Script generated by TTT

Title: Petter: Programmiersprachen (20.01.2016)

Date: Wed Jan 20 14:24:18 CET 2016

Duration: 50:36 min

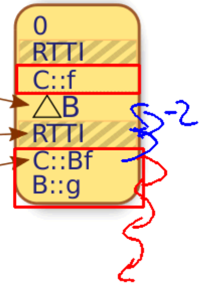
Pages: 23

Basic Virtual Tables (⇝ C++-ABI)

A Basic Virtual Table

consists of different parts:

1. *offset to top* of an enclosing objects heap representation
2. *typeinfo pointer* to an RTTI object (not relevant for us)
3. *virtual function pointers* for resolving virtual methods

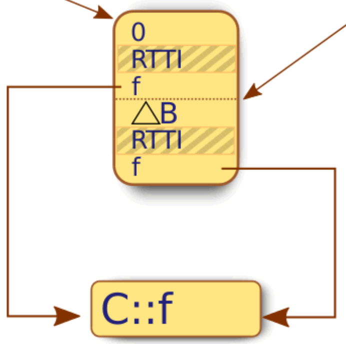


- Virtual tables are composed when multiple inheritance is used
- The `vptr` fields in objects are pointers to their corresponding virtual-subtables
- Casting preserves the link between an object and its ocrresponding virtual-subtable
- `clang -cc1 -fdump-vtable-layouts -emit-llvm code.cpp` yields the vtables of a compilation unit

Casting Issues

```
class A { int a; };
class B { virtual int f(int);};
class C : public A , public B {
  int c; int f(int);
};
C* c = new C();
c->f(42);
```

```
B* b = new C();
b->f(42);
```



Thunks

Solution: *thunks*

…are trampoline methods, delegating the virtual method to its original implementation with an adapted `this`-reference

```
define i32 @__f(%class.B* %this, i32 %i) {
  %1 = bitcast %class.B* %this to i8*
  %2 = getelementptr i8* %1, i64 -16      ; sizeof(A)=16
  %3 = bitcast i8* %2 to %class.C*
  %4 = call i32 @_f(%class.C* %3, i32 %i)
  ret i32 %4
}
```

⇝ B-in-C-vtable entry for `f(int)` is the thunk `_f(int)`

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  ret i32 %4
}
```

- ⇝ `B-in-C`-vtable entry for `f(int)` is the thunk `_f(int)`
- ⇝ `_f(int)` adds the statically constant ΔB to `this` before the call to `f(int)`

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  ret i32 %4
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```

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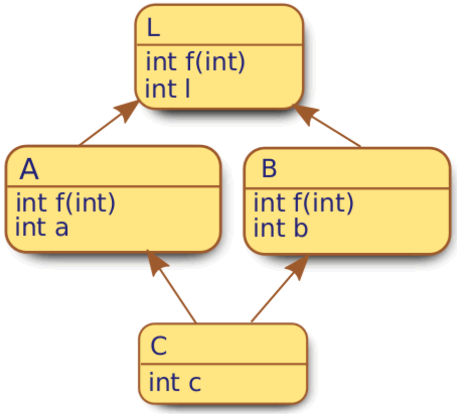
- ⇝ `_f(int)` adds the statically constant ΔB to `this` before the call to `f(int)`
- ⇝ `f(int)` addresses its locals relative to what it assumes to be a `C` pointer

"But what if there are common ancestors?"

Common Bases – Duplicated Bases

Standard C++ multiple inheritance conceptually duplicates representations for common ancestors:



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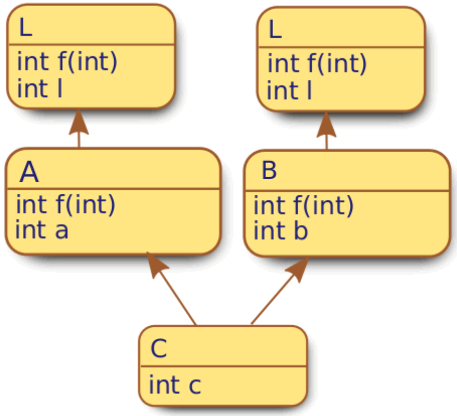
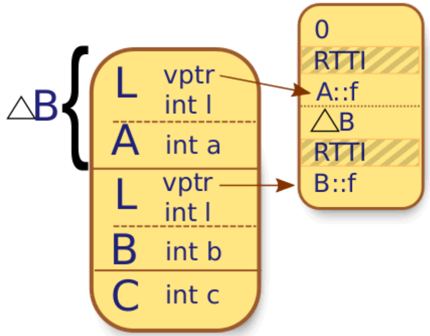


Duplicated Base Classes

```
class L {
  int l; virtual void f(int);
};
class A : public L {
  int a; void f(int);
};
class B : public L {
  int b; void f(int);
};
class C : public A , public B {
  int c;
};
...
C c;
L* pl = &c;
pl->f(42);
C* pc = (C*)pl;
```



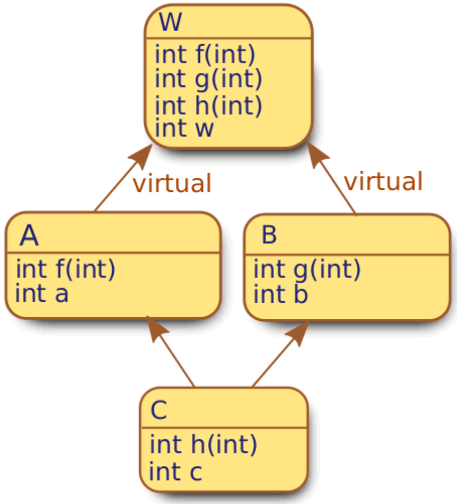

```
%class.C = type { %class.A, %class.B,
                  i32, [4 x i8] }
%class.A = type { [12 x i8], i32 }
%class.B = type { [12 x i8], i32 }
%class.L = type { i32 (...)**, i32 }
```

⚠ Ambiguity!

```
L* pl = (A*)&c;
C* pc = (C*)(A*)pl;
```

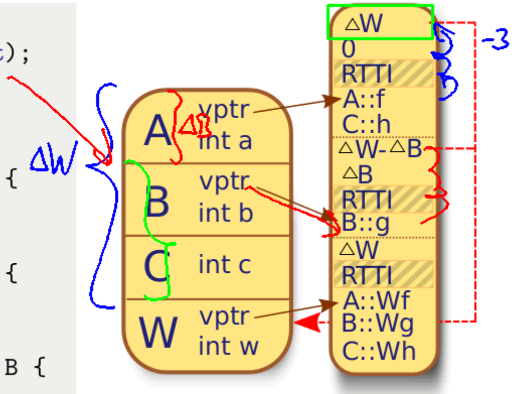

Common Bases – Shared Base Class

Optionally, C++ multiple inheritance enables a shared representation for common ancestors, creating the *diamond pattern*:



Shared Base Class

```
class W {
  int w; virtual void f(int);
  virtual void g(int);
  virtual void h(int);
};
class A : public virtual W {
  int a; void f(int);
};
class B : public virtual W {
  int b; void g(int);
};
class C : public A, public B {
  int c; void h(int);
};
...
C* pc;
pc->f(42);
((W*)pc)->h(42);
((A*)pc)->f(42);
```



⚠ Offsets to virtual base

⚠ Ambiguities

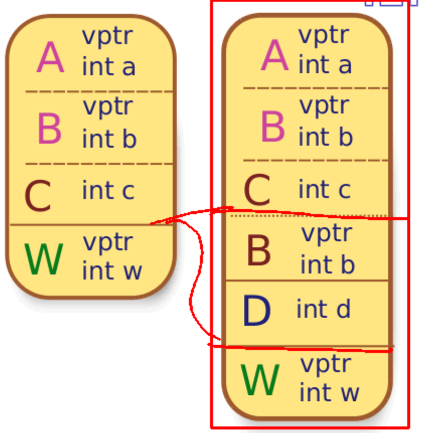
⇝ e.g. overwriting f in A *and* B

Dynamic Type Casts

```
class A : public virtual W {
...
};
class B : public virtual W {
...
};
class C : public A , public B {
...
};
class D : public C,
          public B {
...
};
...
C c;
W* pw = &c;
C* pc = (C*)pw; // Compile error
```

```
C* pc = dynamic_cast<C*>(pw);
```

vs.



Shared Base Class

```
class W {
  int w; virtual void f(int);
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};
class A : public virtual W {
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};
class B : public virtual W {
  int b; void g(int);
};
class C : public A, public B {
  int c; void h(int);
};
...
C* pc;
pc->f(42);
((W*)pc)->h(42);
((A*)pc)->f(42);
```

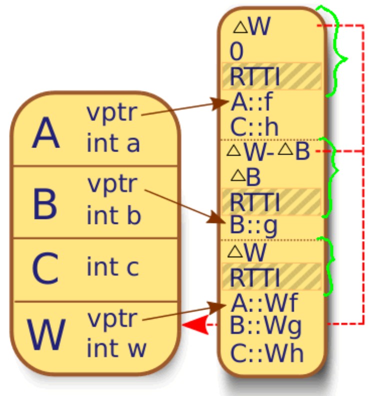

⚠ Offsets to virtual base

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Dynamic Type Casts

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class A : public virtual W {
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};
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class C : public A , public B {
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};
class D : public C,
          public B {
...
};
...
C c;
W* pw = &c;
C* pc = (C*)pw; // Compile error
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C* pc = dynamic_cast<C*>(pw);
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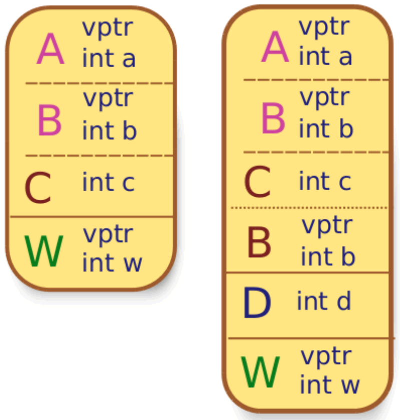
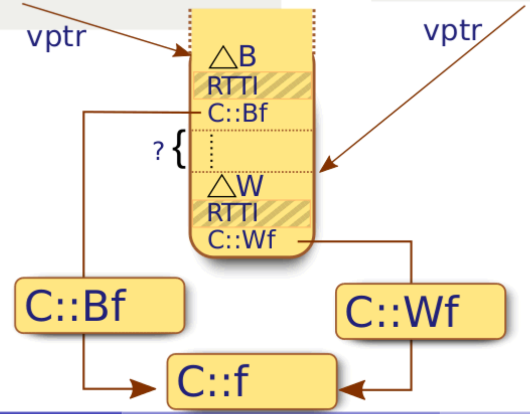


Again: Casting Issues

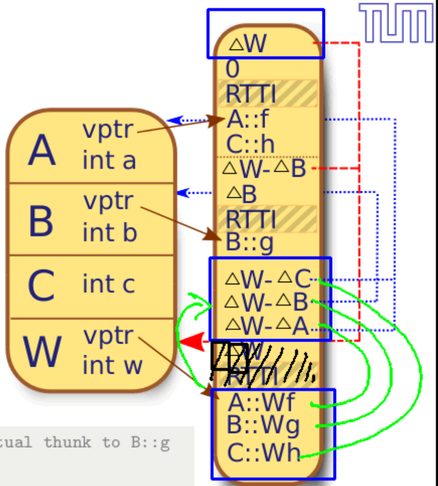
```
class W { virtual int f(int); };
class A : virtual W { int a; };
class B : virtual W { int b; };
class C : public A , public B {
  int c; int f(int);
};
B* b = new C();
b->f(42);
```

```
W* w = new C();
w->f(42);
```



Virtual Thunks

```
class W { ...
virtual void g(int);
};
class A : public virtual W {...};
class B : public virtual W {
  int b; void g(int i){ };
};
class C : public A,public B{...};
C c;
W* pw = &c;
pw->g(42);
```




```
define void @__g(%class.B* %this, i32 %i) { ; virtual thunk to B::g
  %1 = bitcast %class.B* %this to i8*
  %2 = bitcast i8* %1 to i8**
  %3 = load i8** %2                        ; load W-vtable ptr
  %4 = getelementptr i8* %3, i64 -32 ; -32 bytes is g-entry in vcalls
  %5 = bitcast i8* %4 to i64*
  %6 = load i64* %5                        ; load g's vcall offset
  %7 = getelementptr i8* %1, i64 %6  ; navigate to vcalloffset+ Wtop
  %8 = bitcast i8* %7 to %class.B*
  call void @_g(%class.B* %8, i32 %i)
  ret void
}
```


Virtual Tables for Virtual Bases (⇝ C++-ABI)

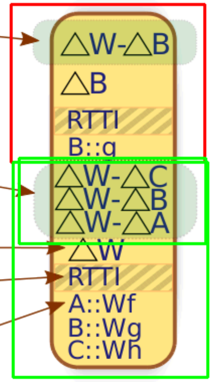
A Virtual Table for a Virtual Subclass

gets a *virtual base pointer*

A Virtual Table for a Virtual Base

consists of different parts:

1. *virtual call offsets* per virtual function for adjusting `this` dynamically
2. *offset to top* of an enclosing objects heap representation
3. *typeinfo pointer* to an RTTI object (not relevant for us)
4. *virtual function pointers* for resolving virtual methods



Virtual Base classes have *virtual thunks* which look up the offset to adjust the `this` pointer to the correct value in the virtual table!

Compiler and Runtime Collaboration

Compiler generates:

1. . . . one code block for each method
2. . . . one virtual table for each class-composition, with
   - references to the most recent implementations of methods of a *unique common signature* (⇝ single dispatching)
   - sub-tables for the composed subclasses
   - static top-of-object and virtual bases offsets per sub-table
   - (virtual) thunks as `this`-adapters per method and subclass if needed

Runtime:

1. At program startup virtual tables are globally created
2. Allocation of memory space for each object followed by constructor calls
3. Constructor stores pointers to virtual table (or fragments) in the objects
4. Method calls transparently call methods statically or from virtual tables, *unaware of real class identity*
5. Dynamic casts may use *offset-to-top* field in ~~objects~~ vtables

Polemics of Multiple Inheritance

Full Multiple Inheritance (FMI)

- Removes constraints on parents in inheritance
- More convenient and simple in the common cases
- Occurance of diamond pattern not as frequent as discussions indicate

Multiple Interface Inheritance (MII)

- simpler implementation
- Interfaces and aggregation already quite expressive
- Too frequent use of FMI considered as flaw in the class hierarchy design

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

1. Different purposes of inheritance
2. Heap Layouts of hierarchically constructed objects in C++
3. Virtual Table layout
4. LLVM IR representation of object access code
5. Linearization as alternative to explicit disambiguation
6. Pitfalls of Multiple Inheritance

Sidenote for MS VC++

- the presented approach is implemented in GNU C++ and LLVM
- Microsoft's MS VC++ approaches multiple inheritance differently
  - splits the virtual table into several smaller tables
  - keeps a vbptr (virtual base pointer) in the object representation, pointing to the virtual base of a subclass.

Further reading...

K. Barrett, B. Cassels, P. Haahr, D. Moon, K. Playford, and T. Withington.
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Llvm project.
URL: `http://llvm.org/docs/LangRef.html`.

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