Photon Mapping

Thanks to Henrik Wann Jensen, UCSD
Photon mapping

A two-pass method

Pass 1: Build the photon map (photon tracing)

Pass 2: Render the image using the photon map
Building the photon map: Photon tracing
Rendering using the photon map
What is a photon?

- Flux (power) - not radiance!
- Collection of physical photons
  * A fraction of the light source power
  * Several wavelengths combined into one entity
Photon emission

Given $\Phi$ Watt lightbulb.
Emit $N$ photons.
Each photon has the power $\frac{\Phi}{N}$ Watt.

- Photon power depends on the number of emitted photons. Not on the number of photons in the photon map.
Diffuse point light

Generate random direction
Emit photon in that direction

// Find random direction
do {
    x = 2.0*random()-1.0;
    y = 2.0*random()-1.0;
    z = 2.0*random()-1.0;
} while ( (x*x + y*y + z*z) > 1.0 );
Example: Diffuse square light

- Generate random position $p^*$ on square
- Generate diffuse direction $d$
- Emit photon from $p$ in direction $d$

// Generate diffuse direction
$u = \text{random}();$
$v = 2\pi\times\text{random}();$
$d = \text{vector}(\cos(v)\sqrt{u}, \sin(v)\sqrt{u}, \sqrt{1-u});$
Projection maps
Surface interactions

The photon is

- Stored (at diffuse surfaces) and
- Absorbed ($A$) or
- Reflected ($R$) or
- Transmitted ($T$)

$$A + R + T = 1.0$$
Storing the photon

```c
struct photon {
    float x,y,z;     // position
    char p[4];       // power packed as 4 bytes
    char phi,theta;  // incident direction
    short flag;      // flag used for kd-tree
};
```

Memory overhead: 20 bytes/photon.
Photon scattering

The simple way:

* Given incoming photon with power $\Phi_p$
* Reflect photon with the power $R \times \Phi_p$
* Transmit photon with the power $T \times \Phi_p$

- Risk: Too many low-powered photons - wasteful!
- When do we stop (systematic bias)?
- Photons with similar power is a good thing.
Russian Roulette

- Statistical technique
- Known from Monte Carlo particle physics
- Introduced to graphics by Arvo and Kirk in 1990

Terminate un-important photons and still get the correct result.
Russian Roulette Example

Surface reflectance: $R = 0.5$
Incoming photon: $\Phi_p = 2\text{ W}$

```java
r = random();
if ( r < 0.5 )
    reflect photon with power 2 W
else
    photon is absorbed
```

Reflect 100 photons with power 2 Watt instead of 200 photons with power 1 Watt.
Russian Roulette Example 2

Surface reflectance: $R = 0.2$
Surface transmittance: $T = 0.3$
Incoming photon: $\Phi_p = 2 \text{ W}$

```
r = random();
if ( r < 0.2 )
    reflect photon with power 2 W
else if ( r < 0.5 )
    transmit photon with power 2 W
else
    photon is absorbed
```
Sampling a BRDF

\[ f_r(x, \bar{\omega}_i, \bar{\omega}_o) = w_1 \cdot f_{r,d} + w_2 \cdot f_{r,s} \]

\[ r = \text{random}(\cdot) \cdot (w_1 + w_2); \]
if \( r < w_1 \)
  reflect diffuse photon
else
  reflect specular
Photon tracing

Overview:

While (we want more photons) {
    Emit a photon
    while (photon hits a surface) {
        Store photon
        Use Russian Roulette to scatter photon
    }
}

Build balanced kd-tree
Figure 4.4: “Cornell box” with glass and chrome spheres: (a) ray traced image (direct illumination and specular reflection and transmission), (b) the photons in the corresponding photon map.
Photon mapping

A two-pass method

Pass 1: Build the photon map (photon tracing)

Pass 2: Render the image using the photon map
Rendering using the photon map
Rendering

We want a Radiance value, $L$, per pixel.

The photon map stores flux/power.

Radiance is the differential flux per differential solid angle per differential cross-sectional area:

$$L(x, \vec{\omega}) = \frac{d\Phi^2(x, \vec{\omega})}{d\omega \cos \theta \, dA}$$
Radiance estimate

\[ L(x, \bar{\omega}) = \int_{\Omega} f_r(x, \bar{\omega}', \bar{\omega}) L'(x, \bar{\omega}') \cos \theta' \, d\omega' \]

\[ = \int_{\Omega} f_r(x, \bar{\omega}', \bar{\omega}) \frac{d\Phi_r^2(x, \bar{\omega}')}{d\omega' \cos \theta' \, dA} \cos \theta' \, d\omega' \]

\[ = \int_{\Omega} f_r(x, \bar{\omega}', \bar{\omega}) \frac{d\Phi_r^2(x, \bar{\omega}')}{dA} \sum_{p=1}^{n} f_r(x, \bar{\omega}_p', \bar{\omega}) \frac{\Delta \Phi_p(x, \bar{\omega}_p')}{\Delta A} \]
Radiance estimate
30000 photons / 50 photons in radiance estimate
Adding water --- more caustics
Figure 4.20: Global photon map radiance estimates visualized directly using 100 photons (left) and 500 photons (right) in the radiance estimate.