Hidden Surface Algorithms

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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:

```
for each pixel $(i,j)$ do
    Z-buffer $[i,j] \leftarrow$ FAR
   Framebuffer$[i,j] \leftarrow$ <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 $[i,j] \leftarrow z$
           Framebuffer$[i,j] \leftarrow s$
        end if
    end for
end for
```

Q: What should FAR be set to?
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:
  \[ r(t) = C + t(P_{ij} - C) \]
  where $t > 0$.
- 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

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Binary-space partitioning (BSP) trees

A

B

C

D

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 (cont’d)

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 ← A
node.neg ← MakeBSPTree(Polygons on neg. side of A)
node.pos ← MakeBSPTree(Polygons on pos. side of A)
return node

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, Point COP

if T is empty then return
if COP 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

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- Easy to implement in hardware?
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Summary

What to take home from this lecture:

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