



(12) **EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION**

(43) Date of publication:
07.10.2009 Bulletin 2009/41

(51) Int Cl.:
G01S 7/52 (2006.01)

(21) Application number: **09004659.0**

(22) Date of filing: **31.03.2009**

(84) Designated Contracting States:
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 SE SI SK TR
Designated Extension States:
AL BA RS

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(30) Priority: **02.04.2008 KR 20080030913**
02.04.2008 KR 20080030918
02.04.2008 KR 20080030921

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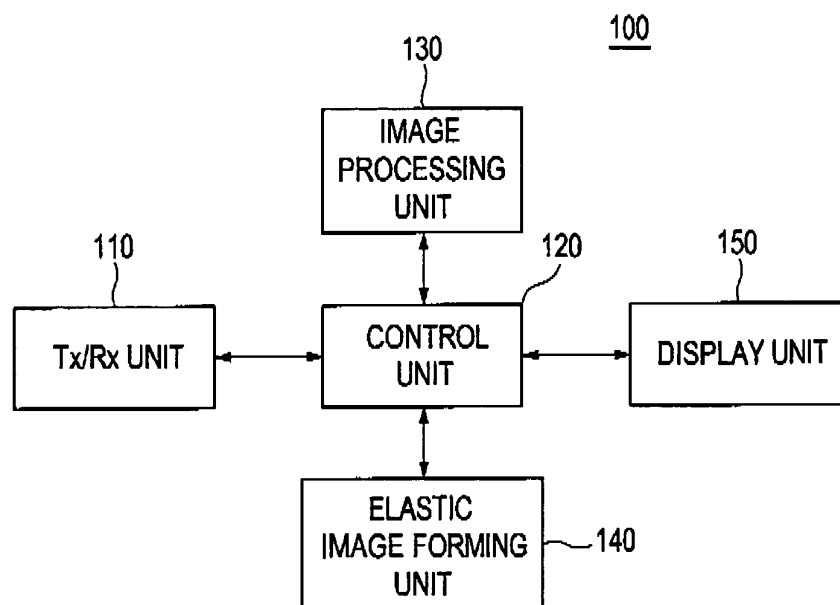
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(54) **Formation of an elastic image in an ultrasound system**

(57) Embodiments for forming elastic images in an ultrasound system are disclosed. In one embodiment, a Tx/Rx unit repeatedly transmits/receives an ultrasound beam along scan lines in a target object to output receive signals. An image processing unit forms a plurality of consecutive ultrasound images based on the receive signals and set a center of the target object on each of the

ultrasound images. The image processing unit further sets radial scan lines in radial directions with respect to the center on each of the ultrasound image and reconstructs the ultrasound images such that the radial scan lines are in parallel with each other to form reconstruction images. An elastic image forming unit forms an elastic image based on the reconstruction images.

FIG. 1



Description

[0001] The present application claims priority from Korean Patent Application Nos. 10-2008-0030913, 10-2008-0030918 and 10-2008-0030921 filed on April 2, 2008, the entire subject matters of which are incorporated herein by reference.

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0002] The present disclosure relates to ultrasound systems, and more particularly to an ultrasound system and method for forming an elastic image.

BACKGROUND

[0003] Recently, an ultrasound system has been extensively used in the medical field due to its non-invasive and non-destructive nature. Modern high-performance ultrasound imaging systems and techniques are commonly used to produce two dimensional ultrasound images and three-dimensional ultrasound images of internal features of patients.

[0004] Generally, the ultrasound image is displayed in a Brightness-mode (B-mode) by using reflectivity caused by an acoustic impedance difference between the tissues of the target object. However, if the reflectivity of the target object is hardly different from those of the neighboring tissues such as tumor, cancer or the like, then it is not easy to recognize the target object in the B-mode image.

[0005] When the target object is a blood vessel, an intravascular ultrasound imaging method is adopted to diagnose a lipid or lesion positioned at an inside of the blood vessel. In such a case, a probe is inserted into the inside of the blood vessel to form an ultrasound image of the blood vessel. Although a high resolution of the ultrasound image of the blood vessel may be obtained through the intravascular ultrasound imaging method, there is a problem in that the blood vessel may be damaged.

SUMMARY

[0006] Embodiments for forming an elastic image in an ultrasound system are disclosed herein. In one embodiment, by way of non-limiting example, an ultrasound system comprises:

a transmission/reception (Tx/Rx) unit configured to repeatedly transmit/receive an ultrasound beam along scan lines in a target object to output receive signals; an image processing unit configured to form a plurality of consecutive ultrasound images based on the receive signals and set a center of the target object on each of the ultrasound images, the image processing unit being further configured to set radial scan lines in radial directions with respect to the center on each of the ultrasound images and

reconstruct the ultrasound images such that the radial scan lines are in parallel with each other to form reconstruction images; and an elastic image forming unit configured to form an elastic image based on the reconstruction images.

[0007] In another embodiment, a method of forming an elastic image in an ultrasound system including a transmission/reception (Tx/Rx) unit, an image processing unit and an elastic image forming unit, comprises: a) using the transmission/reception (Tx/Rx) unit within the ultrasound system to repeatedly transmit/receive an ultrasound beam along scan lines in a target object to output receive signals; b) using the image processing unit within the ultrasound system to form a plurality of consecutive ultrasound images based on the receive signals, set a center of the target object on each of the ultrasound images, set radial scan lines in radial directions with respect to the center on each of the ultrasound images and reconstruct the ultrasound images such that the radial scan lines are in parallel with each other to form reconstruction images; and c) using the elastic image forming unit within the ultrasound system to form an elastic image based on the reconstruction images.

[0008] The Summary is provided to introduce a selection of concepts in a simplified form that are further described below in the Detailed Description. This Summary is not intended to identify key or essential features of the claimed subject matter, nor is it intended to be used in determining the scope of the claimed subject matter.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING

[0009]

- FIG. 1 is a block diagram showing an ultrasound system in accordance with a first embodiment.
- FIG. 2 is a schematic diagram illustrating scan lines in parallel with each other.
- FIG. 3 is a schematic diagram illustrating scan lines converged at a specific point when a convex array transducer is adopted.
- FIG. 4 is a block diagram showing an image processing unit in accordance with the first embodiment.
- FIG. 5 is a schematic diagram showing an example of an ultrasound image.
- FIG. 6 is a schematic diagram showing an example of setting radial scan lines with respect to a center of a target object.
- FIG. 7 is a schematic diagram showing an example of reconstructing an ultrasound image.
- FIG. 8 is a block diagram showing an ultrasound system in accordance with a second embodiment.
- FIG. 9 is a schematic diagram illustrating normal scan lines.
- FIG. 10 is a schematic diagram illustrating steered

- scan lines.
- FIG. 11 is a block diagram showing a first image processing unit in accordance with the second embodiment.
- FIG. 12 is a schematic diagram showing an example of an ultrasound image formed by scanning normal scan lines.
- FIG. 13 is a schematic diagram showing an example of setting radial scan lines on an ultrasound image.
- FIG. 14 is a schematic diagram showing an example of reconstructing an ultrasound image by using radial scan lines in a first image processing unit in accordance with the second embodiment.
- FIG. 15 is a schematic diagram showing an example of interpolating reconstruction images in a first image processing unit in accordance with the second embodiment.
- FIG. 16 is a block diagram showing a second image processing unit in accordance with the second embodiment.
- FIG. 17 is a schematic diagram showing an example of reconstructing an ultrasound image by using radial scan lines in a second image processing unit in accordance with the second embodiment.
- FIG. 18 is a schematic diagram showing an example of interpolating reconstruction images in a second image processing unit in accordance with the second embodiment.
- FIG. 19 is a schematic diagram showing an example of compounding reconstruction images and interpolation images.
- FIG. 20 is a schematic diagram showing an example of forming elastic images by using the compound images.
- FIG. 21 is a block diagram showing an ultrasound system in accordance with a third embodiment.
- FIG. 22 is a block diagram showing a first image processing unit in accordance with the third embodiment.
- FIG. 23 is a block diagram showing a second image processing unit in accordance with the third embodiment.
- FIG. 24 is a schematic diagram showing an example of compounding ultrasound images and forming elastic images by using compound images.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0010] A detailed description may be provided with reference to the accompanying drawings. One of ordinary skill in the art may realize that the following description is illustrative only and is not in any way limiting. Other embodiments of the present invention may readily suggest themselves to such skilled persons having the ben-

efit of this disclosure.

FIRST EMBODIMENT

[0011] Referring to FIG. 1, an ultrasound system 100 in accordance with an illustrative embodiment is shown. As depicted therein, the ultrasound system 100 may include a transmission/reception (Tx/Rx) unit 110 configured to transmit/receive an ultrasound beam to/from a target object to thereby output electrical receive signals.

[0012] The ultrasound system 100 may include a control unit 120 configured to control the Tx/Rx of the ultrasound beam in the Tx/Rx unit 110. The control unit 120 may be operable to control the Tx/Rx of the ultrasound beam to be consecutively performed in synchronization with an ECG signal provided from an electrocardiograph (not shown). Specially, the Tx/Rx of the ultrasound beam may be performed in synchronization with an ECG signal outputted when a left ventricular is in a maximum contraction and/or maximum relaxation.

[0013] The Tx/Rx unit 110 may be operable to perform the Tx/Rx of the ultrasound beam multiple times under the control of the control unit 120. The Tx/Rx unit 110 may include a probe (not shown) containing an array transducer for generating the ultrasound beam and the electrical receive signals. In one embodiment, a linear array transducer may be adopted to generate the ultrasound beam. In such a case, the control unit 120 may set the scan lines S_1 - S_{11} to be parallel with each other, as illustrated in FIG. 2. Also, a convex array transducer 122 may be adopted to generate the ultrasound beam. In such a case, the control unit 120 may set the scan line S_1 - S_{11} to be converged at a specific point, e.g., a center of the target object, as illustrated in FIG. 3. The Tx/Rx unit 100 may further include a beam former (not shown) for performing transmit focusing and receive focusing to form a transmit beam and a receive beam. The control unit 120 may be further operable to control the entire operations of the ultrasound system 100.

[0014] The ultrasound system 100 may further include an image processing unit 130. The image processing unit 130 may be configured to consecutively form a plurality of ultrasound images by using the receive signals outputted from the Tx/Rx unit 120 under the control of the control unit 120. For the sake of convenience, a blood vessel will be referred to as an example of the target object. However, the target object may be not limited thereto.

[0015] FIG. 4 is a block diagram showing an illustrative embodiment of the image processing unit 130. Referring to FIG. 4, the image processing unit 130 may include an ultrasound image forming section 131. The ultrasound image forming section 131 may be operable to consecutively form a plurality of ultrasound images based on the receive signals. Each of the ultrasound images 210 may contain a blood vessel 212 and a lipid 214, as illustrated in FIG. 5.

[0016] The image processing unit 130 may further in-

clude a boundary detecting section 132, a center setting section 133, a radial scan line setting section 134 and an image reconstructing section 135. The boundary detecting section 132 may be operable to detect boundaries of the blood vessel on the ultrasound image 210. The boundaries may be detected based on a variation of brightness determined by using a differential operator. In one embodiment, the boundary detecting section 132 may be operable to detect the boundaries of the blood vessel 212 by using edge masks such as Sobel, Prewitt, Robert, Laplacian of Gaussian, Canny and the like. In another embodiment, the boundary detecting section 132 may be operable to detect the boundaries of the blood vessel 212 based on a difference of eigenvalues using a structure tensor.

[0017] In one embodiment, the center setting section 133 may be operable to set a center "O" of the blood vessel 212 by using detected boundaries of the blood vessel 212, as illustrated in FIG. 6. Also, in another embodiment, the center of the blood vessel 212 may be set in response to a user instruction inputted through a user input unit (not shown).

[0018] The radial scan line setting section 134 may be configured to set a plurality of scan lines 220 in radial directions (hereinafter, referred to as "radial scan lines") with respect to the center "O" on the first ultrasound image 210, as illustrated in FIG. 6. The radial scan line setting section 134 may set a plurality of sample points on each of the radial scan lines 220 and acquire position information of the sampling points and image data of the sampling points based on the receive signals.

[0019] The image reconstructing section 135 may be operable to reconstruct the radial scan lines 220 to be parallel with each other, as illustrated in FIG. 7. The image reconstructing section 135 may be operable to form a reconstruction image corresponding to the first ultrasound image by using the reconstructed radial scan lines 220 and the image data of the sampling points on the radial scan lines.

[0020] Referring again to FIG. 1, the ultrasound system 100 may further include an elastic image forming unit 140. The elastic image forming unit 140 may be operable to perform auto correlation upon an n^{th} reconstruction image and an $(n+1)^{\text{th}}$ reconstruction image to thereby compute an elastic modulus, wherein n is an integer equal to or greater than 1. The elastic image forming unit 140 may be further operable to form an elastic image based on the computed elastic modulus. That is, the elastic image forming unit 140 may compute the elastic modulus corresponding to displacement of the blood vessel, the lipid and neighboring tissues caused by contraction and relaxation of the blood vessel, and then form the elastic image based on the computed elasticity modulus.

[0021] A display unit 150 may be one of a liquid crystal display, a cathode ray tube, a plate panel display and the like capable of displaying the elastic image formed in the elastic image forming unit 140. However, the display unit 150 may not be limited thereto. Also, the first ultrasound

image and the second image may be displayed on the display unit 150.

SECOND EMBODIMENT

[0022] FIG. 8 is a block diagram showing an illustrative embodiment of an ultrasound system. As depicted in FIG. 8, the ultrasound system 800 may further include an image compounding unit 850 compared to the ultrasound system 100 of FIG. 1. Also, the ultrasound system 800 may include a first image processing unit 830 and a second image processing unit 840.

[0023] The ultrasound system 800 may include a Tx/Rx unit 810. The Tx/Rx unit 810 may include a probe (not shown) for transmitting an ultrasound beam along scan lines in a target object and receive ultrasound echoes reflected from the target object to thereby output electrical receive signals. For the sake of convenience, a blood vessel will be referred to as an example of the target object. The probe may include a linear array transducer containing a plurality of elements. The Tx/Rx unit 810 may further include a beam former for performing transmit focusing and receive focusing.

[0024] The ultrasound system 800 may further include a control unit 820 operable to control the Tx/Rx of the ultrasound beam. The control unit 820 may be operable to set scan lines S_1-S_{11} ("normal scan lines") in the normal directions to a linear array transducer (not shown) in the probe, as illustrated in FIG. 9. The control unit 820 may be operable to control the ultrasound beam to be scanned along the normal scan lines.

[0025] Also, the control unit 820 may be configured to set the scan lines $S'_1-S'_{11}$ to be steered ("steered scan lines"), as illustrated in FIG. 10. The control unit 820 may be operable to control the Tx/Rx unit 810 such that the ultrasound beam is transmitted along the scan lines. Detailed description for setting the steered scan lines $S'_1-S'_{11}$ will be described later. The Tx/Rx unit 810 may output first electrical receive signals obtained by scanning the normal scan lines and second electrical receive signals obtained by scanning the steered scan lines. In one embodiment, the scanning of the normal scan lines and the steered scan lines may be alternately carried out. The ultrasound system 800 may include a first image processing 830 that may receive the first receive signals. Referring to FIG. 11, the first image processing unit 830 may include a first ultrasound image forming section 831. The first ultrasound image forming section 831 may be operable to form a first ultrasound image 210 based on the first receive signals, as illustrated in FIG. 12.

[0026] The first processing unit 830 may further include a boundary detecting section 832, which is configured to detect boundaries of a blood vessel 212 on the first ultrasound image 210. The boundaries may be detected based on the variation of brightness determined by using a differential operator. In one embodiment, the boundary detecting section 832 may be operable to detect the boundaries of the blood vessel 212 by using edge masks

such as Sobel, Prewitt, Robert, Laplacian of Gaussian, Canny and the like. In another embodiment, the boundary detecting section 832 may be operable to detect the boundaries of the blood vessel 212 based on a difference of eigen values using a structure tensor.

[0027] The first image processing unit 830 may further include a center setting section 833.

In one embodiment, the center setting section 833 may be operable to set a center "O" of the blood vessel 212 by using detected boundaries of the blood vessel 212, as illustrated in FIG. 13. However, the center setting of the blood vessel 212 is not limited thereto. In another embodiment, the center of the blood vessel 212 may be set in response to a user instruction inputted through a user input unit (not shown).

[0028] The first image processing unit 830 may further include a radial scan line setting section 834. The radial scan line setting section 134 may be operable to set a plurality of scan lines RS_1 - RS_{34} in radial directions (hereinafter, referred to as "radial scan lines") with respect to the center on the first ultrasound image 210, as illustrated in FIG. 13. The number of radial scan lines may be determined according to an interval of the radial scan lines, i.e., a steered angle, which may be set by the control unit 820. The radial scan line setting section 834 may set a plurality of sample points on each of the radial scan lines RS_1 - RS_{34} and acquire position information of the sampling points and image data at the sampling points based on the first receive signals.

[0029] The image processing unit 830 may further include a first image reconstructing section 835. The first image reconstructing section 835 may be operable to reconstruct the radial scan lines RS_1 - RS_{34} to be in parallel with each other. The first image reconstructing section 835 may be operable to form a first reconstruction image corresponding to the first ultrasound image by using the reconstructed radial scan lines RS_1 - RS_{34} and the image data of the sampling points on the radial scan lines. In one embodiment, the first image reconstructing section 135 may be operable to form the first reconstruction image 230 by using the image data corresponding to the radial scan lines RS_8 - RS_{13} and RS_{25} - RS_{30} , which are not overlapped with the steered scan lines S'_1 - S'_{11} shown in FIG. 10. The radial scan lines RS_8 - RS_{13} and RS_{25} - RS_{30} may be determined based on the property of the array transducer and the center of the blood vessel.

[0030] The image processing unit 830 may further include a first image interpolating section 836. The first image interpolating section 836 may be operable to interpolate two consecutive first reconstruction images to thereby form a first interpolation image. As illustrated in FIG. 15, the first image processing unit 830 may be configured to perform interpolation upon the first reconstruction image M_1 and the first reconstruction image M_2 to thereby form the first interpolation image MI_1 . Also, the first image processing unit 830 may be operable to perform interpolation upon the first reconstruction image M_2 and the first reconstruction image M_3 to thereby form the

first interpolation image MI_2 . Similar to the above, a plurality of the first interpolation images MI_3 , MI_4 ... may be formed through the interpolation of the first reconstruction images.

[0031] Referring back to FIG. 8, the control unit 820 may be further operable to set the steered scan lines S'_1 - S'_{11} , which are illustrated in FIG. 8, based on the center information of the blood vessel. That is, the control unit 820 may be operable to set the steered scan lines S'_1 - S'_{11} to be converged at the center of the blood vessel. The control unit 820 may control the Tx/Rx unit 810 such that the ultrasound beam is transmitted along the steered scan lines S'_1 - S'_{11} . In such a case, the electrical receive signal outputted from the Tx/Rx unit 810 will be referred to as "second receive signals."

[0032] The ultrasound system 800 may further include a second image processing unit 840, which may receive the second receive signals. Referring to FIG. 16, the second image processing unit 840 may include a second ultrasound image forming section 841 that may receive the second receive signals. The second ultrasound image forming section 841 may be operable to form a second ultrasound image based on the second receive signals.

[0033] The second image processing unit 840 may further include a boundary detecting section 842 that may be operable to detect boundaries of the blood vessel in the same manner of the boundary detection in the boundary detecting section 832 of the first image processing unit 830.

[0034] The second image processing unit 840 may further include a center setting section 843. In one embodiment, the center setting section 843 may be operable to set a center of the blood vessel based on the center set by the center setting section 833 of the first image processing unit 830.

[0035] The second image processing unit 840 may further include a radial scan line setting section 844. The radial scan line setting section 844 may be operable to set a plurality of scan lines RS_1 - RS_{34} in radial directions (hereinafter, referred to as "radial scan lines") with respect to the center of the blood vessel, as illustrated in FIG. 13. The number of the radial scan lines may be determined according to an interval of the radial scan lines, i.e., a steering angle, which may be set by the control unit 820. In one embodiment, the steering angle of the radial scan lines RS_1 - RS_{34} may be set to be equal to a steering angle of the steered scan lines S'_1 - S'_{11} shown in FIG. 10. The radial scan line setting unit 844 may set the radial scan lines RS_1 - RS_7 , RS_{14} - RS_{24} and RS_{31} - RS_{34} , which are matched with the steered scan lines S'_1 - S'_{11} . The radial scan line setting section 844 may set a plurality of sample points on each of the radial scan lines and acquire position information of the sampling points and image data at the sampling points based on the second receive signals.

[0036] The image processing unit 840 may further include a second image reconstructing section 845. The

second image reconstructing section 845 may be operable to reconstruct the radial scan lines RS_1 - RS_{34} to be in parallel with each other, as illustrated in FIG 17. The second image reconstructing section 845 may be further operable to form a second reconstruction image corresponding to the second ultrasound image by using the reconstructed radial scan lines RS_1 - RS_{34} and the image data of the sampling points on the radial scan lines. In one embodiment, the second image reconstructing section 845 may be operable to form the second reconstruction image 240 by using the image data corresponding to the radial scan lines RS_1 - RS_7 , RS_{14} - RS_{24} and RS_{31} - RS_{34} .

[0037] The second image processing unit 840 may further include a second image interpolating section 846. The second image interpolating section 846 may be configured to interpolate two consecutive second reconstruction images to form a second interpolation image. As illustrated in FIG 18, the second image interpolating section 846 may be operable to perform the interpolation upon the second reconstruction image N_1 and the second reconstruction image N_2 to thereby form the second interpolation image NI_1 . Also, the second image interpolating section 846 may be operable to perform the interpolation upon the second reconstruction image N_2 and the second reconstruction image N_3 to thereby form the second interpolation image NI_2 . In the same manner as above, the second interpolation images NI_3 , NI_4 .. may be formed through the interpolation of the second reconstruction images.

[0038] Referring once again to FIG. 8, the image compounding unit 850 may be operable to compound an i^{th} first interpolation image MI_i formed in the first image processing unit 830 and an i^{th} second reconstruction image N_i to thereby form a compound image (hereinafter, referred to as "first compound image"). Also, the image compounding unit 850 may be further operable to compound an $(i+1)^{th}$ first reconstruction image M_{i+1} formed in the first image processing unit 830 and an i^{th} second interpolation image MI_i to thereby form a compound image (hereinafter, referred to as "second compound image"). In one embodiment, the first and second compound images may be formed at the same time. As illustrated in FIG. 19, the image compounding unit 850 may be operable to compound the first interpolation image MI_1 formed in the first image processing unit 830 and the second reconstruction image N_1 formed in the second image processing unit 840 to thereby form the first compound image MC_1 . In the same manner as above, the image compounding unit 850 may be operable to form a plurality of first compound images MC_3 , ... Also, the image compounding unit 850 may be operable to compound the first reconstruction image M_2 formed in the first image processing unit 830 and the second interpolation image NI_1 formed in the second image processing unit 840 to thereby form the second compound image NC_1 . In the same manner as above, the image compounding unit 850 may be operable to form a plurality of

second compound images NC_2 , NC_3 . The image compounding unit 850 may include a first image compounding unit (not shown) for forming the first compound images and a second image compounding unit (not shown) for forming the second compound images.

[0039] The ultrasound system 100 may further include an elastic image forming unit 860.

The elastic image forming unit 860 may be configured to perform autocorrelation to compute an elasticity modulus between a j^{th} first compound image MC_j and a j^{th} second compound image NC_j , which are formed in the image compounding unit 850, wherein j is an integer equal to or greater than 1. The elastic image forming unit 860 may be further operable to form an elastic image E_j by using the computed elasticity modulus. That is, the elasticity image forming unit 860 may be configured to compute the elasticity modulus corresponding to a displacement of the blood vessel, the lipid and peripheral tissues caused by the contraction and the relaxation of the blood vessel. It may then form the elastic image based on the computed elasticity modulus. In the same manner as above, the elastic image forming unit 860 may be operable to form a plurality of elastic images E_1 , E_2 , E_3 , E_4 , E_5 ... as illustrated in FIG 20.

[0040] The ultrasound system 800 may further include a display unit 870 that may display the elastic image formed in the elastic image forming unit 860. The display unit 870 may also display the first and second ultrasound images, the first and second reconstruction images and the first and second interpolation images.

[0041] The first image processing unit 830, the second image processing unit 840, the image compounding unit 850 and the elastic image forming unit 860 of the ultrasound system 800 will be embodied with a single processor or a plurality of processors.

THIRD EMBODIMENT

[0042] FIG. 21 is a block diagram showing an illustrative embodiment of an ultrasound system. As depicted in FIG 21, the ultrasound system 900 may further include an electrocardiogram (ECG) signal providing unit 910 compared to the ultrasound system 800 of FIG. 8. The ECG signal providing unit 910 may be configured to provide an ECG signal containing a P wave, QRS waves and a T wave. The P wave, QRS waves and T wave are well known to a person to skilled in the art. Thus, detailed descriptions thereof will be omitted herein.

[0043] The ultrasound system 900 may include a Tx/Rx unit 920. The Tx/Rx unit 920 may include a probe (not shown) for transmitting an ultrasound beam along scan lines in a target object and receiving ultrasound echoes reflected from the target object to thereby output electrical receive signals. For the sake of convenience, a blood vessel will be referred to as an example of the target object. The probe may include a linear array transducer containing a plurality of elements. The Tx/Rx unit 920 may further include a beam former for performing

transmit focusing and receive focusing. In the third embodiment, the scan lines may be set to be steered. That is, the Tx/Rx unit 920 may be operable to transmit the ultrasound beam along scan lines S_1 - S_{11} ("normal scan lines") such as shown in FIG 9 and scan lines, which are steered ("steered scan lines") S'_1 - S'_{11} such as shown in FIG 10. The setting of the steered scan lines will be described later. The Tx/Rx unit 920 may output first electrical receive signals obtained by scanning the normal scan lines and second electrical receive signals obtained by scanning the steered scan lines. In one embodiment, the scanning of the normal scan lines may be carried out in synchronization with the P and T waves at a $(2n-1)^{th}$ cardiac cycle and the scanning of the steered scan lines may be carried out in synchronization with the P and T waves at a $(2n)^{th}$ cardiac cycle, wherein n is an integer equal to or greater than 1.

[0044] The ultrasound system 900 may further include a control unit 930 that may be operable to control the transmission and reception of the ultrasound beam. The control unit 930 may be configured to set the normal scan lines. It may also control the Tx/Rx unit 920 such that the ultrasound beam is transmitted along the normal scan lines in synchronization with the P and T waves at the $(2n-1)^{th}$ cardiac cycle. In such a case, the electrical receive signal outputted from the Tx/Rx unit 920 will be referred to as "first receive signals."

[0045] The ultrasound system 900 may include a first image processing 940 that may receive the first receive signals. Referring to FIG 22, the first image processing unit 940 may include a first ultrasound image forming section 941. The first ultrasound image forming section 941 may be operable to form a first ultrasound image based on the first receive signals such as shown in FIG 12.

[0046] The first processing unit 940 may further include a boundary detecting section 942 that may be operable to detect boundaries of a blood vessel 212 on the first ultrasound image 210. The boundary detection may be performed similar to the boundary detection by the boundary detecting section 832 of FIG 9. Thus, detailed descriptions of the boundary detection will be omitted herein.

[0047] The first image processing unit 940 may further include a center setting section 943. The center setting section 943 may be operable to set a center of the blood vessel by using detected boundaries. The center setting may be performed similar to the center setting by the center setting section 833 of FIG 9. Thus, detailed descriptions of the center setting will be omitted herein.

[0048] The first image processing unit 940 may further include a radial scan line setting section 944. The radial scan line setting section 944 may be operable to set a plurality of scan lines RS_1 - RS_{34} in radial directions with respect to the center (hereinafter, referred to as "radial scan lines") on the first ultrasound image 210, as illustrated in FIG 11. The number of the radial scan lines may be determined according to an interval of the radial scan

lines, i.e., an angle, which may be set by the control unit 930. The radial scan line setting section 944 may set a plurality of sample points on each of the radial scan lines RS_1 - RS_{34} and acquire position information of the sampling points and image data at the sampling points based on the first receive signals.

[0049] The image processing unit 940 may further include a first image reconstructing section 945. The first image reconstructing section 945 may be operable to reconstruct the radial scan lines RS_1 - RS_{34} to be in parallel with each other. The first image reconstructing section 945 may be configured to form a first reconstruction image corresponding to the first ultrasound image by using the reconstructed radial scan lines RS_1 - RS_{34} and the image data of the sampling points on the radial scan lines. In one embodiment, the first image reconstructing section 945 may be operable to form the first reconstruction image by using the image data corresponding to the radial scan lines RS_8 - RS_{13} and RS_{25} - RS_{30} , which are not overlapped with the steered scan lines S'_1 - S'_{11} shown in FIG 10.

[0050] Referring back to FIG. 21, the control unit 930 may be further operable to set the steered scan lines S'_1 - S'_{11} , which are illustrated in FIG 10, based on the center information of the blood vessel. That is, the control unit 930 may be configured to set the steered scan lines S'_1 - S'_{11} to be converged at the center of the blood vessel. The control unit 930 may control the Tx/Rx unit 920 such that the ultrasound beam is transmitted along the steered scan lines S'_1 - S'_{11} in synchronization with the P and T waves at the $2n^{th}$ cycle. In such a case, the electrical receive signal outputted from the Tx/Rx unit 920 will be referred to as "second receive signals."

[0051] The ultrasound system 900 may further include a second image processing unit 950 that may receive the second receive signals. Referring to FIG 23, the second image processing unit 950 may include a second ultrasound image forming section 951 that may receive the second receive signals. The second ultrasound image forming section 951 may be operable to form a second ultrasound image based on the second receive signals.

[0052] The second image processing unit 950 may further include a boundary detecting section 952 that may be operable to detect boundaries of the blood vessel similar to the boundary detection in the boundary detecting section 942 of the first image processing unit 940.

[0053] The second image processing unit 950 may further include a center setting section 953. In one embodiment, the center setting section 953 may be operable to set a center of the blood vessel based on the center set by the center setting section 943 of the first image processing unit 940.

[0054] The second image processing unit 950 may further include a radial scan line setting section 954. The radial scan line setting section 954 may be operable to set a plurality of scan lines RS_1 - RS_{34} in radial directions with respect to the center (hereinafter, referred to as "ra-

dial scan lines") such as shown in FIG 13. The number of the radial scan lines may be determined according to an interval of the radial scan lines, i.e., a steering angle, which may be set by the control unit 930. In one embodiment, the steering angle of the radial scan lines RS₁-RS₃₄ may be set to be equal to a steering angle of the steered scan lines. The radial scan line setting section 954 may set the radial scan lines RS₁-RS₇, RS₁₄-RS₂₄ and RS₃₁-RS₃₄ to be matched with the steered scan lines S'₁-S'₁₁. The radial scan line setting section 954 may set a plurality of sample points on each of the radial scan lines RS₁-RS₃₄ and acquire position information of the sampling points and image data at the sampling points based on the second receive signals.

[0055] The second image processing unit 950 may further include a second image reconstructing section 955. The second image reconstructing section 955 may be operable to reconstruct the radial scan lines RS₁-RS₃₄ to be in parallel with each other such as shown in FIG. 15. The second image reconstructing section 955 may be configured to form a second reconstruction image corresponding to the second ultrasound image by using the reconstructed radial scan lines RS₁-RS₃₄ and the image data of the sampling points on the radial scan lines. In one embodiment, the second image reconstructing section 955 may be operable to form the second reconstruction image by using the image data corresponding to the radial scan lines RS₁-RS₇, RS₁₄-RS₂₄ and RS₃₁-RS₃₄, which are overlapped with the steered scan lines S'₁-S'₁₁ shown in FIG 10.

[0056] Referring once again to FIG. 21, the ultrasound system 900 may further include an image compounding unit 960, which may be operable to compound the first reconstruction image formed in the first image processing unit 940 and the second reconstruction image formed in the second image processing unit 950. In such a case, the image compounding unit 960 may be configured to perform motion estimation and compensation between the first and second reconstruction images for compensating motion, which may occur in the compound image. The motion estimation and compensation may be carried out by using the well-know techniques. As such, detailed descriptions thereof will be omitted herein. The image compounding unit 960 may be operable to compound the first reconstruction image M_{P1} formed in synchronization with the P wave of the first cardiac cycle and the second reconstruction image N_{P2} formed in synchronization with the P wave of the second cardiac cycle to thereby form a compound image C_{P1}. Also, the image compounding unit 960 may be operable to compound the first reconstruction image M_{T1} formed in synchronization with the T wave of the first cardiac cycle with the second reconstruction image N_{T2} formed in synchronization with the T wave of the second cardiac cycle to thereby form a compound image C_{T1}. In the same manner as above, the image compounding unit 960 may be configured to form a plurality of compound images C_{P2}, C_{T2}, C_{P3}, C_{T3} ... as illustrated in FIG. 24.

[0057] Referring back to FIG. 21, the ultrasound system 900 may further include an elastic image forming unit 970. The elastic image forming unit 970 may be operable to perform autocorrelation to compute an elasticity modulus between a kth compound image and a (k+1)th compound image, which are formed in the image compounding unit 960, wherein k is an integer equal to or greater than 1. The elastic image forming unit 970 may be further operable to form an elastic image by using the computed elasticity modulus. For example, the elasticity image forming unit 970 may be operable to compute the elasticity modulus by using the first compound image C_{P1} and the second compound image C_{T1}, and then form the elastic image E₁ based on the computed elasticity modulus. In the same manner as above, the elastic image forming unit 970 may be operable to form a plurality of elastic images E₂, E₃, E₄, E₅... as illustrated in FIG 24.

[0058] The ultrasound system 900 may further include a display unit 980 that may display the elastic image formed in the elastic image forming unit 970. The display unit 980 may display the first and second ultrasound images, the first and second reconstruction images and the compound images.

[0059] The first image processing unit 940, the second image processing unit 950, the image compounding unit 960 and the elastic image forming unit 970 of the ultrasound system 800 may be implemented by a single processor or a plurality of processors.

[0060] As mentioned above, the lipid or lesion at inside of the blood vessel may be examined through the elastic image without inserting the probe into the inside of the blood vessel. Also, since the ultrasound images formed in synchronization with the ECG signal are used to form the elastic image, a more accurate elastic image may be formed.

[0061] Although embodiments have been described with reference to a number of illustrative embodiments thereof, it should be understood that numerous other modifications and embodiments can be devised by those skilled in the art that will fall within the spirit and scope of the principles of this disclosure. More particularly, numerous variations and modifications are possible in the component parts and/or arrangements of the subject combination arrangement within the scope of the disclosure, the drawings and the appended claims. In addition to variations and modifications in the component parts and/or arrangements, alternative uses will also be apparent to those skilled in the art.

Claims

1. An ultrasound system, comprising:

a transmission/reception (Tx/Rx) unit configured to repeatedly transmit/receive an ultrasound beam along scan lines in a target object to output receive signals;

an image processing unit configured to form plurality of consecutive ultrasound images based on the receive signals and setting a center of the target object on each of the ultrasound images, the image processing unit being further configured to set radial scan lines in radial directions with respect to the center on each of the ultrasound image and reconstruct the ultrasound images such that the radial scan lines are in parallel with each other to form reconstruction images; and
 an elastic image forming unit configured to form at least one elastic image based on the reconstruction images.

2. The ultrasound system of Claim 1, wherein the scan lines include first scan lines parallel with each other and second scan lines each passing the center, wherein the Tx/Rx unit is configured to alternately transmit/receive the ultrasound beam along the first scan lines and the second scan lines to output first receive signals and second receive signals, respectively.
3. The ultrasound system of Claim 2, wherein the image processing unit includes a first image processing unit receiving the first receive signals and a second image processing unit receiving the second receive signals.
4. The ultrasound system of Claim 3, wherein the first image processing unit includes:

a first ultrasound image forming section for consecutively forming first ultrasound images based on the first receive signals;
 a first boundary detecting section for detecting boundaries of the target object on each of the first ultrasound images;
 a first center setting section for setting the center of the target object based on the detected boundaries;
 a first radial scan line setting section for setting first radial scan lines in first radial directions with respect to the center on each of the first ultrasound images, wherein the first radial scan line setting section is configured to set a steering angle of the first radial scan lines to be equal to a steering angle of the steered scan lines;
 a first image reconstructing section for reconstructing the first ultrasound images such that the first radial scan lines are in parallel with each other to form first reconstruction images; and
 a first image interpolating section for interpolating the first reconstruction images to form first interpolation images.

5. The ultrasound system of Claim 4, wherein the sec-

ond image processing unit includes:

a second ultrasound image forming section for consecutively forming second ultrasound images based on the second receive signals;
 a second boundary detecting section for detecting boundaries of the target object on each of the second ultrasound images;
 a second center setting section for setting the center of the target object based on the detected boundaries;
 a second radial scan line setting section for setting second radial scan lines in second radial directions with respect to the center on each of the second ultrasound images, wherein the second radial scan line setting section is configured to set a steering angle of the second radial scan lines to be equal to the steering angle of the steered scan lines;
 a second image reconstructing section for reconstructing the second ultrasound images such that the second radial scan lines are in parallel with each other to form second reconstruction images; and
 a second image interpolating section for interpolating the second reconstruction images to form second interpolation images.

6. The ultrasound system of Claim 5, further comprising an image compounding unit configured to form compound images by using the first and second reconstruction images and the first and second interpolation images, wherein the image compounding unit includes:

a first image compounding section for compounding an i^{th} first interpolation image and an i^{th} second reconstruction image to form a first compound image,
 wherein i is an integer equal to or greater than 1; and
 a second image compounding section for compounding an $(i+1)^{\text{th}}$ first reconstruction image and an i^{th} second interpolation image to form a second compound image.

7. The ultrasound system of Claim 6, wherein the elastic image forming unit is configured to compute an elasticity modulus by using a j^{th} first compound image and a j^{th} second compound image, wherein j is an integer equal to or greater than 1.
8. The ultrasound system of Claim 2, further comprising an electrocardiogram (ECG) signal providing unit configured to provide an ECG signal representing a cardiac cycle,
 wherein the ECG signal includes a first wave generated before contraction of a left ventricle and a sec-

ond wave generated before relaxation of the left ventricle, wherein the Tx/Rx unit is configured to transmit an ultrasound beam along the first scan lines in synchronization with the first and second wave at a $(2n-1)^{\text{th}}$ cardiac cycle to thereby output first receive signals, the Tx/Rx unit being further configured to transmit an ultrasound beam along the second scan lines in synchronization with the first and second waves at a $2n^{\text{th}}$ cardiac cycle to thereby output second receive signal, wherein n is an integer equal to or greater than 1, and wherein the image processing unit includes a first image processing unit receiving the first receive signals and a second image processing unit receiving the second receive signals.

9. The ultrasound system of Claim 8, wherein the first image processing unit includes:

a first ultrasound image forming section for consecutively forming the first ultrasound images based on the first receive signals corresponding to the first and second waves, respectively, at the $(2n-1)^{\text{th}}$ cardiac cycle;
 a first boundary detecting section for detecting boundaries of the target object on each of the first ultrasound images;
 a first center setting section for setting the center of the target object based on the detected boundaries;
 a first radial scan line setting section for setting first radial scan lines in first radial directions with respect to the center on each of the first ultrasound images, wherein the first radial scan line setting section is configured to set a steering angle of the first radial scan lines to be equal to a steering angle of the steered scan lines; and
 a first image reconstructing section for reconstructing the first ultrasound images such that the first radial scan lines are in parallel with each other to form first reconstruction images,

wherein the first image reconstruction section is configured to form the first reconstruction images by using the radial scan lines which are not matched with the second scan lines.

10. The ultrasound system of Claim 9, wherein the second image processing unit includes:

a second ultrasound image forming section for consecutively forming the second ultrasound images based on the second receive signals corresponding to the first and second waves, respectively, at the $2n^{\text{th}}$ cardiac cycle;
 a second boundary detecting section for detecting boundaries of the target object on each of the second ultrasound images;

a second center setting section for setting the center of the target object based on the detected boundaries;

a second radial scan line setting section for setting second radial scan lines in second radial directions with respect to the center on each of the second ultrasound images, wherein the second radial scan line setting section is configured to set a steering angle of the second radial scan lines to be equal to the steering angle of the steered scan lines; and

a second image reconstructing section for reconstructing the second ultrasound images such that the second radial scan lines are in parallel with each other to form second reconstruction images,

wherein the second image reconstruction section is configured to form the second reconstruction images by using the radial scan lines which are matched with the second scan lines.

11. The ultrasound system of Claim 10, further comprising an image compounding unit configured to compound the first reconstruction images formed in synchronization with the first wave and the second reconstruction images formed in synchronization with the first wave to output first compound images, the image compounding unit being further configured to compound the first reconstruction images formed in synchronization with the second wave and the second reconstruction images formed in synchronization with the second wave to output second compound images, wherein the elastic image forming unit is configured to compute an elasticity modulus through autocorrelation upon the first and second compound images and form elastic images by using the elasticity modulus.

12. A method of forming an elastic image in an ultrasound system including a transmission/reception (Tx/Rx) unit, an image processing unit and an elastic image forming unit, comprising:

a) using the transmission/reception (Tx/Rx) unit within the ultrasound system to repeatedly transmit/receive an ultrasound beam along scan lines in a target object to output receive signals;
 b) using the image processing unit within the ultrasound system to form a plurality of consecutive ultrasound images based on the receive signals, set a center of the target object on each of the ultrasound images, set radial scan lines in radial directions with respect to the center on each of the ultrasound image and reconstruct the ultrasound images such that the radial scan lines are in parallel with each other to form re-

construction images; and
c) using the elastic image forming unit within the ultrasound system to form at least one elastic image based on the reconstruction images.

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- 13.** The method of Claim 12, wherein the image processing unit is used to:

consecutively form the ultrasound images based on the receive signals; 10
detect boundaries of the target object on the ultrasound image;
set the center of the target object based on the detected boundaries;
set the radial scan lines in the radial directions with respect to the center on each of the ultrasound images; and 15
reconstruct the ultrasound images such that the radial scan lines are in parallel with each other to form reconstruction images. 20

- 14.** The method of Claim 13, wherein the step c) includes using the elastic image forming unit to compute an elasticity modulus between two consecutive reconstruction images and form an elastic image based on the computed elasticity modulus. 25

- 15.** The method of Claim 14, wherein the step a) includes using the Tx/Rx unit to transmit the ultrasound beam in synchronization with the ECG signal an electrocardiogram (ECG) signal providing unit further included in the ultrasound image. 30

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FIG. 1

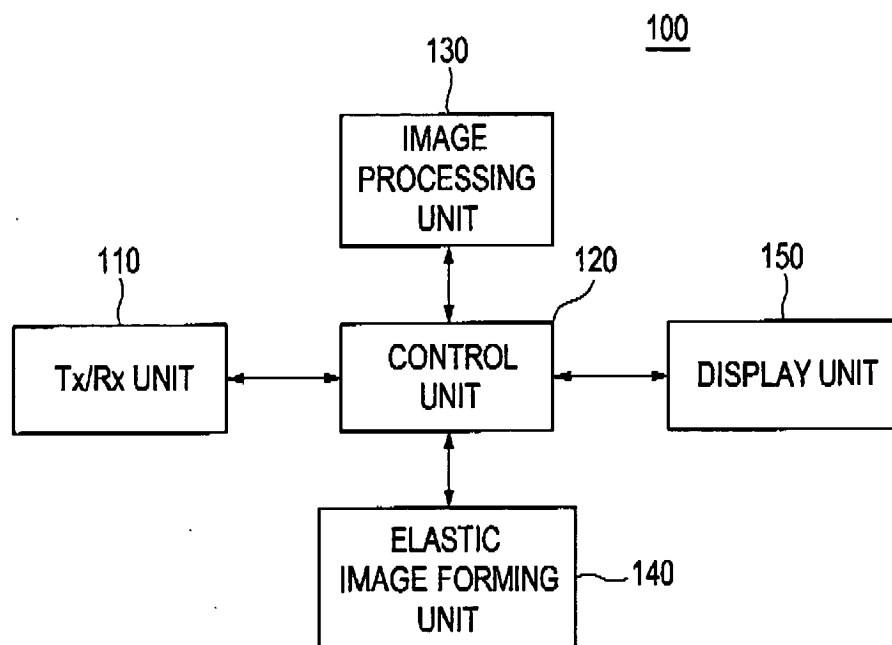


FIG. 2

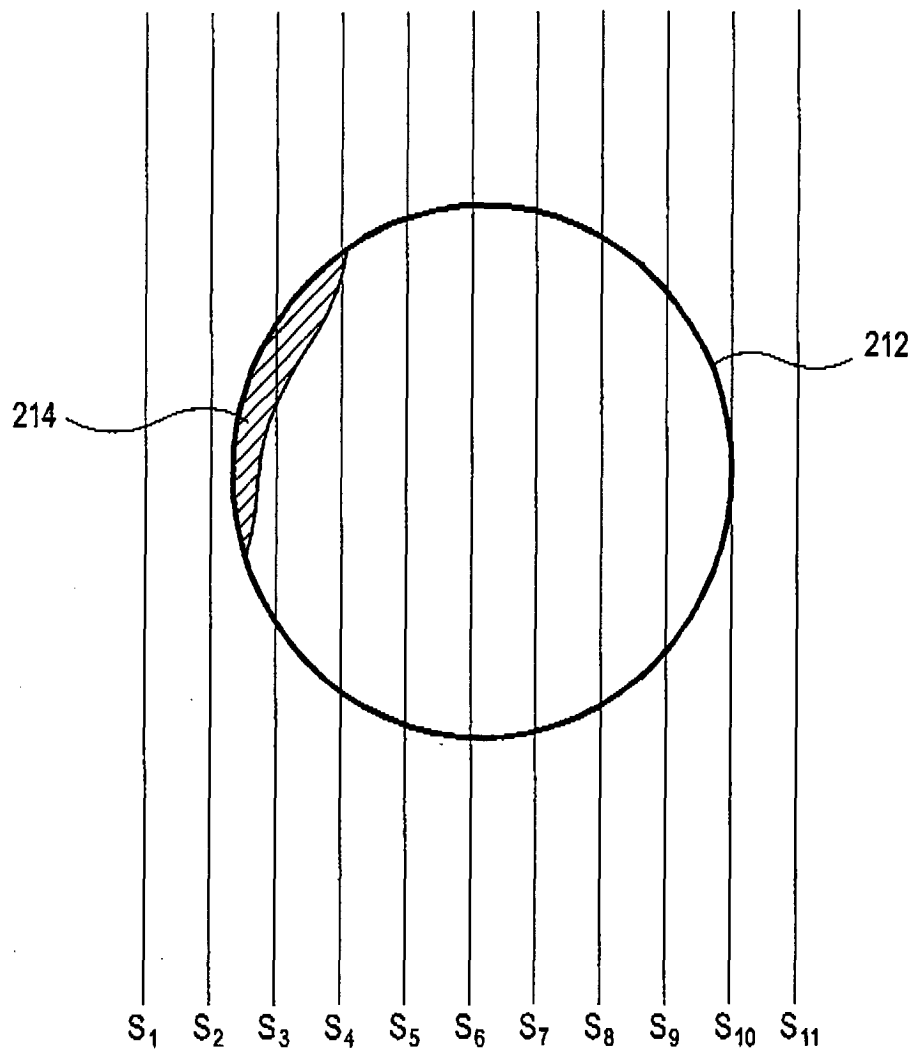


FIG. 3

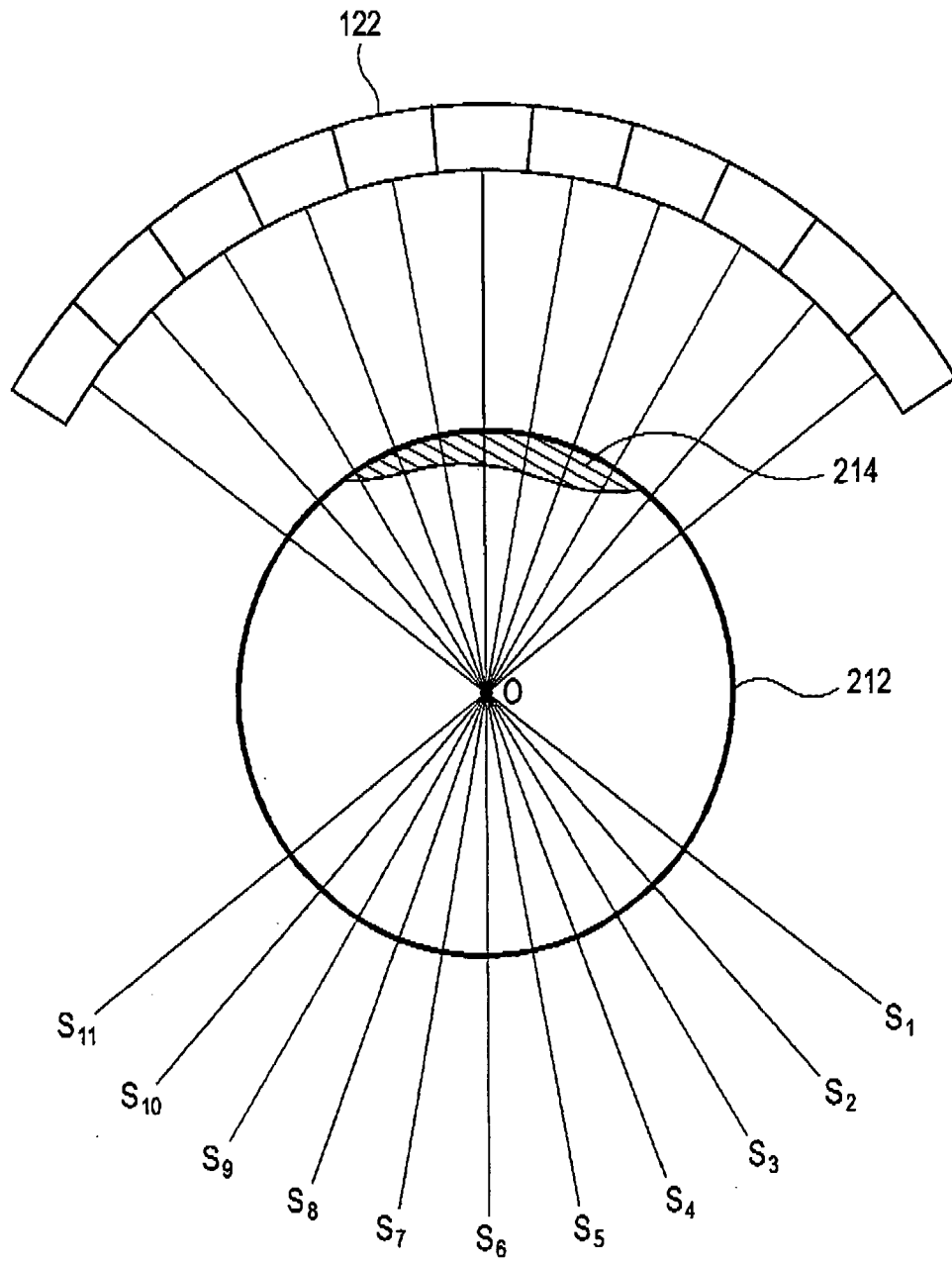


FIG. 4

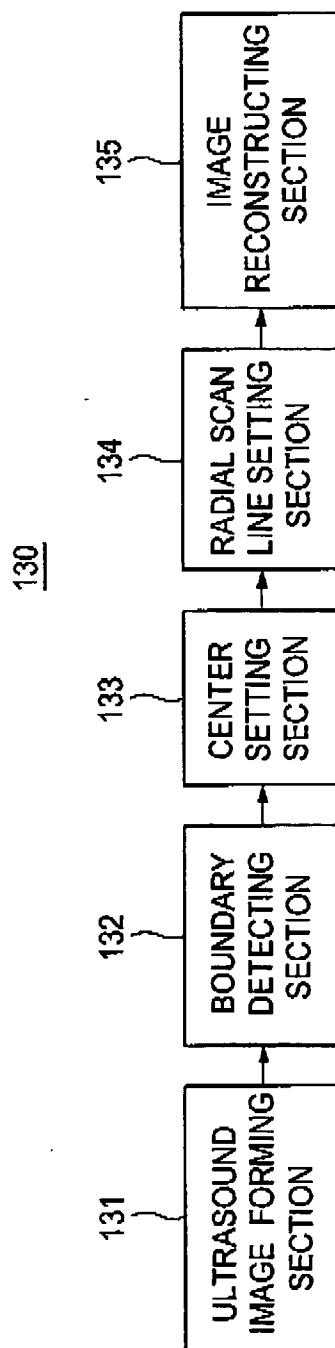


FIG. 5

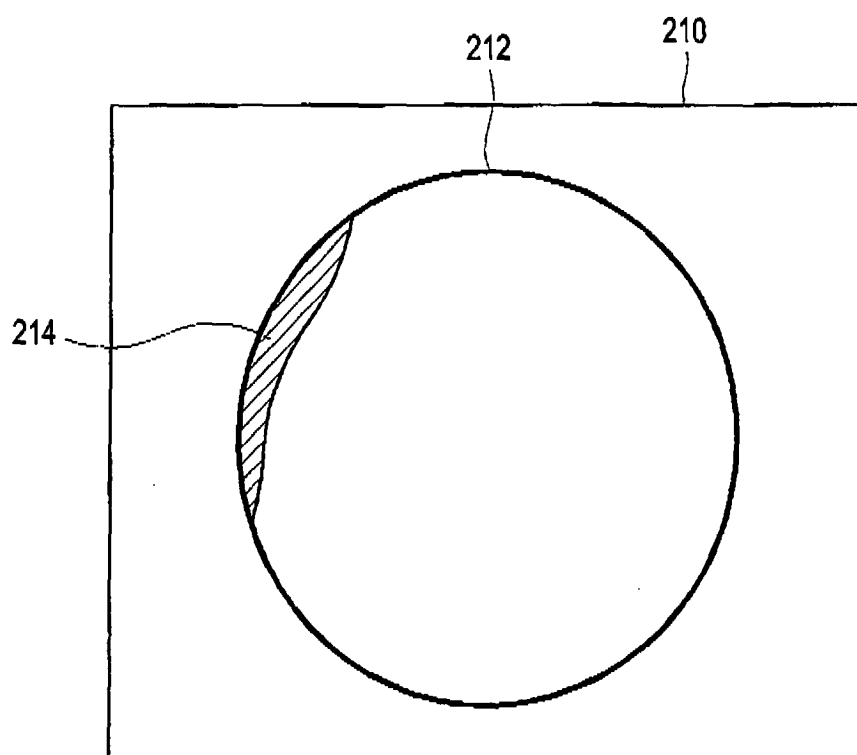


FIG. 6

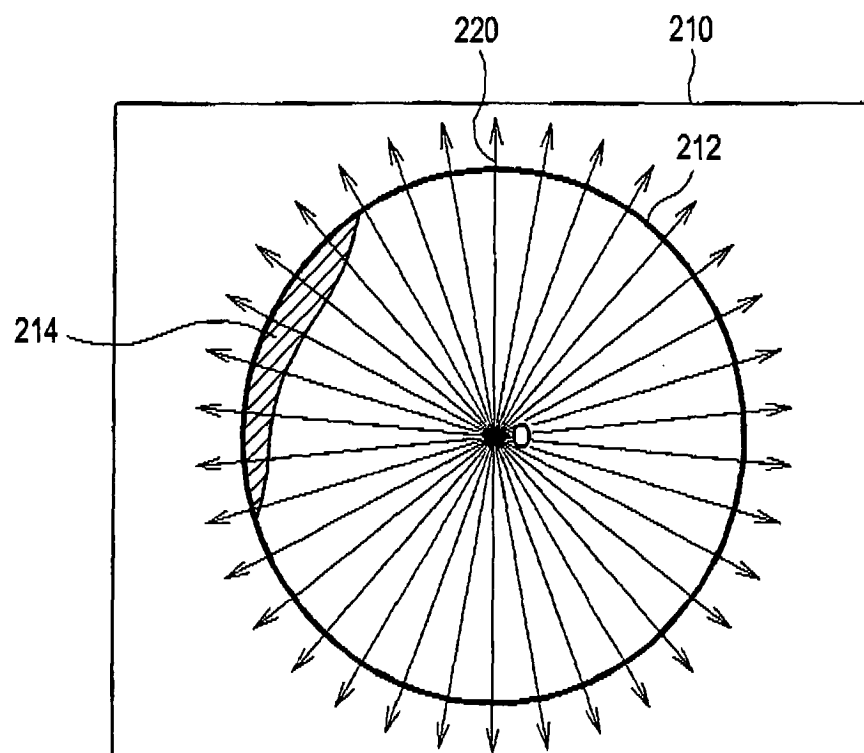


FIG. 7

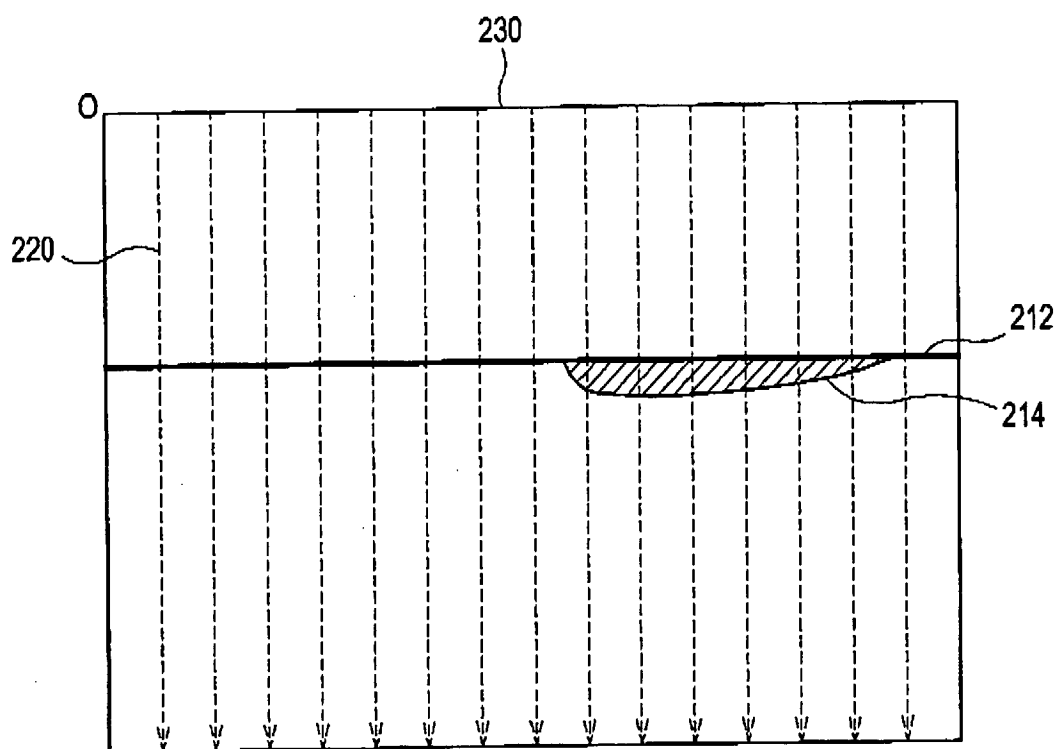


FIG. 8

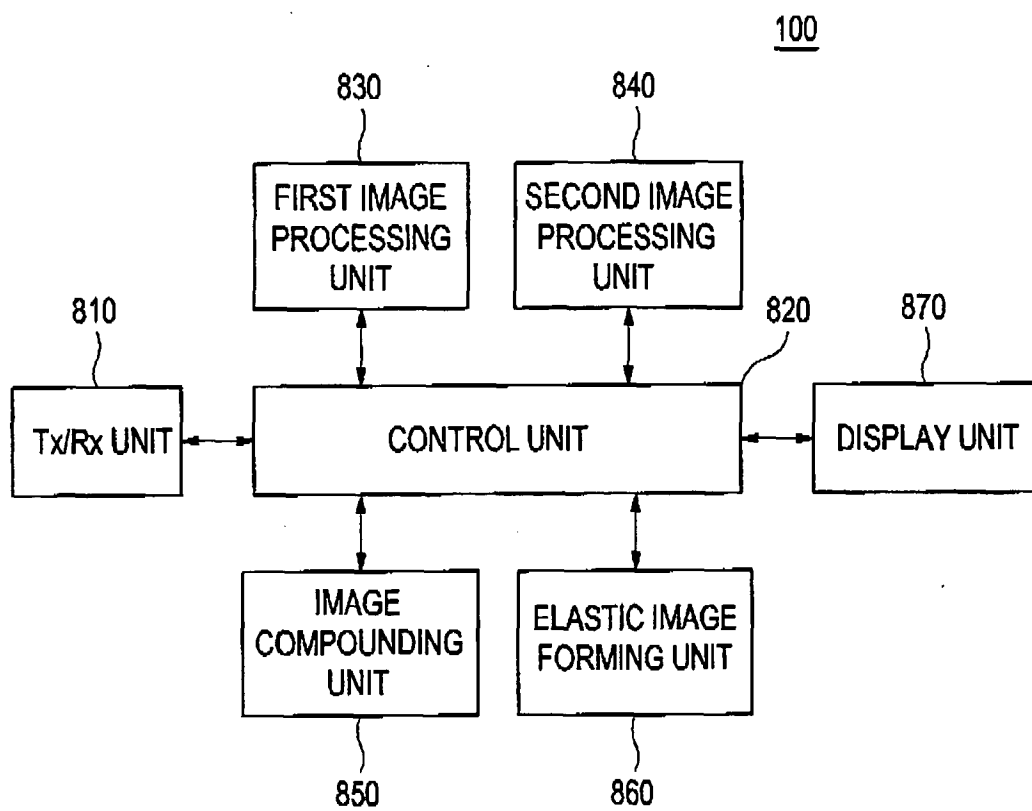


FIG. 9

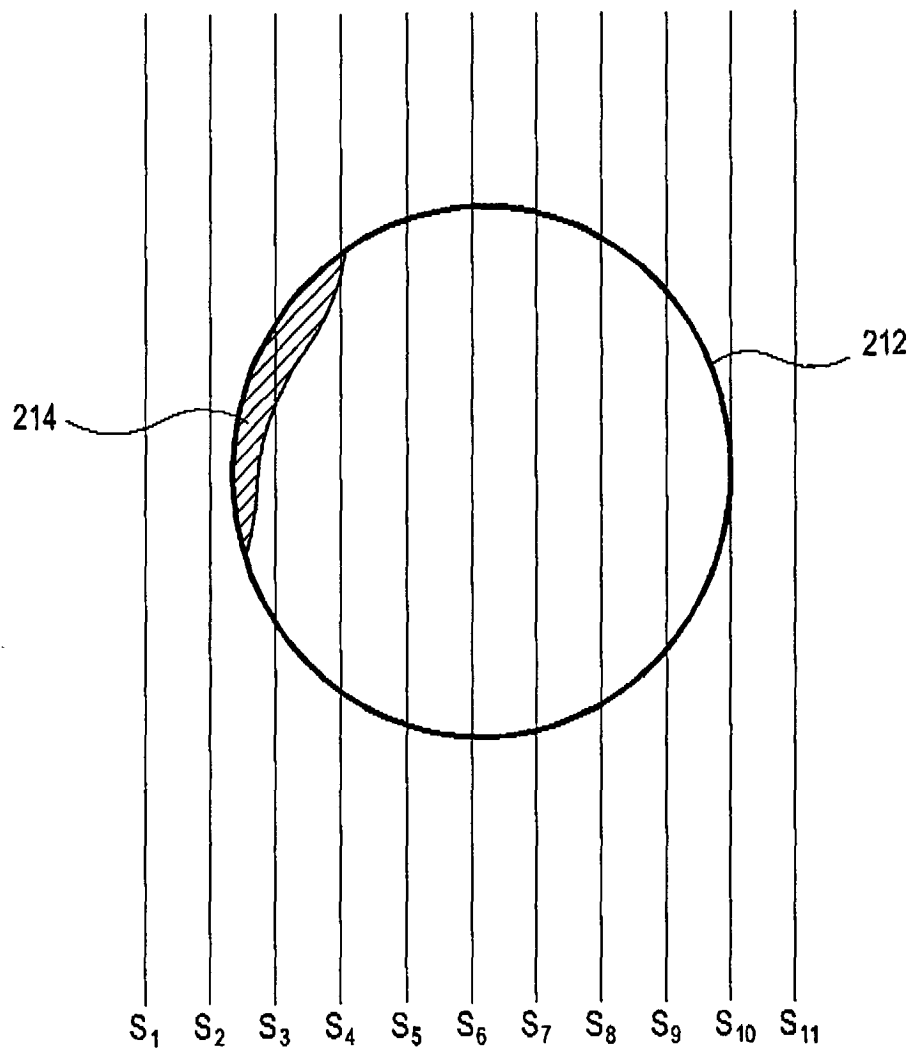


FIG. 10

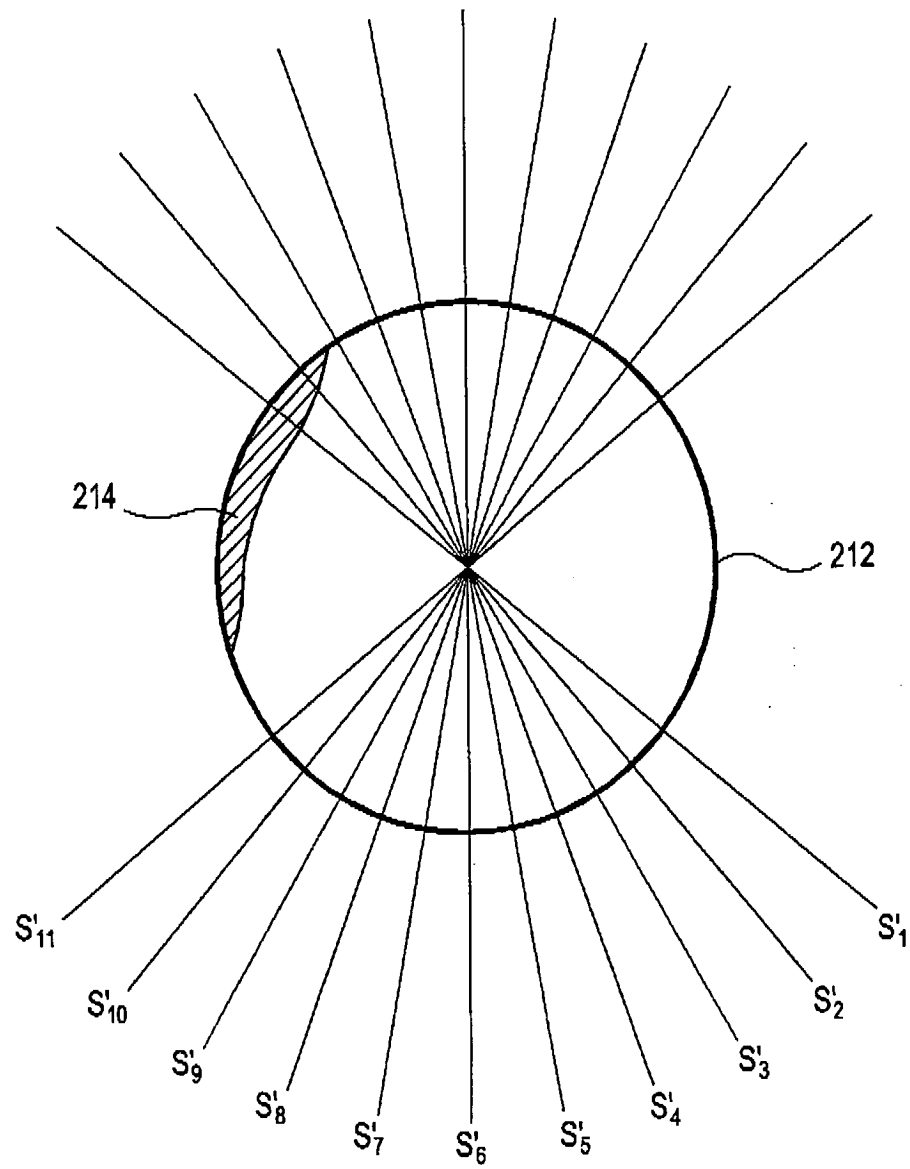


FIG. 11

830

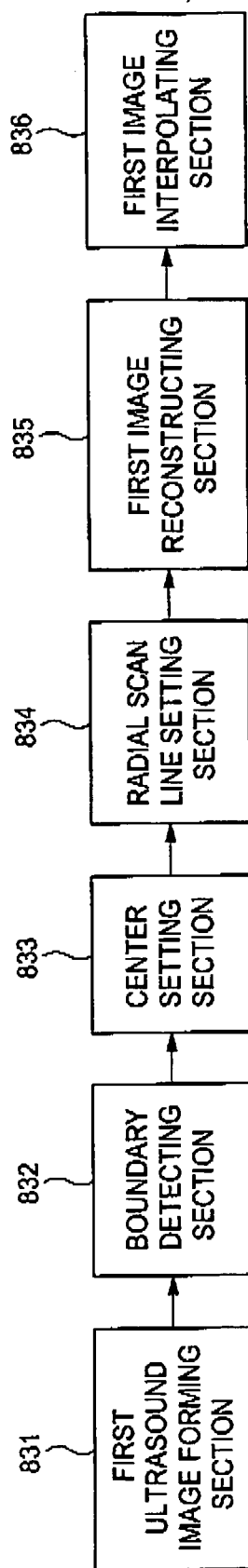


FIG. 12

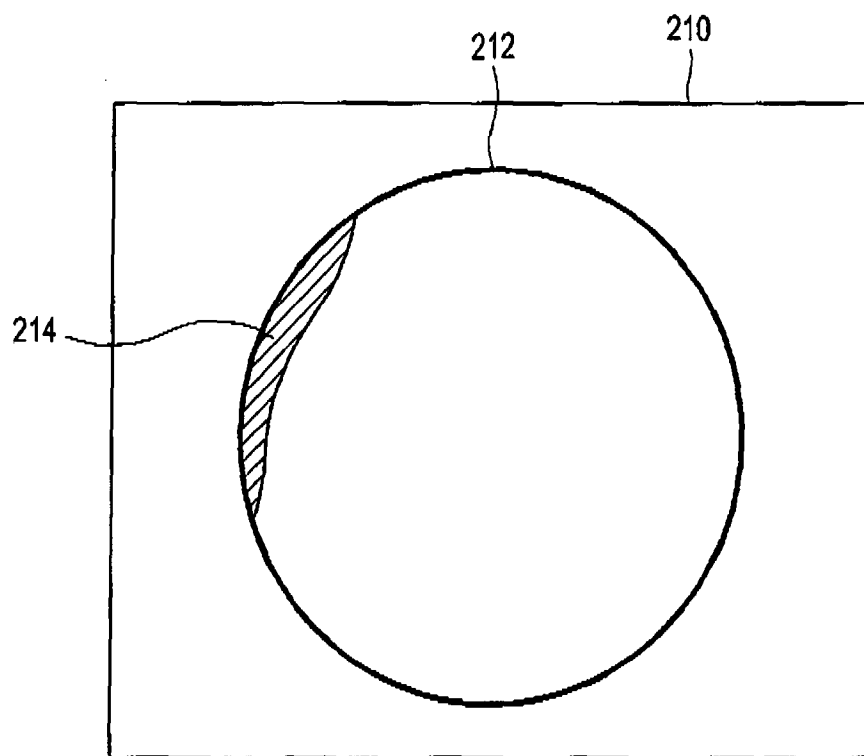


FIG. 13

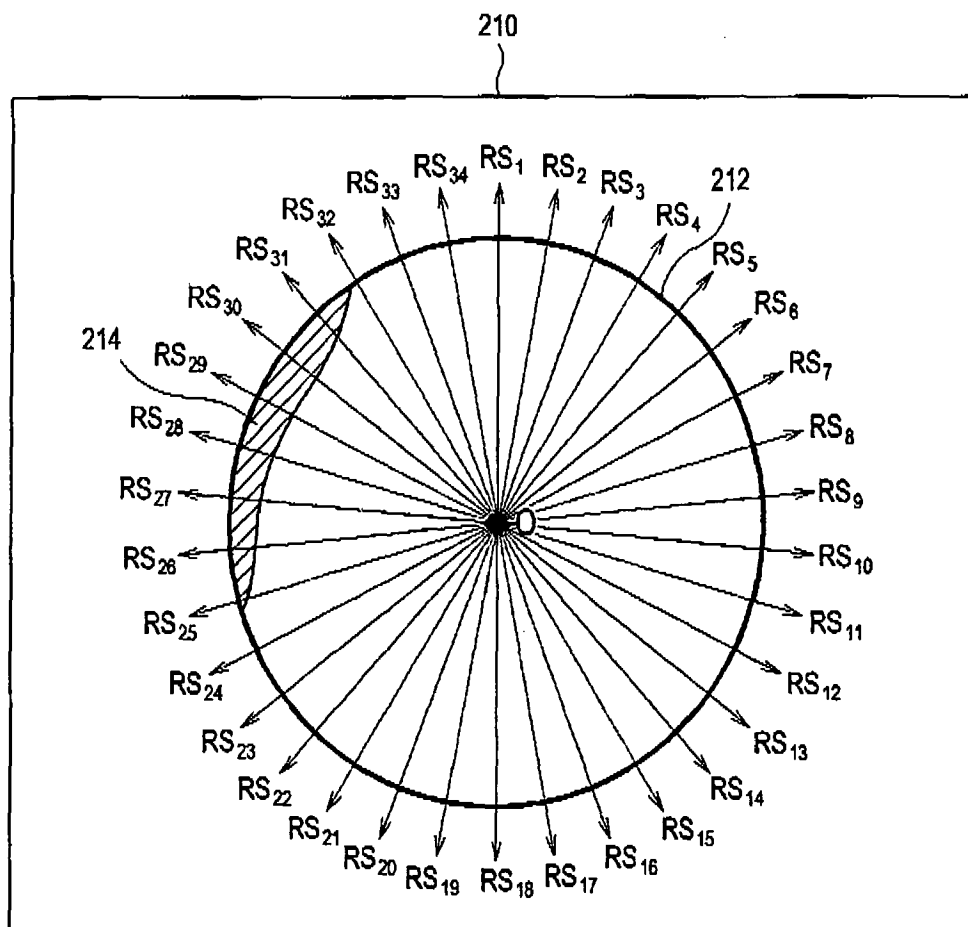


FIG. 14

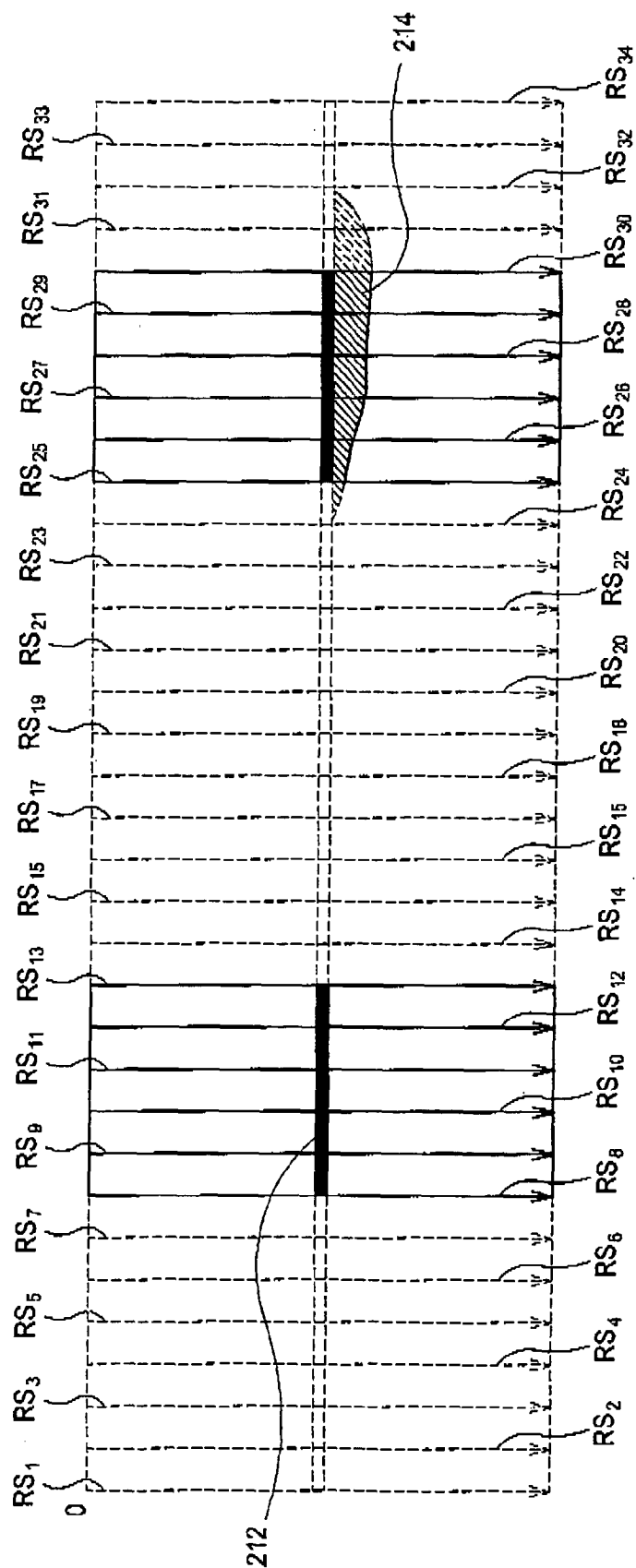


FIG. 15

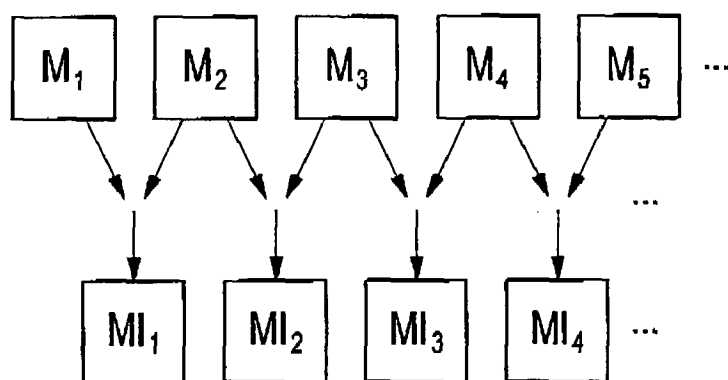


FIG. 16

840

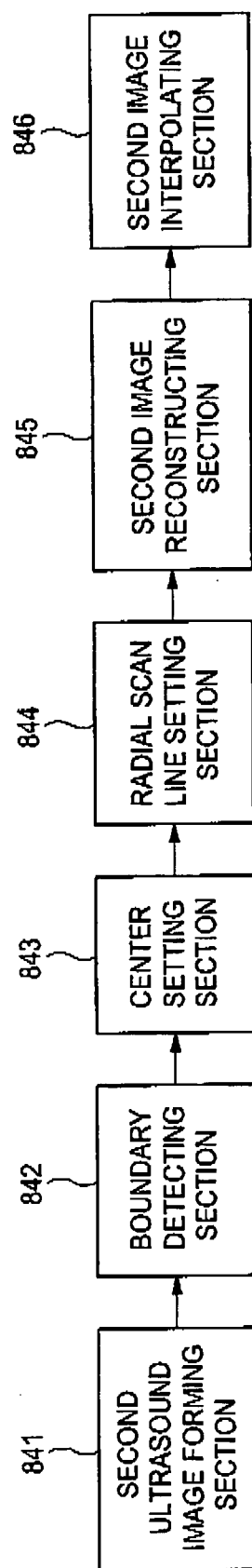


FIG. 17

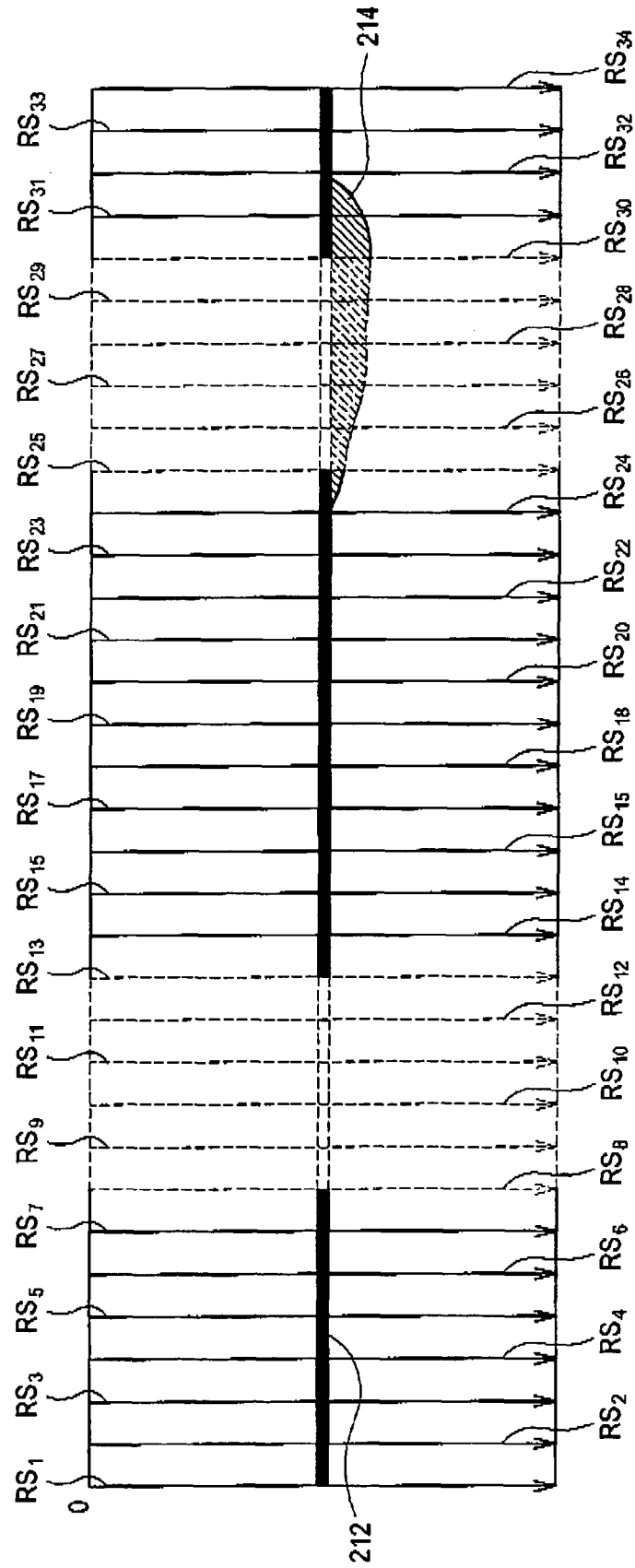
240

FIG. 18

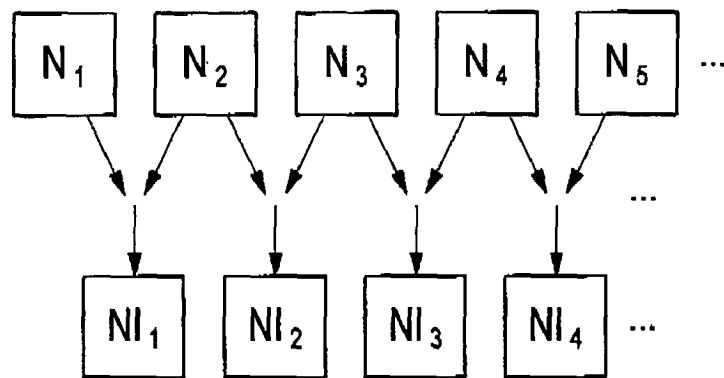


FIG. 19

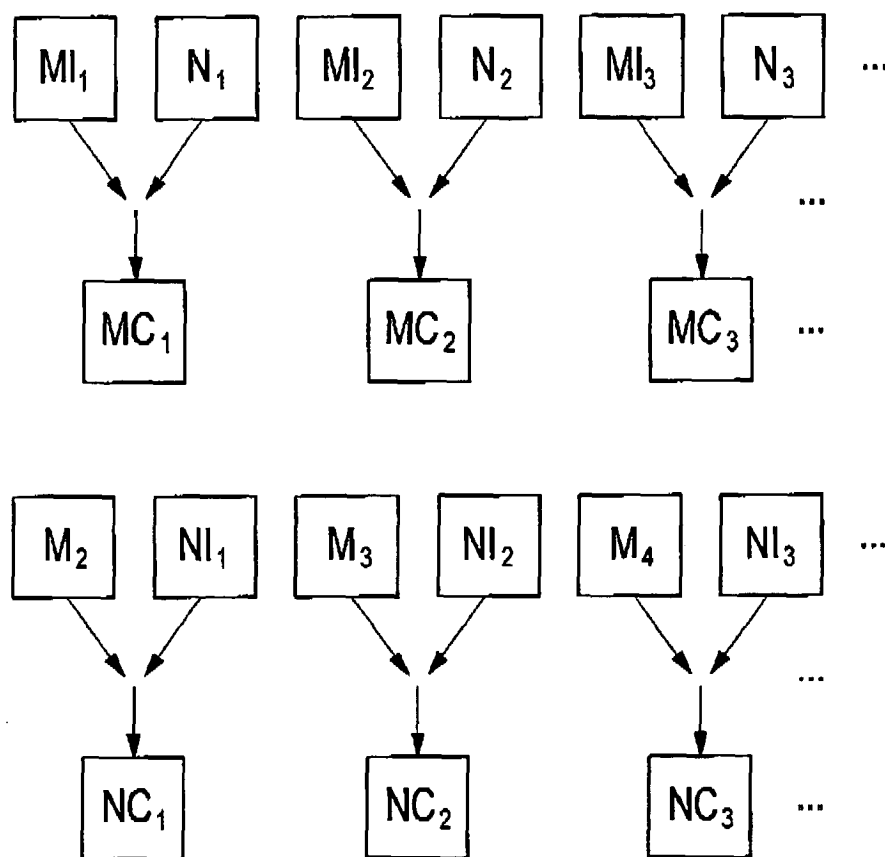


FIG. 20

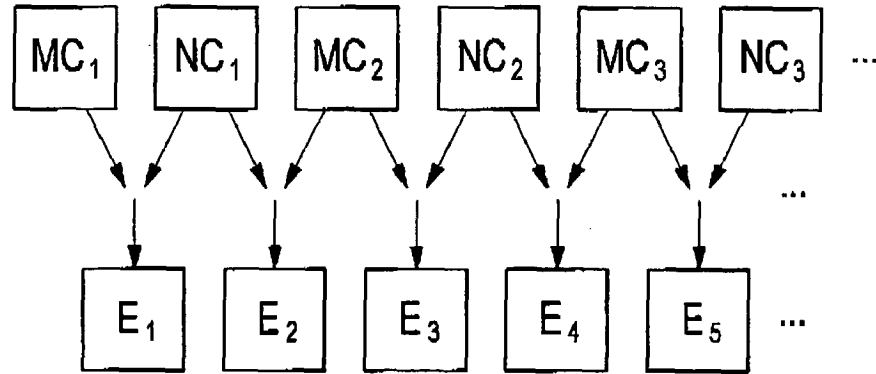


FIG. 21

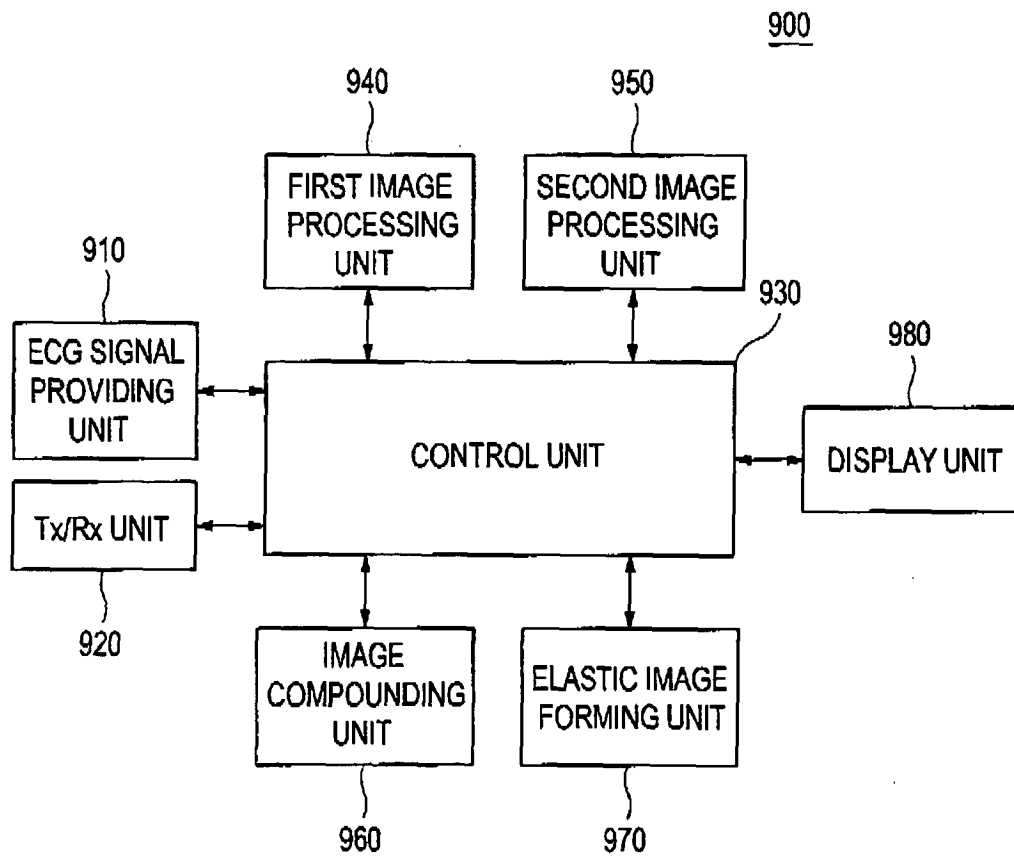


FIG. 22

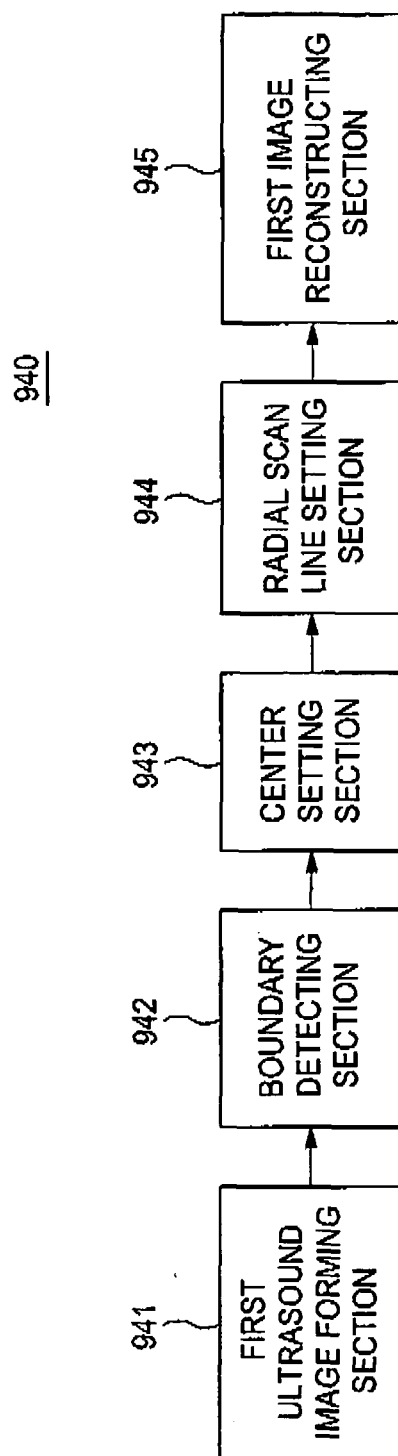


FIG. 23

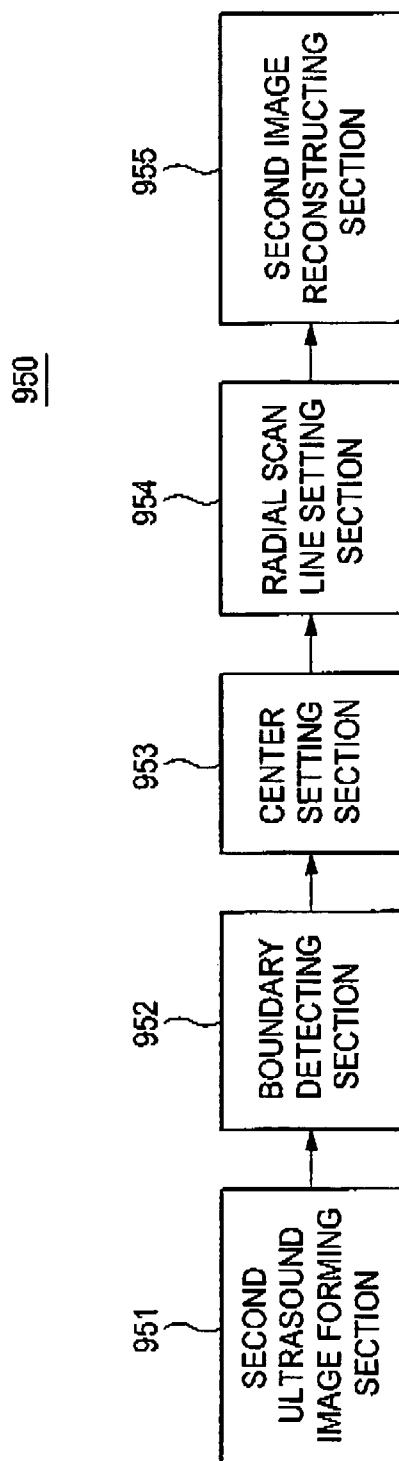
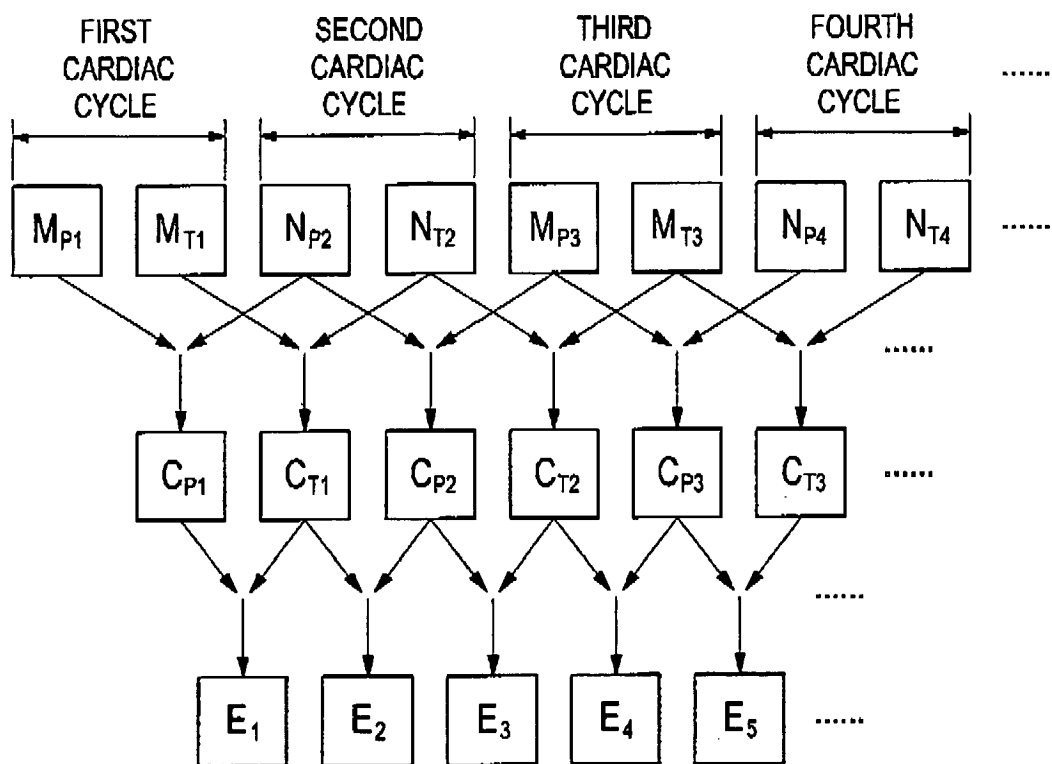


FIG. 24



REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

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Patent documents cited in the description

- KR 1020080030913 [0001]
- KR 1020080030918 [0001]
- KR 1020080030921 [0001]

专利名称(译)	在超声系统中形成弹性图像		
公开(公告)号	EP2107389A2	公开(公告)日	2009-10-07
申请号	EP2009004659	申请日	2009-03-31
申请(专利权)人(译)	MEDISON CO. , LTD.		
当前申请(专利权)人(译)	三星MEDISON CO. , LTD.		
[标]发明人	KIM JONG SIK JEONG MOK KUN		
发明人	KIM, JONG SIK JEONG, MOK KUN		
IPC分类号	G01S7/52 A61B5/02 A61B8/08		
CPC分类号	G01S7/52046 A61B5/02007 A61B8/0833 A61B8/0858 A61B8/485 A61B8/543 G01S7/52034 G01S7/52042 G01S7/52085		
代理机构(译)	LORENZ , MARKUS		
优先权	1020080030913 2008-04-02 KR 1020080030921 2008-04-02 KR 1020080030918 2008-04-02 KR		
其他公开文献	EP2107389A3 EP2107389B1		
外部链接	Espacenet		

摘要(译)

公开了用于在超声系统中形成弹性图像的实施例。在一个实施例中，Tx/Rx单元沿着目标对象中的扫描线重复地发送/接收超声波束，以输出接收信号。图像处理单元基于接收信号形成多个连续的超声图像，并且在每个超声图像上设置目标对象的中心。图像处理单元还在每个超声图像上相对于中心在径向方向上设置径向扫描线，并重建超声图像，使得径向扫描线彼此平行以形成重建图像。弹性图像形成单元基于重建图像形成弹性图像。

