

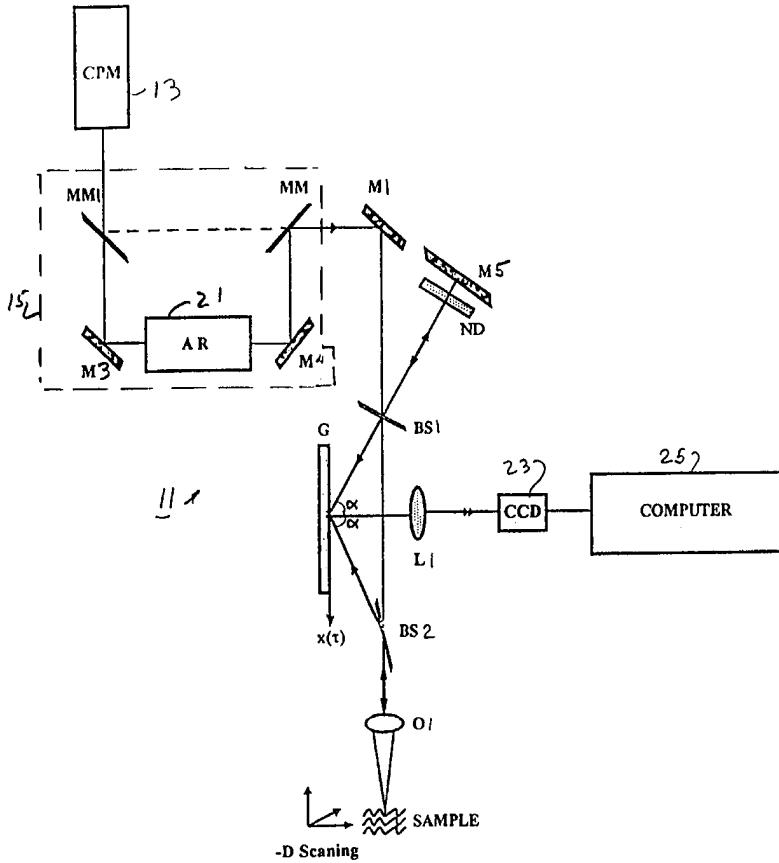


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(54) Title: A SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PERFORMING SELECTED OPTICAL MEASUREMENTS

(57) Abstract

A system (11) and method for performing selected optical measurements on a sample is provided utilizing an optical coherence domain reflectometer which includes a diffraction grating (G). A broadband light source (13) produces light having a short coherence length. A beam splitter (BS1) splits the light into a signal beam and a reference beam. A reference mirror (M5) is disposed to receive the reference beam. A lens (O1) brings the signal beam to focus on the sample. A diffraction grating (G) receives a reflection from the sample and from the reference mirror, the reflections being incident on the diffraction grating with respect to said diffraction grating normal such that the positive and negative first or second or higher diffraction orders from said reflections received propagate along a normal to said diffraction grating. A lens (L1) collects the diffracted orders from the diffraction grating and brings the diffracted orders to focus on a detector (23), the detector (23) producing an output of said positive and negative first diffracted orders received. A computer (25) processes the output from the detector (23).



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A SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PERFORMING SELECTED
OPTICAL MEASUREMENTS

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application
5 60/033,220 filed on 12-4-96 and U.S. Provisional Patent Application 60/042,489
filed on 4-2-97, which Patent applications are incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

10 The present invention relates generally to a method and system for making
optical measurements and, more particularly, to a method and system for making
optical measurements using optical coherence domain reflectometry.

15 Optical coherence domain reflectometry (OCDR), a well known technique,
is based on detection of an interference signal and becomes an attractive method
for making precision measurements that provides resolution of 10 μ m and a
dynamic range of more than 100dB for depth scan up to few mm. Using a high
speed linear translation stage, OCDR measurements can be performed at modest
high speeds. This method can be used to determine an internal depth image below
the surface. OCDR has been developed for imaging of the anterior eye and retina,
optical tomography and histology in highly-scattering media, and catheter-
endoscope tomography in internal organ systems. The mirror velocity is typically
20 in the range of 30 mm/sec corresponding to a Doppler frequency of 50 kHz. To
achieve ultrahigh image acquisition speeds alternative technologies to mirror-
translation scanning must be developed.

25 In U.S. Patent 4,459,570 issued on October 17, 1995 to E.A. Swanson et.
al, a method and apparatus for performing various optical measurements is
provided utilizing an optical coherence domain refractometer (OCDR). A short
coherence optical radiation source applies optical radiation through like optical
paths to a sample and an optical reflector. The optical reflector is movable in
accordance with a predetermined velocity profile to permit interferometric scanning
of the sample, the resulting output having a Doppler shift frequency modulation.
30 This output may be demodulated and detected to obtain desired measurements
and other information. Additional information may be obtained by applying radiation

from two or more sources at different wavelengths to the sample and reflector and by separately demodulating the resulting outputs before processing. Birefringent information may be obtained by polarizing the optical radiation used, by suitably modifying the polarization in the sample and reference paths and by dividing the 5 output into orthogonal polarization outputs which are separately demodulated before processing.

Another reference of interest is U.S. Patent 5,491,552 issued on February 13, 1996 to A. Knutte.

It is an object of this invention to provide a new and improved method and 10 system for optically performing high resolution measurements.

It is another object of this invention to provide a new and improved method and system for optically performing high resolution measurements using a diffraction grating.

It is another object of this invention to provide a method and system for 15 obtaining a 2D image of a sample without scanning the sample in the lateral direction.

It is a further object of this invention to provide a method and system for obtaining a 3D image of a sample.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

A system for performing selected optical measurements on a sample constructed according to the teachings of this invention comprises a broad band light source for producing a broad band beam of light, means for splitting said beam of light into a signal beam and a reference beam, a reference mirror disposed to receive the reference beam, means for bringing the signal beam to focus on said sample, a diffraction grating for receiving light reflected from the sample and light reflected from the reference mirror, the reflections from the mirror and sample being incident on the diffraction grating with respect to said diffraction grating normal such that the positive and negative first and second or higher diffraction orders from said reflections propagate along a normal to said diffraction grating, a detector, means for collecting the diffracted orders from said diffraction grating and bringing said diffracted orders to focus on said detector, said detector producing an output of said positive and negative first diffracted orders received, and means for processing said output from said detector.

A method for performing selected optical measurements on a sample according to this invention comprises producing a beam of light, splitting said beam of light into a signal beam and a reference beam, positioning a reference mirror along the path of the reference beam, bringing the signal beam to focus on said sample, positioning a diffraction grating to receive light reflected from the sample light from the reference mirror, the reflections pulses from the mirror and sample being incident on the diffraction grating with respect to said diffraction grating normal such that the positive and negative first diffraction orders from said reflections propagate along a normal to said diffraction grating, providing a detector, collecting the diffracted orders from said diffraction grating and bringing said diffracted orders to focus on said detector, said detector producing an output of said positive and negative first diffracted orders received, and processing said output from said detector.

In some embodiments, the diffraction grating is stationary and the detector is a one-dimensional linear CCD array while in other embodiments the diffraction

grating is moving and the detector is a multichannel diode array whose output is fed into a demodulator.

Various features and advantages will appear from the description to follow. In the description, reference is made to the accompanying drawings which form a part thereof, and in which is shown by way of illustration, specific embodiments for practicing the invention. These embodiments will be described in sufficient detail to enable those skilled in the art to practice the invention, and it is to be understood that other embodiments may be utilized and that structural changes may be made without departing from the scope of the invention. The following detailed description is therefore, not to be taken in a limiting sense, and the scope of the present invention is best defined by the appended claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS:

In the drawings wherein like reference characters represent like parts:

Fig. 1 is a schematic block diagram of one embodiment of a system for performing selected optical measurements of a sample constructed according to
5 this invention;

Fig. 2 is a diagram illustrating the time delay grating-generated sample depth scan in the embodiment of the invention shown in Fig. 1;

Fig. 3 is a cross-sectional view of a sample tested using the system shown in Fig. 1;

10 Fig. 4 is a graph of the reflectance profile across the sample shown in Fig. 3 measured using the system shown in Fig. 1;

Fig. 4(a) is a CCD image of a single shot interference pattern;

Fig. 5 is a digitized cross correlation trace obtained using the system shown in Fig. 1;

15 Fig. 6 is a schematic block diagram of another embodiment of a system for performing selected optical measurements of a sample constructed according to this invention;

Fig. 7 is a 2D interference image obtained using the system shown in Fig. 6;

20 Fig. 8 is a schematic block diagram of a modification of the system shown in Fig. 6;

Fig. 9 is a schematic block diagram of another modification of the system shown in Fig. 6;

25 Fig. 10 is a schematic diagram useful in understanding another embodiment of the invention;

Fig. 11 is a schematic block diagram of another embodiment of a system for performing selected optical measurements of a sample constructed according to this invention.

30 Fig. 12 is a cross-sectional structure of an oil painting and an incident pulse impinging thereon;

Fig. 13 is a schematic block diagram of a modification of a portion of the system shown in Fig. 11;

Fig. 14 is a schematic block diagram of another modification of the system shown in Fig. 11;

5 Fig. 15 is a schematic block diagram of another modification of the system shown in Fig. 11;

Fig. 16 is a schematic block diagram of another modification of the system shown in Fig. 11;

10 Fig. 17 is a schematic block diagram of a modification of the system shown in Fig. 16;

Fig. 18 is a schematic block diagram of a modification of the system shown in Fig. 17;

Fig. 19 is a schematic block diagram of a modification of the system shown in Fig. 11;

15 Fig. 20 is a schematic block diagram of a modification of the system shown in Fig. 11;

Fig. 21 is a schematic block diagram of a modification of another embodiment of a system for performing selected optical measurements of a sample constructed according to this invention.

20 Fig. 22 is a schematic block diagram of a modification of the system shown in Fig. 21;

Fig. 23 is a schematic block diagram of a modification of the system shown in Fig. 22;

25 Fig. 24 is a schematic block diagram of a modification of the system shown in Fig. 23;

Fig. 25 is a schematic block diagram of a modification of the system shown in Fig. 16;

Fig. 26 is a schematic block diagram of a modification of the system shown in Fig. 16;

30 Fig. 27 is a schematic block diagram of a modification of the system shown in Fig. 16;

Fig. 28 is a schematic block diagram of a modification of the system shown in Fig. 16;

Fig. 29 is a schematic block diagram of another embodiment of the invention; and

5 Fig. 30 is a schematic block diagram of another embodiment of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The present invention is directed to a multifunctional fast correlation-domain interferometric method and system for biomedical and nonmedical applications. The present invention involves single shot method of ultrafast correlation 5 interferometry (UCI) for imaging microscopic scale reflective objects. The method converts the time propagating of pulses reflected from an object into a corresponding coherence-domain interference pattern that permits the simultaneous registration of reflections by use of a stationary diffraction grating and a one dimensional CCD array in some embodiments and in other embodiments by a 10 moving diffraction grating and a multichannel diode array and demodulator.

Referring now to the drawings, there is shown in Fig. 1 an embodiment of a system constructed according to this invention and identified by reference numeral 11.

In system 11, light from a colliding-pulse mode-locked laser 13, is amplified 15 in an amplifier apparatus 15, reflected off a first mirror M1 and strikes a first beamsplitter BSI where it is split into a transmitted part which serves as a reference beam and reflected part which serves as a signal beam. Amplifier apparatus comprises a pair of movable mirrors MMI and MM2, a pair of fixed mirrors M3 and M4 and an amplifier system 21.

20 The reference beam passes through a neutral density filter ND and strikes a reference mirror M5. Light pulses from reference mirror M5 pass back through neutral density filter ND, through first beamsplitter BSI and are incident on a reflection diffraction grating G. Grating G is oriented so as to have vertically disposed grooves.

25 The signal beam transmitted through first beamsplitter BSI, passes through a second beamsplitter BS2 and is brought to focus by a spherical lens O1 on a sample S. Light pulses reflected from sample S are reflected off second beamsplitter BS2 and are incident on grating G.

30 The reflections from sample S and mirror M5 are incident on the grating with respect to grating normal so that the positive and negative first and second (or higher) diffraction orders (from each signal pulse and its corresponding reference

5 pulse) propagate along the normal ($p \sin \alpha = \lambda$, where p is the spacing between grooves, 1/1200 mm). A lens L1 collects the diffracted light and focuses the light onto a one dimensional CCD detector 23 placed at the conjugate image plane of grating G. CCD array 23 includes an input shutter (not shown) to allow the diffraction orders from only one signal and reference pulse to pass through. The output of CCD detector 23, which corresponds to a depth scan i.e. a scan in the Z direction, is fed into a computer 25 where the output from CCD 23 is processed.

10 An explanation of the time delay grating-generated sample depth scan according to this invention may be better understood with reference to Fig. 2. As can be seen in Fig. 2, the diffraction grating introduces a continuous optical delay between a reference pulse and a pulse reflected by a sample in the direction of the 15 grating dispersion (x axis). In this case, pulses reflected by the front and back sample surfaces are split by the diffraction grating in x-direction so that interference maxima showing depth-scan reflections are also split in x-direction. The difference of optical path is

$$\Delta = c\tau = 2x \sin \alpha = 2\lambda x / p, \quad (1)$$

where λ is the wavelength, x is the linear coordinate, and τ is the time delay between the reference and signal pulses. The time-display window is given by

$$\tau = 2\Delta D / c p \cos \alpha, \quad (2)$$

20 where D is the diameter of the beams. For an arrangement wherein $D=3$ mm, $\lambda=620$ nm, $p = 1/1200$ mm, $\cos \alpha = 0.73$ and a time-display window of $\tau_d = 20$ ps is achieved which corresponds to a sample depth of up to 3 mm on single measurement.

Instead of a CPM laser the light source can be any broad band light source.

25 The correlation approach of this invention was tested on measuring the thickness of the cladding of a single-mode fiber schematically shown in Fig. 3. The measured reflectance profile across the fiber is shown in Fig. 4. The refractive indices of the core ($n_c = 1.492$) and the cladding ($n_{cl} = 1.417$) were used to determine the reflectivity of the core-cladding boundary to be -3 3 dB and the 30 cladding-air boundary to be - 15 dB. The cladding thickness d of 19 μm ($d = \Delta / 2n_{cl}$ is distance into sample, Δ is optical delay) was determined.

This system is also described in an article by I. Zeylikovich and R.R. Alfano in Optics Letters Vol. 21, No. 20 October 15, 1996 pp. 1682-1684, which article is incorporated herein by reference.

The ultrafast method of this invention has potential applications for noncontact diagnostics of reflective biological and medical structures to yield the histological picture of tissue because of its insensitivity to mechanical instability. Each reflective layer at depth z_i will be obtained as a signal to map its location.

As will hereinafter be shown, an interferometric system according to this invention can be used for optical communications as a receiver of a pulse code signal, retrieved from an optical memory system, for example, hole-burning holography. An accumulated photon echo read-out speed as fast as 27 Terabit per second was demonstrated using this single-shot crosscorrelation method for a femtosecond four-pulse packet stored by spectral hole burning in a octaethylporphine-doped polystyrene sample.

Figure 4a demonstrates the crosscorrelation detection of an echo four-pulse packet on a single-shot basis. A CCD image of the single-shot interference pattern (between the recalled echo four-pulse packet and a cross-reference pulse) is displayed in Fig. 4a and the corresponding digitized crosscorrelation trace is shown in Fig. 5. The echo pulses are separated by 1.7 psec. The interference pattern and crosscorrelation of the echo signals demonstrates the good single-shot reproduction of the temporal profile of the initial pulse packet and provides 4 bits of information per 150 fsec which corresponds to a data read-out speed of 27 Terabit/sec.

This invention can be used to produce an interference 2D (depth-transversal coordinate) image of biological tissue with acquisition time as short as 20 ms. This method of grating-generated interference microscopy called GIM is applied to produce a high resolution image of skin tissue.

A schematic diagram of an experimental system used to illustrate the invention for obtaining a 2D image is shown in Fig. 6 and identified by reference numeral 31. System 31 differs from system 11 in that amplifier apparatus 15 is omitted, the light source is a Ti:Sapphire laser 33 rather than a CPM laser L2 is a cylindrical lens and O2 is a cylindrical lens and CCD 34 is a 2D imaging array. The

5 chicken skin tissue sample (about 3 mm of thickness) is attached to the glass plate (P) surface. The signal beam is focused by the lens O ($f = 5$ cm) onto the surface of glass plate P so that the beam spot size on the chicken skin surface is about 0.3 mm which determines the transversal coordinate image. The grating plane is optically conjugated with a 1024×1024 pixel CCD array by the lens L2 which records the 2D interference image.

10 The diffraction grating introduces a continuous optical delay (producing biological depth scan) in the direction of the grating dispersion (x axis). For the experimental arrangement described above, $D = 2.5$ mm, $\lambda = 800$ nm, $p = 1/600$ mm, $\cos\alpha=0.877$ and a time-display window of $\tau_d = 13.5$ ps is achieved which corresponds to a sample depth scan of up to 2 mm.

15 After CCD registration of the first interference pattern defined as a signal, a second CCD exposure defined as a reference is applied for which interference between reference and signal pulses is destroyed.

16 The dynamic range (DR) of GIM is defined by the ratio of the largest measurable CCD interference signal to the noise (SNR):

$$DR = 10 \log (SNR). \quad (3)$$

17 There are several noise sources such as the readout CCD system noise (in the dark), optical measurements noise:

$$20 SNR = W_{\max}^2/W_{\min}^2 = (\rho_{sj})^2_{\max}/(\rho_{sj})^2_{\min}, \quad (4)$$

21 where W is the CCD camera detected signal, which is proportional to the light impinging at the CCD array. The dynamic range of GIM depends on the DR of the CCD array. The SNR of the CCD camera is equal to the ratio (W_{\max}/W_{\min}) , then $(DR)_{\max} = (DR)_{\text{ccd}}^2$. The CCD camera with "14 bit DR" has a DR of approximately 10 $\log(1.6 \times 10^4/1)$, which leads to a potential dynamic range $(DR)_{\max}$ of 80 dB.

22 The sensitivity (S) of GIM is defined as:

$$S = 10 \log [(\rho_{sj})^2_{\min}]. \quad (5)$$

23 Using Eqs. (3 to 5), the sensitivity of GIM is expressed as:

$$S = 10 \log [(\rho_{sj})^2_{\max}] - DR. \quad (6)$$

24 The maximum CCD output signal occurs when the amplitudes of reference and signal pulses are equal. Take into account that W_{\max}^2 can be changed, introducing

a neutral density filter in the reference beam then filter double-pass optical density $(OD)_{ref}$ is equal

$$(OD)_{ref} = - \log [(\rho_{sj})^2_{max}]. \quad (7)$$

Using Eq.(6 and 7) the sensitivity can be expressed by:

5 $S = -10 (OD)_{ref} - DR. \quad (8)$

Equation (8) shows an important feature of GIM. S can be increased independently of the GIM DR. For our setup $(\rho_{sj})^2_{min} = 10^{-10}$, DR ≈ 70 dB, and Eq.(8), $(OD)_{ref}$ is calculated to be 3.

10 A 2D interference image (after subtraction of a signal and a reference images) of the chicken skin tissue is shown in Fig. 7.

A rapid 20 ms acquisition time to acquire 2D image for laser power of 30 mw is achieved. This time is ten times faster than other methods. The transversal high resolution ($<1\text{ }\mu\text{m}$) structures of the skin, a membrane and muscle are visualized for the depth of up to 1.5 mm.

15 Another way to increase the system sensitivity and dynamic range of the interferometric system is shown in system 33 in Fig. 8. In system 33, reference mirror M5 is moved by a PZT transducer 35 into two positions with the path difference equal to $\lambda/2$, where λ is the source central wavelength. The positions of reference mirror M5 is managed by a photodetector -PZT feedback loop 37 to 20 acquire two images, one background + signal and the other background - signal, corresponding for the two positions of the PZT. Feedback loop 37 comprises a driver 39 and a photodetector 41. These two images are subtracted to produce 2D (depth- transversal coordinate) dark-field interference image with double sensitivity. In this way the background is removed and the signal is doubled. (Background + 25 signal) - (background - signal) = Two time the 2 signal.

In order to increase the data acquisition speed and remove background the interferometric system can be constructed as shown in Fig. 9. In the system in Fig. 9, which is identified by reference numeral 43, there is a focusing lens L3, acousto-optical modulator (AOM), a 90° reflection prism 45, two neutral density filters ND 30 and two reflection mirrors M5. Mirrors M5 are located so that the beam deflected by modulator AOM and reflected by the sides of prism 45 and one of the mirrors

5 M5 is directed back to the diffraction grating G at the diffraction angle $-\alpha$. The frequency of the beam deflected by the modulator AOM is changed so that interference is destroyed. The CCD frames with and without interference are subtracted sequentially one from another to produce a series of the 2D (depth-transversal coordinate) dark-field interference images. The remainder of system 43 is substantially identical to system 31 in Fig. 6.

10 For the grating-generated coherent scans with single-shot pulses the time response of the CCD linear array - computer memory is 1 ms. The repetition rates cannot be better than 10^3 l.p./s. As can be appreciated, a reference pattern is needed for each axial scan to reduce the background. Full axial scan needs at 15 least 2 ms with repetition rates of 500 l.p/s. Using the repetition rates of 500 l.p/s and the artery scan time of 20 ms only 10 lateral pixels will be produced. This system can be useful for imaging of objects with very fast deviations in axial direction but with the small size of sample in the lateral direction. Therefore, additional methods are needed to increase data acquisition speed, sample scanning size and signal to noise ratio of the optical correlation-domain imaging.

20 Another version of this invention utilizes the principal that when a light beam is diffracted by a moving diffraction grating (DG), the frequency of the diffracted light has a Doppler shift. Consider a diffraction grating DG moving in the direction of the grating dispersion (x-axes) with constant speed v , as can be seen in Fig. 10, the projections of the speed vector V on the direction of the reference (signal) beam are $V_{r,s} = \pm v \sin\alpha$, where $\pm \alpha$ is the angle between the reference (signal) beams and the normal to grating DG. The Doppler frequency shift (DFS) between diffracted reference and signal beams is

$$25 \quad \Delta f_D = 2 v f_o \sin\alpha / c = 2 v \sin\alpha / \lambda o = 2v / p, \quad (9)$$

where p is the space between DG grooves and f_o , and λo are light frequency and wavelength, respectively.

For example, if $v=30$ mm/s and $p=0.001$ mm, then $\Delta f_D = 230/0.001=60$ Khz. The output interference signal will be temporally modulated with a frequency equal of 30 Δf_D .

A system illustrating a moving grating arrangement and identified by reference numeral 51 is shown in Fig. 11. System 51 includes a laser light source 53, a first beamsplitter BSI, a second beamsplitter BS2, a grating DG, a reference mirror M5 a translation 55 for moving grating DG, a focusing lens 01, a collection lens L1, a multichannel diode array 57, a demodulator 59 and a computer 61. System 51 differs from system 31 mainly in that the grating is movable and that the detector is a multichannel diode array and a demodulator. As can be seen, the optical signal from grating DG (i.e. the diffracted light) is directed to multichannel linear array (L.A.) detector 57. The optical signal is detected by demodulating the multichannel diode array detector 57 output at the Doppler shift frequency (DSF). The output signal $W_f(\tau)$ is given by:

$$W_f(\tau) \sim \rho_{sj} |\gamma(\tau-\tau_j)|, \quad (10)$$

where ρ_{sj} is amplitude reflectivity (square-root of the intensity reflectivity) of j-th boundary inside the sample, $|\gamma(\tau-\tau_j)|$ is the degree of coherence. The summation in Eq.4 shows that each signal reflection produces a contribution to interference pattern proportional to the reflectivity ρ_{sj} . The signal coming from the reflecting layers spread inside the object with different time delays produces a contribution to the interference pattern proportional to the layer reflectivity ρ_{sj} . The full width at half maximum (FWHM) of each reflectivity peak will be equal to the amplitude correlation time, (FWHM of the degree of coherence $|\gamma(\tau-\tau_j)|$) determining the resolution of this method. The accuracy with which reflection-site location can be determined depends only on the resolution of the diode array. If $\Delta f_D = 60$ Khz than the processing time of the each diode array pitch AC signal is about $10/60 \times 10^3 \approx 0.1$ ms. The processing of the AC signals are performed in parallel for all pitches. The time response of 0.1 ms for each axial scan and the scan repetition rates of 10^4 l.p./s can be reached. For frequency-modulated interferometry the signal to noise ratio (SNR) of 100 dB may be achieved. This method performs high-resolution cross-sectional imaging by illuminating tissue with low-coherence light and measuring the back scattered light as a function of grating-generated time delay or range at different transverse positions.

In the system shown in Fig. 11, the sample S is mounted on a stage (not shown) movable by means (not shown) in the "X" direction so as to provide 3D imaging. If sample S were not movable in the X direction, (relative to the sample), only 2D imaging could be realized.

5 The system in Fig. 11 provides a noncontact, high-sensitivity, high-resolution technique for optical imaging. High scan speeds are especially relevant for medical and biological diagnostic applications. Histological architecture of eye and tissue is of special interest is the noninvasive measurement of anterior eye dimensions and tissue diagnosis. In addition to diagnostics in biological systems, high-speed
10 10 grating-generated depth scan has numerous applications for noncontact diagnostics of precision mechanical and optical systems as well as for process control and monitoring in manufacturing.

15 This technique for performing an optical histological map (high-resolution micrometer-scale cross-sectional optical imaging) of tissue architectural morphology, such as an artery internal structure or internal structure of a mucous without the need to excise tissue specimens, would have a powerful effect on the diagnosis and clinical management of changes in tissue.

20 Intravascular ultrasound is an existing catheter-based technique for obtaining cross-sectional images of human vasculature. However, the technique of this invention has the capability to image vascular lesions with much higher resolution and may be clinically useful for performing high-resolution imaging of other organ system, such as the artery, skin or GYN, GI tract or bladder.

25 Cross-sectional analysis of paint samples by conventional or confocal incident light microscopy is routinely implemented during the initial examination of paintings undergoing conservation to study the structure of materials used and to identify their components. The technique of this invention has a number of important benefits over usual microscopy not least the increase in image resolution that can be obtained and the ability to produce high-speed serial optical sections of narrow Z-depth with high signal to noise ratio of 100 dB which can then be
30 rendered into 3-d image. A major advantage of the technique of this invention is that it provides a quick and comparatively inexpensive method for accurately

determine the boundaries of layers in a painting and their thickness. This technique can be used to determine if any overpainting has taken place, possibly due to previous conservation and, at high magnifications, sensitivity, could be used to identify pigment particles. A diagram to illustrate the typical cross-sectional structure of an oil painting is shown in Fig 12, where (A) is particulate dirt deposits, (B) is varnish layer; (C) paint layer (pigment particles in a drying oil medium); (D) ground layer (lead white in a drying oil medium); Canvas support (usually linen) impregnated with size (usually animal glue). The incident pulse is reflected by these layers. The time delay between reflected pulses and pulse intensity consist 10 information about the layers depth and reflectivity. This information can be extracted using the interferometric system of this invention.

Combining the properties of the grating-generated coherent depth scan, Doppler frequency modulated interference and the multichannel detector parallel registration the increasing of the data acquisition speed and spatial resolution are 15 achieved.

The DFS between diffracted reference and signal beams can be also obtained if the DG is shaken along its plane as shown by arrow B by a piezotransducer (PZT) so that grating displacement is more than the grating groove space (See Fig. 13). This technique can simplify the interferometer mechanical 20 part.

According to another aspect of the invention the acquisition speed is increased by using a diffraction grating that is rotating at a constant angle speed ω . Increasing of the grating tangential speed v_t is achieved in system 71 shown in Fig. 14. In system 71, grating DG is attached by an arm 73 (not shown) to the 25 drive shaft 75 of a motor (not shown). If $\omega = 8 \times 10^3$ rpm and radius of the circle is of 5 cm than $v_t = \omega r = 8 \times 10^3 \times 50/60 = 6 \times 10^3$ mm/s and DFS $\Delta f_D = 2\omega r/p = 2 \times 6 \times 10^3/10^{-3} = 12$ MHz. The AC signal processing time of the each diode array pitch is about $10/12 \times 10^6 \approx 1 \mu\text{s}$. The time response of $1 \mu\text{s}$ for each axial scan and scan repetition rates (SRR) of 100 l. p./s can be realized.

30 There are several ways to increase the data acquisition speed.

One way to increase the data acquisition speed is to increase the SRR use several diffraction gratings disposed on the sides of a multisided cylindrical device (See Fig. 15). These grating are rotated around the longitudinal axis of the device and the signal beam is discretely scanning in the x (or y) direction so that position 5 of each rotating grating is synchronized with a certain x (or y) position of the scanning system. About 30 gratings of the 1cm length can be used for the circle radius of 5 cm. The SRR is 3×10^3 l.p./s. 2). If the diffraction grating is carried on cylindrical surface CS rotating with constant angle speed the maximum of the SRR and the lateral resolution can be realized (See Fig. 16). The SRR is 1Mhz for 1 μ s 10 axial scan time response. To increase the axial resolution, the interference image output is collected by the fiber linear array FLA (See Fig. 17). Each fiber output is connected with a certain diode array pitch. The size of the each L.A. diode pitch is of 1 mm. The diameter of the single-mode fiber is about 100 μ m and the tenfold increasing of the axial resolution can be achieved.

15 To simplify the multichannel photodetector LA and electronic detection system the diffraction grating and fiber linear array connected with the multichannel photodetector are mounted on a fast moving translator (see Fig. 18).

20 When the central wavelength (λ) of the laser source is discretely tuned the groove space p must satisfy the relation $p = \lambda/\sin\alpha$, where $\pm \alpha$ is the angle between reference (or signal) beams and normal to the diffraction grating. It can be performed using a composition of several co-plane diffraction gratings with 25 different groove spacings (See Fig. 12). The vertical position of the composition grating is discretely changed by the Y translator to satisfy the relation (3).

25 In another embodiment of the invention, (See system 71 in Fig. 20) the light source one is an array of diode lasers LA, each emitting light at different wavelength λ , according to relation (2). The LA laser source is mounted on a holder, accommodating y (or x) translational stage. The position of one laser diode is synchronized with the position of one diffraction grating. The wavelength is selected for the maximum depth exposure typically from 600 to 1600 nm.

30 To simplify the electronic detection system and to use a single detector instead of a diode LA, a rotating diffraction grating DG with a vertical extension in

the form of a reflecting mirror ME is used as shown in system 73 in Fig. 21. The diffracted beams are reflected from a stationary spherical mirror SM which displaces these beams in the vertical direction and directs them back to the rotating reflection mirror ME. Beams reflected from rotating mirror ME are directed into a vertical slit VS. The slit plane is optically conjugated with the grating plane by the reflecting spherical mirror SM. Optical signal passing the slit is detected by demodulating the single detector output at the Doppler shift frequency between signal and reference beams produced by rotating grating RG.

To simplify the mechanical system using a PZT shaking grating DG, the diffracted signal and reference beams are reflected from a small angle shaking reflection mirror SRM as shown in system 75 in Fig. 22.

To increase the SRR without additional diffraction gratings one can use a small angle shaking mechanism SASM for shaking the diffraction grating which is carried on a spherical (or cylindrical) reflection surface with the vertical extension by the reflecting mirror. The axes of a small angle shaking are passing through the center of the grating spherical (or cylindrical) reflection surface (see Fig. 23).

To increase the data acquisition speed the interferometric system can be performed so that beams reflected from the shaking (or rotation) grating are directed to the shaking (or rotation) reflection mirror SRM placed at the axes of shaking (or rotation) of the grating and after mirror reflection are directed to a stationary fiber array connected with the multichannel photodetector (see system 77 in fig. 24).

To obtain an image of the surface structure of the human internal organ, such as artery cross section, tissue section or mucous the signal and reference interferometer arms are fiber-coupled as shown in system 79 in Fig. 25. Tissue reflectance is obtained axially by the grating-generated depth scan and digitizing the magnitude of the demodulated interference envelope. The input of the signal beam fiber is connected with a catheter and the fiber output is connected with a lens LE1 which directs the signal beam to the grating at the diffraction angle α . The fiber output of the reference beam is connected with a lens LE2 which directs the reference beam to the grating at the diffraction angle $-\alpha$. Fiber optics allow to

improve the flexibility of the interferometer set up. The catheter is designed to scan the beam in a circumferential pattern to image cross sectionally through the vessel (or other biological structure) into which it is inserted. During image acquisition the catheter is inserted into the tissue structure being imaged (the artery or other internal tissue channel), and, as the drive motor (not shown) turns, the shaft of the catheter and the distal optics circumferentially scan the focused beam perpendicular to the axis of the catheter. An image is acquired as the beam angle of rotation is varied over some range (usually 360 deg). The speed of imaging depends on the speed of the rotation and the proposed interferometer acquisition speed.

This interferometric system can be used for optical communications as a receiver of a pulse code signal, retrieved from an optical memory system, for example, hole-burning holography (see system 81 in Fig. 26). In the case of the time-domain optical data storage one must detect signal beams despite the presence of relatively strong readout beams in close temporal and spatial proximity. The presence of strong readout beams can be turned to an advantage by use proposed technique. Our approach eliminates the need to ensure overlap between tightly focused and angled excitation beams and the need for optical shutters to prevent detector saturation by intense excitation beams. Other advantages include the ability to minimize cross talk between adjacent spatial storage cells and the ability to amplify signals sufficiently to overcome noise levels of photodiode-based detection system. A pulse code signal is directed on the grating at the diffraction angle α and a coherent reference pulse is directed on grating at the diffraction angle $-\alpha$. For time-display window of 20 ps and the pulse amplitude correlation time of 100 fs the pulse code has about $2 \cdot 10^3$ bit. The information reading speed is of $2 \cdot 10^9$ bits/s with 1MHz repetition rates for 1 μ s axial scan time response. The SNR is about 100 dB.

Due to economic advantages, maturing technology, and high information capacity, single-mode fiber-optic transmission media will be embedded in future telecommunications networks. A desirable feature for these future optical networks would be the ability to process information directly in the optical domain for

purposes of multiplexing, de multiplexing, filtering, amplification, and correlation. Optical signal processing would be advantageous because potentially it can be much faster than electrical signal processing and because it would obviate the need for photon-electron-photon conversion.

5 Characterization of weak ultrashort intensities is essential for single-event detection for time-domain communications. Ultrafast time-domain data packets can be created by the filtering of mode-locked laser pulses. Efficient detection of ultrashort time-domain signals requires novel receiver systems. The proposed interferometer can be performed as a receiver of a pulse code signal, received from
10 the optical communication system (OCS) (see system 83 in Fig. 27). The pulse code signal is directed on the grating at the diffraction angle α and coherent reference pulse extracted from OCS is directed on grating at the diffraction angle - α .

15 The development of sub-picosecond laser sources has largely precluded techniques for accurate and complete characterization of pulses coming from such lasers. Today the most commonly used measurement is the nonlinear autocorrelation. While this technique generally require high intensity pulses. The spectral phase of femtosecond pulse can be measured using a frequency domain correlator. This technique involves cross correlating different spectral slices of the
20 original pulse with itself. The relative delay of the spectral components with respect to each other provides information about any chirp which may be present. The interferometer can be performed so that signal beam includes zero-dispersion stretcher with moving slit placed in the stretcher spectral plane to measure dependence of the output signal position on the slit position (see system 85 in Fig.
25 28). These measurements allow a person to obtain the spectral phase of the input pulse increasing measurement sensitivity and acquisition speed.

30 In system 91 shown in Fig. 29 signal and reference beams are focused by the combination of the cylindrical lenses into the narrow line on the surfaces of a grating and the 2D CCD array. Position of this narrow line is changed on the CCD array, for example, in vertical direction by a rotating mirror so that each lateral position of the signal beam produces the vertical shifted narrow line image on the

CCD array. Several depth-lateral digital images are recorded with different phase shifts. These images are digital processing to produce a 3D image.

In system 99 shown in Fig. 30, the increase signal to noise ratio is increased using an interferometric system wherein the signal and reference beams are focused into a diffraction grating. The optical output signal is detected by demodulating the single detector output at the Doppler shift frequency.

In another embodiment of the invention (not shown) the interferometric system is constructed so that a linear source image on the surface of the sample can be rotated, for example, by 90 degrees. A PZT stretched fiber is inserted to produce phase modulation. Several depth-lateral digital images are recorded by a 2D imaging CCD array with different phase shifts. These images are digital processing to produce a 3D image of the internal structure of a sample.

In another embodiment of the invention (not shown) two perpendicular linear sources illuminate a sample simultaneously. Two diffraction gratings with perpendicular orientations of the grooves are used to create simultaneously two images on two CCD arrays to produce signals for a 3D image processing of the internal structure of a sample.

In another embodiment of the invention (not shown) two orthogonal gratings placed at same or different locations, one or two CCD arrays are used to produce images in x or y directions in combination with the axial z scans of the depth of a sample along the grating dispersion. The images produced by the CCD arrays are used to create a 3D image of a sample.

Important features of this invention include the following:

1. The use of diffraction grating to time resolve reflected signals from material by interference with reference pulse in \pm first (or higher) diffraction orders.
2. The use of a time resolved interference method to obtain the depth map information for reflected signals from layers and defects in scattering medium.
3. The use of a time resolved interference method for a depth scan to obtain a depth map of a scattering medium below its surface up to 3 mm from the reflections within that region.

4. The use of a time resolved interference method for depth analyses of a tissue, semiconductor structure, art work on biological objects within a few mm depth. For tissue analyses it can be used to detect histological changes in tissue and artery wall such as plaque, fat, atheroscleroses.

5. A single-shot correlation-domain interferometric system using a grating-generated coherent depth scan interferometer and a broad-band laser source. The positive and the negative first-order diffracted signal and reference beams propagate along the normal to the grating. The diffraction grating introduces a continuous optical delay between the reference pulses and pulses reflected by the sample in the direction of the grating dispersion (x axis). In this case, pulses reflected by the surfaces located inside the sample are split by the diffraction grating in x-direction so that interference maxima showing depth-scan reflections are also split in x-direction that permits the simultaneous registration of reflections using a CCD array. Each reflective layer at depth z_i will be obtain as a signal to map its location.

10 6. Producing a high dynamic range 2D (depth- transversal coordinate) interference image with a high resolution the interferometric system wherein the reference interferometer arm comprises a reflection mirror movable to the two different positions with a path difference more than grating time-display window ($\tau_d \leq 20$ ps) and a variable neutral-density filter. PZT stretched fiber can be inserted to create the delay time more than τ_d . A signal arm comprises a convex cylindrical (spherical) lens or their combination, to create, for example, a linear source image on the surface of the sample, and registration system. Two images are obtained. A 2D imaging CCD array acquires two images sequentially with (signal) and without (reference) interference corresponding for two different positions of the reference mirror. These signal and reference images are computer subtracted to produce a 2D (depth-transversal coordinate) dark-field interference image.

15 7. Increasing the system sensitivity and dynamic range of the interferometric system of this invention one has a reference mirror moving by a PZT transducer into two positions with the path difference equal to $\lambda/2$, where λ is the source

central wavelength. The positions of the reference mirror are managed by a photodetector-PZT feedback loop to acquire two images one is background + signal and the other is background - signal corresponding for the two positions of the PZT. These two images are subtracted to produce a 2D (depth- transversal coordinate) dark-field interference image with double sensitivity. In this way the background is removed and signal is doubled. (Background + signal) - (background - signal) = 2 signal.

8. Increasing the data acquisition speed and removing background the interferometric system is performed using a reference arm comprising a focusing lens, acousto-optical modulator (AOM), 90° reflection prism, two reflection mirrors placed against the prism reflection sides so that the beam deflected by the AOM and reflected by the one of the prism side and one of the mirrors is directed back to the diffraction grating at the diffraction angle - α . CCD frames with and without interference are subtracted sequentially one from another to produce a series of the 2D (depth- transversal coordinate) dark-field interference images.

9. To perform optical tomography and histology or catheter-endoscope tomography the single-shot interferometric system is performed so that signal beam is scanning for example by a rotating mirror to illuminate a sample at different transverse positions. These signals are used to produce serial optical sections of narrow Z-depth for each transverse position which can then be rendered into 3-d image.

10. To increase the data acquisition speed, spatial resolution and signal to noise ratio the interferometric system includes a diffraction grating is moving along its plane with constant speed producing a Doppler shift frequency between signal and reference beams. The optical signal is detected by demodulating a multichannel linear array (LA) detector output at the Doppler shift frequency. In another version the diffraction grating is along its plane using, for example, a piezotransducer (PZT) so that grating displacement is more than the grating groove space.

11. Rotating the diffraction grating with constant angle speed to increase the tangential speed, DFS and the acquisition speed. In another version several

diffraction gratings are disposed on the sides of the multisided cylindrical unit. These grating are rotated around the axes passing through the center and signal beam is discretely scanning in x (or y) direction so that position of each rotating grating is synchronized with a certain x (or y) position of the scanning system.

5 12. The use of diffraction grating carried on a cylindrical surface rotating with constant angle speed to increase the acquisition speed of the x (or y) scanning system and the lateral resolution.

10 13. To increase the axial resolution of the interferometer the interference image output is collected by a fiber linear array. Each fiber output is connected with a certain diode array pitch.

14. To simplify the multichannel photodetector LA and electronic detection system a diffraction grating and fiber linear array connected with a multichannel photodetector are placed against each other on a fast moving translator.

15 15. A diffraction grating comprising a composition of the several co-plane diffraction gratings with different spacing between grooves. When the central wavelength (λ) of the laser source is discretely tuned the position of the composition, the grating is discretely changed so that the groove space p satisfies the next relation $p = \lambda/\sin\alpha$ (1), where $\pm\alpha$ is the angle between reference (or signal) beams and normal to the diffraction grating.

20 16. Also, laser source is a linear array of the laser sources of different wavelengths λ (400 to 600 nm). The laser source array is mounted on a holder, accommodating x (or y) translational stage allow to choose appropriate wavelength of the laser source.

25 17. To increase the sensitivity for the tissue imaging using short wavelength radiation at maximum tissue absorption wavelength the interferometric system uses laser sources adapted to emit at second harmonics.

30 18. The interferometric system as claimed in claims 7 to 11 wherein a vertical extension of the diffraction grating has a reflecting mirror. The diffracted beams are reflected from a stationary spherical mirror which displaces these beams in the vertical direction and directs them back to a rotating reflection mirror, Beams reflected from the rotating mirror are directed into a vertical slit. The slit plane is

optically conjugated with the grating plane by the reflecting spherical mirror. Optical signal passing the slit is detected by demodulating the single detector output at the Doppler shift frequency between signal and reference beams produced by the rotating grating. This technique allows using a simple detection system.

5 18. To increase the data acquisition speed the interferometric system, beams reflected from a shaking (or rotation) grating are directed to a shaking (or rotation) reflection mirror placed at the axes of shaking (or rotation) of the grating and after mirror reflection are directed to a stationary fiber array connected to a multichannel photodetector.

10 19. To simplify the electronic detection, the interferometric system in a PZT shaking DG signal and reference beams are reflected from a small angle shaking reflection mirror. Beams reflected from the shaking mirror are directed into a vertical slit. Optical signal passing the slit is detected by demodulating the single detector output at the Doppler shift frequency.

15 20. To increase the SRR without additional diffraction gratings the diffraction grating is formed on the spherical (or cylindrical) reflection surface with a vertical extension reflecting mirror which is shaken over a small angle. The axes of the small angle shaking is passing through the center of the grating spherical (or cylindrical) reflection surface.

20 21. To get image of the sub structure of the human internal organ, mucous or tissue, for example an artery, the signal and reference interferometer arms are fiber-coupled. The input of the signal beam fiber is connected for example with a catheter and the fiber output is connected with a lens which directs the signal beam to the grating at a diffraction angle α . The fiber output of the reference beam is connected with a lens which directs the reference beam to the grating at the diffraction angle $-\alpha$.

25 22. Using interferometric system as a receiver of a pulse code signal, retrieved from an optical memory system, for example, hole-burning holography. The pulse code signal is directed on the grating at the diffraction angle α and coherent reference pulse is directed on grating at the diffraction angle $-\alpha$.

30

23. Using the interferometric system as a receiver of a pulse code signal, received from optical communication system (OCS) The pulse code signal is directed on the grating at the angle diffraction α and coherent reference pulse extracted from OCS is directed on grating at the diffraction angle $-\alpha$.

5 24. An interferometric system having a signal beam which includes a zero-dispersion stretcher with moving slit placed in the stretcher spectral plane to measure dependence of the output signal position on the slit position. These measurements allow obtaining the spectral phase of the input pulse.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A system for performing selected optical measurements on a sample comprising:
 - a. a broad band light source,
 - b. means for splitting light from said broad band light source into a signal beam and a reference beam,
 - c. a reference mirror disposed along the path of the reference beam,
 - d. means for bringing the signal beam to focus on said sample,
 - e. a diffraction grating for receiving reflection from the sample and from the reference mirror, the reflection from the sample and the reference mirror being incident on the diffraction grating with respect to said diffraction grating normal such that the positive and negative first diffraction orders, second diffraction orders, or higher diffraction orders from said reflected pulses propagate along a normal to said diffraction grating,
 - f. a detector,
 - g. means for collecting the diffracted orders from said diffraction grating and bringing said diffracted orders to focus on said detector, said detector producing an output of said positive and negative first diffracted orders received, and
 - h. means for processing said output from said detector.
2. The system of claim 1 wherein the detector is a CCD array.
3. The system of claim 2 wherein the CCD array is a one-dimensional array.
4. The system of claim 1 wherein the reference mirror is stationary.
5. The system of claim 4 wherein the grating is stationary.
6. The system of claim 5 wherein the grating is a reflective-type grating.
7. The system of claim 1 wherein the broad band light source is a CPM laser.
8. The system of claim 1 wherein the processing means is a computer.
9. The system of claim 1 wherein the focusing means is a spherical lens.
10. The system of claim 1 wherein the light source is a Ti:sapphire laser.
11. The system of claim 1 wherein the detector is a 2D imaging CCD.

12. The system of claim 1 wherein the reflecting mirror is movable from a first position to a second position.

13. The system of claim 1 wherein the system further includes a demodulator coupled between the detector and the processing means, the detector
5 is a multichannel diode array and the diffraction grating is movable.

14. The system of claim 13 wherein the light source is a laser.

15. The system of claim 14 wherein the system further includes means for shaking the diffraction grating.

16. The system of claim 14 wherein the system further includes means for
10 rotating the diffraction grating.

17. The system of claim 14 wherein the diffraction grating is multisided.

18. The system of claim 14 wherein the system further includes a fiber linear array for transferring the diffraction orders from the collecting means to the detector.

15 19. The system of claim 17 and further including a fast moving translator and wherein said diffraction grating and one end of said fiber linear array are mounted on said fast moving translator.

20 20. A method for performing selected optical measurements on a sample according to this invention comprises:

20 a. producing a broad band beam of light,
b. splitting said beam of light into a signal beam and a reference beam,
c. providing a reference mirror along the path of the reference beam,
d. bringing the signal beam to focus on said sample,

25 e. positioning a diffraction to receive reflections from the sample and from the reference mirror, the reflections beam being incident on the diffraction grating with respect to said diffraction grating normal such that the positive and negative first diffraction orders from said reflections propagate along a normal to said diffraction grating,

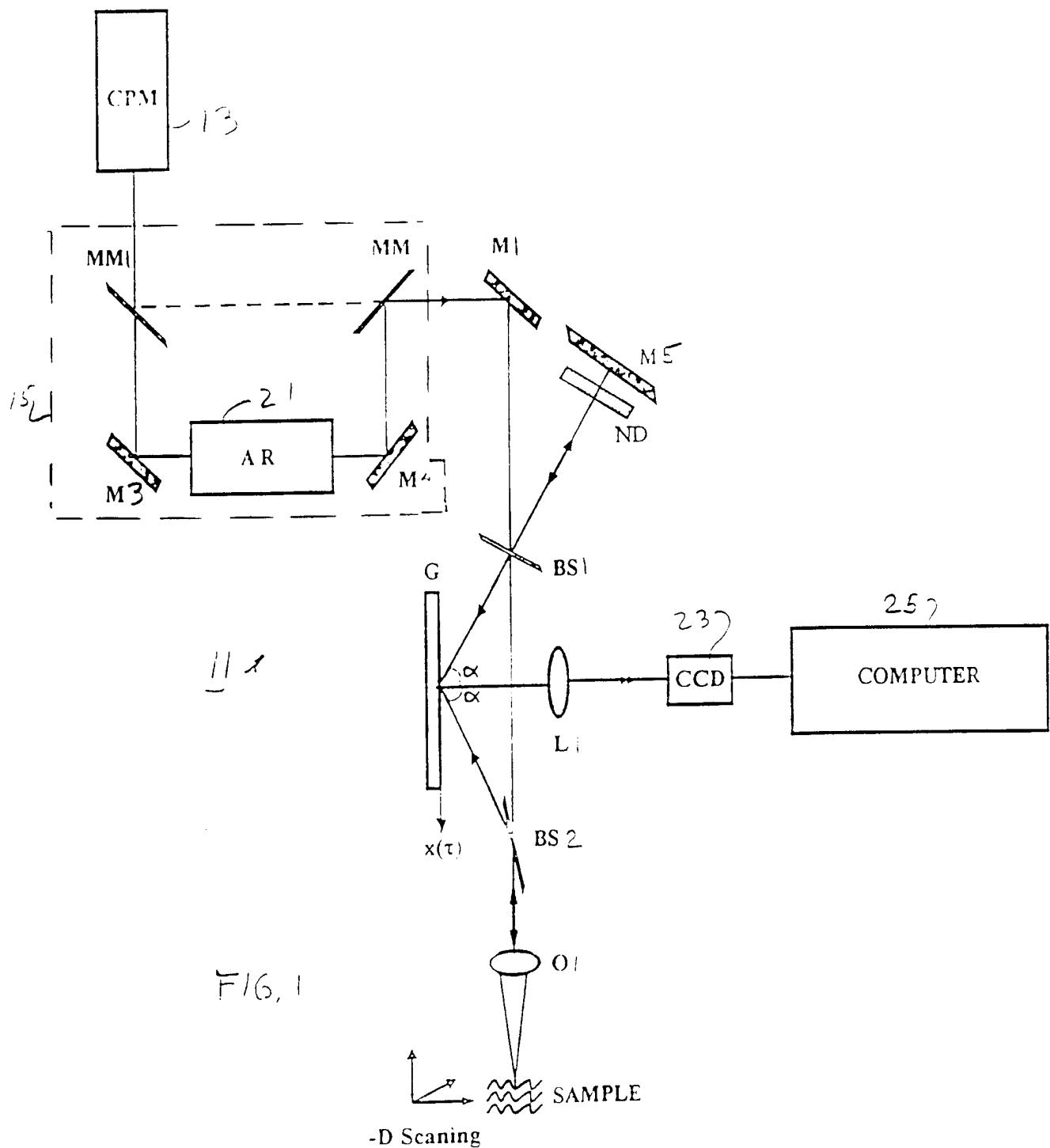
30 f. providing a detector,

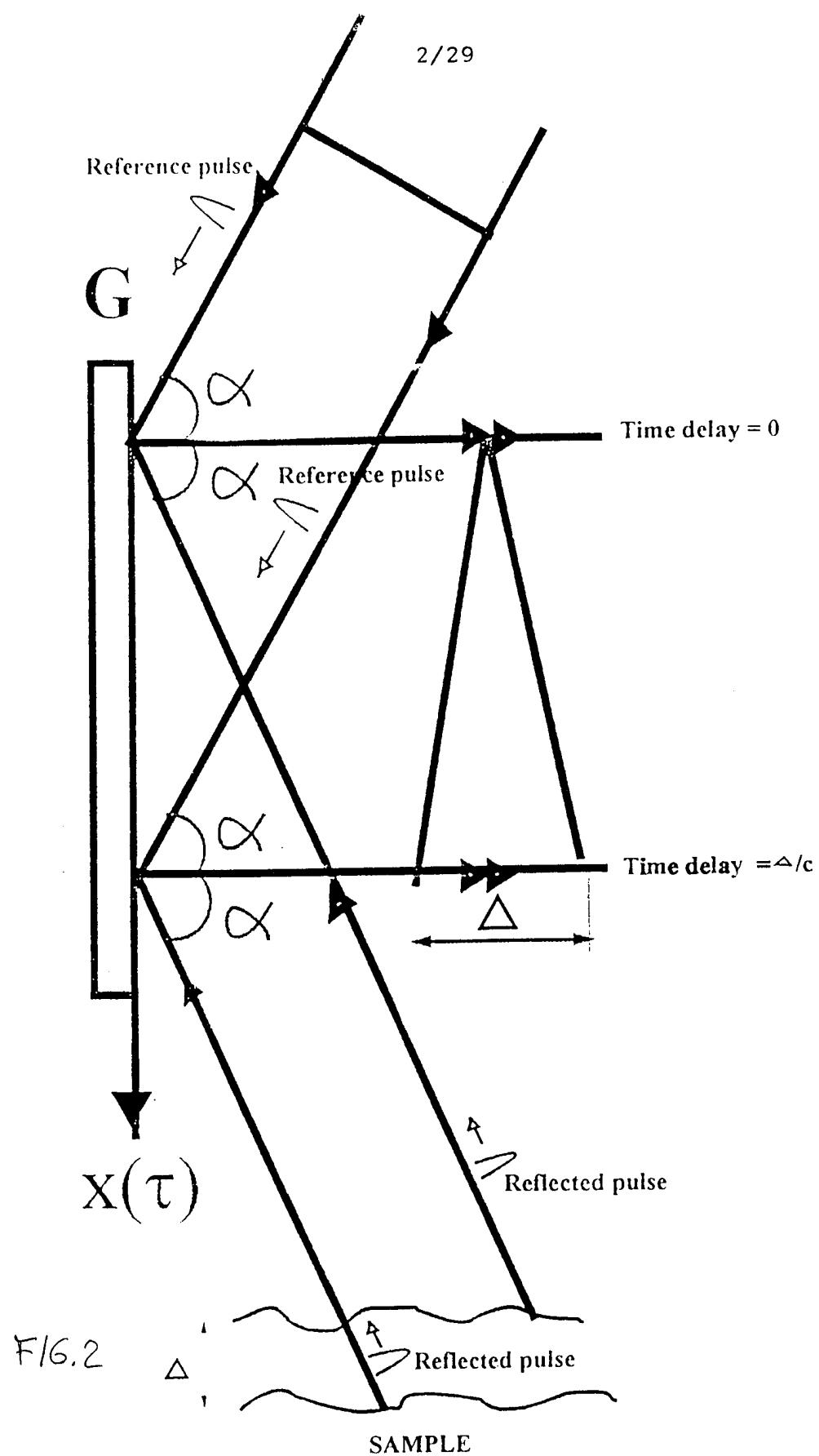
g. collecting the diffracted orders from said diffraction grating and bringing said diffracted orders to focus on said detector, said detector producing an output of said positive and negative first diffracted orders received, and

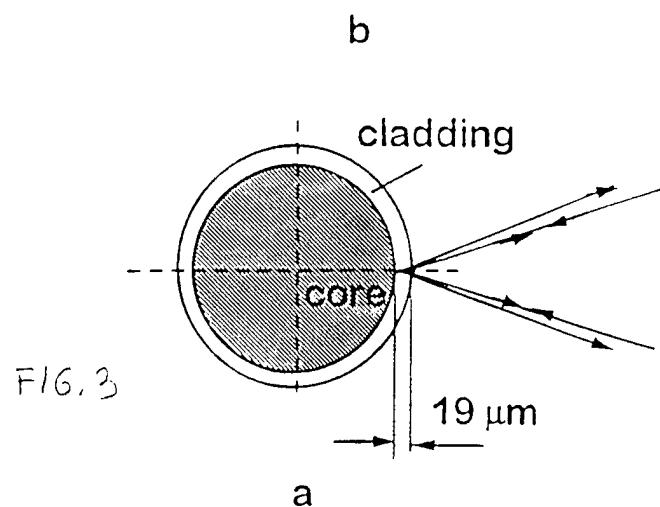
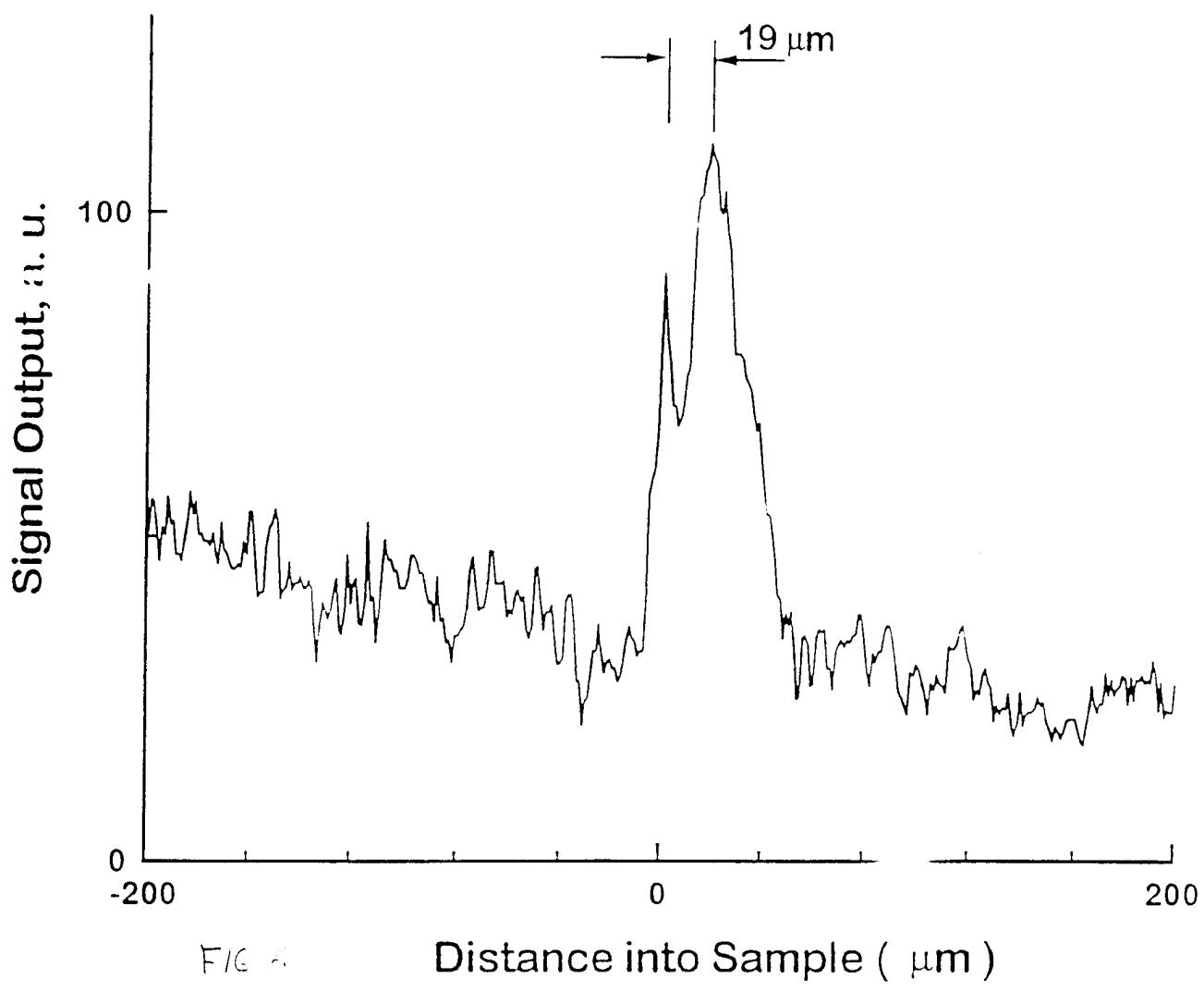
h. processing said output from said detector.

5 21. The method claim 20 wherein processing said output comprises forming an image map of a tissue substructure for GYN, GI, ADI tracts and/or bladder in-vivo and/or in-vitro in order to detect histological changes in tissue and artery wall such as plaque, fat and atheroscleroses.

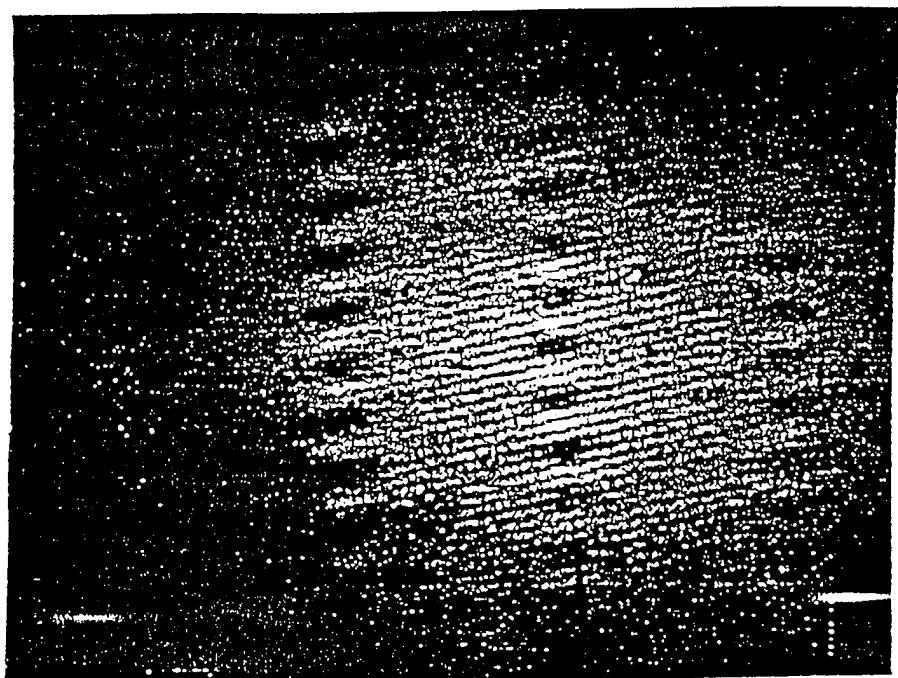
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→
CROSS-CORRELATION

FIG. 4(a)

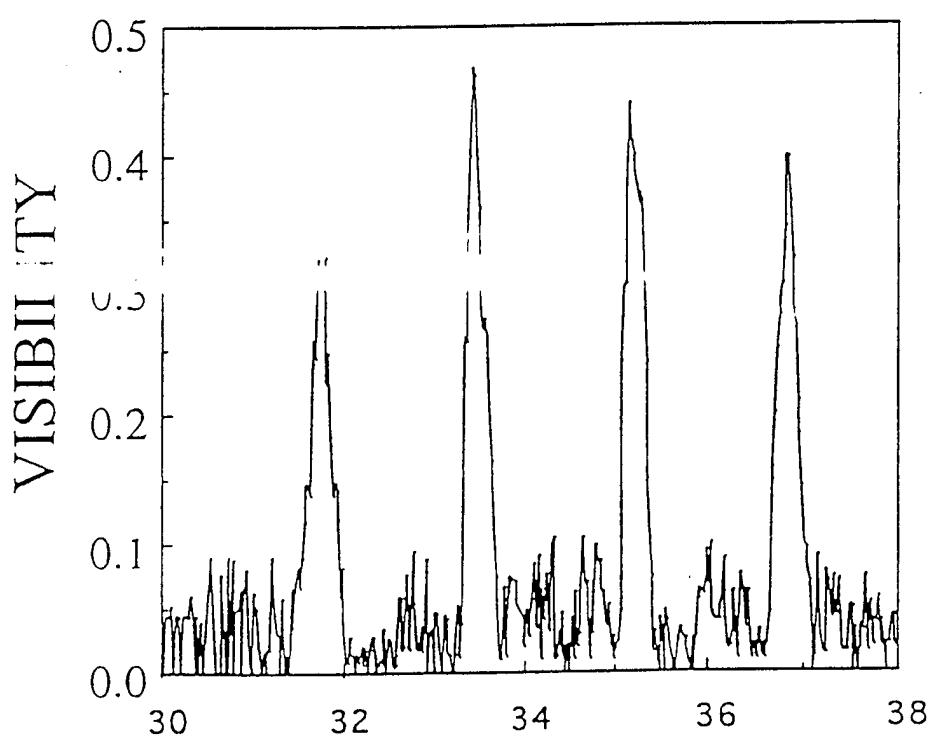
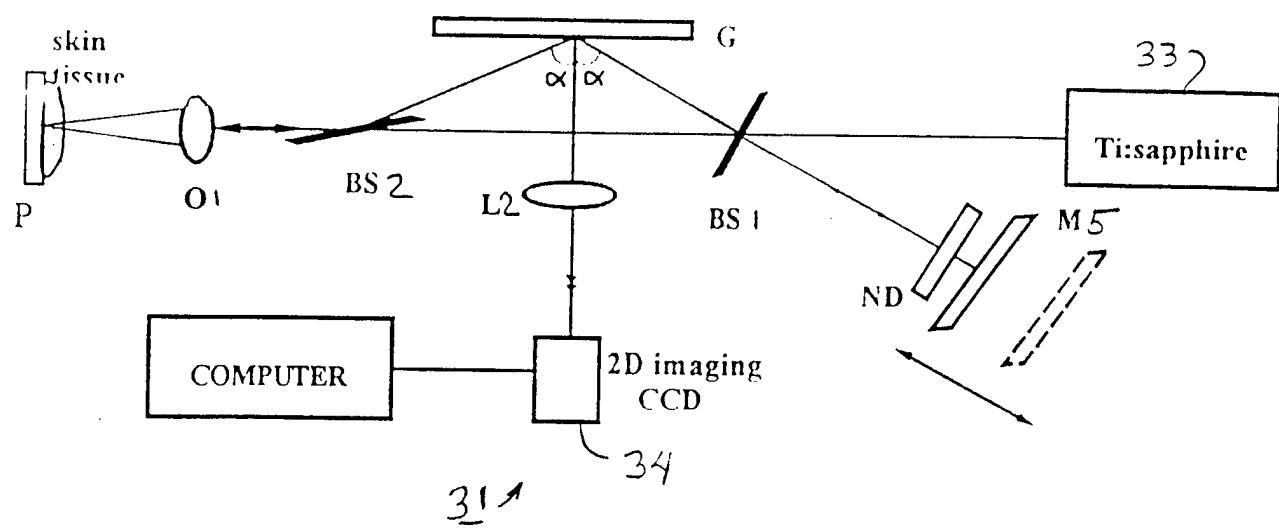


FIG. 5

DELAY TIME (ps)

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F16, 6

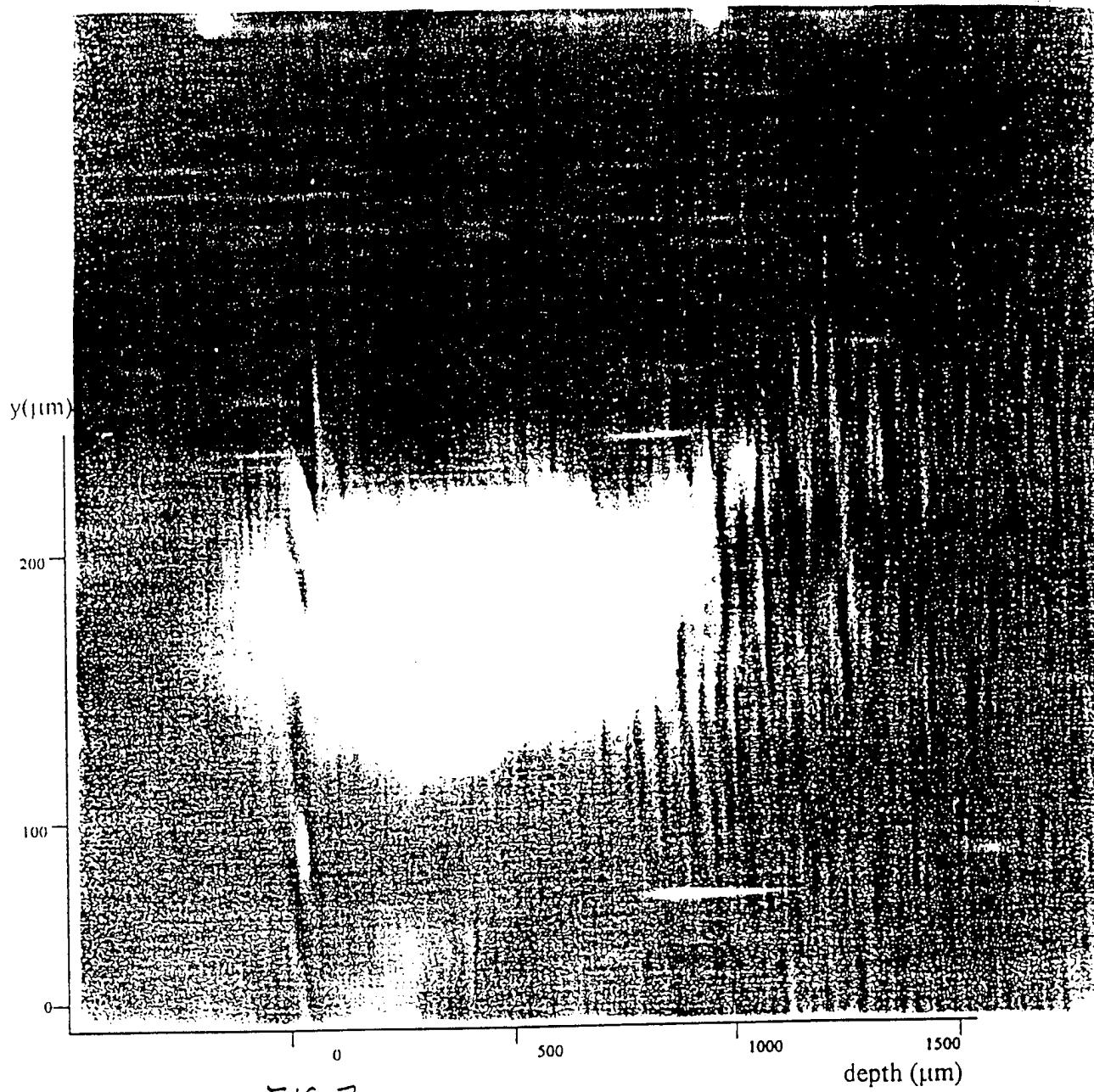


FIG. 7
2D depth- transversal coordinate chicken skin tissue image.

As short as 20 ms image acquisition time for Ti:sapphire laser power of 30 mw is achieved. This time is ten times shorter than other methods. The transversal high resolution (<1 μm) structure of the skin and the fat structure are visualized for the depth of up to 1.5 mm.

The time-display window is given by $\tau_d = 2\lambda D/cp \cos\alpha$, where D is the diameter of the beams. For our setup $D = 2.5$ mm, $\lambda = 800$ nm, $p = 1/600$ mm, $\cos\alpha = 0.877$ and a time- display window of $\tau_d = 13.5$ ps is achieved which corresponds to a sample depth scan of up to 2 mm.

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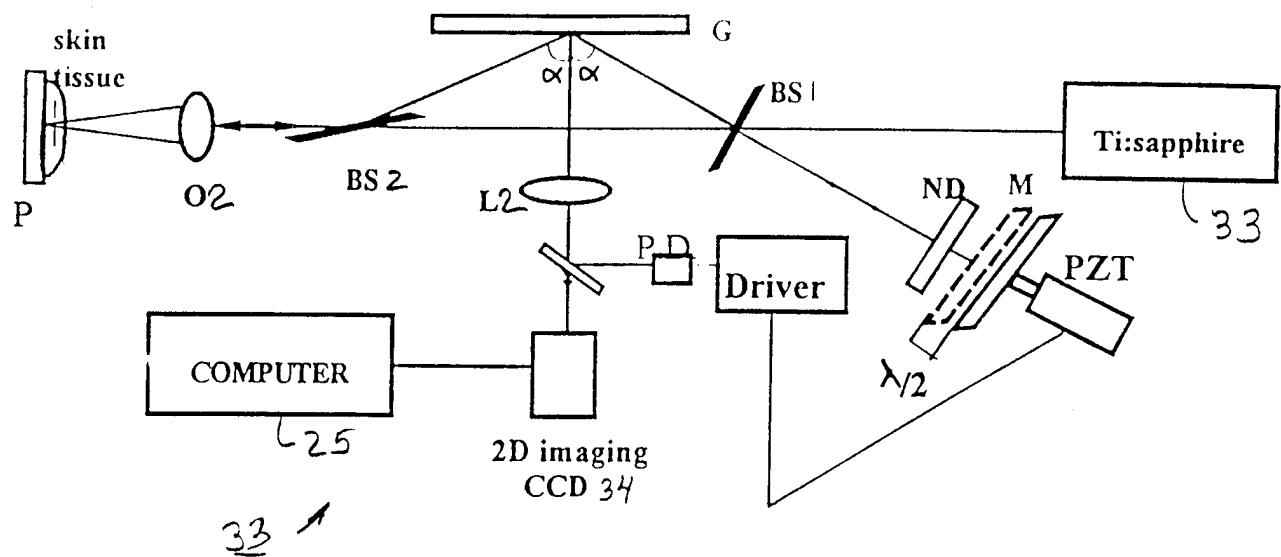
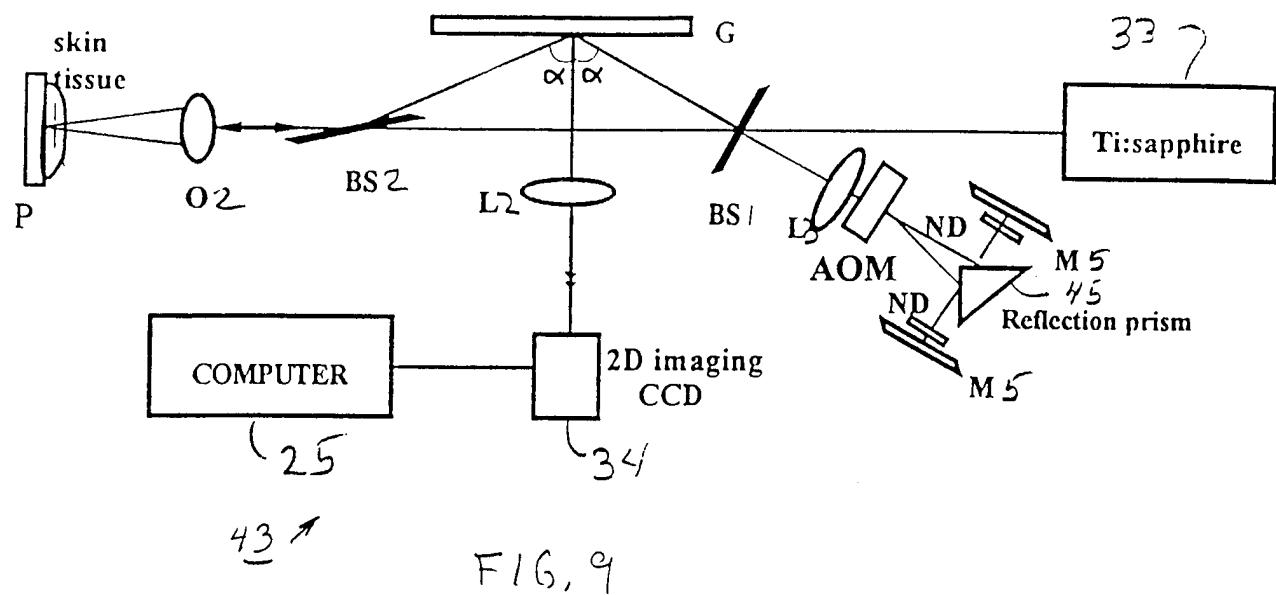
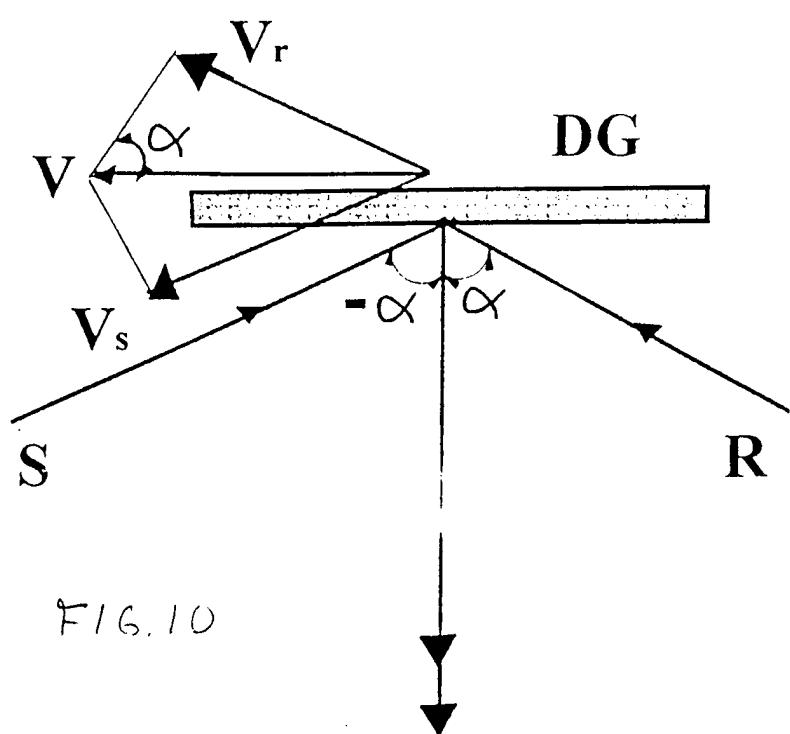


FIG. 8

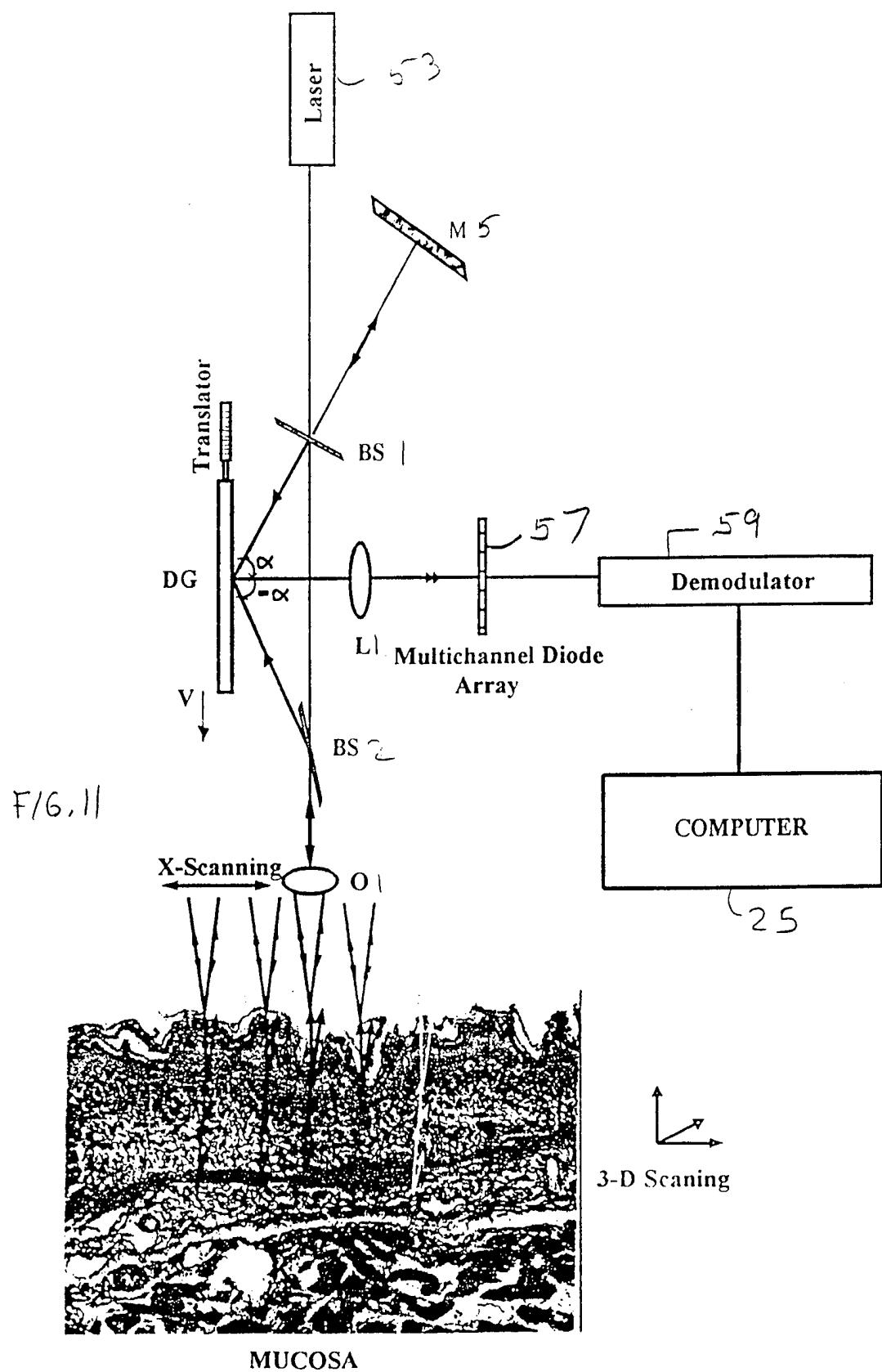
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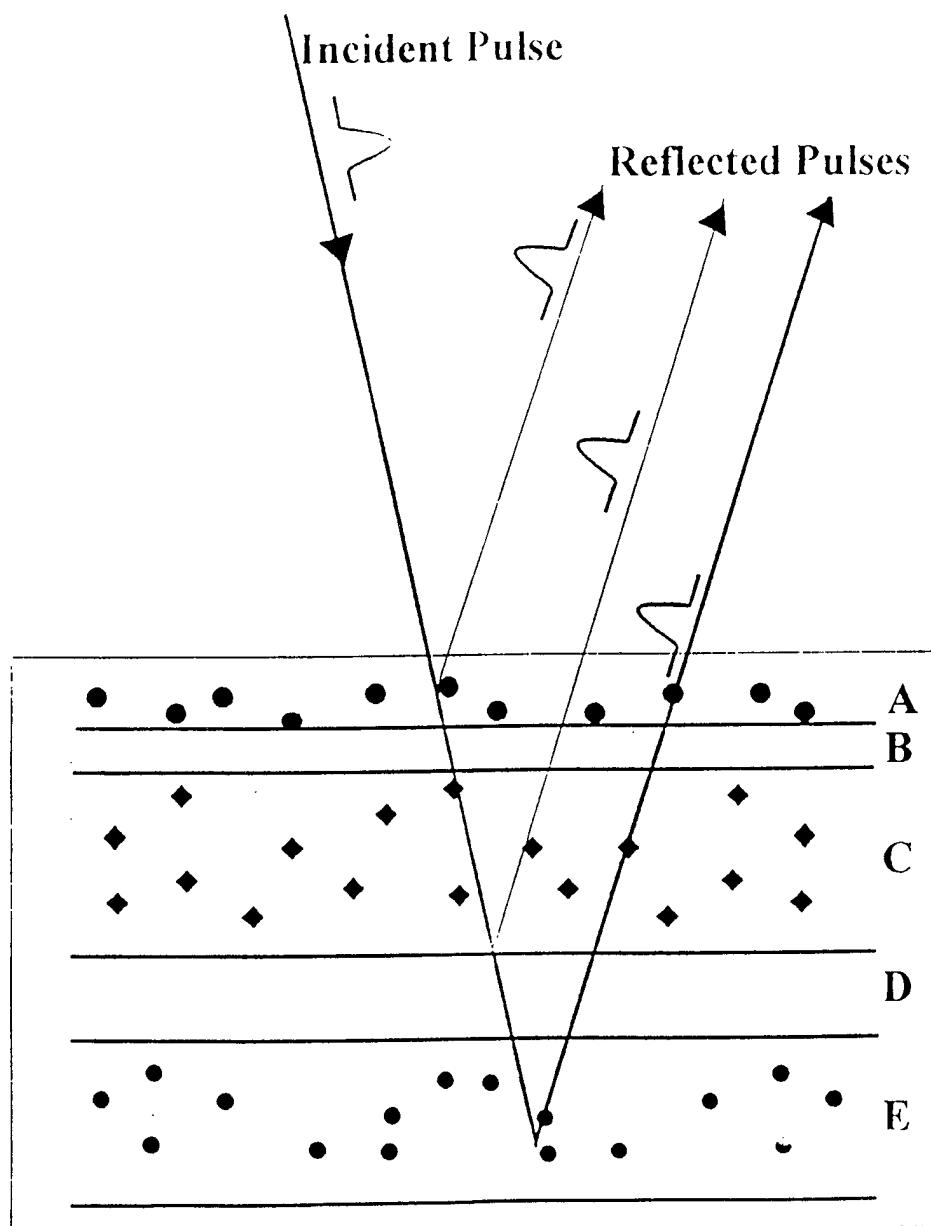
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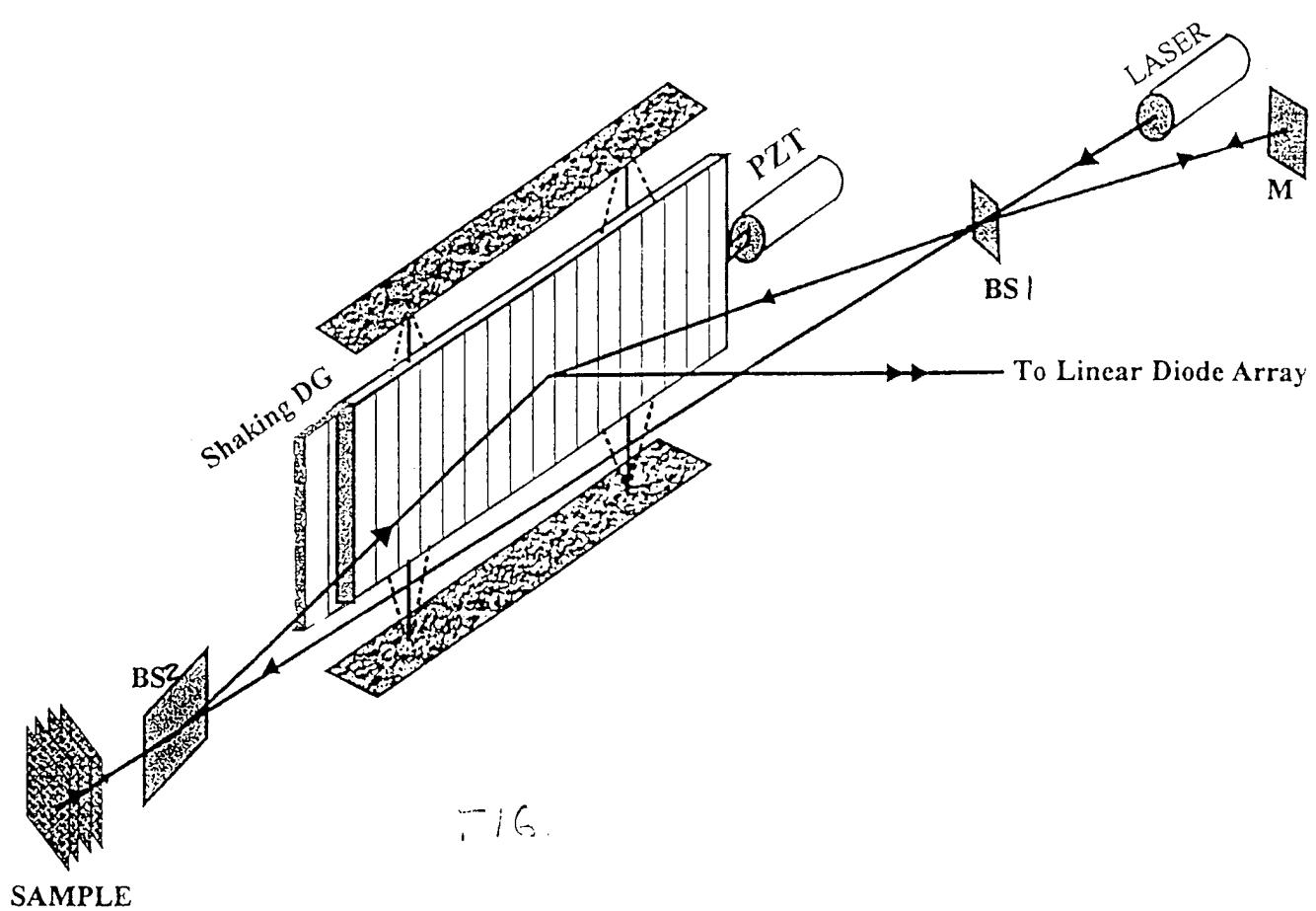
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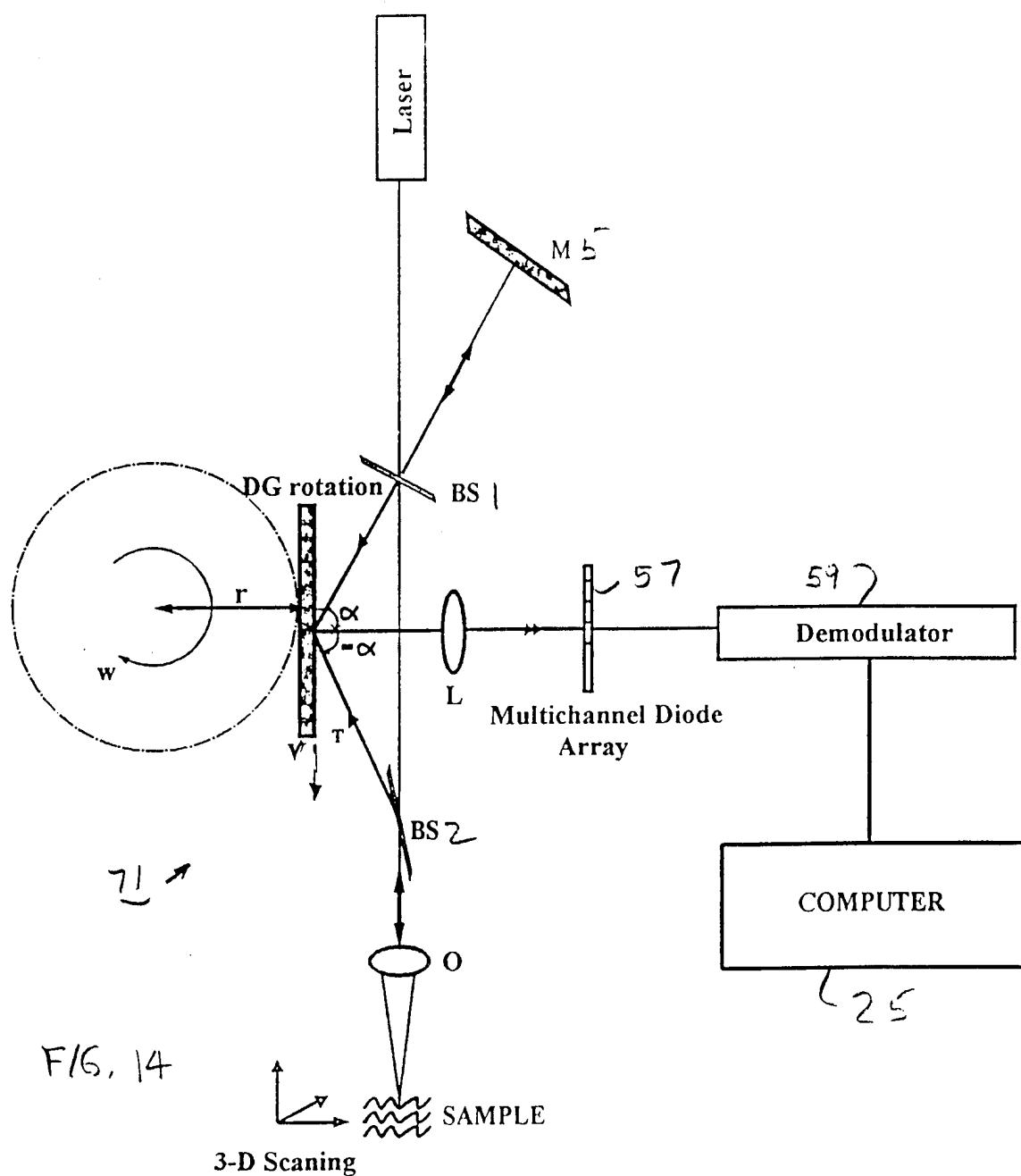
The Cross-sectional Structure of an Oil Painting

FIG. 12

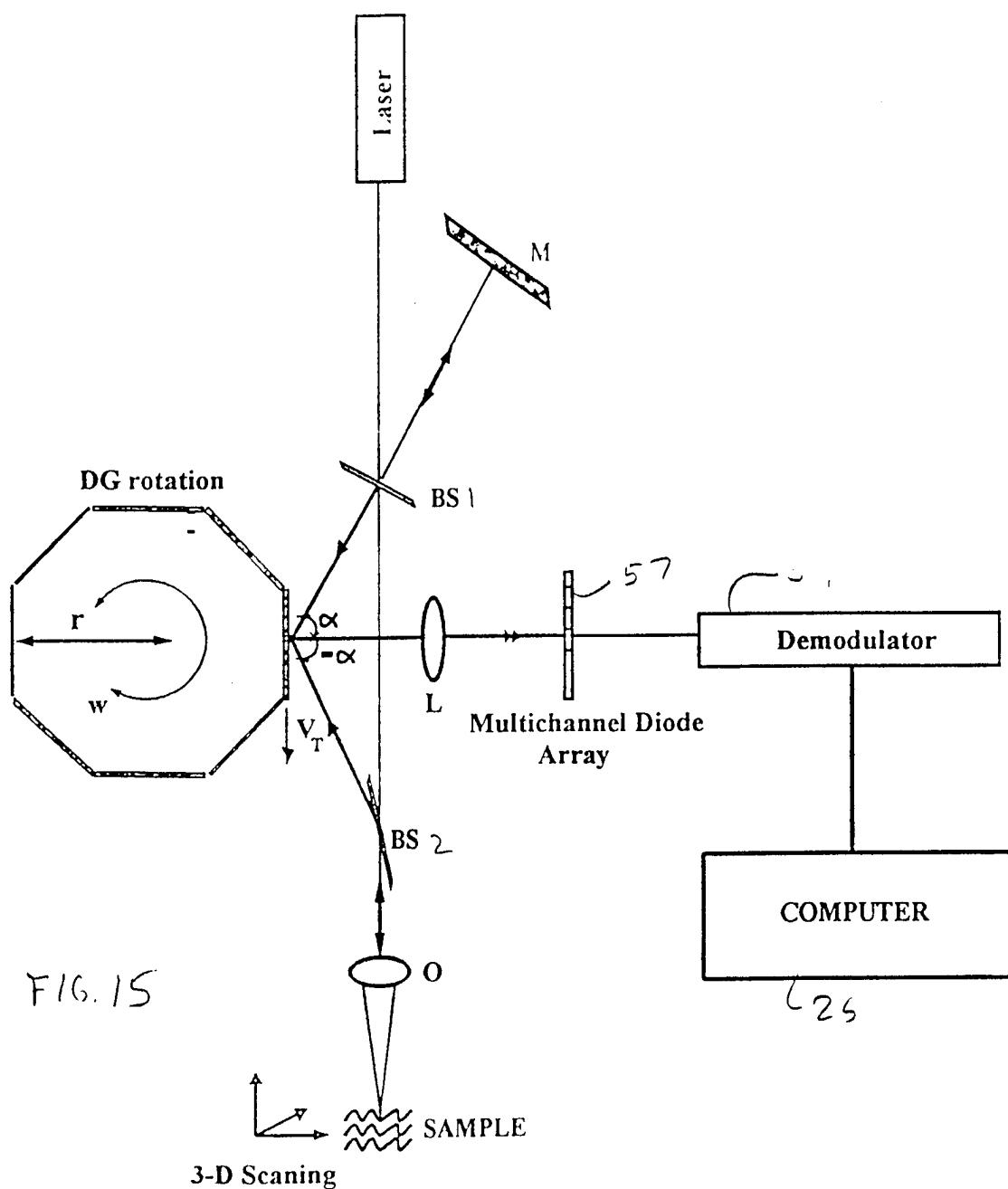
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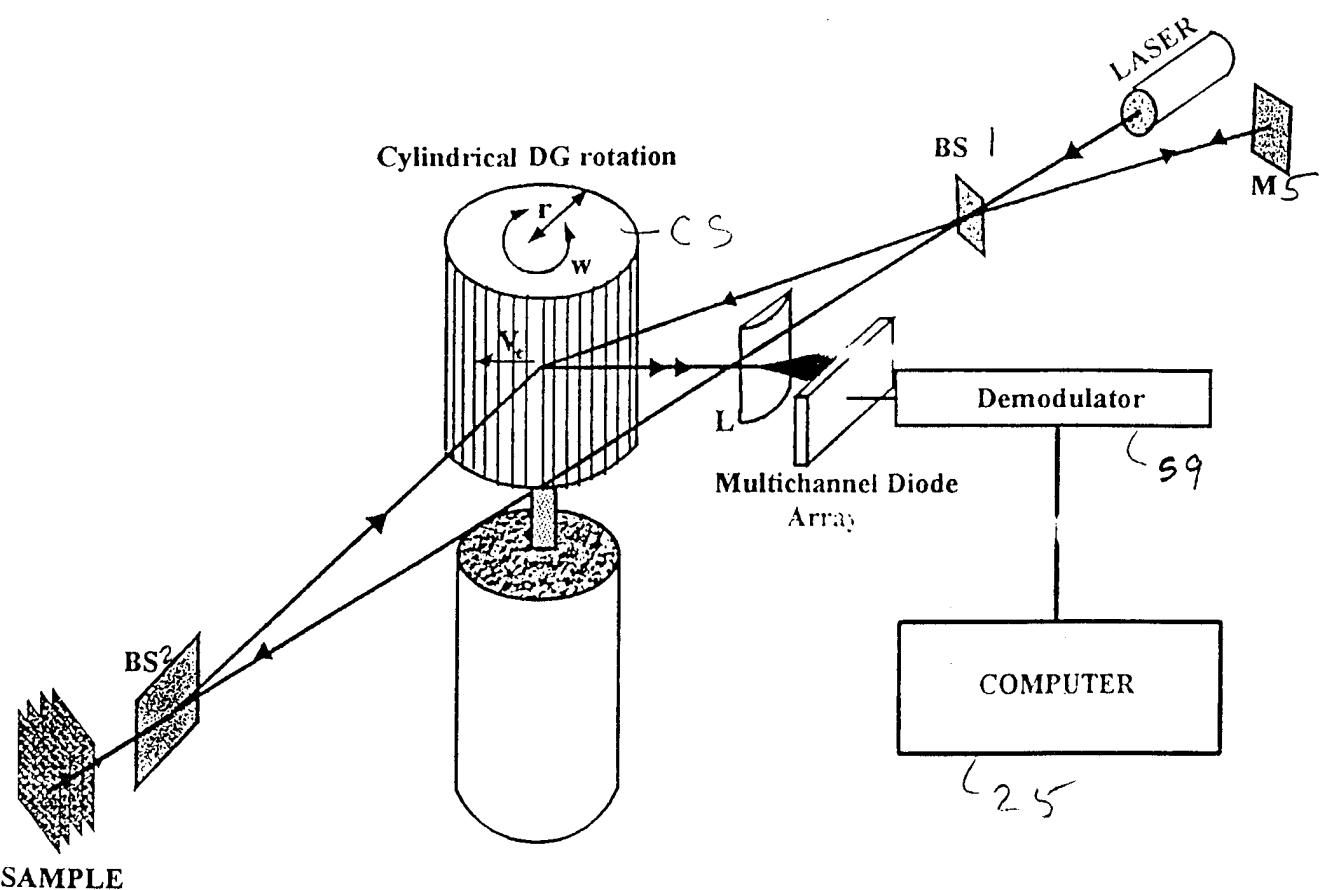
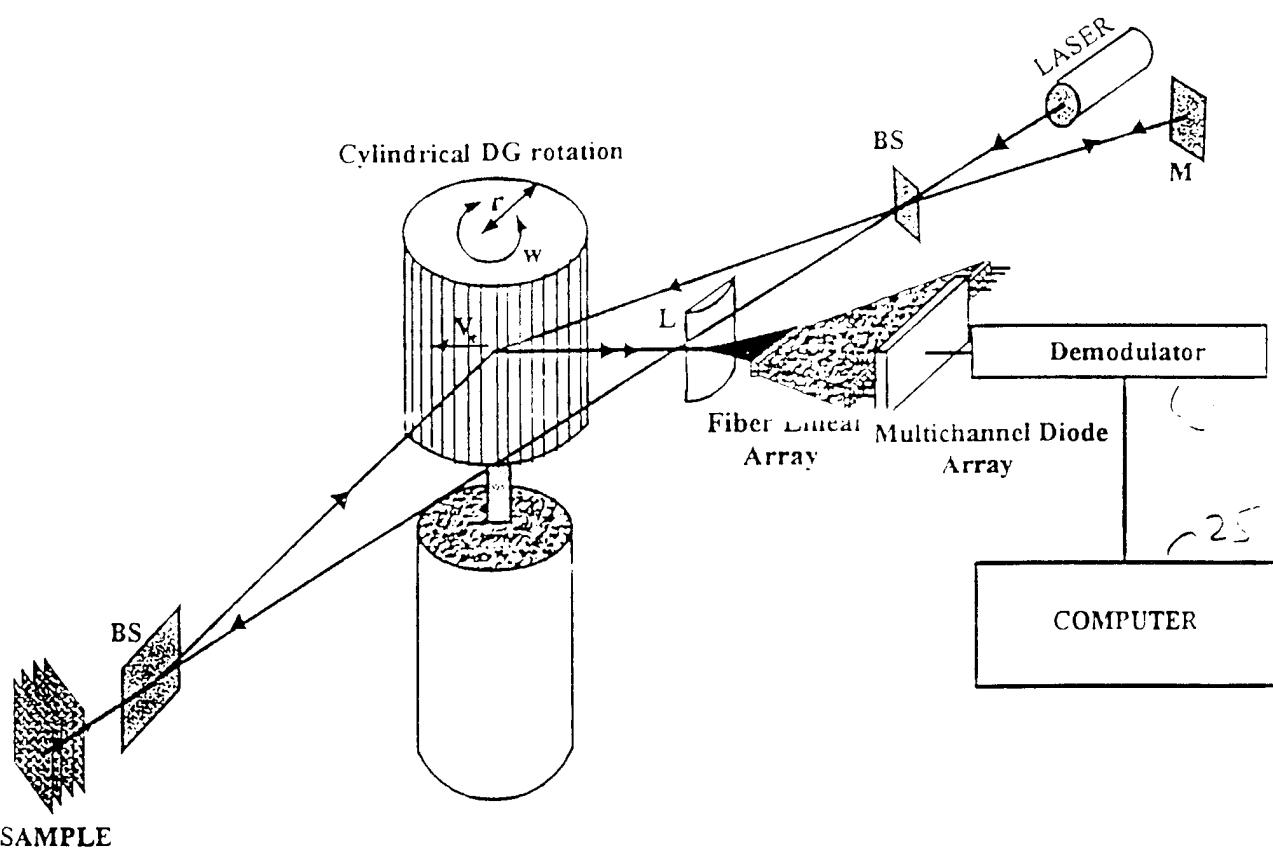


FIG. 16

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F16.16

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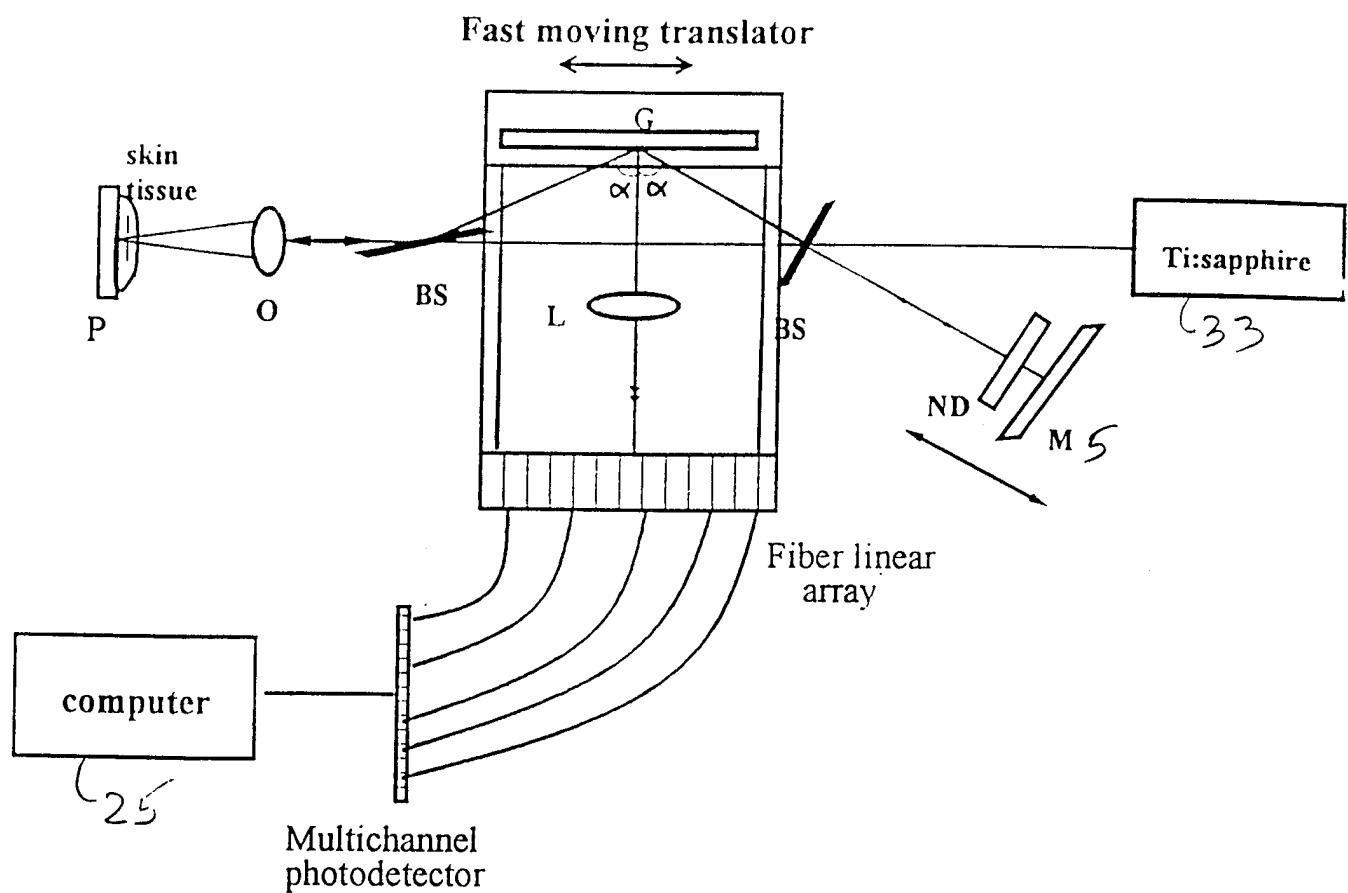


FIG. 18

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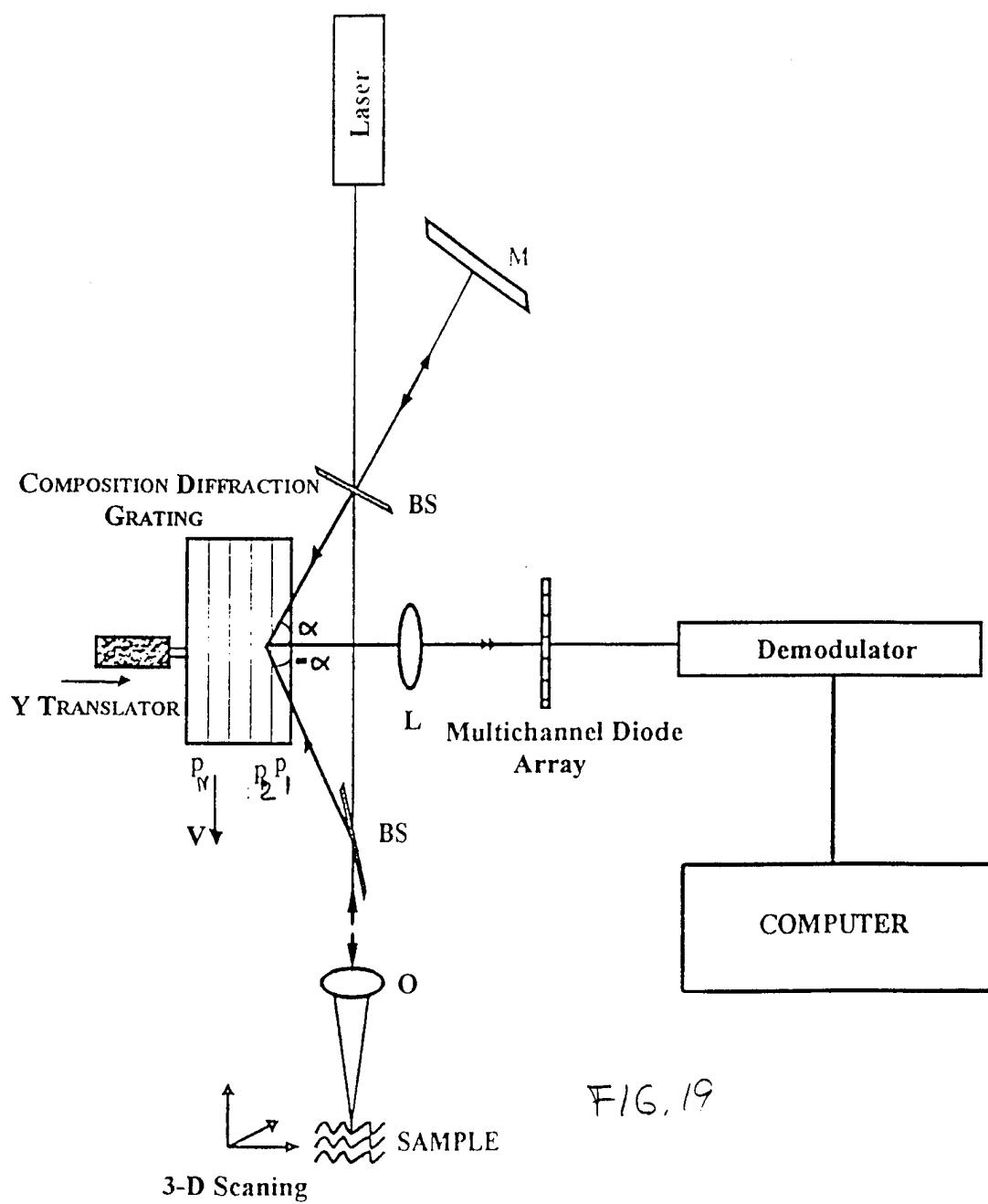
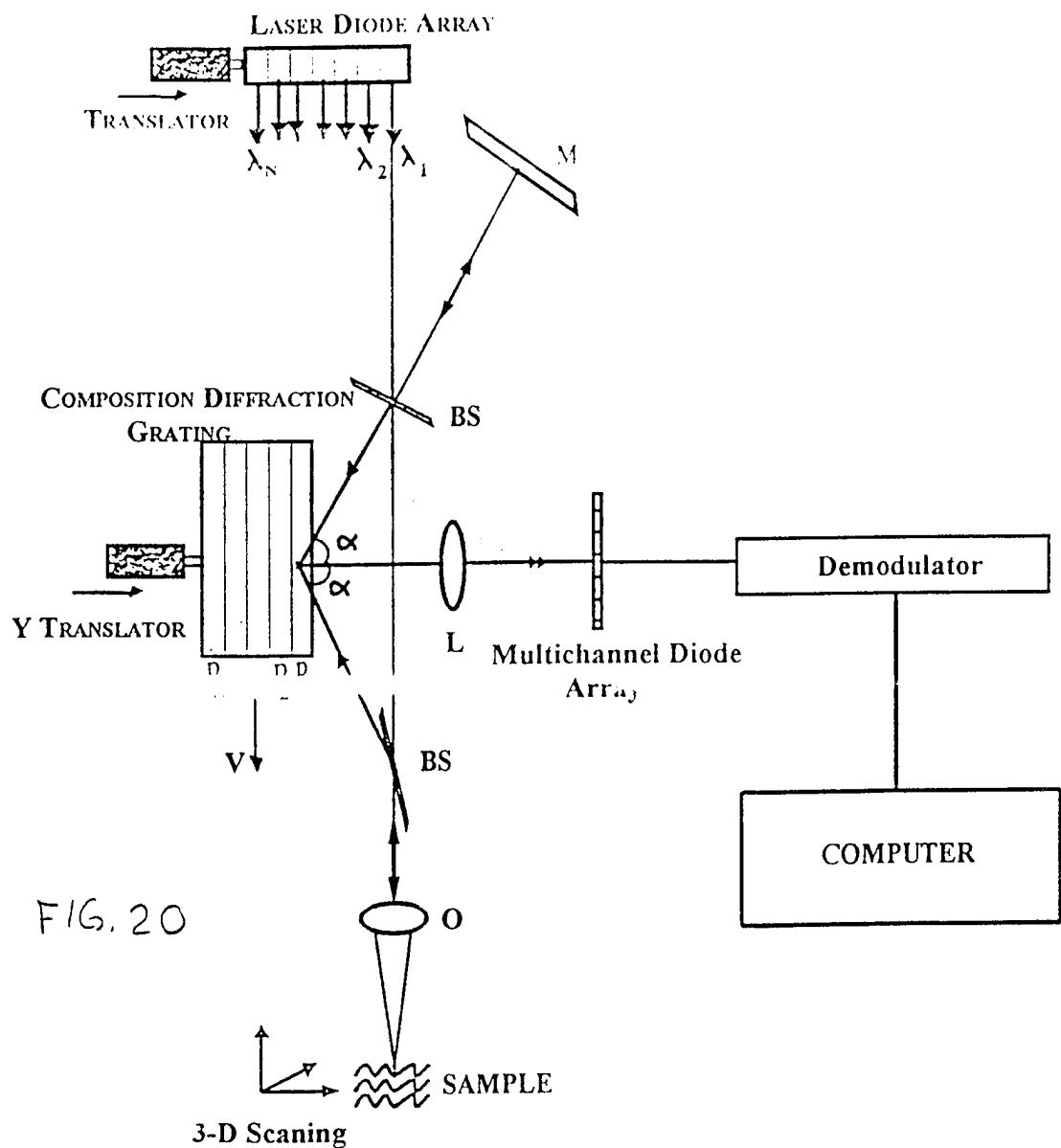


FIG. 19

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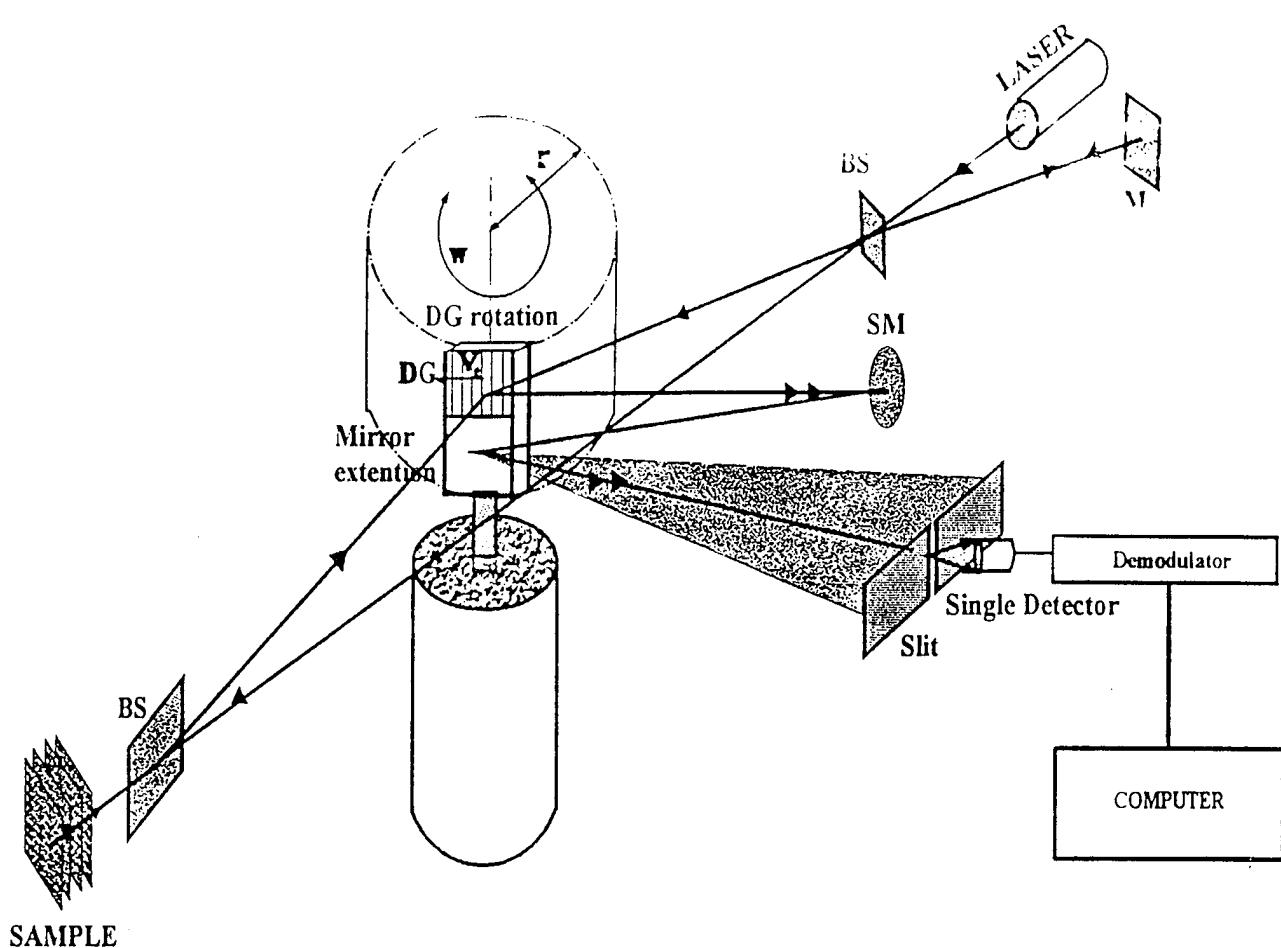
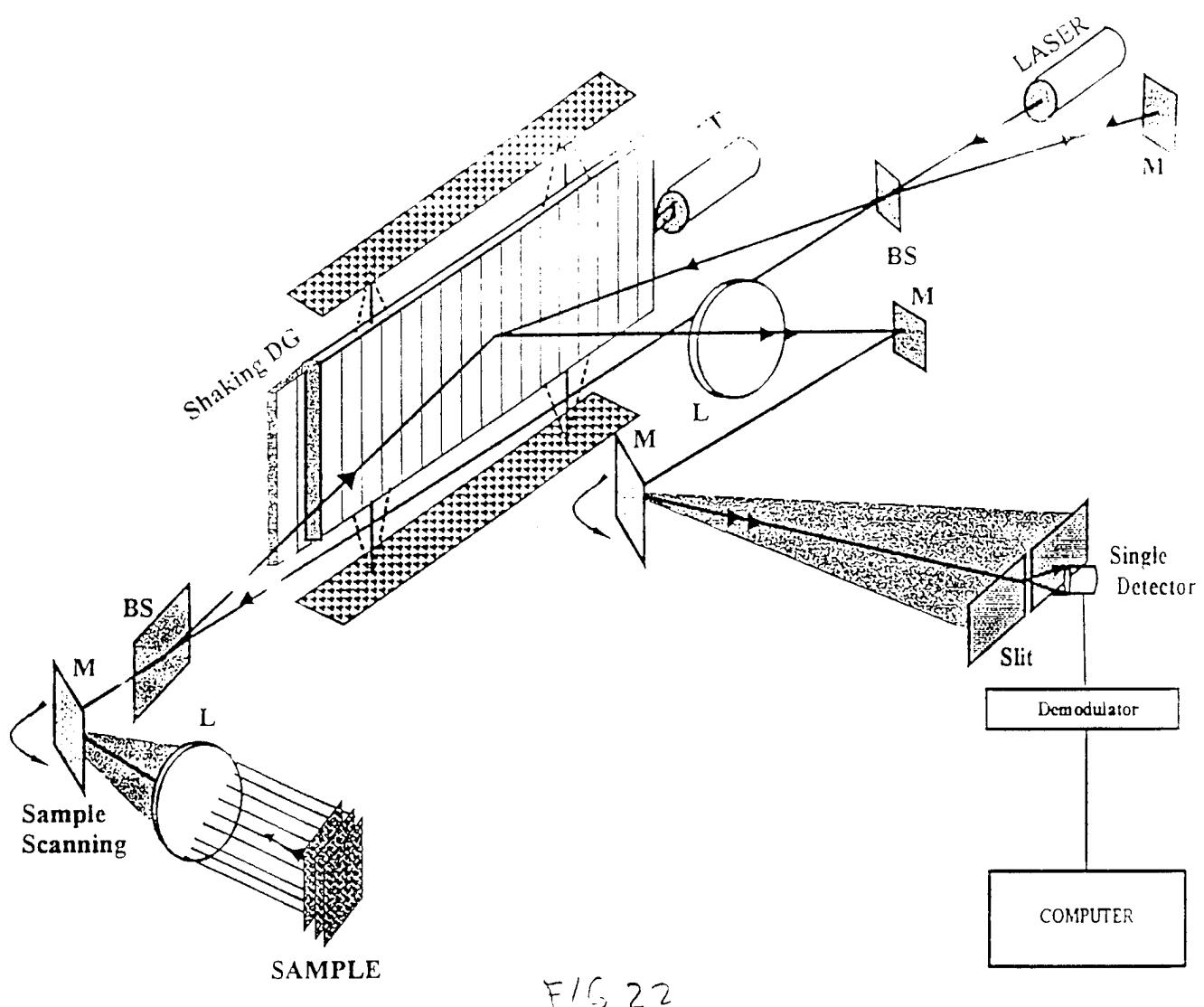


FIG. 21

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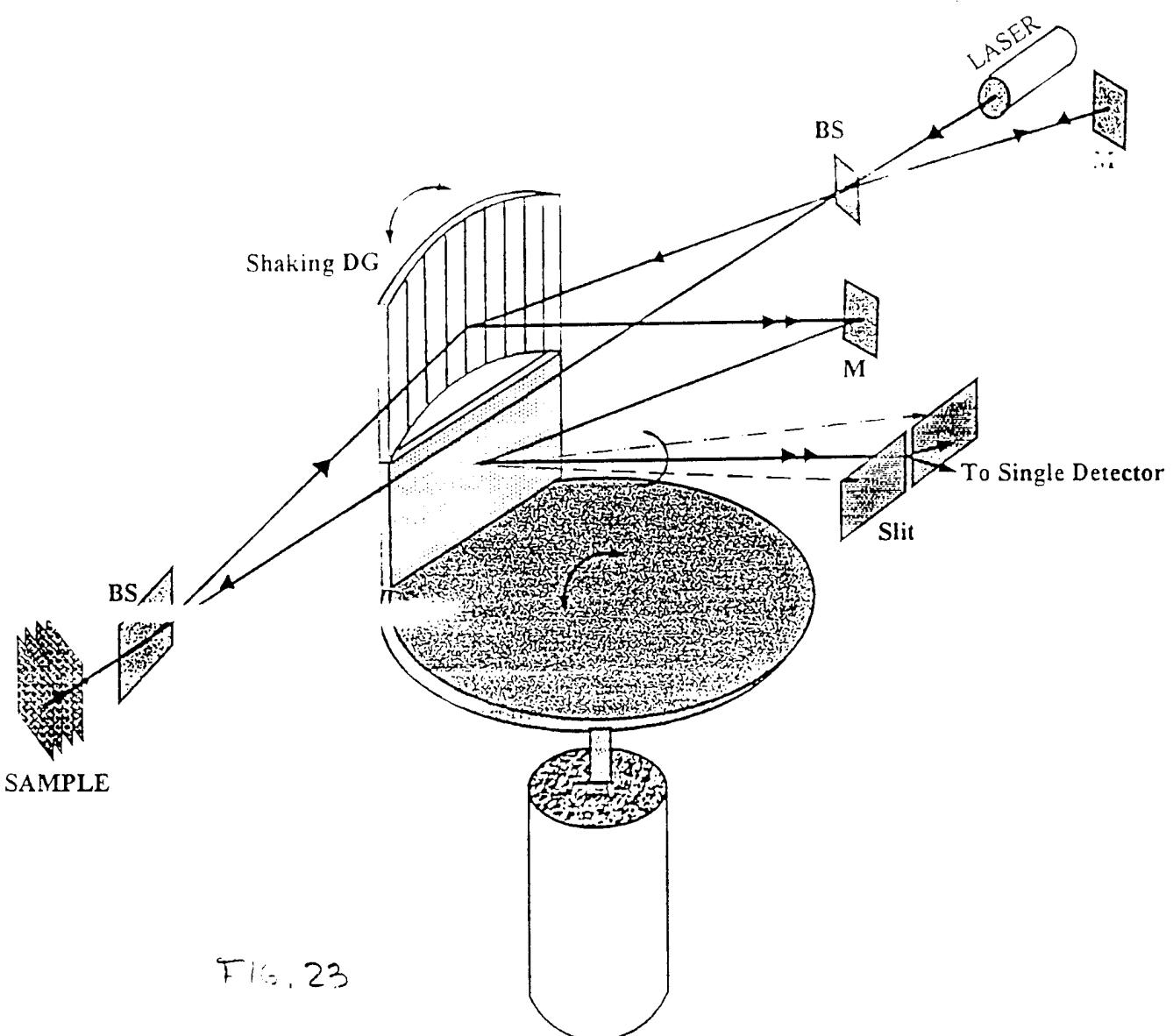


FIG. 23

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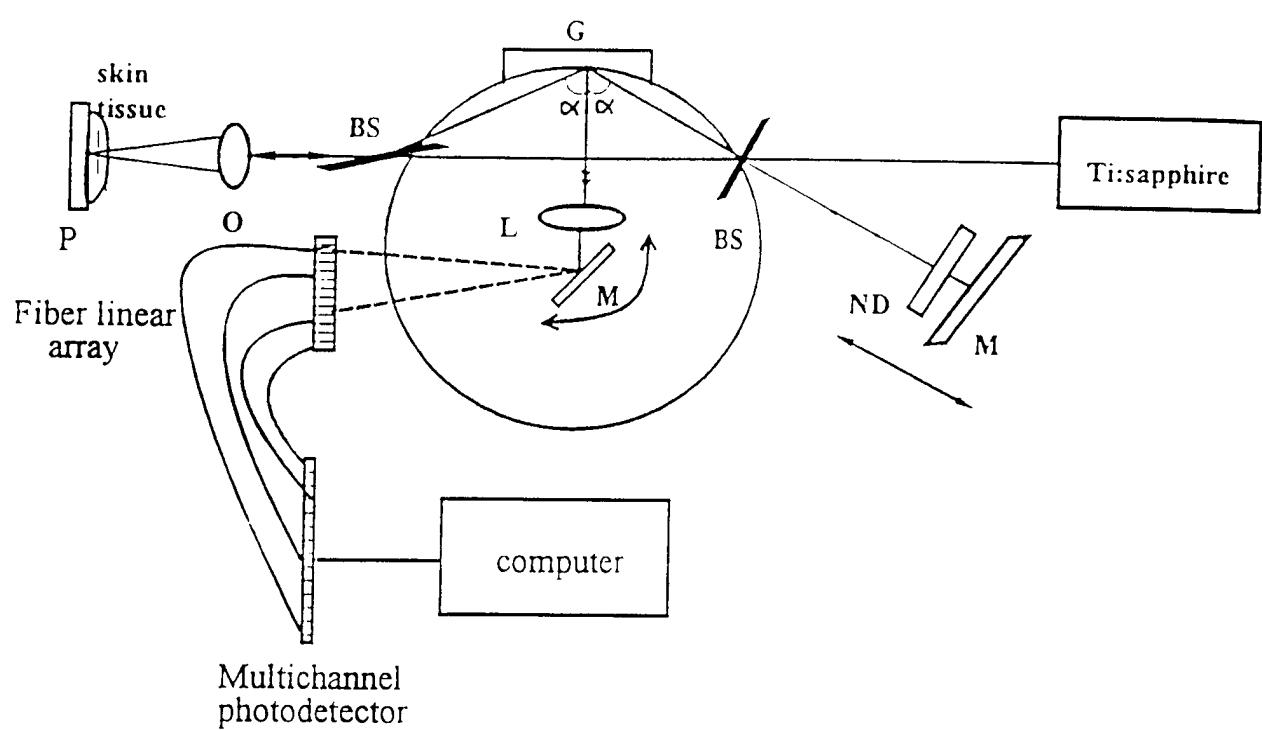
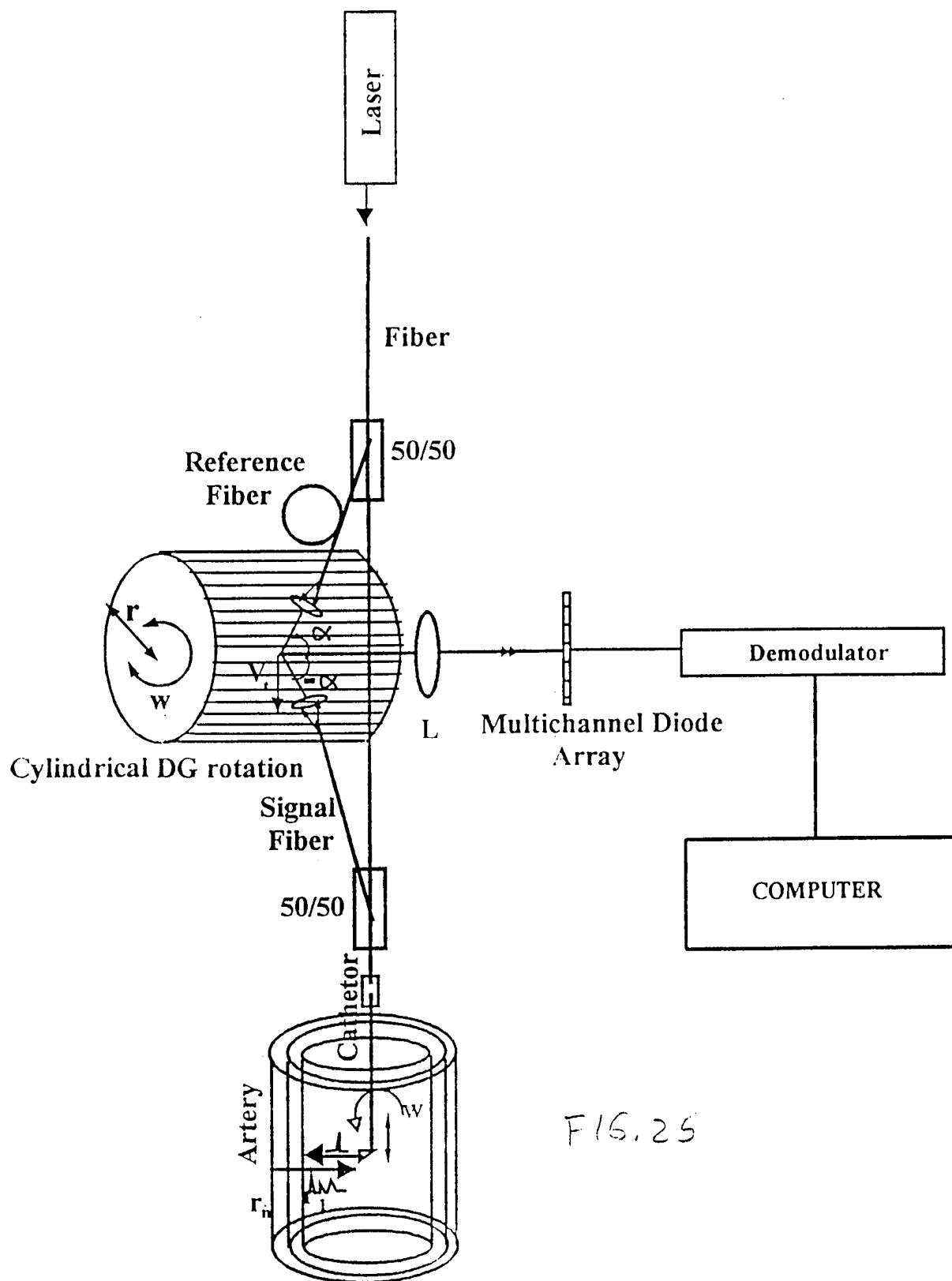


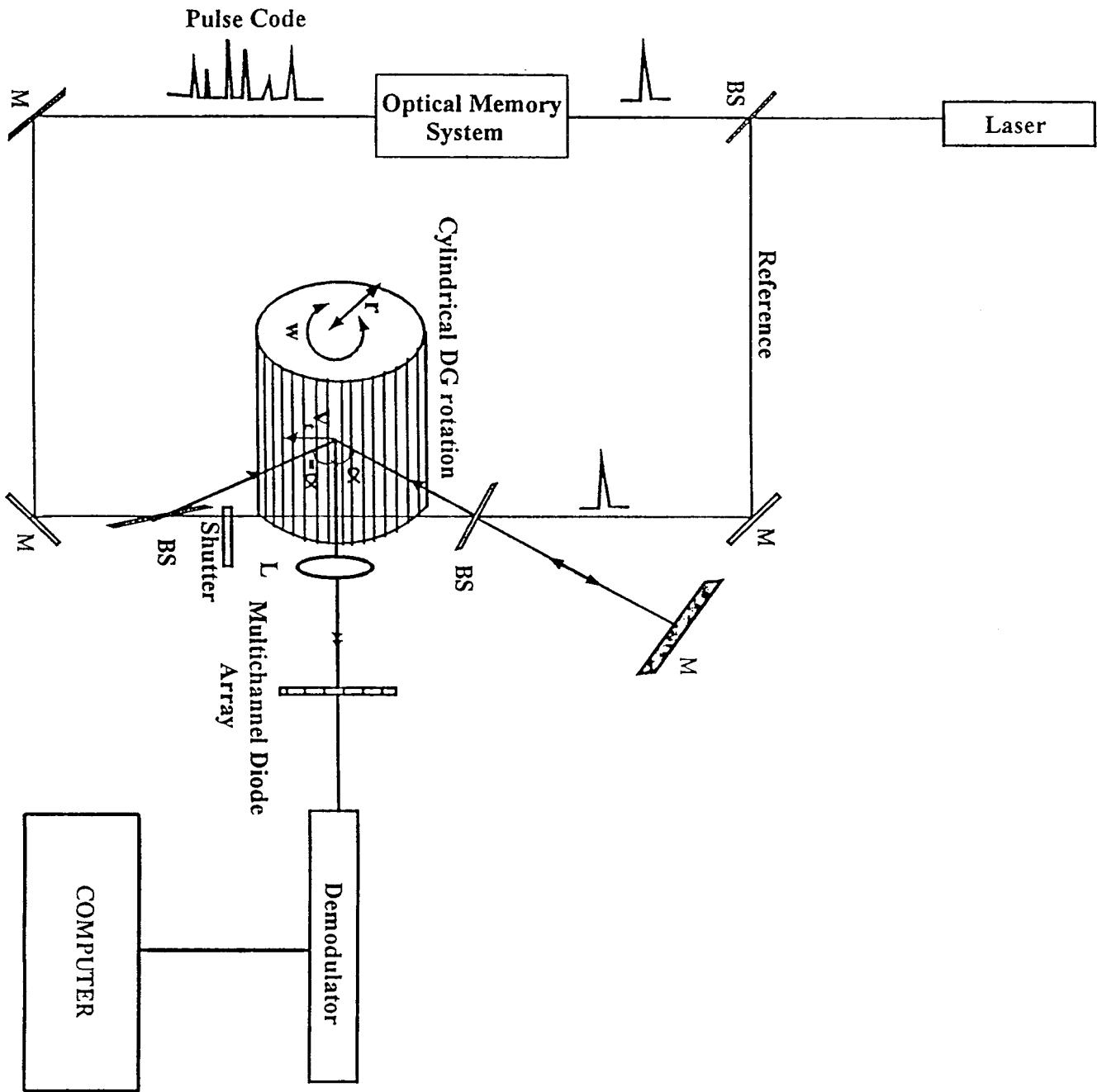
FIG. 24

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FIG. 26



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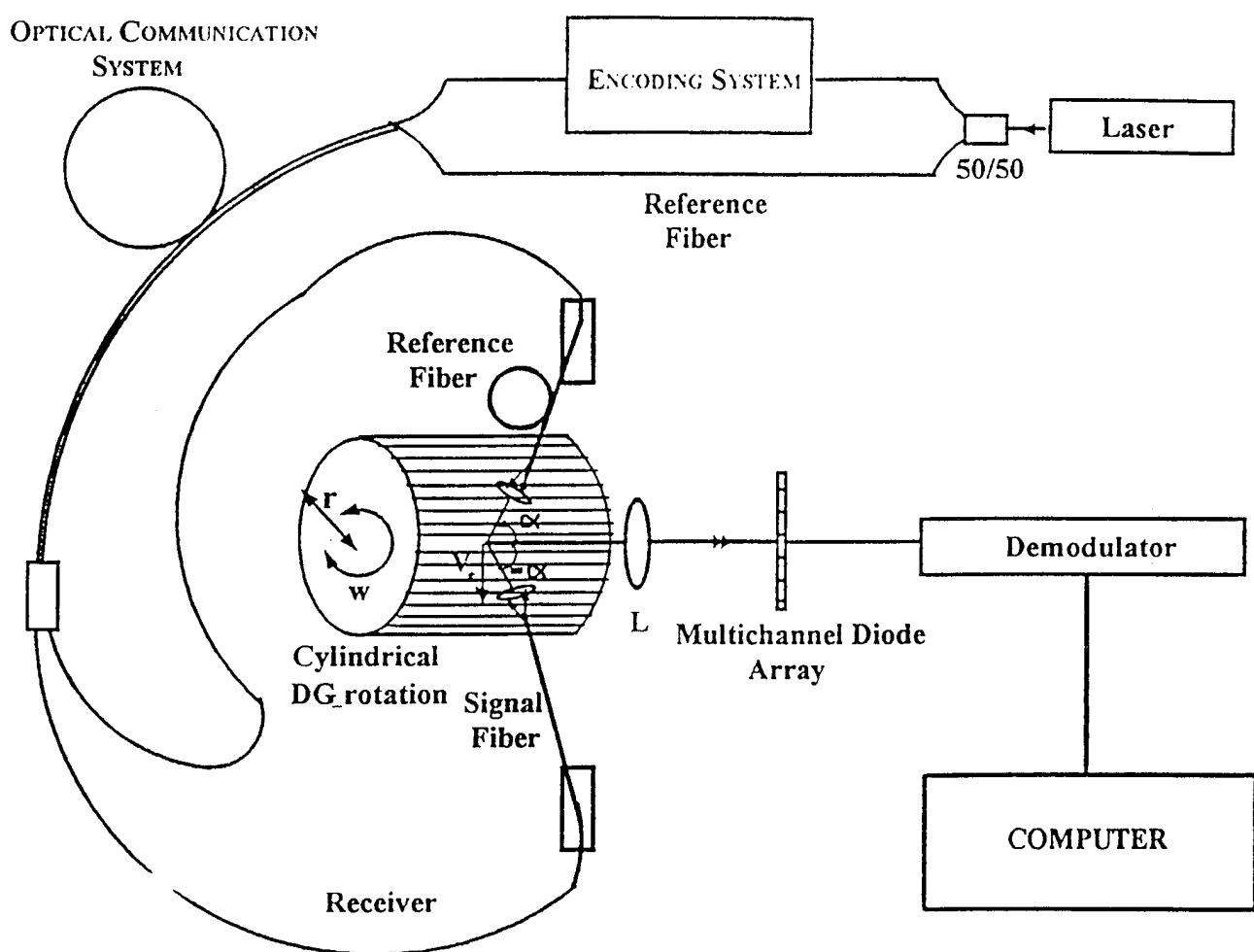


FIG. 27

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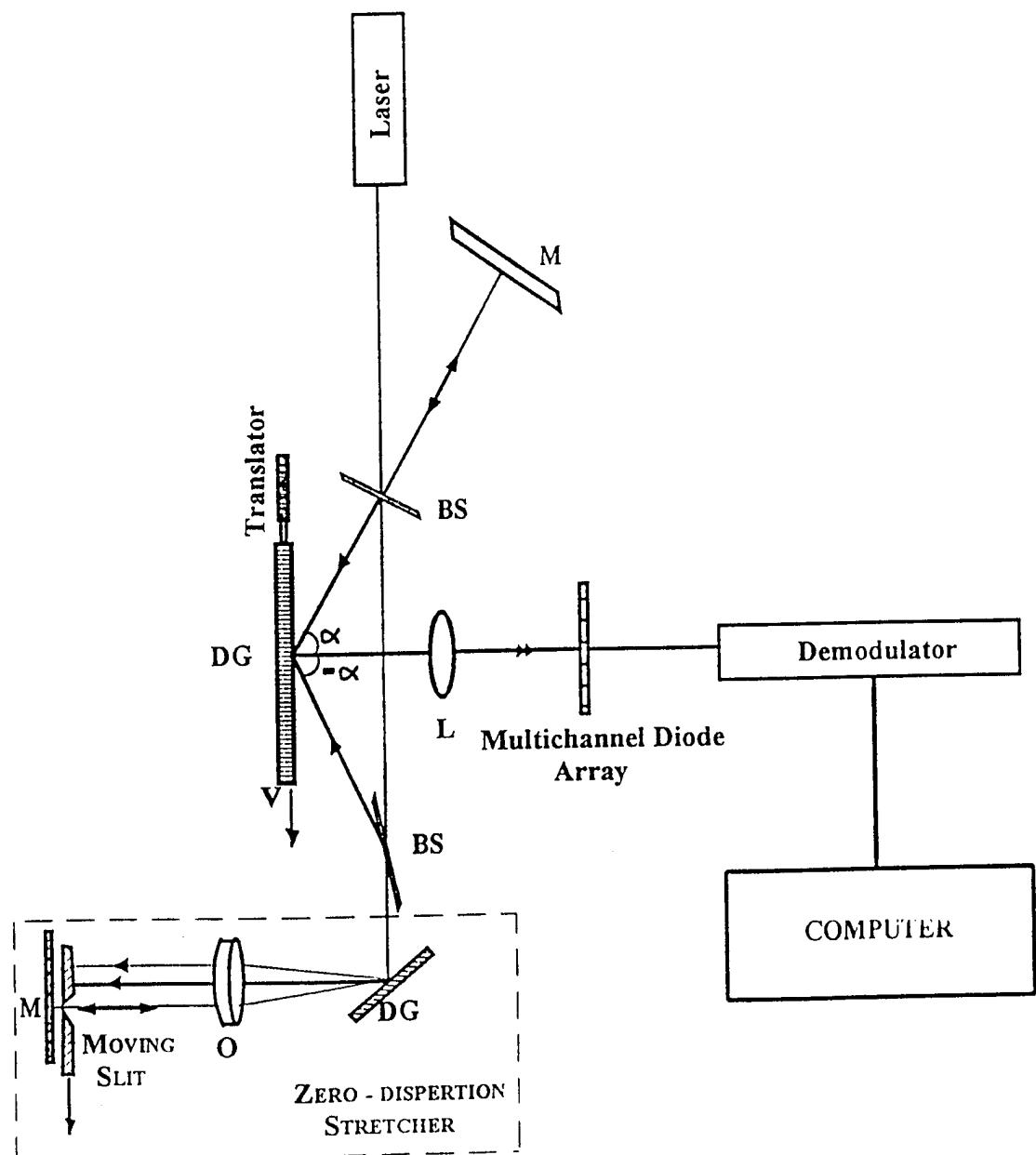
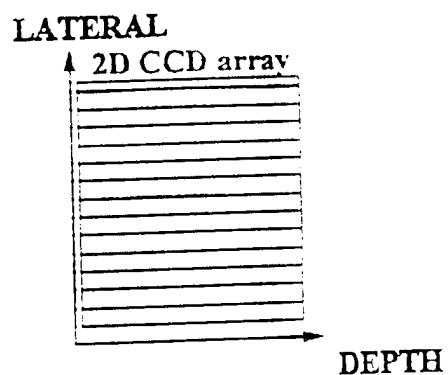
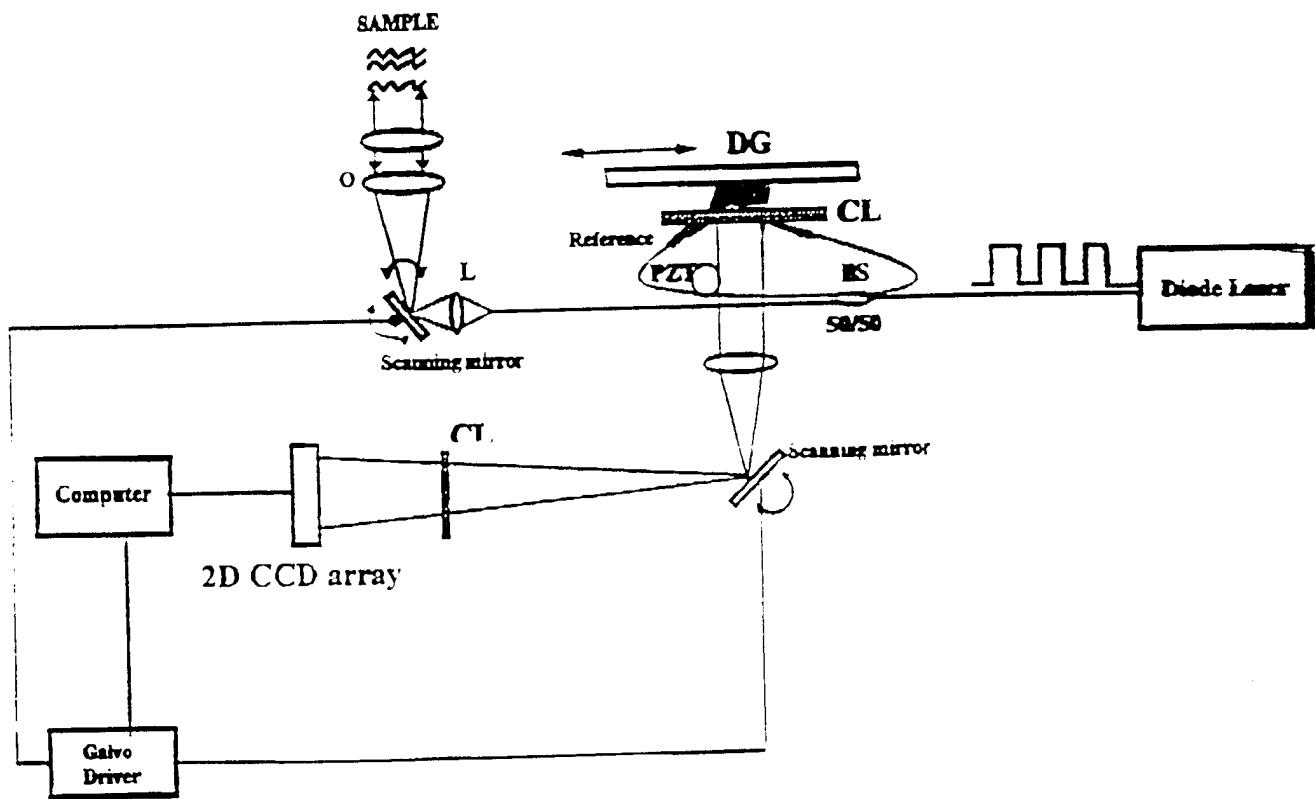
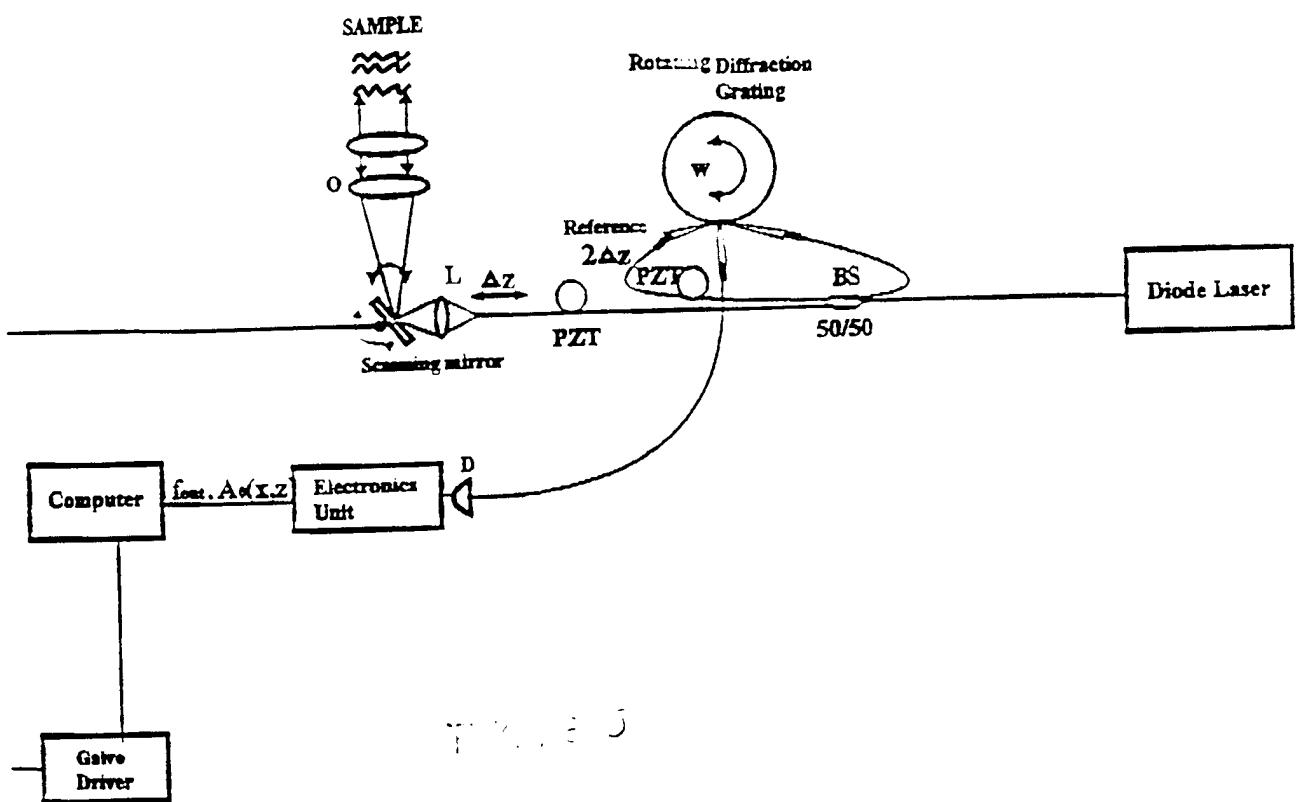


FIG. 23

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US97/22274

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(6) :G01B 9/02
US CL :356/355

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)

U.S. : 356/355, 354, 357, 73.1; 250/237G

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 5,568,256 A (KORNER ET AL.) 22 October 1996 (22.10.96), see figure 1.	1-21

 Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:	"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
"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"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
"E" earlier document published on or after the international filing date	"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
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"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		

Date of the actual completion of the international search

18 MARCH 1998

Date of mailing of the international search report

05 MAY 1998

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