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(54) Title: EXCIMER LASER WITH ELECTRON EMITTERS

(57) Abstract: An apparatus, system, and method for an excimer laser having lasing gas and electron emitters emitting electrons upon the application of an emitting voltage is described herein.



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EXCIMER LASER WITH ELECTRON EMITTERS

Field

[0001] Embodiments of the present invention in general relate to the field of excimer laser design. More specifically, embodiments of the present invention
5 relate to incorporating spatially patterned electron emitters in excimer lasers.

Background

[0002] Excimer lasers have become the lasers of choice for many applications in the ultraviolet spectral region today. Excimer lasers generate ultraviolet lights by subjecting a mixture of noble and halogen gases to high-
10 voltage electrical discharges. Under such conditions, the noble and halogen gases react to form unstable noble-gas halide dimers, which quickly disassociate to release ultraviolet lights.

[0003] Even though excimer lasers are quite useful, there are a few operational drawbacks associated with prior art designs. Some of these
15 drawbacks result from the frequent high-voltage electrical discharges used in excimer lasers. These discharges tend to create sputtering of metal electrodes used in the lasers, with the sputtered materials being deposited inside the chamber impacting operation of the laser components. Furthermore, the sputtered material may react with halogen gases in the lasers to form metal
20 halides, which removes one of the components of the lasing reaction and degrades the intensity of the light produced. Also, complex and expensive electrical components are required to generate and regulate these high-frequency high-voltage electrical discharges. Another drawback of these prior art lasers is that during operation negatively charged halogen gases may react with Silicon
25 Oxide (SiO_2) contained in the optical lenses of the lasers. These reactions may degrade the transparency of the lenses, thereby leading to a costly refurbishing process.

Brief Description of Drawings

[0004] Embodiments of the invention are illustrated by way of example and not by way of limitation in the figures of the accompanying drawings, in which the like references indicate similar elements and in which:

5 [0005] **Figure 1** is a block diagram of an excimer laser system according to one embodiment;

[0006] **Figure 2** illustrates a cross-sectional view of an excimer chamber utilizing an electron-emitting cathode plane according to one embodiment;

10 [0007] **Figure 3** illustrates a top view of the electron-emitting cathode plane of **Figure 2** according to one embodiment;

[0008] **Figure 4** illustrates a cross-sectional view of an excimer chamber utilizing a buried gate according to one embodiment;

[0009] **Figure 5** illustrates a cross-sectional view of an excimer chamber utilizing remote gates according to one embodiment;

15 [0010] **Figure 6** illustrates a cross-sectional view of an excimer chamber utilizing surface conduction emitters, according to one embodiment;

[0011] **Figure 7** illustrates a cross-sectional view of an excimer laser lens, according to one embodiment; and

20 [0012] **Figure 8** is a flow diagram showing a method of operating an excimer laser, according to one embodiment.

Detailed Description

[0013] Various aspects of the illustrative embodiments will be described using terms commonly employed by those skilled in the art to convey the substance of their work to others skilled in the art. However, it will be apparent to
25 those skilled in the art that alternate embodiments may be practiced with only some of the described aspects. For purposes of explanation, specific numbers, materials, and configurations are set forth in order to provide a thorough understanding of the illustrative embodiments. However, it will be apparent to one skilled in the art that alternate embodiments may be practiced without the specific

details. In other instances, well-known features are omitted or simplified in order not to obscure the illustrative embodiments. The terms “comprising,” “having,” and “including” are synonymous, unless the context dictates otherwise.

[0014] **Figure 1** is a functional block diagram of an excimer laser system **11**, according to one embodiment of the present invention. As illustrated for the embodiment, the system **11** may include, but is not limited to, a power supply **12**, a controller **14**, a power control module **16**, and a lasing chamber **18**.

[0015] The power supply **12** may receive and regulate external power provided to the system **11**. The power supply **12** may include, but is not limited to, power filters, surge suppressors, power regulators and monitors, backup power sources, and other components in order to condition the received external power. For delivering regulated power, the power supply **12** may be electrically coupled to the power control module **16** via an electrical connection **22**.

[0016] The power control module **16** may receive regulated power from the power supply **12** and perform high-voltage generation and switching for the chamber **18**. In one embodiment, the power control module **16** may convert the received power to high-voltage and/or low-voltage charges capable of discharging at a number of frequencies. To achieve such a conversion, the power control module **16** may include, but is not limited to, capacitors, voltage regulators, and high-voltage switches. In one embodiment, the power control module **16** may convert the received power to high-voltage direct current charges by utilizing, for example, insulated gate bipolar transistors, voltage regulators, and power filters. For delivering the generated charges, the power control module **16** may be electrically connected to the chamber **18** at connectors **32** and **34** via an electrical connection **26**. The power control module **16** may be capable of delivering charges between a first electrode **36** and a second electrode **38**, as well as between components of the second electrode **38**.

[0017] Both the power supply **12** and the power control module **16** may be monitored and controlled by the controller **14** via control connections **20** and **24**. The controller **14** may receive signals from, or deliver commands to, the power supply **12** and power control module **16** via connections **20** and **24** to monitor or regulate various operational parameters of these components. The controller **14**

may be any digital or analog logic controller containing logic programming such as, but not limited to, a system logic controller (SLC), a program logic controller (PLC), a distributed control system (DCS), an embedded controller, a personal computer, or a microcomputer. In addition, the controller **14** may be integrated
5 with either the power supply **12** or the power control module **16**.

[0018] The chamber **18** may be used to apply electrical charges generated by the power control module **16** to produce ultraviolet (UV) light. The chamber **18** may be a hermetically sealed container with a lasing gas **40** disposed therein. In the described embodiment, the chamber **18** may include, but is not limited to, the
10 first electrode **36**, the second electrode **38** containing a plurality of electron emitters, the lasing gas **40** disposed between the first electrode **36** and the second electrode **38**, a reflective surface **28**, and a lens **30**.

[0019] In various embodiments, the lasing gas **40** may include a noble gas or a noble gas halide. Examples of the lasing gas **40** could include, but are not
15 limited to, Xenon (Xe), a mixture of Xe and F, a mixture of Xe and Chlorine (Cl), a mixture of Xe and Bromine (Br), a mixture of Xe and Iodine (I), a mixture of Krypton (Kr) and F, a mixture of Kr and Cl, or a mixture of Argon (Ar) and F in appropriate concentrations.

[0020] The first electrode **36** may include a metal electrode spaced apart
20 from the second electrode **38**. The second electrode **38** may include a plurality of spatially patterned electron emitters such as field-effect electron emitters, thermal-effect electron emitters, or a combination of both. As will be described in more detail, the plurality of electron emitters found in the second electrode **38** may facilitate the lasing operations of the system **11** being done with less energy,
25 which in turn may result in an improvement in the overall performance of the system **11**.

[0021] In addition, the system **11** may also include other components (not shown) including, but not limited to, a wavelength measurement/calibration unit and line-narrowing modules to monitor and regulate generated UV light. Such
30 optical components may be integrated with, or detachable from, the system **11**.

[0022] Operation of the system **11** will be discussed with reference to a chamber design of an embodiment of the present invention illustrated in **Figure 2**. In this embodiment, the first electrode **36** may contain an insulating layer **54** and an anode **52** deposited or printed on the insulating layer **54**. In various
5 embodiments, the insulating layer **54** may be, but is not limited to, soda-lime glass, ceramic, or plastic. The insulating layer **54** does not need to be continuous, as shown, as the anode **52** may also be self-supporting. In various embodiments, the anode **52** may be constructed from any conductive material with a relatively high vapor pressure such as, but not limited to, Aluminum (Al), Indium Tin Oxide
10 (ITO), Molybdenum (Mo), Titanium (Ti), Tungsten (W), and any combination or alloy thereof.

[0023] In one embodiment, the second electrode **38** may include a substrate **58**, a cathode **56**, a gate insulator **60**, a gate **62**, and spatially patterned electron emitters **64** disposed relative to each other as shown. The substrate **58**
15 may be an insulator constructed from materials such as, but not limited to, a Silicon (Si) wafer, soda-lime glass, ceramic, or plastic and any combinations thereof. The cathode **56** may be a layer deposited or printed on the substrate **58** and may be constructed from any conductive material with a relatively high vapor pressure such as, but not limited to, Al, ITO, Ni, Mo, Ti, W, Si, and any
20 combination or alloy thereof.

[0024] In one embodiment, a resistor (not shown) may be deposited or printed on the cathode **56** to facilitate even electron emission. The resistor may be constructed from a material with even resistance distribution such as, but not limited to, Chromium Silica (CrSi), Silicon Carbide (SiC), doped Si, amorphous Si,
25 and any combination thereof.

[0025] The gate insulator **60** and the gate **62** may be coupled to the cathode **56** by first depositing the layer of selected materials on the cathode **56** and selectively etching or micromachining the deposited materials to define cavities. The gate insulator **60** may be constructed from any material with a high
30 dielectric constant, for example, Silicon Oxide (SiO) or Aluminum Oxide (AlO). The gate **62** may be constructed from a conductive material such as, but not limited to, Al, ITO, Ni, Mo, Ti, W, Pt, and any combination thereof.

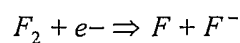
[0026] The electron emitters **64** may be spatially patterned and mounted in each of the cavities and be in electrical communication with the cathode **56**. In this embodiment, the electron emitters **64** may be a plurality of field-effect microtip emitters **64**, each terminating in a pointed tip that is separated from the gate **62** by a spacing **57**. Although only three field-effect microtip emitters **64** are shown in **Figure 2**, other embodiments may use any number of emitters. In one embodiment, the microtip emitters **64** may be mounted in each of the cavities by depositing selected material in a grazing incidence. Other embodiments may include other processes for forming the microtip emitters **64** including, e.g., evaporating emitter material above the cavity for accumulation in the cavity or etching the emitters **64** from bulk material.

[0027] In various embodiments the microtip emitters **64** may be metallic cones constructed from a material such as, but not limited to, Mo, Si, W, Hafnium (Hf), Si, and any combination thereof. These microtip emitters **64** may also be coated to enhance electron extraction. Examples of coating materials may include, but are not limited to, Zirconium Carbide (ZrC), Hafnium Carbide (HfC), Diamond, Silicon Dioxide (SiO₂), amorphous Carbon (C), Sulfur (S) doped Boron Nitride (BN), porous Si, and any combination thereof.

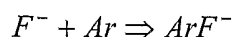
[0028] In operation, a relatively low emitting voltage (e.g., around 10V) may be applied between the microtip emitters **64** (via the cathode **56**) and the gate **62** to create an electrical field. Activated by this electrical field, the microtip emitters **64** may emit electrons into the chamber. The emitting voltage and resulting electron emission may depend on, among other things, the spacing **57** between the microtip emitters **64** and the gate **62**, the sharpness of the gate **62**, and the position of the microtip emitters **64** in the gate hole.

[0029] The emission of electrons into the chamber may allow a lower initiation voltage required to cause the electrons to travel between the microtip emitters **64** and the anode **52**. Or, said another way, electron emission from the emitters **64** may reduce the energy required to cause the electrons to jump the gap from the emitters **64** to the anode **52**. The application of the initiation voltage and the resulting flow of electrons from the tips **62** to the anode **52** may ionize components of the lasing gas **40**. For example, in an embodiment having a

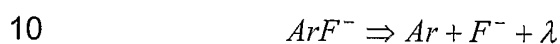
mixture of Ar and F as the lasing gas **40**, the ionization of the Fluorine may be represented by the following equation:



[0030] The Fluorine ions may then associate with the noble gas component
5 of the lasing gas **40**, e.g., Ar, forming an excited dimer reaction as follows:



[0031] The formed dimer complex may have a very short life-span (e.g., less than 5 nanoseconds) and may quickly disassociate to release UV light (λ) as follows:



[0032] The released UV light may then be collected and transmitted through the lens **30**.

[0033] Once the electron flow has been initiated between the microtip emitters **64** and the anode **52**, a lasing voltage, which may be less than the
15 initiation voltage, may be applied between the microtip emitters **64** and the anode **52** to sustain the lasing reaction of the gas **40**. The lasing voltage may determine the acceleration of electrons from the emitters **64** to the anode **52**, and therefore the intensity of the emitted light. Continued lasing may be facilitated by controlling the emitting voltage in a desired way. For example, a decreased lasing voltage,
20 and associated intensity, may be compensated for by increasing the frequency of the emitting voltage. A decrease in the intensity of the light beam may, among other things, lower the heat absorbed by the lenses, which may, in turn result in less lens distortion to allow for greater resolution.

[0034] In one embodiment the relatively low emitting voltage between the
25 gate **62** and the microtip emitters **64** may allow for a direct current application to trigger continuous electron emission throughout operation. In another embodiment, the emitting voltage may be pulsed to generate periodic electron emission throughout operation, which could allow for a wider range of operating frequencies that what is currently available.

[0035] The low voltage, low current requirements of this embodiment may enable the use of electronic devices, e.g., the power control module **16**, capable of higher frequencies than the high voltage, high current requirements of current excimer laser systems. Additionally, the control electronics used may also allow
5 for quicker power-up times of the system **11**.

[0036] In one embodiment, a reduction in the voltage between the electrodes **36** and **38** may also decrease the amount of metal sputtered by the conductors. The amount of metal sputtered may be related to a square of the voltage between the electrodes **36** and **38**. Therefore, reducing the voltage by
10 half could result in a quarter of the amount of metal sputtered. A reduction in sputtered metal may reduce the redeposition of the metal inside the chamber, which could unnecessarily compromise the performance of the overall system **11**. In current excimer laser systems, the redeposition of sputtered metal on the lens, mechanical surface, and insulators have led to deteriorated transmission
15 properties, mechanical movements, and insulation, respectively. This reduction in sputtered material may further reduce its reaction with halides. This, in turn, could reduce the metal halide formation that reduces one of the reactive species and effects the intensity of the laser.

[0037] The spatial pattern of the microtip emitters **64** may be adapted to
20 concentrate the electron cloud and lasing reaction in the area where it has the greatest benefit in terms of lasing intensity or uniformity. For example, one embodiment may have a higher density of the emitters **64** in the center of the chamber to provide for a greater collection and transmission of UV light. Additionally, in various embodiments the array of microtip emitters **64** may be
25 individually activated, activated by section, or activated all at once. The emitting activation patterns may be adjusted to adapt to the objectives of a particular embodiment.

[0038] **Figure 3** shows a top view of the second electrode **38**, in accordance with one embodiment. As illustrated, the second electrode **38** may
30 contain an array of cavities formed by the gate **62** and a portion of the cathode **56**. In the described embodiment, a 3x3 array of cavities is used for illustration; however, other embodiments may use arrays of other sizes as well as other

patterns. As illustrated, within each cavity, one microtip emitter **64** may be mounted. The cavities may be evenly spaced to facilitate even electron emission by the microtip emitters **64**, but are not so limited. In another embodiment, spacing may be adjusted in-line with the direction of lasing or in any pattern to
5 facilitate the lasing operation.

[0039] **Figure 4** shows a cross-sectional view of a first electrode **36** and a second electrode **71**, in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention. In this embodiment, the second electrode **71**, which may be interchangeable with the second electrode **38** described above, may include a
10 layer of insulator **60** deposited or printed upon the gate **62**. Spaced cathodes **56** may be coupled to the insulator **60** by first depositing a layer of selected materials and then selectively etching the deposited materials. Electron emitters such as, e.g., carbon nanotube emitters **72**, may be spatially patterned and stacked on each spaced cathode **56** by depositing selected materials in a grazing incidence.
15 In the described embodiment, four carbon nanotube emitters **72** are illustrated, though any number of carbon nanotube emitters may be used.

[0040] In operation, when an emitting voltage is applied between the cathodes **56** and the gate **62**, the nanotube emitters **72** may emit electrons into the chamber. The remaining lasing operation may then take place in a manner
20 similar to the one described above, with reference to **Figure 1**.

[0041] **Figure 5** shows a cross-sectional view of a first electrode **73** and a second electrode **74**, in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention. In this embodiment, the second electrode **74** may include spaced cathodes **56** deposited on the substrate **58** by selectively etching or
25 micromachining a first deposited cathode layer. The cathodes **56** may be spaced to facilitate desired electron emission. Electron emitters may be spatially patterned and mounted on the cathodes **56**. Suitable electron emitters include, but are not limited to, carbon nanotube emitters **72**.

[0042] In one embodiment, the first electrode **73** may include a plurality of gates **62** coupled to the anode **52** via a plurality of spacers **76**. Spacers **76** may be constructed from any electrically non-conducting material such as, but not
30 limited to, glass, plastic, ceramic, Si, and any combination thereof. Each gate **62**

may be offset from each spaced cathode **56** and nanotube emitter **72**. Upon application of an emitting voltage between cathodes **56** and gates **62**, nanotube emitters **72** may emit electrons into the chamber. The remaining lasing operation may then take place in a manner similar to the one described above, with
5 reference to **Figure 1**.

[0043] **Figure 6** shows a cross-sectional view of a first electrode **36** and a second electrode **75**, in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention. In this embodiment, the second electrode **75**, which may be interchangeable with electrode **38**, may include spaced gates **62** deposited on the
10 substrate **58** by selectively etching or micromachining a first deposited cathode layer. Then, electron emitters, such as, but not limited to, flat ultrafine particle film emitters **78** of Palladium Oxide (PdO), for example, may be deposited in between the gates **62**.

[0044] In operation, when a voltage is applied between the gates **62** the
15 particle film emitters **78** may emit electrons into the chamber. The remaining lasing operation may then take place in a manner similar to the one described above, with reference to **Figure 1**.

[0045] Although the embodiments illustrated above utilize field-effect electron emitters, thermal-effect electron emitters may be equally suitable.
20 Examples of thermal-effect electron emitters include, but are not limited to, Zirconium Oxide (ZrO)/W thermal field emitters.

[0046] **Figure 7** shows a cross-sectional view of a lens **101**, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. As illustrated, the lens **101** may include, but is not limited to, a transparent element **102**, an optical coating **108**, a
25 protective coating **106**, and a support **104**. The lens **101** may be suitably interchanged with lens **28** described in reference to earlier embodiments.

[0047] In the present embodiment, the transparent element **102** may be constructed from any material that transmits UV light, such as, but not limited to, a crown glass and a flint glass. The transparent element **102** may be reinforced by
30 the support **104** constructed from a rigid material such as, but not limited to, metal, plastic, ceramic, and any combination thereof. The lens **101** may also include the

optical coating **108** for optical conditioning such as, but not limited to, providing desired antireflection, polarization, reflection and/or focal properties. The optical coating **108** may be provided as a thin or thick film of organic or inorganic materials.

5 **[0048]** In one embodiment, the lasing gas facing (or inside) surface of the transparent element **102** may be coated with the protective coating **106** having an optical density corresponding to desired transmittance rates of the lens **101**. The protective coating **106** may be adapted to prevent reactions between the transparent element **102** and components of the lasing gas **40** (e.g., halogen
10 ions). For example, in one embodiment, F^- may react with a transparent element constructed of Silicon Dioxide (SiO_2). In this, and similar embodiments, the protective coating **106** may contain a perfluorinated material such as, but not limited to, Teflon, Calcium Fluoride (CaF_2), Magnesium Fluoride (MgF_2), and any combination thereof. The perfluorinated protective coating **106** may inhibit the F^-
15 from reacting with the transparent element **102** due to the fluorine saturation of the protective coating **106**.

[0049] The perfluorinated protective coating **106** may be deposited onto the transparent element **102** along with a copolymer, e.g., polyethylene or any similar straight chain carbon compound with a low ultraviolet (UV) absorption. A
20 protective coating/copolymer composition may, upon application, naturally phase separate to present the lower surface tension material (e.g., the protective coating) to the outer surface, allowing the copolymer to attach to the transparent element **102**. In another embodiment, the protective coating **106** may be grafted onto a polyalkaline with a similar result.

25 **[0050]** In another embodiment, the protective coating **106** may contain a metal such as, but not limited to, Mo, Ni, Al, and any combination thereof. A metal protective coating may be deposited onto the transparent element **102** as a translucent thin film. In operation, before lasing reaction is started, the metal protective coating may be negatively charged such that negatively charged ions of
30 the lasing gas **40** may be repelled from transparent element **102**.

[0051] In yet another embodiment, the protective coating **106** may contain a sacrificial material that may react with ions from the lasing gas **40**. Examples of

such a sacrificial material include, but are not limited to, polyethylene and polypropylene. During use, in an embodiment having negatively charged halogen ions, those ions may react with the sacrificial protective coating thereby protecting the underlying lens. For example, in one embodiment the sacrificial material may
5 include an oxidizer that is adapted to oxidize fluoride ions of the lasing gas to release F_2 .

[0052] The above-disclosed embodiments of the lens **101** may also be combined in use. For example, the protective coating **106** may contain a layer of perfluorinated material and an additional metal layer, or a layer of perfluorinated
10 material and a layer of sacrificial material. Optionally, the protective coating **106** may also contain optical conditioning layers as well. Such optical conditioning layers may be placed between the transparent element **102** and the protective layers of the protective coating **106**.

[0053] **Figure 8** is a flow diagram **110** showing a method of operating an
15 excimer laser, in accordance with a further embodiment. The method of operation of this embodiment may be done with components similar to like components referenced in the above embodiments. As an initial optional operation, the lens with a metal protective coating may be negatively charged to protect the transparent element from degradation **122**. If the protective coating only includes
20 perfluorinated or sacrificial material, this operation may be skipped.

[0054] Electron emitters may then be activated to emit electrons into the lasing gas **124**. In one embodiment, activating electron emitters may involve applying a predetermined emitting voltage between the appropriate conductors to induce field-effect or thermal-effect electron emission. Controlling an individual
25 electron emitter or a group of electron emitters by section may facilitate desired emission.

[0055] After sufficient time is given, an initiation voltage may be applied between the cathode and the anode to start a lasing reaction **126**. After electron flow from the cathode to the ion is established, a lasing voltage may be applied
30 between the cathode and the anode **128**.

[0056] After the lasing reaction occurs, a selection may be performed **130**. If such a lasing reaction is no longer needed, for example, a user command to shut down the system is received and the process ends; otherwise, the process may revert back to block **124**.

5 **[0057]** Although specific embodiments have been illustrated and described herein, it will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art that a wide variety of alternate and/or equivalent implementations may be substituted for the specific embodiments shown and described, without departing from the scope of the present invention. This application is intended to cover any adaptations or
10 variations of the embodiments discussed herein. Therefore, it is manifestly intended that this invention be limited only by the claims and the equivalents thereof.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. An apparatus, comprising:
 - a first electrode;
 - 5 a second electrode, spaced apart from the first electrode, including a plurality of electron emitters adapted to emit electrons upon application of an emitting voltage; and
 - a lasing gas disposed between the first electrode and the second electrode.
- 10 2. The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein the plurality of electron emitters comprise at least one electron emitter selected from a group consisting of a field-effect electron emitter and a thermal-effect electron emitter.
3. The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein the second electrode further comprises:
 - 15 a cathode;
 - an insulator coupled to the cathode;
 - a gate coupled to the insulator; and
 - the plurality of electron emitters electrically coupled to the cathode and adapted to emit electrons upon the application of the emitting voltage between the
 - 20 cathode and the gate.
4. The apparatus of Claim 3, further comprising:
 - a plurality of cavities defined, at least in part, by portions of the cathode, the insulator, and the gate; and
 - 25 the plurality of electron emitters being correspondingly disposed inside the plurality of cavities.
5. The apparatus of Claim 3, wherein a first of the plurality of electron emitters terminates in a tip.
- 30 6. The apparatus of Claim 3, further comprising:
 - a resistor coupling the insulator to the cathode;

a plurality of cavities defined, at least in part, by portions of the resistor, the insulator, and the gate; and

the plurality of electron emitters being correspondingly disposed inside the plurality of cavities.

5

7. The apparatus of Claim 6, wherein the resistor is constructed with at least a material selected from a group consisting of Chromium Silica, Silicon Carbide, and doped Silicon.

10 8. The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein a first of the plurality of electron emitters comprise electron emitters formed with at least a material selected from a group consisting of Molybdenum, Silicon, and Tungsten.

15 9. The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein the second electrode further comprises:
a gate;
an insulator coupled to the gate;
a plurality of cathodes coupled to the insulator; and
the plurality of electron emitters correspondingly coupled to the plurality of cathodes and adapted to emit electrons upon application of the emitting voltage
20 between the gate and the plurality of cathodes.

10. The apparatus of Claim 9, wherein a first of the plurality of electron emitters comprise electron emitters formed with carbon nanotubes.

25 11. The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein the first electrode comprises:
an anode;
an insulating spacer coupled to the anode; and
a gate coupled to the insulating insulator.

30 12. The apparatus of claim 11, wherein the second electrode further comprises:
a plurality of spaced cathodes; and

the plurality of electron emitters correspondingly coupled to the plurality of spaced cathodes; and

at least one of the plurality of electron emitters adapted to emit electrons upon application of the emitting voltage between the corresponding spaced
5 cathode and the gate.

13. The apparatus of Claim 12, wherein a first of the plurality of electron emitters comprise electron emitters formed with carbon nanotubes.

10 14. The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein the second electrode further comprises:
a substrate;
a cathode coupled to the substrate; and
a first of the plurality of electron emitters coupled to the substrate adjacent
to the cathode.

15

15. The apparatus of Claim 14, wherein the first electron emitter comprises a particle film of Palladium Oxide.

16. The apparatus of Claim 1, further comprising:
20 a chamber hermetically enclosing the first electrode, the second electrode,
and the lasing gas.

17. The apparatus of Claim 16, further comprising:
an optical lens mounted at an end of the chamber, including a transparent
25 element having a surface and a first coating coupled to the surface and adapted to
protect the transparent element from the lasing gas.

18. The apparatus of Claim 17, wherein the optical lens further comprises:
a second coating coupled to the transparent element and adapted to
30 provide the lens with a predetermined optical conditioning property.

19. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the lasing gas is adapted to provide a lasing reaction in the presence of a current flow between the plurality of emitters and the first electrode.

5 20. A system, comprising:
a chamber hermetically enclosing
a first electrode;
a second electrode, spaced apart from the first electrode, including a
plurality of electron emitters adapted to emit electrons upon application of
10 an emitting voltage; and
a lasing gas disposed between the first electrode and the second
electrode; and
a power control module electrically coupled to the chamber and adapted to
provide power to the chamber.

15

21. The system of Claim 20, wherein the plurality of electron emitters comprise at least one electron emitter selected from a group consisting of a thermal-effect electron emitter and a field-effect electron emitter.

20 22. The system of Claim 20, wherein the chamber further comprises:
an optical lens mounted at an end of the chamber including a transparent
element having a surface adjacent the lasing gas, and a first coating coupled to
the surface and adapted to protect the transparent element.

25 23. The system of Claim 22, wherein the first coating comprises a material
selected from a group consisting of a perfluorinated material and a metal.

24. The system of Claim 22, wherein the optical lens further comprises:
a second coating coupled to the transparent element and adapted to
30 provide the lens with a predetermined optical conditioning property.

25. A method comprising:

applying a first voltage between a gate and a first electron emitter of a first electrode;

emitting electrons from the first electron emitter into a lasing gas disposed between the first electrode and a second electrode; and

5 applying a second voltage, that is greater than the first voltage, between the first electron emitter and the second electrode to produce a lasing reaction with the lasing gas.

26. The method of Claim 25, further comprising:

10 electrically charging a conductive coating layer on a lens adjacent to the lasing gas such that ions of the lasing gas are repelled from the lens.

27. The method of Claim 25, wherein the applying of the second voltage further comprises applying a selected one of an alternating current voltage or a direct
15 current voltage.

28. The method of Claim 25, wherein the applying of the second voltage comprises applying a constant voltage between the first electron emitter and the second electrode, and the method further comprises:

20 modulating a current flow between the first electron emitter and the second electrode with the first voltage.

29. The method of claim 28, wherein the applying of the first voltage is performed using a selected one of a direct current and an alternating current.

25

30. An apparatus comprising:

 a lasing chamber having

 a first electrode; and

 a second electrode, spaced apart from the first electrode, including a
30 plurality of electron emitters adapted to emit electrons upon application of a first voltage; and

 an electrical connector, coupled to the lasing chamber, adapted to facilitate the application of the first voltage.

31. The apparatus of Claim 30, wherein the second electrode further comprises:

a cathode;

5 an insulator coupled to the cathode;

a gate coupled to the insulator; and

the plurality of electron emitters electrically coupled to the cathode and adapted to emit electrons upon the application of the emitting voltage between the cathode and the gate.

10

32. The apparatus of claim 31, wherein the first electrode comprises an anode and the electrical connector is further adapted to facilitate the application of a second voltage between at least one of the plurality of electron emitters and the anode.

15

33. The apparatus of claim 30, wherein the plurality of electron emitters comprise at least an electron emitter selected from the group consisting of a field-effect electron emitter and a thermal-effect electron emitter.

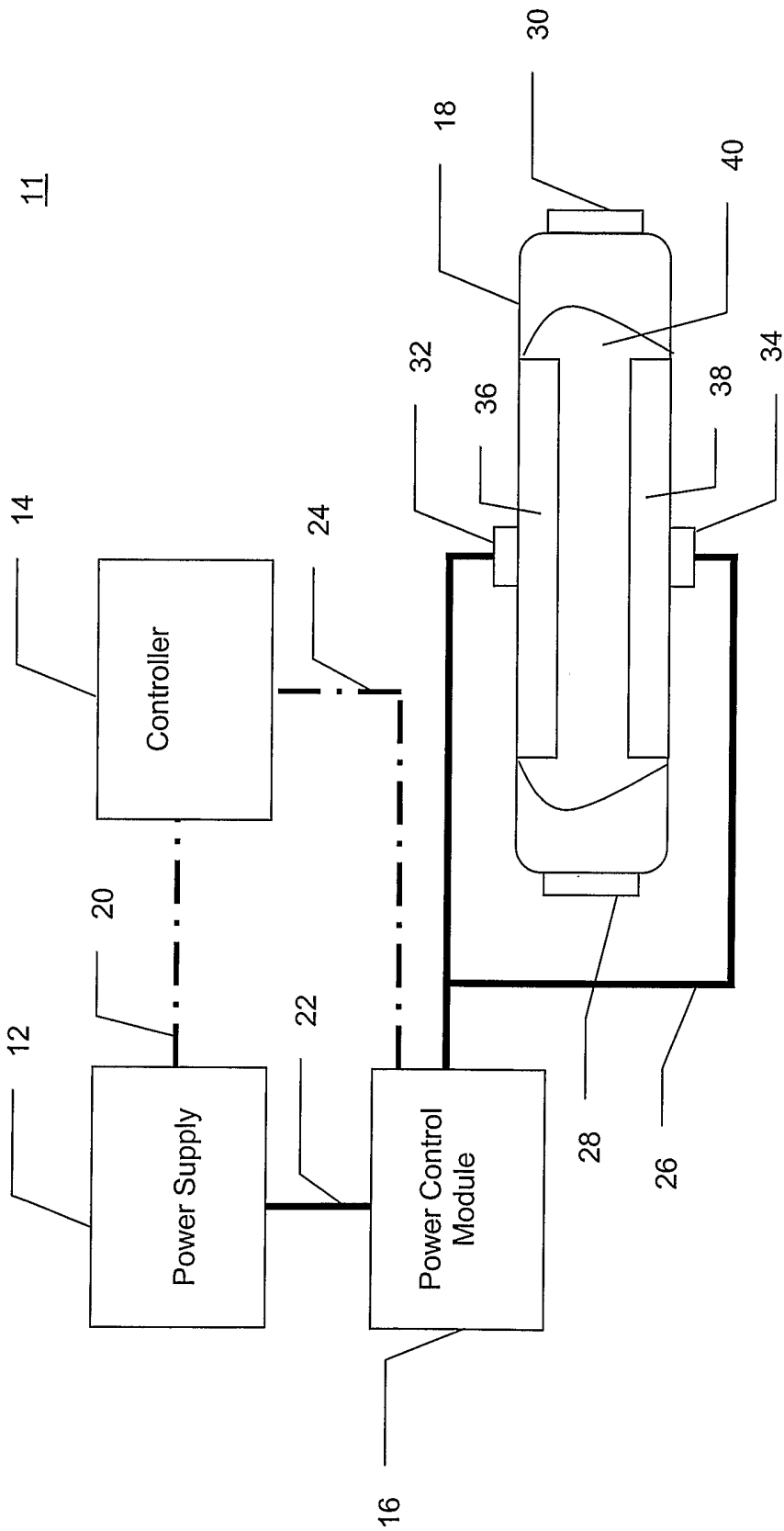


Figure 1

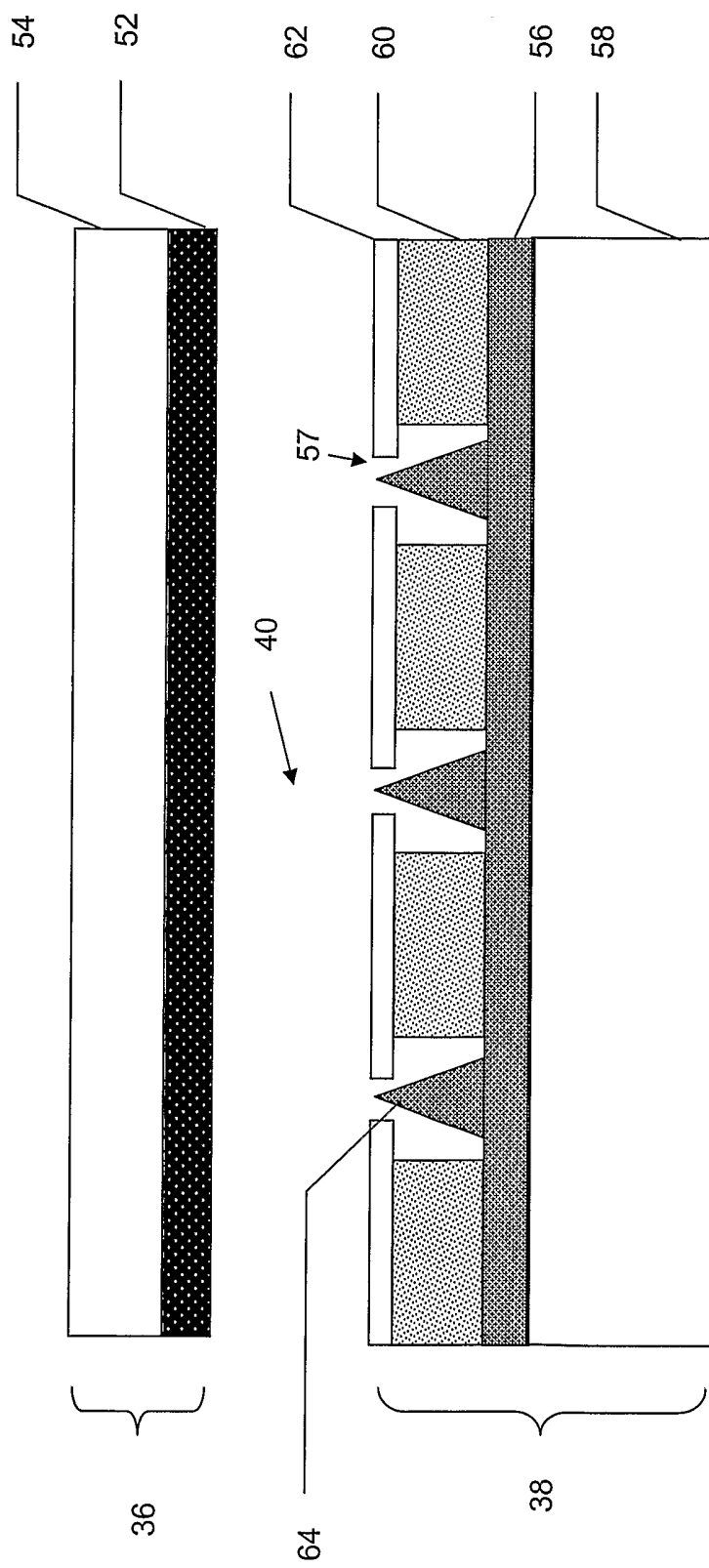


Figure 2

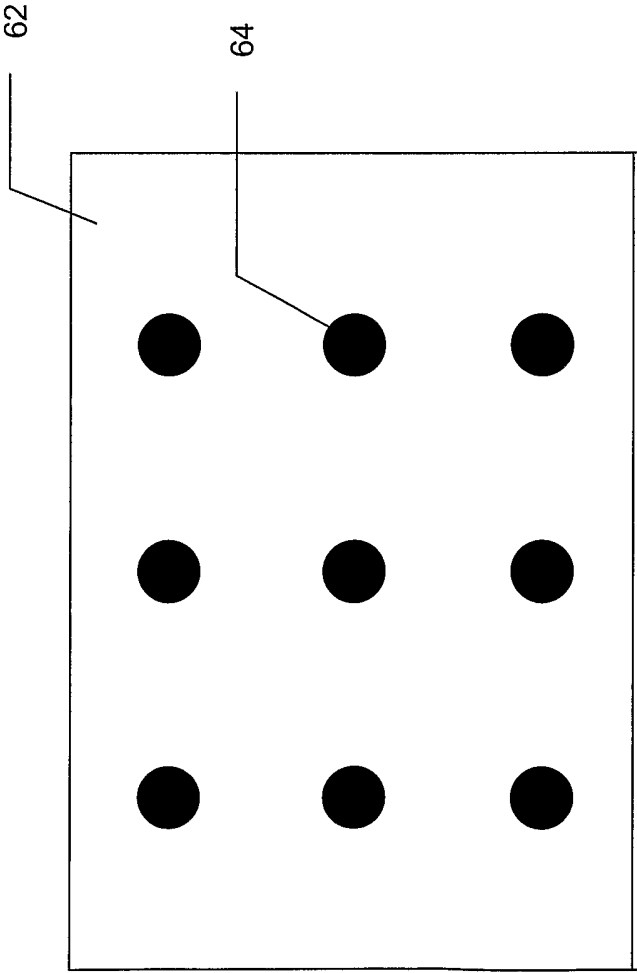


Figure 3

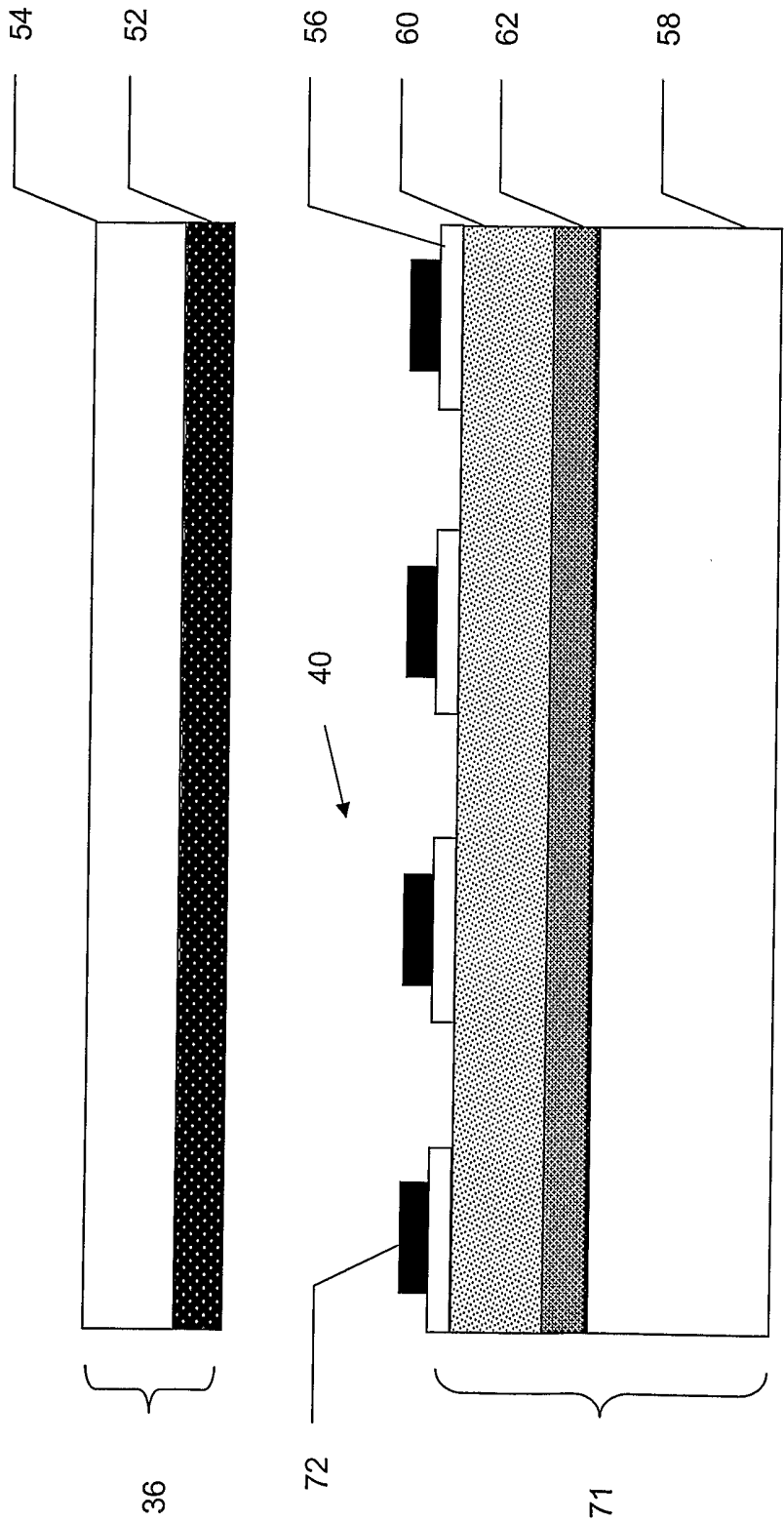


Figure 4

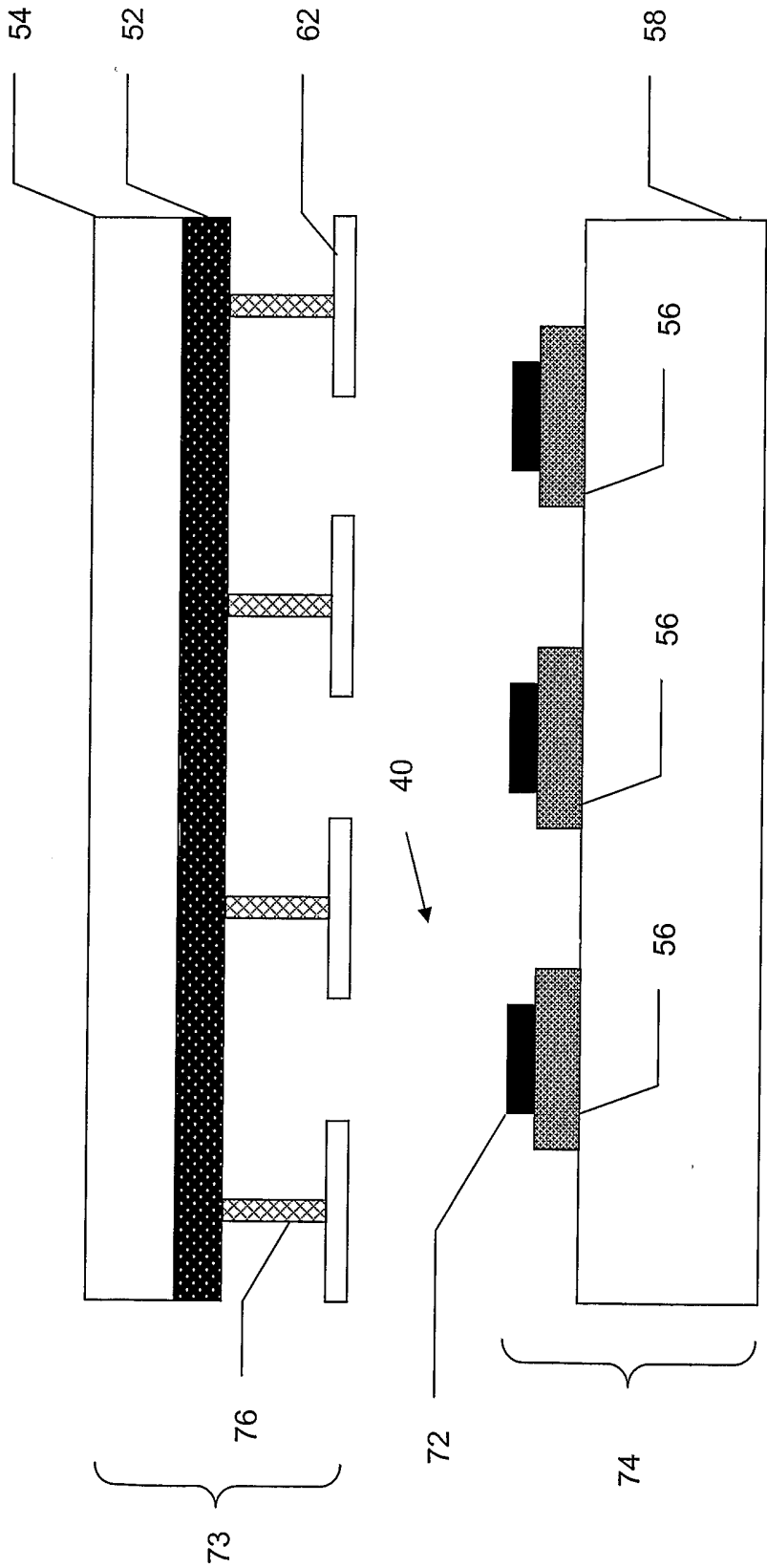


Figure 5

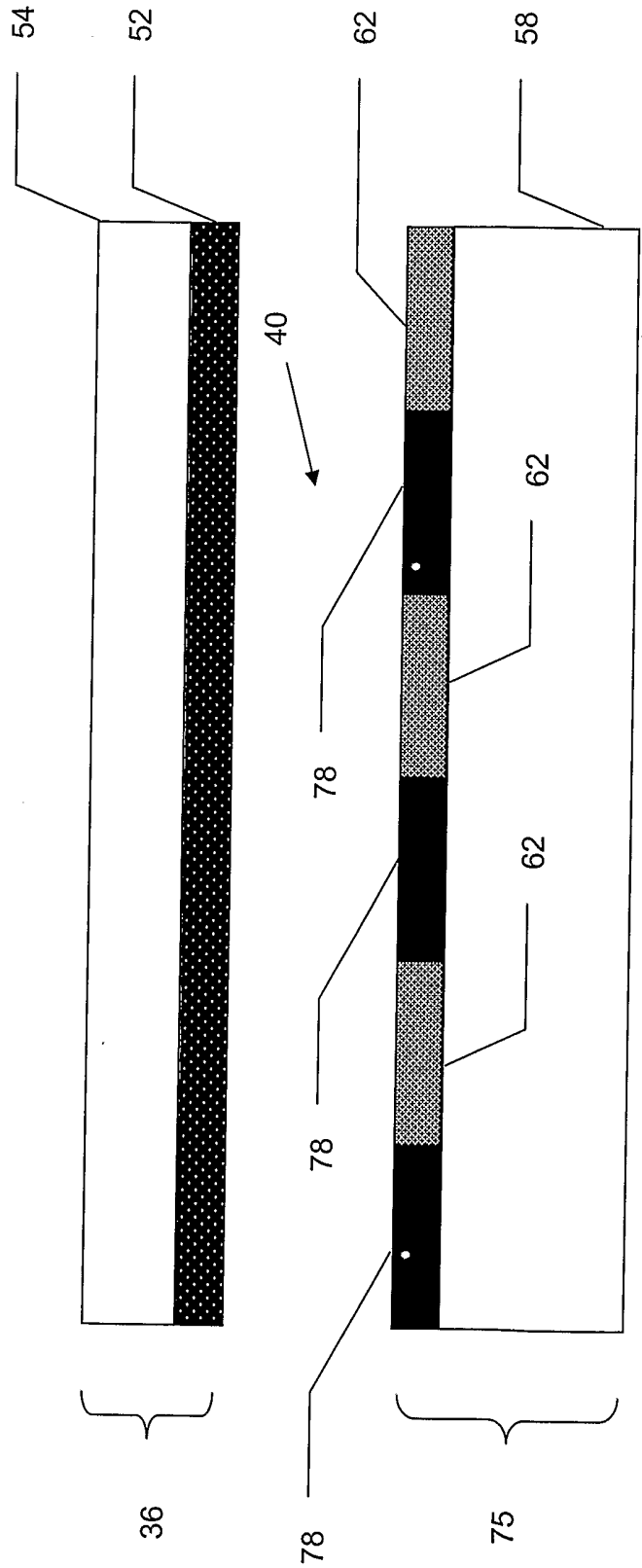


Figure 6

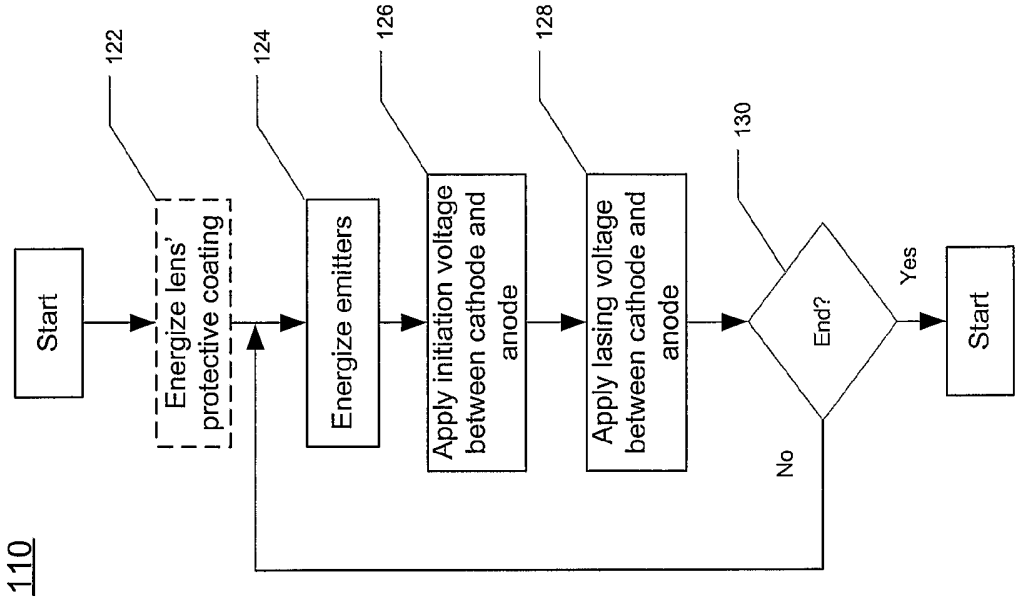


Figure 8

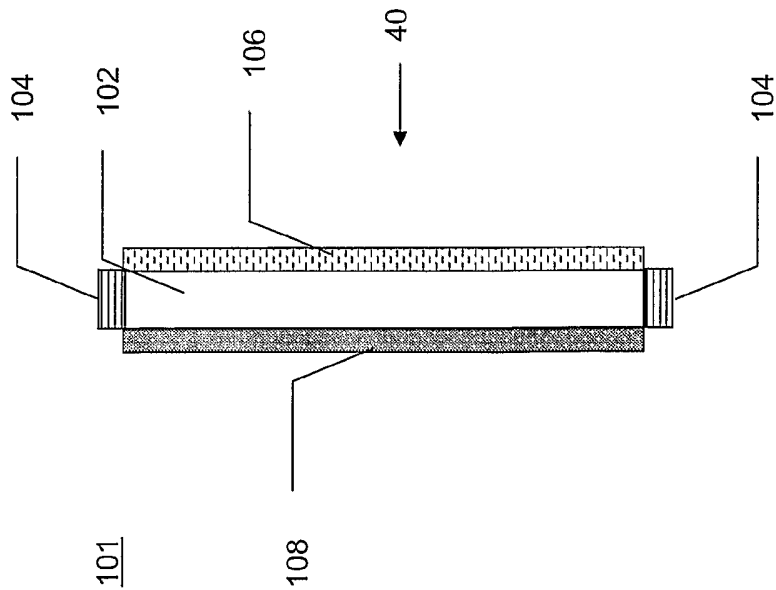


Figure 7