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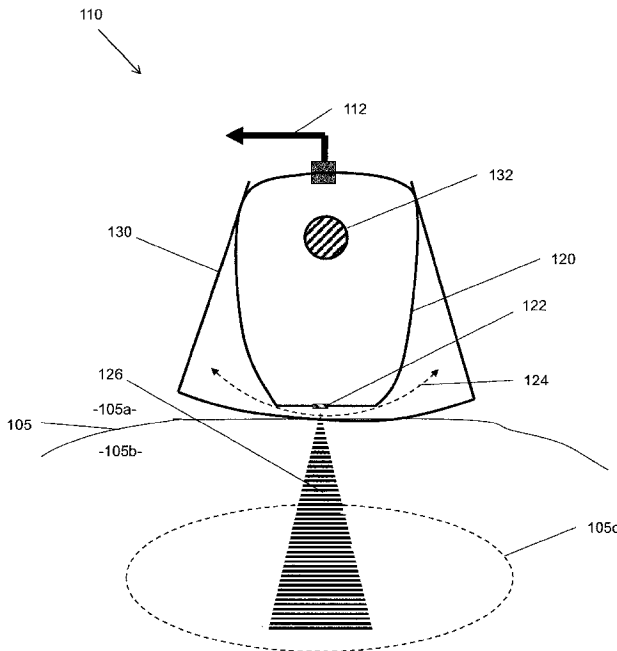


Figure 2

(57) Abstract: An ultrasound imaging apparatus including a processing unit configured to produce an ultrasound image of the target region by applying position/orientation data representative of the position and/or orientation of an ultrasound transducer on the first side of a surface during each collection cycle to echo data representative of reflected ultrasound energy received by the ultrasound transducer during each collection cycle so as to coherently focus the echo data at a plurality of points distributed within the target region.



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## ULTRASOUND IMAGING APPARATUS

This invention relates to ultrasound imaging apparatuses and associated devices and methods.

5 Ultrasound imaging apparatuses, that is, apparatuses for producing ultrasound images are well known. Such devices are typically used in a medical context, where their use is commonly referred to as “diagnostic sonography” or simply “ultrasonography”. A common produce of diagnostic sonography is obstetric sonography in which ultrasound energy is used to produce images of an embryo or foetus in a mother’s womb.

10 Modern ultrasound imaging apparatuses typically produce ultrasound images using echo data produced using a probe having a plurality of ultrasound transducers arranged in a fixed array. A problem with modern ultrasound imaging apparatuses is that the multi-element transducer array and associated beamforming electronics typically used by such apparatuses are expensive to construct. This means that  
15 current “top-end” apparatuses are very expensive, e.g. in the range of £20,000-£100,000 (2012 prices).

The present invention has been devised in light of the above considerations.

20 The inventors have observed that it would be desirable to produce an ultrasound imaging apparatus using very low-cost components, whilst still being capable of producing ultrasound images of useful quality, e.g. so as to open up the possibility of using ultrasound imaging apparatuses in applications and/or regions where use of such apparatuses is currently cost prohibitive.

Accordingly, a first aspect of the invention may provide an ultrasound imaging apparatus including:

- 25           an ultrasound transducer configured to perform, in each of a plurality of positions and/or orientations on a first side a surface, a respective collection cycle in which the ultrasound transducer emits ultrasound energy into and receives reflected ultrasound energy from a target region on a second side of the surface that is opposite to the first side;
- 30           a processing unit configured to acquire echo data representative of reflected ultrasound energy received by the ultrasound transducer during each collection cycle and position/orientation data representative of the position and/or orientation of the ultrasound transducer on the first side of the surface during each collection cycle;
- 35           wherein the processing unit is configured to produce an ultrasound image of the target region by applying the position/orientation data to the echo data so as to coherently focus the echo data at a plurality of points distributed within the target region.

In this way, the inventors have found that an ultrasound image of acceptable quality, (see e.g. Fig. 5(a)(ii), Fig. 5(b)(ii) and Fig. 5(c)(ii)) can be produced using a single

ultrasound transducer and without using the complex beam forming electronics normally required by modern ultrasound imaging apparatuses.

In the context of this disclosure, the term "ultrasound image" is intended to refer to any image produced using reflected ultrasound energy.

- 5 Similar focussing techniques are known in other technical fields, for example in radar (where such techniques are typically referred to as "synthetic aperture radar") and in sonar (where such techniques are typically referred to as "synthetic aperture sonar"), see e.g. "SAMI: a low-frequency prototype for mapping and imaging of the seabed by means of synthetic aperture", Chatillon, J., Adams, A.E., Lawlor, M.A., Zakharia,  
10 M.E., Oceanic Engineering, IEEE Journal of, pages: 4 - 15 Volume: 24, Issue: 1, Jan 1999.

15 However, as far as is known to the inventors, applying position/orientation data to coherently focus echo data acquired from a single ultrasound transducer in each of a plurality of positions and/or orientations on a first side a surface (e.g. by physically scanning the single ultrasound transducer across skin) is not a technique used in any existing medical ultrasound scanning products.

20 Preferably, the position/orientation data is applied to the echo data with the echo data being treated as if it had been acquired using a plurality of ultrasound transducers arranged in a fixed array so as to coherently focus the echo data at a plurality of points distributed within the target region. In this way, the processing unit can be seen as using the position/orientation data and the echo data to simulate echo data acquired by a fixed "synthetic" array of ultrasound transducers, even if the echo data was actually acquired using only a single ultrasound transducer element.

25 Preferably, the plurality of points are distributed at a plurality of depths within the target region. Preferably, the plurality of points are distributed throughout the entire target region.

30 The target region is preferably a 2 dimensional ("2D") region. The 2D region may lie in a plane that includes a predetermined path along which the ultrasound transducer is constrained to be moved relative to a housing (see below). Thus, the ultrasound image is preferably a 2D ultrasound image of the target region.

The ultrasound transducer is preferably included in an ultrasound probe.

Preferably, the ultrasound probe is separate from the processing unit, which may e.g. by a general purpose personal computer ("PC").

35 Preferably, the ultrasound probe is a hand-held ultrasound probe, i.e. suitable for being held in a hand of a user.

Preferably, the ultrasound probe includes a head to which the ultrasound transducer is mounted. The ultrasound transducer is preferably fixedly mounted to the head.

Preferably, the ultrasound probe also includes a housing to which the head is movably mounted so as to allow the ultrasound transducer to be moved relative to the housing.

5 More preferably, the head is movably mounted to the housing so as to allow the ultrasound transducer to be moved relative to the housing along a predetermined path. An advantage of this arrangement is that the predetermined path limits the number available positions and/or orientations of the ultrasound transducer on the first side of the surface during the collection cycles (assuming that the housing is kept substantially still with respect to the surface during the collection cycles) which  
10 generally makes it easier to produce an ultrasound image from the position/orientation data and the echo data.

Preferably, the ultrasound probe is manually operable, preferably with the head being movably mounted to the housing so as to allow the ultrasound transducer to be moved relative to the housing (preferably along a predetermined path, see above) by  
15 a hand of a user.

Alternatively the ultrasound probe may include a motorised mechanism configured to move the head relative to the housing (preferably along a predetermined path, see above).

20 Preferably, the head and housing are sized so that the housing can be held in a first hand of a user while the head is moved relative to the housing by a second hand of the user.

25 Preferably, the housing is configured to be kept substantially still with respect to the surface during each collection cycle. For example, the housing may be configured to be placed in contact with the surface (on the first side of the surface) so as to keep the housing substantially still with respect to the surface during each collection cycle.

The predetermined path could potentially have any shape, but is preferably curved or straight (e.g. for simplicity of calculation). The predetermined path preferably lies in a single plane (again, e.g. for simplicity of calculation).

30 Preferably, the predetermined path is curved. For example, the head may be rotatably mounted to the housing, e.g. by an axle, so as to allow the ultrasound transducer to be moved relative to the housing along a predetermined curved path. The curved path may be referred to herein as an arc.

The curved predetermined path may be convex or concave in relation to the surface. Preferably, the curved predetermined path is convex in relation to the surface, since  
35 this helps the ultrasound transducer to insonify (i.e. emit ultrasound energy into) a wider field of view e.g. compared with a straight predetermined path. In turn, this allows the ultrasound imaging apparatus to produce an ultrasound image of a larger

target region e.g. compared with a straight predetermined path (albeit with a corresponding loss in image quality).

- 5 Preferably, the plurality of positions and/or orientations (in which collection cycles are performed by the ultrasound transducer) correspond to a plurality of predetermined locations on the predetermined path.

The ultrasound transducer may be configured to perform a collection cycle at each of the predetermined locations on the predetermined path based on a signal representative of a position and/or orientation of the head relative to the housing, e.g. as produced by a position and/or orientation determining unit described below.

- 10 Preferably, the predetermined locations on the predetermined path are uniformly spaced (e.g. for simplicity of calculation). However, in some embodiments, the predetermined locations on the predetermined path may be non-uniformly spaced.

- 15 In the case of the head being rotatably mounted to the housing, e.g. by an axle (see above), the ultrasound transducer may be configured to perform a collection cycle at each of the predetermined locations on the predetermined curved path based on a signal representative of an angle of rotation of the head relative to the housing, e.g. with the predetermined locations being separated by predetermined increments of rotation of the head relative to the housing, which predetermined increments may e.g. be  $1^\circ$  or less and are more preferably  $0.5^\circ$  or less.

- 20 Preferably, the distances between the predetermined locations on the predetermined path are small compared to a width of the ultrasound transducer, e.g. so that the "synthetic array has a sufficient spatial sampling rate to avoid aliasing. For example, the average (e.g. mean) distance between the predetermined locations on the predetermined path may be half the width or less than the width of an ultrasound-
- 25 emitting face of the ultrasound transducer. In this context, the width of the ultrasound-emitting face of the ultrasound transducer may be measured in a plane in which the predetermined path lies (see above).

- 30 Preferably, the processing unit is configured to produce a plurality of ultrasound images of the target region, wherein each ultrasound image is produced from position/orientation data and echo data acquired from a respective journey of the ultrasound transducer along the predetermined path.

- 35 Preferably, the processing unit is configured to produce each ultrasound image from position/orientation data and echo data acquired from a respective journey of the ultrasound transducer along the predetermined path regardless of the direction of movement of the ultrasound transducer along the predetermined path (e.g. which could be in a "forward" or "reverse" direction). This may help the apparatus to produce ultrasound images at a faster rate.

Preferably, the ultrasound transducer has a short focal length compared to the length of the imaged field, where focal length is defined as the distance from an ultrasound-emitting face of the ultrasound transducer to a point at which the amplitude of ultrasound energy observed is highest when the ultrasound transducer in use (this point is often referred to as “natural focus” of the ultrasound transducer).

For example, the ultrasound transducer may have a focal length of less than one tenth of the depth of the imaged field. For example, the ultrasound transducer may have a focal length of 5mm or less (e.g. 5mm or less in the plane of the image generation).

10 Preferably the ultrasound transducer has a large beam width, e.g. a beam width of 10 degrees or more (e.g. as measured in the plane of the predetermined path), where beam width may be defined as the angle between the half power points in the emitted acoustic field.

The ultrasound transducer may or may not include a focussing means, e.g. an acoustic lens, for bringing ultrasound energy produced by the ultrasound transducer to a focus. An ultrasound transducer with a focussing means may be referred to herein as a “focussed” ultrasound transducer. An ultrasound transducer without a focussing means may be referred to herein as an “unfocussed” ultrasound transducer. It is preferred that the ultrasound transducer included in an ultrasound imaging apparatus according to the first aspect of the invention is an unfocussed transducer, as this can help to reduce complexity and cost.

Thus, the ultrasound transducer preferably has a fixed focal length.

With a view to achieving a small focal length and large beam width, it is preferable for an unfocussed ultrasound transducer to have a small ultrasound-emitting face.

25 For example, the ultrasound-emitting face may have a width of 3mm or less, or less than 10 signal wavelengths. This width is preferably as measured in a plane in which the predetermined path lies (see above) and/or in the plane of the image generation, to achieve a large beam width in this plane. In this context, a “signal wavelength” may be a wavelength of the ultrasound energy emitted into the target region.

30 Preferably, the ultrasound-emitting face has a length as measured in a plane perpendicular to the predetermined path that is longer than the width of the ultrasound-emitting face, e.g. to achieve a narrower beam in this plane. The length of the ultrasound-emitting face may be 12mm or less and is preferably between 6mm and 12mm.

35 Preferably, the apparatus includes only a single ultrasound transducer. Preferably, the single ultrasound transducer includes only a single ultrasound transducer element.

The ultrasound imaging apparatus may include a position/orientation data unit configured to produce the position/orientation data representative of the position and/or orientation of the ultrasound transducer on the first side of the surface during each collection cycle, e.g. so that the position/orientation data can subsequently be  
5 acquired by the processing unit. The position/orientation data unit may be included in the ultrasound probe, and is preferably included in the head of the ultrasound probe (see above).

The position/orientation data unit may, for example, include a processing means, such as a microprocessor.

10 The position/orientation data unit may, for example, include a position and/or orientation determining unit for producing a signal representative of a position and/or orientation of the head relative to the housing. In this case, the processing means of the position/orientation data unit may be configured to produce the position/orientation data based on this signal.

15 If the head is rotatably mounted to the housing (see above), the position and/or orientation determining unit may be a rotary encoder configured to produce a signal representative of an angle of rotation of the head relative to the housing.

The ultrasound imaging apparatus may include an echo data acquisition unit configured to acquire the echo data representative of reflected ultrasound energy  
20 received by the ultrasound transducer during each collection cycle, e.g. so that the echo data can subsequently be acquired by the processing unit. The echo data acquisition unit may be included in the ultrasound probe, and is preferably included in the head of the ultrasound probe (see above).

25 The echo data acquisition unit may, for example, include a processing means, such as a microprocessor or programmable logic device. The processing means of the echo data acquisition unit may be configured to produce the echo data based on a signal (which may be a digital signal, see below) representative of reflected ultrasound energy received by the ultrasound transducer during each collection cycle.

30 The echo data acquisition unit may include an analogue to digital converter configured to convert an analogue signal representative of reflected ultrasound energy received by the ultrasound transducer during each collection cycle into a digital signal representative of reflected ultrasound energy received by the ultrasound transducer during each collection cycle. In this case, the processing means of the  
35 echo data acquisition unit may be configured to produce the echo data based on the digital signal. The analogue signal may be produced by or otherwise derived from an output of the ultrasound transducer.

Preferably, the echo data acquisition unit includes a bandpass filter for filtering the analogue signal before it reaches the analogue to digital converter.

In general, a bandpass filter is configured to attenuate frequencies below a lower band limit and above an upper band limit (which band limits may be defined by a frequency response of the transducer), whilst passing frequencies between these values. The difference between these band limits is usually referred to as the  
5 "bandwidth" of the bandpass filter.

Preferably, the analogue to digital converter is configured to convert the bandpass filtered analogue signal into the digital signal at a sample rate that is less than two times the bandwidth of the bandpass filtered analogue signal, e.g. using a bandpass sampling technique. Using a bandpass sampling technique in this context can  
10 significantly reduce the cost of the analogue to digital converter, whilst still allowing an accurate ultrasound image to be produced.

The echo data acquisition unit may also include one or more amplifiers configured to amplify the analogue signal before it reaches the analogue to digital converter.

A second aspect of the invention may provide a method corresponding to use of an apparatus according to the first aspect of the invention.  
15

Accordingly, the aspect of the invention may provide a method of producing an ultrasound image, the method including:

performing, in each of a plurality of positions and/or orientations on a first side a surface, a respective collection cycle in which an ultrasound transducer emits  
20 ultrasound energy into and receives reflected ultrasound energy from a target region on a second side of the surface that is opposite to the first side;

acquiring echo data representative of reflected ultrasound energy received by the ultrasound transducer during each collection cycle and position/orientation data representative of the position and/or orientation of the ultrasound transducer on the  
25 first side of the surface during each collection cycle;

producing an ultrasound image of the target region by applying the position/orientation data to the echo data so as to coherently focus the echo data at a plurality of points distributed within the target region.

The method according to the second aspect of the invention may include any method step implementing or corresponding to any apparatus feature described in  
30 connection with any above aspect of the invention.

For example, the method may be performed using an ultrasound imaging apparatus according to the first aspect of the invention.

The method may include applying a fluid to a target area of the surface (e.g. skin)  
35 before performing the collection cycles.

A third aspect of the invention may provide an ultrasound probe as set out in the first aspect of the invention. Note that the ultrasound probe as set out in the first aspect of the invention need not include the processing means.

The ultrasound probe according to the third aspect of the invention may include any apparatus feature described in connection with any above aspect of the invention.

The invention also includes any combination of the aspects and preferred features described except where such a combination is clearly impermissible or expressly  
5 avoided.

Examples of our proposals are discussed below, with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

Fig. 1 is a schematic diagram showing an ultrasound imaging apparatus including an ultrasound probe and a processing unit.

10 Fig. 2 shows the ultrasound probe of Fig. 1 in more detail.

Fig. 3 is a diagram showing the effect of ultrasound transducer width on focal length for an unfocussed ultrasound transducer.

Fig. 4 is a schematic diagram showing electronic components of the ultrasound imaging apparatus of Fig. 1.

15 Fig. 5 is a collection of ultrasound images comparing ultrasound images produced by a commercially available ultrasound imaging apparatus with ultrasound images produced by the ultrasound imaging apparatus of Fig. 1.

As shown in Fig. 1, an ultrasound probe 110 is connected to a processing unit 180 by a cable 112. The processing unit 180 may e.g. be a general purpose personal  
20 computer ("PC") or mobile computing device.

Fig. 2 shows the ultrasound probe 110 of Fig. 1 in more detail.

Preferably, the ultrasound probe 110 includes a cable 112 for connecting the ultrasound probe 110 to the (otherwise separate) processing unit 180. The cable may be compliant with an industry standard for computer peripherals, e.g. a USB standard  
25 such as USB 2 or later.

Preferably, the ultrasound probe 110 is a hand-held probe and includes a head 120 on which a single ultrasound transducer 122 is fixedly mounted.

Preferably, the ultrasound probe 110 is manually operable and includes a housing 130 to which the head 120 is rotatably mounted by an axle 132 so as to allow the  
30 ultrasound transducer 122 to be moved relative to the housing 130 along a predetermined arc 124 by a hand of a user or by a motorised mechanism.

The radius of curvature is preferably between 50mm and 100mm to make the scan area appropriate for typical medical imaging applications and to make the device dimensions appropriate for hand gripping.

For the avoidance of any doubt it is to be noted that the hand of a user may move the ultrasound transducer 122 along the predetermined arc 124 by rotating the head 120 relative to the housing 130. That is, the hand of the user does not need to apply a force directly to the ultrasound transducer 122.

- 5 In Fig. 2, the ultrasound probe is shown as being located on a first side 105a of a surface 105, with the predetermined arc 124 being convex in relation to the surface 105 (when the housing 130 is placed in contact with the surface 105 with the ultrasound transducer 122 adjacent the surface 105). The surface 105 may, for example, be skin of patient, e.g. at an abdomen of a pregnant female patient. On a  
10 second, opposite, side 105b of the surface, there may be tissue of the patient.

- Preferably, the ultrasound transducer 122 is configured to perform, in each of a plurality of positions and/or orientations on the first side 105a of the surface 105, a respective collection cycle in which the ultrasound transducer emits ultrasound energy into and receives reflected ultrasound energy from a target region 105c on  
15 the second side 105b of the surface 105. In Fig. 2, the ultrasound energy emitted by the ultrasound transducer 122 is shown as a beam 126 of ultrasonic energy (which may equally be referred to as an "ultrasonic beam").

- Preferably, the housing 130 is configured to be kept substantially still with respect to the surface 105 during each collection cycle. For example, the housing 130 may be  
20 configured to be placed in contact with the surface 105 so as to keep the housing 130 substantially still with respect to the surface 105 during each collection cycle.

Preferably, the plurality of positions and/or orientations (in which collection cycles are performed by the ultrasound transducer 122) correspond to a plurality of predetermined locations on the predetermined arc 124.

- 25 Preferably, the ultrasound transducer 110 is configured to perform a collection cycle at each of the predetermined locations on the predetermined arc 124 based on a signal representative of an angle of rotation of the head 120 relative to the housing 130, e.g. with the predetermined locations being separated by predetermined increments of rotation of the head 120 relative to the housing 130. The  
30 predetermined increments of rotation are preferably small enough to ensure that the average distance between the predetermined locations on the predetermined arc 124 is less than a width of the ultrasound-emitting face of the ultrasound transducer 122 and may e.g. be  $0.25^\circ$ . The signal representative of an angle of rotation of the head 120 relative to the housing 130 may be produced by the rotary encoder 170  
35 described below with reference to Fig. 4.

- Each collection cycle is preferably performed very quickly such that the emitting and receiving of ultrasound energy can be assumed to occur at the same location on the predetermined arc 124, even if the head 120 is being moved whilst the collection cycle is performed. This may allow up to 3 journeys ("scans") of the ultrasound over  
40 the predetermined arc 124 per second, and hence 3 images to be produced per

second by manual operation. Higher rates could be achieved with a motorised mechanism.

Fig. 3 is a diagram showing the effect of ultrasound transducer width on focal length for an unfocussed ultrasound transducer.

- 5 In Fig. 3(a), a first unfocussed ultrasound transducer 122a is shown that has an ultrasound-emitting face of a first width  $w_a$ .

As shown by Fig. 3(a), in use, the ultrasound-emitting face of the first ultrasound transducer 122a emits ultrasound energy in the form of a beam 126a of ultrasound energy. The beam 126a of ultrasound energy has maximum intensity at a "natural focus" 125a, at a distance from the ultrasound-emitting face that is usually referred to as the "focal length" of the first ultrasound transducer 122a. The focal length is proportional to the square of the transducer aperture size. The region between the ultrasound-emitting face of the first ultrasound transducer 122a and the point 125a of maximum intensity is usually referred to as the "near field" region 128a, with the region beyond the point 125a of maximum intensity usually being referred to as the "far field" region 129a.

For an unfocussed ultrasound transducer, such as the first ultrasound transducer 122a shown in Fig. 3(a), the amplitude of the ultrasound energy emitted by the ultrasound transducer in the near-field region 128a generally goes through a series of maxima and minima before reaching the point 125a of maximum intensity. In the far field region 129a, the amplitude of the ultrasound energy emitted by the ultrasound transducer generally decreases with increasing distance according to an inverse squared law.

- 25 In Fig. 3(b), a second ultrasound transducer 122b is shown that has an ultrasound-emitting face of a second width  $w_a$ , which is an order of magnitude smaller than the first width  $w_a$ .

A consequence of reducing the width of the ultrasound-emitting face of the second ultrasound transducer 122b is that the point of maximum intensity 125b is brought much closer to the ultrasound-emitting face of the second ultrasound transducer 122b. That is, as the width of the ultrasound-emitting face of the second ultrasound transducer 122b is reduced, the focal length of the second ultrasound transducer 122b is also reduced.

35 Preferably, the ultrasound transducer 122 used in the ultrasound probe 110 of Fig. 2 has an ultrasound-emitting face of width less than 10 signal wavelengths (as measured in the plane of the predetermined arc 124), so as to achieve an extremely short focal length, e.g. 5mm or less. This means that field imaged by the ultrasound transducer 122 will, in effect, be entirely in the far field region, see e.g. Fig. 2.

In previous mechanically scanned ultrasound imaging apparatuses with single fixed focus transducers, operating with such a short focal length would result in poor angular resolution due to the large beam width in the far field region. Conversely whilst a larger transducer aperture would achieve smaller beam width in the far field, the longer focal length would place much of the target area in the near field region leading to severe distortions.

However, as described below in more detail, the processing unit 180 shown in Fig. 1 is preferably configured to produce an ultrasound image of the target region by focusing the position/orientation data and the echo data as if they are generated by the elements of a much larger array along the predetermined arc 124. In this way, consistently high angular resolution is achieved over the entire target area without significant near-field distortions.

Fig. 4 is a schematic diagram showing electronic components of the ultrasound imaging apparatus 100 of Fig. 1.

In Fig. 4, the processing unit 180 is shown as including an interface 180a, e.g. a USB interface, for interfacing with the cable 112 of the ultrasound probe 110.

Electronic circuitry of the ultrasound probe 110 can be considered as being divided into four functional blocks: the ultrasound transducer 122; a transmitting unit; an echo data acquisition unit; and a position/orientation data unit. The electronic circuitry of the ultrasound probe 110 is preferably housed in the head 120 shown in Fig. 2.

The ultrasound transducer 122 preferably includes a single piezoelectric transducer element, preferably of PZT (lead zirconate titanate). As described above, the single piezoelectric transducer element preferably has a small width so that the ultrasound energy emitted by the ultrasound transducer 122 will generally be in the far field region at depths corresponding to the target region 105c. A focussing operation to obtain high resolution ultrasound images is preferably performed by software in the processing unit 180 (see below).

The transmitting unit preferably includes a microprocessor 150, a transmit pulser 152 and a diplexer circuit 154.

The echo data acquisition unit preferably includes the microprocessor 150, the diplexer 154, a low noise amplifier 156, a bandpass filter 158 and an analogue to digital converter 160.

The position/orientation data unit preferably includes the microprocessor 150 and a rotary encoder 170.

In use, a fluid is preferably applied to a target area of the surface 105, to create an acoustic impedance matching layer between the ultrasound transducer 122 and a

target area of the surface, preferably with the housing being placed in contact with the surface so as to keep the housing substantially still with respect to the surface.

5 Next, the head 120 is rotated relative to the housing 130 so that the ultrasound transducer is moved along the predetermined arc 124, preferably with the microprocessor 150 initiating a collection cycle at each of the plurality of predetermined locations on the predetermined arc 124 based on a signal representative of an angle of rotation of the head 120 relative to the housing 130 produced by the rotary encoder 170.

10 On initiation of each collection cycle, the microprocessor 150 preferably controls the transmit pulser 152 to send an electric pulse to the ultrasound transducer 122 via the diplexer circuit. This electric pulse causes the ultrasound transducer to emit ultrasound energy from its ultrasound-emitting face in a pulse, e.g. of duration 1 microsecond or less.

15 Subsequently, an analogue (voltage) signal representative of reflected ultrasound energy received by the ultrasound transducer is preferably produced at the ultrasound transducer 122 by the piezoelectric effect. This analogue signal preferably passes through the diplexer circuit 154 at which point it is preferably amplified by the low noise amplifier 156.

20 Next, the bandpass filter 158 preferably attenuates frequencies in the analogue signal below a lower band limit (e.g. 3.6MHz) and above an band limit value (e.g. 4.8 MHz), whilst passing frequencies in the analogue signal that are between these threshold values.

25 The bandpass filtered analogue is preferably then converted by the analogue to digital converter 160 into a digital signal at a sample rate that is less than two times the bandwidth of the bandpass filtered analogue signal using a bandpass sampling technique. The microprocessor 150 then produces echo data representative of reflected ultrasound energy received by the ultrasound transducer 122 based on the digital signal.

30 The rotary encoder 170 may be an optical encoder, e.g. a low cost optical encoder with a 0.25° angular resolution. The rotary encoder 170 may produce a signal representative of an angle of rotation of the head 120 relative to the housing 130. The microprocessor 150 may be configured to produce position/orientation data representative of the position and orientation of the ultrasound transducer 122 on the first side 105a of the surface 105 during each collection cycle based on this signal.

35 On completion of a journey along the predetermined arc 124, the position/orientation data and echo data is preferably transmitted via the cable 122 to be acquired by the processing unit 180.

The processing unit 180 preferably then forms a B-mode (2D) ultrasound image of the target region 105c from the position/orientation data and the echo data acquired on completion of the predetermined arc 124. To coherently focus the echo data for a particular point in the target area, the processing unit may coherently sum the echo data corresponding to that point arising from each of the transducer positions along the predetermined arc which insonify that point. Therefore the processing unit preferably calculates which transducer positions are to be included in the summation, apply an appropriate time delay and/or phase shift to each of the included echo data and then sum each of the time delayed and/or phase shifted echo data. This process is preferably repeated for a plurality of points across the whole of the target area.

Traditionally, "synthetic array" techniques use signals acquired along a straight line trajectory, rather than an arc 124 (as in the proposed device). Therefore, some modification of standard "synthetic array" techniques is required in order to achieve focusing. A reason it is preferred for the ultrasound transducer 122 to be moved along a predetermined arc 124 is that this permits a wide field of view to be insonified with a relatively small amount of movement (albeit with a modest loss in image quality).

Preferably, as the ultrasound transducer 122 is repeatedly moved backwards and forwards along the predetermined arc 124, the proceeding unit 180 preferably produces a plurality of ultrasound images of the target region 105c, wherein each ultrasound image is produced from position/orientation data and echo data acquired from a respective journey of the ultrasound transducer 122 along the predetermined arc 124 and preferably regardless of the direction of movement of the ultrasound transducer 122 along the predetermined arc 124.

Thus, by manually moving the ultrasound transducer 122 backwards and forwards along the predetermined arc, several ultrasound images can be generated per second, meaning that near real-time observation of the structure in the target region is possible.

In general terms, the above discussion can be viewed as describing a preferred example of our proposals that that may provide a low cost ultrasound imaging apparatus including a manually scanned single ultrasound transducer head, with integral electronics, that may be connected to any standard windows PC, e.g. via a USB 2 interface or later. As the ultrasound transducer is manually swept over skin in a predetermined arc defined by a rotary mechanism (see e.g. Fig. 2), echo data from successive transmitted ultrasound pulses is preferably transmitted to a PC along with angle registration data for each position at which a pulse is transmitted. On completion of a full sweep, the PC application then treats this signal data as coming from a convex ultrasound array and coherently focuses the echo data from every point in a target area that has been insonified to produce an ultrasound image.

Fig. 5 is a collection of ultrasound images comparing ultrasound images produced by a commercially available ultrasound imaging apparatus with ultrasound images produced by the ultrasound imaging apparatus of Fig. 1, applied to the same phantom target devices.

- 5 In Fig. 5, the ultrasound images labelled (i) were produced by the commercially available ultrasound imaging apparatuses being sold for £50,000-£100,000 (2012 prices), and the ultrasound images labelled (ii) were produced by the ultrasound imaging apparatus of Fig. 1. In more detail:

- 10 Fig. 5(a)(i),(ii) show the cross section of a head showing ventricles;  
Fig. 5(b)(i),(ii) show the profile of a face and head;  
Fig. 5(c)(i),(ii) show a resolution/contrast phantom (liver tissue).

15 The ultrasound images labelled (ii) in Fig. 5 show that the ultrasound imaging apparatus 100 built according to the principles described herein is capable of producing usable ultrasound images, despite using components which cost a small fraction of those contained in the commercially available ultrasound imaging apparatus.

20 When used in this specification and claims, the terms "comprises" and "comprising", "including" and variations thereof mean that the specified features, steps or integers are included. The terms are not to be interpreted to exclude the possibility of other features, steps or integers being present.

25 The features disclosed in the foregoing description, or in the following claims, or in the accompanying drawings, expressed in their specific produces or in terms of a means for performing the disclosed function, or a method or process for obtaining the disclosed results, as appropriate, may, separately, or in any combination of such features, be utilised for realising the invention in diverse produces thereof.

30 While the invention has been described in conjunction with the exemplary embodiments described above, many equivalent modifications and variations will be apparent to those skilled in the art when given this disclosure. Accordingly, the exemplary embodiments of the invention set forth above are considered to be illustrative and not limiting. Various changes to the described embodiments may be made without departing from the scope of the invention.

All references referred to above are hereby incorporated by reference.

CLAIMS:

1. An ultrasound imaging apparatus including:  
an ultrasound transducer configured to perform, in each of a plurality of  
positions and/or orientations on a first side a surface, a respective collection cycle in  
5 which the ultrasound transducer emits ultrasound energy into and receives reflected  
ultrasound energy from a target region on a second side of the surface that is  
opposite to the first side;  
a processing unit configured to acquire echo data representative of reflected  
ultrasound energy received by the ultrasound transducer during each collection cycle  
10 and position/orientation data representative of the position and/or orientation of the  
ultrasound transducer on the first side of the surface during each collection cycle;  
wherein the processing unit is configured to produce an ultrasound image of  
the target region by applying the position/orientation data to the echo data so as to  
coherently focus the echo data at a plurality of points distributed within the target  
15 region.
2. An ultrasound imaging apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the  
ultrasound transducer is an unfocussed ultrasound transducer.
3. An ultrasound imaging apparatus according to claim 2, wherein the  
ultrasound-emitting face of the unfocussed ultrasound transducer has a width of 3mm  
20 or less, or less than 10 signal wavelengths.
4. An ultrasound imaging apparatus according to any previous claim, wherein  
the ultrasound transducer has a fixed focal length.
5. An ultrasound imaging apparatus according to any previous claim, wherein  
the ultrasound transducer has a focal length of 5mm or less.
- 25 6. An ultrasound imaging apparatus according to any previous claim, wherein  
the apparatus includes only a single ultrasound transducer.
7. An ultrasound imaging apparatus according to any previous claim, wherein  
the plurality of points are distributed at a plurality of depths within the target region.
8. An ultrasound imaging apparatus according to any previous claim , wherein  
30 the ultrasound image is a 2D ultrasound image of the target region.
9. An ultrasound imaging apparatus according to any previous claim, wherein  
the ultrasound transducer is included in an ultrasound probe that is separate from the  
processing unit.
10. An ultrasound imaging apparatus according to claim 9, wherein the  
35 ultrasound probe includes:  
a head to which the ultrasound transducer is mounted; and  
a housing to which the head is moveably mounted so as to allow the

ultrasound transducer to be moved relative to the housing along a predetermined path.

5 11. An ultrasound imaging apparatus according to claim 10, wherein the ultrasound probe is manually operable, with the head being movably mounted to the housing so as to allow the ultrasound transducer to be moved relative to the housing along a predetermined path by a hand of a user.

12. An ultrasound imaging apparatus according to claim 10 or 11, wherein the head and housing are sized so that the housing can be held in a first hand of a user while the head is moved relative to the housing by a second hand of the user.

10 13. An ultrasound imaging apparatus according to any one of claims 10 to 12, wherein the head is rotatably mounted to the housing so as to allow the ultrasound transducer to be moved relative to the housing along a predetermined curved path.

14. An ultrasound imaging apparatus according to claim 13, wherein the curved predetermined path is convex in relation to the surface.

15 15. An ultrasound imaging apparatus according to any one of claims 10 to 14, wherein:

the plurality of positions and/or orientations in which collection cycles are performed by the ultrasound transducer correspond to a plurality of predetermined locations on the predetermined path; and

20 the ultrasound transducer is configured to perform a collection cycle at each of the predetermined locations on the predetermined path based on a signal representative of a position and/or orientation of the head relative to the housing.

25 16. An ultrasound imaging apparatus according to claim 15, wherein the mean distance between the predetermined locations on the predetermined path is half the width or less than the width of an ultrasound-emitting face of the ultrasound transducer.

30 17. An ultrasound imaging apparatus according to any one of claims 10 to 16, wherein the processing unit is configured to produce a plurality of ultrasound images of the target region, wherein each ultrasound image is produced from position/orientation data and echo data acquired from a respective journey of the ultrasound transducer along the predetermined path.

35 18. An ultrasound imaging apparatus according to claim 17, wherein the processing unit is configured to produce each ultrasound image from position/orientation data and echo data acquired from a respective journey of the ultrasound transducer along the predetermined path regardless of the direction of movement of the ultrasound transducer along the predetermined path.

19. An ultrasound imaging apparatus according to any previous claim, wherein the ultrasound transducer is included in an ultrasound probe, the ultrasound probe including a position/orientation data unit configured to produce the position/orientation data representative of the position and/or orientation of the ultrasound transducer on the first side of the surface during each collection cycle.
20. An ultrasound imaging apparatus according to claim 19, wherein the position/orientation data unit includes:  
a position and/or orientation determining unit for producing a signal representative of a position and/or orientation of the head relative to the housing; and  
a processing means configured to produce the position/orientation data based on the signal representative of a position and/or orientation of the head relative to the housing.
21. An ultrasound imaging apparatus according to any previous claim, wherein the ultrasound transducer is included in an ultrasound probe, the ultrasound probe including an echo data acquisition unit configured to produce the echo data representative of reflected ultrasound energy received by the ultrasound transducer during each collection cycle.
22. An ultrasound imaging apparatus according to claim 21, wherein the echo data acquisition unit includes:  
an analogue to digital converter configured to convert an analogue signal representative of reflected ultrasound energy received by the ultrasound transducer during each collection cycle into a digital signal representative of reflected ultrasound energy received by the ultrasound transducer during each collection cycle; and  
a bandpass filter for filtering the analogue signal before it reaches the analogue to digital converter;  
wherein the analogue to digital converter is configured to convert the bandpass filtered analogue signal into the digital signal at a sample rate that is less than two times the bandwidth of the bandpass filtered analogue signal using a bandpass sampling technique.
23. A method of producing an ultrasound image, the method including:  
performing, in each of a plurality of positions and/or orientations on a first side a surface, a respective collection cycle in which an ultrasound transducer emits ultrasound energy into and receives reflected ultrasound energy from a target region on a second side of the surface that is opposite to the first side;  
acquiring echo data representative of reflected ultrasound energy received by the ultrasound transducer during each collection cycle and position/orientation data representative of the position and/or orientation of the ultrasound transducer on the first side of the surface during each collection cycle;  
producing an ultrasound image of the target region by applying the position/orientation data to the echo data so as to coherently focus the echo data at a plurality of points distributed within the target region.

24. An apparatus or method substantially as any one embodiment herein described with reference to and as shown in the accompanying drawings.

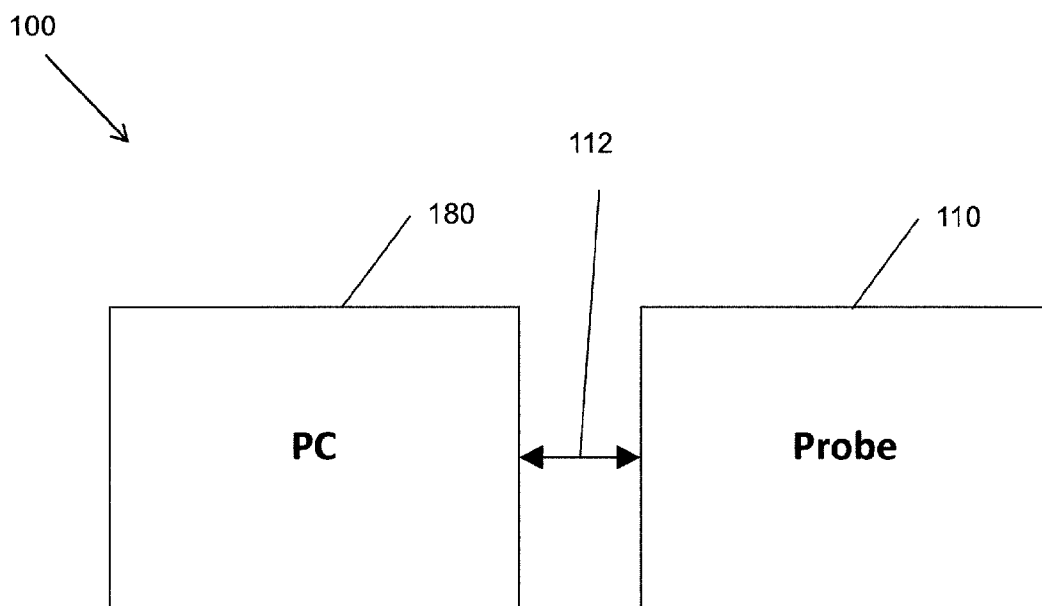


Figure 1

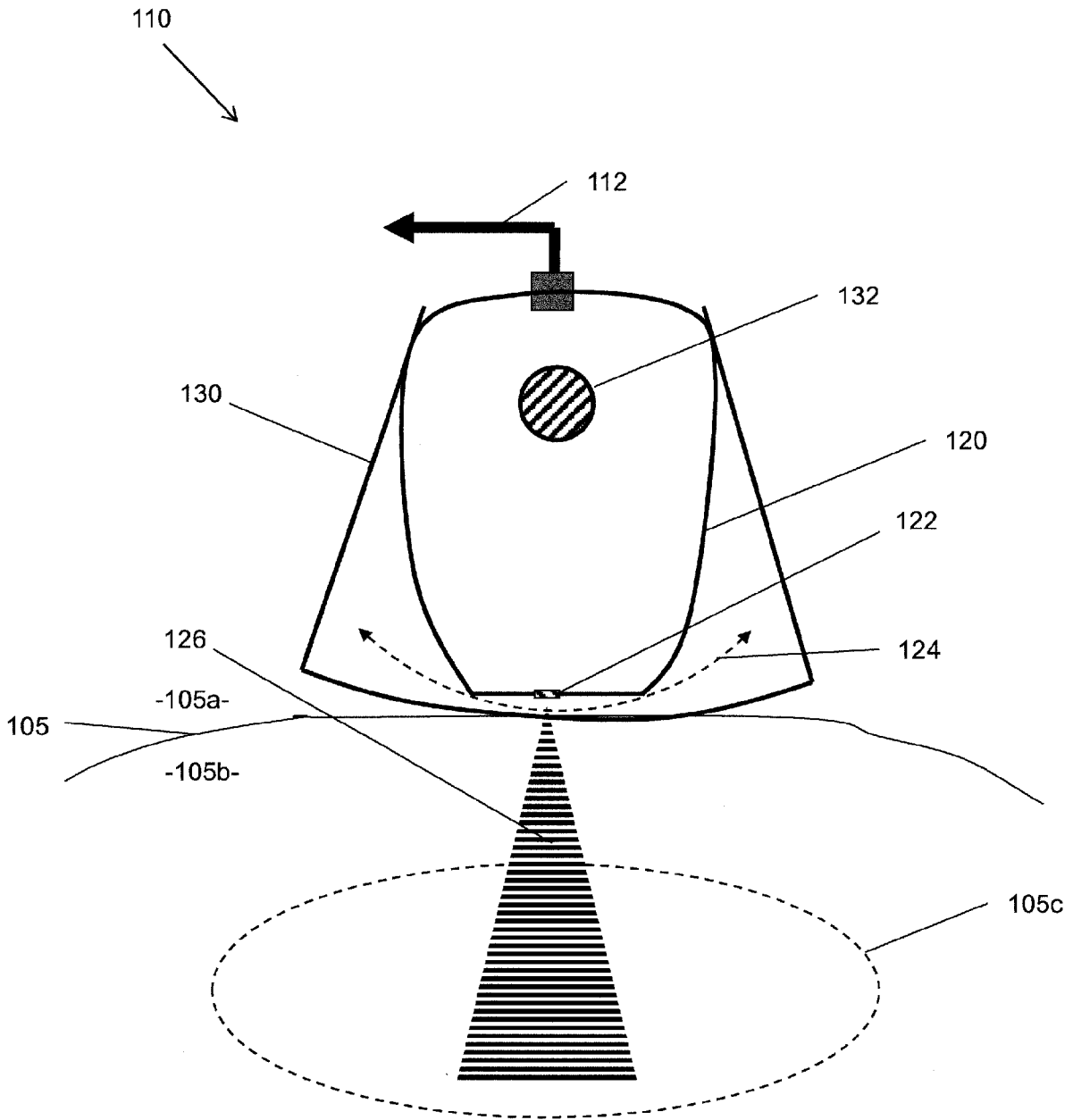


Figure 2

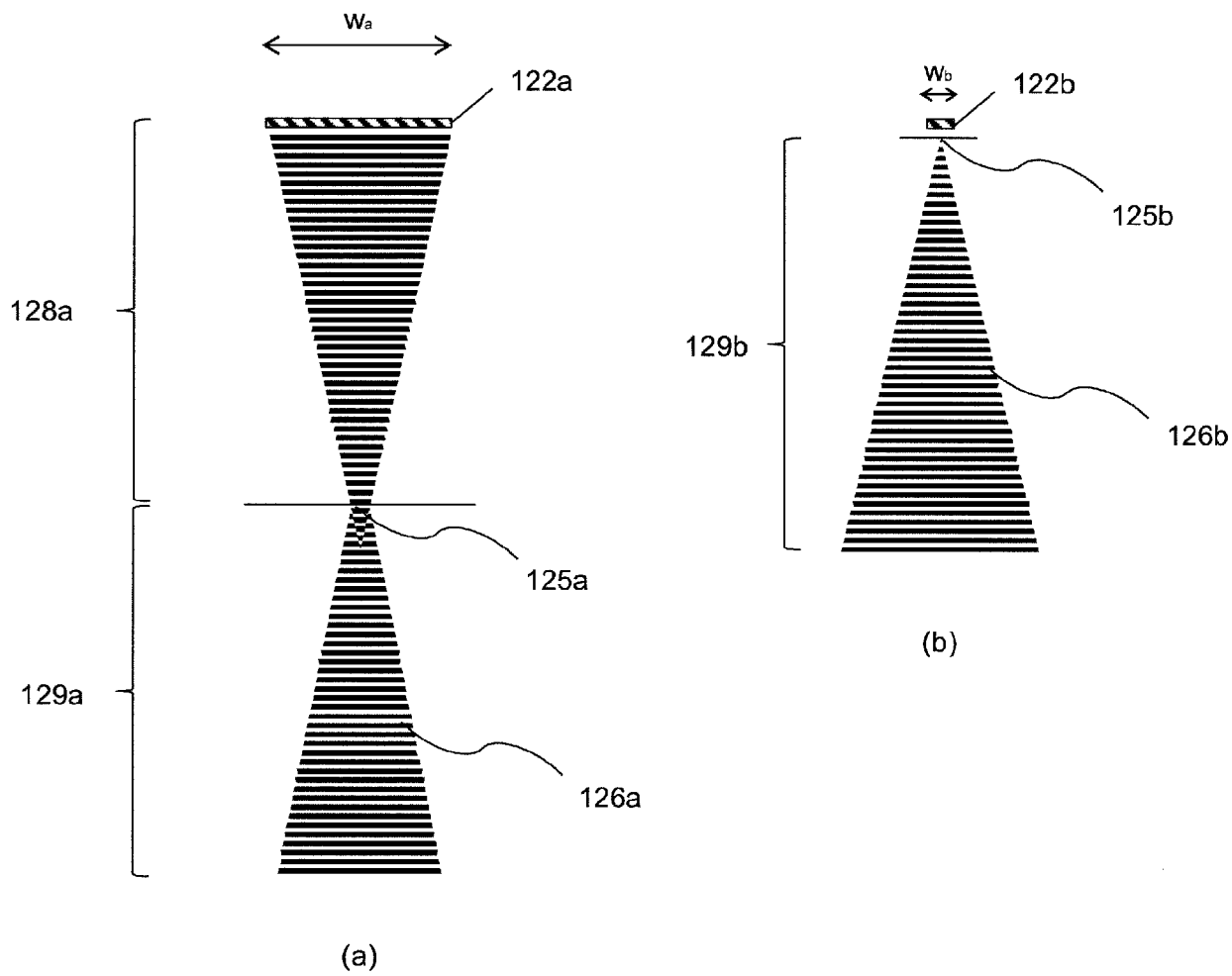


Figure 3

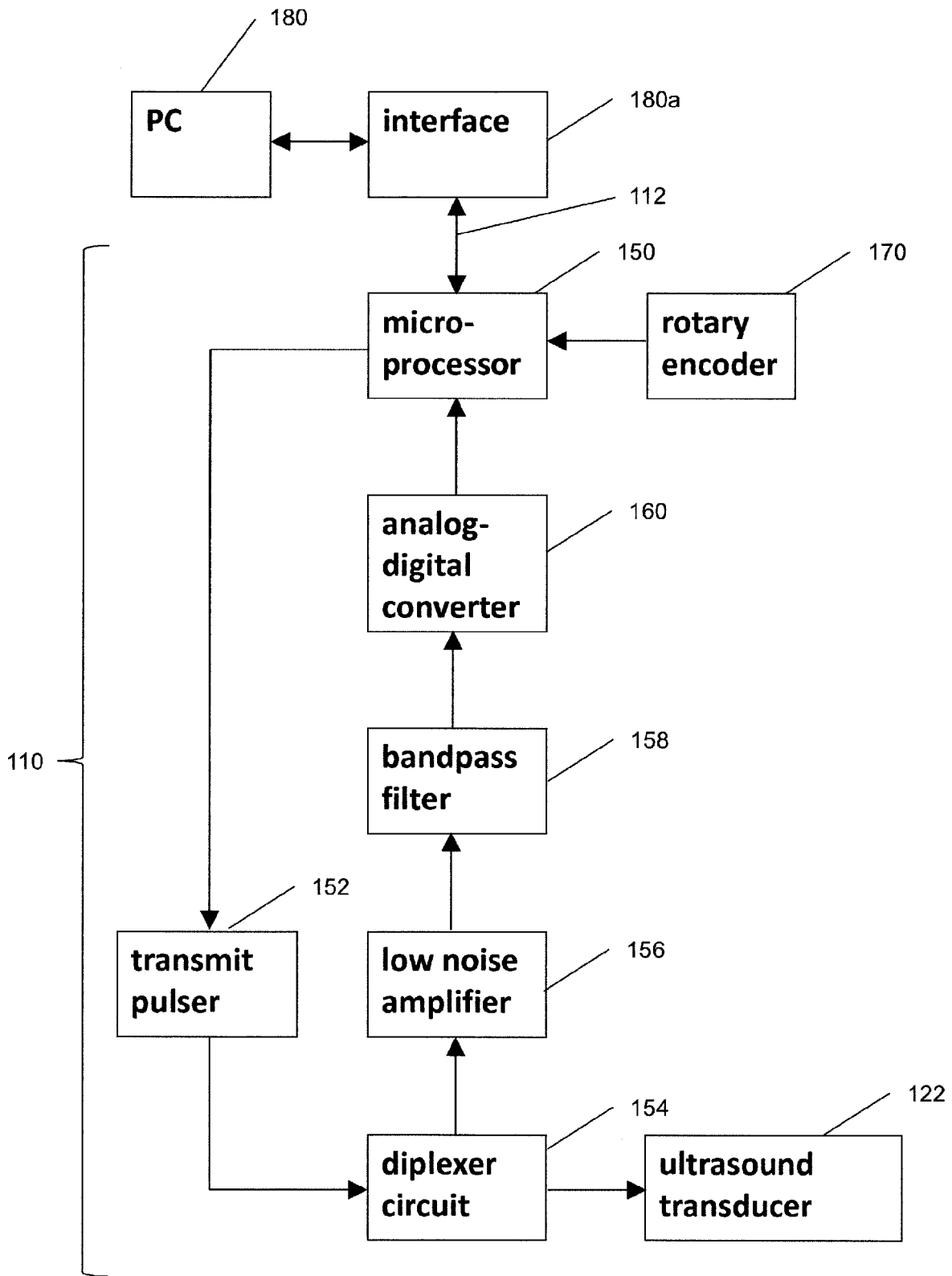


Figure 4

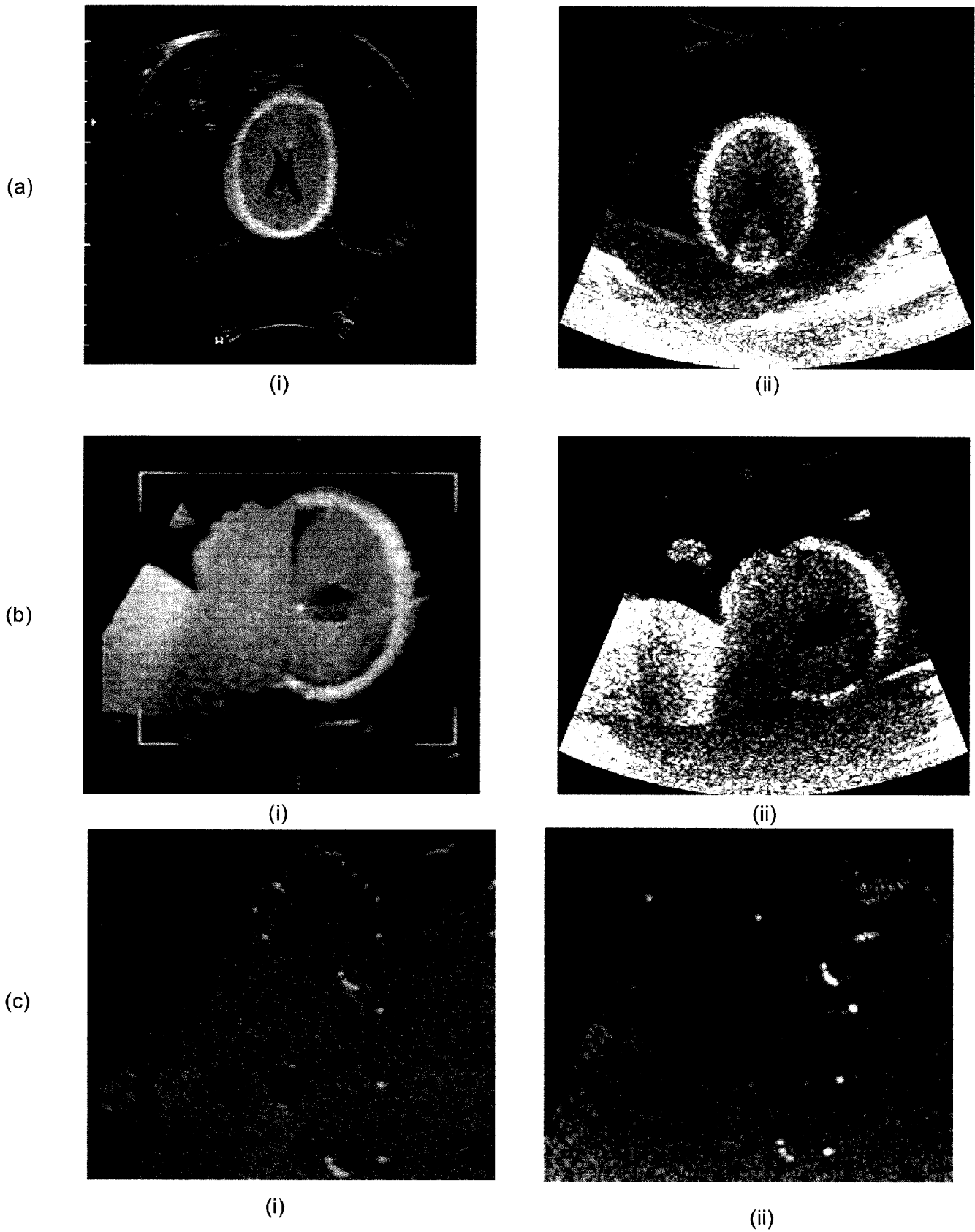


Figure 5

**INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT**

International application No  
PCT/GB2014/050718

**A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER**  
 INV. A61B8/13                      A61B8/14                      A61B8/00  
 ADD.

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

**B. FIELDS SEARCHED**  
 Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)  
 A61B

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)  
 EPO-Internal, WPI Data

**C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT**

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 2012/046548 A1 (HAO XIAOHUI [US] ET AL) 23 February 2012 (2012-02-23) paragraphs [0001] - [0002], [0004], [0020] - [0022], [0033] - [0043], [0066]; claims; figures -----	1,3-8, 23,24 2
X	US 6 120 452 A (BARTHE PETER G [US] ET AL) 19 September 2000 (2000-09-19) column 1, lines 10-25; claims; figures column 2, line 10 - column 6, line 58 -----	1,23
X	EP 2 422 708 A1 (GEN ELECTRIC [US]) 29 February 2012 (2012-02-29) paragraphs [0001] - [0007], [0013] - [0015]; claims; figures ----- -/--	1,23

Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

See patent family annex.

\* Special categories of cited documents :

- "A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance
- "E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date
- "L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)
- "O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means
- "P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art

"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search  19 May 2014	Date of mailing of the international search report  18/07/2014
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Name and mailing address of the ISA/ European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016	Authorized officer  Mundakapadam, S
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## INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No

PCT/GB2014/050718

C(Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 2010/324418 A1 (EL-AKLOUK ESSA [AU] ET AL) 23 December 2010 (2010-12-23) paragraphs [0001] - [0002], [0015] - [0018], [0043] - [0056]; claims; figures -----	1,23
A	US 2002/138004 A1 (DICKEY FRED M [US] ET AL) 26 September 2002 (2002-09-26) paragraphs [0002] - [0003], [0011] - [0016], [0022] - [0023], [0051]; claims; figures -----	1-8,23, 24
Y	IHOR TROTS ET AL: "Multi-Element Synthetic Transmit Aperture in Medical Ultrasound Imaging", ARCHIVES OF ACOUSTICS, vol. 35, no. 4, 1 January 2010 (2010-01-01), XP055118002, ISSN: 0137-5075, DOI: 10.2478/v10168-010-0052-y the whole document -----	2

# INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International application No PCT/GB2014/050718
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Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
US 2012046548	A1	23-02-2012	NONE
-----			
US 6120452	A	19-09-2000	US 6036646 A 14-03-2000
			US 6120452 A 19-09-2000
			US 6213948 B1 10-04-2001
-----			
EP 2422708	A1	29-02-2012	CA 2749465 A1 29-02-2012
			EP 2422708 A1 29-02-2012
			JP 2012050824 A 15-03-2012
			US 2012053468 A1 01-03-2012
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US 2010324418	A1	23-12-2010	AU 2010265832 A1 19-01-2012
			CN 102458258 A 16-05-2012
			EP 2421441 A1 29-02-2012
			EP 2426509 A2 07-03-2012
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			KR 20120112360 A 11-10-2012
			US 2010324418 A1 23-12-2010
			US 2010324423 A1 23-12-2010
			WO 2010148428 A1 29-12-2010
-----			
US 2002138004	A1	26-09-2002	NONE
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# INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.  
PCT/GB2014/050718

## Box No. II Observations where certain claims were found unsearchable (Continuation of item 2 of first sheet)

This international search report has not been established in respect of certain claims under Article 17(2)(a) for the following reasons:

1.  Claims Nos.:  
because they relate to subject matter not required to be searched by this Authority, namely:
  
2.  Claims Nos.:  
because they relate to parts of the international application that do not comply with the prescribed requirements to such an extent that no meaningful international search can be carried out, specifically:
  
3.  Claims Nos.:  
because they are dependent claims and are not drafted in accordance with the second and third sentences of Rule 6.4(a).

## Box No. III Observations where unity of invention is lacking (Continuation of item 3 of first sheet)

This International Searching Authority found multiple inventions in this international application, as follows:

see additional sheet

1.  As all required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers all searchable claims.
2.  As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying an additional fees, this Authority did not invite payment of additional fees.
3.  As only some of the required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers only those claims for which fees were paid, specifically claims Nos.:
4.  No required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant. Consequently, this international search report is restricted to the invention first mentioned in the claims; it is covered by claims Nos.:

1-8, 23, 24

### Remark on Protest

- The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest and, where applicable, the payment of a protest fee.
- The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest but the applicable protest fee was not paid within the time limit specified in the invitation.
- No protest accompanied the payment of additional search fees.

**FURTHER INFORMATION CONTINUED FROM PCT/ISA/ 210**

This International Searching Authority found multiple (groups of) inventions in this international application, as follows:

1. claims: 1-8, 23, 24

directed to an ultrasound imaging apparatus and corresponding method for producing an ultrasound image of a target region

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2. claims: 9-22

directed to features of an ultrasound probe of the ultrasound imaging apparatus.

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专利名称(译)	超声成像设备		
公开(公告)号	<a href="#">EP2967501A1</a>	公开(公告)日	2016-01-20
申请号	EP2014711562	申请日	2014-03-11
申请(专利权)人(译)	纽卡斯尔大学		
当前申请(专利权)人(译)	纽卡斯尔大学		
[标]发明人	NEASHAM JEFFREY ALAN GRAHAM DAVID JAMES		
发明人	NEASHAM, JEFFREY ALAN GRAHAM, DAVID JAMES		
IPC分类号	A61B8/13 A61B8/14 A61B8/00		
CPC分类号	A61B8/5207 A61B5/725 A61B8/14 A61B8/42 A61B8/4209 A61B8/4245 A61B8/4254 A61B8/4411 A61B8/4461 A61B8/4483		
代理机构(译)	LEACH, JAMES		
优先权	2013004498 2013-03-13 GB		
外部链接	<a href="#">Espacenet</a>		

#### 摘要(译)

一种超声成像设备，包括处理单元，所述处理单元被配置为通过在每个收集周期期间在表面的第一侧上施加表示超声换能器的位置和/或取向的位置/取向数据来产生目标区域的超声图像以回显数据表示在每个收集周期期间由超声换能器接收的反射超声能量，以便将回波数据相干地聚焦在分布在目标区域内的多个点处。