

4. Reflection

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Selected material by Marcus Denker and Stéphane Ducasse

Birds-eye view



Reflection allows you to both *examine* and *alter* the meta-objects of a system.

Using reflection to modify a running system requires some care.



Roadmap

- > Reification and reflection
- > Reflection in Programming Languages
- > Introspection
 - Inspecting objects
 - Querying code
 - Accessing run-time contexts
- > Intercession
 - Overriding `doesNotUnderstand:`
 - Anonymous classes
 - Method wrappers



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Why we need reflection

As a programming language becomes *higher and higher level*, its implementation in terms of underlying machine involves *more and more tradeoffs*, on the part of the implementor, about what cases to optimize at the expense of what other cases. ... the *ability to cleanly integrate* something outside of the language's scope *becomes more and more limited*

Kiczales, in Paepcke 1993

What is are Reflection and Reification?

- > Reflection is the ability of a program to manipulate as data something representing the state of the program during its own execution.
 - Introspection is the ability for a program to observe and therefore reason about its own state.
 - Intercession is the ability for a program to modify its own execution state or alter its own interpretation or meaning.
- > Reification is the mechanism for encoding execution state as data

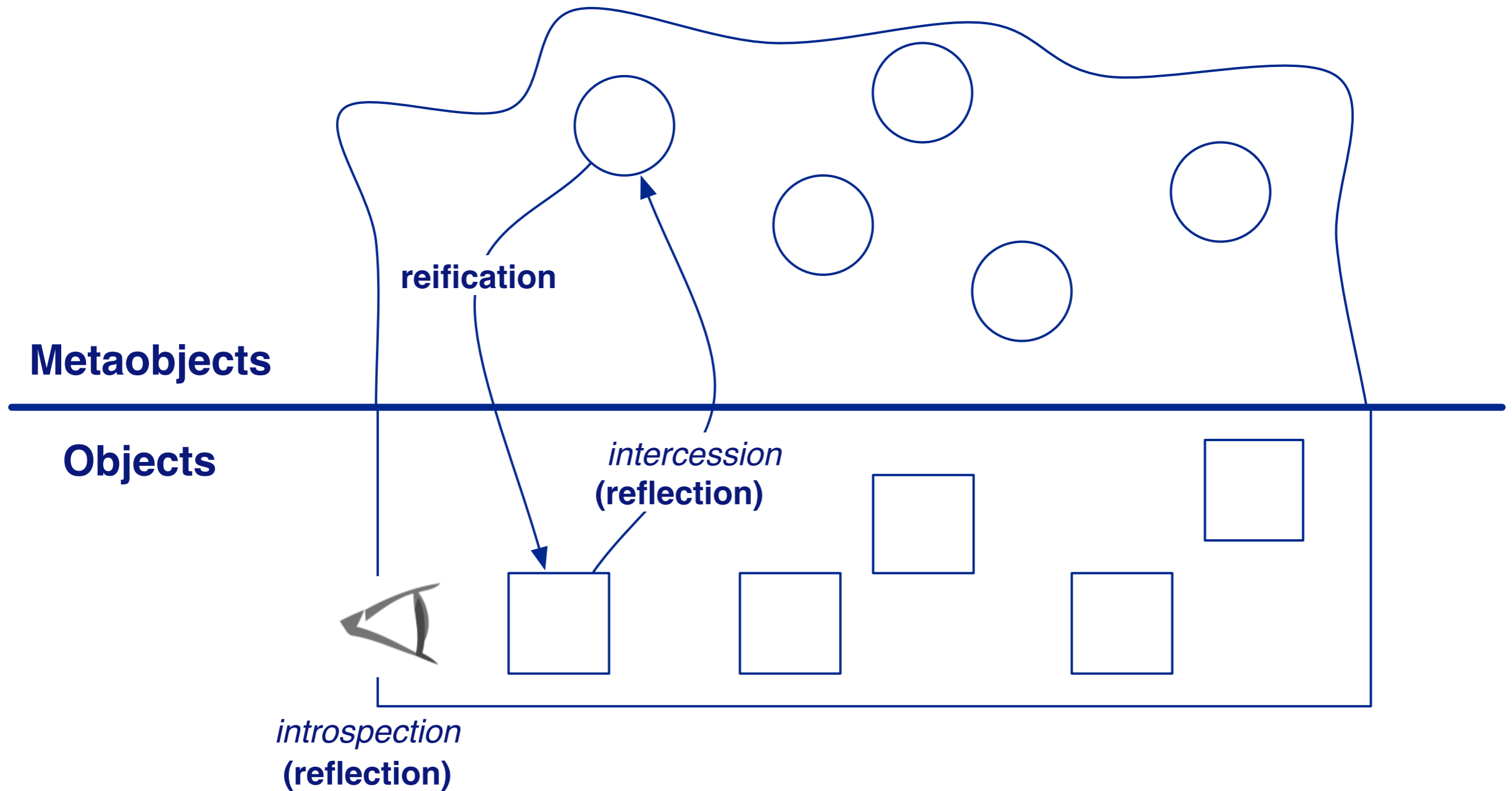
— *Bobrow, Gabriel & White, 1993*

Structural and behavioral reflection

- > Structural reflection lets you reify and reflect on
 - the *program* currently executed
 - its *abstract data types*.
- > Behavioral reflection lets you reify and reflect on
 - the language *semantics* and *implementation* (processor)
 - the data and implementation of the *run-time system*.

Malenfant et al., *A Tutorial on Behavioral Reflection and its Implementation*, 1996

Reflection and Reification



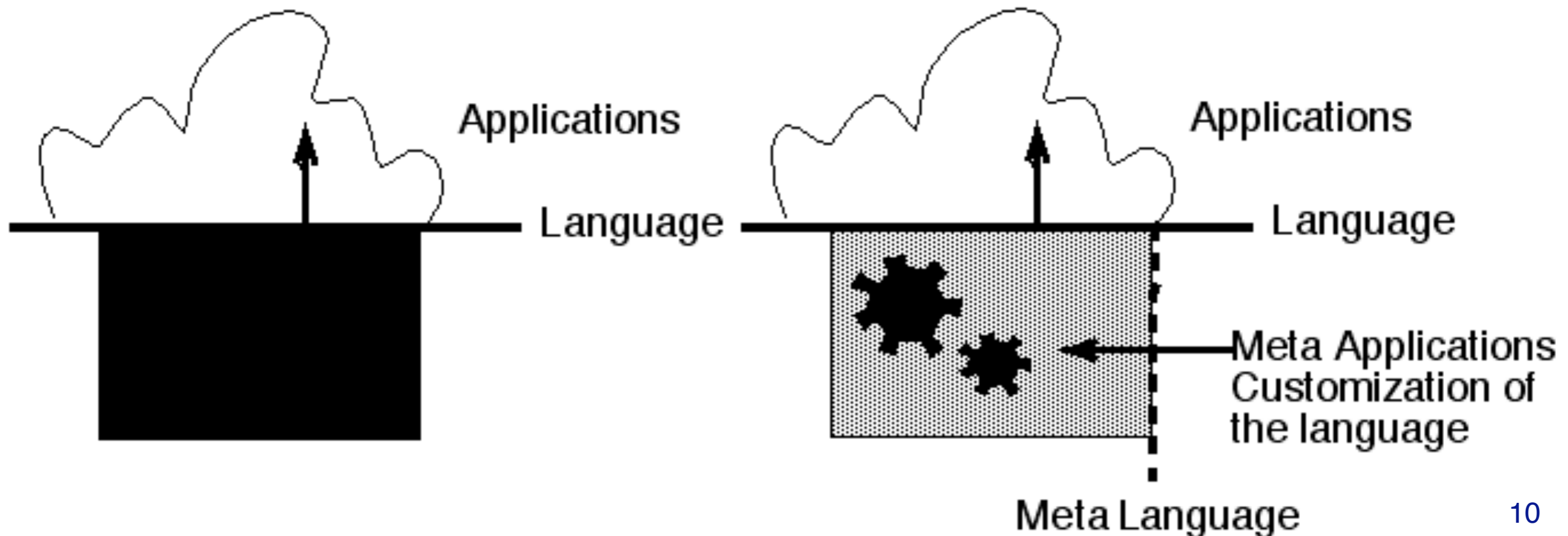
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Metaprogramming in Programming Languages

- > The meta-language and the language can be different:
 - Scheme and an OO language
- > The meta-language and the language can be same:
 - Smalltalk, CLOS
 - In such a case this is a *metacircular architecture*



Introspection in Java

```
// Without introspection  
World world = new World();  
world.hello();
```

```
// With introspection  
Class cls = Class.forName("World");  
Method method = cls.getMethod("hello", null);  
method.invoke(cls.newInstance(), null);
```

Reflection in Smalltalk

The screenshot displays the Smalltalk IDE interface. At the top, a window titled "HelloWorld" shows a class browser with a list of classes on the left and a table of class information on the right. The table has columns for class name, superclass, and instance variables. The "HelloWorld" class is selected, showing its superclass as "as yet unclassified" and its instance variables as "hello". Below the table are buttons for "Instance", "?", and "Class".

Below the class browser, a workspace window shows the following code:

```
hello  
^ 'hello'
```

Another workspace window, titled "Workspa", shows the following code:

```
"Without reflection"  
HelloWorld new hello 'hello'
```

A third workspace window, titled "Workspace", shows the following code:

```
"With reflection"  
Object subclass: #HelloWorld  
  instanceVariableNames: "  
  classVariableNames: "  
  poolDictionaries: "  
  category: 'HelloWorld'.  
(Smalltalk at: #HelloWorld) compile: 'hello ^ "hello"'.  
((Smalltalk at: #HelloWorld) perform: #new) perform: #hello.  
'hello'
```

Three approaches

1. Tower of meta-circular interpreters
2. Reflective languages
3. Open implementation

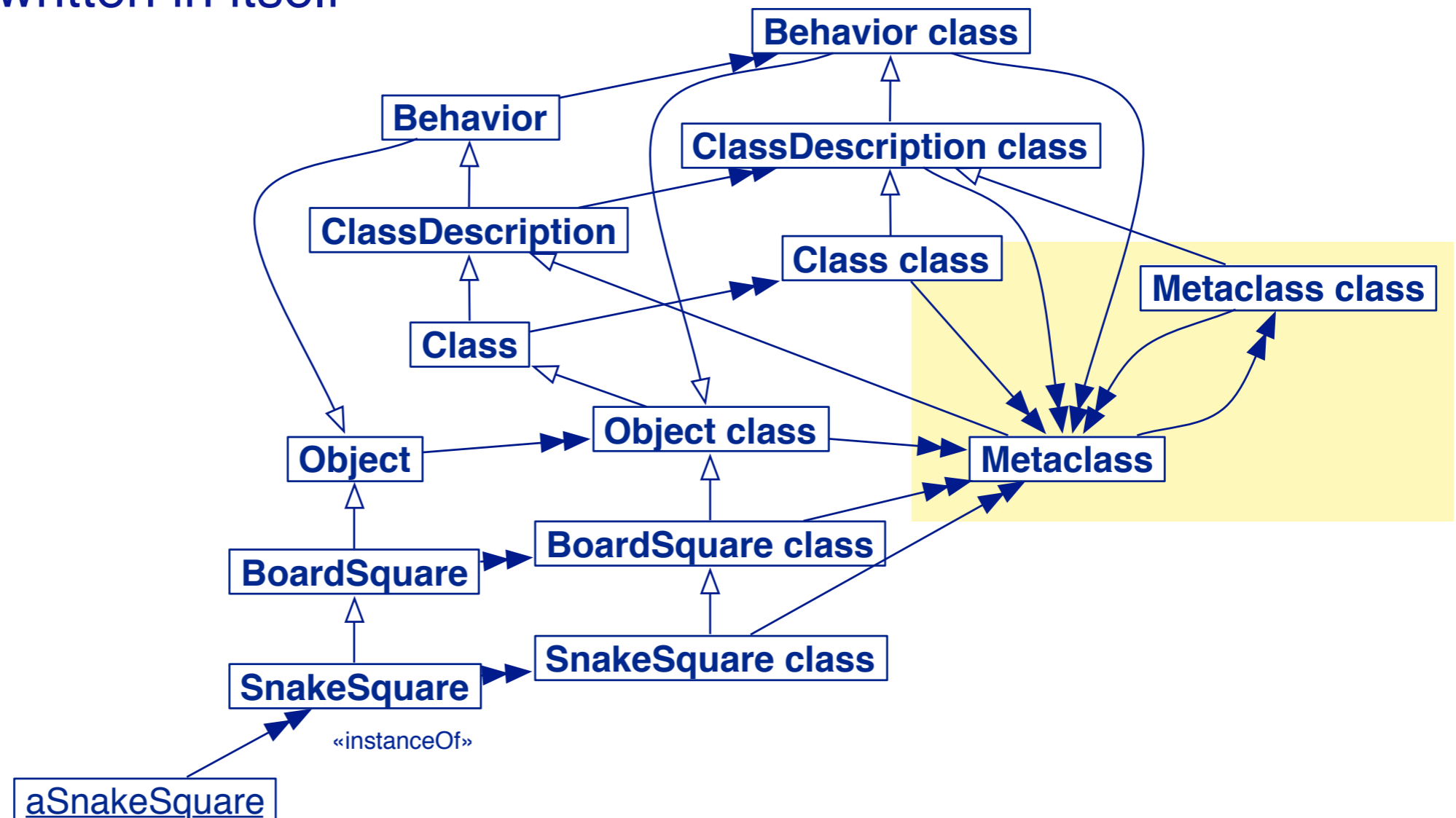
1. Tower of meta-circular interpreters

- > Each level interprets and controls the next
 - 3-Lisp, Scheme
- > “Turtles all the way down” [up]
 - In practice, levels are reified on-demand



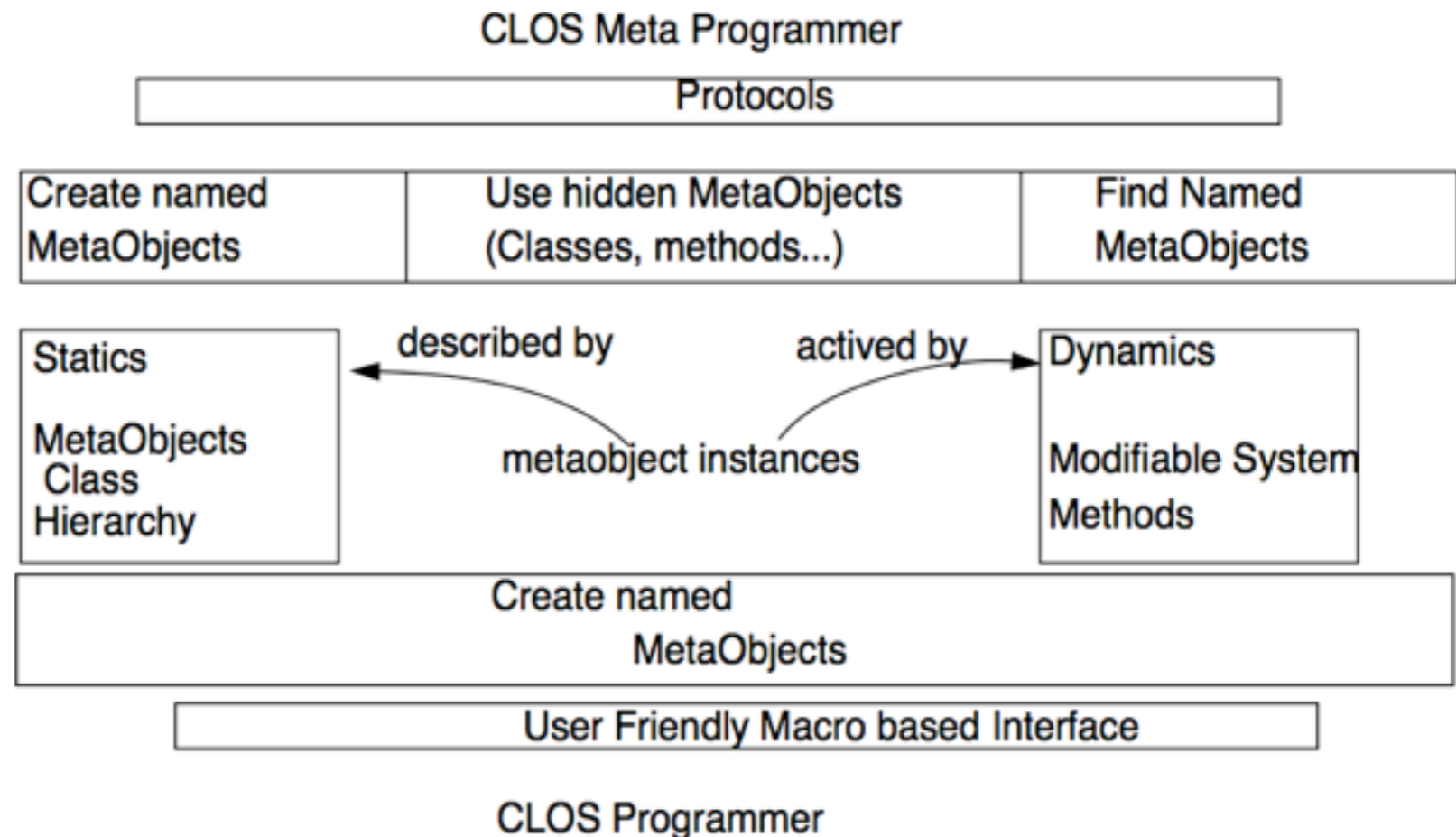
2. Reflective languages

- > Meta-entities control base entities
 - Smalltalk, Self
 - Language is written in itself



3. Open implementation

- > Meta-object protocols provide an interface to access and modify the implementation and semantics of a language
 - CLOS
- > *More efficient, less expressive than infinite towers*



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The Essence of a Class

1. A format (e.g. a set of instance variables)
2. A superclass
3. A method dictionary

Behavior >> initialize

In Pharo 3.0:

```
Behavior>>initialize
  "moved here from the class side's #new"
  super initialize.
  self superclass: Object.
  "no longer sending any messages, some of them crash the VM"
  self methodDict: self emptyMethodDictionary.
  self setFormat: Object format.
  self traitComposition: nil.
  self users: IdentitySet new.
```

NB: not to be confused with Behavior>>new!

The Essence of an Object

1. Objects are pointers (references)
 2. Objects contain values (references to other objects)
 3. Objects have a class (reference to a class)
- > Can be special:
- `SmallInteger`
 - Indexed rather than pointer values
 - Compact classes (`CompiledMethod`, `Array` ...)

Metaobjects vs metaclasses

- > Need distinction between metaclass and metaobject!
 - A metaclass is a class whose instances are classes
 - A metaobject is an object that describes or manipulates other objects
 - *Different metaobjects can control different aspects of objects*

Some MetaObjects

> **Structure:**

- Behavior, ClassDescription, Class, Metaclass, ClassBuilder

> **Semantics:**

- Compiler, Decompiler, IRBuilder

> **Behavior:**

- CompiledMethod, BlockContext, Message, Exception

> **ControlState:**

- BlockContext, Process, ProcessorScheduler

> **Resources:**

- WeakArray

> **Naming:**

- SystemDictionary

> **Libraries:**

- MethodDictionary, ClassOrganizer

Meta-Operations

“Meta-operations are operations that provide information about an object as opposed to information directly contained by the object ...They permit things to be done that are not normally possible”

Inside Smalltalk

Accessing state

- > *Object*>>instVarNamed: aString
- > *Object*>>instVarNamed: aString put: anObject
- > *Object*>>instVarAt: aNumber
- > *Object*>>instVarAt: aNumber put: anObject

```
pt := 10@3.
```

```
pt instVarNamed: 'x'.
```

```
pt instVarNamed: 'x' put: 33.
```

```
pt
```

10

33@3

Accessing meta-information

- > *Object*>>class
- > *Object*>>identityHash

```
'hello' class  
(10@3) class  
Smalltalk class  
Class class  
Class class class  
Class class class class
```

```
'hello' identityHash  
Object identityHash  
5 identityHash
```

```
ByteString  
Point  
SmalltalkImage  
Class class  
Metaclass  
Metaclass class
```

```
2664  
2274  
5
```

Changes

- > `Object>>primitiveChangeClassTo: anObject`
 - both classes should have the same format, *i.e.*, the same physical structure of their instances
 - *“Not for casual use”*
- > `Object>>become: anotherObject`
 - Swap the object pointers of the receiver and the argument.
 - All variables in the entire system that used to point to the receiver now point to the argument, and vice-versa.
 - Fails if either object is a `SmallInteger`
- > `Object>>becomeForward: anotherObject`
 - Like `become:` but only in one direction.

Implementing Instance Specific Methods

```
ReflectionTest>>testPrimitiveChangeClassTo
| anonClass browser |

anonClass := Class new. "an anonymous class"
anonClass superclass: Browser.
anonClass setFormat: Browser format.

browser := Browser new.
browser primitiveChangeClassTo: anonClass new.
anonClass compile: 'thisIsATest ^ 2'.

self assert: browser thisIsATest equals: 2.
self should: [Browser new thisIsATest]
raise: MessageNotUnderstood.
```

become:

- > Swap all the pointers from one object to the other and back (symmetric)

```
ReflectionTest>>testBecome
| pt1 pt2 pt3 |

pt1 := 0@0.
pt2 := pt1.
pt3 := 100@100.
pt1 become: pt3.

self assert: pt1 equals: (100@100).
self assert: pt1 == pt2.
self assert: pt3 equals: (0@0).
```

becomeForward:

- > Swap all the pointers from one object to the other (asymmetric)

```
ReflectionTest>>testBecomeForward
| pt1 pt2 pt3 |

pt1 := 0@0.
pt2 := pt1.
pt3 := 100@100.
pt1 becomeForward: pt3.

self assert: pt1 equals: (100@100).
self assert: pt1 == pt2.
self assert: pt2 == pt3.
```

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Code metrics

Collection allSuperclasses size.	2
Collection allSelectors size.	559
Collection allInstVarNames size.	0
Collection selectors size.	192
Collection instVarNames size.	0
Collection subclasses size.	12
Collection allSubclasses size.	77
Collection linesOfCode.	1034

SystemNavigation

SystemNavigation default browseAllImplementorsOf: #,

Implementors of , [17]

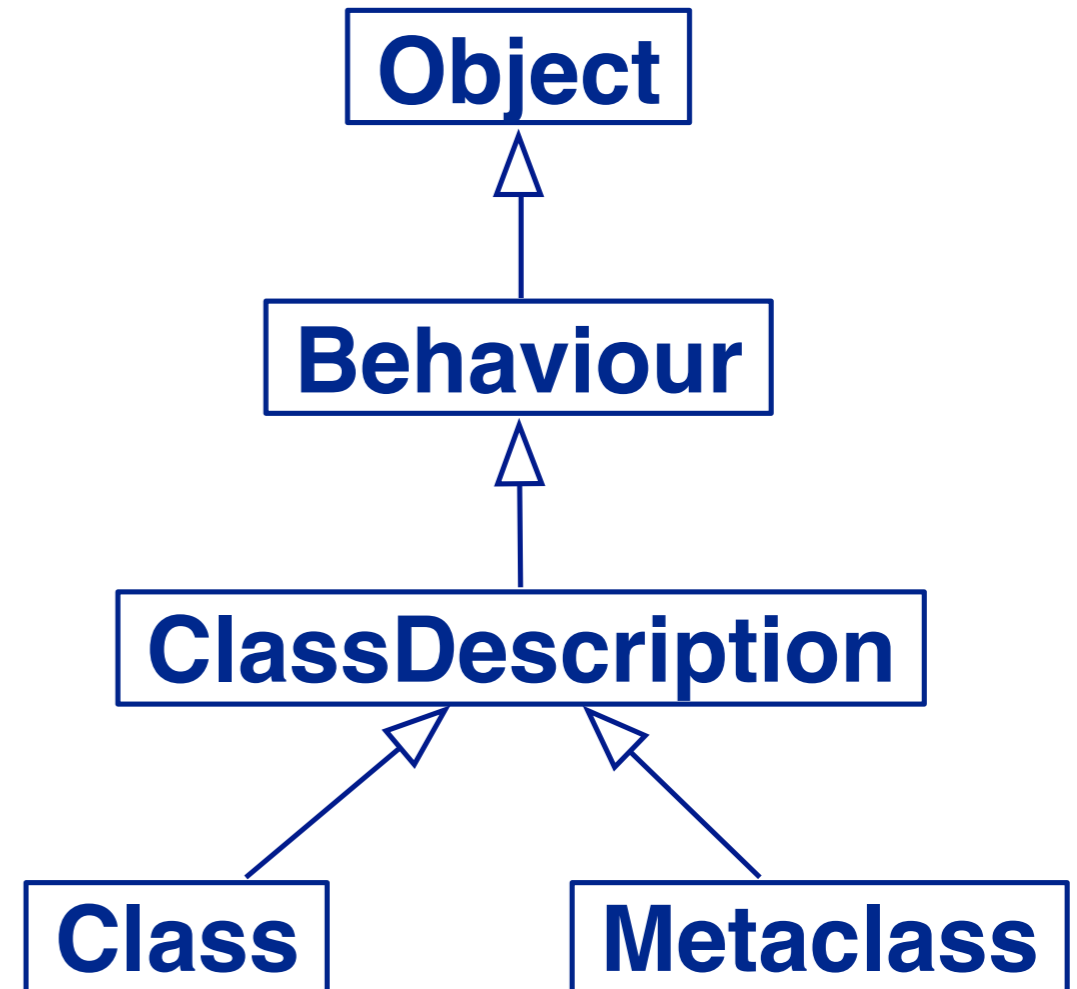
AbstractFileReference (copying)	, [FileSystem-Core]
FileReference (navigating)	, [FileSystem-Core]
Announcement class (public)	, [Announcements-Core]
Collection (copying)	, [Collections-Abstract]
AnnouncementSet (adding)	, [Announcements-Core]
Matrix (copying)	, [Collections-Unordered]
SequenceableCollection (copying)	, [Collections-Abstract]
RunArray (copying)	, [Text-Core]
Exception class (exceptionselector)	, [Kernel]
ExceptionSet (exceptionselector)	, [Kernel]
IRSequence (copying)	, [OpalCompiler-Core]
KMKeyCombination (combining)	, [Keymapping-KeyCombinations]
KMKeyCombinationSequence (combining)	, [Keymapping-KeyCombinations]

Browse Senders Implementors Version Source

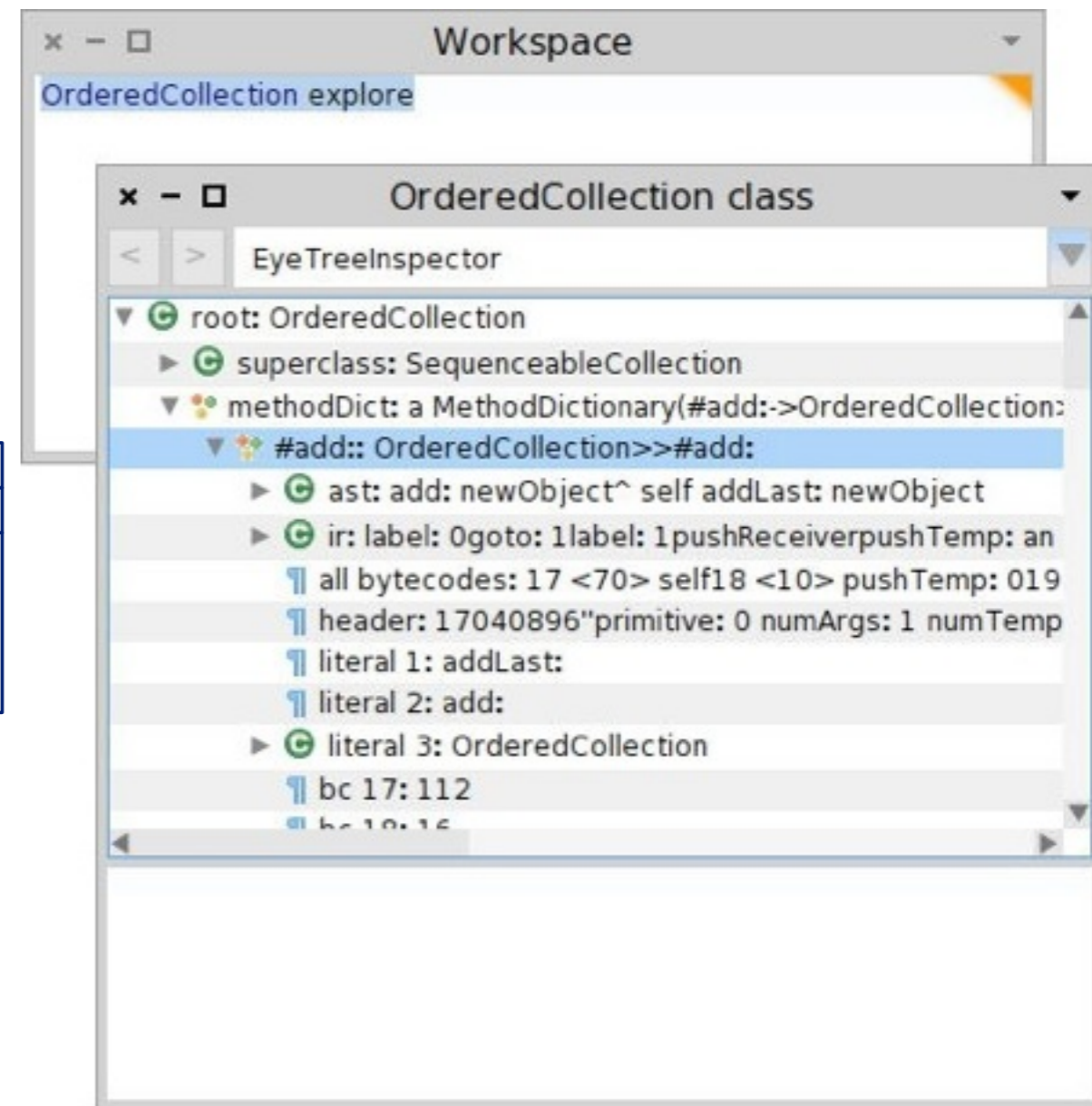
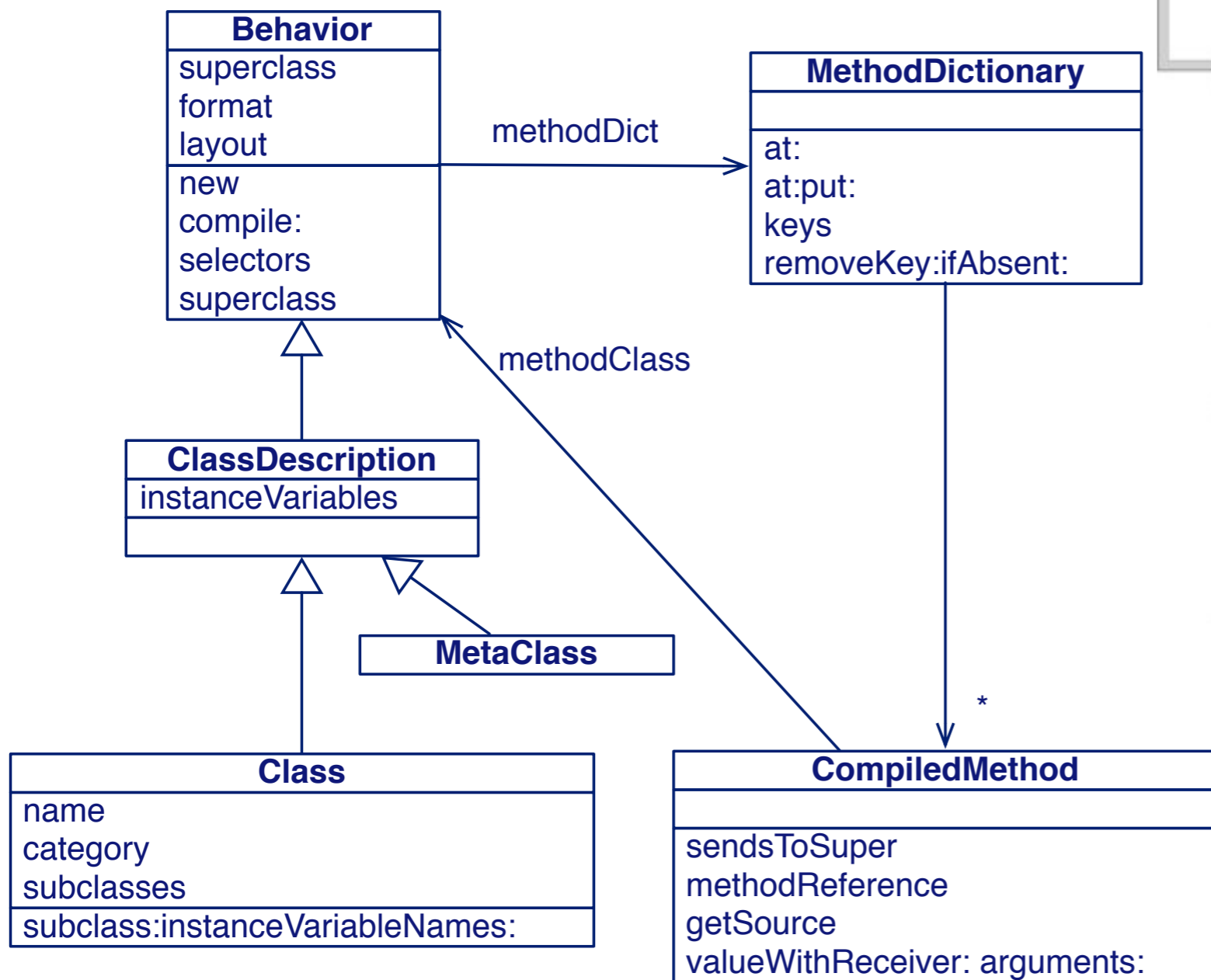
, aCollection
^self copy addAll: aCollection; yourself

Recap: Classes are objects too

- > Object
 - Root of inheritance
 - Default Behavior
 - Minimal Behavior
- > Behaviour
 - Essence of a class
 - Format, methodDict, superclass
- > ClassDescription
 - Human representation and organization
- > Class
 - Normal and anonymous classes
- > Metaclass
 - Sole instance



Classes are Holders of CompiledMethods



Invoking a message by its name

```
Object>>perform: aSymbol  
Object>>perform: aSymbol with: arg
```

- > Asks an object to execute a message
 - Normal method lookup is performed

5 factorial	120
5 perform: #factorial	120

Executing a compiled method

```
CompiledMethod>>valueWithReceiver:arguments:
```

No lookup is performed!

```
(SmallInteger>>#factorial)  
valueWithReceiver: 5  
arguments: #()
```

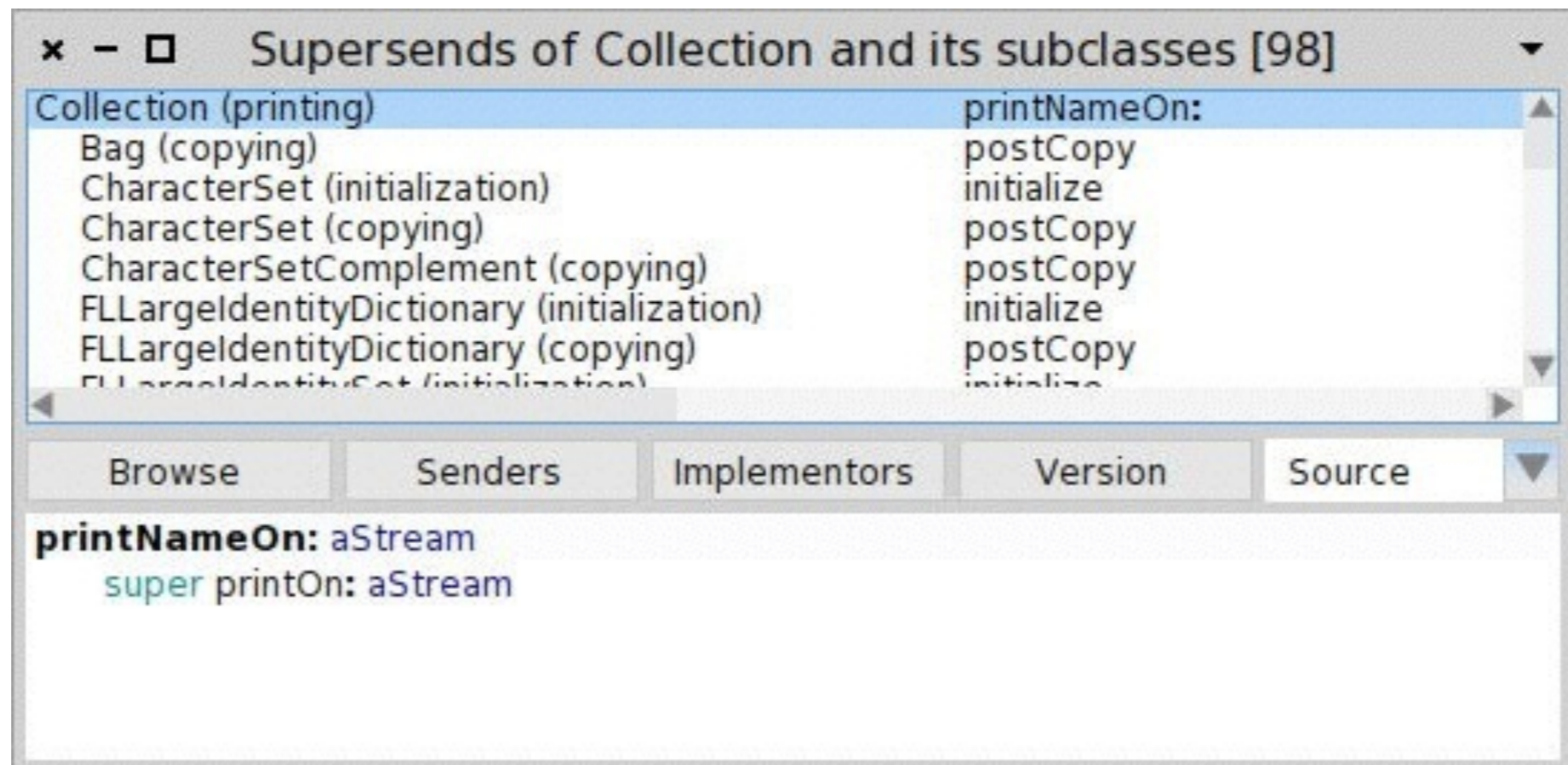
```
Error: key not found
```

```
(Integer>>#factorial)  
valueWithReceiver: 5  
arguments: #()
```

```
120
```

Example: Finding super-sends within a hierarchy

```
class := Collection.  
SystemNavigation default  
  browseMessageList:  
    ((class withAllSubclasses flatCollect:  
     [ :each | each methodDict value ] )  
     select: #sendsToSuper)  
name: 'Supersends of ' , class name , ' and its subclasses'
```



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Accessing the run-time stack

- > The execution stack can be *reified* and *manipulated* on demand
- `thisContext` is a pseudo-variable which gives access to the stack

The screenshot displays three overlapping windows from an IDE:

- Workspace:** Contains the command `thisContext inspect. self halt`.
- MethodContext:** Shows the current context as `EyeMethodContextInspector`. The `self` variable is selected, and its value is `UndefinedObject>>Dolt`. Other variables listed include `sender`, `pc`, `stackp`, `method`, `closureOrNil`, and `receiver`. A command `self stack inspect` is visible at the bottom.
- Halt:** A dialog box with buttons for `Proceed`, `Abandon`, and `Debug`. It displays the current execution stack as a list of frames:
 - UndefinedObject
 - OpalCompiler
 - SmalltalkEditor
 - SmalltalkEditor
 - [...] in PluggableTextMorph
 - [...] in PluggableTextMorph
 - TextMorphForEditView(TextMorph)
- OrderedCollection [51]:** Shows the reified stack as an `OrderedCollection` of 51 elements. The `self` variable is selected, and its value is the collection. The first few elements are:
 - an OrderedCollection(UndefinedObject>>Dolt
 - OpalCompiler>>evaluate
 - SmalltalkEditor>>evaluateSelectionAndDo:
 - SmalltalkEditor>>evaluateSelection [textMorph editor
 - evaluateSelection] in PluggableTextMorph>>dolt [
 - result := editBlock value] in
 - PluggableTextMorph>>handleEdit:
 - TextMorphForEditView(TextMorph)>>handleEdit:
 - PluggableTextMorph>>handleEdit:

What happens when a method is executed?

- > We need space for:
 - The temporary variables
 - Remembering where to return to
- > Everything is an Object!
 - So: we model this space with objects
 - Class MethodContext

```
ContextPart variableSubclass: #MethodContext
  instanceVariableNames: 'method closureOrNil receiver'
  classVariableNames: ''
  poolDictionaries: ''
  category: 'Kernel-Methods'
```


MethodContext

- > MethodContext holds all state associated with the execution of a CompiledMethod
 - Program Counter (pc, from ContextPart)
 - the Method itself (method)
 - Receiver (receiver) and the Sender (sender)
- > The sender is the previous MethodContext
 - (or BlockContext)
 - The *chain of senders* is a stack
 - It grows and shrinks on activation and return

Contextual halting

- > You can't put a halt in methods that are called often
 - e.g., `OrderedCollection>>add:`
 - *Idea*: only halt if called from a method with a certain name

```
HaltDemo>>haltIf: aSelector  
| context |  
context := thisContext.  
[context sender isNil]  
whileFalse:  
    [context := context sender.  
    (context selector = aSelector)  
    ifTrue: [ Halt signal ] ].
```

NB: Object>>haltIf: in Pharo is similar

HaltDemo

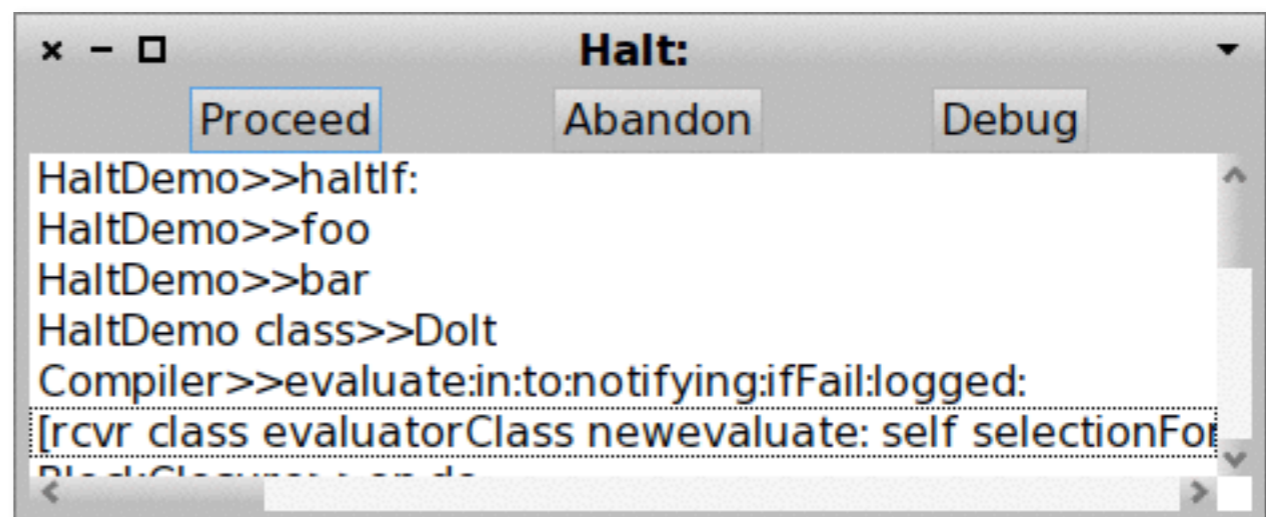
```
HaltDemo>>foo  
  self haltIf: #bar.  
  ^ 'foo'
```

```
HaltDemo>>bar  
  ^ (self foo), 'bar'
```

HaltDemo new foo

'foo'

HaltDemo new bar



Roadmap

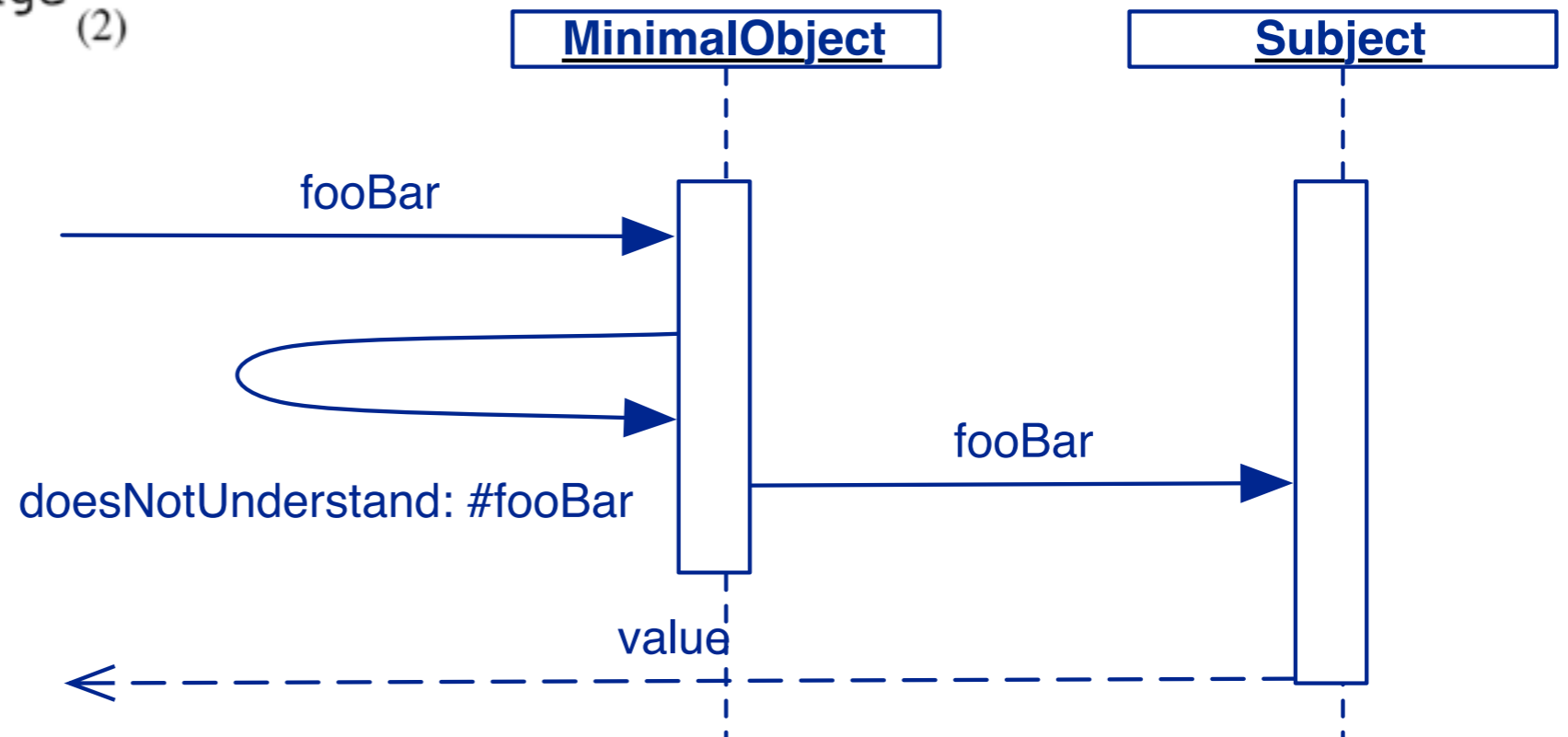
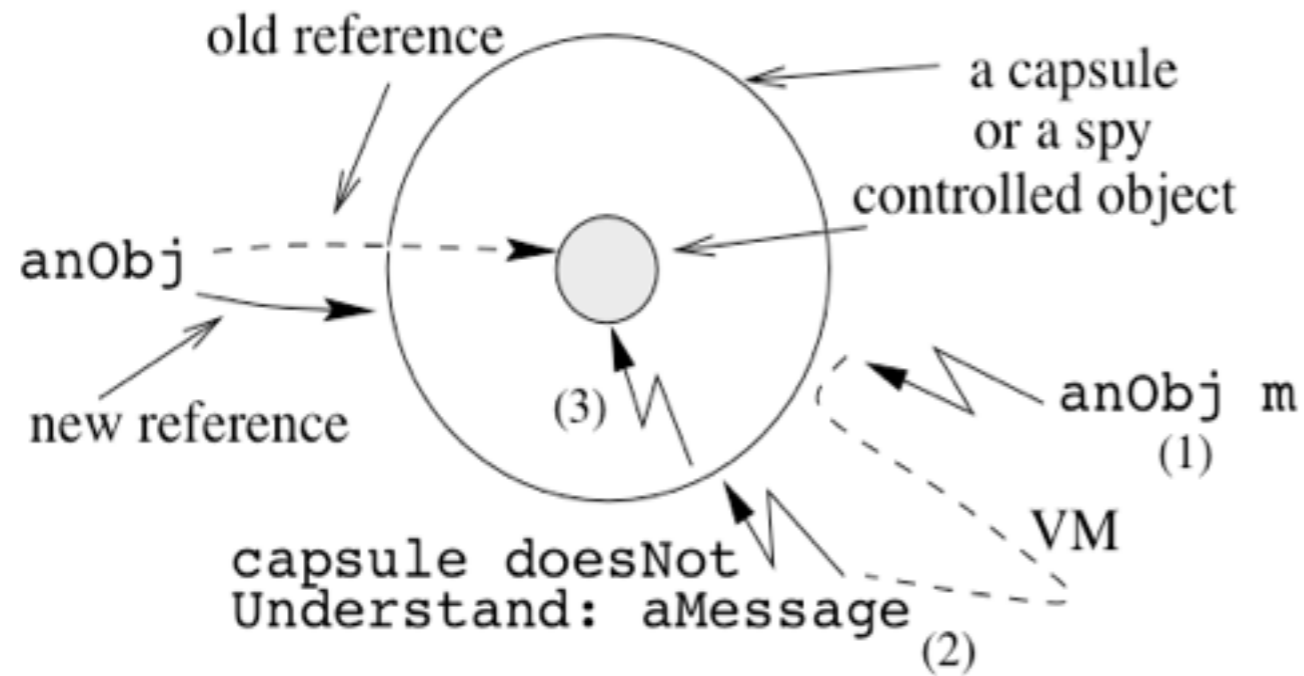
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Overriding doesNotUnderstand:

- > Introduce a *Minimal Object*
 - Wraps a normal object
 - Does not understand very much
 - Redefines doesNotUnderstand:
 - Superclass is nil or ProtoObject
 - Uses becomeForward: to substitute the object to control

Minimal Object at Work



Logging message sends with a minimal object

```
ProtoObject subclass: #LoggingProxy
  instanceVariableNames: 'subject invocationCount'
  classVariableNames: ''
  poolDictionaries: ''
  category: 'PBE-Reflection'
```

```
LoggingProxy>>initialize
  invocationCount := 0.
  subject := self.
```

```
LoggingProxy>>doesNotUnderstand: aMessage
  Transcript show: 'performing ', aMessage printString; cr.
  invocationCount := invocationCount + 1.
  ^ aMessage sendTo: subject
```

```
Message>>sendTo: receiver
  ^ receiver perform: selector withArguments: args
```

Using become: to install a proxy

```
testDelegation
| point |
point := 1@2.
LoggingProxy new become: point.

self assert: point invocationCount equals: 0.
self assert: point + (3@4) equals: (4@6).
self assert: point invocationCount equals: 1.
```

NB: become: will swap the subject variable of the proxy

Limitations

- > self problem
 - Messages sent by the object to itself are not trapped!
- > Class control is impossible
 - Can't swap classes
- > Interpretation of minimal protocol
 - What to do with messages that are understood by both the MinimalObject and its subject?

Using minimal objects to dynamically generate code

```
DynamicAccessors>>doesNotUnderstand: aMessage  
| messageName |  
messageName := aMessage selector asString.  
(self class instVarNames includes: messageName)  
  ifTrue: [self class compile:  
    messageName, String cr, '^ ', messageName.  
    ^ aMessage sendTo: self].  
super doesNotUnderstand: aMessage
```

A minimal object can be used to dynamically generate or lazily load code that does not yet exist.

Roadmap

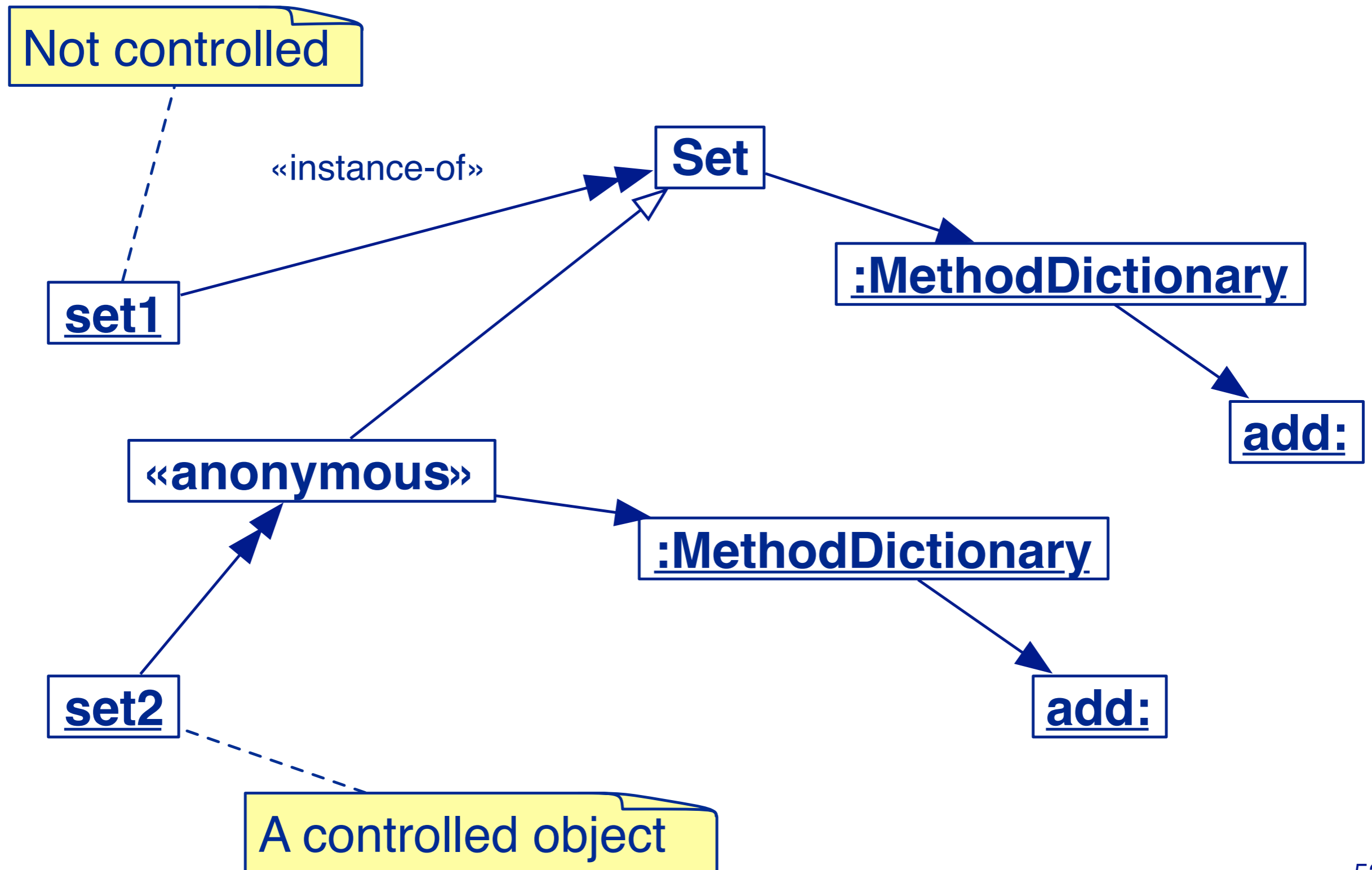
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Message control with anonymous classes

- > Create an *anonymous class*
 - Instance of Behavior
 - Define controlling methods
 - Interpose it between the instance and its class

Selective control



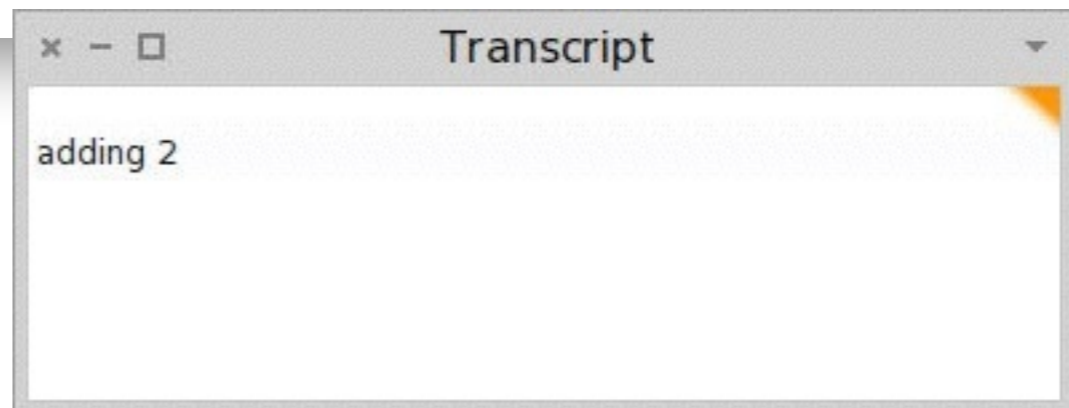
Anonymous class in Pharo

```
| anonClass set |
anonClass := Class new.
anonClass superclass: Set;
  setFormat: Set format.

anonClass compile:
  'add: anObject
  Transcript show: ''adding ', anObject printString; cr.
  ^ super add: anObject'.

set := Set new.
set add: 1.

set primitiveChangeClassTo: anonClass basicNew.
set add: 2.
```



Evaluation

- > Either instance-based or group-based
- > Selective control
- > No self-send problem
- > Good performance
- > Transparent to the user
- > Requires a bit of compilation
 - (could be avoided using clone as in Method Wrapper)

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Method Substitution

First approach:

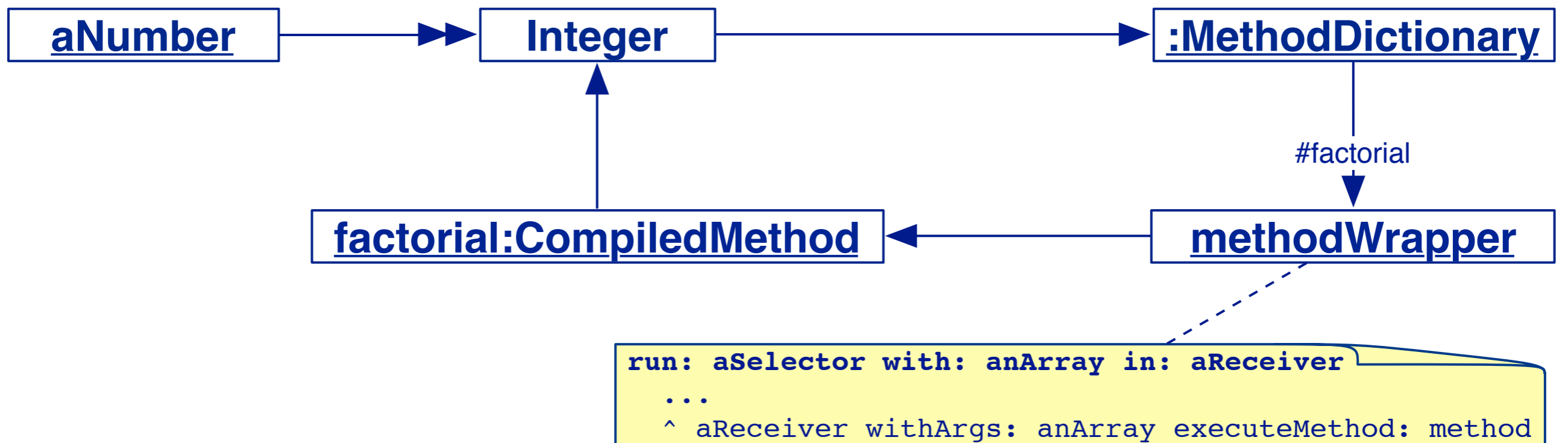
- > Add methods with **mangled names**
 - but the user can see them

Second approach:

- > Wrap the methods without polluting the interface
 - replace the method by an object that implements `run:with:in:`

MethodWrapper before and after methods

A MethodWrapper replaces an original CompiledMethod in the method dictionary of a class and wraps it by performing some before and after actions.



A LoggingMethodWrapper

```
LoggingMethodWrapper>>initializeOn: aCompiledMethod  
  method := aCompiledMethod.  
  invocationCount := 0
```

```
LoggingMethodWrapper>>install  
  method methodClass methodDictionary  
  at: method selector  
  put: self
```

uninstall is similar ...

```
LoggingMethodWrapper>>run: aSelector with: anArray in: aReceiver  
  invocationCount := invocationCount + 1.  
  ^ aReceiver withArgs: anArray executeMethod: method
```

NB: Duck-typing also requires (empty) flushCache,
methodClass:, and selector: methods

Installing a LoggingMethodWrapper

```
logger := LoggingMethodWrapper on: Integer>>#factorial.
```

```
logger invocationCount.
```

0

```
5 factorial.
```

```
logger invocationCount.
```

0

```
logger install.
```

```
[ 5 factorial ] ensure: [logger uninstall].
```

```
logger invocationCount.
```

6

```
10 factorial.
```

```
logger invocationCount.
```

6

Checking Test Coverage

```
TestCoverage>>run: aSelector with: anArray in: aReceiver  
  self mark; uninstall.  
  ^ aReceiver withArgs: anArray executeMethod: method
```

```
TestCoverage>>mark  
  hasRun := true
```

The screenshot shows two windows from an IDE. The 'Test Runner' window displays a list of test classes under 'SDE-Reflection' and a summary of test results: '9 run, 9 passes, 0 skipped, 0 expected failures, 0 failures, 0 errors, 0 unexpected passes'. The 'Not Covered Code (81% Code Coverage) [5]' window shows a table of code elements that were not covered during the test run.

Class	Method	Arguments
HaltDemo (as yet unclassified)	bar	[nil]
HaltDemo (as yet unclassified)	foo	[nil]
HaltDemo (as yet unclassified)	haltIf:	[nil]
LoggingMethodWrapper (private)	methodClass:	[nil]
LoggingMethodWrapper (private)	selector:	[nil]

Below the table, the source code for the 'foo' method is shown:

```
foo  
  self haltIf: #bar.  
  ^ 'foo'
```

Evaluation

- > Class based:
 - all instances are controlled
- > Only known messages intercepted
- > A single method can be controlled
- > Does not require compilation for installation/removal

What you should know!

- > What is the difference between introspection and intercession?
- > What is the difference between structural and Behavioral reflection?
- > What is an object? What is a class?
- > What is the difference between performing a message send and simply evaluating a method looked up in a MethodDictionary?
- > In what way does thisContext represent the run-time stack?
- > What different techniques can you use to intercept and control message sends?

Can you answer these questions?

- > What form of “reflection” is supported by Java?
- > What can you do with a metacircular architecture?
- > Why are Behavior and Class different classes?
- > What is the class ProtoObject good for?
- > Why is it not possible to become: a SmallInteger?
- > What happens to the stack returned by thisContext if you proceed from the self halt?
- > What is the metaclass of an anonymous class?
- > How would you find all duck-typed methods in the image?



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