



- (51) International Patent Classification:
H01S 3/10 (2006.01)
- (21) International Application Number:
PCT/US2013/075636
- (22) International Filing Date:
17 December 2013 (17.12.2013)
- (25) Filing Language: English
- (26) Publication Language: English
- (30) Priority Data:
61/745,270 21 December 2012 (21.12.2012) US
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- (81) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of national protection available): AE, AG, AL, AM, AO, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BH, BN, BR, BW, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CL, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM,

DO, DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, GT, HN, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IR, IS, JP, KE, KG, KN, KP, KR, KZ, LA, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LY, MA, MD, ME, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MY, MZ, NA, NG, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PA, PE, PG, PH, PL, PT, QA, RO, RS, RU, RW, SA, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SM, ST, SV, SY, TH, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, ZA, ZM, ZW.

- (84) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available): ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LR, LS, MW, MZ, NA, RW, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, RU, TJ, TM), European (AL, AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, LV, MC, MK, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, RS, SE, SI, SK, SM, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, KM, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

Published:

- with international search report (Art. 21(3))
- before the expiration of the time limit for amending the claims and to be republished in the event of receipt of amendments (Rule 48.2(h))

(54) Title: SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR NARROWING A WAVELENGTH EMISSION OF LIGHT

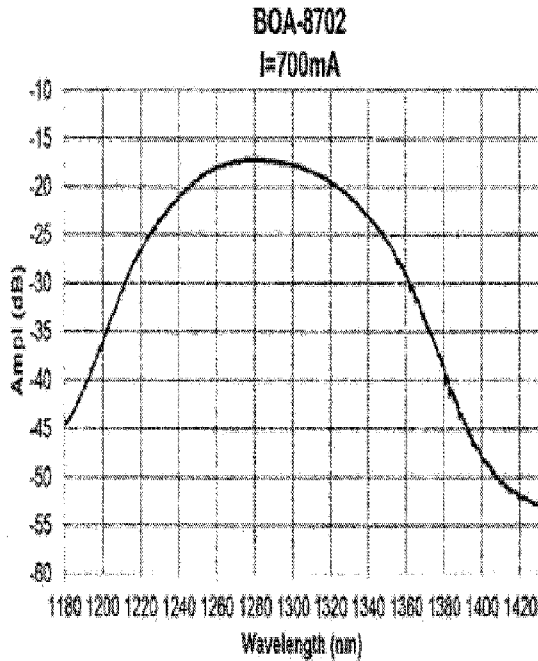


FIG. 1

(57) Abstract: The present invention generally relates to methods and systems for narrowing a wavelength emission of light. In certain aspects, methods of the invention involve transmitting light through a filter and passing a portion of the filtered light through a gain chip assembly at least two times before that portion of light passes again through the filter.

WO 2014/099896 A1

SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR NARROWING A WAVELENGTH EMISSION OF LIGHT

Related Application

5 This application claims the benefit of and priority to U.S. Provisional Application Serial No. 61/745,270, filed December 21, 2012, which is incorporated by reference in its entirety.

Field of the Invention

10 The present invention generally relates to methods and systems for narrowing a wavelength emission of light.

Background

15 Optical coherence tomography (OCT) is an established medical imaging technique that relies on light for producing an image. In OCT, light from a broadband light source is split by an optical fiber splitter with one fiber directing light to a sample path and the other fiber directing light to a reference path mirror. An end of the sample path is typically connected to a scanning device. The light reflected from the scanning device is recombined with the signal from the reference mirror to form interference fringes, which are transformed into a depth resolved image.

20 Numerous different OCT techniques have been developed, including swept source OCT. In swept source OCT, a narrowband light source is rapidly tuned over a broad optical bandwidth, and spectral components are encoded in time. Thus, image quality in swept source OCT relies on the swept laser source achieving very narrow bandwidths at very high frequencies (e.g., 20–200 kHz) over a very short period of time (e.g., 10,000–10,000,000 Sweeps/sec).

25 A typical set-up for a swept source OCT system uses a ring resonator that includes an optical amplifier, a tunable filter, and an optical coupler. Laser light at a specific bandwidth is produced by the optical amplifier and sent through the filter. The filter assists in maintaining the outputted light at the specific bandwidth. From the filter, the light travels to the optical coupler where a portion of the light is directed to an interferometer and the remainder of the light returns to the optical amplifier. The process repeats to achieve different bandwidths of light.

30 A problem with this set-up is that a single pass through an optical amplifier cannot impart enough energy to the light to obtain the very narrow bandwidths in an optimal amount of time.

Another problem with this set-up is that a single pass through an optical amplifier cannot impart enough energy to the light to prevent broadening of the obtained bandwidth, particularly at higher frequencies. Both problems lead to degradation of image quality.

5

Summary

The invention provides a ring resonator set-up for optical coherence tomography (OCT) in which light passes through an optical amplifier twice before it proceeds to an OCT interferometer. As encompassed by the invention, a first pass of light exiting the optical amplifier is directed back through the amplifier rather than continuing through the ring resonator. Light exiting the amplifier can be sent back through the amplifier by using, for example, a mirror. The light re-enters the amplifier, wherein it is amplified a second time. This re-amplified light is then transmitted through the ring resonator where it can continue onto the OCT interferometer. An optical coupler may be used to coordinate the passage of light between the amplifier and the rest of the ring resonator. The provided ring resonators may also include a filter for maintaining the narrow bandwidth of light after it has been amplified twice by the optical amplifier.

By passing the light through the amplifier twice during a single trip through the resonator, a narrowed bandwidth of light is achieved faster than only passing the light through an interferometer once before proceeding to the interferometer. The second pass through the amplifier in a single trip also imparts additional energy to the light, which prevents undesired broadening of the obtained bandwidth at higher frequencies. Accordingly, the provided ring resonators are able to produce high quality OCT images that avoid the image degradation problems associated with prior art ring resonator configurations.

The provided ring resonator can serve as a light source for a variety of applications, including medical imaging. For example, light leaving the ring resonator can be directed towards an OCT system. As noted above, the present invention is particularly suited for OCT due to the improvement of image quality.

In addition to the provided resonators, the invention also encompasses methods for narrowing a wavelength of light. The methods involve passing light through an optical amplifier of a ring resonator twice during one pass around the ring resonator. Using the provided methods, a narrow bandwidth of light is achieved in an optimal amount of time and image quality is

improved.

Brief Description of the Drawings

5 Figure 1 is a gain curve for a booster optical amplifier.

Figure 2 is a diagram of a laser.

Figure 3 schematically depicts a system of the invention, according to certain
embodiments.

10 Figure 4 is a schematic of an optical coherence tomography (OCT) system for use with
systems and methods of the invention.

Figure 5 is a schematic diagram of the imaging engine of an OCT system.

Figure 6 is a diagram of a light path in an OCT system.

Figure 7 shows the organization of a patient interface module in an OCT system.

Detailed Description

15 The invention generally relates to methods and systems for producing narrow emissions
of light. The invention can involve transmitting light through a filter and passing a portion of the
filtered light through a gain chip assembly at least two times before that portion of the filtered
light passes again through the filter. Broadband light is emitted from a light source and
20 transmitted through a filter. The filtered light is passed through a gain chip assembly in which
the light signal is amplified. The amplified light leaves the gain chip assembly, whereupon a
portion of that light is sent back into the gain chip assembly, where it is amplified a second time.
This re-amplified light is then directed back through the filter, wherein the whole process can
repeat itself. Accordingly, the re-amplification of filtered light prior to its return to the filter can
25 include sending the light through a gain medium in the gain chip assembly back through the gain
chip assembly. This results in a second pass through the assembly gain medium before passing
again through the filter.

Any optical filter is useful for practicing the invention. As encompassed by the
invention, the filter receives light from a broadband light source and emits light of a
30 predetermined wavelength. An optical filter typically has a peak reflectivity and a background
reflectivity. The peak reflectivity indicates an amount of light output (reflected) at the specified

wavelength, wherein a desired wavelength can be set in a tunable filter by placing mirrors in an etalon at an appropriate distance apart. The background reflectivity indicates an amount of light output at wavelengths other than the desired wavelength.

5 Typical filters might have, for example, a 20% peak reflectivity and a 0.02% background reflectivity. The ratio of these numbers (10^3) defines the filter contrast ratio, expressed in decibels (dB)(here, 30 dB). Thus, if light of a certain wavelength, for example, 1200 nm, is intended, the filter will transmit light at 1200 nm as well as a broad spectrum of light at lower power in a ratio of 30 dB.

10 In some embodiments, systems of the invention include an optical filter that can be tuned to a desired wavelength, i.e., a tunable filter. Amplified light of a selected wavelength is obtained by tuning the filter to that wavelength and sending the light into the gain medium with sufficient input power to achieve a desired output power.

15 Where an optical system requires a particular wavelength of amplified light, the light source may include an optical filter module such as a tunable optical filter in optical communication with a gain component.

20 In certain embodiments of the invention, the tunable filter is a voltage-controlled optical attenuator. In a VCOA, an optical attenuator is placed between an input and output lens for obstructing the path of an incoming light beam. The attenuator has variable attenuation (reflection, absorption, etc.) which is controlled for maintaining a preset power or wavelength of the outgoing light beam. To this end, a fraction of the outgoing signal is diverted to an output detector by reflecting off an end face of a lens, and processed for obtaining a control signal representative of the output power. An electric output displaces the attenuator to a position corresponding to a preset output power. Further detail on VCOAs can be found, for example, in U.S. Patent No. 5,745,634, incorporated by reference herein in its entirety.

25 The invention also encompasses the use of a gain chip assembly that amplifies the power of light that is transmitted through it. As provided by the invention, light travels from the filter to the gain chip assembly for amplification. The gain chip assembly, or gain component, generally refers to any device known in the art capable of amplifying light such as an optical amplifier, laser, or any component employing a gain medium. A gain medium is a material that increases the power of light transmitted through the gain medium. Exemplary gain mediums
30 include crystals (e.g., sapphire), doped crystals (e.g., yttrium aluminum garnet, yttrium

orthovanadate), glasses such as silicate or phosphate glasses, gasses (e.g., mixtures of helium and neon, nitrogen, argon, or carbon monoxide), semiconductors (e.g., gallium arsenide, indium gallium arsenide), and liquids (e.g., rhodamine, fluorescein).

When light interacts with the material of the gain medium, several outcomes may be obtained. Light may be transmitted through the material unaffected or reflect off a surface of the material. Alternatively, an incident photon of light can exchange energy with an electron of an atom within the material by either absorption or stimulated emission. If the photon is absorbed, the electron transitions from an initial energy level to a higher energy level. In three-level system, there is a transient energy state associated with a third energy level.

When electron returns to ground state, a photon is emitted. When photons are emitted, there is a net increase in power of light within the gain medium. In stimulated emission, an electron emits energy ΔE through the creation of a photon of frequency ν_{12} and coherent with the incident photon. Two photons are coherent if they have the same phase, frequency, polarization, and direction of travel. Equation 1 gives the relationship between energy change ΔE and frequency ν_{12} :

$$(1) \Delta E = h\nu_{12}$$

where h is Planck's constant. Light produced this way can be temporally coherent, i.e., having a single location that exhibits clean sinusoidal oscillations over time.

An electron can also release a photon by spontaneous emission. Amplified spontaneous emission (ASA) in a gain medium produces spatially coherent light, e.g., having a fixed phase relationship across the profile of a light beam.

Emission prevails over absorption when light is transmitted through a material having more excited electrons than ground state electrons—a state known as a population inversion. A population inversion can be obtained by pumping in energy (e.g., current or light) from outside. Where emission prevails, the material exhibits a gain G defined by Equation 2:

$$(2) G = 10 \text{ Log}_{10}(P_{\text{out}}/P_{\text{in}})\text{dB}$$

where P_{out} and P_{in} are the optical output and input power of the gain medium.

As encompassed by the invention, the gain chip component can be an optical amplifier or a laser. An optical amplifier is a device that amplifies an optical signal directly, without the need to first convert it to an electrical signal. An optical amplifier generally includes a gain medium (e.g., without an optical cavity), or one in which feedback from the cavity is suppressed. Exemplary optical amplifiers include doped fibers, bulk lasers, semiconductor optical amplifiers (SOAs) and Raman optical amplifiers. In doped fiber amplifiers and bulk lasers, stimulated emission in the amplifier's gain medium causes amplification of incoming light. In SOAs, electron-hole recombination occurs. In Raman amplifiers, Raman scattering of incoming light with phonons (i.e., excited state quasiparticles) in the lattice of the gain medium produces photons coherent with the incoming photons.

Doped fiber amplifiers (DFAs) are optical amplifiers that use a doped optical fiber as a gain medium to amplify an optical signal. In a DFA, the signal to be amplified and a pump laser are multiplexed into the doped fiber, and the signal is amplified through interaction with the doping ions. The most common DFA is Erbium Doped Fiber Amplifier (EDFA), which features a silica fiber with an Erbium-ion doped core. An exemplary EDFA is the Cisco ONS 15501 EDFA from Cisco Systems, Inc. (San Jose, CA)

Semiconductor optical amplifiers (SOAs) are amplifiers that use a semiconductor to provide the gain medium. In a SOA, input light is transmitted through the gain medium and amplified output light is produced. An SOA includes n-cladding layer and p-cladding layer. The SOA also typically includes a group III-V compound semiconductor such as GaAs/AlGaAs, InP/InGaAs, InP/InGaAsP and InP/InAlGaAs, though any suitable semiconductor material may be used.

A typical semiconductor optical amplifier includes a double heterostructure material with n-type and p-type high band gap semiconductor layers around a low band gap semiconductor. The high band gap layers are sometimes referred to as p-cladding layers (which have more holes than electrons) and n-cladding layers (which have more electrons than holes). The carriers are injected into the gain medium where they recombine to produce photons by both spontaneous and stimulated emission. The cladding layers also function as waveguides to guide the propagation of the light signal. Semiconductor optical amplifiers are described in Dutta and Wang, Semiconductor Optical Amplifiers, World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd.,

Hackensack, NJ (2006) the contents of which are hereby incorporated by reference in their entirety.

Booster Optical Amplifiers (BOAs) are single-pass, traveling-wave amplifiers that only amplify one state of polarization generally used for applications where the input polarization of the light is known. Since a BOA is polarization sensitive, it can provide desirable gain, noise, bandwidth, and saturation power specification. In some embodiments, a BOA includes a semiconductor gain medium. The input and output of BOA can be coupled to one or more waveguides on an optical amplifier chip. Figure 1 is a gain curve for a COTS booster optical amplifier.

Optical amplifier components can be provided in a standard 14-pin butterfly package with either single mode fiber (SMF) or polarization maintain fiber (PMF) pigtailed, which can be terminated with any fixed connection (FC) connector such as an angled physical connection (FC/APC) connector. Optional polarization-maintaining isolators can be provided at the input, output, or both. In certain embodiments, the gain chip assembly includes a wavelength dependent reflector as a reflective surface of the optical amplifier, such as a mirror or one or more facets of the gain medium.

A laser generally is an optical amplifier in which the gain medium is positioned within an optical resonator (i.e., an optical cavity) as diagrammed in Figure 2. In certain embodiments, an optical resonator is an arrangement of mirrors that forms a standing wave cavity resonator for light waves, e.g., a pair of mirrors on opposite ends of the gain medium and facing each other. The pair of mirrors includes a high reflector **217** and output coupler **205** surrounding the gain medium **201**. Incident light **221** reflects between the mirrors creating standing wave **213**. Some light is emitted as a laser beam **209**. Where laser light is desired, the gain medium is positioned in an optical cavity. The optical cavity confines light in the gain medium, thereby feeding it amplified light back through the gain medium allowing it to be amplified again. Input light resonates between the mirrors while being re-amplified by the gain medium until the lasing threshold is surpassed and laser light is produced. This results in a positive feedback cycle tending to increase the gain G of the optical amplifier.

In a laser, one of the mirrors of the optical cavity is generally known as the high reflector while the other is the output coupler. Typically, the output coupler is partially transparent and emits the output laser beam. In certain embodiments, the invention provides a wavelength

dependent reflector as a reflective surface with laser, such as one of the mirrors (e.g., the output coupler) or one of the facets of the gain medium.

A laser can be provided, for example, as a COTS component in a 14-pin butterfly package with either SMF or PMF pigtails. One such exemplary laser is the PowerPure 1998 PLM, a 980 nm pump laser module with Bragg grating available from Avanex Corporation (Fremont, CA).

In certain embodiments, a gain component such as an optical amplifier or a laser amplifies light in a frequency-specific manner. A gain component includes a gain medium having a gain coefficient g (gain per unit length) that is a function of the optical frequency of the incident signal ω . The gain coefficient at a given frequency $g(\omega)$ is given by equation 3:

$$(3) g(\omega) = g_0 / (1 + (\omega - \omega_0)^2 T^2 + P/P_s)$$

where g_0 is the peak gain of the medium, P is the optical power of the signal being amplified, P_s is the saturation power of the gain medium, ω_0 is an atomic transition frequency of the medium, and T is a dipole relaxation time. Where incident light has a frequency ω , a gain medium has a gain coefficient $g(\omega)$ and gain is given by Equation 4:

$$(4) G(\omega) = \exp[g(\omega)L]$$

where L is a length of the gain medium.

The power of amplified light at a distance z from the input end of a gain medium is given by Equation 5:

$$(5) P(z) = P_{in} \exp(gz)$$

Gain coefficient g has an inverse square relationship to $(\omega - \omega_0)$ (see Equation 3) and power $P(z)$ is exponentially related to gain coefficient g . Thus, the gain of a gain medium is higher for optical frequencies ω closer to ω_0 . FIG. 8 shows gain as a function of wavelength for a typical gain medium. As shown by the peak of the gain curve, the gain medium has a “peak gain.”

If light of various wavelengths is amplified by the medium (at powers well below the saturation power P_s of the gain medium), light having a wavelength at or near the peak gain will be amplified to a greater degree than light having a wavelength not at or near the peak gain.

For any wavelength of light, if the gain is greater than the loss, lasing can result in which the light is emitted as a laser beam. The conditions at which gain equals loss is the lasing threshold for a frequency of light. The lasing threshold is lowest at the peak gain and light having a wavelength at the peak gain is more readily and more robustly amplified than at other wavelengths. Consequently, the gain medium most readily lases light at the peak gain.

Unintentional lasing is known as parasitic lasing. If light transmitted through the medium has sufficient power, wavelengths near the peak gain will cross the lasing threshold, causing lasing. This parasitic lasing leaches power from the system, reduces coherence length of signal light, and introduces noise into the signal. Due to the shape of the gain curve in a typical gain medium, parasitic lasing is problematic near the peak gain.

Devices and methods of the invention mitigate parasitic lasing and improve image quality. In one embodiment, systems and methods of the invention mitigate parasitic lasing by optimizing the time required to reach amplified light of a desired wavelength. Accordingly, undesired wavelengths have less opportunity to become amplified and also surpass the lasing threshold. In addition, image quality is also improved by reducing the time necessary to reach a desired wavelength.

In certain aspects, the gain component produces new infrared light from incident light delivered by a filter module in optical connection to the gain component. Preferably, the reflector is an output coupler and the gain component is a semiconductor optical amplifier. Systems of the invention further include any other compatible component known in the art. Exemplary components include interferometers, couplers/splitters, controllers, and any other device known in the art. Systems of the invention may include input and output mechanisms, such as an output mechanism configured to be coupled to a fiber optic interferometer or other imaging device. An optical system may include a controller component. For example, systems can include the LDC1300 butterfly LD/TEC controller from Thorlabs (Newton, NJ). The LD/TEC controller and mount allows a system to be controlled by a computer. In certain embodiments, optical systems are integrated into an optical networking platform such as the Cisco ONS 15500 Dense Wave Division Multiplexer.

In certain embodiments, the system includes an interferometer such as a fiber optic interferometer. An interferometer, generally, is an instrument used to interfere waves and

measure the interference. Interferometry includes extracting information from superimposed, interfering waves.

As encompassed by the invention, a portion of the amplified light leaving the gain chip assembly is directed back into the assembly. In certain aspects, this re-direction is accomplished using a partial mirror. Mirrors typically reflect uniformly over a broad spectral range. In contrast, partial mirrors work at off-normal angles of incidence, thereby reflecting only a portion of the light while transmitting the remainder. In certain aspects, a partial mirror is appropriately positioned outside the gain chip assembly so that when light leaves the assembly, it is reflected by the partial mirror back into the assembly. Accordingly, light is amplified a second time upon re-entering the gain chip assembly.

Any material suitable for antireflective coating may be used to construct the partial mirror. Exemplary materials include metals such as aluminum, silver, or gold or compounds such as magnesium fluoride. Additional exemplary coated materials are sold under the trademark HEBBAR by CVI Melles Griot (Albuquerque, NM).

Coatings of the desired thickness can be fabricated by any method known in the art including, for example, vacuum deposition, electric bombardment vaporization, plasma ion-assisted deposition (PIAD), carbon vapor deposition, plasma vapor deposition, and related techniques. In vacuum deposition, a substrate is put in a vacuum chamber along with a metal crucible holding the coating substance. A high current (e.g., 100 A) is passed through the coating material, vaporizing it. Due to the vacuum, the vaporized material disperses to the material to be coated.

In certain aspects, the filter and gain chip assembly are connected with optical fibers, such that light transmitted from the filter travels through the optical fiber to the gain chip assembly and from the gain chip assembly back into the filter. In certain aspects of the invention, one optical fiber transmits light from the filter to the gain chip assembly, while a second optical fiber transmits light from the gain chip assembly back to the filter.

Optical fibers are flexible, transparent fibers able to transmit light from one end of the fiber to the other. Optical fibers can be prepared from glass (silica) or from a variety of plastic polymers. Optical fibers usually include a transparent core surrounded by a transparent cladding material with a lower index of refraction. Light is kept in the core by total internal reflection, which causes the fiber to act as a waveguide or "light pipe."

Any type of optical fiber is useful for practicing the invention, including multi-mode fibers (MMF) and single-mode fibers (SMF). MMF fibers support many propagation paths or transverse modes while SMF fibers support only a single mode. MMF fibers usually have wider core diameter than SMF fibers, and are used for short-distance communication links and for applications where high power must be transmitted. SMF fibers are often used for communication links longer than 1000 meters. Assemblies of multiple fibers can also be prepared in wrapped bundles, which are often used for imaging procedures. The selection of the appropriate fibers and their connection to the various components described herein is within the skill of the art. For example, MMF fibers having a wavelength range of 400-2400 nm are available from Thorlabs (Item No. AFS50/125Y).

Further embodiments of the invention include an optical circulator for redirecting light among the various components encompassed by the invention. For example, light can travel from the filter to the circulator through an optical fiber connecting both the filter and the circulator. The light can then travel from the circulator to the gain chip assembly and back again via a separate optical fiber connecting the circulator to the gain chip assembly.

An optical circulator is a special fiber-optic component that can be used to separate optical signals that travel in different directions in an optical fiber. Optical circulators are typically three-port devices, configured such that light entering any port exits from the next. This means that if light enters port 1, it is emitted from port 2, but if some of the emitted light is reflected back to the circulator, it does not come out of port 1, but instead exits from port 3. In this sense, fiber optic circulators act as signal routers, transmitting light from an input fiber at a first port to an output fiber at a second port, but directing light that returns along the output fiber to a third port. Circulators protect the input fiber from return power, but also allow the rejected light to be employed. The selection of the appropriate circulators and their connection to the various components described herein is within the skill of the art. For example, optical circulators having a wavelength range of 1525-1610 nm are available from Thorlabs, Inc (Item No. 6015-3-APC).

As encompassed by the invention, light from the filter enters the circulator at a first port, and exits the circulator at a second port, which is connected to the gain chip assembly. When the light amplified in the gain chip assembly reaches the lasing threshold, light is emitted from the gain chip assembly. The emitted light meets a partial mirror outside the gain chip assembly,

whereupon a portion of the amplified light is reflected back into the assembly. The amplified light is amplified for a second time in the gain chip assembly. This re-amplified light travels back to the circulator, entering the circulator at the second port. The re-amplified light then exits the circulator out the third port, whereupon the re-amplified light travels back to the filter and the whole process can begin again.

The present invention can operate as a light source for a variety of uses, including imaging applications. In certain aspects, the unreflected portion of the light leaving the gain chip assembly is directed to an optical tomography (OCT) system. Systems and methods of the invention are particularly amenable for use in OCT as the provided systems and methods can improve image quality and reduce the incidence of parasitic lasing.

Measuring a phase change in one of two beams from a coherent light is employed in optical coherence tomography. Commercially available OCT systems are employed in diverse applications, including art conservation and diagnostic medicine, e.g., ophthalmology. Recently, it has also begun to be used in interventional cardiology to help diagnose coronary heart disease. OCT systems and methods are described in U.S. Patent Application Nos. 2011/0152771; 2010/0220334; 2009/0043191; 2008/0291463; and 2008/0180683, the contents of which are hereby incorporated by reference in their entirety.

Various lumen of biological structures may be imaged with the aforementioned imaging technologies in addition to blood vessels, including, but not limited to, vasculature of the lymphatic and nervous systems, various structures of the gastrointestinal tract including lumen of the small intestine, large intestine, stomach, esophagus, colon, pancreatic duct, bile duct, hepatic duct, lumen of the reproductive tract including the vas deferens, vagina, uterus, and fallopian tubes, structures of the urinary tract including urinary collecting ducts, renal tubules, ureter, bladder, and structures of the head, neck, and pulmonary system including sinuses, parotid, trachea, bronchi, and lungs.

In OCT, a light source delivers a beam of light to an imaging device to image target tissue. Within the light source is an optical amplifier and an tunable filter that allows that allows a user to select a wavelength of light to be amplified. Wavelengths commonly used in medical applications include near-infrared light, for example, 800 nm for shallow, high-resolution scans or 1700 nm for deep scans.

Generally, there are two types of OCT systems, common beam path systems and differential beam path systems, which differ from each other based upon the optical layout of the systems. A common beam path system sends all produced light through a single optical fiber to generate a reference signal and a sample signal, whereupon a differential beam path system splits
5 the produced light such that a portion of the light is directed to the sample and the other portion is directed to a reference surface. The reflected light from the sample is recombined with the signal from the reference surface of detection. Common beam path interferometers are further described in, for example, U.S. Patent Nos. 7,999,938; 7,995,210; and 7,787,127, the contents of which are incorporated by reference herein in its entirety.

10 In a differential beam path system, amplified light from a light source is inputted into an interferometer with a portion of light directed to a sample and the other portion directed to a reference surface. A distal end of an optical fiber is interfaced with a catheter for interrogation of the target tissue during a catheterization procedure. The reflected light from the tissue is recombined with the signal from the reference surface, forming interference fringes that allow
15 precise depth-resolved imaging of the target tissue on a micron scale. Exemplary differential beam path interferometers are further described in, for example, U.S. Patent Nos. 6,134,003; and 6,421,164, the contents of which are incorporated by reference herein in its entirety.

In certain embodiments, the invention can be used in conjunction with a differential beam path OCT system with intravascular imaging capability as illustrated in Figure 4. In these
20 embodiments, systems and methods of the invention can be used to provide a light source of narrow wavelength light. For intravascular imaging, a light beam is delivered to the vessel lumen via a fiber-optic based imaging catheter **826**. The imaging catheter is connected through hardware to software on a host workstation. The hardware includes an imaging engine **859** and a handheld patient interface module (PIM) **839** that includes user controls. The proximal end of
25 the imaging catheter is connected to PIM **839**, which is connected to an imaging engine as shown in Figure 4.

As shown in Figure 5, the imaging engine **859** (e.g., bedside unit) houses a power supply **849**, a light source **827** in accordance with the methods and systems described herein, interferometer **931**, and variable delay line **835** as well as a data acquisition (DAQ) board **855**
30 and optical controller board (OCB) **854**. A PIM cable **841** connects the imaging engine **859** to the PIM **839** and an engine cable **845** connects the imaging engine **859** to the host workstation.

Figure 6 shows the light path in an exemplary embodiment of the invention. Light for image capture originates within the light source **827**. This light is split between an OCT interferometer **905** and an auxiliary interferometer **911**. The OCT interferometer generates the OCT image signal and the auxiliary, or “clock” interferometer characterizes the wavelength tuning nonlinearity in the light source and generates a digitizer sample clock.

In certain embodiments, each interferometer is configured in a Mach-Zehnder layout and uses single mode fiber optics to guide the light. Fibers are connected via LC/APC connectors or protected fusion splices. By controlling the split ratio between the OCT and auxiliary interferometers with splitter **901**, the optical power in the auxiliary interferometer is controlled to optimize the signal in the auxiliary interferometer. Within the auxiliary interferometer, light is split and recombined by a pair of 50/50 coupler/splitters.

Light directed to the main OCT interferometer is also split by splitter **917** and recombined by splitter **919** with an asymmetric split ratio. The majority of the light is guided into the sample path **913** and the remainder into a reference path **915**. The sample path includes optical fibers running through the PIM **839** and the imaging catheter **826** and terminating at the distal end of the imaging catheter **826** where the image is captured.

Typical intravascular OCT involves introducing the imaging catheter into a patients’ target vessel using standard interventional techniques and tools such as a guidewire, guide catheter, and angiography system. When operation is triggered from the PIM or control console, the imaging core of the catheter rotates while collecting image data that it delivers to the console screen. Rotation is driven by spin motor **861** while translation is driven by pullback motor **865**, as shown in Figure 7. Blood in the vessel is temporarily flushed with a clear solution while a motor translates the catheter longitudinally through the vessel.

In certain embodiments, the imaging catheter has a crossing profile of 2.4F (0.8 mm) and transmits focused OCT imaging light to and from the vessel of interest. Embedded microprocessors running firmware in both the PIM and the imaging engine control the system. The imaging catheter includes a rotating and longitudinally-translating inner core contained within an outer sheath. Using light provided by the imaging engine, the inner core detects reflected light. This reflected light is then transmitted along a sample path to be recombined with the light from the reference path.

A variable delay line (VDL) **925** on the reference path uses an adjustable fiber coil to match the length of the reference path **915** to the length of the sample path **913**. The reference path length is adjusted by translating a mirror on a lead screw based translation stage that is actuated electromechanically by a small stepper motor. The free-space optical beam on the inside of the VDL **925** experiences more delay as the mirror moves away from the fixed input/output fiber. Stepper movement is under firmware/software control.

Light from the reference path is combined with light from the sample path. This light is split into orthogonal polarization states, resulting in RF-band polarization-diverse temporal interference fringe signals. The interference fringe signals are converted to photocurrents using PIM photodiodes **929a** and **929b** on the OCG as shown in Figure 6. The interfering, polarization splitting, and detection steps are performed by a polarization diversity module (PDM) on the OCB. Signal from the OCB is sent to the DAQ **855**, shown in Figure 5. The DAQ includes a digital signal processing (DSP) microprocessor and a field programmable gate array (FPGA) to digitize signals and communicate with the host work station and the PIM. The FPGA converts raw optical signals into meaningful OCT images. The DAQ also compresses data as necessary to reduce image transfer bandwidth to 1 Gbps.

In certain embodiments, the invention provides a light source for OCT including a filter, a gain chip assembly comprising a gain medium, and a partially reflecting mirror. The components are configured such that light passes from the filter to the gain chip assembly and a portion of the light is reflected by the partial mirror back through the gain chip assembly before the light passes again through the filter.

Any filter known in the art compatible with the invention may be used, including, for example, a tunable filter. The filter is included to deliver light of a specified wavelength into an optical amplifier. The filter typically has a peak reflectivity and a background reflectivity. In some embodiments, the system includes a commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) filter. One exemplary filter for use with the use with the invention is filter module TFM-687 by Axsun technologies, Inc. (Billerica, MA). An exemplary tunable optical filter exhibits 20% reflectivity and 29 dB contrast ratio.

Any optical amplifier or laser known in the art and compatible with the invention may be used as the gain component including, for example, a semiconductor optical amplifier. The amplifier amplifies the light to a sufficient output power for imaging by OCT. The amplifier

typically has a semiconductor gain medium and an optical cavity. In some embodiments, a system includes a COTS amplifier. One exemplary optical amplifier for use with the invention is booster optical amplifier serial number BOA1130S, BOA1130P, or BOA-8702-11820.4.B01 from Thorlabs (Newton, NJ). An exemplary optical amplifier has a center wavelength of 1285 nm and a small signal gain of 30 dB with a chip length of 1.5 mm.

A mirror can be coated with wavelength dependent material. Suitable materials are available from Unioriental Optics co., Ltd (Zhong Guan Cun Science Park, Beijing, China).

In certain embodiments, the invention provides a light source that emits narrow wavelength light for OCT systems like those shown in Figures 4 and 5. Exemplary components of light source **827** are illustrated schematically in Figure 3. Tunable optical filter **801** provides light to an optical circulator **802** at a first port **802a** via a first optical fiber **803**. The light exits the circulator **802** at a second port **802b** and travels through a second optical fiber **804** to a gain chip assembly **805**. The operation of the gain chip assembly 805 has already been presented schematically in Figure 2. When the light amplified in the gain chip assembly **805** reaches the lasing threshold, light is emitted from the assembly **805**. The emitted light meets a partial mirror **806** outside the gain chip assembly **805**, whereupon a portion of the light is reflected back into the assembly **805**. The amplified light is amplified for a second time in the gain chip assembly **805**. This re-amplified light travels back to the circulator **802** through the second optical fiber **804**, entering the circulator **802** at the second port **802b**. The re-amplified light then exits the circulator **802** out the third port **802c**, whereupon the re-amplified light travels back to the filter **801** via a third optical fiber **807** and the whole process can begin again. Accordingly, systems and methods are able to produce narrow emissions of light faster than conventional methods by transmitting light through a filter and passing a portion of the filtered light through the gain chip assembly at least two times before that portion of filtered light passes again through the filter. This reduction in time to achieve the desired wavelength results in improved image quality and reduces the incidence of parasitic lasing.

Incorporation by Reference

References and citations to other documents, such as patents, patent applications, patent publications, journals, books, papers, web contents, have been made throughout this disclosure. All such documents are hereby incorporated herein by reference in their entirety for all purposes.

Equivalents

The invention may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from the spirit or essential characteristics thereof. The foregoing embodiments are therefore to be considered in
5 all respects illustrative rather than limiting on the invention described herein. Scope of the invention is thus indicated by the appended claims rather than by the foregoing description, and all changes which come within the meaning and range of equivalency of the claims are therefore intended to be embraced therein.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of narrowing a wavelength emission of light, the method comprising:
transmitting light through a filter; and
passing a portion of the filtered light through a gain chip assembly at least two times before that portion of the filtered light passes again through the filter.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein passing a portion of the filtered light through a gain chip assembly at least two times comprises:
sending the light through a gain medium in the gain chip assembly a first time; and
reflecting a portion of the light leaving the gain chip assembly back through the gain chip assembly, resulting in a second pass through the gain medium in the gain chip assembly before passing again through the filter.
3. The method of claim 2, wherein reflecting is accomplished using a partial mirror.
4. The method of claim 1, wherein the filter is a tunable filter.
5. The method of claim 4, wherein the filter is a voltage-controlled optical attenuator.
6. The method of claim 2, wherein the gain medium is a semiconductor.
7. The method of claim 1, wherein an unreflected portion of the light leaving the gain chip assembly is directed to an optical coherence tomography (OCT) system.
8. A system for narrowing a wavelength emission of light, the system comprising:
a filter;
a gain chip assembly comprising a gain medium, and
a partially reflecting mirror; the system being configured such that light passes from the filter to the gain chip assembly and a portion of the light is reflected by the partial mirror back through the gain chip assembly before the light passes again through the filter.

9. The system according to claim 10, wherein the filter is a tunable filter.
10. The system of claim 11, wherein the filter is a voltage-controlled optical attenuator.
11. The system of claim 12, wherein the gain medium is a semiconductor.
12. The system of claim 10, further comprising a circulator, wherein the circulator is operably configured to direct light from the filter to the gain chip assembly and from the gain chip back to the filter.
13. The system of claim 10, further comprising an optical coherence tomography (OCT) system, where the OCT system is configured to receive an unreflected portion of the light that passes through the gain chip assembly.

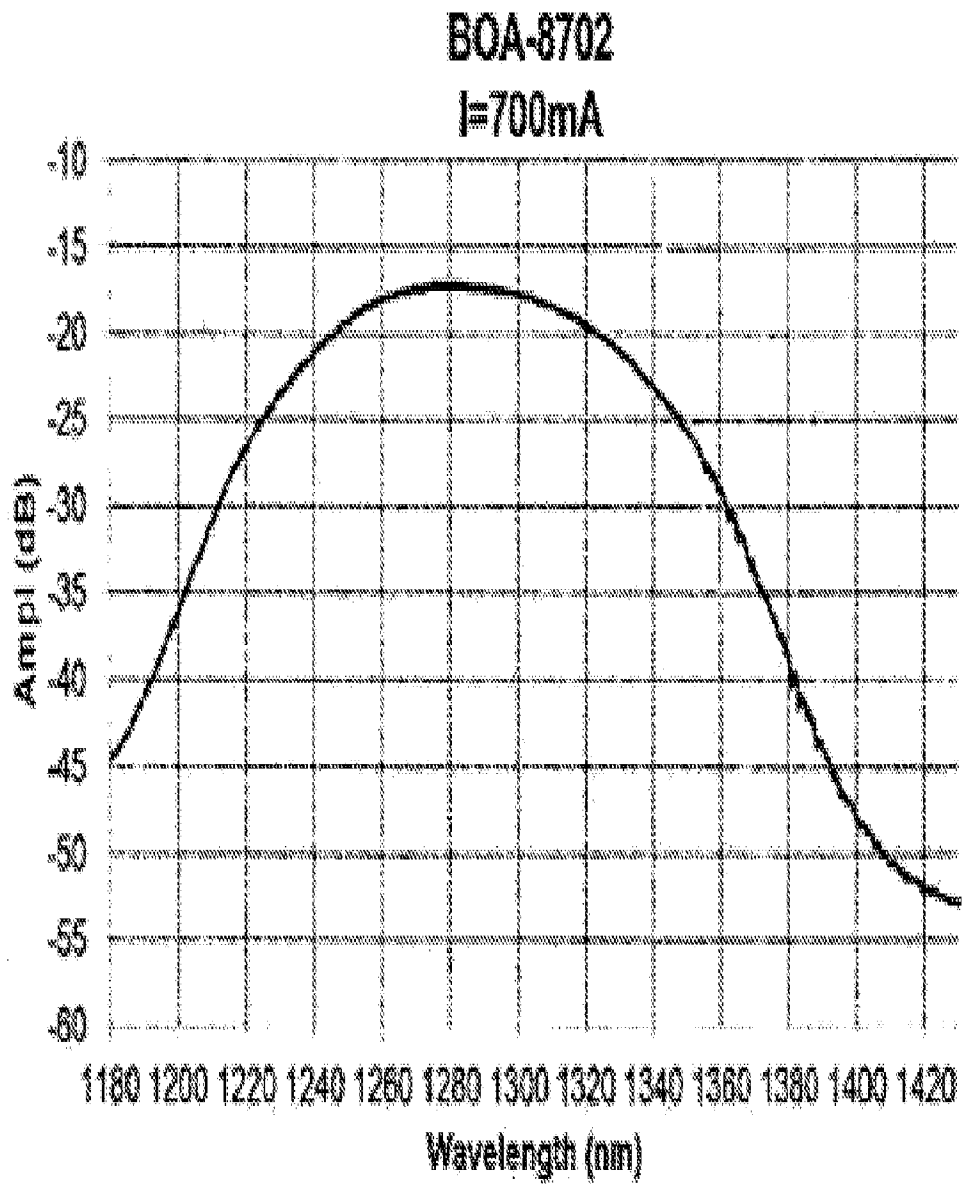


FIG. 1

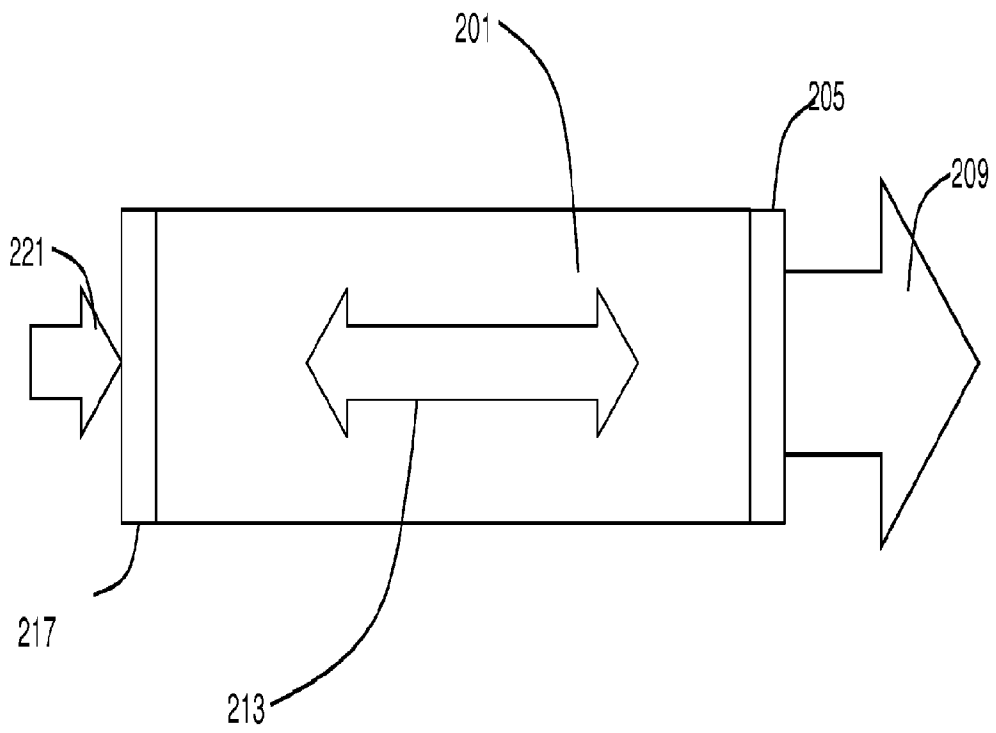


FIG. 2

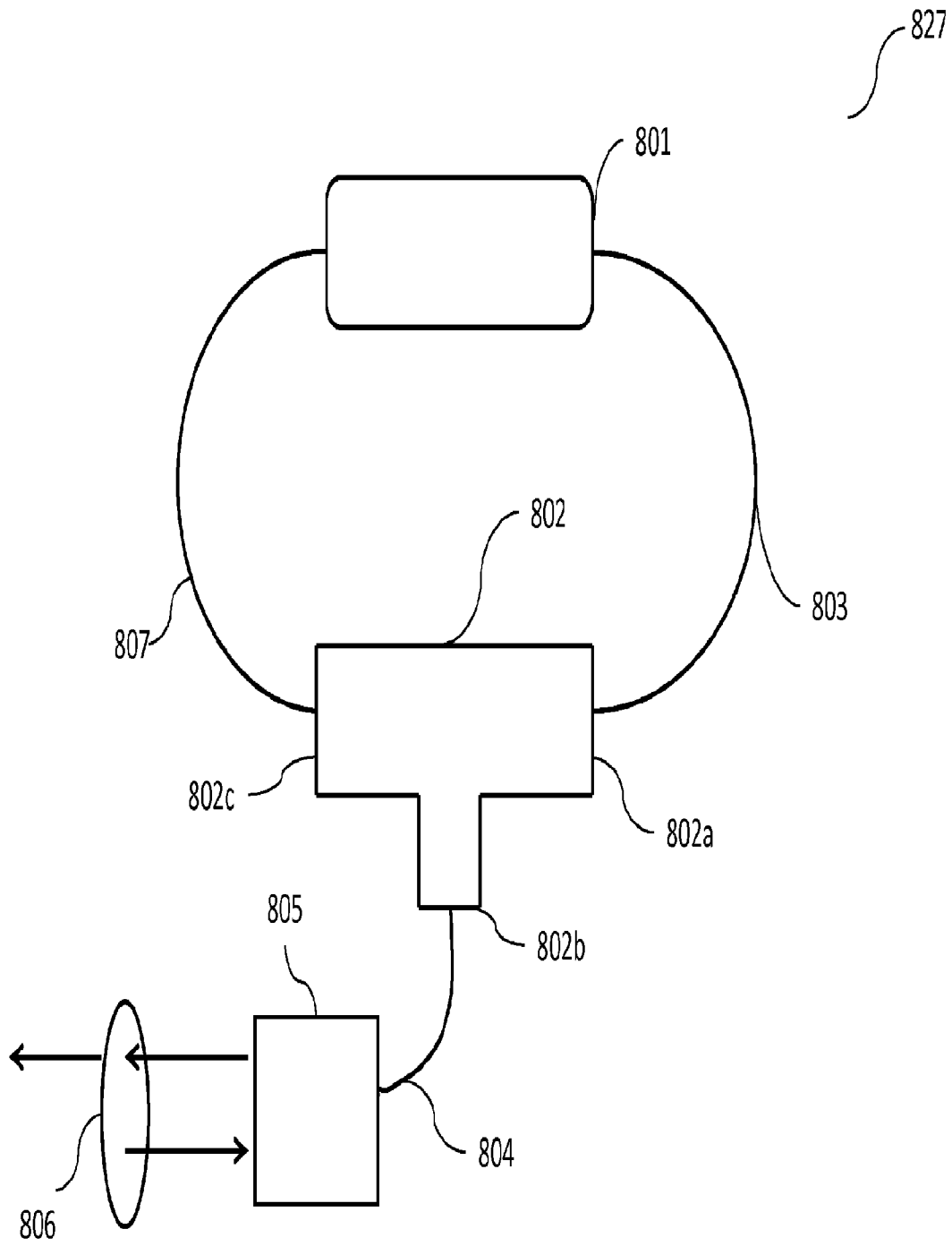


FIG. 3

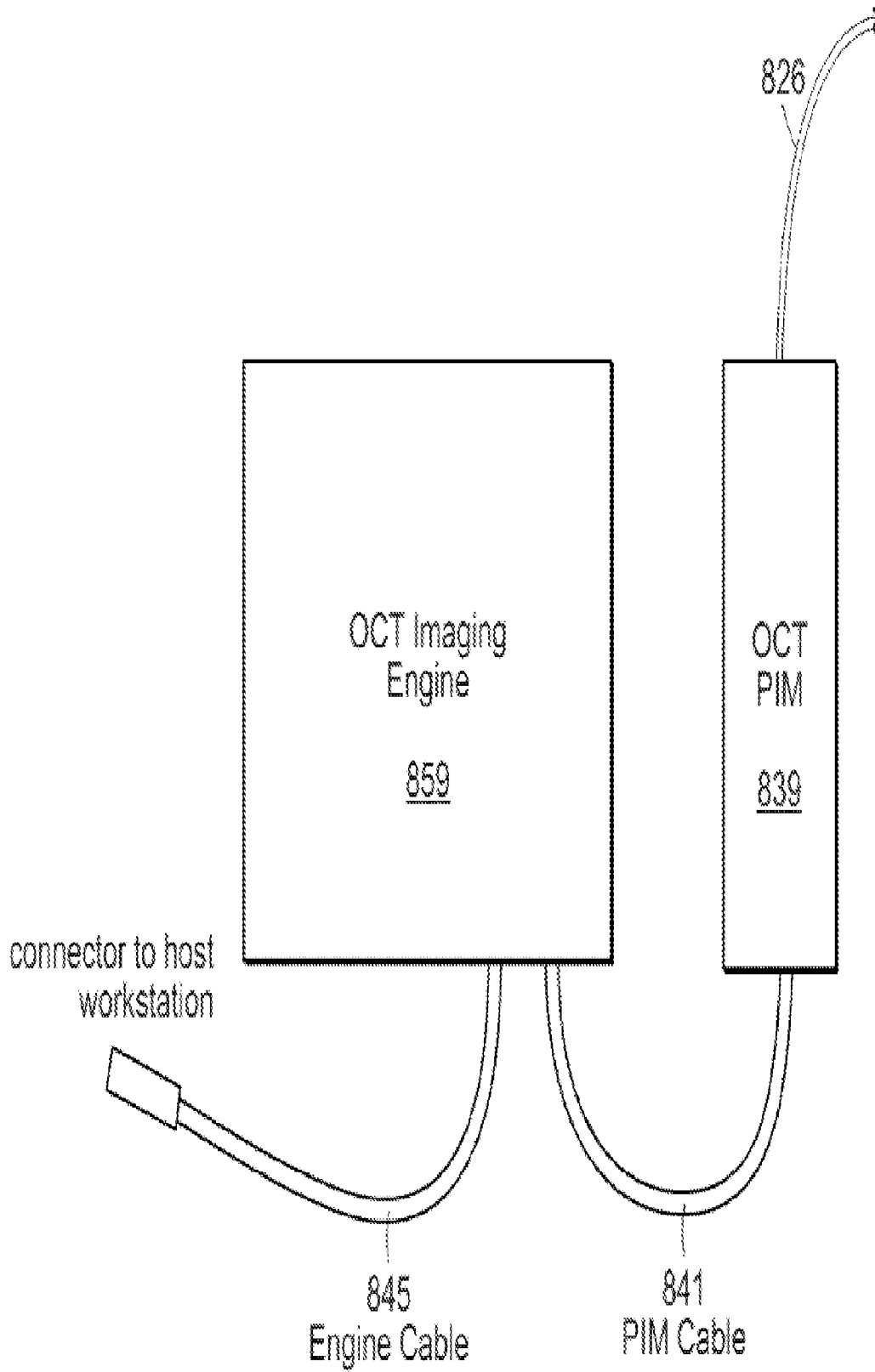


FIG. 4

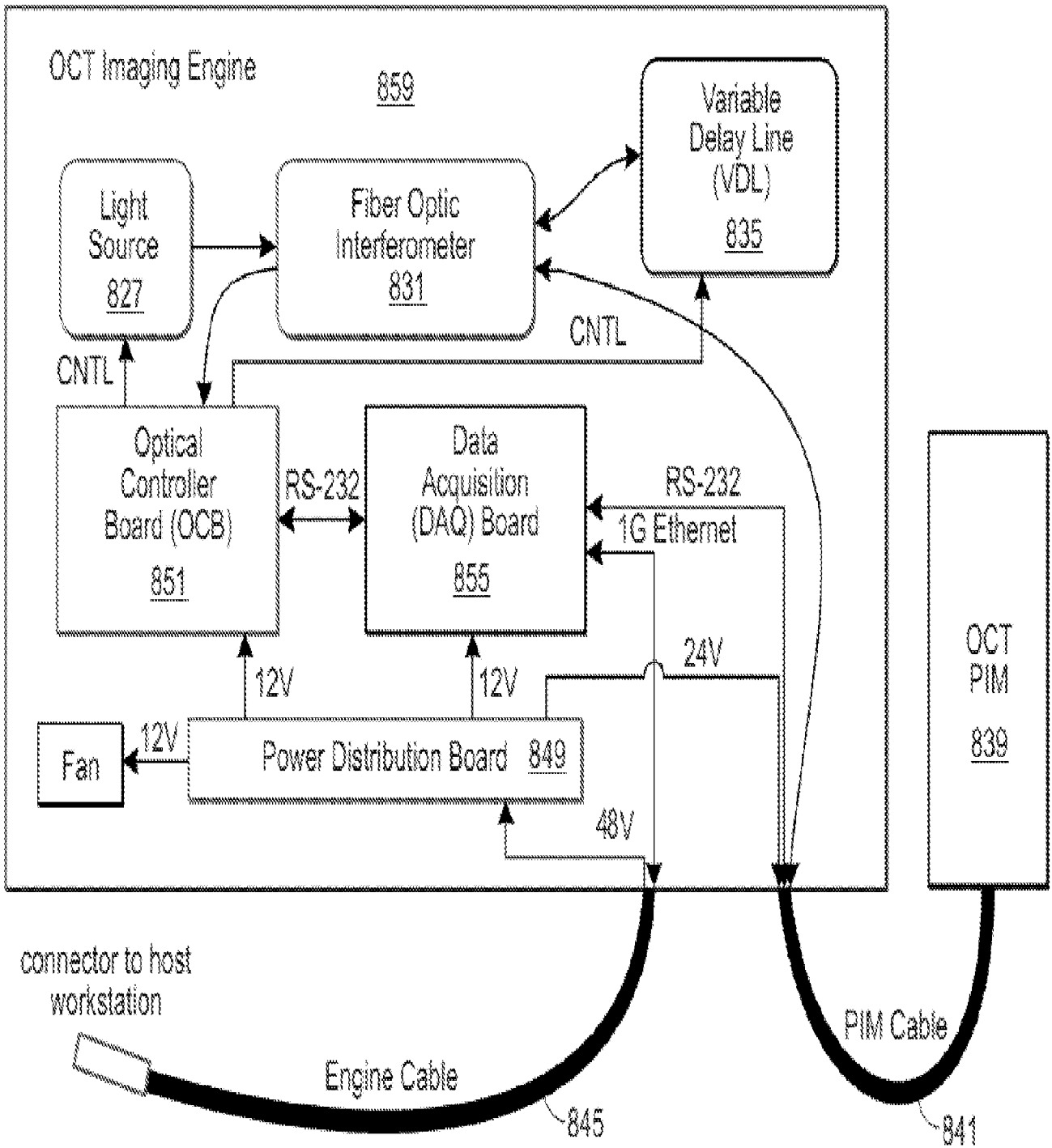


FIG. 5

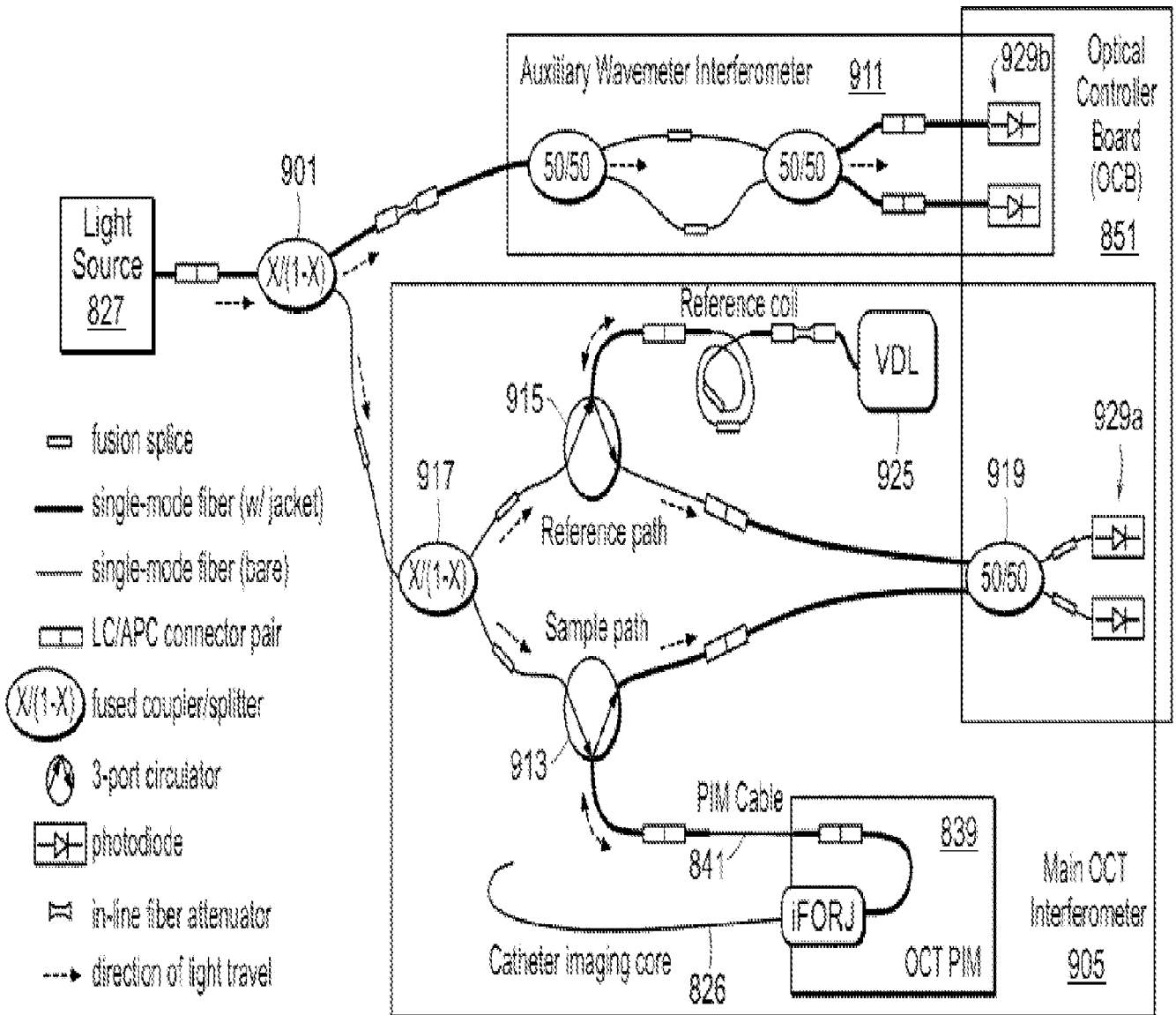


FIG. 6

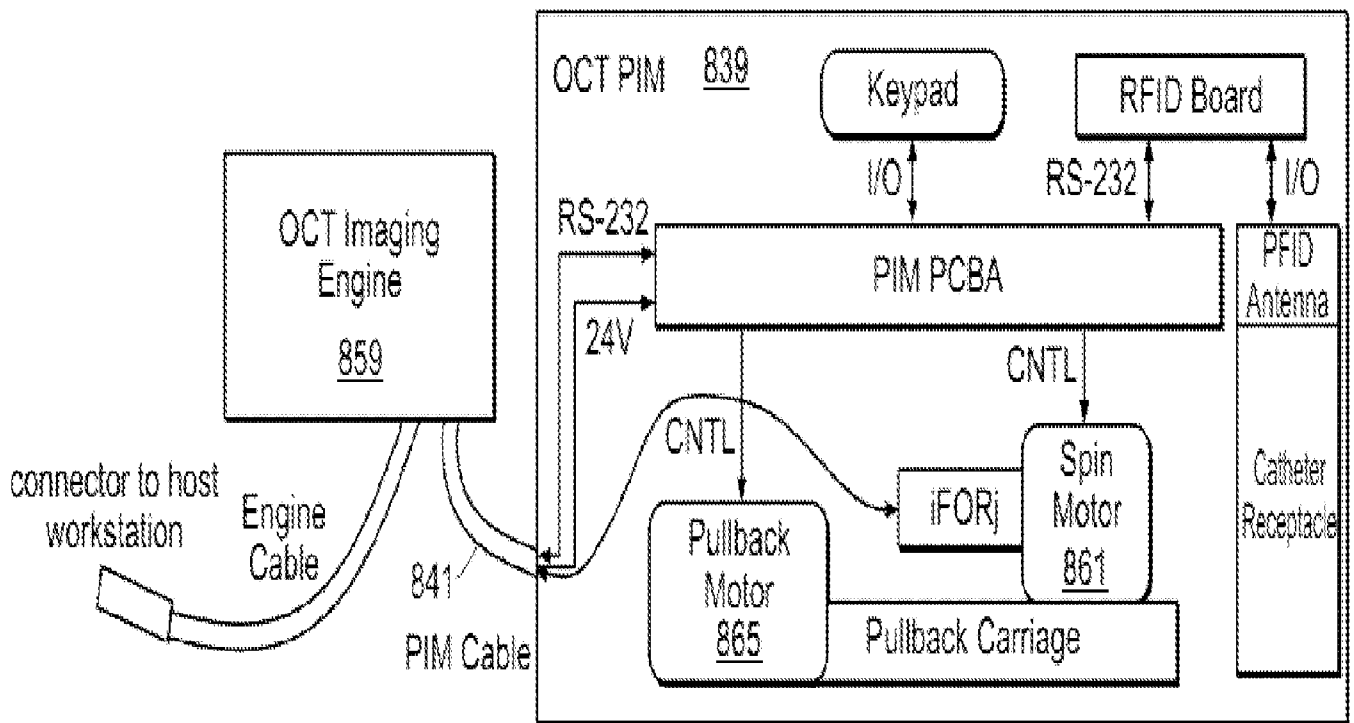


FIG. 7

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US2013/075636

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER IPC(8) - H01S 3/10 (2014.01) USPC - 372/92 According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC		
B. FIELDS SEARCHED Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols) IPC(8) - H01S 3/05, 3/08, 3/083, 3/10, 3/105 (2014.01) USPC -356/226, 452, 491, 477; 372/5, 20, 92, 94, 98 Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched CPC - H01S 3/10, 3/10003, 5/141, 5/145 (2014.02) Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used) Orbit, Google Patents, Google Scholar		
C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X --- Y Y Y A	US 6,295,308 B1 (ZAH) 25 September 2001 (25.09.2001) entire document US 6,343,178 B1 (BURNS et al) 29 January 2002 (29.01.2002) entire document US 2012/0026503 A1 (LEWANDOWSKI et al) 02 February 2012 (02.02.2012) entire document US 2008/0180683 A1 (KEMP) 31 July 2008 (31.07.2008) entire document	1-4, 8 --- 5-7 5 6-7 1-8
<input type="checkbox"/> Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. <input type="checkbox"/>		
* Special categories of cited documents: "A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance "E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date "L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified) "O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means "P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed "T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention "X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone "Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art "&" document member of the same patent family		
Date of the actual completion of the international search 03 April 2014		Date of mailing of the international search report <div style="font-size: 24pt; font-weight: bold; text-align: center;">16 APR 2014</div>
Name and mailing address of the ISA/US Mail Stop PCT, Attn: ISA/US, Commissioner for Patents P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, Virginia 22313-1450 Facsimile No. 571-273-3201		Authorized officer: Blaine R. Copenheaver PCT Helpdesk: 571-272-4300 PCT OSP: 571-272-7774

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US2013/075636

Box No. II Observations where certain claims were found unsearchable (Continuation of item 2 of first sheet)

This international search report has not been established in respect of certain claims under Article 17(2)(a) for the following reasons:

- 1. Claims Nos.:
because they relate to subject matter not required to be searched by this Authority, namely:

- 2. Claims Nos.:
because they relate to parts of the international application that do not comply with the prescribed requirements to such an extent that no meaningful international search can be carried out, specifically:

- 3. Claims Nos.: 9-13
because they are dependent claims and are not drafted in accordance with the second and third sentences of Rule 6.4(a).

Box No. III Observations where unity of invention is lacking (Continuation of item 3 of first sheet)

This International Searching Authority found multiple inventions in this international application, as follows:

- 1. As all required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers all searchable claims.
- 2. As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying additional fees, this Authority did not invite payment of additional fees.
- 3. As only some of the required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers only those claims for which fees were paid, specifically claims Nos.:

- 4. No required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant. Consequently, this international search report is restricted to the invention first mentioned in the claims; it is covered by claims Nos.:

Remark on Protest

- The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest and, where applicable, the payment of a protest fee.
- The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest but the applicable protest fee was not paid within the time limit specified in the invitation.
- No protest accompanied the payment of additional search fees.