

conoa sphere

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Overview

Conoa Sphere is an Adobe After Effects-style plug-in that allows video to be mapped to a sphere in a true three-dimensional space and animated through the video host interface. The sphere is rendered with a powerful raytracing engine. Raytracing is a method of computer graphics rendering that simulates a wide range of real world materials, such as metal or glass. Conoa Sphere employs raytracing to produce images with refraction, specular highlights, texture mapping and reflection mapping.

Coordinate System

Conoa Sphere employs a left-handed coordinate system. In a left-handed coordinate system, if the thumb is aligned with the X-axis and the fingers are aligned with the Y-axis, then the palm faces in the direction of the Z-axis, which in this case points into the screen or page.

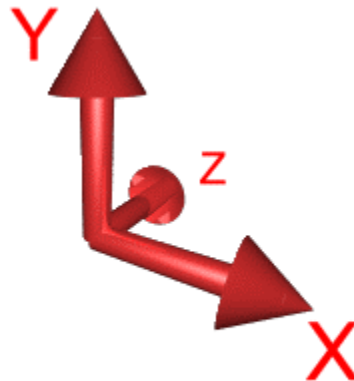


Figure 1 – Conoa Sphere’s coordinate system

The angles of rotation are similarly left-handed. By pointing the thumb in the direction of the axis of rotation, the fingers curl in the direction of the rotation. Figure 2 shows the angles of rotation with respect to the coordinate system.

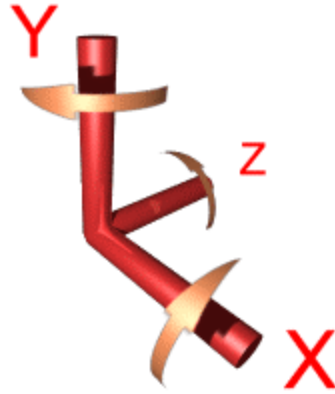


Figure 2 – Conoa Sphere’s angles of rotation

Note: Conoa Sphere’s coordinate system differs from the After Effects coordinate system in that Conoa Sphere’s origin is centered in the composition window and the positive Y-axis points up. After Effect’s coordinate system has the origin in the upper left corner of the composition window and the positive Y-axis points down.

Sphere Controls

Conoa Sphere supports positioning and rotating within the coordinate system described above. The radius of the sphere may be set with the *Radius* control. Layers can be applied to the surface with the *Texture Map* control.

Camera

Conoa Sphere supports two camera models: its own camera model and the camera model of After Effects 5.0. The control *Camera Source* chooses between the two models. By default, Conoa Sphere’s native camera model is used.

Conoa Sphere’s native camera model employs a spherical coordinate system. With spherical coordinates, two rotation angles and a distance from the center of the coordinate system define the camera’s position. The camera’s default position is along the negative Z-axis. *Azimuth* rotates the camera around the Y-axis and *Declination* rotates the camera around the X-axis. *Radius* moves the camera towards or away from the origin. The camera is always pointed at the origin.

If the camera were to move freely, it’s motion would be in the shape of a sphere centered at the origin. The following figure is a depiction of that motion.

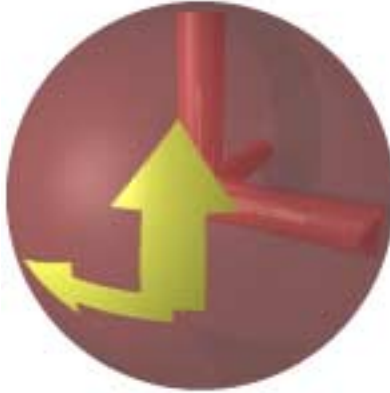


Figure 4 – A representation of the camera’s spherical motion. The arrows point in the direction of positive rotation.

Choosing *Use Comp Camera* for *Camera Source* selects the After Effects 5.0 camera as the source for camera location and orientation. Only camera position and orientation are currently supported.

Note: It is recommended that Auto-Orientation in the layer’s transform properties be set to ‘Off’, when choosing the After Effects camera model.

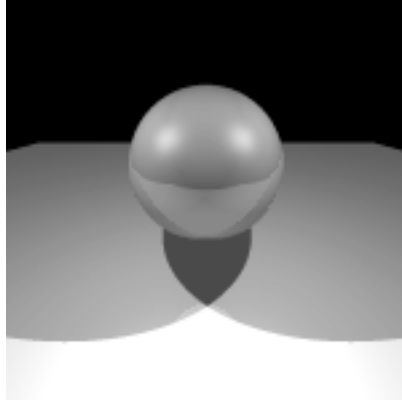
Lights

Conoa Sphere supports two types of lighting controls: its own lights and those of After Effects 5.0. In both cases, only point lights are supported. Conoa Sphere’s own lights are automatically regarded as point light sources. When using After Effects 5.0’s lights, “Point” should be selected as the light type.

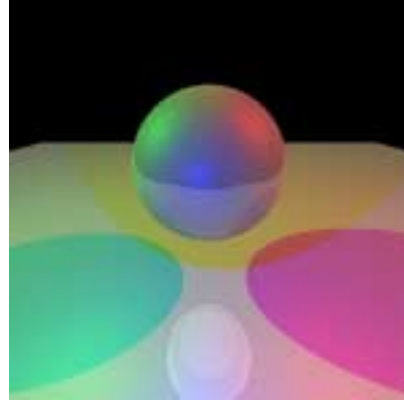
Conoa Sphere supports one or two of its native lights. *Light 2 Toggle* will turn the second light on or off. Conoa Sphere’s lights are always white and always cast shadows.

Choosing *Use Comp Lighting* for *Light Source* selects After Effects 5.0 lights as the lighting source. Conoa Sphere supports the position, color, intensity and ‘casts shadows’ properties of After Effects lights. Additionally, Conoa Sphere supports up to 10 layer lights. Only the first 10 layer lights in a composition will be rendered; the rest will be ignored. A user should use the lights of After Effects 5.0 if color is desired, or shadows are not.

The following images were rendered with Conoa, the full 3D raytracing plugin. They are presented here to demonstrate more fully the effect of multiple light sources.



Conoa Sphere's native lights

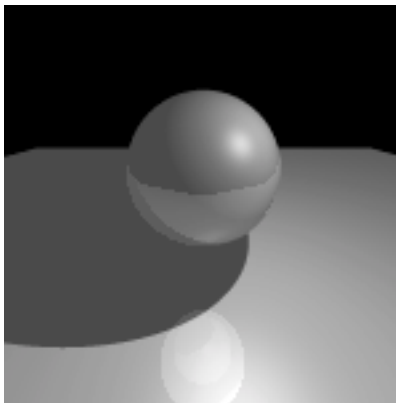


After Effects 5.0 lights

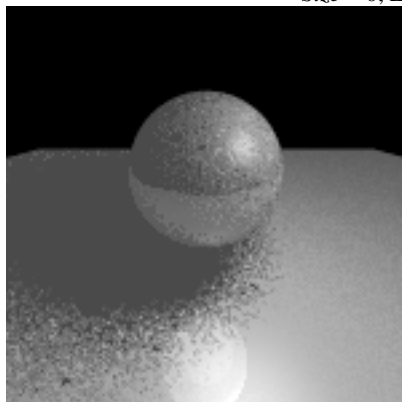
Figure 5 – Conoa Sphere's lights vs. After Effects 5.0 lights

With the Conoa Sphere lighting model, Conoa Sphere supports area light sources. Area light sources produce soft shadows. The *Size* control sets the radius of light source. The larger the radius of the light source, the softer the shadow that is produced. A size of 0 produces a point light, which creates a sharp shadow. The *Light Supersampling Factor* controls how many shadow rays are used to calculate the shadow. The higher the sampling factor, the smoother the shadow gradient will be.

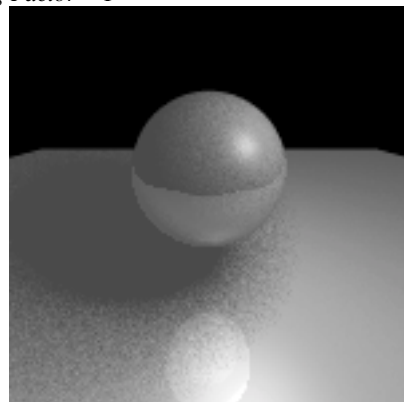
Note: Increasing the *Light Supersampling Factor* can drastically increase render times.



Size = 0, Light Supersampling Factor = 1



Size = 1.3, Light Supersampling Factor = 1



Size = 1.3, Light Supersampling Factor = 25

Figure 6 – Effects of Size and Light Supersampling Factor

Material Properties

Conoa Sphere's material parameters define the visual characteristics of the surfaces of the objects. *Ambient Light* defines the amount of ambient light reflected off the surface. Ambient light is the background light of the scene, and is not dependent on either the position of the light source or the viewer. *Diffuse Light* defines the amount of diffuse light reflected off the surface. Diffuse light is light from the light source that is reflected off the surface. It is not dependent on the position of the camera. *Specular Light* defines the amount of specular light reflected off the surface. Specular light is usually seen as highlights on a surface and is dependent on the position of both the light and the camera. It is usually described as the 'shininess' of the surface. *Opacity* defines the opacity of the surface. The following figures show examples of different material parameters.

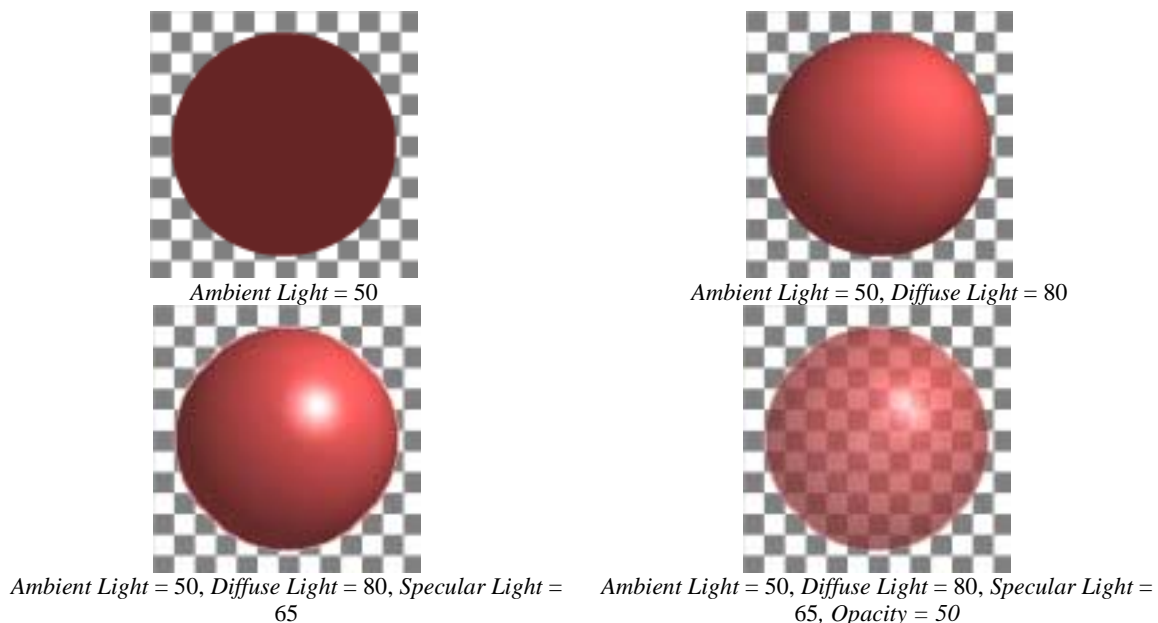


Figure 7 – Effects of the various material parameters

Image Rendering and Quality

Conoa Sphere supports draft and high quality rendering. Draft quality rendering produces images faster, but edges often have a jagged look. High quality rendering eliminates this problem. The layer's quality control can be used to select the rendering style, and thus the image quality.

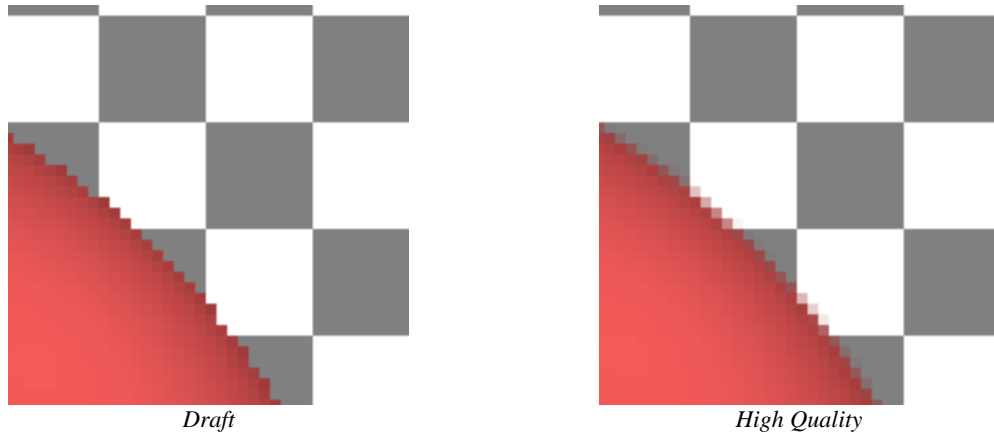


Figure 8 – Draft and High Quality rendering

Conoa Sphere supports four levels of high quality rendering. These are *Coarse*, *Medium*, *Fine* and *Super Fine*, and are set with the pull-down control *Anti-aliasing quality*. These choices affect the level of anti-aliasing that Conoa Sphere performs. Anti-aliasing is the algorithmic method by which Conoa Sphere removes jagged edges from the images. The levels represent the level to which each pixel is examined by the algorithm. *Super Fine* is the highest level of quality, but the slowest to render. *Medium* is adequate for most situations and is the default.

The images below show the difference between the *Coarse* and *Super Fine* levels of anti-aliasing quality. The difference is subtle, but can be best observed along the edge of the sphere.

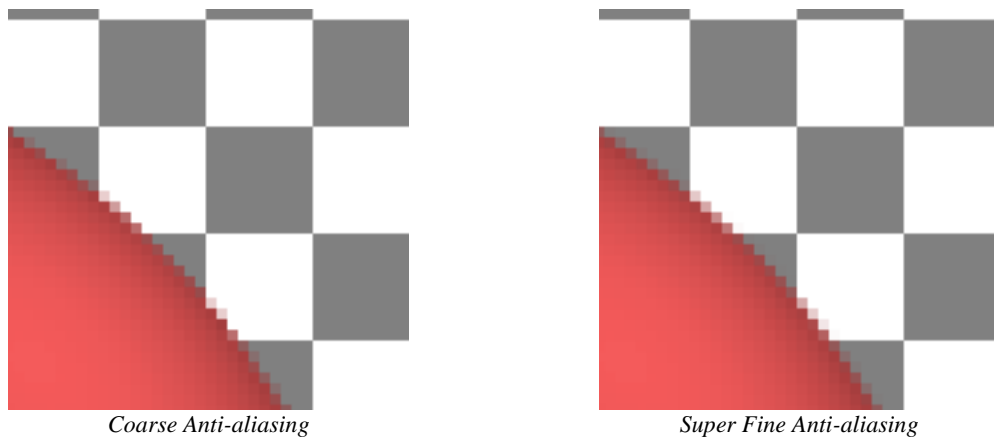


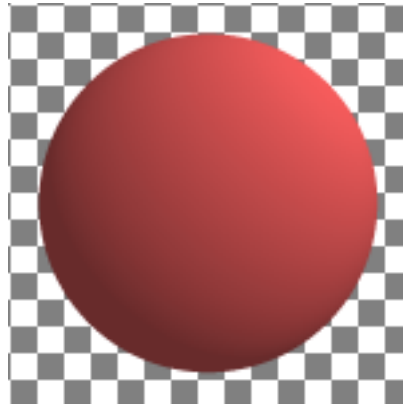
Figure 9 – Anti-aliasing quality

The *Compositing* toggle controls whether the objects will be rendered onto the layer to which Conoa Sphere is applied. If the toggle is set, signifying *Composite On Original* is on, then the plug-in will render its objects “above” the layer to which it’s applied. Any pixel not covered by an object will show the corresponding pixel from the layer to which the plug-in is applied. If the *Compositing* toggle is not set, signifying *Composite On Original* is off, then Conoa Sphere takes over the entire layer to which it’s applied. Any pixel not covered by an object will be set to transparent black.

In the following images, Conoa Sphere has been applied to a single layer that is a bitmap of a checkerboard pattern.



Compositing set Off



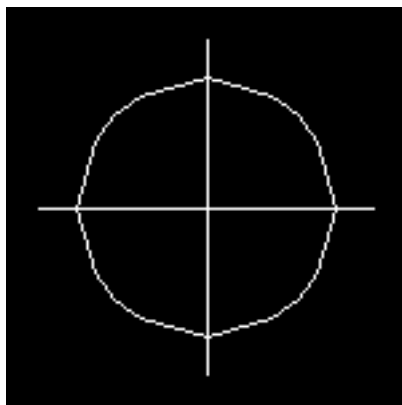
Compositing set On

Figure 10 – *Compositing* toggle switch

Conoa Sphere also has a *Render Mode* control, which is useful for working with the plug-in interactively. The *Render Mode* control specifies which level of material effects will be rendered. Since wireframe views are often sufficient for object placement and diffuse lighting is usually sufficient for light placement, a user can work in these modes for keyframing, leaving the full set of effects for the final rendering. The *Render Mode* control has four choices: *Wireframe*, *Ambient*, *Diffuse*, and *Full*. *Wireframe* will generate a wireframe rendering of the objects. *Ambient* will only use ambient light to light the objects. *Diffuse* displays both ambient and diffuse lighting. *Full* renders the complete set of material parameters, including specular lighting and opacity.

It is important to remember that *Render Mode* does not set material parameters. It simply selectively renders using previously set material parameters.

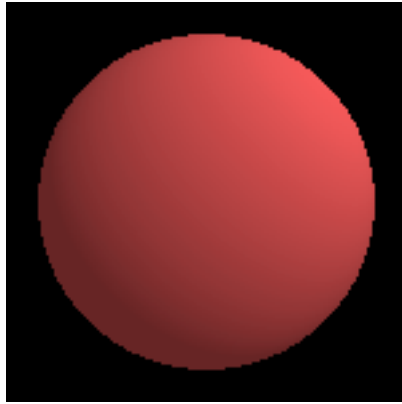
Note: The *Render Mode* control is only active during draft rendering. It has no effect in high quality rendering.



Render Mode set to Wireframe



Render Mode set to Ambient



Render Mode set to Diffuse



Render Mode set to Full

Figure 11 – *Render Mode* settings

Controls

Below is a complete list of the Conoa Sphere Sphere controls.

Sphere group:

X Translate - Move the object along the world X-axis.

Y Translate - Move the object along the world Y-axis.

Z Translate - Move the object along the world Z-axis.

X Rotate - Rotate the object about the local X-axis.

Y Rotate - Rotate the object about the local Y-axis.

Z Rotate - Rotate the object about the local Z-axis.

Radius – The radius of the sphere.

Texture Map – The texture map to apply to this object.

Camera group:

Camera Source - Toggles between Conoa Sphere's camera model and that of After Effects 5.0.

Azimuth - Rotate camera about the world Y-axis, i.e. rotate the camera left/right.

Declination - Rotate camera about the world X-axis, i.e. rotate the camera up/down.

Radius - Move the camera towards or away from the world origin.

Field Of View Angle - The field-of-view of the camera. This control allows the camera to zoom in or out without moving the camera position. As the field-of-view is increased, the camera zooms out and perspective distortion is increased.

Light group:

Light Source - Toggles between Conoa Sphere's light sources and those of After Effects 5.0.

Light Supersampling Factor – The number of rays to shoot toward each light source. Higher numbers of samples of the light sources enable soft shadows. Also, higher

numbers of samples produce smoother shadow areas. This parameter affects the number of samples projected to all light sources. Lights that have a size of 0 are not sampled more than once.

Position – Position of the light in the world X-Y plane.

Depth – Position of the light along the world Z-axis.

Size – Radius of the light. A radius of 0 signifies a point light source, which will produce sharp shadows. Lights with larger radii will produce softer shadows.

Light 2 Toggle – Turns the second light on or off.

Light 2 Position – Position of the second light in the world X-Y plane.

Light 2 Depth – Position of the second light along the world Z-axis.

Light 2 Size – Radius of the second light.

Material group:

Color - The color of both surfaces.

Refractive Index - The index of refraction of both surfaces. This parameter is only taken into account if the opacity of the chosen material is less than 1.0. Otherwise, the material is completely opaque and refraction is not relevant.

Ambient Light - Proportion of ambient light reflected off objects' surfaces.

Diffuse Light - Proportion of diffuse light reflected off objects' surfaces.

Specular Light - Proportion of specular light reflected off objects' surfaces.

Opacity - Amount of opacity that each object has, specified as a percent. A surface with 25% opacity is 75% transparent.

Reflection Map – Layer that is used to create an environment that reflects off the sphere.

Reflectivity – Relative contribution of the reflection map to the surface.

Anti-aliasing quality - The level of anti-aliasing performed by the plug-in. The choices are: *Coarse*, *Medium*, *Fine* and *Super Fine*. The default choice is *Medium*.

Compositing - Determines whether the Conoa Sphere will be composited onto the layer to which it is applied. The default choice is *Off*, so Conoa Sphere replaces the layer to which it is applied.

Render Mode - Sets the style with which Conoa Sphere will render the image. The choices are: *Wireframe*, *Ambient*, *Diffuse* and *Full*. When *Wireframe* is chosen, Conoa Sphere will render the geometry with a “stick” representation, allowing for interactive placement of the objects. With *Ambient*, Conoa Sphere renders the objects with all material properties set to full ambient light and all other material properties turned off. With *Diffuse*, Conoa Sphere will render only ambient and diffuse light, allowing for quicker placement of lights. *Full* will render all material properties, including reflection and refraction. The default choice is *Full*.

Known Issues

- When switching from draft to high quality, materials with partial opacity can show a change in brightness.