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(54) **ULTRASOUND PHANTOM HAVING A
CURVED SURFACE**

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G01N 29/30 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
USPC **73/1.86**

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
None
See application file for complete search history.

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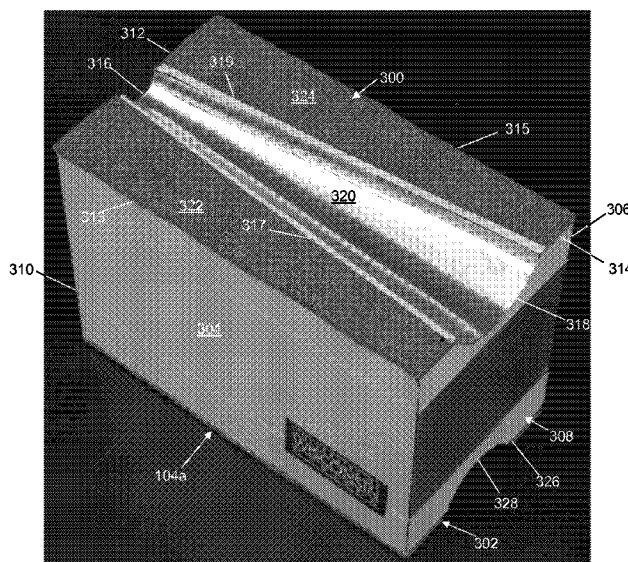
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A phantom used in quality assurance and performance tests
and/or in pre-purchase testing of ultrasound scanners is pro-
vided. The phantom includes a container, a boundary formed
within the container, and a curved scanning surface. The
container includes a top surface, a bottom surface opposite
the top surface, and a wall mounted between the top surface
and the bottom surface to form the container. The boundary is
configured to hold a tissue mimicking material. The curved
scanning surface is formed in the top surface in a direction
towards an interior of the container. The curved scanning
surface is shaped to support translation perpendicular to an
image plane of an application end of an ultrasound transducer
along at least a portion of an axis extending between a first
location on the curved scanning surface and a second location
on the curved scanning surface.

19 Claims, 15 Drawing Sheets



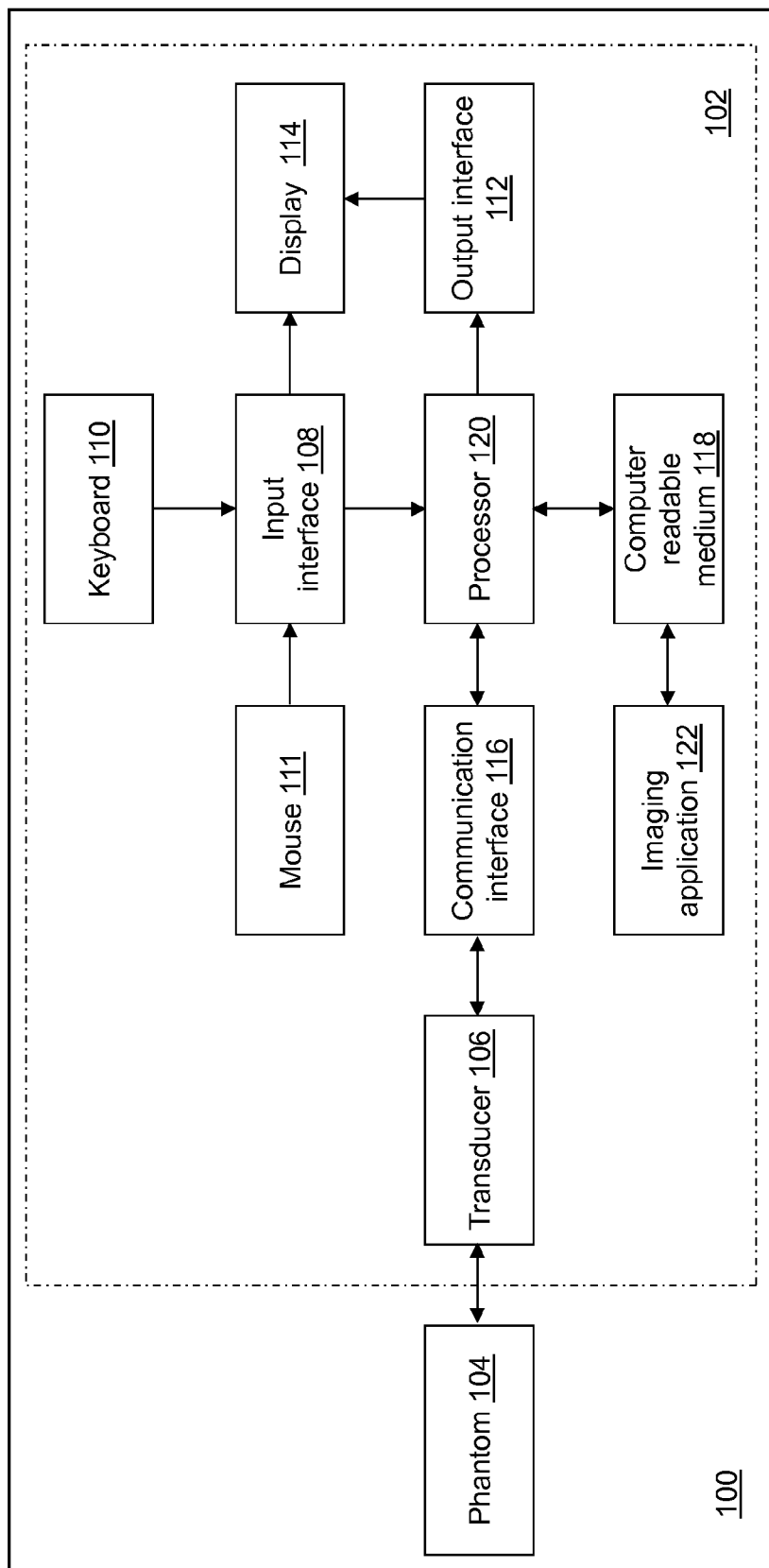


Fig. 1

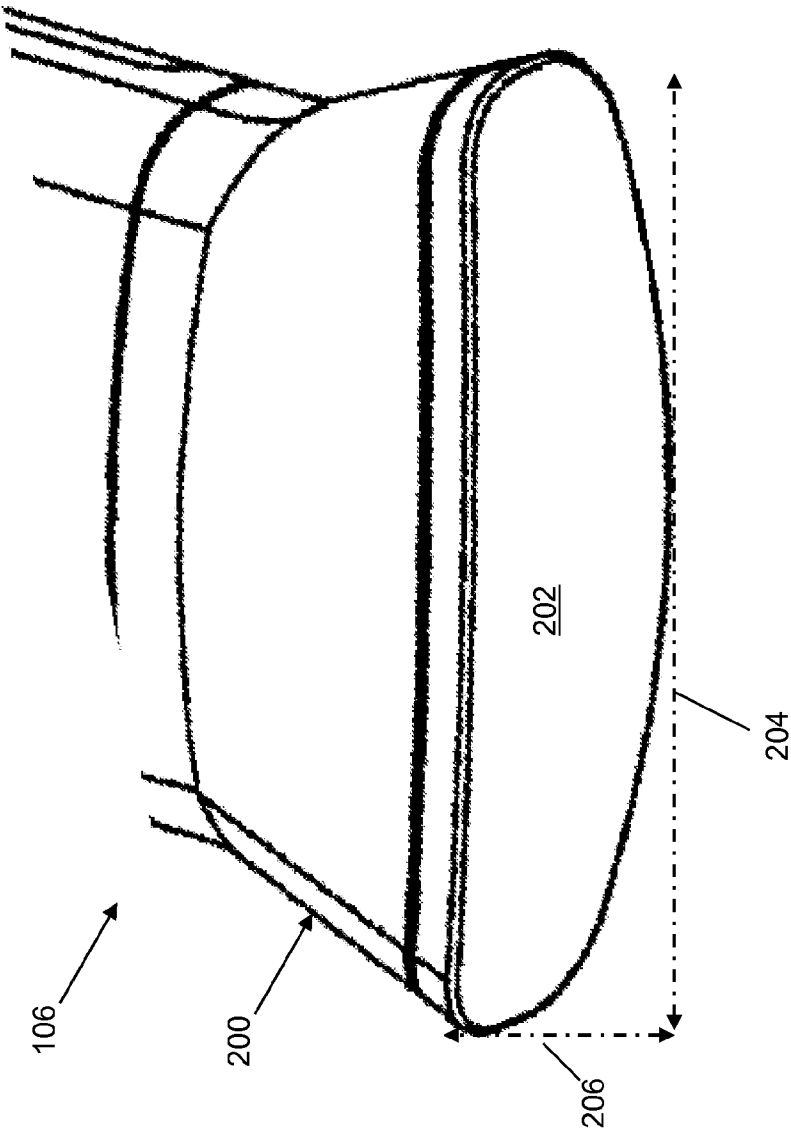


Fig. 2

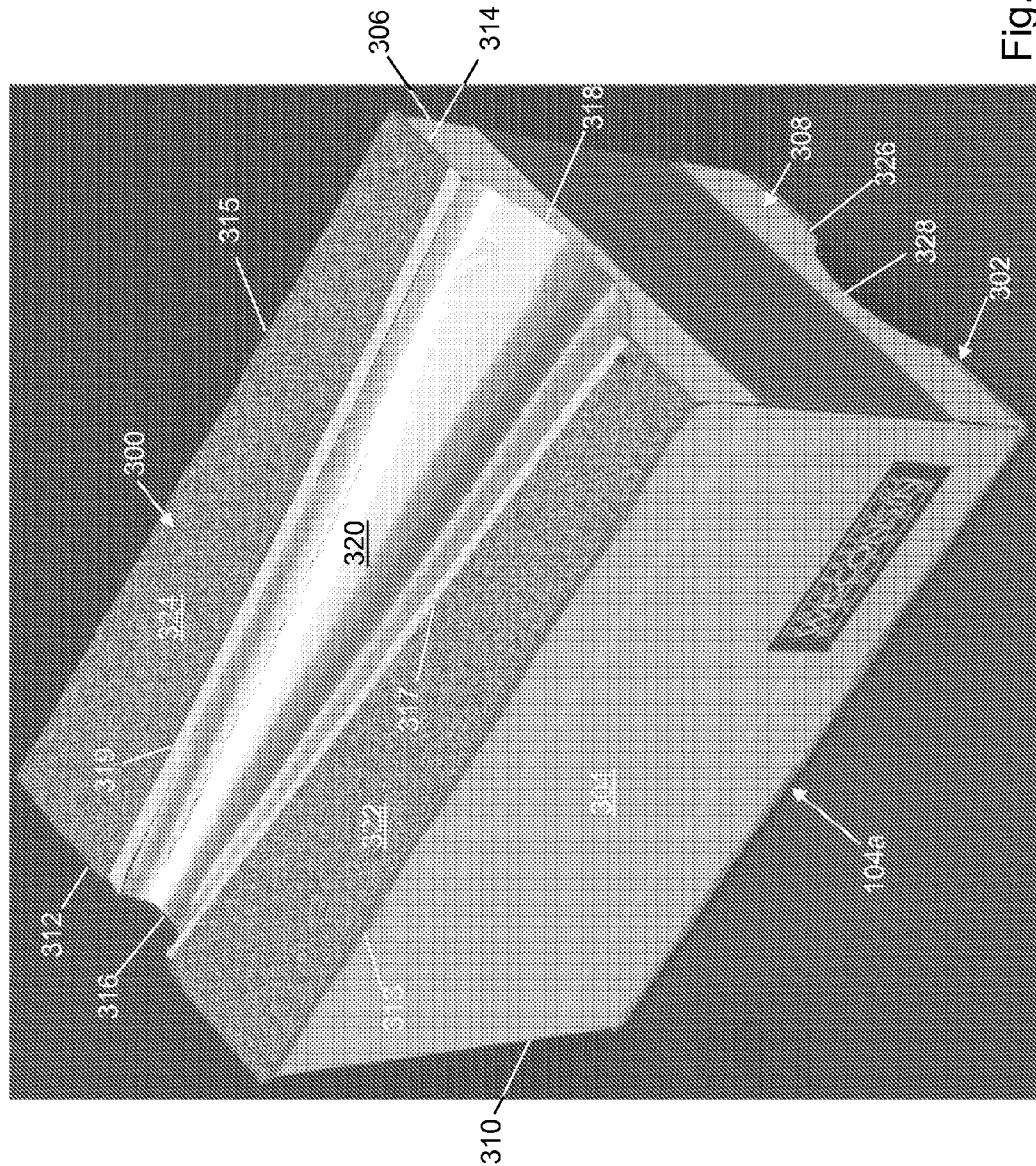
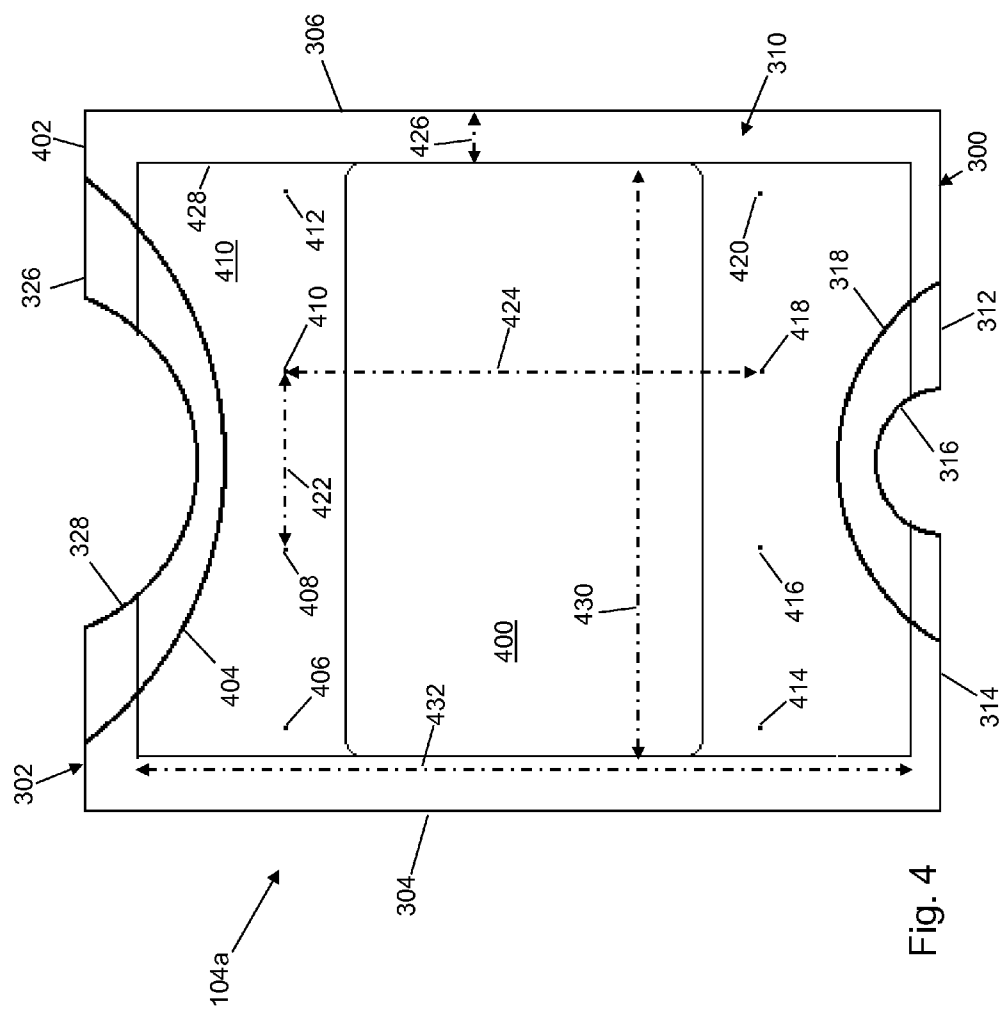


Fig. 3



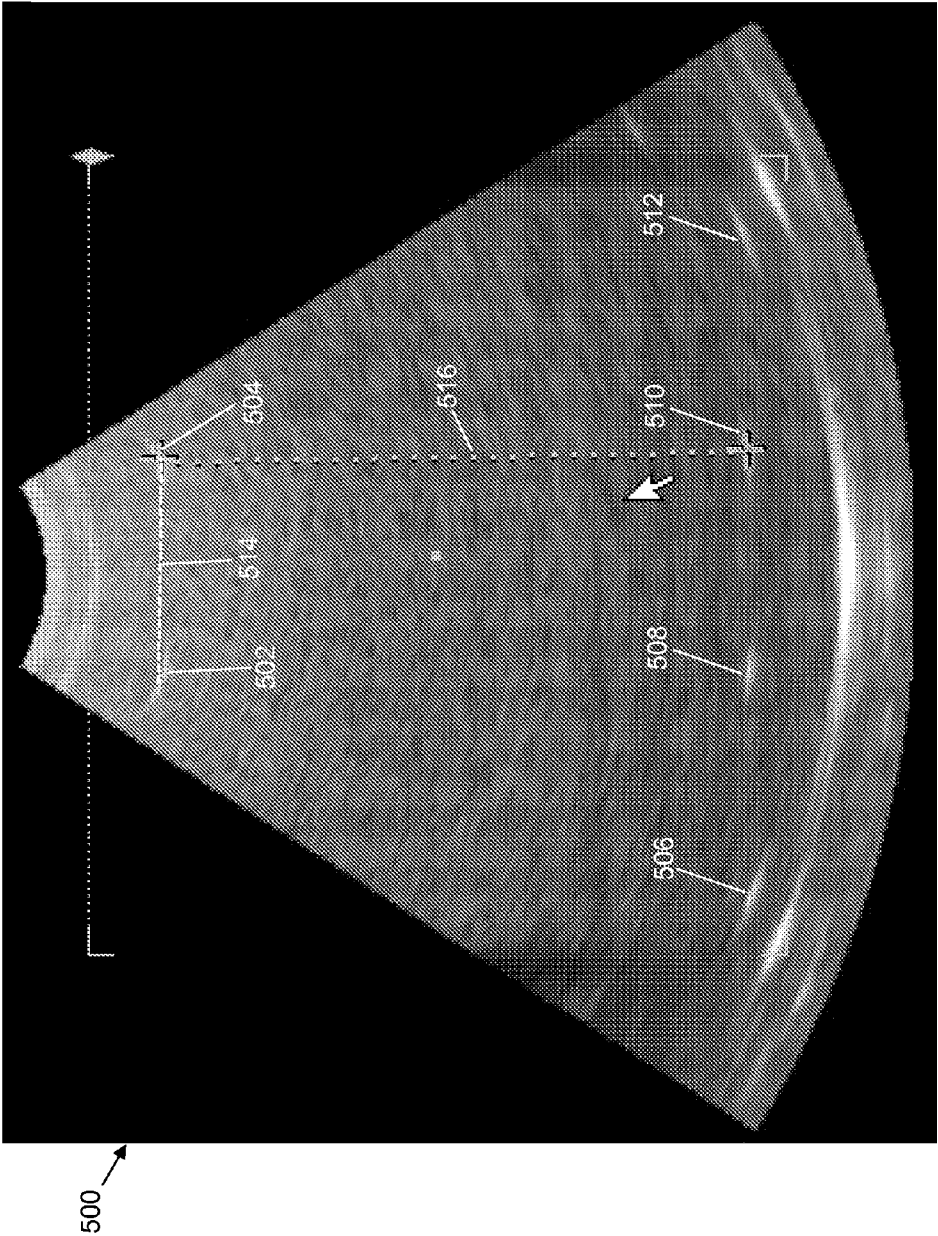


Fig. 5

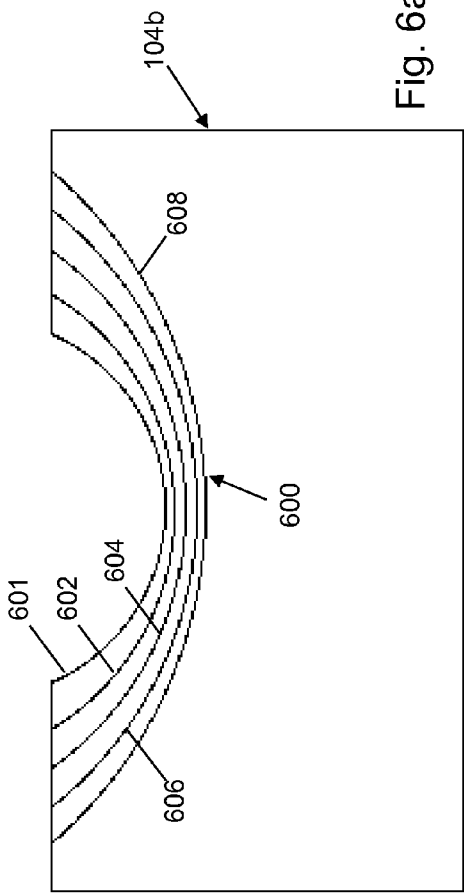


Fig. 6a

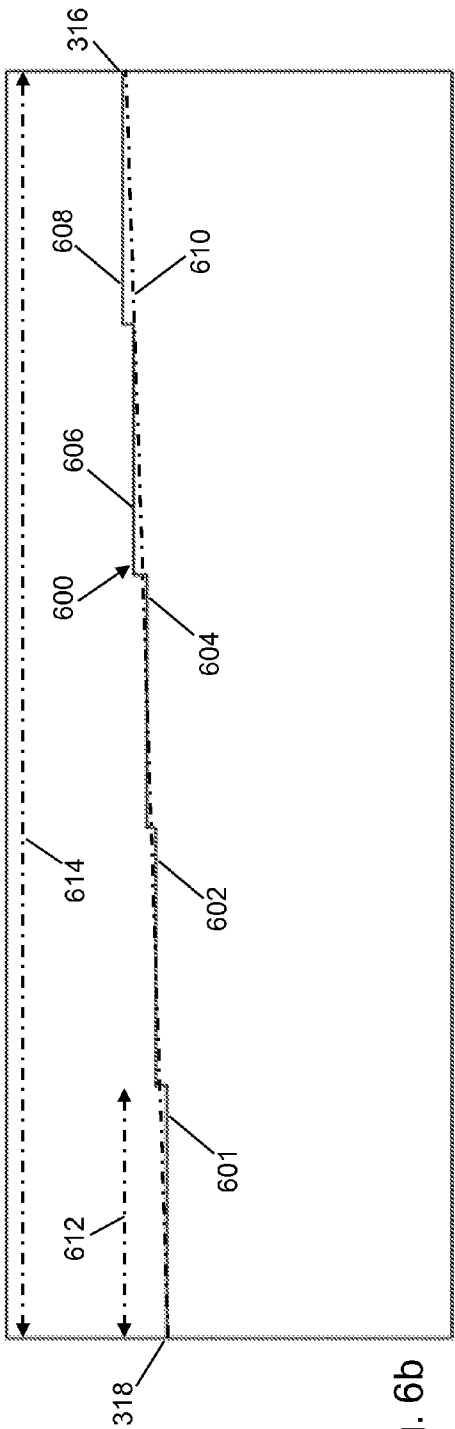


Fig. 6b

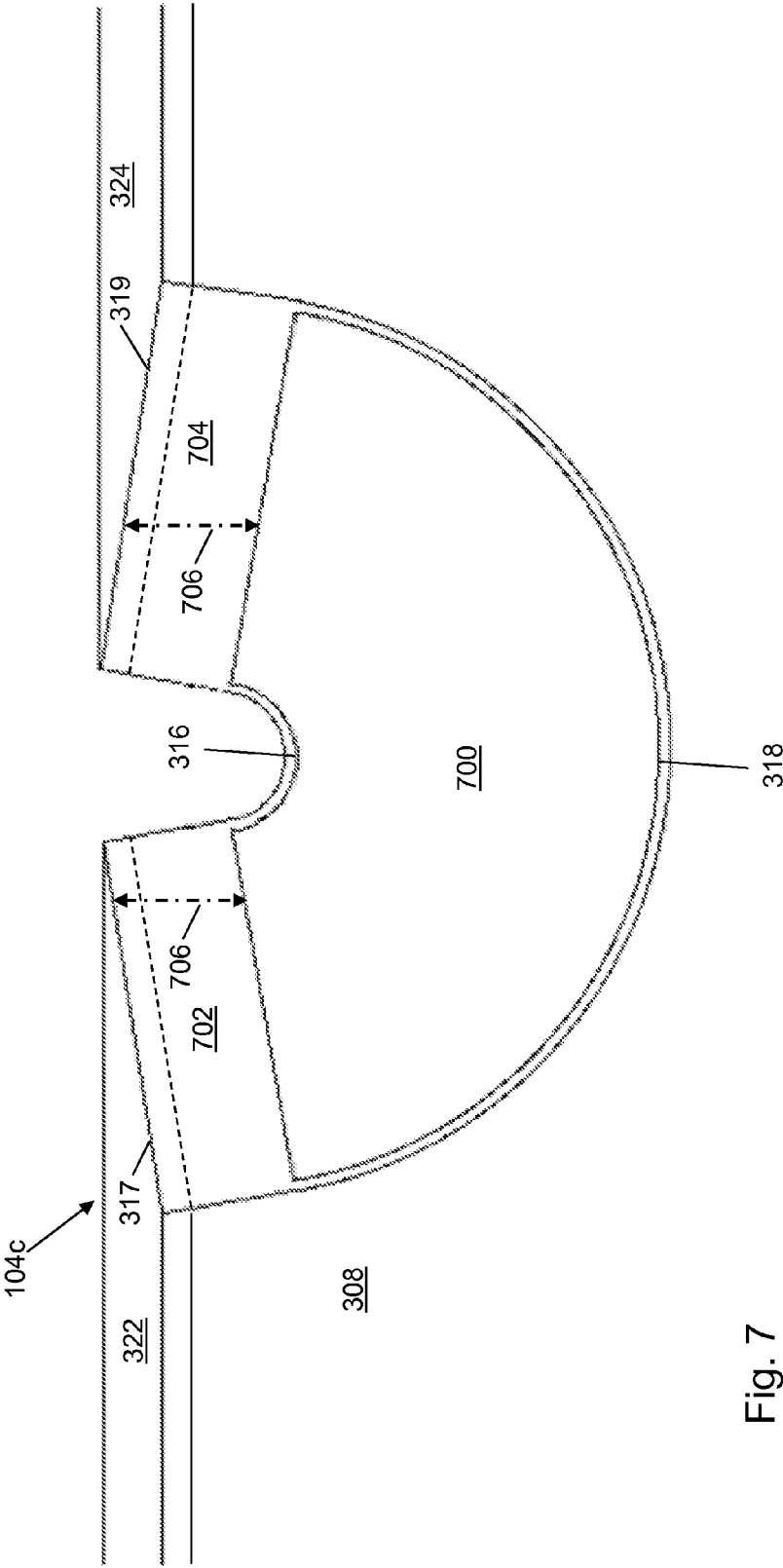


Fig. 7

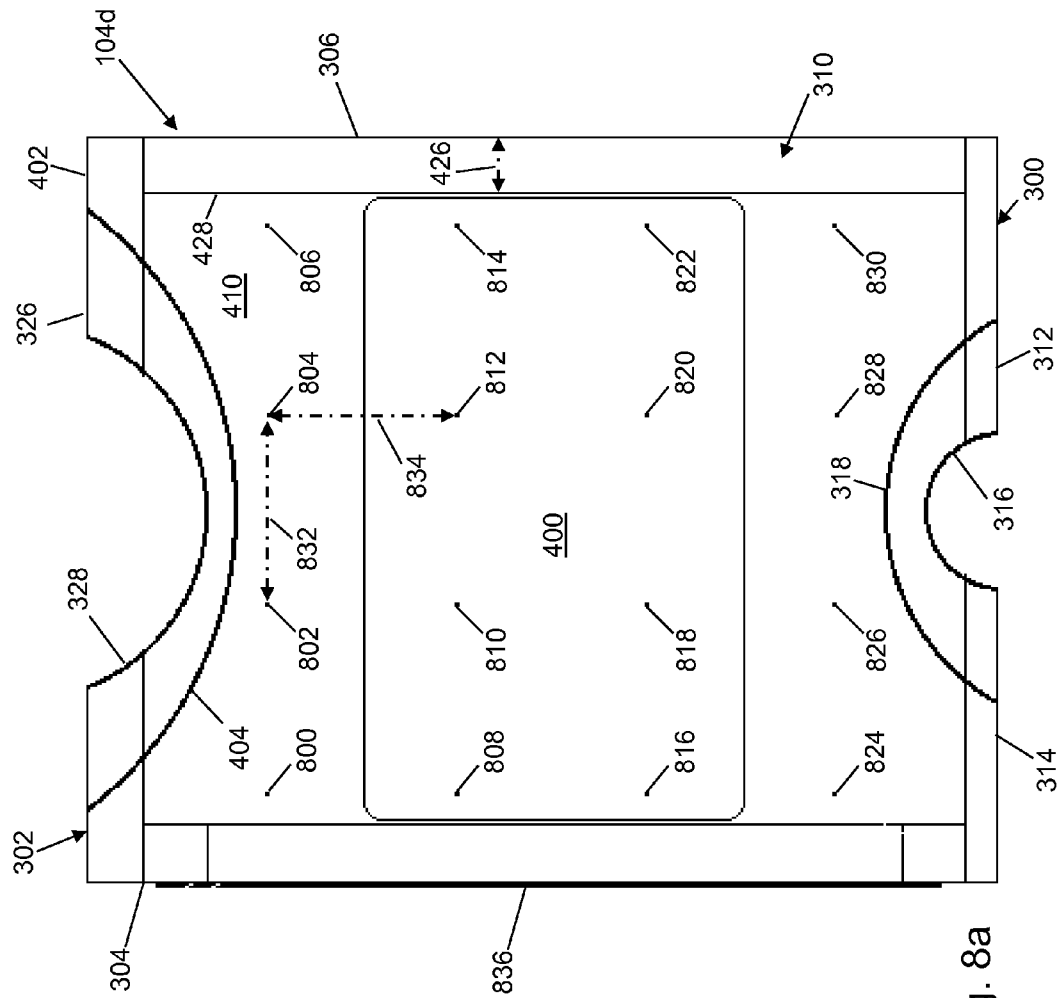


Fig. 8a

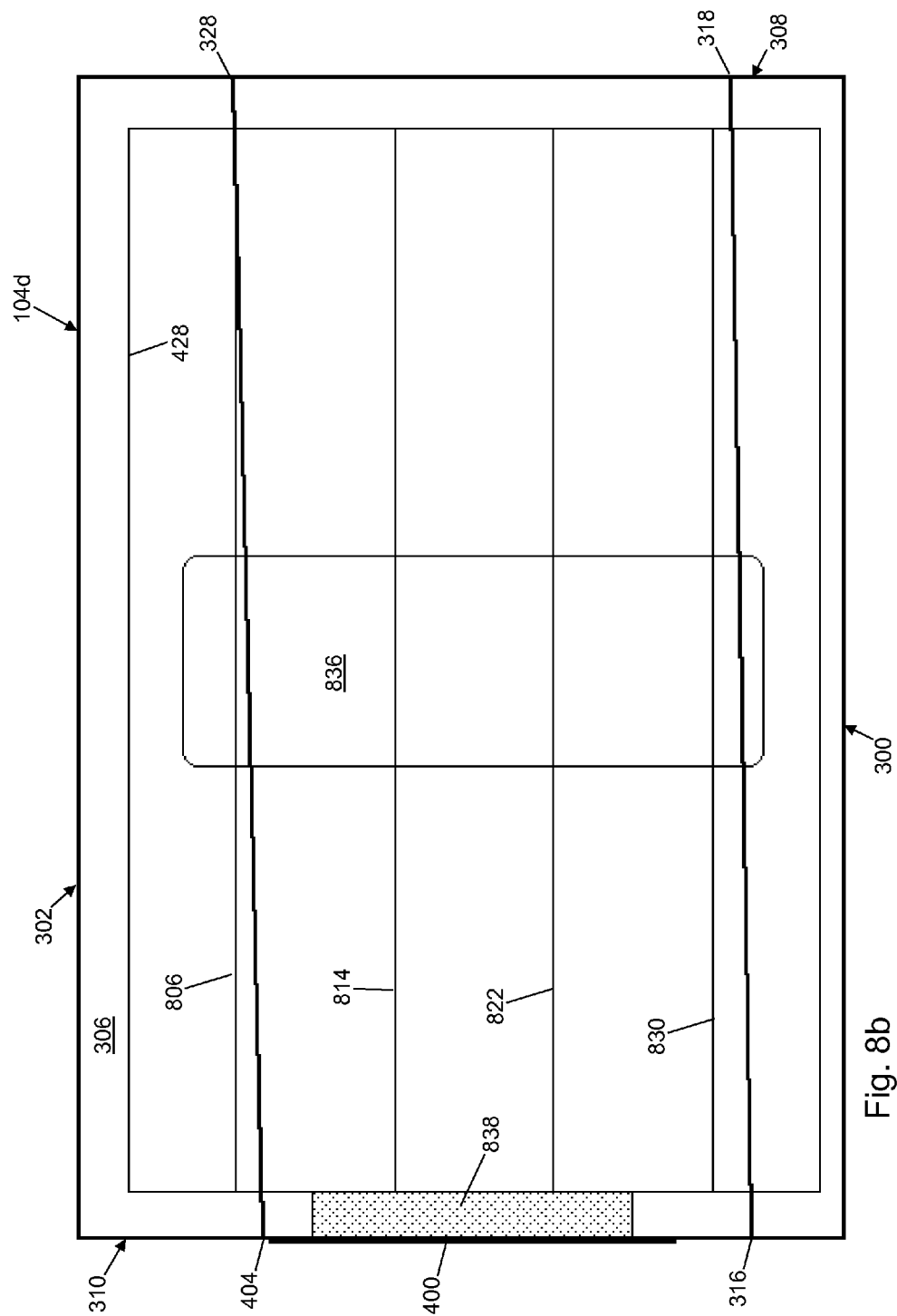


Fig. 8b

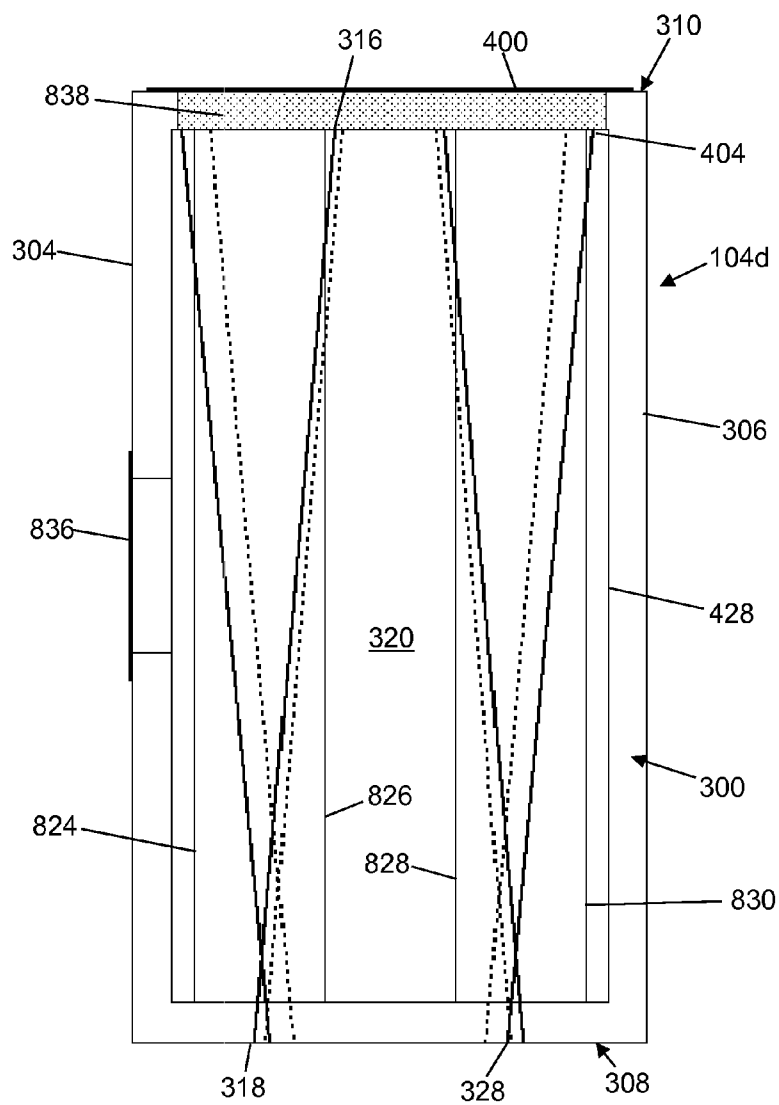


Fig. 8c

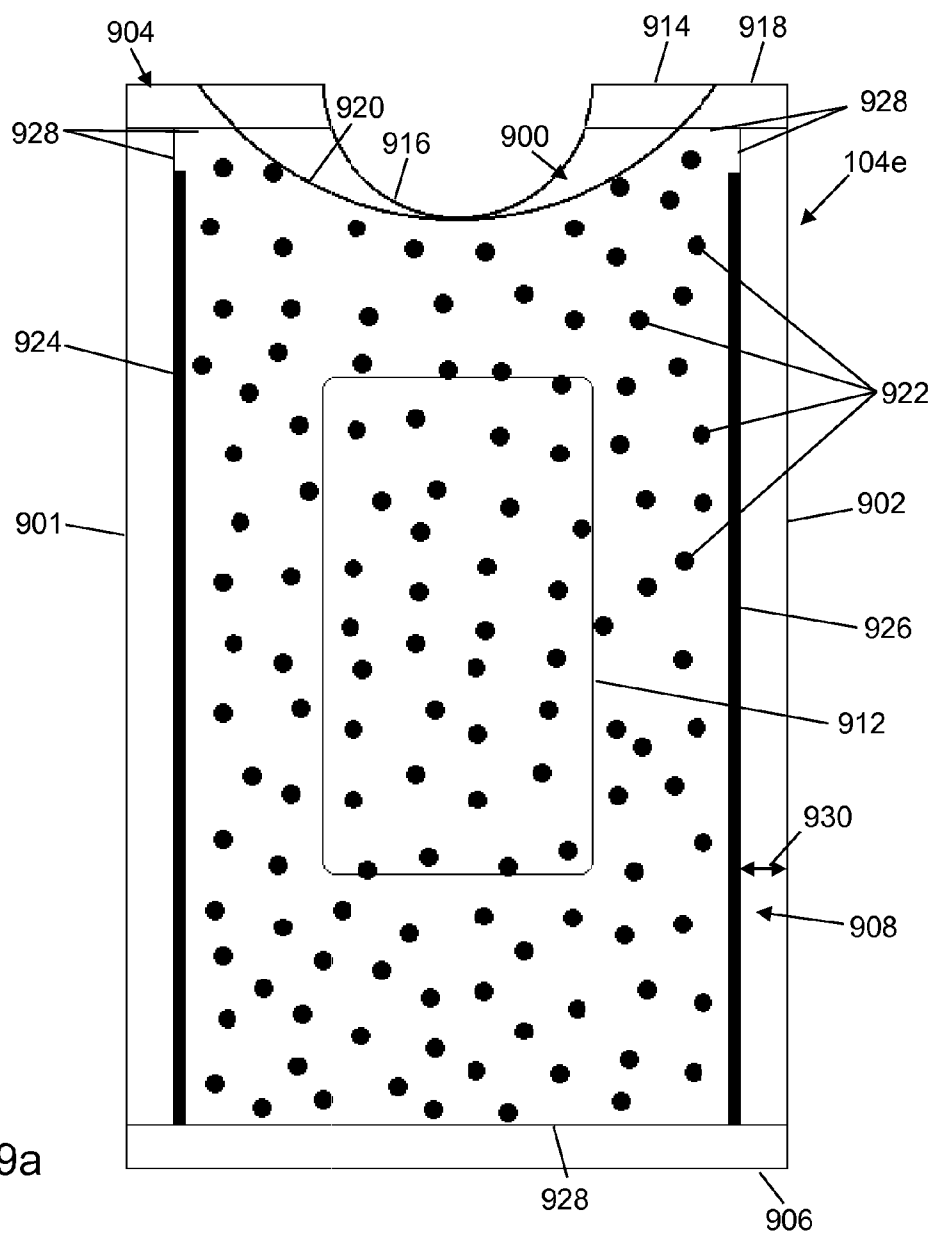
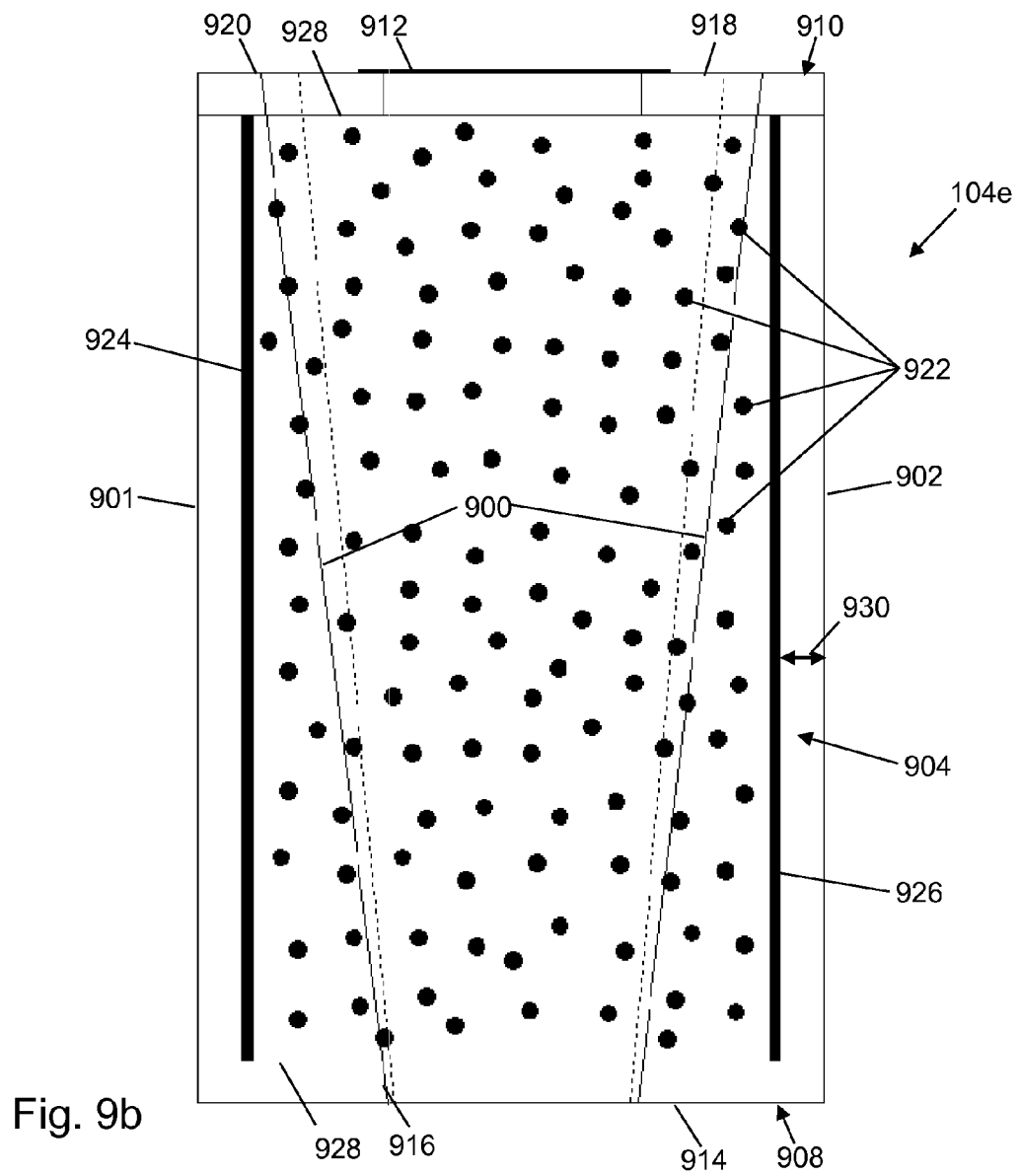
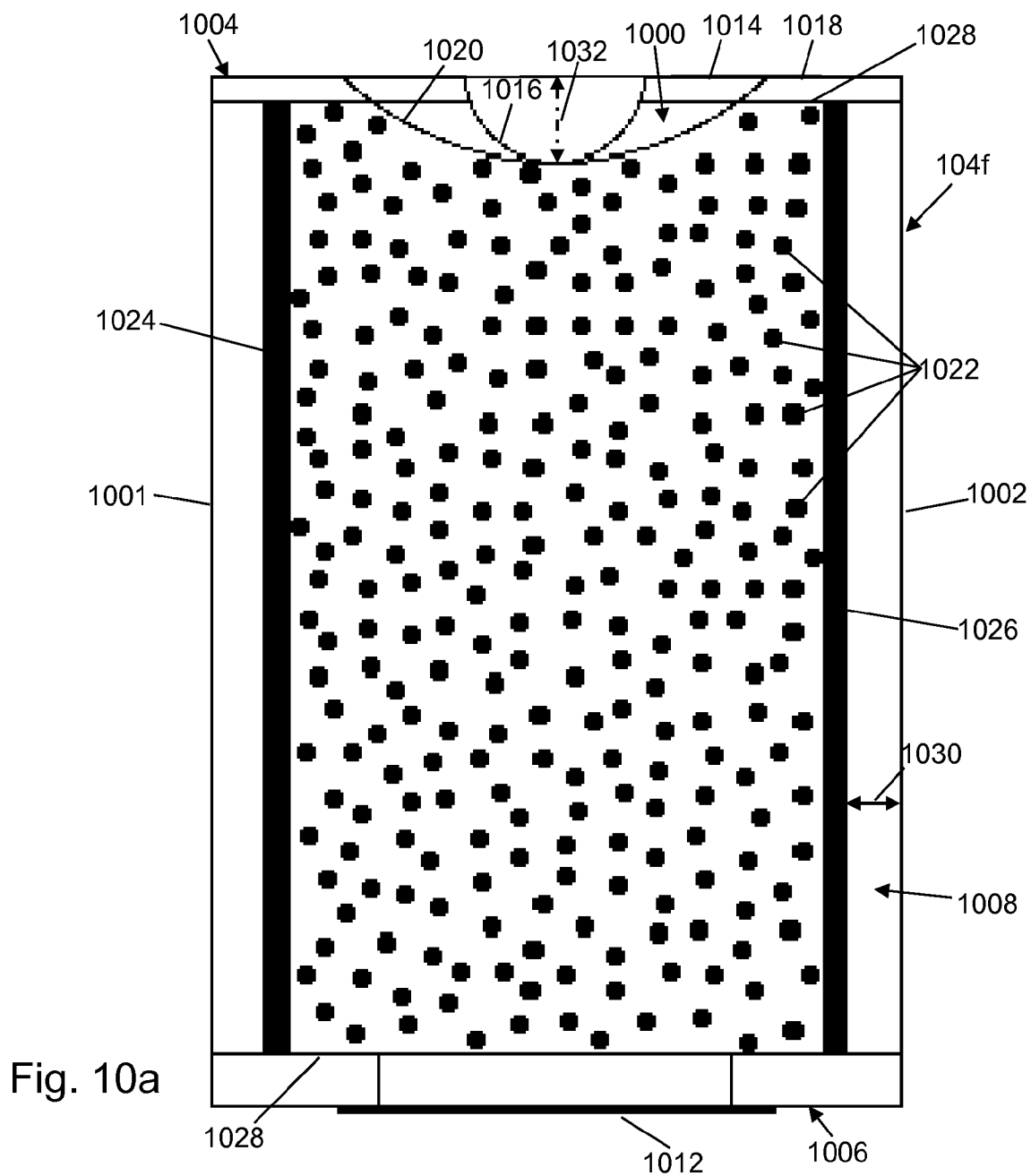


Fig. 9a





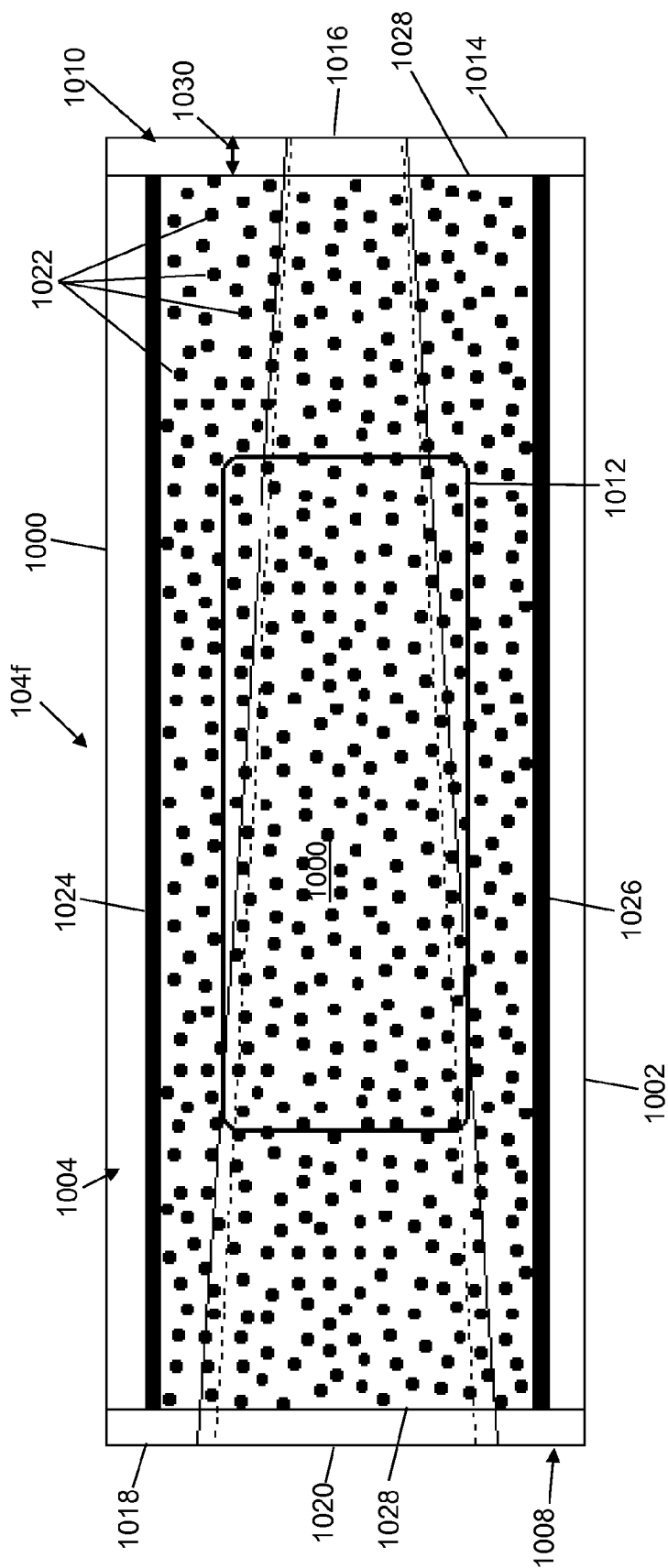


Fig. 10b

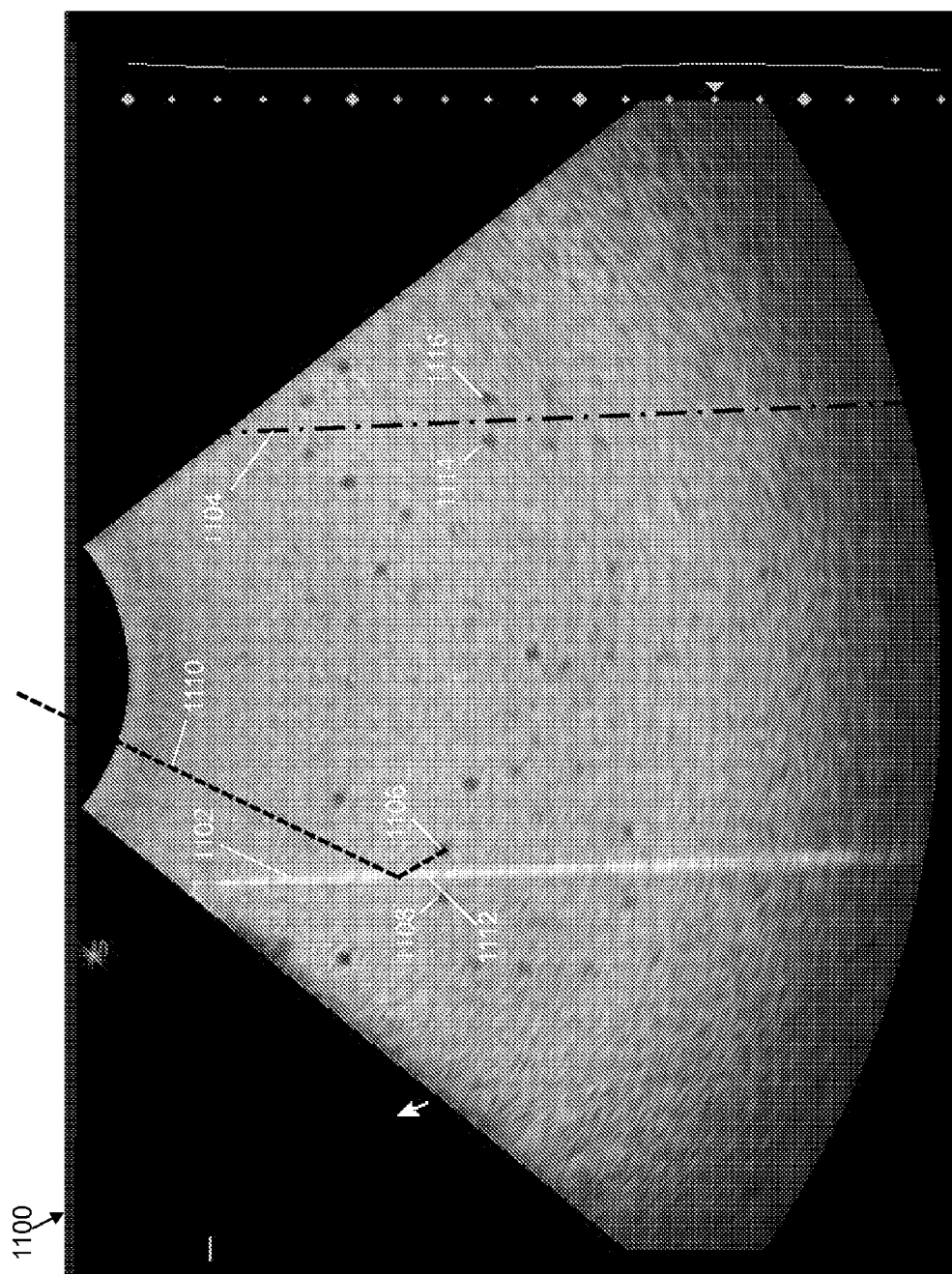


Fig. 11

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ULTRASOUND PHANTOM HAVING A CURVED SURFACE

REFERENCE TO GOVERNMENT RIGHTS

This invention was made with government support under CA111289, CA112192, CA140939, CA140271, and EB010098 awarded by the National Institutes of Health. The government has certain rights in the invention.

BACKGROUND

Periodic testing of ultrasound scanners and transducers is important for maintaining image quality, and is a required element of ultrasound practice accreditation programs. A new federal law, which goes into effect in 2012 in the United States, requires echocardiography imaging practices to achieve and maintain accredited status in order to be reimbursed for imaging examinations of Medicare and Medicaid patients. This new legislation, as well as similar requirements imposed by private insurance providers, has increased the focus on accreditation, and performance evaluation of medical imaging equipment including ultrasound scanners.

As understood by a person of skill in the art, there are a variety of types of phantoms used to support the quality assurance and performance testing of ultrasound scanners. Recommended tests include an element or channel failure (EOCF) test, a distance measurement accuracy (DMA) test, and a maximum depth of penetration (DOP) test. In the EOCF test, images of a macroscopically uniform phantom are inspected for the presence of shadowing extending from the transducer surface. The potential clinical significance of any detected shadowing is assessed. In the distance measurement accuracy test, the accuracy of distance measurements made in the vertical and horizontal directions using a phantom containing multiple objects is determined. In the DOP test, an assessment of the maximum depth from which echoes can be detected is measured. For example, U.S. Pat. No. 5,670,719 to Madsen, et al., discloses a phantom containing background material mimicking the ultrasonic characteristics of human tissue and coplanar spherical target lesions ultrasonically contrasting with the background material. Digitized images can be formed from the ultrasound scan of slices in which the lesions are centered. A lesion signal to noise ratio, LSNR, is calculated at each sphere in the target lesion slice. This calculation employs (1) a pixel value average calculated over a sample area of the target image slice centered at a pixel location and of a size approximately that of the cross-sectional area of the target lesions, (2) an average pixel value calculated over an averaging area centered at the same pixel coordinate, but containing mostly background image data, and (3) a standard deviation of averaged pixel values calculated in the background material image plane. The proximal and distal depth range limits of detectability of an ultrasound scanner, for a given lesion diameter and contrast, can be determined based on the number of pixel locations in a depth range of the scanned plane having an absolute value LSNR greater than a threshold value.

For quality assurance and performance testing, most phantoms contain objects to be detected that are suspended in a material that closely mimics the ultrasonic propagation characteristics of human tissue. For example, a phantom may contain metal or plastic fibers, spheres, cylinders, etc., that may be oriented in a particular direction, such as perpendicular to the scanning plane, at known locations or at random, unknown locations. For example, U.S. Pat. No. 4,843,866 to Madsen, et al., discloses a phantom including a multiplicity of

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scattering particles spaced sufficiently close to each other that the scanner is incapable of resolving individual scattering particles and testing spheres having a testing sphere ultrasonic speed, specific gravity, attenuation coefficient, and backscatter coefficient, at least one of which is different from the corresponding suspension material ultrasonic speed, specific gravity, attenuation coefficient, and backscatter coefficient. The testing spheres are located within the phantom in a random array.

U.S. Pat. No. 6,238,343, to Madsen, et al., discloses an ultrasound phantom configured to provide multiple testing capabilities for quality assurance on ultrasound scanners. The phantom includes a section with an array of target spheres that allow the ability of the scanner to delineate the intersection of a plane of symmetry of the scan slice with diagnostic objects to be determined. Other sections allow low contrast resolution of large objects, spatial resolution regarding lateral and axial dimensions, maximum visualization depth, image gray level uniformity, and distance measurement accuracy to be determined. The phantom may be utilized to provide comparative tests of various scanners and to monitor the performance of a particular scanner over time to determine any changes in the performance of the scanner.

Ideally, the suspension materials are capable of mimicking soft human tissue with respect to at least three characteristics: speed of sound, ultrasonic attenuation, and ultrasonic backscattering. The attenuation coefficient should be approximately proportional to the ultrasonic frequency. In other words, the variation of the attenuation coefficient with respect to frequency, or the attenuation coefficient slope, should remain constant approximately constant over a range of ultrasonic frequencies. The attenuation coefficient should extrapolate to zero as the frequency reduces to zero. These characteristics of human tissue should be maintained at all frequencies in the typical range of ultrasonic scanners, from 1 to 15 megahertz (MHz). Moreover, the variation of these characteristics within the range of room temperature should be small and the materials should be stable in time and invulnerable to reasonable environmental fluctuations.

A tissue mimicking material satisfying the above characteristics was disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 4,277,367, to Madsen, et al., in which both the speed of sound and the ultrasonic attenuation properties could be simultaneously controlled in a mimicking material based on water based gels, such as those derived from animal hides. In one embodiment, ultrasound phantoms embodying the desired features for mimicking soft tissue were prepared from a mixture of gelatin, water, n-propanol and graphite powder, with a preservative. In another embodiment, an oil and gelatin mixture formed the basis of the tissue mimicking material.

U.S. Pat. No. 5,625,137 to Madsen, et al. discloses a tissue mimicking material with intrinsic very low acoustic backscatter coefficient that may be in liquid or solid form. A component in both the liquid and solid forms is a filtered aqueous mixture of large organic water soluble molecules and an emulsion of fatty acid esters, which may be based on a combination of milk and water. Hydroxy compounds, such as n-propanol, can be used to control the ultrasonic speed of propagation through the material.

The tissue mimicking material is enclosed in a container which includes an ultrasound transmitting window. For example, U.S. Pat. No. 6,190,915, to Madsen, et al., discloses an ultrasound transmitting window cover that seals and protects a water-based tissue mimicking material within the phantom container. The window cover includes a multi-layer film formed of at least a layer of metal adhered to a layer of plastic. The metal layer is essentially impervious to moisture

and air molecules, preventing both desiccation of the water based material within the phantom and oxidation or contamination of the tissue mimicking material.

Ultrasound scanners for medical imaging are available from several manufacturers, in various models, with corresponding variations in the performance of the scanners. Additionally, each model of scanner may include one or more transducers of various shapes and sizes and having different types of sensors. For example, the transducers may include a single sensor or multiple sensor elements forming a linear or two-dimensional array, including a phased array. The types of arrays may include a linear array or an arc-shaped array (convex array). The radius of curvature (ROC) of the convex array can vary from 0.5 mm to 7 cm. The different types of arrays may operate at frequencies in the range of from 1 to 15 MHz or more.

SUMMARY

In an example embodiment, a phantom used in quality assurance and performance tests and/or in pre-purchase testing of ultrasound scanners is provided. The phantom includes, but is not limited to, a container, a boundary formed within the container, and a curved scanning surface. The container includes a top surface, a bottom surface opposite the top surface, and a wall mounted between the top surface and the bottom surface to form the container. The boundary is configured to hold a tissue mimicking material. The curved scanning surface is formed in the top surface in a direction towards an interior of the container. The curved scanning surface is shaped to support translation perpendicular to an image plane of an application end of an ultrasound transducer along at least a portion of an axis extending between a first location on the curved scanning surface and a second location on the curved scanning surface.

Other principal features and advantages of the invention will become apparent to those skilled in the art upon review of the following drawings, the detailed description, and the appended claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Illustrative embodiments of the invention will hereafter be described with reference to the accompanying drawings, wherein like numerals denote like elements.

FIG. 1 depicts a block diagram of an ultrasound testing system in accordance with an illustrative embodiment.

FIG. 2 depicts an application end of a transducer of the ultrasound testing system of FIG. 1 in accordance with an illustrative embodiment.

FIG. 3 is a photograph of a phantom for use in the ultrasound testing system of FIG. 1 in accordance with an illustrative embodiment.

FIG. 4 depicts a back schematic view of the phantom of FIG. 3 in accordance with an illustrative embodiment.

FIG. 5 is an image corresponding to a sector scan taken using a transducer, such as that illustrated in FIG. 2, with the phantom of FIG. 3.

FIGS. 6a and 6b depict a stepped scanning surface useable with the phantom of FIG. 3 in accordance with an alternative, illustrative embodiment.

FIG. 7 depicts a second scanning surface useable with the phantom of FIG. 3 in accordance with another alternative, illustrative embodiment.

FIG. 8a depicts a back schematic view of the phantom of FIG. 3 in accordance with a second illustrative embodiment.

FIG. 8b depicts a right-side schematic view of the phantom of FIG. 8a.

FIG. 8c depicts a top schematic view of the phantom of FIG. 8a.

FIG. 9a depicts a front schematic view of a third phantom for use with the ultrasound system of FIG. 1 in accordance with a third illustrative embodiment.

FIG. 9b depicts a top schematic view of the third phantom of FIG. 9a.

FIG. 10a depicts a front schematic view of a fourth phantom for use with the ultrasound system of FIG. 1 in accordance with a fourth illustrative embodiment.

FIG. 10b depicts a top schematic view of the fourth phantom of FIG. 10a.

FIG. 11 is an image taken using a transducer, such as that illustrated in FIG. 2, with the phantom of FIG. 9a.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

With reference to FIG. 1, a block diagram of an ultrasound testing system 100 is shown in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. In the illustrative embodiment, ultrasound testing system 100 may include an ultrasound 102 and a phantom 104. Ultrasound 102 may include a transducer 106, an input interface 108, a keyboard 110, a mouse 111, an output interface 112, a display 114, a communication interface 116, a computer-readable medium 118, a processor 120, and an imaging application 122. Different and additional components may be incorporated into ultrasound 102. For example, ultrasound 102 may be connected to a printer or second computer readable media such as a compact disk (CD), digital versatile disk (DVD), a smart card, a flash memory device, etc. through output interface 112, communication interface 116, and/or input interface 108.

Ultrasound 102 further may be connected directly or indirectly to a database or other data processing system that receives imaging data from ultrasound 102. For example, ultrasound 102 may be connected using communication interface 116 through a network to a database that stores the imaging data for archival or additional analysis purposes. The network may include one or more networks of the same or different types that may be a wired and/or a wireless public or private network including a cellular network, a local area network, a wide area network such as the Internet, etc. The network further may be comprised of sub-networks and consist of any number of devices.

Ultrasound 102 may be connected to one or more transducers of different types. Transducer 106 transmits ultrasound pulses at frequencies generally in the range of one to fifteen MHz into phantom 104 and receives echoes from objects contained within phantom 104. Transducer 106 may have various shapes and sizes and include various types of sensors. For example, transducer 106 may include a single sensor or multiple sensor elements forming a linear or two-dimensional array, including a phased array. The types of arrays may include a high-frequency linear array, a lower frequency linear array, a low frequency curvilinear sector/vector array, a tightly-curved array, etc.

Input interface 108 provides an interface for receiving information from the user for entry into ultrasound 102 as known to those skilled in the art. Input interface 108 may provide a wired or wireless electronic interface to various input technologies including, but not limited to, keyboard 110, a pen and touch screen, mouse 111, a track ball, a touch screen, a keypad, one or more buttons, etc. to allow the user to enter information into ultrasound 102 or to make selections presented in a user interface displayed on display 114. The

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same interface may support both input interface **108** and output interface **112**. For example, a touch screen both allows user input and presents output to the user. Ultrasound **102** may have one or more input interfaces that use the same or a different input interface technology. Mouse **111**, keyboard **110**, and/or display **114** and other input technologies further may be accessible to ultrasound **102** through communication interface **116**.

Output interface **112** provides an interface for outputting information for review by a user of ultrasound **102**. For example, output interface **112** may include a wired or wireless electronic interface to display **114**, a speaker, a printer, etc. Display **114** may be a thin film transistor display, a light emitting diode display, a liquid crystal display, or any of a variety of different displays known to those skilled in the art. Ultrasound **102** may have one or more output interfaces that use the same or a different interface technology. Display **114** and other output technologies further may be accessible to ultrasound **102** through communication interface **116**.

Communication interface **116** provides an interface for receiving and transmitting data between devices using various protocols, transmission technologies, and media as known to those skilled in the art. Communication interface **116** may support communication using various transmission media that may be wired or wireless. Ultrasound **102** may have one or more communication interfaces that use the same or a different communication interface technology. Data and messages may be transferred between transducer **106** and processor **120** using communication interface **116**.

Computer-readable medium **118** is an electronic holding place or storage for information so that the information can be accessed by processor **120** as known to those skilled in the art. Computer-readable medium **118** can include, but is not limited to, any type of random access memory (RAM), any type of read only memory (ROM), any type of flash memory, etc. such as magnetic storage devices (e.g., hard disk, floppy disk, magnetic strips, . . .), optical disks (e.g., CD, DVD, . . .), smart cards, flash memory devices, etc. Ultrasound **102** may have one or more computer-readable media that use the same or a different memory media technology. Ultrasound **102** also may have one or more drives that support the loading of a memory media such as a CD or DVD. Computer-readable medium **118** may provide the electronic storage medium for the database.

Processor **120** executes instructions as known to those skilled in the art. The instructions may be carried out by a special purpose computer, logic circuits, or hardware circuits. Thus, processor **120** may be implemented in hardware, firmware, or any combination of these methods and/or in combination with software. The term "execution" is the process of running an application or the carrying out of the operation called for by an instruction. The instructions may be written using one or more programming language, scripting language, assembly language, etc. Processor **120** executes an instruction, meaning that it performs/controls the operations called for by that instruction. Processor **120** operably couples with output interface **112**, with input interface **108**, with computer-readable medium **118**, and with communication interface **116** to receive, to send, and to process information. Processor **120** may retrieve a set of instructions from a permanent memory device and copy the instructions in an executable form to a temporary memory device that is generally some form of RAM. Ultrasound **102** may include a plurality of processors that use the same or a different processing technology.

Imaging application **122** performs operations associated with creating ultrasound images based on data received from

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transducer **106**. Imaging application **122** may be written using one or more programming languages, assembly languages, scripting languages, etc. as understood by a person of skill in the art.

With reference to FIG. 2, an application end **200** of transducer **106** is shown in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. In use, application end **200** of transducer **106** is pressed against an object to be scanned using ultrasound **102**. For testing and possibly training purposes, application end **200** of transducer **106** is pressed against one or more surfaces of phantom **104**. In the illustrative embodiment, application end **200** includes a curved surface **202** having a width **204** and a height **206**. Curved surface **202** has associated therewith a radius of curvature. Different types of transducers may have those having a non-curved or flat surface. Phantom **104** is designed for use with essentially any type of transducer **106**. Transducers currently in use have radii of curvature in the range of 0.5 centimeters (cm) to 7 cm though this is not intended to limit the design of phantom **104**, which can be modified according to the principles disclosed herein, to accommodate smaller or larger radii of curvature and transducer sizes.

With reference to FIG. 3, a photograph of a first phantom **104a** is shown in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. First phantom **104a** may include a top surface **300**, a bottom surface **302**, a right side surface **304**, a left side surface **306**, a front surface **308**, and a back surface **310**, which generally form a rectangular container though other polygonal, circular, elliptical, etc. shapes may be used. Thus, first phantom **104a** includes top surface **300**, bottom surface **302**, and a wall mounted between top surface **300** and bottom surface **302** to form the container. The wall may have a variety of shapes and, for illustration, includes right side surface **304**, left side surface **306**, front surface **308**, and back surface **310**. Use of directional terms, such as top, bottom, right, left, front, back, etc. are merely intended to facilitate reference to the various surfaces that form first phantom **104a** and are not intended to be limiting in any manner. Top surface **300** may include a first edge **312**, a second edge **314**, a third edge **313**, and a fourth edge **315**. First edge **312** is formed to delineate a transition between top surface **300** and back surface **310**. Second edge **314** is formed to delineate a transition between top surface **300** and front surface **308**, and is thus, generally opposite first edge **312**. Third edge **313** is formed to delineate a transition between top surface **300** and right side surface **304**. Fourth edge **315** is formed to delineate a transition between top surface **300** and left side surface **306**, and is thus, generally opposite third edge **313**.

A first curved edge **316** is formed in first edge **312** to have a first radius of curvature, where first curved edge **316** (and any other curved edge or surface referenced herein) may be circular, elliptical, parabolic, etc. The first radius of curvature is defined in a plane approximately perpendicular to top surface **300** and approximately parallel to back surface **310** and is determined based on the osculating circle formed to fit first curved edge **316** at the point most distant from top surface **300**. A second curved edge **318** is formed in second edge **314** to have a second radius of curvature that is defined in a plane approximately perpendicular to top surface **300** and approximately parallel to front surface **308** and similarly is determined based on the osculating circle formed to fit second curved edge **318** at the point most distant from top surface **300**.

A first curved surface **320** is formed in top surface **300** between first curved edge **316** and second curved edge **318**. First curved surface **320** further includes a first bounding edge

317 and a second bounding edge 319 in top surface 300. Top surface 300 further includes a first flat surface 322 and a second flat surface 324 though first flat surface 322 and second flat surface 324 need not be flat. First flat surface 322 forms the surface between first edge 312, first bounding edge 317, second edge 314, and third edge 313. Second flat surface 324 forms the surface between first edge 312, second bounding edge 319, second edge 314, and fourth edge 315. In the illustrative embodiment, the curved edges are arcs or approximately arcs, and the angle subtended may be as large as 180°.

Bottom surface 302 may include a second curved surface (not shown) shaped in a similar manner though including a different range of radii of curvature. For example, the second curved surface may include a third curved edge 328 formed in a fifth edge 326 and a fourth curved edge 404 formed in a sixth edge 402 (shown with reference to FIG. 4). Fifth edge 326 is formed to delineate a transition between bottom surface 302 and front surface 308. Sixth edge 402 is formed to delineate a transition between bottom surface 302 and front surface 310, and is thus, generally opposite fifth edge 326.

First curved surface 320 and the second curved surface are curved so that the entire radiating surface of transducer 106 (i.e., curved surface 202) maintains contact as transducer 106 is moved over first curved surface 320 and/or the second curved surface. Differently shaped and sized transducers may be used with different portions of first curved surface 320 and/or the second curved surface. The range of radii of curvature of first curved surface 320 and the second curved surface may include the range from approximately 0.5 cm to 7 cm or more or various subsets thereof. For example, first curved edge 316 may have a radius of curvature of 1.25 cm, second curved edge 318 may have a radius of curvature of 3.5 cm, third curved edge 328 may have a radius of curvature of 3 cm, and fourth curved edge 404 may have a radius of curvature of 6.5 cm in an illustrative embodiment. In an illustrative embodiment, first curved surface 320 and/or the second curved surface are formed of a portion of a right circular cone.

With reference to FIG. 4, a back schematic view of first phantom 104a is shown in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. In the illustrative embodiment, first phantom 104a further may include a planar scanning window 400 mounted within back surface 310. First phantom 104a further may include a second planar scanning window 400 mounted in front surface 308 without limitation. Thus, first phantom 104a may include one or more planar scanning windows which are mounted in either or both of front surface 308 and back surface 310. As used in this disclosure, the term "mount" includes join, unite, connect, associate, insert, hang, hold, affix, attach, fasten, bind, paste, secure, bolt, screw, rivet, solder, weld, glue, mold, thermoform, couple, etc. The phrases "mounted on" and "mounted to" include any interior or exterior portion of the support member referenced. Additionally, use of the term "mount" may indicate a direct or an indirect connection between the described components/devices.

First phantom 104a further may include a plurality of fibers suspended therein. The number and arrangement of the plurality of fibers may be selected based on the type of ultrasound test to be performed using first phantom 104a and the type of transducer 106 used with ultrasound 102. For example, the plurality of fibers could be parallel with known distances between them. The accuracy with which those distances are measured using an ultrasound image is a test of the ultrasound/transducer combination. If curved surface 202 of transducer 106 is not in direct contact with the scanning window, such as first curved surface 320, and water or some other

liquid separates part of first curved surface 320 from transducer 106, a distance measurement error can occur due to refraction at the liquid-to-curved surface interface.

In the illustrative embodiment of FIG. 4, first phantom 104a includes a first fiber 406, a second fiber 408, a third fiber 410, a fourth fiber 412, a fifth fiber 414, a sixth fiber 416, a seventh fiber 418, and an eighth fiber 420. First fiber 406, second fiber 408, third fiber 410, fourth fiber 412, fifth fiber 414, sixth fiber 416, seventh fiber 418, and eighth fiber 420 are arranged in a grid comprised of two rows of four fibers each. First fiber 406, second fiber 408, third fiber 410, fourth fiber 412 form a first row closest to bottom surface 302. Fifth fiber 414, sixth fiber 416, seventh fiber 418, and eighth fiber 420 form a second row closest to top surface 300. First fiber 406, second fiber 408, third fiber 410, fourth fiber 412, fifth fiber 414, sixth fiber 416, seventh fiber 418, and eighth fiber 420 extend in a direction generally parallel to top surface 300 and bottom surface 302. Within a row, the fibers are separated by a horizontal distance 422. The two rows are separated by a vertical distance 424. Merely for illustration, horizontal distance 422 may be 3 cm, vertical distance 424 may be 8 cm, and the fibers may be formed of 0.1 mm strands of nylon.

When positioned on planar scanning window 400, transducer 106 scans in a direction parallel to the plurality of fibers. Planar scanning window 400 may be formed of a plastic-coated aluminum foil (PCAF) such as that described in U.S. Pat. No. 6,190,915, to Madsen, et al. First curved surface 320 and the second curved surface further may be formed of the PCAF material. Merely for illustration, planar scanning window 400 may 6 cm in the vertical direction and 10 cm in the horizontal direction.

The remaining portions of top surface 300, bottom surface 302, right side surface 304, left side surface 306, front surface 308, and back surface 310 may be formed of any suitable material(s) that can structurally hold a tissue mimicking material within first phantom 104a without substantial transmission of water vapor or air molecules therethrough. Example materials include acrylic plastic or ABS plastic. A variety of tissue mimicking materials may be used as understood by a person of skill in the art.

First phantom 104a may be formed by mounting top surface 300, bottom surface 302, right side surface 304, left side surface 306, front surface 308, and back surface 310 together using various methods or by one piece molding the surfaces together. A boundary 428 defines a transition between top surface 300, bottom surface 302, right side surface 304, left side surface 306, front surface 308, and back surface 310 and the tissue mimicking material. As a result, top surface 300, bottom surface 302, right side surface 304, left side surface 306, front surface 308, and back surface 310 may have various widths 426 and may be formed of one or more layers of material. For illustration, width 426 may be approximately one cm. A width 430 defined by boundary 428 in the vertical direction may be approximately ten cm. A length 432 defined by boundary 428 in the horizontal direction may be approximately 13 cm.

With reference to FIG. 5, an image 500 corresponding to a sector scan is shown based on use of first phantom 104a for a distance measurement accuracy determination using the mechanical sweep of transducer 106 including a three-dimensional (3D) convex array. The mechanical scan direction is about an axis approximately connecting a center of curvature of first curved edge 316 and a center of curvature of second curved edge 318. Image 500 corresponds to an image plane approximately parallel to back surface 310 and front surface 308 and perpendicular to fibers 406, 408, 410, 412, 414, 416, 418 and 420. Images 502, 504, 506, 508, 510, and 512 of six

of the eight parallel fibers of first phantom **104a** are shown in image **500**. The actual distance between adjacent fibers in each row was 3 cm, and the distance between the rows was 8 cm as illustrated with reference to FIG. **4**. The ultrasound scanner calculated the distances to be 3.06 cm and 8 cm, which is approximately equal to or equal to the actual values.

With reference to FIGS. **6a** and **6b**, a stepped scanning surface **600** is shown in an example second phantom **104b**. Second phantom **104b** may be otherwise structurally similar to first phantom **104a**. Instead of the continuously varying surface **610** of first curved surface **320** as included in FIG. **6b** for comparison, stepped scanning surface **600** varies in steps between the center of first curved edge **316** and the center of second curved edge **318**. In the illustrative embodiment of FIGS. **6a** and **6b**, stepped scanning surface **600** includes a first step **601**, a second step **602**, a third step **604**, a fourth step **606**, and a fifth step **608**. Merely for illustration, first step **601** has a radius of curvature of 7 cm, second step **602** has a radius of curvature of 6 cm, third step **604** has a radius of curvature of 5 cm, fourth step **606** has a radius of curvature of 4 cm, and fifth step **608** has a radius of curvature of 3 cm. Merely for illustration, a width **612** of each of first step **601**, second step **602**, third step **604**, fourth step **606**, and fifth step **608** may be equal and may be selected as 4 cm defining a total length **614** of stepped scanning surface **600** of 20 cm. First step **601**, second step **602**, third step **604**, fourth step **606**, and fifth step **608** may be formed in any order between first curved edge **316** and second curved edge **318**. Also, the axes of rotation defining the surfaces of first step **601**, second step **602**, third step **604**, fourth step **606**, and fifth step **608** need not be coaxial. Second phantom **104b** may be filled with materials that do not mimic tissues well in ultrasonic properties—such as polyurethane or silicone.

With reference to FIG. **7**, a recessed scanning surface **700** is shown in an example third phantom **104c**. Third phantom **104c** may be otherwise structurally similar to first phantom **104a**. Instead of first curved surface **320** extending along the entire surface between first flat surface **322** and second flat surface **324**, recessed scanning surface **700** extends between a first flat portion **702** and a second flat portion **704**. First flat portion **702** extends down from first bounding edge **317** and second flat portion **704** extends down from second bounding edge **319**. First flat portion **702** and second flat portion **704** form flat extensions from recessed scanning surface **700** providing up to a 170 degree sector angle. In the illustrative embodiment of FIG. **7**, first curved edge **316** has a 0.5 cm radius of curvature and second curved edge **318** has a 3.5 cm radius of curvature. A width **706** of first curved portion **702** and second curved portion **704** may be 1 cm.

With reference to FIGS. **8a-8c**, a fourth phantom **104d** is shown in accordance with a second illustrative embodiment. Fourth phantom **104d** is structurally similar to first phantom **104a**. Instead of eight fibers arranged in two rows of four fibers each, however, fourth phantom **104d** includes 16 fibers arranged to form a grid of four rows with four fibers in each row. Thus, in the illustrative embodiment of FIGS. **8a-8c**, fourth phantom **104d** includes a first fiber **800**, a second fiber **802**, a third fiber **804**, a fourth fiber **806**, a fifth fiber **808**, a sixth fiber **810**, a seventh fiber **812**, an eighth fiber **814**, a ninth fiber **816**, a tenth fiber **818**, an eleventh fiber **820**, a twelfth fiber **822**, a thirteenth fiber **824**, a fourteenth fiber **826**, a fifteenth fiber **828**, and a sixteenth fiber **430**. Within a row, the fibers are separated by a second horizontal distance **832**. The four rows are separated by a second vertical distance **834**. Merely for illustration, second horizontal distance **832** may be 3 cm, second vertical distance **834** may be 3 cm, and the fibers may be formed of 0.1 mm strands of nylon.

Fourth phantom **104d** further includes a flat perpendicular scanning window **836** mounted in right side surface **304** without limitation. Thus, fourth phantom **104d** may include one or more perpendicular scanning windows which are mounted in either or both of right side surface **304** and left side surface **306**. When positioned on perpendicular scanning window **836**, transducer **106** scans in a plane perpendicular to the plurality of fibers. Flat perpendicular scanning window **836** may be formed of the PCAF material. Merely for illustration, perpendicular scanning window **836** may be 11 cm in the vertical direction and 4 cm in the horizontal direction.

With reference to FIGS. **8b** and **8c**, a volume **838** may be positioned between planar scanning window **400** and boundary **428**. Volume **838** may be filled with the same or a different tissue mimicking material as that contained within boundary **428**. For illustration, volume **838** may be 1 cm thick between planar scanning window **400** and boundary **428**.

With reference to FIGS. **9a-9b**, a fifth phantom **104e** is shown in accordance with a third illustrative embodiment. Fifth phantom **104e** is structurally similar to first phantom **104a**. Fifth phantom **104e** includes a third curved surface **900**, a second left side surface **901**, a second right side surface **902**, a second top surface **904**, a second bottom surface **906**, a second front surface **908**, a second back surface **910**, a scanning window **912**, a first reflective plate **924**, and a second reflective plate **926**. Scanning window **912** may be flat, formed in either or both of second front surface **908** and/or second back surface **910**, made of the PCAF material, and have dimensions of 6 cm in a horizontal direction and 11 cm in a vertical direction.

A fifth edge **914** is formed to delineate a transition between second top surface **904** and second front surface **908**. A sixth edge **918** is formed to delineate a transition between second top surface **904** and second back surface **910**. A fifth curved edge **916** is formed in fifth edge **914** to have a fifth radius of curvature that is defined in a plane perpendicular to second top surface **904** and generally parallel to second front surface **908**. A sixth curved edge **920** is formed in sixth edge **918** to have a sixth radius of curvature that is defined in a plane perpendicular to second top surface **904** and generally parallel to second back surface **910**. Third curved surface **900** is formed in second top surface **904** and extends between fifth curved edge **916** and sixth curved edge **920**. In an alternative embodiment, third curved surface **900** may be stepped in a manner similar to that shown with reference to stepped scanning surface **600**. For illustration, the fifth radius of curvature may be 3 cm and the sixth radius of curvature may be 7 cm and third curved surface **900** may have a length of 22 cm.

Instead of fibers fifth phantom **104e** includes a plurality of anechoic spheres **922** randomly distributed within the tissue mimicking material and bounded by a second boundary **928**. For illustration, fifth phantom **104e** may be designed for use with transducer **106** operating in the two to seven MHz frequency range though other frequency ranges may be used. Based on the resolution associated with transducer **106** operating in this frequency range, the plurality of anechoic spheres **922** may be four millimeters (mm) in diameter. The plurality of anechoic spheres **922** all have the same diameter and are low echo level relative to the tissue mimicking material. The density of the distribution of the plurality of anechoic spheres **922** within the tissue mimicking material may be one 4 mm diameter anechoic sphere per cubic centimeter. The plurality of anechoic spheres **922** and the tissue mimicking material surrounding them may be selected to have a density of 1.04 grams/millimeter, a propagation speed of 1540 meters/second, and an attenuation coefficient slope of 0.5 or 0.7 decibel (dB)/cm/MHz. The tissue mimicking material

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may have a frequency-dependent backscatter coefficient or “echogenicity” typical of tissue over the frequency range selected while the backscatter coefficient of the plurality of anechoic spheres **922** is more than 30 dB below that of the tissue mimicking material, thus simulating a cyst.

First reflective plate **924** and second reflective plate **926** form two parallel surfaces of the four surfaces that form second boundary **928**. First reflective plate **924** and second reflective plate **926** extend generally parallel to second left side surface **901** and second right side surface **902**, respectively, and generally perpendicular to second top surface **904**, second bottom surface **906**, second front surface **908**, and second back surface **910**. First reflective plate **924** and second reflective plate **926** may be used in a similar manner with the other phantoms described herein. For illustration, first reflective plate **924** and second reflective plate **926** may be formed of 3-6 mm thick stainless steel. As another example, first reflective plate **924** and second reflective plate **926** may be formed of 3-6 mm thick plate glass. As another example, first reflective plate **924** and second reflective plate **926** may be formed of 3-6 mm thick alumina (Al_2O_3) plate. Other materials include those formed from aluminum nitride, silicon carbide, Beramic 995, Beramic Z, and beryllium.

Merely for illustration, second boundary **928** may be 22 cm in a vertical direction and 12 cm in a horizontal direction. Second left side surface **901**, second right side surface **902**, second top surface **904**, second bottom surface **906**, second front surface **908**, second back surface **910** may have various widths and may be formed of one or more layers of material. For illustration, a second width **930** may be approximately one cm.

With reference to FIGS. **10a-10b**, a sixth phantom **104f** is shown in accordance with a fourth illustrative embodiment. Sixth phantom **104f** is structurally similar to fifth phantom **104e**. Sixth phantom **104f** includes a fourth curved surface **1000**, a third left side surface **1001**, a third right side surface **1002**, a third top surface **1004**, a third bottom surface **1006**, a third front surface **1008**, a third back surface **1010**, a second scanning window **1012**, a third reflective plate **1024**, and a fourth reflective plate **1026**. Second scanning window **1012** may be flat, formed in either or both of third front surface **1008** and/or third back surface **1010**, made of the PCAF material, and have dimensions of four cm in a horizontal direction and eleven cm in a vertical direction.

A seventh edge **1014** is formed to delineate a transition between third top surface **1004** and third front surface **1008**. An eighth edge **1018** is formed to delineate a transition between third top surface **1004** and third back surface **1010**. A seventh curved edge **1016** is formed in seventh edge **1014** to have a seventh radius of curvature that is defined in a plane perpendicular to third top surface **1004** and generally parallel to third front surface **1008**. An eighth curved edge **1020** is formed in eighth edge **1018** to have an eighth radius of curvature that is defined in a plane perpendicular to third top surface **1004** and generally parallel to third back surface **1010**. Fourth curved surface **1000** is formed in third top surface **1004** and extends between seventh curved edge **1016** and eighth curved edge **1020**. In an alternative embodiment, fourth curved surface **1000** may be stepped in a manner similar to that shown with reference to stepped scanning surface **600**. For illustration, the seventh radius of curvature may be 1 cm and the eighth radius of curvature may be 3.5 cm and fourth curved surface **1000** may have a length of 20 cm. A depth **1032** of fourth curved surface **1000** is constant between seventh curved edge **1016** and eighth curved edge **1020** and is parallel to third top surface **1004** to allow a translator on top of sixth phantom **104f** to provide incremental

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translation of transducer **106** affixed on the translator i.e., to increment in steps parallel to third top surface **1004** of sixth phantom **104f**. For illustration, depth **1032** may be one cm.

In another illustrative embodiment of sixth phantom **104f**, the seventh radius of curvature may be 0.5 cm. For illustration, depth **1032** may be 1.5 cm.

Instead of fibers sixth phantom **104f** includes a second plurality of anechoic spheres **1022** randomly distributed within the tissue mimicking material and bounded by a third boundary **1028**. For illustration, sixth phantom **104f** may be designed for use with transducer **106** operating in the seven to fifteen MHz frequency range though other frequency ranges may be used. Based on the resolution associated with transducer **106** operating in this frequency range, the second plurality of anechoic spheres **1022** may be two mm in diameter. The second plurality of anechoic spheres **1022** all have the same diameter and are low echo level relative to the tissue mimicking material. The density of the distribution of the second plurality of anechoic spheres **1022** within the tissue mimicking material may be eight 2 mm diameter anechoic spheres per cubic centimeter. The second plurality of anechoic spheres **1022** and the tissue mimicking material may be selected to have a density of 1.04 grams/millimeter, a propagation speed of 1540 meters/second, and an attenuation coefficient slope of 0.5 or 0.7 dB/cm/MHz. The tissue mimicking material may have a frequency-dependent backscatter coefficient or “echogenicity” of soft tissue over the frequency range selected while the backscatter coefficient of the second plurality of anechoic spheres **1022** is more than 30 dB below that of the tissue mimicking material, thus simulating a cyst.

Third reflective plate **1024** and fourth reflective plate **1026** form two parallel surfaces of the four surfaces that form third boundary **1028**. Third reflective plate **1024** and fourth reflective plate **1026** extend generally parallel to third left side surface **1001** and third right side surface **1002**, respectively, and generally perpendicular to third top surface **1004**, third bottom surface **1006**, third front surface **1008**, and third back surface **1010**. Third reflective plate **1024** and fourth reflective plate **1026** may be used in a similar manner with the other phantoms described herein. For illustration, third reflective plate **1024** and fourth reflective plate **1026** may be formed of 3 to 6 mm thick plate glass. Other reflective materials may be used for the reflective plates based on a desired cost and weight and any other manufacturing constraints.

Merely for illustration, third boundary **1028** may be 20 cm in a vertical direction and 6 cm in a horizontal direction. Third left side surface **1001**, third right side surface **1002**, third top surface **1004**, third bottom surface **1006**, third front surface **1008**, third back surface **1010** may have various widths and may be formed of one or more layers of material. For illustration, third width **1030** may be approximately six mm except in third top surface **1004**. In third top surface **1004**, third width **1030** may be three mm.

Fifth phantom **104e** and sixth phantom **104f** incorporate the curved surfaces for imaging performance testing of any curved, linear or phased array transducer as described with reference to FIGS. **3-8c** and are used for the determination of lesion signal-to-noise ratios (LSNR's) over the entire field of view of transducer **106**. The size of fifth phantom **104e** and sixth phantom **104f** is greatly reduced by inclusion of the two parallel reflective plates. The angles of incidence of ultrasound beams exceed a critical angle resulting in fifth phantom **104e** and sixth phantom **104f** displaying the entire field of view for any curved or phased array transducer.

With reference to FIG. **11**, a second image **1100** taken using transducer **106** using fifth phantom **104e** of FIGS. **9a** and **9b** is shown. First reflective plate **924** formed of a flat

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alumina plate is shown as reflection 1102. Alumina has unusually high compression and shear ultrasound propagation speeds with critical angles of incidence relative to 1540 m/s of tissue-mimicking material of 8.3° and 14°, respectively; the Rayleigh critical angle is 15.7°. Thus, total internal reflection of compressional waves with no generation of shear or Rayleigh waves occurs for angles of incidence greater than 16°, which means that the specular, total internal reflection of compressional waves occurs for sector angles as large as 180°–32°=148°. 148° is larger than the sector angles of almost all convex arrays. The alumina, however, also gives rise to ultrasound reflections at its surface resulting in a bright line of echoes. Second reflective plate 926 was formed of plate glass which gives rise to minimal diffuse ultrasound scattering so that there is no apparent vertical line of echoes corresponding to its reflecting surface. The position of the reflecting plate 926 is indicated in second image 1100 at line 1104. First reflective plate 924 provides performance testing of the entire field of view for sector angles as large as 150° by simulating the existence of spheres beyond the volume actually containing spheres. Thus, the volume and weight of fifth phantom 104e is considerably reduced because of the reflecting surfaces. For example, a first beam 1110 emitted by transducer 106 was reflected from first reflective plate 924 along a second beam 1112. Second beam 1112 was reflected by a first sphere 1106 within fifth phantom 104e back in the direction of second beam 1112 and back again towards transducer 106 along first beam 1110. As a result, first sphere 1106 also appeared to be located at the location of a first ghost sphere 1108 thereby allowing a performance test of a field of view beyond boundary 928 of the tissue mimicking material. Similarly, a second ghost sphere 1116 was created by second sphere 1114 as a result of reflection of the sound waves by second reflective plate 926.

The word “illustrative” is used herein to mean serving as an example, instance, or illustration. Any aspect or design described herein as “illustrative” is not necessarily to be construed as preferred or advantageous over other aspects or designs. Further, for the purposes of this disclosure and unless otherwise specified, “a” or “an” means “one or more”. Still further, the use of “and” or “or” is intended to include “and/or” unless specifically indicated otherwise. All dimensional measurements defined herein are approximate unless otherwise specified.

The foregoing description of illustrative embodiments of the invention has been presented for purposes of illustration and of description. It is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise form disclosed, and modifications and variations are possible in light of the above teachings or may be acquired from practice of the invention. The embodiments were chosen and described in order to explain the principles of the invention and as practical applications of the invention to enable one skilled in the art to utilize the invention in various embodiments and with various modifications as suited to the particular use contemplated. It is intended that the scope of the invention be defined by the claims appended hereto and their equivalents.

What is claimed is:

1. An ultrasound phantom comprising:

- a container including a top surface, a bottom surface opposite the top surface, and a wall mounted between the top surface and the bottom surface to form the container;
- a boundary formed within the container and configured to hold a tissue mimicking material;
- a curved scanning surface formed in the top surface in a direction towards an interior of the container, wherein the curved scanning surface is shaped to support trans-

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lation perpendicular to an image plane of an application end of an ultrasound transducer along at least a portion of an axis extending between a first location on the curved scanning surface and a second location on the curved scanning surface; and

a flat scanning window mounted within the wall.

2. The ultrasound phantom of claim 1, wherein the curved scanning surface has a first radius of curvature at the first location in a range from 0.1 centimeters (cm) to ten cm, inclusive.

3. The ultrasound phantom of claim 2, wherein the curved scanning surface has a second radius of curvature at the second location in a range from 0.1 centimeters (cm) to ten cm, inclusive.

4. The ultrasound phantom of claim 3, wherein the first radius of curvature and the second radius of curvature are different.

5. The ultrasound phantom of claim 1, wherein a radius of curvature of the curved scanning surface varies continuously between the first location and the second location.

6. The ultrasound phantom of claim 1, wherein a radius of curvature of the curved scanning surface varies in discrete steps between the first location and the second location.

7. The ultrasound phantom of claim 6, wherein the radii of curvature of the discrete steps vary monotonically between the first location and the second location.

8. The ultrasound phantom of claim 1, wherein the curved scanning surface is covered with a plastic-coated aluminum foil.

9. The ultrasound phantom of claim 1, further comprising a second curved scanning surface formed in the bottom surface in a direction towards the interior of the container.

10. The ultrasound phantom of claim 9, wherein a radius of curvature of the curved scanning surface and a radius of curvature of the second curved scanning surface have the same value at a third location on the curved scanning surface and a fourth location on the second curved scanning surface.

11. The ultrasound phantom of claim 1, further comprising a plurality of fibers suspended in the tissue mimicking material.

12. The ultrasound phantom of claim 1, wherein the wall comprises a right surface, a left surface, a front surface mounted between the right surface and the left surface, and a back surface mounted between the right surface and the left surface and generally opposite the front surface, wherein the front surface and the back surface are perpendicular to the axis, and further wherein the flat scanning window is mounted within the front surface or the back surface.

13. The ultrasound phantom of claim 12, wherein the tissue mimicking material is in direct contact with the flat scanning window or the left surface.

14. The ultrasound phantom of claim 12, further comprising a second flat scanning window mounted within the right surface.

15. The ultrasound phantom of claim 1, further comprising a plurality of anechoic spheres randomly distributed in the tissue mimicking material.

16. The ultrasound phantom of claim 15, further comprising:

- a first flat reflective plate; and
- a second flat reflective plate; wherein the first flat reflective plate and the second flat reflective plate are mounted adjacent to the boundary and in contact with the tissue mimicking material and are configured to specularly reflect an incident compressional ultrasound beam transmitted into the tissue mimicking material from the ultrasound transducer back into the tissue mimicking mate-

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rial with no mode conversion from compressional to either shear or Rayleigh waves.

17. The ultrasound phantom of claim 16, wherein the first flat reflective plate is formed of a material selected from the group consisting of glass, stainless steel, alumina, aluminum nitride, silicon carbide, Beramic 995, Beramic Z, and beryllium. 5

18. The ultrasound phantom of claim 16, wherein the wall comprises a right surface, a left surface, a front surface mounted between the right surface and the left surface, and a back surface mounted between the right surface and the left surface and generally opposite the front surface, wherein the front surface and the back surface are perpendicular to the axis, and further wherein the first flat reflective plate is mounted in a third plane parallel to the right surface and the second flat reflective plate is mounted in a fourth plane parallel to the left surface. 10 15

19. The ultrasound phantom of claim 18, wherein the flat scanning window is mounted within the front surface or within the back surface. 20

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