Dynamic Languages
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References

• An Efficient Implementation of Self, a dynamically-typed object-oriented language based on prototypes, Chambers, Unger, Lee, OOPSLA 1989

• Earlier versions of this lecture by Vijay Menon, CSE 501 Sp09, adapted from slides by Kathleen Fisher
Dynamic Typing

JavaScript:

```javascript
function foo(a, b) {
    t1 = a.x;    // runtime field lookup
    t2 = b.y();  // runtime method lookup
    t3 = t1 + t2; // runtime dispatch on ‘+’
    return t3;
}
```
Overview

• Self
  – 30(!) year old research language
  – One of earliest JIT compilation systems
  – Pioneered techniques used today

• JavaScript
  – Self with a Java syntax
  – Much recent work to optimize
Self

- Prototype-based pure object-oriented language
- Designed by Randall Smith (Xerox PARC) and David Ungar (Stanford University)
  - Successor to Smalltalk-80
  - “Self: The power of simplicity” at OOPSLA ‘87
  - Initial implementation done at Stanford; then project shifted to Sun Microsystems Labs
  - Vehicle for implementation research
- Latest version available from selflanguage.org
Design Goals

• Occam’s Razor: Conceptual economy
  – Everything is an object.
  – Everything done using messages.
  – No classes
  – No variables

• Concreteness
  – Objects should seem “real”
  – GUI to manipulate objects directly
How successful?

• Very well-designed language, but...
• Few users: not a popular success
• However, many research innovations
  – Very simple computational model
  – Enormous advances in compilation techniques
  – Influenced the design of Java compilers
Language Overview

• Dynamically typed
• Everything is an object
• All computation via message passing
• Creation and initialization done by copying example object
• Operations on objects:
  – send messages
  – add new slots
  – replace old slots
  – remove slots
Objects and Slots

Object consists of named slots.

- **Data**
  - Such slots return contents upon evaluation; so act like variables

- **Assignment**
  - Set the value of

- **Method**
  - Slot contains Self code

- **Parent**
  - References an object to inherit its slots
Messages and Methods

• When a message is sent, search the receiver object for a slot with that name
• If none found, all parents are searched
  – Runtime error if more than one parent has a slot with the same name
• If slot found, its contents are evaluated and returned
  – Runtime error if no slot found
Messages and Methods

obj x $\rightarrow$ 3

obj print $\rightarrow$ print point object

obj x: 4 $\rightarrow$ obj after setting x to 4.
Mixing State and Behavior

parent* | ... | + add points

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>parent*</th>
<th>x:</th>
<th>y:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>x</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>←</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>y</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>←</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>x:</td>
<td>←</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>y:</td>
<td>←</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>parent*</th>
<th>x</th>
<th>random number generator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>y</td>
<td></td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>y:</td>
<td></td>
<td>←</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Object Creation

- To create an object, we copy an old one
- We can add new methods, override existing ones, or even remove methods
- These operations also apply to parent slots
Changing Parent Pointers

frog

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>jump</th>
<th>...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>eatFly</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

prince

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>dance</th>
<th>...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>eatCake</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p jump.
p eatFly.
p parent: prince.
p dance.

parent*:

parent*:

name:

name:

Charles
# Changing Parent Pointers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>frog</th>
<th>jump</th>
<th>...</th>
<th>prince</th>
<th>dance</th>
<th>...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>eatFly</td>
<td>...</td>
<td></td>
<td>eatCake</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- p jump.
- p eatFly.
- p parent: prince.
- p dance

```plaintext
parent*:

parent*: ←

name: Charles

name:
```
Disadvantages of classes?

• Classes require programmers to understand a more complex model
  – To make a new kind of object, we have to create a new class first
  – To change an object, we have to change the class
  – Infinite meta-class regression

• But: Does Self require programmers to reinvent structure?
  – Common to structure Self programs with traits: objects that simply collect behavior for sharing
Contrast with C++

• C++
  – Restricts expressiveness to ensure efficient implementation

• Self
  – Provides unbreakable high-level model of underlying machine
  – Compiler does fancy optimizations to obtain acceptable performance
Implementation Challenges I

• Many, many slow function calls:
  – Function calls generally somewhat expensive
  – Dynamic dispatch makes message invocation even slower than typical procedure calls
  – OO programs tend to have lots of small methods
  – Everything is a message: even variable access!

“The resulting call density of pure object-oriented programs is staggering, and brings naïve implementations to their knees” [Chambers & Ungar, PLDI 89]
Implementation Challenges II

• No static type system
  – Each reference could point to any object, making it hard to find methods statically
• No class structure to enforce sharing
  – Copies of methods in every object creates lots of space overhead

Optimized Smalltalk-80 is roughly 10 times slower than optimized C
Optimization Strategies

• Avoid per object space requirements
• Compile, don’t interpret
• Avoid method lookup
• Inline methods wherever possible
  – Saves method call overhead
  – Enables further optimizations
Clone Families
(Objects created from same prototype)

Avoid per object data

prototype

Model

clone family

Mutable
Fixed

Implementation

Map:

Fixed
Info

Map:

Mutable
Map

Mutable
Fixed
Dynamic Compilation

- Method is converted to byte codes when entered into the system
- Compiled to machine code when first executed
- Code stored in cache
  - if cache fills, previously compiled method flushed
- Requires entire source (byte) code to be available at runtime
Lookup Cache

• Cache of recently used methods, indexed by 
  (receiver type, message name) pairs

• When a message is sent, compiler first 
  consults cache
  – if found: invokes associated code
  – if absent: performs general lookup and potentially 
    updates cache

• Berkeley Smalltalk would have been 37% 
  slower without this optimization
Static Type Prediction

• Compiler predicts types that are unknown but likely:
  – Arithmetic operations (+, -, <, etc.) have small integers as their receivers 95% of time in Smalltalk-80
  – ifTrue had Boolean receiver 100% of the time.
• Compiler inlines code (and test to confirm guess):

```plaintext
if type = smallInt jump to method_smallInt
call general_lookup
```
Inline Caches

• First message send from a call site:
  – general lookup routine invoked & backpatch
• Call site back-patched previously
  – is previous method still correct?
    • yes: invoke code directly
    • no: proceed with general lookup & backpatch
• Successful about 95% of the time
• All compiled implementations of Smalltalk and Self use inline caches.
Polymorphic Inline Caches

- Typical call site has <10 distinct receiver types
  - Often can cache all receivers
- At each call site, for each new receiver, extend patch code:
  
  ```
  if type = rectangle jump to method_rect
  if type = circle    jump to method_circle
  call general_lookup
  ```

- After some threshold, revert to simple inline cache (megamorphic site)
- Order clauses by frequency
- Inline short methods into PIC code
Customized Compilation

• Compile several copies of each method, one for each receiver type
• Within each copy:
  – Compiler knows the type of self
  – Calls through self can be statically selected and inlined
• Enables downstream optimizations
• Increases code size
Type Analysis

• Constructed by compiler by flow analysis
• Type: set of possible maps for object
  – Singleton: know map statically
  – Union/Merge: know expression has one of a fixed collection of maps
  – Unknown: know nothing about expression
• If singleton, we can inline method
• If type is small, we can insert type test and create branch for each possible receiver (type casing)
Message Splitting

• Type information above a merge point is often better
• Move message send “before” merge point:
  – duplicates code
  – improves type information
  – allows more inlining
PICS as Type Source

• Polymorphic inline caches build a call-site specific type database *as the program runs*

• Compiler can use this runtime information rather than the result of a static flow analysis to build *type cases*

• Must wait until PIC has collected information
  – When to recompile?
  – What should be recompiled?

• Initial fast compile yielding slow code; then dynamically recompile – *hotspots*
Performance Improvements

• Initial version of Self was 4-5 times slower than optimized C
• Adding type analysis and message splitting got within a factor of 2 of optimized C
• Replacing type analysis with PICS improved performance by further 37%

Fairly recent Self compiler is within a factor of 2 of optimized C.
Impact on Java

- Sun cancels Self
- Animorphics Smalltalk
- Java becomes popular
- Sun buys A.J.
- Java Hotspot
Summary of Self

• “Power of simplicity”
  – Everything is an object: no classes, no variables
  – Provides high-level model that can’t be violated (even during debugging)
• Fancy optimizations recover reasonable performance
• Many techniques now used in Java compilers
• Papers describing various optimization techniques available from Self web site
JavaScript

• Self-like language with Java syntax
  – Dynamic OO language
  – Prototypes instead of classes
  – Nothing to do with Java beyond syntax

• Originated in Netscape

• “Standard” on today’s browsers
High-performance JavaScript

• Self approach:
  – V8 (Google Chrome)
  – SquirrelFish Extreme (Safari / WebKit)

• Trace compilation:
  – TraceMonkey (Firefox)
  – Tamarin (Adobe Flash/Flex)
V8 (Google Chrome)

• Three primary features
  – Fast property access
    • Hidden classes
  – Dynamic compiler
    • Compile on first invocation
    • Inline caching with back patching
  – Generational garbage collection
    • Segmented by types

• See
  http://code.google.com/apis/v8/design.html
Trace-Based Compilation

• Interpret initially
• Record trace information
  – Single entry, multiple exit
  – Loop header is typically trace start
• Compile hot trace (hot path through flowgraph)
  – Interpreter jumps to trace code when available
  – Stitch multiple traces together
• Specialize hot path (omit redundant checks)
  – Claim this achieves benefits of inline caching