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Free-Hand Scanning and Imaging

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(54) **FREE-HAND SCANNING AND IMAGING**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

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Wideband synthetic aperture radar (SAR) imaging. A probe transmits a signal through its aperture incident to an object located in a medium of interest remotely from the probe. The probe receives through the aperture a plurality of nonuniformly sampled reflected signals from the object as the probe moves in a measurement plane located a predetermined distance from the object. A processor executes a SAR-based reconstruction algorithm to generate an image.

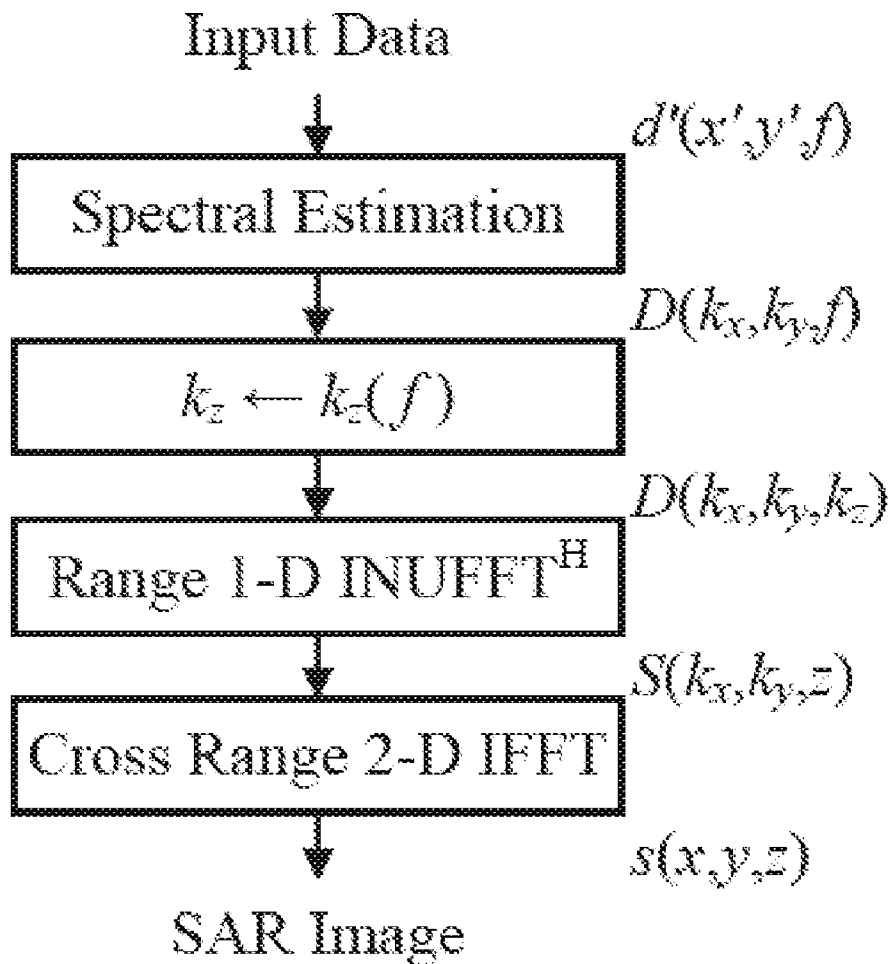


FIG. 1

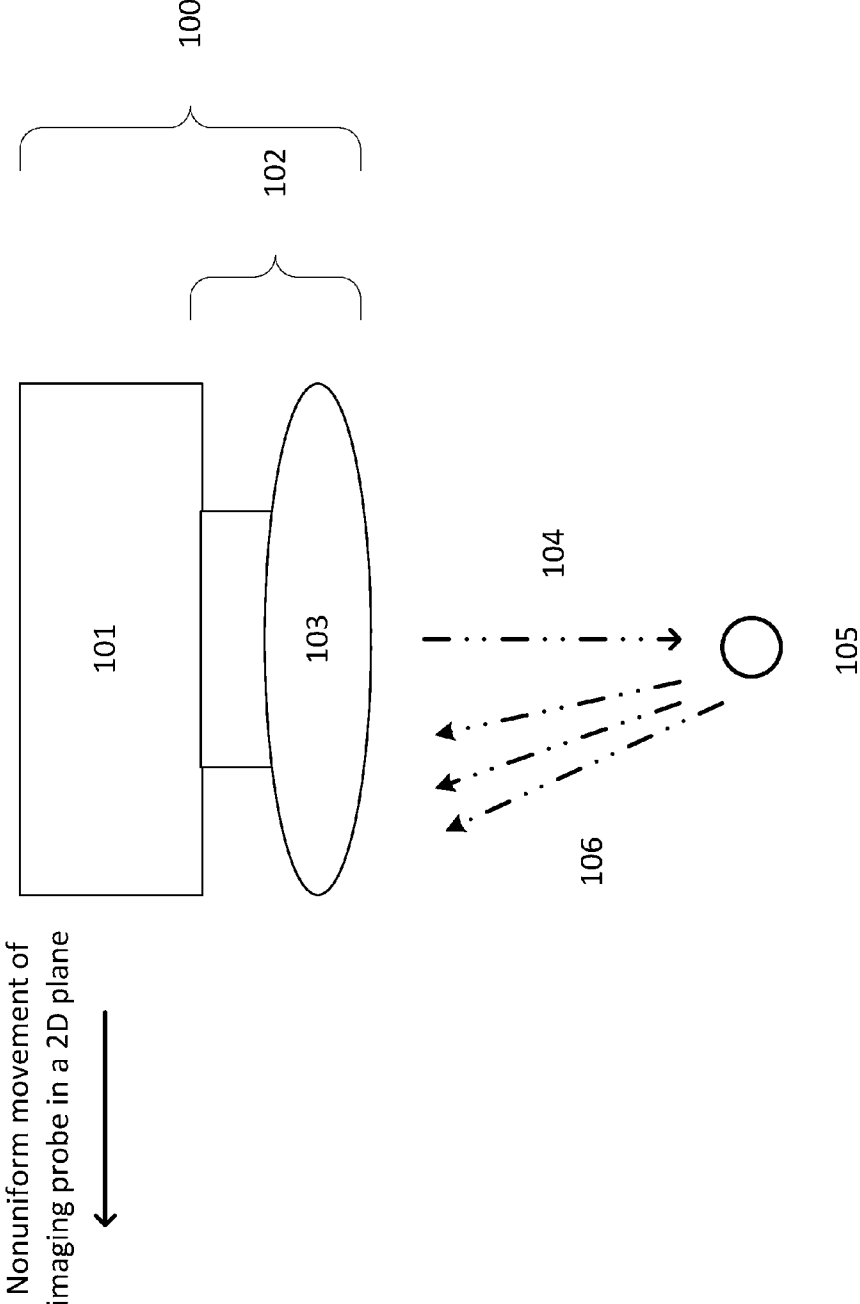


FIG. 2

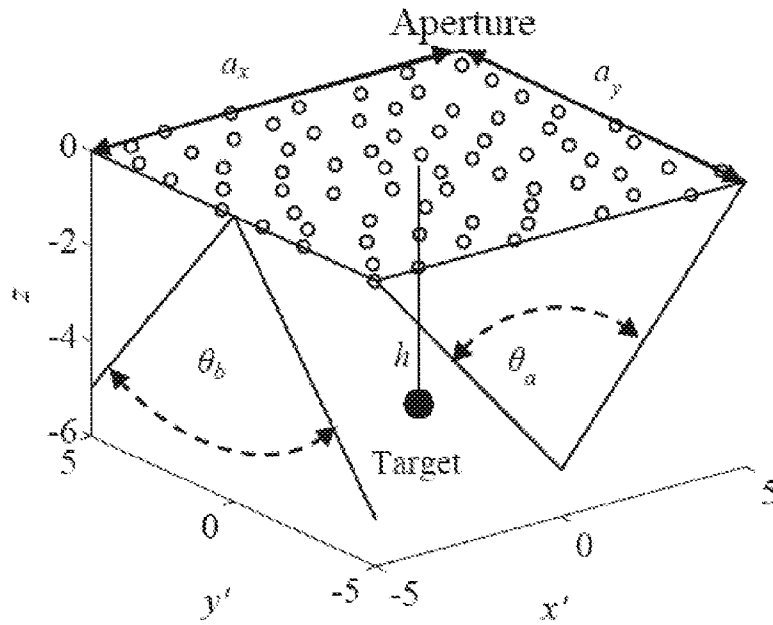


FIG. 3

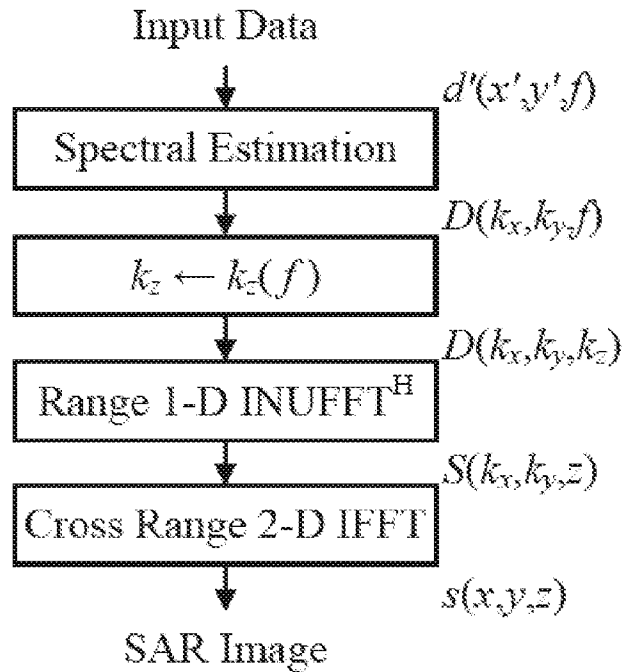


FIG. 4

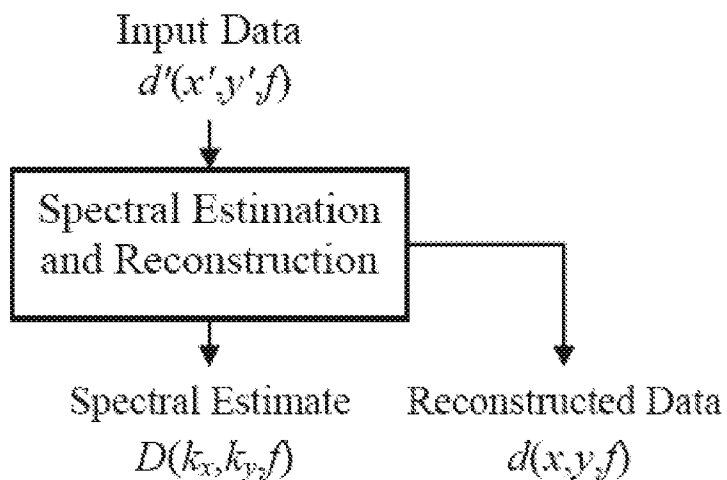


FIG. 5

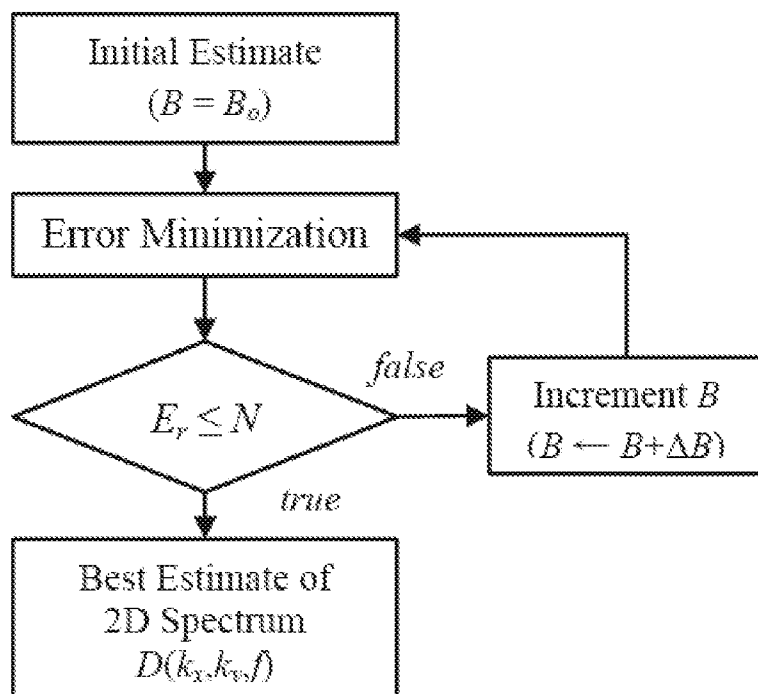


FIG. 6

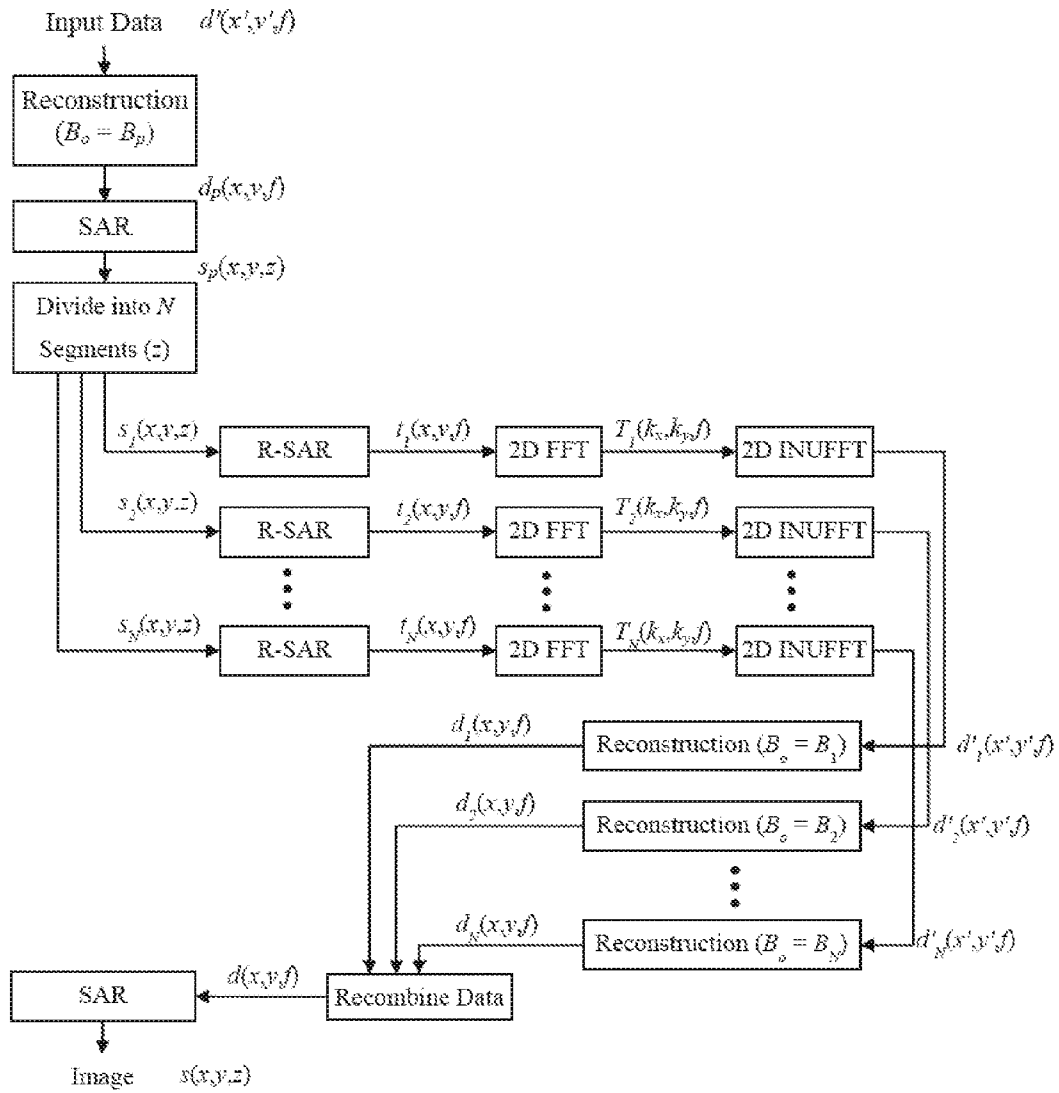


FIG. 7

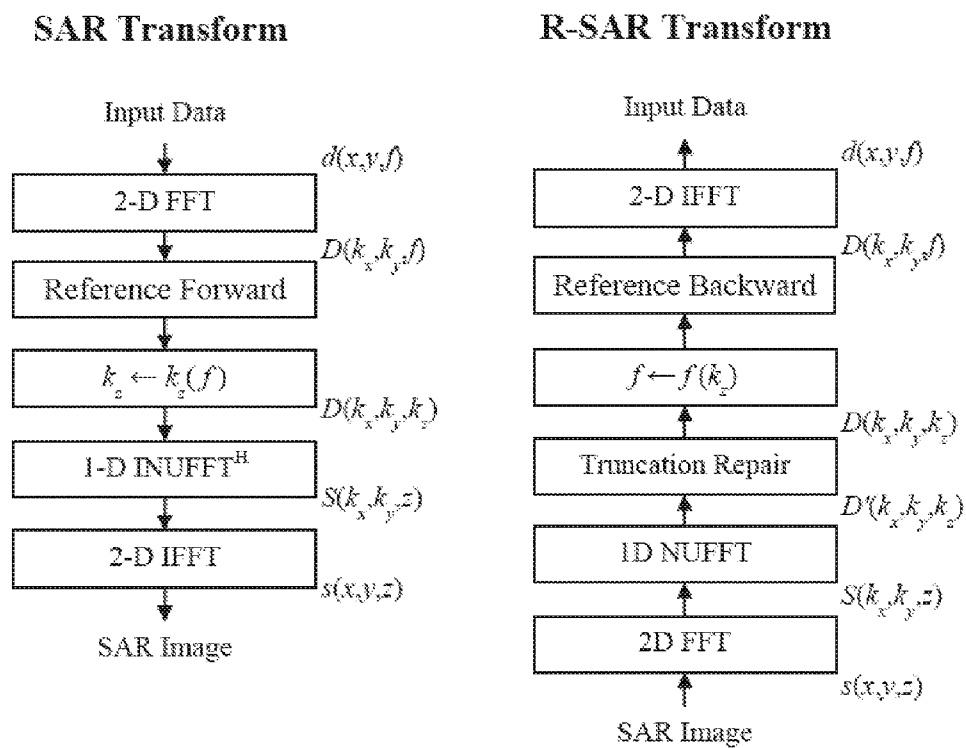


FIG. 8

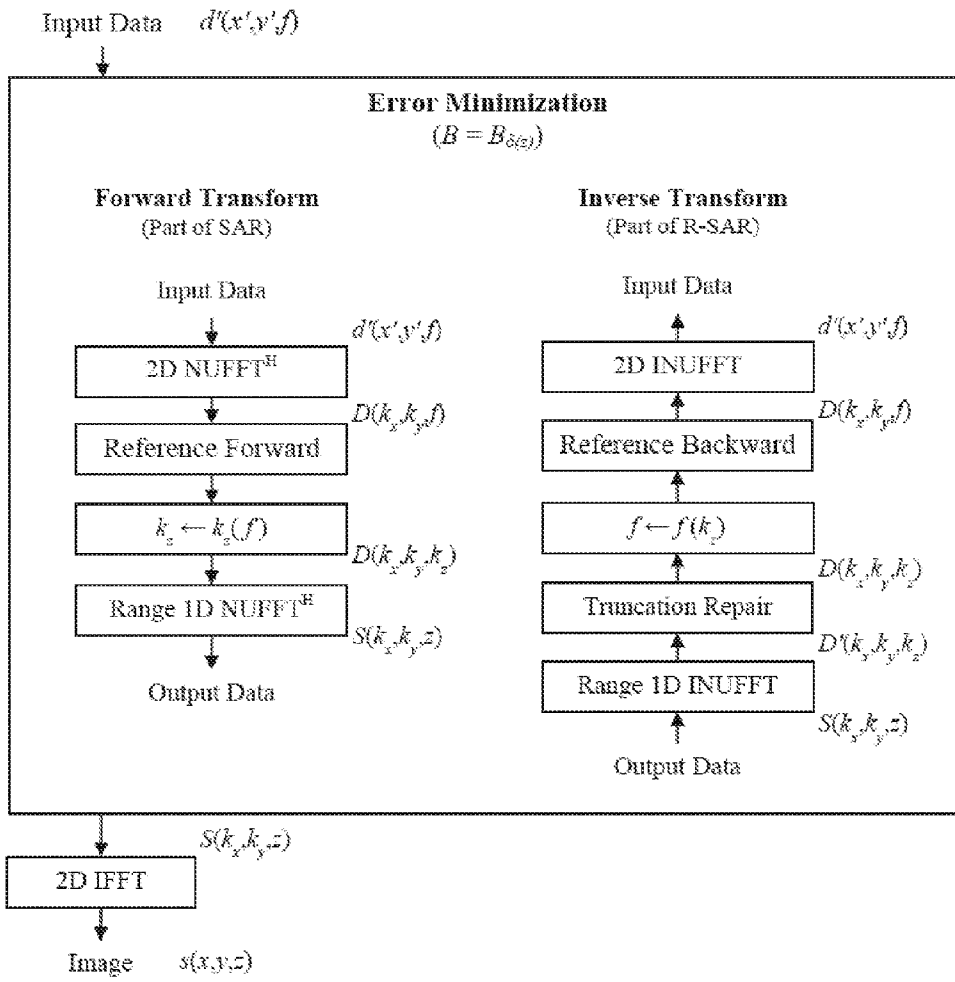


FIG. 9

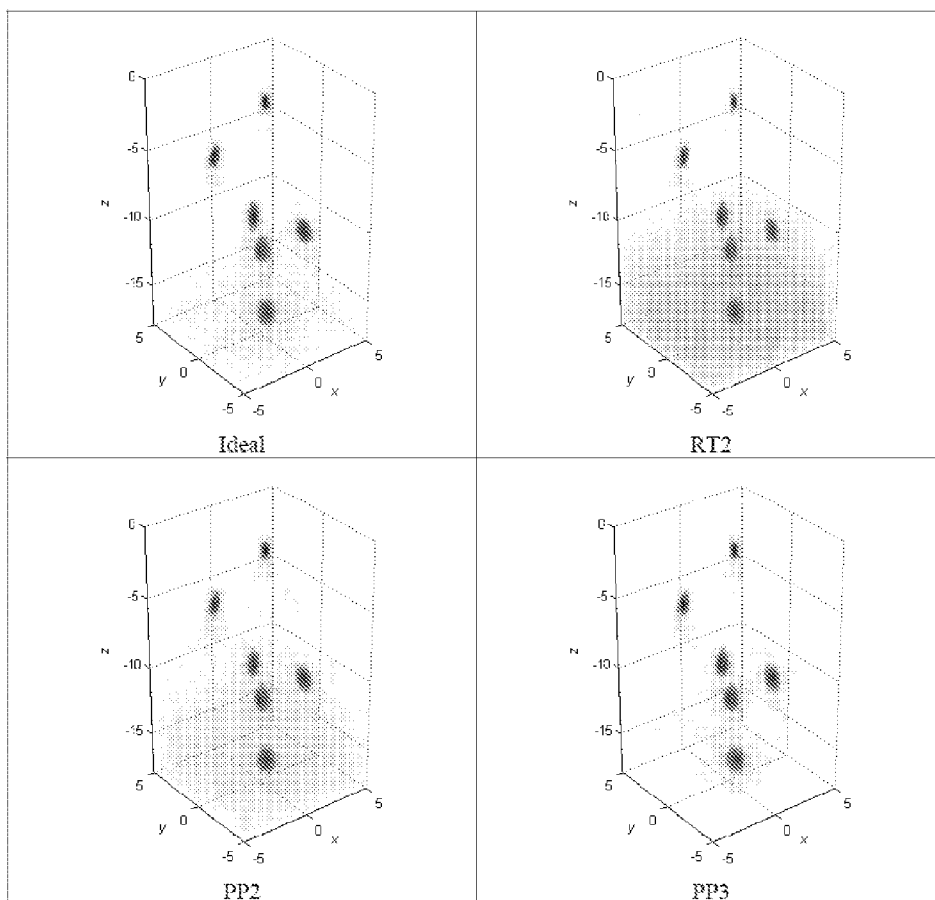


FIG. 10

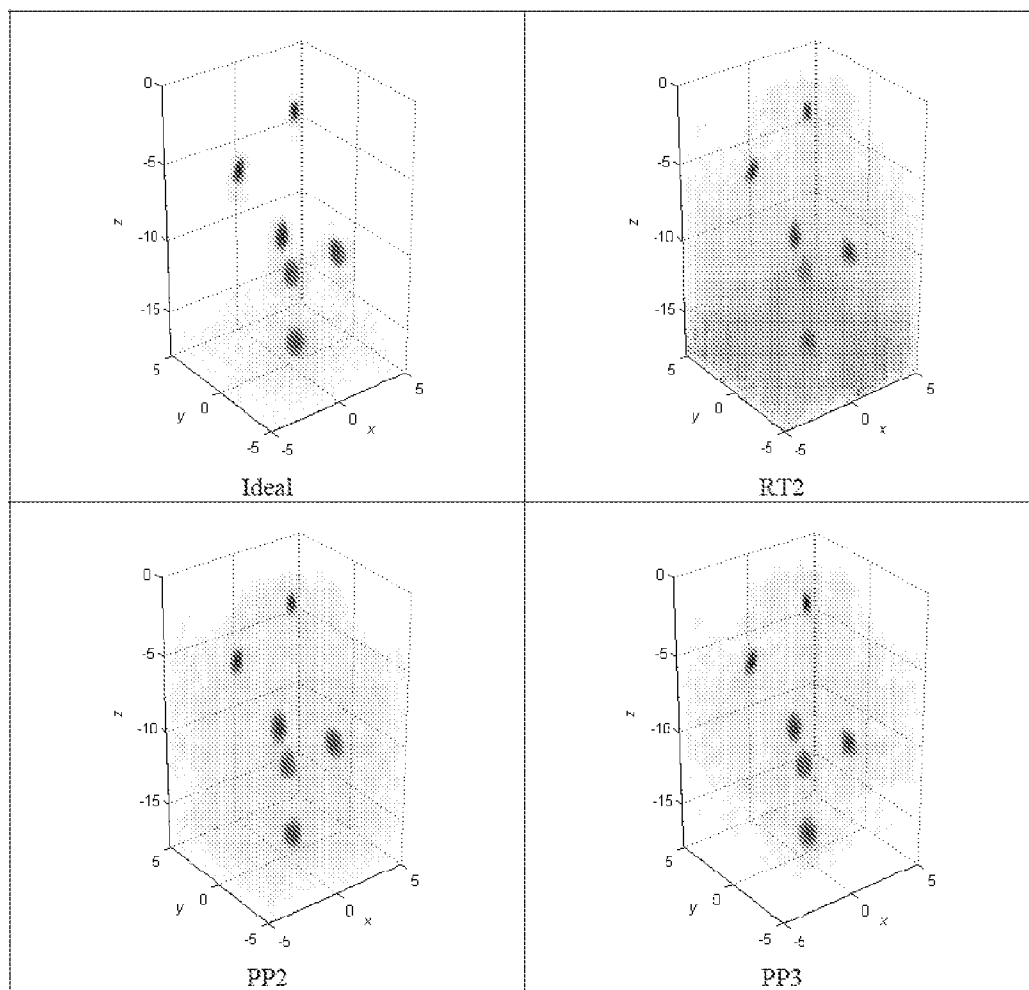
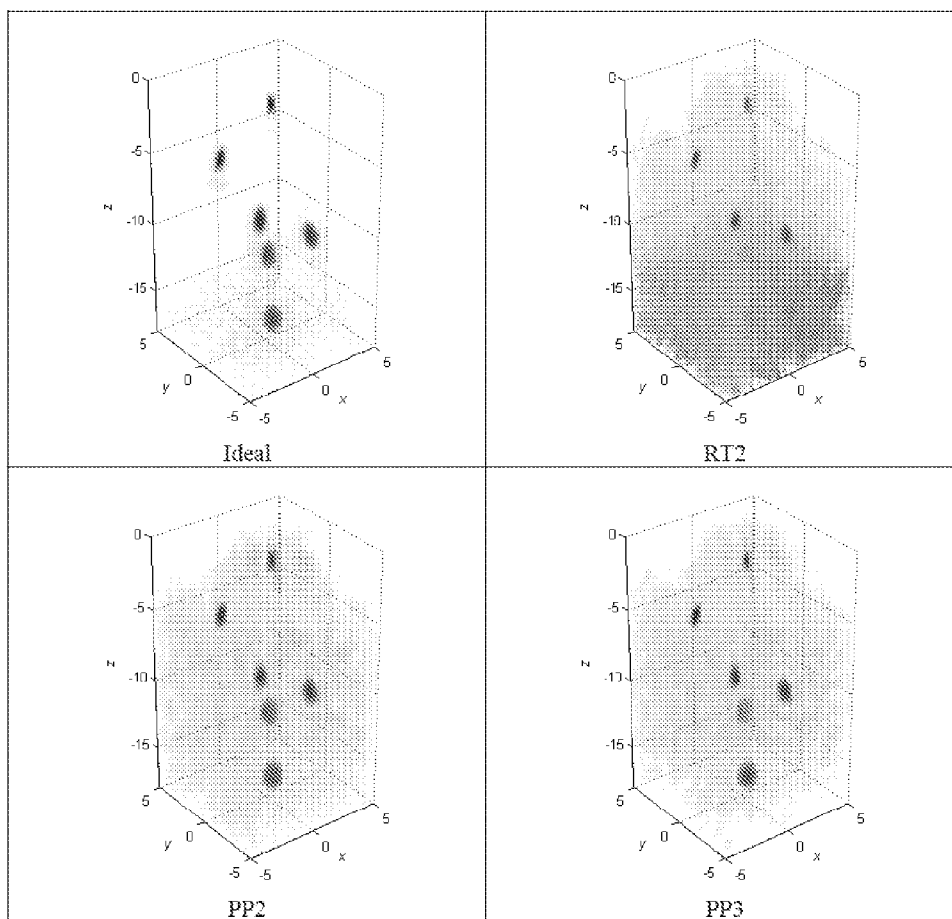


FIG. 11



FREE-HAND SCANNING AND IMAGING

BACKGROUND

[0001] Microwave and millimeter wave wide-band three-dimensional (3-D) synthetic aperture radar (SAR)-based imaging techniques have demonstrated tremendous usefulness for nondestructive evaluation (NDE) applications for industrial, scientific, and medical imaging. For example, such techniques are particularly useful for 3-D imaging of low contrast dielectric media and in security applications. Typically, measurements are performed by raster scanning a probe on a uniform 2-D grid. To achieve optimum resolution and image quality, however, a large quantity of measurements must be obtained to image even a small area. Unfortunately, conventional scanning techniques require a relatively long time to scan and obtain an image. For example, the time needed to perform the measurements typically ranges from tens of minutes to several hours depending on the size of structure being imaged and the operating frequency. As a result, nondestructive testing of large and critical structures (e.g., aircraft, bridges, space vehicles and the like) cannot utilize real-time imaging.

[0002] A method to form SAR images as quickly as possible is desired.

SUMMARY

[0003] Briefly, aspects of the invention permit SAR images to be quickly generated while maintaining an acceptable level of resolution. One such way to achieve this is to manually nonuniformly sample wide-band reflection measurement data over the sample under test while simultaneously producing a SAR image from the data as it is gathered. This enables the production of complete SAR images using only a fraction of the required measured data because the user may intelligently stop the measurement once an image is deemed satisfactory. By reducing the amount of measured data, there is a commensurate time savings achieved in data acquisition. To assist the user during the data acquisition process, a fast 3D wide-band SAR algorithm that produces 3D SAR images in real-time is needed to inform the user in real-time as to the progress of the scan. Furthermore, a reconstruction algorithm used to post-process the data for the objective of optimization resulting in high quality images with, for example, considerably lower background noise/clutter is needed.

[0004] In an aspect, a wideband synthetic aperture radar (SAR) imaging system includes a probe that has an aperture through which a signal, such as an electromagnetic signal, is transmitted incident to an object located in a medium of interest remotely from the probe. Also, the probe receives through the aperture a plurality of nonuniformly sampled reflected signals from the object as the probe moves in a measurement plane located a predetermined distance from the object. The system also includes a memory and a processor. The memory stores measurement data representative of the reflected signals collected by the probe and the processor executes a plurality of computer-executable instructions for a SAR-based reconstruction algorithm. The instructions include instructions for performing a spectral estimation based on the measurement data, instructions for transforming a frequency component of the spectral estimation as a function of the medium of interest, and instructions for obtaining a three-dimensional SAR image from the transformed spectral estimation data using Fourier transforms. The system further includes a display responsive to the processor for presenting the three-dimensional SAR image to a user.

[0005] A method embodying aspects of the invention generates a three dimensional image of a specimen under test (SUT). The method includes transmitting, via a probe, a signal within a predetermined operating bandwidth and tracking nonuniform two-dimensional movement of the probe within a measurement plane remote from the SUT. In addition, the method includes receiving, via the probe, signals reflected from the SUT during the movement of the probe and storing reflection coefficient data based on the reflected signals as distributed measurement positions within the measurement plane by recording the signals at discrete frequencies throughout the operating bandwidth. In a further step, the method includes processing the stored data into a wide band, three dimensional (3-D) synthetic aperture image by implementing a 3-D SAR algorithm. The method also includes displaying the 3-D SAR image to a user in real-time; further processing the 3-D SAR image to perform an objective optimization and further displaying the 3-D SAR image having reduced errors to the user.

[0006] In another aspect, a wideband synthetic aperture radar (SAR) imaging system comprises a signal source, a transceiver antenna coupled to the signal source, a memory, a processor, and a display. The signal source generates a signal with a predetermined operating bandwidth that is transmitted through an aperture of the antenna. The transmitted signal is incident to an object located in a medium and the antenna receives a plurality of nonuniformly sampled reflected signals from the object through the aperture as the antenna moves nonuniformly in a plane located a predetermined distance from the object. The memory stores signal data comprising nonuniformly sampled reflected signals collected at the aperture and the processor executes a plurality of computer-executable instructions for a real-time, post-processing, reconstruction algorithm. The instructions include estimating a two-dimensional spatial spectrum based on the signal data to provide a uniformly sampled spectrum, estimating the uniformly sampled spectrum to remove or minimize image artifacts, reconstructing uniformly sampled data from nonuniformly sampled data to remove or minimize image artifacts, forming a SAR image of the object from the estimated uniform spectrum, dividing the reconstructed SAR image into a plurality of segments, applying a R-SAR transform to each of the segments, and filtering and reconstructing the data for each segment and summing each filtered segment. The display presents the three-dimensional SAR image in real-time to a user.

[0007] This Summary is provided to introduce a selection of concepts in a simplified form that are further described below in the Detailed Description. This Summary is not intended to identify key features or essential features of the claimed subject matter, nor is it intended to be used as an aid in determining the scope of the claimed subject matter.

[0008] Other features will be in part apparent and in part pointed out hereinafter.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0009] For a better understanding of the aforementioned aspects of the invention as well as additional aspects and embodiments thereof, reference should be made to the Detailed Description below, in conjunction with the following drawings in which like reference numerals refer to corresponding parts throughout the figures.

[0010] FIG. 1 is a diagram illustrating an exemplary depiction in accordance with one embodiment of the invention.

[0011] FIG. 2 is a diagram depicting the implementation of a nonuniform scanning system in accordance with one embodiment of the invention.

[0012] FIG. 3 is a block diagram illustrating the operation of an exemplary synthetic aperture radar (SAR) algorithm in accordance with one embodiment of the invention.

[0013] FIG. 4 is a block diagram illustrating the essential requirements of an acceptable spectral estimation method in accordance with one embodiment of the invention.

[0014] FIG. 5 is a block diagram illustrating the error-minimization method used in accordance with one embodiment of the invention.

[0015] FIG. 6 is a block diagram depicting an offline non-uniform signal reconstruction method used in accordance with one embodiment of the invention.

[0016] FIG. 7 depicts block diagrams of synthetic aperture radar algorithms used in another error minimization process of an offline nonuniform signal reconstruction method in accordance with one embodiment of the invention.

[0017] FIG. 8 depicts block diagrams of synthetic aperture radar algorithms used in the error minimization process of an offline nonuniform signal reconstruction method in accordance with one embodiment of the invention.

[0018] FIG. 9 depicts the results of several synthetic aperture radar reconstruction methods, at an average given distance between antennas of $0.3*\lambda$.

[0019] FIG. 10 depicts the results of several synthetic aperture radar reconstruction methods, at an average given distance between antennas of $0.5*\lambda$.

[0020] FIG. 11 depicts the results of several synthetic aperture radar reconstruction methods, at an average given distance between antennas of $0.7*\lambda$.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0021] In general, in one embodiment, a unique system for imaging a scene of interest (e.g., an object) is described. To best reconstruct a complex signal from all targets within a scene of interest (e.g., an object) from nonuniform measurement samples occurs in two parts. In a first part of the imaging process, a two-dimensional (2-D) positioning system is utilized to monitor the movements of an imaging probe as the imaging probe performs a scan in a plane. A processor tracks the position of a probe as the probe scans and collects data. The scanning process is performed free-hand by a user (who is holding and using the imaging probe) and utilizes user feed-back from the real-time SAR image formation as to whether to continue or terminate the scanning process.

[0022] A second part of the imaging process includes post-processing where the collected randomly positioned measurements are processed to reconstruct the 3-D SAR image with optimum resolution and signal-to-noise ratio (SNR). For example, PP2 forms an intermediate 3-D SAR image and then the SAR image is segmented (i.e., the data is transformed temporarily from the data domain to the image domain). These segments are then individually transformed from the image domain to the measurement domain, where each image segment is represented as partial data. This transform is performed using the unique 3-D Reverse-SAR (R-SAR) transform. The partial data are individually and optimally reconstructed according to their own spatial bandwidth of the partial data using an optimization process, such as an error

minimization process (e.g., minimizing residual error). The multi-band partial data segments are subsequently recombined and processed using a 3-D SAR processor to produce the final SAR image.

[0023] FIG. 1 illustrates a general depiction of an embodiment of the invention. The imaging probe 100 comprises a signal source 101 and an antenna 102 for sending and/or receiving electromagnetic waves. In the illustrated embodiment, the antenna 102 is a transceiver antenna having an aperture 103. The signal source 101 contains a processor which executes the various data collection and data processing steps necessary for operation of the invention, as well as a display which shows a 3-D SAR image to a user. The imaging probe 100 transmits a signal with a wavelength 104 between 1 mm and 1 μ m, which reaches an object in the scene of interest 105. As the imaging probe moves in a nonuniform manner in a two-dimensional plane, the reflected signals 106 are nonuniformly sampled by the transceiver antenna 102.

[0024] Table 1 provides a description for the different SAR processors that are discussed throughout this document. For example, the RT1 processor provides a means to simplify real-time data management by including a spectral estimation step consisting of a fast Fourier transform (FFT) on data which is digitally stored corresponding to the nearest uniform grid point. Alternatively, the RT2 processor performs a FFT on the raw sample points, without assigning the points to a uniform grid. Both processors only take a fraction of a second to produce and render an SAR image, enabling quick inspection of a specimen under test (SUT).

[0025] Improved spectral estimation techniques require further processing time, but reduce undesirable aspects of SAR images inherent in processors such as RT1 and RT2, such as uneven brightness and image artifacts. The PP1 processor reduces these undesirable aspects by generating a spectral estimation which decreases the residual error between the original data and the inverse 2D nonuniform fast Fourier transform (NUFFT) of the estimate of the spectrum. Because of this step, this processor is suitable for rendering a SAR image of higher quality than the RT1 and RT2 processors.

[0026] A final method of spectral estimation, exemplified in processors PP2 and PP3, is suitable for providing vastly improved SAR images in situations where the objects sought to be scanned within the SUT lie at different distances from the measurement plane. PP2 renders an improved image by obtaining an intermediate SAR image, then comparing that image with the final processed result to reduce error. PP3, on the other hand, is suitable for producing the most improved SAR images. By comparing a component of the forward SAR algorithm with a component of the reverse SAR algorithm during spectral estimation, and designating each sample of the spectrum its own bandwidth, this processor not only produces the most desirable SAR images when multiple objects lie at different distances from the measurement plane, but also performs this task with less computational complexity than previously known.

TABLE 1

Abbrev.	SAR Processor Name	Description
RT1	Real-time processor using FFT to form spectrum	Nonuniformly sampled points are assigned coordinates aligned to a grid
RT2	Real-time processor using NFFT to form spectrum	Nonuniform sampled points are used without alignment

TABLE 1-continued

Abbrev.	SAR Processor Name	Description
PP1	Single Spatial Bandwidth Spectral Estimation	Spectral estimation/data reconstruction is performed using a single spatial bandwidth
PP2	Coarsely Segmented Multiple Spatial Bandwidth Spectral Estimation	Spectral estimation/data reconstruction is performed using a spatial bandwidth for each segment of a preliminary image
PP3	Fine Segmented Multiple Spatial Bandwidth Spectral Estimation	Spectral estimation/data reconstruction is performed using a spatial bandwidth unique for every depth in the image. A Fourier-based transform based upon SAR and R-SAR is used in the spectral estimation process.

[0027] FIG. 2 illustrates a schematic of a measurement setup for microwave or millimeter wave imaging according to an embodiment of the invention. It is to be understood that aspects of the invention may be applied to signals of other modalities, such as ultrasonic waves or acoustic energy. Measurements are performed at N_{xy} nonuniform positions **P 200** selected on the scanning area **205**, which are represented by multiple small circles on a rectangular region bounded by dimensions a_x and a_y , at a distance h **210** above a target **215**. This area may also hereafter be referred to as an aperture. Individual positions in the matrix **P 200** consist of rows $p_n = (x'_n, y'_n, 0) | n=1 \dots N_{xy}$. Measurements consist of recording the complex microwave reflection coefficient (or scattered electric field distribution) as measured by a transceiver antenna pointed downwards (not shown) with a certain beamwidth **220** (σ_b) at stepped (e.g., discrete) frequencies (f) in the operating bandwidth. Given the location of the target **215**, the angle subtending the aperture σ_a is **225**. Measurements may be conducted by scanning a single transceiver (e.g., open-ended waveguide probe) on a path through positions **P 200** corresponding to the shortest path or the measurements may be collected manually from user movements. However, measurements may also be performed by an imaging array that consists of N_{xy} small transceiving antennas located at **P 200**. Typically this would be considered a real aperture, whereas scattered electric field measurements obtained using a single scanning transceiver is typically considered a synthetic aperture. Volumetric (e.g., wide-band) SAR images are then produced from the scattered electric field measurements. The SAR images are uniformly and highly sampled compared to typical SAR applications. The microwave SAR-based NDE imaging system is unique because the aperture is relatively small, the targets can be relatively close to the aperture, and the positions **P 200** are precisely known.

[0028] FIG. 3 illustrates the 3-D SAR algorithm that uses the ω - k algorithm, which is known in the art, with a one dimensional (1-D) nonuniform Fast Fourier Transform (FFT). The 3-D SAR algorithm first transforms the spatial data sampled over the aperture, $d'(x', y', f)$ **300**, to its spectral decomposition, $D(k_x, k_y, f)$ **305**. This corresponds to the block labeled "Spectral Estimation" **310**. Many algorithms exist that may be used to reconstruct the measured signal from nonuniform samples; thereby, providing different spectral estimates. Therefore in other embodiments, other algorithms can be used to provide a uniformly sampled spectrum from nonuniform spatial samples, (i.e., k_x and k_y are uniformly sampled and dependent upon uniform image sample spacing Δx and Δy , respectively). Thus, the spectrum is bounded by the high uniform sampling density of the image (i.e., $|k_x| \leq \pi/\Delta x$ and $|k_y| \leq \pi/\Delta y$ for $\Delta x = \Delta y \ll \lambda$).

[0029] After spectral estimation **310**, the next step involves determining the wavenumber (k_z), which is related to a frequency, f , by the following dispersion relation abbreviated as $k_z \leftarrow k_z(f)$ **315**:

$$k_z = \sqrt{\left(\frac{2\alpha\pi f}{v}\right)^2 - k_x^2 - k_y^2} \quad (1)$$

where v is the speed of light in the medium. The term α is equal to a value of one for bistatic measurements, and term α is equal to a value of two for monostatic (reflection) measurements. This results in the nonuniform sampling of the image spectrum, $D(k_x, k_y, k_z)$ **320**, along k_z .

[0030] Finally, a 1-D inverse Fourier transform over range (z) **325** is performed, resulting in the partially processed image $S(k_x, k_y, z)$ **330**. Next, a 2-D inverse fast Fourier transform (FFT) over the spatial/cross-range coordinates (x, y) **335** results in a high-resolution volumetric image, $s(x, y, z)$ **340**. To be able to use the FFT along the range and consequently speed up SAR image formation, typical implementations use Stolt interpolation (i.e., linear, spline, and the like) to generate a uniform sampling of the spectrum along the range prior to the 1-D inverse Fast Fourier transform **325**. However, in an embodiment, the Stolt interpolation may be replaced by the nonuniform FFT (NUFFT) to provide a faster and more accurate SAR image **345**. More specifically, the 1-D inverse adjoint NUFFT (INUFFT^H) is used such that: (^H) represents the adjoint. Thus, the 1-D INUFFT^H transforms nonuniform frequency to uniform spatial samples.

[0031] The spatial resolution (δ_x) of the final SAR image is highly dependent upon the imaging system. Particularly, the SAR image is dependent upon aperture size (a), the beamwidth (σ_b), the distance from the target to the aperture (h), and the sampling of the scattered field.

[0032] FIG. 4 illustrates that any spectral estimation (e.g., signal reconstruction) method used **400** should spatially reconstruct the data **405** on a highly sampled uniform grid (x, y) for every frequency (f) **410** and simultaneously provide a high-density spectral estimation **415**. The uniform sampling density of the reconstructed data is the same as the final SAR image (i.e., $\Delta x = \Delta y \ll \lambda$). Two methods will be described below. The first method (RT2) is useful for real-time image formation, which is faster than the second method (PP1). In contrast, the second method (PP1) is useful for off-line processing and has an increased accuracy over the first method (RT2).

[0033] For example, the first method (RT2) is a Fourier integration, which is a fast rudimentary (e.g., direct) spectral

estimation technique and not a reconstruction technique. Each sample may optionally be weighted according to the partial area of the sample on the aperture. The partial area corresponding to every sample may be found from the polygons of a Voronoi diagram. Polygons exceeding the aperture are cropped precisely to the aperture. The data (d') is sampled discretely and nonuniformly at N_{xy} points weighted by this partial area, a_n , when performing the nonuniform discrete Fourier transform (NDFT). In summation form the equation may be expressed as:

$$D(k_x, k_y, f) = \sum_{n=1}^{N_{xy}} d'(x'_n, y'_n, f) a_n e^{-j(k_x x'_n + k_y y'_n)} \quad (2)$$

This summation operation may be performed rapidly and accurately by using the computationally efficient 2-D NUFFT^{Hz} to transform nonuniform spatial samples to a uniformly sampled spatial spectrum. The algorithm is faster without computing the partial weights. For this reason, this method may be desired for real-time applications. Unfortunately, the spectral estimation degrades rapidly for low sample densities because the spectral estimation is only bounded to $|k_x| \leq \pi/\Delta x$ and $|k_y| \leq \pi/\Delta y$ (i.e., a spectrum not sufficiently bounded). This may result in high levels of image artifacts. However, the resolution of the SAR image does not degrade for the same reason. Therefore, in practice some real-time imaging systems may benefit from this method by preserving the resolution and computational speed at the cost of increasing image artifacts.

[0034] FIG. 5 illustrates an outline of the algorithm for the second method, which is named a multi-level error minimization (ML-EM) algorithm (e.g., PP1). The second method is based on a multi-level conjugate gradient (CG) error minimization using the conjugate gradient of the normal equations (CGNE) and is more accurate than the first method. It should be noted that error minimization is merely one of many objectives for reconstruction, included here for purposes of illustration only. In other embodiments, other error minimization methods could also be used (e.g., steepest-descent, Landweber, conjugate gradient residual minimization and the like). Therefore, the ML-EM algorithm is a Fourier-based regularization technique that uses the 2-D spatial bandwidth (B) as the regularization parameter in search of the best reconstruction and spectral estimate of $d'(x', y', f)$ for every f . As such, the ML-EM algorithm begins with an initial estimate of the spatial bandwidth (B_o) 500 and minimizes the error (or residual difference) between the forward NDFT and adjoint/inverse NDFT according to CGNE in the inner loop labeled "Error Minimization" 505. The residual originates from the fact that Fourier transforms of nonuniformly spaced data are not simply invertible with an inverse Fourier transform. Thus, the residual, r , may be defined as:

$$r(x', y', f) = d'(x', y', f) - \text{INDFT}_{2D}\{D(k_x, k_y, f)\}, \quad (3)$$

where INDFT is the inverse NDFT and D is the low-pass filtered spectrum of the measured data (d'):

$$D(k_x, k_y, f) = \text{NDFT}_{2D}\{d'(x', y', f)\} \cdot F_B(k_x, k_y), \quad (4)$$

and where F_B is a rectangular low-pass filter with spatial bandwidth (2B):

$$F_B(k_x, k_y) = \begin{cases} 1 & -B \leq (k_x, k_y) \leq B \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \quad (5)$$

[0035] However, this filter may take any shape the user requires (i.e., circular, etc.). The NDFT transforms may be accelerated if the 2-D NDFT becomes the 2-D NUFFT^{Hz} and the 2-D INDFT becomes the 2-D INUFFT. The error of the minimization process may be represented as the normalized energy of the residual:

$$E_r = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{n=1}^{N_{xy}} \sum_{f \in f} |r(x'_n, y'_n, f)|^2}{\sum_{n=1}^{N_{xy}} \sum_{f \in f} |d'(x'_n, y'_n, f)|^2}} \quad (6)$$

[0036] Referring now to the inner loop of FIG. 5, CGNE reduces E_r iteratively until, as the E_r/N block 507 demonstrates, either E_r is less than the noise (N) or the relative difference in E_r between successive iterations is below a prescribed tolerance level (e.g., 10^{-3} dB). The estimate of the spectrum after "Error Minimization" is highly dependent upon the regularization parameter (B) 510. If B 510 is smaller than the actual spatial bandwidth of the measurement, the error minimization step cannot achieve E_r lower than the noise because vital information is excluded in the low-pass filter. In effect, the error minimization is similar to a 2-D sinc interpolation to reconstruct the data with excessively wide sinc functions (e.g., B is too small). However, if B is large then the error minimization step terminates quickly with sufficiently low E_r . However, the reconstruction is performed with sinc functions that are too narrow. Therefore, B should intentionally be initialized to a minimum value so that B may be slowly incremented by ΔB in the outer loop until the best value for B is determined. The increment ΔB was chosen as the sample spacing of the uniform 2-D spectrum ($2\pi/a_x$). Finally, the process terminates when E_r is below N, and the result obtained corresponds to the best possible estimate of the 2-D spectrum (D) 515. The reconstruction of the data onto uniform samples is the inverse 2-D FFT (IFFT) of D.

[0037] Because the accurate method is highly sensitive to the initial estimate of the spatial bandwidth (B_o), different estimates of the spatial bandwidth may be used. If one uses a B_o that is too large, it can be seen that if B_o is greater than π/δ_x that the minimization problem is underdetermined (i.e., the error minimization will terminate quickly), and reconstruction artifacts may result. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to choose the best B_o .

[0038] The sampled signal contains information from all scatterers in the scanning area. Scatterers are located at different coordinates. Therefore, each scatterer has its own distance from the aperture (h) and its own resolution δ_x , which is a strong function of h. Consequently, the spatial bandwidth necessary to accurately represent each scatterer is different. The preceding accurate spectral estimation/signal reconstruction method is formulated optimally for one scatterer in the scanning area, and not multiple scatterers. This is a significant problem because this method must increment only a single spatial bandwidth B until the termination condition is

met. If a scanning area consists of scatterers near and far from the aperture, the final bandwidth B to satisfy the termination condition may be too large to correctly reconstruct the signal for the scatterers far from the aperture. In an embodiment, it is preferred to separate the signal contributions from scatterers at different h and then reconstruct that data separately, such that each scatterer has its own spatial bandwidth. Thus, the best signal reconstruction may be performed individually for all scatterers present.

[0039] The following describes the details of a general form of coarse multi-bandwidth reconstruction that finds the best reconstruction for all scatterers within a scanning area of interest from nonuniform samples. FIG. 6 illustrates a procedure that enables the best possible SAR image to be formed using coarse segmentation.

[0040] Begin with nonuniform measurement of the scattered fields from scatterers—These measurements are inherently nonuniform and represented by $d'(x',y',f)$ **600** where the primed coordinates indicate measurement samples. They may either be gathered manually as a user moves a probe over the scanning area or they may be gathered automatically (i.e., as an automated system moves a probe along a predetermined path or an array electronically switches between measuring antennas).

[0041] Make a preliminary signal reconstruction onto a high-density uniform grid—The current data $d'(x',y',f)$ **600** must be processed to make the intermediate SAR image **605** that we will segment to divide the current data. A bandwidth that preserves the largest spatial frequencies and preserves the best resolution should be utilized. However, the SAR image **605** is only an intermediate image and will contain a high level of image artifacts for scatterers in image segments that are located far from the aperture. The spatial bandwidth of the filter used in the reconstruction process **610** will correspond to the propagating (e.g., non-attenuating) plane waves that are described by the spectrum $D_p(k_x, k_y, f)$. Thus, the filter should be circular and is defined for every frequency, f , such that:

$$F_B(k_x, k_y) = \begin{cases} 1 & -B_p \leq \sqrt{k_x^2 + k_y^2} \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \quad (7)$$

where $B_p = 2\alpha\pi f/v$.

[0042] Form a SAR image of the scene from the preliminary signal reconstruction—The spectrum $D_p(k_x, k_y, f)$ corresponds to the highly sampled reconstructed data $d_p(x, y, f)$ **615**. This reconstructed data is then passed through a SAR processor to obtain the intermediate SAR image $s_p(x, y, z)$ **620**. This SAR image is computed from $-Z_{max}$ to $+Z_{max}$, however, the choice of Z_{max} must be chosen to facilitate the R-SAR transform **625**. A detailed description of the R-SAR transform **625** is described below. This SAR image **620** will have greater image artifacts for z values far from the aperture.

[0043] Divide the SAR image into segmented ranges—The SAR image $s_p(x, y, z)$ **620** is now divided into N segments **630**. The segmentation is performed along the z axis; however, segmentation may also be performed automatically to extract individual scatterers (e.g., watershed segmentation). The thickness of the segments **630** may be chosen arbitrarily by the user, however, it is useful to divide the image according to the expected range resolution δ_z , where:

$$\delta_z = \frac{v}{2(f_{max} - f_{min})}. \quad (8)$$

Thus,

$$N \approx Z_{max} / \delta_z. \quad (9)$$

Consequently, segment **1** (s_1) **635** is bounded between $-\delta_z \leq z \leq \delta_z$, segment **2** (s_2) **640** is bounded between $-2\delta_z \leq z \leq -\delta_z$ and $\delta_z \leq z \leq 2\delta_z$, segment **3** (s_3) is bounded between $-3\delta_z \leq z \leq -2\delta_z$ and $2\delta_z \leq z \leq 3\delta_z$, etc. Thus, this type of segmentation is referred to as being coarse.

[0044] Perform a highly accurate and fast 3-D Reverse SAR (R-SAR) for each segmented range—All segments **630** of the SAR image **605** correspond to their own reflection data. Thus, the R-SAR transform **625** may be applied to each segment index s **630** where partial data t_s **645** is a result of the R-SAR transform **625** of s_s

$$t_s(x, y, f) = \text{R-SAR}\{s_s(x, y, z)\} \quad (10)$$

However, the R-SAR transform **625** as defined retrieves the data at the high sampling density $t_s(x, y, f)$ **645**. This must be transformed back to the original nonuniform sample locations $d'_s(x', y', f)$ **650** to facilitate another reconstruction attempt **655**. To accomplish another reconstruction **655**, one must first realize that $t_s(x, y, f)$ **645** and $d'_s(x', y', f)$ **650** have the same spectrum. Therefore, the spectrum **665** may be calculated by using the 2-D FFT **660**:

$$T_s(k_x, k_y, f) = \text{FFT}_{2D}\{t_s(x, y, f)\} \quad (11)$$

Consequently, the uniform spectrum can be sampled again onto the nonuniform original sample locations by using the NUFFT that maps uniform samples onto a nonuniform spectrum, which is in contrast to the NUFFT^H that maps nonuniform samples onto a uniform spectrum. Consequently the inverse nonuniform FFT (INUFFT) **670** of the spectrum **665** yields the original nonuniform sample locations $d'_s(x', y', f)$ **650** as:

$$d'_s(x', y', f) = \text{INUFFT}_{2D}\{T_s(k_x, k_y, f)\} \quad (12)$$

[0045] Make another signal reconstruction for each segmented range and sum these—Now that the measured data **650** for every segment has been retrieved, the best signal reconstruction possible for every segment is determined. This is done by utilizing the rectangular filter described above and setting the initial spatial bandwidth **655**, $B_o = B_s$ where

$$B_s = \frac{\pi}{\delta_z \left(h = \left(s - \frac{1}{2} \right) \delta_z \right)}. \quad (13)$$

After this reconstruction process is complete for all segments **675**, the data of the segments may be summed **680** to the final reconstructed data **685**:

$$d(x, y, f) = \sum_{s=1}^N d_s(x, y, f). \quad (14)$$

[0046] Make final SAR image—high quality, highly accurate, with minimal image artifacts—At last, the final SAR image **690** may be computed from this reconstructed data **685**:

$$s(x, y, z) = \text{SAR}\{d(x, y, f)\} \quad (15)$$

This results in a SAR image **690** with the least amount of image artifacts and is the best SAR image obtainable because the reconstruction of the data **655** has been optimized for each range segment **675**.

[0047] The SAR and R-SAR (reverse SAR) algorithms form a transform pair, which enables the separation of data for scatterers located in different range segments. The SAR and R-SAR algorithms may also be used in compressive sensing (CS) techniques to recover the image from under-sampled data and enforce the measurement constraint.

[0048] The ω -k SAR algorithm is used to compute the wideband 3-D SAR images. The SAR algorithm is formulated to use the NUFFT, which as mentioned above, is a fast and accurate approximation to the NDFT. FIG. 7 shows the forward **700** and reverse **705** SAR transforms side by side where the SAR transform **700** is illustrated on the left and the R-SAR transform **705** is illustrated on the right. The following expression assumes that the nonuniform data has previously been reconstructed onto a highly sampled grid because the input data **710** is uniform data $d(x, y, f)$ **715** and not non-uniform data $d(x', y', f)$. The SAR algorithm **700** for a homogeneous medium can be formulated as:

$$s(x, y, z) = \text{IFFT}_{2D} \left\{ \text{INUFFT}_{1D}^H \left\{ \exp \left(-jz_0 \sqrt{\left(\frac{2\alpha\pi f}{v} \right)^2 - k_x^2 - k_y^2} \right) \cdot \text{FFT}_{2D} \{d(x, y, f)\} \right\} \right\} \quad (16)$$

where equation (16) is the mathematical form of FIG. 3, a SAR ω -k algorithm with a 1-D NUFFT. Inside equation (16) is the implicit dispersion relation:

$$k_z = \sqrt{\left(\frac{2\alpha\pi f}{v} \right)^2 - k_x^2 - k_y^2}, \quad (17)$$

where v is the speed of light in the medium that is imaged with dielectric constant ϵ_r , where

$$v = \frac{c}{\sqrt{\epsilon_r}}. \quad (18)$$

The variable z_0 is the shift along the Z direction from the aperture to the top of the medium of interest. This is labeled in FIG. 7 as “Reference Forward” **720** in the SAR transform. Thus, the exponential term containing z_0 is simply the propagation of the spectral decomposition through the first medium, and \bar{v} in equation (16) is the speed of light in the first medium. The variable z_0 is useful for removing the standoff distance between the aperture and the medium of interest. However, if no shift is required, then in an embodiment one may choose to set $z_0=0$ or $v=\bar{v}$.

[0049] The transform as expressed in equation (16) supports propagating through a medium that may or may not have the same properties as the medium being imaged. An obvious restriction is that the boundary between the first and second mediums must be parallel to the aperture. However, strong reflections may occur at the boundary depending upon the relative dielectric contrast between the two media that may mask the scatterers within the medium of interest. To reduce the influence of the boundary on the SAR image, the boundary may be subtracted from the original measurement $d(x, y, f)$ **715**. Given a particular frequency of operation f_m , the reflection from the dielectric boundary is contained in the measurements $d(x, y, f_m)$. Because the boundary is parallel to the aperture, the reflection from the dielectric boundary does not change as a function of location (x, y) . Therefore, an estimate of the data $\hat{d}(x, y, f_m)$ without the reflection from the dielectric boundary can be found by subtracting the mean of $d(x, y, f_m)$:

$$\hat{d}(x, y, f_m) = d(x, y, f_m) - E[d(x, y, f_m)] \forall m \in \{1, 2, \dots, N_f\}, \quad (19)$$

where $E[\cdot]$ is the expectation operator.

[0050] R-SAR algorithms have been described in the art. However, the R-SAR algorithm here **705** is unique because it is a 3-D, robust, and highly accurate algorithm. The R-SAR algorithm **705** is similar to SAR algorithm **700** except the R-SAR algorithm **705** is backward and contains an additional repair step (e.g., “Truncation Repair” **725**), which corrects for the Fourier truncation that occurred in the SAR algorithm by the Fourier transform **730** from k_z to z . Truncation occurs because the SAR image **710** cannot be computed for an infinite range of z and because the SAR image **710** is nonperiodic, which is a result of dispersion relation of equation (17) that generates nonuniform samples of k_z . Uncorrected, the truncation error is the largest source of error when computing R-SAR.

[0051] “Truncation Repair” **725** quickly and accurately deconvolves the effect of the truncation along z from the estimate of the spectrum in k_z **735**. Because truncation error occurs only for the 1-D Fourier transforms, the nomenclature can be simplified from $S(k_x, k_y, z)$ **740** to $S(z)$, which is sampled at N_z uniform locations z_n and may be vectorized as S . (S is used to simplify the following mathematical expressions). The uniform image step size Δz is chosen to be less than or equal to the range resolution δ_z such that:

$$\delta_z = \frac{v}{2(f_{max} - f_{min})} \quad (20)$$

for the range $-R_{max} \leq z_n \leq R_{max}$, where R_{max} is the maximum unambiguous range for the propagating wave along the Z axis from the measurement plane and is defined as:

$$R_{max} = \frac{v}{4\pi\Delta f}, \quad (21)$$

where Δf is the frequency step size. Similarly, reduce $D(k_x, k_y, k_z)$ notation to continuous function $D(k_z)$:

$$D(k_z) = \sum_{m=1}^{N_f} D_m \delta(k_z - k_{zm}), \quad (22)$$

which is sampled at N_f nonuniform samples located at k_{zm} with the values as vectorized by F where $\delta(\cdot)$ is the continuous Dirac delta function. Furthermore, if $D(k_z)$ may be the 1-D discrete time Fourier transform (DTFT) of S , and if S could extend from $-\infty$ to $+\infty$, we have

$$S = \text{IDTFT}_{1D}\{D(k_z)\} \quad (23)$$

and

$$D(k_z) = \text{DTFT}_{1D}\{S\}, \quad (24)$$

where IDTFT is the inverse DTFT. However, as stated before, the SAR image cannot be computed for an infinite range. Therefore, only the spectrum from the truncated SAR image **735** is available:

$$D'(k_z) = \text{DTFT}_{1D}\{\hat{m} \cdot S\}, \quad (25)$$

where the prime notation represents the spectral estimate after truncation **745** and the truncation **725** (i.e., window function or masking function) is represented as:

$$\hat{m}_n = \begin{cases} 1 & -\frac{N_z}{2} \leq n \leq \frac{N_z}{2} \\ 0 & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases} \quad (26)$$

[0052] Knowing that multiplication in the z domain is equivalent to convolution in the k_z domain, the following relationship holds:

$$\hat{m} \cdot S \xrightarrow{\text{DTFT}_{1D}} \hat{M}(k_z) * D(k_z) = D'(k_z), \quad (27)$$

where $*$ denotes convolution operation and $\hat{M}(k_z)$ is the corresponding spectrum to \hat{m} given as:

$$\hat{M}(k_z) = \sum_{n=-\infty}^{\infty} \hat{m}_n e^{-j\Delta z k_z} = \frac{\sin(\Delta z k_z (N_z + 1)/2)}{\sin(\Delta z k_z / 2)}. \quad (28)$$

[0053] The difference between $D(k_z)$ **745** and $D'(k_z)$ **735** is the truncation error, and the truncation error may be reduced by using known error minimization methods. However, these error minimization methods are computationally complex compared to simply solving for the truncation error by deconvolving $\hat{M}(k_z)$ from $D'(k_z)$. One consequence of this deconvolution is that information at any frequency (f or k_z) is independent of all other frequencies.

[0054] To deconvolve the effect of truncation efficiently, one may formulate the convolution in equation (27) in matrix form

$$D' = \hat{M}D \quad (29)$$

such that

$$\hat{M} = \begin{bmatrix} \hat{M}_{11} & \hat{M}_{12} & \dots & \hat{M}_{1,N_f} \\ \hat{M}_{21} & \hat{M}_{22} & \dots & \hat{M}_{2,N_f} \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ \hat{M}_{N_f,1} & \hat{M}_{N_f,2} & \dots & \hat{M}_{N_f,N_f} \end{bmatrix} \quad (30)$$

where for some row r and column c

$$\hat{M}_{rc} = \hat{M}(k_{zr}, -k_{zc}). \quad (31)$$

[0055] If \hat{M} is invertible, the original signal D **745** can be recovered exactly by deconvolving the spectrum representation of the window function **735**:

$$D = \hat{M}^{-1}D', \quad (32)$$

which is referred to as ‘‘Truncation Repair’’ in FIG. 7. Additionally, \hat{M}^{-1} may be stored for all combinations of (k_x, k_y) and used for later reprocessing if necessary. This is practical because the number of frequencies, N_f , is usually much smaller than N_z for NDE applications. Therefore, R-SAR **705** as implemented here can be performed both quickly and accurately. Finally, the R-SAR transform **705** can then be formulated as

$$d(x, y, f) = \text{IFFT}_{2D} \left\{ T\{ \text{NUFFT}_{1D}\{ \text{FFT}_{2D}\{s(x, y, z)\} \} \} \cdot \exp\left(jz_0 \sqrt{\left(\frac{2\alpha\pi f}{v}\right)^2 - k_x^2 - k_y^2} \right) \right\}, \quad (33)$$

where $T\{\cdot\}$ is the truncation repair as implemented in equation (32).

[0056] The R-SAR transform **705** can only be performed successfully if \hat{M}^{-1} exists and if the following three requirements are met: (a) frequencies of measurement must be known, (b) support functions cannot overlap, and (c) sampling of SAR image along z must satisfy the Nyquist rate. Each of the three requirements are discussed further below.

[0057] Frequencies of measurement must be known—The frequencies f used in the measurement $d(x, y, f)$ **715** must be known so that the contributions of these frequencies in the SAR image **710** $s(x, y, z)$ **750** can be determined. This is in contrast to the more general problem for which the frequencies of the system may be unknown. Therefore, the SAR imaging system must be well defined so that SAR **700** and R-SAR **705** algorithms form an accurate transform pair.

[0058] Support functions cannot overlap—The main lobes of the function $\hat{M}(k_z)$ in equation (28) referred to by \hat{M}_{rc} in equation (31) must not overlap. Given that

$$\Delta k_z = \frac{2\alpha\pi\Delta f}{v} \quad (34)$$

and

$$Z_{max} - Z_{min} = \Delta z N_z \quad (35)$$

it can be shown that the following condition must be met

$$Z_{max} - Z_{min} \geq \frac{v}{2\Delta f} = 2R_{max}. \quad (36)$$

[0059] where R^{max} is defined in equation (21).

$$\Delta z \leq \frac{\delta_z}{2} = \frac{v}{4(f_{max} - f_{min})}. \quad (37)$$

Sampling of the SAR image to satisfy the Nyquist rate prevents the occurrence of aliasing error in the 1-D NUFFT **730** of the R-SAR transform **705**.

[0060] As discussed earlier, the accurate NUFFT-based SAR/R-SAR transform pair can be used to accurately separate contributions of scatterers in the measured data. Further, if the truncation error is not repaired, iterations of the SAR **700** and R-SAR **705** algorithms will diverge due to the cumulative error.

[0061] PP3, fine multi-bandwidth reconstruction, determines the best reconstruction for all scatterers within a scene of interest from nonuniform samples, and PP3 is similar to PP2. In an embodiment, PP3 can consist of a coarse filter along z that can obtain identical results to PP2. However, SAR and R-SAR have been combined into the error minimization process, which is illustrated in FIG. **8**, which effectively results in a fine segmentation along z . As such, the intermediate SAR image is not computed and need not be coarsely segmented, which significantly decreases computational complexity. This is useful for images that cannot or should not be segmented coarsely (i.e., images of a scanning area containing many scatterers). Previously, the error minimization process sought the minimum error (or minimum residual) between the 2-D NUFFT **800** and the inverse 2-D NUFFT (2D INUFFT) **805**. Now, the error minimization process seeks the minimum error between two different Fourier-based transforms; one that has been used to transform nonuniform measurements $d'(x', y', f)$ **810** to the 3-D SAR image spectrum $S(k_x, k_y, z)$ **815** and another which is used to transform the 3-D SAR image spectrum $S(k_x, k_y, z)$ **820** to nonuniform measurements $d'(x', y', f)$ **825**. To compare with PP2, the segmentation for PP3 is for every sample along z , and every sample of z has its own partial data and filter bandwidth during reconstruction.

[0062] FIG. **8** illustrates a schematic of PP3. The forward Fourier-based transform **830** utilizes components of the forward SAR transform, where the last step of performing a 2-D IFFT is removed. The inverse Fourier-based transform **835** utilizes components of the R-SAR transform, where only the first 2-D FFT is removed in the end of the process. Using these new transforms, the error minimization process **840** may be executed nearly identically to PP2. The process is not multi-level, however, one may easily adapt this error minimization to a multi-level process so that the bandwidth is incremented in an outer loop. The 2-D filter $B=B_{\delta(z)}$ applies the filter $|k_x| \leq \pi/\delta(z)$ and $|k_y| \leq \pi/\delta(z)$ for the spatial theoretical resolution $\delta(z)$ along $S(k_x, k_y, z)$. Upon completion of the error minimization process, the 2-D spectrum of the image $S(k_x, k_y, z)$ **840** is provided. A high-resolution and high-quality SAR image **845** results after the final 2-D IFFT **850** is applied to the image $S(k_x, k_y, z)$ **840**.

[0063] The following demonstrates exemplary performance of the algorithms using simulated data. A square aperture size with aperture dimensions $a_x=a_y=10\lambda$ was used consisting of antennas with Gaussian half-power beamwidth of 120-degrees. These antennas measured the complex reflection coefficient for 31 uniformly sampled frequencies in Ku-Band (e.g., 12.4-18 GHz). The measuring locations were selected randomly but not independently such that a minimum distance (Δ_m) between antennas was maintained. For N_{xy} nonuniform measurement locations, this resulted in an average sample density of Δ , where:

$$\Delta = \sqrt{a_x a_y / N_{xy}}. \quad (38)$$

Three different Δ_m were selected to show the performance of the algorithm for different sampling (0.3, 0.5, and $0.7*\lambda$). Six point scatterers were placed in the scene to ideally scatter signal back to the aperture for distances 2.5, 5, 7.5, 10, 12.5, and $15-\lambda$. White Gaussian noise was injected into the nonuniform measurements to correspond to a signal-to-noise ratio (SNR) of 30 dB. The simulation was set up such that each scatterer had the same scattering coefficient. Consequently, the scattered signal attenuates as a function of distance (e.g., distant scatterers are weaker).

[0064] The same nonuniform data was processed into SAR images in multiple ways: (1) no reconstruction –RT2, (2) reconstruction using range segments with smooth transitions and thickness equal to the range resolution (δ_z) –PP2, and (3) reconstruction using the modified error minimization method –PP3. These were compared not only to each other but also to an image formed from noiseless, high-density measurements. To render images so they are easy to interpret, the images were auto-scaled as a function of z to make all scatterers appear with the same brightness. Therefore, the image of more distant objects appears noisy as the scattered signal drops to the level of the noise or the error remaining after reconstruction.

[0065] FIG. **9** illustrates the results for the $\Delta_m=0.3\lambda$. This corresponds to a measurement made with only 44% of the measurements required as determined by the proper sampling of $\lambda/4$. The ideal image **900** shows the six scatterers **905** in their proper locations and some noise-like artifacts **910** appear on the bottom of the ideal image **900**. These artifacts **910** originate from the numerical noise (rounding errors) competing with the relatively low signal strength of the farthest scatterers **905**. The image from RT2 **915** shows a large level of artifacts **920** on the bottom of the image **915**, which is partly due to noise but mostly due to the lack of any reconstruction. PP2 reconstruction **925** shows that the artifacts **930** can be greatly reduced thereby allowing a better view of the scatterers **935**. PP3 reconstruction **940** reduces these artifacts **945** even more, which shows that a near ideal image may still be formed from under-sampled measurements (e.g., 44% of proper sampling).

[0066] Results for $\Delta_m=0.5\lambda$ (17% of proper sampling) and $\Delta_m=0.7\lambda$ (8% of proper sampling) are shown in FIGS. **10** and **11**, respectively. FIGS. **10** and **11** show that for decreasing sampling density, the images from RT2, PP2, and PP3 have an increasing level of artifacts. The image of RT2 is always the worst because no reconstruction is performed. PP2 and PP3 have an increased level of background artifacts as compared to the ideal image, but the scatterers can still be easily recognized and thresholding or brightness adjustment (not shown) can easily be performed to improve the images further.

[0067] The following discussion is intended to provide a brief, general description of a suitable computing environment in which aspects of the invention may be implemented. Although not required, aspects of the invention are described in the general context of computer-executable instructions, such as program modules which perform particular tasks or implement particular abstract data types, being executed by computers in network environments or in distributed computing environments.

[0068] Those skilled in the art will appreciate that aspects of the invention may be practiced in network computing environments with many types of computer system configurations (like personal computers, tablets, mobile or hand-held devices, or multi-processor systems). Aspects of the invention may also be practiced in distributed computing environments, where tasks are performed by local and remote processing devices linked through a communications network. Examples of devices used in a distributed computing environment include program modules located in both local and remote memory storage devices.

[0069] An exemplary system for implementing aspects of the invention includes a general purpose computing device consisting of various system components including the system memory. The system memory includes random access memory (RAM) and read only memory (ROM).

[0070] The computing device may also include a magnetic hard disk drive for reading from and writing to a magnetic hard disk or a removable magnetic disk, or an optical disk drive for reading from or writing to a removable optical disk such as a CD-ROM or other optical media. These disk drives are connected to the system bus by specific interfaces. The drives and their associated computer-readable media provide nonvolatile storage of data for the computer. The exemplary environment described herein employs a magnetic hard disk, a removable magnetic disk, and a removable optical disk, but other types of computer readable media for storing data can be used.

[0071] Program code means comprising one or more program modules may be stored on the computer readable media storage previously mentioned. Various means of user input as well as various display devices are typically included. In an embodiment, the SAR images can be displayed in real-time on the monitor.

[0072] The computer may operate in a networked environment, which may include another personal computer or another common network node including many or all of the elements described above relative to the computer. Networking environments may connect computers locally (through a network interface) or wirelessly (through a modem, wireless link, or other means).

[0073] Preferably, computer-executable instructions stored in a memory, such as the hard disk drive, and executed by computer embody the illustrated processes.

[0074] The order of execution or performance of the operations in embodiments of the invention illustrated and described herein is not essential, unless otherwise specified. That is, the operations may be performed in any order, unless otherwise specified, and embodiments of the invention may include additional or fewer operations than those disclosed herein. For example, it is contemplated that executing or performing a particular operation before, contemporaneously with, or after another operation is within the scope of aspects of the invention. In addition, it is contemplated that the Fourier references mentioned throughout this document are in

one embodiment a nonuniform discrete Fourier Transform (NDFT), but may also include other Fourier methodologies as known to one skilled in the art to approximate the NDFT.

[0075] Embodiments of the invention may be implemented with computer-executable instructions. The computer-executable instructions may be organized into one or more computer-executable components or modules. Aspects of the invention may be implemented with any number and organization of such components or modules. For example, aspects of the invention are not limited to the specific computer-executable instructions or the specific components or modules illustrated in the figures and described herein. Other embodiments of the invention may include different computer-executable instructions or components having more or less functionality than illustrated and described herein.

[0076] When introducing elements of aspects of the invention or the embodiments thereof, the articles “a,” “an,” “the,” and “said” are intended to mean that there are one or more of the elements. The terms “comprising,” “including,” and “having” are intended to be inclusive and mean that there may be additional elements other than the listed elements.

[0077] In view of the above, it will be seen that the several objects of the invention are achieved and other advantageous results attained.

[0078] Having described aspects of the invention in detail, it will be apparent that modifications and variations are possible without departing from the scope of aspects of the invention as defined in the appended claims. As various changes could be made in the above constructions, products, and methods without departing from the scope of aspects of the invention, it is intended that all matter contained in the above description and shown in the accompanying drawings shall be interpreted as illustrative and not in a limiting sense.

What is claimed is:

1. A wideband synthetic aperture radar (SAR) imaging system, comprising:
 - a probe having an aperture through which a signal is transmitted incident to an object located in a medium of interest remotely from the probe and through which a plurality of nonuniformly sampled reflected signals from the object are received by the probe as the probe moves in a measurement plane located a predetermined distance from the object;
 - a memory for storing measurement data representative of the reflected signals collected by the probe;
 - a processor executing a plurality of computer-executable instructions for a SAR-based reconstruction algorithm, said instructions comprising:
 - instructions for performing a spectral estimation based on the measurement data;
 - instructions for transforming a frequency component of the spectral estimation as a function of the medium of interest;
 - instructions for obtaining a three-dimensional SAR image from the transformed spectral estimation data using Fourier transforms; and
 - a display responsive to the processor for presenting the three-dimensional SAR image to a user.
2. The imaging system of claim 1, wherein the measurement data is mapped to a densely sampled uniform grid.
3. The imaging system of claim 1, wherein the spectral estimation comprises application of a fast Fourier transform.

4. The imaging system of claim 2, wherein the spectral estimation comprises application of a nonuniform fast Fourier transform.

5. The imaging system of claim 1, wherein the spectral estimation includes a single spatial bandwidth encompassing all depths of a preliminary image, and further comprising instructions for performing an operation that reduces the error between the nonuniform measurement data and an inverse two dimensional nonuniform fast Fourier transform of the estimate of the spectrum.

6. The imaging system of claim 1, wherein the spectral estimation includes a single spatial bandwidth for each segment of a preliminary image.

7. The imaging system of claim 6, further comprising instructions for performing an optimization operation based on a comparison between original nonuniform measurement data and intermediate segmented image data.

8. The imaging system of claim 1, wherein the spectral estimation includes a spatial bandwidth unique for each depth in the preliminary image.

9. The imaging system of claim 1, further comprising instructions for performing an optimization operation based on components derived from a SAR-based transform and an R-SAR-based transform.

10. The imaging system of claim 1, wherein the probe is manually moved in the measurement plane as a scan is performed.

11. The imaging system of claim 1, wherein the signal comprises microwave or millimeter wave electromagnetic energy.

12. The imaging system of claim 1, wherein the signal comprises ultrasonic waves or acoustic energy.

13. The imaging system of claim 1, wherein the probe comprises an open-ended waveguide antenna.

14. The imaging system of claim 1, wherein spectral estimation includes the step of performing a reference shift to align the measurement plane with the top of the medium of interest.

15. A method of generating a three dimensional image of a specimen under test (SUT) comprising:

transmitting, via the probe, a signal within a predetermined operating bandwidth;

tracking nonuniform two-dimensional movement of a probe within a measurement plane remote from the SUT;

receiving, via the probe, signals reflected from the SUT during the movement of the probe;

storing reflection coefficient data based on the reflected signals as distributed measurement positions within the measurement plane by recording the signals at discrete frequencies throughout the operating bandwidth;

processing the stored data into a wide band, synthetic aperture image by implementing a synthetic aperture radar (SAR) algorithm;

displaying the image to a user in real-time;

further processing the image to perform an optimization objective; and

further displaying the optimized image to the user.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein the further processing comprises performing spectral estimation on the reflection coefficient data.

17. The method of claim 16, wherein the optimization includes reducing the error between nonuniform input data

and an inverse two-dimensional nonuniform fast Fourier transform of the spectral estimation.

18. The method of claim 15, wherein the movement of the probe is tracked.

19. The method of claim 18, wherein nonuniform points are sampled from the tracked movement, and the points are mapped to a densely sampled uniform grid.

20. The method of claim 15, wherein said processing comprises of a two-dimensional fast Fourier transform.

21. The method of claim 20, wherein said two-dimensional fast Fourier transform comprises a nonuniform two-dimensional fast Fourier transform.

22. The method of claim 15, wherein said processing comprises segmenting the images for which partial data corresponds to a single spatial bandwidth.

23. The method of claim 15 wherein the optimization includes reducing the error between components derived from a SAR-based transform and an R-SAR-based transform.

24. A wideband synthetic aperture radar (SAR) imaging system, comprising:

a signal source for generating a signal with a predetermined operating bandwidth;

a transceiver antenna coupled to the signal source, the antenna having an aperture through which the signal is transmitted incident to an object located in a medium and through which a plurality of nonuniformly sampled reflected signals from the object are received by the antenna as the antenna moves nonuniformly in a plane located a predetermined distance from the object;

a memory for storing signal data, the signal data comprising nonuniformly sampled reflected signals collected at the aperture;

a processor executing a plurality of computer-executable instructions for a real-time, post-processing, reconstruction algorithm comprising:

instructions for estimating a two-dimensional spatial spectrum based on the signal data to provide a uniformly sampled spectrum;

instructions for estimating the uniformly sampled spectrum to remove or minimize image artifacts;

instructions for reconstructing uniformly sampled data from nonuniformly sampled data to remove or minimize image artifacts;

instructions for forming a SAR image of the object from the estimated uniform spectrum;

instructions for dividing the reconstructed SAR image into a plurality of segments;

instructions for applying a R-SAR transform to each of the segments;

instructions for filtering and reconstructing the data for each segment and summing each filtered segment;

a display for presenting the three-dimensional SAR image in real-time to a user.

25. The imaging system of claim 24, wherein the system is utilized for nondestructive evaluation applications.

26. The imaging system of claim 24, wherein the transceiver antenna is manually moved in the plane as a scan is performed.

27. The imaging system of claim 24, wherein the signal source transmits the signal at a plurality of discrete frequencies in the operating bandwidth.

28. The imaging system of claim 24, wherein nonuniform sampling occurs below a Nyquist sampling rate.

29. The imaging system of claim 24, further comprising instructions for applying a SAR transform to the summed segments to create an optimized three-dimensional SAR image with a reduced amount of image artifacts.

30. The imaging system of claim 24, further comprising instructions for applying SAR-based and R-SAR-based transforms for estimating the 2-D spatial spectrum of the SAR image.

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