

Apparatus of Plural Charged-Particle Beams

CLAIM OF PRIORITY

[0001] This application claims the benefit of priority of U.S. provisional application No. 62/287,626 entitled to Ren et al. filed on Jan. 27, 2016 and entitled “Apparatus of Plural Charged-Particle Beams”, the entire disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference.

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0002] This application is related to U.S. application No. 15/065,342 entitled to Ren et al. filed on March 9, 2016 and entitled “Apparatus of Plural Charged-Particle Beams”, the entire disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference

[0003] This application is related to U. S. application No. 15/078,369 entitled to Ren et al. filed on March 23, 2016 and entitled “Apparatus of Plural Charged-Particle Beams”, the entire disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference.

[0004] This application is related to U. S. application No. 15/150,858 entitled to Liu et al. filed on May 10, 2016 and entitled “Apparatus of Plural Charged-Particle Beams”, the entire disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference.

[0005] This application is related to U. S. application No. 15/213,781 entitled to Li et al. filed on July 19, 2016 and entitled “Apparatus of Plural Charged-Particle Beams”, the entire disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference.

[0006] This application is related to U. S. application No. 15/216,258 entitled to Ren et al. filed on July 21, 2016 and entitled “Apparatus of Plural Charged-Particle Beams”, the entire disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference.

[0007] This application is related to U. S. application No. 15/365,145 entitled to Ren et al. filed on Nov. 30th, 2016 and entitled “Apparatus of Plural Charged-Particle Beams”, the entire disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0008] The present invention relates to an apparatus with a plurality of charged-particle beams. More particularly, it relates to an apparatus which employs plural charged-particle beams to simultaneously acquire images of plural scanned regions within an observed area on a sample surface. Hence, the apparatus can be used to inspect and/or review defects on wafers/masks with high resolution and high throughput in semiconductor manufacturing industry.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE PRIOR ART

[0009] The following description and examples are not admitted to be prior art by their mention in this Background section.

[0010] For manufacturing semiconductor IC chips, pattern defects and/or uninvited particles (residuals) inevitably appear on surfaces of wafers/mask during fabrication processes, which reduce the yield to a great degree. Accordingly, the yield management tools are used to inspect and/or review the defects and the particles. To meet the more and more advanced requirements on performance of IC chips, the patterns with smaller and smaller critical feature dimensions have been adopted. Consequently, the conventional yield management tools with optical beam gradually become incompetent due to diffraction effect, and the yield management tools with electron beam are more and more employed. Compared to a photon beam, an electron beam has a shorter wavelength and thereby possibly offering superior spatial resolution. Currently, the yield management tools with electron beams employ the principle of scanning electron microscope (SEM) with a single electron beam, and as well known their throughputs are not competent for mass production. Although increasing the beam currents can improve the throughputs, the superior spatial resolutions will be fundamentally deteriorated by Coulomb Effect which increases with the beam currents.

[0011] For mitigating the limitation on throughput, instead of using a single electron beam with a large current, a promising solution is to use a plurality of electron beams each with a small current. The plurality of electron beams forms a plurality of probe spots or simply called as a probe spot array on one being-inspected or observed surface of a sample. The plurality of probe spots can

respectively and simultaneously scan a plurality of small scanned regions within a large observed area on the sample surface. The electrons of each probe spot generate secondary electrons from the sample surface where they land on. The secondary electrons comprise slow secondary electrons (energies $\leq 50\text{eV}$) and backscattered electrons (energies close to landing energies of the electrons). The secondary electrons from the plurality of small scanned regions can be respectively and simultaneously collected by a plurality of electron detectors. Consequently, the image of the large observed area including all of the small scanned regions can be obtained much faster than scanning the large observed area with a single beam.

[0012] The plurality of electron beams can be either from a plurality of electron sources respectively, or from a single electron source. For the former, the plurality of electron beams is usually focused onto and scans the plurality of small scanned regions by a plurality of columns respectively, and the secondary electrons from each scanned region are detected by one electron detector inside the corresponding column. The apparatus therefore is generally called as a multi-column apparatus. On the sample surface, the beam interval or pitch is on the order of several to tens millimeters.

[0013] For the latter, a source-conversion unit virtually changes the single electron source into a plurality of sub-sources. The source-conversion unit comprises one beamlet-limit (or beamlet-forming) means with a plurality of beam-limit openings and one image-forming means with a plurality of electron optics elements. The plurality of beam-limit openings divides the primary-electron beam generated by the single electron source into a plurality of sub-beams or beamlets respectively, and the plurality of electron optics elements influence the plurality of beamlets to form a plurality of first parallel (virtual or real) images of the single electron source respectively. Each first image is the crossover of one beamlet and can be taken as one sub-source which emits the corresponding beamlet. To make more beamlets available, the beamlet intervals are at micro meter level. Naturally, one primary projection imaging system and one deflection scanning unit within one single column are used to project the plurality of first parallel images onto and scan the plurality of small scanned regions respectively. The plurality of secondary electron beams therefrom is directed by one beam separator into one secondary projection imaging system, and then focused by the secondary projection imaging

system to be respectively detected by a plurality of detection elements of one electron detection device inside the single column. The plurality of detection elements can be a plurality of electron detectors placed side by side or a plurality of pixels of one electron detector. The apparatus therefore is generally called as a multi-beam apparatus

[0014] The beamlet-limit means is usually an electric-conduction plate with through-holes, and a plurality of through-holes therein functions the plurality of beam-limit openings respectively. For the image-forming means, each electron optics element either focuses one beamlet to form one real image (such as US7,244,949 and the fourth related application in the CROSS REFERENCE), or deflects one beamlet to form one virtual image (such as US6,943,349 and the other related applications in the CROSS REFERENCE). Figure 1A and Figure 1B show two examples in the fifth related application. For sake of clarity, only three beamlets are shown, and the deflection scanning unit, the beam separator, the secondary projection imaging system and the electron detection device are not shown.

[0015] In Figure 1A, the primary-electron beam 102 generated by the electron source 101 is focused by the condenser lens 110 to be incident onto the source-conversion unit 120. The source-conversion unit 120 comprises one pre-beamlet-bending means 123 with three pre-bending micro-deflectors 123_1, 123_2 and 123_3, one beamlet-limit means 121 with three beam-limit openings 121_1, 121_2 and 121_3 and one image-forming means 122 with three electron optics elements 122_1, 122_2 and 122_3. The three pre-bending micro-deflectors 123_1~123_3 respectively deflect the three beamlets 102_1~102_3 perpendicularly incident onto the three beam-limit openings 121_1~121_3, and each of which functions as a beam-limit aperture to limit the current of the corresponding beamlet. The three electron optics elements 122_1~122_3 deflects the three beamlets 102_1~102_3 towards the primary optical axis 100_1 and form three first virtual images of the electron source 101, i.e. each beamlet has a virtual crossover. The objective lens constitutes the primary projection imaging system, which focuses the three deflected beamlets 102_1~102_3 onto the surface 7 of the sample 8, i.e. projecting the three first virtual images thereon. The three beamlets 102_1~102_3 therefore form three probe spots 102_1s, 102_2s and 102_3s on the surface 7. The currents

of the probe spots 102_1s~102_3s can be varied by adjusting the focusing power of the condenser lens 110. In Figure 1B, the movable condenser lens 210 focuses the primary-electron beam 102 to be normally incident onto the beamlet-limit means 121 of the source-conversion unit 220, and the pre-beamlet-bending means 123 in Figure 1A is therefore not needed. Accordingly the currents of the probe spots 102_1s~102_3s can be varied by adjusting the focusing power and the position of the movable condenser lens 210. In Figure 1A and Figure 1B, the landing energies of the beamlets 102_1~102_3 on the sample surface 7 can be varied by adjusted either or both of the potentials of the electron source 101 and the sample surface 7.

[0016] In a multi-beam apparatus, each beamlet scans one sub-FOV (field of view) on the sample surface, and the total FOV is the sum of the sub-FOVs of the plural beamlets. Each sub-FOV is equal or smaller than the beamlet pitch on the sample surface (Ps in Figure 1A). To further improve the throughput, each sub-FOV is better selectable in terms of the imaging resolution and the pitches of the plural beamlets are accordingly varied to keep the sub-FOVs stitched up. In one case with high image resolution, a small pixel size will be used and a small sub-FOV is desired for avoiding a large pixel number. In another case with low image resolution, a large pixel size will be used and a large sub-FOV is desired for a high throughput. Figure 2A shows an example in the later case. As shown in dash line, if the probe spots 102_2s and 102_3s in Figure 1A can be intentionally moved to the right and the left respectively, i.e. the pitch Ps can be changed from P1 to P2, the total FOV will be increased from $3 \times P1$ to $3 \times P2$, and accordingly the throughput is increased. Hence making the beamlet pitch Ps selectable will be one preferred function.

[0017] The continuous scanning mode (a sample continuously moving in the direction perpendicular to a scanning direction of a primary electron beam) is a conventional method to get high throughput in a conventional single-beam apparatus. If using this method in a multi-beam apparatus, it is better to match the orientation of the total FOV or the probe spot array with the stage moving direction. As well known, if there is one magnetic lens in the primary projection imaging system, the magnetic field thereof will rotate the plural beamlets and the total FOV as a result. Due to the magnetic field is varied with respect to the observing conditions (such as landing energies and currents of plural beamlets), the rotation angle of the total FOV will accordingly vary. Figure 2B shows an example if the

objective lens 131 in Figure 1A is a magnetic or electromagnetic compound lens. For instance, when the landing energies of the beamlets 102_1~102_3 are changed from 1keV to 2keV, the probe spots 102_2s and 102_3s will rotate an angle β around the optical axis 100_1 as shown in dash line, i.e. the orientation of the total FOV rotates the angle β . The orientation variation of the total FOV impacts the performance of the continuous scanning mode. Keeping the orientation of the probe spot array same or making it selectable can provide more flexibility to improve the throughput, and accordingly is another preferred function.

[0018] For some sample, a specific match between the orientations of patterns thereon and the probe spot array may be required. Making the orientation of the probe spot array selectable can compensate the mismatch due to the limited loading accuracy, and therefore can increase the throughput by avoiding the time-consuming of re-loading. In addition, to effectively observe some patterns of a sample, the plural beamlets may be required to land onto the sample surface with specific incident angles. Making the incident angles selectable can enable more samples or patterns observable, and will be one more preferred function.

[0019] The present invention will provide methods to realize the foregoing functions in a multi-beam apparatus, especially for those proposed in the CROSS REFERENCE and used as yield management tools in semiconductor manufacturing industry.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0020] The object of this invention is to provide a new multi-beam apparatus for observing a sample with high resolution and high throughput and in flexibly varying observing conditions. Based on the conventional multi-beam apparatuses in the CROSS REFERENCE, this invention proposes several methods to configure the new multi-beam apparatus with a variable total FOV. In the new apparatus, the total FOV can be variable in size, orientation and incident angle. Hence the new apparatus provides more flexibility to speed the sample observation and enable more kinds of samples observable. More specifically, if being used as a yield management tool in semiconductor manufacturing industry to inspect and/or review defects on wafers/masks, the new apparatus can provide more possibilities to achieve a high throughput and detect more kinds of defects.

[0021] Accordingly, the invention therefore provides a multi-beam apparatus for observing a surface of a sample, which comprises an electron source, a condenser lens below the electron source, a source-conversion unit below the condenser lens, an objective lens below the source-conversion unit, a deflection scanning unit below the source-conversion unit, a sample stage below the objective lens, a beam separator below the source-conversion unit, a secondary projection imaging system, and an electron detection device with a plurality of detection elements. The electron source, the condenser lens and the objective lens are aligned with a primary optical axis of the apparatus, and the sample stage sustains the sample so that the surface faces to the objective lens. The source-conversion unit comprises a beamlet-limit means with a plurality of beam-limit openings, and an image-forming means with a plurality of electron optics elements and movable along the primary optical axis. The electron source generates a primary-electron beam along the primary optical axis and the condenser lens focuses the primary-electron beam. A plurality of beamlets of the primary-electron beam pass through the plurality of beam-limit openings respectively, and is deflected by the plurality of electron optics elements towards the primary optical axis to form a plurality of virtual images of the electron source respectively. The plurality of beamlets is focused by the objective lens onto the surface and therefore forms a plurality of probe spots thereon respectively, and the deflection scanning unit deflects the plurality of beamlets to scan the plurality of probe spots respectively over a plurality of scanned regions within an observed area on the surface. A plurality of secondary electron beams is generated by the plurality of probe spots respectively from the plurality of scanned regions and directed into the secondary projection imaging system by the beam separator, the secondary projection imaging system focuses and keeps the plurality of secondary electron beams to be detected by the plurality of detection elements respectively, and each detection element therefore provides an image signal of one corresponding scanned region.

[0022] Deflection angles of the plurality of beamlets due to the plurality of electron optics elements are respectively set to reduce off-axis aberrations of the plurality of probe spots. Pitches of the plurality of probe spots are varied together by moving the image-forming means along the primary optical axis. The objective lens comprises a magnetic lens and an electrostatic lens. An orientation of the plurality of probe spots is selectable by varying a ratio of focusing powers of the

magnetic lens and the electrostatic lens.

[0023] The deflection angles may ensure the plurality of beamlets to land on the surface perpendicularly or substantially perpendicularly. The deflection angles may ensure the plurality of beamlets to obliquely land on the surface with same or substantially same landing angles. The deflection scanning unit is above a front focal plane of the objective lens. The deflection scanning unit tilts the plurality of beamlets to obliquely land on the surface with same or substantially same landing angles. The apparatus may further comprise a beamlet-tilting deflector between the source-conversion unit and a front focal plane of the objective lens. The beamlet-tilting deflector tilts the plurality of beamlets to obliquely land on the surface with same or substantially same landing angles.

[0024] The invention also provides a multi-beam apparatus for observing a surface of a sample, which comprises an electron source, a condenser lens below the electron source, a source-conversion unit below the condenser lens, an objective lens below the source-conversion unit, a deflection scanning unit below the source-conversion unit, a sample stage below the objective lens, a beam separator below the source-conversion unit, a secondary projection imaging system, and an electron detection device with a plurality of detection elements. The electron source, the condenser lens and the objective lens are aligned with a primary optical axis of the apparatus, and the sample stage sustains the sample so that the surface faces to the objective lens. The source-conversion unit comprises a beamlet-limit means with a plurality of beam-limit openings, a first image-forming means with a plurality of first electron optics elements and a second image-forming means with a plurality of second electron optics elements, the second image-forming means is below the first image-forming means and movable in a radial direction, and one of the first image-forming means and the second image-forming means is used as an active image-forming means. The electron source generates a primary-electron beam along the primary optical axis and the condenser lens focuses the primary-electron beam. A plurality of beamlets of the primary-electron beam pass through the plurality of beam-limit openings respectively, and is deflected by the active image-forming means towards the primary optical axis to form a plurality of virtual images of the electron source respectively. The plurality of beamlets is focused by the objective lens onto the surface and therefore forms a plurality of probe spots thereon.

respectively, and the deflection scanning unit deflects the plurality of beamlets to scan the plurality of probe spots respectively over a plurality of scanned regions within an observed area on the surface. A plurality of secondary electron beams is generated by the plurality of probe spots respectively from the plurality of scanned regions and directed into the secondary projection imaging system by the beam separator, the secondary projection imaging system focuses and keeps the plurality of secondary electron beams to be detected by the plurality of detection elements respectively, and each detection element therefore provides an image signal of one corresponding scanned region.

[0025] Deflection angles of the plurality of beamlets due to the active image-forming means are respectively set to reduce off-axis aberrations of the plurality of probe spots. Pitches of the plurality of probe spots are varied together by changing the active image-forming means between the first image-forming means and the second image-forming means, and when the first image-forming means is selected, the second image-forming means is moved outside so as not to block the plurality of beamlets. The objective lens comprises a magnetic lens and an electrostatic lens. An orientation of the plurality of probe spots is selectable by varying a ratio of focusing powers of the magnetic lens and the electrostatic lens.

[0026] The deflection angles may ensure the plurality of beamlets to land on the surface perpendicularly or substantially perpendicularly. The deflection angles may ensure the plurality of beamlets to obliquely land on the surface with same or substantially same landing angles. The deflection scanning unit is above a front focal plane of the objective lens. The deflection scanning unit tilts the plurality of beamlets to obliquely land on the surface with same or substantially same landing angles. The apparatus may further comprise a beamlet-tilting deflector between the source-conversion unit and a front focal plane of the objective lens. The beamlet-tilting deflector tilts the plurality of beamlets to obliquely land on the surface with same or substantially same landing angles.

[0027] The invention also provides a multi-beam apparatus for observing a surface of a sample, which comprises an electron source, a condenser lens below the electron source, a source-conversion unit below the condenser lens, an objective lens below the source-conversion unit, a deflection scanning unit below the source-conversion unit, a sample stage below the objective lens, a beam separator below

the source-conversion unit, a secondary projection imaging system, and an electron detection device with a plurality of detection elements. The electron source, the condenser lens and the objective lens are aligned with a primary optical axis of the apparatus, a first principal plane of the objective lens is movable along the primary optical axis, and the sample stage sustains the sample so that the surface faces to the objective lens. The source-conversion unit comprises a beamlet-limit means with a plurality of beam-limit openings, and an image-forming means with a plurality of electron optics elements. The electron source generates a primary-electron beam along the primary optical axis and the condenser lens focuses the primary-electron beam. A plurality of beamlets of the primary-electron beam pass through the plurality of beam-limit openings respectively, and is deflected by the plurality of electron optics elements towards the primary optical axis to form a plurality of virtual images of the electron source respectively. The plurality of beamlets is focused by the objective lens onto the surface and therefore forms a plurality of probe spots thereon respectively, and the deflection scanning unit deflects the plurality of beamlets to scan the plurality of probe spots respectively over a plurality of scanned regions within an observed area on the surface. A plurality of secondary electron beams is generated by the plurality of probe spots respectively from the plurality of scanned regions and directed into the secondary projection imaging system by the beam separator, the secondary projection imaging system focuses and keeps the plurality of secondary electron beams to be detected by the plurality of detection elements respectively, and each detection element therefore provides an image signal of one corresponding scanned region.

[0028] Deflection angles of the plurality of beamlets due to the plurality of electron optics elements are respectively set to reduce off-axis aberrations of the plurality of probe spots. Pitches of the plurality of probe spots are varied together by moving the first principal plane along the primary optical axis.

[0029] The deflection angles may ensure the plurality of beamlets to land on the surface perpendicularly or substantially perpendicularly. The deflection angles may ensure the plurality of beamlets to obliquely land on the surface with same or substantially same landing angles. The deflection scanning unit is above a front focal plane of the objective lens. The deflection scanning unit tilts the plurality of beamlets to obliquely land on the surface with same or substantially same landing

angles. The apparatus may further comprise a beamlet-tilting deflector between the source-conversion unit and a front focal plane of the objective lens. The beamlet-tilting deflector tilts the plurality of beamlets to obliquely land on the surface with same or substantially same landing angles. The objective lens comprises a lower magnetic lens and an electrostatic lens. The electrostatic lens comprises a field-control electrode and a field-moving electrode, and generates an electrostatic field. A potential of the field-control electrode is set to control the electrostatic field on the surface for the sample free of electrical breakdown. A potential of the field-moving electrode is set to move the electrostatic field for moving the first principal plane. An orientation of the plurality of probe spots is selectable by varying either or both of potentials of the field-control electrode and the field-moving electrode. The apparatus may further comprise an upper magnetic lens above the lower magnetic lens. The first principal plane is moved by varying a ratio of focusing powers of the lower magnetic lens and the upper magnetic lens. An orientation of the plurality of probe spots is selectable by setting polarities of magnetic fields of the upper and lower magnetic lenses same or opposite.

[0030] The invention also provides a multi-beam apparatus for observing a surface of a sample, which comprises an electron source, a condenser lens below the electron source, a source-conversion unit below the condenser lens, a transfer lens below the source-conversion unit, a field lens below the transfer lens, an objective lens below the field lens, a deflection scanning unit below the source-conversion unit, a sample stage below the objective lens, a beam separator below the source-conversion unit, a secondary projection imaging system, and an electron detection device with a plurality of detection elements. The electron source, the condenser lens, the transfer lens, the field lens and the objective lens are aligned with a primary optical axis of the apparatus, and the sample stage sustains the sample so that the surface faces to the objective lens. The source-conversion unit comprises a beamlet-limit means with a plurality of beam-limit openings, and an image-forming means with a plurality of electron optics elements. The electron source generates a primary-electron beam along the primary optical axis and the condenser lens focuses the primary-electron beam. A plurality of beamlets of the primary-electron beam pass through the plurality of beam-limit openings respectively, and is deflected by the plurality of electron optics elements towards the primary optical axis to form a plurality of first virtual images of the electron source respectively.

The transfer lens images the plurality of first virtual images onto an intermediate image plane and therefore forms a plurality of second real images respectively thereon, the field lens is placed on the intermediate image plane and bends the plurality of beamlets, the objective lens images the plurality of second real images onto the surface and therefore forms a plurality of probe spots thereon respectively, and the deflection scanning unit deflects the plurality of beamlets to scan the plurality of probe spots respectively over a plurality of scanned regions within an observed area on the surface. A plurality of secondary electron beams is generated by the plurality of probe spots respectively from the plurality of scanned regions and directed into the secondary projection imaging system by the beam separator, the secondary projection imaging system focuses and keeps the plurality of secondary electron beams to be detected by the plurality of detection elements respectively, and each detection element therefore provides an image signal of one corresponding scanned region.

[0031] Bending angles of the plurality of beamlets due to the field lens are set to reduce off-axis aberrations of the plurality of probe spots. Deflection angles of the plurality of beamlets due to the plurality of electron optics elements are adjusted to change pitches of the plurality of probe spots respectively. The objective lens comprises a first magnetic lens and a first electrostatic lens. An orientation of the plurality of probe spots is selectable by varying a ratio of focusing powers of the first magnetic lens and the first electrostatic lens. The transfer lens comprises a second magnetic lens and a second electrostatic lens. An orientation of the plurality of probe spots is selectable by varying a ratio of focusing powers of the second magnetic lens and the second electrostatic lens. The field lens comprises a third magnetic lens and a third electrostatic lens. An orientation of the plurality of probe spots is selectable by varying a ratio of focusing powers of the third magnetic lens and the third electrostatic lens. The bending angles and deflection angles of the plurality of beamlets due to the plurality of electron optics elements may ensure the plurality of beamlets to land on the surface perpendicularly or substantially perpendicularly. The bending angles and deflection angles of the plurality of beamlets due to the plurality of electron optics elements may ensure the plurality of beamlets to obliquely land on the surface with same or substantially same landing angles. The deflection scanning unit is above a front focal plane of the objective lens. The deflection scanning unit tilts the plurality of beamlets to obliquely land on

the surface with same or substantially same landing angles. The apparatus may further comprise a beamlet-tilting deflector between the source-conversion unit and a front focal plane of the objective lens. The beamlet-tilting deflector tilts the plurality of beamlets to obliquely land on the surface with same or substantially same landing angles.

[0032] The invention also provides a method to configure a multi-beam apparatus for observing a surface of a sample, which comprises steps of configuring an image-forming means of a source-conversion unit movable along a primary optical axis thereof; using the image-forming means to form a plurality of virtual images of an electron source respectively; using an objective lens to image the plurality of virtual images onto the surface and form a plurality of probe spots thereon; and moving the image-forming means to vary pitches of the plurality of probe spots.

[0033] The invention also provides a method to configure a multi-beam apparatus for observing a surface of a sample, which comprises steps of configuring a source-conversion unit with a first image-forming means and a second image-forming means, wherein the second image-forming means is farther away from an electron source than the first image-forming means and movable in a radial direction of the apparatus; using one of the first image-forming means and the second image-forming means as an active image-forming means, wherein when the first image-forming means is used, the second image-forming means is moved away; using the active image-forming means to form a plurality of virtual images of the electron source respectively; using an objective lens to image the plurality of virtual images onto the surface and form a plurality of probe spots thereon; and changing the active image-forming means between the first image-forming means and the second image-forming means to vary pitches of the plurality of probe spots.

[0034] The invention also provides a method to configure a multi-beam apparatus for observing a surface of a sample, which comprises steps of configuring an objective lens with a first principal plane movable along a primary optical axis of the apparatus; using an image-forming means of a source-conversion unit to form a plurality of virtual images of an electron source respectively; using the objective lens to image the plurality of virtual images onto the surface and form a plurality of probe spots thereon; and moving the first principal plane to vary pitches of the

plurality of probe spots.

[0035] The invention also provides a method to configure a multi-beam apparatus for observing a surface of a sample, which comprises steps of configuring an objective lens with a lower magnetic lens and an electrostatic lens in the apparatus; using an image-forming means of a source-conversion unit to form a plurality of virtual images of an electron source respectively; using the objective lens to image the plurality of virtual images onto the surface and form a plurality of probe spots thereon; and changing a ratio of focusing powers of the magnetic lens and the electrostatic lens to select an orientation of the plurality of probe spots.

[0036] The method may further comprise a step of configuring the objective lens with an upper magnetic lens farther away from the surface than the lower magnetic lens. The method may further comprise a step of changing polarities of magnetic fields of the upper and lower magnetic lenses to select the orientation.

[0037] The invention also provides a method to configure a multi-beam apparatus for observing a surface of a sample, which comprises steps of using an image-forming means of a source-conversion unit to deflect a plurality of beamlets from an electron source to form a plurality of first virtual images thereof respectively; using an objective lens to image the plurality of virtual images onto the surface and form a plurality of probe spots thereon; and setting deflection angles of the plurality of beamlets due to the image-forming means so that the plurality of beamlets lands on the surface with same or substantially same landing angles.

[0038] The method may further comprise a step of changing the deflection angles to equally vary the landing angles. The method may further comprise a step of using a deflection scanning unit to tilt the plurality of beamlets so as to equally vary the landing angles. The method may further comprise a step of using a beamlet-tilting deflector to tilt the plurality of beamlets so as to equally vary the landing angles.

[0039] The invention also provides a method to configure a multi-beam apparatus for observing a surface of a sample, which comprises steps of using an image-forming means of a source-conversion unit to deflect a plurality of beamlets from an electron source to form a plurality of first virtual images thereof respectively; using a transfer lens to image the plurality of first virtual images onto

an intermediate image plane and forms a plurality of second real images respectively; placing a field lens on the intermediate image plane to bend the plurality of beamlets; and using an objective lens to image the plurality of second real images onto the surface and form a plurality of probe spots thereon.

[0040] The method may further comprise a step of changing deflection angles of the plurality of beamlets due to the image-forming means to vary pitches of the plurality of probe spots. The method may further comprise a step of setting deflection angles of the plurality of beamlets due to the image-forming means and bending angles of the plurality of beamlets due to the field lens so that the plurality of beamlets lands on the surface with same or substantially same landing angles. The method may further comprise a step of varying the deflection angles to equally change the landing angles. The method may further comprise a step of using a deflection scanning unit to tilt the plurality of beamlets to equally change the landing angles. The method may further comprise a step of using a beamlet-tilting deflector to tilt the plurality of beamlets to equally change the landing angles. The method may further comprise a step of configuring the objective lens with a first magnetic lens and a first electrostatic lens. The method may further comprise a step of changing a ratio of focusing powers of the first magnetic lens and the first electrostatic lens to select an orientation of the plurality of probe spots. The method may further comprise a step of configuring the transfer lens with a second magnetic lens and a second electrostatic lens. The method may further comprise a step of changing a ratio of focusing powers of the second magnetic lens and the second electrostatic lens to select an orientation of the plurality of probe spots. The method may further comprise a step of configuring the field lens with a third magnetic lens and a third electrostatic lens. The method may further comprise a step of changing a ratio of focusing powers of the third magnetic lens and the third electrostatic lens to select an orientation of the plurality of probe spots.

[0041] The invention also provides an apparatus, which comprises a source for providing a primary charged particle beam, a source-conversion unit for dividing the primary charged particle beam into a plurality of charged particle beamlets and using which to form a plurality of images of the source respectively, and an objective lens below the source-conversion unit for projecting the plurality of images onto a sample surface. Pitches of the plurality of charged particle beamlets on the sample

surface are adjustable by changing deflection angles of the plurality of charged particle beamlets prior entering the objective lens.

[0042] The invention also provides an apparatus, which comprises a source for providing a primary charged particle beam, means for using a plurality of beamlets of the primary charged particle beam to form a plurality of images of the source, an objective lens for projecting the plurality of images onto a sample surface to form a plurality of probe spots, and means for adjusting pitches of the plurality of probe spots on the sample surface.

[0043] The invention also provides a method for observing a sample surface, which comprises steps of providing a plurality of charged particle beams with a plurality of crossovers respectively, projecting the plurality of crossovers onto the sample surface to form a plurality of probe spots thereon, scanning the plurality of probe spots on the sample surface, and changing deflection angles of the plurality of charged particle beams such that pitches of the plurality of spots can be adjusted.

[0044] Other advantages of the present invention will become apparent from the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings wherein are set forth, by way of illustration and example, certain embodiments of the present invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0045] The present invention will be readily understood by the following detailed description in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein like reference numerals designate like structural elements, and in which:

[0046] Figures 1A and 1B are schematic illustrations of two configurations of the conventional multi-beam apparatus disclosed in the fifth application of the CROSS REFERENCE.

[0047] Figures 1C is a schematic illustration of one configuration of a conventional electromagnetic compound objective lens.

[0048] Figures 2A and 2B are schematic illustrations of the total FOV varying in size and orientation.

[0049] Figure 3A is a schematic illustration of one configuration of the new multi-beam apparatus in accordance with one embodiment of the present

invention.

[0050] Figures 3B and 3C are schematic illustrations of varying the size of the total FOV in accordance with the embodiment in Figure 3A.

[0051] Figure 4A is a schematic illustration of another configuration of the new multi-beam apparatus in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention.

[0052] Figures 4B and 4C are schematic illustrations of varying the size of the total FOV in accordance with the embodiment in Figure 4A.

[0053] Figure 5A is a schematic illustration of another configuration of the new multi-beam apparatus in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention.

[0054] Figures 5B and 5C are schematic illustrations of varying the size of the total FOV in accordance with the embodiment in Figure 5A.

[0055] Figure 6A is a schematic illustration of another configuration of the new multi-beam apparatus in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention.

[0056] Figures 6B and 6C are schematic illustrations of varying the size of the total FOV in accordance with the embodiment in Figure 6A.

[0057] Figures 7A~7C are illustrations of three configurations of the movable objective lens in Figure 6A in accordance with another three embodiments of the present invention.

[0058] Figures 8A and 8B are schematic illustrations of another two configurations of the new multi-beam apparatus in accordance with another two embodiments of the present invention.

[0059] Figure 9A is a schematic illustration of tilting the plural beamlets in the conventional multi-beam apparatus in Figure 1B in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention.

[0060] Figure 9B is a schematic illustration of tilting the plural beamlets in the new multi-beam apparatus in Figure 5A in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention.

[0061] Figure 10 is a schematic illustration of another configuration of the new multi-beam apparatus in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EXAMPLE EMBODIMENTS

[0062] Various example embodiments of the present invention will now be described more fully with reference to the accompanying drawings in which some example embodiments of the invention are shown. Without limiting the scope of the protection of the present invention, all the description and drawings of the embodiments will exemplarily be referred to an electron beam. However, the embodiments are not used to limit the present invention to specific charged particles.

[0063] In the drawings, relative dimensions of each component and among every component may be exaggerated for clarity. Within the following description of the drawings, the same or like reference numbers refer to the same or like components or entities, and only the differences with respect to the individual embodiments are described.

[0064] Accordingly, while example embodiments of the invention are capable of various modifications and alternative forms, embodiments thereof are shown by way of example in the drawings and will herein be described in detail. It should be understood, however, that there is no intent to limit example embodiments of the invention to the particular forms disclosed, but on the contrary, example embodiments of the invention are to cover all modifications, equivalents, and alternatives falling within the scope of the invention.

[0065] In this invention, “axial” means “in the optical axis direction of an electron optics element (such as a round lens or a multipole lens), or an imaging system or an apparatus”, “radial” means “in a direction perpendicular to the optical axis”, “on-axial” means “on or aligned with the optical axis, and “off-axis” means “not on or aligned with the optical axis”.

[0066] In this invention, “an imaging system is aligned with an optical axis” means “all the electron optics elements (such round lens and multipole lens) are aligned with the optical axis”.

[0067] In this invention, X, Y and Z axe form Cartesian coordinate. The

optical axis of the primary projection imaging system is on the Z-axis, and the primary electron beam travels along the Z-axis.

[0068] In this invention, “primary electrons” means “electrons emitted from an electron source and incident onto a being-observed or inspected surface of a sample, and “secondary electrons” means “electrons generated from the surface by the “primary electrons”.

[0069] In this invention, “pitch” means an interval between two adjacent beamlets or beams on a plane.

[0070] In this invention, “effective deflection plane of a deflector” means “the plane where the total deflection function of the deflector can be equivalent to happen”.

[0071] Based on some conventional multi-beam apparatuses proposed in the CROSS REFERENCE, this invention proposes several methods to configure a new multi-beam apparatus with a variable total FOV. In the new apparatus, the total FOV can be variable in size, orientation and illumination angle. To clearly express the methods, the multi-beam apparatus in Figure 1B is taken as an example. For sake of simplification in explanation, in the new apparatus, only three beamlets are shown but the number of beamlets can be anyone. In addition, one of the three beamlets is on-axis, but they can all be off-axis. In addition, the elements not related to the methods, such as the deflection scanning unit and the beam separator, are not shown or even not mentioned in the illustrations and the description of the embodiments.

[0072] In each of those conventional multi-beam apparatuses, the plural beamlets are deflected towards the optical axis by the image-forming means. The deflection angles of the plural beamlets are set to minimize the off-axis aberrations of the plural probe spots due to the objective lens. Accordingly the plural deflected beamlets typically pass through or approach the front focal point of the objective lens, i.e. forming an on-axis crossover on or close to the front focal plane of the objective lens. The pitches of the plural probe spots therefore depend on the deflection angles of the plural beamlets and the first (or object) focal length of the objective lens. Hence the pitches can be varied by changing the deflection angles and/or the first focal length of the objective lens. For example, in Figure 1A or

Figure 1B, the deflection angles α_2 and α_3 of the two off-axis beamlets 102_2 and 102_3 are set to minimize the off-axis aberrations of the probe spots 102_2s and 102_3s due to the objective lens 131. Accordingly the beamlets 102_2 and 102_3 typically pass through or approach the front focal point of the objective lens 131, i.e. forming the crossover CV on the optical axis and on or close to the front focal plane of the objective lens 131. The pitch P_s between the probe spots 102_1s and 102_2s is determined by the deflection angle α_2 and the first focal length f of the objective lens 131, and can be simply expressed as $P_s \approx \alpha_2 \cdot f$. Similarly, the pitch P_s between the probe spots 102_1s and 102_3s can be simply expressed as $P_s \approx \alpha_3 \cdot f$.

[0073] Figure 3A, Figure 4A and Figure 5A show three embodiments 300A, 400A and 500A of the new apparatus changing the pitches by varying the deflection angles, and Figure 6A shows one embodiment 600A changing the pitches by varying the first focal length. In the embodiment 300A, the source-conversion unit 320 comprises one beamlet-limit means 121 with three beam-limit opening 121_1, 121_2 and 121_3, and one movable image-forming means 322 with three electron optics elements 322_1, 322_2 and 322_3. The effective deflection plane 322_o of the movable image-forming means 322 can be moved along the optical axis 300_1 within the variation range 322_or. The pitches of the plural probe spots will become large as the effective deflection plane 322_o is moved close to the objective 131 and vice versa.

[0074] Figures 3B shows the paths of three beamlets 102_1, 102_2 and 102_3 when the effective deflection plane 322_o is on the position D1. The movable condenser lens 210 collimates the primary electron beam 102 to be normally incident onto the source-conversion unit 320. The beam-limit openings 121_1~121_3 divide the primary electron beam 102 into one on-axis beamlet 102_1, and two off-axis beamlets 102_2 and 102_3. The two off-axis electron optics elements 322_2 and 322_3 deflect the beamlets 102_2 and 102_3 respectively towards the optical axis 300_1. The three beamlets 102_1~102_3 are focused onto the sample surface 7 by the objective lens 131 and therefore form three probe spots 102_1s, 102_2s and 102_3s respectively. The deflection angles α_2 and α_3 of the beamlets 102_2 and 102_3 are set to minimize the off-axis aberrations of the probe spots 102_2s and 102_3s. Accordingly the beamlets 102_2 and 102_3 pass through or approach the front focal point of the objective lens 131, i.e. forming a crossover

on the optical axis 300_1 and on or close to the front focal plane thereof. The two pitches formed by the probe spots 102_1s~102_3s are approximately equal to $\alpha_2 \cdot f$ and $\alpha_3 \cdot f$ respectively. The f is the first focal length of the objective lens 131. The effective deflection plane 322_o in Figure 3C is on the position D2 closer to the objective 131 than the position D1. Accordingly, the deflection angles α_2 and α_3 are increased and the two pitches become larger. The probe spots 102_2s and 102_3s move outside from the previous positions (dash line) in Figure 3B.

[0075] In the embodiment 400A in Figure 4A, the source-conversion unit 420 comprises one more image-forming means 124 in comparison with Figure 1B. The image-forming means 124 with three electron optics elements 124_1, 124_2 and 124_3 is below the imaging-forming means 122, and can be moved in a radial direction. Accordingly the source-conversion unit 420 works in two modes. In the first mode as shown in Figure 4B, the image-forming means 122 is used to form three first virtual images of the single electron source 101, and the image-forming means 124 is moved outside the path of the beamlets 102_1~102_3. In the second mode as shown in Figure 4C, the image-forming means 122 is switched off, and the image-forming means 124 is moved back to form three first virtual images of the single electron source 101. The deflection angles α_2 and α_3 of the beamlets 102_2 and 102_3 are smaller in the first mode than in the second mode, and accordingly the two pitches are larger in the second mode. In Figure 4C, the probe spots 102_2s and 102_3s move outside from the previous positions (dash line) in Figure 4B.

[0076] The embodiment 500A in Figure 5A employs one transfer lens 533 and one field lens 534 between the source-conversion unit 220 and the objective lens 131 in comparison with Figure 1B. Accordingly the transfer lens 533, the field lens 534 and the objective lens 131 constitute the primary projection imaging system. Figures 5B shows the paths of the three beamlets 102_1~102_3. The movable condenser lens 210 collimates the primary electron beam 102 to be normally incident onto the source-conversion unit 220. The beam-limit openings 121_1~121_3 divide the primary electron beam 102 into one on-axis beamlet 102_1, and two off-axis beamlets 102_2 and 102_3. The two off-axis electron optics elements 122_2 and 122_3 deflect the beamlets 102_2 and 102_3 respectively towards the optical axis 500_1. Consequently three first virtual images of the single electron source 101 are formed. Then the transfer lens 533 focuses the three

beamlets 102_1~102_3 onto the intermediate image plane PP1, i.e. projecting the three first virtual images thereon. Accordingly three second real images 102_1m, 102_2m and 102_3m of the single electron source 101 are formed. The field lens 534 is located at the intermediate image plane PP1, and bends the off-axis beamlets 102_2 and 102_3 toward the optical axis 500_1 without influencing the focus situations thereof. After that, the objective lens 131 focuses the three beamlets 102_1~102_3 onto the sample surface 7, i.e. projecting the three second real images 102_1m~102_3m thereon. Consequently, on the sample surface 7, the three beamlets 102_1~102_3 form three probe spots 102_1s, 102_2s and 102_3s respectively.

[0077] In Figure 5B, the bending angles γ_2 and γ_3 of the beamlets 102_2 and 102_3 due to the field lens 534 are set to minimize the off-axis aberrations of the probe spots 102_2s and 102_3s, and the beamlets 102_2 and 102_3 accordingly pass through or approach the front focal point of the objective lens 131, i.e. forming a crossover CV on the optical axis 500_1 and on or close to the front focal plane thereof. The pitch P_s between the probe spots 102_1s and 102_2s is determined by the bending angle γ_2 and the first focal length f of the objective lens 131, and can be simply expressed as $P_s \approx \gamma_2 \cdot f$. Similarly, the pitch P_s between the probe spots 102_1s and 102_3s can be simply expressed as $P_s \approx \gamma_3 \cdot f$. The bending angles γ_2 and γ_3 change with the radial shifts of the second real images 102_2m and 102_3m, and the radial shifts change with the deflection angles α_2 and α_3 of beamlets 102_2 and 102_3 due to the electron optics elements 122_2 and 122_3. Therefore the two pitches can be varied by adjusting the deflection angles α_2 and α_3 . In Figure 5C, the deflection angles α_2 and α_3 are larger than in Figure 5B. Consequently the two off-axis probe spots 102_2S and 102_3S are moved away from the previous positions (shown in dash line) in Figure 5B to the current positions, and the pitches become larger.

[0078] In the embodiment 600A in Figure 6A, the first principal plane 631_2 of the objective lens 631 can be shifted along the optical axis 600_1 within the variation range 631_2r. The axial shift can be done by mechanically moving the position of the objective lens 631 or electrically changing the shape and/or position of the objective lens field. As the first principal plane is closer to the sample surface 7, the first focal length f will become small and the first focal plane will move toward

the surface 7. In addition, as the first focal plane moves down, the deflection angles of the plural beamlets decrease. Accordingly the pitches of the plural probe spots will decrease.

[0079] Figures 6B and 6C show the paths of the three beamlets when the first principal plane 631_2 is respectively on the position D3 and the position D4. The position D3 is closer to the sample surface 7 than the position D4. Accordingly, the first focal length f and the deflection angles α_2 and α_3 of the beamlets 102_2 and 102_3 in Figure 6B are smaller than in Figure 6C. In Figure 6C, the probe spots 102_2s and 102_3s move outside from the previous positions (dash line) in Figure 6B, and the two pitches become larger than in Figure 6B.

[0080] The objective lens in one conventional multi-beam apparatus is an electromagnetic compound lens, as one embodiment 131-1 shown in Figure 1C. The objective lens comprises one magnetic lens and one electrostatic lens, and works in a retarding mode (the landing energy of an electron is lower than the energy of the electron passing through the objective lens) due to low geometric aberrations and low radiation damage on the sample. The magnetic lens is configured by the coil 131_c1 and the yoke 131_y1 with the pole-pieces 131_mp1 and 131_mp2, and the electrostatic lens is formed by the pole-piece 131_mp1, the field-control electrode 131_e1 and the sample 8. The potential of the inner pole-piece 131_mp1 is higher than the sample 8. The potential of the field-control electrode 131_e1 is set to control the electric field on the sample surface. The electric field can ensure the sample free of electrical breakdown, reduce the geometric aberrations of the plural probe spots, control the charge-up on the sample surface 7 by reflecting back a part of secondary electrons or enhance the collection of secondary electron beams. In Figure 1C, the shape of the magnetic field is not variable, and the shape of the electrostatic field can only be changed within a limited range. Hence the conventional objective lens is almost not electrically (changing the potentials of the electrodes and/or the excitation current of the coil) movable.

[0081] Next three solutions for configuring the movable objective lens 631 are proposed in terms of the conventional objective lens 131-1 in Figure 1C, and respectively shown in Figures 7A, 7B and 7C. In Figure 7A, the embodiment 631-1 comprises one more electrode 631-1_e2 between the inner pole-piece 131_mp1 and the field-control electrode 131_e1 in comparison with Figure 1C. Accordingly the

electrostatic lens is formed by the inner pole-piece 131_mp1, the electrode 631-1_e2, the field-control electrode 131_e1 and the sample 8. The electrostatic field shape of the electrostatic lens can be varied by adjusting the potential of the electrode 131_e1 and the potential of the electrode 631-1_e2 as well. As the potential of the electrode 631-1_e2 is adjusted to approach the potential of the inner pole-piece 131_mp1, the electrostatic field is squeezed towards the sample, which is equal to moving the objective lens 631-1 towards the sample 8. Accordingly the electrode 631-1_e2 can be called as a field-moving electrode.

[0082] In Figure 7B, the embodiment 631-2 comprises two more electrodes 631-2_e2 and 631-2_e3 inside the bore of the yoke 131_y1 and above the field-control electrode 131_e1 in comparison with Figure 1C. Accordingly the electrostatic lens is formed by the electrodes 631-2_e3 and 631-2_e2, the field-control electrode 131_e1 and the sample 8. The potential of the electrodes 631-2_e3 is higher than the sample and can be equal to the inner pole-piece 131_mp1. The electrostatic field shape of the electrostatic lens can be varied by adjusting the potential of the electrode 131_e1 and the potential of the electrode 631-2_e2 as well. Similar to Figure 7A, as the potential of the electrode 631-2_e2 is adjusted to approach the potential of the electrodes 631-1_e3, the electrostatic field is squeezed towards the sample 8, which is equal to moving the objective lens 631-2 towards the sample 8. Accordingly the electrode 631-2_e2 can be called as a field-moving electrode. In comparison the embodiment 631-1 with Figure 7A, the magnetic lens can be placed closer to the sample 8, and thereby providing a deeper magnetic immersion to the sample so as to generate lower aberrations.

[0083] In Figure 7C, the embodiment 631-3 comprises one more coil 631-3_c2 and one more yoke 631-3_y2 inside the bore of the yoke 131_y1 and above the inner pole-piece 131_mp1 in comparison with Figure 1C. Accordingly one lower magnetic lens, one upper magnetic lens and one electrostatic lens are formed. The lower magnetic lens generates one lower magnetic field by the coil 131_c1 through the lower magnetic-circuit gap G1 between the inner and outer pole-pieces 131_mp1 and 131_mp2 of the yoke 131_y1, while the upper magnetic lens forms one upper magnetic field by the coil 631-3_c2 through the magnetic-circuit gap G2 between the inner pole-piece 131_mp1 and the upper pole-piece 631-3_mp3 of the yoke 631-3_y2. The electrostatic lens is formed by the inner pole-piece 131_mp1, the field-

control electrode 131_e1 and the sample 8. The distribution shape of the total magnetic field of the objective lens 631-3 changes with the combination of the upper and lower magnetic fields, therefore can be varied by adjusting the excitation ratio of the upper and lower magnetic lenses or the current ratio of the coils 131_c1 and 631-3_c2. As the current ratio is adjusted higher, the total magnetic field of the objective lens 631-3 is squeezed towards the sample, which is equal to moving the objective lens 631-3 towards the sample 8. Two extreme examples are the total magnetic field of the objective lens 631-3 locates the superior top when the coil 131_c1 turns off and the coil 631-3_c2 turn on, and the lowest when the coil 131_c1 turns on and the coil 631-3_c2 turns off. Each of the solutions in Figure 7A and 7B can be combined with the solution in Figure 7C to configure more embodiments of the movable objective lens 631.

[0084] Next some methods of intentionally rotating the probe spot array will be proposed, which can be used to eliminate the orientation variation of the total FOV with respect to changes in the observing conditions and/or accurately match the orientations of sample patterns and the probe spot array. As mentioned above, the objective lens in one conventional multi-beam apparatus is typically an electromagnetic compound lens, such as the embodiment 131-1 shown in Figure 1C. Therefore appropriately combining the focusing powers of the magnetic lens and the electrostatic lens can rotate the probe spot array around the optical axis to a certain degree. For example, if the objective lens 131 in Figure 1A is similar to the embodiment 131-1 in Figure 1C, the field-control electrode 131_e1 can be used to control the rotation of the probe spots 102_2 and 102_3s to a certain degree as well as controlling the electrical field on the surface 7. To keep the electrical field on the surface 7 weaker than a permissible value for the specimen safety, the potential of the field-control electrode 131_e1 can be varied within one specific range, such as -3kV~5kV with respect to the sample 8. The focusing power of the electrostatic lens changes with the potential of the field-control electrode 131_e1, and accordingly the focusing power of the magnetic lens needs being changed to keep the plural beamlets focused on the sample surface 7. The focusing power variation of the magnetic lens changes the rotation angles of the probe spots 102_2s and 102_3s. Hence, the rotation angles of the probe spots 102_2s and 102_3s can be adjusted by varying the potential of the field-control electrode 131_e1 within the specific range.

[0085] For each of the foregoing embodiments 300A, 400A and 500A of the new apparatus in Figures 3A, 4A and 5A, if the objective lens 131 has a configuration similar to the embodiment 131-1, the orientation of the probe spot array can be adjusted by this method. For the embodiment 600A of the new apparatus in Figure 6A, if the movable objective lens 631 has a configuration similar to one of the embodiments 631-1, 631-2 and 631-3 in Figures 7A~7C, the field-control electrode 131_e1 and/or the corresponding field-moving electrode can be used to control the rotation of the probe spot array. For the embodiment 631-3, the orientation can also be changed by varying the polarities of the magnetic fields of the upper magnetic lens and the lower magnetic lens. As well known, for a magnetic lens, the rotation angle is related to the polarity of the magnetic field but the focusing power is not. When the polarities of the magnetic fields of the upper magnetic lens and the lower magnetic lens are same, the upper magnetic lens and the lower magnetic lens rotate the probe spot array in a same direction. When the polarities are opposite to each other, the upper magnetic lens and the lower magnetic lens rotate the probe spot array in opposite directions. Hence the embodiment 631-3 can generate two different orientations of the probe spot array with respect to a required focusing power and the corresponding position of the first principal plane.

[0086] For the embodiment 500A in Figure 5A, the transfer lens 533 and the field lens 534 provide more possibilities to control the rotation of the probe spot array. One embodiment 510A is shown in Figure 8A, wherein the electromagnetic compound transfer lens 533-1 comprises one electrostatic transfer lens 533_11 and one magnetic transfer lens 533_12. The magnetic field of the magnetic transfer lens 533_12 can be adjusted to change the rotation of the probe spot array, and the electrostatic field of the electrostatic transfer lens 533_11 can be accordingly varied to keep the three second real images 102_1m, 102_2m and 102_3m on the intermediate image plane PP1. Another embodiment 520A is shown in Figure 8B, wherein the electromagnetic compound field lens 534-1 comprises one electrostatic field lens 534_11 and one magnetic field lens 534_12. The magnetic field of the magnetic field lens 534_12 can be adjusted to change the rotation of the probe spot array, and the electrostatic field of the electrostatic field lens 534_11 can be accordingly varied to generate the required bending angles of the plural beamlets.

[0087] In each of the foregoing embodiments, the plural beamlets are normal

or substantially normal incident onto the sample surface, i.e. the incident angles or landing angles (angles formed with the normal of the sample surface) of the plural beamlets are approximately equal to zero. To effectively observe some patterns of a sample, the incident angles are better a little larger than zero. In this case, to ensure plural beamlets perform alike, the plural beamlets are required to have same incident angles. To do so, the crossover CV of the plural beamles needs to be shifted away from the optical axis. The shift of the crossover CV can be done by the image-forming means or one additional beamlet-tilting deflector.

[0088] Figure 9A shows how to tilt the plural beamlets 102_1~102_3 by the image-forming means 122 in the conventional multi-beam apparatus 200A. In comparison with Figure 1B, the deflection angles α_1 (equal to zero in Figure 1B), α_2 and α_3 of the beamlets 102_1~102_3 respectively are added same or substantially same amounts so that the crossover CV of the beamlets 102_1~102_3 is shifted away from the optical axis 100_1 and on or close to the first focal plane of the objective lens 131. Accordingly the beamlets 102_1~102_3 obliquely land on the surface 7 with same or nearly same landing angles. The plural beamlets 102_1~102_3 in each of the embodiments 300A, 400A, 500A and 600A can be tilted by the corresponding image-forming means in the same way. For the embodiments 300A, 400A and 600A, the paths of plural beamlets 102_1~102_3 will be similar to those in Figure 9A. For the embodiment 500A, the paths will be different, as shown in Figure 9B. In comparison with Figure 5B, the deflection angles α_1 (equal to zero in Figure 5B), α_2 and α_3 of the beamlets 102_1~102_3 shift the three second real images 102_1m, 102_2m and 102_3m same or substantially distances on the intermediate image plane PP1. Accordingly the crossover CV of the beamlets 102_1~102_3 after bended by the field 534, is still on or close to the first focal plane but shifted away from the optical axis 500_1.

[0089] Figure 10 shows how to tilt the plural beamlets 102_1~102_3 by one beamlet-tilting deflector 135 in one embodiment 700A of the new apparatus. In comparison with Figure 1B, the beamlet-tilting deflector 135 deflects the beamlets 102_1 ~102_3 together to shift the crossover CV away from the optical axis 700_1 and on or close to the front focal plane of the objective lens 131. Similarly, one beamlet-tilting deflector can also be added to the embodiments 300A, 400A, 500A and 600A for tilting the plural beams together. The beamlet-tilting deflector can be

placed between the source-conversion unit and the front focal plane of the objective lens, and is preferred close to the source-conversion unit. In addition, if the deflection scanning unit in one of the foregoing embodiments is above the front focal plane of the objective lens, it can shift the crossover of the plural beamlets and the additional beamlet-tilting deflector therefore is not needed.

[0090] Although each of the foregoing embodiments of the new apparatus only employs one or two of the methods for varying the total FOV in size, orientation and incident angle, the methods can be combined in many ways. For example the new apparatus can use one movable image-forming means and one movable objective lens together, or use one movable objective lens, one transfer lens and one field lens together. Although the methods are shown and explained by taking the embodiment 200A in Figure 1B as an example, the methods can be applied to the other embodiments (such as the embodiment 100A in Figure 1A) of the conventional apparatuses to configure more embodiments of the new multi-beam apparatus.

[0091] In summary, based on the conventional multi-beam apparatuses proposed in the CROSS REFERENCE, this invention proposes several methods to configure a new multi-beam apparatus whose total FOV is variable in size, orientation and incident angle. Hence the new apparatus provides more flexibility to speed the sample observation and enable more kinds of samples observable. More specifically, the new apparatus can be used as a yield management to provide more possibilities to achieve a high throughput and detect more kinds of defects. Three methods are proposed to change the pitches of the plural beamlets on the sample surface for varying the size of the total FOV, i.e. using a movable image-forming means in the source-conversion unit, using a movable objective lens, and using a transfer lens and a field lens between the source-conversion unit and the objective lens. Three methods are employed to intentionally rotate the probe spot array for varying the orientation of the total FOV, i.e. using an electromagnetic compound objective lens and varying the electric field thereof, using one objective lens with two magnetic lenses and setting the magnetic fields thereof opposite in polarity, and using one magnetic lens in either or both of the transfer lens and the field lens. Three methods are proposed to shift the crossover of the plural beamlets away from the optical axis for equally varying the landing angles of the plural

beamlets on the sample surface. The shift can be done by the image-forming means, or one additional beamlet-tilting deflector, or the deflection scanning unit.

[0092] Although the present invention has been explained in relation to its preferred embodiment, it is to be understood that other modifications and variation can be made without departing the spirit and scope of the invention as hereafter claimed.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

- 1 1. A multi-beam apparatus for observing a surface of a sample, comprising:
 - 2 an electron source;
 - 3 a condenser lens below said electron source;
 - 4 a source-conversion unit below said condenser lens;
 - 5 an objective lens below said source-conversion unit;
 - 6 a deflection scanning unit below said source-conversion unit;
 - 7 a sample stage below said objective lens;
 - 8 a beam separator below said source-conversion unit;
 - 9 a secondary projection imaging system; and
 - 10 an electron detection device with a plurality of detection elements,
 - 11 wherein said electron source, said condenser lens and said objective
 - 12 lens are aligned with a primary optical axis of said apparatus, and said sample
 - 13 stage sustains said sample so that said surface faces to said objective lens,
 - 14 wherein said source-conversion unit comprises a beamlet-limit means
 - 15 with a plurality of beam-limit openings, and an image-forming means with a
 - 16 plurality of electron optics elements and movable along said primary optical
 - 17 axis,
 - 18 wherein said electron source generates a primary-electron beam along
 - 19 said primary optical axis and said condenser lens focuses said primary-
 - 20 electron beam,
 - 21 wherein a plurality of beamlets of said primary-electron beam pass
 - 22 through said plurality of beam-limit openings respectively, and is deflected by
 - 23 said plurality of electron optics elements towards said primary optical axis to
 - 24 form a plurality of virtual images of said electron source respectively,
 - 25 wherein said plurality of beamlets is focused by said objective lens onto
 - 26 said surface and therefore forms a plurality of probe spots thereon
 - 27 respectively, and said deflection scanning unit deflects said plurality of
 - 28 beamlets to scan said plurality of probe spots respectively over a plurality of
 - 29 scanned regions within an observed area on said surface,
 - 30 wherein a plurality of secondary electron beams is generated by said
 - 31 plurality of probe spots respectively from said plurality of scanned regions and
 - 32 directed into said secondary projection imaging system by said beam
 - 33 separator, said secondary projection imaging system focuses and keeps said

- 34 plurality of secondary electron beams to be detected by said plurality of
35 detection elements respectively, and each detection element therefore
36 provides an image signal of one corresponding scanned region.
- 37 2. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein deflection angles of said plurality
38 of beamlets due to said plurality of electron optics elements are respectively set to
39 reduce off-axis aberrations of said plurality of probe spots.
- 40 3. The apparatus according to claim 2, wherein pitches of said plurality of probe
41 spots are varied together by moving said image-forming means along said primary
42 optical axis.
- 43 4. The apparatus according to claim 2, wherein said objective lens comprises a
44 magnetic lens and an electrostatic lens.
- 45 5. The apparatus according to claim 4, wherein an orientation of said plurality of
46 probe spots is selectable by varying a ratio of focusing powers of said magnetic lens
47 and said electrostatic lens.
- 48 6. The apparatus according to claim 2, wherein said deflection angles ensure said
49 plurality of beamlets to land on said surface perpendicularly or substantially
50 perpendicularly.
- 51 7. The apparatus according to claim 2, wherein said deflection angles ensure said
52 plurality of beamlets to obliquely land on said surface with same or substantially
53 same landing angles.
- 54 8. The apparatus according to claim 6, wherein said deflection scanning unit is
55 above a front focal plane of said objective lens.
- 56 9. The apparatus according to claim 8, wherein said deflection scanning unit tilts
57 said plurality of beamlets to obliquely land on said surface with same or substantially
58 same landing angles.
- 59 10. The apparatus according to claim 6, further comprising a beamlet-tilting
60 deflector between said source-conversion unit and a front focal plane of said
61 objective lens.
- 62 11. The apparatus according to claim 10, wherein said beamlet-tilting deflector
63 tilts said plurality of beamlets to obliquely land on said surface with same or
64 substantially same landing angles.
- 65 12. A multi-beam apparatus for observing a surface of a sample, comprising:
66 an electron source;
67 a condenser lens below said electron source;

68 a source-conversion unit below said condenser lens;
69 an objective lens below said source-conversion unit;
70 a deflection scanning unit below said source-conversion unit;
71 a sample stage below said objective lens;
72 a beam separator below said source-conversion unit;
73 a secondary projection imaging system; and
74 an electron detection device with a plurality of detection elements,
75 wherein said electron source, said condenser lens and said objective
76 lens are aligned with a primary optical axis of said apparatus, and said sample
77 stage sustains said sample so that said surface faces to said objective lens,
78 wherein said source-conversion unit comprises a beamlet-limit means
79 with a plurality of beam-limit openings, a first image-forming means with a
80 plurality of first electron optics elements and a second image-forming means
81 with a plurality of second electron optics elements, said second image-forming
82 means is below said first image-forming means and movable in a radial
83 direction, and one of said first image-forming means and said second image-
84 forming means is used as an active image-forming means,
85 wherein said electron source generates a primary-electron beam along
86 said primary optical axis and said condenser lens focuses said primary-
87 electron beam,
88 wherein a plurality of beamlets of said primary-electron beam pass
89 through said plurality of beam-limit openings respectively, and is deflected by
90 said active image-forming means towards said primary optical axis to form a
91 plurality of virtual images of said electron source respectively,
92 wherein said plurality of beamlets is focused by said objective lens onto
93 said surface and therefore forms a plurality of probe spots thereon
94 respectively, and said deflection scanning unit deflect said plurality of
95 beamlets to scan said plurality of probe spots respectively over a plurality of
96 scanned regions within an observed area on said surface,
97 wherein a plurality of secondary electron beams is generated by said
98 plurality of probe spots respectively from said plurality of scanned regions and
99 directed into said secondary projection imaging system by said beam
100 separator, said secondary projection imaging system focuses and keeps said
101 plurality of secondary electron beams to be detected by said plurality of

- 102 detection elements respectively, and each detection element therefore
103 provides an image signal of one corresponding scanned region.
- 104 13. The apparatus according to claim 12, wherein deflection angles of said plurality
105 of beamlets due to said active image-forming means are respectively set to reduce
106 off-axis aberrations of said plurality of probe spots.
- 107 14. The apparatus according to claim 13, wherein pitches of said plurality of probe
108 spots are varied together by changing said active image-forming means between said
109 first image-forming means and said second image-forming means, and when said
110 first image-forming means is selected, said second image-forming means is moved
111 outside so as not to block said plurality of beamlets.
- 112 15. The apparatus according to claim 13, wherein said objective lens comprises a
113 magnetic lens and an electrostatic lens.
- 114 16. The apparatus according to claim 15, wherein an orientation of said plurality of
115 probe spots is selectable by varying a ratio of focusing powers of said magnetic lens
116 and said electrostatic lens.
- 117 17. The apparatus according to claim 13, wherein said deflection angles ensure
118 said plurality of beamlets to land on said surface perpendicularly or substantially
119 perpendicularly.
- 120 18. The apparatus according to claim 13, wherein said deflection angles ensure
121 said plurality of beamlets to obliquely land on said surface with same or substantially
122 same landing angles.
- 123 19. The apparatus according to claim 17, wherein said deflection scanning unit is
124 above a front focal plane of said objective lens.
- 125 20. The apparatus according to claim 19, wherein said deflection scanning unit
126 tilts said plurality of beamlets to obliquely land on said surface with same or
127 substantially same landing angles.
- 128 21. The apparatus according to claim 17, further comprising a beamlet-tilting
129 deflector between said source-conversion unit and a front focal plane of said
130 objective lens.
- 131 22. The apparatus according to claim 21, wherein said beamlet-tilting deflector
132 tilts said plurality of beamlets to obliquely land on said surface with same or
133 substantially same landing angles.
- 134 23. An multi-beam apparatus for observing a surface of a sample, comprising:
135 an electron source;

136 a condenser lens below said electron source;
137 a source-conversion unit below said condenser lens;
138 an objective lens below said source-conversion unit;
139 a deflection scanning unit below said source-conversion unit;
140 a sample stage below said objective lens;
141 a beam separator below said source-conversion unit;
142 a secondary projection imaging system; and
143 an electron detection device with a plurality of detection elements,
144 wherein said electron source, said condenser lens and said objective
145 lens are aligned with a primary optical axis of said apparatus, a first principal
146 plane of said objective lens is movable along said primary optical axis, and
147 said sample stage sustains said sample so that said surface faces to said
148 objective lens,
149 wherein said source-conversion unit comprises a beamlet-limit means
150 with a plurality of beam-limit openings, and an image-forming means with a
151 plurality of electron optics elements,
152 wherein said electron source generates a primary-electron beam along
153 said primary optical axis and said condenser lens focuses said primary-
154 electron beam,
155 wherein a plurality of beamlets of said primary-electron beam pass
156 through said plurality of beam-limit openings respectively, and is deflected by
157 said plurality of electron optics elements towards said primary optical axis to
158 form a plurality of virtual images of said electron source respectively,
159 wherein said plurality of beamlets is focused by said objective lens onto
160 said surface and therefore forms a plurality of probe spots thereon
161 respectively, and said deflection scanning unit deflects said plurality of
162 beamlets to scan said plurality of probe spots respectively over a plurality of
163 scanned regions within an observed area on said surface,
164 wherein a plurality of secondary electron beams is generated by said
165 plurality of probe spots respectively from said plurality of scanned regions and
166 directed into said secondary projection imaging system by said beam
167 separator, said secondary projection imaging system focuses and keeps said
168 plurality of secondary electron beams to be detected by said plurality of
169 detection elements respectively, and each detection element therefore

- 170 provides an image signal of one corresponding scanned region.
- 171 24. The apparatus according to claim 23, wherein deflection angles of said
172 plurality of beamlets due to said plurality of electron optics elements are respectively
173 set to reduce off-axis aberrations of said plurality of probe spots.
- 174 25. The apparatus according to claim 24, wherein pitches of said plurality of probe
175 spots are varied together by moving said first principal plane along said primary
176 optical axis.
- 177 26. The apparatus according to claim 24, wherein said deflection angles ensure
178 said plurality of beamlets to land on said surface perpendicularly or substantially
179 perpendicularly.
- 180 27. The apparatus according to claim 24, wherein said deflection angles ensure
181 said plurality of beamlets to obliquely land on said surface with same or substantially
182 same landing angles.
- 183 28. The apparatus according to claim 26, wherein said deflection scanning unit is
184 above a front focal plane of said objective lens.
- 185 29. The apparatus according to claim 28, wherein said deflection scanning unit
186 tilts said plurality of beamlets to obliquely land on said surface with same or
187 substantially same landing angles.
- 188 30. The apparatus according to claim 26, further comprising a beamlet-tilting
189 deflector between said source-conversion unit and a front focal plane of said
190 objective lens.
- 191 31. The apparatus according to claim 30, wherein said beamlet-tilting deflector
192 tilts said plurality of beamlets to obliquely land on said surface with same or
193 substantially same landing angles.
- 194 32. The apparatus according to claim 24, wherein said objective lens comprises a
195 lower magnetic lens and an electrostatic lens.
- 196 33. The apparatus according to claim 32, wherein said electrostatic lens comprises
197 a field-control electrode and a field-moving electrode, and generates an electrostatic
198 field.
- 199 34. The apparatus according to claim 33, wherein a potential of said field-control
200 electrode is set to control said electrostatic field on said surface for said sample free
201 of electrical breakdown.
- 202 35. The apparatus according to claim 34, wherein a potential of said field-moving
203 electrode is set to move said electrostatic field for moving said first principal plane.

- 204 36. The apparatus according to claim 34, wherein an orientation of said plurality
205 of probe spots is selectable by varying either or both of potentials of said field-control
206 electrode and said field-moving electrode.
- 207 37. The apparatus according to claim 32, further comprising an upper magnetic
208 lens above said lower magnetic lens.
- 209 38. The apparatus according to claim 37, wherein said first principal plane is
210 moved by varying a ratio of focusing powers of said lower magnetic lens and said
211 upper magnetic lens.
- 212 39. The apparatus according to claim 37, wherein an orientation of said plurality of
213 probe spots is selectable by setting polarities of magnetic fields of said upper and
214 lower magnetic lenses same or opposite.
- 215 40. A multi-beam apparatus for observing a surface of a sample, comprising:
216 an electron source;
217 a condenser lens below said electron source;
218 a source-conversion unit below said condenser lens;
219 a transfer lens below said source-conversion unit;
220 a field lens below said transfer lens;
221 an objective lens below said field lens;
222 a deflection scanning unit below said source-conversion unit;
223 a sample stage below said objective lens;
224 a beam separator below said source-conversion unit;
225 a secondary projection imaging system; and
226 an electron detection device with a plurality of detection elements,
227 wherein said electron source, said condenser lens, said transfer lens,
228 said field lens and said objective lens are aligned with a primary optical axis of
229 said apparatus, and said sample stage sustains said sample so that said surface
230 faces to said objective lens,
231 wherein said source-conversion unit comprises a beamlet-limit means
232 with a plurality of beam-limit openings, and an image-forming means with a
233 plurality of electron optics elements,
234 wherein said electron source generates a primary-electron beam along
235 said primary optical axis and said condenser lens focuses said primary-
236 electron beam,
237 wherein a plurality of beamlets of said primary-electron beam pass

238 through said plurality of beam-limit openings respectively, and is deflected by
239 said plurality of electron optics elements towards said primary optical axis to
240 form a plurality of first virtual images of said electron source respectively,
241 wherein said transfer lens images said plurality of first virtual images
242 onto an intermediate image plane and therefore forms a plurality of second
243 real images respectively thereon, said field lens is placed on said intermediate
244 image plane and bends said plurality of beamlets, said objective lens images
245 said plurality of second real images onto said surface and therefore forms a
246 plurality of probe spots thereon respectively, and said deflection scanning unit
247 deflects said plurality of beamlets to scan said plurality of probe spots
248 respectively over a plurality of scanned regions within an observed area on
249 said surface,

250 wherein a plurality of secondary electron beams is generated by said
251 plurality of probe spots respectively from said plurality of scanned regions and
252 directed into said secondary projection imaging system by said beam
253 separator, said secondary projection imaging system focuses and keeps said
254 plurality of secondary electron beams to be detected by said plurality of
255 detection elements respectively, and each detection element therefore
256 provides an image signal of one corresponding scanned region.

257 41. The apparatus according to claim 40, wherein bending angles of said plurality
258 of beamlets due to said field lens are set to reduce off-axis aberrations of said
259 plurality of probe spots.

260 42. The apparatus according to claim 41, wherein deflection angles of said plurality
261 of beamlets due to said plurality of electron optics elements are adjusted to change
262 pitches of said plurality of probe spots respectively.

263 43. The apparatus according to claim 41, wherein said objective lens comprises a
264 first magnetic lens and a first electrostatic lens.

265 44. The apparatus according to claim 43, wherein an orientation of said plurality
266 of probe spots is selectable by varying a ratio of focusing powers of said first
267 magnetic lens and said first electrostatic lens.

268 45. The apparatus according to claim 41, wherein said transfer lens comprises a
269 second magnetic lens and a second electrostatic lens.

270 46. The apparatus according to claim 45, wherein an orientation of said plurality
271 of probe spots is selectable by varying a ratio of focusing powers of said second

- 272 magnetic lens and said second electrostatic lens.
- 273 47. The apparatus according to claim 41, wherein said field lens comprises a third
274 magnetic lens and a third electrostatic lens.
- 275 48. The apparatus according to claim 47, wherein an orientation of said plurality of
276 probe spots is selectable by varying a ratio of focusing powers of said third magnetic
277 lens and said third electrostatic lens.
- 278 49. The apparatus according to claim 41, wherein said bending angles and
279 deflection angles of said plurality of beamlets due to said plurality of electron optics
280 elements ensure said plurality of beamlets to land on said surface perpendicularly or
281 substantially perpendicularly.
- 282 50. The apparatus according to claim 41, wherein said bending angles and
283 deflection angles of said plurality of beamlets due to said plurality of electron optics
284 elements ensure said plurality of beamlets to obliquely land on said surface with
285 same or substantially same landing angles.
- 286 51. The apparatus according to claim 49, wherein said deflection scanning unit is
287 above a front focal plane of said objective lens.
- 288 52. The apparatus according to claim 51, wherein said deflection scanning unit tilts
289 said plurality of beamlets to obliquely land on said surface with same or substantially
290 same landing angles.
- 291 53. The apparatus according to claim 49, further comprising a beamlet-tilting
292 deflector between said source-conversion unit and a front focal plane of said
293 objective lens.
- 294 54. The apparatus according to claim 53, wherein said beamlet-tilting deflector
295 tilts said plurality of beamlets to obliquely land on said surface with same or
296 substantially same landing angles.
- 297 55. A method to configure a multi-beam apparatus for observing a surface of a
298 sample, comprising steps of:
- 299 configuring an image-forming means of a source-conversion unit movable
300 along a primary optical axis thereof;
- 301 using said image-forming means to form a plurality of virtual images of an
302 electron source respectively;
- 303 using an objective lens to image said plurality of virtual images onto said
304 surface and form a plurality of probe spots thereon; and
- 305 moving said image-forming means to vary pitches of said plurality of probe

306 spots.

307 56. A method to configure a multi-beam apparatus for observing a surface of a
308 sample, comprising steps of:

309 configuring a source-conversion unit with a first image-forming means and a
310 second image-forming means, wherein said second image-forming means is farther
311 away from an electron source than said first image-forming means and movable in a
312 radial direction of said apparatus;

313 using one of said first image-forming means and said second image-forming
314 means as an active image-forming means, wherein when said first image-forming
315 means is used, said second image-forming means is moved away;

316 using said active image-forming means to form a plurality of virtual images of
317 said electron source respectively;

318 using an objective lens to image said plurality of virtual images onto said
319 surface and form a plurality of probe spots thereon; and

320 changing said active image-forming means between said first image-forming
321 means and said second image-forming means to vary pitches of said plurality of
322 probe spots.

323 57. A method to configure a multi-beam apparatus for observing a surface of a
324 sample, comprising steps of:

325 configuring an objective lens with a first principal plane movable along a
326 primary optical axis of said apparatus;

327 using an image-forming means of a source-conversion unit to form a plurality
328 of virtual images of an electron source respectively;

329 using said objective lens to image said plurality of virtual images onto said
330 surface and form a plurality of probe spots thereon; and

331 moving said first principal plane to vary pitches of said plurality of probe spots.

332 58. A method to configure a multi-beam apparatus for observing a surface of a
333 sample, comprising steps of:

334 configuring an objective lens with a lower magnetic lens and an electrostatic
335 lens in said apparatus;

336 using an image-forming means of a source-conversion unit to form a plurality
337 of virtual images of an electron source respectively;

338 using said objective lens to image said plurality of virtual images onto said
339 surface and form a plurality of probe spots thereon; and

340 changing a ratio of focusing powers of said magnetic lens and said
341 electrostatic lens to select an orientation of said plurality of probe spots.

342 59. The method according to claim 58, further comprising a step of configuring
343 said objective lens with an upper magnetic lens farther away from said surface than
344 said lower magnetic lens.

345 60. The method according to claim 59, further comprising a step of changing
346 polarities of magnetic fields of said upper and lower magnetic lenses to select said
347 orientation.

348 61. A method to configure a multi-beam apparatus for observing a surface of a
349 sample, comprising steps of:

350 using an image-forming means of a source-conversion unit to deflect a
351 plurality of beamlets from an electron source to form a plurality of first virtual
352 images thereof respectively;

353 using an objective lens to image said plurality of virtual images onto said
354 surface and form a plurality of probe spots thereon; and

355 setting deflection angles of said plurality of beamlets due to said image-
356 forming means so that said plurality of beamlets lands on said surface with same or
357 substantially same landing angles.

358 62. The method according to claim 61, further comprising a step of changing said
359 deflection angles to equally vary said landing angles.

360 63. The method according to claim 61, further comprising a step of using a
361 deflection scanning unit to tilt said plurality of beamlets so as to equally vary said
362 landing angles.

363 64. The method according to claim 61, further comprising a step of using a
364 beamlet-tilting deflector to tilt said plurality of beamlets so as to equally vary said
365 landing angles.

366 65. A method to configure a multi-beam apparatus for observing a surface of a
367 sample, comprising steps of:

368 using an image-forming means of a source-conversion unit to deflect a
369 plurality of beamlets from an electron source to form a plurality of first virtual
370 images thereof respectively;

371 using a transfer lens to image said plurality of first virtual images onto an
372 intermediate image plane and forms a plurality of second real images respectively;

373 placing a field lens on said intermediate image plane to bend said plurality of

374 beamlets; and
375 using an objective lens to image said plurality of second real images onto said
376 surface and form a plurality of probe spots thereon.

377 66. The method according to claim 65, further comprising a step of changing
378 deflection angles of said plurality of beamlets due to said image-forming means to
379 vary pitches of said plurality of probe spots.

380 67. The method according to claim 65, further comprising a step of setting
381 deflection angles of said plurality of beamlets due to said image-forming means and
382 bending angles of said plurality of beamlets due to said field lens so that said
383 plurality of beamlets lands on said surface with same or substantially same landing
384 angles.

385 68. The method according to claim 67, further comprising a step of varying said
386 deflection angles to equally change said landing angles.

387 69. The method according to claim 67, further comprising a step of using a
388 deflection scanning unit to tilt said plurality of beamlets to equally change said
389 landing angles.

390 70. The method according to claim 67, further comprising a step of using a
391 beamlet-tilting deflector to tilt said plurality of beamlets to equally change said
392 landing angles.

393 71. The method according to claim 65, further comprising a step of configuring
394 said objective lens with a first magnetic lens and a first electrostatic lens.

395 72. The method according to claim 71, further comprising a step of changing a
396 ratio of focusing powers of said first magnetic lens and said first electrostatic lens to
397 select an orientation of said plurality of probe spots.

398 73. The method according to claim 65, further comprising a step of configuring
399 said transfer lens with a second magnetic lens and a second electrostatic lens.

400 74. The method according to claim 73, further comprising a step of changing a
401 ratio of focusing powers of said second magnetic lens and said second electrostatic
402 lens to select an orientation of said plurality of probe spots.

403 75. The method according to claim 65, further comprising a step of configuring
404 said field lens with a third magnetic lens and a third electrostatic lens.

405 76. The method according to claim 75, further comprising a step of changing a
406 ratio of focusing powers of said third magnetic lens and said third electrostatic lens
407 to select an orientation of said plurality of probe spots.

- 408 77. An apparatus, comprising:
409 a source for providing a primary charged particle beam;
410 a source-conversion unit for dividing the primary charged particle beam into a
411 plurality of charged particle beamlets and using which to form a plurality of images
412 of the source respectively;
413 an objective lens below said source-conversion unit for projecting the plurality
414 of images onto a sample surface;
415 wherein pitches of the plurality of charged particle beamlets on the sample
416 surface are adjustable by changing deflection angles of the plurality of charged
417 particle beamlets prior entering the objective lens.
- 418 78. An apparatus, comprising:
419 a source for providing a primary charged particle beam;
420 means for using a plurality of beamlets of the primary charged particle beam
421 to form a plurality of images of the source;
422 an objective lens for projecting the plurality of images onto a sample surface to
423 form a plurality of probe spots; and
424 means for adjusting pitches of the plurality of probe spots on the sample
425 surface.
- 426 79. A method for observing a sample surface, said method comprising steps of:
427 providing a plurality of charged particle beams with a plurality of crossovers
428 respectively;
429 projecting the plurality of crossovers onto the sample surface to form a
430 plurality of probe spots thereon;
431 scanning the plurality of probe spots on the sample surface; and
432 changing deflection angles of the plurality of charged particle beams such that
433 pitches of the plurality of spotscan be adjusted.