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# The Storage Hierarchy is Not a Hierarchy: Optimizing Caching on Modern Storage Devices with Orthus

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**Abstract.** We introduce *non-hierarchical caching* (NHC), a novel approach to caching in modern storage hierarchies. NHC improves performance as compared to classic caching by redirecting excess load to devices lower in the hierarchy when it is advantageous to do so. NHC dynamically adjusts allocation and access decisions, thus maximizing performance (e.g., high throughput, low 99%-ile latency). We implement NHC in Orthus-CAS (a block-layer caching kernel module) and Orthus-KV (a user-level caching layer for a key-value store). We show the efficacy of NHC via a thorough empirical study: Orthus-KV and Orthus-CAS offer significantly better performance (by up to 2×) than classic caching on various modern hierarchies, under a range of realistic workloads.

## 1 Introduction

The notion of a *hierarchy* (i.e., a *memory hierarchy* or *storage hierarchy*) has long been central to computer system design. Indeed, assumptions about the hierarchy and its fundamental nature are found throughout widely used textbooks [28, 46, 85]: “Since fast memory is expensive, a memory hierarchy is organized into several levels – each smaller, faster, and more expensive per byte than the next lower level, which is farther from the processor. [46]”

To cope with the nature of the hierarchy, systems usually employ two strategies: *caching* [3, 73] and *tiering* [5, 43, 93]. Consider a system with two storage layers: a (fast, expensive, small) performance layer and a (slow, cheap, large) capacity layer. With caching, all data resides in the capacity layer, and copies of hot data items are placed, via cache replacement algorithms, in the performance layer. Tiering also places hot items in the performance layer; however, unlike caching, it migrates data (instead of copying) on longer time scales. With a high-enough fraction of requests going to the fast layer, the overall performance approaches the peak performance of the fast layer. Consequently, classic caching and tiering strive to ensure that most accesses hit the performance layer.

While this conventional wisdom of optimizing hit rates may remain true for traditional hierarchies (e.g., CPU caches and DRAM, or DRAM and hard disks), rapid changes in storage devices have complicated this narrative within the modern storage hierarchy. Specifically, the advent of many new non-volatile memories [20, 54, 77] and low-latency SSDs [8, 13, 16] has introduced devices with (sometimes) overlapping perfor-

mance characteristics. Thus, it is essential to rethink how such devices must be managed in the storage hierarchy.

To understand this issue better, consider a two-level hierarchy with a traditional Flash-based SSD as the capacity layer, and a newer, seemingly faster Optane SSD [8] as the performance layer. As we will show (§3.2), in some cases, Optane outperforms Flash, and thus the traditional caching/tiering arrangement works well. However, in other situations (namely, when the workload has high concurrency), the performance of the devices is similar (i.e., the storage hierarchy is actually not a hierarchy), and thus classic caching and tiering do not utilize the full bandwidth available from the capacity layer. A different approach is needed to maximize performance.

To address this problem, we introduce *non-hierarchical caching* (NHC), a new approach to caching for modern storage hierarchies. NHC delivers maximal performance from modern devices despite complex device characteristics and changing workloads. The key insight of NHC is that when classic caching would send more requests to the performance device than is useful, some of that excess load can be dynamically moved to the capacity device. This improves upon classic caching in two ways. First, by monitoring performance and adapting the requests sent to each device, NHC delivers additional useful performance from the capacity device. Second, NHC avoids data movement between the devices when this movement does not improve performance. While the idea of redirecting excess load to devices lower in the hierarchy applies to both caching and tiering, we focus on caching.

Previous work has addressed some of the limitations of caching [19, 56], offloading excess writes from SSDs to underlying hard drives. However, as we show (§6.4), they have two critical limits: they do not redirect accesses to items present in the cache (hits), and they do not adapt to changing workloads and concurrency levels (which is critical for modern devices).

We implement NHC in two systems: Orthus-CAS, a generic block-layer caching kernel module [32], and Orthus-KV, a user-level caching layer for an LSM-tree key-value store [64]. Under light load, Orthus implementations behave like classic caching; in other situations, they offload excess load at the caching layer to the capacity layer, improving performance. Through rigorous evaluations, we show that Orthus implementations greatly improve performance (up to 2×) on various real devices (such as Optane DCPM, Optane SSD, Flash SSD)

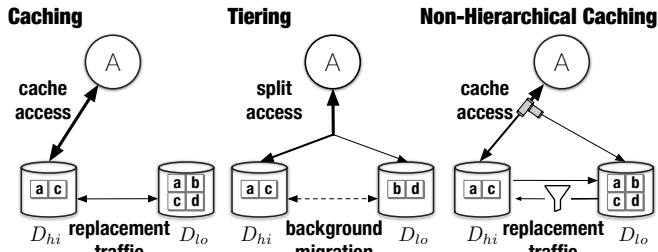


Figure 1: **Caching, Tiering, and Non-Hierarchical Caching.** The figure shows the different approaches to managing a storage hierarchy. Caching copies data items to the performance layer upon a miss. Tiering splits access to each layer and migrates items in the background (on longer time scales). Non-hierarchical caching (§4), our new approach, offloads excess load at the performance layer to the capacity layer.

and other simulated ones for a range of workloads (YCSB [35] and ZippyDB [31]). We show NHC is robust to dynamic workloads, quickly adapting to load and locality changes. Finally, we compare NHC against prior caching strategies and demonstrate its advantages. Overall, the non-hierarchical approach extracts high performance from modern storage hierarchies.

## 2 Motivation

In this section, we discuss classic solutions to storage hierarchy management. We then review current and near-future devices and discuss how they alter the storage hierarchy.

### 2.1 Managing the Storage Hierarchy

A storage hierarchy is composed of multiple heterogeneous storage devices and policies for transferring data between those devices. For simplicity, we assume a two-device hierarchy, consisting of a *performance* device,  $D_{hi}$ , and a *capacity* device,  $D_{lo}$ ; commonly,  $D_{hi}$  is more expensive, smaller, and faster, whereas  $D_{lo}$  is cheaper, larger, and slower.

Traditionally, two approaches have been used for managing such a hierarchy: *caching* and *tiering* (Figure 1). With caching, popular (hot) data is copied from  $D_{lo}$  into  $D_{hi}$  (e.g., on each miss); to make room for these hot data items, the cache evicts less popular (cold) data, as determined by algorithms such as ARC, LRU, or LFU [4, 65, 67, 74, 89, 104]. The granularity of data movement is usually small, e.g., 4-KB blocks.

Tiering [43, 57, 81], similar to caching, usually maintains hot data in the performance device. However, unlike caching, when data on  $D_{lo}$  is accessed, it is not necessarily promoted to  $D_{hi}$ ; data can be directly served from  $D_{lo}$ . Data is only periodically migrated between devices on longer time scales (over hours or days) and longer-term optimizations determine data placement. Tiering typically does such migration at a coarser granularity (an entire volume or a large extent [43]). While caching can quickly react to workload changes, tiering cannot do so given its periodic, coarser-granularity migration.

Both classic caching and tiering, to maximize performance, strive to ensure that most accesses are served from the performance device. Most caching and tiering policies are thus designed to maximize hits to the fast device. In traditional hi-

Example	Latency	Read (GB/s)	Write (GB/s)	Cost (\$/GB)
DRAM	80ns	15	15	~7
NVDIMM	300ns	6.8	2.3	~5
Low-latency SSD	10us	2.5	2.3	1
NVMe Flash SSD	80us	~3.0	~2.0	0.3
SATA Flash SSD	180us	0.5	0.5	0.15

Table 1: **Diversified Storage Devices.** Data taken from SK Hynix DRAM(DDR4, 16GB), Intel Optane DCPM [6, 7], low-latency SSDs (Optane SSD 905P [8], Micron X100 SSD [13]), NVMe Flash SSD (Samsung 970 Pro [14, 15]) and SATA Flash SSD (Intel 520 SSD [9]). Low-latency SSD and NVMe Flash SSD assume PCIe 3.0.

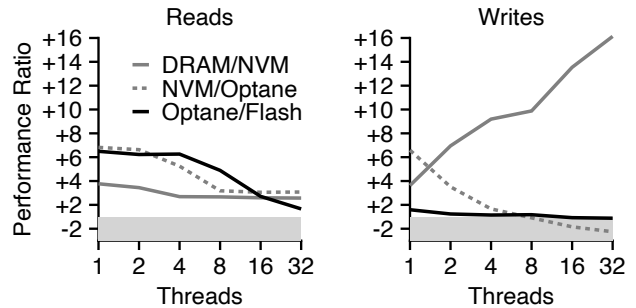


Figure 2: **Performance Ratios Across Modern Devices.** The ratio of throughput, for varying concurrency, across device pairings. We disable the cache prefetcher and use non-temporal stores for DRAM and NVM. NVM is used as App-Direct mode. Note there is no value between -1 and +1.

erarchies where the performance of  $D_{hi}$  is significantly higher than  $D_{lo}$ , such approaches deliver high performance. However, with the storage landscape rapidly changing, modern devices have overlapping performance characteristics and thus it is essential to rethink how such devices must be managed.

### 2.2 Hardware Storage Trends

As shown in Table 1, storage systems are undergoing a rapid transformation with a proliferation of high-performance technologies, including persistent memory (e.g., 3D XPoint memory [1, 44]), low-latency SSDs (e.g., Intel Optane SSD [8], Samsung Z-SSD [16], and Micron X100 SSD [13]), NVMe Flash SSDs ([14, 15]), and SATA Flash SSDs ([9]). Although a seeming ordering exists in terms of latency, bandwidth differences are less clear, and a total ordering is hard to establish.

To better understand the performance overlap of these devices, Figure 2 shows the throughput of a variety of real devices for both 4KB read/load and write/store while varying the level of concurrency. The figure plots the performance ratio between pairs of devices: DRAM/NVM plots the bandwidth of memory (SK Hynix 16GB DDR4) vs. a single Intel Optane DCPM (128GB); NVM/Optane uses the DCPM vs. the Intel 905P Optane SSD; finally, Optane/Flash uses the same Optane SSD and the Samsung 970 Pro Flash SSD. For any pair X/Y, a positive ratio ( $\frac{X}{Y}$ ) is plotted if the performance of X is greater than Y; otherwise, a negative ratio ( $-\frac{Y}{X}$ ) is plotted (in the gray region).

For reads with low concurrency, one can see significant differences between device pairs. Thus, one might conclude that a total ordering exists. However, for reads under high con-

currency, the ratios change dramatically. In the most extreme case, the Optane SSD and Flash SSD have nearly identical performance. For writes, the results are even more intriguing; because of the low performance of NVM concurrent writes, in one case (NVM/Optane), the ratio changes from much better under low load to much worse under high load.

To summarize, the following are the key trends in the storage hierarchy. Unlike the traditional hierarchy (e.g., DRAM vs. HDD), the new storage hierarchy may not be a hierarchy; the performance of two neighboring layers (e.g., NVM vs. Optane SSD) can be similar. Second, the performance of new devices vary depending upon many factors including different workloads (reads vs. writes) and level of concurrency. Managing these devices with traditional caching and tiering is no longer effective. Given our focus on improving caching approaches in this paper, we next demonstrate the limitations of caching in modern hierarchies.

### 3 Characterizing Caching in Traditional and Modern Storage Hierarchies

We now explore caching in different storage hierarchies. Our goal is simple: to understand how caching performs in both traditional and modern hierarchies. In doing so, we hope to build towards a technique that addresses the limitation of caching when running on modern, complex devices and underneath a range of dynamic workloads.

For a deeper intuition, we first model caching performance. We then conduct an empirical analysis on real devices, filling in important details not captured by the model. We also model an approach that we call *splitting* to highlight the drawbacks of classic caching. In splitting, data is simply split across devices, and no migration is performed at run time. Splitting outperforms caching when accesses are optimally split between the performance and capacity devices. In contrast to caching and tiering, splitting is impractical: it is not suitable for workloads where popular items change over time; we use it only as a baseline to build up to our solution.

#### 3.1 Modeling Caching Performance

We assume there are two devices,  $D_{hi}$  and  $D_{lo}$ , where each performs at a fixed rate,  $R_{hi}$  and  $R_{lo}$  ops/s; of course, real devices are more complex, with internal concurrency and performance that depends on the workload, but this simplification is sufficient for our purposes.

We also assume that the workload has either little concurrency (i.e., one request at a time) or copious concurrency (i.e., many requests at a time). This allows us to bound the caching performance between these extremes. We assume that the workload is read only; this simplifies our analysis in that we do not account for dirty writebacks upon a cache replacement.

##### 3.1.1 Model

We develop a model of caching performance based on hit rate,  $H \in [0, 1]$ . As stated above, we model two extremes: low and

high concurrency. For one request at a time, the average time per request is:

$$T_{cache,1} = H \cdot T_{hit} + (1 - H) \cdot T_{miss} \quad (1)$$

$T_{hit}$  is simply the inverse of the rate of the fast device, i.e.,  $T_{hit} = \frac{1}{R_{hi}}$ ;  $T_{miss}$  is the cost of fetching the data from the slow device and also installing it in the faster device, i.e.,  $T_{miss} = \frac{1}{R_{hi}} + \frac{1}{R_{lo}}$ , or  $\frac{R_{hi} + R_{lo}}{R_{hi} \cdot R_{lo}}$ .

The resulting bandwidth is the inverse of  $T_{cache,1}$ :

$$B_{cache,1} = \frac{R_{hi} \cdot R_{lo}}{H \cdot R_{lo} + (1 - H) \cdot (R_{hi} + R_{lo})} \quad (2)$$

We now model concurrent workloads. Assume  $N$  requests.  $H \cdot N$  are hits,  $(1 - H) \cdot N$  are misses. Note that only misses are serviced by the slow device, whereas *all* requests must be serviced by the fast one (data admissions). The time to process  $N$  requests on the slow or fast device is:

$$T_{slow}(N) = N \cdot (1 - H) \cdot \frac{1}{R_{lo}} \quad (3)$$

$$T_{fast}(N) = N \cdot (1 - H) \cdot \frac{1}{R_{hi}} + N \cdot H \cdot \frac{1}{R_{hi}} = N \cdot \frac{1}{R_{hi}} \quad (4)$$

Total time is the maximum of these two, i.e., whichever device finishes last determines the workload time.

$$T_{cache,many}(N) = \max(T_{slow}(N), T_{fast}(N)) \quad (5)$$

$$= \max(N \cdot \frac{1-H}{R_{lo}}, N \cdot \frac{1}{R_{hi}}) \quad (6)$$

Dividing by  $N$  (not shown) yields the average time per request. Finally, the bandwidth can be computed, as it is the inverse of the average time per request:

$$B_{cache,many} = \frac{1}{\max(\frac{1-H}{R_{lo}}, \frac{1}{R_{hi}})} \quad (7)$$

We model splitting performance based on the split rate,  $S \in [0, 1]$ , which determines the fraction  $S$  of requests serviced at  $D_{hi}$ ; the remaining requests  $(1 - S)$  are served at the tier  $D_{lo}$ . Compared to caching, splitting eliminates the cost of installing misses on the faster device. Its throughput can be computed as follows (in a similar way as caching, note the different formula for  $D_{hi}$ ):

$$B_{split,1} = \frac{1}{\frac{1-S}{R_{lo}} + \frac{S}{R_{hi}}} \quad (8)$$

$$B_{split,many} = \frac{1}{\max(\frac{1-S}{R_{lo}}, \frac{S}{R_{hi}})} \quad (9)$$

#### 3.1.2 Model Exploration

We explore different parameter settings with our model. Figure 3 shows the results for four settings, starting with a large difference in performance between  $D_{hi}$  and  $D_{lo}$ , and then slowly increasing the performance of  $D_{lo}$ .

The first graph shows a traditional hierarchy where the performance of  $D_{hi}$  is much (100×) higher than the performance of  $D_{lo}$ . This graph shows that both caching and splitting can deliver high performance on traditional hierarchies. The key is to direct as many requests as possible to  $D_{hi}$ . Caching and splitting perform well if nearly all requests hit in  $D_{hi}$ . Even

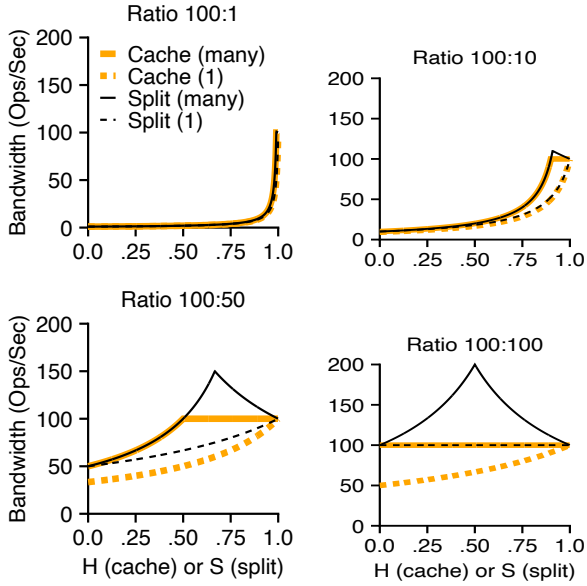


Figure 3: **Modeled Performance.** This figure shows model-predicted throughput for caching and splitting across a range of different device performance levels. We show performance for high (“many”) and low (“1”) concurrency. The faster device performs at a fixed rate of 100 ops/sec.

with 80% hit/split rate, overall performance is quite low, as the slow device dominates.

The next graph (upper right) examines a case where the performance ratio between the devices is still high (10 $\times$ ). Optimizing for a high hit/split rate still works well. Note the slight difference between the low and high concurrency cases; with higher concurrency, these approaches can achieve peak performance even with slightly less than a perfect hit rate, as outstanding requests hide the cost of misses.

The next two graphs represent modern hierarchies where the performance of  $D_{hi}$  is closer to that of  $D_{lo}$  ( $D_{hi}$  delivers bandwidth either 2 $\times$   $D_{lo}$  or equal to it). We make two important observations from these graphs.

First, classic caching is limited by the performance of  $D_{hi}$  and cannot realize the combined performance of both devices. Even with a 100% hit ratio, caching can only deliver 100 ops/sec as it does not utilize the bandwidth of  $D_{lo}$ . Splitting (with an optimal split rate) significantly outperforms caching, exposing critical limitations of caching in modern hierarchies.

Second, in modern hierarchies, maximizing the number of requests served by  $D_{hi}$  does not always yield the best performance. Consider the case where  $D_{hi}$  is 2 $\times$  faster than  $D_{lo}$ . With copious concurrency, when about two-thirds of the requests are directed to  $D_{hi}$ , splitting realizes the aggregate bandwidth of  $D_{hi}$  and  $D_{lo}$ . Increasing the split rate further only degrades performance. Thus, in modern hierarchies, instead of maximizing the hit or split rate, the key is to find the right proportion of requests that must be sent to each device.

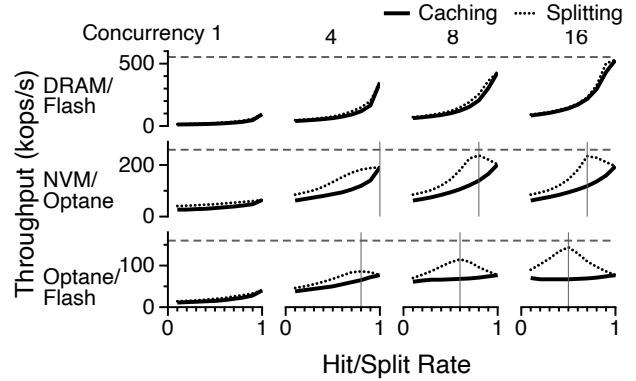


Figure 4: **Performance of Caching and Splitting.** This figure shows the throughput of read-only workloads. Horizontal dotted lines represent the combined bandwidth of both devices (the maximum possible throughput).

### 3.2 Evaluation with Optane DCPM and Optane SSD

Next, we demonstrate that the observations from our model hold for real storage stacks. We use one traditional hierarchy consisting of DRAM and a Flash SSD [14]. We also use two modern stacks: first, NVM (Optane DCPM 128GB) and an Optane 905P SSD; second, an Optane SSD and a Flash SSD. We use these hierarchies to cover a wide range of performance differences; meantime, DCPM and Optane SSD are the most popular emerging devices nowadays. While there could be many hierarchies (e.g., with different versions of these devices), we believe our hierarchies are adequate to validate our modeling and draw meaningful implications for our designs.

For these experiments, we have implemented a new benchmarking tool, called the *Hierarchical Flexible I/O Benchmark Suite (HFIO)*. HFIO contains a configurable hierarchy controller that implements caching and splitting. HFIO uses the LRU-replacement policy for caching. HFIO generates synthetic workloads with a variety of parameters (e.g., mix of reads and writes, locality, and the number of concurrent accesses). HFIO precisely controls the caching layer size and access locality to obtain a desired hit rate. We fix the block size to 32 KB and consider only random accesses. We run our experiments on an Intel Xeon Gold 5218 CPU at 2.3GHz (16 cores), running Ubuntu 18.04. All experiments ran long enough to fill the cache and deliver steady-state performance.

We begin by replicating the results from our model by running read-only workloads and measuring the throughput. Figure 4 shows the results on three hierarchies and workloads with different levels of concurrency. First, in the traditional hierarchy (DRAM+Flash SSD, the first row of Figure 4), as expected, both caching and splitting can achieve high performance. Caching and splitting perform similarly, exactly as our model predicted (Figure 3, 100:1 and 100:10 cases).

The second two rows of Figure 4 show that caching in new storage hierarchies (e.g., NVM+Optane, Optane+Flash) behaves much differently than in the traditional hierarchy. With low concurrency (1 or 4), the caching device (i.e., DCPM or Optane SSD) is not fully utilized and thus optimizing the hit/s-



plit rate still improves performance. However, for workloads with more concurrency, maximizing the hit/split rates does not lead to peak performance in either of the NVM+Optane or Optane+Flash hierarchies. In these situations, capacity devices such as Optane SSD provide substantial performance compared to their caching layers (e.g., DCPM). Splitting (with an optimal split rate) can thus deliver significantly greater performance than caching.

Our experiments with real devices reveal several complexities that the models do not: the optimal split rate depends upon several factors. From Figure 4, we can see that the optimal split rate varies significantly from one device to another and with the level of parallelism of the workload. Write ratios also influence the optimal split rate. As shown in Figure 5, for Optane+Flash, the optimal split rate for a read-heavy workload is 90%, while it is about 60% when the workload is write-heavy. This change occurs because the difference between the write performances of Optane and Flash is smaller than the difference between their read performances. We observe similar results for the NVM+Optane hierarchy.

**Summary and Implications:** Our performance characterization (modeling and evaluation) of caching provides important lessons for our design. Classic caching is no longer effective in modern hierarchies: it does not exploit the considerable performance that can be delivered by the capacity layer. With high hit rates and when the cache layer is under heavy load, some of the requests can be offloaded to the capacity device. Such high hit rates and heavy load are quite common in production caching systems. For instance, a recent study at Twitter showed that eight out of the ten Twemcache clusters have a miss ratio lower than 5% [98]. Studies have also shown that cache layers often experience heavy load (i.e., they are bandwidth saturated) [17, 56].

In the modern hierarchy, the capacity layer can offer substantial performance and should thus be exploited in such situations. An alternative solution is to increase the number of cache devices in the hierarchy; however, this approach can be prohibitively expensive as performance devices are more costly. In contrast, offloading requests to the capacity layer offers a more economic way to realize significant improvements. Such an offloading approach can deliver the aggregate performance of all devices by optimally splitting the requests to each device. For the offloading approach to work well, it is essential to dynamically adjust the split rate because the optimal rate varies widely in modern hierarchies depending upon factors such as write ratios and level of concurrency.

We note that classic tiering (which also aims to direct most requests to the performance layer) suffers from similar shortcomings as caching in modern hierarchies. In this work, we focus on improving caching for two main reasons. First, getting tiering to optimally split accesses is fundamentally hard. Migration or replication to match the current optimal split in tiering may hurt performance. In contrast, caching can readily bypass cache hits to capacity devices; copies of hot data are

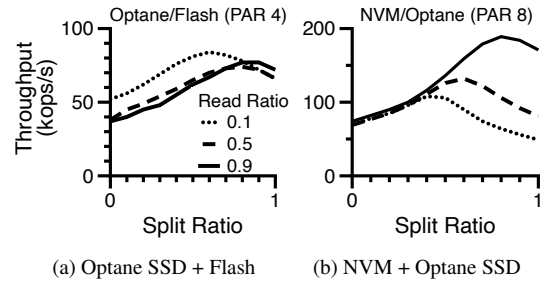


Figure 5: **Mixed Reads and Writes Workloads.** The figure shows the performance of splitting with read-write workloads; PAR: workload parallelism/concurrency.

always available on both devices. Second, we believe there are many scenarios where caching may be the only suitable solution and tiering may not be appropriate. For instance, applications can only use DRAM as a cache when persistence is required and cannot tier in the DRAM+NVM hierarchy. We believe many systems use caching for such reasons and an approach that improves upon classic caching can be beneficial for many such systems.

## 4 Non-Hierarchical Caching

We present *non-hierarchical caching* (NHC), a caching framework that utilizes the performance of devices that would have been treated as only a capacity layer with classic caching. NHC has the following goals:

- (i) **Perform as well or better than classic caching.** Classic caching optimizes the performance of a storage hierarchy by optimizing the performance from the higher-level device,  $D_{hi}$ ; this performance is optimized by finding the working set that maximizes the hit rate. NHC should degenerate in the worst-case to classic caching and should be able to leverage any classic caching policy (e.g., eviction and write-allocation).
- (ii) **Require no special knowledge or configuration.** NHC should not make more assumptions than classic caching. NHC should not require prior knowledge of the workload or detailed performance characteristics of the devices. NHC should be able to manage any storage hierarchy.
- (iii) **Be robust to dynamic workloads:** Workloads change over time, in their amount of load and working set. NHC should adjust to dynamic changes.

The main idea of NHC (Figure 1) is to offload excess load to capacity devices when doing so improves the overall caching performance. NHC can be described in three steps. First, when warming up the system (or after a significant workload change), NHC leverages classic caching to identify the current working set and load that data into the  $D_{hi}$ ; this ensures that NHC performs at least as well as classic caching. Second, after the hit rate has stabilized, NHC improves upon classic caching by sending excess load to the capacity device,  $D_{lo}$ . This excess load has two components: read hits that are not delivering additional performance on  $D_{hi}$  because  $D_{hi}$  is already at its maximum performance, and read misses that

cause unnecessary data movement between the two devices. Classic caching moves data from  $D_{lo}$  to  $D_{hi}$  when a miss occurs to improve the hit rate. However, improving hit rate is not beneficial when  $D_{hi}$  is already delivering its maximum performance. Therefore, NHC decreases the amount of data admissions into  $D_{hi}$ . Using a feedback-based approach, NHC determines the excess load; it requires no knowledge of the device or the workload. Finally, if a workload change is observed, NHC returns to classic caching; if the workload never stabilizes, the algorithm degenerates to classic caching. NHC can leverage the same write-allocation policies as a classic cache (e.g., write-around or write-back).

#### 4.1 Formal Definitions

To describe NHC, we introduce a few terms. We assume that the storage hierarchy is still composed of two devices,  $D_{hi}$  and  $D_{lo}$ . Caching performance is determined by how the workload is distributed across those two devices. We denote the total workload over a time period  $\delta_t$  as a constant  $W$ , a finite set of accesses to data items. We use  $w$  to refer to the subset of  $W$  served by  $D_{hi}$ , and use its complement set  $W - w$  for that served by  $D_{lo}$ . We model performance in the time period  $\delta_t$  as  $\mathbf{P}(W, w) = \mathbf{p}_{hi}(w) + \mathbf{p}_{lo}(W - w)$ . We make the following assumptions about the devices:

**Assumption 1: Performance of a device has an upper bound.** The performance of a device cannot increase after it is fully utilized.  $L_{hi}$  and  $L_{lo}$  represent the maximum possible performance that can be delivered by each device for the current workload,  $W$ . We note  $w_0$  as the smallest subset of  $w$  such that  $\mathbf{p}_{hi}(w_0) = L_{hi}$ .

**Assumption 2: Increasing the workload on a device does not decrease performance.** This implies  $\mathbf{p}_{hi}(x)$  and  $\mathbf{p}_{lo}(x)$  are monotonically increasing functions. Note that HDD performance can decrease with more random requests due to more seeks, but the assumption generally holds for high-performing devices such as DRAM, NVM, and SSDs.

**Assumption 3: Before reaching upper limits,  $\mathbf{p}_{hi}(x)$  has a larger gradient than  $\mathbf{p}_{lo}(x)$ .** Based on our observations from real devices, the potential performance gain of using  $D_{hi}$  is greater than that of using  $D_{lo}$ .

We define classic caching as an approach that optimizes  $\mathbf{P}(W, w)$  by maximizing only  $\mathbf{p}_{hi}(w)$ . Classic caching attempts to maximize  $\mathbf{P}(W, w)$  by finding some working set  $w_{max}$  that maximizes the hit rate of  $D_{hi}$ .

The key insight of NHC is that, when  $w_0 < w_{max}$ , an opportunity exists to move some portion of the workload  $w_{max} - w_0$  away from  $D_{hi}$  to  $D_{lo}$ . Since  $\mathbf{p}_{hi}(w_0) = \mathbf{p}_{hi}(w_{max}) = L_{hi}$ , removing  $w_{max} - w_0$  from  $D_{hi}$  does not decrease the performance of  $D_{hi}$  below  $L_{hi}$  and now  $D_{lo}$  can deliver some amount of performance for  $w_{max} - w_0$ . Thus, NHC can always perform as well or better than classic caching.

#### 4.2 Architecture

As shown in Figure 6, classic caching can be upgraded to NHC by adding decision points to its cache controller and

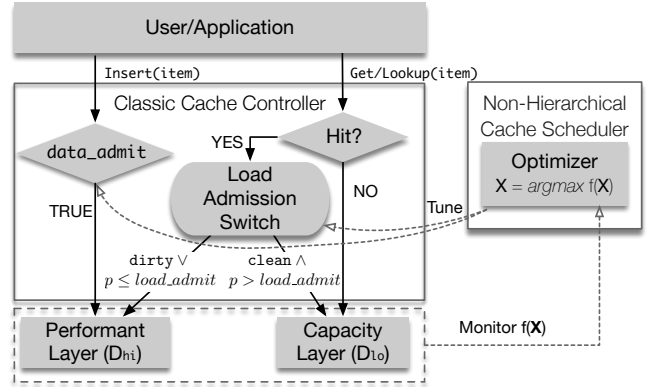


Figure 6: **Non-Hierarchical Caching Architecture.** This figure shows the architecture of NHC. NHC adds decision points and a scheduler to classic caching. As before, NHC is transparent to users. Any classic caching implementation can be upgraded to be a NHC one. Note that decision points only tune cache read hits/misses.

a non-hierarchical cache scheduler. The classic cache controller serves reads and writes from a user/application to the storage devices (i.e.,  $D_{hi}$  and  $D_{lo}$ ) and controls the contents of  $D_{hi}$  based on its replacement policy (e.g., LRU). A new cache scheduler monitors performance and controls whether classic caching is performed and where cache read hits are served. The scheduler optimizes a target performance metric that can be supplied by the end-user (e.g., ops/sec) or use device-level measurements (e.g., request latency).

The NHC scheduler performs this control with a boolean `data_admit` (`da`) and a variable `load_admit` (`la`). The `da` flag controls behavior when a **read miss** occurs on  $D_{hi}$ : when `da` is set, missed data items are allocated in  $D_{hi}$ , according to the cache replacement policy; when `da` is not set, the miss is handled by  $D_{lo}$  and not allocated in  $D_{hi}$ . Classic caching corresponds to the case where the `da` flag is true.

The `la` variable controls how **read hits** are handled and designates the percentage of read hits that should be sent to  $D_{hi}$ ; when `la` is 0, all read hits are sent to  $D_{lo}$ . Specifically, for each read hit, a random number  $R \in [0, 1.0]$  is generated; if  $R \leq la$ , the request is sent to  $D_{hi}$ ; else, it is sent to  $D_{lo}$ . In classic caching, `la` is always 1.

The NHC framework works with any classic caching write-allocation policy (specified by users), which handles **write hits/misses**. NHC admits write misses into  $D_{hi}$  according to the policy; `da`, `la` do not control write hits/misses. With write-back, cache writes introduce dirty data in  $D_{hi}$  and data on  $D_{lo}$  can be out-of-date; in this case, NHC does not send dirty reads to  $D_{lo}$ .

#### 4.3 Cache Scheduler Algorithm

The NHC scheduler adjusts the behavior of the controller to optimize a target performance metric. As shown in Algorithm 1, the scheduler has two states: increasing the amount of data cached on  $D_{hi}$  to maximize hit rate, or keeping the data cached constant, while adjusting the load sent to each device.

---

**Algorithm 1: Non-hierarchical caching scheduler**

---

**cache:** classic cache controller  
**step:** the adjustment step size for *load\_admit*  
**f(x):** function that measures target performance metric when *load\_admit = x*, the value is measured by setting *load\_admit = x* for a time interval

```
1 while true do
  # State 1: Improve hit rate
2  data_admit = true, load_admit = 1.0
3  while cache.hit_rate is not stable do
4    sleep_a_while()
5  data_admit = false, start_hit_rate = cache.hit_rate
  # State 2: Adjust load_admit
6  while true do
7    ratio = load_admit
  # Measure f(ratio-step) and f(ratio+step)
8    max_f = Max(f(ratio-step), f(ratio), f(ratio+step))
  # Modify load_admit based on the slope
9    if f(ratio-step) == max_f then
10     load_admit = ratio - step
11   else if f(ratio+step) == max_f then
12     load_admit = ratio + step
13   else if f(ratio) == max_f then
14     load_admit = ratio
15     if load_admit == 1.0 then
16       goto line 2 # Quit tuning if w < w0
  # Check whether workload locality changes
17   if cache.hit_rate < (1-α)start_hit_rate then
18     goto line 2
```

---

**State 1: Improve hit rate.** The NHC scheduler begins by letting the cache controller perform classic caching with its default replacement policy (*da* is true and *la* is 1); during this process, the cache is warmed up and the hit rate improves as the working set is cached in  $D_{hi}$ . The NHC scheduler monitors the hit rate of  $D_{hi}$  and ends this phase when the hit rate is relatively stable; at this point, the performance delivered by  $D_{hi}$  for the workload  $w_{max}$  is near its peak.

**State 2: Adjust load between devices.** After  $D_{hi}$  contains the working set leading to a high hit rate and performance, the NHC scheduler explores if sending some requests to  $D_{lo}$  increases the performance of  $D_{lo}$ , while not decreasing the performance of  $D_{hi}$ , i.e., the algorithm moves from  $w_{max}$  toward  $w_0$ . In this state, *da* is set to false and feedback is used to tune *la* to maximize the target performance metric. Specifically, the scheduler (Lines 6–18) modifies *la*; in each iteration, performance is measured with *la* +/- *step* over a time interval (e.g., 5ms see §5). The value of *la* is adjusted in the direction indicated by the three data points. When the current value of *la* leads to the best performance, the scheduler sticks with the current value. The value of *la* is kept in the acceptable domain of [0, 1.0] with a negative penalty function. If the scheduler finds the optimal *la* is 1, it quits tuning and moves back to

State 1; intuitively, this means NHC has moved the current workload  $w$  below  $w_0$  and hence requires classic caching to improve the hit rate to further improve performance.

Since NHC relies on classic caching to achieve an acceptable hit rate, it restarts the optimization process when workload locality changes. The NHC scheduler monitors the cache hit rate at runtime; if the current hit rate drops, the scheduler re-enters State 1 to reconfigure the cache with the current working set. If the workload never stabilizes, NHC behaves like classic caching.

**Target Performance Metrics:** NHC can improve different aspects of performance. NHC can be configured to optimize metrics such as throughput, latency, tail latency, or any combination. The target metrics can also capture performance at various levels of the system (e.g., hardware, OS, or application). *f* is a function that measures the target metric.

**Write Operations:** NHC handle writes with the write-allocation policy (specified by users) in the classic cache controller. NHC does not adjust the write-allocation policy because it may be chosen for factors other than performance: endurance [37, 86], persistence, or consistency [59].

**Adapting to Dynamic Workloads:** NHC periodically measures the target metric (e.g., throughput) using *f* and optimizes it by adjusting load-admission ratios (in a way similar to gradient-descent). NHC only needs  $\Delta f$  to determine the optimal split of accesses. Since tuning involves only one parameter (load-admission ratio), it is cheap and converges fast. NHC can thus handle frequently-changing workloads with continual tuning.

**Summary:** Non-hierarchical caching optimizes classic caching to effectively use the performance of capacity devices. NHC improves on classic caching in two ways. First, NHC does not admit read misses into  $D_{hi}$  when the performance of  $D_{hi}$  is fully utilized. Second, when the performance of  $D_{hi}$  is at its peak, NHC delivers useful performance from the  $D_{lo}$  device by sending some of the requests that would have hit in  $D_{hi}$  to  $D_{lo}$  instead. By determining at run-time the appropriate load, NHC obtains useful performance from  $D_{lo}$  instead of using  $D_{lo}$  only to serve misses into  $D_{hi}$ .

## 5 Implementation

We implement non-hierarchical caching in two places: Orthus-CAS, a generic block-layer caching kernel module, and Orthus-KV, a user-level caching layer for a key-value store.

Open CAS [32] is caching software built by Intel that accelerates accesses to a slow backend block device by using a faster device as a cache. It supports different write-allocation policies such as write-around, write-through, and write-back, and uses an approximate LRU policy for eviction. Open CAS is a kernel module that we modify to leverage NHC. Orthus-CAS works with all policies supported in Open CAS.

We also implement NHC within a persistent block cache for Wiskey [64], an LSM-tree key-value store. LSM trees are a good match for Optane SSD, and have garnered significant



industry interest [2, 12, 38]. Wisckey is derived from LevelDB; the primary difference is that Wisckey separates keys from values to reduce amplification. While keys remain in the LSM-tree, values are stored in a log and each key points to its corresponding value in the log. Separating keys and values also improves caching because it avoids invalidating values when compacting levels; this is similar to the approach in memcached [11] for spilling data to SSD. We integrate NHC with Wisckey's persistent block cache layer. The cache keeps hot blocks (both LSM-tree key and value blocks, 4KB in size) on the cache device using sharded-LRU. Eviction occurs in units of 64 blocks. We call this implementation Orthus-KV.

**Detecting Hit-rate Stability:** NHC considers the hit-rate to be stable (Algorithm 1, Lines 3-4) when it changes within 0.1% in the last 100-milliseconds. This simple heuristic works well as NHC does not require perfect hit-rate-stability detection. With intensive workloads, a higher hit-rate will only let NHC bypass more hits; with light workloads, NHC switches to classic caching quickly.

**Target Performance Metrics:** Our implementations support three target metrics: throughput, average latency, and tail (P99) latency, with throughput being the default. When optimizing throughput, we use the Linux block-layer statistics [10] to track device throughputs. When optimizing for latency, we track the end-to-end request latency of the caching system.

**Tuning Parameters:** NHC implementations must measure the target metrics and tune parameters periodically. The speed at which NHC adapts to workload changes depends on both the interval between target performance measurements and the step size. With a smaller interval, tuning converges faster. Though frequent tuning means more CPU overheads, our CPU overheads are negligible. We found the Linux block layer counters [10] are not accurate when the interval is smaller than 5 ms, so we use the smallest yet accurate interval of 5 ms. A large step size leads to faster convergence but may get sub-optimal results. NHC adjusts the load ratio by 2% in each step; we have found this gives a reasonable converging time with end results similar to smaller step sizes. We leave an adaptive step size for future work.

**Implementation Overhead:** We find that implementing NHC into existing caching layers is fairly straightforward and requires nominal developer effort. We added only 460 (not including cache mode registration code) and 228 LOC into Open CAS and Wisckey, respectively.

## 6 Evaluation

Our evaluation aims to answer the following questions:

- How does NHC in Orthus-CAS perform across hierarchies, write-allocation policies, and target metrics? (§6.1)
- How does NHC as implemented in Orthus-KV perform on static workloads? (§6.2)
- How does Orthus-KV handle dynamic workloads? How does it adapt to changes in load and data locality? (§6.3)
- How does NHC compare to previous work? (§6.4)

**Setup.** We use the following real devices: a SK Hynix DDR4 module (denoted as DRAM), an Intel Optane 128GB DCPM (NVM), an Intel Optane SSD 905P (Optane), and a Samsung 970 Flash SSD (Flash). We also use FlashSim [58] to simulate flash devices with different performance characteristics.

### 6.1 Orthus-CAS

We begin by evaluating NHC as implemented in Orthus-CAS running on microbenchmarks where the workloads do not change over time. The accesses are uniformly random and 64KB (the suggested page size for Open CAS). We use 1GB of the cache device and generate workloads with different hit ratios. We report the stable performance of classic caching; for NHC, we report when its tuning stabilizes. Unless otherwise noted, we use throughput as the target function.

#### 6.1.1 Storage Hierarchies

We show the normalized throughput of Open CAS and Orthus-CAS for read-only workloads with different hierarchies, amounts of load, and hit ratios in Figure 7. We define Load-1.0 as the minimum read load to achieve the maximum read bandwidth of the cache device; we generate Load-0.5, 1.5, and 2.0 by scaling load-1.0. We investigate hierarchies that include DRAM, NVM, Optane SSD, and Flash. We also mimic hierarchies with two performance differences (50:10 and 50:25) using FlashSim; we configure FlashSim to simulate devices with maximum speeds of 50MB/s, 25MB/s, and 10MB/s. We make the following observations from the figure:

First, when load is light (e.g., Load-0.5), cache devices always outperform capacity devices. In this case, NHC does not bypass any load and behaves the same as classic caching.

Second, when the workload can fully utilize the cache device, Orthus-CAS improves performance. Intuitively, a higher hit ratio and load gives NHC more opportunities to bypass requests and improve performance. Figure 7 confirms the intuition: with 95% hit ratio and Load-2.0, NHC obtains improvements of 21%, 32%, 54% for DRAM+NVM, NVM+Optane, and Optane+Flash, respectively. Such improvements are marginally reduced with an 80% hit ratio.

Third, among these hierarchies, Optane+Flash improves the most with Orthus-CAS since the performance difference between Optane and Flash is the smallest, followed by NVM+Optane and DRAM+NVM. Our results with FlashSim show how practitioners can predict the improvement of using NHC on their target hierarchies.

Finally, our measurements indicate that Orthus-CAS adapts to complex device characteristics. With an 80% hit ratio, classic caching does not achieve 1.0 normalized throughput on any real hierarchy because cache misses introduce additional writes to the cache device. NHC handles such complexities.

**Latency Improvement.** As shown in Figure 7, Orthus-CAS also improves average latency on all hierarchies. For instance, with Load-2.0, NHC reduces average latency by 19%, 25%, 39%, for DRAM+NVM, NVM+Optane, and Optane+Flash hierarchies, respectively.

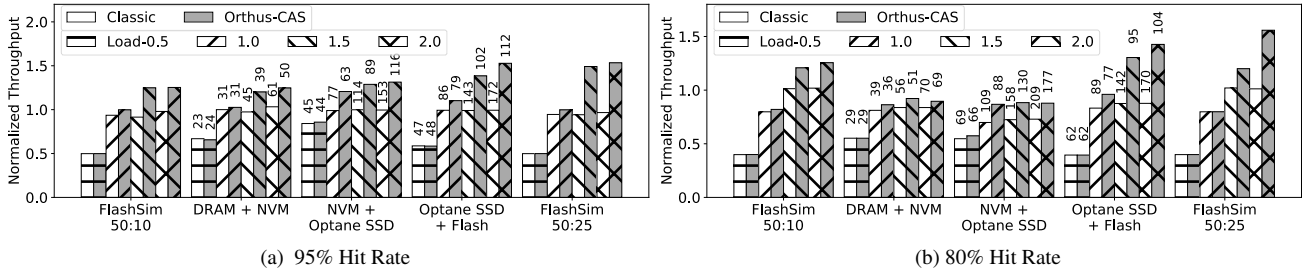


Figure 7: **Orthus-CAS on Various Hierarchies.** Read-only workloads; (a) and (b) show different cache hit rates. All throughputs are normalized to the maximum read bandwidth of the caching device. We show latency ( $\mu\text{s}$ ) on top of each bar (not comparable across hierarchies).

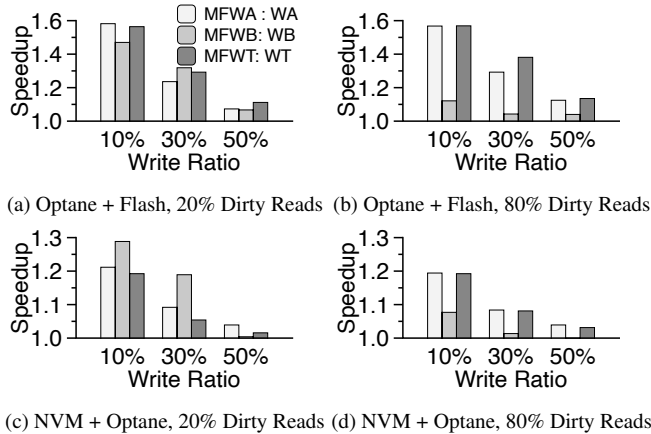


Figure 8: **Orthus-CAS with Different Write-allocation Policies.** The figure shows Orthus-CAS overall throughput speedup (against Open CAS) with different write-allocation policies: WA, WB, and WT are write-around, write-back, and write-through. Workloads have a concurrency level of 16 and 95% hit rates.

### 6.1.2 Write-Allocation Policies

Open CAS can use a variety of write-allocation policies (write-around, write-back, and write-through) and Figure 8 shows that NHC improves performance relative to classic caching with each policy. The experiments vary the storage hierarchy, the write ratio, and the **dirty-read ratio**. We control the dirty-read ratio by limiting the percentage of the working set that writes can touch (e.g., if writes go to 80% of the working set, then 80% of the reads will be dirty).

NHC improves reads irrespective of write ratios. When reads or writes overload the cache device, NHC bypasses read hits, improving performance (e.g., significantly so on NVM+OptaneSSD where NVM writes interfere with reads dramatically). As shown in Figure 8, the overall improvements are dependent upon a combination of the workload write and dirty-read ratios and the write-allocation policy. NHC offers more benefits when there are fewer writes. With write-back, NHC cannot offload reads of dirty items to the capacity device and thus performs much better with fewer dirty reads. Write-around and write-through maintain consistent copies and thus Orthus-CAS offers benefits independent of the dirty-read ratio.

Target Metric	NVM + Optane			Optane + Flash		
	Throughput GB/s	Avg. lat. $\mu\text{s}$	P99 lat. $\mu\text{s}$	Throughput GB/s	Avg. lat. $\mu\text{s}$	P99 lat. $\mu\text{s}$
Open CAS	6.7	77	115	2.3	227	269
Throughput	<b>8.0</b>	<b>64</b>	147	<b>3.9</b>	<b>132</b>	289
Avg. lat.	<b>8.0</b>	<b>64</b>	143	<b>3.9</b>	<b>132</b>	285
P99 lat.	6.9	75	<b>106</b>	3.3	155	<b>245</b>

Table 2: **Different Target Metrics.** The figure shows Orthus-CAS performance using different target performance metrics. We use read-only workloads (concurrency level of 8, 95% hit ratio). The best result for each metric is in bold.

### 6.1.3 Target Performance Metrics

NHC can improve different performance metrics by using different measure functions  $f$ . Table 2 shows the performance of Open CAS and Orthus-CAS when using throughput, average latency, and tail (P99) latency as target metrics. Optimizing throughput or average latency yields similar improvements to both metrics on both hierarchies, but increases tail latency. This increase occurs because in each of these storage hierarchies, the performance device has much better tail latency than the capacity device; thus classic caching defaults to appropriate behavior. When NHC is configured with P99 latency as the target metric, Orthus-CAS has better tail latency than Open CAS and than it does with other targets.

### 6.2 Orthus-KV: Static Workloads

We use Orthus-KV, the NHC implementation in Wiskey, to show the benefits for real applications. Caching in Wiskey uses write-around, due to the LSM-tree’s log-structured writes. In these experiments we focus on Optane+Flash since it is often used for key-value stores [12, 38]. We set the caching layer to 33 GB, 1/3 of the 100 GB dataset. We use cgroup to limit the OS page cache to 1 GB to focus on caching in the storage system instead of caching in main memory.

Our initial evaluation uses the YCSB workloads [35]. Most YCSB workloads are constant: their load does not change and they have a stable key popularity distribution (i.e., Zipfian). These workloads cover different read/write ratios (e.g., YCSB-C: 100% reads, YCSB-A: 50% reads and 50% updates), as well as various operations (e.g., YCSB-E involves 95% range queries and 5% inserting new keys, while Workload-F has 50% read-modify-writes). We evaluate YCSB-D as a dynamic workload (§6.3).

**Gets:** Figure 9 compares the throughput of Wiskey

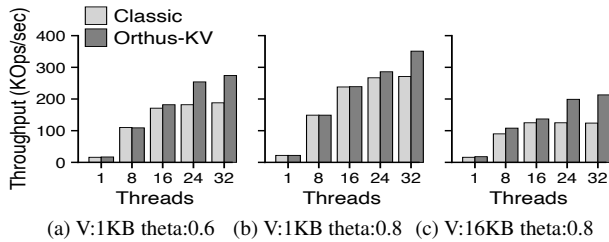


Figure 9: **Orthus-KV, YCSB-C Performance.** *YCSB-C workload has 100% reads. We use 16B keys and 1KB or 16KB values. Accesses follow a Zipfian distribution (theta).*

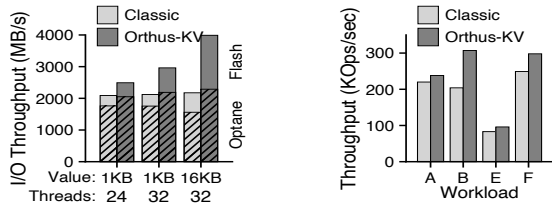


Figure 10: **Bandwidth Breakdown.** *Optane/Flash read bandwidth breakdown during YCSB-C.*

Figure 11: **Other YCSB Workloads.** *16B keys, 1KB values, 32 threads and theta = 0.6.*

and Orthus-KV for three YCSB-C workloads and different amounts of concurrency. Orthus-KV achieves equivalent or higher throughput than Wisckey for all workloads. Orthus-KV significantly improves throughput at high load levels: with 32 threads, 46%, 30%, and 71% higher throughput for the three workloads. When load is high enough to saturate Optane, the relative benefits of Orthus-KV depend on how much it can avoid unnecessary data movement and perform better load distribution. Figure 10 illustrates these two benefits with the read bandwidth delivered by each device. First, classic caching suffers from unnecessary data admissions into Optane: its effective Optane read bandwidth never reaches the peak (2.3GB/s). NHC avoids this wasteful data movement. Second, classic caching never delivers more than the maximum Optane bandwidth to the application. In contrast, NHC improves the performance out of the hierarchy by distributing some cache hits to the Flash SSD.

**Updates, Inserts, and Range Queries:** Figure 11 shows Orthus-KV handles a range of operations (gets, updates, inserts, and range queries) and always performs at least as well as Wisckey. NHC improves all YCSB workloads, with greater benefits with more get operations.

**Latency Improvement:** With throughput as its target, Orthus-KV reduces YCSB average latency by up to 42%. For YCSB-C (32 threads, 0.8 theta), Orthus-KV provides 30% and 38% lower latency for 1KB and 16KB values, respectively.

**CPU Overhead:** Orthus-KV increases CPU utilization slightly (0-2% for 24 threads) due to a few additional counters that track caching behavior and device performance over time.

### 6.3 Orthus-KV: Dynamic Workloads

We evaluate NHC for dynamic workloads using the same experimental setting as §6.2. We explore how Orthus-KV

handles time-varying workloads and dynamic working sets.

#### 6.3.1 Dynamic Load

We evaluate how well NHC handles load changes with the Facebook ZippyDB benchmark [31]. ZippyDB is a distributed key-value store built on RocksDB and used by Facebook. The ZippyDB benchmark generates key-value operations according to realistic trace statistics: 85% gets, 14% puts, 1% scans following a hot range-based model; the request rate models the diurnal load sent to ZippyDB servers. We note that the access patterns (e.g., read sizes) of the ZippyDB benchmark vary significantly as their value sizes range from bytes to MBs. We speed up the replay of Zippydb requests by 1000 to stress the storage system and to better evaluate NHC’s reactions to changes in load.

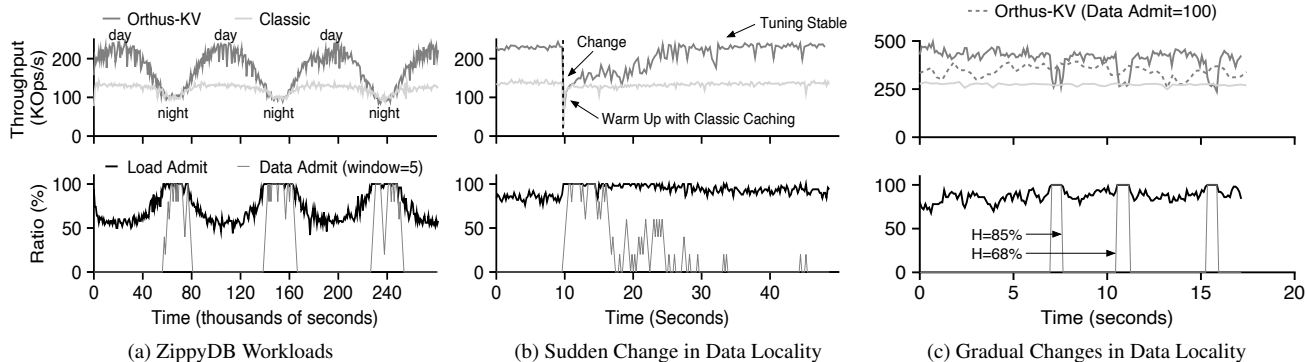
As shown in Figure 12a (top), Orthus-KV outperforms Wisckey during the day by up to 100%, but performs similarly when the load is lower at night. Figure 12a (bottom) shows how Orthus-KV adjusts data and load admit ratios. During the night, both are around 100%; Orthus-KV occasionally adjusts the load admit ratio when the hit rate is stable, but quickly returns to classic caching after finding no improvements. During the day, Orthus-KV keeps the data admit ratio at 0 and adjusts the load admit ratio to adapt to the dynamic load.

#### 6.3.2 Dynamic Data Locality

We demonstrate that NHC reacts well to abrupt changes in the working set in Figure 12b. The experiments base on YCSB-C, beginning with one working set (Zipfian theta=0.8, hot spot at beginning of the key space), and then changing at time 10s (a hot spot at the end of the key space). The graph shows that when the working set changes (time=10s), Orthus-KV quickly detects the change in hit rate and switches to classic caching: the load and data admit ratios increase to 1.0. After the hit rate begins to stabilize (time=11s), Orthus-KV tunes the load admit ratio. Initially (11s-28s), because the hit rate is still not high enough, Orthus-KV often identifies 1.0 as the best load admit and returns to classic caching with data movement. Approximately 20s after the workload change, the hit rate stabilizes and Orthus-KV reaches steady-state performance that is 60% higher than classic caching.

Finally, we show that NHC can outperform classic caching even when the working set changes gradually. Figure 12c shows Orthus-KV’s performance on YCSB-D (95% reads, 5% inserts), where locality shifts over time as reads are performed on recently-inserted values. Due to the locality changes and not admitting new data to the cache, the hit rate in Orthus-KV decreases over time, until NHC identifies that 1.0 is the best load admit rate. Then Orthus-KV returns to classic caching and raises the hit rate. Once the hit rate restabilizes, the cycle resumes with Orthus-KV adjusting the load admit rate.

We also explore the alternative approach of always performing data admission while tuning the load admit rate in Figure 12c. As shown, this alternative maintains a stable hit rate, avoiding abrupt phases of admitting new data; this



**Figure 12: Orthus-KV with Dynamic Workloads.** This figure shows the throughput of Orthus-KV and classic caching (top graphs), as well as load/data admit ratio over time in Orthus-KV (bottom graphs). Because data admit is 0 or 1, we show a fractional windowed sum of its value over 5 time steps for readability. In (a), we replay the ZippyDB benchmark on a single machine. The average value size is 16KB; the number of key ranges is 6. We use 32 threads for the maximum load and adjust the number of threads dynamically according to the diurnal load model. We speed up the two-day workload by 1000 $\times$ . In (b), the workload is similar to YCSB-C 16KB value, 32 threads, but with two different working sets before and after 10s. In (c), we use YCSB-D with 16B keys, 1KB values, 32 threads. We also show throughput of a modified Orthus-KV that always performs data admit in (c).

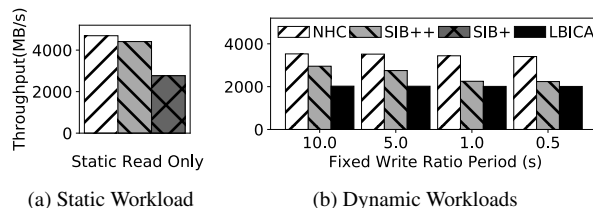
always performs better than classic caching but its peak performance does not reach that of the default Orthus-KV. Our results illustrate the interesting tradeoff between avoiding unnecessary data movement and maintaining a stable hit rate for dynamically changing workloads.

#### 6.4 Comparisons with Prior Approaches

We now show that NHC significantly outperforms two other approaches that have been suggested for utilizing the performance of a capacity device: SIB [56] and LBICA [19]. SIB targets HDFS clusters with many SSDs and HDDs, in which case the aggregate HDD throughput is non-trivial: SIB uses SSDs as a write buffer (does not admit any read miss), and proposes using the HDDs for handling extra read traffic. LBICA determines when a performance layer is under “burst load” at which point it will not allocate new data to the performance layer; unlike NHC, LBICA does not redirect any read hits.

To compare NHC against SIB and LBICA, we have implemented these approaches in Open CAS. To make SIB suitable for general-purpose caching environments, we have improved it in two ways. First, SIB operates on a per-process granularity instead of per-request: the traffic from some processes is not allowed to use the SSD cache; we altered SIB so that it adjusts load per-request (SIB+). Second, we modified SIB so that it admits read misses into the cache (SIB++).

Using the experimental setup from §6.1 on Optane+Flash, we start with a read-only workload in Figure 13.a. SIB+ does not perform well because it does not admit read misses into Optane. SIB++ performs better, but suffers when the workload changes as in Figure 13.b; in these workloads, the amount of write traffic is changed every period, for periods between 10 and 0.5 seconds. SIB cannot handle dynamic workloads because SIB has two phases; in its training phase, SIB learns the maximum performance of the caching device for the current workload; in the inference phase, SIB judges whether the caching device is saturated and, if it is, bypasses some



**Figure 13: NHC vs. SIB and LBICA.** (a) uses a static read-only workload. (b) uses dynamic workloads; the write-ratio is fixed in each period (e.g., 10s), but changes (randomly between 0% to 50%) across periods. We use workloads with parallelism/concurrency 16, 95% hits, runtime 100s on Optane+Flash hierarchy.

processes (requests). As we have shown, the maximum performance of modern devices depends on many workload parameters: read-write ratios, load, and access patterns. Thus, if the workload changes in any way, SIB must either relearn the target maximum performance or use an inaccurate target. In our experiments, as the duration of each phase decreases, the performance of SIB decreases dramatically. Unlike SIB, NHC uses a simple, continuous feedback-based tuning approach and thus converges rapidly and adapts to dynamic workloads well. Finally, LBICA performs poorly because it does not redirect any read hits to use the capacity device; it simply does not allocate more data to the performance device when it is overloaded.

## 7 Related Work

**Algorithms and Policies in Hybrid Storage Systems:** Algorithms and policies for managing traditional hierarchy have been studied extensively [65, 67, 68, 70, 78, 89, 91, 96, 104]. Techniques have been introduced to optimize data allocation [3, 49, 80, 84, 89, 90], address translation [25, 82], identify hot data [4, 51, 53, 71, 73, 75, 79, 88, 91, 95] and perform data migration [26, 33, 40, 43, 70, 87, 91, 100]. Most previous work improves performance by focusing on workload access locality. In contrast, NHC improves by taking all devices and

workloads into account.

**Storage Optimization:** A long line of pioneering work in storage management [21–23, 89, 91] shows how to trace workloads and optimize storage decisions for improved performance; NHC could fit into such a system, making short-term decisions to handle more dynamic workload changes, leaving longer-term optimization to a higher-level system.

**Storage Aware Caching/Tiering:** Our paper shares aspects with storage-aware caching/tiering [19, 29, 42, 43, 47, 52, 56, 59, 60, 72, 93, 99], which considers more factors than hit rate. For instance, Oh et al. [72] propose over-provisioning in Flash to avoid the influence of SSD garbage collection. Modern devices like NVDIMM and Optane SSD have distinctive characteristics compared to Flash. We study the implications of these important emerging devices to caching/tiering. BATMAN [34] shares a similar motivation to NHC: classic caching is not effective when the bandwidth of the capacity layer is a significant fraction of overall bandwidth. However, it investigates a much simpler hierarchy with fixed performance difference (4:1 between high-bandwidth memory and DRAM). Given the fixed difference, BATMAN splits cache accesses between HBM and DRAM statically. This approach would not work effectively on modern hierarchies where performance differences vary dynamically (e.g., depending upon the amount of writes or the level of parallelism in the workload). Wu et al. [93] study tiering on SSDs and HDDs and recognize a similar problem: SSDs (or faster devices) can be the throughput bottleneck. To mitigate the problem, they proposed to periodically migrate data from SSDs to HDDs when the SSD response time is higher than that of HDDs. This approach is limited in three aspects. First, due to its tiering nature, it cannot react to workload changes quickly, its migration traffic can be significant, and it requires extra metadata to track objects across devices. Second, similar to SIB approach, it estimates workload intensity in a period and then migrates data based on the estimation; it hence struggles with dynamic workloads. Third, it is tuned for a specific hierarchy (SSDs and hard drives). Unlike this approach, NHC focuses on improving caching, adapts its behavior during runtime, can react to complex and dynamic workloads, and works well on a range of modern devices.

**Managing NVM-based Devices:** Other related work integrates NVM-based devices into the memory-storage hierarchy [18, 27, 44, 45, 48, 63, 69, 83]. This work includes extensive measurements for both Optane SSD [92] and Optane DCPM [50, 97]. New file systems and databases were proposed to manage NVDIMM [76, 94] and low latency SSDs [61, 66, 101]. Many works have evaluated the potential benefits of caching and tiering on NVM. Kim et al. [55] provide a simulation-based measurement of NVM caching with performance numbers from a Micron all-PCM SSD prototype. [41] provides a I/O cache simulator that assists the analysis of caching workloads on new storage hierarchies. Strata [62] and Ziggurat [103] are file systems that tier data

across a DRAM, NVM, and SSD hierarchy. Dulloor et al. [36], Arulraj et al. [24] and Zhang et al. [102] proposed NVM-aware data placement strategies for the new storage hierarchy. These strategies optimize data placements in a longer period (e.g., offline or periodically). NHC can work with them, providing further improvement by handling more dynamic workload changes. Finally, there have been many companies utilizing NVM/ Optane SSD as a caching layer [30, 38, 39]. Our paper is the first to analyze general caching and tiering on modern hierarchies through modeling and empirical evaluation. We are also the first to propose a generic solution (NHC) to realize the full performance benefits of such a hierarchy.

## 8 Conclusion

In this paper, we show how emerging storage devices have strong implications for caching in modern hierarchies. We introduced non-hierarchical caching, a new approach optimized to extract peak performance from modern devices. NHC is based upon a novel cache scheduling algorithm, which accounts for workload and device characteristics to make allocation and access decisions. Through experiments, we showed the benefits of NHC on a wide range of devices, cache configurations, and workloads. We believe NHC can serve as a better foundation to manage storage hierarchies.

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