

(19) World Intellectual Property Organization
International Bureau



(43) International Publication Date
7 September 2007 (07.09.2007)

PCT

(10) International Publication Number
WO 2007/100476 A2

(51) International Patent Classification: **Not classified**

(21) International Application Number:
PCT/US2007/003621

(22) International Filing Date: 9 February 2007 (09.02.2007)

(25) Filing Language: English

(26) Publication Language: English

(30) Priority Data:
11/362,346 24 February 2006 (24.02.2006) US

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(81) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of national protection available): AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BW, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, GT, HN, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KM, KN, KP, KR, KZ, LA, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, LY, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MY, MZ, NA, NG, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PG, PH, PL, PT, RO, RS, RU, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SM, SV, SY, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, ZA, ZM, ZW.

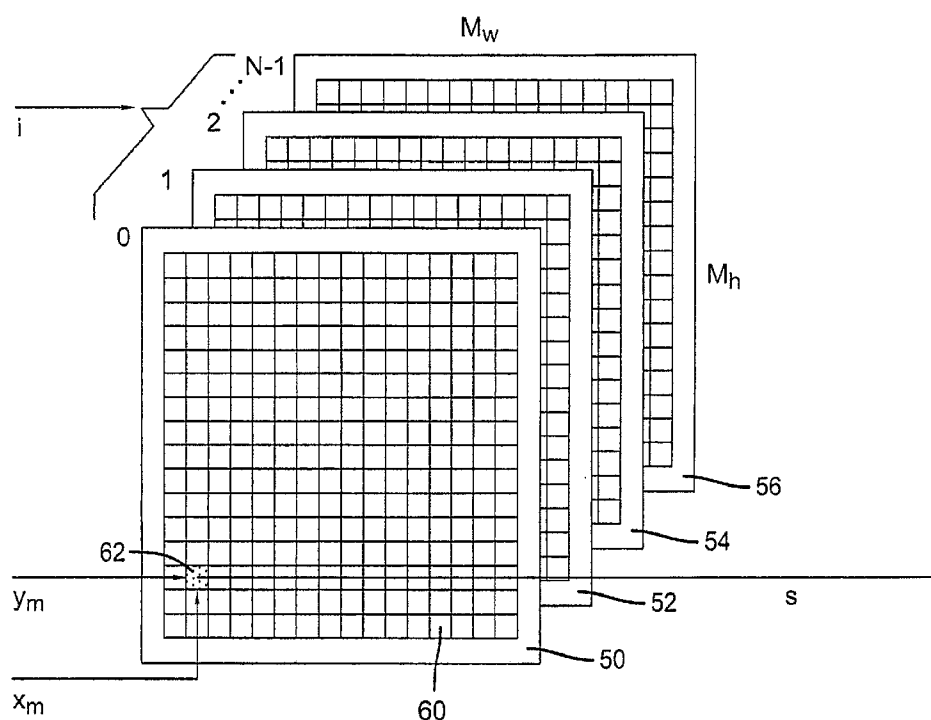
(84) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available): ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, NA, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, LV, MC, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

Published:

— without international search report and to be republished upon receipt of that report

[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: MULTI-LEVEL PRINTING MASKING METHOD



(57) Abstract: A method of computing swath data in response to a digital image having a plurality of rows and columns of pixels, each pixel having a multitone code value, the swath data suitable for commanding an inkjet printer containing at least one printhead having a plurality of nozzles, wherein the inkjet printer is capable of ejecting ink drops in response to the swath data.

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MULTI-LEVEL PRINT MASKING METHOD

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention pertains to the field of inkjet printing systems, and more particularly to a method for multilevel print masking for inkjet printing.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

5 A typical inkjet printer reproduces an image by ejecting small drops of ink from a printhead containing nozzles, where the ink drops land on a receiver medium (typically paper) to form ink dots. A typical inkjet printer reproduces a color image by using a set of color inks, usually cyan, magenta, 10 yellow, and black. It is well known in the field of inkjet printing that if ink drops placed at neighboring locations on the page are printed at the same time, then the ink drops tend to flow together on the surface of the page before they soak into the page. This can give the reproduced image an undesirable grainy or noisy appearance often referred to as "coalescence". It is known that the amount of 15 coalescence present in the printed image is related to the amount of time that elapses between printing adjacent dots. As the time delay between printing adjacent dots increases, the amount of coalescence decreases, thereby improving the image quality. There are many techniques present in the prior art that describe methods of increasing the time delay between printing adjacent dots using 20 methods referred to as "interlacing", "print masking", or "multipass printing". There are also techniques present in the prior art for reducing one-dimensional periodic artifacts referred to as "bands" or "banding." This is achieved by advancing the paper by an increment less than the printhead width, so that successive passes or "swaths" of the printhead overlap. The techniques of print 25 masking and swath overlapping are typically combined. See, for example, U.S. Patents 4,967,203 and 5,992,962. The term "print masking" generically means printing subsets of the image pixels in multiple partially overlapping passes of the printhead relative to a receiver medium.

30 Another attribute of modern inkjet printers is that they typically possess the ability to vary (over some range) the amount of each ink that is deposited at a given location on the page. Inkjet printers with this capability are referred to as "multitone" inkjet printers because they can produce multiple

density tones at each location on the page. Some multitone inkjet printers achieve this by varying the volume of the ink drop produced by the nozzle by changing the electrical signals sent to the nozzle or by varying the diameter of the nozzle. See for example U. S. Pat. No. 4,746,935. Other multitone inkjet printers produce a variable number of smaller, fixed size droplets that are ejected by the nozzle, all of which are intended to merge together and land at the same location on the page. See for example U. S. Pat. No. 5,416,612. These techniques allow the printer to vary the size or optical density of a given ink dot, which produces a range of density levels at each location, thereby improving the image quality.

Another common way for a multitone inkjet printer to achieve multiple density levels is to print a small amount of ink at a given location on several different passes of the printhead over that location. This results in the ability to produce a greater number of density levels than the nozzle can fundamentally eject, due to the build up of ink at the given location over several passes. See, for example, U.S. Patent No. 5,923,349.

In U.S. Patent No. 5,790,150, Lidke et al. disclose a method where multiple passes are made over the page before the page is advanced. In each pass, the pattern of dots in the data swath is constructed with sufficient spacing between the dots such that the printhead can be scanned across the page at a velocity that is higher than the firing frequency limit of the nozzles.

In U.S. Patent No. 6,206,502, Kato et al. disclose a print masking method in which nozzles at the ends of the printhead print with lower duty than nozzles near the center of the printhead, thereby reducing the possibility of banding artifacts occurring at the boundaries between successive printed swaths.

In U.S. Patent No. 6,238,037, Overall et al. disclose a print masking method for a multilevel inkjet printer in which the print mask contains a set of threshold values. A dot will print at a given location on a given pass if the multitone code value for that pixel is greater than the threshold for that pass. This method requires that if a dot gets printed at a given pixel on pass N, then it also must receive dots on passes 0 through N-1.

In U.S. Patent No. 6,454,389, Couwenhoven et al. disclose a print masking method suitable for multilevel inkjet printers that can produce multiple sized ink drops.

In all of the above mentioned inkjet printers, the designer of the printer is faced with the task of splitting the image data into multiple memory buffers corresponding to the multiple passes of the printhead. It is believed that the prior art methods are constrained so that the dot patterns printed corresponding to one multitone level are highly correlated with the dot patterns printed corresponding to another multitone level. This restriction can lead to undesirable print artifacts or excessive or unbalanced use of some nozzles. Therefore there is a need for improvement over the prior art in the area of multipass printing to support multitone ink jet printers which eject multiple drops at a given location on several different passes.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It is an object of the present invention to provide for multipass inkjet printing which produces high quality images. This object is achieved by computing swath data in response to a digital image having a plurality of rows and columns of pixels, each pixel having a multitone code value, the swath data suitable for commanding an inkjet printer containing at least one printhead having a plurality of nozzles, wherein the inkjet printer is capable of ejecting ink drops in response to the swath data, comprising the steps of:

- a) providing a print mask having a plurality of mask planes, each mask plane corresponding to a multitone code value and wherein each mask plane contains a plurality of mask elements, each mask element having at least a first value corresponding to no ejection of an ink drop, and a second value corresponding to an ejection of an ink drop;
- b) selecting a mask plane in response to the multitone code value;
- c) selecting a mask element from the selected mask plane in response to a pixel row index and a pixel column index, and;
- d) computing a swath data value in response to the value of the selected mask element.

ADVANTAGES

It is an advantage of the present invention that print masking is achieved in order to minimize coalescence.

5 It is another advantage of the present invention that banding artifacts may be reduced by swath overlapping.

Yet another advantage of the present invention that dot patterns printed in response to different multitone levels can be independent from each other.

10 Yet another advantage of the present invention that undesirable banding and gloss artifacts can simultaneously be minimized.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a flow diagram showing an typical inkjet printer system;

15 FIG. 2 is a diagram illustrating print masking according to the present invention;

FIG. 3 is a diagram showing the details of a mask plane;

FIG. 4 is a diagram illustrating multipass printing;

FIG. 5 is a diagram showing the details of a mask plane;

FIG. 6 is a diagram illustrating multipass printing;

20 FIG. 7 is a diagram showing the details of a mask plane;

FIG. 8 is a diagram illustrating multipass printing.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

This invention describes a method of printing high quality digital images on a receiver medium using an inkjet printer employing multiple print
25 passes. Turning to FIG. 1, a typical inkjet printer system is shown in which an image preprocessor 10 receives a digital image from a host computer (not shown), and performs standard image processing functions such as sharpening, resizing, color conversion, and multitoneing to produce a multitoned image signal *i*. The multitoned image signal *i* is composed of a set of color data planes hereinafter
30 referred to as color channels. Each color channel corresponds to a particular colorant in the printer, such as the cyan, magenta, yellow, or black inks used in a typical inkjet printer. The data comprising each color channel is a two

dimensional array (width= w , height= h) of individual picture elements, or "pixels". The pixel's location in the image is specified by its (x,y) coordinates in the array, where $0 \leq x \leq w-1$ and $0 \leq y \leq h-1$. The x location of the pixel is also referred to as the pixel column number, and the y location of the pixel is referred to as the pixel row number. The term "signal" is used to generically refer to the array of pixels having digital code values that form the image.

A swath data generator 20 then receives the multitone image signal i and generates a swath data signal s , which controls the volume of ink printed by an inkjet printhead (or printheads) 30. The process of print masking is contained within the swath data generator 20, and will be described in detail hereinafter. Prior to multitone, each pixel contains a numeric code value (typically on the range $\{0,255\}$) for each color channel that indicates the amount of the corresponding colorant to be placed at the given pixel's location in the image. After multitone (at the output of the image preprocessor 10), the image is represented by multitone code values, where the range of pixel code values has been reduced to match the number of density levels that the inkjet printer can produce. For binary inkjet printers, the possible multitone code values will be either 0 or 1, indicating whether to print 0 or 1 drops of ink. Multitone inkjet printers will accept multitone code values on the range $\{0,N-1\}$, where N is the number of possible multitone code values, and is normally the number of density levels (or number of drops) that the multitone inkjet printer can produce at a given pixel.

Turning now to FIG. 2, the details of the swath data generator 20 are shown. A "swath" of data is defined as the dot ejection data that is required during one motion of the printhead across the page. In FIG. 2, according to a preferred embodiment, a print mask for a given color contains a set of mask planes 50, 52, 54, 56, each of which has a $M_w \times M_h$ array of individual mask elements 60. In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the mask planes 50, 52, 54, 56 may be stored in a data file which resides on a disk storage medium in a computer which implements the swath data generator 20. Another embodiment of the present invention may have the swath data generator 20 implemented in an embedded computer within an inkjet printer, and the mask

planes 50, 52, 54, 56 may be stored in programmable memory within the printer. One skilled in the art will recognize that there are many different hardware configurations for the swath data generator 20 and many different storage options for the mask planes that may be constructed, and that the present invention may be
 5 applied to any of the different configurations.

In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the mask height M_h is set equal to the number of nozzles in the printhead, although this is not a fundamental restriction, and a mask height of lesser or greater value may be used. One of the mask planes is selected for a given pixel according to the
 10 multitone code value of the multitoned image signal i , as shown in FIG. 2. A pixel column index x_m and a pixel row index y_m are computed according to the following equations:

$$x_m = x \% M_w \quad \text{EQ 1}$$

$$y_m = y \% M_h \quad \text{EQ 2}$$

15 where x is the pixel column number and y is the pixel row number of the current pixel being processed, M_w is the mask width, M_h is the mask height, and the “%” symbol indicates the mathematical modulo operator. A mask element 62 is then selected from the chosen mask plane according to:

$$20 \quad s = \text{MaskPlane}(i, x_m, y_m) \quad \text{EQ 3}$$

In a preferred embodiment, the value of the swath data signal s for the current pixel is set equal to the value of the selected mask element, as indicated by EQ 3.

25 Turning now to FIG. 3, details of a mask plane 70 are shown. In the mask plane 70, each of the individual mask elements 80 can be one of two values: a first value (0) indicating that no ink drop is to be ejected, and a second value (1) indicating one drop of ink is to be ejected. Thus, if the mask plane 70 corresponds to multitone code value 1, and a uniform 8x8 input image of
 30 multitone code value 1 was input to the swath data generator 20, then a dot pattern indicated by the mask elements having value “1” in the mask plane 70 would be

printed in one pass of the printhead. The mask plane 70 is shown as having a width and height of 8, although one skilled in the art will recognize that the present invention will apply to a mask of any arbitrary size.

Turning now to FIG. 4, the dot patterns resulting from three
5 subsequent passes of an inkjet printhead having 8 nozzles in response to a uniform 8x8 input image of multitone code value 1 are shown. In this example, the print mask used has the mask plane 70 of FIG. 3 set to correspond to multitone code value 1, and the receiver media is advanced by four raster lines between each pass of the printhead. Since the input image has a uniform field of multitone code
10 value 1, then mask plane 70 will be selected for every pixel in the 8x8 image, and the pattern of dots printed in each of the three successive swaths will correspond to the pattern of 1's in the mask plane 70. As shown in FIG. 4, the resulting swath patterns 90, 92, 94 are shown offset horizontally from each other, and the resulting pattern of ink dots 96 is shown. Note that in regions where two successive print
15 passes overlap, every pixel location has received one drop of ink, which corresponds to the desired output for the 8x8 input image of multitone code value 1. Thus, the print mask shown in the example is appropriate for use in a "two-pass" printmode, meaning that two passes of the printhead are required for the desired final dot patterns to be printed. This also means that the mask plane 70 is
20 designed such that the top half and bottom half of the mask, when overprinted on two subsequent print swaths, will produce the desired number of ink drops at each pixel.

Consider now the mask plane 130 of FIG. 5 having an array of mask elements 140. This (somewhat trivial) mask plane is designed for a two
25 pass printmode to correspond to multitone code value 2, meaning that it is desired that each pixel receive two drops of ink. For example, assume that an 8x8 input image of uniform multitone code value 2 is printed using a print mask where mask plane 130 is set to correspond to multitone code value 2. FIG. 6 shows the resulting ink dots that are printed by three subsequent swaths corresponding to
30 patterns 150, 152, 154 (again shown offset horizontally for clarity), where ink dots 156 indicate pixels that have received one drop of ink (so far), and ink dots 158 indicate pixels that have received two drops of ink. One skilled in the art will

recognize that special conditions exist at the top and bottom of a page that require an extra print pass to complete the printing of all intended ink dots.

In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, a print mask is used that has separate mask planes corresponding to each multitone code value.

5 For example, the mask plane 70 of FIG. 3 may be used for multitone code value 1, and the mask plane 130 of FIG. 5 may be used for multitone code value 2. Each of these mask planes can be designed completely independently of each other, as long as they are designed for the same number of print passes and media advance. When two mask planes are referred to as being independent, it is meant that the
10 values of the mask elements in one mask plane do not depend on the values of the mask elements in another plane, including the mask element at the same spatial position in the printmask. Thus, there is no constraint imposed on the pattern of mask elements in a given mask plane due to any other mask plane. This aspect of the present invention is fundamental, and provides for improved image quality
15 relative to the prior art.

Turning now to FIG. 7, another mask plane 100 is shown, having individual mask elements 110. The mask plane 100 is similar to the mask plane 70 of FIG. 3, except that each row of the mask plane will not activate the same number of dots. For example, note that row 0 of the mask plane 100 contains only
20 two 1's, whereas row 3 contains six 1's. As mentioned earlier, a preferred embodiment of the present invention has the mask height M_h equal to the number of nozzles in the printhead, which means that each mask row corresponds to one nozzle. Thus, nozzle 0 would print using mask row 0, and nozzle 3 would print using mask row 3. If a uniform 8x8 image of multitone code value 1 was used
25 with a print mask having mask plane 100 set to correspond to multitone code value 1, then nozzle 0 would print only two out of every eight pixels, and nozzle 3 would print six out of every eight. The percentage of dots printed in the width of the mask is called the nozzle duty cycle. Thus, printing using the mask plane 100 as described above commands a non-uniform duty cycle, meaning that not all of
30 the nozzles in the printhead will print with the same duty. FIG. 8 shows three successive print swaths (again with a media advance of 4 raster lines) that print swath patterns 120, 122, 124 in response to a uniform 8x8 input image of

multitone code value 1 and using a print mask having the mask plane 100 set to correspond to multitone code value 1. It can be seen from the pattern of ink dots 126 that regions that have two overlapping passes result in one ink drop at every pixel, which is the desired output corresponding to the input image.

5 One aspect of printing with a non-uniform duty cycle is that pixels near the boundary between successive swaths are printed predominantly with nozzles near the center of the printhead. This can be advantageous for hiding banding artifacts that commonly occur near the swath boundaries. However, when printing with pigmented inks, a non-uniform duty cycle is known to produce
10 gloss artifacts in darker density tones. This is largely due to the interaction of the pigmented ink drops with the receiver media. However, the method of the present invention can be used advantageously to circumvent this problem. Recall that a key advantage of the present invention is that the mask planes of a print mask can be designed independently from each other, meaning that there is no constrained
15 or implied correlation between the dot patterns printed from one multitone level to the next. Thus, a mask plane having a non-uniform duty cycle can be used for lower multitone code values (corresponding to lighter tones), and a mask plane with a substantially uniform duty cycle can be used for higher multitone code values (corresponding to darker tones). In this arrangement, the benefits of
20 reduced banding at swath boundaries and reduced gloss artifacts are simultaneously achieved. There are also other arrangements that are possible within the scope of the invention to circumvent the gloss artifacts problem. According to another embodiment of the invention, a first print mask corresponding to a first color contains at least a first mask plane that has a non-
25 uniform duty cycle in which the nozzles near the center of the printhead print with higher duty than nozzles near the ends of the printhead. A mask plane having a duty cycle of this type is said to have a "concave down" duty cycle. A second print mask corresponding to a second color contains at least one mask plane that has a non-uniform duty cycle that is substantially "inverted" from the duty cycle
30 of the first mask plane used in the first print mask. In this mask plane, the nozzles at the ends of the printhead would print with higher duty than nozzles in the center of the printhead. A mask plane having a duty cycle for this type is said to have a

“concave up” duty cycle. Using a concave down duty cycle for one color and a concave up duty cycle for another cycle has an advantage when printing with pigmented inks in that the roughness of the printed surface can be made substantially uniform, thereby minimizing gloss artifacts. This arrangement is especially useful for inkjet printers utilizing a clear ink, as the clear ink print mask can be constructed to have a duty cycle that is substantially inverted from the print masks used for the colored inks.

The invention has been described in detail with particular reference to certain preferred embodiments thereof, but it will be understood that variations and modifications can be effected within the spirit and scope of the invention. For example, it will be known to one skilled in the art that it is not necessary to store mask planes corresponding to multitone code value 0 and N-1. This is because multitone code value 0 typically indicates that no ink is intended to be printed, and therefore the print masking process can be skipped entirely. Alternatively, the mask plane corresponding to multitone code value 0 would have all mask elements of 0. Similarly, multitone code value N-1 typically corresponds to the printing of N-1 drops of ink at each pixel. If this mask is used in a printmode having N-1 print passes, then that means that every pixel gets an ink drop on every pass, and the mask plane corresponding to multitone code value N-1 would therefore have all mask elements of 1.

It should also be noted that it is possible within the scope of the invention to have a printmode with P passes that uses a print mask having N mask planes corresponding to an input image having N multitone levels, where $P > N$. For example, an 8 pass printmode may be used to print an image having 3 multitone levels. In this arrangement, the print mask will store 3 mask planes corresponding to the 3 multitone levels, and each mask plane will be designed to produce the correct number of ink drops at each pixel when printed over 8 passes.

In another embodiment of the present invention, the plurality of mask planes that compose the print mask need not all be the same size. For example, the mask plane corresponding to multitone code value 1 may have an array of mask elements that is 32x27 (width x height), and the mask plane corresponding to multitone level 2 may be 16x27. This is possible because the

pixel column index is computed from the pixel column number using a modulo operator with the mask plane width. In this arrangement, it is necessary for the height of each mask plane to be the same.

5 It will also be known to one skilled in the art that the multitone code value does not necessarily correspond to the number of ink drops directly. For example, it is possible that multitone code values of 0,1,2,3 may correspond to 0,1,3,7 drops of ink, respectively. The method of the present invention described above will apply equally well to inkjet printers having such an arrangement.

10 It is also known to one skilled in the art that not all of the nozzles in a printhead are necessarily used in each printmode. For example, it is common to deactivate a few nozzles at one or both ends of the printhead in order to make the number of active nozzles integer divisible by the media advance. In such an arrangement, the method of the present invention will apply equally well by using a print mask having mask elements corresponding to the active nozzles in the
15 printhead.

A computer program product can include one or more storage medium, for example; magnetic storage media such as magnetic disk (such as a floppy disk) or magnetic tape; optical storage media such as optical disk, optical tape, or machine readable bar code; solid-state electronic storage devices such as
20 random access memory (RAM), or read-only memory (ROM); or any other physical device or media employed to store a computer program having instructions for controlling one or more computers to practice the method according to the present invention.

PARTS LIST

	10	image preprocessor
	20	swath data generator
5	30	inkjet printhead
	50	mask plane
	52	mask plane
	54	mask plane
	56	mask plane
10	60	mask element
	62	mask element
	70	mask plane
	80	mask element
	90	swath pattern
15	92	swath pattern
	94	swath pattern
	96	ink dots
	100	mask plane
	110	mask element
20	120	swath pattern
	122	swath pattern
	124	swath pattern
	126	ink dots
	130	mask plane
25	140	mask element
	150	swath pattern
	152	swath pattern
	154	swath pattern
	156	ink dots
30	158	ink dots

CLAIMS:

1. A method of computing swath data in response to a digital image having a plurality of rows and columns of pixels, each pixel having a multitone code value, the swath data suitable for commanding an inkjet printer containing at least one printhead having a plurality of nozzles, wherein the inkjet printer is capable of ejecting ink drops in response to the swath data, comprising the steps of:
- a) providing a print mask having a plurality of mask planes, each mask plane corresponding to a multitone code value and wherein each mask plane contains a plurality of mask elements, each mask element having a mask value being one of at least a first value corresponding to no ejection of an ink drop, and a second value corresponding to an ejection of an ink drop;
- b) selecting a mask plane in response to the multitone code value;
- c) selecting a mask element from the selected mask plane in response to a pixel row index and a pixel column index, and;
- d) computing a swath data value in response to the mask value of the selected mask element.
2. The method of claim 1 wherein each of the plurality of mask planes is independent from each of the other of the plurality of mask planes.
3. The method of claim 1 wherein the number of mask planes is equal to the number of possible multitone code values.
4. The method of claim 1 wherein the inkjet printer is commanded such that N drops of ink are placed at a given pixel having a corresponding multitone code value of N.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein the plurality of mask elements for each mask plane contains at least one mask element corresponding to each active nozzle in the printhead.
- 5 6. The method of claim 1 wherein each mask plane is represented as a two dimensional array indexed along a first dimension by the pixel row index, and indexed along a second dimension by a pixel column index.
7. The method of claim 6 wherein the pixel column index is
10 computed by taking the pixel column number and performing a modulo operation with an integer mask width M_w .
8. The method of claim 6 wherein the pixel row index is
15 computed by taking the pixel row number and performing a modulo operation with an integer mask height M_h .
9. The method of claim 8 wherein the integer mask height M_h is equal to the number of nozzles in the printhead.
- 20 10. The method of claim 1 wherein step d) includes setting the swath data value equal to the value of the selected mask element.
11. The method of claim 5 wherein a set of all mask elements within a mask plane that correspond to a nozzle near one of the ends of the
25 printhead has fewer occurrences of the second mask value than a set of all mask elements within the mask plane than correspond to a nozzle near the center of the printhead.
12. The method of claim 5 wherein at least a first mask plane
30 corresponding to a first multitone code value has a non-uniform duty cycle profile.

13. The method of claim 12 wherein at least a second mask plane corresponding to a second multitone code value has a substantially uniform duty cycle profile.

5 14. The method of claim 13 wherein the second multitone code value is larger than the first multitone code value.

15. A method of computing swath data in response to a digital image having a plurality of rows and columns of pixels, each pixel having a multitone code value, the swath data suitable for commanding an inkjet printer containing at least one printhead having a plurality of nozzles, wherein the inkjet printer is capable of ejecting ink drops in response to the swath data, comprising the steps of:

- a) providing a print mask containing a multidimensional array of mask elements having at least three dimensions, wherein a first dimension of the multidimensional array corresponds to a pixel row index, a second dimension corresponds to a pixel column index, and a third dimension corresponds to the multitone code value;
- b) selecting a mask element from the print mask responsive to the pixel row index, the pixel column index, and the multitone code value;
- c) computing a swath data value in response to the value of the selected mask element.

25 16. A color inkjet printer in which the method of claim 1 is used to create swath data for commanding a printhead corresponding to at least one of the ink colors.

30 17. A color inkjet printer in which the method of claim 1 is applied to at least a first ink and a second ink, and wherein at least a first mask plane of a first print mask corresponding to the first ink has a concave up duty

cycle, and at least a second mask plane of a second print mask corresponding to the second ink has a concave down duty cycle.

18. The method of claim 17 wherein at least one of the first or
5 second inks is a clear ink.

19. The method of claim 1 wherein the print mask has N mask
planes corresponding to N multitone levels, and the inkjet printer prints the digital
image using a printmode at least N-1 passes.

10

20. A method of computing swath data in response to a digital
image having a plurality of rows and columns of pixels, each pixel having a
multitone code value, the swath data suitable for commanding an inkjet printer
containing at least one printhead having a plurality of nozzles, wherein the inkjet
15 printer is capable of ejecting ink drops in response to the swath data, comprising
the steps of:

- a) providing a print mask having mask elements
corresponding to each multitone code value;
- b) selecting a mask element from the print mask in
20 response to a nozzle number, a pixel column, and the multitone code value for a
selected pixel, and;
- c) computing a swath data value for the selected pixel
in response to the value of the selected mask element.

21. A method of printing a digital image with an ink jet print
head including a plurality of nozzles, the digital image having a plurality of rows
and columns of pixels, each pixel of the digital image having a multitone code
value, the method comprising the steps of:

- a) providing a print mask having mask elements
30 corresponding to each multitone code value;

- b) selecting a mask element for each pixel from the print mask in response to a nozzle number, a pixel column, and the multitone code value of the pixel;
- c) computing a swath data value for each pixel in response to the value of the selected mask element, and;
- 5 d) printing ink drops with the print head in response to the swath data value computed for each pixel.

22. The method of claim 1 wherein:
- 10 the values of the mask elements in each of the plurality of mask planes are independent of the values of the mask elements of any others of the plurality of mask planes.

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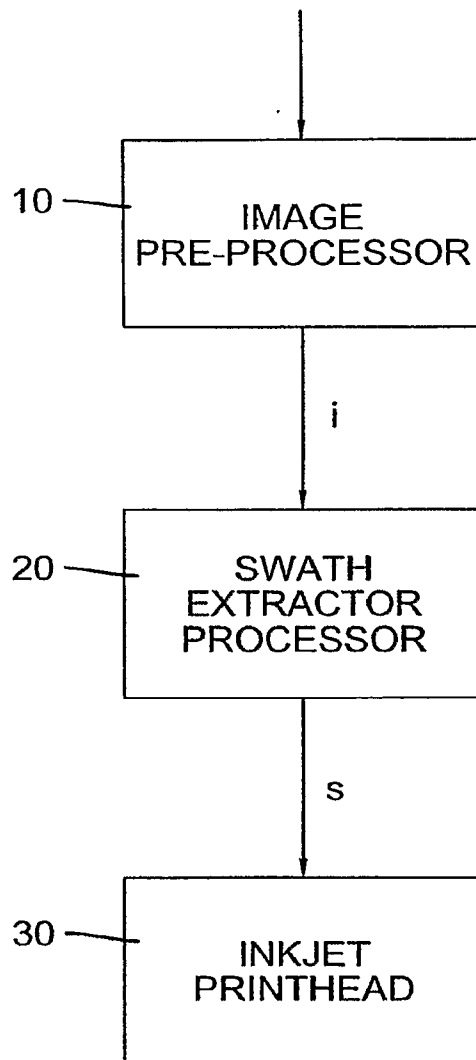


FIG. 1
(PRIOR ART)

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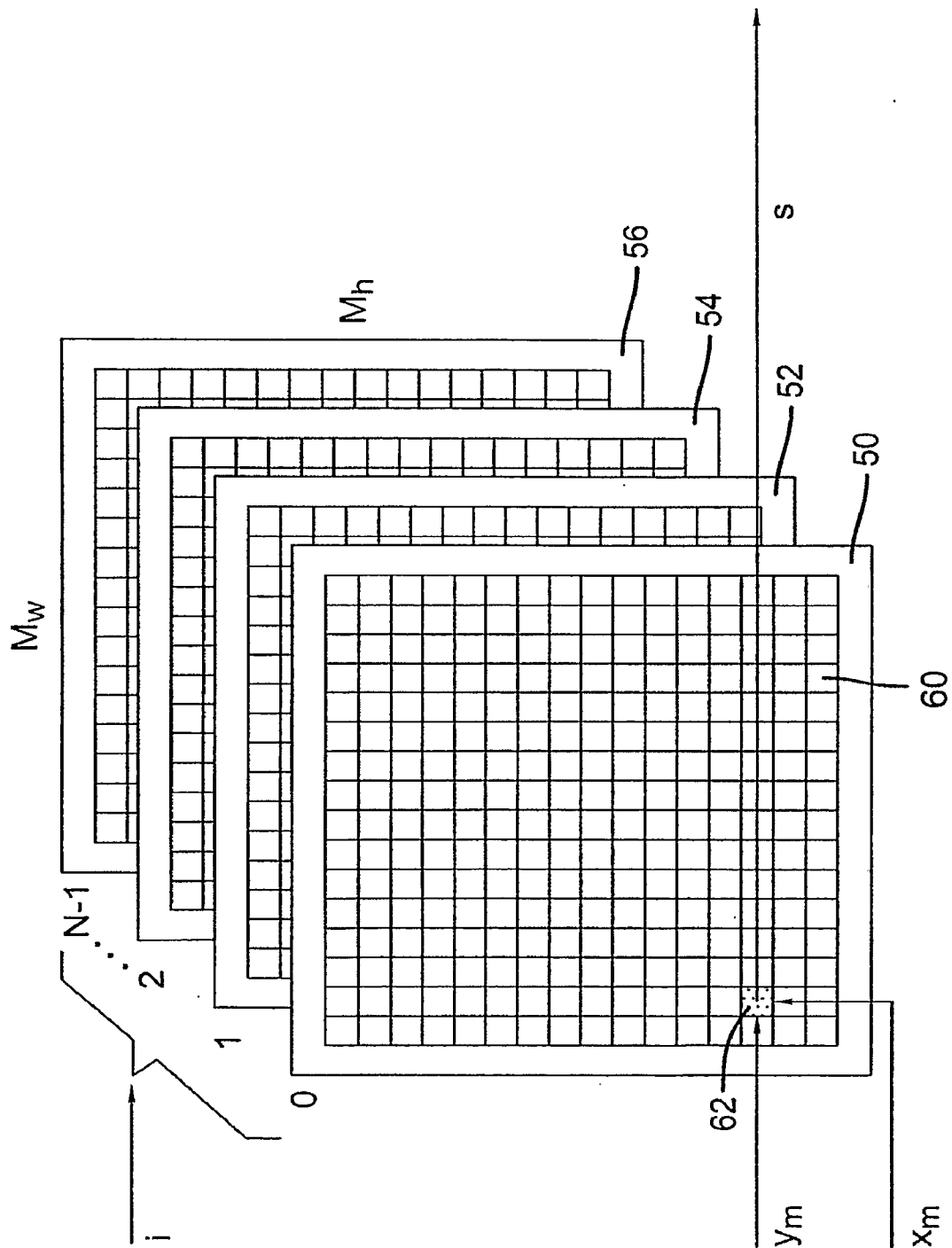


FIG. 2

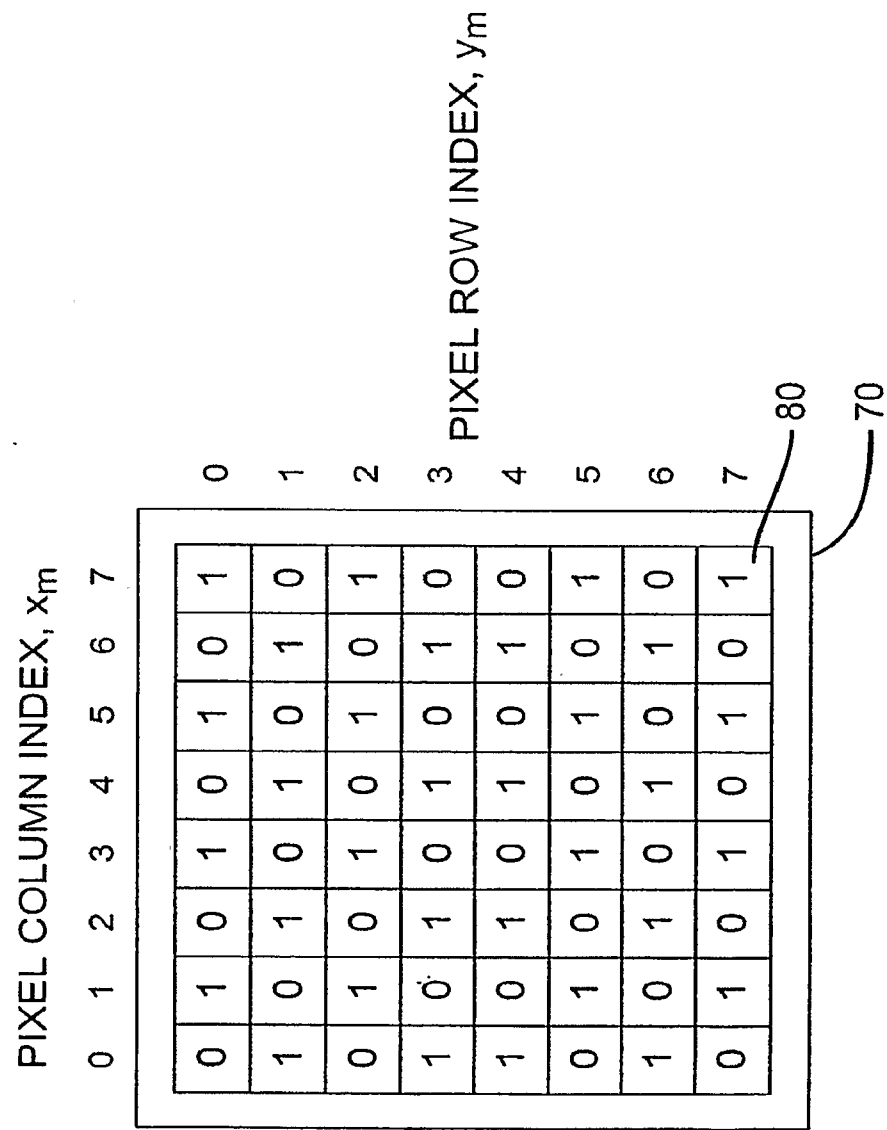


FIG. 3

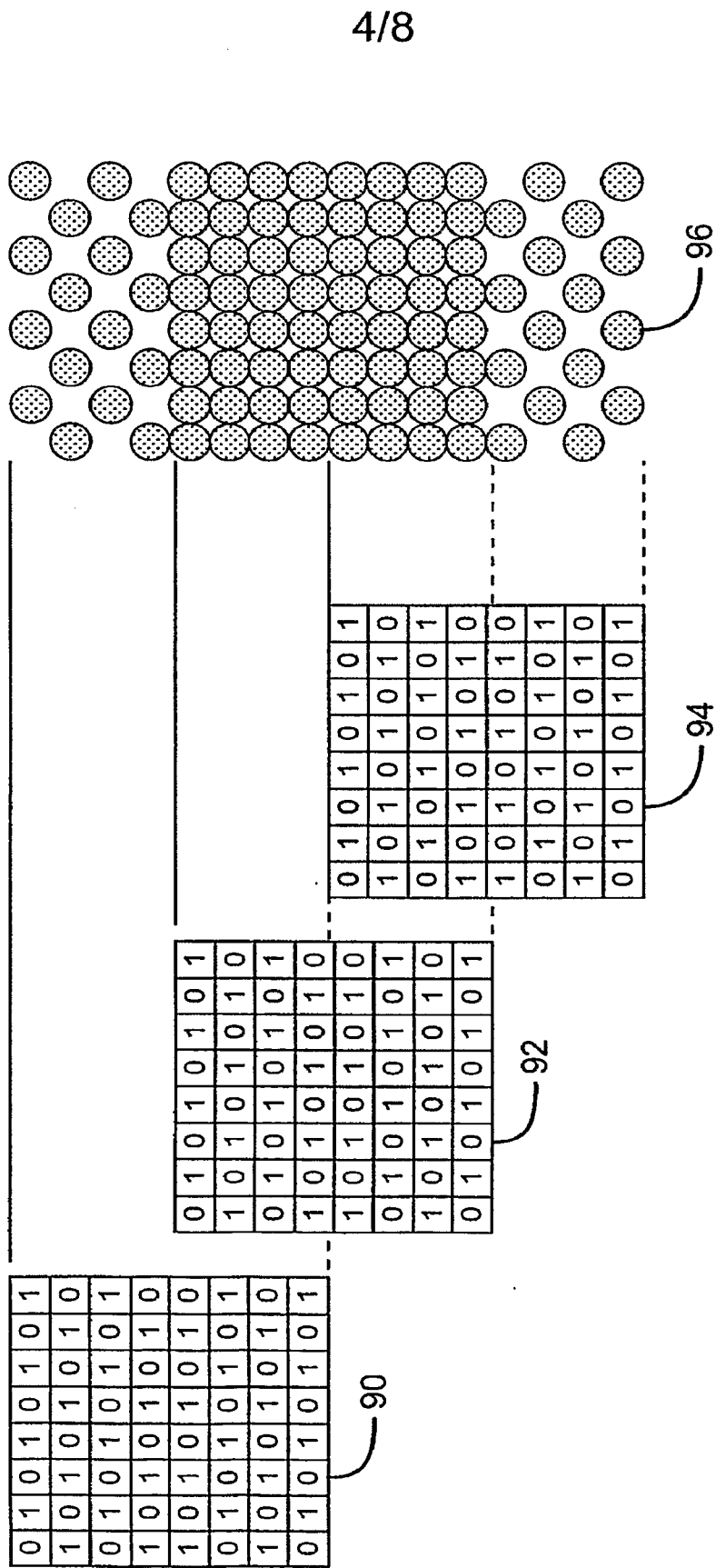


FIG. 4

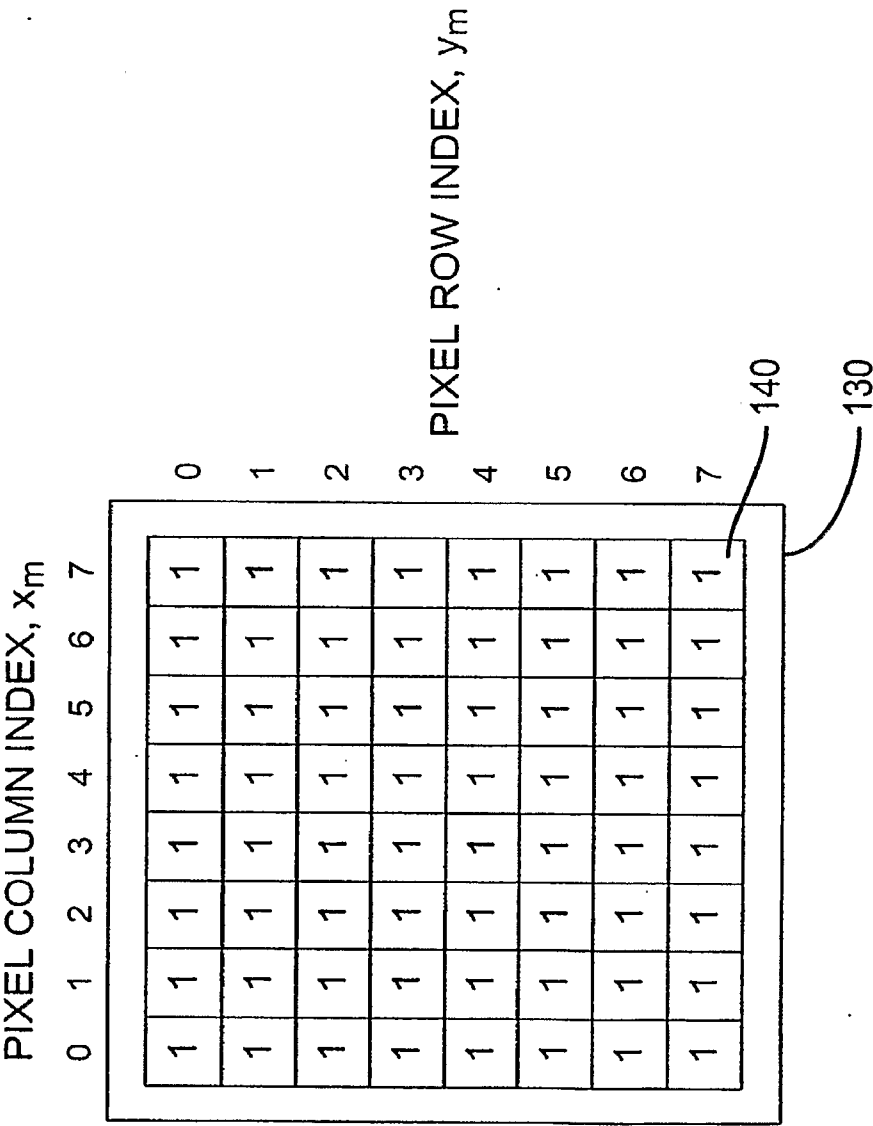


FIG. 5

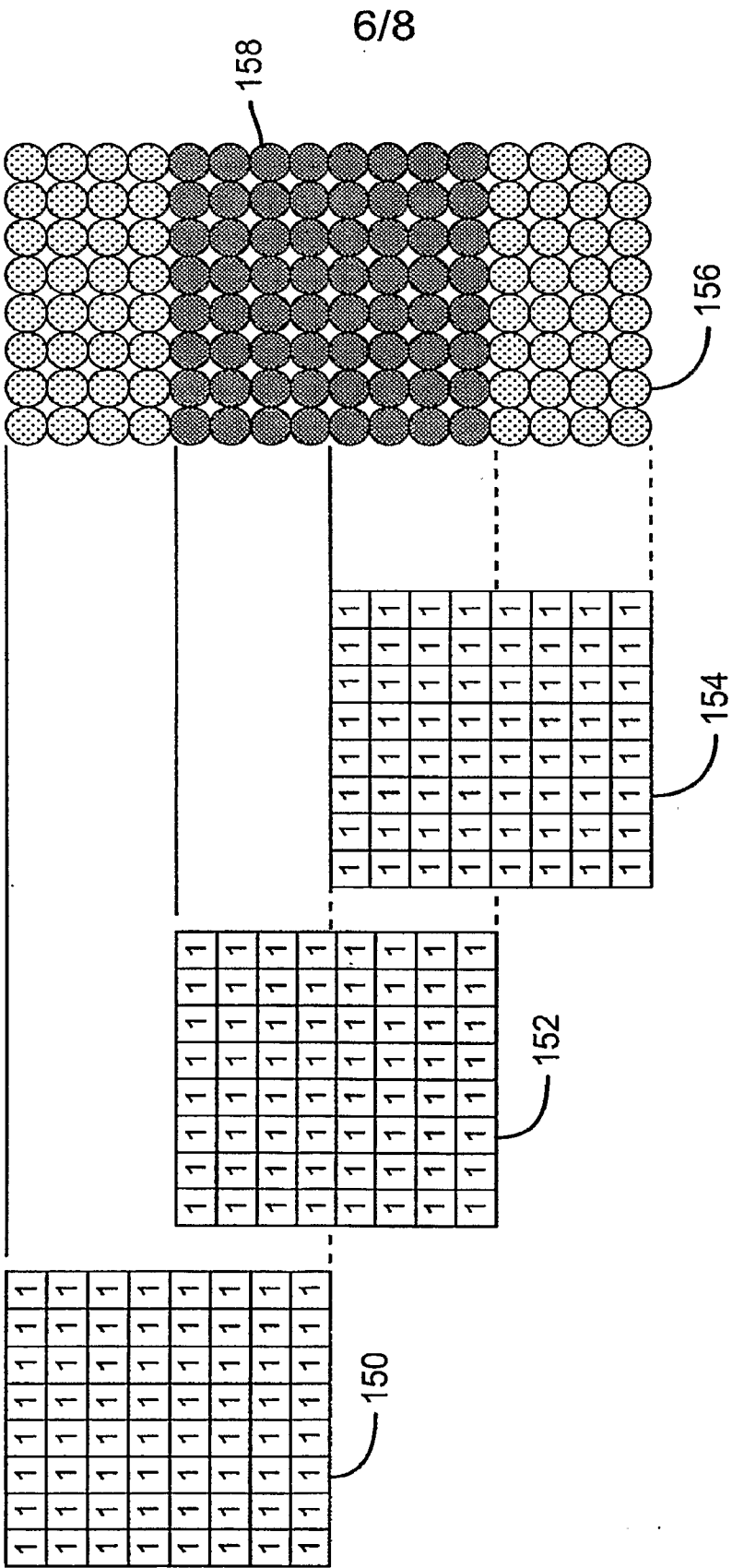


FIG. 6

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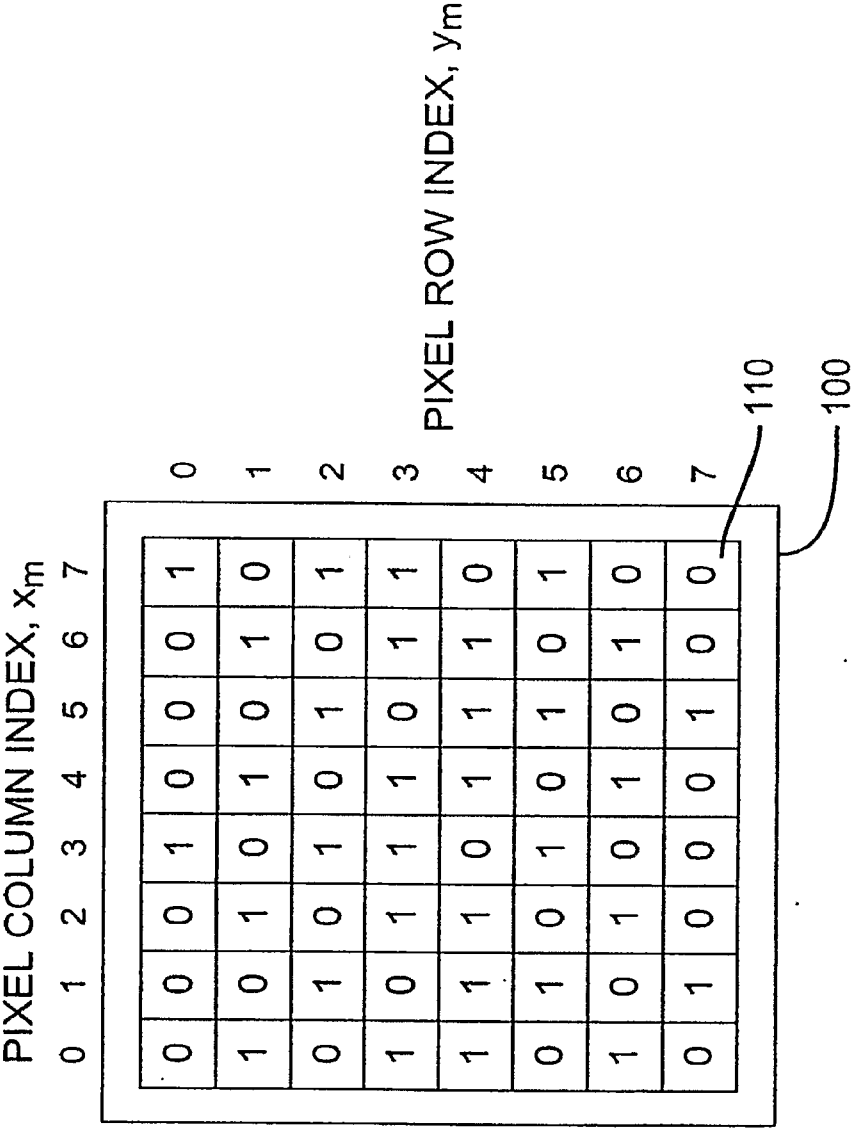


FIG. 7

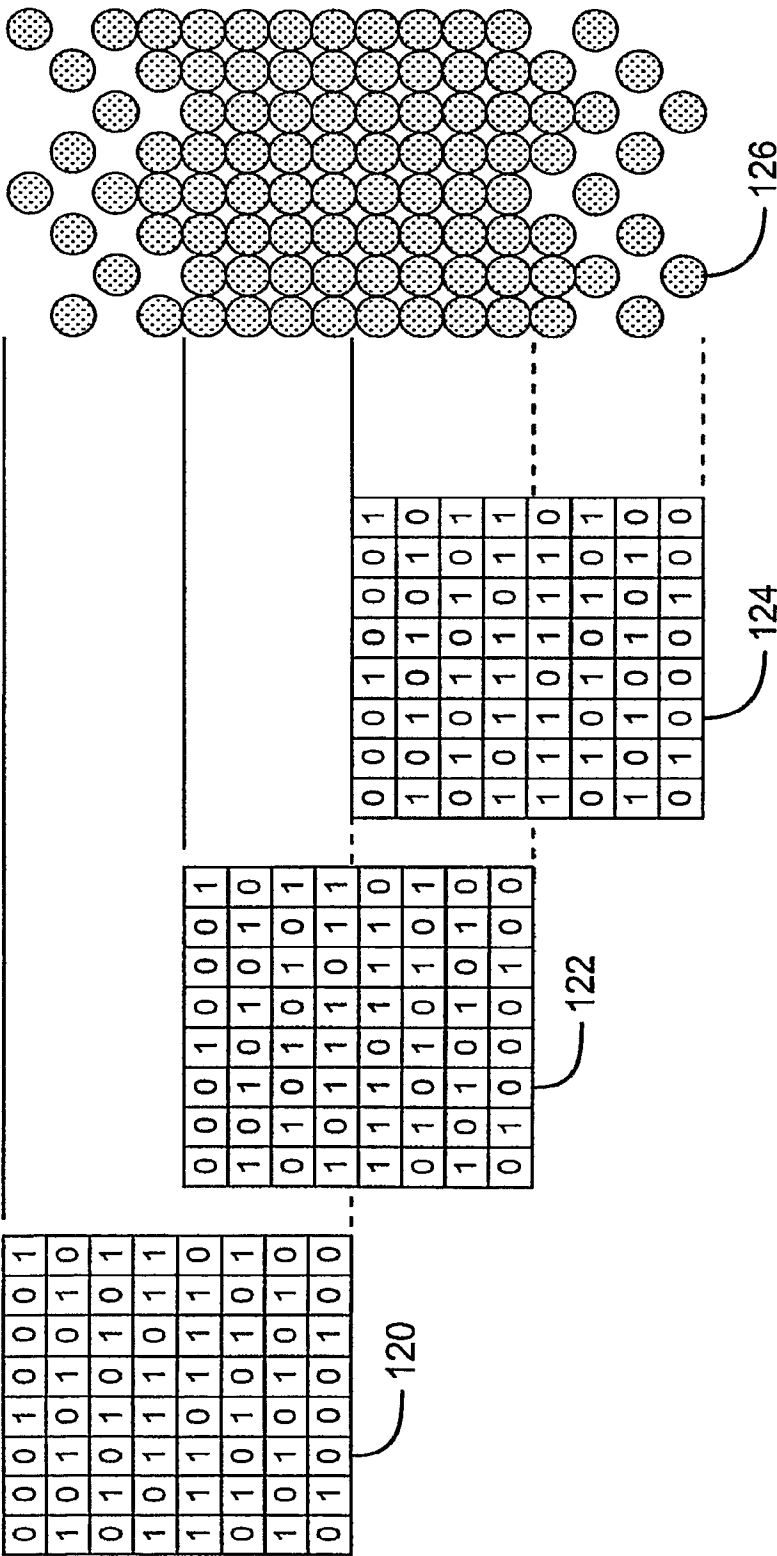


FIG. 8