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(54) **CONNECTION APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR CONTROLLING AN ULTRASOUND PROBE**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A connection apparatus and method for controlling an ultrasound probe are provided. The ultrasound probe includes a first chamber, a second chamber, a sealing member between the first and second chambers and a flexible connection member within each of the first and second chambers. The ultrasound probe further comprises a rigid connection interface forming at least part of the sealing member and connecting the flexible connection member in the first chamber with the flexible connection member in the second chamber.

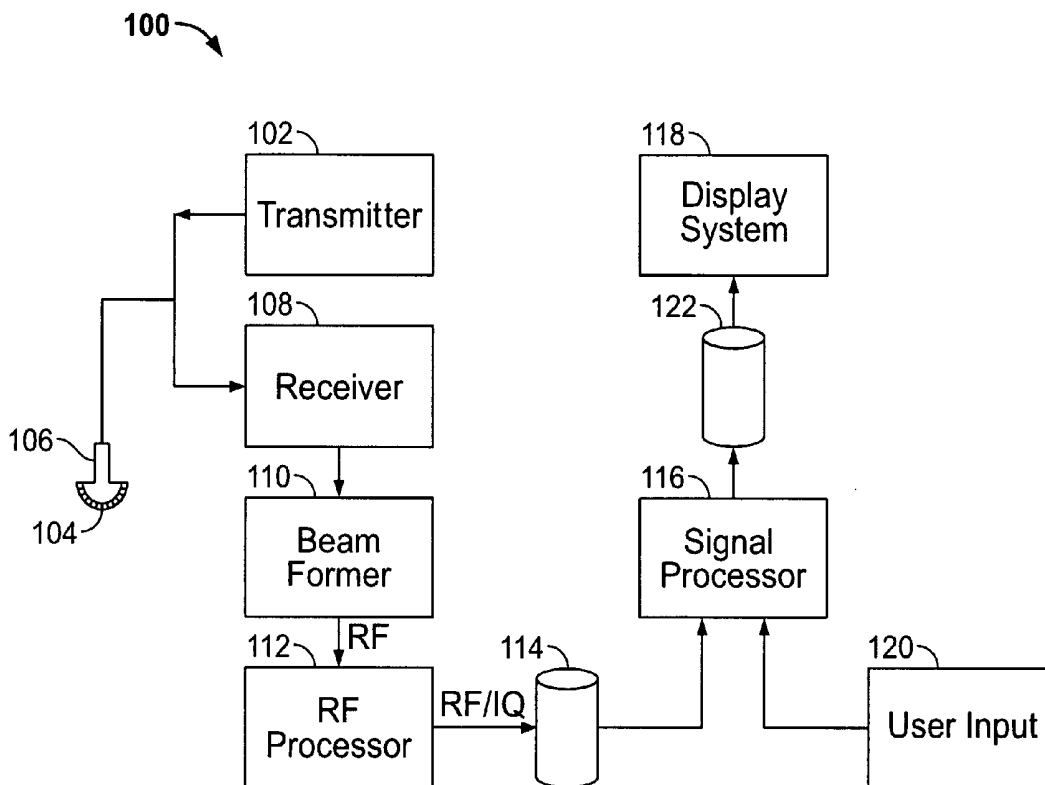
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Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation-in-part of application No. 10/767,585, filed on Jan. 29, 2004, which is a continuation-in-part of application No. 10/756,231, filed on Jan. 13, 2004.



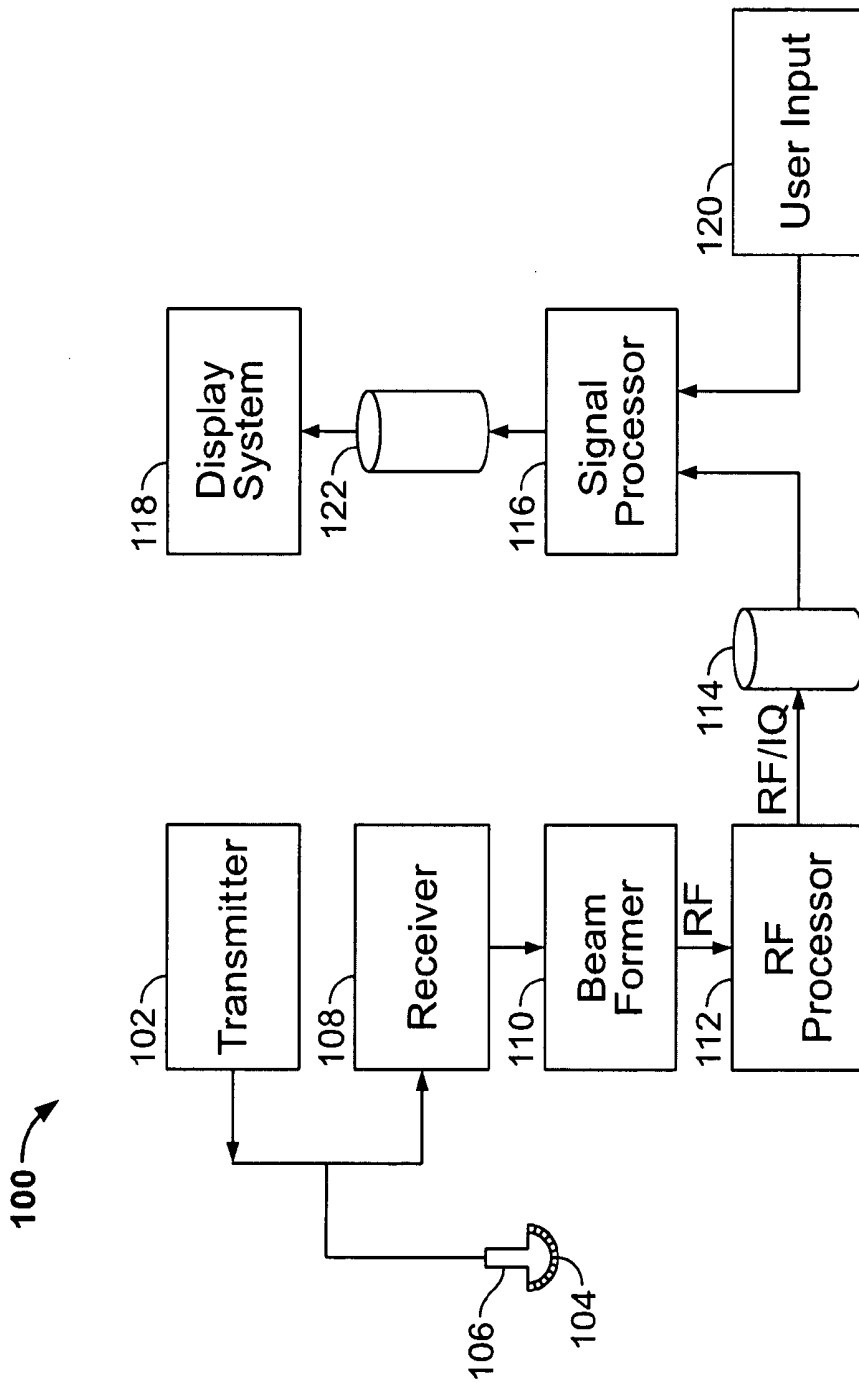


FIG. 1

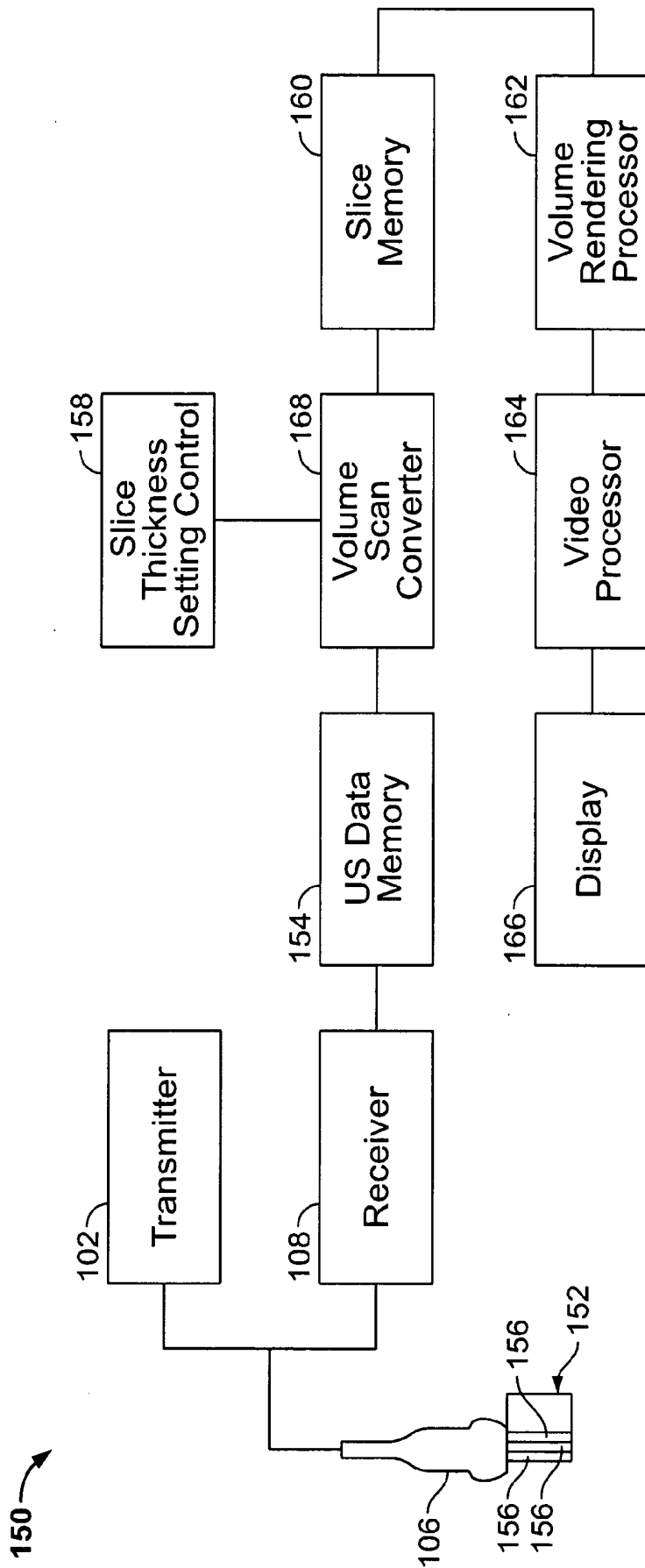


FIG. 2

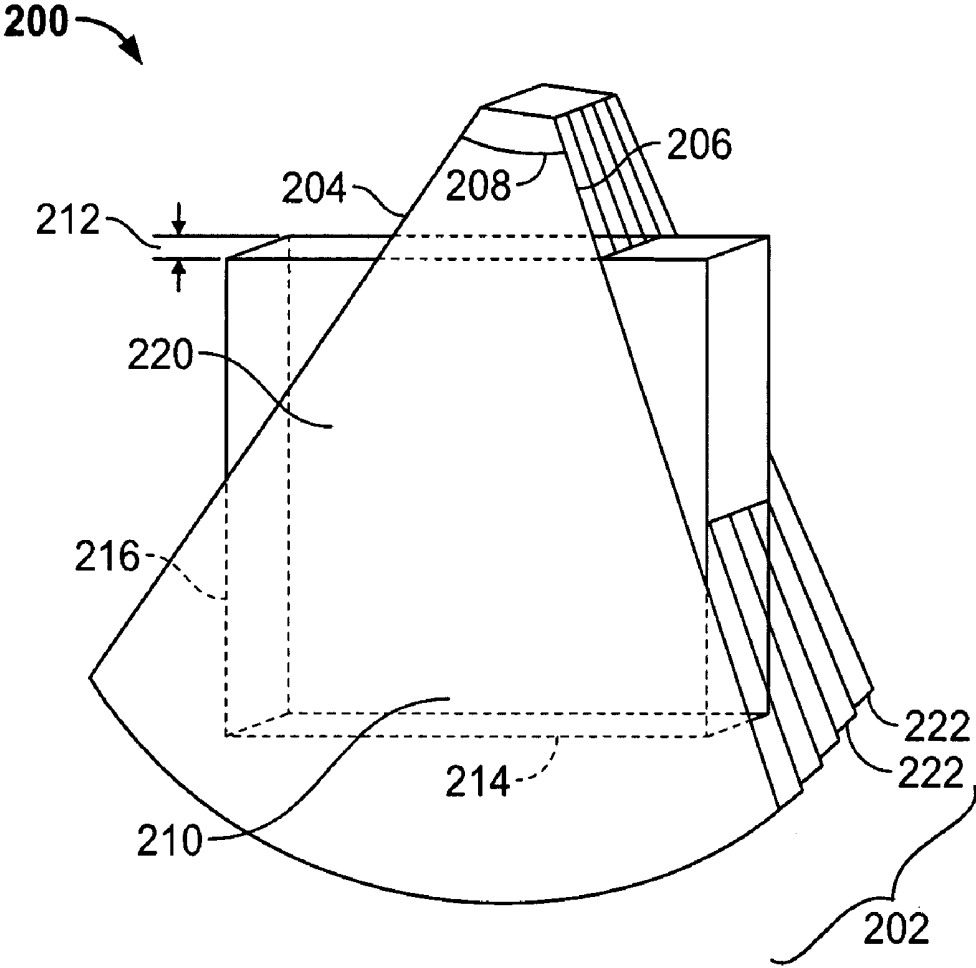


FIG. 3

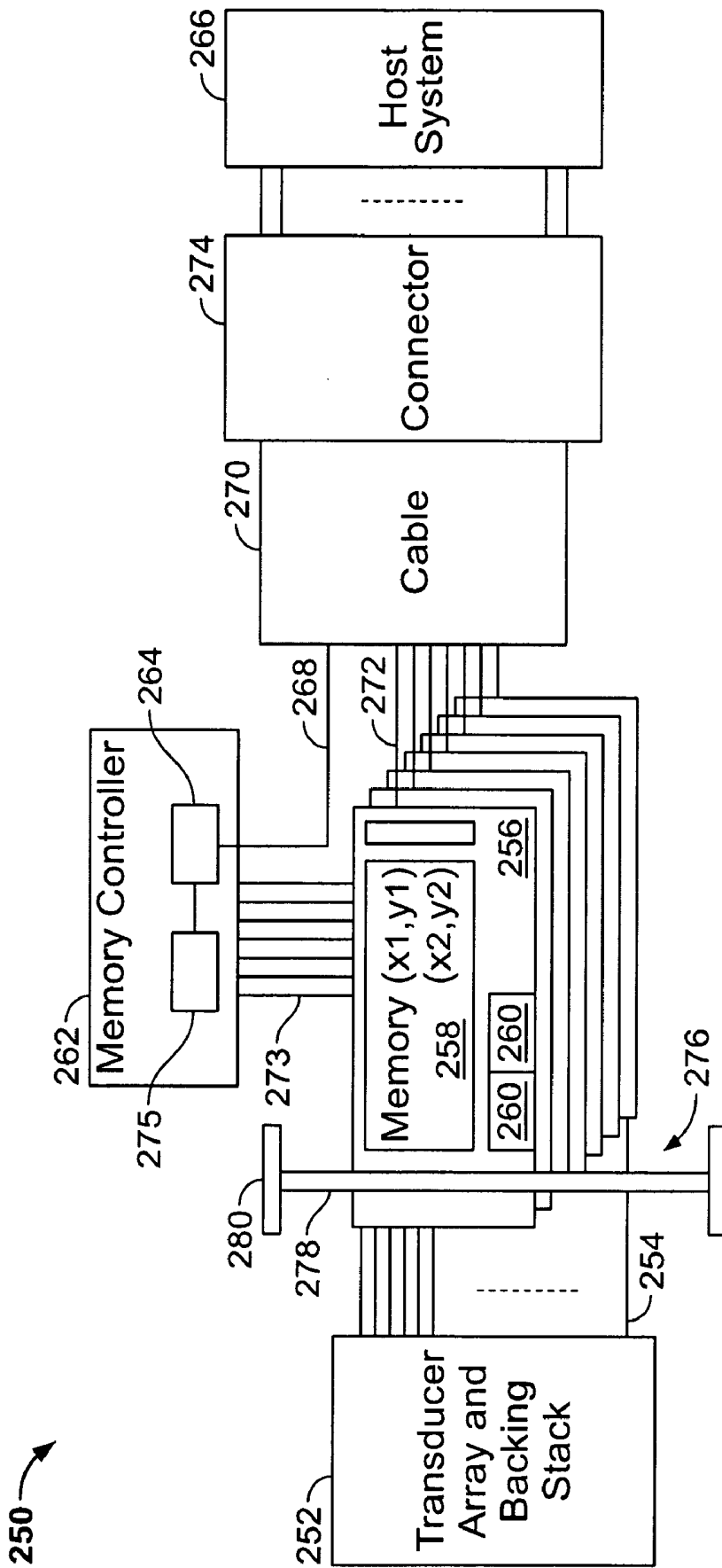


FIG. 4

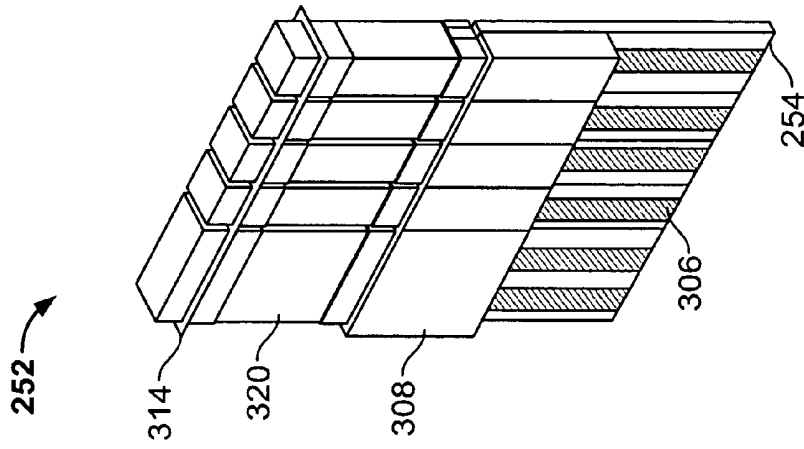


FIG. 6

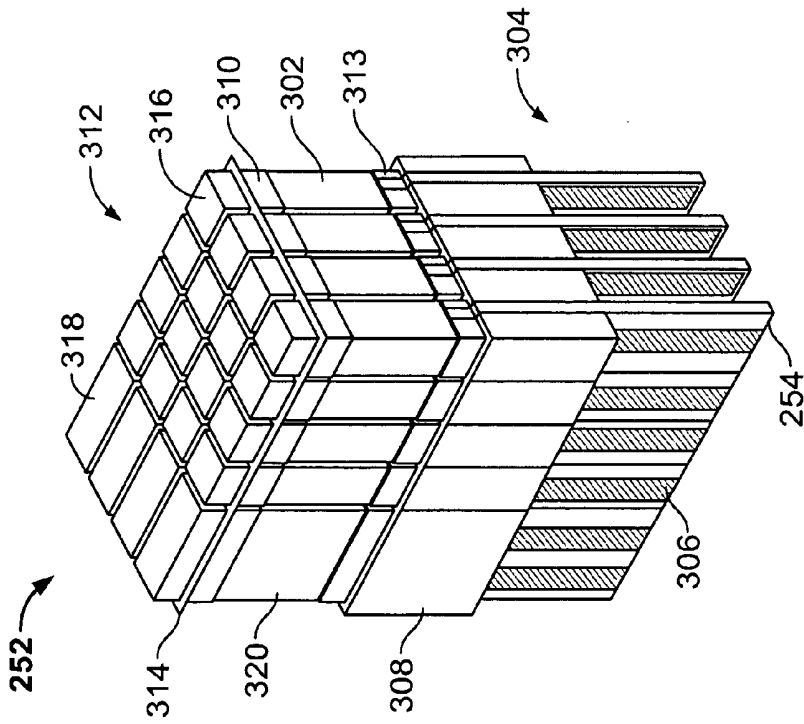


FIG. 5

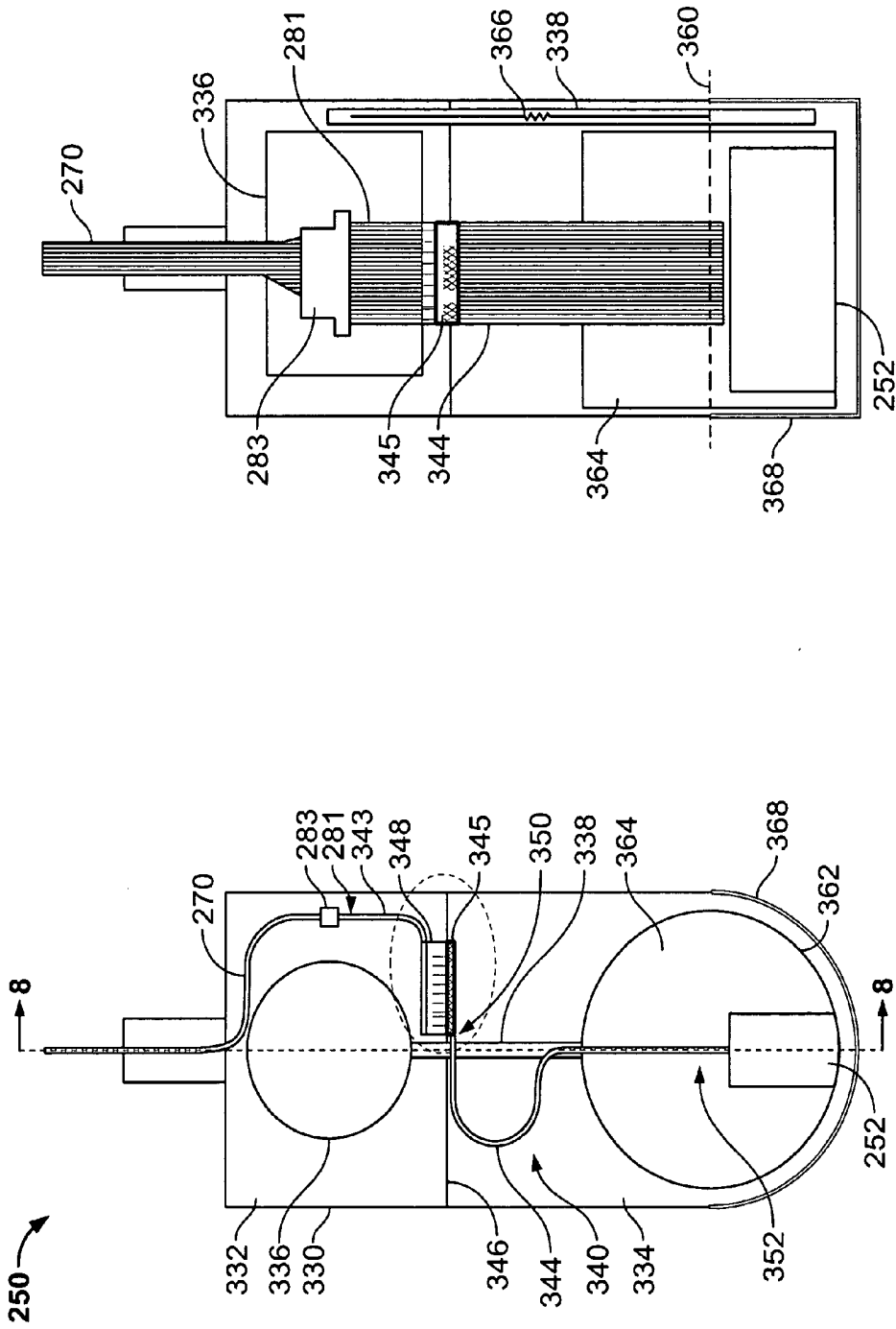


FIG. 8

FIG. 7

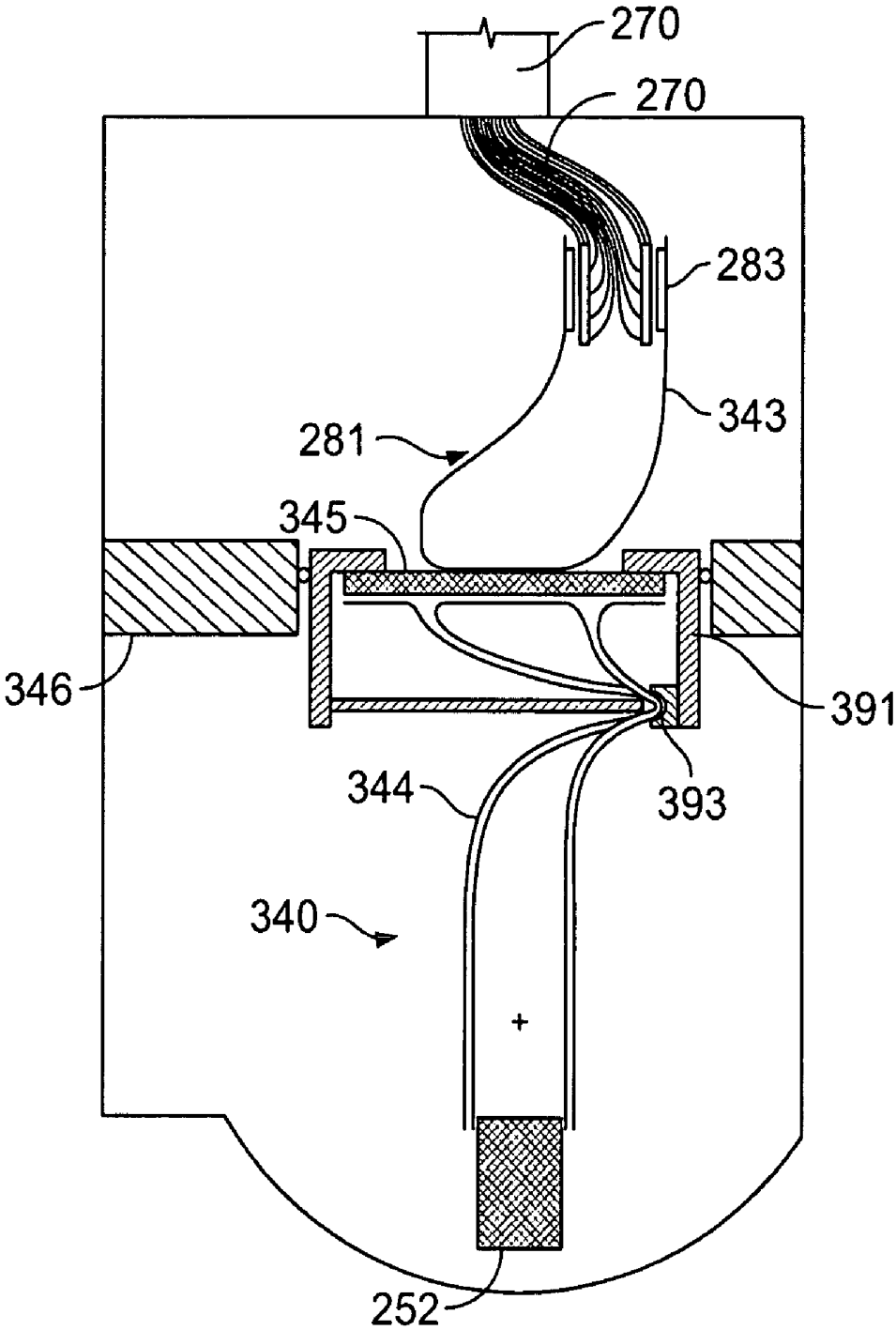


FIG. 9

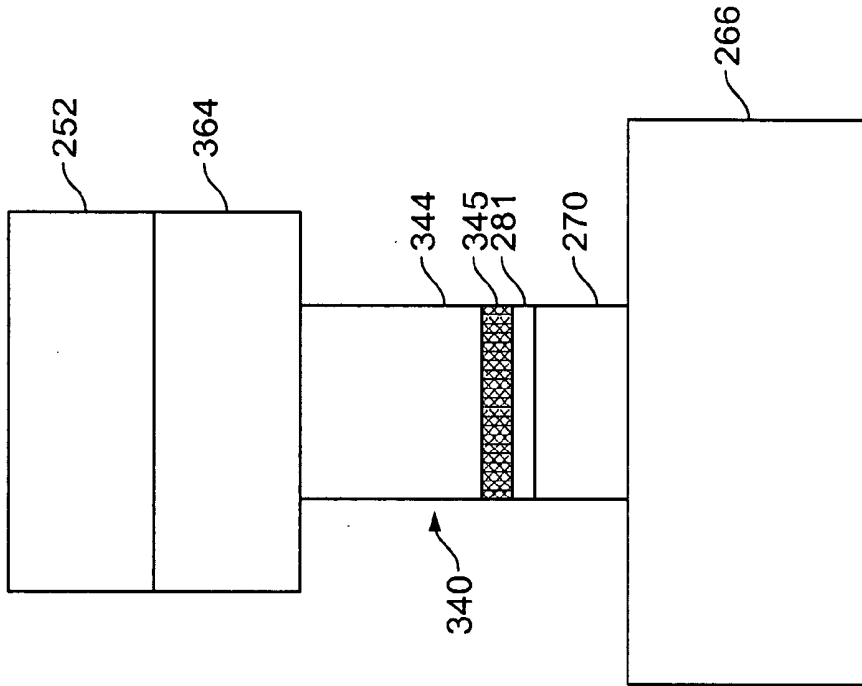


FIG. 11

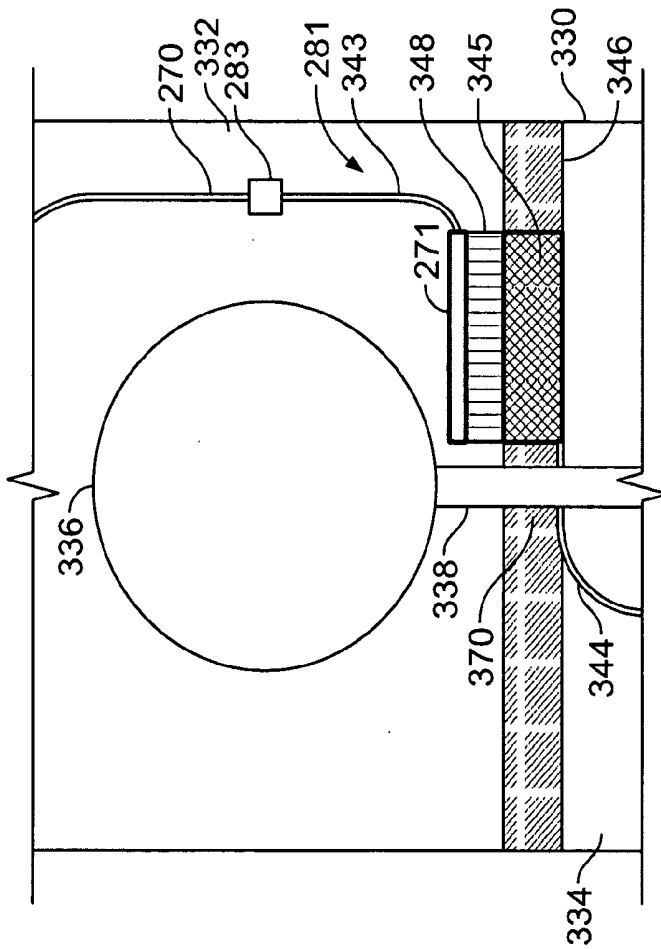


FIG. 10

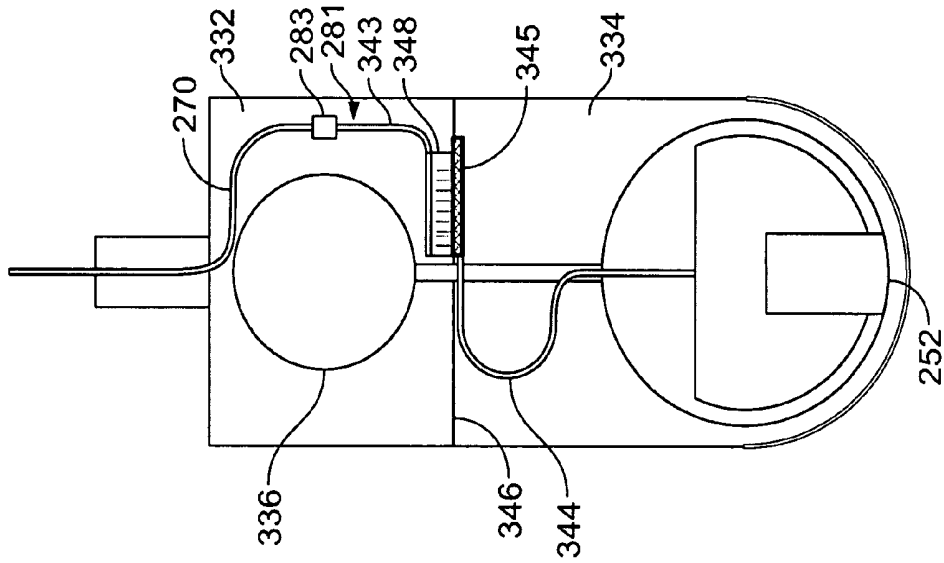


FIG. 12

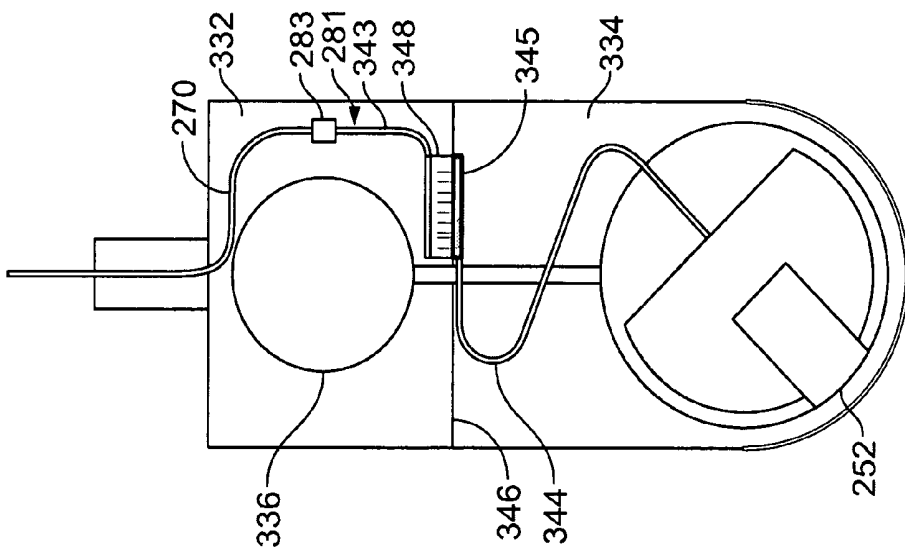


FIG. 13

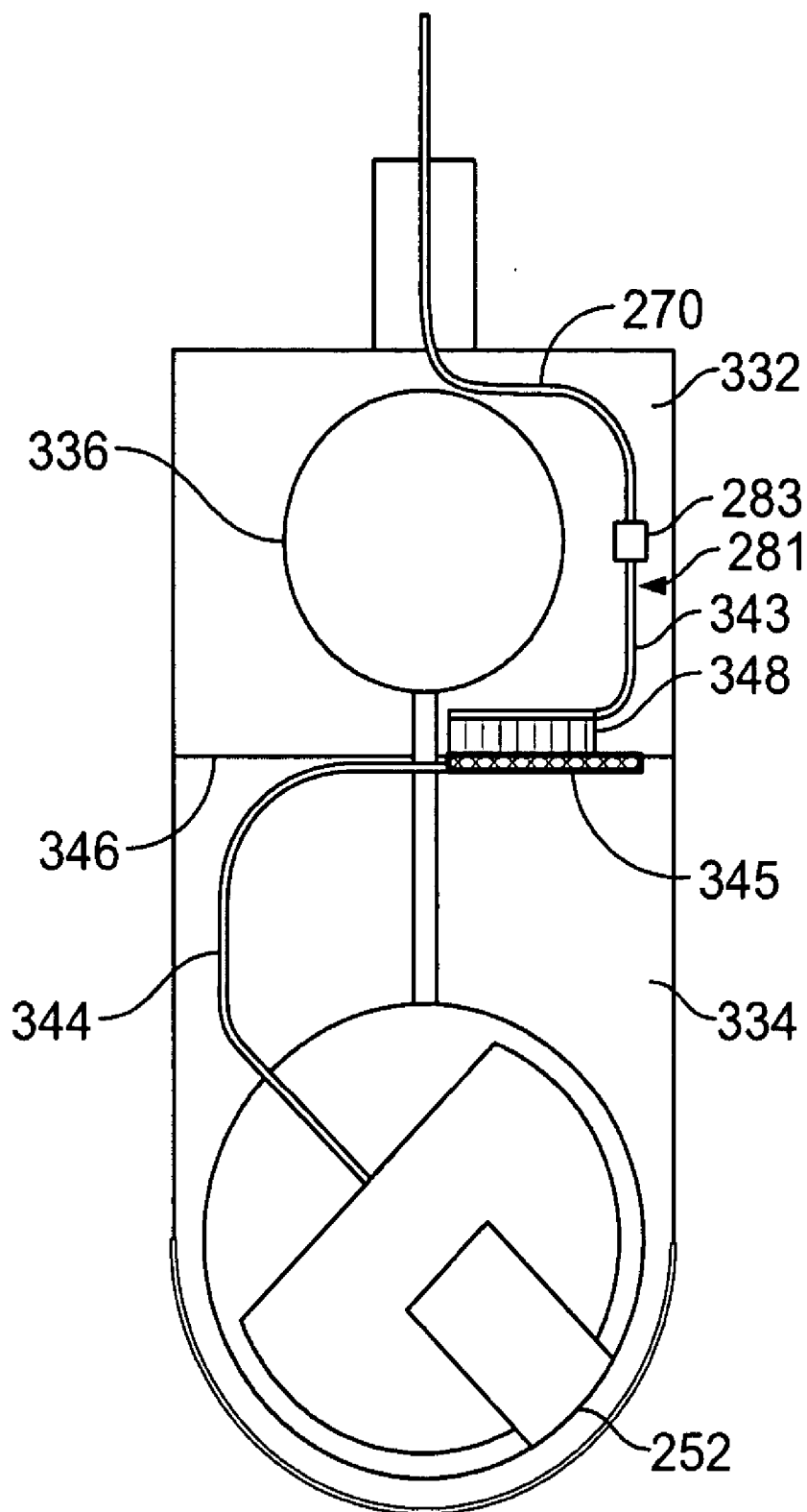


FIG. 14

CONNECTION APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR CONTROLLING AN ULTRASOUND PROBE

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a continuation-in-part and claims priority to U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/767, 585 filed Jan. 29, 2004 for "CONNECTION APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR CONTROLLING AN ULTRASOUND PROBE," which is a continuation-in-part and claims priority to U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/756, 231 filed Jan. 13, 2004 for "APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR CONTROLLING AN ULTRASOUND PROBE," which are both hereby incorporated by reference herein in their entirety.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] This invention relates generally to ultrasound systems and, more particularly, to probes for ultrasound medical imaging systems.

[0003] Ultrasound systems typically include ultrasound scanning devices, such as, ultrasound probes having different transducers that allow for performing various different ultrasound scans (e.g., different imaging of a volume or body). The ultrasound probes are typically connected to an ultrasound system for controlling the operation of the probes. The probes include a scan head having a plurality of transducer elements (e.g., piezoelectric crystals), which may be arranged in an array. The ultrasound system drives the transducer elements within the array during operation, such as, during a scan of a volume or body, which may be controlled based upon the type of scan to be performed. The ultrasound system includes a plurality of channels for communicating with the probe. For example, the channels may transmit pulses for driving the transducer elements and for receiving signals therefrom.

[0004] In volume probes, wherein the scan head mechanically moves during scan operation, a separate wet and dry chamber are typically provided. In particular, the scan head moves (e.g. rotates) in a sealed wet chamber having an acoustic membrane surrounding a scan head housing that contacts a patient during a scan. The wet chamber is typically filled with an acoustic liquid to allow acoustic coupling during scanning (e.g., during transmissions). The wet chamber is sealed from the dry chamber and may include control components for controlling the operation of the scan head in the wet chamber. The control components communicate with and control the scan head, for example, control the operation of transducer elements within the scan head. The communication between the control components and scan head may be provided by different communication lines (e.g., coaxial or other flexible cable). These communication lines traverse the seal between the wet and dry chambers, requiring the use of sealing members to maintain the liquid tight seal between the chambers. Each sealing member that is required increases the likelihood of a failure, for example, an increased likelihood of liquid leaking into the dry chamber through one of the sealing members. Further, the sealing members add complexity in design and cost to the probe. For example, additional components (e.g., brackets) between the wet and dry chambers may be needed to maintain the position and sealing engagement of the sealing members.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0005] In one exemplary embodiment, an ultrasound probe is provided. The ultrasound probe includes a first chamber, a second chamber, a sealing member between the first and second chambers and a flexible connection member within each of the first and second chambers. The ultrasound probe further comprises a rigid connection interface forming at least part of the sealing member and connecting the flexible connection member in the first chamber with the flexible connection member in the second chamber.

[0006] In another exemplary embodiment, a method for controlling an ultrasound probe is provided. The method includes communicating between at least one transducer array and a host system via a first flexible connection member and a second flexible connection member. The first and second flexible connection members connected by a rigid connection interface forming at least part of a wall between a wet chamber having the at least one transducer array and the second flexible connection member therein and a dry chamber having a system cable and the first flexible connection member therein. The system cable is connected to the host system and the second flexible connection member is connected to the at least one transducer array. The method further includes controlling elements of the at least one transducer array with the communicating.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0007] FIG. 1 is a block diagram of an ultrasound system in accordance with one exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

[0008] FIG. 2 is a block diagram of an ultrasound system in accordance with another exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

[0009] FIG. 3 is a perspective view of an image of an object acquired by the systems of FIGS. 1 and 2 in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

[0010] FIG. 4 is a block diagram of an ultrasound probe in communication with a host system in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

[0011] FIG. 5 is a perspective view of an exemplary transducer stack including an array of transducer elements that may be used in the ultrasound probe shown in FIG. 4.

[0012] FIG. 6 is a perspective view of another exemplary transducer stack including an array of transducer elements that may be used in the ultrasound probe shown in FIG. 4.

[0013] FIG. 7 is a cross-sectional elevation view of a probe in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

[0014] FIG. 8 is an elevation view taken along the line 8-8 of FIG. 7.

[0015] FIG. 9 is a cross-sectional view of a probe in accordance with another exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

[0016] FIG. 10 is a partial cross-sectional elevation view of an ultrasound probe in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention showing a rigid connection interface forming part of a wall between chambers of the ultrasound probe.

[0017] FIG. 11 is a block diagram showing a connection arrangement for an ultrasound probe in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

[0018] FIGS. 12-14 are cross-sectional elevation views of an ultrasound probe in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention showing a moving scan head.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0019] Exemplary embodiments of ultrasound systems and methods for controlling ultrasound probes are described in detail below. In particular, a detailed description of exemplary ultrasound systems will first be provided followed by a detailed description of various embodiments of methods and systems for controlling ultrasound probes. A technical effect of the various embodiments of the systems and methods described herein include at least one of improving the sealing arrangement between chambers of an ultrasound probe and allowing for easier maintenance and assembly of the ultrasound probe.

[0020] FIG. 1 illustrates a block diagram of an exemplary embodiment of an ultrasound system 100 that may be used, for example, to acquire and process ultrasonic images. The ultrasound system 100 includes a transmitter 102 that drives an array of elements 104 (e.g., piezoelectric crystals) within or formed as part of a transducer 106 to emit pulsed ultrasonic signals into a body or volume. A variety of geometries may be used and one or more transducers 106 may be provided as part of a probe (not shown). The pulsed ultrasonic signals are back-scattered from density interfaces and/or structures, for example, in a body, like blood cells or muscular tissue, to produce echoes that return to the elements 104. The echoes are received by a receiver 108 and provided to a beamformer 110. The beamformer performs beamforming on the received echoes and outputs an RF signal. The RF signal is then processed by an RF processor 112. The RF processor 112 may include a complex demodulator (not shown) that demodulates the RF signal to form IQ data pairs representative of the echo signals. The RF or IQ signal data then may be routed directly to an RF/IQ buffer 114 for storage (e.g., temporary storage).

[0021] The ultrasound system 100 also includes a signal processor 116 to process the acquired ultrasound information (i.e., RF signal data or IQ data pairs) and prepare frames of ultrasound information for display on a display system 118. The signal processor 116 is adapted to perform one or more processing operations according to a plurality of selectable ultrasound modalities on the acquired ultrasound information. Acquired ultrasound information may be processed in real-time during a scanning session as the echo signals are received. Additionally or alternatively, the ultrasound information may be stored temporarily in the RF/IQ buffer 114 during a scanning session and processed in less than real-time in a live or off-line operation.

[0022] The ultrasound system 100 may continuously acquire ultrasound information at a frame rate that exceeds fifty frames per second, which is the approximate perception rate of the human eye. The acquired ultrasound information is displayed on the display system 118 at a slower frame-rate. An image buffer 122 may be included for storing processed frames of acquired ultrasound information that are

not scheduled to be displayed immediately. In an exemplary embodiment, the image buffer 122 is of sufficient capacity to store at least several seconds of frames of ultrasound information. The frames of ultrasound information may be stored in a manner to facilitate retrieval thereof according to their order or time of acquisition. The image buffer 122 may comprise any known data storage medium.

[0023] A user input device 120 may be used to control operation of the ultrasound system 100. The user input device 120 may be any suitable device and/or user interface for receiving user inputs to control, for example, the type of scan or type of transducer to be used in a scan.

[0024] FIG. 2 illustrates a block diagram of another exemplary embodiment of an ultrasound system 150 that may be used, for example, to acquire and process ultrasonic images. The ultrasound system 150 includes the transducer 106 in communication with the transmitter 102 and receiver 108. The transducer 106 transmits ultrasonic pulses and receives echoes from structures inside a scanned ultrasound volume 152. A memory 154 stores ultrasound data from the receiver 108 derived from the scanned ultrasound volume 152. The scanned ultrasound volume 152 may be obtained by various techniques, including, for example, 3D scanning, real-time 3D imaging, volume scanning, scanning with transducers having positioning sensors, freehand scanning using a voxel correlation technique, 2D scanning or scanning with a matrix of array transducers, among others.

[0025] The transducer 106 is moved, such as along a linear or arcuate path, while scanning a region of interest (ROI). At each linear or arcuate position, the transducer 106 obtains a plurality of scan planes 156. The scan planes 156 are collected for a thickness, such as from a group or set of adjacent scan planes 156. The scan planes 156 are stored in the memory 154, and then provided to a volume scan converter 168. In some exemplary embodiments, the transducer 106 may obtain lines instead of the scan planes 156, with the memory 154 storing lines obtained by the transducer 106 rather than the scan planes 156. The volume scan converter 168 receives a slice thickness setting from a slice thickness setting control 158, which identifies the thickness of a slice to be created from the scan planes 156. The volume scan converter 168 creates a data slice from multiple adjacent scan planes 156. The number of adjacent scan planes 156 that are obtained to form each data slice is dependent upon the thickness selected by the slice thickness setting control 158. The data slice is stored in a slice memory 160 and accessed by a volume rendering processor 162. The volume rendering processor 162 performs volume rendering upon the data slice. The output of the volume rendering processor 162 is provided to a video processor 164 that processes the volume rendered data slice for display on a display 166.

[0026] It should be noted that the position of each echo signal sample (voxel) is defined in terms of geometrical accuracy (i.e., the distance from one voxel to the next) and one or more ultrasonic responses (and derived values from the ultrasonic response). Suitable ultrasonic responses include gray scale values, color flow values, and angio or power Doppler information. It should be noted that the ultrasound system 150 also may include a user input or user interface for controlling the operation of the ultrasound system 150.

[0027] It should be noted that the ultrasound systems **100** and **150** may include additional or different components. For example, the ultrasound system **150** may include a user interface or user input **120** (shown in **FIG. 1**) to control the operation of the ultrasound system **150**, including, to control the input of patient data, scan parameters, a change of scan mode, and the like.

[0028] **FIG. 3** illustrates an exemplary image of an object **200** that may be acquired by the ultrasound systems **100** and **150**. The object **200** includes a volume **202** defined by a plurality of sector shaped cross-sections with radial borders **204** and **206** diverging from one another at an angle **208**. The transducer **106** (shown in **FIGS. 1 and 2**) electronically focuses and directs ultrasound firings longitudinally to scan along adjacent scan lines in each scan plane **156** (shown in **FIG. 2**) and electronically or mechanically focuses and directs ultrasound firings laterally to scan adjacent scan planes **156**. The scan planes **156** obtained by the transducer **106**, and as illustrated in **FIG. 1**, are stored in the memory **154** and are scan converted from spherical to Cartesian coordinates by the volume scan converter **168**. A volume comprising multiple scan planes **156** is output from the volume scan converter **168** and stored in the slice memory **160** as a rendering region **210**. The rendering region **210** in the slice memory **160** is formed from multiple adjacent scan planes **156**.

[0029] The rendering region **210** may be defined in size by an operator using a user interface or input to have a slice thickness **212**, width **214** and height **216**. The volume scan converter **168** (shown in **FIG. 2**) may be controlled by the slice thickness setting control **158** (shown in **FIG. 2**) to adjust the thickness parameter of the slice to form a rendering region **210** of the desired thickness. The rendering region **210** defines the portion of the scanned ultrasound volume **152** that is volume rendered. The volume rendering processor **162** accesses the slice memory **160** and renders along the slice thickness **212** of the rendering region **210**.

[0030] Referring now to **FIGS. 1 and 2**, during operation, a slice having a pre-defined, substantially constant thickness (also referred to as the rendering region **210**) is determined by the slice thickness setting control **158** and is processed in the volume scan converter **168**. The echo data representing the rendering region **210** (shown in **FIG. 3**) may be stored in the slice memory **160**. Predefined thicknesses between about 2 mm and about 20 mm are typical, however, thicknesses less than about 2 mm or greater than about 20 mm may also be suitable depending on the application and the size of the area to be scanned. The slice thickness setting control **158** may include a control member, such as a rotatable knob with discrete or continuous thickness settings.

[0031] The volume rendering processor **162** projects the rendering region **210** onto an image portion **220** of an image plane(s) **222** (shown in **FIG. 3**). Following processing in the volume rendering processor **162**, pixel data in the image portion **220** may be processed by the video processor **164** and then displayed on the display **166**. The rendering region **210** may be located at any position and oriented at any direction within the volume **202**. In some situations, depending on the size of the region being scanned, it may be advantageous for the rendering region **210** to be only a small portion of the volume **202**.

[0032] **FIG. 4** illustrates a block diagram of an exemplary embodiment of an ultrasound probe **250** that may be used in connection with the ultrasound systems **100** or **150**. The ultrasound probe **250** includes a transducer array and backing stack **252** (hereinafter the "transducer array **252**"), transducer flex cables **254**, which may be formed as a scan head cable, and multiple processing boards **256** that support processing electronics. Each processing board **256** may include a location memory **258** (which may include geometry RAM, encoder RAM, location registers and control registers as noted below) and signal processors **260**. A location memory controller **262** (e.g., a general purpose CPU, microcontroller, PLD, or the like) also may be provided and includes a communication interface **264**.

[0033] The communication interface **264** establishes data exchange with a host system **266** over communication lines **268** (e.g., digital signal lines) and through a system cable **270**. Additionally, in an exemplary embodiment, the system cable **270** includes coaxial cables **272** that connect to the processing boards **256** to communicate transmit pulse waveforms to the transducer array **252** and communicate receive signals, after beamforming, to the host system **266**. The probe **250** also may include a connector **274**, through which the probe **250** connects to the host system **266**.

[0034] A clamp **276** may be provided to hold the transducer flex cables **254** against the processing boards **256**. The clamp **276** thereby aids in establishing electrical connectivity between the transducer flex cables **254** and the processing boards **256**. The clamp **276** may include a dowel pin **278** and a bolt **280**, although other implementations are also suitable.

[0035] The transducer array **252** is bonded onto the backing stack, as will be described in more detail below with regard to **FIG. 5**. The transducer flex cables **254** provide electrical signal connections through the backing stack. In one exemplary embodiment, there are forty-two transducer flex cables **254**, each with fifty signal connections. Thus, the transducer flex cables **254** support transmit and receive signal connections for as many as 2100 transducer elements in the transducer array **252**, although fewer may be used. For example, each processing board **256** may couple to six transducer flex cables **254**, and thereby includes signal connections for **300** transducer elements.

[0036] The processing boards **256** may, like the flex cables **254**, be formed from a flex material, such as, for example, polyimide, polyester, etc. The processing boards **256** include the processing electronics for the transducer array **252**, including the signal processors **260** that perform beamforming on the receive apertures in the transducer array **252**.

[0037] Each signal processor **260** may handle, for example, four receive apertures defined at selected spatial locations on the transducer array **252**. The receive apertures may be triangular apertures that include fifteen acoustic transducer elements arranged, for example, as a row of five elements above a row of four elements above a row of three elements above a row of two elements above a row of one element. Furthermore, each processing board **256** may include five signal processors **260**. Thus, in the receive direction, each processing board **256** may process twenty receive apertures, each including fifteen acoustic transducer elements.

[0038] For every ultrasound beam, the location memory controller **262** connects via digital signal lines **273** (e.g.,

carried by a separate flex cable) to each location memory 258 on each processing board 256. The location memory controller 262 communicates the spatial location information into each location memory 258 for each receive aperture processed by the signal processors 260 on the processing boards 256. The digital signal lines 273 may include, for example, a clock line for each processing board 256, a serial command data line for each processing board 256, two data lines (for a total of fourteen data lines) connected to each processing board 256, an output enable for one or more of the signal processors 260, and a test signal.

[0039] The location memory controller 262 communicates with the host system 266 over the digital signal lines 273 that may form part of, for example, a synchronous serial port. To that end, the communication interface 264 and digital signal lines 273 may implement a low voltage differential signal interface, for example, including a coaxial cable with a grounded shield and center signal wire. The location memory controller 262 includes a block of cache memory 275, for example, 1-8 MBytes of static random access memory (SRAM).

[0040] FIG. 5 shows one exemplary embodiment of the transducer array 252. The transducer array 252 includes piezoelectric ceramic 302 that converts electrical-to-acoustic and acoustic-to-electrical energy. The piezoelectric ceramic 302 is located within the center of the transducer array 252. On the signal side, the piezoelectric ceramic 302 is attached to a z-axis backing block 304 comprised of alternating layers of transducer flex cables 254 and acoustic absorbing material 308 bonded into the solid backing block 304.

[0041] The backing block 304 is cut in a direction perpendicular to the orientation of the transducer flex cables 254 thereby exposing the ends of the individual transducer flex cable 254 circuit traces 306 to provide for high density signal connection. The ceramic 302, an electrically conductive inner acoustic matching layer 310 (e.g., a metal filled graphite such as Antimony-Graphite), and the top surface of the backing block 304 are diced in one operation to form discrete acoustic transducer elements 312 centered over each of the flex circuit traces 306 in the transducer flex cables 254. Thus, there is a signal plane 313 on the z-axis backing block 304.

[0042] Each circuit trace 306 contacts the bottom, or signal side, of one transducer element 312. A ground metal layer 314 is coated onto one side of the outer acoustic matching layer 316, which may be formed from a plastic. This matching layer 316 is attached to the top of each element 312 to form a ground connection across the face of the transducer array 252. The outer matching layer 316 is partially diced to separate it into discrete elements, thereby improving the acceptable angle of the transducer element 312. In one exemplary embodiment, however, the dicing does not penetrate to the ground metal layer 314.

[0043] The electrical ground connection to each transducer element 312 is made via the outermost elements 318 in the transducer. A wraparound ground 320 on the ceramic 302 is also provided. Once the transducer array 252 is mounted into a scan head or head shell, a thin silicone protective facing may be applied.

[0044] It should be noted that different transducer arrays that may have different interconnections may be used as

desired or needed (e.g., based upon the probe type or application). For example, FIG. 5 shows an interconnection configuration suitable for arrays requiring an electrical interface of very high density (e.g., two-dimensional (2D) arrays). However, other types of arrays, for example, one-dimensional (1D) arrays, do not require electrical interfaces of this high density and other interconnection configurations may be more suitable. For example, as shown in FIG. 6, in a 1D array application, the 1D array includes a single transducer flex cable 254 wherein the circuit traces 306 contact the elements of the transducer array 252. The elements of the transducer array 252 are positioned adjacent each other as the circuit traces 306 on the transducer flex cable 254 are positioned adjacent each other. Similar configurations with a single transducer flex cable 254 may be used, for example, with 1.25D, 1.5D or 1.75D arrays.

[0045] FIGS. 7 and 8 illustrate an exemplary embodiment of the probe 250, and in particular, a volume imaging probe, having a transducer array 252 in communication with a host system 266 (shown in FIG. 4). The probe 250 includes a housing 330 having a first chamber 332 (e.g., a dry chamber) and a second chamber 334 (e.g., a wet chamber). The first chamber 332 and second chamber 334 may be formed as a single unit (e.g., unitary construction) or may be formed as separate units connected together (e.g. modular design). In an exemplary embodiment, the first chamber 332 is a dry or air chamber having contained therein drive means for mechanically controlling the transducer array 252 and communication means for electrically controlling the transducer array 252. The drive means generally includes a motor 336 (e.g., stepper motor) and a gear arrangement 338, such as a two-stage gear arrangement having a belt drive and a rope drive. The communication means generally includes the system cable 270 and a connection member 281 (e.g., two interconnection flexible printed circuit boards) having one or more communication lines and interconnected to the system cable 270 with a connection interface 283 to communicate with the host system 266 to drive the elements of the transducer array 252 (e.g., selectively activate the elements of the transducer array 252).

[0046] It should be noted that although the drive means and communication means are described herein having specific component parts, they are not so limited. For example, the drive means may have a different gear arrangement and the communication means may have different connection members or transmission lines.

[0047] In this exemplary embodiment, the second chamber 334 is a wet chamber (e.g., chamber having acoustic liquid therein) having contained therein transducer driving means for moving (e.g., rotating) the transducer array 252 and transducer control means for selectively driving elements of the transducer array 252 (e.g., the piezoelectric ceramics 302). The transducer driving means generally includes a drive shaft 360 in connection with a scan head housing 362, supported, for example, on brackets (not shown), that operates to move the transducer array 252 as part of a scan head 364 when driven by the drive means. A support member (not shown) also may be provided for supporting the scan head housing 362 and a biasing spring 366 may be provided, for example, to ensure proper tension on the drive means and transducer drive means. It should be

noted that an acoustic membrane **368** may be provided surrounding the scan head housing **362** and formed as part of the housing **330**.

[0048] The transducer control means generally includes a connection member **340** (e.g., four scan head flexible printed circuit boards) having one or more communication lines for connecting the system cable **270** and the transducer array **252** via the connection member **281**, and providing communication therebetween. In one exemplary embodiment, the connection members **281** and **340** are each formed from one or more flexible printed circuit boards **343** and **344**, respectively, and are interconnected via a rigid connection interface **345**, such as, for example, a rigid printed circuit board as described in more detail below. However, it should be noted that the connection members **281** and **340** may be formed of any suitable material and/or component parts as desired or needed. In general, connection members **281** and **340** are formed to have a flexibility/rigidity as desired or needed, for example, based upon the type of probe, location within the probe or application. For example, the elastic modulus or mean elastic modulus of the connection members **281** and **340** may be determined by the wiring layout of a printed circuit board portion as a result of the distribution of metal layers on the printed circuit board, which may be selected based upon the type of probe. Thus, the material flexibility/rigidity of the connection members **281** and **340** may be varied as desired or needed. In general, connection member **281** is formed such that it provides sufficient stability for connection to the system cable **270** while allowing positioning around other component parts (e.g., the motor **336**). In general, connection member **340** is formed such that it provides sufficient flexibility and durability to ensure proper functioning and/or operation of a probe (e.g., to ensure proper and reliable interconnection between the rigid connection interface **345** and a moving transducer array **252**).

[0049] In one exemplary embodiment, the rigid connection interface **345** forms part of a sealing member **346**, such as, for example, a wall (e.g., fluid impervious wall) between the first chamber **332** and second chamber **334**. The rigid connection interface **345** may be integrally formed with the sealing member **346** or may be provided in sealing engagement therewith, for example, using adhesive sealing (e.g., epoxy) or other sealing members (e.g., O-rings) as shown in FIG. 9. In the various exemplary embodiments, the rigid connection interface **345** and sealing member **346** are a single unitary structure. It should be noted that additional members (e.g., a frame **391** having a clamp **393**) may be provided in connection with the sealing member **346** to provide mechanical stability for bearing mechanical loads that may be applied to the rigid connection interface **345** and to reduce pressure on the sealing member **346**. For example, a mechanical load may be applied to the rigid connection interface **345** by the flexible printed circuit board **344** or an interconnection member **348**. The mechanical load may result, for example, from the movement of the flexible printed circuit board **344** as described herein, by a differential pressure between the first chamber **332** and second chamber **334**, and/or by tensions of the system cable **270** that are induced into the rigid connection interface **345** via the interconnection member **348**, among others.

[0050] At a first portion **350** (e.g., first end) of the connection member **340**, the connection member **340** is con-

nected to the rigid connection interface **345**, which is connected to the connection member **281** via the interconnection member **348** (e.g., board-to-board connector). At a second portion **352** (e.g., second end) of the connection member **340**, the connection member **340** is connected to the transducer array **252**. It should be noted that additional or different connectors may be used to connect to the first portion **350** and second portion **352**. The connection members **281** and **340** thereby provide communication between the transducer array **252** and the host system **266** via the system cable **270**. Additional or different control members also may be provided, such as, for example, multiplexing circuits connected to the transducer array **252** for controlling the operation of the elements of the transducer array **252**.

[0051] It should be noted that although the transducer driving means and transducer control means are described herein having specific component parts, they are not so limited. For example, the transducer driving means may have a different shaft arrangement and the transducer control means may have different control circuits or transmission lines. It also should be noted that additional or different component parts may be provided in connection with the probe **250** as needed or desired, and/or based upon the particular type and application of the probe **250**. For example, a lens covering the transducer array **252** may be provided based upon the type of probe **250**.

[0052] In an exemplary embodiment, and as shown in FIG. 10, the first chamber **332** and second chamber **334** are separated by the sealing member **346** (e.g., fluid impervious wall), with the rigid connection interface **345** forming a part of the sealing member **346**. The sealing member **346** provides a liquid tight sealing arrangement between the first chamber **332** and the second chamber **334** and may be integrally formed as part of one of the first and second chambers **332** and **334**. One or more slots or openings **370** may be provided as part of the sealing member **346** to allow for passage therethrough, for example, of a portion of the drive means (e.g., rope portion of a rope drive). The slots or openings **370** are sealed, for example, with a sealing gasket, epoxy or other suitable sealing member to ensure proper sealing between the first chamber **332** and second chamber **334**. It should be noted that the connection member **281** may include a connector end **271** for connection to the interconnection member **348**.

[0053] Thus, as shown in FIG. 11, the transducer array **252** is connected via the connection members **281** and **340** to the system cable **270**. The system cable **270** then connects to the host system **266**.

[0054] The connection members **281** and **340** allow for communication with and control of the operation of the elements of a moving transducer array **252** (e.g., selectively driving the elements of the transducer array **252**) as shown in FIGS. 12-14. The connection members **281** and **340** with the rigid connection interface **345** also provide an improved sealing arrangement and more modular probe design (e.g., two chambers removably connectable). It should be noted that the transducer array **252** may be configured for operation in different modes, such as, for example, a 1D, 1.25D, 1.5D, 1.75D and 2D mode of operation.

[0055] While the invention has been described in terms of various specific embodiments, those skilled in the art will recognize that the invention can be practiced with modification within the spirit and scope of the claims.

What is claimed is:

1. An ultrasound probe comprising:
 - a first chamber;
 - a second chamber;
 - a sealing member between the first and second chambers;
 - a flexible connection member in each of the first and second chambers; and
 - a rigid connection interface forming at least part of the sealing member and connecting the flexible connection member in the first chamber with the flexible connection member in the second chamber.
2. An ultrasound probe in accordance with claim 1 wherein the sealing member comprises a wall between the first and second chambers.
3. An ultrasound probe in accordance with claim 1 wherein the first chamber is a dry chamber and the second chamber is a wet chamber.
4. An ultrasound probe in accordance with claim 1 wherein each of the flexible connection members comprises at least one flexible printed circuit board.
5. An ultrasound probe in accordance with claim 1 wherein the rigid connection interface comprises a rigid printed circuit board.
6. An ultrasound probe in accordance with claim 1 wherein the rigid connection interface is integrally formed with the sealing member.
7. An ultrasound probe in accordance with claim 1 wherein the rigid connection interface is sealingly engaged with the sealing member.
8. An ultrasound probe in accordance with claim 1 further comprising a connection interface in the first chamber to connect the flexible connection member in the first chamber to a system cable.
9. An ultrasound probe in accordance with claim 1 wherein the sealing member comprise at least one opening.
10. An ultrasound probe in accordance with claim 1 wherein the first and second chambers are formed in a unitary construction.
11. An ultrasound probe in accordance with claim 1 wherein the first and second chambers are formed in a modular construction.
12. An ultrasound probe in accordance with claim 1 wherein the ultrasound probe is configured to operate in at least one of a 1D, 1.25D, 1.5D, 1.75D and 2D mode of operation.
13. An ultrasound probe in accordance with claim 1 wherein the flexible connection member within the wet chamber comprises a plurality of flexible printed circuit boards and the flexible connection member in the second chamber comprises a plurality of flexible printed circuit boards.
14. An ultrasound probe in accordance with claim 1 further comprising a bracket having a clamp for reducing a load on the flexible connection member in the second chamber.
15. An ultrasound probe comprising:
 - a dry chamber having drive means for mechanically controlling at least one transducer and communication means for electrically controlling the at least one transducer, the communication means including a first flexible connection member; and
 - a wet chamber having a second flexible connection member connected to the first flexible connection member with a rigid connection interface, the rigid connection interface forming at least part of a wall between the wet and dry chambers.
16. An ultrasound probe in accordance with claim 15 wherein the communication means further comprises a system cable.
17. An ultrasound probe in accordance with claim 15 wherein the drive means comprises a motor and gear arrangement.
18. An ultrasound probe in accordance with claim 15 wherein the first and second flexible connection members each comprise at least one flexible printed circuit board.
19. An ultrasound probe in accordance with claim 15 wherein the dry and wet chambers are configured to connect in a modular arrangement.
20. An ultrasound probe in accordance with claim 15 wherein the rigid connection interface comprises at least one rigid printed circuit board.
21. A method for controlling an ultrasound probe, the method comprising:
 - communicating between at least one transducer array and a host system via a first flexible connection member and a second flexible connection member, the first and second flexible connection members connected by a rigid connection interface forming at least part of a wall between a wet chamber having the at least one transducer array and the second flexible connection member therein and a dry chamber having a system cable and the first flexible connection member therein, the system cable connected to the host system and the second flexible connection member connected to the at least one transducer array; and
 - controlling elements of the at least one transducer array with the communicating.
22. A method in accordance with claim 21 wherein the flexible connection members each comprise at least one flexible printed circuit board and the rigid connection interface comprises at least one rigid printed circuit board.

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专利名称(译)	连接装置和用于控制超声探头的方法		
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[标]申请(专利权)人(译)	通用电气公司		
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摘要(译)

提供了一种用于控制超声探头的连接装置和方法。超声探头包括第一腔室，第二腔室，在第一腔室和第二腔室之间的密封构件以及在第一腔室和第二腔室中的每个腔室内的柔性连接构件。超声探头还包括刚性连接界面，该刚性连接界面形成密封构件的至少一部分并且将第一腔室中的柔性连接构件与第二腔室中的柔性连接构件连接。

