



(11) **EP 3 448 264 B1**

(12) **EUROPEAN PATENT SPECIFICATION**

(45) Date of publication and mention
of the grant of the patent:
18.09.2019 Bulletin 2019/38

(51) Int Cl.:
G06T 7/00 (2017.01) **A61B 8/08** (2006.01)
G01S 7/52 (2006.01) **G01S 15/89** (2006.01)
G06T 7/33 (2017.01)

(21) Application number: **17719205.1**

(86) International application number:
PCT/EP2017/059018

(22) Date of filing: **13.04.2017**

(87) International publication number:
WO 2017/186518 (02.11.2017 Gazette 2017/44)

(54) **3D IMAGE COMPOUNDING FOR ULTRASOUND FETAL IMAGING**

3D-BILDKOMPOUNDIERUNG FÜR FETALE ULTRASCHALLABBILDUNG

COMPOUNDAGE D'IMAGE 3D POUR IMAGERIE FOETALE PAR ULTRASON

(84) Designated Contracting States:
**AL AT BE BG CH CY CZ DE DK EE ES FI FR GB
GR HR HU IE IS IT LI LT LU LV MC MK MT NL NO
PL PT RO RS SE SI SK SM TR**

(74) Representative: **Veligura, Alina Viktorivna**
Philips International B.V.
Intellectual Property & Standards
High Tech Campus 5
5656 AE Eindhoven (NL)

(30) Priority: **26.04.2016 EP 16167041**

(43) Date of publication of application:
06.03.2019 Bulletin 2019/10

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(73) Proprietor: **Koninklijke Philips N.V.**
5656 AE Eindhoven (NL)

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vol. 1, no. 1, 2 March 1997 (1997-03-02),
XP011028272, ISSN: 1089-7771**

(72) Inventors:
• **KLINDER, Tobias**
5656 AE Eindhoven (NL)
• **LORENZ, Cristian**
5656 AE Eindhoven (NL)
• **WAECHTER-STEHLER, Irina**
5656 AE Eindhoven (NL)

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Description

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention relates to an ultrasound imaging apparatus for inspecting a volume of the subject comprising a fetus, in particular to an ultrasound imaging apparatus arranged combine three dimensional (3D) ultrasound image data into a spatially compounded 3D image of the fetus. The present invention further relates to a method for combining 3D ultrasound image data of the fetus into a spatially compounded 3D image of the fetus.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Fetal imaging is currently developing towards 3D ultrasound imaging. In the later gestational ages of fetus a field of view of the ultrasound transducer is no longer covering the full fetus as illustrated in FIG. 1. As a result, different portions of the body are acquired separately (e.g., brain, abdomen, femurs, see FIG.3). In order to get one compounded view image stitching or mosaicking is known technique extensively used for 2D imaging (e.g., panorama viewing for camera pictures).

[0003] One major difference for image compounding is the fact that in the case of fetal imaging not a static scene is imaged but the fetus, which is (sometimes even extensively) moving between two acquisitions. This does not only hamper image compounding (image stitching), but can also create scenarios where mosaicking is no longer feasible or plausible (especially in case of a large motion of the extremities). This situation is illustrated in FIG. 4; wherein in FIG.4A example, the fetal arms are positioned in front of the belly, while in FIG.4B in example the arms are positioned in front of the fetal face. In this situation a standard image compounding by spatially stitching images acquired at different orientations will not provide a good quality compounded image.

[0004] Document WO 2016/015994 A1 describes a systems generating a compound ultrasound image on the basis of ultrasound scans acquired in different viewing directions or different fields of view so that regions of the scanned object which may be shadowed or masked in the ultrasound image due to the physics of ultrasound propagation in the tissue can be reduced.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0005] It is therefore an object of present invention to provide an improved ultrasound imaging system arranged to evaluate a set of acquired 3D image data in order to provide a compounded 3D image of a fetus irrespective of its position and movement.

[0006] According to one aspect of the present invention, an ultrasound imaging system for producing a spatially compounded image of a fetus comprising:

an input for receiving a plurality of three dimensional

(3D) ultrasound image frames of a volumetric region comprising the fetus, wherein each 3D ultrasound image frame is acquired by an ultrasound probe at a different look direction with respect to the fetus; and an ultrasound image processor responsive to the plurality of 3D ultrasound image frames, said processor arranged to:

store the acquired plurality of 3D ultrasound image frames and an articulated fetal model, wherein the articulated fetal model includes a common fetal structure and at least one joint-limb relationship, segment each 3D image frame based on the articulated fetal model, wherein the ultrasound image processor if further arranged to adapt the articulated fetal model applied to a 3D image frame, when a variation of the common fetal structure compared to another 3D image frame of the plurality is detected, provide a plurality of 3D images of the volumetric region with an identified relative orientation of the fetus with respect to the look direction of the segmented image; and analyze coupled to the segmentation unit and arranged to determine, based on the articulated fetal model, an overall confidence value of the plurality of the 3D images, said image quality analyzer is further arranged to compare the overall confidence value with an image compounding threshold.

[0007] The ultrasound system of the present invention allows evaluating the overall quality of the 3D images of the fetus acquired for the given volumetric region. This evaluation is done by determining an overall confidence value of the plurality of the 3D images based on the incorporated knowledge of an articulated position taken by the fetus during each 3D frame acquisition. While segmenting each ultrasound 3D frame a variation of the common fetal structure in a given 3D frame compared to another 3D image frames can be detected, in the case the ultrasound imaging system allows adapting the articulated fetal model applied to the given 3D image frame. In some cases the relative orientation of the fetus may vary substantially between opposite directions from one 3D image to another. For such cases it may better to reacquire some 3D image frames than giving a user a low quality compounded image. Therefore, the image quality analyser of the system is arranged to compare the determined overall confidence value with an image compounding threshold, above which a spatially compounded 3D image of the fetus would provide an improved visualization of the volumetric region. The system of the present invention may further include a user feedback capability informing the user, when the overall confidence value is below the image compounding threshold. This provides user with an additional flexibility of either per-

forming an additional 3D image frames acquisition or continue with the rest of the selected diagnostic protocol, if time is a limiting factor.

[0008] The benefit of the present ultrasound system lies in using the articulated fetal model, which includes the common fetal structure and at least one joint-limb relationship, in combination with the model's subsequent adaptation during the segmentation process of the 3D image frames. This permits the ultrasound system to automatically assess an extent of a fetal pose change, which might have occurred during the acquisition of the plurality of three dimensional (3D) ultrasound image frames. If the common fetal structure in between the subsequently acquired frames varies substantially such that the model's adaptation causes a reduction of the overall confidence value of the plurality of the 3D images the user may be notified.

[0009] According to another aspect of the present invention the ultrasound imaging system further comprises a spatial image combiner arranged to provide, when the overall confidence value is above the image compounding threshold, a spatially compounded 3D image of the fetus, wherein different regions of said compounded 3D image are formed based on contributions from the plurality of 3D images.

[0010] According to a further aspect of the present invention, a medical imaging method for inspecting a volumetric region comprising fetus is provided comprising the steps of:

- receiving a plurality of three dimensional (3D) ultrasound image frames of a volumetric region with the fetus, wherein each 3D ultrasound image frame is acquired at a different look direction with respect to the fetus, from an ultrasound probe,
- storing the acquired plurality of the 3D ultrasound image frames and an articulated fetal model with a common fetal structure, wherein the articulated fetal model includes a common fetal structure and at least one joint-limb relationship;
- segmenting each 3D image frame based on the articulated fetal model;
- adapting the articulated fetal model applied to a 3D image frame, when a variation of the common fetal structure compared to another 3D image frame of the plurality is detected;
- providing a plurality of 3D images of the volumetric region with an identified relative orientation of the fetus with respect to the look direction of the segmented image and
- providing a spatially compounded 3D image of the fetus, wherein different regions of said compounded 3D image are formed based on contributions from the plurality of 3D images.

[0011] Preferred embodiments of the invention are defined in the dependent claims. It shall be understood that the claimed method has similar and/or identical preferred

embodiments as the claimed device and as defined in the dependent claims.

[0012] The present invention further provides a novel way of generating a compounded 3D image of the fetus with improved image quality. The suggested way is robust towards fetus movements in between the acquired 3D image frames. The ultrasound system in accordance to the present invention allows compensating even for an extreme fetal movement, wherein variable parts of a fetal body may change their relative position with respect to the body, and provides an improved compounded 3D image of this fetus. This is achieved by the incorporating a knowledge on an articulated position taken by the fetus during each 3D frame acquisition. The articulated fetal model includes the common fetal structure and at least one joint-limb relationship, this way a specific to the fetus set of movements and their effect on the overall image quality can be assessed. These movements can include relatively small pose variations such as join-limb movements or change of the fetus orientation to an opposite direction. This knowledge enables the ultrasound system of the present invention to provide a plurality of 3D ultrasound images, wherein relative orientation of the fetus with respect to the look direction is identified for each 3D frame. Further, once the overall confidence value is above the image compounding threshold, the system is arranged to generate the spatially compounded 3D image, wherein different regions are formed based on contributions from the plurality of 3D ultrasound images. Consequently, a high quality compounded ultrasound image of the fetus can be provided in real time with low technical effort, so that the acquiring of the ultrasound image is more comfortable and the quality is increased.

[0013] In a further embodiment of the present invention the overall confidence value includes a spatial combination of confidence values, each confidence value corresponding to a 3D image from the plurality of the 3D images and the spatial image combiner arranged to provide the spatially compounded 3D image of the fetus, wherein different regions of said compounded 3D image are weighted on the basis of the different confidence values of the 3D images from the plurality of 3D images.

[0014] In this embodiment the system can determine confidence values for different 3D frames with respect to the defined common fetal structure. The image quality analyzer may further analyze an image quality of each acquired 3D frame and determine a corresponding confidence value based on this analyses. In this embodiment the system provides the compounded 3D image, wherein each contributing to it 3D image is weighted in accordance to its confidence value. Hence, a wrong clinical diagnosis due to artefacts can be reduced and the reliability of the fetal ultrasound imaging is increased.

[0015] In another embodiment, the plurality of 3D ultrasound image frames further comprises an assembly of partial 3D image frames, each partial 3D image frame corresponding to the volumetric region, which includes a portion of the fetus.

[0016] This embodiment takes into account a possibility that not in all acquired 3D ultrasound frames the fetus will be fully visualized. These partial 3D image frames would include only a portion of the fetus.

[0017] In yet another embodiment, the ultrasound image processor comprises a fetal segmentation unit arranged to adapt the articulated fetal model applied to each of the partial 3D image frames based on the portion of the fetus included in each frame.

[0018] This embodiment provides a further improvement of the compounded 3D image quality by adapting the articulated model, used for the segmentation, in accordance to the portion of the fetus anatomy visualized in each of the partial frames. This step allows to determine more precisely a confidence value corresponding to the respective 3D image originating from the partial 3D image frame. The adaptation of the articulated fetal model may, for example, include varying a joint-limb relationship of the common fetal structure.

[0019] In yet another embodiment, the system further comprises a user interface coupled to the ultrasound image processor and responsive to user manual identification of at least one anchor landmark in the 3D image frame, said user interface is arranged to provide the identified location of the anchor landmark, such as joint pivot, within the 3D image frame as an input for the adaptation of the articulated fetal model.

[0020] This embodiment enables the system to use user's input for the adaptation of the articulated fetal model. The user can identify an anchor landmark within the 3D image frame. A possibility of the manual input may facilitate a more precise and quick adaptation of the articulated fetal model.

[0021] In a yet another embodiment, the ultrasound image processor comprises an image quality analyzer arranged to determine confidence values of the 3D images, which originate from 3D frames segmented with the same fetal articulation, being relatively higher with respect to confidence values corresponding to 3D images, which originate from 3D frames segmented with a different fetal articulation.

[0022] The improved compounded 3D image can be achieved by combining the 3D images with the same fetal pose (fetus image with the same articulation). Thus, an advantage of this embodiment is that 3D images with a fetal structure being different from the given fetal structure (due to the fetus movement in between the frames acquisition) used for the compounded 3D image can be identified and given low confidence values. The weight of the 3D images having these relatively low confidence values will be reduced accordingly in the compounded 3D image.

[0023] In another embodiment, the system further comprises a display operated to display the compounded 3D image and the reference orientation model of the fetus with respect to the volumetric region.

[0024] This embodiment improves visualization of the compounded 3D image by displaying a reference orien-

tation model of the fetus as well. The reference orientation model can be either shown in a separate window next the compounded 3D image; or interposed on to the compounded 3D image. This way the user may get a better spatial feeling of the fetal position and its orientation with respect to the probe.

[0025] In another embodiment, the system further comprises a user interface coupled to the ultrasound image processor, said user interface arranged to enable the user to perform biometry measurements of the fetus based on displayed the spatially compounded 3D image.

[0026] The improved quality compounded 3D image provided in accordance to the present invention enables the system to provide the user with possibility to perform a more precise biometry measurements of the fetus used in obstetric ultrasound.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0027] These and other aspects of the invention will be apparent from and elucidated with reference to the embodiment(s) described hereinafter. In the following drawings

FIG. 1 shows a schematic representation of an ultrasound imaging system in use to scan a volume of a patient's body including a fetus;

FIG. 2 shows a schematic illustration of different ultrasound frames of a volumetric region comprising the fetus acquired in different look (viewing) directions;

FIG. 3 shows a schematic illustration of different partial 3D frames of a volumetric region comprising the fetus acquired in different look (viewing) directions; FIGs. 4A-B show different articulated structures of the fetus;

FIG. 5 illustrates in block diagram form an ultrasonic diagnostic imaging system constructed in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

FIG. 6 illustrates a representation of an articulated model of the fetus;

FIG. 7 illustrates a dual ported memory used for acquired 3D image frame storage in an implementation of the present invention;

FIG. 8A-B shows representative medical images of fetus with identified anchor landmarks;

FIG. 9 illustrates a reference orientation model of the fetus displayed to the user; and

FIG. 10 a workflow diagram of the method according to the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0028] FIG. 1 shows a schematic illustration of an ultrasound imaging system according to an embodiment generally denoted by 100. The ultrasound imaging system 100 is applied to inspect a volumetric region of an anatomical site, in particular an anatomical site of a pa-

tient 13 including a fetus 8. The ultrasound imaging system 100 comprises an ultrasound probe 10 having at least one transducer array having a multitude of transducer elements for transmitting and/or receiving ultrasound waves. The transducer elements are preferably arranged in a two-dimensional (2D) array, which is constructed to electronically steer ultrasound beams within the volumetric region such that a three-dimensional ultrasound image frame of said region is provided. Alternatively, the array may be a one-dimensional array (1D) constructed to be mechanically steered through the volumetric region in order to provide a three-dimensional ultrasound image frame. The probe 10 is adapted to transmit ultrasound waves in a particular direction and to receive ultrasound waves from a particular direction which forms a field of view 6 for a given 3D image frame of the ultrasound probe 10.

[0029] In the embodiment shown in Fig. 1, the patient 13 is a pregnant person, wherein an anatomical object to be inspected is a fetus 8, part of which is disposed in the field of view 6.

[0030] As fetus represents a non-static object its position can vary from one 3D image frame to another. In addition, due to the physics of the ultrasound propagation in tissue, certain regions in the field of view 6 may not reflect the anatomical structures of the fetus 8 since some areas may be shadowed or masked by other anatomical structures within the ultrasound propagation path. Further, at later gestational ages of fetus the field of view 6 of the ultrasound transducer is no longer including an entire fetal body. As described in the following, the ultrasound system 100 in accordance to the present invention can evaluate an overall quality of the 3D image frames acquired for a given diagnostic protocol. Once the evaluated quality, expressed by an overall confidence value, is sufficient for generation of a compounded 3D image of the fetus, the ultrasound system of the present invention is arranged to produce a compounded 3D ultrasound image by combining 3D ultrasound images originating from a plurality of 3D image frames acquired at different viewing directions so that the amount of image quality defects can be reduced.

[0031] It is common in obstetric examination that ultrasound data acquired by the probe 10 with different probe positions or angles of steered beams result in ultrasound image frames having a variation in their quality, thus representing different confidence levels in diagnosing. The ultrasound imaging system 100 may either comprises the probe or an input wherein the ultrasound image data acquired by the probe 10 are received. The system may further comprise an ultrasound imaging apparatus 200 such as a control unit, which controls the provision of an ultrasound image via the ultrasound system 100. As will be explained further below, the ultrasound imaging apparatus 200 may receive ultrasound image data through the input from the transducer array of the ultrasound probe 10 and provides a compounded three-dimensional (3D) ultrasound image derived from the different ultra-

sound data sets of the fetus 8.

[0032] The ultrasound imaging system 100 may further comprise a display 50 for displaying the ultrasound image received from the ultrasound imaging apparatus 200. Still further, a user interface 20 may be provided that may comprise keys or a keyboard and inputting devices and may be connected to the display 50 or directly to the ultrasound imaging apparatus 200.

[0033] In FIG. 2 a schematic perspective diagram is shown for explaining an acquisition of the ultrasound image frames from different viewing directions with respect to the volumetric region comprising the fetus 8. The probe 10 is shifted around the patient's body 13 as indicated by an arrow 25 in order to acquire different ultrasound frames 26, 28 from the different viewing directions so that the fetus 8 is differently oriented within the field of view 6, 6'. These 3D frames may capture a different pose of the fetus, in case the fetus moved during the probe's shift, and the frames may also comprise different regions shadowed or obscured due to the propagation direction of the ultrasound waves can be reduced. In alternative workflow embodiment an acquisition of the image plurality at different look direction with respect to the fetus may be achieved by means of ultrasound beams steering (either electronical or mechanical) performed at the fixed probe's position with respect to the patient's body.

[0034] In order to provide a high quality ultrasound image, the ultrasound imaging apparatus 200 is arranged to combine the different ultrasound frames 26, 28 of the different look (viewing) directions to a compounded 3D ultrasound image on the basis of different spatial references identified in the field of view 6, 6'. The spatial references are identified on the basis of segmented anatomical structures of the fetus 8 as described in detail in the following.

[0035] Referring to FIG.3, the ultrasound probe 10 can acquire a plurality of 3D ultrasound image frames denoted as 1, 2, 3 and 4 and corresponding to a different look direction with respect to fetus. All frames or some (an assembly) of these frames may be partial 3D image frames, wherein each of the partial frames includes a portion of the fetus as shown in FIG.3. These partial 3D image frames comprise image data of a specific anatomy of the fetus, which is included in the field of view for the given look direction. This situation may often occur in later gestational ages, when the fetal size may be larger than the field of view of the probe.

[0036] The 3D image frames may vary in their image quality dependent on the part of the fetal anatomy visualized by the field of view of the given frame. In addition, a fetus pose (articulation) can change from frame to frame as illustrated in FIGs.4A-B. The described below in detail in FIG.5 the ultrasound system of the present invention allows to generate a compounded 3D image of the fetus with improved image quality, which is robust towards fetus movements in between the acquired 3D image frames. The ultrasound system 100 comprises a compound image memory 32 arranged to store data of

the acquired plurality of the 3D ultrasound image frames and an articulated fetal model with a common fetal structure.

[0037] The articulated fetal model takes into account the variability in overall orientation and articulated constellation of the fetal body. This model covers the most important articulation of the fetal skeletal anatomy and defines the degrees of freedom per articulation including range of motion (min/max angles). The implementation of the model is commonly done using joint (j)-limb (L)-relationships. By defining the common fetal structure a three-dimensional data set comprising fetus can be segmented. The idea is illustrated in FIG.6 on a synthetic example. The articulated model gives for each joint the respective articulation parameters (rotation point and angles) and thus defines the overall constellation. In this model following assumptions may be used. Each limb carries a shape, each limb can be saleable, can have a parent joint, can have a list of child-joints. Each joint can be a hinge or a ball joint, has a static limb (with respect to this joint), has a flexible limb. Thus, articulation can be defined by a rotation point, rotation axes and min/max of angulation values. The fetus position is given by the co-ordinate systems which define the location and rotation parameters of the respective joints. Based on this input, the actual fetus pose position (articulation) in the medical image can be determined using inverse kinematics to fit the desired position. When solving the inverse problem the degrees of freedom are considered per joint.

[0038] FIG.5 shows a detailed schematic block diagram of the ultrasound imaging system 100 constructed in accordance with the present invention. The probe 10 including the transducer array 12 transmits beams at different angles over an image field denoted by the dashed rectangle and parallelograms. In this example, three groups of scanlines forming a plurality of image frames are indicated in the drawing, labeled A, B, and C with each group being steered at a different angle relative to the probe. In contrast to the example illustrated in FIG.3, wherein the 3D frames denoted as 1, 2, 3 and 4 are acquired by shifting the probe 10 (similar to the case in FIG.2), the 3D image frames labeled as A, B and C in FIG.5 are acquired by electronically steered ultrasound beams. The transmission of the beams is controlled by a transmitter 14 which controls the phasing and time of actuation of each of the elements of the array transducer so as to transmit each beam from a predetermined origin along the array and at a predetermined angle. The echoes returned from along each scanline are received by the elements of the array, digitized as by analog to digital conversion, and coupled to a digital beamformer 16. The digital beamformer delays and sums the echoes from the array elements to form a sequence of focused, coherent digital echo samples along each scanline. The transmitter 14 and beamformer 16 are operated under control of a system controller 18, which in turn is responsive to the settings of controls on the user interface 20 operated by the user of the ultrasound system. The system controller

controls the transmitter to transmit the desired number of scanline groups at the desired angles, transmit energies and frequencies. The system controller also controls the digital beamformer to properly delay and combine the received echo signals for the apertures and image depths used. The scanline echo signals are filtered by a programmable digital filter 22, which defines the band of frequencies of interest. When imaging harmonic contrast agents or performing tissue harmonic imaging the pass-band of the filter 22 is set to pass harmonics of the transmit band. The filtered signals are then detected by a detector 24. In a preferred embodiment the filter and detector include multiple filters and detectors so that the received signals may be separated into multiple pass-bands, individually detected and recombined to reduce image speckle by frequency compounding. For B mode imaging the detector 24 will perform amplitude detection of the echo signal envelope. For Doppler imaging ensembles of echoes are assembled for each point in the image and are Doppler processed to estimate the Doppler shift or Doppler power intensity.

[0039] In accordance with the principles of the present invention the digital echo signals are processed by spatial compounding in an ultrasound image processor 30. In the embodiment shown in FIG.5 the ultrasound image processor comprises the compound image memory 32 unit. In other system's realization this unit can be also located outside of the processor 30. The compound image memory 32 is a 3D frame storage buffer and can be implemented as a dual port memory 160 which can be written to and read from simultaneously (FIG.7). The use of such a R/W memory enables the new 3D ultrasound image frames being acquired by the transducer array and beamformer to be written into one area of the R/W memory while the data of other 3D image frames previously stored in the memory is read out and analyzed. The writing of new slice image data into the memory 160 is controlled by a write address controller 162a while the reading of slice image data from other locations in the memory is under the control of a read address controller 162b. This embodiment illustrates how a real time image analyses and compounding may be performed. The compound image memory unit 32 further stores the articulated fetal model with the defined common fetal structure.

[0040] The ultrasound image processor may comprise a segmentation unit 34 arranged to segment each 3D image frame based on the articulated fetal model stored in the memory unit 32. The segmentation unit 34 model thereby provides a plurality of 3D images originating from the plurality of 3D frames (A,B and C as illustrated in FIG.5 or 1,2,3,4 as illustrated in FIG.3) of the volumetric region, wherein a relative orientation of the fetus with respect to the look direction is identified for each 3D image. The relative orientation of the fetus linked to the 3D image gives a spatial relationship between the acquired 3D frames. The segmentation unit 34 further allows to adapt the articulated fetal model applied to different 3D images, when a variation of the common fetal structure

compared to another 3D image frame of the plurality is detected. The articulated fetal model includes the common fetal structure and at least one joint-limb relationship, this way a specific to the fetus set of movements and their effect on the overall image quality can be assessed. These movements can include relatively small pose variations such as join-limb movements or change of the fetus orientation to an opposite direction.

[0041] This plurality of the spatially related 3D images may be further processed by an image quality analyzer 34, which is arranged to determine an overall confidence value of the plurality of the 3D images. Image quality of the acquired 3D frame may vary from one look to another. The ultrasound image processor 30 enables the ultrasound system 100 to automatically assess an extent of a fetal pose change, which might have occurred during the acquisition of the plurality of three dimensional (3D) ultrasound image frames. If the common fetal structure in between the subsequently acquired frames varies substantially such that the model's adaptation causes a reduction of the overall confidence value of the plurality of the 3D images the user may be notified. Some of the anatomical features of the fetus may be less pronounced for the given 3D frame due to the variation in the transmitted and reflected echo signals. Therefore, depending on a selected by user diagnostic protocol directed to a specific fetal anatomy observation (for example, neurosonogram), the quality analyzer 34 may denote a relatively low confidence values to those 3D images, wherein the specific anatomy is not fully visualized. While the 3D images corresponding to the frames with the specific anatomy being well pronounced may be denoted relatively high confidence values. Compared to the prior art systems the quality analyses is improved by implementing the fetal articulation knowledge into the segmentation step. Further, the quality analyzer 34 is also arranged to identify a potential fetal movement, which may occur in between or during the 3D frame acquisition. If a fetal structure for the given 3D image frame changes compared to the common fetal structure identified for the rest of the plurality of the 3D image frames, the quality analyzer 34 denotes the relatively low confidence value to the 3D image, wherein the movement was identified. Thus, 3D images, which originate from 3D frames segmented with the same fetal articulation, have relatively higher confidence values compared to 3D images, which originate from 3D frames segmented with a different fetal articulation. The overall confidence value of the plurality of the 3D images determined by the analyzer 34 is based on a spatial combination of confidence values originating from the 3D image frames, wherein each value corresponds to a 3D image from the plurality of the 3D images. In order to obtain the overall confidence values, these confidence values may be either summed or averaged through the volumetric region. The image quality analyzer 34 is further arranged to compare the determined overall confidence value to an image compounding threshold. This threshold can reflect a lower limit below which a

spatially compounded 3D image would not provide an improved quality for a diagnosis. The threshold can be defined by the selected diagnostic protocol and image quality requirements set for an observation of the specific fetal anatomy performed by said protocol (anatomical features expected to be visualized during the examination). Therefore, the overall confidence value provided by the ultrasound image processor may be different for the same plurality of 3D image frames, when different diagnostic protocols are selected. The system of the present invention has an additional flexibility in the image quality assessment, wherein a diagnostic purpose of the acquired plurality of images is automatically taken into account. While for some diagnostic protocols an occurrence of the fetus movement during the acquisition may affect a quality of the diagnosis; for other diagnostic protocols the same movement would not have a substantial effect.

[0042] When the overall confidence value is determined to be below the image compounding threshold, the ultrasound system of the present invention is arranged to provide the user with a feedback indicating that the quality of the acquired 3D frames is not sufficient for the 3D image compounding. At this stage the user can decide whether to perform 3D frames acquisitions again or to proceed with a next in the protocol. After quality analyses the spatially 3D images are compounded by a spatial image combiner 38. Combining may comprise summation, averaging, peak detection, or other combinational means. The combiner is arranged to provide spatially compounded 3D image of the fetus, wherein different regions of said compounded 3D image are formed based on contributions from the plurality of 3D images. The images being combined may also be weighted based on their confidence values prior to combining in this step of the process. The 3D images with the fetal structure being different from the given fetal structure and/or 3D images with the desired fetal anatomy being less pronounced will have low confidence values. The weight of these 3D images may be reduced accordingly in the compounded 3D image. Thus, providing an improved quality compounded 3D image of the fetus. This would result in a wrong clinical diagnosis due to artefacts to be reduced and the reliability of the fetal ultrasound imaging to be increased.

[0043] Finally, post processing is performed by the processor. The processor normalizes the combined values to a display range of values. This processing can be most easily implemented by look-up tables and can simultaneously perform compression and mapping of the range of compounded values to a range of values suitable for display of the compounded image. The compounding process may be performed in estimate data space or in display pixel space. Additionally to post-processing ray-lines can be mathematically projected through the multiple 3D images in the manner of raycasting for volume rendering. The spatially compounded 3D image of the present invention provides an improved image quality

data suitable for volume rendering of the fetus. In a preferred embodiment scan conversion is done following the compounding process by a scan converter 40. The compound images may be stored in a Cineloop® memory 42 in either estimate or display pixel form. If stored in estimate form the images may be scan converted when replayed from the Cineloop memory for display. The scan converter and Cineloop memory may also be used to render three dimensional presentations of the spatially compounded images as described in US. Pat. Nos. 5,485,842 and 5,860,924. Following scan conversion the spatially compounded images are processed for display by a video processor 44 and displayed on an image display 50.

[0044] An improvement in the quality of the compounded 3D image can be achieved by adapting the articulated fetal model applied to different 3D images. This is beneficial in case the plurality of 3D image frames has an assembly of the partial 3D image frames corresponding to the volumetric region, which includes a portion of the fetus. In this case the fetal segmentation unit detects, these partial frames and adapts the articulated model for the partial frames based on the portion (anatomy) of the fetus included in this frame.

[0045] In this embodiment, the articulated model adaptation comprises finding the overall constellation (for all joints the correct set of parameters such as rotation angles) to fit the model to the anatomy information acquired by the partial image. One possibility to adapt the model is by providing the user (via the user interface 20) to manually identify anchor landmarks in the image, e.g., the joint pivot. This landmark is further used as an input for segmentation unit 34 for the adaptation of the articulated fetal model for each specific. An example of the articulated model adaptation is shown for a magnetic resonance image in FIG.8A and 8B. These FIGs illustrate the adaptation of the constellation model to anchor landmarks. These landmarks (crosses) can be either manually or automatically identified. By adapting the model to the landmarks, the overall configuration illustrated in FIG.9 is found.

[0046] With the prior knowledge captured in the articulated model, it is furthermore possible to adapt the model even if some landmarks are set incorrectly/ missing by assuring that the determined configuration is consistent with the model. Similar workflow can be performed for the articulated model adaptation used in the partial 3D images.

[0047] The model adaption can be done in several depending on the exact given problem. For example, there can be multiple landmarks detected per limb, landmarks can be labelled or un-labelled (i.e. it is known to which anatomical structure the landmark belongs to) or the detected landmarks can have a probability how likely it is that this landmark belongs to an anatomical structure. Independent of the exact problem, adaptation will be performed in a hierarchical manner. Starting from a root, adaptation is carried out consecutively per limb and in

each step a transformation is estimated so that the current limb matches to the found landmarks. Again, for the estimation of the transformation various possibilities exist, e.g., finding a closed-form solution of a sum of squared distance between landmark being defined in the limb and corresponding target landmarks or iterative optimization.

[0048] The compounded 3D image may be displayed together with the articulated fetal model used for its compounding of the fetus. Alternatively, the compounded 3D image may be displayed together with the volume rendered fetal image. The articulated fetal model (or rendered volume image) can be either shown in a separate window next the compounded 3D image; or interposed on to the compounded 3D image. This way the user may get a better spatial feeling of the fetal position and its orientation with respect to the probe.

[0049] The display further visualizes a confidence value distribution within different regions of said compounded 3D image. The confidence value distribution can be, for example, given by color indications, wherein a color scale would change from red, corresponding to regions being compounded by 3D images with lower confidence values, to green, corresponding to the regions being compounded by 3D images with higher confidence values. The user is given an opportunity to visually evaluate an overall compounded 3D image. The user can always decide to perform a new 3D frame acquisition, if a specific region in the compounded image was compounded based on the image with a low confidence value.

[0050] In FIG. 10 a workflow diagram of the method 300 according to the present invention is illustrated. In step 301 a plurality of 3D ultrasound image frames of the volumetric region comprising fetus is acquired; alternatively the ultrasound system may receive the plurality of 3D ultrasound image frames via the input. Each 3D ultrasound image frame is acquired at a different look direction with respect to the fetus. In step 302 the acquired plurality of the 3D ultrasound image frames together with an articulated fetal model with a common fetal structure are stored in a compound image memory 32. In step 303 a segmentation of each 3D image frame based on the articulated fetal model is performed. In this step a plurality of 3D images of the volumetric region with an identified relative orientation of the fetus with respect to the look direction of the segmented image is performed. Additionally to segmentation a detection of a variation of the common fetal structure of a 3D frame compared to another 3D image frame of the plurality is performed in step 308, further in this step the articulated model used for each partial frame can be adapted based on the portion of the fetus anatomy included in said frame.

[0051] In step 304 the system determines an overall confidence value based on the articulated fetal model. The overall confidence value is being compared to an image compounding threshold. If the overall value is being below the image compounding threshold, in step 305 the system gives a feedback to the user informing on the

fact that low quality 3D frames for a purpose of 3D image compounding were acquired. At this stage the user can decide to repeat the sequence of steps from the beginning. If the overall value is being above the image compounding threshold, in step 306 the system may weight and register each of the 3D images with respect to the common fetal structure.

[0052] And finally in step 307 a spatially compounded 3D image of the fetus is provided. In this spatially compounded 3D image different regions are formed based on contributions from the plurality of 3D images. In case the step 306 is performed the spatially compounded 3D image of the fetus would include a formation of different regions of said compounded 3D image based on weighted contributions from the 3D images determined in step 306.

[0053] While the invention has been illustrated and described in detail in the drawings and foregoing description, such illustration and description are to be considered illustrative or exemplary and not restrictive; the invention is not limited to the disclosed embodiments. Other variations to the disclosed embodiments can be understood and effected by those skilled in the art in practicing the claimed invention, from a study of the drawings, the disclosure, and the appended claims.

[0054] In the claims, the word "comprising" does not exclude other elements or steps, and the indefinite article "a" or "an" does not exclude a plurality. A single element or other unit may fulfill the functions of several items recited in the claims. The mere fact that certain measures are recited in mutually different dependent claims does not indicate that a combination of these measures cannot be used to advantage.

[0055] A computer program may be stored/distributed on a suitable medium, such as an optical storage medium or a solid-state medium supplied together with or as part of other hardware, but may also be distributed in other forms, such as via the Internet or other wired or wireless telecommunication systems.

[0056] Any reference signs in the claims should not be construed as limiting the scope.

Claims

1. An ultrasound imaging system for producing a spatially compounded image of a fetus comprising:

an input for receiving a plurality of three dimensional (3D) ultrasound image frames of a volumetric region comprising the fetus, wherein each 3D ultrasound image frame is acquired at a different look direction with respect to the fetus by means of an ultrasound probe (10); and an ultrasound image processor (30) responsive to the plurality of 3D ultrasound image frames, said processor arranged to:

store the acquired plurality of 3D ultrasound image frames and an articulated fetal model, wherein the articulated fetal model includes a common fetal structure and at least one joint-limb relationship, segment each 3D image frame based on the articulated fetal model, wherein the ultrasound image processor is further arranged to adapt the articulated fetal model applied to a 3D image frame from the plurality, when a variation of the common fetal structure compared to another 3D image frame of the plurality is detected, provide a plurality of 3D images of the volumetric region with an identified relative orientation of the fetus with respect to the look direction of the segmented image, and analyze, based on the articulated fetal model, an overall confidence value of the plurality of the 3D images, said image quality analyzer is further arranged to compare the overall confidence value with an image compounding threshold.

2. The ultrasound imaging system of claim 1 further comprising a spatial image combiner (38) arranged to provide, when the overall confidence value is above the image compounding threshold, a spatially compounded 3D image of the fetus, wherein different regions of said compounded 3D image are formed based on contributions from the plurality of 3D images.
3. The ultrasound imaging system of claim 2, wherein the overall confidence value includes a spatial combination of confidence values, each confidence value corresponding to a 3D image from the plurality of the 3D images; and the spatial image combiner arranged to provide the spatially compounded 3D image of the fetus, wherein different regions of said compounded 3D image are weighted on the basis of the different confidence values of the 3D images from the plurality of 3D images.
4. The ultrasound imaging system of claim 1 further comprising a user interface (20) coupled to the ultrasound image processor and responsive to a user manual selection of a diagnostic protocol; and wherein the ultrasound image processor is further arranged to analyze, based on the articulated fetal model and the selected diagnostic protocol, an overall confidence value of the plurality of the 3D images, said image quality analyzer is further arranged to compare the overall confidence value with an image compounding threshold.
5. The ultrasound imaging system of claim 1, wherein the plurality of 3D ultrasound image frames further

comprises an assembly of partial 3D image frames, each partial 3D image frame corresponding to the volumetric region, which includes a portion of the fetus.

6. The ultrasound imaging system of claim 5, wherein the ultrasound image processor is arranged to adapt the articulated fetal model applied to a partial 3D image frame based on the portion of the fetus included in the respective frame.

7. The ultrasound imaging system of claim 1 or 6, wherein the ultrasound image processor is arranged to adapt the articulated fetal model by varying a joint-limb relationship of the common fetal structure.

8. The ultrasound imaging system of claim 6, further comprising a user interface (20) coupled to the ultrasound image processor and responsive to user manual identification of at least one anchor landmark in the 3D image frame, said user interface is arranged to provide the identified location of the anchor landmark, such as joint pivot, within the 3D image frame as an input for the adaptation of the articulated fetal model.

9. The ultrasound imaging system of claim 3, wherein the articulated model comprises a set of fetal articulations, wherein each fetal articulation corresponds to a given fetal pose; and the ultrasound image processor is arranged to detect the variation of the common fetal structure based on the fetal pose change occurring during the acquisition of the plurality of three dimensional (3D) ultrasound image frames.

10. The ultrasound imaging system of claim 9, wherein the image quality analyzer is arranged to determine confidence values of the 3D images, which originate from 3D frames segmented with the same fetal articulation, being relatively higher with respect to confidence values corresponding to 3D images, which originate from 3D frames segmented with a different fetal articulation.

11. The ultrasound imaging system of claim 2, further comprising a display (50) operated to display the compounded 3D image and the articulated fetal model with respect to the volumetric region.

12. The ultrasound imaging system of claim 2, further comprising:
a display (50) arranged to display the spatially compounded 3D image; and a user interface (20) coupled to the ultrasound image processor, said user interface arranged to enable the user to perform biometry measurements of the fetus based on the displayed spatially compounded 3D image.

13. The ultrasound imaging system of claims 1 to 12 further comprising the ultrasound probe (10) coupled to the input, said probe having an ultrasound transducer array operable to acquire the plurality of three dimensional (3D) ultrasound image frames of a volumetric region comprising the fetus.

14. A medical imaging method (300) for inspecting a volumetric region comprising fetus is provided comprising the steps of:

- receiving (301) a plurality of three dimensional (3D) ultrasound image frames of a volumetric region with the fetus, wherein each 3D ultrasound image frame is acquired at a different look direction with respect to the fetus, by an ultrasound probe,
- storing (302) the acquired plurality of the 3D ultrasound image frames and an articulated fetal model with a common fetal structure, wherein the articulated fetal model includes a common fetal structure and at least one joint-limb relationship,
- segmenting (303) each 3D image frame based on the articulated fetal model;
- adapting (308) the articulated fetal model applied to a 3D image frame, when a variation of the common fetal structure compared to another 3D image frame of the plurality is detected;
- providing a plurality of 3D images of the volumetric region with an identified relative orientation of the fetus with respect to the look direction of the segmented image,
- providing (307) a spatially compounded 3D image of the fetus, wherein different regions of said compounded 3D image are formed based on contributions from the plurality of 3D images.

15. The method of claim 14, further comprising:

- weighting and registering (306) each of the 3D images with respect to the common fetal structure, wherein providing the spatially compounded 3D image of the fetus, includes a formation of different regions of said compounded 3D image based on weighted contributions from the 3D images of the plurality of 3D images.

Patentansprüche

1. Ultraschall-Bildgebungssystem zum Erzeugen eines räumlich zusammengesetzten Bilds eines Fötus, umfassend:

eine Eingabe zum Empfangen einer Vielzahl von dreidimensionalen (3D) Ultraschall-Einzelbildern eines volumetrischen, den Fötus umfas-

senden Bereichs, wobei jedes 3D-Ultraschall-Einzelbild bei einer unterschiedlichen Blickrichtung bezüglich des Fötus mittels einer Ultraschallsonde (10) erworben wird; und einen Ultraschallbildprozessor (30), der auf die Vielzahl von 3D-Ultraschall-Einzelbildern anspricht, wobei der Prozessor angeordnet ist, um:

die erworbene Vielzahl von 3D-Ultraschall-Einzelbildern und ein bewegliches fetales Modell zu speichern, wobei das bewegliche fetale Modell eine gewöhnliche fetale Struktur und mindestens eine Gelenk-Gliedmaße-Beziehung beinhaltet, jedes 3D-Einzelbild auf Grundlage des beweglichen fetalen Modells zu segmentieren, wobei ein Ultraschallbildprozessor weiter angeordnet ist, um das bewegliche fetale Modell, das auf ein 3D-Einzelbild von der Vielzahl angewendet wird, anzupassen, wenn eine Variation der gewöhnlichen fetalen Struktur, verglichen mit einem anderen 3D-Einzelbild der Vielzahl, detektiert wird, eine Vielzahl von 3D-Bildern des volumetrischen Bereichs mit einer identifizierten relativen Orientierung des Fötus bezüglich der Blickrichtung des segmentierten Bilds bereitzustellen, und auf Grundlage des beweglichen fetalen Modells einen Gesamtkonfidenzwert der Vielzahl der 3D-Bilder zu analysieren, wobei das Bildqualitätsanalysegerät weiter angeordnet ist, um den Gesamtkonfidenzwert mit einem Bildzusammensetzungsschwellenwert zu vergleichen.

2. Ultraschall-Bildgebungssystem nach Anspruch 1, weiter umfassend einen Raumbildkombinierer (38), angeordnet, um, wenn der Gesamtkonfidenzwert über dem Bildzusammensetzungsschwellenwert liegt, ein räumlich zusammengesetztes 3D-Bild des Fötus bereitzustellen, wobei unterschiedliche Bereiche des zusammengesetzten 3D-Bilds auf Grundlage von Beiträgen aus der Vielzahl von 3D-Bildern gebildet werden.

3. Ultraschall-Bildgebungssystem nach Anspruch 2, wobei der Gesamtkonfidenzwert eine räumliche Kombination von Konfidenzwerten, wobei jeder Konfidenzwert einem 3D-Bild von der Vielzahl von 3D-Bildern entspricht; und den Raumbildkombinierer, der angeordnet ist, um das räumlich zusammengesetzte 3D-Bild des Fötus bereitzustellen, wobei unterschiedliche Bereiche des zusammengesetzten 3D-Bilds auf der Grundlage der unterschiedlichen Konfidenzwerte der 3D-Bil-

der aus der Vielzahl von 3D-Bildern gewichtet werden, beinhaltet.

4. Ultraschall-Bildgebungssystem nach Anspruch 1, weiter umfassend eine an den Ultraschallbild-Prozessor gekoppelte und auf eine manuelle Auswahl eines diagnostischen Protokolls eines Anwenders ansprechende Anwenderschnittstelle (20); und wobei der Ultraschallbildprozessor weiter angeordnet ist, um auf Grundlage des beweglichen fetalen Modells und des ausgewählten diagnostischen Protokolls einen Gesamtkonfidenzwert der Vielzahl der 3D-Bilder zu analysieren, wobei das Bildqualitätsanalysegerät weiter angeordnet ist, um den Gesamtkonfidenzwert mit einem Bildzusammensetzungsschwellenwert zu vergleichen.

5. Ultraschall-Bildgebungssystem nach Anspruch 1, wobei die Vielzahl von 3D-Ultraschall-Einzelbildern weiter einen Zusammenbau von Teil-3D-Einzelbildern umfasst, wobei jedes Teil-3D-Einzelbild dem volumetrischen Bereich entspricht, der einen Abschnitt des Fötus beinhaltet.

6. Ultraschall-Bildgebungssystem nach Anspruch 5, wobei der Ultraschallbildprozessor angeordnet ist, um das auf ein Teil-3D-Einzelbild angewendete bewegliche fetale Modell auf Grundlage des in dem jeweiligen Einzelbild beinhalteten Abschnitts des Fötus anzupassen.

7. Ultraschall-Bildgebungssystem nach Anspruch 1 oder 6, wobei der Ultraschallbildprozessor angeordnet ist, um das bewegliche fetale Modell durch Variieren einer Gelenk-Gliedmaße-Beziehung der gewöhnlichen fetalen Struktur anzupassen.

8. Ultraschall-Bildgebungssystem nach Anspruch 6, weiter umfassend eine an den Ultraschallbildprozessor gekoppelte und auf manuelle Identifizierung von mindestens einem Ankerreferenzpunkt in dem 3D-Einzelbild ansprechende Anwenderschnittstelle (20), wobei die Anwenderschnittstelle angeordnet ist, um die identifizierte Stelle oder den Ankerreferenzpunkt, wie einen Gelenkdrehpunkt, innerhalb des 3D-Einzelbilds als eine Eingabe für die Anpassung des beweglichen fetalen Modells bereitzustellen.

9. Ultraschall-Bildgebungssystem nach Anspruch 3, wobei das bewegliche Modell einen Satz fetaler Gelenkverbindungen umfasst, wobei jede fetale Gelenkverbindung einer gegebenen fetalen Haltung entspricht; und der Ultraschallbildprozessor angeordnet ist, um die Variation der gewöhnlichen fetalen Struktur auf Grundlage der fetalen Haltungsänderung, die während der Erwerbung der Vielzahl von dreidimensio-

nen (3D) Ultraschall-Einzelbilder auftritt, zu detektieren.

10. Ultraschall-Bildgebungssystem nach Anspruch 9, wobei das Bildqualitätsanalysegerät angeordnet ist, um Konfidenzwerte der 3D-Bilder zu bestimmen, die aus mit der gleichen fetalen Gelenkverbindung segmentierten 3D-Einzelbildern stammen, die bezüglich Konfidenzwerten, die 3D-Bildern entsprechen, die aus mit einer unterschiedlichen fetalen Gelenkverbindung segmentierten 3D-Einzelbildern stammen, relativ höher sind. 5
11. Ultraschall-Bildgebungssystem nach Anspruch 2, weiter umfassend eine Anzeige (50), die betätigt wird, um das zusammengesetzte 3D-Bild und das bewegliche fetale Modell bezüglich des volumetrischen Bereichs anzuzeigen. 10
12. Ultraschall-Bildgebungssystem nach Anspruch 2, weiter umfassend: 20
eine Anzeige (50), angeordnet, um das räumlich zusammengesetzte 3D-Bild anzuzeigen; und
eine an den Ultraschallbildprozessor gekoppelte Anwenderschnittstelle (20), wobei die Anwenderschnittstelle angeordnet ist, um dem Anwender zu ermöglichen, auf Grundlage des angezeigten räumlich zusammengesetzten 3D-Bilds Biometriemessungen des Fötus durchzuführen. 25
13. Ultraschall-Bildgebungssystem nach Ansprüchen 1 bis 12, weiter umfassend die an die Eingabe gekoppelte Ultraschallsonde (10), wobei die Sonde einen Ultraschallwandlerray, betätigbar zum Erwerben der Vielzahl von dreidimensionalen (3D) Ultraschall-Einzelbildern eines den Fötus umfassenden volumetrischen Bereichs, aufweist. 30
14. Medizinisches Bildgebungsverfahren (300) zum Inspeizieren eines Fötus umfassenden volumetrischen Bereichs wird bereitgestellt, umfassend die Schritte des: 35
- Empfangens (301) einer Vielzahl von dreidimensionalen (3D) Ultraschall-Einzelbildern eines volumetrischen Bereichs mit dem Fötus, wobei jedes 3D-Ultraschall-Einzelbild bei einer unterschiedlichen Blickrichtung bezüglich des Fötus durch eine Ultraschallsonde erworben wird, 40
- Speicherns (302) der erworbenen Vielzahl von 3D-Ultraschall-Einzelbildern und eines beweglichen fetalen Modells mit einer gewöhnlichen fetalen Struktur, wobei das bewegliche fetale Modell eine gewöhnliche fetale Struktur und mindestens eine Gelenk-Gliedmaße-Beziehung beinhaltet, 45

- Segmentierens (303) jedes 3D-Einzelbilds auf Grundlage des beweglichen fetalen Modells;
- Anpassens (308) des auf ein 3D-Einzelbild angewendeten beweglichen fetalen Modells, wenn eine Variation der gewöhnlichen fetalen Struktur, verglichen mit einem anderen 3D-Einzelbild der Vielzahl, detektiert wird;
- Bereitstellens einer Vielzahl von 3D-Bildern des volumetrischen Bereichs mit einer identifizierten relativen Orientierung des Fötus bezüglich der Blickrichtung des segmentierten Bilds,
- Bereitstellens (307) eines räumlich zusammengesetzten 3D-Bilds des Fötus, wobei unterschiedliche Bereiche des zusammengesetzten 3D-Bilds auf Grundlage von Beiträgen aus der Vielzahl von 3D-Bildern gebildet werden.

15. Verfahren nach Anspruch 14, weiter umfassend:

- Gewichten und Registrieren (306) jedes der 3D-Bilder bezüglich der gewöhnlichen fetalen Struktur, wobei Bereitstellen des räumlich zusammengesetzten 3D-Bilds des Fötus eine Bildung unterschiedlicher Bereiche des zusammengesetzten 3D-Bilds auf Grundlage gewichteter Beiträge aus den 3D-Bildern der Vielzahl von 3D-Bildern beinhaltet.

Revendications

1. Système d'imagerie échographique pour produire une image composée spatialement d'un foetus comprenant :

une entrée pour recevoir une pluralité de trames d'images échographiques tridimensionnelles (3D) d'une région volumétrique comprenant le foetus, dans laquelle chaque trame d'image échographique 3D est obtenue dans une direction de regard différente par rapport au foetus au moyen d'une sonde échographique (10) ; et un processeur d'image échographique (30) réactif à la pluralité de trames d'images échographiques 3D, ledit processeur étant agencé pour :

stocker la pluralité obtenue de trames d'images échographiques 3D et un modèle foetal articulé, dans lequel le modèle foetal articulé inclut une structure foetale commune et au moins une relation articulation-membre,
segmenter chaque image 3D sur la base du modèle foetal articulé, dans lequel le processeur d'image échographique est en outre agencé pour adapter le modèle foetal articulé appliqué à une image 3D de la plu-

- ralité, lorsqu'une variation de la structure foetale commune comparée à une autre trame d'image 3D de la pluralité est détectée, fournir une pluralité d'images 3D de la région volumétrique avec une orientation relative identifiée du fœtus par rapport à la direction de regard de l'image segmentée, et
- analyser, sur la base du modèle foetal articulé, une valeur de confiance générale de la pluralité des images 3D, ledit analyseur de qualité d'image est en outre agencé pour comparer la valeur de confiance générale avec un seuil de composition d'image.
2. Système d'imagerie échographique selon la revendication 1, comprenant en outre un combineur d'image spatial (38) agencé pour fournir, lorsque la valeur de confiance générale est supérieure au seuil de composition d'image, une image 3D composée spatialement du fœtus, dans lequel différentes régions de ladite image 3D composée sont formées sur la base de contributions à partir de la pluralité d'images 3D.
 3. Système d'imagerie échographique selon la revendication 2, dans lequel la valeur de confiance générale inclut une combinaison spatiale de valeurs de confiance, chaque valeur de confiance correspondant à une image 3D de la pluralité des images 3D ; et le combineur d'image spatial étant agencé pour fournir l'image 3D composée spatialement du fœtus, dans lequel différentes régions de ladite image 3D composée sont pondérées sur la base des valeurs de confiance différentes des images 3D de la pluralité d'images 3D.
 4. Système d'imagerie échographique selon la revendication 1, comprenant en outre une interface utilisateur (20) couplée au processeur d'image échographique et réactive à une sélection manuelle d'utilisateur d'un protocole de diagnostic ; et dans lequel le processeur d'image échographique est en outre agencé pour analyser, sur la base du modèle foetal articulé et du protocole de diagnostic sélectionné, une valeur de confiance générale de la pluralité des images 3D, ledit analyseur de qualité d'image est en outre agencé pour comparer la valeur de confiance générale avec un seuil de composition d'image.
 5. Système d'imagerie échographique selon la revendication 1, dans lequel la pluralité de trames d'images échographiques 3D comprend en outre un ensemble de trames d'images 3D partielles, chaque trame d'image 3D partielle correspondant à la région volumétrique, qui inclut une partie du fœtus.
 6. Système d'imagerie échographique selon la revendication 5, dans lequel le processeur d'image échographique est agencé pour adapter le modèle foetal articulé appliqué à une trame d'image 3D partielle sur la base de la partie du fœtus incluse dans l'image respective.
 7. Système d'imagerie échographique selon la revendication 1 ou 6, dans lequel le processeur d'image échographique est agencé pour adapter le modèle foetal articulé en faisant varier une relation articulation-membre de la structure foetale commune.
 8. Système d'imagerie échographique selon la revendication 6, comprenant en outre une interface utilisateur (20) couplée au processeur d'image échographique et réactive à une identification manuelle d'utilisateur d'au moins un point de repère d'ancrage dans la trame d'image 3D, ladite interface utilisateur est agencée pour fournir l'emplacement identifié du point de repère d'ancrage, tel qu'un pivot d'articulation, dans la trame d'image 3D comme une entrée pour l'adaptation du modèle foetal articulé.
 9. Système d'imagerie échographique selon la revendication 3, dans lequel le modèle articulé comprend un ensemble d'articulations foetales, dans lequel chaque articulation foetale correspond à une pose foetale donnée ; et le processeur d'image échographique est agencé pour détecter la variation de la structure foetale commune sur la base du changement de pose foetale se produisant durant l'obtention de la pluralité de trames d'images échographiques tridimensionnelles (3D).
 10. Système d'imagerie échographique selon la revendication 9, dans lequel l'analyseur de qualité d'image est agencé pour déterminer des valeurs de confiance des images 3D, qui proviennent de trames d'images 3D segmentées avec la même articulation foetale, étant relativement supérieures par rapport à des valeurs de confiance correspondant à des images 3D, qui proviennent de trames d'images 3D segmentées avec une articulation foetale différente.
 11. Système d'imagerie échographique selon la revendication 2, comprenant en outre un écran (50) fonctionnant pour afficher l'image 3D composée et le modèle foetal articulé par rapport à la région volumétrique.
 12. Système d'imagerie échographique selon la revendication 2, comprenant en outre :
 - un écran (50) agencé pour afficher l'image 3D composée spatialement ; et
 - une interface utilisateur (20) couplée au proces-

seur d'image échographique, ladite interface utilisateur étant agencée pour permettre à l'utilisateur d'effectuer des mesures biométriques du fœtus sur la base de l'image 3D composée spatialement affichée.

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3D de la pluralité d'images 3D.

13. Système d'imagerie échographique selon les revendications 1 à 12, comprenant en outre la sonde échographique (10) couplée à l'entrée, ladite sonde ayant un réseau de transducteurs échographiques pouvant fonctionner pour obtenir la pluralité de trames d'images échographiques tridimensionnelles (3D) d'une région volumétrique comprenant le fœtus.

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14. Procédé d'imagerie médicale (300) pour examiner une région volumétrique comprenant un fœtus est fourni comprenant les étapes consistant à :

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- recevoir (301) une pluralité de trames d'images échographiques tridimensionnelles (3D) d'une région volumétrique avec le fœtus, dans lequel chaque trame d'image échographique 3D est obtenue dans une direction de regard différente par rapport au fœtus, par une sonde échographique,
- stocker (302) la pluralité obtenue des trames d'images échographiques 3D et un modèle foetal articulé avec une structure foetale commune, dans lequel le modèle foetal articulé inclut une structure foetale commune et au moins une relation articulation-membre,
- segmenter (303) chaque trame d'image 3D sur la base du modèle foetal articulé ;
- adapter (308) le modèle foetal articulé appliqué à une trame d'image 3D, lorsqu'une variation de la structure foetale commune comparée à une autre trame d'image 3D de la pluralité est détectée ;
- fournir une pluralité d'images 3D de la région volumétrique avec une orientation relative identifiée du fœtus par rapport à la direction de regard de l'image segmentée,
- fournir (307) une image 3D composée spatialement du fœtus, dans lequel différentes régions de ladite image 3D composée sont formées sur la base de contributions à partir de la pluralité d'images 3D.

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15. Procédé selon la revendication 14, comprenant en outre :

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- la pondération et l'enregistrement (306) de chacune des images 3D par rapport à la structure foetale commune, dans lesquels la fourniture de l'image 3D composée spatialement du fœtus inclut une formation de différentes régions de ladite image 3D composée sur la base de contributions pondérées à partir des images

55

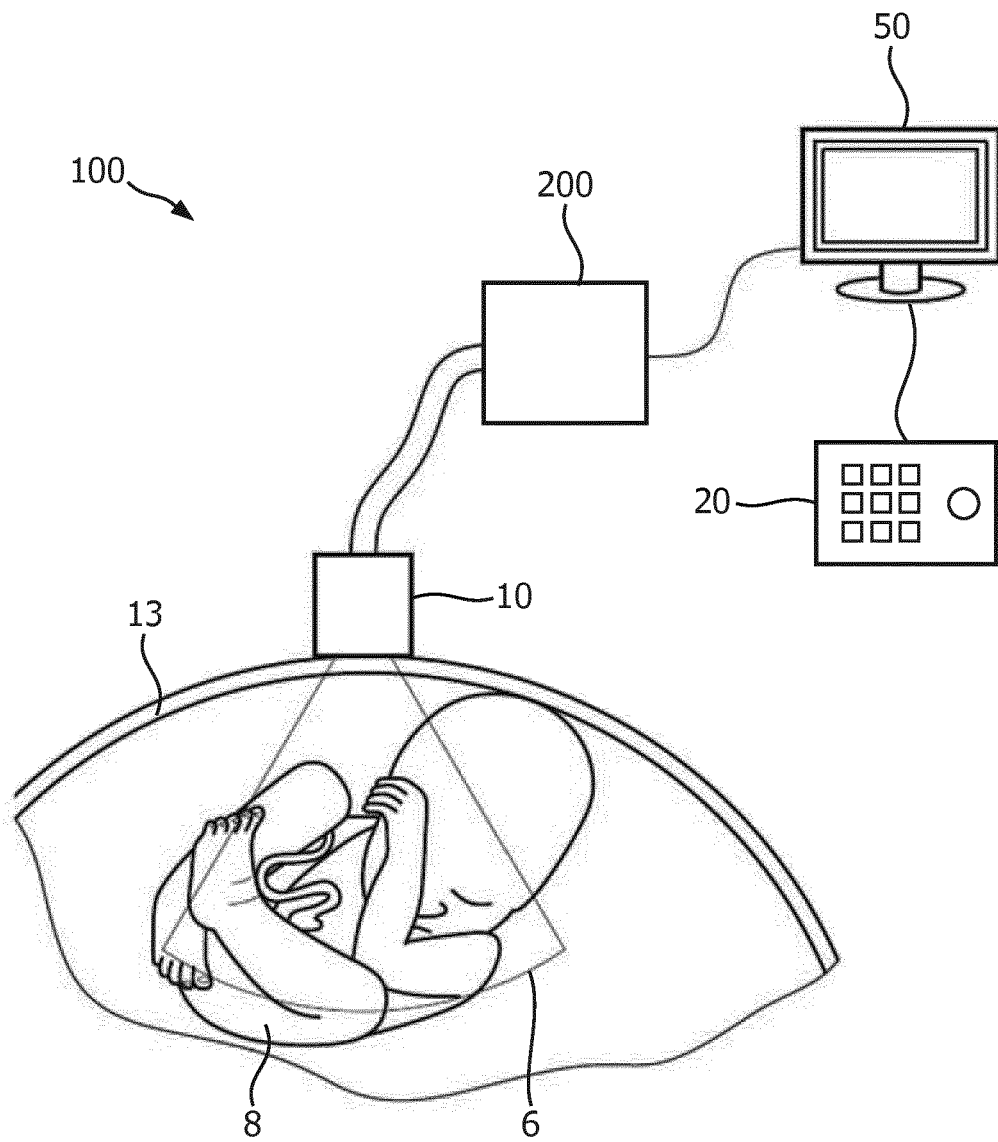


FIG. 1

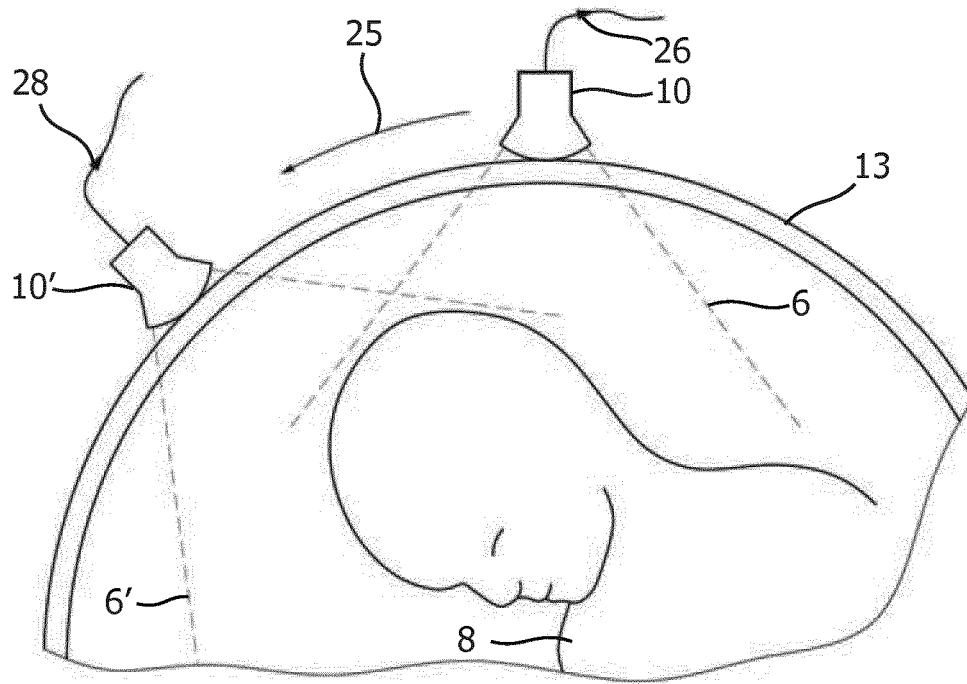


FIG. 2

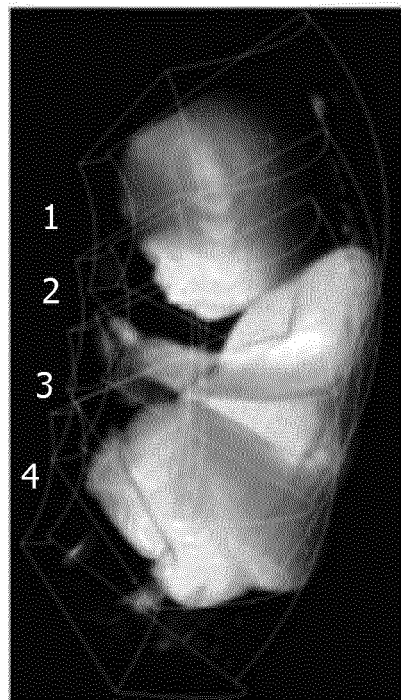


FIG. 3

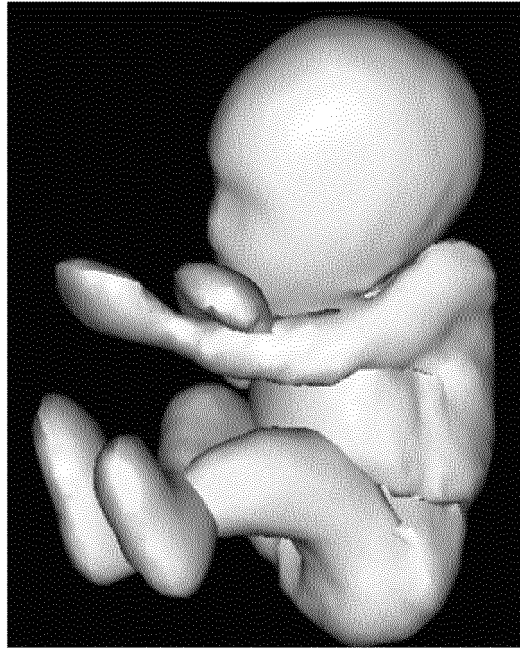


FIG. 4A

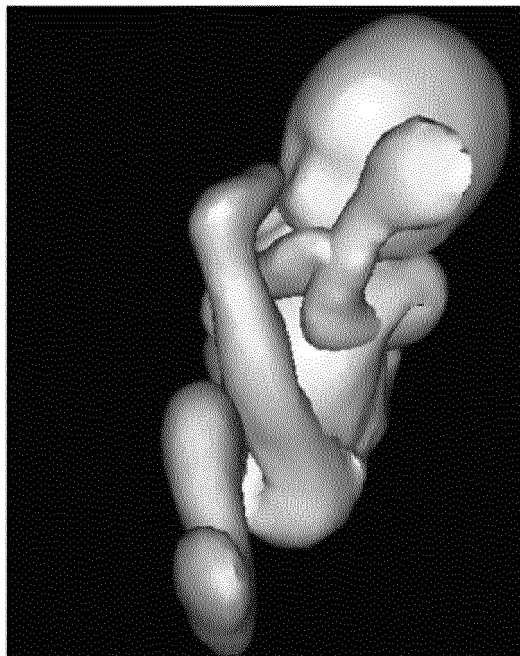


FIG. 4B

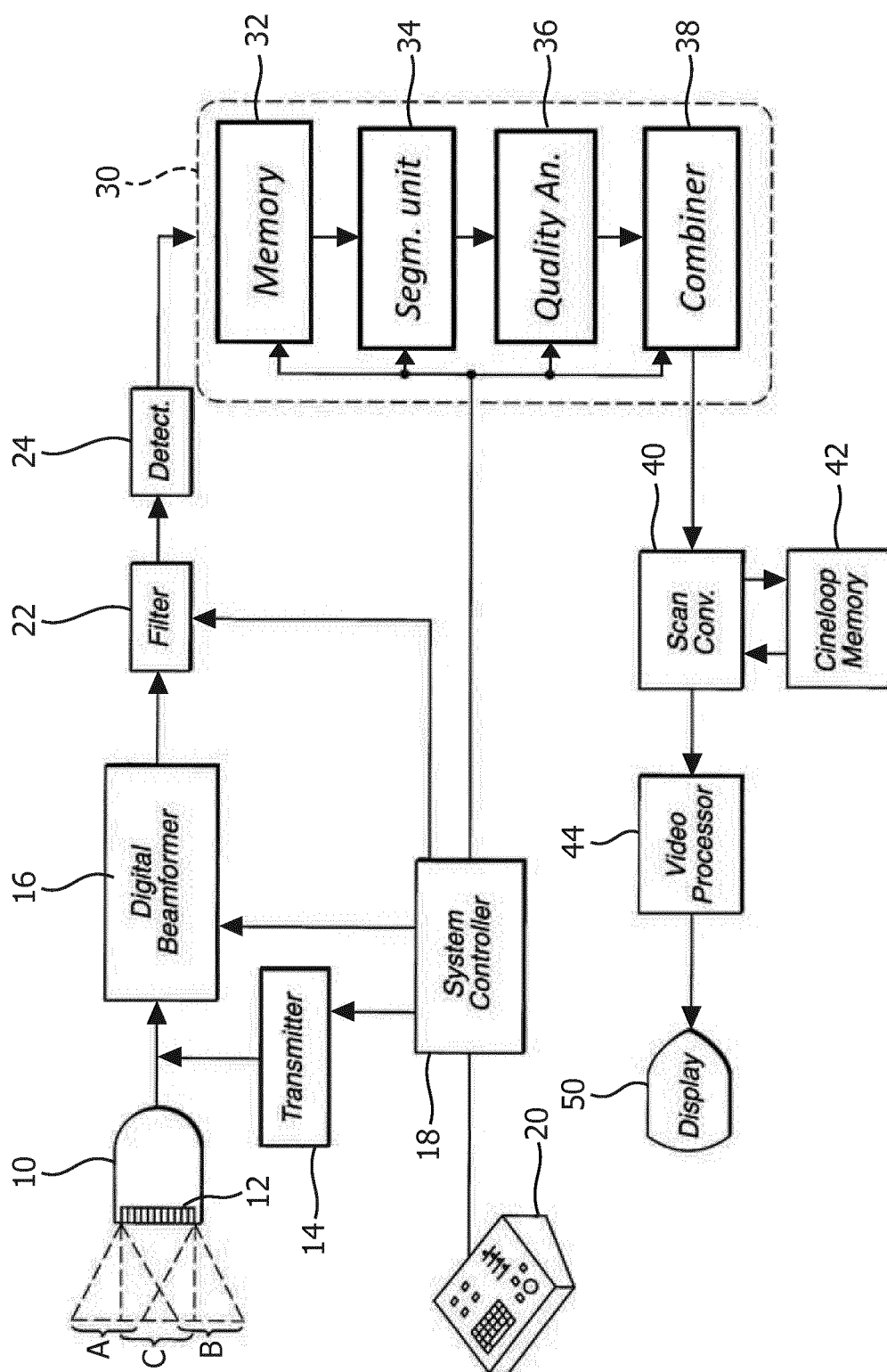


FIG. 5

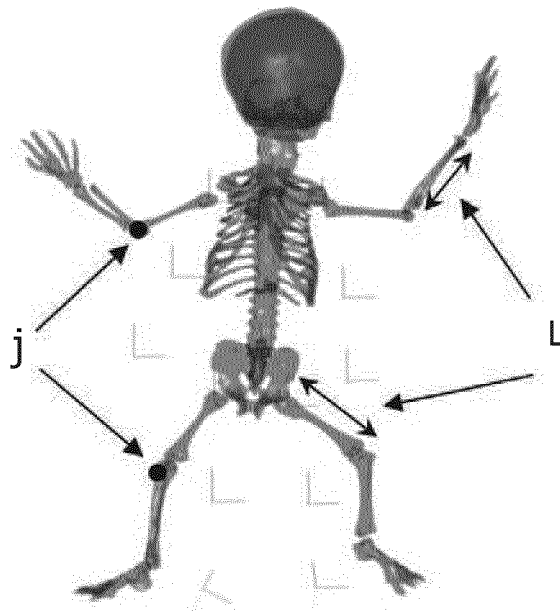


FIG. 6

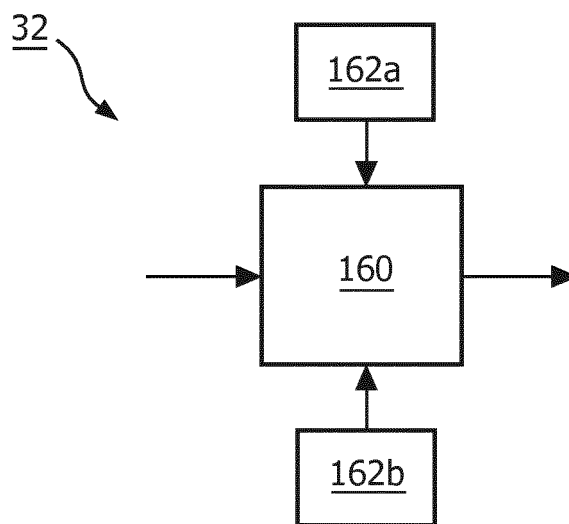


FIG. 7



FIG. 8A

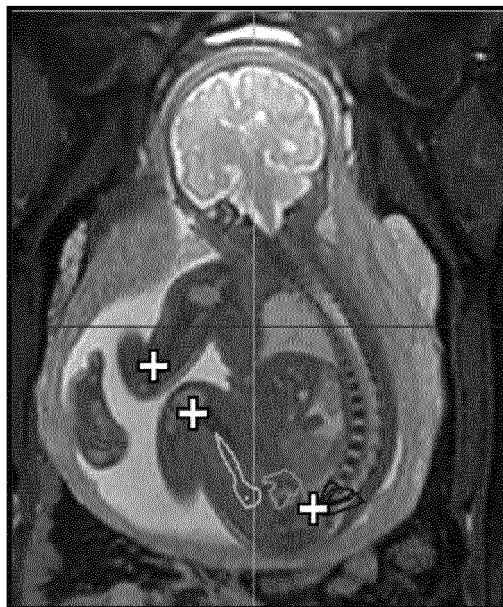


FIG. 8B

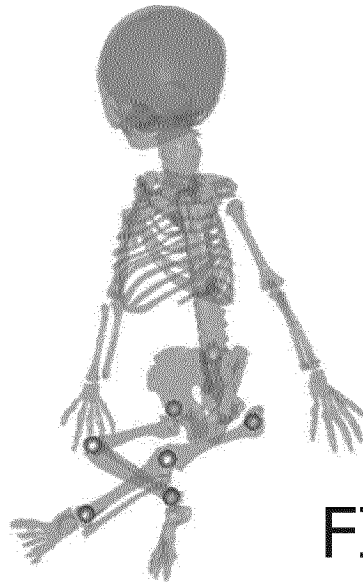


FIG. 9

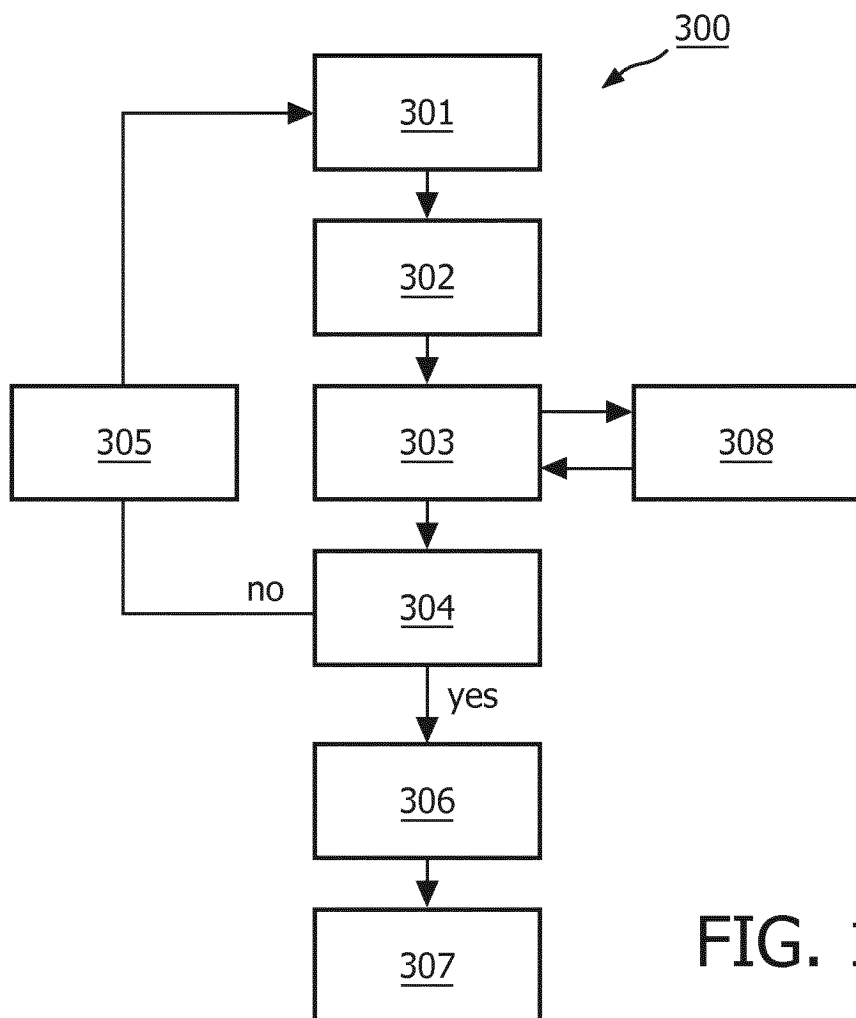


FIG. 10

REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

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Patent documents cited in the description

- WO 2016015994 A1 [0004]
- US 5485842 A [0043]
- US 5860924 A [0043]

专利名称(译)	胎儿超声成像的3D图像合成		
公开(公告)号	EP3448264B1	公开(公告)日	2019-09-18
申请号	EP2017719205	申请日	2017-04-13
[标]申请(专利权)人(译)	皇家飞利浦电子股份有限公司		
申请(专利权)人(译)	皇家飞利浦N.V.		
当前申请(专利权)人(译)	皇家飞利浦N.V.		
[标]发明人	KLINDER TOBIAS LORENZ CRISTIAN WAECHTER STEHLE IRINA		
发明人	KLINDER, TOBIAS LORENZ, CRISTIAN WAECHTER-STEHLER, IRINA		
IPC分类号	G06T7/00 A61B8/08 G01S7/52 G01S15/89 G06T7/33		
优先权	2016167041 2016-04-26 EP		
其他公开文献	EP3448264A1		
外部链接	Espacenet		

摘要(译)

本发明提供了一种改进的超声成像系统，其被布置为评估一组采集的3D图像数据，以便提供胎儿的复合3D图像，而不论其位置和运动如何。这是通过提供一种超声成像系统来实现的，该超声成像系统包括：具有超声换能器阵列的超声探头，该超声换能器阵列可操作以在不同的观看方向上获取包括胎儿的体积区域的多个三维（3D）超声图像帧。复合图像存储器，用于存储获取的多个3D超声图像帧和具有共同胎儿结构的关节胎儿模型；响应于多个3D超声图像帧的超声图像处理器，所述处理器包括胎儿分割单元，其被布置为基于关节胎儿模型分割每个3D图像帧，从而提供体积区域的多个空间相关的3D图像；图像质量分析器，其耦合到分割单元并被布置为基于关节胎儿模型确定多个3D图像的总置信度值，所述图像质量分析器还被布置为将总置信度值与图像进行比较。复利阈值。

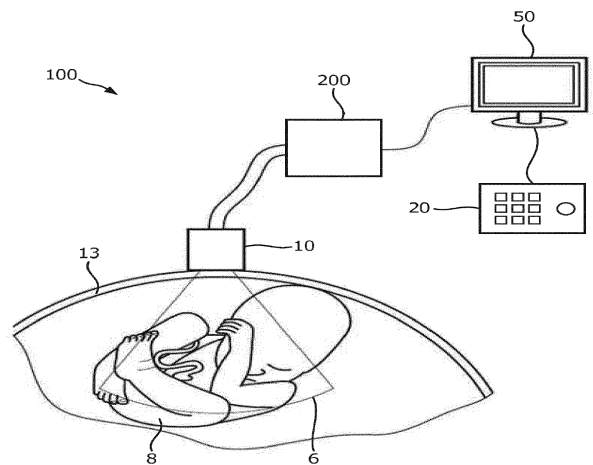


FIG. 1