Between the Lines: VM Assumptions

Laurence
Tratt

KING'S College LONDON

Software Development Team
2020-01-29

What happens if we’re wrong?

VM development is a destination

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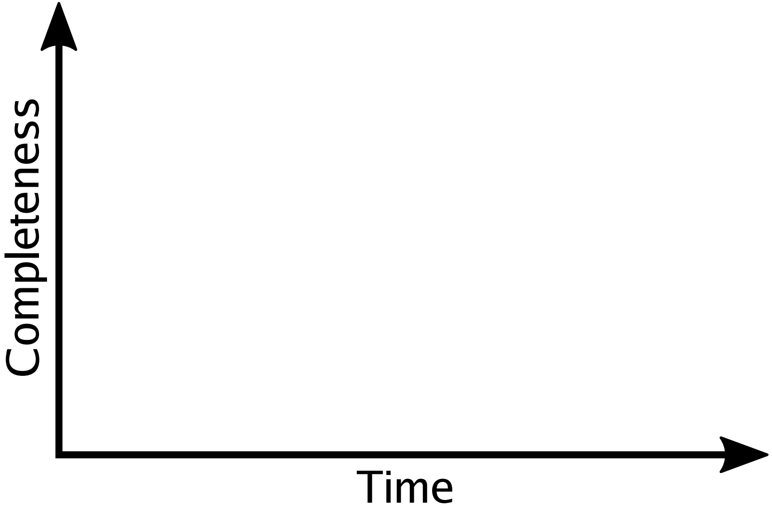

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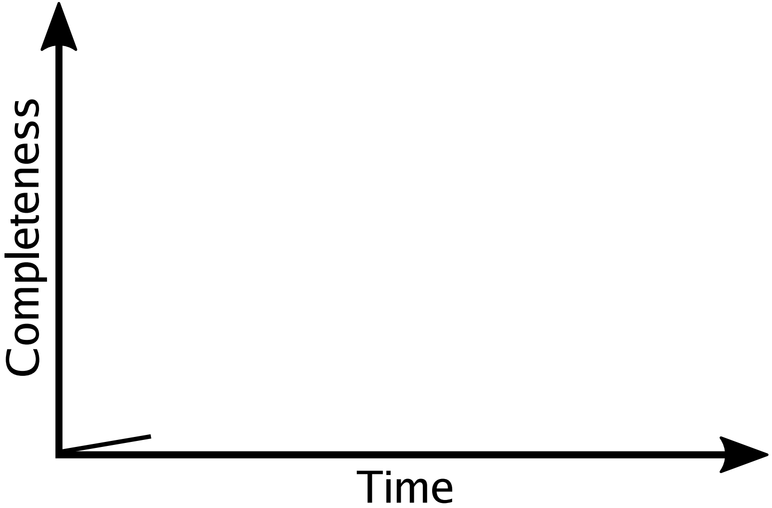

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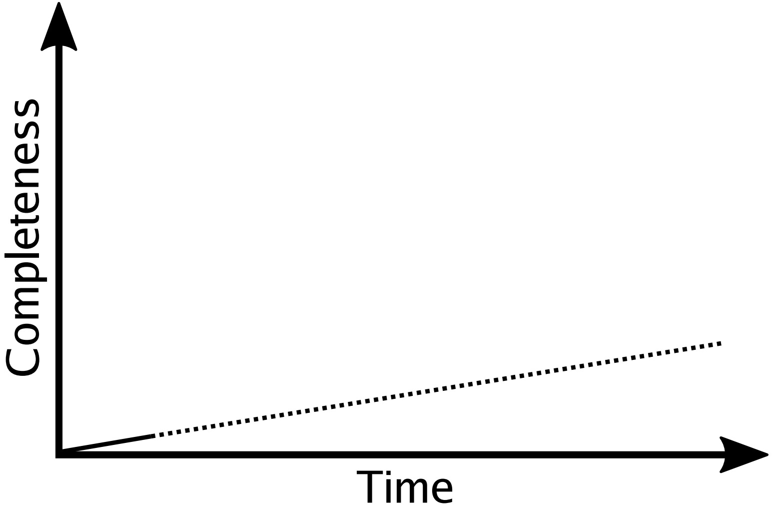

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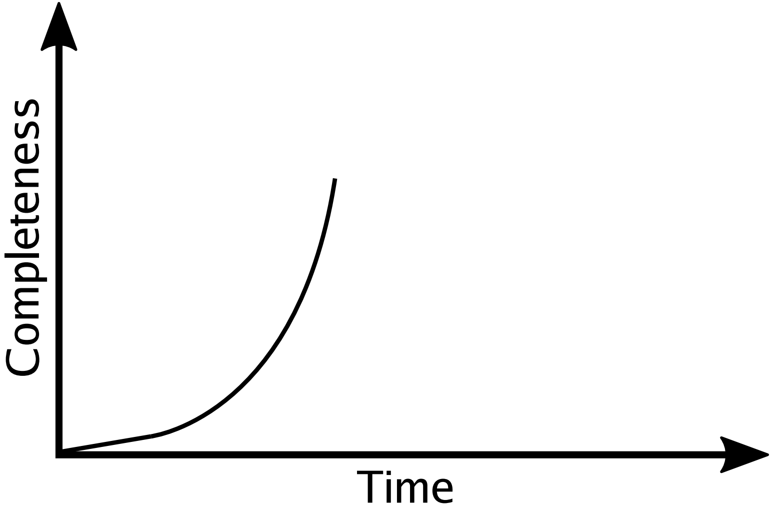

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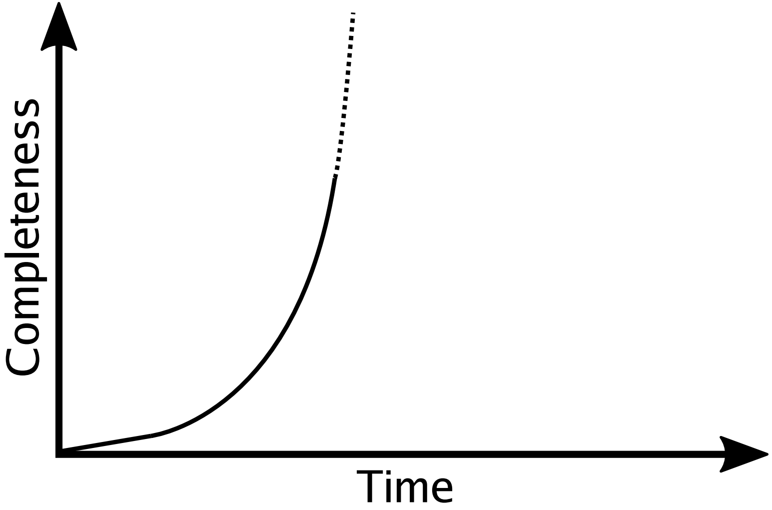

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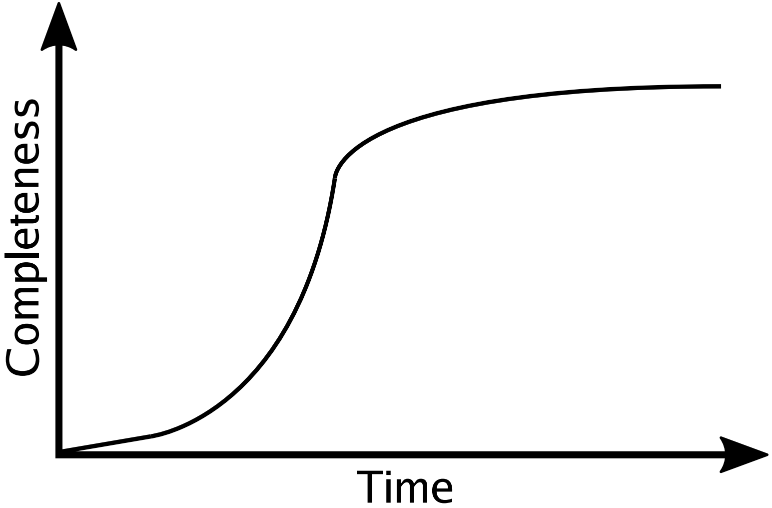

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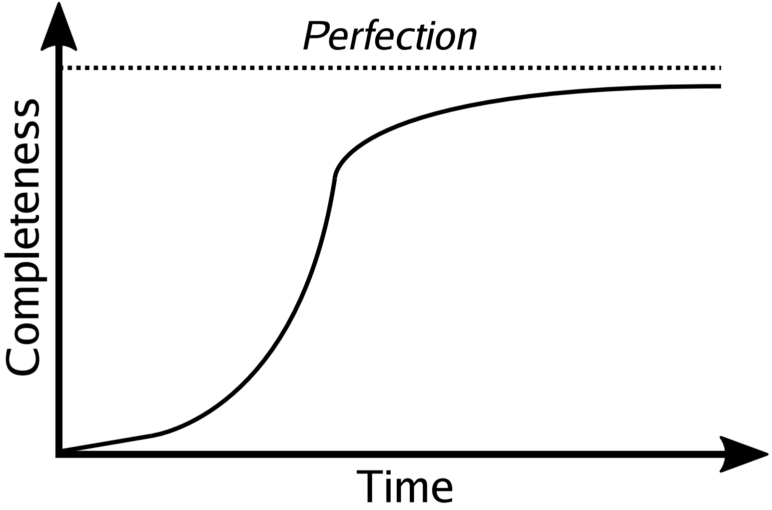

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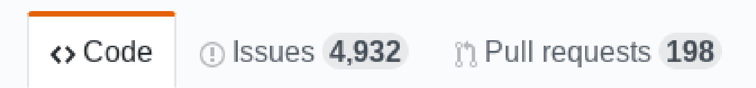

VM development is a destination

VM development is a never-ending process

We know where the performance ceiling is

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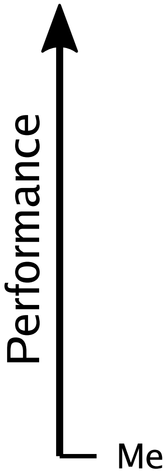
What is the best possible performance for an input *P*?

We know where the performance ceiling is



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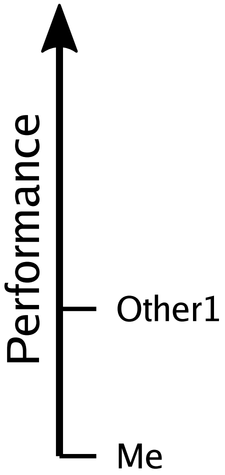

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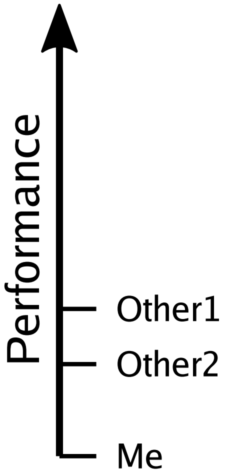

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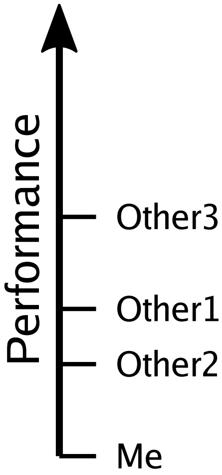

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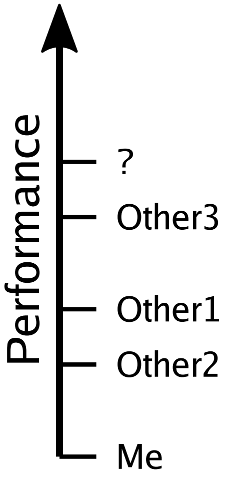

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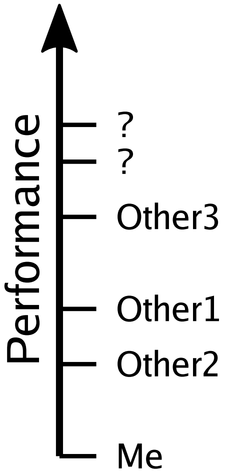

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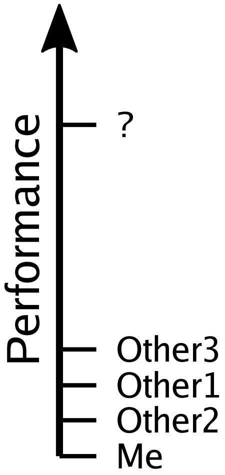

We know where the performance ceiling is

We don’t know how well we’re doing

We’re good at optimising abstractions

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Most optimisations are ad-hoc and/or unpredictable

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Most optimisations are ad-hoc and/or unpredictable

e.g. mono $\rightarrow$ poly $\rightarrow$ megamorphic JS calls

We're good at optimising abstractions

How to communicate optimisations to users?

We know what the impact of individual features is

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What is the effect of e.g. pointer tagging?

We know what the impact of individual features is

What is the effect of e.g. pointer tagging?

GC and register allocation only
fairly deeply studied topics?

We know what the impact of individual features is

Hardware

We know what the impact of individual features is

Hardware: caches

We know what the impact of individual features is

Hardware: caches, predictors

We know what the impact of individual features is

Hardware:	caches, predictors, temperature

We know what the impact of individual features is

Hardware: caches, predictors, temperature, etc.

We know what the impact of individual features is

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OS

We know what the impact of individual features is

Hardware:	caches, predictors, temperature, etc.
OS:	other processes

We know what the impact of individual features is

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VM	

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We know what the impact of individual features is

Hardware:	caches, predictors, temperature, etc.
OS:	other processes, context switches, etc.
VM:	compilation heuristics, GC heuristics, etc.

We know how features interact

Performance non-determinism is rife

Performance non-determinism

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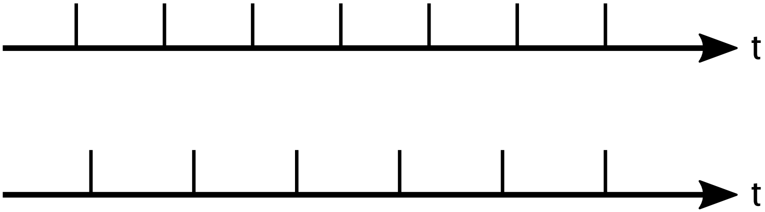
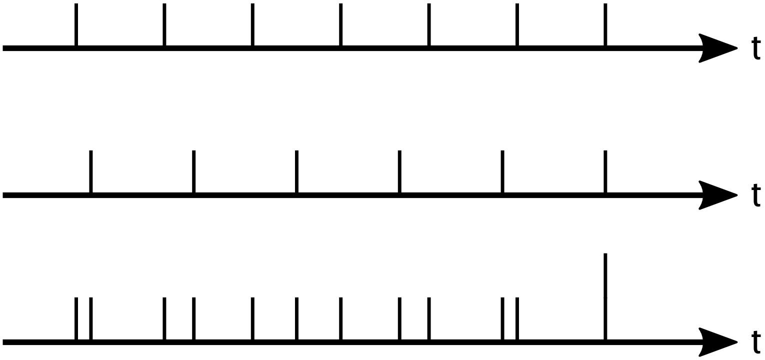


Performance non-determinism



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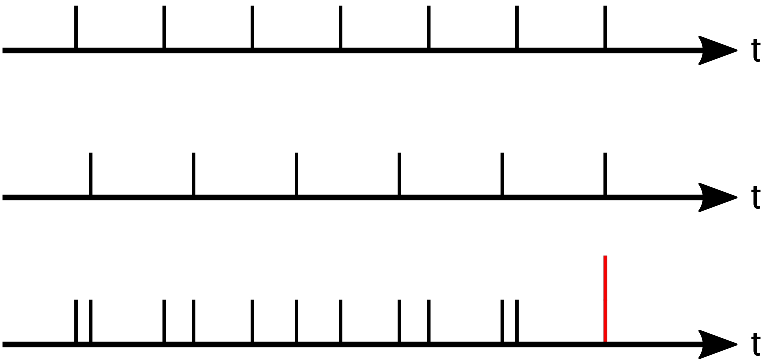

Solution to performance non-determinism

Solution to performance non-determinism:
non-determinism?

We understand how large systems perform

We understand how large systems perform

Microbenchmarks behave poorly

We understand how large systems perform

Microbenchmarks behave poorly

But that doesn't affect big benchmarks

We understand how large systems perform

How convenient!

We understand how large systems perform

What about compositionality?

Multi-language VMs

VMs are expensive to create

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Why not reuse that hard work?

Multi-language VMs

VMs are expensive to create

Why not reuse that hard work?

CPython vs. Jython parable

Semantic mismatch

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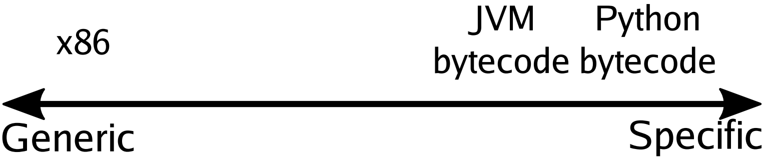
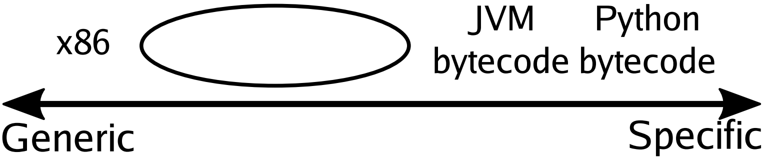
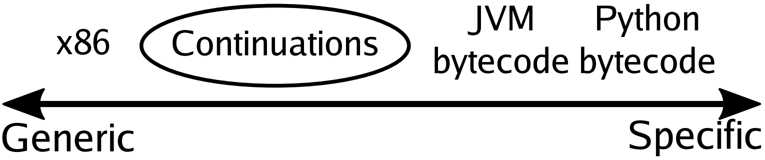
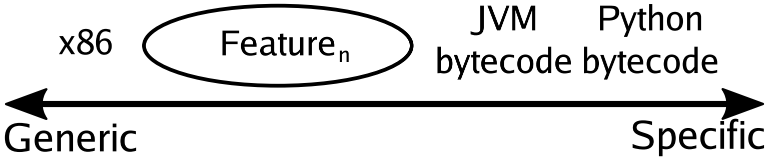


Semantic mismatch

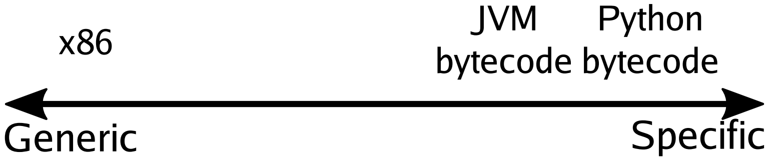


Semantic mismatch




x86
Feature$_n$
JVM bytecode
Python bytecode
Generic
Specific

Semantic mismatch



Semantic mismatch

One solution: language design tweaks

Semantic mismatch

WASM will not solve the semantic mismatch

Semantic mismatch

WASM will not solve the semantic mismatch

Meta-VMs suffer much less

My benchmark suite is good, yours is bad

Fix memory leak in pdfjs.js. #42

ltratt wants to merge 2 commits into `chromium:master` from `ltratt:master`

Conversation 7 | Commits 2 | Checks 0 | Files changed 1

ltratt commented on Oct 2, 2016 • edited

A large amount of data is pushed into the global variable `canvas_logs` which isn't cleared in runPdfJS. On each iteration the list grows, eventually significantly so.

On a Linux machine with a recent-ish V8, it manages 2777 iterations before an allocation fails (at which point it's allocated over 2GiB of virtual memory, and used about 1.4Gib) and V8 crashes (`Fatal error in CALL_AND_RETRY_LAST`).

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natorion commented on Feb 7, 2018 • edited **Member**

It won't be merged. Octane is retired and no longer maintained. Sorry for the long communication cycle.

natorion closed this on Feb 7, 2018

A year with Spectre: a V8 perspective

Published 23 April 2019 · tagged with security

On January 3, 2018, Google Project Zero and others disclosed the first three of a new class of vulnerabilities that affect CPUs that perform speculative execution, dubbed Spectre and Meltdown. Using the speculative execution mechanisms of CPUs, an attacker could temporarily bypass both implicit and explicit safety checks in code that prevent programs from reading unauthorized data in memory. While processor speculation was designed to be a microarchitectural detail, invisible at the architectural level, carefully crafted programs could read unauthorized information in speculation and disclose it through side channels such as the execution time of a program fragment.

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We have experimented with (1) by inserting the recommended speculation barrier instructions, such as Intel's `LFENCE`, on every critical conditional branch, and by using retpolines for indirect branches. Unfortunately, such heavy-handed mitigations greatly reduce performance (2–3× slowdown on the Octane benchmark). Instead, we chose approach (2), inserting mitigation sequences that prevent reading secret data due to mis-speculation. Let us illustrate the technique on the following code snippet:

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Benchmark suites a finite representation of infinite behaviour

My benchmark suite is good, yours is bad

Benchmark suites a finite representation of infinite behaviour

All benchmark suites are imperfect

My benchmark suite is good, yours is bad

Benchmark suites a finite representation of infinite behaviour

All benchmark suites are imperfect

We need more and more benchmarks!

Managed languages are safe

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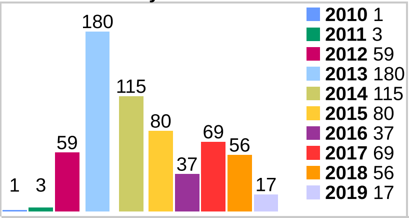
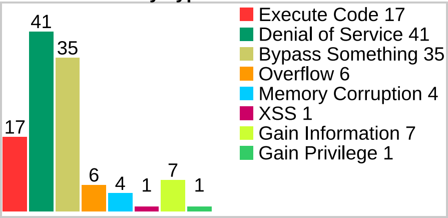
Vulnerabilities By Year



Vulnerabilities By Type



Source: https://www.cvedetails.com/product/19117/Oracle-JRE.html?vendor_id=93

Managed languages are safe

C/C++ aren’t very safe

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And what about JITted code?

Managed languages are safe

C/C++ aren't very safe

And what about JITted code?

Prediction: VM security apocalypse is possible

We’re stuck with C/C++

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What about Rust?

What about Rust?

Not an obvious fit for VMs

We're stuck with C/C++

What about Rust?

Not an obvious fit for VMs

Can we make it so?

VMs use dynamic dispatch extensively

VMs use dynamic dispatch extensively

```
use std::mem::size_of;

trait T { }

fn main() {
  assert_eq!(size_of::<&bool>(), size_of::<&u128>());
  assert_eq!(size_of::<&bool>(), size_of::<usize>());
  assert_eq!(size_of::<&dyn T>(), size_of::<usize>() * 2);
}
```

Thin pointers for dynamic dispatch

```
let x: &dyn T = ...;
let (ptr, vtable) = unsafe {
  mem::transmute<_, (*mut u8, *mut u8)>(x)
};
```

Thin pointers for dynamic dispatch

```
#[repr(C)]
struct ThinPtr { objptr: *mut u8 }

impl ThinPtr {
  fn new<U>(o: U) -> ThinPtr
    where *const U: CoerceUnsized<*const (dyn T + 'static)>,
          U: T + 'static
  {
    let (dataptr, vtable) = unsafe { mem::transmute<_, (*mut u8, *mut u8)>(x) };
    let objptr = malloc(size_of::<*mut u8>() + size_of::<U>());
    unsafe { ptr::write(objptr, &vtable, size_of::<*mut u8>()) };
    unsafe { ptr::write(objptr + 1, ptr, size_of::<U>()) };
    ThinPtr { objptr }
  }
}

impl Deref for ThinPtr {
  type Target = dyn T;
  fn deref(&self) -> &(dyn T + 'static) {
    let vtable = unsafe { ptr::read(objptr, size_of::<*mut u8>()) };
    unsafe { transmute::<(*const _, *const _), _>((self.objptr + 1, vtable)) }
  }
}
```

Thin pointers for dynamic dispatch

```
#[repr(C)]
struct ThinPtr { objptr: *mut u8 }

impl ThinPtr {
  fn try_downcast<U: T>(&self) -> Option<&U> {
    let t_vtable = unsafe {
      transmute::<&dyn T, (*mut u8, *mut u8)>(ptr::null() as *const U) };
    let vtable = unsafe { ptr::read(objptr, size_of::<*mut u8>()) };
    if vtable == t_vtable {
      Some(unsafe { &* (self.objptr + 1) as *const U })
    } else {
      None
    }
  }
}
```

Thin pointers for dynamic dispatch

```
#[narrowable_abgc(ThinObj)]
trait Obj { }

struct VMInt { x: u64 }

impl Obj for VMInt { }

fn f(v: ThinObj) {
  if let Some(o) = v.try_downcast::<VMInt>() {
    println!(o.x);
  }
}
```

Can we use Rust for VMs?

Can we use Rust for VMs?

So far, so good

So far, so good

Major challenge: idiomatic GC support

The security landscape is changing

The security landscape is changing

CHERI:

The security landscape is changing

CHERI: capabilities in 128-bit pointers

We’re good at explaining what we do

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IronPython; Jython; Nuitka; Psyco; PyPy; Pyston; Shed Skin; Stackless; Starkiller; TrufflePython; Unladen Swallow; WPython; Zippy

We’re good at explaining what we do

IronPython; Jython; Nuitka; Psyco; PyPy; Pyston; Shed Skin; Stackless; Starkiller; TrufflePython; Unladen Swallow; WPython; Zippy

e.g. compiling to LLVM fails every time...

We’re good at explaining what we do

We often pretend trade-offs don’t exist

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We often pretend trade-offs don't exist

Huge burden for newcomers to the field

Where can we go next?

Where can we go next?

We understand less than we should

Clear problems

Where can we go next?

Opportunities!

Thanks for listening