



PATENT SPECIFICATION

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(54) Title: Plasma source

(72) Inventor: ALBERT ROGERS ELLINGBOE

(73) Patent Granted to: DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY, An Irish Company, Glasnevin, Dublin 9,
Ireland

Title

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Plasma Source

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to plasma sources and in particular to a plasma
5 source with reactive elements configured to be out of phase with one another so
as to provide for controlled wavelength effects within the plasma process.

Background

A plasma is an ionised gas that conducts electricity. In order to generate a
10 plasma, an electrical field is applied to a contained gas, usually contained within
a specifically designed chamber. In a vacuum chamber, where ions and
electrons have long lifetimes, it is relatively easy to do this. Radio frequency
(RF) power in the MHz range can be applied to two metal plates, or electrodes,
immersed in the chamber, thereby creating a capacitive discharge.
15 Alternatively, RF power may be deposited into a coil mounted on the chamber
walls, thereby producing an inductively coupled plasma.

In the semiconductor industry, plasmas are used to deposit materials on and
etch materials from workpieces that are typically semiconductor, dielectric and
metal surfaces. This process is utilised so as to form specific electronic
20 components on the substrate. A gas is introduced into a vacuum plasma
processing chamber where the workpiece is located. The gas by undergoing an
electrical breakdown forms a plasma in an excitation region using either an
inductive source, where the antenna carries a current adjacent to the plasma
window or a capacitive source which uses one (or more) electrode(s) with an
25 oscillating voltage. Up until the early 1990's capacitive based systems were the
preferred option but in the time period 1991 to 1995, inductive sources became
more prevalent, and they continue to dominate in metal etch or poly etch
applications. There are however problems with such inductive source plasmas
in oxide etch applications. Furthermore, designs of inductive systems for oxide

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etch that provide the necessary performance and stability for manufacturing criteria results in the cost of an inductive based system being quite high.

5 Around 1998 the manufacturers of these systems, companies such as Lam Research Corporation and TEL started to refocus on capacitive systems so as to provide a cheaper and more reliable solution to the problems of plasma etching in this field. Further developments led to the reintroduction of capacitive systems at the expense of inductive systems. It is into this environment that dual frequency capacitive systems re-emerged as the preferred choice for oxide
10 etch applications.

The reason for this trend towards dual frequency systems is that in a single frequency capacitive reactor, it is possible to increase the RF power to get higher ion bombardment energy, but the plasma density will also increase.
15 These two parameters cannot be changed independently using a single frequency generator. In order to provide an additional degree of flexibility, more than one frequency of excitation of a capacitive plasma can be provided. A typical approach, such as that described in WO03015123, employs two separate power supplies (a high frequency supply and a low frequency supply),
20 each attached to one electrode. Filtering is employed to minimize the interaction between the two signals, for example using an inductor that grounds the top electrode at a KHz signal, while appearing to be a high impedance for a MHz signal. Similarly, a capacitor is used to ground the lower electrode for high frequency signals. Alternative configurations include triode or confined
25 arrangements where the plasma is confined within a specific radial geometry and a further arrangement where both supplies are connected to the same electrode can also be employed. In all cases the substrate, and therefore necessarily the associated substrate handling components such as pins and lifters, coolants, sensors etc., are RF driven so coupling to the outside world
30 needs to be sympathetic to those environments. This results in added engineering complexity- adding inevitably to cost.

To a fair approximation, in a dual frequency capacitive system the high frequency power controls the plasma density; due to the higher currents more efficient displacement current increasing the ohmic power into the plasma and sheath heating mechanisms. The low frequency excitation influences the ion bombardment energy. Therefore, the user has some ability to separately adjust the ion bombardment energy and the plasma density, which is not very easy with a single excitation frequency. Reactors of this design have found applications in both PECVD (plasma enhanced chemical vapor deposition) and plasma etching.

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Despite these advances in reactor design a number of problems still exist. These include wavelength effects which introduce currents in the plasma parallel to the electrode surfaces, and under these conditions there is also non-uniform power deposition, which may be expected to produce non-uniform plasma density which degrades the performance of the plasma.

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There is therefore a need to provide a plasma source which is configured to overcome these and other problems.

20 **Summary**

These and other problems are addressed by a plasma source in accordance with the invention. Such a source, according to a first embodiment of the invention provides a plurality of adjacent electrodes, each electrode being out of phase relative to its adjacent neighbour.

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The electrodes can be configured in any one of a plurality of different geometrical configurations including for example planar, hemispheric, dome, convex, concave and/or undulating. The electrodes could be provided so as to be in direct contact with the generated plasma. Using an arrangement in accordance with the present invention it is possible to control the relative centre to edge power deposition by modifying electrode spacings and/or power

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distribution design and/or the inclusion of active elements such as capacitors and/or inductors.

The invention therefore provides a plasma source according to claim 1 with
5 advantageous embodiments being detailed in the dependent claims. The
invention also provides a method of operating a source in accordance with
claim 4. The invention also provides a plasma source substantially as
hereinafter described with reference to the following drawings.

10 These and other features of the invention will now be described with reference
to exemplary embodiments of the invention.

Brief Description Of The Drawings

Figure 1 is a schematic showing an illustrative embodiment of the invention.

15 Figure 2 is a modification to the system of Figure 1 showing an alternative
coupling arrangement for the LF power supply.

Figure 3 shows, in schematic form, an arrangement for using the plasma source
of the present invention with a roll of film.

20 Figure 4 is an example of an electrode arrangement that can be used in a tri-
phase powering arrangement.

Figure 5 shows a typical arrangement for the phase differences between three
supplies for use with the electrode arrangement of Figure 4.

Figure 6 shows an alternative pumping arrangement for introducing and
pumping of gas in the plasma chamber according to the present invention.

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Detailed Description of the Drawings

Figure 1 shows a schematic of operational components of a plasma source 100
in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. The source 100
30 includes a plasma excitation region 110, into which a process gas may be
introduced. This region defines the ultimate plasma volume and it is within this
region that the gas is converted into a plasma, which is then used to process

workpieces placed within the region. A plasma exciting reactive impedance element 105 is provided above the excitation region 110. This element is coupled to a high frequency (HF) generator or source 125, the application of which to the element being used to control density of the plasma. Within the present description the term high frequency is intended to encompass electromagnetic radiation provided in the range 30 kHz - 300 GHz, which sometimes would be referred to as frequency in the radio-frequency to ultra-high frequency range. A reference electrode 115 is displaced below the region 110 and is optionally coupled to a low frequency (LF) source 120, the application of which is used to control the energy of the ions striking the surface (as per present state-of-the-art). The reference electrode provides a mount for the workpiece (not shown), which is typically a semiconductor, dielectric or metal substrate. The application of suitable fields to the elements 105, 115 serves to generate and maintain the correct ratio of ions and radicals relative to neutral species in the plasma and a control of the energy of the ions incident on the workpiece; gas transport and the residence time of these particles in the excitation region play an important role. This control is required to ensure a correct methodology for the selected deposition or etch processes being employed.

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In accordance with the present invention, the reactive element is fabricated from a plurality of individual electrodes, shown in this example as four electrodes 105a, 105b, 105c, 105d, the four electrodes combining to form two sets of electrodes 105a/105c and 105b/105d. Desirably, an even number of electrodes are provided and each of the electrodes is individually coupled to the high frequency power supply which is configured to provide a differential signal to adjacent electrodes. In this manner the signal applied to a first electrode 105a is out of phase with the signal applied to its immediate neighbour 105b. Similarly electrode 105b is out of phase with electrode 105c and electrode 105c is out of phase with electrode 105d. In this way it can be considered that the high frequency generator or drive creates a differential between sets of electrodes. By the very nature of inductive coupling, wavelength effects will be present in

the electrodes and the plasma but the multiple electrodes that make up the reactive element of the present invention are advantageous in that the wavelengths effects can be controlled so as to yield the desired plasma density as opposed to the traditional single electrode problem of non-uniform effects.

5 The dimensions of the individual electrodes are chosen and optimized such that non-uniformities on the scale-length of the electrode size that occur adjacent to the reactive elements do not result in excessive plasma non-uniformity at the substrate. It will be appreciated that these dimensions may vary depending on the specific application for which the plasma source is used but desirably the
10 size of each of the individual electrodes is less than or equal to the distance between the source and the substrate or workpiece and is such as to provide uniform effects, if so desired for the particular application. A transformer 111 may optionally also be included if there is a requirement for the equalisation of currents.

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Figure 2 shows a plasma source 200 which is a modification to the arrangement of Figure 1 where both the LF and HF supplies are coupled to the reactive element. In this embodiment, the HF generator and the LF generator may be applied simultaneously or independently of one another. By coupling both
20 generators to the same reactive element plate it is possible for the lower electrode, the reference electrode, to be grounded. It is not necessary to provide a capacitor in this path to ground (i.e. the reference electrode can be directly coupled to ground), and this arrangement of enabling the reference electrode to be grounded is highly advantageous in that the engineering
25 requirements for the chamber are simplified. For example, in arrangements where a moveable bottom stage was provided it was traditionally necessary for the bellows that make up that moveable stage to define an unknown and variable impedance path; with the grounding of this lower stage, this is no longer a requirement. It will be appreciated that using techniques known in the
30 art that the effect of the LF output can be maximised in the region of interest by confining the plasma volume. This can be achieved in a variety of ways such as for example quartz confinement rings.

The LF supply can be provided in either a differential or a common mode. In a differential mode, with the low frequency signal applied to a first electrode being out of phase with that provided to its immediate neighbour, the ion energy is provided on the reactive element electrodes or on a dielectric material coupled thereto. If the LF supply is provided in a common mode, then greater ion energy is provided on the reference electrode. This driving of the plurality of electrodes making up the reactive element in a common mode configuration therefore controls the ion bombardment onto the workpiece that is mounted on the reference electrode. It will be understood that differential mode results in lower ion energy to the substrate (reference electrode) but maintains high ion energy to reactive elements for sputtering material and/or keeping electrodes clean from deposition. Similarly to that described with reference to Figure 1, a transformer 112 may optionally be provided for coupling LF either in common mode or differential mode. Furthermore, the illustrated methodology used for providing LF will be appreciated as being exemplary of the type of methodology that could be implemented as it will be appreciated that other techniques such as for example, low pass filters or LF match-box components connecting LF power to the HF lines, could be used to couple LF power into the system.

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The generators or supplies can be operated in either VHF or RF modes, with the difference being that in VHF mode the high frequency will couple inductively whereas in RF mode, it will be coupled capacitively. The ability to change frequency enables one to control the transfer from an inductive discharge to a capacitive discharge, so that one can go from high to low frequencies and vice versa without resultant non-uniform etch (or whatever surface treatment is being provided using the plasma treatment) profiles resulting on the workpiece, as would happen if a single electrode were utilised as in the prior art arrangements. Although the actual frequency at which the inductive discharge becomes predominant is not exact, it is thought that at frequencies of about 500MHz, that the plasma discharge is predominately inductively based.

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In a modification to that described heretofore, the present invention also provides for the HF source to operate in a switch mode as opposed to a sinusoidal operation. Such a switch mode operation is advantageous in that it is possible to alter the slew-rate of the switch region so as to yield an “effective frequency” which will determine amount of inductive coupling. The length of time the reactive element is left in the high voltage state would control the ion bombardment energy. Switch mode generators are very well known in the general electronics field with well defined characteristics and components. The ability to use such a switch mode generator provides for a reduction in cost of the plasma source- switch mode generators are cheaper than the equivalent sinusoidal based generator. By controlling the slew rate one is able to move easily from the RF range to Ultra High Frequencies (UHF) thereby providing the possibility to tune the process chemistry and/or the electron temperature, T_e .

Heretofore, the invention has been described with reference to a plasma source configured to operate with a planar workpiece, where the electrodes making up the reactive impedance element and the reference electrodes are substantially parallel to each other and to the workpiece. Such arrangements are advantageous and useful for application in the semiconductor environment where a planar wafer is provided for etching. However it is known that plasma sources can also be used in other applications where it is desired to process a non-planar substrate, for example a roll of film in a textile screen printing application. Figure 3 shows in schematic form how the present invention can be configured for use in such an arrangement 300 where a roll of film 305 is originally provided on a reel 310. The film is unwound from the initial reel 310 on an unwind station 315, passes through the plasma source 105 where it is processed and is re-wound on a rewind station 320. The plasma source of the present invention is suitable for processing such large dimension surfaces because the multiple electrodes that make up the reactive element enable the provision of uniform plasma over an extended area. The arrangement of the present invention allows for the provision of higher frequency sources to be used and therefore the speed of the film through the plasma source can be

increased. These higher frequencies do not lead to a detracting in the quality of the plasma as the multiple electrodes of the reactive element provide for higher density application without detracting from the uniformity of the applied plasma. It will be appreciated that such an arrangement may also be modified for
5 plasma screens, LCD displays, industrial coating on metal/glass, and the like where simultaneous processing of large areas is required. Although the LF supply shown in this embodiment is coupled to the substrate plate it will be understood that in a manner similar to that described with reference to Figure 2 that one could also have a low frequency feed through the upper reactive
10 elements.

Certain applications may require the use of a curved processing area. The present invention provides for such processing in one of two ways. In the first, in a manner similar to that described with reference to Figure 3, the invention
15 utilises a substantially planar arrangement of reactive elements to process a curved workpiece. Figure 4 shows an alternative arrangement in accordance with the teachings of the present invention, where the source could be applied to non-planar plasma volumes. In this example it may be advantageous to provide an electrode configuration that can be configured in a non-planar
20 configuration, and this example uses a hexagonal close pack configuration 400 including a plurality of individual hexagonally dimensioned electrodes 405. In this example, a 3 phase drive mechanism is used as opposed to the direct push pull operation of the configuration of Figures 1 to 3, and each of the individual electrodes is coupled to a respective one of the three sources (identified by the
25 labelling 1, 2, 3 respectively). As with the embodiment of the previous Figures, no two adjacent electrodes are in phase with one another- see Figure 5 for an example of the output configuration for each of the sources. To assist in current imbalance a tri-filar transformer may be used which is advantageous in that it allows for the provision of a low voltage above the substrate and an equalisation
30 of the currents. In other circumstance, it will be appreciated that certain applications where it is useful to drive a net current and therefore a net voltage into the reference electrode may find it advantageous to have a current

imbalance. It will be further appreciated that the examples of two and three phase sources are exemplary of the type of frequency generator that could be used with the reactive elements of the present invention and that certain other applications may require sources capable of providing a higher order phase supply.

Although the plasma source of the present invention may be used with known gas distribution feeds such as a shower effect electrode with radial gas flow and pumping on the perimeter of the plasma volume, the present invention also provides in certain embodiments sources that utilise a gas distribution feed that enables the removal of gas away from the lower reference electrode. Figure 6 shows a portion of such a source where two adjacent electrodes that make up the reactive element are illustrated. The electrodes are mounted below a gas feed chamber 600, and the gas that is within this chamber may be introduced firstly to a feed chamber 630 through an entrance conduit 620 and then into the plasma excitation region 110 through a plurality of apertures 605 provided in the electrodes of the type that will be known to those skilled in the art from existing showerhead technology. Once the gas has entered into the excitation region 110 it then flows towards a ground plate 610 providing a gas exit 615 above the electrodes into a pumping plenum (not shown). The pumping plenum is electrically isolated from the plasma volume thereby obviating the possibility of the plasma reforming in this region. This pumping of the gas away from the excitation region obviates the possibility of the etchant gas interacting with the substrate being treated on the reference electrode. It may be necessary in this arrangement where the gas is moved around the electrodes to coat the electrodes with a dielectric material 625 such as silicon dioxide or the like. Such a dielectric coating is shown as defining the exit path for the gas, but the exact extent of the coating could vary depending on application.

It will be appreciated that what has been described herein is a new plasma source which provides for centre-to-edge power deposition by electrode spacing and/or power distribution design and/or active elements such as capacitors

and/or inductors so as to provide for a controlled uniformity profile plasma. In certain applications this can require a difference in the profile of the plasma at certain regions of applications, such that specific selected areas are regions of greater plasma deposition as opposed to other. Other applications may require the same profile across the substrate. Although, the electrodes have been described with regard to exemplary embodiments it will be appreciated that the configuration chosen for a specific application can be such so as to have the electrodes arranged on any arbitrary – shape plasma facing element including for example flat, hemispheric, dome, convex, concave, undulating. The electrodes could be in direct contact with the plasma or could alternatively interact with the plasma through a dielectric window provided from materials such as SiN, AlN, SiC, SiO₂, Si etc.. The arrangement of the present invention provides a number of distinct advantages over the prior art including:

1. Compatible with HF + LF independent control of ion energy (E_{ion}) and ion flux (Γ_{ion}).
2. Controllable T_e is a possibility by allowing for a HF scanning from RF to UHF.
3. As the individual electrodes making up the reactive element may be dimensioned small, and the dimensions of these can define the plasma volume it is possible to provide a plasma source having a small plasma volume. Any individual non-uniform power coupling from an individual electrode or pair of electrodes does not result in non-uniform plasma density at a large enough distance from the electrodes. Specifically, it will be understood that as each of the individual elements are reduced in size that the distance required within the plasma volume for the overall generated plasma to be equalised is reduced.
4. The source may be used with substrates of many different dimensions as it may be configured to provide minimal centre-to-edge power deposition effects over an extended area and as such is suitable for large substrates (300mm wafers, FPD, textiles and the like).

5. Similarly, the possibility of using high frequency sources is advantageous as one can choose the operational frequency to match the process required, and it is possible to go to higher frequencies than heretofore achievable without introducing plasma non-uniformity.
- 5 6. The source may be used with gas distribution feeds similar to present generation systems or alternatively may be used with a distribution feed that minimizes any interaction between etchant or deposition by-product gas and the substrate material.
- 10 7. Reduced system cost as lower electrode can be grounded. This is particularly advantageous in that there is no longer a requirement to provide a high frequency lower plate, which had the requirement that ancillary equipment needed to be isolated from ground, whereas the configuration of the invention enables the ancillary equipment to be grounded.
- 15 8. Compatible with advanced HF power supply technology and direct – drive switch-mode power, which can provide the necessary frequencies at a lower cost. No HF through lower electrode, so variable gap easier to engineer. As the HF component is applied to the reactive elements solely it is possible to minimize the HF return through chamber body, so
20 unconfined plasma should be less likely to occur. Furthermore, there is no longer the requirement to stringently provide for such HF paths in other components of the chamber.

It will be understood that the invention provides for plurality of physically
25 individually distinct reactive elements with adjacent electrodes being coupled out of phase with one another. It will be appreciated that if two adjacent electrodes are couple in phase with one another that they in effect resemble a physically larger single electrode, and that such a single larger electrode will be out of phase with its immediate neighbours.

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The reactive elements of the invention may be provided in any configuration or array structure, for example a 2-D array or linear structure which may, it will be

appreciated, be scaled in dimension depending on the application required. It will be appreciated that the configuration of the present invention provides for such scaling while maintaining compatibility with VHF/UHF operation requirements and performance levels.

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Therefore although the invention has been described with reference to exemplary illustrative embodiments it will be appreciated that specific components or configurations described with reference to one figure may equally be used where appropriate with the configuration of another figure. Any description of these examples of the implementation of the invention are not intended to limit the invention in any way as modifications or alterations can and may be made without departing from the spirit or scope of the invention. It will be understood that the invention is not to be limited in any way except as may be deemed necessary in the light of the appended claims.

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Similarly, the words comprises/comprising when used in this specification are to specify the presence of stated features, integers, steps or components but does not preclude the presence or addition of one or more other features, integers, steps, components or groups thereof.

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Claims

- 5 1. A plasma source comprising a plasma excitation region and a plasma
exciting reactive impedance element, the source being characterised in
that the plasma exciting reactive impedance element includes a plurality
of electrodes, the electrodes being coupled to a high frequency
generator and wherein, in use, on coupling the electrodes to the
10 generator, adjacent electrodes of the plurality of electrodes are out of
phase with one another.
2. The source as claimed in claim 1 further including a reference electrode,
the reference electrode being provided below the plasma excitation
region.
- 15 3. The source as claimed in claim 1 wherein the electrodes of the reactive
impedance element are additionally coupled to a low frequency
generator.
4. A method of operating a source as claimed in any preceding claim, the
method including the steps of tuning the high frequency generator to
20 optimise a specific process output, the tuning enabling a modification of
the properties of the plasma generated until the specific desired process
output is realised.
5. A plasma source substantially as hereinbefore described with reference
to the accompanying drawings.

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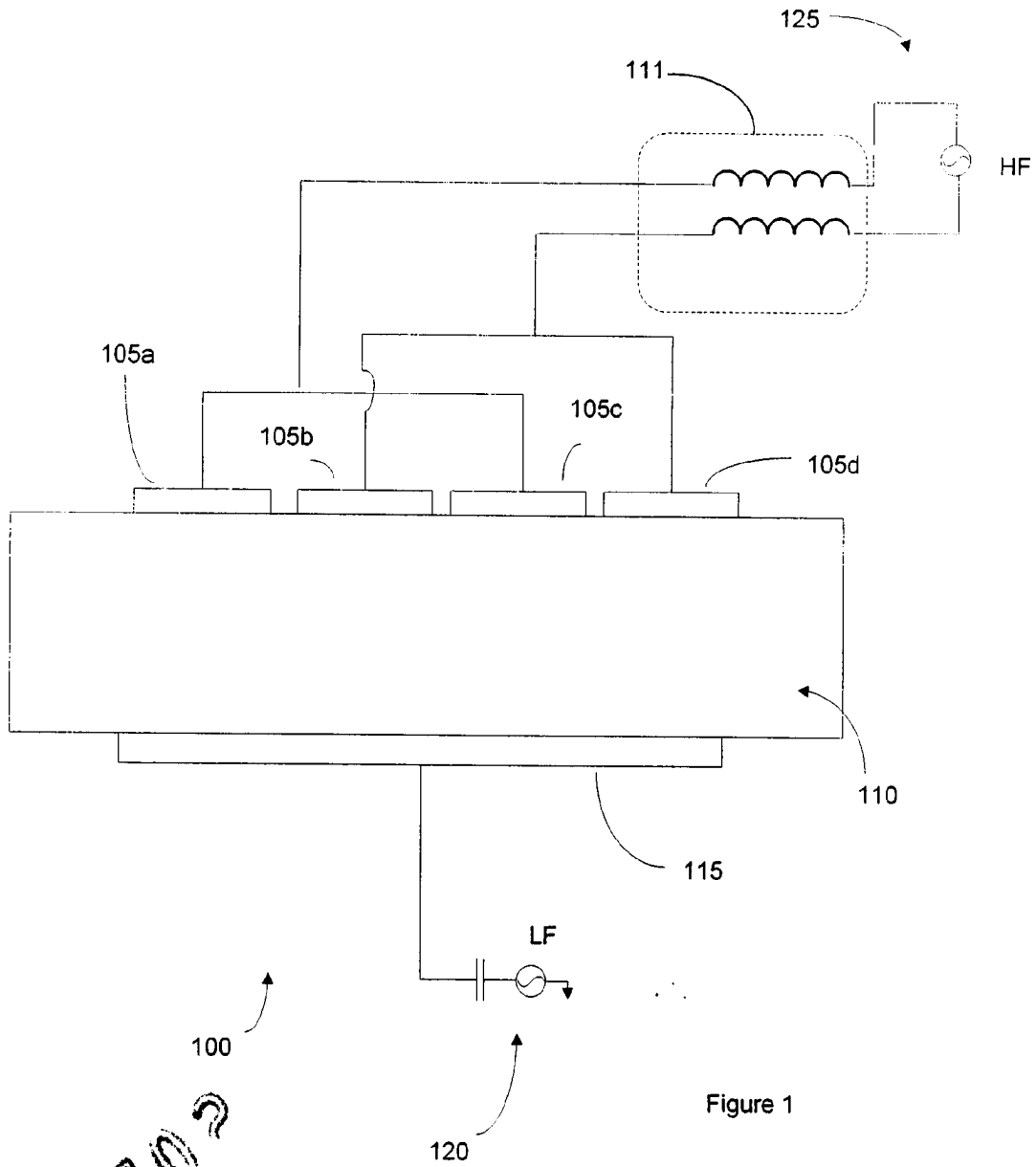


Figure 1

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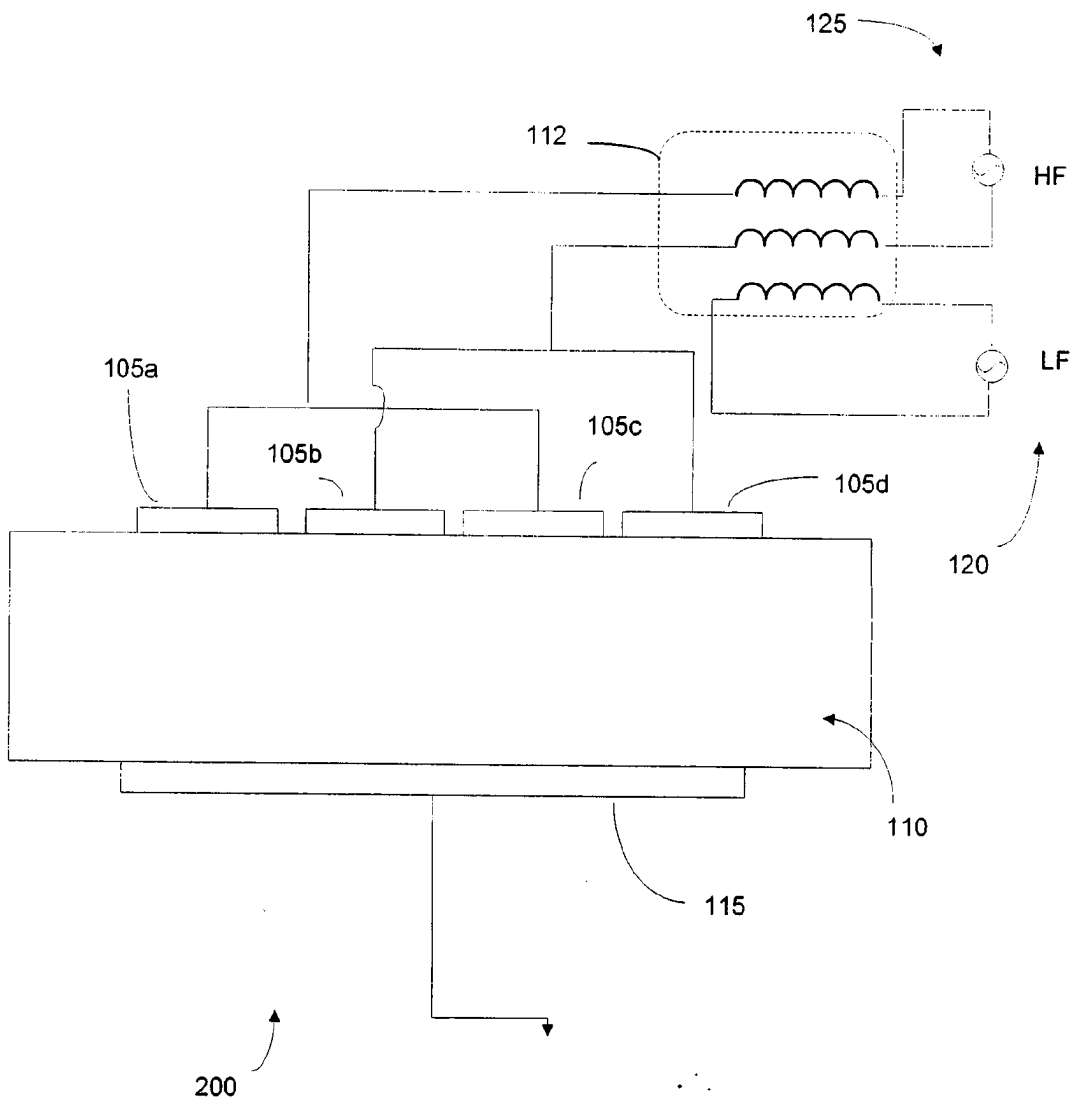


Figure 2

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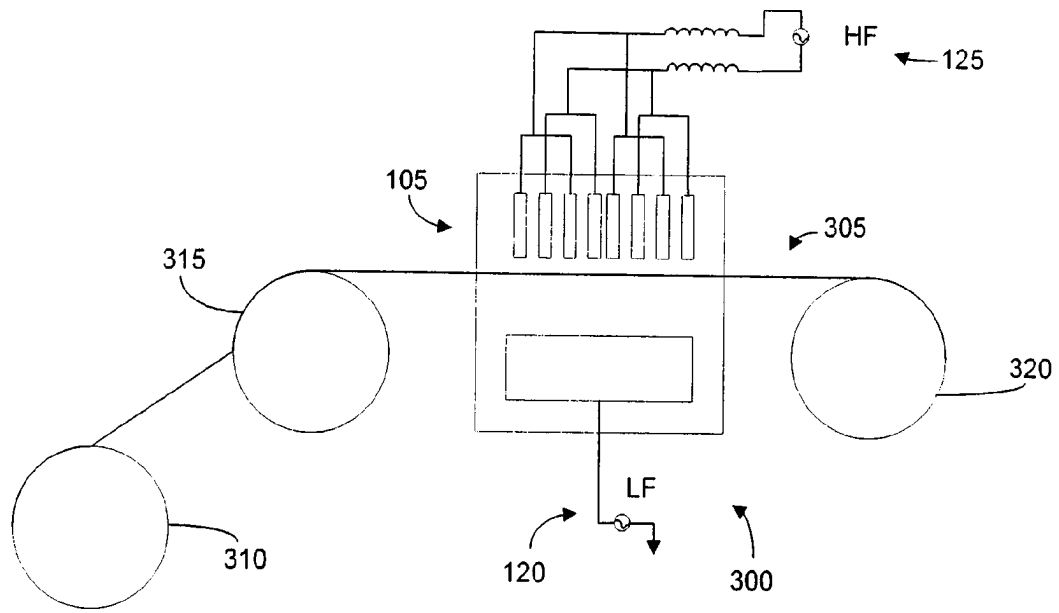


Figure 3

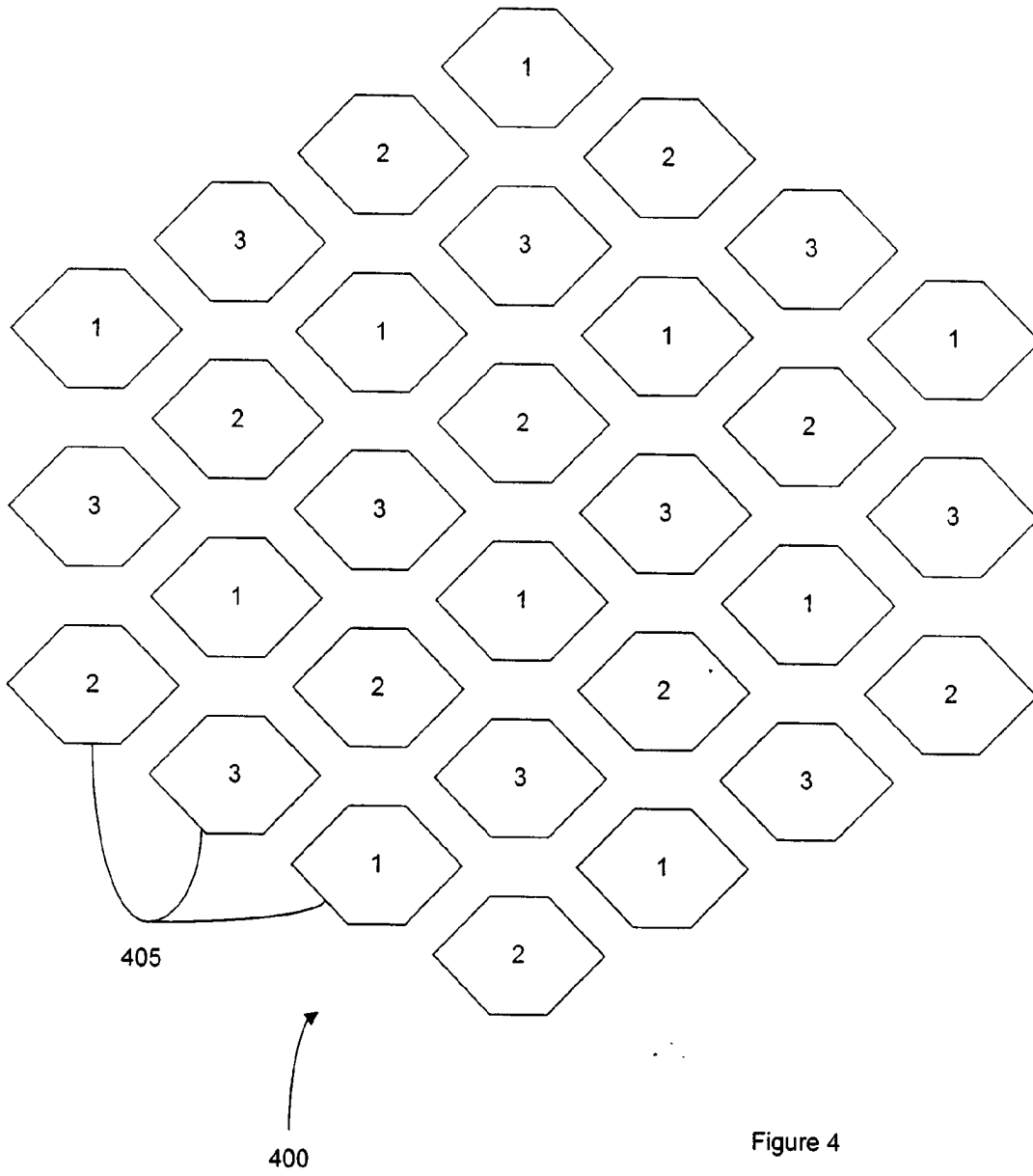


Figure 4

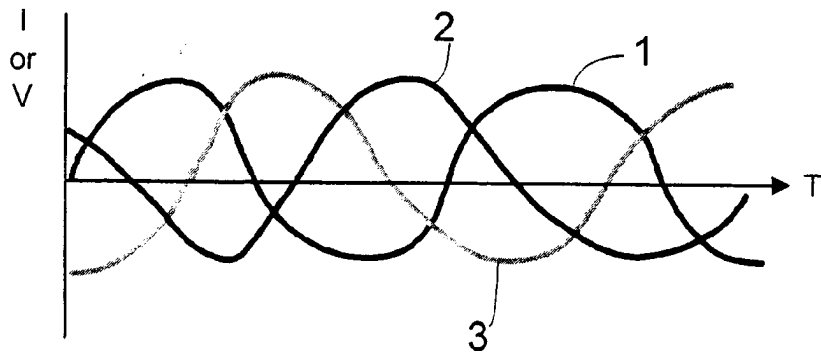
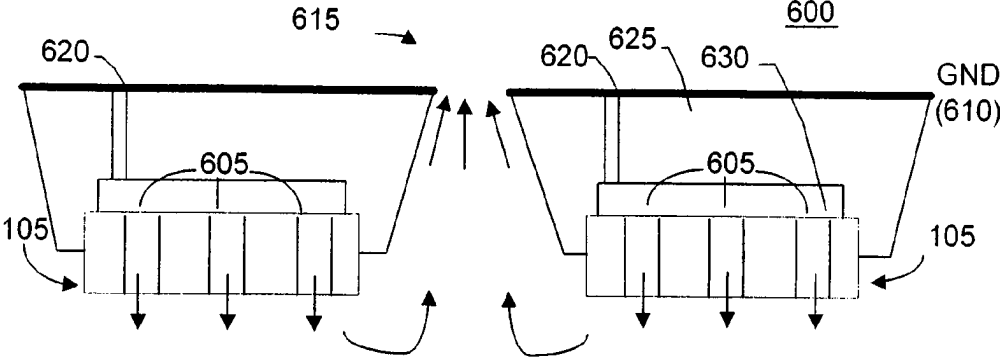


Figure 5

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Figure 6

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