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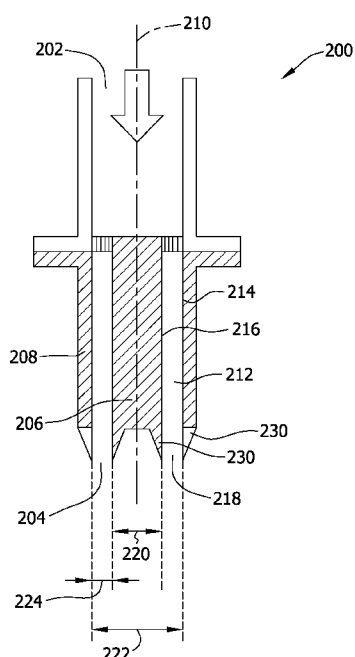
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[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: ELECTROHYDRODYNAMIC ATOMIZATION NOZZLE EMITTING A LIQUID SHEET

Figure 2



(57) Abstract: Embodiments for producing un-agglomerated, monodisperse droplets using a liquid sheet are provided. Nozzles with exit slit openings shape a spray liquid into a thin liquid sheet as the spray liquid exits from the slit opening. Stable multi-jet operation is achieved by including notches along the edge of the slit. The notches separate the liquid sheet into multiple jets to provide anchoring and stable multi-jet operation. In some embodiments, the liquid sheet electrospray techniques and nozzles described herein provide high mass throughput and versatile multiplexing spray systems while reducing the engineering effort and high manufacturing cost.



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ELECTROHYDRODYNAMIC ATOMIZATION NOZZLE EMITTING A LIQUID SHEET

BACKGROUND

[0001] Electrohydrodynamic atomization, often called electrospray (ES), has recently attracted great attention for potential and practical particle applications in fine powder production, food processing, medicine, pharmaceuticals, biology, and chemistry. The technique enables the production of un-agglomerated, monodisperse particles of various materials with sizes ranging from micro-meter to nano-meter. In known ES systems, a liquid meniscus at the exit of a capillary nozzle is subjected to an electrical stress, resulting from a divergent electrical field established between a spray head and a reference electrode. Due to the geometry of capillary nozzles, however, known ES systems have low mass throughput, which makes the feasibility of large scale implementation difficult.

[0002] Several recent electrohydrodynamic atomization techniques reportedly increase the mass throughput. For example, in a single-capillary ES nozzle, a multi-jet mode can be generated when the applied voltage exceeds a voltage range for a cone-jet mode. However, multiple liquid jets initiated from a single-capillary head are unstable. Arranging a number of individual capillaries in a one-dimensional linear array also increases the total spray liquid flowrate. However, although the one-dimensional arrangement of individual capillaries is easy to construct for laboratory investigation, it is not practical for industrial scale applications. Further each individual capillary uses a separate feeding and/or distribution channel.

SUMMARY

[0003] In a first aspect, a nozzle for electrohydrodynamic atomization is provided. The nozzle includes an inner rod, an outer tube concentrically aligned with the inner rod, an annular channel defined between the inner rod and the outer tube, the annular channel forming a circular slit at a spray end of the nozzle, and at least one electrically chargeable notch located on at least one of the inner rod and the outer tube proximate the circular slit.

[0004] In another aspect, a system for electrohydrodynamic atomization is provided. The system includes a nozzle including a source end, a spray end, a first component including a first surface, a second component including a second surface, a fluid channel defined between the first surface and the second surface, the fluid channel forming an exit slit at the spray end of

the nozzle (e.g., a circular exit slit, a planar or linear exit slit, etc.), and at least one electrically chargeable notch located on at least one of the first component and the second component proximate the exit slit. The system may further include a voltage source electrically coupled to the nozzle and configured to supply a voltage to the at least one electrically chargeable notch, and a syringe pump in flow communication with the source end of the nozzle, the syringe pump configured to propel a spray liquid through the nozzle.

[0005] In yet another aspect, a method for electrohydrodynamic atomization is provided that may use one or more of the nozzle configurations described herein. For example, in one aspect the method may include providing a nozzle including an inner rod, an outer tube concentrically aligned with the inner rod, an annular channel defined between the inner rod and the outer tube, the annular channel forming a circular slit at a spray end of the nozzle, and a plurality of notches located on at least one of the inner rod and the outer tube proximate the circular slit. The method further may include supplying a voltage to the plurality of notches, and pumping a spray liquid through the annular channel of the nozzle.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0006] The embodiments described herein may be better understood by referring to the following description in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

[0007] Figure 1 is a schematic diagram of an exemplary electrospray system.

[0008] Figure 2 is a cross-sectional view of an exemplary nozzle that may be used with the system of Figure 1.

[0009] Figures 3A and 3B are perspective views of exemplary nozzles that may be used with the system of Figure 1.

[0010] Figures 4A and 4B are plan views of the exemplary nozzles of Figures 3B and 3B.

[0011] Figures 5A-5C are images of exemplary nozzles that may be used with the system of Figure 1.

[0012] Figures 6A-6L are cross-sectional views of exemplary nozzles that may be used with the system of Figure 1.

[0013] Figure 7 is a graph that illustrates the applied voltage for establishing stable multi-jet operation for nozzles of various numbers of notches.

[0014] Figures 8A-8C are graphs illustrating spray current as a function of applied voltage for nozzles with six, twelve, and twenty notches.

[0015] Figure 9 is a graph that illustrates maximum liquid flowrate as a function of electrical conductivity of a spray liquid.

[0016] Figure 10 is a graph illustrating a ratio of maximum liquid flowrate of a liquid sheet nozzle to the maximum liquid flowrate of a single-capillary nozzle.

[0017] Figure 11 is a plan view of an exemplary nozzle that may be used with the system of Figure 1.

[0018] Figure 12 is a perspective view of the exemplary nozzle shown in Figure 11.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0019] Embodiments provide electrohydrodynamic atomization using a liquid sheet to produce un-agglomerated, monodisperse droplets. In contrast to the capillaries/tubes used in known electrospray (ES) systems, nozzles with exit slit openings shape a spray liquid into a thin liquid sheet as the spray liquid exits from the slit opening. Stable multi-jet operation is achieved by including notches along the edge of the slit. The notches separate the liquid sheet into multiple jets to provide anchoring and stable multi-jet operation. That is, each notch anchors a corresponding jet by preventing the corresponding jet from migrating around the nozzle, substantially fixing the position of the corresponding jet. In some embodiments, the liquid sheet electrospray techniques and nozzles described herein provide high mass throughput and versatile multiplexing spray systems while reducing the engineering effort and high manufacturing cost.

[0020] A schematic diagram of an exemplary electrospray system 100 is shown in Figure 1. System 100 includes a syringe pump 102, a nozzle 104, and a high-voltage source 106. In an exemplary embodiment, syringe pump 102 is a Harvard Apparatus PHD2000 series pump. Alternatively, syringe pump 102 is any pump that enables system 100 to function as described herein.

[0021] High-voltage source 106 is coupled to nozzle 104 such that high-voltage source 106 enables a voltage to be applied to a spray end 108 of nozzle 104. In an exemplary embodiment, high-voltage source 106 provides a voltage ranging from 13kV to 16 kV to spray

end 108. Alternatively, high-voltage source may apply any voltage to nozzle 104 that enables system 100 to function as described herein.

[0022] System 100 also includes a monitoring system 110. Monitoring system 110 includes a microscopic lens 112, a digital camera 114, a monitor 116, and a computer 118, which enable monitoring system 110 to monitor the spray produced by nozzle 104.

[0023] System 100 also includes a current system 120. Current system 120 includes a multimeter 122 electrically coupled to a ground 124 and electrically coupled to ring 126 across a resistor 128. By measuring the voltage across resistor 128, current system 120 can measure the current of the spray produced by nozzle 104. Through multimeter 122, ring 126 is also electrically coupled to ground 124.

[0024] Figure 2 is a cross-sectional view of an exemplary nozzle 200 that may be used with system 100. Nozzle 200 includes a source end 202 and a spray end 204. Nozzle 200 includes an inner rod 206 coaxially aligned with an outer tube 208 along a longitudinal axis 210 of nozzle 200. An annular flow channel 212 is defined between an inner surface 214 of outer tube 208 and an outer surface 216 of inner rod 206. At spray end 204, annular flow channel 212 becomes a circular slit 218. In an exemplary embodiment, an inner diameter 220 of circular slit 218 is 2,950 μm , and an outer diameter 222 of circular slit 218 is 3,250 μm , such that a width 224 of circular slit 218 is 150 μm . Alternatively circular slit 218 may have any dimensions that enable nozzle 200 to function as described herein.

[0025] In operation, syringe pump 102 applies a pressure to a spray liquid, such that the spray liquid is pushed towards nozzle 200 and received at source end 202 of nozzle 200. The spray liquid is then evenly distributed into annular flow channel 212 and emitted from circular slit 218 as a thin liquid sheet. In the exemplary embodiment shown in Figure 2, the emitted liquid sheet is substantially cylindrical.

[0026] Nozzle 200 further includes one or more notches 230 proximate to circular slit 218. As used herein, a “notch” refers to a protruding element that extends from a spray end of a nozzle, such as notches 230 extending from spray end 204 of nozzle 200. For example, such notches may extend or protrude further in the direction of the spray jet than other regions of the spray end separating such notches. In an exemplary embodiment, notches 230 are located on both inner rod 206 and outer tube 208. Alternatively, notches 230 may be located only on inner rod 206 or outer tube 208. When high-voltage source 106 applies a voltage to spray end 204 of nozzle 200, the shape and configuration of notches 230 facilitate local enhancement of an

electric field at notches 230. When the spray liquid reaches the circular slit 218, it exits nozzle 200 as a thin liquid sheet due to the shape of annular flow channel 212. With a sufficiently high voltage applied to spray end 204 of nozzle 200, the thin liquid sheet is separated into multiple jets. Each jet is located at one of notches 230 due to the locally intensified electric field at each notch 230. Further, with a high enough voltage applied to spray end 204, stable multi-jet operation may be achieved. In some embodiments, “stable multi-jet operation” means that a jet of spray liquid is emitted from each notch 230 on nozzle 200.

[0027] Figures 3A and 3B are perspective views of exemplary nozzles 200 that may be used with the system of Figure 1. Figures 4A and 4B are plan views of the nozzles 200 shown in Figures 3A and 3B. The embodiment shown in Figures 3A and 4A includes six notches 230, and the embodiment shown in Figures 3B and 4B includes twenty notches 230. Notches 230 are circumferentially spaced apart from one another by a circumferential distance, 240. In some embodiments, circumferential distance 240 is no less than a size of a notch 230. Circumferential distance 240 is chosen such that the number of notches 230 is maximized while maintaining regions of intensified electric field. That is, if circumferential distance 240 between notches 230 is too small, the electric field generated at one notch 230 will interfere with the electric field generated at an adjacent notch 230. However, as the circumferential distance 240 between notches 230 increases, fewer notches 230 can be located on nozzle 200. With fewer notches 230, fewer jets are created, and the overall mass throughput of nozzle 200 is decreased.

[0028] Figures 5A-5C are images of nozzles 200 producing multiple jets 250 of a spray liquid. The nozzles 200 in Figures 5A, 5B, and 5C include six, twelve, and twenty notches 230, respectively.

[0029] Figures 6A-6L are cross-sectional views of exemplary nozzles 300 that may be used with the system of Figure 1. As demonstrated by the embodiments shown in Figures 6A-6L, several different configurations of nozzle 300 enable nozzle 300 to function as described herein. Moreover, configurations of nozzle 300 are not limited to those specifically described herein.

[0030] Each nozzle 300 in Figures 6A-6L includes a source end 302 and a spray end 304. Further, each nozzle 300 includes an inner rod 306 coaxially aligned with an outer tube 308 along a longitudinal axis 310 of nozzle 300. An annular flow channel 312 is defined between an inner surface 314 of outer tube 308 and an outer surface 316 of inner rod 306. At spray end 304, annular flow channel 312 becomes a circular slit 318. Further, at spray end 304, inner rod

306 includes a center piece 320, and outer tube 308 includes an end portion 322. Each nozzle 300 also includes a plurality of notches 330 which function substantially similar to notches 230 shown in Figure 2. The embodiments of Figures 6A-6L are each discussed in detail below.

[0031] In the embodiment of nozzle 300 shown in Figure 6A, both inner rod 306 and outer tube 308 includes notches 330 thereon. Further, center piece 320 is not retracted or extended with respect to end portion 322. During operation of the embodiment shown in Figure 6A, a spray liquid is emitted from circular slit 318.

[0032] In the embodiment of nozzle 300 shown in Figure 6B, only outer tube 308 includes notches 330 thereon. That is, inner rod 306 does not include notches 330. Further, center piece 320 is retracted with respect to end portion 322. During operation of the embodiment shown in Figure 6B, the spray liquid is emitted from circular slit 318.

[0033] The embodiment of nozzle 300 shown in Figure 6C is substantially similar to the embodiment shown in Figure 6A, except that the embodiment shown in Figure 6C includes a central flow channel 340 defined through inner rod 306. Likewise, the embodiment of nozzle 300 shown in Figure 6D is substantially similar to the embodiment shown in Figure 6B, except that the embodiment shown in Figure 6D includes central flow channel 340 defined through inner rod 306. In the embodiments of Figures 6C and 6D, a stabilizing gas is emitted from central flow channel 340. The emitted gas facilitates maintaining the thin liquid sheet shape of the spray liquid when the spray liquid is emitted from circular slit 318.

[0034] The embodiments of nozzle 300 shown in Figures 6E and 6F are substantially similar to the embodiments shown in Figures 6C and 6D respectively, except that instead of a stabilizing gas, a stabilizing liquid is emitted from central flow channel 340. Similar to the stabilizing gas, the stabilizing liquid facilitates maintaining the thin liquid sheet shape of the spray liquid when the spray liquid is emitted from circular slit 318. The embodiment of nozzle 300 shown in Figure 6G is substantially similar to the embodiment shown in Figure 6F, except that center piece 320 is extended with respect to end portion 322.

[0035] The embodiments of nozzle 300 shown in Figures 6H and 6I are substantially similar to the embodiments shown in Figures 6C and 6D respectively, except that the embodiments of Figures 6H and 6I further include a second outer tube 350. Second outer tube 350 is concentrically aligned with outer tube 308 such that a second annular flow channel 352 is defined between an outer surface 354 of outer tube 308 and an inner surface 356 of second outer

tube 350. Second annular flow channel 352 becomes a second circular slit 360 at spray end 304.

[0036] In the embodiments shown in Figures 6H and 6I, second outer tube 350 includes notches 330 thereon. In addition to the spray liquid emitted from first circular slit 318, a sheath liquid is emitted from second circular slit 360 in a thin liquid sheet shape. With the spray liquid and the sheath liquid both emitted from nozzle 300, particle encapsulation is facilitated, such that the particles produced by nozzle 300 include particles of spray liquid encapsulated by particles of sheath liquid and/or particles of sheath liquid encapsulated by particles of spray liquid. Similar to the embodiments shown in Figure 6C and 6D, a stabilizing gas emitted from central flow channel 340 facilitates maintaining the thin liquid sheet shape of the spray liquid and the sheath liquid. Alternatively, similar to Figures 6E-6G, a stabilizing liquid may be emitted from central flow channel 340. The embodiment shown in Figure 6J is substantially similar to the embodiment shown in Figure 6I, except that the center piece 320 is extended with respect to end portion 322.

[0037] The embodiment of nozzle 300 shown in Figure 6K is substantially similar to the embodiment shown in Figure 6H, except that the embodiment of Figure 6K further includes a third outer tube 370. Third outer tube 370 is concentrically aligned with second outer tube 350 such that a third annular flow channel 372 is defined between an outer surface 374 of second outer tube 350 and an inner surface 376 of third outer tube 370. Third annular flow channel 372 becomes a third circular slit 380 at spray end 304.

[0038] In the embodiment shown in Figure 6K, third outer tube 370 includes notches 330 thereon. In addition to the spray liquid emitted from first circular slit 318 and the sheath liquid emitted from second circular slit 360, an outer liquid is emitted from third circular slit 380 in a thin liquid sheet shape. The emission of liquids from first circular slit 318, second circular slit 360, and third circular slit 380 facilitates particle encapsulation and the production of multi-layered particles. Similar to the embodiments shown in Figure 6C and 6D, a stabilizing gas emitted from central flow channel 340 facilitates maintaining the thin liquid sheet shape of the emitted liquids. Alternatively, similar to Figures 6E-6G, a stabilizing liquid may be emitted from central flow channel 340.

[0039] The embodiment shown in Figure 6L is substantially similar to the embodiment shown in Figure 6K, except that the circular slits 318, 360, and 380 are arranged in a stepped configuration, such that outer tube 308 is extended with respect to second outer tube 350, and

second outer tube 350 is extended with respect to third outer tube 370. Due to the stepped configuration, less voltage may be applied to the embodiment shown in Figure 6L than the embodiment shown in Figure 6K to achieve stable multi-jet operation. In the embodiments shown in Figures 6L and 6K, the outer liquid emitted from third circular slit 380 may be the same liquid as at least one of the spray liquid emitted from first circular slit 318 and the sheath liquid emitted from second circular slit 360. Alternatively, the spray liquid, the sheath liquid, and the outer liquid may all be different liquids. Furthermore, while in the embodiments shown in Figures 6A-6L, certain flow channels are denoted as containing a gas or a liquid, alternatively, any suitable fluid (i.e., gas, liquid) may be provided in any flow channel that enables nozzle 300 to function as described herein.

[0040] Multiple experiments were executed utilizing the nozzles described herein. In the following examples, Isopropanol was selected as the spray liquid, and nitric acid was used as an ion additive to vary the electrical conductivity of the spray liquid from 0.0079 $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$ (pure isopropanol) to 1,044 $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$. The electrical conductivity of the spray liquid was measured by a conductivity meter (Orion 162A, Thermo Electron Corporation), and the electrical resistance of pure isopropanol was measured by a lab-made liquid cell. Alternatively, those of ordinary skill in the art will understand that any spray liquid may be utilized which allows system 100 to function as described herein.

[0041] Figure 7 is a graph that illustrates the applied voltage for establishing stable multi-jet operation for nozzles having various numbers of notches. The graph demonstrates that the applied voltage increases with the number of notches. It was also determined that the applied voltage for establishing stable multi-jet operation is also slightly proportional to the feed flowrate of the spray liquid.

[0042] In one example, to study the evolution in the formation of multiple jets, the spray current was measured, and the number of jets was counted as the applied voltage was continuously increased and then decreased. Figures 8A-8C are graphs illustrating the spray current as a function of the applied voltage for nozzles with six, twelve, and twenty notches, respectively. The spray current and the number of jets increased with the increase of applied voltage. The stable multi-jet operation, in which the number of jets is the same as the number of notches, was achieved at a sufficiently high applied voltage. When the applied voltage was reduced, the number of jets correspondingly decreased. Further, as shown in the graphs, a hysteresis phenomenon was observed.

[0043] In another example, to determine the mass throughput of the nozzles, spray liquids with various electrical conductivities were used to find the maximum liquid flowrate (Q_{\max}) for nozzle operation. Figure 9 is a graph that illustrates the maximum liquid flowrate as a function of the electrical conductivity of the spray liquid. The graph demonstrates that the value of Q_{\max} significantly decreases as the electrical conductivity of the spraying liquid increases, due to the fact that spray liquids with higher electrical conductivity generally use a stronger electric field to establish stable multi-jet operation. The graph also demonstrates that Q_{\max} increases as the number of notches increases. This is because a greater number of notches allow more jets to be established, thus increasing the spray liquid flowrate and the overall mass throughput.

[0044] Figure 10 is a graph illustrating a ratio of the maximum liquid flowrate of the liquid sheet nozzles described herein to the maximum liquid flowrate of a known single-capillary nozzle as a function of the electrical conductivity of the spray liquid. In this example, the diameter of the single-capillary nozzle and the width of the circular slit in the liquid sheet nozzle were both 150 μm . As illustrated in the graph of Figure 10, when using a spray liquid with an electrical conductivity of 0.0079 $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$, the maximum liquid flowrate, Q_{\max} , of the liquid sheet nozzle with 20 notches was one hundred and sixty-six times greater than the maximum liquid flowrate for the single-capillary nozzle. Further, when using a spray liquid with an electrical conductivity of 1,044 $\mu\text{S}/\text{cm}$, the maximum liquid flowrate of the liquid sheet nozzle with twenty notches was seventy times greater than the maximum liquid flowrate for the single-capillary nozzle.

[0045] Notably, the value of Q_{\max} for a liquid sheet nozzle with twenty notches is much higher than the sum of the total liquid flowrates for twenty single-capillary nozzles. This same phenomenon was also observed using liquid sheet nozzles with six and twelve notches. This indicates that, as compared to existing one-dimensional and two-dimensional arrays of single-capillary nozzles, liquid sheet nozzles have potential to drastically increase the mass throughput for spray liquids having a wide range of electrical conductivity.

[0046] Figure 11 is a plan view of an alternative nozzle 500 that may be used with system 100. Figure 12 is a perspective view of nozzle 500 shown in Figure 11. In an exemplary embodiment, nozzle 500 includes a first plate 502, a second plate 504, a source end 506, and a spray end 508. A planar flow channel 510 is defined between first plate 502 and second plate 504. Planar flow channel 510 becomes a linear slit 512 at spray end 508. In operation, a spray liquid is emitted from nozzle 500 from linear slit 512. While the thin liquid sheet emitted from

nozzle 200 is substantially cylindrical, the thin liquid sheet emitted from nozzle 500 is substantially planar.

[0047] In an exemplary embodiment, a plurality of notches 514 are located on both first plate 502 and second plate 504, and staggered with respect to one another. Alternatively, notches 514 may only be located on one of first plate 502 and second plate 504. With a voltage applied to notches 514, notches 514 facilitate separating the thin liquid sheet into a plurality of jets, substantially similar to notches 230 of nozzle 200.

[0048] The nozzles illustrated in Figures 1-6L, 11, and 12 constitute exemplary means for emitting a liquid sheet. Further, the notches illustrated in Figures 2-6L, 11, and 12 constitute exemplary means for separating a liquid sheet emitted by a nozzle into multiple jets. Moreover, nozzles illustrated in Figures 6C-6L constitute exemplary means for maintaining a shape of a liquid sheet emitted from a nozzle.

[0049] In addition to the cylindrical and planar nozzles specifically described herein, those of ordinary skill in the art will understand that any nozzle shape and/or configuration may be utilized which allows system 100 to function as described herein.

[0050] Embodiments described herein enable electrohydrodynamic atomization, or electrospray (ES), using nozzles that produce a thin liquid sheet. The methods and systems described herein increase the mass throughput of ES systems while decreasing the design and manufacturing costs as compared to known ES systems utilizing multiple single-capillary nozzles. The nozzles described herein include annular and/or planar slits designed emit a thin liquid sheet of spray liquid. To separate the thin liquid sheet into multiple jets and to anchor the jets for stable operation, a plurality of notches are included at the annular and/or planar slits. That is, each notch anchors a corresponding jet by preventing the corresponding jet from migrating around the nozzle, substantially fixing the position of the corresponding jet. When a voltage is applied to the nozzles described herein, these notches enable local enhancement of an electric field. Further, stable multi-jet operation of the nozzles described herein can be established for a wide range of spray liquids having various electrical conductivities.

[0051] Moreover, as compared to known ES systems utilizing arrays of single-capillary nozzles, multiple liquid flow feeding and/or distribution channels are no longer necessary for the nozzles described herein. As such, the design concept and fabrication of the nozzles described herein is simpler than known nozzles, enabling flexibility in the design and/or geometry of the nozzles.

[0052] Through experimentation utilizing the nozzles described herein, it was demonstrated that the applied voltage for establishing stable multi-jet operation increased as both the number of jets and the liquid flowrate increased. Further, the maximum operational flowrate through the nozzles described herein was a function of the electrical conductivity of the spray liquid. Moreover, the maximum flowrate for liquid sheet nozzles with various numbers of notches was consistently greater than the total flowrate sum of an array of an equivalent number of single-capillary nozzles. Accordingly, the liquid sheet nozzles described herein enable superior ES techniques. Further, the liquid sheet shape of the spray liquid, as opposed to the cone jet emitted from known single-capillary nozzles, enables the nozzle design to have various geometries, including, but not limited to annular and/or planar slits.

[0053] The order of execution or performance of the operations in the embodiments of the disclosure illustrated and described herein is not essential, unless otherwise specified. That is, the operations may be performed in any order, unless otherwise specified, and embodiments of the disclosure may include additional or fewer operations than those disclosed herein. For example, it is contemplated that executing or performing a particular operation before, contemporaneously with, or after another operation is within the scope of aspects of the disclosure.

[0054] When introducing elements of aspects of the disclosure or embodiments thereof, the articles “a,” “an,” “the,” and “said” are intended to mean that there are one or more of the elements. The terms “comprising,” “including,” and “having” are intended to be inclusive and mean that there may be additional elements other than the listed elements.

[0055] This written description uses examples to disclose the disclosure, including the best mode, and also to enable any person skilled in the art to practice the disclosure, including making and using any devices or systems and performing any incorporated methods. The patentable scope of the disclosure is defined by the claims, and may include other examples that occur to those skilled in the art. Such other examples are intended to be within the scope of the claims if they have structural elements that do not differ from the literal language of the claims, or if they include equivalent structural elements with insubstantial differences from the literal language of the claims.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A nozzle for electrohydrodynamic atomization, said nozzle comprising:
an inner rod;
an outer tube concentrically aligned with said inner rod;
an annular channel defined between said inner rod and said outer tube, said annular
5 channel forming a circular slit at a spray end of said nozzle; and
at least one electrically chargeable notch located on at least one of said inner rod and
said outer tube proximate said circular slit.
2. A nozzle in accordance with Claim 1, wherein said inner rod comprises a central flow
channel defined therethrough.
3. A nozzle in accordance with Claim 2, wherein said central flow channel is configured
to facilitate flow of at least one of a stabilizing gas and a stabilizing liquid therethrough.
4. A nozzle in accordance with Claim 1 further comprising an outermost tube
concentrically aligned with said inner rod and said outer tube such that an outer flow channel is
defined between said outer tube and said outermost tube.
5. A nozzle in accordance with Claim 4, further comprising at least one electrically
chargeable notch located on said outermost tube.
6. A nozzle in accordance with Claim 1, wherein said at least one electrically chargeable
notch is located on only one of said inner rod and said outer tube.
7. A nozzle in accordance with Claim 1, wherein said inner rod comprises a center piece
at the spray end of said nozzle and said outer tube comprises an end portion at the spray end of
said nozzle, said center piece recessed with respect to said end portion.
8. A nozzle in accordance with Claim 1, wherein said inner rod comprises a center piece
at the spray end of said nozzle and said outer tube comprises an end portion at the spray end of
said nozzle, said center piece extended with respect to said end portion.
9. A nozzle in accordance with Claim 1, wherein said at least one electrically chargeable
notch comprises a plurality of notches, said plurality of notches spaced a distance apart from
one another such that when said plurality of notches are electrically charged, an electric field

produced by one notch of said plurality of notches does not interfere with an electric field
5 produced by an adjacent notch of said plurality of notches.

10. A system for electrohydrodynamic atomization, said system comprising:

a nozzle comprising:

a source end;

a spray end;

5 a first component comprising a first surface;

a second component comprising a second surface;

a fluid channel defined between said first surface and said second surface, said
fluid channel forming an exit slit at said spray end of said nozzle; and

at least one electrically chargeable notch located on at least one of said first
10 component and said second component proximate said exit slit;

a voltage source electrically coupled to said nozzle and configured to supply a
voltage to said at least one electrically chargeable notch; and

a syringe pump in flow communication with said source end of said nozzle, said
syringe pump configured to propel a spray liquid through said nozzle.

11. A system according to Claim 10, wherein said first component comprises a first plate
and said second component comprises a second plate, such that said fluid channel is
substantially planar.

12. A system according to Claim 10, further comprising a nozzle means for emitting a
liquid sheet.

13. A system in accordance with Claim 10, further comprising notch means for separating
a liquid sheet emitted from said nozzle into multiple jets.

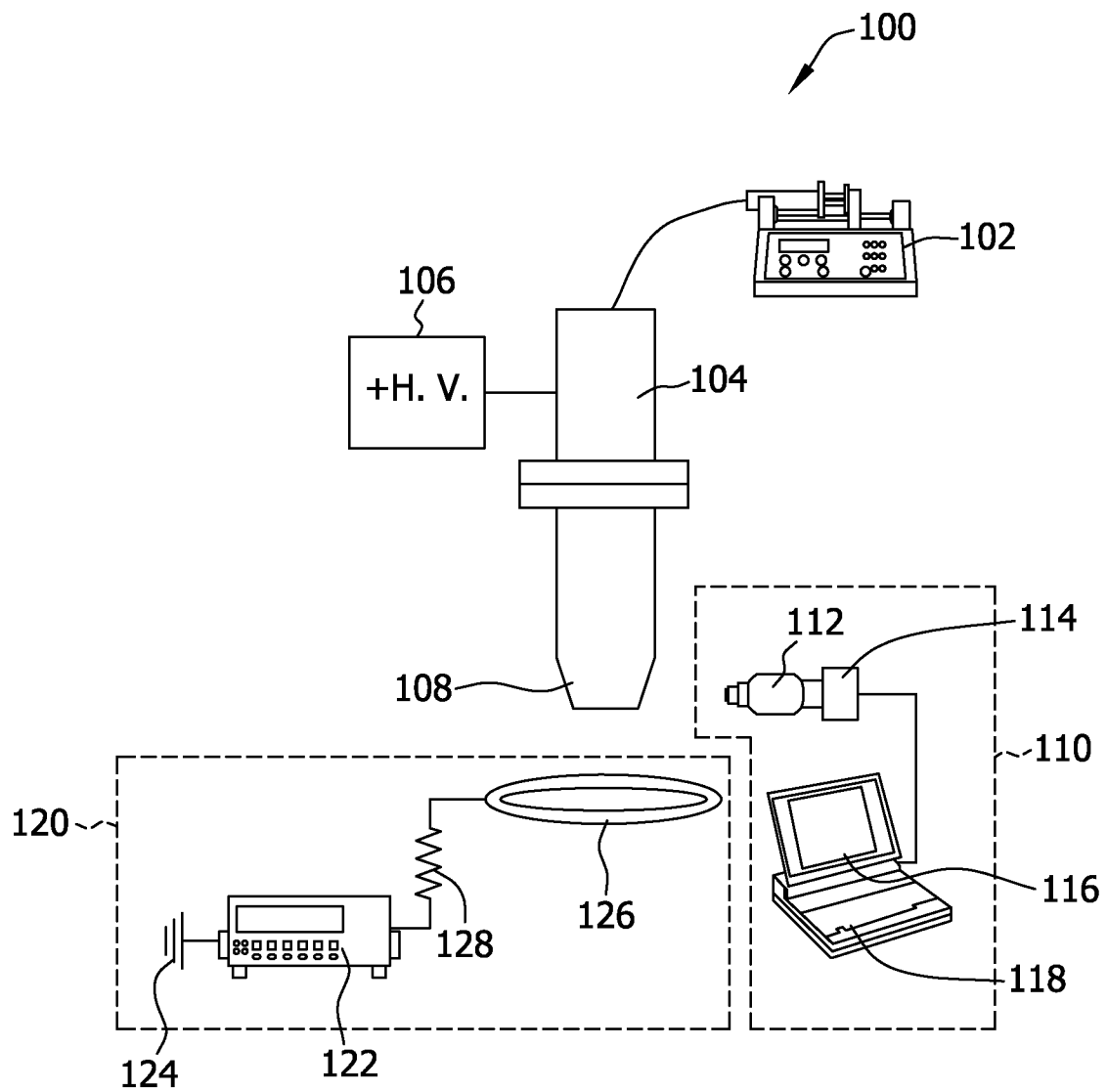
14. A system in accordance with Claim 10, further comprising means for maintaining a
shape of a liquid sheet emitted from said nozzle.

15. A system in accordance with Claim 10, wherein said at least one electrically
chargeable notch comprises a first notch and a second notch, said first and second notches
spaced a distance apart from one another such that when a voltage is supplied to said first and
second notches, an electric field produced by said first notch does not interfere with an electric
5 field produced by said second notch.

16. A method for electrohydrodynamic atomization, said method comprising:
providing a nozzle comprising an inner rod, an outer tube concentrically aligned with the inner rod, an annular channel defined between the inner rod and the outer tube, the annular channel forming a circular slit at a spray end of the nozzle, and a plurality of notches located on
5 at least one of the inner rod and the outer tube proximate the circular slit;
supplying a voltage to the plurality of notches; and
pumping a spray liquid through the annular channel of the nozzle.
17. A method in accordance with Claim 16, wherein the inner rod includes a central flow channel defined therethrough, said method further comprising pumping a stabilizing gas through the central flow channel.
18. A method in accordance with Claim 16, wherein the inner rod includes a central flow channel defined therethrough, said method further comprising pumping a stabilizing liquid through the central flow channel.
19. A method in accordance with Claim 16, further comprising:
providing an outermost tube concentrically aligned with the inner rod and the outer tube, such that a outer flow channel is formed between the outer tube and the outermost tube;
and
5 pumping a sheath liquid through the outer flow channel.
20. A method in accordance with Claim 16, wherein supplying a voltage comprises supplying a voltage such that a jet of spray liquid is formed at each of the plurality of notches.

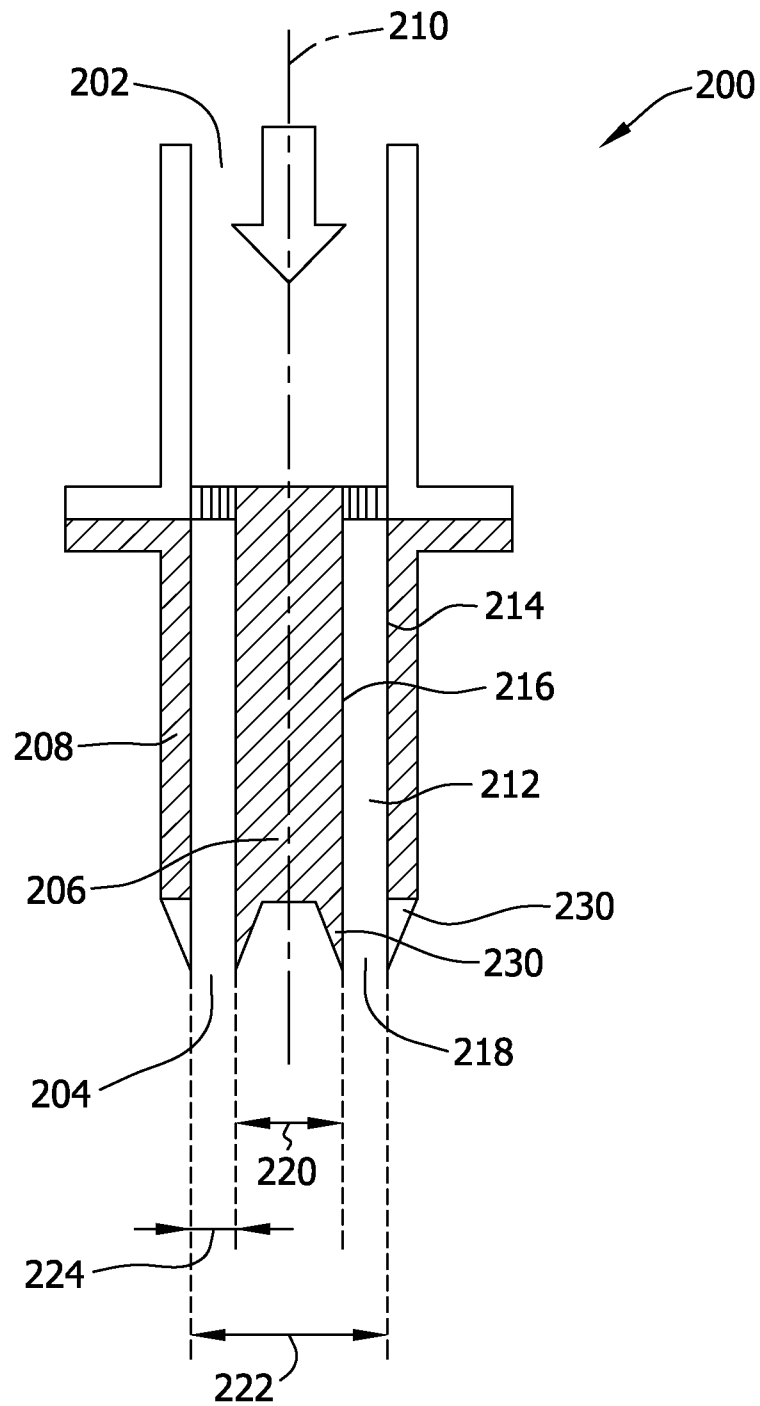
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Figure 1



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Figure 2



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Figure 3A

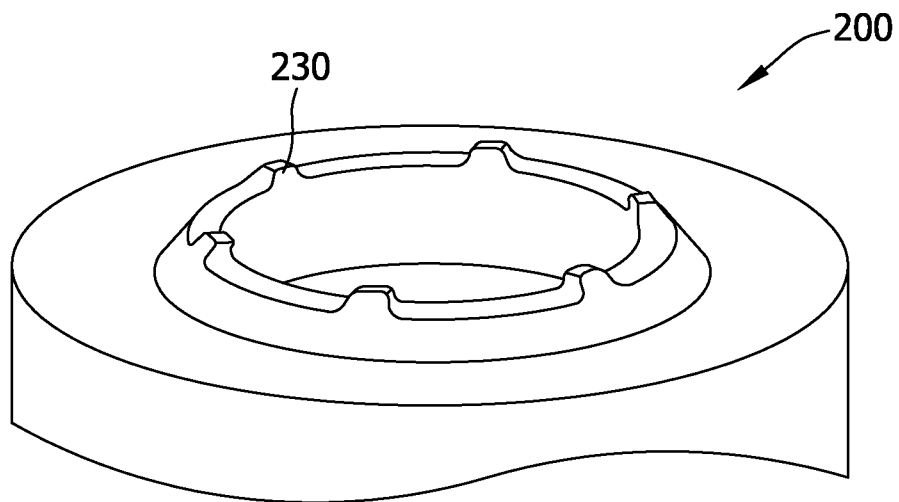
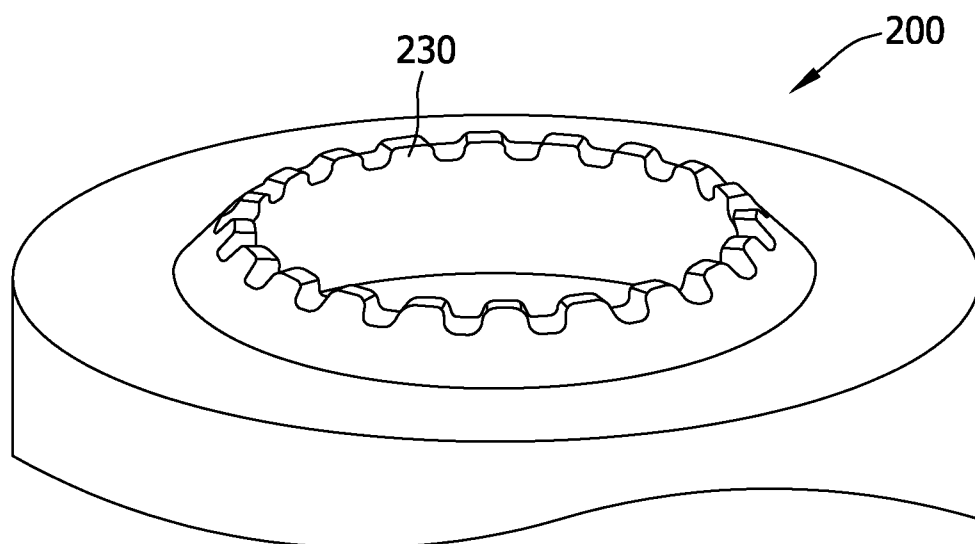


Figure 3B



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Figure 4A

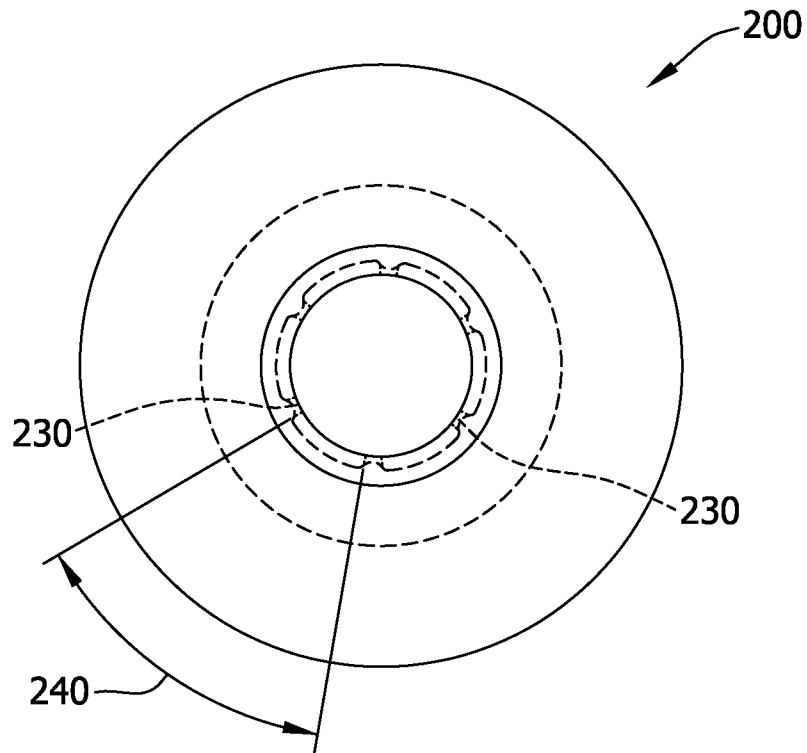
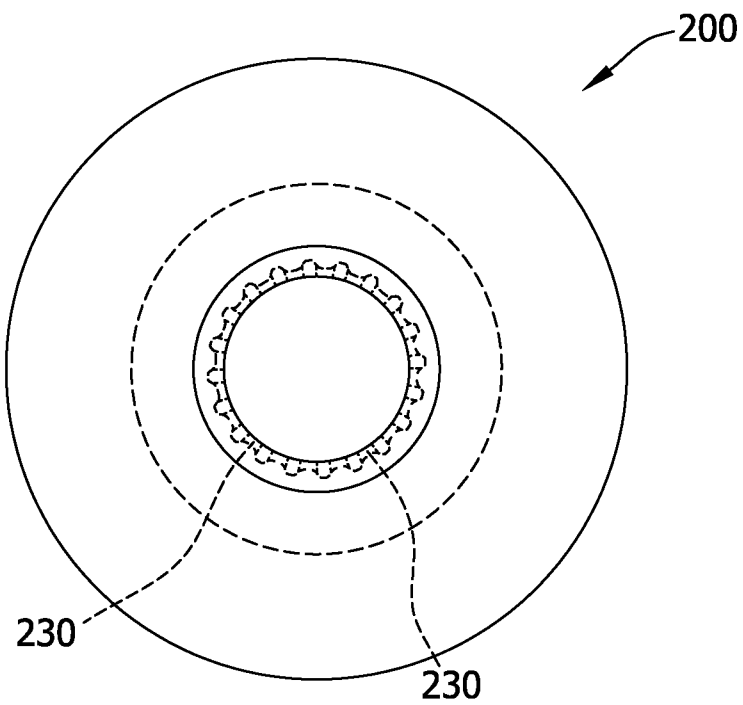


Figure 4B



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Figure 5A

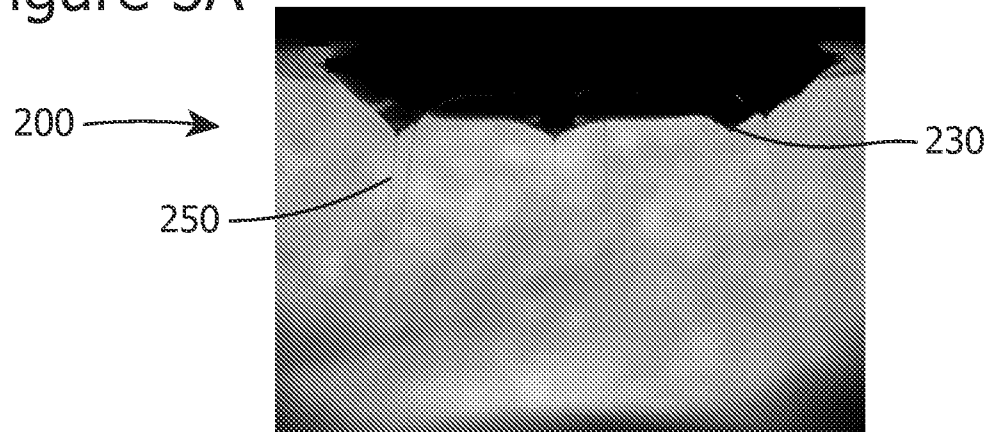


Figure 5B

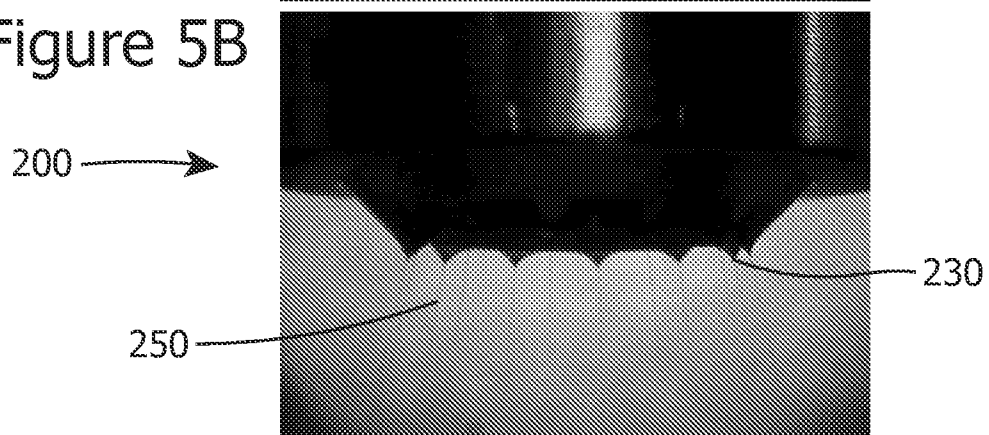
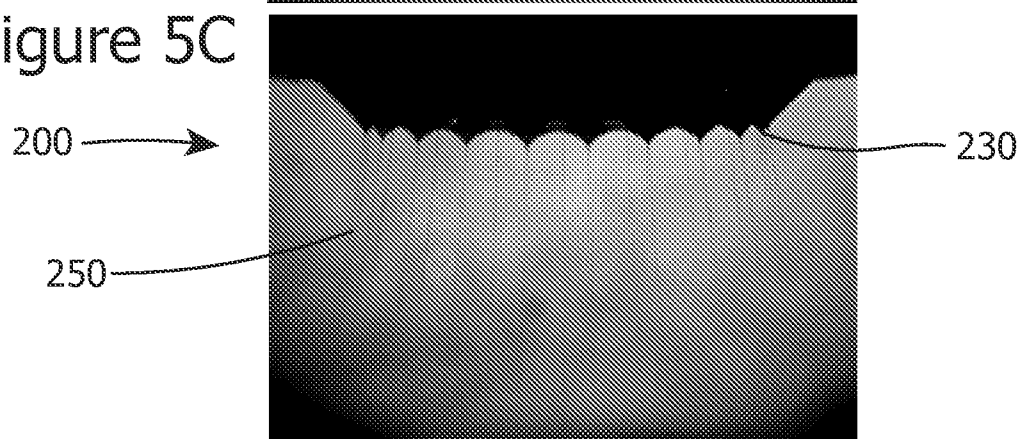


Figure 5C



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Figure 6A

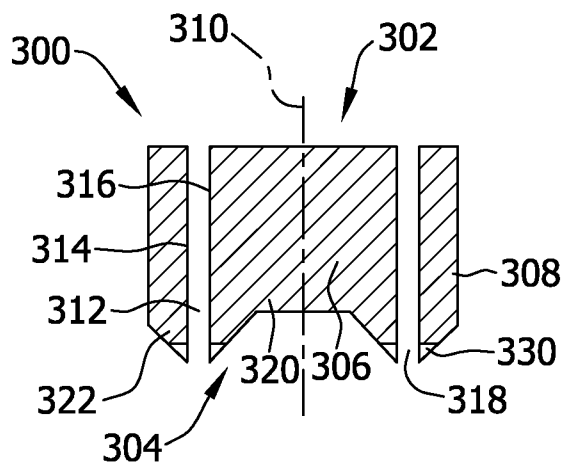


Figure 6B

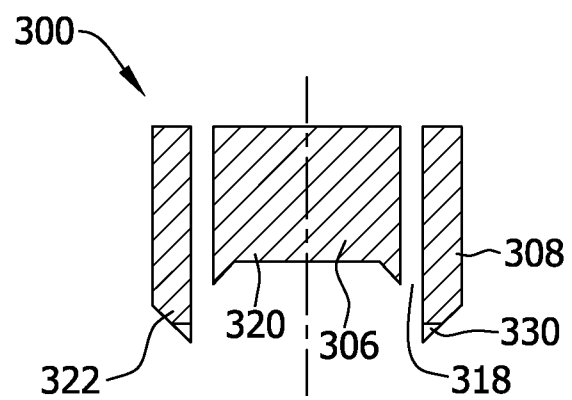


Figure 6C

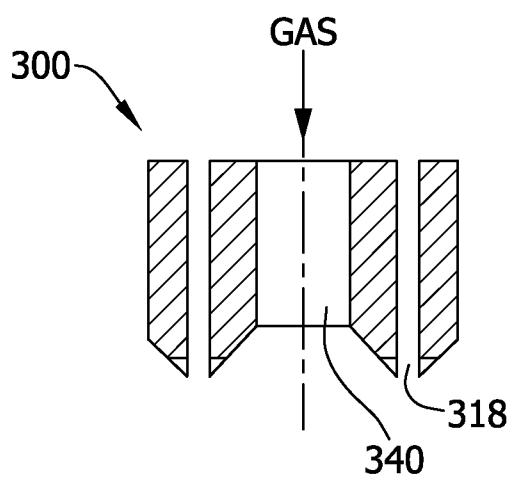
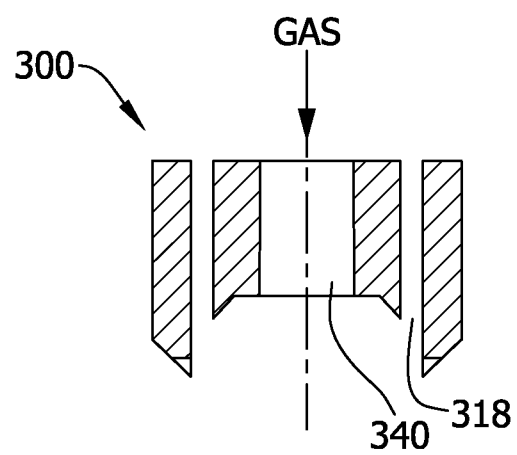


Figure 6D



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Figure 6E

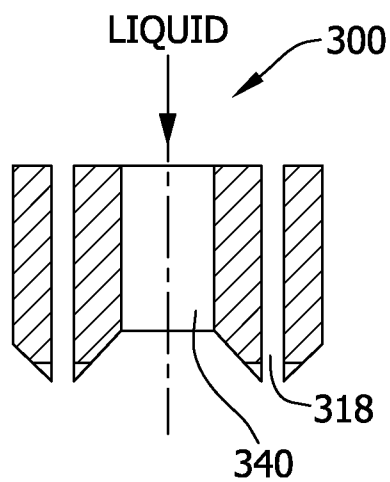


Figure 6F

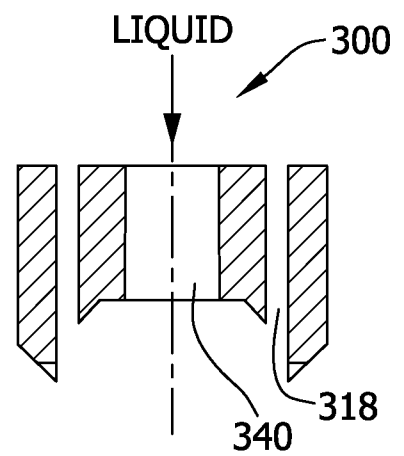


Figure 6G

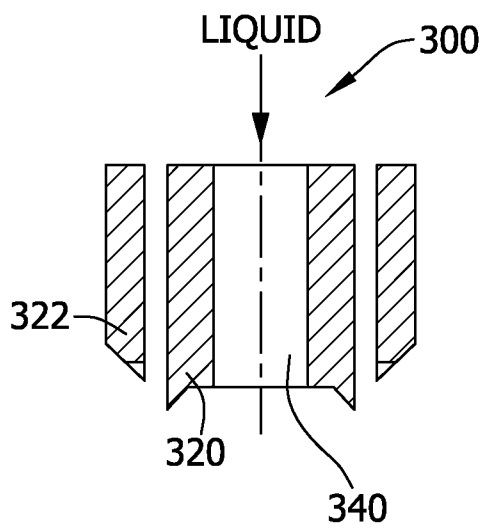


Figure 6H

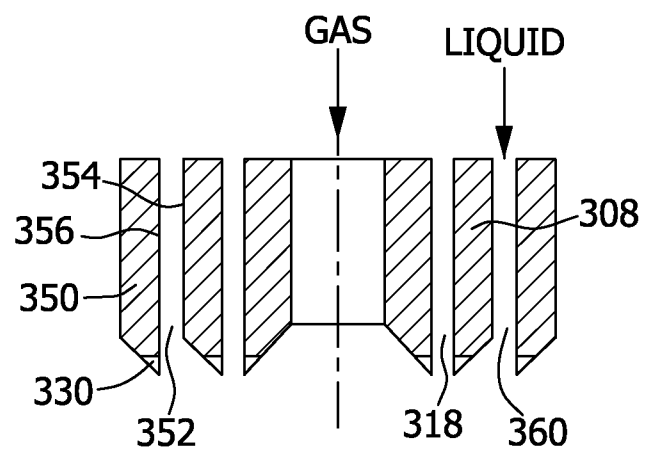


Figure 6I

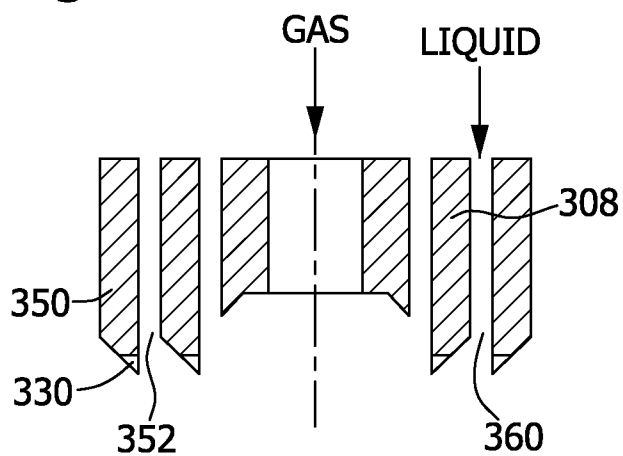


Figure 6J

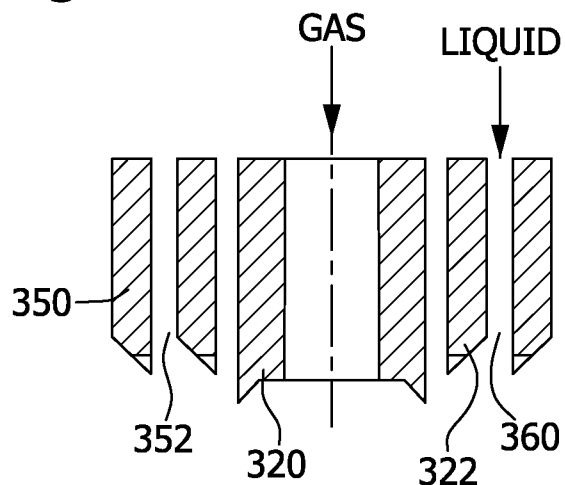


Figure 6K

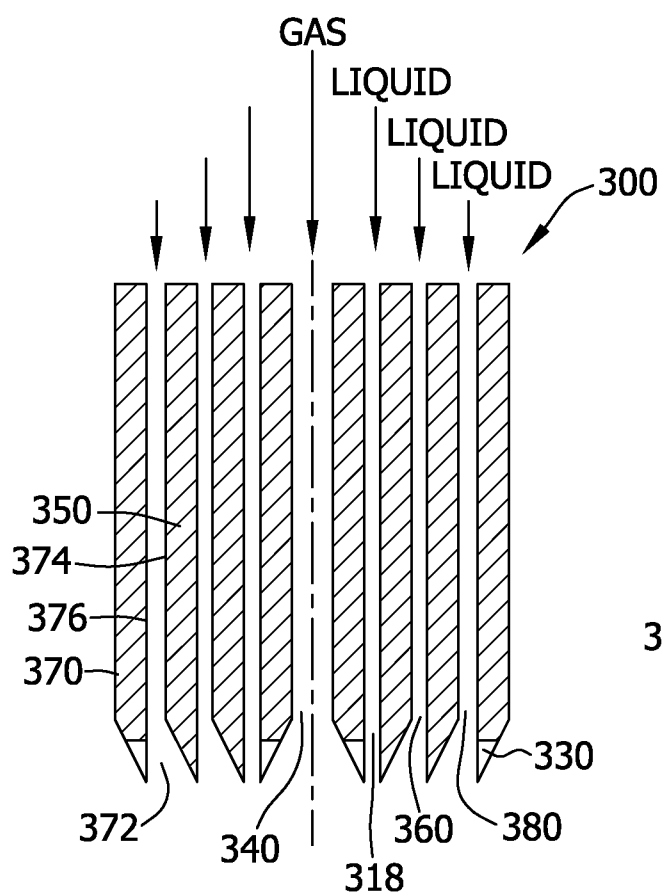
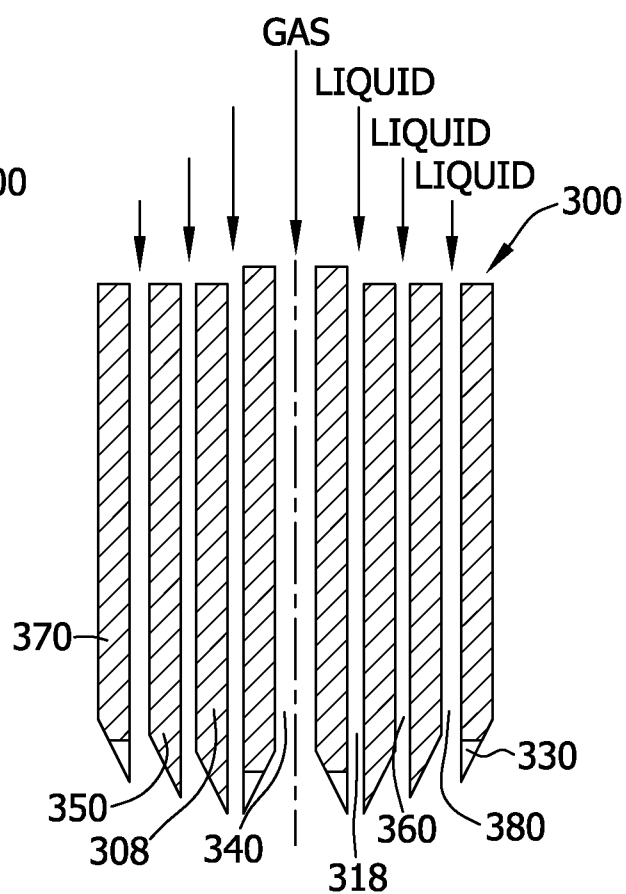
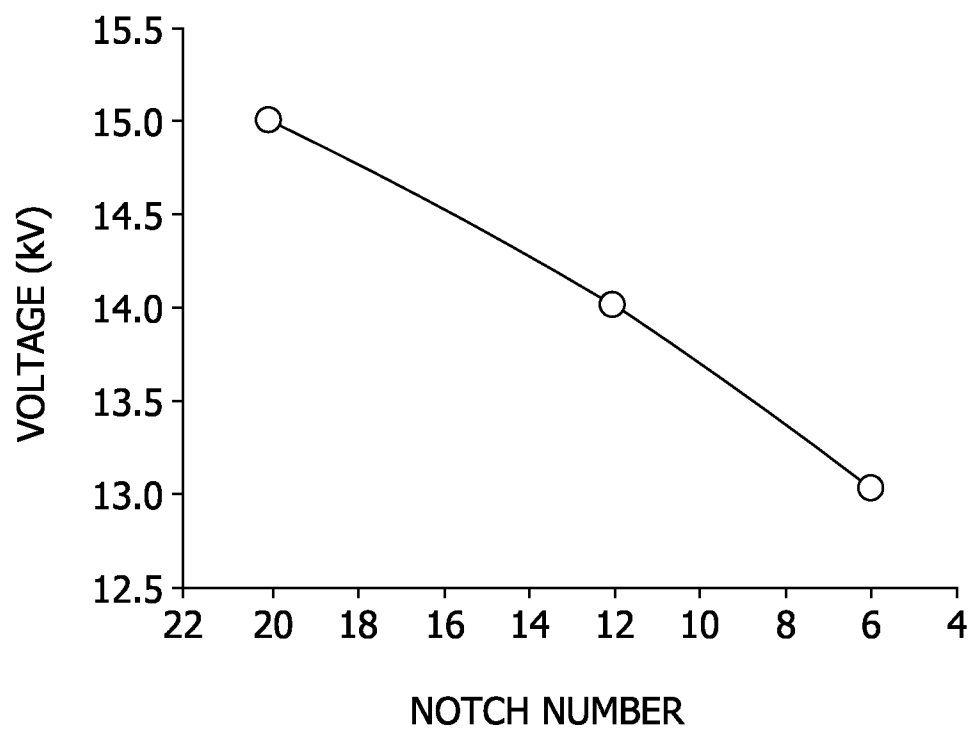


Figure 6L



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Figure 7



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Figure 8A

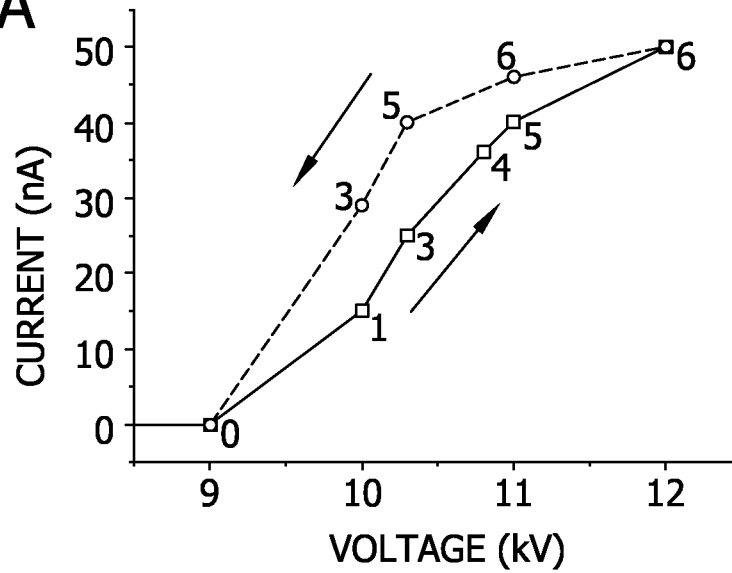


Figure 8B

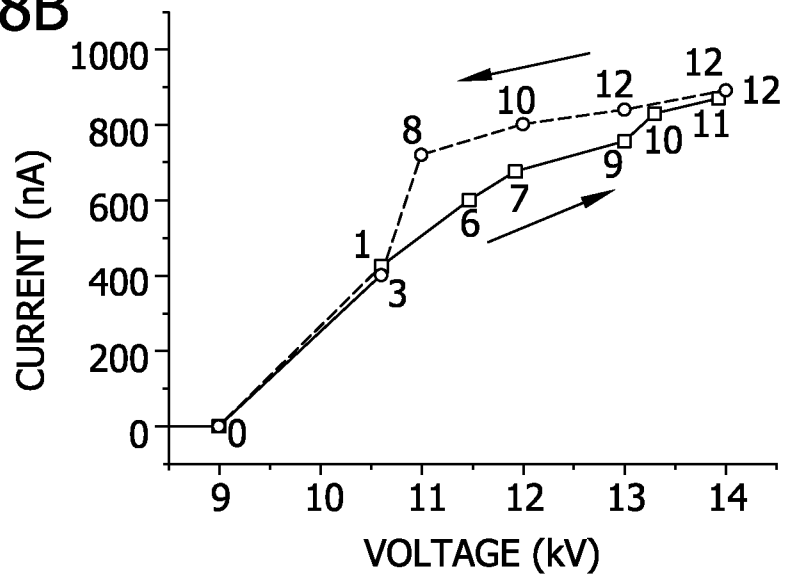
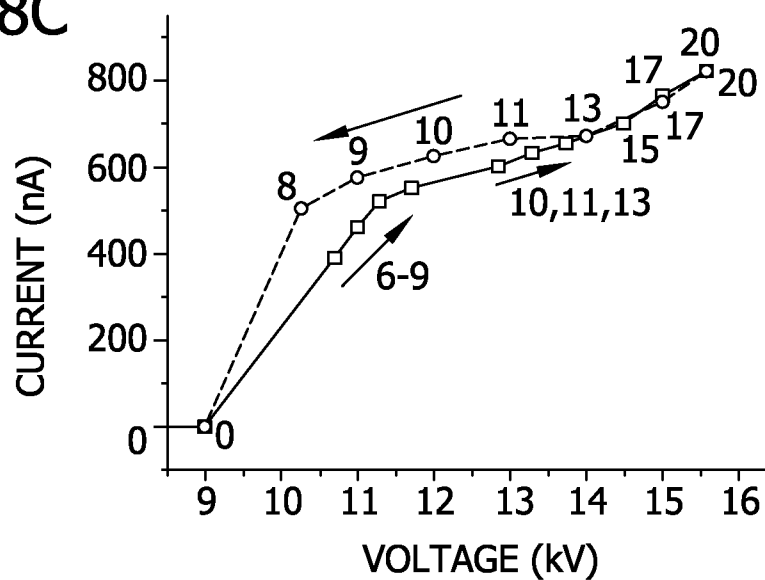


Figure 8C



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Figure 9

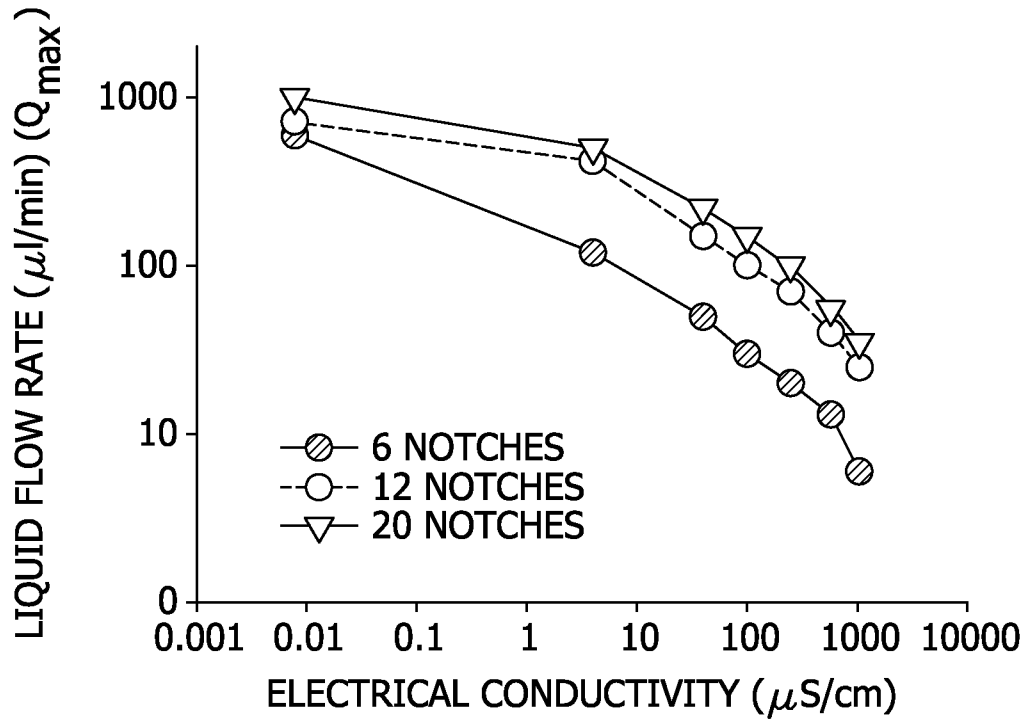
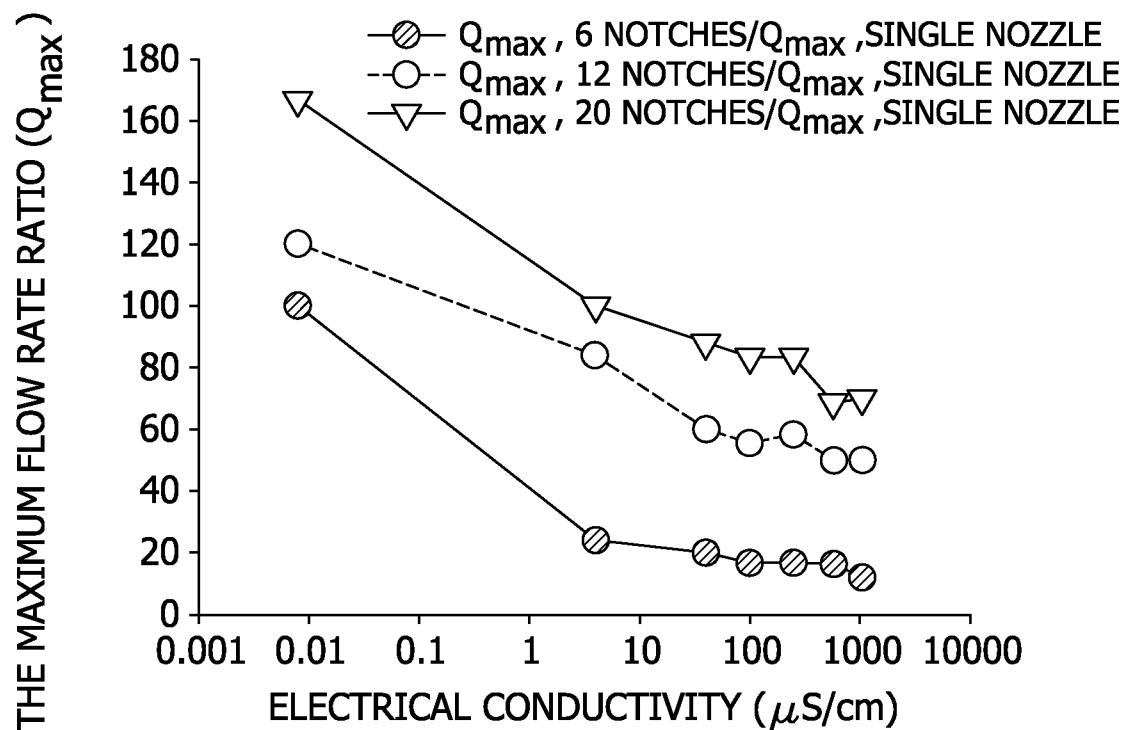


Figure 10



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Figure 11

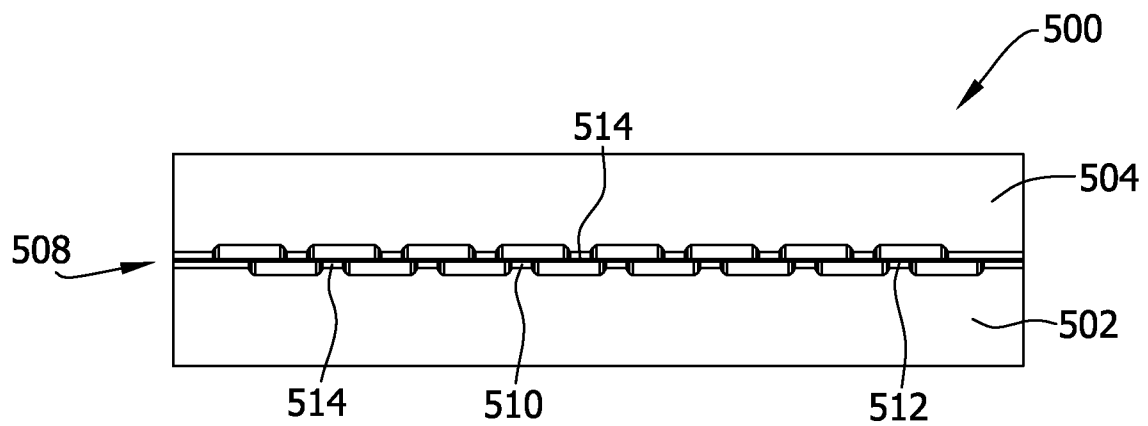


Figure 12

