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Two-photon lensless endoscopes with multicore fibers

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The lensless endoscope represents the ultimate limit in miniaturization of imaging tools: an image can be transmitted by numerical or physical inversion of the mode scrambling process through a bare optical fiber. Lensless endoscopes featuring multicore fibers and spatial light modulators are well adapted for nonlinear imaging as they minimally distort ultrashort pulses in the time domain as opposed to multimode fibers [1]. And in earlier works, we had addressed the issues of imaging artifacts and bending sensitivity with an helically twisted multicore fiber with a sparse and aperiodic core layout in the transverse plane [2]. However sufficiently irradiating the sample plane remained a major challenge – particularly for the imaging of dim and challenging samples such as neurons in scattering media.

In this contribution, we outline the fundamental physics behind the origin of the low irradiance at the focal plane in MCF based endoscopes, and present here two novel approaches that addresses this issue. The first is an all fiberoptic component, a "tapered multi-core fiber (MCF)", designed for integration into ultra-miniaturized endoscopes for minimally invasive two-photon point-scanning imaging.[3] This new design addresses the power delivery issue that has faced MCF based lensless endoscopes. We achieve experimentally a factor 6.0 increase in two-photon signal yield while keeping the ability to point-scan by the memory effect, and a factor 8.9 sacrificing the memory effect. We report two-photon fluorescent imaging of cells and neurons with these improved MCF tapered fibers over a field of view of 100 microns.

And in a second approach, we use 2 photon direct laser writing to 3D print micro-optical components – namely a "hyper-telescope". on the tip of a multicore fiber.[4] This allows us to coherently combine 120 beamlets with an experimental efficiency of 0.35. This leads to about a 100 fold improvement in the two-photon signal over an unmodified MCF. These two major advancement in power delivery through MCFs opens the route towards the use of MCF based lensless endoscopy in challenging imaging conditions.

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