Programming Language (9)
Garbage Collection

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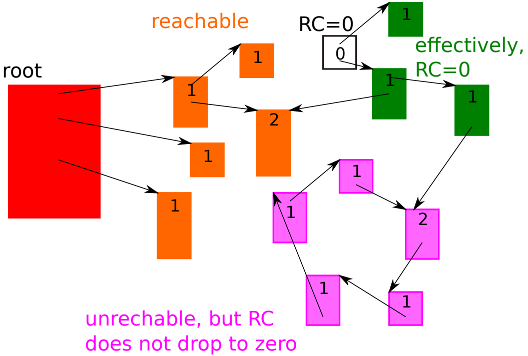
Evaluating GCs

1. preciseness:
   - garbage that can be collected
2. memory allocation cost:
   - the work (including GC) required to allocate memory
3. pause time:
   - the (worst case) time the mutator has to (temporarily) suspend for GC to function
4. mutator overhead:
   - the overhead imposed on the mutator for GC to function

Criteria #1: preciseness

- *reference counting cannot reclaim cyclic garbage*
- reference count < traversing GC (traversing GC is better)



Criteria #2: memory allocation cost

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  - *the cost is determined by the ratio "reachable objects" / "unreachable (reclaimed) objects"* (later)
  - totally depending on apps and memory size, it can be anywhere from the minimum to infinity
  - an advanced technique: generational GC

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  - *the cost is determined by the ratio "reachable objects" / "unreachable (reclaimed) objects"* (later)
  - totally depending on apps and memory size, it can be anywhere from the minimum to infinity
  - an advanced technique: generational GC
- reference counting:
  - the cost of reclaiming an object once its RC drop to zero is small and constant
  - it is constant even if memory is scarce (good)

Criteria #3: pause time

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  - why so? troubled if the mutator runs (= changes the graph of objects) during traversing
    - a solution: incremental GC
    - generational GCs mitigate it too

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  - why so? troubled if the mutator runs (= changes the graph of objects) during traversing
    - a solution: incremental GC
    - generational GCs mitigate it too
- reference counting:
  - when an object's RC drops to zero (as a result of mutator's action), it can be reclaimed immediately
  - reclaim garbage as they arise

Criteria #4: mutator overhead

- traversing < reference counting (traversing GC is better)
- reference counting has a large overhead for updating RCs

```
object * p, * q;
p = q;
```

will do:

```
if (p) p->rc--;
if (q) q->rc++;
p = q;
```

Moreover,

  - what about multithreaded programs?
  - what if the counter overflows (how to check it)?
- techniques: deferred reference counting, sticky reference counting, 1 bit reference counting
- remark: some traversing GCs (e.g., generational and incremental) add overhead to pointer updates too

Summary

	traversing	reference counting
preciseness	$+$	$-$
allocation cost	? $(*)$	$+$
pause time	$-$ $(\dagger)$	$+$
mutator overhead	$+$ $(\ddagger)$	$-$

$(*)$ depends on size of reachable graph and memory; generational garbage collector helps

$(\dagger)$ incremental garbage collector helps

$(\ddagger)$ both generational and incremental garbage collectors impose some mutator overheads

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mark&sweep GC vs. copying GC

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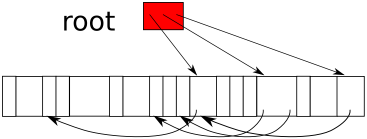
mark&sweep GC vs. copying GC

they differ in what to do on reachable objects

- mark&sweep GC: mark them as “visited”
- copying GC: copy them into a distinct (contiguous) region

Mark&sweep GC

1. mark-phase:
   - traverses objects from the root, *marking* objects it encounters
   - maintains *mark stack (not shown in the figure)*, marked objects whose children may have not been marked (= light gray objects)
2. sweep phase:
   - reclaims all memory blocks that were not visited
   - free memory blocks are not contiguous, so must be managed by an appropriate data structure *(free lists)*



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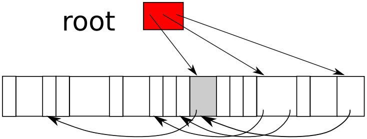

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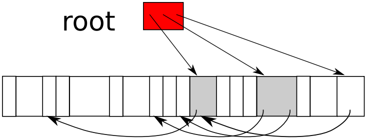

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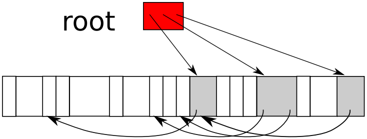

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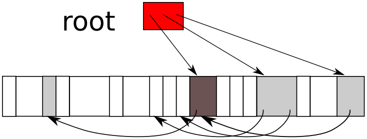

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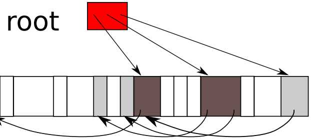

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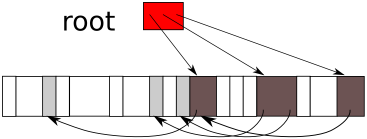

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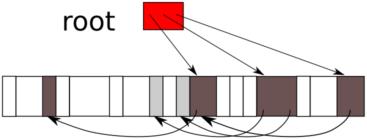

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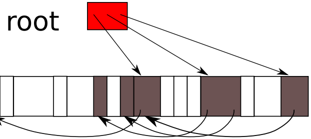
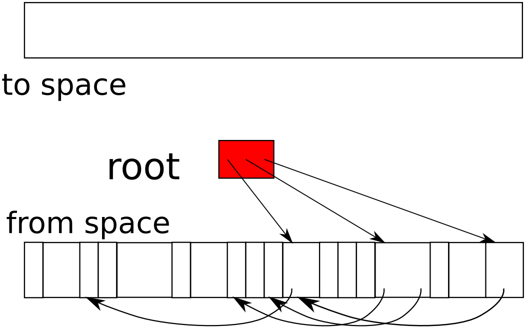


Copying GC

- in essence, ≈ copying a graph (≈ serialization)
  - the same pointers must remain the same after the copy
- semi-space GC (copy all objects reachable from the root into another space)



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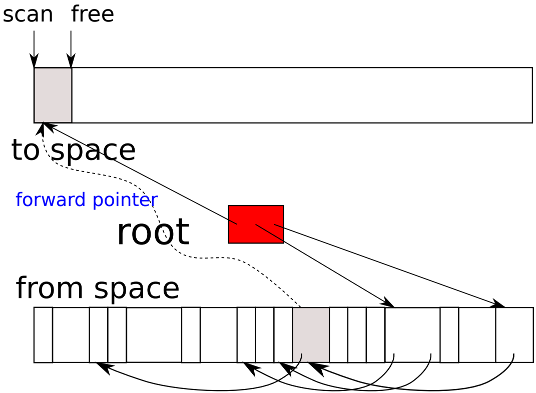

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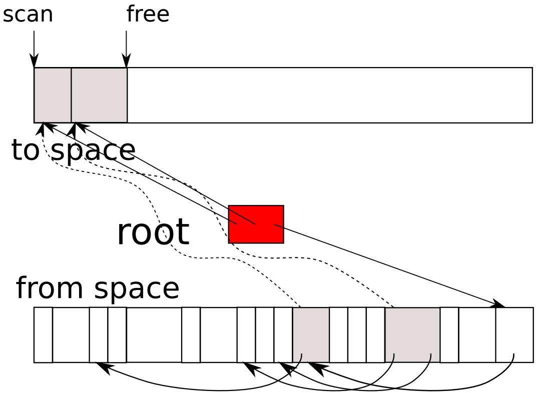

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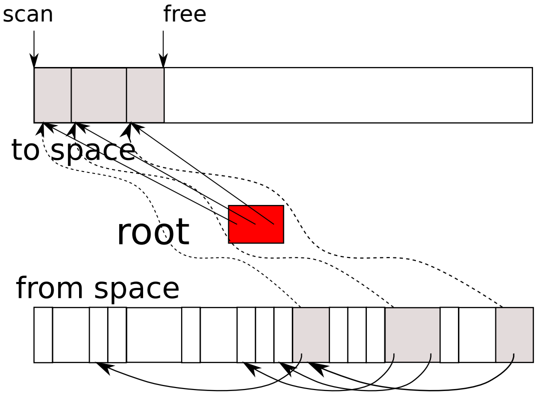

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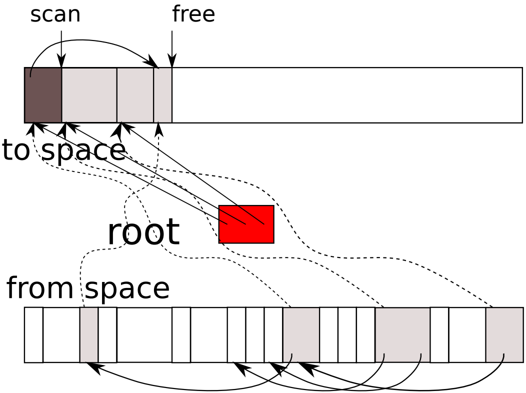

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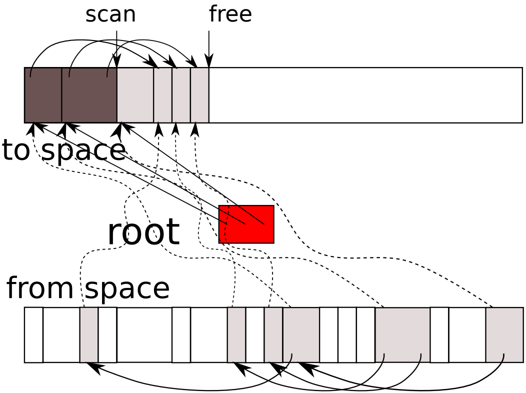

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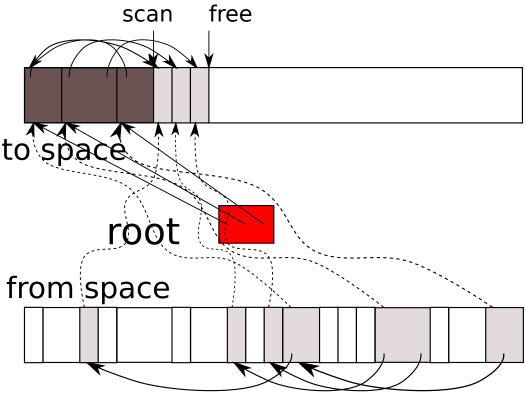

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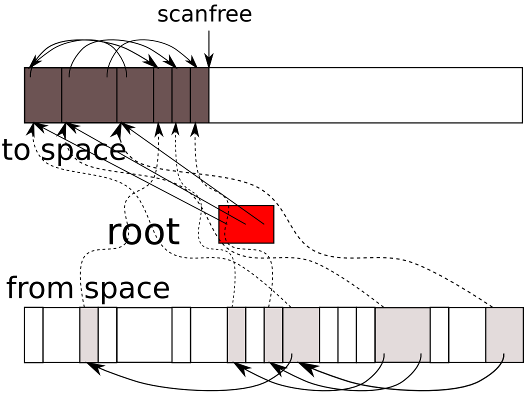

Copying GC: algorithm

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void *free, *scan;
copy_gc() {
  free = scan = to_space;
  redirect_ptrs(root);
  while (scan < free) {
    redirect_ptrs(scan);
    scan += the size of object scan points to;
  }
}
redirect_ptrs(void * o) {
  for (p ∈ pointers in o) {
    if (p has been copied) {
      p = p's forward pointer;
    } else {
      copy p to free;
      p = free;
      p's forward pointer = free;
      free += the size of object p points to;
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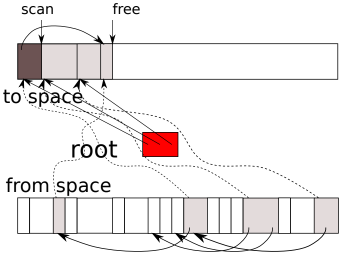
invariant

- $p <$ **scan** $\Rightarrow p$ has been reached; so has its direct children
- $p <$ **free** $\Rightarrow p$ has been reached; but its children may not



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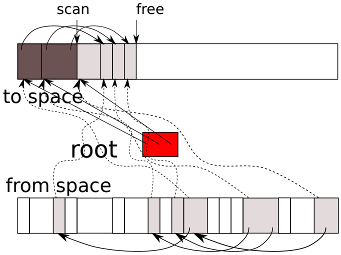


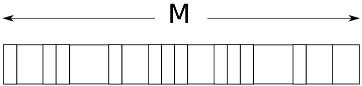
Mark&sweep vs. copying GC

- copying GC pros:
  - live objects occupy a contiguous region after a GC
  - → the free region becomes contiguous too
  - → the overhead for memory allocation is small (no need to "search" the free region)
- copying GC cons:
  - copy is expensive, obviously
  - the free region must be reserved to accommodate objects copied (low memory utilization)
    - must ensure "size of objects that may be copied" ≤ "size of the region to copy them into"
    - → "from space" = "to space"
  - pointers must be "precisely" distinguished from non-pointers (ambiguous pointers are not allowed)
    - pointers are updated to the destinations of copies
    - a disaster occurs if you update non-pointers

Contents

Memory allocation cost of traversing GCs

- let's quantify the cost of allocating a byte including GC's work
- assume:
  - heap size (size of a semi-space in case of copying GC) = M
  - reached objects = r
  - assume for the sake of argument it's *always* r



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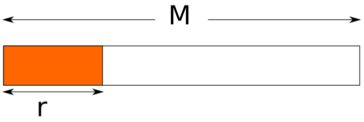

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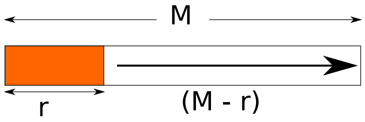

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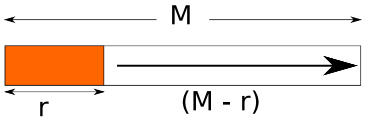
  1. a GC occurs $\rightarrow$ scan (or copy) r bytes, to make a free space of $(M - r)$ bytes
  2. allocate $(M - r)$ bytes without triggering a GC
- a key observation

  the time (cost) of a single GC is roughly proportional to the amount of reached objects (i.e., $\propto r$)



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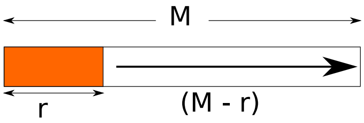

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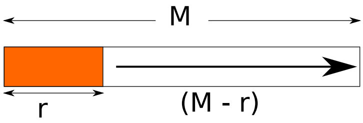
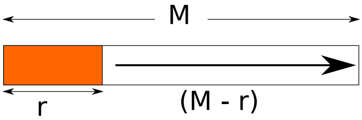


$\therefore$ the cost of allocating a byte

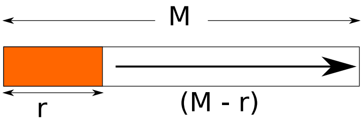
Memory allocation cost of traversing GCs



$$\therefore \quad \text{the cost of allocating a byte}$$
$$= \alpha + \frac{\text{the amount of time spent on a GC}}{\text{the amount of space reclaimed by a GC}}$$

- α : a constant cost needed anyway, even if you don't need to reclaim memory at all

Memory allocation cost of traversing GCs



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= \quad & \alpha + \beta \frac{\text{the amount of space visited by a GC}}{\text{the amount of space reclaimed by a GC}}
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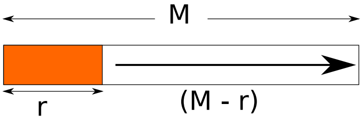
Memory allocation cost of traversing GCs



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= \quad & \alpha + \beta \frac{\text{the amount of space visited by a GC}}{\text{the amount of space reclaimed by a GC}} \\
= \quad & \alpha + \beta \frac{r}{M - r}
\end{aligned}
$$

- α : a constant cost needed anyway, even if you don't need to reclaim memory at all
- β : an average cost to examine a single byte
  - copy it (in a copying GC)
  - see if it is a pointer to an unvisited object

Note on copying GC vs mark-sweep GC

- the key observation

  the time (cost) of a single GC is roughly proportional to the amount of reached objects (i.e., $\propto r$)

  ignores the cost of so-called "sweep phase"
- a more accurate quantification will be

$$\text{the time (cost) of a single GC} \approx \beta r + \gamma(M - r),$$

  which adds a constant (γ) to an allocation cost per byte, which any memory allocator will incur anyway
- i.e., the cost will be

$$\begin{aligned} & \alpha + \frac{\beta r + \gamma(M - r)}{M - r} \\ = \quad & \alpha + \gamma + \beta \frac{r}{M - r} \end{aligned}$$

Memory allocation cost of traversing GCs

- important formula:

$$\text{allocation cost per byte} \propto \text{const.} + \frac{r}{M - r}$$

- $r/(M - r)$ is often called *mark-cons ratio*. its origin:
  - mark : the amount of work to *mark* reachable objects
  - cons : the synonym of memory allocation in the ancient Lisp language =`(cons x y)`

Memory allocation cost of traversing GCs

$$\text{cost per byte} \propto \text{const.} + \frac{r}{M - r}$$

- r (primarily) depends only on app (not dependent of GCs)
  - remark: r may fluctuate depending on “when” GCs occur
- M is an adjustable parameter (up to GC’s choice)
- M is large $\rightarrow$ the cost is small
- $\rightarrow$ you can reduce the cost by making M (memory usage) larger
- may sound obvious, but remember that what is important is the cost *per allocation (byte)*, not the frequency of GCs

How large do we make M (memory usage)?

- alright, the larger we make M, the smaller the cost becomes
  - $\rightarrow$ why don't we make it arbitrarily large (up to physical memory)?
- we normally set M "modestly", like:

$$M \propto r$$

  e.g., choose a constant $k > 1$ and set:

$$M = kr$$

- a GC measures the amount of reachable objects to get r and set M according to the above formula

How large do we make M (memory usage)?

- in this setting,
  - cost
    $$\text{mark-cons ratio} = \frac{r}{kr - r} = \frac{1}{k-1} = \text{const}$$
  - memory usage
    $$\propto \text{the size of reachable objects at a point during execution}$$

  both are "reasonable"
- most GCs allow you to set k (or M directly)
- normally, $k = 1.5 \sim 2$, but it is worth knowing that you can reduce the cost by setting it large

Contents

Generational GC: introduction

- objective: reduce *mark-cons ratio* in traversing GCs
- how: traverse and reclaim only *recently created objects (young generation)*
  - traverse only young generations often
  - traverse the entire heap occasionally when it does not reclaim enough space
- why does it work?

mark-cons ratio (review)

$$
\begin{aligned}
& \text{GC overhead} \\
\equiv \; & \text{GC's work per allocating a byte}
\end{aligned}
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- *the less reachable space there are, the smaller it becomes*

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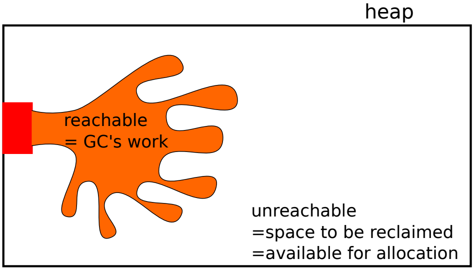
- *the less reachable space there are, the smaller it becomes*
- below, we simply say an object is "alive" when it is "reachable from the root" (strictly, not a correct usage)

Generational GC: the basic idea

- basic idea: traverse (collect) only *a region that has a lesser live object ratio*



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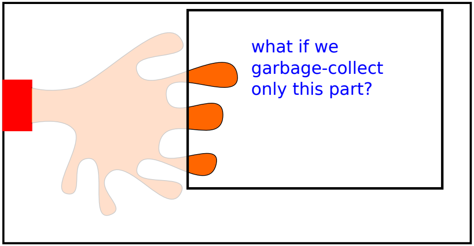

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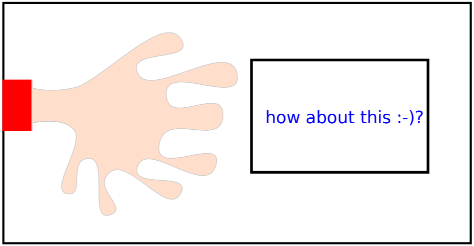

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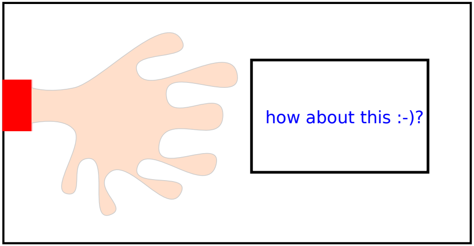

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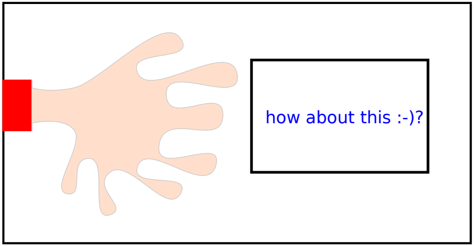

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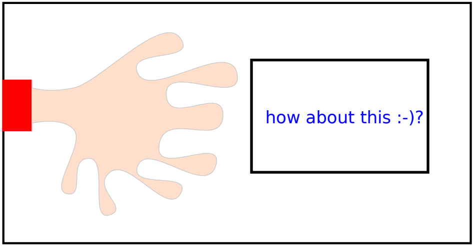

- two problems:
  1. where to target: *which region has a lesser live object ratio?*
  2. correctness: how to find all live objects in a region, *by traversing "only" that region?*

Problem 1: where generational GC targets

a region holding young (recently created) objects

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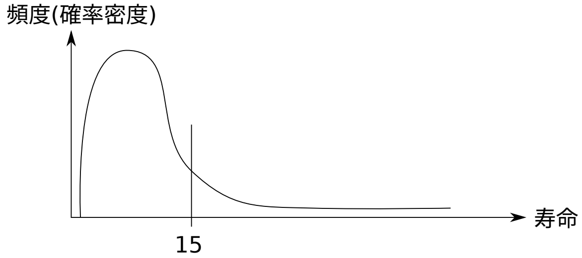
a region holding young (recently created) objects

Q: why (or when) is this effective?

(Weak) generational hypothesis

- *"most objects die young"*
- it seems to hold in most languages (where all memory allocations are served from the heap)



Studies on (weak) generational hypothesis

- studies show *"a (large) fraction d of objects die before a (young) age y"* in various languages
  - note: an "age" of an object o = the total size of memory allocated after o is created (that is, *the time is measured by the amount of memory allocation*)

authors	lang.	mortality rate (d)	age (y)
Zorn	Common Lisp	50-90%	10KB
Sanson and Jones	Haskell	75-95%	10KB
Hayes	Cedar	99%	721KB
Appel	SML/NJ	98%	varies
Barret and Zorn	C	50%	10KB
	C	90%	32KB

source: Richard Jones and Rafael Lins. "Garbage Collection. Algorithms for Automatic Memory Management" Chapter 7.1

“most objects die young” and a rational of generational GCs

- say 90% die younger than 10KB, then

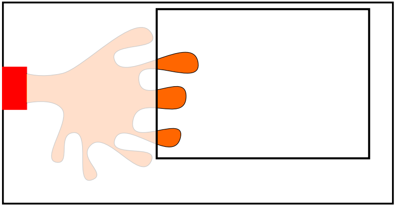
  mark-cons ratio when traversing most recent 10KB ≈ 0.1

- if we use heap 2-3 times larger than the live objects,

  the ratio when traversing the entire heap $\approx 1/3 \sim 1/2 > 0.1$

Problem 2: how to make it correct?

- we need to find all young objects reachable from the root, through "*all pointers, young or old*"
- simply ignoring old objects won't work



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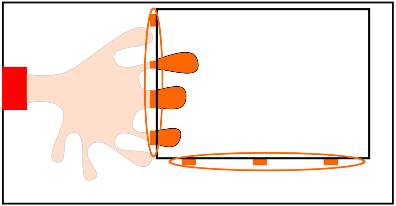

- solution: *record "all" pointers from "old → young"* during the execution and consider them as part of the root

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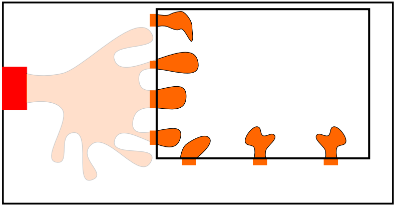

- solution: *record "all" pointers from "old → young"* during the execution and consider them as part of the root
- note: some may not be reclaimed, despite being unreachable from the root

Write barrier

- an intervention in mutator actions to capture all "old $\rightarrow$ young" pointers
- mutator actions that need an intervention: assignments:

  (possibly) old object's field $\leftarrow$ (possibly) young object

- in OCaml,

expression	description	need intervention?
`o.x <- a`	update a mutable field	yes
`{ x = ...; ...}`	create a record etc.	no
`let b = o.x`	initialize a variable	no

- hopefully they rarely occur in "mostly functional" languages

Implementing Write Barrier (1) Remembered Set

- given

```
o.x <- a;
```

we do

```
if (generation(a) < generation(o)) {
  if (o ∉ R) add(R, o)
}
```

- the overhead is large
  - obtain `generation(·)` (address comparison in copying GC)
  - check if `o` $\in$ `R`
  - manage `R`

Implementing Write Barrier (2) Card Marking

- basic idea: unconditionally record addresses pointers are written to
- partition the heap into constant-sized "cards"
  - a card: a region whose addresses share a number of most significant bits
    - e.g., share the highest 57 of 64 bit addresses
    - $\rightarrow$ a single card $2^7 = 128$ bytes

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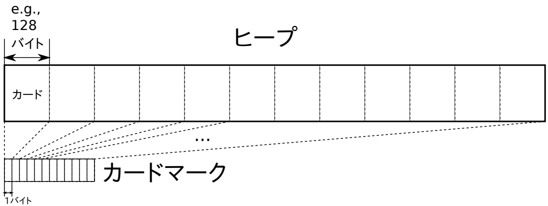

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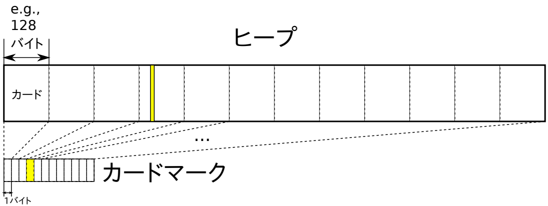


- record only whether each card receives any pointer write (1 byte/card; card mark)

- e.g.: given the following pointer update,

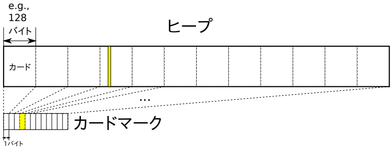
```
o->x <- y;
```

unconditionally record “a card containing `&o->x` is written”

```
C[(&o->x) >> 9] = 1;
```

C is the base address to obtain the card address. that is,

```
C[heap >> 9] == card
```



Card-marking : Pros and Cons

- a small write barrier overhead (if you hold C in a register, it takes three RISC instructions)

```
C[(&o->x) >> 9] = 1;
```

- memory overhead adjustable by adjusting card size (e.g. a card is 128 bytes $\rightarrow$ 1/128)
- you cannot efficiently list written cards; you must check all cards ($\propto$ heap)
- when any address of a card is written, we must consider all addresses of the card a root

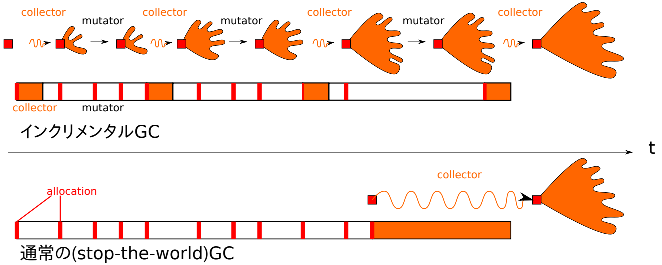
Contents

Incremental GC

- objective: *reduce the "pause time"* of traversing GC
  - good for applications that need real time or interactive responses
- recall that pause time $\approx$ time to traverse all reachable objects

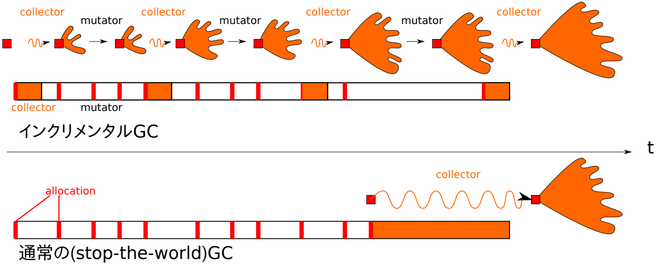
Incremental GC

- objective: *reduce the "pause time"* of traversing GC
  - good for applications that need real time or interactive responses
- recall that pause time ≈ time to traverse all reachable objects
- how: by traversing reachable objects *"a little bit at a time"*
  - instead of traversing 1 GB in one stroke, traverse 10 MB at a time, 100 times



Challenges in incremental GC

- (from GC's view point) *the object graph changes while GC is traversing it*



- how to guarantee it does not miss any reachable object?
- ⇒ we'll get back to the basics of graph traversal

Assumptions for later discussions

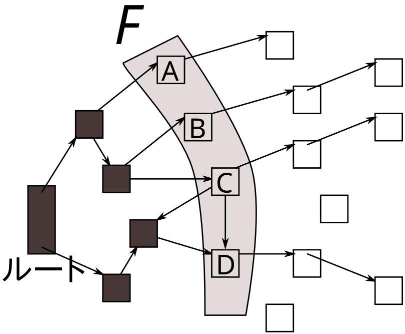
- only a single mutator (the app is single-threaded)
- the mutator and the collector run *“alternately” (not at the same time)*
  - the collector does a little bit of its work upon a memory allocation
- i.e., we do not consider race conditions that would happen when they are truly concurrent

Graph traversal : basics

- traversing GC ≈ graph traversal
- the principle is the same whether it's mark&sweep or copying

- omitting details, it is:

```
F = { root };
while (F is not empty) {
  o = pop(F);
  for (all pointers p in o)
    if (!marked(p)) {
      mark(p);
      add(F, p);
    }
}
```



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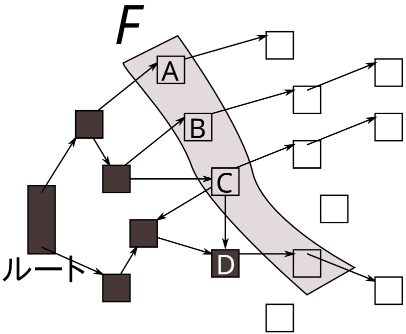
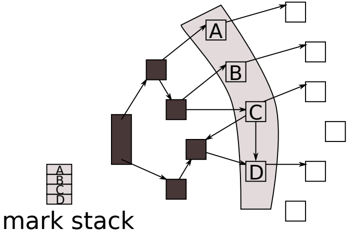
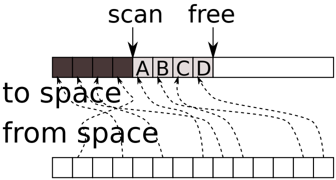


Key data : the frontier

- *F* : frontier
- the set of objects that have been visited but whose children may have not
- the actual data structure
  - mark&sweep : mark stack
  - copying : a part of the to space



mark&sweep



copying

The issue that an incremental GC must address

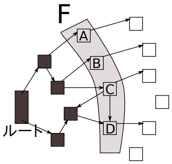
```
F = { root };
while (F is not empty) {
  o = pop(F);
  for (all pointers p in o)
    if (!marked(p)) {
      mark(p);
      add(F, p);
    }
  if (has iterated a few times)
    // the graph changes below
    resume_mutator();
}
```

- ordinary GC: the while loop runs until the end keeping the mutator stopped → the object graph does not change during the loop
- incremental GC:
  - *the collector gets interrupted by the mutator every once in a while*
  - … and continues after a while
  - that is, the issues is how to do with the fact that *the graph may change between iterations of the while loop*

The tri-color abstraction

- likens a graph traversal to coloring its nodes
- visiting an object ≈ coloring an object
  - black: the object and its children have been visited
  - gray: it has been visited but its children may not
  - white: it has not been visited
- the graph traversal using the tri-color abstraction

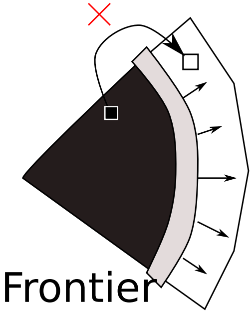
```
gray the root;
while (there is a gray object) {
  o = pick a gray object and blacken it;
  for (all pointers in o)
    if (p points to a white object)
      gray it;
  the mutator changes the graph;  }
```



- correctness of the algorithm: *when there are no gray objects, all objects reachable from the root are black (i.e., white objects are unreachable)*

A problematic mutation to the graph

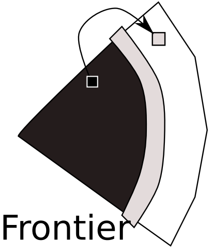
- intuitively, *the issue seems the mutator may create "black → white" pointers*
  - black: GC thinks it has "done" with it
  - white: going to be reclaimed, unless found in other paths
- ⇒ prevent "black → white pointers" from being created

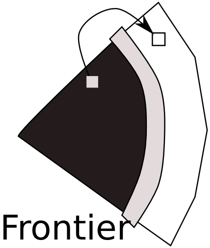


Two approaches to preventing black→white

capture the point where "black→white" is about to be created

1. approach #1: gray the white (make black→gray)
   - pros: the frontier always progresses
   - pros: easier to work with for copying GCs
   - cons: reclaim less objects. even if white becomes unreachable due to another update to black, it won't be reclaimed (by the current GC)
2. approach #2: get the black back to gray (make gray→white)
   - pros: reclaim more objects
   - cons: the frontier retreats





Mutator actions that need to be captured

naively all pointer movements must be captured

- write a pointer into an object field (write barrier)

```
o->x = p
```

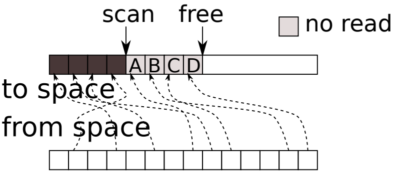
- write a pointer into a root ≡ write a pointer to a variable (read barrier)

```
p = o->x
```

the latter is so frequent that some approaches avoid them (example #2: Boehm GC)

Example #1: Appel-Ellis-Li

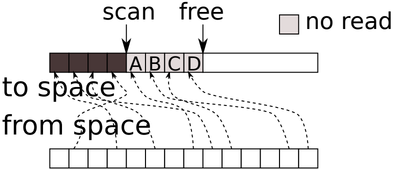
- copying GC + incremental
- based on the approach # 1. more precisely, maintain the following invariant
  the mutator never sees a pointer to white
- how?
  - intervene in reading a field from gray objects (read barrier)
- read-protect the region of gray objects ⊂ scan ∼ free, by the virtual memory primitive of operating systems



Appel-Ellis-Li : the read barrier in action

- when a field of a gray object is read, blacken objects in the page containing it (= scan those objects → they become gray)

```
trap_read_from_grey(a) {
  page = the page including a;
  for (all objects o in the page) {
    scan(o); // copy o's children
  }
  unprotect(page);
}
```



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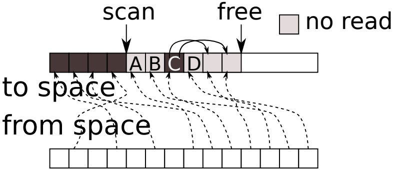
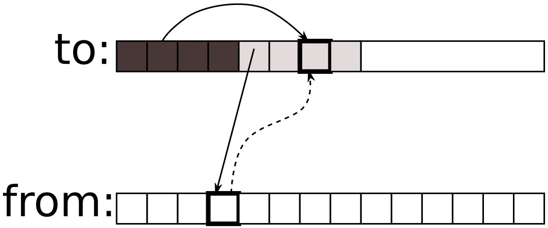


Remark : it's easier for copying GC

- during a copying GC, there are two versions of each visited object (one in the from space and the other in the to space)
- immutable objects do not care which one the mutator sees, but mutable ones do
- it will eventually see the one in to space anyways, so it's natural to maintain "it never sees the one in the from space"
- $\rightarrow$ it's natural to let the mutator never see (get a pointer to) a white object



Example #2: Boehm GC

- conservative GC (→ mark&sweep) + incremental
- invariants:
  - "non-root black → white" pointers never exist
- how?
  - capture *"writing to an object field" (write barrier)*
- remark: "root → white" pointers *may* exist
  - prevention requires us to capture writing to the root → *reading* from an object
  - the overhead is so large that it deserves a separate treatment (covered later)

Write barrier in Boehm GC

- capture writing into objects by virtual memory (the only choice in C/C++)
- gray the "written-to" object
  - push it onto the mark stack
- no read barriers → "root (black) → white" pointers are allowed
- at the end of a mark phase, it traverses from the root again
- during this second traversal, the mutator is stopped → it may cause a long pause time

Appendix: a more rigorous correctness proof

- while it is clear "black→white" pointers cause a problem, it is not trivial that preventing them is sufficient to solve the problem
- the proposition to prove: after the following algorithm finished,

  reachable from the root → black

```
gray the root;
while (there are gray objects) {
  o = pick and blacken a gray object;
  for (pointers p in o)
    if (p points to a white object)
      gray it;
  the mutator changes the graph in such a way
  that does not create black → white pointer;
}
```

The key invariant

- the following "always" holds during the execution (GC or mutator)
  (I): all "white" objects reachable from the root are reachable from some "gray" objects

- if this is true,

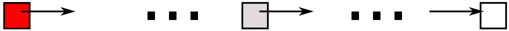
  (I) and the termination condition (i.e. there are no grays)
  → no white objects are reachable from the root
  → white objects can be reclaimed

  and we are done. the only remaining task is to prove (I).

Proof of (I)

- say w is a white object reachable from the root

- since the root is always black or gray and there are no "black $\rightarrow$ white" pointers ($*$), there must be a gray object on each path P from the root to w (QED).



- ($*$) : you need to show that not only the mutator but also the collector never creates "black $\rightarrow$ white" pointers. it's easy and left as an exercise.

Contents

Contents

Managing and finding free space

- in any method except for copying GC (mark&sweep GC, reference counting, malloc/free), free space are not contiguous
- → tracking and managing free blocks is required
- goal:
  - good allocation speed: quickly find a region that fits the request size
  - good memory utilization: do not waste available space
- basic data structure: free list (list of free blocks)

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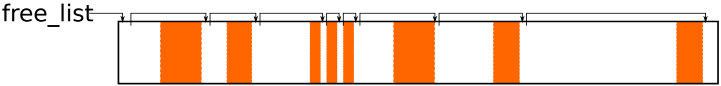
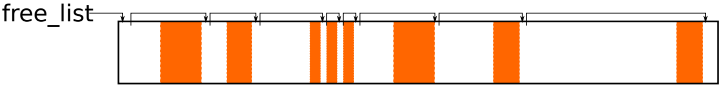


Free list

- list of free blocks (or cells)

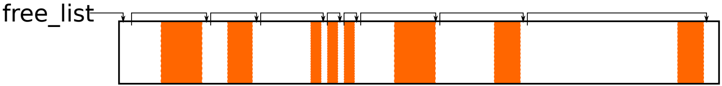
```
typedef struct cell {
  struct cell * next;
  size_t sz;
  /* other info as necessary */
} cell;
cell * free_list;
```

- allocation (malloc) ≈
  1. (linearly) search for a cell large enough for the requested size
  2. if a free space remains in the cell, put it back to the free list
- reclamation (free) ≈
  1. put it back to the free list (issue: how to know its size?)
  2. if the cell just freed is adjacent to another free cell, merge them (coalescing)



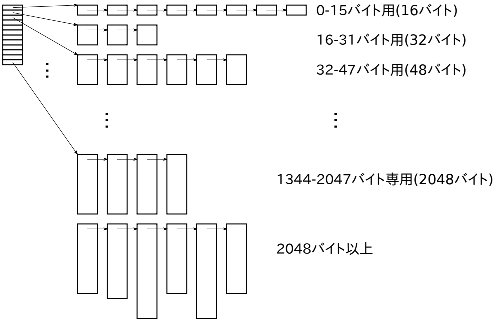
Issues in the simple method

- allocation:
  - needs to traverse a fair amount of cells (until you find a cell that fits)
  - → make many free lists, one for a fixed size (*segregated free lists*)
- reclamation:
  - needs to check if coalescing is possible
  - needs to know the size of the freed cell
  - → manage memory in a larger unit (*page*) and dedicate a page to a single size (*Big Bags of Pages; BiBOP*)



Segregated free lists

- for small sizes (e.g., < 2KB), make a free list for various representative sizes
- a single list for large sizes
- ex:
  - 16, 32, 48, 64, . . . , 448, 512, 672, 800, 1024, 1344, 2048
  - 2048 bytes or larger



Allocation sequence

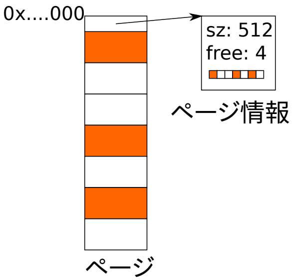
- Colored: a fast path for small objects
- blue: the overhead removable if the size (sz) is a compile-time constant
- red: the essential cost. traverse a list once (6-7 instructions)
- note: in multithreaded programs, we either have to
  - let each thread have its own `free_lists`, or
  - atomically perform the read-modify-write on `free_lists` (this hinders scalability)

```
void ** free_lists;

void * malloc(size_t sz) {
  if (SMALL(sz)) {
    size_t idx =
         bytes_to_idx(sz);
    cell * a =
         free_lists[idx];
    if (a) {
      free_lists[idx] =
         a->next;
      return a;
    } else {
      return malloc_slow(sz);
    }
  } else {
    return malloc_slow(sz);
  }
}
```

Big Bags of Pages

- manage the heap by dividing it into constant-sized blocks (page)
  - a page: a set of addresses sharing a number of highest bits
  - e.g. 64 bit addresses, sharing the highest 52 bits $\rightarrow 2^{12} = 4096$ bytes/page
- each page is either
  - completely free or
  - used only for a single size (e.g., only for 48 bytes)



- Coalescing: repurpose a page only when the page becomes completely empty
  - $\rightarrow$ only need to count the number of free cells in the page
- does not require per-object size field either

Contents

Improving performance of mark&sweep GC

- overall structure:
  1. mark phase: traverses pointers from the root, marking reached objects along the way
  2. sweep phase: reclaims unmarked objects → pushes them back to an appropriate free list
- basics:
  - segregated free lists
  - BiBOP
  - mark bits separated from objects
  - lazy sweep

Separated mark bits

- question: where do you put the mark bit of an object?
- Method 1: use a word within an object
- Method 2: use a separate space dedicated for mark-bits outside objects
  - where is the separate space, exactly? → page header; holds mark bits of all the objects in the page together (1 byte/object)

```
mark(void * o) {
  page * page = o & 0xFFF...000; /* page header address */
  page->header->mark[(o & 0x000...FFF) >> 4] = 1;
}
```

  - point: gather spaces that are written

Lazy sweep

- why do we need to sweep: reclaim space that has become free
- naturally, you would put them back to an appropriate free list (cf. BiBOP)
- lazy sweep: defer this operation until you need to allocate them

Overview of the sweep phase

- after a mark phase is finished, a page is either
  - empty: zero objects have been reached
  - partial: > 0 objects have been reached, > 0 objects have not been reached
  - full: zero objects have not been reached
- a naive implementation of a sweep phase:

```
for (all pages p) {
  if (p is empty) {
    put p in the empty page list;
    /* can be repurposed for any size */
  } else if (p is partial) {
    sz = the size of objects in the page;
    put free cells in p to the free list fo sz bytes;
  }
}
```

Lazy sweep

- does not rebuild free lists immediately
- instead puts the page into the list of “to-reclaim” pages

```
for (all pages p) {
  if (p is empty) {
    put p in the empty page list;
    /* can be repurposed for any size */
  } else if (p is partial) {
    sz = the size of objects in the page;
    put p into the reclaim list for sz bytes;
  }
}
```

Reclaim list

- list of pages that have at least one free cell
- like free lists, there is a list per size
- when an allocation finds the free list empty, look at the reclaim list and if there is any page, move free cells of a page into the free list

What's the point?

- simply deferring the task you need to do anyway? not exactly so
- make more coalescing opportunities:
  - after a few GCs, a page may become empty before it needs to be reused for allocation
- improve temporal locality of references:
  - by touching free cells to put them back to free list, closely before they are used by the mutator
- shorten the pause time due to the sweep phase

Contents

Conservative GC

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  - $\approx$ GC for languages designed without assuming GC, such as C/C++

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Conservative GC

- *conservative* GC
  - ≈ GC for languages designed without assuming GC, such as C/C++
  - ≈ GC in the presence of words that may or may not be pointers (conservatively assumed to be pointers)
- antonym: *accurate* GC
  - does not necessarily reclaim all dead (no longer used) objects
  - accurate or conservative refers to whether "pointer identifications" are accurate or not
  - languages that implement an accurate GC normally use a data representation in which looking at a single word can tell you whether it is a pointer or not
    - ex: the last bit $= 0$ (pointer), $= 1$ (non-pointer)

A challenge in C/C++: pointer ambiguity

- a pointer and a non-pointers cannot be told apart; a word "7596272344674820427 ($1011010010110101 1011 \cdots 011000010100101_2$)" can be any of the following
  - a pointer to an object at address 7596272344674820427,
  - an integer 7596272344674820427,
  - a part of a string ("Kawasaki"),
  - a double precision floating point number ($6.549545 \ldots \times 10^{199}$),
  - $\ldots$

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  - a part of a string ("Kawasaki"),
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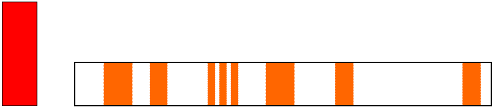
  - ...
- the basic principle:
  - *if a word is an address of a block being used, it is assumed to be the pointer to it*
  - a non-pointer may be misidentified as a pointer
  - a method to minimize the loss (leak) caused by misidentified pointers → blacklisting

Blacklisting

- during marking, record ("blacklist") words p (suspicious addresses) satisfying:



Blacklisting

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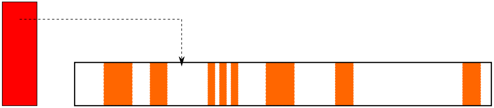
  - p is a subject of future allocation (i.e., an address within the current heap)



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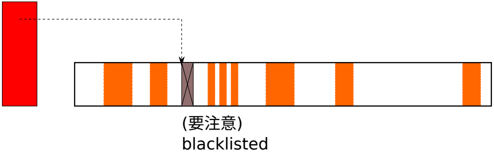

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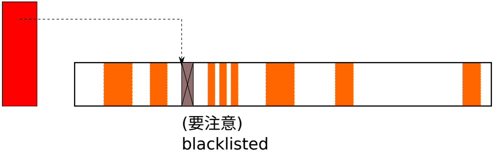
  - p is a subject of future allocation (i.e., an address within the current heap)
- do not use such p's for *future allocation*
- note that we already lose (a memory associated with) p, but it would be much worse and devastating to allocate p and make *p and all objects reachable from p* uncollectable *(the domino effect)*

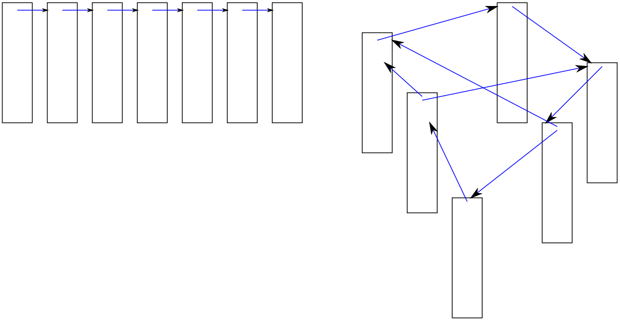


Other tips in conservative GC

1. see `http://hboehm.info/gc/gcinterface.html`
2. `GC_MALLOC_ATOMIC` :
   - same as `GC_MALLOC`, except you indicate (declare) you never put pointers in it (good for strings and numerical arrays)
   - reduce the probability of pointer misidentification
   - reduce the space that must be traversed
3. `GC_MALLOC_IGNORE_OFF_PAGE` : declares "you never put pointers except in the first 512 bytes"
4. clear pointers no longer necessary with NULL
   - pointers within a data structure
   - prevent the domino effect when a single object is mistakenly kept alive
5. tips in how you link data structures
   - data structures less prone to the domino effect due to a pointer misidentification

Data structure (not) prone to the domino effect

- suppose you make link lists, trees and graphs
- (NG): directly link large nodes with payload
- (GOOD): separate the structure linking nodes *(the spine)* and the payloads → misidentifying a payload does not lead to another object



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