

APPARATUS AND METHOD OF SECURING A WORKPIECE DURING HIGH-PRESSURE PROCESSING

Field of the Invention

This invention relates to the field of processing chambers. In particular, this invention relates to an apparatus and a method of securing a workpiece undergoing high-pressure processing.

Background of the Invention

Many systems exist for holding and securing a workpiece undergoing processing in a processing chamber. These systems have various drawbacks. First, these systems create a pressure differential between a top face and a bottom face of the workpiece. In high-pressure processing chambers, for example, these pressure differentials can cause the workpiece to suffer stress fractures or even to break. Second, these systems expose the workpiece to surfaces that can scratch or otherwise damage the workpiece. Third, these systems are not suitable for all processing environments. For example, these systems do not allow both the top and bottom faces of the workpiece to be processed.

Accordingly, what is needed is an apparatus and method of securing a workpiece undergoing processing, which minimizes the pressure differential between the top and bottom faces of a workpiece. What is also needed is an apparatus and method of securing a workpiece undergoing processing, which minimizes the probability that the workpiece is scratched or otherwise damaged. What is also needed is an apparatus and method of securing a workpiece undergoing processing, which allows the workpiece to be processed in a variety of ways.

Brief Summary of the Invention

Embodiments of the present invention include a processing chamber having a first segment and a second segment for securing a workpiece undergoing processing in the processing chamber. In accordance with the present invention, a substantial portion of both the first face and the second face are exposed to a processing material introduced into the processing chamber.

In one embodiment, the first segment is configured to engage the workpiece at or near a top edge, and the second segment is configured to engage the workpiece at or near a bottom edge. In a further embodiment, the first segment is coupled to a top plate and the second

segment is coupled to a bottom plate. When the top plate and the bottom plate are brought together, the first segment and the second segment secure the workpiece within a processing volume defined by the top plate and the bottom plate.

A further embodiment of the present invention comprises an inlet system and an outlet system, both coupled to the processing chamber. In one embodiment, the inlet system is configured to introduce the processing material into the processing chamber, substantially parallel to both the first face and the second face of the workpiece. The outlet system is configured to exhaust the processing material from the processing chamber, substantially parallel to both the first face and the second face of the workpiece. In this way, the processing material is drawn substantially across the first face and the second face, thus processing the first face and the second face.

Brief Description of the Several Views of the Drawings

Figure 1 is a schematic of a perspective exploded view of a processing chamber and a circular workpiece secured in the processing chamber, in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 2 is a schematic of a side cross-sectional view of the processing chamber and the circular workpiece of Figure 1, when the processing chamber is in an intermediate position.

Figure 3 is a schematic of a side cross-sectional view of the processing chamber and the circular workpiece of Figure 1, when the processing chamber is in a processing position.

Figure 4 depicts a side perspective view of a top plate, a bottom plate, a wafer pick, and a workpiece, in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 5 is a schematic of a perspective exploded view of a workpiece and a bottom plate, in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 6 is a side cross-sectional view of a processing chamber securing a workpiece, in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

Figures 7 and 8 are a top view and a side cross-sectional view, respectively, of one bottom element of a holder, configured to secure two workpieces having two different configurations at different times.

Figure 9 is a side cross-sectional view of a processing chamber having two heaters, in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 10 is an illustration of a top view of a top plate with input ports and

corresponding output ports, in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 11 is an illustration of a top view of a top plate with input ports and corresponding output ports, in accordance with a further embodiment of the present invention.

5 Figure 12 is an illustration of a top view of a top plate with input ports and corresponding output ports, in accordance with a further embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 13 is a side cross-sectional view of a processing chamber having a dispenser ring and a collector ring, in accordance with a further embodiment of the present invention.

10 Figure 14 is a top cross-sectional view of the processing chamber of Figure 13, with the top plate removed, illustrating channels coupling the dispenser ring to a processing volume.

Figure 15 is a bottom cross-sectional view of the processing chamber of Figure 13, with the bottom plate removed, illustrating channels coupling a processing volume to the collector ring.

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Detailed Description of the Invention

Embodiments of the present invention provide a holder that secures a workpiece in a processing chamber by contacting only a small portion of the workpiece. In one embodiment, the holder contacts the workpiece at or near an edge of the workpiece. In another embodiment, the holder contacts islands of the workpiece. The holder is configured to leave a substantial portion of both the upper face and the lower face of the workpiece exposed so that both faces can be treated with a processing material introduced into the processing chamber. By minimizing contact with the workpiece, the holder reduces the chance that the holder or particulates on it will scratch or otherwise damage the workpiece. Because a holder in accordance with the present invention mechanically securely supports the workpiece, it obviates the need for pumps, valve lines, and other equipment usually required for vacuum chucks and other holders.

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The following discussions describe a processing chamber in a loading/unloading position, an intermediate position, and a processing position. In the loading/unloading position, a workpiece can be placed into or removed from the processing chamber. In the intermediate position, the workpiece is supported but not fully secured by a holder within the processing chamber. In the processing position, the workpiece is secured by the holder within

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the processing chamber. The processing chamber is sealed so that a processing material can be introduced into the processing chamber to process the workpiece.

Figure 1 is a schematic perspective exploded view of a circular workpiece 130 and a processing chamber 100 for securing and processing the workpiece 130 in accordance with the present invention. The processing chamber 100 comprises a top plate 101A, a bottom plate 101B, and a heater 146 coupled to the bottom plate 101B. The top plate 101A comprises upper elements 125A-C, which together form an upper segment 125 of a holder 129 (Figure 3). The upper elements 125A-C are outlined with broken lines (as seen from the perspective view) to indicate that they are coupled to an opposite, inner surface 119 of the top plate 101A. The top plate 101A also contains a top portion 105A of an inlet port (105, Figure 3) and a top portion 110A of an outlet port 110 (Figure 3). The inlet port 105 and the outlet port 110 are configured to introduce and remove processing materials into and out of the processing chamber 100. The inlet port (105, Figure 3) can be part of an inlet system, which may, for example, comprise a pump (not shown) for introducing the processing materials into the processing chamber 100. The outlet port (110, Figure 3) can be part of an outlet system, which may, for example, comprise a vacuum (not shown) for removing the processing materials from the processing chamber 100. Preferably, the inlet port 105 is configured to introduce processing materials into the processing chamber 100 substantially parallel to both a top face and a bottom face (130A and 130B, respectively, Figure 2) of the workpiece 130. Also, preferably, the outlet port 110 is configured to remove the processing materials from the processing chamber 100 substantially parallel to both the top face and the bottom face (130A and 130B, respectively, Figure 2) of the workpiece 130.

The bottom plate 101B comprises lower elements 120A-C, which together form a lower segment 120 of the holder 129 (Figure 2). The lower elements 120A-C are coupled to an inner surface 118 of the bottom plate 101B. In a preferred embodiment, the lower elements 120A-C are arranged equidistant along the circumference of a circle centered on the bottom plate 101B. As illustrated The bottom plate 101B also contains a bottom portion 105B of the inlet port 105 (Figure 3) and a bottom portion 110B of the outlet port 110 (Figure 3). When the top plate 101A is brought together with the bottom plate 101B to form a processing volume, the top portion 105A and the bottom portion 105B together form the inlet port 105, and the top portion 110A and the bottom portion 110B together form the outlet port 110 (Figure 3).

While the preferred embodiment has three upper elements 125A-C and three

corresponding lower elements 120A-C, it will be appreciated that other numbers of elements can be used to achieve the present invention. For example, fewer than three or more than three upper elements and corresponding lower elements can be used to secure a workpiece in accordance with the present invention. It will also be appreciated that the number of upper
5 elements need not equal the number of lower elements in order to practice the present invention.

Still referring to Figure 1, each of the lower elements 120A-C has a recess, as exemplified by the lower element 120C, a distance H1 from a top surface 121A-C, respectively, of each of the lower elements 120A-C. Each of the recesses is also a distance
10 H2 from the inner surface 118 of the bottom plate 101B. Thus, each of the lower elements 120A-C has a recessed portion, which all preferably lie substantially in a common plane parallel to the bottom plate 101B. As described below, when a bottom face of the workpiece 130 rests on the recessed portions of the lower elements 120A-C, the bottom face 130B of the workpiece will lie in a plane substantially parallel to and a distance H2 from the inner surface
15 118 of the bottom plate 101B.

Figure 2 is a side cross-sectional view of the workpiece 130 resting on the lower elements 120A-B. Figure 2 illustrates the processing chamber 100 in an intermediate position. As illustrated in Figure 2, the workpiece 130 rests in the recesses of each of the lower elements 120A-B. Each of the recesses is shaped to substantially match the contour of
20 an edge of the workpiece 130. A bottom surface of the recess of each of the lower elements 120A-C contacts an edge or shoulder of the workpiece 130 and thus supports the workpiece 130 in a direction indicated by the arrow 81. A side wall of each of the recesses in the lower elements 120A-C secures the workpiece 130 and prevents movement in the directions indicated by the arrows 83 and 84. It will be appreciated that while the lower element 120C
25 is not illustrated in the side cross-sectional view of Figure 2, the bottom element 120C also supports and secures the workpiece 130 in a manner similar to that of the lower elements 120A-B.

When the top plate 101B is moved in the direction indicated by the arrow 82 in Figure 2, the processing chamber 100 is placed in a processing position, as illustrated in Figure 3. As illustrated in Figure 3, each of the top elements 125A-B contacts an edge or shoulder of
30 the workpiece 130, securing the workpiece and preventing movement in the direction indicated by the arrow 85. It will be appreciated that while not illustrated in the side cross-sectional view of Figure 3, the top element 125C also contacts the workpiece 130 at edges or

shoulders of the workpiece 130, further securing the workpiece 130 from movement in the direction indicated by the arrow 85. Figure 3 further illustrates that when the top plate 101A is moved in the direction indicated by the arrow 86, the top portion 110A and the bottom portion 110B form the outlet port 110, and the top portion 105A and the bottom portion 105B form the inlet port 105.

Figure 3 illustrates several features of the present invention. First, the workpiece 130 is displaced from the inner surface 118 of the bottom plate 101B by the distance H2, and from an inner surface 119 of the top plate 101A by the distance D1. Further, when the processing chamber 100 is in the processing position, the inner surface 119 of the top plate 101A and the inner surface 118 of the bottom plate 101B define a portion of a processing volume 139. The processing volume 139 comprises an upper volume 145 and a lower volume 140. The upper volume 145 is defined between the inner surface 119 of the top plate 101A and a top face 130A of the workpiece 130. The lower volume 140 is defined between the inner surface 118 of the bottom plate 101B and a bottom face 130B of the workpiece 130.

As described in more detail below, in operation a processing material is introduced into the processing volume 139 through the inlet port 105. The processing material completely or partially fills the upper volume 145 and the lower volume 140. A portion of the processing material contained in the upper volume 145 processes the top face 130A of the workpiece 130. A portion of the processing material contained in the lower volume 140 processes the bottom face 130B of the workpiece 130. In one embodiment, the processing material is immediately exhausted from the processing volume 139 through the outlet port 110 and circulated back through the processing volume 139 through the inlet port 105, thus creating a process flow over the top face 130A and the bottom face 130B. Alternatively, the processing material can be exhausted from the processing volume 139 through the outlet port 110 at various times, in various manners, in accordance with the present invention.

The processing material processes the workpiece 130 by, for example, removing residue and other particulates from it, forming device layers on it, or performing other processing steps on it. In a preferred embodiment, the processing material is a cleaning material such as carbon dioxide, used to clean one or more faces of the workpiece 130. Also in a preferred embodiment, the processing chamber 100 is configured to perform supercritical processing. Thus, for example, supercritical carbon dioxide is introduced into the processing volume 139 through the inlet port 105 to remove particulates, such as photoresist residue, from one or more faces of the workpiece 130. The supercritical CO₂ containing the

particulates is then exhausted from the processing volume 139 through the outlet port 110. It will be appreciated that materials other than CO₂ can be used to clean the workpiece 130. It will also be appreciated that in accordance with the present invention, other processing materials can be introduced into the processing volume 139 and used to perform other processing steps on the workpiece 130. Furthermore, CO₂ can be introduced into the processing volume 139 and brought to a supercritical state once inside processing volume 139. The supercritical CO₂ can then be circulated within the processing volume 139 and later exhausted, as described above.

Because the bottom face 130B of the workpiece 130 is displaced from and thus does not contact the inner surface 118 of the bottom plate 101B, the bottom face 130B cannot be scratched or otherwise damaged by the bottom plate 101B or particulates residing on the bottom plate 101B. Furthermore, because the workpiece 130 is displaced from the inner surface 119 of the top plate 101A by the upper segment 120, the workpiece 130 cannot be scratched or otherwise damaged by the top plate 101A or particulates residing on the top plate 101A. At worst, the workpiece 130 can be scratched or damaged only where the top face 130A contacts the upper segment 125 and the bottom face 130B and contacts the lower segment 120. By ensuring that the bottom face 130B contacts the holder 129 only at places that do not form part of a finished workpiece, such as the device layers on a completed semiconductor wafer, the effect of any damage is minimized.

Figures 1-3 are labeled with dimensions W1, W2, H1, H2, and H3 to describe relative dimensions only, for one embodiment of the present invention. In one embodiment, the workpiece 130 has a radius W1 and a thickness W2. H1 is the distance between the top surfaces 121A-C of each of the lower elements 120A-C, respectively, and a corresponding recess on each of the lower elements 120A-C. H2 is the distance between the recess on each of the lower elements 120A-C and the inner surface 118 of the bottom plate 101B. H3 is the radius from a center of the bottom plate 101B and a sidewall of each of the lower elements 120A-C, each sidewall defined between the top surfaces 121A-C of each of the lower elements 120A-C, respectively, and the corresponding recess.

In one embodiment, the length H3 is slightly larger than the length W1, thus allowing the workpiece 130 to fit securely within the recesses of the bottom elements 120A-C. Further, in this embodiment, the length W2 is slightly larger than the length H1, thus allowing the workpiece 130 to extend slightly from the top surfaces 121A-C, allowing the top elements 125A-C to contact an edge of the workpiece 130 when the processing chamber 100 is in the

processing position (Figure 3). Further, in this embodiment, H2 is configured so that when the processing chamber is in the processing position (Figure 3), a distance D1 between the top face 130A of the workpiece 130 is approximately equal to the distance H2, for the reasons explained below.

5 Again referring to Figure 3, when the processing chamber 101 is in the processing position, both the upper volume 145 and the lower volume 140 contain a portion of the processing material when the workpiece 130 is being processed by the processing material. Preferably, the volume of the upper volume 145 is substantially equal to the volume of the lower volume 140. When the volume of the upper volume 145 is substantially equal to the
10 volume of the lower volume 140, a pressure exerted on the top face 130A of the workpiece 130 during processing is substantially equal to a pressure exerted on the bottom face 130B of the workpiece 130. The two pressures counterbalance each other so that no significant stress is exerted on the workpiece 130. Thus, preferably, the values of D1 and H2 are substantially equal. It will be appreciated that these relative dimensions are for illustration of one
15 embodiment only and do not limit the scope of the present invention. The relative dimensions can be other than those described here without departing from the scope of the present invention.

In a preferred embodiment, when the processing chamber 100 is in a processing position, each of the upper elements 125A-C is positioned opposite one each of the lower
20 elements 120A-C. In this way, the stress exerted on the workpiece 130 by each of the upper elements 125A-D is advantageously offset by the stress exerted on the workpiece 130 by each of the lower elements 120A-C. Alternatively, the upper elements 125A-D can each be positioned to be slightly offset from one each of the lower elements 120A-C.

It will be appreciated that the inlet port 105 can be coupled to an injector system (not
25 shown) used to inject the processing material into the processing volume 139 through the inlet port 105. Preferably, the injector system is a pressurized system that introduces processing materials under high pressure into the processing volume 139. Alternatively, the injector system comprises a pump. Similarly, the output port 110 can be coupled to a vacuum
30 pump or another apparatus for removing the processing material from the processing volume 139 after processing of the workpiece 130 has completed.

While Figure 1 illustrates the lower elements 120A-C having a circular recessed configuration and the upper elements 125A-C having a triangular, wedge-shaped cross section, the lower elements 120A-C and the upper elements 125A-C can have other shapes

without departing from the present invention. For example, the upper elements 125A-C can have a rectangular cross section or a finger shape. Indeed, the upper elements 125A-C and the lower elements 120A-C can have any shape so long as they securely hold the workpiece 130 during processing and allow a substantial portion of both the top face 130A and bottom face 130B of the workpiece 130 to be exposed and thus processed. Here, a substantial portion can be that portion that must be exposed to the processing material. For example, if the workpiece 130 is to be processed to form an active region on a semiconductor device, a substantial portion can be that portion that must be exposed to the processing material to form the active region. If the workpiece 130 is to be processed to remove photoresist residue, a substantial portion is that portion from which the photoresist residue must be removed for the final device to be properly formed.

Figure 4 illustrates the workpiece 130 and a partial, more detailed view of the processing chamber 100 of Figure 1. Figure 4 illustrates the processing chamber 100 in a loading/unloading position, in which the workpiece 130 can be inserted into or removed from the processing chamber 100. In addition to those elements depicted in Figure 1, Figure 4 depicts a wafer pick 180, used, as described in more detail below, to insert the workpiece 130 into and remove the workpiece 130 from the lower elements 120A-D. The wafer pick 180 comprises a piston 182 coupled to a pedestal 181 configured to support the workpiece 130. The bottom plate 101B has an inner depression 170 and is configured to allow the piston 182 to move through a central portion of the bottom plate 101B. The inner depression 170 contains an o-ring and o-ring groove pair 175. The inner depression 170 is configured to contain the pedestal 181 such that when the pedestal 181 is flush with an inner surface of the bottom plate 101B, the pedestal 181 and the inner surface of the bottom plate 101B form a hermetically-sealed surface through the o-ring and o-ring groove 175 that helps define a sealed processing volume.

Preferably, the elements contained within the processing volume (139, Figure 3) (including an inner surface of the top plate 101A, an inner surface of the bottom plate 101B, the pedestal 181, the upper elements 125A-C, and the lower elements 120A-C) are all made from one or more materials that can withstand the processing material, processing temperatures, and processing pressures used to process the workpiece 130. In one embodiment, the inner surface of the top plate 101A, the inner surface of the bottom plate 101B, the pedestal 181, the upper elements 125A-C, and the lower elements 120A-C, all comprise stainless steel. Alternatively, the above elements can comprise other materials that

can withstand the processing material, the processing temperature, and the processing pressures used to process the workpiece 130.

Again referring to Figure 4, in use, the workpiece 130 is placed on the pedestal 181 by a robot arm (not shown) or by an operator. Next, the wafer pick 180 is moved in the direction indicated by the arrow labeled 10 until the pedestal 181 is flush with the inner surface of the bottom plate 101B. The pedestal 181 and the inner surface of the bottom plate 101B now form a hermetically-sealed surface, which forms part of the processing volume (139, Figure 3) within which the workpiece 130 is processed. As described below, the processing chamber 100 is now in an intermediate position.

Because the lower elements 120A-C project from the inner surface 118 of the bottom plate 101B, when the pedestal 181 is approximately flush with a recess in each of the lower elements 120A-C, the workpiece 130 contacts each of the lower elements 120A-C and is supported by them. Thus, when the pedestal 181 is approximately flush with the inner surface 118 of the bottom plate 101B, a hermetically-sealed lower volume (140, Figure 3) exists between the lower face 130B of the workpiece 130 and the inner surface 118 of the bottom plate 101B.

Referring now to Figure 2, the workpiece 130 is supported at or near an edge by the lower elements 120A-C. Thus, the workpiece 130 is secured in the direction of the arrow 81 by each of the lower elements 120A-C and secured in a horizontal plane, in the direction of the arrows 83 and 84, by the recessed in the lower elements 120A-C. It will be appreciated that other configurations of the holder 129 can be used to secure the workpiece 130 in accordance with the present invention. For example, the lower segment 120 can secure the workpiece using fewer than or more than the three elements 120A-C depicted in Figure 4.

Again referring to Figure 4, the top plate 101A is next moved in the direction indicated by the arrow 91 until the upper elements 125 contact an edge of the workpiece 130, as illustrated in Figure 3. The processing chamber 101 is now in the processing position, as illustrated in Figure 3. The workpiece 130 is now secured by the holder 129 so that a substantial portion of both the top face 130A and the bottom face 130B of the workpiece 130 are exposed. A processing material can now be introduced into the inlet port (105, Figure 3) to process the exposed portions of the top face 130A and the bottom face 130B of the workpiece 130.

When the workpiece 130 has been processed, any processing material contained in the processing volume (139, Figure 3) is exhausted from or circulated through the processing

chamber 100 through the outlet port 110 (Figure 3). Again referring to Figure 4, when processing is complete, the top plate 101A is moved in the direction indicated by the arrow 90, and the pedestal 181 is moved in the direction indicated by the arrow 90. The pedestal 181 contacts the workpiece 130 and lifts it clear of the lower elements 120A-C. The processing chamber 100 is again in the loading/unloading position depicted in Figure 4. The workpiece 130 can now be removed from the pedestal 181 by a robot arm (not shown) or by an operator and replaced with a new workpiece to be processed.

It will be appreciated that lower elements such as those depicted in Figure 1 can be positioned in other configurations in accordance with the present invention. For example, the lower elements can be coupled to an upper plate, such as upper plate 101A depicted in Figure 1. A workpiece can be lifted and supported in a first vertical direction by support arms coupled to a lower plate. The support arms can engage the workpiece and raise it so that the workpiece is engaged and thus secured by the lower elements coupled to the top plate. The support arms can, for example, engage the workpiece in notches formed on a bottom surface of the workpiece. Of course, the workpiece can be engaged and secured using other methods.

It will be also appreciated that the present invention is not limited to securing workpiece having circular shapes. Indeed, workpieces having various shapes can be secured in accordance with the present invention. Figure 5, for example, illustrates a square-shaped workpiece 650 having a top face 650A and a bottom face 650B and secured in accordance with the present invention. The workpiece 650 is supported by the lower elements 615A-D coupled to the bottom plate 610B. It will be appreciated that a processing chamber comprising the bottom plate 610B will further comprise a top plate, similar to the top plate 101A shown in Figure 1. The lower elements 615A-D form a lower segment 615 of a holder. Shaded portions of the lower elements 615A-D depict sidewalls defining recesses in the surface of each of the lower elements 615A-D. As illustrated in Figure 5, the recesses are matched to the contour of the outer edges of the workpiece 650. In this way, the lower elements 615A-D secure the workpiece 650 from movement in a horizontal plane containing the lower elements 615A-D.

Figure 5 is labeled with dimensions W3, W4, W5, H5, and H6 to describe relative dimensions only, for one embodiment of the present invention. In one embodiment, the workpiece 650 has a length W3, a width W4, and a thickness W5. Edges of the workpiece are labeled E1-4. Each of the lower elements 615A-D has a recessed surface a distance H5 from a top surface. Each of the recessed surfaces are a distance H6 from an inner surface of

the bottom plate 610B. Each of the lower elements 615A-D has two sidewalls connecting the upper surface to the recessed surface. The sidewalls of the lower element 615A meet at the point E11, the sidewalls of the lower element 615B meet at the point E12, the sidewalls of the lower element 615C meet at the point E13, and the sidewalls of the lower element 615D meet at the point E14. Parallel sidewalls of the lower elements 615A and 615C are a distance H7 apart, as are parallel sidewalls of the lower elements 615B and 615D. Parallel sidewalls of the lower elements 615A and 615D are a distance H8 apart, as are parallel sidewalls of the lower elements 615C and 615D.

In one embodiment, the workpiece 650 is placed in the lower segment 615 so that the edge E1 approximately fits into the point E11, the edge E2 approximately fits into the point E12, the edge E3 approximately fits into the point E13, and the edge E4 approximately fits into the point E14. In this embodiment: the length H8 is slightly larger than the length W3, and the length H7 is slightly larger than W4, thus allowing the workpiece 650 to fit securely within the recesses of the bottom elements 615A-D. Further, in this embodiment, the length W5 is slightly larger than the distance H5, thus allowing the workpiece 650 to extend slightly from the top surface of each of the lower elements 615A-D. It will be appreciated that these relative dimensions are for illustration of one embodiment only and do not limit the scope of the present invention. The relative dimensions can be other than those described here without departing from the scope of the present invention.

Figure 6 illustrates that a workpiece can be secured in positions other than at or near an edge, in accordance with embodiments of the present invention. Figure 6 illustrates a cross sectional schematic of a processing chamber 700 in which a workpiece 715 is secured. The workpiece 715 has a top face 715A. The processing chamber 700 comprises an upper plate 701A and a lower plate 701B. Upper elements 705A-B are coupled to the upper plate 701A and form an upper segment 705 of a holder 716. The lower elements 710A-B are coupled to the lower plate 701B and form a lower segment 710 of the holder 716. The upper elements 705A-B and the lower elements 710A-B together secure the workpiece 715 within the processing chamber 700. It will be appreciated that in practice, the upper segment 705 will contain more elements than the two elements 705A-B and the lower segment 710 will contain more than the two elements 710A-B depicted in the cross-sectional drawing of Figure 6. As illustrated in Figure 6, the upper elements 705A-B secure the workpiece 715 by contacting it on an outer shoulder of the top face 715A of the workpiece 715.

Figures 8 and 9 illustrate that lower elements can be configured to support and secure

different workpieces having different configurations. As used here, the term configuration is used to define a shape and size of a workpiece. For example, Figure 8 is a top view of a lower element 916 having a stepped configuration. The lower element 916 has a first configured recess 917A, which contains a second configured recess 917B. The first configured recess 917A is configured to receive and secure a first workpiece with a first configuration. The second configured recess 917B is configured to receive and secure a second workpiece with a second, different configuration.

Figure 9 is a side cross-sectional view of the lower element 916, supporting and securing a first workpiece 950 and a second workpiece 951. It will be appreciated that Figure 8B illustrates the two workpieces 950 and 951 simultaneously supported by the lower element 916 for illustration only. Preferably, only one of the workpieces 950 and 951 will be supported by the lower element 916 at one time. It will also be appreciated that Figures 8A-B illustrate only one lower element 916. Preferably, the lower element 916 will be paired with other lower elements to secure a workpiece, as illustrated, for example, in Figure 1.

Figure 9 illustrates a processing chamber 960 in accordance with yet another embodiment of the present invention. The processing chamber 960 comprises a top plate 961A, a bottom plate 961B, an upper segment 965 comprising upper elements 965A-B, a lower segment 966 comprising lower elements 966A-B, a first heater 970 and a second heater 975. As described above in relation to, for example, Figure 1, the upper elements 965A-B are coupled to the top plate 961A and the lower elements 966A-B are coupled to the bottom plate 961B. The first heater 970 is coupled to the top plate 961A and the second heater 975 is coupled to the bottom plate 961B. It has been found that when a holder displaces a workpiece from both a top plate and a bottom plate of a processing chamber, a processing material introduced into the processing chamber can be brought to high pressures and temperatures more efficiently by using two heaters as illustrated in Figure 9.

Inlet ports and outlet ports can be arranged in many configuration in accordance with the present invention. Some examples of different configurations of inlet ports and outlet ports are illustrated in Figures 10-12.

Figure 10 illustrates a top view of a portion of a processing system 500. The portion of the processing system 500 comprises an top plate 501A having inlet ports 150A, 151A, and 152A, and corresponding outlet ports 150B, 151B, and 152B, all aligned substantially parallel to each other and all aligned perpendicular to a circumference of the top plate 501A. Figure 15 also illustrates a workpiece 530, with the dotted lines of the workpiece 530

indicating that the workpiece 530 is contained within a processing chamber formed, in part, by the top plate 501A. It will be appreciated that each inlet port is coupled with an injector system, such as a pump, that injects the processing material into a processing volume during device processing. Similarly, each outlet port is coupled to an exhaust system, such as a vacuum pump, for exhausting the processing material from the processing volume during or after the workpiece has undergone processing.

As illustrated in Figure 10, each inlet port has a paired outlet port configured diametrically opposite it. For example, the inlet port 150A has its corresponding outlet port 150B configured diametrically opposite it on an annular inner portion of the top plate 501A. It will be appreciated that while Figure 10 depicts three pairs of inlet ports and exhaust ports, 150A-B, 151A-B, and 152A-B, more than three and less three pairs of inlet ports and outlet ports can be used in accordance with the present invention. Moreover, it will be appreciated that there need not be a corresponding number of inlet ports and outlet ports. There could be more inlet ports than outlet ports or fewer inlet ports than outlet ports. For example, there could be five inlet ports and two outlet ports.

It will also be appreciated that inlet ports and outlet ports can be positioned at locations other than the top plate 501A. For example, the inlet ports and outlet ports can be located on a bottom plate, on both a bottom plate and an top plate, or elsewhere in a processing system.

Figure 11 illustrates a top view of a portion of a processing system 600. The portion of the processing system 600 comprises an top plate 601A having inlet ports 160A, 161A, and 162A, and corresponding outlet ports 160B, 161B, and 162B. Each inlet port and outlet port is aligned substantially non-perpendicular to a circumference of the top plate 601A. Figure 11 also illustrates a workpiece 630, with the dotted lines of the workpiece 630 indicating the workpiece 630 is contained within a processing chamber formed, in part, by the top plate 601A.

Figure 12 illustrates an embodiment of a portion of another processing system 700 in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention. The processing system comprises an top plate 701A, inlet ports 170A, 171A, 180A, and 181A, and outlet ports 170B, 171B, 180B, and 181B. In Figure 17, each inlet port is configured adjacent to a corresponding outlet port. For example, the inlet port 170A is configured adjacent to a corresponding outlet port 170B; the inlet port 171A is configured adjacent to a corresponding outlet port 171B; the inlet port 180A is configured adjacent to a corresponding outlet port

180B; and the inlet port 181A is configured adjacent to a corresponding outlet port 181B. Similar to the processing system 600 in Figure 11, in the embodiment illustrated in Figure 12, each inlet port and outlet port is aligned at a non-perpendicular angle to the circumference of an top plate 701A.

5 Inlet ports and outlet ports are taught generally in U.S. Patent Serial Number 10/121,791, titled "High Pressure Processing Chamber for Semiconductor Substrate Including Flow Enhancing Features," and filed April 10, 2002, which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

10 Inlet ports and outlet ports, such as those illustrated in Figures 10-12, can be configured with other structures to introduce processing materials into and remove processing materials from processing volumes in a variety of ways. In accordance with embodiments of the present invention, inlet ports and outlet ports can be used with dispenser rings, collector rings, or both. Dispenser rings advantageously allow a larger amount of processing material to be uniformly introduced into a processing volume to process a workpiece. Collector rings
15 advantageously allow the processing material to be uniformly removed from the processing volume after or while a workpiece is being processed.

 Figure 13 is a side cross-sectional view of a processing chamber 800 having a dispenser ring 860 and a collector ring 870. The processing chamber 800 comprises a top section 810 and a bottom section 820, which, when brought together, form a processing
20 volume 865 containing a workpiece 851. The top section 810 comprises a top plate 811, a ringed plate 812 coupled to the top plate 811, a heater 829 coupled to the top plate 811, upper elements 855A and 855B of a holder coupled to the heater 829, and sealing elements 801, 802, and 803. The ringed plate 812 contains a dispenser ring 860, and channels (e.g., inlet ports) 861 and 862-864 (Figure 14) coupling the dispenser ring 860 to the processing volume
25 865. The dispenser ring 860 can be coupled to a supply vessel (not shown), such as a CO₂ supply vessel.

 The bottom section 820 comprises a ringed plate 815 coupled to a bottom plate 819, a heater 821 coupled to the bottom plate 819, lower elements 850A and 850B of the holder coupled to the heater 821, and sealing elements 805 and 806. The ringed plate 815 comprises
30 a collector ring 870, and channels (e.g., outlet ports) 871 and 872-874 (Figure 15) coupling the collector ring 870 to the processing volume 865. The collector ring 870 can be coupled to a collection vessel (not shown) used to store exhausted processing materials. It will be appreciated that the holder generally contains more than two upper elements 855A and 855B

and more than two lower elements 850A and 850B, although only two upper elements and two lower elements are shown in the cross-sectional view of Figure 13. The holder comprising the upper elements 855A and 855B and the lower elements 850A and 850B can have a structure similar to that of the holder 129 illustrated, for example, in Figure 3. Thus, when securing the workpiece 851, the upper elements 855A and 855B and the lower elements 850A and 850B allow the workpiece 851 to be exposed at both a first and a second face to a processing material introduced into the processing volume 865.

Figure 14 is a top cross-sectional view of the processing chamber 800, with the top plate 811, the heater 829, and the upper elements 855A and 855B removed. Figure 14 illustrates the channels 861-864 coupling the dispenser ring 860 to the processing volume 865. The channels 861-864 can be aligned along a circumference of the dispenser ring 860 in many ways. Figure 14 shows the channels 861-864 aligned along a circumference of the dispenser 860 in a manner similar to that of the inlet ports 160A, 161A, and 162A illustrated in Figure 11. It will be appreciated that the channels 861-864 can be configured in other ways in accordance with the present invention. For example, the channels 861-864 can be configured as are the inlet ports 150A, 151A, and 152A illustrated in Figure 10. Alternatively, the channels 861-864 can be configured as are the inlet ports 170A, 171A, and 180A illustrated in Figure 12. As illustrated in Figure 14, the dispenser ring 860 traces a complete circle around an inner circumference of the ringed plate 812. It will be appreciated that in accordance with the present invention, the dispenser ring 860 can have other shapes, such as a partial ring that does not trace a complete circle around an inner circumference of the ringed plate 812.

Figure 15 is a bottom cross-sectional view of the processing chamber 800, with the bottom plate 819, the heater 821, and the lower elements 850A and 850B removed. Figure 15 illustrates the channels 871-874 coupling the collector ring 870 to the processing volume 865. The channels 871-874 can be aligned along a circumference of the collector ring 860 in many ways. Figure 15 shows the channels 871-874 aligned along a circumference of the collector ring 870 in a manner similar to that of the outlet ports 160B, 161B, and 162B illustrated in Figure 11. It will be appreciated that the channels 871-874 can be configured in other ways in accordance with the present invention. For example, the channels 871-874 can be configured as are the outlet ports 150B, 151B, and 152B illustrated in Figure 10. Alternatively, the channels 871-874 can be configured as are the outlet ports 170B, 171B, and 180B illustrated in Figure 12. As illustrated in Figure 15, the collector ring 870 traces a complete circle

around an inner circumference of the ringed plate 815. It will be appreciated that in accordance with the present invention, the collector ring 870 can have other shapes, such as a partial ring that does not trace a complete circle around an inner circumference of the ringed plate 815.

5 Referring to Figures 13-15, in operation, a processing material, such as supercritical CO₂, is introduced into the dispenser ring 860. The supercritical CO₂ is then transmitted from the dispenser ring 860, through the channels 861-864, and into the processing volume 865 to process the workpiece 851. After the workpiece 851 has been processed, the supercritical CO₂ can be removed from the processing volume 865, through the channels 871-874, and into
10 the collector ring 870. The removed supercritical CO₂ can then be routed to a collection vessel (not shown) or recirculated through the processing volume 865.

It will be appreciated that in accordance with the present invention, more than or fewer than four channels (such as the channels 861-864) can couple the dispenser ring 860 to the processing volume 865. The channels 861-864 can comprise valves, which control the
15 introduction of the supercritical CO₂ from the dispenser ring 860 and into the processing volume 865. It will also be appreciated that more than or fewer than four channels (such as the channels 871-874) can couple the processing volume 865 to the collector ring 870. The channels 871-874 can comprise valves, which control the flow of the supercritical CO₂ from the processing volume 865 and into the collector ring 870.

20 It will be appreciated that processing materials other than supercritical CO₂ can be used to process the workpiece 851. It will also be appreciated that the processing material can be circulated within or through the processing volume 865 in many ways. For example, CO₂ can be introduced into the processing volume 865, pressurized to form supercritical CO₂, depressurized, and then exhausted to the collector ring 870. Alternatively, the processing
25 material can be introduced into the processing cavity 865 and then immediately exhausted through the channels 871-874 and to the collector ring 870 to create a continuous flow of processing material through the processing volume 865.

The present invention secures a workpiece within a processing volume, by contacting the workpiece at or near an outer edge of the workpiece. This structure provides several
30 advantages. First, a first volume is defined between a top face of the workpiece and the processing chamber, and a second volume is defined between a bottom face of the workpiece and the processing chamber. Thus, by introducing a processing material into both the first volume and the second volume, both the top face and the bottom face can be contacted by and

thus processed by a processing material. Moreover, by ensuring that the first volume is substantially equal to the second volume, no pressure differential exists between the top face and the bottom face, minimizing the risk of fracturing or breaking the workpiece. Such pressure differentials are particularly harmful in high-pressure and supercritical processing environments. Furthermore, contacting an edge of the workpiece at discrete points rather than, for example, along an entire circumference of the workpiece, allows processing materials to flow and uniformly contact the faces of a workpiece.

It will be readily apparent to one skilled in the art that various modifications may be made to the embodiments without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.

Claims

I claim:

- 1 1. A processing chamber, comprising:
 - 2 a. a first segment; and
 - 3 b. a second segment,
 - 4 wherein the first segment and the second segment are positioned to secure a
 - 5 workpiece within the processing chamber so that a substantial portion of a first
 - 6 face of the workpiece and a substantial portion of a second face of the
 - 7 workpiece are exposed to a processing material introduced into the processing
 - 8 chamber.
- 1 2. The processing chamber of claim 1, wherein the first segment is configured to engage
- 2 the workpiece near a first edge of the workpiece and the second segment is configured
- 3 to engage the workpiece near a second edge of the workpiece.
- 1 3. The processing chamber of claim 1, further comprising:
 - 2 a. a top plate, the first segment coupled to the top plate; and
 - 3 b. a bottom plate, the second segment coupled to the bottom plate,
 - 4 wherein when the top plate and the bottom plate are brought together, the top
 - 5 segment and the bottom segment engage the workpiece, and further wherein
 - 6 the top plate and the bottom plate form a processing volume containing the
 - 7 workpiece.
- 1 4. The processing chamber of claim 3, wherein the first segment comprises a plurality of
- 2 support elements and the second segment comprises a plurality of support elements.
- 3
- 1 5. The apparatus of claim 4, further comprising a wafer pick slidably mounted within the
- 2 processing chamber, wherein in a first position the wafer pick is configured to support
- 3 the workpiece so that the workpiece is disengaged from the second segment, and in a
- 4 second position the wafer pick is disengaged from the workpiece, the workpiece

engaged with the second segment.

- 1 6. The apparatus of claim 5, wherein the bottom plate is configured to receive the wafer
2 pick, such that when the wafer pick is in the second position, the bottom plate and the
3 wafer pick form a hermetically-sealed surface.
- 1 7. The processing chamber of claim 3, wherein the first segment and the second segment
2 are configured so that when the top plate and the bottom plate are brought together, a
3 volume between the workpiece and the top plate is substantially equal to a volume
 between the workpiece and the bottom plate.
- 1 8. The processing chamber of claim 3, further comprising:
2 a. an inlet system configured to introduce a processing material into the
3 processing volume; and
4 b. an outlet system configured to exhaust the processing material from the
5 processing volume.
- 1 9. The processing chamber of claim 8, wherein the inlet system is configured to
2 introduce a processing material into the processing volume substantially parallel to the
3 first face and the second face of the workpiece.
- 1 10. The processing chamber of claim 8, wherein the inlet system comprises a plurality of
2 inlet ports arranged annularly around a circumference of the processing chamber and
3 the outlet system comprises a plurality of outlet ports arranged annularly around the
4 circumference of the processing chamber.
- 1 11. The processing chamber of claim 10, wherein the plurality of inlet ports are arranged
2 at an angle perpendicular to the circumference of the processing chamber.
- 1 12. The processing chamber of claim 10, wherein the plurality of inlet ports are arranged
2 at angles not perpendicular to the circumference of the processing chamber.
- 1 13. The processing chamber of claim 10, wherein the plurality of outlet ports are arranged

1 at an angle perpendicular to the circumference of the processing chamber.

1 14. The processing chamber of claim 10, wherein the plurality of outlet ports are arranged
2 at angles not perpendicular to the circumference of the processing chamber.

1 15. The processing chamber of claim 10, wherein the plurality of inlet ports are positioned
2 substantially opposite the plurality of output ports so that when the processing
3 material is exhausted from the processing volume, the processing material is drawn
4 across the first face and the second face of the workpiece.

1 16. The processing chamber of claim 10, wherein the plurality of inlet ports alternate with
2 the plurality of outlet ports along the circumference of the processing chamber.

1 17. The processing chamber of claim 1, wherein the processing chamber is a supercritical
2 processing chamber.

1 18. The processing chamber of claim 3, further comprising a first heater coupled to the
2 top plate.

1 19. The processing chamber of claim 18, further comprising a second heater coupled to
2 the bottom plate.

1 20. The processing chamber of claim 3, wherein the top plate comprises a dispenser ring
2 coupled to the processing volume.

1 21. The processing chamber of claim 20, wherein the bottom plate comprises a collector
2 ring coupled to the processing volume.

1 22. The processing chamber of claim 20, wherein the dispenser ring is coupled to the
2 processing volume by a plurality of channels arranged at an angle perpendicular to a
3 circumference of the processing chamber.

1 23. The processing chamber of claim 20, wherein the dispenser ring is coupled to the

1 processing volume by a plurality of channels arranged at angles not perpendicular to a
2 circumference of the processing chamber.

1 24. The processing chamber of claim 21, wherein the collector ring is coupled to the
2 processing volume by a plurality of channels arranged at an angle perpendicular to a
3 circumference of the processing chamber.

1 25. The processing chamber of claim 21, wherein the collector ring is coupled to the
2 processing volume by a plurality of channels arranged at angles not perpendicular to a
3 circumference of the processing chamber.

1 26. An apparatus for processing a workpiece having a first face and a second face, the
2 apparatus comprising:
3 a. a processing chamber; and
4 b. a means for securing the workpiece in the processing chamber so that when the
5 processing chamber is in a processing position, both the first face and the
6 second face are substantially exposed to a processing material within the
7 processing chamber.

1 27. A method of processing a workpiece, comprising:
2 a. securing a workpiece in a processing chamber, such that a first face and a
3 second face of the workpiece are substantially exposed;
4 b. introducing the processing material into the processing chamber to process the
5 substantially exposed portions of the first face and the second face of the
6 workpiece; and
7 c. exhausting the processing material from the processing chamber.

1 28. The method of claim 27, wherein the step of securing the workpiece comprises
2 engaging the workpiece near an outer edge of the workpiece.

1 29. The method of claim 27, wherein the step of securing a workpiece, comprises:
2 a. receiving the workpiece on a wafer pick;
3 b. slidably moving the wafer pick to engage the workpiece against a support

1 element on a bottom plate of the processing chamber; and

- 2 c. moving a top plate of the processing chamber against the bottom plate of the
3 processing chamber to form a sealed processing chamber securely containing
4 the workpiece so that the first face and the second face are substantially
5 exposed to the processing material.
6

1 30. The method of claim 27, wherein the processing material is in a supercritical state.

1 31. The method of claim 30, wherein the processing material comprises carbon dioxide.

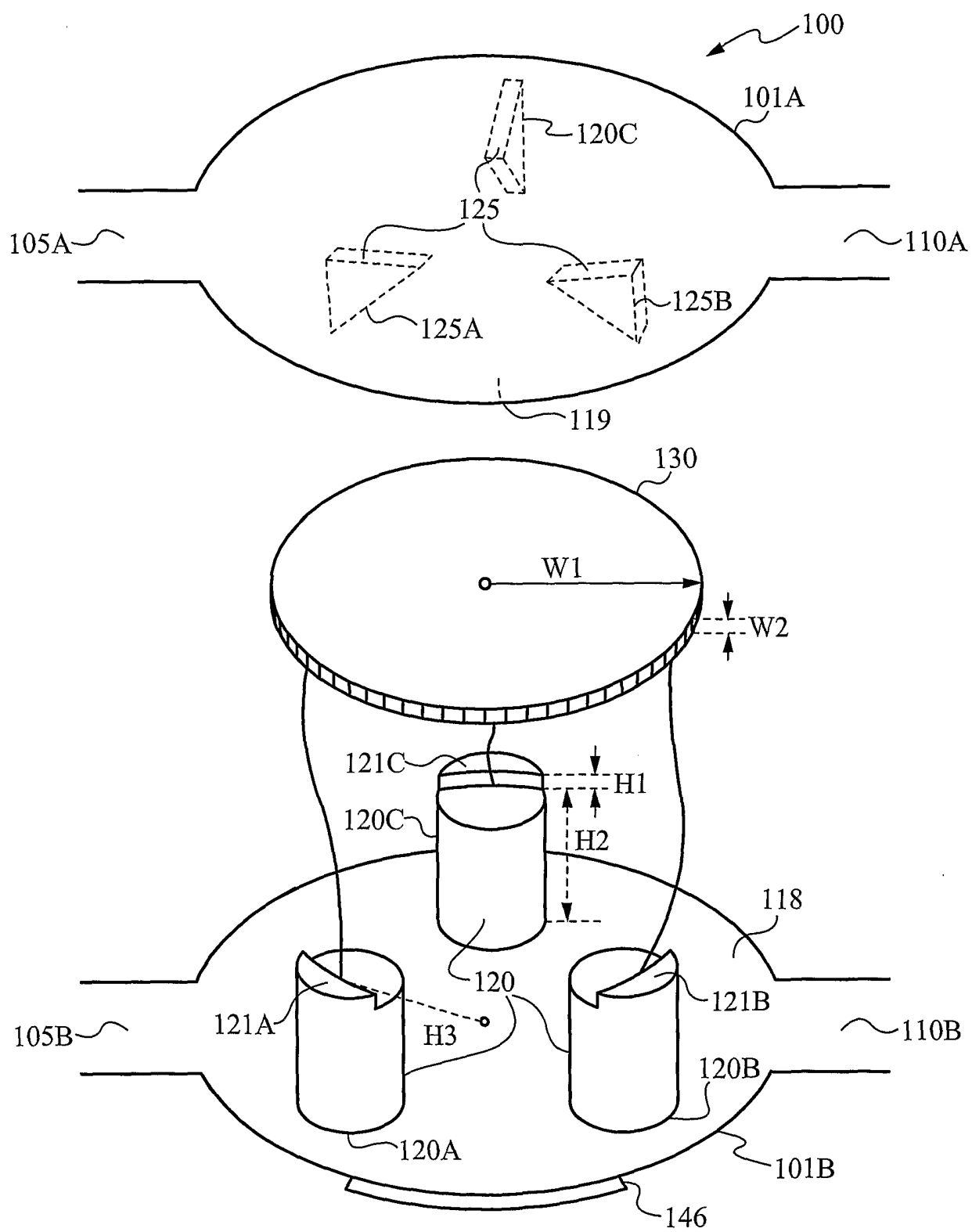
1 32. The method of claim 27, wherein the processing material is introduced into the
2 processing chamber substantially parallel to both the first face and the second face of
the workpiece.

1 33. A processing chamber for processing a workpiece having a first face and a second
2 face, the processing chamber comprising:

- 3 a. a top plate;
4 b. a bottom plate;
5 c. a first segment comprising a plurality of first elements coupled to the top plate,
6 the plurality of first elements configured to engage a top edge of the
7 workpiece;
8 d. a second segment comprising a plurality of second elements coupled to the
9 bottom plate, the plurality of second elements configured to engage a bottom
10 edge of the workpiece, wherein when the top plate and the bottom plate are
11 brought together, the top plate and the bottom plate define a processing
12 volume, the first segment and the second segment securing the workpiece
13 within the processing volume so that a substantial portion of the first face and
14 a substantial portion of the second face are exposed to a processing material
15 within the processing volume;
16 e. a first heater coupled to the top plate;
17 f. a second heater coupled to the bottom plate;
18 g. an inlet system coupled to the processing volume;
19 h. an outlet system coupled to the processing volume; and

- 1 i. a wafer pick slidably mounted within the processing chamber, wherein in a
- 2 first position the wafer pick is configured to support the workpiece so that the
- 3 workpiece is disengaged from the second segment, and in a second position
- 4 the wafer pick is disengaged from the workpiece so that the workpiece is
- 5 engaged with the second segment, and further wherein when the wafer pick is
- 6 in the second position, the bottom plate and the wafer pick form a
- hermetically-sealed surface.

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*Fig. 1*

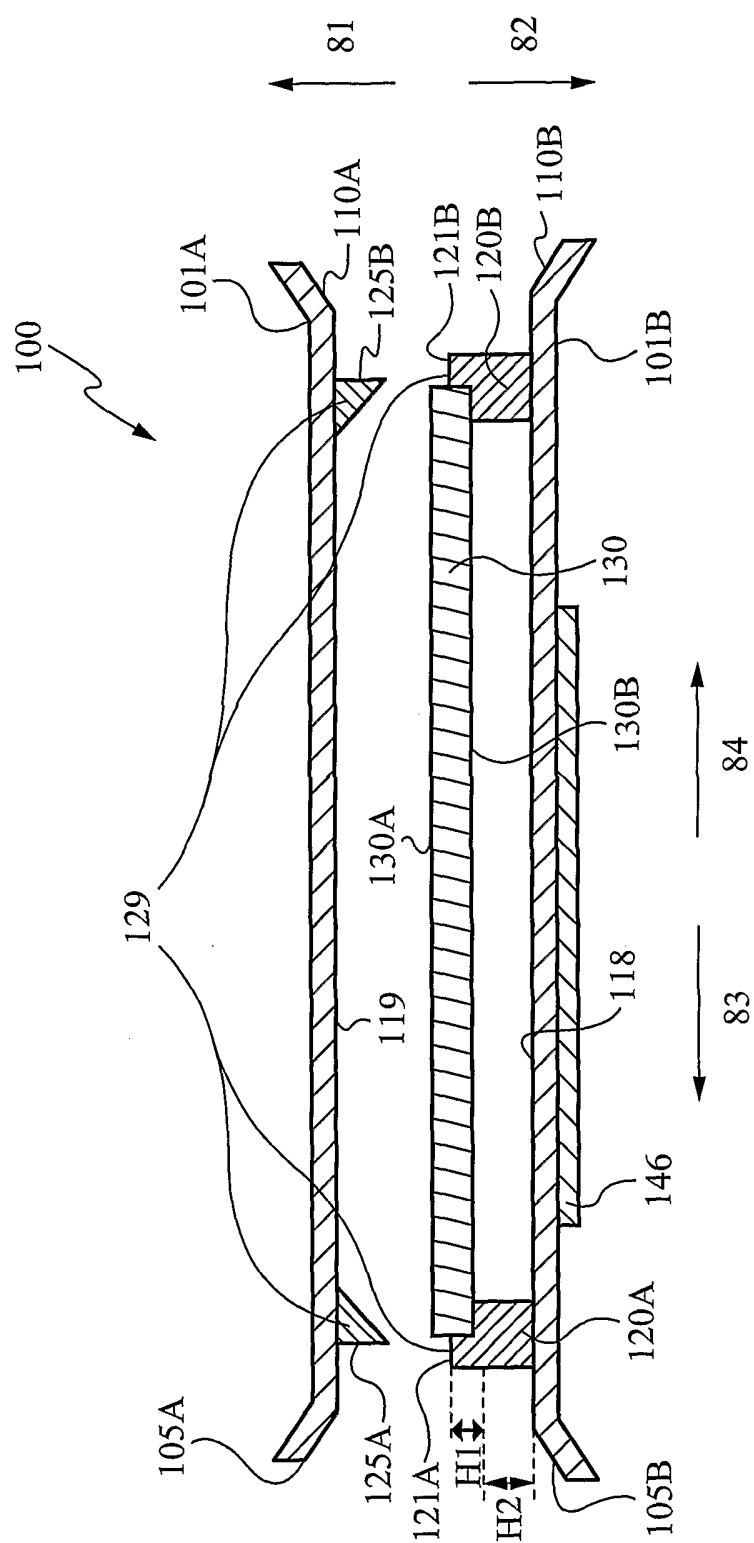


Fig. 2

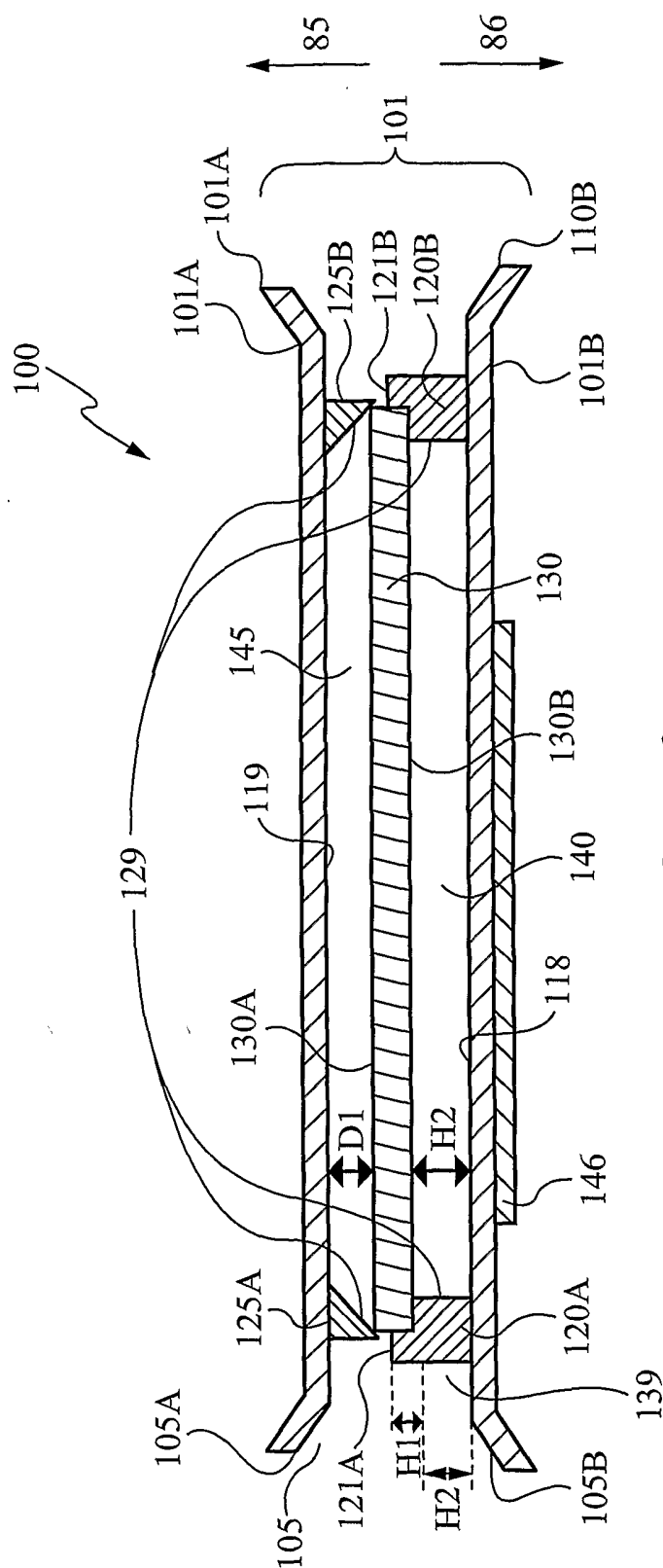
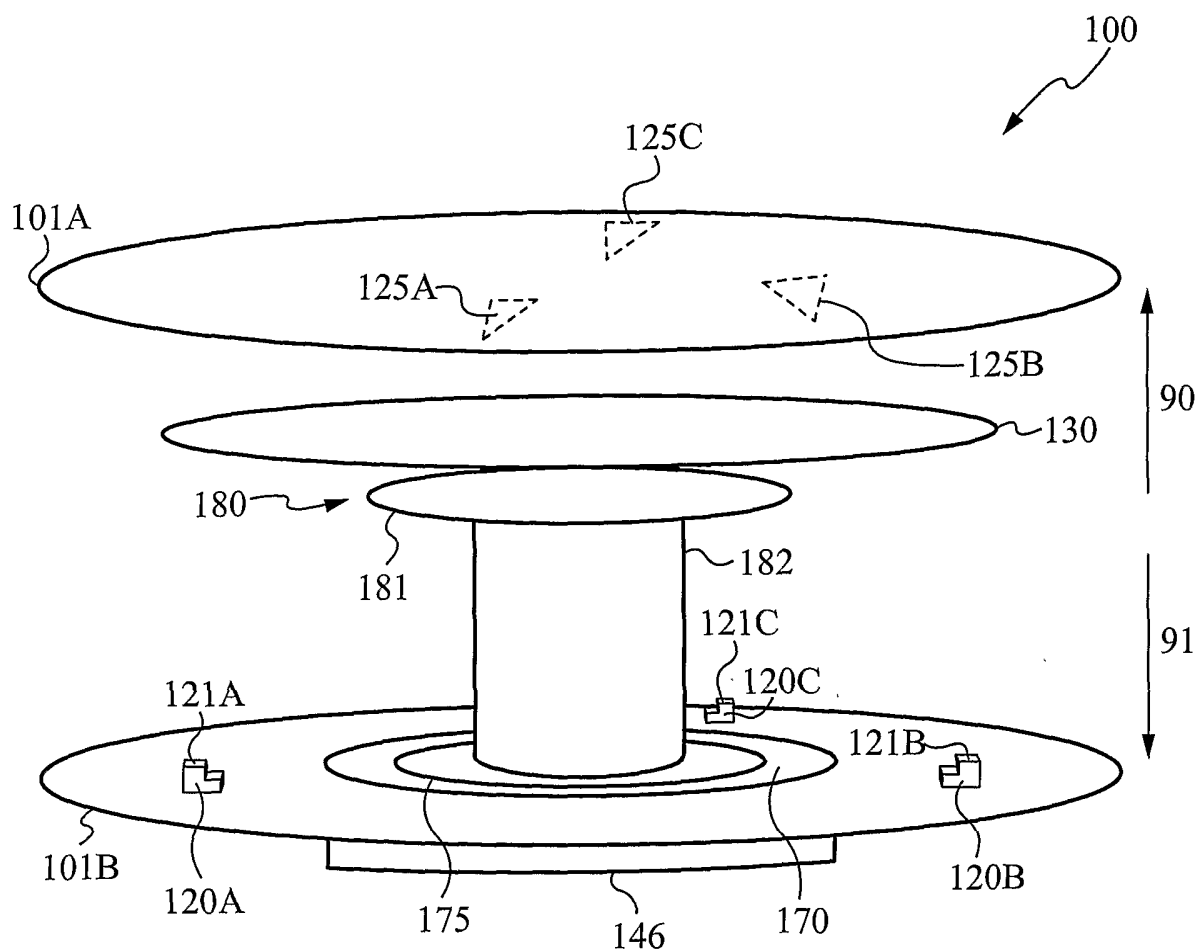
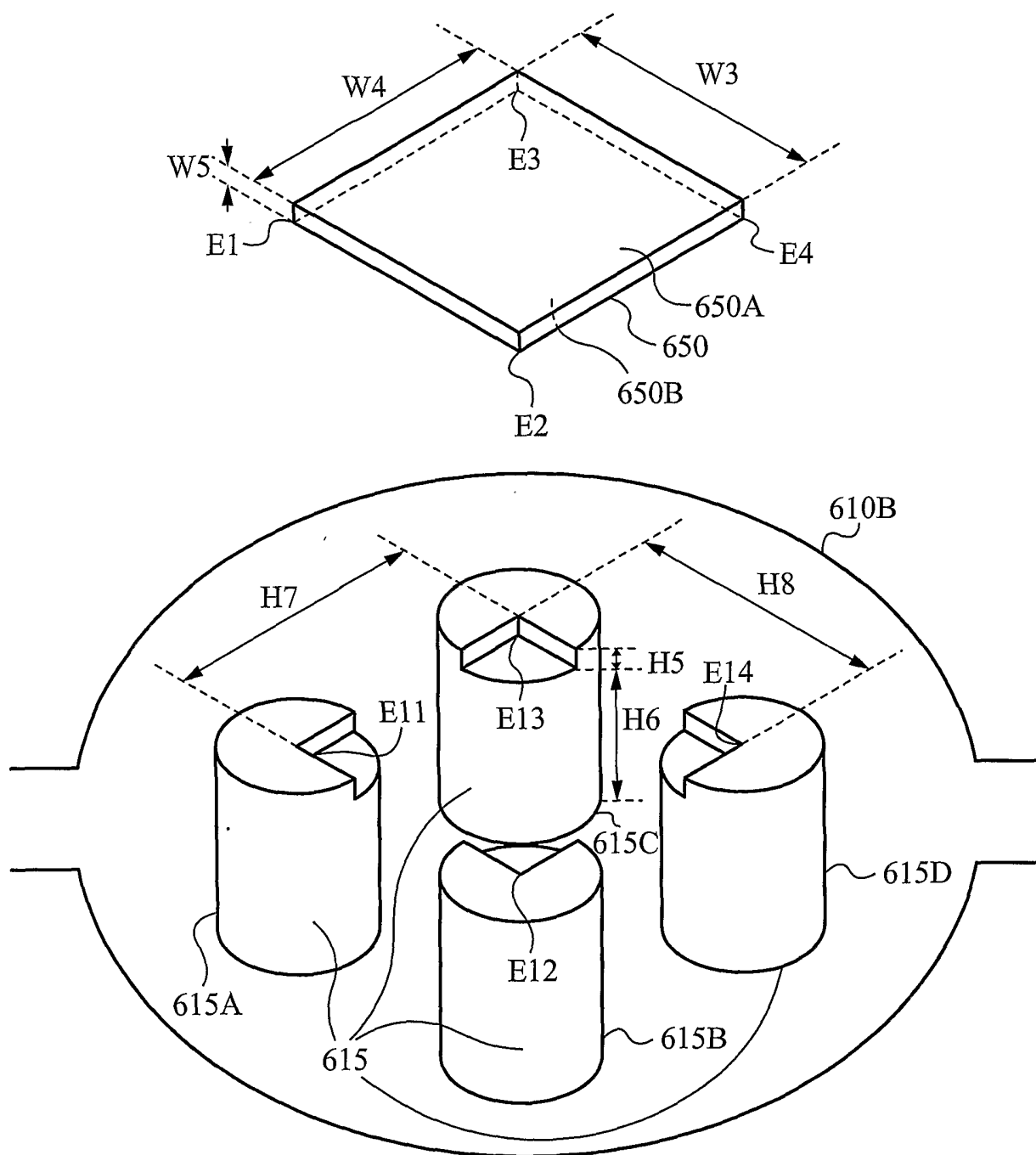


Fig. 3

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*Fig. 4*

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*Fig. 5*

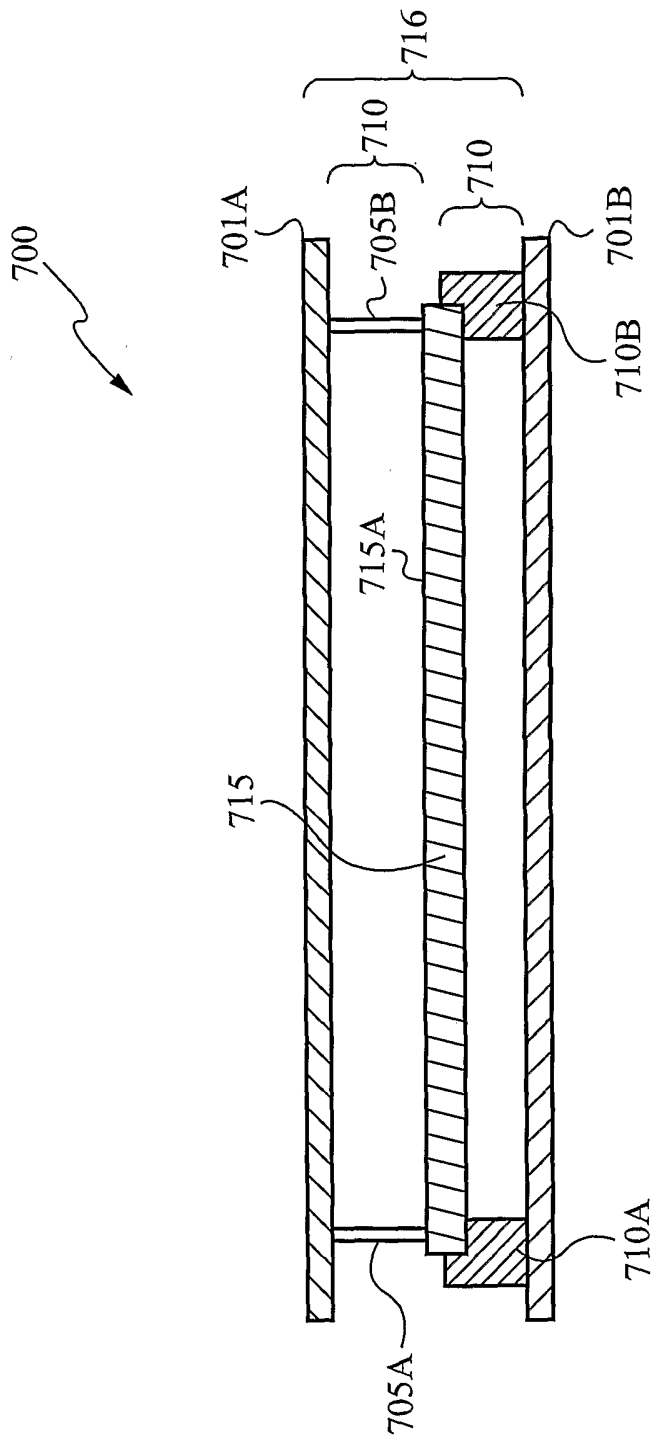


Fig. 6

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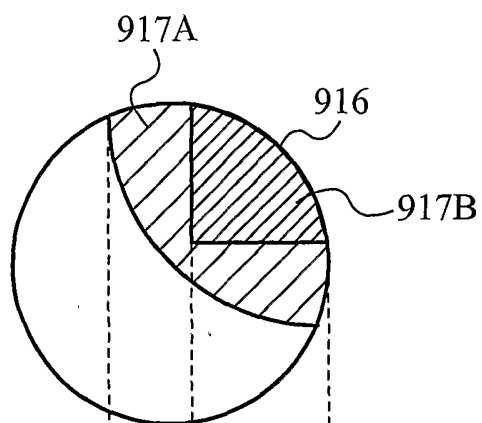


Fig. 7

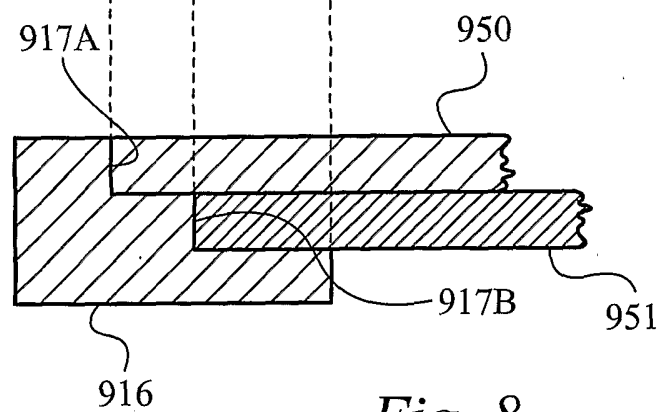
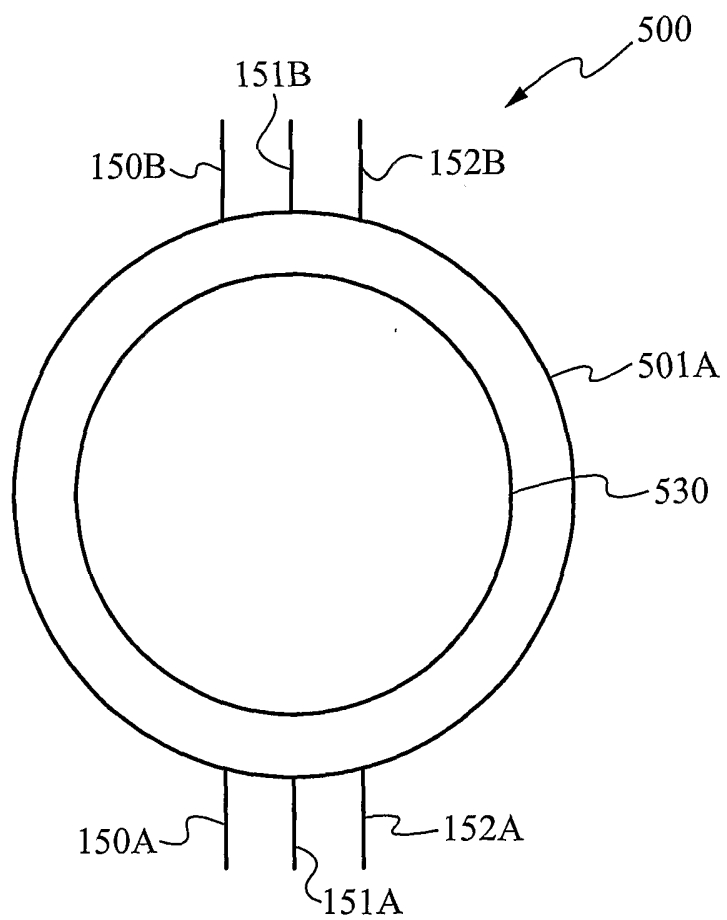
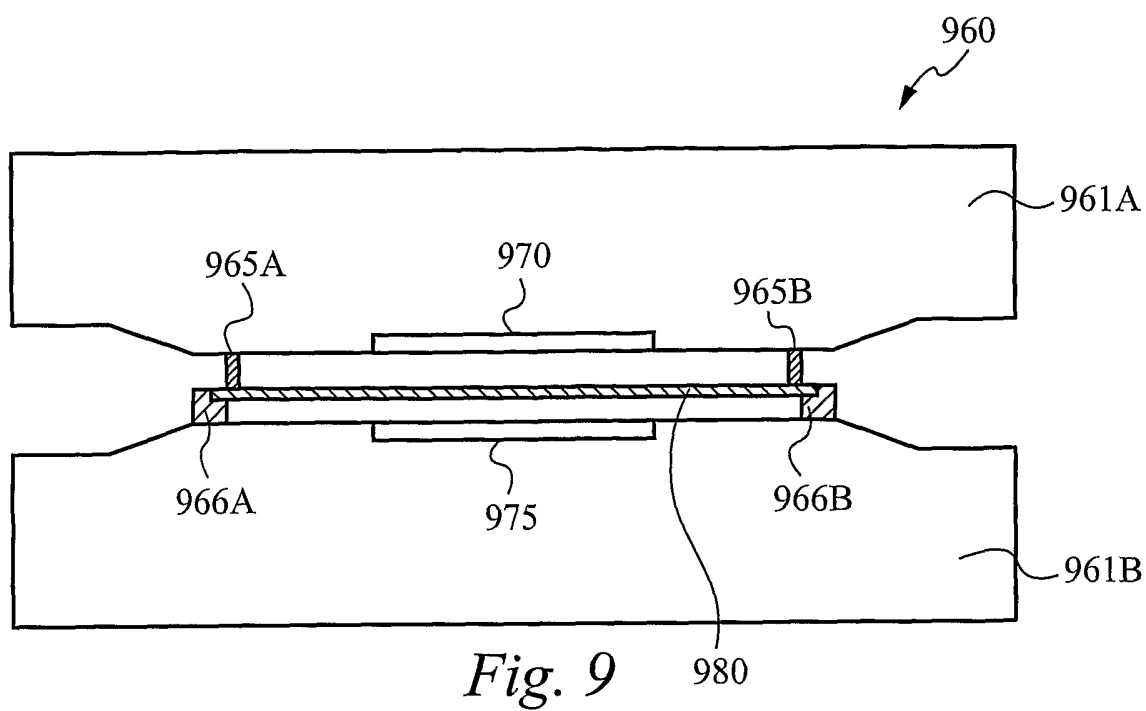
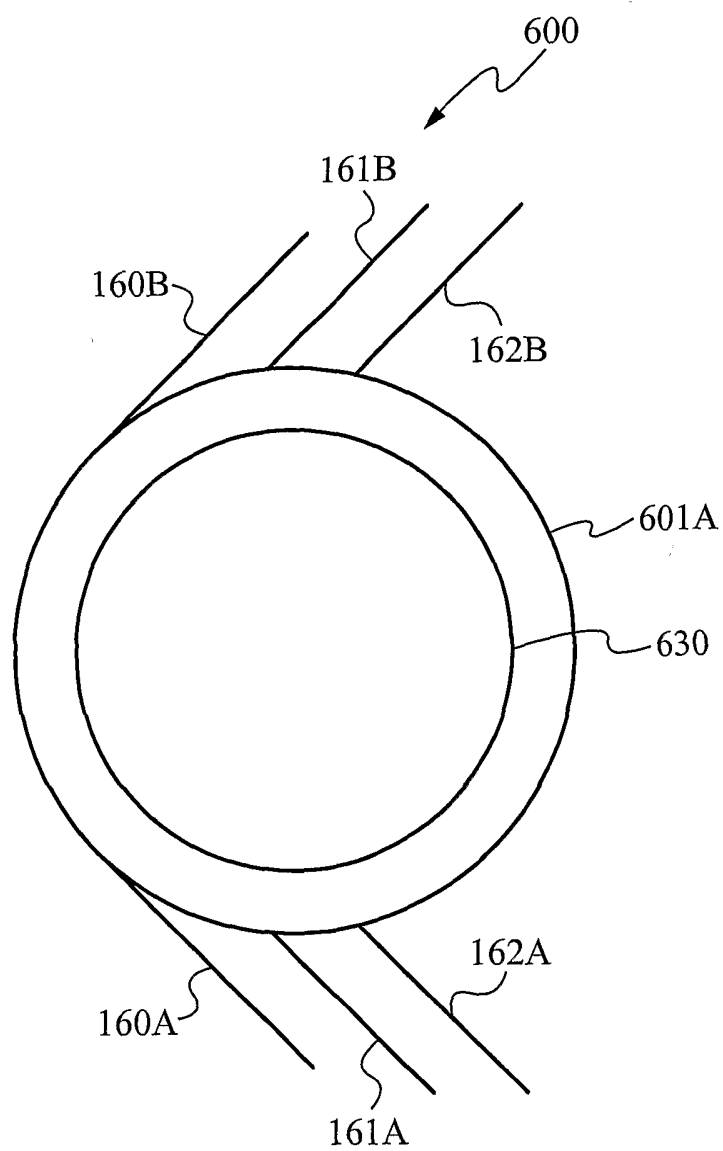


Fig. 8

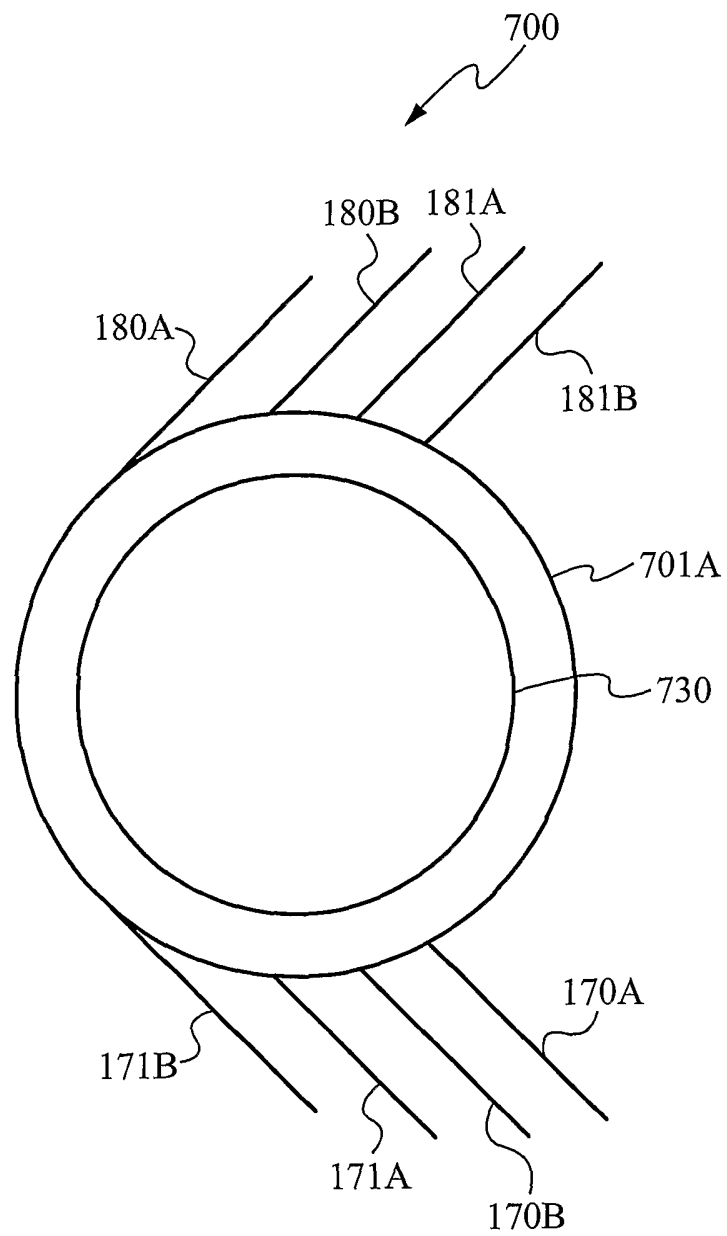
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*Fig. 11*

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*Fig. 12*

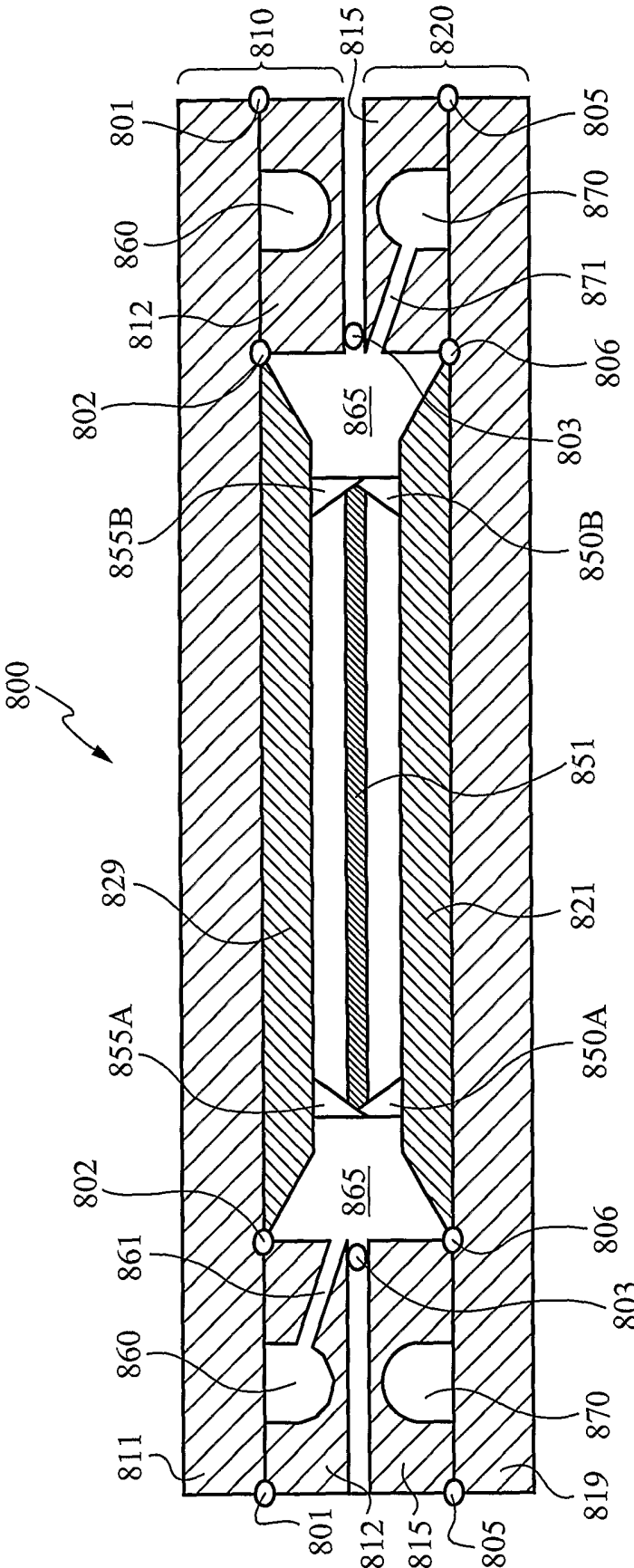


Fig. 13

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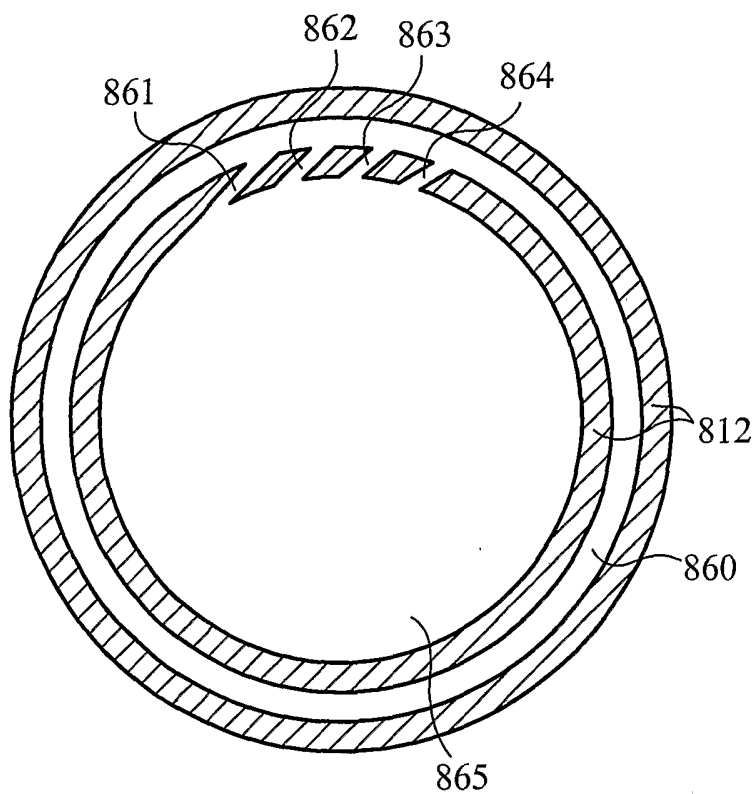


Fig. 14

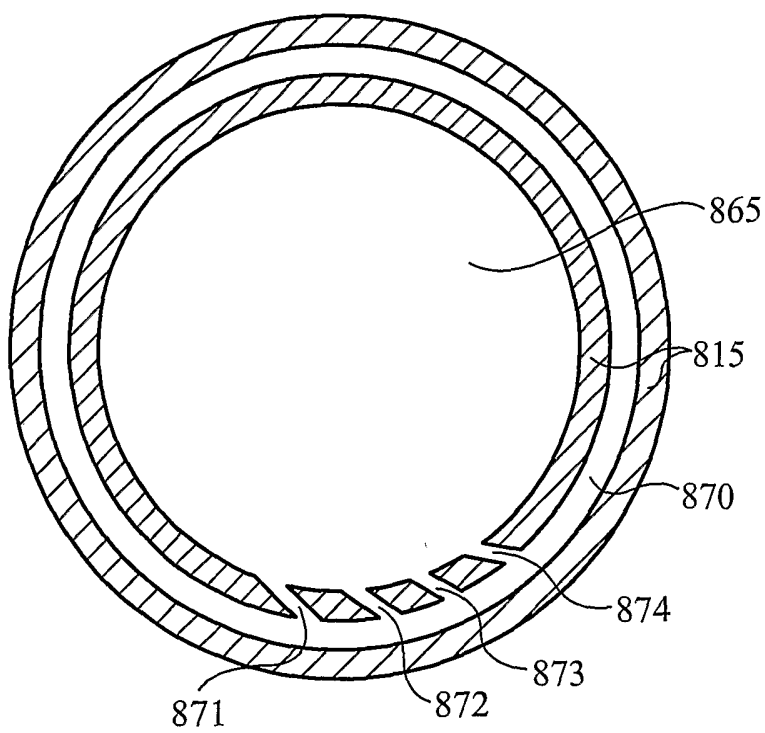


Fig. 15