



(12) **EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION**
published in accordance with Art. 153(4) EPC

(43) Date of publication:
26.01.2011 Bulletin 2011/04

(51) Int Cl.:
A47L 13/20 (2006.01) **A47L 13/16** (2006.01)
A47L 13/256 (2006.01)

(21) Application number: **09728353.5**

(86) International application number:
PCT/JP2009/056518

(22) Date of filing: **30.03.2009**

(87) International publication number:
WO 2009/123128 (08.10.2009 Gazette 2009/41)

(84) Designated Contracting States:
AT BE BG CH CY CZ DE DK EE ES FI FR GB GR HR HU IE IS IT LI LT LU LV MC MK MT NL NO PL PT RO SE SI SK TR
Designated Extension States:
AL BA RS

(72) Inventors:
• **TANAKA, Yoshinori**
Kanonji-shi
Kagawa 769-1602 (JP)
• **FUKUZAWA, Masumi**
Kanonji-shi
Kagawa 769-1602 (JP)

(30) Priority: **31.03.2008 JP 2008090856**

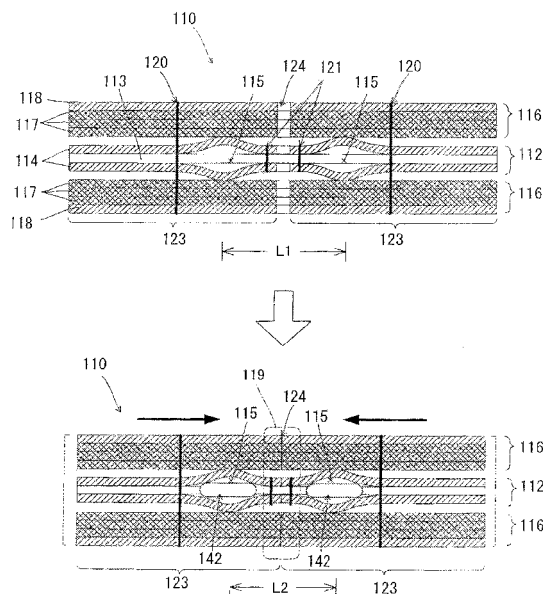
(74) Representative: **Murgatroyd, Susan Elizabeth et al**
Baron Warren Redfern
19 South End
Kensington
London
W8 5BU (GB)

(71) Applicant: **Unicharm Corporation**
Ehime 799-0111 (JP)

(54) **CLEANER**

(57) It is an object of the invention to provide an effective technique for enhancing a cleaning effect in a cleaning tool having a cleaning element for cleaning an object to be cleaned. According to a representative cleaning tool, a cleaning element 110 includes a plurality of elongate split cleaning parts 123, 123 having respective insert regions 115 for receiving the holding elements 142. In an inserted state of the holding elements 142 into the insert regions 115, the fiber assemblies 117 of the adjacent ones of the split cleaning parts 123, 123 overlap each other in the space in a direction transverse to the longitudinal direction.

FIG. 6



Description

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

[0001] The invention relates to a cleaning tool, and more particularly to a technique for providing a cleaning tool having a cleaning element for cleaning an object to be cleaned.

Description of the related Art

[0002] Various types of cleaning tools having a sheet-type cleaning element for cleaning an object are known. For example, Japanese non-examined laid-open Patent Publication No. 2007-29136 discloses a cleaning tool having a cleaning element which comprises a fabric layer and a scraping sheet. However, in designing a cleaning tool of this type having a cleaning element, it is required to provide an effective technique for enhancing its cleaning effect.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0003] Accordingly, it is an object of the invention to provide an effective technique for enhancing a cleaning effect in a cleaning tool having a cleaning element for cleaning an object to be cleaned.

[0004] The above-described problem can be solved by the features of the claimed invention. This invention can be applied to the construction of cleaning tools for cleaning regions to be cleaned (floors, walls, ceilings, external walls, posts, furniture, clothes, curtains, blinds, bedding, lighting, electrical cords, home electric appliances, etc.) inside and outside of houses, apartments, buildings, factories, vehicles, etc. or regions of human body parts to be cleaned. These regions to be cleaned may be either flat or curved, uneven or stepped.

[0005] A cleaning tool according to this invention is used for cleaning an object to be cleaned and includes at least a cleaning element holder and a cleaning element. The cleaning element holder is an elongate member. The cleaning element holder includes a grip to be held by a user and a plurality of holding elements extending from the grip in parallel in a longitudinal direction. In order to extend in "parallel" here, the holding elements are required to be disposed at least side by side. Such a manner of extending in parallel here includes the manner in which a plurality of the holding elements are disposed in parallel, and the manner in which the distance between two adjacent holding elements is decreased toward the front end. The cleaning element is designed as a member to be attached to the elongate cleaning element holder. Particularly, the cleaning element includes a plurality of elongate split cleaning parts which have respective insert regions for receiving the holding elements, and the cleaning element has a space into which

the object to be cleaned can be inserted between adjacent ones of the split cleaning parts. The object inserted into this space is cleaned while being held between the split cleaning parts. Further, the manner of being "split" here widely includes the manner in which a predetermined split cleaning part is disposed in its entirety or in part across the space from the other split cleaning part, and the manner in which a predetermined split cleaning part is integrally connected to the other split cleaning part. Further, each of the split cleaning parts includes a fiber assembly formed by a plurality of fibers extending in a direction transverse to the longitudinal direction of the split cleaning part, and a nonwoven fabric sheet made of nonwoven fabric, and the fiber assembly and the nonwoven fabric sheet are overlaid one on the other and bonded together. In an inserted state of the holding elements into the insert regions, the fiber assemblies of the adjacent ones of the split cleaning parts overlap each other in the space in a direction transverse to the longitudinal direction of the split cleaning parts. Further, the overlapped state of the fiber assemblies between the split cleaning parts in the space is required to be realized at least in the inserted state of the holding elements into the insert regions. In the state in which the holding elements are not yet inserted into the insert regions, the fiber assemblies of the split cleaning parts may overlap each other, or they may be spaced apart from each other without overlapping. Further, the number and combination of the fiber assemblies and nonwoven fabric sheets which are overlaid one on the other and bonded together can be selected as necessary.

[0006] With such construction of the cleaning tool according to this invention, a shape-retaining function is provided by overlapping of the fiber assemblies between the adjacent split cleaning parts. As a result, the entire cleaning element can be prevented from drooping, and unnecessary clearance can be prevented from being formed in the space. Further, the contact area between the object to be cleaned and the split cleaning parts can be increased by wrapping the object to be cleaned between the split cleaning parts. Thus, the cleaning effect of the object to be cleaned which is inserted into the space can be enhanced. Further, deterioration of the appearance of the cleaning tool which may be caused by unnecessary clearance formed in the space can be prevented. As a result, users can be convinced that the cleaning element has a high cleaning effect and the user's cleaning motivation can be effectively enhanced.

[0007] Further, the cleaning element according to this invention may be of disposable type designed for single use, disposable type designed for multiple use which can be used several times, while holding dust or dirt which has been removed from the object to be cleaned, on a brush portion, or reusable type which can be reused by washing.

[0008] In a further embodiment of the cleaning tool according to this invention, preferably, the above-described cleaning element is designed such that, in the state in

which the cleaning element is not yet attached to the cleaning element holder, a center distance between the adjacent insert regions is longer than a center distance between the adjacent holding elements of the cleaning element holder. Further, when the holding elements are inserted into the insert regions, the fiber assemblies of the adjacent split cleaning parts move toward each other and thus overlap each other in the space in a direction transverse to the longitudinal direction. With such construction, the space can be formed such that, when the holding elements are inserted into the insert regions, the object to be cleaned can be inserted into the space while the fiber assemblies of the split cleaning parts overlap each other in the space in a direction transverse to the longitudinal direction of the split cleaning parts.

[0009] In a further embodiment of the cleaning tool according to this invention, preferably, the nonwoven fabric sheet comprises a plurality of split pieces extending in a direction transverse to the longitudinal direction of the split cleaning parts. The split pieces are typically formed by splitting the nonwoven fabric sheet into strips. With such construction, in the cleaning element, the split cleaning parts each include the fiber assembly and the split pieces which extend in the same direction and overlap each other in the space, so that the cleaning element can be provided with a wiping function by the fiber assembly and a scraping function by the split pieces.

[0010] In a further embodiment of the cleaning tool according to this invention, preferably, the holding elements are formed by an elastic material which allows the adjacent holding elements to be elastically deformed away from each other. Typically, a plastic material having elasticity can be used as the elastic material. With such construction, the elastic biasing force of the holding elements is applied to the object to be cleaned which is inserted into the space, from the opposite sides, so that the fiber assembly of the split cleaning parts can be pressed against the object to be cleaned. As a result, the cleaning effect can be further improved. Moreover, when the object to be cleaned is removed from the space, the holding elements return to the original state according to the elastic biasing force, and thus the shape-retaining ability of the cleaning element is secured.

[0011] As described above, according to this invention, in a cleaning tool having a cleaning element for cleaning an object to be cleaned, the cleaning effect of the cleaning element can be enhanced.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0012]

FIG. 1 is a perspective view showing a cleaning tool 100 according to an embodiment of the invention, in a state disassembled into a cleaning element 110 and a cleaning element holder 130.

FIG. 2 is a sectional view of the cleaning element 110, taken along line A-A in FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 is a sectional view of the cleaning element 110, taken along line B-B in FIG. 1.

FIG. 4 is a perspective view of the cleaning element 110 of FIG. 1, in a state separated into layer elements.

FIG. 5 is a perspective view of the holding sheet 112 of the cleaning element 110 in FIG. 2.

FIG. 6 is a sectional view of the cleaning element 110 according to this embodiment of the invention, in the states before and after attachment of the cleaning element holder.

FIG. 7 is a sectional view of the split cleaning parts 123 according to this embodiment, illustrating a first procedure for attaching the cleaning element holder.

FIG. 8 is a sectional view of the split cleaning parts 123 according to this embodiment, illustrating a second procedure for attaching the cleaning element holder.

FIG. 9 shows a manner in which an object to be cleaned W is wiped between a pair of split cleaning parts 123 of the cleaning element 110 in the cleaning tool 100 of this embodiment.

FIG. 10 shows a manner in which the object to be cleaned W is wiped between the pair of split cleaning parts 123 of the cleaning element 110 in the cleaning tool 100 of this embodiment.

FIG. 11 shows the manner in which the object to be cleaned W is wiped between the pair of split cleaning parts 123 of the cleaning element 110 in the cleaning tool 100 of this embodiment.

FIG. 12 shows the manner in which the object to be cleaned W is wiped between the pair of split cleaning parts 123 of the cleaning element 110 in the cleaning tool 100 of this embodiment.

FIG. 13 shows a manner in which the object to be cleaned W is wiped on outer surfaces of the pair split cleaning parts 123 of the cleaning element 110 in the cleaning tool 100 of this embodiment.

FIG. 14 shows the manner in which the object to be cleaned W is wiped on outer surfaces of the pair split cleaning parts 123 of the cleaning element 110 in the cleaning tool 100 of this embodiment.

FIG. 15 shows the manner in which the object to be cleaned W is wiped on outer surfaces of the pair split cleaning parts 123 of the cleaning element 110 in the cleaning tool 100 of this embodiment.

FIG. 16 shows the manner in which the object to be cleaned W is wiped on outer surfaces of the pair split cleaning parts 123 of the cleaning element 110 in the cleaning tool 100 of this embodiment.

FIG. 17 shows the manner in which the object to be cleaned W is wiped on outer surfaces of the pair split cleaning parts 123 of the cleaning element 110 in the cleaning tool 100 of this embodiment.

FIG. 18 is a perspective view schematically showing a cleaning tool 200 according to a further embodiment of the invention, in a state disassembled into a cleaning element 210 and a cleaning element hold-

er 230.

FIG. 19 is a perspective view schematically showing a cleaning tool 300 according to a further embodiment of the invention, in a state disassembled into a cleaning element 310 and a cleaning element holder 330.

FIG. 20 is a schematic sectional view of a cleaning element 410 according to a further embodiment of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0013] A structure of a cleaning tool 100 according to this embodiment is now described with reference to the drawings. The cleaning tool 100 is configured as the cleaning tool for cleaning an object to be cleaned. Objects to be cleaned typically include regions to be cleaned (floors, walls, windows, ceilings, external walls, posts, furniture, clothes, curtains, blinds, bedding, lighting, electrical cords, home electric appliances, etc.) inside and outside of houses, apartments, buildings, factories, vehicles, etc. and regions of human body parts to be cleaned. These various types of objects to be cleaned include a planar structure or three-dimensional structure. In this case, regions to be cleaned may be either flat, curved, uneven or stepped.

[0014] FIG. 1 shows the cleaning tool 100 according to this embodiment in perspective view, in a state disassembled into a cleaning element 110 and a cleaning element holder 130. As shown in FIG. 1, the cleaning tool 100 comprises the cleaning element 110 and the cleaning element holder 130.

[0015] The cleaning element 110 has a function of wiping, sweeping or scraping dirt on the region to be cleaned. The cleaning element 110 is in a sheet-like or plate-like form at the time of purchase or in the initial unused state, and in use, it is loosened such that its volume is increased. As shown in FIG. 1, the cleaning element 110 has a rectangular shape in plan view, extending in a predetermined longitudinal direction (the direction of the length), and has a layered structure in which a plurality of sheets (a cleaning element part 116 and a holding sheet part 112 as described below) having the same planar shape are overlaid one on the other, which will be explained in more detail below. The cleaning element 110 herein is a feature that corresponds to the "cleaning element" according to this invention. The cleaning element 110 may also have a square or other shape in plan view as necessary. The cleaning element 110 may be of disposable type designed for single use, disposable type designed for multiple use which can be used several times, while holding dust which has been removed from the region to be cleaned, on the brush portion, or reusable type which can be reused by washing.

[0016] The cleaning element holder 130 is removably attached to the cleaning element 110. The cleaning element holder 130 is an elongate member including the holder body 140 and the handle 150 connected to each

other. The cleaning element holder 130 is a feature that corresponds to the "cleaning element holder" according to this invention. The handle 150 includes a handle body 151 extending in an elongate form and a connection 151a disposed between the handle body 151 and the holder body 140. The handle body 151 is a part to be held by a user. The handle body 151 and the holder body 140 are fixedly connected at the connection 151a. An appropriate structure of the cleaning element holder 130 to be used here includes a structure in which the holder body 140 and the handle 150 (the handle body 151 and the connection 151a) are integrally formed, a structure in which two of the holder body 140, the handle 150 and the connection 151a are integrally formed, and a structure in which the holder body 140 and the handle 150 are separately formed and designed to be fixedly connected together. The handle 150 and the handle body 151 here form the "grip" according to this invention.

[0017] The holder body 140 has a function of detachably holding the cleaning element 110. The holder body 140 includes a pair of right and left holding plates 142 and a retaining plate 143 which are formed on a base 141 of the handle 150. The holding plates 142 extend forward in the longitudinal direction from the base 141 and parallel with a predetermined spacing therebetween on the same plane. In other words, the holder body 140 has a bifurcated form. Each of the holding plates 142 typically has a constant width in the longitudinal direction or is tapered. The holding plates 142 here form the "holding elements" according to this invention. As for the sectional shape of the holding plates 142, rectangular, square, circular or polygonal shape can be appropriately used. The retaining plate 143 extends forward between the pair holding plates 142 and is convexly curved downward. The retaining plate 143 further has an engagement lug (not shown) on the underside. Further, in this specification, the extending direction of the pair holding plates 142 is defined as the longitudinal direction of the cleaning tool 100 and the cleaning element 110, and the direction of parallel placement of the pair holding plates 142 is defined as the lateral direction of the cleaning tool 100 and the cleaning element 110.

[0018] Each of the holding plates 142 can be inserted into an associated insert region (an insert region 115 which is described below) formed in the cleaning element 110 and have a function of holding the cleaning element 110 in the inserted state. In the inserted state, each of the holding plates 142 is fitted in the insert region by close sliding contact, so that the cleaning element 110 is securely attached to the holding plate 142. Further, in the inserted state, the retaining plate 143 presses the cleaning element 110 from above, and the engagement lug (not shown) formed on the underside of the retaining plate 143 serves as a stopper for preventing the cleaning element 110 from coming off. Thus, in the inserted state in which the holding plates 142 are inserted into the insert region of the cleaning element 110, the cleaning element 110 is reliably retained by the holder body 140.

[0019] The structure of the cleaning element 110 is specifically shown in FIGS. 2 to 5. FIG. 2 is a sectional view of the cleaning element 110, taken along line A-A in FIG. 1, and FIG. 3 is a sectional view of the cleaning element 110, taken along line B-B in FIG. 1. Further, FIG. 4 is a perspective view of the cleaning element 110 of FIG. 1 which is shown separated into elements of a layered structure, and FIG. 5 is a perspective view of the holding sheet part 112 of the cleaning element 110 in FIG. 2.

[0020] As shown in FIGS. 2 to 5, in the cleaning element 110 of this embodiment, the cleaning element sheet parts 116 are overlaid on the both sides of the holding sheet part 112.

Particularly, as shown in FIG. 5, in the holding sheet part 112, a base sheet 113 is disposed between two holding sheets 114 and protrudes from the holding sheets 114 on the side of insertion of the holding plates 142. In this state, the holding sheet part 112 is fusion-bonded together along fusion bonding lines 120, 121. Thus, an insert region 115 into which the holding plates 142 can be inserted is formed between the two holding sheets 114. Further, the base sheet 113 can smoothly guide the holding plates 142 into an opening 115a of the insert region 115. The insert region 115 herein is a feature that corresponds to the "insert region" according to this invention.

[0021] In this embodiment, a center distance (distance L1 in FIG. 2) between the right and left insert regions 115 of the cleaning element 110 which is not yet attached to the cleaning element holder is designed to be longer than a center distance between the pair holding plates 142. Further, the cleaning element 110 has a slit-like space 124 extending in the longitudinal direction and is split into a pair of right and left elongate split cleaning parts 123 by the space 124. The space 124 serves as a space into which the object to be cleaned can be inserted, which will be explained in more detail below. The space 124 herein is a feature that corresponds to the "space" according to this invention. Each of the cleaning element sheet parts 116 includes three fiber assemblies 117 and a front sheet 118 which are overlaid one on the other, and in this state, the cleaning element sheet parts 116 are arranged such that the front sheets 118 of the cleaning element sheet parts 116 are disposed on the top and bottom sides of the cleaning element 110.

[0022] Each of the holding sheets 114 and the front sheets 118 preferably has a plurality of zigzag strips (strip portions) 114a and 118a at the both end sides in its lateral direction. In this case, the holding sheets 114 and the front sheets 118 are also referred to as strip sheets. The strips 114a, 118a herein are features that correspond to the "split pieces" according to this invention. The strips 114a, 118a having such construction are provided with a highly effective cleaning function which can easily trap dust or scrape dust out of the depression. Further, the strips 114a, 118a may have the same kind or different kinds of shape appropriately selected from various shapes, such as zigzag, linear and curved shapes. In this

embodiment, each of the strips 114a, 118a extends in the longitudinal direction of the split cleaning parts 123 (in a direction transverse to the extending direction of the holding plate 142).

[0023] The construction of the nonwoven fabric forming the above-described base sheet 113, holding sheet 114 and front sheet 118 and the construction of the fiber assembly 117 are now explained in detail.

10 (Construction of Nonwoven Fabric)

[0024] The base sheet 113, the holding sheet 114 and the front sheet 118 can typically be formed of sheet-like nonwoven fabric comprising thermal melting fibers (thermoplastic fibers) and thus referred to as the "nonwoven fabric sheet". The base sheet 113, the holding sheet 114 and the front sheet 118 herein form the "nonwoven fabric sheet" according to this invention. The nonwoven fabric has a sheet-like configuration formed by fixing or intertwining fibers by mechanical, chemical or heat treatment. The nonwoven fabric partly includes thermoplastic fibers and thus can be fusion bonded. Further, the nonwoven fabric has a plurality of strips. Examples of the thermal melting fibers (thermoplastic fibers) include polyethylene, polypropylene and polyethylene terephthalate. The nonwoven fabric preferably comprises thermoplastic fibers having practical strength of 10 to 100 g/m². The nonwoven fabric may be manufactured by through-air bonding, spun bonding, thermal bonding, spun lacing, point bonding, melt blowing, stitch bonding, chemical bonding, needle punching or other similar processes. This nonwoven fabric is a feature that corresponds to the "nonwoven fabric" according to this invention. In order to enhance the dust wiping function, it is preferred to use a nonwoven fabric having higher rigidity. Further, as an alternative to or in addition to the nonwoven fabric, strips made of urethane, sponge, woven fabric, net, split cloth or other similar materials may be used.

40 (Construction of Fiber Assembly)

[0025] The fiber assembly 117 is a single fiber structure formed by fibers, a fiber structure having fibers aligned in the length direction and/or the radial direction (twist yarn, spun yarn, yarn to which a plurality of filaments are partially connected), or an assembly of the fiber structures. The fiber assembly 117 partially includes thermoplastic fibers and can be fusion bonded. The fibers forming the fiber assembly 117 are elements of yarn, textile or the like and defined as being thin and flexible fibers having a substantially longer length compared with the thickness. Typically, a long continuous fiber is defined as a filament and a short fiber as a staple. Like the strips 114a and 118a of the holding sheet 114 and the front sheet 118, the fibers of the fiber assembly 117 extend in elongate shape in a direction transverse to the extending direction of the holding plate 142. The fiber assembly 117 is also referred to as the "fiber bundle" having a plurality

of fibers in a bundle. The fiber assembly 117 herein is a feature that corresponds to the "fiber assembly" according to this invention.

[0026] In the representative example shown in FIGS. 2 to 4, three fiber assemblies 117 are stacked in layers, but one or more layers of fiber assemblies may be used as necessary. Preferably, the fiber assembly 117 has a planar structure having a predetermined flat or curved surface and has a three-dimensional form having a certain thickness or has a thin sheet-like form. The "fiber assembly" is typically formed of polyethylene (PE), polypropylene (PP), polyethylene terephthalate (PET), nylon, rayon or the like. In practical use, an assembly of filaments formed by opening a tow is frequently used as the fiber assembly. It is particularly preferable that the fiber assembly comprises conjugated fibers having a core of polypropylene (PP) or polyethylene terephthalate (PET) and a core covering sheath of polyethylene (PE). Further, the filaments of the fiber assembly are preferred to have a fineness of 0.5 to 66 dtex. The individual fiber assembly may contain fibers of substantially the same fineness, or it may contain fibers of different finenesses. When using fibers containing thermoplastic resin, it is preferred to use at least two or more kinds of resins having different melting points (for example, resins between which the difference in the melting point is 20°C or more).

[0027] Further, in order to enhance the dust wiping function, it is preferred to use a fiber assembly including fibers having higher rigidity or fibers having higher fineness. It is further preferred that the fiber assembly has crimped fibers. In this case, it is preferred to use crimped fibers having 5 to 30 crimps per inch. Here, the crimped fibers are fibers subjected to a predetermined crimping process and easily intertwined with each other. With the fibers being crimped, the fiber assembly becomes bulkier than before the holder is attached thereto, and dust can be easily captured by the crimped portions. This structure can be realized especially by using crimped fibers opened from a tow. Further, in order to reliably adsorb dirt, dust or the like, it is preferred to use fibers containing dust adsorbent oil.

[0028] For the fiber assembly, flat yarns or split yarns may also be used. The flat yarns are prepared by slitting a film into tapes and by stretching the tapes in the longitudinal direction. The split yarns are prepared by splitting a thermoplastic film resin in the direction perpendicular to the orientation direction of the resin so that the film is fibrillated and interconnected into a net shape. Alternatively, a nonwoven fabric which is bulky and has low fiber density, such as a through-air bonded nonwoven fabric, may be used to form the fiber assembly.

[0029] The kinds and numbers of the component parts of the cleaning element 110 are not limited to those described in the above-described example, and can be selected as necessary.

[0030] Referring to FIG. 6, operation of the cleaning tool 100 having the above-described construction is described. FIG. 6 is a sectional view of the cleaning element

110 according to this embodiment, in the states before and after attachment of the cleaning element holder. As shown in FIG. 6, the center distance L1 between the right and left insert regions 115 of the cleaning element 110 which is not yet attached to the cleaning element holder is designed to be longer than the center distance L2 between the pair holding plates 142. On the other hand, when the pair holding plates 142 are inserted into the right and left insert regions 115, the right and left split cleaning parts 123 are deformed toward each other according to the center distance L2 between the pair holding plates 142. As a result, after attachment of the cleaning element holder, an overlap region 119 is formed in the space 124 between the right and left split cleaning parts 123 facing each other, by surface contact, overlapping or intertwining of the holding sheets 114, the fiber assemblies 117 and the front sheets 118. When a cleaning operation is performed with an object to be cleaned inserted into the space 124, in order to enhance the cleaning effect, the overlap length (overlap width) of the overlap region 119 is preferably 1 mm or longer in the lateral direction in FIG. 6. Further, the overlap length is preferably as long as the center distance L2 between the pair holding plates 142.

[0031] With such construction, a shape-retaining function is provided at least by overlapping of the fiber assemblies 117 between the adjacent split cleaning parts 123. As a result, the entire cleaning element 110 can be prevented from drooping, and unnecessary clearance can be prevented from being formed in the space 124. Further, the contact area between the object to be cleaned and the split cleaning parts 123 can be increased by wrapping the object to be cleaned between the split cleaning parts 123. Thus, the cleaning effect of the object to be cleaned which is inserted into the space 124 can be enhanced. Further, deterioration of the appearance of the cleaning tool 100 which may be caused by unnecessary clearance formed in the space 124 can be prevented. As a result, users can be convinced that the cleaning element 110 has a high cleaning effect and the user's cleaning motivation can be effectively enhanced.

[0032] Further, the split cleaning parts 123 of the cleaning element 110 are rectangular in section at the time of purchase or in the initial unused state. In use for actual cleaning operation, preferably, each of the split cleaning parts 123 is loosened or fluffed by the user such that its volume is increased. This loosening operation may be performed before attachment of the cleaning element holder by a first procedure, or it may be performed after attachment of the cleaning element holder by a second procedure. FIGS. 7 and 8 are sectional views of the split cleaning parts 123 in this embodiment and illustrate the first and second procedures for attaching the cleaning element holder, respectively.

[0033] In the first procedure shown in FIG. 7, first, in step A1, the split cleaning parts 123 are loosened by the user. At this time, in this embodiment, the holding sheets 114, the fiber assemblies 117 and the front sheets 118

of the respective split cleaning parts 123 have the same length in a direction transverse to the longitudinal direction of the split cleaning parts 123 (in a direction transverse to the extending direction of the holding plate 142) from the fusion bonding line 120. Therefore, when the user performs the loosening operation in step A1, each of the split cleaning parts 123 becomes bulky into a generally circular or elliptical shape as viewed in section in a direction transverse to the extending direction of the holding plate 142. In this bulky state, the strips 114a and 118a of the holding sheet 114 and front sheet 118 and the fibers of the fiber assemblies 117 radiate out from the fusion bonding line 120, as viewed in section in the direction transverse to the longitudinal direction of the split cleaning parts 123 (the direction transverse to the extending direction of the holding plate 142). Subsequently, in step A2, the two holding plates 142 are inserted into right and left insert regions 115. As a result, the pair of right and left split cleaning parts 123 are deformed toward each other according to the distance between the pair holding plates 142 and form the overlap region 119 by surface contact, overlapping or intertwining of the holding sheets 114, the fiber assemblies 117 and the front sheets 118.

[0034] In the second procedure shown in FIG. 8, first, in step B 1, the pair holding plates 142 are inserted into the right and left insert regions 115. As a result, the pair of right and left split cleaning parts 123 are deformed toward each other according to the distance between the pair holding plates 142 and form the overlap region 119 by surface contact, overlapping or intertwining of the holding sheets 114, the fiber assemblies 117 and the front sheets 118. Subsequently, in step B2, when the split cleaning parts 123 are loosened by the user, like in step A2 shown in FIG. 7, each of the split cleaning parts 123 becomes bulky into a generally circular shape in section.

[0035] Referring to FIGS. 9 to 17, cleaning operation using the cleaning tool 100 which is obtained through the above-described first or second procedure is described. FIGS. 9 to 12 show the manner in which the object to be cleaned W is wiped between the pair split cleaning parts 123 of the cleaning element 110 in the cleaning tool 100 of this embodiment, and FIGS. 13 to 17 show the manner in which the object to be cleaned W is wiped on the outer surfaces of the pair split cleaning parts 123 of the cleaning element 110 in the cleaning tool 100 of this embodiment.

[0036] As shown in FIG. 9, it is assumed that a three dimensional object to be cleaned W is cleaned between the pair split cleaning parts 123 of the cleaning element 110. In this case, as shown in FIG. 10, the cleaning element 110 is pressed against the object to be cleaned such that the overlap region 119 of the pair split cleaning parts 123 conforms to the object to be cleaned. The pair holding plates 142 are preferably formed of an elastic material, or typically a plastic material having elasticity, which allows the pair holding plates 142 to be elastically deformed away from each other. Therefore, the object to be cleaned W is pushed into the space 124 while push-

ing and opening up the overlap region 119 against an elastic biasing force of the pair holding plates 142. Then, firstly, dust, dirt or the like (hereinafter also referred to as "dust etc. D") on the object to be cleaned W is adsorbed particularly by the fiber assemblies 117 at the inlet area of the space 124. At this time, the contact area between the space 124 and the object to be cleaned W is large at the inlet area of the space 124, so that the object to be cleaned can be wiped well at the inlet area. Particularly, the holding sheets 114, the fiber assemblies 117 and the front sheets 118 in the overlap region 119 of the cleaning element 110 effectively entwine with the dust etc. D on the surface of the three-dimensional object to be cleaned and thus can reliably trap the dust etc. D. When the object to be cleaned is further pushed forward into the space 124, as shown in FIG. 11, the remaining dust etc. D which cannot be adsorbed by the fiber assemblies 117 at the inlet area of the space 124 is scraped off by the strips 114a of the holding sheets 114 and then immediately adsorbed by the fiber assemblies 117. Further, in this embodiment, the length of the holding sheets 114, the fiber assemblies 117 and the front sheets 118 is preferably set such that each of the split cleaning parts 123 has the largest possible diameter in section. With such construction, the distance and time of contact of the cleaning element can be increased with respect to the object to be cleaned W which passes between the pair split cleaning parts 123. As a result, even if the holding sheets 114 are not provided with the strips 114a, the effect of wiping out the dust etc. D can be enhanced. Further, as shown in FIG. 12, some of the dust etc. D scraped off by the strips 114a of the holding sheets 114 may not be adsorbed by the fiber assemblies 117 and fall from the object to be cleaned. Such dust etc. D is reliably trapped at the rear end side of the fiber assemblies 117 (the inlet area of the space 124) as shown by the arrow in FIG. 12. Such cleaning operation is also effective in the case of wiping the object to be cleaned W by inserting at least one of the split cleaning parts 123 into a clearance (or a slit or opening) on the side of the object to be cleaned W.

[0037] Now, as shown in FIG. 13, it is assumed that an uneven object to be cleaned W is planarly cleaned by the pair split cleaning parts 123 of the cleaning element 110. In this case, in this embodiment, the cleaning element 110 contacts the plane surface of the object to be cleaned W via the pair split cleaning parts 123, so that the user can secure a stable wiping angle during wiping operation without keeping the wrist stabilized more than necessary. Further, the two split cleaning parts 123 contact the object to be cleaned W, so that an effect for two wiping operations can be obtained in a single wiping operation. Particularly, the fiber assemblies 117 of the pair split cleaning parts 123 form four adsorbing regions 123a, 123b, 123c, 123d with respect to the object to be cleaned W. Each of the adsorbing regions 123a, 123b, 123c, 123d has a fan-like form, which can effectively secure a desired adsorbing region for adsorbing the dust etc. D. Further, each of the adsorbing regions 123a, 123b, 123c, 123d

has an arcuate contact surface and contacts the object to be cleaned W mainly at two projections, or a projection between the first adsorbing region 123a and the second adsorbing region 123b and a projection between the third adsorbing region 123c and the fourth adsorbing region 123d. Therefore, the adsorbing regions can be smoothly deformed when they are slid along the surface of the object to be cleaned W. As a result, friction between the adsorbing regions and the object to be cleaned W can be reduced, so that smooth cleaning operation can be realized, that is to say, the cleaning tool feels light to use in cleaning operation.

[0038] More specifically, as shown in FIG. 14, when the cleaning element 110 is moved along the surface of the object to be cleaned W, the dust etc. D is adsorbed by the fiber assemblies 117 of the first adsorbing region 123a. When the cleaning element 110 is further moved, as shown in FIG. 15, the dust etc. D hiding behind a projection is scraped out by the strips 118a of the front sheets 118 between the first adsorbing region 123a and the second adsorbing region 123b, and adsorbed by the fiber assemblies 117 of the second adsorbing region 123b. When the cleaning element 110 is further moved, as shown in FIG. 16, the dust etc. D in a depression is adsorbed by the fiber assemblies 117 of the first adsorbing region 123a. Even if the dust etc. D is not adsorbed by the fiber assemblies 117 of the first adsorbing region 123a, the dust etc. D is scraped out by the strips 114a of the holding sheets 114 between the first adsorbing region 123a and the second adsorbing region 123b, and then adsorbed by the fiber assemblies 117 of the second adsorbing region 123b. Or even if the dust etc. D is not completely scraped out, the dust etc. D is moved rearward within the depression and adsorbed by the fiber assemblies 117 of the second adsorbing region 123b. Further, the dust etc. D which cannot be adsorbed by the fiber assemblies 117 of the second adsorbing region 123b is adsorbed by the fiber assemblies 117 of the third adsorbing region 123c. Further, the dust etc. D which cannot be adsorbed by the fiber assemblies 117 of the third adsorbing region 123c is scraped out again by the strips 114a of the holding sheets 114 between the third adsorbing region 123c and the fourth adsorbing region 123d, and finally adsorbed by the fiber assemblies 117 of the fourth adsorbing region 123d. Or even if the dust etc. D is not completely scraped out, the dust etc. D is moved rearward within the depression and finally adsorbed by the fiber assemblies 117 of the fourth adsorbing region 123d.

[0039] In an operation of wiping a wide plane surface of the object to be cleaned W, when the user's wrist is unstable or when the object to be cleaned W is up high, it is assumed that the cleaning element 110 is operated in an inclined position with respect to the surface of the object to be cleaned W. Therefore, in this embodiment, as shown in FIG. 17, the cleaning element 110 has four adsorbing regions 123a, 123b, 123c, 123d with respect to the object to be cleaned W, so that, for example, the

dust etc. D which cannot be adsorbed by the first adsorbing region 123a or the second adsorbing region 123b can be adsorbed by the third adsorbing region 123c or the fourth adsorbing region 123d.

(Other Embodiments)

[0040] The invention is not limited to the embodiment as described above, but rather, may be added to, changed, replaced with alternatives or otherwise modified. For example, the following provisions can be made in application of this embodiment.

[0041] In the above-described embodiment, the cleaning element 110 is described as having the pair of right and left split cleaning parts 123. However, in the invention, the number of parts corresponding to the split cleaning parts 123 can be appropriately set in the range of two or more. Referring to FIGS. 18 and 19, other embodiments are described. A cleaning tool 200 of the embodiment shown in FIG. 18 is constructed such that a cleaning element holder 230 having elongate three holding portions 242 is attached to a cleaning element 210 consisting of three split cleaning parts 123. Specifically, in attachment of the holder, the holding portions 242 are inserted into the insert regions 115 of the split cleaning parts 123. In this case, the three split cleaning parts 123 are disposed in parallel to each other such that the centers of their sections are located at the respective apexes of a predetermined triangle. Further, a cleaning tool 300 of a further embodiment shown in FIG. 19 is provided such that a cleaning element holder 330 having four elongate holding portions 342 is attached to a cleaning element 310 consisting of four split cleaning parts. Specifically, in attachment of the holder, the holding portions 342 are inserted into the insert regions 115 of the split cleaning parts 123. In this case, the four split cleaning parts 123 are disposed in parallel to each other such that the centers of their sections are located at the apexes of a predetermined square. The cleaning tool 200 shown in FIG. 18 and the cleaning tool 300 shown in FIG. 19 can also provide the same effect as the above-described cleaning tool 100. Further, the cleaning tools 200, 300 may be constructed such that three or four split cleaning parts 123 are disposed in parallel to each other on a predetermined straight line.

[0042] In the above-described embodiment, each of the split cleaning parts 123 of the cleaning element 110 is designed to have a generally circular or elliptical section. However, in the invention, it is necessary for this section to form the generally circular or elliptical shape in its entirety or in part. For example, the section of the split cleaning part may also have a shape of one or more fans which forms part of a circular form. This construction is shown in a cleaning element 410 of a further embodiment shown in FIG. 20. In the cleaning element 410 shown in FIG. 20, each of split cleaning parts 423 has an outside region and an inside region which have respective sections of fan-like shapes which form part of

circular shapes of different diameters. This construction can be realized, for example by changing the position of the fusion bonding lines 120, 121, or the length of the holding sheets 114, the fiber assemblies 117 and the front sheets 118 according to location. With such construction, the outside and inside regions of the split cleaning parts 423 can be effectively provided with different cleaning capabilities.

[0043] In the above-described embodiment, the cleaning element 110 is formed by a sheet-like nonwoven fabric and a fiber assembly. However, in the invention, the cleaning element 110 may be formed by either one of the sheet-like nonwoven fabric and the fiber assembly.

Description of Numerals

[0044]

100	cleaning tool	
110	cleaning element	20
112	holding sheet part	
113	base sheet	
114	holding sheet	
114a	strip	
115	insert region	25
115a	opening	
116	cleaning element sheet part	
117	fiber assembly	
118	front sheet	
118 a	strip	30
119	overlap region	
120, 121	fusion bonding line	
123, 423	split cleaning part	
123a	first adsorbing region	
123b	second adsorbing region	35
123c	third adsorbing region	
123d	fourth adsorbing region	
124	space	
130	cleaning element holder	
140	holder body	40
141	base	
142	holding plate	
143	retaining plate	
150	handle	
151	handle body	45
151a	connecting portion	
200,	300 cleaning tool	
210, 310, 410	cleaning element	
230, 330	cleaning element holder	
242, 342	holding portion	50

Claims

1. A cleaning tool for use in cleaning an object to be cleaned comprising:

an elongate cleaning element holder and

a cleaning element to be attached to the cleaning element holder, wherein:

the cleaning element holder includes a grip to be held by a user and a plurality of holding elements extending from the grip in parallel in a longitudinal direction, the cleaning element comprises a plurality of elongate split cleaning parts having respective insert regions for receiving the holding elements, and the cleaning element has a space into which the object to be cleaned can be inserted between adjacent ones of the split cleaning parts, each of the split cleaning parts includes a fiber assembly formed by a plurality of fibers extending in a direction transverse to the longitudinal direction of the split cleaning part, and a nonwoven fabric sheet made of nonwoven fabric, the fiber assembly and the nonwoven fabric sheet being overlaid one on the other and bonded together and in an inserted state of the holding elements into the insert regions, the fiber assemblies of the adjacent ones of the split cleaning parts overlap each other in the space in a direction transverse to the longitudinal direction.

2. The cleaning tool as defined in claim 1, wherein the cleaning element is designed such that, in the state in which the cleaning element is not yet attached to the cleaning element holder, a center distance between the adjacent insert regions is longer than a center distance between the adjacent holding elements of the cleaning element holder, and when the holding elements are inserted into the insert regions, the fiber assemblies of the adjacent split cleaning parts move toward each other and thus overlap each other in the space in a direction transverse to the longitudinal direction.
3. The cleaning tool as defined in claim 1 or 2, wherein the nonwoven fabric sheet comprises a plurality of split pieces extending in a direction transverse to the longitudinal direction of the split cleaning parts.
4. The cleaning tool as defined in any one of claims 1 to 3, wherein the holding elements comprise an elastic material which allows the adjacent holding elements to be elastically deformed away from each other.

FIG. 1

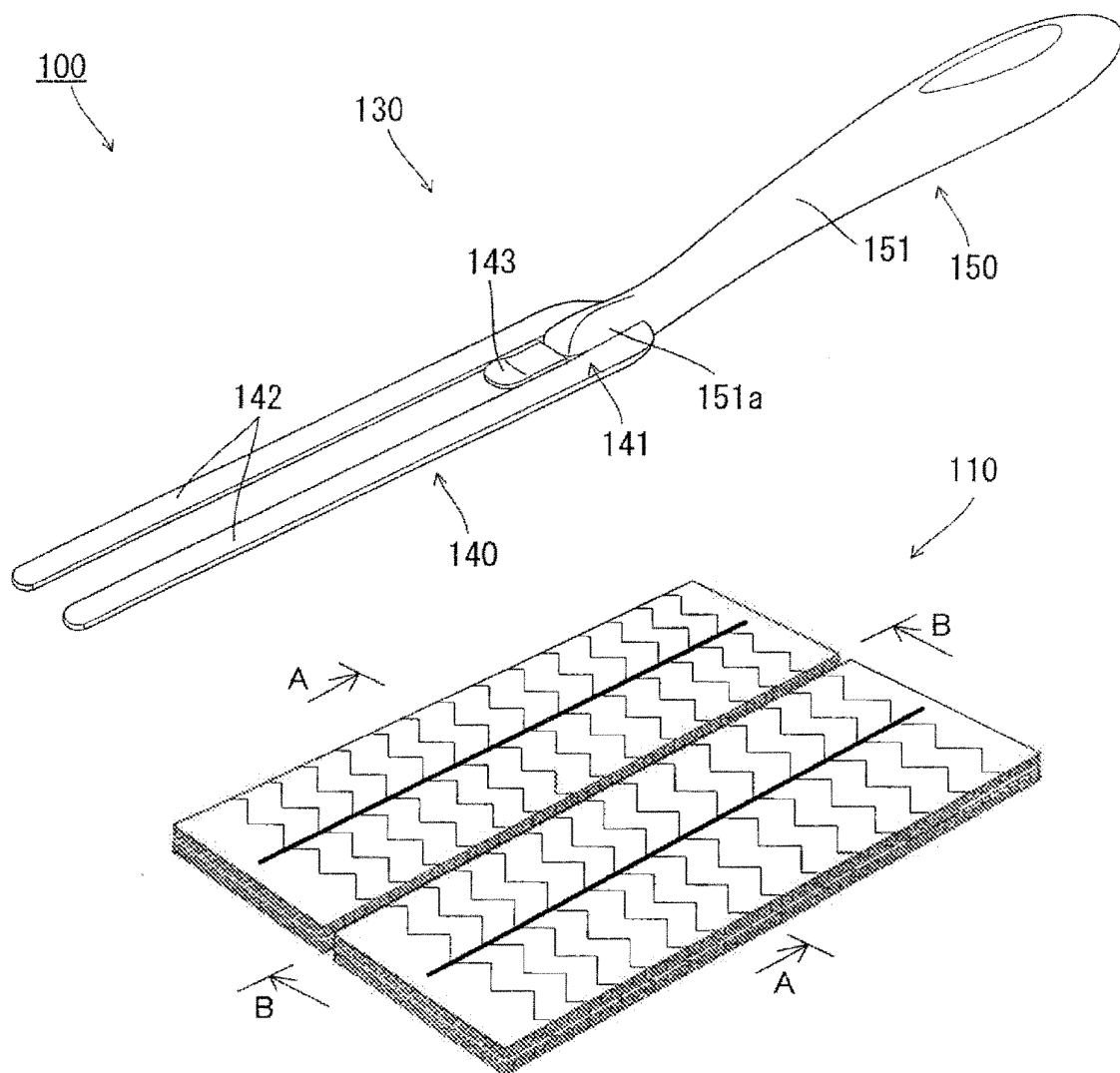


FIG. 2

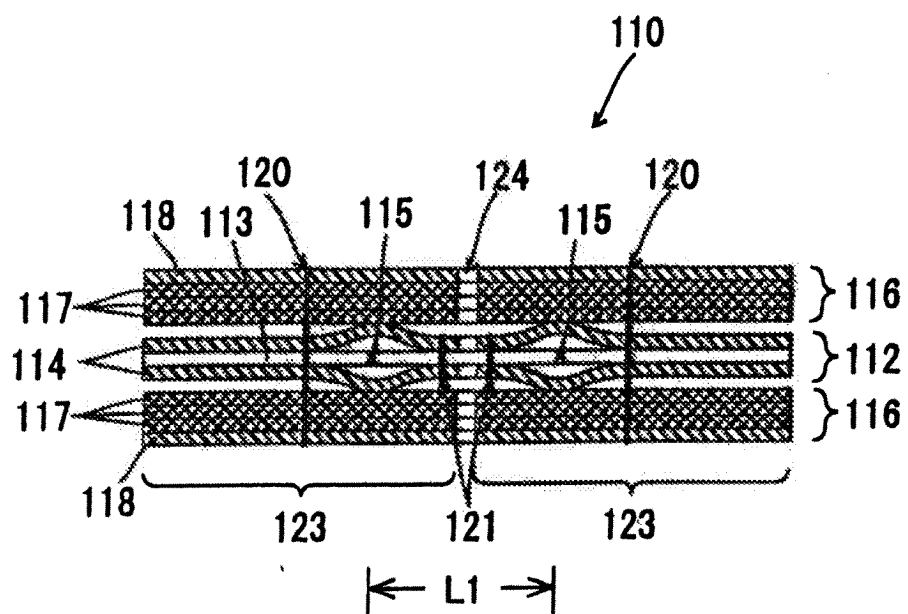


FIG. 3

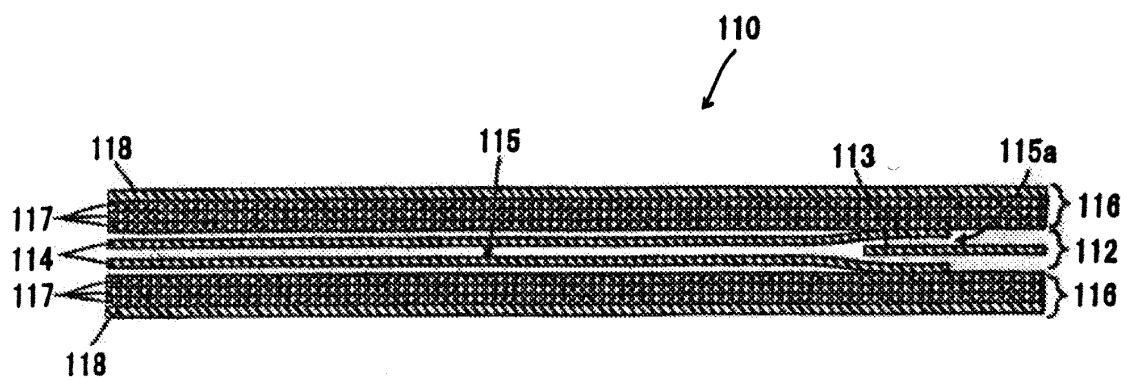


FIG. 4

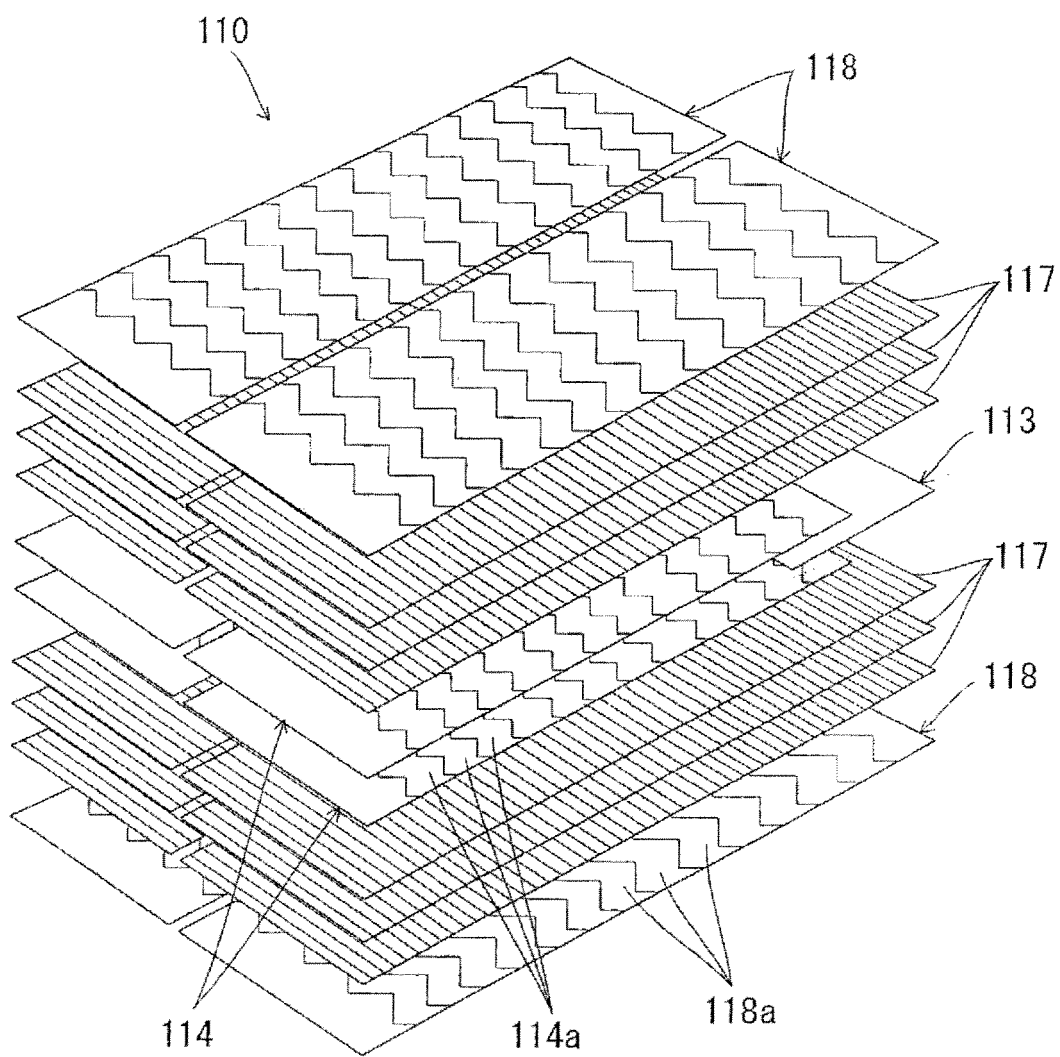


FIG. 5

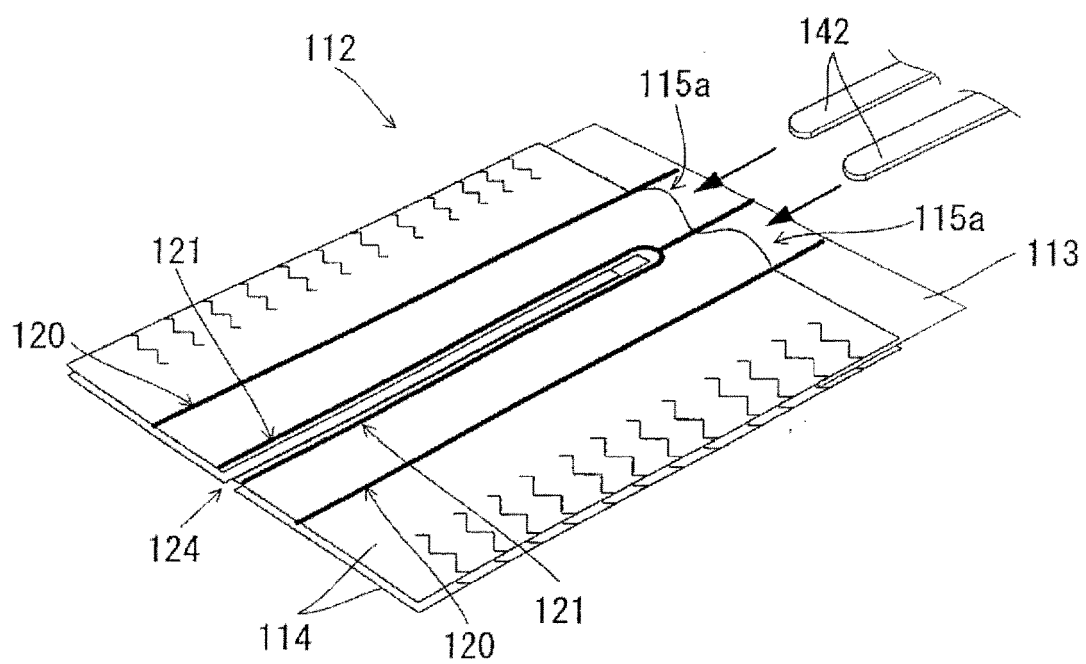


FIG. 6

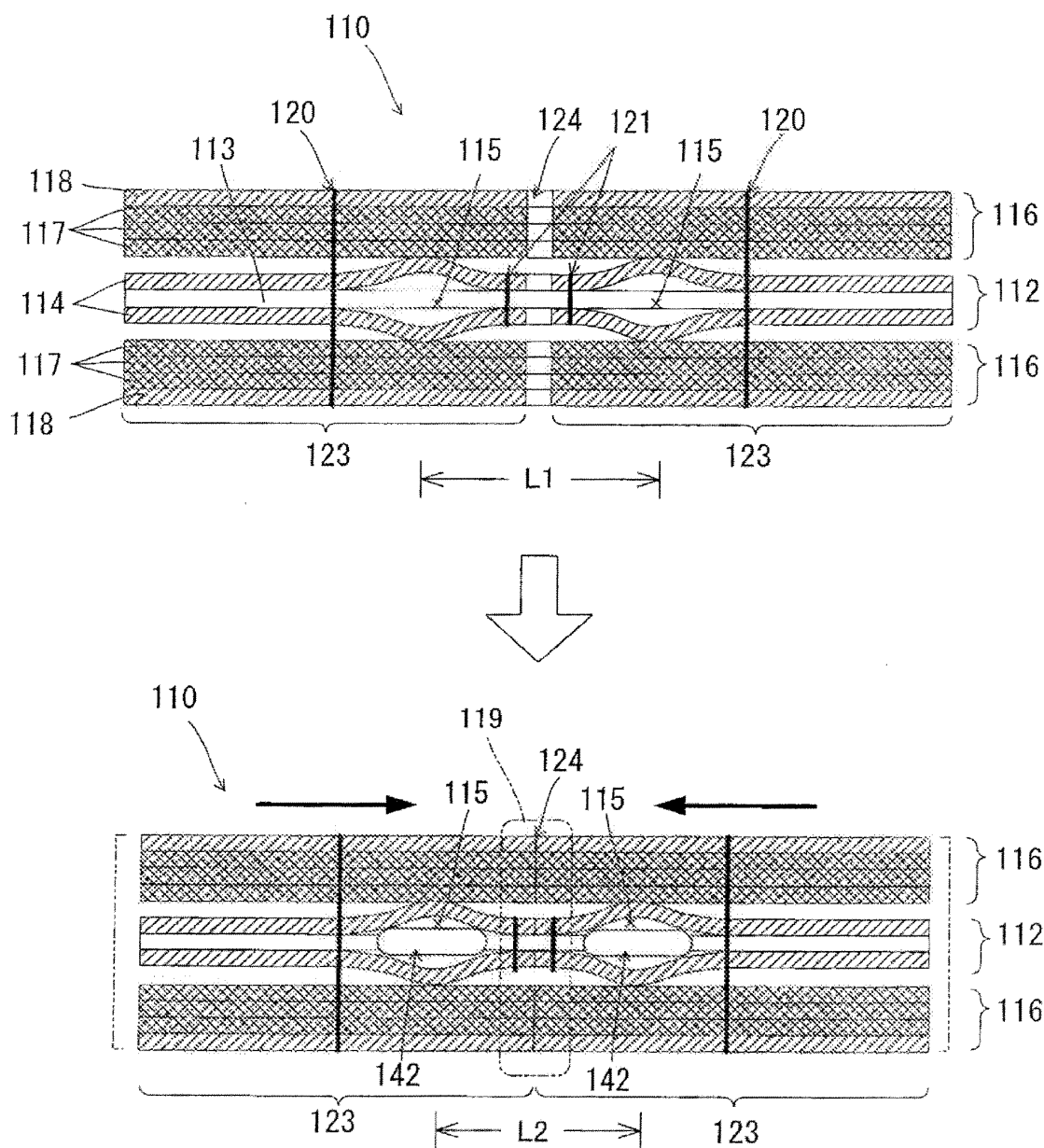


FIG. 7

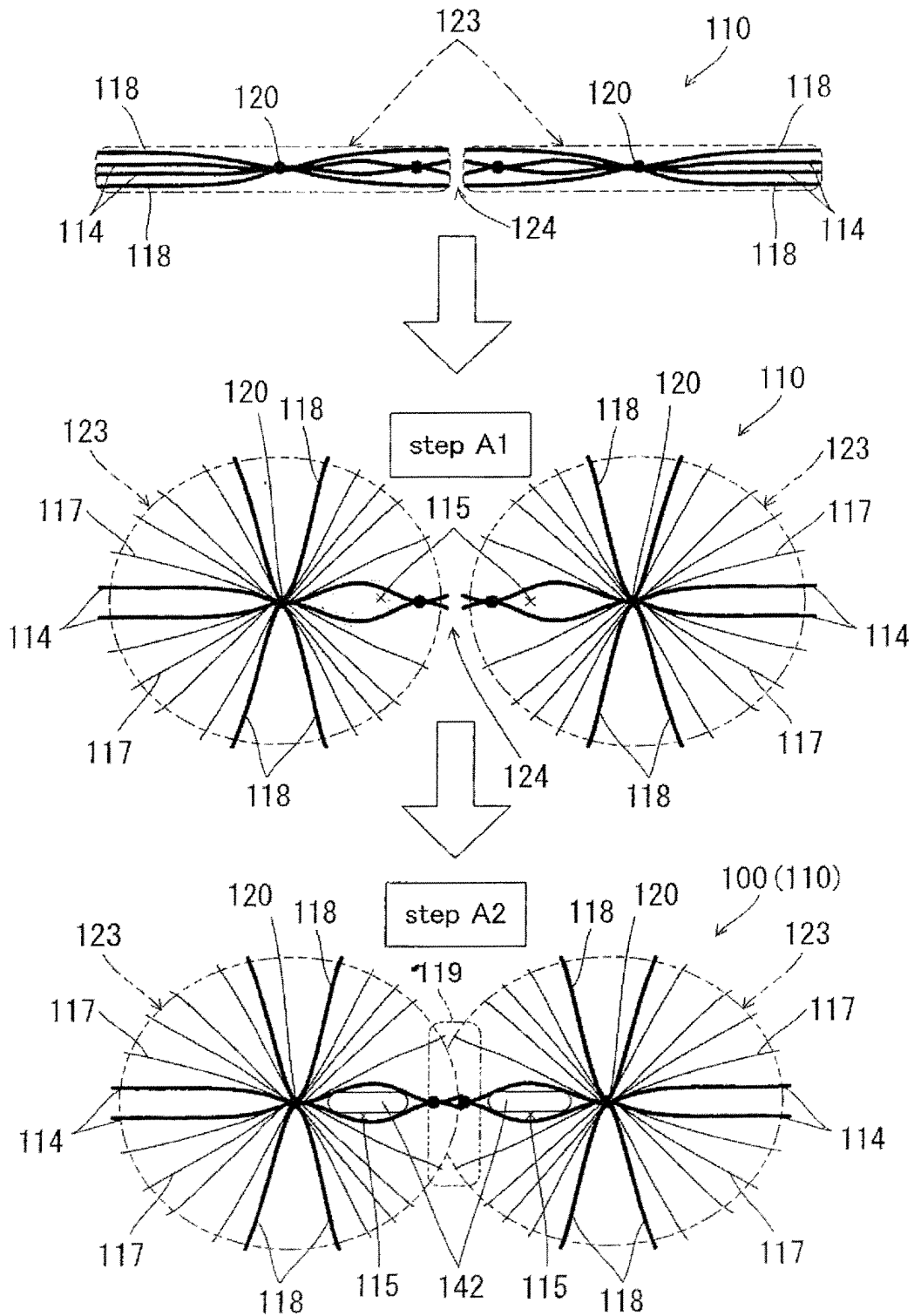


FIG. 8

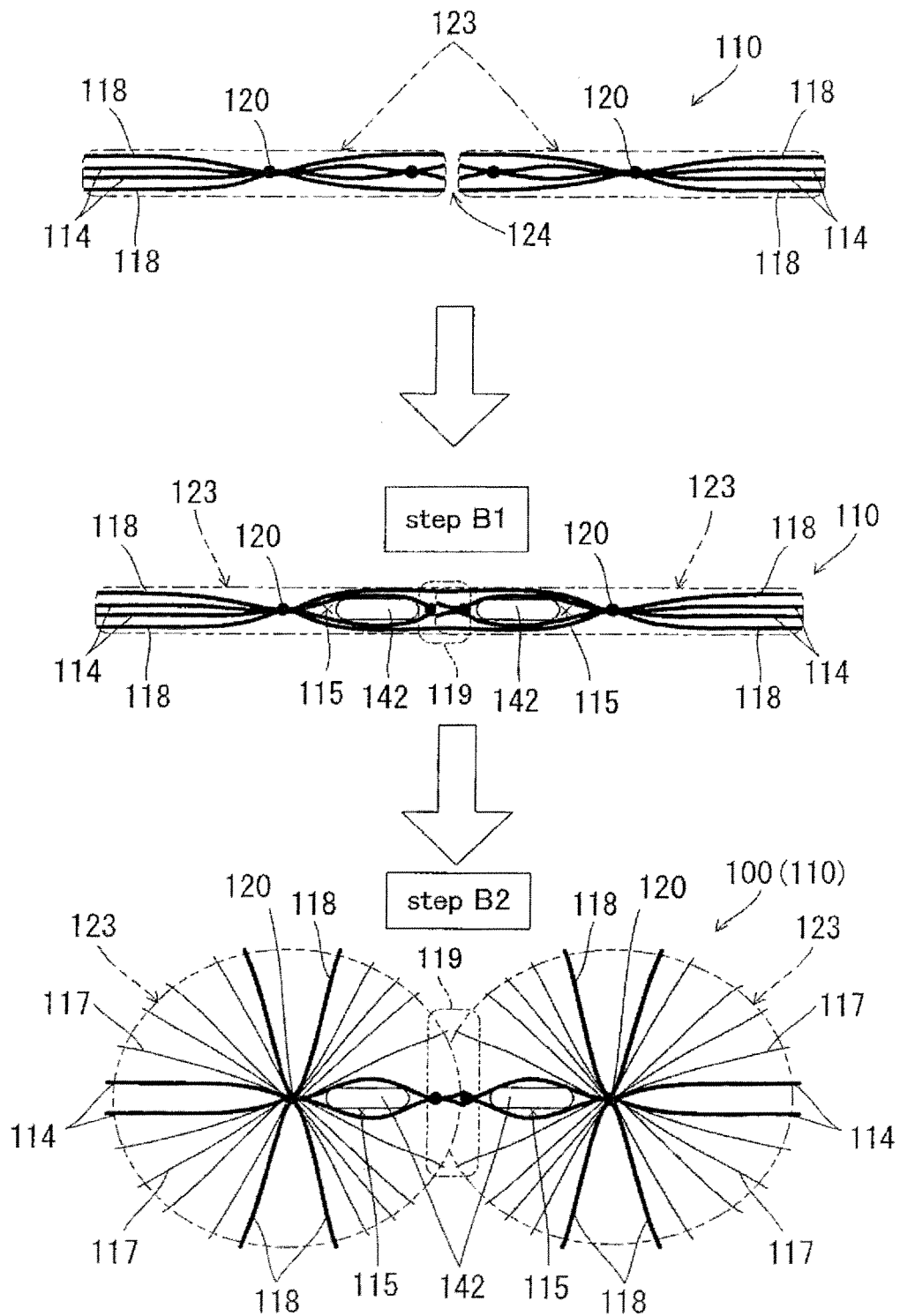


FIG. 9

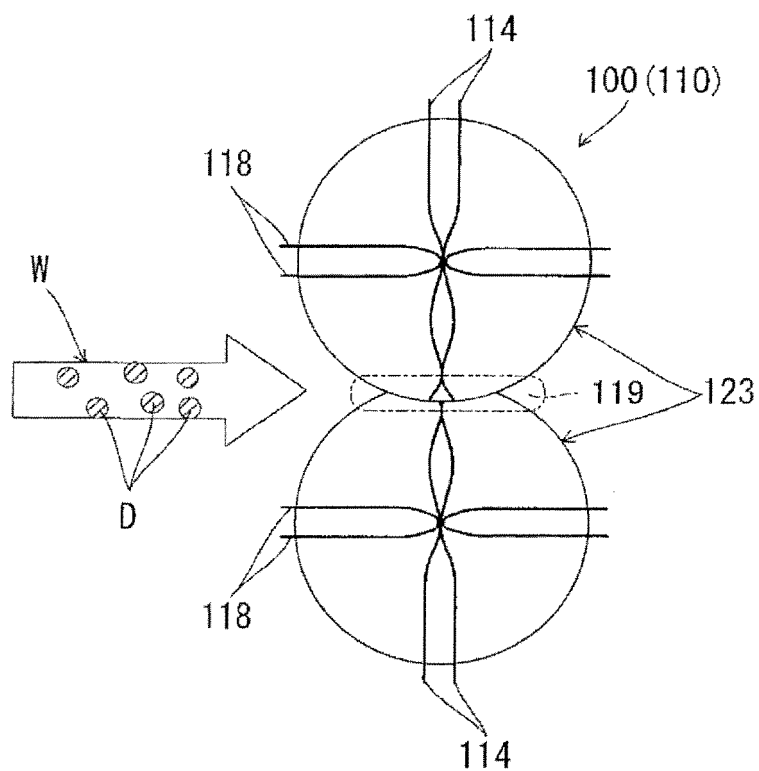


FIG. 10

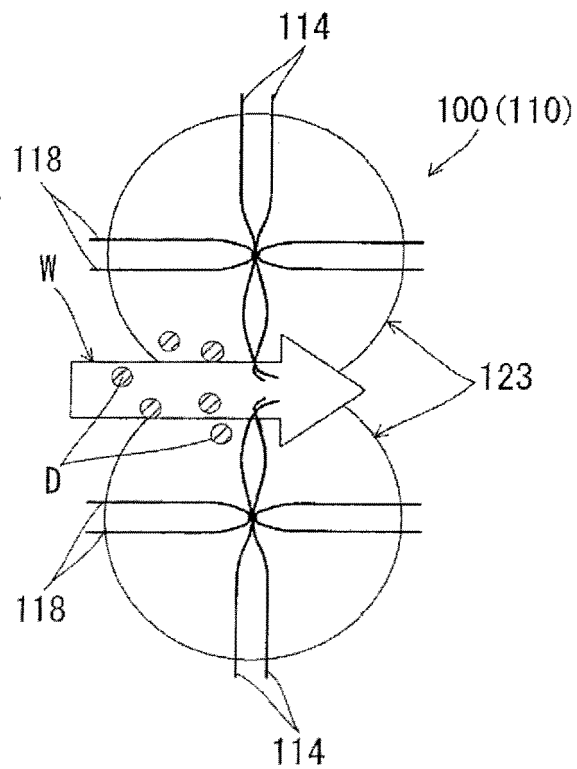


FIG. 11

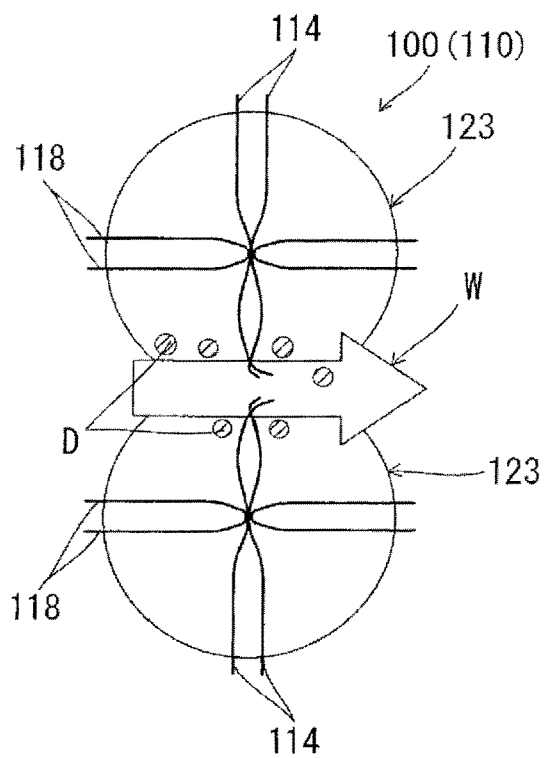


FIG. 12

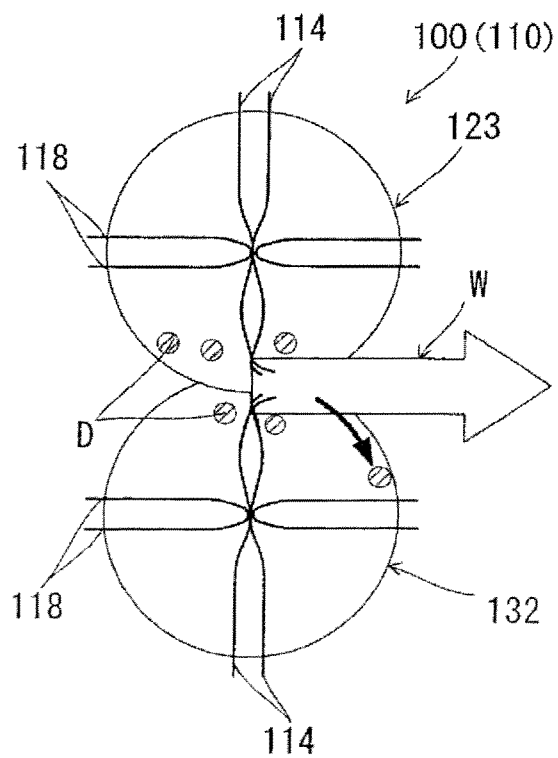


FIG. 13

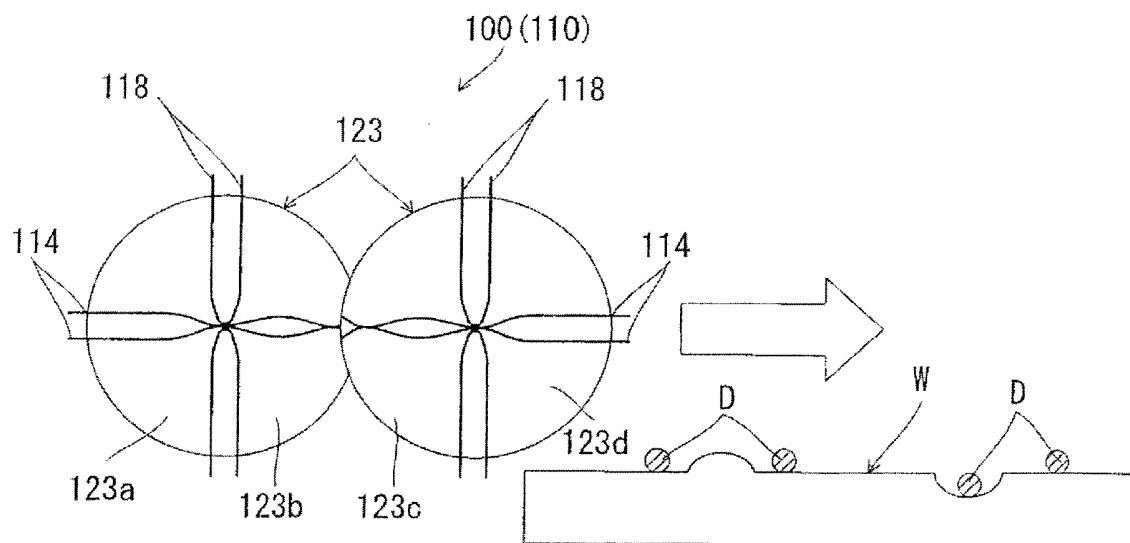


FIG. 14

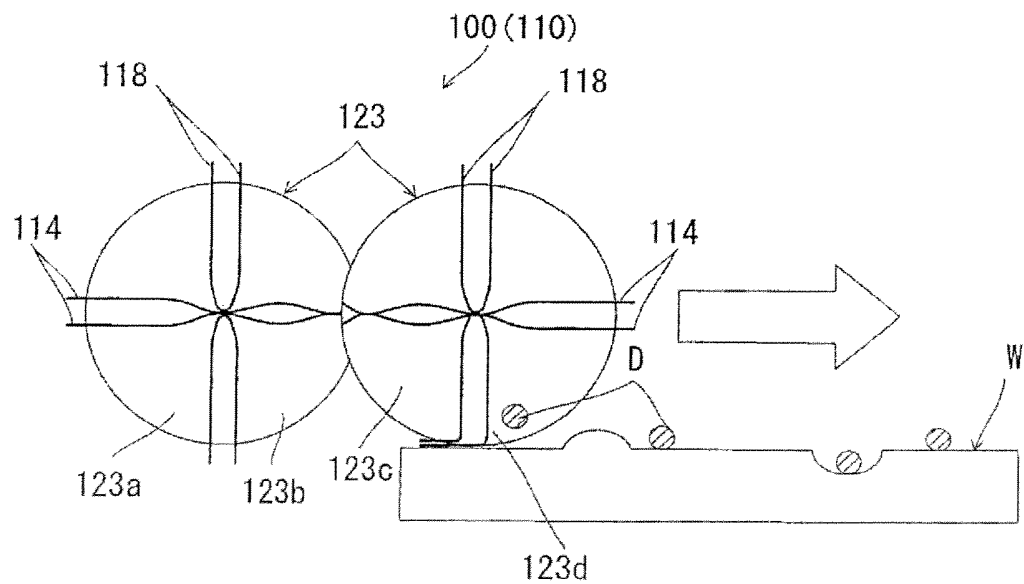


FIG. 15

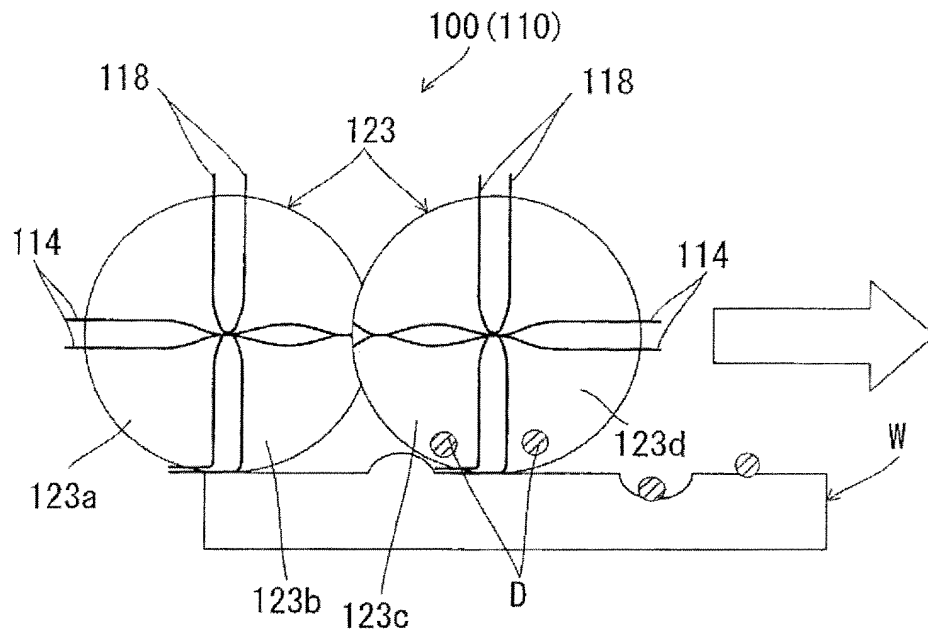


FIG. 16

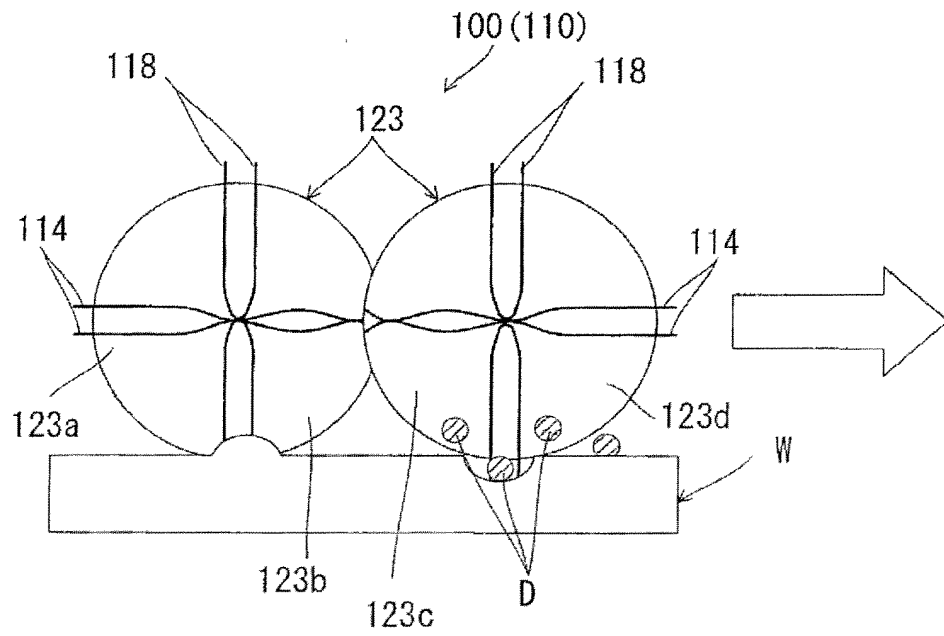


FIG. 17

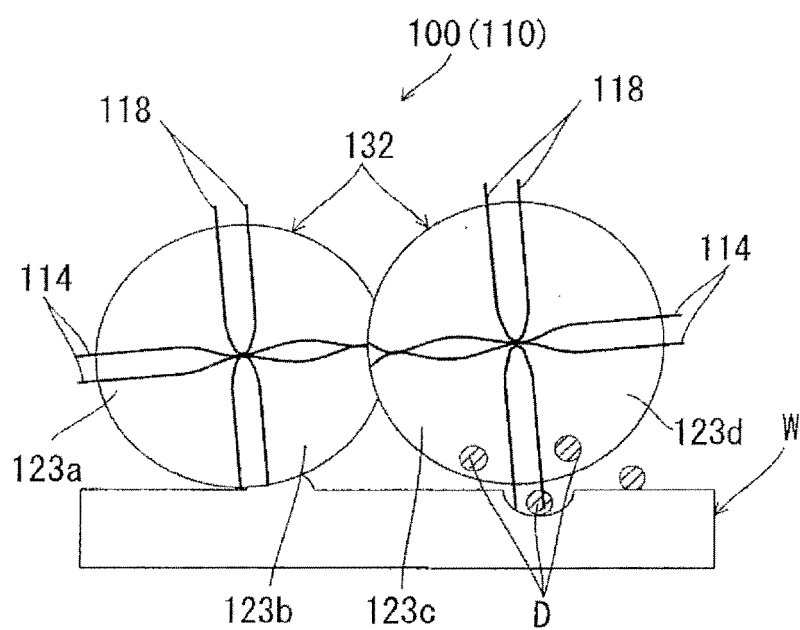


FIG. 18

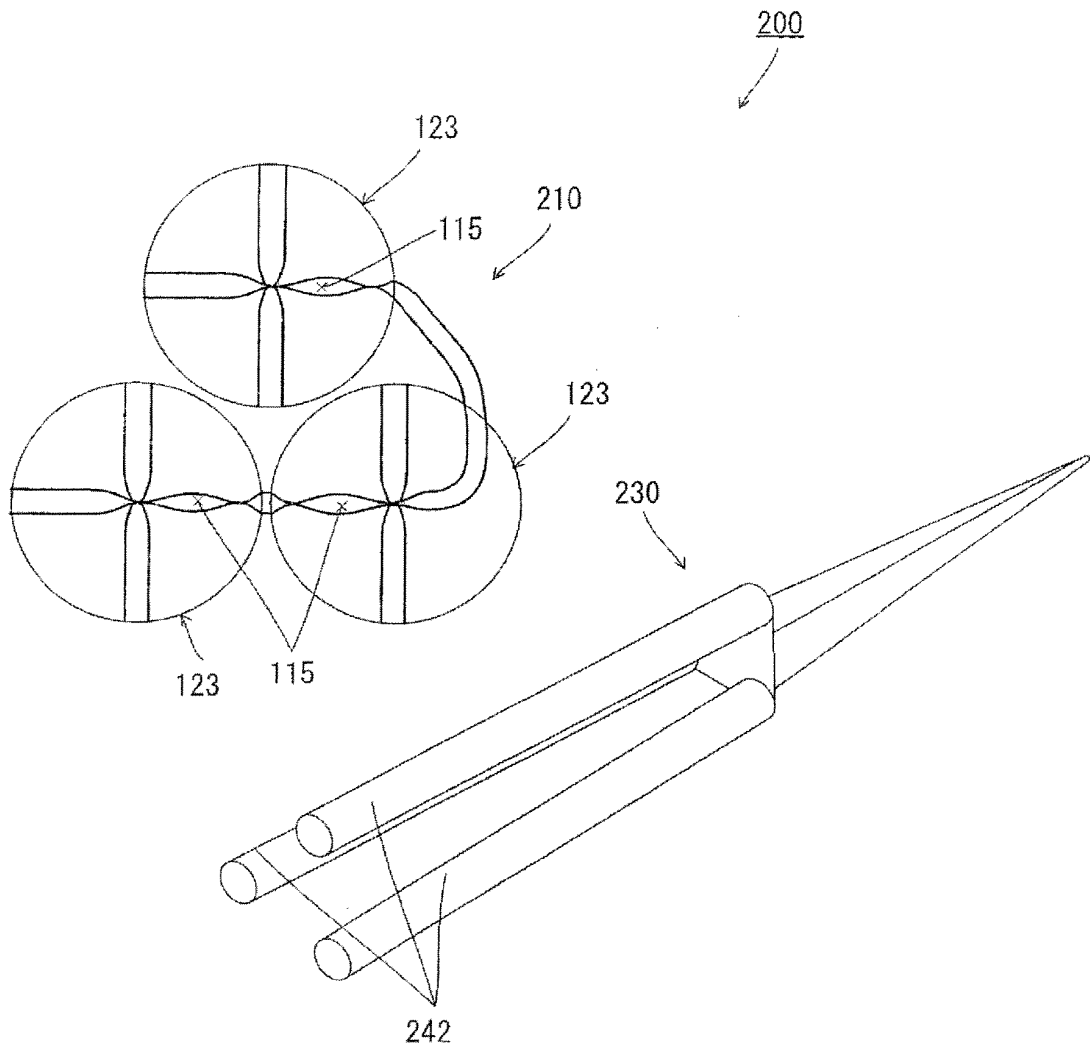


FIG. 19

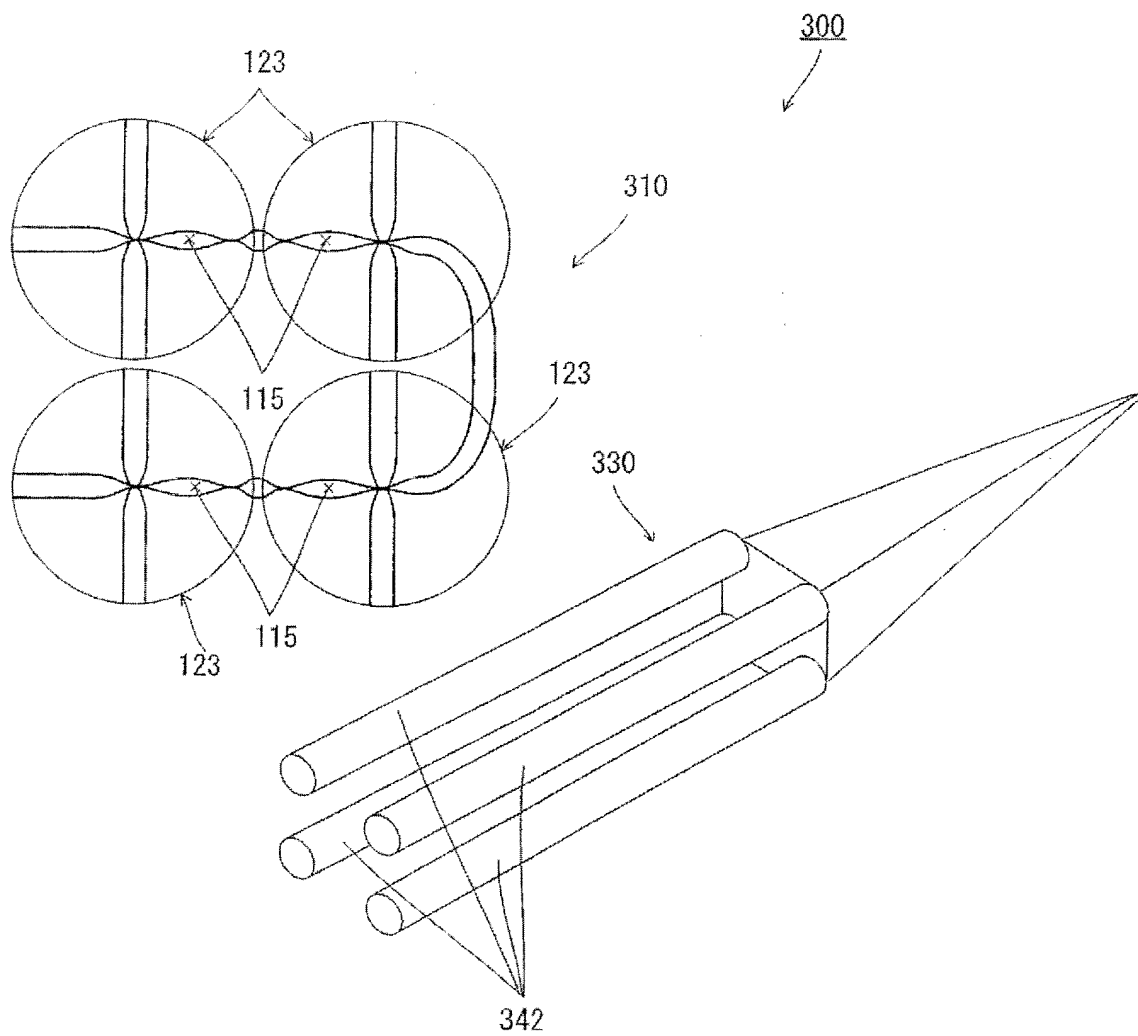
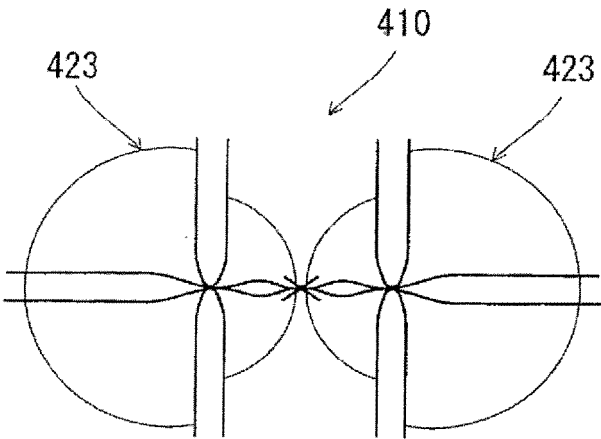


FIG. 20



INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/JP2009/056518

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER A47L13/20(2006.01) i, A47L13/16(2006.01) i, A47L13/256(2006.01) i		
According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC		
B. FIELDS SEARCHED Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols) A47L13/20, A47L13/16, A47L13/256		
Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched Jitsuyo Shinan Koho 1922-1996 Jitsuyo Shinan Toroku Koho 1996-2009 Kokai Jitsuyo Shinan Koho 1971-2009 Toroku Jitsuyo Shinan Koho 1994-2009		
Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)		
C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y A	JP 2007-209460 A (Uni-Charm Corp.), 23 August, 2007 (23.08.07), Full text; all drawings & EP 1982627 A1 & WO 2007/091592 A1	1, 3-4 2
Y A	JP 11-298 A (Lion Corp.), 06 January, 1999 (06.01.99), Par. No. [0013] (Family: none)	1, 3-4 2
☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. ☐ See patent family annex.		
* Special categories of cited documents: “A” document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance “E” earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date “L” document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified) “O” document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means “P” document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed “T” later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention “X” document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone “Y” document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art “&” document member of the same patent family		
Date of the actual completion of the international search 10 April, 2009 (10.04.09)		Date of mailing of the international search report 21 April, 2009 (21.04.09)
Name and mailing address of the ISA/ Japanese Patent Office		Authorized officer
Facsimile No.		Telephone No.

Form PCT/ISA/210 (second sheet) (April 2007)

REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

This list of references cited by the applicant is for the reader's convenience only. It does not form part of the European patent document. Even though great care has been taken in compiling the references, errors or omissions cannot be excluded and the EPO disclaims all liability in this regard.

Patent documents cited in the description

- JP 2007029136 A [0002]