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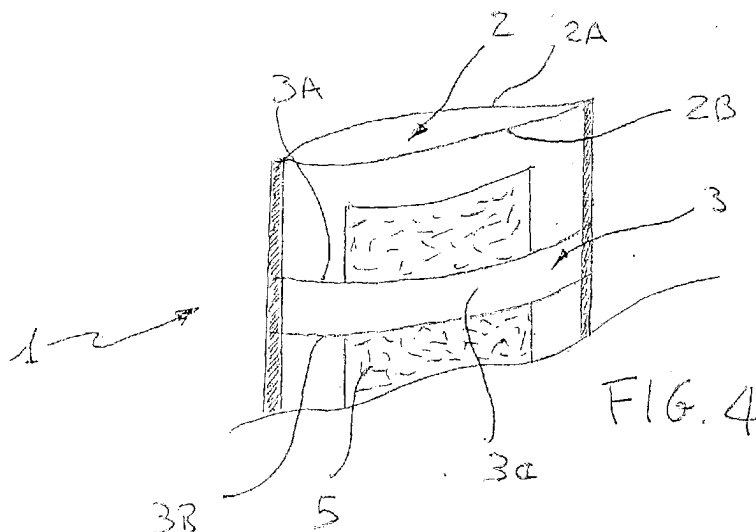
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(54) **Container for foodstuff**

(57) A container for foodstuff comprises a main compartment (2) designed to house a foodstuff, and a retaining element (3) associated with the main compartment (2); the retaining element (3) has a first portion of possible access (4) and at least one second portion of

possible access (5) that in cooperation with the first portion of possible access (4) defines an operating space adapted to house an accessory, the first and second portions of possible access defining respective distinct directions of possible access.



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Description

[0001] The present invention relates to a container for foodstuff ready to be eaten, such as pizza by the slice, sandwiches, backed and fried products (chips, fried sea fish), or also cold pastas or Nutella (a hazelnut-based spreadable cream).

[0002] It is known that many take-away foods have some consistency and appear greasy to such a degree that they must be handled through interposition of suitable objects such as paper or cloth elements to be placed between the foods themselves and the consumer's hands.

[0003] These objects partly or fully surround the foodstuff, leaving part of it in an exposed condition so that it can be eaten by the consumer.

[0004] The known art briefly described above, while being very simple and existing in different embodiments, however has some limits. In fact, in spite of the above expedients, these objects cannot ensure a perfect cleanliness while the product is being consumed, above all in the case the product itself is not fully surrounded by the paper or cloth material.

[0005] In addition, since these objects must be compulsorily held in the consumer's hands, they are not very practical each time the consumer needs to use napkins, cutlery and the like; in other words, these objects do not enable either an easy use (in the typical situations in which products such as pizza by the slice, ice-cream and others are to be eaten outdoors or while the consumer is walking) or a prompt availability of accessories such as napkins, cutlery or glasses.

[0006] Under this situation the technical task underlying the present invention is to conceive a container for foodstuff capable of substantially obviating the mentioned limits.

[0007] Mainly, it is an aim of the present invention to conceive a container for foodstuff that can efficiently contain any foodstuff, while at the same time ensures that the consumer's hands are perfectly clean and separated from the foodstuff and enables a practical access to the exposed part of the product that is ready to be eaten.

[0008] Within the scope of this technical task it is an important aim of the invention to conceive a container for foodstuff enabling an easy transport of additional elements such as napkins, cutlery or the like, so that the latter can be easily handled and used by the consumer.

[0009] In addition, the present invention aims at conceiving a container that can be made in several different forms and with cheap materials, that however are in compliance with the hygienic regulations on foodstuff as established by law, and the ecological regulations.

[0010] The technical task mentioned and the aims specified are substantially achieved by a container for foodstuff having the features set out in one or more of the appended claims.

[0011] The description of a preferred, but not exclu-

sive, embodiment of a container for foodstuff in accordance with the invention is now taken hereinafter by way of non-limiting example, with the aid of the accompanying drawings, in which:

- Fig. 1 is a perspective view of a first possible embodiment of the container in accordance with the invention;
- Fig. 2 is a top view of a container in accordance with the invention;
- Figs. 3, 4, 5 and 10 are perspective views of other possible embodiments of the container in accordance with the invention;
- Fig. 5a is a top view of the container in Fig. 5;
- Figs. 6, 7 and 8 are perspective views of different tablecloths obtained in accordance with the present invention;
- Fig. 9 is a section taken along line IX-IX in Fig. 8; and
- Figs. 11 and 12 show a further embodiment of a container in accordance with the invention.

[0012] With reference to the drawings, the container for foodstuff in accordance with the invention has been generally denoted at 1.

[0013] Container 1 substantially consists of a main compartment 2 which is essentially designed to house a foodstuff; depending on the possible use of the container 1 in accordance with the invention, this compartment 2 can be of any shape (for example, it can be of substantially triangular shape to receive pizza by the slice, or of rectangular or rhomboidal shape and so on), provided it defines a space in which a foodstuff "P" can be confined and only a portion of which can possibly project therefrom for being directly eaten by the consumer.

[0014] Advantageously, a retaining element 3 is present which is associated with the main pocket 2 and which practically defines at least one operating space 4 adapted to house at least one accessory 5 that, depending on the circumstances, can be a napkin, a cutlery set, a glass or others, for example.

[0015] Conveniently, the retaining element 3 has a first access portion 3a and at least one second portion of possible access 3b; within the scope of the present invention, the first portion and the second portion of possible access define respective distinct access directions (preferably in opposition), thereby enabling the accessory to be taken out of, and stowed again into the operating space, indifferently in either direction.

[0016] In other words, due to the presence of at least two portions of possible access, the ergonomic character of the container is greatly improved and above all the possibility of having one or more accessories to hand, which accessories can be very useful to the consumer is introduced. It is further to be noted that these accessories can be taken out of, and stowed into the operating space 4 defined by the retaining element 3 with great

freedom, obviously in addition to being always clearly visible and within reach.

[0017] From a structural point of view, the container shown in Figs. 1-5 and 10 comprises a first plate-like element 2a and a second plate-like element 2b mutually interconnected and defining the main compartment 2 in cooperation with each other; the first and second plate-like elements can have predetermined (and arbitrary) shapes seen in plan view and in order to define the main compartment 2 (that is open on one side alone), they are mutually interconnected along the respective peripheral edges, by heat-sealing for example.

[0018] Still from a structural point of view, the container can further comprise a third plate-like element 3c that in turn defines the retaining element 3 (as shown in Figs. 1, 2, 3, 4). The third plate-like element 3c too has a predetermined shape seen in plan view and is mutually interconnected with the first and/or the second plate-like elements (2a and/or 2b) preferably along part of its edges. Interconnection of the third plate-like element 3c is always made in such a manner as to define the two portions of possible access, in compliance with the spirit of the present invention.

[0019] Alternatively; the retaining element 3 can be directly defined on the second plate-like element 2b by suitable cuts or notches (see Figs. 5 and 5a).

[0020] Furthermore, as shown in Figs. 11 and 12, the compartment 2 can be defined through folding of a flat sheet 13 carrying the retaining element 3 on its surface so that the napkin can also act as a thermally insulating element.

[0021] Depending on the operating requirements (costs and/or products to be contained and others), the first and/or second and/or third plate-like elements can be made of paper material and preferably paper for food use, generally polythene-coated paper; in any case, other materials too can be used, such as metal (aluminium) sheets or plastic sheets adapted for use with food.

[0022] The inventive idea underlying the present invention can also be used for other articles of manufacture; for example, a paper tablecloth of rectangular shape having a rest surface 10 (that is generally designed to receive supports for foodstuff such as dishes and glasses) can also be considered as being part of the present invention.

[0023] This tablecloth advantageously comprises a retaining element 3 defining one or more operating spaces 4 adapted to house at least one accessory; the retaining element 3 is associated (and usually directly engaged) with the rest surface 10 and has a first portion of possible access 3a and at least one second portion of possible access 3b that define respective distinct directions of possible access to the operating space 4.

[0024] Alternatively the retaining element 3 can have a single access 3a defining a sort of holding pocket of one piece construction with the tablecloth. Fig. 6 shows the simplest embodiment in which the tablecloth 10 exclusively allows one accessory 5 to be retained.

[0025] Fig. 7 on the contrary shows a tablecloth 10 in which by addition of the upper element 11 a compartment 2 is defined that houses some cutlery for example, whereas the retaining element 3 in the form of a band 3c is further added and applied on top of element 11 and allows a napkin 5 to be retained.

[0026] Alternatively (Figs. 8 and 9) after the upper element 1 has been heat-sealed to enable compartment 2 to hold the cutlery, cutting out of the sheet 11 itself is carried out so as to define the retaining element 3.

[0027] The invention achieves important advantages.

[0028] In fact, first of all, it is to be noted that the presence of the main compartment involves an important efficiency in retaining any type of foodstuff ready to be eaten, at the inside thereof, whereas the simultaneous presence of the retaining element offers a very comfortable support for housing throwaway napkins, cutlery or glasses, with an obvious practical and hygienic advantage for the consumer.

[0029] The particular conformation of the retaining element also gives the container a great freedom of use because by virtue of the particular "open" conformation it is possible to take out and/or stow any accessory (napkin, piece of cutlery or others) with great ease and without particular ergonomic limitations resulting from the possible presence of closed pockets (i.e. only accessible from one direction).

[0030] In addition, the types of materials to be employed to make the main pocket and the great variety of shapes that can be obtained make the present invention very flexible and adaptable to the most various uses and trade stores.

[0031] It will be appreciated that the particular construction architecture of the present invention allows low production costs and high qualitative standards to be achieved.

Claims

1. A container for foodstuff comprising:

- a main compartment (2) designed to house a foodstuff (P); and
- a retaining element (3) associated with said main compartment (2) and having a first access portion (3a), the retaining element (3) defining an operating space (4) adapted to house an accessory (5);
- **characterised in that** the retaining element (3) further comprises at least one second portion of possible access (3b), the first and second access portions defining respective distinct directions of possible access to said operating space (4).

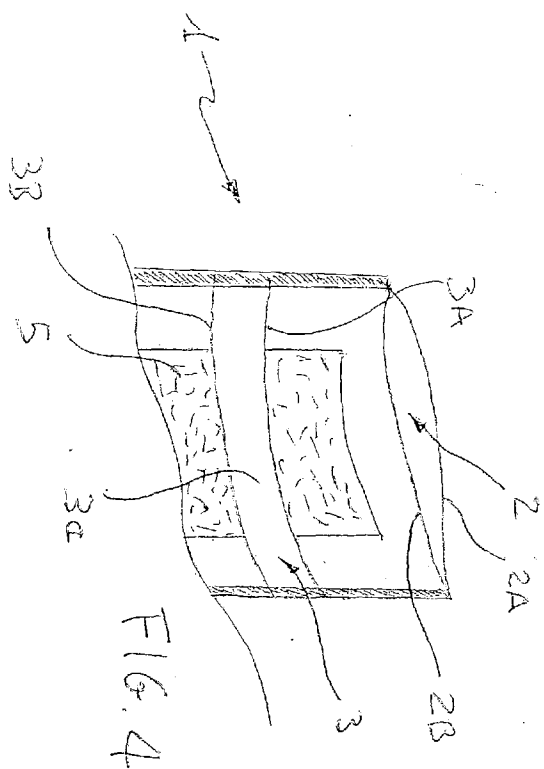
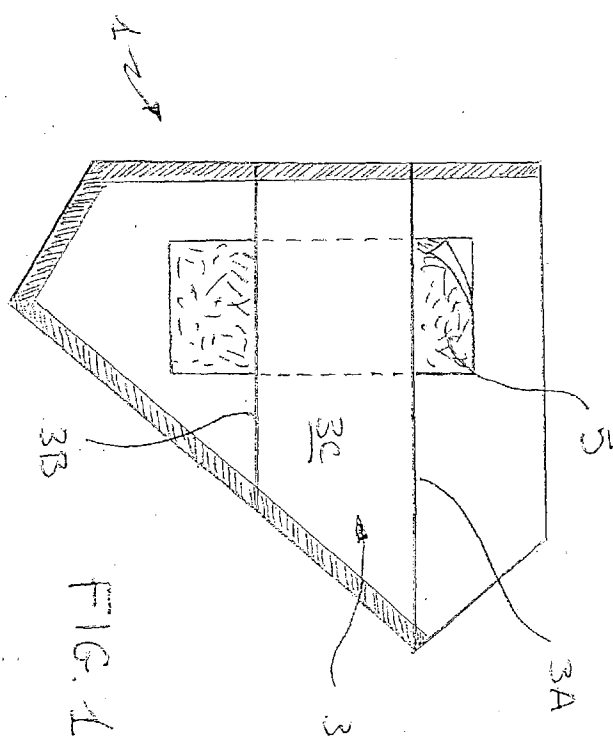
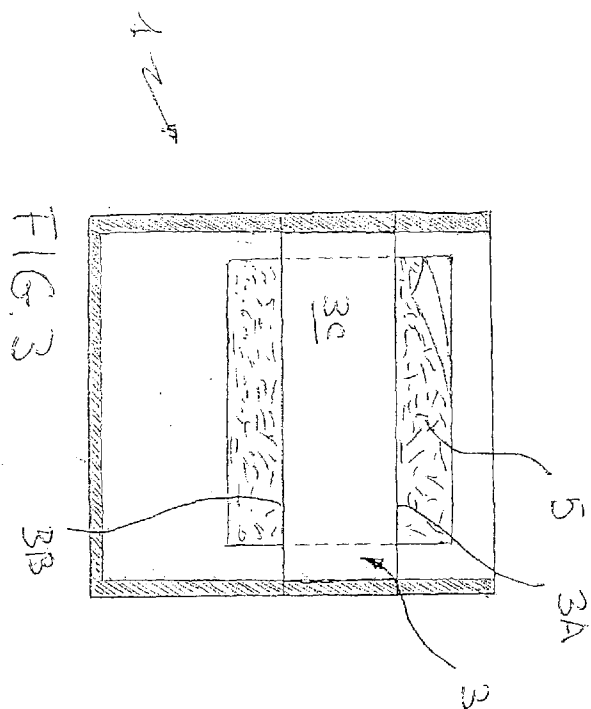
2. A container as claimed in claim 1, **characterised in that** it comprises a first plate-like element (2a) and

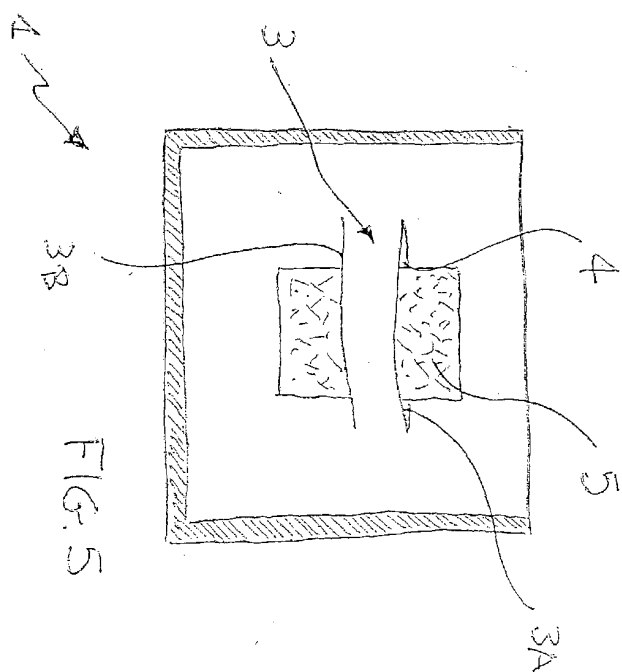
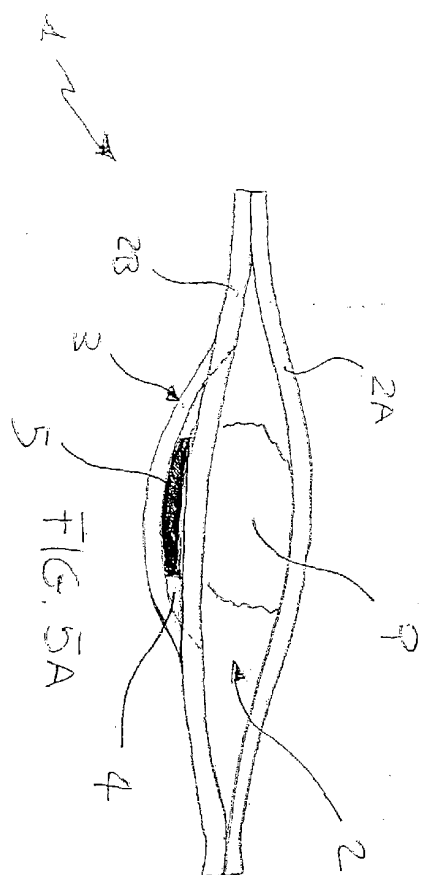
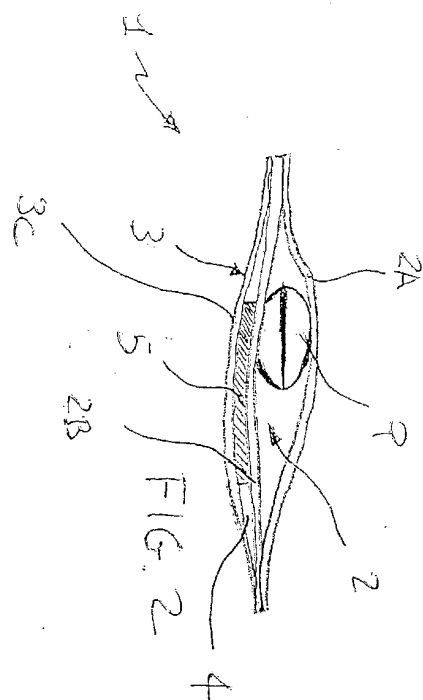
a second plate-like element (2b) mutually interconnected and defining the main compartment (2) in cooperation with each other.

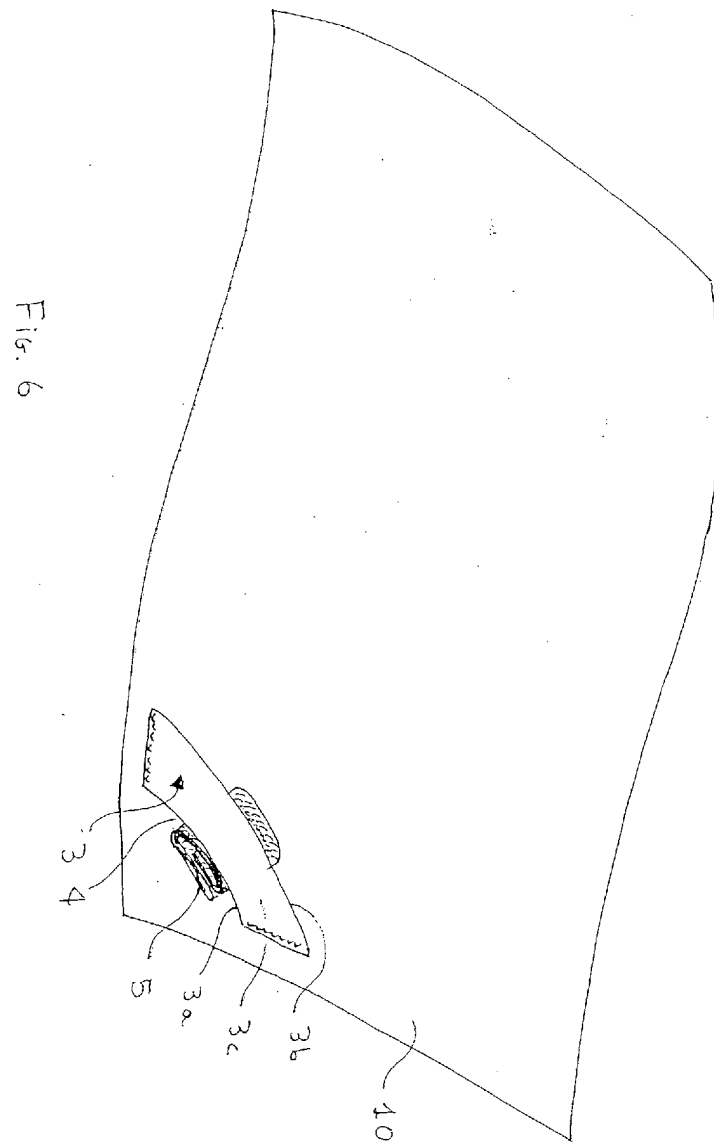
3. A container as claimed in claim 2, **characterised in that** said first and second plate-like elements (2a, 2b) have predetermined shapes seen in plan view and are mutually interconnected along the respective perimetral edges, substantially defining a single side of possible access. 5
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4. A container as claimed in anyone of the preceding claims, **characterised in that** it further comprises a third plate-like element (3c), said third plate-like element defining the retaining element (3). 15
5. A container as claimed in claim 4, **characterised in that** the third plate-like element (3c) has a predetermined shape seen in plan view and is mutually interconnected with the first and/or second plate-like elements (2a and/or 2b) preferably along part of its edges. 20
6. A container as claimed in anyone of the preceding claims 2 to 5, **characterised in that** the first and/or second and/or third plate-like elements are made of a paper material, preferably paper for food use or polythene-coated paper. 25
7. A tablecloth preferably of paper material comprising a rest surface (10) designed to receive supports for foodstuff, **characterised in that** it further comprises a retaining element (3) associated with said rest surface (10), said retaining element (3) defining an operating space (4) adapted to house an accessory (5), the retaining element (3) having a first access portion (3a) and optionally a second portion of possible access (3b), the first and second access portions defining respective distinct directions of possible access to said operating space (4). 30
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8. A tablecloth as claimed in claim 7, **characterised in that** it further comprises an upper element (11) associated with the rest surface (10) to define a housing compartment (2) preferably open along a single insertion side. 45

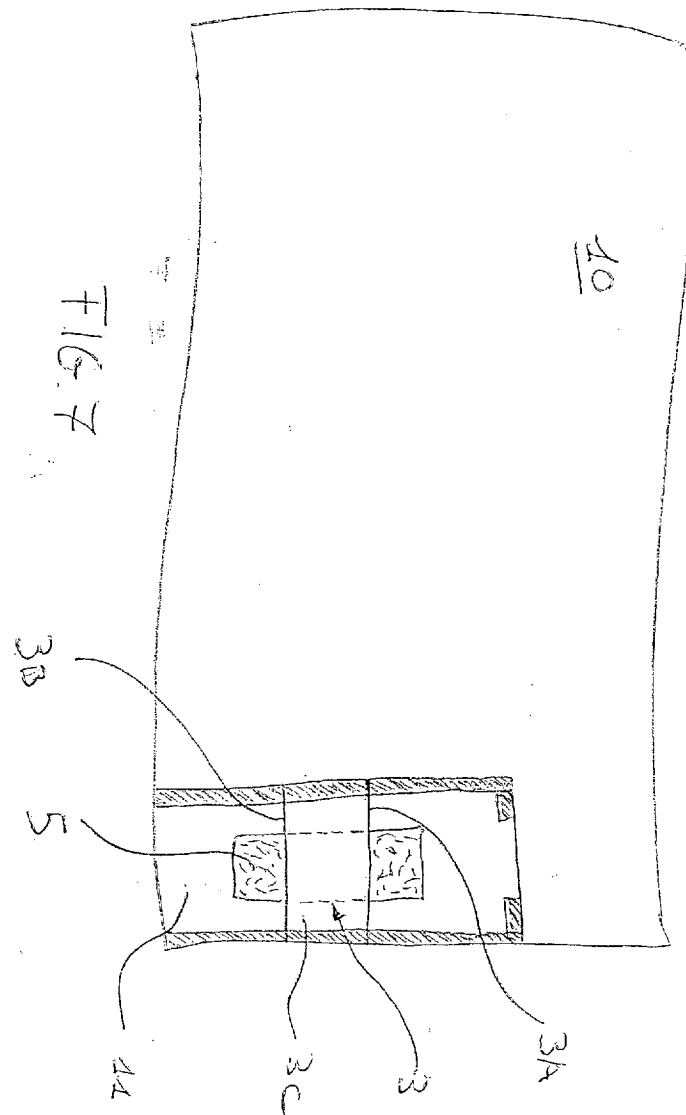
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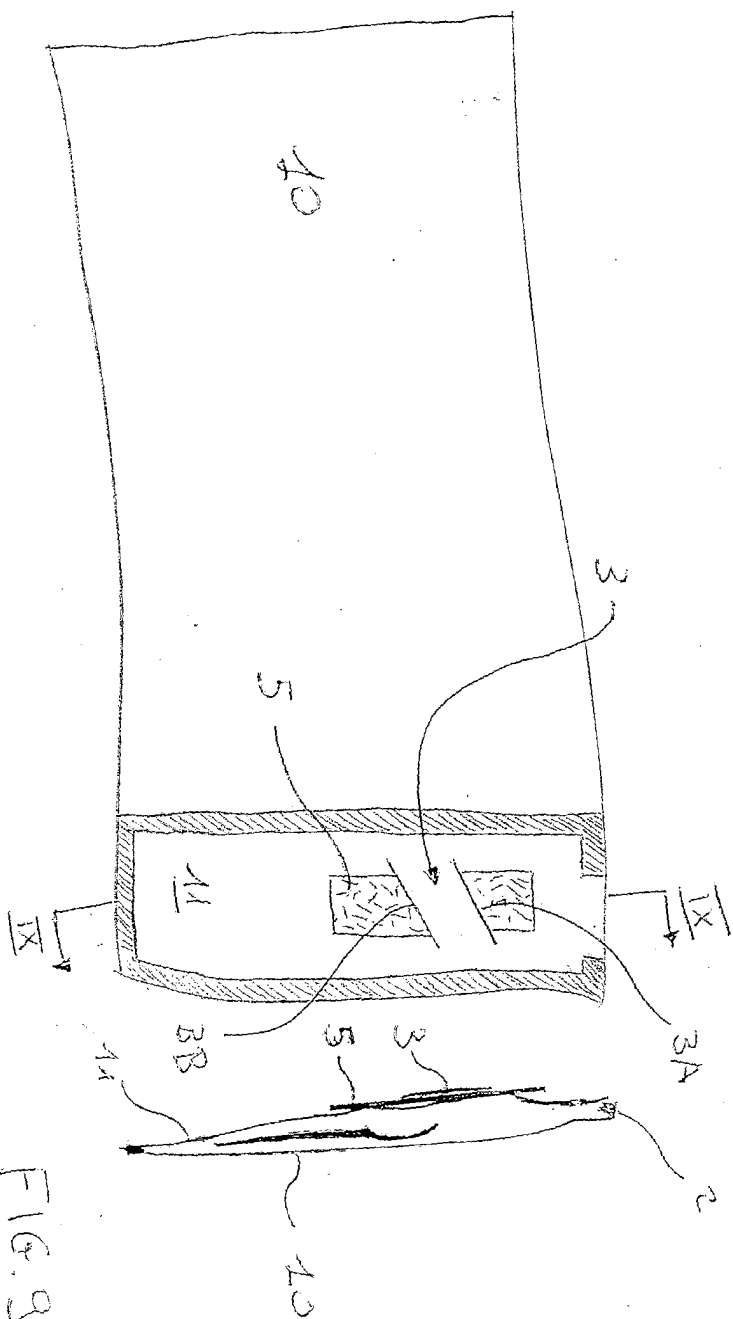
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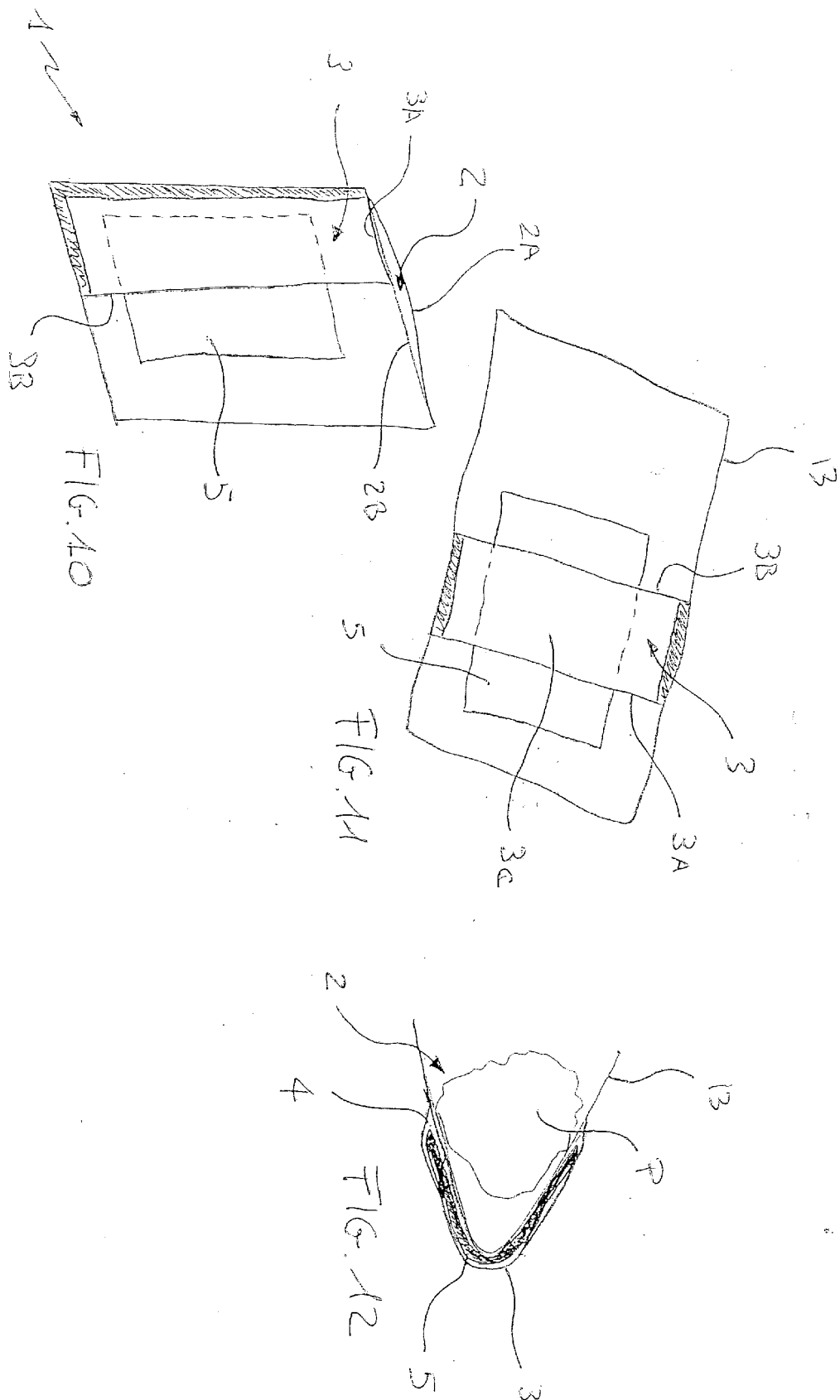














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Application Number
EP 04 10 1918

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Place of search The Hague		Date of completion of the search 18 August 2004	Examiner Vistisen, L
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