High-speed Imperceptible Structured Light Depth Mapping

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Abstract: A novel method is proposed to imperceptibly embed structured light patterns in projected content to extract a real time range image stream suitable for dynamic projection mapping applications. The method is based on a novel pattern injection approach that exploits the dithering sequence of modern Digital Micromirror Device projectors, so that patterns are injected at a frequency and intensity below the thresholds of human perception. A commercially available DLP projector is synchronized with camera capture at rates that allow a stream of grey code patterns to be imperceptibly projected and acquired to realize dense, imperceptible, real time, temporally encoded structured light. The method is deployed on a calibrated stereo procam system that has been rectified to facilitate fast correspondences from the extracted patterns, enabling depth triangulation. The bandwidth achieved imperceptibly is nearly 8 million points per second using a general purpose CPU which is comparable to, and exceeds some, hardware accelerated commercial structured light depth cameras.

1 INTRODUCTION

Many varieties of range sensors have been developed over the past few years, both commercial and prototypical, based on a range of sensing technologies. Each of these technologies has different characteristics that make it more or less suitable for particular application domains. For example, time-of-flight based LiDAR sensors are of medium accuracy, with high bandwidth and a large depth-of-field, making them suitable for autonomous vehicle navigation. Alternately, triangulation-based structured light sensors are high accuracy with a lower bandwidth and depth-offield, making them ideal for industrial part inspection and modelling.

Projection Mapping is a tool for Augmented Reality (AR) projection whereby the images emitted from a data projector are altered to conform to the geometry of the scene content. When executed correctly, projection mapping gives the effect that the projected content is intrinsic to the elements of the scene themselves, rather than being projected from an external source. Unlike Head Mounted Displays, which are oriented toward a single user, Projection Mapping has the potential of producing a shared AR experience to a group of people.

There currently exist commercial products that

achieve *Static* Projection Mapping, wherein the elements of the scene are stationary. An example is the Lightform augmented reality projection engine (Factura et al., 2018), which projects structured light patterns to sense the 3D planar surfaces in a scene, and which offers a user interface to warp images to conform to these surfaces.

Dynamic Projection Mapping is an emerging application that can benefit from a specialized range sensor. Dynamic projection mapping allows the scene elements to move and be tracked in real time. There have been some examples of Dynamic Projection Mapping systems demonstrated to date. These systems remain mostly in prototype form, and are often limited in their generality. To produce an augmented reality projection platform that can scale and adapt to a range of applications, a more versatile projection mapping system is required.

This paper proposes a novel range sensor that has been developed specifically to support general Dynamic Projection Mapping. The method exploits the capabilities of a high frame rate Digital Light Processing (DLP) data projector and synchronized camera to imperceptibly embed binary patterns in video. A novel pattern embedding approach is applied to inject binary frames into the projector's dithering sequence, and combined with a judicious use of rectification, the number of temporal grey code patterns required is small enough to support high bandwidth range sensing in real time. The resulting system is imperceptible, allowing the single data projector to function as both a content transmission device and a real time range sensor. Notably, the system works entirely in the visible spectrum, and requires no specialized hardware other than a signal to synchronize the camera capture.

2 PREVIOUS WORK

2.1 Projection Mapping

Projection mapping refers to the spatial modulation of projected content to turn scene objects, often irregularly shaped, into display surfaces. Projection mapping is most common *static*, meaning it determines the modulation transformations prior to projection and must be recalibrated if changes to the scene occur. For example, most commercial projectors implement simple planar projection mapping in the form of keystone adjustment. *Dynamic* projection mapping occurs concurrently with projection and can adapt dynamically to changes to the projection surface in real time. Dynamic projection mapping is a complex and costly operation and systems that can currently perform dynamic mapping do so with significant constraints imposed.

Most projection mapping systems seek to constrain the projection environment in some way to simplify identification of mapping coordinates. This simplification can take the form of trackable fiducial anchors (Panasonic, 2017), infrared illumination of infrared reflective markers (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2001)(Lee et al., 2008)(Kagami and Hashimoto, 2015)(Narita et al., 2015), matching the projection surface with a predetermined virtual model (Raskar et al., 2001)(Resch et al., 2015), or using neural network based biometric recognition of bodies, fingers, hands and/or faces (Bermano et al., 2017)(Dai and Chung, 2011)(Dai and Chung, 2012). All of these methods are effective at tracking specific objects for use as projection mapping targets and provide effective solutions to their particular problems. A more generalized projection mapping solution, however, would be beneficial to projected AR as a platform.

The most common general projection mapping method is to use an auxiliary depth camera. The Kinect V2 (Zhang, 2012) and the Zivid One (Salmi et al., 2018) are depth camera systems that operate on time-of-flight and structured light, respectively. While effective at high bandwidth imperceptible depth mapping, auxiliary depth cameras have not yet demonstrated the ability to deliver depth data above 30 Hz, even when implemented on custom system-on-a-chip platforms. This suggests that there is currently some limitation to auxiliary depth scanning that could be circumvented by a method deployed on the existing procam hardware.

2.2 Structured Light Projection Mapping

Scene-agnostic depth mapping that can be processed in excess of 30 Hz is currently the domain of structured light methods. Foremost among these is Zhang's defocused fringe projection (Lohry and Zhang, 2014). This method employs a Lightcrafter engine to project binary stripe patterns at extreme speeds and a defocused lens to produce a sinusoidally shifting pattern. The phase of this pattern can be unwrapped to produce a continuous map of the scene from each individual captured frame. Similarly, high speed structured light depth mapping platforms have been created by removing the colour filter from a DLP projector to achieve 3x the projection speeds, albeit all greyscale (Narasimhan et al., 2008)(Mc-Dowall and Bolas, 2005). This allows improved bandwidth over traditional structured light systems. While extremely fast and effective at performing dynamic scene mapping, both of these methods render the projector incapable of projecting standard content in focus and thus are both unsuitable for projection mapping.

Structured light methods have been deployed imperceptibly and concurrently with projected content. The first notable example is Raskar et al.'s Office of the Future (Raskar et al., 1998). They described the use of imperceptible structured light passively throughout the workspace for AR applications. Their method employed flicker fusion, a technique that can embed binary patterns imperceptibly at the expense of halving the projection rate, as well as some slight visible modification to projected content. They concluded that dynamic projection mapping was possible, but computational resources at the time were not sufficient for high-bandwidth projection mapping. Flicker fusion has been further pursued to improve its effectiveness in varying light and noisy conditions (Silapasuphakornwong et al., 2015) (Park et al., 2007) (Grundhöfer et al., 2007), but its operating speed has not been improved upon.

To achieve higher speeds, Cotting et al. exploited DLP dithering (as described in Section 3) to embed patterns more often. Their work involved reverse engineering commercial DLP dithering sequences and leveraging that knowledge to embed data (Cotting et al., 2004). In commercial projectors, the dithering patterns are complex proprietary sequences and exploiting them is challenging and imprecise. While their method allowed successful embedding and extraction of patterns at full projection speed, projected content suffered visible radiometric distortion and the extracted patterns were noisy. The embedding method proposed in this work builds upon Cotting's work and presents a novel method that embeds patterns imperceptibly and at speeds 3x the projector's frame rate without altering the visible radiometry of the projected image signal.

3 IMPERCEPTIBLE PATTERN INJECTION

DLP projectors consist of a light source that reflects off of a digital micro-mirror device (DMD). This device consists of an array of tiny mirrors that can flip rapidly between 2 set positions: on (reflecting light towards the lens) and off (reflecting light towards an absorber). These mirrors are innately binary, but due to the extreme speed and precision at which they can flip, they can create the illusion of continuous grey levels through a process known as dithering. By rapidly cycling between high and low intensity, DLP projectors leverage the fact that the human eye is a continuous integrator of luminous intensity. With a sufficiently short dithering period, the human eye will not perceive the individual binary patterns but rather an integration of their total luminous power is perceived as a grey level. Multiplexing this temporally over red, green, and blue channels further produces the illusion of colour.

The relationship between luminous intensity and human perception is not completely well understood. What is apparent is that injected artefacts (such as binary patterns) are easier to notice the greater their deviation from the average background luminous intensity. It is generally accepted that the speed at which humans fail to perceive an embedded frame is somewhere from 200 to 500 Hz, depending on the exact nature of the frame and the viewer (Kuroki et al., 2007). A bright, high-contrast chessboard pattern displayed in a dark, still image may be visible at or above 500 Hz, while a more subtle pattern in a noisy and/or dynamic image may only be visible below 200 Hz.

Below that rate is the so-called *flicker fusion threshold* (Raskar et al., 1998)(Park et al., 2007), where a single frame of luminous intensity I is displayed twice consecutively during period T to embed a single pattern as per Equations 1 and 2. A pattern

of intensity I_p is multiplied by a weighting factor Δ . The weighted frame ΔI_p is then added to I to create I_{C1} and subtracted from I to create I_{C2} . I_{C1} and I_{C2} are displayed and captured consecutively during period T, resulting in the same total luminous power over the exposure period of both frames as if pattern I was displayed over the same period T, as shown in Equation 3. A synchronized camera can then be used to individually capture frames I_{C1} and I_{C2} , from which pattern I_p can be extracted as per Equation 4. These modifications to projected content become imperceptible if T is below a certain threshold, corresponding to a system frame rate F over a certain threshold. This threshold for F has been claimed to be as low as 60 Hz but is more often cited at 120 Hz.

$$I_{C1} = I + \Delta I_p \tag{1}$$

$$I_{C2} = I - \Delta I_p \tag{2}$$

$$\frac{T}{2}I_{C1} + \frac{T}{2}I_{C2} = TI \tag{3}$$

$$I_{C1} - I_{C2} = 2\Delta I_p \tag{4}$$

The above method suffers from the fact that 2 full frames are needed to embed a single pattern. This constraint limits the pattern rate to half the projection rate, usually 60 Hz.

While the previous methods used flicker fusion between 2 consecutive modified content frames, current DMD devices enable flicker fusion within each individual content frame and the embedded pattern using our newly developed method. To illustrate, we begin with a projected content slide that will display luminous power *I* over time period *T*. Over this period, the human eye will expect to see total luminous intensity *TI*. An embedded pattern of intensity I_p will be exposed over time period $T_p << T$. To render this pattern imperceptible, a new content slide I_c is created via the following equation set:

$$I_c = \frac{TI - T_p I_p}{T - T_p} \tag{5}$$

The exposure periods for I_c and I_p are set as follows:

$$TI' = (T - T_p)I_c + T_pI_p \tag{6}$$

The new total amount of light TI' over both slides is then:

$$TI' = (T - T_p)(\frac{TI - T_pI_p}{T - T_p}) + T_pI_p = TI$$
(7)

so that the total luminous intensity is unchanged. Empirical testing has allowed us to observe that a value of $T_p = 105 \,\mu s$ for $T = 5000 \,\mu s$ has resulted in no perceptible change to projected content, while slight artifacts begin to appear as $T_p > 200 \,\mu s$.



Figure 1: Illustration of the pattern embedding method.

The DMD used in this work is the Texas Instruments DLP 6500 Lightcrafter engine (lig, 2016), which projects colour by consecutive alternating of coloured LED sources. As a result, patterns can be embedded imperceptibly in each colour channel, yielding 3 embedded patterns per frame. Exemplar modified colour channels are displayed in Figure 1, in which I represents an unmodified content channel and T corresponds to a frame rate of 200 Hz.

The proposed method offers 2 major advantages over previously presented imperceptible continuous pattern embedding methods:

- It can operate at the maximum speed of the projector, unlike flicker fusion, which is limited to half of the projector's speed, and;
- It maintains the luminous power of the projected image, unlike reverse-engineered dithering which creates significant radiometric distortion,

4 STRUCTURED LIGHT

Structured light methods facilitate the establishment of correspondences between camera and projector pixels through spatial and/or temporal encoding of the projected signal. While our work can be used with a host of structured light encoding methods, we chose grey code as effective for high-speed synchronized capture. Grey code is a well-known method for temporal encoding, using *n* patterns to yield 2^n points of correspondence in a single dimension. Finer and finer patterns are projected and overlaid until each pixel possesses a unique illumination sequence, known as a *codephrase*. The locations of the transitions between adjacent codephrases in each image plane are taken as correspondences.

Temporally encoded structured light methods are quite effective at extracting dense depth. However, they have seen limited use in real time and dynamic applications due to their requirement of a sequence of images to produce a single depth image frame. For grey code in particular, the accepted method of categorizing each pixel in both the X and Y directions at 1920×1080 resolution requires at least $ceil(log_2(1920)) + ceil(log_2(1080)) = 22$ patterns, as well as an all-white and all-black frame for calibration.

Using the flicker fusion method at 60 Hz, this full sequence of 24 patterns would be projected only 2.5 times per second. Reverse engineered dithering embedding methods operating at 120 Hz would display the sequence 5 times per second. Using the proposed approach to embed patterns in each content frame colour channel, this rate has been increased to 8.3 full sequences per second. Our method further increases the frame rate by using stereo rectification so that only horizontal grey code patterns need be projected, effectively halving the number of grey code patterns projected. The frame rate can be increased again by reducing the number of patterns, at the expense of reducing resolution along the X and Y axes.

5 STEREO RECTIFICATION

A rectifying transformation calculated during preprocessing is used to reduce the correspondence problem to a 1D search across conjugate epipolar lines, as illustrated in Figure 2. The red lines passing through Figure 2 (b) and (d) represent epipolar lines, which intersect the structured light stripes at the same horizontal coordinate in both images; what changes is the vertical point in the epipolar line on which the stripes fall. The vertical correspondence can best be viewed at the edge of the pattern, where the line passes through the same smaller subset of stripes at the same points in both images.

In this way rectification simplifies structured light



(c) the same pattern as re- (d) and rectified covered by the camera

Figure 2: Example of stereo rectification showing vertical epipolar alignment.

encoding. Rather than encoding along both axes to establish pixel disparity in the X and Y dimensions, we need only encode along a single axis. Each codephrase will occur only once per image plane along each epipolar line. Establishing correspondence is thus reduced to a linear search.

Recification can align the epipolar lines in either the X or Y dimension, meaning every real space point will share the same X coordinate in both image planes or the same Y coordinate. In this case, vertical rectification resulting in the vertical alignment of the camera and projector image planes is preferred over horizontal. This orientation aligns the long edges of the image plane (Figure 2) and creates a larger number of shorter epipolar lines when compared with horizontal rectification, as the system's image width is greater than its height. Horizontal rectification would resolve to $1080 \times 2^8 = 276$ k points for 8 patterns, while vertical rectification would resolve to $1440 \times 2^8 = 368$ k points per depth image frame.

6 PATTERN SELECTION

With the correspondence problem reduced to a single axis, what remains is to encode the points along each axis uniquely so that linear disparity may be recovered. Each epipolar line is 1080 pixels long in each image plane. To fully characterize these lines would require $ceil(log_2(1080)) = 11$ patterns, as well as a full black and full white frame for calibration of luminous intensity levels.

To strike a balance between performance and resolution we chose to use 8 binary patterns, providing $2^8 = 256$ points of depth along each epipolar line. Also present is a single white frame for luminous intensity calibration. A second (black) frame is normally used so that a midpoint between high and low illumination levels can be used for thresholding. Its omission renders the system more vulnerable to error from very high or very low reflectance surfaces as well as ambient light. Our experiments have shown this to be an acceptable trade-off in this system. Using 9 patterns yields an operating rate of 22.2 full sequences per second, as limited by the camera's capture rate.

7 EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

A set of experiments was executed to characterize the bandwidth of the imperceptible range image extraction and the accuracy of the range data. The projector used was the Optecks RGB LightCrafter 6500 engine, based on the Texas Instruments DLP 6500 module (lig, 2016). This device bundles 3-channel LED illumination with a high-performance DMD and optics to create a powerful and flexible projection platform at 1920x1080 resolution. Its most notable characteristics are the ability to expose 8-bit patterns for a minimum of $4046 \mu s$ and binary patterns for $105 \mu s$, as well as a programmable hardware trigger.

Combined with this engine is a PointGrey Blackfly S machine vision camera, capable of capturing at over 200 Hz at full 1440x1080 resolution. The camera is synchronized via the hardware trigger and is capable of a 9 μ s response time and a minimum 4 μ s exposure time. Processing is performed on an AMD Ryzen 5 1600 MHz 6-core processor with 2 x 8Gb 2133 MHz RAM cards and a Samsung SM961 256 Gb solid-state drive. The hardware synchronized procam system is shown in Figure 3

7.1 Calibration

Two methods were used to calibrate the system. First, Zhang's well-known method (Zhang, 2000) was used to perform intrinsic calibration on the camera to remove radial distortion. Next, procam stereo calibration as presented by Martynov et al. (Martynov et al., 2011) was used to compute stereo rectification transforms for both the projector and camera. These transforms were equipped to handle relatively small intrinsic distortion so the intrinsics of the projector were not addressed outside these transforms.

Stereo reprojection was used to determine calibration accuracy. This test began with drawing a line visible in both image planes and then rectifying each image. Assuming a perfect rectification transform, both rectified views of the line would match exactly.



Figure 3: The hardware synchronized vertically co-axial procam system employed in this work.

In reality, some pixel disparity occurs and can provide a measure of the accuracy of the computed transforms. First, the OpenCV function used to compute the stereo rectification transforms minimizes reprojection error as part of its functionality. It returns the transform associated with the lowest reprojection error, along with the error itself. To confirm the results given, a script was used to perform another reprojection test with the computed calibration parameters (Bradski and Kaehler, 2008). The OpenCV test yielded a pixel error $\varepsilon = 1.16$ pixels and the custom test yielded $\varepsilon = 1.28$ pixels.

7.2 Range Image Formation

Figure 4 shows some examples of the method. Several scenes are presented and then shown with 1 of the 9 patterns overlayed and finally, the fully reconstructed depth scene is shown as a point cloud.

The *pipe* represents a near-lambertian curved surface and as expected, shows strong continuous depth reconstruction. The *gnome* presents dense features with varying colours and reflectivity, but the binary nature of the patterns and high calibration accuracy render these issues inconsequential and strong continuous depth is present. Finally, the *chessboard* presents a highly reflective surface with stark colour contrast – a challenging scenario for structured light patterns. Again, accurate dense depth points were extracted.

7.3 Imperceptibility

To test the degree of imperceptibility of the method, patterns were embedded in the image shown in Figure 5. This image was selected to demonstrate a vari-

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of disparity points across 5 projector-plane distances.

Plane distance (cm)	Mean error (pixels)	Standard deviation (pixels)
100	2.65	2.69
125	2.70	3.32
150	3.07	3.85
175	2.39	3.73
200	2.51	3.00
Total	2.69	3.40

ety of different characteristics, including regions that are bright and dark and smooth and sharp. There is also a significant region that is dominated by blue, so chosen to test if patterns could still be embedded when some colour channels were barely present.

In empirical testing with over 10 subjects, the system was demonstrated as imperceptible, with no artifacts or obvious disruptions to the image being visible to any observer. In addition, the patterns embedded in the red and green channels displayed no loss in quality of recovery. This is due to the high level of contrast in the acquired binary patterns, which renders them quite resilient to dimming.

7.4 Plane Fitting

To assess the accuracy of the extracted disparity values, a series of 100 disparity images of a flat plane was collected at 5 different projector-surface distances. Each of these images was converted into 3D coordinates and a plane fitting was performed. Then, the ideal disparity corresponding to the fitted plane was calculated at each image plane coordinate. This ideal disparity was compared to the actual disparity measured at that point to determine the accuracy of the system. Figure 6 shows the percentage of points that lie within each integer error bound from 0-20 pixels across all collected disparity images. The mean and standard deviation of the pixel disparity error at each tested distance is visible in Table 1.

To assess the repeatability of the system, a random error test was performed. This test quantifies the standard deviation of each disparity measurement across 100 images of a static scene, as per Equation 8. Here, N denotes the number of disparity measurements, d_i represents the disparity value in image i and \bar{d} denotes the mean value computed over all disparity measurements d_i (ran, 2019).

When determining the variance at a pixel location across a series of disparity frames, we must consider that not all pixels will possess a disparity measurement in each frame. We can thus define the *pixel confidence threshold* as the percentage of disparity



Figure 4: Several objects presented under flat white illumination (a-c), illuminated by the projected content in which patterns are embedded imperceptibly (d-f), illuminated by an exemplar binary pattern (g-i) and finally reconstructed as a cloud of extracted depth points(j-l).



Figure 5: Image used for pattern embedding.

frames in which a pixel must be illuminated to accept that pixel as valid across the series. Figure 7 shows the relationship between the pixel confidence threshold and the random error at all tested projector-plane distances. It also displays the trade-off to a higher pixel confidence threshold in the average number of valid disparity points in each frame.

$$E_{random} = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^{N} (d_i - \bar{d})^2}{N}}$$
(8)

7.5 Operating Speed

The system's operating speed is divided into 3 sections: pattern projection rate, camera capture rate, and processing speed. The rates at which each section can process all 9 patterns are shown in Table 3. As is apparent, the projector and camera speeds are closely aligned. The camera can return the complete set of 9



Figure 6: Percentage of inlier points as a function of disparity error tolerance for a fitted plane across 500 depth frames.



Figure 7: Effect of the pixel confidence threshold on the random error and disparity points per frame.

patterns at 22.2 Hz, slightly slower than the 26.8 Hz at which the projector can embed them imperceptibly.

Table 2 shows a comparison of the system's current performance in depth points per second as compared with the Kinect V1 and V2 (Zhang, 2012) and the Zivid One (Salmi et al., 2018).

	Resolution (points)	Rate of operation (Hz)	Points per second (Mpoints/S)
Kinect V1	633x495	30	9.20
Kinect V2	512x424	30	6.51
Zivid One	1900x1200	13	29.9
Proposed method	1400x256	22.2	7.96

Table 2: Points per second comparison.

8 CONCLUSION

This work presents a novel approach to temporally encoded structured light depth sensing suitable for real

Table 3: Current operating rates of the 3 main system components.

System Component	Operating Rate (Hz)	
Camera	22.2	
Projection	26.8	
Processing	30.2	

time applications, including those that benefit from imperceptibility. The approach is particularly effective for dynamic projection mapping. The comparable systems in Table 2 have been implemented in FPGA and/or VLSI, rather than a CPU as with the proposed approach, and so they have been optimized for time performance. This implies the potential for the proposed method to further and significantly exceed the current bandwidth while maintaining imperceptibility. Any upgrades to processing speed would be predicated on concurrent upgrades to the operating rate of the projector and camera, either through hardware upgrades or algorithmic changes.

Quantitative analysis of imperceptibility in this work was impeded in this case by the Lightcrafter engine's inability to dynamically modify content. In the future, the system will be fitted with the ability to dynamically modify projected content, and a thorough study will be set up to quantitatively assess the imperceptibility of the embedding method. This will consist of alternating frames or sections of video with and without embedded patterns and recording differences noted by observers. These tests will provide a more complete picture of the method's impact on the fidelity of projection.

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