What do VMMs enable?

- Running multiple operating systems (called “guest OS’s”) and their applications on a single physical computer, as if each were running on its own private virtual computer

- Efficient – mostly direct execution, rather than simulation

- Contemporary examples
  - VMware
  - Microsoft’s VirtualPC / VirtualServer
  - Parallels (Mac)
  - Xen
Basic ideas

- Guest OS runs in user mode
- When any kind of interrupt / exception / trap occurs, we'll end up in the VMM rather than the guest OS
- VMM simulates state changes that would have been made by the hardware, then restarts VM at the guest OS handler address
  - E.g., stuffs the saved PC where the architecture says it should be
- When the guest OS tries to execute a privileged instruction
  - VMM gets control, simulates effect of privileged instruction
    - VMM knows that guest OS was in virtual kernel mode so the attempted operation is OK
VMM History

- Conceived by IBM in the late 1960’s
  - CP-40, CP-67, VM/360
- Sold continuously since then
- Used first for OS development and debugging, then for time sharing (multiple single-user OS’s, plus a few single-job batch OS’s), eventually for server consolidation

VMMs Today

- OS development and debugging
- Software compatibility testing
- Running software from another OS
  - Or, OS version
- Virtual infrastructure for Internet services (server consolidation)

• Examples
  - Run Windows on your Mac, or MacOS on your PC
  - VMware in CSE 451
  - Amazon’s Elastic Compute Cloud (EC2)
Comparing the Unix and VMM APIs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>UNIX</th>
<th>VMM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Storage</td>
<td>File system</td>
<td>(virtual) disk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>Sockets</td>
<td>(virtual) Ethernet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>Virtual Memory</td>
<td>(virtual) Physical memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Display</td>
<td>/dev/console</td>
<td>(virtual) Keyboard, display device</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Possible Implementation Strategy: Complete machine emulation

- The VMM implements the complete hardware architecture in software

```c
while(true) {
    Instruction instr = fetch();
    // emulate behavior in software
    instr.emulate();
}
```

Drawback: This is really slow
Practical alternative: VMM gets control on privileged instructions only

- Treat guest operating systems (and their apps) like an application
  - Guest OS (and its apps) run in user mode
  - Most instructions execute natively on the CPU
  - Privileged instructions are trapped and emulated

OS + apps          OS + apps          OS + apps
loads, stores, branches, ALU operations
Virtual machines

VMM

physical hardware

machine halt, I/O instructions, MMU manipulation, disabling interrupts

Virtualizing the User/Kernel Boundary

- Both the guest OS and applications run in (physical) user-mode
- For each virtual machine, the VMM keeps a software mode bit:
  - During a system call, switch to “kernel” mode
  - On system call return, switch to “user” mode
- What does the VMM do if a VM executes a privileged instruction while in virtual user mode?
- What does the VMM do if a VM executes a privileged instruction while in virtual kernel mode?
Questions, to clarify …

- What if the I/O could be handled from the buffer cache?
- Does the VMM handle a VM’s I/O request synchronously?
- There are a zillion different types of disks (and networks and …) … Do the device drivers for these reside in the guest OS or in the VMM?
A possible “gotcha”

• All instructions that modify hardware state must be privileged (so that VMM can get control, modify the virtual hardware state for that guest, and not modify the physical hardware state)

• Example: Suppose the ERET instruction (return to a user process after handling an exception) is not privileged
  – ERET sets the PC to the saved PC, and sets CPU mode to user
  – There doesn’t seem to be a reason to prevent user processes from doing this (even if there’s no reason for them to want to)

Why would this be a problem for a VMM?

x86

• Conditions for an architecture to be virtualizable were defined in 1974

• x86 architecture did not satisfy these conditions!
  – Many reasons, but most of them stem from instructions that have different behavior in user mode and kernel mode, and that don’t trap when executed in user mode

• Approach: binary re-writing
  – When a code page is loaded, scan it, looking for offending instructions
  – Patch these to cause a fault
  – Remember the instruction that used to be there
Other approaches

• Hardware: Both Intel (VT-x) and AMD (AMD-V) have developed virtualization extensions to the architecture (starting ~2006)
• Paravirtualization: Export a slight modification of the hardware; port the OS to this new hardware

Memory

• VMM’s also utilize memory protection (in addition to privileged instructions) to do their job
• Have not described how memory is virtualized by a VMM, creating “virtual physical memory” for the guest OS’s
• Approach involves the VMM futzing with the page tables in the guest OS’s
VMware Paravirtualization Performance

Performance Relative to Native
Bigger is Better

- compile
- Dbench/10run [cpu microbenchmark]
- Dbench/10run [higheMEM [cpu microbenchmark]]
- Database kernel

© 2013 Gribble, Lazowska, Levy, Zahorjan