



- (51) International Patent Classification:
H05H 1/24 (2006.01) C23C 14/04 (2006.01)
- (21) International Application Number:
PCT/NL2010/050079
- (22) International Filing Date:
17 February 2010 (17.02.2010)
- (25) Filing Language: English
- (26) Publication Language: English
- (71) Applicant (for all designated States except US): VISION DYNAMICS HOLDING B.V. [NL/NL]; Fransebaan 592a, NL-5627 JM Eindhoven (NL).
- (72) Inventors; and
- (75) Inventors/Applicants (for US only): BLOM, Paulus Petrus Maria [NL/NL]; De Scheerder 13, NL-5506 BK Veldhoven (NL). STEVENS, Alquin Alphons Elisabeth [NL/NL]; Bergen op Zoomstraat 40, NL-5652 KE Eindhoven (NL). HUIJBREGTS, Laurentia Johanna [NL/NL]; Moreelselaan 26, NL-5643 RN Eindhoven

(NL). DE HAAN, Hugo Anton Marie [NL/NL]; Avafura 1, NL-5691 JA Son (NL). VAN SCHIJNDEL, Antonius Hubertus [NL/NL]; Koninginnepage 19, NL-5654 DL Deurne (NL). TE SLIGTE, Edwin [NL/NL]; Zonneroosstraat 27, NL-5644 ES Eindhoven (NL). VAN HIJNINGEN, Nicolaas Cornelis Josephus [NL/NL]; Tramstraat 17, NL-5611 CM Eindhoven (NL). HUISKAMP, Tom [NL/NL]; Herzenbroekweg 2, NL-5642 NN Eindhoven (NL).

(74) Agent: HATZMANN, M.J.; Verenigde, Johan de Wittlaan 7, NL-2517 JR Den Haag (NL).

(81) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of national protection available): AE, AG, AL, AM, AO, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BH, BR, BW, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CL, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DO, DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, GT, HN, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KM, KN, KP, KR, KZ, LA, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LY, MA, MD, ME, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MY, MZ, NA, NG, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PE, PG, PH, PL, PT, RO, RS, RU, SC, SD,

[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: DEVICE AND METHOD FOR GENERATING A PLASMA DISCHARGE FOR PATTERNING THE SURFACE OF A SUBSTRATE

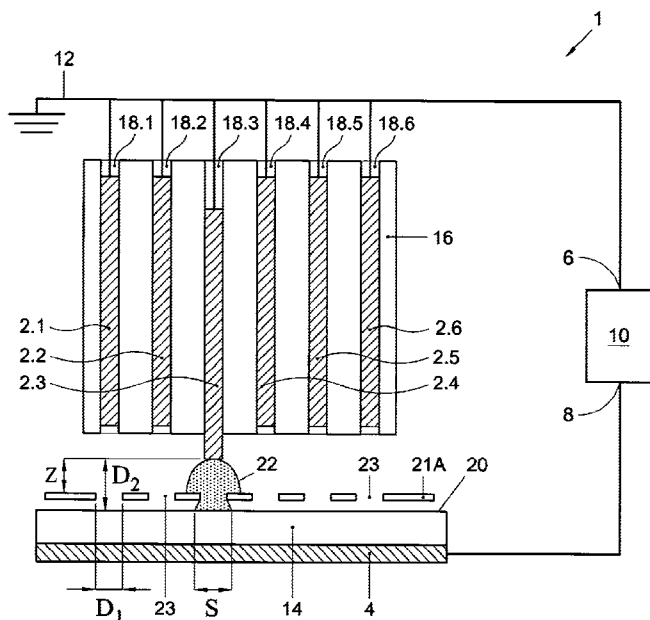


Fig. 1

(57) Abstract: Device for generating a plasma discharge near a substrate for patterning the surface of the substrate, comprising a first electrode having a first discharge portion and a second electrode having a second discharge portion, a high voltage source for generating a high voltage difference between the first and the second electrode, and positioning means for positioning the first electrode with respect to the substrate. The device is further provided with an intermediate structure that is, in use, arranged in between the first electrode and the substrate while allowing for positioning the first electrode with respect to the substrate.



SE, SG, SK, SL, SM, ST, SV, SY, TH, TJ, TM, TN, TR,
TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, ZA, ZM, ZW.

ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, LV,
MC, MK, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, SM,
TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW,
ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

(84) Designated States (*unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available*): ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, NA, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE,

Published:

— *with international search report (Art. 21(3))*

Title: Device and method for generating a plasma discharge for patterning the surface of a substrate

The invention relates to a device for generating a plasma discharge
5 for patterning the surface of a substrate, especially to such device comprising a first electrode having a first discharge portion and a second electrode having a second discharge portion, a high voltage source for generating a high voltage difference between the first and the second electrode, and positioning means for positioning the first electrode with respect to the substrate.

10 BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

It is well-known that plasma's can be used to treat a surface; with the use of a plasma, it is possible to etch, to deposit a material onto a substrate, and/or to change a property of a surface of a substrate, e.g. changing it from hydrophobic to hydrophilic and chemical attachment of atoms. The
15 latter can for example be used in the process of metalizing a plastic substrate (see for example M. Charbonnier et al. in Journal of Applied Electrochemistry 31, 57 (2001)). In this process, a plasma makes the surface of a plastic suitable for attachment of Palladium, on which a metal layer can be grown. Compared to many other metalizing methods, this method has the advantage that the
20 temperature can remain low, which is necessary for plastics having low melting points. For the production of plastic electronics like RFID tags and OLEDs, plasma treatment may thus be useful.

For these applications, making patterned structures directly with the plasma on the surface reduces the number of steps for the fabrication of
25 the electronics. Further, compared to traditional mask/etch methods, there is no waste of metal (due to deposition and subsequent etching of the metal layer), reducing environmental burden. Also for other applications, like labs on chips, direct patterning with a plasma would be useful.

Known devices for directly patterning a surface with a plasma are
30 described in DE 10322696 and in Surface & Coatings Technology 200, 676 (2005). These devices use a mask provided with a desired pattern for

generating that pattern. This may be a good method for mass production, but, as making a mask is quite expensive, takes time and must be performed each time a new pattern is required, a maskless method would be preferable for production of smaller amounts.

5 Another device for directly patterning a surface with a plasma is known from US 4,911,075. This device utilizes a precisely positioned high voltage spark discharge electrode to create on the surface of a substrate an intense-heat spark zone as well as a corona zone in a circular region surrounding the spark zone. The discharge electrode is scanned across the
10 surface while high voltage pulses having precisely controlled voltage and current profiles to produce precisely positioned and defined spark/corona discharges in register with a digital image. Although not using a physical mask, this device has the disadvantage that complicated precise control of the high voltage pulses is required. Further, since the device uses a counter
15 electrode behind the substrate, only thin substrates may be used. Also, spark discharge may not be desirable for certain processes of deposition, etching and hydrophilation.

 In PCT/NL2008/050555 a method and apparatus are described that relate to plasma patterning. PCT/NL2008/050555 describes a method and
20 apparatus wherein the positioning means are arranged for positioning the first electrode selectively with respect to the second electrode. The first electrode can be positioned in a first position in which a distance between the first discharge portion and the second discharge portion is sufficiently small to support the plasma discharge at the high voltage difference, and in a second
25 position in which the distance between the first discharge portion and the second discharge portion is sufficiently large to prevent plasma discharge at the high voltage difference.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

 It is an object of the invention to provide a device for generating a
30 plasma discharge, suitable for maskless direct patterning of a substrate, which

is improved with respect to devices that were previously disclosed. The device should preferably have simple control, long electrode life, be able to quickly pattern the substrate and/or be suitable for a large range of substrates, e.g. thick and thin substrates.

5 More in general, it is an object of the invention to provide a device for generating a plasma discharge near a substrate for patterning the surface of the substrate, comprising a first electrode having a first discharge portion and a second electrode having a second discharge portion, a high voltage source for generating a high voltage difference between the first and the
10 second electrode and, preferably, positioning means for positioning the first electrode with respect to the substrate, the device being improved with respect to devices that were previously disclosed.

 According to the invention there is provided a device for generating a plasma discharge near a substrate for patterning a surface of the substrate,
15 comprising: a first electrode having a first discharge portion and a second electrode having a second discharge portion, a high voltage source for generating a high voltage difference between the first and the second electrode, and positioning means for positioning the first electrode with respect to the substrate, wherein the device is further provided with an intermediate
20 structure that is, in use, arranged in between the first electrode and the substrate. Preferably, the intermediate structure allows for positioning the first electrode with respect to the substrate. By means of the intermediate structure, the generated plasma can be utilized more beneficially and/or can be used to enable an additional functionality. Preferably, the intermediate
25 structure is a sheet such as a plate.

 Positioning the first electrode with respect to the substrate may comprise moving the first electrode towards and/or along the substrate. Positioning the first electrode may be allowed by having an open space between the intermediate structure and the substrate and/or between the
30 intermediate structure and the first electrode. Optionally, the intermediate

structure is mechanically coupled to the first electrode so that it moves along the substrate together with the first electrode.

In an embodiment, the positioning means comprise a piezo-electric actuator that is mechanically coupled to the first electrode for positioning the first electrode with respect to the substrate. By means of the piezo-electric
5 actuator, a relatively high precision in positioning the first electrode can be reached. In this embodiment, the device is not necessarily provided with the intermediate structure. It will be appreciated that it is also possible that the first electrode is formed by a piezo-electric actuator, optionally provided with
10 an additional electrically conducting coating on at least a portion of the outer surface thereof at or near the discharge portion.

In an embodiment, the intermediate structure is formed as a sheet provided with at least one aperture, preferably a plurality of apertures, for providing therethrough the plasma. Optionally, such apertures may have a
15 maximum dimension, such as a maximum diameter, that is smaller than a minimum distance between the first electrode and the substrate. As the plasma may reach the substrate through the apertures, the apertures can influence a size of an area of the substrate that is treated by the plasma. By tuning dimensions of the apertures, the intermediate structure can be utilized
20 to reduce a spot size or track width of a pattern generated by the plasma. In this way, a resolution of the pattern can be improved. The maximum dimension of at least one, optionally all, of the apertures may e.g. be 10 micrometer or 20 micrometer. Hence, the at least one, optionally all, of the apertures may e.g. have a diameter of at most 10 micrometer or at most 20
25 micrometer. The apertures may e.g. be beneficially employed by providing a gas therethrough for forming the plasma. In this way the gas flow can be focussed. The gas can be used more economically. This embodiment may have the additional advantage that the first electrodes can be cooled by the gas flow through the apertures.

In an embodiment, the intermediate structure comprises, and preferably essentially consists of, an electrically non-conductive material. In this way the electric field generated by the high voltage source can be concentrated through the apertures. In this way the size of the area of the substrate that is treated by the plasma can be effectively reduced. That is, the aperture may be used as a diaphragm for effectively reducing the size of the plasma at the substrate. The intermediate structure may be positioned in between the first and the second electrodes.

In an embodiment, the intermediate structure may comprise, and preferably essentially consists of, an electrically conductive material that may form the second electrode. In this way it is possible that the substrate need not be positioned in between the first and second electrode. Exposing the substrate to the electric field generated by the high voltage source may thus be substantially prevented. This may be important if the substrate is relative thick. Then, placing the substrate in between the first and second electrode would require a relatively high electric field for creating a plasma. This may also be important if the substrate is provided with relatively vulnerable components like integrated circuits, which can be damaged by strong electric fields. It will be appreciated that the intermediate structure may be segmented. The intermediate structure may comprise separate segments, each corresponding to an associated first electrode. This allows for the segments to be switched relative to the high voltage source, so as to switch the plasma on and off.

Preferably, the first electrode and/or the second electrode, e.g. the electrically conductive material, may be provided with an electrically insulating cover. In this way, spark formation between the first and second electrode may be hindered and may even be prevented.

In an embodiment, the intermediate structure is formed as a sheet, such as a ribbon, that comprises a process material, such as a precursor or depositable material, that is at least partly displaceable by means of the

plasma. By means of the intermediate structure, the generated plasma can be utilized to enable processing, e.g. deposition, of the at least part of the process material, e.g. the depositable material. In this way an additional functionality of the device can be provided.

5 In an embodiment, the intermediate structure comprises a carrier sheet provided with the process material, wherein the process material is at least partly removable from the carrier sheet by means of the plasma. By means of the intermediate structure, the generated plasma can be utilized to enable processing, e.g. deposition, of the process material held by the carrier
10 sheet. Preferably, in use the process material is arranged in between the carrier sheet and the substrate. However, this is not necessary. Optionally, the carrier-sheet may, e.g. at least partly, be mesh-shaped. Then, the process material may be provided within openings of the mesh. The process material may e.g. be impregnated in the mesh-shaped carrier.

15 In an embodiment, the positioning means are arranged for selectively positioning the first electrode with respect to the second electrode in a first position in which a distance between the first discharge portion and the second discharge portion is sufficiently small to support the plasma discharge at the high voltage difference, and in a second position in which the distance
20 between the first discharge portion and the second discharge portion is sufficiently large to prevent plasma discharge at the high voltage difference. Preferably, the positioning means are arranged for moving the first electrode in a direction towards and away from the second electrode.

 This provides the advantage that the plasma can be switched on or
25 off by placing the first electrode in the first or second position respectively using the positioning means. Hence, no control of the high voltage supply to the electrodes is necessary.

 In an embodiment, the second electrode is designed as a drum on the outer surface of which a sheet-shaped substrate can be placed in between the
30 drum and the first electrode, while the positioning means are arranged for

moving the first electrode in a direction normal to the outer surface. Hence, sheet-shaped electrically insulating substrates, such as plastic foil, may be patterned.

In another embodiment, the positioning means are further arranged
5 for positioning the second electrode in synchronism with the first electrode. This provides the advantage that the first and second electrode together, e.g. as a writing head, can be scanned along the surface of the substrate, hence scanning the plasma along the surface. Moreover, the first and second
10 electrode being scanned in synchronism, e.g. side-by-side, provides the advantage that no electrode is required behind the substrate, so that also non-sheet-shaped substrates, such as thick substrates, irregularly shaped
substrates and/or three-dimensional substrates can be scanned.

Preferably, the positioning means are further arranged for
positioning the first electrode along the surface of the substrate. Thus, in
15 addition to switching the plasma on or off, the positioning means can also be used to scan the first electrode, and hence the plasma, along the surface of the substrate. It will be appreciated that the positioning means may comprise separate actuators, e.g. a first actuator for moving the first electrode in a
20 direction towards and away from the second electrode, a second actuator to move the first electrode in a first direction along the surface of the substrate and a third actuator to move the first electrode in a second direction along the surface of the substrate.

Preferably, the device further comprising a housing, wherein the
first electrode is at least partially surrounded by the housing, and the first
25 electrode is movable with respect to the housing. The housing may be electrically insulating. Thus, the first electrode may be protected by the housing. It is for instance possible that the first electrode is substantially fully retracted within the housing when in the second position and partly protrudes from the housing when in the first position. Thus, the first electrode may be
30 protected from dirt, debris or reaction products of the plasma.

Preferably the high voltage source is arranged for adjusting the high voltage difference between the first and the second electrode. Hence, it is possible to adjust e.g. the spatial extent of the plasma when ignited. Thus, a “dot size” may be adjusted of an area of the substrate affected by the plasma
5 when on. Thus, the dot size of “printing” the pattern on the substrate using the plasma may be determined.

In an embodiment, the device comprises a plurality of first electrodes. These first electrodes may e.g. be placed side-by-side in a print head, so as to be positioned along the surface of the substrate simultaneously.

10 Preferably, the positioning means are arranged for individually positioning each first electrode with respect to the second electrode. Thus, each first electrode of the plurality of first electrodes may be individually positioned to ignite or extinguish the plasma.

It is also possible that the device comprises a plurality of second
15 electrodes. Preferably, the positioning means are arranged for individually positioning each first electrode with respect to one or more second electrodes.

In a special embodiment, the first electrode is formed by a movable pen of a print head of a matrix printer, electrically conducting connected to the high voltage source.

20 In an embodiment, the positioning means are further arranged for positioning the second electrode in synchronism with the first electrode, wherein the positioning means are not necessarily arranged for positioning the first electrode with respect to the second electrode. This also provides the advantage that the first and second electrode together, e.g. as a writing head,
25 can be scanned along the surface of the substrate, hence scanning the plasma along the surface. Moreover, the first and second electrode being scanned in synchronism, e.g. side-by-side, provides the advantage that no electrode is required behind the substrate, so that also thick substrates, irregularly shaped substrates and/or three-dimensional substrates can be scanned.

In an embodiment, the device is provided with a height measuring apparatus for determining the height of the plasma source over the substrate, a height actuator to adjust the height of the plasma source above the substrate and a height controller for controlling, preferably real-time, the height of the plasma source over the substrate to correct for any irregularities in the shape of the substrate.

According to an aspect of the invention, the device for generating a plasma discharge for patterning the surface of a substrate comprises a plurality of first electrodes and a plurality of second electrodes, a high voltage source arranged for generating a high voltage difference between selected first electrodes of the plurality of first electrodes and selected second electrodes of the plurality of second electrodes. Herein the device does not necessarily comprise positioning means for positioning the first and/or second electrodes. Thus, the plurality of first electrodes and the plurality of second electrodes may treat a selected portion of the surface of the substrate by providing the high voltage difference between the associated first and second electrodes. The device may treat the entire selected portion at once, or by applying the high voltage difference to selected first and second electrodes consecutively. Preferably, the first and second electrodes are positioned side-by-side. Preferably the first and second electrodes are interspersed. Optionally, the first and second electrodes are, at least near the substrate, entirely comprised in an electrically insulating, e.g. ceramic, house.

In an embodiment, the first electrode is provided with a gas-supply arranged for supplying therethrough a gas for forming the plasma. Preferably, the first electrode is formed by a hollow pen. This embodiment can be advantageously combined with the embodiment wherein the intermediate structure comprises the electrically conductive material that forms the second electrode. In the latter embodiment, the electric field may not, or only to a limited extent, force the plasma to reach the substrate. As a result, a gas stream to move the plasma towards the substrate will be appreciated. Such a

gas stream can be provided e.g. through the hollow pen. It may be clear that the gas supply does not necessarily need to be provided to the first electrode, but that other parts of the device may be provided with the gas-supply instead or in addition to the first electrode.

5 The invention also relates to a method for patterning the surface of a substrate using a plasma discharge, comprising: providing a first electrode having a first discharge portion and a second electrode having a second discharge portion, creating the plasma discharge by generating a high voltage difference between the first discharge portion and the second discharge
10 portion, i.e. between the first and the second electrode, thus generating the plasma near the substrate, positioning the first electrode with respect to the substrate, and arranging an intermediate structure in between the first electrode and the substrate.

 Preferably, the method comprises repeatedly generating a plasma
15 near the substrate. A plasma may thus reach different positions on the substrate. Preferably, positioning the first electrode is carried out at least after generating the plasma near the substrate. This enables generating the plasma a next time on another position near the substrate. By generating the plasma at different positions in this way, the patterning can be achieved. However,
20 alternatively or additionally, positioning the first electrode may be carried out during generating the plasma. This enables formation of a track along the surface of the substrate that is treated by the plasma. This can be reached e.g. by moving the plasma along the surface of the substrate. In this way the patterning can be achieved.

25 In an embodiment, the intermediate structure is formed as, e.g. has the shape of or is manufactured as, a sheet provided with at least one aperture, preferably a plurality of apertures.

 In another embodiment, the intermediate structure is formed as, e.g. has the shape of or is manufactured as, a sheet that comprises a process
30 material, such as a precursor or depositable material, the method comprising

displacing at least part of the process material by means of the plasma, for processing the at least part of the process material, e.g. depositing at least part of the depositable material on the substrate.

Both embodiments may be advantageously combined. Thus, the
5 intermediate structure may comprise the sheet provided with the at least one aperture, preferably the plurality of apertures, and may further comprise the sheet that comprises the process material.

In an embodiment, the method comprises selectively generating the plasma discharge by positioning the first electrode with respect to the second
10 electrode in a first position in which a distance between the first discharge portion and the second discharge portion is sufficiently small to support the plasma discharge at the high voltage difference, and selectively extinguishing the plasma discharge by positioning the first electrode with respect to the second electrode in a second position in which the distance between the first
15 discharge portion and the second discharge portion is sufficiently large to prevent plasma discharge at the high voltage difference.

The method preferably further comprises selectively etching the surface by means of the plasma discharge, selectively depositing a material onto the surface by means of the plasma discharge, and/or selectively changing
20 a property of the surface, e.g. changing it from hydrophobic to hydrophilic, by means of the plasma discharge.

The device according to the invention may be used for treating the surface of an electrically insulating substrate, such as a plastic object, e.g. a sheet of plastic. The device according to the invention may also be used for
25 treating the surface of a semiconducting or conducting substrates. When using the (semi-)conducting substrate, the first and/or second electrodes are preferably covered, e.g. coated, with electrically insulating material as described above. It will be appreciated that the electrically conducting substrate may also be used as the second electrode.

It has been found that the device according to the invention is suitable for use in treating the surface of various substrates. The invention also relates to a method for manufacturing a meso-scale electronics device (such as an (O)LED device, an RFID tag, or a solar-cell device), a meso-scale
5 three dimensional structure (such as a MEMS device, a micro-lens or a multi-focus lens), a lab-on-chip, a biochip, a printable plastics object or an offset printing plate from a substrate, comprising treating the substrate with a device for generating a plasma discharge according to the invention. E.g., the process material may be a metallic material arranged for manufacturing
10 electrically conducting tracks on the substrate. E.g., the process material may contain fluorine so that a pattern of hydrophobic area's can be formed. In this way, reliability and resolution of ink-jet printed patterns may be improved.

The invention further relates to a method of manufacturing a device for generating a plasma discharge according to the invention, comprising:
15 providing a conventional matrix printer, providing a high voltage source for generating a high voltage difference, electrically conducting connecting at least one printing pen of the print head of the matrix printer with the high voltage source, and optionally electrically conducting connecting the surface of a print drum of the matrix printer with the high voltage source. Hence, the at least
20 one printing pen forms an electrode for generating the plasma.

The invention further relates to a modification kit comprising a high voltage source and a print head for use in a device according to the invention, preferably arranged for carrying out a method according to the invention.

In an embodiment, the modification kit may further comprise a gas
25 inlet for guiding a gas towards a first electrode of the print head. The gas and the high-voltage source may be arranged for generating the plasma in the gas that is guided towards the first electrode of the print head. Optionally, the modification kit comprises transportation means. The transportation means may e.g. be arranged for displacing the print head. The transportation means

may e.g. be arranged for displacing the print head and a substrate with respect to each other.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING

5 The invention will be described by, non-limiting, examples in reference to the accompanying drawing, wherein:

 Fig. 1 shows a schematic representation of a first embodiment of a device according to the invention;

 Fig. 1A shows a pinhole plate in a top view;

10 Fig. 1B schematically shows how a piezoelectric actuator can be used;

 Fig. 2 shows a schematic representation of a second embodiment of a device according to the invention;

15 Fig. 3 shows a schematic representation of a third embodiment of a device according to the invention;

 Figs. 4a and 4b show a schematic representation of a fourth embodiment of a device according to the invention;

 Fig. 5 shows a schematic representation of a fifth embodiment of a device according to the invention;

20 Fig. 5A shows a schematic representation of a further embodiment of a device according to the invention;

 Fig. 5B shows a schematic representation of a further embodiment of a device according to the invention;

25 Fig. 6A shows a schematic representation of a sixth embodiment of a device according to the invention.

 Fig. 6B shows a schematic representation of a variation on the sixth embodiment of a device according to the invention;

 Fig. 7 schematically shows the device 1 in a seventh embodiment according to the invention;

Fig. 8 schematically shows the device 1 in an eighth embodiment according to the invention;

Fig. 8B shows the device in a further embodiment according to the invention;

5 Fig. 9 schematically shows the device 1 in a ninth embodiment according to the invention;

Fig. 10 schematically shows the device 1 in a tenth embodiment according to the invention;

10 Fig. 11 shows a variation wherein a pinhole plate is arranged in between a sheet that comprises a depositable material and a first electrode;

Figs. 12A and 12B show examples of hammerbanks that may be included in a hammerbank printer;

Fig. 13 shows an example of a further embodiment of a device according to the invention;

15 Fig. 14 shows a first height and a second height;

Figure 15A shows an example wherein a first electrode is formed by a hollow needle; and

Figure 15B show a bottom view of a print head of the example of figure 15A.

20

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Fig. 1 shows a schematic representation of a first embodiment of a device 1 for generating a plasma discharge for patterning the surface of a substrate according to the invention. The plasma is generated near the surface so that it reaches the surface to enable patterning the surface, e.g. by realising a patterned hydrophobicity on the surface.

In this example, the device 1 comprises a plurality of first electrodes 2.i (i=1,2,3,...). In this example, the first electrodes 2.i are designed as elongate pens. The device 1 further comprises a second electrode 4. In this example, the second electrode is plate-shaped. The first and second electrodes 2.i, 4 are

30

electrically conducting connected to terminals 6,8 of a high voltage source 10 respectively. The high voltage source 10 is arranged for generating a high voltage difference between the first electrodes 2.i and the second electrode 4. In this example, the first electrodes 2.i are also connected to ground at 12. It will be appreciated that the first electrodes may be negatively charged with respect to the second electrode or vice versa, e.g. depending on whether ions or electrons are desired to impact onto the substrate. In this example, the high voltage difference comprises a DC voltage difference. Alternatively, or additionally, the high voltage difference may comprise an AC voltage difference (e.g. radiofrequent (RF)), pulsed voltage difference, etc.

In this example a substrate 14 to be treated is positioned in between the first electrodes 2.i and the second electrode 4, in this example on top of the second electrode 4. The second electrode 4 of this example is also referred to as counter electrode.

In Fig. 1 the device 1 further comprises a housing 16. The housing 16 comprises a plurality of bores 18.i in each of which one first electrode 2.i is housed. Each first electrode 2.i is slidably housed in its respective bore 18.i. In this example, the device 1 comprises positioning means arranged for individually moving each one of the first electrodes 2.i in its respective bore 18.i. The positioning means may comprise an electric motor, such as a linear motor, a rack and pinion, a piezoelectric actuator, an electromagnetic solenoid or the like.

The device 1 is further provided with an intermediate structure that is, in use, arranged in between the substrate 14 and at least one, in this example all, of the first electrodes 2.i. The intermediate structure in this example is formed as a sheet provided with at least one aperture, in this example with a plurality of apertures. The sheet provided with apertures may be provided as a plate 21A provided with apertures 23, also referred to as a pinhole plate 21A. Through the apertures 23, the created plasma 22 can be provided towards the substrate 14. Thus, in use, the plasma can reach the

substrate through the apertures 23. While Fig. 1 shows the pinhole plate 21A in a side view, Fig. 1A shows the pinhole plate 21A in a top view.

A maximum dimension for the apertures may be defined. For the approximately circular apertures 23 of this example, the maximum dimension
5 may be a diameter D_1 . The diameter D_1 can optionally be smaller than, e.g. at least two times smaller than, a minimum distance D_2 between the first electrode and the substrate. In this way a spot size or track width S of a pattern generated by the plasma can be significantly reduced. However, alternatively, the diameter D_1 may, optionally, be larger than or equal to the
10 minimum distance D_2 between the first electrode and the substrate. The pinhole plate may essentially consist of an electrically non-conductive material such as ceramic.

The device 1 as discussed thus far may be operated in the following manner.

15 First the substrate 14 is placed between the second electrode 4 and the first electrodes 2.i. The high voltage difference is set and maintained between the first and second electrodes.

When the surface 20 of the substrate 14 is to be selectively treated with a plasma, the location where the surface 20 is to be treated is determined.
20 The first electrode 2.i closest to the determined location on the surface is selected. In this example, first electrode 2.3 is selected.

Initially all first electrodes 2.i may be in a retracted position, as shown for first electrodes 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5, and 2.6 in Fig. 1. In this retracted position, the distance between the tip (discharge portion) of the first electrode
25 2.i and the second electrode 4 is sufficiently large to prevent plasma discharge at the high voltage difference. That is, the electric field strength between the first electrode 2.i in the retracted position and the second electrode 4 is sufficiently low to prevent electrical breakthrough.

The positioning means move the selected first electrode 2.3 towards
30 the second electrode 4 into an extended position (see Fig. 1). In this extended

position, the distance between the tip (discharge portion) of the selected first electrode 2.3 and the second electrode 4 is sufficiently small to support the plasma discharge at the high voltage difference. That is, the electric field strength between the first electrode in the extended position and the second electrode 4 is sufficiently high to support the onset of a plasma discharge. In Fig. 1 the plasma is indicated at 22.

More in general a separation distance Z between the first electrode 2.i, e.g. in extended position, and the intermediate structure may be such that, in use, the first electrodes 2.i do not come into contact with the intermediate structure and/or do not cross a plane of the intermediate structure. In this way, the intermediate structure can be arranged in between the first electrode and the substrate while allowing for positioning the first electrode with respect to the substrate. In some embodiments however, it may be appreciated if the first electrode in the extended position reaches through one of the apertures

23. Since the electric field between the first and second electrodes passes through the substrate, the device according to Fig. 1 is suitable for sheet-shaped substrates, such as plastics foils.

The fact that the first electrodes can be retracted provides the advantage that there may be less erosion of the first electrodes adjacent to the first electrode that generates the plasma, because the plasma will not reach the retracted first electrodes. This effect will be improved by completely retracting the first electrodes into the housing (as shown in Fig. 1), especially if the housing 16 comprises an electrically insulating bottom near the plasma. This also applies to the first and second electrodes of the devices shown in Figs. 2 and 3. It will be appreciated, however, that it is not strictly necessary that the electrodes are enclosed by the housing 16. The housing may also comprise a substantially open structure for guiding the electrodes.

By steering the distance between a first electrode and the second electrode, the intensity of the plasma can be steered.

Since the distance between the first electrodes and the surface of the substrate can be controlled, the treatment of curved surfaces and/or 3-dimensional objects may be feasible (possibly in combination with a second electrode that is not flat but follows the shape of the substrate).

5 Fig. 1B schematically shows how the piezoelectric actuator can be used in the device 1, or in a method according to the invention. Fig. 1B shows a first piezoelectric actuator 11A and a second piezoelectric actuator 11B. Fig. 1B shows the second piezoelectric actuator 11B in an extended position. This can be achieved by providing a voltage over the second piezoelectric actuator
10 11B by means of a voltage source 10' associated with the piezoelectric actuators. Fig. 1B shows the first piezoelectric actuator 11A in a retracted position. This can be achieved by, at least partly, releasing a voltage over the first piezoelectric actuator 11B by means of the voltage source 10' associated with the piezoelectric actuators. The voltage source 10' associated with the
15 piezo-electric actuators may be formed by the high-voltage source 10 or can be separate from the high-voltage source 10. It will be appreciated that the piezoelectric actuator allows precise extension of the electrode. In the example of Fig. 1B the first electrode 2.1, 2.2 is carried by the piezoelectric actuator 11A, 11B, respectively. It will also be appreciated that it is also possible that
20 the electrode is entirely formed by a piezo-electric actuator, optionally provided with an additional electrically conducting coating on at least a portion of the outer surface thereof at or near the discharge portion.

Fig. 2 shows a schematic representation of a second embodiment of a device 1 according to the invention. In this example, the plurality of first
25 electrodes 2.i and a plurality of second electrodes 4.j ($j=1,2,3,\dots$) are positioned side-by-side. In this example both the first and second electrodes are slidably housed in their respective bores 18.k ($k=1,2,3,\dots$). Fig. 2 also shows the pinhole plate 21A provided with apertures 23.

The device 1 as shown in Fig. 2 may be operated in the following
30 manner.

The substrate 14 is placed near the first and second electrodes, 2.i, 4.j. The high voltage difference is set and maintained between the first and second electrodes.

When the surface 20 of the substrate 14 is to be selectively treated
5 with a plasma, the location where the surface 20 is to be treated is determined. The first electrode 2.i and the second electrode 4.j closest to the determined location on the surface are selected. In this example, first electrode 2.2 and second electrode 4.2 are selected.

Initially all first electrodes 2.i and all second electrodes 4.j may be in
10 a retracted position, as shown for electrodes 2.1, 2.3, 4.1, and 4.3 in Fig. 2. In this retracted position, the distance between the tip (discharge portion) of the first electrode 2.i and the tip (discharge portion) of the second electrode 4.j is sufficiently large to prevent plasma discharge at the high voltage difference. That is, the electric field strength between the first electrode 2.i in the
15 retracted position and the second electrode 4.j in the retracted position is sufficiently low to prevent electrical breakthrough.

The positioning means move the selected first electrode 2.2 and the selected second electrode 4.2 towards the extended position (see Fig. 2). In this extended position, the distance between the tip of the selected first electrode
20 2.2 and the tip of the selected second electrode 4.2 is sufficiently small to support the plasma discharge at the high voltage difference. That is, the electric field strength between the first electrode in the extended position and the second electrode in the extended position is sufficiently low to support the onset of a plasma discharge.

25 Since in the example of Fig. 2 both the first and the second electrode are positioned at the same side of the substrate 14, also non-sheet-shaped substrates, such as thick substrates, irregularly shaped substrates and/or three-dimensional substrates can be treated with the plasma 22.

As will be described in more detail herein below, the positioning
30 means may be further arranged for positioning the first electrode 2.i along the

surface of the substrate. Thus, the housing 16 comprising the electrodes as shown in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 may be scanned along the surface 20 of the substrate 14. Hence, it is possible to selectively expose areas of the surface 20 to the plasma 22. Herein, the housing 16 comprising the electrodes may be understood to function as a “print head” for plasma treatment instead of ink deposition.

Fig. 3 shows a schematic representation of an embodiment of a device 1 according to a second aspect of the invention. The device shown in Fig. 3 is highly similar to the device shown in Fig. 2. One difference is that in the device 1 shown in Fig. 2, the electrodes 2.i and 4.j are connected to the high voltage source 10 via respective switches 24.k (k=1,2,3,...).

The device 1 as shown in Fig. 3 may be operated in the following manner.

The substrate 14 is placed near the first and second electrodes, 2.i, 4.j. The high voltage difference is set.

When the surface 20 of the substrate 14 is to be selectively treated with a plasma, the location where the surface 20 is to be treated is determined. The first electrode 2.i and the second electrode 4.j closest to the determined location on the surface are selected. In this example, first electrode 2.2 and second electrode 4.2 are selected.

Initially all first electrodes 2.i and all second electrodes 4.j may be disconnected from the high voltage source 10, so that no plasma discharge is generated. The selected first electrode 2.2 and the selected second electrode 4.2 are connected to the high voltage source 10 via switches 24.3 and 24.4, respectively. The distance between the tip of the selected first electrode 2.2 and the tip of the selected second electrode 4.2 is chosen to be sufficiently small to support the plasma discharge at the high voltage difference. That is, the electric field strength between the first electrode and the second electrode is sufficiently low to support the onset of a plasma discharge.

The switches 24.k may form part of the high voltage source 10. Hence, the high voltage source 10 is arranged to in a first mode selectively generate the high voltage difference at the electrodes 2.i and 4.j to support the plasma discharge, and in a second mode generate a decreased voltage
5 difference or zero voltage difference at the electrodes 2.i, 4.j to prevent plasma discharge.

Since in the example of Fig. 3 both the first and the second electrode are positioned at the same side of the substrate 14, also non-sheet-shaped substrates, such as thick substrates, irregularly shaped substrates and/or
10 three-dimensional substrates can be treated with the plasma 22.

In the example of Fig. 3 both the first and second electrodes are selectively connected to the high voltage source. It will be appreciated that also some of the electrodes may be permanently connected to the high voltage source, e.g. all first electrodes 2.i or all second electrodes 4.j.
15

It will be appreciated that the housing 16 the electrodes of the device 101 shown in Fig. 3 may be scanned along the surface 20 of the substrate 14 as described with respect to Figs. 1 and 2.

In the example of Fig. 3 the housing 16 is provided with electrical insulations 17.k forming a barrier between the electrodes 2.i, 4.j and a
20 discharge space 34. The electrical insulations 17.k prevent the electrodes 2.i, 4.j to come in direct contact with the plasma 22. Hence, the electrodes are efficiently protected against erosion. The electrical insulations 17.k are designed such that the high voltage difference between the electrodes is sufficient to allow the plasma discharge. It will be appreciated that the
25 electrical insulations 17.k may also be applied in the device 1 as described with respect to Figs. 1, 2, 4a, 4b or 5. The electrical insulations may be part of the housing or be a separate covering, e.g. coating, of the electrodes.

For all of the devices shown in Figs. 1-3, the housing comprising the electrodes may be movable along the substrate 14 like a print head.

In the example of Fig. 4a, the second electrode 4 is designed as a drum 26 on the outer surface 20 of which a sheet-shaped substrate 14 can be placed in between the drum 26 and the first electrodes 2.i. In this example, the housing 16 comprising the electrodes is designed as described with respect to
5 Fig. 1. The substrate 14 is transported by the drum shaped second electrode 4, while the housing 16 with the movable first electrodes 2.i can move in the direction perpendicular to the cross-section shown in Fig. 4a. Fig. 4b shows a front view of the device 1 according to Fig. 4a. Note that in Fig. 4b the housing 16 is shown as comprising a two-dimensional array of first electrodes 2.i. It
10 will be appreciated that the housing 16 may also comprise a one-dimensional array of first electrodes 2.i or even a single first electrode 2.

Fig. 5 shows a further embodiment of a device 1 for generating a plasma discharge, suitable for maskless direct patterning of a substrate 14 according to the invention, i.e. no mask that is provided with the pattern is
15 used. In this example, the device 201 is specially adapted for patterning the surface 20 of a three-dimensional substrate 14. In the example of Fig. 5, the intermediate structure such as the pinhole plate is present although not drawn for clarity.

In this example, the electrodes 2.i, 4.j are individually movable in a
20 direction towards and away from the substrate 14, as described with respect to Figs. 1 and 2. In this example, each electrode 2.i, 4.j is provided with an electrical insulation 28.k mounted fixed with respect to that electrode. Hence, the electrodes 2.i, 4.j are well protected against erosion.

The device 1 as shown in Fig. 5 may be operated in the following
25 manner.

The substrate 14 is placed near the first and second electrodes, 2.i, 4.j. All electrodes 2.i, 4.j are positioned towards the substrate 14 until each electrode touches the surface 20 of the substrate 14. Next all electrodes 2.i, 4.j are moved away from the surface 20 over a predetermined distance, suitable
30 for generating the plasma 22 for treating the surface 20. Now the electrodes

“follow” the contour of the surface 20. Although Fig. 5 shows a one-dimensional array of electrodes, a two-dimensional array of electrodes 2.i, 4.j is preferred to allow treatment of a surface area of the surface 20 of a three-dimensional substrate.

5 The high voltage difference is set. When the surface 20 of the substrate 14 is to be selectively treated with a plasma, the location where the surface 20 is to be treated is determined. The first electrode 2.i and the second electrode 4.j closest to the determined location on the surface are selected. In this example, first electrode 2.2 and second electrode 4.2 are selected.

10 Initially all first electrodes 2.i and all second electrodes 4.j may be disconnected from the high voltage source 10, so that no plasma discharge is generated. The selected first electrode 2.2 and the selected second electrode 4.2 are connected to the high voltage source 10 via switches 24.3 and 24.4, respectively.

15 In the example of Fig. 5, shields 30.m ($m=1,2,3,\dots$) are mounted in between the electrodes 2.i, 4.j. In this example, the shields are formed by (electrically insulating) foils. The shields 30.m prevent the plasma 22 from entering in an open space 32 between the electrodes 2.i, 4.j. The shields 30.m also allow a gas to be entered into the discharge space 34, while preventing the
20 gas from entering the open space 32 between the electrodes. It will be appreciated that the gas in the discharge space 34 can be chosen to promote plasma discharge. The gas may e.g. comprise Argon or Helium. The gas not being present in the open space 32 may cause the high voltage difference to be
25 unable to cause the plasma discharge in the open space 32. It will be appreciated that these shields 30.m are optional, and may, if desired, also be applied in the device according to Figs. 1, 2, 3, 4a and 4b.

 Figure 5A schematically shows how the gas can be entered into the discharge space 34. The device 1 may be provided with a gas supply, e.g. an inlet tube 13A, for supplying the gas, for forming the plasma therein, towards
30 the first electrode 2. The device 1 may further be provided with a gas drain,

e.g. an outlet tube 13B, for draining the gas away from the first electrode or the substrate. The device 1 may further be provided with an enclosure 13C that surrounds the first electrode 2. The enclosure 13C may be in fluidum communication with the inlet tube 13A, so that the gas in use flows out of the inlet tube 13A directly into the enclosure 13C. The inlet tube 13A and the outlet tube 13B may be placed in such a way that, before reaching the outlet tube 13B, the gas has to flow out of the enclosure 13C. By means of the inlet tube, the outlet tube, and the enclosure a focussed gas stream may be effectuated. It may be clear however, that a focussed gas stream may also be reached without the enclosure 13C. It is also possible that the outlet tube 13B mouths into the enclosure 13C as shown in figure 5B.

The inventors realized that a commercially available matrix printer can easily be converted to a plasma printer comprising a device according to Fig. 1, 1B, 2, 3, 5, 5A, 5B, 6A, 6B, 7, 8, 8B, 9, 10, 11, 12A, 12B, 13, 14 or 15A. The device shown in Figs. 4a and 4b could in fact be part of such converted matrix printer.

Converting a conventional matrix printer could be performed as follows. A modification kit in an embodiment according to the invention may be used.

First, a conventional matrix printer is provided, and a high voltage source for generating a high voltage difference is provided. At least one printing pen of the print head of the matrix printer is electrically conducting connected with the high voltage source.

If a device according to Fig. 1 is desired, the outer surface of the print drum of the conventional matrix printer is electrically conducting connected with the high voltage source. If required, the surface of the print drum may be provided with an electrically conducting coating.

If a device according to Figs. 2, 3 or 5 is desired, at least one printing pen of the print head is connected to the positive terminal of the high voltage

source, while at least one other printing pen of the print head is connected to the negative terminal of the high voltage source.

When more than two first electrodes 2.i and/or second electrodes 4.j are used, they can be arranged in a 1- or 2-dimensional array. A smart way to separate the electrodes in such an array from each other is with a membrane as described in patent WO 2008/004858, incorporated herein by reference. In this way, the electrodes 2.i, 4.j can be placed close together, e.g. in a hexagonal packing, with a membrane separating individual electrodes. When the membrane is electrically insulating, the electrodes are electrically isolated from each other as well. Another advantage of the arrangement and method of pin movement described in WO 2008/004858 is that the electrodes can be moved individually without influencing each other.

Fig. 6A shows a sixth embodiment of a device 1 according to the invention. In this embodiment a conventional inkjet print head 35 is converted for the purpose of providing the plasma discharge. In this example, the inkjet print head comprises a plurality of nozzles 37.n (n=1,2,3,..). Per nozzle, two piezo-electric elements 31,33 are positioned adjacent an internal ink chamber 39. According to the modification, the piezo-electric elements 31,33 are electrically conducting connected to the terminals 6,8 of the high voltage source 10, respectively. When a high voltage difference is maintained between the piezo-electric elements 31,33, these act as the first and second electrodes 2.i, 4.j. In the example of Fig. 6A, the intermediate structure is drawn as the pinhole plate 21A.

It will be appreciated that it is also possible in the embodiment of Fig. 6A that the pinhole plate is electrically conductive and functions as the second electrode. In this case only one electrode of the inkjet print head, e.g. one piezo-electric element, in the internal chamber 39 is required for forming the first electrode.

The device of Fig. 6A may be operated as follows. Instead of an ink, a gas flow is fed into the print head 35, as indicated with arrow G. When the

surface 20 of the substrate 14 is to be selectively treated with a plasma, the location where the surface 20 is to be treated is determined. The nozzle 37.n and the associated first electrode 2.i and second electrode 4.j closest to the determined location on the surface are selected. In this example, first electrode
5 2.3 and second electrode 4.3 are selected.

Initially all first electrodes 2.i and all second electrodes 4.j may be disconnected from the high voltage source 10, so that no plasma discharge is generated. The selected first electrode 2.3 and the selected second electrode 4.3 are connected to the high voltage source 10 via switches 24.5 and 24.6,
10 respectively. Then, in the region between the electrodes, the plasma 22 will be generated. Due to the velocity of the gas flow, the plasma 22 will be ejected from the nozzle 37.3 towards the surface 20 of the substrate. It will be appreciated that the modified inkjet head 35 may be scanned along the surface
20.

15 Fig. 6B shows a variation on the sixth embodiment of the device 1 according to the invention. In this embodiment a conventional inkjet print head 35 is converted for the purpose of providing the plasma discharge. In this example, the inkjet print head comprises a plurality of nozzles 37.n (n=1,2,3,...). According to the modification, needle-shaped first electrodes 2.i are mounted to
20 extend through the internal chambers 39 of the head.

The needle-shaped first electrodes may in general e.g. have a diamond tip, e.g. provided with an electrically conductive coating. In this way the first electrodes can be provided with a relatively sharp tip. Hence, a size of the plasma can be reduced. Thus, a spot size or track width during patterning
25 can be reduced.

The first electrodes 2.i are electrically conducting connected to the terminal 6 of the high voltage source 10. The pinhole plate 21A is electrically conducting connected to the terminal 8 of the high voltage source 10 and acts as second electrode 4. In this example, the first electrodes are switched
30 through the switches 24.i. It will be appreciated that the first electrodes 2.i

may also be arranged to be moveable from a retracted position to an extended position as indicated e.g. with respect to Fig. 1 or 2.

In the example of Fig. 6B, a gas may be caused to flow through the nozzles 37.n, around the first electrodes 2.i. The gas may e.g. comprise a precursor or depositable material.

It will be appreciated that other conventional inkjet heads may also be converted for forming the device 1 according to the invention. It is for instance possible that the first electrode is formed by a piezo-electric element of the print head while the second electrode is formed by an electrically conducting nozzle plate surrounding the nozzle. It is also possible that an alternative electrically conducting structure within the conventional inkjet print head, such as an electrical heating resistor forms an electrode for generating the plasma.

Fig. 7 schematically shows the device 1 in a seventh embodiment according to the invention. Fig. 7 shows the first electrodes 2.i, formed by extendable pens similar to e.g. the first embodiment, the substrate 14, the high-voltage source 10, and the created plasma 22. In the seventh embodiment, the device 1 is further provided with the pinhole plate 21A having the apertures 23. In the seventh embodiment, the examples wherein the pinhole plate essentially consists of an electrically conductive material such as a metallic material, e.g. platinum, silver, and/or gold. The pinhole plate may thus form the second electrode 4.

Fig. 8 schematically shows the device 1 in an eighth embodiment according to the invention. In comparison to the seventh embodiment, the device 1 in the eighth embodiment is provided with an additional second electrode 4A and an additional high-voltage source 10A. The additional second electrode 4A and the additional high-voltage source 10A are provided in a similar way as the second electrode 4 and the high-voltage source 10 in Figs. 1-6. The high-voltage source 10 can be used for controlling a voltage of the second electrode 4. The additional high-voltage source 10A can be used for

controlling a voltage of the additional second electrode 4A. Thus, more in general, the device 1 may comprise the first electrode having the first discharge portion, the second electrode having the second discharge portion, and the additional second electrode (a third electrode) having an additional
5 second discharge portion (a third discharge portion). Hence, the device may be provided with three associated electrodes. In use, the three electrodes may be used for controlling the electric field for creating and/or sustaining the plasma. It may be clear that such a three-electrode configuration enables an improved control compared to a configuration with two electrodes. The intermediate
10 structure, such as the pinhole plate, preferably comprising an electrically conducting or semiconducting material, may form the third electrode or the second electrode.

In Fig. 8, the substrate 14 is provided in between the second electrode 4 and the first electrodes 2.i. In Fig. 8, the additional second
15 electrode 4A, i.e. the pinhole plate 21A, is provided in between the substrate 14 and the first electrode. By providing both the second electrode and the additional second electrode, the electric field that enables the generation of the plasma can be better controlled.

In Fig. 8, the first electrodes 2.i are elongatedly shaped along an axis
20 19 that extends through the at least one aperture 23. Thus, a tip of at least one of the first electrodes 2.i faces one of the apertures 23.

Fig. 8B shows the device 1 in a further embodiment according the invention. In this embodiment, the electrode is provided with the first electrode 2, the pinhole plate 21A that forms the third electrode 4A (also
25 referred to as additional second electrode), and the second electrode 4. The second electrode may have the form of a line, e.g. may have an elongated form. The second electrode may be relatively thin, e.g. may have a maximum cross-sectional width smaller than 100 micrometer or smaller than 30 micrometer. This may enhance the resolution of the device. The second electrode may
30 extend along the substrate 14 at a side of the substrate that faces away from

the third electrode and/or the first electrode. The second electrode may be positioned opposite a plurality of first electrodes. The device may further be provided with one or more shielding elements 5. Such shielding elements may, at least partly, surround one or more of the first, second, and third electrodes, e.g. the second electrode as shown in Fig. 8B.

Fig. 8B shows the first electrode 2 in its rest position. Fig. 8B also shows the extended position 7 of the first electrode. In the extended position, the first electrode 2 may at least partly extend in or through the aperture 23. In this way the first electrode can come relatively close the substrate 14. In this example, the first electrode and the third electrode may be grounded. This may be beneficial for electro-magnetic-shielding of the substrate.

Fig. 9 schematically shows the device 1 in a ninth embodiment according to the invention. In the ninth embodiment, the intermediate structure is formed as a sheet that comprises a process material, in this example a depositable material, 25 that is displaceable by means of the plasma. The sheet may comprise a carrier sheet 27 and may take the form of a ribbon 21B. The carrier sheet 27 may be mesh-shaped. Then, the depositable material 25 may be removable from the carrier sheet 27 by means of the plasma. Without wanting to be bound by any theory, the plasma may cause small droplets, particles or molecules 29 containing part of the depositable material 25 to deposit on the substrate 14. In use, the depositable material 25 may be arranged in between the carrier sheet 27 and the substrate 14. Hence, the carrier sheet 27 may in use face the first electrodes 2.i.

Fig. 10 schematically shows the device 1 in a tenth embodiment according to the invention. In the tenth embodiment, the device is provided with both the pinhole plate 21A and the ribbon 21B. Similar to influencing the size of the area treated by the plasma, the apertures 23 of pinhole plate 21A can be used to influence a size of an area of the substrate on which part of the depositable material 25 is deposited. In this way, a spot size or track width of a pattern comprising part of the depositable material 25 can be reduced.

In the tenth embodiment, the ribbon 21B may be arranged in between the pinhole plate 21A and the first electrodes 2.i. However, in the variation shown in Fig. 11, the pinhole plate is arranged in between the ribbon 21B and the first electrodes 2.i. More in general, having the pinhole plate
5 arranged in between the sheet that comprises the depositable material 25, e.g. the ribbon 21B, and the first electrodes 2.i enables another advantageous embodiment. Therein, the device 1 comprises a gas inlet 41 that is arranged in the device 1 for providing the gas in between the substrate 14 and the sheet 21 that comprises the depositable material 25.

10 Further embodiments according the invention may relate to a modification kit comprising a high voltage source and a print head for use in a device according to the invention, e.g. the device 1 in one of the embodiments described herein. The modification kit may further comprise a gas inlet for guiding the gas, e.g. containing Argon, arranged for creating the plasma
15 towards a first electrode of the print head. Such a modification kit may be used for modifying a conventional printer, such as an ink jet printer, or a matrix printer, such as more in particular a hammerbank printer. More in general, the modification kit may be suitable for being mounted to any X-Y writer or positioning device.

20 Figs. 12A and 12B show examples of hammerbanks 101 that may be included in a hammerbank printer. A hammerbank type matrix printer is e.g. known from US 6,779,935 B1, the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference. For an explanation of the meaning of reference numbers in Figs. 12A and 12B that are not made clear in the present application is referred to
25 the corresponding description in US 6,779,935 B1. US 6,779,935 B1 describes how the hammerbank 101 can function in a hammerbank printer.

The hammerbank printer may comprise a plurality of hammers 46, 82 mounted on the hammerbank 36 having printing tips 48, 86, a permanent magnet for retaining said hammers 46, 82, and an electrical drive for releasing
30 said hammers from retention by said permanent magnet. The permanent

magnet is not shown in Figs. 12A and 12B but is shown in Figs. 4 and 5 of US 6,779,935 B1 with reference number 122. The electric drive system may comprise a printed circuit board. The electric drive system is not shown in Figs. 12A and 12B but is known as such to the skilled person so that a further
5 description is deemed superfluous. In use, the printing tips may impact a print ribbon for printing on a given media. Embodiments wherein these features, i.e. at least the plurality of hammers, a permanent magnet, and an electrical drive, are incorporated are further described in the detailed specification of a US 6,779,935.

10 Optionally, the hammerbank printer may comprise two magnetically permeable extensions in longitudinal placement on either side of a first one of the hammers 46, 82 and along the same plane as said hammers for shunting flux from said permanent magnet.

 The printing tips 48, 86 may form the first electrodes 2.i. The
15 printing tips may be electrically connected to the high voltage source 10 of the modification kit. Part of the electrical connections between the high voltage source and the printing tips 48, 86 may be formed by the hammers 46, 82.

 The hammerbank printer may comprise a cover plate 60. Such a cover plate is an example of the intermediate structure 21A and may form the
20 second electrode 4. It will be clear to the skilled person that the modification kit may comprise isolation elements that are designed to isolated the cover plate and the hammers 46, 82 from each other and from other parts of the hammerbank printer. For example, such isolation element may be advantageously mounted under the cover plate 60 near openings 68.

25 In use, for example all printing tips 48, 86 may be held at the same voltage. When a printing tip is brought towards the second electrode, the electric field strength becomes high enough for generating the plasma. When the printing tip is retracted towards its rest position, the electric field strength decreases again and the plasma disappears. It will be appreciated that it is

also possible to not use the cover plate 60 as second electrode, but to position the second electrode underneath the substrate instead.

The hammerbank printer may be a line printer type matrix printer. It may comprise a single row of printing tips, i.e. first electrodes, (Fig. 12B) or
5 a double row of printing tips (Fig. 12A). It may be appreciated that even more than two rows of printing tips may be provided for printing, in one hammerbank. It may also be appreciated that a plurality of hammerbanks, each having one, two or more than two rows of printing tips, may be used in a printing system. Such a system may enable an increased productivity.

10 During printing by means of one or a plurality of hammerbanks, various way of moving the substrate 14 with respect to a hammerbank may be employed. In general, a particular advantageous method of moving the substrate 14 with respect to the hammerbank may comprise the following steps: a) moving the hammerbank in a first direction and/or moving the
15 substrate in a second direction that is opposite to the first direction, wherein the first and/or the second direction are transverse to a direction in which the row of printing tips extends; b) moving the substrate in a third direction that is transverse to the first and/or the second direction; c) moving the hammerbank and/or the substrate in a direction opposite to the direction of moving the
20 hammerbank and/or the substrate in step a); d) moving the substrate in the third direction. Optionally, steps a)-d) may be repeated, e.g. one time or a plurality of times. In such a way a hammerbank printer can e.g. be used in a roll-to-roll system. The substrate may be continuously fed to the printer. Thus, changing a moving direction of the substrate may be prevented. A single-pass
25 process can thus be obtained.

The inventors realised that, by using a modification kit according to the invention, the hammerbank printer may be advantageously modified. The hammerbank printer or a hammerbank may be provided, and a high voltage source for generating a high voltage difference may be provided. At least one

hammer of the hammer bank is electrically conducting connected with the high voltage source.

The modification kit may be used for modifying other printers as well. It may be clear that, accordingly, in a possible method according to the invention, the modification kit may be used for manufacturing a device for
5 generating a plasma discharge according to the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and/or tenth embodiment and/or variations thereon. Such a possible method may comprise: providing a conventional matrix printer; providing a high voltage source for generating a high voltage
10 difference; and electrically conducting connecting at least one printing pen of the print head of the matrix printer with the high voltage source.

In another embodiment of a method according to the invention, the modification kit may be used for manufacturing a device for generating a plasma discharge according to the sixth embodiment or its variety. In this
15 embodiment, the method may comprise: providing a conventional inkjet printer; providing a high voltage source for generating a high voltage difference; and electrically conducting connecting at least one electrical conducting structure of the print head of the inkjet printer with the high voltage source.

20 It will be recognised that the substrate 14 may be non-flat. The substrate may e.g. be tilted or have a corrugated top with respect to the plasma sources. This may influence the size of the plasma generated, and hence the resolution of the device.

There to, in general and as illustrated by example in Fig. 13, the
25 device 1 may be provided with a height measuring apparatus 41 for determining the height of the plasma source over the substrate. In this example, the device 1 also comprises a height actuator 43 to adjust the height of the plasma source above the substrate 14. In this example, the device 1 also comprises a height controller 45 for controlling, preferably real-time, the

height of the plasma source over the substrate to correct for any deformations in the substrate.

The height of the plasma source over the substrate may e.g. be determined by measuring the electric current through the first electrode when said first electrode generates the plasma. The current is representative of the size of the plasma, and hence of the height of the electrode over the surface of the substrate. Alternatively, the height of the plasma source over the substrate may be determined optically, e.g. using a camera or an autofocus device (such as for instance used in a CD-player). It is also possible to determine the height capacitively or inductively. By means of the height measuring apparatus, a first height h_1 between (the tip of) the first electrode 2 and the substrate 14 may be determined and/or a second height h_2 between the print head 35' and the substrate 14 may be determined. Fig. 14 shows the first height h_1 and the second height h_2 . The height controller 45 may be arranged for controlling, preferably real-time, the first height h_1 and/or the second height h_2 .

It will be appreciated that the device for generating a plasma discharge, suitable for maskless direct patterning of a substrate as described above may be used for treating the surface of the substrate using the plasma, e.g. for etching the surface, deposition of matter onto the surface, or changing a surface property such as wettability. The latter may e.g. be used for printing purposes, by locally modifying the wettability of the surface with respect to the printing medium (e.g. ink or solder).

It will be appreciated that the device for generating a plasma discharge, suitable for maskless direct patterning of a substrate as described with respect to Figs. 1-6 above may be used for manufacturing a meso-scale electronics device, such as an (O)LED device, an RFID tag, or a solar-cell device); a meso-scale three dimensional structure, such as a MEMS device, a micro-lens or a multi-focus lens; a lab-on-chip; a biochip; a printable plastics object or an offset printing plate from a substrate.

It will be appreciated that the plasma 22 may be generated under atmospheric conditions. Alternatively, the plasma may be generated at reduced or elevated pressure. The plasma may e.g. be formed in air. The plasma may also be formed in a gas comprising argon, oxygen, ammonia,
5 nitrogen, helium or a mixture thereof. Also precursors, e.g. vapourized, may be added to the gas (mixture), e.g. organosilicon compounds, such as hexamethyldisiloxane (HMDSO) or (3-aminopropyl) trimethoxysilane (APTMS), heptylamine, water (H₂O), or methanol (CH₃OH).

In the foregoing specification, the invention has been described with
10 reference to specific examples of embodiments of the invention. It will, however, be evident that various modifications and changes may be made therein without departing from the broader spirit and scope of the invention as set forth in the appended claims.

In the examples the electrodes in the housing 16 are needle-like.
15 However, other shapes are also possible.

In the example of Fig. 1 the second electrode 4 is plate-shaped. It will be appreciated that other designs are possible. It is for instance possible that second electrode comprises a plurality of needle-like electrodes, each of which may be positioned opposite a needle-like first electrode, with the
20 substrate between the first and second needle-like electrode.

In the example, the needle-like electrodes may be simple metal rods or needles. It will be appreciated that nano-structured or micro-structured electrodes may be used. The nano-/micro-structured electrodes may enhance the field emission, can be used to confine the plasma in a small area hereby
25 increase the resolution of the device, and influence the characteristics and inception voltage of the plasma. These nano-/micro-structured electrodes may e.g. be produced by laser deposition or ablation of a needle tip, dedicated crystal growth at the needle tip or by using carbon nanotubes at the needle tip.

Although Figs. 1, 1B 2, 3, 5 6A, 6B, 7, 8, 8B, 9, 10, and 11 shows a one-dimensional array of electrodes, a two-dimensional array of electrodes may be used.

It will be appreciated that the electrodes comprising the electrical insulation 28.k as shown in Fig. 5, may also be used in the other embodiments.

In the examples of Figs. 1-15A, the electrodes in the housing were shown as parallel electrodes, moving in parallel. However, the electrodes do not need to be parallel. The electrodes may for instance be mounted in the housing 16 at an angle with respect to each other. It will be appreciated that when a first and a second electrode are mounted in the housing so as to converge when moved from the retracted to the extended position, the distance between the discharge portion of said electrodes may be reduced highly efficiently. Similar results may be obtained when the electrodes are moved along a curved or angled path in the housing.

In the examples, the discharge portion is located near the tip of the electrode. It is also possible that the discharge portion of the electrode is positioned otherwise, e.g. near a curve of a curved electrode.

In the examples of i.a. Figs. 3 and 5 the electrodes are selectively connected to the high voltage source through respective switches. It will be appreciated that also alternative switching means are possible, such as electronic switching means, selective amplification etc. It is also possible that the switches switch between a high voltage difference, capable of supporting plasma discharge, and a low voltage difference, capable of extinguishing the plasma discharge. It will be appreciated that it is also possible that the high voltage source is arranged to in a first mode selectively generate the high voltage difference to support the plasma discharge, and in a second mode generate a decreased voltage difference or zero voltage difference to prevent plasma discharge, e.g. by selectively increasing or decreasing a voltage difference between certain electrodes.

In the examples of Figs. 1, 1B 2, 3, 4A, 5, 5A, 5B, 6B, 7, 8, 8B, 9, 10, 11, 12A, 12B, 13, 14 and 15A the first electrodes are of elongated shape. It will be appreciated that such electrodes may also be of hollow needle-like shape. Then, a gas may be provided towards the substrate and/or plasma through the hollow electrode. Figure 15A shows an example wherein the first electrode 2.2 is formed by a hollow needle. Gas flowing out of the hollow needle is indicated by arrow G₁. More in general, the device 1 may be provided with a gas drain 13B around the hollow needle 2.2. Flow of drained gas is indicated by arrow G₂. By means of the gas flow G₁ and/or G₂, effective cooling of the first electrode, e.g. the hollow needle, may be achieved. Figure 15B shows a bottom view of the print head of the example of figure 15A, wherein the needles 2.i are visible. However, other modifications, variations and alternatives are also possible.

For example, the patterning may be followed by e.g. slot-die coating, dipcoating, or ink-jet printing. As a further example, the device 1 in one or more, e.g. all, of the embodiments can e.g. be provided on an platform provided with transportation means for displacing the substrate 14 and/or the first electrodes 2.i with respect to each other. Preferably, the transportation means have a relative and/or absolute placement accuracy smaller than or approximately equal to 10 micrometer, more preferably 5 micrometer, in particular 1 micrometer. The transportation means may form the positioning means, although this is not necessary. The transportation means may comprise an x-y table and/or a rotatable element such as a chuck, on which the substrate or the first electrodes 2.i can be mounted.

The specifications, drawings and examples are, accordingly, to be regarded in an illustrative rather than in a restrictive sense.

In the claims, any reference signs placed between parentheses shall not be construed as limiting the claim. The word 'comprising' does not exclude the presence of other features or steps than those listed in a claim. Furthermore, the words 'a' and 'an' shall not be construed as limited to 'only

one', but instead are used to mean 'at least one', and do not exclude a plurality. The mere fact that certain measures are recited in mutually different claims does not indicate that a combination of these measures cannot be used to advantage.

CLAIMS

1. Device for generating a plasma discharge near a substrate for patterning a surface of the substrate, comprising
a first electrode having a first discharge portion and a second electrode having a second discharge portion,
5 a high voltage source for generating a high voltage difference between the first and the second electrode, and
positioning means for positioning the first electrode with respect to the substrate,
wherein the device is further provided with an intermediate
10 structure that is, in use, arranged in between the first electrode and the substrate.
2. Device according to claim 1, wherein the intermediate structure is formed as a sheet provided with at least one aperture, preferably a plurality of
15 apertures, for providing therethrough the plasma.
3. Device according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the intermediate structure comprises, and preferably essentially consists of, an electrically non-conductive
20 material.
4. Device according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the intermediate structure comprises, and preferably essentially consists of, an electrically conductive material.
- 25 5. Device according to one of claims 2-4, wherein the first electrode is elongatedly shaped along an axis that extends through the at least one aperture.

6. Device according to one of claims 1-5, wherein the intermediate structure is formed as a sheet that comprises a process material that is at least partly displaceable by means of the plasma.

5

7. Device according to claim 6, wherein the intermediate structure comprises a carrier sheet provided with the process material, wherein the process material is at least partly removable from the carrier sheet by means of the plasma.

10

8. Device according to claim 7, wherein, in use, the process material is arranged in between the carrier sheet and the substrate.

9. Device according to one of claims 1-8, wherein the positioning means are arranged for selectively positioning the first electrode with respect to the second electrode in a first position in which a distance between the first discharge portion and the second discharge portion is sufficiently small to support the plasma discharge at the high voltage difference, and in a second position in which the distance between the first discharge portion and the second discharge portion is sufficiently large to prevent plasma discharge at the high voltage difference.

10. Device according to claim 9, wherein the positioning means are arranged for moving the first electrode in a direction towards and away from the second electrode.

25

11. Device according to claim 9 or 10, wherein the second electrode is designed as a drum on the outer surface of which a sheet-shaped substrate can be placed in between the drum and the first electrode, while the positioning

means are arranged for moving the first electrode in a direction normal to the outer surface.

12. Device according to any one of claims 1-11, wherein the positioning
5 means are further arranged for positioning the first electrode along the surface of the substrate.

13. Device according to any one of the preceding claims, further
comprising a housing, wherein the first electrode is at least partially
10 surrounded by the housing, and the first electrode is movable with respect to the housing.

14. Device according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the
high voltage source is arranged for adjusting the high voltage difference
15 between the first and the second electrode.

15. Device according to any one of the preceding claims, comprising a
plurality of first electrodes and/or a plurality of second electrodes.

20 16. Device according to claim 15, wherein the positioning means are arranged for individually positioning each first electrode with respect to the one or more second electrodes.

17. Device according to claim 15 or 16, wherein the positioning means
25 are arranged for individually positioning each first electrode with respect to the remaining first electrodes.

18. Device according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the
first electrode is formed by a movable pen of a print head of a matrix printer,
30 electrically conducting connected to the high voltage source.

19. Device according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the first electrode and/or the second electrode is nano-structured or micro-structured, for instance by means of laser deposition or ablation at the discharge portion, dedicated crystal growth at the discharge portion or by providing carbon nanotubes at the discharge portion.
20. Device according to one of claims 1-19, wherein the positioning means are further arranged for positioning the second electrode in synchronism with the first electrode.
21. Device according to claim 20, wherein the first and second electrode are coupled mechanically.
22. Device according to claim 20 or 21, wherein the high voltage source is arranged to in a first mode selectively generate the high voltage difference to support the plasma discharge, and in a second mode generate a decreased voltage difference or zero voltage difference to prevent plasma discharge.
23. Device according to any one of claims 1-22, comprising a plurality of first electrodes and a plurality of second electrodes, wherein the high voltage source is arranged for selectively applying the high voltage between at least one first electrode and at least one second electrode.
24. Device according to any one of claims 1-23, provided with a gas supply for supplying a gas for forming the plasma therein toward the first electrode, and/or provided with a gas drain for draining a gas away from the first electrode or the substrate.

25. Device according to claim 24, wherein the first electrode is provided with the gas-supply arranged for supplying therethrough a gas for forming the plasma.
- 5 26. Device according to claim 25, wherein the first electrode is formed by a hollow pen.
27. Device according to one of claims 1-26, wherein the first electrode is formed by a printing tip of a hammerbank that is preferably comprised by a
10 hammerbank printer.
28. Method for patterning the surface of a substrate using a plasma discharge, comprising:
providing a first electrode having a first discharge portion and a
15 second electrode having a second discharge portion,
creating the plasma discharge by generating a high voltage difference between the first discharge portion and the second discharge portion, thus generating the plasma near the substrate,
positioning the first electrode with respect to the substrate, and
20 arranging an intermediate structure in between the first electrode and the substrate.
29. Method according to claim 28, wherein the intermediate structure is formed as a sheet provided with at least one aperture, preferably a plurality of
25 apertures.
30. Method according to claim 29, comprising generating the plasma near the substrate by providing the plasma through the at least one aperture.

31. Method according to one of claims 28-30, wherein the intermediate structure comprises, and preferably essentially consists of, an electrically non-conductive material.
- 5 32. Method according to one of claims 28-31, wherein the intermediate structure comprises, and preferably essentially consists of, an electrically conductive material that forms the second electrode.
33. Method according to one of claims 28-32, wherein the intermediate
10 structure is formed as a sheet that comprises a process material, the method comprising displacing at least part of the process material by means of the plasma, for providing the at least part of the process material on or near the substrate.
- 15 34. Method according to claim 33, wherein the intermediate structure comprises a carrier sheet provided with the process material, the method comprising removing the at least part of the process material from the carrier sheet by means of the plasma.
- 20 35. Method according to claim 33 or 34, including arranging the process material in between the carrier sheet and the substrate.
36. Method according to one of claims 28-35, including selectively
generating the plasma discharge by positioning the first electrode with respect
25 to the second electrode in a first position in which a distance between the first discharge portion and the second discharge portion is sufficiently small to support the plasma discharge at the high voltage difference, and
selectively extinguishing the plasma discharge by positioning the
first electrode with respect to the second electrode in a second position in
30 which the distance between the first discharge portion and the second

discharge portion is sufficiently large to prevent plasma discharge at the high voltage difference.

37. Method according to one of claims 28-36, comprising moving the first
5 electrode in a direction towards the second electrode when moving the first electrode into the first position and moving the first electrode in a direction away from the second electrode when moving the first electrode into the second position.

10 38. Method according to one of claims 28-37, further comprising scanning the first electrode along the surface of the substrate.

39. Method according to any one of claims 28-38, comprising
15 simultaneously positioning a plurality of first electrodes with respect to the substrate and individually positioning each first electrode with respect to the second electrode.

40. Method according to any one of claims 28-39, further comprising
20 selectively etching the surface by means of the plasma discharge, selectively depositing a material onto the surface by means of the plasma discharge, and/or selectively changing a property of the surface, e.g. changing it from hydrophobic to hydrophilic, by means of the plasma discharge.

41. Method according to one of claims 28-40, comprising moving the first
25 electrode and second electrode in synchronism along the surface of the substrate.

42. Method for manufacturing a meso-scale electronics device, such as
30 an (O)LED device, an RFID tag or a solar-cell device; a meso-scale three dimensional structure, such as a MEMS device, a micro-lens or a multi-focus

lens; a lab-on-chip; a biochip; a printable plastics object or an offset printing plate from a substrate, comprising treating the substrate with a device for generating a plasma discharge according to any one of claims 1-27.

- 5 43. Method of manufacturing a device for generating a plasma discharge according to any one of claims 1-27, comprising:
- providing a conventional matrix printer;
 - providing a high voltage source for generating a high voltage difference;
- 10 - electrically conducting connecting at least one printing pen of the print head of the matrix printer with the high voltage source.
44. Method of manufacturing a device for generating a plasma discharge according to any one of claims 1-27, comprising:
- 15 - providing a conventional inkjet printer;
- providing a high voltage source for generating a high voltage difference;
 - electrically conducting connecting at least one electrical conducting structure of the print head of the inkjet printer with the high voltage source.
- 20
45. Method of manufacturing a device for generating a plasma discharge according to any one of claims 1-27, comprising:
- providing a hammerbank printer;
- 25 - providing a high voltage source for generating a high voltage difference;
- electrically conducting connecting at least one electrical conducting structure of a hammerbank of the hammerbank printer with the high voltage source.

46. Modification kit comprising a high voltage source and a print head for use in a device according to one of claims 1-27, preferably arranged for carrying out the method of one of claims 43-45.
- 5 47. Modification kit according to claim 46, further comprising a gas inlet for guiding a gas towards a first electrode of the print head.
48. Modification kit according to claim 46 or 47, further provided with the intermediate structure of a device according to one of claims 1-27.

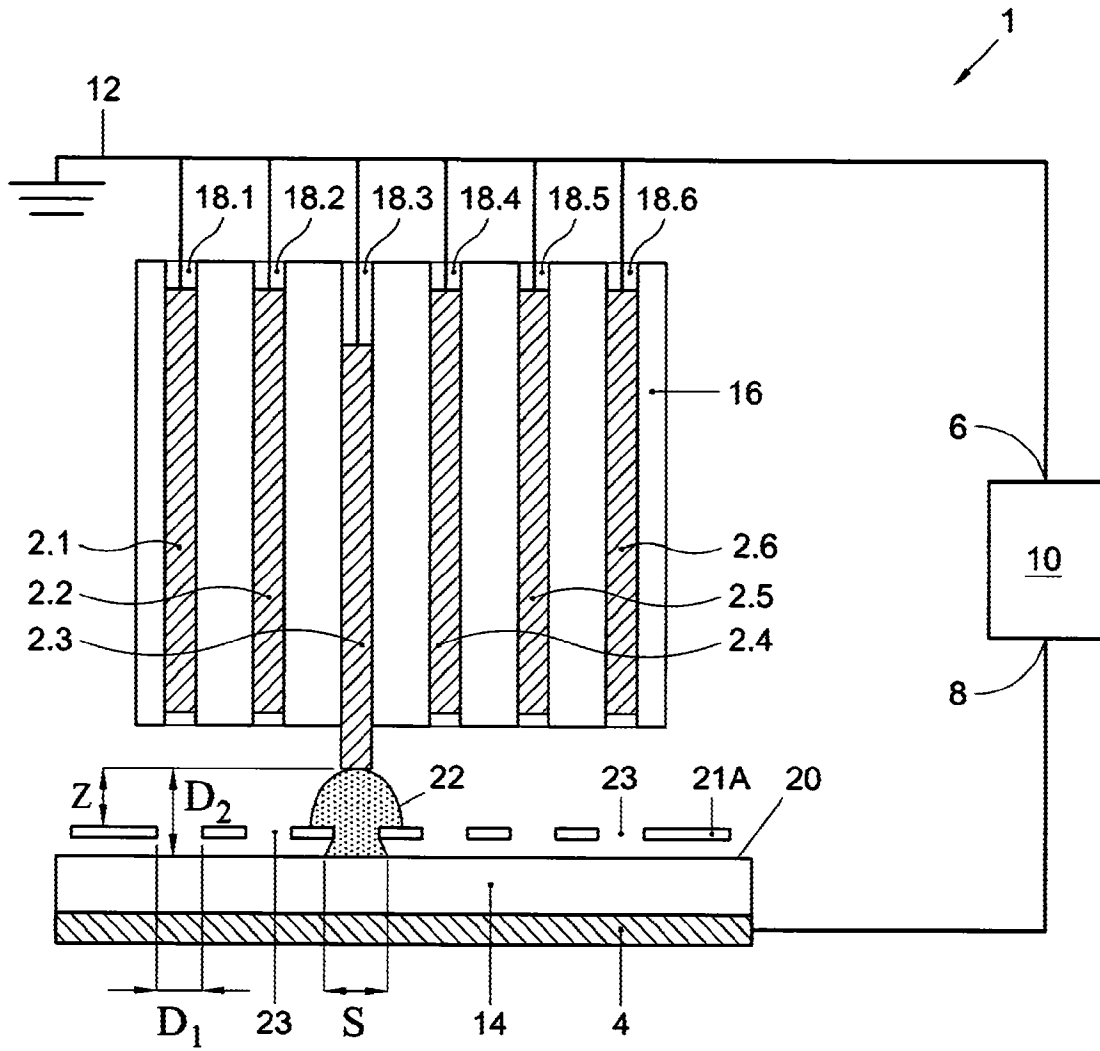


Fig. 1

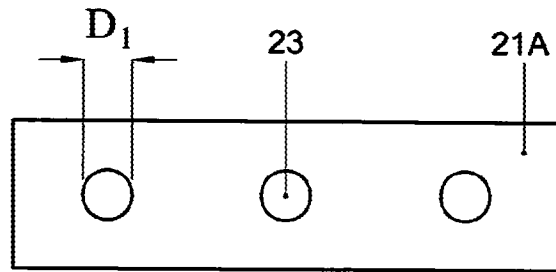


Fig. 1A

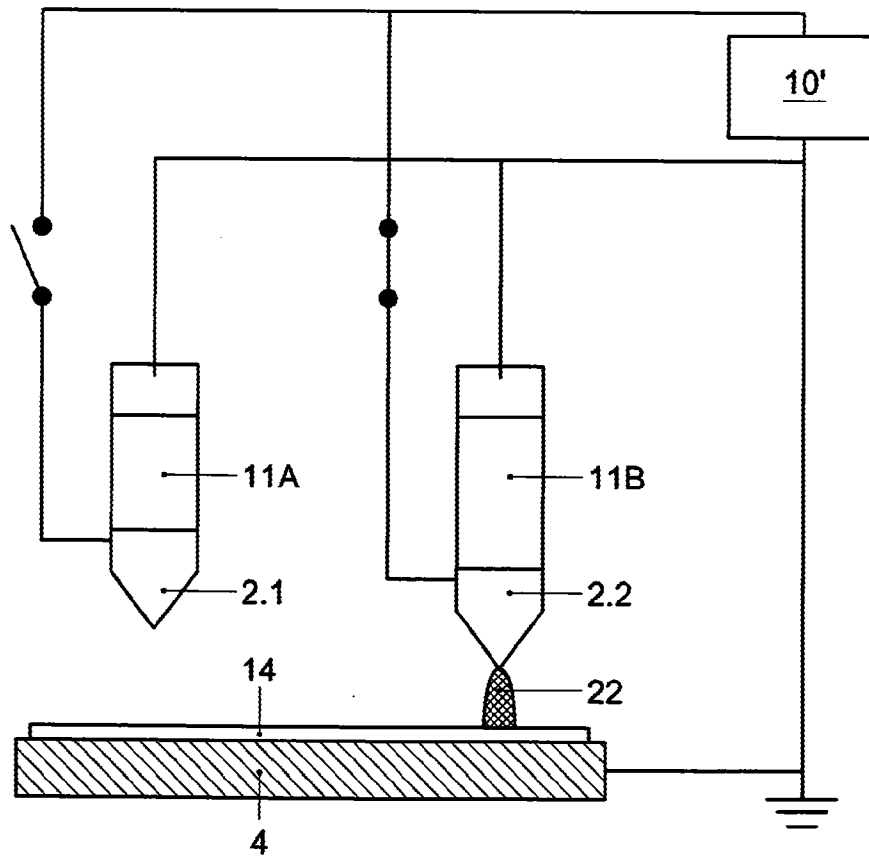


Fig. 1B

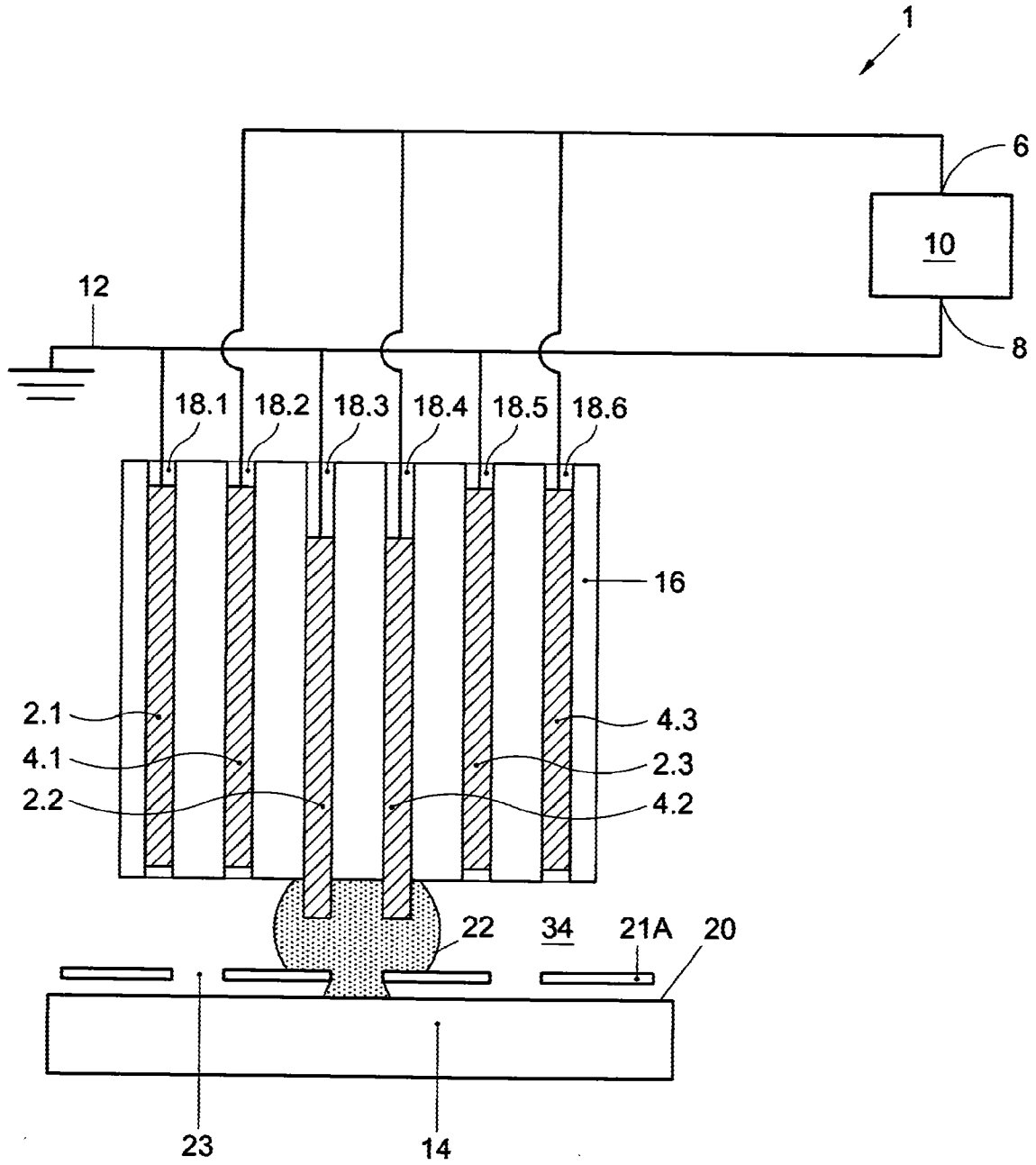


Fig. 2

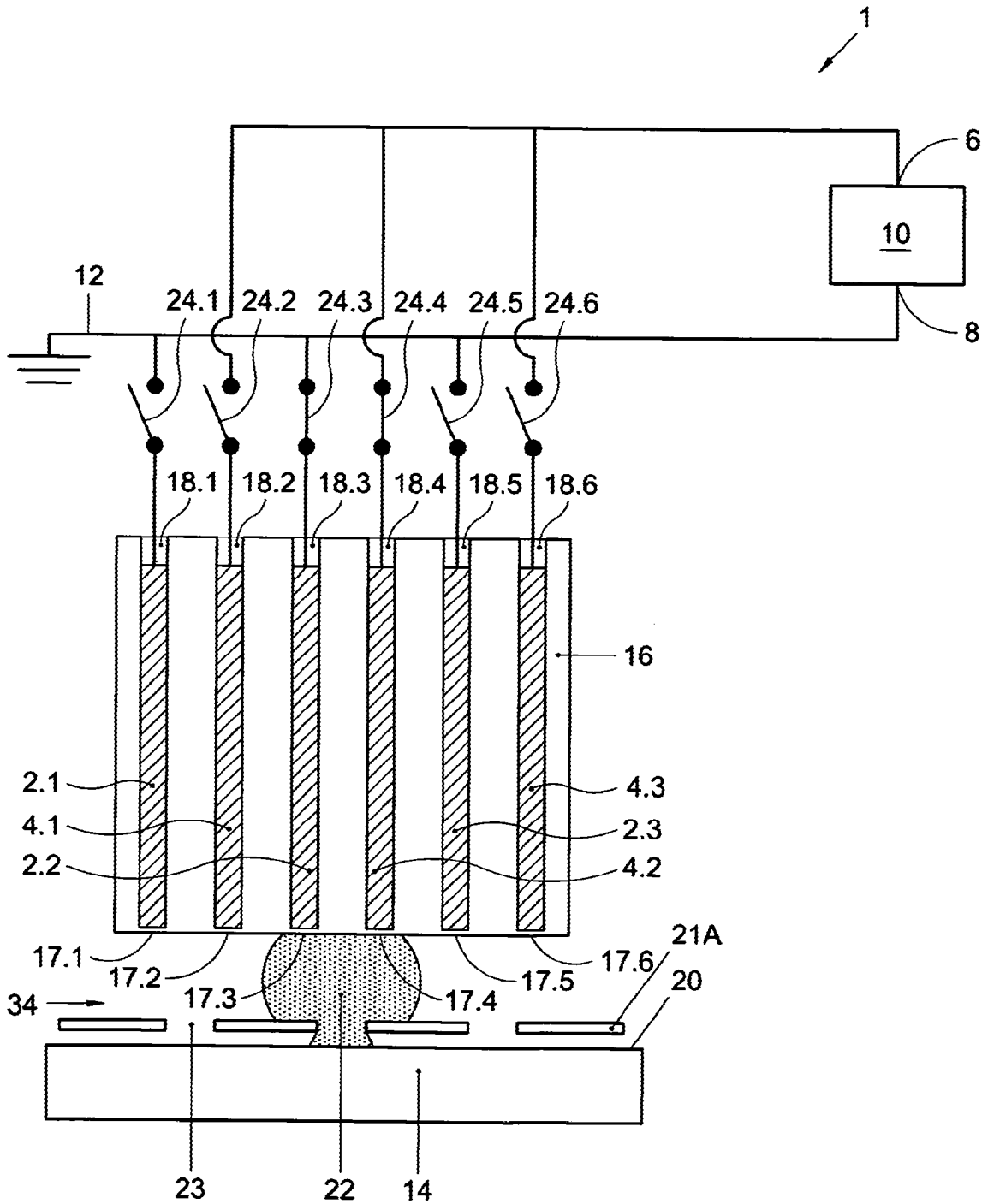


Fig. 3

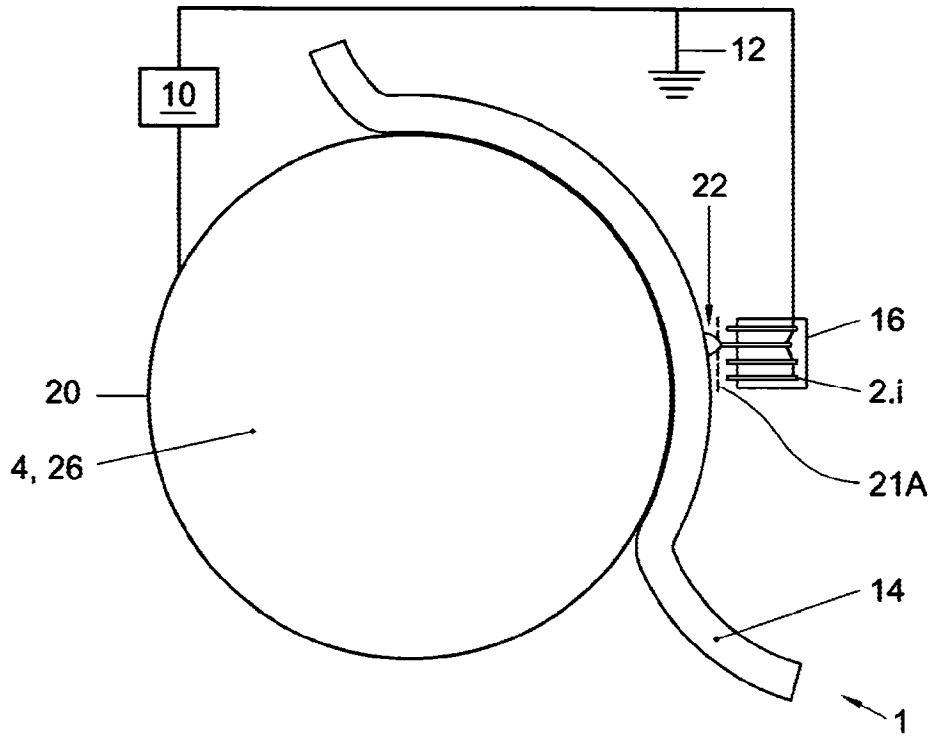


Fig. 4A

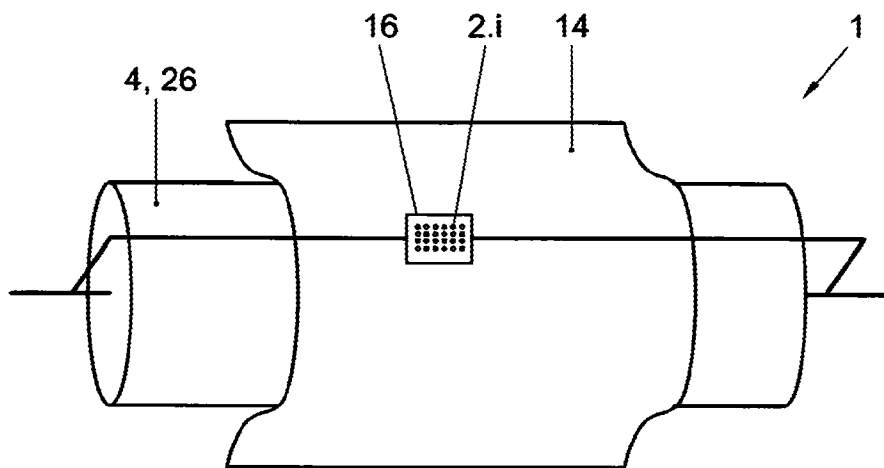


Fig. 4B

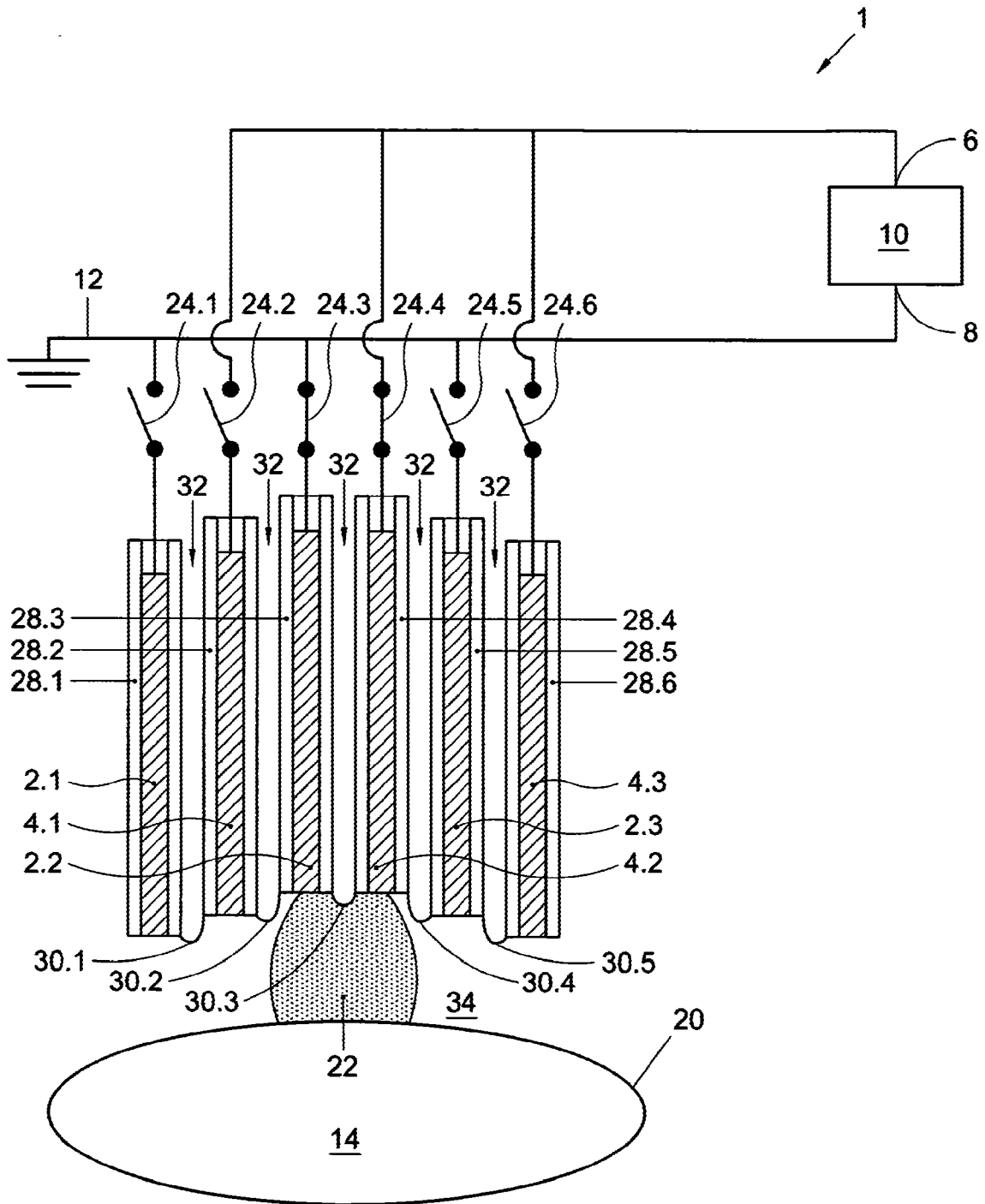


Fig. 5

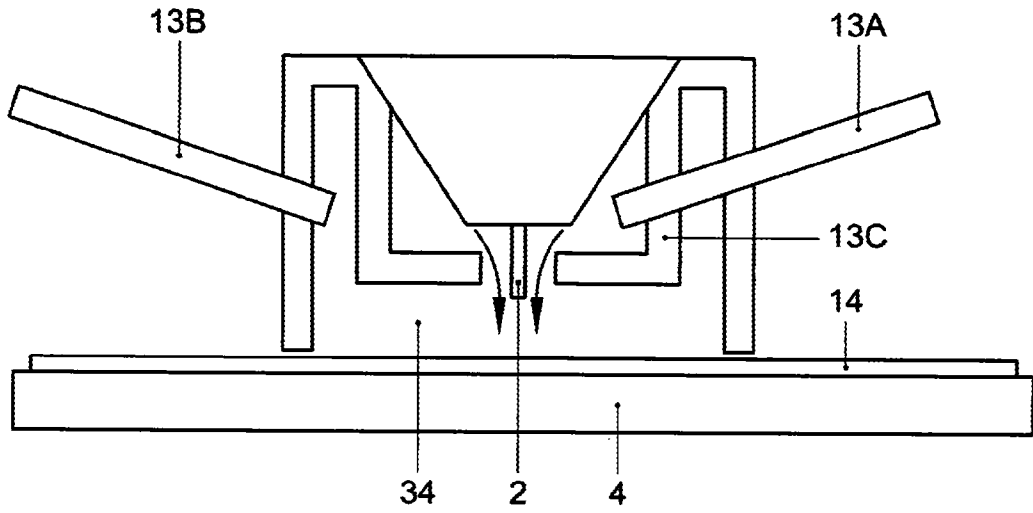


Fig. 5A

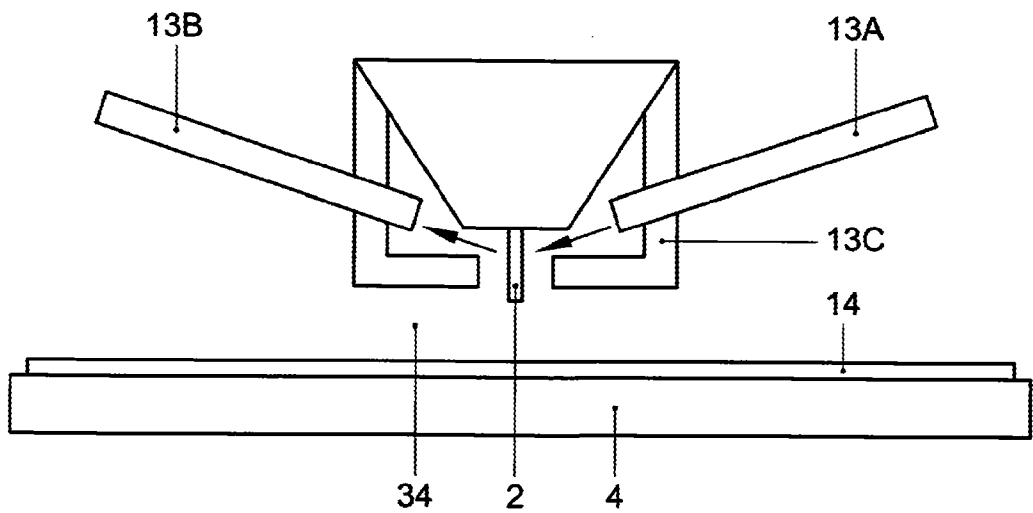


Fig. 5B

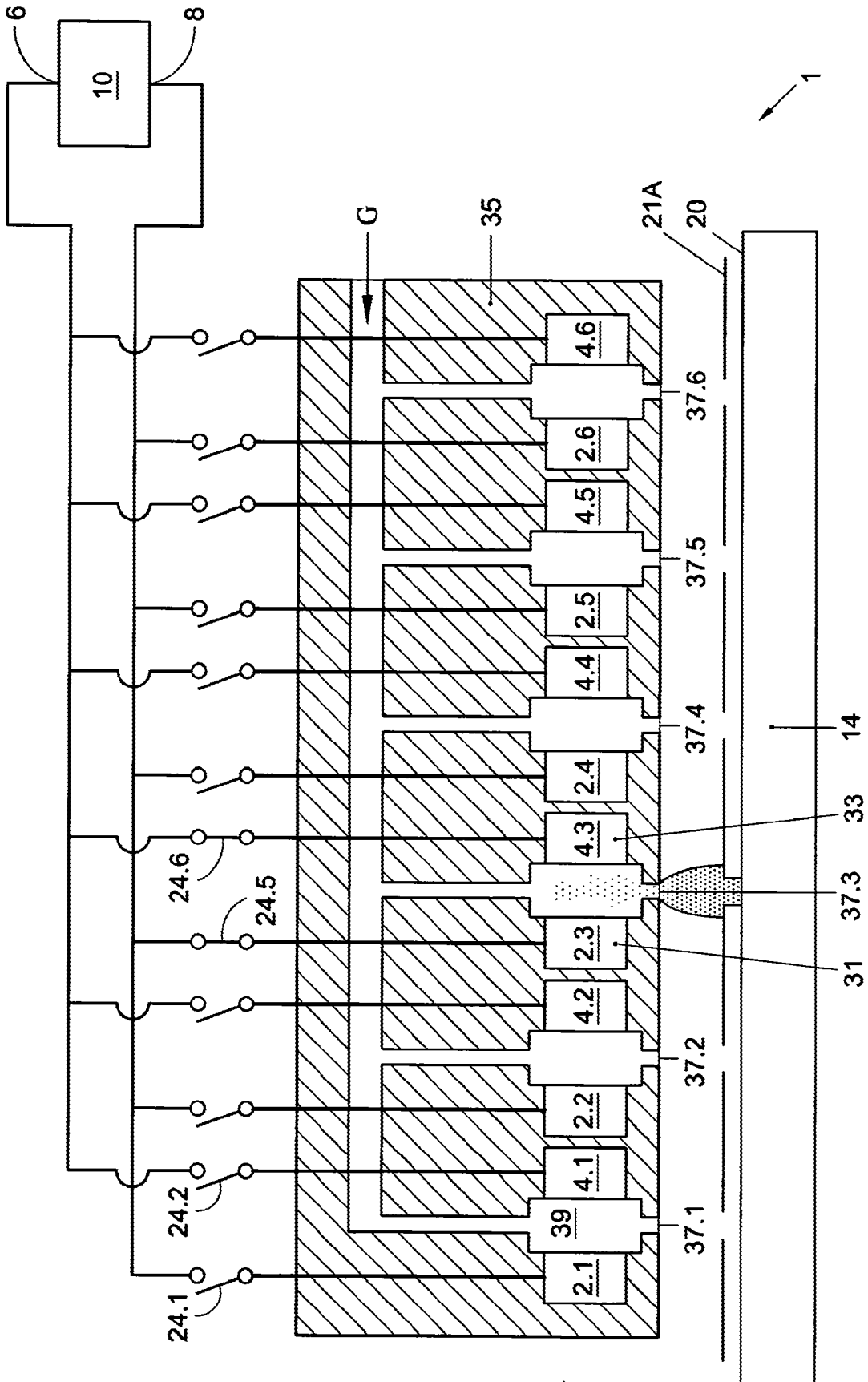


Fig. 6A

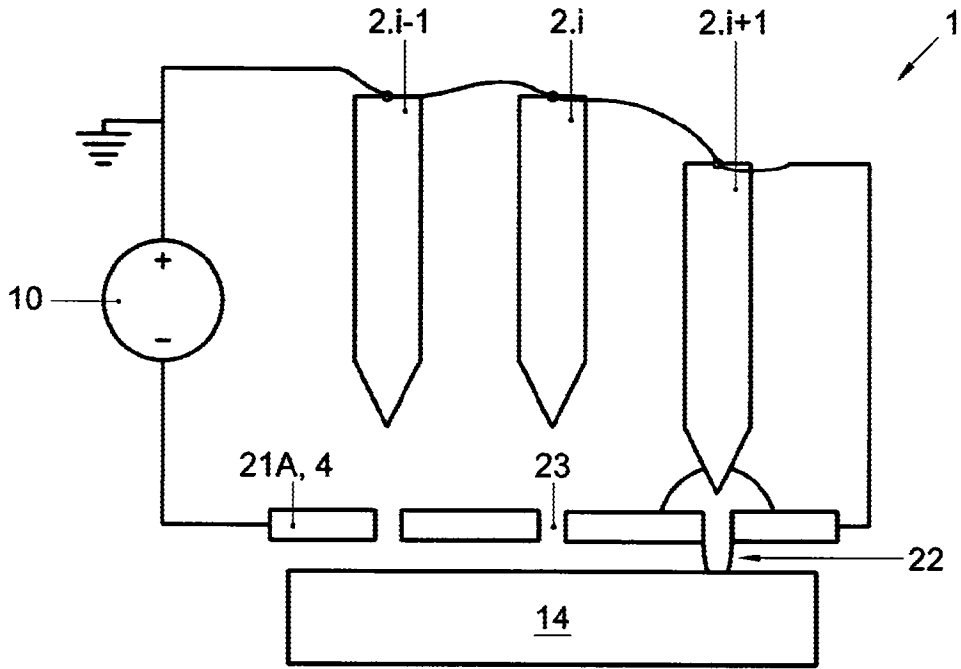


Fig. 7

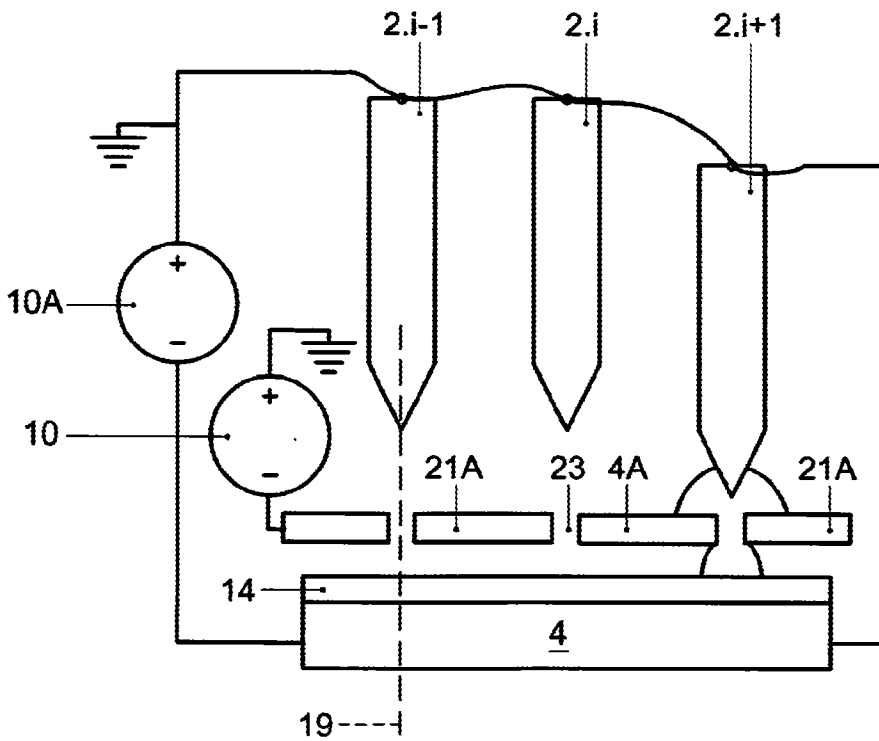


Fig. 8

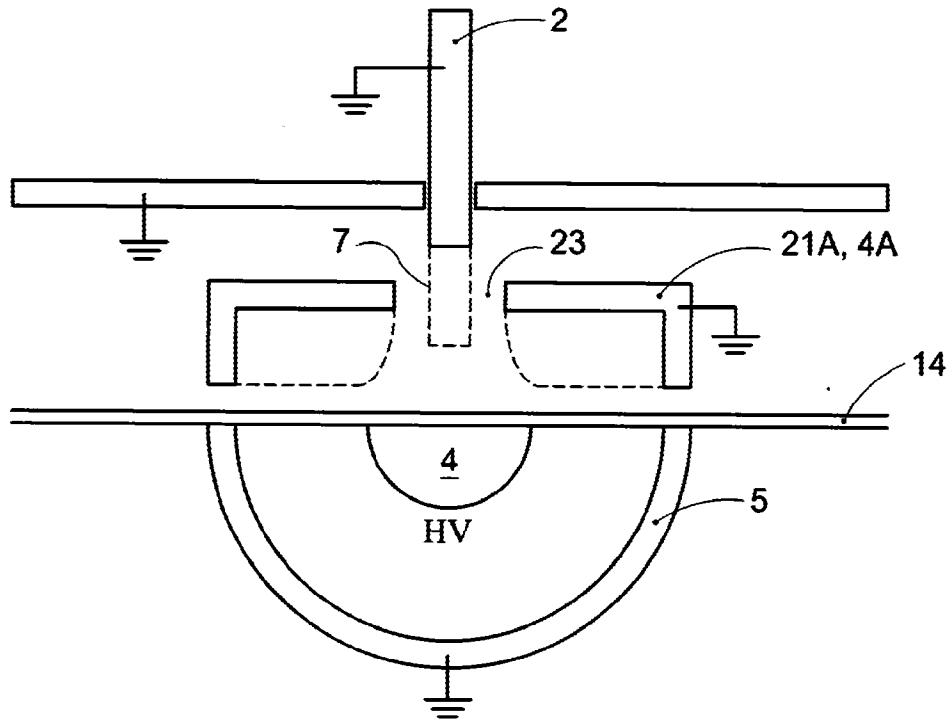


Fig. 8B

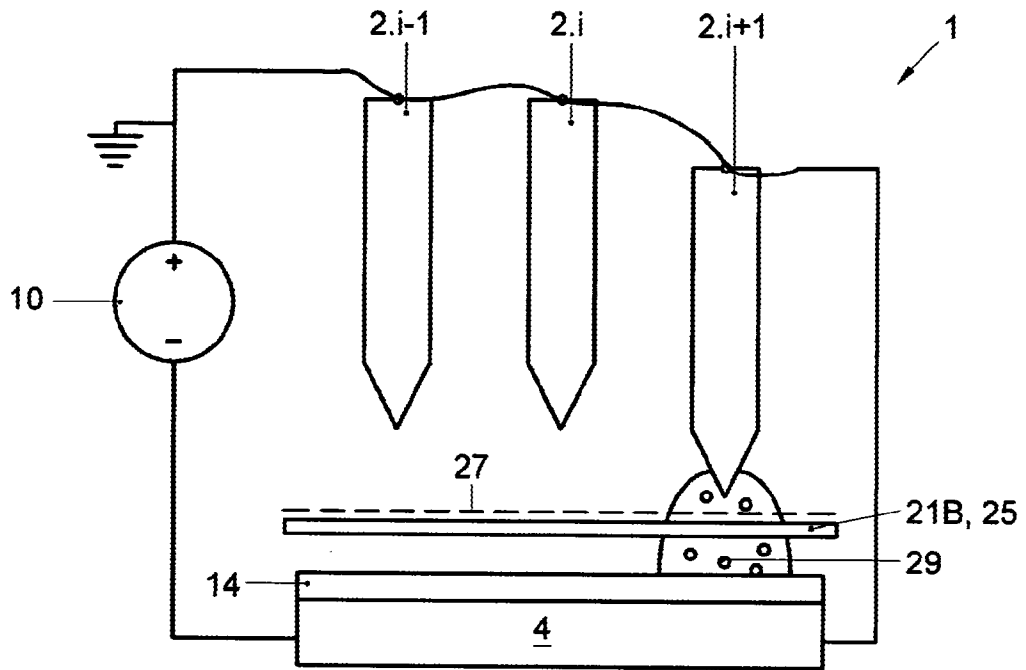
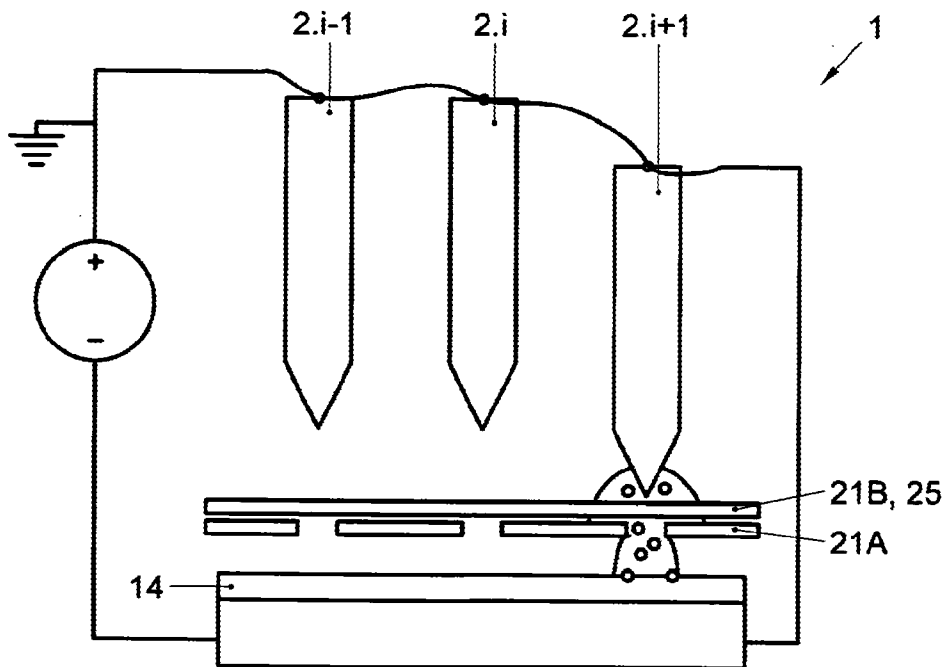


Fig. 9



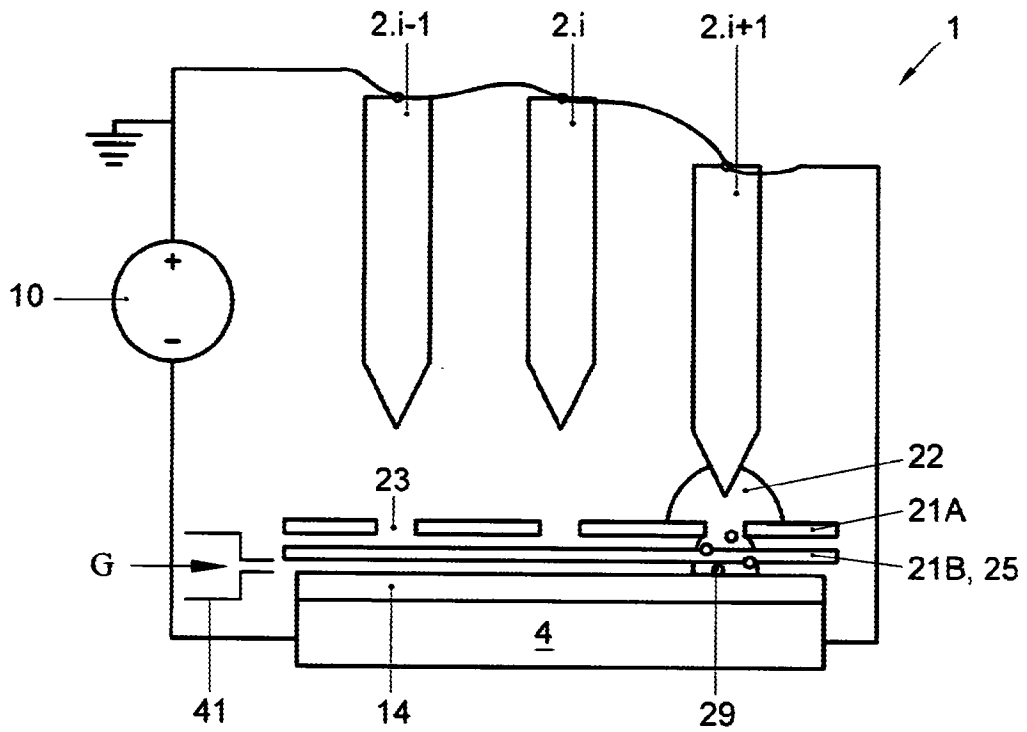


Fig. 11

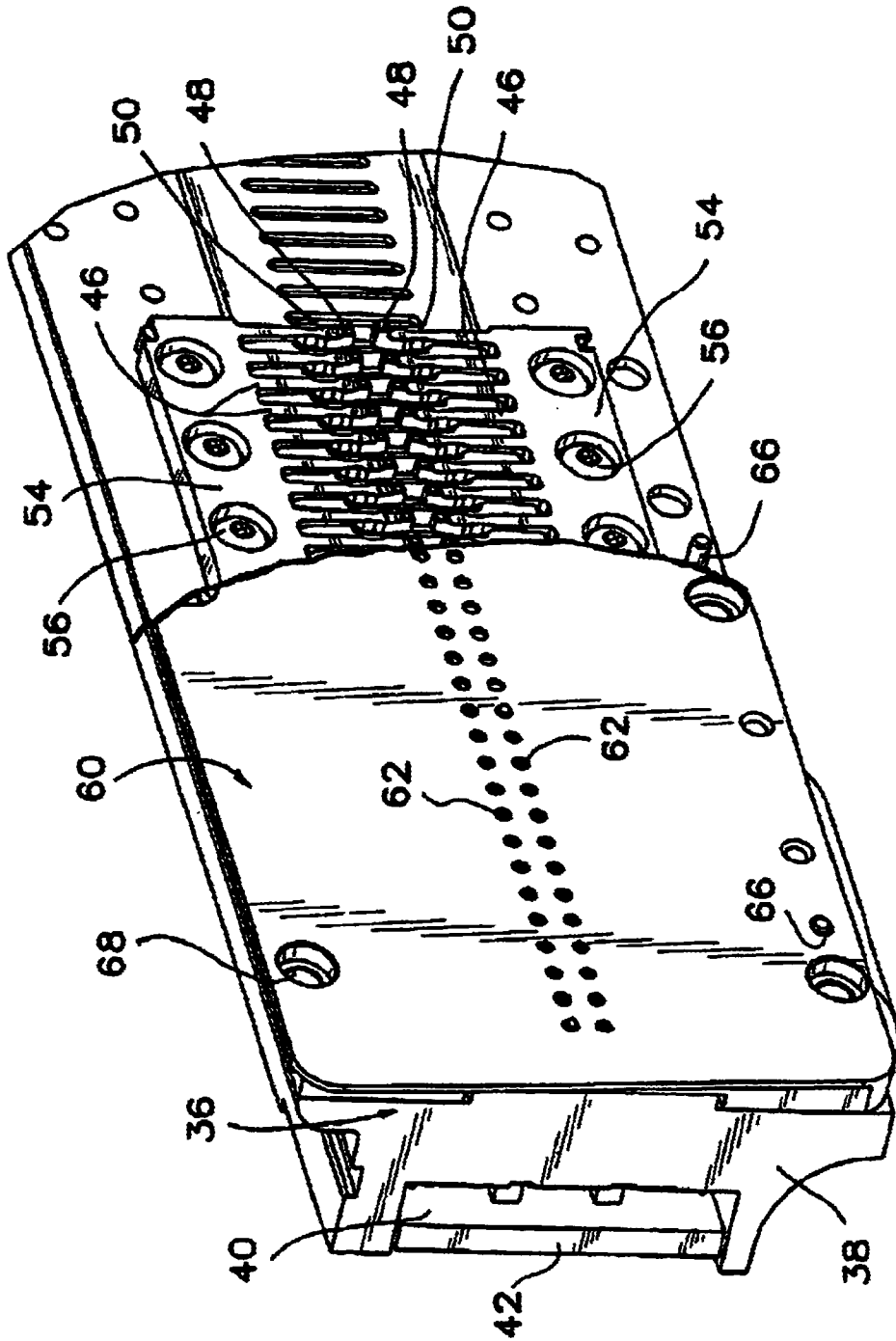


Fig. 12A

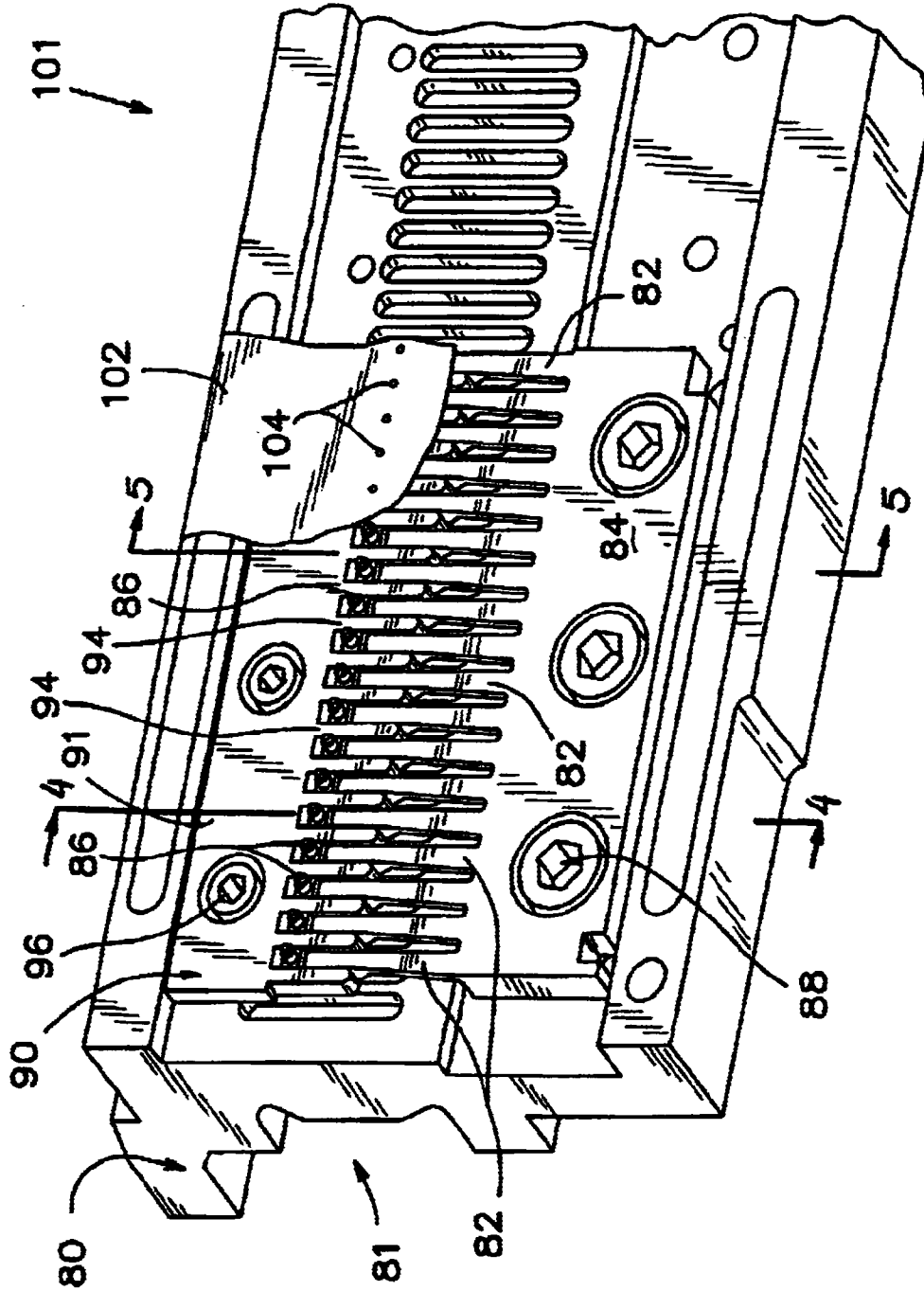


Fig. 12B

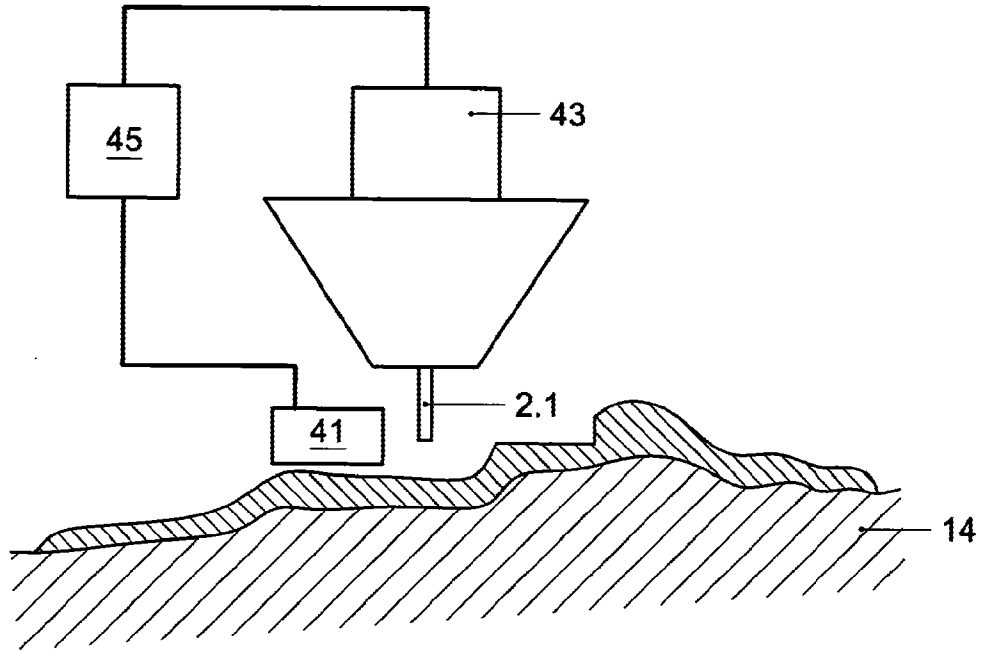


Fig. 13

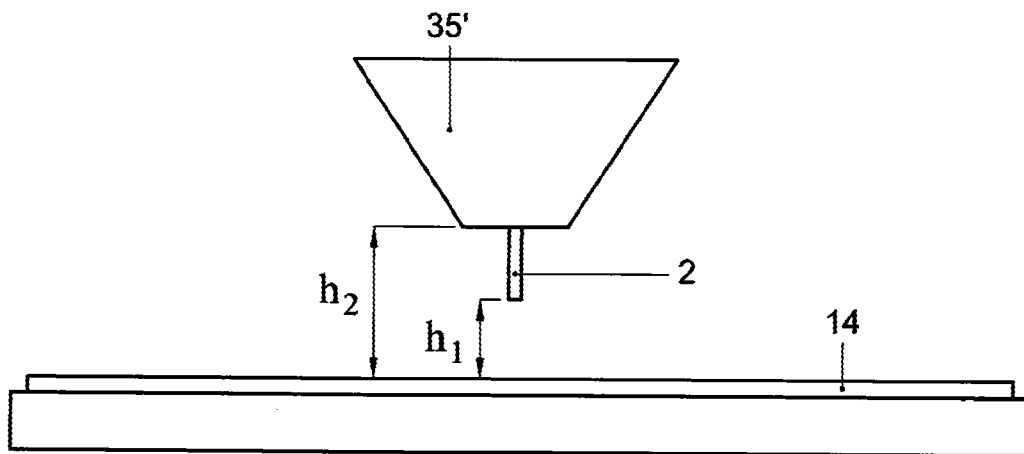


Fig. 14

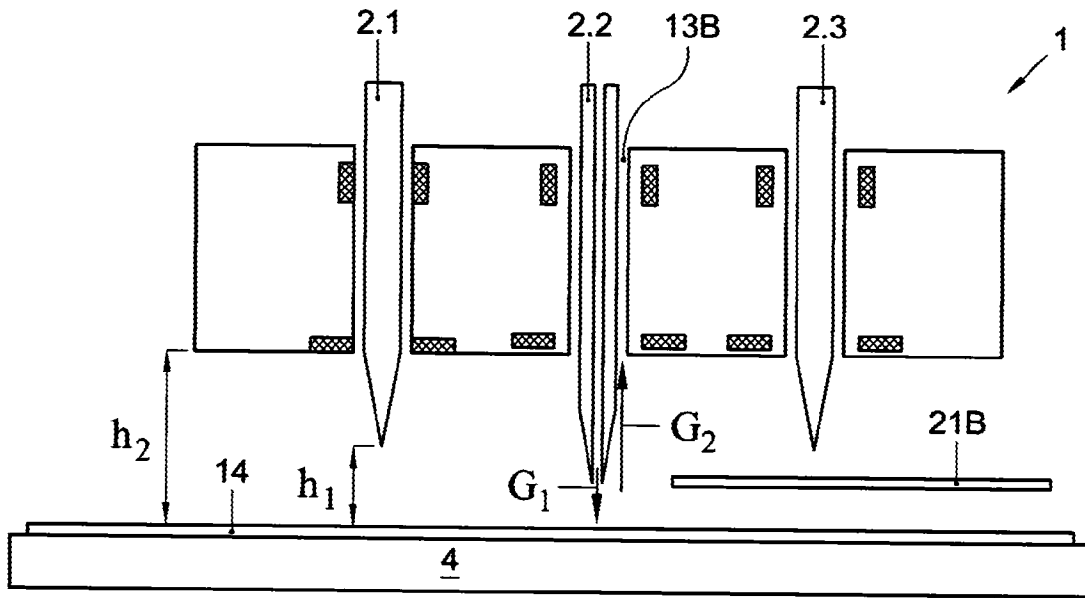


Fig. 15A

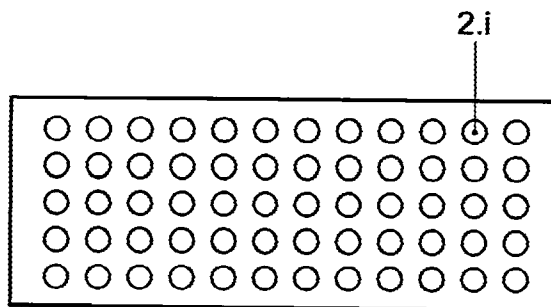


Fig. 15B

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/NL2010/050079

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
INV. H05H1/24 C23C14/04
ADD.

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
H05H C23C

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal, WPI Data

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

| Category* | Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages | Relevant to claim No. |
|-----------|---|---|
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| X | US 4 349 409 A (SHIBAYAMA HIKOU ET AL) 14 September 1982 (1982-09-14) | 1,2,9, 10,13, 14,24, 25, 28-30, 36,40,42 |
| Y | * abstract; figures 2A,7B -/-- | 4,32 |

Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

See patent family annex.

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- "O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means
- "P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

- "T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
- "X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
- "Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art.
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Date of the actual completion of the international search

8 November 2010

Date of mailing of the international search report

17/11/2010

Name and mailing address of the ISA/

European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2
NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk
Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040,
Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016

Authorized officer

Crescenti, Massimo

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No

PCT/NL2010/050079

C(Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

| Category* | Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages | Relevant to claim No. |
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| Y | cited in the application column 7, lines 3-13; figures 1,3,4F column 8, lines 24-45 column 12, lines 34-43 column 14, lines 48-52 | 1,2, 5-12, 15-27, 29,30, 33-35, 39-41, 43-45 |
| Y | ----- US 4 764 249 A (GOBRECHT JENS [CH] ET AL) 16 August 1988 (1988-08-16) column 3, lines 32-34; figure 2C | 1,2, 4-12, 15-19, 29,30, 32-35 |
| Y | WO 2009/096785 A1 (FUJIFILM MFG EUROPE BV [NL]; KORNGOLD BRUNO ALEXANDER [NL]; DE VRIES H) 6 August 2009 (2009-08-06) * abstract; claim 9; figure 2 page 2, line 3 ----- | 20-27, 39-41, 43-45 |

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International application No

PCT/NL2010/050079

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