Metrics for System Investigation
Performance Evaluation of Computer Systems

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Outline

1. Overview
2. Intermezzo: Out Of Order Execution
3. Intermezzo: Branch Prediction
4. Processor Behavior Metrics
5. Intermezzo: Memory Hierarchy
6. Memory Related Behavior Metrics
System Investigation

Measuring for the purpose of understanding system behavior.

Requirements:

- Directly related to specific system components.
- Configurable to fit variety of investigated systems.
- Reasonably simple to measure during development or operation.

Pitfalls:

- Metric design often influenced by what we can measure.
- Behavior of specific components may be difficult to isolate.
- Relationship to practically observed performance questionable.
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# Current Processor Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pipelined</td>
<td>Multiple instructions processed at different execution stages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superscalar</td>
<td>Multiple instructions dispatched simultaneously to multiple execution units.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out Of Order Processing</td>
<td>Instructions scheduled for execution and retired based on dependencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speculative Program Execution</td>
<td>Instructions may be executed based on speculation about future state.</td>
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General terminology may not fit when applied on particular processor.
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Branch Prediction

**Condition Prediction**
Trying to guess whether a conditional jump will jump or not.

- Concerns most loops and branches in source.
- Short branches also done with conditional instructions.

**Target Prediction**
Trying to guess where an indirect jump will jump.

- Concerns all virtual method invocations in source.
- Concerns all return statements in source.
- Concerns some switch statements.
Static Prediction

Predicting without knowledge of past behavior.

Not much can be done:
- Forward jumps predicted as not taken.
- Backward jumps predicted as taken.
- Guess why?
Prediction With Counters

**Single Bit**

Remember last state as taken or not taken.
Predict same behavior as last time.

- Works for loops with many iterations.
- Poor for many common patterns.

**Saturating Two Bits**

Use saturating counter that increments vs decrements depending on branch being taken vs not taken.
Predict behavior depending on counter value.

- Still poor for many common patterns.
Prediction With History

History
Remember recent history as string of taken or not taken bits. Use history as index to table of saturating counters.

- We already have a hash table of counters anyway.
- Fixes behavior with short patterns that break counters alone.
- History either local for one branch or global across all branches.
Branch Target Buffer

**One Target**
Simply store last branch target in hash table.

- Not very good with polymorphic targets.
- Some benchmarks suggest success around half of the time.

**More Targets**
Store multiple targets indexed by history.

- History of past addresses or parts of those.
- Some benchmarks suggest global history better than local.
Real designs mix more prediction principles.

**Intel Sandy Bridge**
- Two level predictor with 32 bits global history.
- Branch target buffer size probably around 4096 entries.
- Return target stack for up to 16 nested calls.

**AMD Ryzen**
- Hybrid predictor with perceptron.
  - Sounds arcane but in fact linear combination of selected history bits.
  - Of course many details are hidden in the training phase.
- Branch target buffer architecture and size not reported.
- Return target stack for up to 32 nested calls.
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Overview

Metrics characterising application execution effectivity:
- Instructions per cycle (IPC or inverse CPI).
- Branch prediction hit (miss) count or rate.
- Memory accesses per instruction.
- ...

Metric properties:
- Useful for example to appraise code optimisations.
- Typically very much platform specific.
Overview

Metrics characterising application execution demands:
- Instruction mix in general terms.
- Average lifetime of register values.
- General predictability of branch instructions.
- ...

Metric properties:
- Very hard to define meaningful metrics and values.
- Platform independent measurement possible.
  http://boegel.kejo.be/ELIS/mica
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Memory Hierarchy Features

**Translation Caching**
Address translation caches remember recent virtual to physical mappings.

**Content Caching**
Content caches remember recent data and hold recent writes.

**Prefetching**
Regular access patterns trigger prefetching.

**Coherency**
Single memory illusion maintained.
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## Cache Relevant Behavior Metrics

### Overview

Metrics characterize memory access patterns.

- **Cache misses (hits) per memory access (rate).**
  - Individually for each cache level.
  - Also for address translation caches.
- **Stack (reuse) distance.**
  Number of accesses to unique addresses between reuses of the same address.
- **Average memory access time usually in clock cycles.**
  
  \[
  T_{avg} = p_{hit} \cdot T_{cache} + (1 - p_{hit}) \cdot T_{memory}
  \]

**Metric properties:**

- Depends on many platform properties (timing, prefetching, replacement strategies).
- Can guide application specific optimizations (data layout modifications, tiling, compute to fetch ratio).
Allocation Behavior Metrics

Overview

Metrics characterize dynamic (heap) memory allocation patterns.

- **Allocation rate**, **deallocation rate**.
  Should be the same, on average.

- **Live size**.
  Total size of usable (reachable) memory.

- **Object lifetime**.
  What time elapses between object allocation and deallocation (becoming unreachable). Time unit is usually a byte allocated or an object allocated.

- **Object size**.

  \[ \text{Avg live size} = \text{Avg object size} \cdot \text{Avg object lifetime} \]