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(71) Applicant(s)
Wave Optics Ltd

(72) Inventor(s)
Grey, David James;Valera, Mohmed Salim

(74) Agent / Attorney
Madderns Pty Ltd, GPO Box 2752, Adelaide, SA, 5001, AU

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(71) Applicant: **WAVE OPTICS LTD** [GB/GB]; 99 Park Drive, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 4RY (GB).

(72) Inventors: **GREY, David James**; Wave Optics Ltd., 99 Park Drive, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 4RY (GB). **VALERA, Mohmed Salim**; Wave Optics Ltd, 99 Park Drive, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 4RY (GB).

(74) Agent: **GILL JENNINGS & EVERY LLP**; The Broadgate Tower, 20 Primrose Street, London EC2A 2ES (GB).

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(54) Title: WAVEGUIDE FOR AN AUGMENTED REALITY OR VIRTUAL REALITY DISPLAY

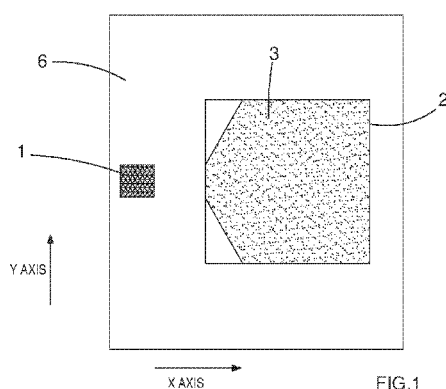


FIG. 1

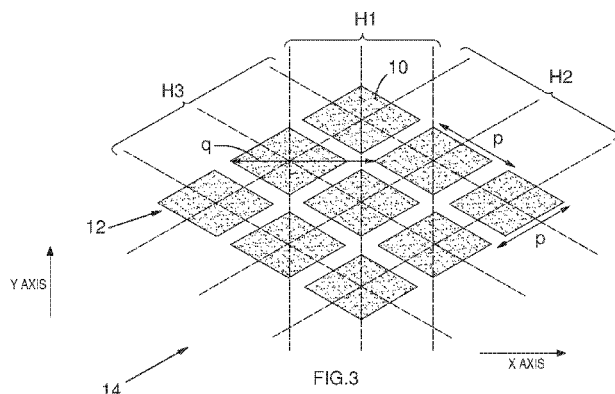


FIG. 3

(57) Abstract: A waveguide is disclosed for use in an augmented reality or virtual reality display. The waveguide includes a plurality of optical structures (10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80) exhibiting differences in refractive index from a surrounding waveguide medium. The optical structures are arranged in an array to provide at least two diffractive optical elements (H1, H2) overlaid on one another in the waveguide. Each of the two diffractive optical elements is configured to receive light from an input direction and couple it towards the other diffractive optical element which can then act as an output diffractive optical element, providing outcoupled orders towards a viewer. The optical structures have a shape, when viewed in the plane of the waveguide, comprising a plurality of substantially straight sides having respective normal vectors at different angles and this can effectively reduce the amount of light that is coupled out of the waveguide on first interaction with the optical structures.

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Waveguide for an Augmented Reality or Virtual Reality Display

The present invention relates to a waveguide for use in an augmented reality or virtual reality display. In particular, the invention relates to a waveguide in which
5 input light is expanded in two orthogonal directions in an output element and is coupled out of a waveguide towards a viewer. This can allow physical expansion of the eyebox in an augmented reality display.

An augmented reality display allows a user to view their surroundings as well as
10 projected images. In military or transportation applications the projected images can be overlaid on the real world perceived by the user. Other applications for these displays include video games and wearable devices, such as glasses.

In a normal augmented reality set-up a transparent display screen is provided in
15 front of a user so that they can continue to see the physical world. The display screen is typically a glass waveguide, and a projector is provided to one side. Light from the projector is coupled into the waveguide by a diffraction grating. The projected light is totally internally reflected within the waveguide. The light is then coupled out of the waveguide by another diffraction grating so that it can be viewed
20 by a user. The projector can provide information and/or images that augment a user's view of the physical world.

An optical device is disclosed in WO 2016/020643 for expanding input light in two dimensions in an augmented reality display. An input diffractive optical element is
25 provided for coupling input light from a projector into a waveguide. The optical device also includes an output element having two diffractive optical elements overlaid on one another in the waveguide so that each of the two diffractive optical elements can receive light from the input diffractive optical element and couple it towards the other diffractive optical element in the pair, which can then act as an
30 output diffractive optical element which couples light out of the waveguide towards a viewer. In one embodiment the two diffractive optical elements overlaid on one another are provided in a photonic crystal. This is achieved by having an array of pillars arranged within or on the surfaces the waveguide, having an increased refractive index relative to the surrounding waveguide medium. The pillars in WO

2016/020643 are described as having a circular cross-sectional shape when viewed in the plane of the waveguide, from the perspective of a viewer. This arrangement has been found to be very effective at simultaneously expanding light in two dimensions and coupling light out of the waveguide. Advantageously this can
5 improve the use of space on the waveguide which can decrease the cost of manufacture.

An issue has been identified with known waveguides because a central strip in the output image has been observed as having a higher relative brightness than other
10 parts. This “striping” effect is undesirable for users, and thus there is a need to provide improved waveguides, or at least provide a useful alternative to known waveguides.

According to an aspect of the invention there is provided a waveguide for use in an
15 augmented reality or virtual reality display, comprising: a plurality of optical structures; wherein the plurality of optical structures are arranged in an array to form a plurality of diffractive optical elements in or on a waveguide, the plurality of optical structures and the plurality of diffractive optical elements integrated with one another to form a unitary diffractive optical element that is configured to receive light from an
20 input direction and to diffract the received light into diffraction orders that are further diffracted in a plane of the waveguide, and the unitary diffractive optical element further configured to diffract the received light into a diffraction order that is coupled out of the waveguide towards a viewer; wherein the plurality of optical structures, respectively, have a shape, in the plane of the waveguide, having a plurality of
25 substantially straight sides having respective angles relative to one another.

In this way, it has been found that the waveguide can reduce the proportion of light that is diffracted into an order which causes the striping effect. This can improve the diffraction efficiency of the overlaid diffractive optical elements, increasing the
30 proportion of light that is turned and coupled towards the other diffractive optical element. This can mitigate the striping effect that has been observed with known waveguides having optical structures with a circular cross-sectional shape. This can also improve the overall efficiency of the waveguide by controlling the light coupled towards a user for viewing.

The plurality of optical structures respectively may have a polygonal shape. Thus, the plurality of optical structures respectively may include at least one vertex. There may be at least four substantially straight sides, and possibly five, six or more substantially straight sides joined by vertices.

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The at least one vertex may represent a rounded edge. It is believed that any practical implementation would involve rounded edges, at least to some degree.

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The plurality of optical structures, respectively may include at least one axis of symmetry which is substantially perpendicular to the input direction. The at least one axis of symmetry may be substantially parallel to the input direction. The optical structure may have at least two axes of symmetry, which are perpendicular to one another.

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The internal angle of each vertex may be less than 180° . This can improve the ease with which the optical structures can be manufactured since it may be more complicated to create optical structures having notches, or inwardly projecting inlets.

20

One of the sides may have a length that is a ratio of around 0.1 to 0.4 of the spacing of optical structures in the array. More preferably one of the sides has a length that is around 0.2 of the spacing of optical structures. The spacing of optical structures may otherwise be known as the lattice constant of the array.

25

The optical structure may include sides that are substantially parallel to the two respective diffractive optical elements. The sides may be angled at substantially $\pm 30^\circ$ to the input direction. It has been found that this arrangement can advantageously improve diffraction efficiency into the required orders and mitigate striping.

30

The waveguide may include an input diffractive optical element configured to couple light into the waveguide and to provide light to the plurality of optical structures in the array in the input direction. The input diffractive optical element is preferably a diffraction grating comprising grooves in one surface of the waveguide. Preferably the input grating has a high efficiency for coupling light into the waveguide.

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The input direction may define an input axis, and the optical structures may have different shapes at positions which are tangentially displaced from the input axis. The optical structures may have shapes that aim to reduce transmission in the order which causes the striping effect, where they are aligned with the input axis.

5 This may be less important at positions that are displaced from the input axis and therefore optical structures at the sides of the array may have a different shape.

The array of optical structures in the waveguide may be referred to as a photonic crystal. The waveguide may be provided within an optical display.

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The optical structures preferably exhibit differences in refractive index from a surrounding waveguide medium. In this way, the optical structures can be embedded within a waveguide and their diffractive properties can be created due to a difference in refractive index between the structures and the waveguide medium.

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The optical structures may be provided as surface relief features on a surface of the waveguide. The mismatch between the refractive index of the surface relief features and the air that surrounds them may provide the desired diffractive properties. In some embodiments a coating may be provided on the optical structures in order to control diffraction efficiency.

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According to another aspect of the invention there is provided a method of manufacture of a waveguide for an augmented reality or virtual reality display, comprising the steps of: providing a plurality of optical structures in a photonic crystal; arranging the plurality of optical structures in an array to form a plurality of diffractive optical elements in or on the waveguide, the plurality of optical structures and the plurality of diffractive optical elements integrated with one another to form a unitary diffractive optical element configured to receive light from an input direction and to diffract the received light into diffraction orders that are diffracted in a plane of the waveguide, and the unitary diffractive optical element further configured to diffract the received light into a diffraction order that is outcoupled from the unitary diffractive optical element towards a viewer; and providing the plurality of optical structures respectively with a shape which when viewed in the plane of the waveguide, has a plurality of substantially straight sides.

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Embodiments of the invention are now described, by way of example, with reference to the drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a top view of a known waveguide;

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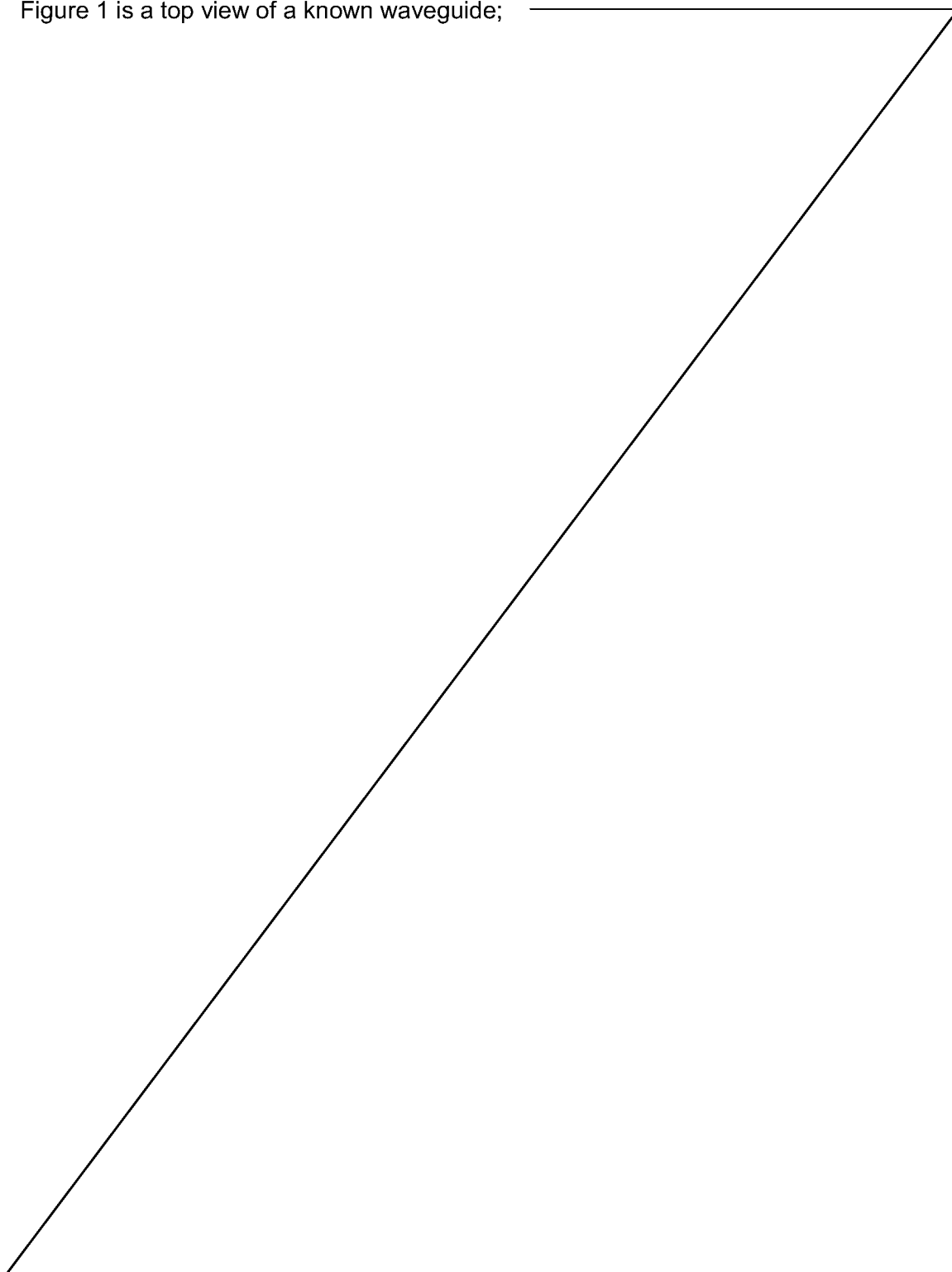


Figure 2 is another top view of a known waveguide;

Figure 3 is a top view of a photonic crystal for use in a waveguide in an embodiment of the invention;

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Figure 4 shows a number of examples of optical structures with different shapes that can be used in a photonic crystal in a waveguide in an embodiment of the invention;

Figure 5 is a top view of a photonic crystal for use in a waveguide in an embodiment of the invention;

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Figure 6 is a graph showing how diffraction efficiency varies with notch width for an optical structure with a particular shape, in an embodiment of the invention; and

Figure 7 is another graph showing how diffraction efficiency varies with flat sided width for an optical structure with another shape, in an embodiment of the invention.

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Figures 1 and 2 are top views of a known waveguide 6. An input diffraction grating 1 is provided on a surface of the waveguide 6 for coupling light from a projector (not shown) into the waveguide 6. Light that is coupled into the waveguide travels by total internal reflection towards an output element 2 which includes a photonic crystal 3. In this example the photonic crystal 3 includes pillars (not shown) having a circular cross-sectional shape from the perspective of these top views. The pillars have a different refractive index relative to the refractive index of the surrounding waveguide medium and they are arranged in an array having hexagonal symmetry.

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When light encounters the photonic crystal 3 in the output element 2 from the input diffraction grating along the x-axis it is either transmitted or turned through $\pm 60^\circ$ by one of the diffractive optical structures formed by the array in the photonic crystal 3.

30

It has been found that the output image diffracted from element 2 includes a central stripe 7 which has a higher relative brightness than other parts. It is believed that this effect is created due to the diffraction efficiencies of the diffractive optical structures formed by the array in the photonic crystal 3. In particular, it is believed that a significant proportion of light received from the input diffraction grating 1 is

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diffracted to the eye when it encounters the photonic crystal 3, rather than being diffracted and turned through $\pm 60^\circ$.

Figure 3 is a top view of part of a photonic crystal 12, which is an array of optical structures 10 that are provided within a waveguide 14. The waveguide 14 may have a low refractive index, with $n \sim 1.5$. The optical structures 10 in this arrangement are parallelograms having four substantially straight sides and four vertices. The optical structures 10 have substantially the same cross-sectional shape across the width of the waveguide. In other embodiments the optical structures 10 may be provided across only a portion of the width of the waveguide 14.

In one embodiment the optical structures 10 can be provided on one surface of the waveguide 14. In this arrangement the optical structures 10 can have a feature height so that they project from the surface of the waveguide 14. It has been found that an effective photonic crystal can be created with feature height in the range of 30nm to 200nm. Air channels are formed in the valleys between the optical structures 10. The optical structures 10 can have the same refractive index as the waveguide medium with $n \sim 1.5$. The optical structures 10 are surrounded by air with a refractive index, $n=1$, and this mismatch in refractive index can allow diffraction. The diffraction efficiency can be controlled by applying a thin film coating on the horizontal surfaces of the optical structures 10. The coating material would usually (but not always) have a higher refractive index than the waveguide 14. In one embodiment a coating is applied with a refractive index of $n \sim 2.4$.

In another embodiment the optical structures 10 can be embedded within the waveguide 14 medium. The optical structures 10 can therefore be provided entirely within the waveguide 14 medium. This requires a refractive index mismatch between the optical structures 10 and the waveguide medium 14 in order for diffraction to occur. This can be achieved by creating a waveguide 14 having a surface relief profile with optical structures 10 on one surface. A bonding material can then be applied on the optical structures 10 and this can be bonded to a cover piece having the same refractive index as the waveguide 14. By choosing a bonding material that has a different (usually higher) refractive index than the waveguide medium 14 a unified waveguide 14 can be created between the original waveguide and the cover piece, with the bonding material sandwiched in between.

In this design the bonding material has the same shape as the optical structures 10, but a different refractive index from the surrounding waveguide medium.

The regular arrangement of optical structures 10 in the array may be thought of as a number of effective diffraction gratings or diffractive optical structures. In particular it is possible to define a grating H1 with optical structures 10 aligned along the y-axis with adjacent rows of optical structures separated by a distance q . Grating H2 is arranged with rows of optical structures 10 at an angle of $+30^\circ$ to the x-axis, with adjacent rows separated by a distance p , known as the lattice constant. Finally, grating H3 is arranged with rows of optical structures at an angle of -30° to the x-axis, with adjacent rows separated by a distance p . The values p and q are related to one another by the expression $q=2p\cos(30^\circ)$. It has been found that an effective photonic crystal can be created with values of p in the range of 340nm to 650nm.

When light from an input grating received along the x-axis is incident on the photonic crystal 12 it undergoes multiple simultaneous diffractions by the various diffractive optical elements. Light can be diffracted into a zero order, which is a continuation of the propagation of the incident light. Light can also be diffracted into a first diffraction order by grating H1. The first order is coupled out of the waveguide 14 in a positive direction along the z-axis, towards a viewer which can be defined as the straight to eye order. Light can also be diffracted into a first diffracted order by the H2 diffractive optical structure. This first order is diffracted at $+60^\circ$ to the x-axis, and this light beam goes on to make further interactions with the photonic crystal. Light can also be diffracted into a first diffracted order by the H3 diffractive optical structure. This first order is diffracted at $+60^\circ$ to the x-axis, and this light beam goes on to make further interactions with the photonic crystal. A subsequent diffractive interaction with the H2 diffractive optical structure can couple light out of the waveguide 12 in the positive z-axis towards a viewer. Thus, light can be coupled out of the waveguide at each point, and yet light can continue to expand within the waveguide 12 in two dimensions. The symmetry of the photonic crystal means that every exit beam has the same angular and chromatic properties as the input beam, which means that a polychromatic (as well as a monochromatic) light source may be used as the input beam with this photonic crystal arrangement.

The photonic crystal can allow simultaneous and rapid expansion of light in two dimensions so that the input light can fill a two-dimensional display screen. This can

allow an ultra-compact display because the waveguide size can be kept to a minimum due to the two-dimensional beam expansion.

5 In this arrangement the optical structures 10 have straight sides that are parallel to the diffractive optical structures H2, H3. Thus, the sides of the parallelograms are angled at $\pm 30^\circ$ to the x-axis, which is the direction along which input light is received from the input grating 1.

10 A surprising advantage has been found with non-circular optical structures 10, which is that the diffraction efficiencies of the diffractive optical structures H1, H2, H3 are significantly increased. This increases the proportion of light that is diffracted into the first orders by the structures H1, H2, H3, and decreases the proportion of light that is diffracted into the zero order, and which continues to propagate in the waveguide 12 by total internal reflection. This can reduce the striping effect which
15 has been observed with circular structures, which significantly improves the utility of the waveguide 14.

Figure 4 shows a number of examples of other shapes for the optical structures 10 which can be used to further reduce the striping effect. A first optical structure 10
20 has a shape similar to that shown in Figure 3. The first optical structure 10 is a simple parallelogram, shown within a larger parallelogram 16, which indicates the spacing of optical structures 10 within the photonic crystal 12. The upper and lower apexes have 120° angles. The lattice constant, p , is equal to the length of one of the sides of the larger parallelogram 16. A second optical structure 20 is a modified
25 parallelogram having a pair of central notches 22. In this arrangement each notch 22 is formed of two sides which are parallel to respective main sides of the outer parallelogram and the diffractive optical structures H2, H3. A notch width 24 can be defined, and the notch width 24 can be varied in different embodiments. The notch 22 includes a vertex 26 having an internal angle which is larger than 180° . A third
30 optical structure 30 is another modified parallelogram having two surfaces that are parallel to the x-axis. A "flat-sided" length 34 can be defined, which is the length of the side that is parallel to the x-axis; the flat sided length 34 can be varied in different embodiments. The third optical structure 30 has a plurality of vertices, each of which has an internal angle which is less than 180° . A fourth optical
35 structure 40 is provided, which is similar to the second optical structure 20, but

includes only one notch 42. A fifth optical structure 50 is provided having a notch 52 on one side and a flat portion 54 on the other side which is parallel to the x-axis. A sixth optical structure 60 is provided, which is similar to the third optical structure 30, but with only one "flat sided" length 64. A seventh optical structure 70 is provided with a similar shape to the first optical structure 10, but with a reduced size. An eighth optical structure 80 is provided with a similar shape to the second optical structure 20, having upper and lower notches 82. The notches 82 are defined by first and second notch widths 84, 85, where the second notch width 85 is larger than the first notch width 84. Thus, the eighth optical structure 80 has a shape composed of two similar and partially overlapping parallelograms of different size. The first, second, third and seventh optical structures 10, 20, 30, 70 have symmetry in x-axis and the y-axis. The fourth, fifth and sixth optical structures 40, 50, 60 have symmetry in the y-axis only. The eighth optical structure 80 has symmetry in the x-axis only.

In all of the optical structures shown in Figure 4 the polygons include sides that are substantially parallel to the diffractive optical structures H1, H2 in the photonic crystal 12. However, other viable embodiments are envisaged where the optical structures have sides that are non-parallel to the structures H1, H2.

Vertices are present in all of the optical structures shown in Figure 4. In practice these vertices would have slightly rounded corners, depending on the degree of magnification that is used when they are examined.

Figure 5 is an example of a photonic crystal 12 with a regular array of the second optical structures 20.

Figure 6 is a graph showing the efficiency with which light is coupled into the straight to eye order when it interacts with the photonic crystal 12 as shown in Figure 5, formed by an array of the second optical structures 20. The graph shows how the efficiency of the straight to eye order varies when the notch width 24 is varied (while maintaining symmetry in the x-axis and the y-axis). The efficiency is plotted for the s-polarisation and p-polarisation. In this graph the s-polarisation has the higher efficiency when the notch width is zero. It is noted that a notch width of zero would actually correspond to the simple parallelogram shape of the first optical structure

10. It can be seen that the straight to eye diffraction efficiency is reduced to a minimum when the notch width 24 is in the range of 0.15 to 0.25 of the lattice constant, p . In practice, the lattice constant, p , is selected in part based on the central wavelength of light that is intended for use in the waveguide.

5

It is evident from Figure 6 that effective suppression of light that is coupled into the straight to eye order can be achieved through the use of a photonic crystal with a regular array of the second optical structures, as shown in Figure 5, where the notch width 24 is in the range of 0.15 to 0.25 of the lattice constant, p . In practice, it may be desirable to avoid reducing the efficiency entirely to zero, otherwise an absence of light may create an effective dark stripe in the output image.

10

Figure 7 is a graph showing the efficiency with which light is coupled into the straight to eye order when it interacts with a photonic crystal 12, formed by an array of the third optical structures 30. The graph shows how the efficiency varies when the flat sided length 34 is varied (while maintaining symmetry in the x-axis and the y-axis). The efficiency is plotted for the s-polarisation and p-polarisation. In this graph the s-polarisation has the higher efficiency when the flat sided width is zero. It is noted that a flat sided width of zero would actually correspond to the simple parallelogram shape of the first optical structure 10. It can be seen that diffraction efficiency is reduced to a minimum when the flat sided width 34 is in the range of 0.25 to 0.35 of the lattice constant, p .

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The reference to any prior art in this specification is not, and should not be taken as, an acknowledgement or any form of suggestion that such prior art forms part of the common general knowledge.

25

It will be understood that the terms “comprise” and “include” and any of their derivatives (e.g. comprises, comprising, includes, including) as used in this specification, and the claims that follow, is to be taken to be inclusive of features to which the term refers, and is not meant to exclude the presence of any additional features unless otherwise stated or implied.

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In some cases, a single embodiment may, for succinctness and/or to assist in understanding the scope of the disclosure, combine multiple features. It is to be

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understood that in such a case, these multiple features may be provided separately (in separate embodiments), or in any other suitable combination. Alternatively, where separate features are described in separate embodiments, these separate features may be combined into a single embodiment unless otherwise stated or implied. This also applies to the claims which can be recombined in any combination. That is a claim may be amended to include a feature defined in any other claim. Further a phrase referring to "at least one of" a list of items refers to any combination of those items, including single members. As an example, "at least one of: a, b, or c" is intended to cover: a, b, c, a-b, a-c, b-c, and a-b-c.

10

It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that the disclosure is not restricted in its use to the particular application or applications described. Neither is the present disclosure restricted in its preferred embodiment with regard to the particular elements and/or features described or depicted herein. It will be appreciated that the disclosure is not limited to the embodiment or embodiments disclosed, but is capable of numerous rearrangements, modifications and substitutions without departing from the scope as set forth and defined by the following claims.

15

CLAIMS

1. A waveguide for use in an augmented reality or virtual reality display, comprising:

a plurality of optical structures;

wherein the plurality of optical structures are arranged in an array to form a plurality of diffractive optical elements in or on a waveguide, the plurality of optical structures and the plurality of diffractive optical elements integrated with one another to form a unitary diffractive optical element that is configured to receive light from an input direction and to diffract the received light into diffraction orders that are further diffracted in a plane of the waveguide, and the unitary diffractive optical element further configured to diffract the received light into a diffraction order that is coupled out of the waveguide towards a viewer; and

wherein the plurality of optical structures, respectively, have a shape, in the plane of the waveguide, comprising a plurality of substantially straight sides having respective angles relative to one another.

2. The waveguide of claim 1, wherein the plurality of optical structures respectively include at least one vertex.

3. The waveguide of claim 1 or claim 2, wherein the plurality of optical structures respectively include at least four substantially straight sides.

4. The waveguide of any of the preceding claims, wherein one of the plurality of substantially straight sides has a length that is a ratio of around 0.1 to 0.4 of a regular spacing of optical structures in the array.

5. The waveguide of any of the preceding claims, wherein the plurality of optical structures respectively include substantially straight sides that are substantially parallel to respective portions of the unitary diffractive optical elements.

6. The waveguide of any of the preceding claims, wherein the plurality of optical structures respectively include substantially straight sides that are angled at substantially $\pm 30^\circ$ to the input direction.
7. The waveguide of any of the preceding claims, wherein the plurality of optical structures respectively have a plurality of vertices, and wherein the internal angle of each vertex is less than 180° .
8. The waveguide of any of the preceding claims, comprising an input diffractive optical element, separate from the two diffractive optical elements overlaid on one another in the waveguide, configured to couple light into the waveguide and to provide light to the plurality of optical structures in the array in the input direction.
9. The waveguide of any of the preceding claims, wherein the plurality of optical structures respectively comprise at least one axis of symmetry that is substantially perpendicular to the input direction.
10. The waveguide of any of the preceding claims, wherein the plurality of optical structures respectively comprise at least one axis of symmetry that is substantially parallel to the input direction.
11. The waveguide of any of the preceding claims, wherein the plurality of optical structures respectively have at least two axes of symmetry, which are perpendicular to one another.
12. The waveguide of any of the preceding claims, wherein the input direction defines an input axis, and the optical structures have different shapes at positions which are displaced from the input axis.
13. The waveguide of any of the preceding claims, wherein the plurality of optical structures exhibit differences in refractive index from a surrounding waveguide medium.
14. The waveguide of any of claims 1 to 12, wherein the plurality of optical structures are surface relief structures on a surface of the waveguide.

15. The waveguide of any of claims 1 to 12, wherein each of the plurality of optical structures are arranged in an array is parallelogram shaped with a pair of central notches.

16. The waveguide of any of claims 1 to 12, wherein each of the plurality of optical structures are arranged in an array is parallelogram shaped having two surfaces parallel to the input direction.

17. A method of manufacture of a waveguide for an augmented reality or virtual reality display, comprising the steps of:

providing a plurality of optical structures in a photonic crystal;

arranging the plurality of optical structures in an array to form a plurality of diffractive optical elements in or on the waveguide, the plurality of optical structures and the plurality of diffractive optical elements integrated with one another to form a unitary diffractive optical element configured to receive light from an input direction and to diffract the received light into diffraction orders that are diffracted in a plane of the waveguide, and the unitary diffractive optical element further configured to diffract the received light into a diffraction order that is outcoupled from the unitary diffractive optical element towards a viewer; and

providing the plurality of optical structures respectively with a shape which when viewed in the plane of the waveguide, has at least one axis of symmetry and a plurality of substantially straight sides.

18. The method of claim 17, further comprising the step of applying a coating to the plurality of optical structures.

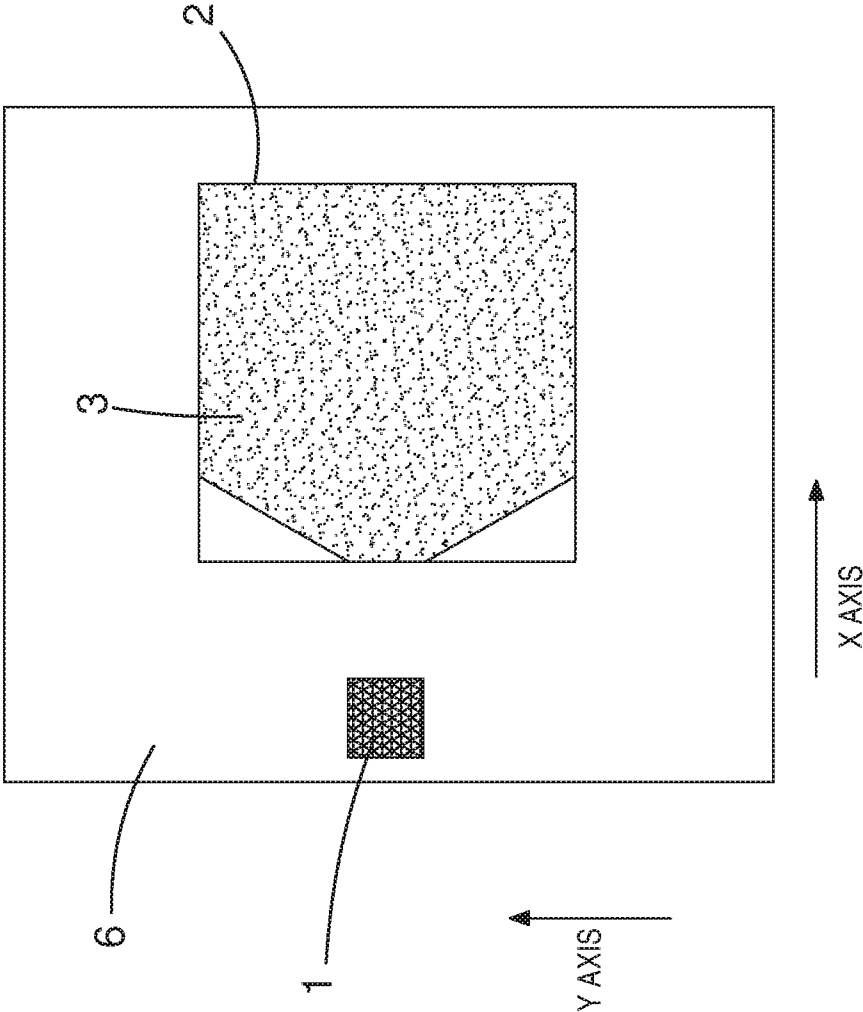


FIG.1

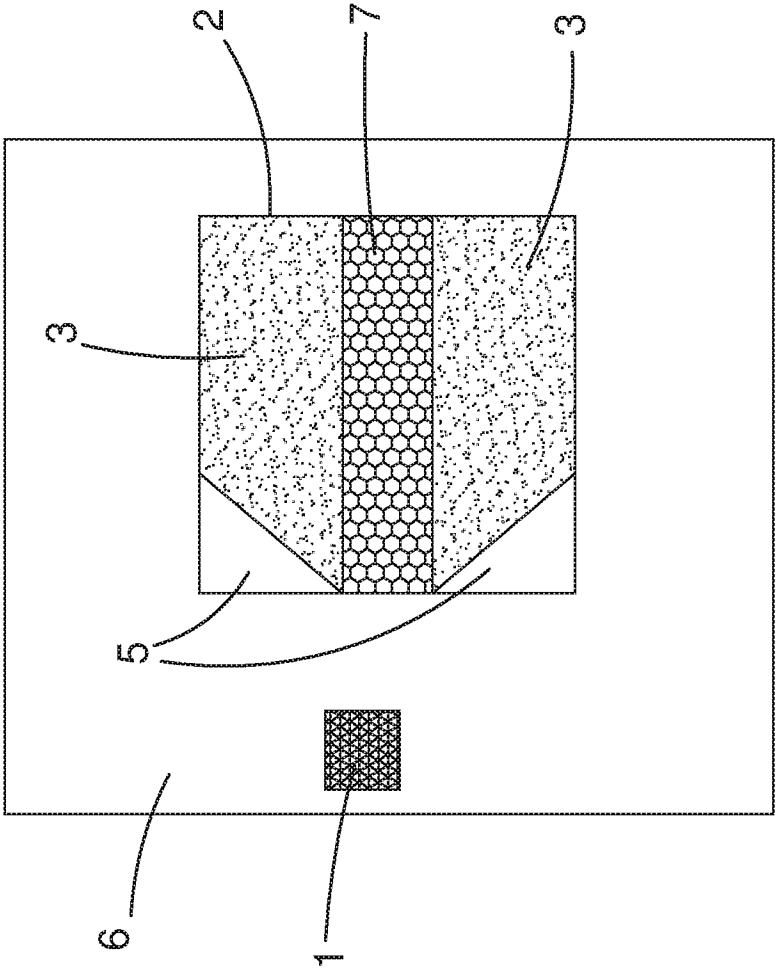


FIG.2

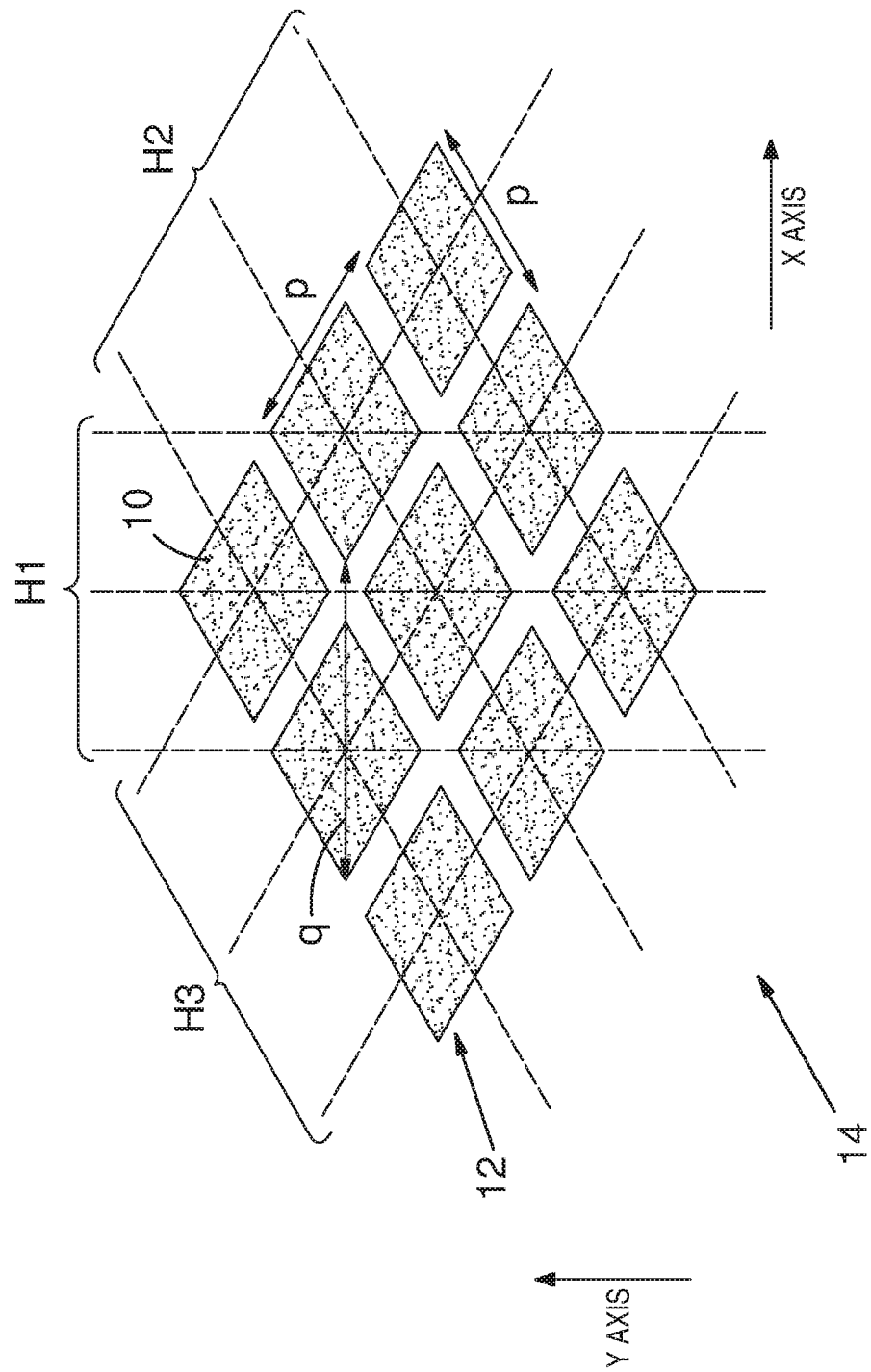


FIG.3

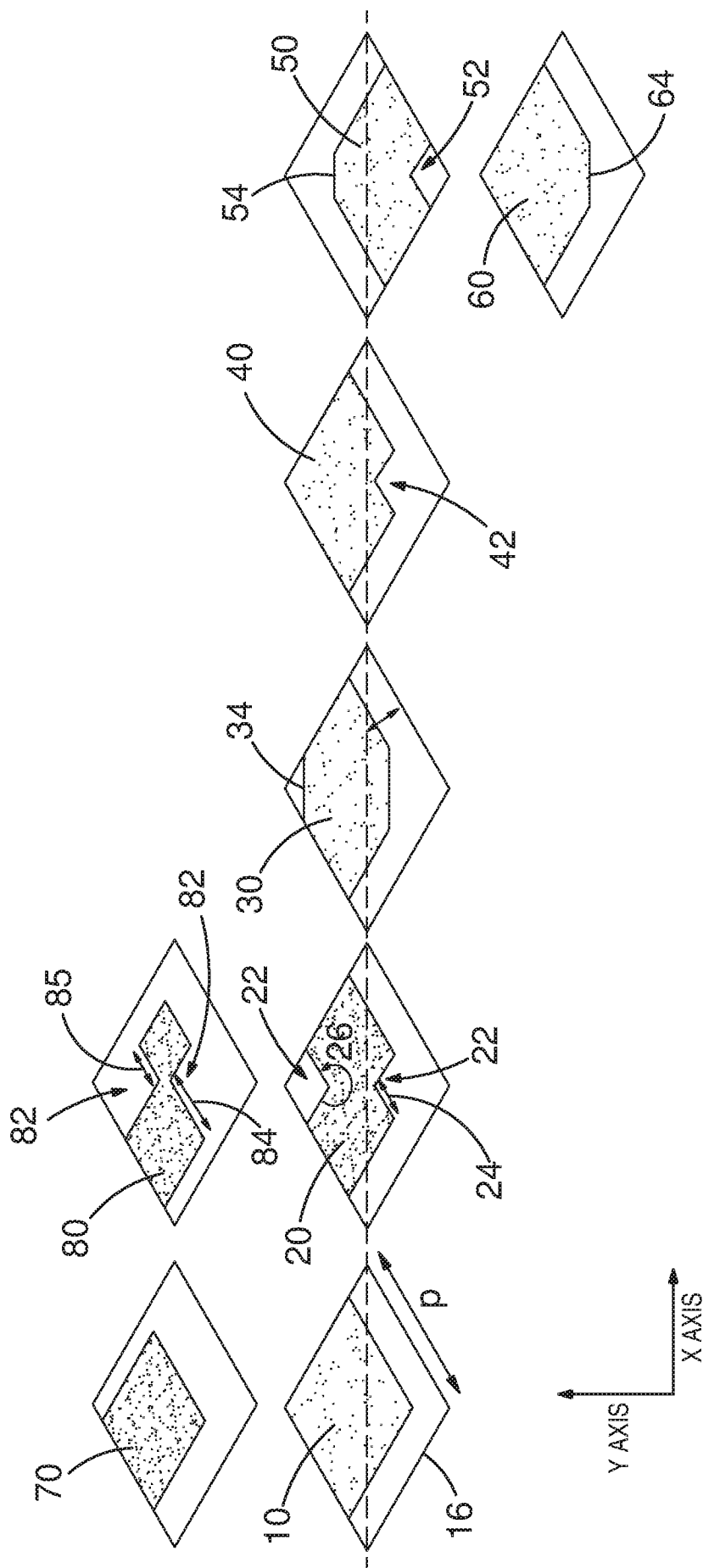


FIG.4

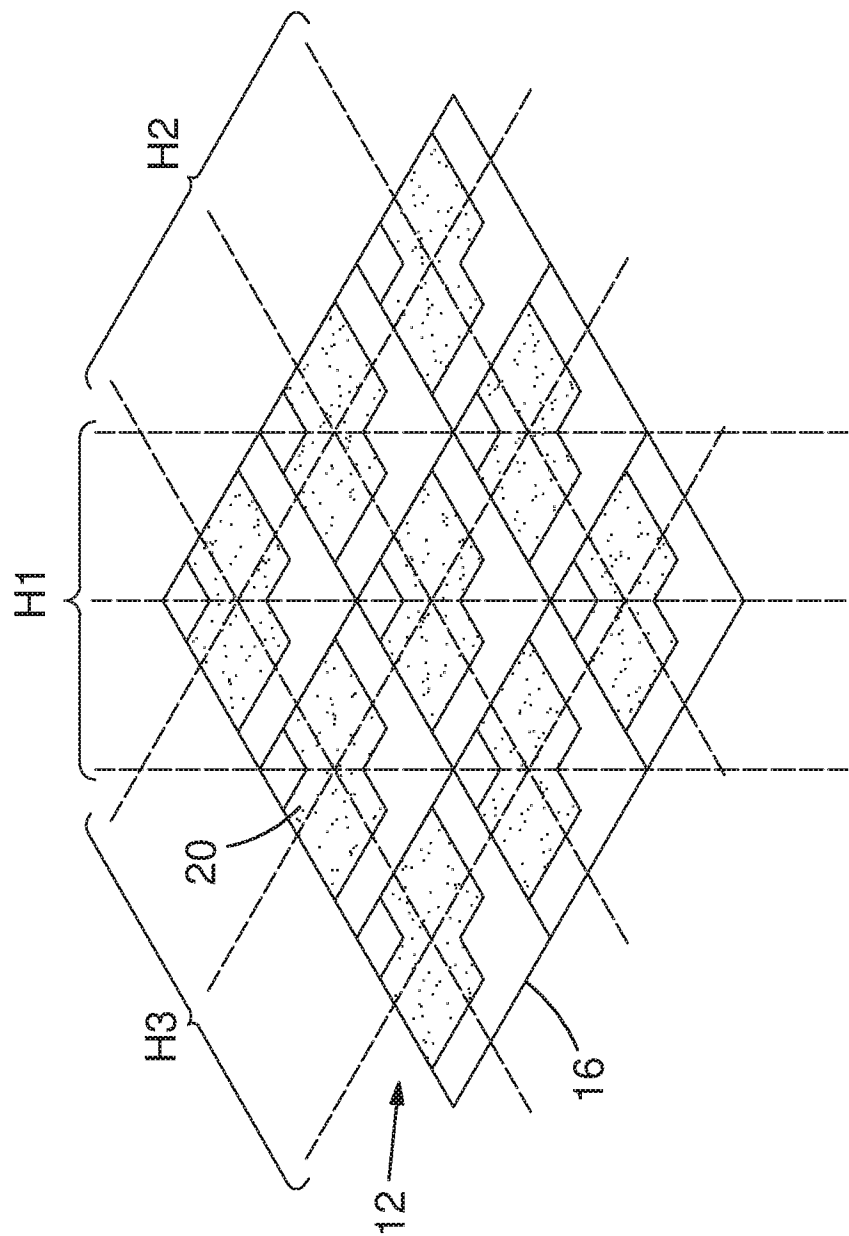


FIG.5

GRAPH OF NOTCH WIDTH (NORMALISED TO LATTICE CONSTANT) v STE ORDERS

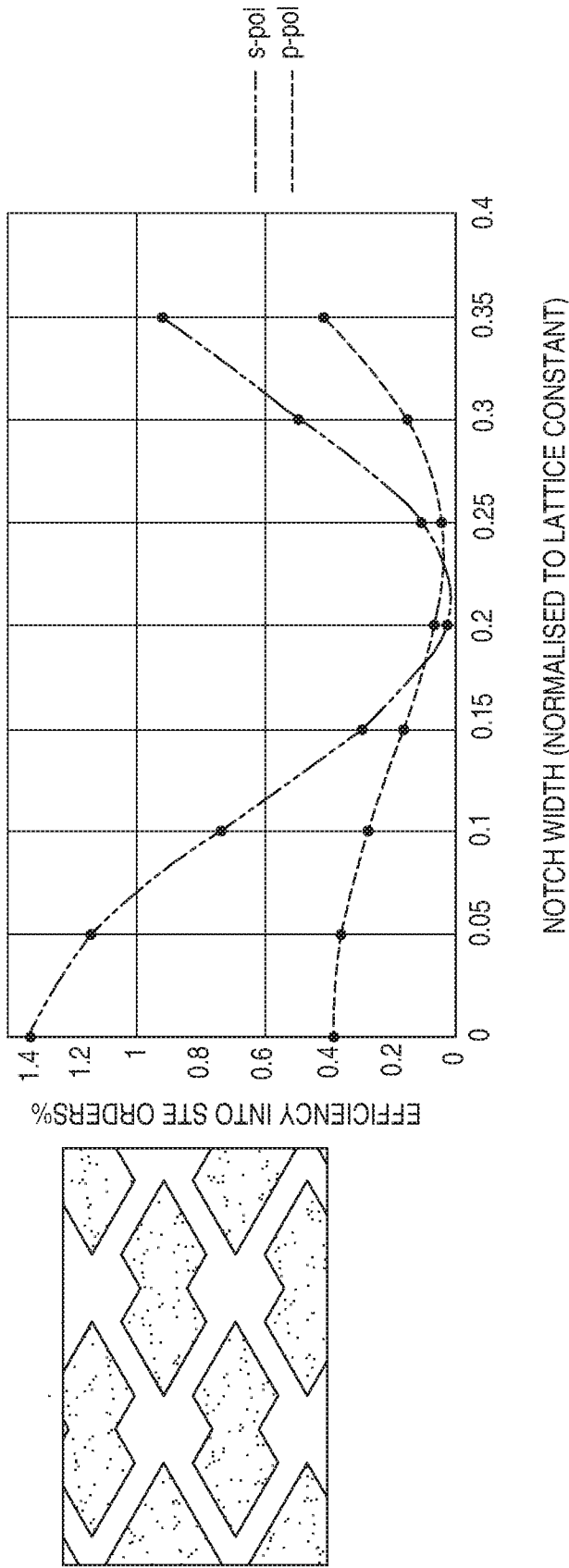


FIG.6

FLAT SIDED 'LENGTH' v STE FOR S AND P POL AT 620NM

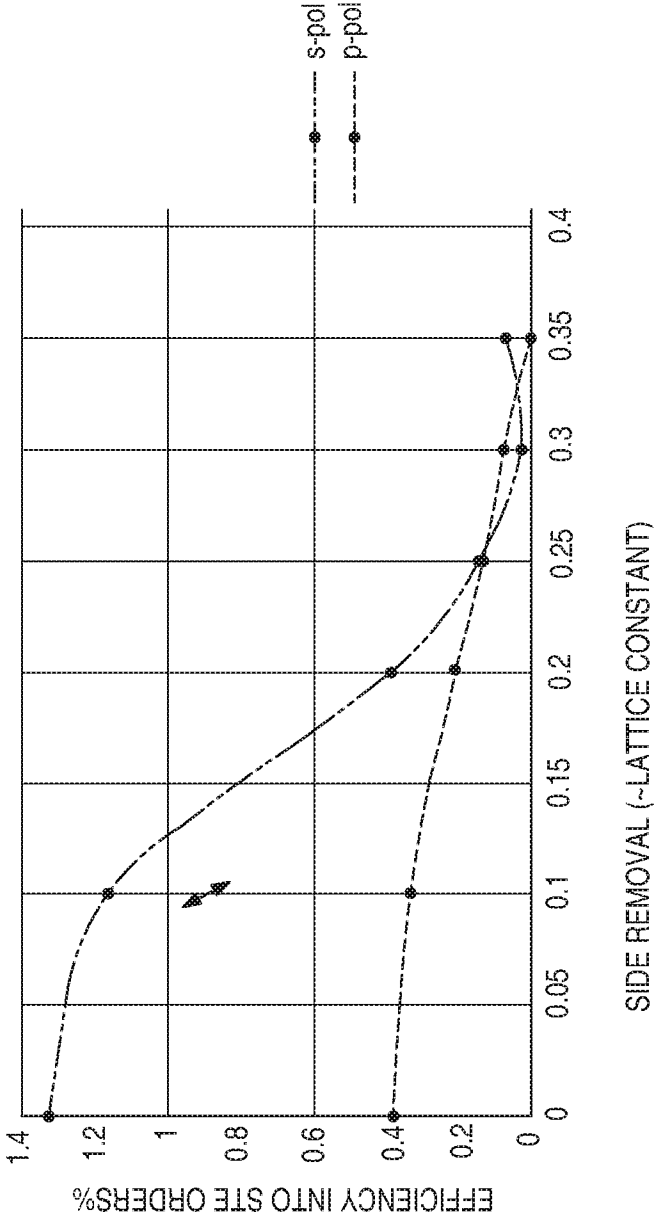


FIG.7