Preliminaries II

Dmitri Loguinov
Texas A&M University

January 19, 2024
Agenda

- Pointers
- Homework setup
- Cave lights
- Cave search
- Pipes
Pointers

• What is a C/C++ pointer?
  - 4-byte number in Win32/x86, 8-byte in x64

```c
// example assumes Win32
char str[] = "hello";
short *p = (short*) str;
printf("%X %X %X\n", p, &p, *p);
printf("%X %X %X\n", str, &str, *str);
char **p2 = (char**) &p;
printf("%X %X %X %X\n", p2, &p2, *p2, **p2);
```

• What is a static array?
  - Immutable pointer hidden in compiler space
  - &str same as str (compiler hack)
Agenda

• Pointers
• Homework setup
• Cave lights
• Cave search
• Pipes
Homework Setup

- Implement four parallel search algorithms on a weighted graph under random edge-traversal delay
- Now the details
  - Assume you have a space rover stuck in some cave on a remote planet with many interconnected rooms
  - The cave is dark and its topology is unknown
  - As the rover is slow, it cannot directly search for the exit
Homework Setup

• However, it has a number of flybots
  – These can travel all over the cave much quicker and search for the exit

• Main problem is flybots are somewhat dumb
  – Cannot remember which rooms they have been to
  – Cannot decide which next room to explore
  – Cannot talk to each other

• But they can figure out a path to a given room from its ID
  – No need to construct the graph yourself
Preliminaries: Homework Setup

- Your job is to write software that can control the flybots from the rover to find the exit in the shortest time.
- Communication from your process goes through the Command Center (CC) block on the rover.
  - Commands: MOVE to a given room R
  - Responses: list of R’s neighboring rooms.
Homework Setup

- Response delays are random
  - Based on distance traveled and power state of flybot antenna
  - Report will determine the average delay
- Target cave size 10M rooms
  - Single robot requires over 2 months
  - Obviously there is a need to massively parallelize the search
Agenda

- Pointers
- Homework setup
- Cave lights
- Cave search
- Pipes
Cave Lights

- So far, the problem is solvable by the most basic parallel BFS
  - Final element is to make the graph weighted
- Assume the cave is pitch black, except certain rooms where light penetrates from the outside
  - Presence of light could indicate there is an exit
  - Or there might be a ceiling hole through which the rover cannot escape
- Light propagation
  - Given a light source of intensity $L \geq 1$, all neighboring rooms get their light boosted by $L/2$, which repeats recursively
  - Exponential decay of light until it drops below 1 unit
Agenda

• Pointers
• Homework setup
• Cave lights
• Cave search
• Pipes
Cave Search

• What would be a good search technique for this problem?
  – Key observation: the exit and surrounding rooms are likely to have non-zero light intensity

• Assume we maintain two structures:
  – Set of unexplored nodes U
  – Set of discovered nodes D

• Note: each room in D has been inserted into U, but not necessarily visited by a robot yet

• The main difference between the four studied algorithms is how to select the next node from U
Cave Search

- BFS and DFS are classic, already covered in 221
- **Best First Search (bFS)**
  - Largest intensity of light among U
  - May find sub-optimal paths when distracted by a bright, but lengthy path
- **A**\(^*\) tries to overcome this
  - Heuristically weighs both distance and amount of light
  - For each candidate node \(i\), compute its **quality**
    \[ Q_i = L_i + w / (d_i + 1) \]
    where \(L_i\) is amount of light in the room, \(d_i\) is its distance from the rover, and \(w\) is some weight
  - Next explore room with the largest \(Q_i\)
- What do we get with \(w = 0\) and \(w = \infty\)?
- How to implement bFS and A\(^*\) efficiently?
Agenda

• Pointers
• Homework setup
• Cave lights
• Cave search
• Pipes
Pipes

• Pipes are communication channels between processes
  - Lossless
  - Implemented as FIFO queues through the kernel

• Anonymous pipes
  - Can communicate only with child processes
  - One-way, byte-based queue
  - Requires 2 pipes for duplex communication
  - Often used to redirect stdin/stdout of the child →

• Named pipes
  - Globally unique names
  - Duplex (bi-directional)
  - Can be both byte-based and message-based

• Homework uses the latter type

```
cat a.txt | grep hello | more
```
Robot responses consist of a header, followed by an array of tuples (node, intensity)
- Node is an 8-byte hash of a neighboring room
- Intensity is a float value (amount of light)
• By default, CC pipes are blocking and synchronous
  - Only one message at a time can be in the pipe
  - However, its size is unknown a-priori
• **Idea**: receive as much of the message as buffer
  allows, then peek at the pipe, receive the rest
  - Here is pseudo-code (needs more work to be functional)

```c
#define BUF_SIZE 128   // small initial size to prevent over-allocation
char *buf = malloc (BUF_SIZE);
ReadFile (pipe, buf, ..., &read, ...);
if (read == BUF_SIZE) { // buffer filled to the max?
    PeekNamedPipe (pipe, ..., &remainder, ...);
    if (remainder > 0) {
        // realloc buffer to full size
        realloc (buf, BUF_SIZE);
        ReadFile (pipe, ...);  // receive remainder
    }
}
```
Pipes

• Optimization
  - Per-message allocation/deletion of buf should be avoided
  - Retain newbuf until some future message overflows it
  - *For monster caves, keep the buffer only if smaller than 5 KB*

• Pipe names
  - Case insensitive:
    - Dot . represents the same host
  - Fixed user-created: `\server\pipe\pipename`

• Pipe names must be globally unique
  - If users run multiple copies of CC.exe on the same host, the pipe name must specify which of them to use
  - This homework uses `\\.\pipe\CC-X`, where X is the process ID of the CC in hex
Wrap-up

- Reminder: hw1-part1 is due in a week
  - Error checking for all function calls, proper disconnect
  - Wait for CC.exe to quit, common mistake to exit before CC
  - Print initial room and all CC/robot text responses
- See the grade sheet at the end of the handout
- **Task:** allocate a buffer with 100 bytes and fill in three NodeTuple64 classes starting from byte 37
  - The i-th node has ID i and intensity 1 / (i+1)

```c
char buf[100];
NodeTuple64 *nt = (NodeTuple64 *) (buf + 37);
for (int i = 0; i < 3; i++) {
    nt[i].node = i;
    nt[i].intensity = 1.0 / (i + 1);
}
```