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(54) **ULTRASOUND APPARATUS AND METHOD
OF GENERATING ULTRASOUND IMAGE**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

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17, 2012.

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A method of generating an ultrasound image includes trans-
mitting an ultrasound signal to a predetermined point
included in an object and receiving at least three response
signals reflected from the predetermined point; extracting a
plurality of response signal pairs by combining the received at
least three response signals two-by-two; obtaining a plurality
of pieces of prediction vector information, each of the pieces
of prediction vector information indicating a prediction
velocity magnitude and a prediction velocity direction of the
predetermined point, based on reception angles and Doppler
frequencies of the response signals included in the plurality of
response signal pairs; and determining vector information
indicating a velocity magnitude and a velocity direction of the
predetermined point, based on the plurality of pieces of pre-
diction vector information.

100

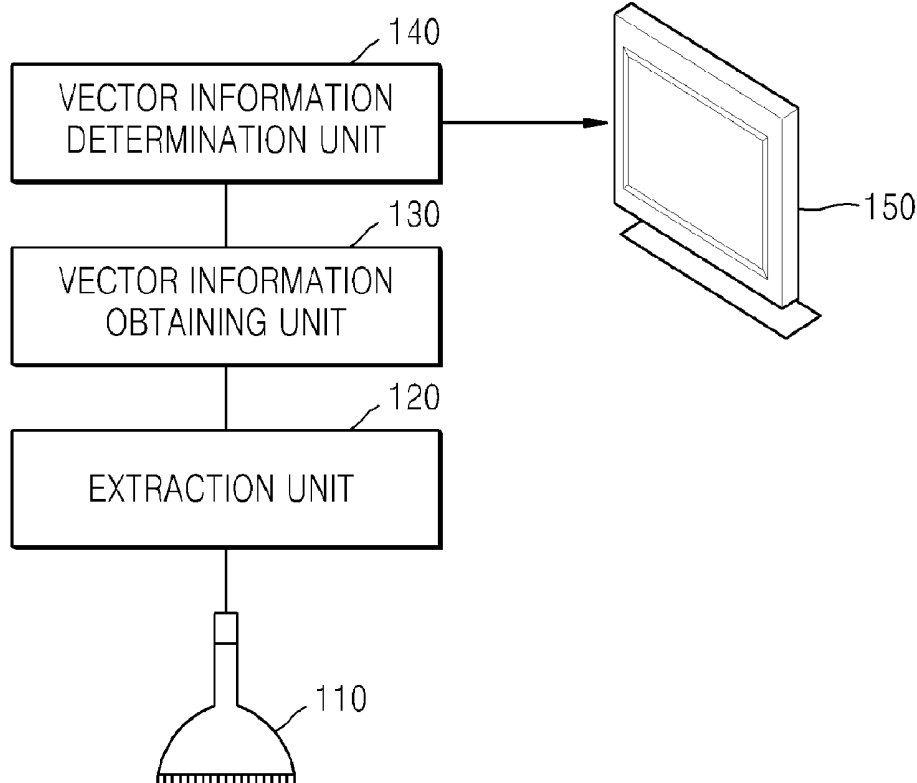


FIG. 1 (RELATED ART)

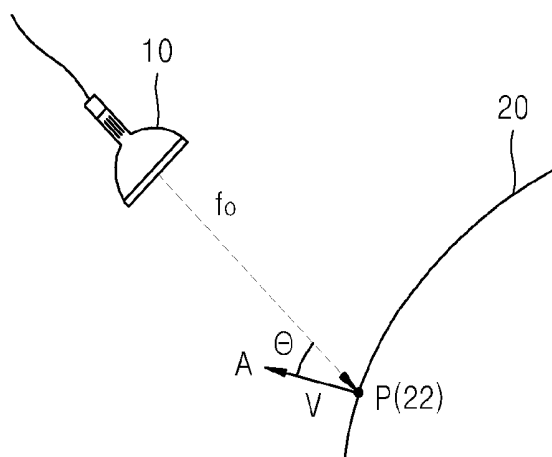


FIG. 2

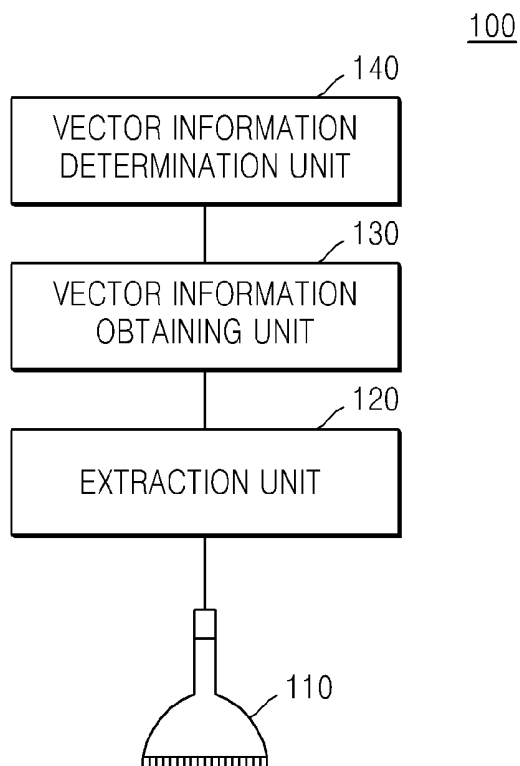


FIG. 3

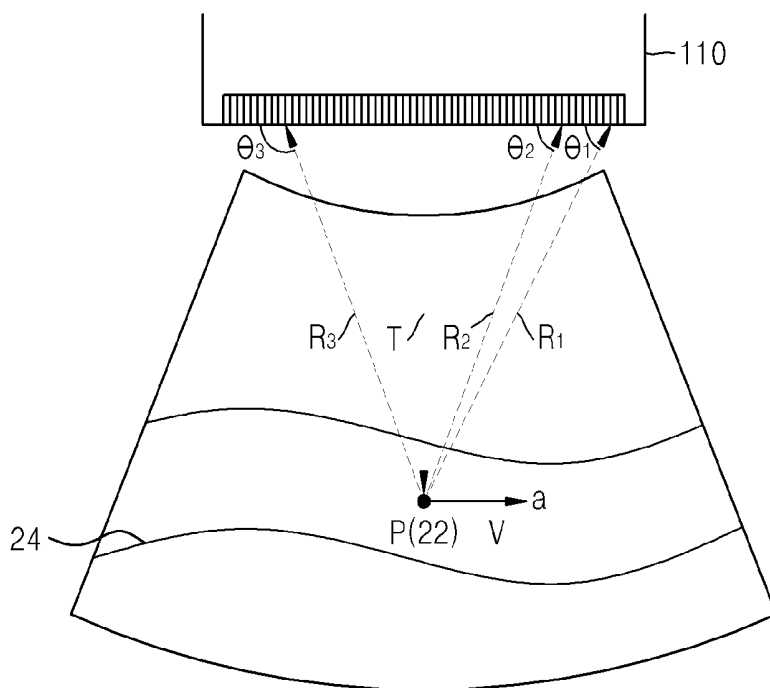


FIG. 4

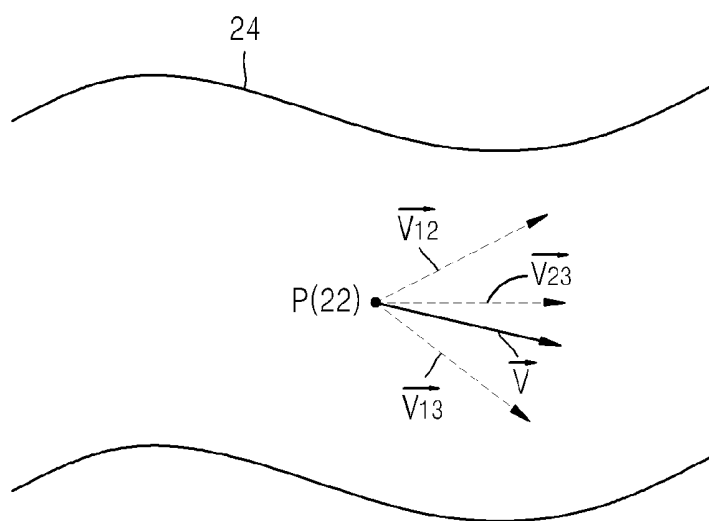


FIG. 5A

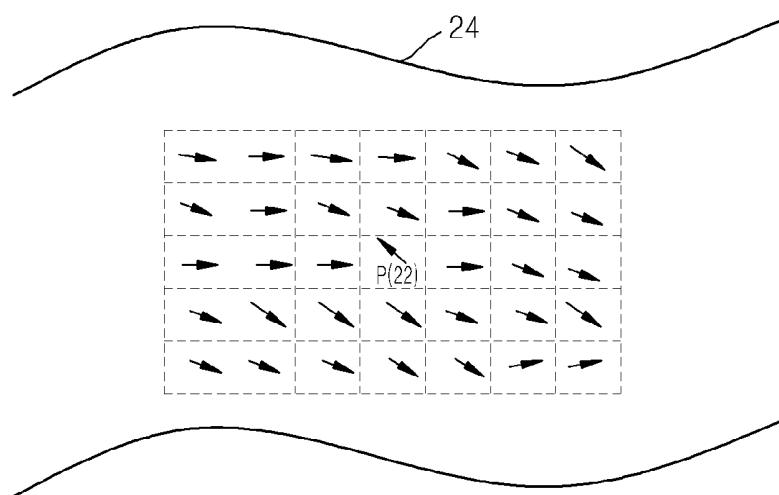


FIG. 5B

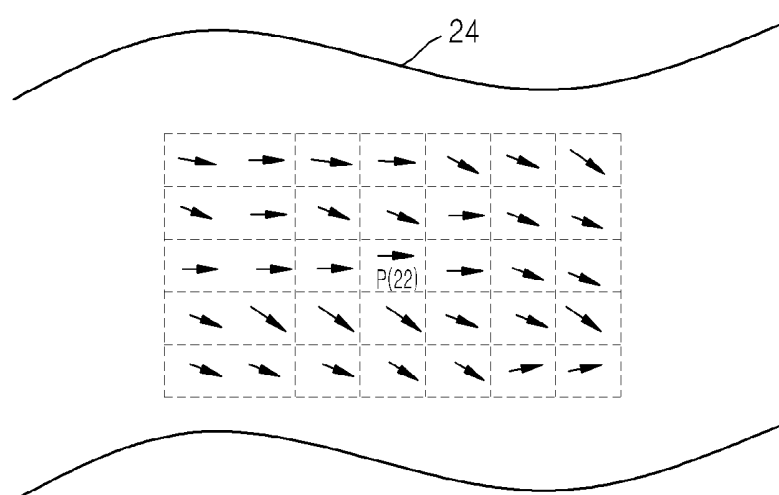


FIG. 6

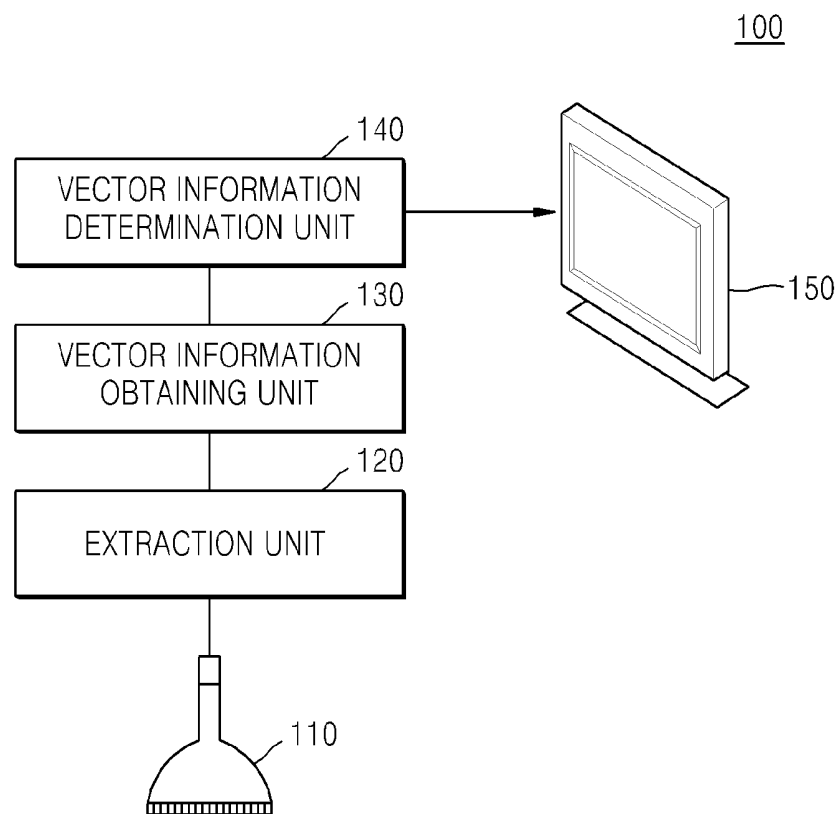


FIG. 7B

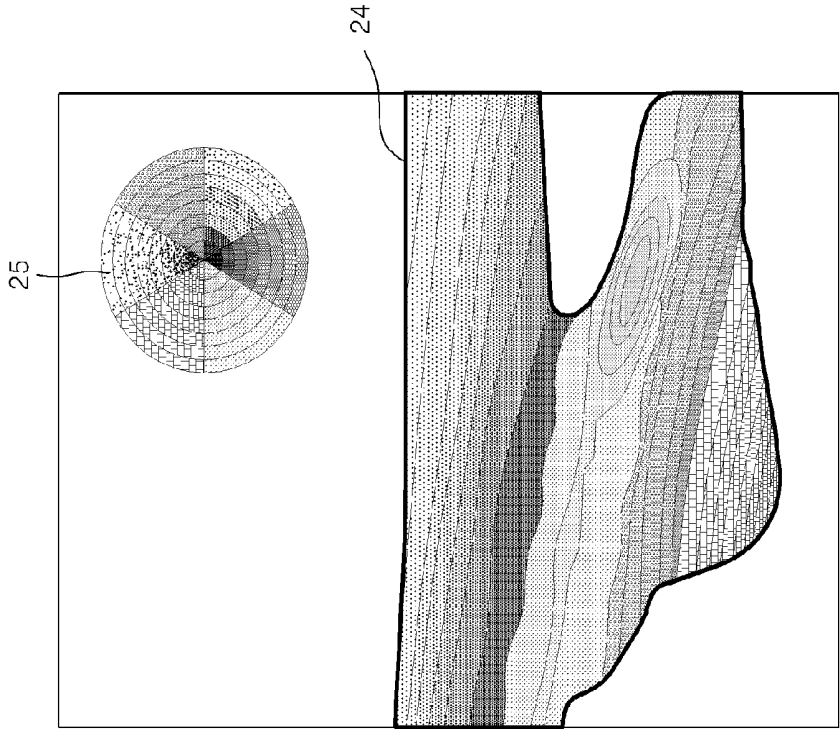


FIG. 7A

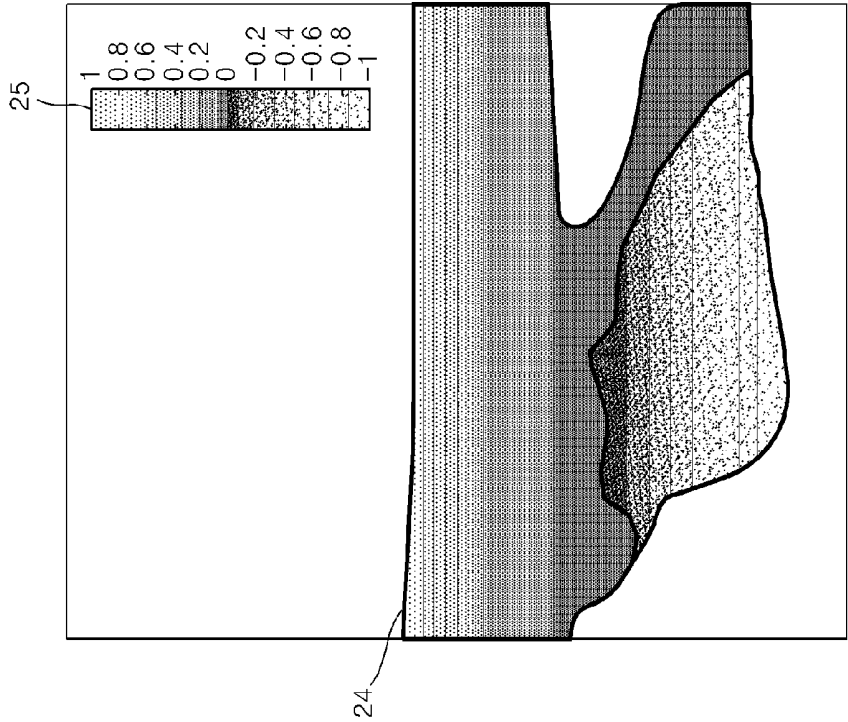


FIG. 8

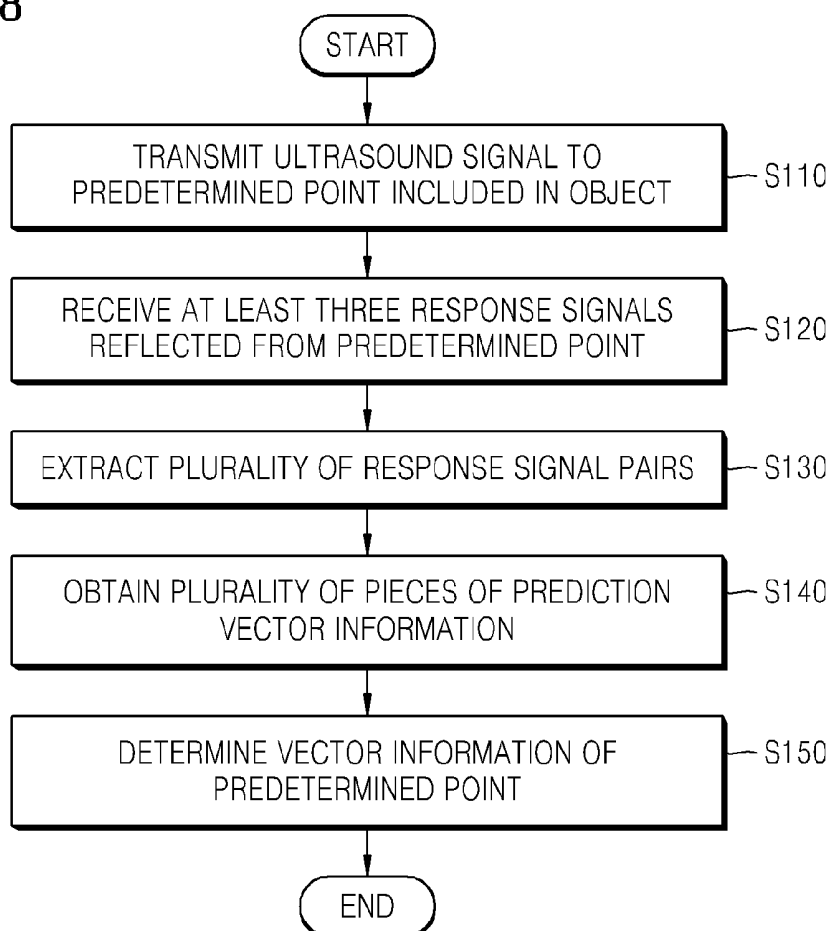


FIG. 9

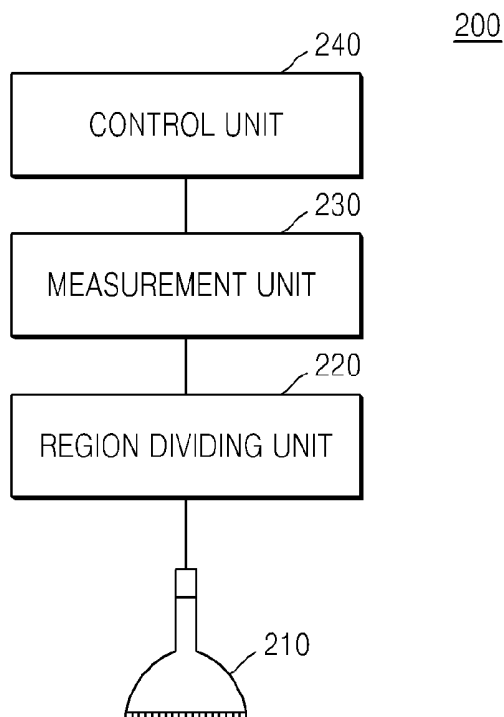


FIG. 10

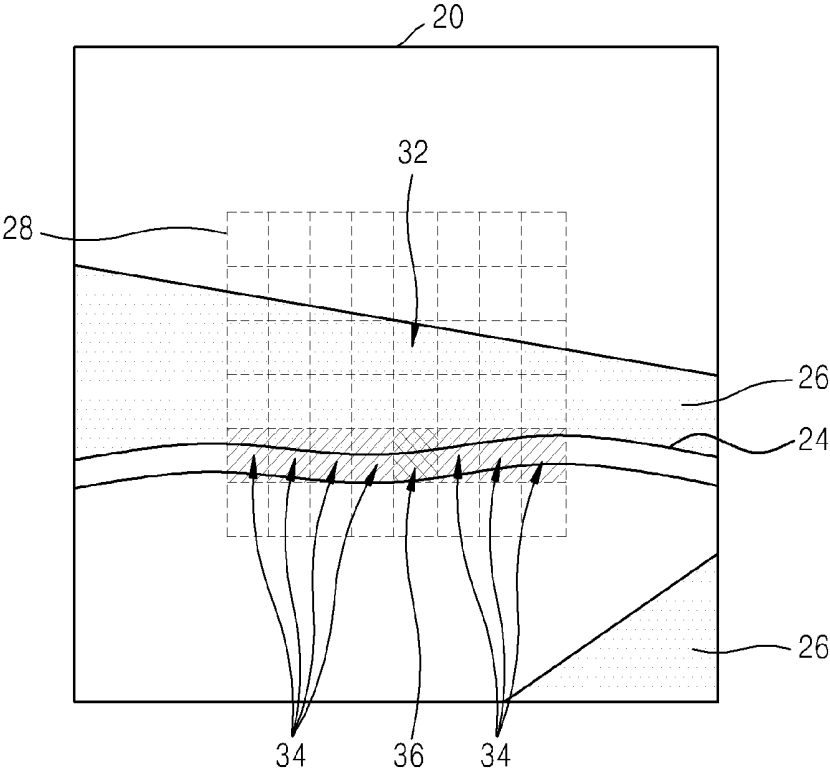


FIG. 11

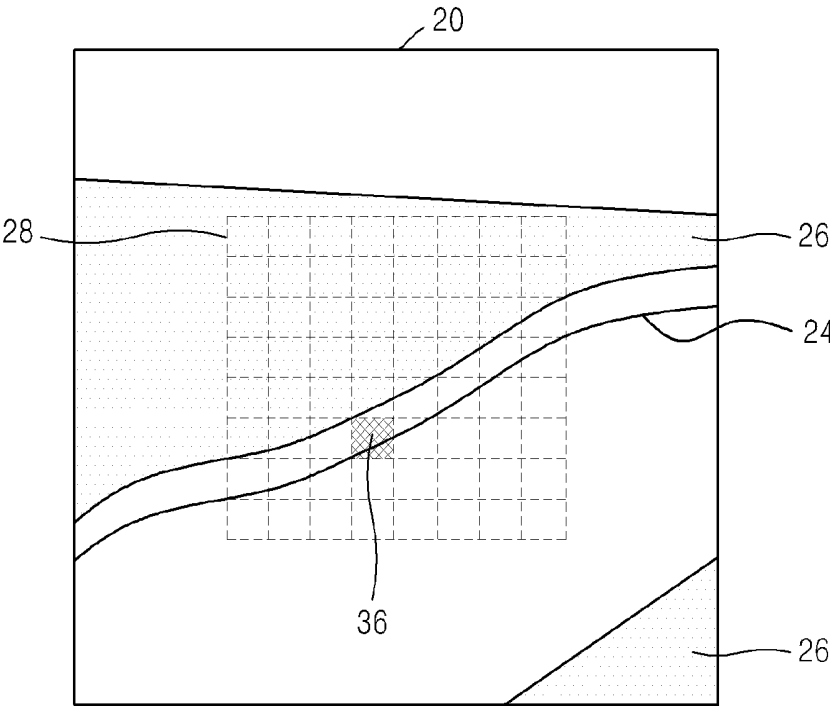


FIG. 12

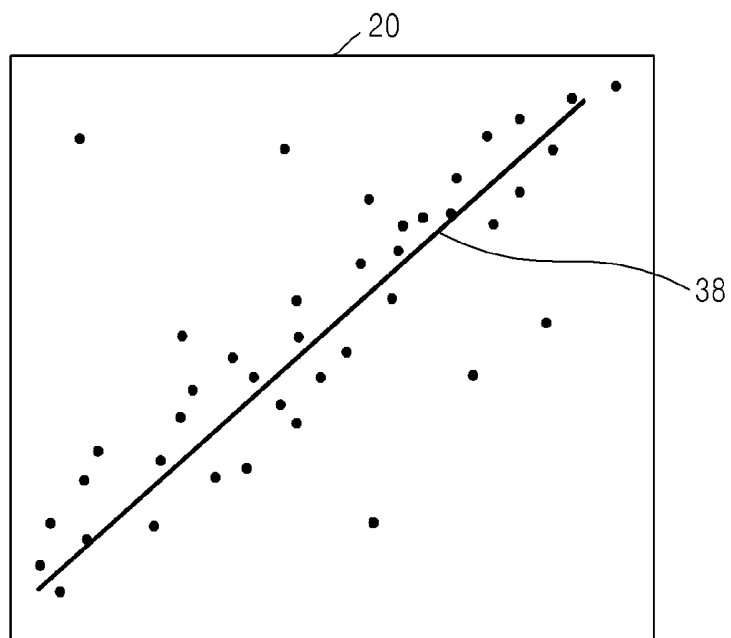


FIG. 13

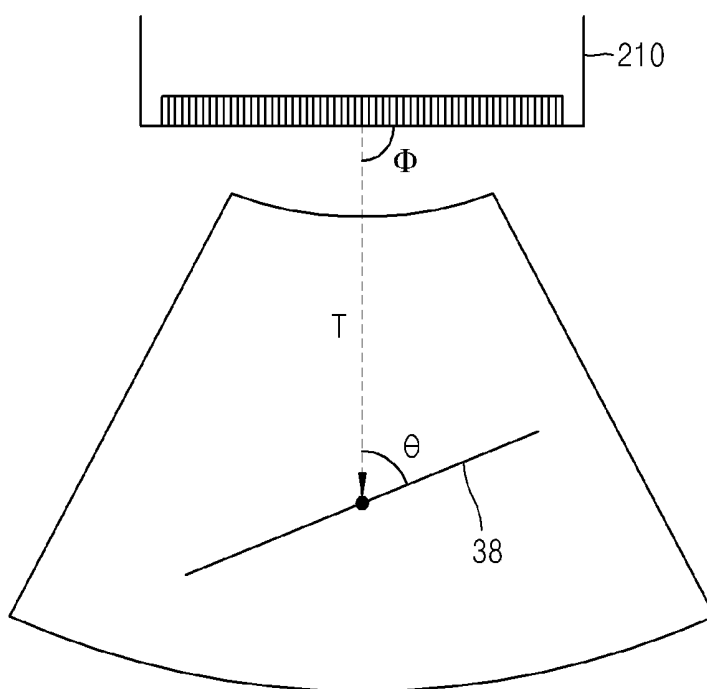
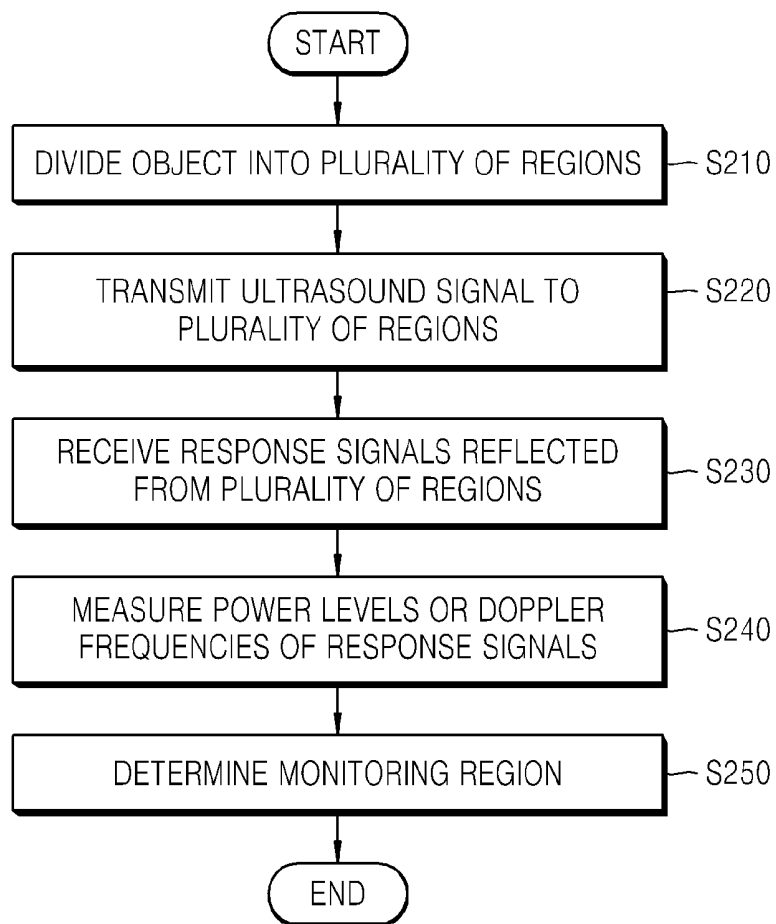


FIG. 14



ULTRASOUND APPARATUS AND METHOD OF GENERATING ULTRASOUND IMAGE

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED PATENT APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a divisional application of U.S. application Ser. No. 13/768,627 filed Feb. 15, 2013, which claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 61/600,062, filed on Feb. 17, 2012, in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, and the benefit of Korean Patent Application No. 10-2012-0075171, filed on Jul. 10, 2012, in the Korean Intellectual Property Office, the disclosures of which are incorporated herein in their entirety by reference.

BACKGROUND

[0002] 1. Field

[0003] The present disclosure relates to a method and apparatus for generating an ultrasound image and, more particularly, to a method and apparatus for generating a Doppler image of an object.

[0004] 2. Description of the Related Art

[0005] Ultrasound apparatuses are used to monitor the internal structure of an organic body. Ultrasound apparatuses are non-invasive test devices and show structural details, tissues, and fluidic flows in the body.

[0006] An ultrasound apparatus may display the flow of blood or movement of tissues as a color Doppler image or a spectral Doppler image, and a user may view the color Doppler image or the spectral Doppler image to check the motion of heart valves, a blood velocity or a blood flow rate in blood vessels, or the like.

[0007] Since the color Doppler image and the spectral Doppler image include information about a velocity magnitude and a velocity direction of a blood flow or tissues, a method of accurately measuring the information is required.

SUMMARY

[0008] The present disclosure provides an ultrasound apparatus and a method of generating an ultrasound image which are capable of accurately measuring vector information of an object.

[0009] The present disclosure also provides an ultrasound apparatus and a method of generating an ultrasound image which are capable of providing a reliable color Doppler image or a reliable spectral Doppler image to a user.

[0010] According to an aspect of an exemplary embodiment, there is provided a method of generating an ultrasound image, the method including transmitting an ultrasound signal to a predetermined point included in an object and receiving at least three response signals reflected from the predetermined point; extracting a plurality of response signal pairs by combining the received at least three response signals two-by-two; obtaining a plurality of pieces of prediction vector information, each of the pieces of prediction vector information indicating a prediction velocity magnitude and a prediction velocity direction of the predetermined point, based on reception angles and Doppler frequencies of the response signals included in the plurality of response signal pairs; and determining vector information indicating a velocity magnitude and a velocity direction of the predetermined point, based on the plurality of pieces of prediction vector information.

[0011] The determining of the vector information may include determining the vector information based on a linear vector sum of the plurality of pieces of prediction vector information.

[0012] The determining of the vector information may include determining any one of the plurality of prediction velocity directions included in the plurality of pieces of prediction vector information, as the velocity direction of the predetermined point; and determining a linear sum of the plurality of prediction velocity magnitudes included in the plurality of pieces of prediction vector information, as the velocity magnitude of the predetermined point.

[0013] The method may further include determining vector information of a plurality of additional points located within a preset distance from the predetermined point.

[0014] The determining of the vector information may include compensating for the velocity direction of the predetermined point by applying a smoothing filter to velocity directions of the plurality of additional points; and determining the compensated velocity direction as the velocity direction of the predetermined point.

[0015] The determining of the vector information may include compensating for the velocity magnitude of the predetermined point by applying a smoothing filter to velocity magnitudes of the plurality of additional points; and determining the compensated velocity magnitude as the velocity magnitude of the predetermined point.

[0016] The transmitting of the ultrasound signal may include transmitting the ultrasound signal a plurality of times and receiving each of the at least three response signals a plurality of times, a plurality of the same received response signal forming ensemble signals for the respective response signal, and the obtaining of the plurality of pieces of prediction vector information may include obtaining a Doppler frequency of each response signal included in the plurality of response signal pairs by using autocorrelation between the ensemble signals of the response signals.

[0017] According to another aspect of an exemplary embodiment, there is provided a method of generating an ultrasound image, the method including transmitting an ultrasound signal to a point included in an object and receiving a response signal reflected from the point; determining vector information indicating a velocity magnitude of the point, based on a reception angle and a Doppler frequency of the response signal; and displaying a color Doppler image of the object by mapping the velocity magnitude of the point to a color scale.

[0018] The method may further include determining vector information including a velocity direction of a plurality of points included in the object; estimating an overall velocity direction of the object by using the velocity directions of the plurality of points; and displaying the color Doppler image of the object by mapping angle differences between the velocity directions of the plurality of points and the overall velocity direction of the object to a color scale.

[0019] The method may further include determining vector information including a velocity magnitude of a plurality of points included in the object, and the displaying of the color Doppler image of the object may include mapping a velocity magnitude of a point having a first velocity direction component, from among the plurality of points, to a first color and mapping a velocity magnitude of a point having a second

velocity direction component opposite to the first velocity direction component, from among the plurality of points, to a second color.

[0020] According to another aspect of an exemplary embodiment, there is provided a method of generating an ultrasound image, the method including dividing an object into a plurality of regions; transmitting an ultrasound signal to the plurality of regions and receiving response signals reflected from the plurality of regions; measuring power levels or Doppler frequencies of the received response signals; and determining a monitoring region from among the plurality of regions by using the power levels or the Doppler frequencies of the received response signals.

[0021] The determining of the monitoring region may include arbitrarily setting an initial region from among the plurality of regions; and determining one of the regions reflecting response signals having Doppler frequencies in a first predetermined range, which is closest to the initial region, as the monitoring region.

[0022] The determining of the monitoring region may include determining one of the regions reflecting a response signal having a Doppler frequency in a second predetermined range, as the monitoring region.

[0023] The determining of the monitoring region may include arbitrarily setting an initial region from among the plurality of regions; and determining one of the regions reflecting response signals having power levels in a third predetermined range, which is closest to the initial region, as the monitoring region.

[0024] The determining of the monitoring region may include determining one of the regions reflecting a response signal having a power level in a fourth predetermined range, as the monitoring region.

[0025] The determining of the monitoring region may include determining one of the regions reflecting a response signal having a power level in a fifth predetermined range from among the response signals that pass through a clutter filter, as the monitoring region.

[0026] The method may further include adjusting a region of interest in such a way that the monitoring region is included in the region of interest.

[0027] The method may further include adjusting a range gate in such a way that the range gate is located in the monitoring region.

[0028] The method may further include measuring power levels or Doppler frequencies of response signals reflected from a plurality of the regions located within a preset distance from the monitoring region; obtaining a modeled line by applying a fitting method to the power levels or the Doppler frequencies of the response signals reflected from the plurality of regions; determining a blood vessel direction of the object based on the obtained modeled line; and adjusting a steering angle of the ultrasound signal in such a way that an angle between the blood vessel direction and an incident direction of the ultrasound signal transmitted to the plurality of regions is a predetermined angle.

[0029] According to another aspect of an exemplary embodiment, there is provided an ultrasound apparatus including a probe which transmits an ultrasound signal to a predetermined point included in an object and receives at least three response signals reflected from the predetermined point; an extraction unit which extracts a plurality of response signal pairs by combining the received at least three response signals two-by-two; a vector information obtaining unit

which obtains a plurality of pieces of prediction vector information, each of the pieces of prediction vector information indicating a prediction velocity magnitude and a prediction velocity direction of the predetermined point, based on reception angles and Doppler frequencies of response signals included in the plurality of response signal pairs; and a vector information determination unit which determines vector information indicating a velocity magnitude and a velocity direction of the predetermined point, based on the plurality of pieces of prediction vector information.

[0030] The vector information determination unit may determine the vector information by using a linear vector sum of the plurality of pieces of prediction vector information.

[0031] The vector information determination unit may determine any one of the plurality of prediction velocity directions included in the plurality of pieces of prediction vector information, as the velocity direction of the predetermined point, and may determine a linear sum of the plurality of prediction velocity magnitudes included in the plurality of pieces of prediction vector information, as the velocity magnitude of the predetermined point.

[0032] The vector information determination unit may determine vector information of a plurality of additional points located within a preset distance from the predetermined point.

[0033] The vector information determination unit may compensate for the velocity direction of the predetermined point by applying a smoothing filter to velocity directions of the plurality of additional points, and may determine the compensated velocity direction as the velocity direction of the predetermined point.

[0034] The vector information determination unit may compensate for the velocity magnitude of the predetermined point by applying a smoothing filter to velocity magnitudes of the plurality of additional points, and may determine the compensated velocity magnitude as the velocity magnitude of the predetermined point.

[0035] The probe may transmit the ultrasound signal a plurality of times and receive each of the at least three response signals a plurality of times, a plurality of the same received response signal forming ensemble signals for the respective response signal, and the vector information obtaining unit may obtain a Doppler frequency of each response signal included in the plurality of response signal pairs by using autocorrelation between the ensemble signals of the response signals.

[0036] According to another aspect of an exemplary embodiment, there is provided an ultrasound apparatus including a probe which transmits an ultrasound signal to a point included in an object and receives a response signal reflected from the point; a vector information determination unit which determines vector information indicating a velocity magnitude of the point, based on a reception angle and a Doppler frequency of the response signal; and a display unit which displays a color Doppler image of the object by mapping the velocity magnitude of the point to a color scale.

[0037] The vector information determination unit may determine vector information including velocity directions of a plurality of points included in the object and estimates an overall velocity direction of the object by using the velocity directions of the plurality of points, and the display unit may display the color Doppler image of the object by mapping

angle differences between the velocity directions of the plurality of points and the overall velocity direction of the object to a color scale.

[0038] The vector information determination unit may determine vector information including a vector magnitude of a plurality of points included in the object, and the display unit may map a velocity magnitude of a point having a first velocity direction component, from among the plurality of points, to a first color and may map a velocity magnitude of a point having a second velocity direction component opposite to the first velocity direction component, from among the plurality of points, to a second color.

[0039] According to another aspect of an exemplary embodiment, there is provided an ultrasound apparatus including a region dividing unit which divides an object into a plurality of regions; a probe which transmits an ultrasound signal to the plurality of regions and receives response signals reflected from the plurality of regions; a measurement unit which measures power levels or Doppler frequencies of the received response signals; and a control unit which determines a monitoring region from among the plurality of regions by using the power levels or the Doppler frequencies of the received response signals.

[0040] The control unit arbitrarily may set an initial region from among the plurality of regions, and may determine one of the regions reflecting response signals having Doppler frequencies in a first predetermined range, which is closest to the initial region, as the monitoring region.

[0041] The control unit may determine one of the regions reflecting a response signal having a Doppler frequency in a second predetermined range, as the monitoring region.

[0042] The control unit may arbitrarily set an initial region from among the plurality of regions, and may determine one of the regions reflecting response signals having power levels in a third predetermined range, which is closest to the initial region, as the monitoring region.

[0043] The control unit may determine one of the regions reflecting a response signal having a power level in a fourth predetermined range, as the monitoring region.

[0044] The control unit may determine one of the regions reflecting a response signal having a power level in a fifth predetermined range from among the response signals that pass through a clutter filter, as the monitoring region.

[0045] The control unit may adjust a region of interest in such a way that the monitoring region is included in the region of interest.

[0046] The control unit may adjust a range gate in such a way that the range gate is located in the monitoring region.

[0047] The measurement unit may measure power levels or Doppler frequencies of response signals reflected from a plurality of the regions located within a preset distance from the monitoring region, and the control unit may determine a blood vessel direction of the object based on a modeled line obtained by applying a fitting method to the power levels or the Doppler frequencies of the response signals reflected from the plurality of regions, and may adjust a steering angle of the ultrasound signal in such a way that an angle between the blood vessel direction and an incident direction of the ultrasound signal transmitted to the plurality of regions is a predetermined angle.

[0048] According to another aspect of an exemplary embodiment, there is provided a non-transitory computer-

readable recording medium having recorded thereon a computer program for executing the method according to exemplary embodiments.

[0049] According to another aspect of an exemplary embodiment, there is provided an ultrasound apparatus including a probe which transmits an ultrasound signal to a point of an object and receives a plurality of response signals reflected back from the point, and a vector information determiner which determines a velocity direction and a velocity magnitude of the point based on the response signals, wherein, for each of the plurality of response signals, an angle between a reflection direction of the response signal and a velocity direction of the point is less than or greater than 90°.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0050] The above and other features and advantages of the present disclosure will become more apparent by describing in detail exemplary embodiments thereof with reference to the attached drawings in which:

[0051] FIG. 1 is a schematic diagram for describing a general method of obtaining a velocity magnitude of an object;

[0052] FIG. 2 is a block diagram of an ultrasound apparatus according to an exemplary embodiment;

[0053] FIG. 3 is a schematic diagram showing an ultrasound signal being transmitted to a predetermined point of an object and response signals being received from the predetermined point using the ultrasound apparatus illustrated in FIG. 2;

[0054] FIG. 4 is a schematic diagram for describing a method of obtaining vector information of the predetermined point of the object using the ultrasound apparatus illustrated in FIG. 2;

[0055] FIG. 5A is a schematic diagram showing vector information of a plurality of points of the object obtained using the ultrasound apparatus illustrated in FIG. 2;

[0056] FIG. 5B is a schematic diagram showing a result of applying a smoothing filter to the vector information illustrated in FIG. 5A;

[0057] FIG. 6 is a block diagram of an ultrasound apparatus according to another exemplary embodiment;

[0058] FIGS. 7A and 7B are color Doppler images in which vector information of a plurality of points of an object is mapped to a color scale;

[0059] FIG. 8 is a flowchart of a method of generating an ultrasound image, according to an exemplary embodiment;

[0060] FIG. 9 is a block diagram of an ultrasound apparatus according to another exemplary embodiment;

[0061] FIG. 10 is a schematic diagram for describing a method of determining a monitoring region from among a plurality of regions of an object, using the ultrasound apparatus illustrated in FIG. 9;

[0062] FIG. 11 is a schematic diagram for describing another method of determining a monitoring region from among a plurality of regions of an object, using the ultrasound apparatus illustrated in FIG. 9;

[0063] FIG. 12 is a schematic diagram for describing a method of determining a location of a blood vessel included in an object, using the ultrasound apparatus illustrated in FIG. 9;

[0064] FIG. 13 is a schematic diagram for describing a method of adjusting a steering angle of an ultrasound signal, using the ultrasound apparatus illustrated in FIG. 9; and

[0065] FIG. 14 is a flowchart of a method of generating an ultrasound image, according to another exemplary embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0066] The present disclosure will now be described more fully with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which exemplary embodiments are shown. The exemplary embodiments may, however, be embodied in many different forms and should not be construed as being limited to the exemplary embodiments set forth herein; rather, these exemplary embodiments are provided so that this disclosure will be thorough and complete, and will fully convey the concept of the exemplary embodiments to one of ordinary skill in the art. Like reference numerals in the drawings denote like elements.

[0067] The term “unit” in the exemplary embodiments of the present disclosure may refer to a software component or a hardware component, such as a field-programmable gate array (FPGA) or an application-specific integrated circuit (ASIC), that performs a specific function. However, the term “unit” is not limited to software or hardware. The “unit” may be formed so as to be stored in an addressable storage medium, or may be formed so as to operate one or more processors. Thus, for example, the term “unit” may refer to components such as software components, object-oriented software components, class components, and task components, processes, functions, properties, procedures, subroutines, segments of program codes, drivers, firmware, micro codes, circuits, data, databases, data structures, tables, arrays, and parameters. Functions provided by elements and “units” may be combined in a smaller number of elements and “units” or may be separated into additional elements and “units”.

[0068] According to exemplary embodiments, the term ‘vector information’ refers to a vector value indicating a velocity magnitude and a velocity direction, and the term ‘velocity magnitude’ refers to a scalar value not indicating a direction of a velocity but indicating only a magnitude of the velocity. According to exemplary embodiments, the term ‘velocity direction’ refers to a direction in which a certain point of an object moves at an arbitrary time.

[0069] FIG. 1 is a schematic diagram for describing a general method of obtaining a velocity magnitude of an object 20.

[0070] In the present disclosure, an ‘object’ refers to a certain body part of which an ultrasound image is to be obtained, e.g., tissue, blood, or an organ.

[0071] A predetermined point P (22) of the object moves at a velocity magnitude v and in a velocity direction A. A probe 10 of an ultrasound apparatus transmits an ultrasound signal having a frequency f_0 to the predetermined point P 22 and receives a response signal reflected from the predetermined point P (22). Based on the Doppler effect, a frequency of the response signal varies according to the velocity magnitude v of the predetermined point P (22) and an angle θ between an incident direction of the ultrasound signal and the velocity direction A of the predetermined point P (22), and a difference between the frequency of the ultrasound signal transmitted to the predetermined point P (22) and the frequency of the response signal is referred to as a Doppler frequency. Also, a signal having the Doppler frequency is referred to as a Doppler signal. The velocity magnitude v of the predetermined point P (22) may be obtained by using the Doppler frequency.

[0072] If an angle between a velocity direction of each point and an incident direction of an ultrasound signal trans-

mitted to an object is 0° , a velocity magnitude of the point may be accurately measured. However, a velocity magnitude of a point that is moving in another direction may not be accurately measured. In particular, if an angle between a velocity direction of each point and an incident direction of an ultrasound signal transmitted to an object is 90° , since a Doppler frequency is 0 Hz, a velocity magnitude of the point is measured as 0.

[0073] FIG. 2 is a block diagram of an ultrasound apparatus 100 according to an exemplary embodiment.

[0074] Referring to FIG. 2, the ultrasound apparatus 100 according to the exemplary embodiment includes a probe 110, an extraction unit 120, a vector information obtaining unit 130, and a vector information determination unit 140 (also referred to as vector information determiner). The extraction unit 120, the vector information obtaining unit 130, and the vector information determination unit 140 may be formed as microprocessors, although are not limited thereto.

[0075] The probe 110 includes a plurality of piezoelectric elements, and transmits an ultrasound signal to a predetermined point P (22) of an object and receives at least three response signals reflected from the predetermined point P (22). Each of the at least three response signals may have a Doppler frequency and a reception angle that is an incident angle from the probe 110.

[0076] FIG. 3 is a schematic diagram showing an ultrasound signal T being transmitted to a predetermined point P (22) of an object and response signals R_1 , R_2 , and R_3 being received from the predetermined point P (22), using the ultrasound apparatus 100 illustrated in FIG. 2. Referring to FIG. 3, the probe 110 transmits the ultrasound signal T to the predetermined point P (22) in a blood vessel 24 of the object and receives the response signals R_1 , R_2 , and R_3 reflected from the predetermined point P (22). The response signals R_1 , R_2 , and R_3 respectively have reception angles θ_1 , θ_2 , and θ_3 .

[0077] The probe 110 may transmit the ultrasound signal T to the predetermined point P (22) of the object a plurality of times and may receive each of the at least three response signals reflected from the predetermined point P (22) a plurality of times. For example, if the three response signals include the response signals R_1 , R_2 , and R_3 , the probe 110 receives each of the response signals R_1 , R_2 , and R_3 a plurality of times. A plurality of response signals R_1 , a plurality of response signals R_2 , and a plurality of response signals R_3 are referred to as ensemble signals. That is, ensemble signals refer to a plurality of response signals received at the same reception angle. By receiving a response signal a plurality of times, the reliability of data obtained by using the response signal may be improved.

[0078] The extraction unit 120 extracts a plurality of response signal pairs by combining the at least three response signals received by the probe 110 two-by-two. If n response signals are received, a certain number of response signal pairs may be extracted. The certain number may be ${}_nC_2$ (${}_nC_2 = \{n * (n-1)\} / (2 * 1)$).

[0079] For example, if the probe 110 receives the response signals R_1 , R_2 , and R_3 , a response signal pair R_{12} may be extracted by combining the response signals R_1 and R_2 , a response signal pair R_{13} may be extracted by combining the response signals R_1 and R_3 , and a response signal pair R_{23} may be extracted by combining the response signals R_2 and R_3 .

[0080] The vector information obtaining unit 130 obtains a plurality of pieces of prediction vector information indicating

a prediction velocity magnitude and a prediction velocity direction of the predetermined point P (22), based on reception angles and Doppler frequencies of response signals included in the plurality of response signal pairs. The vector information obtaining unit 130 may obtain a Doppler frequency of each response signal included in the plurality of response signal pairs by using autocorrelation between ensemble signals of the response signal.

[0081] Many different methods of obtaining vector information indicating a velocity magnitude and a velocity direction of a predetermined point by using Doppler frequencies and reception angles of two response signals may be used according to exemplary embodiments, and a detailed description thereof is not provided here.

[0082] The vector information determination unit 140 determines vector information indicating a velocity magnitude and a velocity direction of the predetermined point P (22) of the object, by using the plurality of pieces of prediction vector information.

[0083] In a conventional ultrasound apparatus using a vector Doppler technique, vector information of a predetermined point of an object is obtained by using only two response signals reflected from the predetermined point. However, if an angle between a reflection direction of any one response signal and a velocity direction of the predetermined point is close to 90°, accurate vector information may not be obtained. On the other hand, by using the ultrasound apparatus 100 according to exemplary embodiments or by using a method of generating an ultrasound image according to exemplary embodiments, since vector information of the predetermined point P (22) of the object is obtained by using at least three response signals reflected from the predetermined point P (22), accurate vector information may be obtained.

[0084] FIG. 4 is a schematic diagram for describing a method of obtaining vector information V of the predetermined point P (22) of the object, using the ultrasound apparatus 100 illustrated in FIG. 2.

[0085] FIG. 4 shows three pieces of prediction vector information V_{12} , V_{23} , and V_{13} obtained by using response signal pairs of three response signals reflected from the predetermined point P (22) in the blood vessel 24.

[0086] The vector information determination unit 140 may obtain vector information V of the predetermined point P (22) by using a linear vector sum of the pieces of prediction vector information V_{12} , V_{23} , and V_{13} .

[0087] That is, the vector information determination unit 140 may obtain the vector information V of the predetermined point P (22) by using Equation 1.

$$V = aV_{12} + bV_{23} + cV_{13} \quad (a, b, \text{ and } c \text{ are real numbers}) \quad [\text{Equation 1}]$$

[0088] If all of a, b, and c are set as 1, the vector information V may be a simple vector sum of the pieces of prediction vector information V_{12} , V_{23} , and V_{13} . If all of a, b, and c are set as 1/3, the vector information V may be an average of the pieces of prediction vector information V_{12} , V_{23} , and V_{13} . Alternatively, a, b, and c may be set as different real numbers to apply a weight to a certain piece of prediction vector information.

[0089] A prediction velocity direction included in each piece of prediction vector information is not significantly different from an actual velocity direction of the predetermined point P (22), and a significant difference does not exist between prediction velocity directions.

[0090] Accordingly, the vector information determination unit 140 may determine any one of the prediction velocity directions included in the pieces of prediction vector information as being the velocity direction of the predetermined point P (22), and may determine a linear sum of prediction velocity magnitudes included in the pieces of prediction vector information as being the velocity magnitude of the predetermined point P (22). The velocity magnitude of the predetermined point P (22) may be obtained by using Equation 2. According to this technique, the amount of calculations for obtaining the vector information of the predetermined point P (22) may be reduced.

$$|V| = a|V_{12}| + b|V_{23}| + c|V_{13}| \quad (a, b, \text{ and } c \text{ are arbitrary real numbers}) \quad [\text{Equation 2}]$$

[0091] FIG. 5A is a schematic diagram showing vector information of a plurality of points including the predetermined point P (22), obtained using the ultrasound apparatus illustrated in FIG. 2. FIG. 5B is a schematic diagram showing a result of applying a smoothing filter to the vector information illustrated in FIG. 5A.

[0092] If a response signal reflected from the predetermined point P (22) has noise, vector information of the predetermined point P (22) may not be accurately obtained. Since the predetermined point P (22) of the object and peripheral points of the predetermined point P (22) have similar velocity magnitudes and velocity directions, accurate vector information may be obtained in consideration of the velocity magnitudes and the velocity directions of the peripheral points as well as the velocity magnitude and the velocity direction of the predetermined point P (22).

[0093] The vector information determination unit 140 determines vector information of each of a plurality of points located within a preset distance from the predetermined point P (22). In more detail, the probe 110 transmits an ultrasound signal to the plurality of points and receives at least three response signals reflected from each of the plurality of points. The extraction unit 120 extracts a plurality of response signal pairs with respect to each of the plurality of points, and the vector information obtaining unit 130 obtains a plurality of pieces of prediction vector information of each of the plurality of points by using the plurality of response signal pairs. The vector information determination unit 140 determines vector information of the plurality of points by using the plurality of pieces of prediction vector information. The vector information of the plurality of points is represented by arrows in FIG. 5A. It is understood that the vector information of the plurality of points is not limited to being represented by the arrows shown in FIG. 5A, and may be represented in other ways as well.

[0094] A smoothing filter is commonly used in the fields of, for example, statistics and image processing, and is a technology for smoothing a data set to extract a pattern of the data set and to remove noise. For example, the smoothing filter may apply different weights to data of a plurality of points including a certain point so as to calculate their average and may determine the calculated average as data of the certain point.

[0095] FIG. 5B shows a result of applying a smoothing filter to the velocity magnitudes and the velocity directions of the plurality of points illustrated in FIG. 5A. As shown in FIG. 5B, by using the smoothing filter, the velocity magnitude and the velocity direction of the predetermined point P (22), which were significantly different from the velocity magni-

tudes and the velocity directions of the peripheral points before using the smoothing filter (as shown in FIG. 5A), are compensated.

[0096] The vector information determination unit 140 may compensate for only the velocity direction of the predetermined point P (22) by applying a smoothing filter to velocity directions of the plurality of points, or may compensate for only the velocity magnitude of the predetermined point P (22) by applying a smoothing filter to velocity magnitudes of the plurality of points.

[0097] FIG. 6 is a block diagram of an ultrasound apparatus 100 according to another exemplary embodiment of the present invention. The ultrasound apparatus 100 according to the exemplary embodiment shown in FIG. 6 may further include a display unit 150.

[0098] The ultrasound apparatus 100 includes the display unit 150 which may display a color Doppler image of an object to a user. The display unit 150 may display the color Doppler image of the object by mapping velocity magnitudes of a plurality of points of the object to a color scale. It is understood that the display unit 150 is not required to display a color image, and may also display other types of images, e.g., black and white images, according to other exemplary embodiments.

[0099] Also, the ultrasound apparatus 100 may obtain vector information of a predetermined point of the object by using a method of obtaining the vector information of the predetermined point, and may display the color Doppler image of the object by mapping a velocity magnitude of the predetermined point to a color scale.

[0100] In more detail, the probe 110 transmits an ultrasound signal to a predetermined point included in an object and receives a response signal reflected from the predetermined point. The vector information determination unit 140 determines vector information indicating a velocity magnitude and a velocity direction of the predetermined point, based on a reception angle and a Doppler frequency of the response signal. The vector information determination unit 140 may determine the vector information of the predetermined point based on reception angles and Doppler frequencies of two response signals. The display unit 150 may display a color Doppler image of the object by mapping the velocity magnitude of the predetermined point to a color scale.

[0101] FIGS. 7A and 7B are color Doppler images in which vector information of a plurality of points of an object is mapped to a color scale 25.

[0102] The display unit 150 may display the color Doppler image of the object by mapping velocity magnitudes of the plurality of points to predetermined colors of the color scale 25. As such, a user may instinctively and easily check movement of, for example, blood in a blood vessel.

[0103] If only velocity magnitudes of the plurality of points are mapped to the color scale 25, two points having opposite velocity directions but having the same velocity magnitude may be mapped to the same color. Accordingly, the color Doppler image should be formed in consideration of velocity magnitudes and velocity directions of the plurality of points.

[0104] From among the plurality of points, the display unit 150 of the ultrasound apparatus 100 may map a velocity magnitude of a point having a first velocity direction component to a first color, and may map a velocity magnitude of a point having a second velocity direction component opposite to the first velocity direction component to a second color, as illustrated in FIG. 7A. The color scale 25 of FIG. 7A include

colors corresponding to velocity magnitudes from 0 to -1, or from 0 to 1. That is, points having a velocity direction ① are mapped to the first color (corresponding to a part above the velocity magnitude 0 in the color scale 25 of FIG. 7A), and points having a velocity direction ② are mapped to the second color (corresponding to a part below the velocity magnitude 0 in the color scale 25 of FIG. 7A). As such, a user may easily check blood flow and may easily identify different types of blood flow, such as backflow.

[0105] The vector information determination unit 140 may estimate an overall velocity direction of the object by using the velocity directions of the plurality of points. For example, the vector information determination unit 140 may estimate an overall velocity direction of the object by using a vector sum of the vector information of the plurality of points.

[0106] The display unit 150 may display the color Doppler image of the object by mapping angle differences between the velocity directions of the plurality of points and the overall velocity direction of the object to the color scale 25. As such, a user may easily check blood flow and may easily identify different types of blood flow, such as turbulent flow or backflow.

[0107] The display unit 150 may display the color Doppler image of the object by mapping velocity magnitudes of the plurality of points and angle differences between the velocity directions of the plurality of points and the overall velocity direction of the object to the color scale 25, as illustrated in FIG. 7B. That is, referring to FIG. 7B, points having different velocity magnitudes and velocity directions are mapped to different colors. The circular color scale 25 of FIG. 7B includes colors corresponding to increasing or decreasing velocity magnitudes as indicated by the relative positions of the colors from a center of the circular color scale 25 toward a circumference of the circular color scale 25, and includes colors corresponding to angle differences between the velocity directions of the plurality of points and the overall velocity direction of the object as indicated by the relative angular positions of the colors within the circular color scale 25.

[0108] FIG. 8 is a flowchart of a method of generating an ultrasound image, according to an exemplary embodiment. Referring to FIG. 8, the method according to the exemplary embodiment includes operations performed in series by the ultrasound apparatus 100 illustrated in FIG. 2. Accordingly, although not mentioned particularly below, the descriptions provided above in relation to the ultrasound apparatus 100 illustrated in FIG. 2 may also be applied to the method illustrated in FIG. 8. It is understood that the method shown in FIG. 8 is not required to be performed by the ultrasound apparatus 100 illustrated in FIG. 2, and may alternatively be performed by other apparatuses according to other exemplary embodiments.

[0109] In operation S110, the ultrasound apparatus 100 transmits an ultrasound signal to the predetermined point P (22) included in the object.

[0110] In operation S120, the ultrasound apparatus 100 receives at least three response signals reflected from the predetermined point P (22). Each of the at least three response signals has a Doppler frequency and a reception angle.

[0111] In operation S130, the ultrasound apparatus 100 extracts a plurality of response signal pairs by combining the at least three response signals two-by-two. If the ultrasound apparatus 100 receives n response signals, a certain number of response signal pairs may be extracted. The certain number may be ${}_nC_2({}_nC_2 = \{n*(n-1)/(2*1)\})$.

[0112] In operation S140, the ultrasound apparatus 100 obtains a plurality of pieces of prediction vector information by using the plurality of response signal pairs. The plurality of pieces of prediction vector information includes a prediction velocity magnitude and a prediction velocity direction of the predetermined point P (22).

[0113] In operation S150, the ultrasound apparatus 100 determines vector information indicating a velocity magnitude and a velocity direction of the predetermined point P (22) by using the plurality of pieces of prediction vector information.

[0114] FIG. 9 is a block diagram of an ultrasound apparatus 200 according to another exemplary embodiment.

[0115] The ultrasound apparatus 200 according to the exemplary embodiment shown in FIG. 9 locates a region of interest in an image generated by a color Doppler apparatus and a range gate in an image generated by a spectral Doppler apparatus accurately on a region of an object to be measured, and adjusts a steering angle of an ultrasound signal in such a way that an angle between a velocity direction of the region to be measured and an incident direction of the ultrasound signal transmitted to the object is not 90°.

[0116] Referring to FIG. 9, the ultrasound apparatus 200 according to the exemplary embodiment includes a probe 210, a region dividing unit 220, a measurement unit 230, and a control unit 240. The region dividing unit 220 and the control unit 240 may be formed as microprocessors, although are not limited thereto.

[0117] Initially, the region dividing unit 220 divides the object into a plurality of regions. The region dividing unit 220 may divide only a portion of the object into a plurality of regions.

[0118] The probe 210 transmits an ultrasound signal to the plurality of regions and receives response signals reflected from the plurality of regions.

[0119] The measurement unit 230 measures power levels or Doppler frequencies of the received response signals.

[0120] The control unit 240 determines a monitoring region from among the plurality of regions by using the power levels or the Doppler frequencies of the response signals.

[0121] When a user desires to measure movement of blood in a blood vessel, the region of interest should be adjusted to include blood in the blood vessel and the range gate should be adjusted to be located in blood in the blood vessel. However, if the user manually adjusts the region of interest and the range gate, an inaccurate Doppler image may be generated.

[0122] Accordingly, when a user desires to measure movement of blood in a blood vessel, the ultrasound apparatus 200 automatically adjusts the monitoring region of the ultrasound apparatus 200 to be located in blood in the blood vessel and correspondingly adjusts the region of interest or the range gate.

[0123] FIGS. 10 and 11 are schematic diagrams for describing methods of determining a monitoring region 36 from among a plurality of regions 28 of an object 20, using the ultrasound apparatus 200 illustrated in FIG. 9. According to this example, a user desires to monitor movement of blood in a blood vessel 24. It is understood that many other types of objects and flows may also be monitored.

[0124] FIGS. 10 and 11 show the object 20 including tissues 26 and the blood vessel 24, and a portion of the object 20 is divided into the plurality of regions 28.

[0125] In FIG. 10, the control unit 240 arbitrarily sets an initial region 32 from among the plurality of regions 28.

[0126] The measurement unit 230 measures power levels or Doppler frequencies of response signals reflected from the plurality of regions 28.

[0127] In general, power levels of response signals reflected from the tissues 26 are higher than those of response signals reflected from blood, and a Doppler frequency of a response signal reflected from the tissue 26 is less than that of a response signal reflected from blood.

[0128] The control unit 240 selects regions 34 reflecting response signals having Doppler frequencies in a first predetermined range and determines one of the regions 34, which is the closest to the initial region 32 set by the control unit 240, as the monitoring region 36. The first predetermined range may be a Doppler frequency range equal to or greater than a preset value and equal to or less than the highest Doppler frequency from among the Doppler frequencies of the response signals. Since the regions 34 reflecting response signals having Doppler frequencies greater than the preset value are mostly distributed in a region where blood flows in the blood vessel 24, the control unit 240 determines one of the regions 34, which is the closest to the initial region 32, as the monitoring region 36. However, the first predetermined range may vary within a range that is well known to one of ordinary skill in the art.

[0129] Referring to FIG. 11, the control unit 240 may not set an initial region and may determine a region reflecting a response signal having a Doppler frequency in a second predetermined range from among the Doppler frequencies of the received response signals, as the monitoring region 36. In this case, the second predetermined range may include the highest Doppler frequency from among the Doppler frequencies of the response signals, and may vary within a range that is well known to one of ordinary skill in the art.

[0130] Also, the control unit 240 may select regions 34 reflecting response signals having a power level in a third predetermined range and may determine one of the regions 34, which is the closest to the initial region 32 set by the control unit 240, as the monitoring region 36. The third predetermined range may be a power level range greater than 0 and equal to or less than a preset value. Since the regions 34 reflecting response signals having a power level less than the preset value are mostly distributed in a region where blood flows in the blood vessel 24, the control unit 240 determines one of the regions 34, which is the closest to the initial region 32, as the monitoring region 36. However, the third predetermined range may vary within a range that is well known to one of ordinary skill in the art.

[0131] Furthermore, as illustrated in FIG. 11, the control unit 240 may not set an initial region and may determine a region reflecting a response signal having a power level in a fourth predetermined range, as the monitoring region 36. In this case, the fourth predetermined range may include the lowest power level from among the power levels of the response signals, and may vary within a range that is well known to one of ordinary skill in the art.

[0132] As described above, the response signals reflected from the plurality of regions 28 include the response signals reflected from the tissues 26 and the response signals reflected from blood. The response signals reflected from the tissues 26 may be removed by applying a clutter filter to the received response signals. As such, the response signals reflected from the tissues 26, which have power levels relatively higher than those of response signals reflected from blood, may be removed. In this case, the control unit 240 may

determine a region reflecting a response signal having a power level in a fifth predetermined range from among the response signals that pass through the clutter filter, as the monitoring region 36. The fifth predetermined range may include the highest power level from among the power levels of the response signals that pass through the clutter filter, and may vary within a range that is well known to one of ordinary skill in the art.

[0133] In the color Doppler apparatus, the control unit 240 may adjust the region of interest in such a way that the monitoring region 36 is included in the region of interest. In the spectral Doppler apparatus, the control unit 240 may adjust the range gate in such a way that the range gate is located in the monitoring region 36.

[0134] Since the monitoring region 36 is determined based on power levels or Doppler frequencies of response signals, a user may automatically obtain accurate location information of blood and may obtain an accurate Doppler image.

[0135] Although a region corresponding to blood in a blood vessel is determined as a monitoring region in the above description, it will be understood by one of ordinary skill in the art that, due to a simple modification, a region corresponding to tissues or other objects may also be determined as the monitoring region.

[0136] As described above, if an angle between an incident direction of an ultrasound signal transmitted to an object and a velocity direction of the predetermined point P (22) is close to 90°, a velocity magnitude of the predetermined point P (22) may not be easily measured in an accurate fashion. Accordingly, a steering angle of the ultrasound signal should be adjusted.

[0137] FIG. 12 is a schematic diagram for describing a method of determining a location of the blood vessel 24 included in the object 20, using the ultrasound apparatus 200 illustrated in FIG. 9.

[0138] The measurement unit 230 measures power levels or Doppler frequencies of response signals reflected from a plurality of regions located within a preset distance from the monitoring region 36.

[0139] Since Doppler frequencies of response signals reflected from blood are higher than those of response signals reflected from the tissues 26, if a high-pass filter is applied to the response signals, the response signals that pass through the high-pass filter are mostly distributed along the blood vessel 24 and are scarcely distributed in the other regions.

[0140] The control unit 240 obtains a modeled line 38 by applying a fitting method to the Doppler frequencies of the response signals. The fitting method may include many different type of fitting, e.g., linear fitting or curve fitting, and the modeled line 38 may include a linear line or a curved line. The fitting method is a method of obtaining a line indicating a tendency of data distribution, and is used in statistics.

[0141] A location of the modeled line 38 obtained by applying the fitting method to the Doppler frequencies of the response signals very closely corresponds to the location of the blood vessel 24. Since blood in the blood vessel 24 flows along the blood vessel 24, the control unit 240 adjusts a steering angle of an ultrasound signal transmitted to the plurality of regions in such a way that an angle between the obtained modeled line 38 and an incident direction of the ultrasound signal is a predetermined angle. If the modeled line 38 is a curved line, a direction of a tangent to the curved line may be determined as a direction of the blood vessel 24. Alternatively, the control unit 240 may apply the fitting

method to velocity magnitudes of the plurality of regions, which are obtained from the Doppler frequencies of the response signals, based on the concept that blood has velocity magnitudes less than those of the tissues 26.

[0142] Also, the control unit 240 may obtain the modeled line 38 by applying the fitting method to power levels of the response signals. Since power levels of response signals reflected from blood are lower than those of response signals reflected from the tissues 26, the control unit 240 may obtain reciprocals of the power levels of the response signals and may apply a high-pass filter to the reciprocals of the power levels so as to reduce a data distribution of the response signals reflected from the tissues 26. As such, data of the response signals reflected from blood are mostly distributed along the blood vessel 24, and data of the response signals reflected from regions other than blood are reduced.

[0143] If the fitting method is applied to the reciprocals of the power levels, the modeled line 38 illustrated in FIG. 12 may be obtained, and the control unit 240 may adjust the steering angle of the ultrasound signal transmitted to the plurality of regions in such a way that the angle between the obtained modeled line 38 and the incident direction of the ultrasound signal is the predetermined angle.

[0144] FIG. 13 is a schematic diagram for describing a method of adjusting a steering angle of an ultrasound signal, using the ultrasound apparatus 200 illustrated in FIG. 9.

[0145] Referring to FIG. 13, an angle between the ultrasound signal and the modeled line 38 is θ , and the steering angle of the ultrasound signal is Φ . The control unit 240 adjusts the steering angle Φ of the ultrasound signal transmitted to the object 20 in such a way that the angle θ between an incident direction of the ultrasound signal and the modeled line 38 is not 90°. That is, the control unit 240 may adjust the steering angle Φ in such a way that the angle θ between the incident direction of the transmitted ultrasound signal and the modeled line 38 is close to 0°.

[0146] FIG. 14 is a flowchart of a method of generating an ultrasound image, according to another exemplary embodiment. Referring to FIG. 14, the method according to another exemplary embodiment includes operations performed in series by the ultrasound apparatus 200 illustrated in FIG. 9. Accordingly, although not mentioned particularly below, the descriptions provided above in relation to the ultrasound apparatus 200 illustrated in FIG. 9 may also be applied to the method illustrated in FIG. 14. It is understood that the method shown in FIG. 14 is not required to be performed by the ultrasound apparatus 200 illustrated in FIG. 9, and may alternatively be performed by other apparatuses according to other exemplary embodiments.

[0147] In operation S210, the ultrasound apparatus 200 divides an image of an object into a plurality of regions. The ultrasound apparatus 200 may divide a portion of the object into a plurality of regions.

[0148] In operation S220, the ultrasound apparatus 200 transmits an ultrasound signal to the plurality of regions.

[0149] In operation S230, the ultrasound apparatus 200 receives response signals reflected from the plurality of regions.

[0150] In operation S240, the ultrasound apparatus 200 measures power levels or Doppler frequencies of the response signals reflected from the plurality of regions.

[0151] In operation S250, the ultrasound apparatus 200 determines a monitoring region from among the plurality of regions by using the power levels or the Doppler frequencies of the response signals.

[0152] The ultrasound apparatus 200 may adjust a region of interest in such a way that the monitoring region is included in the region of interest, or may adjust a range gate in such a way that the range gate is located in the monitoring region.

[0153] Exemplary embodiments of the present disclosure can be written as computer programs and can be implemented in general-use digital computers that execute the programs using a computer-readable recording medium.

[0154] Examples of the computer-readable recording medium include magnetic storage media (e.g., ROM, floppy disks, hard disks, etc.), optical recording media (e.g., CD-ROMs or DVDs), etc.

[0155] While the present disclosure has been particularly shown and described with reference to exemplary embodiments thereof, it will be understood by those of ordinary skill in the art that various changes in form and details may be made therein without departing from the spirit and scope of the present disclosure as defined by the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. An ultrasound apparatus comprising:
 - a region dividing unit which divides an object into a plurality of regions;
 - a probe which transmits an ultrasound signal to the plurality of regions and receives response signals reflected from the plurality of regions;
 - a measurement unit which measures power levels or Doppler frequencies of the received response signals; and
 - a control unit which determines a monitoring region from among the plurality of regions by using the power levels or the Doppler frequencies of the received response signals.
2. The ultrasound apparatus of claim 1, wherein the control unit arbitrarily sets an initial region from among the plurality of regions, and determines one of the regions reflecting response signals having Doppler frequencies in a first predetermined range, which is closest to the initial region, as the monitoring region.

3. The ultrasound apparatus of claim 1, wherein the control unit determines one of the regions reflecting a response signal having a Doppler frequency in a second predetermined range, as the monitoring region.

4. The ultrasound apparatus of claim 1, wherein the control unit arbitrarily sets an initial region from among the plurality of regions, and determines one of the regions reflecting response signals having power levels in a third predetermined range, which is closest to the initial region, as the monitoring region.

5. The ultrasound apparatus of claim 1, wherein the control unit determines one of the regions reflecting a response signal having a power level in a fourth predetermined range, as the monitoring region.

6. The ultrasound apparatus of claim 1, wherein the control unit determines one of the regions reflecting a response signal having a power level in a fifth predetermined range from among the response signals that pass through a clutter filter, as the monitoring region.

7. The ultrasound apparatus claim 2, wherein the control unit adjusts a region of interest in such a way that the monitoring region is included in the region of interest.

8. The ultrasound apparatus claim 2, wherein the control unit adjusts a range gate in such a way that the range gate is located in the monitoring region.

9. The ultrasound apparatus of claim 1, wherein the measurement unit measures power levels or Doppler frequencies of response signals reflected from a plurality of the regions located within a preset distance from the monitoring region, and

wherein the control unit determines a blood vessel direction of the object based on a modeled line obtained by applying a fitting method to the power levels or the Doppler frequencies of the response signals reflected from the plurality of regions, and adjusts a steering angle of the ultrasound signal in such a way that an angle between the blood vessel direction and an incident direction of the ultrasound signal transmitted to the plurality of regions is a predetermined angle.

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专利名称(译)	超声设备和产生超声图像的方法		
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摘要(译)

产生超声图像的方法包括将超声信号发送到包括在对象中的预定点并接收从预定点反射的至少三个响应信号;通过将所接收的至少三个响应信号2×2组合来提取多个响应信号对;基于多个响应中包括的响应信号的接收角度和多普勒频率,获得多条预测矢量信息,每条预测矢量信息指示预定点的预测速度幅度和预测速度方向信号对;基于所述多条预测矢量信息,确定指示所述预定点的速度大小和速度方向的矢量信息。

