

# An Entity System for Unity: 2015-1

# Who am I?

- Former game developer + CTO
- Building Entity Systems since 2002
- Writing about Entity Systems since 2007
- Now teaching children to program (Ages 6-16), and training teachers

I



**Editor Customization**

I

*[bitch on Twitter about]*

Editor Customization



Unity Editor is still a  
**Black Art**

**WARNING!**

# WARNING!

“Here Be Generalizations”



# WARNING!

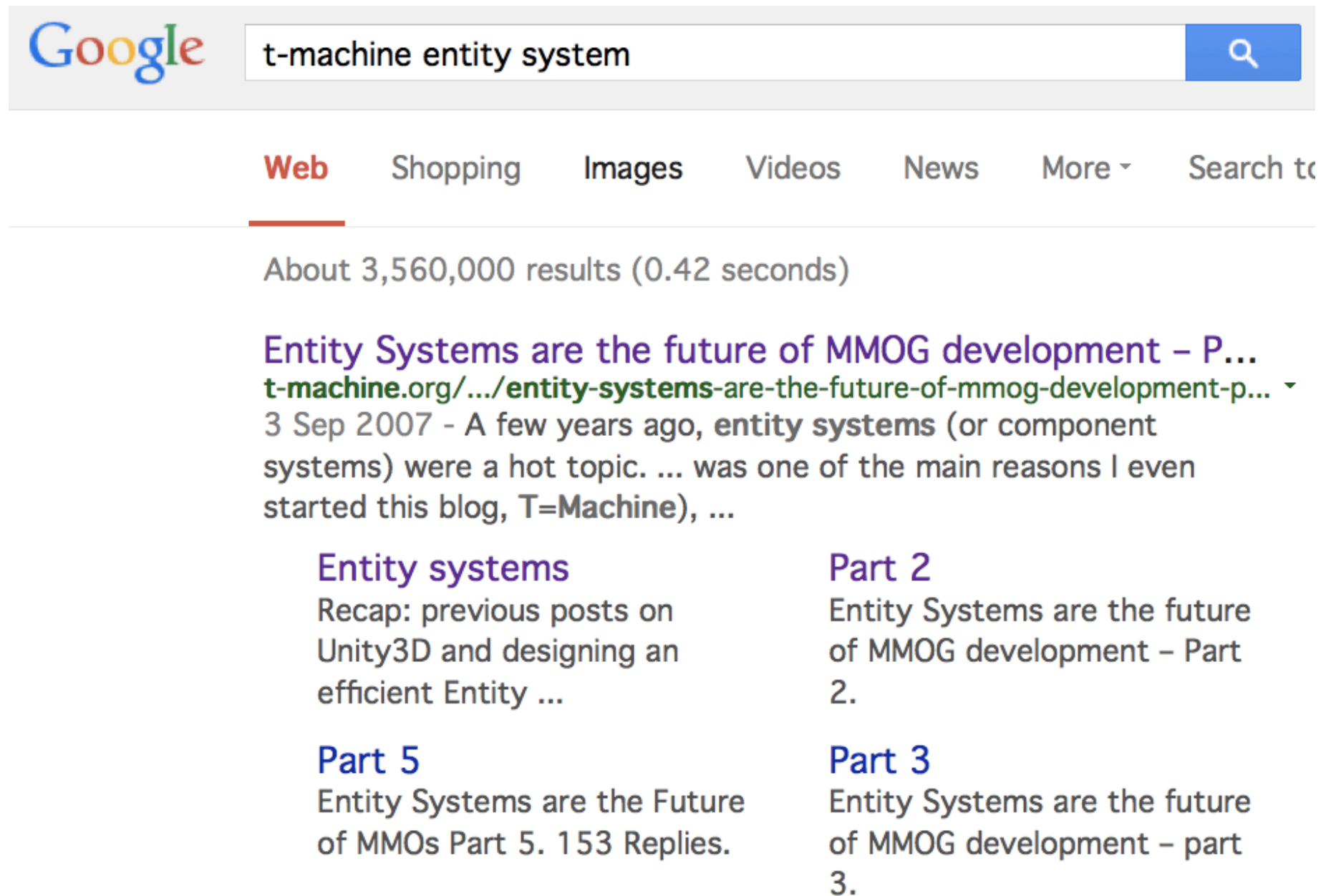
“Here Be Generalizations”  
(only a short talk, lots to cover)

Today ...  
... Entity Systems

# Why use an Entity System?

- 1. Quicker prototyping (games, features)
- 2. Faster game (CPU, RAM, Mobile)
- 3. Easier code (debug less, design more)

# What is an Entity System?



Google t-machine entity system

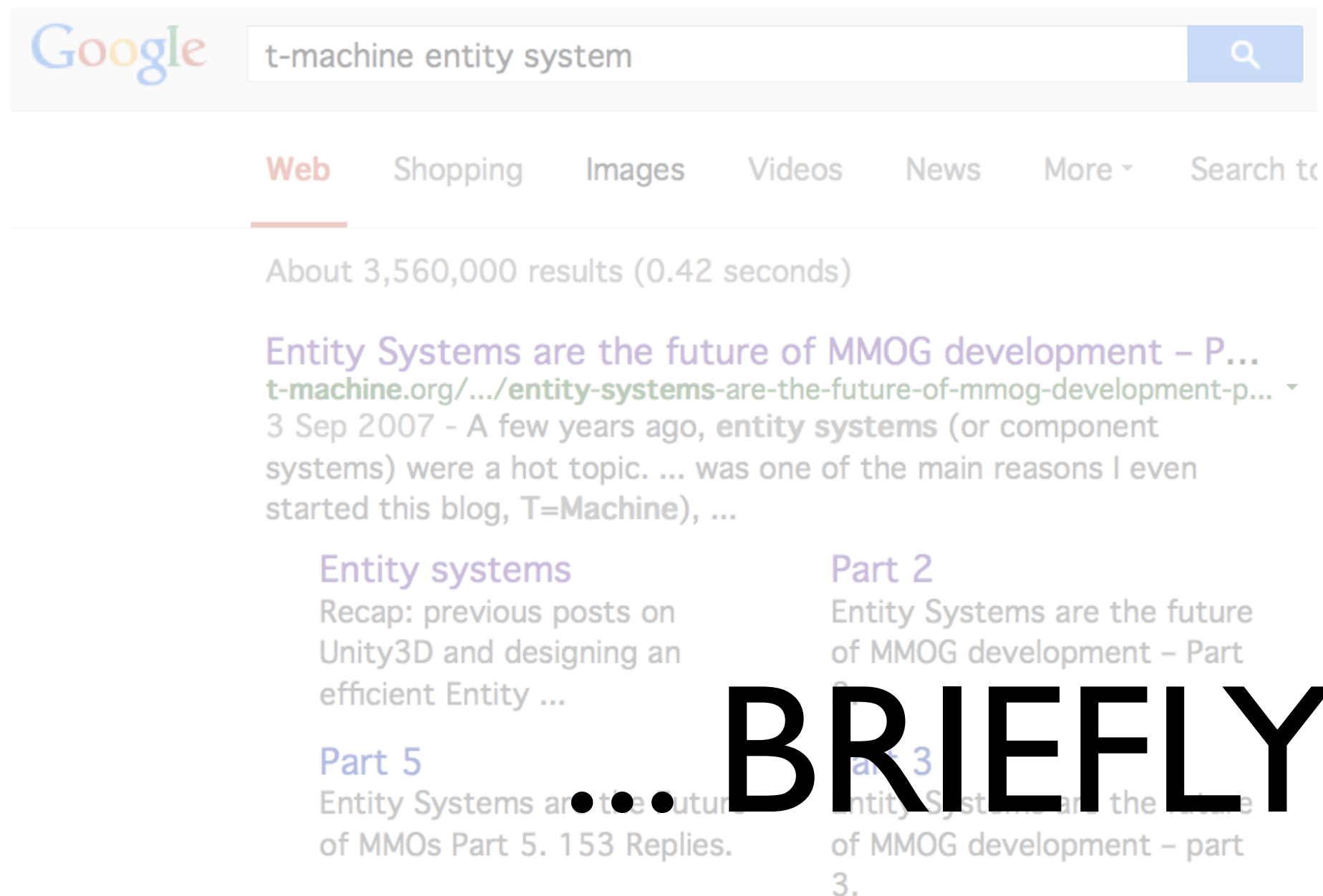
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About 3,560,000 results (0.42 seconds)

**Entity Systems are the future of MMOG development – P...**  
[t-machine.org/.../entity-systems-are-the-future-of-mmog-development-p...](#) ▾  
3 Sep 2007 - A few years ago, **entity systems** (or component systems) were a hot topic. ... was one of the main reasons I even started this blog, **T=Machine**), ...

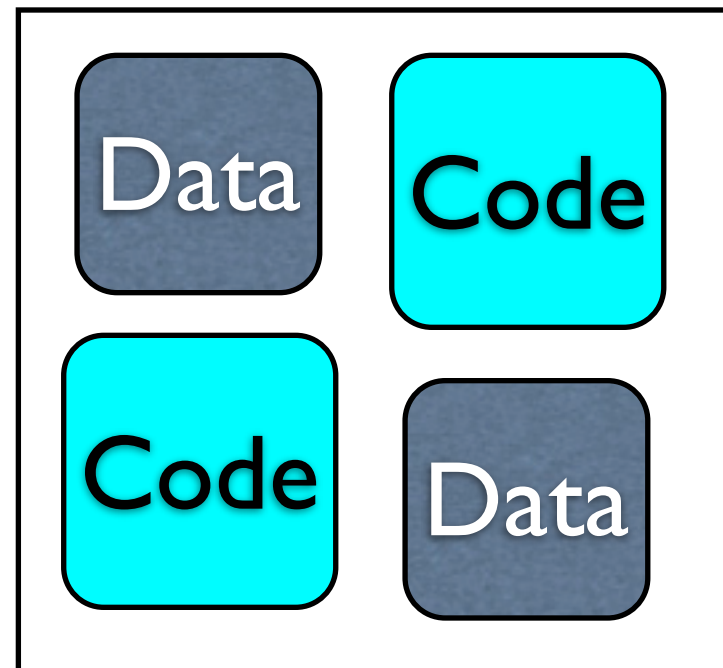
<b>Entity systems</b> Recap: previous posts on Unity3D and designing an efficient Entity ...	<b>Part 2</b> Entity Systems are the future of MMOG development – Part 2.
<b>Part 5</b> Entity Systems are the Future of MMOs Part 5. 153 Replies.	<b>Part 3</b> Entity Systems are the future of MMOG development – part 3.

# What is an Entity System?

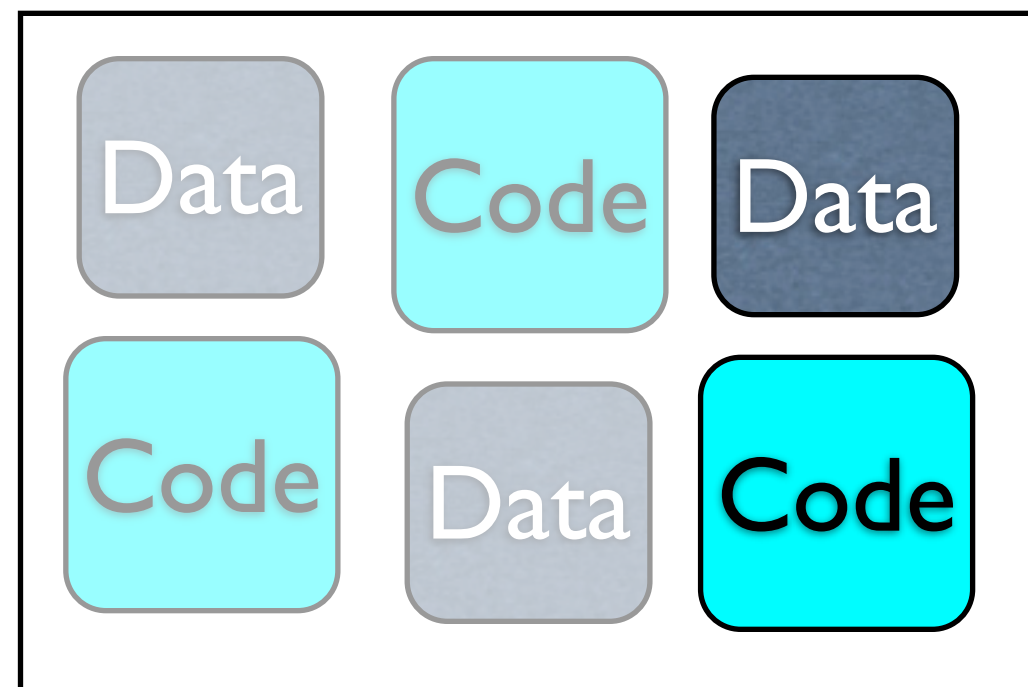


# IT Industry attempts Computer Games

Game Object 1



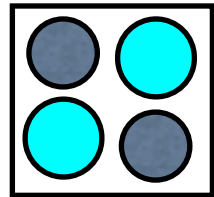
Game Object 2



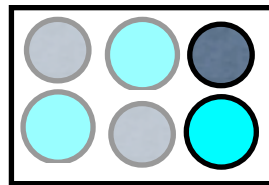
inherit

# IT Industry attempts Computer Games

Game Object 1

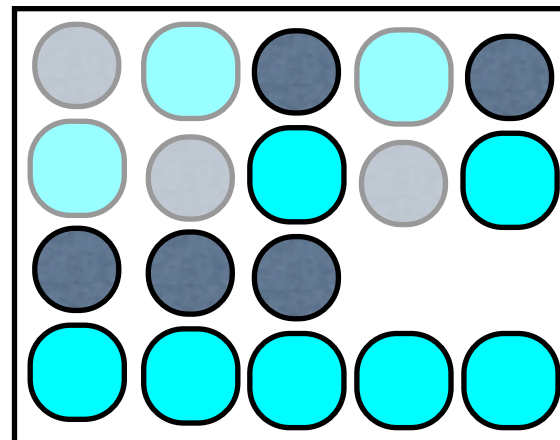


Game Object 2



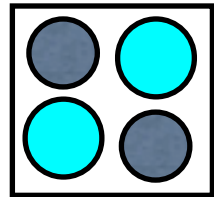
...

Game Object N

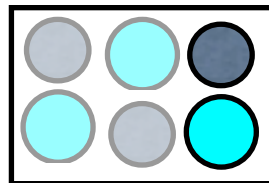


# IT Industry attempts Computer Games

Game Object 1

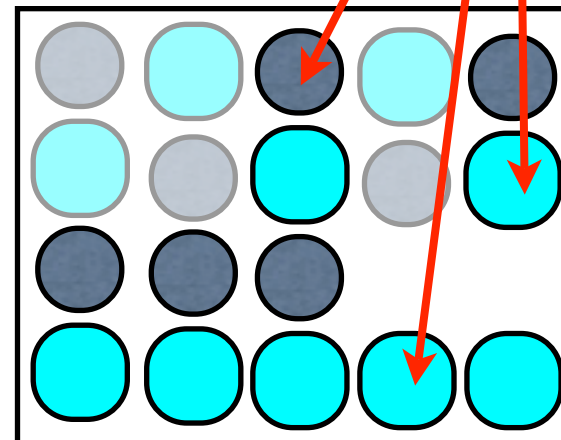


Game Object 2



...

Game Object N



Which one is MyFeature72?

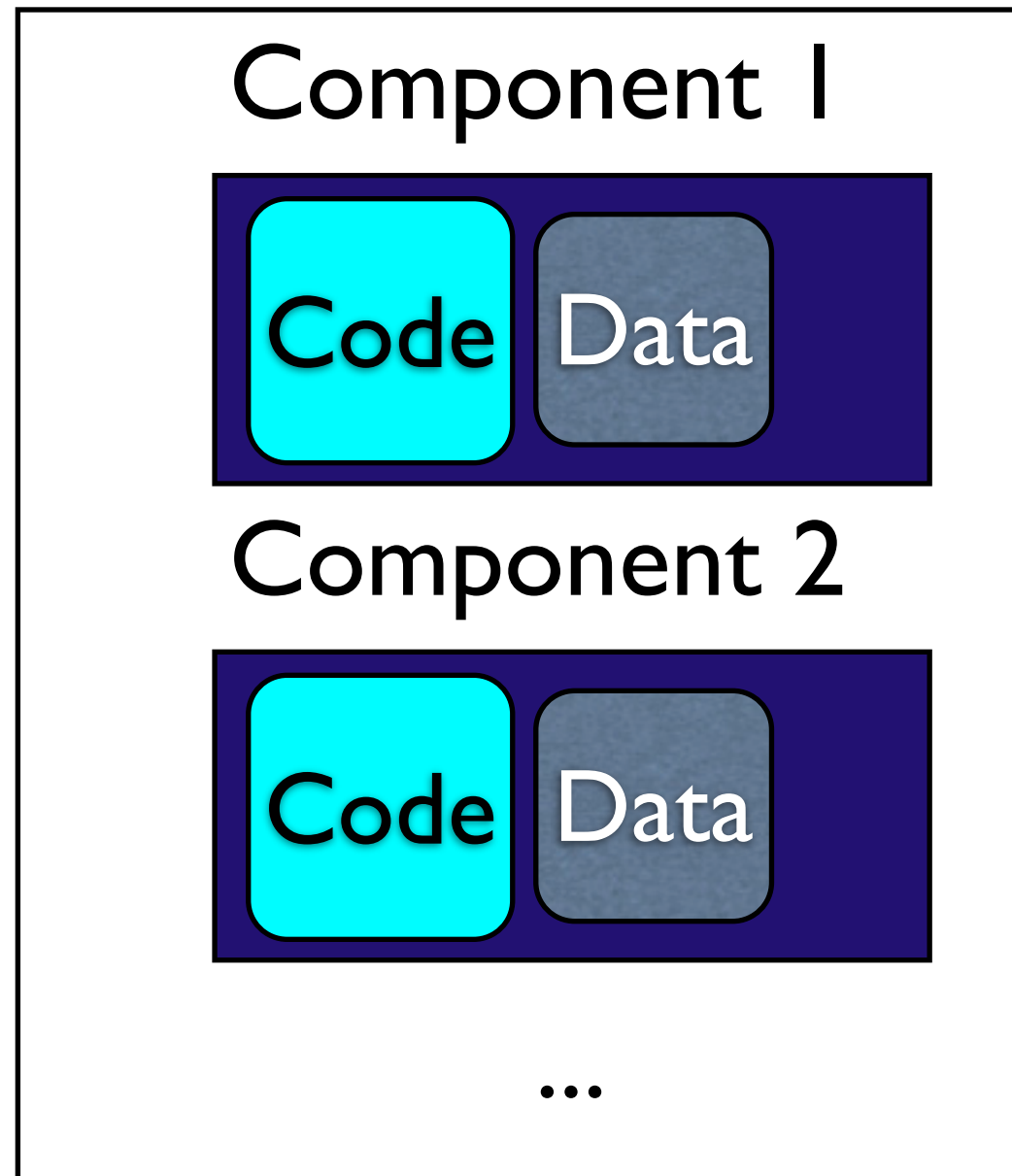


# Computer hates it too

- Modern computers terribly slow at doing “one RANDOM little piece at a time”
- Memory-fragmentation is an Unsolved Problem (tm)
- Multithreaded code / processors detest OOP encapsulation

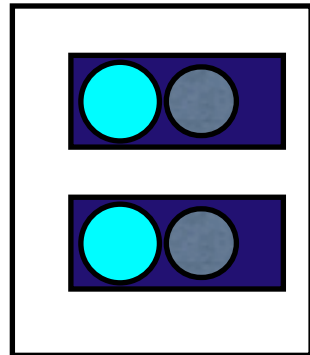
# Unity does Computer Games

Game Object 1

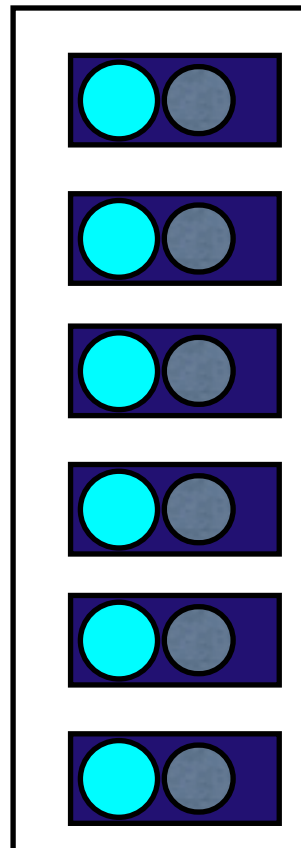


# Unity does Computer Games

Game Object I

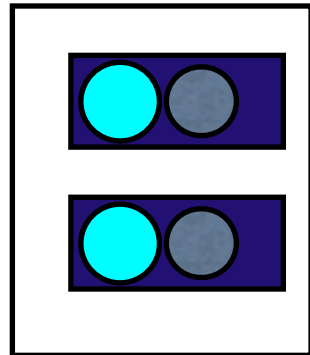


Game Object N

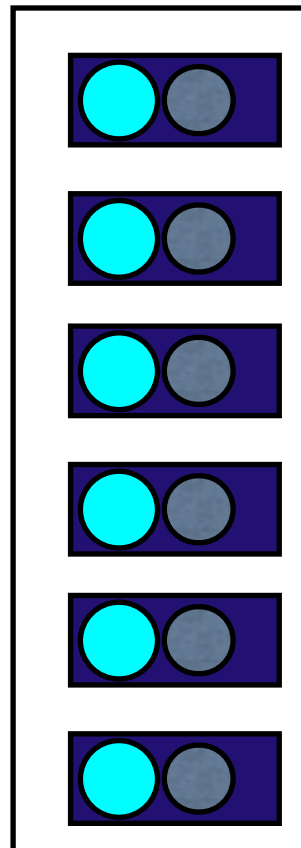


# Unity does Computer Games

Game Object I



Game Object N

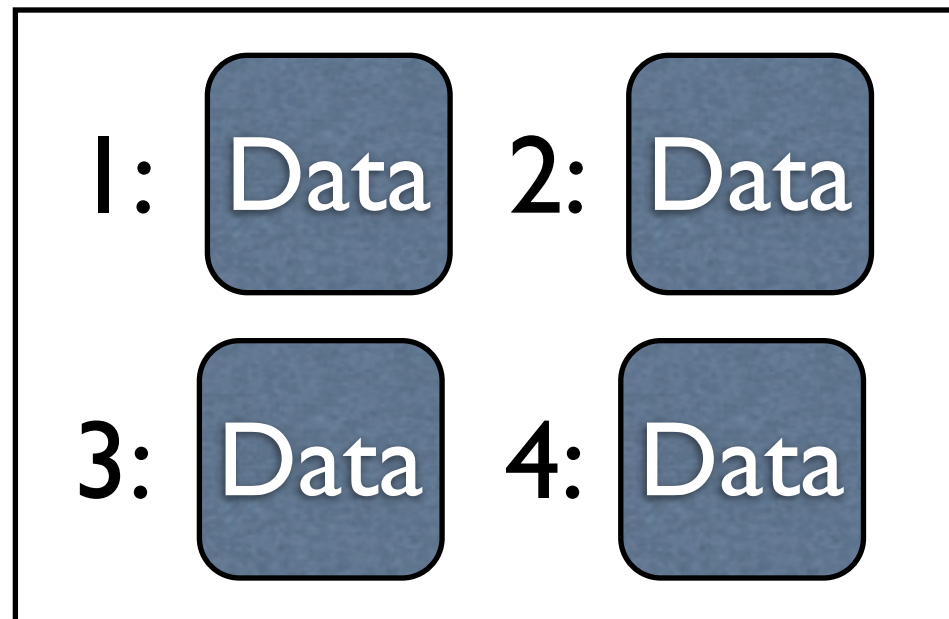


Improvement?

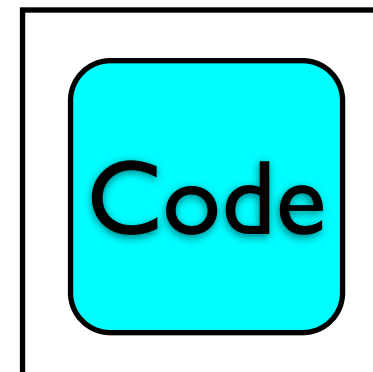
Hmm.

# GameDevs make EntitySystems

Feature 1: all objects

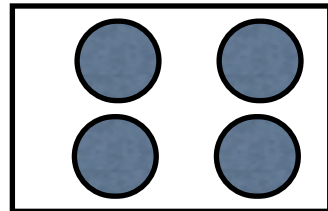


Feature 1: all code

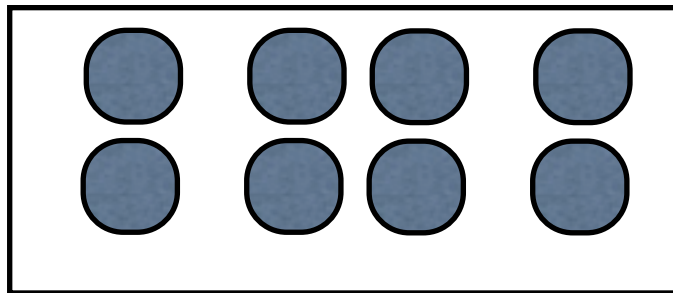


# GameDevs make EntitySystems

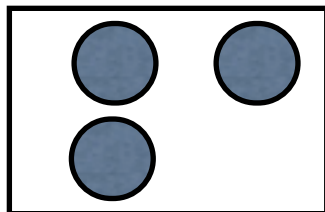
Feature 1: all objects



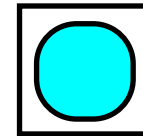
Feature 2: all objects



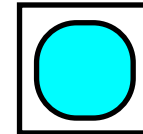
Feature 3: all objects



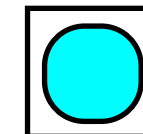
Feature 1: all code



Feature 2: all code

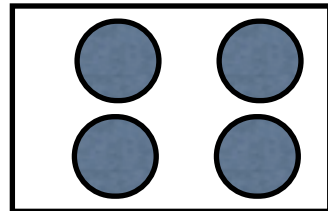


Feature 3: all code

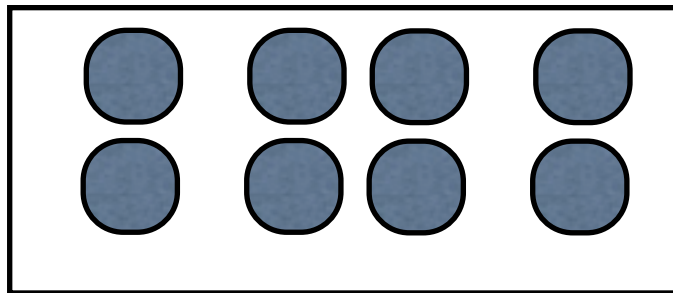


# GameDevs make EntitySystems

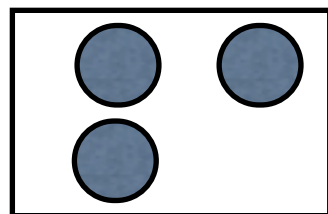
Feature 1: all objects



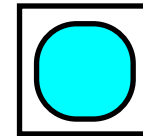
Feature 2: all objects



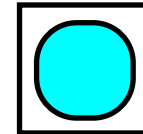
Feature 3: all objects



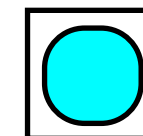
Feature 1: all code



Feature 2: all code



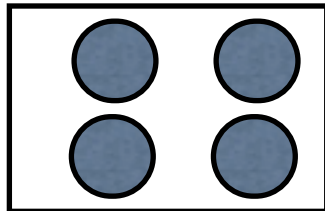
Feature 3: all code



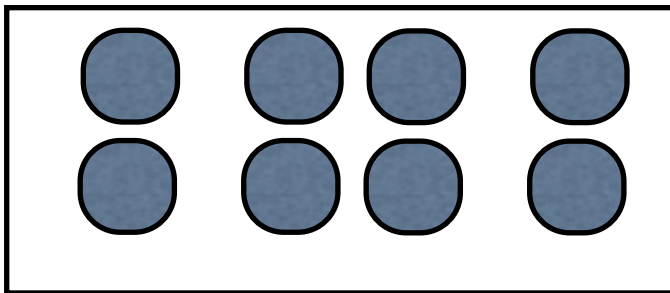
Which one is MyFeature2?

# GameDevs make EntitySystems

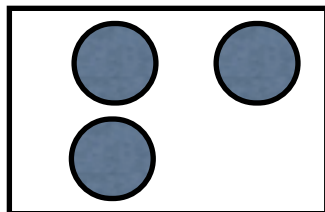
Feature 1: all objects



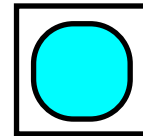
Feature 2: all objects



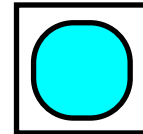
Feature 3: all objects



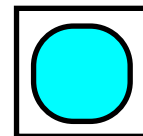
Feature 1: all code



Feature 2: all code



Feature 3: all code



Which one is MyFeature2?



# Computer loves it too

- Can do “all the Feature N” objects at once
- Fragmentation much easier to cope with
- Multithreading is EASY! (almost: Free)

# In practice, though...

Unity

Entity System

“which file did I write  
that in?”  $\xrightarrow[\text{Coding}]{\text{vs.}}$

# In practice, though...

Unity

Entity System

“which file did I write  
that in?”  $\xrightarrow[\text{Coding}]{\text{vs.}}$  “Easy.This one.”

# In practice, though...

Unity

Entity System

“which file did I write  
that in?”  $\xrightarrow[\text{Coding}]{\text{vs.}}$  “Easy. This one.”

“to add a number, must  
write a script”  $\xrightarrow[\text{Prototyping}]{\text{vs.}}$

# In practice, though...

Unity

Entity System

“which file did I write  
that in?”

vs.

Coding

“Easy. This one.”

“to add a number, must  
write a script”

vs.

Prototyping

“Add the number”

# In practice, though...

Unity

Entity System

“which file did I write  
that in?”

vs.

Coding

“Easy. This one.”

“to add a number, must  
write a script”

vs.

Prototyping

“Add the number”

“Find() is sloooooow”

vs.

Speed

# In practice, though...

Unity

Entity System

“which file did I write  
that in?”

vs.

Coding

“Easy. This one.”

“to add a number, must  
write a script”

vs.

Prototyping

“Add the number”

“Find() is sloooooow”

vs.

Speed

“Entity.Find() is  
lightning fast”

# Generally speaking

- Every “new game feature” is quicker to try
- Every algorithm requires less source code
- Bugs are easier to isolate
- Performance is improved across the board



# Entity Systems ... inside Unity

# 3 x Key Areas

- Making stuff in the Editor
- Writing + editing scripts
- Running in the Player (Runtime)

(recap)

# Why use an Entity System?

- 1. Quicker prototyping (games, features)
- 2. Faster game (CPU, RAM, Mobile)
- 3. Easier code (debug less, design more)

(a.k.a.)

# Why use an Entity System?

- 1. Easier to add game-features
- 2. Runs faster
- 3. Less / easier Debugging

# Effectiveness

	Debug	Game Features	Speed
In the Editor?	✓	✓	
Writing scripts?	✓	✓	
Running in the Player?		✓	✓

# Editor, I choose you!

	Debug	Game Features	Speed
In the Editor?	✓	✓	
Writing scripts?	✓	✓	
Running in the Player?		✓	✓



# In-Editor Goals

- Is it easy to use?
  - ... easier than plain Unity?
- Can this be implemented in C#?
  - ... without destroying performance?
  - ... without writing “bad code”?
  - ... without “bizarre coding practices”?

Challenges so far...

# 3 problems

- I. Unity Serialization

# 3 problems

- 1. Unity Serialization
- 2. Unity Serialization

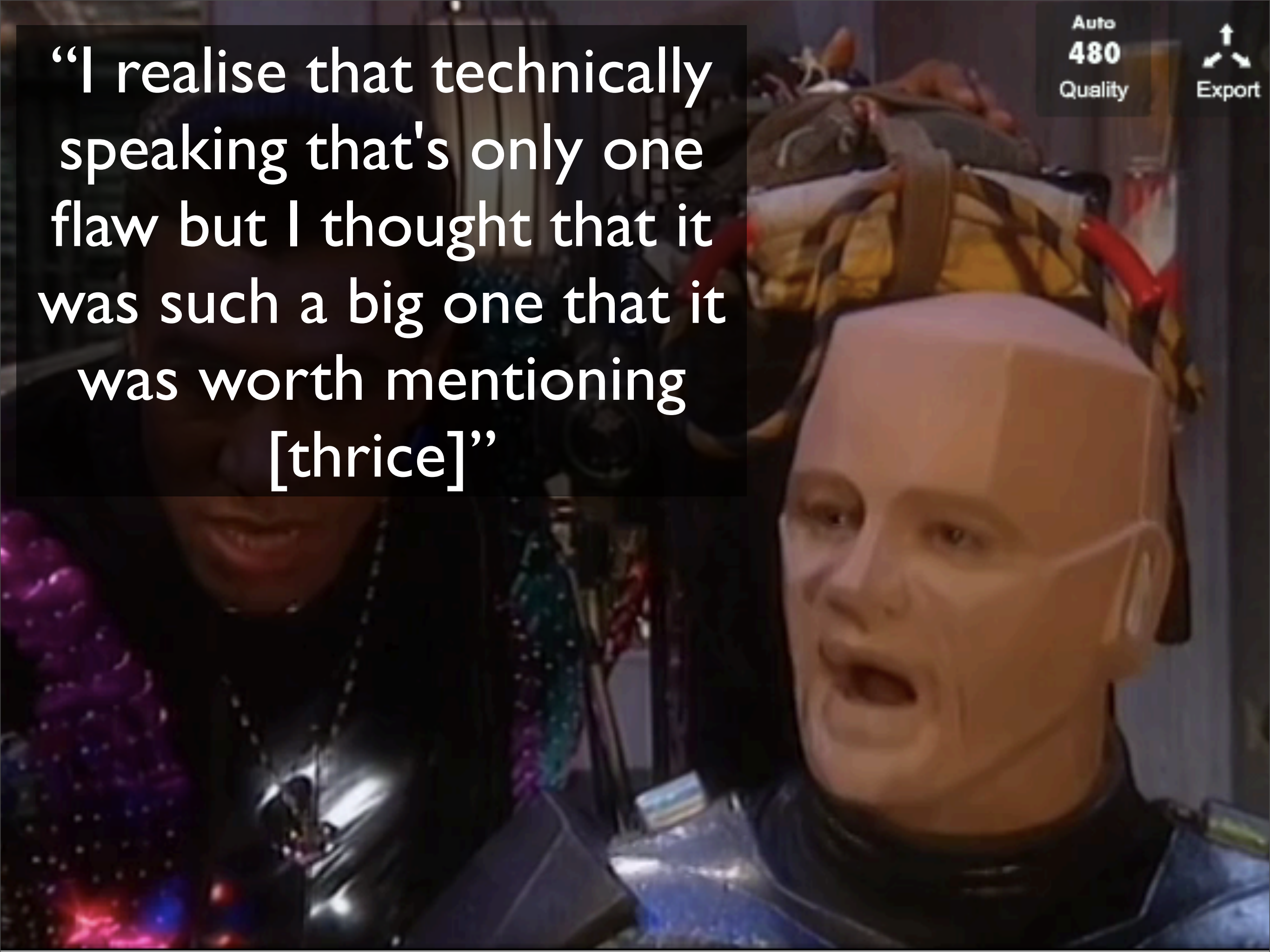
# 3 problems

- 1. Unity Serialization
- 2. Unity Serialization
- 3. Unity Serialization

“I realise that technically speaking that's only one flaw but I thought that it was such a big one that it was worth mentioning [thrice]”

Auto  
480  
Quality

↑  
↙ ↘  
Export



# Unity ...“challenges”

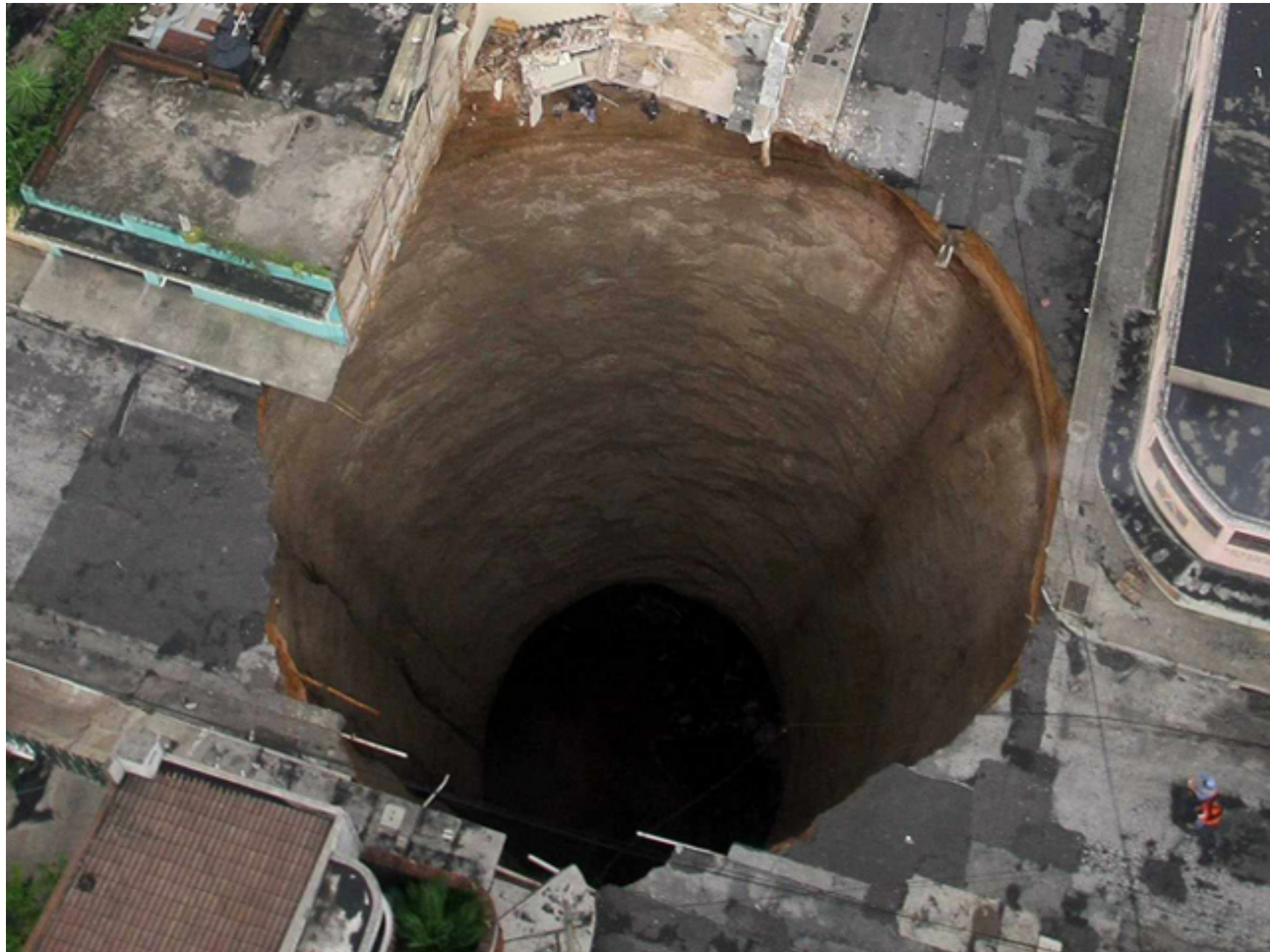
- Unity has no API for save/load to a Scene
- ScriptableObject is half-implemented, half-broken
- ...Unity Serialization

# Unity Serialization ... “challenges”

- ..requires SetDirty
- ..sometimes ignores SetDirty
  - SetDirty needs Find
    - Unity doesn't fully support Find (yet)
- ..doesn't support C# core classes
- ..restoring breaks “static” variables
- ..“change scene” code in Unity 5 is wrong
- ..C# Constructors go FUBAR
- ..THERE'S NO DEBUG INFORMATION
- ..zero Editor support from Unity Corp



# Unity Serialization ... “challenges”



# ...and C#

- “return ref” isn’t possible (C#)

**Progress so far...**  
**... in Editor**



Projects

Get started

Open other

New project

Aliqua-Unity5

/Users/adam/Documents/PROJECTS/Aliqua/Platforms

5.0.1

IntelligentNew Unity5

/Users/adam/Documents/TEMP CURRENT

5.0.1

IntelligentNew

/Users/adam/Documents/TEMP CURRENT

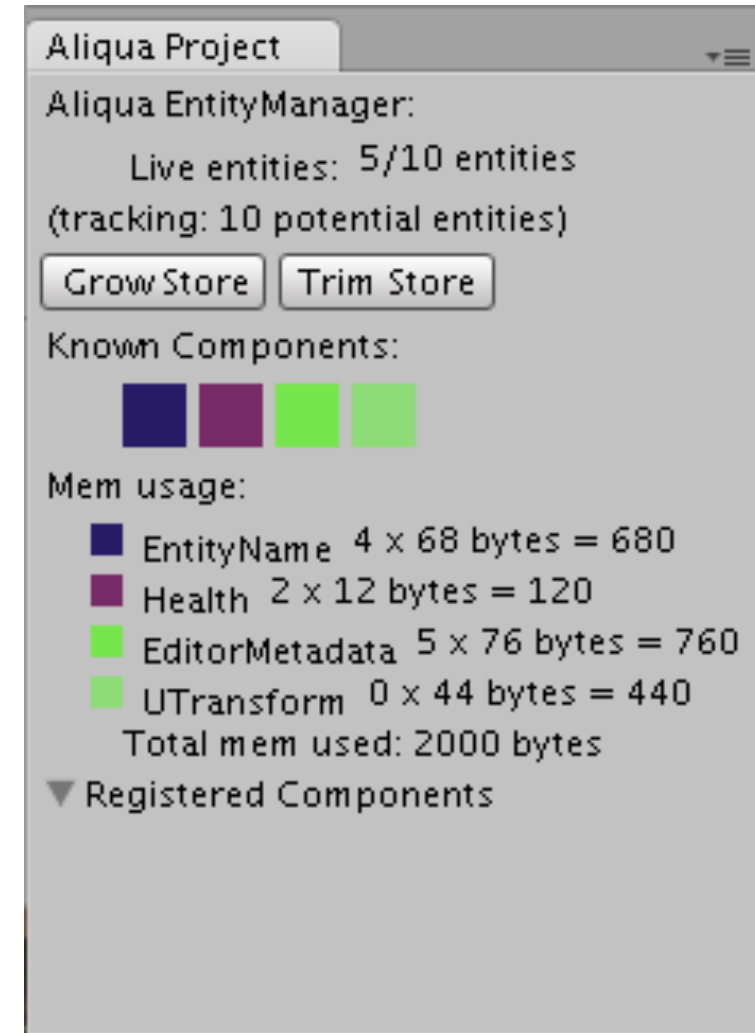
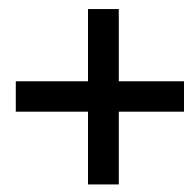
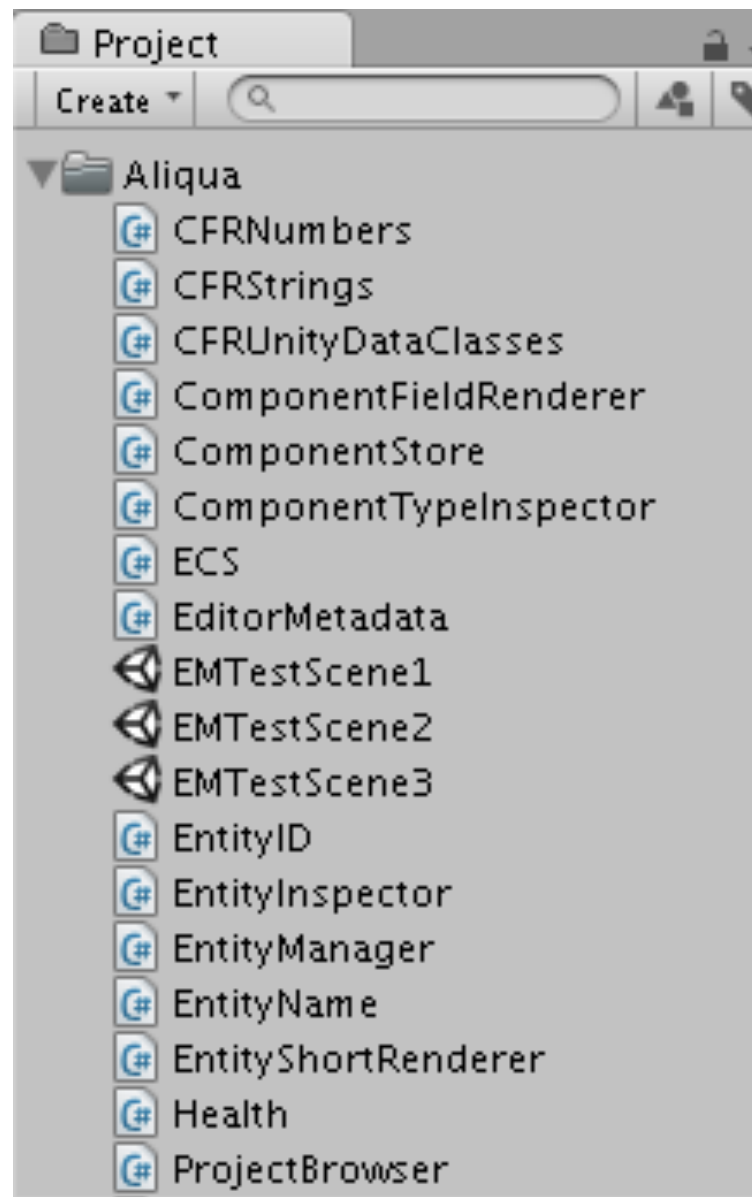


Community

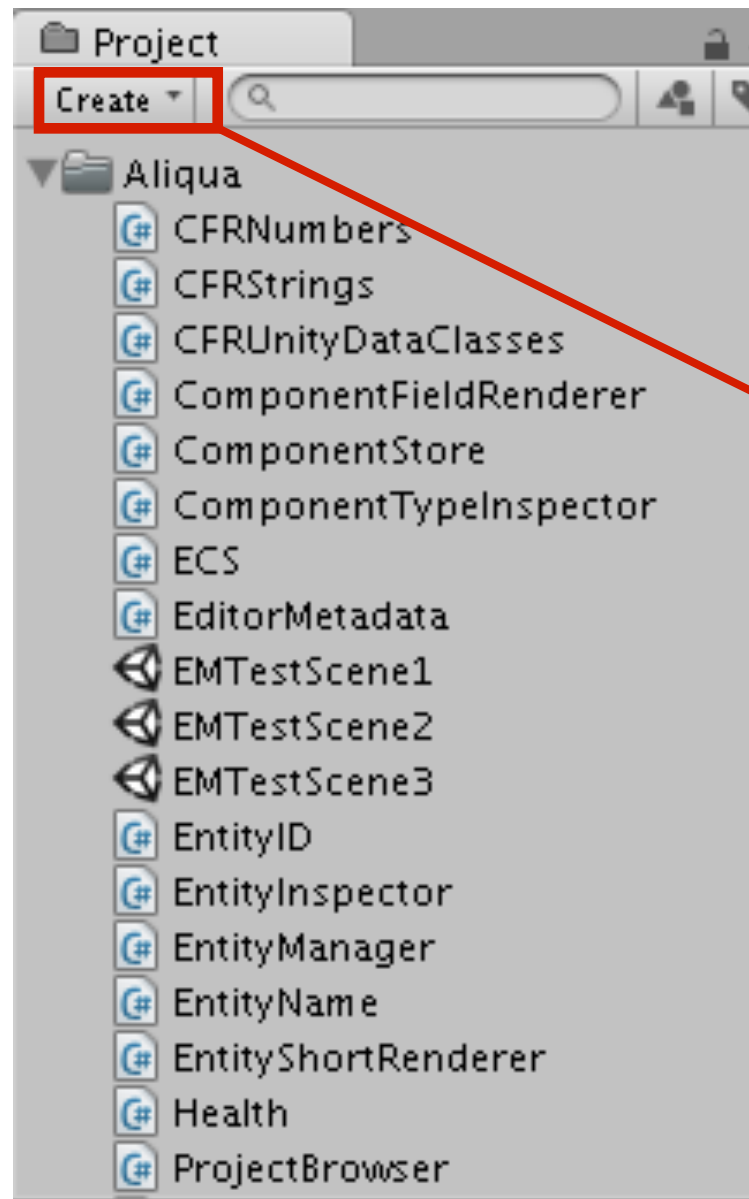
Documentation

Tutorials

# Project Window



# Project Window



Use Unity:

- Create/Edit scripts

# Project Window



Use Entity System:

- Debug “invisible stuff”

# Project Window



## Use Entity System:

- Debug “invisible stuff”
- Register Components



# Project Window



## Use Entity System:

- Debug “invisible stuff”
- Register Components
- Watch Memory-usage

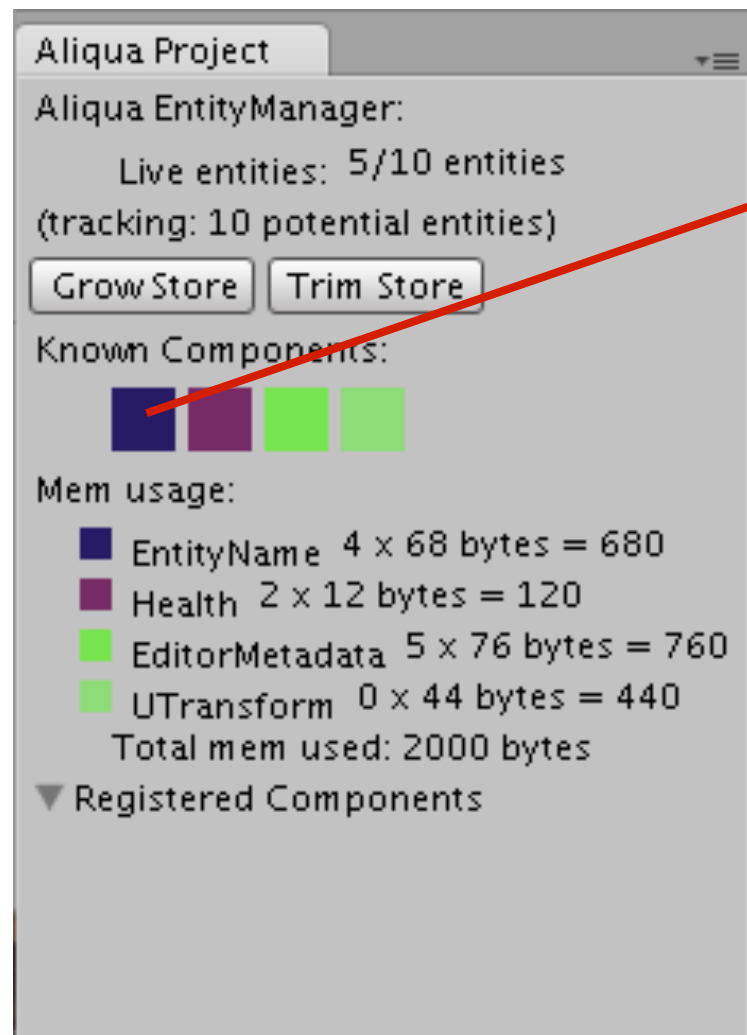
# Project Window



## Use Entity System:

- Debug “invisible stuff”
- Register Components
- Watch Memory-usage
- Test internals

# Project Window



?

# Project Window

Aliqua Project

Aliqua EntityManager:  
Live entities: 5/10 entities  
(tracking: 10 potential entities)

Known Components:

Mem usage:

- EntityName 4 x 68 bytes = 680
- Health 2 x 12 bytes = 120
- EditorMetadata 5 x 76 bytes = 760
- UTransform 0 x 44 bytes = 440

Total mem used: 2000 bytes

Registered Components


Component Inspector	
Component	EntityName
Int32	entityID
String [64 chars]	name

# Project Window

Aliqua Project

Aliqua EntityManager:  
Live entities: 5/10 entities  
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Known Components:





Mem usage:

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Total mem used: 2000 bytes

▼ Registered Components

Component Inspector	
Component	EntityName
Int32	entityID
String [64 chars]	name
	

Component Inspector	
Component	Health
Int32	entityID
Int32	hitpointsCurrent
Int32	hitpointsMax
	


# Project Window

Aliqua Project

Aliqua EntityManager:  
Live entities: 5/10 entities  
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Grow Store Trim Store

Known Components:





Mem usage:

- EntityName 4 x 68 bytes = 680
- Health 2 x 12 bytes = 120
- EditorMetadata 5 x 76 bytes = 760
- UTransform 0 x 44 bytes = 440


Total mem used: 2000 bytes

▼ Registered Components

Component Inspector	
Component	EntityName
Int32	entityID
String [64 chars]	name
	

Component Inspector	
Component	Health
Int32	entityID
Int32	hitpointsCurrent
Int32	hitpointsMax
	

# Project Window

 = “in memory, has unique values”

 = “in memory, null / default / empty”

Aliqua Project

Aliqua EntityManager:  
Live entities: 10 (tracking: 10 potential entities)

Grow Store Trim Store


Known Components:


Mem usage:

- EntityName 4 x 68 bytes = 680
- Health 2 x 12 bytes = 120
- EditorMetadata 5 x 76 bytes = 760
- Transition 4 x 12 bytes = 48

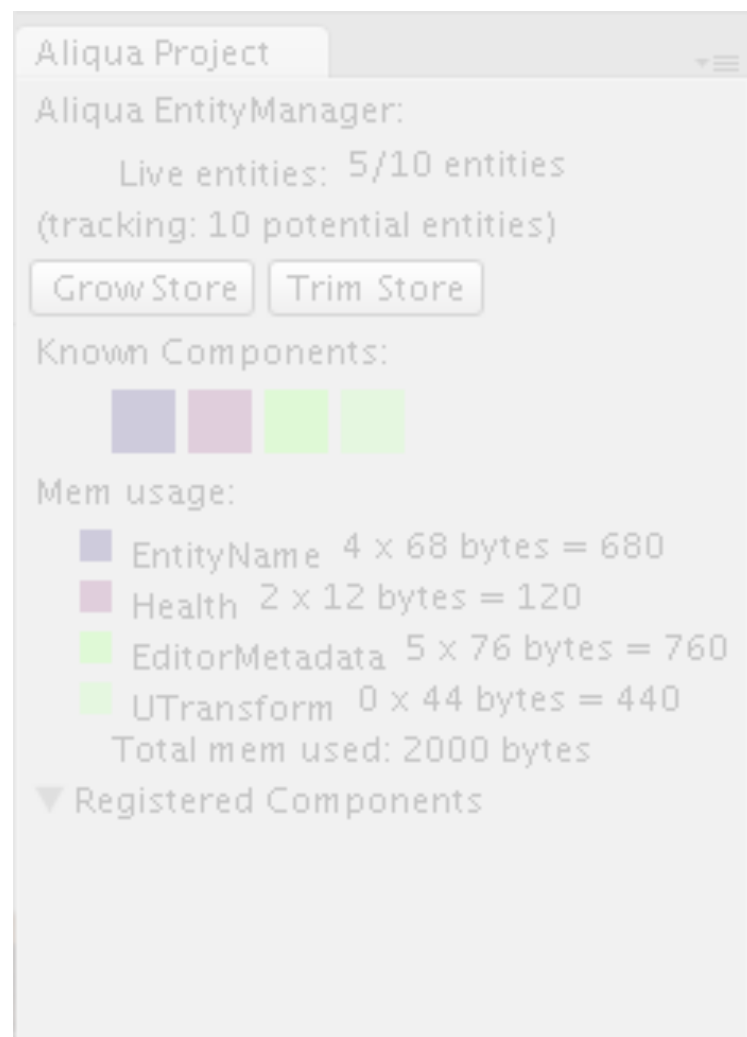
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Component	EntityName
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Component Insp	
Component	Health
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# Project Window





# Project Window


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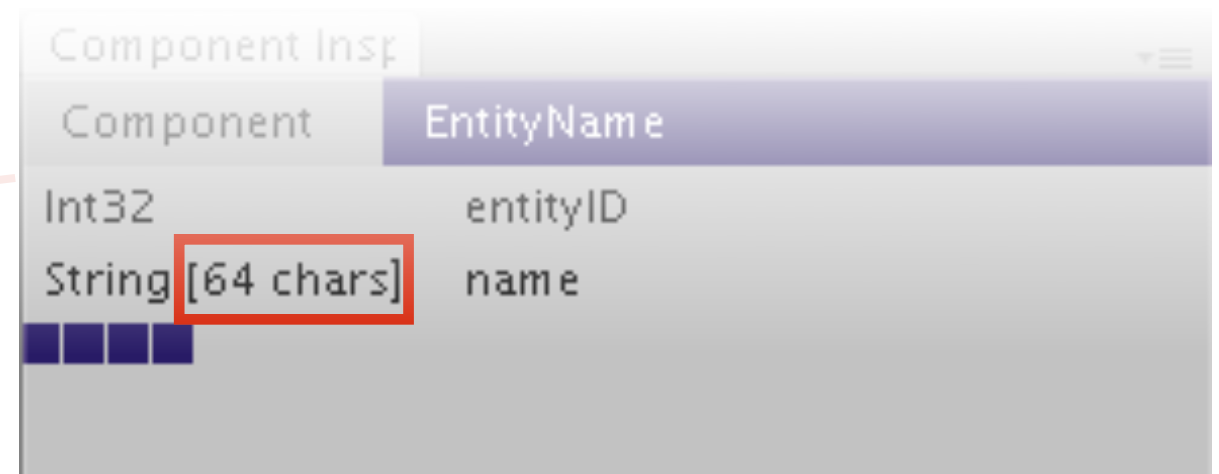
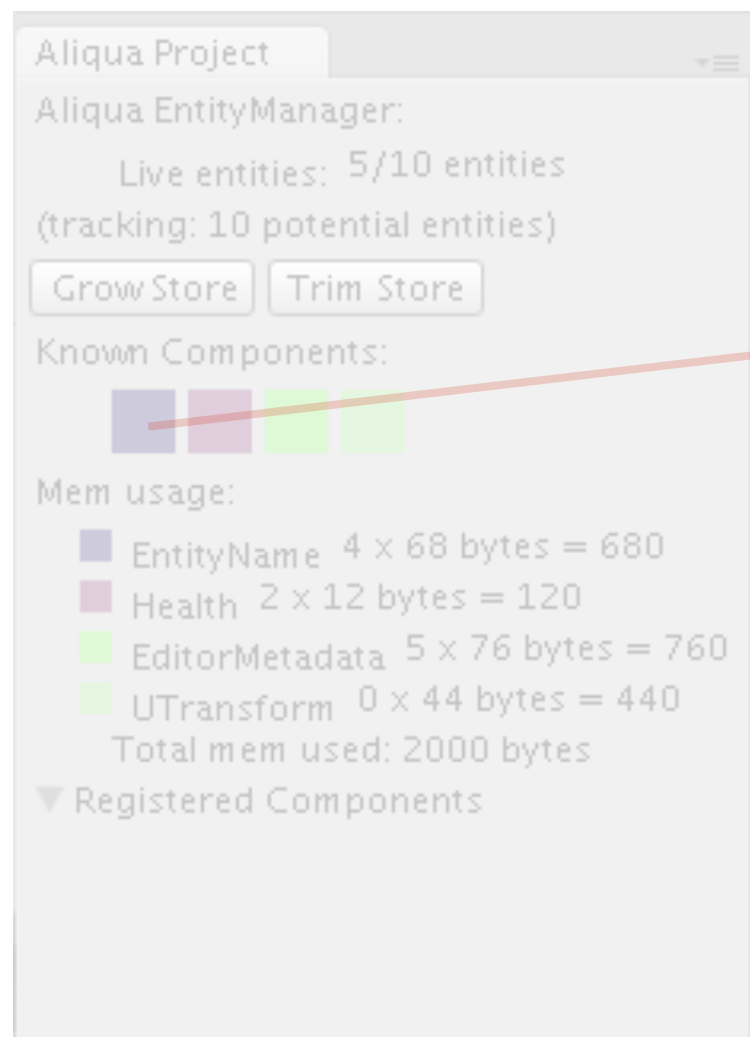
▼ Registered Components

Component Inspector

Component	EntityName
Int32	entityID
String [64 chars]	name

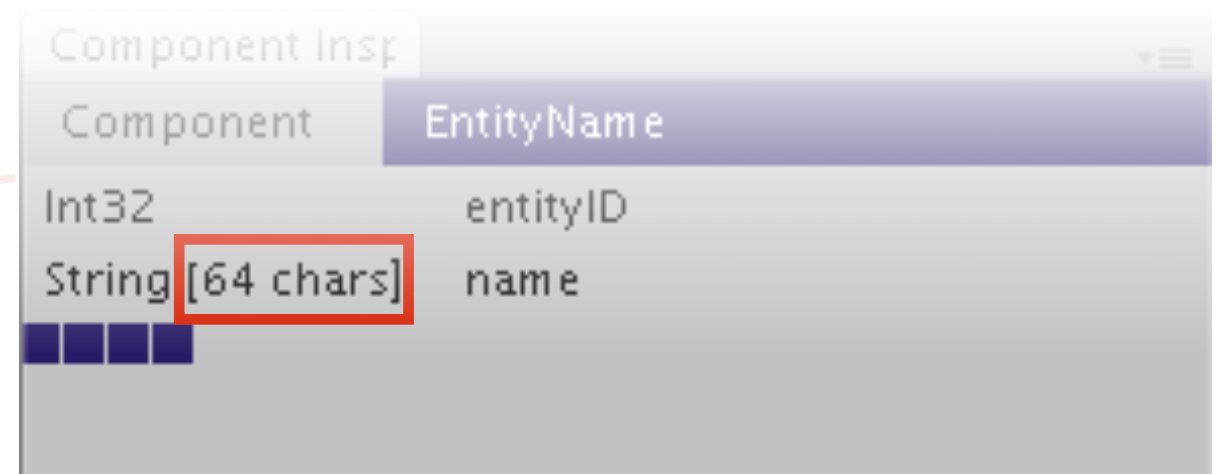
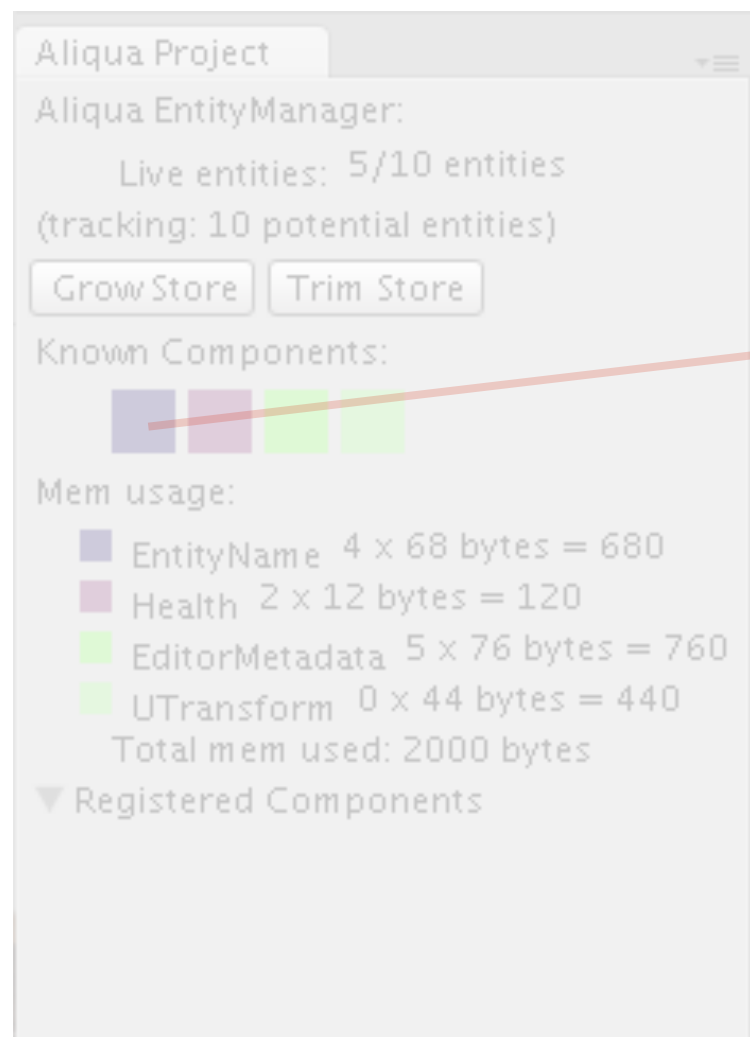
# Project Window

*[MarshalAs(UnmanagedType.ByValTStr, SizeConst = 64)]*  
public string name;



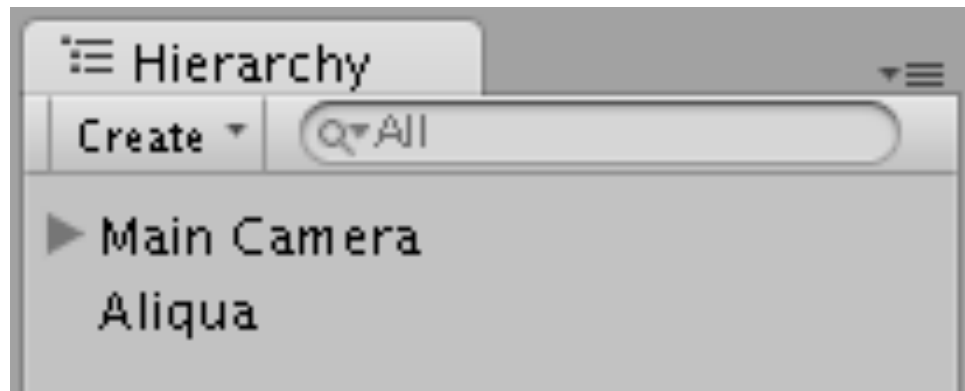
# Project Window

*[MarshalAs(UnmanagedType.ByValTStr, SizeConst = 64)]*  
public string name;

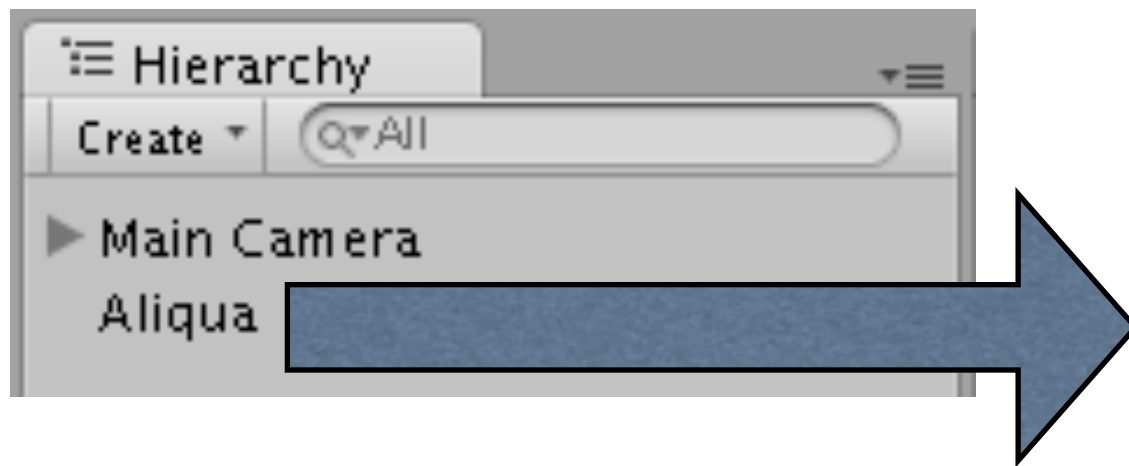


= “fixed size struct, only the first 64 chars will save”

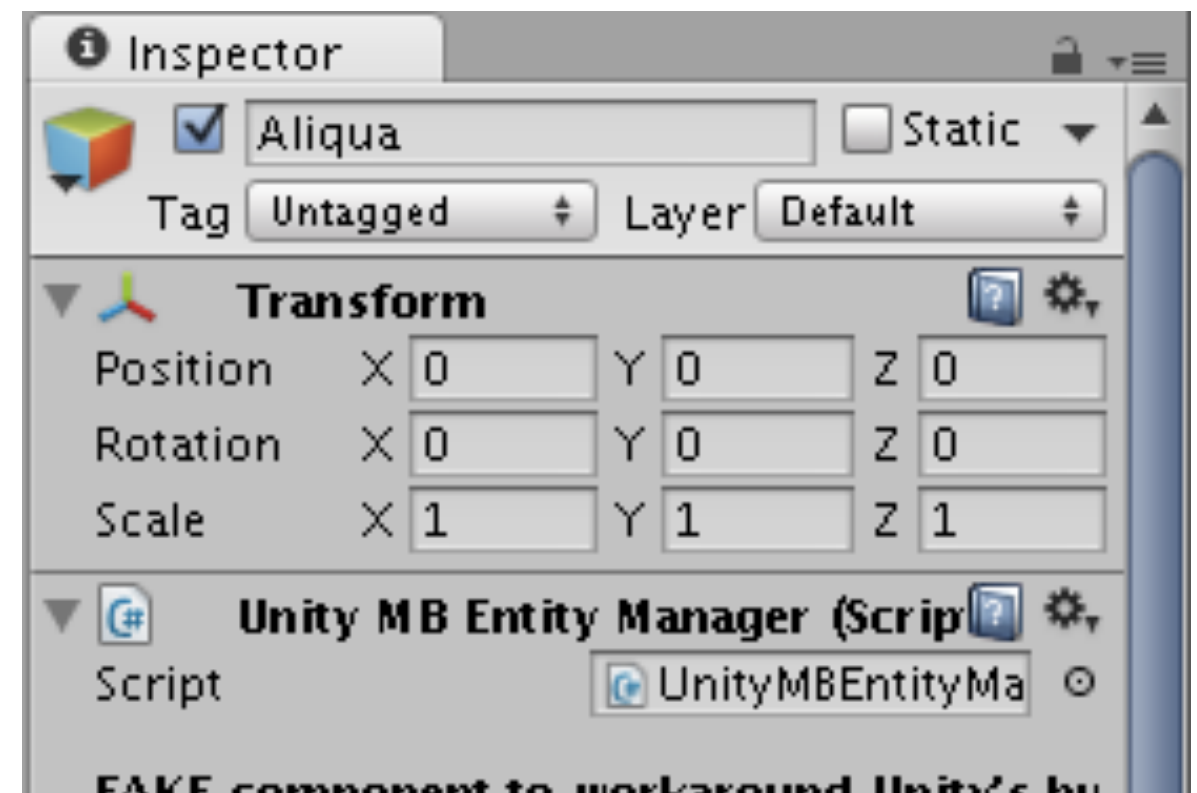
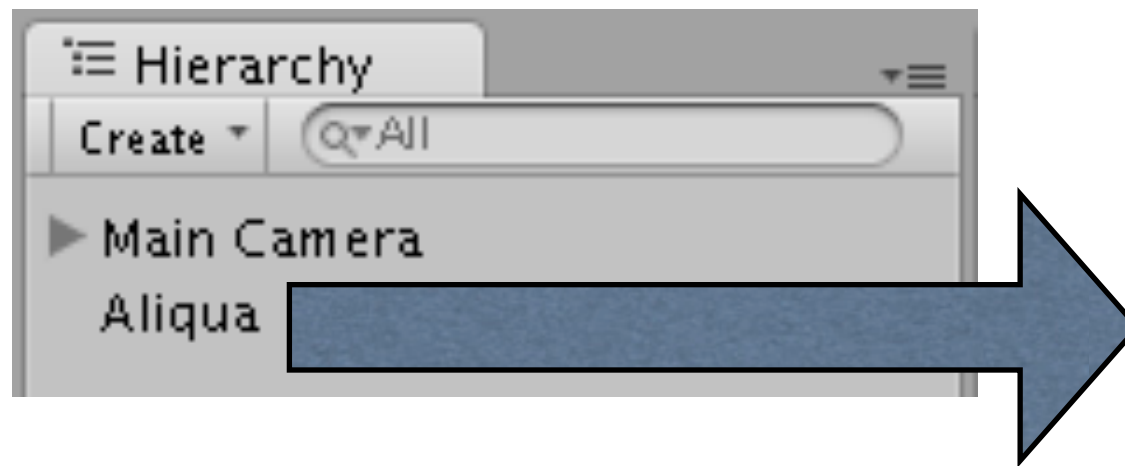
# Hierarchy Window



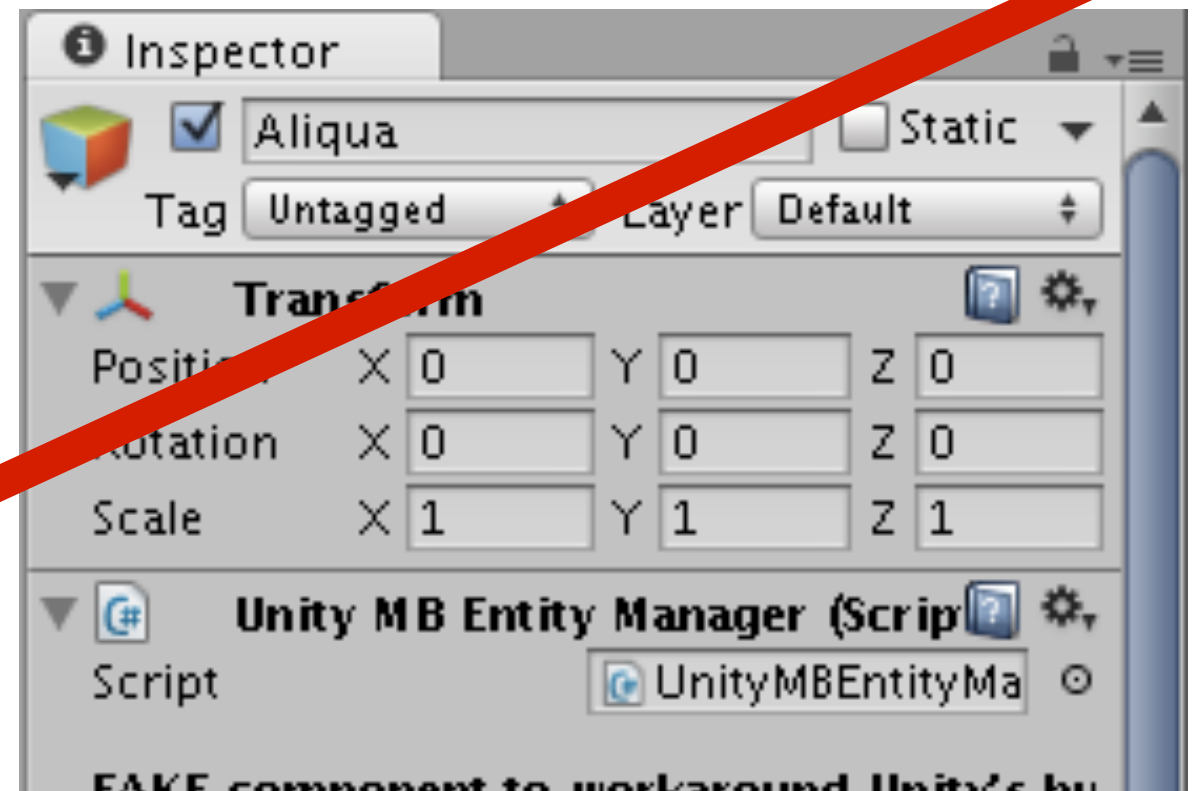
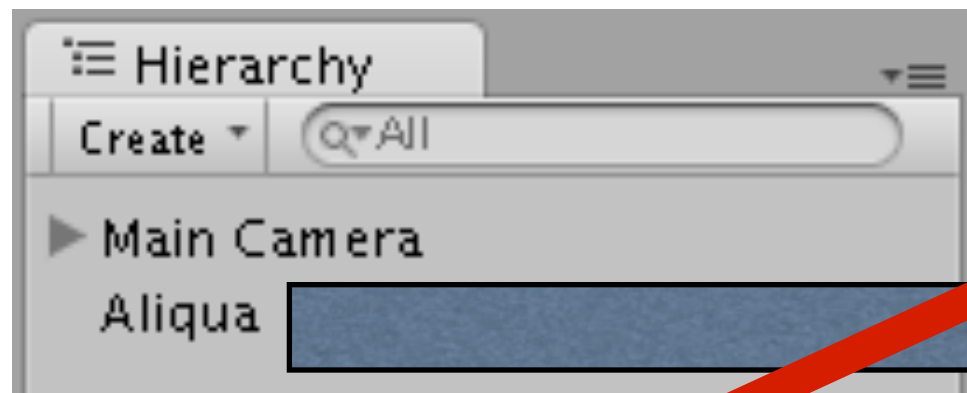
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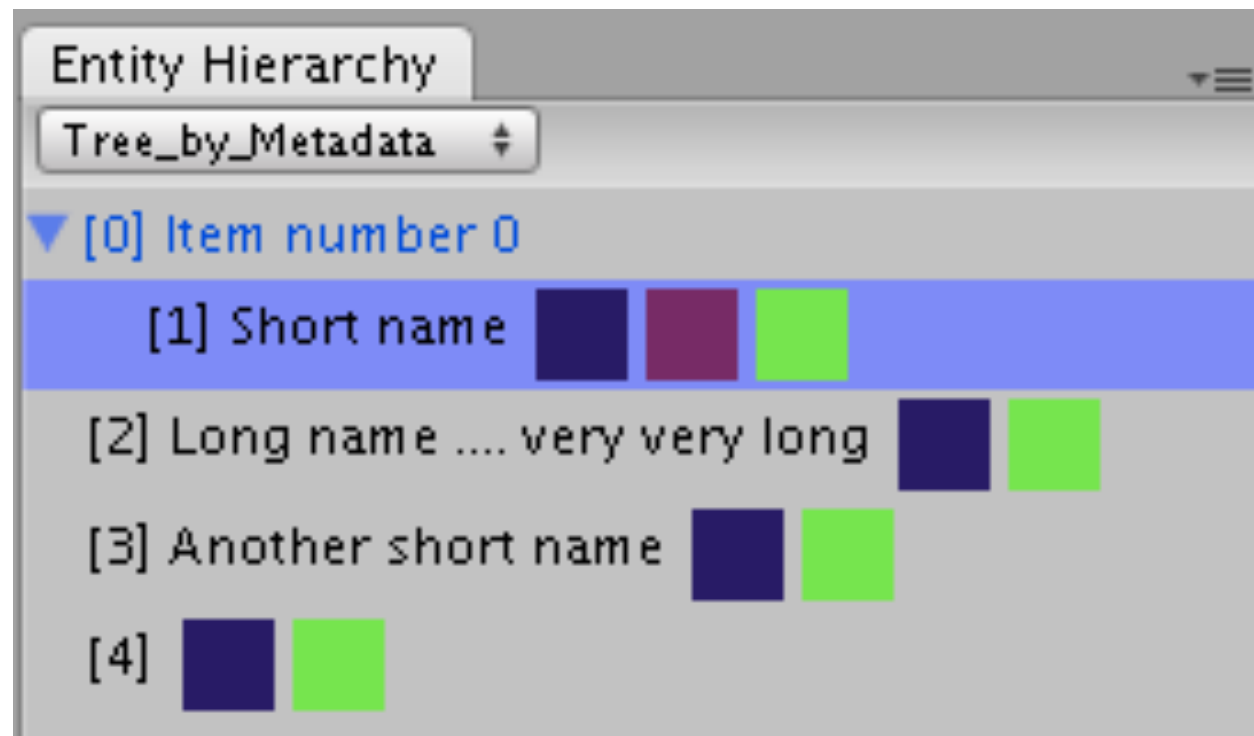
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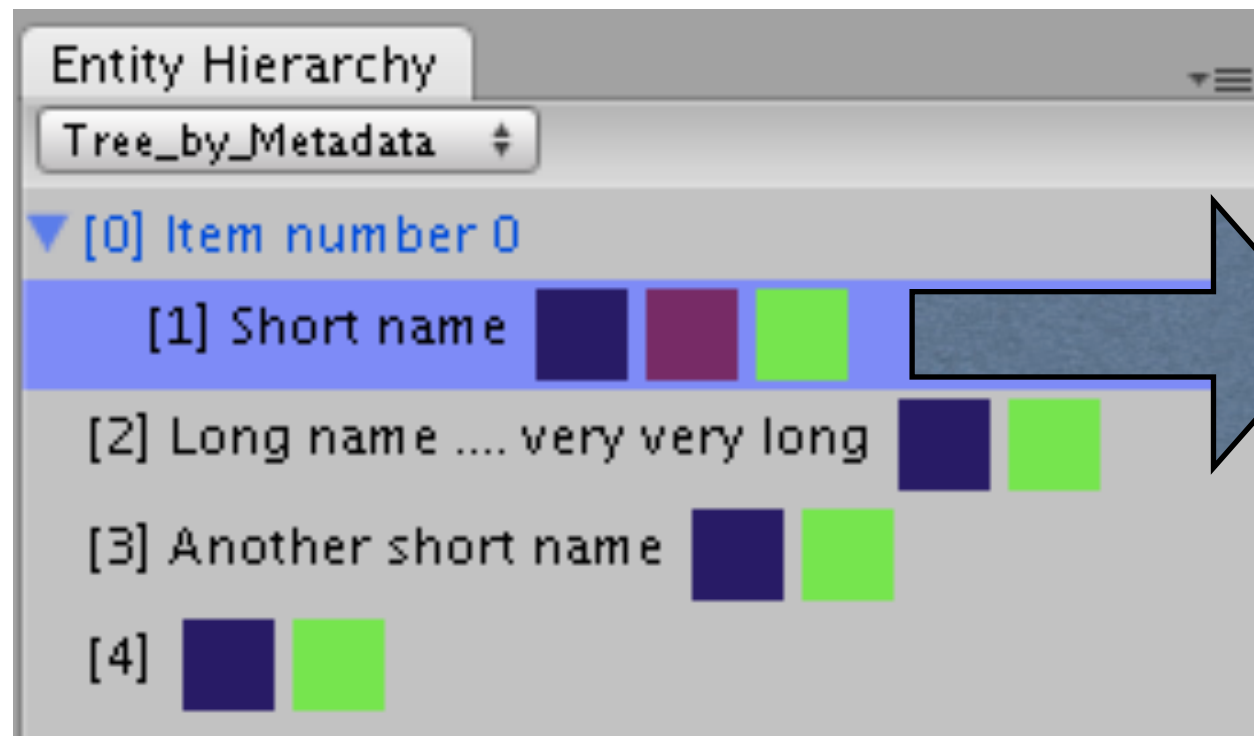


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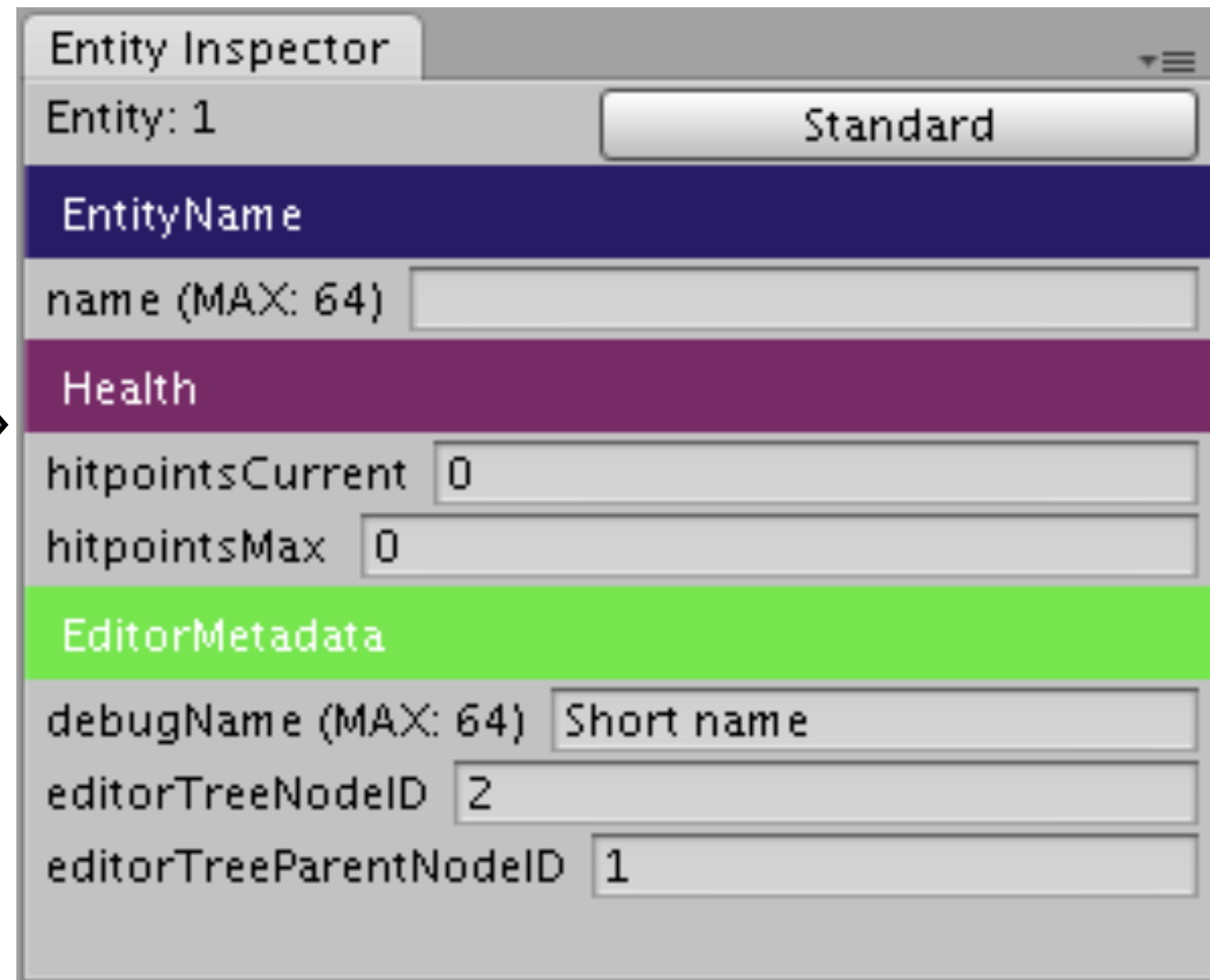
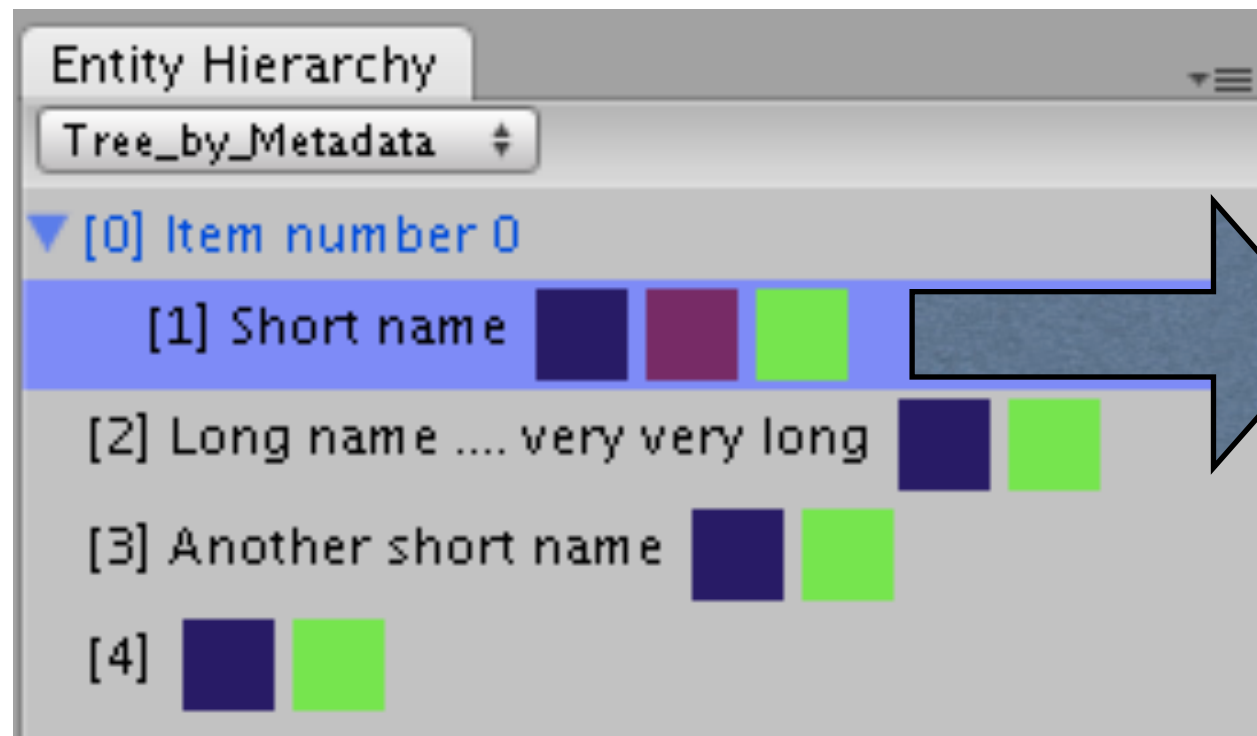




# Hierarchy Window

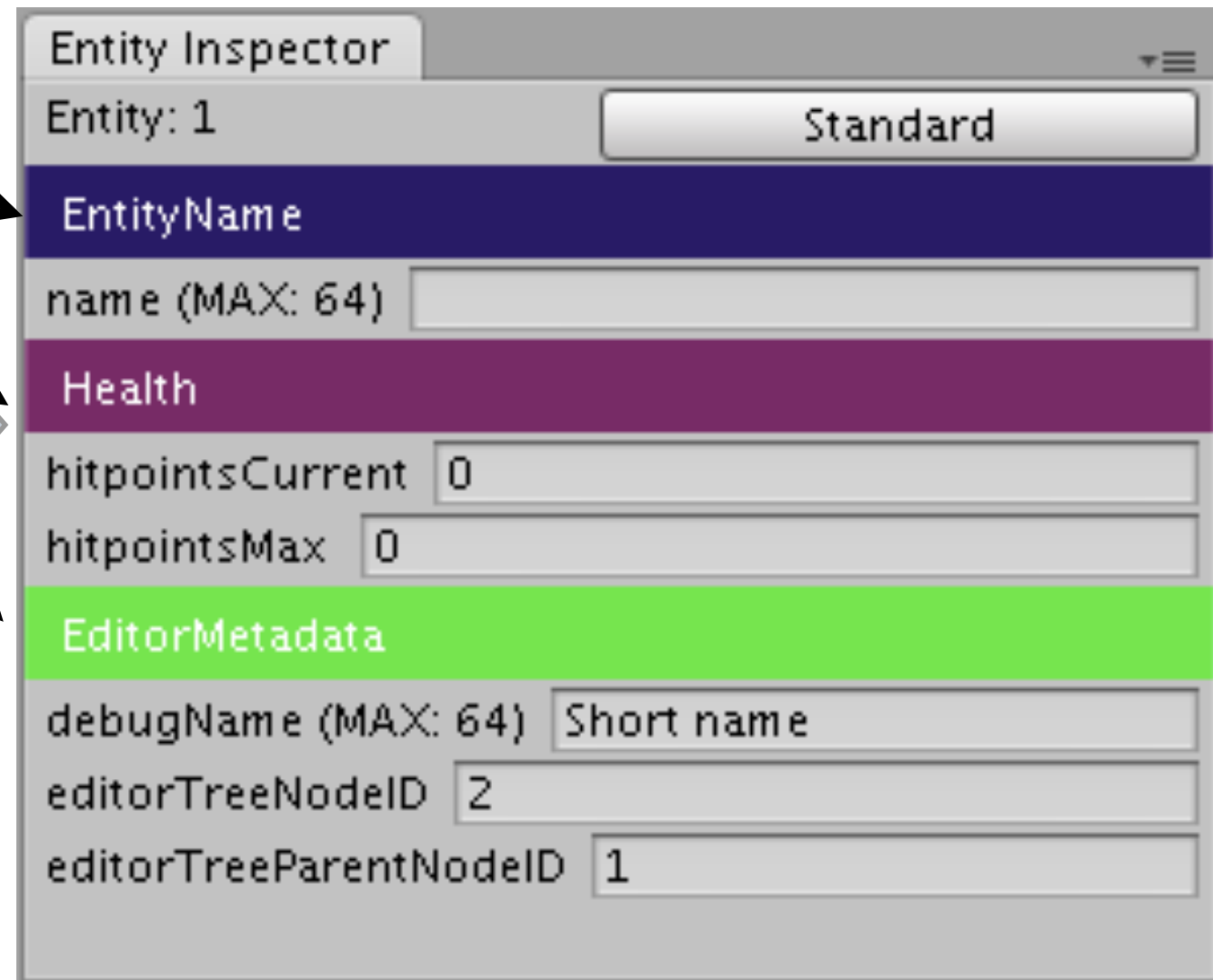
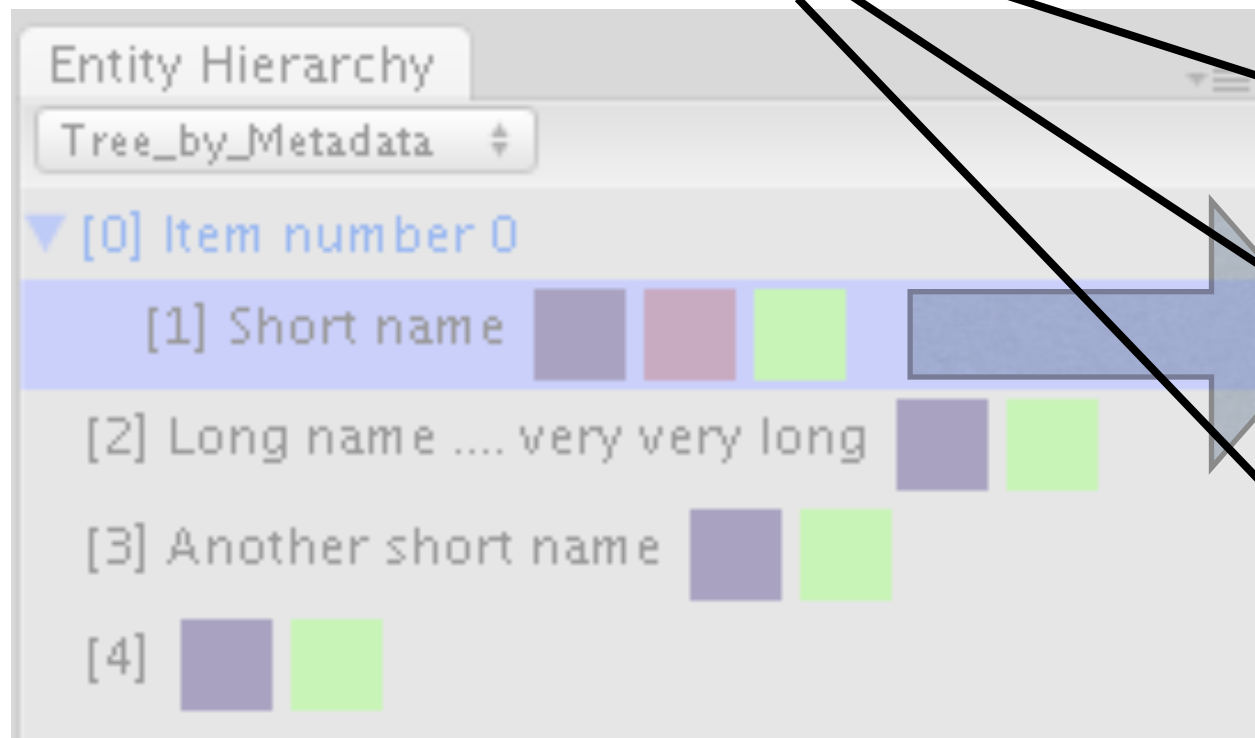


# Hierarchy Window



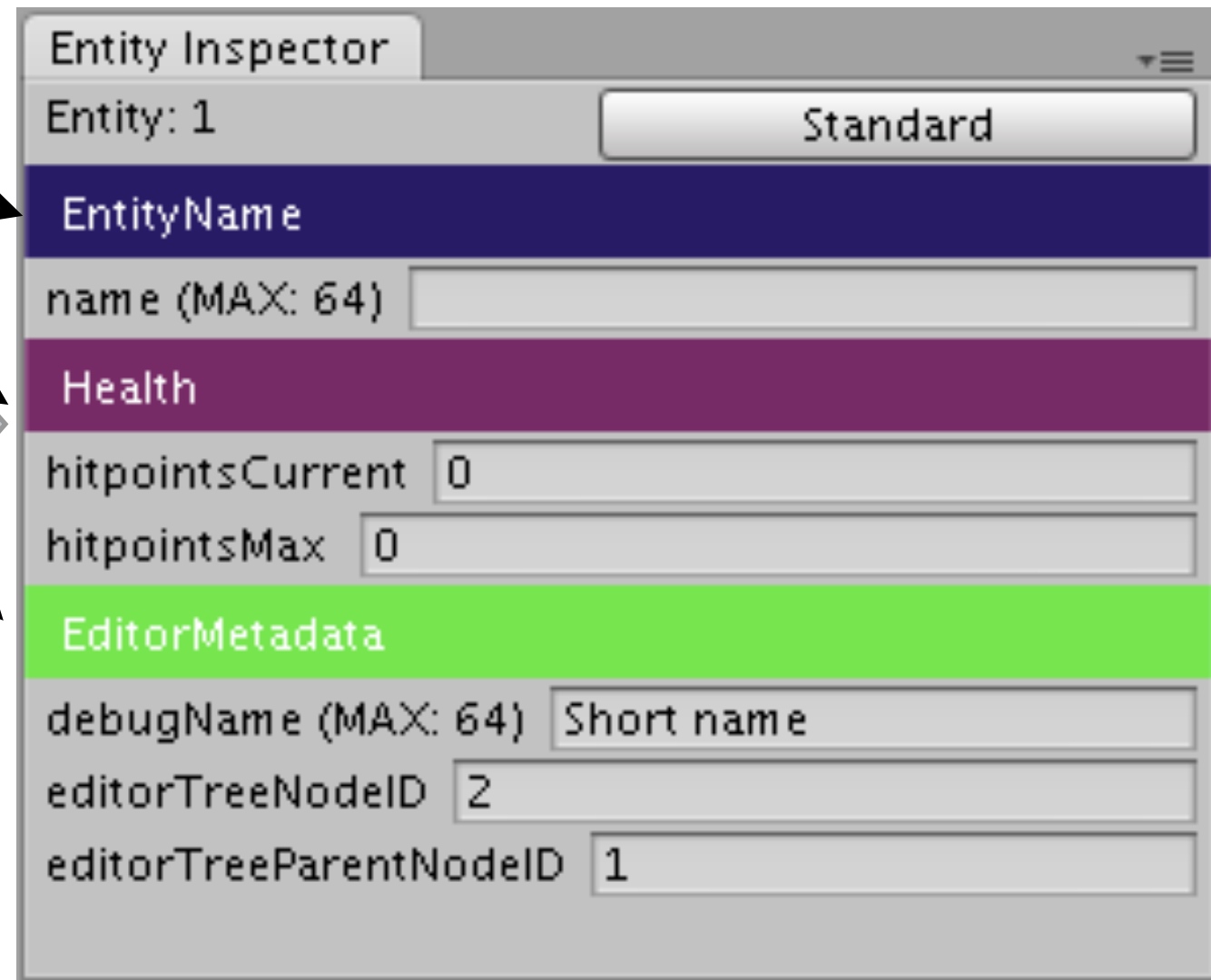
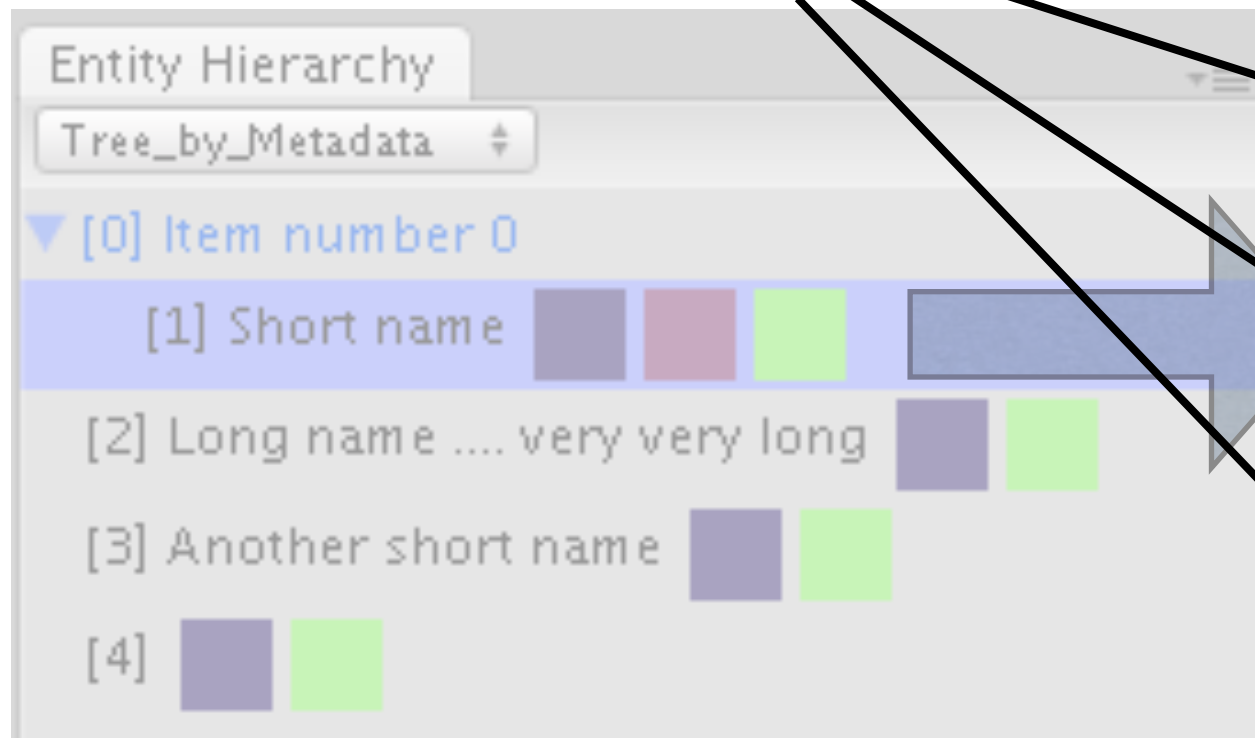
# Hierarchy Window

All structs!



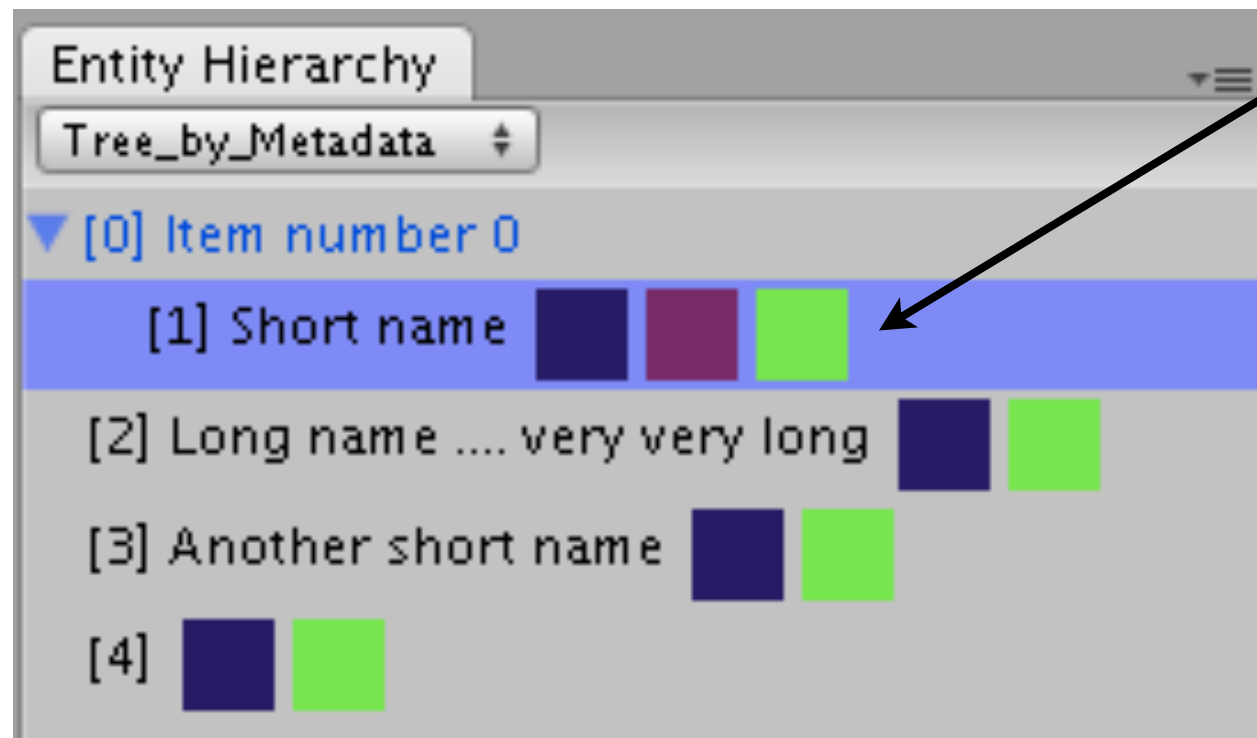
# Hierarchy Window

All structs!



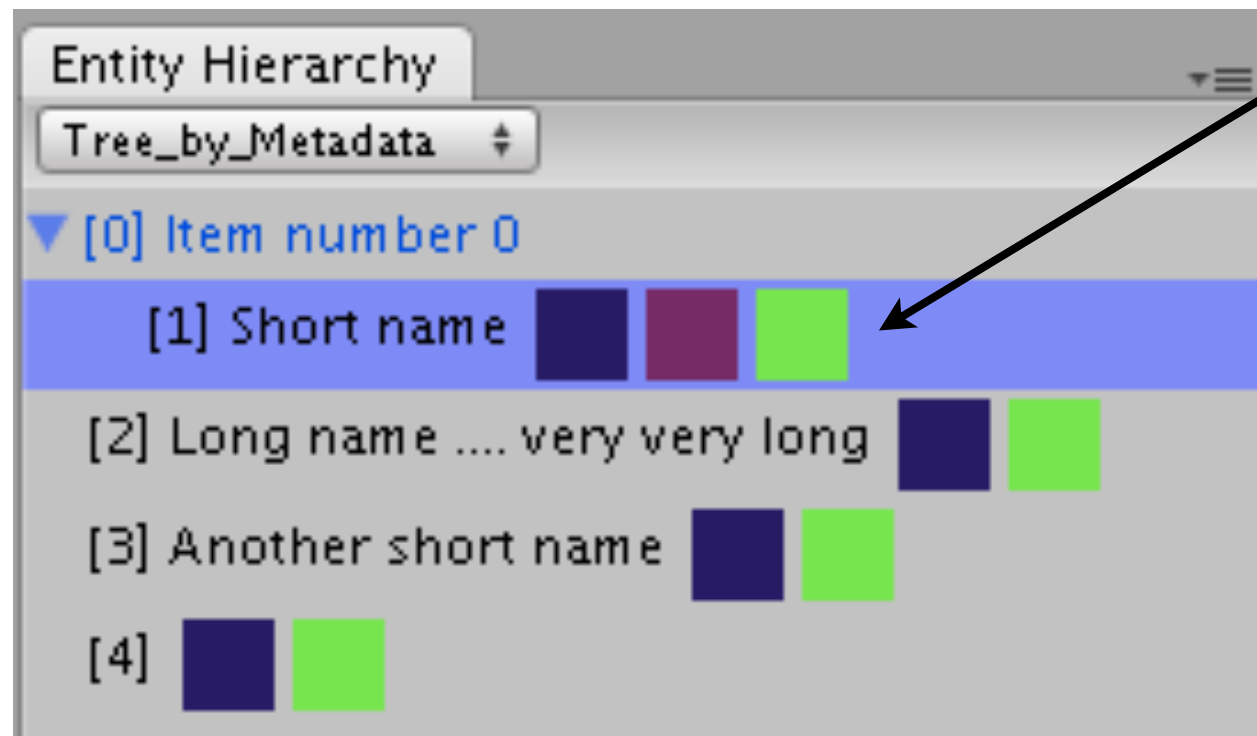
...no source code  
allowed here!

# Hierarchy Window



Tree without Transforms!

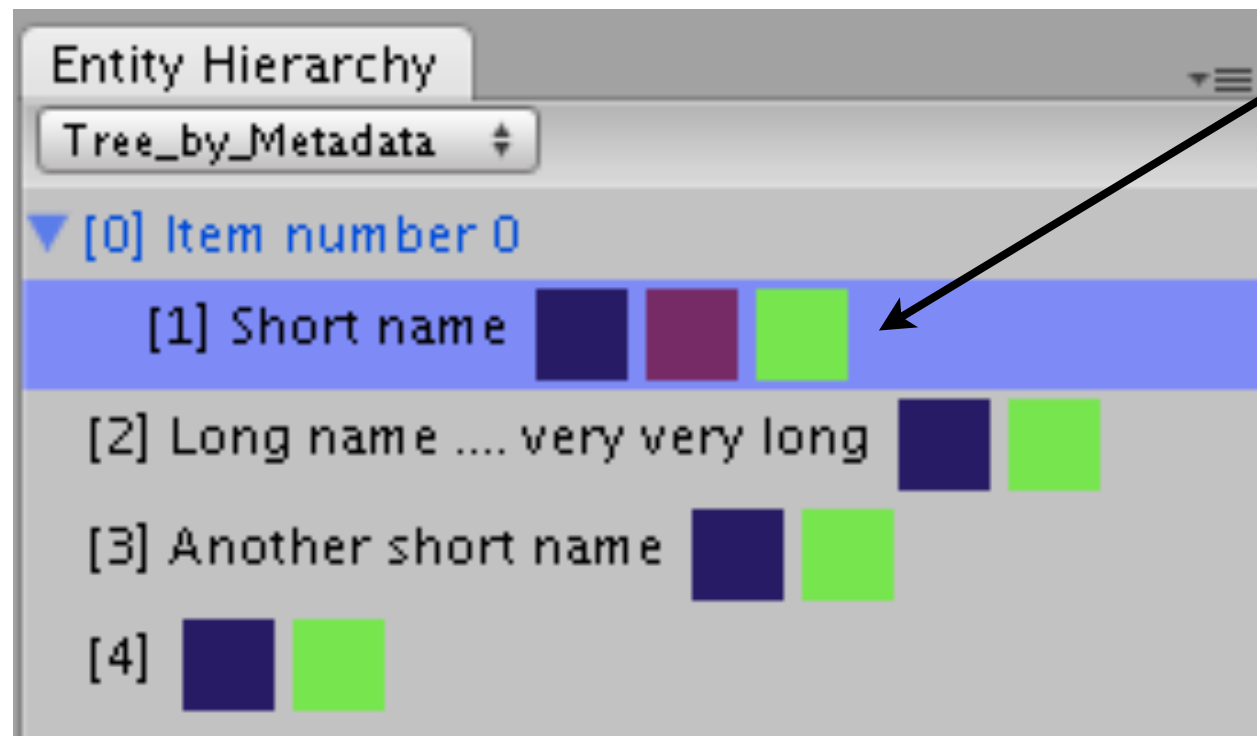
# Hierarchy Window



Tree without Transforms!

... arrange however you like,  
**DOES NOT BREAK**  
Physics/Render/AI/Logic/etc

# Hierarchy Window



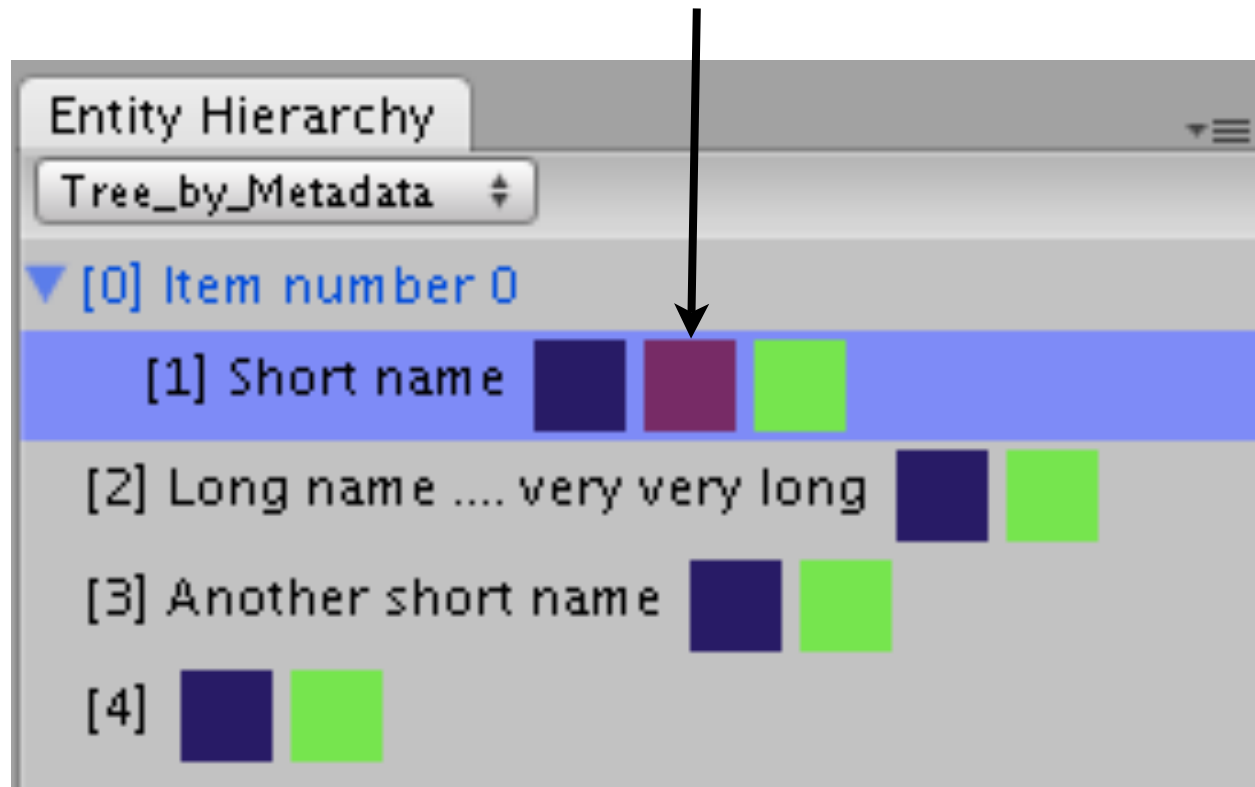
Tree without Transforms!

... arrange however you like,  
**DOES NOT BREAK**  
Physics/Render/AI/Logic/etc

... don't need a fake invisible  
GameObject to group things!

# Hierarchy Window

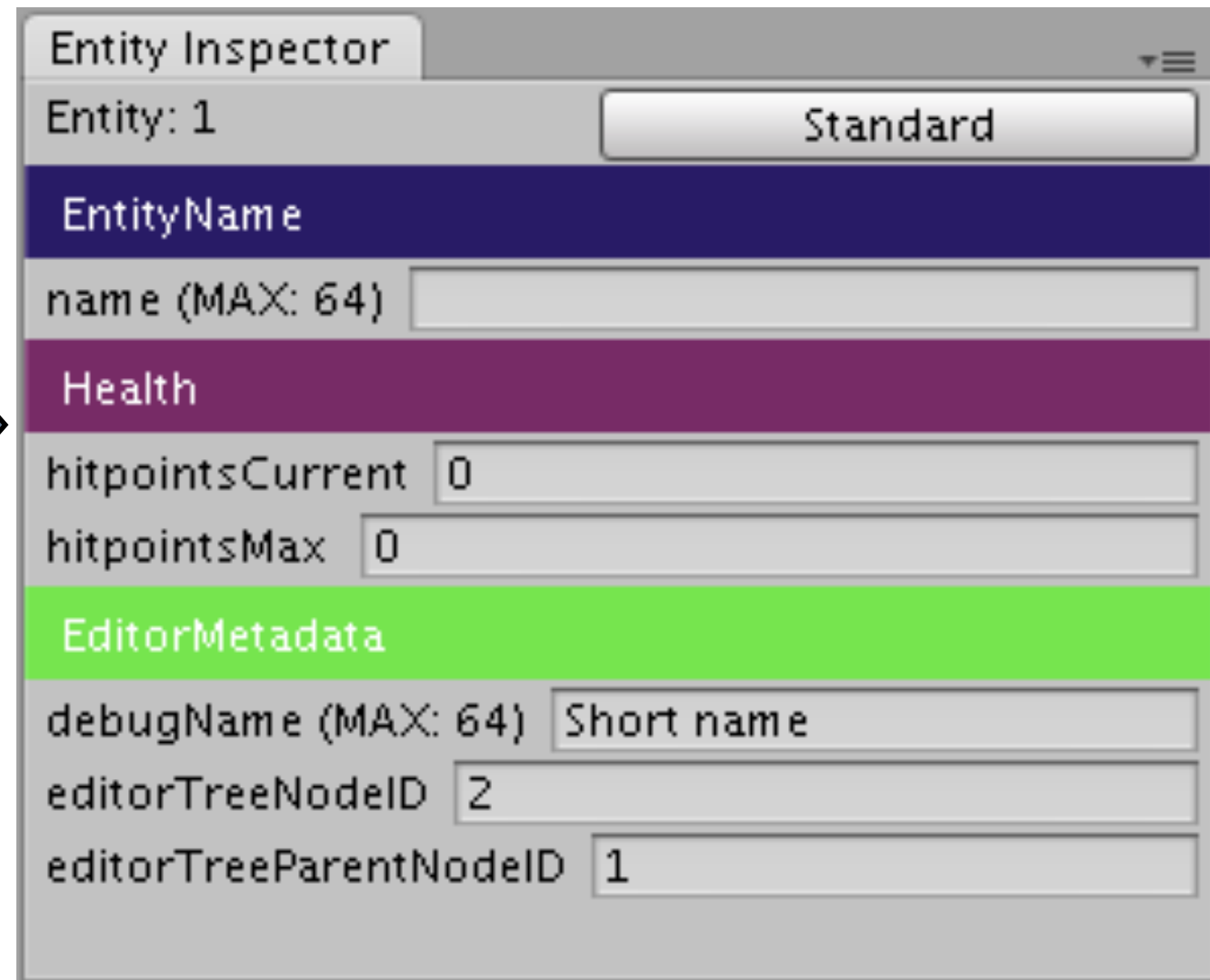
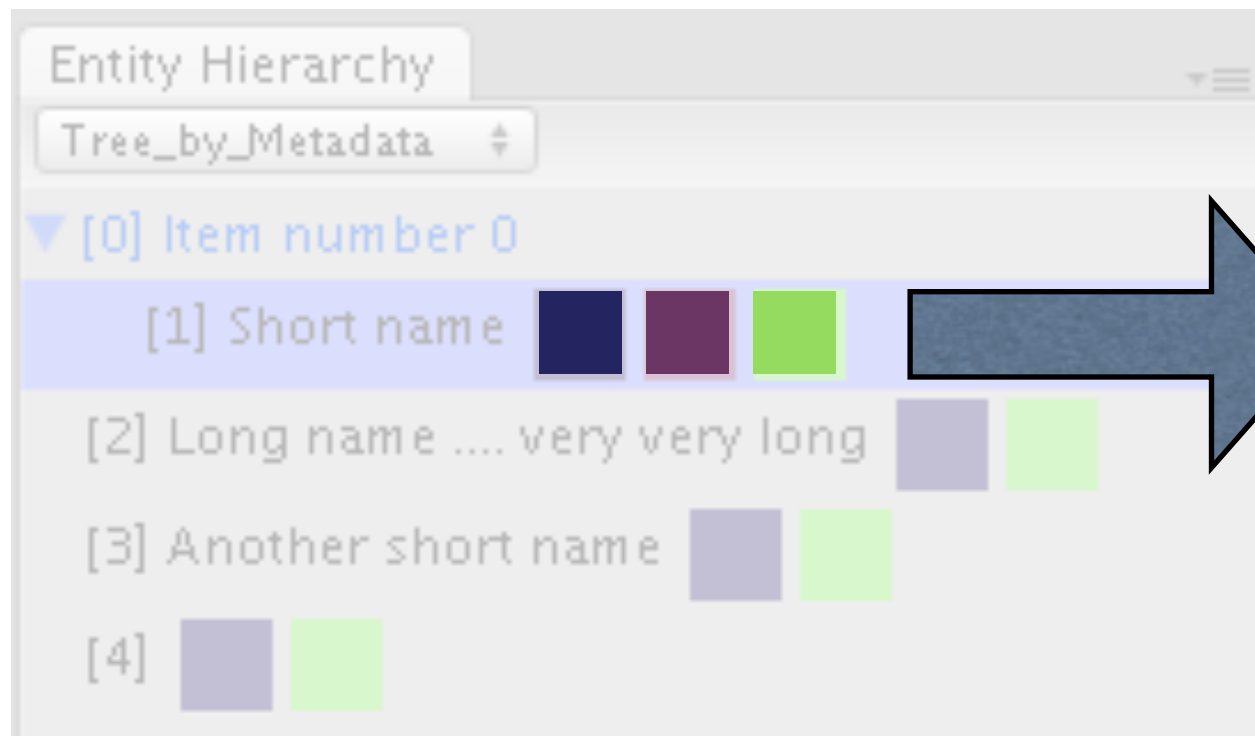
## Components-at-a-glance





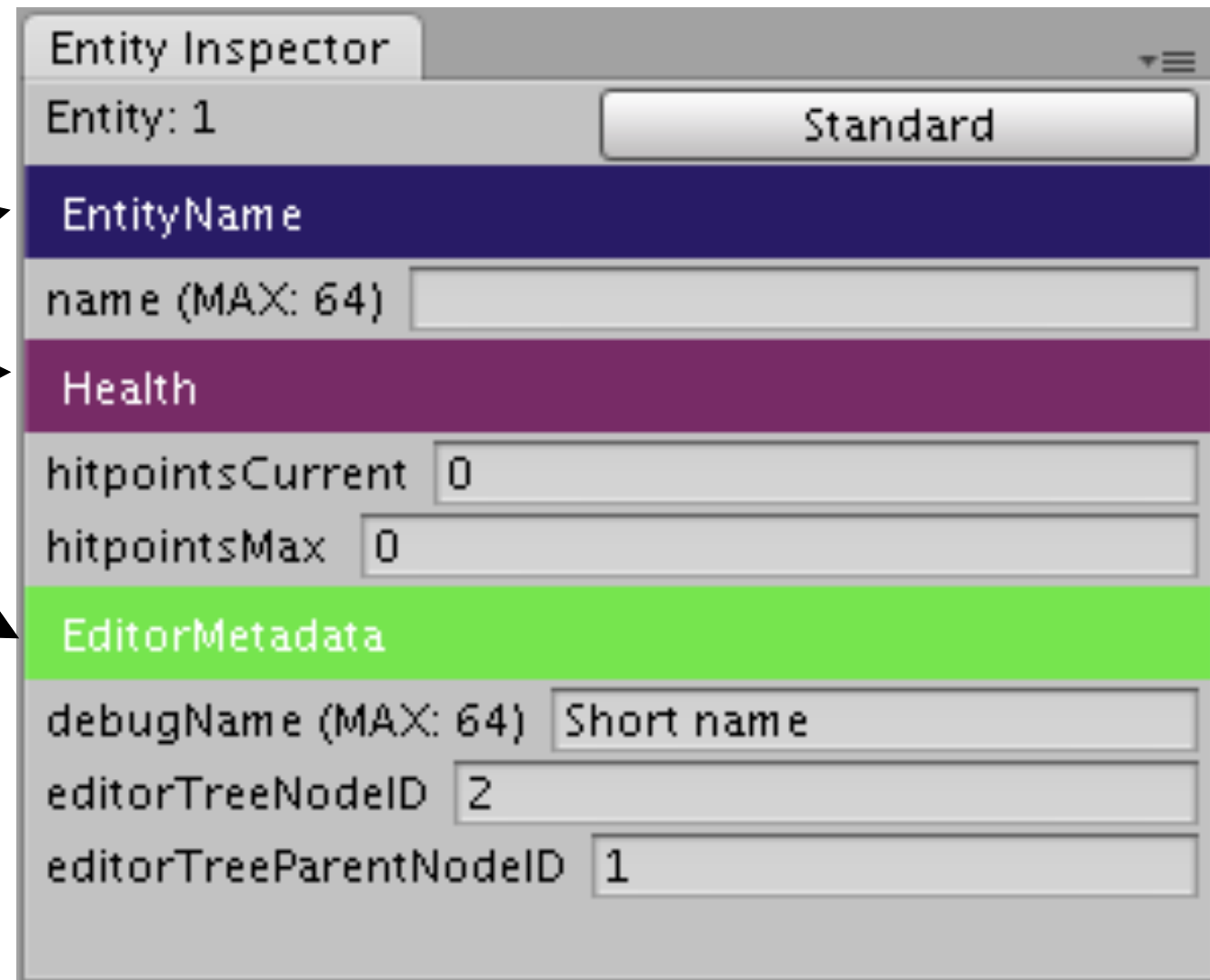
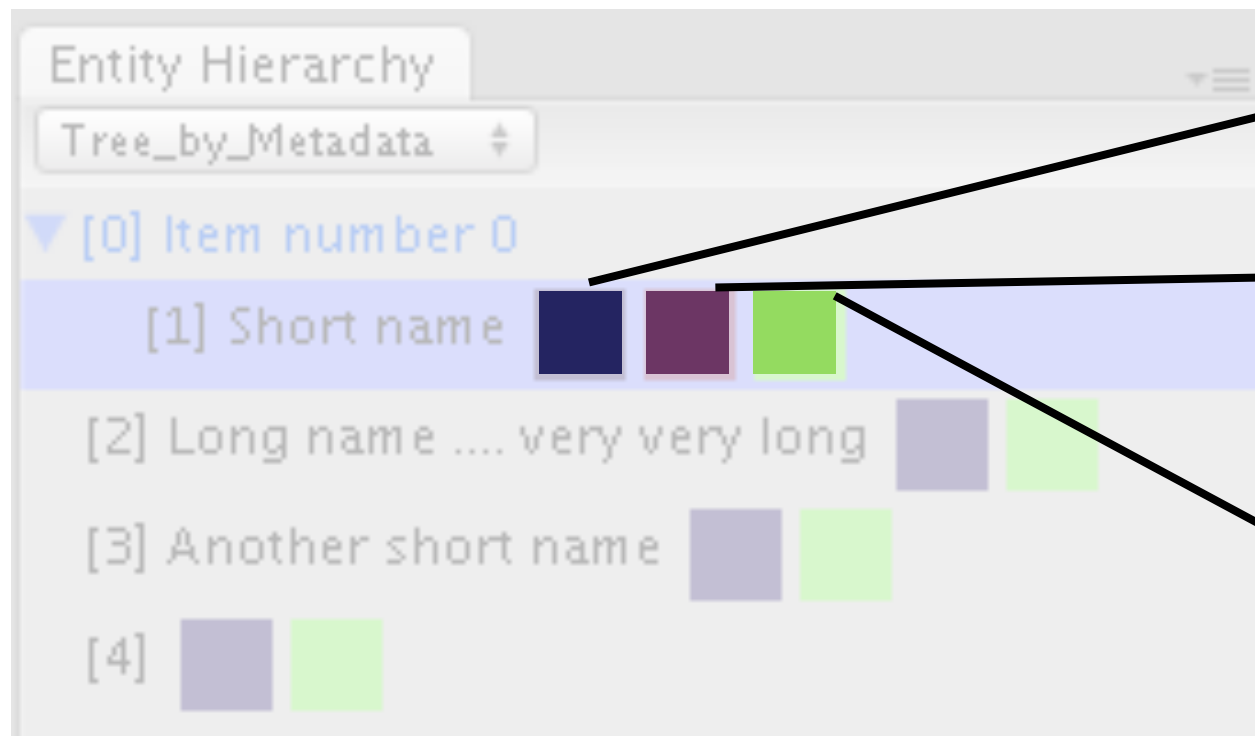
# Hierarchy Window

## Components-at-a-glance

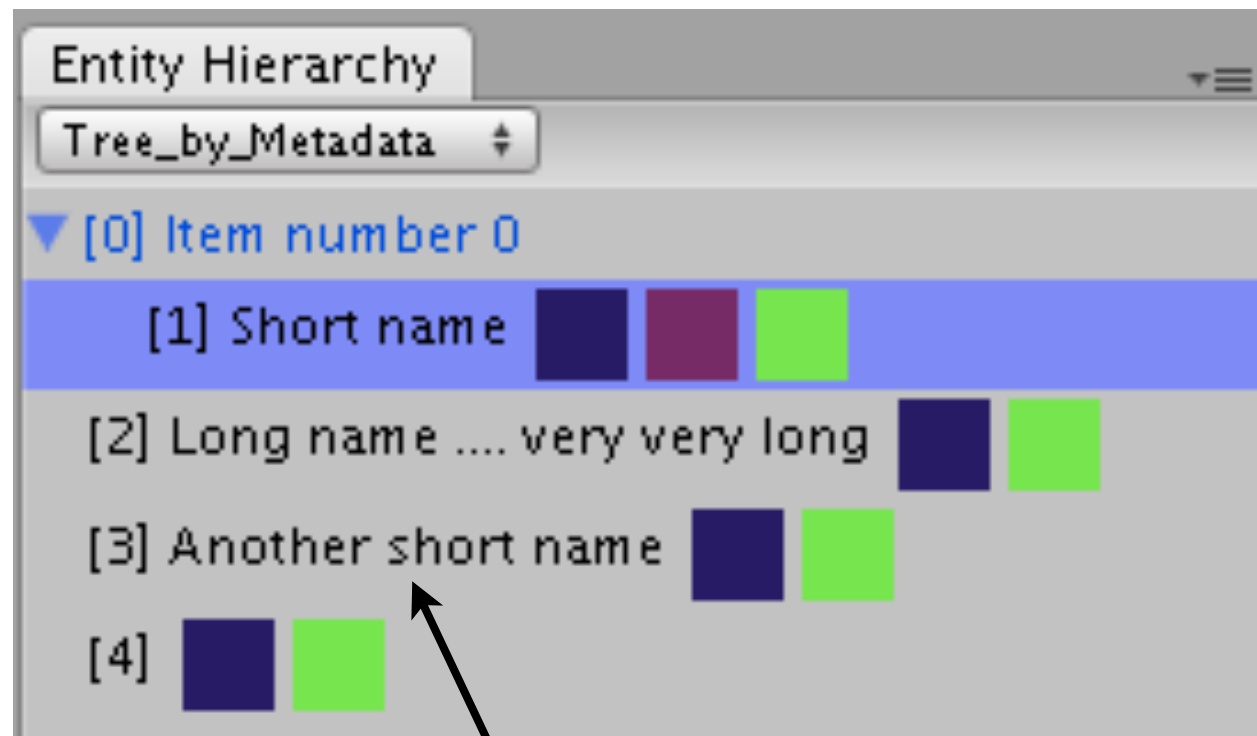


# Hierarchy Window

## Components-at-a-glance

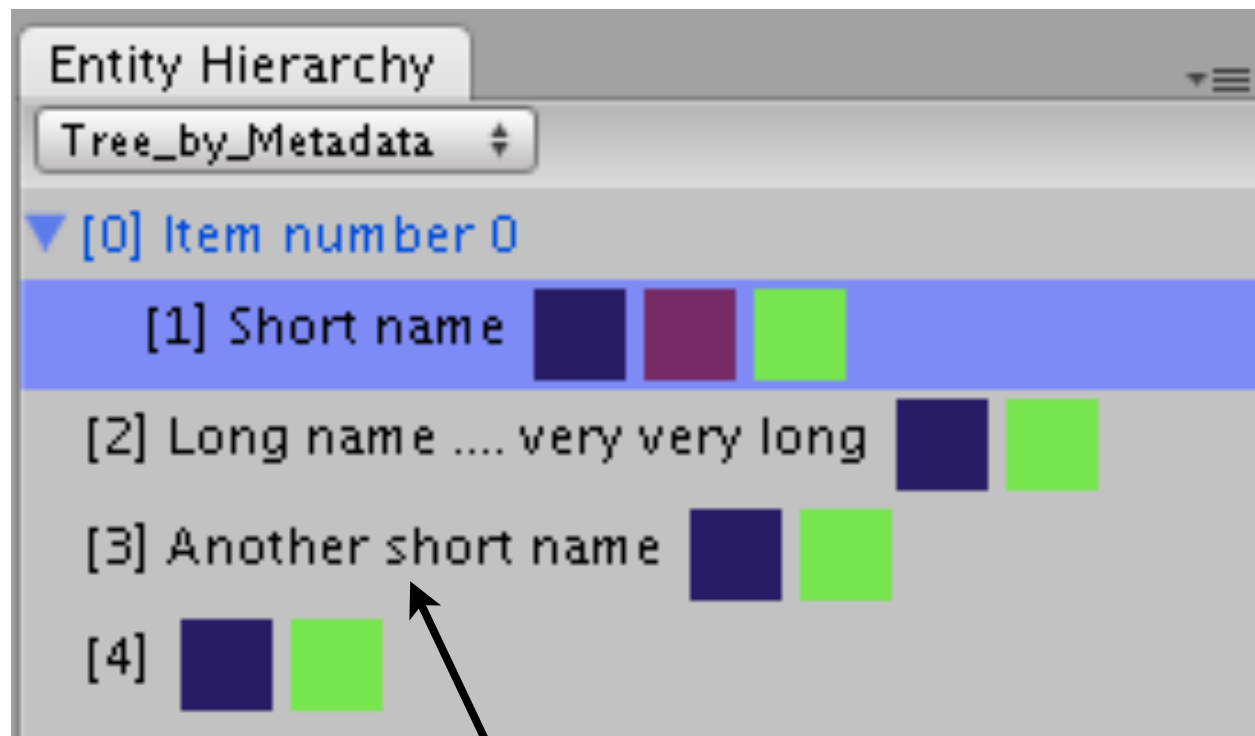


# Hierarchy Window



Use anything as "name"

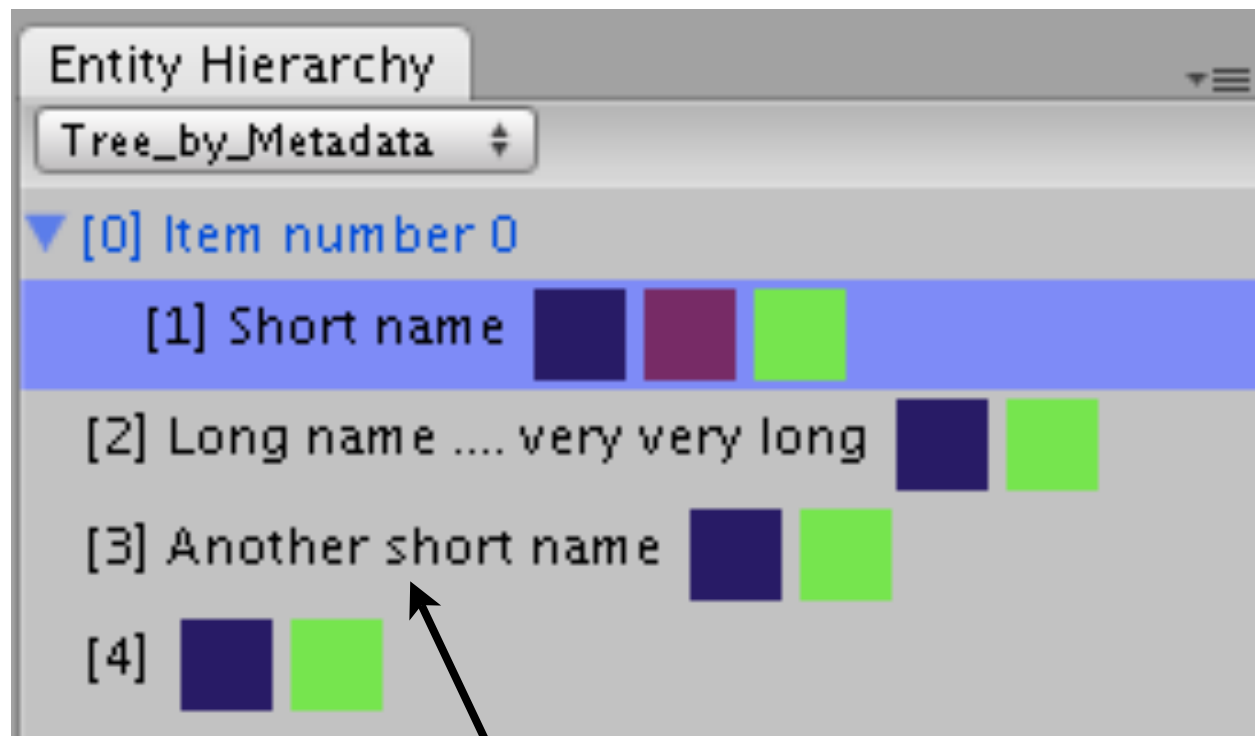
# Hierarchy Window



Have more than one name per object (Entity)!

Use anything as "name"

# Hierarchy Window

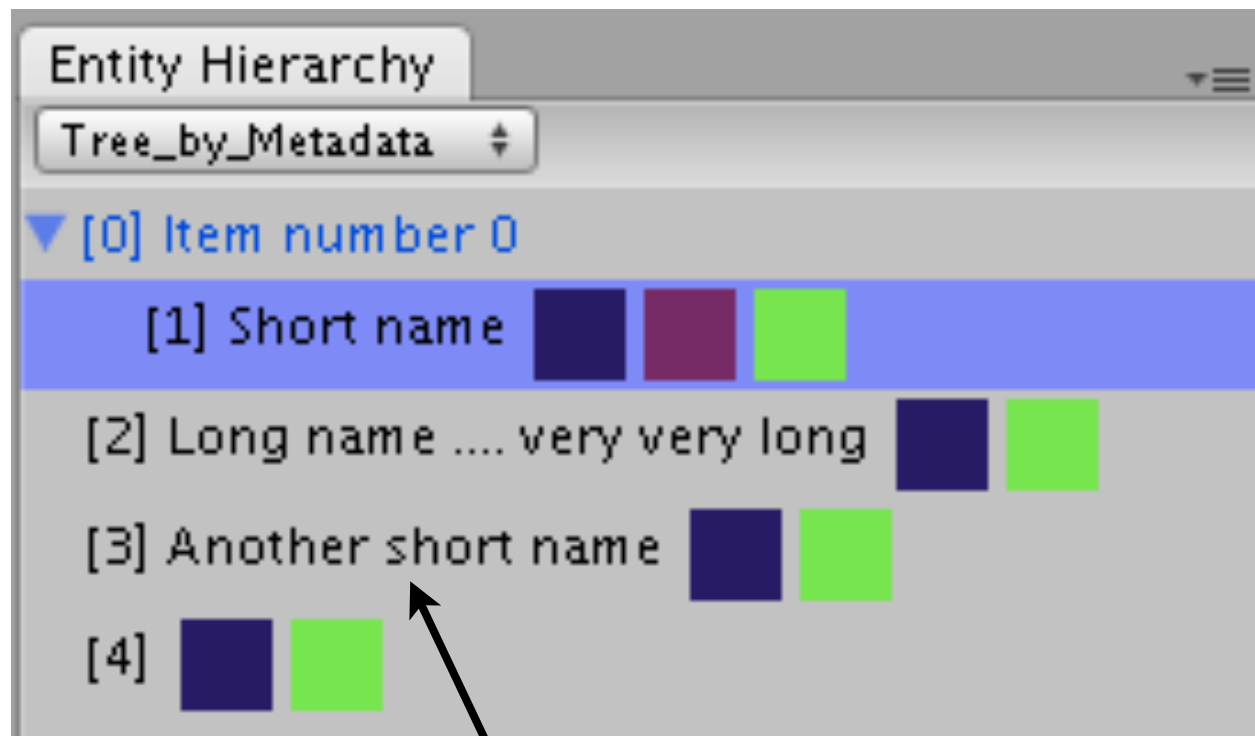


Have more than one name  
per object (Entity)!

... DEBUG name

Use anything as "name"

# Hierarchy Window



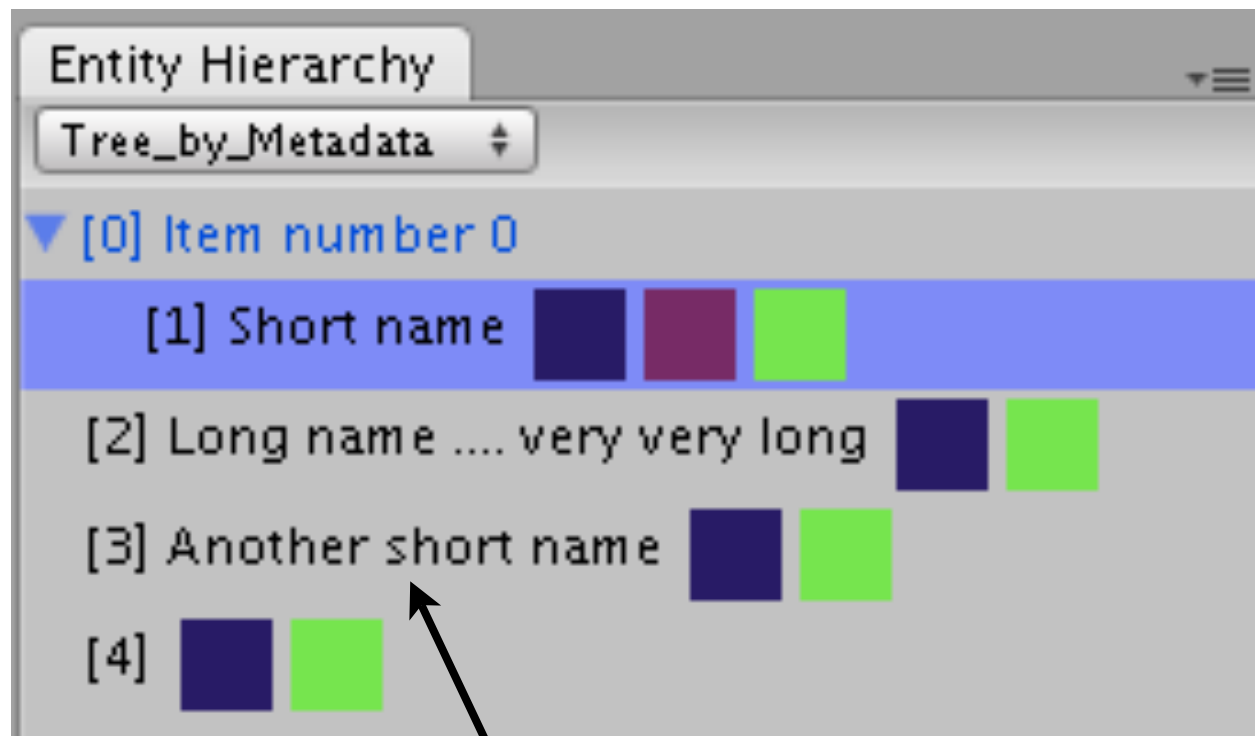
Have more than one name  
per object (Entity)!

... DEBUG name

... + player-GUI name

Use anything as "name"

# Hierarchy Window



Have more than one name  
per object (Entity)!

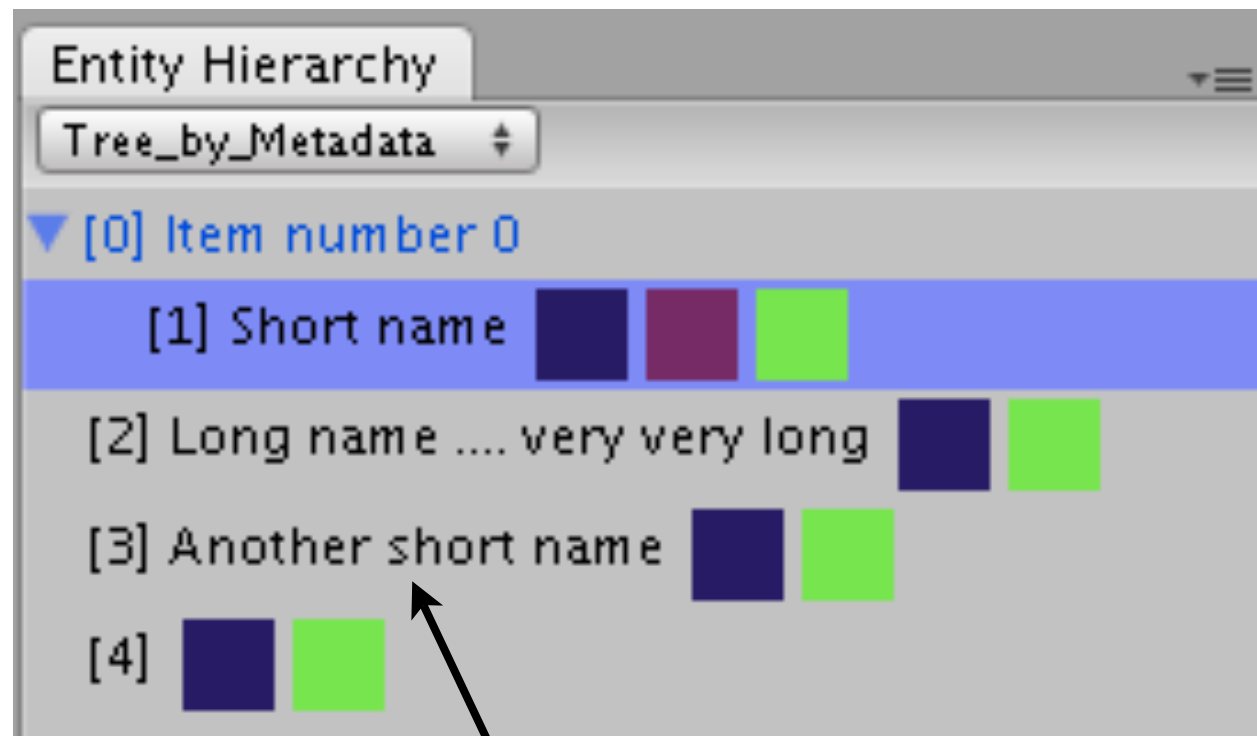
... DEBUG name

... + player-GUI name

... + script-hardcoded name

Use anything as "name"

# Hierarchy Window



Have more than one name  
per object (Entity)!

... DEBUG name

... + player-GUI name

... + script-hardcoded name

... etc

Use anything as "name"



Progress so far...

... in Source Code

# Source Code

- All Components are C# struct
- structs stored in massive raw [arrays]
- Generics guarantee safe + fast access
- Components can be fast-copied by C#
- Everything saved to Unity Serialization

# Problem:

## no “return ref”

```
struct Position;
```

```
private Position[1000] allPositions;
```

```
public *Position GetPosition( ID identifier );
```

# Problem: no “return ref”

struct Position;

private Position[1000] allPositions;

public ~~\*Position~~ GetPosition( ID identifier );

# Workarounds

- C# delegate ?
- private -> public ?
- C# Enumerable ?
- C# 7 <--- hope and pray

Unity problem:  
Integrate Serialization

(very quick overview;  
needs a whole talk in  
itself)

# Unity Serialization: ISerializationCallbackReceiver

- Use C# Marshal to convert your game-data to/from raw byte[]
- Save byte[] as: [SerializeField] private byte[]
- Unity calls incorrectly in 10% of cases
  - => monitor + fix on case-by-case basis
- In some edge-cases, Unity doesn't serialize
  - DEAL WITH IT. (i.e. "not-solved-yet")



Summary...

# I. Performance improves on Unity

With 100,000 GameObjects ... 10-30x faster

# 2. Replacement for Inspector works/usable

But nothing special (yet)

3. C# code is pretty  
clean, simple to write

EASIER to write if/when C# v7 is added to Unity

Could run MUCH faster if/when C# v7 is added to Unity

# 4. Many kludges, hacky source code

But ... IT WORKS!  
(proves the concept fairly well)

**Next steps...**

# Future features

- Re-implement prefabs BUT PROPERLY!
  - Drag/drop “prefab editor”
- Visual scripting
  - Maybe debugging only; Maybe coding too
- Database-backed entity store
  - SQL FTW (...maybe)

# Features (cont'd)

- AWESOME FUNKTASTIC VISUALIZR!
  - (not entirely sure how this'll look yet)
- Very-High-speed version
  - Complex mem-management algorithms
- Auto-integrate with MonoBehaviour
  - Control Unity's Renderer; Physics; etc



# Towards the Asset Store...

- Start using it in my own (hobby) games
- Early-access via Kickstarter, Patreon, or similar
- Work towards: Production build (good enough for shipping commercial games)

@t\_machine\_org  
[adam.m.s.martin@gmail.com](mailto:adam.m.s.martin@gmail.com)

<http://aliqua.org>

**More info coming soon ... subscribe for updates**

\* indicates required

Email Address \*

***(temporary holding page for  
following the project. Average of  
1-2 emails per month)***