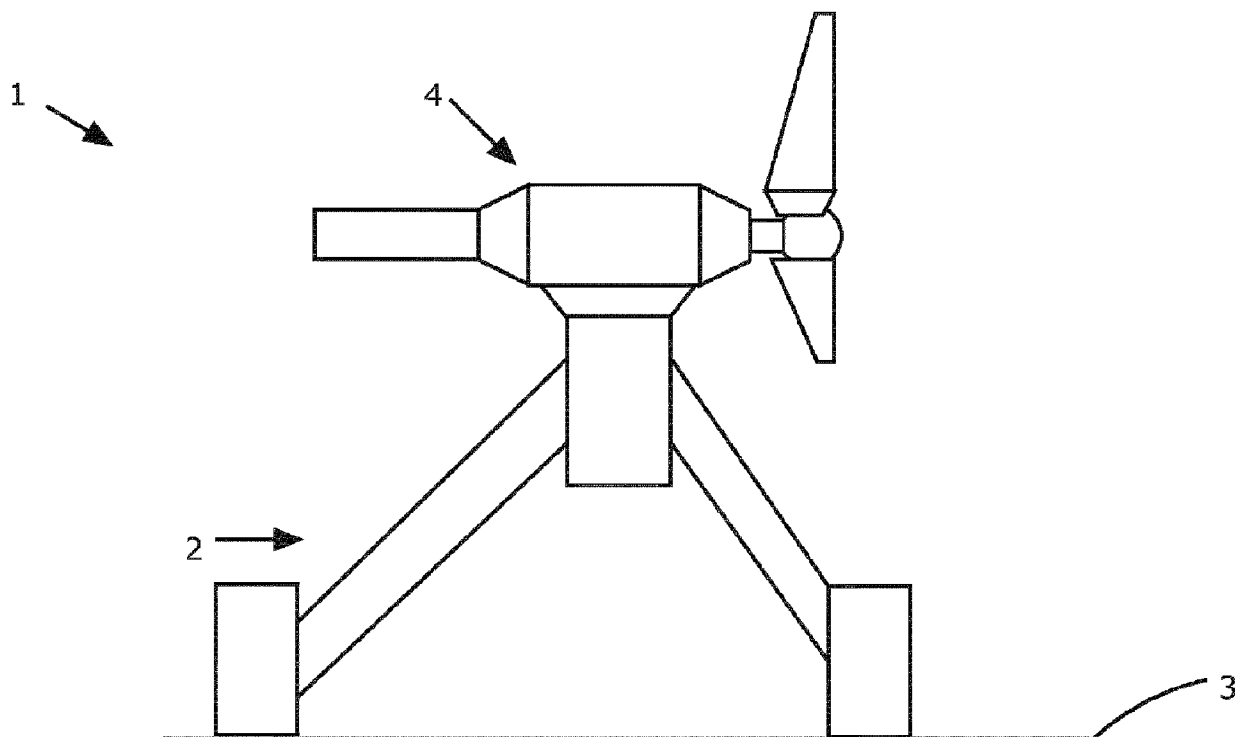




(86) Date de dépôt PCT/PCT Filing Date: 2012/12/19
(87) Date publication PCT/PCT Publication Date: 2013/06/27
(45) Date de délivrance/Issue Date: 2020/03/10
(85) Entrée phase nationale/National Entry: 2014/06/06
(86) N° demande PCT/PCT Application No.: EP 2012/076113
(87) N° publication PCT/PCT Publication No.: 2013/092686
(30) Priorité/Priority: 2011/12/23 (GB1122255.1)

(51) Cl.Int./Int.Cl. *F03B 13/18* (2006.01),
F03B 13/26 (2006.01), *F03B 17/06* (2006.01)
(72) Inventeur/Inventor:
VIGARS, PAUL, GB
(73) Propriétaire/Owner:
TIDAL GENERATION LIMITED, GB
(74) Agent: CRAIG WILSON AND COMPANY

(54) Titre : SYSTEMES DE GENERATION D'ENERGIE A COURANT D'EAU
(54) Title: WATER CURRENT POWER GENERATION SYSTEMS



(57) **Abrégé/Abstract:**

An underwater structure (1) comprises a power generation unit (4) including a main body (10), a mounting portion (14) which extends from the main body (10) and which defines a mounting axis (M), and a support structure (2) adapted for engagement with

(57) Abrégé(suite)/Abstract(continued):

a bed (3) of a body of water, and including a support housing (20). The mounting portion (14) defines a substantially continuous mounting surface which extends substantially completely around the mounting portion, and the support housing (20) defines a substantially continuous support surface which extends substantially completely around the support housing. The mounting surface and support surface are arranged to abut one another substantially continuously when the power generation unit (4) is mounted on the support structure (2). The mounting portion (14) and the support housing (20) are adapted to cooperate with one another for mounting of the power generation unit (4) on the support structure (2) in any polar orientation about the mounting axis (M). The power generation unit includes a connection actuator means (39) operable to rotate the connection carrier about the mounting axis.

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

(19) World Intellectual Property
Organization
International Bureau

(43) International Publication Date
27 June 2013 (27.06.2013)



(10) International Publication Number
WO 2013/092686 A1

(51) International Patent Classification:

F03B 13/18 (2006.01) *F03B 17/06* (2006.01)
F03B 13/26 (2006.01)

(21) International Application Number:

PCT/EP2012/076113

(22) International Filing Date:

19 December 2012 (19.12.2012)

(25) Filing Language:

English

(26) Publication Language:

English

(30) Priority Data:

1122255.1 23 December 2011 (23.12.2011) GB

(71) Applicant: **TIDAL GENERATION LIMITED** [GB/GB];
Moor Lane, Derby DE24 8BJ (GB).

(72) Inventor: **VIGARS, Paul**; Tidal Generation Limited, Castlemead, Lower Castle Street, Bristol BS1 3AG (GB).

(74) Agent: **VIGARS, Christopher, Ian**; ElementOne IP Limited, St. Nicholas House, 31-34 High Street, Bristol BS1 2AW (GB).

(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, BN, 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, PA, PE, PG, PH, PL, PT, QA, RO, RS, RU, RW, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SM, ST, SV, SY, TH, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, ZA, ZM, ZW.

(84) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available): ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LR, LS, MW, MZ, NA, RW, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, RU, TJ, TM), European (AL, AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, LV, MC, MK, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, RS, SE, SI, SK, SM, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

Declarations under Rule 4.17:

— as to applicant's entitlement to apply for and be granted a patent (Rule 4.17(ii))

Published:

— with international search report (Art. 21(3))
— before the expiration of the time limit for amending the claims and to be republished in the event of receipt of amendments (Rule 48.2(h))

(54) Title: WATER CURRENT POWER GENERATION SYSTEMS

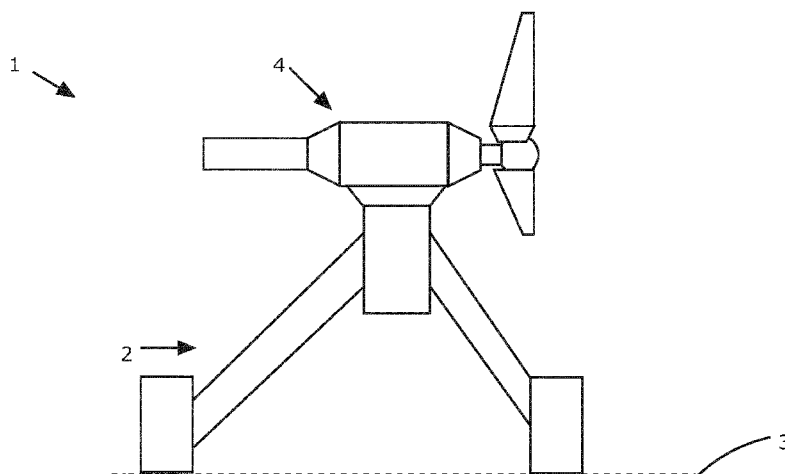


Figure 1

(57) Abstract: An underwater structure (1) comprises a power generation unit (4) including a main body (10), a mounting portion (14) which extends from the main body (10) and which defines a mounting axis (M), and a support structure (2) adapted for engagement with a bed (3) of a body of water, and including a support housing (20). The mounting portion (14) defines a substantially continuous mounting surface which extends substantially completely around the mounting portion, and the support housing (20) defines a substantially continuous support surface which extends substantially completely around the support housing. The mounting surface and support surface are arranged to abut one another substantially continuously when the power generation unit (4) is mounted on the support structure (2). The mounting portion (14) and the support housing (20) are adapted to cooperate with one another for mounting of the power generation unit (4) on the support structure (2) in any polar orientation about the mounting axis (M). The power generation unit includes a connection actuator means (39) operable to rotate the connection

carrier about the mounting axis.

WATER CURRENT POWER GENERATION SYSTEMS

The present invention relates to water current power generation systems, and in particular to such systems which employ removable power generation units.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

5 It is widely known that easily accessible resources of fossil fuels are declining. In addition, the impact of the use of fossil fuels upon the environment has become increasingly apparent. As a result of this, it has become imperative that viable alternative energy sources are used as effectively and efficiently as possible. The use of turbines to capture the power of water flow, such as tidal, river and ocean current flows is becoming a viable source of
10 alternative energy. The turbine equipment used to capture such water flow energy typically includes a shaft driven generator connected using a drivetrain to a rotor assembly. The rotor assembly includes a plurality of rotor blades that are driven by the water flow, so as to turn an input shaft of the drivetrain.

In order to be economically practical, multiple water current turbine devices need to be
15 deployed in a suitable area. For example, a tidal turbine farm may have tens to hundreds of turbines. The turbines are preferably arranged in an array having multiple rows of multiple turbines. The turbine array could be deployed in a tidal flow area, a river flow, an ocean current, or any other suitable water current area. Although it is preferable for the turbines to be arranged in an array, geography, bathymetry and other factors may mean that a turbine
20 farm has another arrangement.

Such turbine equipment needs to be secured to the bed of a body of water, such as a sea, estuary or river. Conventional underwater turbines used to drive electrical generators are mounted on a horizontal rotational axis and require a significant amount of ancillary features, in order to maximise energy capture. One such feature that is essential for efficient energy
25 generation is yaw capability: it must be possible to direct the turbine to the most effective orientation with respect to the direction of current flow at any particular time.

Installation, maintenance and servicing of underwater power generation apparatus, particularly in deep sea environments, are highly costly and time consuming procedures. It is therefore desirable to simplify the construction and deployment of underwater power
30 generation apparatus, lowering capital cost and reducing the frequency with which in service intervention is required.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to one aspect of the present invention, there is provided an underwater structure comprising a power generation unit including a main body, a mounting portion which extends from the main body and which defines a mounting axis, a connection carrier, and a
5 connector mounted on the connection carrier, and a support structure adapted for engagement with a bed of a body of water, and including a support housing, a support connection carrier attached to the support housing, and a support connector mounted on the support connection carrier, the support connector being adapted for releasable engagement with the connector of the power generation unit, wherein the mounting portion defines a
10 substantially continuous mounting surface which extends substantially completely around the mounting portion, and wherein the support housing defines a substantially continuous support surface which extends substantially completely around the support housing, the mounting surface and support surface being arranged to abut one another substantially continuously when the power generation unit is mounted on the support structure, and
15 wherein the mounting portion and the support housing are adapted to cooperate with one another for mounting of the power generation unit on the support structure in any polar orientation about the mounting axis.

In one example of such a structure, the power generation unit includes connection actuation means operable to move the connection carrier substantially parallel to the mounting axis,
20 and to rotate the connection carrier about the mounting axis. In one example of such a structure, the connection actuation means is provided by a single actuator.

In one example of such a structure, support structure includes support connection actuation means operable to move the support connection carrier substantially parallel to the mounting axis, and to rotate the support connection carrier about the mounting axis.

25 In one example of such a structure, the support connection actuation means is provided by a single actuator.

In one example of such a structure, the support connection carrier is removable from the support housing.

In one example of such a structure, wherein the support connection carrier includes
30 engagement means operable to engage releasably with the support housing so as to enable releasable engagement of the support connection carrier with the support housing. In one

example of such a structure, the support connection carrier is provided a substantially planar plate.

In one example of such a structure, the connection carrier is provided with a predetermined amount of positional float with respect to the mounting portion.

- 5 In one example of such a structure, the connection carrier is provided with a predetermined amount of positional float with respect to the actuation means.

- In one example of such a structure, the connection carrier includes a locating portion which is acted upon by the actuation means, and a secondary carrier which carries the connector, the secondary carrier being provided with a predetermined amount of positional float with
10 respect to the locating portion.

In one example of such a structure, the connector is provided with a predetermined amount of positional float with respect to the secondary carrier.

In one example of such a structure, the connector is provided with a predetermined amount of positional float with respect to the connection carrier.

15 **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

Figure 1 is a schematic view of a water current power generation system;

Figure 2 is a schematic drawing of a power generation unit for use in the system of Figure 1;

Figure 3 illustrates a connection between a power generation unit and a support structure of the system of Figure 1;

- 20 Figure 4 illustrates a mounting portion of the power generation unit of Figure 2;

Figure 5 illustrates a support housing of a support structure of the system of Figure 1;

Figure 6 illustrates the mounting portion of Figure 4 engaged in a first configuration with the support housing of Figure 5;

- 25 Figure 7 illustrates the mounting portion of Figure 4 engaged in a second configuration with the support housing of Figure 5;

Figure 8 illustrates an alternative example of mounting portion of the turbine device of Figure 2;

Figures 9 to 13 illustrate respective examples of connection carrier mounting; and

Figure 14 illustrates mounting of a connector.

5 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

A water current power generation system 1 is shown in Figure 1 and comprises a support structure 2 located on a bed 3 of a body of water. A power generation unit 4, such as a turbine device, is mounted on the support structure 2. In this example, as the water current flows past the power generation unit 4, a rotor assembly turns, thereby driving an electrical generator, or other power converter apparatus, provided in the power generation unit 4. In one example, the power generation unit 4 is buoyant, and is winched down to the support structure 2.

Figure 2 illustrates the power generation unit 4 of Figure 1 in more detail. The power generation unit 4 comprises a main body 10, on which is rotatably mounted a rotor assembly 12. The rotor assembly 12 operates to drive an electricity generator, or other power generation apparatus, housed in the main body 10. The power generation unit 4 is adapted for releasable mounting on the support structure 2, and includes a mount 14 to provide this releasable mounting.

The attachment of the mount 14 to the support structure is shown in more detail in Figure 3. The main body 10, from which the engagement portion 14 extends, is not shown in Figure 3 for the sake of clarity. The mount 14 defines a mounting axis M for the power generating unit 4.

The mount 14 has a mounting flange 15 which engages with an associated support flange 21 provided by the support housing 20. The mounting and support flanges 15 and 21 allow the power generating unit 4 to be affixed to the support structure 2 in an appropriate manner. For example, the power generating unit 4 may be substantially rigidly fixed to the support structure 2 during power generation, and may be rotatable with respect to the support structure 2 during a re-orientation procedure.

Figure 4 is a schematic cross-sectional view of an example mount 30 for a power generation unit 4. This example mount 30 is provided with a tapered mounting portion 31 which is

substantially circular in cross-section, and which provides an aperture therethrough. In the example shown in Figure 4, the mounting portion 31 is in the form of a truncated cone, but could be provided by any suitable shape. It will be appreciated that the mounting portion 31 need not be tapered nor circular in cross section, but may be provided by any suitable shape. For example, the mounting portion 31 may be provided by a hollow cylinder, or by a hollow prism.

The mounting portion 31 has, at a distal end thereof, a mounting flange 32, which defines a substantially circular and substantially continuous mounting surface. In the example shown in Figure 4, an attachment flange 33 is provided for attaching the mount 30 to the main body of the power generation unit. The mount 30 can be bolted, welded, or fixed in any other suitable manner, to the housing 10, and may not require the provision of the attachment flange 33.

A connection carrier 35 is provided within the mounting portion 31, and carries any appropriate number of electrical, optical and other connectors 38. The precise nature and number of connectors 38 carried by the connection carrier 35 is not material to examples of the present invention. In Figure 4, the connection carrier 35 is shown in a first, unconnected, configuration.

The connection carrier 35 may be provided by any suitable shape and configuration. The exemplary connector carrier shown in Figure 4 comprises a carrier shaft (or locating portion) 35a onto which is mounted a carrier plate 35b. The connectors 38 are carried by the carrier plate 35b, on a mating surface of the carrier plate 35b.

The connection carrier shaft 35 is mounted on actuation means 39, such as one or more hydraulic or electrical actuators. The actuation means 39 serve to move the connection carrier 35 in a direction substantially parallel to the mounting axis M. The actuation means 39 also operate to rotate the connection carrier 35 about that axis M. The actuation means may be provided by any suitable arrangement of equipment. In one example, the actuation means comprises a linear actuator linked to the carrier shaft 35a by a linkage arrangement, and a rotary actuator that operates directly on the carrier shaft 35a. In another example, the actuation means includes an actuator that engages the carrier plate 35b for rotation of the connection carrier 35. The actuation means may be located in any convenient location in the mounting portion 31, and/or in the main body 10 of the power generation unit 4.

The connection carrier 35 is provided with at least one alignment pin, such as the two alignment pins 36 and 37 shown in Figure 4, which extend from the carrier plate 35b. As will be described in more detail below, the alignment pins serve to enable accurate alignment of the connection carrier 35 on the support structure 2.

- 5 Connector cables 40 are connected with the connectors 38, and are routed through a cable management system 41 before connecting to cables 42 from the power generating apparatus.

Figure 5 illustrates a schematic cross-sectional view of a support housing 50 provided on the support structure 2. The example support housing 50 shown in Figure 5 is substantially
10 cylindrical, and defines a circular aperture therethrough. It will be readily appreciated that, as for the mounting portion 31 of the power generation unit 4, the support housing 50 can be of any suitable shape and cross section.

The support housing 50 includes a support flange 51 which defines a substantially circular and substantially continuous support surface onto which the mounting surface of the mount
15 30 abuts when the power generating unit 4 is mounted on the support assembly 2.

A support connection carrier 52 is provided in the support housing 50. The support connection carrier 52 extends across the aperture of the support housing 50, and carries support connectors 59 for connecting to the connectors 38 of the connection carrier 35 of the power generating unit 4. Alignment apertures 60 and 61 are arranged to receive the
20 alignment pins 36 and 37 of the power generating unit. It will be appreciated that any number of alignment pins and associated apertures can be provided. In one example, the alignment holes 60 and 61 have conical openings configured to allow for some level of initial misalignment of the alignment pins.

It is to be noted that the alignment pins may be provided on the support connection carrier,
25 and the corresponding alignment apertures on the connection carrier of the mounting portion. It will be readily appreciated that each of the carriers may be provided with both alignment pins and alignment apertures, with corresponding apertures and pins being provided on the other of the carriers.

The support connection carrier 52 also includes a cable connector 57 arranged to connect
30 the support connectors 59 to an input/output cable 58. The cable 58 is used to export generated power from the power generating apparatus. For example, the cable may be

used to export electricity generated by the power generating apparatus to a grid connection. In an alternative application, the export cable may be used to transfer hydraulic fluid from the power generating apparatus. The cable 58 can also include control and measurement cables.

5 In the example shown in Figure 5, the support connection carrier 52 is removable from the support housing 50, and is held in place using locking actuators 53 and 54, which serve to move engagement features 55 and 56 into engagement with an inner surface of the support housing 50. Such an arrangement enables the support connection carrier 52 to be removed from the support housing 50 for maintenance purposes, without the need to remove the
10 whole support structure, or support housing, or to undertake complex underwater cutting and welding operations.

Figure 6 illustrates the mount 30 of Figure 4 located on the support housing 50 of Figure 5 in a first, unconnected, configuration. The mount 30 is brought into contact with the support housing 50, so that the mounting and support surfaces defined by the attachment flanges 32
15 and 51 respectively abut one another. The connectors 38 of the power generation unit and the support connectors 59 remain unconnected at this stage.

Figure 7 shows a second configuration in which the connection carrier 35 has been moved axially in a direction substantially parallel to the mounting axis M, such that the connectors 38 and alignment pins 36 and 37 are engaged with associated connectors 59 and alignment
20 apertures 60 and 61 on the support connection carrier 52. The actuator 39 is operated to move the connection carrier 35 into connection with the support connection carrier 52.

Before the connection carrier 35 is moved into position axially, it may need to be rotated in order that the alignment pins 36 and 37 are substantially aligned with the alignment holes 60 and 61 respectively. A motor for providing this rotation may be provided within the mounting
25 portion 31, or the rotation may be achieved by the actuation means 39.

As the connection carrier 35 moves into connection with the support connection carrier 52, the connectors 38 meet with the corresponding connectors 59 to complete the electrical/hydraulic, optical and/or control connections between the power generating unit 4 and the cable 58.

30 Figure 8 illustrates another example of a mount 30 located on the support housing 50. In this example, the mounting portion 31 includes a locating portion 63 which extends from an

end region of the mounting portion 31. The locating portion 63 extends from within the mounting portion 31 past the mounting flange 32. The locating portion 63 is coaxial with the mounting portion 31, and is provided with an aperture therethrough. The locating portion 63 is tapered so as to aid location of the power generating unit on the support structure. As the power generating unit is lowered into place on the support structure, the distal end of the locating portion 63, which is narrower than the aperture of the support housing 50 of the support structure, is able to enter the support housing structure 50 with a degree of positional freedom. That is, the accuracy of location of the distal end of the locating portion 63 is not as fine as that required to locate the mounting and support flanges 32 and 51. As the power generating unit continues to be lowered onto the support structure, the locating portion 63 centres the mount 30 on the support housing 50, such that the mounting and support surfaces abut one another. It will be appreciated that a similar locating portion could be provided by the support housing 50 instead of by the mount 30.

The mounting surface transfers the load of the power generation unit onto the support surface, and hence into the support structure. The substantially circular and substantially continuous nature of the mounting and support surfaces serves to distribute the loads around the support housing, and to remove, or substantially reduce, the occurrence of point loading on the support housing.

The substantially circular and substantially continuous nature of the mounting surface of the power generation unit and of the support surface of the support housing, in combination with the rotatable connection carrier of the power generation unit, also enables the mounting portion 30 to be located on the support housing 50 in any polar orientation with respect to the mounting axis M.

The ability to mount the power generation unit on the support structure in any polar orientation (that is, without discrete mounting locations) simplifies the deployment of the power generation unit to the support structure. This is because there is no requirement to orient the unit as it descends into its mounting position on the support structure.

The mounting and support surfaces allow the power generation unit to rotate with respect to the support structure, so that the unit can be oriented appropriately for power generation, irrespective of the orientation of the unit when it was first deployed to the support structure.

Due to the high loading associated with the rotor and tidal flow, it is preferable to use a clamping arrangement, such as that shown in UK Patent Number 2448710. Such a clamp

arrangement allows the power generating unit to be oriented for power generation for an initial tide direction, and then re-oriented when the tide turns.

In addition, this polar mounting freedom of the power generation unit enables the location and orientation of the support structure to be simplified, since the polar orientation of the support housing is not important when the power generating unit can be mounted, and then operated, in any polar orientation with respect to the support structure.

The mounting arrangements described above are particularly advantageous for use with a single cable winch deployment system, such as that described in UK Patent Number 2431628. In such a configuration, a winch cable tube or aperture is provided substantially aligned with the mounting axis. In one example, a tube is provided through the connection carriers, through an arm of the actuation means, and then through the main body of the power generation unit.

In a practical example of an arrangement that follows the principles of those described above, a degree of positional freedom, or "float" is desirable for at least some of the components. In this context, the term "float" is used to mean that a component has some flexibility of movement about a nominal mounting position, without the need for specific adjustment intervention. This positional float is provided in order to allow for manufacturing and positioning tolerance.

Figure 9 illustrates a first example of float, in which the actuation means 39 are able to float in position with respect to the mount 30. In Figure 9, this floating coupling is illustrated by mounting elements 100, which are illustrative only. The elements 100 can be provided by any suitable means, for example flexible mountings or slot and pin arrangements. Using the arrangement of Figure 9, the whole of the actuation means and connection carrier assembly is able to float in position with respect to the mount 30. Following initial rotational alignment, as the actuation means 39 moves the connection carrier 35 linearly, the alignment pins (not shown in Figure 9 for clarity) are brought into engagement with the corresponding alignment apertures. If there is any misalignment of the pins and apertures, the alignment pins cause the actuation means and connection carrier assembly to move with respect to the mount, as those pins are brought into alignment with the apertures. The respective shapes of the alignment pins and alignment apertures serve to bring the pins into alignment with the apertures through the linear action of the connection carrier 35. The float provided to the actuation means and carrier assembly by the mounting elements 100 enable the lateral, rotational and angular position of the carrier plate 35b to be aligned correctly with the

corresponding support connection carrier to enable the connectors to engage with one another.

Figure 10 illustrates another example of the provision of float to the connection carrier 35. In this example, the actuation means 39 are fixed substantially rigidly with respect to the mount 30, and the connection carrier 35 is able to float with respect to the actuation means 39. This float is illustrated by the elements 101. In this example, the float may be provided by specifying bearings between the actuation means 39 and the carrier shaft 35a that have a required amount of play. In this way, the carrier shaft 35a and the carrier plate 35b are able to move with respect to a nominal mounting position by the action of the alignment pins aligning and engaging with the alignment apertures.

Figure 11 illustrates another example of the provision of float to the connection carrier. In this example, the actuation means 39 are fixed substantially rigidly with respect to the mount 30, and the carrier shaft 35a is located in the actuation means 39 using bearing having substantially no play. As such, the carrier shaft 35a and carrier plate 35b are moveable linearly, and are rotatable, with respect to the mount 30 substantially without float. A secondary carrier 35c is mounted on the carrier plate 35b on mounting elements 102. The mounting elements 102 are illustrative only and may be provided by any suitable arrangement. The mounting elements 102 allow the secondary carrier 35c to float with respect to the carrier plate 35b. the secondary carrier plate 35c carries the alignment pins and connectors (not show for clarity), and so the float provided to the secondary plate 35c enables the alignment of the alignment pins and connectors carried by the secondary carrier 35c.

Figure 12 illustrates the connection carrier 35, comprising the carrier shaft 35a, and the carrier plate 35b, and illustrates another example of the provision of float. Alignment pins 36 and 37 extend from the carrier plate 35b without the provision of float. The connectors 38 are mounted on the carrier plate 35b by way of mounting elements 103 that allow a predetermined amount of float for the connectors 38. As the carrier plate 35b is brought into engagement with the support connection carrier of the support structure, the mounting elements 103 allow the connectors 38 to align correctly with the support connectors of the support structure.

Figure 13 illustrates the connection carrier 35 making use of the float techniques illustrated in Figures 11 and 12. As such, a secondary carrier plate 35c is provided on the carrier plate 35b, and is able to float with respect to the carrier plate 35b. In addition, connectors 38 are

mounted on the secondary carrier plate 35c by way of elements that allow float of the connectors with respect to the secondary carrier plate 35c. Alignment pins 36 and 37 extend from the secondary carrier plate 35c substantially without float. In this way, as the connection carrier is brought into engagement with the support connection carrier, the alignment pins engage with the alignment apertures. If there is any slight misalignment, the action of the alignment pins engaging with the apertures causes the secondary carrier plate 35c to move (laterally, rotationally, and/or angularly) such that the alignment pins are able to engage fully with the apertures. As the connectors 38 come into engagement with the support connectors, the mounting elements 103 allow the connectors to align correctly, taking up any minor misalignment.

It will be appreciated that the float provision of Figures 9 to 13 may be used individually, or in any suitable combination, depending upon the requirements and specific design of connection carrier. The provision of positional float enables the action of the alignment pins engaging with the alignment apertures to cause alignment of the connectors to allow for manufacturing or fitting tolerances of the connection carriers. Providing the individual connectors with float then enables any connector-related misalignment to be taken up and overcome.

Figure 14 illustrates an example of mounting of a connector 38 on the carrier plate 35b or on the secondary carrier plate 35c. The connector 38 is attached to the carrier plate 35b/35c via a flexible attachment means 65. The attachment means 65 allows a predetermined amount of lateral float 66 of the connector 38, and also allows a predetermined amount of angular float 67 of the connector 38. In such a manner, an amount of lateral and angular mismatch can be taken into account when the connectors are brought into connection with support connectors on the support connection carrier. It will be readily appreciated that the support may be provided with such positional freedom in addition to, or in place of, that provided to the connectors of the power generation unit.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An underwater structure comprising:

a power generation unit including a main body, a mounting portion which extends from the main body and which defines a mounting axis, a power generation unit connection carrier, and a connector mounted on the power generation unit connection carrier, the power generation unit connection carrier disposed within, and being rotatable relative to, the mounting portion; and

a support structure adapted for engagement with a bed of a body of water, and including a support housing, a support connection carrier attached to the support housing, and a support connector mounted on the support connection carrier, the support connector being adapted for releasable engagement with the connector of the power generation unit,

wherein the mounting portion defines a continuous mounting surface which extends completely around the mounting portion, and wherein the support housing defines a continuous support surface which extends completely around the support housing, the mounting surface and support surface being arranged to abut one another continuously when the power generation unit is mounted on the support structure,

wherein the power generation unit includes a connection actuator operable to rotate the power generation unit connection carrier about the mounting axis and relative to the mounting portion, and

wherein the continuous mounting surface of the mounting portion, the continuous support surface of the support housing, and the power generation unit connection carrier allow for mounting of the power generation unit on the support structure in any polar orientation about the mounting axis.

2. The structure as claimed in claim 1, wherein the connection actuator is operable to move the power generation unit connection carrier parallel to the mounting axis.

3. The structure as claimed in claim 1, wherein the connection actuator is operable to move the power generation unit connection carrier

parallel to the mounting axis, and wherein the connection actuator is provided by a single actuator.

4. The structure as claimed in claim 1, wherein the support structure includes a support connection actuator operable to move the support connection carrier parallel to the mounting axis, and to rotate the support connection carrier about the mounting axis.

5. The structure as claimed in claim 1, wherein the support connection carrier is removable from the support housing.

6. The structure as claimed in claim 1, wherein the support connection carrier is removable from the support housing, and wherein the support connection carrier includes an engagement feature.

7. The structure as claimed in claim 1, wherein the support connection carrier is removable from the support housing, and wherein the support connection carrier comprises a planar plate.

8. The structure as claimed in claim 1, wherein the power generation unit connection carrier is provided with a predetermined amount of positional float with respect to the mounting portion.

9. The structure as claimed in claim 1, wherein the connection actuator is operable to move the power generation unit connection carrier parallel to the mounting axis, and wherein the power generation unit connection carrier is provided with a predetermined amount of positional float with respect to the connection actuator.

10. The structure as claimed in claim 1, wherein the connection actuator is operable to move the power generation unit connection carrier parallel to the mounting axis, and wherein the power generation unit connection carrier includes a locating portion which is acted upon by the connection actuator, and a secondary carrier which carries the connector, the

secondary carrier being provided with a predetermined amount of positional float with respect to the locating portion.

11. The structure as claimed in claim 1, wherein the connection actuator is operable to move the power generation unit connection carrier parallel to the mounting axis, and wherein the power generation unit connection carrier includes a locating portion which is acted upon by the connection actuator, and a secondary carrier which carries the connector, the secondary carrier being provided with a predetermined amount of positional float with respect to the locating portion, and wherein the connector is provided with a predetermined amount of positional float with respect to the secondary carrier.

12. The structure as claimed in claim 1, wherein the connector is provided with a predetermined amount of positional float with respect to the power generation unit connection carrier.

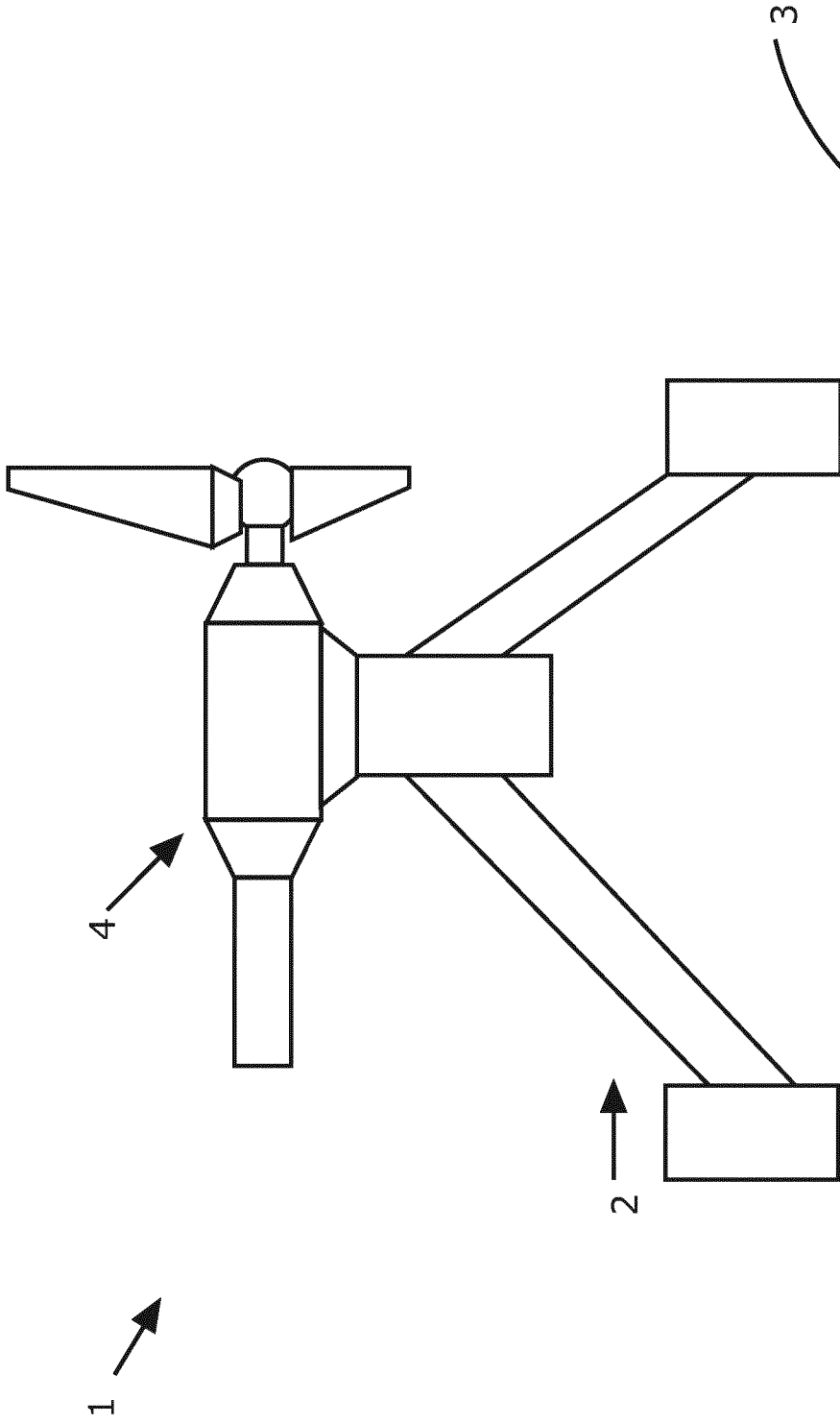


Figure 1

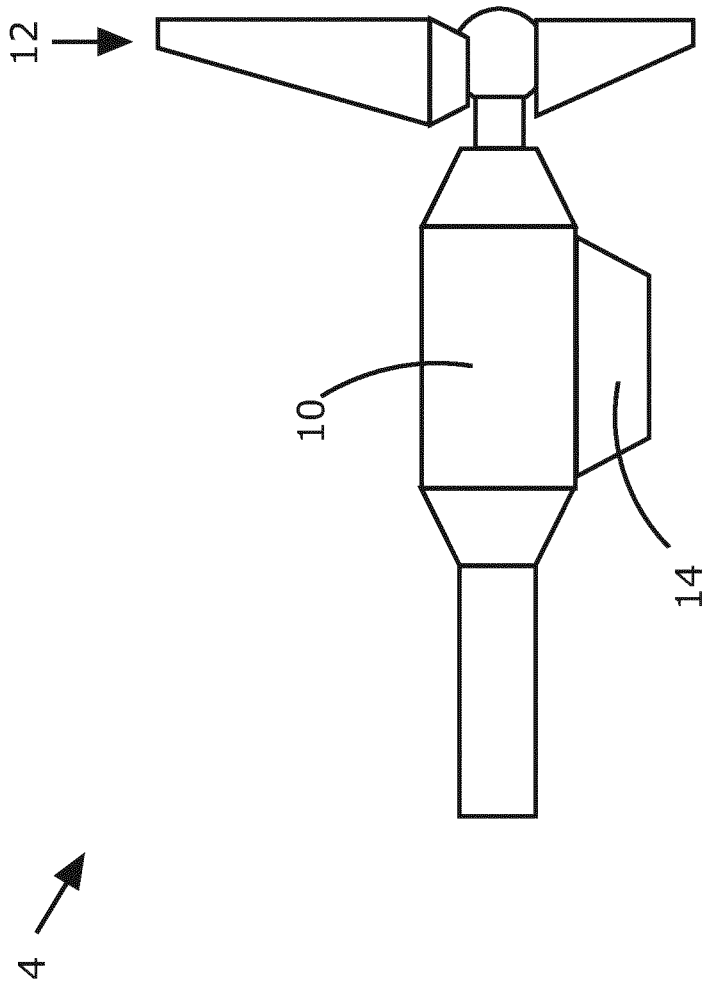


Figure 2

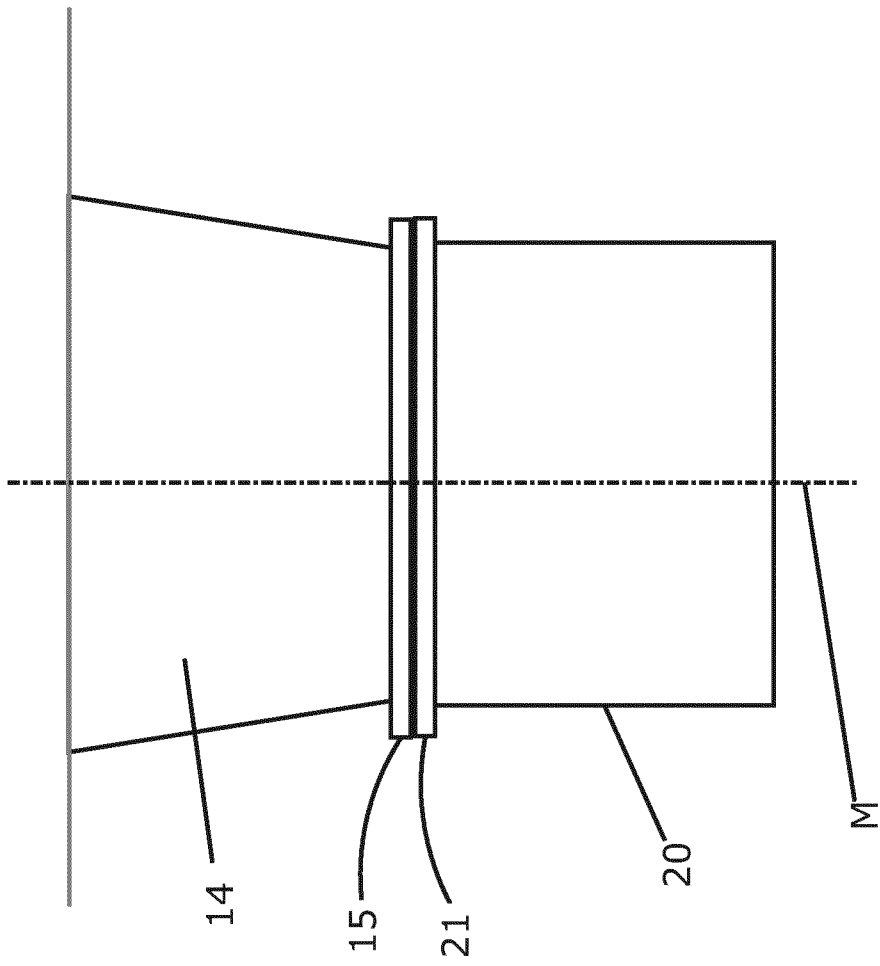


Figure 3

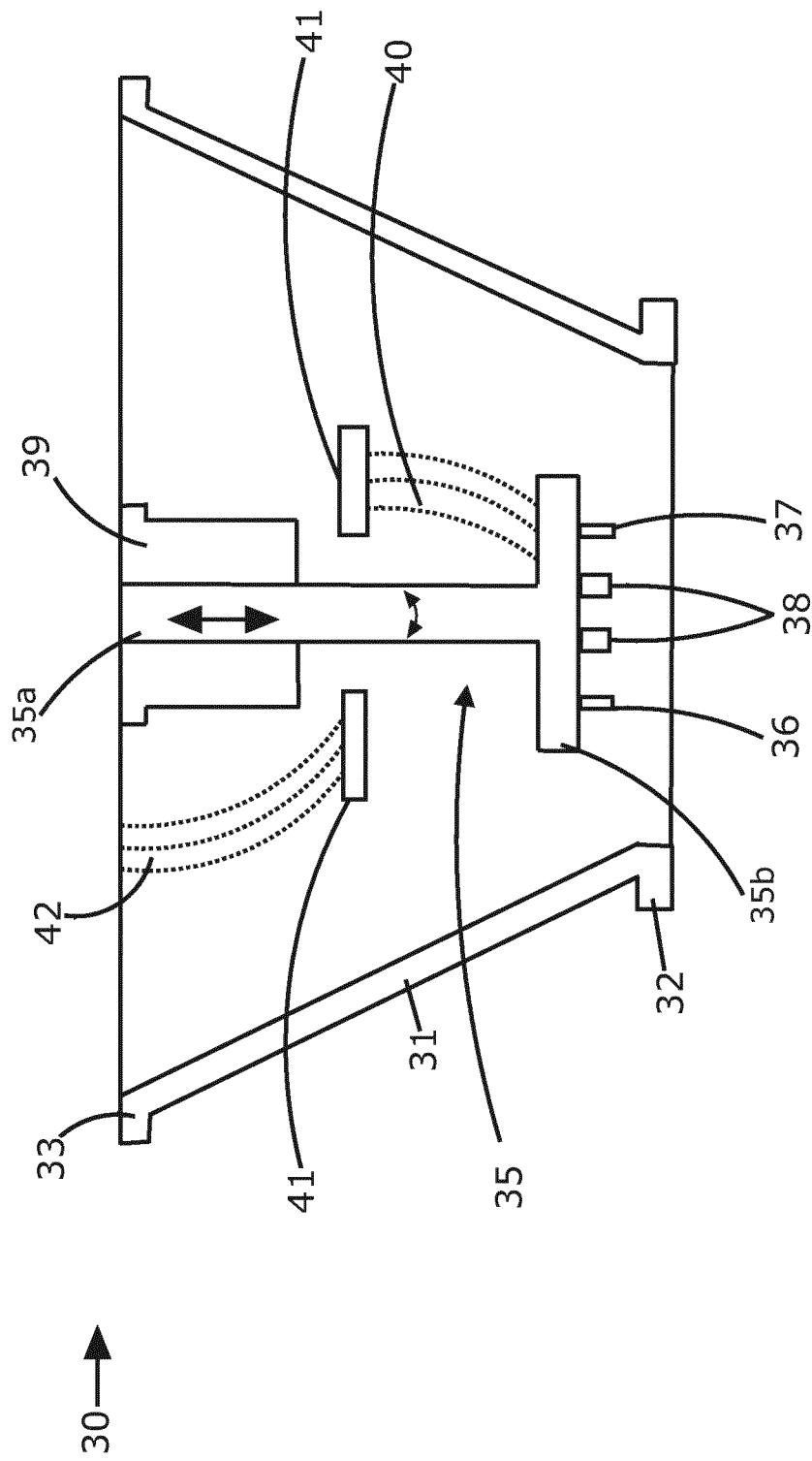


Figure 4

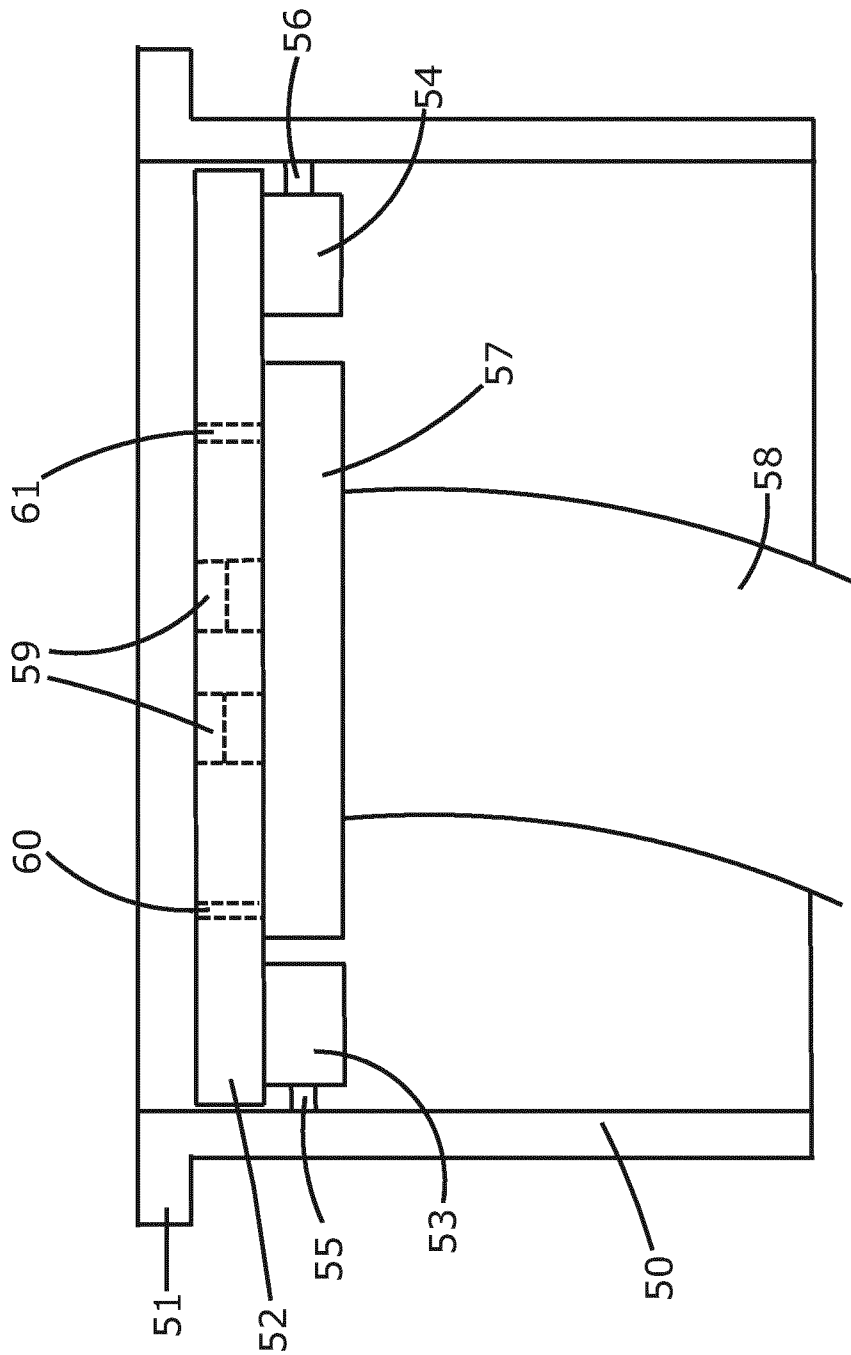


Figure 5

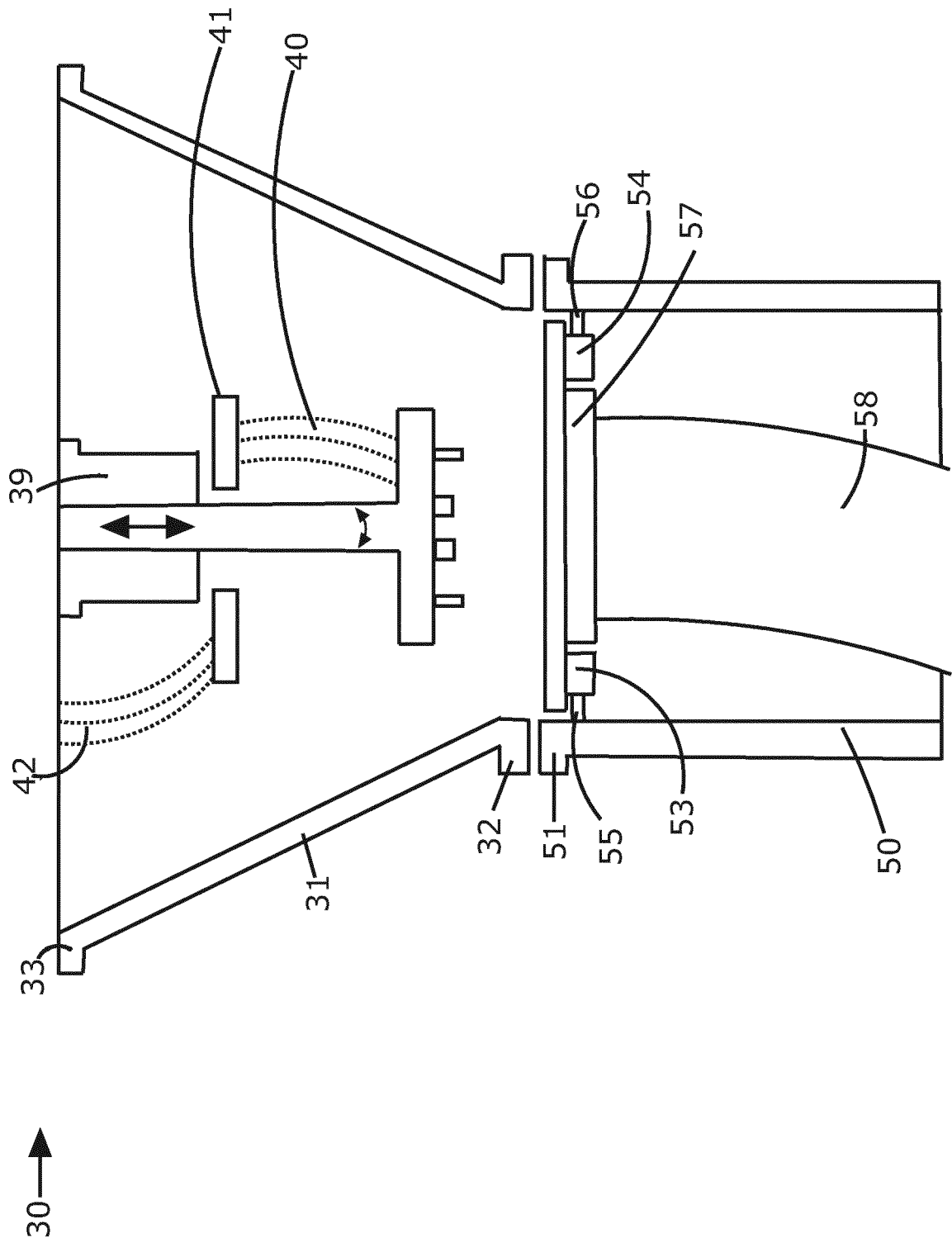


Figure 6

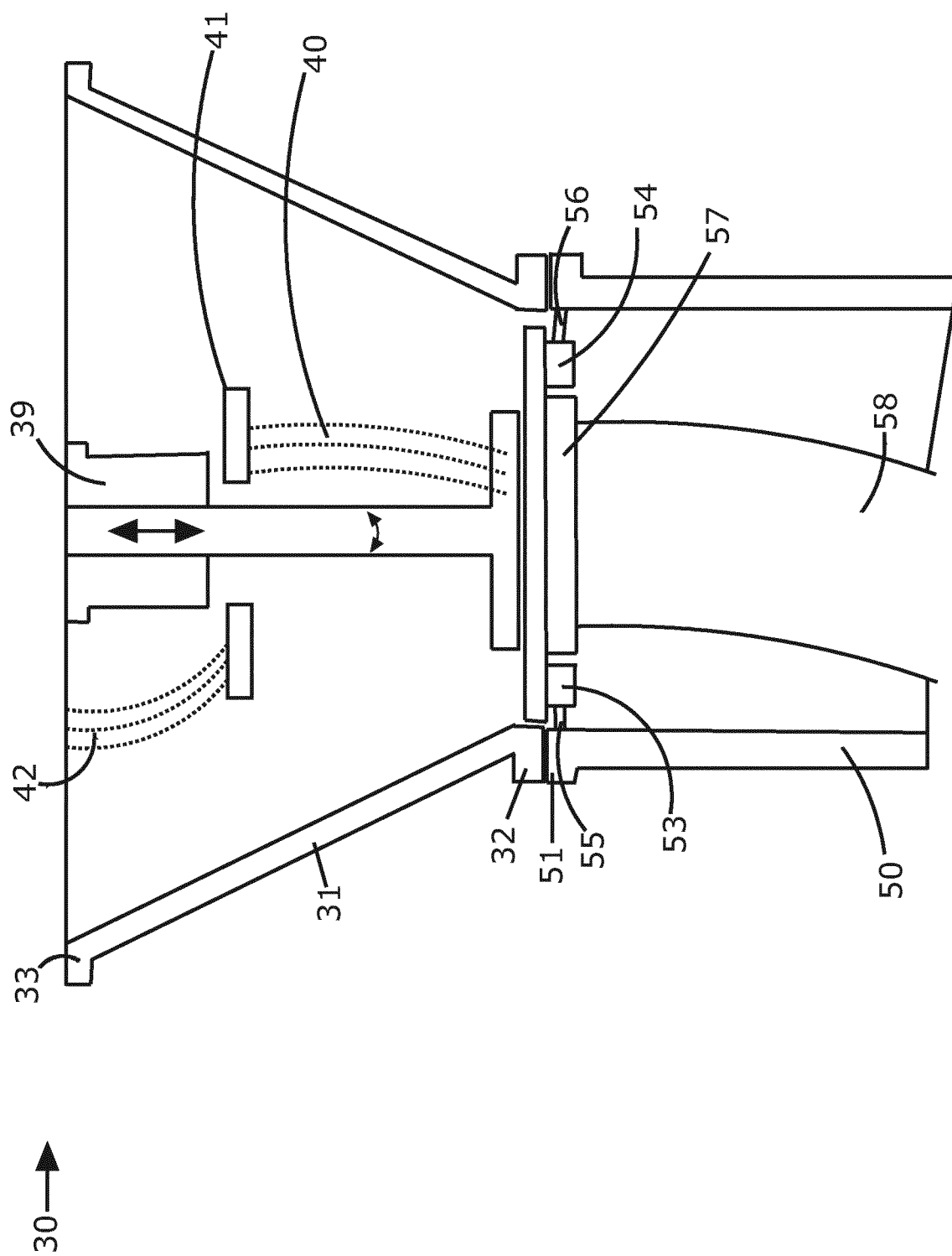


Figure 7

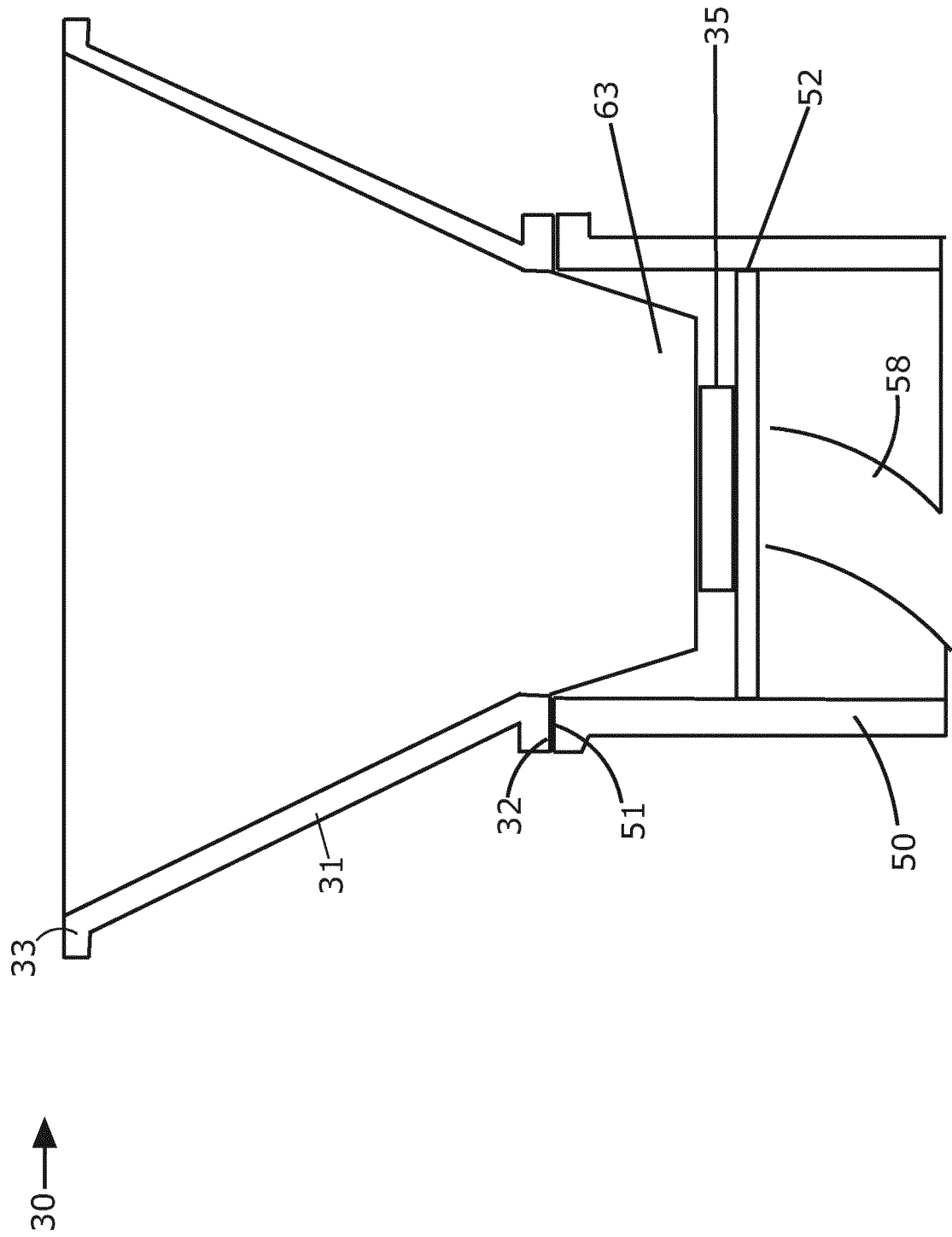


Figure 8

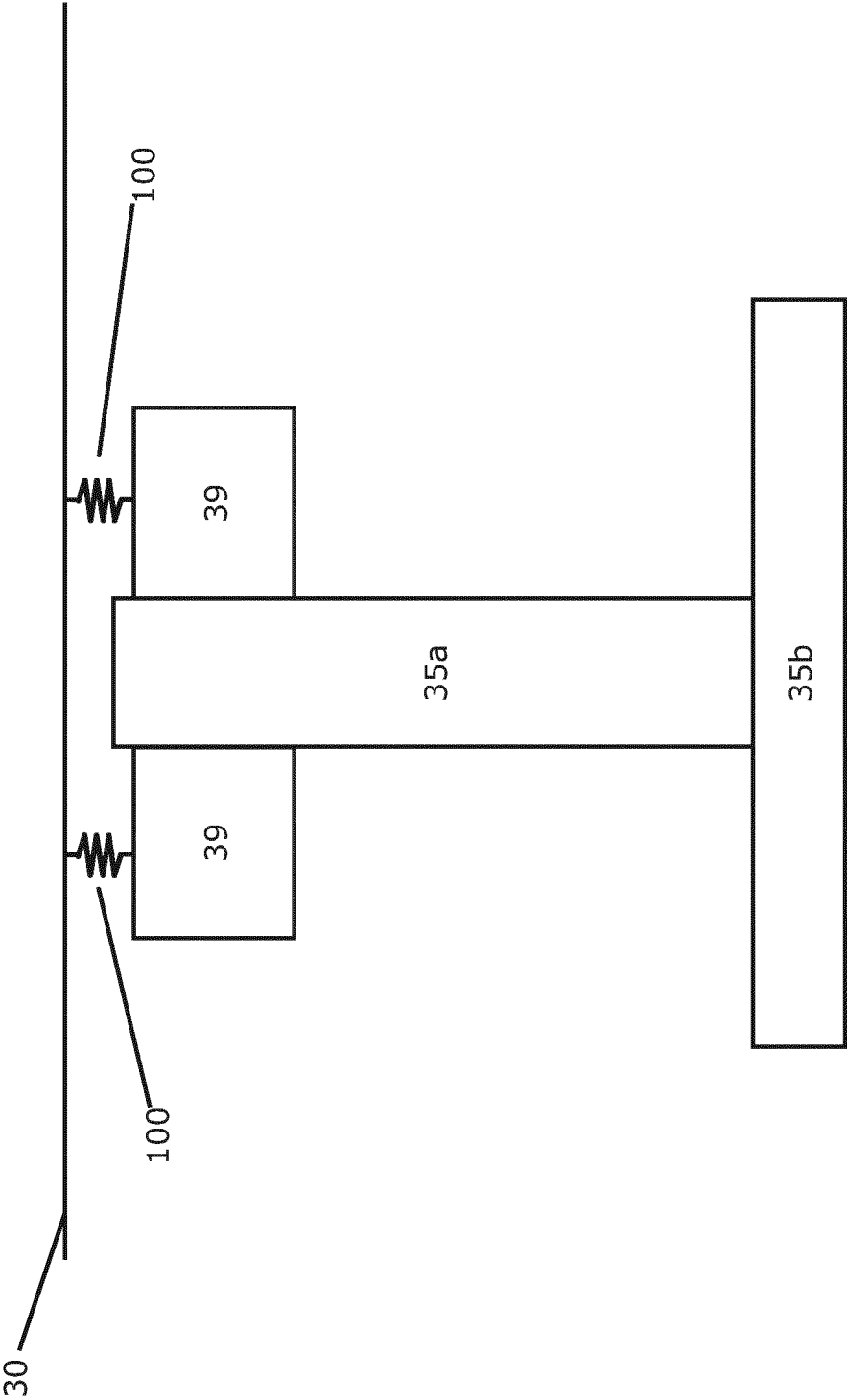


Figure 9

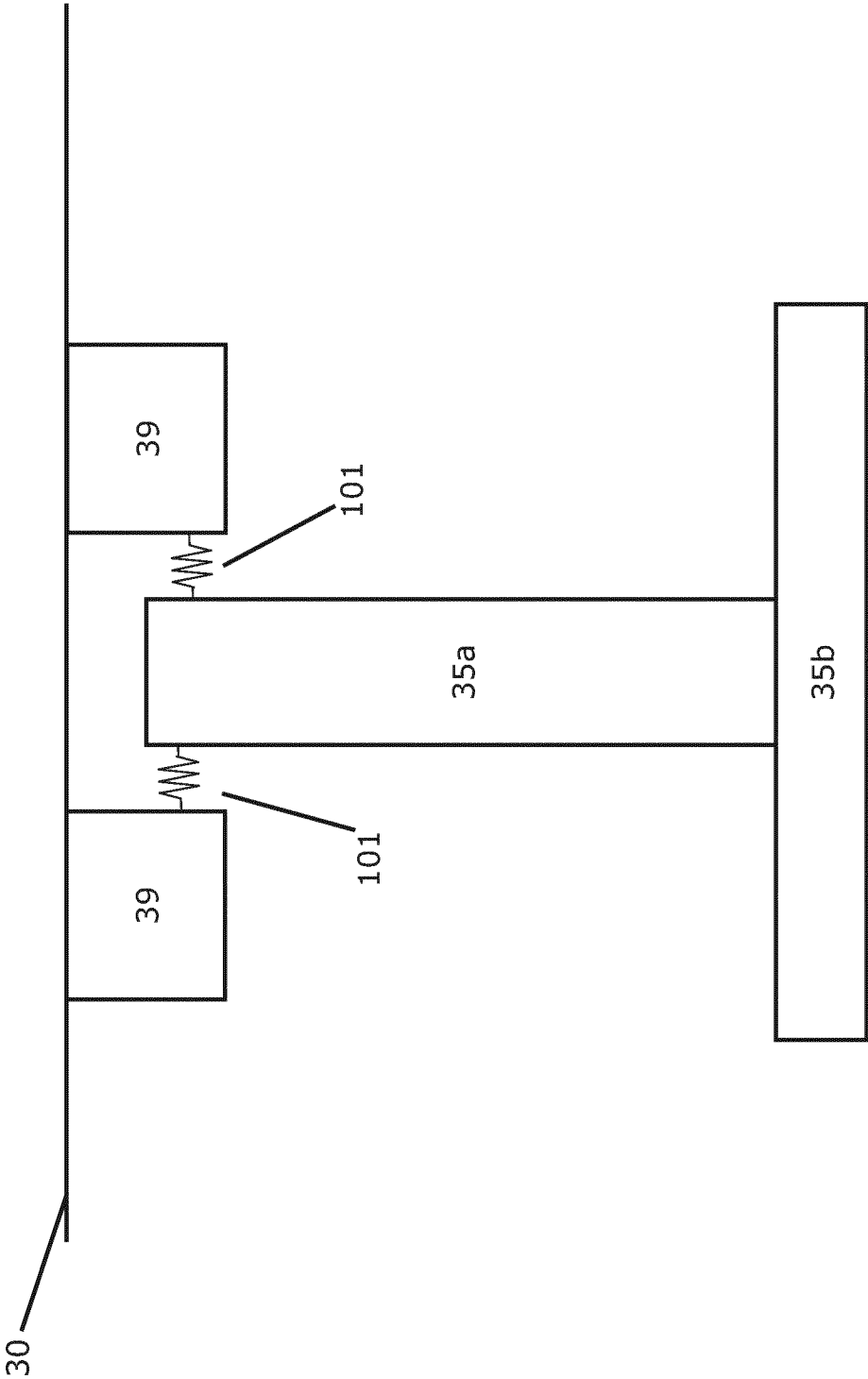


Figure 10

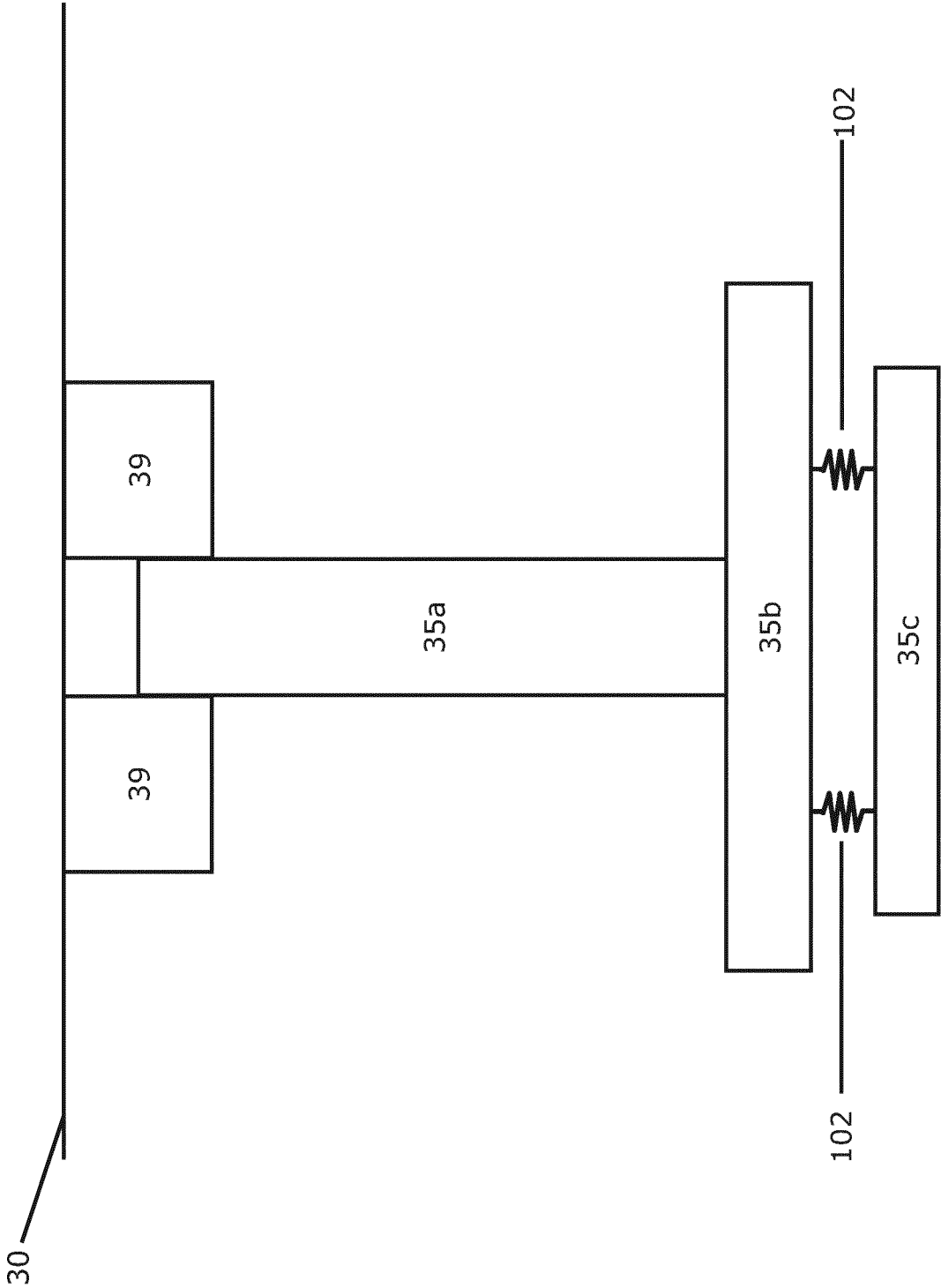
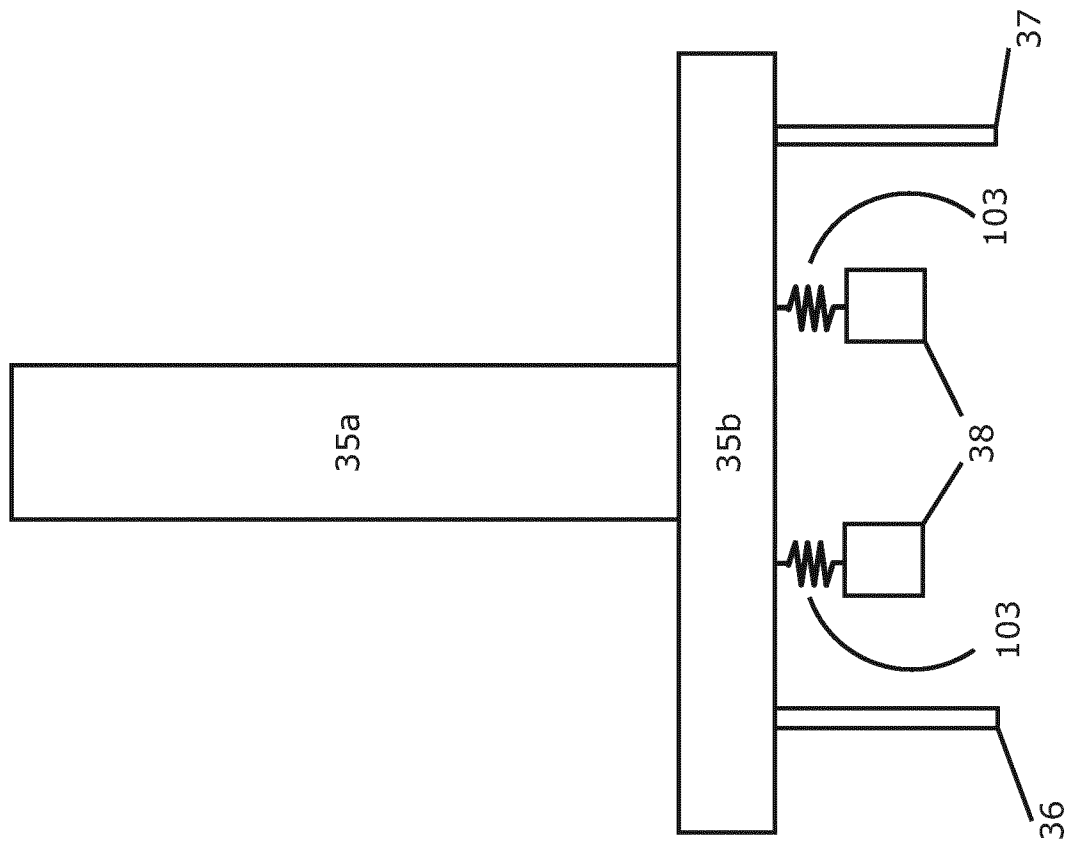


Figure 11

**Figure 12**

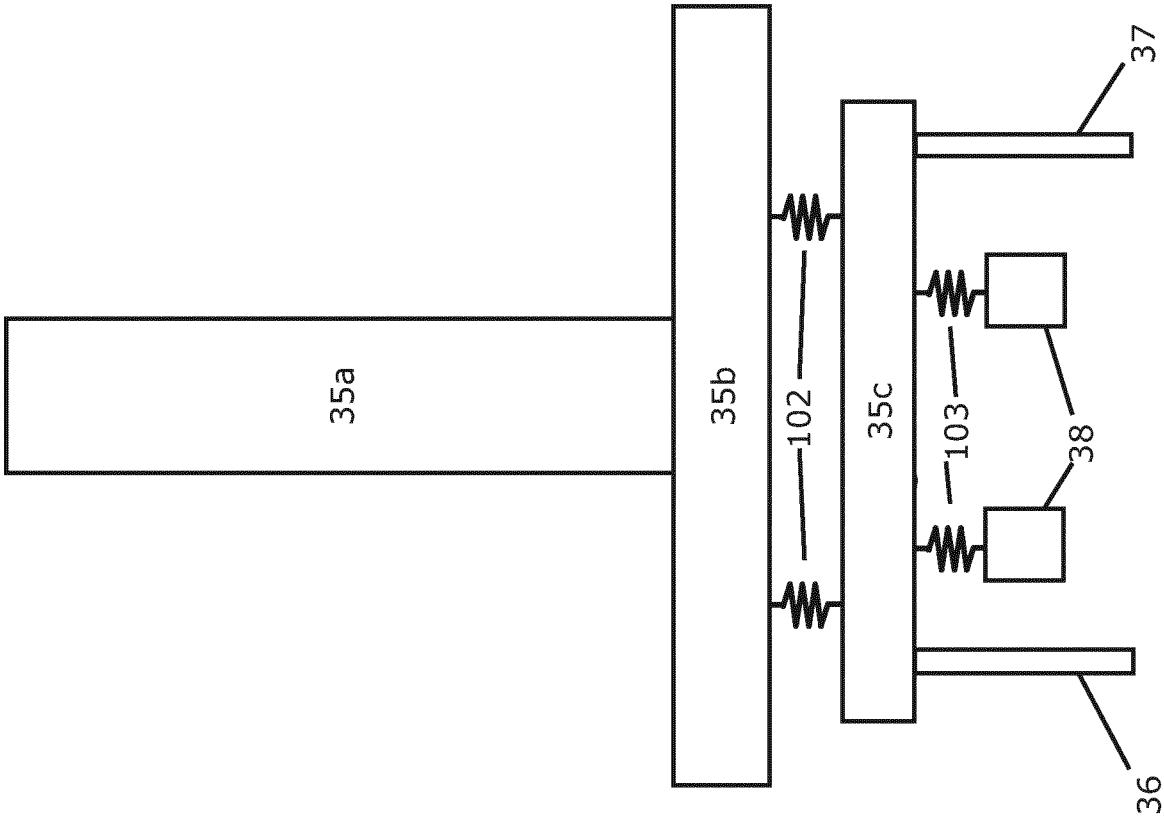
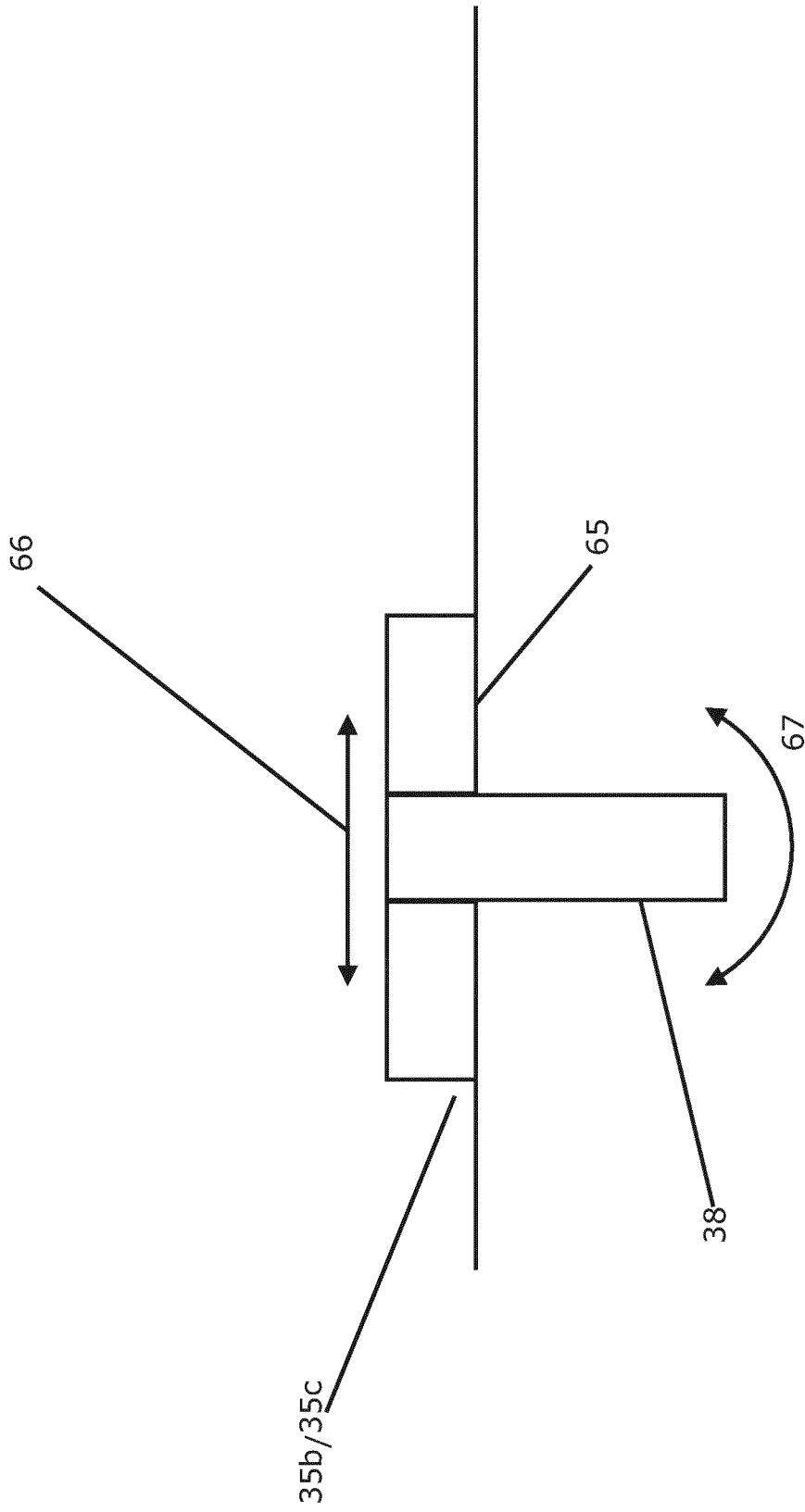


Figure 13

**Figure 14**

