

1 TITLE OF THE INVENTION:

Automatic Focusing Apparatus

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION:

Field of the Invention

5 The present invention relates to a focus detection apparatus for a camera or the like.

Related Art

In a conventional focus detection apparatus for a single-lens reflex camera, two images of beams which pass through two different pupil regions of a photographing lens are received by a pair of sensor arrays and are photoelectrically converted. A relative positional displacement of the image signals as outputs from the pair of sensor arrays is obtained to detect an amount of out-of-focus (defocus amount) of the photographing lens. In this case, since only a brightness distribution of a specific area of the object space is detected by the pair of sensors, a defocus amount cannot be detected in an object having no brightness distribution in the specific area.

A plurality of sensor pairs and the corresponding focus detection optical systems are prepared to extract brightness distributions of the plurality of areas. Therefore, focus detection for many objects has been attempted, as disclosed in Japanese Patent Publication No. 59-28886, Japanese Patent Laid-Open No. 62-212611,

1 and Japanese Patent Application No. 62-234895 filed by
the present applicant.

When an accumulation type sensor is used,
accumulation time must be optimally controlled in
5 accordance with an object brightness level in order to
cause an output signal from the sensor to fall within
the dynamic range of a processing system. In a system
having the plurality of sensor pairs, when the
accumulation operations of all the sensors are
10 completed within the same accumulation time, different
brightness levels are obtained since spatial areas of
the object extracted by the respective sensor pairs are
different. Therefore, the range of image signals thus
obtained from the sensors may not fall within the
15 dynamic range of the processing system.

For example, if a given portion corresponding to
an object has a high brightness level and the
accumulation time is shortened in accordance with a
sensor pair corresponding to the given portion, object
20 patterns are rarely obtained from other sensors
corresponding to dark portions, resulting in
inconvenience.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to the invention there is provided a focus detection apparatus or an automatic focusing camera having said focus detection apparatus which has a plurality of accumulation type sensor sections for detecting a brightness distribution of different object areas and which performs focus detection in the different object areas, comprising: (a) an accumulation time control circuit for independently controlling the signal accumulation time of each said sensor section; and (b) a processing circuit for processing accumulated signal of the sensor section whose accumulation time control has been completed, said processing circuit executing said processing to the sensor section whose accumulation time control has been completed even before the accumulation time control of other said sensor sections has not yet been completed.

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How the invention may be carried out will now be described by way of example only and with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

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1 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS:

Fig. 1 is an optical diagram of a focus detection system in an automatic focusing control apparatus for a camera according to an embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 2 is a circuit diagram showing an embodiment of the camera according to the present invention;

Fig. 3 is a circuit diagram showing arrangements of a sensor unit SNS and a sensor driver SDR shown in Fig. 2;

Fig. 4 is a circuit diagram showing an arrangement of a sensor shown in Fig. 3;

Figs. 5A, 5B, and 5C are waveform charts for explaining sensor drive timings;

Fig. 6 is a circuit diagram showing an arrangement of an accumulation control circuit AGC shown in Fig. 3;

Fig. 7 is a waveform chart for explaining a method of controlling accumulation by the circuit AGC shown in Fig. 6;

Fig. 8 is a circuit diagram showing an arrangement of an amplifier VAMP shown in Fig. 3;

Figs. 9A, 9B, and 9C, Figs. 10A, 10B, and 10C, and Fig. 11 are program flow charts for explaining operations of the automatic focusing control apparatus for the camera according to the present invention shown in Fig. 2; and

Figs. 12 and 13 are views for explaining an operation of the present invention.

1 DESCRIPTION OF THE EMBODIMENT OF THE INVENTION:

 A preferred embodiment of the present invention will be described with reference to the accompanying drawings from Fig. 1.

5 Fig. 1 shows an optical system used in an focus detection apparatus according to the present invention.

 The optical system includes an objective lens (photographing lens) FLNS, a view mask MSK located near a prospective focal plane, a field lens FLDL, a pair of
10 lenses MI1 and MI2 (constituting a secondary optical system) and a pair of lenses MO1 and MO2 (constituting a secondary optical system) located symmetrical about an optical axis of the objective lens FLNS and perpendicular to each other with different base line
15 lengths. In this embodiment, the base line length of the pair of lenses MO1 and MO2 is set to be longer than that of the pair of lenses MI1 and MI2.

 A pair of sensor arrays SNSI1 and SNSI2 are arranged behind the pair of lenses MI1 and MI2,
20 respectively. Similarly, a pair of sensor arrays SNSO1 and SNSO2 are arranged behind the pair of lenses MO1 and MO2, respectively. Diaphragms DPI1 and DPI2 are arranged in correspondence with the pair of lenses MI1 and MI2, respectively. Diaphragms DPO1 and DPO2 are
25 arranged in correspondence with the pair of lenses M $\bar{O}$ 1 and M $\bar{O}$ 2, respectively.

1 The field lens FLDL has a focusing function for
focusing the diaphragms DPI1 and DPI2 on exit pupil
areas ARI1 and ARI2 and the diaphragms DPO1 and DPO2 on
exit pupil areas ARO1 and ARO2 of the objective lens
5 FLNS. Beams passing through the areas ARI1 and ARI2
are incident on the sensor arrays SNSI1 and SNSI2,
respectively. Similarly, beams passing through the
areas ARO1 and ARO2 are incident on the sensor arrays
SNSO1 and SNSO2, respectively.

10 In the focus detection system shown in Fig. 1,
when a focal point of the objective lens FLNS is
located in front of the prospective focal plane, object
images formed on the sensor pairs come close to each
other. When the focal point of the objective lens FLNS
15 is located behind the prospective focal plane,
objective images formed on the sensor pairs are
separated from each other. A relative displacement of
the object images has a specific functional
relationship with the defocus amounts. When
20 appropriate calculations are performed for sensor
outputs in each sensor pair, a defocus amount of the
objective lens can be detected.

 In this optical system, the pair of sensors SNSO1
and SNSO2 extract a light amount distribution of the
25 object in the longitudinal direction. The pair of
sensors SNSI1 and SNSI2 extract a light amount
distribution in the lateral direction. Therefore, this

1 optical system can cope with various types of object
patterns. Since the base line of the secondary optical
system (MO1 and MO2) in the longitudinal direction is
longer than that of the secondary optical system (MI1
5 and MI2) in the lateral direction, the relative
positional displacement of the object image in the
longitudinal direction is larger than that in the
lateral direction. Therefore, longitudinal focal
detection is more accurate than lateral focal
10 detection. Since the relative positional displacement
in the lateral direction is small, a lateral defocus
amount larger than a longitudinal defocus amount can be
detected.

Fig. 2 is a circuit diagram for explaining an
15 arrangement of the camera including the focus detection
apparatus according to the present invention. The
arrangements of the respective circuit components will
be described below.

Referring to Fig. 2, a camera controller (to be
20 referred to as a computer hereinafter) PRS comprises a
one-chip microcomputer having a CPU (central processing
unit), a ROM, a RAM, and an A/D conversion function.
The computer PRS performs a series of operations such
as automatic exposure (AE) control function and an
25 automatic focus (AF) control function, a film
winding/rewinding operation in accordance with camera
sequence programs stored in the ROM. For this purpose,

1 the computer PRS communicates with peripheral circuits
in a camera body and a controller in a lens by using
communication signals SO, SI, SCLK, and communication
selection signals CLCM, CSDR, and CDDR, thereby
5 controlling the operations of the respective circuits
and the lens.

The data signal SO is output from the computer
PRS, and the data signal SI is input thereto. The data
signals SO and SI are output and input in response to
10 the sync clock signal SCLK.

A lens communication buffer circuit LCM supplies
power to a lens power source terminal VL during the
operation of the camera. The lens communication buffer
circuit LCM serves as a communication buffer between
15 the camera and the lens when the selection signal CLCM
from the computer PRS is set at a high-potential level
(to be referred to as "H" level hereinafter; and a
low-potential level is referred to as "L" level
hereinafter).

20 When the computer PRS sets the signal CLCM at "H"
level and outputs predetermined data in the form of the
output signal SO in synchronism with the signal SCLK,
the buffer circuit LCM outputs buffer signals LCK and
DCL of the signal SCLK and the signal SO through
25 communication contacts between the camera and the lens.
At the same time, a buffer signal of a signal DLC from
the Lens is output as the input signal SI. The

1 computer PRS receives the lens data as the input signal
SI in synchronism with the clock signal SCLK.
A switch detection & display circuit DDR is selected
when the signal CDDR is set at "H" level and is
5 controlled by the computer PRS using the signals SO,
SI, and SCLK. More specifically, the circuit DDR
changes a display content of a display member DSP of
the camera on the basis of the data sent from the
computer PRS and informs the computer PRS of the ON/OFF
10 states of various operation members of the camera
through communication.

Switches SW1 and SW2 are interlocked with a
release button (not shown). The switch SW1 is turned
on upon the first half depression of the release
15 button, and the switch SW2 is turned with the second
half depression of the release button. The computer
PRS performs photometric and AF operations when the
switch SW1 is turned on. The computer PRS performs AE
control and subsequent film winding by using an ON
20 signal as a trigger signal from the switch SW2.

The switch SW2 is connected to an "interruption
input terminal" of the computer PRS. Even during
execution of a program upon an ON operation of the
switch SW1, an ON signal from the switch SW2 interrupts
25 the presently executed program, so that a predetermined
interruption program is immediately executed.

1 A film feed motor MRT1 and a mirror up/down and
shutter spring charge motor MRT2 are driven by drivers
MDR1 and MDR2, respectively. These motors are
reversible motors which can be rotated in the forward
5 and reverse directions. Signals M1F, M1R, M2F, and M2R
input from the computer PRS to the motor drivers MDR1
and MDR2 are motor control signals.

Shutter front and rear curtain drive start magnets
MG1 and MG2 are energized by amplification transistors
10 TR1 and TR2 in response to signals SMG1 and SMG2, so
that shutter control is performed by the computer PRS.

The switch detection and display circuit DDR, the
motor drivers MDR1 and MDR2, and shutter control are
not directly associated with the present invention, and
15 a detailed description thereof will be omitted.

A control circuit LPRS is arranged in the lens.
The signal DCL input in synchronism with a clock signal
CLK is instruction data input from the camera to a
photographing lens LNS. Lens operations of the
20 instruction are predetermined. The control circuit
LPRS analyzes the instruction in accordance with a
predetermined sequence and performs AF control and AE
control and outputs data representing operating states
of the respective components (e.g., driving states of
25 focus control optical system and diaphragms) and
various parameters (the smallest f-number, a focal

1 length, and a coefficient of a displacement of defocus
amount vs. focus control optical system).

In this embodiment, the lens is exemplified by a
zoom lens. When a focus control instruction is sent
5 from the camera to the zoom lens, a focus control motor
LTMR is driven by signals LMF and LMR in accordance
with data representing the drive amount and its
direction. The focus control optical system is moved
in the direction of optical axis, thereby performing
10 focus control. A displacement of the optical system is
controlled as follows. A pattern on a signal plate
pivoted interlocking with the optical system is
detected by a photocoupler, a pulse signal SENC_F from
an encoder circuit NCF for outputting signals
15 corresponding to the displacement is monitored, and the
number of signals is counted by a counter in the
circuit LPRS. When the count reaches the displacement
value sent to the LPRS, the circuit LPRS sets the
signals LMF and LMR at "L" level, thereby braking a
20 motor LMTR.

Once the focus control instruction is sent from
the camera to the lens, the camera controller
comprising the computer PRS need not involve in lens
driving until lens driving is completed. When a
25 request from the camera is detected, the content of the
counter can be sent to the camera.

1 When an exposure control instruction is sent from
the camera to the lens, a known stepping motor DMTR is
driven to drive the diaphragm in accordance with a
stopping-down count sent from the camera. The stepping
5 monitor is controlled by an open loop, and an encode
for monitoring its operation is not required.

 An encoder circuit ENCZ is connected to the zoom
lens system. The circuit LPRS receives a signal SENCZ
from the encoder circuit ENCZ to detect a zoom
10 position. Lens parameters at zoom positions are stored
in the control circuit LPRS. When a request is sent
from the computer PRS on the camera side, a parameter
corresponding to the present zoom position is sent to
the camera.

15 An exposure control photometric sensor SPC
receives light from an object through the photographing
lens. An output SSPC from the photometric sensor SPC
is input to an analog input terminal of the computer
PRS. The input analog signal is converted into digital
20 data, and the digital data is processed in accordance
with a predetermined program, thereby using the
processed data for AE control.

 A driver SDR drives a focus detection line sensor
unit SNS. When the signal CSDR is set at "H" level,
25 the driver SDR is selected and controlled by the
computer PRS using the signals SO and SI and the signal
SCLK.

1 A signal ϕ SEL supplied from the driver SDR to the
sensor unit SNS is a signal SEL from the computer PRS.
The signal ϕ SEL selects one of the outputs from the
longitudinal sensor array pair (SNSO1 and SNSO2) and
5 the lateral sensor array pair (SNSI1 and SNSI2). When
the signal ϕ SEL (SEL) goes to "H" level, the
longitudinal sensor array pair is selected. After
charge accumulation, image signals are serially output
from the sensor arrays SNSO1 and then SNSO2 from an
10 output VOUT in synchronism with clock signals ϕ SH and
 ϕ HRS, respectively. When the signal ϕ SEL (SEL) is set
at "L" level, the lateral sensor arrays are selected,
and image signals are sequentially output from the
lateral sensor arrays SNSI1 and SNSI2 in the order
15 named.

A monitor signal VPO is output from an object
brightness monitor sensor located near the longitudinal
sensor arrays SNSO1 and SNSO2. A monitor signal VPI is
output from an monitor sensor located near the lateral
20 sensor arrays SNSI1 and SNSI2. The potentials of the
monitor signals VPO and VPI are increased from the
start of signal accumulation, thereby controlling the
signal accumulation of the sensor arrays.

Signals ϕ RES and ϕ VRS are clock signals for
25 resetting the sensors. Signals ϕ HRS and ϕ SH are clock
signals for reading the image signals. Signals ϕ TO and
 ϕ TI are clock signals for terminating accumulation.

1 An output VIDEO from the driver SDR is an image
signal obtained by calculating a difference between a
dark current output and the image signal VOUT from the
sensor unit SNS and amplifying the different with a
5 gain determined by an object brightness level. The
dark current output has an output value of pixels
shielded in each sensor array. The driver SDR causes a
capacitor to hold its output in response to a signal
DSH from the computer PRS and performs differential
10 amplification between the held signal and the image
signal. The output VIDEO is connected to the analog
input terminal of the computer PRS. The computer PRS
converts the analog signals into digital signals, and
these digital signals are sequentially stored at
15 predetermined addresses of the RAM. Signals /TINTEO
and /TINTEI represent that the horizontal sensor array
pair (SNS01 and SNS02) and the lateral sensor array pair
(SNSI1 and SNSI2) are optimally changed, respectively.
The computer PRS executes image signal read access upon
20 reception of the signals /TINTEO and /TINTEI.

 A signal BTIME determines a timing of a gain of
the image signal amplifier in the driver SDR. When the
signal BTIME is set at "H" level, the driver SDR
determines the gain of the amplifier in accordance with
25 the voltage of the signal VPO or VPI.

 Clock signals CK1 and CK2 are used to generate the
signals ϕ RES, ϕ VRS, ϕ HRS, and ϕ SH.

1 The computer PRS sets the signal CSDR to "H" level
and outputs a predetermined "accumulation start
command" to the driver SDR, thereby starting the
accumulation operation of the sensor unit SNS.

5 The longitudinal and lateral sensors perform
photoelectric conversion of object images, and the
charge is accumulated in the sensor photoelectric
transducer elements. At the same time, the outputs VPO
and VPI from the longitudinal and lateral brightness
10 monitor sensors are increased. When these output
potentials reach predetermined levels, the signals
/TINTEO and /TINTEI in the driver SDR are independently
set at "L" level.

 The computer PRS assigns a predetermined waveform
15 to the clock signal CK2. The driver SDR outputs the
clock signals ϕ SH and ϕ HRS to the sensor unit SNS on
the basis of the clock signal CK2. The sensor unit SNS
outputs an image signal in response to the clock
signal. The computer PRS causes the A/D conversion
20 function to convert the output VIDEO input to the
analog input terminal into a digital signal in
synchronism with the clock signal CK2 output from the
computer PRS. The resultant digital signals are
sequentially stored at predetermined addresses of the
25 RAM.

 Of the circuit components described above,
detailed arrangements of the sensor unit SNS and the

1 sensor driver SDR which are particularly associated
with the present invention will be described with
reference to Fig. 3.

A pair of longitudinal image signal detection
5 sensor arrays SNSPX01 and SNSPX02 and a pair of lateral
image signal detection sensor arrays SNSPXI1 and
SNSPXI2 are arranged in the sensor unit SNS. The
sensor arrays SNSPX01 and SNSPX02 and the sensor arrays
SNSPXI1 and SNSPXI2 correspond to the sensor arrays
10 SNSO1 and SNSO2 and the sensor arrays SNSI1 and SNSI2,
respectively. Circuits DRCKT01, DRCKT02, DRCKTI1, and
DRCKTI2 perform control and read operations of the
respective sensor arrays. Shift registers SNSSR01,
SNSSR02, SNSSRI1, and SNSSRI2 sequentially output
15 charge signals accumulated in the pixels of the sensor
arrays. A pair of sensor arrays AGCPX01 and AGCPX02
monitor an object brightness level in the longitudinal
direction, and a pair of sensor arrays AGCPXI1 and
AGCPXI2 monitor an object brightness level in the
20 lateral direction. These sensor array pairs are
located near and parallel to the image signal detection
sensor arrays in point symmetry. Circuits AGCCKT01,
AGCCKT02, AGCCKTI1, and AGCCKTI2 read charge signals
from the monitor sensor arrays, respectively.

25 The arrangement and operation of the sensor unit
will be described in more detail with reference to
Fig. 4.

1 The sensor array of this embodiment is constituted
by an accumulation type photoelectric transducer
element array consisting of a phototransistor array
disclosed in Japanese Patent Laid-Open Nos. 60-12579
5 and 60-12765.

The photoelectric transducer element is different
from a known CCD or MOS sensor. A charge proportional
to incident light is accumulated in a base portion. A
signal corresponding to the accumulated charge amount
10 is output in units of elements. The operation of the
photoelectric transducer element is disclosed in the
above prior arts, and a detailed description thereof
will be omitted.

Referring to Fig. 4, the gates of p-channel MOS
15 transistors MOS5 connected to the bases of bipolar
transistors TR1 serving as photoelectric transducer
elements MOS5 are commonly connected and receive a
sensor reset clock signal $\phi\text{RES}'$. The sources of the
MOS transistors MOS5 are commonly connected and receive
20 a constant potential VBG.

The gates of MOS transistors MOS8 connected to the
emitters of the transistors TR1 are commonly connected
and receive a reset clock signal $\phi\text{VRS}'$. The emitters
of the transistors TR1 are connected to capacitors CT
25 through MOS transistors MOS11, respectively. The
charges of the capacitors CT are input to an output
amplifier SNSAMP through MOS transistors MOS12.

1 The transistors MOS12 are sequentially turned on
by a shift register SNSSR. The shift register SNSSR is
arranged such that a signal terminal of "H" level is
sequentially shifted in response to read clock signal
5 $\phi SH'$.

The gates of the transistors MOS11 are commonly
connected and receive an accumulation end clock ϕT^*
(where * represents 0 or 1; if * is 1, then it
corresponds to the longitudinal sensor arrays; however
10 if * is 0, then it corresponds to the lateral sensor
arrays). The input of the output amplifier SNSAMP is
connected to GND through a MOS transistor MOS14. A
read clock signal $\phi HRS'$ is input to the gate of the
transistor MOS14.

15 The gates of p-channel MOS transistors MOS6
connected to the bases of the bipolar transistors TR2
serving as photoelectric transducer elements are
commonly connected and receive the sensor reset clock
signal $\phi RES'$ in the same manner as in the transistors
20 MOS5. The sources of the MOS transistors MOS6 are
commonly connected and receive the constant voltage
VBG.

The emitters of the transistors TR2 are commonly
connected and a common output signal therefrom is input
25 to an output amplifier AGCAMP.

The input of the output amplifier AGCAMP is
connected to GND through a MOS transistor MOS9.

1 A block SNSPX represented by an alternate long and
short dashed line is an image signal detection sensor
array constituted by the plurality of bipolar
transistors TR1 serving as photoelectric transducer
5 elements. A block DRCKT is a control and read circuit
for the sensor array SNSPX and comprises the plurality
of MOS transistors MOS5, the plurality of MOS
transistors MOS11, the plurality of MOS transistors
MOS12, and the plurality of capacitors CT, the output
10 amplifier SNSAMP, and the MOS transistor MOS14.

A block AGCPX represented by an alternate long and
short dashed line is a brightness monitor sensor array
constituted by the plurality of bipolar transistors
TR2. A block AGCKT is a read circuit for the sensor
15 array AGCPX and comprises the plurality of MOS
transistors MOS6, the output amplifier AGCAMP, and the
MOS transistor MOS9.

An operation of the sensor array will be described
with reference to a timing chart in Fig. 5A.

20 The signals SCLK, SO, CK1, CK2, and BTIME are
control signals input from the computer PRS to the
driver SDR. The signals ϕ RES, ϕ VRS, ϕ TO, ϕ TI, ϕ SH, and
 ϕ HRS are clock signals input from the driver SDR to the
sensor unit SNS.

25 The clock signal serves as the signal ϕ RES' in
Fig. 4; ϕ VRS, as ϕ VRS'; ϕ SH, as ϕ SH'; and ϕ HRS, as
 ϕ HRS'.

1 The clock signals ϕ_{TO} and ϕ_{TI} are accumulation end
clock signals for the longitudinal and lateral sensor
arrays and are independently supplied to the sensor
arrays. Referring to Fig. 4, the signal ϕ_{TO} serves as
5 ϕ_{T^*} for the longitudinal sensor array, while the
signal ϕ_{TO} serves as ϕ_{T^*} for the lateral sensor array.

 The signals ϕ_{VRS} and ϕ_{TO} (ϕ_{TI}) are set at "H"
level at time t_1 , and the signal ϕ_{RES} is set at "L"
level at time t_2 . All the p-channel MOS transistors
10 MOS5 are turned on, and the potential VBG is applied to
the bases of all the transistors TR1. When each of the
residual potentials of the bases of the transistors TR1
is lower than the potential VBG, charges are injected
into the bases. Otherwise, an excessive charge is
15 recombined. Finally, the charge having the potential
VBG is held in each base.

 Meanwhile, since the signal ϕ_{TO} (ϕ_{TI}) is kept at
"H" level, the charges in the capacitors CT are cleared
through the MOS transistors MOS8.

20 When the signal ϕ_{RES} is set at "H" level at time
 t_3 , the charges held in the bases are gradually
recombined and disappear since the signal ϕ_{VRS} is held
at "H" level. Since the charge having the base
potential as VBG is held at the base of each transistor
25 TR1, the charges left in the bases of the transistors
TR1 are equal to each other at time t_4 regardless of
the magnitudes of the charges held prior to time t_2 .

1 When the signals ϕVRS and ϕTO (ϕTI) go to "L"
level at time t_4 , the transistors MOS8 and MOS11 are
turned off. From this moment, the charges generated by
light pumping or excitation are accumulated by the
5 bases of the transistors. A time interval from time t_1
to time t_4 is a reset operation period of the sensor
unit.

 When a predetermined accumulation time has
elapsed, the transistors MOS11 are turned on during a
10 period corresponding to a pulse width of the pulse ϕTO
(ϕTI) from time t_6 to time t_7 . Signals corresponding
to the charges accumulated by the bases of the
transistors TR1 are shifted to the capacitors CT by the
transistor operations. Therefore, the bases of the
15 transistors TR1 continuously accumulate optically
excited charges without a decrease in charge
accumulated in the bases.

 When the signal ϕHRS is set at "H" level during a
time interval from time t_8 to time t_9 , the transistors
20 MOS14 are kept on during this time interval to remove
the charges left in the stray capacitances of a read
line RDLN to the ground GND. Scanning of the MOS
transistors MOS12 is started by the shift register
SNSSR operated in response to a pulse the signal ϕSH
25 during a time interval from time t_{10} to time t_{11} . When
the transistors MOS12 are turned on, the signals held
by the capacitors CT are output to a terminal VOUT'

1 through the read line RDLN and the output amplifier
SNSAMP.

By repeating the above operations, the signals
photoelectrically converted during the accumulation
5 period from time t_4 to time t_6 can be sequentially
read.

In this manner, when the read operation of the
signals from all the transistors TR1 is completed, the
reset operation is performed again from time t_1 to time
10 t_4 , thereby starting the next accumulation operation.

The operation of the image signal detection sensor
array has been described. The reset operation of the
object brightness monitor sensor array from time t_1 to
time t_4 is performed.

15 During the accumulation after the end of reset
operation, the base potential of each transistor TR2 is
gradually increased. The emitter potential of each
transistor TR2 is gradually increased accordingly.

Since the emitters of the transistors TR2 are
20 commonly connected, the highest one of the emitter
potentials of the transistors TR2 serves as the emitter
potential of all the transistors TR2. This highest
potential is output to a terminal corresponding to a
signal VP^* through the output amplifier AGCAMP.
25 Therefore, the signal VP^* is a time variable signal
having a highest brightness level within the object

1 image incident on the object brightness monitor sensor array.

Until the reset operation is performed, the transistors RT1 continue the charge accumulation. The
5 read operation from time t7 is performed again to extract the photoelectric converted signals from the last reset operation up to the present. This operation timing is shown in Fig. 5B.

Referring to Fig. 5B, the reset operation is not
10 performed from time t1 to time t4, as described above. During this time interval, only the read operation is performed. This operation is called "not destruction accumulation" or "not destruction read access". This mode of operation is one of the main features of this
15 embodiment.

A further description will be made with reference to Fig. 3 again.

The sensor arrays described with reference to Fig. 4 comprise two longitudinal sensor arrays and two
20 lateral sensor arrays. The outputs from the longitudinal sensor arrays (SNSPX01 and SNSPX02) are coupled as VoutO which is then input to an analog switch ANSW1. Similarly, the outputs from the lateral sensor arrays (SNSPXI1 and SNSPXI2) are coupled as
25 VoutI which is then input to an analog switch ANSW1'. In practice, the output amplifier ANSAMP is omitted from the read circuit DRCKT02 of the sensor array

1 SNSPX02. The read line RDLN of the read circuit
DRCKT02 is connected as Vout02 to the read line of the
read circuit DRCKT01 of the sensor array SNSPX01. The
output from the output amplifier of the circuit DRCKT01
5 serves as Vout0. The arrangement of the lateral sensor
array is the same as that of the vertical sensor array.

Outputs from the analog switch pair (ANSW1 and
ANSW1') are wired to obtain an output Vout which is
defined as an image signal output. A control signal
10 for the switch pair is ϕ SEL. When the signal ϕ SEL is
set at "H" level, the switch ANSW1 is turned on. When
the signal ϕ SEL is set at "L" level, the switch ANSW1'
is turned on. Therefore, when the signal ϕ SEL is set
at "H" level, a horizontal sensor array image signal
15 Vout0 is output as Vout. When the signal ϕ SEL is set
at "L" level, the lateral sensor array image signal
VoutI is output as Vout.

The outputs (VPO1 and VPO2) from the vertical
object brightness monitor sensor array pair (AGCPX01
20 and AGCPX02) are input to an amplifier AGCOAMP through
a resistor to constitute an illustrated circuit
arrangement. The output VPO from the circuit
arrangement is a sum of the outputs VPO1 and VPO2.

The output VPI from an amplifier AGCIAMP is a sum
25 of the outputs (VPI1 and VPI2) of the lateral monitor
sensor array pair.

1 Signals ϕ RES, ϕ VRS, and ϕ HRS from the sensor
driver SDR are input to the respective read circuits.

 The signal ϕ SH is input to the common input of an
analog switch pair (ANSW2 and ANSW2'), and an output
5 from the analog switch ANSW2 is input as the input ϕ SH'
of the longitudinal shift register SNSSRO2 and as the
input ϕ SH' of the lateral shift register SNSSRI2. In
addition, since the control signal of the switch pair
is ϕ SEL, the analog switch ANSW2 is turned on in
10 response to the signal ϕ SEL of "H" level. The signal
 ϕ SH is input to only the longitudinal shift register.
When the signal ϕ SEL is set at "L" level, only the
analog switch ANSW2' is turned on, so that the signal
 ϕ SH is input to the lateral shift register. A signal
15 from the last stage of the shift register SNSSRO2 is
input as the input ϕ SH' of the longitudinal shift
register SNSSRO1. When scanning of the shift register
SNSSRO2 is completed, scanning of the shift register
SNSSRO1 is performed. The lateral shift register is
20 operated in the same manner described above.

 The signal ϕ TO serves as the input ϕ T*' of the
longitudinal read circuits (DRCKTO1 and DRCKTO2). The
signal ϕ TI serves as the input ϕ T*' of the lateral read
circuits (DRCKTI1 and DRCKTI2).

25 The sensor driver SDR will be described below.

 A clock generation logic circuit SNSLOG outputs
the signals ϕ RES and ϕ VRS during resetting of the

1 sensor and the signals ϕ HRS and ϕ SH during read access
of the sensor on the basis of the clock signals CK1 and
CK2 input from the computer PRS.

Accumulation control circuits AGCO and AGCI
5 control the longitudinal and lateral sensor arrays,
respectively, and will be described below with
reference to Fig. 6.

Referring to Fig. 6, the brightness monitor sensor
signal VPO or VPI from the sensor unit SNS is input to
10 a terminal corresponding to a monitor signal VP* and is
connected to the positive inputs of comparators ACMP1,
ACMP2, CMP3, and ACMP4. Potentials obtained by
dividing a voltage Vref by resistors are input to the
negative inputs of the comparators. The resistances of
15 resistors R11, R12, R13, and R14 are set to satisfy the
following relation:

$$R11 : R12 : R13 : R14 = 4 : 2 : 1 : 1$$

Therefore, the voltage Vref is input to the negative
input of the comparator ACMP1; Vref/2, comparator
20 ACMP2; Vref/4, ACMP3; and Vref/8, ACMP4.

All outputs from the comparators are set at "L"
level during sensor resetting. When the potential of
the monitor signal VP* is increased as a function of
time, the outputs from the comparators ACMP4, ACMP3,
25 ACMP2, and ACMP1 sequentially go high in an order
named.

1 When a signal ENAGC is set at "H" level, of all
analog switch pairs (ANSWI3 and ANSWI3'), (ANSWI4 and
ANSWI4'), (ANSWI5 and ANSWI5'), (ANSWI6 and ANSWI6'),
the analog switches ANSWI3, ANSWI4, ANSWI5, and ANSWI6
5 are turned on. Outputs from the respective comparators
are input to AND gates AND16, AND17, AND18, AND19, and
AND20. The signal ENAGC is a selection signal for
determining whether sensor accumulation control is
performed by the monitor signal. When the signal ENAGC
10 is set at "H" level, accumulation control by the
monitor signal is performed.

The signal ENAGC will be described in detail
later.

Of all the outputs from the comparators, outputs
15 from the comparators ACMP2, ACMP3, and ACMP4 are
respectively input to the D inputs of D flip-flops FF1,
FF2, and FF3. The clock inputs of the flip-flops FF1,
FF2, and FF3 receive the signal BTIME. Therefore, the
flip-flops FF1, FF2, and FF3 hold the output states of
20 the comparators ACMP2, ACMP3, and ACMP4 when the signal
BTIME is set at "H" level.

The signal BTIME is a signal for giving a timing
to determine the gain of image signal amplification and
is output from the computer PRS.

25 The gain determination and accumulation control in
this embodiment will be described with reference to
Fig. 7.

1 Referring to Fig. 7, the time from the start of
accumulation is plotted along the abscissa. TBTIME
along the abscissa represents time when the signal
BTIME is set at "H" level, and TMAXINT along the
5 abscissa represents a maximum accumulation time. When
a brightness level of an object is low, the magnitude
of the image signal can be increased in a prolonged
accumulation time. However, when the accumulation time
is prolonged in an accumulation type sensor, sensor
10 noise called a dark current is increased. Even if the
object brightness level is extremely low, the
accumulation time cannot be infinitely prolonged, and
the accumulation time is appropriately interrupted
according to a general control technique. This time is
15 called the maximum accumulation time.

The potential of the monitor signal VP* is plotted
along the ordinate. VTH1, VTH2, VTH3, and VTH4 along
the ordinate represent potentials input to the negative
inputs of the comparators ACMP1, ACMP2, ACMP3, and
20 ACMP4, respectively.

As described above, the magnitude of the signal
VP* is increased as a function of time. The rate of
increase in magnitude of the signal VP* is increased
when the object brightness level is increased, as
25 indicated by a curve B1. Otherwise, the rate of
increase is given by a curve B6.

1 There are six combinations of the gains and
accumulation control for the monitor signal VP^* as
follows:

(1) The potential VP^* is higher than $VTH1$ prior
5 to time $TBTIME$ (curve B1).

Accumulation is ended at time $tB1$ for $VP^* = VTH1$,
and a gain is 1.

(2) Inequality $VTH2 \leq VP^* < VTH1$ is established
at time $TBTIME$ (curve B2).

10 Accumulation is ended at time $tB2$ for $VP^* = VTH1$,
and a gain is 1.

(3) Inequality $VTH3 \leq VP^* < VTH2$ is established
at time $TBTIME$ (curve B3).

Accumulation is ended at time $tB3$ for $VP^* = VTH2$,
15 and a gain is 2.

(4) Inequality $VTH4 \leq VP^* < VTH3$ is established
at time $TBTIME$ (curve B4).

Accumulation is ended at time $tB4$ for $VP^* = VTH3$,
and a gain is 4.

20 (5) Inequality $0 \leq VP^* < VTH4$ is established at
time $TBTIME$, and VP^* exceeds $VTH4$ prior to $TMAXINT$
(curve B5).

Accumulation is ended at time $tB5$ for $VP^* = VTH4$,
and a gain is 8.

25 (6) Inequality $0 \leq VP^* < VTH4$ is established at
time $TBTIME$, and VP^* does not exceed $VTH4$ at time
 $TMAXINT$ (curve B6).

1 Accumulation is ended at time T_{MAXINT} (t_{B6}), and a
gain is 8.

 When a ratio of comparison potentials V_{TH1} , V_{TH2} ,
 V_{TH3} , and V_{TH4} for the potential V_{P^*} is set to be 8 : 4
5 : 2 : 1 and the gains of the image signals obtained
when the potential V_{P^*} reaches the comparison
potentials are set to be 1, 2, 4, and 8, the magnitudes
of the amplified image signals can always be equal to
each other regardless of the end timing of accumulation
10 at any one of the comparison potentials. The signal
 $BTIME$ is a signal for giving time for determining this
gain. When the signal $TBTIME$ is generated earlier, a
higher gain can be obtained even if the object
brightness is kept unchanged.

15 When a high gain can be obtained, the accumulation
time can be shortened to improve the response
characteristics of focus detection. However, the noise
component included in the image signal is also
amplified with a high gain, thus decreasing an S/N
20 ratio.

 The time $TBTIME$ is appropriately determined in
consideration of the response time and the S/N ratio.

 A description of a accumulation control circuit
 AGC^* in Fig. 6 will be made again.

25 Q and $\bar{Q}$ outputs from the flip-flops $FF1$, $FF2$, and
 $FF3$ are output directly or through AND gates $AND12$,
 $AND13$, and $AND14$ to obtain signals $GSEL1^*$, $GSEL2^*$,

1 GSEL3*, and GSEL4*. These signals represent that the
gains are set to be 1, 2, 4, and 8. That is, when the
output from the flip-flop is confirmed at the leading
edge of the signal BTIME at time TBTIME and if the Q
5 output from the flip-flop FF1 is set at "H" level, the
monitor signal VP* has a potential higher than the
potential VTH2 at time TBTIME. Similarly, if the Q
output from the flip-flop FF2 is set at "H" level, the
signal VP* has a potential higher than the potential
10 VTH3. If the Q output from the flip-flop FF3 is set at
"H" level, the signal VP* has a potential higher than
the VTH4. The signal GSEL1" is the Q output from the
flip-flop FF1. The signal GSEL2* is an AND signal of
the $\bar{Q}$ output from the flip-flop FF1 and the Q output
15 from the flip-flop FF2. The signal GSEL3* is an AND
signal of the $\bar{Q}$ outputs from the flip-flops FF1 and FF2
and the Q output from the FF3. The signal GSEL4* is an
AND signal of the $\bar{Q}$ outputs from the flip-flops FF1,
FF2, and FF3. When the monitor signal VP* has a
20 potential higher than the VTH2 at time TBTIME, only the
signal GSEL1* is set at "H" level, and the gain is 1.
Similarly, the signal VP* is higher than VTH3 and lower
than VTH2, only the signal GSEL2* is set at "H" level,
and the gain is 2. When the signal VP* is higher than
25 VTH4 and lower than VTH3, only the signal GSEL3* is set
at "H" level, and the gain is 4. When the signal VP*

1 does not exceed VTH4 at time BTIME, only the GSEL4* is
set at "H" level, and the gain is 8.

The accumulation end operation will be described
below.

5 The signals GSEL1*, GSEL2*, GSEL3*, and GSEL4* are
output outside the circuit AGC* and at the same time
are input to the AND gates AND16, AND17, AND18, and
AND19. These AND gates commonly receives an output
from an AND gate AND15. The gates of the AND gates
10 AND16, AND17, AND18, and AND19 receive outputs from the
comparators ACMP1, ACMP2, ACMP3, and ACMP4 through the
analog switch pairs (ANSWI3 and ANSWI3'), (ANSWI4 and
ANSWI4'), (ANSWI5 and ANSWI5'), and (ANSWI6 and
ANSWI6'). When the signal ENAGC is set at "H" level,
15 the output from the comparator ACMP1 is input to the
AND gates AND16 and AND20. Similarly, the output from
the comparator ACMP2 is input to the AND gate AND17,
the output from the comparator ACMP3 is input to the
AND gate AND18, and the output from the comparator
20 ACMP4 is input to the AND gate AND19.

The AND gate AND 15 receives the signal ENAGC and
the signal BTIME through inverters INV7 and IV8.

Direct coupling of the inverters IV7 and INV8 aims
at delaying the signal BTIME. The signal BTIME is
25 input to the AND gates AND16 to AND20 after the outputs
from the flip-flops FF1 to FF3 are confirmed and input
to the AND gates AND16 to AND20. When the signal BTIME

1 goes from "L" level to "H" level while the signal ENAGC
is set at "H" level, an output from the AND gate AND15
is changed from "L" to "H" with a slight delay. This
signal is input to the AND gates AND16 to AND19.

5 The AND gate AND20 also receives a signal obtained
by inverting the signal BTIME by an inverter INV6.

Outputs from the AND gates AND16 to AND20 are
input to an OR gate OR5. An output from the OR gate
OR5 is output as a signal AGCEND* outside the circuit
10 AGC*.

An operation in a brightness state (curve B1)
shown in Fig. 7 will be described below. Until time
tB1, the outputs from the comparators ACMP4, ACMP3, and
CMP2 are sequentially changed from "L" to "H", but the
15 signal BTIME is kept at "L" level. In this state, the
AND gate AND15 is kept at "L" level. Therefore, the
AND gates AND16 to AND20 are kept "L". When the
monitor signal VP* reaches the potential VTH1 at time
tB1, the output from the comparator ACMP1 goes from "L"
20 to "H". One of the three inputs of the AND gate AND20
receives an inverted signal of the signal BTIME, i.e.,
"H" level signal. In response to the logical change
from "L" to "H" of the comparator ACMP1, an output from
the AND gate AND20 goes from "L" to "H". The output
25 AGCEND* from the OR gate OR5 goes from "L" to "H". At
this moment, charge accumulation of the sensor is
optimized. As will be described later, the signal

1 AGCEND* is input to the clock generator SNSLOG (Fig. 3)
through inverters INV3 and IV4. The clock generators
SNSLOG generates the signal ϕ TO (or ϕ TI) shown in
Fig. 5A in response to the signal AGCEND*. A signal
5 corresponding to the accumulated charge in the sensor
is charged by the capacitors CT. From this moment, the
image signals of the sensor can be read.

A signal inverted through the inverter INV3 or
INV4 is input to the clock generator SNSLOG and is
10 output as the external signal /TINTEO or /TINTEI
outside the sensor driver SDR. The signals /TINTEO and
/TINTEI are stored in the computer PRS. Therefore,
when signal AGCENDO (or AGCENDI) is inverted from "L"
level, its inverted signal /TINTEO (or /TINTEI) goes
15 "L", thereby informing the computer PRS of the
accumulation end timing.

An operation for the curve B2 in Fig. 7 will be
described below. The sequence until time TBTIME is the
same as in the curve B1. That is, outputs from the
20 comparators are sequentially inverted from "L" level to
"H" level, but the monitor signal VP* does not reach
the potential VTH1, and the accumulation is not ended.

When the signal BTIME goes from "L" level to "H"
level, the outputs from the comparators ACMP4, ACMP3,
25 and ACMP2 have already been "H" level, the Q outputs
from the flip-flops FF1, FF2, and FF3 are latched to
"H" level. Therefore, the signal GSEL1* is set at "H"

1 level, and the signals GSEL2*, GSEL3*, and GSEL4* are
set at "L" level, so that the gain is set to 1. In
addition, the AND gate AND15 is set from "L" level to
"H" level with a slight delay by the delay behavior of
5 the inverters IV7 and INV8 after time TBTIME at which
the signal BTIME is changed from "L" level to "H"
level. Of the AND gates AND16 to AND19, two out of
three inputs of only the AND gate AND16 are set at "H"
level. In this case, one out of three inputs of each
10 of the remaining AND gates AND17 to AND19 is set at "H"
level.

An output from the comparator ACMP1 is changed
from "L" level to "H" level at time tB2 and is input to
the AND gate AND16. An output from the AND gate AND16
15 is changed from "L" level to "H" level. An output from
the OR gate OR5 is changed from "L" level to "H" level.
At this moment, accumulation of the sensor is
completed.

An operation for the curve B3 will be described
20 below. A gain of 2 is confirmed at time TBTIME, and
only the signal GSEL2* is set at "H" level. The AND
gate AND15 is set at "H" level with a slight delay from
time TBTIME. Two out of three inputs of the AND gate
AND15 are set at "H" level. The remaining one input is
25 an output from the comparator ACMP2. When the monitor
signal VP* reaches the potential VTH2 at time tB3, the
output from the comparator CAMP2 is changed from "L"

1 level to "H" level, and the output from the AND gate
AND17 is set at "H" level. In the same manner as in
the curve B2, the OR gate OR5 is changed from "L" level
to "H" level. At this moment, the accumulation
5 operation is ended.

In operations for the curves B4 and B5, the
accumulation operations are ended at times t_{B4} and t_{B5}
with gains of 4 and 8, respectively.

An operation for the curve B6 in Fig. 7 is
10 different from those for the curves B1 to B5. Since
the monitor signal VP^* does not reach the potential
 V_{TH4} at time T_{BTIME} , the gain is 8. This is the same
as in the curve B5. In this state, when the monitor
signal VP^* reaches the potential V_{TH4} , the accumulation
15 is ended (t_{B5} in the curve B5). Even if the maximum
accumulation time T_{MAXINT} has elapsed, the monitor
signal VP^* does not reach the potential V_{TH4} in the
curve B6. At this moment, the accumulation is forcibly
interrupted based on the limitation of the maximum
20 accumulation time as previously described. More
specifically, the computer PRS forcibly sets the signal
/TINTE* at "L" level in Fig. 3. Since the inverters
INV3 and INV4 are open collector type inverters, their
outputs are pulled up inside the inverters. The signal
25 /TINTEO or /TINTEI goes to "L" level in response to an
external pulse, so that the clock generator SNSLOG

1 outputs the clock pulse ϕTO (or ϕTI), thereby
terminating the accumulation operation of the sensor.

The above description has been made on an
assumption that the signal ENAGC is set at "H" level.
5 When the signal ENAGC is set at "H" level,
"accumulation control of the sensor is performed on the
basis of the monitor signal VP* (to be referred to as
an "AGC accumulation" mode hereinafter)". When the
signal ENAGC is set at "L" level, "accumulation control
10 of the sensor is performed on the basis of the given
gain and the accumulation time (to be referred to as a
"not AGC accumulation" mode hereinafter)".

When the signal ENAGC goes to "L" level, analog
switches ANSWI3', ANSWI4', ANSWI5', and ANSWI6' of the
15 analog switch pairs (ANSWI3 and ANSWI3'), (ANSWI4 and
ANSWI4'), (ANSWI5 and ANSWI5'), (ANSWI6 and ANSWI6')
are turned on. Instead of the outputs from the
comparators ACMP1, ACMP2, ACMP3, and ACMP4, outputs
from AND gates AND21 to AND23 are supplied to the
20 flip-flops FF1, FF2, and FF3, and the AND gates AND16
to AND20.

The outputs from the AND gates AND21 to AND23 are
determined by the external signals GSEL2* and GSEL1*
supplied from the circuit AGC*, thereby setting the
25 gains. The correspondence between the signals GSEL1*
and GSEL2* and the AND gates AND21 to AND23 is defined,
as shown in Fig. 12.

1 The outputs from the AND gates AND21 to AND23 are
supplied to the flip-flops FF1 to FF3 and the AND gates
AND16 to AND20 regardless of the logical level of the
monitor signal VP*. When the signal BTIME goes from
5 "L" level to "H" level, the flip-flops FF1 to FF3 latch
the outputs. At this moment, the gains are determined.
After the gains are determined, no changes occur in the
inputs to the AND gates AND16 to AND20. The end of
accumulation cannot occur logically. As indicated by
10 the curve B6 in Fig. 7, the signal /TINTEO (or /TINTEI)
is forcibly changed from "H" level to "L" level in
response to an external pulse, thereby terminating the
accumulation.

Referring back to Fig. 3, signals GSEL2O, GSEL1O,
15 GSEL2I, and GSEL1I can be set by outputs Q0 to Q3 of a
communication command shift register CMDSR.
Communication regulations between the sensor driver SDR
and the computer PRS will be described below.

The driver SDR is selected in response to a chip
20 select signal CSDR. When the chip select signal CSDR
is set at "H" level, the analog switch ANSW3 is turned
on to supply a sync clock signal to the clock input of
the command shift register CMDSR. When communication
is performed in this state, transmission data from the
25 computer PRS is input to the 8-bit 3-shift register
CMDSR as the signal SO in synchronism with the clock
signal SCLK. Outputs Q0 to Q7 from the register CMDSR

1 are determined at the end of 8-bit communication. A
communication format is shown in Fig. 13.

The outputs Q7, Q6, and Q5 from the register CMDSR
are respectively input to AND gates AND1, AND2, and
5 AND3. The output Q0 from a clock counter CLKCNT is
commonly input to the clock terminals of the AND gates
AND1, AND2, and AND3. The counter CLKCNT is a 3-bit
binary counter, and its input receives an inverted
signal (i.e., a signal inverted by an inverter INV2) of
10 the communication clock signal CLK. Therefore, the Q0
output is set at "H" level every time 8-bit
communication is terminated.

With the above arrangement, the outputs from the
AND gates AND1, AND2, and AND3 are determined at the
15 end of 8-bit communication. The output from the AND
gate AND1 is an "accumulation start" signal. In
response to the accumulation start signal, the clock
generator SNSLOG generates the sensor clock signals
 ϕ RES, ϕ VRS, ϕ TO, and ϕ TI on the basis of the sensor
20 clock signal CK1, as described in Figs. 5A or 5B.

The output from the AND gate AND2 is a signal for
switching between the "destruction accumulation" mode
and the "not destruction accumulation" mode. When the
output from the AND gate AND2 is set at "H" level, the
25 "destruction accumulation" mode is set to perform
accumulation after the sensor is normally reset. The
clock generator SNSLOG generates the clock signals

1 shown in Fig. 5A. However, when the output from the
AND gate AND2 is set at "L" level, the "not destruction
accumulation" mode is set to perform accumulation
without resetting the sensor. In this case, the clock
5 generator SNSLOG generates the clock signals shown in
Fig. 5B (in this case, no signals are output in
practice).

The output from the AND gate AND3 is a signal for
switching between the "AGC accumulation" mode and the
10 "not AGC accumulation" mode. This signal serves as the
signal ENAGC which is then input to the accumulation
control circuits AGCO and AGCI.

An image signal amplifier VAMP will be described
with reference to Fig. 8.

15 Referring to Fig. 8, the image signal Vout output
from the sensor is connected to the analog switch ANSW4
and a resistor R6 through a voltage follower VOP1. The
analog switch ANSW4, a capacitor DHC, and a voltage
follower VOP2 constitute a so-called a sample/hold
20 circuit. The sample/hold circuit performs sampling
during the "H" period of a control signal DSH and holds
the sampled values during its "L" period. The
sample/hold circuit holds the potentials of the
shielded pixels of the sensor. The sample/hold circuit
25 holds an image signal of the first pixel (shielded
pixel) during read access of the image signal as the
signal DSH and a predetermined period "H",

1 differentially calculates the held potentials during
read access of valid pixels (to be described later),
and then amplifying the difference.

An operational amplifier VOP3, resistors R1 to
5 R10, and analog switches ANSW5 to ANSW12 constitute a
variable gain amplifier. Each analog switch is
controlled by OR gates OR1 to OR4. Outputs from AND
gate pairs (AND4 and AND9), (AND6 and AND10), (AND7 and
AND11), and (AND8 and AND12) are input to the OR gates
10 OR1 to OR4, respectively. Gain signals GSEL40 to
GSEL10 and GSEL4I to GSEL1I, the signal SEL, and its
inverted signal (inverted by an inverter INV5) are
commonly input to the AND gates. The signal SEL is a
signal for selecting the lateral or longitudinal sensor
15 array. When the signal SEL is set at "H" level, the
longitudinal sensor array is selected. However, when
the signal SEL is set at "L" level, the lateral sensor
array is selected. When the signal SEL is set at "H"
level, the signals GSEL40 to GSEL10 are directly input
20 from the AND gates AND4 to AND8. In this case, all
outputs from the AND gates AND9 to AND12 are set at "L"
level. For example, when the signal GSEL10 is set at
"H" level (all the signals GSEL20 to GSEL40 are set at
"L" level), only an output from the AND gate AND8 is
25 set at "H" level, and then an output from the OR gate
OR4 which receives the output from the AND gate AND8 is
set at "H" level. If the signal GSEL20 is set at "H",

1 only the OR gate OR3 is set at "H"; if GSEL30, then
OR2; and if GSEL40, then OR1. In this case, all the
AND gates AND9 to AND12 are set at "L" by the inverter
INV5. In this case, an operation is not associated
5 with the gain signals GSEL1I to GSEL4I for the lateral
sensor array.

When the signal SEL is set at "L" to select the
lateral sensor array, the signals GSEL1I, GSEL2I,
GSEL3I, and GSEL4I correspond to the OR gates OR4, OR3,
10 OR2, and OR1, respectively. In this case, all the
outputs from the AND gate AND4 to AND8 are set at "L".

The resistors R1 to R10 satisfy the following
conditions:

$$R1 = R6, R2 = R7, R3 = R8, R4 = R9, R5 = R10$$

15 and

$$R1 : (R2 + R3 + R4 + R5) = 1 : 8$$

$$(R1 + R2) : (R3 + R4 + R5) = 1 : 4$$

$$(R1 + R2 + R3) : (R4 + R5) = 1 : 2$$

$$(R1 + R2 + R3 + R4) : R5 = 1 : 1$$

20 that is,

$$R2 = 4R1/5$$

$$R3 = 6R1/5$$

$$R4 = 3R1/2$$

$$R5 = 9R1/2$$

25 With the above arrangement, when only the output
from the OR gate OR4 is set at "H" level, the analog
switches ANSW8 and ANSW12 are turned on; so that the

1 gain of the operational amplifier VOP3 is 1. When only
the output from the OR gate OR3 is set at "H" level,
the analog switches ANSW7 and ANSW11 are turned on, and
the gain is set to 2. When only the output from the OR
5 gate OR2 is set at "H" level, the analog switches ANSW6
and ANSW10 are turned on, and the gain is set to 4.
When only the output from the OR gate OR1 is set at "H"
level, the analog switches ANSW5 and ANSW9 are turned
on, and the gain is set to 8. The output from the
10 operational amplifier VOP3 is connected to the analog
input terminal of the computer PRS as the amplified
image signal VIDEO. The computer PRS converts this
signal into a digital signal, thereby obtaining an
image signal of the sensor.

15 Referring back to Fig. 3, the longitudinal gain
signals GSEL10 to GSEL40 and the lateral gain signals
GSEL1I to GSEL4I are output from the accumulation
control circuits AGCO and GCI and input to the image
signal amplifier VAMP. At the same time, these gain
20 signals are also connected to the parallel inputs of a
parallel-in serial-out shift register AGCSR. Since the
shift register AGCSR receives an inverted signal (by an
inverter INV1) of the communication clock signal, the
shift register AGCSR outputs serial data from the Q
25 output in response to parallel input data when
communication is started. The serial output data is
supplied to the computer PRS as its reception data.

1 The computer PRS can detect the set gains of the sensor unit.

The AF control apparatus of the camera having the above arrangement will be described with reference to
5 flow charts from Figs. 9A to 9C.

Upon the first half depression of the release button of the camera, the switch SW1 is turned on to start the AF control operation in step (000).

Referring to Fig. 9A, upon the second half
10 depression of the release button, the state of the switch SW2 is detected in step (001). If the switch SW1 is ON in step (001), continuous photographing is made, and the flow is branched to connector (B). However, if the switch SW1 is OFF, the flow advances to
15 step (002) to perform normal AF control.

As described above, the switch SW2 is connected to the "interruption input terminal" of the computer PRS. When the switch SW2 is determined to be OFF in step (001), an interruption by the switch SW2 is allowed.
20 Thereafter, when the switch SW2 is turned on, the flow is branched into a predetermined interruption step by the interruption function regardless of the presently executed operation, and a release operation is performed. When the release operation is completed,
25 the SW2 interruption inhibit state is set. Since the release operation is not directly associated with the present invention, a detailed description thereof will

1 be omitted. When a series of release operations
(photographing operations) such as a mirror-up
operation, a shutter curtain drive operation, a
mirror-down operation, and a film winding operation are
5 completed, the flow returns to the AF start operation
in step (000). In step (001), the state of the switch
SW2 is detected. In this case, if the switch SW2 is
ON, a state immediately after the release operation,
i.e., a state of continuous photographing is
10 discriminated.

A state in which the switch SW2 is OFF will be
described below.

A subroutine "accumulation start mode 1" is
executed in step (002). This subroutine is illustrated
15 in detail in the flow chart of Fig. 10A. In other
words, this routine is a sensor accumulation start
routine with normal sensor resetting.

The subroutine "accumulation start mode 1" will be
described with reference to the flow chart in
20 Fig. 10A. When this subroutine is called, constant
"200" is set as a variable MAXINTO representing the
longitudinal maximum accumulation time in step (101)
after step (100). This value is determined in units of
msec. More specifically, the longitudinal maximum
25 accumulation time is set to 200 msec. In step (102),
similarly, constant "200" is set as a variable MAXINTI
representing the lateral maximum accumulation time.

1 Constant "20" is set as a variable BCNT in step
 (103). The variable BCNT defines the time TBTIME and
 is expressed in units of msec. Contact "20" means 20
 msec. Therefore, the time TBTIME is set 20 msec after
5 the start of accumulation.

 In step (104), an accumulation time count variable
 INTCNT is cleared to 0.

 In step (105), 8-bit serial data "\$E0" (symbol \$
 represents a hexadecimal number) is sent to the sensor
10 driver SDR. The hexadecimal "E0" corresponds to binary
 "11100000". The upper three bits of "1" represent
 "accumulation start", "destruction accumulation mode",
 and "AGC accumulation mode", respectively. Upon
 reception of the transmitted data, the sensor driver
15 SDR starts the control operation in Fig. 5A. More
 specifically, the sensor unit is reset (i.e., the
 charges of the photoelectric transducer elements are
 cleared) and sensor charge accumulation is started in
 the "AGC mode".

20 In step (106), an interruption function is allowed
 so that the computer PRS can execute an "accumulation
 end interruption" by the accumulation end signals
 /TINTEO and /TINTEI from the driver SDR. In step
 (107), the subroutine returns to the main routine. The
25 accumulation end interruptions are executed at the end
 of accumulation of the longitudinal and lateral sensor
 arrays.

1 Referring back to Fig. 9A, the computer PRS
waits for the end of accumulation of the longitudinal
and lateral sensor arrays in steps (003) and (004).
The computer PRS waits until the end of accumulation of
5 longitudinal or lateral sensor array.

As described above, the end timings of
accumulations of the longitudinal and lateral sensor
arrays can be detected by the trailing edges of the
signals /TINTEO and /TINTEI, respectively. These
10 signal are connected to the terminal with an
"input/output switching enable, input interruption
control function". When the accumulated charge of the
longitudinal sensor array becomes optimal and the
signal /TINTEO from the driver SDR rises, the computer
15 PRS detects its leading edge, and the interruption
operations from step (050) are performed. Similarly,
when the signal /TINTEI falls, the computer PRS
determines that the accumulated charge of the lateral
sensor array is optimal, and then performs the
20 interruption operation from step (060).

The accumulation time is monitored by interruption
processing as "timer interruption" from step (070) in
the flow of Fig. 9C. An interruption is generated,
e.g., every msec. Timer interruption processing will
25 be described with reference to Fig. 9C.

1 When a timer interruption is generated, an accumulation time counter INTCNT is incremented by one in step (071) through step (070) and connector (C).

5 In step (072), the count of the counter INTCNT is compared with a value in a RAM area BCNT. If a noncoincidence is detected, the flow is branched to step (074). However, if a coincidence is detected, the signal BTIME is set at "H" level in step (073). BCNT is a time in units of msec for giving time TBTIME.

10 When the count of the counter INTCNT does not coincide with the value of the RAM area MAXINTO in step (074), the flow is branched into step (076).

Otherwise, the signal /TINTEO is set at "L" level in step (075). MAXINTO represents the longitudinal maximum accumulation time in units of msec. When the count of the accumulation time counter coincides with the longitudinal maximum accumulation time, the signal /TINTEO is set at "L" level, thereby forcibly terminating the accumulation of the longitudinal sensor array.

20

 In steps (076) and (077), the count of the counter INTCNT is compared with the lateral maximum accumulation time MAXINTI. If the count coincides with the lateral maximum accumulation time MAXINTI, the accumulation of the lateral sensor array is forcibly ended.

25

1 While the computer PRS waits for the end of
accumulation, a timer interruption is generated every
msec, and the accumulation time is monitored. A
predetermined operation is performed between the time
5 TBTIME and the maximum accumulation time TMAXINT of
both the longitudinal and lateral sensor arrays.

Referring back to Fig. 9A, while the computer
PRS waits for determinations in steps (003) and (004),
when the accumulated charge of the longitudinal sensor
10 array becomes optimal, the flow is branched into step
(050) by the interruption generated upon falling of the
signal /TINTEO.

In step (051), the value of the accumulation time
counter is stored in an RAM area INTTMO. At the same
15 time, a timer value TIMER of a self-running timer
inside the computer PRS is stored in a RAM area ENDTMO.

In step (052), an image signal from the
longitudinal sensor array SNSO is input. This
operation will be described in more detail with
20 reference to Fig. 5C. Fig. 5C shows a relationship
between the signals, clock pulses, and the image signal
after the end of accumulation as a function of time.

When an image signal is read from the longitudinal
sensor array, the signal SEL is set at "H" level (t12)
25 to select the longitudinal sensor array. The sensor
drive clock signals ϕ SH and ϕ HRS are generated on the
basis of the clock signal CK2 from the computer PRS.

- 1 Image information appears in the sensor image signal
Vout during the "H" period of the signal ϕSH .

 Since the first pixel is a shielded pixel, its
signal potential is held. The signal DSH is set at "H"
5 level during the "H" period of the signal ϕSH of the
first pixel. In response to the signal DSH, the sensor
drive SDR causes the capacitor DHC to hold the shielded
pixel potential. Thereafter, longitudinal sensor image
signals $O_1, \dots, O_{n-1}, O_n$ of the longitudinal sensor
10 array are sequentially amplified and output every clock
signal CK2. The computer PRS performs A/D conversion
of the image signal at timings of the signal CK2 output
thereby, and the digital data is stored in the RAM
area.

- 15 When a lateral sensor image signal is read, the
signal SEL is set at "L" level to select the lateral
sensor array. The subsequent operations are the same
as those described above.

 A description will be made again with reference to
20 the flow chart of Fig. 9A.

 When the read operation of the longitudinal sensor
array is completed in step (052), the subroutine is
returned to the main routine in step (053). The return
destination is step (003) or (004) in the main routine.

- 25 When the read operation of the longitudinal sensor
array SNSO is completed, the flow advances from step
(003) to step (006).

1 In step (006), a defocus amount detection
calculation of the photographing lens is performed on
the basis of the image signal from the longitudinal
sensor array. A detailed calculation method is
5 disclosed in Japanese Patent Application No. 61-160824
filed by the present applicant, and a detailed
description thereof will be omitted.

 An interruption is allowed during execution of
step (006). When the accumulation of charges of the
10 lateral sensor array SNSI is completed, the flow is
branched into step (060) in the same manner as in the
longitudinal sensor array. The read operation of the
lateral sensor array SNSI from step (060) is performed.
The value of the accumulation time counter INTCNT is
15 stored in a RAM area INTTMI, and the self-running timer
value is stored in an area ENDTMI. The interruption is
returned from step (063) to the main routine.

 When an interruption is generated during execution
of step (006), the interruption is returned to the main
20 routine, and the operation in step (006) is restarted.
When the focus detection calculation in the
longitudinal direction is completed, the image signal
of the lateral sensor array has already been read. The
flow advances to step (010) through step (009).

25 When an interruption is generated after the
computer PRS waits for the end of accumulation of the
lateral sensor array in step (009) upon completion of

1 step (006), the interruption is returned to the main routine, and the flow immediately advances to step (010).

5 A focus detection calculation is performed on the basis of the image signal from the lateral sensor array in step (010). At the end of calculation, the flow advances to step (011).

The flow in which the end of accumulation of the longitudinal sensor array is earlier than that of the lateral sensor array has been described. When the end of accumulation of the lateral sensor array is earlier than that of the longitudinal sensor array, the flow advances to step (011) through steps (005), (007), and (008).

15 Up to step (011), the focus detection calculations in both longitudinal and lateral directions are completed, a defocus amount DEFO and a contrast amount ZDO are obtained in the "focus detection calculation in the longitudinal direction, and a defocus amount DEFI and a contrast amount ZDI are obtained in the "focus detection calculation in the lateral direction".

In step (011), validity of the focus detection calculations is checked. That is, since the focus detection results and the image signal contrast amounts have been obtained in steps (005) and (008) or steps (006) and (010) prior to step (011). In step (011), the contrast amounts of the image signals in the

1 vertical and lateral directions are checked. If both
contact levels are low, the focal detection results are
determined not to be valid. In this case, the flow
advances to step (016). If one of the contrast amounts
5 of the longitudinal and lateral sensor arrays is
sufficient, the flow advances to step (012).

A subroutine "discrimination" is executed in step
(012).

The flow chart of the subroutine "discrimination"
10 is shown in Fig. 11. In this subroutine, one of the
focus detection results by the longitudinal and lateral
sensor images is employed on the basis of the
magnitudes of the contrast levels of the images from
the longitudinal and lateral sensor arrays. In this
15 case, the contrast values are weighted, and the
weighted values are compared with each other. In the
focus detection optical system of this embodiment, the
base line length in the longitudinal direction is
different from that in the lateral direction. When the
20 contrast level is kept unchanged, a better focus
detection result is obtained in the longitudinal
direction.

Weighting coefficients CO and CI (wherein $CO > CI$)
are multiplied with the contrast amounts ZDO and ZDI
25 obtained based on the longitudinal and lateral sensor
images, and the products are compared with each other.
If condition $ZDO \cdot CO \geq ZDI \cdot CI$ is established, the flow

1 advances to step (403). However, if condition
ZDO·CO < ZDI·CI is established, the flow advances to
step (402). In step (403), the longitudinal focus
detection result DEFO is defined as the final defocus
5 amount DEF. In step (402), the lateral focus detection
result DEFI is defined as the final defocus amount DEF.
The "discrimination" subroutine is returned to the main
routine in step (404).

Referring back to the flow chart in Fig. 9(a), if
10 the employed defocus amount DEF is smaller than a
predetermined amount, an in-focus state is determined
in step (013), and the flow advances to step (014).
Otherwise, a defocus state is determined, and the flow
advances to step (015).

15 When the in-focus state is detected, the in-focus
display is performed on the display DSP in step (014).
However, the defocus state is detected, the lens is
driven on the basis of the defocus amount in step
(015). The flow returns to step (001) again, and the
20 next focus detection operation is executed. A method
of driving the lens in step (015) is disclosed in
Japanese Patent Application No. 61-160824 filed by the
present applicant, and a detailed description thereof
will be omitted.

25 When both the longitudinal and lateral image
signals are determined to have low contrast levels in
step (011), the flow advances to step (016).

1 Accumulation mode detection is performed in step
 (016). If mode 1 is determined, the flow advances to
 step (018). Otherwise, the flow advances to step
 (017). Since the flow in which the accumulation mode 1
5 executed in step (002) has been described, the
 operations from step (018) will be described below. In
 step (018), the peak values of the image signals in the
 longitudinal and lateral directions, which were read in
 steps (052) and (062) are detected. If the peak values
10 are sufficiently large (i.e., larger than the
 predetermined values), the flow advances to step (017).
 Otherwise, the flow advances to step (019). That is,
 when the peak values are sufficiently large, the
 computer PRS determines that a further improvement
15 cannot be expected by the sensor accumulation control.
 In this case, search lens driving is performed in step
 (017). The search lens driving is control for
 increasing the contrast level during driving of the
 lens when an object contrast is low (i.e., after the
20 lens is driven by a predetermined amount, the flow
 returns to step (001); or the flow returns to step
 (001) while the lens is driven. When the contrast
 level is increased, the lens is stopped, and the flow
 advances to step (012)). This control is disclosed in
25 detail in Japanese Patent Application No. 61-160824.

 When the peak values of the image signals are
 smaller than the predetermined values in step (018),

1 the peak values may be increased with an increases in
accumulation time, so that the contrast levels can be
highered accordingly. For this purpose, accumulation
control is performed in steps (019), (020), and (021).

5 The computer PRS determines in step (019) whether
the actual accumulation time reaches the predetermined
maximum accumulation time. If YES in step (019), the
flow advances to step (021) to set an "accumulation
start mode 3". Otherwise, the flow advances to step
10 (020) to set an "accumulation start mode 2".

In the photoelectric transducer elements of this
embodiment of the present invention, unlike the sensor
such as a CCD sensor, the accumulated charge is not
cleared after the read operation and can be read again
15 to perform the "not destruction read access" (control
in Fig. 5B). When the actual accumulation time does
not reach the predetermined time, the subroutine
"accumulation start mode 2" is executed to control the
"not destruction read access" in step (020).

20 The flow chart of the subroutine "accumulation
start mode 2" in step (020) is shown in Fig. 10(b).

The basic concept of the "not destruction read
access" will be described below. When the dynamic
range of the sensor output is not matched with the
25 range of the processing system, the image signals are
read again after a lapse of an accumulation time
assumed so that the peaks of the image signals become

1 optimal, on the basis of the peak values of the image
signals obtained in the normal read operation and the
corresponding accumulation time.

5 An accumulation time EXINTTM for obtaining optimal
peak values is defined as follows if an optimal peak
value is given as a count "250" (if the resolution of
the A/D converter of the computer PRS is given as 8
bits, the optimal peak value is defined with respect to
the 8-bit full-range):

10
$$\text{EXINTTM} = (250/\text{PK}) \cdot \text{INTTM}$$

where PK is the peak value, and INTTM is the
accumulation time.

15 Since the predetermined period of time has elapsed
from the end of read operation up to the present since
focus detection operations have been performed. If the
predetermined period of time is defined as RTM, a time
TINTTM from the present moment to the read timing is
given as follows:

$$\text{RINTTM} = \text{EXINTTM} - \text{INTTM} - \text{RTM}$$

20 When the time RINTTM is used as the maximum
accumulation time, and the image signal is read in the
"not AGC mode", the peak value of the image signal is
expected as the A/D-converted digital value as a count
"250".

25 When the subroutine "accumulation start mode 2" is
called, a peak value PK0 of the image signal from the
longitudinal sensor array SNS0 is detected in step

1 (201) of Fig. 10B through step (200). In step (202),
a variable ENDTMO is subtracted from the self-running
timer value TIMER inside the computer PRS which
represents the present time. A difference is stored as
5 the variable RTMO. Since the TIMER value at the end of
longitudinal accumulation is already stored. The value
RTMO obtained by subtracting ENDTMO from the present
time represents a lapse of time from the end of
accumulation to the present time.

10 In step (203), a period from the present moment to
the read start timing is calculated on the basis of the
above equation to optimize the peak value. The
calculated value is stored as the variable MAXINTO.
The variable MAXINTO is a variable for defining the
15 maximum accumulation time of the longitudinal sensor
array and represents a period required to complete the
"not destruction read access". Similar calculations
are performed for the lateral sensor arrays in steps
(204) to (206). A remaining period for optimizing the
20 peak value of the image signal from the lateral sensor
array is set as the variable MAXINTI.

The variable BCNT is set to "1" in step (207).
The variable BCNT is for giving the time TBTIME. Since
the accumulation control which is being described
25 herein is given as the "not destruction" control. The
gain mode has thus already been determined, and the
value of the MTIME may be any value. However, "1" is

1 stored to determine the gain immediately after the
start of accumulation. In step (208), the accumulation
time counter INTCNT is cleared.

The gains in the previous accumulation operation
5 are input from the driver SDR in step (209).

A gain code GCD for the present "not destruction
read access" is generated in step (210). In step
(211), the gain code is added to a control command
"\$80" of the sensor driver SDR, and the sum is output
10 to the driver SDR. For example, if gains in both the
longitudinal and lateral directions are given as 1, the
gain code GCD is "\$00", and the control command sent to
the driver SDR is "\$80". When the hexadecimal value
"80" is expressed as a binary value "10000000". The
15 upper three bits "100" represent the "accumulation
start", the "not destruction accumulation mode", and
the "not AGC accumulation mode", respectively. The
lower four bits represent that the gains of the
longitudinal and lateral directions in the "not AGC
20 accumulation" are set to 1 each. If the previous gain
in the longitudinal direction is 2 and that in the
lateral direction is 8, the gain code GCD is given as a
binary value "00001011". In this case, the command
sent to the driver SDR is given as "\$87". The driver
25 SDR receives these commands to start the accumulation
operation without resetting the sensor and without
using the AGC function. In practice, the driver SDR is

1 not operated for the sensor unit SNS. Since the sensor
unit of this embodiment of the present invention
continues accumulation without being reset, the driver
SDR itself is set in the status as "during
5 accumulation".

In step (212), the PRS interruption function by
the accumulation end signals /TINTEO and /TINTEI is
allowed. The interruption subroutine is then returned
to the main routine in step (213). In the AGC
10 accumulation mode, the sensor driver SDR disables the
signals /TINTEO and /TINTEI by the AGC function, and
the accumulation end signals are stored in the computer
PRS. However, in the "not AGC accumulation mode", the
computer PRS itself disables the signals /TINTEO and
15 /TINTEI after a lapse of the predetermined period
(MTXINTO and MAXINTI), thereby forcibly ending the
accumulation. In this case, the same operations as in
the lapse of the maximum accumulation time are
performed.

20 Referring back to Fig. 9A, in step (019), if the
normal accumulation time reaches the maximum
accumulation time, the computer PRS determines that the
accumulation of the sensor is excessively performed due
to the processing time for focus detection calculations
25 and the like and the peak value of the image signal
read at this moment has a value larger than the optimal
value. In this case, the flow is branched into step

1 (021), and the subroutine "accumulation start mode 3"
is executed.

The flow chart of the subroutine "accumulation
start mode 3" is shown in Fig. 10C. This mode is set
5 when the actual accumulation time exceeds the maximum
accumulation time to read the image signal in the "not
destruction read access".

When the subroutine "accumulation start mode 3" is
called, the accumulation times of the longitudinal and
10 lateral sensor arrays are calculated in step (301)
through step (300). The accumulation times EXINTTM for
obtaining optimal peak values are calculated in the
longitudinal and lateral directions, and the calculated
values are stored as the maximum accumulation time
15 variables MAXINTO and MAXINTI. In step (302), constant
"1" is set in the time TBTIME control value BCNT
because this accumulation operation is the "not AGC
accumulation mode" and their gains have already been
determined.

20 In step (303), the accumulation time counter
INTCNT is cleared.

In steps (304) and (305), the previous gains are
input from the sensor driver SDR, and the gain code GCD
for the present accumulation operation on the basis of
25 the previous gains is generated.

In step (306), the gain code GCD is added to the
control command "\$C0" of the driver SDR, and the sum is

1 sent to the driver SDR. In this case, the hexadecimal
value "C0" is expressed as a binary value "11000000".
The upper three bits, "110", represent the
"accumulation start", the "not destruction accumulation
5 mode", and the "not AGC accumulation mode",
respectively. Upon reception of this command, the
sensor driver SDR starts the accumulation without using
the AGC function upon resetting of the sensor unit.

The computer PRS allows an accumulation end
10 interruption in step (307), and the subroutine
"accumulation start mode 3" is returned to the main
routine in step (308). Thereafter, the accumulation
continues until the computer PRS sets the accumulation
end signals /TINTEO and /TINTEI to "L" level.

15 Referring back to Fig. 9A, when the peak value
of the image signal read by the normal accumulation is
not an optimal value in step (020) or (021), the
accumulation operation is performed to obtain the
optimal peak value by AGC control. After the
20 accumulation is started in the "accumulation start mode
2" or the "accumulation start mode 3", the flow returns
to step (003), and the computer PRS waits for the end
of accumulation in the "mode 2" or the "mode 3".

More specifically, when the accumulation is
25 started in the "mode 2" or the "mode 3", the time
MAXINT is counted in "timer interruption" in step
(070). After the lapse of the time MAXINT, the signals

1 /TINTEO and /TINTEI are set at "L" level to terminate the accumulation. At the same time, the image signals are input in steps (050) and (060).

Thereafter, the focus detection calculations are
5 performed in steps (005) to (010), and the flow advances to steps (011) to (014) or (015). When the image signal obtained by the accumulation in the "mode 2" or the "mode 3" is discriminated as a low-contrast signal, the flow advances from step (016) to step
10 (017). The search driving is performed without setting the "mode 2" or the "mode 3".

The above operations are repeated during the ON state of the switch SW1, and the lens is moved to the in-focus position.

15 An operation of the AF control apparatus in the continuous photographing mode according to the present invention will be described with reference to Fig. 9B. In the continuous photographing mode, since the switch SW2 is ON upon the second half depression of
20 the release button even after the end of the previous photographing operation, the flow is branched from step (001) of Fig. 9A to step (022) of Fig. 9B through connector (B).

In step (022), a subroutine "accumulation start
25 mode 1F" is executed to cause the sensor unit to start normal accumulation. Gains in this mode are set to be slightly higher than those in the "accumulation start

1 mode 1". That is, the accumulation time can be
shortened by increasing the gain even if the same
object is subjected to distance measurements, thereby
improving the response characteristics of the focus
5 control operation.

The flow of the subroutine "accumulation start
mode 1F" is shown in Fig. 10A. When this subroutine
is called, constant "200" is set as each of maximum
accumulation time variables MAXINTO and MAXINTI of the
10 longitudinal and lateral sensor arrays in steps (121)
and (122) through step (120). Step (123) in this
subroutine is different from the corresponding portion
in the "accumulation start mode 1". Constant "5" is
set as the time TBTIME control variable BCNT. Constant
15 "5" represents 5 msec. Although the constant is set as
20 in the "mode 1", the constant is set to "5" in the
"mode 1F" to set the time TBTIME earlier, so that the
gains determined by the driver SDR during accumulation
are set to be higher.

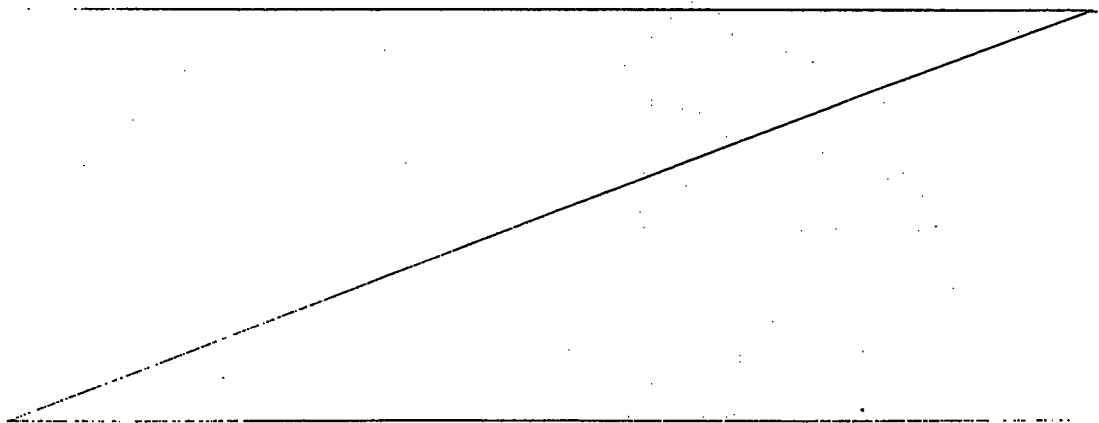
20 The flow advances to step(104), and the same
control operations as in the "mode 1" are performed.

Referring back to Fig. 9B, the "accumulation
start mode 1F" is returned to the main routine. In
step (023), the computer PRS checks which one of the
25 image signals from the longitudinal and lateral sensor
arrays is employed as the final result. If the
longitudinal focus detection result is employed, the

1 flow advances to step (024). If the lateral sensor is
employed, the flow advances to step (026). If no focus
detection operation is performed because both sensors
show low contact, the flow advances to step (028).
5 Since a quick focus adjustment is strongly needed in
the continuous photographing, in the embodiments of the
present invention, if the longitudinal sensor is
employed in the preceding focus detection, the same
longitudinal sensor is used for the following focus
10 detection. Also if the lateral sensor is employed in
the preceding focus detection, the lateral sensor is
successively used for the next operation. Because only
one sensor is used, comparing with a case in which two
sensors are used for a focus detection operation, the
15 operation time is shortened in reading-out of the image
signal and in focus detection calculation. However,
when the two sensors are both in the low-contrast
state, the two sensors are used as in a normal focus
detection since there is no sensor to be selected.

20

25



1 When the flow is branched from step (023) to step
 (024), the computer PRS waits for the end of the read
 operation of the image signals from the longitudinal
 sensor arrays in the mode 1F.

5 When the read operation of the longitudinal sensor
 image signals is completed as in the interruption
 processing shown in steps (050) and (070), the flow is
 shifted to step (025), and focus detection calculations
 using the longitudinal sensor image signals are
10 performed.

 When the lateral sensor image signal is used in
 the previous focus detection, the computer PRS waits
 for the end of read operation of the lateral sensor
 image signal in step (026). Subsequently, in step
15 (027), focus detection calculations using the lateral
 sensor image signals are performed.

 When both the longitudinal and lateral sensor
 image signals have low contrast levels, focus detection
 calculations using both the longitudinal and lateral
20 sensor image signals are performed in steps (028) to
 (035). In step (036), the computer PRS determines
 which one of the sensor image signals is selected as in
 the normal focus detection operation. These steps are
 the same as steps (003) to (010), and a detailed
25 description thereof will be omitted.

 After the focus detection operation is completed,
 the contrast level is detected in step (037). If the

1 resultant contrast value is smaller than a
predetermined value, i.e., if a low contrast is
detected, the flow is not branched, and no lens driving
is performed. However, if the contrast value is larger
5 than the predetermined value, the flow advances to step
(038), and the lens is driven on the basis of the
detected defocus amount.

When lens driving in the continuous photographing
mode is completed, the computer PRS waits for an
10 interruption from the switch SW2. If the switch SW2 is
kept ON at this moment, the release operation is
executed by the interruption function. When the
release operation is completed, the SW2 interruption is
inhibited.

15 After the release operation is completed, the flow
returns to step (001), and a new focus control
operation is started.

In the above embodiment, the gains are increased
in the continuous photographing mode. However, there
20 are other conditions which require a short response
time in AF control in accordance with operating states
of the camera. As in "search lens driving" in step
(017) of Fig. 9A, the present invention is also
effective for focus control during lens driving.

25 In this embodiment, a nondestructive read sensor
is used as an accumulation type sensor. However, an

1 accumulation type sensor such as a CCD sensor may be
employed in the present invention.

In the embodiment described above, the sensor used
in the continuous photographing mode is the sensor used
5 in the previous focus detection cycle. However, for
example, the lateral sensor array may be preferentially
used.

The sensor described above comprises a
nondestructive read sensor as a photoelectric
10 transducer element. However, the present invention is
also effective for a focus detection sensor using,
e.g., a CCD sensor.

In the embodiment described above, focus detection
processing is performed for two sensor outputs, and
15 then weighted contrast levels of the image signals are
compared with each other to select one of the detection
results. However, image signals may be selected prior
to focus detection processing. In this case, focus
detection processing is performed for only the selected
20 image signals.

In the above embodiment, the two focus detection
mechanisms are provided. However, the number of focus
detection mechanisms is not limited two, but can be
three or more.

25 Reference is made to the Applicant's co-pending
application no. GB 8919652.1.



CLAIMS

1. A focus detection apparatus or an automatic focusing camera having said focus detection apparatus which has a plurality of accumulation type sensor sections for detecting a brightness distribution of different object areas and which performs focus detection in the different object areas, comprising:

(a) an accumulation time control circuit for independently controlling the signal accumulation time of each said sensor section; and

(b) a processing circuit for processing accumulated signal of the sensor section whose accumulation time control has been completed, said processing circuit executing said processing to the sensor section whose accumulation time control has been completed even before the accumulation time control of other said sensor sections has not yet been completed.

2. A focus detection apparatus or an automatic focusing camera having said focus detection apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein said control circuit is arranged to independently monitor accumulation states



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of said sensor sections to generate monitor signals and to control the accumulation times of said sensor sections on the basis of the monitor signals.

5 3. A focus detection apparatus or an automatic focusing camera having said focus detection apparatus according to Claim 2, wherein each sensor section comprises a first sensor portion for detecting the brightness distribution and a second sensor portion
10 for monitoring an accumulation state of said first sensor portion to output the monitor signal.

4. A focus detection apparatus or an automatic focusing camera having said focus detection apparatus
15 according to Claim 2, wherein said time control circuit compares monitor signal of each said sensor section with a predetermined value and stops the accumulation operation of sensor section which outputs the monitor signal that reaches said predetermined
20 value.

5. A focus detection apparatus or an automatic focusing camera having said focus detection apparatus, comprising:



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a plurality of accumulation-type sensor sections for respectively receiving light from different areas, each said sensor section starting a signal accumulation operation in response to a first
5 signal;

a monitor circuit for independently monitoring a signal accumulation state of each said sensor section, said monitor circuit outputting a second signal when the accumulation state of said each sensor section
10 reaches a predetermined state;

a reading circuit for supplying said second signal to a said sensor section which has reached said predetermined state, the said sensor section to which said second signal is supplied outputting the
15 accumulated signal before another said sensor section outputs its accumulated signal; and

a signal processing circuit for receiving said accumulated signal from the said sensor section to which said reading circuit outputs said second signal,
20 and for starting a focus calculation, whereby, if the accumulation state of the said sensor section reaches the predetermined state, the focus calculation is performed based on the accumulated signal of the said



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sensor section even if the accumulation operation of other said sensor sections is still being performed.

5 6. A focus detection apparatus as claimed in claim 1 arranged, constructed, and adapted to operate substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to any one of the embodiments illustrated in the accompanying drawings.
