

VIDEO CONTENT DETECTOR

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] This invention generally relates to improving video and graphics quality.
5 In particular, the present invention relates to apparatus and methods for determining the type of image content, such as video, text, or a mixed combination, present in a video image.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Televisions, computer monitors and other display devices exist in a great
10 multitude of display sizes and aspect ratios. For example, conventional television displays have a 4:3 (1.33:1) aspect ratio (hereafter referred to as a standard display) while widescreen displays, such as theater or HDTV displays, have a 16:9 (1.78:1) aspect ratio. There are also still wider displays having aspect ratios of 2.39:1 or 2.35:1. Moreover, a given display unit should be able to display the great multitude of
15 video signal formats that exist. In order for a given display unit to display a format other than its own native format, various techniques are used to shrink or extend the aspect ratio of the nonnative format. Many of these techniques involve projecting the nonnative image in its original format onto the native display and simply blackening the "gaps" where no image information exists.

20 [0003] Letterboxing is the practice of transferring wider video formats, such as 16:9, to more square formats while preserving the original aspect ratio. The resulting video display must include masked-off areas above and below the picture area, often referred to as black bars, or, more accurately, as mattes. In contrast, pillarboxing, or windowboxing, is necessitated when video that was not originally designed for
25 widescreen is shown on a widescreen display. The original material is shrunk and placed in the middle of the widescreen frame while vertical black bars are placed on either side. Lastly, there are sometimes instances in which standard ratio images are presented in the central portion of a letterboxed picture, resulting in a black border all around. This effect is referred to as matchboxing, and obviously wastes a great deal of
30 screen space as well as reduces the resolution of the original image.

[0004] Although a controller for a television display generally "knows" that the incoming signal it is receiving is a video signal, the controller generally does not know the format of the incoming signal it is receiving. In the case of computer

monitors, or monitors in general, even less is known about the incoming signal; that is, the monitor does not know whether it is receiving a video signal (such as from a DVD), a textual signal (such as from a computer), or a combination of both. Hence, it is difficult for the display controller to know how to best process the incoming signal.

5 [0005] In order to apply image improvement effects, such as color enhancement or other processing to a graphics or video image, it is necessary to know the nature of the image content; that is, it is desirable to know whether the image is largely real (a film or digital recording) or synthetic (artificial or textual image). In the case where a given display is letterboxed, pillarboxed, or both, it is further desirable to know which
10 portions of the image frame are real and which are synthetic such that appropriate and efficient image processing is accomplished.

[0006] Therefore, it would be desirable to automatically determine the image content of an incoming signal into a display unit.

SUMMARY

15 [0007] Broadly speaking, the invention relates to determining the image content of an incoming bitstream such that image improvement effects such as better pixel allocation and increased luminance contrast levels may be accomplished. The invention can be implemented in numerous ways, including as a method, system, device, apparatus, or computer readable medium. Several embodiments of the
20 invention are discussed below.

[0008] In embodiments of the present invention, a method of determining a realness value of an image formed of a plurality of pixels each having associated pixel data by evaluating a spatial distribution of luminance values of the image is described. The method may be carried out by: dividing the image into a number of image blocks,
25 generating a luminance histogram for selected image blocks, and using the luminance histograms to determine a realness value for each of the selected image blocks. Determining a realness value for each image block may include determining a range of represented luminance values, determining a density of represented luminance values, and/or analyzing a distribution pattern of the represented bins
30 thereby providing a distribution pattern of represented luminance values, for example. The realness values for each of the selected image blocks may then be used to determine the realness value for the image. The realness value for the image may then be compared to one or more specified values. In various embodiments, the image may be considered real if the total realness value is greater than a largest specified value,

the image may be considered synthetic if the total realness value is less than a smallest specified value, and the image may be considered mixed if the total realness value is in between selected specified values.

[0009] In other embodiments of the present invention, an apparatus for
5 determining a realness value of an image formed of a plurality of pixels each having associated pixel data by evaluating a spatial distribution of luminance values of the image is described. The apparatus includes means for dividing the image into a number of image blocks, means for generating a luminance histogram for selected image blocks, and means for using the luminance histograms to determine a realness
10 value for each of the selected image blocks. Means for determining a realness value for each image block may include means for determining a range of represented luminance values, means for determining a density of represented luminance values, and/or means for analyzing a distribution pattern of the represented bins thereby providing a distribution pattern of represented luminance values, for example. The
15 apparatus may also include means for determining the realness value of the image based upon the realness values obtained for each of the selected image blocks, as well as means for comparing the realness value obtained for the image to one or more specified values.

[0010] In still other embodiments of the present invention, computer program
20 product executable by a processor for determining a realness value of an image formed of a plurality of pixels each having associated pixel data by evaluating a spatial distribution of luminance values of the image is described. The computer program product includes computer code for dividing the image into a number of image blocks, computer code for generating a luminance histogram for selected image
25 blocks, and computer code for using the luminance histograms to determine a realness value for each of the selected image blocks. Computer code for determining a realness value for each image block may include computer code for determining a range of represented luminance values, computer code for determining a density of represented luminance values, and/or computer code for analyzing a distribution
30 pattern of the represented bins thereby providing a distribution pattern of represented luminance values, for example. The computer program product may also include computer code for determining the realness value of the image based upon the realness values obtained for each of the selected image blocks, as well as computer

code for comparing the realness value obtained for the image to one or more specified values. Computer readable medium for storing the computer code is also provided.

[0011] Other aspects and advantages of the invention will become apparent from the following detailed description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0012] The invention, together with further objects and advantages thereof, may best be understood by reference to the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in which:

- 10 FIG. 1 shows a flowchart illustrating a process of determining a realness value of an image in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;
- FIG. 2 shows a representative image frame subdivided into image blocks;
- FIG. 3a shows an exemplary real image;
- FIG. 3b shows an exemplary realness value plot of the associated real image of
- 15 FIG. 3a in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;
- FIG. 4a shows an exemplary synthetic image;
- FIG. 4b shows an exemplary realness value plot of the associated synthetic image of FIG. 4a in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;
- FIG. 5a shows an exemplary video-in-window image;
- 20 FIG. 5b shows an exemplary realness value plot of the associated video-in-window image of FIG. 5a in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

[0013] In the drawings, like reference numerals designate like elements. Also, it should be understood that the depictions in the figures are not to scale.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF SELECTED EMBODIMENTS

- 25 [0014] Reference will now be made in detail to a particular embodiment of the invention an example of which is illustrated in the accompanying drawings. While the invention will be described in conjunction with the particular embodiment, it will be understood that it is not intended to limit the invention to the described embodiment. To the contrary, it is intended to cover alternatives, modifications, and
- 30 equivalents as may be included within the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.

[0015] In an aspect of the present invention, a method of determining a realness value of an image formed of a plurality of pixels each having associated pixel data by evaluating the spatial distribution of luminance values of the image is described. In

general, if an image is mostly synthetic, it is textual, if it is mostly real, it is video (or photo), if the image displays some of each, it is "mixed" if distributed unevenly, or "video-in-window" if concentrated in a large rectangle. An example of a mixed signal may be an Internet source displaying many small real images on a synthetic

5 background. An example of a mixed signal may even be a synthetic photo or video recording that has been enhanced, perhaps through random luminance addition, to look more real. An example of a video-in-window signal may be an Internet source displaying a photo or video recording in an application window that is surrounded by a larger window or background displaying synthetic colors or text, as shown in Fig. 2
10 illustrating an image frame 200 having a real video image 206 with edges 204 and a synthetic background 208.

[0016] In one embodiment, an image frame is received at step 102 at a display unit that may be a television display or computer monitor configured in any number of formats such as 1.33:1 format, widescreen 1.78:1 format or widescreen 2.39:1 format.

15 At step 104, the image frame is subdivided into a plurality of image blocks 202. In the described embodiment, each of the image blocks 202 is of equal size in physical dimension. The image blocks are organized into N rows and M columns. By way of example, the use of 32 columns and 30 rows of image blocks (resulting in 960 rectangular image blocks) has been shown to work well. It should be noted that each
20 of the image blocks 202 need not be square, nor need they be of equal size. In other embodiments, the image blocks may be smaller, for example, in the center of the display or where a real image is expected.

[0017] As is known in the art, an RGB signal comprising the chroma portions red, green, and blue can be transformed into a YUV signal comprising the luminance
25 portion Y, and two chroma portions U and V. Once an incoming RGB color space signal is converted to a corresponding YUV color space signal, the luminance portion, Y, for each of the pixels in an image block is used to generate a luminance histogram in step 106. In some embodiments, all of the pixels in the image block are used to generate a luminance histogram having a predefined number of luminance bins (such
30 as 128) each of which represents a range of luminance values. It should be noted that in order to preserve computing time and/or resources, each bin of the luminance histogram may be represented in a computer memory by a single bit indicating whether or not a particular range of luminance values is represented. By way of

example, a logic 1 may indicate that a bin is represented in the image block while a logic 0 may indicate that the particular bin is not represented.

[0018] Although it is contemplated that all, or substantially all, of the pixels in a particular image block are used, in some cases it may be preferable to use only
5 selected ones of the pixels in a particular image block to generate the luminance histograms. In any case, once a luminance histogram is generated for a particular image block, a luminance histogram is generated for all, or substantially all, of the image blocks (however, in some cases it may be desirable to use only selected ones of the image blocks)

10 [0019] Once all of the luminance histograms have been generated, the luminance histograms are analyzed at step 108 in order to determine a spatial distribution of luminance across the displayed image. The analysis may include finding the bin representing the highest represented luminance value, finding the bin representing the lowest represented luminance value and determining the number of bins in between.
15 This portion of the analysis may be used to estimate the range of represented luminance values in the image block. The wider the range, the more likely the content present in the image block is real; that is, that the content was produced through an analog or digital recording. In various embodiments, the density of represented luminance values in the image frame may be determined. In some embodiments, the
20 density may be estimated as a number of bins represented out of the total range of represented bins for each image block. The greater the density of bins represented, the more likely that the image is real. In still other embodiments, a third method of analysis may be employed having to do with the pattern of represented bins. By way of example, if the represented bins are spread out, i.e. not clumped into a narrow
25 range, then it is more likely that the image block is real.

[0020] The combination of one or more of the aforementioned analysis tools may then be used to estimate the "realness" of an image block in the image frame at 110. By way of example, a scale from 0 to 10, where a 0 indicates an entirely synthetic image block and a 10 indicates an entirely real image block, may be used to estimate a
30 realness value for the image block. As stated earlier, a synthetic image will often have a very narrow range of luminances or a wide range but with many gaps in between. A real image will tend to have a wider range of luminances with most of the luminances in the range represented.

[0021] Figs. 3a and 3b illustrate a real image and an associated two-dimensional rendition of a three-dimensional plot showing the realness values obtained for all of the image blocks of the image. The plot shows an image frame divided into 31 rows and 32 columns and having a height scale ranging from 0 to 30 representing the
5 realness value of the image block. Figs. 4a and 4b similarly illustrate a synthetic image and associated three-dimensional realness value plot. Lastly, Figs. 5a and 5b similarly illustrate a video-in-window image and associated three-dimensional realness value plot. In the video-in-window example, the central region clearly shows the real portion of the image frame.

10 [0022] At 112, the realness values computed for the entire image frame may then be analyzed. By way of example, the realness values may simply be added to obtain a realness value for a region of the image frame, or the image frame in its entirety. At 114, the nature of the image content of the image frame is determined. The image may be classified into one of a number of categories based upon a comparison
15 between its realness value and one or more specified values. If the realness value computed for the image is greater than a largest specified value, the image may be considered real, if the realness value of the image is less than a smallest specified value, the image may be considered synthetic, and if the realness value of the image is in between selected specified values, the image may be considered mixed. The
20 specified values used for comparison may be fixed predetermined numbers, or numbers that are made variable.

[0023] As alluded to earlier, in the case of mixed images, it is further desirable to determine if the mixed image is a video-in-window image such that various image improvement effects might be performed on the real (windowed) portion. Video-in-
25 window detection may be achieved by analyzing the distribution of the realness values of the image blocks in the image frame. In a display unit configured to display a native video format, if a video-in-window signal is detected, a better allocation of pixels may be achieved. As mentioned in the background, a matchboxing effect may result from a combination of letterboxing followed by pillarboxing, such as would be
30 observed if a standard format advertisement is incorporated into a widescreen display format being displayed on a standard format display unit. In this manner, the video-in-window signal that would normally be dramatically reduced in size and resolution, may be displayed in a format more consistent with the display as well as that intended by the source. In order to make such image improvements, it is necessary to define

the edges of the video window, that is, the boundaries between the real video and the synthetic background. Such a boundary edge detection process 116 is described in detail in co-pending patent application entitled, "Video Window Detector" by Neal having Application Serial No. 11/565,464, which is incorporated herein by reference
5 in its entirety for all purposes.

[0024] Finally, it should be noted that the described realness measurement need not be performed on every frame in all embodiments. By way of example, it has been shown that performing the realness measurement every four frames is sufficient for many applications while not burdening memory resources.

10 [0025] Embodiments of the invention, including the apparatus disclosed herein, can be implemented in digital electronic circuitry, or in computer hardware, firmware, software, or in combinations of them. Apparatus embodiments of the invention can be implemented in a computer program product tangibly embodied in a machine-readable storage device for execution by a programmable processor; and method steps of the
15 invention can be performed by a programmable processor executing a program of instructions to perform functions of the invention by operating on input data and generating output. Embodiments of the invention can be implemented advantageously in one or more computer programs that are executable on a programmable system including at least one programmable processor coupled to receive data and
20 instructions from, and to transmit data and instructions to, a data storage system, at least one input device, and at least one output device. Each computer program can be implemented in a high-level procedural or object-oriented programming language, or in assembly or machine language if desired; and in any case, the language can be a compiled or interpreted language.

25 [0026] Suitable processors include, by way of example, both general and special purpose microprocessors. Generally, a processor will receive instructions and data from a read-only memory and/or a random access memory. Generally, a computer will include one or more mass storage devices for storing data files; such devices include magnetic disks, such as internal hard disks and removable disks; magneto-optical
30 disks; and optical disks. Storage devices suitable for tangibly embodying computer program instructions and data include all forms of non-volatile memory, including by way of example semiconductor memory devices, such as EPROM, EEPROM, and flash memory devices; magnetic disks such as internal hard disks and removable

disks; magneto-optical disks; and CD-ROM disks. Any of the foregoing can be supplemented by, or incorporated in, ASICs (application-specific integrated circuits).

[0027] A number of implementations of the invention have been described.

- Nevertheless, it will be understood that various modifications may be made without
5 departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. Accordingly, other embodiments
are within the scope of the following claims.

CLAIMS

1. A method of determining a realness value of an image formed of a plurality of pixels each having associated pixel data by evaluating a spatial distribution of luminance values of the image.
- 5 2. A method as recited in claim 1, further comprising:
dividing the image into a number of image blocks;
generating a luminance histogram for selected image blocks; and
using said luminance histograms to determine a realness value for each of said selected image blocks.
- 10 3. A method as recited in claim 2, wherein the image is divided into image blocks of equal size.
4. A method as recited in claim 2, wherein each bin of the luminance histogram is represented by 1 bit indicating whether or not a particular range of luminance values is represented in the image block.
- 15 5. A method as recited in claim 2, wherein using said luminance histogram to determine a realness value for the image block includes determining a range of represented luminance values.
6. A method as recited in claim 5, wherein using said luminance histogram to determine a realness value for the image block includes determining a density of
20 represented luminance values.
7. A method as recited in claim 6, wherein using said luminance histogram to determine a realness value for the image block includes analyzing a distribution pattern of the represented bins thereby providing a distribution pattern of represented luminance values.
- 25 8. A method as recited in claim 7, wherein the realness value is selected based upon one or more of a group including the range of represented luminance values, the density of represented luminance values, and the distribution pattern of represented luminance values.
9. A method as recited in claim 2, further comprising determining realness values
30 for each, and all, of the image blocks in the image.
10. A method as recited in claim 2, further comprising using the realness values for each of said selected image blocks to determine the realness value for the image.
11. A method as recited in claim 10, further comprising comparing the realness value determined for the image to one or more specified values.

12. A method as recited in claim 11, wherein the image is considered real if the realness value of the image is greater than a largest specified value, wherein the image is considered synthetic if the realness value of the image is less than a smallest specified value, and considered mixed if the realness value of the image is in between selected specified values.
13. An apparatus for determining a realness value of a displayed image formed of a plurality of pixels each having associated pixel data by evaluating a spatial distribution of luminance values of the displayed image.
14. An apparatus as recited in claim 13, further comprising:
10 means for dividing the image into a number of image blocks;
means for generating a luminance histogram for selected image blocks; and
means for using said luminance histograms to determine a realness value for each of said selected image blocks.
15. An apparatus as recited in claim 14, wherein the image is divided into image blocks of equal size.
16. An apparatus as recited in claim 14, wherein each bin of the luminance histogram is represented by 1 bit and stored in a means of storage indicating whether or not a particular range of luminance values is represented in the image block.
17. An apparatus as recited in claim 14, wherein means for using said luminance histogram to determine a realness value for the image block includes means for
20 determining a range of represented luminance values.
18. An apparatus as recited in claim 17, wherein means for using said luminance histogram to determine a realness value for the image block includes means for determining a density of represented luminance values.
19. An apparatus as recited in claim 18, wherein means for using said luminance histogram to determine a realness value for the image block includes means for analyzing a distribution pattern of the represented bins thereby providing a distribution pattern of represented luminance values.
20. An apparatus as recited in claim 19, wherein the realness value is selected
30 based upon one or more of a group including the range of represented luminance values, the density of represented luminance values, and the distribution pattern of represented luminance values.
21. An apparatus as recited in claim 14, further comprising determining realness values for each, and all, of the image blocks in the image.

22. An apparatus as recited in claim 14, further comprising means for using the realness values for each of said selected image blocks to determine the realness value for the image.
23. An apparatus as recited in claim 22, further comprising means for comparing
5 the realness value determined for the image to one or more specified values.
24. An apparatus as recited in claim 23, wherein the image is considered real if the realness value of the image is greater than a largest specified value, wherein the image is considered synthetic if the realness value of the image is less than a smallest specified value, and considered mixed if the realness value of the image is in between
10 selected specified values.
25. Computer program product executable by a processor for determining a realness value of a displayed image formed of a plurality of pixels each having associated pixel data by evaluating a spatial distribution of luminance values of the displayed image.
- 15 26. Computer program product as recited in claim 25, further comprising:
computer code for dividing the image into a number of image blocks;
computer code for generating a luminance histogram for selected image blocks;
computer code for using said luminance histograms to determine a realness
20 value for each of said selected image blocks; and
a computer readable medium for storing the computer code.
27. Computer program product as recited in claim 26, wherein the image is divided into image blocks of equal size.
28. Computer program product as recited in claim 26, further comprising
25 computer code for representing each bin of the luminance histogram by 1 bit indicating whether or not a particular range of luminance values is represented in the image block.
29. Computer program product as recited in claim 26, wherein computer code for using said luminance histogram to determine a realness value for the image block
30 includes computer code for determining a range of represented luminance values.
30. Computer program product as recited in claim 29, wherein computer code for using said luminance histogram to determine a realness value for the image block includes computer code for determining a density of represented luminance values.

31. Computer program product as recited in claim 30, wherein computer code for using said luminance histogram to determine a realness value for the image block includes computer code for analyzing a distribution pattern of the represented bins thereby providing a distribution pattern of represented luminance values.
- 5 32. Computer program product as recited in claim 31, wherein the realness value is selected based upon one or more of a group including the range of represented luminance values, the density of represented luminance values, and the distribution pattern of represented luminance values.
33. Computer program product as recited in claim 26, further comprising
10 determining realness values for each, and all, of the image blocks in the image.
34. Computer program product as recited in claim 26, further comprising computer code for using the realness values for each of said selected image blocks to determine the realness value for the image.
35. Computer program product as recited in claim 34, further comprising
15 computer code for comparing the realness value determined for the image to one or more specified values.
36. Computer program product as recited in claim 35, wherein the image is considered real if the realness value of the image is greater than a largest specified value, wherein the image is considered synthetic if the realness value of the image is
20 less than a smallest specified value, and considered mixed if the realness value of the image is in between selected specified values.