Embedded Systems Design: A Unified Hardware/Software Introduction

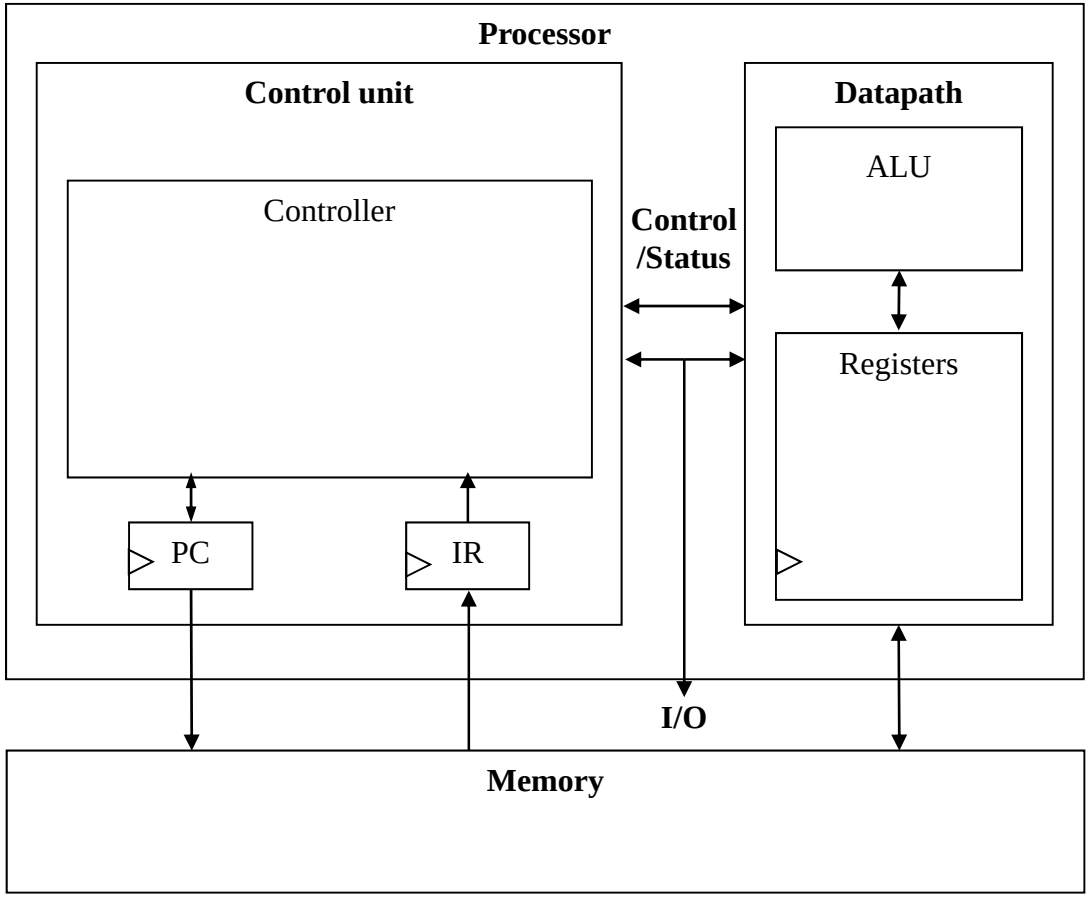
Chapter 3 General-Purpose Processors: Software

Introduction

- General-Purpose Processor
  - Processor designed for a variety of computation tasks
  - Low unit cost, in part because manufacturer spreads NRE over large numbers of units
    - Motorola sold half a billion 68HC05 microcontrollers *in 1996 alone*
  - Carefully designed since higher NRE is acceptable
    - Can yield good performance, size and power
  - Low NRE cost, short time-to-market/prototype, high flexibility
    - User just writes software; no processor design
  - a.k.a. “microprocessor” – “micro” used when they were implemented on one or a few chips rather than entire rooms

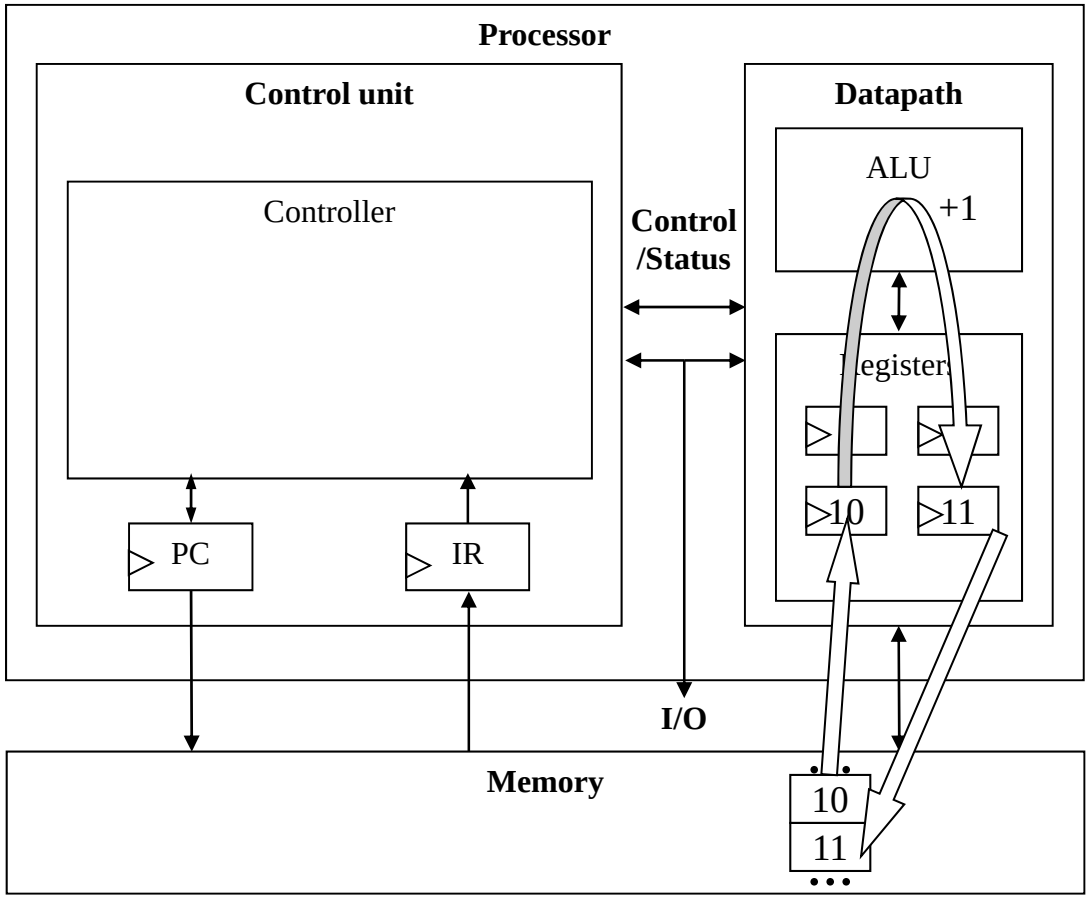
Basic Architecture

- Control unit and datapath
  - Note similarity to single-purpose processor
- Key differences
  - Datapath is general
  - Control unit doesn't store the algorithm – the algorithm is "programmed" into the memory



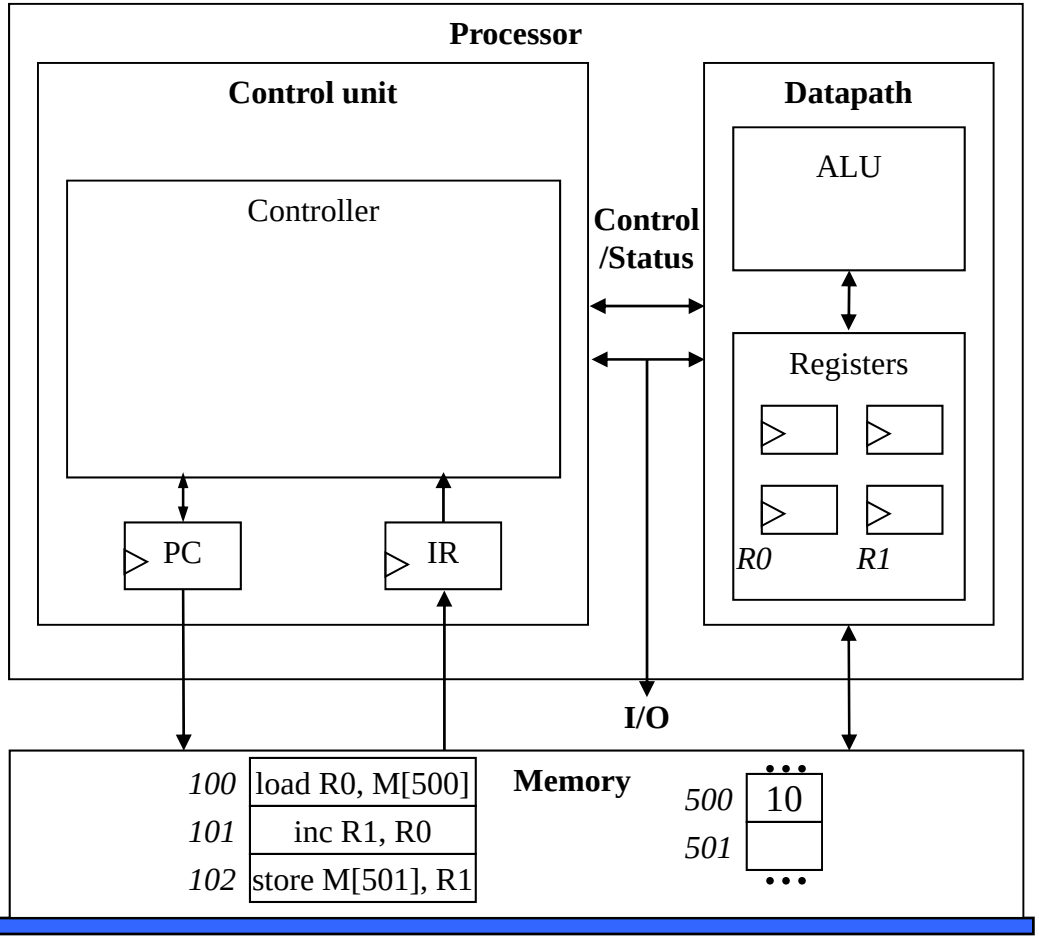
Datapath Operations

- Load
  - Read memory location into register
- ALU operation
  - Input certain registers through ALU, store back in register
- Store
  - Write register to memory location



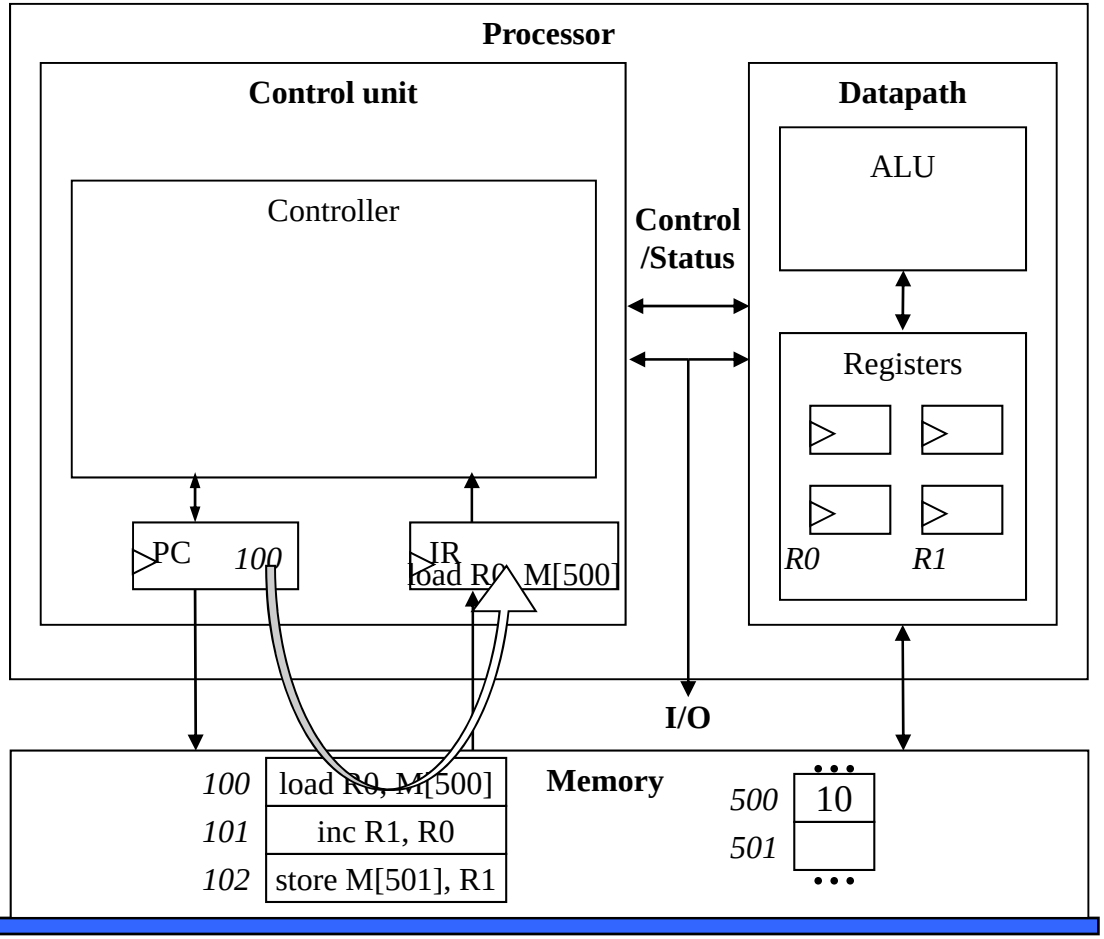
Control Unit

- Control unit: configures the datapath operations
  - Sequence of desired operations (“instructions”) stored in memory – “program”
- Instruction cycle – broken into several sub-operations, each one clock cycle, e.g.:
  - Fetch: Get next instruction into IR
  - Decode: Determine what the instruction means
  - Fetch operands: Move data from memory to datapath register
  - Execute: Move data through the ALU
  - Store results: Write data from register to memory



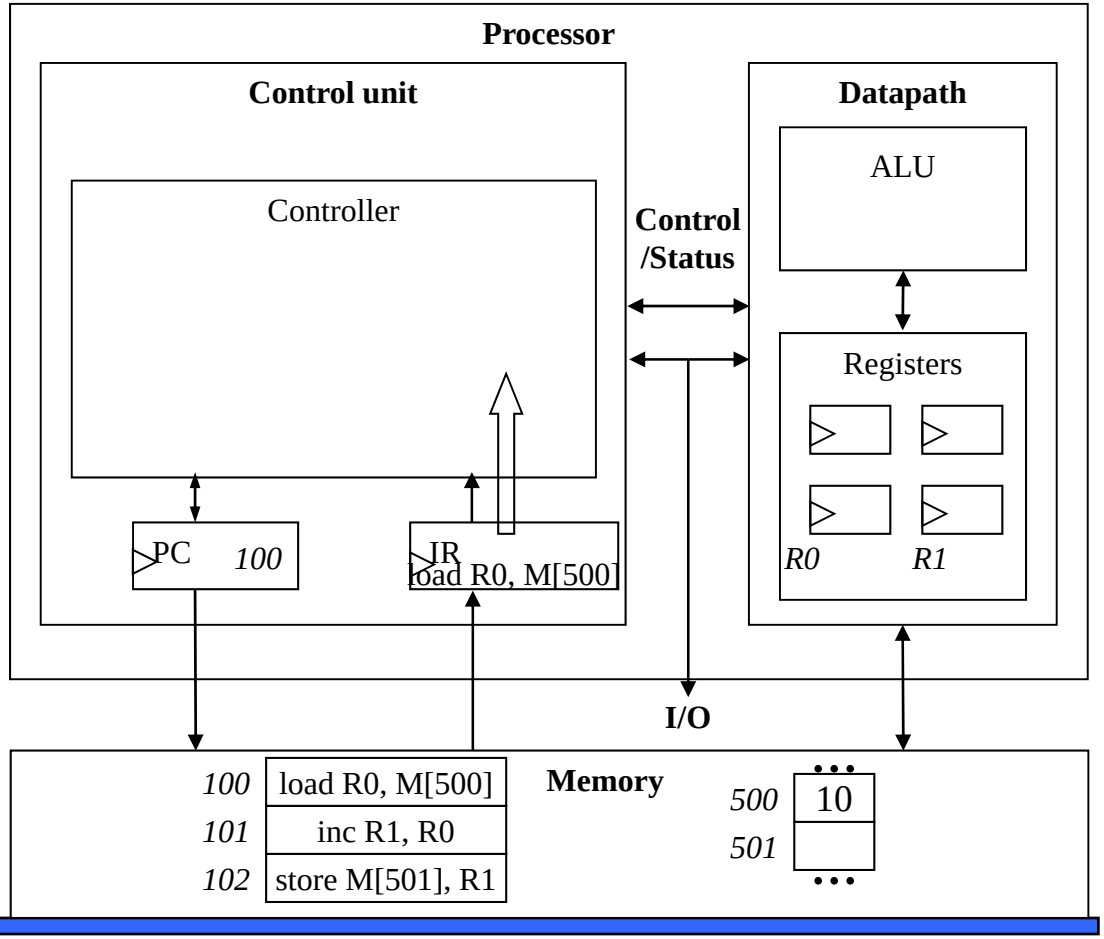
Control Unit Sub-Operations

- Fetch
  - Get next instruction into IR
  - PC: program counter, always points to next instruction
  - IR: holds the fetched instruction



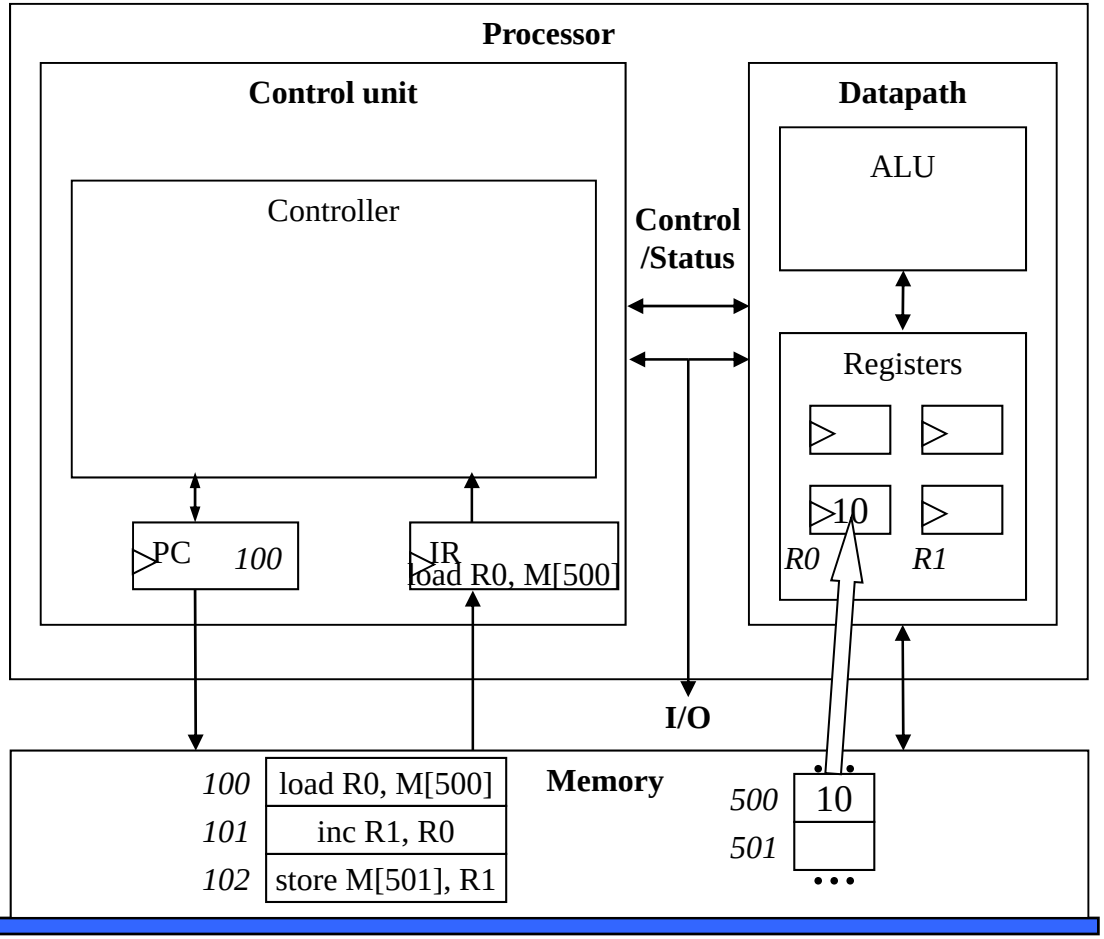
Control Unit Sub-Operations

- Decode
  - Determine what the instruction means



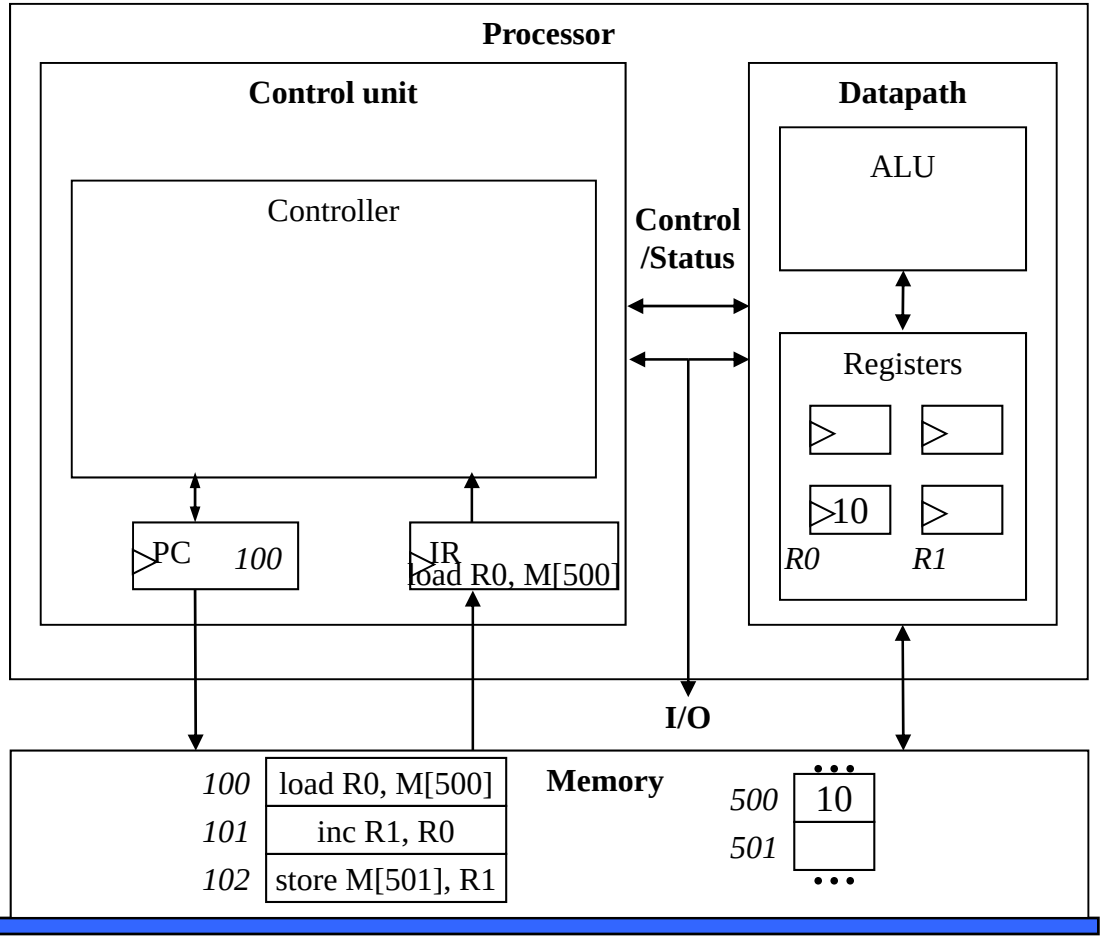
Control Unit Sub-Operations

- Fetch operands
  - Move data from memory to datapath register



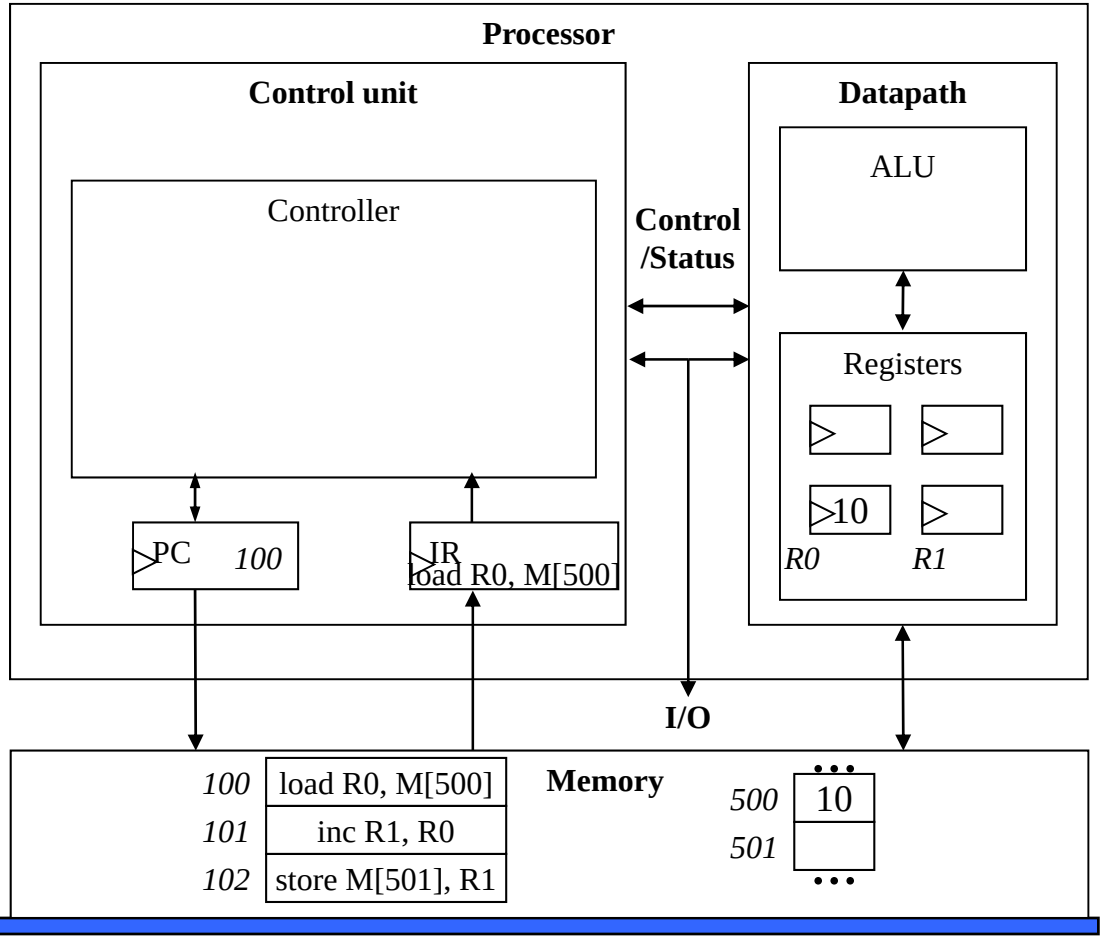
Control Unit Sub-Operations

- Execute
  - Move data through the ALU
  - This particular instruction does nothing during this sub-operation

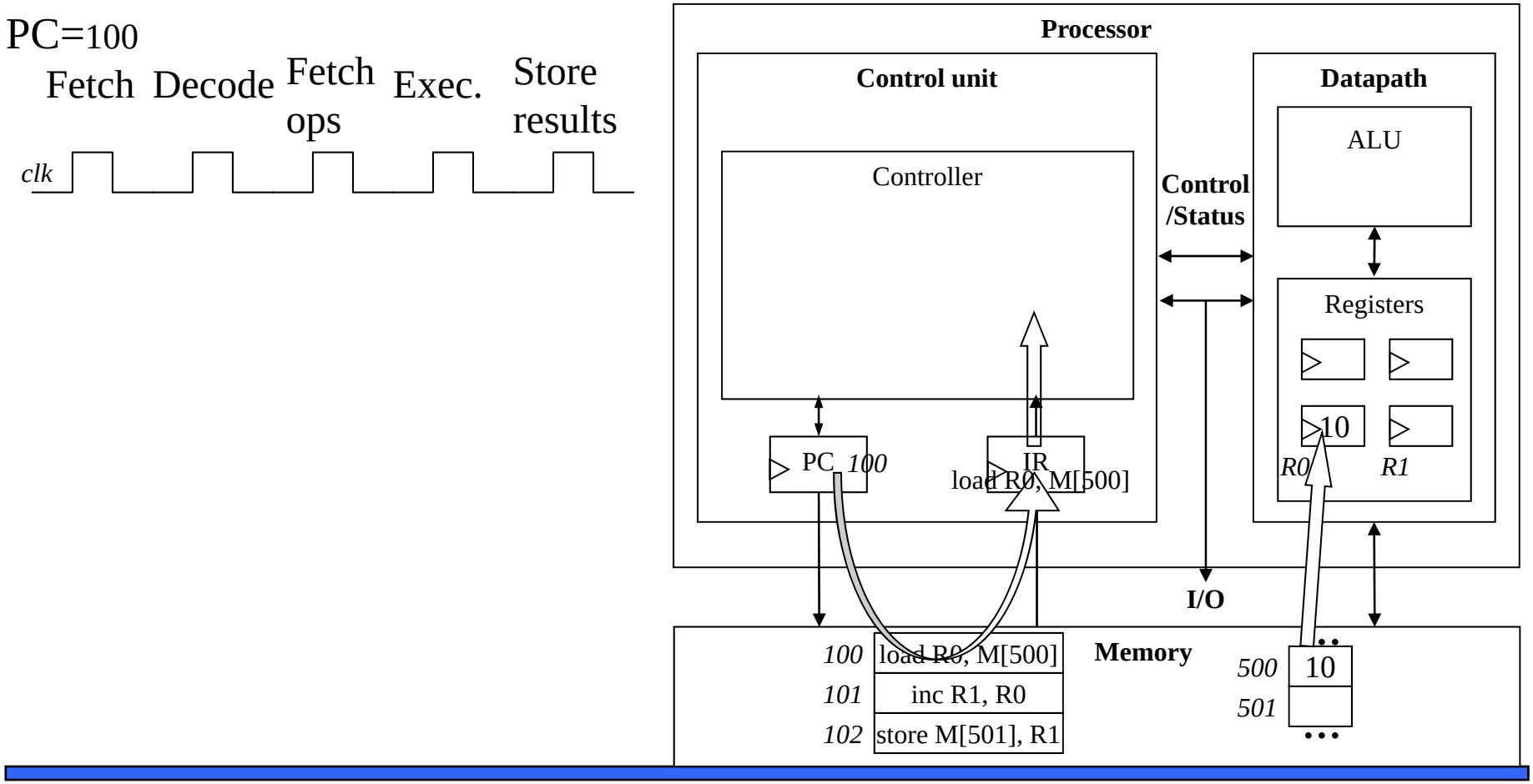


Control Unit Sub-Operations

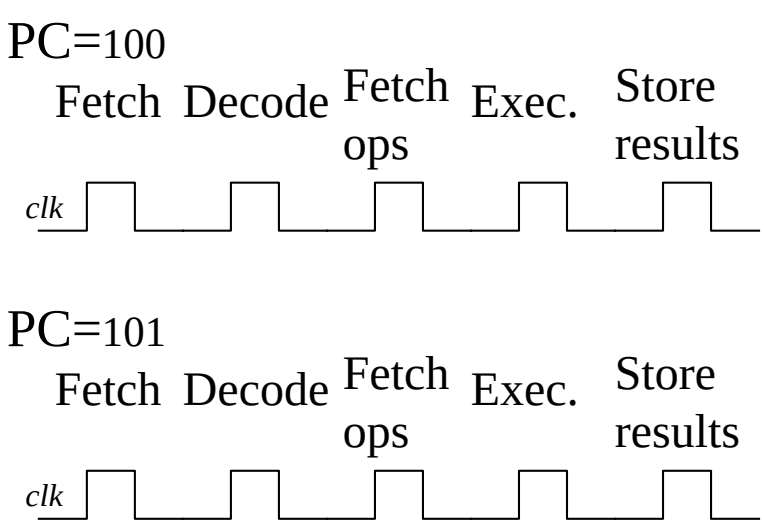
- Store results
  - Write data from register to memory
  - This particular instruction does nothing during this sub-operation

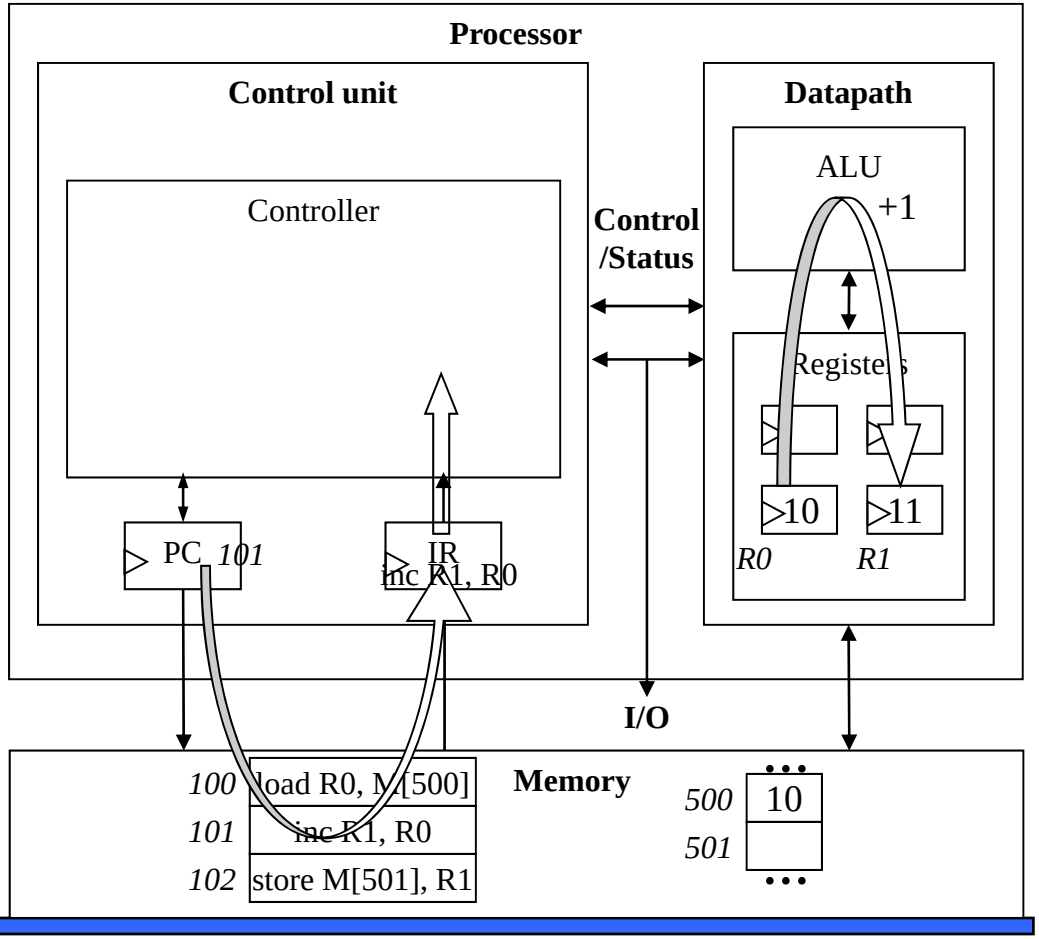


Instruction Cycles

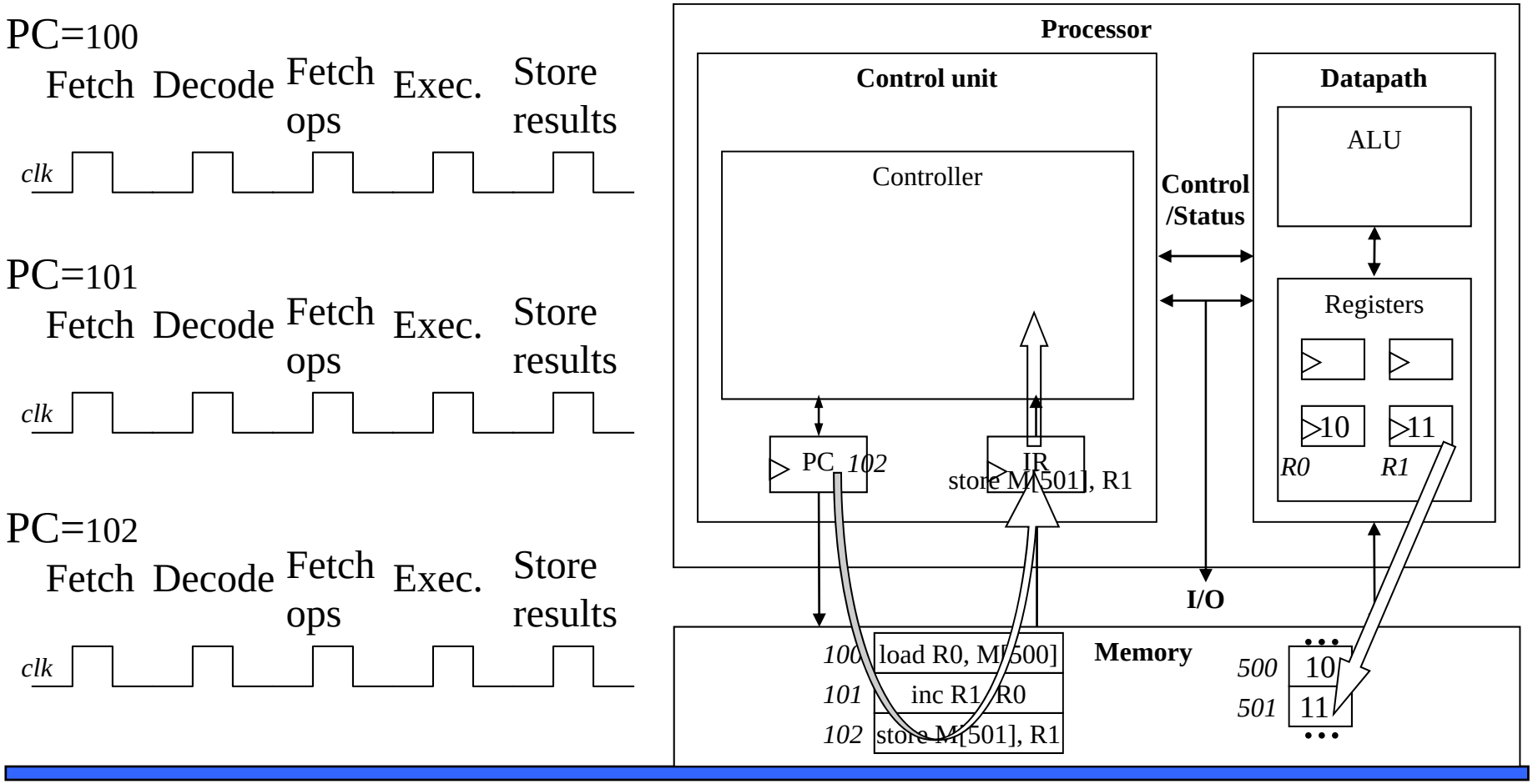


Instruction Cycles



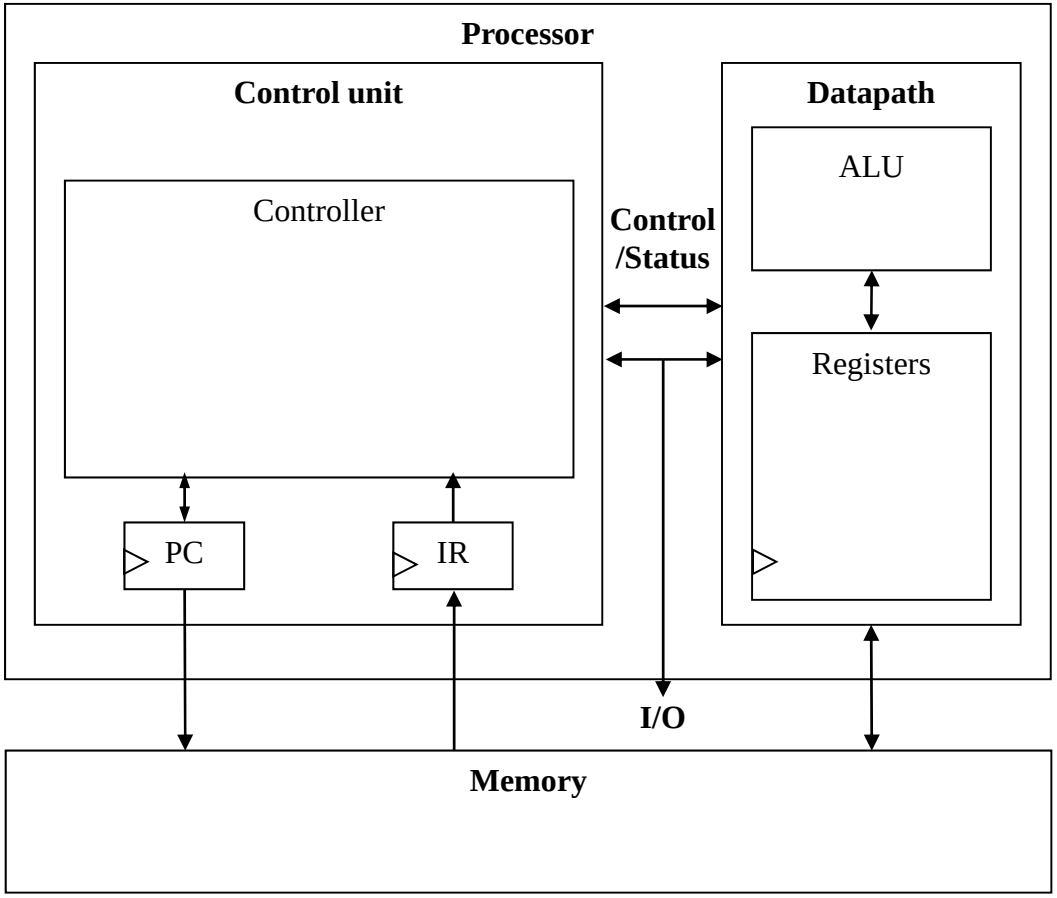


Instruction Cycles



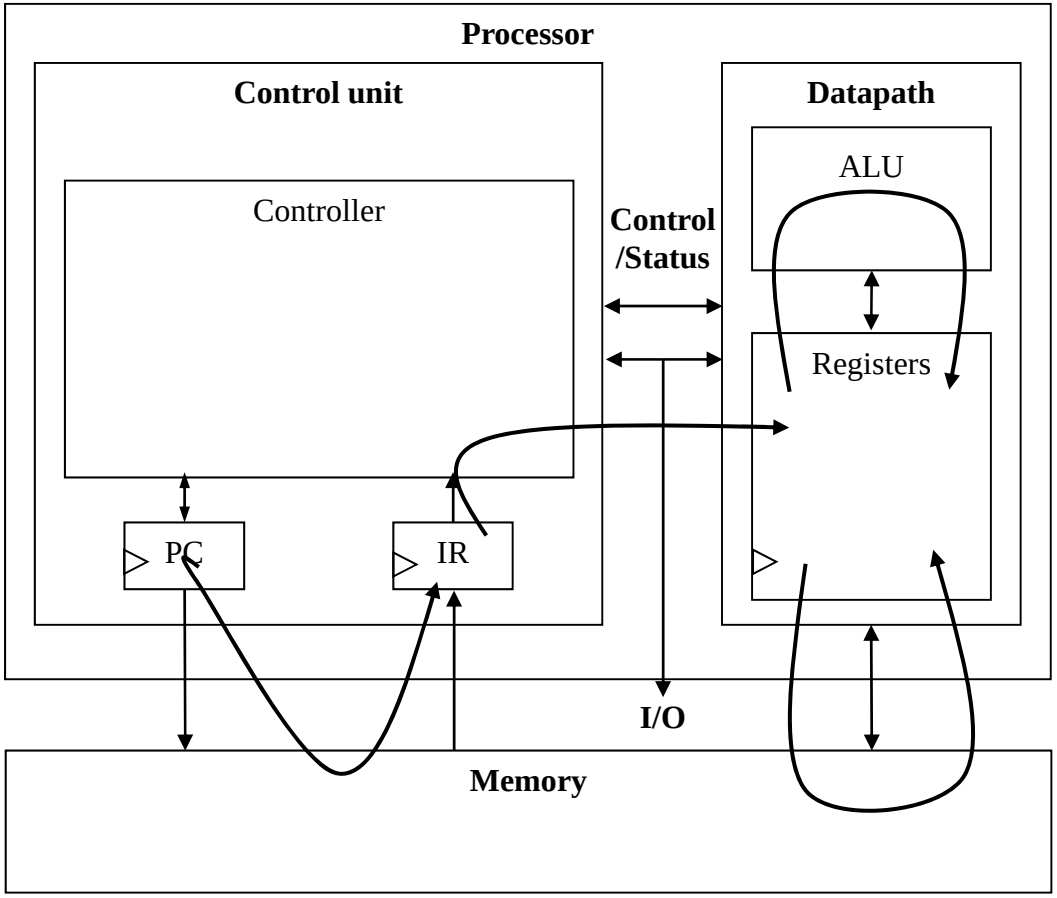
Architectural Considerations

- *N-bit* processor
  - N-bit ALU, registers, buses, memory data interface
  - Embedded: 8-bit, 16-bit, 32-bit common
  - Desktop/servers: 32-bit, even 64
- PC size determines address space

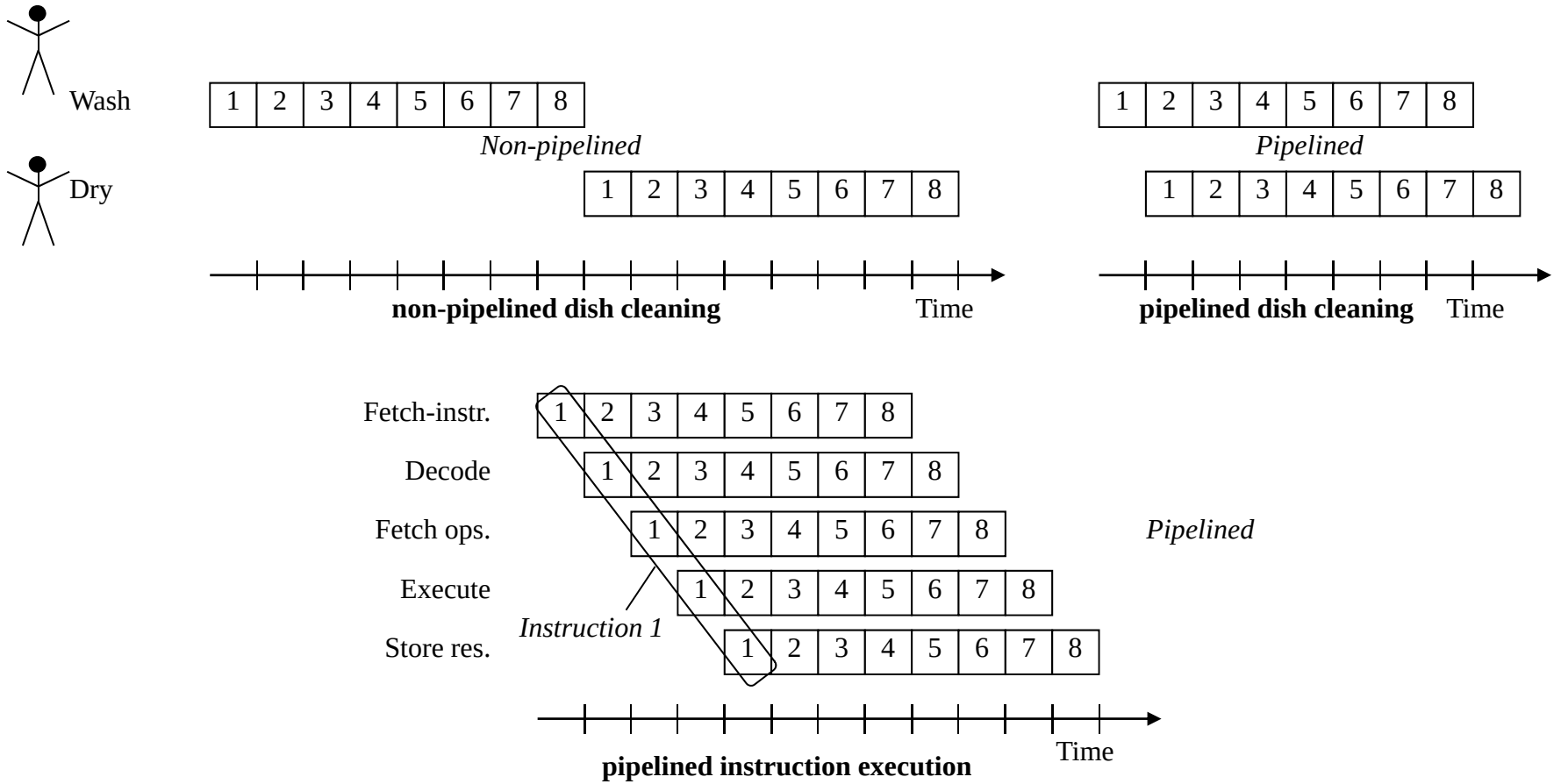


Architectural Considerations

- Clock frequency
  - Inverse of clock period
  - Must be longer than longest register to register delay in entire processor
  - Memory access is often the longest



Pipelining: Increasing Instruction *Throughput*

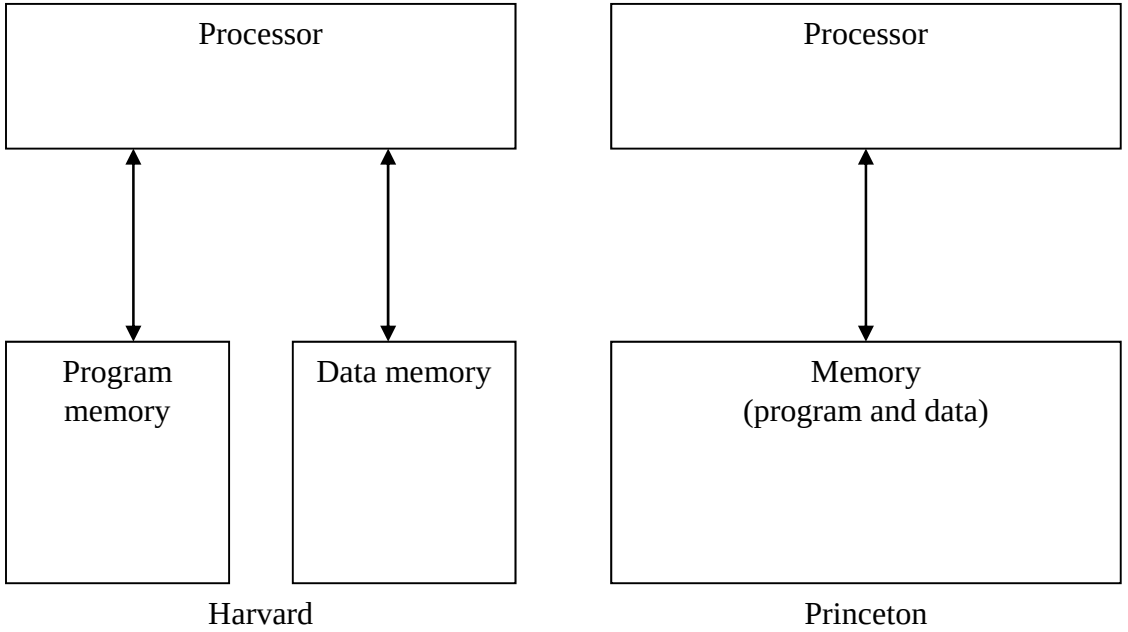


Superscalar and VLIW Architectures

- Performance can be improved by:
  - Faster clock (but there's a limit)
  - Pipelining: slice up instruction into stages, overlap stages
  - *Multiple ALUs* to support more than one instruction stream
    - Superscalar
      - Scalar: non-vector operations
      - Fetches instructions in batches, executes as many as possible
        - May require extensive hardware to detect independent instructions
      - VLIW: each word in memory has multiple independent instructions
        - Relies on the compiler to detect and schedule instructions
        - Currently growing in popularity

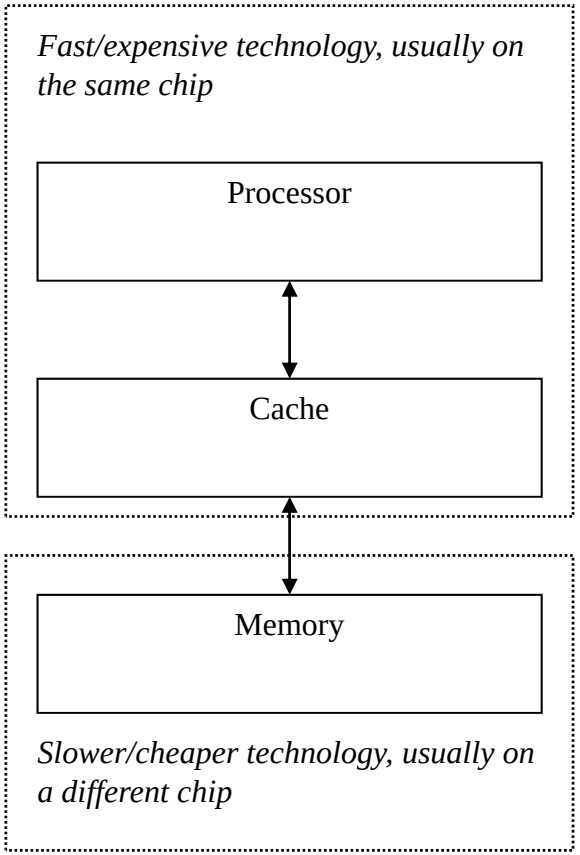
Two Memory Architectures

- Princeton
  - Fewer memory wires
- Harvard
  - Simultaneous program and data memory access



Cache Memory

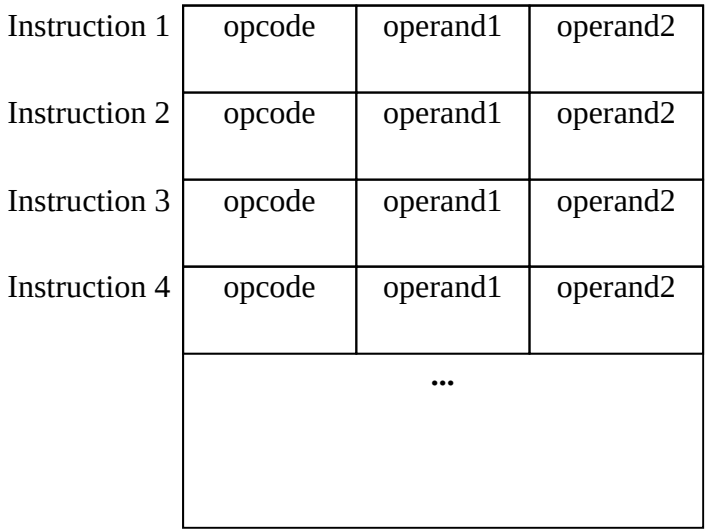
- Memory access may be slow
- Cache is small but fast memory close to processor
  - Holds copy of part of memory
  - Hits and misses



Programmer's View

- Programmer doesn't need detailed understanding of architecture
  - Instead, needs to know what instructions can be executed
- Two levels of instructions:
  - Assembly level
  - Structured languages (C, C++, Java, etc.)
- Most development today done using structured languages
  - But, some assembly level programming may still be necessary
  - Drivers: portion of program that communicates with and/or controls (drives) another device
    - Often have detailed timing considerations, extensive bit manipulation
    - Assembly level may be best for these

Assembly-Level Instructions



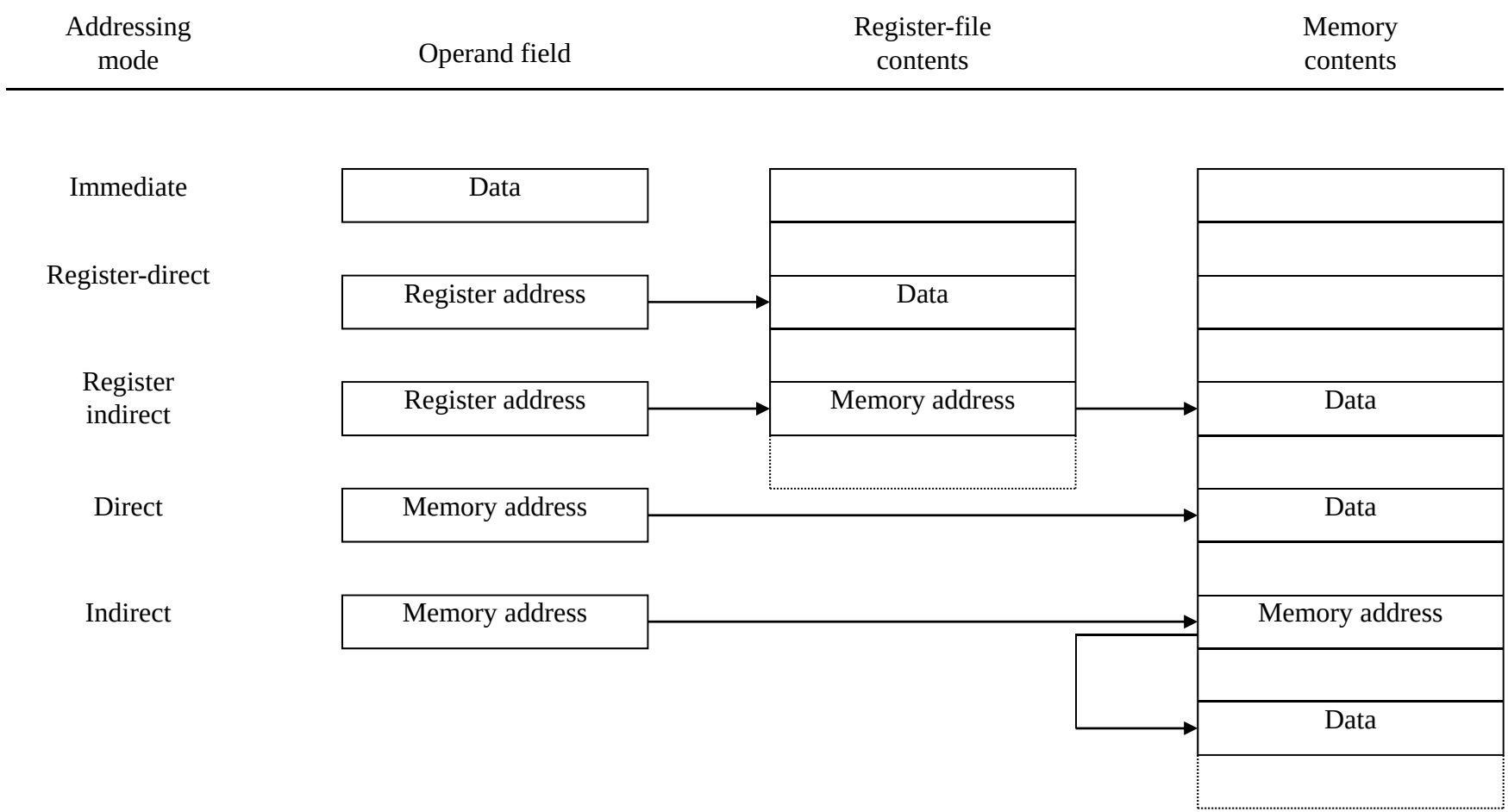
- Instruction Set
  - Defines the legal set of instructions for that processor
    - Data transfer: memory/register, register/register, I/O, etc.
    - Arithmetic/logical: move register through ALU and back
    - Branches: determine next PC value when not just PC+1

A Simple (Trivial) Instruction Set

Assembly instruct.	First byte		Second byte	Operation
MOV Rn, direct	0000	Rn	direct	Rn = M(direct)
MOV direct, Rn	0001	Rn	direct	M(direct) = Rn
MOV @Rn, Rm	0010	Rn	Rm	M(Rn) = Rm
MOV Rn, #immed.	0011	Rn	immediate	Rn = immediate
ADD Rn, Rm	0100	Rn	Rm	Rn = Rn + Rm
SUB Rn, Rm	0101	Rn	Rm	Rn = Rn - Rm
JZ Rn, relative	0110	Rn	relative	PC = PC+ relative (only if Rn is 0)

opcode operands

Addressing Modes

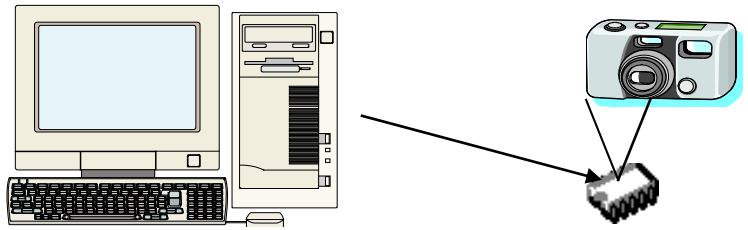


Programmer Considerations

- Program and data memory space
  - Embedded processors often very limited
    - e.g., 64 Kbytes program, 256 bytes of RAM (expandable)
- Registers: How many are there?
  - Only a direct concern for assembly-level programmers
- I/O
  - How communicate with external signals?
- Interrupts

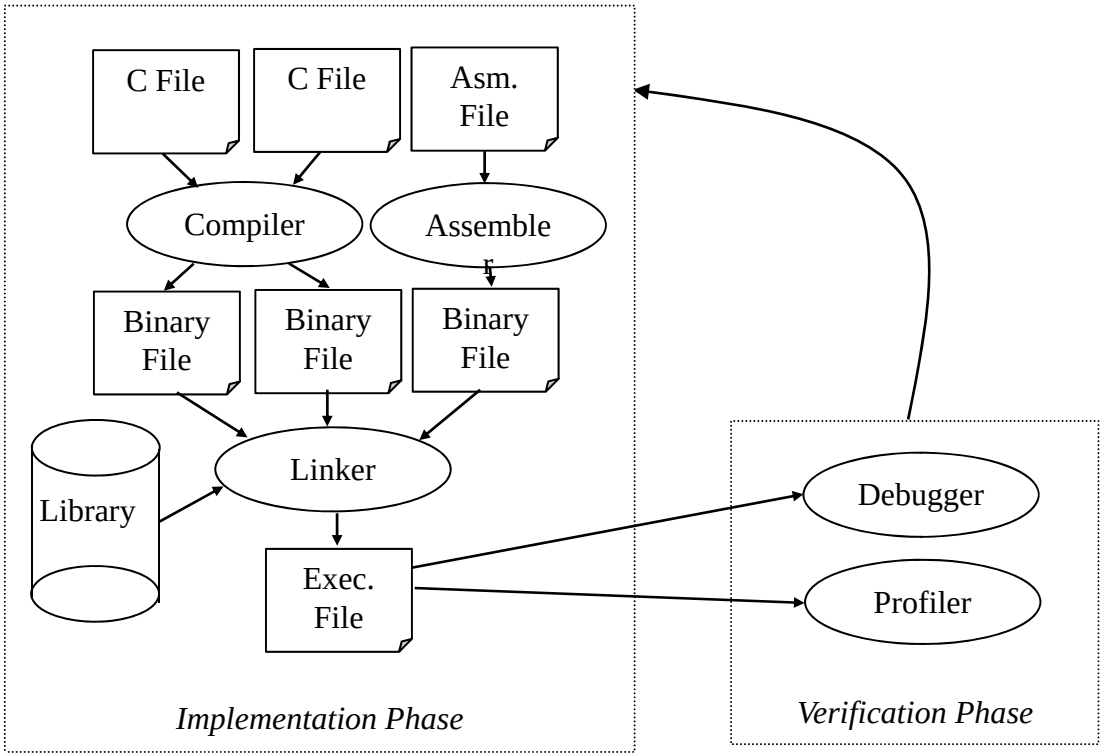
Development Environment

- Development processor
  - The processor on which we write and debug our programs
    - Usually a PC
- *Target processor*
  - The processor that the program will run on in our embedded system
    - Often different from the development processor



Development processor Target processor

Software Development Process



- Compilers
  - Cross compiler
    - Runs on one processor, but generates code for another
- Assemblers
- Linkers
- Debuggers
- Profilers

Running a Program

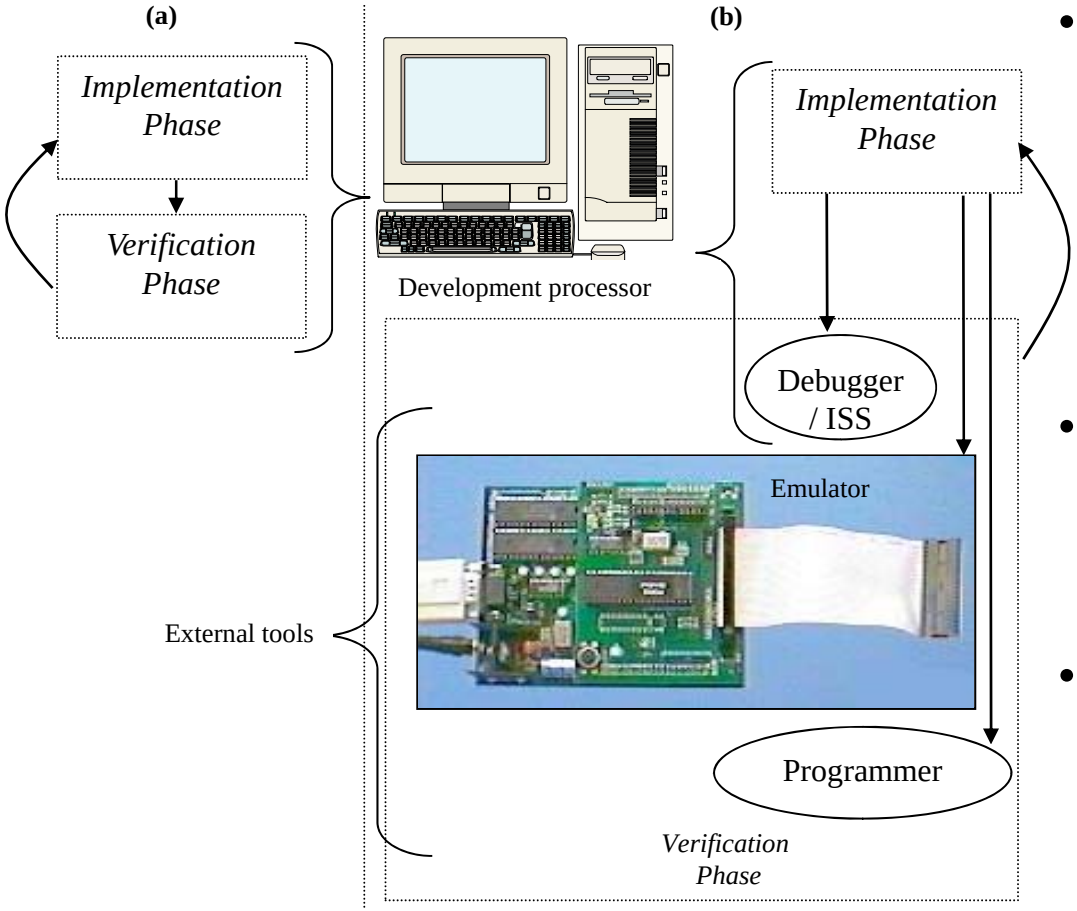
- If development processor is different than target, how can we run our compiled code? Two options:
  - Download to target processor
  - Simulate
- Simulation
  - One method: Hardware description language
    - But slow, not always available
  - Another method: *Instruction set simulator (ISS)*
    - Runs on development processor, but executes instructions of target processor

Instruction Set Simulator For A Simple Processor

```
#include <stdio.h>
typedef struct {
   unsigned char first_byte, second_byte;
} instruction;

instruction program[1024];  //instruction memory
unsigned char memory[256];  //data memory

void run_program(int num_bytes) {

   int pc = -1;
   unsigned char reg[16], fb, sb;

   while( ++pc < (num_bytes / 2) ) {
      fb = program[pc].first_byte;
      sb = program[pc].second_byte;
      switch( fb >> 4 ) {
         case 0: reg[fb & 0x0f] = memory[sb]; break;
         case 1: memory[sb] = reg[fb & 0x0f]; break;
         case 2: memory[reg[fb & 0x0f]] =
                 reg[sb >> 4];  break;
         case 3: reg[fb & 0x0f] = sb; break;
         case 4: reg[fb & 0x0f] += reg[sb >> 4]; break;
         case 5: reg[fb & 0x0f] -= reg[sb >> 4]; break;
         case 6: pc += sb; break;
         default: return –1;
```

```
}
   }
   return 0;
}

int main(int argc, char *argv[]) {

   FILE* ifs;

   If( argc != 2 ||
       (ifs = fopen(argv[1], “rb”) == NULL ) {
            return –1;
   }

   if (run_program(fread(program,sizeof(program)))==0)
   {
            print_memory_contents();
            return(0);
   }
   else return(-1);
}
```

Testing and Debugging



- ISS
  - Gives us control over time – set breakpoints, look at register values, set values, step-by-step execution, ...
  - But, doesn't interact with real environment
- Download to board
  - Use device programmer
  - Runs in real environment, but not controllable
- Compromise: emulator
  - Runs in real environment, at speed or near
  - Supports some controllability from the PC

Application-Specific Instruction-Set Processors (ASIPs)

- General-purpose processors
  - Sometimes too general to be effective in demanding application
    - e.g., video processing – requires huge video buffers and operations on large arrays of data, inefficient on a GPP
  - But single-purpose processor has high NRE, not programmable
- ASIPs – targeted to a particular domain
  - Contain architectural features specific to that domain
    - e.g., embedded control, digital signal processing, video processing, network processing, telecommunications, etc.
  - Still programmable

A Common ASIP: Microcontroller

- For embedded control applications
  - Reading sensors, setting actuators
  - Mostly dealing with events (bits): data is present, but not in huge amounts
  - e.g., VCR, disk drive, digital camera (assuming SPP for image compression), washing machine, microwave oven
- Microcontroller features
  - On-chip peripherals
    - Timers, analog-digital converters, serial communication, etc.
    - Tightly integrated for programmer, typically part of register space
  - On-chip program and data memory
  - Direct programmer access to many of the chip's pins
  - Specialized instructions for bit-manipulation and other low-level operations

Another Common ASIP: Digital Signal Processors (DSP)

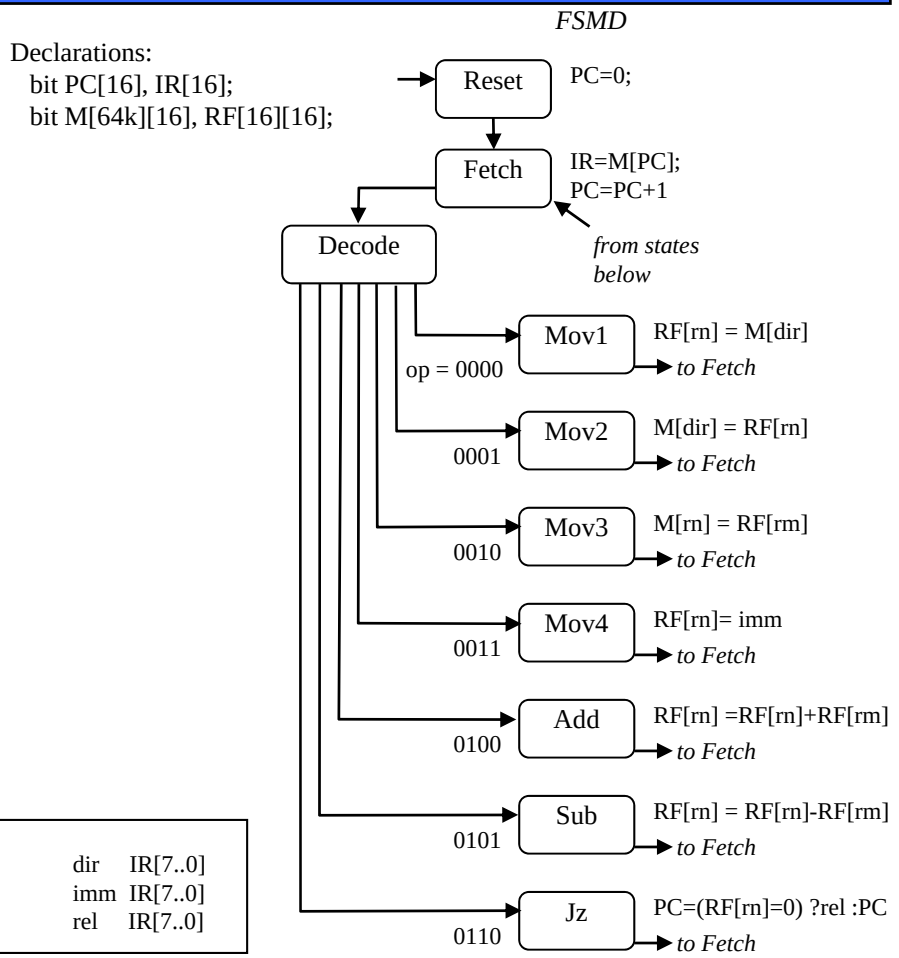
- For signal processing applications
  - Large amounts of digitized data, often streaming
  - Data transformations must be applied fast
  - e.g., cell-phone voice filter, digital TV, music synthesizer
- DSP features
  - Several instruction execution units
  - Multiple-accumulate single-cycle instruction, other instrs.
  - Efficient vector operations – e.g., add two arrays
    - Vector ALUs, loop buffers, etc.

Trend: Even More Customized ASIPs

- In the past, microprocessors were acquired as chips
- Today, we increasingly acquire a processor as Intellectual Property (IP)
  - e.g., synthesizable VHDL model
- Opportunity to add a custom datapath hardware and a few custom instructions, or delete a few instructions
  - Can have significant performance, power and size impacts
  - Problem: need compiler/debugger for customized ASIP
    - Remember, most development uses structured languages
    - One solution: automatic compiler/debugger generation
      - e.g., www.tensillica.com
    - Another solution: retargettable compilers
      - e.g., www.improvsys.com (customized VLIW architectures)

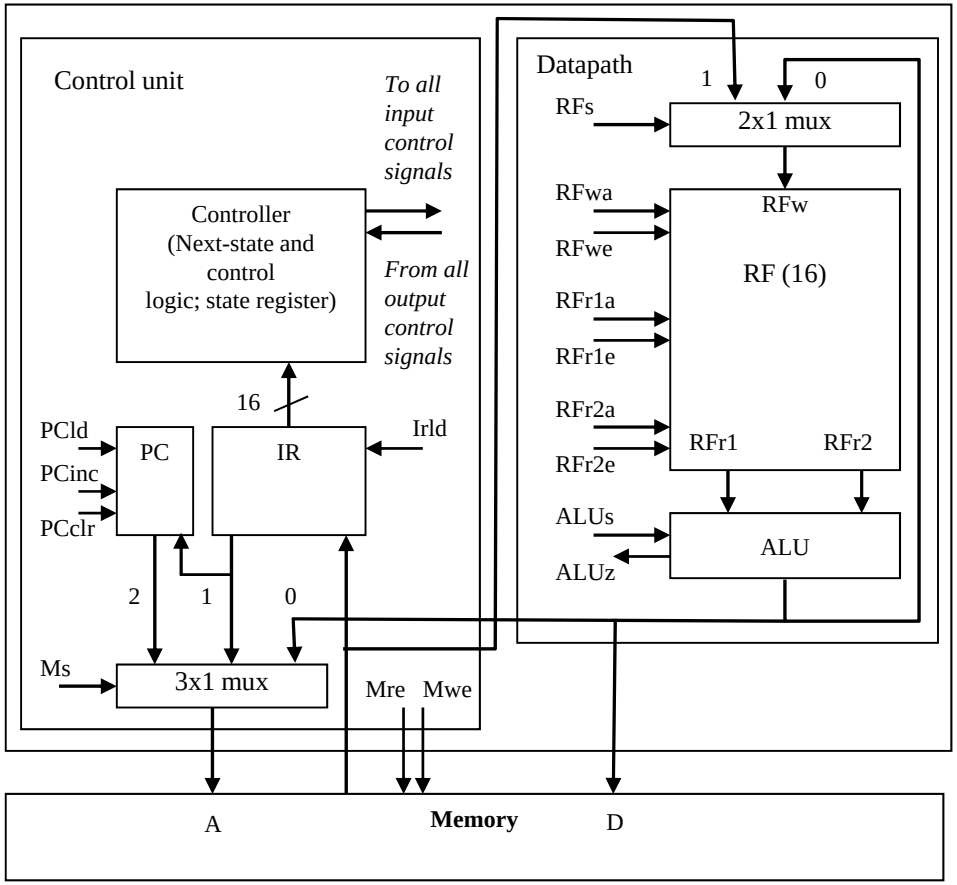
Designing a General Purpose Processor

- Not something an embedded system designer normally would do
  - But instructive to see how simply we can build one top down
  - Remember that real processors aren't usually built this way
    - Much more optimized, much more bottom-up design

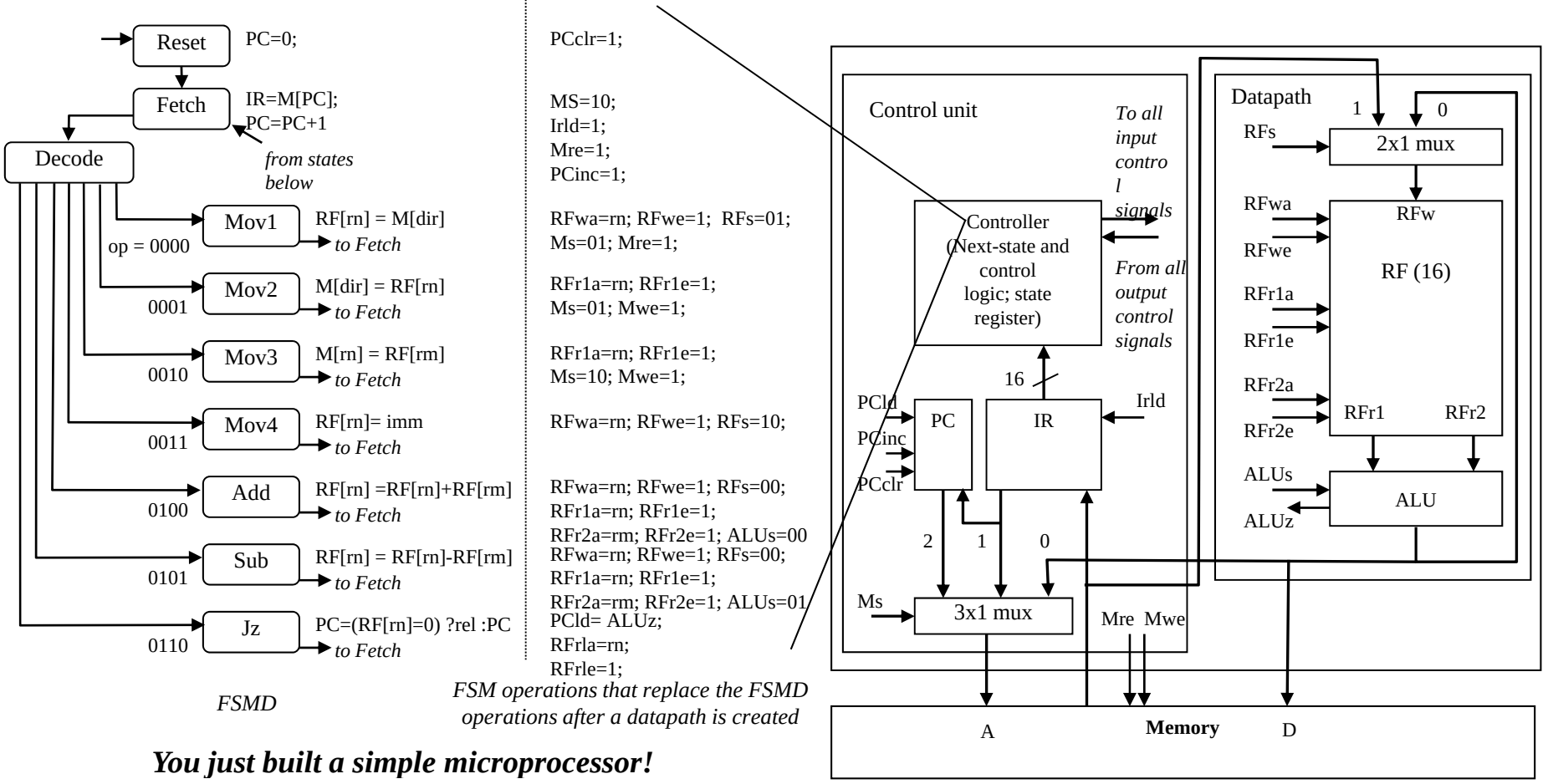


Architecture of a Simple Microprocessor

- Storage devices for each declared variable
  - register file holds each of the variables
- Functional units to carry out the FSMD operations
  - One ALU carries out every required operation
- Connections added among the components' ports corresponding to the operations required by the FSM
- Unique identifiers created for every control signal



A Simple Microprocessor



FSMD

FSM operations that replace the FSMD operations after a datapath is created

You just built a simple microprocessor!