Bachelor Informatica

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Dynamic program loading in a shared address space

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Abstract

In this abstract the research will be summarized to some extent.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Context

Modern computing platforms allow the user to load programs which perform some task or calculation, these systems typically allow not just a single program to run but enable some form of sharing of the available resources so a user can run more than just a single program. This is typically done by an Operating System, often abbreviated as OS. An OS will typically a collection of functions or even programs which maintains full control over the system where any client or userspace activities is granted only those limited rights and control they need. A users activities are divided into processes, each of these can have access to some randomly accessible memory and limited computing time. Along with file interaction,process state is maintained and organized by the OS. The execution of a process it done through threads. A threads is a section of program code which executed fully sequentially. Each process consists of one or more threads where threads may be started at any moment during execution and they are executed parallel to each other. All available[1] threads are commonly executed interlaced with each other and any other threads running on the system.

In a single processor single core setup the OS would typically interlace thread execution with those of that of any other thread the user has initiated. This is a sharing system where all seemingly parallel execution needs support from the OS. In a multi chip or multi core design this restriction is lifted to some extent, the architecture now allows true parallel computation although in most traditional systems the number of available cores, whether on a single chip or a local network of chips, is outnumbered by the amount of running processes. A trivial example would be the laptop this document was written on, it has 2 processing cores and is typically running around a hundred processes. Most operating systems still interlace the execution of all the processes as they would in a single core environment but with the added benefit of being able to execute several threads in true parallel.

The Microgrid environment is a novel platform for the parallel execution of programs with at its core the large number of general purpose processing units capable of OS independent thread management and fast thread creation. This opens up possibilities to make programs massively multithreaded where the traditional overhead is reduced to a minimum.

1.2 Meet the problems

The version of MGSim used during this research contains a simple loader. This loader is capable of loading an initial ELF memory image upon system initialization.

The Microgrid implements a virtual memory system to programmers. This system is controlled and centered on the Memory Management Unit. The platform used in this research has a single Memory Management Unit per chip. This unit is shared across the chip holding more than one core. The chip has a limited number of caches, each core has access to at least one

[1] Some might not be available due to unresolved data dependencies

Figure 1.1: 4 cores sharing L2 cache

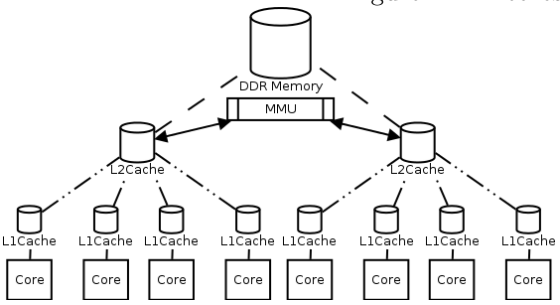
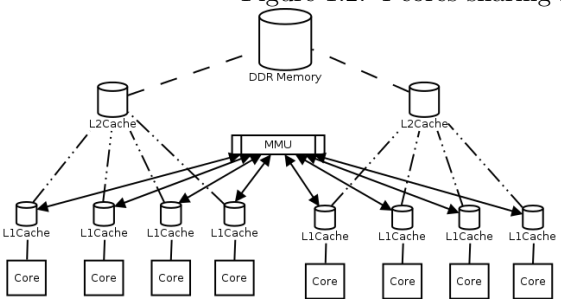


Figure 1.2: 4 cores sharing L2 cache with single MMU



cache. As a consequence most caches have to be shared due to their high cost[2]. In Figure 1.1 eigth cores can be seen sharing an L2 cache per four cores, where the MMU is only accessed on DDR memory access.

The sharing of L2 cache would mean that in order to prevent memory collissions, any memory access goes through the memory management unit before it can be processed, even if the memory being requested is in the cache of the current core. In Figure 1.2 the MMU is shown to be in the way of many memory accesses. As each call to the MMU needs to be finished prior to the access to the L2 cache can begin.

In order to achieve performance the caches could use virtual addresses instead of physical addresses, this however introduces collisions as more than a single program would normally share a cache. For programs this effectively means either sharing the address space regardless from the main memory layout. An alternative to these solutions would be the anti architectural limitation of one program per cache, where any shared cache would have each and every request go to the memory management unit first which would lead to differing impact on the overhead depending upon the cache level being shared.

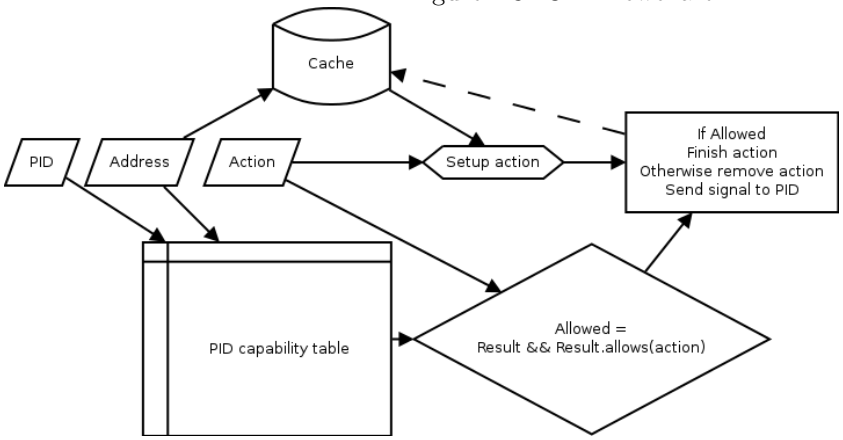
1.3 Proposal

The proposed solution for this problem is sharing a single address space across several programs which would eliminate the need for the blocking call to the memory management unit. As oposed to most virtual memory systems permissions based on address space isolation will be void.

In order to achieve permissions per process or thread a call could be made to a component such as the Memory Management Unit, which holds a capability table for PID to permission mapping. These calls would be issued in parallel to the cache access as opposed to the TLB. This parallelism would enable a speedup in the critical path for most memory access, the call to the CLB[3] will need to finish in order to conclude the cache access. As any violations need to be cought prior to damaging the shared cache. In Figure 1.3 a flowchart can seen for an access to any shared cache. As can be seen only the final finish action, the possibly damaging action is the only step depending on both actions, as such they may be executed in parallel.

[2]the required number of gates on the chip
[3]Capability Lookaside Buffer

Figure 1.3: CLB flowchart



1.4 Contribution

The goal of our research is to demonstrate the feasibillity and benefits of a single virtual address space shared by multiple independent program, such as the one provided the Microgrid architecture. To achieve this, we implement the components of an operating sustem for the Microgrid in charge of loading and starting programs in a shared address space. Our proposed components include:

A memory manager which divides a 64-bit virtual address space in large regions and interacts with the "virtual memory manager"[4] to allocate and deallocate physical memory.

A process manager which tracks which memory has been allocated per process, and provide seperate API handles to each program.

A program loader which is able to relocate ELF data sections over the shared address space on-the-fly and configure the segments access permissions specified by executable files using the hardware MMU.

Using our technology, we are able to show that multiple programs compiled seperately can be loaded, share the virtual address space and interleace on microthreaded cores without the overhead of switching address spacec on context switches between threads.

[4]Accelerated in hardware

CHAPTER 2

Theoretical background

2.1 Platform

For this research we will use the the Microgrid platform. The Microgrid is a many-core architecture proposed by the University of Amsterdam which combines hardware multithreading on each core and hardware logih to optimize the distribution of program-defined threads to multiple cores[1]. This platform is designed as a research vehicle for the exploitation of fine-grained , massive parralelism on chip.

In our work we use a software emulator of the Microgrid called MGSim, developed by the CSA group at UvA. This emulator implements Microgrids with configurable hardware parameters, such as the number of cores, ISAs and cache sizes. We intend our loader program to be compatible with any Microgrid configuration. However, as a reference configuration we use a Microgrid of 128 cires with each core implementing a 64-bit DEC Alpha ISA.

2.1.1 Features

The Alpha processor, the MGSim used during this research is based on the DEC Alpha processor, each core is essentially an Alpha processor.

64bits address space

The virtual memory system has a 64 bits address width. All integer registers have a 64-bits size.

General purpose CPU design

Though many processors are specifically designed to do a single task well while sacrificing performance or even usability in other areas the Alpha processor was designed as a true general purpose unit.

RISC instruction set

In order to keep both the processor design and low level programming comprehensible a clean instruction set was constructed.

Large address space and memory pool

The large potential amount of memory opens up possibilities for many programs. Typical computation platforms offer the possibility to run several programs either interlaced or in parallel and the main memory is shared among the many running processes.

[1] http://svp-home.org/microgrids

Houses a lot of parallel processing power

Microgrids can be configured with a diversity of hardware parameters, such as the number of cores and cache sizes. The default configuration in our project defines

- 128 D-RISC cores with an Alpha ISA, each with 6KB[2] of L1 cache
- 128KB L2 caches, shared by groups of 4 cores
- 4 DDR3-1600 external memory channels

The entire chip, consisting of multiple cores and caches, shares a MMU

As a microgrid chip houses many cores with several caches it offers a lot of potential. The chip does however have a single Memory Management Unit. This component is responsible for translating virtual address into physical addresses. In a many core configuration this leads to severe problems concerning cache validity and performance as detailed in Section 1.2. In Figure 2.1.1 a network of these cores can be seen.

Snoopy network

In order to facilitate communication between the processing cores and on chip components such as the Memory Management Unit the Microgrid processors have an on chip peer to peer network dedicated to small packets. This network is depicted in Figure 2.1.1.

2.1.2 Problem statement

The memory mananger in our system will need to decide where in the available virtual address range in order for the process to place a loaded programs memory image. In this context the loader will fulfill the task of an operating system. It will decide which regions of virtual memory can be used to load a program and will ensure this memory can be recycled should the process terminate.

This allocation of a memory range and deallocation is bound to several critical sections which prevent it from being fully independent. As such the memory manager needs to ensure several actions are executed in an essentially sequential manor. In order to improve performance and utilize parallel capabilities these sections should not include any code which could be safely executed in parallel.

In order to offer timing instruments the process manager should be equipped with the means to time loaded processes and offer insight in not only the loaded programs performance but also the loading of that program.

2.2 Overview of the loading problem

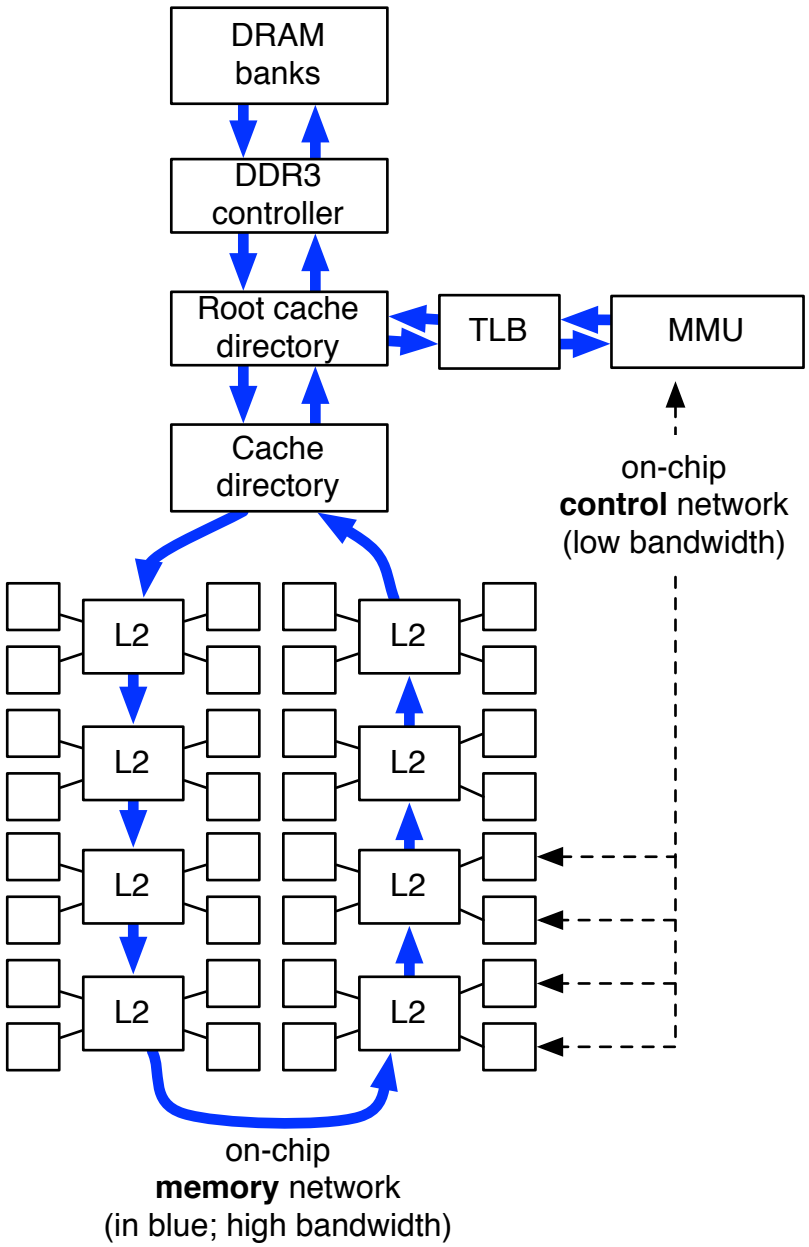
Loading a program has several phases to go through. At the end of these steps a traditional loader would transfer control to the loaded software.

2.2.1 User input

The loader needs to be able to adept itself to the needs of the user, most commonly a user will want to tell the loader what programs need to be loaded and what specific parameters or settings should be used. We propose to to do this via a configuration file, although our work can be easily extended to use an API instead. For information on the implemented configuration file see Section 2.3.2.

[2] 2KB code, 4KB data

Figure 2.1: A 32 core Microgrid



Courtesy of Raphael 'Kena' Poss.

2.2.2 Loading from ELF

The loader will need to load the program the user has requested, program code can be packed and stored in many file formats. The ELF file format has been chosen for this loader as supports some key features needed for our loader such as Relocation information and the Dynamic Symbol table, these features are primarily needed for relocation. The preexisting loader for the Microgrid platform has been used as a stepping stone, as it is already capable of loading an ELF file in a straightforward way to the Microgird platform. The ELF file format is the defacto standard for executable files.

The loading of an ELF executable proceeds generally as specified in [1]. Loading would result in a set of memory ranges being populated with code and data. Administrative features included in the ELF format like the program entry point and symbol data are used beyond this point though they are not necessarily part of a fully loaded program.

2.2.3 Location decisions

Since programs will share the address space in a parallel fashion a single arbiter, our memory manager, needs to decide where a process can be loaded. This is due to the risk of independent programs memory content overlapping each other. Such overlap if unintentional could lead to massive memory corruption.

The memory manager is a sequential component in an otherwise parallel system[3]. In order to retain high performance with an increasing amount of processes a freelist could be maintained. This list points to an administrative entry which is guaranteed to be either available or a truthful indicator that there is no space whatsoever. It contains a link to the next available entry. On process termination, its entry can be attached to the front of the freelist ensuring that all memory ranges are accounted for at any time.

The freelist maintains constant complexity over an increasing amount of processes in the system, it does however demand locking/serialization of the requests.

2.2.4 Relocation

During the loading process an exact location is determined for the program. This location is highly dynamic as it depends on the current memory occupation and deallocation history. When the program is requested to load any other program load can affect its final location. This introduces the need for program relocation [4]. The relocation can be split into two important phases. The code relocation and data relocation. The code is not always trivially relocated [5]. To protect the scope of this research the loader demands for the loaded programs to be compiled with several flags related to Position Independent Codeso that the code is functionally independent of its location in memory. The needed flags are elaborated on in Section 3.5.3.

This leaves some data relocation entries to be processed by the loader in order to correct data pointers. For an example and explanation see Section A.1.1. These relocation corrections are done as specified in [6]. This can be summarized as adding the programs base address to each pointer the compiler has flagged for correction. These pointers are full size pointers which places no extra limitations on program location. Some of these pointers could be function pointers for usage by the Position Independent Code. This is however irrelevant to the relocation code.

2.2.5 Process private memory

As programs may require arguments and environment variables which outlast the parent process they require their own storage whose lifetime is bound to the loaded process and not the process invoking the loader. This allocated room is not required for programs which do not follow the

[3]this process could be paralleled to some extend by dividing the possibilities over a set of arbiters and choosing the earliest available arbiter, this introduces overhead and does not solve the need for a single (arbiter) arbiter

[4]Documentation about: position dependent code

[5]Documentation about: coderelocationhard

[6]Documentation about: ELF reloc data reference

C convention of passing command line arguments and environment variables, as such this is optional.

The allocation of this memory is supported by the ELF file format by including a special section which reserves space for either arguments, environment or other custom data segments. This section is detected during loading and if present will be used to pass any argument and environment variables. If this section is absent no arguments will be passed to the program. This enables a minor speedup and memory saving for programs which are known not to use arguments[7].

2.2.6 Execution

Our process manager governs the transferring control to the loaded program. Its primary tasks in this context are debugging support, timing control, and most importantly transfering partial control of the system to the fully prepared programs memory image. This is done via the Microgrid construct sl_create which places the program on the desired cores, taking as parameters the address to start execution at and any arguments to pass. It offers an option to fully reserve the cores for the given program, blocking any core sharing. Due to the serializing effects of this option and the absence of intelligent core selection this is disabled by default. By default the program will be started on the core invoking the loader call. A possible sideeffect of this option could be deadlock, if a program is started on a reserved core. The program would prevent any calls dependent on that core, including those it needs to terminate. A check could be implemented into the process manager prior to accepting this flag, in a performance critical section.

2.3 User control

The loader can be influenced by a user in several ways. During its preparation and compilation several settings can be tweaked for optimum performance as will be specified in Section 2.3.1. After the loader has been compiled and linked the remaining tweaks need to be done via configuration, most tweaks are program specific so that once a program is loaded other ill-written programs can not legally affect it[8].

2.3.1 Preparation and Compilation

The performance of the loader is influenced in many ways such as the macro definitions, configuration settings and the loaded programs. During compilation some values such as the memory size for programs can be tweaked. The default cores for some operations... debugging print...

- Ranges Base, base_off in loader_api.h
- Ranges Size, base_progmaxsize in loader_api.h
- Maximum number of programs, $\frac{Memory_{available} - base\_progmaxsize}{base\_progmaxsize}$
- Core used for serialized printing, PRINTCORE in basfunc.c
- Core used for administrative functions, MEMCORE in basfunc.c

The base_off setting allows the tweaking of the base location, this so that the loader may evade certain areas of memory, this also prevents any loaded program from being placed before this address. Possible usage of this setting includes preserving some room for future system services or inter process memory.

The base_progmaxsize settings is the primary means of assuring loaded processes will not overflow their allotted memory by selecting a value fitting to the largest needed memory range.

The PRINTCORE setting is used to pick the core used for blocking prints, as such it should not be used for performance intensive processes.

The MEMCORE settings is used to pick the core used for blocking memory accesses needed for atomic structure access, as such it should not be used for performance intensive processes.

[7] Documentation about: example no arg programs and speedup

[8] Some efforts of sabotage are predicted to be effective as detailed in Section 5.2.1

2.3.2 Configuration details

The user can guide the loader by using a quite powerful configuration file. The file can be easily written in any text editor capable of saving as plain formatted text. The filename setting is obligatory, the arguments and environment will need representation in the configuration although these may be represented by an empty line.

- Filename of the ELF file (string)
- Arguments, can be an empty line (newline separated strings)
- Environment, can be an empty line (newline separated strings)

Some settings such as the verbosity are optional but would be present in most cases

- Verbose, "true" or a numerical value"
- Exclusive, "true" or "false" (Optional, default false)
- Core_start, numerical core number, (Optional)
- Core_size, numerical number of cores, (Optional, defaults to 1)

Settings enum

The settings enum which is given to several calls, this enumeration is defined in loader_api.h. This enumeration can be OR'ed together to from the requested settings.

- e_noprogname, if true the argv[0] will not be passed.
- e_timeit, if true print timing information on termination of a loaded process.
- e_exclusive, if true sl_exclusive is passed to the MGSim.

CHAPTER 3

Implementation

3.1 Assumptions and constraints

In the implementation process of the loader several assumptions had to be made.

- Availability of a working C compiler, slc
- Availability of a working linker, slcc
- ELF file format output for the linker
- Availability of the -fpic -fPIC and -shared flags
- Correctness of loaded code
- Relocateability of loaded code
- Loaded code will not try to harm other loaded programs

3.1.1 C compiler

The CSA group provides a C toolchain to program the Microgrid, fully compatible with the MGSim platform that we target in our work. This toolchain comprises of a C compiler which supports concurrency management extensions to C called SL. The compiler itself is called `‘slc‘` and uses GNU C as a back-end to produce code, as such slc nearly fully compatible with C99 as supported by GNU C.

3.1.2 The linker

The process of grouping object code, produced by the compiler, together with libraries to form an autonomous executable file file falls under the responsibility of a linker program, commonly called `‘ld‘`.

Like gcc, the command slc can also be used to drive ld, ld accepts parameters to tune the linking process, such as whether to include relocation information in the final executable. We explore these in Section 3.1.3.

3.1.3 Flags for linker and compiler

For the loadable programs some extra restraints exist, the C compiler and linker need to follow some specific rules in order to maintain full relocatability and functional correctness. These flags are the -fpic -fPIC and -shared flags. The -f flags indicate to the compiler that any executable code needs to be fully relocatable. The -shared flags indicated to the linker all data references might be relocated prior to execution and as such administration to support should be included. These flags are needed to compile any program that should reliably run within our loader.

To implement the loader the C programming language is employed, a compiler converts this into executable code for the Microgrid platform.

3.2 API

The Application Programming Interface, an interface to be used to interact with and guide to loader. This is implemented in our loader via an interface akin to a UNIX syscall table, where all loaded program are offered a pointer from which at known offsets certain function pointers are stored. These functions are to be abstracted by the C standard library as they represent system calls directly into the loader which in this area could be seen as the operating system.

The loaded programs currently lack a full C library which offers functions such as fopen, fprintf and many others. The incompatibility with our loader stems from the preexisting C runtime used to link and locate the library making false assumptions about the system and its no longer private address space. In order to offer the loaded applications some of the missing functionality and more importantly access to several loader related functions an API structure is defined, which holds pointers to functions as offered by the loader. The loader passes the pointer to all loaded programs which can be used to accessed loader functions, this is done by passing the pointer to the single struct as a parameter in a register. This pointer points to a struct containing function pointers for these functions:

Name First argument	Description Second argument	Return value Leftover arguments
spawn const char* ELFFileName	spawn a program enum settings[1]	int 0 on success int argc, char **argv, char *env[2]
print_string const char* PrintedString	prints in an orderly fashion (blocking) int WhichOutput[3]	None
print_int int PrintedNumber	prints an integer in an orderly fashion (blocking) int WhichOutput	None
print_pointer void* PrintedValue	prints pointer in an orderly fashion (blocking) int WhichOutput	None
load_fromconf const char* ConfigFileName	loads a program from config file	int 0 on success
load_fromconf_fd int FileDescriptor	loads a program from config from an open file	int 0 on success
load_fromparam struct admin_s* PreparedStruct	loads from structure with parameters	int 0 on success
breakpoint int IdForPrinting	loader break point for program, prints and breaks const char* ForPrinting	enum WhoHandledIt[4]

3.3 Platform dependency

We depend on the microgrid for several key functions and constructs, these would need to be replaced if any other platform where to be targeted.

- sl_create, for creating the program stack and core allocation
- sl_detach, letting the loader detach from a loaded program logically tied to sl_create.
- mgsim_control, for sending messages to the MMU concerning range allocation and deallocation
- mgsim_control, for sending a message to the simulator concerning breakpoints

3.4 Configuration

The loader accepts a configuration file which contains everything it needs to know in order to prepare, call and clean up a loaded ELF file and all its memory. A simple scanner which parses keyword value pairs, these are then terminated by a blank line at which point the arguments can be specified. These arguments will be passed as the traditionally called argv, which can only be done if the necessary room is reserved in a section as detailed in Section 3.5.1. These newline separated arguments are terminated by a blank line. After this blank line the environment variables are once written separated by newlines. The environment variables should be in the form `a=b`. The environment variables are terminated by a blank line after which any remaining data would be left untouched.

3.5 ELF loading

3.5.1 Special symbols

The loader searches for some special symbols which it can use to store and pass arguments to programs in an unobtrusive manner. These symbols are generated by including a C source file during compilation[5] of the loadable program. These are symbols with global scope, which is global to the compiled program. Other loaded programs do not see them. These symbols are detected when parsing the dynamic symbol table and include both the size and the unrelocated location, after correcting for relocation the symbol location is stored in the programs administration for later use. The symbols are recognized by their names, these can be changed by altering the definition of `ROOM_ARGV` or `ROOM_ENV` in the file `loader_api.h` and the related C source file which would be either `argroom.c` or `envroom.c`. The latter also permit the size to be modified in order to accommodate for the anticipated amount of arguments.

Size constraints and guidelines

The size the argument and environment objects require depends on the anticipated input, in order to calculate the most efficient size these formula should be used:

$$Size_{Env} = 1 + \sum_{i \in environment} (1 + strlen(i))$$

$$Size_{Args} = 8 * (Argc + 1) + \sum_{i \in argv} (1 + strlen(i))$$

The room needed for the arguments considers the storage for the argv array, the environment room does so for the final null byte. These storage locations are only related in concept and implementation. They are fully independent so one may choose to include any combination of sizes.

In the situation insufficient room is available for the arguments the loader will print a warning message, setup to pass no arguments whatsoever. It will then check the same for the environment variables. It will still try to execute the program even if these checks both fail by passing null pointers and an argc of zero to indicate no arguments could be passed. It is left up to the developer of the loaded program to decide whether it can successfully execute in their absence.

3.5.2 Algorithm

The ELF file is read into memory where a simple algorithm is followed.

```
Load the file into memory
Inspect the header
Locate the program headers
Scan the program headers for the base address
```

[5] linking an object file compiled from this file will achieve the same effect

```
Find an available PID
Determine the read base address, aligned
Loop over the program headers:
  Load segments to their destination
  Zero leftover memory
Locate the section headers
Scan the section headers for the Dynamic Symbol table and Relocation tables
Scan the Dynamic Symbol table for special symbols:
  Note the location and size for the argument and environment room
For all found Relocation tables:
  Loop over all entries in the table:
    Determine the pointer location
    Determine the symbol and offset
    Calculate and update the pointer
Prepare the arguments and environment if room is available
Spawn a thread which will call the main function as found in the entry point
```

The loader optionally includes a verbose set of print statements useful for debugging purposes. This can be disabled for performance reasons by changing a macro definition or disabled at runtime by passing a verbosity setting to the loader.

The loader is guided by a configuration file which describes what program should be called with optional arguments and program specific settings. This configuration file is covered in detail in Section 2.3.2. The loader follows two simple algorithms for parsing.

```
Reading key value pairs:
Start:
  Key=""
  Value=""
  Buffer=""
  Read character X:
    If X == '=':
      Key=Buffer
    If X === '\n':
      if Key == "":
        Goto Done
      Value=Buffer
      Goto ParseSetting(Key, Value)
    Buffer += X
    Goto Read character X

  ParseSetting(Key, Value):
    Pick the setting based on Key, set it using Value
    Return

  Done:
    Finish up, settings done
```

At this point all settings have been parsed, the programs filename is known and the settings have been terminated with an empty line. At this point the command line arguments can be set.

```
Argc=1
Argv[0]=ELFFilename
Read character X:
  if X == '\n':
    if Argv[Argc][0] == '\0':
      Goto Done
    Argc++
  Argv[Argc] += X
```

```
  Goto Read character X
Done:
  Finish up, Arguments known in Argv and Argc
```

The same is the done for the Environment substituting Argc and Argv for EnvC and Evnp.

3.5.3 Program limitations and requirements

Some compilation flags and settings are explicitly required in order to reliably load a program.

- -fpic, to tell the compiler to generate position independent code.
- -fPIC, to tell the compiler to generate position independent code which could be needed for compilation to SPARC machines[6].
- -shared
- crt_fun.c
- -nostdlib

These flags tell slc [7]to compile position independent code, to include data relocation information and replace the C runtime codewith a bare one which consists of a wrapper which calls the main function of the loadable program.

3.6 Spawning an initial program

The loader initial program is loaded by passing arguments which will be parsed as configuration files, loading them in sequence on either the default core or the specified cores. These files should adhere to the format as specified in Section 2.3.2. Several examples are included in Section A.2

The loader in this research will behave in ways like loaders normally found in userspace within an operating system environment. As such it will not offer full control of the system as a bootloader would, it will run in userspace and it resides in virtual memory. It is however designed for a system lacking a full operating system, it therefore currently lacks some features that most operating systems offer through the loader. The most prominent missing features include program exception handling, a loaded program which performs illegal operations is likely to terminate the entire loader and all loaded programs. Library support, programs currently lack a way to share libraries dynamically which could mean increasing redundancy as more and more statically linked programs include their own copy of common code. The loader will not treat debugging information in any special way, and as such might require expansion if a debugger is introduced to the system.

3.7 In-program Loader calls

In order to allow more complex program structure we offer programs an API through which they can invoke loader functions to spawn programs or perform other related tasks such as printing strings, integers and pointers. This enables user readable printing. Another function is the powerfull load_fromparam which allows loading with fully customized settings without the need for creating a configuration file.

[6]it concerns GOT maximum size

[7]Documentation about: `slc 3.7b.28-dac6`

```
  Copyright (C) 2009,2010 The SL project. This is free software; see the source for copying
conditions. There is NO warranty; not even for MERCHANTABILITY or FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR
PURPOSE.
  Written by Raphael 'kena' Poss.
```

3.8 Implementation considerations and reflection

A perfect design is rare, as not all optimum settings are fully compatible.

3.8.1 Location dilemma

Size

A program needs a location which can not be easily changed at run time. The run time of a program may be unbounded and as such a single program introduces fragmentation of the memory space. This is largely an allocation problem where prior to execution exact space requirements may not be available.

Location

When loading a program care has to be taken to ensure no programs are given overlapping address spaces[8].

During the debugging of any collection of programs one would like to know which program is responsible for certain instructions, problems or memory usage. In order to trace a specific memory location to a program we would need some sort of standard procedure.

Solution

As our loader is designed with a 64bits address space in mind we have adopted a formula for base address calculation in which a process is given a base address based on its identifier and a predetermined size. This size is the upper limit for any loaded process sub address space. This size can be changed prior to loader compilation.

$$Base = Base_{Global} + (Id_{Process} * Size_{maximumsubspace})$$

This enables us to efficiently determine a base address for a process by a simple caclulation based on the Process Identifier.

An indicattion of the resulting memory layout is shown in Figure 3.8.1, where the loader is shown to populate several regions of memory after each noted event.

By selecting a value for $Size_{maximumsubspace}$ the maximum amount of memory one loaded process can legally address is determined, in order to prevent overflow we have opted to use a default value of 2^{50} which offers each process more addressable memory than current platforms offer as randomly accessible memory. This value can be tweaked to suit any specific situation as defined in Section 2.3.1

3.8.2 Traceability of problems

As our loader loads an increasingly large number of programs problems memory ownership needs to stay intuitive. In order to trace errors we can determine ownership by calculating the Id of the memory based on the inverse of our location formula.

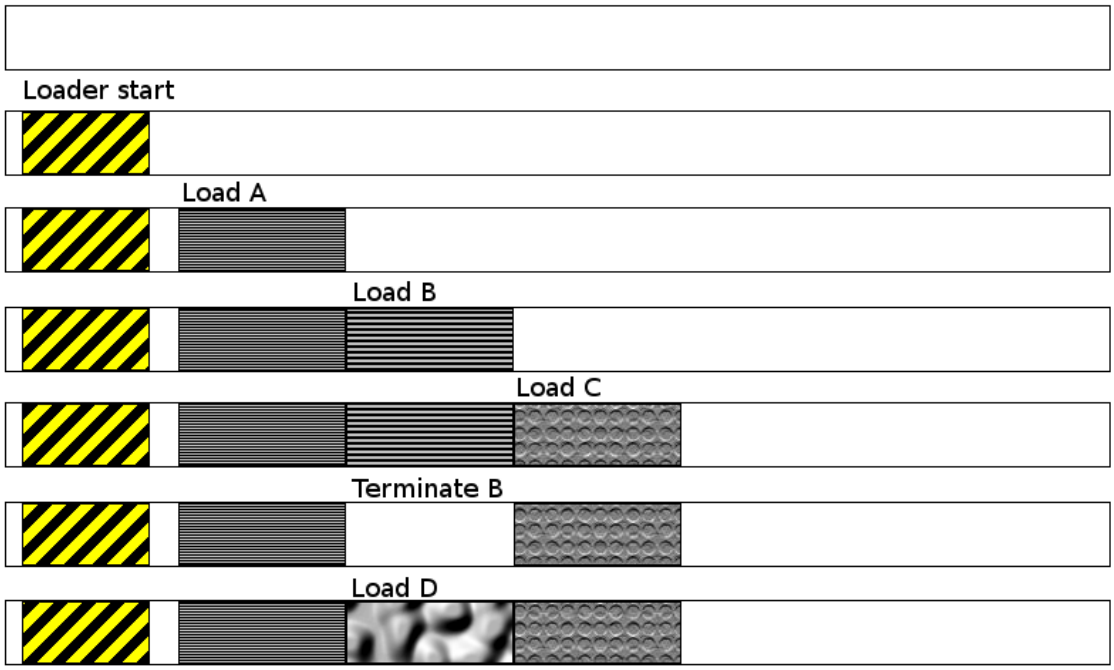
$$Id = rounddown((Address - Base_{Global})/Size_{maximumsubspace})$$

3.8.3 Relocation

The loaded program is loaded to an a priory unknown location so the loader has to finish the relocation process. This is done by using relocation information information stored in the section headers. The loader parses the section data. [2]

[8] All programs share the same address space, but to their knowledge the subspace they inhabit is a traditional address space

Figure 3.1: Memory occupancy evolution



CHAPTER 4

Progress report

During my research I have reached several conclusions.

4.1 Milestones

4.1.1 Planned milestones

A loader for single program.
A loader for multiple programs.
A loader with in program spawn function.
A loader with Input and Output redirection.

4.1.2 Unexpected roadblocks

Missing functions.
Libc conflicts, loading an existing libc leads to crashes.
Runtime cleanup, programs not being cleaned due to thread termination.

4.1.3 Reached milestones

Loading a program.
Loading more programs.
Loading based on user configuration.
Loading on a specific core.
Letting programs output in a orderly fashion.

Loading something

A single program being loaded, though it seems trivial it is quite the relief when it finally does.

Loading several programs

The more significant milestone, loading multiple programs which execute as they would in a private address space. With the significant difference that they share their address space between themselves and the loader. The second large milestone reached is the usage of global variables which due to their relocation needs was a hassle to get right.

4.2 Future research

4.3 Security

As the memory manager is focused on sharing an address space between programs some assumptions where made as seen in [1]. One of these assumptions is the willingness to cooperate. Each program loaded has the same rights as any other to the same memory without the isolation most application programmers are used to. This has potential drawbacks where a virus could easilly infect the entire system. The platform could be extended with 'capabilities' to prevent rogue threads accessing information the may not, this would however need to be supported by hardware much like a TLB.

[1] Documentation about: assumtionsprograms

CHAPTER 5

Experiments

5.1 Testing

During the development several programs where written to test nominal behavior. These programs are designed to make use of several features the ELF file format which could break on loader malfunction.

5.1.1 Relocation

The `tinyex.c` prints strings which are globally defined in an array. This array of string pointers requires runtime relocation to ensure they point to the relocated string data. These are full size absolute pointers and as such corrected by simple addition of the program base offset which is unknown at compile time.

Symptoms of malfunction for this program would include illegal memory access and the attempted printing of non string data.

5.2 Limitations and future work

5.2.1 Permissions

In order to explore possible problems nasty programs were constructed. These have been used during testing to improve the loader. There is however another class of programs, malicious programs which attempt to access memory which was allocated for another loaded program or even the loader itself. Due to the lack of memory protection methods beyond the normal read write and execute permissions all programs share these permissions. As such any program could take control of most other programs.

A means of protecting loaded programs from each other is documented in [3]. Their proposed protection system would enable fine grain access control and secure the loader and programs from ill written programs if not malicious programs.

5.2.2 Library sharing

The loader could be extended to dynmicly load libraries in such a manner that multiple programs can share them in existing operating systems this has shown to decrease program sizes and reduce memory needs.

5.3 Applications

The loader offers a platform which could be extended to allow dynamic task execution and placement. A shell program could be used to offer a dynamic interface. Combined with other

programs and daemons a simple operating system could be realized.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions

6.1 Benchmarking results

In benchmarks we have seen that performance... It quite likely works

6.2 Stability

The loader lacks some of the protection mechanisms required for the stable execution of untrusted code. However under normal execution the loader is quite stable and handles any errors it can by terminating the offending program and offering several handles for debugging purposes.

During testing ??? programs have been run in tandem. ??? programs have been run on the same core. ??? programs have been run in a recursive manner.

6.3 Final conclusion

The system...

6.4 References

Bibliography

[1] Tool Interface Standard (TIS) Committee. *Executable and Linking Format (ELF) Specification, Version 1.2*, May 1995.

[2] John D. Polstra. *FreeBsd Source src/sys/sys/elf64.h, version 1.9, 5 May 2012, http://freebsd.active-venture.com/FreeBSD-srctree/newsrc/sys/elf64.h.html*, September 1999.

[3] Emmett Witchel, Josh Cates, and Krste Asanović. Mondrian memory protection. In *Proc. 10th international conference on Architectural Support for Programming Languages and Operating Systems (ASPLOS'02)*, ASPLOS-X, pages 304–316, New York, NY, USA, 2002. ACM.

APPENDIX A

Problems and in depth solutions

A.1 Bugs

A.1.1 Implementation details

At an early stage in the loaders development progress all data relocation was done at compile time. The assumption was made the compiler would generate code to correct data pointers included in initialized variables. However this is not the case as was concluded when a simple program designed to print an array of strings was run and it became clear that these strings where assumed to be at a fixed location. The error in the location could be expressed as the loaded programs base. The programs continued to show this behavior when compiled with the -fPIC and -fpic compiler flags.

In order to solve this problem, which is a symptom of an incomplete relocation process the data pointers need to be corrected. In order to know which data needs to be corrected for the actual base the compiler needs to be told that the loader will finish the loading process. This is done by passing it the -shared flag. This flag prevents the compiler from incorrectly assuming a value for the definitive base address and include relocation information into the produced ELF file.

Example of the printy programs reported sections when not compiled with -shared

```
Section   #(    Type):            Name, Type#          Flags,          Addr,           Off,
Section   0(NULLTYPE):               ,     0,              0,             0,             0,
Section   1(Progbits):           .text,     1,              6,      16777216,         65536,
Section   2(Progbits):         .rodata,     1,              2,      16778048,         66368,
Section   3(Progbits):   .eh_frame_hdr,     1,              2,      16778112,         66432,
Section   4(Progbits):       .eh_frame,     1,              2,      16778136,         66456,
Section   5(Progbits):            .got,     1,              3,      16843720,         66504,
Section   6(  Nobits):            .bss,     8,              3,      16843720,         66504,
Section   7(Progbits):        .comment,     1,              0,             0,         66504,
Section   8(Progbits):        .argroom,     1,              0,             0,         66522,
Found the argument section
Section   9(  Strtab):       .shstrtab,     3,              0,             0,         74714,
Section  10(  Symtab):         .symtab,     2,              0,             0,         75576,
Section  11(  Strtab):         .strtab,     3,              0,             0,         75984,
Spawning program from 0x80101230 of size 0x1290e with flags 2
To cores: 1 @ 0
Returning from Loader main
```

The same program With -shared

```
Section   #(    Type):            Name, Type#          Flags,          Addr,           Off,
Section   0(NULLTYPE):               ,     0,              0,             0,             0,
```

```
Section   1(Progbits):           .text,     1,              6,      16777216,         65536,
Section   2(    Hash):           .hash,     5,              2,           400,           400,
Section   3(  Dynsym):         .dynsym,    11,              2,           576,           576,
Section   4(  Strtab):         .dynstr,     3,              2,           792,           792,
Section   5(    Rela):       .rela.plt,     4,              2,           848,           848,
Section   6(Progbits):         .rodata,     1,              2,      16778048,         66368,
Section   7(Progbits):   .eh_frame_hdr,     1,              2,      16778112,         66432,
Section   8(Progbits):       .eh_frame,     1,              2,      16778136,         66456,
Section   9( Dynamic):        .dynamic,     6,              3,      16843720,         66504,
Section  10(Progbits):            .plt,     1,              7,      16844016,         66800,
Section  11(Progbits):            .got,     1,              3,      16844064,         66848,
Section  12(  Nobits):            .bss,     8,              3,      16844072,         66856,
Section  13(Progbits):        .comment,     1,              0,             0,         66856,
Section  14(Progbits):        .argroom,     1,              0,             0,         66874,
Found the argument section
Section  15(  Strtab):       .shstrtab,     3,              0,             0,         75066,
Section  16(  Symtab):         .symtab,     2,              0,             0,         76352,
Section  17(  Strtab):         .strtab,     3,              0,             0,         76976,
Spawning program from 0x80101230 of size 0x12d27 with flags 2
To cores: 1 @ 0
Returning from Loader main
```

As can be observed, the RELA section.

A.2 Example Configurations

These configurations load a single program each with the specified arguments, environment and specific loader settings.

```
verbose=true
filename=/path/to/file/elffile

argv1
argv2
argv3

env0=1
env1=cookies
env3=needs more ducktape
env4=sudo su
env5=make sandwhich -j9001
```