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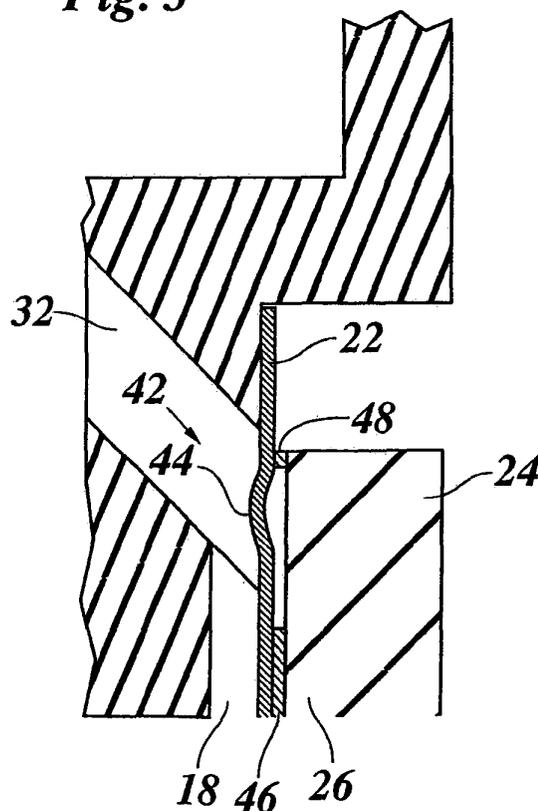
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(54) **Inkjet printhead**

(57) Inkjet printhead having a plurality of pressure chambers (18) each of which is fluidly connected on the one hand, via an ink supply path (32), to a common ink reservoir (12) and on the other hand to a nozzle (20), wherein an actuator (26) is provided for each pressure chamber (18) for pressurizing the ink contained therein, so as to eject an ink droplet through the nozzle (20) in accordance with a print signal, characterized by an acoustic wave attenuator (42) arranged to control the acoustic reflection and transmission properties of the ink supply path (32).

Fig. 3



Description

[0001] The invention relates to an inkjet printhead having a plurality of pressure chambers each of which is fluidly connected on the one hand, via an ink supply path, to a common ink reservoir and on the other hand to a nozzle, wherein an actuator is provided for each pressure chamber for pressurizing the ink contained therein, so as to eject an ink droplet through the nozzle in accordance with a print signal.

[0002] EP-A-1 022 140 describes a drop-on-demand inkjet printhead of the type indicated above, wherein the nozzles are arranged in two parallel linear arrays, so that a plurality of pixel lines of an image can be printed simultaneously. The pressure chambers associated with the nozzles of both arrays are configured as elongated ink channels that are formed in opposite surfaces of a common substrate and extend in parallel to one another. The downstream ends of the ink channels each converge into the associated nozzle, whereas the upstream ends of the ink channels of both arrays are connected to the common ink reservoir through their respective ink supply paths. The actuators are formed by piezoelectric elements that are arranged along each ink channel. When an ink droplet is to be expelled from a specific nozzle, the associated actuator is energized such that the piezoelectric element will first contract, so that ink is sucked-in through the ink supply path, and the piezoelectric element will then expand again, so that the liquid ink contained in the ink channel is pressurized and an acoustic pressure wave will propagate towards the nozzle.

[0003] A problem encountered with printheads of this type is the occurrence of cross-talk among the various nozzles. A major reason for this cross-talk phenomenon is the propagation of acoustic waves in the solid material of the piezoelectric actuators and in the common substrate in which the ink channels are formed. As is known in the art, this kind of cross-talk can be suppressed, for example, by selecting an appropriate design for the substrate and the ink channels and by providing a suitable support structure for the piezoelectric actuators.

[0004] Another source of cross-talk may be the propagation of acoustic waves through the liquid ink in the ink supply system. In order to avoid cross-talk of this kind, EP-A-0 726 151 proposes a printhead in which the ink supply paths connecting the pressure chambers to the common ink reservoir comprise acoustically matched sets of inlet filters, inlet ports, and inlet channels, which are designed to avoid, through acoustic matching, the propagation of acoustic waves from the various pressure chambers into the ink reservoir. In the printhead described in this document, the ink reservoir is formed by a closed chamber which is bounded on one side by a compliant wall. The purpose of this compliant wall is to further minimize pressure fluctuations in the ink reservoir during the "start up" of the printhead, until a steady ink flow is established.

[0005] It has been found however that the printed images obtained with an inkjet printer of the type described above may under certain conditions still show some undesired artifacts which degrade the image quality.

[0006] It is accordingly an object of the invention to provide a multi-nozzle inkjet printhead which provides an improved image quality.

[0007] According to the invention, this object is achieved by an inkjet printhead of the type indicated in the opening paragraph, which printhead is characterized by comprising an acoustic wave attenuator disposed to control the acoustic wave transmission and reflection properties of the ink supply path.

[0008] The inventors have found that the artifacts mentioned above can be traced back to a new type of cross-talk phenomenon which has not yet been addressed in the prior art and which can be explained as follows: Ideally, the ink supply path which connects the pressure chamber to the ink reservoir and hence to the other pressure chambers of the array(s) should behave like an open end of the pressure chamber, so that acoustic waves propagating towards the ink reservoir are reflected almost completely with phase inversion. Then, for example, when the piezoelectric actuator performs its suction stroke and a negative pressure wave propagates towards the ink reservoir, this pressure wave will be reflected and will return as a positive pressure wave propagating towards the nozzle. This positive pressure wave will then be boosted further when the actuator performs its compression stroke.

[0009] In a conventional printhead, the ink supply path is configured, i. e. acoustically matched, to fulfill this requirement. As a result, due to the practically complete reflection of the acoustic waves at the ink supply path, these waves should be prevented from propagating further into the ink reservoir and into the other pressure chambers. However, due to constructional constraints, the ink supply path can only have a limited cross-sectional area. In spite of this restricted cross-section, the ink supply path will act as an open end, as desired, when only a single actuator is energized. If, however, a plurality of neighboring actuators are energized simultaneously in accordance with the image information to be printed, then the restricted area where the ink supply paths of the various pressure chambers are jointly connected to the ink reservoir will form a bottleneck for the ink flowing into the pressure chambers. As a consequence, the ink supply path can no longer act as an ideal open end, and the acoustic waves propagating towards the ink reservoir will be reflected only partly, and a portion of the acoustic energy is transmitted into the ink reservoir and into the other pressure chambers and will give rise to cross-talk.

[0010] According to the invention, the acoustic wave attenuator is arranged to control the reflection and transmission behavior of the ink supply path such that, in this case, the ink supply paths will still act as almost ideal open ends in spite of the increased demand for ink. In

this way, the acoustic waves can be prevented from entering into the ink reservoir and from causing cross-talk, regardless of the pixel pattern to be printed, so that the image quality is improved.

[0011] The invention is particularly useful in case of a printhead design in which the ink supply paths leading from the ink reservoir to the various pressure chambers of one array comprise a restricted inlet passage or manifold through which the plurality of ink chambers are commonly connected to the ink reservoir. The acoustic wave attenuator will then be arranged to attenuate acoustic waves which would otherwise be generated in this passage due to an increase demand for ink and which would then propagate into the neighboring pressure chambers and also into the ink reservoir. By suppressing pressure fluctuations in this inlet passage, the ink supply paths are all allowed to behave like open ends, and intra-array cross-talk, i. e. cross-talk among the pressure chambers belonging to the same array, can be avoided more reliably.

[0012] In addition, in case of a multi-array printhead, where the pressure chambers of at least two nozzle arrays are connected to the same ink reservoir, the invention has the further remarkable advantage that inter-array cross-talk, i. e. cross-talk between the different arrays, can also be suppressed successfully. Such inter-array cross-talk would otherwise be likely to occur, for example, in a hot-melt printhead in which an ink reservoir that is kept at atmospheric pressure and is filled with molten ink to a certain level is disposed above the pressure chambers and is connected to the pressure chambers of each array through a respective inlet passage. Would the pressure fluctuations in the inlet passages not be attenuated, then a pressure wave would propagate from one of the inlet passages, in which a large demand for ink occurs, into the ink reservoir, and would then be reflected at the liquid/air meniscus in the ink reservoir and would propagate into the inlet passage of the other array, where it would give rise to cross-talk. Thanks to the acoustic wave attenuator according to the invention, this phenomenon can be suppressed successfully.

[0013] Useful details of the invention are indicated in the dependent claims.

[0014] In preferred embodiment, the acoustic wave attenuator is formed by a compliance element provided in each of the fluid supply paths. Preferably, the compliance element is provided in an inlet passage which forms a common part of the fluid supply paths of the same array.

[0015] The compliance element may for example be formed by a flexible sheet defining a portion of the wall of the ink supply passage and allowed to deflect in response to changes in the pressure of the liquid ink, thereby attenuating pressure fluctuations.

[0016] In a frequently used printhead design, the pressure chambers are formed by an array of parallel ink channels that are covered by a common flexible sheet, and the actuators are formed as electro-mechan-

ical actuators arranged to deflect the portions of the flexible sheet covering the various ink channels. Then, a sufficiently large portion of the same flexible sheet, which portion is not rigidly connected to the actuators, may serve as the acoustic wave attenuator according to the invention. In this way, the invention may be realized with only a minor change in the conventional printhead design. The portion of the flexible sheet serving as the compliance element of the attenuator may comprise a bulge that is lifted off from the surface of the actuator to some extent, so that it is capable of being deflected not only away from the actuator in order to absorb negative pressure waves but also to deflect towards the actuator in order to absorb positive pressure waves.

[0017] A preferred embodiment of the invention will now be described in conjunction with the accompanying drawing, in which:

Fig. 1 is an exploded perspective view, partly broken away, of an inkjet printed according to the invention;

Fig. 2 is a cross-sectional view along the line II-II in figure 1; and

Fig. 3 is an enlarged detail of the sectional view shown in figure 2.

[0018] Figure 1 shows the essential parts of a hot-melt inkjet printhead which has a symmetric structure and comprises a substrate 10 made of graphite, for example, which defines an upwardly open ink reservoir 12 in its upper part. A lower portion of the substrate 10 is configured as a channel plate 14 which has opposite side surfaces only one of which is visible in figure 1. Each of these side surfaces is formed with an array 16 of parallel ink channels 18 which have only been shown schematically in figure 1. The ink channels 18 are cut into the surface of the channel plate 14, and the lower ends thereof are converged so as to form nozzles 20 through which ink droplets are to be expelled. In this way, a linear array of nozzles 20 is formed on either side of the channel plate 14. The symmetric arrangement of arrays 16 of ink channels 18 and nozzles 20 on both sides of the channel plate 14 can be seen in figure 2. Each of the arrays 16 of ink channels 18 is covered by a flexible sheet 22 that is bonded to the ridges of the channel plate 14 separating the individual ink channels 18. Thus, the open outwardly facing sides of all the ink channels 18 and of the nozzles 20 are closed-off by the sheets 22.

[0019] An actuator block 24 is bonded to the outer surface of each sheet 22. The actuator block 24 is made of a piezoelectric ceramic material and has a comb-like structure forming a plurality of parallel, vertically extending piezoelectric fingers 26 and is provided with electrodes (not shown) associated with each of the fingers 26. A flexible lead foil 28 is attached to the outer surface of each of the actuator blocks 24 and is formed with electric leads for individually energizing the piezoelectric fingers 26.

[0020] The actuator blocks 24 are protected by a cap 30 fitted over the lower end of the channel plate 14 and bonded to the lower edges of the sheets 22 and the lower end face of the channel plate 14.

[0021] In figure 2, the sectional plane passes to the piezoelectric fingers 26 of the actuator blocks 24. It can be seen that these fingers 26 project towards the flexible sheet 22 and each engage a portion of the sheet covering one of the ink channels 18. The top end of the ink channels 18 of each array 16 are connected to the ink reservoir 12 through an inclined inlet passage 32. The top ends of the inlet passages 32, in the plane of the bottom of the ink reservoir 12, may be covered by a filter element 34 which prevents solid particles from entering into the ink channels 18 and clogging the nozzles 20.

[0022] As is shown in figure 1, a receptacle 36 for accommodating another (coarser) filter element is defined in the walls of the ink reservoir 12. Although not shown in the drawing, the ink reservoir 12 further accommodates a heating element for heating the hot-melt ink so as to keep the same in the liquid state. The meniscus of the liquid ink in the ink reservoir 12 is shown at 38 in figure 2.

[0023] When the printhead is operating, electric signals are supplied to the individual piezoelectric fingers 26 via the lead foil 28, so that the piezoelectric fingers perform expansion and retraction strokes towards and away from the associated ink channel 18, so that the sheet 22 covering this ink channel is flexed, and the liquid ink contained in the ink channel is pressurized and an ink droplet is jetted-out through the nozzle 20. Thus, the ink channels 18 serve as pressure chambers for pressurizing the ink. More precisely, when an ink droplet is to be expelled, the associated piezoelectric finger 26 will at first be retracted, so that ink is sucked-in through the inlet passage 32.

[0024] As can be seen in figure 1, the ink passage 32 extends transversely of the ink channels 18, and its cross-section is significantly larger than that of the ink channels 18. Thus, when a negative pressure wave propagates in the liquid ink from the ink channel 18 towards the inlet passage 32, the transition between the ink channel and the inlet passage will act like an open end at which the acoustic wave is reflected almost completely, with phase reversal. As a result, a positive pressure wave will then propagate through the ink channel 18 toward the nozzle 20. At an appropriate timing, the piezoelectric finger 26 is expanded again, so that the positive pressure wave is boosted. Positive pressure waves propagating towards the inlet passage 32 will also be reflected at the transition, so that no substantial pressure fluctuations should occur in the inlet passage 32.

[0025] However, when a plurality adjacent ink channels 18 are energized simultaneously, the demand for ink in the associated portion of the inlet passage 32 may become so large that the ink flow is restricted by the limited cross-section of the inlet passage 32. As a result,

the transitions between the ink channels 18 and the ink passage 32 would no longer act as ideal open ends, and the acoustic waves arriving from the ink channels 18 would no longer be reflected completely, but would partly be transmitted through the inlet passage 32 into the ink reservoir 12. A ridge 40 (figure 2) formed centrally on the bottom wall of the ink reservoir 12 would prevent the direct propagation of the transmitted wave from one inlet passage 32 to the other. However, the pressure waves propagating through the liquid ink in the ink reservoir 12 would be reflected at the meniscus 38 and could then enter into the other inlet passage 32, as is indicated by a dot-dashed line in figure 2. If no countermeasures were taken, this propagation of acoustic waves from one inlet passage 32 to the other could give rise to inter-array cross-talk.

[0026] In order to avoid this type of cross-talk, the present invention provides an acoustic wave attenuator 42 for controlling the acoustic wave transmission and reflection properties of the ink supply paths connecting the ink reservoir 12 to the ink channels 18 of the two arrays 16. In the present embodiment, as is shown in figure 3, such an attenuator 42 is formed by a portion of the flexible sheet 22 which closes off the downstream end of the inlet passage 32 and the top (upstream) end portions of the ink channels 18. In this portion, the sheet 22 is not rigidly connected to the piezoelectric fingers 26 but instead forms a small bulge 44 which slightly projects into the inlet passage 32 and extends transversely of the ink channels 18 throughout the length of the inlet passage 32. Thus, in the bulge 44, the sheet 22 is separated from the piezoelectric finger 26 by a small gap, so that it is free to flex inwardly and outwardly of the inlet passage 32. The rest of the sheet 22 is adhered to the piezoelectric fingers 26 by means of a layer of adhesive 46 which, however, is interrupted in the vicinity of the bulge 44. Only a very small strip of adhesive 48 is applied at the very top end of the actuator block 24. Thus, any pressure waves that might be created in the inlet passage 32 can be attenuated by the flexing movement of the portion of the sheet 22 forming the attenuator 42. This portion of the sheet serves as a compliance element which smoothens out any pressure fluctuations in the inlet passage 32 and assures that the transition between the ink channel 18 and the inlet passage 32 will always act as an open end, with complete reflection of acoustic waves in the ink, even in case of an increased demand for ink in the inlet passage 32. As a result, no pressure waves will propagate through the inlet passage 32 into the ink reservoir 12 and into the ink passage 32 of the other array, and inter-array cross-talk is eliminated. Similarly the attenuator 42 also helps to reduce cross-talk among adjacent ink passages of the same array.

[0027] In a modified embodiment, the length of the actuator block 24 may be reduced so that it covers only the ink channels 18 but not the end of the inlet passage 32. Then, the sheet 22 would freely span the down-

stream end of the ink passage 32 and would thus be free to act as a compliance element.

[0028] In yet another embodiment, the downstream end of the ink supply passage 32 may be closed-off by a rigid member, and the attenuator 42 may be formed in the top ends of the ink channels 18 adjacent to the inlet passage 32. The attenuator 42 may also be formed by other means, for example by a piece of sponge-like material arranged in or close to the inlet passage 32, a trap formed on purpose for capturing an air bubble in the inlet passage 32, and the like.

pressure chambers (18) and nozzles (20), wherein the pressure chambers (18) of said at least two arrays (16) are connected to the same ink reservoir (12).

- 4. Printhead according to any of the preceding claims, wherein said portion of the sheet (22) forming the attenuator (42) is arranged to close-off a downstream end of the inlet passage.

Claims

- 1. Inkjet printhead having a plurality of pressure chambers (18) each of which is fluidly connected on the one hand, via an ink supply path (32), to a common ink reservoir (12) and on the other hand to a nozzle (20), wherein:

an actuator (26) is provided for each pressure chamber (18) for pressurizing the ink contained therein, so as to eject an ink droplet through the nozzle (20) in accordance with a print signal, the pressure chambers form at least one array (16) of parallel ink channels (18) each connected to the corresponding nozzle (20) at one end thereof and connected to the ink reservoir at the other end, the ink supply path (32) for the nozzle channels (18) comprises an inlet passage which is connected to the ink reservoir (12), extends transversely of the ink channels (18), and interconnects the same, the printhead has an acoustic wave attenuator (42) arranged to control the acoustic reflection and transmission properties of the ink supply path (32), the actuators (26) are electro-mechanic actuators disposed along the said ink channels (18) for deflecting a flexible sheet (22) covering the ink channels (22), and said attenuator (42) is formed by a portion of said sheet (22) which is allowed to flex relative to the actuators (26) in response to pressure fluctuations in the ink supply path (32),

characterized in that said portion of the sheet (22) forming the attenuator (42) is arranged to bulge away from the actuators (26).

- 2. Printhead according to claim 1, wherein said flexible sheet (22) is a compliant sheet (22) defining a wall of the ink supply path (32).
- 3. Printhead according to any of the preceding claims, comprising at least two parallel linear arrays (16) of

Fig. 1

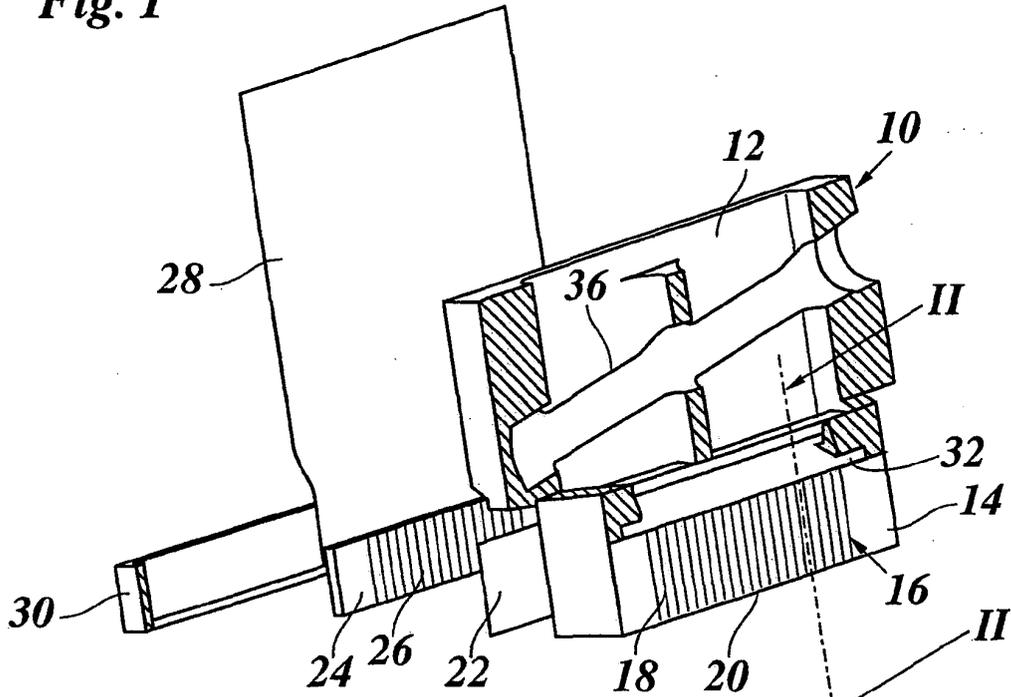


Fig. 2

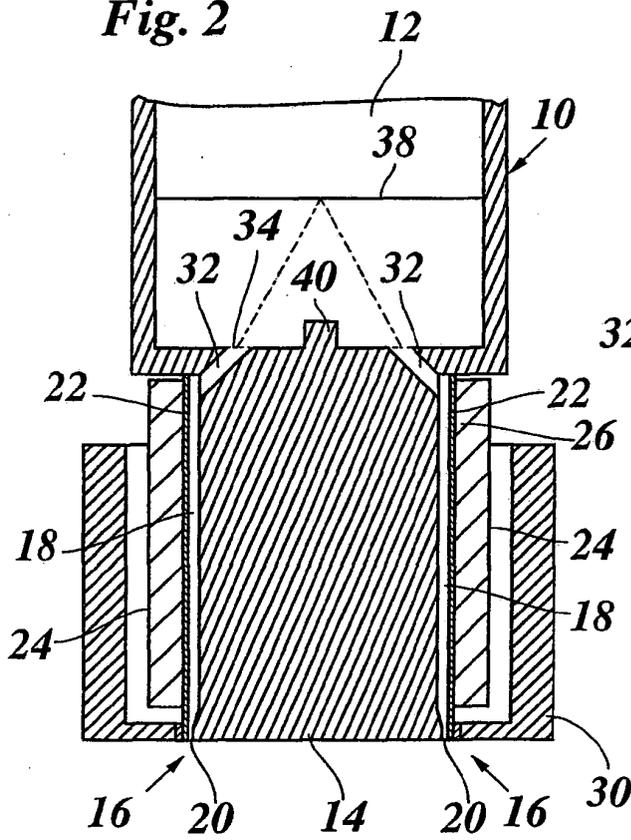
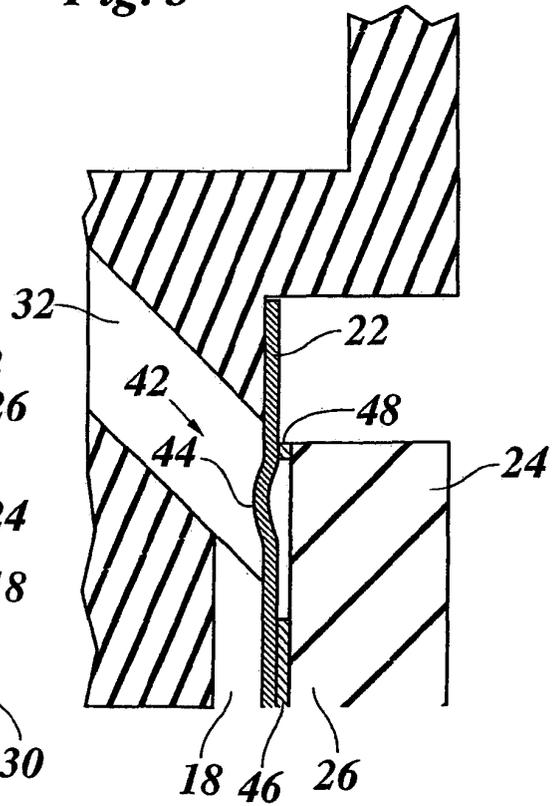


Fig. 3





DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.7)
A	US 6 431 689 B1 (SCHIPPERS MICHAEL S) 13 August 2002 (2002-08-13) * abstract * * column 2, line 53 - column 3, line 67 * * figure 2 *	1-4	B41J2/055
A	--- PATENT ABSTRACTS OF JAPAN vol. 005, no. 162 (M-092), 17 October 1981 (1981-10-17) & JP 56 089570 A (NEC CORP), 20 July 1981 (1981-07-20) * abstract *	1-4	
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A	--- US 2003/063171 A1 (OKUDA MASAKAZU ET AL) 3 April 2003 (2003-04-03) * paragraph [0156] - paragraph [0158] * * figure 11 *	1	
A	--- US 6 394 589 B1 (AKIYAMA YOSHITAKA ET AL) 28 May 2002 (2002-05-28) * column 2, line 15 - column 3, line 60 * * figure 1 *	1	
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The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.7)
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Place of search	Date of completion of the search	Examiner	
THE HAGUE	7 June 2004	Didenot, B	
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS		T : theory or principle underlying the invention	
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ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT
ON EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION NO.

EP 04 07 5979

This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned European search report. The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on the above-mentioned European search report. The European Patent Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information.

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