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(54) Title: SECTION OF A SEPARATION COLUMN, SEPARATION COLUMN AND A METHOD OF OPERATION

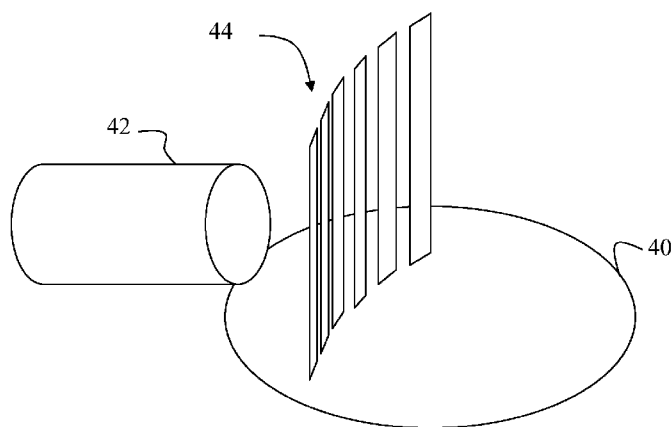


Fig. 4

(57) Abstract: A section of a contacting column (40), such as a vacuum distillation column, comprising a feed distribution device (44) comprising a plurality of plates with voids between them and a method of operating a contacting column using a distribution device. The feed distribution device (44) being arranged substantially in front of a feed inlet (42) and capable of diffusing and directing a feed flow from the feed inlet (42) so as to distribute the feed substantially evenly over the surface area of a separation plate in the column (40) thereby increasing the columns efficiency. The contacting column containing the feed distribution device being capable of shorter height, less costly design and lower operating cost than a contacting column without the feed distribution device.