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(54) **MAGNETIC RESONANCE IMAGING USING A REDUCED NUMBER OF ECHO ACQUISITIONS**

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(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.

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(51) **Int. Cl.**⁷ **G01V 3/00**

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **324/318; 324/322; 600/421**

(58) **Field of Search** 324/309, 307, 324/318, 322, 306, 314; 600/421, 422

(57) **ABSTRACT**

According to one embodiment of the invention, an apparatus for magnetic resonance imaging is provided. The apparatus includes a detection surface defined by a plurality of sensors. Each of the sensors is operable to receive image information concerning a particular portion of a target surface by substantially confining to the each of the sensors magnetic flux associated with the particular portion of the target surface. The detection surface is operable to acquire all image information for generating a magnetic resonance image resembling the target surface by receiving, at the each of the sensors, a single echo signal from the particular portion of the target surface that correspondingly underlies the each of the sensors. The magnetic resonance image has a resolution of at least sixty-four pixels by a number of pixels equal to M. M is an integer.

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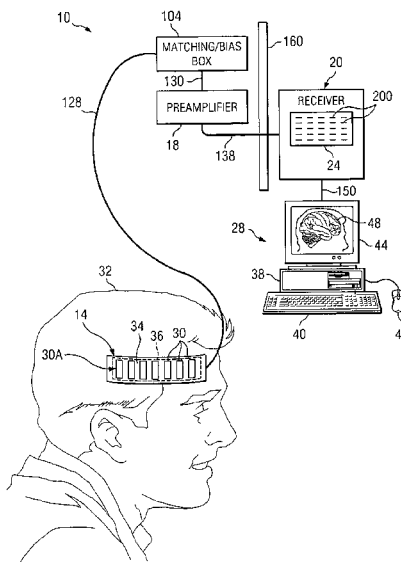
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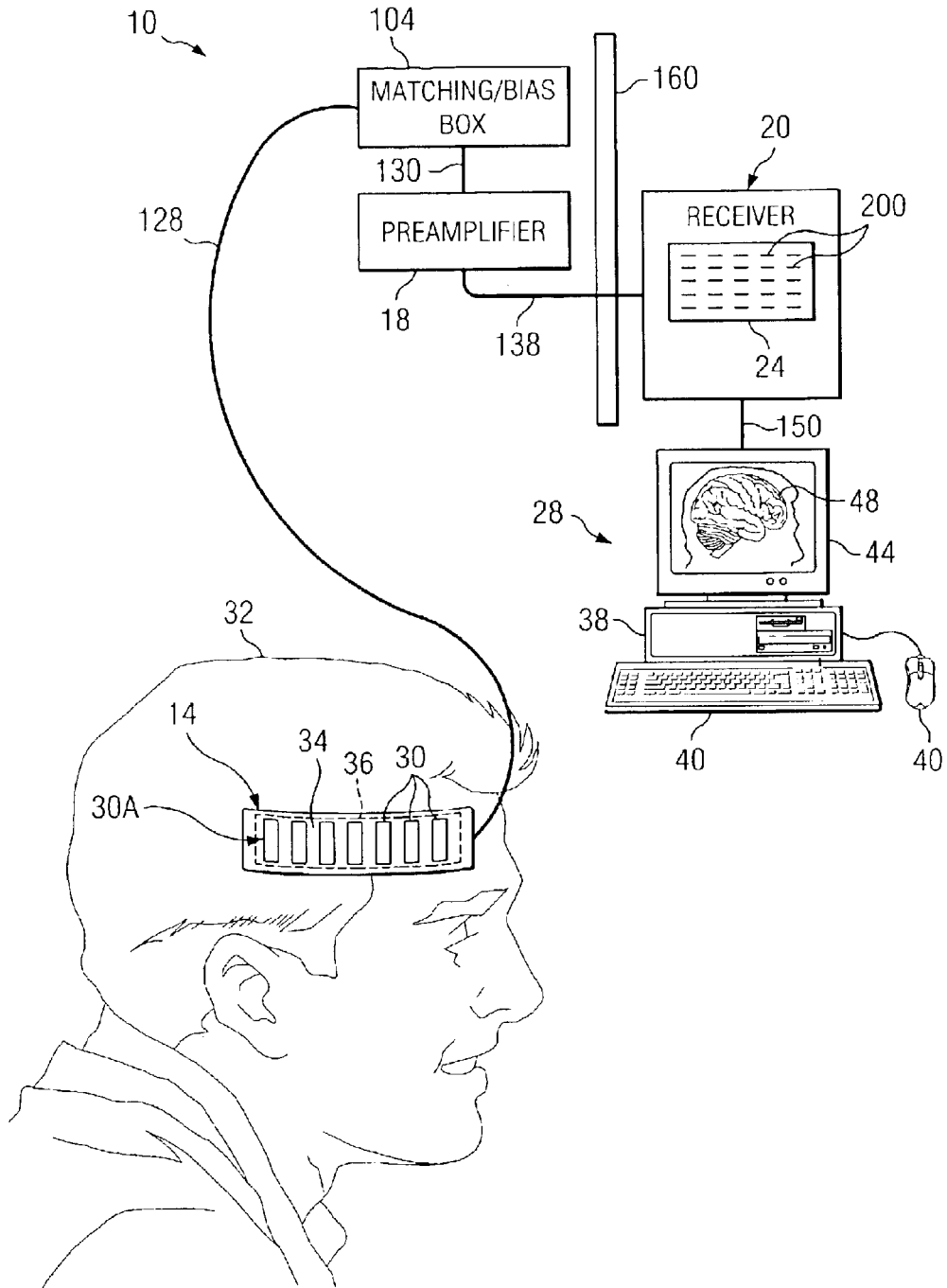


FIG. 1

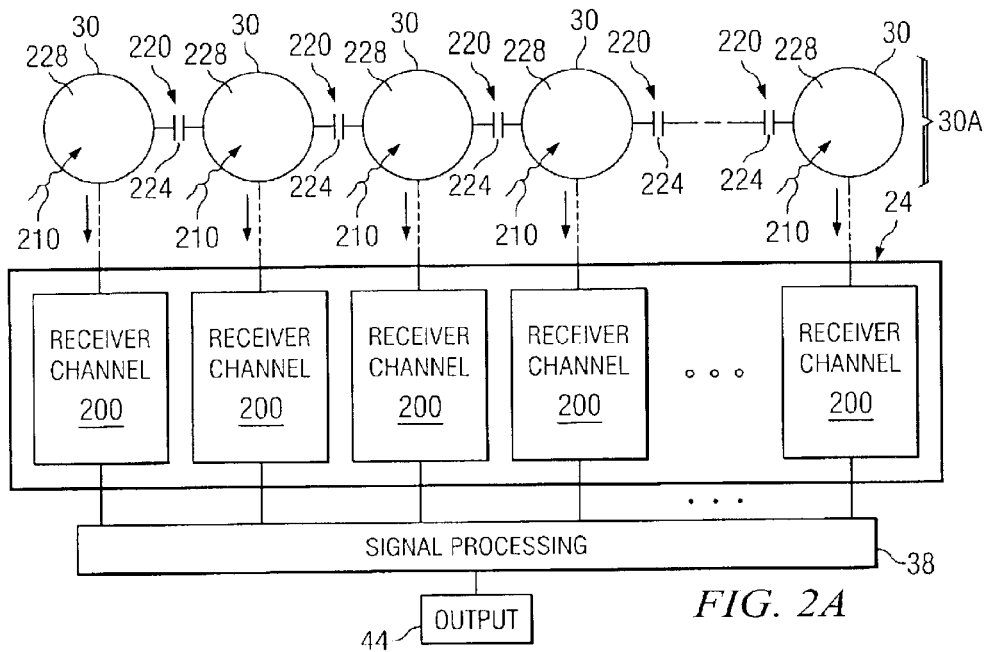


FIG. 2A

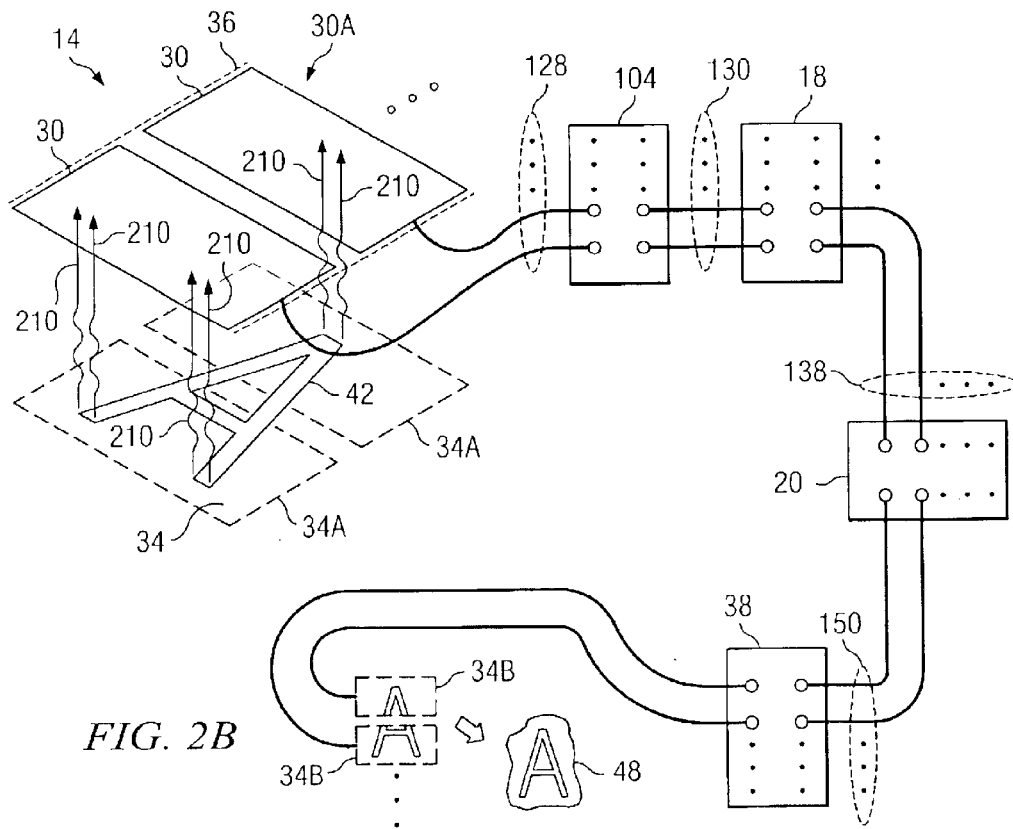
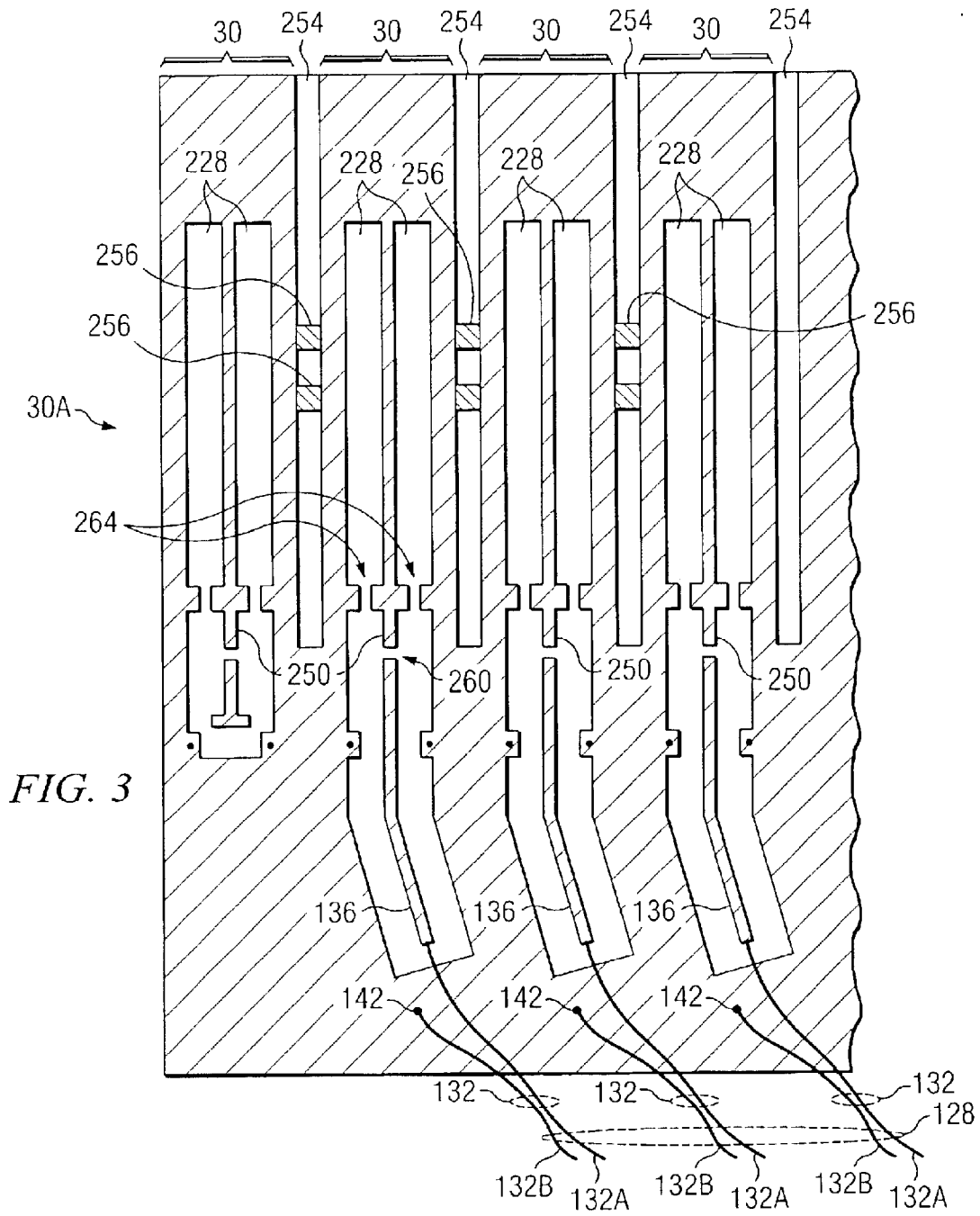


FIG. 2B



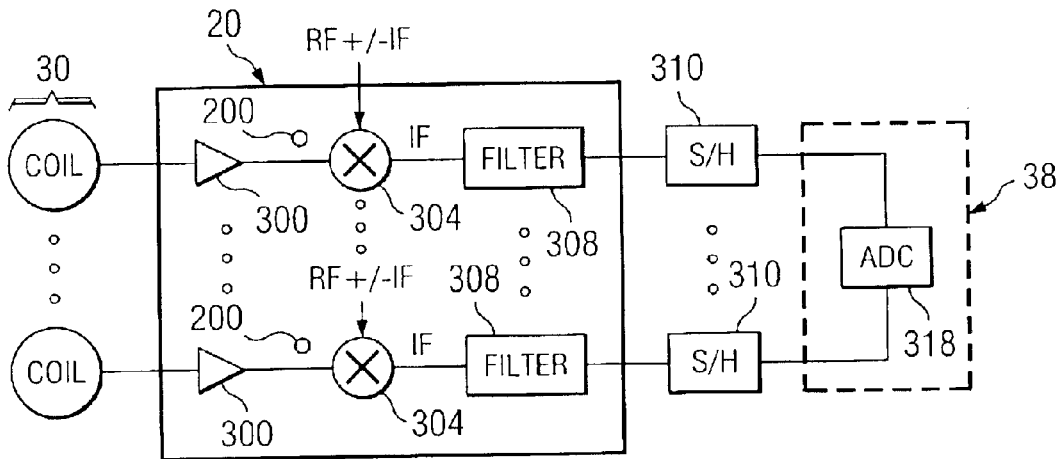


FIG. 4A

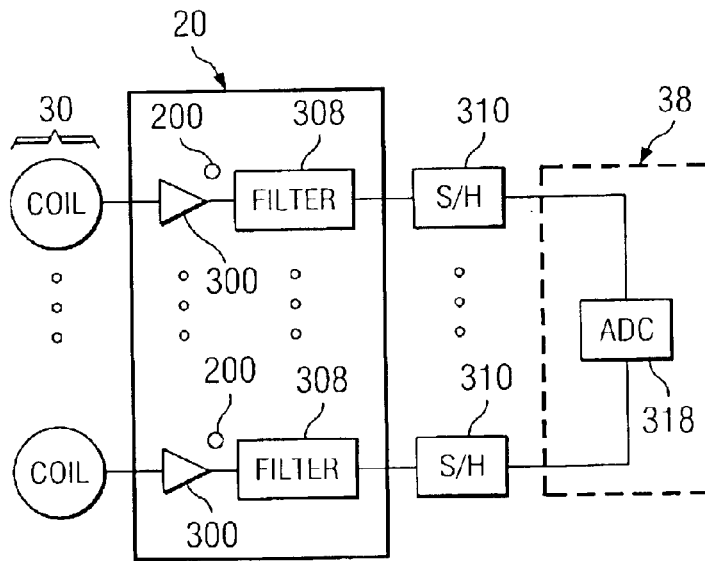


FIG. 4B

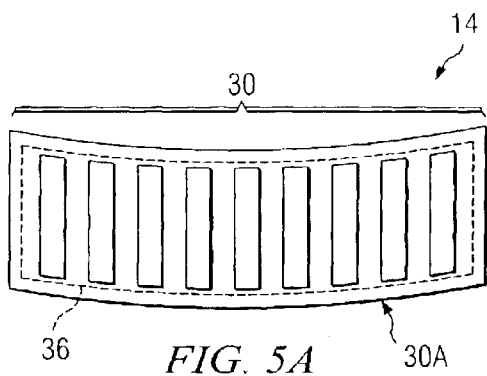


FIG. 5A

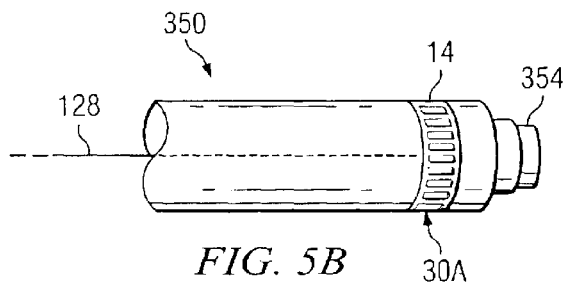


FIG. 5B

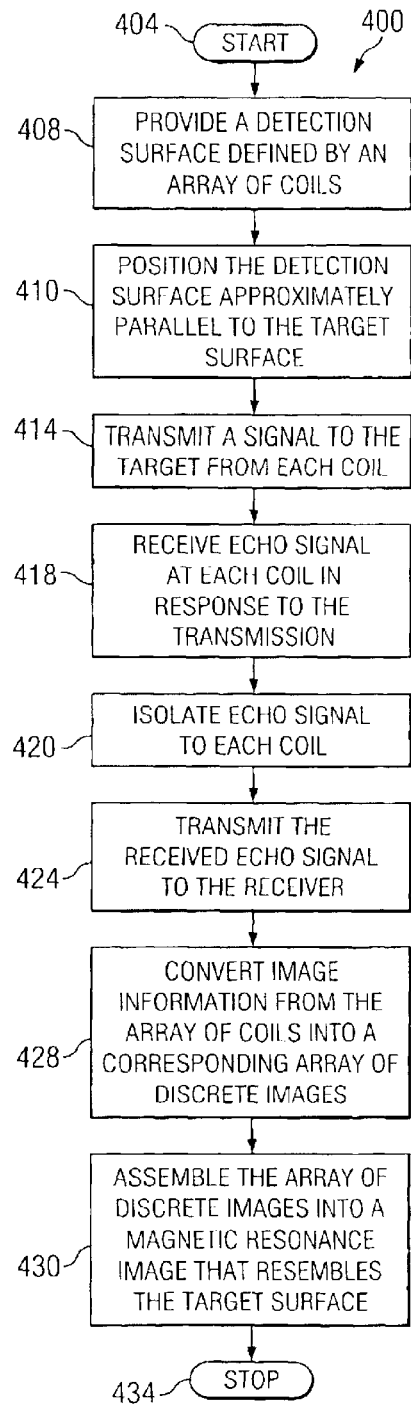


FIG. 6

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MAGNETIC RESONANCE IMAGING USING A REDUCED NUMBER OF ECHO ACQUISITIONS

RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims the benefit under 35 U.S.C. §119 (e) of the filing date of U.S. Provisional Application Serial No. 60/348,154, filed Nov. 6, 2001 entitled Radio-Frequency Encoding (RFE) Probes For Magnetic Resonance Imaging, and U.S. Provisional Application Serial No. 60/346,045, filed Nov. 6, 2001 entitled Receiver For Detecting Signals From An Array Of Sensors In Magnetic Resonance Imaging And Spectroscopy.

GOVERNMENT RIGHTS

This invention was made with Government support under U.S. Army Grant No. DAMD 17-97-2-7016. The government has certain rights in this invention.

TECHNICAL FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates generally to the field of imagery and more particularly to magnetic resonance imaging using a reduced number of echo acquisitions.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Magnetic Resonance Imaging ("MRI") is a widely used imaging technique. For example, MRI may be used to obtain an image of a patient's tumor, lesion, or other internal feature without performing invasive medical procedures. Recent advances in MRI make possible new medical procedures, such as magnetic resonance guided intervention procedures and patient interactive diagnosis. However, the practical application of these procedures using MRI has been limited because of slow imaging speed.

Imaging speed depends on the number of sensors used to acquire image information and the time required to perform a required repetition of scans to produce an image of acceptable resolution. A number of different MRI techniques have been developed to improve imaging speed by increasing the number of sensors and/or reducing the time of scan repetition by increasing the rate of scan. However, the points to which these measures may be taken to improve the overall imaging speed are limited for a number of reasons. For example, as the number of sensors increases, the difficulty of decoupling the sensors from one another for independent data collection also increases. Up to sixteen sensors may have been successfully used to simultaneously acquire image information. As the scan rate is increased, the probability of bio-hazards, such as unintended neural stimulation and patient heating due to the pulse power of the radio frequency signal, may also increase. These limitations have hindered further improvement of imaging speed for MRI.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to one embodiment of the invention, an apparatus for magnetic resonance imaging is provided. The apparatus includes a detection surface defined by a plurality of sensors. Each of the sensors is operable to receive image information concerning a particular portion of a target surface by substantially confining to the each of the sensors magnetic flux associated with the particular portion of the target surface. The detection surface is operable to acquire all image information for generating a magnetic resonance image resembling the target surface by receiving, at the each of the sensors, a single echo signal from the particular

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portion of the target surface that correspondingly underlies the each of the sensors. The magnetic resonance image has a resolution of at least sixty-four pixels by a number of pixels equal to M. M is an integer.

5 Some embodiments of the invention provide numerous technical advantages. Some embodiments may benefit from some, none, or all of these advantages. For example, according to one embodiment, an acceptable magnetic resonance image may be produced using fewer number of scans by employing a number of sensors equal to one dimension of the image resolution that is deemed acceptable for a particular use. In another embodiment, an image of a surface that is parallel to a detection surface may be obtained by arranging sixty-four or more sensors side-by-side to define a detection surface that is approximately parallel to a target surface. In another embodiment, an image having an acceptable resolution may be generated using only a single echo signal acquisition by arranging sixty-four or more decoupled sensors in an array to define a detection surface.

20 Other technical advantages may be readily ascertained by one of skill in the art.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

25 Reference is now made to the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein like reference numbers represent like parts, in which:

FIG. 1 is a schematic diagram illustrating one embodiment of a magnetic resonance imaging ("MRI") system that may benefit from the teachings of the present invention;

30 FIG. 2A is a block diagram illustrating one embodiment of an array of sensors and a corresponding array of receiver channels shown in FIG. 1;

35 FIG. 2B is a schematic diagram illustrating exemplary operational details of the system shown in FIG. 1 and the array of sensors shown in FIG. 2A;

40 FIG. 3 is a schematic diagram illustrating additional details of one embodiment of the array of sensors shown in FIG. 2A:

FIGS. 4A and 4B are block diagrams illustrating some embodiments of a receiver channel shown in FIG. 1;

45 FIGS. 5A and 5B are perspective views illustrating some embodiments of a detection surface shown in FIG. 1; and

FIG. 6 is a flowchart illustrating one embodiment of a method for MRI.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EXAMPLE EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION

Embodiments of the invention are best understood by referring to FIGS. 1 through 6 of the drawings, like numerals being used for like and corresponding parts of the various drawings.

55 FIG. 1 illustrates one embodiment of a magnetic resonance imaging ("MRI") system 10 that may benefit from the teachings of the present invention. System 10 comprises a sensor system 14, a matching/bias box 104, a preamplifier 18, a receiver system 20, and an image display system 28. Sensor system 14 comprises one or more sensors 30 operable to detect radio frequency ("RF") signals that echo from a surface 34 of a target 32, such as the head of a patient; however, sensors 30 are operable to detect echo signals from any other target surfaces. Receiver system 20 comprises a bank 24 of one or more channels 200 that are operable to receive the signals transmitted by respective sensors 30 in sensor system 14. Image display system 28 comprises a

computer **38**, one or more input devices **40**, and one or more output device **44** that are operable to display an MRI image **48**. Output device **44** may be a monitor, a printer, or any other device that allows a user to view MRI image **48**. Preamplifier **18** amplifies the signals received from sensor system **14** to a level that allows receiver system **20** to process the signals so that computer **38** may digitize the signals. Matching/bias matching/bias box **104** is operable to provide a direct current (“DC”) bias for varactors on sensor system **14** and perform series capacitive matching for each of the sensors on sensor system **14**. “Varactors” refer to voltage controlled diodes that serve as variable capacitors tunable by a DC voltage. In place of varactors, variable capacitors may also be used, in some embodiments.

Sensor system **14** is coupled to matching/bias box **104** by a line **128**. Matching/bias box **104** is coupled to preamplifier **18** by a lines **130**. Preamplifier **18** is coupled to receiver system **20** by line **138**. Receiver system **20** is coupled to computer **38** by line **150**. Sensor system **14**, matching/bias box **104**, and preamplifier **18** may be separated from receiver system **20** and computer **38** by a magnet room wall **160** that shields receiver system **20** and computer **38** from the signals transmitted and received by sensor system **14**.

In operation, sensor system **14** is positioned over target surface **34**. Then sensors **30** of sensor system **14** transmit RF signals to target surface **34**. In response, sensors **30** of sensor system **14** receive respective echo signals indicative of image information of the respective portions of target surface **34** underlying the respective sensors **30**. The process of transmitting an RF signal and receiving an echo signal is referred to as a “scan” or “echo acquisition.” After the scan, each of echo signal is transmitted to matching/bias box **104**. Matching/bias box **104** provides a DC bias for varactors on sensor system **14** and performs series capacitive matching for each sensor **30** of sensor system **14**. The processed signals are transmitted from matching/bias box **104** to preamplifier **18**. Preamplifier **18** amplifies the received signals and transmits the amplified signals to receiver system **20**. After receiving the amplified signals, receiver system **20** processes the amplified signals to generate an image that may be digitized and displayed by image display system **28**. Image display system digitizes the image signals from receiver system **20**. The digitized signals may be displayed using output unit **44** of image display system **28**.

A conventional MRI system generates a magnetic resonance (“MR”) image having an acceptable resolution by performing multiple echo acquisitions. An acceptable resolution of an image may be expressed as $N \times M$, where N and M are integers indicating the number of pixels in particular directions, such as the x and the y directions on a two-dimensional plane. M is an integer that is generally an integer multiple of N ; however, M may be any number. A pixel refers to a basic unit of an image, such as a dot, that forms the image. The physical dimension of a pixel depends on the particular dot pitch that is selected by one skilled in the art. Although the definition of an acceptable resolution or an acceptable image may vary depending on the particular use of the image, a resolution of 64×64 pixels is generally considered as a minimum standard of acceptable image resolution. Conventionally, multiple echo acquisitions may be performed by repeatedly transmitting RF signals in the presence of a phase encoding gradient having different amplitudes to a target surface so that a sensor system repeatedly receives different sets of echo signals indicating different sets of image information. The repetition of echo acquisition allows such a system to acquire image information for one direction (the direction associated with N , for

example) of a two dimensional image by using phase encoding gradients; information for the other direction (the direction associated with M , for example) is acquired using magnetic field gradients.

To improve imaging speed, the rate of scan repetition may be increased to shorten the total time of scan repetition. However, increasing the rate of scan repetition may produce adverse physiological effects associated with repeated RF pulses and rapidly switched frequency encoding gradient. Examples of physiological effects include patient heating and neural stimulation. A number of different parallel imaging techniques, such as SMASH and SENSE, take another approach to the improvement of imaging speed by increasing the number of sensors, which decreases the number of scan repetitions required to generate an acceptable image. By using an array of up to eight sensors to simultaneously perform echo acquisition, imaging speed has been accelerated by a factor of up to eight. However, even with eight sensors, these techniques require numerous echo acquisitions to generate an image that has an acceptable resolution.

The teachings of the invention recognizes that the point to which the number of sensors may be increased is limited by the difficulties associated with decoupling the sensors from each other while positioning the sensors within a required field of view (“FOV”). FOV refers to an area defined by sensors. The area, also referred to as a “detection surface,” is positioned on sensor system **14** and corresponds with the portion of the target surface that is imaged. Because sensors are positioned within a FOV having a limited size, an increased number of sensors would crowd the FOV, which increases the difficulty associated with decoupling. Thus, the use of multiple echo acquisition remains as a necessity for many MRI techniques.

According to some embodiments of the present invention, a method, apparatus, and system are provided that allow an image having an acceptable resolution to be generated using a single echo acquisition. This is advantageous in some embodiments of the invention because an acceptable MR image may be produced using a fewer number of scans by employing a number of sensors equal to one dimension of the image resolution that is deemed acceptable for a particular use. In another embodiment, an image of a surface that is parallel to a detection surface may be obtained by arranging sixty-four or more sensors side-by-side to define a detection surface that is approximately parallel to a target surface. In another embodiment, an image having an acceptable resolution may be generated using only a single echo signal acquisition by arranging sixty-four or more decoupled sensors in an array to define a detection surface. Additional details of example embodiments of the invention are described in greater detail below in conjunction with portions of FIG. **1** and FIGS. **2A** through **6**.

Referring back to FIG. **1**, in one embodiment of the invention, a number of sensors **30** equaling N is positioned in an array **30A** within a particular FOV, thus defining a detection surface **36**. For example, where 64×256 resolution is acceptable, sixty-four sensors **30** may be positioned as array **30A** within FOV **36**. In one embodiment, N number of sensors **30** may be positioned within FOV **36** by using elongated, planar coils as sensors **30**. Sensors **30** are also referred to herein as coils **30**; however, any other types of sensors suitable for MRI may be used as sensor **30**. In one embodiment, elongated planar coils **30** are positioned side-by-side and substantially parallel to each other to maximize the number of coils **30** within FOV **36**. In one embodiment, each coil **30** is separated by a gap to enhance decoupling of each coil **30** from other coils **30**. In one embodiment, a

capacitor may be positioned across each gap to enhance the decoupling. In one embodiment, planar pairs may be used as coils **30**. Additional details of planar coils are provided below in conjunction with FIG. 3. By placing N number of coils within FOV **36** and arranging them in array **30A**, each coil **30** is essentially responsible for only one pixel of the generated image and not required to perform multiple echo acquisitions. Thus, the need to use phase encoding gradients for coil **30** to detect image information may be eliminated, which substantially reduces imaging time without adverse physiological side effects. In one embodiment, each coil **30** may be used to transmit RF signals to the respective portions of target surface **34**; however, RF signals may be transmitted using other devices. For example, a transmit coil (not explicitly shown) that encompasses array **30A** of coils **30** may be used to send RF signals to target surface **34**.

In one embodiment, sensor system **14** may have a planar profile, allowing sensor system **14** to acquire image information from a target surface that is approximately parallel to the profile of sensor system **14**. Stated in other words, any surface or cross-sectional plane of the target that is approximately parallel to detection surface **36** of sensor system **14** may be imaged. For example, if an image of a patient's brain surface is needed, then detection surface **36** of sensor system **14** may be formed as a curve having approximately the same curvature as the curvature of the brain surface. Then detection surface **36** is positioned over the portion of the brain surface that needs to be imaged so that the detection surface **36** is approximately parallel to the portion of the brain surface. In another example where an image of the inner wall of a patient's throat is needed, sensor system **14** may be formed into a cylinder having an approximately same curvature as the inner wall of the throat. Then the sensor system **14** may be inserted into the throat so that detection surface **36** is within the throat and approximately parallel to the inner wall of the throat. By positioning detection surface **36** approximately parallel to the inner wall of the throat, the inner wall of the throat may be imaged. Some embodiments of sensor system **14** having a curved profile and cylindrical profile are described below in conjunction with FIGS. **5A** and **5B**, respectively.

To give sensor system **14** a planar profile, coils **30** may be printed using techniques analogous to those used for manufacturing printed circuit boards. Sensors **30** may be printed on a DUPONT PYRALUX LF substrate, a flexible substrate with a thickness of less than 100 microns, in one embodiment; however, substrates having different physical dimensions that are formed from other suitable materials may also be used. DUPONT PYRALUX LF substrate is available from Dupont Corporation.

Referring again to FIG. 1, in one embodiment where N equals 64, sensor system **14** comprises array **30A** of sixty-four decoupled coils **30**. To accommodate the sixty-four coils **30**, matching/bias box **104**, preamplifier **18**, receiver system **20**, and data acquisition computer **38** each comprises a corresponding sixty-four channels. In some embodiments, receiver system **20** may include computer **38** as a part of receiver system **20**. Receiver system **20** may also be referred to as a receiver. In some embodiments, multiple units of matching/bias boxes **104**, preamplifiers **18**, and receivers **20** each having less than sixty-four channels may be used to provide the respective sixty-four channels. For example, two thirty-two channel matching/bias boxes **104**, two thirty-two channel preamplifiers **18**, and two thirty-two channel receivers **20** may be used to provide a total of sixty-four channels, respectively. Also, two thirty-two channel analog/digital converter boards (not explicitly shown) for computer **38**

may be used so that computer **38** may provide a total of sixty-four channels. Although the components **104**, **18**, **20**, and **38** of MRI system **10** are described as configured for using sensor system **14** having sixty-four coils **30**, these components **104**, **18**, **20**, and **38** may be configured for any other number of coils **30** by including enough channels in each of matching/bias box **104**, preamplifier **18**, receiver system **20**, and computer **38** to establish a one-to-one correspondence between each channel and each coil **30**. For example, where N number of coils **30** are used, components **104**, **18**, **20**, and **38** each has N number of channels.

In one embodiment, as shown in FIG. 1, matching/bias box **104** is a component separate from sensor system **14** to enhance the planar profile of sensor system **14** and/or reduce the cost of making sensor system **14**; however, in some embodiments where sensor system **14** has the suitable circuitry for tuning, matching/bias box **104** may be omitted. In one embodiment, receiver system **20** may process signals received from coils **30** to enhance resolution, by either making one or more echo acquisitions or by accounting for the reception pattern of each loop of each coil **30** to obtain a super-resolution.

In one embodiment, line **128** is a collection of transmission lines where a particular transmission line couples a particular coil **30** of sensor system **14** to a corresponding channel of matching/bias box **104**. Line **130** is a collection of transmission lines where a particular transmission line couples a particular channel of matching/bias box **104** to a corresponding channel of preamplifier **18**. In one embodiment, GORE Ribbon-AX cables may be used as lines **128** and **130**; however, other suitable cables may also be used. GORE Ribbon-AX cables are available from W. L. Gore corporation. Line **138** is a collection of cables where a particular transmission line couples a particular channel of preamplifier **18** to a corresponding channel of receiver system **20**. In one embodiment, a bundle of RG-174 coaxial cables may be used as line **138**; however, other suitable cables may be used. RG-174 coaxial cables are available from Allied Electronics corporation.

FIG. 2A is a block diagram illustrating one embodiment of array **30A** of coils **30** and channel bank **24** of FIG. 1. Coil **30** may be any suitable sensor. Each coil **30** is coupled to a particular receiver channel **200** of bank **24**. Although coil **30** is shown in FIG. 2A as having one simple loop that defines an opening **228**, coil **30** may comprise more than one loop. In one embodiment, a single transmission line or flat strip may be used as a loop of coil **30**. In one embodiment, planar pairs may be used as coils **30**. Additional details of planar pairs are described below in conjunction with FIG. 3. In one embodiment, N number of coils **30** are positioned side-by-side in array **30A**. For example, as shown in FIG. 2A, simple loops of coils **30** may be positioned side-by-side so that the respective surfaces defined by openings **228** are approximately parallel to target surface **34**; however, in some embodiments, simple loops of coil **30** may be positioned side-by-side so that the respective surfaces defined by openings **228** are perpendicular to target surface **34**. Coil **30** may be formed from any suitable conductive material for receiving electromagnetic signals. For example, coil **30** may be formed from copper. Receiver channels **200** are coupled to computer **38** for processing and digitizing the image signals so that output unit **44** may display an MRI image, such as image **48**.

To lower the probability of generating erroneous image information, each coil **30** is decoupled from other coils **30**. "Decoupling", also referred to as "isolation," refers to minimizing the measure of the voltage produced at the

terminals of one coil **30** due to a current in another coil **30**. This parameter may be quantified as S_{12} . In some embodiments, S_{12} is less than -20 dB; however, coils **30** may be considered as “decoupled” from each other at values as high as -15 dB. Depending on the particular design of an MRI system, other values of S_{12} may also render coils **30** as sufficiently decoupled. In one embodiment, to decouple the coils **30**, a gap **220** is positioned between each coil **30**. In one embodiment, a capacitor **224** may be positioned across each gap **220** to further enhance the isolation of coils **30**. Other suitable methods of isolation, such as the use of planar pairs as coils **30**, may also be used in conjunction with coils **30**. In some embodiments, gap **220** and/or capacitor **224** may be omitted.

In an illustrative operation, an electromagnetic signal **210** indicating image information of a particular portion of target surface **34** is received when signal **210** travels through opening **228** defined by a loop of coil **30**. Upon receiving signal **210**, the magnetic portion of the electromagnetic signal **210** generates a current indicating the image information. The current is transmitted to a corresponding receiver channel **200**. Because of the isolation features, such as gap **220** and capacitor **224**, only a minimal measure of voltage is produced at the terminals of other coils **30** due to the current generated at the coil **30**.

FIG. **2B** is a schematic diagram illustrating additional operational details of sensor system **14** and system **10**, shown in FIGS. **2A** and **1**, respectively. Only two coils **30** are shown in FIG. **2B** for illustrative purposes; however, N number of coils **30** may be in array **30A** to form detection surface **36**. As shown in FIG. **2B**, each coil **30** in array **30A** is responsible for a “strip” of information corresponding to a portion **34A** of target surface **34** that underlies the coil **30**. For illustrative purposes, a letter “A” is shown on target surface **34** as an example feature. To receive the corresponding strip of image information, each coil **30** receives one echo signal, which is depicted as signal **210**. The information along the strip may be frequency encoded in a standard manner. Then the received strips of image information from coils **30** are transmitted over their respectively corresponding transmission lines of line **128** to matching/bias box **104** for processing. Then the processed strips of information are transmitted from matching/bias box **104** to preamplifier **18** over their respectively corresponding transmission lines of line **130** for amplification. Then the amplified signals indicating the strips of information are transmitted from preamplifier **18** to receiver system **20** over their respectively corresponding transmission lines of line **138** for processing. The processed strips of information are transmitted from receiver system **20** to computer **38** over their respectively corresponding transmission lines of line **150** for digitization. Computer **38** digitizes the received strips of information from the respective coils **30** into discrete images **34B**. One discrete image **34B** shows the upper half of the letter “A,” while the other discrete image **34B** shows the lower half of the letter “A.” Then computer **38** assembles the discrete images **34B** into MR image **48** according to the relative order of the coils **30** in array **30A**. Rather than forming discrete images **34B**, some embodiments of the invention may arrange the respective image information according to the relative order of the coils **30** in array **30A**, then convert all of the information at the same time into MR image **48**. In these embodiments, discrete images **34B** may not be formed.

FIG. **3** is a schematic diagram illustrating additional details of one embodiment of array **30A** of coils **30** shown in FIG. **2A**. As shown in FIG. **3**, some embodiments of coil

30 defines two separate, elongated loops, as indicated by two openings **228** of each coil **30**. Using coils **30** having elongated loops is advantageous in some embodiments because the number of coils **30** that may be positioned within FOV **36** (shown in FIG. **1**) is increased. In one embodiment, the loops of each coil **30** share a common conductor **250**; however, common conductor **250** may be omitted. In one embodiment, the loops of each coil **30** are planar. Coil **30** having two planar loops that share a common conductor is referred to as a “planar pair.” Using planar pair coils **30** is advantageous in some embodiments because they are inherently easier to decouple. Another advantage of using planar pair coils **30** in array **30A** is that it is inherently unbalanced with respect to ground, and thus does not require a balun needed in standard MRI coils. “Balun” refers to a balanced-to-unbalanced converter, which is an external circuitry that aids in decoupling coil **30** from one another.

In one embodiment, a particular transmission line **132** of line **128** may be coupled to each coil **30**. Each transmission line comprises a signal line **132A** and a ground line **132B**. For each coil **30**, signal line **132A** is coupled to a node **136** that is separated from common conductor **250** by a gap **260**. Each ground line **132B** of each transmission line **132** may be coupled to any portion of the body of sensor system **14**, such as a node **142**. In one embodiment where the circuitry for tuning sensor system **14** is located in matching/bias box **104** to make the circuitry a component that is separate from sensor system **14**, gap **260** may be filled with a conductive material, such as copper. In one embodiment where the circuitry for tuning is a part of sensor system (which may allow matching/bias box **104** to be omitted, in some embodiments), capacitors may be used to bridge gaps **260** and **264**.

In one embodiment, gap **254** separates coils **30** from one another for enhanced decoupling. Decoupling may be further enhanced by positioning capacitors **256** across gap **254**. In one embodiment, capacitor **256** may be a planar capacitor formed from copper strips, thus maintaining the flat profile of sensor system **14**. In one embodiment, as shown in FIG. **3**, unused coil **30** may be added to each end of array **30A** next to the first coil **30** and the last coil **30** as buffer elements. In some embodiments, more than one unused coil **30** may be added to each end of array **30A**. By adding buffer elements, which are unused but matched coils **30** at the edges of array **30A**, all of the used coils **30** (the N number of coils **30** between the buffer elements) see nearly identical impedance, thus substantially reducing any edge effects. In this manner, each coil **30** may be matched, tuned and isolated with identical components.

In one embodiment, coils **30** may be formed from either high temperature superconducting material or cryogenically cooled metals to lower the resistance. In one embodiment, such as one shown in FIG. **3**, coils **30** may be printed on a flexible substrate, such as a printed circuit board. The size and spacing of coil **30** may vary. In one embodiment, much thinner conductors may be used, with total unit cell (single coil) dimensions on the order of 3 mm to fit thirty-two coils **30** within a 10 cm-wide FOV. For the unbalanced configuration shown in FIG. **3**, capacitors **256** may be created by placing copper conductor across gap **254** between coils **30**, insulated by a thin dielectric material. In one embodiment, to reduce the width of each coil **30**, gap **254** between coils **30** may be removed. This increases coupling, but enables more coils **30** to be packaged in a given dimension of FOV **36**. Loop geometry of coils **30** may also vary. Arrays of loops may be used, including one array with the axes of the loops aligned. The return path may be a ground-plane,

enabling direct connection to a coaxial transmission line, such as line **128**, without the use of a balun. To diminish coupling, shared capacitance would be inserted on the long legs of the loops. This may be done with lumped or planar capacitors.

The high number of coils **30** enables MRI using a single echo acquisition without requiring phase encoding gradients, resulting in faster imaging, reduced gradient switching, lower incidence of nerve stimulation, and reduced blurring due to T2 and T2* decay. In one embodiment, an array **30A** of sixty-four coils **30**, each 25 cm long and 4 mm wide, would acquire enough image information with a single echo acquisition for an image having a physical dimension of 25 cm×25 cm and 64×256 resolution. Multiple echo acquisitions may also be used to form new images with time resolution better than a millisecond per image. In one embodiment, multiple echo acquisition may be used with array **30A** to get extremely high quality images. (For example, 256×256) Typically, images may be confined to regions relatively close to coil **30**, which is ideal for implanted coils **30** and imaging typically performed with a surface coil **30**. However, some embodiments of the invention may enable the construction of sixty-four or more element arrays **30A** of conventional surface coils for volume imaging done using the conventional SMASH or SENSE techniques.

FIGS. **4A** and **4B** are block diagrams illustrating two embodiments of receiver system **20** of FIG. **2A**. FIGS. **4A** and **4B** are described jointly. As shown in FIG. **4A**, in one embodiment, each channel **200** of receiver system **20** comprises an amplifier **300**, a mixer **304**, and a filter **308** that are coupled to each other. Filter **308** of each channel **200** is coupled to a sample and hold (“S/H”) unit **310**. S/H unit **310** is coupled to an analog/digital converter (“ADC”) board **318** of computer **38**. Amplifiers **300**, mixers **304**, and filters **308** may all reside on one printed circuit board of receiver system **20**; however, any suitable implementation method may be used. In some embodiments, mixer **304** may be omitted, as shown in FIG. **4B**.

In an illustrative operation, once the signal from preamplifier **18** is received at channel **200** of receiver system **20**, the received signal is amplified at amplifier **300**. Then the signal is transmitted to mixer **304**, where the signal is mixed down to an intermediate frequency (“IF”). For example, in one embodiment, the signal may be mixed down to a 500 kHz IF; however, in one embodiment shown in FIG. **4B**, the mixing of the signal may be omitted. In one embodiment, the signal may be amplified again and transmitted to filter **308**, where the signal is low-pass filtered to a particular bandwidth. For example, in one embodiment, the signal may be low-pass filtered to a 1 MHz bandwidth. The signal is then sent to S/H unit **310** for capturing the filtered signal so that slow speed digitizers may capture the signal outside their normal range. In some embodiments, S/H unit **310** may reside next to computer **38**. The signal is transmitted from S/H unit **310** to ADC board **318** of computer **38**, where the signal is digitized. In one embodiment where sixty-four channels are used to accommodate sixty-four coils **30**, two thirty-two channel digitizers, such as ICS-645 digitizers, may be used as ADC **318**. ICS-645 digitizer is available from Interactive Circuits and Systems Ltd., located in Gloucester, Ontario.

Using one ICS-645 digitizer **318** allows simultaneous sampling of thirty-two channels **200** at 2.5 MHz per channel **200**. This provides a 1.25 MHz bandwidth per channel **200** according to the Nyquist theorem, sufficiently broad to enable undersampled demodulation of any pulse sequence

currently used for MRI. Two of these boards **310** allow simultaneous sampling from sixty-four coils **30**, sufficient to form a 64×256 image. Image reconstruction may be done using any suitable computer or computer system. Although two ICS-645 board **318** are used as an example of ADC board **318** that is operable to receive and process signals from sixty-four coils **30**, other types ADCs **318** having analogous capabilities may be used for receiving signals from sixty-four or any other number of coils **30**.

By using S/H board **310** that is capable of capturing single samples at the original Larmor frequency and undersampling, a completely digital receiver system **20** may be formed, in one embodiment. A multiplexer (not explicitly shown) may be used to switch between the multiplicity of coils **30** to provide array detection capability. Each element is sampled in turn at the desired undersampling rate. Filtering is done at the Larmor frequency with a bandwidth determined by the actual sampling bandwidth on each channel **200**. Multiplexing is performed at the IF. As shown by the layout of components in FIGS. **4A** and **4B**, filtering is also done at the IF with a bandwidth determined by the actual sampling rate on each channel **200**. This is advantageous in some embodiments of the invention because the IF frequency where filters are readily available may be chosen.

In one embodiment, the signal may be mixed down directly to an audio frequency (“AF”) such that the entire MR bandwidth is above DC (zero frequency) and fully sample the signal at the Nyquist rate. The multiplexer is built for the AF and filtering may be performed there (in addition to image rejection filtering at the original mixing stage at mixer **304**). While this is not an undersampling method, it may avoid the need for multiple analog channels for quadrature demodulation and allows bandpass filtering at an IF or RF stage at the sampling bandwidth.

The techniques described above may be implemented with magnitude reconstruction (for strip encoding with RFE probes) or true phase sensitive demodulation. The physical distribution of components may vary, as determined by one skilled in the art.

FIGS. **5A** and **5B** are perspective views of sensor system **14** that may be used in conjunction with system **10** of FIG. **1**. FIG. **5A** shows sensor system **14** having N number of elongated coils **30** that are positioned side-by-side in array **30A**. Array **30A** defines detection surface **36**. Detection surface **36** is the FOV of sensor system **14** because a portion of target surface **34** that overlies or underlies detection surface **36** is imaged using coils **30**. In one embodiment, coils **30** are printed on a flexible substrate and may be formed to have the particular profile of target surface **34**. For example, to image a patient’s brain surface, curved sensor system **14** shown in FIG. **5A** may have approximately the same curvature as the patient’s brain surface. Thus, once the flexible substrate of sensor system **14** is positioned over target surface **34**, such as a portion of a brain surface, the profile of target surface **34** and detection surface **36** are approximately parallel. Although FIG. **5A** illustrates a curved detection surface **36**, detection surface **36** may be formed in any other shape. Detection surface **36** may also have any size to suitably cover the size of the particular target surface **34**, as determined by one skilled in the art.

Referring to FIG. **5B**, sensor system **14** is positioned near a tip **354** of a catheter **350**. In this embodiment, sensor system **14** is wrapped around the shaft of catheter **350** to form a cylinder so that coils **30** are facing outward from catheter **350** to receive image information. In one embodiment, to image the inner wall of a patient’s throat,

cylindrical sensor system 14 shown in FIG. 5B may have approximately the same curvature as the patient's throat. Thus, once catheter 350 is inserted into the throat, sensor system 14 is positioned so that the profile of target surface 34, such as the inner wall of the throat, and detection surface 36 are approximately parallel. Cylindrical sensor system 14 for catheter 350 may be constructed by conforming planar sensor system 14 that is fabricated on a flexible circuit board around the surface of catheter 350. The inside of catheter 350 may contain line 128 having a plurality of transmission lines, each transmission line corresponding to particular coil 30 of sensor system 14. Signals may be collected from a cylindrical region immediately outside catheter 350, such as a blood vessel or urethra, or standard tissue in the case of magnetic resonance guided thermal therapy.

FIG. 6 is a flowchart illustrating one embodiment of a method 400 for MRI. A portion or all of method 400 may be performed using system 10. Although method 400 is described as being performed using system 10 for illustrative purposes, method 400 may be performed using other suitable systems and/or devices. Method 400 starts at step 404. At step 408, a detection surface, such as detection surface 36, is provided. Detection surface 36 is defined by array 30A of sensors, such as coils 30. In essence, detection surface 36 defines the FOV. In one embodiment, a number of coils 30 equal to N forms array 30A. In one embodiment, sensors 30 are positioned side-by-side; however, depending on the desired geometry of detection surface 36, other positioning techniques may be used. At step 410, detection surface 36 is positioned over target surface 34 so that detection surface 36 is approximately parallel to target surface 34.

Steps 414 through 428 is performed for each sensor 30. At step 414, an RF signal is transmitted from sensor 30 to the corresponding portion 34A of target surface 34; however, step 414 may be omitted where a different source is used to excite target surface 34. For example, where a loop (not explicitly shown) that encompasses array 30A of sensors 30 is used to transmit RF signals to all of target surface 34, step 414 may be omitted. At step 418, echo signal 210 is received from the corresponding portion 34A of target surface 34 at the sensor 30. Echo signal 210 indicates image information concerning the corresponding portion 34A of target surface 34. At step 420, the received echo signal 210 is isolated to the particular sensor 30. At step 424, a signal generated in response to receiving the echo signal is transmitted from the sensor 30 to one corresponding channel 200 of receiver system 20 over lines 128, 130, and 138. Receiver system 20 processes the signal for digitization. At step 428, the signal processed by receiver system 20 is converted into a discrete image by computer 38.

At step 430, once computer 38 converts the respective signals from sensors 30 into respective discrete images, the discrete images are assembled, according to the relative order of sensors 30 in array 30A, into MR image 48. For example, the discrete image formed using the signal from a first sensor 30 is placed next to the discrete image formed using the signal from a second sensor 30, and the discrete image formed using the signal from a third sensor 30 is placed next to the discrete image of the second sensor 30. Method 400 stops at step 434.

Although some embodiments of the present invention have been described in detail, it should be understood that various changes, substitutions, and alterations can be made hereto without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A system for magnetic resonance imaging, comprising:
a detection surface defined by an array of at least sixty-four elongated coils that are positioned side-by-side, the detection surface having a particular profile;

wherein each one of the at least sixty-four elongated coils comprises two or more elongated planar loops and is operable to receive image information concerning a particular portion of a target surface by substantially confining to the each one of the at least sixty-four elongated coils magnetic flux that is associated with the particular portion of the target surface, the particular profile of the detection surface approximately the same as a profile of the target surface; and

a receiver operable to receive the image information received by the each of the at least sixty-four elongated coils and generate a magnetic resonance image of the target surface, the magnetic resonance image having a resolution of at least sixty-four pixels by M pixels, wherein M is an integer multiple of 64.

2. The system of claim 1, wherein the each one of the at least sixty-four elongated coils is separated from a neighboring one of the at least sixty-four elongated coils by a gap.

3. The system of claim 1, wherein the each one of the at least sixty-four elongated coils is separated from a neighboring one of the at least sixty-four elongated coils by a gap, and further comprising a capacitor positioned to cross the gap.

4. The system of claim 1, wherein the receiver has a particular corresponding channel for the each of the at least sixty-four elongated coils.

5. The system of claim 1, wherein the receiver is operable to generate a magnetic resonance image by converting the received image information received by the each of the at least sixty-four elongated coils into a corresponding discrete image and positioning the corresponding discrete image according to a relative position of the each of the at least sixty-four elongated coils in the array.

6. The system of claim 1, wherein the each one of the at least sixty-four elongated coils is operable to receive the image information by detecting only a single echo signal from the particular portion of the target surface.

7. The system of claim 1, wherein the each one of the at least sixty-four elongated coils is operable to receive the image information by detecting a plurality of echo signals from the particular portion of the target surface.

8. The system of claim 1, wherein the particular profile of the detection surface is flat.

9. The system of claim 1, wherein the particular profile of the detection surface is curved.

10. The system of claim 1, wherein the particular profile of the detection surface is substantially circular and defines a cylindrical body.

11. The system of claim 1, wherein the at least sixty-four coils are used coils, and further comprising two unused coils, wherein the at least sixty-four coils are positioned between the two unused coils.

12. A system for magnetic resonance imaging, comprising:

a detection surface having a particular profile and defined by an array of a number of sensors equal to N, the sensors positioned side-by-side, wherein N is a predetermined integer;

wherein each of the sensors comprises at least one loop and is operable to receive image information concerning a particular portion of a target surface by detecting

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a single echo signal from the particular portion of the target surface and substantially confining to the each of the sensors magnetic flux that is associated with the particular portion of the target surface, the particular profile of the detection surface approximately the same as a profile of the target surface; and

a receiver operable to generate a magnetic resonance image that resembles the target surface by receiving the image information from the each of the sensors, wherein the magnetic resonance image has a resolution of at least N pixels by M pixels and M is an integer.

13. The system of claim 12, wherein the each one of the sensors is a planar pair.

14. The system of claim 12 wherein the each one of the sensors is separated from a neighboring one of the sensors by a gap.

15. The system of claim 12, wherein the each one of the sensors is separated from a neighboring one of the sensors by a gap, and further comprising a capacitor positioned to cross the gap.

16. The system of claim 12, wherein the receiver has a particular corresponding channel for the each of the sensors.

17. The system of claim 12, wherein the receiver is operable to generate a magnetic resonance image by converting the received image information received by the each of the sensors into a corresponding discrete image and positioning the corresponding discrete image according to a relative position of the each of the sensors in the array.

18. The system of claim 12, wherein the each one of the sensors is operable to receive the image information by detecting a plurality of echo signals from the particular portion of the target surface.

19. The system of claim 12, wherein the particular profile of the detection surface is flat.

20. The system of claim 12, wherein the particular profile of the detection surface is curved.

21. The system of claim 12, wherein the particular profile of the detection surface is substantially circular and defines a cylindrical body.

22. The system of claim 12, wherein the sensors are used sensors, and further comprising two unused sensors, wherein the sensors are positioned between the two unused sensors.

23. A method for magnetic resonance imaging, comprising:

providing a detection surface having a particular profile and defined by an array of a number of coils equal to

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N, the coils positioned side-by-side, wherein N is a predetermined integer, and wherein each one of the coils comprises at least one loop and is operable to receive image information concerning a particular portion of a target surface, the particular profile of the detection surface approximately the same as a profile of the target surface;

initiating a single transmission of an echo signal to the target surface;

in response to the single transmission, receiving, at the each coil, image information concerning the corresponding particular portion of the target surface;

substantially confining magnetic flux associated with the particular portion of the target surface to the each coil; transmitting the received image information to a receiver; converting, at the receiver, the image information into a discrete image; and

assembling the plurality of discrete images into a magnetic resonance image resembling the target surface, the magnetic resonance image having a resolution of at least N pixels by M pixels, wherein M is an integer.

24. The method of claim 23 wherein the each one of the coils is separated from a neighboring one of the coils by a gap.

25. The method of claim 23, wherein the each one of the coils is separated from a neighboring one of the coils by a gap, and further comprising a capacitor positioned to cross the gap.

26. The method of claim 23, wherein the receiver has a particular corresponding channel for the each of the coils.

27. The method of claim 23, wherein assembling the plurality of discrete images comprises positioning the plurality of discrete images according to the respective relative positions of the each of the coils in the array.

28. The method of claim 23, wherein the particular profile of the detection surface is flat.

29. The method of claim 23, wherein the particular profile of the detection surface is curved.

30. The method of claim 23, wherein the particular profile of the detection surface is substantially circular and defines a cylindrical body.

31. The method of claim 23, wherein the coils are used coils, and further comprising positioning the coils between two unused coils.

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