

OPTICAL CONCENTRATOR

FIELD OF THE DISCLOSED TECHNIQUE

The disclosed technique relates to optics in general, and to
5 methods and systems for concentrating light, in particular.

BACKGROUND OF THE DISCLOSED TECHNIQUE

The need to concentrate light is relevant in many technological applications. One such application is concentrating incoming light rays
10 from a light source onto a photodetector. Such a photodetector may be detecting the wavelength of incoming light rays, its intensity, or various other properties or signals carried by incoming light rays. Photodetectors come in various sizes with regards to the size of their active detecting surface. Their price increases significantly with an increase in their active
15 detecting surface. A photodetector, with an active detector surface in the square centimeter range, can cost many times the amount of a similar photodetector, with an active detector surface in the square millimeter range. It is therefore cost effective to be able to concentrate incoming light onto ever smaller photodetectors. Currently, optical systems exist which
20 can achieve the goal of concentrating incoming light rays onto small photodetectors. The optical systems currently used to concentrate incoming light rays are usually either large, bulky or not cost effective. As such, they are not well suited to be used in cases where light concentration onto small detectors is required and the physical size of
25 such optical systems needs to be small.

US Patent No. 5,604,607 issued to Mirzaoff, and entitled "Light concentrator system" is directed to a system for collecting and concentrating electromagnetic radiation. The system includes a photosensitive medium for capturing light and a planar array located
30 proximate to the photosensitive medium for guiding the light into the

photosensitive medium. The planar array includes a plurality of concentrator elements. The concentrator elements each have a circular input and a circular output opening, and a hyperbolic cross section. Between each input and output opening is a reflective inner wall. The
5 reflective inner wall functions to guide and concentrate radiant energy or light impinging upon an input opening through the concentrator element to an output opening towards the photosensitive medium.

US Patent No. 6,541,694 issued to Winston et al., and entitled "Nonimaging light concentrator with uniform irradiance" is directed to a
10 nonimaging light concentrator system and nonimaging optical mixer designs that produce uniform flux for use with photovoltaic dish concentrators. The system includes a primary collector of light, such as a reflector dish, for producing highly concentrated light flux. The system further includes an optical mixer located near the focal zone of the primary
15 collector of light. The optical mixer includes a transparent entrance aperture and a transparent exit aperture. The optical mixer further includes an internally reflective housing for substantially total internal reflection of light. An array of photovoltaic cells is located near the transparent exit aperture.

20 The system works as follows. Light entering the system is collected by the primary collector of light and directed towards its focal zone. At the focal zone, the light enters an optical mixer. Light inside the optical mixer is provided to the array of photovoltaic cells by substantial total internal reflection inside the optical mixer. Substantial total internal
25 reflection provides for uniform light flux on the array of photovoltaic cells.

US Patent No. 6,302,100 issued to Vandenberg, and entitled "System for collimating and concentrating direct and diffused radiation" is directed to a system and a method for collimating light energy falling
30 randomly from a plurality of directions onto a fixed positioned thin flat surface. The system includes a collimator for collimating incident light, a lens for concentrating light collimated by the collimator, a light funnel for

further concentrating light concentrated by the lens, and a receiver. The collimated light is concentrated by an assembly of converging and diverging prismatic slabs and optical means towards the light funnel. Each prism slab's longitudinal axis is parallel to the shortest side of the collector. Each diverging prism has a first side in contact with a converging prism, and a second side in contact with another converging prism. The index of refraction of the converging prisms differs from the index of refraction of the diverging prisms.

SUMMARY OF THE DISCLOSED TECHNIQUE

Embodiments of the present invention provide a novel method and system for optically concentrating light rays using two Fresnel lenses.

In a first aspect of the invention, there is provided apparatus, for concentrating light rays arriving from at least one opening onto a receiver, said light rays originating from at least one source external to said apparatus, the distance between said at least one source of said light rays and said apparatus being substantially larger than the size of said opening, individual beams of said light rays thereby each arriving at said apparatus substantially collimated, comprising: a respective Fresnel lens assembly for each said at least one opening, said at least one respective Fresnel lens assembly including: a first Fresnel lens, located between a respective one of said at least one opening and said receiver, for making parallel with an optical axis of said first Fresnel lens, said light rays arriving from said respective one of said at least one opening; and a second Fresnel lens, located between said first Fresnel lens and said receiver, for converging said parallel light rays onto said receiver, wherein each said at least one opening is located in front of said respective Fresnel lens assembly, on the focal plane of said respective first Fresnel lens, centered on the focal point of said respective first Fresnel lens, wherein said receiver is located behind each said at least one respective Fresnel lens assembly, on the focal point of the respective said second Fresnel lens.

In a second aspect of the invention, there is provided apparatus, for concentrating light rays arriving from at least one opening onto a receiver, said light rays originating from at least one source external to said apparatus, the distance between said at least one source of said light rays and said apparatus being substantially larger than the size of said opening, individual beams of said light rays thereby each arriving at said apparatus substantially collimated, the apparatus comprising: a respective lens assembly for each said at least one opening, said at least one respective lens assembly including: a first lens, located between a respective one of said at least one opening and said receiver, for making parallel with an optical axis of said first lens said light rays arriving from said respective one of said at least one opening; and a second lens, located between said first lens and said receiver, for converging said parallel light rays onto said receiver, wherein each said at least one opening

is located in front of said respective lens assembly, on the focal plane of said respective first lens, centered on the focal point of said respective first lens, wherein said receiver is located behind each said at least one respective lens assembly, on the focal point of the respective said second lens.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The disclosed technique will be understood and appreciated more fully from the following detailed description taken in conjunction with the drawings in which:

5 Figure 1A is a schematic diagram of the prior art illustrating the collimating properties of convex lenses and Fresnel lenses.

 Figure 1B is a schematic diagram illustrating the converging properties of convex and Fresnel lenses;

 Figure 2 is a schematic diagram of a system, constructed and
10 operative in accordance with an embodiment of the disclosed technique;
 and

 Figure 3 is a schematic diagram of another system, constructed and operative in accordance with an embodiment of the disclosed technique.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE EMBODIMENTS

The disclosed technique overcomes the disadvantages of the prior art by providing an optical concentrator comprising two Fresnel lenses. One Fresnel lens is used to collimate incoming light rays, whereas
5 the other Fresnel lens is used to concentrate the incoming light rays onto a small photodetector. The disclosed technique provides a product which is lightweight, compact, and cost effective.

Fresnel lenses produce the same optical effects of conventional lenses, be it concentrating light, collimating light, or dispersing light, for a
10 fraction of the weight, volume and width of conventional lenses. This is due to their unique design. Reference is now made to Figure 1A, which is a schematic diagram illustrating the collimating properties of a convex lens and a Fresnel lens. Convex lens 20 has a property whereby light rays 21
15 passing through its surface are collimated provided such light rays pass through point 24, an imaginary point known as the focal point. In fact, any light ray passing through line 26, an imaginary line known as the focal plane, will be collimated by convex lens 20. This property is due to the refractive nature of light rays passing through different media. The
20 distance from focal plane 26 to convex lens 20 is known as the focal length and is specific for the particular curvature of convex lens 20. Fresnel lens 22, just like convex lens 20, has the same property whereby light rays 21 passing through its surface are collimated, provided such light rays pass through its focal point 28 or its focal plane 30.

Reference is now made to Figure 1B, which is a schematic
25 diagram illustrating the converging properties of a convex lens and a Fresnel lens. Convex lens 20 has a property whereby collimated light 32 passing through its surface can be converged onto its focal point 24. This property is due to the refractive nature of light rays passing through different media. Fresnel lens 22, just like convex lens 20, has the same
30 property whereby collimated light 32 passing through its surface is converged onto its focal point 28.

Reference is now made to Figure 2, which is a schematic diagram of a system, generally referenced 100, constructed and operative in accordance with an embodiment of the disclosed technique. System 100 includes opening 102, first Fresnel lens 104, second Fresnel lens 106, and photodetector 108. System 100 may be encapsulated in closed structure 114 to prevent ambient light or other external light sources from entering it. Opening 102 is located on the focal plane of first Fresnel lens 104, centered along optical axis 112 of first Fresnel lens 104 and second Fresnel lens 106. Opening 102 is located in front of first Fresnel lens 104. Optical axis 112 passes through the focal points of both Fresnel lenses. Opening 102 can vary in size. If opening 102 is larger than the diameter of Fresnel lenses 104 and 106, some of the light entering system 100, via opening 102, may not be concentrated on photodetector 108. Side 114 of first Fresnel lens 104 is ridged, whereas side 116 of first Fresnel lens 104 is flat. Fresnel lenses can be referred to as ridged lenses as their unique design gives them the appearance of having ridges. First Fresnel lens 104 has its ridged side 114 facing opening 102. First Fresnel lens 104 and second Fresnel lens 106 are substantially similar in size. Second Fresnel lens 106 is located behind first Fresnel lens 104, centered on optical axis 112 such that optical axis 112 passes through its focal point. Side 120 of second Fresnel lens 106 is ridged, whereas side 118 of second Fresnel lens 106 is flat. Second Fresnel lens 106 has its flat side 118 facing opening 102. In an embodiment of the disclosed technique, second Fresnel lens 106 and first Fresnel lens 104 are fit together by joining side 116 of first Fresnel lens 104 to side 118 of second Fresnel lens 106. In another embodiment of the disclosed technique, first Fresnel lens 104 and second Fresnel lens 106 are located a distance apart from one another. In a further embodiment of the disclosed technique, first Fresnel lens 104 can have its flat side 116 facing opening 102. In another embodiment of the disclosed technique second Fresnel lens 106 can have its ridged side 120 facing opening 102. Photodetector 108 is located on the focal plane

of second Fresnel lens 106, centered on optical axis 112. Photodetector 108 is located behind second Fresnel lens 106. This means that photodetector 108 is located on the focal point of second Fresnel lens 106. Photodetector 108 is significantly smaller than the size of opening 102.

5 System 100 works in the following generalized manner. Light rays 110A arrive at system 100 from multiple directions. Incoming, light rays 110A, to be concentrated on photodetector 108, pass through opening 102. Since the size of opening 102 is, in general, much smaller than the distance between system 100 and the source of light rays 110A, each individual beam of light passing through opening 102 will pass there through as a substantially collimated beam of light. Opening 102 is the only way for incoming light rays to fall incident on Fresnel lenses 104 and 106 because system 100 may be completely encapsulated within closed structure 114. Since opening 102 is smaller than or equal to the diameter of Fresnel lenses 104 and 106, and since opening 102 lies on the focal plane of first Fresnel lens 104, any light rays passing through opening 102 and falling incident on first Fresnel lens 104 will become substantially collimated, or substantially parallel with one another, after passing through first Fresnel lens 104. Once incoming light rays 110A pass through first Fresnel lens 104, they emerges as substantially collimated light rays 110B due to the specific location of opening 102 vis-à-vis first Fresnel lens 104. Substantially collimated light rays 110B then fall incident on second Fresnel lens 106. Since the light rays falling incident on second Fresnel lens 106 are substantially collimated, they will pass through second Fresnel lens 106 and then converge onto the focal point of second Fresnel lens 106. Since photodetector 108 is located on the focal point of second Fresnel lens 106, convergent light rays 110C exiting second Fresnel lens 106 will be concentrated on photodetector 108.

 In general, there is no restriction on the distance between first Fresnel lens 104 and second Fresnel lens 106, although due to the ridged nature of first Fresnel lens 104, some of substantially collimated light rays

110B may disperse slightly once they pass through first Fresnel lens 104. The amount of dispersion, in terms of distance from the ends of second Fresnel lens 106, depends on the distance between the two Fresnel lenses. As the distance between the two Fresnel lenses increases, the amount of dispersion, in terms of distance from the ends of second Fresnel lens 106, also increases. If the amount of dispersion is significant, then the diameter of second Fresnel lens 106 needs to be increased accordingly to converge the dispersed rays that pass through first Fresnel lens 104 onto photodetector 108.

It is noted that first Fresnel lens 104 and second Fresnel lens 106 can each be replaced by a cylindrical Fresnel lens. It is also noted that first Fresnel lens 104 and second Fresnel lens 106 can be replaced by a double-sided Fresnel lens. It is further noted that first Fresnel lens 104 and second Fresnel lens 106 can each be replaced by a spherical lens, a cylindrical lens, or a regular lens.

Reference is now made to Figure 3, which is a schematic diagram of another system, generally referenced 140, constructed and operative in accordance with an embodiment of the disclosed technique. System 140 includes three Fresnel lens sets which are each substantially similar to system 100 (Figure 2). System 140 includes openings 142_A, 142_B and 142_C, first Fresnel lenses 144_A, 144_B and 144_C, second Fresnel lenses 146_A, 146_B and 146_C, and photodetector 148. One side of each of first Fresnel lenses 144_A, 144_B and 144_C is ridged, whereas the other side of each of first Fresnel lenses 144_A, 144_B and 144_C is flat. One side of each of second Fresnel lenses 146_A, 146_B and 146_C is ridged, whereas the other side of each of second Fresnel lenses 146_A, 146_B and 146_C is flat. First Fresnel lenses 144_A, 144_B and 144_C, and second Fresnel lenses 146_A, 146_B and 146_C, are substantially similar in size.

Opening 142_A is located on the focal plane of first Fresnel lens 144_A, centered along optical axis 152_A of first Fresnel lens 144_A and second Fresnel lens 146_A. Opening 142_A is located in front of first Fresnel

lens 144_A. Optical axis 152_A passes through the focal points of both Fresnel lenses. Second Fresnel lens 146_A is located behind first Fresnel lens 144_A, centered on optical axis 152_A such that optical axis 152_A passes through its focal point. Opening 142_B is located on the focal plane of first Fresnel lens 144_B, centered along optical axis 152_B of first Fresnel lens 144_B and second Fresnel lens 146_B. Opening 142_B is located in front of first Fresnel lens 144_B. Optical axis 152_B passes through the focal points of both Fresnel lenses. Second Fresnel lens 146_B is located behind first Fresnel lens 144_B, centered on optical axis 152_B such that optical axis 152_B passes through its focal point. Opening 142_C is located on the focal plane of first Fresnel lens 144_C, centered along optical axis 152_C of first Fresnel lens 144_C and second Fresnel lens 146_C. Opening 142_C is located in front of first Fresnel lens 144_C. Optical axis 152_C passes through the focal points of both Fresnel lenses. Second Fresnel lens 146_C is located behind first Fresnel lens 144_C, centered on optical axis 152_C such that optical axis 152_C passes through its focal point.

Photodetector 148 is located on the intersection of the focal planes of second Fresnel lenses 146_A, 146_B and 146_C. Photodetector 148 is located behind second Fresnel lenses 146_A, 146_B and 146_C. This means that photodetector 148 is located on the focal points of second Fresnel lenses 146_A, 146_B and 146_C. Second Fresnel lenses 146_A, 146_B and 146_C are configured such that their respective focal points all coincide. Photodetector 148 is significantly smaller than the size of openings 142_A, 142_B and 142_C. Openings 142_A, 142_B and 142_C can vary in size. If the openings are larger than the diameter of the Fresnel lenses, some of the light entering system 140, via opening 142_A, 142_B and 142_C may not be concentrated on photodetector 148. In an embodiment of the disclosed technique, second Fresnel lenses 146_A, 146_B and 146_C are each respectively fit together to first Fresnel lenses 144_A, 144_B and 144_C by respectively joining the flat side of each of first Fresnel lenses 144_A, 144_B

and 144_C to the respective flat side of each of second Fresnel lenses 146_A, 146_B and 146_C.

Each Fresnel lens set and opening (for example opening 142_A, first Fresnel lens 144_A and second Fresnel lens 146_A) is configured to receive light rays, for example light rays 150_A, 150_B and 150_C, coming from different directions. It is noted that each individual beam of light, in each of light rays 150_A, 150_B and 150_C, arrives at system 140 substantially collimated. Each individual beam of light arrives at system 140 substantially collimated since the size of openings 142_A, 142_B and 142_C are, in general, much smaller than the distance between system 140 and the source of light rays 150_A, 150_B and 150_C. The location and orientation of each Fresnel lens set and opening, with respect to one another, is such that photodetector 148 is simultaneously located at the focal point of each second Fresnel lens of each Fresnel lens set. In another embodiment of the disclosed, a plurality of Fresnel lens sets and openings are configured to receive light rays coming from different directions. The location and orientation of each Fresnel lens set and opening, with respect to one another, is such that photodetector 148 is simultaneously located at the focal point of each second Fresnel lens of each Fresnel lens set. System 140 allows light rays coming from a plurality of directions to be concentrated onto a single photodetector.

It will be appreciated by persons skilled in the art that the disclosed technique is not limited to what has been particularly shown and described hereinabove. Rather the scope of the disclosed technique is defined only by the claims, which follow.

CLAIMS

1. Apparatus, for concentrating light rays arriving from at least one opening onto a receiver, said light rays originating from at least one source external to said apparatus, the distance between said at least one source of said light rays and said apparatus being substantially larger than the size of said opening, individual beams of said light rays thereby each arriving at said apparatus substantially collimated, comprising:
 - a respective Fresnel lens assembly for each said at least one opening, said at least one respective Fresnel lens assembly including:
 - a first Fresnel lens, located between a respective one of said at least one opening and said receiver, for making parallel with an optical axis of said first Fresnel lens, said light rays arriving from said respective one of said at least one opening; and
 - a second Fresnel lens, located between said first Fresnel lens and said receiver, for converging said parallel light rays onto said receiver,
 - wherein each said at least one opening is located in front of said respective Fresnel lens assembly, on the focal plane of said respective first Fresnel lens, centered on the focal point of said respective first Fresnel lens,
 - wherein said receiver is located behind each said at least one respective Fresnel lens assembly, on the focal point of the respective said second Fresnel lens.
2. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein, for each said respective Fresnel lens assembly, the distance from said respective one of said at least one opening to said receiver is approximate to the accumulated distance of the focal length of said respective first Fresnel lens, the focal length of said respective

second Fresnel lens and the space between said respective first Fresnel lens and said respective second Fresnel lens.

3. The apparatus according to claim 2, wherein said respective first
5 Fresnel lens and said respective second Fresnel lens each include a ridged side and a flat side,
wherein said respective first Fresnel lens has its ridged side facing said respective one of said at least one opening and its flat side facing said respective second Fresnel lens, and wherein said
10 respective second Fresnel lens has its flat side facing said respective first Fresnel lens and its ridged side facing said receiver.
4. The apparatus according to claim 3, wherein said respective Fresnel lenses are substantially similar in size.
- 15 5. The apparatus according to claim 2, wherein said space equals zero.
6. The apparatus according to claim 3, wherein said respective
20 Fresnel lenses are joined together into a single optical element.
7. The apparatus according to claim 2, wherein, for each said respective Fresnel lens assembly, said respective one of said at least one opening is substantially equal in size, or smaller in size,
25 than a diameter of said respective first Fresnel lens and said respective second Fresnel lens.
8. The apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising a closed structure for preventing ambient light from entering said apparatus,
30 wherein said at least one opening is located on said closed

structure, and said closed structure encapsulates said respective Fresnel lens assembly and said receiver.

9. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein at least one of said first Fresnel lens and said second Fresnel lens, is selected from the group consisting of:
 - Fresnel lens;
 - cylindrical Fresnel lens; and
 - double-sided Fresnel lens.
10. Apparatus, for concentrating light rays arriving from at least one opening onto a receiver, said light rays originating from at least one source external to said apparatus, the distance between said at least one source of said light rays and said apparatus being substantially larger than the size of said opening, individual beams of said light rays thereby each arriving at said apparatus substantially collimated, the apparatus comprising:
 - a respective lens assembly for each said at least one opening, said at least one respective lens assembly including:
 - a first lens, located between a respective one of said at least one opening and said receiver, for making parallel with an optical axis of said first lens said light rays arriving from said respective one of said at least one opening; and
 - a second lens, located between said first lens and said receiver, for converging said parallel light rays onto said receiver,
 - wherein each said at least one opening is located in front of said respective lens assembly, on the focal plane of said respective first lens, centered on the focal point of said respective first lens,
 - wherein said receiver is located behind each said at least one respective lens assembly, on the focal point of the respective said second lens.

11. The apparatus according to claim 10, wherein, for each said
respective lens assembly, the distance from said respective one of
said at least one opening to said receiver is approximate to the
5 accumulated distance of the focal length of said respective first
lens, the focal length of said respective second lens and the space
between said respective first lens and said respective second lens.
12. The apparatus according to claim 11, wherein said respective first
10 lens and said respective second lens each include a ridged side
and a flat side,
wherein said respective first lens has its ridged side facing
said respective one of said at least one opening and its flat side
facing said respective second lens, and wherein said respective
15 second lens has its flat side facing said respective first lens and its
ridged side facing said receiver.
13. The apparatus according to claim 12, wherein said respective
lenses are substantially similar in size.
- 20 14. The apparatus according to claim 11, wherein said space equals
zero.
15. The apparatus according to claim 12, wherein said respective
25 lenses are joined together into a single optical element.
16. The apparatus according to claim 11, wherein, for each said
respective lens assembly, said respective one of said at least one
opening is substantially equal in size, or smaller in size, than a
30 diameter of said respective first lens and said respective second
lens.

17. The apparatus according to claim 10, further comprising a closed structure for preventing ambient light from entering said apparatus, wherein said at least one opening is located on said closed structure, and said closed structure encapsulates said respective lens assembly and said receiver.
18. The apparatus according to claim 10, wherein at least one of said first lens and said second lens is selected from the group consisting of:
- cylindrical lenses; and
 - regular lenses.
19. The apparatuses according to any of the claims 1-18 substantially as described hereinabove or as illustrated in any of the drawings.