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(54) Title: METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR THE SEPARATION OF COLOURLESS DIAMONDS

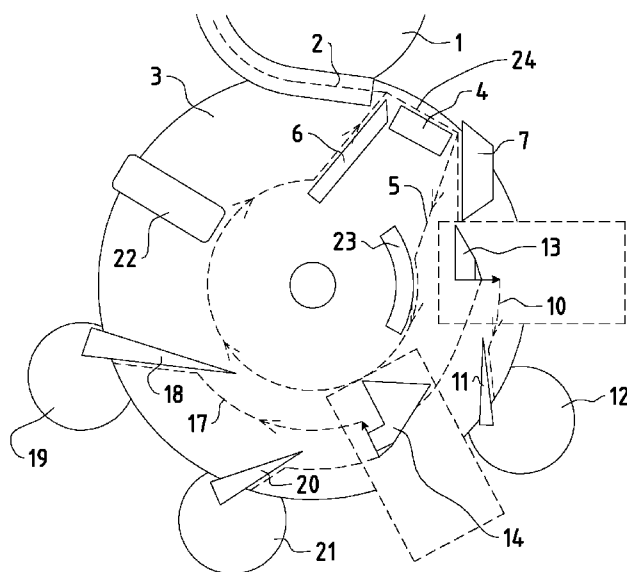


FIG. 1

(57) Abstract: The present invention relates to a method and an apparatus for the separation of colourless untreated natural diamonds from: • a) colourless diamond imitations; • b) colourless treated natural diamonds; • c) colourless untreated synthetic diamonds and • d) colourless treated synthetic diamonds; comprising: • a step A of removing the colourless diamond imitations; and • a step B of removing the colourless diamonds which are suspected to be treated natural diamonds, untreated synthetic diamonds or treated synthetic diamonds; • wherein said step A is carried out before said step B and using Raman Shift Detection (RSD), the diamonds having, at a predetermined wavelength (λ_e), an emission signal, the intensity of which is lower than a predetermined value (V_e) being removed, and wherein said step B is carried out using a UVc transmission measurement (UTM), the diamonds having, in a predetermined wavelength region (R_a), a transmission value V_T which is higher than a predetermined value (V_T), being removed.



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Method and apparatus for the separation of colourless diamonds

Technical domain of the invention

The present invention relates to a method and an apparatus for the
5 separation of colourless untreated natural diamonds from colourless diamond
imitations, colourless treated natural diamonds, colourless untreated synthetic
diamonds and colourless treated synthetic diamonds comprising a step of
removing the colourless diamond imitations; and a step of removing the
colourless diamonds which are suspected to be treated natural diamonds,
10 untreated synthetic diamonds or treated synthetic diamonds. For the purpose
of the present invention, the term "a colourless diamond" is to be understood as
comprising all diamonds which show no distinct hue when observed table up.

Background of the invention

15 The watch and jewellery industry uses large quantities of polished
colourless diamonds (often of small size) for their luxury products. These
diamonds are natural, and have grown by a geologic process in nature. They
are only cut and polished from rough material to be set into jewellery.

Natural diamonds may contain chemical impurities and are separated
20 into two categories (so called type I and type II) and a number of subcategories
(i.e. IaA, IaB, IaAB, Ib, IIa, IIb) according to the presence (type I) or absence
(type II) of nitrogen as a trace element detected by FT-infrared spectrometry.

Apart from natural diamonds, there are also synthetic diamonds on
the market (also described as man-made or laboratory-created diamonds).
25 There are mainly two methods to produce colourless synthetic diamonds: a)
HPHT synthesis (High Pressure and High Temperature) and b) CVD synthesis
(Chemical Vapour Deposition). Both methods may also be used for producing
coloured synthetic diamonds.

The absence of colour in a natural or synthetic diamond can also be the result of a treatment. The most effective and sophisticated treatment is the so-called "HPHT" treatment (High Pressure and High Temperature), by which originally brownish (natural or synthetic) diamonds of type II or IaB become
5 colourless to near-colourless.

Beside this, there are many colourless to near-colourless diamond imitations on the market. They are mostly used in non-expensive fashion jewellery. A non-exhaustive list of colourless diamond imitations is: synthetic moissanite, cubic zirconium oxide (artificial product), glass (artificial product),
10 synthetic spinel, and synthetic corundum.

There is a high interest in the industry to separate colourless natural diamonds of natural colour, i.e. colourless untreated natural diamonds, from the other kinds of diamonds (treated and/or synthetic) and the diamond imitations.

There exists a wide range of analytical approaches to separate
15 colourless natural diamonds from the above-mentioned other products. These methods which are well documented in the scientific gemmological literature are generally described for "large" colourless diamonds (with a weight which is commonly greater than 0.15 carat, with a diameter for a round brilliant cut which is greater than 3.5 mm). They are mainly based on, but not limited to, visual
20 observations, optical investigations such as measurement of the refractive index, measurement of the specific gravity, and most importantly, spectroscopic or spectrometric or magnetic characterisations.

There are two main challenges for determining the authenticity of small and colourless diamonds (the mean diameter of a round polished small
25 diamond is smaller than about 3.5 mm).

The first is due to their small size, which makes not only the testing itself a challenge, but also may lead to a testing fee similar to the value of a small diamond (thus economically not justifiable).

The second challenge is that small diamonds are usually marketed in lots of large quantities (e.g. several thousands of single diamonds), thus multiplying the time and costs extensively.

The international patent application published under number WO
5 96/07894 discloses a method of distinguishing natural colourless diamonds from synthetic colourless diamonds, comprising a step of irradiating the diamond with ultraviolet light of a wavelength below about 250 nm and observing the induced phosphorescence decay. An apparatus is also disclosed, which allows an operator to observe the variation with time of the
10 phosphorescence intensity and classify the diamond.

Such method and apparatus are only intended for natural and synthetic diamonds and not for diamond imitations. In addition, they do not allow an automatic and continuous classification of an elevated number of colourless diamonds.

15 As a result even nowadays the separation of colourless diamonds is still performed manually.

Regarding its transparency to UV short waves (UVc), a colourless diamond may be either transparent or not.

Type IIa, type IIb and pure type IaB diamonds are transparent to
20 UVc. Pure type IaA and type IaAB diamonds are generally not transparent to UVc and a slight UVc transparency may be noticeable if their nitrogen concentration is unusually low (e.g. below 4ppm).

On one hand, approximately 97% of colourless untreated natural diamonds are not transparent to UVc.

25 On the other hand, only a remaining small percentage (approximately 3%) of colourless untreated natural diamonds are transparent to UVc. Additionally, all colourless HPHT treated natural diamonds and all colourless

synthetic diamonds, either HPHT or CVD grown, either HPHT treated or not, are also transparent to UVc.

Part of the pertinence of the invention relies on separating colourless diamonds that are not transparent to UVc from those that are transparent to UVc, therefore forming a first group of colourless diamonds transparent to UVc and a second group of colourless diamonds that are not transparent to UVc.

The first group will exclusively contain colourless untreated natural diamonds while the second group will contain a small quantity (3% as opposed to 97%) of colourless untreated natural diamonds plus, if present, all colourless HPHT treated natural diamonds plus, if present, all colourless synthetic diamonds, HPHT or CVD grown, HPHT treated or not.

The separation of this two groups is made automatically for small colourless diamonds, as is the separation between diamond and diamond imitation.

Summary of the invention

The main object of the invention is therefore to provide a reliable system which allows to separate automatically, rapidly, easily and reliably colourless untreated natural diamonds from colourless diamond imitations, colourless treated natural diamonds, colourless untreated synthetic diamonds and colourless treated synthetic diamonds. As already mentioned above, the term "a colourless diamond" in the present invention refers to all diamonds which show no distinct hue when observed table up. In addition, this system should also be able to determine the authenticity of diamonds of a small size, that is, diamonds having a mean diameter (when round and polished) smaller than about 3.5 mm.

This object is achieved by a method which comprises:

a step A of removing the colourless diamond imitations; and

a step B of removing the colourless diamonds which are suspected to be treated natural diamonds, untreated synthetic diamonds or treated synthetic diamonds;

said method being characterised in that said step A is carried out
5 before said step B and using Raman Shift Detection (RSD), wherein the diamonds having at a predetermined wavelength W_e an emission signal, the intensity of which is lower than a predetermined value V_e , are removed.

The invention also relates to an apparatus which comprises:

means for submitting colourless diamonds or diamond imitations to a
10 Raman Shift Detection (RSD) and

means for removing the colourless diamonds or diamond imitations having at a predetermined wavelength W_e an emission signal, the intensity of which is lower than a predetermined value V_e .

15 **Brief description of the drawings**

Other features and advantages of the invention will now be described in detail in the following disclosure which is given with reference to the appended figures which schematically represent:

Fig. 1: an apparatus according to the invention;

20 Fig. 2: a detail view of the apparatus of Fig. 1;

Fig. 3: a diamond stone correctly positioned and irradiated during the RSD detection;

Fig. 4: equipment for the RSD;

Fig. 5a-d: RSD results;

Fig. 6: a diamond stone correctly positioned and irradiated during an UVc transmission measurement;

Fig. 7: equipment for the UTM;

Fig. 8a-f: UVc transmission measurement results together with the
5 respective IR absorption spectra; and

Fig. 9a-b: an example of a flow sheet.

Detailed disclosure of the invention

A preferred embodiment of the invention will now be described
10 hereinafter with reference to the accompanying drawings.

As can be seen in Fig. 1, the starting product, usually a batch of polished small stones, which are colourless and composed of untreated or treated natural or synthetic diamond or of a diamond imitating material, is introduced into a vibrating bowl 1 equipped with a feeder 2. The stones
15 reaching the top of the vibrating bowl 1 are pushed to feeder 2 and brought on a table which is preferably a glass disk 3 rotated by a generally electric motor (not represented).

The rotation of disk 3 leads the stones one by one to a set of orientation chicanes 4 which deviates the stones that are not correctly oriented
20 to an inner orbit 5 for reaching a chicane 6 which sends them back to the the set of orientation chicanes 4.

The rotation of disk 3 brings the correctly oriented stones to an aligning and spacing device 7 which ensures that the stones are spaced one from another by a determined clearance, for example 12 mm.

25 The stones then face Raman detection means 13 where their Raman shift is measured in a wavelength range of between 565 nm and 575 nm. In

particular, their Raman shift (emission) signal is observed at a wavelength of 572.6 nm, which is the characteristic Raman shift wavelength W_e of natural or synthetic diamond when using an excitation wavelength of 532 nm.

Advantageously, a reference signal may also be observed at a
5 different wavelength, for example between 555 and 565 nm. The use of two such signals allows to reduce background signals and therefore improves the measurement results.

When the intensity of the calculated signal of a stone at the
predetermined wavelength W_e is lower than a predetermined value V_e used as
10 a discard threshold, it is considered that the stone is a diamond imitation and must be removed.

Represented in Fig. 2 is a discard removing arm 8 aimed at rotating
in a direction denoted by arrow 9, in order to push a diamond imitation stone
into a partial trajectory 10 having a larger diameter and reaching a discard
15 chicane 11 which leads the diamond imitation to a vessel 12 for diamond imitation stones.

Turning back to Fig. 1, one can see that the remaining stones, now
diamonds, are brought by the further rotation of disk 3 to UVc transmission
measurement means 14, where their transmission signal is observed in a
20 predetermined wavelength region R_a , in particular in the UVc region, for example 270 nm.

When the intensity of the absorbance signal of a stone in the
predetermined wavelength region R_a is lower than a predetermined value V_a
used as a re-examination threshold, it is considered that the stone is
25 questionable and must be re-examined, with the same and/or other methods. The questionable stone is either a HPHT treated natural diamond, a synthetic diamond (either treated or untreated) or a rare untreated natural diamond – approximately 3% of untreated natural diamonds are concerned.

Represented in Fig. 2 is a re-examination removing arm 15 aimed at rotating in a direction denoted by arrow 16, in order to push a questionable stone into an outer orbit 23 and reaching a re-examination chicane 20 which leads the questionable stone to a vessel 21 for stones that deserve further
5 investigation.

The stones which were not pushed by the removing arm 8 nor by re-examination removing arm 15 are brought by the further rotation of disk 3 on track 17 to a successful stone chicane 18 which leads them to a vessel 19 for colourless to near-colourless untreated natural diamond stones.

10 Optionally, a set of cameras (not shown on Fig. 2) may be added before chicane 18, to measure any diamonds on orbit 17, for their depth, diameter, crown, pavilion, etc. and a computer will calculate the desired cut proportion values.

Preferably a fixed disk cleaner 22 is provided, for example between
15 re-examination chicane 18 and return chicane 6.

Complements to the method and apparatus according to the invention

It goes without saying that various numerous additional appropriate means and corresponding steps may be added, for example, means for
20 cleaning the stones, means for weighting them, means for detecting the presence of a diamond or diamond imitation in a specific location in front of the Raman or UVc sensors, electronic means for controlling the measurements and their sequence, memory means, recording means for recording the measurement results, processing means for controlling the movement of the
25 arms, analysing means for taking a decision on the results (namely by way of comparison with threshold values), means for counting the stones, statistic means, means for signalling errors, means for emitting a noise or turning on a light or other device in order to advise an operator of a result, an error, etc.

These means are known per se and need not be further detailed herein. Therefore, only a few of them will be described hereinafter with reference to the appended figures 3 to 8.

Moreover, there may be a preliminary (or an additional) step in which
5 coloured diamonds, if any, are removed so that only truly colourless diamonds remain for further processing. In a possible method for determining whether a diamond is colourless or not, the diamond passes between an emission of visible light (such as, but not limited to, a light from a halogen lamp) and a spectrometer which determines the absorbance of the diamond in the visible
10 spectral range. A computer integrates the measured absorption coefficient value of the diamond within a given specific spectral range and then compares it to data of an internal database in order to define the diamond's colour range. Depending on the diamond colour range found for the diamond, the latter is automatically excluded or further processed.

Also, further to the spectral authentication of diamonds, a size
15 measurement can also be carried out. For doing so, it is for example possible to use optical means, i.e. a set of two digital cameras which record the top measurements and the profile measurements of diamonds, respectively. To this end, it is preferable to have the sight direction of the first camera
20 perpendicular to the rotating glass plate and the sight direction of the second camera parallel to the rotating glass plate. After a comparison with a set of digital masks, the combination of these measurements gives access to a series of measure and proportion values for each diamond. A few examples of the measure values are: minimum diameter, maximum diameter, mean diameter,
25 table size, total depth, crown size, pavilion size and girdle thickness and a few examples of the proportion values are: deviation of the roundness, table percentage, crown angle, pavilion angle, symmetry. Of course, the method and apparatus according to the invention can also be used in order to determine other measures and proportions.

Example and details of a Raman Shift Detection (RSD)

Fig. 3 represents a polished round brilliant cut diamond correctly positioned on disk 3, hit by a 100 mW focused green laser 36 (532 nm) onto the pavilion of the diamond and emitting a characteristic diamond Raman peak 37 at 572.6 nm.

Represented in Fig. 4 is the rotating disk 3 with a 532 nm laser source 24 connected by optic fibre cable 25 to a Raman probe 26 aimed at irradiating a stone, preferably with an irradiating angle of 90 degrees with the pavilion of the polished stone. The signal of the scattered light received by the Raman probe 26 is conducted by an optic fibre cable 27 to a fibre optic splitter 28 and then both to a Raman channel photo-detector 29 and to a background channel photo-detector 30. Both signals are band-passed, filtered, pre-amplified and then subtracted 31. The resulting signal is then coupled with a stone at place signal. The coupled signals are finally processed and compared to a suitable threshold value in a processing means 32.

The stone at place signal is provided to detect when a stone is at the correct position on disk 3 for the Raman measurement. The information is transmitted by an optic fiber cable 35, treated by sensor electronic means 36 and forwarded to signal processing means 32.

The inspection is passed both when the stone is correctly placed on disk 3 in front of Raman probe 26 and the Raman signal exceeds a given threshold.

However, if the Raman signal does not reach the threshold value, arm 8 (Fig. 2) then moves and pushes the stone into a larger orbit 10 (Fig.2) so that it a chicane 11 (Fig. 2) drives it into the re-examination vessel 12 (Fig 2).

Fig. 5a-d are the results (oscilloscope diagrams) of measurements performed at a disk rotation speed of 6 rpm with a glass disk with a diameter of 20 cm, with a laser current of 800 mA. The upper trace shows the digital signal from stone at place sensor 34. The lower trace displays the Raman signal

output (Raman channel minus Background channel). Each diagram shows the maximum, mean and minimum measured values of ten runs (individual measurements) taken with the same sample, but with random rotational orientation of the stone. For Fig. 5a, it is obvious that each trace shows three
5 different maximum peak intensities illustrating the rotation of the pavillion during each measurement.

Fig. 5a corresponds to a pure type IaA diamond ($d = 1.4$ mm) having a "normal" nitrogen concentration. The Raman signal is high, 500 mV, i.e. above the threshold value. The stone therefore passes the test.

10 Fig. 5b corresponds to a diamond type IaAB ($d = 0.9$ mm) having a "high" nitrogen concentration. The Raman signal is also high, 450 mV, i.e. above the threshold value. The stone therefore passes the test.

Fig. 5c corresponds to a diamond type IIa ($d = 0.9$ mm) having a "low" nitrogen concentration (not detectable by Fourier Transform Infrared spectroscopy FTIR). However, the Raman signal is still 400 mV, i.e. above the
15 threshold value and thus the stone passes the test.

Fig. 5d corresponds to a cubic zirconia stone ($d = 1.8$ mm), i.e. a diamond imitation. No Raman signal is observed. Therefore the stone does not pass the test, and is pushed away by arm 8 (Fig. 2).

20 All these measurements show that the method and apparatus according to the invention can reliably detect a diamond indepently of its type and a diamond imitation by means of the Raman Shift Detection (RSD) and that a colourless diamond whichever is its type will pass the RSD test and therefore will continue its route on the glass plate while a diamond imitation will not pass
25 the test and therefore will be sorted out into vessel 12 for further identification tests (e.g. Raman spectrometry).

Example and details of a UVc Transmission Measurement (UTM)

Fig. 6 represents a diamond stone correctly positioned on disk 3, hit by a 270 nm UVc light source 38 and transmitting a signal 39 from the internal reflection on the table (bottom) of the stone to an UVc detector.

5 Represented in Fig. 7 is the rotating disk 3 with a monitored UVc source 47 connected by glass fibre cable 40 to a UVc focusing lense 41 aimed at irradiating a stone, preferably with an irradiating angle of 90 degrees with reference to the pavillion's stone hit by the light rays. On the opposite side of the stone, the transmitted light coming from the internal reflection at the bottom
10 of the diamond (i.e. the inside surface of the diamond's table) passes through a diffuser, a UVc filter and is measured by a UVc sensitive photo-detector 42. The signal of which is then amplified and conducted by a multipolar cable 43 to signal processing means 44.

On the other hand an optic sensor 45 detects when a stone is at the
15 correct position on disk 3 for the UVc transmission measurement. The information is transmitted to sensor electronic means 46 and forwarded to signal processing means 44.

The inspection is passed both when the stone is correctly placed on disk 3 in front of UVc focusing lense 41 and the the transmission value V_T signal
20 does not exceed a given threshold value.

However if the UVc transmission signal reaches the threshold value, arm 15 (Fig. 2) then deviates the diamond into an outer orbit so that chicane 20 drives it into the re-examination vessel 21.

Fig. 8a-f are the results (oscilloscope diagrams) of measurements
25 performed at a disk rotation speed of 6 rpm, with a UVc-LED current of 5 mA. Each diagram shows the maximum, mean and minimum measured values of ten to fifteen runs (individual measurements) taken with the same diamond, but with random rotational orientation of the stone. The upper trace shows the

digital signal from the stone at place sensor 45. The lower traces display the preamplifier output signals from the UVc detector.

Fig. 8a corresponds to a pure type IaA diamond ($d = 1.4$ mm) having a “normal” nitrogen concentration (independently determined by FTIR spectroscopy). The resulting signals indicate that no UVc transparency is detected. The stone therefore passes the test.

Fig. 8b corresponds to a type IaAB diamond ($d = 1.3$ mm) having a “low” nitrogen concentration (independently determined by FTIR spectroscopy). The resulting signals indicate that depending on the stone orientation, no UVc transparency or a slight UVc transparency is detected. The signals being below a predetermined threshold, the diamond therefore passes the test.

Fig. 8c corresponds to a diamond of the type IaA ($d = 1.4$ mm) having a “very low” nitrogen concentration (independently determined by FTIR spectroscopy). The resulting signals indicate that depending on the stone orientation, a variable but significant UVc transparency is detected. The signals being over a predetermined threshold, the diamond therefore does not pass the test.

Fig. 8d corresponds to a type IaAB, a diamond ($d = 0.9$ mm) having a “high” nitrogen concentration (independently determined by FTIR spectroscopy). The resulting signals indicate that no UVc transparency is detected. The signals being below a predetermined threshold, the diamond therefore passes the test.

Fig. 8e corresponds to a type IIa (independently determined by FTIR spectroscopy) diamond ($d = 0.9$ mm). The resulting signals indicate that depending on the stone orientation, a variable but significant UVc transparency is detected. The signals being over a predetermined threshold, the diamond therefore does not pass the test.

Fig. 8f corresponds to a type IIa (independently determined by FTIR spectroscopy) diamond ($d = 1.1$ mm). The resulting signals indicate that

depending on the stone orientation, a variable but significant UVc transparency is detected. The signals being over a predetermined threshold, the diamond therefore does not pass the test.

All these measurements show that the method and apparatus
5 according to the invention can reliably detect, based on their UVc transparency, type II colourless diamonds (potentially synthetic diamonds) and type IIa or type IIaB colourless diamonds (potentially HPHT treated natural diamonds) by means of this UVc transmission measurement and that colourless diamonds with very low nitrogen concentration will not pass the UVc transmission test and therefore
10 will be sorted out into the vessel 21 for further testings (e.g. FTIR absorption spectrometry or low temperature photoluminescence).

Flow sheet

Fig. 9a-b is an example of a flow sheet for controlling the method and apparatus according to the invention.

Claims

1. Method for the separation of colourless untreated natural diamonds from:

a) colourless diamond imitations;

5 b) colourless treated natural diamonds;

c) colourless untreated synthetic diamonds and

d) colourless treated synthetic diamonds;

comprising:

a step A of removing the colourless diamond imitations; and

10 a step B of removing the colourless diamonds which are suspected to be treated natural diamonds, untreated synthetic diamonds or treated synthetic diamonds;

said method being **characterised in that** said step A is carried out before said step B and using Raman Shift Detection (RSD),

15 wherein the diamonds having at a predetermined wavelength (W_e) an emission signal, the intensity of which is lower than a predetermined value (V_e), are removed.

2. Method according to claim 1, wherein the method further comprises a step C of removing coloured diamonds using a source of visible
20 light and a spectrometer which determines the absorbance of the diamonds in the visible spectral range, characterised in that the diamonds having a predetermined absorbance outside a predetermined range are removed.

3. Method according to claim 1 or 2, wherein said step B is carried out using a UVc transmission measurement, wherein the diamonds having, in a predetermined wavelength region (R_a), a transmission value V_T which is higher than a predetermined value (V_T), are removed.

5 4. Method according to any one of the claims 1 to 3, wherein said predetermined wavelength (W_e) is around 573 nm.

5. Method according to claim 3 or to claim 4 when depending on claim 2, wherein said predetermined wavelength region (R_a) ranges from 200 to 280 nm.

10 6. Method according to any one of the claims 1 to 5, further comprising a pre-step of removing wrongly oriented or diamonds of undesired size.

7. Method according to any one of the claims 1 to 6, further comprising a step of measuring the size of diamonds.

15 8. Apparatus for the separation of colourless untreated natural diamonds from:

a) colourless diamond imitations;

b) colourless treated natural diamonds;

c) colourless untreated synthetic diamonds and

20 d) colourless treated synthetic diamonds;

characterized in that it comprises:

supporting means (3) for supporting diamonds or diamond imitations;

feeding means (1,2) for bringing diamonds or diamond imitations on said supporting means (3);

moving means for moving said supporting means (3);

detection means (13) for submitting colourless diamonds or diamond
5 imitations to a Raman Shift Detection (RSD),

first removing means (8) for removing the colourless diamonds or diamond imitations having, at a predetermined wavelength (W_e), an emission signal, the intensity of which is lower than a predetermined value (V_e);

measurement means (14) for carrying out a UVc transmission
10 measurement on the remaining colourless diamonds,

second removing means (15) for removing the colourless diamonds having, in a predetermined wavelength region (R_a), a transmission value (V_T) higher than a predetermined value (V_T),

means (20,21) for recovering the colourless untreated natural
15 diamonds.

9. Apparatus according to claim 8, wherein the apparatus further comprises a source of visible light, a spectrometer which determines the absorbance of the diamonds in the visible spectral range and a third removing means for removing coloured diamonds having a predetermined absorbance
20 outside a predetermined range are removed.

10. Apparatus according to claims 8 or 9, wherein said predetermined wavelength (W_e) is about 573 nm.

11. Apparatus according to any one of the claims 8 to 10, wherein said predetermined wavelength region (R_a) ranges from 200 to 280 nm.

12. Apparatus according to any one of the claims 8 to 11, further comprising means (4,6,23) for checking the correct position of said colourless diamonds or diamond imitations on said supporting means (3) and for returning wrongly positioned colourless diamonds or diamond imitations to said feeding means (1,2).

13. Apparatus according to any one of the claims 8 to 12, further comprising means (7) for aligning and spacing said diamonds or diamond imitations with respect to one another by a predetermined clearance before the RSD detection means (13).

14. Apparatus according to any one of the claims 8 to 13, wherein said supporting means (3) is a disk and/or said moving means are rotating or blowing means.

15. Apparatus according to claim 14, wherein said first removing means (8) and said second removing means (15) are able to modify the diameter of the respective trajectory of said diamonds or diamond imitations on said disk (3).

16. Apparatus according to any one of the claims 8 to 15, further comprising means (22) for cleaning said supporting means (3).

17. Apparatus according to any one of the claims 8 to 16, further comprising means for carrying out size measurements of diamonds.

18. Apparatus according to claim 17, characterised in that the means for carrying out size measurements are optical means, in particular a set of two digital cameras having the sight direction perpendicular to the supporting means (3) and parallel to the supporting means (3) respectively.

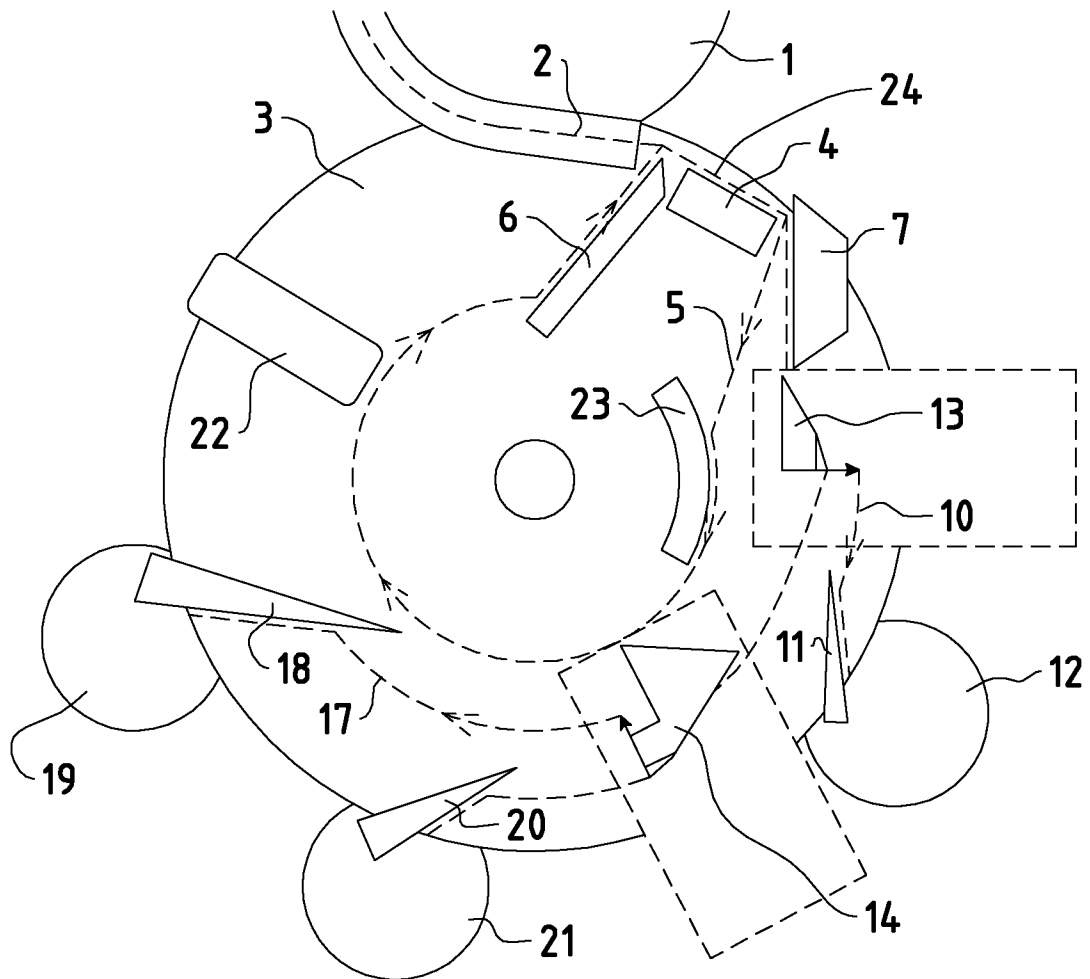


FIG. 1

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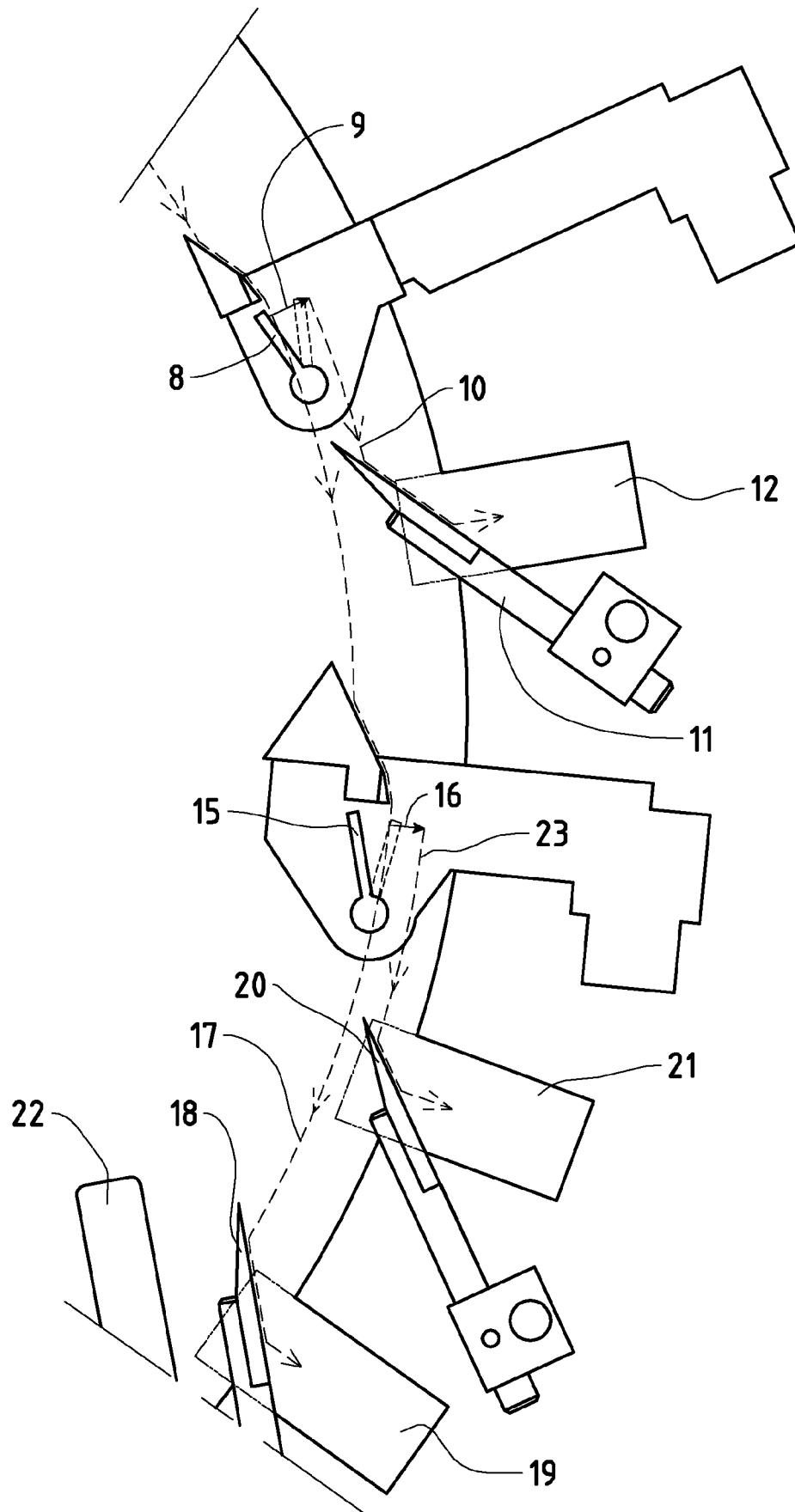


FIG. 2

FIG. 3

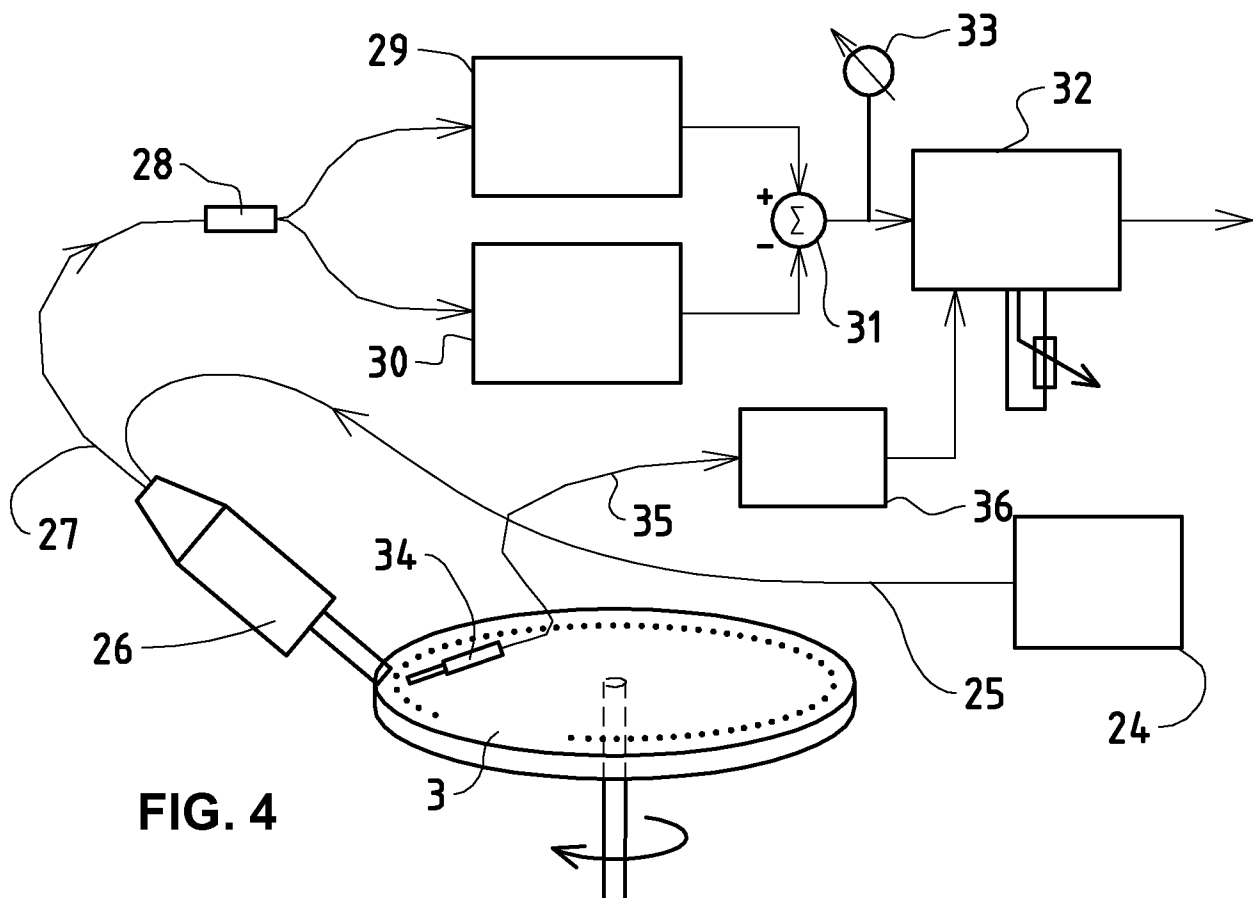
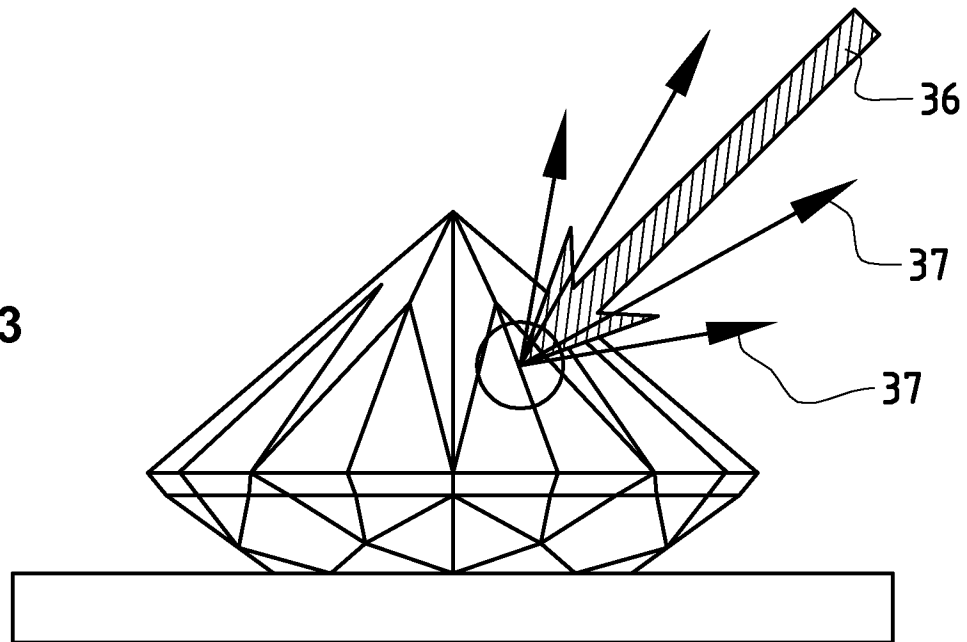


FIG. 4

FIG. 5a

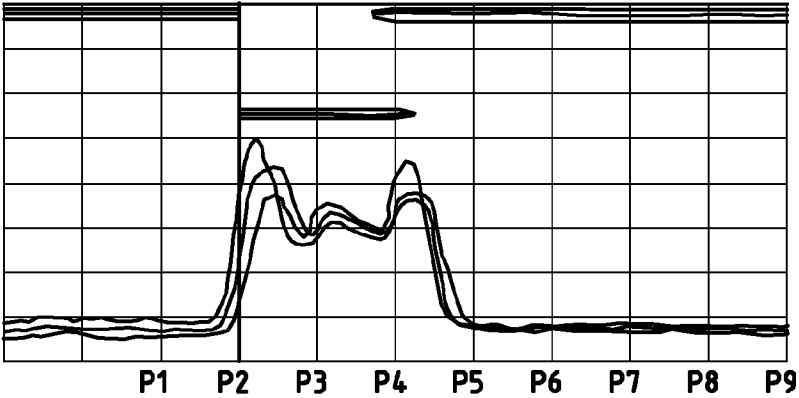


FIG. 5b

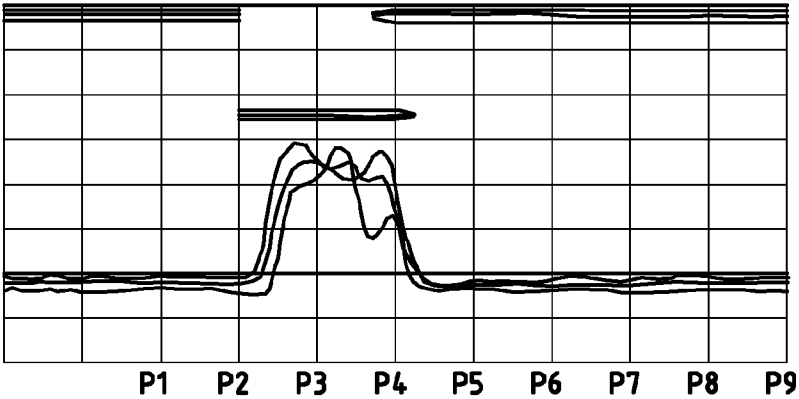


FIG. 5c

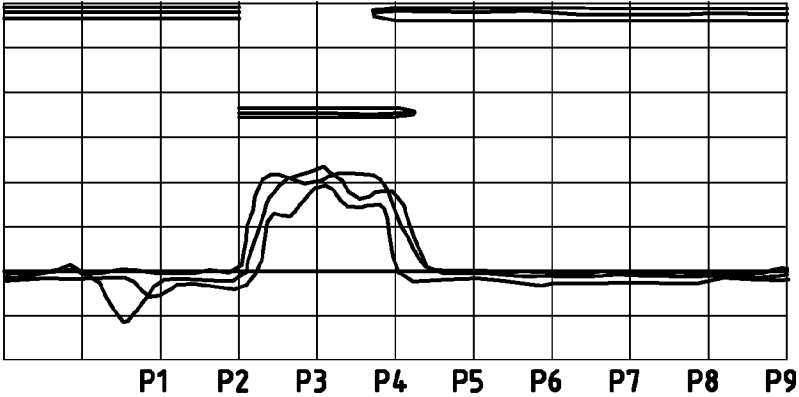


FIG. 5d

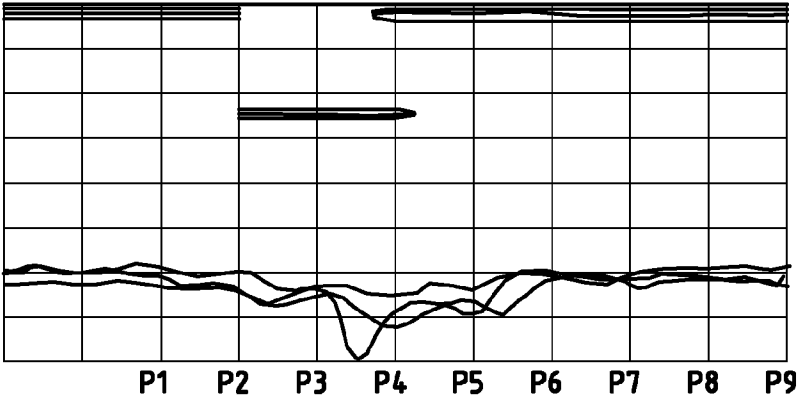


FIG. 6

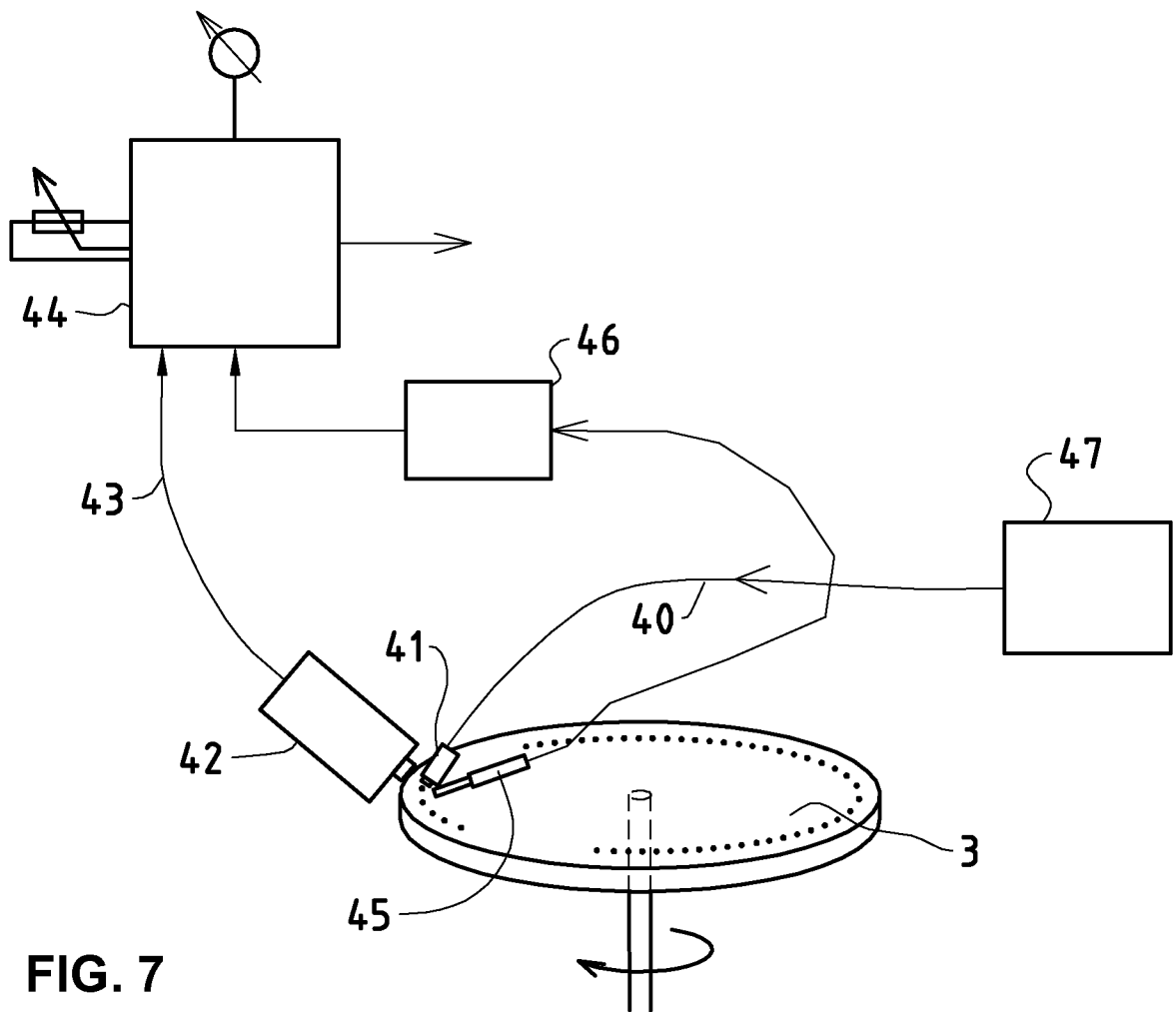
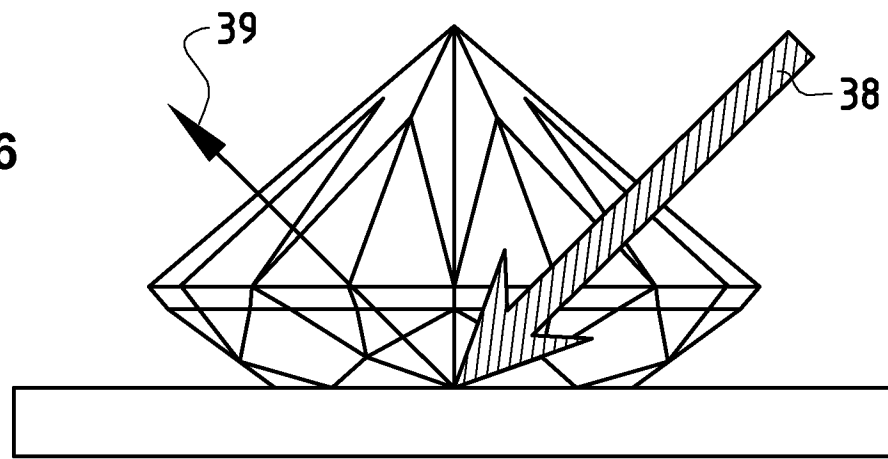


FIG. 7

FIG. 8a

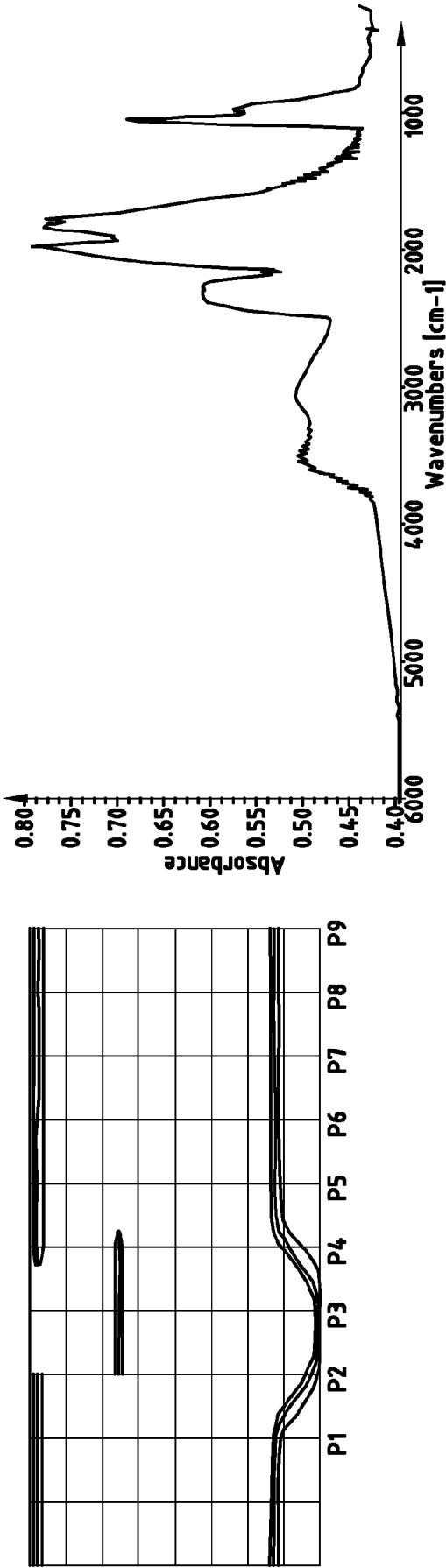


FIG. 8b

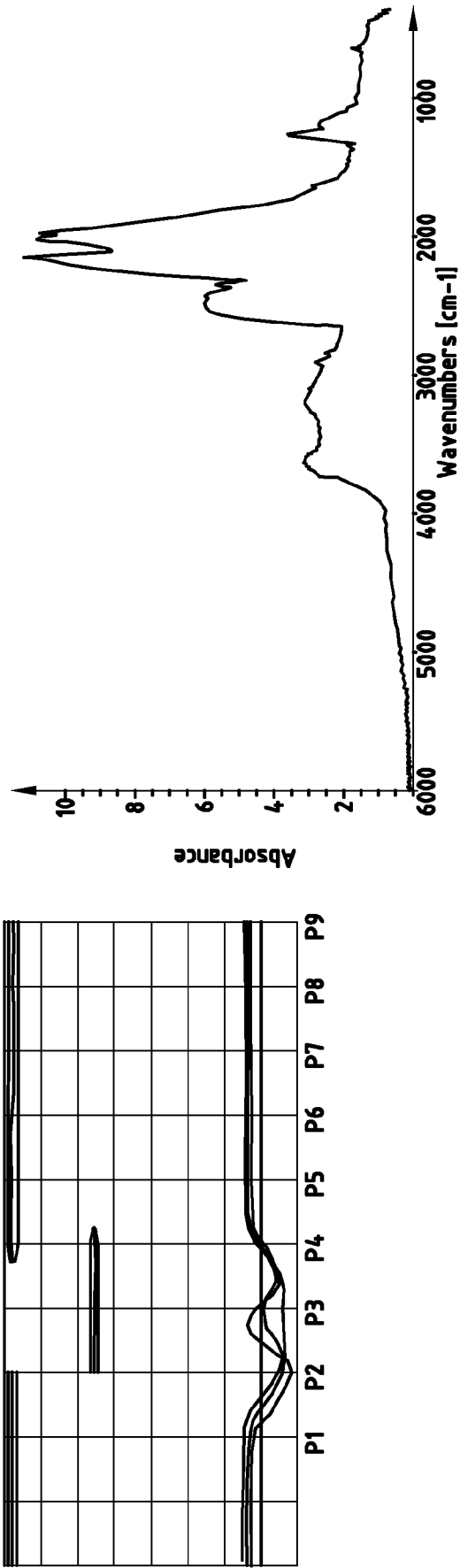


FIG. 8c

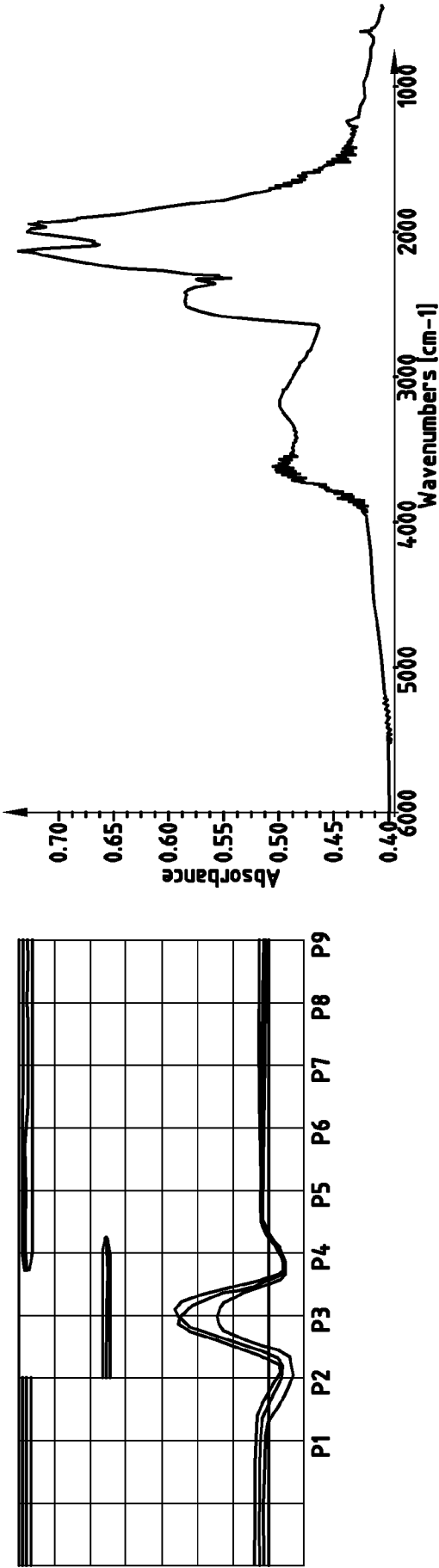


FIG. 8d

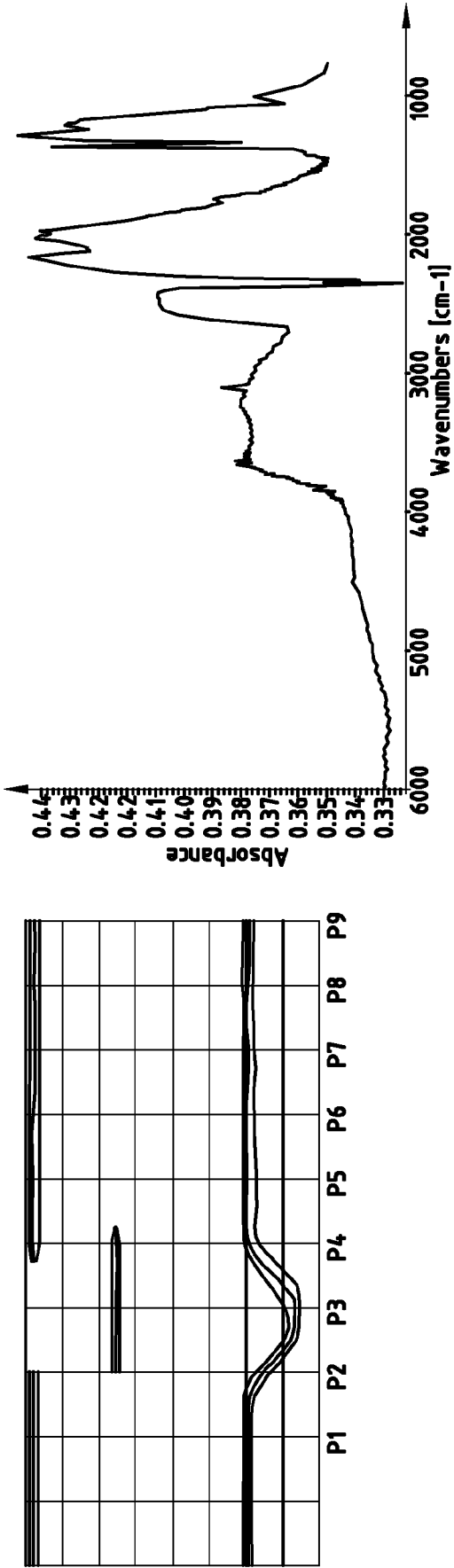


FIG. 8e

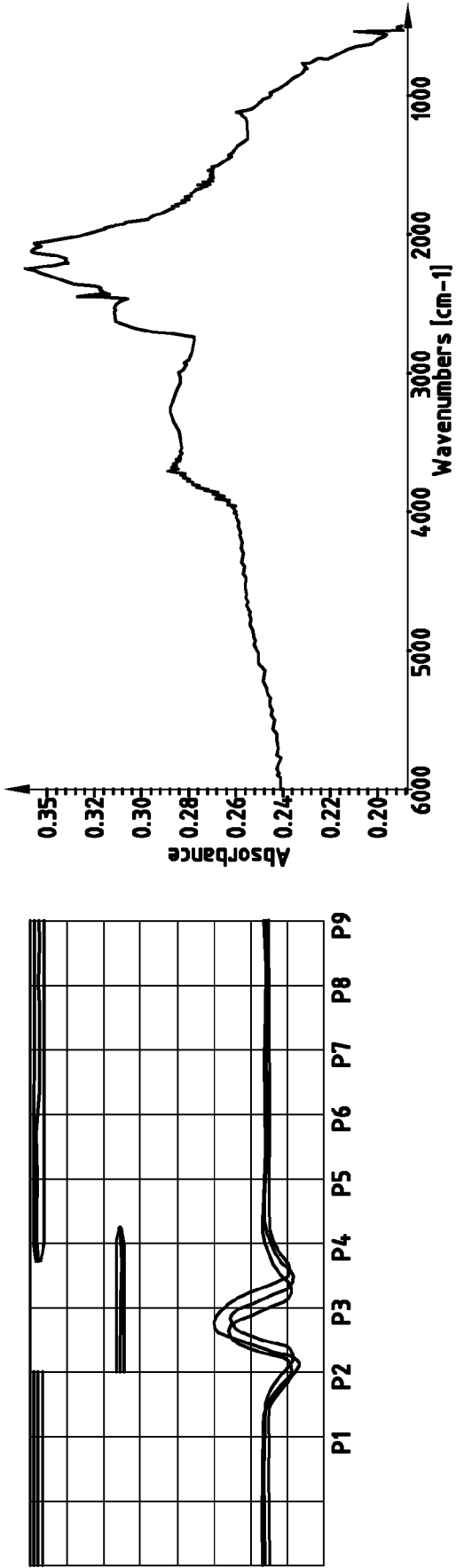
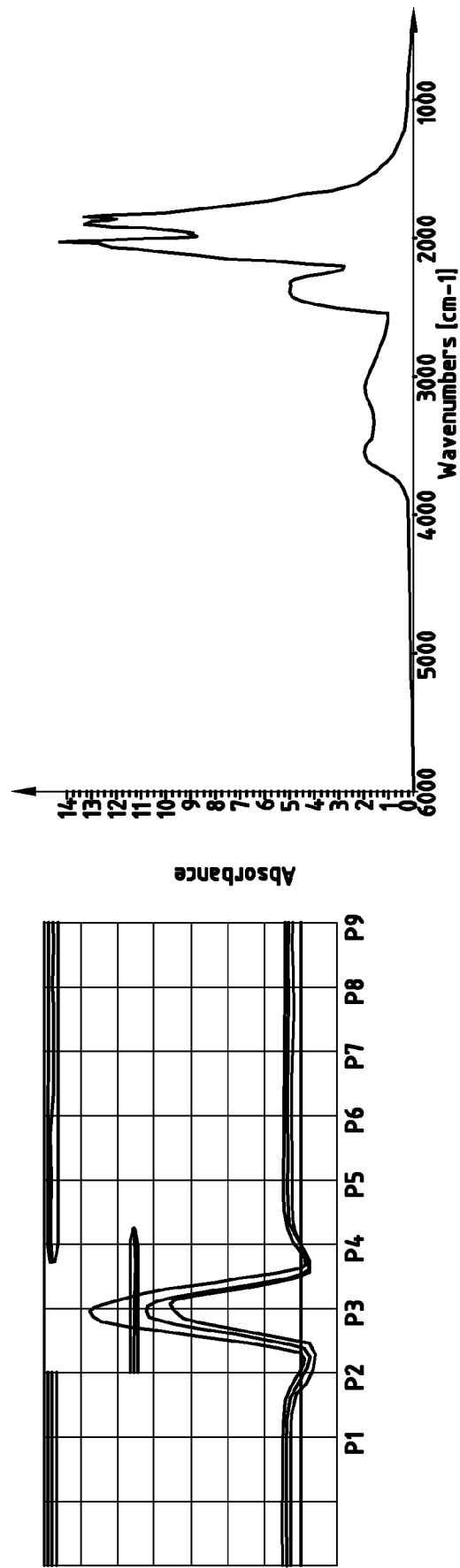
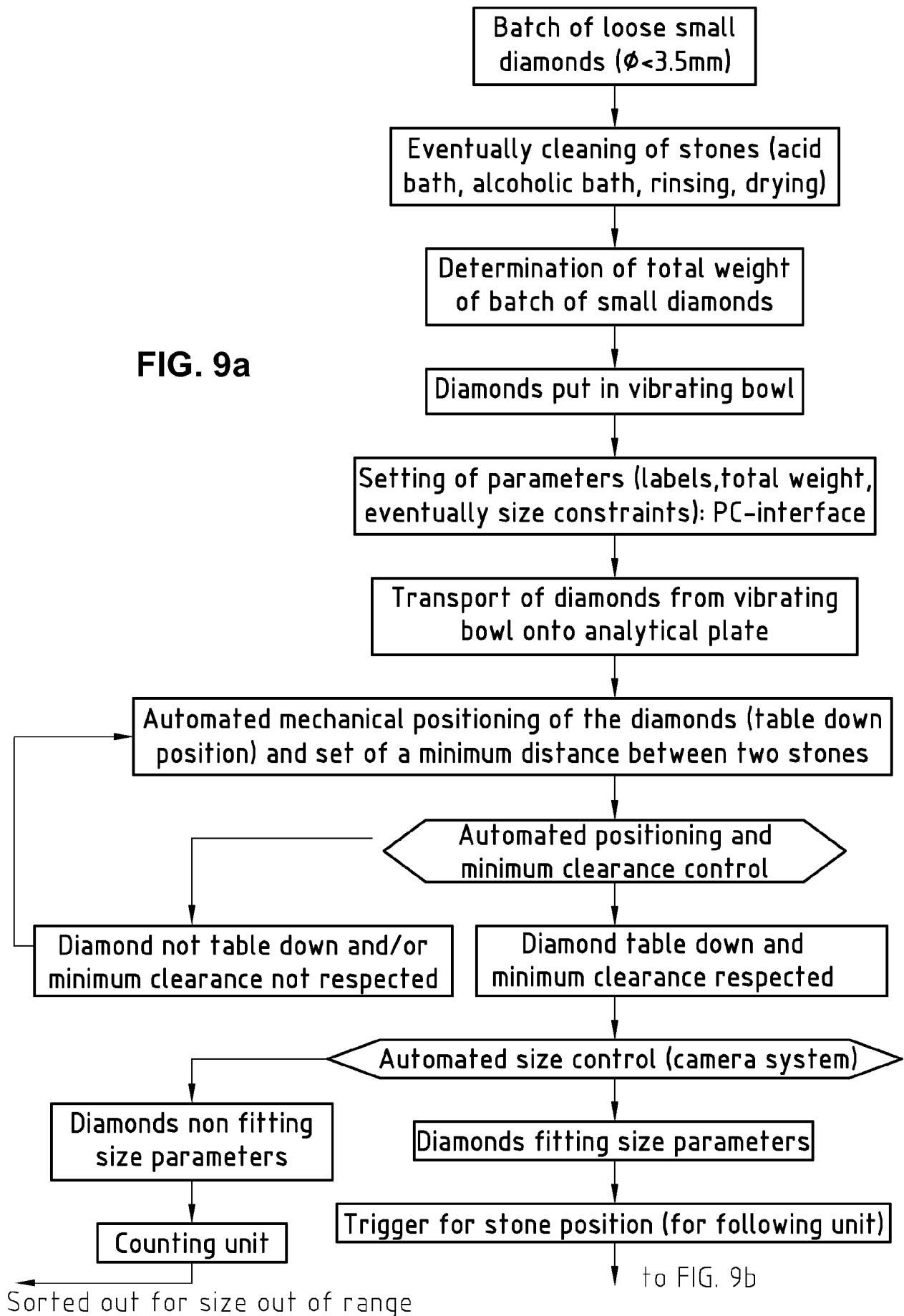


FIG. 8f

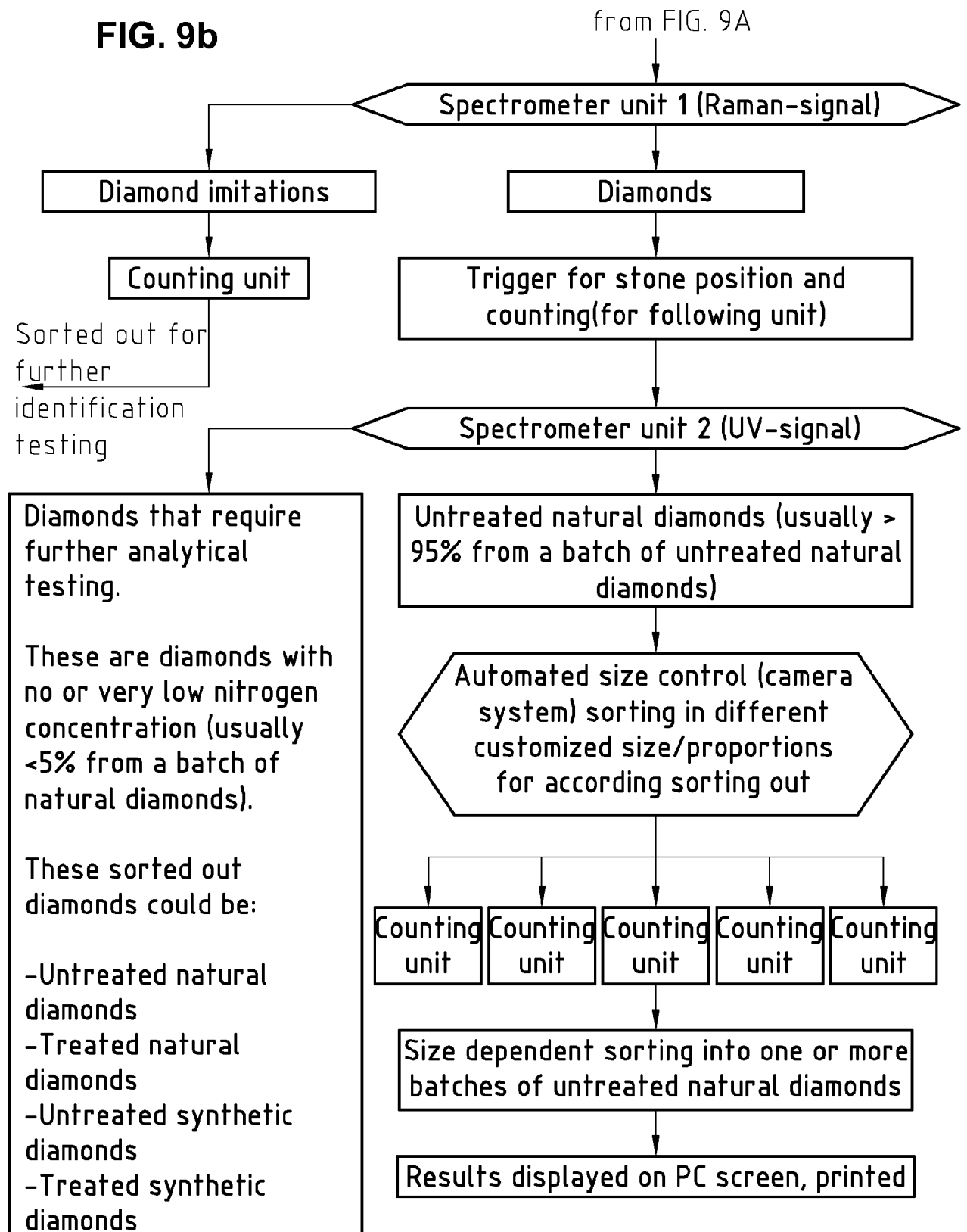


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FIG. 9a



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FIG. 9b

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/EP2014/067766

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

INV. G01N21/87 B07C5/36 B07C5/342 G01N33/38
ADD. B07C5/10

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)

G01N B07C

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

EPO-Internal, WPI Data

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

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Y	page 1, lines 4-9 page 2, lines 6-11 page 3, lines 4-10 page 4, lines 3-11 page 4, line 20 - page 5, line 11	2,3,5, 7-18
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Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.



See patent family annex.

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

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Date of mailing of the international search report

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No

PCT/EP2014/067766

C(Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

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