Anti-aliased and Accelerated Ray Tracing

Steven Tanimoto

Adapted from materials by Brian Curless and Daniel Leventhal

CSE 457
Spring 2012

Reading

Optional reading:

- Shirley 10.9, 10.11.1
- A. Glassner. An Introduction to Ray Tracing. Academic Press, 1989.

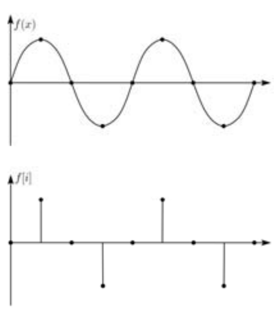
Aliasing

Ray tracing is a form of sampling and can suffer from annoying visual artifacts...

Consider a continuous function $f(x)$. Now sample it at intervals Δ to give $f[i]$ = quantize$[f(i\Delta)]$.

Q: How well does $f[i]$ approximate $f(x)$?

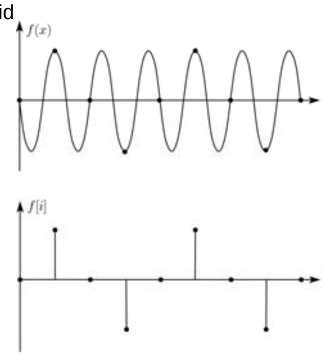
Consider sampling a sinusoid:



In this case, the sinusoid is reasonably well approximated by the samples.

Aliasing (con't)

Now consider sampling a higher frequency sinusoid

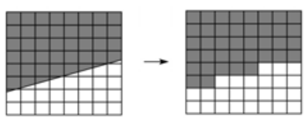


We get the exact same samples, so we seem to be approximating the first lower frequency sinusoid again.

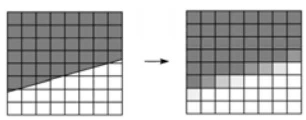
We say that, after sampling, the higher frequency sinusoid has taken on a new "alias", i.e., changed its identity to be a lower frequency sinusoid.

Aliasing in rendering

One of the most common rendering artifacts is the "jaggies". Consider rendering a white polygon against a black background:



We would instead like to get a smoother transition:



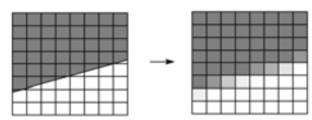
5

Anti-aliasing

Q: How do we avoid aliasing artifacts?

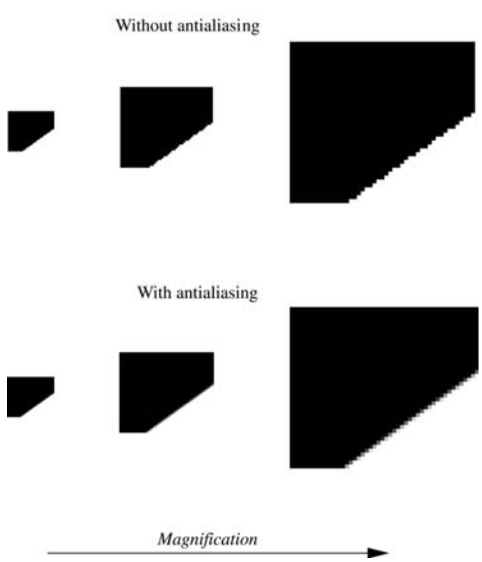
1. Sampling:
2. Pre-filtering:
3. Combination:

Example - polygon:



6

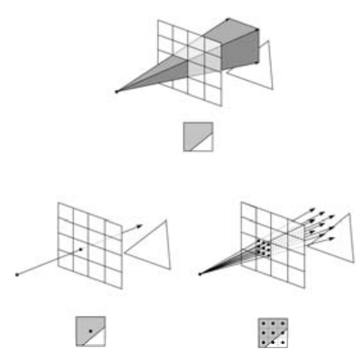
Polygon anti-aliasing



7

Antialiasing in a ray tracer

We would like to compute the average intensity in the neighborhood of each pixel.



When casting one ray per pixel, we are likely to have aliasing artifacts.

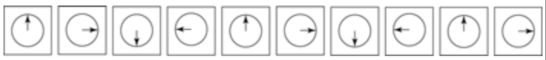
To improve matters, we can cast more than one ray per pixel and average the result.

A.k.a., **super-sampling and averaging down**.

8

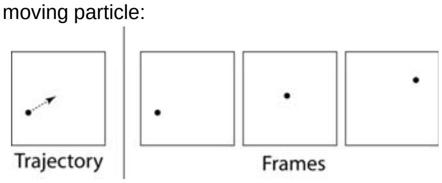
Temporal aliasing

Suppose we are rendering a “clock” with a fast turning hand:



What happens if we sample too infrequently? (This is sometimes called the “wagon wheel” effect.)

Another more common scenario is something moving quickly across the frame, e.g., a fast-moving particle:



How might we address these temporal aliasing effects?

9

Speeding it up

Brute force ray tracing is really slow!

Consider rendering a single image with:

- m x m pixels
- k x k supersampling
- n primitives
- average ray path length of d
- ℓ shadow ray per intersection
- 0, 1, or 2 rays cast recursively per intersection

Asymptotic # of intersection tests =

$\ell = 10$

For m=1,000, k = 5, n = 100,000, ,
d=8…very expensive!!

In practice, some acceleration technique is almost always used.

We’ve already looked at reducing d with adaptive (early) ray termination.

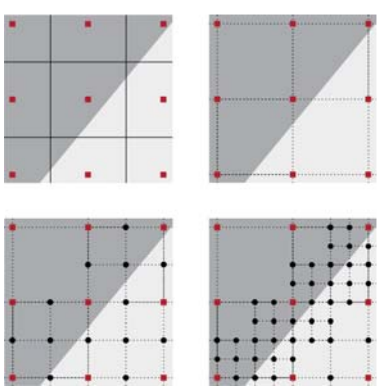
Now we look at reducing the effect of the k and n terms…

10

Antialiasing by adaptive sampling

Casting many rays per pixel can be unnecessarily costly. If there are no rapid changes in intensity at the pixel, maybe only a few samples are needed.

Solution: **adaptive sampling**.

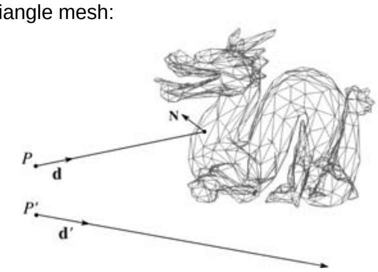


Q: When do we decide to cast more rays in a particular area?

11

Faster ray-polyhedron intersection

Let’s say you were intersecting a ray with a triangle mesh:



Straightforward method

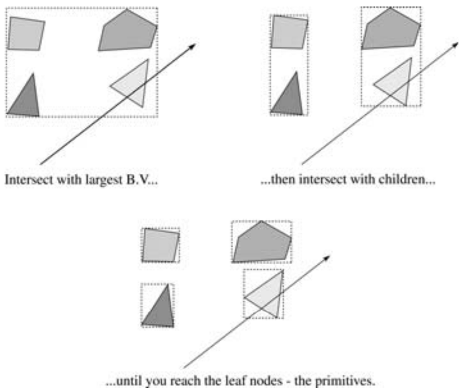
- intersect the ray with each triangle
- return the intersection with the smallest t-value.

Q: How might you speed this up?

12

Hierarchical bounding volumes

We can generalize the idea of bounding volume acceleration with **hierarchical bounding volumes**.

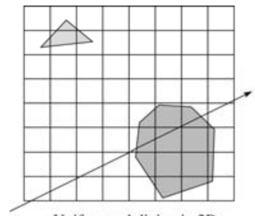


Key: build balanced trees with *tight bounding volumes*.

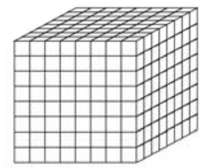
13

Uniform spatial subdivision

Another approach is **uniform spatial subdivision**.



Uniform subdivion in 2D



Uniform subdivion in 3D

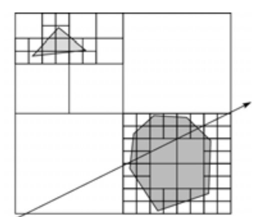
Idea:

- Partition space into cells (voxels)
- Associate each primitive with the cells it overlaps
- Trace ray through voxel array *using fast incremental arithmetic* to step from cell to cell

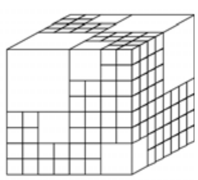
14

Non-uniform spatial subdivision

Still another approach is **non-uniform spatial subdivision**.



Quadtree in 2D



Octree in 3D

Other variants include k-d trees and BSP trees.

Various combinations of these ray intersection techniques are also possible.

15

Summary

What to take home from this lecture:

- The meanings of all the boldfaced terms.
- An intuition for what aliasing is.
- How to reduce aliasing artifacts in a ray tracer
- An intuition for how ray tracers can be accelerated.

16