



John Pugh



Paul White

# OOPSLA—Reinventing Itself Again

**T**his month we've just gotten off a plane, this time returning from OOPSLA. This year was the 11th ACM OOPSLA conference, which was held in San Jose, California. As is often the case, OOPSLA can surprise you in terms of the tenor of the conference, and of the focus and interests of those in attendance. This year was no exception.

The overriding focus of this year's conference appeared to be on issues dealing with architectures, frameworks, and patterns. Unlike the past few years, where we've had the feeling the conference served as a showcase for Smalltalk technology, this conference seemed noticeably language-neutral. This was somewhat surprising, given that virtually every other conference having anything to do with objects lately has become a "Java conference." We say this not as either a good or bad thing, but rather as an observation that most attendees appear more interested in discussing new software architectures and their associated benefits and limitations, than waging language wars. Certainly Java played a large part in these discussions, as did Smalltalk and C++, but the language was discussed as part of the solution, rather than as the issue itself. We believe this is a reflection of the audience, which continues to be a group very knowledgeable in object technology, and with roots spread across the academic, research, and industrial communities. Finally, the keynote delivered by Christopher Alexander served to set the tone of the conference with a thought-provoking presentation of his view of patterns—he certainly managed to evoke a great deal of discussion.

OOPSLA has often served as the forum where new products—and organizations—are introduced to the rest of the object community. This year, however, the exhibit area appeared smaller than past years, and appeared to have fewer newcomers. The one exhibit that did capture the attention of many in attendance was the new Virtual Machine (VM) technology called HotSpot, created by Animorphic Systems. It has adapted many of the ideas from the Self project in creating both the Smalltalk and Java VMs, and their most notable characteristic is speed!! They boast execution times of up to three to five times faster than existing commercial Smalltalk VMs. This is significant because it demonstrates that it is possible to create such technologies, if speed is the major factor to be considered. Speed comes

with trade-offs, though, such as execution space and a reliance on in-lining methods, but Animorphic's claim is that it sacrificed relatively little in both categories to achieve the speed. Whatever comes of the technology itself, it certainly created quite a stir. The parade of Smalltalk experts, including many lead engineers from both PP-D and IBM, to Animorphic's booth was testimony to its achievement. For more details on Animorphic's VM technology, you can visit its Web site at <http://www.animorphic.com>.

The other technology that created a great deal of interest from the Smalltalk crowd was OTI's new ENVY/QA. While we plan to include a review of ENVY/QA in an upcoming issue, we can state briefly that QA is a suite of tools designed to provide application developers with a better understanding of the quality of their Smalltalk code. It includes four main features: Code Metrics, which provides a summary of various static metrics; Code Critic, which provides feedback on the "quality" of Smalltalk code, based on a list of standard measures; Code Coverage; and Code Publisher, which generates documentation-style output of an application class library. The important feature of this tool is that it is extensible—that is, it has been designed to allow you to specify your own measures for quality assurance. We suspect it will become a mainstay in many Smalltalk developers' toolkits. You can get more details from OTI's Web site at <http://www.oti.com>.

In the end, OOPSLA appears to be reinventing itself. For the conference to stay relevant, it must continue to attract people from various backgrounds and interests, and offer them a forum to share ideas. This year's conference appeared to be taking steps toward achieving this goal. It is still the case that activities such as the poster sessions, the educators' symposium, and the Ph.D. seminar series offer a forum unmatched by other conferences.

Finally, we'd be remiss not to mention the wild evening spent at Great America theme park. Given that last month we were writing about Disneyland, and now this month about the new Top Gun roller-coaster and "The Drop Zone," object technology appears to have taken a turn toward serving crowds of thrill seekers. We offer no comment on this new relationship between thrills and objects.

Enjoy the issue.