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Alignment patterns for two objects to be aligned relative to each other

The invention relates to alignment marks to be used to align two objects to one another. The alignment marks consist of straight lines the positions of which are co-determined by an optoelectronic line-by-line scanning of evaluation areas and integration of the obtained brightness values. Such alignment marks are particularly used in semiconductor technology and more particularly for the relative alignment of a wafer and a mask in photolithography.

Alignment marks consisting of straight lines which are optoelectronically line-scanned during the positioning process and whose brightness values are subsequently integrated are known from DE—28 22 269. They consist of patterns of straight orthogonally intersecting lines arranged on the two objects (wafer, mask) to be aligned to one another. The objects are aligned in such a way that the lines of the alignment pattern of the wafer are parallel to those of the mask. Although the alignment marks lie in different optical planes, it cannot be avoided that the wafer's alignment pattern, albeit indistinctly, is still visible through the mask's alignment patterns; correspondingly, the mask's lines are also still visible during evaluation of the wafer's alignment mark. During the line-by-line scanning in one object plane these undesirable influences of the other object are registered, too, and lead to inaccuracies in the determination of the lines' positions. A further drawback of the alignment marks known from the prior art is that the integration length is too short when the contrast is poor and the intersecting lines produce undesired shadings of the

wafer by the mask which shadings deteriorate the resolution of the wafer image by reducing the aperture.

The problem underlying the present invention is to provide alignment marks for aligning two objects relative to each other which marks allow to avoid errors due to optical influences of the other object during evaluation and which allow a high processing speed.

The problem is solved by the features of the patent claims.

The advantages of the alignment marks according to the invention as compared to the prior art reside in a higher positioning accuracy, a larger capture area during coarse alignment and a faster determination of the focus.

The alignment marks according to the invention offer particular advantages for alignment processes in which the alignment marks are recorded and analyzed by image pattern recognition; in these processes, the alignment marks are optoelectronically line-scanned and the obtained brightness values are integrated.

The invention is illustrated by the drawing.

Figure 1 shows a mask alignment pattern with the areas covered during horizontal and vertical line-scanning (x and y direction), diagram: brightness values integrated in y and x direction, respectively,

Figure 2 shows a wafer alignment pattern below the mask alignment mark showing also those areas which are covered during horizontal and vertical line-scanning (x and y direction) of the mask alignment mark, diagram: brightness values integrated in y and x direction, respectively,





Figure 3 shows resulting brightness values of the mask alignment mark with the background signal from the wafer alignment mark and wafer alignment mark.

Figures 1 and 2 show an embodiment of the alignment marks according to the invention on a photolithographic mask or a wafer. The evaluation is performed for instance on the basis of the principle of pattern recognition. With the help of a photographic imaging system, e.g. a CCD camera, an image of the areas to be evaluated is recorded. Both in the mask and in the wafer alignment mark the brightness values are line-scanned in areas of identical line direction and are integrated in a direction orthogonally thereto. They provide the signals of the line pattern. With the help of a corresponding evaluation process the position of the lines is determined and is used for the relative alignment of mask and wafer.

For the scanning of the mask in the (in the drawing horizontal) x direction both evaluation areas 3M and 2M are scanned; by integration of the brightness values in vertical direction the x_M signal is obtained (preferably those brightness values that are scanned from the areas 1M and 4M are not integrated, i.e. line 6M constitutes the upper or lower integration limit for the evaluation areas 3M and 2M, respectively). During the above line-scanning of the optically transparent mask alignment mark the translucent underlying orthogonal line structure of the wafer alignment mark with the evaluation areas 3W and 2W in Figure 2 is recorded; however, it provides only a constant background U_{xM} for the brightness values of the mask alignment mark and the superposition simply results in an increase in the signal level (summation signal $\Sigma x_M, U_{xM}$ in Figure 3) without, however, influencing the edge position and shape of the signals. The position of the alignment marks' lines can be determined very exactly. Likewise, when scanning the evaluation areas 1M and 4M of the mask one obtains for the

(in the drawing vertical) y direction the y_M signal and from the wafer (evaluation areas 1W and 4W, respectively) the background signal U_{yM} and the total summation signal $\Sigma y_M, U_{yM}$. The two signals $\Sigma x_M, U_{xM}$ and $\Sigma y_M, U_{yM}$ can now be evaluated directly in a conventional manner in order to determine the position of the mask and to align it. Corresponding position signals of the wafer are obtained with or without mask from the evaluation areas 1W and 4W (for the x direction) and from the evaluation areas 3W and 2W (for the y direction). The actual alignment is done by means of a comparison between the target values and actual values of the position signals of wafer and mask.

With the alignment marks according to the invention a high line resolution can be achieved in optoelectronic evaluation. Therefore, a high line density is possible leading to an increase in the information content of the alignment marks. Thus, for an exact determination of the focus even in case of a distinct misalignment there are enough lines available allowing an excellent and fast focussing. Furthermore, the high line density allows a definite recognition of the alignment marks in the coarse alignment process resulting in a large capture area.

Other embodiments of the invention can show different line densities and widths in the mask and wafer alignment marks, with a low line density being preferred in the mask alignment marks to minimize shading effects.

The distances between the evaluation areas (1M to 4M; 1W to 4W) should be long enough in order to exclude interference of the line signals from different evaluation areas.

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Claims

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1. Alignment marks for aligning two objects relative to each other, with at least the upper object being optically transparent, particularly a wafer and a mask in semiconductor technology, with the alignment marks being superimposed while aligning, characterized in

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a) that the alignment marks consist of parallel non-intersecting straight lines and

b) that the straight lines of two directly superimposed alignment mark areas are not arranged parallel to one another in the desired position.

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2. Alignment marks according to claim 1, characterized in that the straight lines of two superimposed alignment marks are arranged essentially orthogonally to one another.

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3. Alignment marks according to claim 1 or 2, characterized in that the straight lines form a periodic lattice.

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4. Alignment marks according to claim 1 or 2, characterized in that the straight lines form a lattice with two or three lattice constants.

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5. Alignment marks according to any of claims 1 to 4, characterized in that the line density on the wafer is higher than that on the mask.



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6. Alignment marks according to any of claims 1 to 5, characterized in that every individual alignment mark consists of four evaluation areas (1M to 4M; 1W to 4W) being each identical in one diagonal and being arranged diagonally to the mark symmetry lines (5M, 6M; 5W, 6W).

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7. Alignment marks according to claim 6, characterized in that the evaluation areas are distinctly separated alongside the mark symmetry lines (5M, 6M; 5W, 6W).

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8. Alignment marks according to claim 6 or 7, characterized in that the four evaluation areas are preferably quadratic.

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9. Alignment marks according to claim 8, characterized in that the total line length on the mask alignment mark is 800 μm per 100 x 100 μm^2 evaluation area and the line width is 2 μm and that the total line length on the wafer alignment mark is 2400 μm per 100 x 100 μm^2 evaluation area and the line width is 2 μm .

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10. Use of the alignment marks according to any of claims 1 to 9 when aligning two objects relative to each other by means of an image recognition system wherein different straight lines on both objects are optoelectronically scanned and the obtained brightness values are integrated line-by-line.

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