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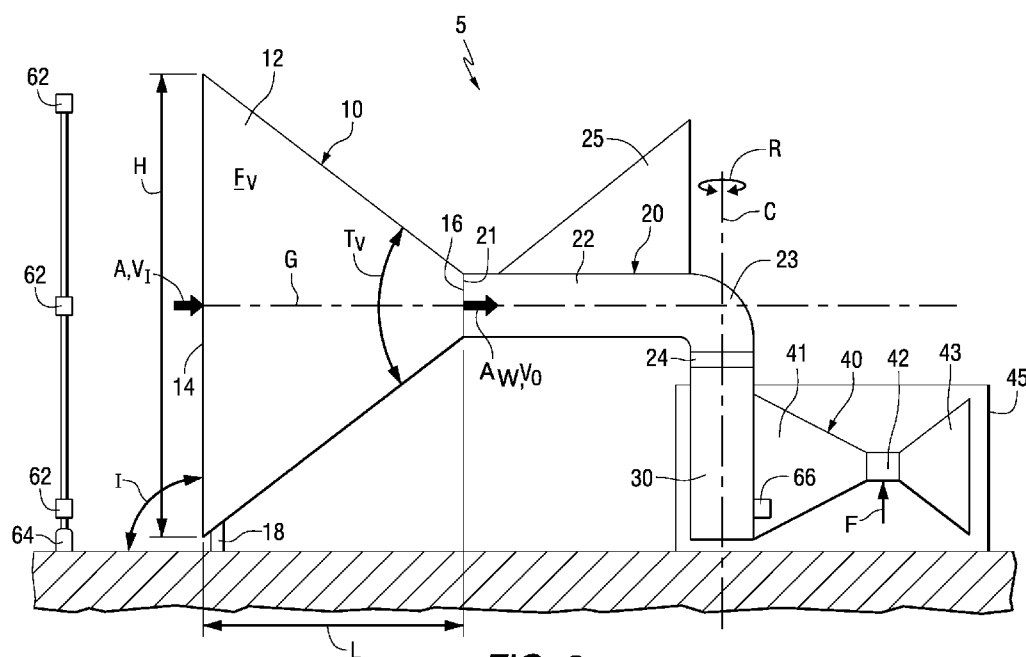


FIG. 2

(57) Abstract: Wind-funneling systems for gas turbines are disclosed. Air travels through a wind funnel where it is compressed, and then flows into a gas turbine that is fueled by a hydrocarbon fuel source such as natural gas. The wind funnels have a controlled volume with an opening facing the wind that concentrates air power and energy and directs the force into a constricted outlet that feeds into the gas turbine. Compressed air from the wind funnel may enter the front compressor section of the gas turbine at relatively high density and force. As a result, the gas turbine does not have to use as much energy to pull the air in, which creates fuel savings. The compressed air from the wind funnel then flows to the combustion section of the gas turbine where oxygen from the wind-compressed air is used to combust the hydrocarbon fuel supplied to the gas turbine. The wind funnel is thus used to generate compressed air that may increase efficiency in the front compressor section of the gas turbine, and serves as an oxygen source in the combustion section of the gas turbine.



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WIND-FUNNELING FOR GAS TURBINES

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims priority from U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 62/658,860, filed on April 17, 2018 which is incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention relates to wind-funneling for gas turbines.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

[0003] Conventional gas turbines consume large quantities of air for natural gas or other hydrocarbons to combust in a confined space. Combustion causes the turbine shaft to spin in a back expansion section of the turbine, and flaps in the front end compressor of the turbine concentrate the weight of the air. For example, a conventional aero-derivative turbine may concentrate air from about 20 cubic meters to 1 cubic meter per second in the combustion area of a natural gas turbine where natural gas is injected and ignited. However, such compression of normal density air results in significant energy loss.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0004] The present invention provides wind-funneling systems for gas turbines. The gas turbines include turbines fueled by various types of hydrocarbon fuels, such as natural gas, oil, methane, propane, ethanol, naphtha, coke oven gas and the like. Air travels through a wind funnel into the gas turbine, where oxygen in the air is used to combust the hydrocarbon fuel. The wind funnels have a controlled volume with an opening facing the wind that concentrates air power and energy, and directs the force into a constricted outlet that feeds into the gas turbine. The compressed air entering the turbine front compressor section is heavier because it has been concentrated and enters the front end of the turbine at higher density and higher force. Consequently, the gas turbine does not have to use as much energy to pull the air in, which creates fuel savings. The compressed air from the wind funnel then flows to the combustion section of the gas turbine where oxygen from the wind-compressed air is used to combust the hydrocarbon fuel supplied to the gas turbine. The wind

funnel is thus used to generate compressed air that increases efficiency in the front compressor section of the gas combustion turbine, and serves as an oxygen source in the combustion section of the gas turbine.

[0005] An aspect of the present invention is to provide a wind funnel and gas turbine system comprising: a wind funnel comprising an inlet opening having a cross-sectional area and an outlet opening having a cross-sectional area less than the cross-sectional area of the inlet opening, wherein the wind funnel is inwardly tapered between the inlet opening and the outlet opening; and a gas combustion turbine in flow communication with the wind funnel.

[0006] Another aspect of the present invention is to provide a wind funnel for connection to a compression section of a gas combustion turbine comprising an inlet opening having a cross-sectional area, an outlet opening structured and arranged for flow communication with the compression section of the gas turbine having a cross-sectional area less than the cross-sectional area of the inlet opening, and a sidewall tapered inwardly from the inlet opening and the outlet opening.

[0007] A further aspect of the present invention is to provide a method of operating a wind funnel and gas combustion turbine system. The method comprises feeding compressed air from the wind funnel to the gas combustion turbine and combusting fuel in the gas turbine in the presence of oxygen supplied from the compressed air, wherein the wind funnel comprises an inlet opening having a cross-sectional area, an outlet opening having a cross-sectional area less than the cross-sectional area of the inlet opening, and a sidewall tapered inwardly from the inlet opening and the outlet opening.

[0008] These and other aspects of the present invention will be more apparent from the following description.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0009] Fig. 1 is a schematic flow diagram illustrating features of a wind-funneling system for gas turbines in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

[0010] Fig. 2 is a partially schematic side view of a wind funnel and gas turbine system in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention corresponding to the system of Fig. 1.

[0011] Fig. 3 is a partially schematic top view of a wind funnel and gas turbine system in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention corresponding to the system of Fig. 1.

[0012] Fig. 4 is a schematic flow diagram illustrating features of a wind-funneling system for gas turbines in accordance with another embodiment of the invention.

[0013] Fig. 5 is a partially schematic top view of a wind funnel and gas turbine system in accordance with an embodiment of the invention corresponding to Fig. 4.

[0014] Fig. 6 is a partially schematic top view of a wind-funneling system for gas turbines illustrating rotation of a wind funnel on a circular track into multiple orientations in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

[0015] Fig. 7 is a partially schematic side view of a wind funnel in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

[0016] Fig. 8 is a partially schematic side view of a wind funnel in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention.

[0017] Fig. 9 is a partially schematic end view of the inlet opening of a wind funnel in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

[0018] Fig. 10 is a partially schematic end view of the inlet opening of a wind funnel in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention.

[0019] Fig. 11 is a partially schematic end view of the inlet opening of a wind funnel in accordance with a further embodiment of the present invention.

[0020] Fig. 12 is a partially schematic end view of the inlet opening of a wind funnel in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention.

[0021] Fig. 13 is a partially schematic end view of the inlet opening of a wind funnel in accordance with a further embodiment of the present invention.

[0022] Fig. 14 is a partially schematic top view of a wind funnel in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

[0023] Fig. 15 is a partially schematic top view of a wind funnel in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention.

[0024] Fig. 16 is a partially schematic top view of a wind funnel in accordance with a further embodiment of the present invention.

[0025] Fig. 17 is a partially schematic top view of a wind funnel in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention.

[0026] Fig. 18 is a schematic flow diagram illustrating the introduction of pressurized air from a wind funnel into a low compression section or into a medium compression section of a gas turbine in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

[0027] Fig. 19 is a schematic flow diagram including a partially schematic cross-sectional view of a compressor section of a gas turbine, illustrating introduction of pressurized air from a wind funnel into the compressor section.

[0028] Fig. 20 is a partially schematic side sectional view of a wind-assisted gas turbine including a coupling mechanism to selectively engage and disengage compression sections of the gas turbine in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

[0029] Fig. 21 is a schematic flow diagram illustrating features of a generator system with two engageable and disengageable sections for use with a wind-assisted gas turbine in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

[0030] Fig. 22 is a partially schematic side view of a generator system with two engageable and disengageable sections for use with a wind-assisted gas turbine in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0031] Fig. 1 schematically illustrates a wind funnel and gas turbine system 5 in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. A wind funnel 10, as more fully described below, communicates with a transfer pipe 20 which communicates with an air handler and filter 30 which, in turn, communicates with a gas turbine and generator 40. Hydrocarbon fuel F is fed to the gas turbine 40. As more fully described below, the wind funnel 10 generates compressed air A_w that is fed into the gas turbine 40. The air handler 30 may be of any conventional design known to those skilled in the art. The gas turbine 40 provides power to an output generator 50 through a driven shaft 55.

[0032] As used herein, the terms “gas turbine” and “gas combustion turbine” mean gas turbines that utilize combustible fuels such as natural gas or other hydrocarbons such as methane, ethane, propane, oil, diesel, ethanol, petroleum distillates, naphtha, and coke oven gas to generate electrical power. Typical gas turbines include a compression section, a combustion section and an expansion section. In the compression section, multiple rows of turbine blades are mounted on a rotatable turbine shaft. The turbine shaft extends through the

compression, combustion and expansion sections. Multiple rows of turbine blades may be mounted on the turbine shaft in the expansion section of the gas turbine.

[0033] In certain embodiments, the gas turbine 40 may comprise a natural gas turbine with any suitable power output. For example, power outputs of from 1 to 600 MW, or from 10 to 100 MW, or from 15 to 50 MW. Examples of commercially available natural gas turbines include turbines sold under Model Nos. LM 2500, TM 2500 and LM 6000 sold by General Electric Corporation, Model Nos. SGTS-8000H, SGT 500 and SGT 800 sold by Siemens Corporation, and Model Nos. M701J and M701F5 sold by Mitsubishi Hitachi Power Systems Corporation.

[0034] In accordance with embodiments of the present invention, the efficiency of gas turbines, such as those described above, can be increased significantly due to the controlled supply of compressed air from an air funnel to the compression section of a gas turbine. As used herein, the term “increased efficiency” when referring to the operation of a gas turbine means the percentage decrease in the amount of hydrocarbon fuel F that is consumed during operation of the gas turbine for a given power output level due to the supply of compressed air from an air funnel. For gas turbines, the amount of hydrocarbon consumed during operation may be described in units of kg/MW hour, or kg/hour for a given power output, e.g., 1 MegaWatt.

[0035] In accordance with embodiments of the present invention, compressed air from at least one wind funnel flows from the compression section of the gas turbine to the combustion section, where oxygen in the compressed air is used to combust the hydrocarbon fuel in the combustion section of the gas turbine.

[0036] As further shown in Fig. 1, the wind funnel and gas turbine system 5 may include at least one air sensor module 60 for receiving sensed parameters at or near the wind funnel 10, such as wind speed, wind direction, temperature, barometric pressure and the like and/or for receiving sensed parameters at or near the gas turbine 40, such as air pressure temperature, humidity and direction at the compression, combustion and expansion sections of the turbine. The system may include a controller 70 into which signals from the air sensor module 60 are fed. An adjustment actuator 80 may be used to control the orientation of the wind funnel 10. The controller 70 may send input signals to a power plant control system, which then controls the operation of the natural gas turbine 40, transfer pipe 20 and/or adjustment actuator 80. In certain embodiments, the controller 70 may send input signals to

the adjustment actuator 80, which may be used to change the orientation of the wind funnel 10, as more fully described below.

[0037] In the system shown in Fig. 1, the air sensor module 60, air control system 70, adjustment actuator 80 and wind funnel 10 operate together as follows: the air sensor module 60 may detect air speed, temperature and/or density of currents near the opening of the wind funnel 10 and/or inside the wind funnel 10. Such information may be sent to the power plant control system 90, which makes decisions as to the composition of the air desired and conveys those orders to the air control system 70, which may take additional data from the air sensor module 60. The air control system 70 may make mechanical decisions as to air flow, and may use the adjustment actuator 80 to control which direction the wind funnel 10 faces for optimum air intake. The air control system 70 may also have the ability to manipulate the compressed air handler-filter 30, and any additional ambient air handler-filter 130 as described below, as well as the transfer pipe 20.

[0038] Fig. 2 is a partially schematic side view and Fig. 3 is a partially schematic top view of a wind funnel and natural gas turbine system 5 in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. The system 5 includes a wind funnel 10 having a tapered body 12, inlet opening 14, and outlet opening 16. As shown in Fig. 2, a support member 18 may be used to support the wind funnel 10 on the ground or floor. The support member 18 may be of any suitable design, such as a wheel or roller that may roll on the ground or on a track, such as that shown in Fig. 6 and described below, to provide up to 360° rotation of the wind funnel in a substantially horizontal plane.

[0039] An array of air sensors 62 is positioned adjacent to the wind funnel 10, and may be supported by any suitable structure, such as the base support member 64 shown in Fig. 2 or any other suitable structure, e.g., a metal cable (not shown) extending across the inlet opening 12 or mouth of the wind funnel 10. The sensors 62 may be equipped with power and data from the sensors 62 may be transmitted by wire or wirelessly to the air sensor module 60. Each wind funnel 10 may have its own air sensors 62, e.g., mounted on metal cables. A farm of wind funnels may be provided, having their own area of wind, temperature and humidity sensors, e.g., on poles in four corners of a wind farm transmitting data back to the air sensor module 60.

[0040] The wind funnel and natural gas turbine system 5 also includes a transfer pipe 20 having an inlet 21, body 22 and elbow 23. A rotation joint 24 may be used to connect the

body and elbow 22 and 23 of the transfer pipe 20 to a turbine inlet air handler and filter 30. The transfer pipe 20 and wind funnel 10 are thus rotatable 360° in a substantially horizontal plane through the use of the rotation joint and support member 18. The transfer pipe 20 may have any suitable cross-sectional shape, such as circular, square, rectangular or the like. The transfer pipe 20 may be located above ground as shown in Figs. 2 and 3, or at least a portion of the transfer pipe 20 may be located below ground. A directional vane 25 may be mounted on the body 22 of the transfer pipe 20 or on the wind funnel 10 to facilitate alignment of the wind funnel 10 with the prevailing wind direction. The directional vane 25 may be of any suitable construction, such as a plastic or metal sheet, or a flexible fabric fastened to an angled metal pole at the leading edge of the vane 25.

[0041] As further shown in Figs. 2 and 3, the wind funnel and natural gas turbine system 5 includes a natural gas turbine 40 having a compression section 41, combustion section 42 and expansion section 43, as known to those skilled in the art. The natural gas turbine 40 may be located inside a housing 45 that rests on the ground or floor. The wind funnel 10 and transfer pipe 20 may rotate around a central rotational axis C to produce rotational movement R. Although the transfer pipe 20 shown in Figs. 2 and 3 is illustrated as rotating R around a central axis C located at the gas turbine 40, any other suitable location of the central axis C may be used, e.g., away from the gas turbine 40.

[0042] At least one sensor 66 may be located in or near the gas turbine 40 and communicates with the sensor module 60. For example, at least one sensor 66 may be provided at the compression section 41 and/or at the combustion section 42 and/or at the expansion section 43 for detecting parameters such as air pressure, gas pressure, gas flow velocity, gas flow direction, temperature, humidity and the like.

[0043] As shown in the side view of Fig. 2, the wind funnel 10 is inwardly tapered between the inlet opening 14 and the outlet opening 16 at a vertical taper angle T_v , which is measured in a vertical plane. As further shown in Fig. 2, the inlet opening 14 of the wind funnel 10 is oriented at an inclination angle I measured from a horizontal plane. As further shown in Fig. 2, the inlet opening 14 of the wind funnel 10 has a height H. A horizontal or ground plane G is labeled in Fig. 2.

[0044] As shown in the top view of Fig. 3, the wind funnel 10 has a horizontal taper angle T_H between the inlet opening 14 and outlet opening 16, which is measured in a horizontal plane. As further shown in Fig. 3, the inlet opening 14 of the wind funnel 12 has a

width W . As shown in Figs. 2 and 3, the wind funnel 10 has a length L measured between the inlet opening 14 and outlet opening 16.

[0045] In accordance with embodiments of the present invention, the vertical taper angle T_V shown in Fig. 2 may typically range from 20° to 120° , for example, from 30° to 90° , or from 35° to 70° , or from 45° to 65° .

[0046] In accordance with embodiments of the present invention, the horizontal taper angle T_H shown in Fig. 3 may typically range from 30° to 120° , for example, from 45° to 100° , or from 60° to 90° .

[0047] In certain embodiments, the ratio of the vertical taper angle to horizontal taper angle $T_V:T_H$ may typically range from 1:4 to 3:1, for example, from 1:3 to 2:1, or from 1:2 to 1:1.

[0048] In accordance with embodiments of the present invention, the inclination angle I shown in Fig. 2 may typically range from 75° to 120° , for example, from 80° to 100° , or from 85° to 95° . In certain embodiments, the inclination angle I is 90° . However, any other suitable inclination angle may be used.

[0049] In accordance with certain embodiments, the height H of the wind funnel inlet opening 14 shown in Fig. 2 may typically range from 5 to 300 meters, for example, from 10 to 150 meters, or from 20 to 120 meters. However, any other suitable height H may be used, e.g., based on land availability, topography and the like.

[0050] In accordance with certain embodiments, the width W of the wind funnel inlet opening 14 shown in Fig. 3 may typically range from 5 to 300 meters, for example, from 10 to 150 meters, or from 20 to 120 meters. However, any other suitable width W may be used.

[0051] In accordance with certain embodiments, the length L of the wind funnel inlet opening 14 as shown in Figs. 2 and 3 may typically range from 5 to 300 meters, for example, from 10 to 150 meters, or from 20 to 120 meters.

[0052] In certain embodiments, the ratio of the height to length $H:L$ may typically range from 1:3 to 3:1, for example, from 1:2 to 2:1, or from 1:1.5 to 1.5:1.

[0053] In certain embodiments, the ratio of the width to length $W:L$ may range from 1:3 to 3:1, for example, from 1:2 to 2:1, or from 1:1.5 to 1.5:1.

[0054] In certain embodiments, the height H and the width W may be the same. Alternatively, the height H and width W may be different. For example, the height to width ratio $H:W$ may range from 1:3 to 3:1, for example, from 1:2 to 2:1, or from 1:1.5 to 1.5:1.

[0055] In accordance with the present invention, the inlet opening has a cross-sectional area A_I larger than a cross-sectional area A_O of the outlet opening. In certain embodiments, the cross-sectional area ratio $A_I:A_O$ may typically range from 3:1 to 80,000:1, for example, from 5:1 to 10,000:1, or from 10:1 to 5,000:1, or from 20:1 to 1,000:1.

[0056] The wind funnel 10 has an internal volume F_V that may typically range from 1,000 to 15,000,000 m^3 , for example, from 10,000 to 12,000,000 m^3 , or from 100,000 to 5,000,000 m^3 . In certain embodiments, the internal volume F_V of the wind funnel 10 may be selected depending upon the power output of the natural gas turbine 40 in MW, e.g., the ratio of $F_V:MW$ may typically range from 10,000:1 to 200,000:1, for example, from 50,000:1 to 100,000:1, or from 55,000:1 to 85,000:1. While the use of a single wind funnel 10 is primarily described herein, it is to be understood that two or more wind funnels may be used in combination to feed a single gas turbine.

[0057] Factors to consider when selecting the size and configuration of the wind funnel(s) 10 include: availability of land around the power plant allow the wind funnel 10 to circle around one turbine or to circle around a specific point to capture the compressed wind and then transport it to the turbine by pipe; topography and relative location of the power plant to concentrating wind funnels that surround it; height above sea level to determine air density for time period when it is used; time of day wind speed average; ambient temperature of the time period when the wind power will occur; and/or specific turbine size.

[0058] As further shown in Figs. 2 and 3, ambient wind A may enter the inlet opening 14 of the wind funnel 10 at an air velocity V_I , and compressed air A_w exits through the outlet opening at an air velocity V_O . In certain embodiments, the outlet to inlet air velocity ratio $V_O:V_I$ may range from 1.5:1 to 100:1, for example, from 2:1 to 50:1, or from 5:1 to 20:1.

[0059] The air pressure at the outlet P_O of the wind funnel 10 is greater than the ambient air pressure P_I at the inlet of the wind funnel, e.g., the ratio of $P_O:P_I$ may typically range from 1.1:1 to 10:1, for example, from 1.2:1 to 5:1, or from 1.5:1 to 3:1.

[0060] Fig. 4 is a schematic flow diagram illustrating a wind funnel and gas turbine system 105 in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention. Fig. 5 is a partially schematic top view of wind funnel and gas turbine system 105 in accordance with the embodiment of Fig. 4. Similar reference numbers are used to label similar elements in the embodiment of Figs. 4 and 5 as used in the embodiment of Figs. 1-3.

[0061] As shown in Fig. 4, the wind funnel and gas turbine system 105 includes a wind funnel 10, transfer pipe 20, compressed air handler-filter 30, gas turbine 40, driven shaft 55, output power generator 50, air sensor 60, air control system 70, adjustment actuator 80, and power plant control system 90, similar to the embodiment shown in Figs. 1-3. Hydrocarbon fuel F is fed to the gas turbine 40. Compressed air A_w from the wind funnel 10 is fed to the gas turbine 40. In addition, the wind funnel and gas turbine system 105 of Fig. 4 includes an ambient air handler-filter 130 that receives ambient air 8' for delivery to the gas turbine 40. The ambient air handler-filter 130 may be of any conventional design known to those skilled in the art. Thus, in the embodiment shown in Fig. 4, separate compressed air A_w and ambient air A sources are provided. As more fully described below, the wind funnel and gas turbine system 105 shown in Fig. 4 may be selectively operated to supply compressed air A_w from the wind funnel 10 and transfer pipe 20 through the compressed air handler-filter 30 into the gas turbine 40, to supply ambient air A from the ambient handler-filter 130 into the gas turbine 40, or a combination thereof.

[0062] As shown in Figs. 4 and 5, the wind funnel and gas turbine system 105 includes similar components as the embodiment illustrated in Figs. 2 and 3, with a separate compressed air A_w handler-filter 30 and ambient air A handler-filter 130 feeding into the gas turbine 40. The compressed and ambient air handler-filters 30 and 130 may be of any conventional design known to those skilled in the art.

[0063] The wind funnel and gas turbines system 105 shown in Fig. 5 may operate as follows. The power plant control system 90 controls the actuator 80 and air control system 70. By using information from the air sensor module 60 and air sensors 62 and 66, the power plant control system 90 can extract the lowest cost power from the gas turbine 40. Operational possibilities include: (1) if the power plant control system 90 receives information from the air sensor system 60 that there is enough compressed air available, it would first give priority to the source of compressed air and send it to a low compressor section front end of the turbine by commanding air control system 70 to manipulate compressed air handler 30, or the high pressure compressed air with high velocity may be directed to a medium compressor section or high compressor section of the front end of the turbine; (2) if the air sensor system module 60 detects that there is not enough compressed air A_w from the wind funnel 10, transfer pipe 20 and compressed air handler 30, it would inform the power plant control system 90 of this, and the power plant control system 90 will instruct

the air control system 70 to supplement air from ambient air A handler 130; (3) if the wind is dead, the air sensor module 60 informs the power plant control system 90 of this, and the power plant control system 90 commands the air control system 70 to operate normally and pull all necessary air in through ambient air handler 130 into gas turbine 40; (4) if the wind has changed direction it operates similar to number (3) above and at the same time the power plant control system 90 sends orders to the adjustment actuator 80 to change the direction the wind funnel 10 is facing in order to capture the maximum wind power.

[0064] As shown in Fig. 6, the transfer pipe 20, and the attached wind funnel 10, may rotate R around the central rotational axis C in order to adjust the orientation of the wind funnel 10. For example, if the direction of the prevailing wind changes, the wind funnel 10 may be pivoted into a position in which the prevailing wind meets the inlet opening 14 head on in order to maximize the inlet opening air velocity V_I during operation. The directional vane 25 may be used to align the wind funnel 10 with the prevailing wind direction. While the natural gas turbine 40 and housing 45 may remain in a stationary position, the wind funnel 10 may be selectively rotated in an arc of up to 360° in order to maximize the inlet opening air velocity V_I . Although a full rotational movement R of 360° is within the scope of the present invention, the arc transversed by the rotational movement may be less than 360° in certain embodiments, for example, 270° or 180° .

[0065] In the embodiment shown in Fig. 6, the wind funnel 10 and its support members 18 may be supported and guided along a circular track 15, which in the embodiment shown extends in a 270° arc around the central rotational axis C. For example, the track 15 may comprise two railroad tracks that each support two metal or polymeric roller wheels for a total of four wheels for each support member 18.

[0066] Although in the embodiment shown in Figs. 2, 3, 5 and 6, the wind funnel 10 and transfer pipe 20 are shown as being fixed together, it is to be understood that an articulated joint (not shown) between the wind funnel 10 and transfer pipe 20 may be used in addition to, or in place of, the central rotational axis C and rotation joint 24 illustrated in the figures. In addition, any other suitable mounting mechanism or configuration may be used in accordance with the present invention that allows control of the wind funnel orientation while maintaining air flow communication between the wind funnel and the turbine inlet filter 30 or natural gas turbine 40.

[0067] In accordance with certain embodiments, the turbine inlet filter 30 may be of any suitable conventional design, such as turbine inlet filters included with natural gas turbine assemblies sold by General Electric Corporation, Siemens Corporation and Mitsubishi Corporation.

[0068] In accordance with embodiments of the present invention, the configuration of the transfer pipe 20 may be controlled based upon the particular configuration of the upstream wind funnel 10 and/or the configuration of the downstream turbine inlet filter 30 and natural gas turbine 40. For example, the cross-sectional shape and size of the transfer pipe 20 may be controlled, the overall length of the transfer pipe may be controlled, and the shape and dimensions of all the longitudinal length of the transfer pipe 20 may be controlled. In certain embodiments, the inlet 21 of the transfer pipe 20 substantially matches the outlet opening 16 of the wind funnel 10. Thus, the cross-sectional shapes and dimensions may be matched. However, in other embodiments, the inlet 21 of the transfer pipe 20 may not match the outlet opening 16 of the wind funnel 10.

[0069] In the embodiment shown in Figs. 2, 3 and 5, the transfer pipe 20 may have an inner diameter defining a cross-sectional area similar to the cross-sectional area A_0 of the outlet opening. In certain embodiments, the cross-sectional area of the transfer pipe 20 is maintained substantially constant along the longitudinal length of the transfer pipe 20. However, in other embodiments, the cross-sectional area of the transfer pipe 20 may vary along its length, e.g., the transfer pipe 20 may taper inwardly slightly from its inlet to its outlet.

[0070] The transfer pipe 20 may be provided in any suitable length. For example, the overall length of the transfer pipe 20 may be minimized in order to reduce air friction, pressure drops or deceleration of the air as it passes through the transfer pipe 20. The transfer pipe 20 may have a circular cross section, or any other desired shape such as square, etc.

[0071] In certain embodiments as shown in Figs. 2, 3 and 5, the length of the transfer pipe 20 and shape of the wind funnel 10 are controlled in order to provide sufficient clearance space for the transfer pipe 20 and wind funnel 10 to rotate over and past the housing 45 of the natural gas turbine 40 without being obstructed. Alternative wind funnel and/or transfer pipe configurations may be provided to ensure sufficient clearance during rotation, for example, a flat-bottom wind funnel 10a such as shown in the embodiment of Fig. 7 may be used to provide additional clearance as the wind funnel rotates above the turbine housing 45.

[0072] Figs. 7 and 8 are side views of alternative wind funnel configurations in accordance with embodiments of the invention. In Fig. 7, the wind funnel 10A has a lower surface that is substantially parallel with the horizontal plane G. The vertical taper angle T_v thus extends from the substantially horizontal bottom surface to the angled upper surface of the wind funnel 10A. In Fig. 8, the wind funnel 10B has an upper surface that is substantially parallel with the horizontal plane G and an angled lower surface. In this embodiment, the vertical taper angle T_v is measured from the upper substantially horizontal surface to the lower angled surface. In each of the embodiments shown in Figs. 7 and 8, the vertical taper angle T_v may fall within the vertical taper angle T_v ranges described above in connection with the embodiment shown in Fig. 2.

[0073] Figs. 9-13 are partially schematic end views of wind funnels 10 having various types of cross-sectional shapes in accordance with embodiments of the invention.

[0074] In the embodiment shown in Fig. 9, the inlet opening 14 of the wind funnel 10 has a rectangular shape, and the outlet opening 16 also has a rectangular shape. The inlet opening 14 has a cross-sectional area A_I corresponding to the product of $W \cdot H$. The outlet opening 16 has a smaller cross-sectional area A_O which, in the embodiment shown, represents the product of the height and width of the outlet opening multiplied together. As described above, the ratio of $A_I:A_O$ may typically range from 3:1 to 80,000:1, for example, from 5:1 to 10,000:1, or from 10:1 to 5,000:1, or from 20:1 to 1,000:1.

[0075] In the embodiment shown in Fig. 10, the inlet opening 14 of the wind funnel 10 has a generally square cross-sectional shape with a cross-sectional area A_I corresponding to the product of $W \cdot H$. Although not shown in Fig. 10, the wind funnel 10 also has an outlet opening 16 of any desired cross-sectional shape, such as square, rectangular, round or the like.

[0076] In the embodiment shown in Fig. 11, the inlet opening 14 of the wind funnel 10 is generally circular with a diameter D . The cross-sectional area A_I is also labeled in Fig. 11.

[0077] In the embodiment shown in Fig. 12, the inlet opening 14 of the wind funnel 10 is generally hemispherical and has a diameter D . The cross-sectional area A_I of the inlet opening is also labeled in Fig. 12.

[0078] In the embodiment shown in Fig. 13, the inlet opening 14 of the wind funnel 10 has a generally triangular shape with a height H and width W . The cross-sectional area A_I is also labeled in Fig. 13.

[0079] Although various wind funnel cross-sectional shapes are illustrated in Figs. 9-13, it is to be understood that any other suitable cross-sectional shape of the inlet opening 14 and/or outlet opening 16 may be used in accordance with the present invention, e.g., trapezoidal, ovular, elliptical, etc.

[0080] Figs. 14-17 are top views schematically illustrating various wind funnel configurations in accordance with embodiments of the present invention.

[0081] In the embodiment shown in Fig. 14, the body of the wind funnel 10 includes generally flat angled sides similar to the embodiments shown in Figs. 3 and 5.

[0082] In the embodiment shown in Fig. 15, the wind funnel 10C comprises a convexly curved inner surface.

[0083] In the embodiment shown in Fig. 16, the wind funnel 10D comprises a concavely curved inner surface.

[0084] In the embodiment shown in Fig. 17, the wind funnel 10E comprises a complex curved inner surface including a concave portion near the inlet opening 14 and a convex portion near the exit opening.

[0085] In the embodiments shown in Figs. 14-17, the various wind funnels have a width W and a length L , which may correspond to the widths W and lengths L described above.

[0086] In accordance with embodiments of the present invention, the particular configuration of the wind funnel 10 may be selected based upon various parameters or factors such as prevailing wind speeds, land topography, land availability, elevation, ambient temperature, turbine output power and the like. For example, computer modeling may be performed in order to optimize the shape and size of the wind funnel 10.

[0087] Fig. 18 schematically illustrates a wind-assisted gas turbine system similar to that shown in the embodiment of Fig. 4, with the addition of engageable and disengageable gas turbine compression sections in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. The wind funnel 10 as described above communicates with the transfer pipe 20, which communicates with the air handler and filter 30 which, in turn, delivers compressed air A_w from the wind funnel 10 to the gas turbine 40. Although not shown in Fig. 18, hydrocarbon

fuel F is fed to the gas turbine 40 as shown in the embodiments of Figs. 1 and 4. The gas turbine 40 is connected to the power output generator 50 by a driven shaft 55. For purposes of simplification and clarity, the combustion section 42 and expansion section 43 of the gas turbine 40 are not shown in Fig. 18. In accordance with this embodiment, the gas turbine 40 includes a first low compression section 140 with an output shaft 150, and a second medium compression section 240 with an input shaft 200. A turbine coupling mechanism 180 is provided between the output shaft 150 and the input shaft 200, which allows the first and second compression sections 140 and 240 of the gas turbine 40 to be selectively engaged and disengaged from each other.

[0088] As further shown in Fig. 18, the first low compression section 140 of the gas turbine 40 may be fed by ambient air 8' that enters the front end of the compression section 140, while compressed air fed from the wind funnel 10 can selectively enter the gas turbine 40 at the same location or downstream from the point that the ambient air 8' enters the first compression section 140. The air feed system illustrated in Fig. 18 includes separate compressed air and ambient air feed sources. In this embodiment, the compressed air from the wind funnel 10 can be directed against specific desired rows of blades in either the low compression section 140 or the medium compression section 240 of the gas turbine for maximum impact. Although not shown in Fig. 18, compressed air from the wind funnel 10 may also be introduced into a high compression section of the gas turbine 40 if desired. Compressed air can be directed with jets, nozzles, embedded pipes and the like. The compressed air may be directed at an angle such that it hits the angled blade faces at 90 degrees or close to 90 degrees. Supplementary fresh air 8' from fresh air handler and filter 30 may still be passed through the front low pressure section 140 if directed by the air control system which may respond to commands from the power plant controller 90. If more power is desired, compressed air may be directed to the front end low pressure compression section 140 of the gas turbine 40, e.g., through pipes and/or nozzles directly hitting blades at an angle in the front low pressure section 140.

[0089] There may be high wind speeds when it is desirable to channel all compressed air from the wind funnel 10 into the medium compression section 240 of the gas turbine 40. In this case, the turbine coupling mechanism 180 may disengage the output shaft 150 of the low compression section 140 from the spinning input shaft 200 of the medium compression section 240 in order to improve efficiency. In certain embodiments, the power output

generator 50 may be a two-stage generator with a coupling therebetween to selectively engage and disengage the generator sections, as more fully described below.

[0090] Figs. 19 and 20 schematically illustrate a wind funnel 10 and compressed air feed system 30 in which compressed air is fed to a set of turbine blades in a selected compression section of a gas turbine in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. As shown in Figs. 19 and 20, compressed air A_w from the wind funnel 10, transfer pipe 20 and air handler-filter 30 is separated into multiple flow paths 46 for introduction into the compression section 41 of the gas turbine 40 at selected circumferential locations. A series of nozzles 47 introduce compressed air flow 48 into the interior of the compression section 41 toward the turbine blades 49, which rotate in the direction of arrow B. The compressed air may flow in equal amounts to each nozzle 47, or may be controlled to flow in non-equal amounts, e.g., more compressed air may be fed to the upper nozzle 47 in Fig. 20. As shown in Fig. 19, the compressed air flow 48 generated from the wind funnel 10 may be directed into the compression section 41 through the nozzles 47 in an angled direction having a component normal to air impact surfaces of the turbine blades 49, e.g., in an air feed direction having a component in the circumferential rotation direction of the turbine blades 49.

[0091] As shown in Fig. 20, the gas turbine 40 includes a combustion section 42 downstream from the first and second compression sections 140 and 240, and an expansion section 43 downstream from the combustion section 42. Ambient air A can enter the front end of the first compression section 140, while compressed air A_w fed from the wind funnel 10 can enter the gas turbine 40 downstream from the first compression section 140, and upstream from the second compression section 240. The hydrocarbon fuel F such as natural gas or the like is fed into the combustion section 42 of the gas turbine 40 by conventional fuel injection means known to those skilled in the art, where oxygen contained in the compressed air A_w from the wind funnel 10 is used to combust the fuel F.

[0092] As further shown in Fig. 20, the coupling mechanism 180 may be used to selectively engage and disengage the first compression section 140 of the gas turbine 40 from its second compression section 240. The first compression section 140 includes a first rotatable shaft 150 having a series of turbine blades or vanes 141 mounted thereon. The second compression section 240 includes a second rotatable shaft 200 having a series of turbine blades or vanes 241 mounted thereon.

[0093] An actuator 170 may be provided adjacent to the first compression section 140 and may engage the first rotatable shaft 150 of the first compression section 140. The actuator 170 may include a roller bearing assembly (not shown) in which an end of the first rotatable shaft 150 is rotatably mounted, but constrained in its axial movement in relation to the roller bearing assembly of the actuator. Lateral movement of the actuator 170 side-to-side may cause the first rotatable shaft 150 of the first compression section 140 to move along its longitudinal axis toward and away from the second rotatable shaft 200 of the second compression section 240. In this manner, the coupling mechanism 180 engages and disengages the first and second compression section shafts 150 and 200 upon lateral movement of the actuator 170.

[0094] The system illustrated in Fig. 20 may operate as follows during periods of high wind. The male and female components of the coupling mechanism 180 may be disconnected between the first and second compressor sections 140 and 240, and compressed air from the wind funnel 40 may only be introduced into the second compressor section 240 to thereby lower the cost of the power supply and increase efficiency. Such disconnection of the compressor sections may decrease costs and provide additional savings.

[0095] Figs. 21 and 22 illustrate an embodiment of the present invention in which the wind-assisted gas turbine 40 drives a power output generator 50 having a first generator 50A and a second generator 50B engageable and disengageable from each other by a generator coupling mechanism 52. As shown in Fig. 22, the driven shaft 55 extending through the first generator 50A is disengageably coupled to a second driven shaft 155 extending into or through the second generator 50B by means of the generator coupling mechanism 52. In the embodiment shown, the generator coupling mechanism 52 includes a male coupling 56 at the end of the first driven shaft 55 that is receivable within a female coupling 58 and the end of the second driven shaft 155.

[0096] As further shown in Figs. 21 and 22, the second generator 50B is moveable in relation to the first generator 50A as schematically shown by the arrow M. By moving the second generator 50B in the direction of the movement arrow M, the movable second generator 50B may be moved from a disengaged position as shown in Fig. 22, in which the male 56 and female 58 couplings are disengaged from each other, to an engaged position in which the male coupling 56 is received within the female coupling 58 to thereby allow torque transmission from the driven shaft 55 extending through the first generator 50A to the driven

shaft 155 extending into the movable second generator 50B. Any suitable means (not shown) may be used to move the generator second section 50B, such as rollers, wheels, tracks, conveyor belts and the like that may be installed below the movable second generator 50B. Once the second generator 50B is moved into either the engaged or disengaged position, it can be secured in place by any suitable means such as a latch mechanism (not shown).

[0097] As shown in Fig. 22, a generator actuator 59 may be used to push or pull the second generator 50B into the engaged or disengaged position using a piston rod 165 or the like that extends from the generator actuator. The rotatable driven shaft 155 does not extend externally rightwardly from the second generator 50B in the embodiment shown in Fig. 22. Alternatively, the driven shaft 155 may extend through and rightwardly from the second generator 50B, and the generator actuator 59 may include a roller bearing assembly (not shown) for supporting and aligning the driven shaft 155 during operation. Excess energy may thus be captured into electrical power by use of disconnectable generator sections, e.g., by robotically pushing the shaft 155 of the second generator 50B into engagement with the shaft 55 of the first generator 50A in front of it with the generator stationary, or pushing the whole second generator forward to connect and produce energy or to pull it back when wind energy drops.

[0098] A sensor and control system (not shown) may be used to ensure that the first 55 and second 155 rotatable shafts of the corresponding first and second generators 50A and 50B are aligned in the desired rotational orientation with respect to each other. This ensures that the first and second generators 50A and 50B are in phase with each other when engaged, i.e., the sinusoidal alternating current wave forms from each of the first and second generators match each other.

[0099] Information on air velocity, temperature, density and humidity detected by sensors at various points from the wind to the output may be collected to determine the minimum quantity of natural gas or the hydrocarbon fuel F needed to be injected into burner section 42 of the gas turbine 40. That same information may be used to determine if there is more or less energy to route using an air handler to a smaller natural gas turbine or a larger natural gas turbine. If too much energy and power is wanted then the actuator for the generator may advance the second generator section to connect to the first generator section, depending on more or less demand for power from the grid control center.

[00100] The following example is intended to illustrate various aspects of the present invention and is not intended to limit the scope of the invention.

Example

[00101] A wind funnel and gas turbine system may be provided and operated using the following configuration. A wind funnel is provided in the shape of a cylindrical half cone sliced in half laid flat on the ground and rotatable around a vertical axis. The wind funnel has a width of 220 meters corresponding to the diameter of the half cone at its inlet opening, and a length of 220 meters measured from the inlet opening to the outlet opening. The base is an isosceles triangle for symmetry. The wind funnel and gas turbine are located on substantially flat ground with no surrounding obstructions to wind flow. The height above sea level is 500 feet. The ambient temperature is 80°F, with variable humidity. A prevailing wind speed of 25 mph may occur during operation. The gas turbine has a power capacity of 28.6 MW. The compressed air pipe is not run underground or cooled. With this wind funnel configuration and these operating parameters, an impact in power of between 7 to 14 MW- 20 MW (high wind velocity) or more in costs fuel savings may be achieved. Such 7 to 14 MW savings may only be available when the wind is available, which is mostly in daytime.

[00102] An E 126 Enercom wind blade turbine with input space of 12,665 meters produces currently 7 MW. A gas turbine that produces 28.6 MW has a simple cycle (no combined cycle and no heat recovery) efficiency of 37%. Meaning 77.402 MW of energy is inputted into the natural gas turbine system to produce 28.6 MW of electrical energy, and 10 MW of heat. So 77.4 MW inputted energy minus 28.6 MW output electrical minus 10 MW heat = 38.8 MW is spent as kinetic energy fuel costs on pulling air into the compressor section of the turbine and expelling it. So 7 MW of savings is applied to that 77.4 MW total = gross 9 % savings. Or the 7 MW reduction is applied to reduction in 38.8 kinetic energy to pull air in and expel it at 18 % savings in losses. If 14 MW kinetic energy is inputted through the wind funnel and it is all applied, then the savings may double: 14/77.4 gives 18 % of gross costs or 14 MW/ 38.8 = 36 % reduction in kinetic energy costs of pulling in air and expelling air.

[00103] The present invention provides several benefits. The present invention takes advantage of maximum wind speeds under most operating conditions except when the grid

does not need power. It is noted that most grids flow one way and thus have been designed inflexibly. Utilities are often forced to absorb night time costs when demand may be reduced by up to 40 percent or more. With the present invention, there are minimal parts associated with the wind funnel, providing lower total cost of ownership.

[00104] Whereas particular embodiments of this invention have been described above for purposes of illustration, it will be evident to those skilled in the art that numerous variations of the details of the present invention may be made without departing from the invention as defined in the appended claims.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A wind funnel and gas combustion turbine system comprising:
a wind funnel comprising an inlet opening having a cross-sectional area and an outlet opening having a cross-sectional area less than the cross-sectional area of the inlet opening, wherein the wind funnel is inwardly tapered between the inlet opening and the outlet opening; and
a gas combustion turbine in flow communication with the wind funnel, wherein the wind funnel is structured and arranged to receive air from a wind source through its inlet opening and to discharge compressed air from its outlet opening for delivery to the gas combustion turbine.
2. The wind funnel and gas combustion turbine system of Claim 1, wherein the gas combustion turbine comprises a compression section in flow communication with the outlet opening of the wind funnel.
3. The wind funnel and gas combustion turbine system of Claim 2, wherein the gas combustion turbine comprises a combustion section comprising a fuel inlet into which a hydrocarbon fuel is fed, and oxygen from the compressed air from the wind funnel is combined with the hydrocarbon fuel in the combustion section for combustion of the hydrocarbon fuel.
4. The wind funnel and gas combustion turbine system of Claim 3, wherein the hydrocarbon fuel comprises natural gas, oil, methane, propane, ethanol, naphtha, coke oven gas or a combination thereof.
5. The wind funnel and gas combustion turbine system of Claim 3, wherein the hydrocarbon fuel comprises natural gas.
6. The wind funnel and gas combustion turbine system of Claim 1, wherein the wind funnel is rotatable around a vertical axis to adjust for different prevailing wind directions.
7. The wind funnel and gas combustion turbine system of Claim 6, further comprising a support member adjacent the inlet opening of the wind funnel structured and arranged to support the wind funnel when it is rotated around the vertical axis.
8. The wind funnel and gas combustion turbine system of Claim 7, wherein the support member comprises at least one wheel engageable with an arcuate track supported by ground below the wind funnel.

9. The wind funnel and gas combustion turbine system of Claim 1, wherein the inlet opening of the wind funnel has a cross-sectional area A_I , the outlet opening of the wind funnel has a cross-sectional area A_O , and a cross-sectional area ratio $A_I:A_O$ is greater than 5:1.

10. The wind funnel and gas combustion turbine system of Claim 9, wherein the cross-sectional area ratio $A_I:A_O$ is from 10:1 to 5,000:1.

11. The wind funnel and gas combustion turbine system of Claim 1, wherein the wind funnel has an internal volume F_v of greater than 1,000 m³.

12. The wind funnel and gas combustion turbine system of Claim 1, further comprising a transfer pipe extending from the outlet opening of the wind funnel in flow communication between the wind funnel and a compression section of the gas combustion turbine.

13. The wind funnel and gas combustion turbine system of Claim 1, further comprising a compressed air handler-filter in flow communication between the wind funnel and a compression section of the gas combustion turbine.

14. The wind funnel and gas combustion turbine system of Claim 1, further comprising an ambient air inlet in flow communication with the gas combustion turbine.

15. The wind funnel and gas combustion turbine system of Claim 14, wherein the ambient air inlet is in flow communication with a compression section of the gas combustion turbine.

16. The wind funnel and gas combustion turbine system of Claim 15, wherein the ambient air inlet is structured and arranged to introduce ambient air into the compression section of the gas combustion turbine upstream from a location of introduction of the compressed air from the wind funnel into the compression section.

17. The wind funnel and gas combustion turbine system of Claim 1, further comprising an ambient air handler-filter in flow communication between a source of ambient air and a compression section of the gas combustion turbine.

18. The wind funnel and gas combustion turbine system of Claim 1, wherein the compressed air from the wind funnel is introduced into a compression section of the gas combustion turbine downstream from a first row of rotatable blades attached to a rotatable turbine shaft in the compression section.

19. The wind funnel and gas combustion turbine system of Claim 18, wherein the compressed air from the wind funnel is selectively introduced into the compression section at multiple locations downstream from the first row of rotatable blades.

20. The wind funnel and gas combustion turbine system of Claim 1, wherein the gas combustion turbine comprises a compression section including a low compression section and a medium compression section, and the compressed air from the wind funnel is selectively introduced into the low compression section or the medium compression section.

21. The wind funnel and gas combustion turbine system of Claim 1, wherein the gas combustion turbine comprises a compression section including a first compression section including an output shaft, a second compression section including an input shaft, and a turbine coupling mechanism structured and arranged to selectively engage and disengage the output and input shafts to thereby engage and disengage the first and second compression section from each other.

22. The wind funnel and gas combustion turbine system of Claim 1, wherein the gas combustion turbine comprises a compression section including at least one air inlet structured and arranged to introduce the compressed air from the wind funnel into the compression section toward multiple rotating blades contained in the compression section in an air feed direction having a component normal to air impact surfaces of the blades.

23. The wind funnel and gas turbine system of Claim 1, wherein the gas combustion turbine is drivingly connected to a power output generator, and the power output generator comprises a first generator and a second generator selectively engageable and disengageable from each other.

24. The wind funnel and gas combustion turbine system of Claim 1, further comprising at least one air sensor structured and arranged to detect an air parameter at the inlet opening of the wind funnel, at the outlet opening of the wind funnel, or at an inlet of a compression section of the gas combustion turbine, wherein the air parameter comprises air flow, air pressure, air temperature or air humidity.

25. A wind funnel for connection to a compression section of a gas combustion turbine, the wind funnel comprising:

an inlet opening having a cross-sectional area;

an outlet opening structured and arranged for flow communication with the compression section of the gas combustion turbine having a cross-sectional area less than the cross-sectional area of the inlet opening; and

a sidewall tapered inwardly from the inlet opening toward the outlet opening.

26. A method of operating a wind funnel and gas combustion turbine system comprising:

feeding compressed air from the wind funnel to a gas combustion turbine; and

combusting fuel in the gas combustion turbine in the presence of oxygen supplied from the compressed air, wherein the wind funnel comprises:

an inlet opening having a cross-sectional area;

an outlet opening having a cross-sectional area less than the cross-sectional area of the inlet opening; and

a sidewall tapered inwardly from the inlet opening toward the outlet opening.

27. The method of Claim 26, wherein the compressed air from the wind funnel is fed into a compression section of the gas combustion turbine.

28. The method of Claim 27, wherein the compression section of the gas combustion turbine comprises multiple rows of turbine blades located at different axial positions along an axial length of a rotatable turbine shaft, and the compressed air from the wind funnel is fed into the compression section of the gas combustion turbine downstream from a leading row of the turbine blades.

29. The method of Claim 26, further comprising adjusting an orientation of the wind funnel based upon wind direction, wherein the wind funnel orientation is adjustable.

30. The method of Claim 29, wherein the wind funnel orientation is adjustable around a stationary vertical axis.

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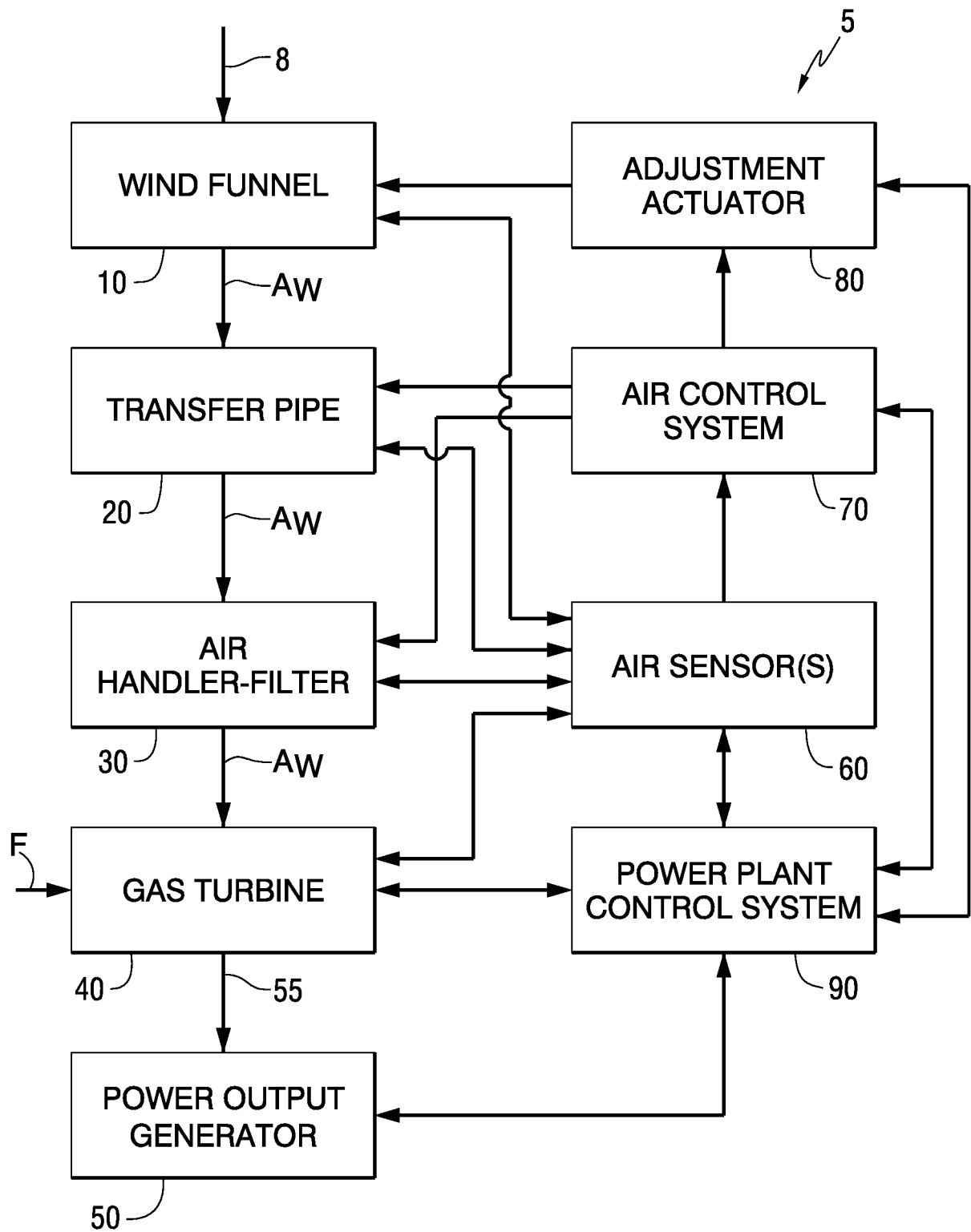
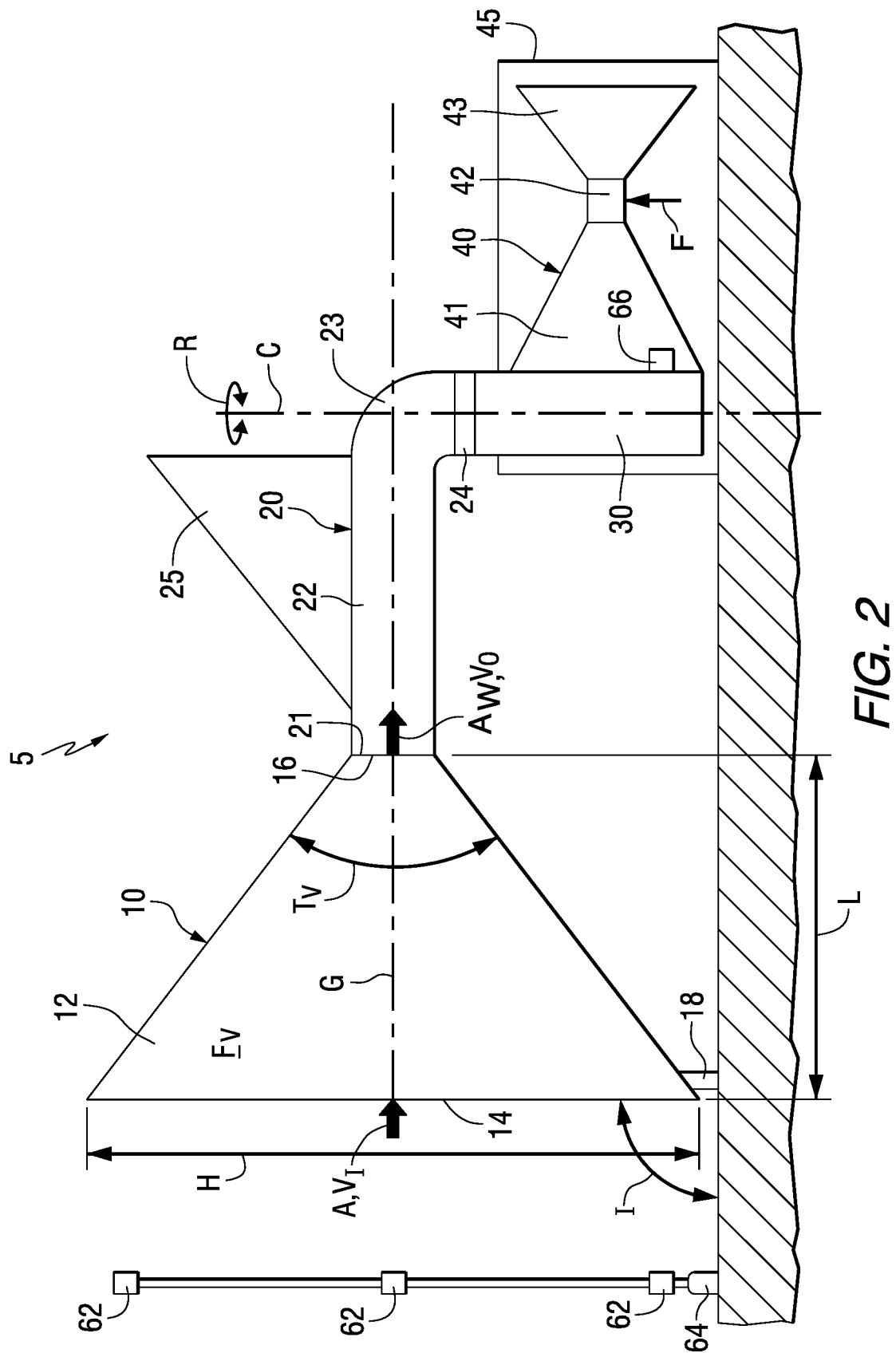
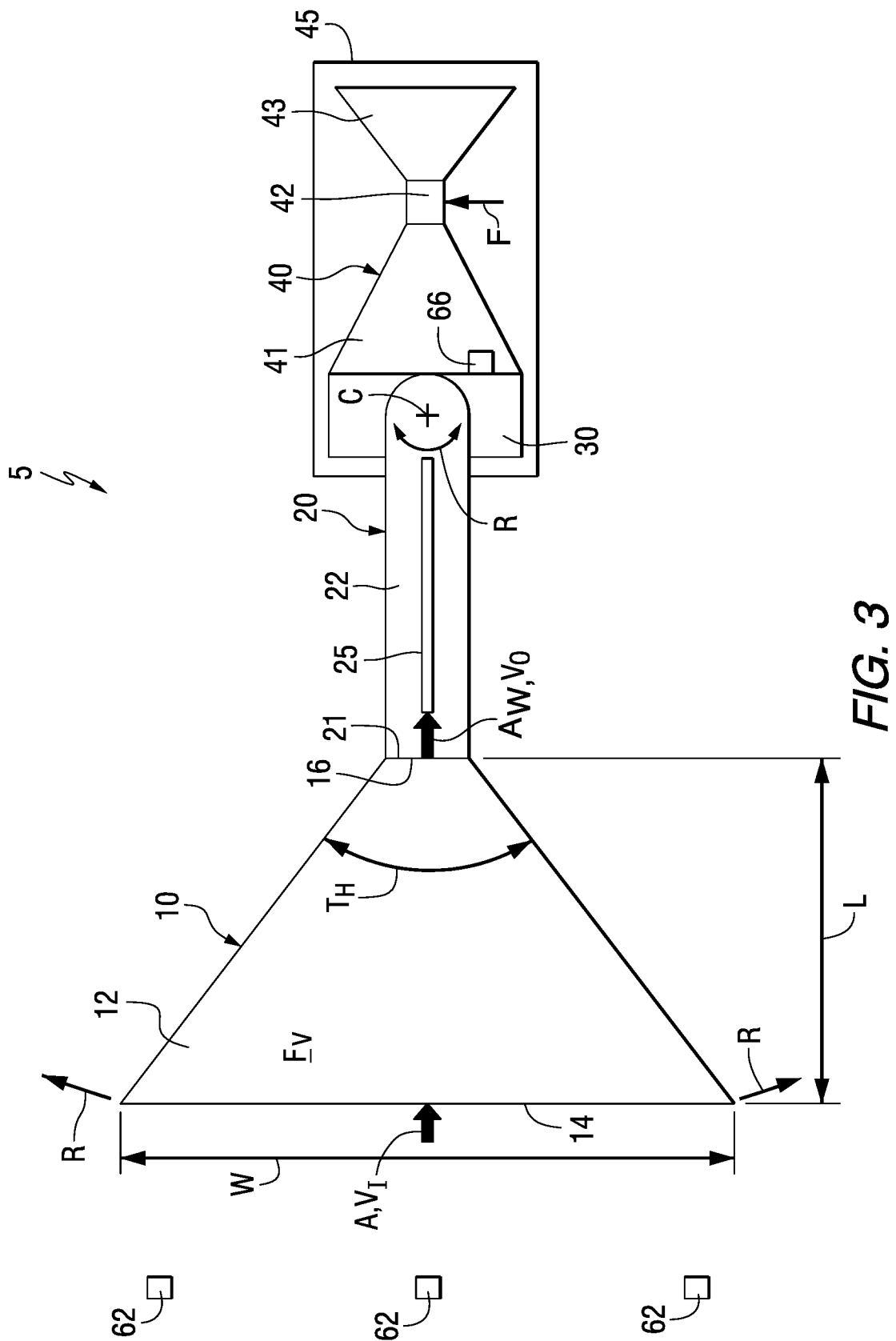


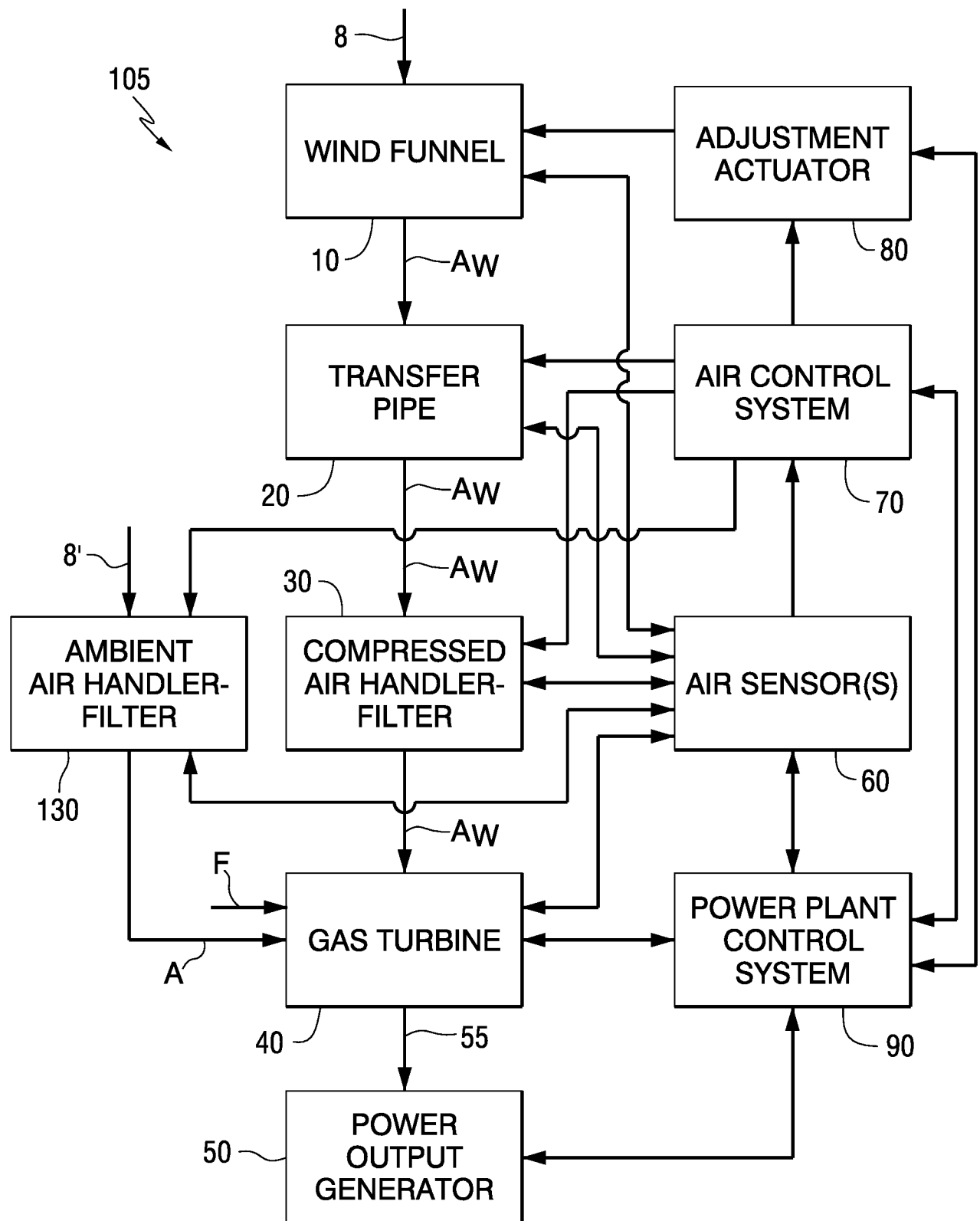
FIG. 1

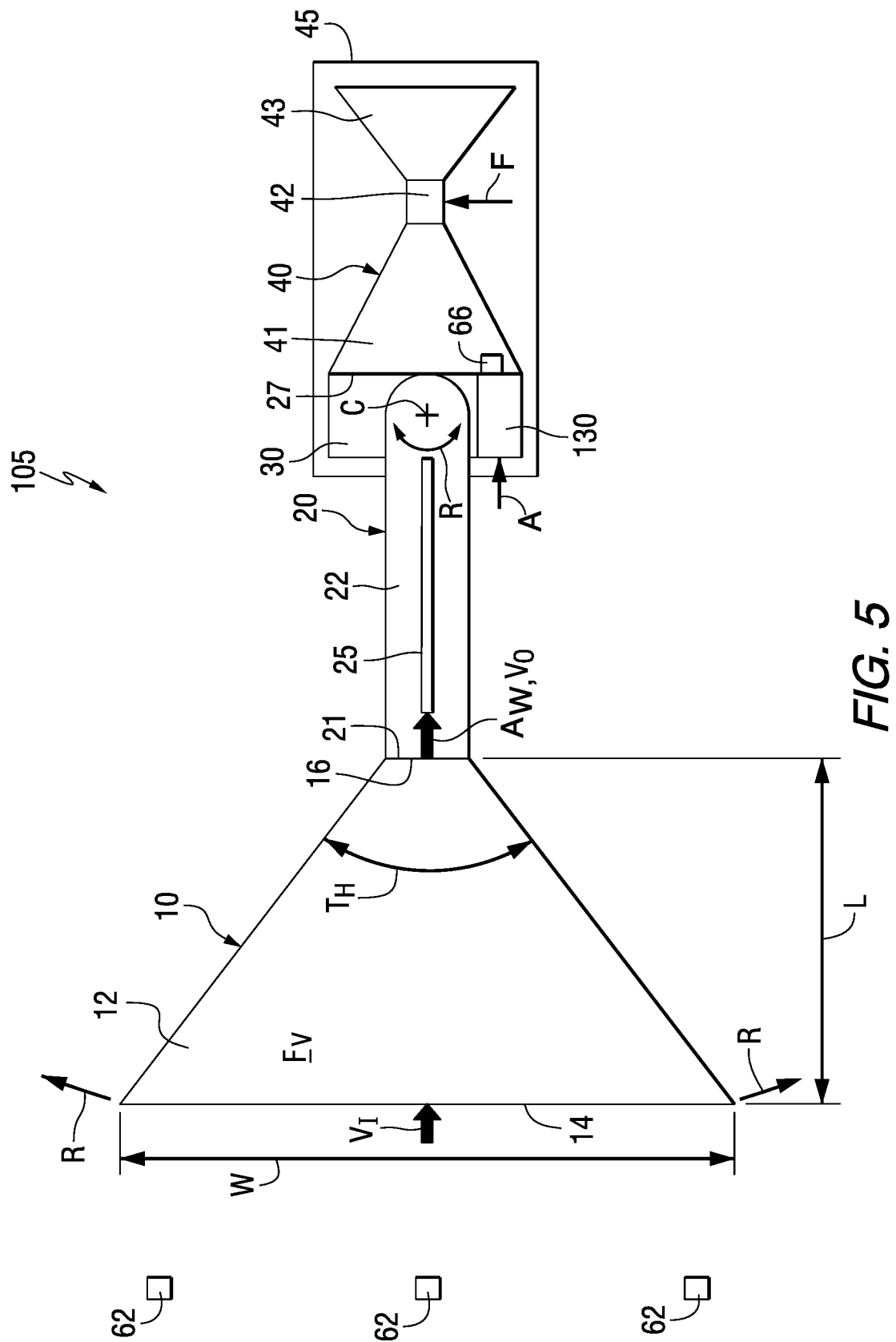


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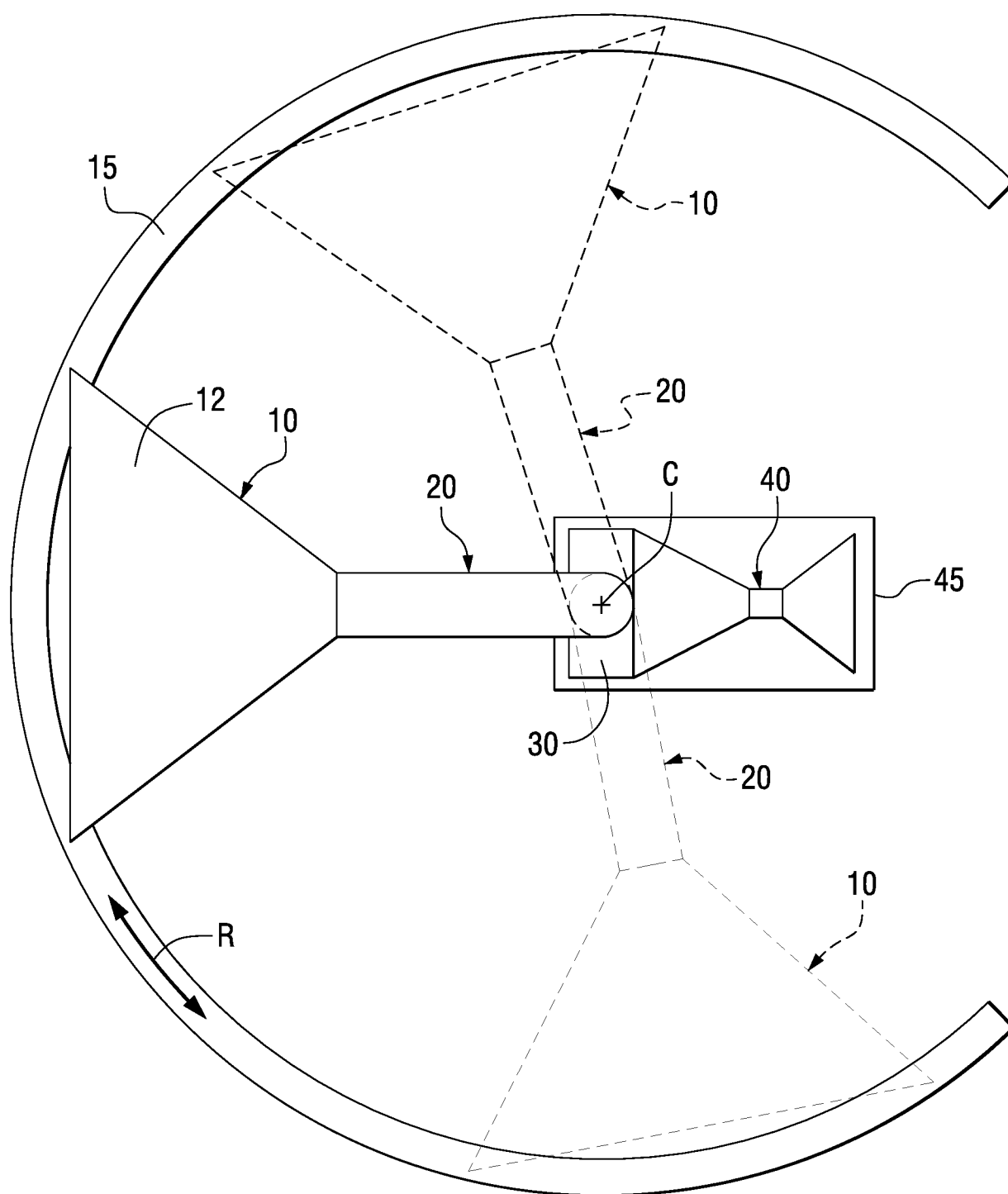


FIG. 6

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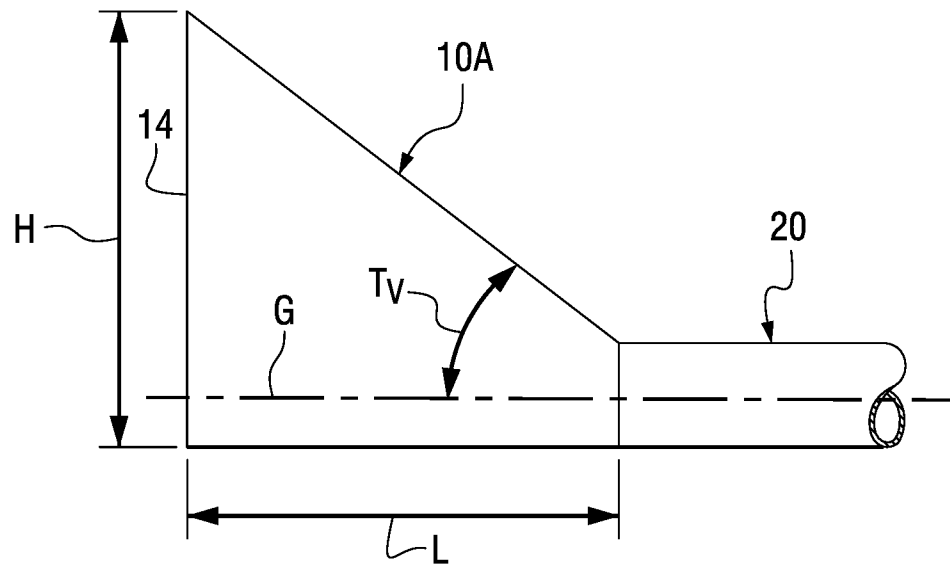


FIG. 7

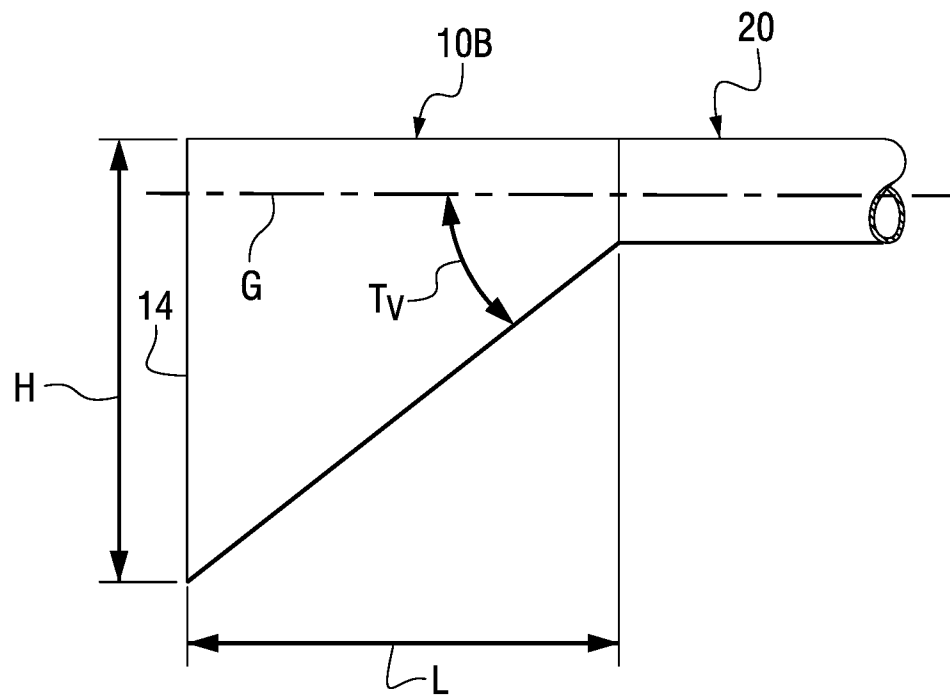
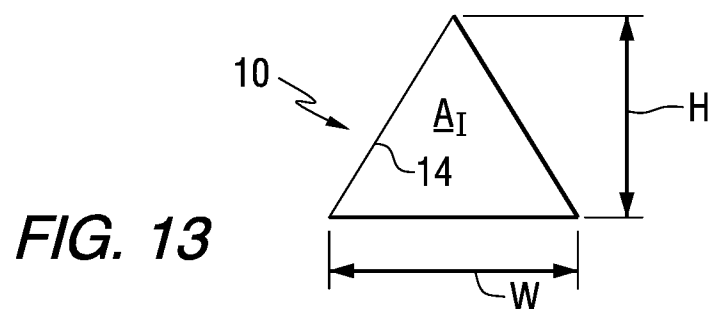
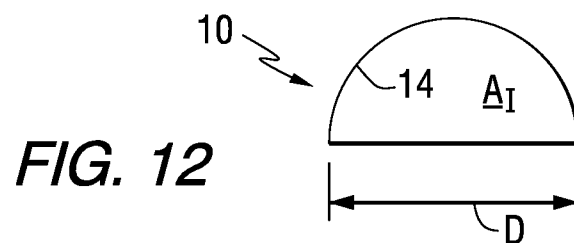
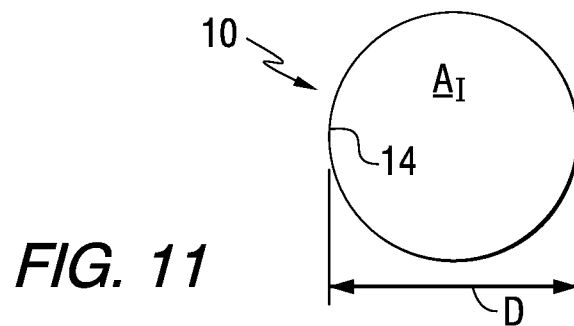
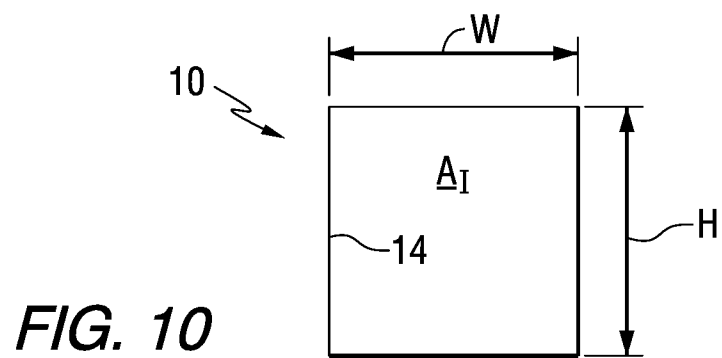
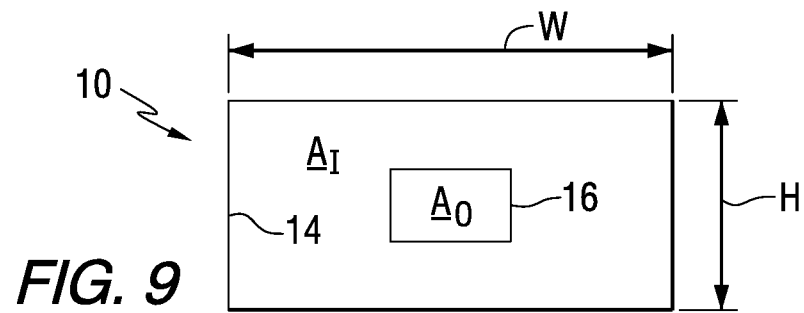
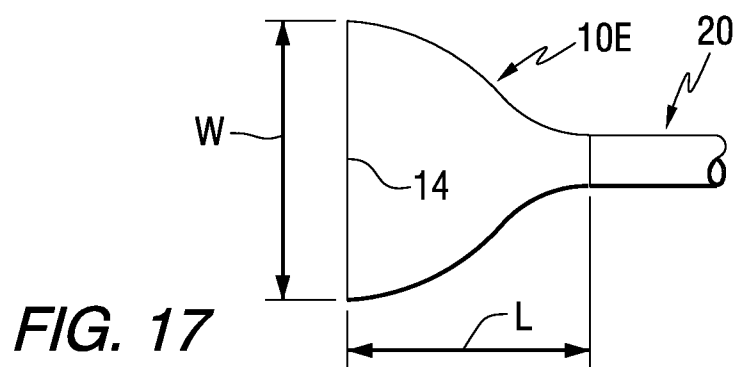
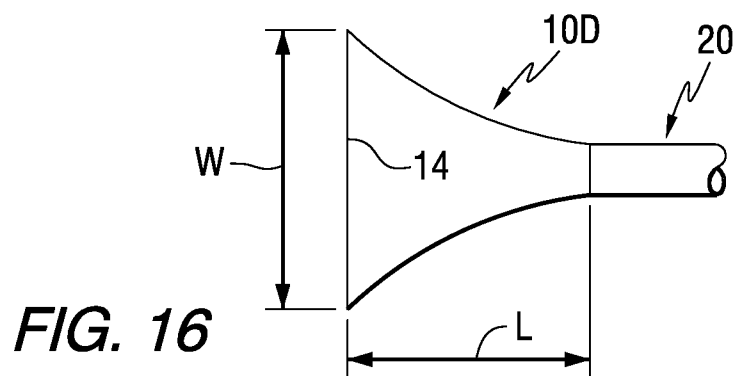
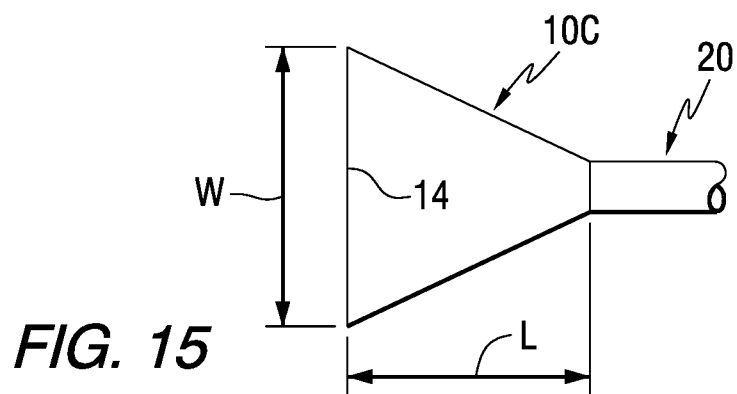
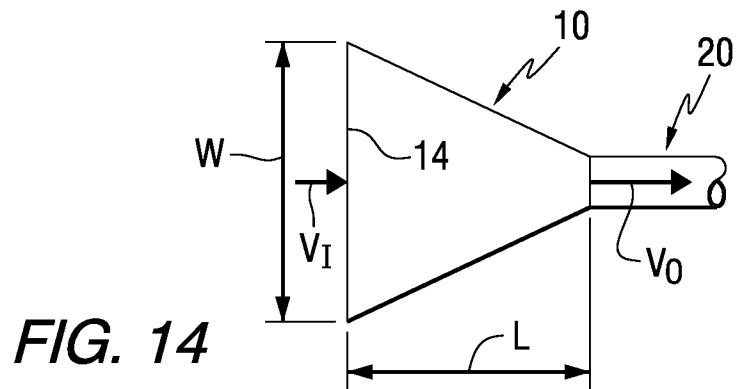


FIG. 8

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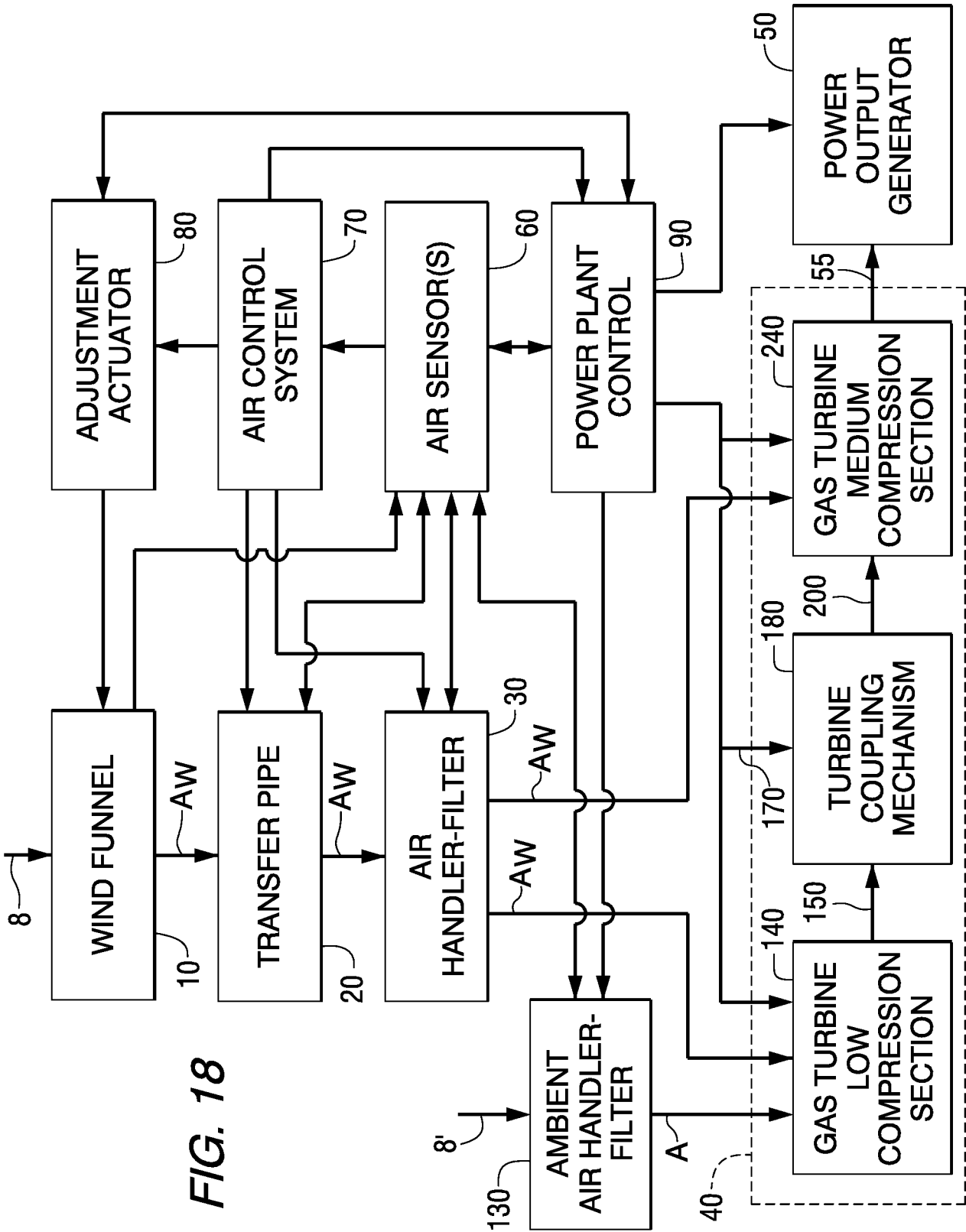


FIG. 18

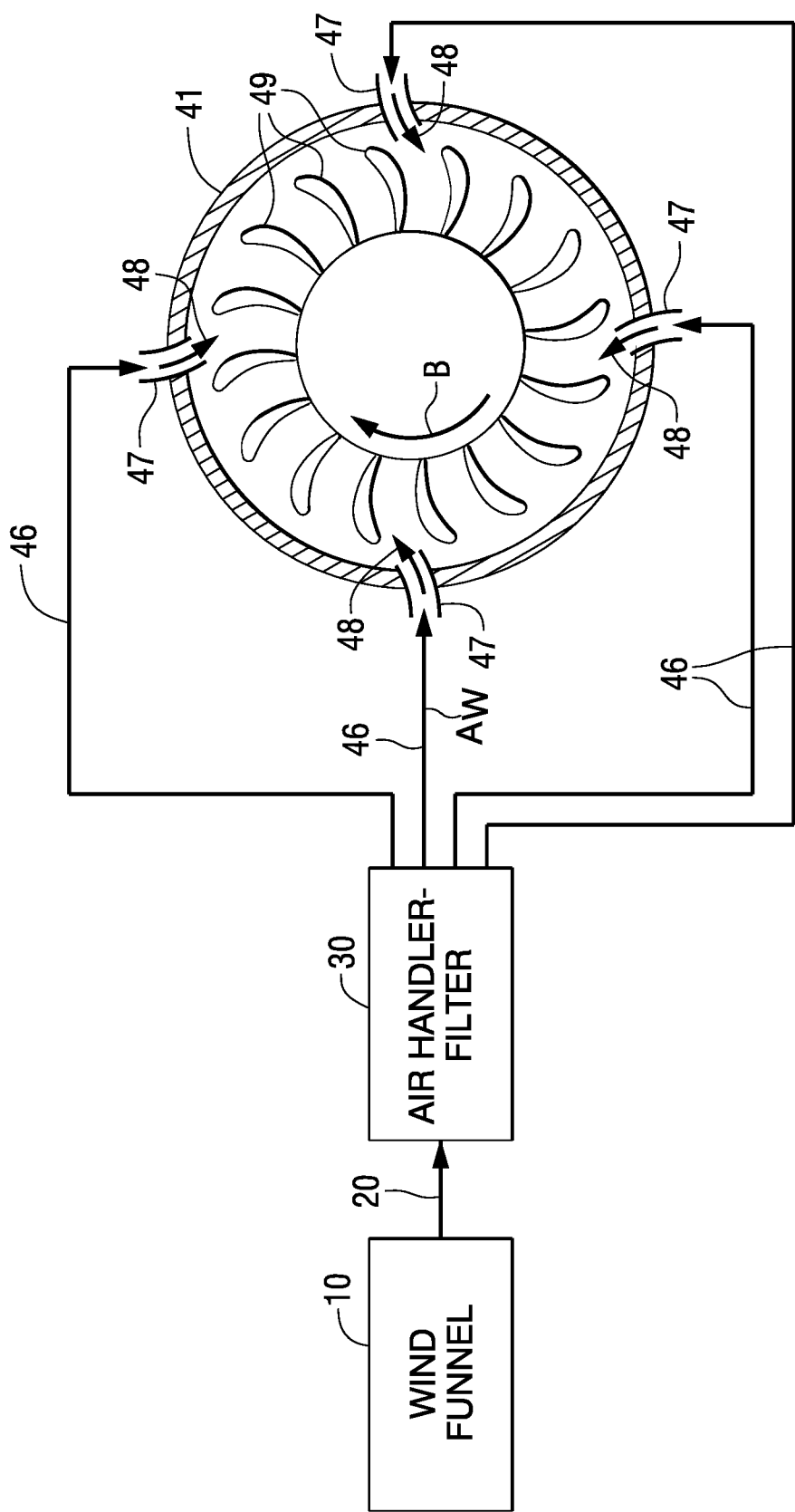


FIG. 19

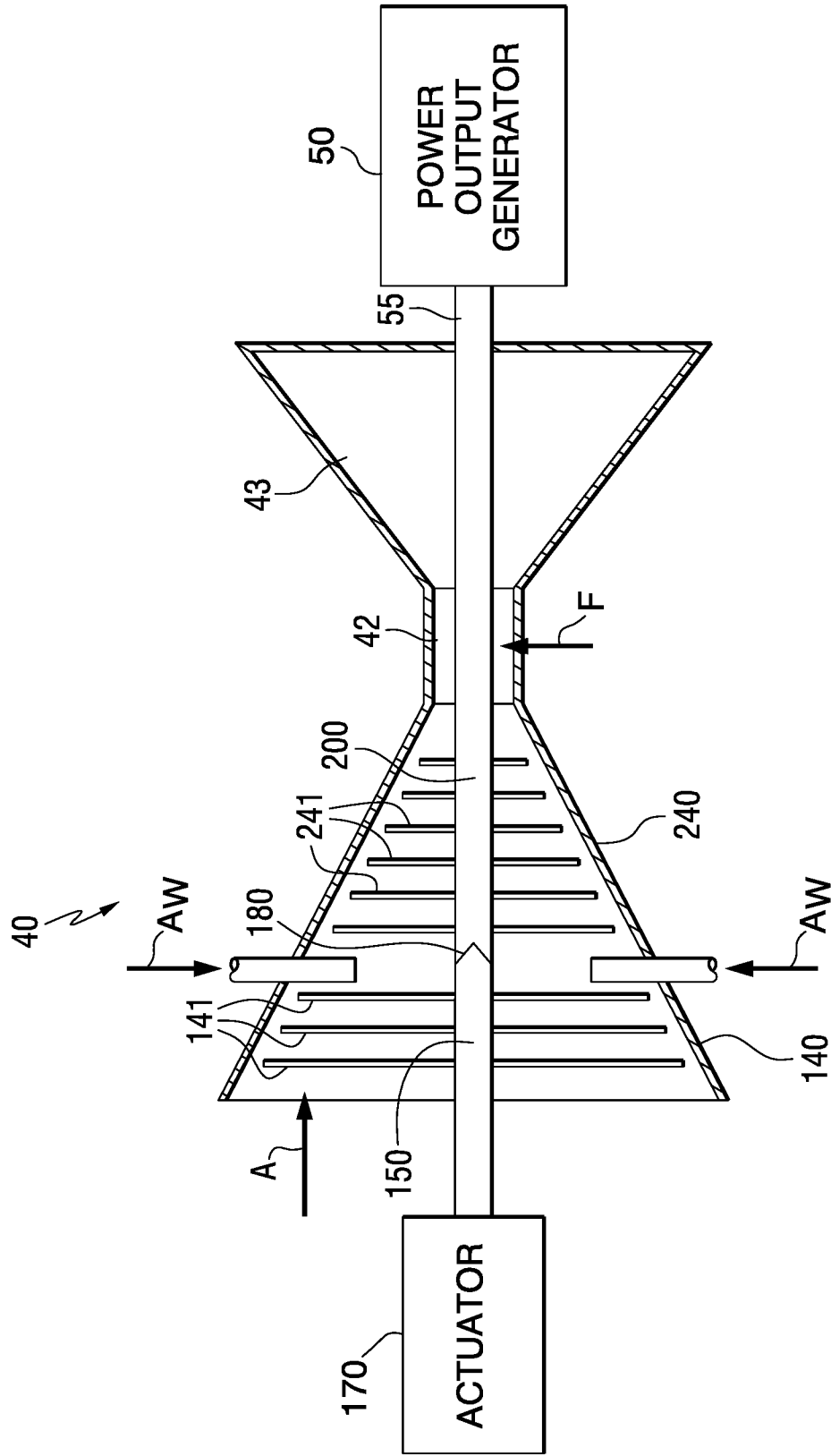
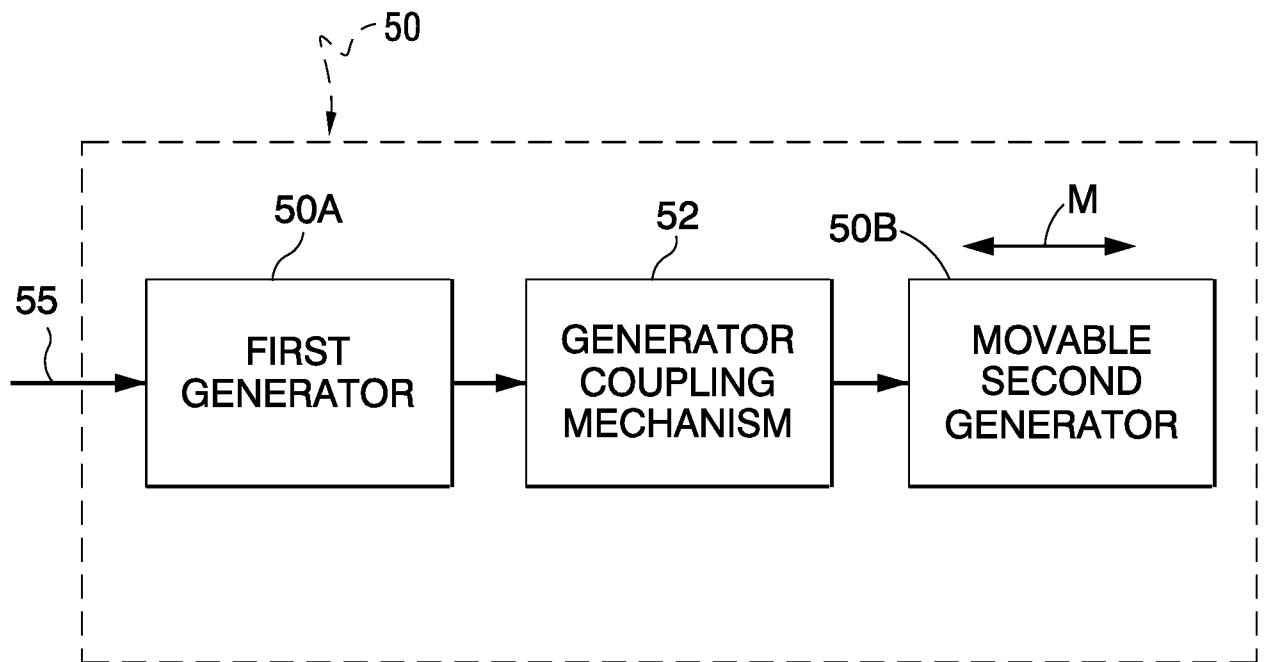
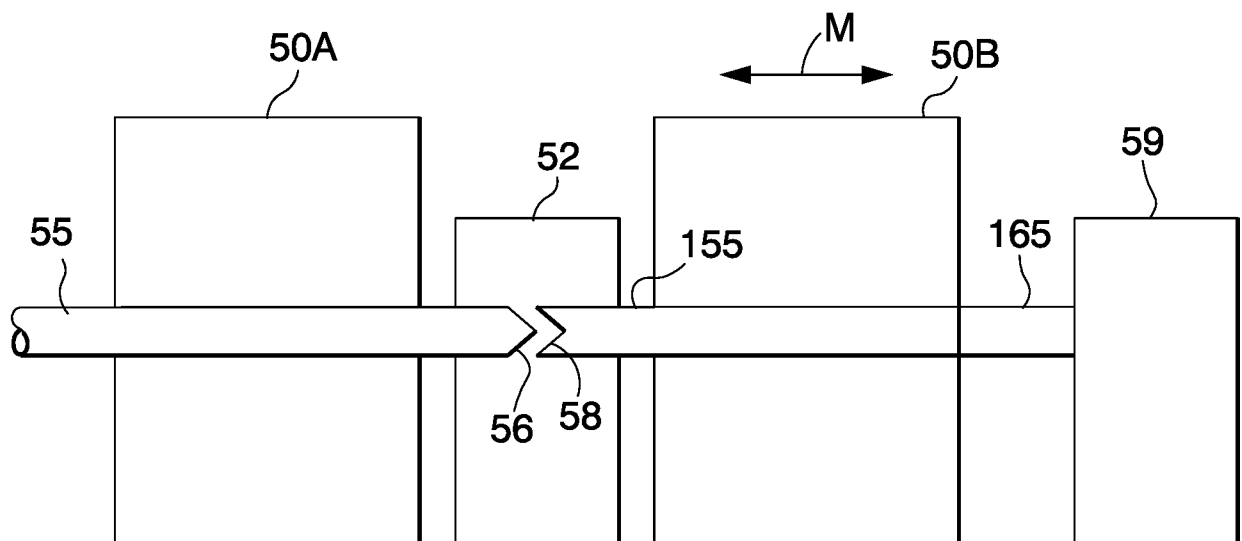


FIG. 20

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*FIG. 21**FIG. 22*