the given message, the module that needs to make the next (refining) classification (if any), and the message for that next module. The message for the next module is normally the same as the original message, except that the protocol header at the front of the message will have been stripped off. This scheme works as long as the classification problem is locally hierarchical. The ramifications of this constraint will be explained in detail in Section 3.4.3.1. For now, we assume that the Scout classification problem satisfies this constraint. Using such partial classifiers, the problem can be solved with the pseudo-code shown in Figure 3.7. Lines 2–5 of the pseudo-code determine the set of paths that either begin or end at module `m`. This path set

```
1  classify (Module m, Message d):
2    pset ← ∅
3    for (p in pset)
4      if (p.end[0].module == m || p.end[1].module == m)
5        pset ← pset ∪ {p};
6    path ← NULL
7    while (m != NULL ∧ pset != ∅) do
8      ⟨m, pset, d⟩ ← m.demux (pset, d)
9      for (p in pset)
10       if (p.end[0].module == m || p.end[1].module == m)
11         path ← p
12   return path
```

Figure 3.7: Classification Pseudo-Code

is stored in variable `pset`. Then, as long as there is a module `m` and a set of candidate paths `pset`, the partial classifier `demux` of module `m` is invoked (line 8), passing the current candidate set and message `d` as parameters. The partial classifier is expected to return the next module `m` that should refine the classification, a new candidate set `pset`, and a new message `d`. If there is no next module, then `m` will be `NULL`. Given the new candidate set, the code checks in lines 9–11 whether there is any path `p` in `pset` that ends at module `m`. If there is such a path, it is suitable for processing the original message and is stored in variable `path`. Scout does not allow ambiguity in classification, meaning that there is at most one path per iteration that is suitable for processing the message.[2] However, finding a suitable path does not stop the search since there may be a longer path that would be preferable over a shorter one. Thus, the search continues as long as there is a next module and the candidate set is not empty. Once the search stops, line 12 returns the best path found or `NULL`, if no suitable path exists.

We observe that the classification process can be viewed as a tree traversal where the partial classifiers are used to select the next node to be visited and where each node corresponds to a path set. This tree-traversal can be implemented efficiently. Note that

[2] Scout's rule of disallowing ambiguity is different from most packet filters, which typically adopt the semantics of delivering a message to every matching path in the case of ambiguity.

the search tree contains one node per module and per path set. In Scout, demultiplexing nodes have the following structure:

```
typedef struct {
  long   numPaths;
  Path   path;
  Module nextModule;
} * DemuxNode;
```

Integer `numPaths` gives the size of the set of paths represented by this node. The pointer `path` of a demux node *n* is `NULL` if no path exists that could handle a message that reaches node *n* during classification. If it is non-`NULL`, it points to the longest path that can be used for a message that reaches node *n* during classification. Pointer `nextModule` either refers to the next module that should be used to refine the classification or is `NULL` if there is no such module. The latter case implies that there is no path that extends beyond the module represented by the demux node and that the path referred to by `path` should be used to process the message.

Given the definition of a demux node, the partial classifiers are functions with a prototype shown below (`Msg` is the Scout type to represent a message, i.e., a sequence of data bytes):

```
Path (*DemuxFunc) (DemuxNode pset, Msg m);
```

Note that the return value is a path. This is because each partial classifier will invoke the partial classifier of the next module, if necessary. Thus, the tree traversal loop is implicitly implemented as a sequence of nested calls. Also note that the partial classifier function of each module is stored in the module object (see Section 3.2.3.2). When a new module object is created, the module must initialize member `demux` in the object to the module's partial classifier function.

The next question is how the tree of demux nodes is created and maintained. Suppose a new path *p* has been created. The first stage *s* in this path is `p->end[0]`. If we assume that the module at which the path starts uses a hash table *h* to implement the partial classifier function and that the module's partial key for path *p* is *k*, then the first module in the path can update its demux node by calling function `updateDemuxNode` passing *s*, *h*, *k* and `NULL` as arguments in this order. The `updateDemuxNode` function is illustrated with the pseudo-code shown in Figure 3.8. In line 3, the function concatenates the bits

```
1  void
2  updateDemuxNode (Stage s, HashTable h, Key k, DemuxNode pn) {
3    dk = concat (pn, k);
4    n = hashLookup (h, dk);
5    if (!n) {
6      n = new (DemuxNode);
7      n->numPaths = 0;
8      n->path = NULL;
9      n->nextModule = next module in path;
10     hashEnter (h, dk, n);
11   }
12   if (s == s->path->end[1])
13     n->path = s->path;
14   else if (pn)
15     n->path = pn->path;
16   ++n->numPaths;
17 }
```

Figure 3.8: Update of Demux Tree

of the previous demux node with those for the partial key `k`. Since this is the first stage in the path, there is no previous demux node (`pn` is `NULL`), so `dk` equals `k`. In line 4, the demux node is looked up using the demux key. If no demux node exists for that key yet, lines 6–10 create a new node and enter it in the hash table. In lines 12–15, the `path` member of the node is updated if necessary. Specifically, if stage `s` is the last stage of the path, then path `p` can be used for any message that gets classified at least to node `n`. If the end of the path has not been reached yet, `n->path` is simply set to the path of the previous node, or left unmodified if there is no previous node. In line 16, the number of paths in the path set represented by `n` is incremented.

A demux node is normally updated during the establish callback of a stage. Note that the same routine can be used to update the demux nodes for all stages in a newly created path. The only difference compared to the first stage is that `pn`, the previous node pointer is no longer `NULL`. This pointer is passed as attribute `PREVIOUS_DEMUX_NODE` in the attribute set passed to each stage. Note that, in general, classification can be initiated at either end of the path. Thus, when descending in the establish callback chain, this attribute points to the previous demux node with respect to classification in the forward direction, but once the end of the path is reached, the attribute changes its meaning into representing the previous node with respect to classification in the backward direction.

Note that the `updateDemuxNode` function works properly even in the case of a module that does not perform demultiplexing in the given direction. In such a case, the key `k` simply has zero length. While the function works properly, this special case can be optimized by simply updating the `nextModule` pointer of the previous node to the next module along the path. This has the effect that modules that do not perform classification in the given direction are skipped.

With this setup, a partial classification function is typically implemented similar to that shown in Figure 3.9. First, line 2 extracts the partial demux key from the message (typically from a header) and stores it in `k`. Then the bits of the previous demux node and the partial key are concatenated and looked up in the hash table. If an appropriate demux node exists for the message, the classification is refined by calling the partial classifier function of the next module. If that classification succeeds, the path found is returned. Otherwise, the path associated with demux node `n` is returned (which may be `NULL` if no suitable path exists).

3.4.3.1 Globally Hierarchical Classification

As alluded to before, the classification scheme as described so far works for locally hierarchical classification problems. By this we mean that each partial classifier can make its decision in isolation. Unfortunately, for real networking protocols, the problem is not limited to this special case. It is hierarchical, but only at the global level. This is illustrated in Figure 3.10, which shows the IP and UDP header fields that are used for classification purposes. IP uses the protocol field, and the local and remote addresses. In the figure, these fields are labelled protl, laddr, and raddr respectively. For UDP, the fields used are the local and remote port number; lport and rport in the figure. For paths

```
Path demux (DemuxNode pn, Msg m) {
  extract key k from m;
  dk = concat (pn, k);
  n = hashLookup (h, dk);
  if (n) {
    if (n->nextModule)
      path = n->nextModule->demux (n, msg);
      if (path)
        return path;
    return n->path;
  }
  return NULL;
}
```

Figure 3.9: Typical Partial Classifier

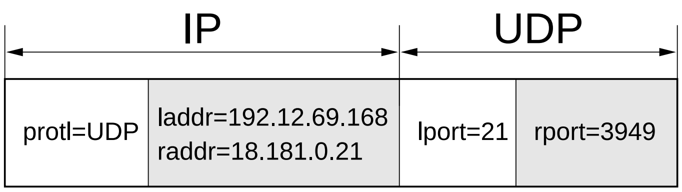

Figure 3.10: Example Requiring Global Hierarchical Classification

that represent actively opened network connections (active paths), all five fields need to be matched. On the other hand, for paths representing passively opened connections (passive paths), only the protocol field and local port field need to be matched. This means that the classification process is still hierarchical, but only at the global level. Suppose a system has the mappings shown in Table 3.1 in place. If a packet with the fields ⟨protl=UDP, laddr=192.12.69.168, raddr=18.181.0.21, lport=21, rport=3950⟩ were to arrive, then IP could not make a proper decision as to whether the path subset it passes to UDP should include both the active path and the passive path or only the former. If it were to pass on the active path only, classification would erroneously fail, since there is no active path matching the packet. On the other hand, if it were to pass on both paths, then classification would be erroneously ambiguous for packets that belong to the active path. That is,

protl	**laddr**	**raddr**	**lport**	**rport**		**maps to:**
$\langle$UDP,	*any*	*any*	21,	*any*$\rangle$	$\Rightarrow$	path 1 (passive)
$\langle$UDP,	192.12.69.168,	18.181.0.21,	21,	3949$\rangle$	$\Rightarrow$	path 2 (active)

Table 3.1: Example Mappings

whether IP should use the fields for an active path or the a passive path depends on the classification decision of UDP. Since IP cannot know how UDP's partial classifier works, it may make the wrong choice no matter how careful it is.

To solve this problem in general, it is necessary to try to find a path with the most specific keys first and, if that fails, backtrack and try the same with a less specific key. For example, networking protocols such as IP that distinguish between active and passive keys, could use logic similar to the one shown in Figure 3.11. In the figure, functions

```
path ← try_active_demux (pn, m);
if (!path)
  path ← try_passive_demux (pn, m);
```

Figure 3.11: Generalized Partial Classifier

`try_active_demux` and `try_passive_demux` correspond to classifiers as shown in Figure 3.9 that use the active and passive keys, respectively. With this kind of backtracking in place, it is guaranteed that the correct combination of keys is eventually found and therefore classification is guaranteed to find the correct path, if it exists.

Unfortunately, adding backtracking causes classification complexity to increase from $O(N)$ to $O(2^N)$, where N is the number of partial demux functions that require backtracking. Even though this involves exponential complexity, it might be quite practical since the number of demultiplexing layers is rarely bigger than four or five (not all of which may require backtracking). Better still, for networking protocols backtracking can be limited in a way that allows bringing back classification to linear time complexity. Observe that for the vast majority of systems, it is acceptable to limit paths to use either all active or all passive keys.[3] In this limited scenario, classification can be achieved by first trying to find an active path. If an active key lookup anywhere along the chain of partial classifiers fails, then classification can be aborted and retried with passive keys only. Thus, in the worst case, $2N$ classification decisions have to be made, where N is the number of modules that are traversed by a path. Note that this scheme does not *force* limited backtracking in every module. If there are any modules that require richer backtracking (e.g., because there are more than two possible choices), then they can still do so. In other words, this scheme reduces classification overhead to linear time complexity for the common case yet is not limited to locally hierarchical classification.

3.4.3.2 Classification in Non-Demultiplexing Modules

Most demultiplexing occurs in modules implementing networking protocols, but it certainly is desirable to be able to connect modules implementing networking protocols and other modules without any bad consequences (as long as the module graph is sensible). For example, a filter that converts MPEG-encoded video into a sequence of images should work properly independent of whether its input is fed from a disk or the network. Similarly, it should be possible to insert a filter (e.g., one that counts the number of bytes that pass through it) between a pair of networking protocols (e.g., TCP and IP) and have the system operate as expected.

This kind of support requires answering how demultiplexing needs to be interpreted with respect to modules that do not perform any demultiplexing themselves. Fortunately, this is straight-forward in Scout: a module simply needs to ensure that its partial classifier applies the same data transformations as the actual processing. If the data is not transformed at all (such as in the byte-counting filter mentioned previously), then the partial classifier would not have to do anything either. On the other hand, if a module modifies all data passing through it—e.g., by complementing it—then the partial classifier would

[3] This is indeed a common restriction. For example, while the *x*-kernel [49] does not explicitly enforce such a restriction, it is unable to guarantee proper demultiplexing if a connection exists with an active key in a layer beneath a layer that uses a passive key.

have to do the same. Of course, if the operation is complex or computationally expensive (such as encryption), then the module might prefer not to let classification proceed beyond itself. A module can do this by blocking the `PREVIOUS_DEMUX_NODE` attribute during the establish callback. When a module does this, it implies that the earlier modules have to be able to make an accurate enough classification so that a unique path can be found even without the help of the partial classifiers in later modules.

3.4.4 Evaluation

To gain a better understanding of the Scout classifier, we compare it to other existing packet classifiers. The two classifiers with the best published performance are DPF [30] and PathFinder [5]. Unfortunately, the existing implementation of PathFinder is not 64-bit clean and even on 32-bit systems there appear to be problems that prevent it from working reliably. For this reason, the remainder of this discussion is limited to a comparison with DPF. The available DPF implementation is version 2.0 beta, which is a re-implementation of the version presented in [30]. The measurements for this comparison were performed in a user-level test environment running on Linux on an AlphaStation 600/333. This machine uses a 21164 Alpha chip running at 333MHz. All measurements were done with warm caches. Measurements not reported here indicated that the slowdown due to cold caches is significant, but comparable for the two versions and therefore of no particular interest to this discussion. To make the comparison with DPF more meaningful, the Scout classifier was implemented assuming messages are represented as a linear sequence of bytes (the Scout kernel uses a more general tree of linear byte sequences instead).

Table 3.2 presents a summary of the two classifiers. The row labelled *Expressiveness* shows that the Scout classifier is universal. This is because the partial demux functions are written in ordinary C and because an exhaustive tree search can be performed if necessary. In contrast, DPF version 2 filters can make use of only two kinds of operators. The first kind supports testing a bitfield in the message contents for equality with either a constant or another bitfield in the message. The second kind of operators support dropping bytes from the front of the message. Both dropping by a constant or a variable number of bytes is supported. A filter can achieve the latter by specifying a bitfield in the message

	Scout	DPF v2.0
Expressiveness	universal	limited
Trust assumed	yes	no
Static size of code and data [byte]	4,901	122,311
Lookup active path [μs]	0.75	0.56
Lookup passive path [μs]	1.45	0.65
Insert passive path [μs]	3.70	24.2
Remove passive path [μs]	1.02	3.78
Bytes per filter	56	8,440

Table 3.2: Summary of Scout Classifier and DPF Comparison

contents that determines the possibly scaled number of bytes to drop. Unfortunately, this feature did not work properly for the Alpha architecture in the beta version of DPF v2.0 that was available at the time of this writing. For this reason, the TCP/IP filters used in the measurements assumed fixed size headers (which is not realistic, as both TCP and IP support header options).

The row labelled *Trust assumed* shows that the Scout classifier assumes the partial demux functions are trusted. To supported untrusted demux functions, Scout would have to employ software fault-isolation [109] to sandbox the possibly malicious code. In contrast, the simple DPF filter are provably safe and hence can be supplied by untrusted users.

The third row, labelled *Static size of code and data* compares the static size of the code and data sections required by the two classifiers. This was measured by counting the number of bytes by which the size of test program increases when linking in one or the other classifier. In the DPF case, this includes the size of the vcode dynamic code generator, which accounts for about 74KB of the reported size [31].

The next four rows lists various performance aspects. The row labelled *Lookup active path* lists the time required to classify a TCP/IP packet. To provide for a realistic environment, the classification was performed with three filters installed: one for the TCP/IP packets being looked up and one each for ARP and ICMP packets [79, 81]. The table shows that DPF is about 25% faster than the Scout classifier. This may sound like a large difference, but it corresponds to 62 CPU cycles which is marginal compared to the cost of fielding an interrupt, which can easily be several hundred cycles. The next row, labelled *Lookup passive path*, shows the $2N$ behavior of the Scout classifier discussed earlier. The data show that classifying a packet for a passive path is almost twice as expensive as for an active path. In contrast, DPF classification overhead increases by 16% only. Since passive paths are typically used to initiate path creation, the slower Scout time is not expected to significantly affect overall performance. It is also interesting to study classification performance as a function of the number of active TCP/IP filters in the classifier. This is illustrated in Figure 3.12. It shows that the Scout classification time remains largely unaffected by the number of active filters. The slightly larger time when two filters are active is a cache effect. DPF optimizes the case where just one filter is active, but uses a hash table for all other cases. Hence, classification time is slightly better with just one filter in place and remains largely constant when two or more filters are active. In Table 3.2, the rows labelled *Insert passive path* and *Remove passive path* show the time it takes to insert and remove a filter for a passive TCP/IP path. Insertion is more than six times slower for DPF than for Scout, which is due to the fact that DPF has to perform fairly sophisticated analysis of the newly inserted filter and because it requires dynamic code generation. It should be noted, however, that filter insertion/removal is typically less frequent than packet classification.

The last row, labelled *Bytes per filter*, shows the average size of the memory allocated dynamically per TCP/IP filter. In the Scout case, adding a TCP/IP filter requires just one demux node of 56 bytes if other TCP/IP filters are already installed. In the worst case, adding a TCP/IP filter to an empty classifier requires four demux nodes or 224 bytes. In contrast, DPF requires about 6-8KB per filter. This is because DPF uses a large, statically sized array to represent filters. Simple filters leave most of this array unused but, on the other hand, using a large array keeps the number of dynamic memory allocation requests to a minimum.

In summary, the comparison shows that the Scout classification approach is performance competitive with other classifiers and at the same time completely general. However, the above measurements should be considered optimistic, since the user-level test program makes some simplifying assumptions and since it assumes warm caches. For

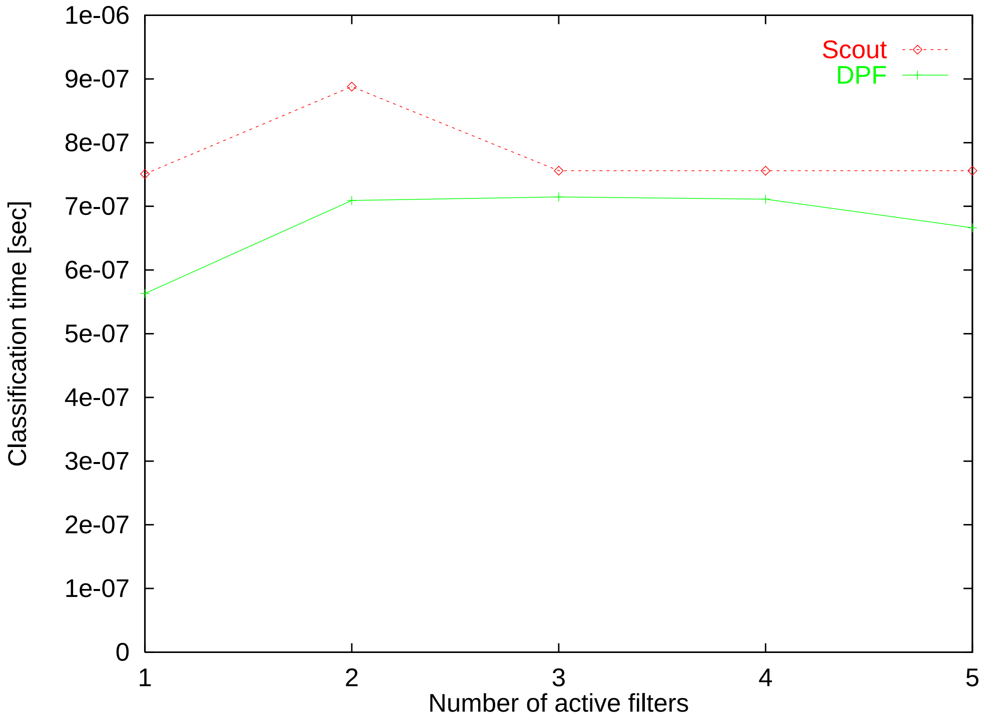

Figure 3.12: Classification Performance as a Function of Number of Filters

example, measurements with an actual Scout kernel indicate that, on an older 21064A Alpha clocked at 300MHz, classifying a TCP packet takes about 3.5μ when the instruction cache is warm, and about 7.2μs when the instruction cache is cold. In the warm-cache case, 0.8μs are spent on initializing and destroying the message data structure that Scout uses for the classification process, so the actual classification process takes 2.7μs. On the same machine, the test program reports a time of 1.14μs. This difference is most likely caused by three factors. First, the kernel implementation uses the normal Scout message abstraction instead of a simple linear byte sequence. Second, the kernel uses a more general and therefore more heavy-weight hash-table implementation and, third, the partial demultiplex functions are more widely scattered in the address space than in the test program. There is no reason these issues could not be addressed, but it is not clear whether doing so would result in an overall performance improvement that would make this worthwhile.

3.5 Execution Model

Scout paths are passive entities. In a sense, they provide lanes within a modular system through which data flows. The entities that move the data through these lanes are threads. Threads are orthogonal to paths, meaning that at any time there may be zero, one, or several threads executing in a path. Each thread is scheduled independently, though threads normally inherit scheduling parameters from the path that they are currently executing in.

An alternative to independent threads would be to constrain each thread to a particular path. Such threads could be viewed as server threads that are responsible for moving (processing) the data enqueued at the path's input queues. However, such an approach would force a context switch every time a message needs to be moved from one path to another. With independent threads, such context switches can be typically avoided. Moreover, when a thread moves from one path to another, it is also often possible to bypass the output and input queues of the paths involved. This makes moving from one path to another highly efficient—the only overhead is due to the dynamic routing decision that the module at the end of the path needs to make to find the next path on which to continue, and possibly an adjustment of scheduling priority when the thread enters the new path. Note that the dynamic routing decision is necessary in a purely modular system as well, so, strictly speaking, it would be more appropriate to consider it a part of the data processing cost, rather than a part of the overhead. Owing to the efficiency with which threads can typically move from one path on to another, even a system with many short paths is likely to perform comparably to or better than traditional systems that avoid per-layer context switching, such as the *x*-kernel or UNIX [49, 89].

Furthermore, an approach using independent threads does not prevent building a system in which threads have path affinity. Whether a thread enqueues a message when reaching the end of a path or whether it continues processing the message by moving on to the next path is under control of code provided by the module at the end of the path, so ultimately, it is up to the modules to implement one or the other policy. Path affinity might, for example, make sense in an environment where the cost of bringing a path's code into the caches is high relative to the cost of bringing the data into the caches [10].

If the costs are reversed, then letting a thread move a message as far as possible is likely to result in better performance [16]. Rather than based on cache costs, the decision of whether a thread should continue executing in the old path or should move on to the next path may depend on path priority. It seems advisable that a new path is entered only if it has a priority that is at least as high as the priority of the current path. The issue becomes quite interesting when there are sequences of three or more paths. In that case, two high-priority paths may be connected by a low-priority path. This might require a form of priority inheritance to ensure correct scheduling decisions. In any case, the point is that, depending on circumstances, one or another policy may be more appropriate for a given path. With independent threads, this policy choice is left to the individual modules in a path. If necessary, these modules can coordinate their efforts by establishing well-known path attributes, such as the execution priority, but Scout does not dictate a particular choice.

3.5.1 Thread Scheduling

In Scout, threads are scheduled non-preemptively according to a scheduling policy and priority. Two scheduling policies are supported and a higher-level round-robin scheduler allocates percentages of CPU time to each.[4] The minimum CPU share that each policy gets is determined by a compile-time parameter. The two policies supported are (1) fixed-priority round-robin and (2) earliest-deadline first (EDF) [58]. The reason for implementing the EDF policy is that for many soft realtime applications, it is most natural to express a path's priority in terms of a deadline. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5. The current scheduling system is sufficient for experimentation with various aspects of paths, but is suboptimal for several reasons. Finding a more appropriate appliance-oriented scheduling system remains a subject of future research, as will be discussed in Chapter 6.

The choice of a non-preemptive scheduler may seem unusual. However, for information appliances there is likely to be little reason to introduce the complexity of preemptive

[4] The exact algorithm is to give each scheduling policy a fixed percentage of scheduling *opportunities*, which is equivalent to CPU percentages if each thread uses up its alloted time slice.

scheduling. In contrast to general purpose machines, where preemption has to be dealt with anyway due to the true concurrency present in shared-memory multi-processors, many appliances are expected to be uniprocessors (at least for the near- to medium-range future). Not having to worry about pre-emption has the advantage of greatly reducing and often eliminating locking overhead, providing a simpler programming model, and allowing for more efficient context switching. For example, on the Alpha architecture, only nine integer registers need to be saved and restored in a synchronous context switch. In contrast, an asynchronous switch requires preserving all 31 integer registers. On the other hand, a non-preemptive scheduler does require a certain amount of cooperation among different tasks. For example, in Scout it is expected that no thread executes longer than one time-slice without giving the scheduler the opportunity to reschedule the CPU. Thus, long-running processing loops have to explicitly call a thread yield primitive at least once per time-slice. While this partly offsets the performance advantage of the synchronous context switching, the yield primitive can be implemented as a single memory read access and a conditional branch for the common case where the CPU does not have to be yielded. The bigger disadvantage of explicit yielding may be that it complicates the programming model somewhat. This can be avoided by moving the responsibility of placing yield calls to the compiler. While this would essentially guarantee correct use of the yield primitive, it is likely that a compiler would place such calls conservatively, causing more overhead than strictly necessary. Thus, there is a choice between a safe solution (using compiler placed yields) and a solution that, at least theoretically, provides the most efficient solution (manually placed yield calls). Scout currently employs the latter approach.

As mentioned in the introduction to this section, threads inherit the scheduling parameters (policy and priority) from the path they are executing in. Once a thread is executing inside a path, it can adjust its own scheduling parameters by calling the appropriate thread primitive. But the scheduling parameters also need to be set when waking up a thread to execute on behalf of a path. For this purpose, the path object provides the `realtime` and `prio` members (see Section 3.3.3). If `realtime` evaluates to true, then a thread entering the path should be scheduled as a realtime task with the deadline set to the value given by `prio`. This value is interpreted as a deadline in micro-seconds. With a thirty-two bit integer, this accommodates task execution times of up to slightly more than thirty minutes. If `realtime` is false, then the thread should be scheduled using the round-robin scheduler and using `prio` as its fixed priority.

Code inside a path can and may modify these two scheduling parameters at any time. The only restriction is that a non-realtime constraint set may not replace a realtime deadline unless that deadline has already expired. Similarly, a path's realtime deadline may be replaced only with an earlier deadline unless the existing deadline has been met or has already expired. These rules ensure that threads in a path are scheduled according to the most stringent constraints that exist inside the path. Note that this inheritance scheme does not permit differentiation between multiple threads that may be entering a path. However, once inside a path, a thread is able to adjust its own priority as necessary.

3.5.2 Thread Creation

A final question related to the execution model is when threads are created and destroyed. Since they are first-class objects, threads can be created by any existing thread as necessary and a thread can terminate itself whenever its task is complete. In addition to this, device drivers create and schedule new threads as messages arrive at the input queues of paths. Logically, Scout implements a thread-per-message model, i.e., every message has its own thread, called a *shepherd*, that takes care of moving it through the path.

The thread-per-message model is a convenient abstraction, but when a system operates under overload conditions, the input queues can quickly build up and as a result the number of threads may become so large that they overwhelm the system. To ameliorate this problem, Scout keeps the number of shepherds executing in a path as small as possible. This optimization is based on the observation that a path can notice a violation of the thread-per-message model only if it were to deadlock due to an insufficient number of threads. Thus, Scout strives to maintain the invariant that there is exactly one runnable shepherd per path whenever one of the path's input queues is non-empty. This is realized as follows: when a message is enqueued on a path with formerly empty input queues, Scout assigns a new shepherd to the path. As long as that shepherd continues to execute inside the path, there is no danger of deadlock and hence Scout does not assign any additional shepherds, even if the input queues continue to grow. However, should the shepherd block while inside the path, there is a danger of deadlock. In this case, Scout assigns a new shepherd to the path as soon as its input queues grow non-empty. Note that this simple scheme does not guarantee *exactly* one runnable shepherd per path since, eventually, the blocked shepherd will resume execution and, at that point, two or more shepherds may be runnable inside the path. But having multiple threads execute in the same path is consistent with the thread-per-message model, so this is not a problem.

The real issue is that while this scheme minimizes the number of threads in the system to the degree possible, it does not bound it. This is because each time a shepherd blocks, a new message may arrive and thus a new shepherd may get assigned which may then block as well. Since this process can repeat itself indefinitely, an unbounded number of shepherds may accumulate inside a path. Unfortunately, putting an arbitrary limit on the number of shepherds per path introduces the risk of deadlock. It is easy to determine the number of points inside a path that may block, but determining the maximum number of times shepherds may block at those points is undecidable, in general. For this reason, the Scout *infrastructure* does not prevent paths from indefinitely accumulating shepherds (and therefore from unbounded resource consumption). Instead, it leaves it up to higher-level mechanisms to ensure that the overall system does not suffer from such problems. In essence, each module individually or in combination with others must take the necessary precautions to avoid creating situations where shepherds may accumulate without bound. This is typically achieved either through a feedback mechanism (such as TCP flow-control) or a load shedding mechanism (such as dropping messages).

3.6 Related Work

Several aspects of Scout bear similarities to the *x*-kernel and indeed often are refinements that derive from experiences gained with it [49]. An interesting question is whether it would have been possible to add the path abstraction to the *x*-kernel. The CORDS system effectively did that with a limited form of paths [105]. In this sense, it is possible. However, a problem with adding paths to existing systems is that oftentimes existing abstractions conflict, or at least interfere, with paths. For example, in the case of the *x*-kernel, there are session objects that serve the role of communication end-points. This is very similar to the view paths present to the programmer of a module, so this raises the question of how sessions are related to paths. In essence, adding paths to existing systems is likely to significantly complicate the programming model. This is true not just for networking subsystems such as the *x*-kernel. For example, UNIX has the notion of file- and socket-descriptors, or X11 has the notion of window-handles, all of which would cause similar conflicts. It is also the case that modules typically need to be aware of path construction to ensure paths can grow as long as desired and also to ensure proper semantics should a path not be able to grow as long as desired. Suppose a path is created for communicating data via TCP/IP. If, for some reason, IP cannot make a fixed routing decision at path creation time, then the path would have to terminate at the IP module. To maintain the semantics of the TCP/IP path, this might force IP to create small paths between IP and each network adapter, for example. In general, the path abstraction often significantly affects the logic with which objects are created and destroyed, meaning that cleanly integrating such changes in a system not designed for paths is likely to be difficult.

UNIX STREAMS [42] are superficially similar to Scout paths. A STREAM essentially consists of a sequence of modules that is terminated by a STREAM *head* at the top (beneath the user/kernel boundary) and by a STREAM *end* at the bottom (device-driver level). The sequence of modules in a STREAM is dictated by the user-level application, meaning that the modules cannot affect these routing decisions. The interface between STREAM modules is limited to a message-oriented, bidirectional interface. This limits applicability of STREAMS to relatively simple applications as more complicated interfaces, such as those required for the disk subsystem or window management, cannot be accommodated. STREAMS also do not appear to support packet classification. For this reason, STREAMS are typically very wide in the Scout sense. For example, a STREAM may represent a stack of networking protocols, but it could not (easily) represent an individual TCP connection.

Like Scout, the work presented by Kay supports the construction of optimized code paths [56]. Its approach is to introduce the notion of PathIDs, which are integer numbers stored in the lowest-layer header of a networking subsystem. These identifiers are allocated on a per-path basis and therefore allow to quickly identify the code-path that should be used to process an incoming packet. In Scout, this would be equivalent to short-circuiting the packet classification process presented in Section 3.4.1. In some cases it may be possible to implement PathIDs using existing networking protocols. For example, ATM has a field containing a virtual circuit identifier (VCI). If VCIs can be allocated on a per-path basis, then they can be used in lieu of an additional PathID field [26]. However, PathIDs are not a general path-abstraction like the one defined by Scout. For example, they do not provide a means to generate optimized code paths automatically [56]. Manually written code is likely to result in good performance, but it is also time consuming to generate and difficult to maintain such vertically integrated code. In fact, Kay suggests that the use of PathIDs should be limited to the rare occasions where having to maintain two parallel branches of source code is justifiable.

In academia, much of the current OS research focuses on run-time extensibility of operating system kernels. Examples in this area include the Exokernel [32], FLUX [36], SPIN [7], and VINO [92]. In contrast, Scout is targeted at communication-oriented information appliances where the need for dynamic extensibility of kernel software is less of an issue. This is because many appliances are expected to be of relatively static nature. Rather than through fine-grained extension of a running system, appliances are more likely to be upgraded either through complete replacement of the system software or through virtual machine environments as discussed in the next paragraph. This is not to say that dynamic extensibility could not have a place in information appliances. Indeed, the techniques developed by these research projects are applicable to Scout insofar that they are orthogonal to the modular structure and path abstraction around which Scout is centered. For example, Scout and its path abstraction could readily be implemented in a type safe language such as Modula-3 [13] or it could employ sandboxing [109] to ensure the safe execution of dynamically loaded native-code modules.

In industry, there is a wealth of operating systems that are increasingly targeted at network computers (NCs) which could be considered a form of information appliances. There is no universal agreement on what precisely an NC is, though the term typically implies a machine that is primarily used for communication. There appear to be three major approaches to supporting NCs:

1. virtual machine based,
2. pared-down general purpose OS, and
3. Internet-extended embedded OS.

JavaOS and Inferno use the first approach [59, 25]. Both emphasize on the ability to download platform-independent virtual machine code over the network and execute it safely. The issue of supporting virtual machine code is orthogonal to the path abstraction defined by Scout. It is not difficult to add modules to Scout that support such virtual machines. This would make it possible to employ paths inside the virtual machine and the associated runtime environment. However, the more interesting issue is whether it would be useful to support paths in the virtual machine environment itself. Whether this would make sense depends on two factors: what fraction of the system is expected to be implemented in the form of virtual machine code and how performance sensitive the virtual machine code programs are. If a large fraction of the system is written in virtual machine code and that code needs to satisfy certain performance or quality-of-service issues, then it is likely that making available the path abstraction inside the virtual machine environment would be beneficial.

The second approach is followed by systems such as Oracle's NCI and Windows CE. The former uses a NetBSD kernel as its foundation with a trimmed down X Windowing System as its user interface. Similarly, Windows CE is essentially a trimmed down version of the Win32 API. For these systems, it seems questionable whether they are flexible enough to support the wide range that information appliances are expected to cover (e.g., both depend on the presence of virtual memory hardware). It is also unclear how effectively these systems could meet the predictability requirements that may be present in many appliances. In essence, this approach attempts to leverage existing application software, whereas Scout attempts to define a new paradigm that is inherently well-suited for the needs of communication-oriented devices.

The third approach involves adapting existing embedded operating systems to support communication through the addition of Internet protocols such as HTTP [35], TCP, and IP. Examples in this class include OS-9, pSOS+, QNX, and VxWorks [48]. Such systems often have hard realtime support and are relatively small and modular. They also are compute-focused, so support for path-like abstractions is missing. In essence, this means that realtime support is limited to the process abstraction and does not extend to the I/O subsystems. As a result, they cannot provide the level of control for resource management from the source- to the sink-device the way Scout paths can. It is also the case that hard realtime support is not necessarily sufficient or appropriate for information appliances. As will be described in some more detail in Section 6.3.1, soft realtime scheduling is in many ways more challenging than hard realtime scheduling. This is primarily because soft realtime scheduling needs to be able to deal with overload in a graceful manner, whereas hard realtime systems are typically designed to guarantee the absence of overload. Such a conservative design may not be appropriate for information appliances since it would mean that resources may remain underutilized most of the time, making the appliance more expensive than strictly necessary. Another important difference is that most embedded operating systems approach the question of modularity by providing the most general type of interface, such as a POSIX.1 interface or a micro-kernel like messaging interface. In contrast, Scout modularity is aimed at providing the *least* number of *minimal* interfaces, which makes it possible to connect modules in many useful ways and sometimes in ways not anticipated by the developer of a module. This is also facilitated by the filter-like modules of Scout and the fact that modules are connected by low-overhead procedure calls.

Aside from the path abstraction and modular architecture, Scout uses a novel classification scheme that is both efficient and powerful. The scheme is also unique in that it can be explained independently of the networking context in which it is usually employed. This makes it possible to elevate the classification problem to a general mechanism. As a consequence, Scout uses classifiers not just at the network driver level, but wherever an appropriate path needs to be found based on the contents of a message. Of the many packet classifiers and packet filters that have been proposed in the past, none fit the requirements of Scout perfectly. For example, interpreted packet filters are generally not fast enough [113, 61]. The performance of DPF, a classifier that uses runtime code generation [30] has been reported to be impressive, but unfortunately makes it relatively slow to insert and remove existing filters or, as is the case for version 2.0, provides a language with limited expressiveness. The PathFinder classifier [5] also has competitive performance, but it is a rather complex engine which would make it less suitable for appliances with stringent memory requirements. A practical problem common to all but the Scout classifier is that they require writing the classifier predicates in a special language. In contrast, the partial classifiers of Scout can be implemented in C. This is advantageous since it means that the data structures used by the module's packet processing code can also be used by the classifier. This greatly reduces problems due to inconsistencies in the packet descriptions, for example. Finally, the Scout classifier is powerful since the partial classifiers are implemented in a universal language. The only constraints on their complexity are due to performance and the desire to keep them side-effect free so that they can be short-circuited when an explicit PathID is present in a packet.

CHAPTER 4

USING PATHS TO OPTIMIZE CODE

Poetry: the best words in the best order.
– Samuel Taylor Coleridge

This chapter presents a case study for using paths to improve execution speed in a networking subsystem. Specifically, it is targeted at reducing protocol processing latency. The reason for choosing this problem is that optimizing for latency is often considered hard since, in contrast to throughput-oriented optimizations, there is rarely a single dominant latency bottleneck [55, 112]. Instead, to improve latency it is typically necessary to improve protocol processing along the *entire* path of execution [18, 51]. In this sense, the problem is ideally suited to demonstrate some of the potential benefits of Scout paths. It is important, however, to keep in mind that the approach taken in this case study is by no means the only way paths can be exploited to improve execution speed of a system. Dynamic code generation [60], manually crafted vertically integrated code-paths [56, 23], or a language-based approach [14] represent a few other possibilities in this spectrum.

The case study proposes and analyzes four techniques targeted at improving protocol processing. Of these techniques, the first three are path-based and the last one is a compiler-based technique that addresses the overhead due to the deep call chains that are commonly encountered during path execution (and in systems code in general). The path-based techniques optimize for a particular sequence of partial processing functions. This means that different code is needed for each possible sequence that is performance critical, but not necessarily for each path, since paths traversing the same sequence of modules may be able to share the same optimized code. This also means that a Scout realization is straight-forward: the function sequences can, for example, be pre-generated at system build time. At runtime, the only additional processing required is to match the processing function sequence present in a newly created path with the sequences for which optimized code was pre-generated. If there is a match, the function pointers in the interfaces of the path's stages can be redirected to this optimized code.

4.1 Preliminaries

This section sets the context in which this study was performed. It first describes the experimental testbed and provides evidence that the base case used in later sections is sound, i.e., that it is representative of the behavior of production-quality TCP/IP implementations.

4.1.1 Experimental Testbed

The hardware used for all tests consists of two DEC 3000/600 workstations connected over an isolated 10Mbps Ethernet. These workstations use a first-generation 21064 Alpha CPU running at 175MHz [93]. The CPU is a 64-bit wide, super-scalar design that can issue up to two instructions per cycle. Though the peak issue rate is two, there are few dual-issue opportunities in the pure integer code that is typical for systems code. Thus, as far as the networking subsystem is concerned, it is more accurate to view the CPU as a single-issue processor.

The workstation's memory system features split primary i- and d-caches of 8KB each, a unified 2MB second-level cache (backup-cache, or b-cache), and 64MB of main memory. All caches are direct-mapped and use 32-byte cache blocks. The d-cache is write-through, read-allocate. CPU writes to the b-cache are aggregated through a write-buffer that is four entries deep, with each entry holding a full cache-line. Writes to the write-buffer are merged, if possible. Since Alpha instructions have a fixed length of four bytes, an i-cache block size of 32 bytes implies that each block can hold eight instructions. Memory read accesses are non-blocking meaning that there is not necessarily a direct relationship between the number of misses and the number of CPU stall cycles induced by these misses. This is because non-blocking loads enable overlapping (hiding) memory accesses with useful computation. The memory system interface is 128 bits wide and the lmbench [63] suite reports a memory access latency of 2, 10, and 48 cycles for a d-cache, b-cache, and main-memory access, respectively. When executing code sequentially from the b-cache, the CPU can sustain an execution rate of 8 instructions per 13 cycles [34].

Unless noted otherwise, all software was implemented in a prototype version of Scout that was derived from the *x*-kernel [49]. The module graph consists of the networking subsystem and measurement code only. The resulting Scout system is so small that it fits entirely into the b-cache and, unless forced (as in some of the tests), there are no b-cache conflicts. All code was compiled using a version of gcc 2.6.0 [99] that was modified as necessary to support some of the techniques.

4.1.2 Test Cases

As the goal of this study is to test a set of latency improving techniques on protocol stacks that are representative of networking code in general, two protocol stacks are analyzed that differ greatly in design and implementation: a conventional TCP/IP stack and a generic RPC stack. TCP/IP was chosen primarily because its ubiquitous nature facilitates comparison with other work on latency-oriented optimizations. Due to their roots in BSD UNIX, the TCP/IP modules are relatively coarse-grained. In contrast, the RPC stack exemplifies the *x*-kernel paradigm that encourages decomposing networking functionality into many small modules [72].

The module configurations for the two protocol stacks are shown in Figure 4.1. The left hand side shows the TCP/IP stack. At the top is TCPTEST, a simple, ping-pong style test program. Below are TCP and IP which are the Scout modules for of the corresponding Internet protocols [83, 82]. The TCP implementation is based on BSD UNIX source code so, apart from interface changes and differences in connection setup and tear-down, they are identical. Module VNET routes outgoing messages to the appropriate network adapter. In BSD-like networking subsystems, the functionality of VNET is implemented as part of the IP protocol. Module ETH implements the device-independent Ethernet protocol processing and module LANCE implements the driver for the Ethernet adapter present in the DEC 3000 machine.

The right hand side of Figure 4.1 shows the RPC stack. It implements a remote procedure call facility similar to Sprite RPC [110]. As the figure shows, the RPC stack is

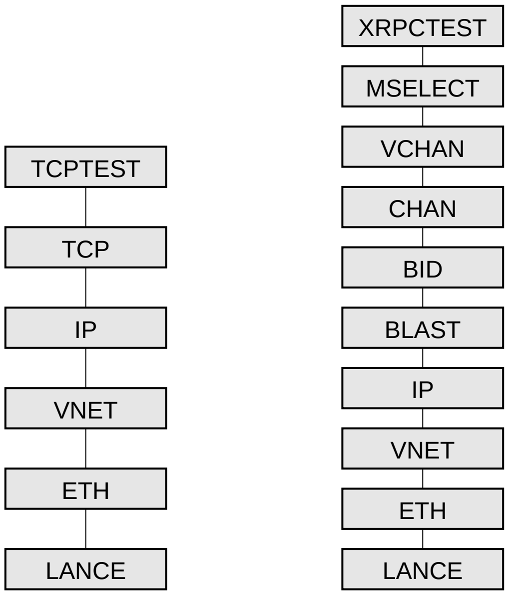

Figure 4.1: Test Protocol Stacks

considerably taller than the one for TCP/IP. At the top is module XRPCTEST, which is the RPC-equivalent of the ping-pong test implemented by TCPTEST. Modules MSELECT, VCHAN, CHAN, BID and BLAST in combination provide the RPC semantics. A detailed description of the protocols these modules implement can be found in [72]. The modules below BLAST are identical to the modules of the same name in the TCP/IP stack.

4.1.3 Base Case

To determine whether the base case is sound, the Scout prototype version of the TCP/IP stack is compared with the version implemented by DEC UNIX v3.2c. The latter is generally considered to be a well-optimized implementation and runs on the same platform as the Scout system. Because of large structural differences between the two, it is, however, not meaningful to directly compare end-to-end performance. For example, in DEC UNIX, network communication involves crossing the user/kernel boundary, whereas in the Scout prototype, all execution is in kernel mode. For this reason, the performance comparison concentrates on TCP/IP input processing. Functionality-wise, the two versions are essentially identical for this part of the network processing, so a direct comparison is meaningful. Since the interest is in processing latency, the case measured involves sending a one byte TCP segment between a pair of hosts.

The necessary data was collected by instrumenting both kernels with a tracing facility that can acquire instruction traces of pristine, working code.[1] Execution times were measured separately using the cycle counter register provided by the Alpha architecture [93]. This register allows measuring time intervals on the order of a few seconds in duration with a resolution of a single CPU cycle (approximately 5.7ns for the 175MHz CPU that was used in the tests). In combination, the traces and execution times enable a detailed comparison of processing overhead.

	UNIX v3.2c:	**Scout v0.0**:
# of instruction executed…		
… from IP to TCP input:	262	437
… from TCP to socket input:	1188	1004
CPI:	4.3	3.3

Table 4.1: Comparison of TCP/IP Implementations

Table 4.1 lists the instruction counts for TCP and IP input processing as well as the average number of cycles per instruction (CPI) achieved for the entire input processing. The first row in the table gives the number of instructions executed as part of IP processing, and the second row gives the number of instructions executed as part of TCP processing. For UNIX, IP processing includes all instructions executed between entering `ipintr` and entering `tcp_input` and for Scout this includes everything between `ipDemux` and `tcpDemux`. Similarly, for TCP processing under UNIX, everything between `tcp_input` and `sowakeup` is counted and for Scout everything between `tcpDemux` and `clientStreamDemux` is counted. The third row gives the average CPI for the entire TCP/IP input processing. It is the quotient of the execution times (in cycles) and the total instruction count.

[1]The traces are available at http://www.cs.arizona.edu/scout/tcpip/.

As the first and second rows in Table 4.1 illustrate, DEC UNIX has a shorter IP processing while the Scout implementation has a shorter TCP processing. Overall, the two traces have almost the same length: 1450 instructions for DEC UNIX versus 1441 instructions for Scout. As the last row shows, the average number of cycles required to execute each instruction (CPI) is 3.3 for Scout and 4.3 for UNIX, so in terms of actual execution time, Scout is more than 20% faster. The important point, however, is that the similarity in code-path length suggests that the Scout TCP/IP is indeed comparable to production-quality implementations.

4.2 Latency Reducing Techniques

This section describes four techniques to reduce protocol-processing latency. Unlike other optimizations that improve execution speed by reducing the number of instructions executed, these techniques are primarily targeted at reducing the average *cost* of each instruction. That is, they attempt to reduce the average CPI. The first three techniques rely on the path abstraction, whereas the fourth technique is a purely compiler-based technique that is also aimed at improving predictability of execution time.

4.2.1 Outlining

As the name suggests, outlining is the opposite of inlining. It exploits the fact that not all basic blocks in a subroutine (function) are executed with equal frequency. For example, error handling in the form of a kernel panic is clearly expected to be a low-frequency event. Unfortunately, it is rarely possible for a compiler to detect such cases based only on compile-time information. In general, basic blocks are generated simply in the order of the corresponding source code lines. For example, the sample C source code shown on the left is often translated to machine code of the form shown on the right:

```
                                        :
       :                      load      r0,(bad_case)
if (bad_case) {               jump_if_0 r0,good_day
   panic ("bad day");         load_addr a0,"bad day"
}                             call      panic
printf ("good day");       good_day:
       :                      load_addr a0,"good day"
```

```
                call      printf
                   :
```

The machine code on the right hand side is suboptimal for two reasons: (1) it requires a jump to skip the error handling code, and (2) it introduces a gap in the i-cache if the block size is larger than one instruction. A taken jump often results in pipeline stalls and i-cache gaps waste memory bandwidth because useless instructions are loaded into the cache. This can be avoided by moving error handling code out of the main line of execution, that is, by *outlining* error handling code. Such outlined code could, for example, be moved to the end of the function or to the end of the program where it does not interfere with any frequently executed code.

Outlining is sometimes used with profile-based optimizers [47, 77]. With profile information, outlining can be automated relatively easily. However, for the purpose of experimentation, it is more appropriate to use a language based approach that gives full and direct control to the programmer. Thus, we modified the GNU C compiler such that if-statements can be annotated with a static prediction as to whether the if-conditional will mostly evaluate to true or false. If-statements with annotations will have the machine code for the unlikely branch generated at the end of the function. Un-annotated if-statements are translated as usual. With this compiler-extension, the code on the left is translated into the machine code on the right:

```
                                   :
        :                     load         r0,(bad_case)
if (bad_case @ 0) {           jump_if_not_0 r0,bad_day
   panic("bad day");          load_addr    a0,"good day"
}                             call         printf
printf("good day");        continue:
        :                          :
                              return_from_function

                           bad_day:
                              load_addr    a0,"bad day"
                              call         panic
                              jump         continue
```

Note that the if-conditional is followed by an `@0` annotation. This tells the modified compiler that the expression is expected to evaluate to false most of the time. In contrast, the annotation `@1` would mark a mostly-true expression. For portability and readability, such annotations are normally hidden in C pre-processor macros called `PREDICT_FAL-SE` and `PREDICT_TRUE`.

The above machine code avoids the taken jump and the i-cache gap at the cost of an additional jump in the infrequent case. Corresponding code is generated for if-statements with an else-branch. In that case, the static number of jumps remains the same, however. It is also possible to use such annotations to direct the compiler's optimizer. For example, it would be reasonable to give outlined code lower priority during register allocation. The present implementation does not exploit this option.

Outlining should not be applied overly aggressively as otherwise the reduced locality and the additional jumps caused by the execution of outlined basic blocks will negate all potential for performance improvement. In practice, the following three cases appear to be good candidates for outlining:

1. Error handling. Any kind of expensive error handling can be safely outlined. Error handling is expensive, for example, if it requires a reboot of the machine, console I/O, or similar actions.

2. Initialization code. Any code along the critical path of execution that is executed only once (e.g., at system startup) can be outlined.

3. Conditionally infrequent code. Some code is frequently executed only under certain circumstances. If those circumstances are not met in a given path, the relevant code can be outlined.

Note that the first and second cases involve predictions that are independent of any dynamic aspects of the way the code is used. In contrast, the third case critically depends on having dynamic information available. For example, a path used in a latency sensitive path might outline all unrolled loops, whereas a throughput sensitive path might leave them inlined. The former makes sense because the latency sensitive case usually involves so little data processing that unrolled loops are never entered.

The performance results reported in Section 4.3 will show that outlining alone does not make a tremendous difference in end-to-end processing latency. However, the dynamic code density improvements that it can achieve is essential to the effectiveness of the next two techniques: cloning and path-inlining.

4.2.2 Cloning

Cloning involves creating a copy of a function. The cloned copy can be relocated to a more appropriate address and/or optimized for a particular use. For frequently executed paths, it is generally desirable to pack the involved functions as tightly as possible since the resulting increase in code-density can improve i-cache, TLB, and paging behavior. The later cloning is applied in the lifetime of a system, the more information is available to specialize the cloned functions. For example, if cloning is delayed until a TCP/IP path is established, most connection state will remain constant and can be used to partially evaluate the cloned function. This achieves similar benefits as code synthesis [60].

Just like inlining, cloning is at odds with locality of reference. Cloning at connection creation time will lead to one cloned copy per connection, while cloning at module graph creation time requires only one copy per protocol stack. By choosing the point at which cloning is performed, it is possible to tradeoff locality of reference with the amount of specialization that can be applied.

Cloning can be considered the next logical step following outlining—the latter improves (dynamic) instruction density within a function, while the former achieves the same across functions. Figure 4.2 summarizes the effects that outlining and cloning have on the i-cache footprint. The leftmost column shows many small i-cache gaps due to infrequently executed code. As shown in the middle column, outlining compresses frequently executed code and moves everything else to the end of the function. The rightmost column shows that cloning leads to a contiguous layout for clone A and clone B. Note that this particular example assumes that the clones and the original functions can share the outlined code. Whether this is possible depends on architectural details. For the Alpha, sharing is normally possible. Where sharing is not possible, cloning places a copy of the outlined code behind all frequently executed code.

Cloning has been implemented as a means to allow flexible experimentation with various function positioning algorithms. For this purpose, it is most adequate to perform

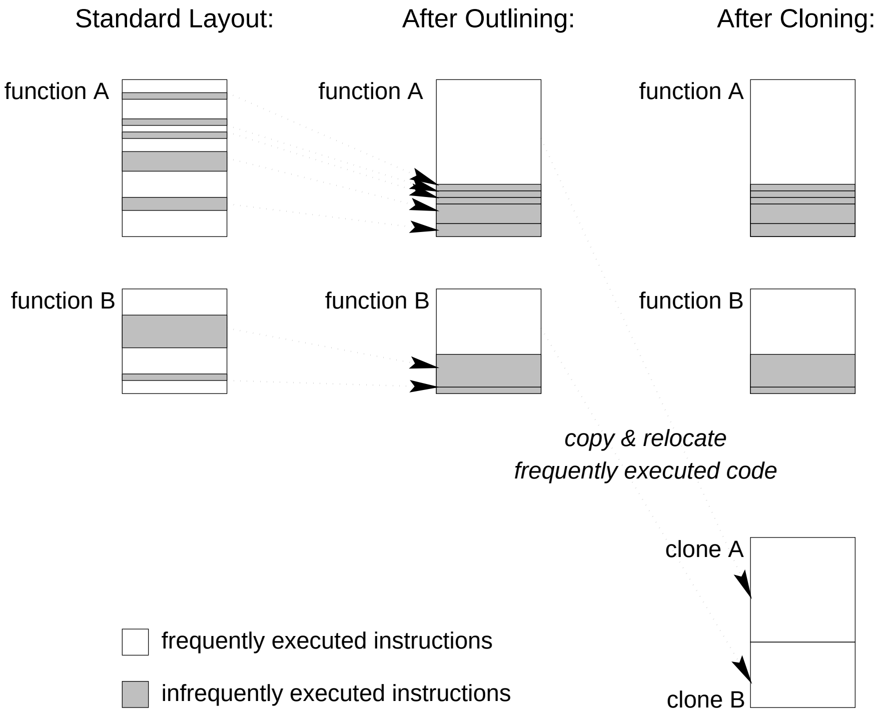

Figure 4.2: Effects of Outlining and Cloning

cloning at system boot time instead of at build time and to limit specialization to simple code improvements. The supported code specializations are specific to the Alpha architecture and targeted at reducing function call overhead. In particular, under certain circumstances, the Alpha calling convention allows skipping the first few instructions in the function prologue. Similarly, if a caller and callee are spatially close, it is possible to replace a jump to an absolute address with a PC-relative branch. This typically avoids the load instruction required to load the address of the callee's entry point and also improves branch-prediction accuracy.

Extensive experiments were performed with different layout strategies for cloned code. The idea was that, ideally, it should be possible to avoid all i-cache conflicts along a critical path of execution. With a direct-mapped i-cache, the starting address of a function determines exactly which i-cache blocks it is going to occupy [62]. Consequently, by choosing appropriate addresses, it is possible to optimize i-cache behavior for the sequence of functions in a given path. The cost is that this fine-grained control of function-placement occasionally makes it necessary to introduce gaps between two consecutive functions. Gaps have the obvious cost of occupying main memory without being of any direct use. More subtly, if i-cache blocks are larger than one instruction, fetching the last instructions in a function frequently results in part of a gap being loaded into the i-cache as well, thereby wasting memory bandwidth.

A tool employing simple heuristics was devised that, based on a trace-file, computes a layout that minimizes replacement misses without introducing too many additional gaps. This approach can be called *micro-positioning* because function placement is controlled down to the size of an individual instruction. I-cache simulation results were encouraging—the tool made it possible to reduce replacement misses for the TCP/IP path by an order of magnitude (from 40, down to 4), while introducing only four or five new cold misses due to gaps.

However, when performing end-to-end measurements, a much simpler layout strategy consistently outperformed the micro-positioning approach. The simpler layout strategy achieves a *bipartite layout*. Cloned functions are divided into two classes: *path* functions that are executed once and *library* functions that are executed multiple times per path invocation. There is very little benefit in keeping path functions in the cache after they executed, as there is no temporal locality unless the entire path fits into the i-cache. In contrast, library functions should be kept cached between the first and and last invocation from a path. Based on these considerations it makes sense to partition the i-cache into a path partition and a library partition. Within a partition, functions are placed in the order in which they are called. Such a sequential layout maximizes the effectiveness of prefetching hardware that may be present. This layout strategy is so simple that it can be computed easily at runtime—the only dynamic information required is the order in which the functions are invoked. In essence, computing a bipartite layout consists of applying the well-known closest-is-best strategy to the library and path partition *individually* [77].

Establishing the performance advantage of the bipartite layout relative to the micro-positioning approach is difficult since small changes to the heuristics of the latter approach resulted in large performance variations. The micro-positioning approach usually performed somewhat worse than a bipartite layout and sometimes almost equally well, but never better. It is not entirely obvious why this is so and it is impossible to make any definite conclusions without even more fine-grained simulations, but we have three hypotheses. First, micro-positioning leads to a non-sequential memory access pattern because a cloned function is positioned wherever it fits best, that is, where it incurs the minimum number of replacement misses. It may be this nearly random access pattern that causes the overall slowdown. Second, the gaps introduced by the micro-positioning approach do cost extra memory bandwidth. This hypothesis is corroborated by the fact that we have not found a single instance where aligning function entry-points or similar gap-introducing techniques would have improved end-to-end latency. Note that this is in stark contrast with the findings published in [43], where i-cache optimization focused on functions with a very high degree of locality. So it may be that micro-positioning suffers because of the memory bandwidth wasted on loading gaps. Third, the DEC 3000/600 workstations used in the experiments employ a large second-level cache. It may be the case that the initial i-cache misses also missed in the second-level cache. On the other hand, i-cache replacement misses are almost guaranteed to result in a second-level cache hit. Thus, it is quite possible that 36 replacement misses were cheaper than four or five additional cold misses introduced by micro-positioning.

Despite the unexpected outcome, the above result is encouraging. It is not necessary to compute an optimal layout to improve i-cache performance—a simple layout-strategy such as the bipartite layout appears to be just as good (or even better) at a fraction of the cost. It must be emphasized that the bipartite layout strategy may not be appropriate if all the path and library functions fit into the i-cache. If it is likely that the path will remain cached between subsequent path-invocations, it is better to use a simple linear allocation scheme that allocates functions strictly in the order of invocation, that is, without making any distinction between library and path functions. This is a recurrent theme for cache-oriented optimizations: the best approach for a problem that fits into the cache is often radically different from the best one for a problem that exceeds the cache size.

4.2.3 Path-Inlining

The third latency reducing technique is path-inlining. This is an aggressive form of inlining where the entire latency-sensitive path of execution is inlined to form a single function. Consider that a path consists of a sequence of stages. The interfaces in the stages imply the entire processing that a message undergoes as it traverses a path. If it were possible to know the sequence of stages in a path at system build time, it would be possible to prepare optimized code for that path simply by compiling the functions encountered in the interfaces as a single function. One way to achieve this is to let the system designer choose what sequences of modules are important, pre-generate code for those important sequences, and then, at runtime, replace the modular code of a path with the optimized code. This can be realized using a path transformation rule (see Section 2.2.3.3) whose guard checks whether or not the sequence of modules in a path matches the sequence of modules for which a path-inlined function was generated. If so, the function pointers in the interfaces can be replaced with pointers to the path-inlined version.

Since path-inlining results in code that is specific to a particular sequence of modules, it is warranted only if the resulting code-path is executed frequently. It is also important to avoid inlining library-functions: by definition, library-functions are called multiple times during a single path execution, so it is better to preserve the locality of reference that they afford. In addition, inlining library-functions would likely lead to an excessive growth in code size.

The advantage of path-inlining is that it removes almost all call overhead and greatly increases the amount of context available to the compiler for optimization. For example, in the VNET module, output processing consists of simply calling the next lower layer's output function. With path-inlining, the compiler can trivially detect and eliminate such useless call overhead.

While path-inlining is simple in principle, the practical problem is quite difficult. None of the commonly available C compilers are able to inline code across module boundaries (object files) and through indirect function calls. Note that inlining through indirect function calls is made possible by information available from the path that is being optimized for. In essence, this is how routing decisions are frozen into the code-path. There are tools available that assist in cross-module inlining, but the ones that were available were not reliable enough to be of much use. While it should not be difficult to add path-information assisted cross-module inlining to an existing C compiler, the path-inlined versions for the TCP/IP and RPC paths were obtained by manually combining code from different modules and then using gcc's normal inlining facility to produce the final code. For TCP/IP, path-inlining resulted in two large functions: one for input processing and one for output processing. Roughly the same applies for the RPC stack, although the split is slightly different: one function takes care of all the processing in protocols XRPCTEST, MSELECT, VCHAN as well as the output processing in CHAN and the protocols below it, whereas the other function handles all input processing up to the CHAN protocol.

4.2.4 Last Call Optimization

The fourth and final technique is called *last call optimization*. It does not *exploit* paths but instead addresses an issue that frequently arises during path execution, namely deeply nested call chains. Often, the last action of a partial processing function in a path stage is to call the processing function of the next stage in the path. This means that each stage in a path requires additional stack space to store the call frame for the stage's processing function. This is often wasteful since, if the call frame of a stage is not accessible to more deeply nested call frames, it could have been deallocated before calling the next stage.

The last call optimization recognizes such opportunities and avoids wasting stack space by deallocating stack frames as early as possible. Ideally, in a calling sequence that is nested N deep, the amount of stack space used would be just the *maximum* frame size among the active functions instead of the *sum* of the frame sizes. This last call optimization is an old technique (e.g., [33]) that is popular with compilers for functional languages, but not for imperative languages such as C. The main problem with imperative languages is that it is difficult to decide whether or not a callee has access to a caller's stack frame. A simple solution is to apply the last call optimization only if none of the local (automatic) variables have had their addresses taken. This is conservative but sufficiently accurate to uncover many last call opportunities.

A trial-implementation of the last call optimization in gcc showed improvements of up to 30% for heavily recursive functions. Unfortunately, for the TCP/IP and RPC stacks, it did not achieve a measurable improvement. There are several likely reasons for this. First, about half the available last call opportunities were destroyed by the reference counting scheme that was present in the Scout prototype. Specifically, there were several occasions where the optimization could have been applied had it not been for the few instructions required to decrement a reference count after returning from a deeply nested function call.[2] Second, the test programs did not stress stack usage because the tests did not involve any concurrency. This means that the entire system essentially operated on a single stack that remained cached across multiple path executions. Third, Section 4.3.3.3 will show that the TCP/IP and RPC stacks have such poor i-cache behavior on the test system that the difference due to the last call optimization is not noticeable. On a system with larger i-caches or with smaller networking stacks, the last call optimization likely would make a noticeable difference.

4.3 Evaluation

This section evaluates the three path-based techniques presented in the previous section. It first describes the specific test cases and then follows with a presentation of end-to-end latency results and a detailed, trace-based analysis of processing behavior. Throughput measurements are not presented since they would simply confirm that none of the techniques had a measurably negative effect on throughput. In fact, as is commonly the case, the latency improvements also resulted in a slightly higher throughput.

4.3.1 Test Cases

All measurements are for the environment described in Section 4.1.1. Both TCP/IP and RPC are measured in several configurations that enable gauging the effect of each technique. An exhaustive measurement of all possible combinations would have been impractical, so we focus on the following six version and supply additional data as necessary.

[2] The current version of Scout implements reference counting at the path level instead of the module level, so this problem has become less of an issue.

- **STD**: This is the Scout prototype base case described in Section 4.1.3. It uses none of the latency-reducing optimizations described in Section 4.2.
- **OUT:** Like STD, but uses outlining to eliminate error handling and other basic blocks that are infrequently executed on the latency-sensitive path.
- **CLO:** Like OUT, but uses cloning in addition to outlining to achieve a dense i-cache footprint. A bipartite layout is used to ensure that path-functions do not collide with library functions.
- **BAD:** Like CLO, but cloning has been used to artificially *worsen* the i-cache behavior. While not strictly a worst-case scenario, this version is used to establish the potential of i-cache effects to influence processing latency. Specifically, for the TCP stack, version BAD results in 217 additional i-cache and 110 additional b-cache misses (relative to CLO, which has 483 i-cache and 678 b-cache misses). For the RPC stack, it results in 233 additional i-cache and 14 additional b-cache misses (relative to CLO with 488 i-cache and 845 b-cache misses).
- **PIN:** Like OUT, but also uses path-inlining.
- **ALL:** Like PIN, but cloning with a bipartite layout has been used to improve i-cache behavior. That is, this version uses all techniques, and is expected to achieve the best performance.

Note that all versions except STD use path specific code. Thus, it is necessary to lookup the appropriate path for incoming packets either by using PathIDs [56] or a packet classifier (such as the one presented in Section 3.4.1). To keep this study independent of the quality of the classifier, which may well be assisted by hardware, and independent of whether PathIDs are used, the path lookup costs are excluded from the results presented in the remainder of this chapter.

4.3.2 End-to-End Results

TCP and RPC latency was measured by ping-ponging packets with no payload between a server and a client machine. Since TCP is stream-oriented, it does not send any network packets unless there is data to be sent. Thus, the *no payload* case is approximated by sending 1B of data per message. For both protocol stacks, the tests result in 64-byte frames on the wire since that is the minimum frame size for Ethernet. The reported end-to-end latency is the average time it took to complete one roundtrip in a test involving 100,000 roundtrips. Time was measured with a clock running at 1024Hz, thus yielding roughly a 1ms resolution.

For the TCP/IP stack, the optimizations were applied to both the server and client side. Since the processing on the server and client side is almost identical, the improvement on each side is simply half of the end-to-end improvement. For the RPC stack, the optimizations were restricted to the client side. On the server side, the configuration yielding the best performance was used in all measurements (which happened to be the ALL version). Always running the same RPC server ensures that the reference point remains fixed and allows a meaningful analysis of client performance.

	TCP/IP		**RPC**	
Version	T_e [μs]	Δ [%]	T_e [μs]	Δ [%]
BAD	498.8±0.29	+60.5	457.1±0.20	+25.1
STD	351.0±0.28	+12.9	399.2±0.29	+9.2
OUT	336.1±0.37	+8.1	394.6±0.10	+8.0
CLO	325.5±0.07	+4.7	383.1±0.20	+4.8
PIN	317.1±0.03	+2.0	367.3±0.19	+0.5
ALL	310.8±0.27	+0.0	365.5±0.26	+0.0

Table 4.2: Roundtrip Latency

Table 4.2 shows the end-to-end results. The rows are sorted according to decreasing latency, with each row giving the performance of one version of the TCP/IP and RPC stacks. The performance is reported in absolute terms as the mean roundtrip time plus/minus one standard deviation, and in relative terms as the per cent slow-down compared to the fastest version (ALL). For TCP/IP, the mean and standard deviation were computed based on ten samples; five samples were collected for RPC.

As the table shows, the BAD version of the TCP/IP stack performs by far the worst. With almost 500μs per roundtrip, it is over 173μs slower than version CLO, which corresponds to a slowdown of more than 53%. As explained above, the code in the two versions is essentially identical. The only significant difference is the layout of that code. This clearly shows that i-cache effects can have a profound effect on end-to-end latency.

Row STD shows that the regular Scout prototype version of the protocol stacks has a much better cache behavior than BAD. Compared to the best case, that version is slower by about 12.9% for TCP/IP and 9.2% for RPC. There are two reasons why STD performs relatively well. First, earlier experiences with direct-mapped caches led to attempts to improve cache performance by manually changing the order in which functions appear within the object files and by changing the link order. Because of such manual tuning, the STD version has a reasonably good cache behavior to begin with. Second, it also appears to be the case that the function usage pattern in the Scout prototype is such that laying out the functions in the address space in what basically amounts to a random manner, yields an average performance that is closer to the best case than to the worst case. This is especially true since in the latency sensitive case, there are few loops that have the potential for pathological cache-behavior. Keep in mind, however, that case BAD is possible in practice unless the cache layout is controlled explicitly. The techniques proposed in this chapter provide sufficient control to avoid such a bad layout.

Row OUT indicates that outlining works quite well for TCP/IP—it reduces roundtrip time by about 15μs compared to STD. Since both the client and the server use outlining, the reduction on the client side is roughly half of the end-to-end reduction, or 7.5μs. Outlining works less well for RPC but is still able to achieve a 4.6μs reduction. This behavior can be explained by the fact that TCP consists of a few large functions that handle most of the protocol processing (including connection establishment, tear-down, and packet retransmission), whereas RPC consists of many small functions that often handle exceptional events through separate functions. In this sense, the RPC code is already structured in a way that handles exceptional events outside the performance critical code path. Nevertheless, outlining does result in significantly improved performance for both protocol stacks.

In contrast, row CLO indicates that cloning works better for RPC than for TCP. In the former case, the reduction on the client side is about 11.5μs whereas in the latter case the client-side reduction is roughly 5.3μs. This makes sense since TCP/IP absorbs most of its instruction locality in a few, big functions, meaning that there are few opportunities for self-interference. The many-small-functions structure of the RPC stack makes it likely that the uncontrolled layout present in version OUT leads to unnecessary replacement misses. Conversely, this means that there are good opportunities for cloning to improve cache effectiveness.

Path-inlining also appears to work well for the RPC stack. Since PIN is the same as version OUT with path-inlining enabled, it is more meaningful to compare it to the outlined version (OUT), rather than the next best version (CLO). If we do so, we find that the TCP/IP client side latency is about 9.5μs and the RPC client side about 27.3μs below the corresponding value in row OUT. Again, this is consistent with the fact that the RPC stack contains many more—and typically much smaller—functions than TCP. Just eliminating call-overhead through inlining improves the performance of the RPC stack significantly.

Finally, row ALL shows the roundtrip latency of the version with all optimizations applied. As expected, it is indeed the fastest version. However, the client-side reduction for TCP/IP compared to PIN is only about 3.1μs and the improvement in the RPC case is a meager 1.8μs. That is, with path-inlined code, partitioning library and path functions does not increase performance much further.

While end-to-end latency improvements are certainly respectable, they are nevertheless fractional on the given test system. It is important to keep in mind, however, that modern high-performance network adapters have much lower latency than the LANCE Ethernet adapter present in the DEC 3000 system [3]. To put this into perspective, consider that a minimum-sized Ethernet packet is 64 bytes long, to which an 8 byte long preamble is added. At the speed of a 10Mbps Ethernet, transmitting the frame takes 57.6μs. This is compounded by the relative tardiness of the LANCE controller itself: we measured 105μs between the point where a frame is passed to the controller and the point where the *transmission complete* interrupt handler is invoked. The LANCE overhead of 47.4μs is consistent with the 51μs figure reported elsewhere for the same controller in an older generation workstation [104]. Since the latency between sending the frame and the receive interrupt on the destination system is likely to be higher, and since each roundtrip involves two message transmissions, we can safely subtract $105\mu s \times 2 = 210\mu s$ from the end-to-end latency to get an estimate of the actual processing time involved. For example, if we apply this correction to the TCP/IP stack, we find that version BAD is actually 186% slower than the fastest version. Even version STD is still 40% slower than version ALL.

Table 4.3 revisits the end-to-end latency numbers, adjusted to factor out the overhead imposed by the controller and Ethernet. While there will obviously be some additional latency, one should expect roundtrip times on the order of $50\mu s$ rather than the $210\mu s$ measured on our experimental platform.[3]

	TCP/IP		**RPC**	
Version	T_e [μs]	Δ [%]	T_e [μs]	Δ [%]
BAD	288.8	+186.5	247.1	+59.0
STD	141.0	+40.2	189.2	+21.7
OUT	126.1	+25.1	184.6	+18.7
CLO	115.5	+14.6	173.1	+11.3
PIN	107.1	+6.3	157.3	+1.2
ALL	100.8	+0.0	155.5	+0.0

Table 4.3: Roundtrip Latency Adjusted for Network and Controller

4.3.3 Detailed Analysis

The end-to-end results are interesting to establish global performance effects, but since some of the protocol processing can be overlapped with network I/O, they are not directly related to CPU utilization. Also, it is impossible to control all performance parameters simultaneously. For example, the tests did not explicitly control data-cache performance. Similarly, there are other sources of variability. For example, the memory free-list is likely to vary from test case to test case (e.g., due to different memory allocation patterns at boot time). While not all of these effects can be controlled, most can be measured.

Towards this end, we collected two additional data sets. The first is a set of instruction traces that cover most of the protocol processing. The second is a set of fine-grained

[3]Numbers is this range have been reported in the literature for FDDI and ATM controllers [23].

measurements of the execution time of the traced code. The instruction traces do not cover all of the processing since the tracing facility did not allow the tracing of interrupt handling, but other than that, the traces are complete.

4.3.3.1 Cache Statistics

Using the execution traces and a simulator of the DEC 3000/600 memory hierarchy it is possible to compute the cache statistics presented in Table 4.4. It lists the i-cache, d-cache, and b-cache performance as the number of misses to the cache (column **Miss**), the total number of accesses to the cache (column **Acc**), and the number of replacement misses (column **Repl**). Note that the middle three columns represents a combination of the d-cache and write-buffer performance since the d-cache is used only on the read path and the write-buffer is used only on the write path. The write-buffer in the 21064 CPU performs write-merging, so a merged write is counted like a cache-hit whereas a write that results in a write to the b-cache is counted like a cache-miss.

The rightmost column in the table shows that, except for the BAD versions, none of the tests cause replacement misses in the b-cache. Since the entire kernel is small enough to fit into the b-cache, this means that all code executes out of the b-cache unless there are conflicts with data accesses performed outside of the traced code.

A more important observation is that the cache simulations confirm that cloning with a bipartite layout does indeed help avoid i-cache replacement misses. For example, applying cloning to version OUT reduces the number of i-cache replacement misses in the TCP/IP stack from 69 to 27. Interestingly, path-inlining alone does not get rid of many replacement misses. The table shows that the PIN version still suffers from 66 such misses. This is because, for PIN, there is nothing that prevents library code from clashing with path code.

The RPC case is analogous to TCP/IP except that the reductions in replacement misses are even larger: compared to version OUT, cloning alone causes a reduction by a factor of 3.7 and, together with path-inlining, not a single replacement miss remains.

		i-cache			d-cache/wr-buffer			b-cache		
		Miss	Acc.	Repl	Miss	Acc	Repl	Miss	Acc	Repl
	BAD	700	4718	224	459	1862	31	863	1390	110
	STD	586	4750	72	492	1845	56	800	1286	0
	OUT	547	4728	69	462	1841	40	731	1183	0
TCP/IP	CLO	483	4684	27	455	1862	34	678	1074	0
	PIN	484	4245	66	406	1668	27	630	1015	0
	ALL	414	4215	10	401	1682	28	596	913	0
	BAD	721	4253	176	556	1663	19	995	1544	14
	STD	590	4291	31	547	1635	14	1004	1379	0
	OUT	542	4257	26	556	1629	19	951	1313	0
RPC	CLO	488	4227	7	547	1664	13	845	1213	0
	PIN	402	3471	14	453	1310	19	694	972	0
	ALL	374	3468	0	450	1330	13	662	931	0

Table 4.4: Cache Performance. **Miss**: number of accesses that missed in the cache. **Acc**: Total number of cache accesses. **Repl**: Number of replacement misses.

4.3.3.2 Processing Time Measurements

Given the execution traces and timings, it is possible to derive a number of interesting quantities: protocol processing time, CPI, and the memory CPI (mCPI)—the average number of cycles that each instruction was stalled due to a memory access. Protocol processing time can be measured using the CPU cycle counter. From this, the CPI can be derived from this by dividing it with the length of the trace (in instructions). The memory CPI can then be calculated by subtracting the instruction CPI (iCPI). The iCPI is the average number of cycles spent on each instruction assuming a perfect memory system, which means that the relationship $\text{CPI} = \text{iCPI} + \text{mCPI}$ holds. The iCPI can be derived from the instruction trace by feeding it into a CPU simulator that assumes a perfect memory system. The simulator used for this study is somewhat crude with respect to branches as it simply adds a fixed penalty for each taken branch, but other than that, it has almost perfect accuracy.

The results obtained when applying these derivations are shown in Table 4.5. The T_p columns show measured processing time in micro-seconds. Like before, this is shown

	TCP/IP				RPC			
	T_p [μs]	Length	iCPI	mCPI	T_p [μs]	Length	iCPI	mCPI
BAD	167.0±1.75	4718	1.61	4.58	154.2±0.47	4253	1.69	4.66
STD	89.6±0.34	4750	1.72	1.58	85.1±0.53	4291	1.78	1.69
OUT	84.1±0.12	4728	1.61	1.50	81.0±0.16	4257	1.68	1.65
CLO	77.2±0.36	4684	1.61	1.28	71.0±0.29	4227	1.69	1.25
PIN	69.9±0.48	4245	1.57	1.31	57.7±0.18	3471	1.66	1.25
ALL	66.1±0.48	4215	1.57	1.17	49.2±0.12	3468	1.67	0.81

Table 4.5: Protocol Processing Costs

as the sample mean plus/minus the sample standard deviation. The columns labelled Length give the trace length in instructions. Columns mCPI and iCPI are the memory and instruction CPI values, respectively.

Looking at the iCPI columns, we find that both the TCP/IP and RPC stack break down into three classes: the standard version has the largest iCPI, the versions using outlining (BAD, OUT, CLO) have the second largest value, and the path-inlined versions have the smallest value. This is expected since the code within each class is largely identical. Since the CPU simulator adds a fixed penalty for each taken branch, the decrease in iCPI when going from the standard version to the outlined versions corresponds directly to the reduction in taken branches. Interestingly, outlining improves iCPI by almost exactly 0.1 cycles for both protocol stacks. This is a surprisingly large reduction considering that path-inlining achieves a reduction of 0.04 cycles at the most. We expected that the increased context available in the inlined versions would allow the compiler to improve instruction scheduling more. Since this does not seem to be the case, the performance improvement due to path-inlining stems mostly from a reduction in the critical-path code size. Note that even in the best case, the iCPI value is still above 1.5. While some of this can be attributed to suboptimal code generation on the part of gcc 2.6.0, a more fundamental reason for this large value is the structure of systems code: the traces show that there is very little actual computation, but much interpretation and branching.

The mCPI columns in the table show that, except for the RPC case of ALL, the CPU spends well above 1 cycle per instruction waiting for memory (on average). Comparing the mCPI values for the various versions, we find that the proposed techniques are rather effective. Both protocol stacks achieve a reduction by a factor of more than 3.9 when going from version BAD to version ALL. Even when comparing version ALL to STD we find that the latter has an mCPI that is more than 35% larger. In terms of mCPI reduction, cloning with a bipartite layout and path-inlining are about equally effective. The former is slightly more effective for the TCP/IP stack, but in the RPC case, both achieve a reduction of 0.4 cycles per instruction. Combining the two techniques does have some synergistic effects for TCP/IP. The additional reduction compared to outlining or path-inlining alone is small though, on the order of 0.11 to 0.14 cycles per instruction. Of all the mCPI values, the value 0.81 for the ALL version of the RPC stack clearly stands out. Additional measurements that are not reported here lead us to believe that the value is an anomaly: just small changes to the code resulted in mCPI values more in line with the other results. This serves as a reminder that while the proposed techniques improve cache behavior, it is nearly impossible to achieve perfect control for any reasonably complex system.

4.3.3.3 Performance Improvement Comparison

It is now possible to compare the end-to-end results with the processing execution times and the trace-based cache simulation results. First, we would like to verify that the outlining and cloning improvements are really primarily due to i-cache rather than due to (uncontrolled) d-cache effects. The fact that the mCPI values are much bigger than zero indicates that the memory system is the bottleneck. As all versions run out of the b-cache (except for the BAD versions), the processing time improvement is dominated by changes in the number of b-cache accesses (column ΔN_b in Table 4.6). Thus, we would like to know the percentage I of b-cache access reduction due to the i-cache, as opposed to the d-cache/write-buffer.[4] If the number of b-cache accesses is reduced purely due to the i-cache, the percentage would be 100%. If the reduction is purely due to the d-cache/write-buffer, it would be 0%. A value greater than 100% indicates that d-cache/write-buffer

[4] In computing this percentage, it is important to keep in mind that the number of b-cache accesses due to the i-cache is given by the number of b-cache accesses minus the number d-cache/write-buffer misses. This is typically greater than the number of i-cache misses since a miss may lead to another i-cache block being prefetched, thus resulting in two b-cache accesses.

performance got worse, but that the i-cache was able to compensate for the losses so that, overall, the number of b-cache access was still reduced.

	TCP/IP					**RPC**				
	I [%]	ΔT_e [μs]	ΔT_p [μs]	ΔN_b [1]	ΔN_m [1]	I [%]	ΔT_e [μs]	ΔT_p [μs]	ΔN_b [1]	ΔN_m [1]
BAD→CLO	97	86.7	89.8	316	110	99	74.0	83.2	331	14
STD→OUT	114	7.4	5.5	103	0	71	4.6	4.1	66	0
OUT→CLO	91	5.3	6.9	109	0	94	11.5	10.0	100	0
OUT→ PIN	70	9.5	14.2	168	0	67	27.3	23.3	341	0
PIN→ ALL	93	3.2	3.8	102	0	95	1.8	8.5	41	0

Table 4.6: Comparison of Latency Improvement

Table 4.6 lists this percentage for both the TCP/IP and RPC protocol stack in the respective columns labelled I. Note that in all but one case more than 90% of the b-cache access reductions obtained through outlining and cloning are due to the i-cache. The exception is where outlining is applied to the standard Scout prototype version of the RPC stack. As shown in row STD→OUT, the i-cache can take credit for only 71% of the reduction in b-cache accesses, but in all other cases, d-cache effects did not lead to significantly overestimating the benefit of a technique.

It is also interesting to compare the end-to-end latency improvements (ΔT_e) with the improvements in processing time (ΔT_p) as reported in Table 4.6. The data shows that the improvements are generally consistent with each other. The end-to-end improvement may be bigger than the processing time improvement if portions of the untraced code executed faster as well. The converse can occur if, for example, most of the improvement occurs in a section of the code whose execution overlaps network communication. The only place where these figures deviate significantly from each other is in the RPC case, when going from the path-inlined version (PIN) to the version that was also cloned (ALL). In this case, the processing time improvement is 8.5μs, but the observed end-to-end improvement is only 1.8μs. This is the same case that caused the 0.81 mCPI reported in Table 4.5 and, as explained previously, is most likely an anomaly.

Finally, it is possible to cross check whether the time improvements are consistent with the reductions in the number of b-cache accesses. If we divide the processing time improvements (ΔT_p) in the second through fifth row by the difference in the number of b-cache accesses (ΔN_b) we get an average b-cache latency in the range from 5.6 to to 17.5 cycles.[5] These values appear reasonable considering that a b-cache access takes 10 cycles to complete. It would be unrealistic to expect exactly 10 cycles per miss since this simple model ignores many of the finer aspects of the DEC 3000's memory system. Also, the same reasoning cannot be applied to the BAD→CLO improvements since the number of b-cache blocks that remained cached across multiple path invocations was not measured. Nevertheless, the table includes the data for the sake of completeness. Note that the PIN→ALL change in the RPC stack yields an 8.5μs processing time improvement, but the difference in the number of b-cache accesses is only 41. This confirms that the anomalous improvement cannot be due to the decrease in the number of b-cache accesses since, otherwise, that would imply that each access cost on the order of 36 cycles—almost four times the theoretical latency.

4.3.3.4 Outlining Effectiveness

The results presented so far are somewhat misleading in that they underestimate the benefits of outlining. While it does achieve performance improvements in and of itself, it is also important as an enabling technology for path-inlining and cloning. Thanks to outlining, the amount of code replication due to path-inlining and cloning is greatly reduced. Together with this size reduction goes an increase in dynamic instruction density, that is, less memory bandwidth is wasted loading useless instructions. This can be demonstrated quantitatively with the results presented in Table 4.7. It shows that without outlining (STD version), around 20% of the instructions loaded into the cache never get executed. For both protocol stacks, outlining reduces this by roughly a factor of 1.4. It is illustrative to consider that a waste of 20% corresponds to 1.8 unused instructions per eight instructions (one cache block). Outlining reduces this to about 1.3 unused instructions. This is a respectable improvement, especially considering that outlining was applied conservatively.

The table also shows that outlining results in impressive critical-path code-size re-

[5] Ignoring the anomalous RPC case PIN→ALL and using a conversion factor of 175 cycles/μs.

	Without Outlining		With Outlining	
	i-cache unused	Size	i-cache unused	Size
TCP/IP	21%	5841	15%	3856
RPC	22%	5085	16%	3641

Table 4.7: Outlining Effectiveness

ductions. The Size columns show the static code size (in number of instructions) of the latency critical path before and after outlining. In the TCP/IP stack, about 1985 instructions could be outlined, corresponding to 34% of the code. Note that this is almost a full primary i-cache worth of instructions (8KB). Similarly, in the RPC stack 28% of the 5085 instructions could be outlined. This reinforces the claim that outlining is a useful technique not only because of its direct benefits, but also as a means to greatly improve cloning and path-inlining effectiveness. Minimizing the size of the path code improves cloning flexibility and increases the likelihood that the entire path will fit into the cache.

4.4 Concluding Remarks

This chapter introduced four latency-reducing techniques: one can take advantage of paths (outlining), two critically depend on paths (cloning and path-inlining), and the fourth (last call optimization) is targeted at reducing overhead due to the deep call-chains that are common to path execution. The fourth technique failed to measurably improve performance in the test environment, but is likely to be beneficial under different circumstances, as discussed in Section 4.2.4. The three path-based techniques achieve two kinds of benefits: first, they improve execution speed by reducing protocol processing latency and, second, they improve predictability of path execution time by providing explicit control over critical-path code layout.

The path-based techniques reduce processing latency by improving the memory system behavior of the code path, i.e., by reducing the mCPI. Fundamentally, this can be achieved by (a) increasing the dynamic instruction stream density, (b) reducing the number of cache conflicts, and (c) reducing the critical-path code size. Each of these components is addressed by one or more of the techniques presented. Since the gap between processor and memory speed continues to widen, the techniques are likely to become even more important in the future. For example, this study was conducted on a machine with a 175MHz dual-issue Alpha processor and a 100MB/s memory system. Now, systems with 600MHz quadruple-issue processors and 200MB/s memory systems are readily available—in other words, the peak execution rate increased by almost a factor of seven, yet the memory bandwidth increased by only a factor of two.

Predictability is often just as important as raw performance. The proposed techniques address this issue by enabling reducing fluctuations in execution speed. The BAD case reported in Section 4.3 demonstrates that an uncontrolled i-cache layout can have a profound effect. Even though this case was constructed artificially, suboptimal configurations are possible and not are uncommon in practice. For example, the measured mCPI for the DEC UNIX v3.2c TCP/IP stack is 2.3, which is significantly worse than the 1.58 mCPI measured for the standard Scout prototype version. The proposed techniques, though not guaranteeing perfect behavior, avoid such bad i-cache behavior.

CHAPTER 5

USING PATHS FOR RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

The greatest of all gifts is the power to estimate things at their true worth.

– La Rochefoucauld

This chapter serves two purposes. First, it provides a concrete example for building a simple, yet fully functional Scout appliance. The appliance presented is a network-attached TV that can display MPEG encoded video [54, 67].

Second, this chapter demonstrates path-derived resource management benefits. To emphasize resource management—as opposed to the path-code related benefits described in the previous chapter—it is best to choose an appliance that spends most of its CPU time in just one or a few modules. To this end, MPEG decoding is ideal. This compression algorithm is capable of reducing the size of a video by a factor of 10 to 100 and with this high compression ratio comes a relatively expensive decompression algorithm. Workstations have only recently become fast enough to perform MPEG decoding in real-time. For example, on a first generation Alpha, it is not atypical that displaying a single video uses up all available CPU time—ninety percent or more of which is spent in the MPEG decoder. This means that code-path overhead such as cross-module call overhead or extraneous operations due to abstraction boundaries are irrelevant for all practical purposes. On the other hand, proper resource management, such as CPU scheduling or buffer management, is crucial when multiple loads are put on the system simultaneously.

5.1 Building NetTV

This section describes the structure and modules of the NetTV appliance, how paths are created, and what attributes are involved in path creation. It also provides evidence that the performance of NetTV is reasonable given the hardware that it is running on.

5.1.1 Module Graph

The complete Scout module graph of NetTV is shown in Figure 5.1. A brief explanation of the modules appearing in this graph is given in Table 5.1. In the figure, each arc is labelled by the pair of interfaces that are used to communicate along the arc. If this label contains just a single name, it means that the interface by that name is used to communicate in both directions (up and down). If the label contains two names separated by a slash (/), the first name refers to the interface used when communicating from the module above to the one below, and the second refers to the interface used in the reverse direction. For example, the label framebuf/⟨null⟩ near the arc between WiMP and TGA indicates that TGA provides a `framebuf` interface to WiMP and that WiMP does not provide an interface to TGA. A description of interfaces appearing in the graph is given in Table 5.2.

The operation of most modules is readily understood from the descriptions given in Table 5.1. The MPEG decoder deserves additional attention, however. MPEG expects the compressed video messages to contain an integral number of MPEG macroblocks. The number of macroblocks per message is expected to be small enough so that the message size does not exceed the maximum transmission unit (MTU) of the network link. This kind of application-level framing (ALF) [16] ensures that the MPEG decoder does not reach the end of the message in the middle of a complex operation. This simplifies the MPEG decoder, reduces queuing inside video paths, minimizes the number of context switches required to process a message, enables integrated layer processing [16], and enables early load shedding, as will be explained later.

Another aspect of the module graph that may not be entirely obvious is that STDIO is connected to TERM by three separate arcs. The former module implements C standard I/O library functions such as `fopen` and `printf` in terms of Scout paths. These functions can be called by any other module in the graph and are provided as a convenience and to facilitate porting existing software to Scout. To implement these services, STDIO has one service access point that it expects to have at least three connections. The first connection is used for standard input (`stdin`), the second for standard output (`stdout`),

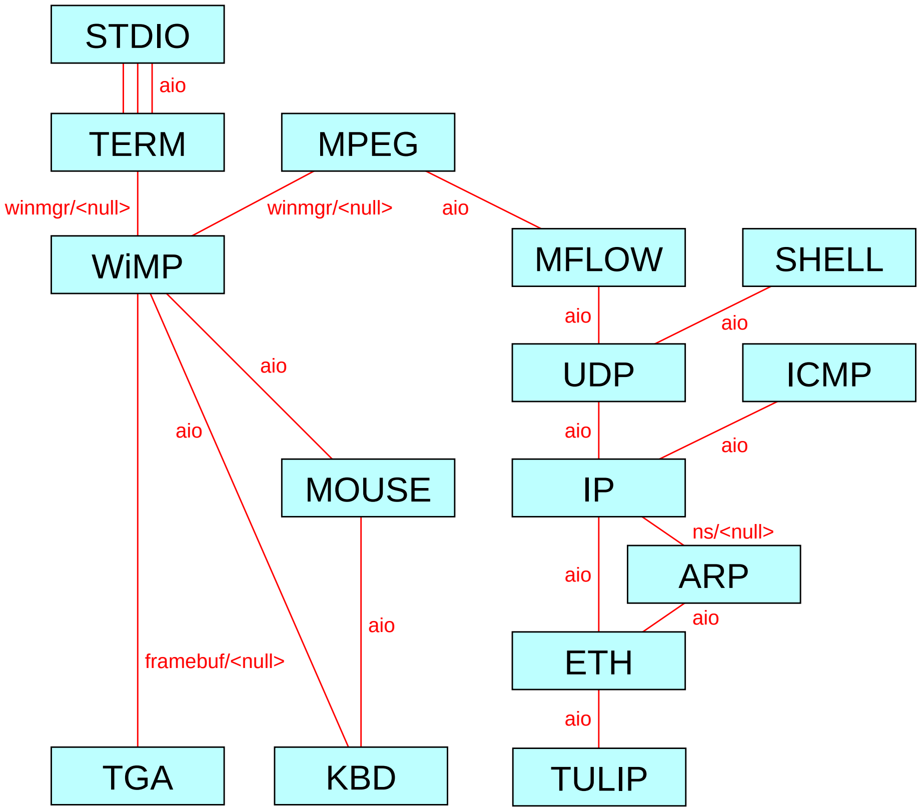

Figure 5.1: Module Graph For MPEG Example

and the third for standard error output (`stderr`). In the NetTV example, these are connected to TERM, so all standard I/O occurs through a terminal emulator window. If more than three connections are made, then paths through those additional connections can be created by calling `fopen` with a path name that starts with the module name to which which the connection leads (if multiple connections lead to the same module name, the first one is used).

5.1.2 Paths

Given the module graph, how are paths used in the NetTV appliance? As discussed in Chapter 2, an initial set of paths is created at system boot time. The initial paths for NetTV are shown in Figure 5.2. As the figure shows, module STDIO creates three paths

Module:	Description:
TULIP	Device driver for DECchip 21040 Ethernet chip.
ETH	Device-independent part of Ethernet protocol processing [65].
ARP	The Ethernet Address Resolution Protocol [79].
IP	The Internet Protocol [82].
ICMP	The Internet Control Message Protocol [81].
UDP	The User Datagram Protocol [80].
SHELL	The command shell. It receives commands such as requests to display a new video and creates appropriate paths in response.
MFLOW	Multimedia-oriented flowcontrol protocol.
MPEG	Implements the MPEG video decompression algorithm.
TGA	Device driver for DECchip 21030 based frame buffers.
KBD	Device driver for IBM PC-AT keyboard interface.
MOUSE	Implements IBM PS/2 mouse protocol.
WiMP	Window manager with paths: MGR [106] derived window manager that supports paths.
TERM	Terminal emulator.
STDIO	Translates between C-style stdio streams and Scout paths. This is used for tasks that are not performance critical, such as error logging.

Table 5.1: Description of NetTV Modules

Interface:	Description:
aio	Asynchronous I/O. Supports sending of messages (sequence of data bytes).
framebuf	Frame buffer. Provides access to the raw frame buffer and allows registering callbacks that are invoked at the beginning of every vertical synchronization blanking period.
winmgr	Window manager. Supports bitblt [78], text rendering, and similar graphics primitives.
ns	Naming-service. Supports lookup and reverse-lookup of arbitrary fixed-size name/value pairs.

Table 5.2: Description of NetTV Interfaces

to TERM—one each for `stdin`, `stdout`, and `stderr`. These paths are created so error logging and keyboard I/O can be performed through the windowing system (by default, standard I/O is connected to the boot console, if there is one). Module TERM realizes this I/O by creating a path to WiMP. This path provides a window on the output side and provides access to keyboard and mouse events on the input side. WiMP itself creates paths to TGA, KBD and MOUSE so it can access the graphics frame buffer and receive raw keyboard and mouse data, respectively. In the networking subsystem, ICMP creates a path through IP to handle ICMP requests. Module IP creates a path to ARP so it can translate IP addresses into link-level (Ethernet) addresses. ARP creates a path for its own use through ETH to be able to receive and respond to ARP messages and, finally, module SHELL creates a path through UDP so it can receive commands from the network.

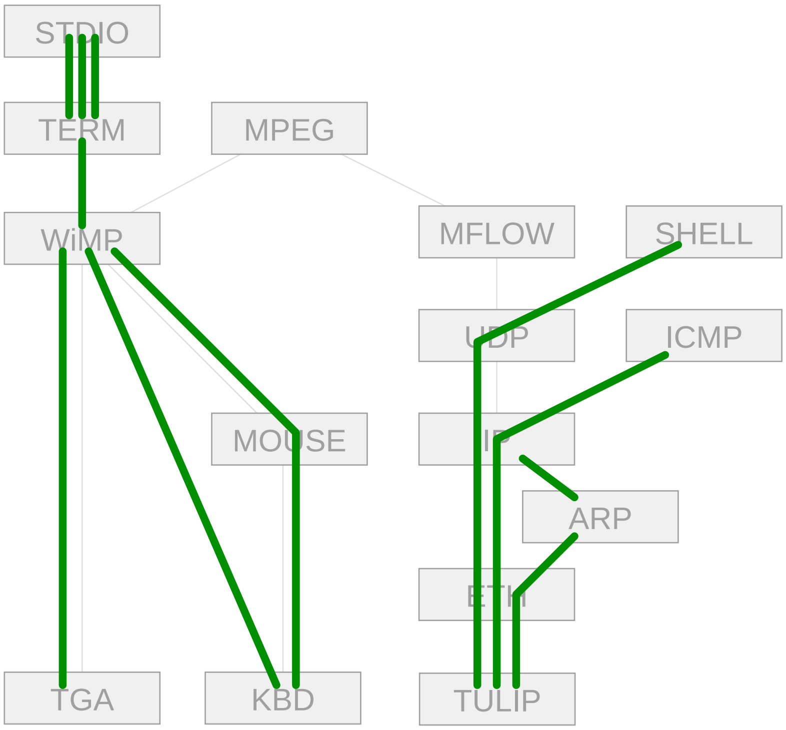

Figure 5.2: Paths Created at Boot Time

5.1.2.1 Shell Commands

Once the shell module has created its path through UDP, it simply waits for command messages to arrive. When such a message arrives, it interprets the command and executes it. In Scout, interpretation involves translating the command and optional parameters into appropriate attribute sets, and execution corresponds to making `pathCreate` and `pathExtend` calls as necessary. Note that in this configuration, shell commands come in from the network, not from a user typing at the keyboard.

The syntax of shell command messages is similar to UNIX-style command lines. Each message simply contains a text string that is interpreted as a command with a list of associated parameters:

`command-name (option-name[=option-value])...`

The command name is used to lookup the recipe of how to translate the arguments into path creation attributes and how to use those attributes to create the paths necessary to achieve the desired semantics. For example, the `mpeg_decode` command would be translated into a `pathCreate` call on router MPEG with an attribute set that contains an indication of the maximum message size (this is possible since MPEG uses ALF) and an attribute that specifies the remote address of the video source (which is implied by the source address in the command message). Then the shell would have to invoke `pathExtend` at the MPEG end of the newly created path, specifying an attribute that forces the path through WiMP and from there on to TGA. A description of the most important attributes used during path creation in NetTV is given in Table 5.3.

Note that the shell needs to have explicit instructions on how to translate each command into one or more appropriate paths. In a sense, these instructions most closely resemble what is traditionally regarded as the application—the modules in the paths that are providing the desired semantics are generally unaware of, and do not have to know about, how they are being used. That is, the majority of modules are expected to resemble simple filters.

Name:	Value type:	Description:
WINDOW_ID	`long`	Informs WiMP (or some other window manager) of the id of the window that should be used for the path. If this attribute is not specified, a new window is created. This enables embedding performance critical paths in a graphical user interface (e.g., a VCR-like interface for NetTV).
PATHNAME	`char *`	Forces the route a path must follow. The value is a string consisting of a sequence of module names, separated by slash characters. With the example graph shown in Figure 5.1, setting this to `"WiMP/TGA"` when creating a path at module MPEG, forces the path through WiMP to TGA (or fails, if such a path is not possible). Support for some form of wildcards may be useful but is not currently supported.
MAX_SIZE	`int`	Specifies maximum message size. This, for example, is used by IP to determine whether datagram reassembly may be needed.
MIN_SIZE	`int`	Specifies minimum message size.
PARTICIPANTS	`Part *`	Specifies the remote and/or the local network address that should be used for communication along the path. In NetTV, an `mpeg_decode` command causes this attribute to be set to the remote network address of of the peer that originated the command.
PASSIVE_OPEN	`bool`	Used to create paths through the network subsystem that can receive data from any peer. For passively opened paths, the local network address must be specified in PARTICIPANTS, for active paths the remote network address must be specified.
PROT_ID	`long`	Used between modules that implement networking protocols to communicate demultiplexing information. Specifically, the value of this attribute is the number that uniquely identifies the next higher layer module to the module that is interpreting this attribute. For example, in Scout, UDP is identified by number five, which IP can use to translate into the IP-relative protocol number `0x11`. Unlike other attributes, this one is reset by each networking protocol and is passed through unmodified by non-networking protocol modules.

Table 5.3: Description of a Commonly-used Path Attributes

5.1.2.2 Video Paths

Figure 5.3 shows a typical NetTV video path. One such path is created for each video to be displayed on the appliance. Each video path starts at the Ethernet device driver (TULIP), goes through the network subsystem, the flow-control protocol (MFLOW) and the MPEG decoder, and then through the window manager (WiMP) to the graphics frame buffer (TGA). For simplicity, only the main queues are shown: the input queue in module TULIP and the output queue in TGA. Both queues are serviced by interrupt handlers. In the Ethernet device driver, the queue is filled in response to receive interrupts, and in the frame buffer module, the output queue is drained in response to interrupts that indicate the beginning of a vertical synchronization period. Output to the display is synchronized to this signal because there is no benefit to updating the display at a higher frequency.

There are three points worth emphasizing about these path. First, there are no queues other than the ones in the device-drivers. As mentioned above, this is due to MPEG's use of ALF. Second, ALF—along with explicit paths—enables integrated layer processing. Since MPEG reads the network messages in units of 32 bits, it would be straight-forward to integrate the (optional) UDP checksum with the reading of the MPEG data, for example. This would require a path-transformation rule that matches MPEG being run over UDP. If this pattern were to match, the path could be transformed by replacing the UDP and MPEG receive processing functions with functions that implement the UDP checksum computation as part of MPEG's reading of the packet data. Third, without queuing in the middle of the path, scheduling is simplified—if the output queue is already full, there is little point in scheduling a thread to process a packet in the input queue. This implication would not hold in the presence of additional queues.

5.1.3 Base Performance

It is interesting to compare the base performance of Scout NetTV to a general purpose operating system running on the same hardware. To this end, Table 5.4 shows the maximum frame rate that Scout and a Linux-based video decoder can achieve for various short videos. Along with the maximum frame rates, it also lists the length of the video in num-

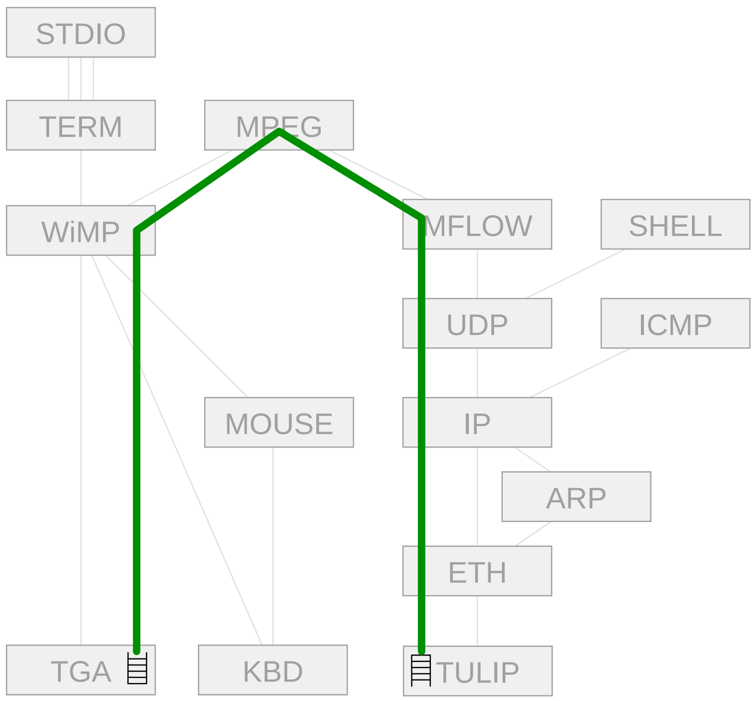

Figure 5.3: Example Video Paths

ber of frames. All measurements were performed on a first-generation 21064A Alpha running at 300MHz. The Scout and Linux MPEG-decoder were derived from the same code base [74], so the only significant difference between the two systems is that Linux requires a context switch to move a video frame from the MPEG decoder process to the windowing system (X11). Since almost no time is spent in the networking subsystem, the performance of that subsystem does not significantly influence overall performance (in fact, separate measurements yielded roughly the same maximum frame rates when sourcing the video from the local disk, or more precisely, the disk cache).

As the table shows, the Scout appliance consistently outperforms the Linux based system by 20-34%. Of course, this is to be expected given that Linux is a general purpose system and the Scout appliance is relatively custom built for the purpose. For this reason, it would not be fair to say Linux is slow (indeed, it performs quite well), but the comparison does show that Scout achieves a performance level that is at least consistent with the machine it is running on.

Video	# of frames	max. rate [fps]	
		Scout	Linux
Flower	150	44.7	37.1
Neptune	1345	49.9	39.2
RedsNightmare	1210	67.1	55.5
Canyon	1758	245.9	183.3

Table 5.4: Coarse Grain Comparison of Scout and Linux

The comparison also illustrates that if the goal is to build an information appliance that displays MPEG encoded video, and nothing else, then a configurable system like Scout might indeed be the better choice. A simple application like this one results in a Scout kernel that is both small (roughly seven times smaller than the Linux kernel) and fast (20-30% faster than Linux for the benchmark videos).

5.2 Resource Management

This section discusses how Scout paths assist in three different resource management tasks: proper sizing of I/O-queues, proper scheduling of the CPU, and admission control.

5.2.1 Queues

As Figure 5.3 shows, the two queues of primary interest in a video path are the input queue in module TULIP and the output queue in module TGA. Both queues are unavoidable: fundamentally, the input queue is necessary because, for high-latency networks, multiple network packets may have to be in transit at any given time to be able to sustain the throughput needed by the video. If multiple packets are in transit, then, due to network jitter, these packets may all arrive clustered together and since the peak arrival rate at the Ethernet is much higher than the typical MPEG processing rate, the queue is needed to buffer such bursts. The output queue is also used to absorb jitter, but it does so at a more global level. First, decompression itself introduces significant jitter. Depending on the spatial and temporal complexity of a video scene, the encoded size of any particular video frame may be orders of magnitudes different from the size of the average frame in that stream. Second, the network itself may suffer from significant jitter, e.g., due to temporary congestion of a network link. The third jitter component is due to the sender of the MPEG stream. For example, the sender may read the video from a disk drive that may be accessed concurrently by other tasks.

Since there are queues in each path, an important resource management question is how big these queues should be. To conserve memory, it is clearly desirable to keep them as small as possible. This is particularly true for the output queue since each queue element consists of a complete video frame, which may be quite sizeable (225KB for a 320×240 RGB image). But on the other hand, the queues need to be big enough so that they can absorb most, if not all jitter normally encountered.

First, consider the input queue. If processing a single packet requires more time than it takes to request a new packet from the source, then an input queue that can hold two packets is sufficient: one slot is occupied by the packet currently being processed, and the second slot is advertised as free to the source. By the time the processing of the current packet has completed, the next packet will have arrived, and thus, the processor is never kept idle. On the other hand, if the roundtrip time (RTT) is greater than the time to process a packet, then the input queue needs to be two times the RTT × bandwidth product of the network. This relationship is easy to derive, but the intuition behind it is that several packets need to be grouped together so that the processing time of the packet group is at least as big as the roundtrip time. Then two slots for such packet groups are required to keep the network pipe full. This discussion implies that in order to properly size the input queue, it is necessary to know the relationship between the average roundtrip time and the average processing time per packet. The roundtrip time can be estimated, for example, with the algorithm typically used for TCP [50]. For example, in the protocol stack of NetTV, MFLOW could implement this by putting a timestamp in its packet header and making available this measured roundtrip time by maintaining a well-known path attribute (e.g., AVG_RTT), giving the measured average roundtrip time in micro-seconds. Keeping track of the path execution time is straight-forward as well, especially if the scheduler maintains a path attribute that specifies the total CPU time accumulated so far. If such is the case, the average packet processing time can be approximated by the amount by which the accumulated CPU time increases while processing a packet. With this setup, the Ethernet driver (TULIP) can simply test whether both the average roundtrip time attribute and the accumulated CPU time attribute are present in the path's attribute set. If so, it can use their values to compute the proper queue sizes and resize the queues accordingly. Note that the path plays two central roles in this application: first, it provides the means to communicate information (the roundtrip time from MFLOW to TULIP and the processing time from the scheduler to TULIP) and second, it enables accurate measuring of the per packet processing time (since the path extends all the way from the source device to the sink device).

In the case of the output queue, the factors influencing queue size are more varied and complex. In theory, it might be possible to compute an appropriate queue size based on recent observed history. However, the time-scales involved easily reach a range that is readily noticeable by a human user. Hence, a feedback based algorithm is likely too slow to be practical. In effect, this means that automatic control of this parameter requires either distributed paths or a network resource reservation protocol such as RSVP [11] (or a combination of both). For these reasons, Scout currently leaves this parameter under user control.

5.2.2 Scheduling

To guarantee proper scheduling, two properties must be satisfied. First, the system must always execute the highest-priority runnable path. In other words, priority inversion must be avoided. Second, the scheduling parameters (policy and priority) must computed properly for each path. Fortunately, paths assist in solving both problems.

5.2.2.1 Avoiding Priority Inversion

In traditional systems, a frequent source of priority inversion is due to queues that are shared by distinct dataflows. For example, UNIX commonly uses a single queue for all IP packets. This can cause priority inversion since low-priority IP packets may have to be processed before a high-priority packet can be discovered and processed. Note that this problem cannot be solved simply by replacing the shared IP queue with a priority queue. This is because IP itself does not necessarily have sufficient information available to judge the priority of a packet. The Scout NetTV appliance can easily avoid this problem because each video path has its own input queue. With this setup, newly arriving packets are classified at interrupt time and then placed on the correct path queue.

Avoiding priority inversion is one of the more significant advantages of paths and can readily be demonstrated. Consider the case where a video is being played back on a remote machine. A malicious or negligent user could start sending ICMP ECHO requests at a high rate to the target system. Since each ICMP ECHO request triggers a corresponding reply, this can lead to a significant CPU load on the target system. In traditional systems such as Linux, where all arriving network packets have to go through a shared queue, this leads to priority inversion. Specifically, low-priority ICMP ECHO requests may appear in the shared IP input queue ahead of high-priority video packets. This causes traditional systems to spend too much time processing ICMP packets and too little time processing video packets. In contrast, no such priority inversion occurs in Scout since separate paths are used for handling video and ICMP packets.

The effect of priority-inversion is illustrated in Table 5.5, which shows how the maximum decoding frame rate for the Neptune video (see Table 5.4) drops when the ICMP load is added to the Scout and Linux systems, respectively. The additional load consists of a flood of ICMP ECHO requests. This load is generated using the UNIX `ping -f` command. This command either sends ECHO requests as fast as it receives replies or at a minimum rate of 100 packets per second. In other words, rather than a truly malicious user, it represents a user that attempts to send packets as quickly as possible as long as the target system can keep up with the stream of requests, but limits the sending rate to 100 packets per second if the system appears overloaded.

	Frame-rate [fps] unloaded	loaded	Δ
Scout	49.9	49.8	-0.2%
Linux	39.2	22.7	-42.1%

Table 5.5: Frame Rate Under Load

In the Scout case, the video path is run at the default round-robin priority, whereas the path handling ICMP requests is run at the next lower priority.[1] In contrast, Linux handles ICMP and video packets identically up to the point where IP demultiplexes them into UDP and ICMP packets. As the table shows, adding the ICMP load has little effect on the frame rate for Scout, while the maximum frame-rate for Linux drops by more than 42%. Clearly, avoiding priority inversion can have significant benefits. Nevertheless, this is not to say that paths are the only way to solve this particular problem. For example, both lazy receiver processing [28] and avoiding receive livelock [68] can have similar benefits. The point is, however, that the per-path queues in Scout avoid priority inversion naturally and without requiring any special effort on the part of the system programmer.

5.2.2.2 Scheduling According to Bottleneck Queue

Paths also help ensuring that the right scheduling policy and priority is used to process video packets. The default Scout scheduler is a fixed-priority, round-robin scheduler. Since video is periodic, it seems reasonable to use rate-monotonic (RM) scheduling for MPEG paths [58]. With this approach, priorities are assigned in increasing order of frame rate and non-realtime paths are given priorities below those of any realtime path. However, for video, there are several reasons why earliest-deadline-first (EDF) scheduling more practical:

- The frame-rate should be user-controllable to support slow-motion play and fast forwarding. This implies that a large and indeed variable number of RM priority-levels may be necessary. Otherwise, two MPEG paths that have similar, but not identical, frame-rates could not be distinguished and therefore could not be scheduled properly. Unfortunately, with a large number of priority levels, RM scheduling is less efficient than EDF scheduling because for typical implementations, RM scheduling has a time-complexity that is linear in the number of priority-levels whereas EDF has a time-complexity that is linear only in the number of runnable threads.

[1] Round-robin instead of realtime scheduling is used for the video path since the current Scout scheduler cannot automatically determine the correct CPU percentage to allocate to the realtime policy. Using a higher round-robin priority compared to the ICMP path has this effect and is sufficient for the purpose of this demonstration.

- MPEG decoding is periodic, but not perfectly so. Consider playing a movie at 31Hz on a machine with a display update frequency of 30Hz. Given that only 30 images can be displayed every second, it will be necessary to drop one image during each one second interval. When the drop occurs, there is no need to schedule that path, so a fixed priority would be suboptimal.

- While not a quantitative argument, probably the strongest case for EDF scheduling is that it is the *natural* choice for a soft realtime thread that moves data from an input queue to an output queue. For example, if the output queue drains at 30 frames/second and the queue is half full, it is trivial to compute the deadline by which the next frame has to be produced.

For these reasons, Scout supports EDF scheduling for videos considered important by the user. As alluded to previously, RM scheduling *could* work well in a system where the workload is static (known at system build time). However, in a dynamic system such as Scout, RM would most likely have to be approximated with a single or just a few priorities for realtime tasks. If so, it is easy to demonstrate the advantages of EDF scheduling. For example, using EDF scheduling, Scout can display 8 Canyon movies at a rate of 10 frames per second and a Neptune movie playing at 30 frames per second without missing any deadlines. The same load performs poorly when using a single round-robin priority for the realtime tasks: with an output queue size of 128 frames per video path, on the order of 850 out of 1345 deadlines are missed by the path displaying the Neptune movie. The reason for this is that the round-robin scheduler keeps allocating CPU time to the 8 Canyon movies as long as their output queues are not full, even though the Neptune movie may need the CPU more urgently. Of course, this particular example could be accommodated trivially by using two realtime priorities, but the point is that it is always possible to construct equivalent examples as long as the number of round-robin priorities is fixed.

The interesting part of EDF scheduling is how the deadline of video paths is computed. If path execution is the bottleneck, then the goal should be to keep the output queue as full as possible. This increases the chance that a video can be displayed without missed deadlines even if some frames transiently overload the CPU. On the other hand, if network latency is the bottleneck, then the deadline should be based on the state of the input queue. Since at any given time some number of packets (n) should be in the transit to keep the network pipe full, the flow control protocol implemented by MFLOW must be able to advertise an open window of size n. This means that the deadline is the time at which the input queue would have less than n free slots. This time can be estimated based on the current length of the queue and the average packet arrival rate.

Since the path provides direct access to both queues, the effective deadline can simply be computed as the minimum of the deadlines associated with each queue. Alternatively, the path could use the path execution time and network roundtrip time to decide which queue is the bottleneck queue, and then schedule according to the bottleneck queue only. The latter approach is slightly more efficient, but would require a clear separation between path execution time and network roundtrip time.

Would scheduling based on the input queue ever make a difference compared to scheduling according to the output queue? Since the two queues are connected by a path, whether a scheduling decision can take effect depends on the state of the other, non-bottleneck queue—output cannot be produced unless input is available and input cannot be processed unless there is space in the output queue. However, despite this dependency, scheduling according to the bottleneck queue would make a difference for video paths. This is because there is not a simple one-to-one correspondence between input packets and output frames. The MPEG module effectively processes and then buffers incoming packets until a full output frame has been reassembled. Thus, scheduling according to the input queue would tend to process packets as soon as they arrive, which would help to keep the network pipe full. In contrast, scheduling according to the output queue would tend to cluster packet processing since incoming packets would be queued up until an output slot becomes available. This clustering (batching) would improve the effectiveness of the memory system and therefore effectiveness of the CPU at a time when CPU cycles are at a premium—certainly a desirable property.

5.2.3 Admission Control

Paths are also useful to decide whether or not a new video path should be admitted to the system. Admission control involves testing whether sufficient resources are available for a new path. The primary resources of concern are memory, CPU cycles, and I/O bandwidth. Since each path has a unique id, it is trivial to account for memory consumption on a per-path basis. While, in general, it is difficult to predict memory requirements *a priori*, it is easy to create a path and let it execute as long as it remains within the memory constraints set by the admission policy. This is particularly practical since experience indicates that many paths require little or no dynamic memory allocation once they are fully established. Thus, should a path exceed its memory limits, this fact will typically be discovered during path creation time.

Deciding admissibility with respect to CPU load is more difficult since by the time CPU overload is detected it may be too late for corrective actions. MPEG encoded videos make the problem especially difficult since the decoding time per frame is highly variable. Fortunately, there appears to be a fairly good correlation between the average frame size in a video and the average decoding time per video frame. For example, the correlation for a selection of fourteen video clips is shown in Figure 5.4. The selection includes commercials, cartoons, and scenes from feature-length movies. The frame type sequences and graphical resolution also varies widely. The graph shows the average decoding time in seconds per frame as a function of the average frame size of each clip. Each data point is represented by a small diamond shaped marker and the sample points are connected by a solid line. In addition to this raw data, a linear regression curve is shown as a dashed line. The R^2 coefficient of the linear regression through the fourteen sample points is only 0.78 and the graph shows that there certainly is quite some variability. On the other hand, it appears that the correlation is good enough to be useful for making at least a rough estimate as to whether a new video path could be accommodated or not.

The parameters of the linear regression depend on the CPU type, clock rate, cache sizes, graphics card, and so on, and are therefore highly system dependent. Rather than laboriously deriving the parameters for each platform, it would seem more appropriate to

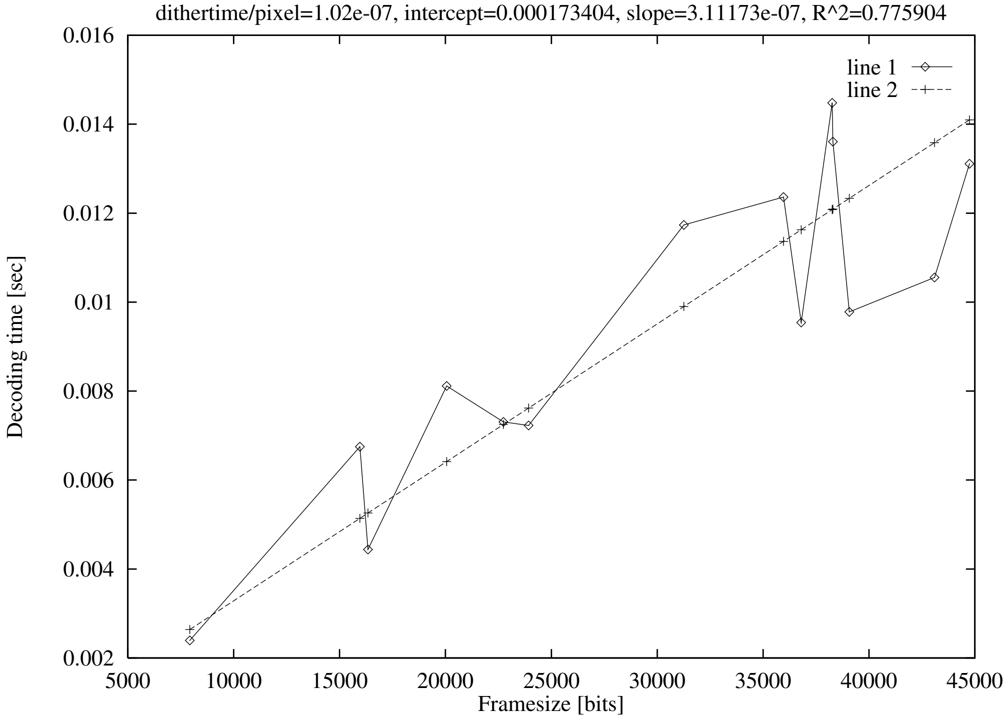

Figure 5.4: Correlation Between MPEG Frame Size and Decoding Time

compute the parameters online as videos are being played back. This, again, is made easy by the fact that it is straight-forward to keep track of the per-path execution time.

Yet another path application comes into play when the admission control determines that a given video cannot be accommodated. At that point, a user may choose to view the video with degraded quality. For example, the user may request that only every third image be displayed. Thanks to ALF and early demultiplexing, this could be realized by a special classification filter that drops all packets except for those whose frame number is an integer multiple of three. In other words, paths make it possible to shed load at the earliest possible point within the system. Dropping the frames directly at the source may be an even better solution, but this is possible only if the video is transmitted point-to-point, not via multicast.

Admission control of the final resource of interest—I/O bandwidth—benefits from paths since device-to-device paths such as the video paths identify which devices are used. For video paths, the necessary network bandwidth and graphics adapter bandwidth can be computed relatively easily based on the geometric size of the video, its frame rate, and the average size of an encoded frame. Hence, to decide whether a newly created path should be admitted, the admission control policy would simply have to check whether enough bandwidth is remaining both for the source and the sink device of the path.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

Si finis bonus est, totum bonum erit.
(If the end be well, all is well.)
– Gesta Romanorum (Tale LXVII)

6.1 Summary

This dissertation presents the Scout operating system architecture, which is oriented towards communication-oriented systems in general, and information appliances in particular. A cornerstone of this architecture is a new abstraction called the *path*, which can be viewed as a vertical slice through a modular system. Paths are complementary to, and just as fundamental as, modular system design. They are modeled after virtual circuits in communication networks, and hence, can be viewed as bidirectional dataflows. Since data processing inside a system is considerably richer than the processing that occurs along a virtual circuit in a traditional (passive) communication network, paths are significantly more complex and versatile. Owing to this necessary flexibility, it just as natural to view paths as processing pipe-lines, paths of execution, resource accounts, or loci of identity. No one view is technically more correct than the others, but depending on the context in which paths are applied, choosing the right view often simplifies developing an appropriate mental model.

The path abstraction enables building efficient communication-oriented systems because it encapsulates performance critical dataflows and the processing along those flows across multiple module boundaries. By crossing multiple modules, a path enables global optimizations that are typically difficult or impossible to realize in strictly modular systems. The same encapsulation also enables using paths as the building blocks to realize systems that provide quality-of-service guarantees that are difficult to realize in purely modular systems. In essence, paths make it easy to distinguish between different dataflows in the system and to monitor and control their behavior.

Scout is a modular architecture that employs paths as the primary means to communicate data through a system. Using just a single communication abstraction greatly simplifies the programming model as it relieves system designers from having to choose from similar yet sometimes conflicting abstractions. Paths are passive entities (data-lanes) through which data is shepherded by threads. Scout defines a simple but flexible execution model that avoids deadlock and depends on higher-level mechanisms to bound resource consumption due to threads. Most of the time, the path that should be used to transmit or receive data is known from context. To accommodate the other case, where the appropriate path is implied by the contents of the data itself, Scout supports a packet classification scheme that is both modular and efficient. Systems that employ classifiers without paths typically cause a duplication of all demultiplexing decisions, since the classifier has to make the decisions to find the right place to deliver the message to, but then the same classification decisions have to be repeated as part of the regular data processing. Scout is able to avoid such duplication since the demultiplexing decisions are represented explicitly in the path as a sequence of stages.

To validate the basic architecture, this dissertation studies two of the potential applications of paths. The first study investigates paths as a mechanism to improve networking subsystem performance and the second study investigates paths as a mechanism to improve resource management in a networked television appliance (NetTV). The NetTV study also provides a concrete example for building a simple yet useful information appliance with Scout.

The networking subsystem study tests three path-based optimization techniques—outlining, cloning, and path-inlining—on both a TCP/IP and an RPC protocol stack. The techniques are primarily targeted at improving the memory system behavior of the latency-sensitive paths that occur when processing small packets. The techniques are able to achieve significant improvements in latency and dramatic reductions in the average number of cycles that a CPU is stalled due to the memory system.

In contrast, the structure of the NetTV appliance is such that the overhead due to module boundaries is not an overriding concern. However, since displaying video is a complex and computationally expensive soft realtime task, proper resource management is essential to providing appropriate quality-of-service. The study shows that paths can assist in solving such resource management problems in an efficient and easy manner.

6.2 Contributions

This dissertation supports the claim that information appliances and communication-oriented systems in general require and benefit from novel operating system concepts. The path abstraction and Scout's demultiplexing scheme are just two examples discussed in this dissertation that are novel concepts designed specifically with the needs of information appliances in mind. This is not to say that these concepts are necessarily limited to appliances, or that they would not have been conceived without appliances, but the needs of appliances at least fostered their invention. The ultimate truth of the claim can only be evaluated as a function of the success or failure that information appliances experience in the long term.

The dissertation establishes that paths can be evolved into a fundamental abstraction. In Scout, paths are the only means to communicate, in a controlled fashion, data between an arbitrary module pair. Paths also have been shown to be efficient, general, and useful. The generality of paths derives from the fact that they can be so short that a Scout system can degenerate into a traditional modular system. Such a degenerate system is certainly not optimal with respect to performance or resource management, but it ensures that any modular system can be built with Scout. The two validation studies presented in this dissertation suggest that paths are useful both to optimizing the processing along a path, as well as to ensure proper resource management on a per path basis. Micro- and macro-benchmarks show that paths do not incur undue space or time overhead and often help improving system performance. In other words, Scout paths are efficient and light-weight.

6.3 Future Directions

As discussed earlier, this dissertation establishes the basic Scout and path architecture and provides initial evidence that the architecture is indeed appropriate for communication-oriented appliances. At the same time, it leaves many questions unanswered. For example, exactly what kinds of path invariants are meaningful and exploitable in different subsystems, and what tools can be used to exploit these invariants certainly warrants further research. Similarly, the usefulness of quasi-invariants likely deserves more attention. For the networking subsystem, there are cases where quasi-invariants could be beneficial, and the same is expected to be true for other parts of the system as well. For example, IP routing information changes infrequently relative to the life time of paths, but since that information is not guaranteed to remain constant, the current Scout system does not permit paths that depend on IP routing information to extend beyond IP. With quasi-invariants, it would be trivial to avoid this limitation. However, whether or not the advantages due to quasi-invariants would outweigh the additional complexity they introduce is not obvious. To answer such questions, it is necessary to collect more experience in designing, building, and studying actual appliances that span a wide range of applications. A few examples are discussed next.

- **IP router:** An IP router supporting different quality-of-service on a per-flow basis can exploit paths to ensure proper resource management for each flow.

- **Active network node:** Using Scout to implement nodes in an active network [103] allows efficient forwarding of passive packets, yet flexible processing of active packets. The modularity of Scout should also make it easy to quickly adapt to different hardware and facility experimentation with different processing engines.

- **Scalable storage server node:** A variety of path-based benefits are imaginable for the disk subsystem. For example, it might be useful to associate one of the data access patterns identified by Cao et al. [12] with each path that traverses the disk subsystem. The access pattern of a path could be used by the modules in the disk subsystem to select an appropriate caching policy. Also, code-optimization techniques could be used to improve the performance of small reads or writes [85]. As a final example, paths through the disk subsystem could prove useful in scheduling disk accesses in a manner that will ensure a certain level of quality-of-service for the path. Employing Scout to build the nodes in a scalable storage server or network-attached disks would provide an ideal target to study such path applications.

- **Web server:** Building a web server with Scout is interesting for two reasons. First, Scout paths should make it possible to build powerful web servers based on commodity hardware and adequate web servers based on minimum cost appliances (such as network-attached thermometers). Second, paths should also enable providing differentiated service to the various classes of customers.

- **Network firewall:** Building a firewall based on general purpose operating system makes guaranteeing correctness and safety a difficult problem. A Scout system could facilitate this task because its modular structure enables solving the problem with the smallest possible number of modules, which minimizes the amount of code that would have to be proven secure. Similar to the IP router example, paths could be used to separate dataflows with distinct security requirements.

- **Network camera:** Combining NetTV with a remote network camera makes it possible to study and exploit paths in a truly end-to-end environment. This is particularly interesting in a setting that involves intermediate routers that either support active computation or at least distinct levels of quality-of-service.

- **Mobility:** Appliances such as personal information managers will be used in a roaming mode and will therefore be connected a communication network on an intermittent basis only. Handling intermittent connectivity typically requires support from higher-level and often application-specific software [75], but studying such appliances should also provide interesting insights on the path architecture. For example, the role of quasi-invariants could be significantly more important on mobile appliances than on stationary ones.

6.3.1 CPU Scheduling

Scout focuses on information appliances which implies that both soft realtime and non-realtime tasks need to be accommodated, that tasks are created dynamically at runtime, and that the CPU scheduler should be able to operate well in a mostly autonomous fashion. The requirement of autonomous operation is due to the fact that appliances should not rely on a sophisticated user that ensures a given task mix is reasonable. This is because either the user is not sophisticated, does not want to worry about such menial tasks, or does not exist at all (e.g., in case of a remote operated appliances).

Finding an appropriate soft realtime scheduler is difficult because, unlike many hard realtime schedulers, it must be fairly general. For example, it cannot assume that synchronization constraints within a task are trivial or negligible. Non-trivial synchronization makes it difficult to employ planning-based approaches, such as the one presented in [53]. On the other hand, if a user is committed to a certain realtime task, then it probably would not be acceptable if starting another unrelated task, which may not even be a realtime task, would cause the realtime task to start to misbehave. The desire to support at least a certain level of fate isolation makes it difficult to use fair share based schedulers such as the one presented in [70]. At the same time, hierarchical schedulers such as the ones presented in [36, 41] are not of much help since realtime scheduling by its very nature is not hierarchical (time is absolute).

On the positive side, it should be possible to exploit the relatively simple linear structure of paths to improve scheduling decisions. For example, for I/O bound tasks the size of the input and output queues convey important information. Similarly, average path execution time and related quantities should help in solving the scheduling problem.

Aside from finding an appropriate scheduling mechanism, the question of finding a useful, easy to understand policy is crucial in its own right. Many sophisticated scheduling mechanism make use of priorities, deadlines, latency tolerances, and various other parameters. In an appliance-like environment, a policy would be required that could derive these parameters either fully automatically, based on observing (remote) user behavior, or based on simple hints by the user.

6.3.2 Distributed Paths

At present Scout paths do not extend beyond the boundary of a single system. Extending paths to cover end-to-end data flows even when distributed across multiple systems is both a logical and useful step. For example, distributed paths are necessary to provide truly end-to-end quality-of-service assurances. Distributed paths are particularly important when operating in a wide-area network where network bandwidth and latency are often the limiting factors to overall performance.

Distributed paths are likely to be realizable on top of existing Scout paths and corresponding network concepts, such as flows [11]. The more interesting questions relate to how path creation should be controlled in a distributed environment. For example, the source and destination machines may want to coordinate the values for certain path invariants (e.g., maximum packet size or throughput may depend on the network connection being used). Thus, new networking protocols may be needed to support exchanging such meta-path information.

An interesting observation is that Scout paths and the virtual circuits they are modeled after appear to be on a course of convergence. Research in active networks [103] effectively makes it, at least theoretically, possible to build network routers that perform processing as complex as that in Scout modules. It is therefore fully expected that Scout distributed paths will be able to leverage off of research in active networks and vice versa.

6.3.3 Secure Paths

Scout paths encapsulate dataflows. Since the task of a secure system is often to safe-guard dataflows, it appears that Scout paths could provide a natural foundation for building secure systems. Securing data flows could occur at two levels: in a distributed environment where each individual Scout machine executes code that is trusted or within a single Scout machine where there is a certain level of internal mistrust. The latter would require adding mechanisms to Scout to enforce the safety of paths, such as hardware protection domains or sand-boxing [95].

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