

PLANAR BEAM FORMING AND STEERING OPTICAL PHASED ARRAY CHIP AND METHOD OF USING SAME

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims priority to U.S. Patent Application No. 14/318,716 filed June
5 30, 2014, the contents of which are incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to the field of environment sensing, and more particularly to the use of Time of Flight (ToF) lidar sensors for real-time three-dimensional mapping and object detection, tracking, identification and/or classification.

10 BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

A lidar sensor is a light detection and ranging sensor. It is an optical remote sensing module that can measure the distance to a target or objects in a scene, by irradiating the target or scene with light, using pulses (or alternatively a modulated signal) from a laser, and measuring the time it takes photons to travel to said target or landscape and return after
15 reflection to a receiver in the lidar module. The reflected pulses (or modulated signals) are detected, with the time of flight and the intensity of the pulses (or modulated signals) being measures of the distance and the reflectivity of the sensed object, respectively.

Conventional lidar sensors utilize mechanically moving parts for scanning laser beams. In some systems, including certain systems used in automotive applications, such as
20 advanced driver assist systems (ADAS) and autonomous driving systems, it is preferred to use solid state sensors for a variety of potential advantages including but not limited to higher sensor reliability, longer sensor lifetime, smaller sensor size, lower sensor weight, and lower sensor cost.

Radio frequency (RF) delay lines used for the creation of radar phased arrays were
25 used several decades ago for the solid state steering of radar signals. Photonic integrated circuit (PIC) based delay lines combined with detectors and RF antenna arrays were used two decades ago to improve the precision of delays in the solid state steering of radar signals. PICs with microscale and nanoscale devices can be used to produce optical phased arrays (OPAs), comprising tunable optical delay lines and optical antennas, for the solid state
30 steering of laser beams.

Phased arrays in the optical domain that are produced to date are complex, costly and/or have a different purpose than beam forming and beam steering; some combine spatial filters, optical amplifiers and ring lasers (US 7,339,727), some involve a plurality of optical input beams (US 7,406,220), some involve volume diffraction gratings and a plurality of input directions (US 7,428,100), some combine beams of a plurality of wavelengths (US 7,436,588), some have optical phase reference sources and gain elements (US 7,489,870), some have predetermined areas in the field of view and a plurality of beam forming elements (US 7,532,311), and some have multiple frequencies and multiple optical phase reference sources (US 7,555,217).

Two-dimensional beam forming and steering phased arrays in the optical domain that are produced to date have low yields and are costly because they steer in two dimensions with a complex two-dimensional pixel array.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

A one-dimensional (1D) planar beam forming and steering optical phased array chip is a simple building block of a two-dimensional (2D) beam forming and steering solid-state lidar, enabling manufacturing of said lidars at high yield and low cost through the use of a plurality of said chips. Innovative Photonic Integrated Circuit (PIC) chip architectures that follow Design for Manufacturing (DFM) rules enable said building blocks.

According to a first aspect of the present invention, there is provided an apparatus comprising: a first optical phased array one-dimensional beam forming and steering integrated circuit with a first field of view steering range adjacent to a second optical phased array one-dimensional beam forming and steering integrated circuit with a second field of view steering range; the first field of view steering range and the second field of view steering range establishing an increased horizontal field of view steering range in a common direction, the first optical phased array one-dimensional beam forming and steering integrated circuit and the second optical phased array one-dimensional beam forming and steering integrated circuit each being a building block of a solid-state lidar, and each including: at least one optical power splitter; and at least one optical phase shifter controlled with at least one phase shifting device, including but not limited to: a gain element, an all-pass filter, a Bragg grating, a dispersive material, a wavelength tuning device and a phase tuning device.

There is disclosed a method for optical-phased-array-based one-dimensional beam forming and steering utilizing a photonic integrated circuit apparatus comprising: at least one optical power splitter; at least one optical phase shifter; and at least one out-of-plane optical coupler laid out in a pixel array configuration.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The following drawings are illustrative of embodiments of the present invention and are not intended to limit the invention as encompassed by the claims forming part of the application.

The schematic diagram of Figure 1 depicts the splitting section of a 1D planar beam forming and steering optical phased array chip, said splitting section comprising a $1 \times L$ Y-branch tree **20** followed by $1 \times M$ multimode interference couplers **30**, resulting in a $1 \times N$ splitter (where $L \times M = N$, e.g., $8 \times 128 = 1024$).

The schematic diagram of Figure 2 depicts a 1D planar beam forming and steering optical phased array chip, said chip comprising a laser **10**, a splitting section comprising a Y-branch tree **20** and multimode interference couplers **30**, optical phase shifters **40**, and out-of-plane optical couplers **120** laid out in a one-dimensional pixel array configuration. A graded-index (GRIN) lens **140** is used to reduce the spot size in the dimension perpendicular to the steering direction. Alternatively, a standard geometric refractive lens, a diffractive optical

element (DOE), a holographic optical element (HOE) or an on-chip grating could be used to achieve said spot size reduction.

The schematic diagram of Figure 3 depicts a 1D planar beam forming and steering optical phased array chip, said chip comprising a laser **10**, a splitting section comprising a Y-branch tree **20** and multimode interference couplers **30**, optical phase shifters in the form of two grouped linear ohmic heating electrodes **40** in push-pull configuration, and out-of-plane optical couplers **120**.

The schematic diagram of Figure 4 depicts a 1D planar beam forming and steering optical phased array chip, said chip comprising a laser **10**, a splitting section comprising a Y-branch tree **20** and multimode interference couplers **30**, optical phase shifters in the form of two grouped sets of linear ohmic heating electrodes **50** in push-pull configuration, and out-of-plane optical couplers **120**.

The schematic diagram of Figure 5 depicts a 1D planar beam forming and steering optical phased array chip, said chip comprising a laser **10**, a splitting section comprising a Y-branch tree **20** and multimode interference couplers **30**, optical phase shifters in the form of two grouped linear ohmic heating electrodes **40** and optical phase shifters in the form of two grouped nonlinear ohmic heating electrodes **60**, both linear and nonlinear heating electrodes bring in push-pull configuration, and out-of-plane optical couplers **120**.

The schematic diagram of Figure 6 depicts a 1D planar beam forming and steering optical phased array chip, said chip comprising a laser **10**, a splitting section comprising a Y-branch tree **20** and multimode interference couplers **30**, optical phase shifters in the form of two pairs of grouped linear ohmic heating electrodes, one pair **40** used for coarse phase adjustments and one pair **70** used for fine phase adjustments, both said pairs of electrodes bring in push-pull configuration, one phase offset electrode **80**, and out-of-plane optical couplers **120**.

The schematic diagram of Figure 7 depicts a 1D planar beam forming and steering optical phased array chip, said chip comprising a laser **10**, a splitting section comprising a Y-branch tree **20** and multimode interference couplers **30**, optical phase shifters in the form of two pairs of grouped linear ohmic heating electrodes, each ohmic heater consisting of linear heaters in series, one pair **90** used for coarse phase adjustments and one pair **100** used for fine phase adjustments, both said pairs of electrodes bring in push-pull configuration, one set of phase offset electrodes **110**, and out-of-plane optical couplers **120**.

The schematic diagram of Figure 8 is similar to the schematic diagram of Figure 7 with an added concave lens **130** used to extend the steering range.

The schematic diagram of Figure 9 comprises a plurality of the photonic integrated circuit (PIC) depicted in Figure 7 with the laser being shared between the two PICs. Alternatively, each PIC could be supplied with a separate laser.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

5 A lidar-based apparatus and method are used for the solid state steering of laser beams using Photonic Integrated Circuits (PICs). Integrated optic design and fabrication micro- and nanotechnologies are used for the production of chip-scale optical splitters that distribute an optical signal from a laser essentially uniformly to an array of pixels, said pixels comprising tunable optical delay lines and optical antennas. Said antennas achieve out-of-plane coupling
10 of light.

As the delay lines of said antenna-containing pixels in said array are tuned, each antenna emits light of a specific phase to form a desired far-field radiation pattern through interference of these emissions. Said array serves the function of solid state optical phased array (OPA).

15 By incorporating a large number of antennas, high-resolution far-field patterns can be achieved by an OPA, supporting the radiation pattern beam forming and steering needed in solid state lidar, as well as the generation of arbitrary radiation patterns as needed in three-dimensional holography, optical memory, mode matching for optical space-division multiplexing, free space communications, and biomedical sciences. Whereas imaging from
20 an array is conventionally transmitted through the intensity of the pixels, the OPA allows imaging through the control of the optical phase of pixels that receive coherent light waves from a single source.

A one-dimensional (1D) planar beam forming and steering optical phased array chip is a simple building block of a solid-state lidar, enabling manufacturing of lidars with high
25 yields and at low cost.

The vertical dimension (i.e., the dimension perpendicular to the steering direction) of the spot size is reduced with at least one on-chip grating or at least one off-chip lens.

Types of said off-chip lens include but are not limited to:

- Refractive lens
- 30 - Graded-index (GRIN) lens
- Diffractive optical element (DOE)
- Holographic optical element (HOE)

One or a plurality of 1D beam forming and steering circuits can be used to achieve desired horizontal field of view (FOV) or steering range.

Beam spitting is achieved with any subset of beam splitting optical devices, including but not limited to:

- 5 - Y-branches
- Directional couplers
- Multimode interference (MMI) couplers

A preferred embodiment for beam splitting comprises Y-branch splitters followed by MMI couplers.

10 Phase shifting controlled with any subset of phase shifting optical devices, including but not limited to:

- Gain elements
- All-pass filters
- Bragg gratings
- 15 - Dispersive materials
- Wavelength tuning
- Phase tuning

When phase tuning is used, the actuation mechanisms used to tune said delay lines, and said optical splitters when they are tunable, can be any of a variety of mechanisms,

20 including but not limited to:

- Thermo-optic actuation
- Electro-optic actuation
- Electroabsorption actuation
- Free carrier absorption actuation
- 25 - Magneto-optic actuation
- Liquid crystal actuation
- All-optical actuation

Each pixel can have independent phase control for maximum flexibility and optimal control of the far field radiation pattern, or grouping (sometimes called banding) can be used to provide phase tuning to a plurality of pixels with one control signal for the simplification of the design, fabrication, testing, control and operation.

- 5 Grouped phased shifting controlled with any subset of:
- One or plurality of linear (triangular) electrode(s) – serial or parallel; identical or coarse and fine adjustment electrodes
 - One or plurality of nonlinear (sublinear or superlinear) electrode(s) – serial or parallel; identical or coarse and fine adjustment electrodes

- 10 One or plurality of phase offset electrode(s) of polygonal shape (e.g., rectangular) – serial or parallel; identical or coarse and fine adjustment electrodes – additive or subtractive; push-push or push-pull configurations.

The optical antennas can be any of a variety of nanostructures that can couple light out of the plane of the PIC, including but not limited to:

- 15
 - Gratings
 - Holographic optical elements (HOE)
 - Mirrors
 - Total internal reflection (TIR) interfaces
 - Lenses

- 20 The chip containing the OPA PIC is preferably compatible with a complementary metal-oxide-semiconductor (CMOS) process.

What is Claimed is:

1. An apparatus, comprising:
a first optical phased array one-dimensional beam forming and steering integrated circuit with a first field of view steering range adjacent to a second optical phased array one-dimensional beam forming and steering integrated circuit with a second field of view steering range, the first field of view steering range and the second field of view steering range establishing an increased horizontal field of view steering range in a common direction, the first optical phased array one-dimensional beam forming and steering integrated circuit and the second optical phased array one-dimensional beam forming and steering integrated circuit each being a building block of a solid-state lidar, and each including:
at least one optical power splitter; and
at least one optical phase shifter controlled with at least one phase shifting device, including but not limited to: a gain element, an all-pass filter, a Bragg grating, a dispersive material, a wavelength tuning device and a phase tuning device.
2. The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising at least one on-chip grating or at least one off-chip lens.
3. The apparatus of claim 2 wherein said at least one off-chip lens includes but is not limited to: a refractive lens; a graded-index lens; a diffractive optical element and a holographic optical element.
4. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said at least one optical power splitter is selected from any subset of power splitting optical devices, including but not limited to:
Y-branches;
Directional couplers; and
Multimode interference couplers.
5. The apparatus of claim 4 wherein said at least one optical power splitting has Y-branches followed by multimode interference couplers.

6. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein an actuation mechanism of said at least one phase shifter utilizes a subset of actuation mechanisms, including but not limited to:

- Thermo-optic actuation;
- Electro-optic actuation;
- Electroabsorption actuation;
- Free carrier absorption actuation;
- Magneto-optic actuation;
- Liquid crystal actuation; and
- All-optic actuation.

7. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein each pixel of the pixel array has associated with it an independent phase shifter.

8. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein a plurality of said pixels of the pixel array are banded by having combined phase shifters.

9. The apparatus of claim 8 wherein the plurality of pixels of the pixel array are banded with control elements, including but not limited to one or a plurality of the following:

- linear electrodes;
- nonlinear electrodes; and
- phase offset electrodes.

10. The apparatus of claim 9 wherein electrodes present in plural quantities are disposed in a manner that is at least one of the following:

Serial;
Parallel;
Additive; and
Subtractive.

11. The apparatus of claim 1 combined with at least one out-of-plane optical coupler achieved with an optical element including but not limited to:

Gratings;
Holographic optical elements;
Mirrors;
Total internal reflection interfaces; and
Lenses.

12. The apparatus of claim 1 combined with a lensing apparatus to extend the steering range.

13. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said photonic integrated circuit is compatible with a complementary metal-oxide-semiconductor silicon fabrication process.