Hidden Surface Algorithms

Introduction

In the previous lecture, we figured out how to transform the geometry so that the relative sizes will be correct if we drop the z component.

But, how do we decide which geometry actually gets drawn to a pixel?

Known as the hidden surface elimination problem or the visible surface determination problem.

There are dozens of hidden surface algorithms.

We look at three prominent ones:
- Z-buffer
- Ray casting
- Binary space partitioning (BSP) trees

Z-buffer

The Z-buffer or depth buffer algorithm [Catmull, 1974] is probably the simplest and most widely used.

Here is pseudocode for the Z-buffer hidden surface algorithm:

```plaintext
for each pixel (i,j) do
  Z-buffer[i,j] ← FAR
  Framebuffer[i,j] ← <background color>
end for

for each polygon A do
  for each pixel in A do
    Compute depth z and shade s of A at (i,j)
    if z > Z-buffer[i,j] then
      Z-buffer[i,j] ← z
      Framebuffer[i,j] ← s
    end if
  end for
end for
```

Q: What should FAR be set to?

Reading

Reading:
- Angel 5.6, 10.10.2, 12.2 (pp. 626-627)

Optional reading:
- Foley, van Dam, Feiner, Hughes, Chapter 15
Rasterization

The process of filling in the pixels inside of a polygon is called rasterization.

During rasterization, the z value and shade s can be computed incrementally (fast!).

Curious fact:
- Described as the “brute-force image space algorithm” by [SSS]
- Mentioned only in Appendix B of [SSS] as a point of comparison for huge memories, but written off as totally impractical.

Today, Z-buffers are commonly implemented in hardware.

Z-buffer: Analysis

- Easy to implement?
- Easy to implement in hardware?
- Incremental drawing calculations (uses coherence)?
- Pre-processing required?
- On-line (doesn’t need all objects before drawing begins)?
- If objects move, does it take more work than normal to draw the frame?
- If the viewer moves, does it take more work than normal to draw the frame?
- Typically polygon-based?
- Efficient shading (doesn’t compute colors of hidden surfaces)?
- Handles transparency?
- Handles refraction?

Ray casting

Idea: For each pixel center $P_{ij}$
- Send ray from eye point (COP), $C$, through $P_{ij}$ into scene.
- Intersect ray with each object.
- Select nearest intersection.

Ray casting, cont.

Implementation:
- Might parameterize each ray:
  $$r(t) = C + t (P_{ij} - C)$$

- Each object $O_k$ returns $t_k > 0$ such that first intersection with $O_k$ occurs at $r(t_k)$.

Q: Given the set $\{t_k\}$ what is the first intersection point?

Note: these calculations generally happen in world coordinates. No projective matrices are applied.
Ray casting: Analysis

- Easy to implement?
- Easy to implement in hardware?
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Binary-space partitioning (BSP) trees

Idea:
- Do extra preprocessing to allow quick display from any viewpoint.

Key observation: A polygon \( A \) is painted in correct order if
- Polygons on far side of \( A \) are painted first
- \( A \) is painted next
- Polygons on near side of \( A \) are painted last.

BSP tree creation

procedure MakeBSPTree:
  takes PolygonList \( L \)
  returns BSPTree
  Choose polygon \( A \) from \( L \) to serve as root
  Split all polygons in \( L \) according to \( A \)
  node \( \leftarrow \) \( A \)
  node.neg \( \leftarrow \) MakeBSPTree(Polygons on neg. side of \( A \))
  node.pos \( \leftarrow \) MakeBSPTree(Polygons on pos. side of \( A \))
  return node
end procedure

Note: Performance is improved when fewer polygons are split --- in practice, best of ~ 5 random splitting polygons are chosen.

Note: BSP is created in world coordinates. No projective matrices are applied before building tree.
BSP tree display

procedure DisplayBSPTree:
Takes BSPTree T

if T is empty then return
if viewer is in front (on pos. side) of T.node
    DisplayBSPTree(T. _____ )
    Draw T.node
    DisplayBSPTree(T._____)
else
    DisplayBSPTree(T. _____)
    Draw T.node
    DisplayBSPTree(T. _____)
end if
end procedure

BSP trees: Analysis

• Easy to implement?
• Easy to implement in hardware?
• Incremental drawing calculations (uses coherence)?
• Pre-processing required?
• On-line (doesn't need all objects before drawing begins)?
• If objects move, does it take more work than normal to draw the frame?
• If the viewer moves, does it take more work than normal to draw the frame?
• Typically polygon-based?
• Efficient shading (doesn't compute colors of hidden surfaces)?
• Handles transparency?
• Handles refraction?

Summary

What to take home from this lecture:

• Understanding of three hidden surface algorithms:
  • Z-buffering
  • Ray casting
  • BSP tree creation and traversal