

Camera Space Shadow Maps for Large Virtual Environments

Ivica Kolić¹ · Zeljka Mihajlovic²

Abstract This paper presents a new single-pass shadow mapping technique that achieves better quality than the approaches based on perspective warping, such as perspective, light-space and trapezoidal shadow maps. The proposed technique is appropriate for real-time rendering of large virtual environments that include dynamic objects. By performing operations in camera space, this solution successfully handles the general and the dueling frustum cases, and produces high-quality shadows even for extremely large scenes. This paper also presents a fast non-linear projection technique for shadow map stretching that enables complete utilization of the shadow map by eliminating wastage. The application of stretching results in a significant reduction in unwanted perspective aliasing, commonly found in all shadow mapping techniques. Technique is compared with other shadow mapping techniques, and the benefits of the proposed method are presented. The proposed shadow mapping technique is simple and flexible enough to handle most of the special scenarios. An API for a generic shadow mapping solution is presented. This API simplifies the generation of fast and high-quality shadows.

Keywords: Shadow maps, Real-time shadows, Dynamic shadows, Virtual environments

1 Introduction

A shadow is one of the most important elements for achieving realism in virtual environments. Over the years, many real-time shadow-generation approaches have been developed. The most well-known approaches are fake and planar shadows, shadow volumes (Crow 1977), and shadow mapping (Williams 1978).

This paper primarily focuses on the shadow mapping technique that is recognized as the most important shadow generation tool today because of its simplicity, generality, and predictability. The basic shadow mapping principle involves two steps. In the first step, the shadow map is generated by storing the depth of the scene from the point of view of the light. In the second step, the scene is rendered regularly; however, for every drawn pixel, the shadow map is consulted to determine whether that particular pixel is directly visible to the light. This is accomplished by comparing the distance of the shadow map from the light with the distance of the pixel (depth) from the light.

In this paper, we will present a new shadow mapping approach, termed camera space shadow maps (CSSM). This approach acquires the shadow map in a simple manner by directly using a camera. We will also describe a method for the maximum utilization of the shadow map to prevent wastage and significantly reduce the perspective aliasing of the shadow near the camera.

The organization of the remainder of this paper is as follows: Previous work in the area of shadow mapping is summarised in Section 2, while the new CSSM approach is described in Section 3. Section 4 presents a novel pixel-accurate shadow map stretching technique. In Section 5, the experimental results are discussed, and the new CSSM approach is compared with other approaches. Details of the

¹ Ivica Kolić
Systemcom d.o.o.
mail: ivica.kolic@systemcom.hr

² Zeljka Mihajlovic
University of Zagreb, Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing, Croatia
Unska 3, 10 000 Zagreb, Croatia
mail: zeljka.mihajlovic@fer.hr

generic shadow mapping API (Kolic 2010) are provided in Section 6, while section 7 presents the conclusions and future work.

2 Previous Work

Shadow mapping techniques can be classified as single-pass and multi-pass approaches, based on the number of passes required to create the shadow map. Single-pass approaches are fast and less demanding; however, in general, they cannot be used for large-scale environments because it is difficult to achieve good shadow map distribution for both near and distant shadows. Several approaches such as perspective shadow maps (PSM) (Stamminger and Drettakis 2002; Kozlov 2004), light space shadow maps (LiSPSM) (Wimmer et al. 2004), trapezoidal shadow maps (TSM) (Martin and Tan 2004, Martin 2008), and soft shadow maps (Mo et al. 2007) have been developed to address this issue. However, a single-

3 Camera space shadow maps

The aim of this paper is to provide the first complete shadow mapping solution that, in a single pass, always produces the highest quality shadow map for any type of light/scene/camera and various special cases. In theory, the highest-quality shadow map would be achieved if every pixel on the screen has exactly one corresponding texel in the shadow map. This level of quality can only be achieved by ray tracing. Hence, in this paper, a considerably simpler definition is used: the highest shadow mapping quality is achieved when the resulting shadow map is completely free of wastage, and every texel is reserved exclusively for shadow passing through visible space.

The shadow mapping solution must also provide an easy method to control distance-based shadow distribution. This can be implemented by allowing the specification of a distance value for which a certain percentage of the shadow map should be reserved. For example, the shadow within 20 m from the camera should occupy 50% of the shadow map. This cannot be achieved using linear transformation.

Existing perspective warping approaches (such as TSM and LiSPSM) were designed primarily for the general case, and they cannot efficiently handle complex dueling frustum cases and various other possible lighting conditions. Therefore, a new, more generic approach will be presented, in which it is easy to perceive the configuration to be used for special cases, such as dueling frustum, camera without far clipping and the most difficult case of the large omnidirectional light located within visible space.

pass robust solution capable of handling most of the special cases has not yet been proposed. Multi-pass approaches, on the other hand, are widely used today due to their ability to provide good-quality shadows in most of the special cases (such as dueling frustum). In these approaches, the scene is split into smaller segments for which individual shadow maps are acquired and applied. The main disadvantages of these approaches are low speed, high memory consumption, and discontinuity in shadow quality in the region where separate shadow maps connect. Hence, their usage is mainly reserved for scenes with only one dominant light, such as the Sun. Two popular multi-pass approaches are cascaded shadow maps (Dimitrov 2007) and parallel split shadow maps (Zhang et al. 2006). A detailed description of shadow mapping approaches can be found in Nealen (2002) and King (2004).

3.1 Construction of shadow map

The main principle of perspective warping-based approaches involves treating geometry with the projections of both camera and light. Thus, a shadow closer to the camera gets more shadow map space. The goal must be decided on the basis of the manner in which regular geometry is treated by the camera. The goal must be to transform shadow mapping geometry into camera space, using the camera matrix for shadow map warping. However, it is not possible to simply transform, rotate, and scale geometry because this would cause loss of light occlusion and depth information. Depth information is not very relevant because it can always be calculated separately in a vertex or even pixel shader, but the preservation of occlusion information is essential. We, however, made the following observation: If shadow casting geometry is projected on any arbitrary plane, the limitations on translation, rotation, and scaling are avoided, and the geometry can be transformed into camera space without losing occlusion information. Once the geometry is in camera space, perspective warping occurs automatically.

Fig. 1 demonstrates a new, simple method for acquiring the shadow of the entire visible space using only one projection plane and the camera itself. Projection plane P is placed such that it touches the lower point of the viewing frustum at the near clipping distance and the opposite point at the far clipping distance. However, today, a common scenario involves rendering of enormous scenes where far clipping is not done at all. In this case, the shadow plane should be parallel with the appropriate side of the view frustum, as shown in the figure. Fig. 1 also suggests that if a light is located slightly in front of the viewer, the starting point for the plane should be the upper point of the viewing frustum at the near clipping distance.

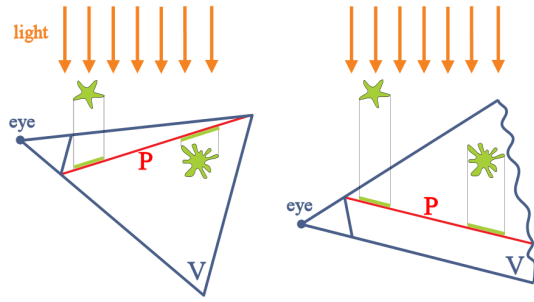


Fig. 1. Basic principle of CSSM. The projective plane P is located within the view frustum V . The case with the limited view frustum is shown on the left. When the view frustum is not far clipped (right), the projective plane is parallel to the side of the view frustum.

The dueling frustum case is shown in Fig. 2. From the figure on the left, it is clearly visible that a single projection plane cannot provide good shadow projection into visible space, and hence, multiple planes must be used, as shown in the figure on the right. In the 2D representation shown in the figure, only two planes are used; however, in the actual 3D case, four projective planes are required (top, bottom, left, and right).

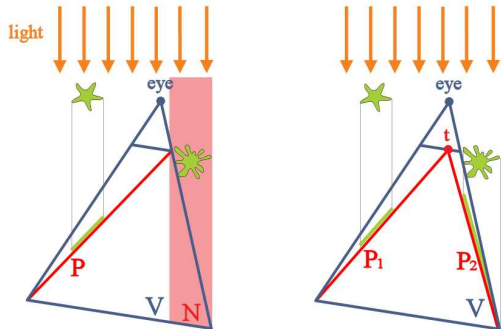


Fig. 2. The dueling frustum case cannot be solved with only one plane (left), where the unshadowed area is marked as N . The correct approach requires multiple planes with a common point t , as shown on the right.

As seen from the figures, various shadow mapping operations are performed in camera space and the camera itself is used to capture the shadow map. This is in contradiction with all other shadow mapping approaches where the shadow map is exclusively captured from the point of view of the light. The proposed approach is therefore appropriately termed camera space shadow maps (CSSM).

In the general case, CSSM is acquired in the following manner:

- Rotate (roll) the camera around its Z -axis so that the light always originates from above (as shown in Fig. 1).

- Change the FOV (Field of view) angles of the rotated camera so that the entire view frustum of the original camera can fit within the new view frustum.
- Design a plane that passes through the two lower points of the near clipping plane and the two upper points of the far clipping plane, as shown in Fig. 1. If the source of light is located slightly in front of the camera, opposite points should be used and the FOV angle of the X -axis of the camera must be slightly increased, so that the plane seen from the point of view of the light covers the entire view frustum.
- Light-project shadow casting geometry on the constructed plane.
- Use the projection matrix of the rotated camera to acquire the shadow map.

In the dueling frustum case, CSSM is acquired in the following manner:

- Determine a point on a near clipping plane by applying the projection of the camera on the position/direction of the source of light.
- Construct four planes that cross through the acquired point and all the edges of the far clipping plane.
- Light-project geometry on the projective planes using geometry shader. For each projective plane, a projected triangle must be created with clipping distances of two neighbouring planes set at every vertex. Thus, the clipper will remove unnecessary geometry, and the geometry shader will always generate a predictive number of triangles as output.
- Use the camera projection matrix to acquire the shadow map.

3.2 Distribution of shadow map

A close examination of Fig. 1 reveals a problem commonly found in all perspective warping approaches: approximately half of the shadow map is allocated for the shadow that resides within the near clipping distance (n) from the start of the viewing frustum. An example is as follows:

- Near clipping occurs at 0.2 m (n)
- Far clipping occurs at 1000 m (f).

In this example, the first half of the shadow map is reserved for a very small shadow located between 0.2 and 0.4 m from the camera: $[n, 2n]$, and the second half of the shadow map is reserved for an enormous shadow area located between 0.4 and 1000 m: $<2n, f]$.

Almost every approach (PSM, TSM, LiSPSM) addresses this problem of near shadow oversampling by moving the camera backward, thus increasing the near clipping distance. The effect of this method can be observed in Fig. 3.

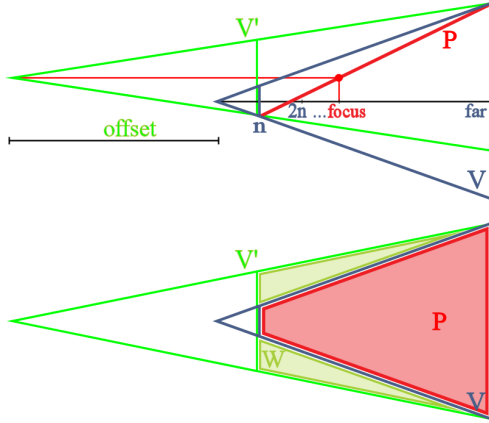


Fig. 3. View frustum V replaced with the view frustum V' seen from a side and top. V' is introduced so that the lower half of the shadow map would be reserved for the shadow residing within the focus region. Wastage W is introduced.

As seen in Fig. 3, the focus region is introduced as a controlling distance for which half of the shadow map should be reserved (along the Y-axis). The new view frustum V' is then constructed by adjusting the position of the camera, moving it backward and upward, and thus, appropriately narrowing the viewing angle to avoid wastage along the Y-axis.

In the general case with a single plane, the camera must be pushed backward and in the upward direction. In the dueling frustum case, however, the camera need not be pushed backward (although it can be). Instead, point t could be pushed forward in the direction of light, so that it resides within the focus region with respect to the camera. Hence, the focus region would be applied, and the appropriate planar distribution would be preserved. If point t is simply pushed forward, regardless of the direction of light, every plane would get an almost equal share of the shadow map, which is not desired. It is important to note that for the dueling frustum case, the focus region has a different meaning, but the general idea remains the same: a larger focus region results in more shadow map for distant geometry and less shadow map for near geometry. The focus region itself is an application-dependent constant, which should be in the range of 10 to 20 m, 50 to 100 m, and 500 m and more for first-person games, racing simulations, and flight simulations, respectively.

The negative effect of pushing the camera backward can be observed in the lower part of Fig. 3, where the scene is observed from the top. Distance-based (Y-axis) distribution of shadow maps has been corrected at the cost of width-based (X-axis) distribution and wastage W has been introduced. The wastage problem is greatest at the shadow near the camera, where shadow aliasing is introduced. This is solvable only by increasing the X-resolution of the shadow map. Although near

shadow quality is significantly improved by perspective warping approaches, the wastage introduced prevents perfect pixel-accurate results and introduces aliasing. Near shadow is oversampled along the Y-axis and undersampled along the X-axis. In case of the far shadow, the problem is reversed. Along the X-axis, the shadow map is completely utilized; however, this is not beneficial because the shadow map is greatly undersampled along the Y-axis. This ratio, where the Y-axis distribution is corrected at the expense of the X-axis distribution, is common to all shadow mapping approaches, and no linear transformation will ever achieve better results.

Wastage is caused due to the fact that after the camera is moved backward, near geometry is divided by a much larger number ($offset + z$, instead of just z) in the perspective process. One approach to resolve this problem is to deform the geometry in a vertex shader by scaling the X-axis of the projected geometry by the factor $z/(z + offset)$. This approach works only for highly tessellated geometry, which is not a general case. Hence, the most obvious solution is to use tessellation hardware. However, our experiments performed with DirectX 11 tessellation have shown that this problem cannot be efficiently solved by hardware tessellation due to two primary reasons:

- High tessellation required for correct shadow map stretching is extremely slow.
- Large polygons, mostly used for terrain and buildings, cannot be sufficiently tessellated. Even a maximal tessellation factor of 64 is not sufficient for these polygons; therefore, it appears that there is no feasible solution.

4 Pixel-accurate shadow map stretching

In this section, a new shadow map stretching approach is presented. Nonlinear transformation required to stretch the shadow map is generally considered as a very difficult problem that can only be solved using tessellation hardware. However, we present a new approach that achieves fast pixel-accurate shadow map stretching using only the features available in DirectX 10-compatible hardware.

To summarize, a triangle must be stretched by applying the factor $(z + offset)/z$ to each of its pixels. Fig. 4 shows the effect of this process. On the left, a simple triangle is shown; the stretching factor is applied to the vertices of this triangle. In the middle, a highly tessellated version of the same triangle is shown, in which the effect of the resulting stretching is clearly visible. Fig. 4. suggests a method for achieving triangle stretching using a quad. Using the original triangle, a quad that is large enough to contain the distorted triangle is generated.

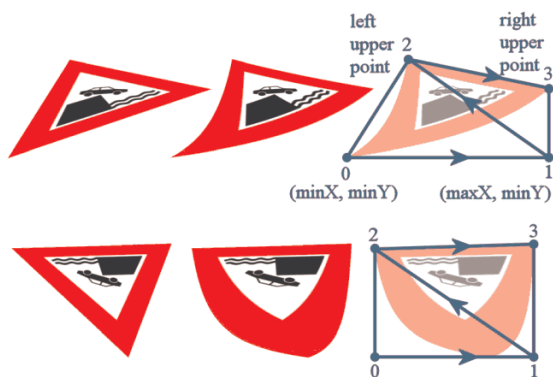


Fig. 4. Triangle stretching is achieved by generating a quad that is large enough to contain the distorted triangle. Each pixel of the quad is tested to determine if it lies within the original triangle.

The easiest method to construct an appropriate quad is to detect the minimal and maximal projection positions and the upper left and right projection points, as shown in the figure. This approach also works for a quad when the triangle is clipped by a near clipping plane.

If each pixel of a quad is transformed back in the space of the original (undistorted) triangle and tested to determine if it lies within the original triangle, then, pixel-accurate stretching is achieved. This is tested by calculating the barycentric UV coordinates, which are also beneficial for correct texture coordinate interpolation when bit-masking is used (for rendering plants, fences, etc.). This process results in fast and pixel-accurate stretching that completely eliminates shadow map wastage.

The actual process of testing whether pixel p lies within the original triangle is shown in Fig. 5. After z is determined using only the y -coordinate of the pixel, the correct (unstretched) x -coordinate and the accompanying point p' on a projection plane can be determined. The next step involves projecting point p' on point p'' located on the plane of the original triangle, using the simple line vs. plane test. Then, the perspective-correct UV coordinates can be determined, and the actual test can be performed: stretched pixel p belongs to the triangle if the UV coordinates are positive and their sum is smaller than 1. At this point, perspective-correct texture coordinates can be interpolated if necessary, for potential bit masking. Although this appears to be a complicated process, the resulting pixel shader script contains only a few lines of code since all the complex calculations are performed only once per triangle within the geometry shader.

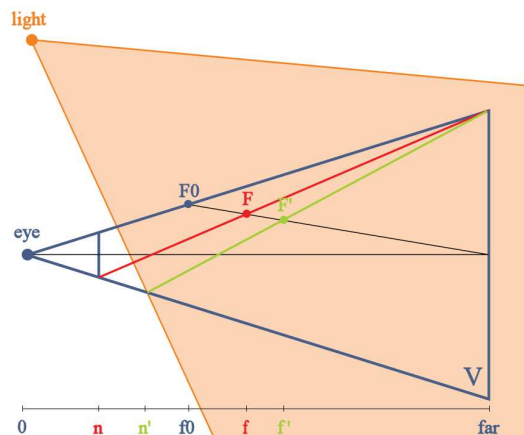


Fig. 5. Determining if pixel p belongs to the stretched triangle T . After z is determined, the correction factor for the X -axis is easy to calculate.

It is also important to note that pixel stretching is only necessary for shadow triangles that are near the camera. As the distance of the triangles from the camera increases, the apparent effect of the deformation decreases. In fact, beyond a certain distance (dependent on the focus range and triangle size), pixel accurate stretching is not needed since the deformation effect is not noticeable, and shaders can switch to the regular approach in which stretching is implemented only on vertex basis. The triangles that are situated at a sufficiently large distance should be marked in geometry shader. This will enable pixel shader to be aware that simple implementation should be used. In this case, the output of the geometry shader is the original triangle and not the quad.

This action is very important because it significantly decreases the creation time of the shadow map, and pixel-accurate stretching is performed only for a few triangles that cast a shadow near the camera.

When the X -axis distribution is fixed, bad perspective aliasing near the camera is reduced significantly. Along the X -axis, the shadow map is completely utilized and additional increase of shadow map resolution would not yield better results (except at highly angled surfaces). At this point, the Y -axis distribution is a major problem, since the entire length of the scene must be fitted on it. Hence, we propose the usage of longer but narrower shadow maps to ensure that the fill rate remains unchanged, while there is a significant improvement in the general shadow quality. This will add slight near shadow aliasing. If the usage of additional shadow map is not desired, the existing shadow map should at least be rotated in the perspective process to allow the longer side of the shadow map to be reserved for the Y -axis (distance distribution). It is important to note that shadow map stretching is not applied in the dueling frustum case, where the shadow map is already fully utilized.

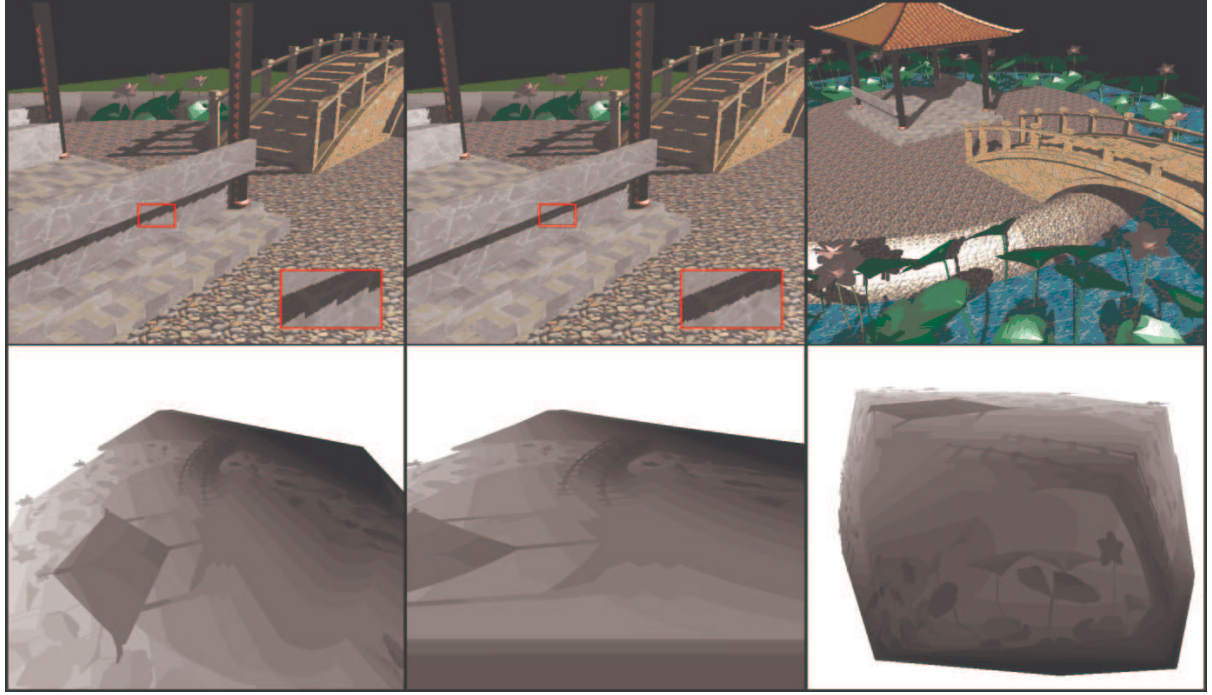


Fig. 6. Comparison between general case for TSM (left) and CSSM (centre) techniques. Dueling frustum CSSM case is shown on the right. Accompanying shadow maps are shown below. The scene is a ‘Pavilion Garden’.

The effects of pixel-accurate shadow map stretching are:

- Near shadow quality is significantly improved by eliminating wastage.
- Far shadow quality is improved by increase in the Y-axis resolution.

5 Experimental results

In this section, tests are performed to determine the speed of the newly proposed approach, and comparisons with other perspective warping approaches are shown. The results obtained in this section will help us to choose the optimal approaches for the generic shadow mapping API.

The most important difference between TSM and CSSM is shown in Fig. 6. Due to pixel-accurate stretching, CSSM provides better solutions for near shadow. Unbiased comparison between TSM and CSSM was ensured in the case where the focus region was equalized. It is obvious that without stretching, both approaches would produce an almost identical result. The dueling frustum case for TSM is not shown because this approach is not designed to work in scenes that are presumed to be large. Here, scene analysis was not done and small 640×640 shadow maps were used to easily observe the effect of aliasing.

The performance was tested using an ATI Radeon HD 5770 graphics card, at a rendering resolution of 640×640 pixels, using the palm tree model

consisting of 10624 triangles, as shown in Fig. 7. The scene was rendered from two angles to capture view from first person (FPS) for the general and the dueling frustum cases at different shadow map resolutions, since the usage of large shadow maps is common. The general case was tested with and without pixel-accurate stretching. The reference frame rate is provided for the case when there is no lighting in order to facilitate the evaluation of the amount of time taken by regular deferred rendering passes. The frame rates are specified in Table 1 and Fig. 7.

From Table 1, the fictive frame rate can be calculated exclusively for shadow map rendering. This data is shown in Table 2.

From table 2, we can conclude that at higher shadow map resolutions, pixel-accurate shadow map stretching is approximately three times slower than the approach without stretching (one plane or TSM). However, in Fig. 8, the improvement in shadow quality is substantial when stretching is used. The dueling frustum case shows very good shadow quality and high speed when a single plane is used. This proves that an increase in geometry shader activity (or instancing) caused by the usage of multiple projection planes has no significant effect on performance but has a significant effect on quality. This result was expected and it can be attributed to the same reason that results in fast cube mapping: unnecessary triangles are instantly clipped.

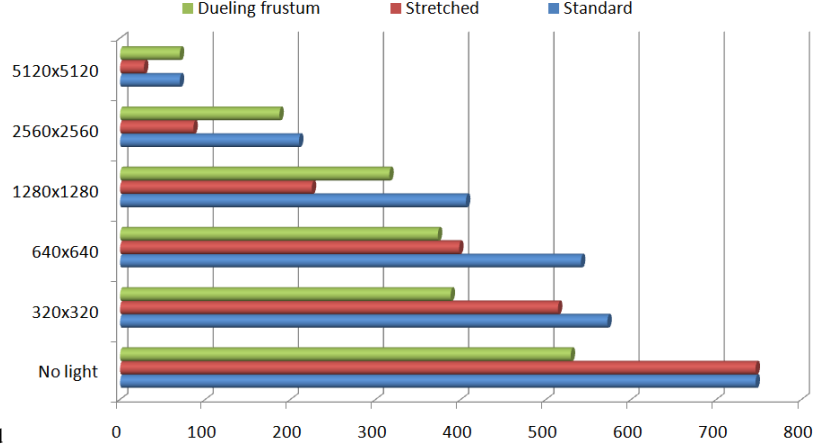


Fig. 7. Testing results in frames per second

Table 1 Testing results in FPS for different shadow map resolutions

Shadow map resolution	Standard	Stretched	Dueling frustum
No light	746	746	529
320 × 320	572	514	388
640 × 640	541	398	373
1280 × 1280	406	225	316
2560 × 2560	210	86	187
5120 × 5120	70	28	70

Table 2. Fictive frame rate for shadow rendering only (acquiring and applying).

Shadow resolution	map	Standard	Stretched	Dueling frustum
No light	0	0	0	0
320 × 320	2452	1653	1456	
640 × 640	1969	853	1265	
1280 × 1280	891	322	785	
2560 × 2560	292	97	289	
5120 × 5120	77	29	81	

The next important analysis is the comparison between the time taken to render and apply the shadow map and the time required for regular rendering passes. This information represents the increase in rendering time for every new source of light and it is shown in Table 3.

From Table 3, the most interesting observation is that the dueling frustum case with four planes shows better results than the standard case with only one plane. This can be attributed to the fact that, in the general case, the palm tree is not entirely drawn, thus speeding up regular rendering as opposed to shadow map rendering. In the dueling frustum case, approximately the same

amount of geometry is rendered in every rendering pass.

From the test results, it can be concluded that using multiple projection planes is not more expensive than using a single projection plane. Hence, our generic shadow mapping API can be based on this principle. Shadow map stretching, although fast, is still several times slower than the multiple plane solution.

6 Generic shadow mapping API

In this section, we will describe the methodology for applying the new shadow mapping approach for every light type. We will also explain the approach for handling many complex scenarios. When implemented, the process of achieving computer-generated shadows, once considered extremely difficult, becomes trivial. The API handles each type of light as described below:

6.1 Directional light

Directional light is the simplest case, and all the details for this scenario have been described in the previous sections of this paper. Two main approaches were used: one for the general case, and the other for the dueling frustum and border case. Note that for the border case, the camera is initially slightly rotated towards the light before FOV is appended, in order to avoid wastage.

6.2 Spot light

Spot light, however, presented a more challenging problem. Standard (simple) shadow mapping was used in every case when the light source was located near the camera, or in front of the camera facing the forward direction. In these cases, complex camera space approaches were not needed because standard shadow mapping offers satisfactory quality.

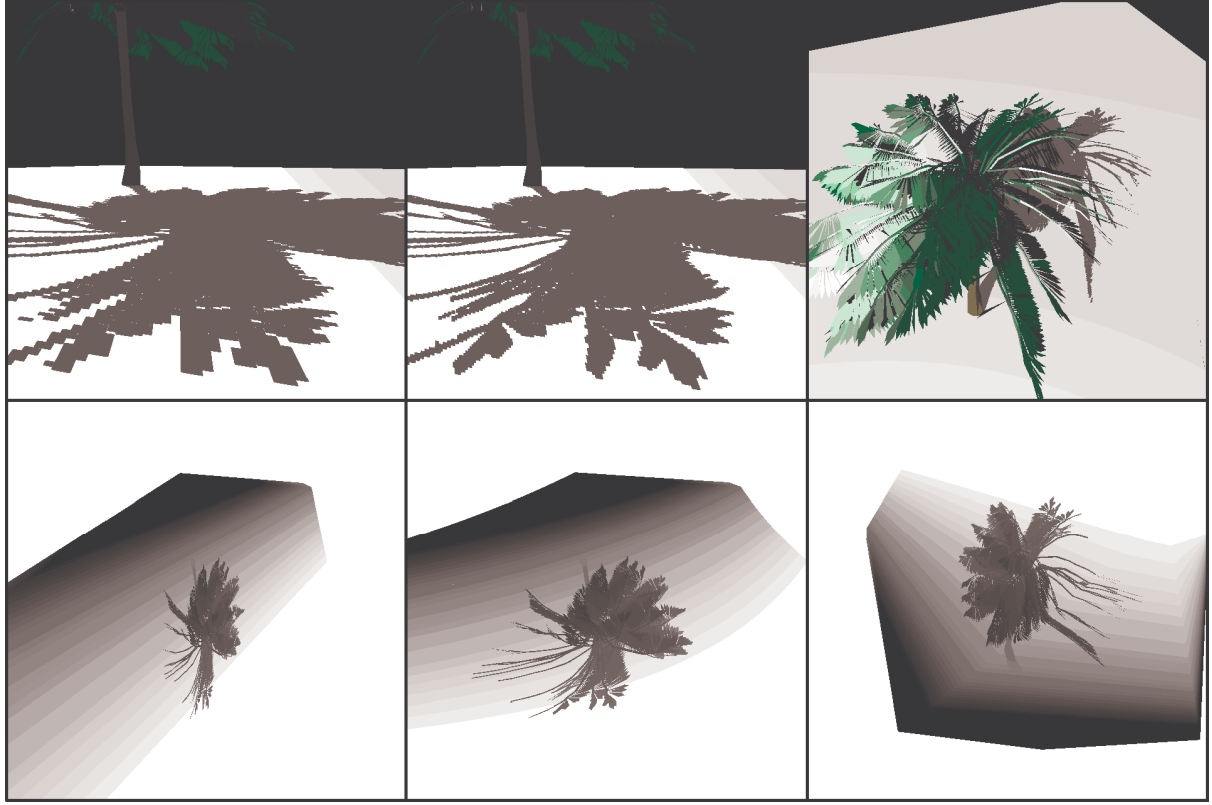


Fig. 8. Testing model of a palm tree. TSM case that contains wastage is shown on the left. Middle shows CSSM approach that performs pixel-accurate shadow map stretching. Dueling frustum CSSM case is shown on the right. In every case shadow map resolution was 640×640 .

Table 3. Percentage increase in rendering time for every new source of light at different shadow map resolutions.

Shadow map resolution	Standard	Stretched	Dueling frustum
No light	0	0	0
320×320	30.42	45.14	36.34
640×640	37.89	87.44	41.82
1280×1280	83.74	231.56	67.41
2560×2560	255.24	767.44	182.89
5120×5120	965.71	2564.29	655.71

Compared to directional light camera space shadow mapping, spot light required some modification. Near and far clipping distances had to be recalculated by intersecting visible frustum at the appropriate points. Fig. 8 shows a situation where the camera origin is not lighted. In this case, a new focus range must be recalculated to prevent unnecessary wastage. Therefore, the new near clipping is done at n' and not n . In this case, the original focus range f is replaced with the corresponding focus range f' . Parameter f_0

represents the theoretical focus range in the absence of near clipping, and serves as a reference. In most implementations, this range can be considered to be equal to f because the near clipping distance n is very small. The approximate new focus range is now calculated as:

$$f' = (1 - n' / far')f + n'$$

In addition, in certain scenarios, depending on the angle and direction of the light, dueling frustum can be handled as a general case. This occurs when light is positioned in the dueling frustum area but the origin of the camera is not lighted due to the direction of light.

6.3 Omnidirectional light

Omnidirectional light was the most challenging case. The following approaches were used:

- General case with one plane for every non-dueling frustum case.
- Dueling frustum with four planes when light is located behind the camera.
- Special dueling frustum with eight planes when light is located in front of the camera.

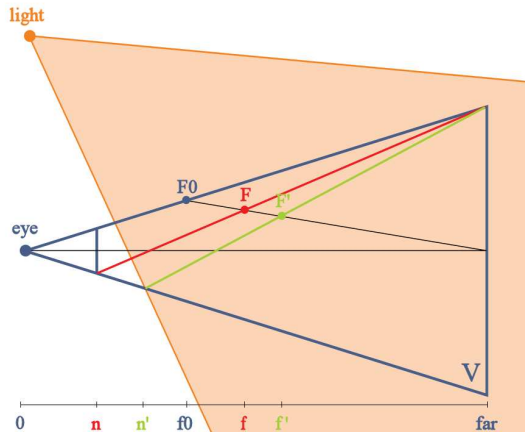


Fig. 9. Fixing the focus region. If camera is not lighted, alternative near clipping is done at n' with corresponding focus range f' .

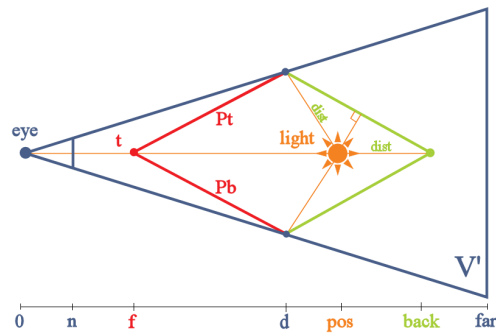


Fig. 10. Most problematic omnidirectional light case where eight planes are used.

- Simple projection on four sides of a tetrahedron when the light source is small or is very near the camera.

The special dueling frustum case is shown in Fig. 10. It is the most difficult case, which combines dueling frustum CSSM approach with four additional back projection planes. Initially, we used CSSM for front and back planes. However, although the resulting shadow quality was excellent for near and far shadows, it was bad for medium distance shadow. Hence, we decided to use CSSM for front planes and standard shadow mapping for back planes. The distance d where CSSM ends and standard shadow mapping begins is calculated so that the shadow quality at the endpoint of CSSM approach is the same as the standard shadow mapping quality of the back planes (note that standard shadow mapping quality is uniform over the entire back plane and it does not change as CSSM quality does).

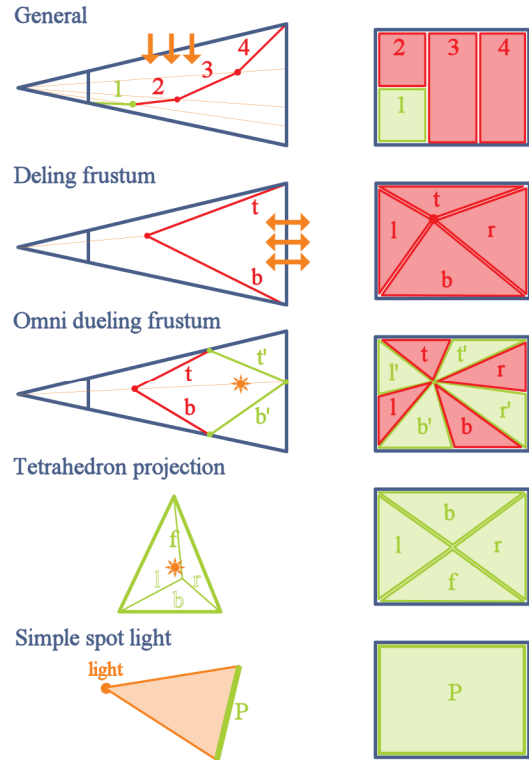


Fig. 11. Shadow map organization for various special cases. For the general case, long and narrow effect is achieved by splitting shadow map into columns. Green projection planes indicate the usage of standard shadow mapping, while red planes represent the usage of CSSM approach.

Simple projection on four planes of tetrahedron is used for the case when small light sources are located within the viewing frustum.

6.4 API implementation

It is necessary for the API to satisfy the following constraints:

- The usage should be extremely simple (even simpler than standard shadow mapping) so that the main API function can be implemented in standard graphic libraries (DirectX, OpenGL) and everyone will have access to high quality shadows out-of-the-box.
- The API should also be very fast (single-pass) having a speed measurable with standard shadow mapping, but with better quality.
- Only one shadow map should be used for various cases and an additional depth buffer should not be required (so that the memory usage remains minimal).

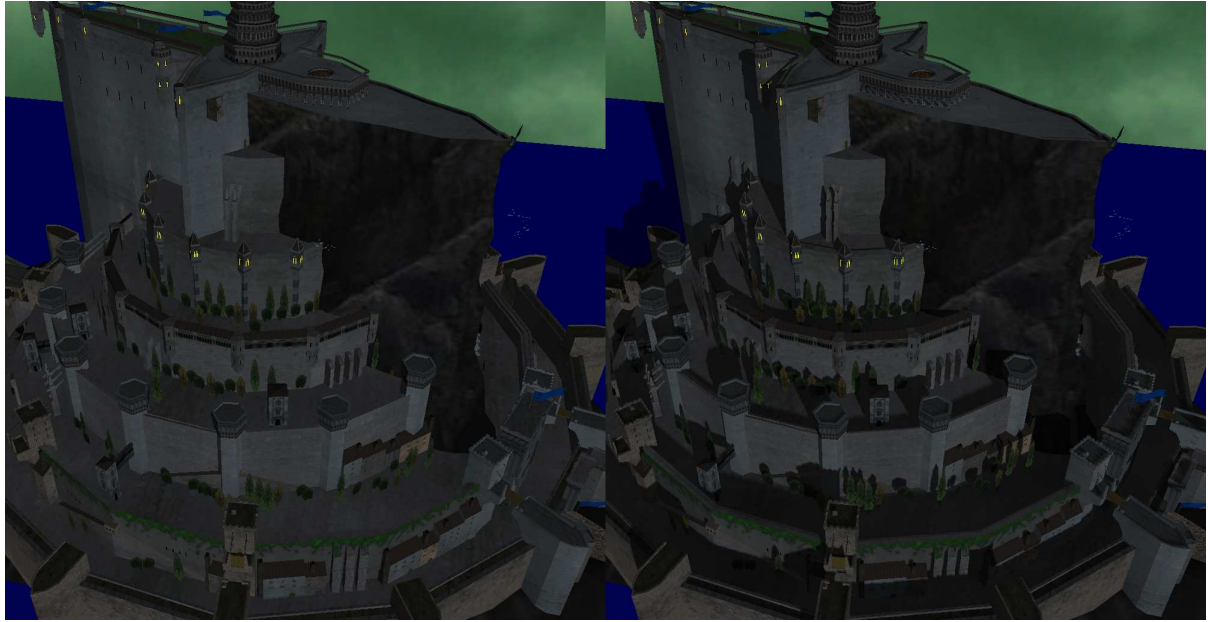


Fig. 12. Large scene of Citadel is presented without shadows (left) and with CSSM shadows (right)

- The API should work even on DirectX 9 hardware.
- The shader implementation should be minimal and easy to incorporate in the existing rendering systems.

Due to the introduction of the DirectX 9 constraint, the general cases for all the light types were implemented using multiple planes, as shown in Fig. 11. However, we noted that after the elimination of wastage, the shadow map used should be long and narrow. This is in contradiction with the constraint related to shadow map count and size, which meant that after planar projection, pieces of the shadow map should be rearranged for the regular-sized shadow map to appear like a long and narrow one (shadow map was split into multiple columns). Every special case approach, except the standard dueling frustum, required the rearrangement of projections within the shadow map, and some form of clip biasing so that errors in the region where different projections meet would not be visible. The placement and clipping of projection planes for all considered approaches is shown in Fig. 11. The API implementation consists of a single function stored in a dynamic linked library (CSSM.dll), and it is available in Kolic (2010). Figure 12 depicts a large scene with and without shadows.

7 Conclusion

Shadow mapping has evolved greatly over the last few decades and can be considered to have reached its peak. Simply stated, no linear transformation will ever be good enough to create better shadow mapping; hence, there is a need for an alternative solution using non-linear transformations or multiple plane projections.

A new perspective shadow map warping approach has been presented, which is simple and flexible enough to handle most of the special cases (compared to TSM and LiSPSM, which are designed only for the general case).

A new non-linear transformation system based on the idea of generating quads that are large enough to contain the distorted triangles and performing checks in pixel shader has been presented.

The generic shadow mapping API solution was implemented in a single pass in order to minimize the expensive render call and changes to render targets. In rare situations requiring multiple instances of geometry, the fastest available methods such as geometry shader and instancing were used. The API satisfied the four main constraints: single-pass, single shadow map (without z-buffer), highest quality (in the form of complete shadow map utilization), and arbitrary distance distribution. All these qualities make the API suitable for implementation in standard graphic libraries such as DirectX and OpenGL and for presentation of virtual worlds in real-time.

CSSM works well in situations where objects are evenly distributed around the camera (typical for FPS games). However, in some situations, such as flight, where terrain is observed from a great height, CSSM will not perform very well because most of the shadow map will be used for the empty space between the camera and the ground. Varying the focus range based on distance from the ground would greatly improve quality; however, in this case, the ideal solution would be to use the plane of the ground for shadow projection, which is similar to the ideas presented by Chong and Gortler (2004). Therefore, future work could involve extending the API to accept information about dominant surface in the scene, and deciding whether to reserve parts of the shadow map for this type of projection. Further optimization would involve implementation of scene analysis, which is similar to the work by Lauritzen et al. (2011) and which would automatically detect dominant surfaces. Further investigation could be pursued if this analysis and plane construction is done on GPU and combined with the ideas presented by Lefohn et al. (2007). Also, instead of just having fixed focus range, optimal focus range and camera clipping could be determined dynamically by sampling minimal, maximal and average scene depth (in spite of having a few frames delay) which is very easy to achieve if multi-resolution rendering is used.

Like every other perspective warping approach, CSSM suffers from shadow flickering; however, the effect is significantly less due to wastage elimination. This is not a major problem since shadow map filtering and smoothing is common today. In addition, scenes are becoming increasingly dynamic today; therefore, even stable shadow mapping approaches are not immune to flickering. In fact, in a dynamic scene with considerable vegetation influenced by the wind, using stable cascaded shadow maps will actually produce the worst flickering because the shadow map utilization is not as high as with CSSM. Future work could also include further investigation of shadow flickering.

By using the shadow mapping API presented in this paper, computer-generated shadows that were once considered very difficult and slow have become trivial, fast, and appropriate for large virtual environments.

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