Introduction to Aspect-Oriented Programming

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Brian Sletten
brians@acm.org
What AOP Is Not

- Brand New
- A Silver Bullet
- A Replacement for OOP
- A Patch For Bad Design
- Only Good for Academic Navel-Gazing
Agenda

- Backstory
- AOP
- AspectJ
- Other AOP Systems
- Summary
Backstory
## History

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Separation of Concerns (SOC)

- Intellectual forebear to AOP
- Reduction of Code Coupling and Tangling
- Flexibility and Reuse in Design
- “Pay As You Go”
What is a Concern?

“...A specific requirement or consideration that must be addressed in order to satisfy the overall system goal...”

“AspectJ in Action”, p.9
Example Concerns

- Logging
- Thread Synchronization
- Persistence
- Domain Modeling/Business Logic
- Security
- Exception-Handling
Prism Metaphor for SOC

- Business Logic
- Thread Synchronization
- Persistence
- Security
- Logging
- Requirements

Built System
Some Non-AOP Solutions

- Dynamic Proxies
  - Controlled Access to underlying object
- Servlet Filters
  - XSLT Transformations, Compression
- Design Patterns
  - Decorator Pattern
Interception Pattern

All three approaches demonstrate the notion of “interception”

Could also be Dynamic Proxies or Filters
OO is Good For

Object Abstractions
OO Is Not Good For

Concern Abstractions that are “Cross-Cutting”
What is a Cross-Cutting Concern?

- A feature or requirement that does not fit into a class-only decomposition
- Poorly modularized cross-cutting concerns result in
  - Code Tangling
  - Code Scattering
Code Tangling

- Multiple concerns complicate class behavior
- Reuse is hampered
- Maintenance is a bear
- Did security get called before persistence?
- Did I remember to synchronize after the logging?
Code Scattering

Good Modularity
Socket Creation in Tomcat

Fair modularity
Classloading in Tomcat

Bad modularity
Logging in Tomcat

Analysis compliments of Ron Bodkin (http://www.newaspects.com)
Limitations of OO

- Object-oriented programming is great for modeling object abstractions.
- Suffers from the “Tyranny of the Dominant Decomposition”*
  - When all you have is a class...
  - No support for cross-cutting concerns

*Term from the Hyper/J team
What is an Aspect?

“...A unit of modularization for cross-cutting concerns”
Goals of AOP

- ... to appropriately modularize cross-cutting concerns
- Does not replace class-based decomposition of OOP
- Promotes architectural flexibility and reduced coupling/tangling
AOP Process

- Remember the Prism
- Once the concerns are separated and modularized, they are “woven” together
  - Compile-time or run-time
- Production and Development Aspects
Benefits of AOP

- Each module has a clear definition
  - Simpler to implement
- Modules know as little about each other as possible
  - Easier to maintain
  - Better chance for reuse
- Evolution of system architecture
  - Weave features as needed
AspectJ Overview

- Developed at XEROX PARC
- Team lead by Gregor Kiczales
- Designed as an extension to Java
  - Aspects look an awful lot like Classes
  - Requires a separate compiler but emits standard bytecode that can run on any JVM
  - Easy to incorporate into conventional Java build processes
AspectJ Today

- Spun off to the Eclipse Project
- Maintained by many of the same people
- AJDT is a cool plug-in for Eclipse
- Increasingly in use in development and production systems
What is a Join Point?

Any identifiable/describable point in the control flow of a program

- A method call (**caller** side)
- A method execution (**callee** side)
- Setting/Getting a variable
- A constructor
What is a Pointcut?

- Expressions that select some set of join points and their context
  - arguments
  - Object being called
  - return values
  - variable being referenced
What is Advice?

- Pieces of code that are associated with one or more pointcuts
- Executed when the pointcut is reached
  - before advice - executed before pointcut
  - after advice - executed after pointcut
  - around advice - executed around point
Putting it together

A join point is where you would like to run some code (before, after, around -advice) when (pointcut) you get there
Finally, Some Code!

public class Foo {

    private int count;

    public Foo() {
    }

    public void sayHello() {
        System.out.println("Hello, AOP!");
        count++;
    }

    public int getCount() {
        return count;
    }

}
public aspect FooAspect {
    before() : call( * sayHello(..) )
    {
        System.out.println("Before the greeting!");
    }
}

The aspect "FooAspect" has before() advice for the pointcut specifying any call to a method called "sayHello" no matter how many arguments it takes.
Main method

public static void main( String [] args ) {
    Foo f = new Foo();
    f.sayHello();
}

Foo
int count
sayHello()
main()

FooAspect
<<aspect>>
before() : call( sayHello )
<<advises>>

Foo
int count
sayHello()
main()
Making it happen

```bash
ajc -classpath ./usr/local/aspectj1.1/lib/aspectjrt.jar *.java
java -cp ./usr/local/aspectj1.1/lib/aspectjrt.jar Foo
Before the greeting!
Hello, AOP!
```

**ajc** is the AspectJ compiler

**aspectjrt.jar** is the runtime support for AspectJ

It compiles the **Java source files** into a standard **Java class file**
Add Another Pointcut

before(): execution( * sayHello(..) )
{
    System.out.println("Also before the greeting!");
}

ajc -classpath ./usr/local/aspectj1.1/lib/aspectjrt.jar *.java
java -cp ./usr/local/aspectj1.1/lib/aspectjrt.jar Foo
Before the greeting!
Also before the greeting.
Hello, AOP!
call vs. execute

Not conventional UML, “Foo” treated as two Objects just for clarity
around() advice

```java
int around() : execution( * getCount() )
{
    System.out.println( "Before getCount()" );
    int retValue = proceed();
    System.out.println("After getCount()" );

    if( retValue == 0 ) {
        System.out.println("That was the first call!" );
    }

    return retValue;
}
```

Notice the **return type** specified for the around() advice. **proceed()** causes the actual method to be called.
Some Ideas for before() advice

- Ensure a user has the right privileges to make the call in question
- Assert any precondition
  - Help debug difficult problems like calling Swing code from the wrong thread!
Some Ideas for around() advice

- Obtain thread locks before calling proceed; release when done
- Only synchronize when you need it
- Allow different synchronization policies
- Catch any exception thrown on any method in an interface
Just the Tip of the Iceberg!

- AspectJ has so much more to offer
  - Abstract/reusable aspects
  - Pointcut context
  - Exception softening
  - Static cross-cutting
Other AOP Systems
Hyper/J

- Developed at IBM
  - Harold Osher and Terri Parr
- Comes out of the Subject-Oriented Programming efforts
- Multi-dimensional separation of concerns
Hyper/J (cont)

- Software is configured by files indicating how to assemble concern “hyperslices”
- Java-based but could be applied to other languages in theory
- Doesn’t have the activity that AspectJ does but is still supported and used
Composition Filters

- Developed at the University of Twente
  - Mehmet Aksit and Lodewijk Begmans
- “Interception”-based Java implementation
- Work includes formalisms for composing filters
- Very compelling but mostly academic
DemeterJ

- Work done by Dr. Karl Lieberherr and students at Northeastern Univ.
- Originally as Separation of Concerns (SOC)
- Based on “Adaptive Programming” model - special case of AOP
- Building blocks are graphs and traversals
- Traversals cross-cut graphs
Follows *Law of Demeter*

- “Only talk to your immediate friends that share your concerns”

- Keeps tangling and complication down by cleanly separating concerns as graph traversals
More Java-based AOP

- JBOSS AOP
- JAC
- AspectWerkz
- Nanning
JBOSS AOP

Built around Dynamic Proxies and interceptor stacks

- Add logging, persistence, replication, remoteness, ACIDity, caching and security to POJOs without changing Java code

- Smart resolution for method calls

- Avoid the marshalling penalty if target object lives in the same VM
JAC

- Based on Renaud Pawlak’s Ph.D. Thesis
- Part of ObjectWeb Middleware Project
- Adds CMP, clustering, distributed transactions (via JOTM) and access authentication to POJOs
- Has Rapid Application Development features
- UMLAF IDE (UML Aspectual Factory)
Most work by Jonas Bonér and Alexandre Vasseur

Supported by BEA

Lightweight, runtime bytecode modification via ClassLoader

Advice can be modified at runtime

XML-configuration or attributes

Aspects/advice are written in plain Java
Most work by Jon Tirsen

Simple “Interception”-based mechanism using Dynamic Proxies

Also supports Mixins and Introduction (static cross-cutting)

Designed to add EJB and J2EE kinds of features to POJOs
Non-Java AOP

- Largely unremarkable, inactive and lagging behind Java-based activity
- .NET offers compelling cross-language pointcut vision
- AspectR and Aspect.pm seem to be dead
AspectC++

Modeled after AspectJ

- C++ language extensions that require a separate compiler
- Doesn’t presently support get/set join points
- Commercial support from Pure Systems GmbH
- Plug-ins for VS.NET ($$) and Eclipse (in dev.)
AspectS

Project to add AOP concepts to the Squeak environment

Like many other approaches, the goal was not to modify the Smalltalk language or environment
Summary
AOP Today

- Fairly steep learning curve
  - Learn good OO first
- Tools are too primitive for average use
  - AJDT is improving this situation
- AOP augments OO
  - Class-based decomposition works for many situations (i.e. modeling object abstractions)
AOP Today (cont)

- Folded in gradually in many production systems
- Very popular as part of development systems (sanity checks, mock objects, etc.) -- compiled out of production
- **LOTS** of research to make it easier, unify the approaches, improve aspect weaving and composition
ATrack

Open source project to build a proof of concept AOP system from the ground up using AspectJ

- Bug Tracking system with persistence, transaction, session management, exception handling and logging as aspects

- Is also developing AJEE, a first cut at a "Standard Aspect Library"
AOP Consulting

AspectMentor
http://www.aspectmentor.com/

New Aspects of Software
http://www.newaspects.com/
Getting Started

Nanning, AspectWerkz and JAC are lightweight but don’t have the best conceptual introductions

AspectJ is the most “commercialized” AOP tool (tutorials, etc.)

“AspectJ in Action” by Ramnivas Laddad is a great book (Manning Publications)
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