Enhanced File Prefetching

Tushar Khot Varghese Mathew Priyananda Shenoy
Department of Computer Sciences
University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI
{tushar,vmathew,shenoy}@cs.wisc.edu

1 Related Work

With rapidly increasing processing speeds that have not quite been matched by rising disk speeds, prefetching and caching gain dominance as mechanisms to mitigate the lag and allow higher utilization of the processor even with I/O bound tasks.

Cao et. al [1] compares two prefetching strategies, aggressive and conservative, and conclude that an aggressive strategy comes closer to the offline-computed optimal strategy than the conservative one. However, we believe that this is overly generalized. In our perspective, the comparison of aggressive vs. conservative must be done at a file-type granularity. For e.g.. a multimedia audio file will not need extremely aggressive access since the read need not take place faster than the rate at which the file is being played. Likewise, an archive file which most likely is accessed in a piecewise sequential manner can again be prefetched somewhat conservatively to avoid buffer cache pollution and wasteful prefetching.

Shih et al. [6] propose to use cache hit histories to determine the sequentiality of access and perform prefetching accordingly. However, the inferences thus drawn are not persistent. And storing them on a per-file basis may not be a scalable approach. However, file-types offer a convenient axis against which inferences about access patterns can be aggregated and stored.

With concurrent I/O by different applications brought into the equation, Li et al. [2] propose a strategy where prefetch depth is determined by the amount of data that can be read in the average time gap between an I/O switch. However, this approach is not without problems. For e.g.. with a multimedia file and a Pdf file contending for prefetch from disk, an equal share is not the best solution.. The multimedia file needs to get priority as it is the one that would suffer more because of delays. This is again a situation where prioritizing based on file-type can possibly yield a solution.

Butt et al. [7] stress on the importance of studying prefetching algorithms and cache management algorithms in conjunction. These two are closely related and therefore an optimization in one without regard to its impact on the other can actually result in deterioration of performance. We therefore look at cache management strategies that can complement the prefetching enhancements at the file-type granularity. Eviction policy is an ideal candidate for improvisation with knowledge of file-type.

A fairly obvious idea is to allow applications to inform the file system about it's prefetching pol-

icy. Griffioen [3] uses application specified hints to better tune the prefetching policy. Patterson et al. [4] extends this idea to cover both prefetching and caching policies. To relieve the programmer of the responsibility of giving hints correctly, Chang et al. [5] instrument the application binary to analyze access patterns and generate hints automatically. The problem with hints is that most of the time applications do not themselves know future access patterns, and static analysis of application may not yield the right patterns.

Another approach which has been tried is to build application specific optimizations for complex access patterns. Mitra et al. [8] developed specialized application level prefetch prediction for multimedia programs. They achieve this by generating a prefetch thread which prefetches entirely at the application level. But such approaches do not generalize well to other applications.

Baek et al. [9] optimize prefetching for massive media files. They distinguish between metadata reads and sequential data reads and adapt accordingly. But they do not use any file type or file history information to make a prefetch decision.

Kim et al. [10] streamline cache management and prefetch policies for multimedia servers. They use system load to determine prefetch depth and cache policies. Their goal is not necessarily to optimize overall performance, but to guarantee quality of service to each client.

File prefetching can be done at both inter-file and intra-file level. Griffioen [12] studied the performance of automatic prefetching which remembers file access patterns and aggressively loads files related to this file. Preload [11] operates as a daemon which looks at file accesses, and uses a predictive probabilistic model to preload files likely to be accessed next. While these techniques work fine for inter-file dependencies, they cannot directly be applied for intra-file block accesses.

A large body of work has been concentrated on analyzing the access patterns of a file and predicting the prefetch depth. Fido [13] uses a dynamic learning algorithm to determine which class the access belongs to, in the specific context of databases. Such approaches suffer from having only local histories, which are forgotten after the session ends. On the other hand, maintaining per-file access histories across sessions involves too much of an overhead.

Phunchongharn et al. [14] used file type information to optimize various strategies such as disk allocation, redundancy, and caching strategies. But their work doesn't cover prefetching strategies.

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