

# A Distributed Graph Algorithm: Knot Detection

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A *knot* in a directed graph is a useful concept in deadlock detection. A distributed algorithm for identifying a knot in a graph by using a network of processes is presented. The algorithm is based on the work of Dijkstra and Scholten.

Categories and Subject Descriptors: C.2.4 [Computer-Communication Systems]: Distributed Systems—*distributed applications, network operating systems*; D.1.3 [Programming Techniques]: Concurrent Programming; F.2.2 [Analysis of Algorithms and Problem Complexity]: Nonnumerical Algorithms and Problems—*sequencing and scheduling*; G.2.2 [Discrete Mathematics]: Graph Theory—*graph algorithms, network problems*

General Terms: Algorithms

Additional Key Words and Phrases: Distributed algorithms, message communication, knot

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

A vertex  $v_i$  in a directed graph is in a *knot* if for every vertex  $v_j$  reachable from  $v_i$ ,  $v_i$  is reachable from  $v_j$ . Chang [2] shows that knot is a useful concept in deadlock detection. Dijkstra [3] has proposed a distributed algorithm for detecting whether a given process in a network of processes is in a knot. His algorithm is based on his previous work with Scholten [4] on termination detection of diffusing computations. We propose an algorithm for knot detection which is also based on [4] but is conceptually simpler. We also discuss the extensions of our algorithm to a more general class of problems.

## 2. MODEL OF A NETWORK OF COMMUNICATING PROCESSES

A process is a sequential program which can communicate with other processes by sending/receiving messages. Two processes  $P$  and  $Q$  are said to be neighbors if they can communicate directly with one another without having messages go through intermediate processes. We assume that communication channels are bidirectional: if  $P$  can send messages to  $Q$ , then  $Q$  can send messages to  $P$ . A process knows its neighbors but is otherwise ignorant of the general communication structure of the network.

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Supported in part by the Air Force under grant AFOSR 81-0205.

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ACM Transactions on Programming Languages and Systems, Vol. 4, No. 4, October 1982, Pages 678-686.

We assume a very simple protocol for message communication; this protocol is equivalent to the one used by Dijkstra and Scholten [4]. Every process has an input buffer of unbounded length. If process  $P$  sends a message to a neighbor process  $Q$ , then the message gets appended at the end of the input buffer of  $Q$  after a finite, arbitrary delay. We assume that (1) messages are not lost or altered during transmission, (2) messages sent from  $P$  to  $Q$  arrive at  $Q$ 's input buffer in the order sent, and (3) two messages arriving simultaneously at an input buffer are ordered arbitrarily and appended to the buffer. A process receives a message by removing it from its input buffer.

The assumption of unbounded length buffers is for ease of exposition. We show in Section 5.1 that the input buffer length of process  $Q$  can be bounded by the number of neighbors of  $Q$ .

### 3. A DISTRIBUTED ALGORITHM FOR KNOT DETECTION

Consider a network of processes corresponding to a given directed graph  $G$ : there is a one-to-one correspondence between processes in the network and vertices in the graph; a process  $p_i$  in the network represents vertex  $v_i$  in  $G$ , for all  $i$ ; and  $p_i, p_j$  are neighbors if edge  $(v_i, v_j)$  or  $(v_j, v_i)$  exists in  $G$ . Process  $p_1$  initiates a computation to determine if  $v_1$  is in a knot.

#### 3.1 Local Variables of Processes

Every process  $p_i$  maintains the following variables.

- succeeding*( $i$ ): This Boolean variable is set *true* when  $p_i$  determines that  $v_i$  is reachable from  $v_1$ . Initially this variable is *false* for all  $p_i, i \neq 1$ , and is *true* for  $p_1$ . Eventually, *succeeding*( $i$ ) will be *true* if and only if  $v_i$  is reachable from  $v_1$ .
- preceding*( $i$ ): Same as above, except that *preceding*( $i$ ) represents whether  $v_1$  is reachable from  $v_i$ .
- subordinate*( $i$ ): This is integer valued and will be set to 1 if and only if *succeeding*( $i$ ) **and not** *preceding*( $i$ ); else it will be set to 0.  $v_1$  is in a knot if and only if *subordinate*( $i$ ) is eventually zero for every process  $i$ .
- cs*( $i$ ): This is an integer-valued variable which keeps the partial sum of some subordinate variables. A goal of the program is to establish the following at termination:

$$cs(1) = \sum_i subordinate(i).$$

Therefore  $v_1$  is in a knot if and only if  $cs(1) = 0$  at termination.

We discuss in Section 3.2 the different types of messages sent among processes. In short, a process  $p_i$  may send a *message* to  $p_j$ , and  $p_j$  sends an *acknowledgment* (*ack*) to  $p_i$  for every *message* that  $p_j$  receives from  $p_i$ . We introduce the following variables related to *message* and *ack* transmission.

- num*( $i$ ): This is the number of unacknowledged *messages*, that is, the number of *messages* sent by this process  $p_i$  for which *acks* have not been received so far.

*father(i)*: This is a process from which  $p_i$ ,  $i \neq 1$ , received a *message* when its *num(i)* was last zero. *father(i)* is undefined initially.

Our goal is to maintain a rooted tree structure at all times over processes whose  $num > 0$ ; *father* will denote the parent in this tree structure, and  $p_1$  the root.

### 3.2 Messages Sent Among Processes

There are two types of messages sent between neighbors in this algorithm.

(i) Structure message, or *message*, has two components,  $(type, p)$ , where *type* = *suc* or *pre* and  $p$  is the identity of the sender process. Process  $p_i$  sends  $(suc, p_i)$  to  $p_j$  if there is a path from  $v_1$  to  $v_j$  in which  $v_i$  is the prefinal vertex. Process  $p_i$  sends  $(pre, p_i)$  to  $p_j$  if there is a path from  $v_j$  to  $v_1$  in which  $v_i$  follows  $v_j$  in the path.

(ii) Acknowledgment message, or *ack*, is of the form  $(ack, c)$ , where  $c$  is an integer. *Acks* are used to update *cs* and *num*. The entire computation terminates when process  $p_1$  receives *acks* for all messages that it sent, that is, when  $num(1)$  is decremented to zero. *Acks* for all messages are sent back as soon as the messages are received, except for messages received from *father*; an *ack* to a *father* is sent *only when num* next becomes zero.

*Convention.* It is convenient for purposes of proof to define an *atomic action* within which invariant assertions may be temporarily violated and outside of which the invariants must hold. We write  $\langle A_1; A_2; \dots; A_n \rangle$  to show that executions of statements  $A_1, A_2, \dots, A_n$  must be considered as an atomic action. We use PASCAL-like notation with the added commands *send* and *receive* to write our programs.

### 3.3 Knot-Detection Algorithm

*Convention.* We write *succeeding*, *preceding*, etc., for *succeeding(i)*, *preceding(i)*, etc., when the context is clear.

*Overview of the Algorithm.* As stated earlier, one goal of the algorithm is to maintain a rooted directed tree structure over the set of processes  $p_i$  whose  $num(i) > 0$ . The root of the tree will be  $p_1$ , and *father(i)* will be the parent in the tree for  $p_i$ ,  $i \neq 1$ . In order to maintain the tree structure, we must ensure that (1) a process  $p_i$ ,  $i \neq 1$ , acquires a *father* only if it does not have one currently: this is guaranteed, since a process acquires a *father* only when its  $num(i)$  becomes nonzero; and (2) a process  $p_i$  can be removed from the tree (i.e., set its  $num(i) = 0$ ) only if it is a leaf node: this will be guaranteed by every process sending its last *ack* to its *father*. Computation terminates when the tree is empty.

We will also maintain the invariant (1) given in Lemma 4.2, which states that the sum of *cs* over all processes plus the  $c$ 's in the *acks* in transit equals the sum of *subordinates* over all processes. The algorithm will ensure that if  $num(i) = 0$  and  $i \neq 1$ , then  $cs(i) = 0$ . Therefore, when the tree is empty,  $cs(i) = 0$  for all  $i$ ,  $i \neq 1$ , and hence

$$cs(1) = \sum_i subordinate(i).$$

Process  $p_1$  is in a knot if and only if  $cs(1) = 0$ .

Algorithm for  $p_1$

*Initialization*

```

begin
  father is undefined;
  subordinate := 0; cs := 0; num := 0;
  ⟨succeeding := true;
  num := num + number of successors of  $v_1$ ;
  send (suc,  $p_1$ ) to all successors);
  ⟨preceding := true;
  num := num + number of predecessors of  $v_1$ ;
  send (pre,  $p_1$ ) to all predecessors)
end

```

*Upon receiving a structure message (type, p)*

```

  send (ack, 0) to  $p$ 

```

(M1)

*Upon receiving an acknowledgment (ack, c)*

```

begin
  cs := cs + c; num := num - 1;
  if num = 0 then terminate computation
    { $v_1$  is in a knot if cs = 0}
end

```

(M2)

Algorithm for  $p_i$ ,  $i \neq 1$

*Initialization*

```

begin
  father is undefined; subordinate := 0; cs := 0; num := 0;
  succeeding := false; preceding := false
end

```

*Upon receiving a message (type, p)*

```

begin
  {update father or send an ack immediately}
  if num = 0
    then father :=  $p$ 
    else begin {send (ack, cs) to  $p$ ; cs := 0} end;
  {update succeeding and preceding if necessary}
  if type = suc and not succeeding {For the first time  $p_i$  has determined that  $v_i$  is
    reachable from  $v_1$ }
    then
      begin {succeeding := true;
        num := num + number of successors of  $v_i$ ;
        send (suc,  $p_i$ ) to all successors}
      end;
    if type = pre and not preceding {For the first time  $p_i$  has determined that  $v_1$  is
      reachable from  $v_i$ }
      then
        begin {preceding := true;
          num := num + number of predecessors of  $v_i$ ;
          send (pre,  $p_i$ ) to all predecessors}
        end;
  {update subordinate if necessary. Also update cs to maintain the invariant in Lemma 4.2}
end

```

(L1)

```

if succeeding and not preceding
  then
    begin  $\langle cs := cs - subordinate + 1; subordinate := 1 \rangle$  end (L2)
  else
    begin  $\langle cs := cs - subordinate + 0; subordinate := 0 \rangle$  end; (L3)
    {send ack to father if  $num = 0$ }
    if  $num = 0$ 
      then begin  $\langle \text{send} (ack, cs) \text{ to } father; cs := 0 \rangle$  end (L4)
    end

```

Upon receiving an acknowledgment (*ack*, *c*)

```

begin
   $cs := cs + c; num := num - 1;$  (L5)
  if  $num = 0$ 
    then
      begin  $\langle \text{send} (ack, cs) \text{ to } father; cs := 0 \rangle$  end (L6)
    end
end

```

#### 4. PROOF OF CORRECTNESS

LEMMA 4.1. *At any point in the computation, the set of processes with  $num > 0$  form a rooted tree with  $p_1$  as the root and the parent relation specified by the local variable "father."*

PROOF. The lemma holds vacuously initially.  $num(i)$  and  $father(i)$  may be changed only upon receipt of a *message* or an *ack* by process  $i$ . If a process with  $num > 0$  receives a *message*, then it does not alter its *father*, thus preserving the tree property. Similarly, if a process has  $num > 0$  after processing an *ack*, it does not alter the tree structure. If a process  $p_j$  changes  $num(j)$  from zero, then it must have received a *message* from some other process  $p_i$  on the tree and must have set  $father(j) = i$ , thus preserving the tree property.

We now show that only a leaf node can decrement its  $num$  to zero. If  $p_i$  is on the tree and is not a leaf, then there is a process  $p_j$  with  $num(j) > 0$  and  $father(j) = i$ ; then  $p_j$  will not return an *ack* to  $p_i$  while  $p_j$  remains on the tree, and hence  $num(i) > 0$  while  $p_j$  remains on the tree. Therefore only a leaf node can decrement its  $num$  to 0, which preserves the tree property. This completes the proof.  $\square$

Let  $T$ , at any point in computation, denote the set of *ack* messages which are in Transit, that is, which have been sent but have not yet been received.

LEMMA 4.2. *The following is an invariant:*

$$\sum_i cs(i) + \sum_{(ack, c) \in T} c = \sum_i subordinate(i). \quad (1)$$

PROOF. The lemma holds initially, since all the terms in the equation are zero. For  $p_i$ ,  $i \neq 1$ , the terms in the equations are modified only at program points L1-L6, and for  $p_1$ , these terms can be modified only at M1 or M2. The reader may easily convince himself that the equation is left invariant by the execution of the statements at these program points.  $\square$

THEOREM 4.3. *Assume that process  $p_1$  terminates computation (in step M2).  $cs(1) = 0$  if and only if  $v_1$  is in a knot.*

PROOF. We first show that when  $p_1$  terminates computation (i)  $cs(i) = 0$  for  $i \neq 1$ , (ii)  $subordinate(i)$  is correctly set, and (iii) the set  $T$  is empty. The theorem follows directly from the invariant proved in Lemma 4.2.

(i) When  $p_1$  terminates computation in step M2,  $num(1) = 0$ . Then the tree is empty, since  $p_1$  was the root of the tree. Therefore  $num(i) = 0$  for all  $i$ . If  $num(i) = 0$ , then  $cs(i) = 0$  for all  $i$ ,  $i \neq 1$ , because every change to  $num(i)$  is followed by the code to set  $cs(i)$  to 0 if  $num(i)$  is 0 (steps L4 and L6).

(ii) If  $v_i$  is reachable from  $v_1$ , it follows by induction on path length to  $v_i$  that  $p_i$  will eventually receive a message which will result in  $succeeding(i)$  set true;  $succeeding(i)$  remains true thereafter. Similarly for  $preceding(i)$ . Therefore  $subordinate(i)$  will eventually be set to its correct value. When assignment is made to  $succeeding(i)$  or  $preceding(i)$ ,  $p_i$  has not returned an *ack* to its father, and hence the computation could not be over. Therefore these variables are assigned their correct values before the termination of computation.

(iii) Since the tree is empty, every process must have received *acks* corresponding to all messages sent. Therefore there can be no *ack* in transit, that is, set  $T$  is empty.  $\square$

LEMMA 4.4.  $p_1$  will terminate computation in finite time.

PROOF. A process  $p_i$  sends at most two messages (*type*,  $p_i$ ) to any other process  $p_j$  because (1) a message is sent only when *succeeding* or *preceding* is set to true, and (2) *succeeding* and *preceding* are never reset to false. Because the graph is finite, the total number of messages sent is bounded. Hence the total number of *acks* sent is also bounded. Observe that every process must send or receive either a message or an *ack* every time it starts to execute. Therefore a process can switch from idle to executing only a finite number of times. There are no loops in the program; therefore every executing process will become idle in finite time. Hence every process in the network will cease to execute in finite time, and no more messages or *acks* will be sent or received from then on.

We now show that the tree must be empty at this point. If not, let  $p_i$  be a leaf node of the tree;  $num(i) > 0$ , since  $p_i$  is on the tree. There is no  $p_j$  on the tree for which  $father(j) = p_i$ , and hence  $p_i$  must have received all its outstanding *acks*; therefore  $num(i) = 0$ , a contradiction!  $\square$

## 5. NOTES ON THE KNOT-DETECTION ALGORITHM

### 5.1 Bounding the Buffer Size

We assumed earlier for purposes of exposition that buffers are of unbounded length. In the knot-detection algorithm a process sends at most two messages to any neighbor process, and therefore no process sends more than two *acks* to any other process. Hence the buffer length for any process need not exceed four times the number of neighbors of the process.

### 5.2 Efficiency

This algorithm is superior to the brute-force algorithm in which process  $p_1$  (1) computes *successor\**, the set of vertices reachable from  $v_1$ ; (2) computes *prede-*

cessor\*, the set of vertices that can reach  $v_1$ ; and (3) then declares that  $v_1$  is in a knot if and only if  $successor^* \subseteq predecessor^*$ . The computation of  $successor^*$  ( $predecessor^*$ ) can be done by using an algorithm similar to the one proposed here—every *ack* carries with it a set of *successors* (*predecessors*). Therefore a *successor* at distance  $d$  from  $v_1$  will have its identity transmitted through  $d$  processes to reach  $v_1$ . The total message length will be at least  $O(N^2)$  for an  $N$ -vertex graph, as opposed to  $O(E)$  for our algorithm, where  $E$  is the number of edges.

## 6. EXTENSIONS

We show in this section that the ideas in the knot-detection algorithm can be extended to solve a very general class of problems. Consider a distributed computation which is initiated by process  $p_1$  sending messages to some of its neighbors. Any other process can send messages only after receiving a message. The computation terminates when no process has any more messages to send and all messages that have been sent have been received. Dijkstra and Scholten [4] were the first to identify this class of computations, which they call *diffusing computations*. They proposed an algorithm, using the growing and shrinking tree, to detect termination of diffusing computations. Our contribution is to show how the same idea may be exploited to compute a networkwide function of locally computed results.

Let  $local\text{-}result(i)$  denote some computed result at process  $p_i$ , at termination of the entire computation. It is required to compute  $global\text{-}result$  at the termination of computation, where

$$global\text{-}result = f(local\text{-}result(i), \text{ for all } i), \quad (2)$$

$f$  being any arbitrary computable function.

The knot-detection algorithm computed the  $global\text{-}result$   $cs(1)$ , with  $local\text{-}result(i) \equiv subordinate(i)$ , and

$$cs(1) = \sum_i subordinate(i), \quad (3)$$

that is,  $f \equiv \sum$ .

We propose two schemes for computing networkwide functions. Note that our algorithm can be used to develop distributed algorithms according to the following methodology. In order to compute some  $global\text{-}result$ , invent a function  $f$  and  $local\text{-}result(i)$  satisfying (2) and then design a distributed algorithm to compute  $local\text{-}result(i)$  at process  $p_i$ , for all  $i$ . Then superimpose our algorithm to compute the  $global\text{-}result$ . A variation of this idea appears in [1], where a number of other problems amenable to this approach are listed.

One difficulty with a straightforward implementation is that a process cannot know when network computation has terminated. Process  $p_i$  knows that network computation can terminate only when  $num(i) = 0$ ; however,  $p_i$  cannot assert the converse, that is, that network computation may not have terminated even if  $num(i) = 0$ . Hence  $p_i$  must send back its current value of  $local\text{-}result(i)$  to its *father* every time that it decrements  $num(i)$  to zero. This causes a problem:  $p_i$  may send back a  $local\text{-}result$  to its *father* and subsequently get another *message*

which causes it to compute a new *local-result*. Therefore  $p_i$  must cancel the old *local-result* value. We propose two mechanisms for canceling out-of-date local results: bags and time stamps.

To simplify exposition in our discussion of cancellation schemes, we will assume that there is no delay between sending and receiving a message, that is, that there is never any message in transit. The reader can easily convince himself that the arguments also apply when the transmission delay is not zero.

### 6.1 Bags

Each process  $p_i$  maintains two bags, *all*( $i$ ) and *canceled*( $i$ ). Each bag element is of the form  $(j, \text{local-result}(j))$ . If  $(j, x)$  is an element in *canceled*( $i$ ), then process  $p_j$  has *definitely canceled* an out-of-date *local-result*  $x$ . If  $(j, x)$  is an element of *all*( $i$ ), then at some time  $p_j$  posted a *local-result*  $x$ . The elements in *all*( $i$ ) are not necessarily current. Every *local-result* that  $p_j$  has posted appears in the union of bags *all*( $i$ ), for every  $i$ . Similarly, all *local-results* that  $p_j$  has canceled appear in the union of *canceled*( $i$ ), for every  $i$ . Therefore  $p_j$ 's current *local-result* is in the difference of these two bag unions. In other words, the goal is to maintain the following invariant. Let  $r(j)$  denote the current *local-result* of process  $j$ , and let  $\cup$  denote the union operation over bags. Then

$$\cup_j (j, r(j)) = \cup_i \text{all}(i) - \cup_i \text{canceled}(i).$$

Initially, *all*( $i$ ) holds the initial *local-result* of  $p_i$ , and *canceled*( $i$ ) is empty. To post a current *local-result*  $x$  and cancel the previous *local-result*  $y$ , process  $p_i$  adds  $(i, x)$  to *all*( $i$ ) and  $(i, y)$  to *canceled*( $i$ ).

Two bags *a bag* and *c bag* are returned with every *ack* in the form  $(\text{ack}, a \text{ bag}, c \text{ bag})$ . When  $p_j$  sends an *ack*, it takes the elements out of bag *all*( $j$ ) and puts them into *a bag*, and similarly puts elements from *canceled*( $j$ ) into *c bag*, and then sends *a bag* and *c bag* along with the *ack*. If  $p_i$  receives  $(\text{ack}, a \text{ bag}, c \text{ bag})$ , it adds the contents of *a bag* to *all*( $i$ ) and *c bag* to *canceled*( $i$ ).

At termination, *all*( $i$ ) and *canceled*( $i$ ) will be empty for  $i \neq 1$ , *canceled*(1) will contain tuples corresponding to all canceled *local-results*, and *all*(1) will contain tuples corresponding to all *local-results*, current and canceled. By removing the canceled results (i.e., elements of *canceled*(1)) from *all*(1),  $p_1$  can determine the current *local-results* for all processes. The knot-detection algorithm of Section 3 uses the bag idea; the information in the two bags has been condensed into a single integer *cs*. Adding an element  $(j, x)$  to *all*( $i$ ) is implemented by incrementing  $cs(i)$  by  $x$ . Adding an element  $(j, y)$  to *canceled*( $i$ ) is achieved by decrementing  $cs(i)$  by  $y$ .

*Efficiency.* The sizes of the bags returned with *acks* can be reduced by having each process  $p_i$  remove all elements common to *all*( $i$ ) and *canceled*( $i$ ) from both *all*( $i$ ) and *canceled*( $i$ ).

### 6.2 Time Stamps

Each process  $p_i$  maintains a set  $S(i)$  of triples of the form  $(j, n(j), \text{local-result}(j))$ , where  $n(j)$  is a time stamp local to process  $p_j$ . When a process  $p_i$  wishes to post



a new *local-result*  $x$  (and cancel an out-of-date result), it increments  $n(i)$  and adds  $(i, n(i), x)$  to  $S$ .

When  $p_i$  sends an *ack*, it sends  $(ack, S(i))$  and then sets  $S(i)$  to empty. Upon receiving an *ack*,  $(ack, B)$ ,  $p_i$  sets  $S(i)$  to the union of  $S(i)$  and  $B$ . Upon termination,  $S(i)$  will be empty for all  $i \neq 1$ , and  $S(1)$  will contain all tuples  $(i, n(i), S(i))$  that have been sent.  $p_1$  can identify the current *local-results* because they will be associated with the latest time stamps.

*Efficiency.* The sizes of the sets returned with *acks* can be reduced by having each process  $p_i$  discard all elements in  $S(i)$  that it can identify as being out of date.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge the suggestions of E. W. Dijkstra and C. S. Scholten, on whose work this paper is based. We are also grateful to two anonymous referees for their valuable comments.

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Received September 1981; revised May 1982; accepted May 1982