Cloud-based RAW image editing

Student Name: Ryan Collins (gcdk35)
Supervisor Name: Dr Tom Friedetzky

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Abstract —

Context/Background

Aims The main aim of this project is to test the feasibility of a Cloud-based RAW image editor.

Method A render server backend will first be implemented as an API, taking in an input as a JSON object, and then processing the image, and then a JavaScript client shall be created to interface with this API.

Proposed Solution A web application that uses dcraw coupled with custom Java code to read RAW images, and allow adjustment of various parameters, with the output being sent back to the user.

Keywords — RAW image editing, dcraw, cloud image editing

I INTRODUCTION

Many photographers use a file format (or rather, a family of very similar file formats) called RAW, which rather than compressing the image and conducting some image manipulation on the camera, store the RAW camera sensor data outputted by the camera sensor, for later processing and editing by a computer. These files can be much larger than the compressed image, but provide a far greater degree of control over the captured image, when compared with a compressed JPEG, along with an increase in quality. A RAW file essentially acts as a digital negative, as the image can be edited constantly without losing any quality between edits. (Verhoeven 2010)

A Project Aim

The aim of this project is to produce a Cloud-based RAW image photo editor, both as an API (allowing potential image rendering headlessly), along with a full RAW image editor interface via a web browser. The image photo editor should be able to read at least DNG and NEF files, and allow contrast, colour and exposure adjustment, along with noise reduction, haze removal, and auto correction options. Furthermore, this system should be multi-user, allowing more than one user to edit RAW photos at a time through the web interface, each with their own individual collection of images.

Number	Requirement	Priority
FR-01	Allow the user to edit the exposure of a RAW image	High
FR-02	Allow the user to adjust the colour saturation and hue	Medium
FR-03	Allow the user to export their edits to several popular file formats: JPEG, PNG, and TIFF	Medium
FR-04	Store the render settings of a given RAW file (as specified by the user), to allow for the image to be re-rendered and re-edited without losing quality	High
FR-05	Have the ability to edit user specified files (i.e. users can specify which file to edit, rather than using a hardcoded file within the system)	High
FR-06	The client interface should have the ability to zoom in and out of the preview image, to help aid editing	Low
FR-07	Allow the user to apply automated image enhancement algorithms to the image to find the best parameters for each image	Low

Table 1: Functional Requirements

Number	Requirement	Priority
NFR-01	The system should be able to cope with at least 2 users simultaneously using the system	High
NFR-02	The system should allow the editor controls to be hidden, to show the preview image on its own	Medium
NFR-03	The render server should provide a preview within 15 seconds of changing a parameter	Low
NFR-04	The user interface must be accessible through a web browser	High

Table 2: Non-Functional Requirements

B Deliverables

II DESIGN

This section outlines the design of the system, starting off with the specification of what such a system needs to have, followed by further research, options for designing different components of the system, along with some information on implementation detail. Furthermore, details on architecture are outlined here.

A Requirements

Table 1 shows the functional requirements of the project, which define the functional elements of the system being produced.

Table 2 show the non-functional requirements of the project, which don't directly relate to the functionality of the system, but are performance based attributes that ensure the system will be more likely to succeed at the aims.

B Proposed Extensions

C Architecture

As the system is fairly large, it's important to break it down into individual pieces. These are:
TODO: Add diagram of the system architecture

C.1 Client Interface to Render Server Communication

There are several options for communicating between the user interface and the render server.

Representational State Transfer (REST) A Representational State Transfer system would work by sending a request to the server, requesting an image be rendered. This initial request will be replied to with a job number, which will be quoted in further communications. From here, future requests will be made over a regular interval, requesting the information for the specified job. If this job is finished, the result will be returned, but otherwise further requests will need to be made. This is the process of polling.

The XMLHttpRequest object in JavaScript, used to make AJAX requests, was designed by Microsoft in 1999, and later adopted in the 2000s. This method is definitely the most compatible with browsers, being compatible with Edge, Chrome, Firefox, Internet Explorer 7+, Opera, and Safari. (Mozilla 2017)

However, this method does require making many requests and connections to the server, coupled with code to regularly poll at an interval until done. While this will work, it's not the most optimal solution, and the code produced from this would be more complex (code could be needed to issue jobs, recall jobs, and to ensure that the person who requests the result of a job is actually allowed to see the result of the job).

Web Socket Web Socket allows for two way communication between a browser and a server. It acts in a similar way to traditional TCP socket communication, only it incorporates the origin based security model used within web browsers. By using web socket over REST, opening multiple HTTP connections is not needed, as a single connection is maintained at all times. (Melnikov & Fette 2011)

Socket.io Socket.io is an implementation that relies on both REST and Web Socket. If the browser supports web socket, then it is utilised, but in the event that the user's browser does not support new web socket technologies, then it defaults to using REST, and automatically polls regularly for information. This way, we get the best of both options shown above, in such a way that the code itself remains fairly tidy (as the polling nature of REST is abstracted away from our system).

C.2 Render Server

TODO: ADD DIAGRAM OF THE RENDER SERVER SUB LAYERS (ADAMS, DCRAW)
The render server takes instructions given to it (with accordance to our API), and generates the output image based on the RAW image supplied, and the appropriate settings.

One of the first considerations is how to parse RAW files.

dcraw Dcraw is an executable that allows the processing of RAW image files.

Dcraw itself can then be used to convert to other formats, one being the uncompressed TIFF format, giving us a very high quality image that can then be adjusted. Our system isn't merely a wrapper for dcraw in this instance, but extends the features supplied by dcraw.

Despite being an executable, it's written using only standard C libraries, and therefore it's fairly portable, not requiring any dependencies (aside from compiling with a C compiler of course, if no binaries are downloaded). (Coffin 2017)

According to the manpage, the executable contains commands to set RAW exposure, export as TIFF, set saturation level, set white balance, set colourspace, set gamma curve and flip the image. (Coffin 2015)

libraw LibRaw is a C++ library based on dcraw, that is designed as a library rather than just an executable.

LibRaw would be used when loading RAW images, processing them, and then from this, the image can be processed using custom routines (i.e. converting the libraw format to a matrix representation, and then using that matrix representation to carry out some manipulation).

While LibRaw has many useful features, the documentation is somewhat limited.

ImageMagick ImageMagick is a library that can be used to process any images, not just RAW. While it can read RAW image files, it also has many more features, including many feature that we don't need/want to implement ourselves for the purpose of this project. As such, I believe while ImageMagick is a good option, it's a bit too heavy for our use. **TODO: SOURCE FOR IMAGEMAGICK READING RAW FILES TODO: SOURCE FOR FEATURES OF IMAGE MAGICK**

C.3 Client-side Interface

The page design of the interface shall follow the design in D. The goal of the client side interface is to allow adjustment of the image parameters, and show a preview whenever a parameter is changed.

To display the image, an HTML5 Canvas will provide a large amount of control to how we can display the image, allowing for features such as zooming, and drawing. This can't be achieved using a standard HTML image.

D User Interface

A sidebar should be used as the main interface for adjusting image parameters. This sidebar should be able to be hidden, showing the image fully underneath. When the sidebar is in the expanded state, the preview image should be displayed fully on screen.

The user interface design is shown in Figure **??**

Within the sidebar, clicking on a navigation item will display a new submenu. If the item is a parameter adjustment, updating the value in the menu will also update the value that is sent to the render server to generate a preview.

TODO ADD INTERFACE DRAWINGS.

E Implementation Information

Each individual module of the system requires different technologies in order to produce an overall system.

Client-side Interface For this, HTML5, CSS3 and JavaScript (with jQuery to provide extra functionality) are ideal, as HTML5 can be used to create the user interface, with CSS3 providing styling and some basic animation to improve the UX. Using JavaScript with jQuery, it allows us to keep track of the state of the editor, and transmit and receive information between client and render server with help of some library. jQuery is useful for interfacing with the DOM (the webpage itself, and it's components), allowing us to specify events, and functions to run on particular events, along with template loading and various other functionalities.

As this is mostly static content, only a few web services needed for image selection/ maintaining user uploaded RAW files, a web server like Apache/NGINX can be used to serve these static files, using server side scripting only to determine whether a user is authenticated, and if so forwarding headers can be used to serve the static file without needing to serve static files through the scripting language itself, which is much slower **TODO: find source for static content and forwarding headers and performance.**

NGINX is what I'd recommend in this situation because unlike Apache, NGINX isn't configured out of the box for dynamic content, but Apache is configured to use PHP out of the box.

User account based RAW file management In order to select and upload images, a method of specifying users, and their uploaded images needs to be created. This will require a database, to store the user information (username, password), pointers to the images (image URL, and user associated with each image), along with some server side scripts to manage authentication, dealing with file uploads, and maintaining collections of images (listing all images associated with a user).

While any web framework would work with this, I've chosen to use the Python programming language with the Django web framework, as database queries can be made using the built-in Object Relational Mapper (ORM), that automatically writes SQL queries for the specified database backend (e.g. MySQL, PostgreSQL), based on defining models as Python classes (inheriting the django models.Model class).

Furthermore, Django contains built-in authentication, and built in methods to create users, login, and managing sessions. These two features simplify the creation of the server side scripts for user account based RAW file management.

For the interface, rather than sticking to server side generated pages, serving a JavaScript based interface for this means the files can all be stored on the static file server used for the editor, and therefore AJAX requests can be made to the server to get the information needed, and load them onto the page. This avoids having to generate an entire page just for a few pieces of information. This JavaScript code shall make a request to get a list of the images (encoded as JSON, along with their associated urls). When a user clicks on the URL, the image picker loads up the editor, passing the URL to the image to edit (through GET variables). This way, there is less reliance on the entire server side framework.

In order to ensure all of this works, a database is needed. Django officially supports three databases: PostgreSQL, MySQL, Oracle and SQLite. SQLite is file based, and while it's ok for single user apps, for multiple users it won't scale well. **TODO: reference for not using SQLite in production**.

MySQL is far better for applications, implementing most (but not all) of the SQL functionality. However, it doesn't perform as well with concurrent users on write operations (e.g. writing new images into the database), or writing the associated image settings to the database. Furthermore, features are missing like full text search.

PostgreSQL is the most advanced, being fully standards compliant, and it has concurrency features built in to avoid using read locks. It's extensible, and allows for features like full text search. However, it can potentially be slower for primarily read based operations compared to MySQL, and as setup complexity for Postgres is far higher, it might not be the best tool for our project.

Therefore, for this part of the system, Django shall be used alongside MySQL.

Render Server While lower level programming languages might be useful for image processing, the requirement of linking this with web technologies means that a language such as C or C++ is not as ideal.

Java is a better choice, as there are libraries available to provide web services (REST), along with Web Socket implementations, along with Socket IO. Furthermore, Java contains some libraries within the language that allow for image manipulation, most notably BufferedImage related features such as ConvolveOp, image resizing, and various other standard features build in. This is useful, as rather than starting completely from scratch, the custom image processing routines can build on the built in Java implementations, and create more advanced algorithms using them.

While Java doesn't support loading TIFF into BufferedReader using ImageIO directly, an extension exists online, in the form of TwelveMonkeys. No RAW image loading library exists within Java, but an executable such as dcraw or rawspeed can be used to generate a file that can be read within Java, while retaining the quality (e.g. uncompressed TIFF). This can be done using ProcessBuilder, and ideally writing a library to do this.

As this system will likely use a large amount of external dependencies, a dependency management tool like Apache Maven should be used, to both manage dependencies from an external source (e.g. GitHub, Maven Repositories), and also to build the system. **TODO: reference libraries here.**

Account Management Server As this system needs to be used by multiple people, we need to have some record of users, and their associated images.

Rather than rendering each page dynamically, we can instead use JavaScript to make AJAX requests, fetching the data needed, and this way, we don't need to render whole HTML web pages. In terms of backend technology, it doesn't matter too much what is used, as it won't be used too much, but in my case I'll be using Node.JS with an Express server, simply because it's easy to deploy and install dependencies ("npm install" can be run to install dependencies in one command), and it can also connect to a database to provide services such as login, and records of individual files.

Distributed System Management As this system consists of several smaller systems, it's important that these are managed. For each smaller component, a Docker container can be created, containing the configuration between each one. From here, Docker Compose can then be used to manage the entire system, bringing everything online, opening ports, and building everything automatically.

This requires us to create a Dockerfile per system (one for the render server, one for the client front-end). This Dockerfile specifies the image to build from, along with instructions that need to be run, and files that should be shared, to make that container work. Rather than customising an individual image, this customisation can be done by building on existing images, saving time without needing to start again from scratch. (Kent 2014)

TODO: some source of docker

F Evaluation

III REFERENCES

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