SynthoVision: AI-Powered Image Synthesis

Saurav Singh
Department of Computer Science and Engineering
Chandigarh University, Mohali, Punjab, India

Ayukt Kumar
Department of Computer science and Engineering
Chandigarh University, Mohali, Punjab, India

Abstract- The ever-growing demands of deep learning models necessitate the exploration of efficient training data generation techniques. Abstract image synthesis offers a compelling solution, enabling the creation of vast amounts of training data while meticulously controlling the production process to guarantee optimal distribution and content diversity. This approach holds immense potential for significantly enhancing the training pipeline within the field of machine learning. Over the past decade, a plethora of methodologies for generating training data have emerged. However, with the prospect of further advancements in this domain, a comprehensive survey and classification of these techniques is crucial. This paper provides an extensive inventory of the current image synthesis techniques employed in the context of visual machine learning.

We propose a taxonomy for classifying these techniques based on their underlying modelling and rendering approaches specific to image generation. Additionally, we categorize them based on the computer vision applications they are most suited for. This classification scheme aims to foster the development of future image generation methods specifically tailored for machine learning applications. Focusing on the computer graphics aspects of these techniques, we delve deeper into their inner workings to encourage further exploration and refinement. Finally, we evaluate each technique based on reported performance and the quality of the generated images. This evaluation serves as an indicator of their projected learning potential for machine learning tasks.

By encompassing both the application and data development aspects, this paper serves as a comprehensive reference for researchers working in the field of machine learning and related disciplines.

Keywords – methods and applications

I. INTRODUCTION

Deep learning (DL) is revolutionizing numerous fields, from computer vision to natural language processing. However, its effectiveness hinges on vast amounts of high-quality training data, a resource often scarce and expensive to annotate. This scarcity creates a bottleneck, limiting model performance regardless of computational power.

Traditional data augmentation techniques, while valuable, are limited by the underlying real data. Synthetic data generation emerges as a promising solution. Unlike augmentation, it creates entirely new data, offering exciting possibilities for manipulating its composition to address specific challenges.

This paper focuses on the intersection of deep learning and synthetic image generation for visual machine learning tasks (object detection, scene understanding, etc.). We delve into the computer graphics aspects of image synthesis, examining techniques that generate complete training datasets, excluding methods solely for augmentation or testing.

To organize and analyze existing work, we propose a taxonomy based on scene modeling, rendering techniques, and the target computer vision application. This framework aims to guide future research and highlight the potential of synthetic data in addressing key DL challenges like adversarial examples, data bias, and domain adaptation.

II. BACKGROUND

This section provides a foundation in image formation and synthesis for machine learning applications. We start with a concise overview of the historical integration of image synthesis into the machine learning field. Subsequently, we delve into the methodologies employed for scene modeling and image synthesis. Finally, we explore recent advancements, including learning-based generative modeling, and clarify the distinction between image synthesis and data augmentation techniques.

A. Historical Contest-

This section provides a historical context for the integration of image synthesis and machine learning. Early Developments in Image Synthesis (1950s-1990s): The concept of computer-generated visuals emerged in the mid-20th century, with pioneering work on fundamental techniques like bump mapping, shading, and ray tracing (1979). The 1980s and 1990s witnessed significant growth in computer graphics research fueled by advancements in computer games and the film industry. Applications have since expanded to encompass virtual reality, science, engineering, medicine, and advertising. Machine Learning Foundations (18th-20th Centuries):

The groundwork for machine learning was laid in the 18th and 19th centuries with the introduction of least squares and Bayes' Theorem. Andrey Markov's Markov chains and Alan Turing's exploration of thinking machines in the 20th century were further milestones. The Perceptron (Rosenblatt, 1958) marked the initial foray into deep learning (DL) and neural networks, with core concepts emerging as early as the 1940s. A second wave of development in the 1980s introduced core DL ideas like convolutional neural networks, backpropagation, reinforcement learning, and recurrent neural networks.

Deep Learning Revolution and the Rise of Synthetic Data (2010s-Present): The third wave of deep learning, starting in the early 2010s, is often attributed to the work of Krizhevsky et al. This period saw rapid advancements in training deeper networks with techniques like dropout, batch normalization, and residual connections. The 1980s witnessed the convergence of computer vision and computer graphics due to the need for ground truth annotations for evaluating optical flow algorithms using synthetic images. Optical flow, a crucial aspect of computer vision, heavily relies on synthetic data due to the difficulty of manual annotation and the need for specific scene configurations in real data. The first publicly available training set for optical flow, the Middlebury dataset, only emerged in 2011. Recent advancements in deep learning have further fueled the use of large-scale synthetic data, often involving pasting simple 3D objects onto background images.

B. Production of visual data-

This section explores image data generation for machine learning applications. It covers content creation, rendering, and key considerations for training data.

Content Creation: Content creation involves defining the virtual environment, objects, and settings for sensor simulation. The complexity can range from simple objects to fully featured scenes, depending on the application. Common approaches include building complete virtual environments with simulated sensor movement or generating content on-demand using procedural techniques. Procedural generation utilizes algorithms to create diverse content, including objects, materials, and lighting conditions.

Rendering: Rendering simulates how light interacts with the environment and sensors capture this interaction. Light transport theory describes this process, and the rendering equation mathematically represents it. However, solving this equation is computationally expensive. Rasterization and ray tracing are the two main rendering categories. Rasterization prioritizes speed and is commonly used in game engines. Ray tracing offers superior accuracy and flexibility but requires more computation.

Considerations for Training Data: Feature Variation and Coverage: The generated data should encompass a broad range of features representative of the real-world application domain.

Domain Realism: Minimizing discrepancies between synthetic and real-world sensor data is crucial. Domain transfer models can be employed for post-processing if necessary.

High-Quality Annotations: Synthetic data offers the advantage of automatically generating high-quality annotations and metadata. Scalable Data Generation: The data generation process should be efficient to produce large volumes of annotated data points.

Learning-Based Image Synthesis: The emergence of deep learning has introduced generative models like Variational Autoencoders (VAEs) and Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs) for image creation. These models operate directly in pixel space, with a neural network generating complete images. GANs utilize a two-part training process: a generator that creates images and a discriminator that distinguishes real from synthetic data. Through an iterative process, both models improve, leading to increasingly realistic synthetic images. However, controlling the content generation process in GANs remains a challenge.

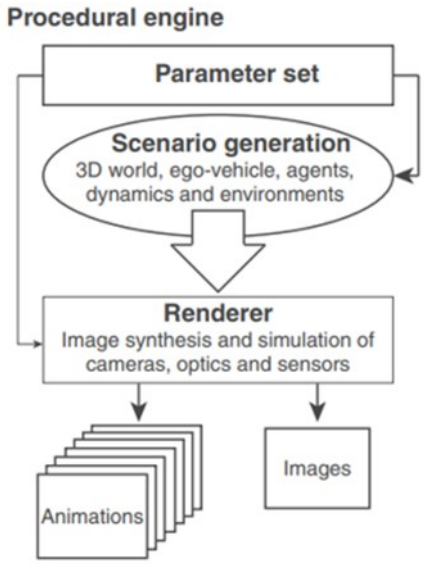

Figure 1. Procedural modeling defines a scene using parameters like shapes, materials, lighting, and sensors to create images or videos.

Data Augmentation (for reference only):

Data augmentation techniques modify existing training data samples to increase dataset size and improve model performance. This survey focuses on image synthesis for generating complete training datasets and excludes augmentation methods.

III. Experiment and Result

This section explores image synthesis techniques for machine learning, categorized based on the modeling and rendering processes involved (refer to Figure 4 in the original paper).

Modeling: Procedural Modeling: Leverages mathematical functions and algorithms to define scene elements like object shapes, textures, and layouts. This offers control, flexibility, and variability in scene content creation.

Data-Driven Modeling: Employs statistical models derived from real-world sensor data (e.g., 3D laser scans) to create realistic representations of objects or phenomena not easily modeled using physics or procedural techniques.

Physically Based Modeling: Relies on established physical principles to define scene elements. This category can also include manually created models that visually adhere to physical laws but may not have a rigorous underlying scientific formulation.

Non-Physically Based Modeling: Encompasses scene content that does not strictly adhere to physical rules or cannot be modeled using the above approaches. Models are often created randomly or based on abstract ideas.

Rendering: Real-Time Rendering: Utilizes real-time visual simulators, often game engines, to directly generate images or extract data from existing game environments. Game engines have become a valuable source of synthetic data due to their advancements in creating realistic visuals. Techniques for extracting data from commercial games without access to source code involve specialized software solutions.

3D Development Platforms: Platforms like Unity and Unreal Engine, originally designed for game development, offer tools for various applications, including synthetic data generation. These platforms primarily rely on precomputed lighting and rasterization rendering for high frame rates. Modern versions are starting to incorporate real-time ray tracing features.

Simulator-Based Rendering: Certain simulators, such as physics engines and driving simulations, can also be used to generate synthetic visual data for machine learning tasks, even if their primary purpose lies in other research areas.

Offline Rendering: Prioritizes quality over speed and allows for techniques like ray casting, rasterization, and physically based ray and path tracing. Offline renderers offer the highest level of photorealism achievable with current technology. Several commercial and open-source offline renderers are available for synthetic data creation.

Object Infusion: Involves offline rendering of objects that are then inserted onto background images to create the final scene. This category also includes techniques that essentially cut and paste objects from one image to another.

A. Computer Vision Training Data Generation Technique-

Computer Vision Applications Benefiting from Image Synthesis, this section explores computer vision research areas that leverage image synthesis for training data. It builds upon the image synthesis taxonomy. Table 1 summarizes computer vision tasks where synthetic training data has been prevalent in the past decade. These tasks encompass object detection, segmentation (semantic, instance, point-cloud), recognition (object, face, scene), pose estimation, optical flow, depth estimation, and robotics/autonomous driving.

The analysis highlights feature-based alignment, dense motion estimation (including optical flow), stereo correspondence, scene recognition, structure from motion, and computational photography as the primary beneficiaries of image synthesis techniques. Notably, tasks like object recognition and scene understanding have witnessed significant advancements due to the rise of deep learning and the emphasis on neural networks. This section emphasizes the value of image synthesis in generating training data for various computer vision applications, paving the way for further exploration.

B. Overview Of Image Synthesis Techniques-

This section explores how computer vision benefits from image synthesis for generating training data. It complements the image synthesis taxonomy presented earlier (not shown here).

Key Applications: Synthetic training data has been prevalent in various computer vision tasks over the past decade. These include object detection, segmentation (semantic, instance, point-cloud), recognition (object, face, scene), pose estimation, optical flow, depth estimation, and robotics/autonomous.

Beneficiaries: Feature-based alignment, dense motion estimation (including optical flow), stereo correspondence, scene recognition, structure from motion, and computational photography are the primary beneficiaries of image synthesis techniques.

Fundamental Concepts: Two key ideas bridge the gap between synthetic and real-world data:

Domain randomization introduces randomness into simulated content to enhance the model's ability to generalize to real-world variations. Rendering randomization varies lighting and camera setups during image rendering, mimicking real-world scenarios.

Examples:

Pose Estimation: Synthetic data pipelines for pose estimation tasks focus on image diversity rather than realism to avoid overfitting. These methods leverage object infusion, rendering randomization, and domain randomization.

Dense Motion Estimation (Optical Flow): Early methods used procedural modeling for offline rendering. Later advancements include real-time rendering using game/simulator engines and short animated films, enabling larger training sets with complex motions. Notably, domain randomization and physically based modeling are crucial for this task.

Stereo Correspondence and Depth Estimation: Disparity and depth estimation are closely related tasks in stereo vision. Synthetic data sets like FlyingThings3D and Unreal Stereo leverage game/simulator engines and physically based modeling to generate disparity ground truth maps.

Recognition: Semantic segmentation is a crucial task for scene understanding. Driving simulators and games featuring urban environments have revolutionized image synthesis for this purpose Techniques like semi-automatic pixel-level annotation and offline unbiased path-tracing rendering are used for ground truth labeling.

Image Creation and Computational Photography: Simulating camera effects for autonomous driving applications is an emerging field. Recent techniques leverage offline physically based rendering and non-procedural modeling to create training data for various camera sensor types.

Intrinsic Image Decomposition: This task involves separating an image into reflectance and illumination layers. Modern techniques employ path tracing, scene databases, and measured materials to achieve this.

In conclusion, image synthesis plays a vital role in generating diverse and controllable training data for various computer vision tasks. This paves the way for further exploration of advanced image synthesis techniques for even more robust computer vision applications.

C. Comparative Qualitative Analysis-

This section proposes a method for evaluating the quality of data creation methods for computer vision tasks. It introduces three factors:

Data Complexity: This combines visual complexity (rendering techniques used) and data production efficiency (speed). Photorealistic, real-time rendering with automation gets the highest score.

Performance Improvement: This measures how much a method improves over baseline performance on real or synthetic data.

Relative Quality Index: This is a weighted combination of data complexity and performance improvement. Figures 2-5 show sample evaluations for pose estimation, optical flow, disparity/depth estimation, and recognition. The key takeaways are:

Method	Year	Sequence	Quantity	Resolution	Relative quality
[SQLG15]	2015	–	–	–	★★★☆☆
[TFR*17]	2017	–	–	–	★★☆☆☆
[PJA*12]	2012	✓	–	–	★☆☆☆☆
[PR15]	2015	✓	400	–	★☆☆☆☆
[CWL*16]	2016	–	5 099 405	–	★☆☆☆☆
[VRM*17]	2017	✓	6 536 752	320 × 240	★☆☆☆☆
[FLC*18]	2018	✓	460 800	1920 × 1080	★☆☆☆☆
[TPAB19]	2019	–	383 000	1024 × 1024	★☆☆☆☆

Figure 2- : Object vs. Human Body Pose Estimation: A table presents quality scores (based on complexity and performance) for object and human body pose estimation frameworks.

Method	Year	Sequence	Quantity	Resolution	Relative quality
[BSL*11] – G	2011	✓	8	640 × 480	★★★☆☆
[BSL*11] – U	2011	✓	8	640 × 480	★★½☆☆
[MIH*16] – FT	2016	✓	26 066	960 × 540	★★☆☆☆
[RHK17]	2017	✓	254 064	1920 × 1080	★★☆☆☆

Figure 3- Dense Motion Estimation (Optical Flow): The table summarizes optical flow generation frameworks using a quality score that reflects complexity and performance.

Method	Year	Sequence	Quantity	Resolution	Relative qualit
[MG15]	2015	√	400	–	★★☆☆☆
[MIH*16] – FT			26 066		★★½☆☆
[MIH*16] – M	2016	√	8591	960 × 540	★★½☆☆
[MIH*16] – D			4392		★☆☆☆☆
[MIH*16] – FT			26 066		★★☆☆☆
[MIH*16] – M	2016	√	8591	960 × 540	★★☆☆☆
[MIH*16] – D			4392		★☆☆☆☆
[ZQC*18]	2018	–	10 825	–	★★☆☆☆
[VRM*17]	2017	√	6 536 752	320 × 240	★☆☆☆☆

Figure 4- Stereo Correspondence and Depth Estimation: The table categorizes frameworks for scene flow, disparity, and depth estimation with quality scores based on complexity and performance within each category.

Simple methods with domain/renderer randomization can achieve high performance for pose estimation. Procedural modeling and physically based rendering offer better visual complexity and performance for optical flow. Domain/renderer randomization is promising for scene flow estimation. Realistic rendering with automation is desirable for recognition tasks.

These results suggest that while data complexity and performance are important, there's room for improvement in data creation methods, especially for efficiency and automation.

Method	Year	Sequence	Quantity	Resolution	Relative quality
[RSM*16] – R	2016	–	13 400	960 × 720	★★☆☆☆
[ASS16]	2016	–	60 000	1024 × 768	★★☆☆☆
[RVRK16]	2016	–	24 966	1914 × 1052	★★☆☆☆
[HPB*16]	2016	–	–	–	★★☆☆☆
[VRM*17]	2017	✓	6 536 752	320 × 240	★★☆☆☆
[RHK17]	2017	✓	254 064	1920 × 1080	★★☆☆☆
[MHLD17]	2017	✓	5 000 000	320 × 240	★★★☆☆
[ZSY*17]	2017	–	500 000	–	★★★☆☆
[CGM*17]	2017	–	614	256 × 256	★★☆☆☆
[STR*18]	2018	–	211	128 × 128	★★☆☆☆
[AEK*18]	2018	–	1 355 568	1920 × 1080	★★☆☆☆
[WU18]	2018	–	25 000	1440 × 720	★★★★☆
[KPL*19]	2019	–	–	–	★★☆☆☆
[PJA*12]	2012	✓	–	–	★★☆☆☆
[JRBM*16]	2017	–	200 000	1914 × 1052	★★☆☆☆
[WU18]	2018	–	25 000	1440 × 720	★★★☆☆
[TPA*18]	2018	–	100 000	1200 × 400	★★☆☆☆
[PBB*18]	2019	–	25 000	–	★★★☆☆
[KPL*19]	2019	–	–	–	★★☆☆☆
[HCW19]	2019	–	50 000	1920 × 780	★★☆☆☆
[FLC*18]	2018	✓	460 800	1920 × 1080	★★☆☆☆
[GWCV16]	2016	✓	21 260	1242 × 375	★★☆☆☆
[ACF*19]	2019	✓	500 000	1920 × 1080	★★☆☆☆
[KPL*19]	2019	–	–	–	★★☆☆☆
[TF18]	2018	–	–	32 × 32	★★☆☆☆
[YWS*18]	2018	–	10 848	–	★★☆☆☆
[ASN*17]	2017	–	–	648 × 490	★★☆☆☆
[KSG*18]	2018	–	–	–	★★☆☆☆

Figure 5- Recognition: A quality score table is provided for semantic segmentation, object detection, tracking, classification, point cloud segmentation, and face recognition frameworks. The score reflects complexity and performance.

D. Result-

Synthetic data holds immense potential for computer vision tasks, but it's still in its early stages. Here are some key areas for future exploration:

Beyond Efficiency: While reducing annotation effort is crucial, future work should explore optimal data distribution and image synthesis for the best coverage within that distribution. We can explore if creating highly complex or rendered objects benefits learning.

Bias Control: Real data can be biased. Synthetic data offers the ability to control the training data distribution to mitigate bias in areas like demographics.

Advanced Benchmarking: Existing methods trained-on synthetic data and evaluate on real data. Future work can involve testing models on high-quality synthetic images for more rigorous statistical testing across various factors like object types, scene conditions, and demographics.

Meta-data and Analysis: Synthetic data allows control over image content and generation of detailed meta-data (depth, camera settings, etc.). This enables comprehensive analysis of model performance during testing. Reducing Domain Gap: The gap between synthetic and real images is a major hurdle. While photorealistic rendering can produce very realistic images, computational resources and replicating all real-world details remain challenges. Integration of synthetic and real data can also be a powerful approach.

Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs): GANs show great promise for creating training data. Future work can explore incorporating more data (demographics, physical constraints) into the image generation process. However, control over GAN-based image generation and creating images beyond the training data distribution remain challenges.

Ethics and Privacy: Synthetic data can be a valuable tool in the big data era, but privacy concerns need to be addressed. It can be used to ensure data diversity and individual privacy protection, especially for sensitive data. Ethical considerations include deanonymization risks and mitigating data set bias through the creation process.

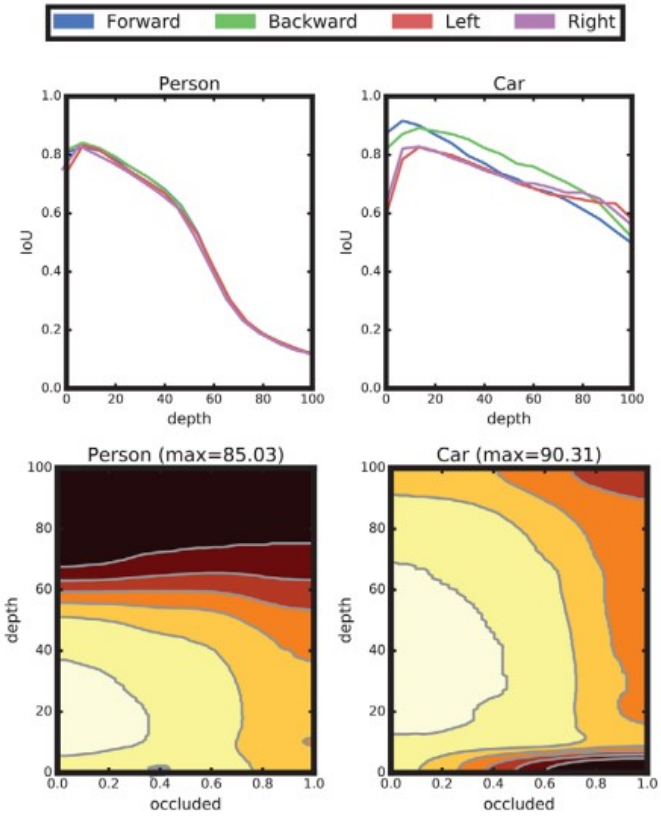

Figure 6- In this work, we demonstrate how meta-data (e.g., depth, occlusion) from synthetic data can be used to analyze object detection model performance variations across different object classes.

IV.CONCLUSION

Recent advancements in machine learning (ML), particularly deep learning (DL), have highlighted the critical role of training data quality and quantity in achieving effective algorithms. Image synthesis techniques have emerged as a powerful tool to expedite the production of training data, offering significant flexibility in both data volume and quality control. This approach facilitates the automation of data synthesis within a well-defined ethical framework, allowing for tailored data generation specific to the application's requirements, while also enabling a high degree of control over the entire production pipeline.

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