

(12) INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(19) World Intellectual Property Organization
International Bureau



(43) International Publication Date
19 December 2002 (19.12.2002)

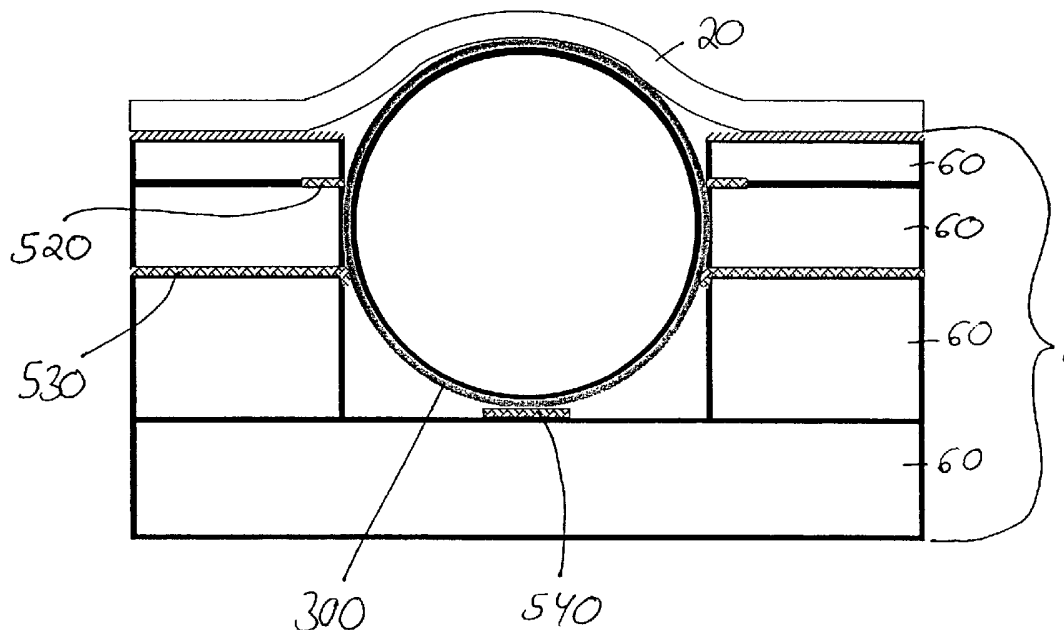
PCT

(10) International Publication Number
WO 02/101287 A2

- (51) International Patent Classification⁷: **F21V**
- (21) International Application Number: PCT/US01/42803
- (22) International Filing Date: 26 October 2001 (26.10.2001)
- (25) Filing Language: English
- (26) Publication Language: English
- (30) Priority Data:
09/697,358 27 October 2000 (27.10.2000) US
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- (81) Designated States (*national*): AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DZ, EC, EE, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MZ, NO, NZ, PH, PL, PT, RO, RU, SD, SE, SG, SI, SK, SL, TJ, TM, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, UZ, VN, YU, ZA, ZW.
- (84) Designated States (*regional*): ARIPO patent (GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, CH, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE, TR), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).
- Published:**
— *without international search report and to be republished upon receipt of that report*

[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: A MICRO-COMPONENT FOR USE IN A LIGHT-EMITTING PANEL



(57) Abstract: An improved light-emitting panel having a plurality of micro-components sandwiched between two substrates is disclosed. Each micro-component contains a gas or gas-mixture capable of ionization when a sufficiently large voltage is supplied across the micro-component via at least two electrodes. Several improved methods of forming micro-components are also disclosed.



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A MICRO-COMPONENT FOR USE IN A LIGHT-EMITTING PANEL

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

The following applications filed on the same date as the present application are herein incorporated by reference: *A Socket for Use with a Micro-Component in a Light-Emitting Panel* (Attorney Docket Number 203692); *A Method for Testing a Light-Emitting Panel and the Components Therein* (Attorney Docket Number 203686); *A Method and System for Energizing a Micro-Component In a Light-Emitting Panel* (Attorney Docket Number 203688); and *A Light-Emitting Panel and Method of Making* (Attorney Docket Number 203694).

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a light-emitting panel and methods of fabricating the same. The present invention further relates to a micro-component for use in a light-emitting panel.

DESCRIPTION OF RELATED ART

In a typical plasma display, a gas or mixture of gases is enclosed between orthogonally crossed and spaced conductors. The crossed conductors define a matrix of cross over points, arranged as an array of miniature picture elements (pixels), which provide light. At any given pixel, the orthogonally crossed and spaced conductors function as opposed plates of a capacitor, with the enclosed gas serving as a dielectric. When a sufficiently large voltage is applied, the gas at the pixel breaks down creating free electrons that are drawn to the positive conductor and positively charged gas ions that are drawn to the negatively charged conductor. These free electrons and positively charged gas ions collide with other gas atoms causing an avalanche effect creating still more free electrons and positively charged ions, thereby creating plasma. The voltage level at which this ionization occurs is called the write voltage.

Upon application of a write voltage, the gas at the pixel ionizes and emits light only briefly as free charges formed by the ionization migrate to the insulating dielectric walls of the cell where these charges produce an opposing voltage to the applied voltage and thereby extinguish the ionization. Once a pixel has been written, a continuous sequence of light
5 emissions can be produced by an alternating sustain voltage. The amplitude of the sustain waveform can be less than the amplitude of the write voltage, because the wall charges that remain from the preceding write or sustain operation produce a voltage that adds to the voltage of the succeeding sustain waveform applied in the reverse polarity to produce the ionizing voltage. Mathematically, the idea can be set out as $V_s = V_w - V_{wall}$, where V_s is the sustain voltage, V_w is
10 the write voltage, and V_{wall} is the wall voltage. Accordingly, a previously unwritten (or erased) pixel cannot be ionized by the sustain waveform alone. An erase operation can be thought of as a write operation that proceeds only far enough to allow the previously charged cell walls to discharge; it is similar to the write operation except for timing and amplitude.

Typically, there are two different arrangements of conductors that are used to perform the
15 write, erase, and sustain operations. The one common element throughout the arrangements is that the sustain and the address electrodes are spaced apart with the plasma-forming gas in between. Thus, at least one of the address or sustain electrodes is located within the path the radiation travels, when the plasma-forming gas ionizes, as it exits the plasma display. Consequently, transparent or semi-transparent conductive materials must be used, such as indium
20 tin oxide (ITO), so that the electrodes do not interfere with the displayed image from the plasma display. Using ITO, however, has several disadvantages, for example, ITO is expensive and adds significant cost to the manufacturing process and ultimately the final plasma display.

The first arrangement uses two orthogonally crossed conductors, one addressing conductor and one sustaining conductor. In a gas panel of this type, the sustain waveform is
25 applied across all the addressing conductors and sustain conductors so that the gas panel maintains a previously written pattern of light emitting pixels. For a conventional write operation, a suitable write voltage pulse is added to the sustain voltage waveform so that the combination of the write pulse and the sustain pulse produces ionization. In order to write an individual pixel independently, each of the addressing and sustain conductors has an individual

selection circuit. Thus, applying a sustain waveform across all the addressing and sustain conductors, but applying a write pulse across only one addressing and one sustain conductor will produce a write operation in only the one pixel at the intersection of the selected addressing and sustain conductors.

5 The second arrangement uses three conductors. In panels of this type, called coplanar sustaining panels, each pixel is formed at the intersection of three conductors, one addressing conductor and two parallel sustaining conductors. In this arrangement, the addressing conductor orthogonally crosses the two parallel sustaining conductors. With this type of panel, the sustain function is performed between the two parallel sustaining conductors and the addressing is done
10 by the generation of discharges between the addressing conductor and one of the two parallel sustaining conductors.

 The sustaining conductors are of two types, addressing-sustaining conductors and solely sustaining conductors. The function of the addressing-sustaining conductors is twofold: to achieve a sustaining discharge in cooperation with the solely sustaining conductors; and to fulfill
15 an addressing role. Consequently, the addressing-sustaining conductors are individually selectable so that an addressing waveform may be applied to any one or more addressing-sustaining conductors. The solely sustaining conductors, on the other hand, are typically connected in such a way that a sustaining waveform can be simultaneously applied to all of the solely sustaining conductors so that they can be carried to the same potential in the same instant.

20 Numerous types of plasma panel display devices have been constructed with a variety of methods for enclosing a plasma forming gas between sets of electrodes. In one type of plasma display panel, parallel plates of glass with wire electrodes on the surfaces thereof are spaced uniformly apart and sealed together at the outer edges with the plasma forming gas filling the cavity formed between the parallel plates. Although widely used, this type of open display
25 structure has various disadvantages. The sealing of the outer edges of the parallel plates and the introduction of the plasma forming gas are both expensive and time-consuming processes, resulting in a costly end product. In addition, it is particularly difficult to achieve a good seal at the sites where the electrodes are fed through the ends of the parallel plates. This can result in gas leakage and a shortened product lifecycle. Another disadvantage is that individual pixels are

not segregated within the parallel plates. As a result, gas ionization activity in a selected pixel during a write operation may spill over to adjacent pixels, thereby raising the undesirable prospect of possibly igniting adjacent pixels. Even if adjacent pixels are not ignited, the ionization activity can change the turn-on and turn-off characteristics of the nearby pixels.

- 5 In another type of known plasma display, individual pixels are mechanically isolated either by forming trenches in one of the parallel plates or by adding a perforated insulating layer sandwiched between the parallel plates. These mechanically isolated pixels, however, are not completely enclosed or isolated from one another because there is a need for the free passage of the plasma forming gas between the pixels to assure uniform gas pressure throughout the panel.
- 10 While this type of display structure decreases spill over, spill over is still possible because the pixels are not in total electrical isolation from one another. In addition, in this type of display panel it is difficult to properly align the electrodes and the gas chambers, which may cause pixels to misfire. As with the open display structure, it is also difficult to get a good seal at the plate edges. Furthermore, it is expensive and time consuming to introduce the plasma producing gas
- 15 and seal the outer edges of the parallel plates.

- In yet another type of known plasma display, individual pixels are also mechanically isolated between parallel plates. In this type of display, the plasma forming gas is contained in transparent spheres formed of a closed transparent shell. Various methods have been used to contain the gas filled spheres between the parallel plates. In one method, spheres of varying sizes
- 20 are tightly bunched and randomly distributed throughout a single layer, and sandwiched between the parallel plates. In a second method, spheres are embedded in a sheet of transparent dielectric material and that material is then sandwiched between the parallel plates. In a third method, a perforated sheet of electrically nonconductive material is sandwiched between the parallel plates with the gas filled spheres distributed in the perforations.

- 25 While each of the types of displays discussed above are based on different design concepts, the manufacturing approach used in their fabrication is generally the same. Conventionally, a batch fabrication process is used to manufacture these types of plasma panels. As is well known in the art, in a batch process individual component parts are fabricated separately, often in different facilities and by different manufacturers, and then brought together

for final assembly where individual plasma panels are created one at a time. Batch processing has numerous shortcomings, such as, for example, the length of time necessary to produce a finished product. Long cycle times increase product cost and are undesirable for numerous additional reasons known in the art. For example, a sizeable quantity of substandard, defective, or useless fully or partially completed plasma panels may be produced during the period between detection of a defect or failure in one of the components and an effective correction of the defect or failure.

This is especially true of the first two types of displays discussed above; the first having no mechanical isolation of individual pixels, and the second with individual pixels mechanically isolated either by trenches formed in one parallel plate or by a perforated insulating layer sandwiched between two parallel plates. Due to the fact that plasma-forming gas is not isolated at the individual pixel/subpixel level, the fabrication process precludes the majority of individual component parts from being tested until the final display is assembled. Consequently, the display can only be tested after the two parallel plates are sealed together and the plasma-forming gas is filled inside the cavity between the two plates. If post production testing shows that any number of potential problems have occurred, (e.g. poor luminescence or no luminescence at specific pixels/subpixels) the entire display is discarded.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Preferred embodiments of the present invention provide a light-emitting panel that may be used as a large-area radiation source, for energy modulation, for particle detection and as a flat-panel display. Gas-plasma panels are preferred for these applications due to their unique characteristics.

In one basic form, the light-emitting panel may be used as a large area radiation source. By configuring the light-emitting panel to emit ultraviolet (UV) light, the panel has application for curing, painting, and sterilization. With the addition of a white phosphor coating to convert the UV light to visible white light, the panel also has application as an illumination source.

In addition, the light-emitting panel may be used as a plasma-switched phase array by configuring the panel in at least one embodiment in a microwave transmission mode. The panel

is configured in such a way that during ionization the plasma-forming gas creates a localized index of refraction change for the microwaves (although other wavelengths of light would work). The microwave beam from the panel can then be steered or directed in any desirable pattern by introducing at a localized area a phase shift and/or directing the microwaves out of a specific aperture in the panel

Additionally, the light-emitting panel may be used for particle/photon detection. In this embodiment, the light-emitting panel is subjected to a potential that is just slightly below the write voltage required for ionization. When the device is subjected to outside energy at a specific position or location in the panel, that additional energy causes the plasma forming gas in the specific area to ionize, thereby providing a means of detecting outside energy.

Further, the light-emitting panel may be used in flat-panel displays. These displays can be manufactured very thin and lightweight, when compared to similar sized cathode ray tube (CRTs), making them ideally suited for home, office, theaters and billboards. In addition, these displays can be manufactured in large sizes and with sufficient resolution to accommodate high-definition television (HDTV). Gas-plasma panels do not suffer from electromagnetic distortions and are, therefore, suitable for applications strongly affected by magnetic fields, such as military applications, radar systems, railway stations and other underground systems.

According to a general embodiment of the present invention, a light-emitting panel is made from two substrates, wherein one of the substrates includes a plurality of sockets and wherein at least two electrodes are disposed. At least partially disposed in each socket is a micro-component, although more than one micro-component may be disposed therein. Each micro-component includes a shell at least partially filled with a gas or gas mixture capable of ionization. When a large enough voltage is applied across the micro-component the gas or gas mixture ionizes forming plasma and emitting radiation.

In one embodiment of the present invention, the micro-component is configured to emit ultra-violet (UV) light, which may be converted to visible light by at least partially coating each micro-component with phosphor. To obtain an increase in luminosity and radiation transport efficiency, each micro-component may be at least partially coated with a secondary emission enhancement material.

In another embodiment, each micro-component is coated with a reflective material. An index matching material is disposed so as to be in contact with at least a portion of the reflective material. The combination of the index matching material and the reflective material permits a predetermined wavelength of light to be emitted from each micro-component at the point of contact between the index matching material and the reflective material.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a micro-component for use in a light-emitting panel. A shell at least partially filled with at least one plasma-forming gas provides the basic micro-component structure. The shell may be doped or ion implanted with a conductive material, a material that provides secondary emission enhancement, and/or a material that converts UV light to visible light.

Another preferred embodiment of the present invention is to provide a method of making a micro-component. In one embodiment, the method is part of a continuous process, where a shell is at least partially formed in the presence of at least one plasma-forming gas, such that when formed, the shell is filled with the plasma-forming gas or gas mixture.

In another embodiment, the micro-component is made by affixing a first substrate to a second substrate in the presence of at least one plasma-forming gas. In this method, either the first and/or the second substrate contains a plurality of cavities so that when the first substrate is affixed to the second substrate the plurality of cavities are filled with the plasma-forming gas or gas mixture. In a preferred embodiment, a first substrate is advanced through a first roller assembly, which includes a roller with a plurality of nodules and a roller with a plurality of depressions. Both the plurality of nodules and the plurality of depressions are in registration with each other so that when the first substrate passes through the first roller assembly, the first substrate has a plurality of cavities formed therein. A second substrate is advanced through a second roller assembly and then affixed to the first substrate in the presence of at least one gas so that when the two substrates are affixed the cavities are filled with the gas or gas mixture. In an alternate preferred embodiment, the second roller assembly includes a roller with a plurality of nodules and a roller with a plurality of depressions so that when the second substrate passes through the second roller assembly, the second substrate also has a plurality of cavities formed therein. In either of these embodiments, at least one electrode may be sandwiched between the first and second substrates prior to the substrates being affixed.

In another embodiment, at least one substrate is thermally treated in the presence of a least one plasma-forming gas so as to form shells filled with the plasma-forming gas or gas-mixture.

Other features, advantages, and embodiments of the invention are set forth in part in the description that follows, and in part, will be obvious from this description, or may be learned from the practice of the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The foregoing and other features and advantages of this invention will become more apparent by reference to the following detailed description of the invention taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

FIG. 1 depicts a portion of a light-emitting panel showing a plurality of micro-components disposed in sockets.

FIG. 2 shows a socket with a micro-component disposed therein.

FIG. 3A shows an example of a cavity that has a cube shape.

FIG. 3B shows an example of a cavity that has a cone shape.

FIG. 3C shows an example of a cavity that has a conical frustum shape.

FIG. 3D shows an example of a cavity that has a paraboloid shape.

FIG. 3E shows an example of a cavity that has a spherical shape.

FIG. 3F shows an example of a cavity that has a cylindrical shape.

FIG. 3G shows an example of a cavity that has a pyramid shape.

FIG. 3H shows an example of a cavity that has a pyramidal frustum shape.

5 FIG. 3I shows an example of a cavity that has a parallelepiped shape.

FIG. 3J shows an example of a cavity that has a prism shape.

FIG. 4 shows an apparatus used in an embodiment of the present invention as part of a
10 continuous process for forming micro-components.

FIG. 5 shows an apparatus used in an embodiment of the present invention as part of another process for forming micro-components.

15 FIG. 6 shows a variation of the apparatus shown in Fig. 5, which is used as part of another process for forming micro-components.

FIG. 7 illustrates, according to an embodiment, one way in which an electrode may be disposed between two substrates as part of a process for forming micro-components.

20 FIG. 8 depicts the steps of another method for forming micro-components.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION

25 As embodied and broadly described herein, the preferred embodiments of the present invention are directed to a novel light-emitting panel. In particular, the preferred embodiments are directed to a micro-component capable of being used in the light-emitting panel and at least partially disposed in at least one socket.

30 Figs. 1 and 2 show two embodiments of the present invention wherein a light-emitting panel includes a first substrate 10 and a second substrate 20. The first substrate 10 may be made

from silicates, polypropylene, quartz, glass, any polymeric-based material or any material or combination of materials known to one skilled in the art. Similarly, second substrate 20 may be made from silicates, polypropylene, quartz, glass, any polymeric-based material or any material or combination of materials known to one skilled in the art. First substrate 10 and second substrate 20 may both be made from the same material or each of a different material. Additionally, the first and second substrate may be made of a material that dissipates heat from the light-emitting panel. In a preferred embodiment, each substrate is made from a material that is mechanically flexible.

The first substrate 10 includes a plurality of sockets 30. A cavity 55 formed within and/or on the first substrate 10 provides the basic socket 30 structure. The cavity 55 may be any shape and size. As depicted in Figs. 3A-3J, the shape of the cavity 55 may include, but is not limited to, a cube 100, a cone 110, a conical frustum 120, a paraboloid 130, spherical 140, cylindrical 150, a pyramid 160, a pyramidal frustum 170, a parallelepiped 180, or a prism 190. The size and shape of the socket 30 influence the performance and characteristics of the light-emitting panel and are selected to optimize the panel's efficiency of operation. In addition, socket geometry may be selected based on the shape and size of the micro-component to optimize the surface contact between the micro-component and the socket and/or to ensure connectivity of the micro-component and any electrodes disposed within the socket. Further, the size and shape of the sockets 30 may be chosen to optimize photon generation and provide increased luminosity and radiation transport efficiency.

At least partially disposed in each socket 30 is at least one micro-component 40. Multiple micro-components may be disposed in a socket to provide increased luminosity and enhanced radiation transport efficiency. In a color light-emitting panel according to one embodiment of the present invention, a single socket supports three micro-components configured to emit red, green, and blue light, respectively. The micro-components 40 may be of any shape, including, but not limited to, spherical, cylindrical, and aspherical. In addition, it is contemplated that a micro-component 40 includes a micro-component placed or formed inside another structure, such as placing a spherical micro-component inside a cylindrical-shaped structure. In a color light-emitting panel according to an embodiment of the present invention, each cylindrical-shaped

structure holds micro-components configured to emit a single color of visible light or multiple colors arranged red, green, blue, or in some other suitable color arrangement.

In another embodiment of the present invention, an adhesive or bonding agent is applied to each micro-component to assist in placing/holding a micro-component 40 or plurality of micro-components in a socket 30. In an alternative embodiment, an electrostatic charge is placed on each micro-component and an electrostatic field is applied to each micro-component to assist in the placement of a micro-component 40 or plurality of micro-components in a socket 30. Applying an electrostatic charge to the micro-components also helps avoid agglomeration among the plurality of micro-components. In one embodiment of the present invention, an electron gun is used to place an electrostatic charge on each micro-component and one electrode disposed proximate to each socket 30 is energized to provide the needed electrostatic field required to attract the electrostatically charged micro-component.

In its most basic form, each micro-component 40 includes a shell 50 filled with a plasma-forming gas or gas mixture 45. Any suitable gas or gas mixture 45 capable of ionization may be used as the plasma-forming gas, including, but not limited to, krypton, xenon, argon, neon, oxygen, helium, mercury, and mixtures thereof. In fact, any noble gas could be used as the plasma-forming gas, including, but not limited to, noble gases mixed with cesium or mercury. One skilled in the art would recognize other gasses or gas mixtures that could also be used. In a color display, according to another embodiment, the plasma-forming gas or gas mixture 45 is chosen so that during ionization the gas will irradiate a specific wavelength of light corresponding to a desired color. For example, neon-argon emits red light, xenon-oxygen emits green light, and krypton-neon emits blue light. While a plasma-forming gas or gas mixture 45 is used in a preferred embodiment, any other material capable of providing luminescence is also contemplated, such as an electro-luminescent material, organic light-emitting diodes (OLEDs), or an electro-phoretic material.

The shell 50 may be made from a wide assortment of materials, including, but not limited to, silicates, polypropylene, glass, any polymeric-based material, magnesium oxide and quartz and may be of any suitable size. The shell 50 may have a diameter ranging from micrometers to centimeters as measured across its minor axis, with virtually no limitation as to its size as measured across its major axis. For example, a cylindrical-shaped micro-component may be only

100 microns in diameter across its minor axis, but may be hundreds of meters long across its major axis. In a preferred embodiment, the outside diameter of the shell, as measured across its minor axis, is from 100 microns to 300 microns. In addition, the shell thickness may range from micrometers to millimeters, with a preferred thickness from 1 micron to 10 microns.

5 When a sufficiently large voltage is applied across the micro-component the gas or gas mixture ionizes forming plasma and emitting radiation. In Fig. 2, a two electrode configuration is shown including a first sustain electrode 520 and an address electrode 530. In Fig. 1, a three electrode configuration is shown, wherein a first sustain electrode 520, an address electrode 530 and a second sustain electrode 540 are disposed within a plurality of material layers 60 that form
10 the first substrate 10. The potential required to initially ionize the gas or gas mixture inside the shell 50 is governed by Paschen's Law and is closely related to the pressure of the gas inside the shell. In the present invention, the gas pressure inside the shell 50 ranges from tens of torrs to several atmospheres. In a preferred embodiment, the gas pressure ranges from 100 torr to 700 torr. The size and shape of a micro-component 40 and the type and pressure of the plasma-
15 forming gas contained therein, influence the performance and characteristics of the light-emitting panel and are selected to optimize the panel's efficiency of operation.

 There are a variety of coatings 300 and dopants that may be added to a micro-component 40 that also influence the performance and characteristics of the light-emitting panel. The coatings 300 may be applied to the outside or inside of the shell 50, and may either partially or
20 fully coat the shell 50. Types of outside coatings include, but are not limited to, coatings used to convert UV light to visible light (*e.g.* phosphor), coatings used as reflecting filters, and coatings used as band-gap filters. Types of inside coatings include, but are not limited to, coatings used to convert UV light to visible light (*e.g.* phosphor), coatings used to enhance secondary emissions and coatings used to prevent erosion. One skilled in the art will recognize that other coatings
25 may also be used. The coatings 300 may be applied to the shell 50 by differential stripping, lithographic process, sputtering, laser deposition, chemical deposition, vapor deposition, or deposition using ink jet technology. One skilled in the art will realize that other methods of coating the inside and/or outside of the shell 50 may also work. Types of dopants include, but are not limited to, dopants used to convert UV light to visible light (*e.g.* phosphor), dopants used
30 to enhance secondary emissions and dopants used to provide a conductive path through the shell

50. The dopants are added to the shell 50 by any suitable technique known to one skilled in the art, including ion implantation. It is contemplated that any combination of coatings and dopants may be added to a micro-component 40.

In an embodiment of the present invention, when a micro-component is configured to
5 emit UV light, the UV light is converted to visible light by at least partially coating the inside the shell 50 with phosphor, at least partially coating the outside of the shell 50 with phosphor, doping the shell 50 with phosphor and/or coating the inside of a socket 30 with phosphor. In a color panel, according to an embodiment of the present invention, colored phosphor is chosen so the visible light emitted from alternating micro-components is colored red, green and blue,
10 respectively. By combining these primary colors at varying intensities, all colors can be formed. It is contemplated that other color combinations and arrangements may be used.

To obtain an increase in luminosity and radiation transport efficiency, in an embodiment of the present invention, the shell 50 of each micro-component 40 is at least partially coated with a secondary emission enhancement material. Any low affinity material may be used including,
15 but not limited to, magnesium oxide and thulium oxide. One skilled in the art would recognize that other materials will also provide secondary emission enhancement. In another embodiment of the present invention, the shell 50 is doped with a secondary emission enhancement material. It is contemplated that the doping of shell 50 with a secondary emission enhancement material may be in addition to coating the shell 50 with a secondary emission enhancement material. In
20 this case, the secondary emission enhancement material used to coat the shell 50 and dope the shell 50 may be different.

In addition to, or in place of, doping the shell 50 with a secondary emission enhancement material, according to an embodiment of the present invention, the shell 50 is doped with a conductive material. Possible conductive materials include, but are not limited to silver, gold,
25 platinum, and aluminum. Doping the shell 50 with a conductive material provides a direct conductive path to the gas or gas mixture contained in the shell and provides one possible means of achieving a DC light-emitting panel.

In another embodiment of the present invention, the shell 50 of the micro-component 40 is coated with a reflective material. An index matching material that matches the index of
30 refraction of the reflective material is disposed so as to be in contact with at least a portion of the

reflective material. The reflective coating and index matching material may be separate from, or in conjunction with, the phosphor coating and secondary emission enhancement coating of previous embodiments. The reflective coating is applied to the shell 50 in order to enhance radiation transport. By also disposing an index-matching material so as to be in contact with at least a portion of the reflective coating, a predetermined wavelength range of radiation is allowed to escape through the reflective coating at the interface between the reflective coating and the index-matching material. By forcing the radiation out of a micro-component through the interface area between the reflective coating and the index-matching material greater micro-component efficiency is achieved with an increase in luminosity. In an embodiment, the index matching material is coated directly over at least a portion of the reflective coating. In another embodiment, the index matching material is disposed on a material layer, or the like, that is brought in contact with the micro-component such that the index matching material is in contact with at least a portion of the reflective coating. In another embodiment, the size of the interface is selected to achieve a specific field of view for the light-emitting panel.

Several methods are proposed, in various embodiments, for making a micro-component for use in a light-emitting panel. It has been contemplated that each of the coatings and dopants that may be added to a micro-component 40, as disclosed herein, may also be included in steps in forming a micro-component, as discussed herein.

In one embodiment of the present invention, a continuous inline process for making a micro-component is described, where a shell is at least partially formed in the presence of at least one plasma-forming gas, such that when formed, the shell is filled with the gas or gas mixture. In a preferred embodiment, the process takes place in a drop tower. According to Fig. 4, and as an example of one of many possible ways to make a micro-component as part of a continuous inline process, a droplet generator 600 including a pressure transducer port 605, a liquid inlet port 610, a piezoelectric transducer 615, a transducer drive signal electrode 620, and an orifice plate 625, produces uniform water droplets of a predetermined size. The droplets pass through an encapsulation region 630 where each water droplet is encased in a gel outer membrane formed of an aqueous solution of glass forming oxides (or any other suitable material that may be used for a micro-component shell), which is then passed through a dehydration region 640 leaving a hollow dry gel shell. This dry gel shell then travels through a transition region 650 where it is heated

into a glass shell (or other type of shell depending on what aqueous solution was chosen) and then finally through a refining region 660. While it is possible to introduce a plasma-forming gas or gas mixture into the process during any one of the steps, it is preferred in an embodiment of the present invention to perform the whole process in the presence of the plasma-forming gas or gas mixture. Thus, when the shell leaves the refining region 660, the plasma-forming gas or gas mixture is sealed inside the shell thereby forming a micro-component.

In an embodiment of the present invention, the above process is modified so that the shell can be doped with either a secondary emission enhancement material and/or a conductive material, although other dopants may also be used. While it is contemplated that the dopants may be added to the shell by ion implantation at later stages in the process, in a preferred embodiment, the dopant is added directly in the aqueous solution so that the shell is initially formed with the dopant already present in the shell.

The above process steps may be modified or additional process steps may be added to the above process for forming a micro-component to provide a means for adding at least one coating to the micro-component. For coatings that may be disposed on the inside of the shell including, but not limited to a secondary emission enhancement material and a conductive material, it is contemplated in an embodiment of the present invention that those coating materials are added to the initial droplet solution so that when the outer membrane is formed around the initial droplet and then passed through the dehydration region 640 the coating material is left on the inside of the hollow dry gel shell. For coatings that may be disposed on the outside of the shell including, but not limited to, coatings used to convert UV light to visible light, coatings used as reflective filters and coatings used as band-gap filters, it is contemplated that after the micro-component leaves the refining region 660, the micro-component will travel through at least one coating region. The coatings may be applied by any number of processes known to those skilled in the art as a means of applying a coating to a surface.

In another embodiment of the present invention, two substrates are provided, wherein at least one of two substrates contain a plurality of cavities. The two substrates are affixed together in the presence of at least one plasma-forming gas so that when affixed, the cavities are filled with the gas or gas mixture. In an embodiment of the present invention at least one electrode is disposed between the two substrates. In another embodiment, the inside, the outside, or both the

inside and the outside of the cavities are coated with at least one coating. It is contemplated that any coating that may be applied to a micro-component as disclosed herein may be used. As illustrated in Fig. 5, one method of making a micro-component in accordance with this embodiment of the present invention is to take a first substrate 200 and a second substrate 210 and then pass the first substrate 200 and the second substrate 210 through a first roller assembly and a second roller assembly, respectively. The first roller assembly includes a first roller with nodules 224 and a first roller with depressions 228. The first roller with nodules 224 is in register with the first roller with depressions 228 so that as the first substrate 200 passes between the first roller with nodules 224 and the first roller with depressions 228, a plurality of cavities 240 are formed in the first substrate 200. The second roller assembly, according to a preferred embodiment, includes two second rollers, 232 and 234. The first substrate 200, with a plurality of cavities 240 formed therein, is brought together with the second substrate 210 in the presence of a plasma-forming gas or gas mixture and then affixed, thereby forming a plurality of micro-components 250 integrally formed into a sheet of micro-components. While the first substrate 200 and the second substrate 210 may be affixed by any suitable method, according to a preferred embodiment, the two substrates are thermally affixed by heating the first roller with depressions 228 and the second roller 234.

The nodules on the first roller with nodules 224 may be disposed in any pattern, having even or non-even spacing between adjacent nodules. Patterns may include, but are not limited to, alphanumeric characters, symbols, icons, or pictures. Preferably, the distance between adjacent nodules is approximately equal. The nodules may also be disposed in groups such that the distance between one group of nodules and another group of nodules is approximately equal. This latter approach may be particularly relevant in color light-emitting panels, where each nodule in a group of nodules may be used to form a micro-component that is configured for red, green, and blue, respectively.

While it is preferred that the second roller assembly simply include two second rollers, 232 and 234, in an embodiment of the present invention as illustrated in Fig. 6, the second roller assembly may also include a second roller with nodules 236 and a second roller with depressions 238 that are in registration so that when the second substrate 210 passes between the second roller with nodules 236 and the second roller with depressions 238, a plurality of cavities 260 are

also formed in the second substrate 210. The first substrate 200 and the second substrate 210 are then brought together in the presence of at least one gas so that the plurality of cavities 240 in the first substrate 200 and the plurality of cavities 260 in the second substrate 210 are in register. The two substrates are then affixed, thereby forming a plurality of micro-components 270
5 integrally formed into a sheet of micro-components. While the first substrate 200 and the second substrate 240 may be affixed by any suitable method, according to a preferred embodiment, the two substrates are thermally affixed by heating the first roller with depressions 228 and the second roller with depressions 238.

In an embodiment of the present invention that is applicable to the two methods discussed
10 above, and illustrated in Fig. 7, at least one electrode 280 is disposed on or within the first substrate 200, the second substrate 240 or both the first substrate and the second substrate. Depending on how the electrode or electrodes are disposed, the electrode or electrodes will provide the proper structure for either an AC or DC (Fig. 7) light-emitting panel. That is to say, if the at least one electrode 280 is at least partially disposed in a cavity 240 or 260 then there will
15 be a direct conductive path between the at least one electrode and the plasma-forming gas or gas mixture and the panel will be configured for D.C. If, on the other hand, the at least one electrode is disposed so as not to be in direct contact with the plasma-forming gas or gas mixture, the panel will be configured for A.C.

In another embodiment of the present invention, at least one substrate is thermally treated
20 in the presence of at least one plasma-forming gas, to form a plurality of shells 50 filled with the plasma-forming gas or gas mixture. In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, as shown in Fig 8, the process for making a micro-component would entail starting with a material or material mixture 700, introducing inclusions into the material 710, thermally treating the material so that the inclusions start forming bubbles within the material 720 and those bubbles
25 coalesce 730 forming a porous shell 740, and cooling the shell. The process is performed in the presence of a plasma-forming gas so that when the shell cools the plasma-forming gas 45 is sealed inside the shell 50. This process can also be used to create a micro-component with a shell doped with a conductive material and/or a secondary emission enhancement material by combining the appropriate dopant with the initial starting material or by introducing the
30 appropriate dopant while the shell is still porous.

Other embodiments and uses of the present invention will be apparent to those skilled in the art from consideration of this application and practice of the invention disclosed herein. The present description and examples should be considered exemplary only, with the true scope and spirit of the invention being indicated by the following claims. As will be understood by those of
5 ordinary skill in the art, variations and modifications of each of the disclosed embodiments, including combinations thereof, can be made within the scope of this invention as defined by the following claims.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A light-emitting panel comprising:

a first substrate, wherein the first substrate comprises a plurality of sockets;

a plurality of micro-components, wherein each micro-component comprises a shell at least partially filled with a plasma-forming gas, wherein at least one micro-component of the plurality of micro-components is at least partially disposed in each socket, wherein one or more micro-components are at least partially coated with phosphor, and wherein at least one coating in addition to the phosphor is at least partially disposed on one or more micro-components;

a second substrate, wherein the second substrate is opposed to the first substrate such that the at least one micro-component is sandwiched between the first substrate and the second substrate; and

a plurality of electrodes, wherein at least two electrodes of the plurality of electrodes are arranged so that voltage supplied to the at least two electrodes causes one or more micro-components to emit radiation.

2. The light-emitting panel of claim 1, wherein the at least one coating is a secondary emission enhancement material.

3. The light-emitting panel of claim 1, wherein each micro-component of the plurality of micro-components is coated with a reflective material and wherein an index matching material is disposed on at least a portion of the reflective material, such that a predetermined wavelength range of radiation is emitted from each micro-component at the interface of the reflective material and the index-matching material.

4. The light-emitting panel of claim 3, wherein the size of the interface is selected to achieve a specific field of view for the light-emitting panel.

1 5. The light-emitting panel of claim 1, wherein the at least one coating is an adhesive
2 or bonding agent.

1 6. A light-emitting panel comprising:
2 a first substrate, wherein the first substrate comprises a plurality of sockets;
3 a plurality of micro-components, wherein each micro-component comprises a shell at
4 least partially filled with a plasma-forming gas, wherein at least one micro-component of the
5 plurality of micro-components is at least partially disposed in each socket, and wherein at least
6 one coating is at least partially disposed on one or more micro-components;
7 a second substrate, wherein the second substrate is opposed to the first substrate such that
8 the at least one micro-component is sandwiched between the first substrate and the second
9 substrate; and
10 a plurality of electrodes, wherein at least two electrodes of the plurality of electrodes are
11 adhered to only the first substrate, only the second substrate, or at least one electrode is adhered
12 to each of the first substrate and the second substrate and wherein the at least two electrodes are
13 arranged so that voltage supplied to the at least two electrodes causes one or more micro-
14 components to emit radiation.

1 7. The light-emitting panel of claim 6, wherein the at least one coating is a secondary
2 emission enhancement material.

1 8. The light-emitting panel of claim 6, wherein the at least one coating is phosphor.

1 9. The light-emitting panel of claim 6, wherein each micro-component of the
2 plurality of micro-components is coated with a reflective material and wherein an index matching
3 material is disposed on at least a portion of the reflective material, such that a predetermined
4 wavelength range of radiation is emitted from each micro-component at the interface of the
5 reflective material and the index-matching material.

1 10. The light-emitting panel of claim 9, wherein the size of the interface is selected to
2 achieve a specific field of view for the light-emitting panel.

1 11. A light-emitting panel comprising:
2 a first substrate, wherein the first substrate comprises a plurality of sockets;
3 a plurality of micro-components, wherein each micro-component comprises a shell at
4 least partially filled with a plasma-forming gas, wherein at least one micro-component of the
5 plurality of micro-components is at least partially disposed in each socket, and wherein at least
6 one coating is at least partially disposed on one or more micro-components;
7 a second substrate, wherein the second substrate is opposed to the first substrate such that
8 the at least one micro-component is sandwiched between the first substrate and the second
9 substrate; and
10 a plurality of electrodes, wherein at least two electrodes of the plurality of electrodes are
11 arranged so that voltage supplied to the at least two electrodes causes one or more micro-
12 components to emit radiation throughout the field of view of the light-emitting panel without
13 crossing the at least two electrodes.

1 12. The light-emitting panel of claim 11, wherein the at least one coating is a
2 secondary emission enhancement material.

1 13. The light-emitting panel of claim 11, wherein the at least one coating is phosphor.

1 14. The light-emitting panel of claim 11, wherein each micro-component of the
2 plurality of micro-components is coated with a reflective material and wherein an index matching
3 material is disposed on at least a portion of the reflective material, such that a predetermined
4 wavelength range of radiation is emitted from each micro-component at the interface of the
5 reflective material and the index-matching material.

1 15. The light-emitting panel of claim 14, wherein the size of the interface is selected
2 to achieve a specific field of view for the light-emitting panel.

1 16. The light-emitting panel of claim 11, wherein the at least one coating is an
2 adhesive or bonding agent.

1 17. A light-emitting panel comprising:
2 a first substrate, wherein the first substrate comprises a plurality of sockets;
3 a plurality of micro-components, wherein each micro-component comprises a shell at
4 least partially filled with a plasma-forming gas, wherein at least one micro-component of the
5 plurality of micro-components is at least partially disposed in each socket, and wherein at least
6 one shell comprises at least one dopant;
7 a second substrate, wherein the second substrate is opposed to the first substrate such that
8 the at least one micro-component is sandwiched between the first substrate and the second
9 substrate; and
10 a plurality of electrodes, wherein at least two electrodes of the plurality of electrodes are
11 arranged so that voltage supplied to the at least two electrodes causes one or more micro-
12 components to emit radiation.

1 18. The light-emitting panel of claim 17, wherein the at least one dopant is a
2 secondary-emission enhancement material.

1 19. The light-emitting panel of claim 17, wherein the at least one dopant is a
2 conductive material.

1 20. A light-emitting panel comprising:
2 a first substrate, wherein the first substrate comprises a plurality of sockets;
3 a plurality of micro-components, wherein each micro-component comprises a shell at
4 least partially filled with a plasma-forming gas, wherein at least one micro-component of the
5 plurality of micro-components is at least partially disposed in each socket, and wherein an
6 electrostatic charge is applied to one or more micro-components; and

7 a second substrate, wherein the second substrate is opposed to the first substrate such that
8 the at least one micro-component is sandwiched between the first substrate and the second
9 substrate; and

10 a plurality of electrodes, wherein the at least two electrodes are arranged so that voltage
11 supplied to the at least two electrodes causes one or more micro-components to emit radiation.

1 21. The light-emitting panel of claim 20, wherein at least one electrode is energized
2 such that an electrostatic field is created that assists in the placement or holding of one or more
3 micro-components in at least one socket of the plurality of sockets.

1 22. A light-emitting panel comprising:

2 a first substrate, wherein the first substrate comprises a plurality of sockets;

3 a plurality of micro-components, wherein each micro-component comprises a shell at
4 least partially filled with a plasma-forming gas, wherein at least one micro-component of the
5 plurality of micro-components is at least partially disposed in each socket, and wherein one or
6 more micro-components are at least partially coated with a secondary emission enhancement
7 material; and

8 a second substrate, wherein the second substrate is opposed to the first substrate such that
9 the at least one micro-component is sandwiched between the first substrate and the second
10 substrate; and

11 a plurality of electrodes, wherein the at least two electrodes are arranged so that voltage
12 supplied to the at least two electrodes causes one or more micro-components to emit radiation.

1 23. A light-emitting panel comprising:

2 a first substrate, wherein the first substrate comprises a plurality of sockets;

3 a plurality of micro-components, wherein each micro-component comprises a shell at
4 least partially filled with a plasma-forming gas, wherein at least one micro-component of the
5 plurality of micro-components is at least partially disposed in each socket, wherein one or more
6 micro-components are coated with a reflective material and wherein at least one index matching
7 material is disposed on the reflective material; and

8 a second substrate, wherein the second substrate is opposed to the first substrate such that
9 the at least one micro-component is sandwiched between the first substrate and the second
10 substrate; and

11 a plurality of electrodes, wherein the at least two electrodes are arranged so that voltage
12 supplied to the at least two electrodes causes one or more micro-components to emit radiation.

1 24. A continuous process for forming a micro-component, wherein the process is at
2 least partially performed in the presence of a plasma-forming gas, comprising the steps of:
3 forming a droplet;
4 encasing the droplet with an outer membrane formed from an aqueous solution; and
5 removing the droplet leaving a shell.

1 25. The process of claim 24, further comprising the step of at least partially disposing
2 at least one coating on the shell.

1 26. The process of claim 25, wherein the at least one coating is selected from a group
2 consisting of phosphor, adhesive, bonding agent, secondary emission enhancement material, and
3 reflective material.

1 27. The process of claim 24, wherein the drop comprises a secondary emission
2 enhancement material or a reflective material such that when the droplet is removed, the
3 secondary emission enhancement material or the reflective material are at least partially coated
4 on the inside of the shell.

1 28. The process of claim 24, further comprising the step of adding at least one dopant
2 to the aqueous solution such that when the droplet is removed the shell comprises the at least one
3 dopant.

1 29. The process of claim 24, wherein the dopant is selected from a group consisting of
2 a conductive material, a secondary emission enhancement material and phosphor.

1 30. A method for forming a plurality of micro-components, comprising the steps of:
2 forming a plurality of cavities in at least one of a first substrate and a second substrate;
3 affixing the first substrate to the second substrate in the presence of a plasma-forming
4 gas, such that when affixed, the plurality of cavities are filled with a plasma-forming gas.

1 31. The method of claim 30, wherein the step of affixing the first substrate to the
2 second substrate in the presence of at least one plasma-forming gas comprises the step of
3 disposing at least one electrode between the first substrate and the second substrate.

1 32. The method of claim 30, further comprising the step of disposing at least one
2 coating on the inside of at least one cavity of the plurality of cavities.

1 33. The method of claim 30, further comprising the step of disposing at least one
2 coating on the outside of at least one cavity of the plurality of cavities.

1 34. A method for forming a plurality of micro-components, comprising the steps of:
2 advancing a first substrate through a first roller assembly, wherein the first roller
3 assembly comprises a first roller with a plurality of nodules and a first roller with a plurality of
4 depressions, wherein the plurality of nodules are in register with the plurality of depressions,
5 such that when the first substrate exits the first roller assembly, a plurality of cavities are formed
6 in the first substrate;
7 advancing a second substrate through a second roller assembly;
8 affixing the first substrate to the second substrate in the presence of at least one plasma-
9 forming gas, such that when affixed, the plurality of cavities are at least partially filled with the at
10 least one plasma-forming gas.

1 35. The method of claim 34, wherein the second roller assembly comprises a second
2 roller with a plurality of nodules and a second roller with a plurality of depressions such that

3 when the second substrate exits the second roller assembly, a plurality of cavities are formed in
4 the second substrate.

1 36. The method of claim 34, wherein the step of affixing the first substrate to the
2 second substrate in the presence of at least one gas comprises the step of disposing at least one
3 electrode between the first substrate and the second substrate prior to affixing the first substrate
4 to the second substrate.

1 37. A method for making a micro-component, wherein the method is performed in the
2 presence of a plasma-forming gas, comprising the steps of:
3 providing a material;
4 introducing inclusions into the material;
5 thermally treating the material so that the inclusions start forming bubbles within the
6 material;
7 allowing the bubbles to coalesce, such that a porous shell is formed; and
8 cooling the shell so that when the shell is cooled the plasma-forming gas is sealed inside
9 the shell.

1 38. The method of claim 37, wherein the material comprises at least one dopant so
2 that the shell comprises the at least one dopant.

1 39. The method of claim 37, further comprising the step of exposing the porous shell
2 to at least one dopant so that when the shell is cooled the shell comprises the at least one dopant.

1 40. The light-emitting panel of claim 17, wherein the at least one dopant is phosphor.

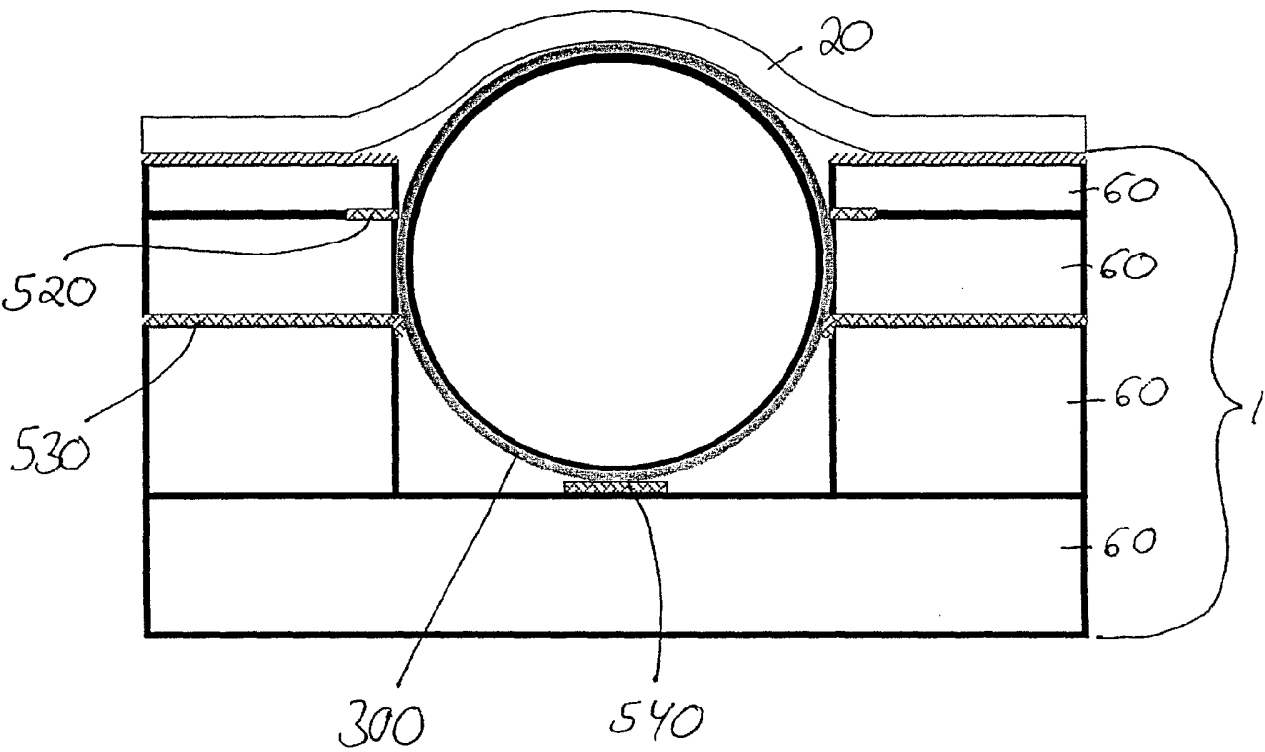


Fig. 1

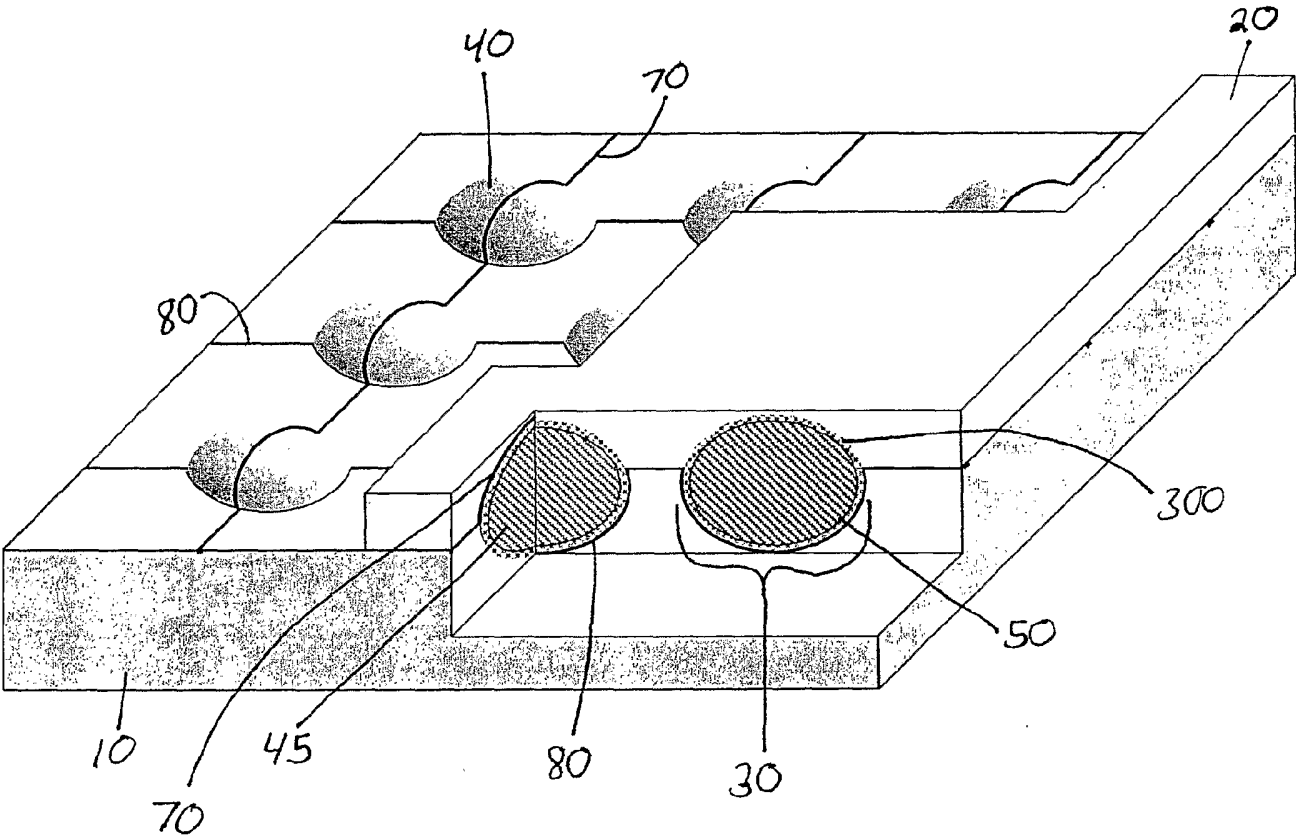


Fig. 2

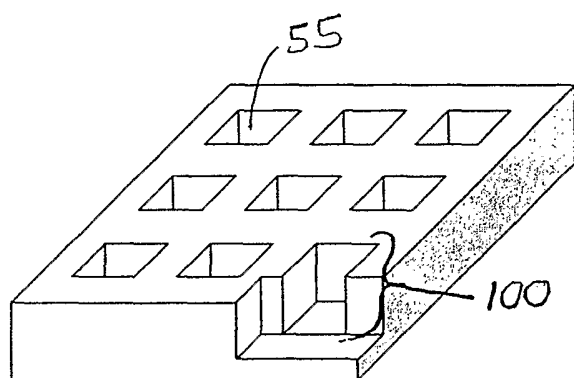


Fig. 3A

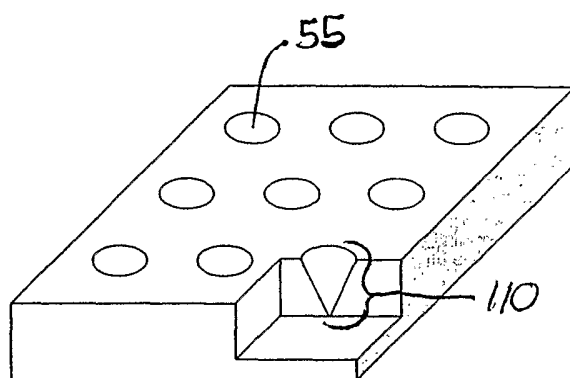


Fig. 3B

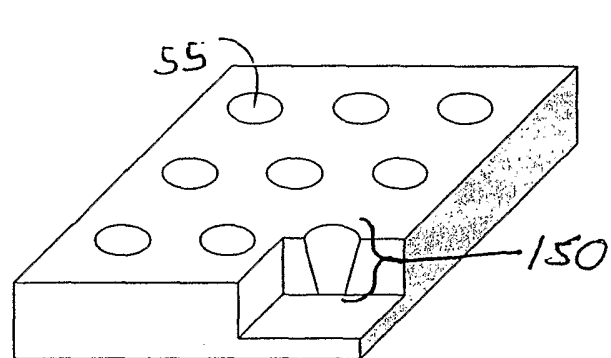


Fig. 3C

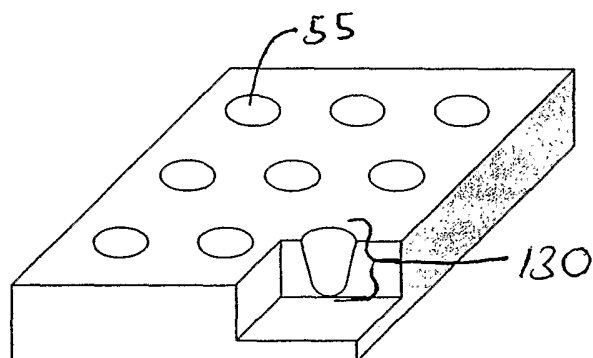


Fig. 3D

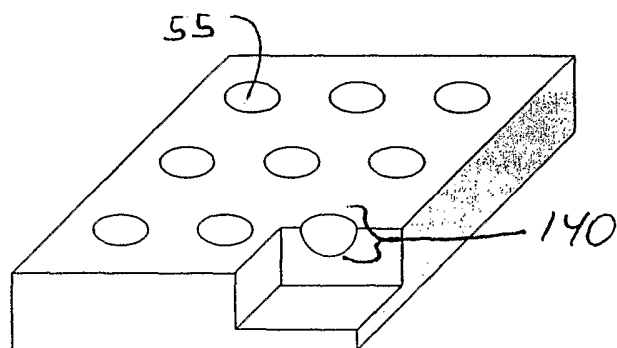


Fig. 3E

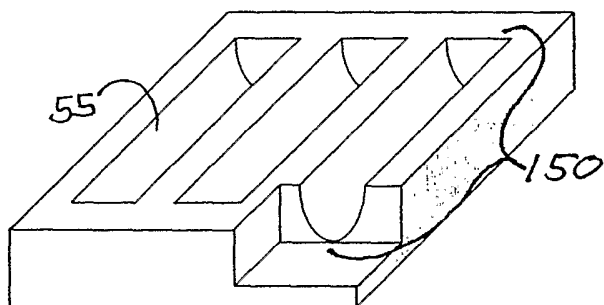


Fig. 3F

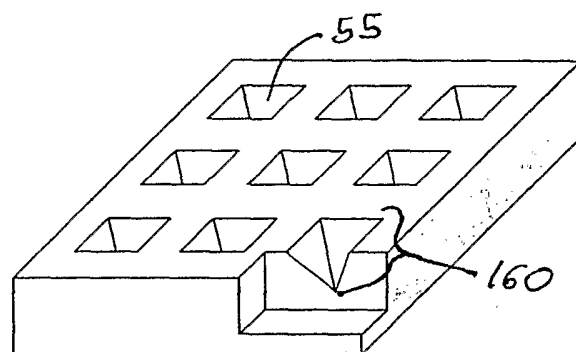


Fig. 3G

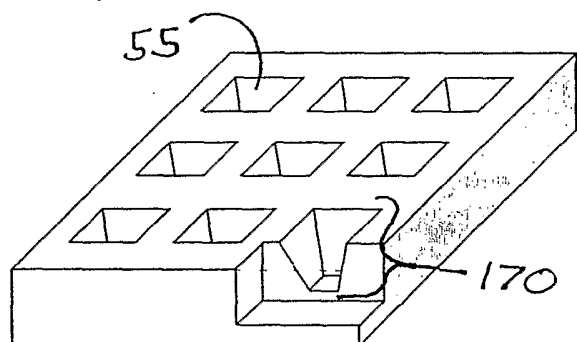


Fig. 3H

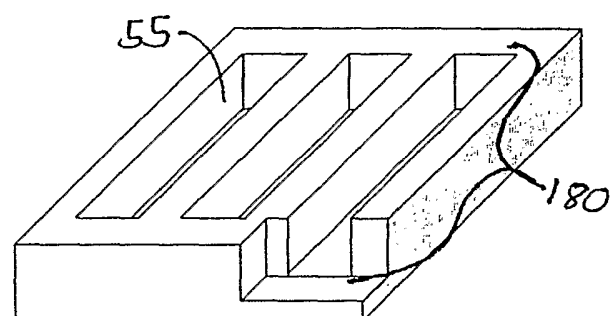


Fig. 3I

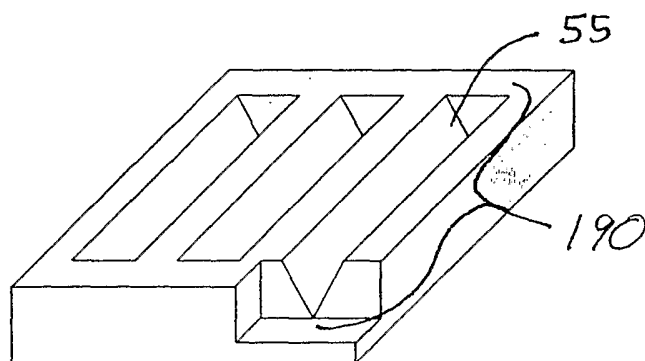


Fig. 3J

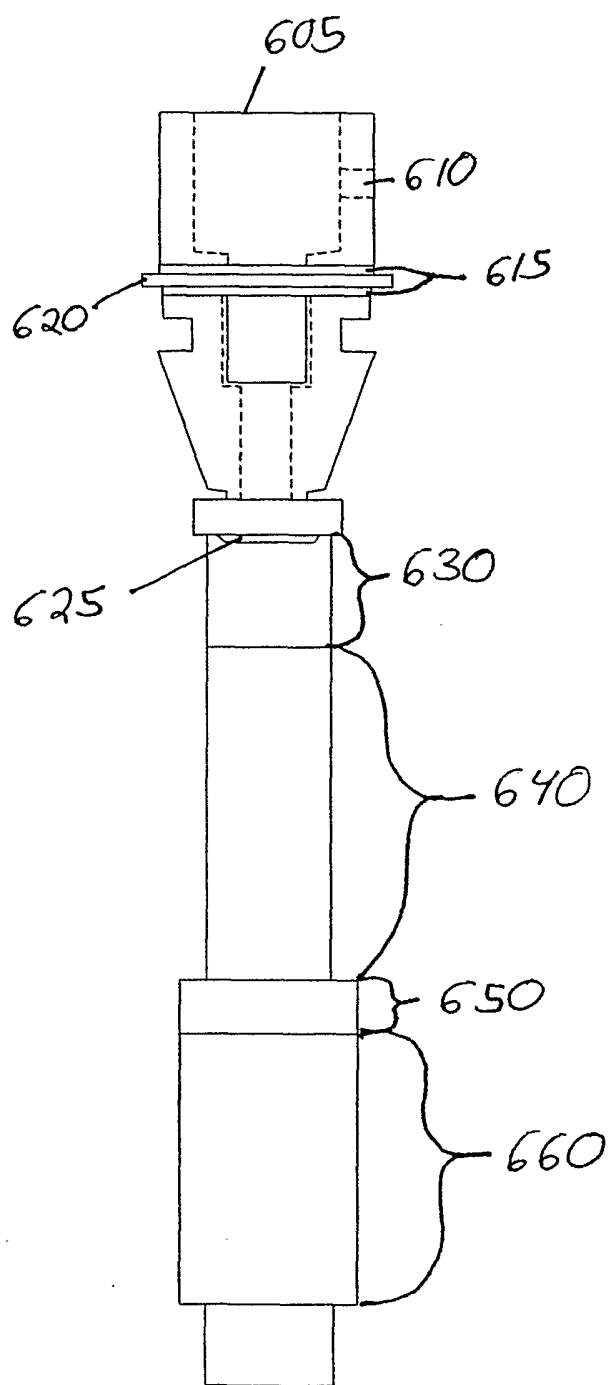


Fig. 4

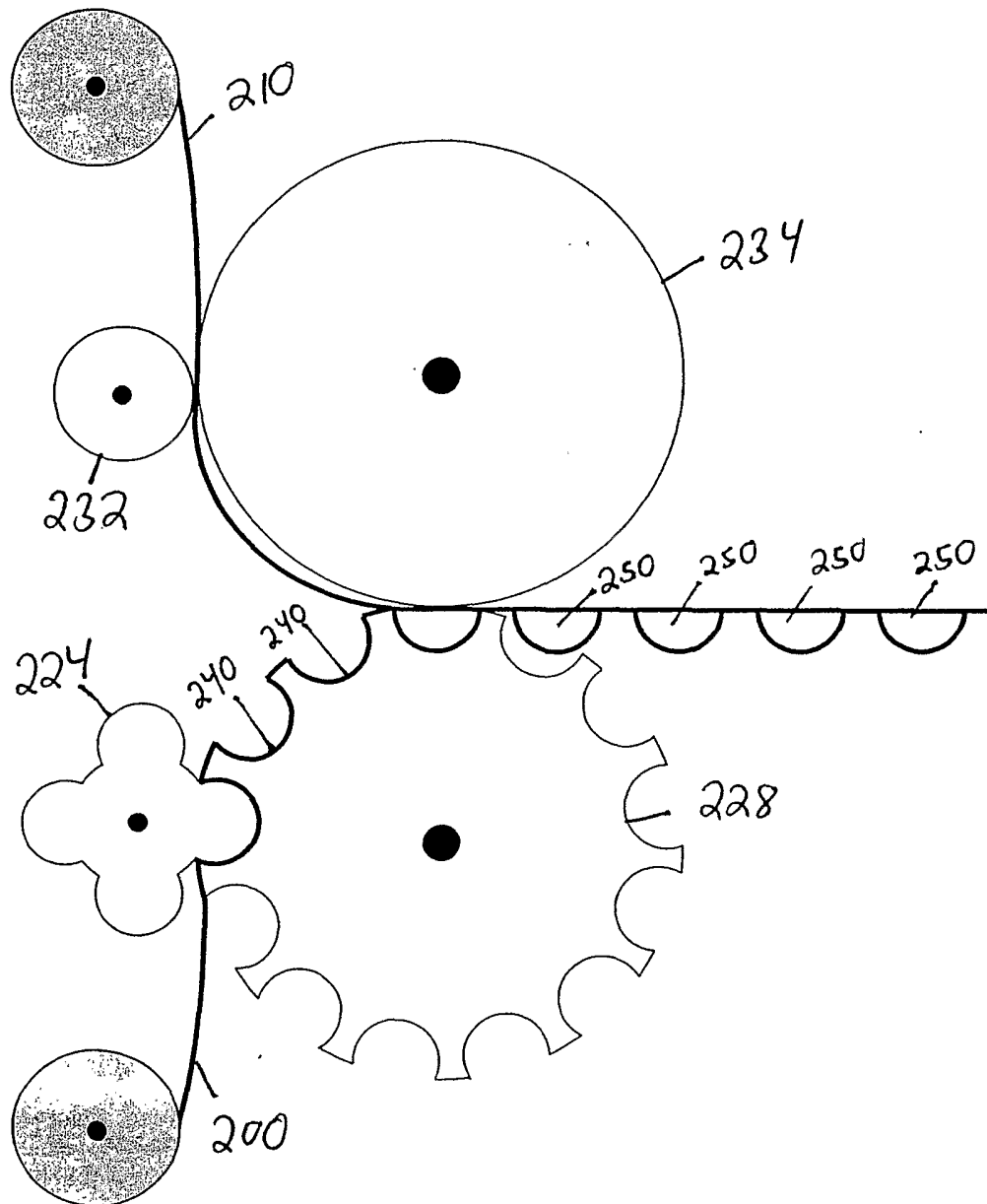


Fig. 5

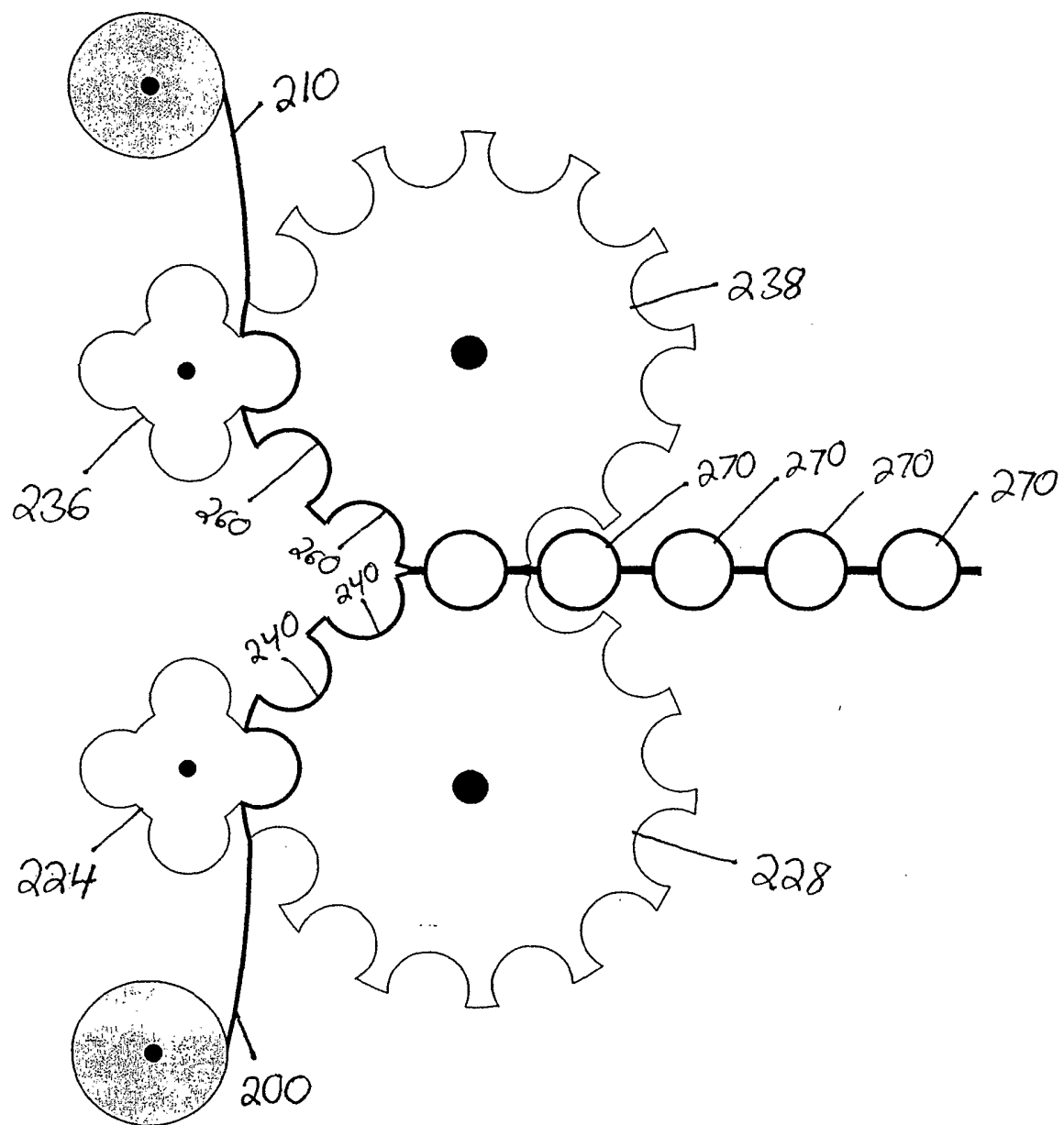


Fig. 6

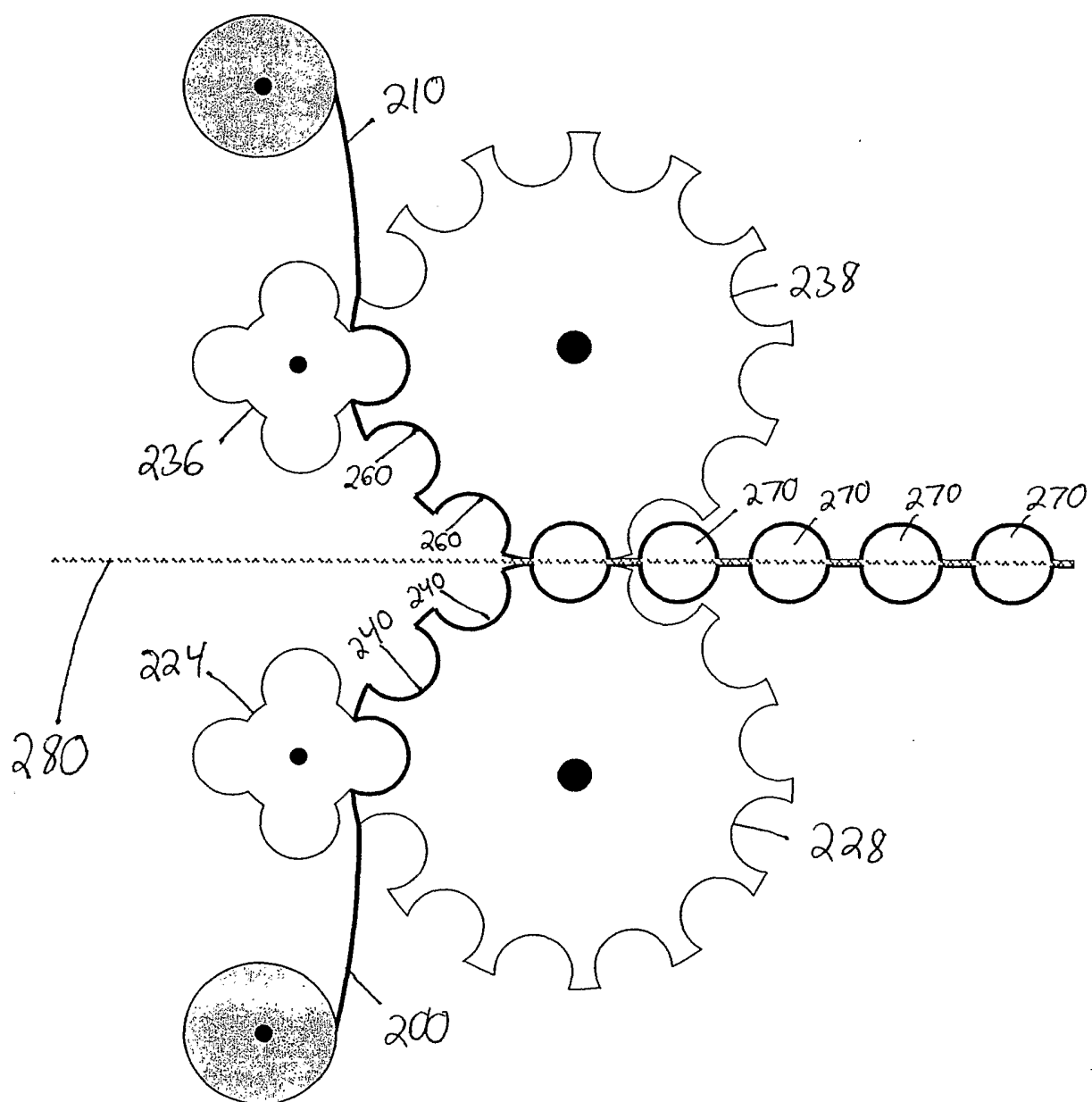


Fig. 7

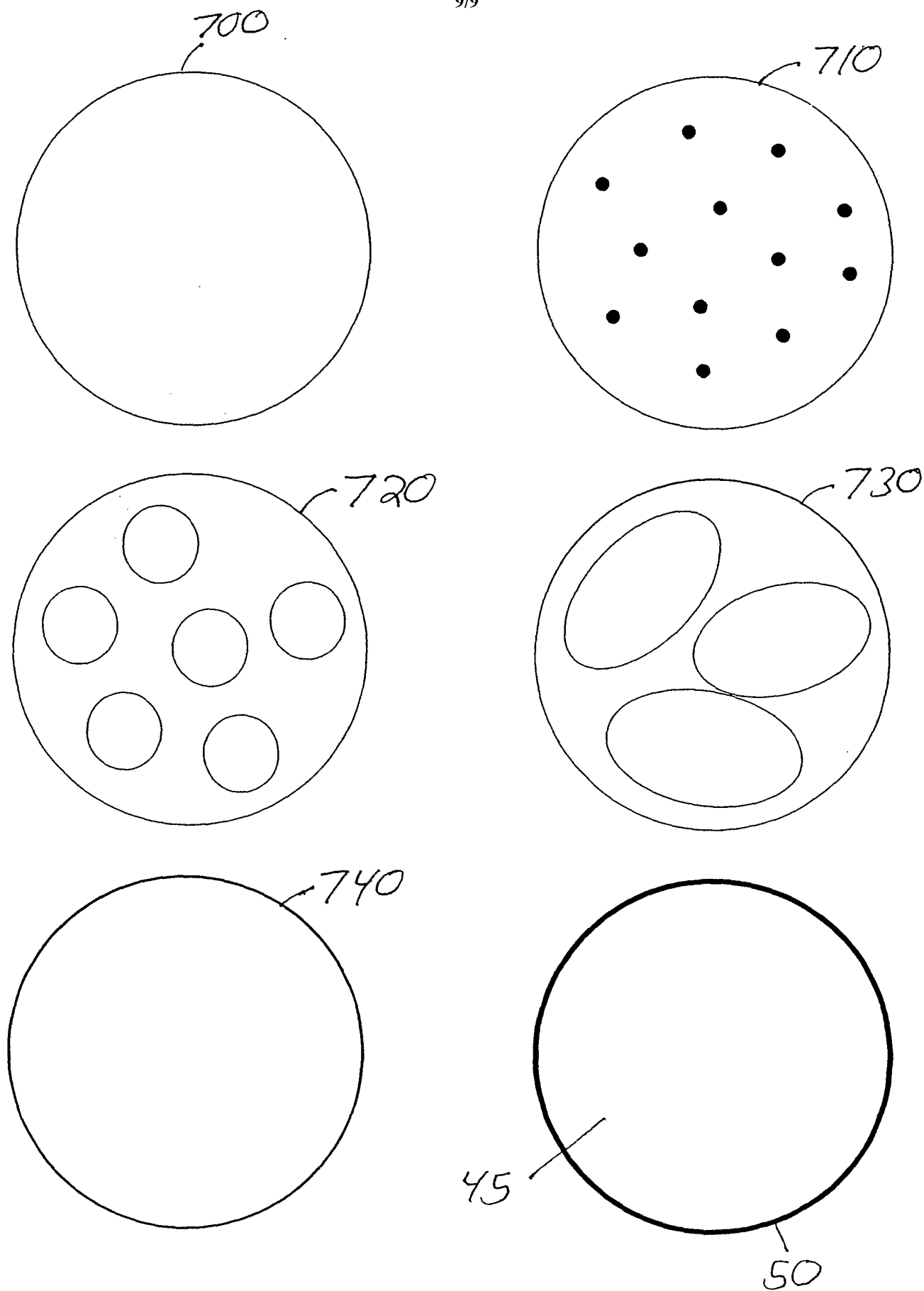


Fig. 8