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(54) **LASER LINE GENERATOR**

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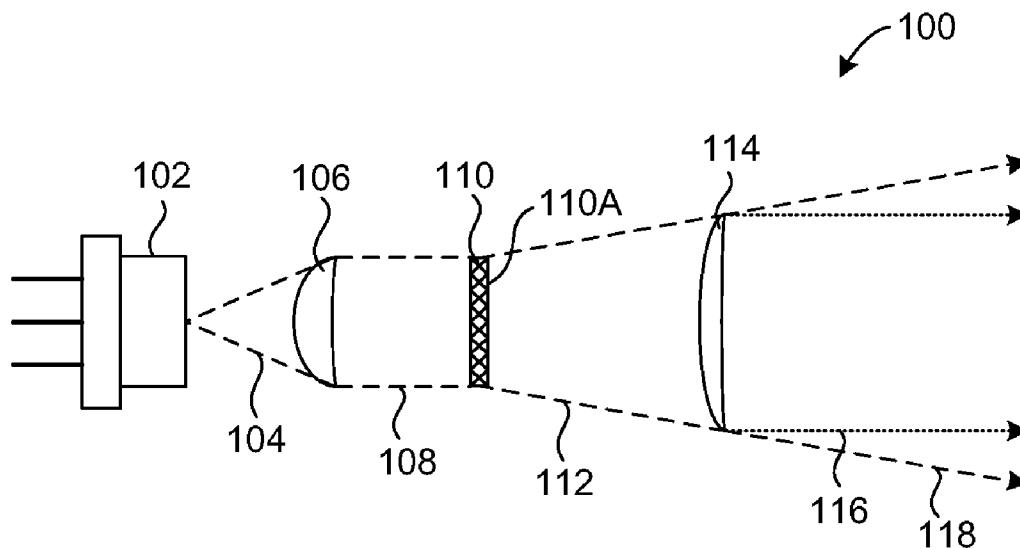
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A laser beam emission is collimated by optics. The collimated beam is shaped into an expanding planar laser beam by line generator optics. The expanding planar laser beam is collimated by other optics such that a beam having a generally rectangular cross-section is derived. The resulting beam can be used in ink drop detection and/or other applications.

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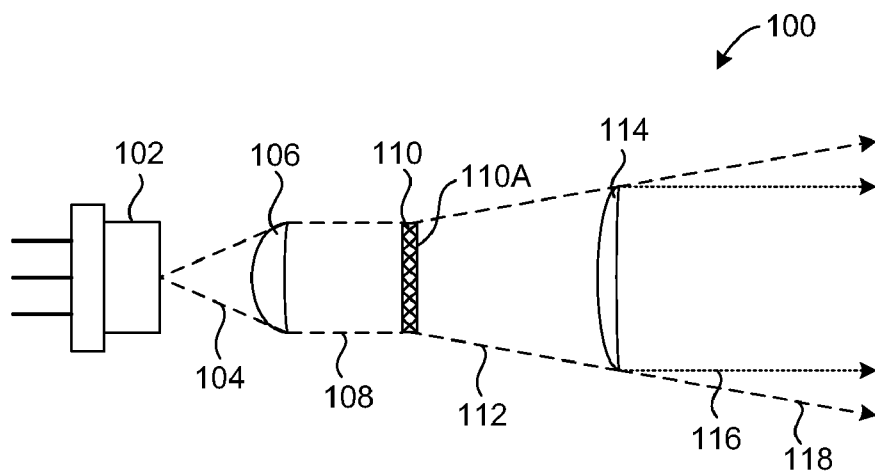


FIG. 1

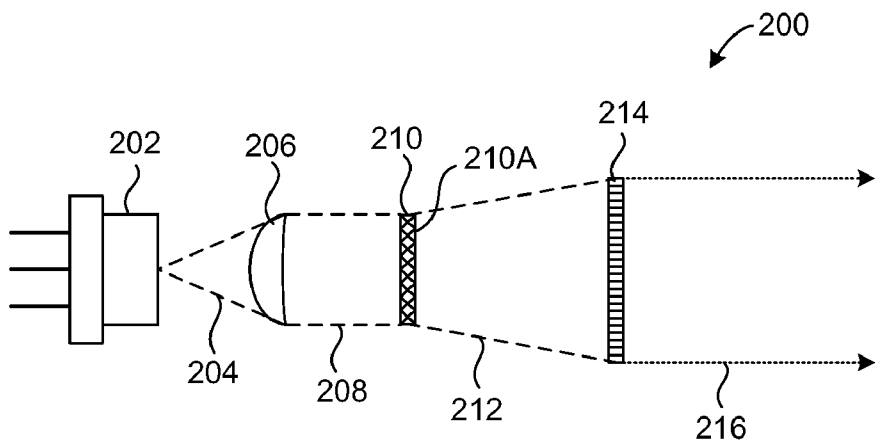


FIG. 2

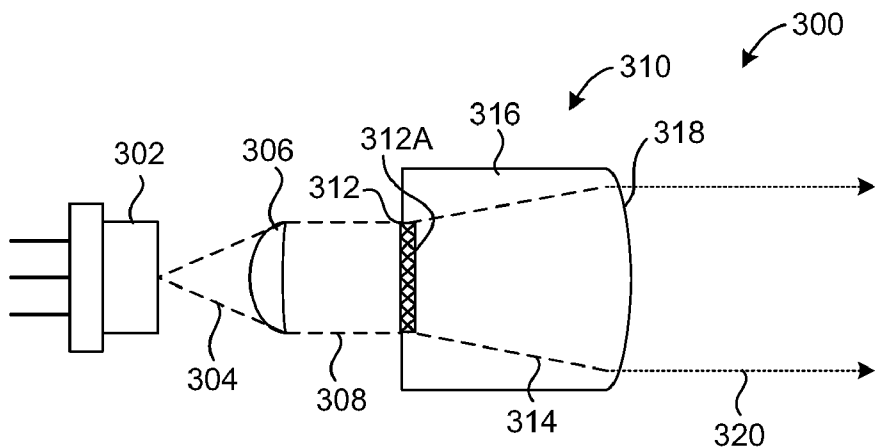


FIG. 3

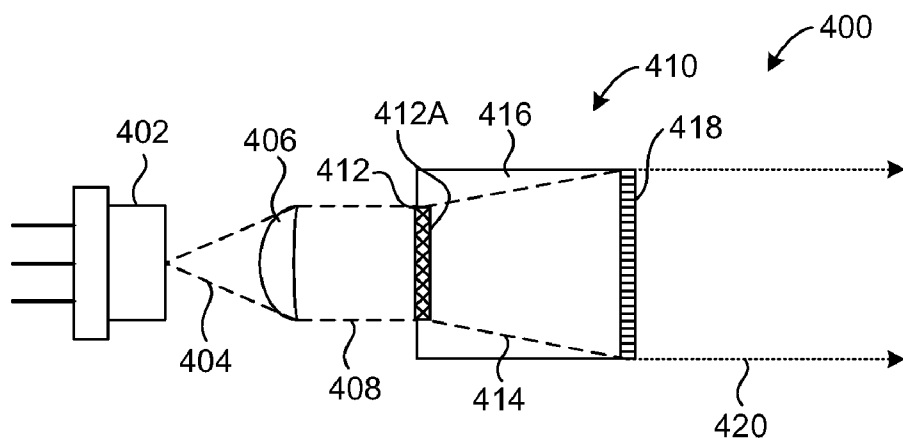


FIG. 4

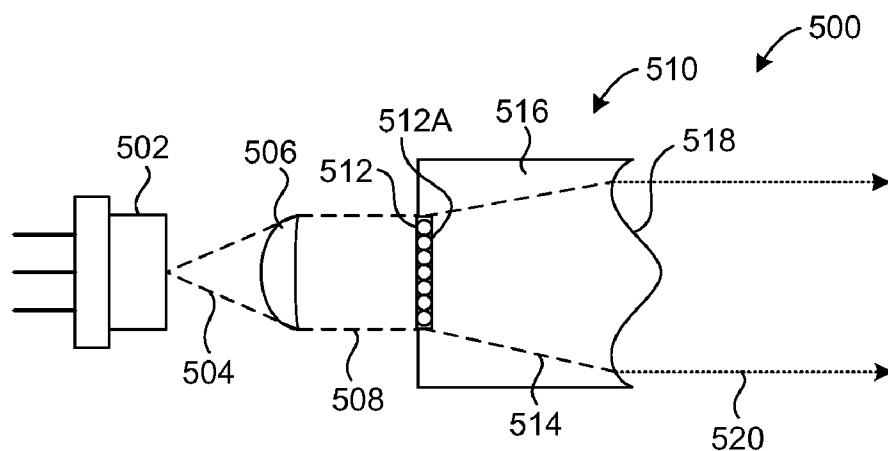


FIG. 5

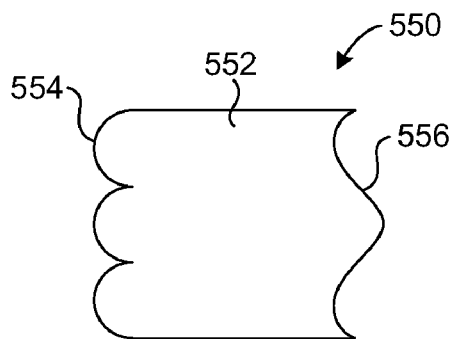


FIG. 5A

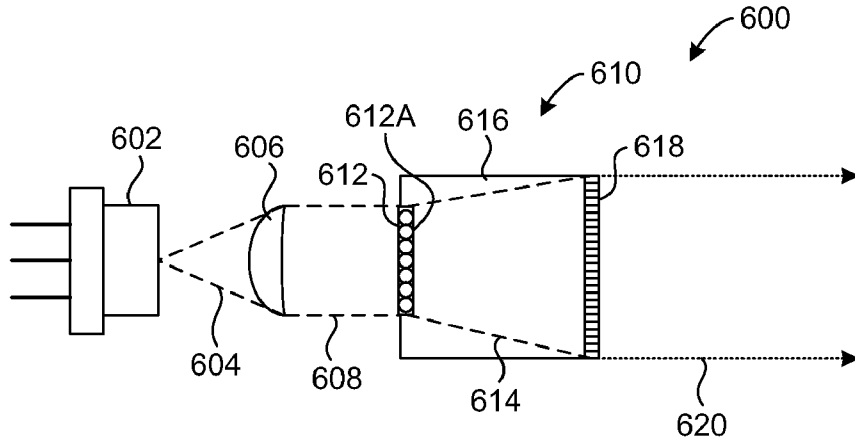


FIG. 6

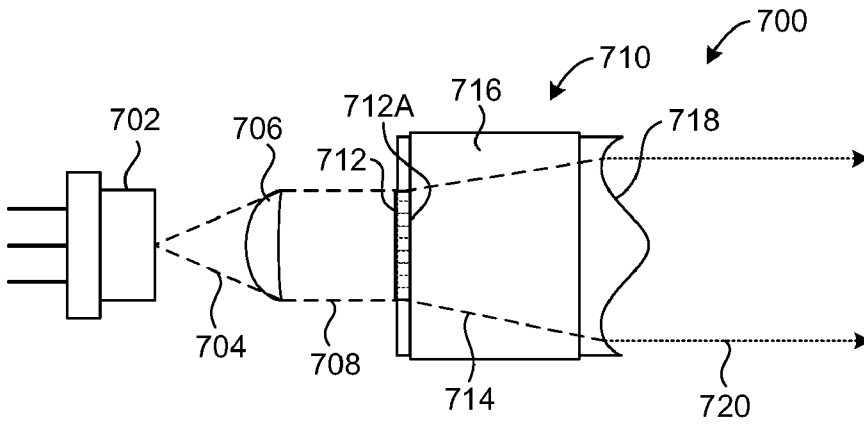


FIG. 7

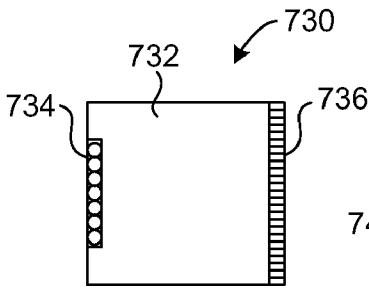


FIG. 7A

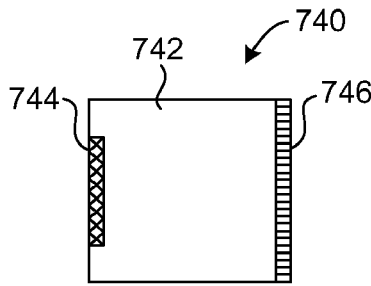


FIG. 7B

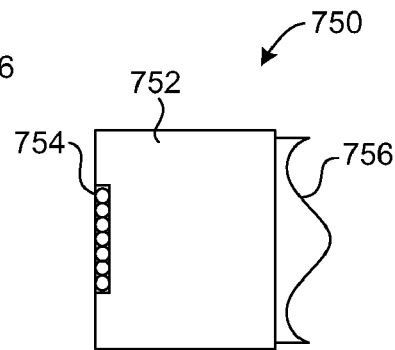


FIG. 7C

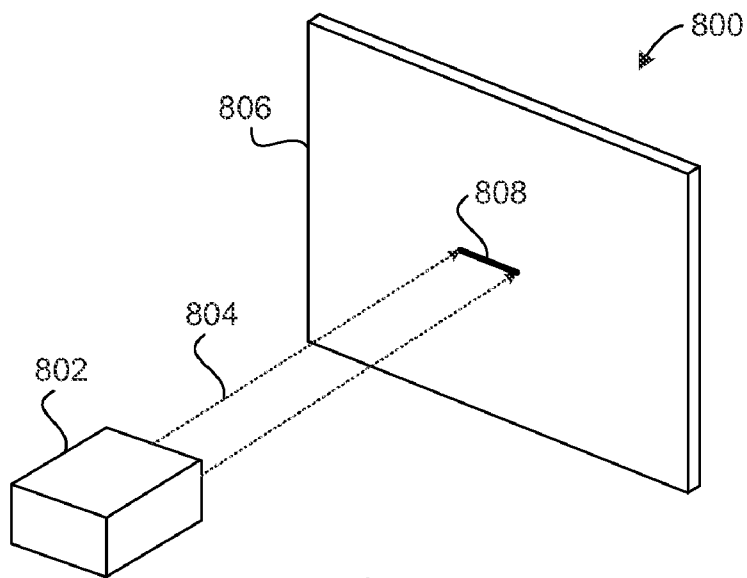


FIG. 8

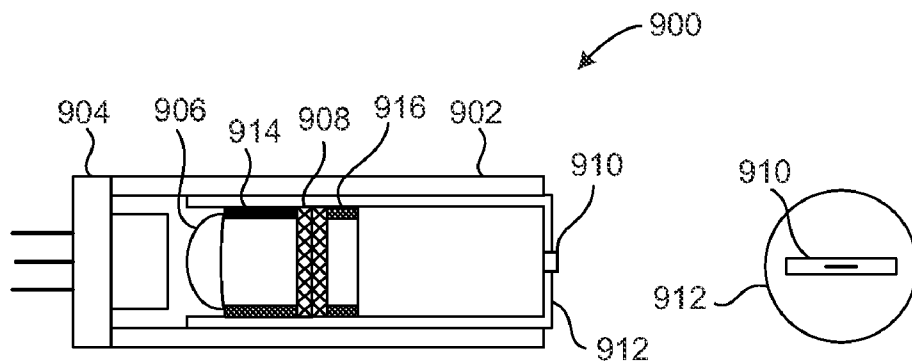


FIG. 9

FIG. 9A

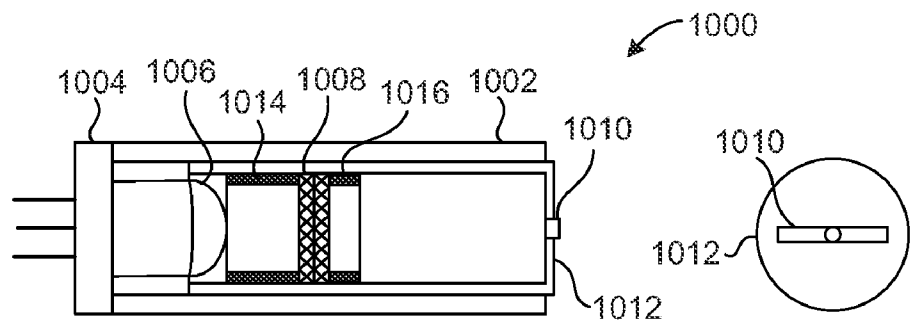


FIG. 10

FIG. 10A

LASER LINE GENERATOR

BACKGROUND

[0001] Lasers are used in a multitude of devices and applications. A typical laser emits a beam having a disc-like cross-section and Gaussian energy distribution. Many such laser beams strikes a target as a "spot" of energy having peak intensity at its center, the intensity decreasing radially in a characteristic non-linear manner.

[0002] Some applications require laser beam energy having other than a disc-like or elliptical cross-sectional distribution. Additionally, it is desirable to provide such other laser beam patterns in an economical manner and with a minimum of apparatus complexity.

[0003] Accordingly, the embodiments described hereinafter were developed in the interest of addressing the foregoing needs and problems.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0004] The present embodiments will now be described, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

[0005] FIG. 1 depicts a schematic view of an optical system according to an embodiment;

[0006] FIG. 2 depicts a schematic view of an optical system according to an embodiment;

[0007] FIG. 3 depicts a schematic view of an optical system according to an embodiment;

[0008] FIG. 4 depicts a schematic view of an optical system according to an embodiment;

[0009] FIG. 5 depicts a schematic view of an optical system according to an embodiment;

[0010] FIG. 5A depicts a schematic view of a compound optical element according to one embodiment;

[0011] FIG. 6 depicts a schematic view of an optical system according to an embodiment;

[0012] FIG. 7 depicts a schematic view of an optical system according to an embodiment;

[0013] FIG. 7A depicts a schematic view of an integrated optical assembly according to an embodiment;

[0014] FIG. 7B depicts a schematic view of an integrated optical assembly according to an embodiment;

[0015] FIG. 7C depicts a schematic view of an integrated optical assembly according to an embodiment;

[0016] FIG. 8 depicts an isometric block diagram of an operating scenario according to one embodiment;

[0017] FIG. 9 depicts a schematic view of a packaged laser device according to one embodiment;

[0018] FIG. 9A depicts an end detail view of the embodiment of FIG. 9;

[0019] FIG. 10 depicts a schematic view of a packaged laser device according to one embodiment;

[0020] FIG. 10A depicts an end detail view of the embodiment of FIG. 10.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Introduction

[0021] Means and methods for producing a planar laser beam are provided by the present teachings. A laser emitter generates a laser beam. Optics disposed within the path of the laser beam function to shape and collimate the laser beam in at least one axis such that a generally flattened, planar laser beam is derived. Such a planar laser beam has a substantially

rectangular or line-like cross-sectional pattern. The planar laser beams according to the present teachings can be used in ink drop detection and/or other applications.

[0022] In one embodiment, an apparatus includes a line generator that is configured to shape a collimated laser beam into an expanding planar laser beam. The line generator includes at least one planar surface through which the expanding planar laser beam passes. The apparatus also includes a collimator configured to collimate the expanding planar laser beam in at least a fast axis or a slow axis, such that a collimated planar laser beam is derived.

[0023] In another embodiment, an optical apparatus includes a solid-state laser configured to emit a laser beam. The apparatus also includes first collimation optics configured to shape the laser beam into a collimated laser beam. Also included are line generator optics configured to shape the collimated laser beam into an expanding planar laser beam. The line generator optics include a planar optical surface through which the expanding planar laser beam passes. The apparatus further includes second collimation optics configured to shape the expanding planar laser beam into a collimated planar laser beam.

[0024] In yet another embodiment, an integrated apparatus includes a packaging, and a laser emitter supported by the packaging. The integrated apparatus also includes collimation optics supported by the packaging. The collimation optics is configured to collimate a laser beam emitted by the laser emitter. Additionally, line generator optics is supported by the packaging and is configured to shape the collimated laser beam into a planer laser beam having about a rectangular cross-section. The integrated apparatus further includes a slit supported by the packaging. The slit is configured to limit at least a width dimension or a thickness dimension of the planar laser beam as it propagates from the packaging.

First Illustrative Embodiment

[0025] FIG. 1 depicts a schematic view of an optical system 100 according to one embodiment. The system 100 is illustrative and non-limiting with respect to the present teachings. Thus, other systems can also be defined, produced and used according to the present teachings.

[0026] The system 100 includes a laser emitter (i.e., laser) 102. The laser 102 can be, for non-limiting example, a solid-state laser diode, an edge emitter laser, a vertical-cavity surface-emitting laser (VCSEL), a gas-based laser, a ruby laser, etc. Other suitable lasers can also be used. The laser 102 is configured to emit a laser beam 104.

[0027] The system includes an aspheric lens 106. The lens 106 is disposed within the path of the laser beam 104. The lens 106 is configured to collimate (i.e., shape) the laser beam 104 such that a laser beam 108 that is collimated to some degree in at least one or both optical axis is produced. That is, the beam 108 is further collimated relative to laser beam 104. In this way, the lens 106 can also be considered a collimator 106 for purposes of the present teachings.

[0028] The system 100 also includes a diffraction grating 110 disposed within the path of the collimated laser beam 108. The diffraction grating 110 is configured to shape the collimated laser beam 108 into a generally planar beam 112. The beam 112 has an expanding width-wise dimension as it propagates away from the diffraction grating 110, and has a substantially constant thickness-wise dimension. The beam 112 is also referred to as an expanding planar laser beam 112 for purposes herein. It is noted that the diffraction grating 110

includes at least one planar side **110A** through which the expanding planar laser beam **112** passes.

[0029] The system **100** also includes a cylindrical lens **114**. The lens **114** is disposed within the path of the expanding planar laser beam **112** and acts to shape a planar laser beam **116** that is collimated in both the fast axis and the slow axis. Additionally, a portion **118** of the expanding planar laser beam **112** passes through the lens **114** that is collimated in the fast (or slow) axis only. Thus, the lens **114** can also be considered a collimator **114** for purposes of the present teachings.

[0030] The system **100** serves to shape (or derive) an original (or source) laser beam **104** having a typical disc-like (or elliptical), Gaussian distribution pattern into a collimated, planar laser beam **116** having a cross-section that is elongated in a width-wise dimension and flattened (i.e., narrowed) in a thickness-wise dimension. Such a planar laser beam **116** strikes a flat target normal thereto as a line or generally rectangular region.

[0031] Table 1 below provides illustrative and non-limiting examples of commercially available elements that can be used to assemble the system **100**. Other respective suitable elements (i.e., parts or components) can also be used.

TABLE 1

Illustrative System 100 Elements		
Element	Model/Designation	Source/Manufacturer
Laser 102	OED-LDP65001E	Lumex Inc
Lens 106	AL5040-B	ThorLabs
Grating 110	NT48-585	Edmund Optics
Lens 114	NT46-107	Edmund Optics

Second Illustrative Embodiment

[0032] FIG. 2 depicts a schematic view of an optical system **200** according to one embodiment. The system **200** is illustrative and non-limiting with respect to the present teachings. Thus, other systems can also be defined, produced and used according to the present teachings.

[0033] The system **200** includes a laser emitter (i.e., laser) **202**. The laser **202** can be defined substantially as described above with respect to the laser **102**. Other suitable lasers can also be used. The laser **202** is configured to emit a laser beam **204**. The system **200** also includes an aspheric lens **206**. The lens **206** is disposed within the path of the laser beam **204** and is configured to shape the laser beam **204** such that a collimated laser beam **208** is produced. In this way, the lens **206** can be considered a collimator **206** for purposes of the present teachings.

[0034] The system **200** also includes a diffraction grating **210** disposed within the path of the collimated laser beam **208**. The diffraction grating **210** is substantially as defined above with respect to the diffraction grating **110**, and is configured to shape the collimated laser beam **208** into an expanding, generally planar beam **212**. The beam **212** is also referred to as an expanding planar laser beam **212** for purposes herein. It is noted that the diffraction grating **210** includes at least one planar side **210A** through which the expanding planar laser beam **212** passes.

[0035] The system **200** also includes a Fresnel cylindrical lens **214**. The Fresnel lens **214** is disposed within the path of and acts to collimate the expanding planar laser beam **212** in one chosen axis. As depicted in FIG. 2, it is the fast axis that

is collimated. As such, a collimated planar laser beam **216** having a substantially linear or substantially rectangular cross-sectional energy distribution pattern is derived. The Fresnel lens **214** can also be referred to as a collimator **214** for purposes of the present teachings.

[0036] The system **200** serves to shape a laser beam **204** having a typical Gaussian distribution pattern into a collimated, planar laser beam **216** having a cross-section having a generally constant width-wise dimension and a flattened, generally constant thickness-wise dimension. Such a planar laser beam **216** strikes a flat target normal thereto as a line or generally rectangular region (see FIG. 8).

[0037] Table 2 below provides illustrative and non-limiting examples of commercially available elements that can be used to assemble the system **200**. Other respective suitable elements can also be used.

TABLE 2

Illustrative System 200 Elements		
Element	Model/Designation	Source/Manufacturer
Laser 202	OED-LDP65001E	Lumex Inc
Lens 206	AL5040-B	ThorLabs
Grating 210	NT48-585	Edmund Optics
Cyl. F. Lens 214	NT46-107	Edmund Optics

Third Illustrative Embodiment

[0038] FIG. 3 depicts a schematic view of an optical system **300** according to one embodiment. The system **300** is illustrative and non-limiting with respect to the present teachings. Thus, other systems can also be defined produced and used according to the present teachings.

[0039] The system **300** includes a laser emitter (i.e., laser) **302**. The laser **302** can be defined substantially as described above with respect to the laser **102**. Other suitable lasers can also be used. The laser **302** is configured to emit a laser beam **304**. The system includes an aspheric lens **306**. The lens **306** can be any suitable aspheric lens with focal length of 0.65 mm. The lens **306** is disposed within the path of the laser beam **304** and is configured to shape the laser beam **304** such that collimated laser beam **308** is produced. The lens **306** can be considered a collimator **306** for purposes of the present teachings.

[0040] The system **300** also includes an integrated optical element **310**. The optical element **310** includes a diffraction grating **312** disposed within the path of the collimated laser beam **308**. The diffraction grating **312** is configured to shape the collimated laser beam **308** into an expanding, generally planar laser beam **314**. The beam **314** is also referred to as an expanding planar laser beam **314** for purposes herein. It is noted that the diffraction grating **312** includes at least one planar side **312A** through which the expanding planar laser beam **314** passes.

[0041] The integrated optical element **310** includes a mass of solid transparent material **316**. The transparent material **316** can be defined by transparent media such as acrylic glass, BK7 glass etc. Other integrated optical elements or assemblages **310** having respectively varying materials **316** can also be used. The diffraction grating **312** is set within, cemented to, or defined by the transparent material **316**. Thus, in one embodiment, the transparent material **316** molded, scribed or otherwise formed to define the diffraction grating **312**, such

that the optical element **310** is defined by a monolithic structure. Other embodiments can also be used.

[0042] The integrated optical element **310** includes, or is configured to define, a cylindrical lens surface **318**. The cylindrical lens surface **318** is configured to collimate the expanding planar laser beam **314** in one chosen axis, which is fast axis in the example. In one embodiment, the optical element **310** is custom formed, having a combination of a diffractive element (diffraction grating) **312** of twenty-five hundred lines per mm, and a cylindrical lens with a focal length of 6 mm.

[0043] As such, a collimated planar laser beam **320** having a substantially linear or rectangular cross-section is derived and propagates away from the integrated optical element **310**.

[0044] The system **300** serves to shape a laser beam **304** having a typical Gaussian distribution pattern into a collimated, planar laser beam **320** having a cross-section that is elongated in a width-wise dimension and generally flattened in a thickness-wise dimension. Such a planar laser beam **320** strikes a flat target normal thereto as a line or generally rectangular region (see FIG. 8).

[0045] Table 3 below provides illustrative and non-limiting examples of commercially available elements that can be used to assemble the system **300**. Other respective suitable elements can also be used.

TABLE 3

Illustrative System 300 Elements		
Element	Model/Designation	Source/Manufacturer
Laser 302	OPV332	Optek Inc.
Lens 306	aspheric	F.L. = 0.65 mm
Optical E. 310	custom	custom made

Fourth Illustrative Embodiment

[0046] FIG. 4 depicts a schematic view of an optical system **400** according to one embodiment. The system **400** is illustrative and non-limiting with respect to the present teachings. Thus, other systems can also be defined, produced and used according to the present teachings.

[0047] The system **400** includes a laser emitter (i.e., laser) **402**. The laser **402** can be defined substantially as described above with respect to the laser **102**. Other suitable lasers can also be used. The laser **402** is configured to emit a laser beam **404**. The system includes an aspheric lens **406** disposed within the path of the laser beam **404** and configured to shape the laser beam **404** such that collimated laser beam **408** is produced. The lens **406** can be considered a collimator **406** for purposes of the present teachings.

[0048] The system **400** also includes an integrated optical element **410**. The optical element **410** includes a diffraction grating **412** disposed within the path of the collimated laser beam **408**. The diffraction grating **412** is configured to shape the collimated laser beam **408** into an expanding, generally planar laser beam **414**. It is noted that the diffraction grating **412** includes at least one planar side **412A** through which the expanding planar laser beam **414** passes.

[0049] The integrated optical element **410** includes a mass of solid transparent material **416**. The transparent material **416** can be defined by transparent media such as acrylic glass, BK7 glass etc. Other integrated optical elements or assemblages **410** having respectively varying materials **416** can also be used. The diffraction grating **412** is set within, cemented

to, or defined by the transparent material **416**. The integrated optical element **410** includes, or is configured to define, a Fresnel cylindrical lens surface **418**. The Fresnel lens surface **418** is configured to collimate the expanding planar laser beam **414** in one axis as determined by the system design. The Fresnel lens surface **418** can be defined by, or cemented to, the transparent material **416**.

[0050] As such, a collimated planar laser beam **420** having a substantially linear or rectangular cross-sectional energy distribution pattern is derived and propagates away from the integrated optical element **410**. In one embodiment, the optical element **410** is custom formed, having a combination of diffractive element (diffraction grating) **412** of twenty-five hundred lines per mm, and a cylindrical lens with a focal length of 152.4 mm (6 inches), cemented together. Other embodiments (e.g., monolithic, etc.) are possible.

[0051] The system **400** operates to provide a collimated, planar laser beam **420** having a cross-section that is elongated in a width-wise dimension and generally flattened in a thickness-wise dimension. Such a planar laser beam **420** strikes a target normal thereto as a line or generally rectangular energy region.

[0052] Table 4 below provides illustrative and non-limiting examples of commercially available elements that can be used to assemble the system **400**. Other respective suitable elements can also be used.

TABLE 4

Illustrative System 400 Elements		
Element	Model/Designation	Source/Manufacturer
Laser 402	OPV332	Optek Inc.
Lens 406	aspheric	F.L. = 0.65 mm
Optical E. 410	custom	custom made

Fifth Illustrative Embodiment

[0053] FIG. 5 depicts a schematic view of an optical system **500** according to one embodiment. The system **500** is illustrative and non-limiting with respect to the present teachings. Thus, other systems can also be defined, produced and used according to the present teachings.

[0054] The system **500** includes a laser emitter **502** and an aspheric lens **506** that are defined and configured substantially as described above with respect to the laser **402** and the lens **406**, respectively. The laser **502** is configured to emit a laser beam **504**. In turn, the aspheric lens **506** is disposed and configured to shape the laser beam **504** such that a collimated laser beam **508** is produced. Lens **506** is an aspheric lens with focal length 0.65 mm. The lens **506** can be considered a collimator **506** for purposes of the present teachings.

[0055] The system **500** also includes an integrated optical element **510**. The optical element **510** includes a lenticular lens array **512** disposed within the path of the collimated laser beam **508**. The lenticular lens array **512** is configured to shape the collimated laser beam **508** into an expanding, generally planar laser beam **514** (expanding planar laser beam **514**). It is noted that the lenticular lens array **512** includes at least one planar side **512A** through which the expanding planar laser beam **514** passes.

[0056] The integrated optical element **510** includes a mass of solid transparent material **516**. The transparent material **516** can be defined by transparent media such as acrylic glass,

BK7 glass etc. Other integrated optical elements 510 having respectively varying materials 516 can also be used. The lenticular lens array 512 is set within, cemented to, or defined by the transparent material 516.

[0057] The integrated optical element 510 includes, or is configured to define, an acylindrical lens surface 518. The acylindrical lens surface 518 is configured to collimate the expanding planar laser beam 514 in both the fast axis and the slow axis. As such, a collimated planar laser beam 520 having a substantially linear or rectangular cross-sectional energy distribution pattern is derived and propagates away from the integrated optical element 510. In one embodiment, the optical element 510 is a custom element, which is a combination of lenticular lens array 512 with a focal length of 2.16 mm (0.085 inches) and an acylindrical custom lens with a focal length of 6 mm, for example, cemented together. Other embodiments, such as monolithic structures, can also be used.

[0058] The system 500 operates to provide a collimated, planar laser beam 520 having a cross-section that is elongated in a width-wise dimension and generally flattened in a thickness-wise dimension. It is noted that the lenticular lens array 512 operates to diverge/enlarge the laser beam 514 in one axis, while the aspheric surface 518 operates to provide a specific degree of collimation. Table 5 below provides illustrative and non-limiting examples of commercially available elements that can be used to assemble the system 500. Other respective suitable elements can also be used.

TABLE 5

Illustrative System 500 Elements		
Element	Model/Designation	Source/Manufacturer
Laser 502	Opv332	Optek Inc.
Lens 506	NT43-028	Edmund Optics
Optical E. 510	Custom	Custom made

[0059] FIG. 5A depicts a compound optical element 550. The compound optical element 550 can be used in place of the integrated optical element 510 depicted in FIG. 5. The compound optical element 550 includes a mass of solid transparent material 552. The compound optical element 550 includes, or is configured to define, a lenticular lens array surface 554. The lenticular lens array surface 554 is configured to shape a collimated laser beam (e.g., 508) into an expanding planar laser beam (e.g., 514).

[0060] The compound optical element 550 includes, or is configured to define, an acylindrical lens surface 556. The acylindrical lens surface 556 is configured to collimate the expanding planar laser beam (e.g., 514) in both the fast axis and the slow axis. As such, a collimated planar laser beam (e.g., 520) having a substantially linear or rectangular cross-sectional energy distribution pattern is derived and propagates away from the integrated optical element 550 during normal operation.

[0061] The compound optical element 550 operates to provide a collimated, planar laser beam (e.g., 520) having a cross-section that is elongated in a width-wise dimension and generally flattened in a thickness-wise dimension. Other suitable compound optical elements can also be used.

Sixth Illustrative Embodiment

[0062] FIG. 6 depicts a schematic view of an optical system 600 according to one embodiment. The system 600 is illustrative and non-limiting with respect to the present teachings.

Thus, other systems can also be defined, produced and used according to the present teachings.

[0063] The system 600 includes a laser emitter 602 and an aspheric lens 606 that are defined and configured substantially as described above with respect to the laser 102 and the lens 106, respectively. The laser 602 is configured to emit a laser beam 604. In turn, the aspheric lens 606 is disposed and configured to shape the laser beam 604 such that a collimated laser beam 608 is produced. The lens 606 is an aspheric lens with focal length of 0.65 mm. The lens 606 can be considered a collimator 606 for purposes of the present teachings.

[0064] The system 600 also includes an integrated optical element 610. The optical element 610 includes a lenticular lens array surface 612 disposed within the path of the collimated laser beam 608. The lenticular lens array surface 612 is configured to shape the collimated laser beam 608 into an expanding planar laser beam 614. It is noted that the lenticular lens array surface 612 includes at least one planar side 612A through which the expanding planar laser beam 614 passes.

[0065] The integrated optical element 610 includes a mass of solid transparent material 616. The transparent material 616 can include a refractive transparent media such as acrylic glass, BK7 glass etc. Other integrated optical elements 610 having respectively varying materials 616 can also be used. The lenticular lens array surface 612 is set within, cemented to, or defined by, the transparent material 616.

[0066] The integrated optical element 610 includes, or is configured to define, a Fresnel cylindrical lens surface 618. The Fresnel cylindrical lens surface 618 is configured to collimate the expanding planar laser beam 614 in both the one axis. As such, a collimated planar laser beam 620 having a generally linear or rectangular cross-sectional energy distribution pattern is derived and propagates away from the integrated optical element 610. In one embodiment, the optical element 610 is a custom element which is a combination of lenticular array 612 with a focal length of 2.16 mm (0.085 inches), and Fresnel acylindrical custom lens with a focal length of 6 mm, cemented together. Other embodiments can also be used (e.g., monolithic structures, etc.).

[0067] The system 600 operates to provide a collimated, planar laser beam 620 having a cross-section that is elongated in a width-wise dimension and generally flattened in a thickness-wise dimension.

[0068] Table 6 below provides illustrative and non-limiting examples of commercially available elements that can be used to assemble the system 600. Other respective suitable elements can also be used.

TABLE 6

Illustrative System 600 Elements		
Element	Model/Designation	Source/Manufacturer
Laser 602	Opv332	Optek Inc.
Lens 606	NT43-028	Edmund Optics
Optical E. 610	Custom	Custom made

Seventh Illustrative Embodiment

[0069] FIG. 7 depicts a schematic view of an optical system 700 according to one embodiment. The system 700 is illustrative and non-limiting with respect to the present teachings.

Thus, other systems can also be defined, produced and used according to the present teachings.

[0070] The system 700 includes a laser emitter (i.e., laser) 702. The laser 702 can be defined substantially as described above with respect to the laser 102. Other suitable lasers can also be used. The laser 702 is configured to emit a laser beam 704. The system includes an aspheric lens 706 disposed within the path of the laser beam 704 and configured to shape the laser beam 704 such that a collimated laser beam 708 is produced. The lens 706 can be considered a collimator 706 for purposes of the present teachings.

[0071] The system 700 also includes an integrated optical assembly 710. The optical assembly 710 includes a beam shaping element 712 disposed within the path of the collimated laser beam 708. The beam shaping element 712 is configured to shape the collimated laser beam 708 into an expanding planar laser beam 714. It is noted that the beam shaping element 712 includes at least one planar side 712A through which the expanding planar laser beam 714 passes. The beam shaping element 712 can be variously defined as described below in regard to FIGS. 7A, 7B and 7C, inclusive.

[0072] The integrated optical assembly 710 includes a mass of solid transparent material 716. The transparent material 716 is characterized by a refractive index that matches that of the beam shaping element 712. For non-limiting example, the transparent material 716 can be any transparent material compatible with the operating wavelength such as acrylic glass, BK7 glass etc. The transparent material 716 can have a refractive index specifically defined for system application such as, for non-limiting example, 1.52, 1.4, or any material selected to match the optical characteristics of the system. Other suitable materials can also be used. The beam shaping element 712 is bonded (cemented) to (or set within) and supported by the transparent material 716.

[0073] The integrated optical assembly 710 includes a collimator 718 disposed within the path of the expanding planar laser beam 714. The collimator 718 is bonded to and supported by the transparent material 716. Additionally, the collimator 718 is characterized by a refractive index that matches that of both the beam shaping element 712 and the transparent material 716. The collimator 718 can be variously defined as described below in regard to FIGS. 7A, 7B and 7C, inclusive. The collimator 718 is configured to collimate the expanding planar laser beam 714 in one axis. As such, a collimated planar laser beam 720 having a generally linear or rectangular cross-sectional energy distribution pattern is derived and propagates away from the integrated optical assembly 710.

[0074] FIG. 7A depicts an integrated optical assembly 730 that can be used in place of the integrated optical element 710 depicted in FIG. 7. The integrated optical assembly 730 includes a mass of solid transparent material 732, a lenticular lens array surface 732 (i.e., beam shaping element), and a Fresnel cylindrical lens surface 736 (i.e., collimator). In one embodiment, the optical element 730 is a custom element which is a combination of a lenticular lens array 734 with a focal length of 2.16 mm (0.085 inches) and a Fresnel acylindrical custom lens 736 with a focal length of 6 mm, cemented together with custom glass block 732 of 10 mm thickness. In another embodiment, the optical assembly 730 is defined by a monolithic structure.

[0075] Table 7 below provides illustrative and non-limiting examples of commercially available elements that can be used to assemble the integrated optical assembly 730. Other respective suitable elements can also be used.

TABLE 7

Illustrative Assembly 730 Elements		
Element	Model/Designation	Source/Manufacturer
Optical Mat. 732	custom BK7, 10 mm thick	(any)
Lens Surface 734	NT43-028	Edmund Optics
Fresnel Lens 736	NT46-114	Edmund Optics

[0076] FIG. 7b depicts an integrated optical assembly 740 that can be used in place of the integrated optical element 710 depicted in FIG. 7. The integrated optical assembly 740 includes a mass of solid transparent material 742, a diffraction grating surface 744 (i.e., beam shaping element), and a Fresnel cylindrical lens surface 746 (i.e., collimator). In one embodiment, the optical element 740 is a custom element which is a combination of diffractive element 744 of twenty-five hundred lines/mm, and Fresnel lens 746 with a focal length of 6 mm, cemented together by custom glass 742 of 10 mm thickness. In another embodiment, the optical assembly 740 is defined by a monolithic structure.

[0077] Table 8 below provides illustrative and non-limiting examples of commercially available elements that can be used to assemble the integrated optical assembly 740. Other respective suitable elements can also be used.

TABLE 8

Illustrative Assembly 740 Elements		
Element	Model/Designation	Source/Manufacturer
Optical Mat. 742	BK7 glass, 10 mm thick	(any)
Grating 744	2500 lines/mm	(any)
Fresnel Lens 746	6 mm focal length	(any)

[0078] FIG. 7C depicts an integrated optical assembly 750 that can be used in place of the integrated optical element 710 depicted in FIG. 7. The integrated optical assembly 750 includes a mass of solid transparent material 752, a lenticular lens array surface 754 (i.e., beam shaping element), and an acylindrical or cylindrical lens surface 756 (i.e., collimator), depending on desired performance level. In another embodiment, the optical assembly 750 is defined by a monolithic structure.

First Illustrative Operation

[0079] FIG. 8 depicts an isometric block diagram of an operating scenario (i.e., operation) 800 according to the present teachings. The operation 800 is illustrative and non-limiting in nature, and is directed to a clear understanding the present teachings. Other operations consistent with the present teachings can also be used.

[0080] The operation 800 includes a device (system or assembly) 802 configured to provide a collimated, planar beam of laser energy 804. The device 802 can be defined by any suitable such device or apparatus according to the present teachings such as, for non-limiting example, system 200, 300, 400, etc., as described above or the device 900 or 1000, etc., as described below. Other devices or systems in accordance with the present teachings can also be used.

[0081] A flat target 806 is disposed normal to the path of the laser beam 804. In turn, the laser beam 804 strikes the target 806 as a line of energy 808. Thus, an original (i.e., source)

beam of laser energy (not shown) generated within the device **802** has been shaped so as to strike the target **806** as a line-like or narrow, substantially rectangular area **808**.

Eighth Illustrative Embodiment

[0082] FIG. 9 depicts a packaged laser device **900** according to another embodiment. The device **900** is illustrative and non-limiting with respect to the present teachings. Other packaged devices can also be configured and/or used according to the present teachings.

[0083] The device **900** includes a holder tube (i.e., packaging or housing) **902**. The holder tube **902** can be formed from any suitable material such as, for non-limiting example, aluminum, stainless steel, etc. Other materials can also be used. The holder tube **902** is configured to protectively house a plurality of elements described hereinafter.

[0084] The device **900** also includes an edge emitter laser **904**. The laser **904** is configured to provide a beam of laser energy. The laser **904** is analogous in operation to the lasers **102**, **202**, etc. as described above. The laser **904** is supported at one end of the holder tube **902**. The device **900** also includes collimation optics **906**. The collimation optics **906** are configured to collimate a beam emitted by the laser **904**. In one embodiment, the collimation optics **906** are defined by an aspheric lens. Other suitable collimation optics can also be used. The collimation optics **906** are analogous to the collimators **106**, **206**, etc. as described above. The collimation optics **906** are supported within the holder tube **902**.

[0085] The device **900** includes line generator **908**. The line generator **908** is configured to shape the collimated laser beam propagating from the collimation optics **906** into a generally flattened, collimated planar laser beam. In one embodiment, the line generator **908** is defined by an integrated optical element such as, for non-limiting example, the integrated optical elements **310**, **410**, **510**, etc. Other suitable line generators **908** can also be used.

[0086] The device **900** also includes a slit **910** defined in an end plug **912**. Reference is also made to FIG. 9A, which depicts an end elevation view of details of the device **900**. The slit **910** is configured to limit width-wise and thickness-wise dimensions of the laser beam emitted from the device **900** during normal operation. In this way, a laser beam having a flattened, generally rectangular cross-sectional energy distribution pattern is provided by the device **900** during normal use. Support elements **914** and **916** are further included within the device **900** so as to fixedly support and space collimation optics **906** and line generator **908**. Additionally, an optional spatial filter (not shown) can be included within or adjacent to the slit **910**.

[0087] The device **900** provides an integrated assemblage of elements configured to generate a laser beam having a line-like or rectangular cross-sectional energy distribution of generally constant width and thickness dimensions. The device **900** is applicable, for non-limiting example, in an inkjet printing context to perform drop detection testing of the ink emitter dies. Other suitable applications are also possible.

Ninth Illustrative Embodiment

[0088] FIG. 10 depicts a packaged laser device **1000** according to another embodiment. The device **1000** is illustrative and non-limiting with respect to the present teachings. Other packaged devices can also be configured and/or used according to the present teachings.

[0089] The device **1000** includes a holder tube (i.e., packaging or housing) **1002**. The holder tube **1002** can be formed from any suitable material such as, for non-limiting example, aluminum, stainless steel, etc. Other materials can also be used. The holder tube **1002** is configured to protectively house a plurality of elements described hereinafter.

[0090] The device **1000** also includes a vertical-cavity surface-emitting laser (VCSEL) **1004**. The laser **1004** is configured to provide a beam of laser energy. The laser **1004** is analogous in operation to the lasers **102**, **202**, etc. as described above. The laser **1004** is supported at one end of the holder tube **1002**. The device **1000** also includes optional collimation optics **1006**. The collimation optics **1006** are configured to collimate a beam emitted by the laser **1004**. In one embodiment, the collimation optics **1006** include a spheric or aspheric lens. Other suitable collimation optics can also be used. The collimation optics **1006** are analogous to the collimators **106**, **206**, etc. as described above. The collimation optics **1006** is supported within the holder tube **1002** or in VCSEL package.

[0091] The device **1000** includes a line generator **1008**. The line generator **1008** is configured to shape the collimated laser beam propagating from the (optional) collimation optics **1006** into a generally flattened, collimated planar laser beam. In one embodiment, the line generator **1008** is defined by an integrated optical element such as, for non-limiting example, the integrated optical elements **310**, **410**, **510**, etc. Other suitable line generators **1008** can also be used.

[0092] The device **1000** also includes a slit **1010** defined in an end plug **1012**. Reference is also made to FIG. 10A, which depicts an end elevation view of details of the device **1000**. The slit **1010** is configured to limit a width-wise dimension and a thickness-wise dimension of the laser beam emitted from the device **1000** during normal operation. In this way, a laser beam having a flattened, rectangular cross-sectional pattern is provided by the device **1000** during normal use. Support elements **1014** and **1016** are further included within the device **1000** so as to fixedly support and space collimation optics **1006** and line generator **1008**. Additionally, a spatial filter (not shown) can be optionally included within or adjacent to the slit **1010**.

[0093] The device **1000** provides an integrated assemblage of elements configured to generate a laser beam having a line-like or rectangular cross-sectional energy distribution of generally constant width and thickness dimensions. The device **1000** is applicable, for non-limiting example, in an inkjet printing context to perform drop detection testing of the ink emission nozzles. Other suitable applications are also possible.

What is claimed is:

1. An apparatus, comprising:
 - a line generator configured to shape a collimated laser beam into an expanding planar laser beam, the line generator including at least one planar surface through which the expanding planar laser beam passes; and
 - a collimator configured to collimate the expanding planar laser beam in at least a fast axis or a slow axis so as to derive a collimated planar laser beam.
2. The apparatus according to claim 1 further comprising:
 - an emitter configured to provide a laser beam having a Gaussian cross-sectional distribution;
 - a lens disposed in the path of the laser beam, the lens configured to shape the laser beam into the collimated laser beam.

3. The apparatus according to claim 1, the line generator including a diffraction grating surface.

4. The apparatus according to claim 1 the line generator including a lenticular lens array.

5. The apparatus according to claim 1, the line generator including a Fresnel surface.

6. The apparatus according to claim 1, the collimator including a cylindrical lens.

7. The apparatus according to claim 1, the collimator including a Fresnel cylindrical lens or a Fresnel acylindrical lens.

8. The apparatus according to claim 1, the collimator including a cylindrical lens surface.

9. The apparatus according to claim 1, the collimator including an acylindrical lens surface.

10. The apparatus according to claim 1 further comprising a solid transparent media disposed within the path of the expanding planar laser beam, the solid transparent media configured to support the line generator and the collimator.

11. An optical apparatus, comprising:

a solid-state laser configured to emit a laser beam;

first collimation optics configured to shape the laser beam into a collimated laser beam;

line generator optics configured to shape the collimated laser beam into an expanding planar laser beam, the line generator optics including a planar optical surface through which the expanding planar laser beam passes; and

second collimation optics configured to shape the expanding planar laser beam into a collimated planar laser beam.

12. The optical apparatus according to claim 11, the line generator optics including at least a diffraction grating, diffraction grating surface, a lenticular lens array, a lenticular lens array surface, or a Fresnel surface.

13. The optical apparatus according to claim 11 the second collimation optics including at least a cylindrical lens, a Fresnel cylindrical lens, a cylindrical lens surface, a Fresnel cylindrical lens surface, or an acylindrical lens surface.

14. The optical apparatus according to claim 11 further comprising a spatial filter disposed to filter the collimated planar laser beam.

15. An integrated apparatus; comprising:

a packaging;

a laser emitter supported by the packaging;

collimation optics supported by the packaging and configured to collimate a laser beam emitted by the laser emitter;

line generator optics supported by the packaging and configured to shape the collimated laser beam into a planer laser beam having about a rectangular cross-section; and a slit supported by the packaging and configured to limit at least a width dimension or a thickness dimension of the planar laser beam as it propagates from the packaging.

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