Point Clouds can render up to 10x faster with compute shaders instead of glDraw

Rendering Point Clouds with Compute Shaders
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Abstract
Regular point rasterization with glDrawArrays(GL_POINT,...) can be slow due to the overhead of the rendering pipeline. Compute shaders with atomicMin and atomicAdd are often a faster alternative.

Method 1: Compute
A compute shader transforms points to pixel coordinates, and then encodes linear depth and color into a 64 bit integer. With atomicMin, we store the fragments with the lowest depth in a pixel buffer. A second compute shader transfers the pixel buffer into a texture.

Method 2: High-Quality
First, create a depth buffer with method 1. Then, use atomicAdd to sum up and count color values of points at most 1% behind depth buffer. Finally, divide sum of colors by number of fragments to get an average color value of overlapping points in a pixel. Compute shader implementation of Botsch et al. [1].

Results
• Our compute and the classic GL_POINTS method produce the same result • The basic compute method is up to 2x to 10x faster than GL_POINTS • The high-quality method is up to 2x to 4x faster than GL_POINTS • Evaluated for point sizes of 1 pixel • GL_POINTS still faster for point sizes larger than 2x2 pixels

Dataset: San Simeon, 117M points, courtesy of PG&E
Code: github.com/m-schuetz/compute_rasterizer
Video: bit.ly/2nv48gl

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References / Related Work