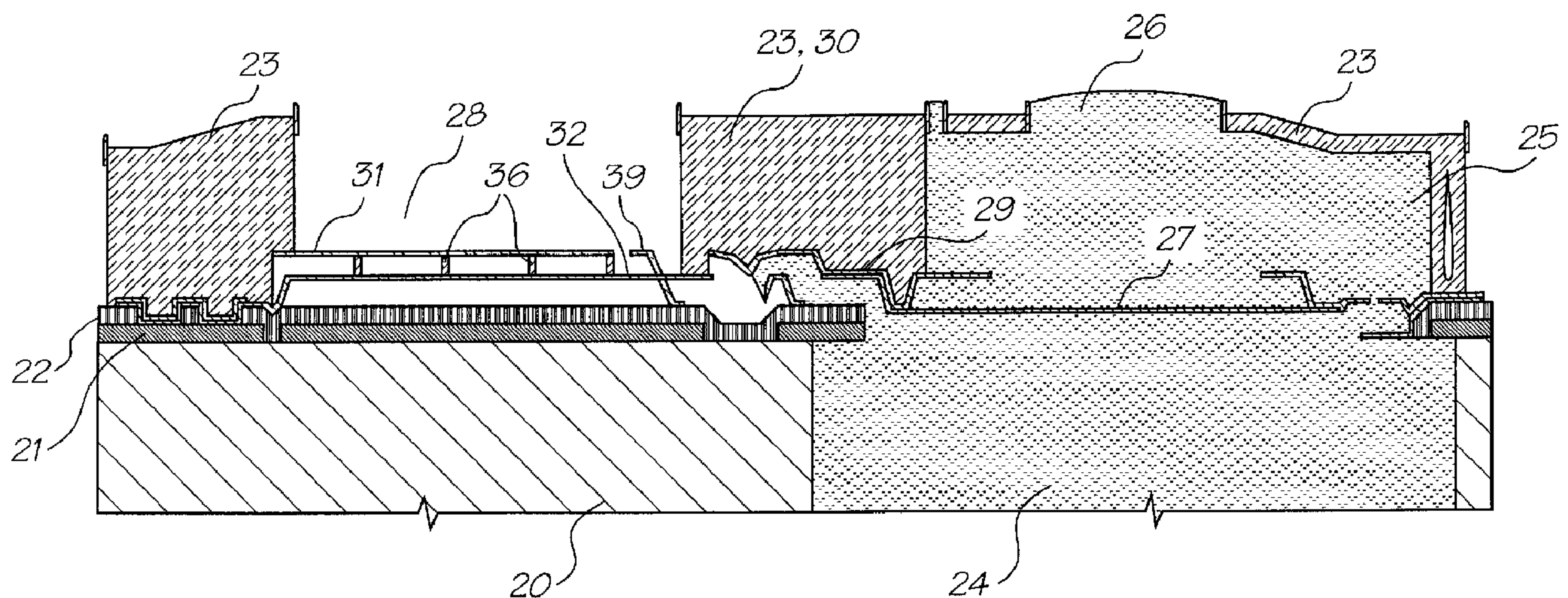




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(54) Title: FAULT DETECTION IN A MICRO ELECTRO-MECHANICAL DEVICE



(57) Abrégé/Abstract:

A method of detecting a fault within a micro electro-mechanical device in the form of an ink ejection nozzle having an actuating arm that moves an ink displacing paddle when heat inducing electric current is passed through the actuating arm and having a movement sensor associated with the actuating arm. The method comprises the steps of passing at least one current pulse having a predetermined duration through the actuating arm and detecting for a predetermined level of movement of the actuating arm. If a fault is detected to exist, as indicated by an insufficient level of movement of the actuating arm, at least one further current pulse having an energy level greater than the fault detecting pulse may be passed through the actuating arm in an attempt to clear the fault.



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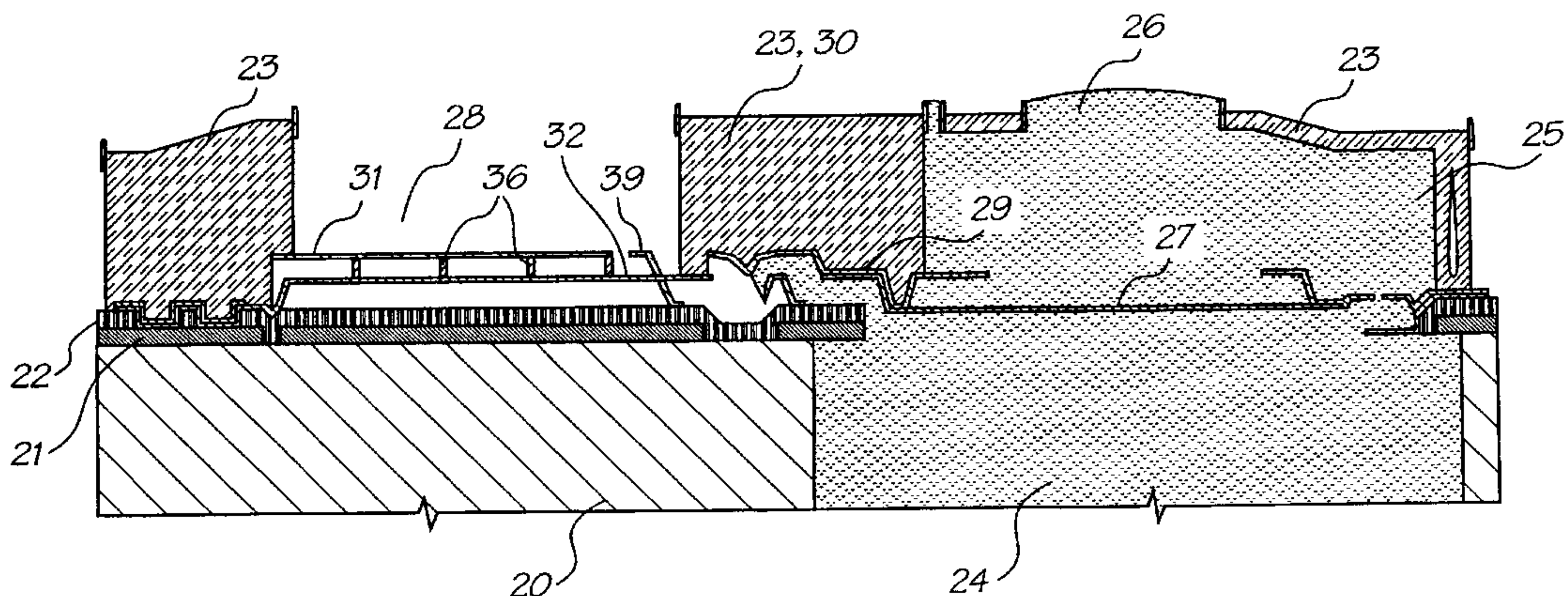
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(54) Title: FAULT DETECTION IN A MICRO ELECTRO-MECHANICAL DEVICE



(57) Abstract: A method of detecting a fault within a micro electro-mechanical device in the form of an ink ejection nozzle having an actuating arm that moves an ink displacing paddle when heat inducing electric current is passed through the actuating arm and having a movement sensor associated with the actuating arm. The method comprises the steps of passing at least one current pulse having a predetermined duration through the actuating arm and detecting for a predetermined level of movement of the actuating arm. If a fault is detected to exist, as indicated by an insufficient level of movement of the actuating arm, at least one further current pulse having an energy level greater than the fault detecting pulse may be passed through the actuating arm in an attempt to clear the fault.

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"FAULT DETECTION IN A MICRO ELECTRO-MECHANICAL DEVICE"**FIELD OF THE INVENTION**

This invention relates to a method of detecting and, if appropriate, remedying a
 5 fault in a micro electro-mechanical (MEM) device. The invention has application in ink
 ejection nozzles of the type that are fabricated by integrating the technologies applicable to
 micro electro-mechanical systems (MEMS) and complementary metal-oxide semiconductor
 (CMOS) integrated circuits, and the invention is hereinafter described in the context of that
 application. However, it will be understood that the invention does have broader
 10 application, to the remedying of faults within various types of MEM devices.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Various methods, systems and apparatus relating to the present invention are
 disclosed in the following published PCT applications filed by the applicant or assignee of
 the present invention:

15	WO 00/72241 A1,	WO 00/72242 A1,
	WO 00/72202 A1,	WO 00/72232 A1,
	WO 00/72233 A1,	WO 00/72234 A1,
	WO 00/72235 A1,	WO 00/72138 A1,
	WO 00/72124 A1,	WO 00/72192 A1,
20	WO 00/72243 A1,	WO 00/72236 A1,
	WO 00/72244 A1,	WO 00/72576 A1,
	WO 00/72237 A1,	WO 00/72125 A1,
	WO 00/72247 A1,	WO 00/71353 A1,
	WO 00/72248 A1,	WO 00/72245 A1,
25	WO 00/72203 A1,	WO 00/72204 A1,
	WO 00/072499 A1,	WO 00/72505 A1,
	WO 00/72136 A1,	WO 00/72503 A1,
	WO 00/71355 A1,	WO 00/71356 A1,
	WO 00/71362 A1,	WO 00/71354 A1,
30	WO 00/71357 A1,	WO 00/71455 A1,
	WO 00/71348 A1,	WO 00/71350 A1,
	WO 00/72137 A1,	WO 00/72126 A1,
	WO 00/72126 A1,	WO 00/72286 A1,

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	WO 00/72128 A1,	WO 00/72129 A1,
	WO 00/72230 A1,	WO 00/72238 A1,
	WO 00/72287 A1,	WO 00/72249 A1,
	WO 00/72130 A1,	WO 00/72250 A1,
5	WO 00/72110 A1,	WO 00/72131 A1,
	WO 00/72132 A1,	WO 00/72133 A1,
	WO 00/72134 A1,	WO 00/72246 A1,
	WO 00/72135 A1,	WO 01/89839 A1,
	WO 01/89840 A1,	WO 00/72177 A1,
10	WO 01/02176 A1,	WO 01/02289 A1,
	WO 01/02181 A1,	WO 01/02287 A1,
	WO 01/02288 A1,	WO 01/89987 A1,
	WO 01/89845 A1,	WO 01/89846 A1,
	WO 01/89842 A1,	WO 01/89844 A1,
15	WO 01/02178 A1,	WO 01/02179 A1,
	WO 01/02180 A1,	WO 01/89849 A1,
	WO 01/89847 A1,	WO 01/89848 A1,
	WO 01/89836 A1,	WO 01/89837 A1,
	WO 01/89851 A1,	WO 00/89838 A1,
20	WO 01/89850 A1,	WO 00/71346 A1,
	WO 00/71358 A1,	WO 00/71347 A1,
	WO 00/71349 A1,	WO 00/71351 A1,
	WO 00/72087 A1,	WO 00/72265 A1,
	WO 00/71352 A1,	WO 00/72259 A1,
25	WO 00/72260 A1,	WO 00/72088 A1,
	WO 00/72266 A1,	WO 00/72261 A1,
	WO 00/72262 A1	

A high speed pagewidth inkjet printer has recently been developed by the present Applicant. This typically employs in the order of 51200 inkjet nozzles to print on A4 size paper to provide photographic quality image printing at 1600 dpi. In order to achieve this nozzle density, the nozzles are fabricated by integrating MEMS-CMOS technology.

A difficulty that flows from the fabrication of such a printer is that there is no

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convenient way of ensuring that all nozzles that extend across the printhead or, indeed, that are located on a given chip will perform identically, and this problem is exacerbated when chips that are obtained from different wafers may need to be assembled into a given printhead. Also, having fabricated a complete printhead from a plurality of chips, it is difficult to determine the energy level required for actuating individual nozzles, to evaluate the continuing performance of a given nozzle and to detect for any fault in an individual nozzle.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention may be defined broadly as providing a method of detecting a fault within a micro electro-mechanical device of a type having a support structure, an actuating arm that is movable relative to the support structure under the influence of heat inducing current flow through the actuating arm and a movement sensor associated with the actuating arm. The method comprises the steps of:

- (a) passing at least one current pulse having a predetermined duration t_p through the actuating arm, and
- (b) detecting for a predetermined level of movement of the actuating arm.

The method as above defined permits in-service fault detection of the micro electro-mechanical (MEM) device. If the predetermined level of movement is not detected following passage of the current pulse of the predetermined duration through the arm, it might be assumed that movement of the arm is impeded, for example as a consequence of a fault having developed in the arm or as a consequence of an impediment blocking the movement of the arm.

If it is concluded that a fault in the form of a blockage exists in the MEM device, an attempt may be made to clear the fault by passing at least one further current pulse (having a higher energy level) through the actuating arm.

Thus, the present invention may be further defined as providing a method of detecting and remedying a fault within an MEM device. The two-stage method comprises the steps of:

- (a) detecting the fault in the manner as above defined, and
- (b) remedying the fault by passing at least one further current pulse through the actuating arm at an energy level greater than that of the fault detecting current pulse.

If the remedying step fails to correct the fault, the MEM device may be taken out of service and/or be returned to a supplier for service.

The fault detecting method may be effected by passing a single current pulse having a predetermined duration t_p through the actuating arm and detecting for a predetermined level of movement of the actuating arm. Alternatively, a series of current pulses of

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successively increasing duration t_p may be passed through the actuating arm in an attempt to induce successively increasing degrees of movement of the actuating arm over a time period t . Then, detection will be made for a predetermined level of movement of the actuating arm within a predetermined time window t_w where $t > t_w > t_p$.

PREFERRED FEATURES OF THE INVENTION

The fault detection method of the invention preferably is employed in relation to an MEM device in the form of a liquid ejector and most preferably in the form of an ink ejection nozzle that is operable to eject an ink droplet upon actuation of the actuating arm. In this latter preferred form of the invention, the second end of the actuating arm preferably is coupled to an integrally formed paddle which is employed to displace ink from a chamber into which the actuating arm extends.

The actuating arm most preferably is formed from two similarly shaped arm portions which are interconnected in interlapping relationship. In this embodiment of the invention, a first of the arm portions is connected to a current supply and is arranged in use to be heated by the current pulse or pulses having the duration t_p . However, the second arm portion functions to restrain linear expansion of the actuating arm as a complete unit and heat induced elongation of the first arm portion causes bending to occur along the length of the actuating arm. Thus, the actuating arm is effectively caused to pivot with respect to the support structure with heating and cooling of the first portion of the actuating arm.

The invention will be more fully understood from the following description of a preferred embodiment of a fault detecting method as applied to an inkjet nozzle as illustrated in the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In the drawings:-

Figure 1 shows a highly magnified cross-sectional elevation view of a portion of the inkjet nozzle,

Figure 2 shows a plan view of the inkjet nozzle of Figure 1,

Figure 3 shows a perspective view of an outer portion of an actuating arm and an ink ejecting paddle or of the inkjet nozzle, the actuating arm and paddle being illustrated independently of other elements of the nozzle,

Figure 4 shows an arrangement similar to that of Figure 3 but in respect of an inner portion of the actuating arm,

Figure 5 shows an arrangement similar to that of Figures 3 and 4 but in respect of the complete actuating arm incorporating the outer and inner portions shown in Figures 3 and 4,

Figure 6 shows a detailed portion of a movement sensor arrangement that is shown encircled in Figure 5,

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Figure 7 shows a sectional elevation view of the nozzle of Figure 1 but prior to charging with ink,

Figure 8 shows a sectional elevation view of the nozzle of Figure 7 but with the actuating arm and paddle actuated to a test position,

5 Figure 9 shows ink ejection from the nozzle when actuated under a fault clearing operation,

Figure 10 shows a blocked condition of the nozzle when the actuating arm and paddle are actuated to an extent that normally would be sufficient to eject ink from the nozzle,

10 Figure 11 shows a schematic representation of a portion of an electrical circuit that is embodied within the nozzle,

Figure 12 shows an excitation-time diagram applicable to normal (ink ejecting) actuation of the nozzle actuating arm,

15 Figure 13 shows an excitation-time diagram applicable to test actuation of the nozzle actuating arm,

Figure 14 shows comparative displacement-time curves applicable to the excitation-time diagrams shown in Figures 12 and 13,

Figure 15 shows an excitation-time diagram applicable to a fault detection procedure,

20 Figure 16 shows a temperature-time diagram that is applicable to the nozzle actuating arm and which corresponds with the excitation-time diagram of Figure 15, and

Figure 17 shows a deflection-time diagram that is applicable to the nozzle actuating arm and which corresponds with the excitation/heating-time diagrams of Figures 15 and 16.

25

Detailed Description of the Invention

As illustrated with approximately 3000x magnification in Figure 1 and other relevant drawing figures, a single inkjet nozzle device is shown as a portion of a chip that is fabricated by integrating MEMS and CMOS technologies. The complete nozzle device includes a support structure having a silicon substrate 20, a metal oxide semiconductor layer 21, a passivation layer 22, and a non-corrosive dielectric coating/chamber-defining layer 23.

30

The nozzle device incorporates an ink chamber 24 which is connected to a source (not shown) of ink and, located above the chamber, a nozzle chamber 25. A nozzle opening 26 is provided in the chamber-defining layer 23 to permit displacement of ink droplets toward paper or other medium (not shown) onto which ink is to be deposited. A paddle 27 is located between the two chambers 24 and 25 and, when in its quiescent position, as

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indicated in Figures 1 and 7, the paddle 27 effectively divides the two chambers 24 and 25.

The paddle 27 is coupled to an actuating arm 28 by a paddle extension 29 and a bridging portion 30 of the dielectric coating 23.

5 The actuating arm 28 is formed (i.e. deposited during fabrication of the device) to be pivotable with respect to the support structure or substrate 20. That is, the actuating arm has a first end that is coupled to the support structure and a second end 38 that is movable outwardly with respect to the support structure. The actuating arm 28 comprises outer and inner arm portions 31 and 32. The outer arm portion 31 is illustrated in detail and in isolation from other components of the nozzle device in the perspective view shown in
10 Figure 3. The inner arm portion 32 is illustrated in a similar way in Figure 4. The complete actuating arm 28 is illustrated in perspective in Figure 5, as well as in Figures 1, 7, 8, 9 and 10.

The inner portion 32 of the actuating arm 28 is formed from a titanium-aluminium-nitride (TiAl)N deposit during formation of the nozzle device and it is connected
15 electrically to a current source 33, as illustrated schematically in Figure 11, within the CMOS structure. The electrical connection is made to end terminals 34 and 35, and application of a pulsed excitation (drive) voltage to the terminals results in pulsed current flow through the inner portion only of the actuating arm 28. The current flow causes rapid resistance heating within the inner portion 32 of the actuating arm and consequential
20 momentary elongation of that portion of the arm.

The outer arm portion 31 of the actuating arm 28 is mechanically coupled to but electrically isolated from the inner arm portion 32 by posts 36. No current-induced heating occurs within the outer arm portion 31 and, as a consequence, voltage induced current flow through the inner arm portion 32 causes momentary bending of the complete actuating arm
25 28 in the manner indicated in Figures 8, 9 and 10 of the drawings. This bending of the actuating arm 28 is equivalent to pivotal movement of the arm with respect to the substrate 20 and it results in displacement of the paddle 27 within the chambers 24 and 25.

An integrated movement sensor is provided within the device in order to determine the degree or rate of pivotal movement of the actuating arm 28 and in order to permit fault
30 detection in the device.

The movement sensor comprises a moving contact element 37 that is formed integrally with the inner portion 32 of the actuating arm 28 and which is electrically active when current is passing through the inner portion of the actuating arm. The moving contact element 37 is positioned adjacent the second end 38 of the actuating arm and, thus, with a
35 voltage V applied to the end terminals 34 and 35, the moving contact element will be at a potential of approximately V/2. The movement sensor also comprises a fixed contact element 39 which is formed integrally with the CMOS layer 22 and which is positioned to

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be contacted by the moving contact element 37 when the actuating arm 28 pivots upwardly to a predetermined extent. The fixed contact element is connected electrically to amplifier elements 40 and to a microprocessor arrangement 41, both of which are shown in Figure 11 and the component elements of which are embodied within the CMOS layer 22 of the device.

When the actuator arm 28 and, hence, the paddle 27 are in the quiescent position, as shown in Figures 1 and 7, no contact is made between the moving and fixed contact elements 37 and 39. At the other extreme, when excess movement of the actuator arm and the paddle occurs, as indicated in Figures 8 and 9, contact is made between the moving and fixed contact elements 37 and 39. When the actuator arm 28 and the paddle 27 are actuated to a normal extent sufficient to expel ink from the nozzle, no contact is made between the moving and fixed contact elements. That is, with normal ejection of the ink from the chamber 25, the actuator arm 28 and the paddle 27 are moved to a position partway between the positions that are illustrated in Figures 7 and 8. This (intermediate) position is indicated in Figure 10, although as a consequence of a blocked nozzle rather than during normal ejection of ink from the nozzle.

Figure 12 shows an excitation-time diagram that is applicable to effecting actuation of the actuator arm 28 and the paddle 27 from a quiescent to a lower-than-normal ink ejecting position. The displacement of the paddle 27 resulting from the excitation of Figure 12 is indicated by the lower graph 42 in Figure 14, and it can be seen that the maximum extent of displacement is less than the optimum level that is shown by the displacement line 43.

Figure 13 shows an expanded excitation-time diagram that is applicable to effecting actuation of the actuator arm 28 and the paddle 27 to an excessive extent, such as is indicated in Figures 8 and 9. The displacement of the paddle 27 resulting from the excitation of Figure 13 is indicated by the upper graph 44 in Figure 14, from which it can be seen that the maximum displacement level is greater than the optimum level indicated by the displacement line 43.

Figures 15, 16 and 17 shows plots of excitation voltage, actuator arm temperature and paddle deflection against time for successively increasing durations of excitation applied to the actuating arm 28. These plots have relevance to fault detection in the nozzle device.

When detecting for a fault condition in the nozzle device or in each device in an array of the nozzle devices, a series of current pulses of successively increasing duration t_p are induced to flow that the actuating arm 28 over a time period t . The duration t_p is controlled to increase in the manner indicated graphically in Figure 15.

Each current pulse induces momentary heating in the actuating arm and a

- 7 -

consequential temperature rise, followed by a temperature drop on expiration of the pulse duration. As indicated in Figure 16, the temperature rises to successively higher levels with the increasing pulse durations as shown in Figure 15.

As a result, as indicated in Figure 17, under normal circumstances the actuator arm 28 will move (i.e. pivot) to successively increasing degrees, some of which will be below that required to cause contact to be made between the moving and fixed contact elements 37 and 39 and others of which will be above that required to cause contact to be made between the moving and fixed contact elements. This is indicated by the "test level" line shown in Figure 17. However, if a blockage occurs in a nozzle device, as indicated in Figure 10, the paddle 27 and, as a consequence, the actuator arm 28 will be restrained from moving to the normal full extent that would be required to eject ink from the nozzle. As a consequence, the normal full actuator arm movement will not occur and contact will not be made between the moving and fixed contact elements 37 and 39.

If such contact is not made with passage of current pulses of the predetermined duration t_p through the actuating arm, it might be concluded that a blockage has occurred within the nozzle device. This might then be remedied by passing a further current pulse through the actuating arm 28, with the further pulse having an energy level significantly greater than that which would normally be passed through the actuating arm. If this serves to remove the blockage ink ejection as indicated in Figure 9 will occur.

As an alternative, more simple, procedure toward fault detection, a single current pulse as indicated in Figure 12 may be induced to flow through the actuator arm and detection be made simply for sufficient movement of the actuating arm to cause contact to be made between the fixed and moving contact elements.

Variations and modifications may be made in respect of the device as described above as a preferred embodiment of the invention without departing from the scope of the appended claims.

CLAIMS:

1. A method of detecting and remedying a fault within a micro electro-mechanical device of a type having a support structure, an actuating arm that is movable relative to the support structure under the influence of heat inducing current flow through the actuating arm and a movement sensor associated with the actuating arm, the method comprising the steps of:
 - (a) passing at least one current pulse having a predetermined duration t_p through the actuating arm;
 - (b) detecting for a predetermined level of movement of the actuating arm; and
 - (c) remedying the fault by passing at least one further current pulse through the actuating arm at an energy level greater than that of the fault detecting current pulse.
2. The method as claimed in claim 1 when employed in relation to a liquid ejection nozzle having a liquid receiving chamber from which the liquid is ejected with movement of the actuating arm.
3. The method as claimed in claim 1 when employed in relation to an ink ejection nozzle having an ink receiving chamber from which the ink is ejected with movement of the actuating arm.
4. The method as claimed in claim 3 wherein the movement sensor comprises a moving contact element formed integrally with the actuating arm, a fixed contact element formed integrally with the support structure and electric circuit elements formed within the support structure, and wherein the predetermined level of movement of the actuating arm is detected by contact made between the fixed and moving contact elements.
5. The method as claimed in claim 3 wherein a single current pulse having the predetermined pulse t_p is induced to pass through the actuating arm and detection is made for a predetermined movement of the actuating arm consequential on the passage of the single current pulse.
6. The method as claimed in claim 3 wherein a series of current pulses of successively increasing duration t_p are induced to pass through the actuating arm over a time period t and detection is made for the predetermined level of movement of the actuating arm within a predetermined time window t_w where $t > t_w > t_p$.

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7. The method as claimed in claim 4 wherein the movement sensor includes a microprocessor that detects for the predetermined level of movement of the actuating arm and correlates the predetermined level of movement of the actuating arm with the predetermined duration of the current pulse.

8. The method as claimed in claim 6 wherein the movement sensor includes a microprocessor that detects for the predetermined level of movement of the actuating arm within the predetermined time window t_w and correlates the predetermined level of movement with a pulse duration t_p that induces the predetermined movement within the time window t_w .

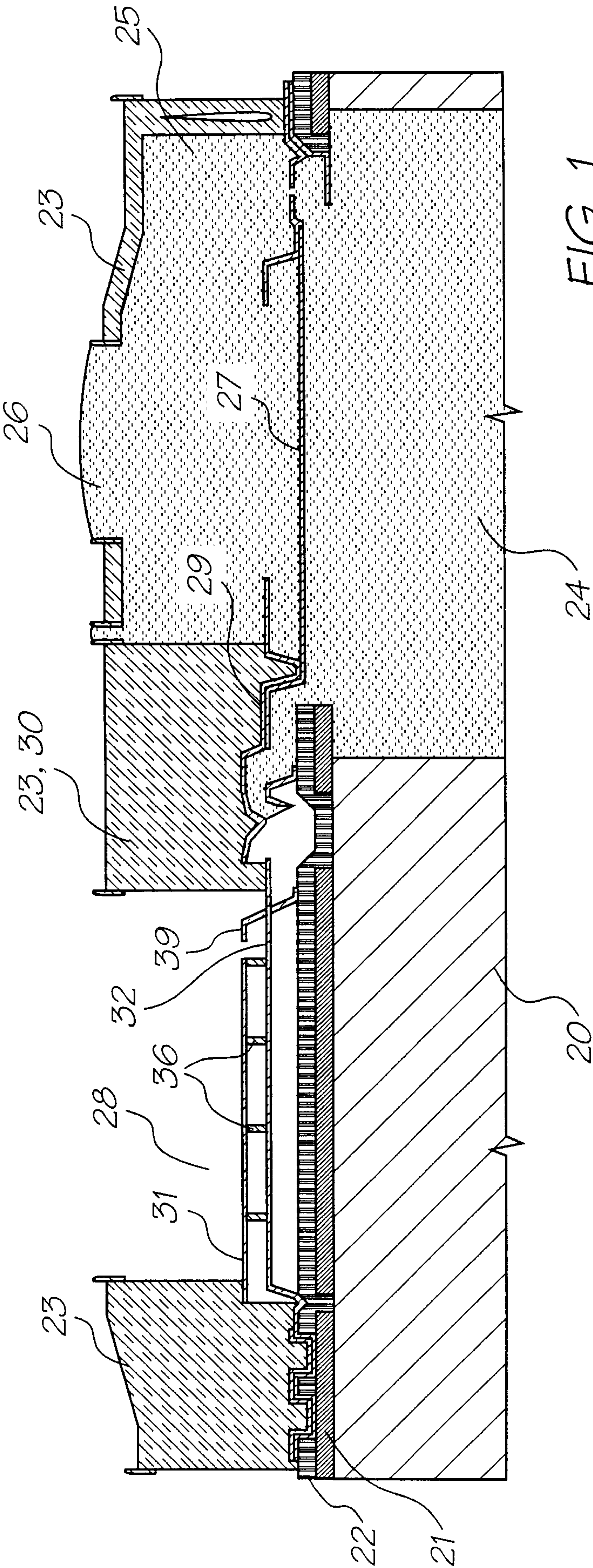


FIG. 1

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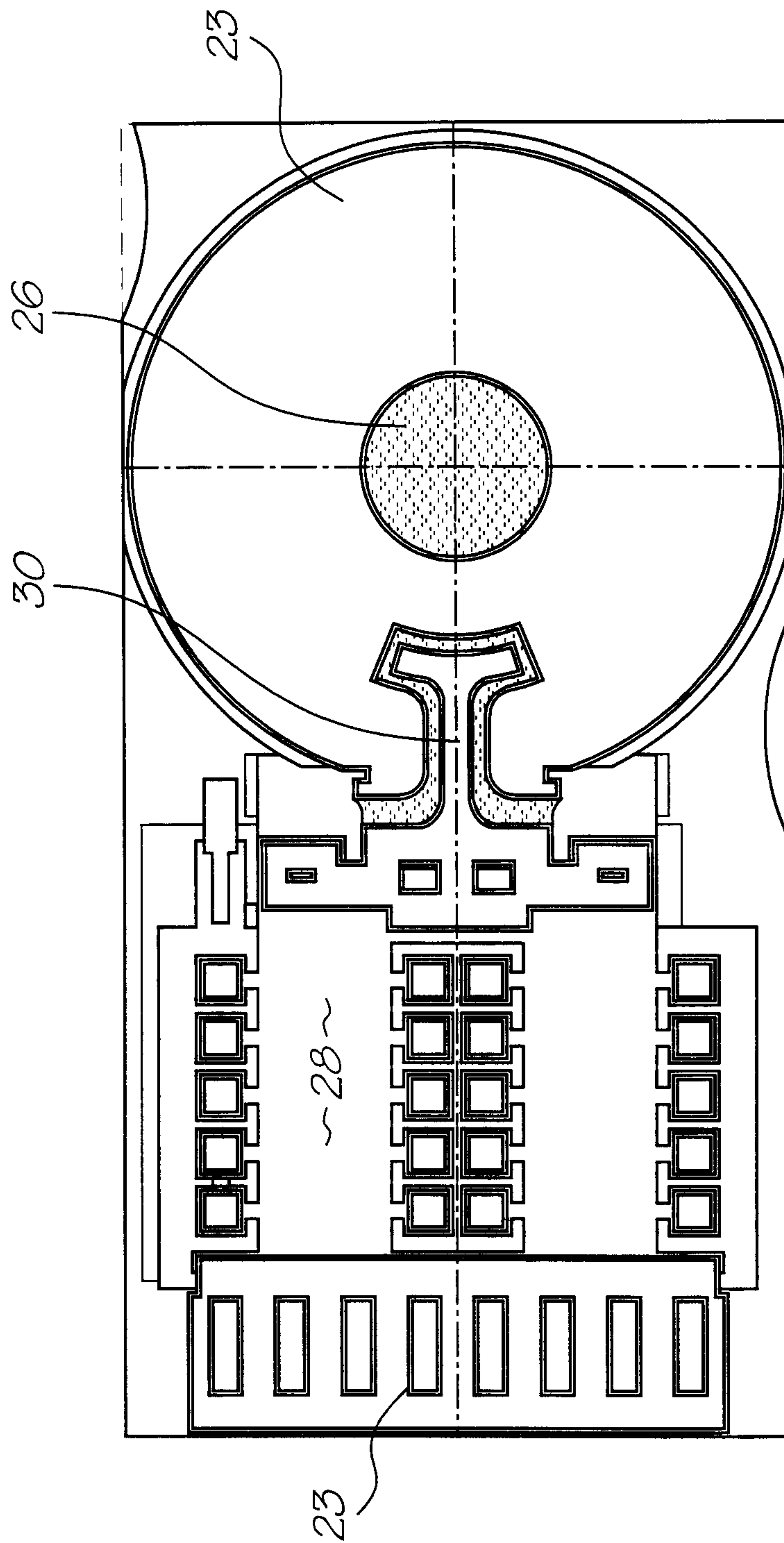


FIG. 2

3/11

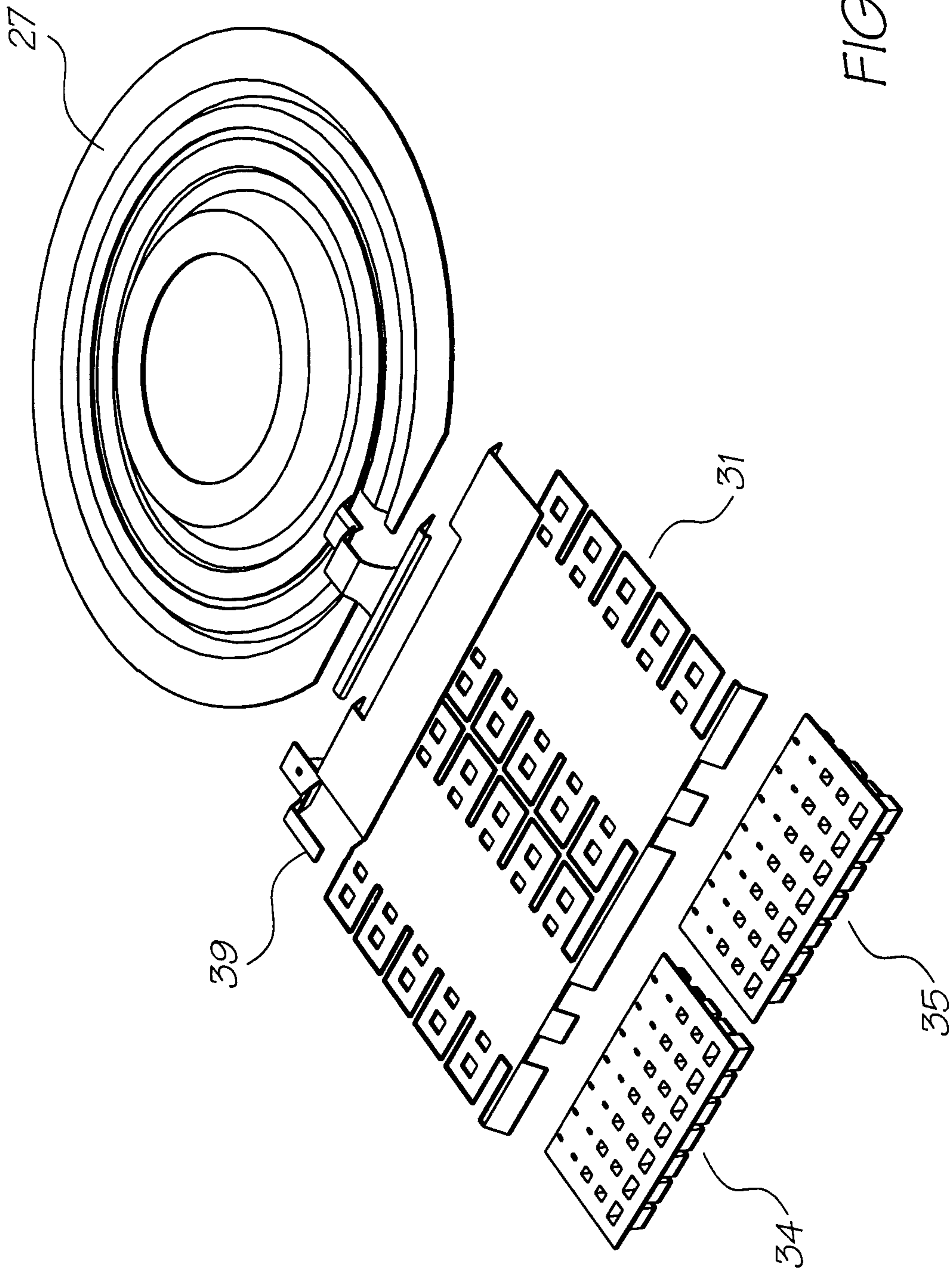
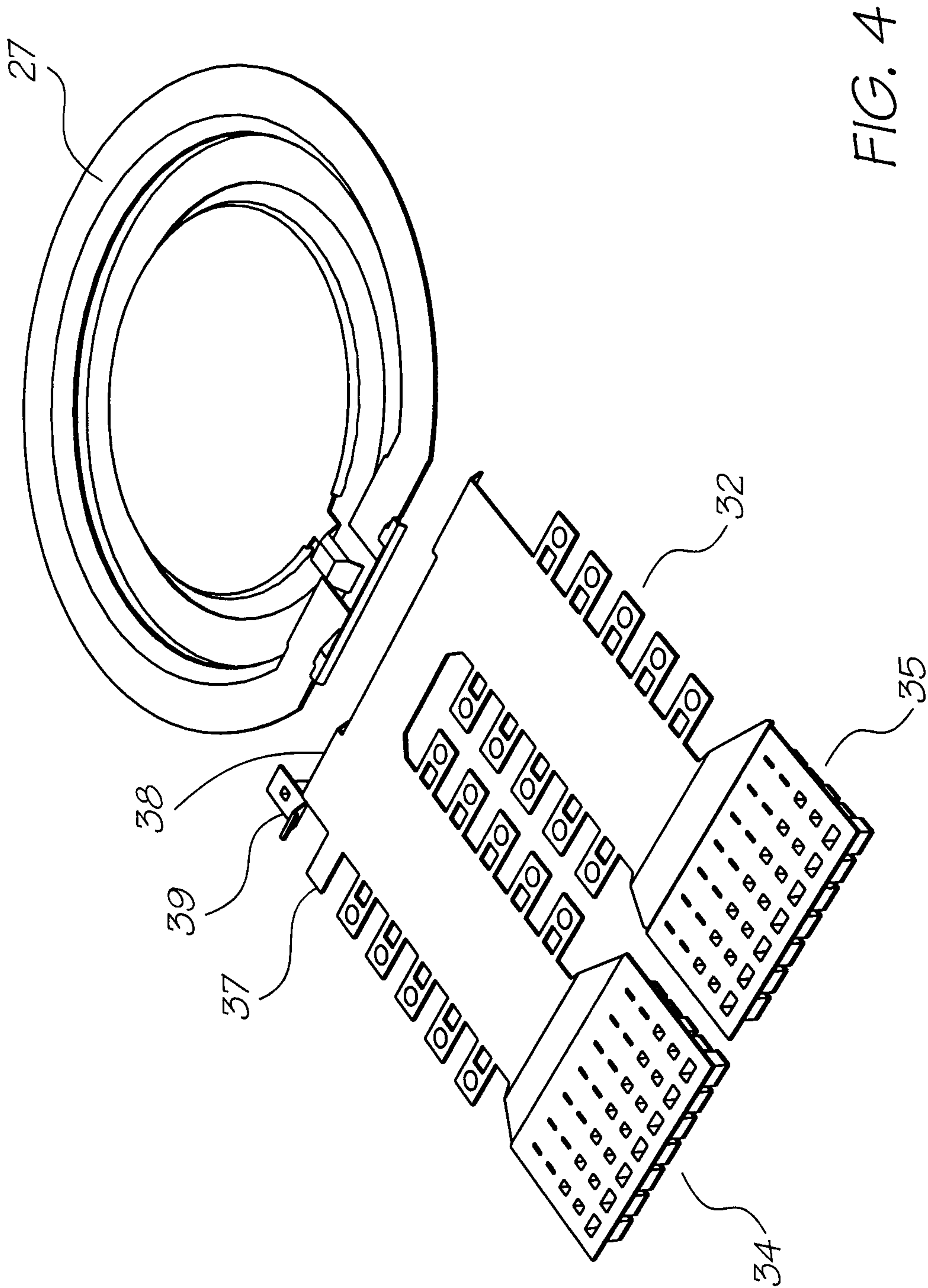
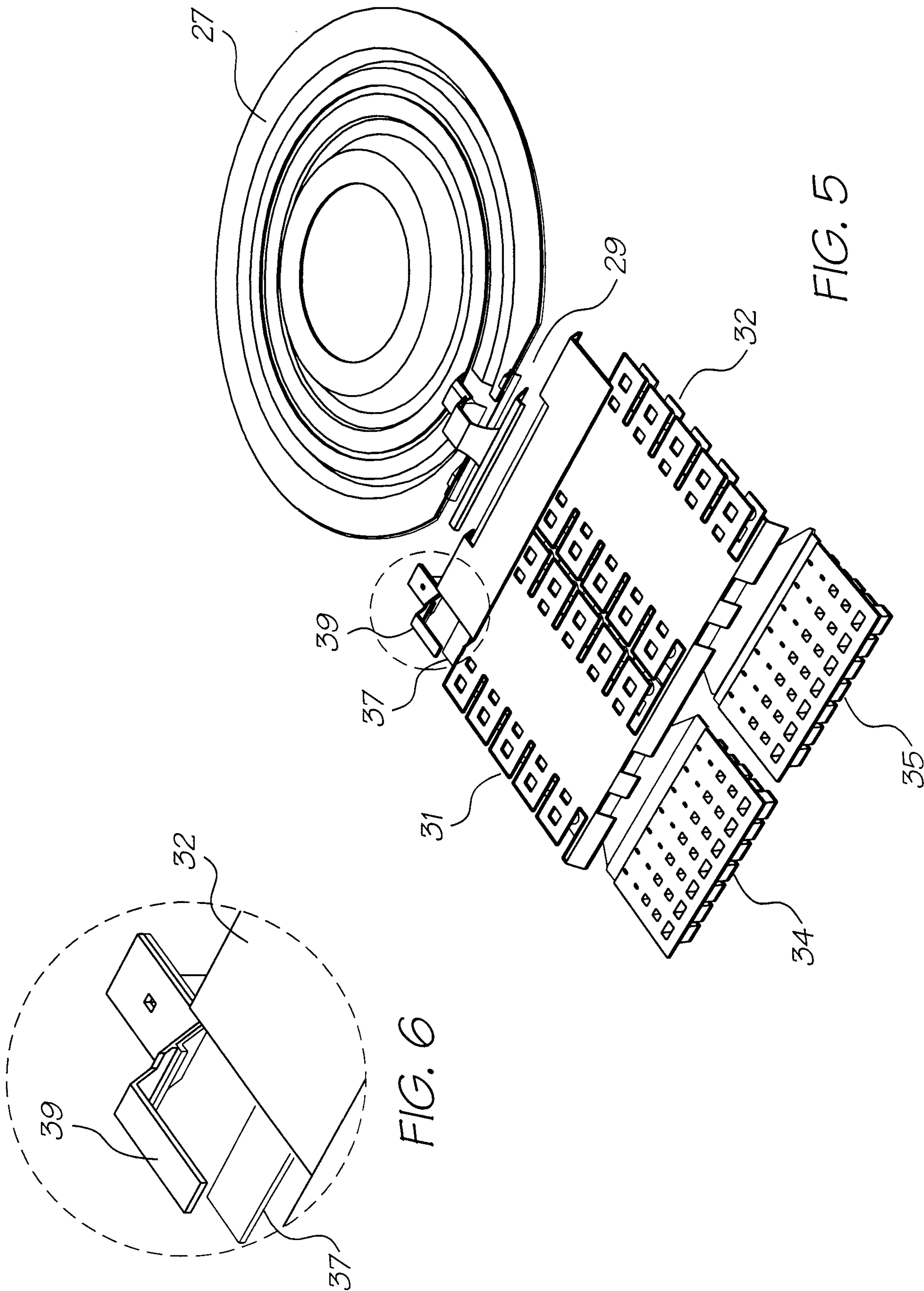
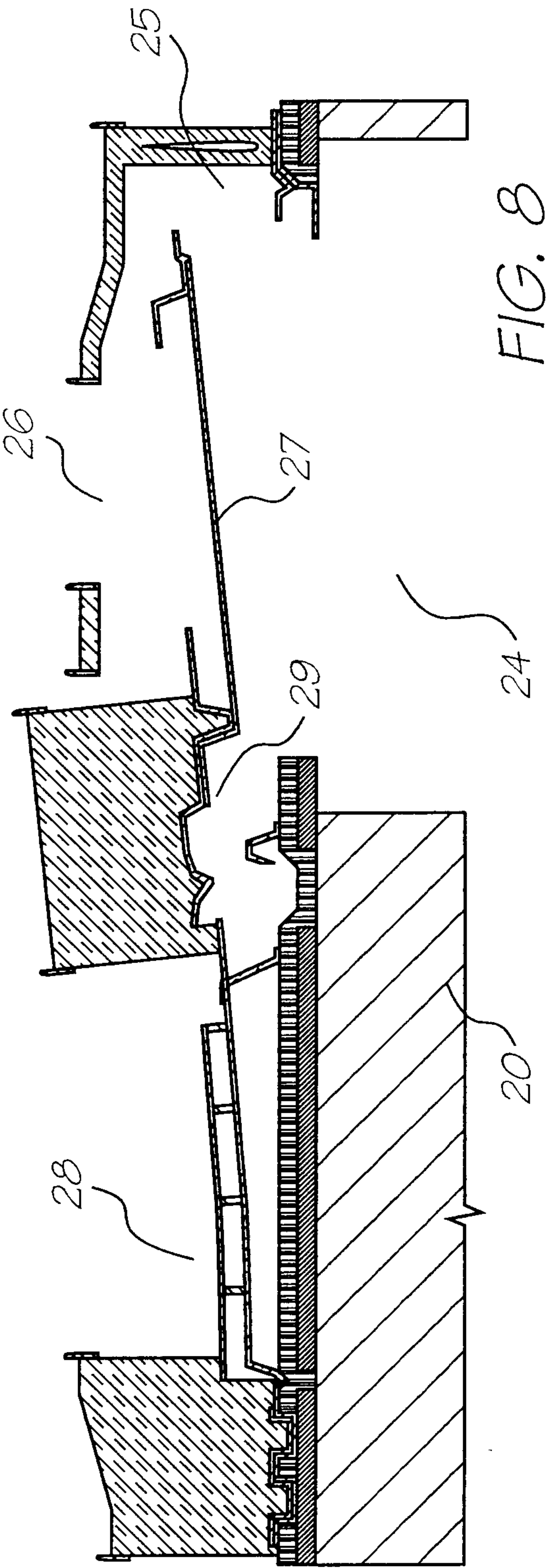
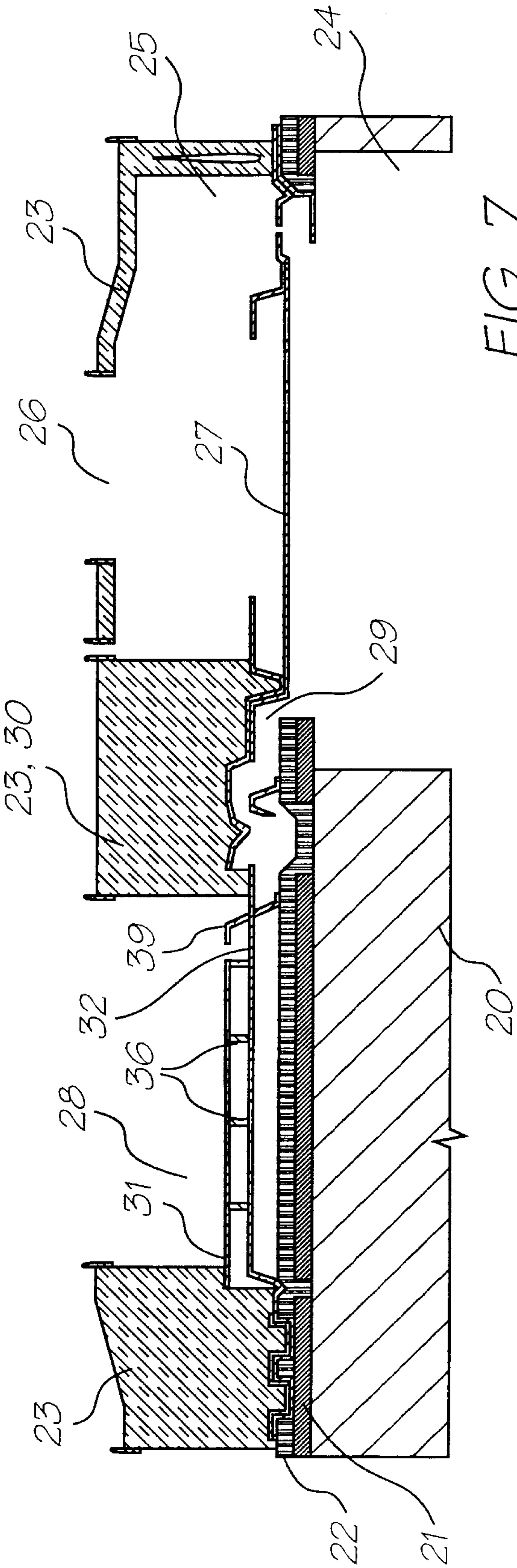


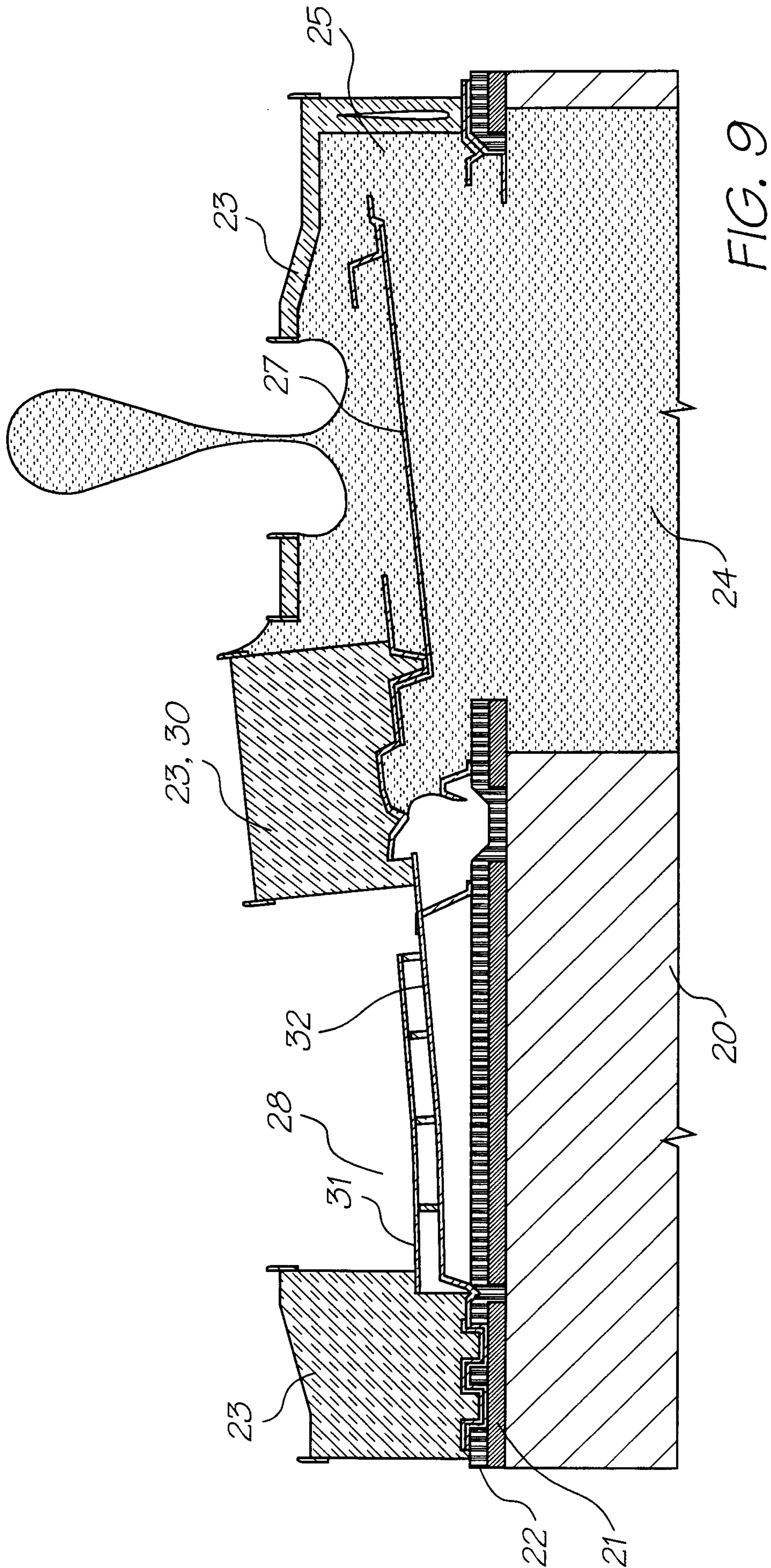
FIG. 3







7/11



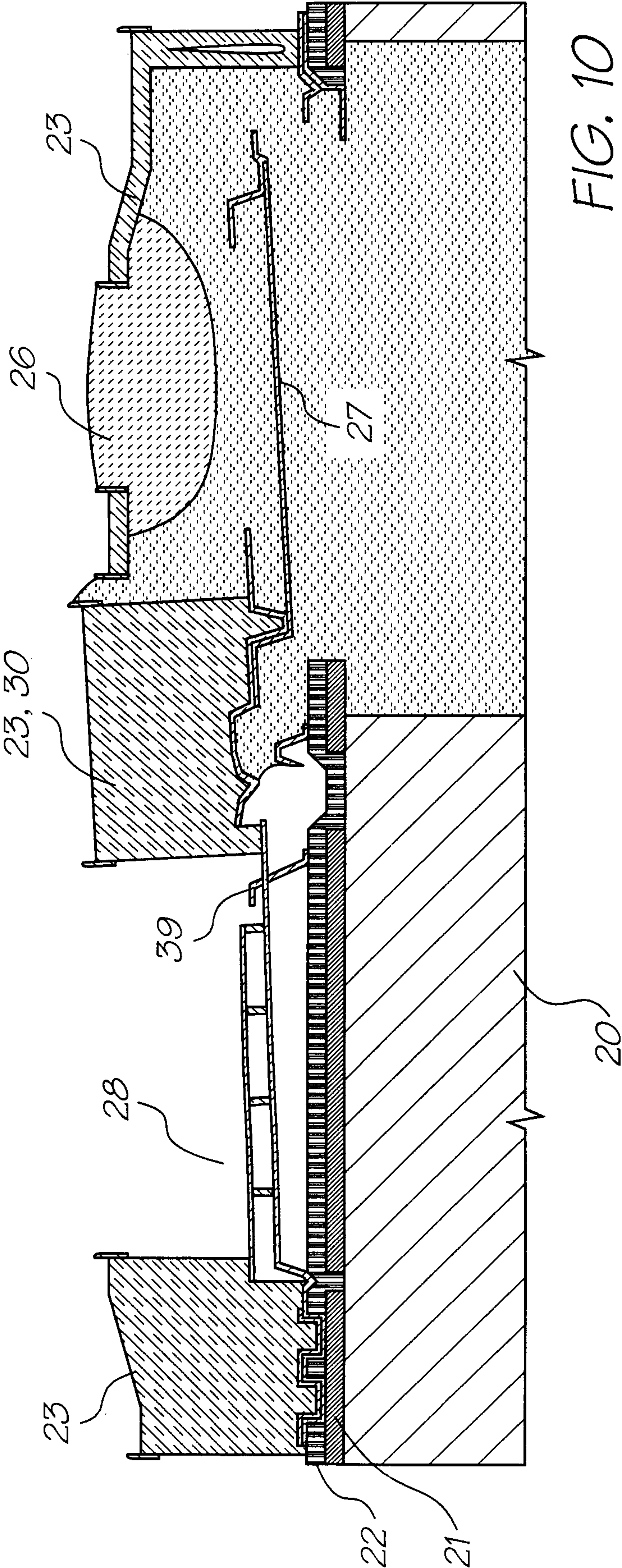


FIG. 10

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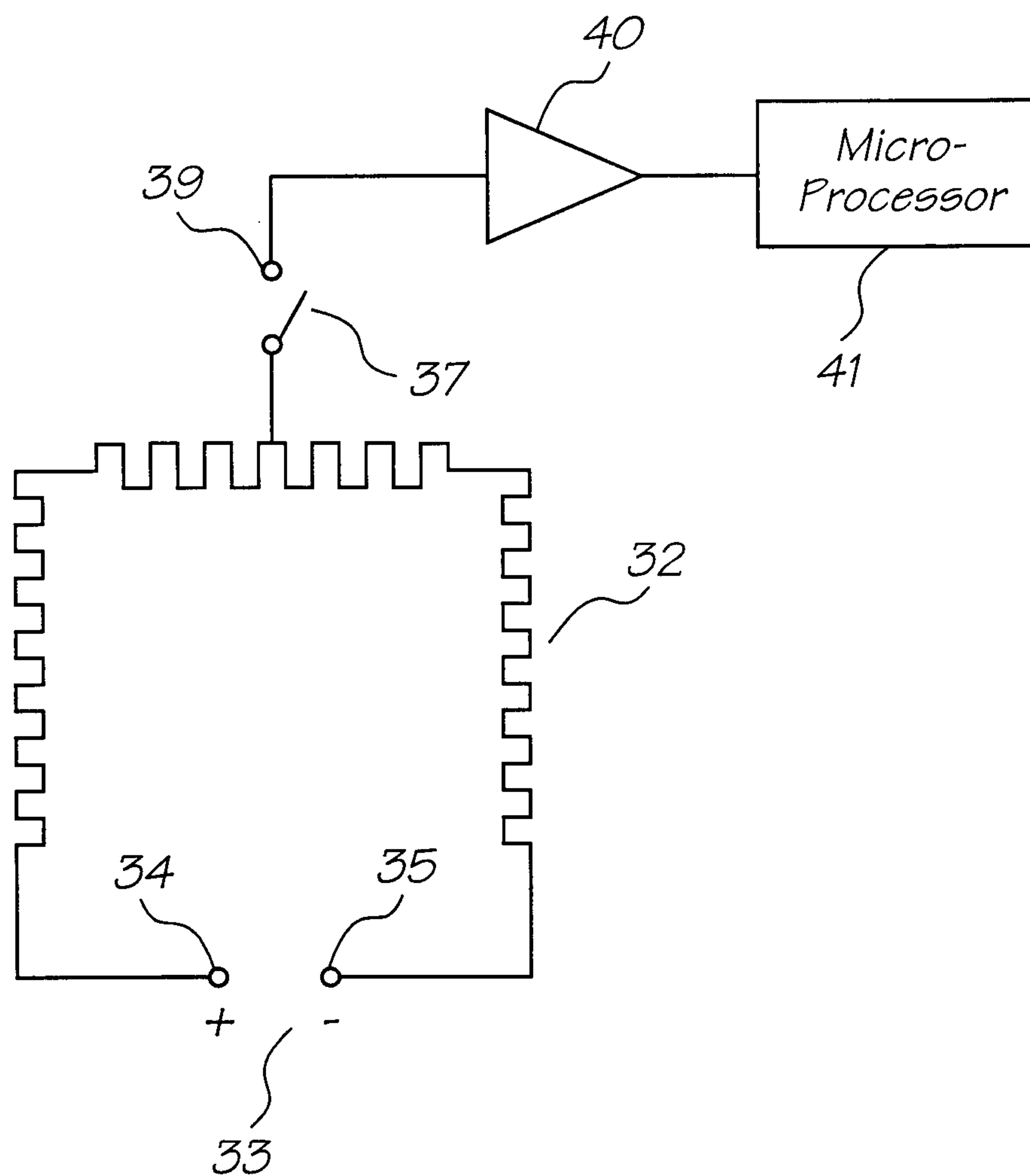


FIG. 11

10/11

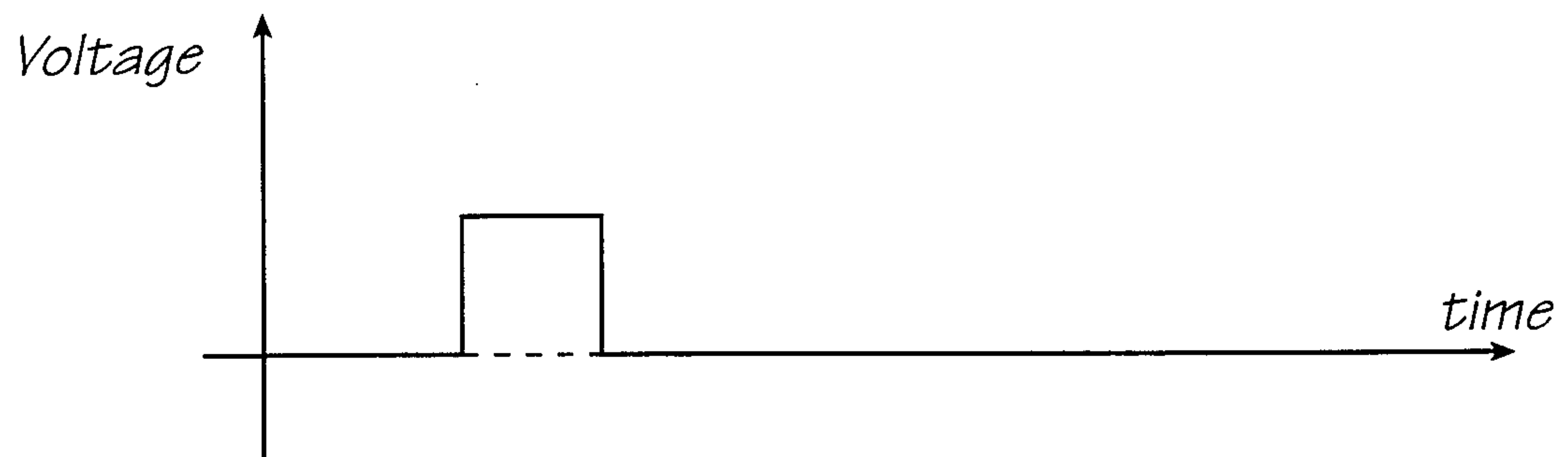


FIG. 12

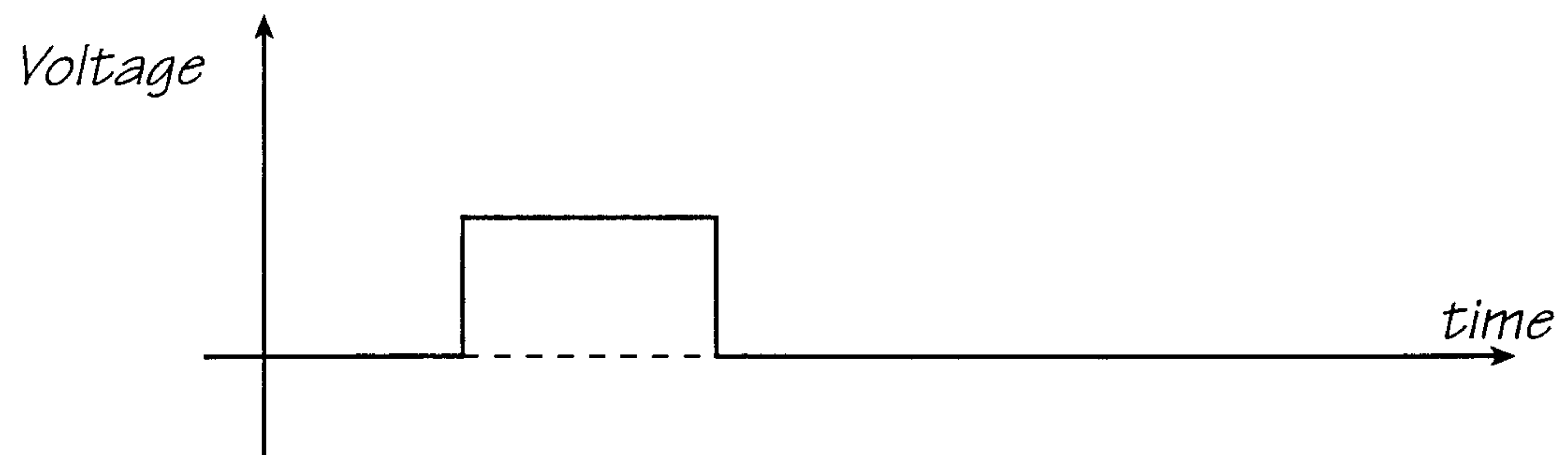


FIG. 13

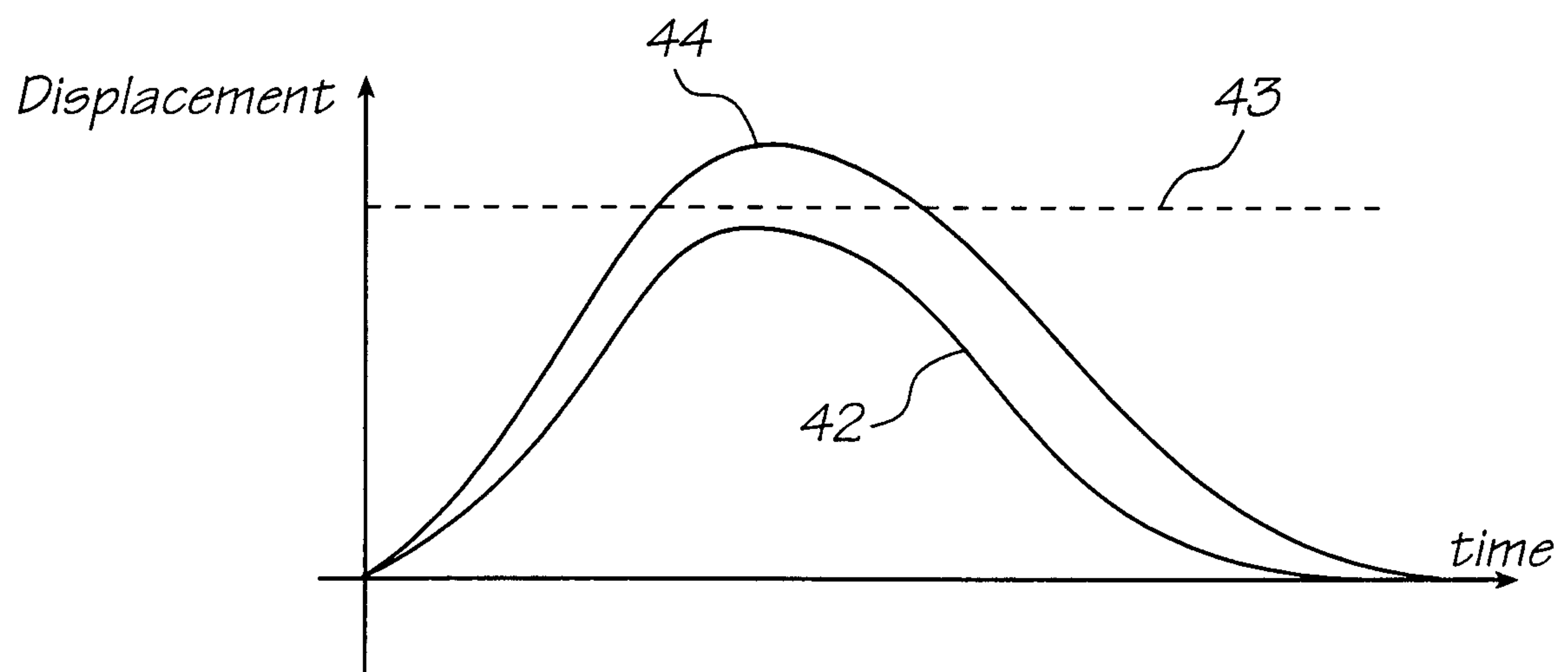


FIG. 14

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