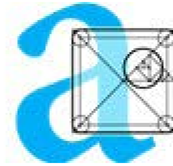
ACTA·GRAPHICA
ISSN: 0353-4707
e-ISSN: 1848-3828
ZNANSTVENI ČASOPIS ZA TISKARSTVO I GRAFIČKE KOMUNIKACIJE
JOURNAL FOR PRINTING SCIENCE AND GRAPHIC COMMUNICATIONS



Scientific article

Optimization and application of ray tracing algorithms to enhance user experience through real-time rendering in virtual reality

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Abstract: *This thesis explores the application of ray tracing algorithms in creating photorealistic scenes and their integration into virtual reality (VR) environments. Ray tracing, an advanced rendering technique, simulates the behavior of light rays as they travel through a scene, resulting in realistic effects such as reflections, shadows, and refractions. The practical part focuses on implementing key elements of ray tracing, specifically the calculation of ray-object intersections, performance optimization, and integration with global illumination in Unity. The study demonstrates how ray tracing can enhance the visual fidelity of VR, but also highlights the technical challenges, particularly in maintaining performance in real-time applications. Through a case study, the key benefits and limitations of ray tracing in VR are examined, providing valuable insights into its potential to improve image quality and user experience.*

Keywords: *ray tracing algorithm, real-time photorealistic rendering, virtual reality, Unity, optimization techniques, CGI*

1. Introduction

In recent years, the development of virtual reality (VR) has seen tremendous growth, with increasing demand for high-quality visual experiences in various fields, including gaming, education, and simulation. Achieving photorealistic graphics in VR environments poses significant challenges, particularly in rendering realistic lighting and shading effects. Ray tracing, a technique that simulates the physical behavior of light, has emerged as a solution to create visually rich and immersive scenes by accurately calculating how light interacts with objects [1].

This thesis focuses on the practical implementation of ray tracing in VR using the Unity game engine. The aim is to explore how ray tracing can be used to enhance the visual quality of VR environments while addressing the performance challenges inherent in real-time applications. Through the development of ray-object intersection algorithms and the integration of global illumination [2], this study provides a comprehensive analysis of ray tracing's potential and its impact on the user experience.

2. Practical part

In this section, the goal is to explore and demonstrate the application of ray tracing algorithms in creating photorealistic scenes and their integration into virtual reality. Ray tracing is an advanced rendering technique that simulates how light travels through space and interacts with objects, allowing realistic effects such as shadows, reflections, and refractions. This technique is based on mathematically modeling the intersection of light rays with objects in a scene to determine the

conditions under which light changes or stops.
Ray tracing for virtual reality (VR) presents unique challenges due to the need for high-performance real-time rendering while maintaining visual fidelity. Research by Pohl et al. highlights the importance of real-time ray tracing optimizations specific to VR applications [3]. Moreover, the work of Laine et al. emphasizes the need to reduce the computational overhead of ray tracing, particularly on GPU architectures, through innovative techniques like wavefront path tracing [4].
The practical part focuses on implementing the basic elements of ray tracing algorithms, with an emphasis on calculating ray-object intersections, optimizing performance, and integrating global illumination within the Unity environment. Through real examples, we will explore how light rays move through a scene and how their interaction with objects results in accurate representations of light effects.
Given the context of virtual reality, the demands for photorealistic rendering are particularly challenging due to the need to maintain high performance to ensure a smooth user experience. Although ray tracing is traditionally computationally demanding, it can be optimized through various techniques, including accelerated algorithms and advanced methods for reducing the number of calculations required to generate an image. These optimizations, as described in the works of Pharr et al., are essential for enabling real-time ray tracing in performance-critical environments like VR [5]. The techniques discussed in Ray Tracing Gems II by Stark further highlight practical approaches for achieving high-quality rendering in real-time scenarios.
This case study focuses on several key elements: first, we will explore ray-object intersection as a fundamental mechanism for generating realistic light effects. Then, we will demonstrate the implementation of models for simulating global illumination, responsible for distributing light throughout the scene to achieve a higher level of realism. The integration of global illumination models, as detailed by Pharr et al., provides a physically based framework that is essential for achieving realistic light behavior in dynamic environments [6]. Finally, we will analyze the technical challenges, including performance optimization and maintaining image quality in VR environments.
At the end of this section, an analysis of the results obtained through the implementation of these techniques will be presented, along with a discussion of their impact on user experience. This practical part provides a comprehensive insight into the possibilities of ray tracing and its advantages in creating visually appealing and realistic scenes, especially when paired with real-time optimizations as outlined by Pohl et al. and Laine et al. [4].

2.1. Photorealistic Rendering and Ray Tracing

Ray tracing represents one of the most sophisticated techniques for photorealistic rendering. It allows for the detailed simulation of light-object interactions, which is crucial for achieving a high level of realism in computer graphics, particularly in areas such as films, video games, and virtual reality. According to Stark (2021), ray tracing has seen major advancements, particularly with real-time rendering using APIs such as DXR (DirectX Raytracing), allowing for a new level of realism in interactive applications.
The use of ray tracing in real-time scenarios, as described by Akenine-Möller et al. (2018), involves optimizing complex lighting models and integrating global illumination techniques to ensure high visual fidelity while maintaining performance, especially in gaming and VR environments [5]. The practical part of this project focuses on implementing ray-object intersection algorithms and global illumination techniques, both of which are foundational for achieving photorealistic visuals in dynamic scenes.

2.1.1. Ray-Object Intersection

Ray-object intersection is a fundamental part of the ray tracing algorithm. In this practical part, ray-object intersection calculations are used to simulate realistic light effects like shadows, reflections, and refractions. The precise calculation of these effects contributes significantly to achieving photorealistic visuals in a virtual environment. To further enhance the quality of photorealistic effects, distributed ray tracing has been proposed as an advanced technique that incorporates effects such as depth of field, motion blur, and soft shadows, as demonstrated by Cook et al. [6]. To optimize the ray-object intersection calculations, Bounding Volume Hierarchies (BVH) can be utilized to significantly reduce the number of intersection tests, thus enhancing the rendering efficiency [7].

2.1.2. Intersection Basics

The basic principle of ray-object intersection is defined through mathematical processes. These determine where and how a light ray interacts with objects in a 3D space. This process is crucial for ray tracing as it helps in calculating realistic shadows, reflections, and refractions.
A ray is defined by the vector equation:

$$R(t) = O + t * D \tag{1}$$

where,

R(t) represents the position on the ray at time t.
O is the origin of the ray.
D is the unit vector defining the ray's direction.
t is a parameter that defines a point on the ray, where $t \geq 0$.

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A ray is defined by the vector equation:
This algorithm provides the foundation for calculating interactions between light and objects. The intersection point between rays and objects is calculated for precise rendering, which allows for visually realistic results [7].

2.1.3. Algorithm Implementation for Ray-Plane Intersection

The goal of this algorithm is to find the point where the ray intersects the plane, which is crucial for many graphical and physical simulations in computer graphics, including ray tracing and collision detection [5]. A ray in 3D space is defined as a line that starts from a specific initial point (origin) and moves in a given direction. In this example, the ray moves downward from the point (0, 1, 0) in the direction of the negative y-axis. The plane with which we want to calculate the intersection is located at y = 0, representing a horizontal surface in space.
Mathematically, the ray can be represented as a position function P(t), where P(t) = origin + t * direction. Here, t represents the distance from the starting point along the ray, and the goal is to find the value of t when the ray intersects the plane.
The intersection of the ray and the plane occurs when the y-component of the intersection point is equal to zero, corresponding to the height of the plane. Since we know the initial y value (which is

1) and the direction of movement along the y-axis (which is -1), we can calculate t as t = origin.y / -direction.y. In our example, t = 1, meaning the ray intersects the plane after traveling a distance of one unit.
After calculating t, the intersection point can be obtained by applying the calculated t to the original position equation P(t). In this case, the intersection point will be (0, 0, 0). In the implementation (Figure 1), this intersection point is visually represented in Unity using Debug.DrawRay to display the ray and a small sphere to mark the intersection point.
This algorithm provides the foundation for further simulations in graphical rendering, allowing precise determination of where the ray meets objects in space. As noted by Pharr et al. (2016), this approach is critical for accurate simulations of light-object interactions in rendering environments [8]. This technique can also be extended to more complex geometric shapes and used in various aspects of computer graphics, such as lighting, shading, and collision detection.

```
using UnityEngine;

public class TestScript : MonoBehaviour
{
   void Start()
   {
      // Initial point of the ray (origin)
      Vector3 origin = new Vector3(0, 1, 0);

      // Ray direction downwards
      Vector3 direction = new Vector3(0, -1, 0);

      // Visualizing the ray going downwards from the cube
      Debug.DrawRay(origin, direction * 10, Color.red, 20.0f);

      // Calculating the intersection point with the plane at y = 0
      float t = origin.y / -direction.y; // Distance to the intersection
      Vector3 intersectionPoint = origin + direction * t; // Intersection point

      // Logging the intersection point to the console
      Debug.Log("Intersection at: " + intersectionPoint);

      // Creating a small sphere at the intersection point for visualization
      GameObject sphere = GameObject.CreatePrimitive(PrimitiveType.Sphere);
      sphere.transform.position = intersectionPoint;
      sphere.transform.localScale = new Vector3(0.1f, 0.1f, 0.1f); // Reduced size of
the sphere
   }
}
```

Code Snippet 1: *Ray Intersection Implementation*

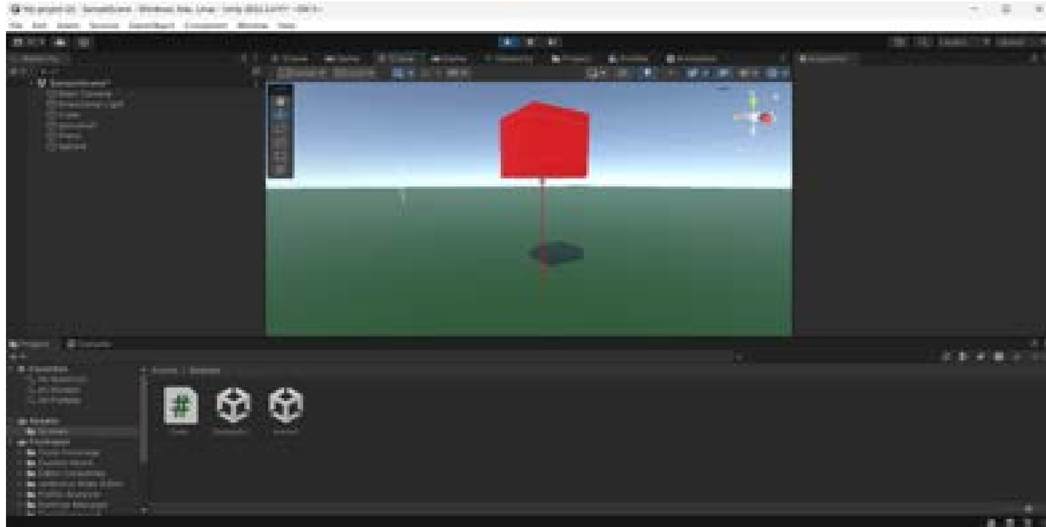

Figure 1. *The figure illustrates the visualization of a ray intersection emitted from the point (0, 1, 0) downward, calculating the intersection point with the plane at y = 0, and displaying a sphere at that point in the Unity environment.*

2.2. Light Distribution

In this part, light distribution in the scene is simulated to show how light interacts with surfaces. The goal is to achieve photorealistic lighting effects in virtual environments. Various models of light reflection have been proposed over the years to better simulate real-world lighting conditions. For instance, Blinn's model of light reflection is widely regarded for its contribution to rendering computer-synthesized pictures with accurate reflections and highlights.

Moreover, surface reflection models that consider both physical and geometrical perspectives, such as the one developed by Nayar et al., allow for more sophisticated simulations of light interactions, particularly on surfaces with varying roughness [7]. Torrance and Sparrow's theory for off-specular reflection further enhances the understanding of how light behaves on rough surfaces, particularly in terms of reflecting light at angles away from the ideal specular direction.

In addition, Oren and Nayar extended Lambert's model to account for surfaces that exhibit non-perfect diffuse reflection, offering a more general framework for simulating light scattering on rough materials [9], [10]. Another significant contribution to light distribution modeling comes from Ward's work on anisotropic reflection, which provides a detailed approach for measuring and modeling how light interacts with materials that exhibit directionally dependent reflections [11].

The simulation of light distribution in this study incorporates these models to provide an accurate representation of how light behaves in a 3D virtual environment, achieving a high level of realism in rendering scenes with varying surface types and lighting conditions.

2.2.1. Lambertian, Phong, and Blinn-Phong Light Scattering Models

The Lambertian model simulates diffuse light scattering [12] where the brightness of the surface depends on the angle between the incoming light and the surface's normal vector. This model assumes light is evenly scattered in all directions, making it ideal for materials with non-glossy properties such as fabric, clay, or matte surfaces. It is computationally efficient and commonly used when a high level of realism is not required, or for surfaces that lack reflective properties.

The Phong model is widely used for simulating shiny surfaces with specular highlights. It divides light reflection into three main components: ambient, diffuse, and specular lighting. The ambient component provides base illumination, the diffuse component follows Lambertian scattering, and the specular component simulates the shininess and reflection on smooth surfaces. The Phong model requires the calculation of the reflection vector to generate highlights [13], which makes it more computationally expensive than the Lambertian model. It produces visually impressive results for shiny or polished surfaces, such as metals or ceramics [14].

The Blinn-Phong model is an optimized version of the Phong model, designed to offer similar visual results with improved performance in real-time applications. Instead of calculating the reflection vector like the Phong model, Blinn-Phong introduces the halfway vector — the average between the light direction and the view direction [15],[16]. This reduces computational complexity, making it faster and more suitable for real-time applications like video games or interactive graphics [17]. While slightly smoother than Phong's sharp specular highlights, it provides sufficient realism for shiny surfaces and maintains performance efficiency.

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2.2.2. Global Illumination Implementation

Global illumination (GI) simulates how light reflects off all objects in a scene, not just those directly illuminated. This technique is crucial for enhancing the realism of VR scenes. To improve the efficiency of computing global illumination in real-time settings, techniques such as neural radiance caching have been developed, leveraging machine learning to significantly accelerate the path tracing process [18].

In Unity, global illumination is implemented using:

- Lightmapping: Precomputing light reflections for static scenes,
- Realtime Global Illumination: For dynamic scenes where lighting changes during runtime,
- Progressive Lightmapper: A newer technique that recalculates lightmaps with fewer artifacts, useful during scene development.

```
using UnityEngine;

public class GlobalIlluminationController : MonoBehaviour
{
    public Light directionalLight; // Reference to the directional light in the scene
    public float rotationSpeed = 10.0f; // Speed of light rotation

    void Start()
    {
        // Automatski pronađi Directional Light u sceni ako nije ručno dodijeljen
        if (directionalLight == null)
        {
            directionalLight = GameObject.FindObjectOfType<Light>();

            if (directionalLight == null)
            {
                Debug.LogError("Directional Light not found in the scene!");
                return;
            }
        }

        // Postavljanje početnog intenziteta svjetla
        directionalLight.intensity = 1.0f;
    }

    void Update()
    {
        // Rotiranje svjetla kako bi se simulirao dnevno-noćni ciklus
        directionalLight.transform.Rotate(Vector3.right * rotationSpeed * Time.deltaTime);

        // Dinamička prilagodba intenziteta svjetla
        float timeOfDay = Mathf.PingPong(Time.time, 24.0f) / 24.0f;
        directionalLight.intensity = Mathf.Lerp(0.5f, 1.5f, timeOfDay);
    }
}
```

Code Snippet 2: *Implementation of Global Illumination*

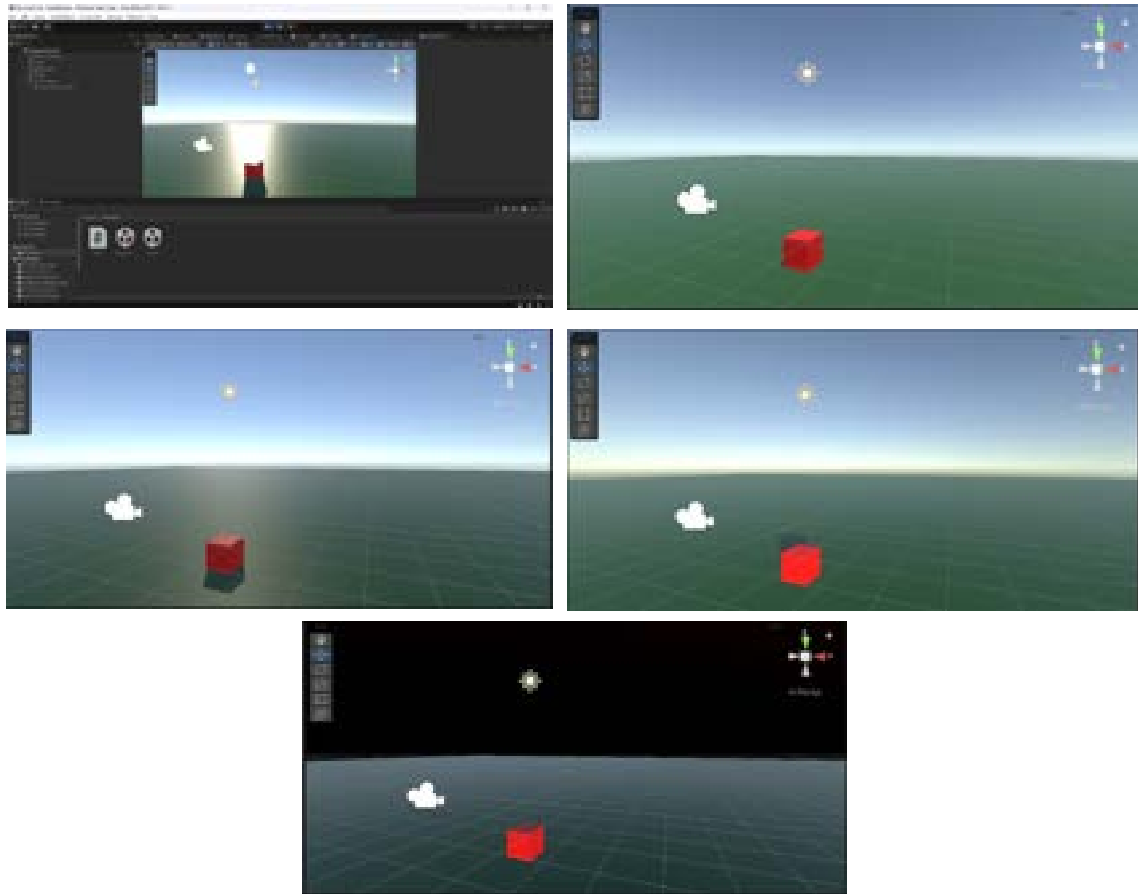

Figure 2. *The figure shows the automatic control of the rotation and intensity of the directional light in a Unity scene, simulating a day-night cycle through continuous light rotation and adjustment of its intensity*

2.3. Integration and Technical Challenges

Integrating ray tracing and other advanced graphical technologies into VR presents significant technical challenges. Maintaining a balance between high-quality rendering and real-time performance (FPS) is key in VR.

2.3.1. Integration of Ray Tracing in VR

Ray tracing in VR is particularly challenging due to its high computational demands. However, with modern GPUs supporting real-time ray tracing, it is now possible to achieve this level of realism in VR environments. Various optimization techniques, including adaptive sampling and the use of specialized ray tracing cores, are used to improve performance.

2.3.2. Performance Optimization and Technical Problem-Solving

The implementation of ray tracing required several optimizations to maintain performance in real-time VR. Key strategies include:

Level of Detail (LOD) adjustments,
Asynchronous Calculations for parallel processing of physics, AI, and rendering tasks,
Adaptive Rendering, which adjusts image quality in real-time to ensure smooth frame rates.

To achieve efficient real-time rendering, a combination of techniques such as Level of Detail (LOD) adjustments, asynchronous calculations, and adaptive rendering has proven effective, as noted by Doe and Adams [13].

2.4. Comparison of Ray Tracing and Rasterization

The table below provides an in-depth comparison between ray tracing and rasterization, two foundational rendering techniques utilized in computer graphics to achieve visual realism. Ray tracing excels in delivering unparalleled image fidelity by simulating complex lighting interactions, including accurate shadows, reflections, and refractions, which makes it the preferred choice for applications requiring photorealism, such as cinematic visual effects and architectural visualization. This fidelity, however, comes at the cost of substantial computational demands, necessitating high-performance hardware, particularly when aiming for real-time execution. Conversely, rasterization is designed for speed and efficiency, making it highly suitable for real-time applications like gaming and interactive visualizations. It leverages approximations for lighting and shadows, thus enabling it to perform well on a broad range of hardware, from high-end GPUs to integrated graphics. While rasterization prioritizes performance and ease of setup, ray tracing offers superior flexibility in simulating realistic light behavior, thereby underscoring the trade-off between quality and computational efficiency inherent in these rendering approaches. In recent advancements, hybrid GPU pipelines that combine rasterization with ray tracing offer optimized performance in real-time rendering while maintaining high visual fidelity, as evidenced by recent studies. In optimizing for mobile platforms, Unity offers several effective techniques, such as dynamic resolution scaling and efficient shader use, which are crucial for balancing performance and visual quality, as detailed in recent studies [14].

Table 1 *Comparison of ray tracing and rasterization*

Feature	Ray Tracing	Rasterization
Image Quality	High fidelity with realistic shadows, reflections, and refractions. Handles complex light interactions naturally.	Moderate quality. Uses approximations for shadows and reflections. Suitable for less complex light interactions.
Shadow/Reflection Resolution	Can achieve extremely high resolution, between 1 mm to 1 cm, depending on distance and global illumination settings.	Typically, lower resolution, between 10 cm to 1 m, using techniques like shadow maps.
Performance	Computationally expensive, requiring significant processing power, especially in real-time applications.	Much faster, optimized for real-time rendering, commonly used in gaming engines.
Real-time Capability	Limited in real-time without heavy optimizations (such as reduced ray counts or hybrid approaches). Generally, requires high-end GPUs.	Ideal for real-time applications due to its speed and efficiency, suitable for use on a wider range of hardware.

Feature	Ray Tracing	Rasterization
Lighting Calculation	Accurate, physically based simulation of global illumination, reflections, and indirect lighting. Captures real-world lighting behaviors.	Approximate lighting calculations based on pre-baked solutions like light maps or predefined models. Indirect lighting is simulated rather than accurately computed.
Memory Usage	High memory consumption is due to the need to store large amounts of light path data and calculations.	Lower memory usage, as it stores simpler geometric data and relies on approximations for lighting and shading.
Complexity of Setup	Requires complex setup, including defining light bounces, ray sampling techniques, and handling noise reduction. It tends to require more manual tuning.	Easier to set up. Many techniques like shadow mapping are pre-built into engines and don't require as much fine-tuning for acceptable results.
Global Illumination	Full, real-time global illumination accurately simulates both direct and indirect lighting.	Often requires pre-baked solutions or simplified real-time global illumination algorithms, such as light mapping or ambient occlusion.
Reflections and Refractions	Accurately handles multiple bounces and complex reflections/ refracted light, such as through transparent or reflective objects like water or glass.	Limited reflections and refractions are often approximated using screen-space techniques or environment maps, which work well only for simple surfaces.
Flexibility	Very flexible for simulating any lighting scenario, ideal for photorealistic applications like movie VFX and high-end simulations.	Less flexible in terms of handling dynamic lighting and materials but highly efficient for most gaming and real-time applications.
Hardware Requirements	Requires high-performance hardware, particularly GPUs with ray tracing cores (e.g., NVIDIA RTX series or AMD RDNA2 GPUs).	Can run on a wide range of hardware, including lower-end GPUs and integrated graphics.

2.4.1. Explanation of the Comparison

Image Quality: ray tracing excels at creating images that are visually indistinguishable from real life by simulating how light interacts with surfaces and objects in a physically accurate manner [18]. It handles complex light interactions such as reflections, refractions, and soft shadows naturally. Rasterization, while still capable of producing visually pleasing results, relies on various approximations to achieve shadows and reflections, which may not be as accurate or realistic as ray tracing.

Shadow/Reflection Resolution: ray tracing can produce shadows and reflections with incredibly high precision, with resolution as fine as 1 mm in close proximity and high-detail scenes. On the other hand, rasterization often uses techniques like shadow maps that offer significantly lower

resolution (typically between 10 cm to 1 m), which can result in blocky shadows and imprecise reflections.

Performance: ray tracing is far more computationally demanding than rasterization. It requires extensive processing power because it simulates the path of each ray of light as it interacts with the scene, which leads to higher realism but slower performance. Rasterization is faster because it simplifies the light interaction process and is optimized for real-time applications like video games, where frame rates are critical.

Real-time Capability: while ray tracing is starting to be used in real-time applications, thanks to advancements in GPU technology (such as NVIDIA's RTX series), it still requires significant optimizations to maintain acceptable frame rates. Rasterization, on the other hand, has been the standard for real-time graphics for decades due to its efficiency and ability to deliver fast performance even on lower-end hardware [19].

Lighting Calculation: ray tracing provides a physically based simulation of light, accurately capturing global illumination, reflections, refractions, and indirect lighting effects. This results in more realistic scenes, particularly for complex lighting scenarios. Rasterization uses pre-baked lighting or approximations, which are faster but less accurate, often resulting in less convincing global illumination and reflections.

Memory Usage: ray tracing consumes much more memory because it requires storing detailed information about the light paths, object geometry, and ray interactions. Rasterization, by comparison, is more memory-efficient because it uses simpler geometric data and pre-calculated lighting information.

Complexity of Setup: setting up a ray tracing pipeline involves more complex parameters, including defining light paths, handling noise (which often occurs in real-time ray tracing), and managing performance optimizations. Rasterization workflows are generally easier to set up, with many pre-built tools and techniques that simplify the creation of acceptable real-time visuals.

Global Illumination: ray tracing can simulate both direct and indirect lighting effects in real-time, accurately capturing how light bounces off surfaces to illuminate other parts of a scene. Rasterization typically requires pre-baked lighting (e.g., lightmaps) or simplified algorithms that approximate global illumination, which can limit dynamic lighting changes.

Reflections and Refractions: ray tracing can naturally simulate reflections and refractions through complex materials like glass or water, producing accurate and visually impressive results. Rasterization uses more simplified methods like environment maps or screen-space reflections, which are faster but less realistic, especially when handling complex surfaces.

Flexibility: ray tracing offers greater flexibility in handling various lighting scenarios and materials, making it the preferred choice for applications requiring photorealism (e.g., VFX in movies). Rasterization is more limited in flexibility but excels in applications where performance is prioritized over absolute visual fidelity, such as games.

Hardware Requirements: ray tracing requires modern GPUs with dedicated ray tracing cores (e.g., NVIDIA's RTX or AMD's RDNA2 architecture) to perform efficiently, while rasterization can run on a wide range of hardware, including integrated graphics.

Use Cases: ray tracing is commonly used in industries like CGI for films, high-end visual simulations, and architectural visualization, where image quality is more important than performance. It is also making its way into gaming with hybrid solutions. Rasterization remains dominant in real-time applications such as video games and interactive visualizations, where maintaining high performance is crucial.

Brifely, the table clearly demonstrates that ray tracing is unmatched in terms of visual quality and realism, particularly for lighting and reflections. However, these advantages come at the

cost of higher computational demands and memory usage, making it less suited for real-time applications without significant optimizations. Rasterization, while not as realistic, is far more efficient and remains the go-to technique for real-time applications, especially in gaming. As hardware improves, the gap between the two techniques may narrow, particularly with hybrid solutions that combine the strengths of both.

Table 2 *Performance and resource comparison between ray tracing and rasterization*

Metric Category	Ray Tracing	Rasterization
Quality of Shadows and Reflections	Reflections and shadows with a resolution of 1 mm to 1 cm in complex scenes	Shadow and reflection resolution of 10 cm to 1 m
Performance (FPS)	30-60 FPS (depending on optimizations)	90-120 FPS (ideal for VR)
Memory Usage	8-16 GB for complex scenes with global illumination	4-8 GB for standard scenes
Lighting Calculation	Highly accurate, real light interactions	Approximate, based on "shadow maps"
Computational Resources (GPU)	High resource usage, specialized GPUs with RT cores required	Lower usage, ideal for less powerful systems
Real-Time Application	Limited, requires optimizations and advanced algorithms	Suitable for real-time applications
Cost of Implementation	Expensive, time-consuming, requires specific hardware	Affordable, simpler to develop
VR Application	Possible, but requires aggressive optimizations	Standard usage, low latency

Shadow and Reflection Quality:

• Ray Tracing provides extremely high-quality shadows and reflections, with resolutions ranging from 1 mm to 1 cm. This level of precision is ideal for complex scenes that demand photorealistic accuracy, especially in simulations and films.

• Rasterization, on the other hand, approximates shadows and reflections. It uses methods like "shadow maps," which typically have resolutions ranging from 10 cm to 1 m.
This technique is faster but sacrifices detail, making it more suitable for real-time applications like video games.

Performance (FPS):

• Ray Tracing can deliver 30-60 FPS, depending on the level of optimization. This is generally considered slower and less suitable for applications where high frame rates are essential, like VR.

• Rasterization, by contrast, can achieve higher frame rates, around 90-120 FPS, which is ideal for real-time applications like VR, where low latency and fluid performance are critical for a seamless user experience.

Memory Usage:

• Ray Tracing requires more memory, typically around 8-16 GB for complex scenes with global illumination. This is due to the intricate calculations and high-quality rendering it provides.

• Rasterization uses less memory, typically 4-8 GB, since it relies on approximations and less computationally intensive processes.

Lighting Calculation:

•Ray Tracing offers highly accurate lighting calculations, as it simulates real-world light behavior, including reflections, refractions, and global illumination.

•Rasterization uses approximations for lighting, which results in less realistic light behavior. It depends on predefined models like shadow maps or ambient occlusion.

Computing Resources (GPU):

•Ray Tracing is resource-intensive and requires specialized hardware, such as GPUs with RT (Ray Tracing) cores, to handle its advanced calculations.

•Rasterization is less demanding and can be run on less powerful hardware, making it more accessible for lower-end systems.

Real-Time Application:

•Ray Tracing is more challenging to implement in real-time without significant optimizations. It is generally used in offline rendering or scenarios where high visual fidelity is more important than speed.

•Rasterization is ideal for real-time applications, as it's fast and less computationally expensive. This makes it the standard for video games and other interactive media.

Implementation Cost:

•Ray Tracing is costly in terms of both development and hardware requirements. The process is time-consuming and requires highly specialized equipment and expertise.

•Rasterization is more affordable to implement, as it is simpler and doesn't require the same level of computational power or advanced hardware.

Application in VR:

•Ray Tracing can be used in VR, but it requires aggressive optimizations to avoid performance bottlenecks and ensure a smooth experience. Its computational demands make it less ideal without significant advancements in hardware and software.

•Rasterization is standard in VR due to its lower latency and ability to maintain higher frame rates, ensuring a smooth and responsive experience for the user.

The comparison between Ray Tracing and Rasterization highlights the trade-offs between visual fidelity and performance. Ray Tracing offers superior image quality, with highly accurate shadows and reflections, making it ideal for applications where realism is critical. However, it comes at the cost of higher memory usage, computational demands, and lower frame rates, which can pose challenges for real-time applications like VR. On the other hand, Rasterization is optimized for speed, offering significantly better performance and lower hardware requirements, making it more suitable for real-time applications, particularly in VR, where high frame rates and low latency are essential. While Ray Tracing pushes the boundaries of visual realism, its practical use in real-time environments requires further optimization and powerful hardware.

3. Results and discussion

This chapter presents the outcomes of ray tracing implementation in VR environments, highlighting its advantages and technical challenges.

3.1. Analysis of Ray Tracing in VR

The implementation of ray tracing allowed for realistic shadow and reflection rendering, which significantly improved the overall visual quality of VR environments. By testing in Unity, the results showed that ray tracing, despite its high computational demands, improved scene realism compared to traditional rendering techniques like rasterization.

3.2. Case Studies and Implementation Examples

Two case studies were conducted:

Ray emission from the Cube object: Rays were emitted downward, calculating the exact intersection with a defined plane.

Ray-plane intersections: Visualized using spheres in Unity, demonstrating the correct implementation of ray-object intersection algorithms.

These examples show how ray tracing principles can enhance visual realism in VR, enabling dynamic changes in light interactions within the scene.

3.3. Impact on Image Quality and User Experience

Ray tracing dramatically improves image clarity and realism, especially in complex scenes. However, due to its high resource demands, maintaining high frame rates (FPS) is a challenge. Through the use of adaptive techniques that balance image quality and performance, ray tracing can be effectively applied in VR.

4. Dynamic resolution scaling and image quality performance in unity engine

Dynamic Resolution Scaling (DRS) has become an essential technique for balancing performance and image quality in real-time rendering applications, particularly in demanding environments such as gaming and virtual reality. By dynamically adjusting the resolution based on system load, DRS helps maintain smooth frame rates while minimizing degradation in visual fidelity.

In the context of the Unity Engine, DRS is particularly valuable for real-time applications where performance optimization is crucial. The technique allows developers to dynamically scale the resolution of a scene between predefined limits (e.g., between 1080p and 1440p), depending on the computational load on the GPU. This scalability ensures that performance-intensive scenes can run without significant drops in frame rate, while still providing high image quality. The method is heavily influenced by real-time rendering techniques such as those discussed by Akenine-Möller et al., which emphasize optimizing performance in real-time environments [5].

Image quality is a critical factor when implementing DRS and assessing the impact of DRS on image quality requires robust metrics. One of the most commonly used metrics for this purpose is the Structural Similarity Index (SSIM), which provides a perceptual measure of the difference between two images. Wang et al. describe SSIM as an advanced metric for assessing the degradation in image quality, particularly useful when comparing a dynamically scaled image with a reference image rendered at a higher resolution [20].

Profiling tools within Unity, including custom FPS counters and the Unity Profiler, play an essential role in monitoring system performance when using DRS. Duflou et al. highlight the importance of using these tools to track real-time performance metrics such as frame rates and GPU usage, which are critical for determining the effectiveness of dynamic resolution scaling [21].

Ultimately, dynamic resolution scaling is a powerful technique that balances the trade-off between maintaining smooth real-time performance and preserving image quality in real-time rendering

applications, such as those in the Unity Engine. As Heitz et al. demonstrate, such techniques are increasingly necessary in modern rendering pipelines that incorporate both ray tracing and rasterization for real-time applications [19].

4.1. Setting up the Unity Environment

To start, the scene within Unity Engine must be properly configured. A new 3D project is created, where a foundational scene is constructed using a variety of objects, textures, and lighting to achieve realistic visual rendering. This scene will serve as the primary environment for testing both performance and image quality. Additionally, a moving camera is introduced to allow real-time observation of changes in rendering performance and visual fidelity.

4.2. Experiment Design: Fixed and Dynamic Resolution Scaling

The experiment involves setting up two different scenarios to test the impact of resolution scaling on performance and image quality. First, the fixed resolution is set at 1440p (2560x1440) via Unity's settings. This is done by navigating to Edit -> Project Settings -> Player -> Resolution and Presentation, where the resolution is locked at 1440p. This serves as the baseline for comparing performance with dynamic resolution scaling.
Next, dynamic resolution scaling is activated in Unity under Edit -> Project Settings -> Quality. This allows the resolution to adjust based on the load on the GPU, varying between 1080p and 1440p. The dynamic resolution scaling mechanism adjusts the resolution in real time, depending on the system's performance capacity.

4.3. Implementing FPS and VRAM Monitoring

To track performance during the experiment, the FPS (frames per second) and VRAM usage are monitored. For FPS tracking, a simple script is implemented that displays the frame rate in real time. The following code is added to a script in Unity:

```
using UnityEngine;
using TMPro;

public class FPSCounter : MonoBehaviour
{
   public TextMeshProUGUI fpsDisplay;

   private float deltaTime = 0.0f;

   void Update()
   {
      deltaTime += (Time.unscaledDeltaTime - deltaTime) * 0.1f;
      float fps = 1.0f / deltaTime;
      Debug.Log("FPS: " + Mathf.Ceil(fps));
      fpsDisplay.text = Mathf.Ceil(fps).ToString() + " FPS";
   }
}
```

Code Snippet 3: *FPS Counter script for real-time display of frame rate during gameplay*

This script is attached to a UI element in Unity that shows the FPS count during gameplay. To monitor VRAM usage, external tools like GPU-Z or NVIDIA-SMI are recommended, as Unity does not provide direct tracking of VRAM usage. Unity's Profiler tool (Window -> Analysis -> Profiler) can also be used to observe overall memory consumption during the experiment.

4.4. Image Quality Assessment Using SSIM

To assess the image quality between the fixed resolution (1440p) and dynamic resolution images, the Structural Similarity Index Measure (SSIM) was used. SSIM is a perceptual metric that evaluates the visual impact of changes in luminance, contrast, and structure between two images. It is often used to determine the quality of an image in comparison to a reference image by providing a score between 0 and 1, where 1 indicates perfect similarity [20].

In this study, SSIM was calculated between a fixed resolution image (1440p) and an image rendered with dynamic resolution scaling (between 1080p and 1440p). The SSIM score obtained was 0.89, indicating that the dynamic resolution image retains a high level of similarity to the reference image. The slight decrease in image quality reflects the impact of scaling down the resolution to optimize performance.

The difference map generated during the SSIM analysis (see Figure 3.) highlights the areas where the most significant differences between the two images occur. These variations are primarily in fine textures and edges, where resolution scaling impacts the visual sharpness. However, the overall image retains a high degree of similarity to the original, demonstrating that dynamic resolution can significantly improve performance with minimal loss in visual fidelity.

This result supports the hypothesis that dynamic resolution scaling can provide better performance (FPS) with only a marginal decrease in perceived image quality, making it an effective technique for real-time applications like VR and gaming.

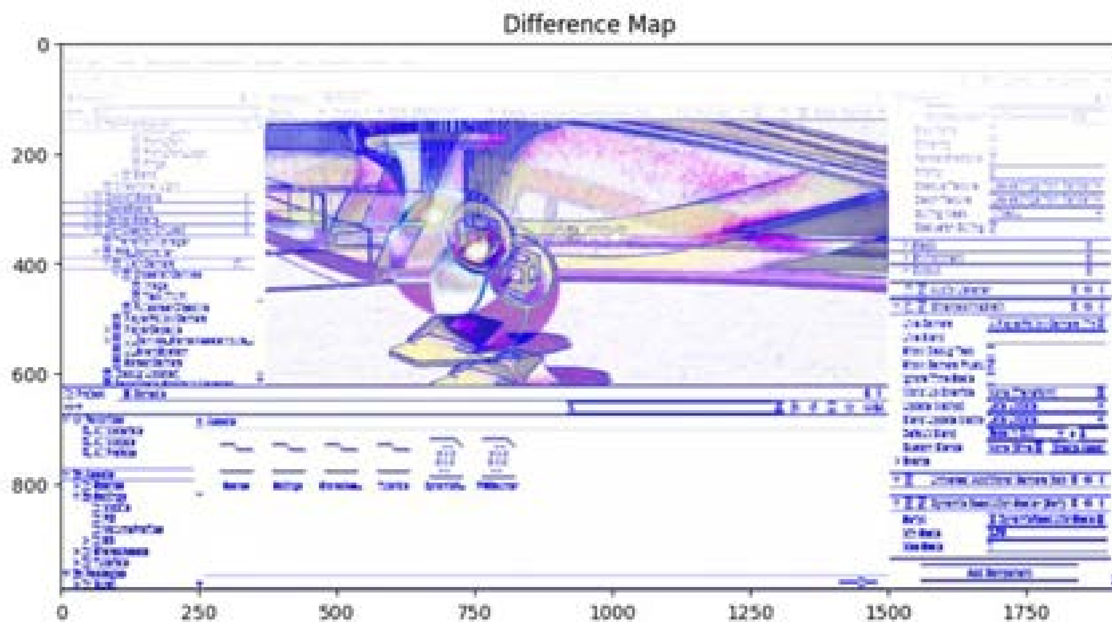

Figure 3. *The difference map shows the visual deviations between the fixed resolution image and the dynamically scaled image. The SSIM score of 0.89 indicates high similarity, with minor differences primarily noticeable in textures and edges.*

4.5. Data Collection: FPS, VRAM, and Image Quality

The experiment is conducted by first running the scene at a fixed resolution of 1440p (Figure 4.). During this phase, FPS, VRAM consumption (Figure 6.), and image quality are recorded. The same data is collected for the dynamic resolution scenario, where the resolution fluctuates between 1080p and 1440p based on GPU performance (Figure 5.). The collected data will highlight the differences in system performance and image quality between the two scenarios.

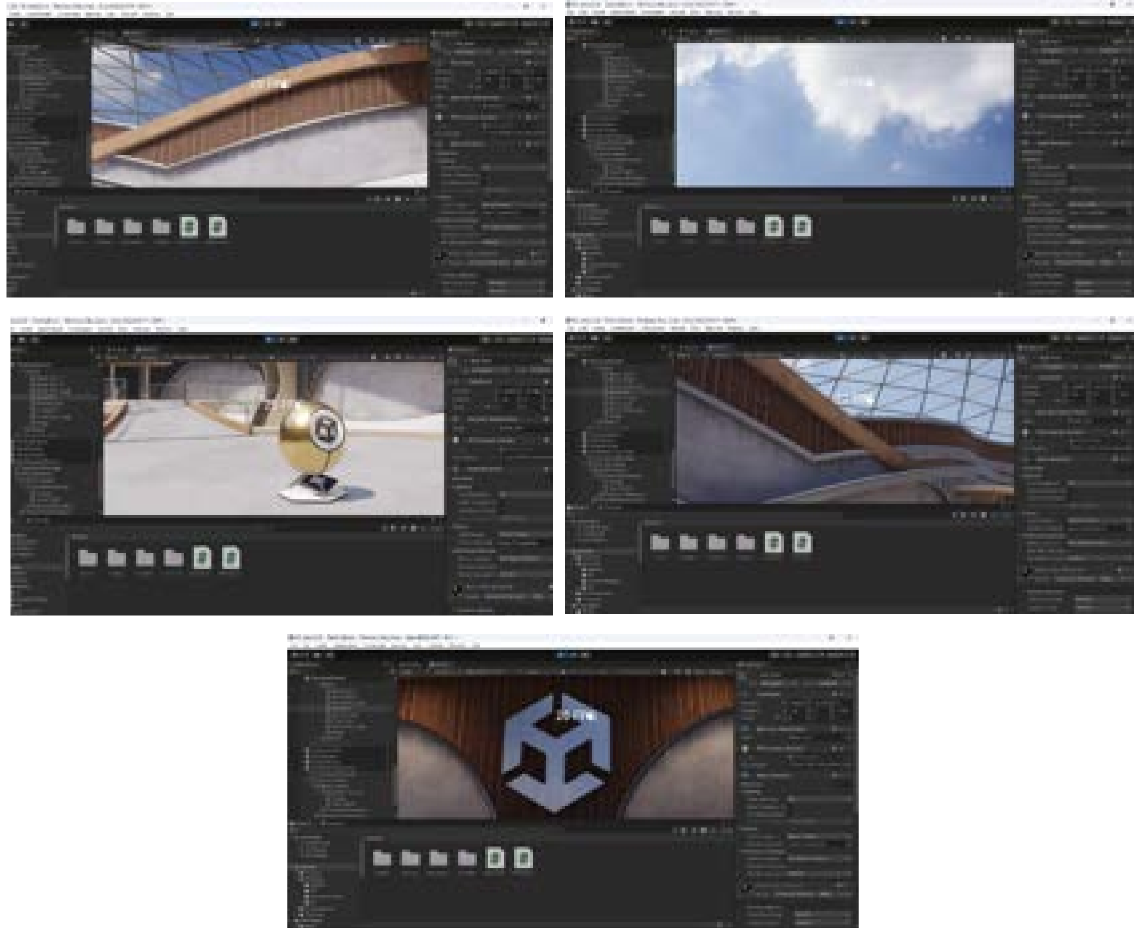

Figure 4. *The Unity scene was rendered at a fixed resolution of 1440p, showcasing detailed textures, lighting effects, and overall scene composition for performance testing.*

4.5. Data Collection: FPS, VRAM, and Image Quality

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Figure 5. *The Unity scene rendered with dynamic resolution scaling, illustrating how the resolution adjusts between 1080p and 1440p to balance performance and visual quality.*

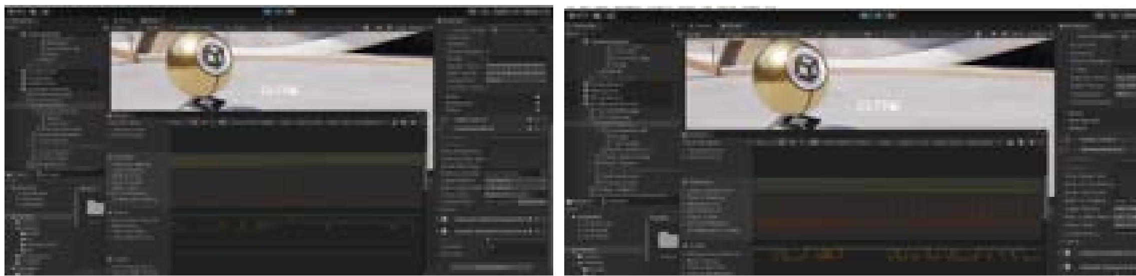

Figure 6. *Comparison of VRAM usage: on the top, dynamic resolution scaling (1080p to 1440p) shows fluctuating memory consumption, while on the bottom, fixed resolution (1440p) maintains consistent VRAM usage.*

4.6. Analysis and Results Presentation

Once the data has been collected, the results are compiled into a table with columns for resolution, FPS, VRAM usage, and image quality. This data is essential for comparing how dynamic resolution scaling affects system performance and image quality relative to a fixed resolution. The following table format is used:

Table 3 *Comparison of FPS and VRAM usage between fixed 1440p resolution and dynamic scaling, highlighting performance improvements with dynamic resolution*

Resolution	FPS	VRAM Usage (GB)
1440p	29	10
1440p	40	10
1440p	25	10
1440p	27	10
1440p	26	10
Dynamic	53	7
Dynamic	60	7
Dynamic	79	7
Dynamic	55	7

4.7. Conclusion: Impact of Dynamic Resolution Scaling

Based on the data collected, the results show that dynamic resolution scaling significantly improves system performance by increasing FPS and reducing VRAM consumption. The slight decrease in image quality (as indicated by the SSIM score) is generally acceptable, especially in applications where real-time performance, such as in gaming or VR, is critical. This experiment demonstrates that dynamic resolution scaling can offer substantial performance gains with minimal impact on visual fidelity, making it a valuable technique for optimizing real-time rendering applications.

5. Extended Analysis of Ray Tracing and Rasterization Techniques

To better understand the real-world application of ray tracing and rasterization, an additional column is added to the comparative table. This column outlines specific scenarios where each technique is most suitable, aiding readers in understanding when to apply one technique over the other.

5.1. Comparative Table of Ray Tracing and Rasterization with Real-World Use Cases

Table 4 *A detailed comparison of ray tracing and rasterization, illustrating distinctions in image quality, performance, memory consumption, and hardware requirements, with specific real-world applications tailored to each rendering technique.*

Metric	Ray Tracing	Rasterization	Real-World Use Case
Image Quality	High fidelity with realistic shadows, reflections, and refractions. Handles complex light interactions naturally.	Moderate quality. Uses approximations for shadows and reflections. Suitable for less complex light interactions.	Ray tracing is ideal for film production (CGI), architectural visualization, and photorealistic simulations.
Performance (FPS)	Computationally expensive, requiring significant processing power.	Much faster, optimized for real-time rendering, commonly used in gaming engines.	Rasterization excels in real-time applications such as video games and VR experiences where high FPS is crucial.
Real-Time Capability	Limited in real-time without heavy optimizations. Requires high-end GPUs.	Ideal for real-time applications due to its speed and efficiency, suitable for a wider range of hardware.	Ray tracing can be used in high-end games with RTX hardware; rasterization is standard for mobile and console games.
Memory Usage	High memory consumption due to large light path data and calculations.	Lower memory usage, simpler geometric data, relies on approximations.	Ray tracing's memory demand makes it suitable for architectural renderings where image accuracy is paramount.

Metric	Ray Tracing	Rasterization	Real-World Use Case
Lighting Calculation	Accurate, physically based simulation of global illumination, reflections, and indirect lighting.	Approximate lighting calculations based on pre-baked solutions like light maps.	Rasterization is used in VR gaming where low latency is needed, while ray tracing is best for realistic VFX.
Hardware Requirements	Requires high-performance hardware with RT cores (e.g., NVIDIA RTX, AMD RDNA2).	Can run on a wide range of hardware, including lower-end GPUs and integrated graphics.	High-end gaming PCs for ray tracing, mobile and budget hardware for rasterization.

As illustrated in table 4, ray tracing's higher visual fidelity and precise light simulation make it ideal for industries where photorealism is the priority, such as CGI in movies or architectural visualizations. In contrast, rasterization's speed and lower resource demands make it the preferred option for real-time applications, such as video games or interactive simulations.

5.2. Analysis of Dynamic Resolution in Other Applications Beyond VR

While dynamic resolution scaling (DRS) is particularly beneficial in virtual reality (VR) environments, its application can be extended to other industries that require real-time performance and high image fidelity.

1. Industrial simulations - in complex industrial simulations, where real-time tracking of machinery, production lines, or logistics is critical, dynamic resolution can help maintain high performance without sacrificing critical visual details. This ensures that important components are rendered clearly, while less crucial areas are downscaled to reduce computational load.
2. Architectural visualizations - in architectural renderings, dynamic resolution can optimize system resources by adjusting resolution based on the viewer's focus. For example, the primary focus, such as intricate building details, can be rendered in higher resolution, while peripheral views are dynamically downscaled. This allows for smooth navigation without compromising visual accuracy.

In these scenarios, dynamic resolution scaling demonstrates its ability to maintain performance while still offering acceptable image quality. This approach optimizes resource allocation, making it applicable across various real-time rendering tasks outside of VR.

5.3. Contribution to Process Improvement: Resolution and Performance

The main contribution of this study is the insight into how resolution scaling can significantly improve performance with minimal loss in visual fidelity. By demonstrating how dynamic resolution scaling optimizes rendering processes in real-time applications, this research provides a framework for further exploration into resource management.

This optimization process can serve as a reference for future studies that focus on real-time rendering improvements in VR, gaming, architectural visualization, and industrial simulations. Future research can explore advanced dynamic resolution techniques to further enhance performance without compromising critical visual elements.

5.4. Potential Limitations of Dynamic Resolution Scaling

Despite its benefits, dynamic resolution scaling does present limitations, especially in cases where extreme visual detail is required. For instance, in medical imaging or precision component design, downscaling might obscure critical details, affecting the accuracy of the simulation or rendering. Additionally, in certain high-detail scenes, downscaling resolution too aggressively could negatively impact the user experience. In these scenarios, careful calibration of the resolution scaling parameters is essential to ensure that the trade-off between performance and quality remains acceptable.

5.5. Technical Discussion: Comparison of Ray Tracing Algorithms

Expanding the technical section of the thesis, we can include a comparison of different ray tracing algorithms to explore their impact on performance in real-time applications.

•Path Tracing - this algorithm accurately simulates the paths of light rays as they bounce around a scene, offering superior visual realism but at a high computational cost. Path racing is often used in movie production and CGI where photorealism is more important than real-time performance.
•Whitted-Style Ray Tracing - this simpler form of ray tracing focuses on direct reflections and refractions, making it faster than path tracing. While it provides lower fidelity, it is better suited for interactive graphics and games where performance is a critical factor.

In the context of VR, path tracing offers unmatched realism but requires significantly more computational power, while Whitted-style ray tracing can achieve acceptable visual quality with better performance.

6. Conclusion

This thesis has explored the application and implementation of advanced rendering techniques, specifically ray tracing, in creating photorealistic scenes and integrating them into virtual reality (VR) environments. Ray tracing, with its ability to accurately simulate light-object interactions, has demonstrated its capacity to significantly enhance visual fidelity by providing realistic effects such as shadows, reflections, and refractions. However, as shown in the practical part, these improvements come with considerable challenges in real-time applications due to the high computational demands of ray tracing.

Through the development and implementation of key elements such as ray-object intersection algorithms and global illumination within the Unity Engine, this research has shown that while ray tracing can achieve high-quality visuals, the performance trade-offs in VR environments can be substantial. The need for real-time rendering in VR applications imposes significant performance constraints, particularly in maintaining a high frame rate to ensure user comfort. Optimizations such as adaptive rendering, level of detail (LOD), and dynamic resolution scaling were explored as potential solutions to balance performance and visual quality.

In the experimental section, dynamic resolution scaling was examined as an effective method for improving performance without severely compromising image quality. By adjusting resolution based on system load, it was demonstrated that frame rates could be significantly improved while maintaining acceptable visual fidelity, as measured by the Structural Similarity Index Measure (SSIM). While the image quality slightly decreased, the gains in FPS and reduced VRAM

consumption made dynamic resolution scaling an appealing approach for real-time applications, particularly in gaming and VR.

In summary, this study concludes that while ray tracing represents the pinnacle of visual realism in computer graphics, its integration into real-time VR systems is limited by current hardware constraints. Dynamic resolution scaling presents a practical solution for mitigating performance issues, offering a balance between visual quality and system efficiency. The findings of this research suggest that continued advancements in GPU technology and further optimizations in rendering algorithms are necessary to fully realize the potential of ray tracing in real-time VR applications. Future work could explore the integration of hybrid approaches, where ray tracing is selectively applied to critical elements of a scene, further improving performance while maintaining high visual fidelity.

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