Implementing Multi-threaded CORBA Applications with ACE and TAO

Douglas C. Schmidt

Associate Professor
schmidt@uci.edu
www.eng.uci.edu/~schmidt/

Elec. & Comp. Eng. Dept.
University of California, Irvine
(949) 824-1901

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Outline

- Building multi-threaded distributed applications is hard
- To succeed, programmers must understand available tools, techniques, and patterns
- This tutorial examines how to build multi-threaded CORBA applications
  - Using ACE and TAO
- It also presents several concurrency models
  1. *Thread-per-Connection*
  2. *Thread Pool*

Overview of CORBA

- Simplifies application interworking
  - CORBA provides higher level integration than traditional “untyped TCP bytestreams”
- Provides a foundation for higher-level distributed object collaboration
  - *e.g.*, Windows OLE and the OMG Common Object Service Specification (COSS)
- Benefits for distributed programming similar to OO languages for non-distributed programming
  - *e.g.*, encapsulation, interface inheritance, and object-based exception handling

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CORBA Quoter Example

```
int main (void)
{
  // Use a factory to bind
  // to a Quoter.
  Quoter_var quoter =
    bind_quoter_service ();

  const char *name =
    "ACME ORB Inc.";

  CORBA::Long value =
    quoter->get_quote (name);
  cout << name << " = "
       << value << endl;
}
```

- Ideally, a distributed service should look just like a non-distributed service
- Unfortunately, life is harder when errors occur...

CORBA Quoter Interface

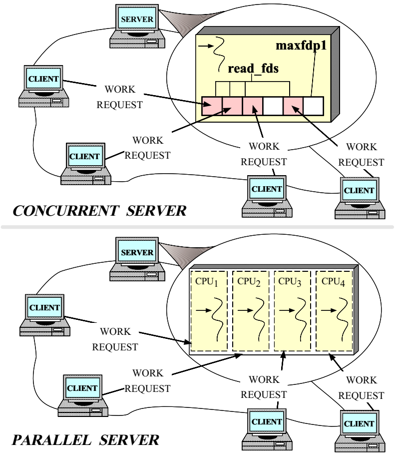
```
// IDL interface is like a C++
// class or Java interface.
interface Quoter
{
  exception Invalid_Stock {};

  long get_quote
    (in string stock_name)
    raises (Invalid_Stock);
};
```

- We write an OMG IDL `interface` for our `Quoter`
  - Used by both clients and servers

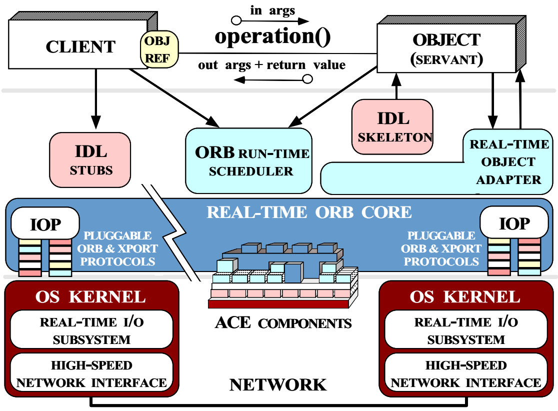
Using OMG IDL promotes *language/platform independence*, *location transparency*, *modularity*, and *robustness*

Motivation for Concurrency in CORBA



- *Leverage hardware/software*
  - *e.g.*, multi-processors and OS thread support
- *Increase performance*
  - *e.g.*, overlap computation and communication
- *Improve response-time*
  - *e.g.*, GUIs and network servers
- *Simplify program structure*
  - *e.g.*, sync vs. async

Overview of The ACE ORB (TAO)



www.cs.wustl.edu/~schmidt/TAO.html

TAO Overview →

- An open-source, standards-based, real-time, high-performance CORBA ORB
- Runs on POSIX/UNIX, Win32, & RTOS platforms
  - *e.g.*, VxWorks, Chorus, LynxOS
- Leverages ACE

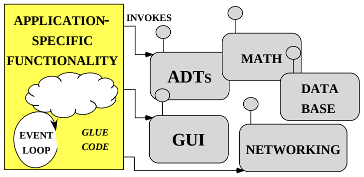
Threading in TAO

- An application can choose to ignore threads and if it creates none, it need not be thread-safe
- TAO can be configured with various concurrency strategies:
  - Thread-per-Connection
  - Thread Pool
  - Thread-per-Endpoint
- TAO also provides many locking strategies
  - TAO doesn't automatically synchronize access to application objects
  - Therefore, applications must synchronize access to their own objects

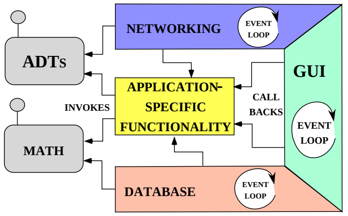
Overcoming Limitations with CORBA

- *Problem*
  - CORBA primarily addresses “communication” topics
- *Forces*
  - Real world distributed applications need many other components
    - *e.g.*, concurrency control, layering, shared memory, event-loop integration, dynamic configuration, *etc.*
- *Solution*
  - Integrate CORBA with ACE OO communication framework

Class Libraries, Frameworks, and Components



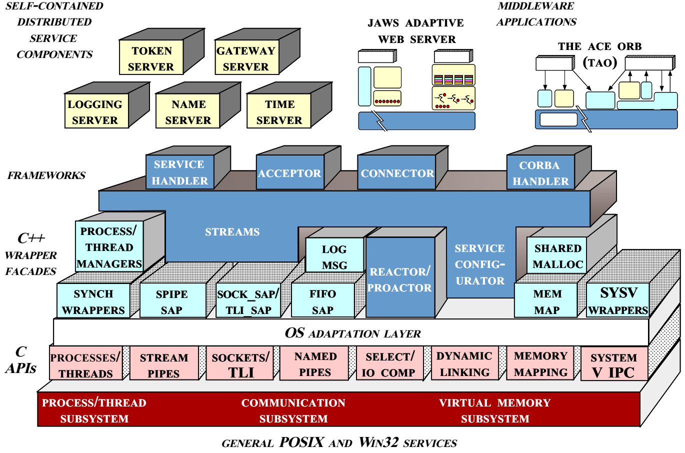
(A) CLASS LIBRARY ARCHITECTURE



(B) FRAMEWORK ARCHITECTURE

- **Proven solutions**
  - *Components*
    - Self-contained, “pluggable” ADTs
  - *Frameworks*
    - Reusable, “semi-complete” applications
  - *Patterns*
    - Problem/Solution/Context
  - *Architecture*
    - Families of related patterns and components

The ADAPTIVE Communication Environment (ACE)

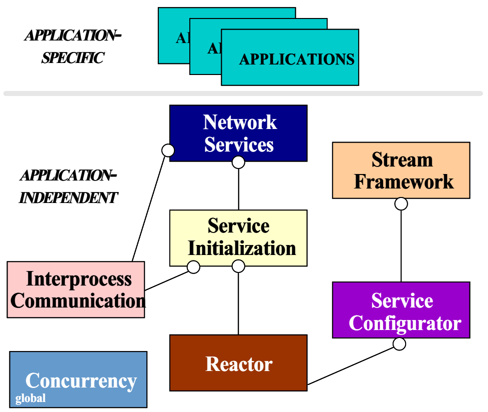


www.cs.wustl.edu/∼schmidt/ACE.html

ACE Statistics

- ACE contains $>$ 200,000 lines of C++
  - Over 25 person-years of effort
- Ported to UNIX, Win32, MVS, and RT/embedded platforms
  - *e.g.*, VxWorks, LynxOS, Chorus
- Large user community
  - ∼schmidt/ACE-users.html
- Currently used by dozens of companies
  - Bellcore, BBN, Boeing, Ericsson, Hughes, Kodak, Lockheed, Lucent, Motorola, Nokia, Nortel, Raytheon, SAIC, Siemens, etc.
- Supported commercially by Riverace
  - www.riverace.com

Class Categories in ACE



- ACE is structured as a “forest” of class categories
- This design permits fine-grained subsetting of ACE components
  - Subsetting helps minimize ACE’s memory footprint

ACE Class Category Responsibilities

- `IPC` encapsulates local and/or remote *IPC mechanisms*
- `Service Initialization` encapsulates active/passive connection establishment mechanisms
- `Concurrency` encapsulates and extends *multi-threading* and *synchronization* mechanisms
- `Reactor` performs *event demuxing* and *event handler dispatching*
- `Service Configurator` automates *(re)configuration* by encapsulating explicit dynamic linking mechanisms
- `Stream Framework` models and implements *layers* and *partitions* of hierarchically-integrated communication software
- `Network Services` provides distributed naming, logging, locking, and routing services

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Overview of ACE Concurrency

- ACE provides portable C++ threading and synchronization wrappers
- ACE classes we’ll examine include:
  - *Thread Management*
    - `ACE_Thread_Manager` → encapsulates threads
  - *Synchronization*
    - `ACE_Thread_Mutex` and `ACE_RW_Mutex` → encapsulates mutexes
    - `ACE_Atomic_Op` → atomically perform arithmetic operations
    - `ACE_Guard` → automatically acquire/release locks
  - *Queueing*
    - `ACE_Message_Queue` → thread-safe message queue
    - `ACE_Message_Block` → enqueued/dequeued on message queues

Overview of ACE Concurrency (cont’d)

- Several `ACE_Thread_Manager` class methods are particularly interesting:
  - `spawn` → Create 1 new thread of control running `func`

```
int spawn (void *(*)(void *) func,
           void *arg,
           long flags,
           .....);
```

  - `spawn_n` → Create n new threads of control running `func`

```
int spawn_n (size_t n,
             void *(*)(void *) func,
             void *arg,
             long flags,
             ......);
```

  - `wait` → Wait for all threads in a manager to terminate

```
int wait (void);
```

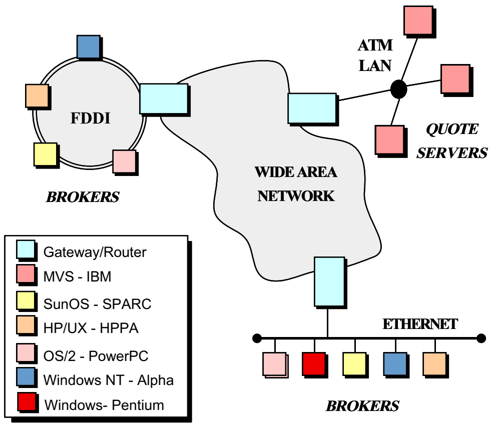
TAO Multi-threading Examples

- Each example implements a concurrent CORBA stock quote service
  - Show how threads can be used on both the client and server side
- The server is implemented in two different ways:

1. *Thread-per-Connection* → Every client connection causes a new thread to be spawned to process it
2. *Thread Pool* → A fixed number of threads are generated in the server at start-up to service all incoming requests

- Note that clients are unaware which concurrency model is being used...

CORBA Stock Quoter Application Example



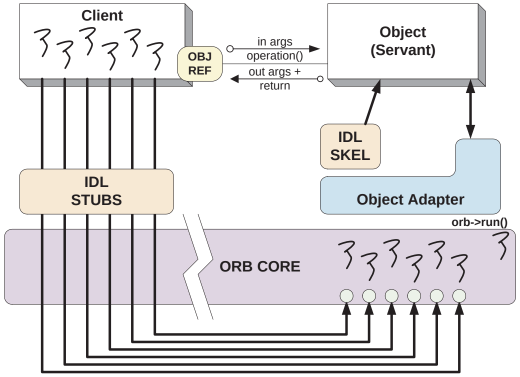
- The quote server(s) maintains the current stock prices
- Brokers access the quote server(s) via CORBA
- Note all the heterogeneity!

Simple OMG IDL Quoter Definition

```
module Stock {
  // Exceptions are similar to structs.
  exception Invalid_Stock {};
  exception Invalid_Factory {};

  // Interface is similar to a C++ class.
  interface Quoter {
    long get_quote (in string stock_name) raises (Invalid_Stock);
  };
  // A factory that creates Quoter objects.
  interface Quoter_Factory {
    // Factory Method that returns a new Quoter
    // selected by name e.g., "Dow Jones,"
    // "Reuters,", etc.
    Quoter create_quoter (in string quoter_service)
      raises (Invalid_Factory);
  };
};
```

TAO’s Thread-per-Connection Concurrency Architecture



Pros

- Simple to implement and efficient for long-duration requests

Cons

- Excessive overhead for short-duration requests
- Permits unbounded number of concurrent requests

Thread-per-Connection Main Program

The server creates a single Quoter factory and waits in ORB's event loop

```
int main (void)
{
  ORB_Manager orb_manager (argc, argv);
  const char *factory_name = "my quoter factory";

  // Create the servant, which registers with rootPOA
  // and Naming Service implicitly.
  My_Quoter_Factory factory (factory_name);

  // Block indefinitely waiting for incoming invocations
  // and dispatch upcalls.
  // After run() returns, the ORB has shutdown.
  orb_manager.run ();
}
```

The ORB's `svc.conf` file

```
static Resource_Factory "-ORBResources global -ORBReactorType select_mt"
static Server_Strategy_Factory "-ORBConcurrency thread-per-connection"
```

Thread-per-Connection: Quoter Interface

```
typedef u_long COUNTER; // Maintain request count.

// Implementation of the Quoter IDL interface
class My_Quoter :
  virtual public POA_Stock::Quoter,
  virtual public PortableServer::RefCountServantBase
{
public:
  // Constructor.
  My_Quoter (const char *name);

  // Returns the current stock value.
  long get_quote (const char *stock_name)
    throw (CORBA::SystemException, Quoter::InvalidStock);
private:
  // Maintain request count.
  static COUNTER req_count_;
};
```

Thread-per-Connection Quoter Implementation

```
// Implementation of multi-threaded Quoter callback invoked by
// the CORBA skeleton
long My_Quoter::get_quote (const char *stock_name)
    throw(CORBA::SystemException,Quoter::InvalidStock)
{
  // Increment the request count (beware...).
  ++My_Quoter::req_count_;

  // Obtain stock price (beware...).
  long value = Quote_Database::instance ()->
                 lookup_stock_price (stock_name);

  // Skeleton handles exceptions.
  if (value == -1)
    throw Stock::Invalid_Stock ();

  return value;
}
```

Eliminating Race Conditions

- *Problem*
  - The concurrent Quote server contains “race conditions” *e.g.*,
    - Auto-increment of static variable `req_count_` is not serialized properly
    - `Quote_Database` also may not be serialized...
- *Forces*
  - Modern shared memory multi-processors use ‘deep caches *and* weakly ordered‘ memory models
  - Access to shared data must be protected from corruption
- *Solution*
  - Use synchronization mechanisms

Basic Synchronization Mechanisms

- One approach to solve the serialization problem is

```
// SunOS 5.x, implicitly "unlocked".
mutex_t lock;

long
My_Quoter::get_quote (const char *stock_name)
    throw(CORBA::SystemException,Quoter::InvalidStock)
{
  mutex_lock (&lock);
  // Increment the request count.
  ++My_Quoter::req_count_;

  // Obtain stock price.
  long value = Quote_Database::instance ()->
                 lookup_stock_price (stock_name);
  if (value == -1)
    // Skeleton handles exceptions.
    throw Stock::Invalid_Stock ();
  mutex_unlock (&lock);
  return value;
}
```

Problems Galore!

- Problems with explicit `mutex_*` calls:
  - *Inelegant*
    - “Impedance mismatch” with C/C++
  - *Obtrusive*
    - Must find and lock all uses of `lookup_stock_price` and `req_count_`
  - *Error-prone*
    - C++ exception handling and multiple method exit points cause subtle problems
    - Global mutexes may not be initialized correctly...
  - *Non-portable*
    - Hard-coded to Solaris 2.x
  - *Inefficient*
    - *e.g.*, expensive for certain platforms/designs

C++ Wrappers for Synchronization

- To address portability problems, define a C++ wrapper:

```
class Thread_Mutex
{
public:
  Thread_Mutex (void) {
    mutex_init (&lock_, USYNCH_THREAD, 0);
  }
  ~Thread_Mutex (void) { mutex_destroy (&lock_); }
  int acquire (void) { return mutex_lock (&lock_); }
  int tryacquire (void) { return mutex_trylock (&lock); }
  int release (void) { return mutex_unlock (&lock_); }

private:
  mutex_t lock_; // SunOS 5.x serialization mechanism.
  void operator= (const Thread_Mutex &);
  Thread_Mutex (const Thread_Mutex &);
};
```

- Note, this mutual exclusion class interface is portable to other OS platforms

Porting Thread_Mutex to Windows NT

- Win32 version of `Thread_Mutex`

```
class Thread_Mutex
{
public:
  Thread_Mutex (void) {
    InitializeCriticalSection (&lock_);
  }
  ˜Thread_Mutex (void) { DeleteCriticalSection (&lock_); }
  int acquire (void) {
    EnterCriticalSection (&lock_); return 0;
  }
  int tryacquire (void) {
    TryEnterCriticalSection (&lock_); return 0;
  }
  int release (void) {
    LeaveCriticalSection (&lock_); return 0;
  }
private:
  CRITICAL_SECTION lock_; // Win32 locking mechanism.
  // ...
```

Using the C++ Thread_Mutex Wrapper

- Using the C++ wrapper helps improve portability and elegance:

```
Thread_Mutex lock;

long My_Quoter::get_quote (const char *stock_name)
    throw(CORBA::SystemException,Quoter::InvalidStock)
{
  lock.acquire ();
  ++My_Quoter::req_count_; // Increment the request count.

  // Obtain stock price.
  long value = Quote_Database::instance ()->
                 lookup_stock_price (stock_name);
  if (value == -1)
    // Skeleton handles exceptions.
    throw Stock::Invalid_Stock ();
  lock.release ();
  return value;
}
```

- However, it does not solve the *obtrusiveness* or *error-proneness* problems...

Automated Mutex Acquisition and Release

- To ensure mutexes are locked and unlocked, we’ll define a template class that acquires and releases a mutex automatically

```
template <class LOCK>
class Guard
{
public:
  Guard (LOCK &m): lock_ (m) { lock_.acquire (); }
  ˜Guard (void) { lock_.release (); }
  // ...
private:
  LOCK &lock_;
}
```

- `Guard` uses the C++ idiom whereby a ‘constructor acquires a resource*and the* destructor releases the resource‘

Using the Guard Class

- Using the `Guard` class helps reduce errors:

```
Thread_Mutex lock;

long My_Quoter::get_quote (const char *stock_name)
    throw(CORBA::SystemException,Quoter::InvalidStock)
{
  Guard<Thread_Mutex> mon (lock);
  ++My_Quoter::req_count_; // Increment the request count.

  // Obtain stock price.
  long value = Quote_Database::instance ()->
                 lookup_stock_price (stock_name);
  if (value == -1)
    // Skeleton handles exceptions.
    throw Stock::Invalid_Stock ();
  return value; // Destructor of mon release lock.
}
```

- However, using the `Thread_Mutex` and `Guard` classes is still overly obtrusive and subtle (may lock too much scope...)

OO Design Interlude

- Q: *Why is Guard parameterized by the type of LOCK?*
- A: there are many locking mechanisms that benefit from `Guard` functionality, *e.g.*,
  - *Non-recursive vs recursive mutexes*
  - *Intra-process vs inter-process mutexes*
  - *Readers/writer mutexes*
  - *Solaris and System V semaphores*
  - *File locks*
  - *Null mutex*
- In ACE, all synchronization classes use the Wrapper Facade and Adapter patterns to provide identical interfaces that facilitate parameterization

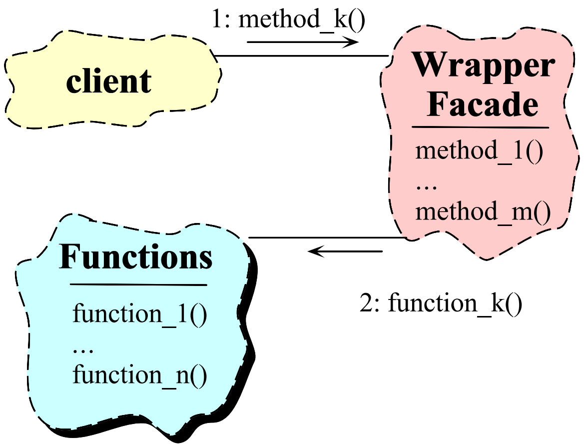
---

The Wrapper Facade Pattern

- *Intent*
  - 'Encapsulate low-level, stand-alone functions within type-safe, modular, and portable class interfaces'
- This pattern resolves the following forces that arises when using native C-level OS APIs

1. 'How to avoid tedious, error-prone, and non-portable programming of low-level IPC and locking mechanisms'
2. 'How to combine multiple related, but independent, functions into a single cohesive abstraction'

Structure of the Wrapper Facade Pattern



1: method_k()

client

Wrapper Facade

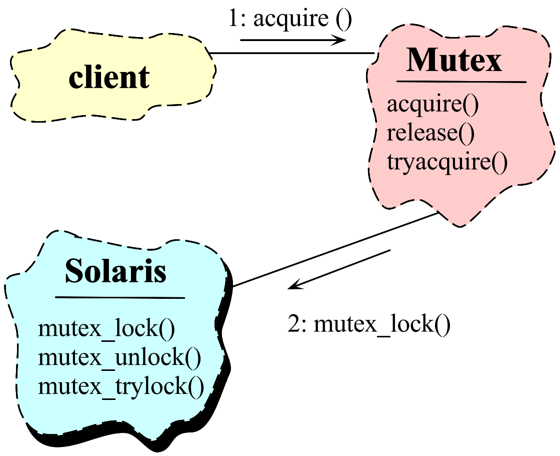
method_1()
...
method_m()

Functions

function_1()
...
function_n()

2: function_k()

Using the Wrapper Facade Pattern for Locking



1: acquire ()

client

Mutex

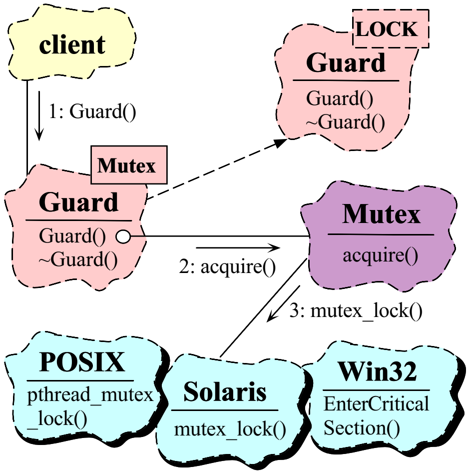
acquire()
release()
tryacquire()

Solaris

mutex_lock()
mutex_unlock()
mutex_trylock()

2: mutex_lock()

Using the Adapter Pattern for Locking



Parameterizing Synchronization Via C++

The following C++ template class uses the “Decorator” pattern to define a set of atomic operations on a type parameter:

```
template <class LOCK = ACE_Thread_Mutex, class TYPE = u_long>
class ACE_Atomic_Op {
public:
  ACE_Atomic_Op (TYPE c = 0) { count_ = c; }

  TYPE operator++ (void) {
    Guard<LOCK> m (lock_);   return ++count_;
  }

  operator TYPE () {
    Guard<LOCK> m (lock_);   return count_;
  }
  // Other arithmetic operations omitted...

private:
  LOCK lock_;
  TYPE count_;
};
```

Using ACE_Atomic_Op

- A few minor changes are made to the class header:

```
#if defined (MT_SAFE)
typedef ACE_Atomic_Op<> COUNTER; // Note default parameters...
#else
typedef ACE_Atomic_Op<ACE_Null_Mutex> COUNTER;
#endif /* MT_SAFE */
```

- In addition, we add a lock, producing:

```
class My_Quoter : virtual public POA_Stock::Quoter,
                  virtual public PortableServer::RefCountServantBase
{
// ...
  // Serialize access to database.
  ACE_Thread_Mutex lock_;

  // Maintain request count.
  static COUNTER req_count_;
};
```

Thread-safe Version of Quote Server

- `req_count_` is now serialized automatically so only minimal scope is locked

```
long
My_Quoter::get_quote (const char *stock_name)
{
  // Increment the request count by calling
  // ACE_Atomic_Op::operator++(void) decorator.
  ++My_Quoter::req_count_;

  // Obtain stock price via decorator.
  long value = Quote_Database::instance ()->
             lookup_stock_price (stock_name);
  if (value == -1)
    // Skeleton handles exceptions.
    throw Stock::Invalid_Stock ();
  return value;
}
```

Thread Pool

- This approach creates a thread pool to amortize the cost of dynamically creating threads
- In this scheme, before waiting for input the server code creates the following:
  1. A `Quoter_Factory` (as before)
  2. A pool of threads based upon the command line input
- Note the use of the ACE `spawn_n` method for spawning multiple pool threads

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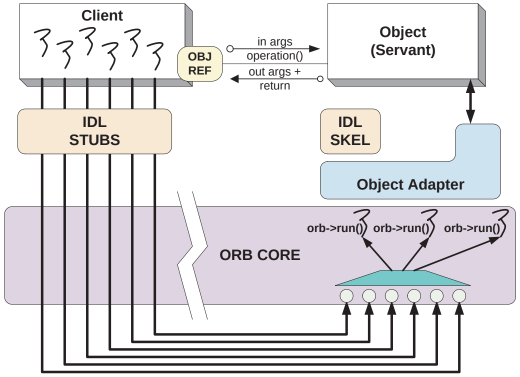
TAO's Thread Pool Concurrency Architecture



Pros

- Bounds the number of concurrent requests
- Scales nicely for multi-processor platforms, *e.g.*, permits load balancing

Cons

- Potential for Deadlock

Thread Pool Main Program

```
const int DEFAULT_POOL_SIZE = 8;

int main (int argc, char *argv[])
{
  try {
    ORB_Manager orb_manager (argc, argv);

    const char *factory_name = "my quoter factory";

    // Create the servant, which registers with
    // the rootPOA and Naming Service implicitly.
    My_Quoter_Factory factory (factory_name);

    // ...
```

Thread Pool Main Program (cont'd)

```
    int pool_size = argc < 2 ? DEFAULT_POOL_SIZE
                             : atoi (argv[1]);
    // Create a thread pool.
    ACE_Thread_Manager::instance ()->spawn_n
      (pool_size, &run_orb, (void *) orb_manager.orb (),
       THR_DETACHED | THR_NEW_LWP);

    // Block indefinitely waiting for other threads to exit.
    ACE_Thread_Manager::instance ()->wait ();

    // After run() returns, the ORB has shutdown.
    } catch (...) { /* handle exception ... */ }
}
```

Thread Pool Configuration

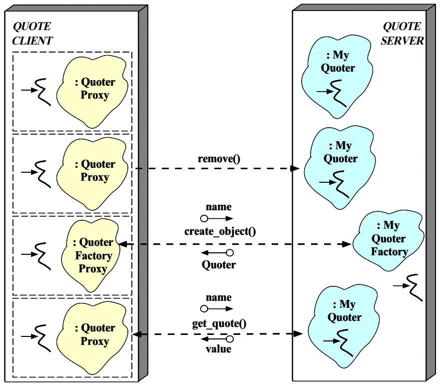
The `run_orb` adapter function

```
void run_orb (void *arg)
{
  try {
    CORBA::ORB_ptr orb =
      ACE_reinterpret_cast (CORBA::ORB_ptr, arg);

    // Block indefinitely waiting for incoming
    // invocations and dispatch upcalls.
    orb->run ();

    // After run() returns, the ORB has shutdown.
  } catch (...) { /* handle exception ... */ }
}
```

The ORB's `svc.conf` file

```
static Resource_Factory "-ORBReactorType tp"
```

Client/Server Structure



- The client works with any server concurrency model
- The client obtains a `Quoter_Factory` object reference, spawns n threads, and obtains a `Quoter` object reference per-thread
- Each thread queries the `Quoter` 100 times to obtain the value of ACME ORB's stock
- `main()` then waits for threads to terminate

Client Code

The entry point function that does a remote invocation to get a stock quote from the server

```
// This method executes in one or more threads.
static void *get_quotes (void *arg)
{
  Quoter_Factory_ptr factory = static_cast<Quoter_Factory_ptr> (arg);

  CosLifeCycle::Key key = Options::instance ()->key ();
  Quoter_var quoter = Stock::Quoter::_narrow(factory->create_object (key));

  if (!CORBA::is_nil (quoter)) {
    for (int i = 0; i < 100; i++) {
      try {
        long value = quoter->get_quote ("ACME ORBs");
        cout << "value = " << value << endl;
      } catch (...) { /* Handle exception */ }
    }
    quoter->remove ();
  }
}
```

Main Client Program

Client spawns threads to run the `get_quotes` function and waits for threads to exit

```
int main (int argc, char *argv[])
{
  Options::instance ()->parse_args (argc, argv);

  try {
    // Narrow to Quoter_Factory interface.
    Quoter_Factory_var factory =
      bind_service<Quoter_Factory> ("My_Quoter_Factory",
                                     argc, argv);

    // Create client threads.
    ACE_Thread_Manager::instance ()->spawn_n
      (Options::instance ()->threads (), get_quotes,
       (void *) factory, THR_DETACHED | THR_NEW_LWP);

    // Wait for the client threads to exit
    ACE_Thread_Manager::instance ()->wait ();
  } catch (...) { /* ... */ }
}
```

Obtaining an Object Reference via the Naming Service

```
static CORBA::ORB_ptr orb;
extern CosNaming::NamingContext_ptr name_context;

template <class T> typename T::_ptr_type /* trait */
bind_service (const char *n, int argc, char *argv[])
{
  CORBA::Object_var obj; // "First time" check.
  if (CORBA::is_nil (name_context)) {
    // Get reference to name service.
    orb = CORBA::ORB_init (argc, argv, 0);
    obj = orb->resolve_initial_references ("NameService");
    name_context = CosNaming::NamingContext::_narrow (obj);
    if (CORBA::is_nil (name_context)) return 0;
  }
  CosNaming::Name svc_name;
  svc_name.length (1); svc_name[0].id = n;
  svc_name[0].kind = "object impl";
  // Find object reference in the name service.
  obj = name_context->resolve (svc_name);
  // Narrow to the T interface and away we go!
  return T::_narrow (obj);
}
```

Concluding Remarks

- TAO supports several threading models
  - Performance may determine model choice
- ACE provides key building blocks for simplifying concurrent application code
  - www.cs.wustl.edu/∼schmidt/ACE.html
- More information on CORBA can be obtained at
  - www.cs.wustl.edu/∼schmidt/corba.html
- C++ Report columns written with Steve Vinoski
  - www.cs.wustl.edu/∼schmidt/report-doc.html