



(19) **United States**

(12) **Patent Application Publication**
Japikse

(10) **Pub. No.: US 2010/0077765 A1**

(43) **Pub. Date: Apr. 1, 2010**

(54) **HIGH-PRESSURE FLUID COMPRESSION SYSTEM UTILIZING CASCADING EFFLUENT ENERGY RECOVERY**

Publication Classification

(75) Inventor: **David Japikse, Woolwich, ME (US)**

(51) **Int. Cl.**
F02C 1/00 (2006.01)
F01K 13/00 (2006.01)
F02C 5/00 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** 60/772; 60/645; 60/643; 60/39.76

Correspondence Address:

DOWN'S RACHLIN MARTIN PLLC
199 MAIN STREET, P O BOX 190
BURLINGTON, VT 05402-0190 (US)

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A high-pressure system and method utilizing an input fluid. The system includes a reactor treating a material to produce an effluent having an energy content, a plurality of stages compressing the input fluid in a stepwise manner providing a high-pressure reactor input stream to the reactor, and a cascading effluent energy recovery system mechanically communicating with the plurality of stages. The cascading effluent energy recovery system imparts a portion of the energy content of the effluent into each of the plurality of stages powering that stage. The method includes receiving an input fluid, compressing the input fluid over a plurality of stages producing the high-pressure stream, providing the high-pressure stream to the reactor, recovering a portion of the energy content of the effluent at each of the plurality of stages, and using each the portion of the energy in compressing the input fluid at a corresponding respective stage.

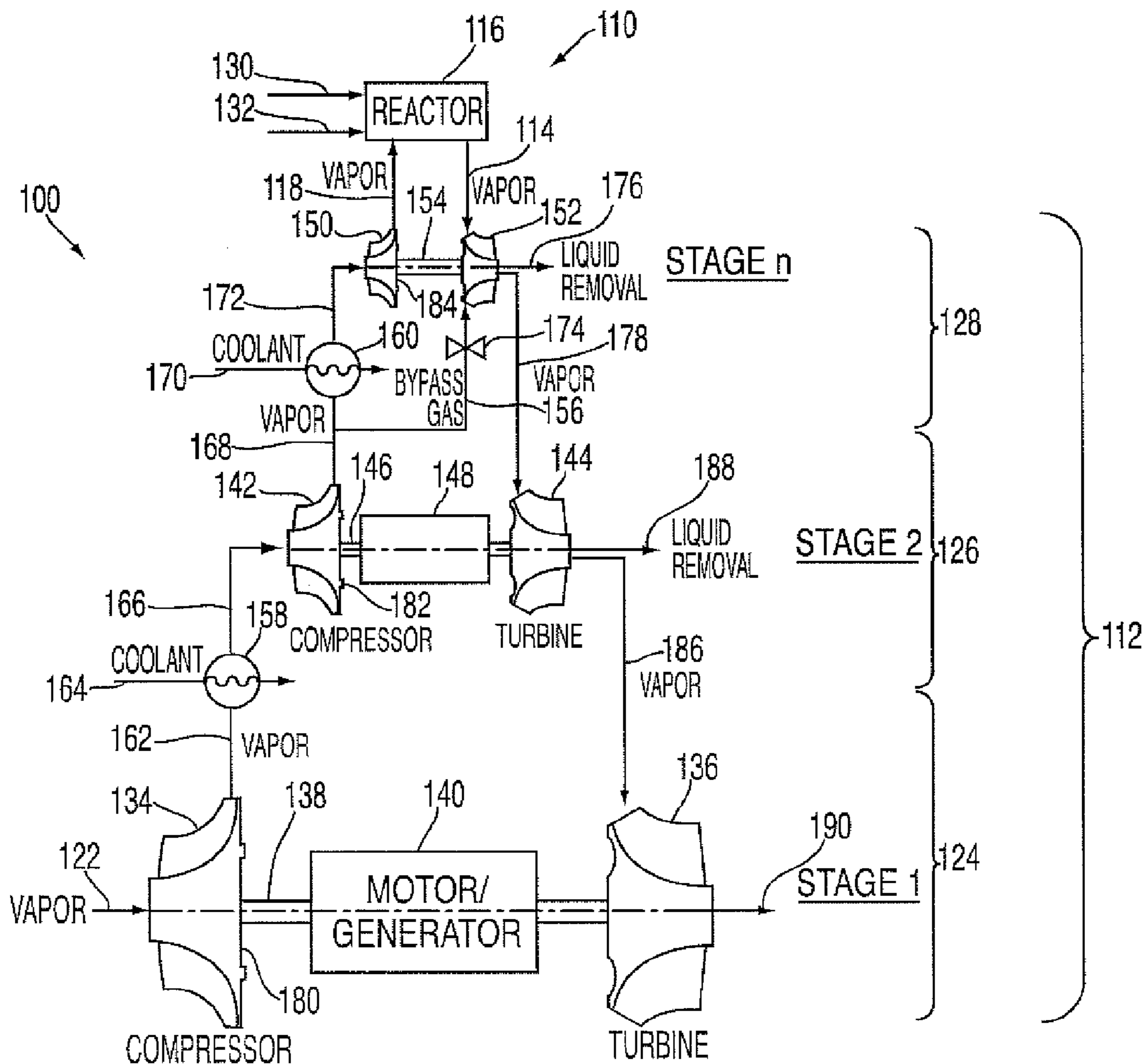
(73) Assignee: **CONCEPTS ETI, INC., White River Junction, VT (US)**

(21) Appl. No.: **12/631,276**

(22) Filed: **Dec. 4, 2009**

Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 11/623,153, filed on Jan. 15, 2007, now Pat. No. 7,640,745.



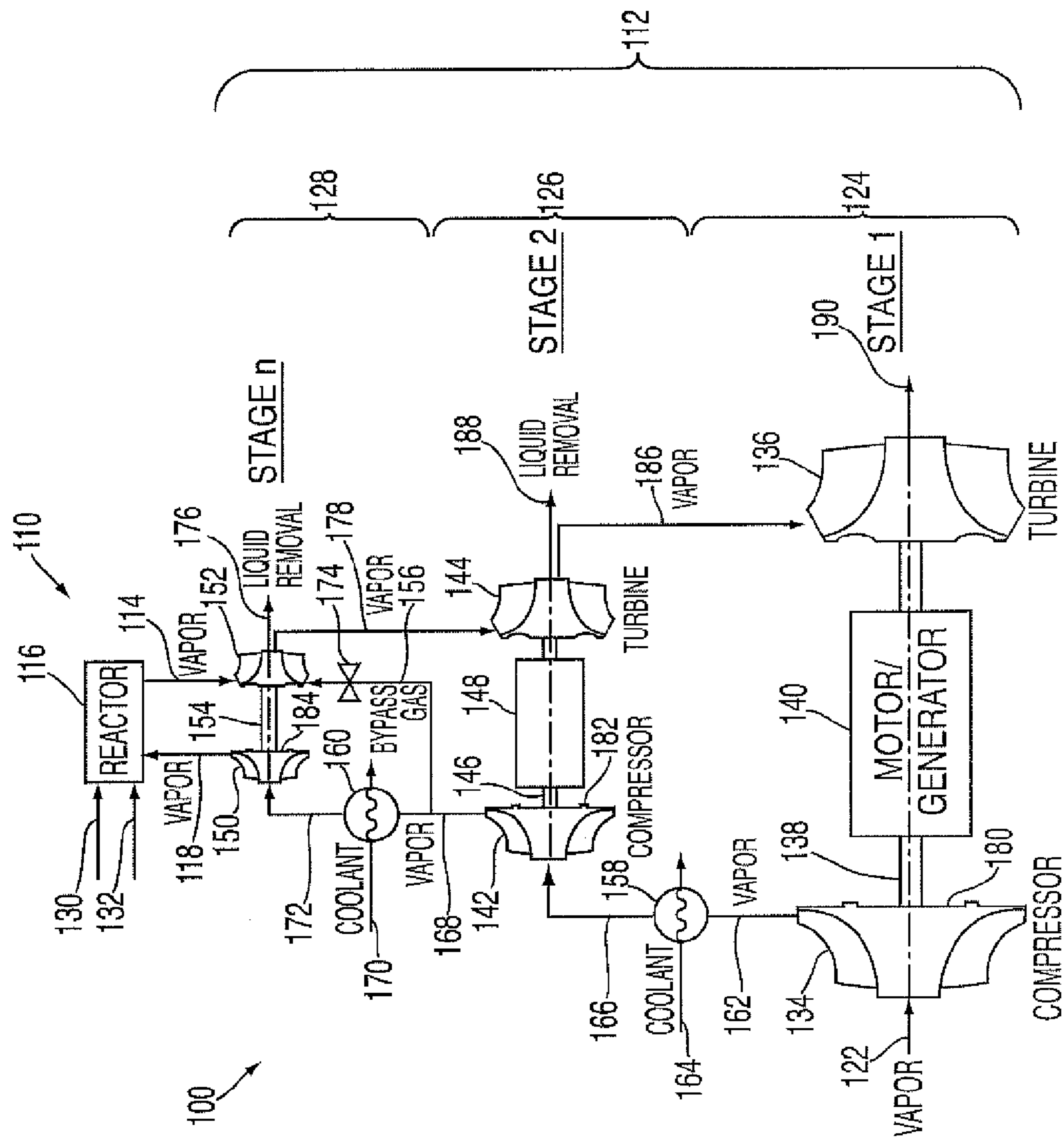


FIG. 1

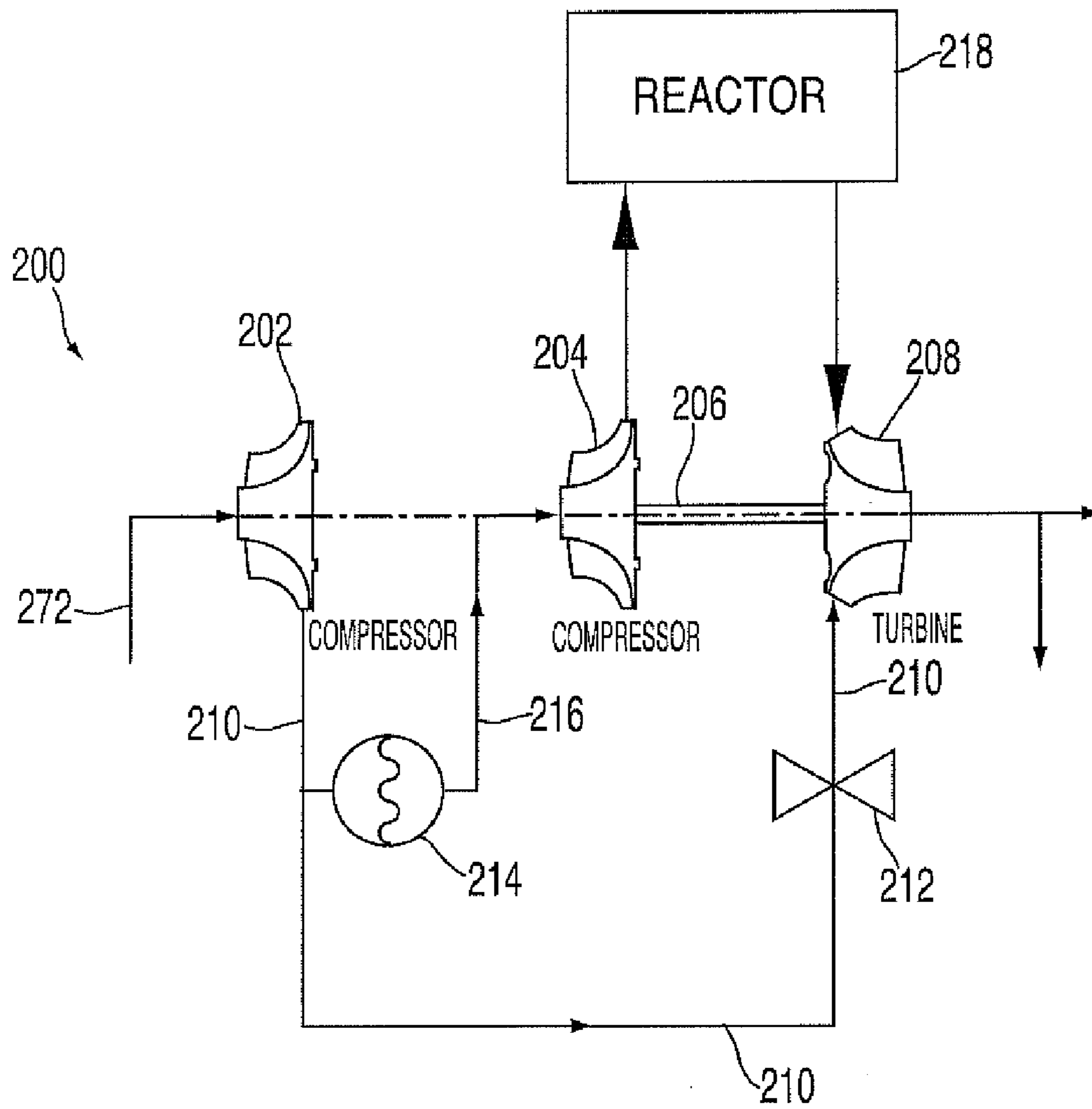


FIG. 2

**HIGH-PRESSURE FLUID COMPRESSION
SYSTEM UTILIZING CASCADING
EFFLUENT ENERGY RECOVERY**

RELATED APPLICATION DATA

[0001] This application is a continuation of U.S. Non-provisional patent application Ser. No. 11/623,153, filed on Jan. 15, 2007, and titled "High-Pressure Fluid Compression System Utilizing Cascading Effluent Energy Recovery," which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

FIELD OF THE DISCLOSURE

[0002] The present disclosure generally relates to the field of pressurizing systems for use in thermo-chemical processes. In particular, the present disclosure is directed to a high-pressure compression system utilizing cascading effluent energy recovery.

BACKGROUND

[0003] High-pressure air and steam are used in various industrial applications. For example, extremely high-pressure air may be used on submarines for clearing main ballast tanks. High-pressure water vapor (commonly referring to water molecules with or without air or other gas molecules present) can also be used to create a very effective high-pressure chemical reaction with a purpose of reducing various components of the reaction down to their fundamental constituents of water and carbon dioxide. For example, this technique is used in the process of supercritical water oxidation (SCWO), wherein diverse waste streams, including sewage, commercial waste, old munitions, and the like, are converted to basic oxidized constituents with minimal harmful waste effluent from the process.

[0004] Conventional forms of compression for such high-pressure applications have been accomplished with positive displacement compressors originally designed for submarines and that provide pressures in the order of 5,000 psi. Such conventional compressors limit the possibilities of efficient recapture of waste energy and reinsertion of the energy back into the cycle.

[0005] Various processes for treating a feedstock require process materials to be maintained at elevated pressures. Additionally, conventional processes may require the feedstock to be at an elevated temperature. In such treatment processes, obtaining a high-pressure rise with minimum energy consumption presents a continuing problem. One of the efforts to recover waste energy in current systems involves the use of conventional turbines to expand the high-pressure gas effluent stream once the reaction is complete. The energy recaptured is then delivered to an electric generator. The electric power created in the generator is either used to drive the high-pressure positive displacement compressors or is returned to the grid.

[0006] Inefficient use of waste energy has been particularly acute in the hydrothermal treatment of organic waste products using SCWO techniques. In a typical SCWO process, the materials in a reaction chamber are preferably maintained at a pressure of over 200 bar and a temperature of over 700° Celsius. Processes may have a preferred reaction pressure of 1000 bar. Conventional positive displacement compressors, as described above, are used to help achieve such high-pressures in the reaction chamber.

[0007] In SCWO processes, oxidation of waste organics can be achieved by pumping an oxidizer, such as air, into the reaction chamber for mixing with other constituents of the reaction, such as supercritical water, raw wastes, and additives such as a fuel to assist in maintaining suitable temperatures. Such processes are described in U.S. Pat. No. 4,338,199 issued to Modell on Jul. 6, 1982, U.S. Pat. No. 5,106,513 issued to Hong on Apr. 21, 1992, and U.S. Pat. No. 6,519,926 issued to Hazlebeck on Feb. 18, 2003, which are all hereby incorporated by reference in their entirety.

[0008] Multiple stage turbocharging of internal combustion engines is a technique well known in the art. For examples, such multiple stage turbocharging of internal combustion engines may be found in U.S. Pat. No. 7,000,393 issued to Wood et al. Additionally, multiple stage turbocharging of internal combustion engines is also provided in *Turbocharging the Internal Combustion Engine*, by N. Watson and M. S. Janota, at sections 11.5 and 11.6, published by Wiley-Interscience Division, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York (1982). However, the recovery of energy in such conventional systems has generally been inefficient.

SUMMARY OF THE DISCLOSURE

[0009] In one implementation, the present disclosure is directed to a system utilizing an input fluid. The system includes: a continuous reaction reactor for converting an input material using the input fluid so as to produce an effluent having an energy content of a first energy type; and a plurality of compression stages, located in series with one another, for compressing the input fluid in a stepwise manner so as to provide a pressurized reactor input stream to the continuous reaction reactor; and a cascading effluent energy recovery system mechanically communicating with each of the plurality of compression stages, the cascading effluent energy recovery system for imparting a first portion of the energy content of the effluent into each of the plurality of compression stages so as to power that one of the plurality of compression stages.

[0010] In another implementation, the present disclosure is directed to a system utilizing an input fluid. The system includes: a continuous self-sustaining chemical process reactor for converting a continuous feedstock using the input fluid so as to produce an effluent having an energy content of a first energy type, the continuous self-sustaining chemical process reactor having a first inlet for receiving the continuous feedstock and a second inlet for receiving a compressed version of the input fluid; a first early compression stage comprising: a first early stage compressor for compressing the input fluid; a first early stage expansion turbine for recovering a first portion of the energy content of the effluent, the first early stage expansion turbine mechanically linked to the first early stage compressor for at least partially driving the first compressor; and a first motor/generator mechanically linked to each of the first early stage compressor and the first early stage expansion turbine, the first motor/generator selectively powering the first early stage compressor during periods of insufficient power from the first early stage expansion turbine and converting an excess of the energy content into electricity during periods of excess power from the first early stage expansion turbine; and a latter compression stage located downstream from the first early compression stage and upstream from the continuous self-sustaining chemical process reactor and in fluid communication with the second inlet, the latter compression stage comprising: a latter stage compressor for fur-

ther compressing the input fluid; and a latter stage expansion turbine for recovering a second portion of the energy content of the effluent, the latter stage expansion turbine mechanically linked to the latter stage compressor for driving the latter stage compressor.

[0011] In still another implementation, the present disclosure is directed to a method of converting a feedstock. The method includes: providing the feedstock to a continuous reaction reactor; simultaneous with the providing the feedstock, providing a pressurized stream of an input fluid to the continuous reaction reactor so as to produce, from the continuous reaction reactor, a non-pulsed effluent having an energy content, the providing the pressurized stream including: receiving the input fluid; compressing the input fluid over a plurality of compression stages so as to produce the pressurized stream of the input fluid; providing the pressurized stream to the continuous reaction reactor; recovering a portion of the energy content of the effluent at each of the plurality of compression stages; and using each portion of the energy content in compressing the input fluid at a corresponding respective one of the plurality of compression stages.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0012] For the purpose of illustrating the disclosure, the drawings show aspects of one or more embodiments of the disclosure. However, it should be understood that the present disclosure is not limited to the precise arrangements and instrumentalities shown in the drawings, wherein:

[0013] FIG. 1 is a schematic diagram of the components of a high-pressure system in accordance with the present disclosure; and

[0014] FIG. 2 is a schematic diagram of a later compression stage of a high-pressure system in accordance with the present disclosure.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0015] Referring to the drawings, FIG. 1 illustrates an efficient high-pressure system 100. At a high level, system 100 includes a pressurized chemical reaction system 110 and a cascading energy recovery system 112. As can be readily seen in FIG. 1, cascading energy recovery system 112 interacts with pressurized system 110 to recover at least a portion of the initial energy content from effluent 114 and uses this energy to produce, or aid in producing, a high-pressure stream 118, e.g., air and/or steam, that is input into pressurized system 110 as part of the reaction process.

[0016] High-pressure system 100 includes a series of compression and expansion stages, here stages 124, 126, and 128, for compressing an input fluid 122, e.g., vapor and/or gas, through the series of stages to produce high-pressure stream 118 for reactor 116 on a compression side and for expanding effluent 116 through the series of stages to produce power for each associated stage on an expansion side. It is noted that while FIG. 1 shows three compression and expansion stages 124, 126, and 128, the present disclosure contemplates a lower or greater number of stages while keeping within the scope and spirit of the present disclosure. The number of compression and expansion stages utilized may depend upon the actual pressure requirements for high-pressure stream 118 and upon the actual energy content available from reactor effluent 114. Generally, three or more stages will typically be required to achieve necessary levels of pressure on the input side of pressurized chemical reaction system 110 and to suc-

cessfully recapture high amounts of waste energy on the output side, as will be described below.

[0017] In the illustrative embodiment shown, pressurized chemical reaction system 110 includes a reactor 116 that may perform a continuous self-sustaining process for converting an uninterrupted continuous feed of input materials, as discussed further below, into effluent 114 with an initial energy content. The self-sustaining process of reactor 116 provides a thermally self-sustaining continuous flow of energy to system 100, wherein the reactor includes but is not limited to a supercritical water oxidation (SCWO) reactor, or other type of continuous chemical process reactor. In these cases, reactor 116 may be referred to as a "continuous reaction reactor." It is noted that the present disclosure also contemplates that reactor 116 may be of a "pulsed reaction" type in which the ongoing process involves a series of intermittent reactions, e.g., combustions. Examples of such pulsed reaction reactors include reciprocating-type internal combustion engines, e.g., spark-ignition engines or diesel engines, among others. Input materials may include any of a variety of materials which may be treated and/or converted to usable end products, as will be discussed below.

[0018] FIG. 1 illustrates reactor 116 as an SCWO reactor in which SCWO reactions occur under high-pressure and high-temperature conditions. (Again, although the illustrated embodiment is directed to SCWO, those skilled in the art will readily appreciate that the scope of this disclosure covers systems beyond SCWO.) Reactor 116 may process a mixture of a feedstock 130, an additive 132, and high-pressure stream 118. Reactor 116 generally gasifies the mixture of water and organics under hydrothermal treatment conditions to produce effluent 114 with the initial energy content. Effluent 114 may include a high-temperature and high-pressure gaseous mixture of steam and combustible gases containing particulates, salts and corrosive species, among other things. Moreover, effluent 114 may include compounds resulting from the broken chemical bonds of organics during the reaction in reactor 116. Additionally, reactor 116 may include mechanical systems and/or purging systems (not shown) for helping transport materials through the reactor.

[0019] Feedstock 130 generally includes organic wastes. Additive 132 may include one or more waste materials or fuel, including but not limited to, an oil-based hydrocarbon or diesel. Additive 132 may also include, but is not limited to, neutralizing agents to neutralize acids formed in reactor 116, inert solids to aid in salt transport, salt-forming agents, corrosion inhibitors, minerals, and combustible material for use as an auxiliary fuel. Generally, burning additive 132 helps maintain appropriate elevated temperatures in reactor 116 for the desired reactions. For example, elevated temperatures may generally be in the range of 350° Celsius to 800° Celsius, but are not limited to this range. High-pressure stream 118 generally includes pressurized steam and air for use in reactor 116.

[0020] As shown, the compression side of first stage 124 may include a first compressor 134 having a moderate pressure ratio, such as a pressurization in the range of but not limited to 2 to 9, for compressing input fluid 122. First compressor 134 may be mechanically linked with a first expansion turbine 136 of energy recovery system 112, e.g., via a first shaft 138 on the expansion side of first compression and expansion stage 124. First expansion turbine 136 generally powers first compressor 134 as effluent 114 expands through the turbine. The input:output pressure ratios for both first

compressor **134** and first expansion turbine **136** are preferably chosen so as to balance the thrust to a reasonable first order, with residual thrust being handled by bearings or a thrust collar (not shown). Additionally, first compression and expansion stage **124** may also include a first motor/generator **140** coupled to first shaft **138** so as to selectively drive first compressor **134**, either alone or in combination with first expansion turbine **136**, during periods of insufficient power from the first expansion turbine or to generate electricity when the amount of energy needed to drive the first compressor is less than the energy recovered by the first expansion turbine.

[0021] The compression side of second compression and expansion stage **126** may include a second compressor **142** for further compressing/pressurizing input fluid **122**, which may be received as a cooled second-stage input **166** as described below. Second compressor **142** is mechanically linked with a second expansion turbine **144**, via a second shaft **146**. Second expansion turbine **144** generally powers second compressor **142** as effluent **114** expands through the second turbine. Additionally, second compression and expansion stage **126** may also include a second motor/generator **148** coupled to second shaft **146** so as to selectively drive second compressor **142**, either alone or in combination with second expansion turbine **144**, during periods of insufficient power from the second expansion turbine or to generate electricity when the amount of energy needed to drive the second compressor is less than the energy recovered by the second expansion turbine.

[0022] Third compression and expansion stage **128** may include a third compressor **150** on the compression side for yet further compressing input fluid **122** so as to produce high-pressure stream **118** that enters reactor **116**. Third compressor **150** may be driven by a third expansion turbine **152** via a third shaft **154**. In the present example, each compression and expansion stage **124**, **126**, **128** achieves a gain of approximately, but not limited to, 6 to 7 times in pressure exiting that stage relative to the input of that stage.

[0023] Since third turbine **152** of third compression and expansion stage **128** is the first of three expansion turbines **136**, **144**, and **152** to expand effluent **114**, the third turbine will typically output sufficient power to drive third compressor **150** without the need of an associated motor/generator in the stage, as in first and second stages **124**, **126**. Moreover, typical optimal speeds of operation of the later compression stage(s), i.e., stage(s) closest to reactor **116**, are so high that it is often problematic, at least under contemporary technology, to employ a motor rotating at such high speeds.

[0024] For startup of one or more later compression stages, i.e., the stage(s) closest to reactor **116**, and/or where additional motive force in steady-state is needed, a motive system without additional rotating parts may be provided, e.g., in the form of a bootstrap, or bypass **156**, that bypasses reactor **116** and utilizes pressurized flow from one or more lower stages, here, compression and expansion stages **124**, **126**. The bootstrap driving of third compression and expansion stage **128** by bypass **156** utilizes a portion of input fluid **122** after compression/pressurization by second compression and expansion stage **126**. In other embodiments, e.g., one or more bootstrap drives similar to bypass **156** may replace the motor/generators of two or more stages after first compression and expansion stage **124** or other early compression stages.

[0025] Pressurized system **110** may also include one or more intercoolers, or heat exchangers, e.g., heat exchangers

158, **160**, that may serve one or more purposes. For example, in some processes, inter-stage cooling of compressed input fluid **122** may be required to satisfy temperature requirements for a cycle. Inter-stage cooling helps achieve improved downstream stage compressor performance and thermodynamic efficiency. Additionally, lower temperatures allow compressors, such as compressors **134**, **142**, and **150**, and related components to be constructed from less expensive materials and/or surface-coated with materials having lower temperature limits that provide less stringent design constraints. Alternatively, the material characteristics of the particular compressors and related components selected may require inter-stage cooling. Inter-stage cooling may be accomplished by providing heat exchangers **158**, **160** between corresponding successive compression and expansion stages. For example, first heat exchanger **158** may be fluidly located between first compression and expansion stage **124** and second compression and expansion stage **126**, and second heat exchanger **160** may be fluidly located between the second compression and expansion stage and third compression and expansion stage **128**. Heat exchangers (intercoolers) **158** and **160** capture and remove heat and energy from the input fluid following compression at the corresponding respective compression and expansion stages. The removed heat and energy may be used within high-pressure system **100** as described below or elsewhere.

[0026] During operation of high-pressure system **100**, input fluid **122** enters first compressor **134** at first compression and expansion stage **124**. First compressor **134** imparts energy to input fluid **122** by raising the pressure and temperature of the input fluid to produce a first-stage output **162** for introduction into second compressor **142** of second compression and expansion stage **126**. As discussed below in more detail, first compressor **134** is powered by either first expansion turbine **136**, first motor/generator **140**, or both, depending upon the particular operating characteristics and state of operation of high-pressure system **100**.

[0027] When first heat exchanger **158** is present, first-stage output **162** enters the first heat exchanger, wherein heat and energy is removed from the first-stage output, e.g., using a coolant **164**. First heat exchanger **158** provides a cooled second-stage input **166** to second compressor **142**. The heat and energy removed from first-stage output **162** may be utilized, e.g., to assist in pre-heating feedstock **130** and/or additive **132** for receipt by reactor **116**, or for another purpose.

[0028] Cooled second-stage input **166** (or first-stage output **162** if first heat exchanger **158** is not present) enters second compressor **142** for additional compression so as to output a second-stage output **168** with a higher pressure and temperature than the cooled second-stage input. For example, if the output:input pressure ratio for first compressor **134** is slightly greater than 7, and the output:input pressure ratio for second compressor **142** is also slightly greater than 7, then an output:input pressure ratio of approximately 50 or more for the two stages together may be achieved. As discussed below in more detail, second compressor **142** is powered by either second expansion turbine **144**, second motor/generator **148**, or both, depending upon the particular operating characteristics of high-pressure system **100**.

[0029] When second heat exchanger **160** is present, second-stage output **168** enters the second heat exchanger, wherein heat and energy is removed from the second-stage output, e.g., using a coolant **170**. Second heat exchanger **160** provides a cooled third-stage input **172** to third compressor

150. The heat and energy removed from second-stage output **168** may be transferred to and utilized in another part of system **100** or used elsewhere.

[0030] Cooled third-stage input **172** (or second-stage output **168** if second heat exchanger **160** is not present) enters third compressor **150** for additional compression so as to output high-pressure stream **118**, which has a higher pressure and temperature than the cooled third-stage input. In one example, the output:input pressure ratio for first compressor **134** may be slightly greater than 7, the output:input pressure ratio for second compressor **142** may be slightly greater than 7, and the output:input pressure ratio for third compressor **150** may be approximately 5, resulting in a combined output:input pressure ratio for the three stages of approximately 250, which if input fluid **122** has an initial pressure of about 14 psi results in high-pressure stream **118** having a pressure of about 3,500 psi.

[0031] It is noted that high-pressure system **100** may not include a heat exchanger (intercooler) downstream of third compressor **150**. This is so because it may be desirable to retain the full temperature of high-pressure stream **118** exiting third compressor **150** (or other final stage(s) in other embodiments) in order to keep heat (enthalpy) in the system to promote the reaction in reactor **116**. In any case, the materials from which the later stage compressor(s) are typically constructed must be able to operate for long periods of time at highly elevated temperatures. It is also noted that first, second, and third compressors, **134**, **142**, **150** are illustrated with progressively smaller impellers **180**, **182**, **184** respectively, to indicate that smaller physical dimensions of these machines may be needed due to higher gas density and to keep up with the peripheral speed of the respective compressor's rotating elements within the tolerances of the materials available for their construction.

[0032] Turning to the expansion side of cascading energy recovery system **112**, in this illustrative embodiment third expansion turbine **152** expands effluent **114** to provide sufficient power to drive third compressor **150** generally without the need for additional power from an associated motor. (While this is true for this embodiment, it is to be understood that other embodiments may indeed include a motor/generator if needed or desired.) As mentioned above, during startup of high-pressure system **100**, bypass **156** from downstream of second compressor **142** may be used to help drive third expansion turbine **152** along with effluent **114**. Bypass **156** may be closed and/or the flow therein may be adjusted via a valve **174**, e.g., a balancing valve or similar device, that may work in conjunction with one or more other devices (not shown), e.g., a timer, pressure sensor in the bypass, and/or a speed sensor associated with third expansion turbine **152** or third shaft **154**, among others. Valve **174** may work to reduce bootstrap driving of third expansion turbine **152** as is appropriate as effluent **114** gains sufficient energy to drive the third expansion turbine.

[0033] Effluent **114** expands and cools through third expansion turbine **152**. If effluent **114** contains a vapor, upon cooling some of the vapor may condense, resulting in a third-stage liquid output **176** and a third-stage vapor output **178** from third expansion turbine **152**. In the context of SCWO, third-stage liquid output **176** will typically be principally water, entrained salts, and precipitants. Third-stage liquid output **176** may be removed via a liquid removal collector and channel (not shown). In the SCWO context, third-stage vapor output **178** typically includes simpler compounds produced in reactor **116** from feedstock **130**. Due to the expansion through third expansion turbine **152**, the removed compounds are at a reduced temperature and reduced pressure relative to

effluent **114**. Generally, third-stage vapor output **178** retains large amounts of energy in the form of elevated temperature and pressure, even with the temperature and pressure drop across third expansion turbine **152**.

[0034] Third-stage vapor output **178** cascades into second expansion turbine **144** of second compression and expansion stage **126**, where it expands and helps drive second compressor **142**. If the power needed to drive second compressor **142** is greater than the power provided by second expansion turbine **144**, second motor/generator **148** will act as a motor to help drive the second compressor. If, on the other hand, the power needed to drive second compressor **142** is less than the power provided by second expansion turbine **144**, second motor/generator **148** may act as a generator to produce electricity. If the power requirement of second compression **142** and the power output by second expansion turbine **144** balance, second motor/generator **148** may not operate in either a motor or generator capacity. Third-stage vapor output **178** expands and cools in second expansion turbine **144** to produce a second-stage vapor output **186** and, typically, a second-stage liquid output **188**, which may be removed via a liquid removal collector and channel (not shown). In the SCWO context, second-stage liquid output **188** may include simpler compounds produced from third-stage vapor output **178** in second expansion turbine **144**. By virtue of the expansion through second expansion turbine **144**, the removed compounds are at a reduced temperature and reduced pressure relative to third-stage vapor output **178**. Second-stage output vapor **180** retains large amounts of energy in the form of elevated temperature and pressure, even with the temperature and pressure drop across second expansion turbine **144**.

[0035] Second-stage vapor output **186** cascades into first expansion turbine **136** of first compression and expansion stage **124**, where it expands and helps drive first compressor **134**. If the power needed to drive first compressor **134** is greater than the power provided by first expansion turbine **136**, first motor/generator **140** will act as a motor to help drive the first compressor. If, on the other hand, the power needed to drive first compressor **134** is less than the power provided by first expansion turbine **136**, first motor/generator **140** may act as a generator to produce electricity. If the power required by first compression **134** and the power output by first expansion turbine **136** balance, first motor/generator **140** may not operate in either a motor or generator capacity. First expansion turbine **136** expands and cools second-stage vapor output **186** to produce a first-stage output **190**, which may include vapors and liquid of lower temperature and pressure and suitable for final energy extraction with a heat exchanger (not shown) or for inputting to a separator (not shown) that isolates the components of the effluent for disposal or other use, such as fuel for reactor **116** or elsewhere.

[0036] FIG. 2 illustrates an alternative embodiment of a latter compression and expansion stage **200**, generally a stage located directly upstream or closest to a reactor **218**, of the present disclosure. Generally, latter compression and expansion stage **200**, e.g., third compression and expansion stage **128** in the illustrative embodiment of FIG. 1, may include a latter stage compressor **202** and an additional compressor **204** mounted on, e.g., a common shaft **206** that may also be shared with a respective latter stage expansion turbine **208**. Additional compressor **204** may provide additional compression of an input **272** from a previous stage to stage **200**, e.g., cooled third-stage input **172** of FIG. 1, when required by process requirements. Latter stage expansion turbine **208** may receive a bootstrap bypass drive stream **210** from latter stage compressor **202**. A valve **212** may be provided for controlling the flow of bypass drive stream **210** into latter stage expansion

turbine **208**. A heat exchanger **214** may be included to reduce the temperature of a portion of bypass drive stream **210** to provide a cooled drive stream **216** to drive additional compressor **204**. The heat and energy recovered by heat exchanger **214** may be used, e.g., to preheat materials supplied to a reactor **218** or for other purposes in the corresponding system (not shown).

[0037] As will be appreciated, any stage of a high-pressure system made in accordance with the present disclosure, such as any one of first, second, and third compression and expansion stages **124, 126, 128** of high-pressure system **100** of FIG. **1**, may include multiple compressors in the manner illustrated in FIG. **2**, while keeping within the scope and spirit of the present disclosure. Multiple compressors in a stage of such a system may improve that stage's efficiency and reduce mechanical stress on each compressor.

[0038] Moreover, it will be appreciated that the use of a multiplicity of turbocharger-type stages to provide a pre-reaction compression process may be desirable for use with other reaction systems that utilize supercritical water oxidation. In any such system the compression arrangement of the present disclosure achieves various beneficial results, such as reduced size of motor/generators needed, elimination of positive displacement equipment, the availability of design methodologies for radial flow compressors and turbines, minimal interfacing with an external electric grid, reduction in size of the compression and energy recovery systems, and simplification of maintenance.

[0039] Exemplary embodiments have been disclosed above and illustrated in the accompanying drawings. It will be understood by those skilled in the art that various changes, omissions and additions may be made to that which is specifically disclosed herein without departing from the spirit and scope of the present disclosure.

What is claimed is:

- 1.** A system utilizing an input fluid, comprising:
 - a continuous reaction reactor for converting an input material using the input fluid so as to produce an effluent having an energy content of a first energy type; and
 - a plurality of compression stages, located in series with one another, for compressing the input fluid in a stepwise manner so as to provide a pressurized reactor input stream to said continuous reaction reactor; and
 - a cascading effluent energy recovery system mechanically communicating with each of said plurality of compression stages, said cascading effluent energy recovery system for imparting a first portion of said energy content of said effluent into each of said plurality of compression stages so as to power that one of said plurality of compression stages.
- 2.** A system according to claim **1**, wherein said plurality of compression stages includes a corresponding respective plurality of compressors and said cascading effluent energy recovery system includes a plurality of expansion turbines for respectively driving said plurality of compressors.
- 3.** A system according to claim **1**, wherein each of fewer than all of said plurality of compression stages includes an energy converting device for selectively powering the corresponding one of said plurality of compressors during periods of insufficient power from the corresponding one of said plurality of expansion turbines or converting an excess of said portion of said energy content into a second energy type different from said first energy type during periods of excess power from the corresponding one of said plurality of expansion turbines.

4. A system according to claim **3**, wherein said energy converting device comprises a motor/generator.

5. A system according to claim **1**, wherein said plurality of compression stages includes at least three compression stages.

6. A system according to claim **1**, further comprising a heat exchanger fluidly located between successive ones of said plurality of compression stages, said heat exchanger for removing heat from the input fluid.

7. A system according to claim **1**, wherein said continuous reaction reactor comprises a supercritical water oxidation reactor.

8. A system utilizing an input fluid, comprising:

- a continuous self-sustaining chemical process reactor for converting a continuous feedstock using the input fluid so as to produce an effluent having an energy content of a first energy type, said continuous self-sustaining chemical process reactor having a first inlet for receiving the continuous feedstock and a second inlet for receiving a compressed version of the input fluid;

- a first early compression stage comprising:

- a first early stage compressor for compressing the input fluid;

- a first early stage expansion turbine for recovering a first portion of said energy content of said effluent, said first early stage expansion turbine mechanically linked to said first early stage compressor for at least partially driving said first compressor; and

- a first motor/generator mechanically linked to each of said first early stage compressor and said first early stage expansion turbine, said first motor/generator selectively powering said first early stage compressor during periods of insufficient power from said first early stage expansion turbine and converting an excess of said energy content into electricity during periods of excess power from said first early stage expansion turbine; and

- a latter compression stage located downstream from said first early compression stage and upstream from said continuous self-sustaining chemical process reactor and in fluid communication with said second inlet, said latter compression stage comprising:

- a latter stage compressor for further compressing the input fluid; and

- a latter stage expansion turbine for recovering a second portion of said energy content of said effluent, said latter stage expansion turbine mechanically linked to said latter stage compressor for driving said latter stage compressor.

9. A system according to claim **8**, wherein said continuous self-sustaining chemical process reactor comprises a supercritical water oxidation reactor.

10. A system according to claim **8**, further including a second early compression stage located downstream of said first early compression stage and upstream of said latter compression stage, said second early compression stage comprising:

- a second early stage compressor for further compressing the input fluid relative to said first compressor;

- a second early stage expansion turbine for recovering a third portion of said energy content of said effluent, said second early stage expansion turbine mechanically

linked to said second early stage compressor for at least partially driving said second early stage compressor; and

a second motor/generator mechanically linked to each of said second early stage compressor and said second early stage expansion turbine, said second motor/generator selectively powering said second early stage compressor during periods of insufficient power from said second early stage expansion turbine or converting an excess of said energy content into electricity during periods of excess power from said second early stage expansion turbine.

11. A system according to claim **8**, further comprising at least one heat exchanger located downstream from said first early stage compressor and upstream from said latter stage compressor, said at least one heat exchanger for removing heat from the input fluid following compression of the input fluid.

12. A system according to claim **8**, wherein said continuous self-sustaining chemical process reactor includes a third inlet for receiving an additive for assisting the converting of the feedstock.

13. A method of converting a feedstock, comprising:
 providing the feedstock to a continuous reaction reactor;
 simultaneous with said providing the feedstock, providing a pressurized stream of an input fluid to the continuous reaction reactor so as to produce, from the continuous reaction reactor, a non-pulsed effluent having an energy content, said providing the pressurized stream including:
 receiving the input fluid;
 compressing the input fluid over a plurality of compression stages so as to produce the pressurized stream of the input fluid;
 providing the pressurized stream to the continuous reaction reactor;

recovering a portion of the energy content of the effluent at each of the plurality of compression stages; and using each portion of the energy content in compressing the input fluid at a corresponding respective one of the plurality of compression stages.

14. A method according to claim **13**, wherein said recovering the portion of the energy content of the effluent at each of the plurality of compression stages includes passing at least a portion of the effluent through an expansion turbine.

15. A method according to claim **14**, wherein said compressing the input fluid over the plurality of compression stages includes passing the input fluid through a series of compressors, wherein the expansion turbine at each of the plurality of compression stages at least partially drives a corresponding one of the series of compressors.

16. A method according to claim **13**, further comprising supplementing the portion of the energy content of the effluent at each of fewer than all of the plurality of compression stages with additional power for compressing the input fluid or converting an excess of the portion of the energy content into another form of energy.

17. A method according to claim **16**, wherein said supplementing or recovering includes, respectively, externally powering an electric motor/generator and driving said motor/generator with the excess.

18. A method according to claim **16**, wherein said recovering the portion of the energy content of the effluent at each of the plurality of compression stages includes passing at least a portion of the effluent through an expansion turbine.

19. A method according to claim **13**, further comprising, simultaneously with said providing the feedstock, providing an additive to assist with the converting of the feedstock.

20. A method according to claim **13**, further comprising a step of removing heat from the input fluid after one or more of the plurality of compression stages.

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