Reproducing Problems
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The First Task

- Once a problem is reported (or exposed by a test), some programmer must fix it.
- The first task is to reproduce the problem.

Why reproduce?

- Observing the problem. Without being able to reproduce the problem, one cannot observe it or find any new facts.
- Check for success. How do you know that the problem is actually fixed?
A Tough Problem

- Reproducing is one of the toughest problems in debugging.
- One must
  - recreate the environment in which the problem occurred
  - recreate the problem history – the steps that lead to the problem

Reproducing the Environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where to reproduce?</th>
<th>Chances of Success</th>
<th>Costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>User</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Iterative Reproduction

- Start with your environment
- While the problem is not reproduced, adapt more and more circumstances from the user’s environment
- Iteration ends when problem is reproduced (or when environments are “identical”)
- Side effect: Learn about failure-inducing circumstances
Setting up the Environment

- Millions of configurations
- Testing on dozens of different machines
- All needed to find & reproduce problems

Virtual Machines

Reproducing Execution

- After reproducing the environment, we must reproduce the execution
- Basic idea: Any execution is determined by the input (in a general sense)
- Reproducing input → reproducing execution

Source: [http://www.ci.newton.ma.us/MIS/Network.htm](http://www.ci.newton.ma.us/MIS/Network.htm)

Program Inputs

Randomness → Operating System
Communication → Schedules
User Interaction → Physics
Data → Debugging Tools

Data

• Easy to transfer and replicate
• Caveat #1: Get all the data you need
• Caveat #2: Get only the data you need
• Caveat #3: Privacy issues
Program Inputs

User Interaction

Program

Data

User Interaction

Input Sources

Record

Replay

Recorded Interaction

send_xevents key H @400,100
send_xevents wait 376
send_xevents key T @400,100
send_xevents wait 178
send_xevents key T @400,100
send_xevents wait 214
send_xevents key P @400,101
send_xevents wait 537
send_xevents keydn Shift_L @400,101
send_xevents wait 218
send_xevents key ";" @400,101
send_xevents wait 167
send_xevents keyup Shift_L @400,101
send_xevents wait 1556
send_xevents click 1 @428,287
send_xevents wait 3765
Communication

- General idea: Record and replay like user interaction
- Bad impact on performance
- Alternative #1: Only record since last checkpoint (= reproducible state)
- Alternative #2: Only record “last” transaction

Program Inputs

Randomness

Communication

User Interaction

Data
Randomness

- Program behaves different in every run
- Based on random number generator
  - Pseudo-random: save seed (and make it configurable)
  - Same applies to time of day
- True random: record + replay sequence

Program Inputs

Operating System

- The OS handles entire interaction between program and environment
- Recording and replaying OS interaction thus makes entire program run reproducible
# A Password Program

```c++
#include <string>
#include <iostream>
using namespace std;

string secret_password = "secret";

int main()
{
    string given_password;
    cout << "Please enter your password: ";
    cin >> given_password;
    if (given_password == secret_password)
        cout << "Access granted." << endl;
    else
        cout << "Access denied." << endl;
}
```

$ c++ -o password password.C$
$ ./password$
Please enter your password: secret
Access granted.$

# Traced Interaction

```bash
$ c++ -o password password.C$
$ strace ./password 2> LOG$
Enter your password: secret
Access granted.$
$ cat LOG$
```

...write(1, "Please enter your password: ", 28) = 28
read(0, "secret\n", 1024) = 7
write(1, "Access granted.\n", 16) = 16
exit_group(0) = ?

# How Tracing works

![Diagram showing the interaction between Program, Kernel, and Tracer]
Replaying Traces

Challenges

- Tracing creates lots of data
- Example: Web server with 10 requests/sec
  A trace of 10 k/request means 8GB/day
- All of this must be replayed to reproduce the failure (alternative: checkpoints)
- Huge performance penalty!

XRay + DTrace
XRay + DTrace

- DTrace: Kernel extension for capturing data
- System interaction can be monitored
- Captured I/O can be replayed at will
- Focus on high performance

Program Inputs

Accessing Passwords

```
open(".htpasswd")
read(...) modify(...) write(...) close(...)
```

```
Thread A

.httpasswd file
open(".httpasswd")
read(...) modify(...) write(...) close(...)

Thread B
```
### Lost Update

```
Thread A
open(".htpasswd")
read(…)
read(…)
modify(…)
write(…)
close(…)

Thread B
modify(…)
write(…)  
close(…)
```

A’s updates get lost!

### Reproducing Schedules

- Thread changes are induced by a scheduler
- It suffices to record the schedule (i.e., the moments in time at which thread switches occur) and to replay it
- Requires deterministic input replay

### Constructive Solutions

- Lock resource before writing
- Check resource update time before writing
- … or any other synchronization mechanism
Program Inputs

Physical Influences

- Static electricity
- Alpha particles (not cosmic rays)
- Quantum effects
- Humidity
- Mechanical failures + real bugs

Debugging Tools
A Heisenbug

- Code fails outside debugger only

```c
int f() {
    int i;
    return i;
}
```

In program:
returns random value

In debugger:
returns 0

Bohr Bug = Repeatable under well-def'd conditions
Heisenbug = Changes when observed
Mandelbug = Causes are complex and chaotic, appears non-deterministic, but isn’t
Schrödinbug = Never should have worked, and promptly fails as soon one realizes this

More Bugs

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<th>Heisenbug</th>
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Isolating Units

- Capture + replay unit instead of program
- Needs an *unit control layer* to monitor input
Isolated Units

- **Databases.** Replay only the interaction with the database.
- **Compilers.** Record + replay intermediate data structures rather than the entire front-end.
- **Networking.** Record + replay communication calls.

A Control Example

```cpp
class Map {
public:
    virtual void add(string key, int value);
    virtual void del(string key);
    virtual int lookup(string key);
};

• How do we control this?
```

A Log as a Program

```cpp
#include "Map.h"
#include <assert>

int main() {
    Map map;
    map.add("onions", 4);
    map.del("truffels");
    assert(map.lookup("onions") == 4);
    return 0;
}

• This is a log file (and also a program)
• How do we get this?
```
Controlled Map

class ControlledMap: public Map {
public:
    typedef Map super;
    virtual void add(string key, int value);
    virtual void del(string key);
    virtual int lookup(string key);
    ControlledMap(); // Constructor
    ~ControlledMap(); // Destructor
};

Logging

void ControlledMap::add(string key, int value) {
    clog << "map.add("" << key << ", "
         << value << ");" << endl;
    Map::add(key, value);
}

void ControlledMap::del(string key) {
    clog << "map.del("" << key << ");" << endl;
    Map::del(key);
}

virtual int ControlledMap::lookup(string key) {
    clog << "assert(map.lookup("" << key << ") == ";
    int ret = Map::lookup(key);
    clog << ret << ");" << endl;
    return ret;
    assert(map.lookup("onions") == 4);
}

Logging Fixture

ControlledMap::ControlledMap()
{
    clog << ":include \"Map.h\"" << endl
        << ":include <cassert>" << endl
        << ":" << endl
        << "int main() {" << endl
        << "    Map map;" << endl;
}

ControlledMap::~ControlledMap()
{
    clog << "    return 0;" << endl
          << "}" << endl;
}
More Interaction

- Variables (hard to detect)
- Other units (break dependency if needed)
- Time (record + replay, too)

Mock Objects

- A Mock Object simulates an original object
- Its implementation tells how to react on specific calls (i.e. returning other mock objects)
- Can be combined with recording, too!

Concepts

★ Once a problem is tracked, one must reproduce it in the own environment
★ To reproduce a problem…
  - reproduce the environment (by adopting one circumstance after the other)
  - reproduce the execution (by controlling the input of the program or a unit)
Program Inputs

Randomness -> Operating System
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Data -> Debugging Tools

Program

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