Today’s Lecture

- Discuss
  - No Silver Bullet paper
  - Brooks’ reflections on it after nine years

No Silver Bullet

“There is no single development, in either technology or management technique, which by itself promises even one order-of-magnitude improvement within a decade in productivity, in reliability, in simplicity.”

-- Fred Brooks, 1986

i.e. There is no magical cure for the “software crisis”
An Order of Magnitude

• In order to improve the development process by a factor of 10
  • the accidents of software engineering would have to account for 9/10ths of the overall effort
  • tools would have to reduce accidents to zero

• Brooks
  • doesn’t believe the former is true and
  • the latter is highly unlikely, even if it was true
    • because each tool will solve some problems but introduce others

The Essence

• Brooks divides the essence into four subcategories
  • complexity
  • conformity
  • changeability
  • invisibility

• Lets consider each in turn

Complexity

• Software entities are amazingly complex
  • No two parts (above statements) are alike
    • Contrast with materials in other domains
  • They have a huge number of states
    • Brooks claims they have an order of magnitude more states than computers (e.g. hardware) do
  • As the size of the system increases, its parts increase exponentially

Complexity, continued

• Problem
  • You can’t abstract away the complexity
    • Physics models work because they abstract away complex details that are not concerned with the essence of the domain; with software the complexity is part of the essence!
  • The complexity comes from the tight interrelationships between heterogeneous artifacts: specs, docs, code, test cases, etc.
Complexity, continued

- Problems resulting from complexity
  - difficult team communication
  - product flaws
  - cost overruns
  - schedule delays
  - personnel turnover (loss of knowledge)
- unenumerated states (lots of them)
- lack of extensibility (complexity of structure)
- unanticipated states (security loopholes)
- project overview is difficult (impedes conceptual integrity)

Conformity

- A significant portion of the complexity facing software engineers is arbitrary
  - Consider a system designed to support a particular business process
  - New VP arrives and changes the process
  - System must now conform to the (from our perspective) arbitrary changes imposed by the VP

Conformity, continued

- Other instances of conformity
  - Non-standard module or user interfaces
    - Arbitrary since each created by different people
    - not because a domain demanded a particular interface
  - Adapting to a pre-existing environment
    - May be difficult to change the environment
    - however if the environment changes, the software system is expected to adapt!
  - It is difficult to plan for arbitrary change!

Changeability

- Software is constantly asked to change
  - Other things are too, however
    - manufactured things are rarely changed
    - the changes appear in later models
    - automobiles are recalled infrequently
    - buildings are expensive to remodel
  - With software, the pressures are greater
    - software = functionality (plus its malleable)
    - functionality is what often needs to be changed!
Invisibility

• Software is invisible and unvisualizable
  • In contrast to things like blueprints
    • Here geometry helps to identify problems and optimizations of space
  • It's hard to diagram software
    • We find that one diagram may consist of many overlapping graphs rather than just one
      • Flow of control, flow of data, patterns of dependency, etc.
  • This lack of visualization deprives the engineer from using the brain’s powerful visual skills

What about <x>?

• Brooks argues that past breakthroughs solve accidental difficulties
  • High-level languages
  • Time-Sharing
  • Programming Environments
• “New” hopefuls
  • Ada, OO Programming, AI, expert systems, “automatic” programming, etc.

Promising Attacks on Essence

• Buy vs. Build
  • Don’t develop software at all!
• Rapid Prototyping
  • Brooks buys in
• Incremental Development
  • Grow, not build, software
• Great designers

No Silver Bullet Refired

• Brooks reflects on the “No Silver Bullet” paper, ten years later
  • Lots of people have argued that their methodology is the silver bullet
    • If so, they didn’t meet the deadline of 10 years!
  • Other people misunderstood what Brooks calls “obscure writing”
    • For instance, when he said “accidental”, he did not mean “occurring by chance”
The size of “accidental” effort

- Some people misunderstood his point with the “9/10ths” figure
  - Brooks doesn’t actually think that accidental effort is 9/10th of the job
    - it’s much smaller than that
  - As a result, reducing it to zero (which is probably impossible) will not give you an order of magnitude improvement

Obtaining the Increase

- Some people interpreted Brooks as saying that the essence could never be attacked
  - That’s not his point however; he said that no single technique could produce an order of magnitude increase by itself
  - He argued that several techniques in tandem could achieve that goal but that requires industry-wide enforcement and discipline

Obtaining the Increase, cont.

- Brooks states
  - “We will surely make substantial progress over the next 40 years; an order of magnitude over 40 years is hardly magical…”

Next Week

- Software Deployment (Lab 1)
  - installation
- Pattern Matching
  - wildcards and regular expressions
- Pattern Matching Tools
  - find and grep