IMGD 3000 - Technical Game Development I: Game Engine Structure

by

Robert W. Lindeman

gogo@wpi.edu
The User Experience

- You spawn into an outdoor scene
  - Flag waving
  - Waterfall
  - Trees
  - Rocks
  - A bridge
  - A satellite dish

- You shoot at the rocks
  - A projectile

- Animate vs. inanimate objects
The Engine Experience

- Engine must provide support for your world
  - Load the scene objects
  - Place inanimate objects
  - Place you
  - Make the flag wave, the water fall
  - Make your projectile fly/hit/disappear
  - Show you everything
High-Level Engine Code

- Basic game loop:

```c
InitializeObjects();
while( gameNotFinished ) {
    // Handle user input
    // (mouse, keyboard, gamepad, etc.)
    // Update objects in the world
    // Render the World
}
```
Digging Deeper: Initialization

```cpp
ResourceResult GameWorld::Preprocess( void ) {  
    ResourceResult result = World::Preprocess();  
    if( result != kResourceOkay ) return( result );  
    SetCamera( &spectatorCamera );  
    playerCamera = &firstPersonCamera;  
    spawnLocatorCount = 0;  
    CollectZoneMarkers( GetRootZone() );  
    const Marker *marker = GetFirstSpectatorLocator();  
    if( marker )  {
        // Initialize spectatorCamera to the marker's  
        // position and direction.  
        else  {
            spectatorCamera.SetNodePosition( Point3D( 0.0F, 0.0F, 1.0F ) );
        }
    }
    return( kResourceOkay );
}
```
Digging Deeper: User Input

- C4 defines a *singleton* called `TheInputMgr`
- Singleton?
- The input manager dispatches actions to your code
  - You need to
    - subclass the `Action` class
    - Define `Begin()` and `End()` methods
    - Bind the action to the instance you want to use
Game Engine Flow

- Load program
- Initialize variables
- Load mission/level information
- Place objects/NPCs into world
- Schedule events
- Start clock
- Spawn player
- Handle events
  - Generated by player(s), NPCs, or timers
Multiplayer: Server

- Start server
  - Like previous slide
  - Events include clients joining
- Spawn player
- Receive updates from clients
- Update global state
  - Maintain the world state
- Disseminate state changes
  - To clients
  - To other servers
Multiplayer: Client

- Load client code
- Search for a server
  - Choose wisely!
- Establish connection
- Receive current game state
- Render game to user
- Receive
  - Input from user
  - Updates from server
Game Engines

- Scene graph
  - Representation of the world
  - Includes characters

- Timing is very important
  - Events
    - Time-based
    - Multi-player
  - Synchronization

- Database of objects

- Networking
  - Between Server and clients
  - Between Servers
Game Graphics

- Different from other media
  - Need to process and display @ 30 fps
  - Dynamic scenes

- Graphics Processing Units (GPUs) are now programmable
  - Need to understand how to program for them
  - nVidia's cg programming language, OpenGL 2.0 extensions, GLSL
  - Stream-processing model
  - Data must be packed into textures
  - Limited control support
    - Loops, stack data structures

- Good jobs here!
Physics

☐ Need to consider how fast you can compute
  ■ Scalable in the number of objects?
  ■ Scalable in the types of objects?
    ☐ Cloth?
    ☐ Hair?
    ☐ Water?

☐ Three main types of objects
  ■ Point masses
  ■ Rigid bodies
  ■ Soft bodies

☐ Life is a combination of physics and freewill
  ■ How do we balance these?
Server Details

- Server performs multiple tasks concurrently
  - Each WORKER is a separate thread
  - How do they coordinate efforts?

**Initialize game**
- Load assets
- Load map
- Load add-ons (mods)
- Initialize NPCs
- Start WORKER threads
- Start clock

**WORKER**
- Update NPC state
  - Time
  - Behavior

**WORKER**
- Client join/leave process

**WORKER**
- Transmit updates to clients
  - Object state
  - Player state
  - Does this scale?

**WORKER**
- Listen for client updates
  - One port per client?
Server Coordination

- Each worker has tables of interest
  - Workers sleep until table data changes
  - Database dispatcher monitors tables, wakes workers

**Initialize game**
- Load assets
- Load map
- Load add-ons (mods)
- Initialize NPCs
- Start WORKER threads
- Start clock

**Game Data Tables**

**WORKER**
- Update NPC state
  - Time
  - Behavior

**WORKER**
- Client join/leave process

**WORKER**
- Transmit updates to clients
  - Object state
  - Player state
  - Does this scale?

**WORKER**
- Listen for client updates
  - One port per client?

**WORKER**
- Database event dispatcher

One port per client?
Even More Server Details

- For this to work, you need
  - Threads
  - Inter-process/thread Communication
    - Sockets
    - Shared memory
  - Some way of doing timing
    - Callback
    - Interrupt handler
  - An efficient data store

- In order to do it well, you also need
  - Thorough understanding of systems programming
  - A very good design, and lots of it!
  - You should have seen this in CS-3013: OS, and CS-2303: Systems Programming Concepts
Client/Server Approach

- Requires messages to be passed
  - Network could be bottleneck
  - Server could be bottleneck

- Lag is bad
  - Example: the player you shoot at is "magically" not there anymore by the time the projectile gets to him

- Inconsistent state is bad
  - Who grabbed that object first?
Client/Sever Programming

- Make it easy on the programmer
  - Hide the fact that things are being sent to server

- Make "surrogates" for server objects
  - Underlying system does actual communication

- How can we make a system really scalable to 1000s of users?
  - How is this done in gaming systems?
Graphical User Interface

- Provides access to
  - Game menus (e.g., save, load, boss)
  - Player status (e.g., health, current speed)
  - Maps
    - Current play location
    - Location of "persons of interest"
    - Location of "goals"
  - Non-Player Character (NPC) dialog
  - Player-to-player chat
C4 Scene Graph

- Everything in the scene is part of the scene graph
- The scene graph is created (loaded) at initialization
- At runtime, your game will manipulate the nodes in the graph
  - Update transformations (positions/orient.)
  - Add nodes (e.g., projectiles)
  - Delete nodes (e.g., health packs)
Traversing the Scene Graph

- In C4, the root node is called the “infinite zone”
  - All game elements must be part of a zone
- You can access the root node with the `World::GetRootNode()` function
- Move through (traverse) the tree with
  - `GetFirstSubNode()`
  - `GetNextNode()`
  - `GetPreviousNode()`
  - etc.
- Look at the `Tree` class
- More on scene graphs later
More on Nodes

- Search the C4 API for “hierarchy”
  - Shows Node class hierarchy

- A transform is a matrix representing the object’s position, orientation, and scale

- Two notions of a transform
  - Local transform is relative to the immediate parent node in the scene graph
  - World transform is the absolute position in world space

- Moving an object means updating its transform
Game Loop, Revisited

- Can expand “Update objects in the world” to:
  - Starting at the root node in the scene graph, traverse from parent to child nodes recursively
  - For each node, if certain conditions are met, call some function to update the transform

- But how do you specify what code to call, and under what conditions?
Geometry and Nodes

- Geometry (mesh) information is not contained directly in the node
  - It is stored in a GeometryObject
  - See `Set/GetObject()` methods for geometry nodes
  - Separating them allows for instancing, saving memory
    - Each instance has its own transforms
C4 Engine Structure

- Layered structure
  - Base Services
  - System Managers
  - Large-Scale Architecture
  - Plugin Modules
  - Application (e.g., your game)

http://www.terathon.com/c4engine/architecture.php
C4 Base Services

- File Manager
- Memory Manager
- Time Manager
- Resource Manager
- Math Library
- Utility Library
- System Utilities
C4 System Managers

- Sound Manager
- Rendering Core
- Display Manager
- Graphics Manager
- Input Manager
- Network Manager
C4 Large-Scale Architecture

- Interface Manager
- Message Manager
- Effect Manager (fluid, cloth, particles)
- Scene Graph
- Animation System
- Controller System
- World Manager
- Plugin Manager
C4 Plugin Modules

- Import Tools (Collada, TGA files)
- World Editor
- Application Module
- Media players
  - Model viewer
  - Texture viewer
  - Font generator
  - Sound player
  - Movie player