



US008758253B2

(12) **United States Patent**
Sano et al.

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 8,758,253 B2**
 (45) **Date of Patent:** **Jun. 24, 2014**

(54) **ULTRASONIC PROBE AND ULTRASONIC
 DIAGNOSTIC APPARATUS USING THE
 SAME**

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(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this
 patent is extended or adjusted under 35
 U.S.C. 154(b) by 595 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **12/513,858**

(22) PCT Filed: **Nov. 6, 2007**

(86) PCT No.: **PCT/JP2007/071516**

§ 371 (c)(1),
 (2), (4) Date: **May 7, 2009**

(87) PCT Pub. No.: **WO2008/056643**

PCT Pub. Date: **May 15, 2008**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2010/0036257 A1 Feb. 11, 2010

(30) **Foreign Application Priority Data**

Nov. 8, 2006 (JP) 2006-302627

(51) **Int. Cl.**

A61B 8/14 (2006.01)

A61B 8/00 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC **A61B 8/4281** (2013.01)

USPC **600/459; 73/570; 310/322**

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

USPC 600/459; 367/153, 181, 188; 73/632,

73/633, 861.18, 861.23–861.26

See application file for complete search history.

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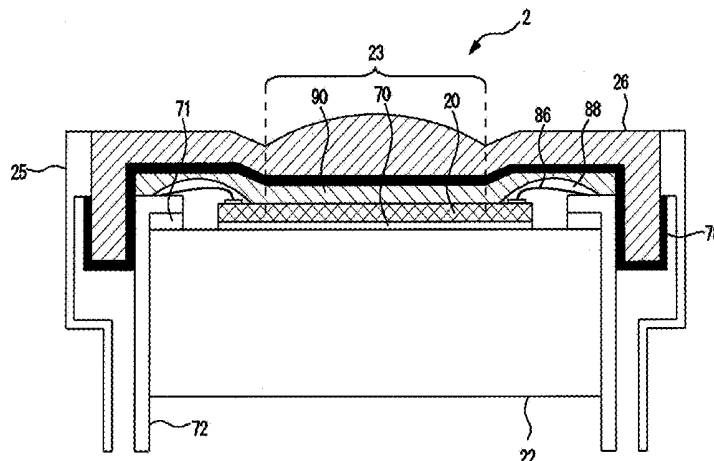
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

An ultrasonic probe is disclosed which includes a cMUT chip
 having a plurality of vibration elements whose electromechanical coupling coefficient or sensitivity is changed according to a bias voltage and transmitting and receiving ultrasonic waves, an acoustic lens arranged above the cMUT chip, and a backing layer arranged below the cMUT chip. An electric leakage preventing unit is provided at the ultrasonic wave transmission/reception surface side of the acoustic lens or between the acoustic lens and the cMUT chip. The electric leakage preventing unit can be, for example, an insulating layer such as a ground layer. Such a structure makes it possible to provide an ultrasonic probe capable of preventing electric leakage from the ultrasonic probe to an object to be examined so as to improve the electric safety and an ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus using the probe.

6 Claims, 15 Drawing Sheets



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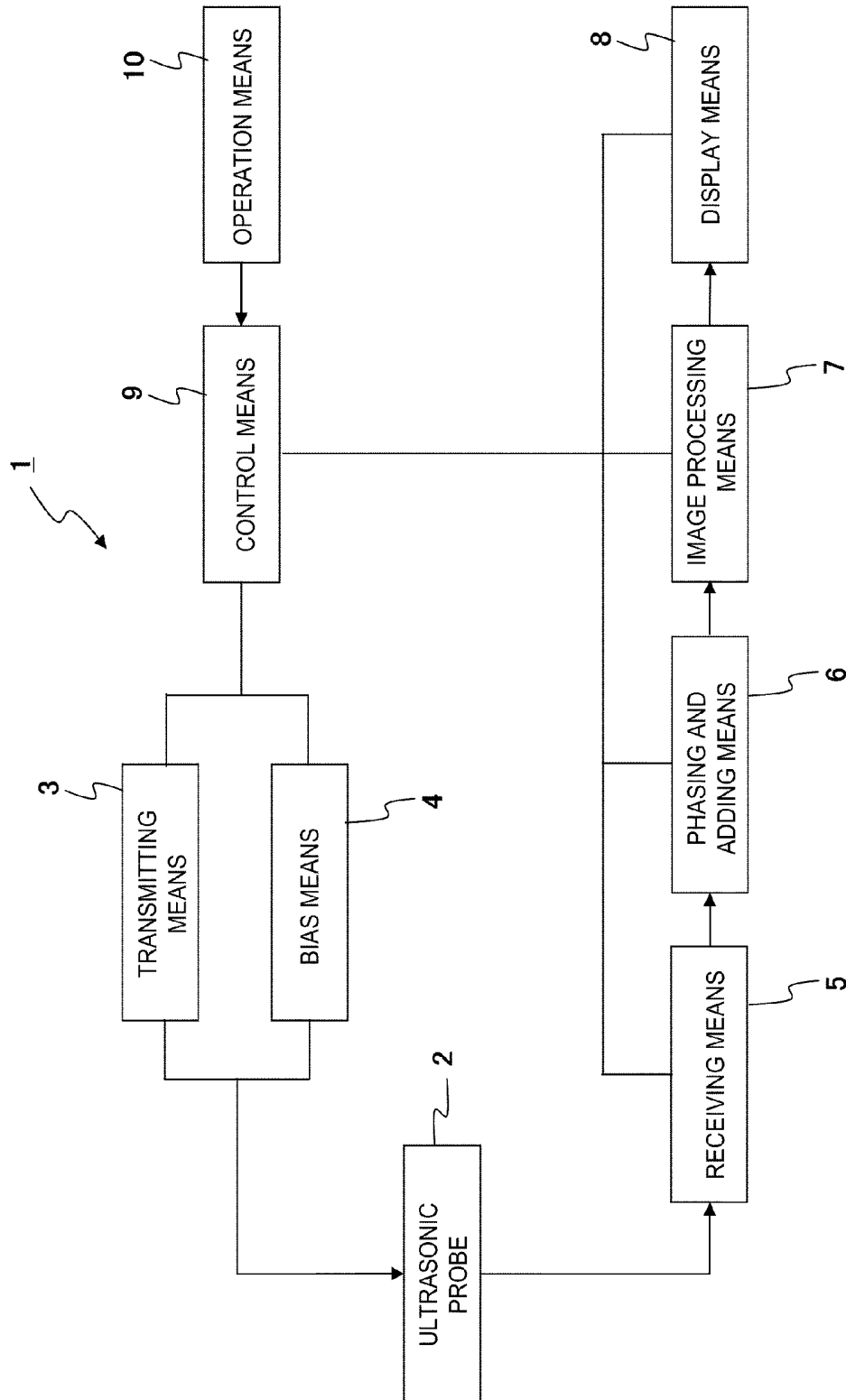
FIG. 1

FIG. 2

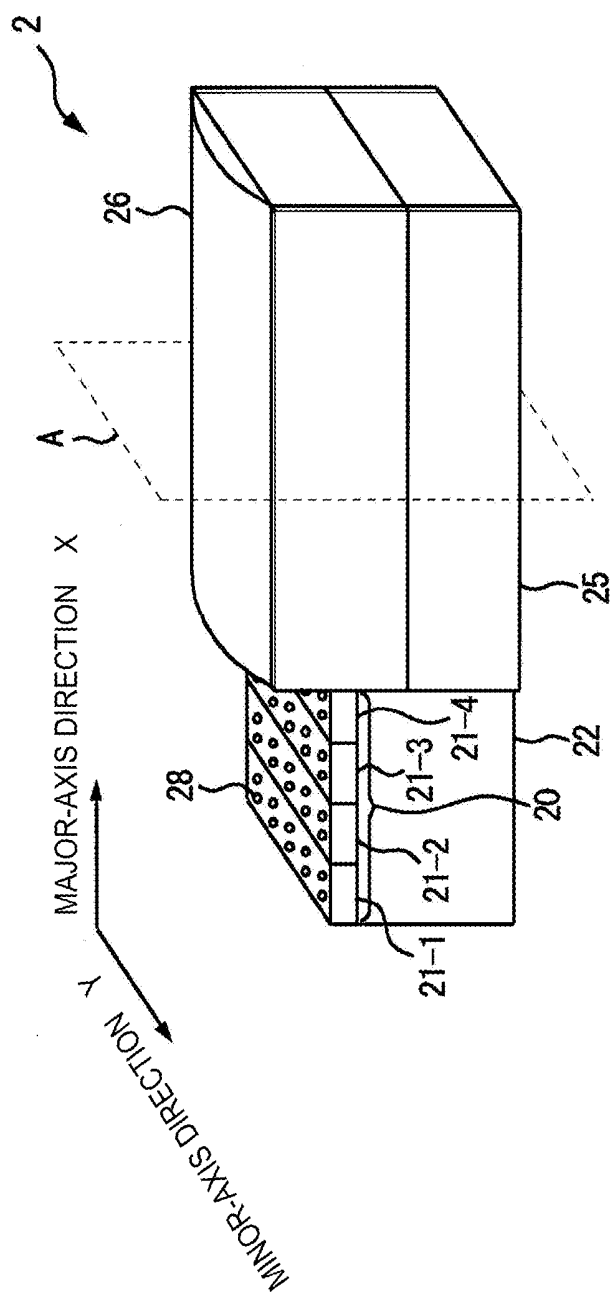


FIG. 3

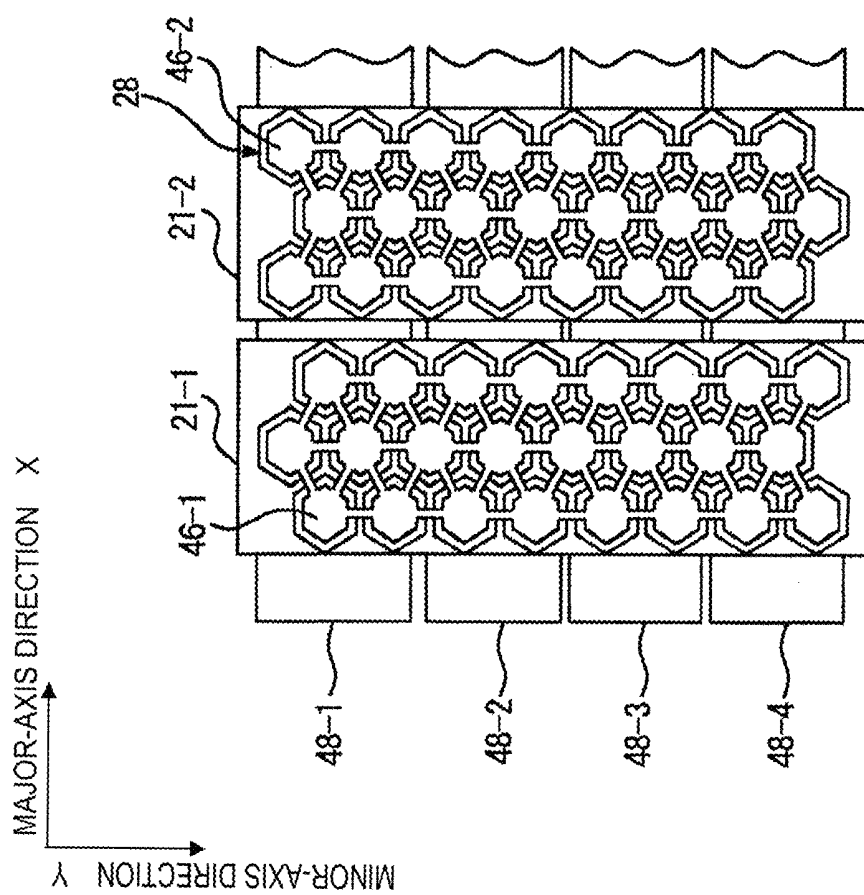


FIG. 4

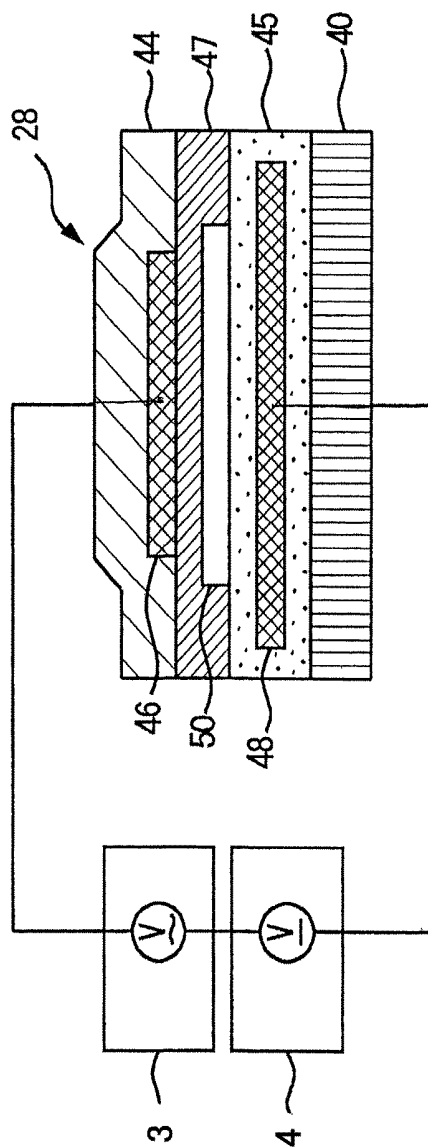


FIG. 5

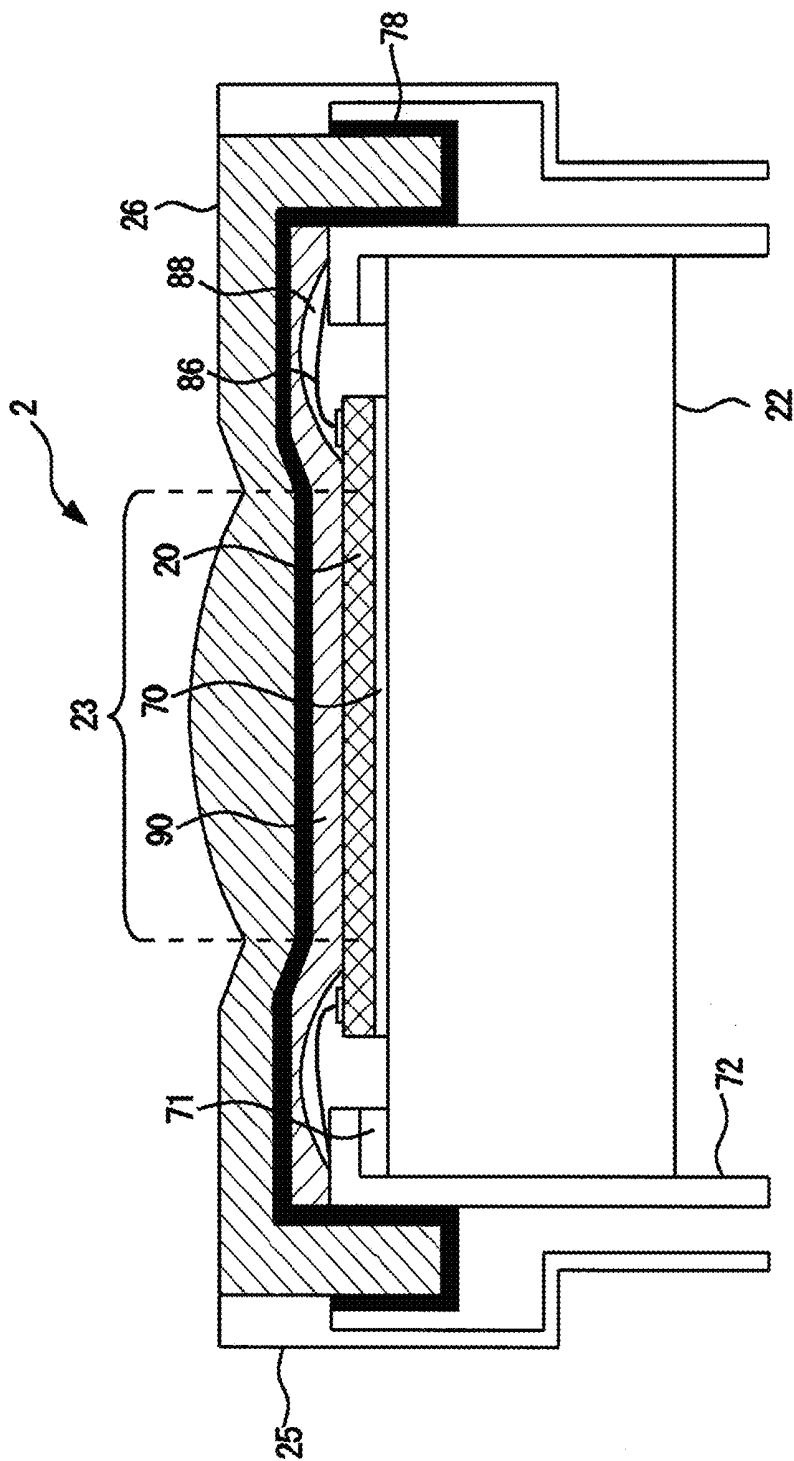


FIG. 6

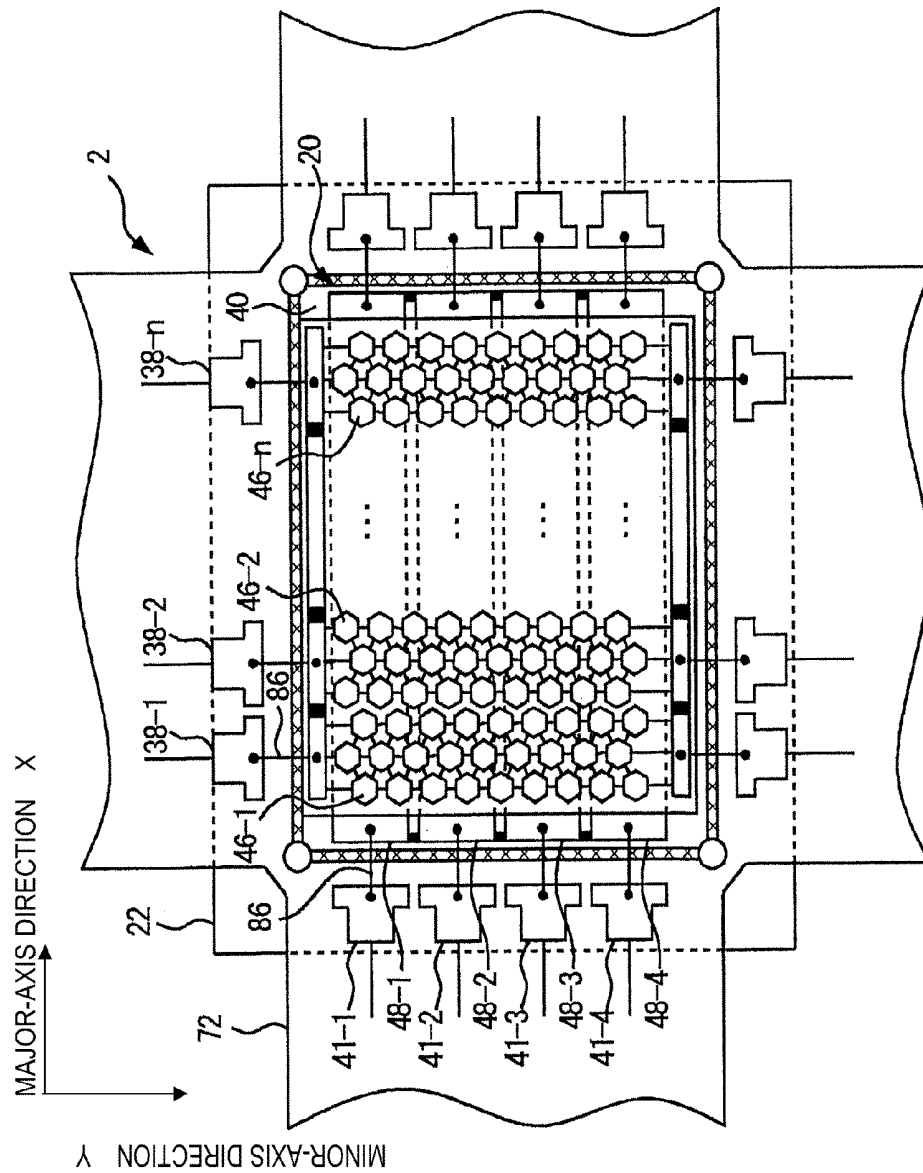
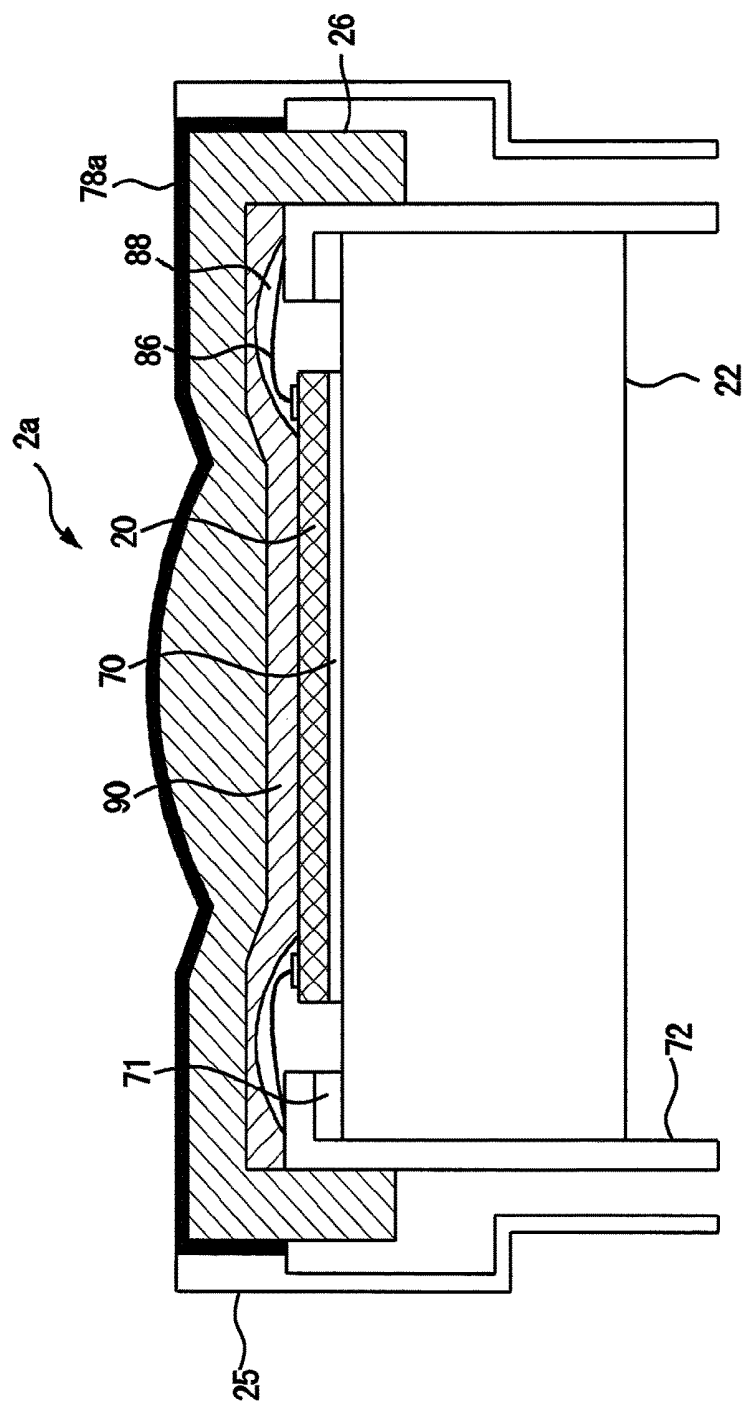
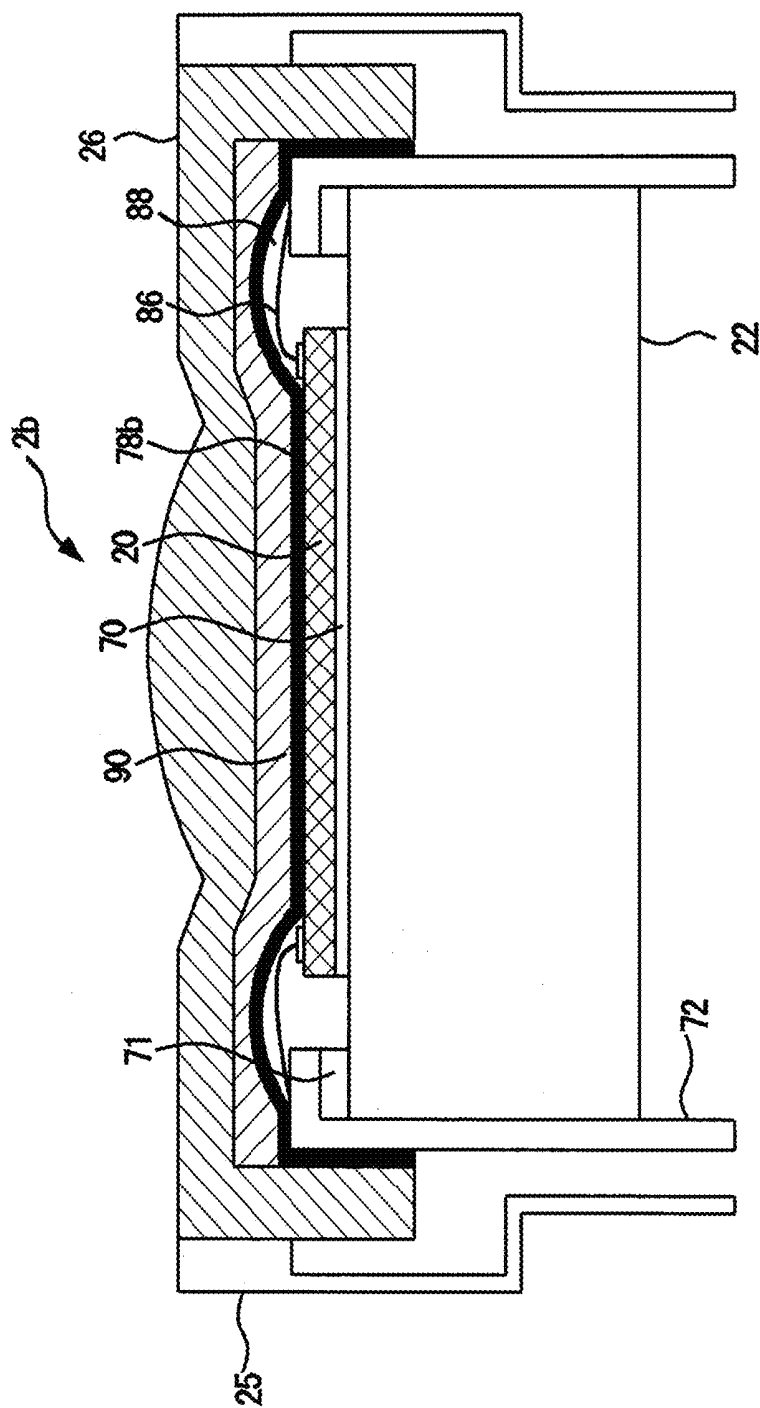


FIG. 7



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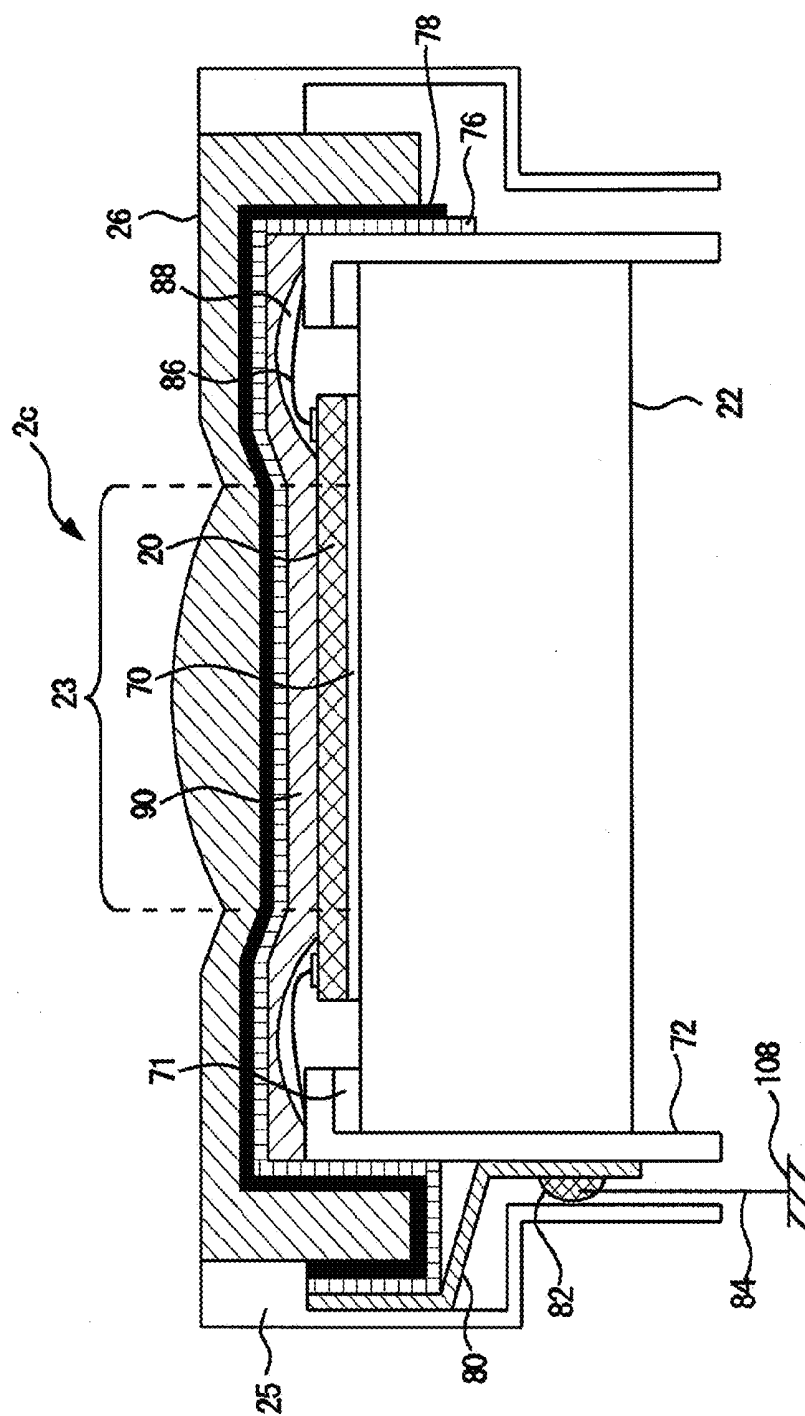


FIG. 11

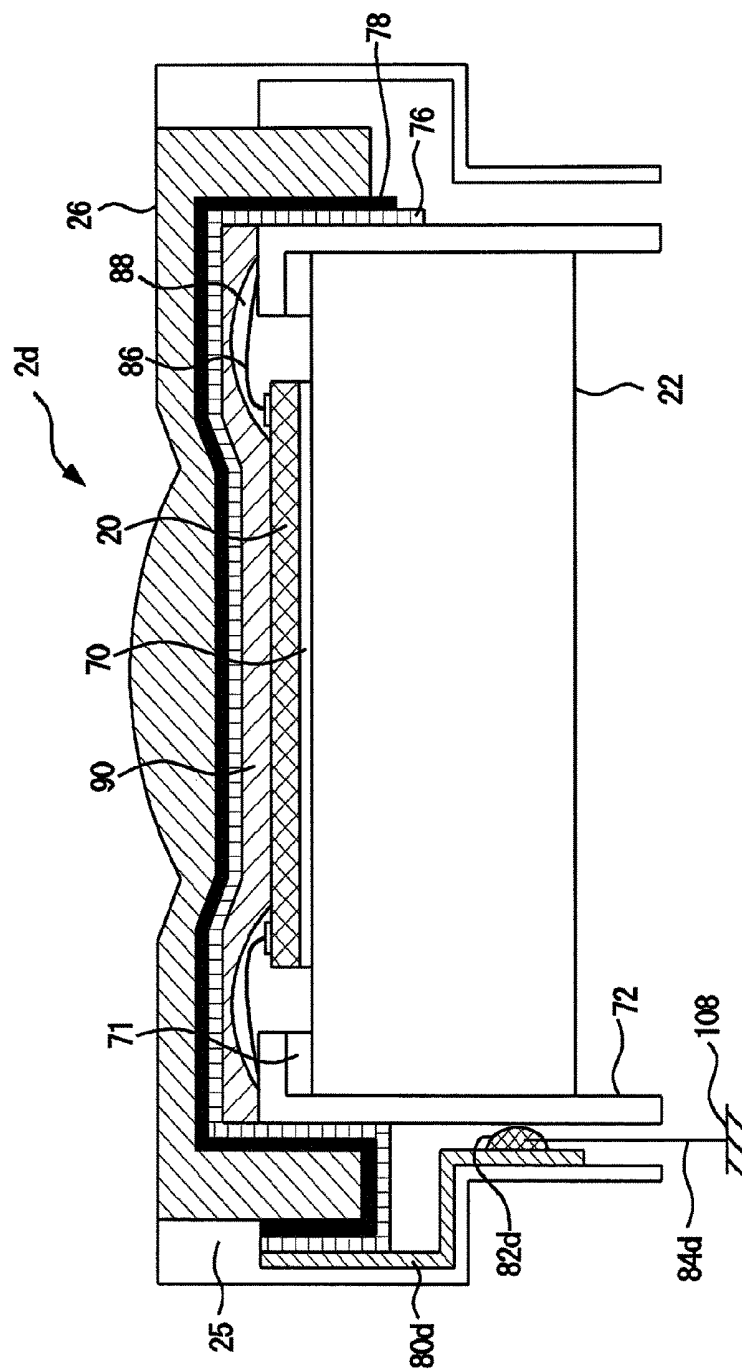


FIG. 13

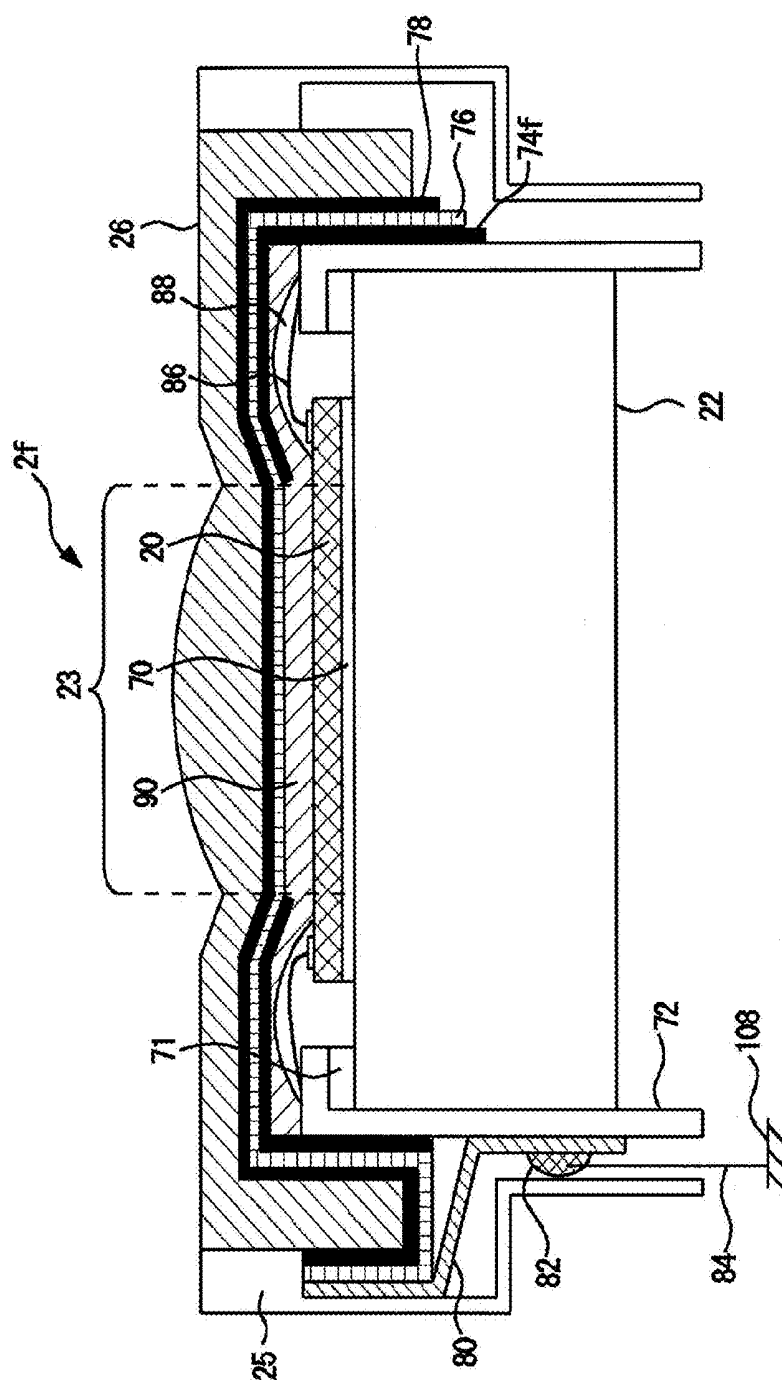
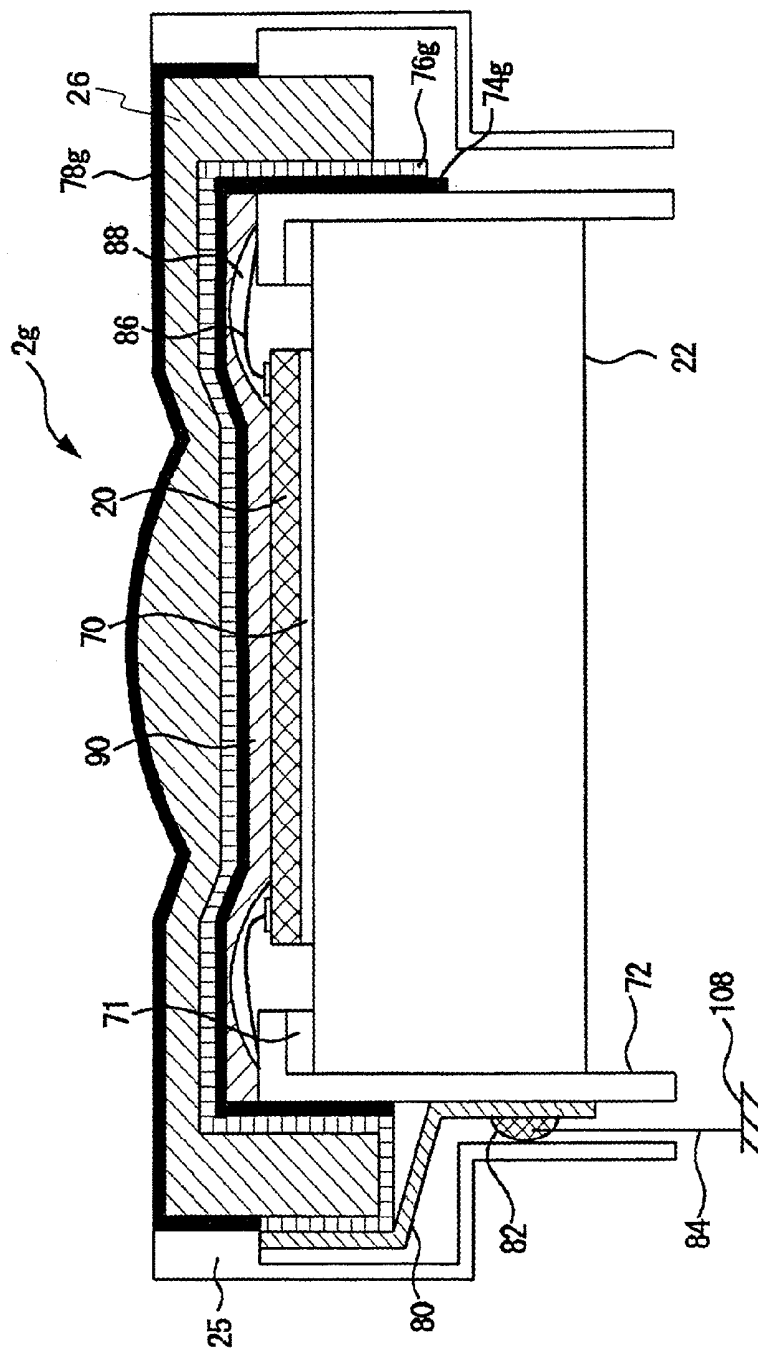


FIG. 14



ULTRASONIC PROBE AND ULTRASONIC DIAGNOSTIC APPARATUS USING THE SAME

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates to an ultrasonic probe and ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus using the same, and more particularly to an ultrasonic probe and ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus using the same wherein the electric safety for an object to be examined is improved.

BACKGROUND ART

An ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus is for imaging diagnostic images based on the echo signals and the reflected signals thereof outputted from an ultrasonic probe. In an ultrasonic probe, a plurality of ultrasonic transducers is disposed. The ultrasonic transducers convert driving signals into ultrasonic waves and transmit them to the object, as well as receive the reflected echo signals produced from the object and convert them into electric signals.

In recent years, ultrasonic probes using a cMUT (Capacitive Micromachined Ultrasonic Transducer) have been developed. The cMUT is an ultrafine capacitance ultrasonic transducer manufactured by semiconductor microfabrication process as disclosed, for example, in Patent document 1. In the cMUT, bias voltage is applied on two electrodes (the object side and the backing layer side) disposed in a plurality of pairs opposite each other in a direction parallel to the ultrasonic wave transmitting/receiving surface, driving signals are superimposed and applied, and ultrasonic waves are sent out.

Patent Document 1: U.S. Pat. No. 5,894,452

Patent Document 2: JP-A-2007-235795

DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

Problems to be Solved

However, the present inventors found out the problem described below as a result of reviewing the above-mentioned conventional technique.

That is, in the conventional ultrasonic probe using the conventional PZT, only one kind of driving signal is to be applied as voltage between the electrodes disposed opposite each other on the ultrasonic wave transmitting/receiving surface, whereby capable of reducing the current passing from the electrode toward the object by contacting the ground electrode to the electrode disposed on the object side as disclosed in, for example, Patent Document 2. However, in the ultrasonic probe using a cMUT, since the bias voltage is mainly applied to the electrode on the backing layer side at the same time as the driving signal formed by a high-frequency wave (drive voltage) is applied to the electrode on the object side, the ground layer cannot be contacted to the electrode on the object side directly, thus the insulation becomes insufficient unless a ground layer is provided.

Also, while there are cases in the ultrasonic probe using a cMUT that an acoustic matching layer is not provided, which causes the problem of deterioration in insulation construction.

The objective of the present invention is to provide an ultrasonic probe using a cMUT and an ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus using the same capable of preventing electrical

leakage on the object by providing adequate insulation configuration in an ultrasonic probe using a cMUT, improved in electrical safety.

Means to Solve the Problem

In accordance with the present invention, the ultrasonic probe comprises:

- a cMUT chip having a plurality of vibration elements wherein electromechanical coupling coefficient or sensitivity varies in accordance with bias voltage, for transmitting/receiving ultrasonic waves;
 - an acoustic lens provided on the upper part of the cMUT chip; and
 - a backing layer provided on the lower part of the cMUT chip,
- characterized in further comprising electric leakage preventing means on the side of ultrasonic wave transmitting/receiving surface of the acoustic lens or between the acoustic lens and the cMUT chip.

Effect of the Invention

In accordance with the present invention, it is possible to provide an ultrasonic probe using a cMUT and an ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus using the same improved in electrical safety capable of preventing electric leakage to an object by providing adequate insulation configuration.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DIAGRAMS

FIG. 1 is a configuration diagram showing an ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus related to the present invention.

FIG. 2 is a configuration diagram showing an ultrasonic probe related to the present invention.

FIG. 3 is a configuration diagram showing a transducer related to the present invention.

FIG. 4 is a configuration diagram of one vibration element in FIG. 3 viewed from the side.

FIG. 5 shows an ultrasonic probe related to embodiment 1.

FIG. 6 shows the wiring of the ultrasonic probe.

FIG. 7 shows an ultrasonic probe related to embodiment 2.

FIG. 8 shows an ultrasonic probe related to embodiment 3.

FIG. 9 shows an ultrasonic probe related to embodiment 4.

FIG. 10 is a pattern diagram showing conductor configuration and insulation configuration.

FIG. 11 shows an ultrasonic probe related to embodiment 5.

FIG. 12 shows an ultrasonic probe related to embodiment 6.

FIG. 13 shows an ultrasonic probe related to embodiment 7.

FIG. 14 shows an ultrasonic probe related to embodiment 8.

FIG. 15 shows an ultrasonic probe related to embodiment 9.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SYMBOLS

- 2c . . . ultrasonic probe, 20 . . . cMUT chip, 22 . . . backing layer, 23 . . . region from which ultrasonic waves are emitted, 25 . . . ultrasonic probe cover, 26 . . . acoustic lens, 70 & 71 . . . adhesion layer, 72 . . . flexible substrate, 76 . . . conductive film, 78 . . . insulating film, 80 . . . conductive material, 82 . . . connecting unit, 84 . . . ground wire, 86 . . . wire, 88 . . . wire sealing resin, 90 . . . adhesion layer, 108 . . . ground

BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

The preferable embodiments of the ultrasonic probe and ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus using the same related to the present invention will be described below in detail referring to the attached diagrams. In the attached diagrams, the components having the same function are denoted by the same symbols, and the repeated explanation thereof will be omitted.

First, the configuration of ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus 1 will be described referring to FIG. 1.

FIG. 1 is a configuration diagram of the ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus 1.

The ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus 1 related to the present invention is configured by ultrasonic probe 2, transmitting means 3, bias means 4, receiving means 5, phasing and adding means 6, image processing means 7, display means 8, control means 9 and operation means 10.

The ultrasonic probe 2 is for transmitting/receiving ultrasonic waves to/from an object while being applied on the object. Ultrasonic waves are emitted from the ultrasonic probe 2 to the object, and the reflected echo signals produced from the object are received by the ultrasonic probe 2.

The transmitting means 3 and the bias means 4 are for applying bias voltage to the electrodes disposed in the ultrasonic probe 2 opposite each other, superimposing a drive signal and applying, and transmitting ultrasonic waves.

The receiving means 5 is for receiving the reflected echo signals to be transmitted to the ultrasonic probe 2. The receiving means 5 further performs the process such as analog/digital conversion on the received reflected echo signals.

The phasing and adding means 6 performs phasing and adding of the received reflected echo signals. The image processing means 7 constructs a diagnostic image (for example, a tomographic image or a blood flow image) based on the phased and added reflected echo signals.

The display means 8 displays the diagnostic image constructed in the image processing means 7.

The control means 9 controls the above-described respective components.

The operation means 10 gives commands such as to start diagnosis, to the control means 9. The operation means 10 is an input device such as a trackball, keyboard or mouse.

Next, the ultrasonic probe 2 will be described referring to FIG. 2~FIG. 4.

FIG. 2 is a block diagram of the ultrasonic probe 2. FIG. 2 is a partly cutaway perspective view of the ultrasonic probe 2. The upper side of the diagram is the direction to be applied on the object and that ultrasonic waves are transmitted.

The ultrasonic probe 2 comprises a cMUT chip 20. The cMUT chip 20 is a one-dimensional array type of transducer group in which a plurality of transducers 21-1, 21-2, . . . are disposed in rectangles. Into the transducers 21-1, 21-2, . . . , a plurality of vibration elements 28 are disposed. While the probe illustrated in FIG. 2 is a linear-type probe, other types of transducer group such as a 2-dimensional array type or convex type may be used.

On the back surface of the cMUT chip 20 (lower side in the diagram), a backing layer 22 is provided. On the ultrasonic waves emitting side of the cMUT chip 20, an acoustic lens 26 is provided. The cMUT chip 20 and the backing layer 22, etc. are contained in an ultrasonic probe cover 25.

In the cMUT chip 20, on the basis of the application of bias voltage by bias means 4, the drive signals from the transmitting means 3 are converted into ultrasonic waves, and the converted ultrasonic waves are transmitted to the object.

The receiving means 5 converts the ultrasonic waves produced from the object into electric signals, and receives them as the reflected echo signals.

The backing layer 22 is a layer for absorbing the transmission of the ultrasonic waves emitted from the cMUT chip 20 to the back surface side so as to constrain the extra vibration.

The acoustic lens 26 is a lens for converging the ultrasonic beams transmitted from the cMUT chip 20. Curvature of the acoustic lens 26 is defined based on the desired binocular vision.

A matching layer may be provided between the acoustic 26 and the cMUT chip 20. The matching layer is for matching the cMUT chip 20 and the acoustic impedance of the object so as to improve the transmitting efficiency of ultrasonic waves.

FIG. 3 is a configuration diagram of a transducer 21 in FIG. 2.

On the object side of the plurality of vibration elements 28 by which the transducers 21-1, 21-2, . . . are formed, upper electrodes 46-1, 46-2, . . . are disposed, divided to be pluralized in the long-axis direction X, and wire-connected for each transducer 21. In other words, the upper electrodes 46-1, 46-2, . . . are disposed in parallel in the long-axis direction X.

On the opposite side from the object side of the plurality of vibration elements by which the transducer 21 are formed, the lower electrodes (48-1~48-4) are disposed, divided to be pluralized (into four rows in FIG. 3) in the minor-axis direction Y to be wire-connected. In other words, the lower electrodes 48-1, 48-2, 48-3, . . . are disposed in parallel in the minor-axis direction Y.

FIG. 4 is a configuration diagram (cross-section view) of one vibration element 28 shown in FIG. 3, viewed from the side.

The vibration element 28 is formed by a basal plate 40, film body 44, film body 45, upper electrode 46, frame body 47 and lower electrode 48. The vibration element 28 is formed by semiconductor micro fabrication process. It is equivalent to one element of the cMUT.

The basal plate 40 is a semiconductor substrate such as silicon, and is disposed on the lower electrode side.

The film body 44 and the frame body 47 are formed by semiconducting compound such as silicon compound. The film body 44 is provided on the object side (ultrasonic waves emitting side) of the vibration elements 28, and the frame body 47 is disposed on the back surface of the film body 44 (opposite side from the object side). The upper electrode 46 is placed between the film body 44 and the frame body 47. The film body 45 is placed between the frame body 47 and the basal plate 40, and the lower electrode 48 is placed inside of the film body 45. An internal space 50 which is compartmented by the frame body 47 and the film body 45 is left as a vacuum or filled with predetermined gas.

The upper electrode 46 and the lower electrode 48 are respectively connected to the transmitting means 3 for providing alternating-current high-frequency voltage as drive signals and bias means 4 for applying direct-current voltage as bias voltage.

When ultrasonic waves are transmitted, direct-current bias voltage (Va) is applied to the upper electrode 46 and the lower electrode 48 of the vibration elements 28, and an electric field is generated by bias voltage (Va). Tensile force is generated in the film body 44 by the generated electric field, and reaches a predetermined electromechanical coupling coefficient (Sa). When the drive signals are provided from the transmitting means 3 to the upper electrode 46, the ultrasonic waves having high intensity based on the electromechanical coupling coefficient (Sa) are emitted from the film body 44.

Also, when another direct-current bias voltage (V_b) is applied to the upper electrode **46** and the lower electrode **48** of the vibration elements **28**, an electric field is generated by the bias voltage (V_b). Tensile force is generated in the film body **44** by the generated electric field and reaches a predetermined electromechanical coupling coefficient (S_b). When the drive signals are provided from the transmitting means **3** to the upper electrode **46**, the intense ultrasonic waves based on the electromechanical coupling coefficient (S_b) are emitted from the film body **44**.

Here, in the case that the bias voltage is " $V_a < V_b$ ", the electromechanical coupling coefficient is " $S_a < S_b$ ".

On the other hand, when ultrasonic waves are received, the film body **44** is excited by the reflected echo signals produced from the object, and the capacity of the internal space **50** is changed. This variation quantity of the internal space **50** is detected via the upper electrode **46** as electric signals.

The electromechanical coupling coefficient of the vibration elements **28** is determined by the tension applied on the film body **44**. Therefore, if the level of bias voltage to be applied to the vibration elements **28** is changed and the tension of the film body **44** is controlled, even in the case that the drive signals having the same amplitude are inputted, the intensity (or acoustic pressure, amplitude) of the ultrasonic waves to be emitted from the vibration elements **28** can be changed.

Embodiment 1

Next, embodiment 1 of the present invention will be described referring to FIG. 5 and FIG. 6.

FIG. 5 shows the ultrasonic probe **2** related to embodiment 1. FIG. 5 is a cross-sectional view of the flat plane "A" of the ultrasonic probe **2** shown in FIG. 2.

In accordance with FIG. 5, an insulating film **78** which is an insulation layer is formed on the back surface of the acoustic lens **26**. The insulating film **78** is, for example, a silicon oxide film or a paraxylene film.

The cMUT chip **20** is glued to the upper surface of the backing layer **22** via the adhesion layer **70**. A flexible substrate **72** (Flexible printed circuits: FPC) is provided from the peripheral border of the upper surface of the backing layer **22** over to the side surfaces in four directions. The flexible substrate **72** is glued onto the peripheral border of the upper surface of the backing layer **22** via the adhesion layer **71**.

The adhesion layer **70** and the adhesion layer **71** are an adhesive agent formed by, for example, epoxide resin. The height, direction and position of the cMUT chip **20** and the flexible substrate **72** can be adjusted by arbitrarily adjusting the layer thickness of the adhesion layer **70** and the adhesion layer **71**.

The flexible substrate **72** and the cMUT chip **20** are electrically connected via a wire **86**. The wire **86** is connected by the wire bonding method. As for the wire **86**, Au wire, etc. can be used. A wire-sealing resin **88** is filled around the wire **86**.

The acoustic lens **26** is glued onto the upper surface of the cMUT chip **20** via an adhesion layer **90**. As for the material of the acoustic lens **26**, for example, silicon rubber is used. In regard to the material of the adhesion layer **90**, it is desirable to use a material similar to that used in the acoustic lens **26** (for example, silicon).

The upper surface of the acoustic lens **26** has a convex shape in the ultrasonic waves emitting direction in the range of at least region **23** within the region from which the ultrasonic waves are emitted. In the cMUT chip **20**, the vibration elements **28** are disposed within the region corresponding at least to the region **23**. Ultrasonic waves are to be irradiated

from the convex portion which is on the ultrasonic waves irradiating side (toward the object side) of the acoustic lens **26**.

The back surface of the acoustic lens **26** (the opposite side from the object side, which is the backing layer side) has a concave portion so that the cMUT chip **20** can be disposed therein. In this concave portion, the cMUT chip **20** and the flexible substrate **72** are fitted by the connecting portion (wire preventing resin **88**).

The ultrasonic probe cover **25** is provided on the surface in four sides of the ultrasonic probe **2**, and is fixed on the surface in four sides of the acoustic lens **26**. An examiner is to hold the ultrasonic probe cover **25** by his/her hand to operate the ultrasonic probe **2**.

FIG. 6 shows the wiring of the ultrasonic probe **2**. The basal plate **40** of the cMUT chip **20** is fixed on the upper surface of the backing layer **22**. The flexible substrate **72** is fixed on the peripheral border of the upper surface of the backing layer **22**.

On the flexible substrate **72**, signal pattern **38-1**~signal pattern **38-n** are disposed in pairs vertically on the diagram, and signal pattern **41-1**~signal pattern **41-4** are disposed in pairs horizontally on the diagram.

The upper electrode **46-1**~upper electrode **46-n** are connected to the signal pattern **38-1**~signal pattern **38-n**. The lower electrode **48-1**~lower electrode **48-4** are connected to the signal pattern **41-1**~signal pattern **41-4**. The spacings between the adjacent lower electrode **48-1**~lower electrode **48-4** are mutually insulated.

The upper electrode **46** and the lower electrode **48** are connected to the flexible substrate **72** via the wire **86** respectively by the wire bonding method.

As for the shape of the lower electrode **48-1**~lower electrode **48-4**, it is desirable that it corresponds to the shape of the vibration elements **28** (for example, a hexagon) such as a waveform. In this manner, the respective vibration elements **28** can be disposed corresponding to only one of the lower common electrode **48-1**~lower common electrode **48-4**.

While four electrodes are disposed in the lower electrode **48-1**~lower electrode **48-4**, the number does not have to be limited to four.

Also, while the signal pattern **38-1**~signal pattern **38-n** are disposed in pairs vertically on the diagram and the signal pattern **48-1**~signal pattern **48-4** are disposed in pairs horizontally on the diagram, the pattern does not have to be limited in pairs and they may be disposed only on one side.

Also, while it is described above that the wire bonding method is used to connect the signal pattern and the upper electrode or the lower electrode, the method does not have to be limited thereto and the flip chip bonding method which connects pads to pads may be used.

As described above in detail, in the ultrasonic probe **2** of embodiment 1, the insulation layer as the electric leakage preventing means for preventing the leakage of electricity from the electrode in the cMUT chip to the object is formed as the insulating film **78** between the acoustic lens **26** and the cMUT chip. The spacing between the ultrasonic wave transmitting/receiving surface and the cMUT chip is performed with double insulation by the acoustic lens and the insulation layer. In this manner, even when friction or damage is caused in the ultrasonic wave transmitting/receiving surface, electric leakage from the ultrasonic wave transmitting/receiving surface to the object or electric shock due to the leakage can be prevented whereby improving the safety of the ultrasonic probe.

Embodiment 2

Next, embodiment 2 will be described referring to FIG. 7.

FIG. 7 shows an ultrasonic probe **2a** related to embodiment 2. FIG. 7 is equivalent to the cross-sectional view of the flat plane "A" shown in FIG. 2.

While the insulation film **78** is illustrated as being disposed in the lower surface of the acoustic lens in embodiment 1, the insulation layer which is electric leakage preventing means for preventing the leakage of electricity from the electrode in the cMUT chip to the object is disposed in the upper surface (object side) of the acoustic lens **26** as an insulation film **78a** in embodiment 2.

In this manner, in the ultrasonic probe **2a** of embodiment 2, the insulation layer is formed in the upper surface of the acoustic lens. The spacing between the ultrasonic wave transmitting/receiving surface and the cMUT chip is performed with double insulation by the insulation layer (insulation film) and the acoustic lens. Therefore, even when friction or damage is caused in the ultrasonic wave transmitting/receiving surface, electric leakage from the ultrasonic wave transmitting/receiving surface to the object or electric shock due to the leakage can be prevented whereby improving the safety of the ultrasonic probe, which provides the same effect as embodiment 1.

In addition, in embodiment 2, the manufacturing process of the probe is easier compared to embodiment 1 since the insulation layer is provided on the upper surface of the acoustic lens, not on the lower surface.

Embodiment 3

Next, embodiment 3 will be described referring to FIG. 8.

FIG. 8 shows an ultrasonic probe **2b** related to embodiment 3. FIG. 8 is equivalent to the cross-sectional view of the flat plane "A" shown in FIG. 2.

While the insulation film **78** is described as being disposed on the lower surface of the acoustic lens **26** in embodiment 1, the insulation layer which is electric leakage preventing means for preventing the leakage of electricity from the electrode in the cMUT chip to the object is disposed on the upper surface of the cMUT chip **20** as an insulation film **78b** in embodiment 3.

In this manner, in the ultrasonic probe **2b** of embodiment 3, the insulation layer is formed on the upper surface of the cMUT chip. In the spacing between the ultrasonic wave transmitting/receiving surface and the cMUT chip, double insulation is performed by the insulation layer and the acoustic lens. Thus the same effect can be performed as embodiment 1.

Embodiment 4

Next, embodiment 4 will be described referring to FIG. 9 and FIG. 10.

FIG. 9 shows an ultrasonic probe **2c** related to embodiment 4. FIG. 9 is equivalent to the cross-sectional view of the flat plane "A" shown in FIG. 2.

While embodiment 1 is described without the provision of a ground layer, in embodiment 4, a conductive film **76** which is the ground layer is further provided as electric leakage preventing means for preventing the leakage of electricity from the electrode in the cMUT chip to the object is provided on the back surface (the opposite side from the object side) of the insulation film **78** as an insulation layer.

The conductive film **76** is connected to a ground **108** which is the ground potential. The conductive film **76** is, for example, a Cu film. The insulation film **78** is placed on the

back surface of the acoustic lens **26**, and the Cu film is deposited on the back surface of the insulating film **78** to form the conductive film **76**.

The conductive film **76** is formed from the internal lower surface of the acoustic lens **26** over to the external side surfaces. The conductive film **76** is connected to a ground **108** on the main apparatus side via a conductive material **80** and a ground wire **84**.

The conductive material **80** is a material which has electrical conductivity. The conductive material **80** can be manufactured using a highly reliable material which is more heavy-duty compared to the conductive film **76**. The conductive material **80** is, for example, a Cu tape which has higher rigidity compared to the conductive film **76**. The conductive material **80** is fixed on the external side surface of the flexible substrate **72**.

The ground wire **84** is connected to the conductive material **80** via the connecting portion **82** using a method such as soldering.

FIG. 10 is a pattern diagram showing the conducting structure and insulating structure.

The upper electrode **46** is connected to a reception amplifier **100** and the transmitting means **3** via a cable **96** and a transmission/reception separating circuit **98**. The lower electrode **48** is connected to the bias means **4** via a cable **102**.

A resistor **110** is a resistor element for stabilizing the electric potential of bias means **4** to the ground potential. A capacitor **112** is a capacitive element for bypassing signal current.

The conductive film **76** is connected to the ground wire **84**, and further connected to the ground **108** via a chassis ground of the main apparatus.

In this manner, in the ultrasonic probe **2c** in embodiment 4, the conductive film **76** as the ground layer is provided on the lower part of the insulating film **78** as an insulation layer. By such configuration, even when the acoustic lens **26** and the insulating film **78** are damaged, the conductive film **76** can prevent electric shock because of the ground potential, whereby improving electrical safety of the ultrasonic probe with respect to an object.

Also, by the conductive film **76**, the ground wire **84** and the chassis ground of the main apparatus, a closed space of electric potential is formed. In other words, since the main components of the ultrasonic probe **2c** or the main circuits of the ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus are contained in the closed space of the ground potential, it is possible to prevent the influence of unwanted electric waves from outside or exerting a bad influence upon external apparatuses due to electromagnetic waves produced from the ultrasonic probe **2c** itself.

Also, in the ultrasonic probe **2c** of embodiment 4, the conductive film **76** is formed from the internal lower surface of the acoustic lens **26** over to its external surfaces, and is connected to the ground **108** via the conductive material **80** and the ground wire **84** which are highly reliable.

By such configuration, the conductive film **76** can be easily and securely connected to the ground wire via the conductive material from the conductive film formed from the internal lower surface of the acoustic lens over to its external surfaces, not from the sheet-like conductive film to be pulled out by the in mold forming, whereby it is possible to improve assuredness and workability in the implementation of the apparatus.

Also, by using highly reliable conductive material, damage of conductive material upon being fixed to the flexible substrate can be prevented.

Also, while the conductive material **80** and the ground wire **84** are illustrated only on the left side surface of the flexible

substrate **72** in the diagram of FIG. 9, they may be placed on any of the four side surfaces of the flexible substrate **72**.

The conductive film **76** and the ground wire **84** can be connected directly. In this case, the mounting operation needs to be conducted cautiously since the conductive film **76** is thin in its thickness.

In the present embodiment, while the ground layer is provided on the back surface of the insulating film **78** (the opposite side from the object side), an intervening layer which does not conduct electricity is disposed as a film body **44** shown in FIG. 4 in a part of the cMUT chip between the ground layer and the electrode in the cMUT chip (for example, the electrode **46** in FIG. 4). Therefore, since the electrode in the cMUT chip (for example, the electrode **46** shown in FIG. 4) and the ground layer are not in contact as disclosed in Patent Document 2, there is an advantage also that the drive voltage for transmitting/receiving ultrasonic waves can be applied to the electrode on the ultrasonic wave transmitting/receiving side (object side) in the cMUT chip.

Embodiment 5

Next, embodiment 5 will be described referring to FIG. 11. FIG. 11 shows an ultrasonic probe **2d** related to embodiment 5. FIG. 11 is equivalent to the cross-sectional view of the flat plane "A" shown in FIG. 2.

While the conductive material **80** is described to be fixed on the external side surfaces of the flexible substrate **72** in embodiment 4, it can be fixed on any place formed by a material capable of fixing the conductive material **80**. In embodiment 5, a conductive material **80d** is fixed on the internal side surfaces of the ultrasonic probe cover **25**.

The conductive film **76** is connected to the ground **108** on the main apparatus side via a conductive material **80d** and a ground wire **84d**.

The conductive material **80d** is fixed on the internal side surfaces of the ultrasonic probe cover **25**. The ground wire **84d** is connected to the conductive material **80d** via a connecting portion **82d** by a method such as soldering.

In this manner, in embodiment 5, it is possible to connect the conductive film and the ground wire easily and unfailingly as in embodiment 4 while securing high reliability.

While the conductive material **80d** and the ground wire **84d** are shown only on the left side of the internal side surfaces in the ultrasonic probe cover **25** of in FIG. 11, they can be placed on the internal side surface of any four sides in the ultrasonic probe cover **25**.

Embodiment 6

Next, embodiment 6 will be described referring to FIG. 12.

FIG. 12 shows an ultrasonic probe **2e** related to embodiment 6. FIG. 12 is equivalent to the cross-sectional view of the flat plane "A" shown in FIG. 2.

While it is described that one layer of insulation is provided in embodiment 1–embodiment 5, two layers of insulation is provided in embodiment 6 having the ground layer therebetween.

Between the acoustic lens **26** and the adhesion layer **90** on the cMUT chip **20**, the insulating film **78** as an upper insulation layer, the conductive film **76** as a ground layer and the insulating film **74** as a lower insulating layer are formed. The conductive film **76** is formed between the insulating film **78** and the insulating film **74**.

In other words, from the direction that the ultrasonic probe **2** is applied to an object, the acoustic **26**, insulating film **78**, conductive film **76** and insulating film **74** are layered in order.

For details, the insulating film **78** is formed on the lower surface of the acoustic lens **26**, the conductive film **76** is formed by depositing the Cu film on the lower surface of the insulating film **78**, and the insulating film **74** is formed on the lower surface of the conductive film **76**.

In this manner, in embodiment 6, between the ultrasonic wave transmitting/receiving surface and the cMUT chip, two layers of insulation layers are comprised having a conductive film therebetween as electric leakage preventing means for preventing the leakage of electricity from the electrode in the cMUT chip to the object. By such configuration, it is possible to improve safety by increasing insulation of the ultrasonic probe.

Also, while the ground layer is provided between the two layers of insulating films **74** and **78** in the present embodiment, the insulating film **74** is further disposed between the ground layer and the electrode in the cMUT chip as an intervening layer which does not conduct electricity (for example, the electrode **46** in FIG. 4). Therefore, since the electrode in the cMUT chip (for example, the electrode **46** in FIG. 4) and the ground layer are not in contact as disclosed in Patent Document 2, there is an advantage that the drive voltage for transmitting/receiving ultrasonic waves can be applied also to the electrode on the ultrasonic wave transmitting/receiving surface side (object side) in the cMUT chip.

Embodiment 7

Next, embodiment 7 will be described referring to FIG. 13.

FIG. 13 shows an ultrasonic probe **2f** related to embodiment 7. FIG. 13 is equivalent to the cross-sectional view of the flat plane "A" shown in FIG. 2.

While the insulating film **74** is described as being provided in the region indicated as region **23** in embodiment 6, an insulating film **74f** in embodiment 7 is not provided in the region **23**.

In this manner, in embodiment 7, the insulating film **74f** is not placed on the cMUT chip **20**, thus there is no influence of the insulating film **74f** on the ultrasonic waves transmitted/received in the cMUT chip **20**, whereby improving the acoustic characteristics.

In the above-described embodiment, it is desirable to make the film thickness of the conductive layer in the range of 0.1 μm , and the film thickness of the insulation layer in the range of 1 μm . By making the respective film thickness of the insulation layer and the conductive layer, the influence to the ultrasonic waves transmitted/received in the cMUT chip (influence or attenuation to pulse and frequency characteristic) can be restrained.

As for the method to form the films, the method to perform the in mold forming on the insulating sheet attached with the conductive film at the same time as forming the acoustic lens, or the method for forming the insulating film and the conductive film by chemical deposition can be used. While the film can be formed at low cost in the in-mold forming method, the limit of the film thickness is in the range of 10 μm . On the other hand, the film thickness can be in the range of 1 μm in the film forming by deposition method.

While the region where the insulating film is not provided within the region **23** is "74f" in the present embodiment, it may be "78" or both.

The ultrasonic probe and ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus may be configured by properly combining the above-described embodiments.

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Embodiment 8

FIG. 14 shows an ultrasonic probe 2g related to embodiment 8.

In the ultrasonic probe 2g, a ground layer 76g is placed on the lower surface of the acoustic lens 26, an insulation layer 78g is further placed on the upper surface (the object side) of the acoustic lens 26, and an insulating film 74g is placed on the back surface of the ground layer 76g.

Embodiment 9

FIG. 15 shows an ultrasonic probe 2h related to embodiment 9.

The ultrasonic probe 2h is the case that the two layers of insulation layers having a conductive film therebetween is comprises as electric leakage preventing means for preventing the leakage of electricity from the electrode in the cMUT chip to an object, and an example that the conductive material 80 for connecting a conductive film 76h and the ground wire 84 is fixed on the flexible substrate 72.

While preferable embodiments of the ultrasonic probe and ultrasonic diagnostic apparatus related to the present invention have been described above referring to the attached diagrams, the description herein of specific embodiments is not intended to limit the invention to the particular forms described. On the contrary, it is apparent to those skilled in the art that the intension is to cover all modifications, equivalents and alternations falling within the spirit and scope of invention as defined by the appended claims.

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The invention claimed is:

1. An ultrasonic probe comprising:

a capacitive micro-machined ultrasonic transducer (cMUT) chip for transmitting/receiving ultrasonic waves, and including a plurality of vibration elements having an electromechanical coupling coefficient or sensitivity which varies in accordance with bias voltage; an acoustic lens disposed on the ultrasonic wave emitting side of the cMUT chip;

an insulating layer disposed between the acoustic lens and an upper electrode of the cMUT chip to which a drive signal applied; and

a ground layer disposed between the acoustic lens and the insulation layer.

2. The ultrasonic probe according to claim 1, wherein the insulation layer is a part of the cMUT chip, and is disposed on the bias voltage applied electrode.

3. The ultrasonic probe according to claim 2, wherein the insulation layer is a film body.

4. The ultrasonic probe according to claim 1, wherein the insulation layer comprises two layers of insulation material and a ground layer disposed between the two layers of insulation material.

5. The ultrasonic probe according to claim 1, wherein the insulation layer is a paraxylene film.

6. The ultrasonic probe according to claim 1, wherein the ground layer is a Cu film.

* * * * *

专利名称(译)	超声波探头和使用其的超声波诊断装置		
公开(公告)号	US8758253	公开(公告)日	2014-06-24
申请号	US12/513858	申请日	2007-11-06
[标]申请(专利权)人(译)	株式会社日立医药		
申请(专利权)人(译)	日立医疗器械股份有限公司		
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IPC分类号	A61B8/14 A61B8/00		
CPC分类号	A61B8/4281 A61B8/4455 A61B8/4483 B06B1/0292 H04R19/005		
审查员(译)	JUNG , UNSU		
优先权	2006302627 2006-11-08 JP		
其他公开文献	US20100036257A1		
外部链接	Espacenet USPTO		

摘要(译)

公开了一种超声波探头，其包括具有多个振动元件的cMUT芯片，所述振动元件的机电耦合系数或灵敏度根据偏置电压而改变并且发送和接收超声波，布置在cMUT芯片上方的声透镜和布置的背衬层在cMUT芯片下面。防漏单元设置在声透镜的超声波发送/接收表面侧或声透镜和cMUT芯片之间。防漏单元可以是例如诸如接地层的绝缘层。这样的结构使得可以提供能够防止从超声波探头漏电到待检查对象的超声波探头，从而提高电气安全性，以及使用该探头的超声波诊断装置。

