Virtual Memory

A layer of abstraction between applications and hardware

- Programs use “virtual addresses” to access memory locations for code & data
- OS & architecture translate to “physical addresses” that correspond to locations in physical memory
- OS (possibly with hardware support) manages which parts of the program’s virtual address space to allocate to physical memory
- Address translation typically done at page granularity

Why is Virtual Memory Needed? (1/2)

- Memory Capacity
  - A program may need more memory than the main memory capacity on a system
  - Without virtual memory, this would be managed with software “overlays” where programmers or compilers swap out parts of code/data for others
  - With virtual memory, this is managed by hardware & OS
- Program Portability
  - Program compiles using virtual addresses that could be ported to run in any part of physical memory (independent of other running processes)

Why is Virtual Memory Needed? (2/2)

- Protection
  - Different regions of memory need different permissions (e.g., read-only, read/write, execute)
  - Virtual memory could be used to implement page-level access permissions
- Security & Isolation
  - A program cannot access another’s memory
  - A bug (e.g., bad pointer) in one process may not corrupt memory for another process

Address Translation

Biggest overhead needed to support virtual memory

- Need to translate virtual address in every load/store instruction to physical address before accessing cache/memory
  - Unless cache is virtually addressed (discussed before)
  - Translation done at page level (page offset is the same for virtual and physical addresses)

Page Tables

OS manages address translation through page tables

- Each Page Table Entry (PTE) includes one VPN → PPN mapping
- Separate structure per process (each process needs its own mapping)
- May need a lot of pages to map the whole virtual address space

Page Table Design Parameters

- Page Size
- Number of page sizes supported
- Number of page table levels
- Alternative designs, e.g., Inverted Page Tables
- Tradeoff between page size & PT levels
Hardware Support for Virtual Memory
- Without hardware support, huge performance hit
  - Example, in a four-level page table design, each load/store could need five memory accesses to be completed
  - Overhead could be decreased (though not completely avoided) if some PTEs are cached
- Translation Lookaside Buffers (TLBs) needed to avoid performance loss
  - Caches recent/frequent address translations to avoid memory accesses
  - On a TLB miss, a page walk is initiated to fetch translation
  - Tradeoff between TLB size/associativity and latency
  - Larger page sizes increase TLB reach

Virtualization
- Virtual memory is an example of virtualization
- Definition: Separation of resource/service from underlying physical delivery of that service (VMWare White Paper: http://www.vmware.com/pdf/virtualization.pdf)
- Why is it needed?
  - Server consolidation
  - Debugging and testing: fault containment
  - Availability
  - Security

Classical Virtualization
- A virtual machine monitor (VMM) needs to satisfy three conditions:
  - Fidelity: Software on VMM executes identically to native execution (except for timing differences)
  - Performance: Most guest instructions need to be performed directly by the hardware with no VMM intervention
  - Safety: The VMM manages all hardware resources
- Typically implemented using “Trap and Emulate” for privileged instructions, and maintaining shadow structures for guest OS (e.g., page tables)
- x86 doesn’t support “trap and emulate”

Software x86 Virtualization
- One solution: Guest executes on interpreter instead of directly on physical CPU
  - High overhead, violates performance requirement
- Binary translation
  - Input is binary x86 code (not source code)
  - Translation happens dynamically at runtime, interleaved with executing generated code
  - Produces safe code (mostly user-mode)
  - On-demand and adaptive
- Example translated code in paper

Software x86 Virtualization (Cont.)
- Most instructions can be translated identically, except for:
  - PC-relative addressing: translator output could be at a different address than the input
  - Direct control flow (branches, calls) need mapping from guest address to translated-code address
  - Indirect control flow: computed dynamically, introducing some overhead (typically < 10%)
  - Privileged instructions
- BT VMM could outperform classical VMM by avoiding expensive privileged instruction traps

Hardware x86 Virtualization
- Virtual Memory Control Block (VMCB) is an in-memory data structure that combines control state with a subset of the state of a guest virtual CPU
- New execution mode “guest mode” supports running guest code in a less privileged mode
  - vmrun instruction transfers from host→guest mode
  - exit instruction returns to host mode (saving state in VMCB) based on certain conditions
  - Guest page faults, TLB flushes, context switching, I/O instructions, accessing page tables and memory mapped devices trigger exit
- Hardware vs. Software: Paper Figure 2, 3, 4, 5
Next Week’s Announcements

- Final exam on Monday
  - Open book, notes, calculator
  - No phones, computers, tablets
- Project presentations on Wednesday
  - Review Oral Presentation Advice
  - Final project report due June 9
  - Submission instructions posted on webpage