Lecture 10

Game Architecture
2110-Level Apps are Event Driven

Generates event e and then calls method(e) on listener

Registers itself as a listener

JFrame

Application

Listener

@105dc

method(Event)
**Limitations of the Event Model**

- Program only reacts to user input
  - Nothing changes if user does nothing
  - Desired behavior for productivity apps

- Games continue without input
  - Character animation
  - Clock timers
  - Enemy AI
  - Physics Simulations
The Game Loop

60 times/s
= 16.7 ms

Update:
- Receive player input
- Process player actions
- Process NPC actions
- Post-process (e.g. physics)

Draw:
- Cull non-visible objects
- Transform visible objects
- Draw to backing buffer
- Display backing buffer
Few Words on Drawing

- Drawing needs to be **fast**!
  - Do as little computation as possible
  - But draw as few objects as possible

- **Is this a contradiction?**
  - Need to compute who to draw
  - So drawing *less* has extra overhead

- **Rule**: do **not** modify game state in draw
  - Any extra computation is local-only
The Game Loop

Receive player input
Process player actions
Process NPC actions
Post-process (e.g. physics)
Player Input

- Traditional input is event-driven
  - Events capture state of controller
  - OS/VM generates events for you
  - Listeners react to events

- Game loop uses **polling** for input
  - Ask for controller state at start of loop
  - **Example**: What is joystick position?
  - If no change, do no actions that loop
Problem with Polling

- Only one event per update loop
  - Multiple events are lost
  - **Example**: Fast typing

- Captures state at beginning
  - Short events are lost
  - **Example**: Fast clicks

- Event-driven does not have these problems
  - Captures all events as they **happen**
Combining Input Approaches

- Can combine using an event queue
  - Listeners write at end of the queue
  - Game loop reads from the front

Game loop reads event here

Event handler puts event here

- Generally requires multiple threads
  - Event handler is (usually) OS/VM provided thread
  - Game loop itself is an additional thread
Warning: Thread Coordination

- Threads are tricky if you do not know how
  - Queue is shared between two threads
  - Most queues are not thread safe!
  - What if threads modify queue at same time?

- Classic *critical section* problem
  - Threads need to lock queue when access
  - But locking every frame can be expensive
Warning: XNA Event Handling

- XNA and Windows Forms are different
  - **XNA**: game loop thread, no event handlers
  - **Forms**: event handlers, no game loop thread

- Combining is a lot of work
  - Many low-level details
  - Do it only if necessary
  - Sample on web page

- Ruins X-Box compatibility
Handlers: Really Necessary?

- Most of the time: **No**
  - Frame rate is short: 16.7 ms
  - Most events are > 16.7 ms
  - Event loss not catastrophic

- Buffering is sometimes undesirable
  - Remembers every action ever done
  - But may take a longer time to process
  - If takes too long, just want to abort
The Game Loop

- **Update**
  - Receive player input
  - Process player actions
  - Process NPC actions
  - Post-process (e.g. physics)

- **Draw**
Player Actions

- Actions alter the game state
  - Can alter player state: movement
  - Can alter opponent state: damage

- Player actions correspond to user input
  - Choice is determined by input controller
  - Else action is performed by computer

- These are your game verbs!
Abstract Actions from Input

- **Actions**: functions that modify game state
  - `move(dx,dy)` modifies `x`, `y` by `dx`, `dy`
  - `attack(o)` attacks opponent `o`

- Input controller **maps** input to actions
  - Read input state from controller
  - Pick an action and call that function

- Input handler should never alter state directly!
Abstract Actions from Input

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The Game Loop

Update

Receive player input
Process player actions
Process NPC actions
Post-process (e.g. physics)

Draw
NPC: Non-Player Character

- NPC is an intelligent computer-controlled entity
  - Unlike a physics object, it can act, not just interact
  - Sometimes called an agent
- NPCs have their own actions/verbs
  - But no input controller to choose
- Work on sense-think-act cycle
  - **Sense:** perceive the world around it
  - **Think:** choose an action to perform
  - **Act:** update the game state
Act versus Sense-Think

- Act should be very fast!
  - Function to update state
  - Example: apply velocity
  - Exactly like the player

- Sense-think unique to NPC
  - The hard computation
  - Focus of AI lectures

- Multiplayer: Replace sense-think with human decision
Problem with Sensing

- Sensing may be slow!
  - Consider *all* objects

- Example: morale
  - \( n \) knights, \( n \) skeletons
  - Knights fear skeletons
  - Proportional to \# seen

- Count skeletons in view
  - \( O(n) \) to count skeletons
  - \( O(n^2) \) for all units
Processing NPCs

- **Naïve solution:** sequentially

- **Problem:** NPCs react too fast!
  - Each reads the actions of previous
  - Even before drawn on screen!

- **Idea:** only react to what can see
  - *Choose* actions, but don’t perform
  - Once all chosen, then perform
  - Another reason to abstract actions
Acting Without Thinking

- Save time: don’t think
  - Think every *few* frames
  - Unless then, just act
- Remember last action
  - Keep doing that action!
  - Use verb *and* parameters
- **Example**: Movement
  - Keep track of velocity
  - Apply each game loop

- **Called** *dead reckoning*
  - From nautical term
  - Important to networking
  - Will cover later in course
Focus of Game Lab 2
- Crucial if top view
- Major area of research

Potentially very slow
- $n$ NPCs, $g$ grid squares
- Dijkstra: $O(g^2)$
- For each NPC: $O(ng^2)$

Moving obstacles?
Focus of Game Lab 2
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Moving obstacles?
Asynchronous Pathfinding

Looks like input buffering!
Asynchronous Pathfinding

- NPCs do not get answer right away
  - Check every loop until answered
  - Remember request; do not ask again

- What to do until then?
  - Act, but don’t think!
  - If nothing, **fake** something
  - “Stomping Feet” in RTSs
The Game Loop

- **Update**
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- **Draw**
Purpose of a Physics Engine

• Moving objects about the screen
  • **Kinematics**: Without regard to external forces
  • **Dynamics**: The effect of forces on the screen

• Collisions between objects
  • **Collision detection**: Did a collision occur?
  • **Collision resolution**: What do we do?

• More on this issue later (~Spring Break)
Physics Engines: Two Levels

- **White Box**: Engine corrects movement errors
  - Update object state ignoring physics
  - Physics engine nudges object until okay

- **Black Box**: Engine handles everything
  - Do not move objects or update state
  - Give forces, mass, velocities, etc. to engine
  - Engine updates to state that is *close enough*
Almost everything is in loop
- Except asynchronous actions
- Is enough for simple games

How do we organize this loop?
- Do not want spaghetti code
- Distribute over programmers
Architecture: Organizing Your Code

Game Architecture
Architecture: Organizing Your Code

The Diagram:

- **Game Engine**
  - Input Devices
  - Discrete Simulation Engine
  - GUI
  - Rendering Engine
  - Audio Engine

- **Implementation**

- **Interface**

- **Game Content**
  - Character Scripts
  - Character Data
  - UI Elements
  - Models and Textures
  - Sounds

- **Compiler**

- **Data Management Layer**

- **Programmer**
  - Physics Engine
  - AI Engine (e.g. Pathfinding)

- **Designer or Modder**
How Do These Relate?

Game Architecture

Next Time!