

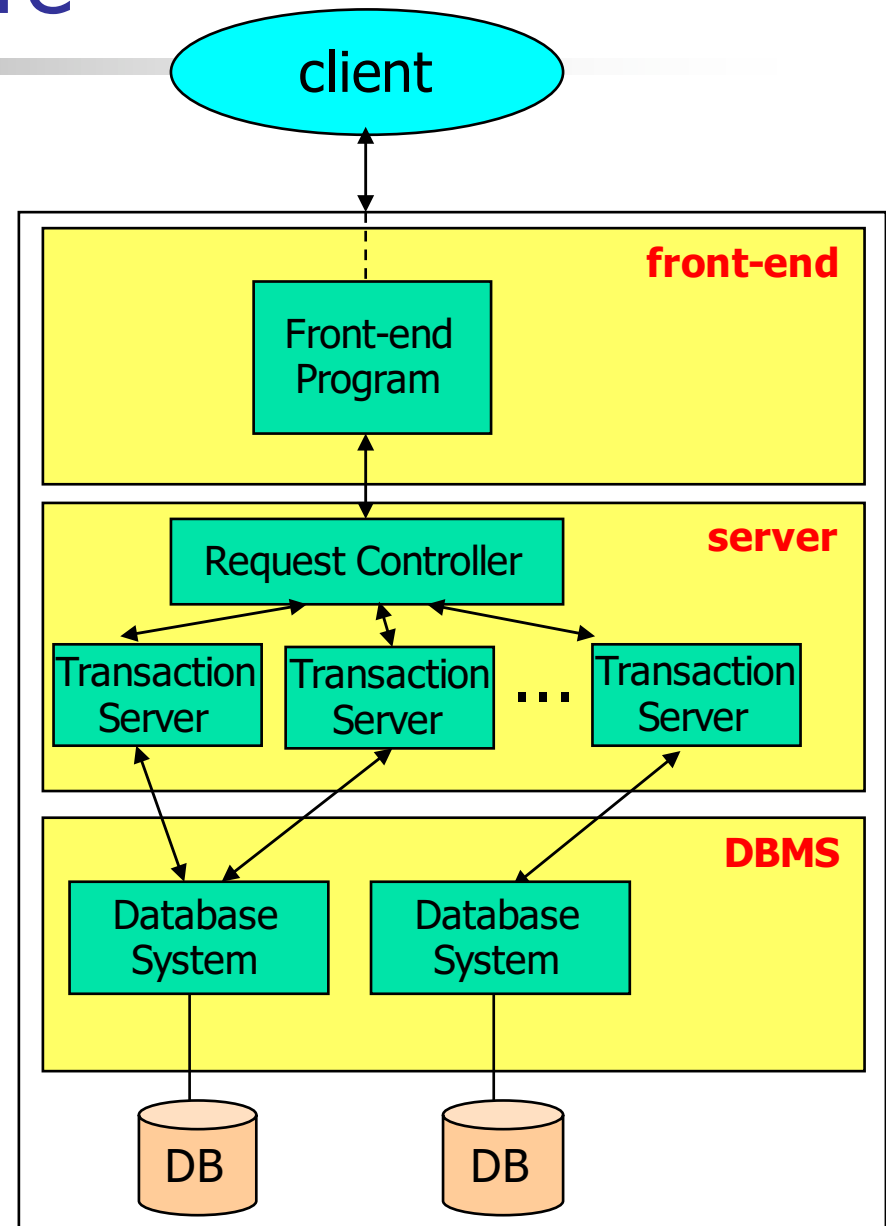
Chapter 11

Web-based Information Systems



TP Application Architecture

- Front-end program
 - interacts with (possibly wide range of) display devices
 - gathers and validates input, displays output
 - constructs and forward request (e.g., as a RPC or asynchronous message)
 - provides **device-independence** for server
- Request controller
 - guides the request execution
 - determines required steps, then executes them by invoking transaction servers
 - usually runs as part of an ACID transaction
- Transaction server
 - process that runs application programs doing the actual work of the request
 - almost always runs within the scope of an ACID transaction
 - typically interacts with a DBMS
 - simple applications can be composed into more complex ones (using local proc. call, TRPC, asynch. messaging, ...)
 - makes difference to req. controller fuzzy



Front-end Program Functions

- Gather input and display output (user interaction)
 - form and menu concepts
 - user selects a menu item to identify the type of transaction to be executed
 - front-end program display a (series of) form(s) for gathering input data
 - input data is validated by the front-end program
 - goal: avoid calling the TP-server with incorrect input
 - based on general data type/format, possibly using "cached" data values
 - presentation technologies support form and menu concepts
 - define menus and how to navigate between them
 - define fields and screen layout of forms
 - identify data validation routines to be called for each field
- Construct requests and interpret replies
 - request can take the form of an RPC or (a)synchronous message
 - typically includes
 - user identifier
 - device identifier (e.g., network address)
 - request type
 - input parameters

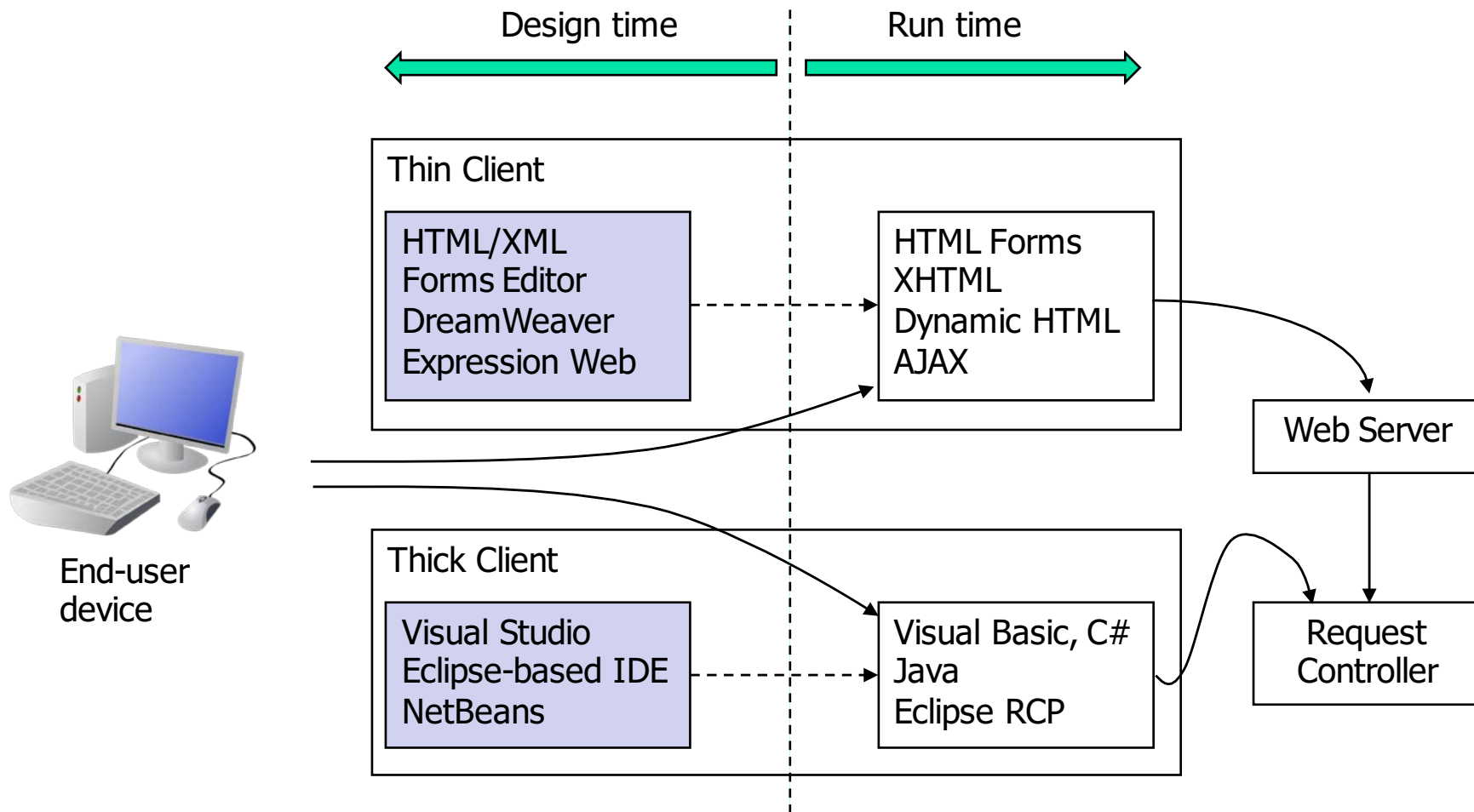


Web-based IS

- Initial purpose of the WWW: sharing information on the internet
 - technologies
 - HTML documents
 - HTTP protocol
 - web browser as client for internet information access
- For Information Systems: connecting remote clients with applications across the internet/intranet
 - "web-enabled" applications
 - extend application reach to the consumer
 - leverage advantages of web technologies
 - web browser as a universal application client/front-end program
 - "thin client"
 - no application-specific client code has to be installed
 - requirements
 - content is coming from dynamic sources (IS, DBS)
 - request to access a resource has to result in application invocation
 - session state: tracking repeated interactions of the same client with a web server

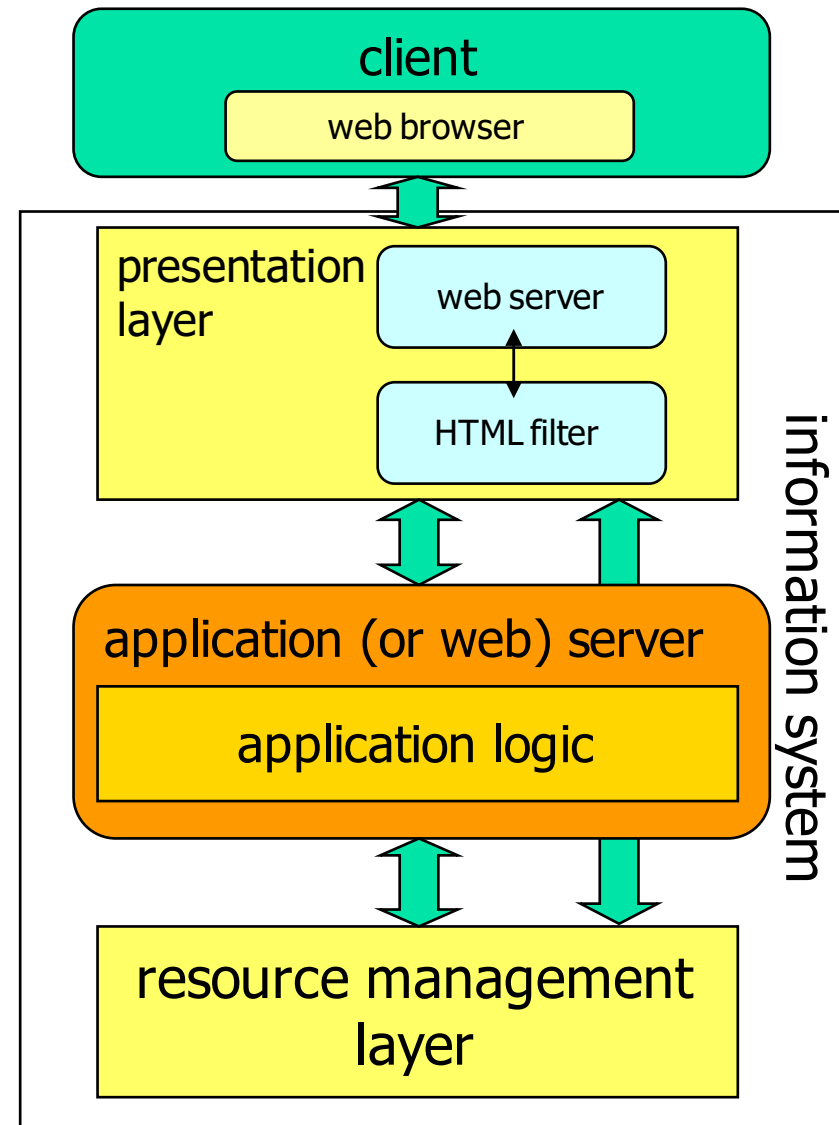


Forms Technologies and Tools

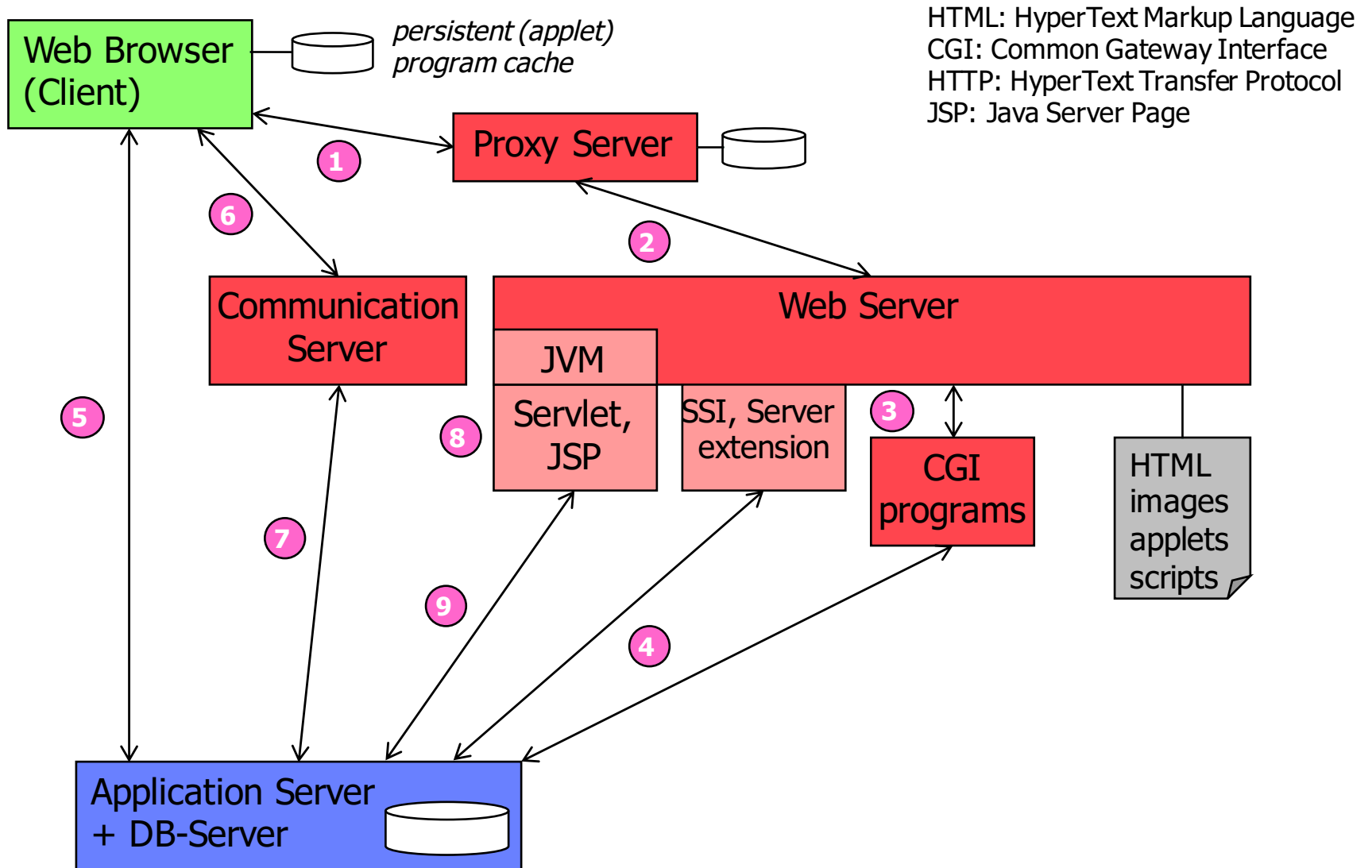


Architecture for Web-IS

- Presentation layer may be realized in separate tiers
 - client-side presentation using browser, *client components (optional)*
 - server-side presentation done by web server, dynamic HTML generation (HTML filter)
- Presentation components interact with application logic components
 - managed by appl. server, or *run within web server environment*
- Access to RM layer
 - "encapsulated" in appl. logic component
 - may also be performed directly *within presentation logic component*
 - special case, if there is no application logic (only data access logic)



Overview



Server Components

- WWW-Server
 - core component
 - provides static HTML pages, incl. embedded images, etc. (①, ②)
 - provides Java applets, which may access a DB either directly (⑤) or via a communication server (⑥, ⑦)
 - invokes server-side extensions (③)
 - invokes CGI programs (③)
 - invokes Java servlets, Java Server Pages (JSPs) (⑧)
 - delivers results of TP interactions (CGI programs ④, Java servlets ⑨) as dynamically generated HTML to web browser

Server Components (2)

- DB-Server
 - manages application data
 - may manage static HTML pages (or fragments)
- Application-Server
 - manages and executes request controllers and transaction servers
- Proxy-Server
 - caches results (HTML documents, images) of an HTTP request to improve response time for static information requests
 - dynamically generated or specially marked documents are not cached
- Communication-Server
 - can be used to support DB-Server connectivity for Java applets (6, 7)

Core Technologies

- Client-side
 - Java Applets, Javascript
- Server-side
 - Common Gateway Interface (CGI) programs
 - Web Server API
 - Java Servlets
 - Server-side Includes (SSI)
 - Java Server Pages (JSP)



Client-Side Approaches

- Goal: application-specific, dynamic clients integrated into the web browser
- Capabilities
 - application modules can be downloaded (at run-time) to the client and executed
 - don't need to be pre-installed prior to invocation
 - module can access application server or DB server
 - may result in performance benefits
 - module can manage state across multiple interactions



Java Applets

- Application component embedded in HTML page (similar to images), stored on the web server
- Dynamically transferred to the client to be executed in a Java-enabled web browser (1, 2)
 - requires JVM integrated into web browser or loaded by Java plug-in
- Applets can use full Java language support
- JAR files (Java ARchive) can be used to package all class files needed by an applet for download over the network
- General security restrictions (untrusted applets)
 - no access to local resources
 - network communication restricted to server of origin
- Signed Applets
 - Security concept for applets (since JDK 1.1)
 - JAR file contains digitally signed applet files and digital certificate
 - guarantee that applet has not been modified after signed by providing party
 - client may trust applets, grant permissions based on certificates
 - Can be stored persistently on the client side

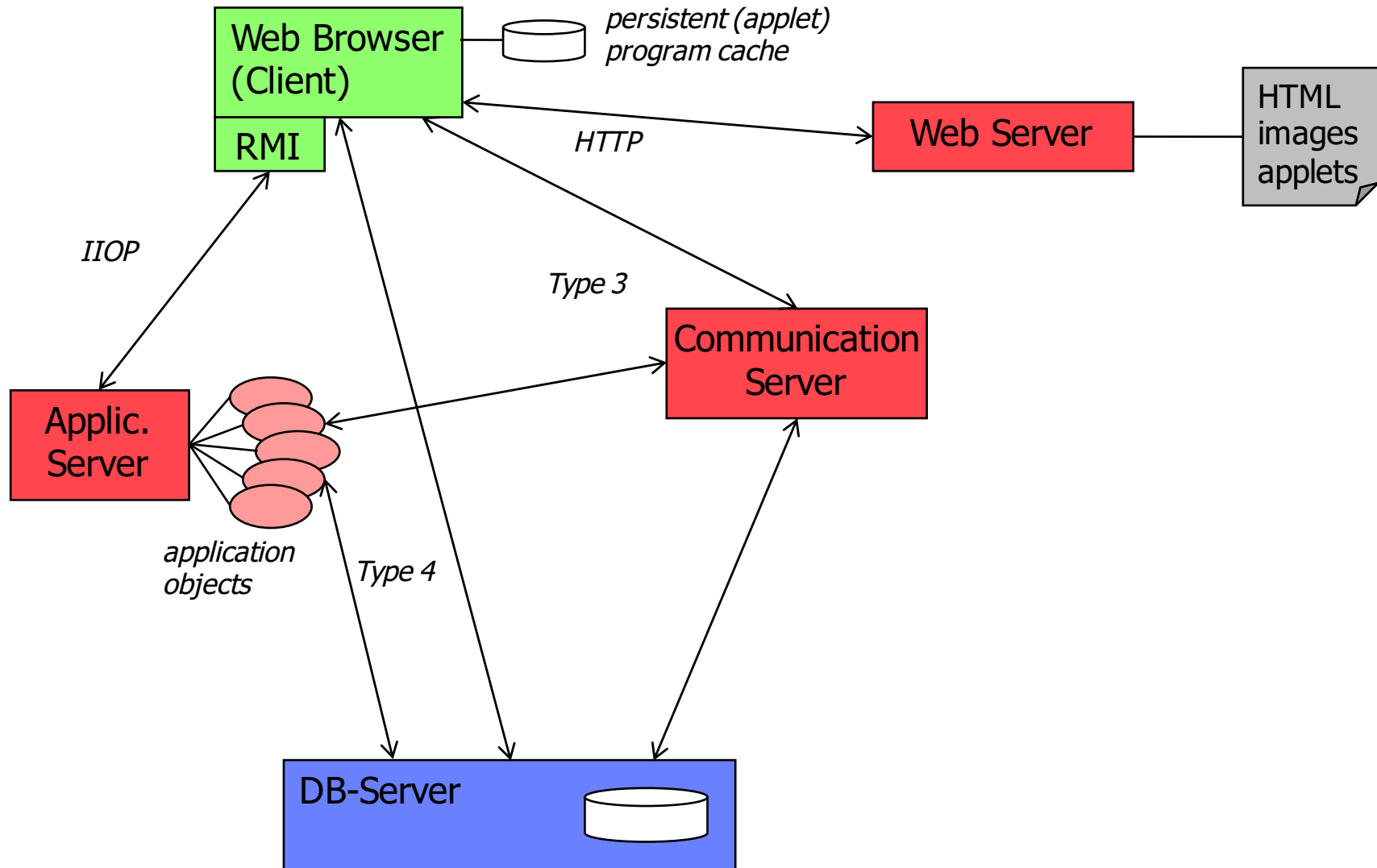
Applet-based DB Access

- Using JDBC/SQLJ
 - Type 3 driver
 - improved security
 - communication server for load balancing
 - works with unsigned applets
 - communication overhead (longer response times)
 - Type 4 driver
 - direct communication
 - requires either signed applets or identical DB-server and web server location
- Additional alternatives and APIs
 - ODMG Java-Binding
 - for access OODBMS
 - defines language binding for ODL (Object Definition Language) to Java
 - API for executing OQL(Object Query Language) statements and processing of results
 - other Java-DB APIs
 - proprietary, DBMS-vendor-specific Java-APIs
 - applet implementations not portable

Interaction with Application Components

- CORBA
 - since CORBA 2.2: *Java Language Binding*, supported by numerous ORBs with Java support
 - Java-IDL
 - CORBA-compliant ORB, can communicate with server objects and server-side ORBs using *IIOP (Internet Inter Orb Protocol)*
 - available in all Java-enabled browsers as part of JDK 1.2
 - avoids downloading CORBA runtime
- Java Remote Method Invocation (RMI)
 - interoperability with CORBA/EJB
 - RMI over IIOP

Applet-based Architecture for Web-IS



Evaluation: Advantages

- Enhanced UI-support
 - HTML only supports presentation of alpha-numeric data, potentially in tabular form
 - applets can leverage Java to process data and visualize complex data structures (e.g., geometry/CAD data)
 - complete UI has to be implemented in Java
 - transient storage of state within applet, across multiple user interactions
- Connectivity, transactions
 - applet may connect directly to
 - DB-Server (5)
 - Connection-Server (6, 7)
 - Application-Server
 - applet state can preserve DB-connections across interactions
 - long, multi-step transactions
 - distributed transactions

Evaluation: Disadvantages

- Loading time
 - higher initial loading time due to downloading applet (application logic, UI) from web server
 - solution: persistent program cache
 - in combination with signed applets
 - applets can be held persistently at client
 - alternative: use of Java interfaces, delaying download of implementation
- Java security
 - unsigned applet can only connect back to server of origin
 - web, DB/connection server have to reside on the same machine (-> bottleneck)
 - this restriction can be avoided by using signed applets and appropriate client security policies
- No adequate support for combined client/server-side transactions
 - passing transaction context to server-side web components not supported by HTTP
- Requires enabling/allowing connection to DB server systems from web clients
 - may be suitable for the intranet
 - questionable for internet scenarios (security, firewalls, ...)

Client-Side Processing

- JavaScript
 - object-oriented scripting language (syntax similar to Java)
 - can be embedded in or referenced from within a web page
 - script can interact with the Document Object Model (DOM) of the web page
 - can manipulate the page/HTML
 - can react to user events
- Web browser
 - needs to support the JavaScript language
 - interprets the script elements
- Main use
 - implement user interface logic of a web page
 - validate web forms
 - make web pages more interactive, dynamic and responsive

Ajax

- Originally a shorthand for „Asynchronous JavaScript and XML“
- Indicates a set of technologies used for web applications
 - presentation based on XHTML, CSS
 - dynamic display and interaction using Document Object Model
 - data interchange and manipulation using XML, XSLT
 - asynchronous data retrieval using XMLHttpRequest
 - JavaScript (binding everything together)
- Ajax „variations“
 - use of another scripting language (e.g., VBScript)
 - data interchange based on JavaScript Object Notation (JSON) or others
- Main benefits
 - avoids reloading complete pages, only interacts with server for subset of the content or avoids interactions altogether
 - user perceives web application as faster, due to asynchronous loading of data
 - state preserved inside JavaScript variables across multiple interactions
 - main container page is not reloaded

Server-side Approaches

- Idea
 - web server can execute program component based on client request
 - may perform data access operations
 - can interact with other business logic components (e.g., EJBs, JavaBeans, ...)
 - program dynamically generates required resource (e.g., HTML document)
- Approaches
 - CGI programs
 - Server API
 - Java Servlets
 - Server-Side-Includes
 - Java Server Pages (JSPs)

Common Gateway Interface (CGI) Programs

- Dynamic generation of HTML documents based on CGI and HTML forms
- Web server starts CGI program in a separate process
- CGI program inspects environment variables set by web server
- Web server communicates parameters provided in HTML forms to CGI program in a well-defined manner (3)
- CGI program can access DB-server using DB client APIs (4)
- CGI program generates HTML document and returns it to the web server as the result of the program execution
- Web server passes the resulting HTML back to the client (web browser)

Server API (for Server Extensions)

- Web server vendors provide proprietary APIs to avoid creation of separate process for CGI program
- Examples:
 - NSAPI (Netscape Server API), Netscape
 - ISAPI (Internet Server API), Microsoft
- Means to extend web server capabilities with additional functions (Server Application Function, SAF) that previously had to be realized using CGI
- SAFs are provided as dynamic program libraries, linked to web server at startup time
- Web server can distinguish regular HTML document access from SAF invocation based on URL and configuration data (3)
- Performance advantage over CGI
 - avoids creation of separate process
 - DB-connection can be kept open

Java Servlets

- SUNs response to server extensions by Netscape, Microsoft for Java-based web server
- Included in JDK 1.2, supported by many web server implementations
- Supports platform-independent and vendor-independent extensibility of web servers
- Primary approach for realizing web applications in J2EE
 - web application server integrates support for and interaction of web components (e.g., servlets) and application components (EJBs)
- Requires integration of JVM in web server (8) or cooperation of web server with associated JVM process
- Follows the same model as C-based server APIs
- Additional advantage: dynamic binding of Java class loader -> uninterrupted web server execution

Server-Side Includes (SSI)

- Directives included in HTML document as HTML extensions
- Dynamically evaluated by web server when document is requested by client
- Can be used to
 - include current date, time or other status information into the web page
 - invoke applications and OS commands
 - access DB-server
- Web-server-specific extensions

Java Server Pages (JSPs)

- Server-side scripting
 - HTTP page templates contain programming instructions that are
 - to be executed by a server program (web server scripting engine)
 - to build the dynamic content (plain HTML) of the web page
 - popular approaches: PHP, Java Server Pages, ...
- JSPs are based on SSI, servlets
 - JSPs are translated (once) into servlets for execution
- Mixes static HTML with embedded JSP constructs for presenting dynamic content
 - scripting elements
 - Java code to be included in servlet
 - directives
 - controls overall structure of servlet
 - actions
 - allow for use of existing components
- Standard/custom tag libraries, invocation of JavaBeans components
 - separation of programming and page design/development concerns and roles

Session Support

- Stateful interactions may depend on the outcome of previous steps
- Server-side approaches are based on HTTP
- HTTP is a stateless protocol
 - does not provide direct support for storing information that persists across HTTP interactions
 - problems
 - DB-clients realized with CGI, Server-APIs are only "active" for the duration of a single interaction
 - no transactions across multiple requests
 - new connection has to be obtained for every HTTP request resulting in DB-access
 - negative impact on response times
- Session support is required
 - session tracking: associate all requests of a single user with a session
 - session state: state information has to be stored and managed by the server/application

Session Tracking

- Session may consist of multiple steps (e.g., managing a shopping cart)
 - client state (context) needs to be stored/managed and made available to server components
 - *Session-ID* and *User-ID* (to avoid repeated authentication) required
 - included as tokens or conversation identifiers in client/server interactions
- Common techniques
 - Form variables (hidden form fields)
 - URL encoding
 - HTTP-Cookies
 - HTTP-Authentication
- Use of the techniques
 - explicitly by the programmer
 - implicitly through higher-level programming interfaces
 - Example: HttpSession-Interface for Servlets

Form Variables

- Session-ID is included in HTML forms as a hidden variable by server
`<INPUT TYPE=HIDDEN NAME=SID VALUE=4711>`
- Value is transmitted back to web server together with form input, can be used to establish association with session context
- Can be used with all client configurations, supported for every browser and browser configuration
- Forces developer to use dynamic HTML documents with form submissions for all interactions, because Session-ID needs to be inserted into all HTML documents potentially causing subsequent stateful interactions
 - response times suffer
 - complicates application development

URL Encoding

- Encoding session/user-ID in the URL as a path parameter (“/news/overview;**id=4711**”)
 - pages are dynamic, each URL on the page is “personalized” by the server
 - client request now “re-transmits” the id
 - web server/CGI program needs to extract the ID from the URL and perform the appropriate action
- Supported in all configurations and browsers
- Again, all pages need to be dynamic!
- Overall, realization is complex, personalized URL is not user-friendly

HTTP-Cookies

- Independent of web documents
- Cookies are pieces of text that can be transmitted by the server, together with the meta data of the HTML, stored temporarily at the client
- Automatically included in web server interaction by the browser (until cookie is invalidated)
- Example:
 - the string
Set-Cookie: ID="4711"; Version="1"; Path="/catalog"; Max-Age="1800"
is transmitted to browser, together with the HTML document
 - every request to the web server that includes the subdirectory *catalog* will include
Cookie: ID=4711
 - cookie is valid only for *1800 seconds*
- Disadvantage: cookies may be disabled by the browser/client

HTTP-Authentication

- REMOTE_USER environment variable can be used by CGI program to correlate requests
- Advantage: automatically supported by browser and web server
- Disadvantage: user **registration** and authentication before **every** session

Comparison

	Form variable	URL encoding	HTTP-Cookie	HTTP-Authentication
Pros	Independent of browser type and user preferences.	Independent of browser type and user preferences.	Automatic browser support; Independent of HTML document.	Automatic browser and web server support; Independent of HTML document.
Cons	Has to be included in every HTML page to be displayed by the browser; Dynamic HTML complicates application development.	Dynamic pages; [Complex translation of HTTP requests.]	User configuration needs to permit use of cookies.	Requires user registration and authentication.

- APIs can help reduce complexity (e.g., servlet APIs)
- Problem with all techniques: choosing timeout values
 - for server-side termination of session due to inactivity of user
 - important for releasing server resources
 - suitable values for timeout are application-dependent

Summary

- Web-based applications become ubiquitous, concepts for web-based IS are therefore increasingly important
 - web browser as a simple, uniform user interface
 - networks become more powerful
- Server-side, HTTP-based approaches suitable for wide range of applications
 - server components
 - server-side scripting
- Client-side, applet-based approaches may be suitable for
 - applications with specific UI requirements
 - data access in intranet environments
- Techniques for managing session state
 - URL encoding, HTTP-Cookies most commonly used