DEBUGGING

WS 2017/2018

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This program is supposed to return the middle (median) of three numbers.
int middle (int x, int y, int z) {
    int m = z;
    if (y < z) {
        if (x < y)
            m = y;
        else if (x < z)
            m = y;
    } else {
        if (x > y)
            m = y;
        else if (x > z)
            m = x;
    }
    return m;
}

Some test cases:

middle (1, 2, 3) = 2
middle (1, 3, 2) = 2
middle (2, 3, 1) = 2
middle (3, 1, 2) = 2
middle (3, 2, 1) = 2
middle (1, 1, 1) = 1
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The Program “Middle”

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**BUG!**
The First Documented Bug in a Computer

moth in Harvard Mark II found on Sept 9, 1947
From Defects to Failures

1. The programmer creates a defect.  
   Why? Who is to blame?

2. The defect causes an infection.  
   After the execution of the defect, 
   the program state might not be as intended.

3. The infection propagates.  
   Or it can be overwritten, masked, or corrected 
   by later program instructions.

4. The infection causes a failure, i.e., an observable error in 
   the program behavior.
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Not every defect results in an infection and not every infection results in a failure.
Reasons for Defects

defects (bugs) are inherent parts of programs:

- mistake by the programmer
- incomplete/changing requirements
- incompatible interfaces of modules
- unpredictable interaction of multiple components in a distributed environment
- ...

Why does a program fail, and how can we fix it?
Verification & Validation vs. Debugging

verification and validation
show existence of defects
- not every defect causes a failure
- testing can only show the presence of errors – not their absence

debugging
locate and correct defects
- relate failure to defect
- ... and remove it

from [Zeller09]
Debugging Process

7 Steps for Debugging – The Traffic Principle

- **Track** the problem (bookkeeping in DB)
- **Reproduce** the problem
- **Automate** the simplification of the test case
- **Find origins** possible infection origins
- **Focus** on the most likely origins
- **Isolate** the infection chain
- **Correct** the defect
Complexity of Debugging

find a defect

= 

isolate the transition from a sane state infected state

= 

search in space and time
Complexity of Debugging

find a defect

= 

isolate the transition from a sane state infected state

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search in **space** and time

**space**

- a state consists of the current values of the variables of a program and a program counter
- which part of a state has to be inspected to find an infection?
Complexity of Debugging

find a defect

= isolate the transition from a sane state infected state

= search in space and time

- space
  - a state consists of the current values of the variables of a program and a program counter
  - which part of a state has to be inspected to find an infection?

- time
  - the program execution consists of many states
  - when does the infection take place?
From Defects to Failures

variables

time

from [Zeller09]
From Defects to Failures

from [Zeller09]
Basic Debugging Principle I

separate sane from infected

from [Zeller09]
Basic Debugging Principle II

separate relevant from irrelevant

from [Zeller09]
Techniques for Automating Debugging

- program slicing
- observing & watching of states
- asserting invariants
- detecting anomalies
- isolating cause-effect chains
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Example: Broken Shell-Short

```c
void shell_sort (int a[], int size) {
    ...
}

int main (int argc, char *argv[]) {
    int *a, i;

    a = (int *)malloc ((argc - 1) * sizeof(int));
    for (i = 0; i < argc - 1; i++)
        a[i] = atoi(argv[i + 1]);

    shell_sort (a, argc);

    printf ("Output: ");
    for (i = 0; i < argc - 1; i++) printf("%d ", a[i]);
    printf("\n");

    free(a);
    return 0;
}
```

$ shell_sort 9 8 7
Output: 7 8 9

$ shell_sort 11 14
Output: 0 11
Demo: Debugging Broken Shell-Sort

- where does the “0” in $a[0]$ come from?
- when does the infection happen?

from [Zeller09]
Common Crash Scenarios

1. Application works as expected and never crashes.
2. Application crashes due to rare bugs that nobody notices or cares about.
3. Application crashes due to a commonly encountered bug.
4. Application deadlocks and stops responding due to a common bug.
5. Application crashes long after the original bug.
6. Application causes data loss and/or corruption.

https://blog.codinghorror.com/whats-worse-than-crashing/
What’s a Problem?

A problem is a questionable property of a program run. It becomes

- ... a failure if it’s incorrect
- ... a request for enhancement if it is a missing feature
- ... a feature if it reflects normal behavior
Problem Life Cycle

- The user informs the vendor about some problem.
- The vendor
  1. reproduces the problem
  2. isolates the circumstances
  3. locates and fixes the defect
  4. delivers the fix to the user
Large Scale Debugging Processes

organizations of the problem life cycle:

- which problems are currently open?
- which are the most severe problems?
- did similar problems occur in the past?

management of problems requires more than a TODO list
Facts about the Problem

- problem history: how to reproduce the problem
  - accessed resources (input files, configurations)
  - circumstances necessary for the problem to occur
  - as simple as possible

- diagnostic information of the program
  - logging features of the program
  - stack traces of the operating system

- symptoms of the problem

- expected behavior
  - bug or feature?
Facts about the Problem

- product release
- operating environment
- system resources

crucial if the problem depends on specific product or environment features

⇒ automatic collection possible
⇒ privacy issues from internal information like core dumps, log files about user actions, ...!
General Outline of a Bug Report

- summary
- component
- version
- operating system
- description
- steps to reproduce
- actual results
- expected results
Life cycle of a Bugzilla Bug

from [Zeller09]
Features of Issue-Tracking Systems

- severity classification
  - enhancement. A desired feature.
  - minor. Problem with easy workaround.
  - major. Major loss of function.
  - critical. Crashes, loss of data or memory
  - showstopper. Blocks development.

- priority
  - higher the priority, sooner to be addressed
  - independent from severity

- identifier

- comments

- notification
Responsibilities

Who ... 

- ... files problem reports?
- ... classifies problem reports?
- ... sets priorities?
- ... takes care of the problem?
- ... closes the issue?

in many organizations: software change control board
Challenges

- as many facts as possible to reproduce the problem vs. as few facts as possible to find duplicates
- relate version of product with problem
  - □ binaries of user
  - □ all sources of specific releases
  - □ recreation of any given configuration
⇒ tool support software configuration management like version control systems:
  - □ tag releases
  - □ storing of fixes in branches
- failing test cases should make bug reports obsolete