Lecture 12 – Garbage Collection
COSE212: Programming Languages

Jihyeok Park

◭PLRG

2025 Fall

Recall

- Mutation makes it possible to **change the state** of a program by **updating the contents** of a data structure or a variable.
    - BFAE – FAE with **mutable boxes**
    - MFAE – FAE with **mutable variables**
    - Evaluation with **memories**, finite maps from addresses to values:

        $$\begin{array}{ll} \text{Memories} & M \in \mathbb{A} \xrightarrow{\text{fin}} \mathbb{V} \\ \text{Addresses} & a \in \mathbb{A} \end{array}$$

- In this lecture, we will learn **memory management** techniques to **deallocate** unreachable memory cells:
    - **Stack and Heap**
    - **Manual Memory Management**
    - **Garbage Collection (GC)**

Contents

Contents

Stack and Heap

In the previous lecture, we have seen the memory in the following MFAE expression has **unreachable** memory cells as follows:

```
/* MFAE */
var y = 1;
var f = x => {
  x = x + y;
  x * x
};
f(5);        /* 36 */
y = 3;
f(5);        /* 64 */      *
```

$$\sigma = [$$
$$\quad \text{y} \mapsto a_0$$
$$\quad \text{f} \mapsto a_1$$
$$]$$

$$\begin{array}{ccccc} \mathbb{A} & : & a_0 & a_1 & a_2 & a_3 & \dots \\ M & = & \boxed{3} & v & \boxed{6} & \boxed{8} & \dots \end{array}$$

where $v = \langle \lambda \text{x}.(\text{x} = \text{x} + \text{y}; \ \text{x} * \text{x}), [\text{y} \mapsto a_0] \rangle$

Then, how to **detect** and **deallocate** unreachable memory cells?

Let's delete **unreachable** memory cells when the program **exits** functions!

Stack and Heap

We can **divide** the memory into two parts:

- **Stack** – for **local variables** and **function parameters**
- **Heap** – for **dynamically allocated** memory cells
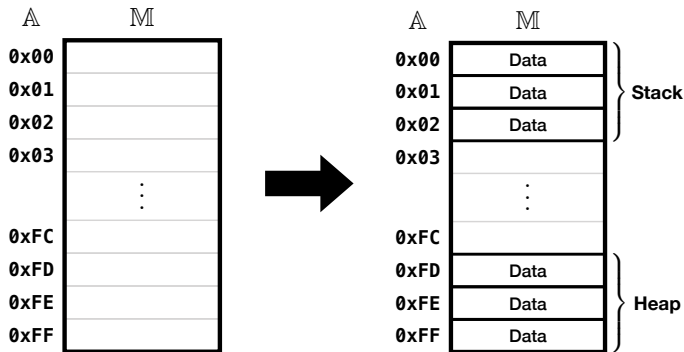
Create a **new stack frame** when the program **enters** a function, and **delete** the stack frame when it **exits** the function.
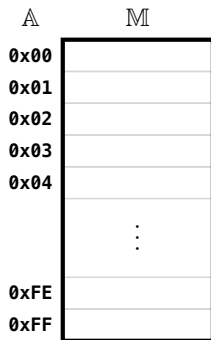
Stack and Heap

For example, consider the following Scala program:

```scala
case class Box(var k: Int)

def f(x: Int): Int =
  var y = Box(1)
  var z = g(2)
  x + y.k + z

def g(b: Int): Int =
  var c = Box(b)
  c.k + 3

var a = 1
var d = f(42)
a + d
```
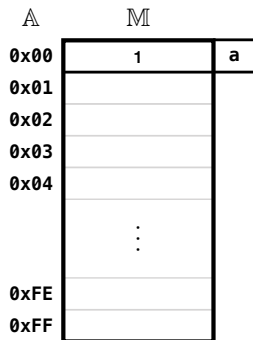
$\mathbb{A}$	$\mathbb{M}$
0x00	
0x01	
0x02	
0x03	
0x04	
⋮	
0xFE	
0xFF	

Stack and Heap

For example, consider the following Scala program:

```scala
case class Box(var k: Int)

def f(x: Int): Int =
  var y = Box(1)
  var z = g(2)
  x + y.k + z

def g(b: Int): Int =
  var c = Box(b)
  c.k + 3

var a = 1              /* a -> 0x00 */  *
var d = f(42)
a + d
```

$\mathbb{A}$	$\mathbb{M}$	
0x00	1	**a**
0x01		
0x02		
0x03		
0x04		
	$\vdots$	
0xFE		
0xFF		

For example, consider the following Scala program:

```scala
case class Box(var k: Int)

def f(x: Int): Int = /* x -> 0x01 */
  var y = Box(1)        /* y -> 0x02 */  *
  var z = g(2)
  x + y.k + z

def g(b: Int): Int =
  var c = Box(b)
  c.k + 3

var a = 1              /* a -> 0x00 */
var d = f(42)
a + d
```

$\mathbb{A}$	$\mathbb{M}$		
0x00	1	a	
0x01	42	x	
0x02	0xFF	y	f
0x03			
0x04			
	$\vdots$		
0xFE			
0xFF	1		

A **new stack frame** is created when it enters the function f.

Stack and Heap

For example, consider the following Scala program:

```scala
case class Box(var k: Int)

def f(x: Int): Int = /* x -> 0x01 */
  var y = Box(1)      /* y -> 0x02 */
  var z = g(2)
  x + y.k + z

def g(b: Int): Int = /* b -> 0x03 */
  var c = Box(b)      /* c -> 0x04 */
  c.k + 3             /* 5 */        *

var a = 1             /* a -> 0x00 */
var d = f(42)
a + d
```

$\mathbb{A}$	$\mathbb{M}$		
0x00	1	a	
0x01	42	x	f
0x02	0xFF	y	
0x03	2	b	g
0x04	0xFE	c	
	⋮		
0xFE	2		
0xFF	1		

A **new stack frame** is created when it enters the function g.

Stack and Heap

For example, consider the following Scala program:

```scala
case class Box(var k: Int)

def f(x: Int): Int = /* x -> 0x01 */
  var y = Box(1)      /* y -> 0x02 */
  var z = g(2)        /* z -> 0x03 */
  x + y.k + z         /* 48 */           *

def g(b: Int): Int =
  var c = Box(b)
  c.k + 3

var a = 1             /* a -> 0x00 */
var d = f(42)
a + d
```

$\mathbb{A}$	$\mathbb{M}$		
0x00	1	a	
0x01	42	x	
0x02	0xFF	y	f
0x03	5	z	
0x04			
	⋮		
0xFE	2		
0xFF	1		

After exiting the function g, its stack frame is **deleted**. The memory cells allocated for b and c in the stack frame are **deallocated**.

Stack and Heap

For example, consider the following Scala program:

```scala
case class Box(var k: Int)

def f(x: Int): Int =
  var y = Box(1)
  var z = g(2)
  x + y.k + z

def g(b: Int): Int =
  var c = Box(b)
  c.k + 3

var a = 1            /* a -> 0x00 */
var d = f(42)        /* d -> 0x01 */
a + d                /* 49 */          *
```

$\mathbb{A}$	$\mathbb{M}$	
0x00	1	a
0x01	48	d
0x02		
0x03		
0x04		
$\vdots$		
0xFE	2	
0xFF	1	

After exiting the function f, its stack frame is **deleted**. The memory cells allocated for x, y, and z in the stack frame are **deallocated**.

PLRG

Here is another example with a recursive function:

```
def sum(x: Int, acc: Int): Int =
  if (x < 1) acc
  else sum(x - 1, x + acc)

sum(1000, 0)
```

𝔸	𝕄		
0x00	1000	x	sum
0x01	0	acc	
0x02			
0x03			
0x04			
0x05			
	⋮		
0xFE			
0xFF			

Tail-Call Optimization (TCO)

Here is another example with a recursive function:

```
def sum(x: Int, acc: Int): Int =
  if (x < 1) acc
  else sum(x - 1, x + acc)

sum(1000, 0)
```

$\mathbb{A}$	$\mathbb{M}$		
0x00	1000	x	sum
0x01	0	acc	
0x02	999	x	sum
0x03	1000	acc	
0x04			
0x05			
	⋮		
0xFE			
0xFF			

Tail-Call Optimization (TCO)

Here is another example with a recursive function:

```scala
def sum(x: Int, acc: Int): Int =
  if (x < 1) acc
  else sum(x - 1, x + acc)

sum(1000, 0)
```

$\mathbb{A}$	$\mathbb{M}$		
0x00	1000	x	sum
0x01	0	acc	
0x02	999	x	sum
0x03	1000	acc	
0x04	998	x	sum
0x05	1999	acc	
	⋮	⋮	
0xFE	873	x	sum
0xFF	118999	acc	

It fails with a **stack overflow** error.

However, is it really necessary to keep **all the stack frames**? **No!**

Scala supports **tail-call optimization** (TCO).

Tail-Call Optimization (TCO)

Here is another example with a recursive function:

```scala
def sum(x: Int, acc: Int): Int =
  if (x < 1) acc
  else sum(x - 1, x + acc) // tail-call

sum(1000, 0)
```

$\mathbb{A}$	$\mathbb{M}$		
0x00	1000	x	sum
0x01	0	acc	
0x02			
0x03			
0x04			
0x05			
	⋮		
0xFE			
0xFF			

Why? the function call is in **tail-call position** (i.e., the final action in the function). It means that it directly returns the result without any further computation.

Thus, we can safely **discard** the current stack frame **before** calling the function, and it is called **tail-call optimization** (TCO).

Tail-Call Optimization (TCO)

Here is another example with a recursive function:

	$\mathbb{A}$	$\mathbb{M}$		
0x00		999	**x**	**sum**
0x01		1000	**acc**	
0x02				
0x03				
0x04				
0x05				
		$\vdots$		
0xFE				
0xFF				

```
def sum(x: Int, acc: Int): Int =
  if (x < 1) acc
  else sum(x - 1, x + acc) // tail-call

sum(1000, 0)
```

Why? the function call is in **tail-call position** (i.e., the final action in the function). It means that it directly returns the result without any further computation.

Thus, we can safely **discard** the current stack frame **before** calling the function, and it is called **tail-call optimization** (TCO).

Here is another example with a recursive function:

```scala
def sum(x: Int, acc: Int): Int =
  if (x < 1) acc
  else sum(x - 1, x + acc) // tail-call

sum(1000, 0) // 500500
```

$\mathbb{A}$ $\mathbb{M}$

0x00	0	x
0x01	500500	acc
0x02		
0x03		
0x04		
0x05		
⋮		
0xFE		
0xFF		

(x and acc brace together labeled **sum**)

Why? the function call is in **tail-call position** (i.e., the final action in the function). It means that it directly returns the result without any further computation.

Thus, we can safely **discard** the current stack frame **before** calling the function, and it is called **tail-call optimization** (TCO).

```
def factorial(x: Int): Int =
  if (x < 2) 1
  else factorial(x - 1) * x
```

Is it in the **tail-call position**? **No!**

After `factorial(x - 1)`, it needs to multiply the result by x.

```
def factorial(x: Int): Int =
  if (x < 2) 1
  else x * factorial(x - 1)
```

Is it in the **tail-call position**? **Still No!**

After `factorial(x - 1)`, it still needs to multiply the result by x.

Then, how to make it in the **tail-call position**?

Tail-Call Optimization (TCO)

One common pattern for TCO is to use an **accumulator**:

```
def factorial(x: Int, acc: Int): Int =
  if (x < 2) acc
  else factorial(x - 1, x * acc)

factorial(5, 1) // 120
```

However, it is not a user-friendly interface because we need to pass the initial value of the accumulator (e.g., 1) every time.

We can define a nested function to hide the additional parameter:

```
def factorial(x: Int): Int =
  def aux(x: Int, acc: Int): Int =
    if (x < 2) acc
    else aux(x - 1, x * acc)
  aux(x, 1)

factorial(5) // 120
```

Tail-Call Optimization (TCO)

Most modern programming languages support **tail-call optimization** (TCO) to avoid stack overflow errors.

In addition, Scala supports `@tailrec` annotation to check whether a function is in the tail-call position in compile time:

```scala
import scala.annotation.tailrec

// Passes the tail-call position check
@tailrec
def factorial(x: Int, acc: Int): Int =
  if (x < 2) acc
  else factorial(x - 1, x * acc)

// Compile-time error
@tailrec
def factorial(x: Int): Int =
  if (x < 2) 1
  else x * factorial(x - 1)
```

Contents

Let's see the previous example again:

```scala
case class Box(var k: Int)

def f(x: Int): Int =
  var y = Box(1)
  var z = g(2)
  x + y.k + z

def g(b: Int): Int =
  var c = Box(b)
  c.k + 3

var a = 1          /* a -> 0x00 */
var b = f(42)      /* b -> 0x01 */
a + b              /* 49 */        *
```

$\mathbb{A}$	$\mathbb{M}$	
0x00	1	a
0x01	48	b
0x02		
0x03		
0x04		
	$\vdots$	
0xFE	2	Heap
0xFF	1	

Unfortunately, we still cannot deallocate memory cells (e.g., 0xFE and 0xFF) dynamically allocated in the **heap** rather than the **stack**.

Manual Memory Management

One way to resolve this is using the **manual memory management**, and
C++ is an example language that supports it with special keywords for
memory allocation (new) and deallocation (delete) in heap, respectively:

```cpp
struct Box { int k; Box(int k): k(k) {} };
int f(int x) {
  Box* y = new Box(1);   // alloc  0xFF
  int z = g(2);
  int k = y->k;
  return x + k + z;
}
int g(int b) {
  Box* c = new Box(b);   // alloc  0xFE
  int k = c->k;
  return k + 3;
}
int a = 1;      /* a -> 0x00 */
int b = f(42); /* b -> 0x01 */
a + b;          /* 49 */        *
```
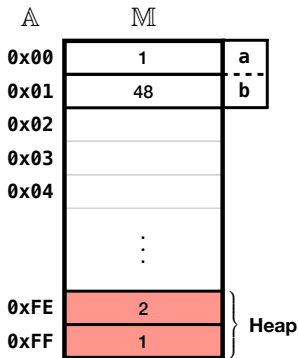
𝔸	𝕄	
0x00	1	a
0x01	48	b
0x02		
0x03		
0x04		
⋮	⋮	
0xFE	2	} Heap
0xFF	1	

Manual Memory Management

One way to resolve this is using the **manual memory management**, and
C++ is an example language that supports it with special keywords for
memory allocation (`new`) and deallocation (`delete`) in heap, respectively:

```
struct Box { int k; Box(int k): k(k) {} };
int f(int x) {
  Box* y = new Box(1);   // alloc  0xFF
  int z = g(2);
  int k = y->k; delete y; // dealloc 0xFF
  return x + k + z;
}
int g(int b) {
  Box* c = new Box(b);   // alloc  0xFE
  int k = c->k; delete c; // dealloc 0xFE
  return k + 3;
}
int a = 1;     /* a -> 0x00 */
int b = f(42); /* b -> 0x01 */
a + b;         /* 49 */       *
```

$\mathbb{A}$	$\mathbb{M}$	
0x00	1	a
0x01	48	b
0x02		
0x03		
0x04		
$\vdots$		
0xFE		
0xFF		

Manual Memory Management

Pros:

- **Efficient** – Users can **explicitly** deallocate memory cells allocated in heap whenever they want.

Cons:

- **Error-prone** – Users have all the **responsibility** to deallocate memory cells allocated in heap:
    - **Memory Leak** occurs if users forget to deallocate memory cells.

    ```
    b = new Box(42);  ...
    ```

    - **Use After Free (UAF)** occurs if users try to access memory cells already deallocated.

    ```
    b = new Box(42);  ... delete b;  ... b->k;
    ```

    - **Double Free** occurs if users deallocate memory cells more than once.

    ```
    b = new Box(42);  ... delete b;  ... delete b;
    ```

Contents

Garbage Collection

Is there any way to **automatically** deallocate memory cells in heap? **Yes!**

Garbage collection (GC) is a representative technique for **automatic memory management** that automatically **detects** and **deallocates** memory cells that are no longer reachable in heap.

Let's learn several GC algorithms:

- **Reference counting**
- **Mark-and-sweep GC**
- **Copying GC** (Two-space GC)
- Others

Before explaining them, let's represent memory cells in heap in a **graphical way** without actual addresses.
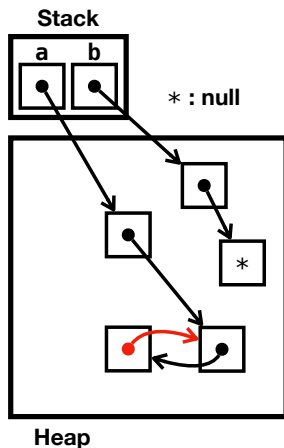
From now on, we will use the **graphical representation** of memory cells:

```scala
case class Box(var x: Box)

var a = Box(Box(Box(null)))  *

var b = Box(Box(null))

a.x.x.x = a.x

b.x = a

a.x = Box(null)

a = a.x

b = null
```
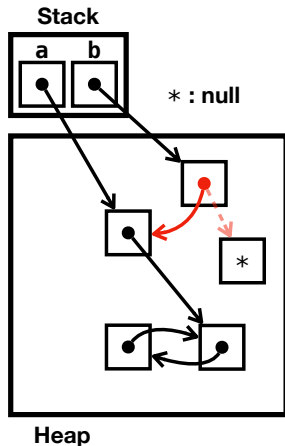

Stack

a

∗ : **null**
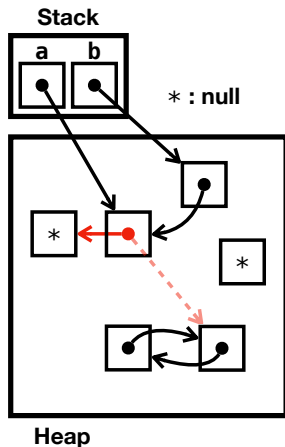
Heap

Garbage Collection

From now on, we will use the **graphical representation** of memory cells:

```scala
case class Box(var x: Box)

var a = Box(Box(Box(null)))

var b = Box(Box(null))        *

a.x.x.x = a.x

b.x = a

a.x = Box(null)

a = a.x

b = null
```
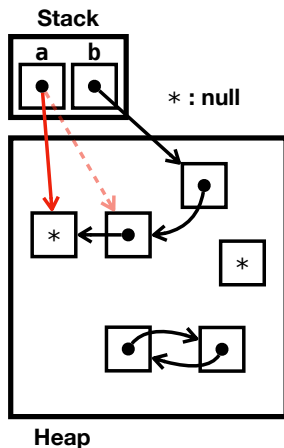
Garbage Collection

From now on, we will use the **graphical representation** of memory cells:

```scala
case class Box(var x: Box)

var a = Box(Box(Box(null)))

var b = Box(Box(null))

a.x.x.x = a.x            *

b.x = a

a.x = Box(null)

a = a.x

b = null
```

Garbage Collection

From now on, we will use the **graphical representation** of memory cells:

```scala
case class Box(var x: Box)

var a = Box(Box(Box(null)))

var b = Box(Box(null))

a.x.x.x = a.x

b.x = a                            *

a.x = Box(null)

a = a.x

b = null
```
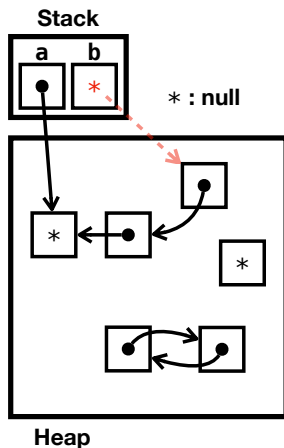
Stack

∗ : **null**

Heap

From now on, we will use the **graphical representation** of memory cells:

```scala
case class Box(var x: Box)

var a = Box(Box(Box(null)))

var b = Box(Box(null))

a.x.x.x = a.x

b.x = a

a.x = Box(null)          *

a = a.x

b = null
```
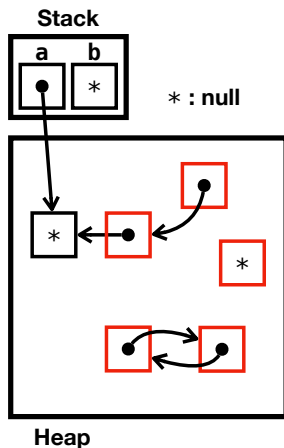
Garbage Collection

From now on, we will use the **graphical representation** of memory cells:

```scala
case class Box(var x: Box)

var a = Box(Box(Box(null)))

var b = Box(Box(null))

a.x.x.x = a.x

b.x = a

a.x = Box(null)

a = a.x

b = null
```

Garbage Collection

PLRG

From now on, we will use the **graphical representation** of memory cells:

```scala
case class Box(var x: Box)

var a = Box(Box(Box(null)))

var b = Box(Box(null))

a.x.x.x = a.x

b.x = a

a.x = Box(null)

a = a.x

b = null                    *
```


Stack

a   b

* **: null**

Heap

Garbage Collection

From now on, we will use the **graphical representation** of memory cells:

```scala
case class Box(var x: Box)

var a = Box(Box(Box(null)))

var b = Box(Box(null))

a.x.x.x = a.x

b.x = a

a.x = Box(null)

a = a.x

b = null
```


Stack

a	b
•	*

$*$: **null**

Heap

We need to deallocate five unreachable memory cells in heap.

Reference Counting

Reference counting is a simple GC algorithm that keeps track of the **number of references** to each memory cell in heap.

1. **Initialize** the reference count of each cell to 0.

2. When a reference to a cell is created, **increment** its reference count.

3. When a reference to a cell is deleted, **decrement** its reference count.

4. When the reference count of a cell reaches 0, **deallocate** the cell.

Many programming languages use reference counting to implement GC:

- Python, Swift, Perl, Objective-C, etc.

Reference Counting

Reference counting is a simple GC algorithm that keeps track of the **number of references** to each memory cell in heap.

```scala
case class Box(var x: Box)

var a = Box(Box(Box(null)))  *

var b = Box(Box(null))

a.x.x.x = a.x

b.x = a

a.x = Box(null)

a = a.x

b = null
```
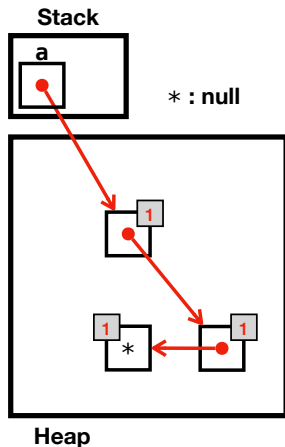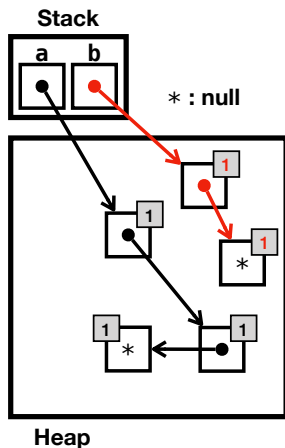

Stack

a

∗ : **null**

Heap

Reference Counting

Reference counting is a simple GC algorithm that keeps track of the
number of references to each memory cell in heap.

```scala
case class Box(var x: Box)

var a = Box(Box(Box(null)))

var b = Box(Box(null))        *

a.x.x.x = a.x

b.x = a

a.x = Box(null)

a = a.x

b = null
```
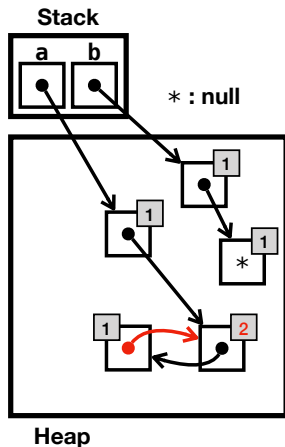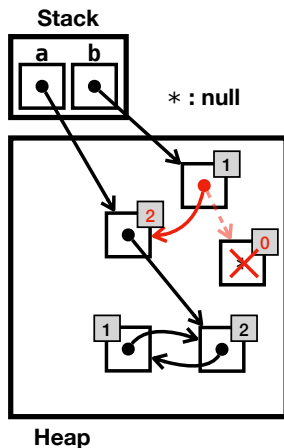
Reference counting is a simple GC algorithm that keeps track of the
number of references to each memory cell in heap.

```scala
case class Box(var x: Box)

var a = Box(Box(Box(null)))

var b = Box(Box(null))

a.x.x.x = a.x              *

b.x = a

a.x = Box(null)

a = a.x

b = null
```
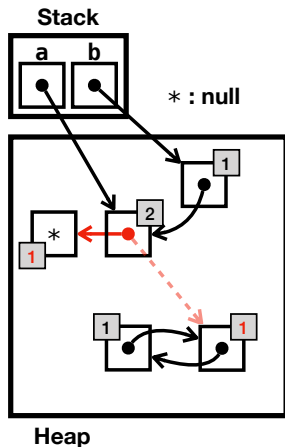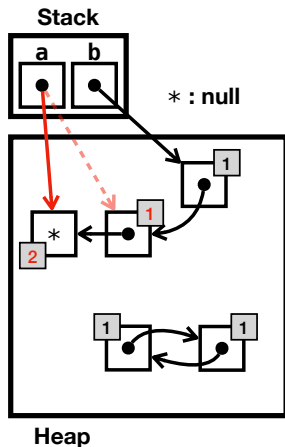

Stack

a   b

∗ : **null**

Heap

Reference counting is a simple GC algorithm that keeps track of the **number of references** to each memory cell in heap.

```scala
case class Box(var x: Box)

var a = Box(Box(Box(null)))

var b = Box(Box(null))

a.x.x.x = a.x

b.x = a                    *

a.x = Box(null)

a = a.x

b = null
```

Reference Counting

Reference counting is a simple GC algorithm that keeps track of the **number of references** to each memory cell in heap.

```scala
case class Box(var x: Box)

var a = Box(Box(Box(null)))

var b = Box(Box(null))

a.x.x.x = a.x

b.x = a

a.x = Box(null)            *

a = a.x

b = null
```

Stack

a   b

∗ : **null**

Heap

Reference Counting

Reference counting is a simple GC algorithm that keeps track of the **number of references** to each memory cell in heap.

```
case class Box(var x: Box)

var a = Box(Box(Box(null)))

var b = Box(Box(null))

a.x.x.x = a.x

b.x = a

a.x = Box(null)

a = a.x                        *

b = null
```
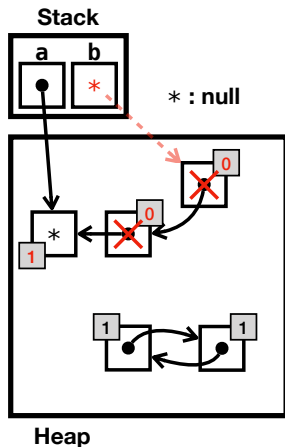

Stack

a b

∗ : null

Heap

Reference counting is a simple GC algorithm that keeps track of the **number of references** to each memory cell in heap.

```scala
case class Box(var x: Box)

var a = Box(Box(Box(null)))

var b = Box(Box(null))

a.x.x.x = a.x

b.x = a

a.x = Box(null)

a = a.x

b = null
```
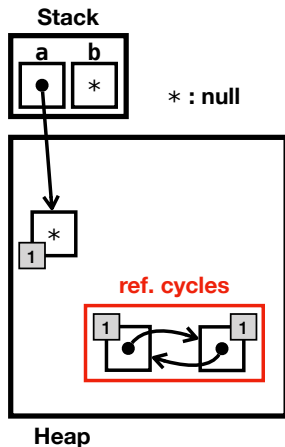
Stack

∗ : null

Heap

Reference Counting

Reference counting is a simple GC algorithm that keeps track of the **number of references** to each memory cell in heap.

```scala
case class Box(var x: Box)

var a = Box(Box(Box(null)))

var b = Box(Box(null))

a.x.x.x = a.x

b.x = a

a.x = Box(null)

a = a.x

b = null
```

Stack

$*$: **null**

ref. cycles

Heap

Unfortunately, we cannot deallocate unreachable **reference cycles**.

Reference Counting

Reference counting is a simple GC algorithm that keeps track of the **number of references** to each memory cell in heap.

Pros:

- **Easy to implement** – Simply increment and decrement the reference count when a reference is created and deleted.
- **Low overhead** – Deallocation is immediate and takes a short time.

Cons:

- **Reference cycles** – It cannot deallocate unreachable reference cycles.
- **Reference count cost** – It requires space to store reference counts.
- **Free List** and **Fragmentation** – It requires a **free list** to keep track of available free memory cells in heap, and it also suffers from **fragmentation** making it difficult to allocate large objects.

Mark-and-Sweep GC is one of **tracing GC** algorithms that **traverses the heap** to find unreachable objects when it is **triggered** under some conditions.

1. **Mark** all memory cells as **unreachable** (white).

2. **Mark** all memory cells referenced by roots as **unscanned** (gray).

3. Repeat until there are no unscanned (gray) memory cells:
   1. **Pick** an unscanned (gray) memory cell.
   2. **Mark** memory cells referenced by the picked one as **unscanned** (gray).
   3. **Mark** the picked memory cell as **scanned** (black).

4. **Deallocate** (sweep) all memory cells that are still marked as **unreachable** (white).

Assume that the GC is triggered at the following program point, and let's perform **mark-and-sweep** GC.

```scala
case class Box(var x: Box)

var a = Box(Box(Box(null)))

var b = Box(Box(null))

a.x.x.x = a.x

b.x = a

a.x = Box(null)          *

a = a.x

b = null
```
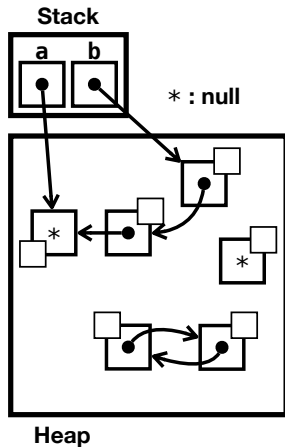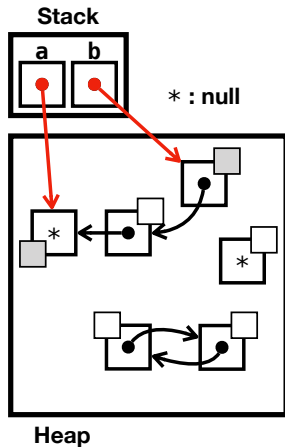

Stack

a **b**

$*$: **null**

Heap

Assume that the GC is triggered at the following program point, and let's perform **mark-and-sweep** GC.

```scala
case class Box(var x: Box)

var a = Box(Box(Box(null)))

var b = Box(Box(null))

a.x.x.x = a.x

b.x = a

a.x = Box(null)          *

a = a.x

b = null
```
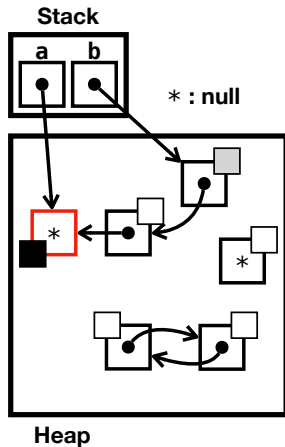

Stack

a   b

∗ : null

Heap

Mark-and-Sweep GC

Assume that the GC is triggered at the following program point, and let's perform **mark-and-sweep** GC.

```scala
case class Box(var x: Box)

var a = Box(Box(Box(null)))

var b = Box(Box(null))

a.x.x.x = a.x

b.x = a

a.x = Box(null)          *

a = a.x

b = null
```
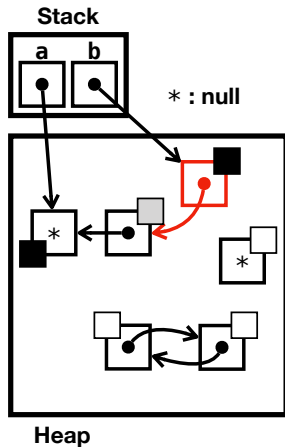

Stack

a   b

* : null

Heap

Mark-and-Sweep GC

Assume that the GC is triggered at the following program point, and let's perform **mark**-**and**-**sweep** GC.

```scala
case class Box(var x: Box)

var a = Box(Box(Box(null)))

var b = Box(Box(null))

a.x.x.x = a.x

b.x = a

a.x = Box(null)          *

a = a.x

b = null
```


Stack

a   b

* : null

Heap

Assume that the GC is triggered at the following program point, and let's perform **mark-and-sweep** GC.

```scala
case class Box(var x: Box)

var a = Box(Box(Box(null)))

var b = Box(Box(null))

a.x.x.x = a.x

b.x = a

a.x = Box(null)          *

a = a.x

b = null
```
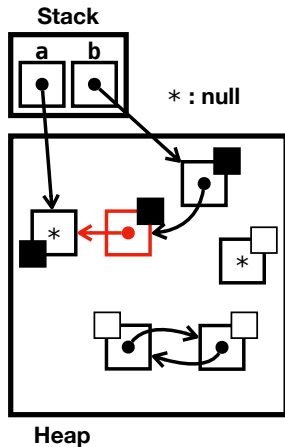
Stack

a   b

* : null

Heap

Mark-and-Sweep GC

Assume that the GC is triggered at the following program point, and let's perform **mark-and-sweep** GC.

```scala
case class Box(var x: Box)

var a = Box(Box(Box(null)))

var b = Box(Box(null))

a.x.x.x = a.x

b.x = a

a.x = Box(null)          *

a = a.x

b = null
```
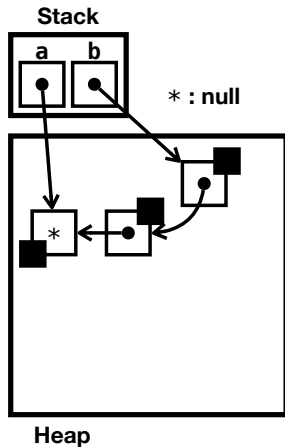

Stack

a   b

$*$: null

Heap

Mark-and-Sweep GC is one of **tracing GC** algorithms that **traverses the heap** to find unreachable objects when it is **triggered** under some conditions.

Pros:

- **Handle Reference Cycles** – It can deallocate unreachable reference cycles.
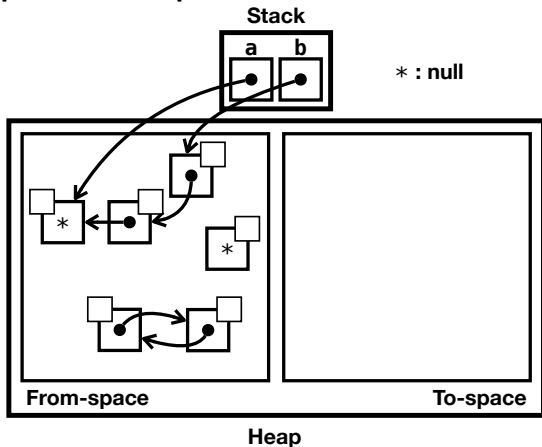
Cons:

- **Stop-the-world** – It **stops** the program execution during GC.
- **Free List** and **Fragmentation** – It requires a **free list** to keep track of available free memory cells in heap, and it also suffers from **fragmentation** making it difficult to allocate large objects.

Copying GC (Two-Space GC)

OPLRG

Similar to mark-and-sweep GC, **copying GC** (Two-space GC) is another **tracing GC** algorithm. However, it **copies** all the reachable objects and reorganizes them in a **compact** layout by splitting the heap into two spaces: **from-space** and **to-space**.

- **Allocation** – It allocates memory cells only in **from-space**.
- **Deallocation** – It deallocates all the unreachable objects as follows:

  1 **Mark** all memory cells as **unreachable** (white).

  2 **Copy** all memory cells referenced by roots as **unscanned** (gray) and copy them from the **from-space** to the **to-space**

  3 **Update** the data of the original memory cell to point to the copied one.

  4 Repeat until there are no unscanned (gray) memory cells
    1 **Pick** an unscanned (gray) memory cell in the **from-space**.
    2 **Copy** memory cells referenced by the picked one as **unscanned** (gray).
    3 **Update** the data of the original memory cell to point to the copied one.
    4 **Mark** the picked memory cell as **scanned** (black).

  5 **Swap** from-space and to-space.

Similar to mark-and-sweep GC, **copying GC** (Two-space GC) is another **tracing GC** algorithm. However, it **copies** all the reachable objects and reorganizes them in a **compact** layout by splitting the heap into two spaces: **from-space** and **to-space**.
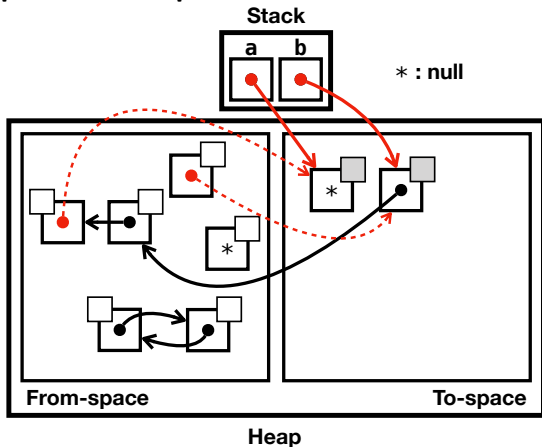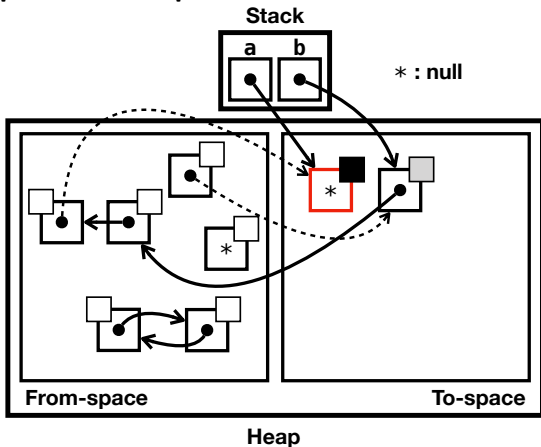
Copying GC (Two-Space GC)

Similar to mark-and-sweep GC, **copying GC** (Two-space GC) is another **tracing GC** algorithm. However, it **copies** all the reachable objects and reorganizes them in a **compact** layout by splitting the heap into two spaces: **from-space** and **to-space**.
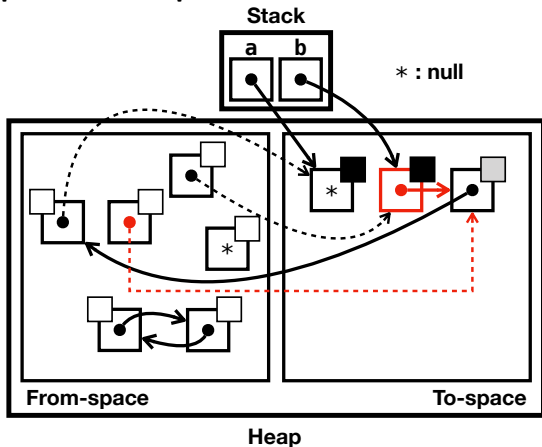

Heap

Copying GC (Two-Space GC)

Similar to mark-and-sweep GC, **copying GC** (Two-space GC) is another **tracing GC** algorithm. However, it **copies** all the reachable objects and reorganizes them in a **compact** layout by splitting the heap into two spaces: **from-space** and **to-space**.
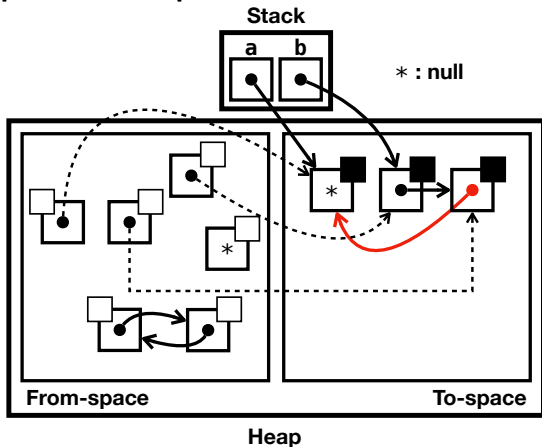

Heap

Copying GC (Two-Space GC)

Similar to mark-and-sweep GC, **copying GC** (Two-space GC) is another **tracing GC** algorithm. However, it **copies** all the reachable objects and reorganizes them in a **compact** layout by splitting the heap into two spaces: **from-space** and **to-space**.

Similar to mark-and-sweep GC, **copying GC** (Two-space GC) is another **tracing GC** algorithm. However, it **copies** all the reachable objects and reorganizes them in a **compact** layout by splitting the heap into two spaces: **from-space** and **to-space**.
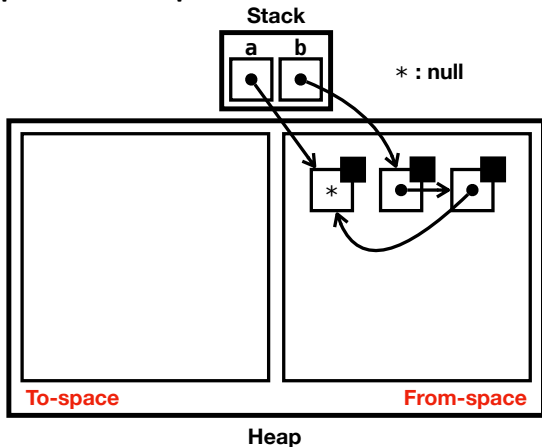
Copying GC (Two-Space GC)

Similar to mark-and-sweep GC, **copying GC** (Two-space GC) is another **tracing GC** algorithm. However, it **copies** all the reachable objects and reorganizes them in a **compact** layout by splitting the heap into two spaces: **from-space** and **to-space**.

Copying GC (Two-Space GC)

Similar to mark-and-sweep GC, **copying GC** (Two-space GC) is another **tracing GC** algorithm. However, it **copies** all the reachable objects and reorganizes them in a **compact** layout by splitting the heap into two spaces: **from-space** and **to-space**.

Pros:

- **Handle Reference cycles** – It can deallocate unreachable reference cycles.
- No more **Free List** and **Fragmentation** – After deallocation process, the heap is always **contiguous**. Thus, it is enough to keep track of the first free memory cell for allocation.
- **Fast Allocation** – It does not require any extra work to find free memory cells in the free list for allocation.

Cons:

- **Stop-the-world** – It **stops** the program execution during GC.
- **Only half of the heap** (from-space) is used for allocation.
- **Expensive copying process** – It copies all the reachable objects from

Other GC Algorithms

Existing real-world programming languages utilize more sophisticated GC algorithms, mix diverse GC algorithms, or even provide options to choose different GC algorithms:

- **Generational GC** – e.g, Java[1], Python[2]

- **Concurrent GC** – e.g., Java[3], Golang[4]

- **Escape Analysis** – e.g., Java[5]

- etc.

Or, a totally different approach called **Ownership** system is used in Rust[6]

---

[1] https://www.oracle.com/webfolder/technetwork/tutorials/obe/java/gc01/index.html

[2] https://devguide.python.org/internals/garbage-collector/

[3] https://docs.oracle.com/javase/8/docs/technotes/guides/vm/gctuning/cms.html

[4] https://tip.golang.org/doc/gc-guide

[5] https://blogs.oracle.com/javamagazine/post/escape-analysis-in-the-hotspot-jit-compiler

[6] https://doc.rust-lang.org/book/ch04-01-what-is-ownership.html

Summary

1. Stack and Heap
   Tail-Call Optimization (TCO)

2. Manual Memory Management

3. Garbage Collection
   Reference Counting
   Mark-and-Sweep GC
   Copying GC (Two-Space GC)
   Other GC Algorithms

- Lazy Evaluation

Jihyeok Park
jihyeok_park@korea.ac.kr
https://plrg.korea.ac.kr