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(54) **METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR GENERATING SENSORY DATA ONTO THE HUMAN NEURAL CORTEX**

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(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.

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(51) **Int. Cl.⁷** **A61B 19/00**

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **128/898**

(58) **Field of Search** 128/897, 898, 128/24; 607/54

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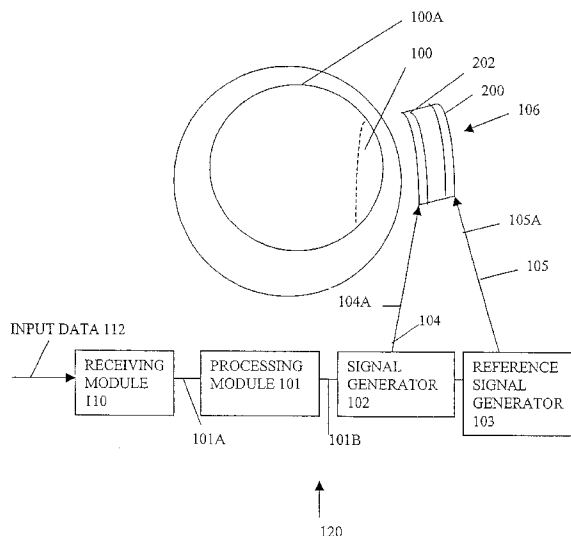
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A non-invasive system and process for projecting sensory data onto the human neural cortex is provided. The system includes a primary transducer array and a secondary transducer array. The primary transducer array acts as a coherent signal source, and the secondary transducer array acts as a controllable diffraction pattern that focuses energy onto the neural cortex in a desired pattern. In addition, the pattern of energy is constructed such that each portion projected into the neural cortex may be individually pulsed at low frequency. This low frequency pulsing is formed by controlling the phase differences between the emitted energy of the elements of primary and secondary transducer arrays.

8 Claims, 3 Drawing Sheets



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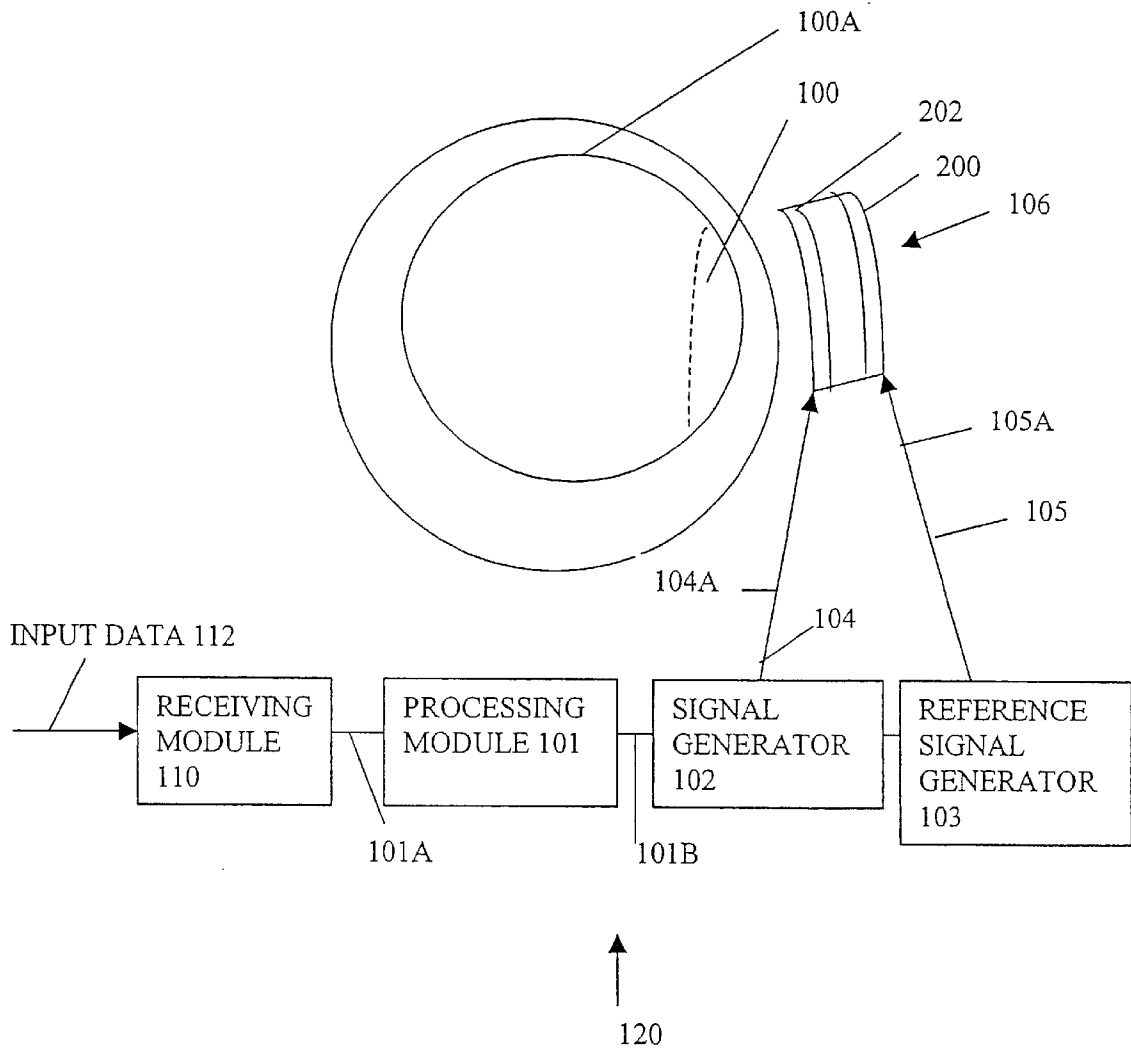


FIG. 1

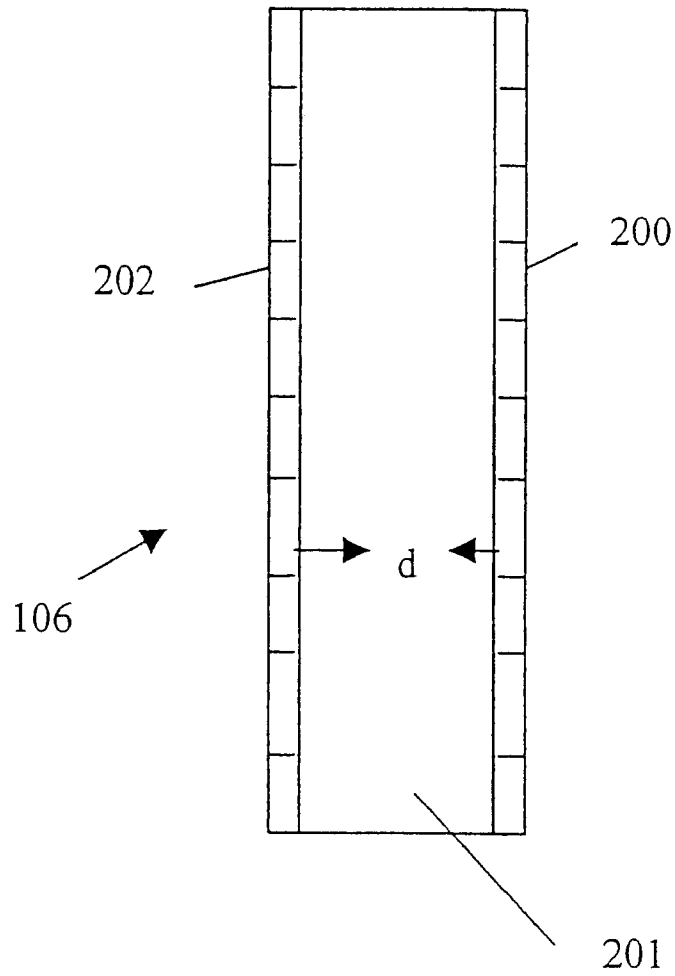


FIG. 2

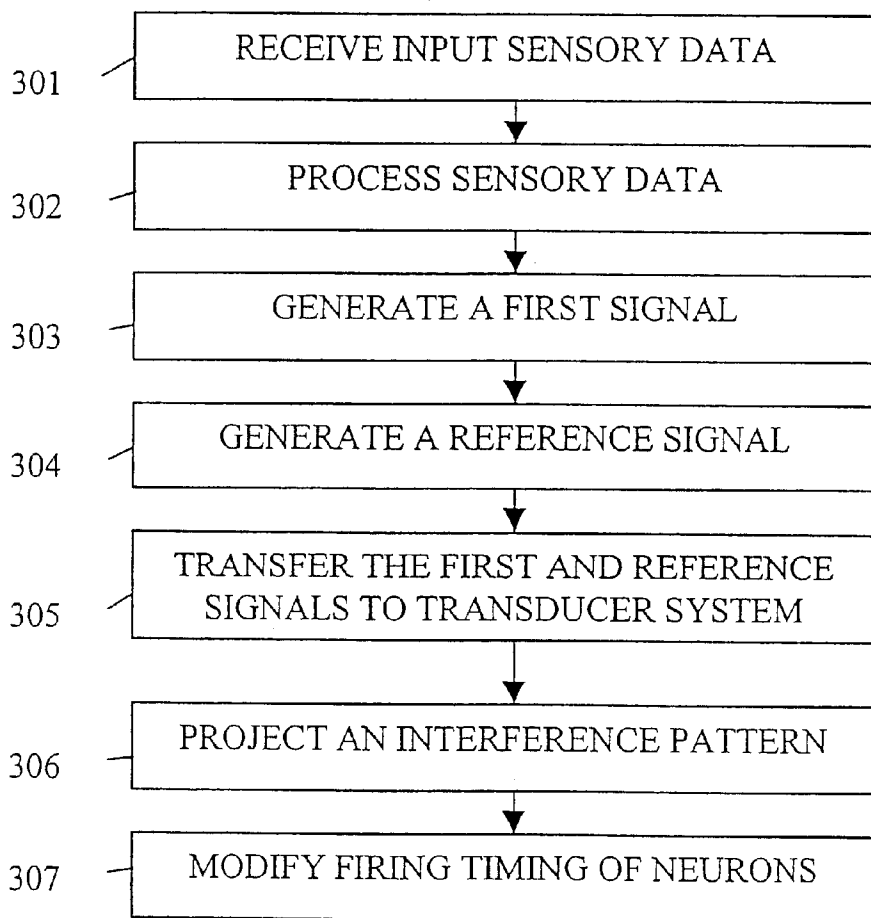


FIG. 3

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METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR GENERATING SENSORY DATA ONTO THE HUMAN NEURAL CORTEX

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application is a division of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/690,571 entitled "Method And System For Generating Sensory Data Onto The Human Neural Cortex" filed on Oct. 17, 2000 and now U.S. Pat. No. 6,536,440.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to non-invasive methods and systems for generating sensory experiences within the human neural cortex.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

A conventional technique for generating neural activity in the human nervous system requires surgical implants. The implants may comprise wires that cause electronic impulses to interact with some portion of the human nervous system, such as the human neural cortex, and thereby cause neural activity in the human neural cortex. Researchers have successfully mapped audio sensory data to the cochlear channel, and visual data to the visual cortex.

Conventional invasive techniques have several drawbacks. First, surgical implants may cause patient trauma and medical complications during and/or after surgery. Second, additional or on-going surgery may be required, particularly if new technology is developed.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention solves the foregoing drawbacks by providing a non-invasive system and process for generating/projecting sensory data (visual, audio, taste, smell or touch) within/onto the human neural cortex.

One embodiment of the system comprises a primary transducer array and a secondary transducer array. The primary transducer array acts as a coherent or nearly-coherent signal source. The secondary transducer array acts as a controllable, acoustical diffraction pattern that shapes, focuses and modulates energy from the primary transducer onto the neural cortex in a desired pattern. The secondary transducer emits acoustical energy that may be shifted in phase and amplitude relative to the primary array emissions.

The pattern of energy is constructed such that each portion of the pattern projected into the neural cortex may be individually pulsed at low frequency. The system produces low frequency pulsing by controlling the phase differences between the emitted energy of the primary and secondary transducer array elements. The pulsed ultrasonic signal alters the neural timing in the cortex. Changes in the neural firing timing induce various sensory experiences depending on the location of the firing timing change in the cortex. The mapping of sensory areas of the cortex is known and used in current surgically invasive techniques. Thus, the system induces recognizable sensory experiences by applying ultrasonic energy pulsed at low frequency in one or more selected patterns on one or more selected locations of the cortex.

One of the advantages of the present system is that no invasive surgery is needed to assist a person, such as a blind person, to view live and/or recorded images or hear sounds.

This brief summary has been provided so that the nature of the invention may be understood quickly. A more com-

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plete understanding of the invention can be obtained by reference to the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments thereof in connection with the attached drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 illustrates one embodiment of a system in accordance with the present invention.

FIG. 2 illustrates one embodiment of a transducer system within the system of FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 illustrates one embodiment of a process in accordance with the present invention.

Use of the same reference symbols in different figures indicates similar or identical items.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

FIG. 1 illustrates one embodiment of a system **120** in accordance with the present invention. FIG. 1 shows a visual portion **100** of the human cortex located in a person's brain **100A**, such as for example, a vision-impaired person's brain. The system **120** of FIG. 1 is used with the visual cortex **100** merely as an example and is not intended to limit the scope of the invention. Instead of or in addition to the visual cortex **100**, the system **120** may be used to stimulate neural activity in other areas of the nervous system. For example, the system **120** may be used as is or modified to generate audio, taste, smell or touch sensations within the brain **100A**.

In FIG. 1, the system **120** comprises a receiving module **110**, a processing module **101**, a signal generator **102**, a reference signal generator **103**, a transducer system **106**, a first signal line **104** and a second signal line **105**. The receiving module **110**, processing module **101**, signal generator **102**, and reference signal generator **103**, may be referred to as, alone or in combination, a sensory data processing system. Various configurations of the system **120** may be configured in accordance with the present invention. The system **120** may comprise other modules and components in addition to or instead of the modules and components shown in FIG. 1.

In general, the system **120** receives, analyzes and transfers the sensory data **112** to the human brain **100A**. The receiving module **110** receives sensory input data **112**. Such data **112** may comprise live video data captured by a video camera (not shown) which a vision-impaired person may not be able to see. The sensory data **112** may be live or recorded. The data **112** may be generated by other sources, such as for example a VCR, a DVD player, a cable broadcast, a satellite broadcast, an Internet connection, etc.

The processing module **101** receives input data **101A** from the receiving module **110** and formats or converts the data **101A**. For example, analog input data from the receiving module **110** may be digitized and/or converted into a neural firing time difference pattern. In one embodiment, the system **120** uses a technique that is reversed from a technique disclosed in "Reconstruction of Natural Scenes from Ensemble Responses in the Lateral Geniculate Nucleus" by Garrett B. Stanley et al. in the Sep. 15, 1999 issue of the Journal of Neuroscience, which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

Processed data **101B** is transferred to the signal generator **102**. Based upon the data **101B**, the signal generator **102** generates a first signal **104A** on the first line **104**. The reference signal generator **103** generates a reference signal **105A** on the second line **105**. Both signals **104A** and **105A** are transferred to a transducer system **106**.

FIG. 2 illustrates one embodiment of a transducer system 106 within the system 120 of FIG. 1. The transducer system 106 includes a primary (or first) transducer array 200, and a secondary (or second) transducer array 202. An aperture 201 with a distance “d” separates the primary and secondary arrays 200 and 202. The distance 201 may be fixed or adjusted depending on the wavelength of energy emitted by primary array 200. In one embodiment, the distance 201 is equal to the wavelength of sound emitted by the primary transducer 200.

The primary transducer array 200 may comprise one or more columns and rows of individually-controllable piezoelectric elements. The secondary transducer array 202 may also comprise a two-dimensional array of individually-controllable piezoelectric elements.

In one embodiment, the primary and/or secondary transducer array 200, 202 each comprise a thin sheet of metal, glass, plastic or ceramic material covered with a two-dimensional array of individually-controllable piezoelectric elements. Each element in the arrays 200, 202 may emit a unique signal. The arrays 200, 202 may or may not be flat and may be shaped to conform to a portion of the human head over which the transducer system 106 lays to provide better focusing. The layout of individual elements within each array 200, 202 can also be altered to provide better focusing, according to the shape of the area of the human cortex where signal 104A is to be projected.

In one embodiment, the arrays 200, 202 comprise piezoelectric elements that are held together by a flexible material, such as plastic or rubber. This embodiment allows the arrays 200, 202 to further conform to a portion of the human head over which the transducer system 106 lays to provide better focusing.

The primary and secondary transducer arrays 200, 202 are arranged such that the primary array 200 acts as a source of coherent energy, while the secondary array 202 acts as a programmable diffraction grating. For example, the primary transducer array 200 may comprise a phased array of emitters, whereby the combined output of some or all of the emitters appears to the secondary transducer array 202 as a coherent acoustical signal source. The primary array 200 may emit acoustical energy, thereby providing an acoustical implementation of projective holography. In one embodiment, the phase of one or more array elements in the primary array 200 is controllable to allow shaping of the energy received by the secondary transducer array 202. The primary and secondary arrays 200 and 202 may emit ultrasonic energy at the same wavelength.

The secondary transducer array 202 may comprise an array of emitters, where each emitter can be individually controlled for amplitude and phase relative to the energy emitted by primary transducer 200. Changes in signal amplitude and phase are driven by signal 104A. The secondary array 202 may provide focusing and low frequency modulation of phase differences and/or signal amplitude between the energy emitted by the arrays 200, 202. The modulation of phase differences and/or signal amplitude induces low frequency vibrations in the neurons of the visual cortex 100. The focusing effect is accomplished by the primary array 200 acting as a coherent signal source, and the secondary array 202 acting as a controllable diffraction pattern, based upon signals 104A and 105A.

Ultrasonic frequencies may accurately place signal patterns within the cortex. Interaction of emissions from the primary and secondary arrays 200, 202 projects an interference pattern (e.g., low frequency signals or pulses) in the

brain 100A. The projected interference pattern creates a highly defined pattern within the visual cortex 100 or another part of the human neural cortex. Each point in the pattern may have an individually pulsed low frequency amplitude that is used to modify neural firing times.

Low frequency amplitude modulation combined with wavelength phase interactions from the primary and secondary transducer arrays 200, 202 form a stimulus to activate neurons in the visual cortex area 100 or another part of the human neural cortex. By controlling the pattern of signal amplitude and phase shifts in secondary array 202, a wide range of patterns can be focused towards visual cortex 100 or any other region of the human cortex. Ultrasonic signals altering neural firings are discussed in “Temporally-specific modification of myelinated axon excitability in vitro following a single ultrasound pulse” by Mihran et al. published by the *Ultrasound Med Biol* 1990, 16(3), pp. 297–309 and “Transient Modification of Nerve Excitability In Vitro by Single Ultrasound Pulses” by Mihran et al. found in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, University of Colorado, 1990, paper #90-038, which are hereby incorporated by reference in their entirety.

Changes in the neural firing timing induce various sensory experiences depending on the location of the firing timing change in the cortex. The mapping of sensory areas of the cortex is known and used in current surgically invasive techniques.

FIG. 3 illustrates one embodiment of a process in accordance with the present invention. In a process block 301, the receiving module 110 (FIG. 1) receives sensory input data 112 from, for example, a video camera, VCR, DVD player, cable broadcast, satellite broadcast, and/or Internet connection. The receiving module 110 outputs the data 101A to the processing module 101 (FIG. 1).

In a block 302, the processing module 101 processes the input data 101A. As stated above, in one embodiment, the processing module 101 digitizes analog data 101A from the receiving module 110 and/or converts the data 101A into a set of neural firing time differences or a pattern.

In a block 303, the signal generator 102 converts the firing time differences to a first signal 104A. For example, the first signal 104A may comprise an acoustical pattern, which comprises a plurality of amplitude and phase differences. In one embodiment, this conversion is accomplished by using known techniques in generating projective holograms. Acoustic holography is discussed in “Nearfield acoustic holography: I. Theory of generalized holography and the development of NAH” by J. D. Maynard et al. in the October 1985 issue of the *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

In a block 304, the reference generator module 103 generates a reference signal 105A, which provides a coherent signal source, onto the second line 105. In one embodiment, the acts described in blocks 303 and 304 occur substantially simultaneously.

In a block 305, signals 104A and 105A are transferred to transducer system 106. The first signal 104A is transferred to the secondary array 202. The reference signal 105A is transferred to the primary array 200.

In a block 306, the transducer arrays 200 and 202 project a focused interference pattern onto the human cortex. The shape of the interference pattern and the amplitude pulse rate for each portion of the pattern may be controlled through the signals transferred in block 305. Low frequency pulses are

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derived from the interaction of the emissions from the primary and secondary arrays **200, 202**.

In a block **307**, low frequency pulsing of different points of the projected ultrasonic energy modifies the firing timing of the neurons in the human nervous system (in this example, the visual cortex **100**), thereby giving rise to perceived sensory experiences, such as visual images. Sensory data is mapped in the neural cortex as differences in neural firing times. Thus, altering the firing times in cortical neurons can generate sensory experiences.

One advantage of the present system is that no surgery is needed to change neural activity causing a sensory experience.

Although the present invention has been described with reference to specific embodiments, these embodiments are illustrative only and not limiting. Many other applications of this present invention will be apparent in light of this disclosure and the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for projecting sensory data in a part of a human brain, the method comprising:

emitting a first acoustical energy as a coherent signal source toward the human brain;

producing a diffraction pattern for the first emitted acoustic energy, the diffraction pattern being based on input sensory data; and

altering neural firing timing in the brain with the diffraction pattern.

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2. The method of claim **1**, further comprising:

converting sensory data to a plurality of neural firing time differences;

converting the neural firing time differences to an acoustical pattern signal; and

generating the diffraction pattern from the acoustical pattern signal.

3. The method of claim **1**, further comprising:

generating a reference signal; and

emitting acoustic energy as a coherent signal source based on the reference signal.

4. The method of claim **1**, further comprising converting analog data from a sensory data source to digital data.

5. The method of claim **1**, wherein the act of altering neural firing timing in the brain with the diffraction pattern comprises generating neural activity in the brain such that the brain perceives sensory experiences.

6. The method of claim **1**, wherein the diffraction pattern comprises a plurality of amplitude and phase shifts in relation to the first emitted acoustic energy.

7. The method of claim **1**, wherein the diffraction pattern comprises an interaction of the first emitted acoustic energy and a second emitted acoustic energy.

8. The method of claim **1**, wherein the diffraction pattern comprises a set of controllable low frequency pulses.

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