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(57) **ABSTRACT**

Low-noise, low-power, low drift offset correction in operational and instrumentation amplifiers and amplifiers using the same are disclosed. The amplifiers disclosed use different combinations of chopping and auto-zero techniques. Also disclosed are amplifiers using on-off switches to affect the chopping and auto-zeroing, with unique circuits for driving the switches on the differential input to provide boot-strapped switch controls. Other features are disclosed.

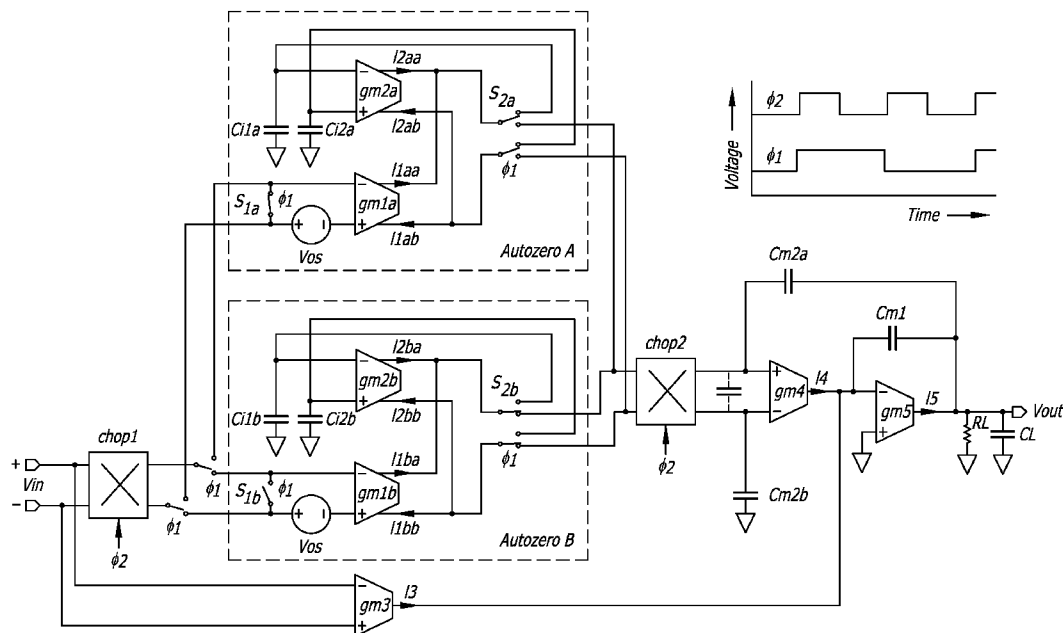
28 Claims, 17 Drawing Sheets



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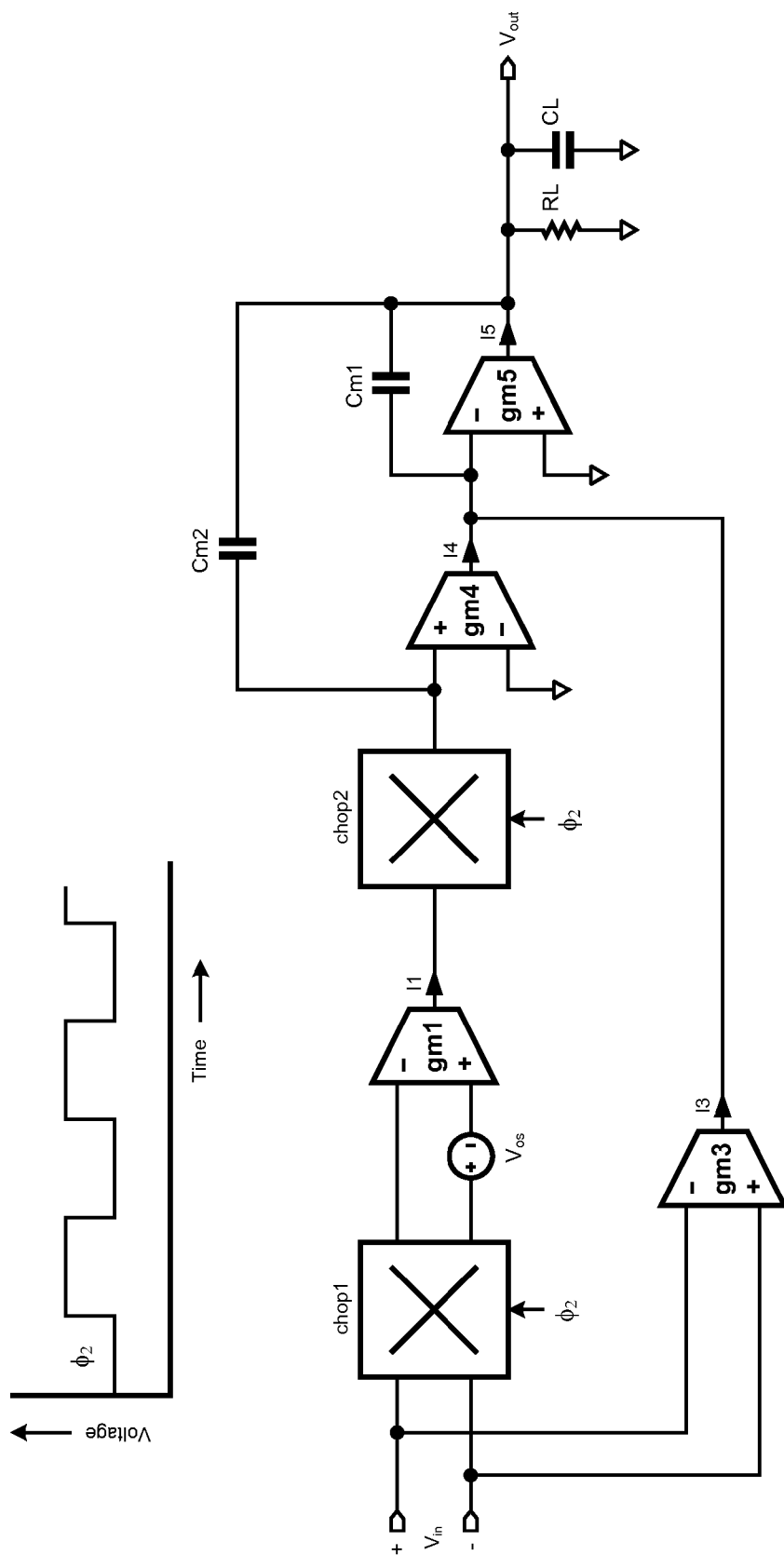


Fig. 1 (Prior Art)

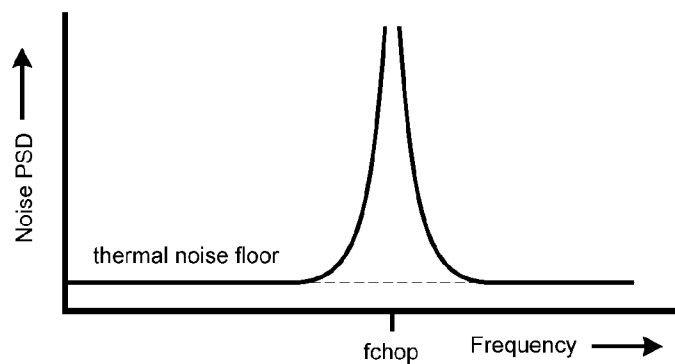


Fig. 2 (Prior Art)

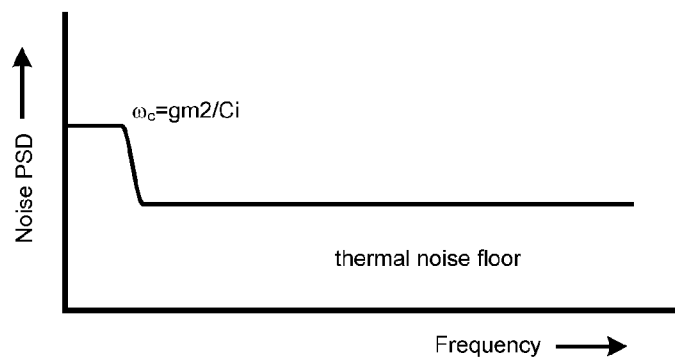


Fig. 4 (Prior Art)

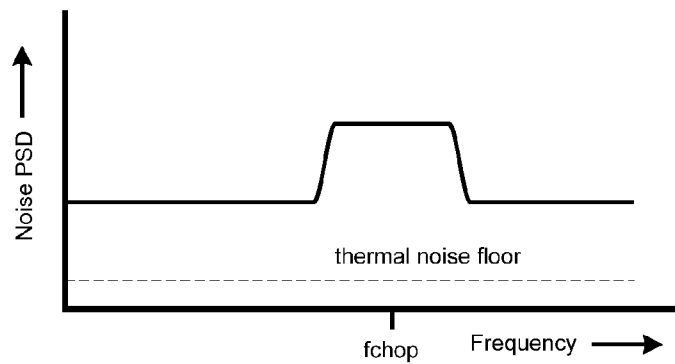


Fig. 6

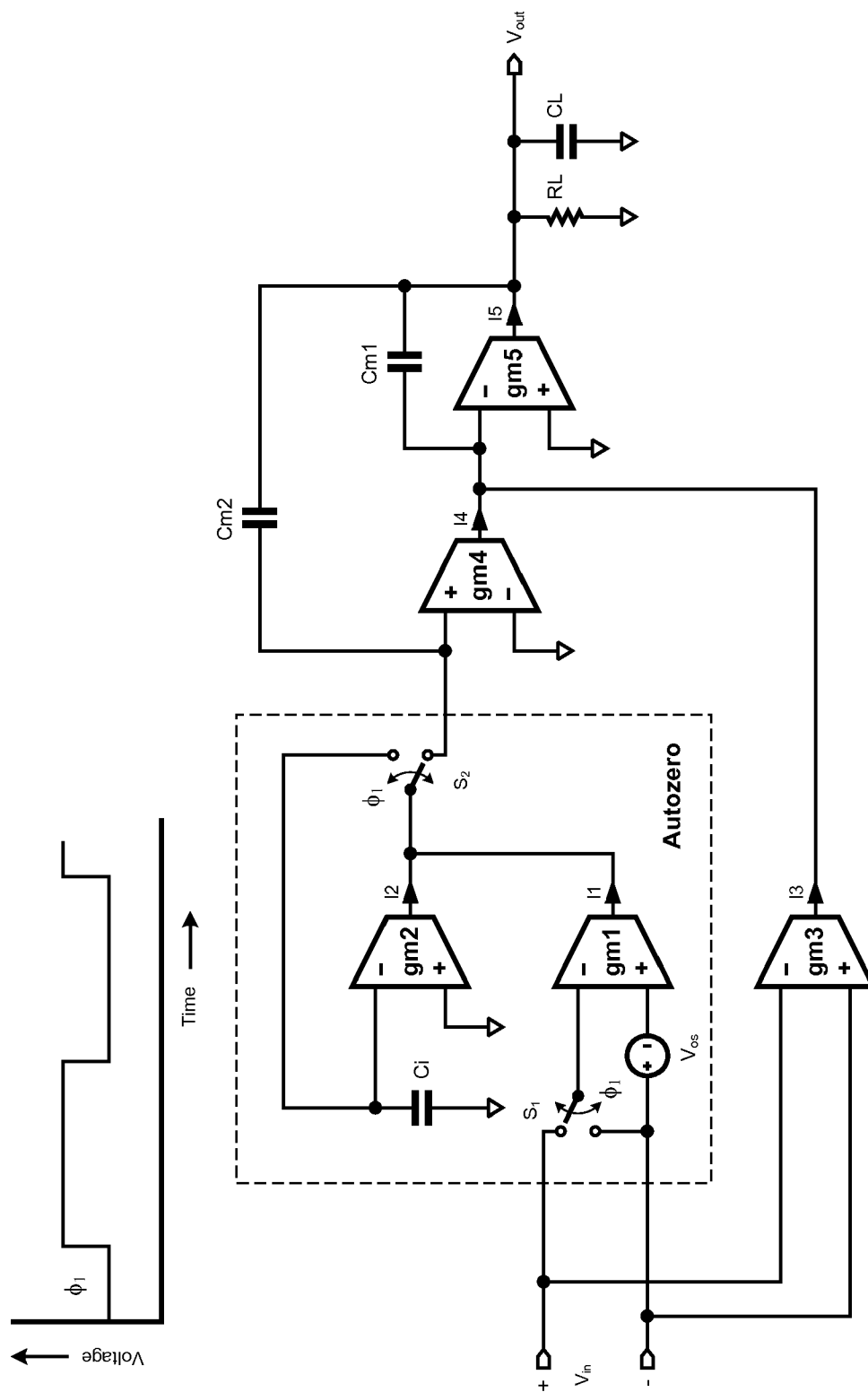
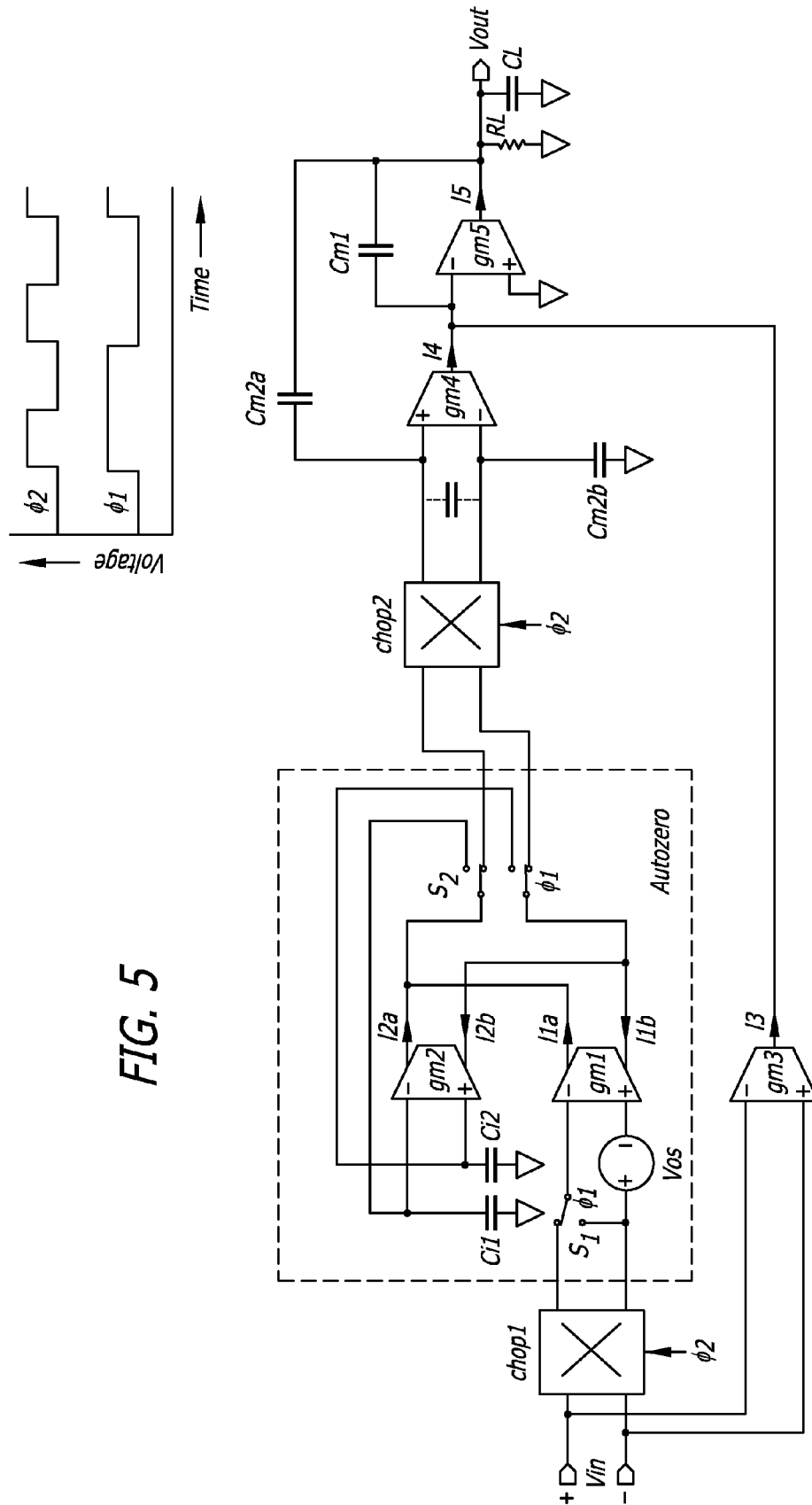


Fig. 3 (Prior Art)



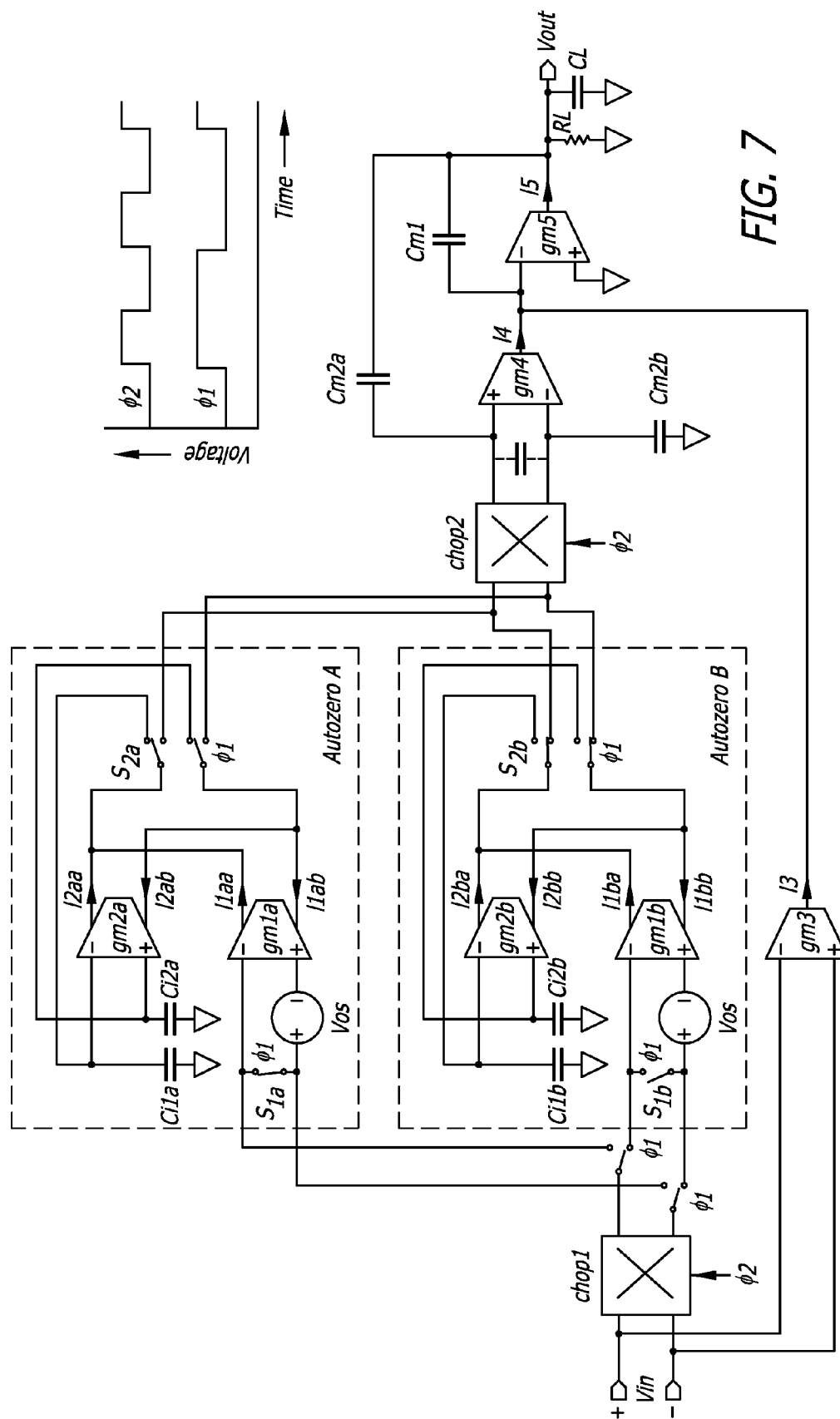


FIG. 7

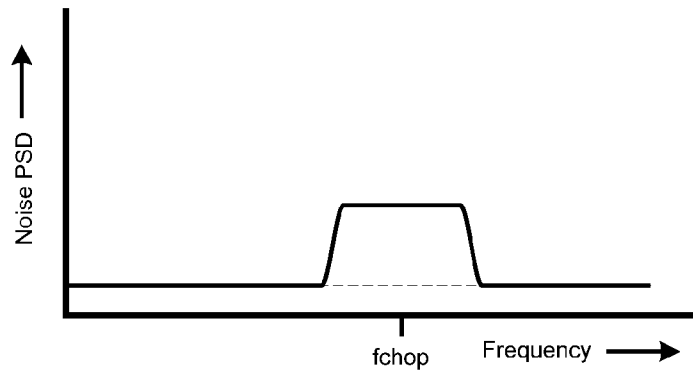


Fig. 8

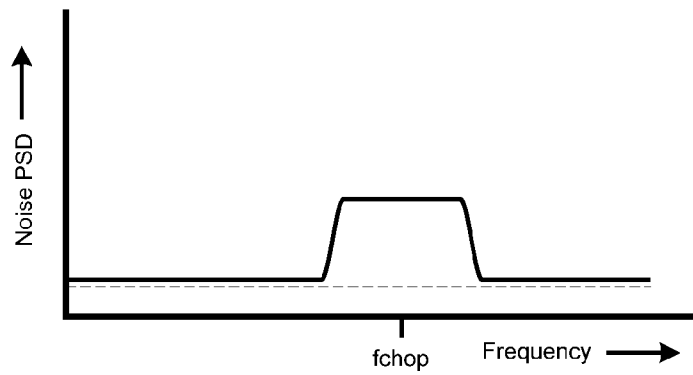


Fig. 10

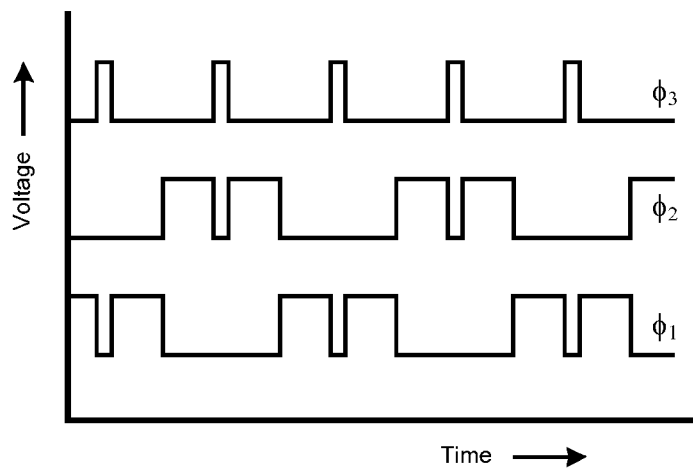
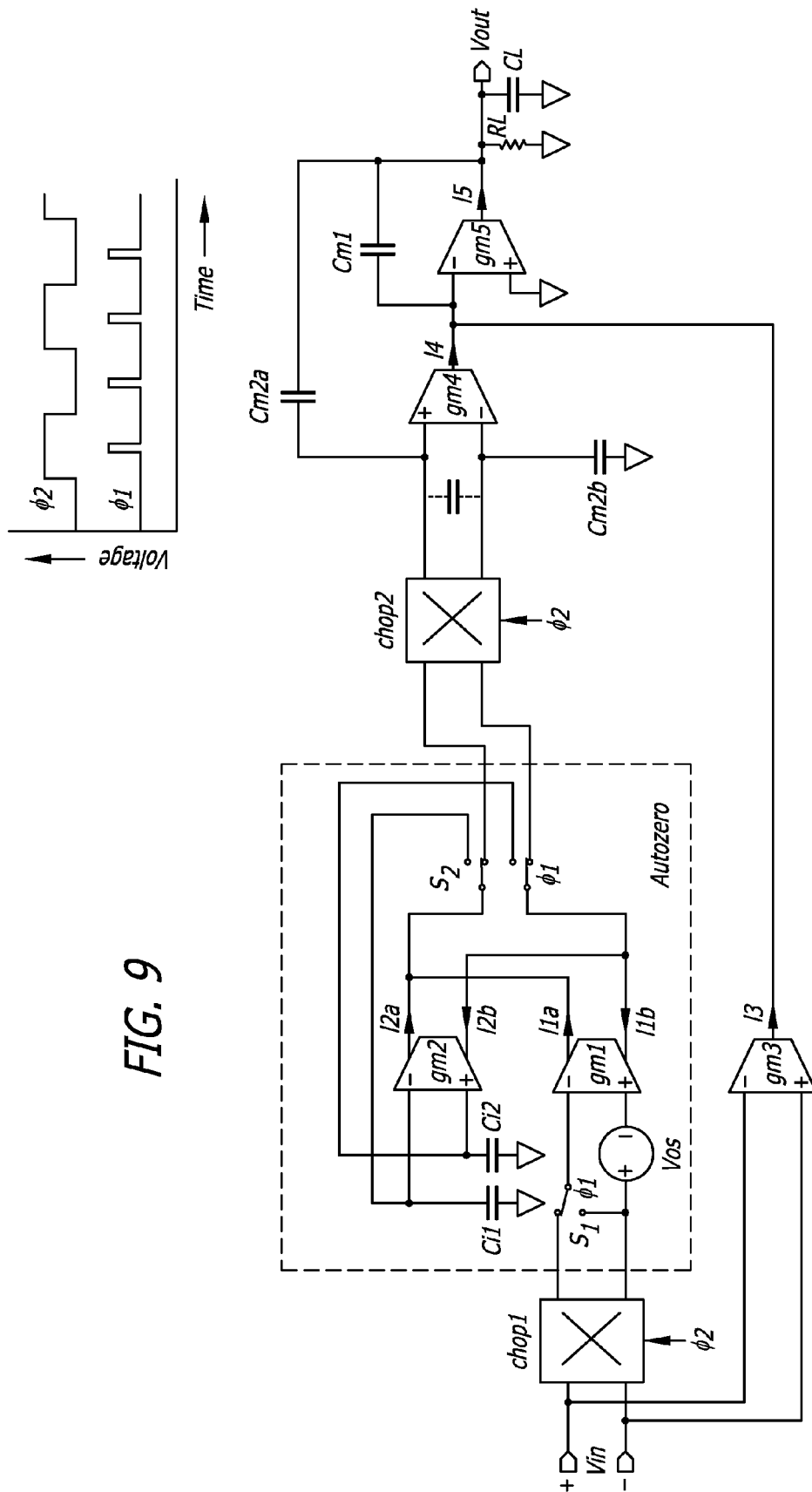


Fig. 14



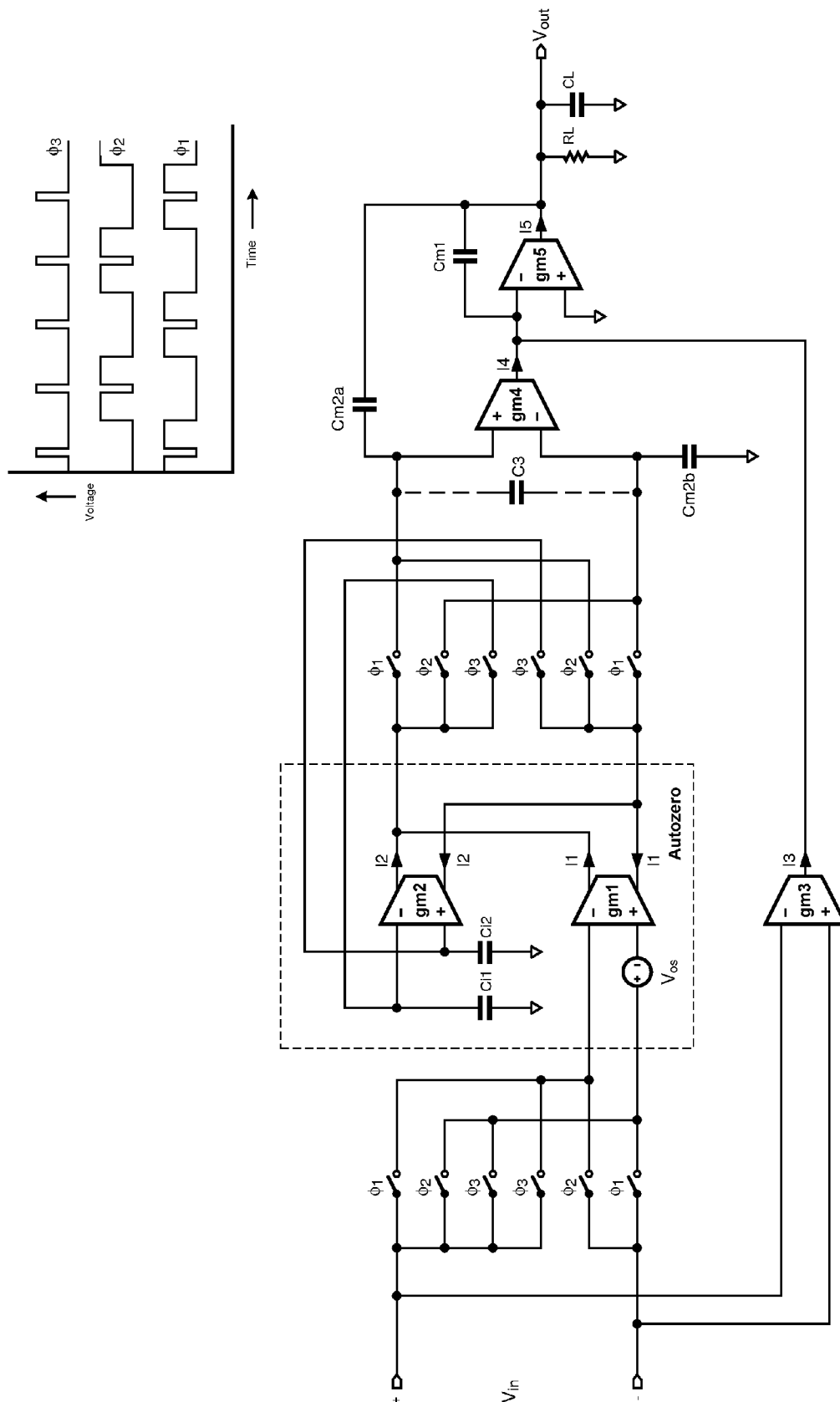


Fig. 11

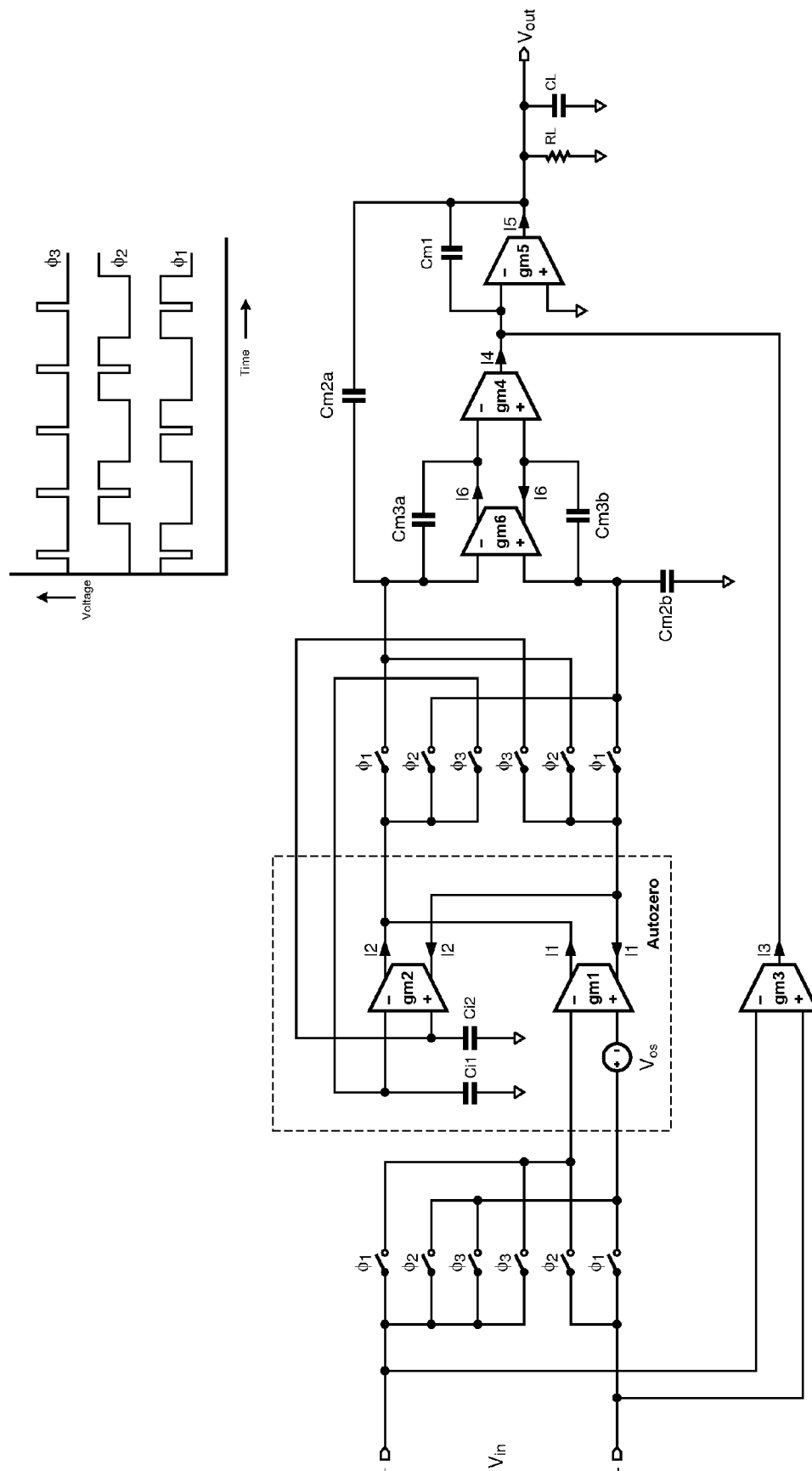
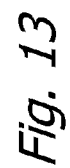


Fig. 12



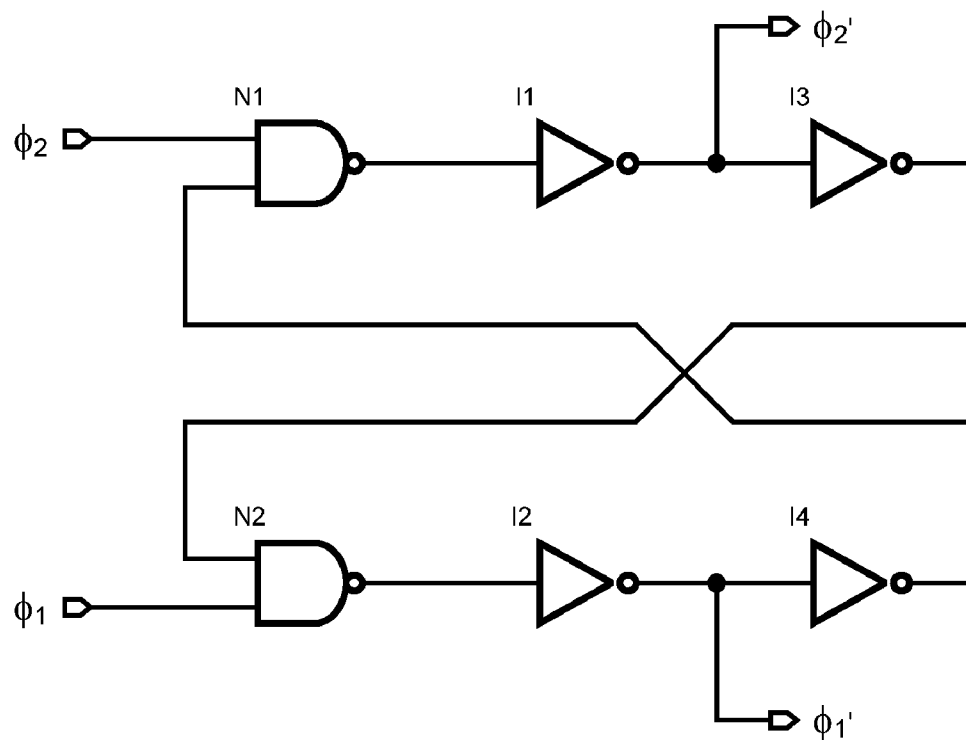


Fig. 15 (Prior Art)

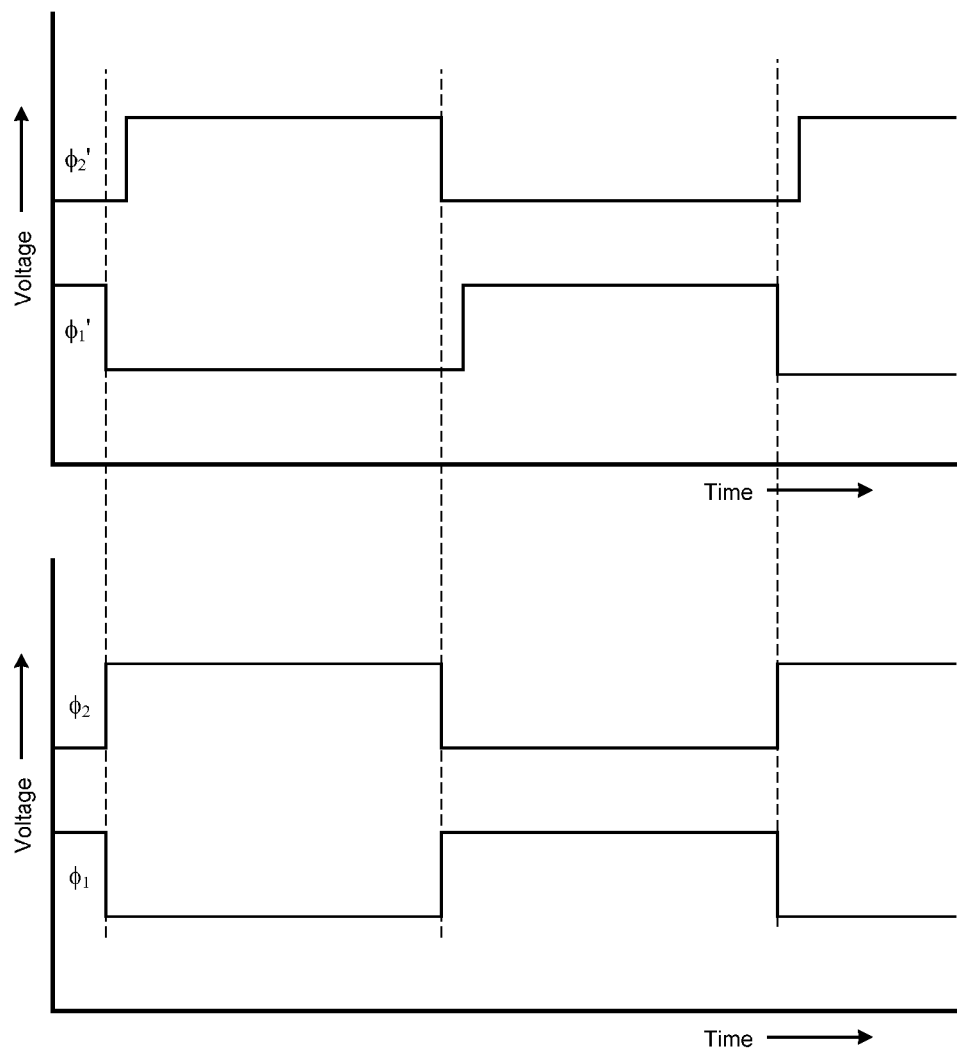
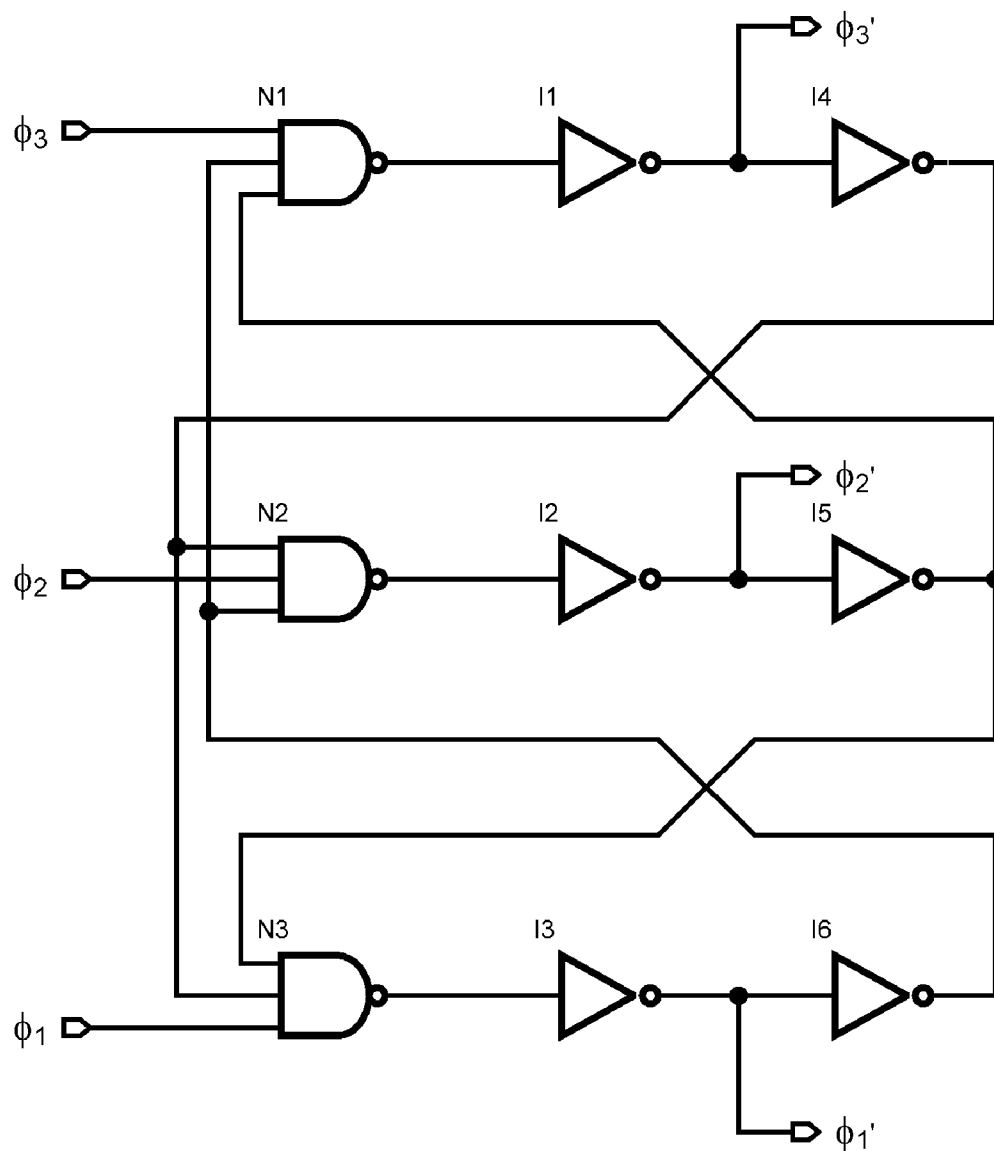
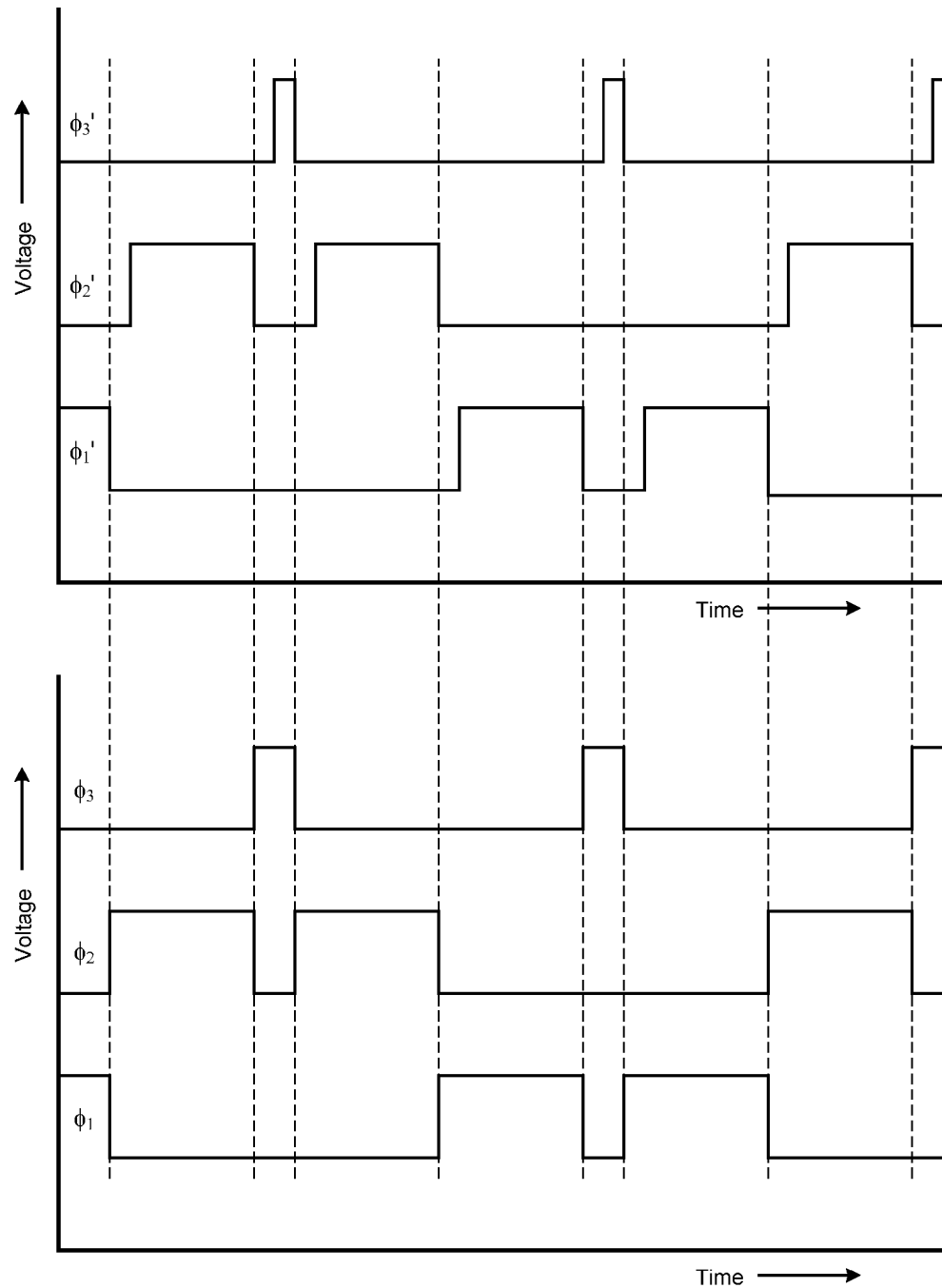


Fig. 16 (Prior Art)

*Fig. 17*

*Fig. 18*

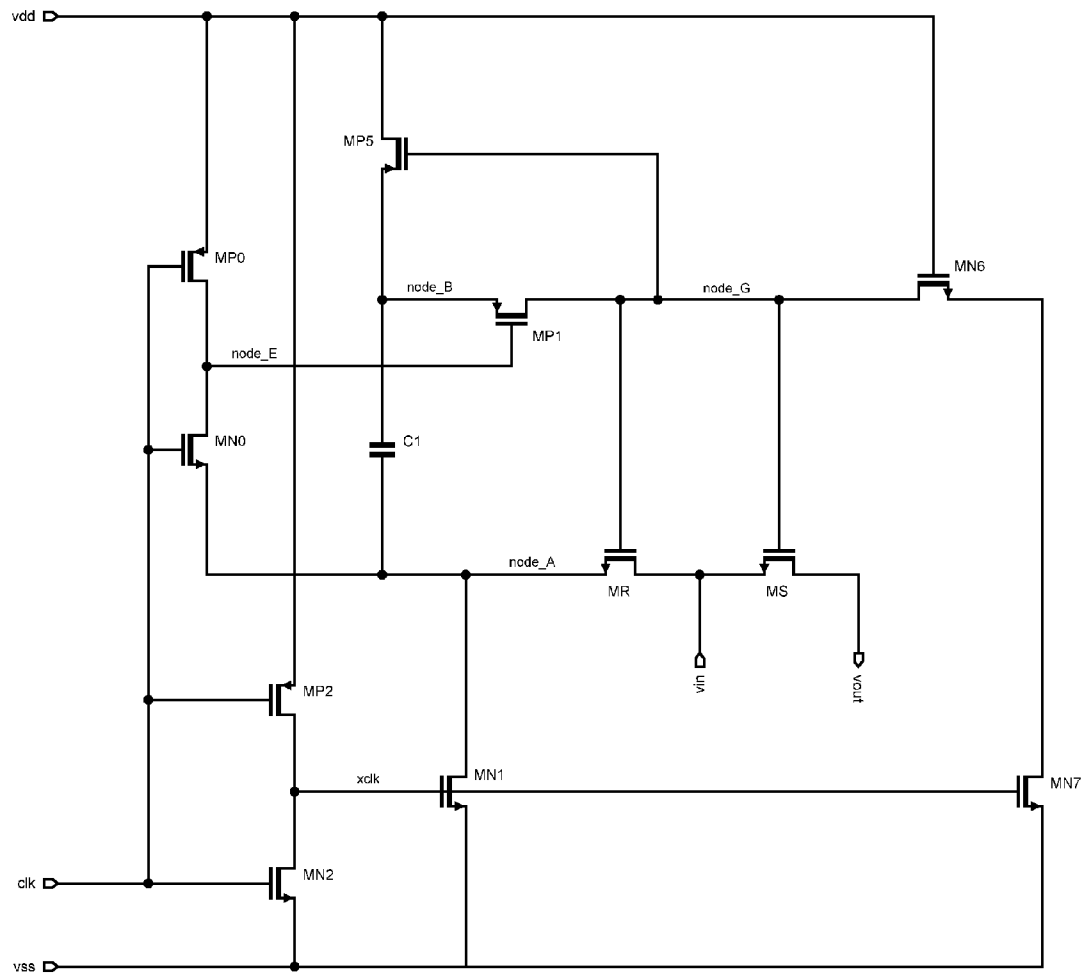


Fig. 19 (Prior Art)

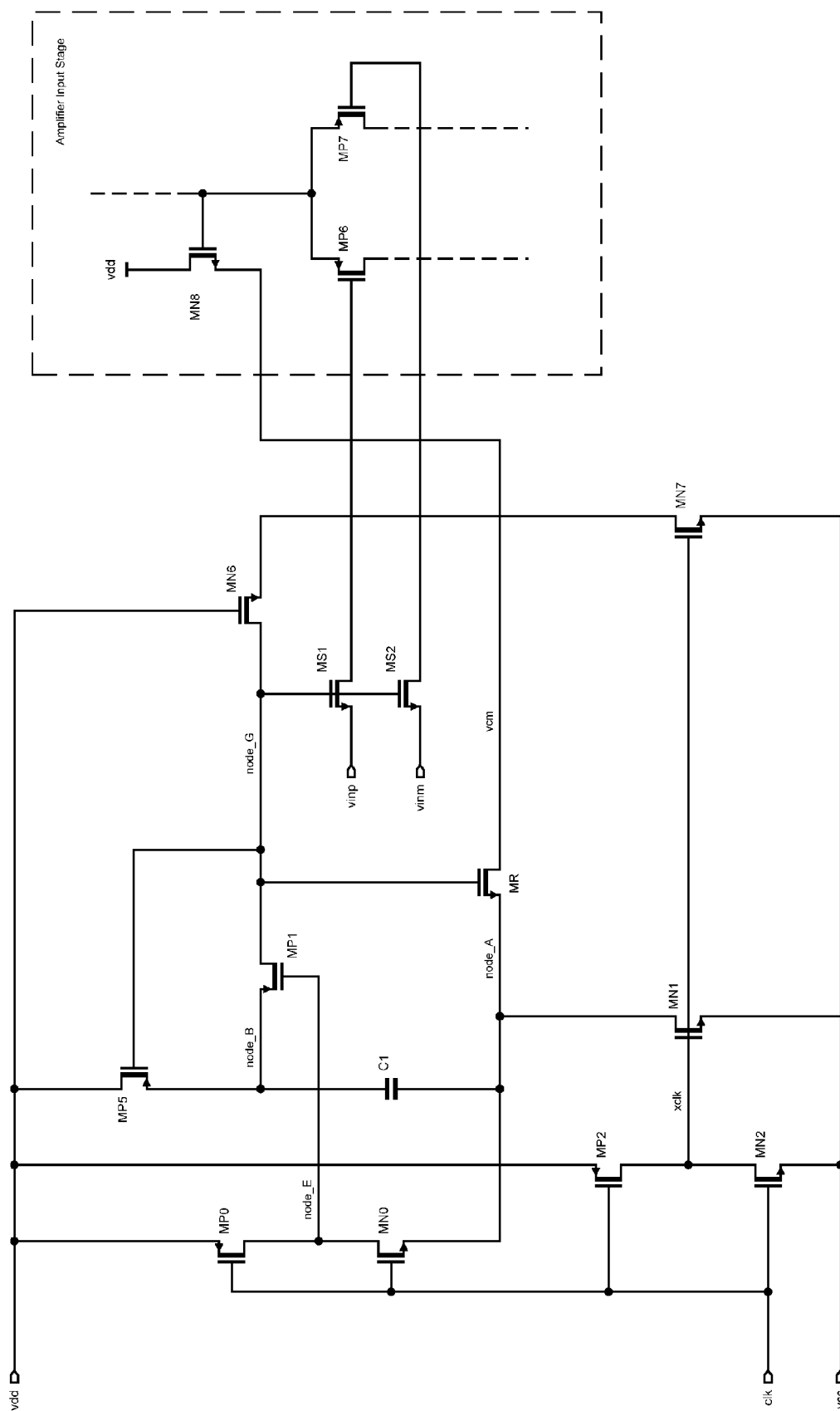


Fig. 20

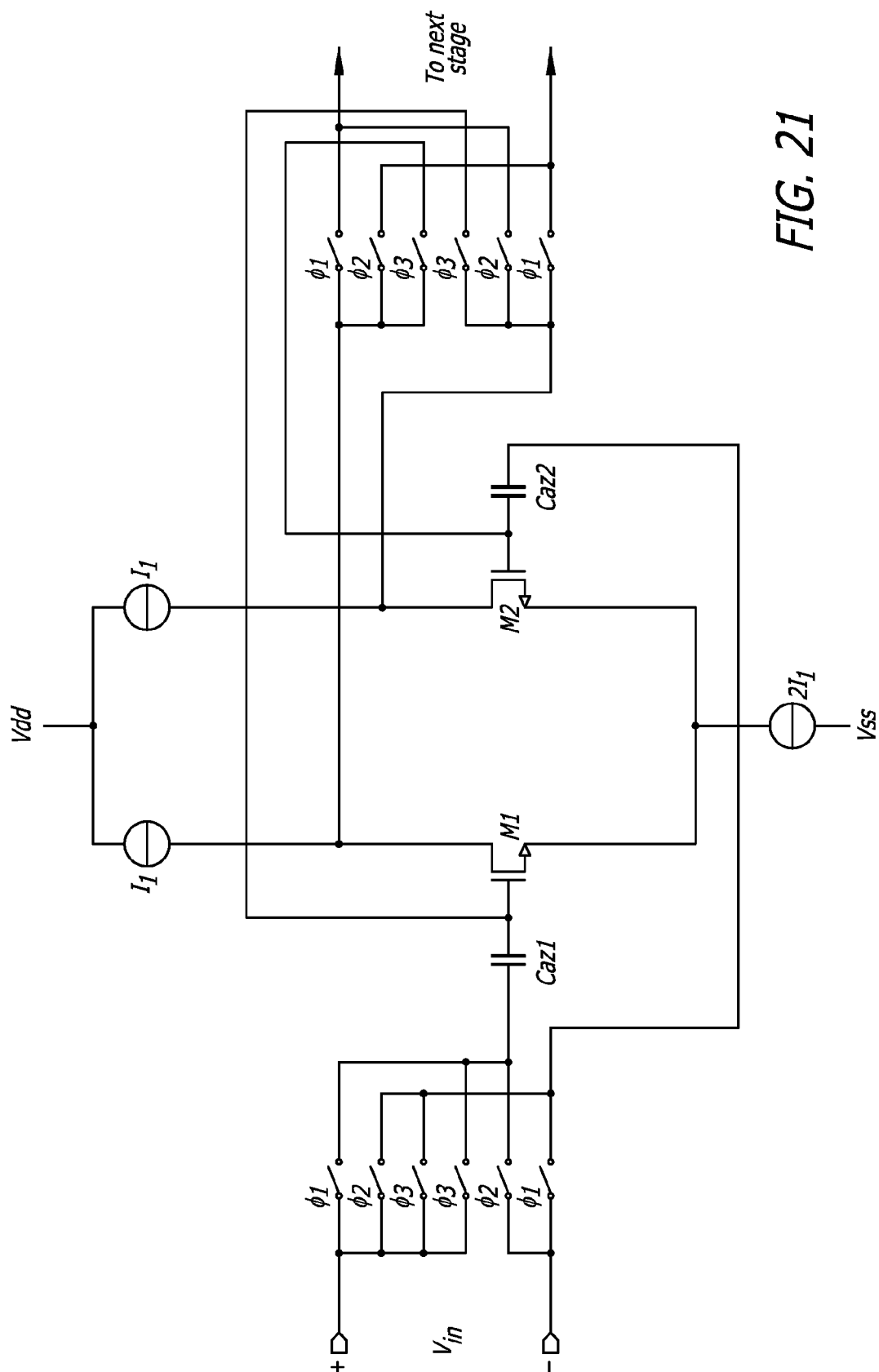


FIG. 21

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LOW-NOISE, LOW-POWER, LOW DRIFT OFFSET CORRECTION IN OPERATIONAL AND INSTRUMENTATION AMPLIFIERS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to the field of operational and instrumentation amplifiers.

2. Prior Art

One of the key performance specifications of an operational amplifier is its DC error or offset voltage. The offset voltage limits the ability of the amplifier to resolve small DC input voltages. The total offset voltage is usually specified assuming a single source of error at the input terminals. The value of this imaginary voltage source represents the input referred offset voltage of the amplifier. The significance of this parameter lies in the fact that the amplifier will not be able to resolve any DC voltages at its input that are smaller than the input referred offset voltage.

In monolithically integrated operational amplifiers, the input referred offset voltage (also called input offset, offset voltage or just offset for short) is mostly due to statistical mismatch between critical components in the circuit. Commonly, these critical components include the input stage transistors, but other devices may contribute significantly to the offset as well. Typical offset voltages due to component mismatch lie in the order of several millivolts.

In the past, many techniques have been proposed and implemented to limit the effect of statistical mismatch on the input referred offset voltage. These techniques fall into one of two categories (see "Circuit Techniques for Reducing the Effects of Op-Amp Imperfections: Autozeroing, Correlated Double Sampling, and Chopper Stabilization", C. C. Enz and G. C. Temes, *IEEE J. Solid-State Circuits*, vol. 84, November 1996, pp. 1584-1614).

1. Chopper Stabilization

2. Autozeroing

The following will address each of these techniques, along with their respective advantages and disadvantages.

Chopper Stabilization

Chopper stabilization relies on periodically swapping the signal paths for the negative and positive input terminals of the amplifier. On average, this causes the offset between the two terminals to even out (see "Circuit Techniques for Reducing the Effects of Op-Amp Imperfections: Autozeroing, Correlated Double Sampling, and Chopper Stabilization", C. C. Enz and G. C. Temes, *IEEE J. Solid-State Circuits*, vol. 84, November 1996, pp. 1584-1614). FIG. 1 shows the block diagram of a chopper stabilized amplifier.

The input referred offset voltage of the input stage g_{m1} is represented by voltage source V_{os} . The behavior of the choppers is to multiply their input signal by +1 or -1, depending on the state of clock phase ϕ_2 . In the case of a differential signal (e.g. chopper $chop_1$), multiplying by -1 simply means swapping the input signals. Multiplying by +1 indicates direct connections between inputs and outputs.

Note how for one clock phase the input offset source V_{os} will cause a negative error voltage at the output, while for the other phase the effect will be a positive voltage. The net output error voltage, averaged over time, will be zero.

For the input signal the situation is different. In this case the signal passes to both choppers $chop_1$ and $chop_2$, and the polarity of the output signal will not change. Therefore, the output signal will consist of the unmodified input signal, and a ripple voltage caused by chopping by chopper $chop_2$ of the input offset voltage V_{os} .

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Alternatively, in the frequency domain the choppers $chop_1$ and $chop_2$ can be regarded as multipliers or mixers, shifting the input frequencies by the chopper frequency f_{chop} . From this point of view, chopper $chop_1$ will convert up a DC input signal to the chopper frequency f_{chop} . Input stage g_{m1} will then amplify the resulting signal at f_{chop} , while chopper $chop_2$ converts the signal back to DC. Note that the DC input signal reappears as a DC signal at the output of chopper $chop_2$. This is because at this point the signal has passed through two choppers, implementing up and down conversion of the input signal.

The situation for the offset source V_{os} is different, however. Since there is only one chopper between the offset source V_{os} and the output, the DC offset voltage V_{os} will get up converted to the chopper frequency f_{chop} at the output. By low pass filtering (or averaging) the output the effect of the offset source V_{os} can then be eliminated.

Besides to the DC offset, the same frequency up conversion applies to any 1/f or low frequency noise of input stage g_{m1} . Therefore, the 1/f noise is shifted out of the signal band in the same way the DC offset is.

The gain stages g_{m1} , g_{m4} and g_{m5} comprise the chopped signal path. Since DC offset is—by definition—a low-frequency phenomenon, the chopped signal path does not require a very high bandwidth. Instead, the parallel input stage g_{m3} is added to the circuit to deal with high frequency signals. Together, input stages g_{m1} and g_{m3} handle the entire spectrum from DC up to the bandwidth of the amplifier. Capacitors C_{m1} and C_{m2} implement frequency compensation to ensure stability when applying feedback to the amplifier, as well as a smooth transition between the high and low frequency portions of the amplifier gain. This frequency compensation setup is based on Multipath Nested Miller Compensation (see "Frequency Compensation Techniques for Low-Power Operational Amplifiers", R. Eschauzier and J. Huijsing, section 6.1, Boston, Mass.: Kluwer, 1995, section 6.1, Boston, Mass.: Kluwer, 1995).

A significant benefit of the chopping technique, besides its effectiveness in reducing offset and 1/f noise, is that the noise power density spectrum (PSD) at low frequencies approaches the thermal noise limit of the amplifier without choppers.

The main disadvantage of chopping is that the output spectrum of the chopper stabilized amplifier will show a sharp peak around the chopper frequency f_{chop} (FIG. 2).

This noise peak is caused by the up conversion of the offset voltage and 1/f noise of the input stage g_{m1} , and corresponds to the ripple voltage at the output of the amplifier in the time domain.

Autozeroing

Autozeroing includes techniques that calibrate out the input offset by measuring the offset, storing it into some kind of internal memory, and then compensating for the error during normal operation. This process is very similar to zeroing a weighing scale for example. The moment of calibration can be during manufacturing, in which case the measured offset needs to be stored onto a non-volatile memory, to ensure that the measured offset value does not disappear after the part is powered down. Alternatively, the autozeroing can be performed during normal operation, by periodically interrupting the signal path for a brief calibration. In this case, the measured voltage needs to be retained for a short amount of time only, allowing the use of volatile memory, or even a capacitor to store the value. The advantage of autozeroing during normal operation is that as the offset of the amplifier shifts, e.g. due to temperature changes or aging, the autozeroing will track the changes and continue to compensate for it.

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Autozeroing during manufacturing does not compensate for varying conditions, and is therefore susceptible to offset drift.

FIG. 3 shows the simplified block diagram of an amplifier using autozeroing to reduce its offset.

It comprises of input stage g_{m1} with its associated input referred offset voltage source V_{os} . The switches S_1 and S_2 , transconductor g_{m2} and capacitor C_i implement the autozero function. When clock phase ϕ_1 is high (autozero), switch S_1 shorts the input terminals of input stage g_{m1} . Switch S_2 closes a feedback loop around stage g_{m2} , which forces the output voltage of input stage g_{m1} to zero. After the feedback loop settles, the voltage on autozero capacitor C_i counteracts the input referred offset voltage V_{os} .

The moment clock phase ϕ_1 goes low (normal operation), switch S_2 opens the feedback loop around transconductor g_{m2} . Because of the high input impedance of transconductor g_{m2} , the voltage across the autozero capacitor C_i remains constant (sample-and-hold), and continues to compensate for the offset voltage V_{os} .

With clock phase ϕ_1 low, input switch S_1 goes from shorting out the input stage g_{m1} to directly connecting the input terminals of the amplifier to the input stage g_{m1} . Input stage g_{m1} now operates as a normal input stage, connected between the input terminals of the amplifier and the subsequent gain stages g_{m4} and g_{m5} . As a result of the calibration in the previous clock phase, the small current I_2 that transconductor g_{m2} adds to the output current of input stage g_{m1} exactly compensates for the error current at the output of g_{m1} due to offset voltage V_{os} . In other words, the autozero current I_2 effectively eliminates the input referred offset voltage V_{os} of the amplifier.

Besides eliminating DC offset, the autozero process is also very effective against low-frequency or $1/f$ noise. This noise component can be regarded as a slowly varying offset voltage, and as long as the amplifier is autozeroed with short enough intervals, any $1/f$ noise will be removed in the same fashion DC offset is.

The autozeroed amplifier in FIG. 3 separates high and low frequency signals and processes them through two parallel signal paths, as was the case with the chopper stabilized amplifier of FIG. 1. The gain stages g_{m1} , g_{m4} and g_{m5} comprise the low-frequency autozeroed signal path, while the parallel input stage g_{m3} deals with high frequency signals. Capacitors C_{m1} and C_{m2} again implement Multipath Nested Miller Compensation (see "Frequency Compensation Techniques for Low-Power Operational Amplifiers", R. Eschauzier and J. Huijsing, section 6.1, Boston, Mass.: Kluwer, 1995., section 6.1, Boston, Mass.: Kluwer, 1995), ensuring stability and a smooth frequency response.

Although autozeroing according to FIG. 3 is a simple and effective method to reduce the input offset, it greatly deteriorates the noise properties of the amplifier due to a process called wide-band noise sampling (see "Circuit Techniques for Reducing the Effects of Op-Amp Imperfections: Autozeroing, Correlated Double Sampling, and Chopper Stabilization", C. C. Enz and G. C. Temes, *IEEE J. Solid-State Circuits*, vol. 84, November 1996, pp. 1584-1614).

Wide-band noise sampling, which is inherent to any sample-and-hold action, is caused by the fact that the instantaneous noise value at the output of input stage g_{m1} (and also autozero stage g_{m2}) is sampled by autozero capacitor C_i and held for the entire period that ϕ_1 is low (normal operation). The sampling of the noise takes place by switch S_2 and capacitor C_i , which are both components with a bandwidth that far exceeds the bandwidth of the amplifier. Therefore, the noise is sampled with a very high bandwidth, which results in a corresponding high rms value (or standard deviation σ) of

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the sampled noise voltage in the time domain. As a result, the sampled voltage on autozero capacitor C_i at the end of each autozero period shows a significant random variation. This variation causes a random input referred offset voltage that changes at the end of each autozero interval, and is then kept constant throughout an entire period of normal operation.

In the frequency domain, this wide-band noise sampling causes an increase in the noise floor for low frequencies (see FIG. 4).

The corner frequency ω_c of this elevated noise band is set by the bandwidth of the autozero loop through transconductor g_{m2} , switch S_2 and autozero capacitor C_i and equals g_{m2}/C_i .

In the circuit of FIG. 3, there is also another, second, source of wide-band noise sampling. This is due to the sample-and-hold action of switch S_2 and the integrating capacitor C_{m2} during the autozero period. As a result, the noise floor beyond the corner frequency of the autozero loop will also be higher compared to the thermal noise limit of the amplifier without autozeroing. The bandwidth of this sampled noise spectrum is approximately equal to the frequency at which the amplifier is autozeroed (and lies beyond the maximum frequency on the X-axis of FIG. 4.)

The noise power spectral density (or PSD) of the overall amplifier is shown in FIG. 4. Due to the multiple sample-and-hold actions in the circuit, the overall noise density is significantly higher than the thermal noise limit of the circuit without autozeroing. For low frequencies, the noise increase is especially noticeable, and in practice can be a factor 10 or more. Note that compensating for this elevated noise level by lowering the thermal noise of g_{m1} (and g_{m2}), would mean that the currents in these stages will have to go up by the same factor 10. In many cases such a large supply current increase will turn out to be an unacceptable impact to the total power budget of the amplifier.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of a Prior Art chopper stabilized amplifier.

FIG. 2 illustrates the Noise Power Spectral Density (PSD) of a Prior Art chopper stabilized amplifier.

FIG. 3 is a block diagram of a Prior Art autozeroed amplifier.

FIG. 4 illustrates the Noise PSD of a Prior Art autozeroed amplifier.

FIG. 5 is a block diagram of one circuit combining the advantages of chopping and autozeroing in a single amplifier.

FIG. 6 illustrates the Noise PSD of the amplifier of FIG. 5 with both chopping and autozeroing.

FIG. 7 is a block diagram of an Amplifier combining chopping and autozeroing with a ping-pong autozeroed input stage.

FIG. 8 illustrates the Noise PSD of the amplifier with ping-pong autozeroing.

FIG. 9 is a block diagram of an Amplifier combining chopping and autozeroing with reduced wide-band noise sampling.

FIG. 10 illustrates the Noise PSD of the chopped and autozeroed amplifier with improved clocking scheme of FIG. 9.

FIG. 11 is a block diagram of a Simplified chopped and autozeroed amplifier.

FIG. 12 is a block diagram of a Chopped and autozeroed amplifier using Multipath Hybrid Nested Miller Compensation.

FIG. 13 is a block diagram of an Instrumentation amplifier with chopping and autozeroing.

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FIG. 14 illustrates the Clock phases of the chopped and autozeroed amplifier of FIG. 13.

FIG. 15 presents a Prior Art Circuit for generating two-phase non-overlapping clock signals.

FIG. 16 illustrates the two-phase non-overlapping clock signals of the Prior Art circuit of FIG. 15.

FIG. 17 presents a circuit for a three-phase non-overlapping clock generator.

FIG. 18 illustrates the three-phase non-overlapping clock signals for the circuit of FIG. 17.

FIG. 19 presents a Prior Art circuit for a Bootstrapped input switch circuit.

FIG. 20 presents a circuit for an improved bootstrapped switch with reduced switching glitch and die area.

FIG. 21 illustrates an alternative form of autozero circuit using a single differential amplifier.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

In the attached drawings, for reference, in instances where it matters, all switches are shown in states for a respective low control signal. In that regard, the word switch is used herein and in the following claims in both the singular and the plural sense, and in the sense to include an on/off switch or switches, and switches that alternately connect one line to either of two other lines. However when used in the plural sense, each such switch is responsive to the same control signal. Also the word amplifier as used herein means an amplifier of one or more stages, and may include frequency compensation.

Table 1 summarizes the properties of the chopping and autozeroing techniques for reducing the DC offset and 1/f noise of an amplifier.

TABLE 1

Properties of chopping and autozeroing.		
	Advantage	Disadvantage
Chopping	Low-noise	Output ripple
Autozeroing	No output ripple	Wide-band noise sampling

Clearly, each of the techniques has its own set of advantages and disadvantages. Chopping results in low noise, but causes a significant output ripple, while autozeroing suffers from wide-band noise sampling, and hence high noise, but does not generate a ripple at the output.

Ideally, we would like to find an alternative approach that combines the advantages of chopping and autozeroing, i.e. low noise and small output ripple. FIG. 5 shows a first attempt at such a technique.

The circuit consists of autozeroed input stage g_{m1} that is "embedded" between the two choppers $chop_1$ and $chop_2$. The order of operation of the various parts is as follows. When clock phase ϕ_1 is high, input stage g_{m1} is being autozeroed by switch S_2 , transconductor g_{m2} and autozero capacitor C_f . When clock phase ϕ_1 goes low, input stage g_{m1} enters normal operation, while the output current of transconductor g_{m2} compensates for its input referred offset V_{os} . During this half cycle of normal operation, the two choppers $chop_1$ and $chop_2$ will go through a full clock cycle ϕ_2 , averaging out any remaining offset of autozeroed input stage g_{m1} . The cycle repeats by clock phase ϕ_1 going high again, entering the amplifier into autozero.

At first sight, the circuit of FIG. 5 seems to have many advantages over only chopping or only autozeroing. Because

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the offset V_{os} of g_{m1} is already autozeroed, chopping by chopper $chop_2$ does not introduce any output ripple. Also, because the choppers shift any low-frequency noise of the autozeroed input stage g_{m1} to the chopper frequency f_{chop} , the effect of the wide-band noise sampling by autozero capacitor C_f , is greatly eliminated. This can be seen in the noise it is shifted to the PSD of FIG. 6.

Clearly, the low frequency noise resulting from the wide band noise sampling by autozero capacitor C_f , is shifted to the chopper frequency f_{chop} . Finally, since both the autozeroing and chopping contribute to reducing the offset, the resulting input referred offset can be much lower than by using chopping or autozeroing alone.

The noise PSD of FIG. 6 also shows the main disadvantage of the combined autozeroed and chopped circuit of FIG. 5. Notice how the overall noise floor is raised significantly above the thermal noise limit of the amplifier. This elevated noise floor is entirely due to the sample-and-hold action of switch S_2 and Miller capacitor C_{m2} . While the input stage is being autozeroed (clock phase ϕ_1 is high), the normal signal path is being interrupted. During this time, the voltage across Miller capacitor C_{m2} , holding the value at the time switch S_2 opened, will determine the output voltage of the amplifier. The sample-and-hold effect of switch S_2 and Miller capacitor C_{m2} again gives rise to wide-band noise sampling. It can raise the overall noise floor by a factor 10 or more, all the way up to the autozero frequency f_{az} (which is beyond the range on the x-axis of FIG. 6).

A simple way to avoid the wide-band noise sampling in the circuit of FIG. 5 is shown in FIG. 7.

Here, the input stage of the amplifier is implemented using two independent transconductors g_{m1a} and g_{m1b} in a so-called ping-pong setup. The two input transconductors are alternately being autozeroed. While one transconductor is in its autozero mode, the other will provide a signal path between the input terminals and the intermediate stage g_{m4} , and vice versa. As a result, the normal signal path will never be interrupted, and no wide-band noise sampling takes place on the Miller capacitor C_{m2} . This is apparent from the noise PSD in FIG. 8.

For low frequencies, the noise of the ping-pong circuit is identical to the thermal noise of the amplifier without chopping and autozeroing. The noise bump due to the autozeroing of g_{m1a} and g_{m1b} is shifted to the chopper frequency f_{chop} by the two choppers $chop_1$ and $chop_2$, as was the case in the circuit of FIG. 5.

Although the noise PSD of FIG. 8 approaches the ideal of low-noise and low output voltage ripple, this performance comes at a considerable price in terms of die area and power consumption. Because of the ping-pong structure, the input stage almost doubles in size and supply current. Since both area and supply current of the input stage are key in obtaining a low thermal noise floor, the die size and power penalty of doubling the input stage will be unacceptable in many practical cases.

An alternative approach to combining the advantages of chopping and autozeroing, without the die size and power penalty of a ping-pong autozeroed input stage, is shown in FIG. 9.

This circuit is similar to the circuit of FIG. 5, but employs a modified clocking scheme. Instead of the autozero clock phase ϕ_1 running at half the chopping frequency f_{chop} , it now operates at twice the chopping frequency f_{chop} . Also, the duty cycle is such, that the autozero time is substantially shorter than the time the input stage provides a normal signal path. Thus the duty cycle of ϕ_1 is preferably less than 50%, and is more preferably not more than 25%. The result is that each

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half cycle of the choppers is interrupted by the auto-zeroing, though for less than one half of each half cycle of the chopping. This is also preferred for the embodiments of FIGS. 11, 12 and 13.

By placing the autozero pulse in the middle of each half cycle of the chopper clock phase ϕ_2 , chopper C_{hop2} will average out any residual offset after autozeroing in the time between two autozero pulses. This residual offset averaging stems from the fact that during a period between two autozero pulses, the signal is passed through chopper $chop_2$ directly and with reversed polarity with the same duration.

The modified clocking scheme substantially reduces the wide-band noise sampling by switch S_2 and Miller capacitor C_{m2} . Even though the hold voltage on Miller capacitor C_{m2} after opening S_2 still has the same large random variation as was the case in the circuit of FIG. 5, limiting the time this random voltage affects the signal path, greatly reduces its overall effect. This is shown in FIG. 10.

By choosing a suitably small autozero duty cycle, the overall noise increase due to the wide-band noise sampling can become arbitrarily small. In practice, by choosing a duty cycle less than 10% the noise floor of the circuit will be within several percent of the theoretical thermal noise floor limit.

FIG. 11 shows a simplification of the circuit in FIG. 9.

Notice how in the previous circuit of FIG. 9 the autozero switches and internal chopper switches are connected in series, each with their own clocking phases. The circuit of FIG. 11 combines these series connections of switches into one switch where possible, and provides the proper clocking phases to drive them.

Operation is as follows. The first state of the circuit is when clock phase ϕ_3 is high; the circuit is in autozero mode, with the switches labeled ϕ_3 closed. As a result, the inputs of transistor g_{m1} are both tied to the positive input terminal. Hence, the input differential voltage of g_{m1} is zero, while the voltage at the positive input sets the common-mode voltage. The output terminals of input transistor g_{m1} are connected to the autozero capacitors C_{i1} and C_{i2} , closing the autozero loop.

The second state occurs after clock phase ϕ_3 goes low again. Now there are two possible situations: either clock phase ϕ_1 goes high, while phase ϕ_2 remains low, or vice versa. Assuming the first case, ϕ_1 high and ϕ_2 low, input stage g_{m1} is connected directly between the input terminals and the intermediate stage g_{m4} . Offset voltage source V_{os} will cause a positive error voltage at the output of the amplifier. The two autozero capacitors C_{i1} and C_{i2} are disconnected from the signal path and hold their voltage to cancel out any offset of input stage g_{m1} .

The circuit enters its third and final state when ϕ_1 and ϕ_2 reverse polarities (ϕ_1 low and ϕ_2 high). In this situation, input stage g_{m1} is effectively turned upside down, swapping both the input and output terminals. The polarity of the signal path remains the same, but the effect of input offset voltage V_{os} at the output changes sign: it will cause a negative excursion of the output voltage.

Since states two and three have the same duration, the average effect of the offset source V_{os} will be zero. State 1 is effectively operating at twice the frequency of states 2 and 3, though states 2 and 3 are each interrupted by state 1, with each half cycle of the chopping being temporarily interrupted by the auto-zeroing process.

The order of states two and three after each autozero pulse ϕ_3 alternates. This results in the following overall order of the circuit states: 2-1-2, 3-1-3, 2-1-2 etc. The average (residual) offset across one autozero cycle, whether it is the 2-1-2 or the 3-1-3 cycle, will be zero.

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Input stage g_{m3} again implements a separate signal path for high frequencies. Together with capacitors C_{m1} , C_{m2a} and C_{m2b} , this parallel input stage g_{m3} implements Multipath Nested Miller Compensation (see "Frequency Compensation Techniques for Low-Power Operational Amplifiers", R. Eschauzier and J. Huijsing, section 6.1, Boston, Mass.: Kluwer, 1995). This frequency compensation technique ensures stability when applying feedback to the overall amplifier, while enabling a smooth frequency response without artifacts in the cross-over region between the high and low frequency signal paths. Capacitor C_3 is an optional component that can help the gain of the low-frequency signal path (g_{m1} , g_{m4} and g_{m5}) to drop off steeply enough at high frequencies not to interfere with the high-frequency signal path through parallel input stage g_{m3} .

A final refinement of the circuit in FIG. 11 is shown in FIG. 12.

This circuit is identical to the circuit of FIG. 11, except for the additional gain stage g_{m6} . The purpose of this additional stage is to increase the gain of the low-frequency signal path through input stage g_{m1} . This additional gain will help to suppress any DC offset of the overall amplifier due to mismatches in the parallel input stage g_{m3} . A DC offset in the parallel input stage g_{m3} will cause an input referred offset voltage of the overall amplifier. The resulting input referred offset can be very small, however, as its effect is reduced by the ratio of the gains of the low frequency signal path and high frequency signal path. By introducing the additional gain stage g_{m6} , the circuit of FIG. 12 will offer gain ratios on the order of 10,000x or more in typical situations. Therefore, a DC offset of the parallel input stage g_{m3} of 10 mV for example, will be reduced to less than a microvolt. At these low levels, the effect of a DC mismatch in the parallel input stage g_{m3} is sufficiently small not to significantly affect the overall performance of the amplifier.

Because of the additional gain stage g_{m6} , the circuit of FIG. 12 now requires Multipath Hybrid Nested Miller compensation to guarantee stability with overall feedback applied (see "Frequency Compensation Techniques for Low-Power Operational Amplifiers", R. Eschauzier and J. Huijsing, section 6.3, Boston, Mass.: Kluwer, 1995). This frequency compensation technique is similar to Multipath Nested Miller Compensation used in FIG. 11, except that it uses an active integrator with Miller capacitors C_{m3a} and C_{m3b} , as opposed to the passive filter capacitor C_3 in FIG. 11.

Instrumentation Amplifiers

By adding an additional input stage to any of the circuits in FIG. 5, FIG. 7, FIG. 9, FIG. 11 and FIG. 12, these can easily be transformed into so-called instrumentation amplifiers (see "Operational Amplifiers, Theory and Design", J. Huijsing, pp. 52-53, Boston, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001). Instrumentation amplifiers have two sets of differential input terminals and are capable of sensing small differential signals in the presence of a large common-mode disturbance.

In order for the chopping and autozeroing to work properly in the modified circuit, only the input stage devices (including the parallel devices for Multipath frequency compensation) and input switches need to be repeated from the original opamp. The autozeroing can be done across both input stages combined, and therefore does not require additional autozero capacitors, nor autozero feedback switches.

FIG. 13 shows the chopped and autozeroed instrumentation amplifier that results from modifying the opamp depicted in FIG. 12. The components added to the circuit are the two input stages g_{m1b} and g_{m3b} , along with the corresponding input switches.

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FIGS. 5, 7 and 9 implement one form of autozero circuit, also effectively incorporated in FIGS. 11, 12 and 13, though it should be understood that other forms of autozero circuits may be used. By way of example, FIG. 21 illustrates an alternative form of autozero circuit using a single differential amplifier rather than the two of the previous embodiment. In FIG. 21, a differential transistor pair M1 and M2 each have a drain current I_1 and a common source connection having a tail current of $2I_1$. Either the drain currents or the tail current can be controlled by a common mode voltage controlled current source to achieve the desired common mode input to the gates of the transistors M1 and M2. Note that this common mode voltage is unrelated to, and can be fixed and very different from, the common mode input to the amplifier system, the difference being the voltages across capacitors Caz1 and Caz2.

Clock phases ϕ_1 and ϕ_2 are the chopper clock phases. During autozeroing, clock phases ϕ_1 and ϕ_2 are low and the clock phase ϕ_3 is high. Note that if the two drain currents I_1 are not perfectly matched, that mismatch, itself, will also cause an offset in the differential pair of transistors M1 and M2. However that offset is also autozeroed by the foregoing process so that a perfect match of the two drain current sources I_1 is not required.

In any autozero circuit, the input to the input stage is periodically disconnected and then shorted, with the offset then being stored on one or more capacitors for subtraction from the signal path between autozeroing operations. In the embodiments of FIGS. 5, 7, 9 and 11-13, a second amplifier is used, with the net input offset of both amplifiers gm1 and gm2 being stored on the capacitors on the input to the second amplifier. The offsets are cancelled by the second amplifier having a current output opposite the current output of the differential input stage when the input of the differential input stage is shorted. In the embodiment of FIG. 21, only one differential amplifier is used for the autozero operation, with the autozeroing being done by appropriately charging capacitors in series with the differential amplifier input.

Clock Generation

The clock phase ϕ_3 can be thought of as the autozero phase, while the clock phase ϕ_1 and ϕ_2 can be (broadly) thought of as the two chopper phases. One complication that arises in the circuits of FIG. 11 and FIG. 12 is that only one of the sets of switches corresponding to a particular clock phase (ϕ_1 , ϕ_2 or ϕ_3) is allowed to be closed at any particular time. Closing two or more sets of switches will cause short circuits between the various nodes of the circuit. In order to guarantee this break-before-make behavior, the switches need to be driven by non-overlapping clock phases.

A prior art circuit for generating two-phase non-overlapping clock signals is shown in FIG. 15 (see "Principles of CMOS Design", N. H. E. Weste and K. Eshraghian, section 5.5.10, Addison-Wesley, 1993).

It generates the two non-overlapping clock phases ϕ_1' and ϕ_2' from the potentially overlapping input clock phases ϕ_1 and ϕ_2 . This process is illustrated in FIG. 16.

Operation of the circuit is as follows (assuming for simplicity that all gates are delay free, except for the inverters I3 and I4). With clock phase ϕ_1 low and clock phase ϕ_2 high, the output clock phases ϕ_1' and ϕ_2' will also be low and high respectively. When the two input clock phases ϕ_1 and ϕ_2 change states (ϕ_1 transitioning to high and ϕ_2 to low), output ϕ_2' will change almost instantaneously (see FIG. 16). This direct output response occurs because when the input ϕ_2 to nand gate N1 goes low, its output will go high, regardless of the state of the other input to the nand gate. During the same transition (ϕ_1 to high and ϕ_2 to low), output ϕ_1' will respond

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with a delay. One input of the nand gate N2 is held low by inverter I3. With one input low, the output of nand gate N2 will not change its output, independently of the state of the other input that is connected to input clock phase ϕ_1 . Only when the output of I3 changes, will the output of nand N2 change, and hence output ϕ_1' . Note that inverters I3 and I4 are assumed to exhibit noticeable delay, whereas all other gates are delay-free. The resulting output clock phases ϕ_1' and ϕ_2' are shown in FIG. 16. As indicated before, output ϕ_2' responds directly to the falling edge of ϕ_2 , while clock phase ϕ_1' tracks the rising edge of input ϕ_1 with a slight delay. Note how the resulting output phases ϕ_1' and ϕ_2' are never on at the same time (break before make).

The next change of input state, input clock phase ϕ_1 will go low again, and input clock phase ϕ_2 high. The process reverses, and in this case the output ϕ_1' responds directly to the falling edge of ϕ_2 , while clock phase ϕ_1' tracks the rising edge of input ϕ_1 with a slight delay. This timing again avoids overlap of the two output clock signals ϕ_1' and ϕ_2' . Note in FIG. 16 how the output clock phases always respond directly to a falling edge of the corresponding input clock phase, whereas rising edges are tracked with a slight delay. This timing property is fundamental to producing the two non-overlapping clock signals ϕ_1' and ϕ_2' .

FIG. 17 extends the operation of the non-overlapping clock generator of FIG. 15 to the three specific clock phases of FIG. 14. In the preferred embodiment, the three timing signals input to the circuit of FIG. 17 are generated by a simple state machine, and may be overlapping.

In this case, the circuit needs to make sure that none of the three output clock phases ϕ_1' , ϕ_2' and ϕ_3' will ever be high at the same time. Operation is similar to that of the circuit in FIG. 15 and illustrated in FIG. 18.

For simplicity, all components are assumed to be delay-free again, except for the inverters I4, I5 and I6.

When the input clock phase ϕ_3 is low, the output of inverter I4 is high, and the circuit part consisting of the nand gates N2 and N3, and inverters I2, I3, I5 and I6 behave identically to the prior art circuit in FIG. 15. These six components create non-overlapping clock phases ϕ_1' and ϕ_2' from the two input clock phases ϕ_1 and ϕ_2 . Since clock phase ϕ_3 was low to begin with, the result is that only one output clock phase ϕ_1' , ϕ_2' or ϕ_3' will be high at a given time.

When input clock phase ϕ_3 transitions high, the output clock phase ϕ_3' will wait for both other inputs to the nand gate N1 to become high as well, before it follows input clock phase ϕ_3 in going high. The other two inputs of the nand gate N1 will go high—albeit with some delay—because both input clock phase ϕ_1 and ϕ_2 will be low once input clock phase ϕ_3 has gone high. The delay is caused by one of the two inverters I5 and I6, depending on the state of the input clock phase ϕ_1 and ϕ_2 . If input clock phase ϕ_1 was low before the input clock transition, it will remain low, while input clock phase ϕ_2 goes from high to low. In this case the delay is caused by inverter I5. Inverter I6 becomes responsible for the delay in the situation where input clock phase ϕ_2 starts off and remains low, while input clock phase ϕ_1 makes the high-to-low transition. The delay before the output clock phase ϕ_3' goes high, results in the non-overlap time for this clock phase.

A high-to-low transition of input clock phase ϕ_3 affects output clock phase ϕ_3' almost immediately, as it causes one input to the nand gate N1 (the one connected to input ϕ_3) to go low. One low input to the nand gate is sufficient to make the output clock phase ϕ_3' go low as well, regardless of the other inputs to the nand gate N1.

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Since the circuit of FIG. 17 is symmetrical around all of its input-output pairs ϕ_1/ϕ_1' , ϕ_2/ϕ_2' and ϕ_3/ϕ_3' , the same reasoning that applies to the pair ϕ_3/ϕ_3' holds equally for the other two pairs.

The overall result of the timing in the circuit of FIG. 17, is that the clock phase outputs ϕ_1' , ϕ_2' and ϕ_3' will follow any high-to-low transition of their respective input clock phases ϕ_1 , ϕ_2 and ϕ_3 directly, while a low-to-high transition is propagated with a certain delay. FIG. 18 clearly shows how this delayed response to the rising edges creates the required three phase non-overlapping clock signals. Of course the circuit of FIG. 17 may in effect be realized using logical permutations accordingly to Boolean geometry to achieve the delay of each signal going to a first state until the both the other signals are in the second state.

Rail-to-Rail Input Switches

When operating any of the circuits FIG. 5, FIG. 7, FIG. 9, FIG. 11 or FIG. 12 at a low supply voltage while requiring a rail-to-rail input common-mode voltage range, the need arises for bootstrapped input switches. This need is especially felt when the supply voltage of the amplifier is lower than the sum of the threshold voltages of an NMOS and a PMOS device in the manufacturing process technology. Under these circumstances, we are not able to operate traditional complementary transmission gates at the inputs.

A transmission gate consists of the parallel connection of a PMOS and NMOS switch, each of which is operated by an opposite phase signal at its gate. To turn the transmission gate on, the gate of the NMOS device is pulled high, while the gate of the PMOS device is pulled low. At supply voltages below the sum of the threshold voltages of the NMOS and PMOS device, an area in the middle of the common-mode voltage range of the switch will occur where neither of the two devices can develop enough voltage across its gate-source terminals to be turned on.

The alternative to a transmission gate is to use a single NMOS or PMOS device, with a gate drive voltage that can rise above (NMOS) or drop below (PMOS) the supply voltage of the circuit. FIG. 19 shows an example of a prior art bootstrapped NMOS switch that uses a capacitor to increase the control voltage at the gate of the switching device (see "Very low-voltage digital-audio $\Sigma\Delta$ modulator with 88-dB dynamic range using local switch bootstrapping", M. Dessouky and A. Kaiser, IEEE J. Solid-State Circuits, vol. 36, no. 3, pp. 349-355, March 2001).

Operation of the bootstrapped switch is as follows. While the input terminal clk is held low (switch turned off), device M_{N7} pulls down node G (gates of the switching transistor) through cascode device M_{N6} . Switch devices MR and MS are in their off states, while capacitor C_1 is being charged to the supply voltage by devices M_{P5} and M_{N1} . Devices M_{P0} and M_{P1} are off. Stepping the control voltage clk high (turning the switch on), device M_{N0} pulls down node E, and device M_{P1} will start to conduct current. Device M_{P1} on its turn will connect the pre-charged capacitor C_1 between the gate and source of device M_R , which will also turn on. With devices M_{P1} and M_R in their on states, the gate-source voltage of the switching device M_S equals the voltage V_{dd} stored on the capacitor C_1 . With its gate-source voltage V_{gs} above the threshold voltage, the switch devices M_S will turn on.

Even though the voltages at node G and node B can rise significantly above the supply voltage (maximally twice V_{dd}), safe operation of all devices is guaranteed.

There are two apparent drawbacks of the prior art circuit in FIG. 19. The first is that the circuit requires a capacitor for each input switch. Since the disclosed circuits will be operating a total of six input switches, the six capacitors will

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represent a considerable die area penalty. Secondly, operating the switch will cause a major switching glitch in the signal path. This glitch is especially apparent while turning the switch on. In that case, device M_R is closed, while node A is still at the ground potential V_{ss} . With device M_R closed, node A needs to be lifted all the way up to the common-mode voltage level at the input terminal V_{in} . The charge needed for this voltage jump is pulled from the input terminal V_{in} , leading to the switching glitch.

The circuit of FIG. 20 alleviates the die size penalty and switching glitches associated with the prior art circuit of FIG. 19.

The circuit of FIG. 20 uses only one gate-drive capacitor C_1 to drive the two input switch devices M_{S1} and M_{S2} . Since all six input switches in FIG. 11 and FIG. 12 come in three pairs that are driven by the same clock phase, this reduces the total number of capacitors from six to three. This is not needed between stages, as the common mode voltage may be controlled (limited) so a rail to rail switching voltage may be used for these switches.

The key modification to allow driving multiple switch devices with one bootstrap circuit is the use of voltage v_{cm} as a reference to lift gate-control capacitor C_1 , instead of the source of the switch device M_S in the prior art circuit of FIG. 19. Disconnecting the sources of the switches MS1 and MS2 from the bootstrap circuit has the added benefit of avoiding the switching glitch that arose in the prior art circuit of FIG. 19.

The key to successfully operating the switch devices M_{S1} and M_{S2} in FIG. 20 lies in generating the proper common-mode voltage v_{cm} . This voltage v_{cm} is derived through source follower M_{N8} from the voltage at the sources of the input transistors M_{P6} and M_{P7} of the overall amplifier circuit, M_{P6} and M_{P7} being the differential transistor pair in a differential input stage for the amplifier system. Because of this connection, the common mode voltage v_{cm} has two important properties:

1. The voltage v_{cm} will track the minimum of the two voltages at the gates of input transistors M_{P6} and M_{P7} . This is due to the fact that the input device with the lowest gate voltage, e.g. M_{P6} , will start acting as a source follower, tracking the voltage at its gate with the source, while the other device (M_{P7} in this example) will be turned off by lack of a sufficiently high gate-source voltage V_{gs} . In a typical amplifier application, the differential input will be minimal, so that the voltage v_{cm} will accurately reflect the common mode voltage of the differential input. Note also, that only one source follower M_{N8} need be used for all switches coupled to that differential input.

2. Because of source follower M_{N8} , the common mode voltage v_{cm} can never exceed the positive rail V_{dd} , even if the tail current source of the input pair M_{P6} and M_{P7} is connected to a voltage higher than the supply voltage V_{dd} . A common situation where the input stage tail current source is tied to a higher supply voltage than the remainder of the amplifier is in amplifiers that employ a charge-pump to obtain a rail-to-rail input common-mode range. The charge pump generates a boosted supply voltage for the input stage, extending its common mode input voltage range.

Because of these two points, the circuit continues to guarantee safe operation of all devices in the circuit. The gate of the switching devices M_{S1} and M_{S2} will never be pulled higher than one supply voltage V_{dd} above the minimum of the two input voltages V_{inp} and V_{inm} . Consequently, the gate-source voltages V_{gs} of switching devices M_{S1} and M_{S2} cannot exceed the supply voltage V_{dd} . Also, node E, which is connected to v_{cm} when switch devices M_{N0} and M_R are closed,

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cannot exceed the supply voltage V_{dd} . This is critical to avoid forward biasing of the backgate diode of M_{P3} .

Operation of the circuit is similar to that of the prior art circuit in FIG. 19: when input terminal clk is low (switch turned off), device M_{N7} pulls down node G (gates of the switching transistors) through cascode M_{N6} . Switch devices M_{S1} and M_{S2} are in their off states, while capacitor C_1 is being charged to the supply voltage by devices M_{P5} and M_{N1} . Devices M_{P0} and M_{P1} are off. When the control voltage clk goes high (turning the switch on), device M_{N0} pulls down node E, and device M_{P1} will start to conduct current. Device M_{P1} in turn will connect the pre-charged capacitor C_1 between the gate and source of device M_R , which will also turn on. With devices M_{P1} and M_R in their on states, the voltage at node G will be the common-mode voltage v_{cm} plus the voltage V_{dd} stored on the capacitor. The result is that the gate-source voltages V_{gs} of the switch devices M_{S1} and M_{S2} will rise above their threshold voltages and turn the two devices on.

The embodiments shown and described herein use differential amplifiers. It should be noted that a single ended amplifier is functionally a differential amplifier with one input and/or one output connected to a circuit ground. Similarly, a chopper alternately reverses two inputs, independent of whether one is a circuit ground or not. Accordingly references herein and in the following claims to differential amplifiers is a reference that includes amplifiers with one input and/or one output connected to a circuit ground, i.e., commonly referred to as single ended amplifiers. Also the embodiments shown and described herein are shown and described with respect to MOS transistors, though other active devices may be used, such as, by way of example, bipolar transistors.

Thus the present invention has a number of aspects, which aspects may be practiced alone or in various combinations or sub-combinations, as desired. While certain preferred embodiments of the present invention have been disclosed and described herein for purposes of illustration and not for purposes of limitation, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various changes in form and detail may be made therein without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the full breadth of the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. In an amplifier system, a circuit comprising:
a first differential amplifier;
first and second choppers for chopping the input and the output of the first differential amplifier, respectively;
autozero circuitry coupled to the first differential amplifier for autozeroing the first differential amplifier;
the autozero circuitry operating at a first frequency and the choppers operating at a second frequency, the first frequency being twice the second frequency, the second frequency having a 50% duty cycle;
the first frequency having a duty cycle of less than 50%;
each half cycle of the choppers being interrupted while the first differential amplifier is auto-zeroed.
2. The circuit of claim 1 further comprising an amplifier having differential inputs coupled to the first and second differential inputs of the amplifier system and an output coupled to the output amplifier.
3. The circuit of claim 1 wherein the first frequency has a duty cycle of not more than 25%.
4. In an amplifier system, a circuit comprising:
a first differential amplifier;
first and second choppers for chopping the input and the output of the first differential amplifier, respectively;

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the first chopper being coupled to the first and second differential inputs of the amplifier system;

a first-switch having a first first-switch state coupling the differential inputs of the first differential amplifier to differential outputs of the first chopper, and a second first-switch state connecting the differential inputs of the first differential amplifier together;

a second differential amplifier, the second differential amplifier having differential inputs, each connected to a circuit ground through a respective capacitance;
differential outputs of the first and second differential amplifiers being coupled in common;

an output amplifier having an input coupled to an output of the second chopper;

a second-switch having a first second-switch state coupling the common outputs of the first and second differential amplifiers to an input of the second chopper, and a second second-switch state coupling the common outputs of the first and second differential amplifiers to the differential inputs of the second differential amplifier;
the first and second switches operating at a first frequency and the choppers operating at a second frequency unequal to the first frequency.

5. The circuit of claim 4 wherein the second frequency is twice the first frequency, and the first and second frequencies each have a 50% duty cycle.

6. The circuit of claim 4 wherein the first frequency is twice the second frequency, the second frequency having 50% duty cycle.

7. The circuit of claim 6 wherein the first frequency has a duty cycle of less than 50%, whereby each half cycle of the choppers is interrupted while the first differential amplifier is auto-zeroed.

8. The circuit of claim 6 wherein the first frequency has a duty cycle of not more than 25%, whereby each half cycle of the choppers is interrupted while the first differential amplifier is auto-zeroed.

9. The circuit of claim 6 further comprising:

third and fourth differential amplifiers, the fourth differential amplifier having differential inputs, each connected to a circuit ground through a respective capacitance,
differential outputs of the third and fourth differential amplifiers being coupled in common;

the first-switch when in the first first-switch state also coupling the differential inputs of the third differential amplifier together and coupling the common outputs of the third and fourth differential amplifiers to the differential inputs to the fourth differential amplifier;

the first-switch when in the second first-switch state coupling the differential outputs of the first chopper to the differential inputs of the third differential amplifier and coupling the common differential outputs of the third and fourth differential amplifiers to the differential inputs of the second chopper.

10. The circuit of claim 9 further comprising an amplifier having differential inputs coupled to the first and second differential inputs of the amplifier system and an output coupled to the output amplifier.

11. The circuit of claim 6 wherein:

the first and second switches and the first and second choppers comprise third, fourth and fifth switches, each having an open and a closed state;

the first differential input of the amplifier system being connectable to a first differential input of the first differential amplifier by third and fifth switches, and to a second differential input of the first differential amplifier by the fourth and fifth switches;

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the second differential input of the amplifier system being connectable to the first differential input of the first differential amplifier by the fourth switch, and to the second differential input of the first differential amplifier by the third switch;

a first common connection of the outputs of the first and third differential amplifiers being connectable to a first differential input of the differential output amplifier through the third switch and to a second differential input to the differential output amplifier through the fourth switch;

a second common connection of the outputs of the first and second differential amplifiers being connectable to a first input of the differential output amplifier through the fourth switch and to a second input to the differential output amplifier through the third switch;

the common connection of the differential outputs of the first and second differential amplifiers being connectable to the differential inputs of the second differential amplifier by the fifth switch.

12. The amplifier of claim 11 wherein the output amplifier is a multiple stage amplifier.

13. The circuit of claim 11 further comprising a third amplifier having differential inputs coupled to the differential inputs of the amplifier system and an output coupled to the output amplifier.

14. The circuit of claim 11 wherein the third switches are all closed at the same time, but not when the fourth and fifth switches are closed, the fourth switches are all closed at the same time, but not when any of the third and fifth switches are closed, and the fifth switches are all closed at the same time, but not when any of the third or fourth switches are closed, whereby the switch operation is nonoverlapping, the fifth switches being closed at the first frequency with a duty cycle of less than 50%, the third switches being closed at a second frequency with a duty cycle of approximately 50%, except as interrupted for the closure of the fifth switches, and the fourth switches being closed at the second frequency with a duty cycle of approximately 50%, except as interrupted for the closure of the fifth switches.

15. The amplifier of claim 14 wherein the fifth switches are closed with a duty cycle of not more than 25%.

16. The amplifier of claim 14 wherein the output amplifier is a multiple stage amplifier.

17. The circuit of claim 14 further having third and fourth differential inputs of the amplifier system forming a second differential input port, and further comprising:

a third differential amplifier having first and second differential inputs;

the third differential input of the amplifier system being connectable to the first differential input of the third differential amplifier by third and fifth switches, and to the second differential input of the third differential amplifier by the fourth and fifth switches;

the fourth differential input of the amplifier system being connectable to the first differential input of the third differential amplifier by the fourth switch and to the second differential input of the third differential amplifier by the third switch;

differential outputs of the third differential amplifier being coupled in common with the differential outputs of the first and second differential amplifiers.

18. The circuit of claim 17 further comprising fourth and fifth differential amplifiers, the fourth differential amplifier having differential inputs coupled to the first and second differential inputs of the amplifier system and an output coupled to the output amplifier, and the fifth differential

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amplifier having differential inputs coupled to the third and fourth differential inputs of the amplifier system and an output coupled to the output amplifier.

19. The circuit of claim 14 further comprising:

a timing circuit for providing three output timing signals for controlling the timing of the third, fourth and fifth switches respectively, the output timing signals having first and second states and being nonoverlapping in the second state, the three output timing signals being provided from three input signals of first and second states, any of which input signals may overlap in the second state, comprising:

logic coupled to delay the change of a first output timing signal to the second state response to a change of the first input signal to the second state until after both second and third output signals are in the first state;

logic coupled to delay the change of a second output timing signal to the second state response to a change of the second input signal to the second state until after both first and third output signals are in the first state; and,

logic coupled to delay the change of a third output timing signal to the second state response to a change of the third input signal to the second state until after both first and second output signals are in the first state.

20. The circuit of claim 19 further comprising:

switch drive circuits for driving the third, fourth and fifth switches on the first and second differential inputs to the amplifier system to control their on and off states, respectively, each drive circuit being responsive to a respective output timing signal of the timing circuit, to control the on and off states of the third, fourth and fifth switches, respectively;

circuitry for connecting a first lead of a capacitor to a power supply voltage, a second capacitor lead to a circuit ground and holding the respective switch in the off state when the respective output timing signal is its first state; and,

circuitry for connecting the second lead of the capacitor to a voltage responsive to a common mode voltage of the first and second differential inputs of the amplifier system and connecting the first capacitor lead to a control voltage for the respective switch when the circuit is clocked by a respective output timing signal;

whereby the control voltage for turning on the switches is approximately one power supply voltage above the common mode voltage of the first and second differential inputs of the amplifier system, independent of what the common mode voltage is.

21. A method of operating a chopper stabilized first amplifier, the chopper stabilized first amplifier having an auto-zeroing capability comprising:

operating the chopper stabilization at a first frequency; and, operating the auto-zeroing at a second frequency; the ratio of the frequencies being two to one; the second frequency being twice the first frequency and having a duty cycle of less than one half.

22. A method of operating a chopper stabilized first amplifier, the chopper stabilized first amplifier having an auto-zeroing capability comprising:

operating the chopper stabilization at a first frequency; and, operating the auto-zeroing at a second frequency; the ratio of the frequencies being two to one; the second frequency having a duty cycle of not more than one-quarter.

23. A method of operating a chopper stabilized first amplifier, the chopper stabilized first amplifier having an auto-zeroing capability comprising:

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operating the chopper stabilization at a first frequency; and,
 operating the auto-zeroing at a second frequency;
 the ratio of the frequencies being two to one;
 after each cycle of the chopper stabilization of the first
 amplifier, chopper stabilizing a second amplifier using 5
 the same choppers;
 auto-zeroing the second amplifier while the first amplifier
 is being chopper stabilized; and,
 auto-zeroing the first amplifier while the second amplifier 10
 is being chopper stabilized;
 the outputs of the first and second amplifiers being con-
 nected in common.

24. A method of operating a chopper stabilized first ampli-
 fier, the chopper stabilized first amplifier having an auto-
 zeroing capability wherein the chopper stabilized first ampli- 15
 fier has first, second and third pluralities of open and closed
 switches, the first and second switches being coupled as input
 and output chopper switches and the third switches being
 coupled as auto-zero switches, wherein the first switches are
 all closed at the same time, but not when the second and third 20
 switches are closed, the second switches are all closed at the
 same time, but not when any of the first and third switches are
 closed, and the third switches are all closed at the same time,
 but not when the first or second switches are closed, whereby 25
 the switch operation is nonoverlapping, the third switches
 being closed at a first frequency with a duty cycle of less than
 50%, the first switches being closed at a second frequency
 equal to one half the first frequency with a duty cycle of
 approximately 50%, except as interrupted for the closure of 30
 the third switches, and the second switches being closed at the
 second frequency with a duty cycle of approximately 50%,
 except as interrupted for the closure of the third switches;
 operating the first and second switches at a first frequency;
 and,
 operating the third switches at a second frequency; 35
 the ratio of the frequencies being two to one.

25. The method of claim **24** wherein the third switches are
 closed with a duty cycle of not more 25%.

26. The method of claim **25** wherein the output amplifier is
 a multiple stage amplifier. 40

27. The method of claim **24** wherein the first amplifier has
 first and second differential inputs and further comprising:

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controlling, responsive to a clocking signal, the on and off
 states of switches controlling the connection of the first
 and second differential inputs to differential amplifier
 system inputs and to themselves, the differential ampli-
 fier system inputs having a common mode voltage, com-
 prising, for each pair of switches:

connecting a first lead of a capacitor to a power supply
 voltage, a second capacitor lead to a circuit ground and
 holding the switches in the off state when the switch
 control circuit is not being clocked by one of a first,
 second or third timing signal; and,

connecting the second lead of the capacitor to a voltage
 responsive to the common mode voltage and connecting
 the first capacitor lead to a control voltage when the
 circuit is clocked by the respective first, second or third
 timing signal;

whereby the control voltage for turning on the switches is
 approximately one power supply voltage above the com-
 mon mode voltage, independent of what the common
 mode voltage is.

28. The method of claim **27** further comprising:

providing the first, second and third timing signals, each
 having first and second states corresponding to switch
 on and off states, the three timing signals being nonover-
 lapping in the first state from three input signals of first
 and second states, any two of which may overlap in the
 first state by;

delaying the change of the first timing signal to the first
 state response to a change of the first input signal to the
 first state until after both the second and the third timing
 signals are in the second state;

delaying the change of the second timing signal to the first
 state response to a change of the second input signal to
 the first state until after both the first and the third output
 signals are in the second state; and,

delaying the change of the third timing signal to the first
 state response to a change of the third input signal to the
 first state until after both the first and the second output
 signals are in the second state.

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