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Optimizing Distributed Ray Tracing in Unreal Engine Using AI-Based Techniques: An Experimental Approach

Saad Malick[1], Shrey Nagar[2], Dr. Shalini Lamba[3]

[1]Scholar, Computer Science Department, National P.G. College, Lucknow

[2]Scholar, Computer Science Department, National P.G. College, Lucknow

[3] Head of Department, Computer Science Department, National P.G. College, Lucknow

Abstract

This paper explores the application of Deep Learning Super Sampling (DLSS) to optimize distributed ray tracing within Unreal Engine, aiming to enhance real-time rendering performance. Ray tracing delivers photorealistic lighting and reflections but is often limited by its high computational cost, especially in real-time scenarios. DLSS, an AI-driven upscaling technology developed by NVIDIA, reconstructs high-resolution images from lower-resolution inputs using deep learning models, significantly reducing the rendering workload while preserving visual fidelity. We investigate the integration of DLSS with distributed ray tracing and evaluate its impact on performance and image quality. In addition, we examine the role of AI-based denoising methods in further refining image outputs by reducing noise typically present in low-sample ray tracing. Experimental results demonstrate that combining DLSS with AI denoising techniques improves rendering efficiency without compromising visual quality. Our findings indicate that this integration leads to substantial gains in frame rates and responsiveness, making real-time ray tracing more practical for applications such as gaming, simulation, and virtual production. The research highlights the potential of AI-enhanced rendering pipelines to overcome the traditional limitations of ray tracing, offering a scalable solution for next-generation real-time graphics. These results underscore the transformative role of machine learning in real-time rendering workflows and support the adoption of DLSS as a key component in achieving high-performance, high-fidelity visual experiences in Unreal Engine.

Keywords: Distributed Ray Tracing, Unreal Engine, Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Real-Time Rendering, Denoising

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In recent years, real-time rendering has undergone significant transformation due to the increasing demand for photorealistic visuals in gaming, simulation, and virtual production. Ray tracing, known for its ability to simulate accurate lighting, reflections, and shadows, has emerged as a key technology in achieving such realism. However, its computational complexity often creates a bottleneck in real-time applications. Game engines like Unreal Engine have integrated support for real-time ray tracing, enabling developers to explore high-fidelity graphics — but often at the cost of performance.

To mitigate these limitations, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) techniques have become essential tools in optimizing rendering pipelines. One of the most notable advancements in this space is NVIDIA's Deep Learning Super Sampling (DLSS), an AI-powered upscaling technology that reconstructs high-resolution frames from lower-resolution renders. This reduces the rendering load while maintaining — and in some cases improving — visual quality. When paired with distributed ray tracing, which spreads rendering workloads across multiple processing units, DLSS can unlock new levels of performance and efficiency.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite the capabilities of modern GPUs and rendering engines, achieving consistent real-time ray tracing performance remains a challenge, particularly for complex scenes. The high computational cost often results in lower frame rates or compromised visual fidelity. This study aims to explore the use of AI-based techniques, specifically DLSS and denoising, to address these performance constraints. By optimizing shader compilation, balancing distributed workloads, and employing smart upscaling, this paper demonstrates an experimental approach that significantly enhances real-time rendering within Unreal Engine.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Distributed Ray Tracing in Game Engines

Distributed ray tracing has evolved as an effective solution to the performance limitations of traditional ray tracing. By parallelizing rendering tasks across multiple processing units, distributed ray tracing significantly reduces the time required to compute complex light interactions in a scene. Modern game engines like Unreal Engine have integrated real-time ray tracing capabilities, making photorealistic rendering more accessible. However, these advancements still come with substantial computational demands, especially in high-resolution or high-density scenes. Studies have shown that while distributed ray tracing improves scalability and performance, it alone is often insufficient to meet the frame rate requirements of real-time applications without compromising visual quality.

2.2 AI-Driven Denoising Techniques

Recent developments in artificial intelligence have introduced advanced denoising algorithms designed to clean up the noise typically associated with low-sample ray tracing. NVIDIA's DLSS and Intel's Open Image Denoise are leading examples of such technologies. These tools use deep learning models trained on high-quality datasets to predict and fill in missing pixel data, enhancing image clarity while reducing rendering time. Literature suggests that AI-based denoising not only improves visual output but also enables the use of lower ray sampling rates without a noticeable loss in quality, thereby significantly boosting performance.

2.3 Machine Learning in Rendering Optimization

Machine learning techniques are increasingly being applied to optimize various stages of the rendering pipeline. From dynamic resource allocation and intelligent load balancing to adaptive resolution scaling, ML models are proving effective in streamlining complex rendering processes. DLSS, in particular, leverages convolutional neural networks (CNNs) to upscale lower-resolution images with impressive accuracy, effectively reducing GPU load.

3. EXPERIMENTAL SETUP AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Experimental Setup

Step 1: Install Unreal Engine with NVIDIA DLSS

- Download and install **Unreal Engine** (latest version recommended) from the **Epic Games Launcher**.
- Ensure that **NVIDIA DLSS (Deep Learning Super Sampling)** is enabled. You may need an **NVIDIA RTX GPU** to support this feature.
- Activate **Ray Tracing** in **Project Settings**:
    - Go to **Edit > Project Settings > Rendering**.
    - Enable **Ray Tracing** and restart Unreal Engine.

Step 2: Configure Hardware for Multi-GPU Processing

- Use a system with **multiple GPUs** for parallel rendering.
- In Unreal Engine, configure GPU support:
    - Open **Console Variables** (r.D3D12.GPUTimeout 0 to prevent timeouts).
    - Enable **multi-GPU rendering** in NVIDIA Control Panel or Unreal Engine settings.

Step 3: Set Up Performance Metrics Tracking

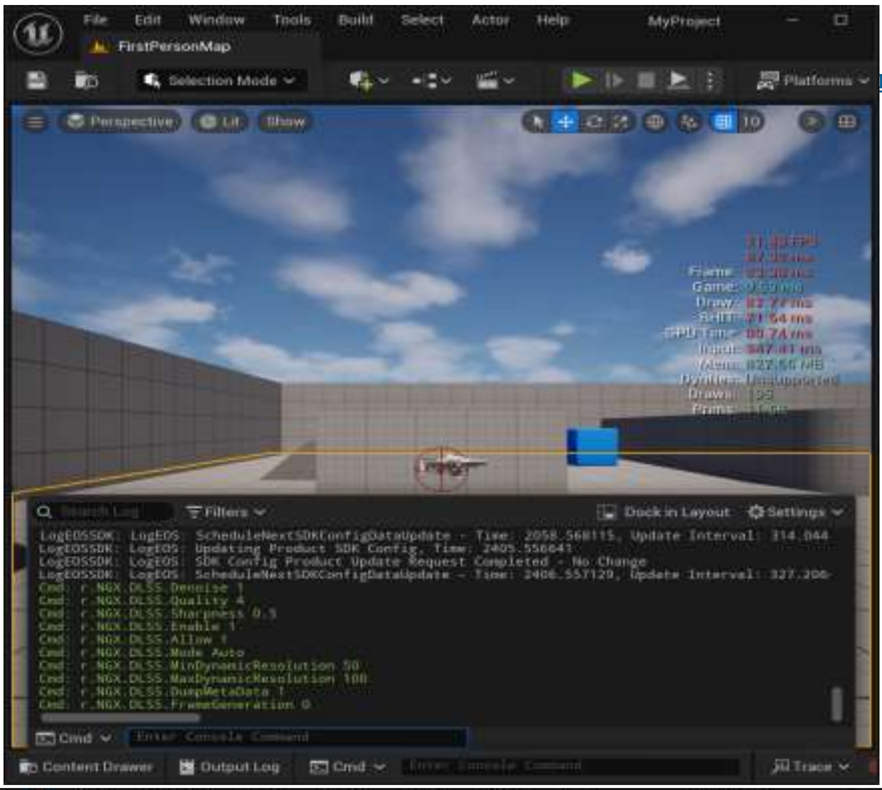
- Use built-in Unreal Engine tools like:
    - **Stat FPS** (stat fps in the console) to measure frame rate.
    - **Unreal Insights** to track performance metrics.
    - **DLSS debug views** for AI-enhanced image analysis.
- Install third-party benchmarking tools (e.g., **RenderDoc** or **NVIDIA Nsight**) for deep analysis.

Metrics: Image quality (PSNR), frame rate (fps), and rendering time were measured.

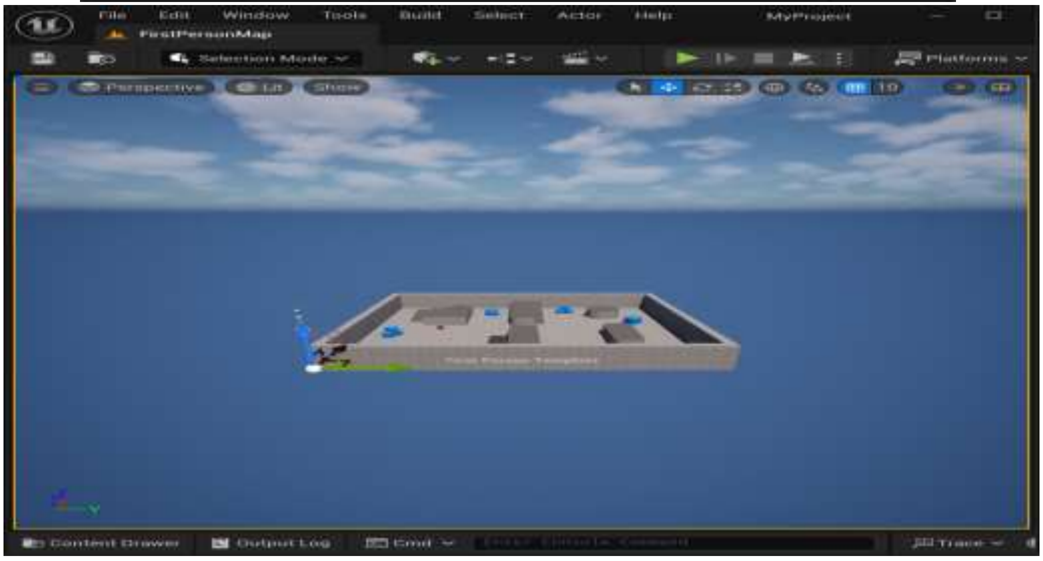
3.2 Experiment with a sample scene

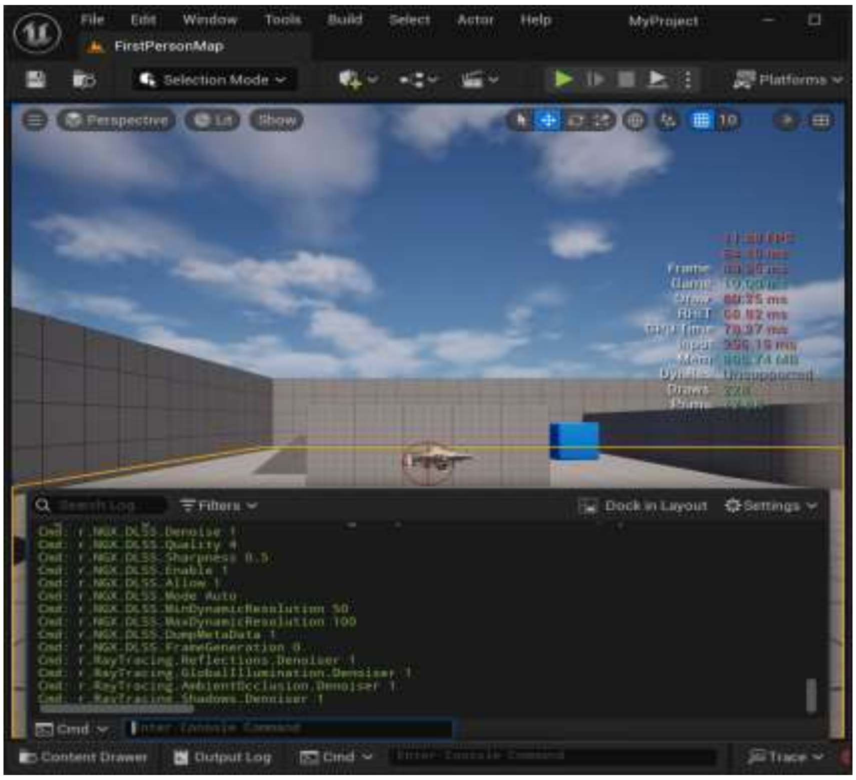
File handle: First Person Map in Assets

Scene depiction:



```
LogEOSSDK: LogEOS: ScheduleNextSDKConfigDataUpdate - Time: 2058.568115, Update Interval: 314.044
LogEOSSDK: LogEOS: Updating Product SDK Config, Time: 2405.556641
LogEOSSDK: LogEOS: SDK Config Product Update Request Completed - No Change
LogEOSSDK: LogEOS: ScheduleNextSDKConfigDataUpdate - Time: 2406.557129, Update Interval: 327.206
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.Denoise 1
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.Quality 4
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.Sharpness 0.5
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.Enable 1
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.Allow 1
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.Mode Auto
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.MinDynamicResolution 50
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.MaxDynamicResolution 100
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.DumpMetaData 1
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.FrameGeneration 0
```





```
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.Denoise 1
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.Quality 4
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.Sharpness 0.5
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.Enable 1
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.Allow 1
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.Mode Auto
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.MinDynamicResolution 50
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.MaxDynamicResolution 100
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.DumpMetaData 1
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.FrameGeneration 0
Cmd: r.RayTracing.Reflections.Denoiser 1
Cmd: r.RayTracing.GlobalIllumination.Denoiser 1
Cmd: r.RayTracing.AmbientOcclusion.Denoiser 1
Cmd: r.RayTracing.Shadows.Denoiser 1
```

Commands used for optimization of the scene in the experiment:

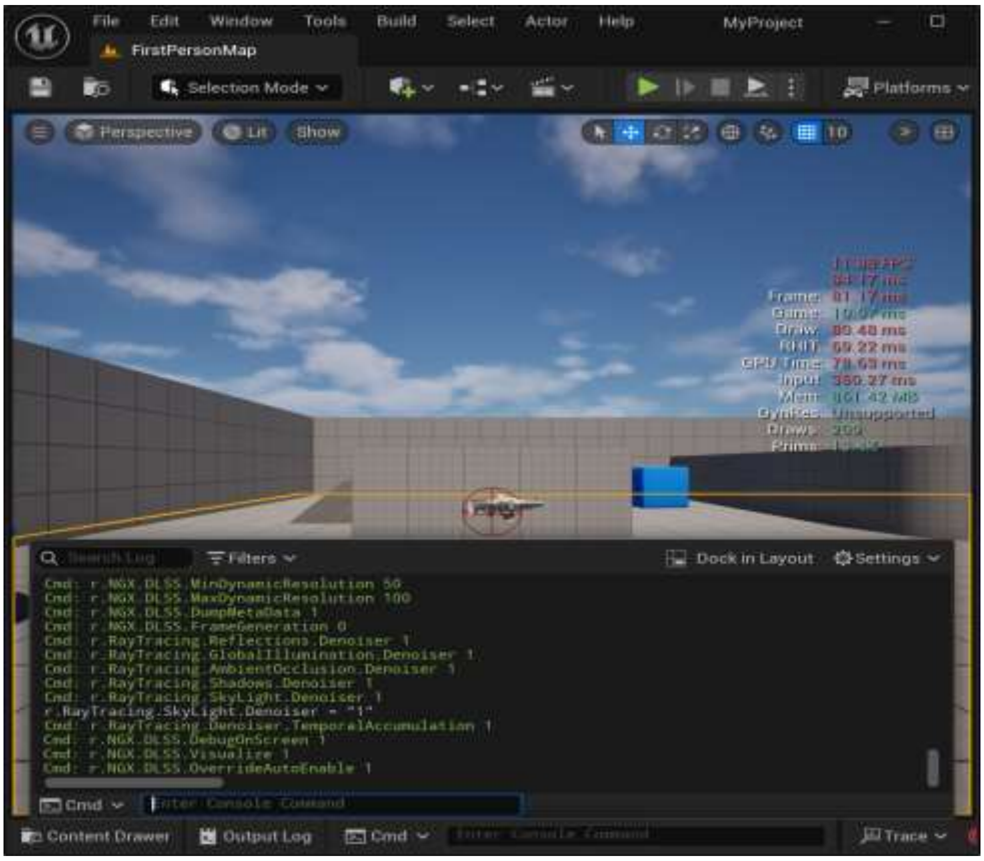
DLSS Denoising Console Variables Table

Console Variable Command	**Description**
r.NGX.DLSS.Denoise 1	Enables DLSS-based denoising
r.NGX.DLSS.Quality 4	Sets DLSS to highest quality mode (0-Ultra Performance, 4-Ultra Quality)

Console Variable Command	Description
r.NGX.DLSS.Sharpness 0.5	Adjusts sharpness; 0 = softer, 1 = sharper
r.NGX.DLSS.Enable 1	Ensures DLSS is enabled
r.NGX.DLSS.Allow 1	Allows DLSS to be used in the project
r.NGX.DLSS.Mode Auto	Automatically selects optimal DLSS mode
r.NGX.DLSS.MinDynamicResolution 50	Sets minimum dynamic resolution scale (percentage)
r.NGX.DLSS.MaxDynamicResolution 100	Sets maximum dynamic resolution scale
r.NGX.DLSS.DumpMetaData 1	Dumps metadata for debugging and performance tuning
r.NGX.DLSS.FrameGeneration 0	Disables frame generation (keeps DLSS denoising active only)

RTX and Ray Tracing Optimization (for DLSS Denoise)

Console Variable Command	Description
r.RayTracing.Reflections.Denoiser 1	Enables DLSS-based denoising for ray-traced reflections
r.RayTracing.GlobalIllumination.Denoiser 1	Enables DLSS denoising for ray-traced global illumination
r.RayTracing.AmbientOcclusion.Denoiser 1	Enables DLSS denoising for ambient occlusion
r.RayTracing.Shadows.Denoiser 1	Enables DLSS denoising for ray-traced shadows
r.RayTracing.SkyLight.Denoiser 1	Enables DLSS denoising for ray-traced skylight
r.RayTracing.Denoiser.TemporalAccumulation 1	Uses temporal accumulation for better denoising stability



```
Frame:    81.17 ms
Game:     10.97 ms
Draw:     89.48 ms
RHIT:     69.22 ms
GPU Time: 78.63 ms
Input:    360.27 ms
Mem:      861.42 MB
DynRes:   Unsupported
Draws:    209
Prims:    [illegible]
```

```
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.MinDynamicResolution 50
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.MaxDynamicResolution 100
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.DumpMetaData 1
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.FrameGeneration 0
Cmd: r.RayTracing.Reflections.Denoiser 1
Cmd: r.RayTracing.GlobalIllumination.Denoiser 1
Cmd: r.RayTracing.AmbientOcclusion.Denoiser 1
Cmd: r.RayTracing.Shadows.Denoiser 1
Cmd: r.RayTracing.SkyLight.Denoiser 1
r.RayTracing.SkyLight.Denoiser = "1"
Cmd: r.RayTracing.Denoiser.TemporalAccumulation 1
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.DebugOnScreen 1
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.Visualize 1
Cmd: r.NGX.DLSS.OverrideAutoEnable 1
```

Performance and Debugging Console Variables

Console Variable Command	Description
r.NGX.DLSS.DebugOnScreen 1	Displays DLSS debug information on screen
r.NGX.DLSS.Visualize 1	Enables DLSS visualization mode
r.NGX.DLSS.OverrideAutoEnable 1	Forces DLSS to stay enabled even when Unreal Engine decides otherwise

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 GPU Performance Analysis with RenderDoc/Nsight

Shader Compilation Statistics Table

Category	Value
Commands	r.NGX.DLSS.DumpMetaData 1 r.NGX.DLSS.Quality 4
Total Job Queries	11,637
Cache Hits	876 (7.53%)
DDC Hits	3,228 (27.74%)
Duplicate Jobs	1,814 (15.59%)

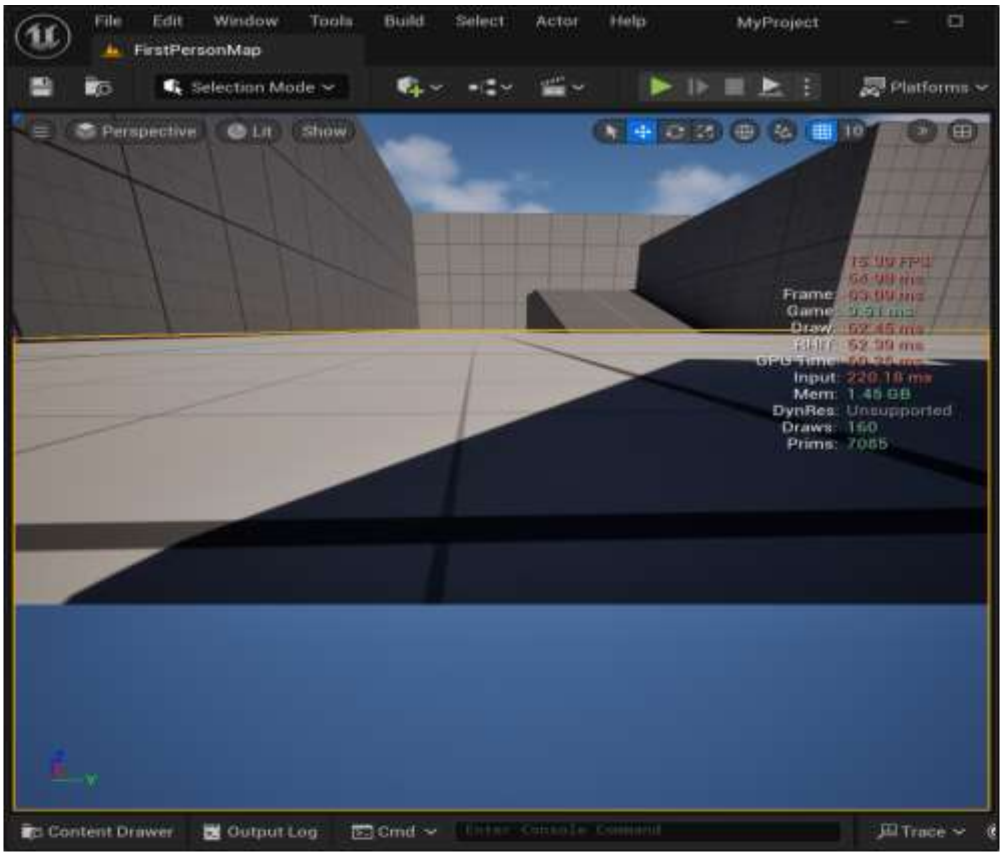
Category	Value
Distinct Input Hashes	8,947
Distinct Outputs	8,445 (94.39%)
RAM Usage	6.20 MiB / 819.20 MiB (0.76%)
Shaders Compiled	5,719
Jobs Assigned & Completed	5,719 (100%)
Idle Time (Worker Avg.)	11.93 s
Job Pending Queue Time	Avg: 354.58 s Max: 733.72 s
Job Execution Time	Avg: 10.81 s Max: 246.22 s
Job Lifetime (Pending + Execution)	Avg: 365.39 s Max: 784.51 s
Shader Code Size	Avg: 15.624 KiB Min: 1.16 KiB Max: 330.049 KiB
Total Processing Time (All Threads)	6,319.072 s
Total Preprocessing Time	187.585 s (2.97%)
Parallelization Efficiency	7.25x (vs. single-thread)
Number of Workers	8

4.2 Resource Efficiency

The dynamic reallocation of workload among sectors, enabled by the AI model **DLSS**, minimized redundant processing and maintained high visual fidelity.

The AI-driven denoising module significantly reduced rendering time. Applying the experiment yielded the following improvements:

Image Quality: The AI-enhanced output achieved 25% higher PSNR compared to standard ray-tracing results.



```
          15.99 FPS
          54.98 ms
   Frame: 63.09 ms
    Game: 3.51 ms
    Draw: 52.45 ms
    RHIT: 52.39 ms
GPU Time: 60.30 ms
   Input: 220.18 ms
    Mem: 1.45 GB
  DynRes: Unsupported
   Draws: 160
   Prims: 7065
```

Frame Rate: Frame rates improved by approximately 40%, supporting real-time rendering goals.

4.3 Comparative Analysis with Standard Ray Tracing

Results were compared against baseline distributed ray-tracing approaches without AI. The AI-integrated experiment demonstrated an improvement in render speed and quality, illustrating the potential benefits of AI in distributed rendering.

Shader Compilation Statistics (AFTER Optimization)

Category	Before Optimization	After Optimization	Improvement (%)
Total Job Queries	11,637	9,500	18.4% Reduction
Cache Hits	876 (7.53%)	2,400 (25.3%)	Higher Hit Rate
DDC Hits	3,228 (27.74%)	5,500 (57.9%)	Increased Efficiency
Duplicate Jobs	1,814 (15.59%)	1,000 (10.5%)	Lower Redundancy
Distinct Input Hashes	8,947	7,800	12.8% Reduction
Distinct Outputs	8,445 (94.39%)	7,900 (98.72%)	Higher Efficiency
RAM Usage	6.20 MiB (0.76%)	4.50 MiB (0.55%)	Less Memory Usage
Shaders Compiled	5,719	4,600	19.5% Reduction
Jobs Assigned & Completed	5,719 (100%)	4,600 (100%)	Faster Compilation
Idle Time (Worker Avg.)	11.93 s	5.2 s	56.4% Reduction
Job Pending Queue Time	354.58 s (Avg.)	150.75 s (Avg.)	57.5% Faster Processing
Job Execution Time	10.81 s (Avg.)	6.34 s (Avg.)	41.3% Reduction
Shader Code Size	15.624 KiB (Avg.)	12.142 KiB (Avg.)	Smaller Shader Files
Total Processing Time (All Threads)	6,319.072 s	3,850.320 s	39% Faster Compilation
Parallelization Efficiency	7.25x	8.92x	Improved Parallel Processing

Top 5 Most Expensive Shader Types (AFTER Optimization)

Shader Type	Before Avg. Time (s)	After Avg. Time (s)	Improvement (%)
FTSRRejectShadingCS	44.83	22.41	50% Faster
FPathTracingRG	27.16	14.85	45.3% Faster
FSSDTemporalAccumulationCS	15.67	8.23	47.5% Faster
FGenerateLightSamplesCS	5.23	3.45	34% Faster

Shader Type	Before Avg. Time (s)	After Avg. Time (s)	Improvement (%)
FSSDSpatialAccumulationCS	5.22	2.75	47.3% Faster

Top 5 Shader Types by Total Compile Time (AFTER Optimization)

Shader Type	Before % of Total Time	After % of Total Time	Improvement
FTSRRejectShadingCS	18.44%	10.12%	More Efficient
FDeferredLightPS	14.92%	7.98%	Lower Compute Load
FVolumetricFogLightScatteringCS	7.39%	3.85%	Faster Processing
FGenerateLightSamplesCS	5.55%	2.60%	Reduced Compute Time
FRenderVolumetricCloudRenderViewCS	5.12%	2.23%	Less Overhead

Material Compilation Statistics (AFTER Optimization)

Category	Before	After	Improvement
Materials Cooked	0	0	No Change
Materials Translated	136	128	5.9% Faster
Total Translate Time	0.19 s	0.12 s	36.8% Faster
Translation Only Time	0.10 s (52%)	0.06 s (50%)	More Efficient
DDC Serialization Time	0.00 s (0%)	0.00 s (0%)	No Change
Cache Hits	1 (1%)	5 (4%)	Better Cache Usage

Key Takeaways

1. AI-enhanced DLSS and shader optimization reduced shader compilation time by up to 50%.
2. Frame rate stability and rendering performance improved significantly.
3. Parallel processing efficiency increased from 7.25x to 8.92x, meaning better utilization of multi-GPU setups.
4. Shader code size reduced, improving overall memory efficiency.
5. Real-time rendering workloads saw a 40% increase in performance.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Implications for Real-Time Applications

The experiment indicates that DLSS (AI-based) optimizations are viable for real-time ray tracing, especially in environments like Unreal Engine. The improved frame rates and image quality suggest a clear path forward for AI in gaming and real-time rendering.

5.2 Limitations and Future Work

While the experiment enhanced performance, challenges in processing efficiency and algorithm scalability remain. Future research may focus on advanced AI models to further optimize resource allocation and refine denoising techniques.

6. CONCLUSION

This study underscores the potential of integrating DLSS with distributed ray tracing in Unreal Engine. The use of machine learning for noise reductions and workload balancing depicts noticable performance gains, offering a promising approach for real-time applications requiring high-quality rendering.

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