Software Clone Detection

State-of-the-Art Survey

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No two parts are alike in software. . .

> *Software entities are more complex for their size than perhaps any other human construct because* **no two parts are alike** *(at least above the statement level).* **If they are, we make the two similar parts into a subroutine** *— open or closed. In this respect, software systems differ profoundly from computers, buildings, or automobiles, where repeated elements abound.*

– by Frederick P. Brooks, Jr: *No Silver Bullet: Essence and Accidents of Software Engineering*

Software Redundancy

copy&paste is common habit:

- number 1 on Beck and Fowler's "Stink Parade of Bad Smells"
- typically 5–30 % of code is similar (Baker, 1995; Baxter et al., 1998)
- in extreme cases, even up to 50 % (Ducasse et al., 1999)

Roadmap I

1. What is a clone?
2. Why do they exist?
3. What are the consequences of cloning?
4. What are costs and benefits of clone removal?
5. How do clones evolve?
6. How can we detect clones?
7. How can we compare clone detectors?

Roadmap II

8. How can we present clones to a user?

9. Clone Detection in Forward Engineering

What is a software clone?

> *Software clones are segments of code that are similar according to some definition of similarity.*
>
> – Ira Baxter, 2002

There can be different definitions of similarity based on . . .

- text
- syntax
- semantics
- pattern

What types of clones exist?

Clone detection experiment (Bellon, 2002a):

- type 1: identical code segments except for differences in layout and comments
- type 2: structurally identical segments except for differences in identifiers, literals, layout, and comments
- type 3: similar segments (additions, modifications, removals of statements)
- type 4: semantically equivalent segments

$\longrightarrow$ degree of similarity

properties:

- type-1, type-2, and type-4 clones form an equivalence relation
- semantic equivalence guaranteed only for type-4 clones

Open Issues

- What are suitable definitions of similarity for which purpose?
- Is there a theory of program redundancy similar to normal forms in databases?
- What other categorizations of clones make sense (e.g., syntax, semantics, origins, risks, etc.)?
- What is the statistical distribution of clone types in real-world programs?
- Which strategies of removal and avoidance, risks of removal, potential damages, root causes, and other factors are associated with these categories?

Why do clones exist?

Ethnographic study by Kim et al. (2005):

- Limitations of programming language designs may result in unavoidable duplicates in a code.
- Programmers often delay code restructuring until they have copied and pasted several times.
- Copy&paste dependencies often reflect important underlying design decisions, such as crosscutting concerns.
- Copied text is often reused as a template and is customized in the pasted context.

Investigation of clones in large systems by Kapser and Godfrey (2006): patterns of cloning:

- forking
- templating
- customization

Open Issues

More empirical research needed. Other potential reasons:

- insufficient information on global change impact
- badly organized reuse process (type-4 clones)
- questionable productivity measures (LOCs per day)
- time pressure
- educational deficiencies, ignorance, or shortsightedness
- intellectual challenges (e.g., generics)
- professionalism/end-user programming (e.g., HTML, Visual Basic, etc.)
- development process (Nickell and Smith (2003): XP yields less clones?)
- organizational issues, e.g., distributed development organizations

$\longrightarrow$ fight the reasons, not just the symptoms

What are the consequences of cloning?

Only plausible arguments, such as clones increase maintenance effort.

Very few empirical studies on effects of cloning

Monden et al. (2002):

- 2,000 Cobol modules with clones with at least 30 lines (1 MLOC, 20 years old)
- max clone length versus change frequency and number of errors

$\longrightarrow$ most errors in modules with a 200-line clone

$\longrightarrow$ many errors for modules with clones of less than 30 lines, too

$\longrightarrow$ lowest error rate for modules with 50-100–line clones

What are the consequences of cloning?

Chou et al. (2001) investigate hypothesis that if a function, file, or directory has one error, it is more likely that is has others

- additional observation for Linux and OpenBSD:
  - this phenomenon can be observed most often where programmer ignorance of interface or system rules combines with copy-and-paste

  $\longrightarrow$ programmers believe that "working" code is correct code

  $\longrightarrow$ if copied code is incorrect, or it is placed into a context it was not intended for, the assumption of goodness is violated

What are the consequences of cloning?

Li et al. (2006) use clone detection to find bugs when programmers copy code but rename identifiers in the pasted code inconsistently.

Systems analyzed: *Linux kernel*, *FreeBSD*, *Apache*, and *PostgreSQL*.

Findings:

- 13 % of the clones flagged as copy-and-paste bugs turned out to be real errors
- 73 % are false positives
- 14 % of the potential problems are still under analysis by the developers of the analyzed systems.

Open Issues

More empirical research needed on relation of cloning to quality attributes (bugs, costs, performance, etc.).

What are costs and benefits of clone removal?

We know various techniques to remove clones:

- automatic refactoring (Fanta and Rajlich, 1999)
- functional abstraction (Komondoor and Horwitz, 2002)
- macros (e.g., *CloneDr* by *Semantic Designs*)
- design patterns (Balazinska et al., 1999, 2000)

Cordy (2003) argues that companies are afraid of the risks.

What are costs and benefits of clone removal?

clone detection integrated in development process (Lague et al., 1997):

(1) preventive control: addition of a clone is reported for confirmation

(2) problem mining: find other pieces of code to be changed

benefits analyzed post-mortem:

(1) is assessed by the number of functions changed that have clones that were not changed; i.e., how often a modification was missed potentially

(2) is assessed by the number of functions added that were similar to existing functions; i.e., the code that could have been saved

What are costs and benefits of clone removal?

Open Issues

Empirical investigations of costs and benefits of clone removal are needed:

- clone types and their relation to quality attributes
- relevance ranking of clone types
- suitable removal techniques with costs and risks

How do clones evolve?

- Cloning is common and steady practice in Linux kernel (Godfrey and Tu, 2000, 2001; Antoniol et al., 2001, 2002)
- Clone genealogies (Kim et al., 2005):
  - show how clones derive in time over multiple versions of a program from common ancestors
  - many code clones exist in the system for only a short time

  $\longrightarrow$ extensive refactoring of such short-lived clones may not be worthwhile if they likely diverge from one another very soon
  - many long-living clones that have changed consistently with other elements in the same group cannot easily be avoided because of limitations of the programming language.

How do clones evolve?

Open Issues

- How do clones evolve in industrial systems?
- What does their evolution tell about the development organization?
- What affects cloning likelihood over time?
- How we can track and manage clones over versions?
- Can we use history information to improve clone detectors?

How can we detect clones?

Comparison of . . .

- text
  - string comparison (Johnson, 1993, 1994b) based on fingerprints (Karp, 1986; Karp and Rabin, 1987)
  - line comparison based on dot plots (Ducasse et al., 1999; Rieger, 2005)
  - for whole files (Manber, 1994)
- identifiers (information retrieval techniques)
  - latent semantic indexing (Marcus and Maletic, 2001)

How can we detect clones?

Comparison of . . .

- tokens
  - type-1/-2 clones: suffix trees (McCreight, 1976; Kosaraju, 1995) for parameterized strings **per line** (Baker, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1999)
  - type-3: dynamic programming (Baker and Giancarlo, 2002).
  - **per token** plus normalization of token stream (Ueda et al., 1999; Inoue et al., 2001; Kamiya et al., 2002, 2001b; Kamiya, 2001; Nakae et al., 2001; Ueda et al., 2001, 2002a,b; Kamiya et al., 2001a)
  - post-processing to find clones fully contained in syntactic unit (Higo et al., 2002)
  - pre-processing to find clones fully contained in syntactic unit (Synytskyy et al., 2003; Cordy et al., 2004) using island parsers (Moonen, 2001)
  - parsing to obtain syntactic scopes (Gitchell and Tran, 1999)

How can we detect clones?

Comparison of . . .

- metrics (Kontogiannis et al., 1994, 1995; Kontogiannis, 1997; Mayrand et al., 1996; Kontogiannis et al., 1996b,a; Lague et al., 1997; Balazinska et al., 1999, 2000; Merlo et al., 2002; Patenaude et al., 1999; Merlo et al., 2004)
  - for web sites (Di Lucca et al., 2002; Lanubile and Mallardo, 2003)
- statements using data mining (Wahler et al., 2004; Li et al., 2004)

How can we detect clones?

Comparison of . . .

- syntax trees
  - hashing plus tree matching (Baxter et al., 1998; Leitao, 2003)
  - tree matching plus dynamic programming (for file comparison) (Yang, 1991)
  - suffix trees for serialized syntax trees (Falke, Frenzel, and Koschke, 2006)
- program dependency graphs (Komondoor and Horwitz, 2001a,b; Krinke, 2001)

How can we detect clones?

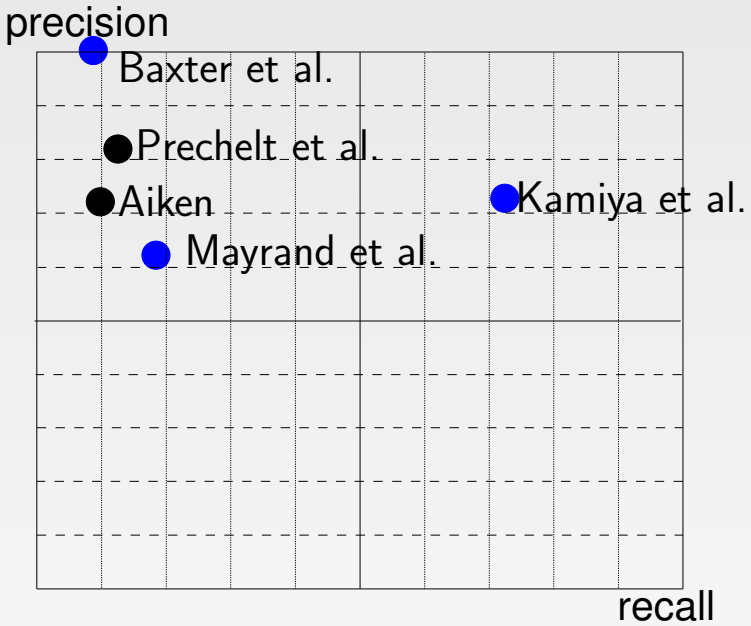
Combined approach by Leitao (2003)

- syntactic transformations in canonical form
- plus semantics in terms of comparison functions for
  - call graphs
  - commutative operators
  - user-defined equivalences that yield degree of evidence

How can we compare clone detectors?

Quantitative comparison of clone detectors by Bailey and Burd (2002)

- human oracle for 16 KLOC program
- comparison of
  - token-based (Kamiya et al., 2002)
  - syntax-based (Baxter et al., 1998)
  - metric-based (Mayrand et al., 1996) (reimplemented)
  - token-based (plagiarism) (Prechelt et al., 2000)
  - text-based (plagiarism) (Schleimer et al., 2003)



How can we compare clone detectors?

Quantitative comparison of clone detectors by Bellon and Koschke (2002b; 2007) for 4 Java and 4 C systems of 850 KLOC in total

	Baker	Baxter	Kamiya	Krinke	Merlo	Rieger
Basis	Token	AST	Token	PDG	Metric	Text
Clone type	1, 2	1, 2	1, 2, 3	3	1, 2, 3	1, 2, 3
Speed	+ +	-	+	- -	+ +	?
RAM	+	-	+	+	+ +	?
Recall	+	-	+	-	-	+
Precision	-	+	-	-	+	-
Hidden	42 %	28 %	46 %	4 %	24 %	31 %

Later re-used and extended by Falke, Frenzel, and Koschke, 2006

How can we compare clone detectors?

Qualitative study by Van Rysselberghe and Demeyer (2004):

- text-based Ducasse et al. (1999); Rieger (2005)
- token-based Baker (1995)
- metric-based Mayrand et al. (1996)

Criteria:

- how easy it is to adapt to a new language
- recall and precision
- effort
- suitability for particular task

Conclusions:

- text-based detection suitable for first overview
- token-based detection suitable for refactoring at statement level
- metric-based detection suitable for refactoring at method level

Benchmarks

Open Issues

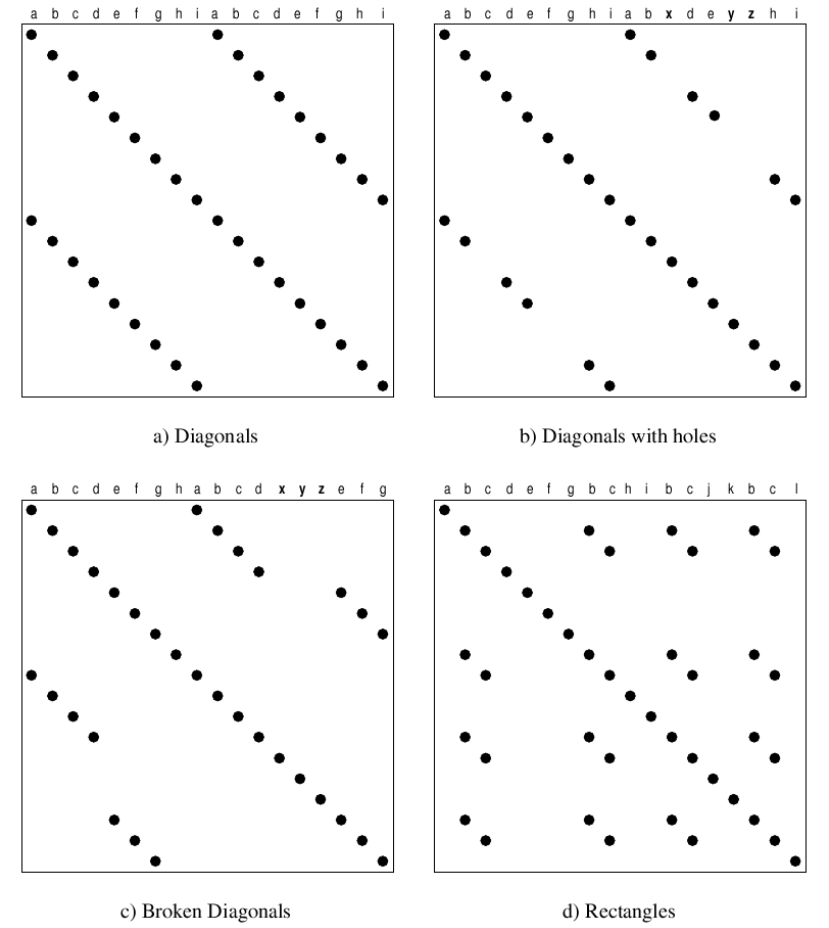
Limitations of current benchmarks

- single oracle (until recently)
  - differences among different human raters for clone candidates (Walenstein et al., 2003) when clones ought to be removed.
- yes/no decision rather than degree of confidence
- clones length measured as lines rather than tokens
- insists on contiguous lines/tokens
- clone pairs rather than clone classes

Benchmarking should become standard procedure of the community.

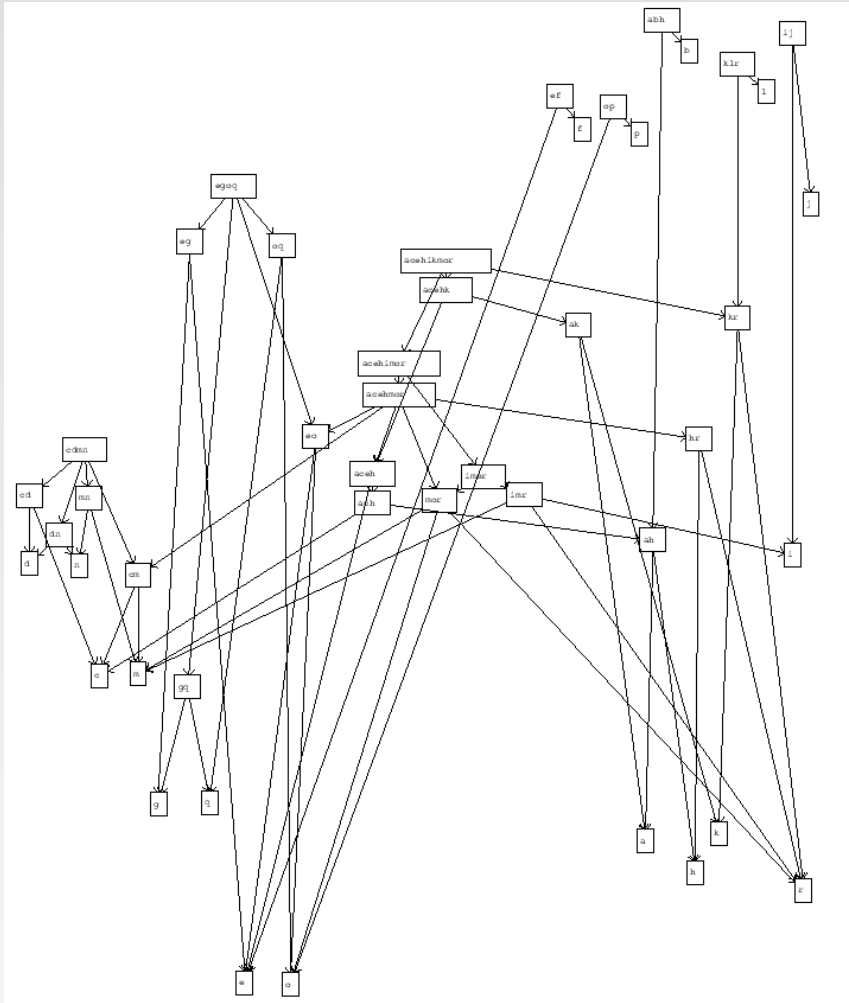
How can we present clones to a user?

Dot plots (Church and Helfman, 1993; Ducasse et al., 1999; Ueda et al., 2002b):



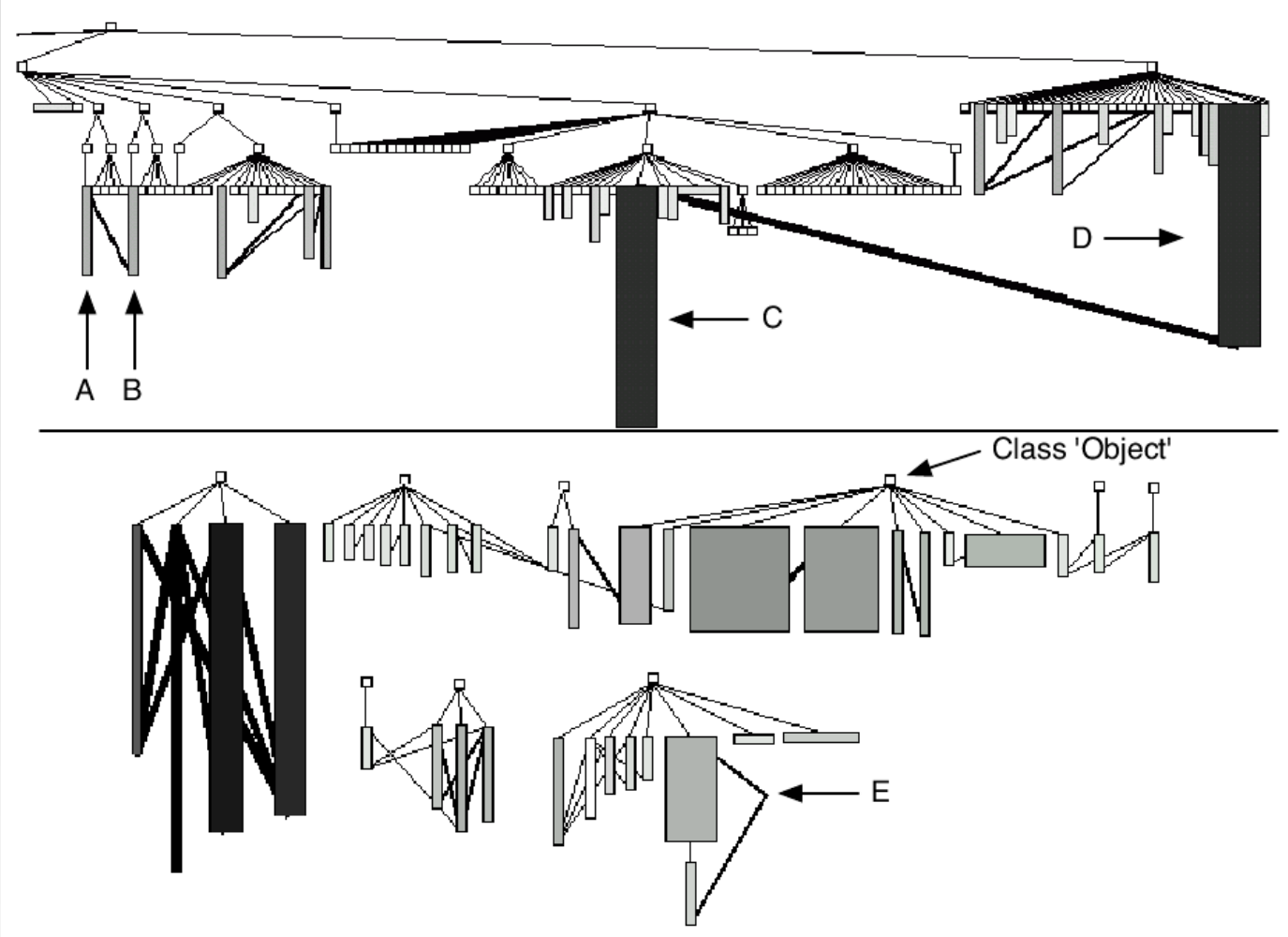
How can we present clones to a user?

Hasse diagram by Johnson (1994a):



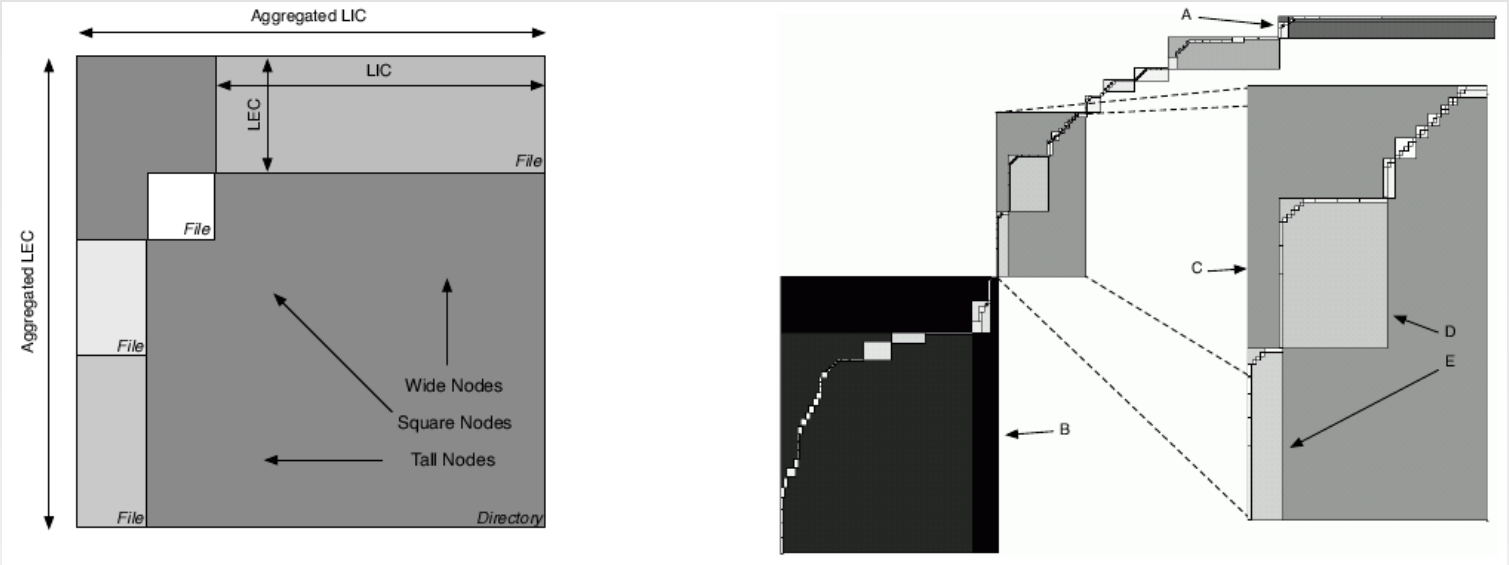
How can we present clones to a user?

Polymetric view by Rieger et al. (2004):



How can we present clones to a user?

Tree map variation by Rieger et al. (2004):

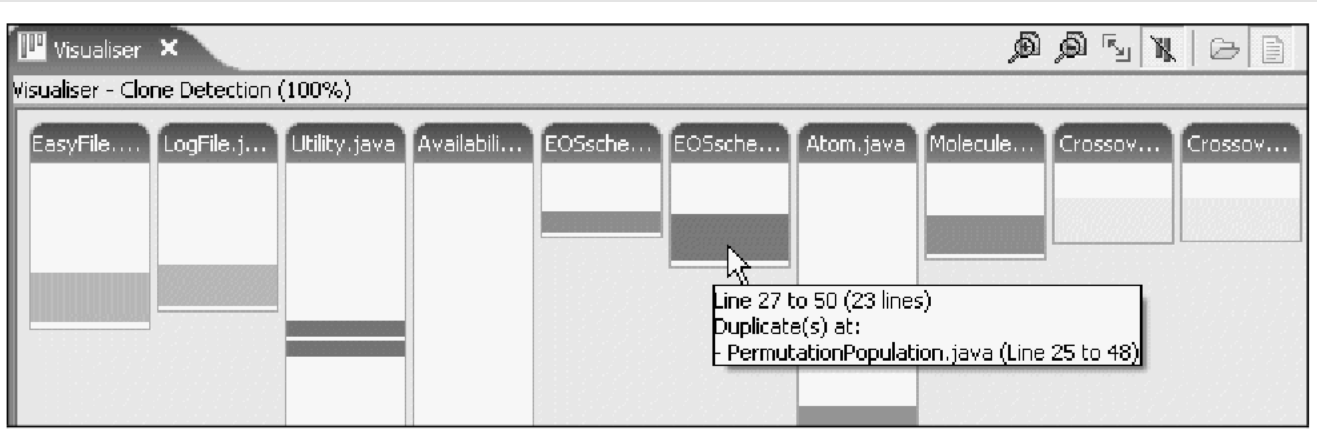


How can we present clones to a user?

Arc diagram by Wattenberg (2002):

How can we present clones to a user?

Clones visualiser view in Eclipse (Tairas et al., 2006):



How can we present clones to a user?

Open Issues

No systematic empirical research on the appropriate type of visualization for a particular task (clone monitoring, detection, removal, etc.).

Tool Support in Forward Engineering

Current software engineering tools have poor support for identifying reusable code templates or maintaining them during software evolution.

– Kim et al. (2005)

Cloning is a good strategy if you have the right tools in place. Let programmers copy and adjust, and then let tools factor out the differences with appropriate mechanisms.

– Ira Baxter, 2002

Further Reading and Resources

- `http://www.informatik.uni-bremen.de/st/lehredetails.php?id=&lehre_id=44`
  Lecture on software reengineering (slides and video) including techniques for clone detection
- `http://www.bauhaus-stuttgart.de/clones/`
  Material on experiment to compare clone detectors
- `http://drops.dagstuhl.de/portals/index.php?semnr=06301`
  Dagstuhl seminar on clone detection, slides and proceedings

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