Lecture 29: OO Design Heuristics

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Object-Oriented Analysis and Design

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Goals of Lecture

- Cover OO Design Heuristics
  - Classes and Objects
  - Topologies of Procedural versus Object-Oriented Applications
  - Relationships between Classes and Objects
  - The Inheritance Relationship
  - Multiple Inheritance

Typical Problem

- I have created my design
  - Is it good?
  - Bad?
  - Somewhere in between?
- Ask an OO "guru"
  - A design is good when "it feels right"
- So, how do we know when it feels right?

One Approach: Design Heuristics

- Object-Oriented Design Heuristics
  - by Arthur J. Riel
  - ISBN: 0-201-63385-X
- "The guru runs through a subconscious list of heuristics, built up through his or her design experience, over the design. If the heuristics pass, then the design feels right, and if they do not pass, then the design does not feel right"

Riel's Take

- We would be in a sorry state if we depended on designers to gain heuristics only through experience
- Riel's book documents 61 heuristics that he has developed working as a faculty member at Northeastern University and as a consultant on real-world OO A&D software development projects
- Lets take a look at a subset of these heuristics

Note on Heuristics

- Not all heuristics work together
  - Some are directly opposed!
- This occurs because there are always trade-offs in analysis and design
  - Sometimes you will want to make a change to reduce complexity…this may have the consequence that it also reduces flexiblity
  - You will have to decide what you want on a case-by-case basis

Classes and Objects

- Heuristics
  - All data should be hidden within its class
    - When a developer says
      - "I need to make this piece of data public because…"
    - They should ask themselves
      - "What is it that I'm trying to do with the data and why doesn't the class perform that operation for me?"
  - Users of a class must be dependent on its public interface, but a class should not be dependent on its users
    - Why?

Classes and Objects, continued

- Heuristics
  - Minimize the number of messages in the protocol of a class
    - The problem with large public interfaces is that you can never find what you are looking for…smaller public interfaces make a class easier to understand and modify
  - Do not put implementation details such as common-code private functions into the public interface of a class
    - Users of a class do not want to see operations in the public interface that they are not supposed to use

Classes and Objects, continued

- Heuristics
  - Classes should only exhibit nil or export coupling with other classes, that is, a class should only use operations in the public interface of another class or have nothing to do with that class
- This resonates with what we have seen before on coupling earlier in the semester
  - nil coupling: no coupling
  - export coupling: make use of public interface
  - overt coupling: make use of private details

Classes and Objects, continued

- Heuristics
  - A class should capture one and only one key abstraction
    - e.g. a class should be cohesive; Riel defines "key abstraction" as an element of the problem domain
  - Keep related data and behavior in one place
    - Similar to the "Move Method" refactoring pattern
  - Spin off non-related information into another class
    - Similar to the "Extract Class" refactoring pattern (not covered)
  - Most of the methods defined on a class should be using most of the data members most of the time
- All of these heuristics deal with class cohesion

Topologies of Procedural vs. OO Applications

- These heuristics help you identify the use of non-OO structures in OO Applications
  - Procedural topologies break an application down according to function which then share data structures
    - while it is easy to see which functions access which data structures, it is difficult to go the other way, to see which data structures are used by which functions
    - The problem: a change to a data structure may have unintended consequences because the developer was not aware of all the dependencies on the data structure

Typical problems

- There are two typical problems that arise when developers familiar with procedural techniques try to create an OO design
  - The God Class
    - A single class drives the application, all other classes are dumb data holders
  - Proliferation of Classes
    - Problems with modularization taken too far

OO Topologies

- Heuristics (God Class)
  - Distribute system intelligence horizontally as uniformly as possible, that is, the top-level classes in a design should share the work uniformly
  - Do not create god classes/objects in your system. Be very suspicious of a class whose name contains "Driver", "Manager", "System", or "Subsystem"
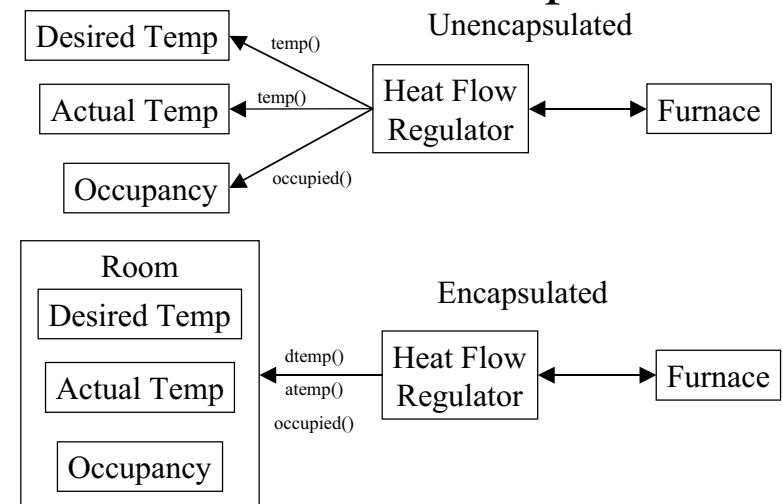
OO Topologies

- Heuristics (God Class)
  - Beware of classes that have many accessor methods defined in their public interface. Having many implies that related data and behavior are not being kept in one place
  - Beware of classes that have too much non-communicating behavior, that is, methods that operate on a proper subset of the data members of a class. God classes often exhibit much non-communicating behavior

OO Topologies, continued

- God Class Example
  - A heat flow regulator needs to decide when to activate a furnace to keep a room at a certain temperature
  - Consider the following three designs
    - Unencapsulated
    - Encapsulated
    - Distributed Intelligence

God Class Example

God Class Example, continued

Room
| Desired Temp |
| Actual Temp |
| Occupancy |

Distributed Intelligence

do_you_need_heat()

Heat Flow Regulator ←→ Furnace
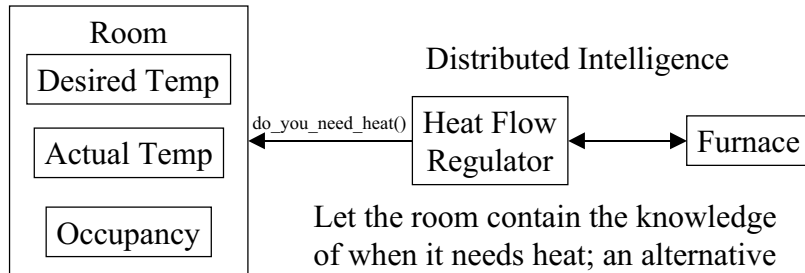
Let the room contain the knowledge of when it needs heat; an alternative design would allow the room to just ask the regulator for heat when do_you_need_heat() is true

OO Topologies

- Heuristics (Proliferation of Classes)
  - Eliminate irrelevant classes from your design
    - principle of domain relevance
    - often only have get, set, and print methods
  - Eliminate classes that are outside the system
    - principle of domain relevance again
  - Do not turn an operation into a class.
    - Be suspicious of any class whose name is a verb or is derived from a verb, especially those that have only one piece of meaningful behavior.
    - Ask if that piece of meaningful behavior needs to be migrated to some existing or undiscovered class

Relationships between Classes and Objects

- Heuristics
  - Minimize the number of classes with which another class collaborates
    - Look for situations where one class communicates with a group of classes
      - Ask if its possible to replace the group with a class that contains the group
  - Related Heuristics
    - Minimize the number of message sends between a class and its collaborator
    - Minimize the amount of collaboration between a class and its collaborator, that is, the number of different messages sent
    - Minimize fanout in a class, that is, the product of the number of messages defined by the class and the messages they send

Relationships between Classes and Objects, continued

- Heuristic
  - If a class contains objects of another class, then the containing class should be sending messages to the contained objects
    - that is a containment relationship should always imply a uses relationship
- Related
  - Classes should not contain more objects than a developer can fit in short-term memory. A favorite value for this number is six.
  - A class must know what it contains, but it should not know who contains it.
  - Objects that share lexical scope—those contained in the same containing class—should not have uses relationships between them

Inheritance Relationship

- Important not to confuse inheritance and containment
- Heuristics
  - Inheritance should be used only to model a specialization hierarchy
    - Containment is black-box
    - Inheritance is white-box
  - Derived classes must have knowledge of their base class by definition, but base classes should not know anything about their derived classes
  - All data in a base class should be private; do not use protected data

Inheritance Relationship, continued

- Heuristics
  - In theory, inheritance hierarchies should be deep—the deeper, the better
  - In practice, inheritance hierarchies should be no deeper than an average person can in short-term memory. A popular value for this depth is six.
  - All abstract classes must be base classes
  - All base classes should be abstract classes
  - Factor the commonality of data, behavior, and/or interface as high as possible in the inheritance hierarchy

Multiple Inheritance

- Riel does not advocate the use of multiple inheritance (its too easy to misuse it). As such, his first heuristic is
  - If you have an example of multiple inheritance in your design, assume you have made a mistake and prove otherwise!
- Most common mistake
  - Using multiple inheritance in place of containment

Multiple Inheritance

- A Second Heuristic
  - Whenever there is inheritance in an object-oriented design, ask yourself two questions: 1) Am I a special type of the thing from which I'm inheriting? 2) Is the thing from which I'm inheriting part of me?
- A yes to 1) and no to 2) implies the need for inheritance; A no to 1) and a yes to 2) implies the need for composition
  - Is an airplane a special type of fuselage? No
 - Is a fuselage part of an airplane? Yes

Multiple Inheritance

- A third heuristic
  - Whenever you have found a multiple inheritance relationship in an object-oriented design, be sure that no base class is actually a derived class of another base class
- Otherwise you have what Riel calls accidental multiple inheritance

Multiple Inheritance

- So, is there a valid use of multiple inheritance?
  - Yes, subtyping for combination
    - It is used to define a new class that is a special type of two other classes and those two base classes are from different domains

Multiple Inheritance Example
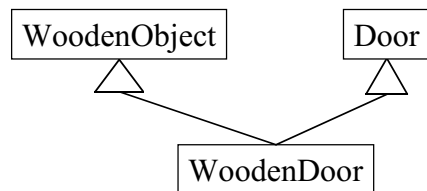
Is a wooden door a special type of door? Yes
Is a door part of a wooden door? No
Is a wooden door a special type of wooden object? Yes
Is a wooden object part of a door? No
Is a wooden object a special type of door? No
Is a door a special type of wooden object? No
All Heuristics Pass!