Principles of Computer Game Design and Implementation

Lecture 3
We already knew

• Introduction to this module
• History of video
• High-level information for a game (such as Game platform, player motivation, game structure, player-game model, character archetype, game genres)
Outline for Today

- Overall architecture
- Game structure
- scripting language
Game Architecture
More than Code

• Until the 1980s programmers developed the whole game (and did the art and sounds too!)
• Now programmers write code to support designers and artists (content creators)
• The code for modern games is highly complex
• With code bases exceeding a million lines of code, a well-defined architecture is essential
History

• Initially, games were written as a monolith entity
  – Ad-hoc manner
  – Low-level programming languages (Assembly, C)
    • Low resource requirements
    • Atari 2600 VCS only had 4K memory for the entire game!
  – Rapid development of hardware lead to poor code reuse
History

• id Software games (Doom and Quake) were so popular that other developers preferred to licence their 3D manipulation code rather than develop it from scratch
• Leads to a better design in computer games
Overall Architecture: Ad-hoc

- No organisation
- Code grows “organically”
- Subsystems not identified nor isolated
- Works for small projects (used in the past also for efficiency)
Overall Architecture: Modular

- Subsystems clearly isolated
- Well-defined module interfaces
- Reuse and maintainability
- Dependencies between modules are not controlled
Overall Architecture: DAG

- Modular + no cycles
- Classify modules
  - Higher-level
    - E.g. Game-specific code
  - Lower-level
    - E.g. Platform-specific code
Overall Architecture: Layered

• Rigid layers
  – Can only interact with modules directly below
  – Can lead to code duplication
    • Give MODULE A access to MODULE I
  – Improves portability and best for code reuse
Perils of Modular Architecture

• We want something like this

\[
\text{Physics} \quad \text{AI} \quad \text{Graphics}
\]

• We want something like this for \textit{this} game
  – No silver bullet
Game Subsystems

- Input
- Networking
- Rendering
- Sound
- Script
- Loading
- Front-end
- HUD
- Physics
- AI/Gameplay

Ideally, we want them to be as independent as possible
- Each system as a black box with controlled communication
- But...
  - Renderer, Physics, Networking, sound, AI all need positions of objects
Inspiration: MVC Pattern

• In business applications, Model-View-Controller design pattern is quite popular

- Model: data
- View: UI
- Controller: links the two
- World model
- Graphics
- Game Engine
Game State

• A collection of information that presents the state of game entities in a particular moment
  – Position, orientation, velocity
  – Behaviour, intentions, ...
  – Geometry

• Putting it all together (global state) may not be a good idea
Game Structure
Large Projects

• Game code
  – Anything related directly to the game

• Game engine
  – Any code that can be reused between different games

• Tools
  – In house tools
  – Plug-ins for off-the-shelf tools
Game Code

• Everything directly related to the game
  – Camera behaviour
  – Characters
  – AI entities
  – Choices
  – ...

• C, C++, but increasingly *scripting languages* used
Scripting Languages

• Why use scripting languages?
  – Ease and speed of development
  – Short iteration time
  – Code becomes a game asset
  – Offer additional features and are customizable
  – Can be mastered by artists / designers
Scripting Languages

• Drawbacks
  – Slow performance
  – Limited tool support
  – Dynamic typing makes it difficult to catch errors
  – Awkward interface with the rest of the game
  – Difficult to implement well
Scripting Languages

• Popular scripting languages
  – Python
  – Lua
  – Custom scripting languages
    • UnrealScript, QuakeC, NWNScript
Game Engine

• To isolate game from hardware
• To encourage code reuse
• To simplify game development

• Tasks:
  – Rendering (2D or 3D), physics, sound, animation, networking
  – AI
  – Interface to game code
C++

- Initially, there was no alternative to the Assembly language (performance, resources)
- Then, C became the most popular language for games
- Today, C++ is the language of choice for game development especially in game engines
C++: Strengths

• Performance
  – Control over low-level functionality (memory management, etc)
  – Can switch to assembly or C whenever necessary
  – Good interface with OS, hardware, and other languages
C++: Strengths

• High-level, object-oriented
  – High-level language features are essential for making today's complex games
  – Has inheritance, polymorphism, templates, and exceptions
  – Strongly typed, so it has improved reliability
C++: Strengths

• C Heritage
  – C++ is the only high-level language that is backwards-compatible with C
  – Has APIs and compiler support in all platforms
  – Easier transition for experienced programmers
C++: Strengths

- Libraries
  - STL (Standard Template Library)
    - Comprehensive set of standard libraries
  - Boost: widely used library with wide variety of functionality
  - Many commercial C++ libraries also available
C++: Weaknesses

• Too low-level
  – Still forces programmers to deal with low-level issues
  – Too error-prone
  – Attention to low-level details is overkill for high-level features or tools
C++: Weaknesses

• Too complicated
  – Because of its C heritage, C++ is very complicated
  – Long learning curve to become competent with the language
Java for Game Development

• Why use Java?
  – It's a high-level OO language that simplifies many C++ features
  – Adds several useful high-level features
  – Easy to develop for multiple platforms because of intermediate bytecode
  – Good library support
Java for Game Development

• Performance
  – Has typically been Java's weak point
  – Has improved in the last few years: still not up to C++ level, but very close
  – Uses Just-In-Time compiling and HotSpot optimizations
  – Now has high-performance libraries
  – Also has access to native functionality
Java for Game Development

• Platforms
  – Well suited to downloadable and browser-based games
  – Dominates development on mobile and handheld platforms
  – Possible to use in full PC games
    • More likely to be embedded into a game
  – Not currently used in consoles
Java for Game Development

• Teaching Java game development
  – Java is taught to all our students
  – We can concentrate on game development issues rather than on the study of a new language
  – Knowledge can be used in broader context

We will use a Java game engine, jMonkeyEngine