Virtual Memory

Explicit Memory Management

Freelists

Buddy System

Outline

- Virtual memory
- Explicit memory management
- Garbage collection techniques
  - Reference counting
  - Mark and sweep
  - Copying GC
  - Concurrent/incremental GC
  - Generational GC
- Book: "Garbage Collection", by R. Jones and R. Lins

Explicit Memory Management

- Unix (libc) interface:
  - `void* malloc(long n)`: allocate n bytes of storage on the heap and return its address
  - `void free(void *addr)`: release storage allocated by `malloc` at address `addr`
- User-level library manages heap, issues `brk` calls when necessary

Freelists

- Blocks of unused memory stored in freelist(s)
  - `malloc`: find usable block on freelist
  - `free`: put block onto head of freelist
  - `Freeist pointer`
  - `heap`
- Simple, but fragmentation ruins the heap
- External fragmentation = small free blocks become scattered in the heap
- Cannot allocate a large block even if the sum of all free blocks is larger than the requested size

Buddy System

- Idea 1: freelists for different allocation sizes
  - `malloc`, `free` are O(1)
- Idea 2: freelist sizes are powers of two: 2, 4, 8, 16, ...
  - Blocks subdivided recursively: each has buddy
  - Round requested block size to the nearest power of 2
  - Allocate a free block if available
  - Otherwise, (recursively) split a larger block and put all the other blocks in the free list
- Internal fragmentation: allocate larger blocks because of rounding
- Trade external fragmentation for internal fragmentation
Explicit Garbage Collection

- Java, C, C++ have new operator / malloc call that allocates new memory
- How do we get memory back when the object is not needed any longer?
- Explicit garbage collection (C, C++)
  - delete operator / free call destroys object, allows reuse of its memory: programmer decides how to collect garbage
  - makes modular programming difficult—have to know what code "owns" every object so that objects are deleted exactly once

Automatic Garbage Collection

- The other alternative: automatically collect garbage!
- Usually most complex part of the run-time environment
- Want to delete objects automatically if they won’t be used again: undecidable
- Conservative: delete only objects that definitely won’t be used again
- Reachability: objects definitely won’t be used again if there is no way to reach them from root references that are always accessible (globals, stack, registers)

Object Graph

- Stack, registers are treated as the roots of the object graph.
- Anything not reachable from roots is garbage
- How can non-reachable objects be reclaimed efficiently?
  Compiler can help

Algorithm 1: Reference Counting

- Idea: associate a reference count with each allocated block (reference count = the number of references (pointers) pointing to the block)
- Keep track of reference counts
  - For an assignment x = Expr, increment the reference count of the new block x is pointing to
  - Also decrement the reference count of the block x was previously pointing to
- When number of incoming pointers is zero, object is unreachable: garbage

Reference Counts

- ... how about cycles?

Reference Counts

- Reference counting doesn’t detect cycles!
**Performance Problems**

- Consider assignment: \( x.f = y \)
- Without ref-counts: \([tx+ \text{ off}] = ty\)
- With ref-counts:
  \[ t_1 = [tx + f.\text{ off}]; \ c = [t_1 + \text{ refcnt}]; \ c = c - 1; \ [t_1 + \text{ refcnt}] = c; \]
  \( \text{if } (c \neq 0) \text{ goto } L_1 \text{ else goto } L_2; \]
  \( L_1: \text{call release}_Y \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_object(t_1); \ L_2: \ c = [ty + \text{ refcnt}]; \ c = c + 1; \ [ty + \text{ refcnt}] = c; \ [tx + f.\text{ off}] = ty; \)
- Data-flow analysis can be used to avoid unnecessary increments & decrements
- Large run-time overhead
- Result: reference counting not used much by real language implementations

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**Algorithm 2: Mark and Sweep**

- Classic algorithm with two phases
- **Phase 1:** Mark all reachable objects
  - start from roots and traverse graph forward marking every object reached
- **Phase 2:** Sweep up the garbage
  - Walk over all allocated objects and check for marks
  - Unmarked objects are reclaimed
  - Marked objects have their marks cleared
  - Optional: compact all live objects in heap

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**Traversing the Object Graph**

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**Implementing Mark Phase**

- Mark and sweep generally implemented as depth-first traversal of object graph
- Has natural recursive implementation
- What happens when we try to mark a long linked list recursively?

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**Pointer Reversal**

- **Idea:** during DFS, each pointer only followed once. Can reverse pointers after following them -- no stack needed! (Deutsch-Waite-Schorr algorithm)

- **Implication:** objects are broken while being traversed; all computation over objects must be halted during mark phase (oops)

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**Cost of Mark and Sweep**

- Mark and sweep accesses all memory in use by program
  - Mark phase reads only live (reachable) data
  - Sweep phase reads all of the data (live + garbage)
- Hence, run time proportional to total amount of data!
- Can pause program for long periods!
**Conservative Mark and Sweep**
- Allocated storage contains both pointers and non-pointers; integers may look like pointers
- Issues: precise versus conservative collection
- Treating a pointer as a non-pointer: objects may be garbage-collected even though they are still reachable and in use (unsafe)
- Treating a non-pointer as a pointer: objects are not garbage collected even though they are not pointed to (safe, but less precise)
- Conservative collection: assumes things are pointers unless they can’t be; requires no language support (works for C!)

**Algorithm 3: Copying Collection**
- Like mark & sweep: collects all garbage
- Basic idea: use two memory heaps
  - one heap in use by program
  - other sits idle until GC requires it
- GC mechanism:
  - copy all live objects from active heap (from-space) to the other (to-space)
  - dead objects discarded during the copy process
  - heaps then switch roles
- Issue: must rewrite referencing relations between objects

**Copying Collection (Cheney)**
- Copy = move all root objects from from-space to to-space
- From space traversed breadth-first from roots, objects encountered are copied to top of to-space.

**Benefits of Copying Collection**
- Once scan=next, all uncopied objects are garbage. Root pointers (registers, stack) are swung to point into to-space, making it active
- Good:
  - Simple, no stack space needed
  - Run time proportional to # live objects
  - Automatically eliminates fragmentation by compacting memory
  - malloc(n) implemented as (top = top + n)
- Bad:
  - Precise pointer information required
  - Twice as much memory used

**Incremental and Concurrent GC**
- GC pauses avoided by doing GC incrementally; collector & program run at same time
- Program only holds pointers to to-space
- On field fetch, if pointer to from-space, copy object and fix pointer
- On swap, copy roots and fix stack/registers

**Generational GC**
- Observation: if an object has been reachable for a long time, it is likely to remain so
- In long-running system, mark & sweep, copying collection waste time, cache scanning/copying older objects
- Approach: assign heap objects to different generations $G_0, G_1, G_2, \ldots$
- Generation $G_0$ contains newest objects, most likely to become garbage (<10% live)
Generations

- Consider a two-generation system. G₀ = new objects, G₁ = tenured objects
- New generation is scanned for garbage much more often than tenured objects
- New objects eventually given tenure if they last long enough
- Roots of garbage collection for collecting G₀ include all objects in G₁ (as well as stack, registers)

Remembered Set

- How to avoid scanning all tenured objects?
- In practice, few tenured objects will point to new objects; unusual for an object to point to a newer object
- Can only happen if older object is modified long after creation to point to new object
- Compiler inserts extra code on object field pointer writes to catch modifications to older objects—older objects are remembered set for scanning during GC, tiny fraction of G₁

Summary

- Garbage collection is an aspect of the program environment with implications for compilation
- Important language feature for writing modular code
- IC: Bohm/Demers/Weiser collector
  – conservative: no compiler support needed
  – generational: avoids touching lots of memory
  – incremental: avoids long pauses
  – true concurrent (multi-processor) extension exist