Fundamentals of Computer Science I: Media Computing (CS151.01 2008S)

Class 40: Pairs and Pair Structures

Held: Monday, 14 April 2008

Summary: We consider *pairs*, the basic data type used to build lists and other structures in Scheme. We also consider why it is useful to understand about pairs.

Related Pages:

- EBoard.
- Lab: Pairs and Pair Structures.
- Reading: Pairs and Pair Structures.

Notes:

- I will continue to reserve time at the start of class for discussion of campus issue.
- Are there questions on Assignment 9?
- The intended lesson for Assignment 9 gets lost in the cost of file I/O.
- We will have visitors in this class on Tuesday and Wednesday (at least) as part of my triennial review.
- Reading for tomorrow: Deep Recursion.

Overview:

- Memory and naming.
- Pairs and cons cells.
- Why care?

Behind the Scenes: Scheme and Memory

- Many of the issues we've been considering lately (e.g., naming) have a hidden dimension: The behavior is governed, in part, by the way that Scheme represents values "behind the scenes", particularly how it stores values in the computer's memory.
- You can think of Scheme as maintaining a few tables that map names to values.
- Each value must be *stored* somewhere in memory.
- Each value must be *tagged* with its type. (Memory is really only a sequence of 0's and 1's; we need a way to interpret that type.)
- Different types are stored in different ways.
 - Many basic values, such as moderately-sized numbers, are stored in a fixed amount of memory.
 - Other values get stored in a larger, value-specific amount of memory (along with explicit or implicit info about the size).
- I'll draw some pictures in class.

Cons Cells

- One set of interesting values in Scheme are the things that cons creates. We often call these *cons cells* or *pairs*
- The first value of a pair is a reference to the first parameter to cons. The second value is a reference to the second parameter.
- I'll also draw some pictures of these things in class.

Dotted Pairs

- Although we've used lists as the second parts of each cons cell, you can use other values. If the second part of a cons cell is not a list, you get what is called a *dotted pair*.
- The shorthand for a dotted pair is (x . y).
- You'll also see the dot at the end of a long sequence of cons cells.
- Why is the dot there?
 - To distinguish things close to lists from lists.
- Why is it right before the last element, and not earlier?
 - Because we don't know until we hit the end that it's not a list.

Why Care?

- Why should we care about the underlying structure used for lists?
- Because it helps explain why Scheme does some things the way it does.
- Because it helps us understand the hidden costs associated with some operations.
- Because it provides background for future discussions.

Lab

- Any questions?
- Do the lab (preferably in pairs :-).
- Be prepared to reflect.

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