CSc 520

Principles of Programming Languages

9 : Garbage Collection — Copying Collection

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Copying Collection

- Even if most of the heapspace is garbage, a mark and sweep algorithm will touch the entire heap. In such cases it would be better if the algorithm only touched the live objects.
- Copying collection is such an algorithm. The basic idea is:
  1. The heap is divided into two spaces, the from-space and the to-space.
  2. We start out by allocating objects in the from-space.
  3. When from-space is full, all live objects are copied from from-space to to-space.
  4. We then continue allocating in to-space until it fills up, and a new GC starts.

Copying Collection...

- An important side-effect of copying collection is that we get automatic compaction – after a collection to-space consists of the live objects in a contiguous piece of memory, followed by the free space.
- This sounds really easy, but $\cdots$:
  - We have to traverse the object graph (just like in mark and sweep), and so we need to decide the order in which this should be done, depth-first or breadth-first.
  - DFS requires a stack (but we can, of course, use pointer reversal just as with mark and sweep), and BFS a queue. We will see later that encoding a queue is very simple, and hence most implementations of copying collection make use of BFS.

Copying Collection. . .

- This sounds really easy, but · · ·
  - An object in from-space will generally have several objects pointing to it. So, when an object is moved from from-space to to-space we have to make sure that we change the pointers to point to the new copy.

Copying Collection. . .

- Mark-and-sweep touches the entire heap, even if most of it is garbage. Copying collection only touches live cells.
- Copying collection divides the heap in two parts: from-space and to-space.
- to-space is automatically compacted.
- How to traverse object graph: BFS or DFS?
- How to update pointers to moved objects?

Algorithm:

1. Start allocating in from-space.
2. When from-space is full, copy live objects to to-space.
3. Now allocate in to-space.

Copying Collection...

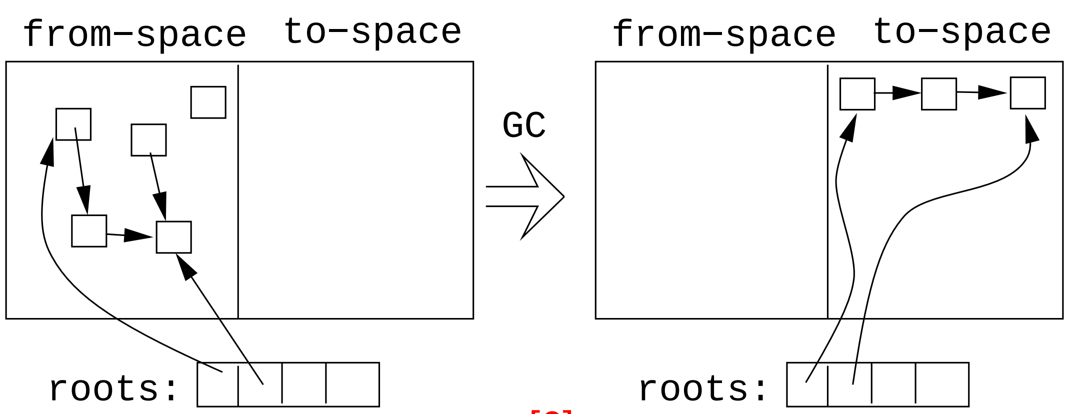
Traversing the Object Graph:

- Most implementations use BFS.
- Use the to-space as the queue.

Updating (Forwarding) Pointers:

- When an object is moved its new address is stored first in the old copy.

Example:



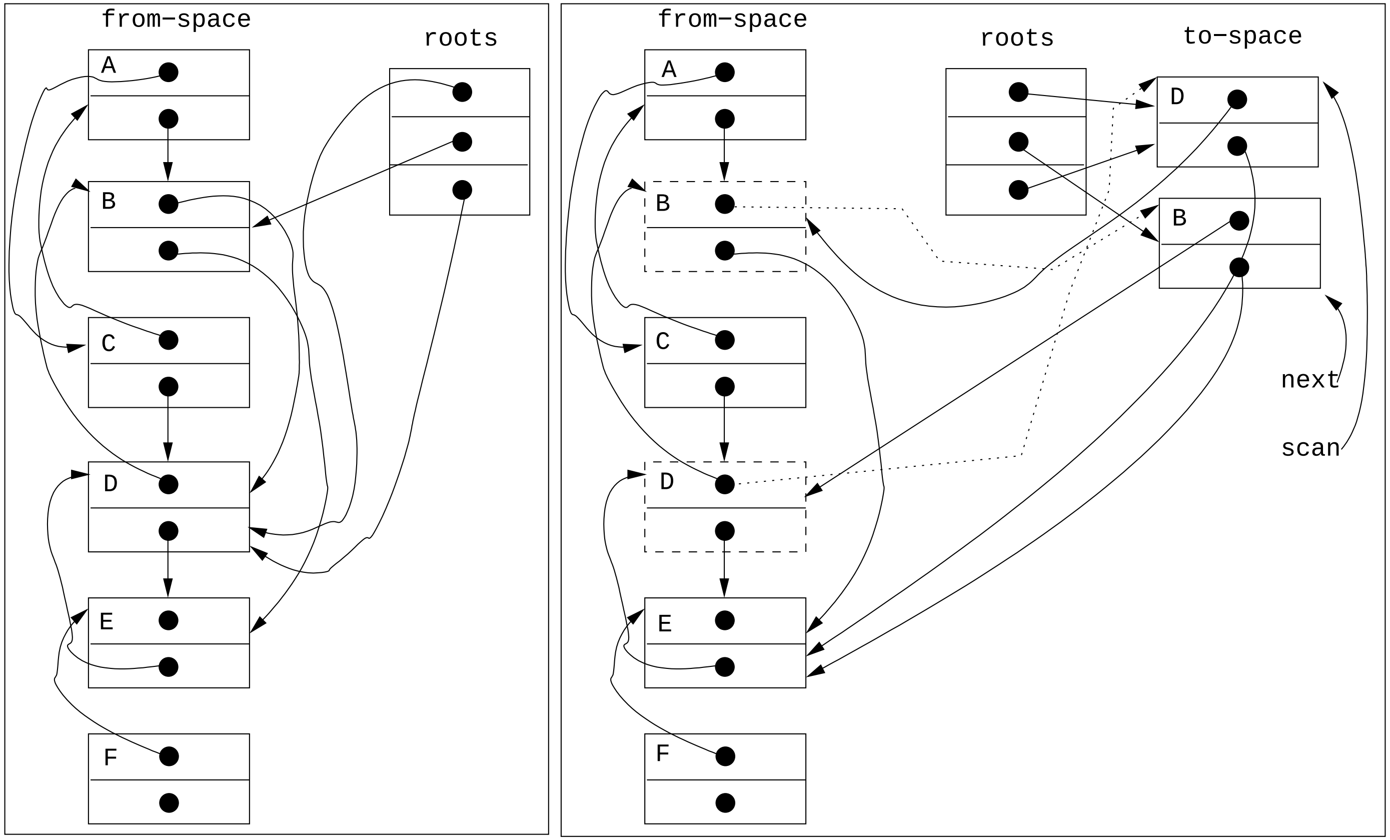
[6]

Copying Collection Algorithm

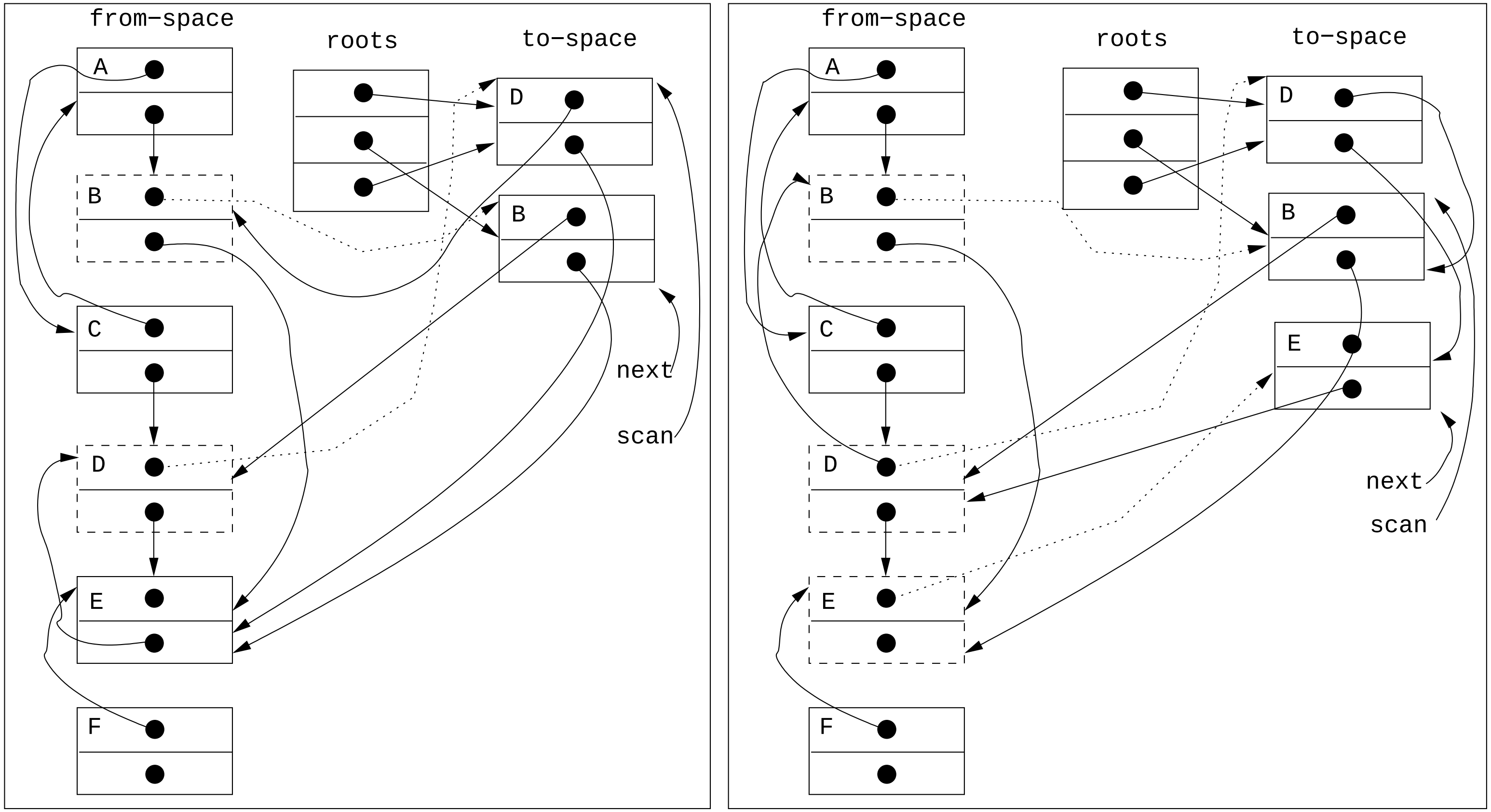
1. `scan := next := ADDR(to-space)`
   - [`scan` $\cdots$ `next`] hold the BFS queue.
   - Objects above `scan` point into `to-space`. Objects between `scan` and `next` point into from-space.
2. Copy objects pointed to by the root pointers to `to-space`.
3. Update the root pointers to point to `to-space`.
4. Put each object's new address first in the original.
5. Repeat (recursively) with all the pointers in the new `to-space`.
   (a) Update `scan` to point past the last processed node.
   (b) Update `next` to point past the last copied node.

   Continue while `scan < next`.

Copying Collection Example. . . (A)



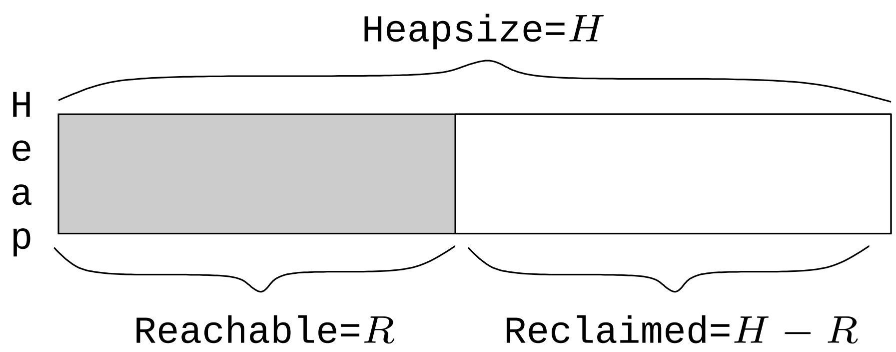
Copying Collection Example. . . (B)



Cost of Garbage Collection

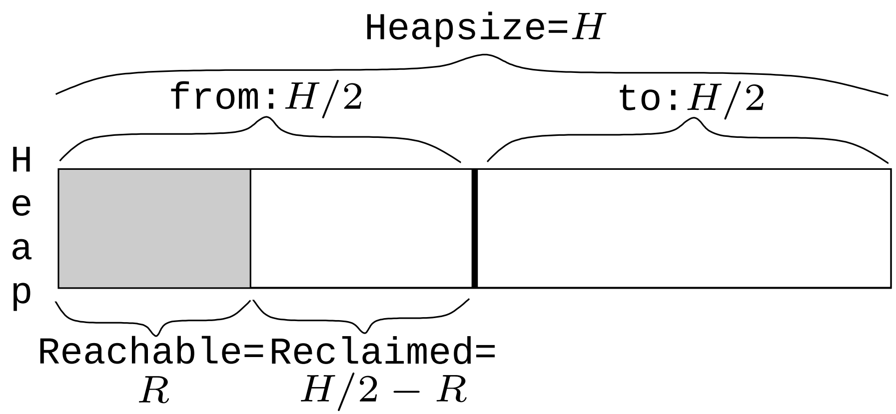
Cost of Garbage Collection

- The size of the heap is H, the amount of reachable memory is R, the amount of memory reclaimed is $H - R$.



$$\begin{aligned} \textit{amortized GC cost} &= \frac{\textit{time spent in GC}}{\textit{amount of garbage collected}} \\ &= \frac{\textit{time spent in GC}}{H - R} \end{aligned}$$

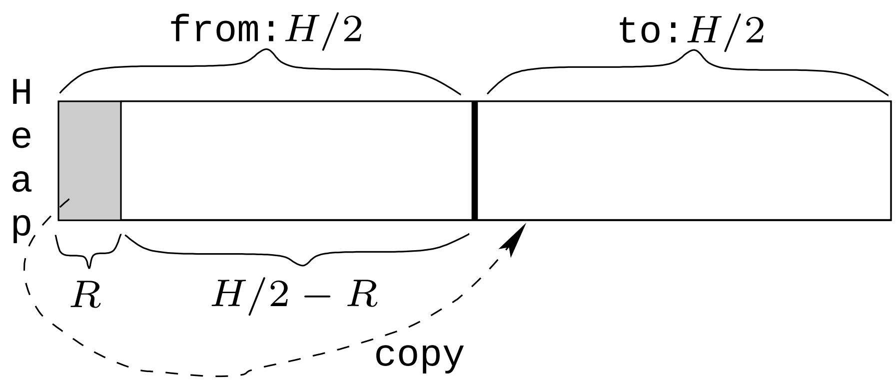
Cost of GC — Copying Collection



- The breadth first search phase touches all live nodes. Hence, it takes time c_3R, for some constant c_3. $c_3 \approx 10$?
- The heap is divided into a from-space and a to-space, so each collection reclaims $\frac{H}{2} - R$ words.

$$\textit{GC cost} = \frac{c_3R}{\frac{H}{2} - R} \approx \frac{10R}{\frac{H}{2} - R}$$

Cost of GC — Copying Collection...



- If there are few live objects ($H \gg R$) the GC cost is low.
- If $H = 4R$, we get

$$\text{GC cost} = \frac{c_3 R}{\frac{4R}{2} - R} \approx 10.$$

This is expensive: 4 times as much memory as reachable data, 10 instruction GC cost per object allocated.

Readings and References

- Read Scott, pp. 387–388.