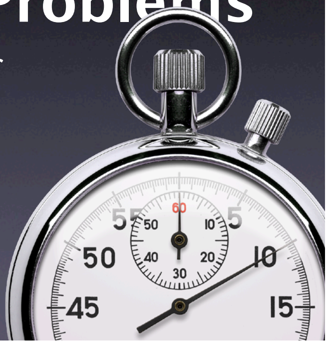
# Reproducing Problems

Andreas Zeller





## The First Task

- Once a problem is reported (or exposed by a test), some programmer must fix it.
- The first task is to *reproduce* the problem.



2

## Why reproduce?

- Observing the problem. Without being able to reproduce the problem, one cannot observe it or find any new facts.
- Check for success. How do you know that the problem is actually fixed?



3

# A Tough Problem

- Reproducing is one of the *toughest* problems in debugging.
- One must
  - recreate the *environment* in which the problem occurred
  - recreate the *problem history* – the steps that lead to the problem



4

# Reproducing the Environment

| Where to reproduce? | Chances of Success | Costs |
|---|---|---|
| User | + | -- |
| Developer | o | + |



5

# Iterative Reproduction

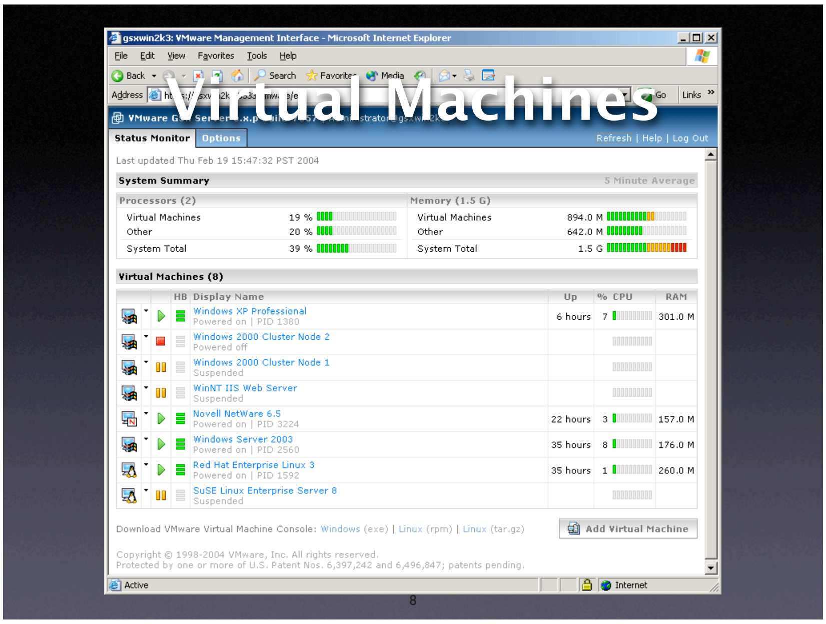
- Start with *your* environment
- While the problem is not reproduced, adapt more and more circumstances from the *user's* environment
- Iteration ends when problem is reproduced (or when environments are "identical")
- Side effect: Learn about failure-inducing circumstances



6


7

Source: http://www.ci.newton.ma.us/MIS/Network.htm




8

Source: http://www.vmware.com/products/server/gsx_screens.html

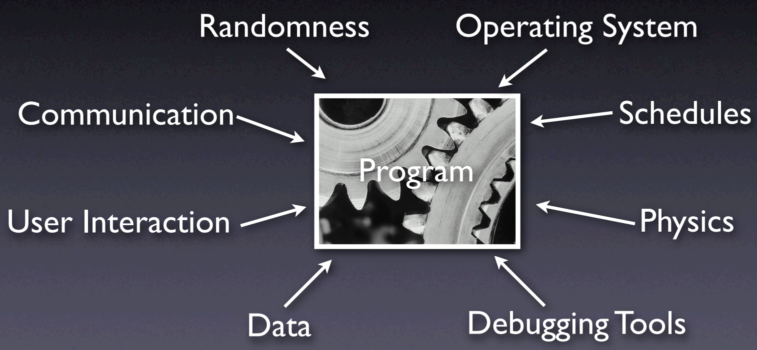
# Reproducing Execution

- After reproducing the environment, we must reproduce the *execution*
- Basic idea: Any execution is determined by the *input* (in a general sense)
- Reproducing input → reproducing execution!

9

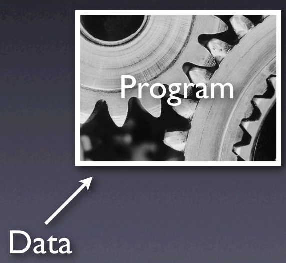
9

# Program Inputs




10

# Program Inputs



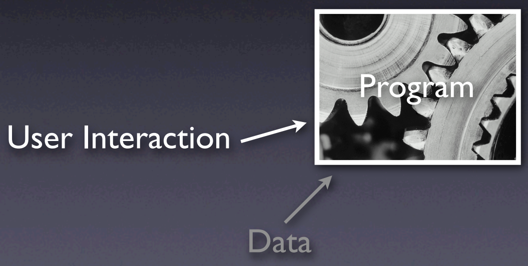

11

# Data

- Easy to transfer and replicate
- Caveat #1: *Get all the data you need*
- Caveat #2: *Get only the data you need*
- Caveat #3: Privacy issues

12

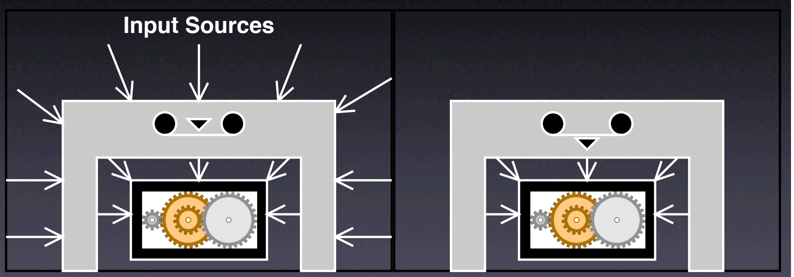
# Program Inputs








# User Interaction




Record

Replay

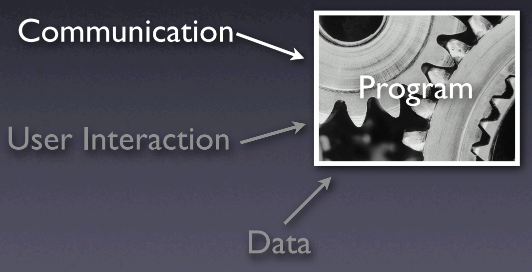




# Recorded Interaction

```
send_xevents key H @400,100
send_xevents wait 376
send_xevents key T @400,100
send_xevents wait 178
send_xevents key T @400,100
send_xevents wait 214
send_xevents key P @400,101
send_xevents wait 537
send_xevents keydn Shift_L @400,101
send_xevents wait 218
send_xevents key “;” @400,101
send_xevents wait 167
send_xevents keyup Shift_L @400,101
send_xevents wait 1556
send_xevents click 1 @428,287
send_xevents wait 3765
```

# Program Inputs



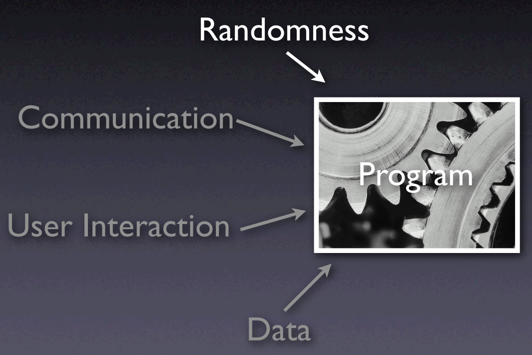



# Communication

- General idea: Record and replay like user interaction
- Bad impact on performance
- Alternative #1: Only record since last *checkpoint* (= reproducible state)
- Alternative #2: Only record “last” transaction



# Program Inputs



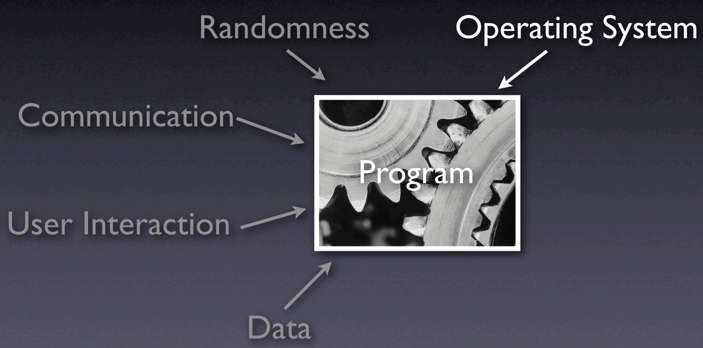
# Randomness

- Program behaves different in every run
- Based on random number generator
  - Pseudo-random: save *seed* (and make it configurable)
    - Same applies to *time of day*
  - True random: record + replay sequence





# Program Inputs








# Operating System

- The OS handles *entire* interaction between program and environment
- Recording and replaying OS interaction thus makes entire program run reproducible

# A Password Program

```
#include <string>
#include <iostream>
using namespace std;

string secret_password = "secret";

int main()
{
    string given_password;
    cout << "Please enter your password: ";
    cin >> given_password;
    if (given_password == secret_password)
        cout << "Access granted." << endl;
    else
        cout << "Access denied." << endl;
}
```

```
$ c++ -o password password.C
$ ./password
Please enter your
password: secret
Access granted.
$
```





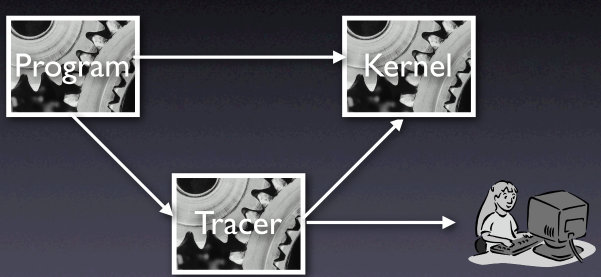
# Traced Interaction

```
$ c++ -o password password.C
$ strace ./password 2> LOG
Enter your password: secret
Access granted.
$ cat LOG
...
write(1, "Please enter your password: ", 28) = 28
read(0, "secret\n", 1024)                    = 7
write(1, "Access granted.\n", 16)            = 16
exit_group(0)                                = ?
```

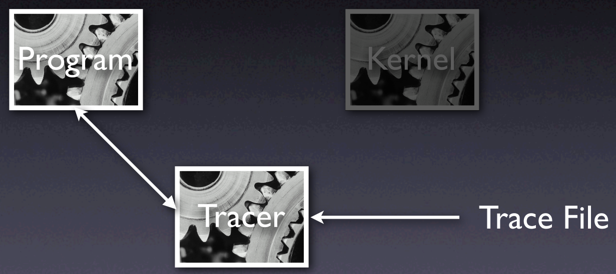




# How Tracing works



# Replaying Traces






25

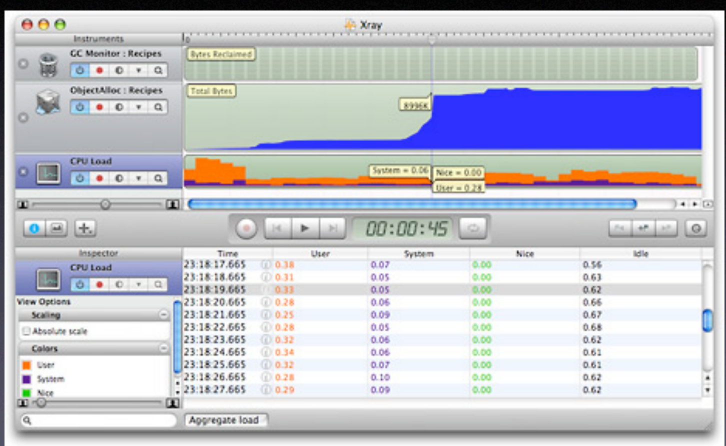
# Challenges

- Tracing creates *lots* of data
- Example: Web server with 10 requests/sec
  A trace of 10 k/request means 8GB/day
- All of this must be *replayed* to reproduce the failure (alternative: *checkpoints*)
- Huge performance penalty!



26

# XRay + DTrace






27

# XRay + DTrace

- DTrace: Kernel extension for capturing data
- System interaction can be *monitored*
- Captured I/O can be *replayed* at will
- Focus on high performance





# Program Inputs

Randomness
Operating System
Communication
Schedules
User Interaction
Data






# Accessing Passwords

Thread A

open(".htpasswd")
read(…)
modify(…)
write(…)
close(…)

.htpasswd file

Thread B

open(".htpasswd")
read(…)
modify(…)
write(…)
close(…)

# Lost Update

| | |
|---|---|
| | open(".htpasswd") |
| | open(".htpasswd") |
| Thread A | read(…) |
| | read(…) |
| | modify(…) |
| | write(…) |
| | close(…) |
| Thread B | modify(…) |
| | write(…) |
| | close(…) |

A's updates get lost!





# Reproducing Schedules

- Thread changes are induced by a *scheduler*
- It suffices to record the schedule (i.e. the moments in time at which thread switches occur) and to replay it
- Requires deterministic input replay

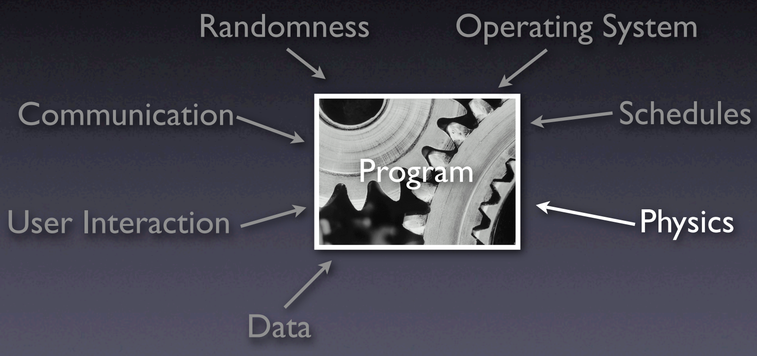




# Constructive Solutions

- Lock resource before writing
- Check resource update time before writing
- … or any other *synchronization mechanism*

# Program Inputs




34

34

# Physical Influences

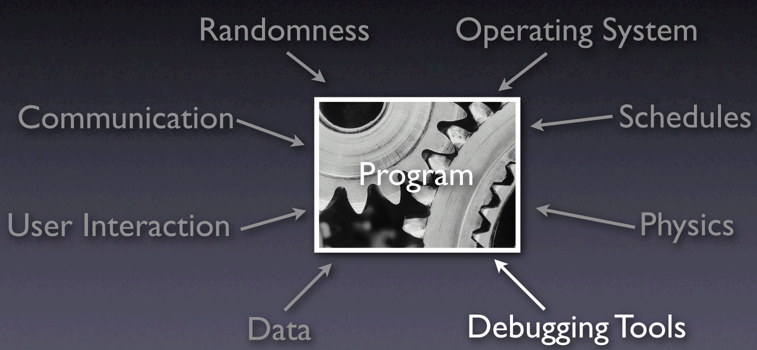
- Static electricity
- Alpha particles (*not* cosmic rays)
- Quantum effects
- Humidity
- Mechanical failures + real bugs

Rare and hard to reproduce

35

35

# Program Inputs




36

36

# A Heisenbug

- Code fails outside debugger only

```
int f() {
    int i;
    return i;
}
```

In program:
returns random value

In debugger:
returns 0





# More Bugs

| | |
|---|---|
| Bohr Bug | Heisenbug |
| Mandelbug | Schrödinbug |

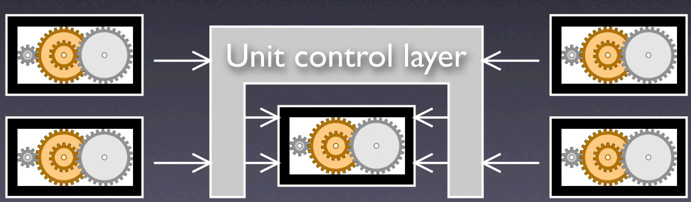




Bohr Bug = Repeatable under well-def'd conditions
Heisenbug = Changes when observed
Mandelbug = Causes are complex and chaotic, appears non-deterministic, but isn't
Schrödinbug = Never should have worked, and promptly fails as soon one realizes this

# Isolating Units

- Capture + replay *unit* instead of program
- Needs an *unit control layer* to monitor input



# Isolated Units

- Databases. Replay only the interaction with the database.
- Compilers. Record + replay intermediate data structures rather than the entire front-end.
- Networking. Record + replay communication calls.





# A Control Example

```
class Map {
public:
    virtual void add(string key, int value);
    virtual void del(string key);
    virtual int lookup(string key);
};
```

- How do we control this?





# A Log as a Program

```
#include "Map.h"
#include <assert>

int main() {
    Map map;
    map.add("onions", 4);
    map.del("truffels");
    assert(map.lookup("onions") == 4);
    return 0;
}
```

- This is a log file (and also a program)
- How do we get this?

# Controlled Map

```
class ControlledMap: public Map {
public:
    typedef Map super;

    virtual void add(string key, int value);
    virtual void del(string key);
    virtual int lookup(string key);

    ControlledMap();            // Constructor
    ~ControlledMap();           // Destructor
};
```



43

# Logging

```
void ControlledMap::add(string key, int value) {
    clog << "map.add(\"" << key << "\", "
         << value << ");" << endl;
    Map::add(key, value);
}                                       map.add("onions", 4);
void ControlledMap::del(string key) {
    clog << "map.del(\"" << key << "\");" << endl;
    Map::del(key);
}                                       map.del("truffels");
virtual int ControlledMap::lookup(string key) {
    clog << "assert(map.lookup(\"" << key << "\") == ";
    int ret = Map::lookup(key);
    clog << ret << ");" << endl;
    return ret;
}                          assert(map.lookup("onions") == 4);
```



44

# Logging Fixture

```
ControlledMap::ControlledMap()
{
    clog << "#include \"Map.h\"" << endl
         << "#include <assert>" << endl
         << "" << endl
         << "int main() {" << endl
         << "    Map map;" << endl;
}

ControlledMap::~ControlledMap()
{
    clog << "    return 0;" << endl;
         << "}" << endl;
}
```



45

# More Interaction

- Variables (hard to detect)
- Other units (break dependency if needed)
- Time (record + replay, too)

46

46

# Mock Objects

- A *Mock Object simulates* an original object
- Its implementation tells how to react on specific calls (i.e. returning other mock objects)
- Can be combined with *recording*, too!

47

47

# Concepts

★ Once a problem is tracked, one must *reproduce it* in the own environment

★ To reproduce a problem…

- reproduce the *environment* (by adopting one circumstance after the other)
- reproduce the *execution* (by controlling the input of the program or a unit)

48

48

# Program Inputs