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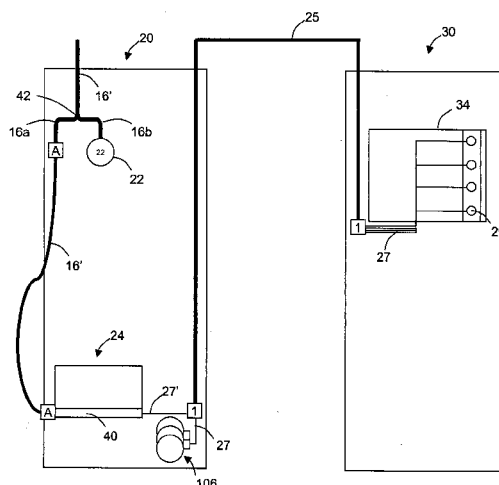


FIGURE 5

(57) Abstract: A method of providing an interconnection between a network and service equipment, comprising providing a network cable connected to the network, breaking out the network cable to expose a plurality of network fibres contained within the network cable, identifying one of the plurality of network fibres requiring interconnection with the service rack, providing an equipment fibre connected to the service equipment, making an interconnection between the identified one of the network fibres and the equipment fibre, storing the interconnected fibres in an interconnected fibre store, and - storing at least some of the remaining un-interconnected network fibres at a store remote from the interconnected fibre store.

EXCHANGE CABLING METHOD AND APPARATUS

This invention relates to apparatus and methods relating to cabling within telecommunications exchanges, particularly but not limited to the accommodation or
5 routing of cables which interconnect electronic equipment located within the exchange, with a telecommunications network external to the exchange.

Optical fibre is commonly deployed in the trunk parts of networks, and this use is gradually extending into the access network, with fibre-to-the premises (FTTP) bringing
10 an optical connection all the way to end user customers. One method of serving FTTP customers is by way of a passive optical network (PON), a point-to-multipoint system using an unpowered optical splitter which links a number (commonly 32 to 128) of customers to a telecommunications exchange via a single optical fibre.

15 A typical exchange in the UK can serve up to a large number of customers, which can range from a few hundred to tens of thousands or even more, and the building itself may be a vast space over a number of floors. The building would house a large variety and quantity of electronic and other equipment, which provide services required by customers. Such equipment is typically located on equipment racks, and are
20 interconnected to each other in a complex network, as well as to and from customer premises via the external telecommunications network.

This task of carrying the cables in a manner allowing for any piece of equipment to interconnect with any other piece of equipment within the exchange premises is
25 presently carried out by apparatus sometimes known as flexibility racks. The term "interconnection" in this description includes the creation of an interconnection or link or connection by splicing fibres together, or by use of a mechanical or other connector. The terms "cable" and "fibre" denote one and or the other as the context permits. The "flexibility" function arises from their serving as junction or distribution points within the
30 exchange so that a fibre or cable of the external network entering (or exiting) the building can be interconnected to a piece of equipment regardless of where the equipment is located.

In modern exchanges, these racks carry almost exclusively optical fibre, and so are
35 termed optical flexibility, or fibre, racks (OFRs). The racks are typically deployed in

pairs forming a "flexibility suite". The flexibility suite comprises a network or line ("L") side rack which receives the network cables and fibres. The other rack in the pair is the exchange or equipment ("E") side receives fibre travelling to and from typically a single equipment rack. The racks include numbers of fibre trays which accommodate and protect the join of spliced fibres. For those L and E side fibres which need interconnection, the respective ends are spliced on trays of the respective racks to a separate jumper or patch cord serving as an intermediary between the two racks which completes the link between the network fibre and the fibre of the equipment rack.

Fibres arriving at the flexibility suite from the network and the equipment rack may arrive singly (e.g. in a point-to-point connection), although it is more and common for them to arrive in a cable which contains a number of individual fibres. For example, each cable optical fibre (COF) used with the flexibility racks contains 144 individual optical fibres. Specifically, the COF comprises a bundle of 12 cable elements, each of which in turn contains 12 fibres. Where not all the fibres of a particular COF require interconnection, those not requiring interconnection are designated and spliced on a fibre tray on the E or L side racks (depending on which side the cables and fibres are arriving from). The unused fibre is thus stored until it is needed for interconnecting by jumpering as described above.

Such conventional methods are commonly known and described in e.g. "Modular Optical Plant for Access Network: Operational Aspects" by D. Brewer et. al (Proc. EFOC & N (Technology and Infrastructure) 1995, at pages 164-167).

With the sheer numbers of customers served by the exchange and the quantity of equipment involved, it can be appreciated that massive amounts of cabling is involved. Work on the fibres include the creation of new interconnections, the re-routing of existing interconnections, the breaking of interconnections which are no longer needed, the identification of what a particular cable interconnects, and so on. Such work with large numbers of cables snaking in all directions throughout the exchange building is very likely to generally give rise to logistical and other problems over time. These problems are brought on and exacerbated by customer number growth, equipment replacement and upgrading, and other such changes within the exchange and in the external network leading to the customer premises.

Current OFRs, such as the exchange racks manufactured by Prysmian S.p.A., have the capacity to accommodate hundreds of fibres in trays, and great numbers of these racks are deployed in exchange buildings both to accommodate and to route fibres and cables. They tend however, to become fully populated quickly, due in part to the need to store unused (i.e. unpatched) fibres on the racks. Over time, severe congestion can occur at the OFRs, which hampers the identification and other dealings with the fibres. It is the experience of the applicants that such unused fibres spliced in fibre trays in the racks often end up never being used. There are many reasons for this: for example, if the customer served by a particular L side fibre never wants a particular service, the need to interconnect that fibre to the relevant equipment rack never arises. In the situation of an overcrowded OFR or exchange, it may be that the fibres requiring interconnection simply cannot be accurately identified or located, and so the safest and most expedient solution is simply to provide another L and E side fibre for interconnection, which of course adds to the congestion.

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A solution to the problems raised by cable and fibre overcrowding in the exchange would be desirable.

The method of interconnecting fibres by splicing demands considerable expertise and precision. This already-difficult task is impeded if the engineer has to work in a large, rigid tangle of cables, making the task even more time-consuming and complicated. Another problem with fibre overcrowding at OFRs is that cables and fibres are routed across each other in close proximity, often directly onto each other, so that fibres located under the weight of others above it suffer an increased risk of circuit failure through optical loss and fibre breakage. This problem becomes even more critical as higher bit rate systems are employed, as these tend to be more sensitive to increases in optical loss.

Another determinant of transmission quality is the number of interconnections introduced into the optical link between its transmission and reception ends. Each interconnection introduced into the link, whether it takes the form of a splice, using a connector or otherwise, degrades the quality of the optical transmission across that link. This is the case even if the interconnection is made well. Current exchange cabling methods in exchanges typically involve the interconnection of several lengths of optical fibre interconnected by means of connectors and/or splices. It is rare for a link

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between the CCJ and an equipment rack to contain fewer than 12 interconnections. Typically, the further the location of a piece of service equipment in the exchange from the incoming fibre of the network, the longer the optical link path, and the greater the number of interconnections in that link. This is because a longer path involves the passing of the link through a greater number of OFR suites which route the link to its destination equipment rack, and the link is spliced twice at each OFR suite: once on each rack making up the suite.

A solution to reduce the number of interconnections required to link a fibre of the external network, to a particular piece of service equipment within the exchange, would be desirable.

A related issue is the growth in the types of services which have become available, which require different equipment types. For example, a PON system serves a number of customer (e.g. 32) per fibre, so the equipment providing this service must include multiplexing in the form of e.g. a wavelength-division multiplexing (WDM). In the current flexibility systems, the splice trays on which the fibres are spliced pre-dedicates the fibres to a certain type of service. Where a particular fibre is to be interconnected to PON service equipment and the splice tray does not support WDM, that splice will have to be broken and the fibre re-routed to another tray, or even another rack, which is WDM-capable.

A solution to provide flexibility in the provisioning of splice trays suitable to a required service, would be desirable.

In a first aspect, the present invention provides a method of providing an interconnection between a network and service equipment, comprising

- providing a network cable associated with the network,
- breaking out the network cable to expose a plurality of network fibres contained within the network cable,
- selecting one of the plurality of network fibres requiring interconnection with the service rack,
- providing an equipment fibre associated with the service equipment,
- making an interconnection between the network and the service equipment by splicing the selected one of the network fibres and the equipment fibre,

- storing the spliced fibres in a spliced fibre store, and
- storing at least some of the remaining un-spliced network fibres at an unspliced store remote from the spliced fibre store.

5 An exemplary method of the invention involves the deferment of splicing fibres which do not (yet) require interconnection to service equipment. The storage of such unused and unspliced fibre is provided in a location away from the live, spliced, fibre storage section i.e. the shelf of trays (comprising both splice trays and storage trays). In other words, fibres are brought to the shelves and spliced only when they are needed to form
10 an interconnection, which can be performed using mechanical connectors although splices are the preferred alternative. Delaying the occupation of valuable shelf and fibre tray space in this way reduces the amount of "dead" shelf space occupied by fibre which does not (yet, if ever) require interconnection, thus addressing the issue of cable crowding within the exchange, particularly at the fibre racks. This can be contrasted
15 with the prior art method of unnecessarily storing L and E side fibres in the shelves, to form an almost-complete link which may never be needed.

Preferred embodiments of the method involve the use of a particular type of COF multi-fibre L side cable, wherein the fibres within are sheathed in intermediate cable
20 elements, as will be described in greater detail below.

In a second aspect, the present invention provides a telecommunications exchange including an interconnection between a network and service equipment, provided by the method of the invention.

25 In a third aspect, the present invention provides apparatus for accommodating an interconnection between a network and service equipment, comprising

- network cable receiving means for receiving a network cable of the network, each network cable including a plurality of network fibres,
- 30 - service equipment fibre receiving means for receiving a service equipment fibre of the service equipment,
- a spliced fibre store for storing spliced fibres comprising the service equipment fibre spliced with a selected one of the plurality of network fibres, and
- a un-spliced network fibre store for storing unselected ones of the plurality of
35 network fibres remotely from the spliced fibre store.

A fibre rack is described, which permits storage of spliced (live) and unspliced (unused) fibre at different places within the rack. Unused fibres are, in preferred embodiments of the rack of the invention, not spliced, but coiled up and kept away from the shelves of the fibre trays in which spliced fibres are retained. This arrangement not only keeps shelf and tray space free for live fibres, but also keeps the working area around the shelves free from cables and fibres trailing and causing obstructions.

In preferred embodiments, the unused fibre storage area on the L side is remote from not only the fibre trays, but also from the shelves of which the trays are a part. As will be described below, one implementation of the invention adopted by the applicants involves storing a small number of fibres in trays on the shelves even though they are unused and unspliced. This can be encompassed within the basic inventive concept which is to reduce (and not necessarily eliminate) the numbers of fibres which are not in use at the rack.

In a further aspect, the present invention provides a system for accommodating an interconnection between a network and service equipment, comprising

- network cable receiving means for receiving a network cable of the network, each network cable including a plurality of network fibres,
- service equipment fibre receiving means for receiving a service equipment fibre of the service equipment,
- a spliced fibre store for storing spliced fibres comprising the service equipment fibre spliced with a selected one of the plurality of network fibres, and
- an un-spliced network fibre store for storing unselected ones of the plurality of network fibres remotely from the spliced fibre store.

In this aspect, an installation e.g. in an exchange covers the possibility that storage of unused fibres from the L and/or the E sides of the exchange, is located not at the flexibility fibre rack, but at another location within the exchange, so long as it is away from the shelves containing the splices of interconnected fibres.

In a further aspect, there is provided a shelf for use with telecommunications exchange routing apparatus for accommodating an interconnection between a network and service equipment, comprising

- a splice tray for receiving a spliced service equipment fibre of the service equipment being spliced to a network fibre of the network, and
- an unused service fibre store for storing unspliced service equipment fibre remotely from the splice tray.

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An exchange rack according to invention is here referred to as an optical consolidation rack (OCR) as the rack is capable of "consolidating" the availability of a number – potentially all – the telecommunication services offered to the customer by the exchange, as further explained below. In one embodiment, it includes a shelf, preferably a number of shelves which make up a sub-rack. The shelves are fibre trays which accommodate fibre from both the L side and the E side. On the E side, only spliced fibres are accommodated on the trays on the shelf. Thus on the E side, all fibres which are not in use are stored away from the trays. In one embodiment (as described below), they may be stored on the shelf itself, but not in a tray. In other

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embodiments, such unused E side fibres may be stored at a location completely remote to the shelf, sub-rack, or even the OCR.

Embodiments of the invention will now be described by way of example only with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

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Figures 1A and 1B are a schematic views of an exchange including OFRs according to the prior art;

Figure 2A depicts components making up a cable of the network, and Figure 2B depicts a cable of an equipment rack;

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Figure 3 is a schematic view of a an OCR of the invention, depicted with the cable chamber joint (CCJ) and two equipment racks;

Figures 4A and 4B depict the creation of an interconnection between the network and an equipment rack at the OCR;

Figure 5 depicts in more detail the interconnection created at the OCR;

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Figure 6 is a schematic view of the storage of cables and fibres within the OCR;

Figure 7A shows a shelf of fibre trays of an OCR;

Figure 7B shows a splice tray carrier;

Figure 7C shows a sub-rack of shelves of an OCR

Figure 7D depicts E side fibre management at the sub-rack;

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Figures 8A to 8C depict fibre and cable storage and management at the OCR; and

Figure 9 depicts an exchange layout including an number of OCRs.

Figures 1A and 1B is a schematic view of a typical layout of an exchange installation of the prior art, which includes a first flexibility suite (2) comprising a pair of optical flexibility racks (OFR) within an exchange building. In Figure 1A, an incoming fibre or cable (4) from a cable chamber joint (CCJ) (6) is interconnected to a rack of service equipment (10) via a pair of intermediate flexibility suites (8) by means of spliced jumper cables or patch cords (5a) which create a link along a first fibre path (4a) to the service equipment (10). The CCJ accommodates external network cables and fibres. For the avoidance of doubt, an incoming fibre cable includes any fibre or cable from the external telecommunications network or served clients which require connection to the exchange or equipment within the exchange.

The CCJ is typically located within the exchange building (e.g. in the exchange basement), although this need not be the case. The CCJ represents the L side of the exchange for purposes of fibre routing within the exchange so that fibre splice trays, racks, cables, cable elements, fibres, and the like which "face" the CCJ are said to be on the L side. In a similar way, the equipment rack represents the E side.

The cabling used in exchanges typically comprise COF which as described above, comprises a number of individual fibres. The cable arriving at the first flexibility rack (2) is "broken out" by cutting away a section of an extreme end of the outer COF cable sheath, so that the fibre elements and individual fibres within are exposed. Each individual fibre is then allocated to and spliced on splice tray at the L side rack of the flexibility suite (2). As noted above the splice trays of the prior art serves to store a fibre whether it is interconnected through to an equipment rack, or not. In other words, each of the e.g. 144 fibres in the broken out COF is spliced, and occupies a splice tray, whether it is transmitting or not.

In Figure 1A, the link represented by (4a) is considered to be live as it is patched through to the equipment rack, in contrast to incomplete link (4b), which is merely spliced (but not patched). One splice tray is used per fibre, as this segregates the fibres from each other and prevents "intervention" problems which arise from the possibility of an engineer disrupting a first fibre while working on a second fibre where such fibres are stored together and not segregated from each other. Such "single

circuit" splice trays function is primarily to protect the fragile splice portion of two fibres which have been spliced together, by securely locating the spliced fibre and splice protection sleeve within a splice holder. The splice trays also typically include positive bend management means to hold the fibre in the tray, to avoid overbending the optical fibre in view of its minimum bend radius.

After the fibres have been spliced at the L and E side rack pairs, the link requiring interconnection is created by using a jumper or a patch cord (5a) at each rack (2, 8) on the path to the equipment rack (10), which completes the link (4a) from the CCJ (6) to the equipment rack. Unused fibres (e.g. 4b) are similarly spliced and stored in splice trays but not interconnected with jumpers. Thus the path (4b) is complete save that it is not patched through, and only requires the addition of jumper cables at each OFR suite to complete the circuit.

The OFR suites of the prior art are considered to provide "flexibility" of circuit connection within the exchange insofar that they provide routing or junctioning options. Referring to Figures 1A and 1B as an example, the incoming fibre (4) may be routed, depending on need, to equipment racks (10) or (12) (via fibre links (4a or 4b)) which may be located on e.g. on different floors of the exchange. Referring now to Figure 1B, if and when the time comes for the link with the incoming fibre to be re-routed, e.g. from equipment rack (10) to equipment rack (12), the splice on the fibre splice tray of the E side rack of suite (2) between the jumper or patch cord (5a, 5b) and fibre (4a) is broken, so that a new patch cord splice can be created to connect the incoming fibre (4) to the fibre (4b), the ends of which are sitting waiting in splice trays in the racks of OFR suite (8).

Thus the route to the second equipment rack (12) is already defined on "Day 1" (i.e. upon the initial provisioning or installation of the rack, etc., as appropriate within the context of the description) owing to the pre-dedication of the fibre path (4b) between OFR suites leading to the equipment (12). This is so even though it is not or never used, as the link is incomplete only due to the absence of jumpers or patch cords (5a). This arrangement allows for the interconnection to be made between the incoming fibre and the second equipment rack (4) to be flexibly configured by re-directing the patch cord so that it takes route (4b) instead of (4a).

It can be appreciated that even though it is not known on "Day 1" (when the COF cables are broken out at the suites) what services are required, and to what extent, nonetheless all the fibres from the broken out COFs are spliced and taking up a splice trays, whether they are live or unused, whether it is known that they will be needed, if
5 ever, or not. In other words, large numbers of single circuit splice trays are committed, and large numbers of splices made for fibres, regardless of whether they will ever be used.

As noted above, this could, and does, lead to large amounts of unused fibre being
10 stored on fibre splice trays at OFR suites, which are doing nothing more than taking up valuable tray and rack space, and not optimally located should they be required for service. Considerable time and skilled effort is also involved in the creation of splices for such unused fibres. A direct consequence of this is congestion at OFR suites and in the exchange, where the amount of cabling and racks used seldom reflects
15 anywhere near the level of actual transmission activity occurring, owing to the poor utilisation of the fibre, the racks, and other supporting exchange infrastructure. This in turn gives rise to all the problems associated with overcrowding in the exchange, in addition to the simple sheer logistical and other waste of providing and accommodating fibre which may never be used and indeed may be impeding the use and performance
20 of those fibres and equipment which are live and in deployment.

These unused fibres pointlessly occupying splice tray space on the prior art racks are also often difficult, if not impossible, to identify. This is because of the need for a separate system of record-keeping, to note the fibres' existence and identity. Even if
25 records are well-kept at the start, it is likely that over time, a fully-populated flexibility suite of e.g. Figure 1A may become so crowded that a particular fibre wanted for splicing cannot be found or even seen, even if it is known to be located at a particular rack.

30 The cables used for creating the interconnection between a selected equipment rack and the external network are shown in Figures 2A and 2B. Figure 2A depicts a COF201 (14) which is one possible choice as cabling for use within an exchange. As noted above, a COF contains a number of individual fibres. The COF201 contains 12 intermediate cable elements (16) (three are shown for illustration in Figure 3A), each
35 containing 12 individual fibres (17). Each COF201 cable thus contains a total of 144

individual fibres. The skilled person would appreciate that the exchange cabling and fibre may comprise a cable having any number of individual fibres therein, and include intermediate sheathing or not, in any arrangement or number. It is possible also that the network cable comprise a single fibre, as might be the case in a point-to-point installation. The COF201 is suitable for L side use; it is also possible for E side use for cabling an equipment rack to a rack.

Figure 2B shows a specialised version of a multi-fibre cable suitable for E side use (25). This comprises a bundle of individual fibres (27) which are encased in a cable sheath (26). The fibres terminate in a mechanical connector (29) at one end of the cable, and serve as pre-connectorised tails so that they may be connected to e.g. a line card (34) of an equipment rack without need for splicing. The other end of the fibre remains unconnectorised for splicing. Such a cable is known as a "Hydra" cable, and in the present example, comprises e.g. four individual fibres in a bundle as shown in Figure 3B. Of course, the E side cabling can comprise any number of fibres, including just one, and may or may not be connectorised at one or both ends. As noted above, it is also possible to use a COF as an E side cable.

Figure 3 shows a flexibility rack (20) according to the invention. As it is configured to flexibly accept interconnections to and from a number of different equipment rack types conforming to various standards and systems as described below, the applicants refer to it as an "optical consolidation rack" (OCR) although it will be appreciated that the aspect of "consolidation" does not limit the inventive concept described herein. As shown, the OCR comprises a single rack, in contrast with the pair of racks making up the OFR flexibility suites of the prior art. It will be recalled that the flexibility jumpers (5a, 5b) of the prior art OFR suites of Figures 1A and 1B are key to the creation of fibre links using pre-spliced fibres, cable routing and flexibility of circuit connection within the exchange. In contrast, no patching is required in the OCR to create interconnections and to obtain routing. This is because the paths to and from particular equipment racks are not pre-provided (as was the case of fibre (4b) discussed against Figure 1A), but formed only on demand. Furthermore, fibres which are not live and in use are not spliced at the rack. Thus no patching using jumpers are required.

At its most basic, the OCR (20) comprises accommodation for spliced fibres creating links (without patching) between the CCJ and transmission equipment, where the

splice, fibre route and link configuration are created only when the need for the link is identified. In this sense, the exchange cabling method is reactive to need, unlike the current system. Preferably, the OCR includes an unused fibre store (22) for accommodating unused (and unspliced) fibres from the network and transmission equipment.

There is also provided sub-racks (24) of fibre trays as shown in Figure 3. Unlike the OFR suites or racks of the prior art, the OCR fibre trays are, on "Day 1", not fully-fledged splice trays, but are simply configured for the storage of optical fibre. In other words, these fibre trays would not, from the start, include a splice holder to accommodate a splice protection sleeve. Instead, something which may be more appropriately thought of as a fibre storage tray is provided in the sub-racks, which allow for fibre storage and management, but not for splice protection. This "Day 1" fibre storage tray is configured to accept e.g. an insert or a carrier which allows the tray to additionally protect a splice housed within or on the tray, as will be described further below. For the purposes of this description, the term "tray" or "fibre tray" includes references to either the storage or splice protection function of the tray, or both, as is appropriate in the context of the description.

The function and structure of these components shown in Figure 3 will be described more fully below. For now, it suffices to note that in one embodiment, the OCR's primary function is to provide storage and protection to individual fibres, whether spliced (live) or unspliced (unused), arriving to and from the network and the equipment racks. Some of these fibres will be interconnected (e.g. by splicing) on "Day 1", and routed to a splice tray on a shelf; others which are not used on "Day 1" are not spliced, but stored for later use. In preferred embodiments, these unused fibres are routed to and stored in dedicated storage within the OCR so as not to occupy space in a shelf (40), but be in a position to be retrievable and become available for use at some point in the future.

On the L side, the OCR functions to accept fibres or cables from a joint (7) of the CCJ (6), and also receives and accommodate E side fibre cables and fibres to and from various equipment racks (30, 32). Advantageously, the equipment racks can carry a variety of equipment types, or else the OCR is able to accommodate fibres arriving from a variety of equipment racks providing a variety of services of e.g. the types

described below. For this reason, the OCR is said to "consolidate" within a single rack, a number of services available to customers in the form of connections to more than one of the service equipment types. For example, a gigabit passive optical network (GPON) equipment rack can include optical line termination (OLT) means, which
5 communicates with a number of end customers premises via a passive splitter as noted above. Other racks could carry equipment for the next generation networks (NGN) such as a F-IRS (Fibre Integrated Reception Services) rack, and point-to-point services (i.e. those not carried on a PON). In the example shown in Figure 3, two equipment rack types are shown to be provided, namely a GPON rack (30) and an
10 NGN rack (32). E side fibres to and from the OCR are interconnected to line cards (34) on the equipment racks.

Figures 4A and 4B show how an interconnection is made at the OCR (20) between a fibre of the external network and the GPON rack (30). In the scenario depicted in
15 Figures 4A and 4B, only one individual fibre needs to be interconnected to the GPON rack (30). The process begins as shown in Figure 4A, where a COF201 cable (14) is led from a joint (7) of the CCJ (6) to the OCR (20) in response to a need for interconnection. There, the outer sheath (15) of the COF201 (20) is cut to breakout the intermediate cable elements (16 in Figure 2A). As only one fibre is to be spliced, the
20 COF201 cable element containing that fibre is identified, and the individual fibres (17) of only that cable element is in turn broken out of its sheathing.

Each cable element of the COF201 contains 12 individual fibres. The applicants have adopted the practice of managing fibres thus broken out, by dividing them into two
25 groups of six fibres each. Assuming that the network fibre that needs to be spliced belongs to the first group, all six of the fibres in this first cable element group are brought down to a shelf (40) comprising six fibre trays in one of the sub-racks (24) at the OCR. Each of the six individual fibres is designated its own tray within the shelf: those five fibres not requiring splicing are simply coiled up and stored in their basic
30 fibre trays, while the one to be interconnected is temporarily accommodated in its tray until the fibre from GPON rack is brought to the OCR, which is the next step in the process.

In a preferred embodiment, the fibres are guided along the route to the shelf, to
35 improve the organisation of the fibres vertically along the OCR. For example, there

could be provided, on "Day 1", routing tubes arranged to connect at the bottom end, to each of the trays of the OCR, through which broken-out fibres are threaded to reach the tray it is destined for. Each routing tube could be configured to accommodate, in this example, six fibres. In this implementation, a space is provided on "Day 1" between the upper end of the routing tubes and the fibre storage (22). This space is, over time, gradually populated by cross-connect tubes, which lead fibres as and when they are broken out, to their destination trays via the relevant routing tube serving the particular destination tray.

As shown in Figure 4B, in a preferred implementation a Hydra cable is connectorised by connectors (29) at the equipment rack (30) on its line cards (34) as shown in detail (31). The unconnectorised end of the Hydra cable (25) is brought from the equipment rack (30) to the OCR (20), specifically to the fibre tray on the shelf (40) of the sub-rack where the network fibre requiring interconnection has been brought to, and is waiting in a tray. The four fibres (27) of the Hydra cable are then broken out of their sheathing, and the selected one of the Hydra fibres then spliced to the waiting network fibre. Splicing creates the interconnection with a particular L side fibre (16) and a particular E side fibre (27). The spliced fibres are then stored in a fibre tray, which has been modified to include a splice tray to protect the delicate splice. The E side fibres (27) which are not spliced are stored as shown in detail (33) and which will be discussed further below.

Figure 5 shows in greater detail the manner of and means for creating an interconnection at the OCR. A cable element (16') from a broken-out COF201 is brought from the CCJ to the OCR. A first group (16a) and a second group (16b) of broken out fibres are formed. The groups are separated using e.g. a "Y"-shaped manifold (42) to direct the two groups to different parts of the rack. The first group (16a) of network fibres includes the one fibre which is to be spliced, which group is tagged for identification (e.g. "A"). All six fibres in this group (16a) are brought down to its designated shelf (40) of fibre trays; the one fibre requiring splicing is placed on a tray ready for splicing. The rest of the unused fibres of group (16a) are allocated basic fibre trays and are stored therein, in an unspliced state, until needed.

On the E side, the four fibres (27) of a Hydra cable (25) have been pre-connectorised to e.g. an OLT line card (31) on the GPON rack (30) at one end, and broken out to

expose the individual fibres at the OCR at the other end. The relevant Hydra fibre (27') is identified (e.g. "1") and brought to the fibre tray (40) in the shelf with the waiting L side fibre, and spliced. The fibre storage tray for the spliced fibres is then upgraded to include a splice tray carrier or receptacle, or otherwise to include a splice protection component.

The above describes how spliced (live) fibres are managed and stored. The management and storage of unspliced, unused fibres of the COF201 (from the L side) and the Hydra cable (from the E side) will now be described in connection with Figure 6.

Continuing to use the example above, it will be remembered that on the L side, only one of the 144 fibres from the COF201 was used. The remaining 143 fibres are unused and unspliced, and consists of:

- 132 of the unused network fibres, still sheathed in the remaining 11 cable elements which have not been broken out; and
- 11 unused network fibre elements remaining from those broken out of the 12th cable element (16'). As noted above, the fibres in this cable element have been managed into two groups (16a and 16b), which is an optional step to ease the management of a large number of fibres. Thus there remains five unused fibres in the first group (16a) (one having been spliced as described above), and six in the second group (16b).

Figure 6 is a schematic depiction of the unused fibre storage at the OCR. On the L side ("L") is shown a COF201 cable (14) which fibres (17, 16a, 16b) have been broken out from one of the 12 (only three shown) cable elements (16'). One (17') of the 144 fibres has been spliced (100) to its counterpart (27') from the Hydra cable (25) on the E side. The splice is stored in a fibre splice tray (102).

On the L side: the remaining cable elements (16) which fibres have not been broken out are stored in the unused network fibre storage area of the OCR (22 in e.g. Figures 2 and 6). Those unused fibres (16b) which have been broken out of a cable element in the second fibre group are also stored in the unused network fibre store (22). The unused fibres in the first fibre group (16a) have been brought down to the same shelf with the live fibre (17') - these are designated basic fibre trays (104) and are stored,

loosely-coiled, unspliced, until the time comes for them to be interconnected. If and when they are spliced, an insert is added to the trays that they are accommodated within, to protect the splice.

5 On the E side: only the fibre (27') of the Hydra cable (25) which is to be spliced is led to the splice tray (102). The remaining three which do need require splicing are stored as further described below against Figure 7C, in a separate area away from the shelf and fibre trays.

10 In the above example, the number of unused fibres residing on fibre trays is reduced to just 5, while in the prior art, an OFR suite would have had 143 fibre splice trays occupied by unused network fibre on the L side, and three trays with unused equipment fibres on the E side. The number of trays taken up by spliced L side and E side fibres is reduced to just one.

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The fact that no unused fibres are spliced, and that not all unused fibres are allocated a fibre tray, is not a trivial distinction from the prior art. The invention enables the implementation of a fundamentally different approach in the way and the means for cabling an exchange. In the OFR of the prior art, the idea was to pre-construct the fibre paths between the network and the equipment racks so that if interconnection was required, all that was needed was to patch the two sides of each OFR suite on the route between the equipment rack and the network. To achieve this, each and every fibre arriving at each side of the suite were allocated a rack whether they were to be spliced on "Day 1" or whether they were unused. As noted above, this led to the result of significant fibre wastage, high operational expenditure on splicing, and so on.

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The OCR of the present invention on the other hand, allows for interconnections to be made on an incremental basis, and only on demand. The exemplary OCR and method of creating interconnections described better matches supply to demand, so that routes and links are formed only when a customer requires provision of a particular service. The method and apparatus described herein, such as the use of particular cables, and methods to create two network fibre groupings (16a, 16b) from the network cable elements, etc., are adopted for convenience and for greater ease of management only. It can be appreciated that a system according to the invention can be implemented according to the invention so that only live links need to be interconnected, and occupy

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valuable fibre tray space in the sub-racks, while all unused network fibre is left un-interconnected and preferably stored separately away from the sub-racks, or else in a way which is less space-hungry and/or out of the way. As and when a fresh interconnection is to be made between another two fibres each from the two exchange sides, they can be retrieved from their storage areas, spliced or otherwise interconnected, and only then allocated a splice tray in which it is stored.

Various specific components of the OCR will now be discussed against the drawings in Figures 7 and 8.

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Figure 7A depicts a shelf (40) of six trays which are initially provisioned for the storage of unspliced fibre. The trays shown (46) sit in the recess (44) on the shelf, and are configured to accommodate and store a single unspliced (unused) fibre. Thus, they are the "basic" version of the tray, which provide only a nominal amount of bend management to prevent overbending of the optical fibres. A double-sided version of the tray (25) is also shown, which can accommodate two splices, one on each side of the tray. As and when the fibre sitting in the basic tray is to be spliced, a full splice tray carrier (47) is provided into the space on the shelf. Referring to Figure 7B, the splice tray can added to the basic tray (46) or it could replace the basic tray completely to occupy the space (44) on the shelf (40), depending on exact designs. The tray shown in Figure 7B includes a wavelength division multiplex (WDM) bay (49) which is suitable for use in a PON network. Fibres not intended for use in PON systems should be used with another splice tray type.

As the OCR is configured to accommodate interconnections to a wide variety of services (GPON, NGN, F-IRS and so on) which are not known on "Day 1", a modular solution allowing for basic trays to be modified or upgraded only when required, allows for different tray types to be used. This can be contrasted with prior art methods, where fibres are committed by splicing to a particular splice tray type on "Day 1". For example, an unused fibre which needs to be used in a PON system will need a splice tray of the type shown in Figure 7B; if it has already been spliced to a splice tray not including a WDM bay, this splice will need to be broken and re-made, with all the cost, time and effort that would be involved.

As discussed above, some of the used L side fibres are brought down to the shelf, but not spliced. By not providing facilities to accommodate a splice in the basic fibre trays, the risk that an engineer may splice an unused cable in error is removed.

5 Turning now to Figure 7C, it can be seen that a number of shelves (40) e.g. 12, make up a sub-rack (24). In one configuration (see e.g. Figure 3), an OCR is provided with a bank of eight sub-racks. Manifolds (49) are used for managing the bend of Hydra optical fibres, and these are located at the end of the rack from which the equipment cable (25) enters the shelves. Figure 7C shows in greater detail the storage space
10 (106) for four individual unused Hydra fibres, located at one of a shelf of trays. Unused Hydra fibres (27) are simply coiled in their storage space near the fibre trays, but not on them. Another view of the storage of E side unused fibre is shown in Figures 4B and 5, which depict the storage of three unused fibres (27) where the fourth (27') has been spliced.

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Figure 8A is an exploded view of some of the components, and the overall structure of, an OCR. Sub-racks (24) of trays are attached to the frame (50). Control of the bend radius of the E side optical fibre arriving at the rack is managed by a mandrel (52). As shown in greater detail in Figure 8B, L side fibre is led to the OCR in the form of
20 COF201 (14) which is eventually broken out; unused elements are guided by a manifold (42) to the unused network fibre storage containers (22).

Figure 8C shows a configuration of a bank of four OCRs (20), arranged back to back with a number of equipment racks (30, 32, etc.). Running along the top of the OCR
25 bank are the cable management components, comprising cable raceways (54), along which cables to and from the equipment racks are led into and from the OCRs.

Figure 9 shows an exemplary arrangement within a telecommunications exchange which includes a bank of OCRs of the invention. Spine cables (1) lead from the
30 external network into an exchange via one or more joints (7) in a CCJ (6). Some legacy connections can be led into the exchange via legacy OFR suites (3). The remaining external network cables are led to a bank of OCRs (20), each of which is designated to form interconnections with specific equipment rack types. In the example shown in Figure 9, OCRs (20a and 20b) are configured to communicate with
35 the GPON racks (30), while the rest are designated the NGN rack (32). One or other of

the groups of OCRs are also designated to interconnect with other rack types (36). COF201 cables (14) provide the connections between the CCJ and the OCRs, and the OCRs to various communication providers (38a to 38c) (in the context of unbundled local loop). Hydra cables (25) lead to and from equipment racks and OCRs.

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Following on from the adoption of the exemplary OCR and cabling method described, a variety of advantages can be achieved. These include:

- A reduction in exchange floor space requirement over the prior art OFR suites based on fibre circuit capacity, which is becoming a pressing issue with increasing numbers of customers driving the deployment of increasing amounts of fibre and cable, and equipment and other racks and infrastructure;
- Improved and easier record capture, e.g. by adoption of colour coding, numbering, bar-coding, RFID-tagging of the various elements and components such as of cables, cable elements, individual fibres, fibre trays, shelves, sub-racks, cable raceways, etc.;
- Deferment of implementation costs until demand exists for service provision by providing connections and links only on demand;
- All plant and cable can be more fully used over their planned lifetime;
- Provide a scalable solution to meet
 - both new build and full fibre deployment requirements, and
 - the requirements of a variety of exchange sizes;
- Reduction in numbers of fibre splices between the equipment rack port and the CCJ, compared to OFR suites of the prior which requires three or four splices at the least; and
- Jumper cables no longer necessary, so no jumper splicing required.

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The skilled person would appreciate that owing in part to the nature of the invention, many alternative implementations and configurations are possible, both in respect of the structure of the OCR, the arrangement within the exchange, and the method by which interconnections are made, the cabling is routed and so on. For example, unused network and equipment fibre need not be stored at the OCR itself, but at another location away from the rack - e.g. at dedicated storage areas within the exchange premises.

The methods and configurations as described above and in the drawings are for ease of description only and not meant to restrict the apparatus or methods to a particular arrangement or process in use. It will be apparent to the skilled person that various sequences and permutations on the methods and apparatus described are possible

5 within the scope of this invention as disclosed.

Claims:

1. A method of providing an interconnection between a network and service equipment, comprising
 - 5 - providing a network cable associated with the network,
 - breaking out the network cable to expose a plurality of network fibres contained within the network cable,
 - selecting one of the plurality of network fibres requiring interconnection with the service rack,
 - 10 - providing an equipment fibre associated with the service equipment,
 - making an interconnection between the network and the service equipment by splicing the selected one of the network fibres and the equipment fibre,
 - storing the spliced fibres in a spliced fibre store, and
 - storing at least some of the remaining un-spliced network fibres at an un-spliced fibre store remote from the spliced fibre store.
- 15 2. A method according to claim 1 including the step of providing an equipment cable comprising a plurality of equipment fibres, and wherein the step of making an interconnection between the network and the service equipment comprises selecting one of the plurality of equipment fibres of the equipment cable.
- 20 3. A method according to claim 2 further including the step of storing at least some of the remaining un-spliced equipment fibres at an un-spliced fibre storage site remote from the spliced fibre store.
- 25 4. A method according to any preceding claim wherein the network cable comprises a plurality of network cable elements which collectively comprise the plurality of network fibres, and wherein the step of breaking out the network cable comprises breaking out the network cable to expose the plurality of network cable elements, and further including the step of selecting one of the plurality of network cables to break out to expose the network fibre requiring interconnection with the service rack.
- 30 5. A method according to any preceding claim wherein the step of storing the spliced fibres in a spliced fibre store is performed at a shelf of a fibre rack.
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6. A method according to any preceding claim used for providing a plurality of interconnections between the network and the service equipment comprising iteration of the steps of the method as and when a further interconnection between the network and the service equipment is required.
7. A telecommunications exchange including an interconnection between a network and service equipment, provided by the method of any preceding claim.
8. Apparatus for accommodating an interconnection between a network and service equipment, comprising
- network cable receiving means for receiving a network cable of the network, each network cable including a plurality of network fibres,
 - service equipment fibre receiving means for receiving a service equipment fibre of the service equipment,
 - a spliced fibre store for storing spliced fibres comprising the service equipment fibre spliced with a selected one of the plurality of network fibres, and
 - a un-spliced network fibre store for storing unselected ones of the plurality of network fibres remotely from the spliced fibre store.
9. Apparatus according to claim 8 wherein the service equipment fibre receiving means is arranged to receive service equipment fibres of a plurality of service equipment.
10. Apparatus according to claim 8 wherein the service equipment fibre spliced with the selected network fibre is a selected one of a plurality contained in an equipment cable, and further including an un-spliced equipment fibre store for storing unselected ones of the plurality of equipment fibres remotely from the spliced fibre store.
11. Apparatus according to any one of claims 8 to 10 wherein the network cable comprises a plurality of network cable elements which collectively comprise the plurality of network fibres, and further including a network cable element store for storing those of the plurality of network cable elements not containing the selected one

of the plurality of network fibres, the network cable element store being located remotely from the spliced fibre store.

12. Apparatus according to any one of claims 8 to 11 wherein the spliced fibre store
5 comprises a shelf of splice trays.

13. A system for accommodating an interconnection between a network and service equipment, comprising

- 10 - network cable receiving means for receiving a network cable of the network, each network cable including a plurality of network fibres,
- service equipment fibre receiving means for receiving a service equipment fibre of the service equipment,
- a spliced fibre store for storing spliced fibres comprising the service equipment fibre spliced with a selected one of the plurality of network fibres, and
- 15 - an un-spliced network fibre store for storing unselected ones of the plurality of network fibres remotely from the spliced fibre store.

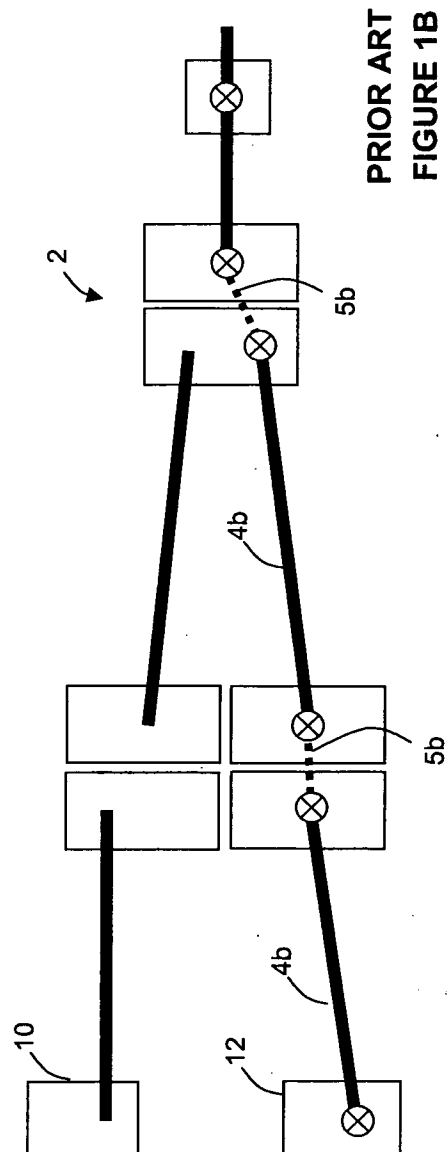
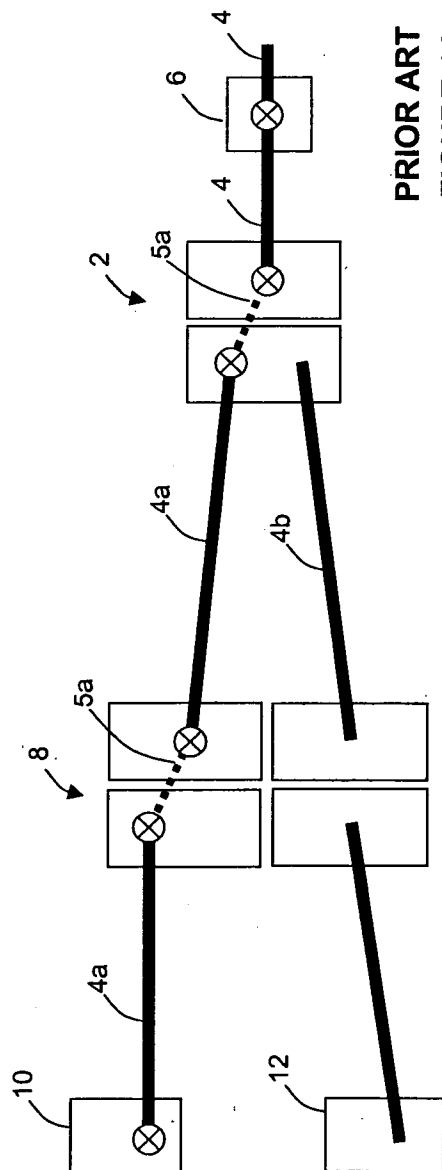
14. A system according to claim 13 wherein the service equipment fibre spliced with the selected network fibre is a selected one of a plurality contained in an equipment
20 cable, and further including an un-spliced equipment fibre store for storing unselected ones of the plurality of equipment fibres remotely from the spliced fibre store.

15. A system for accommodating an interconnection between a network and service equipment, comprising apparatus of any one of claims 8 to 12.

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16. A shelf for use with telecommunications exchange routing apparatus for accommodating an interconnection between a network and service equipment, comprising

- 30 - a splice tray for receiving a spliced service equipment fibre of the service equipment being spliced to a network fibre of the network, and
- an unused service fibre store for storing unspliced service equipment fibre remotely from the splice tray.



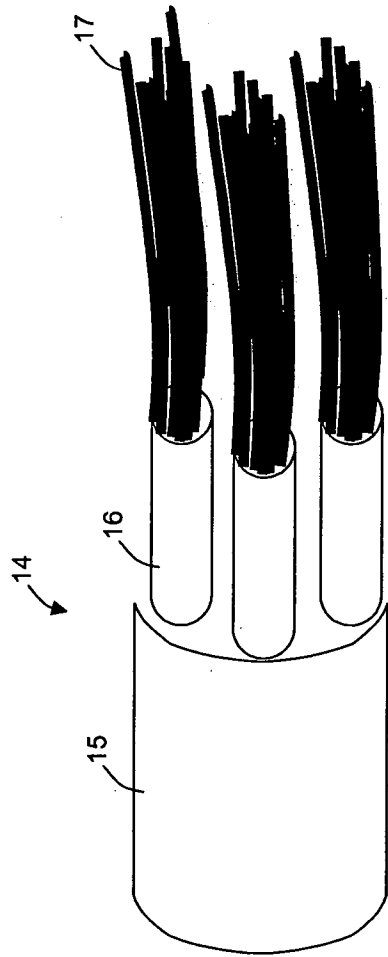


FIGURE 2A

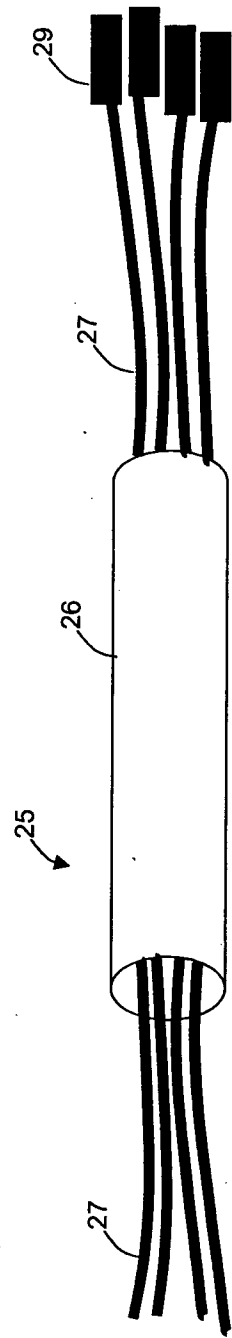


FIGURE 2B

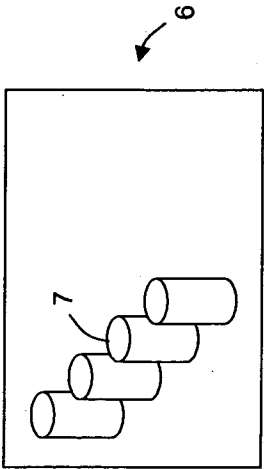
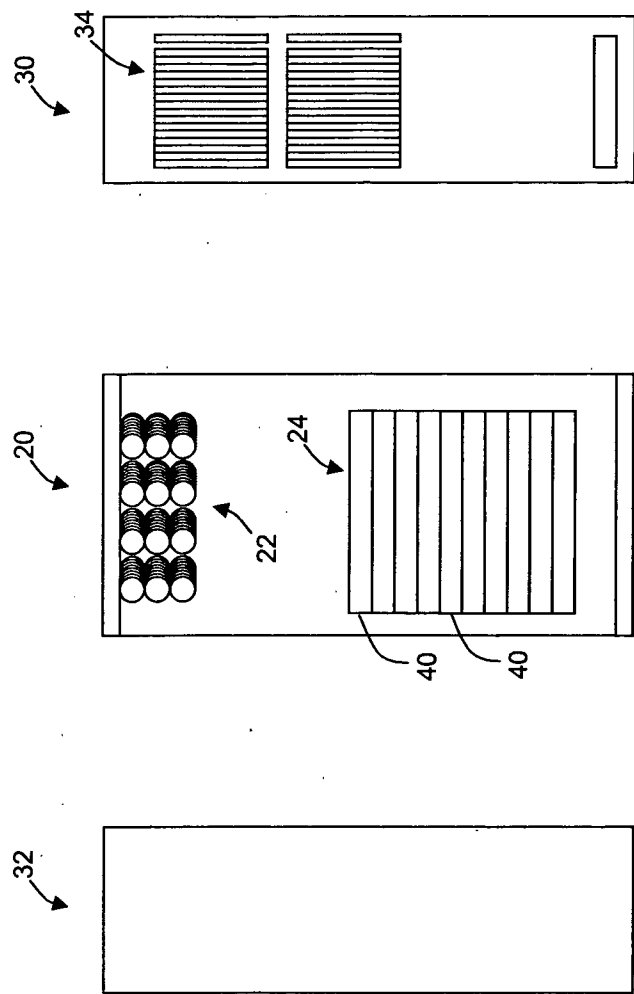


FIGURE 3

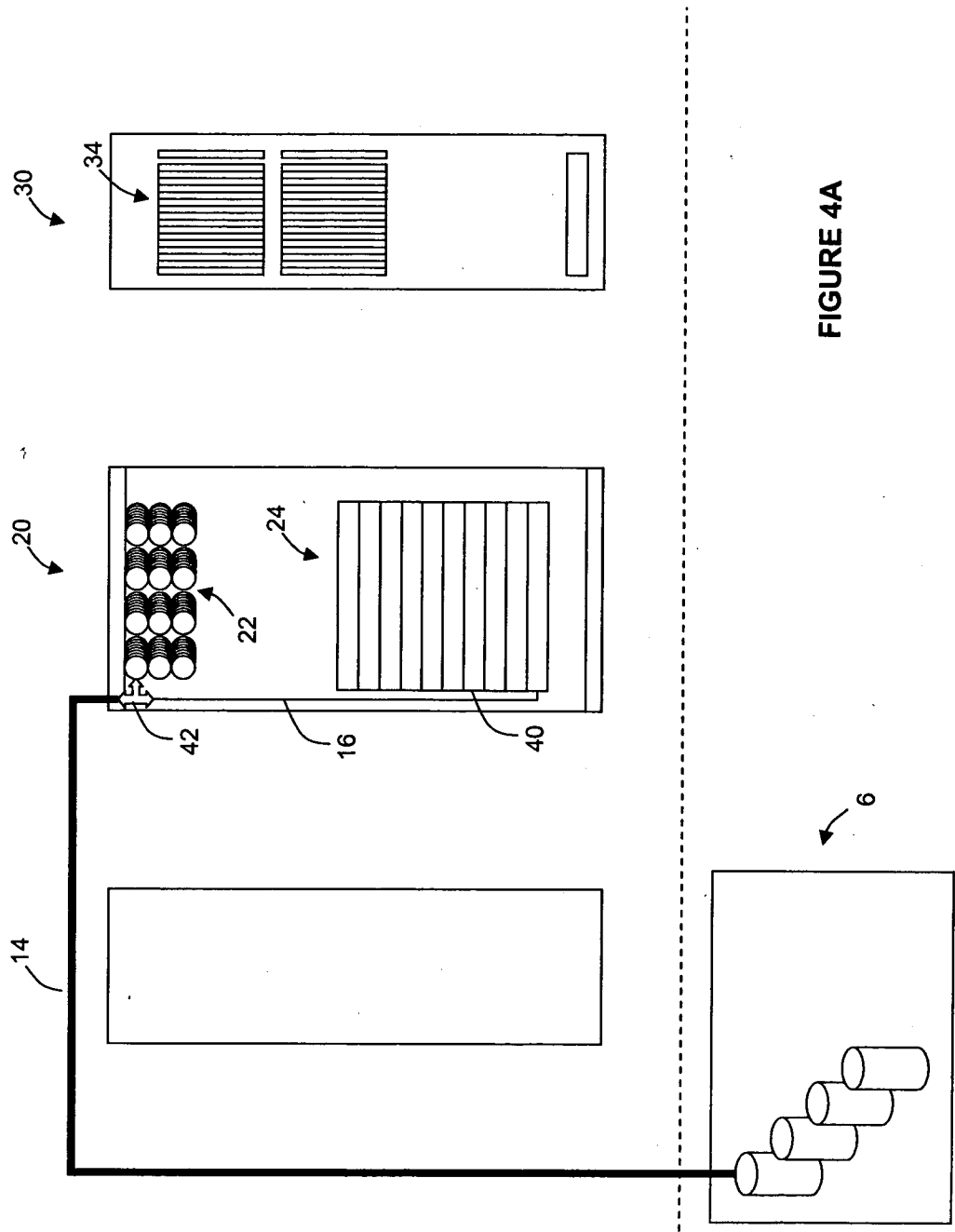


FIGURE 4A

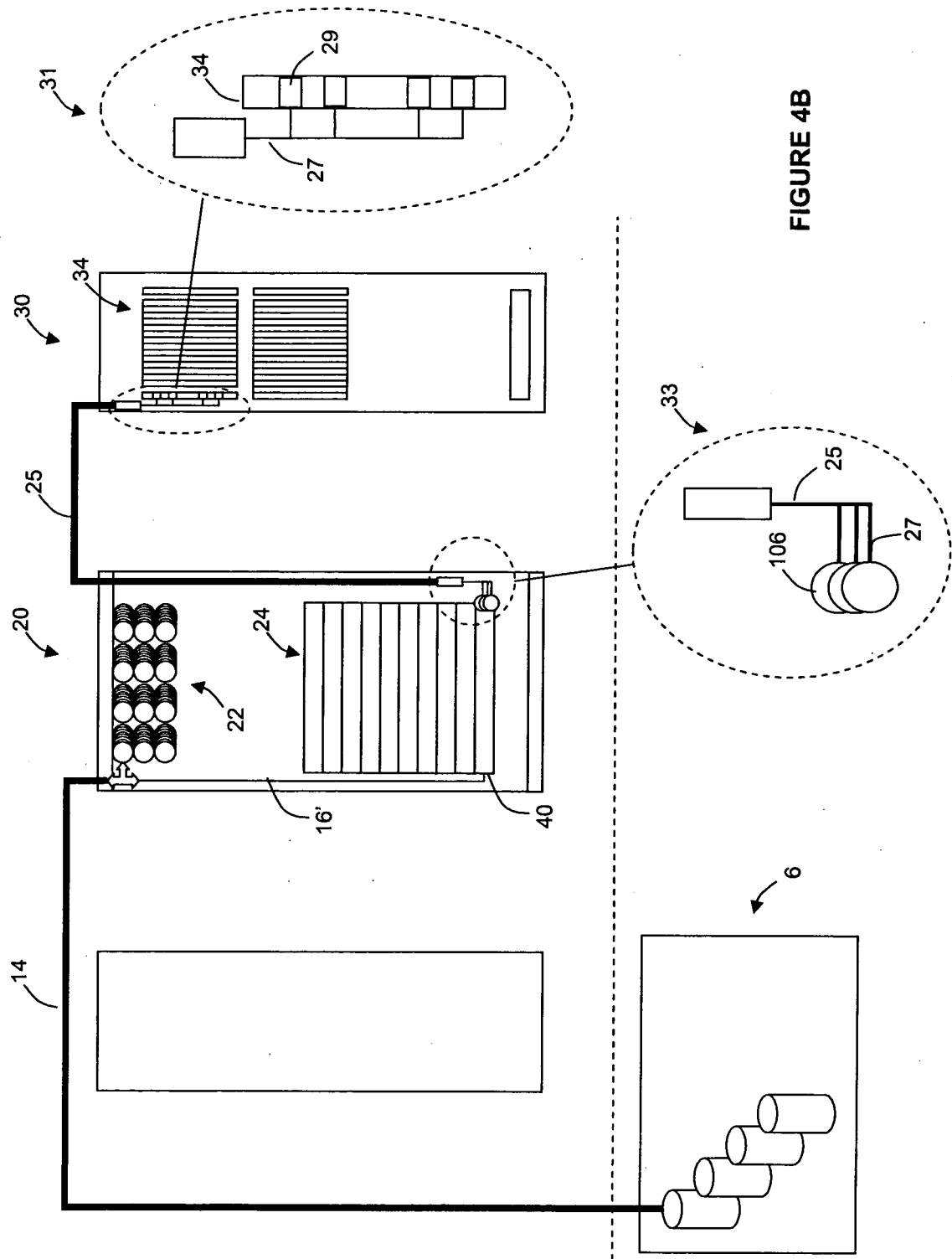
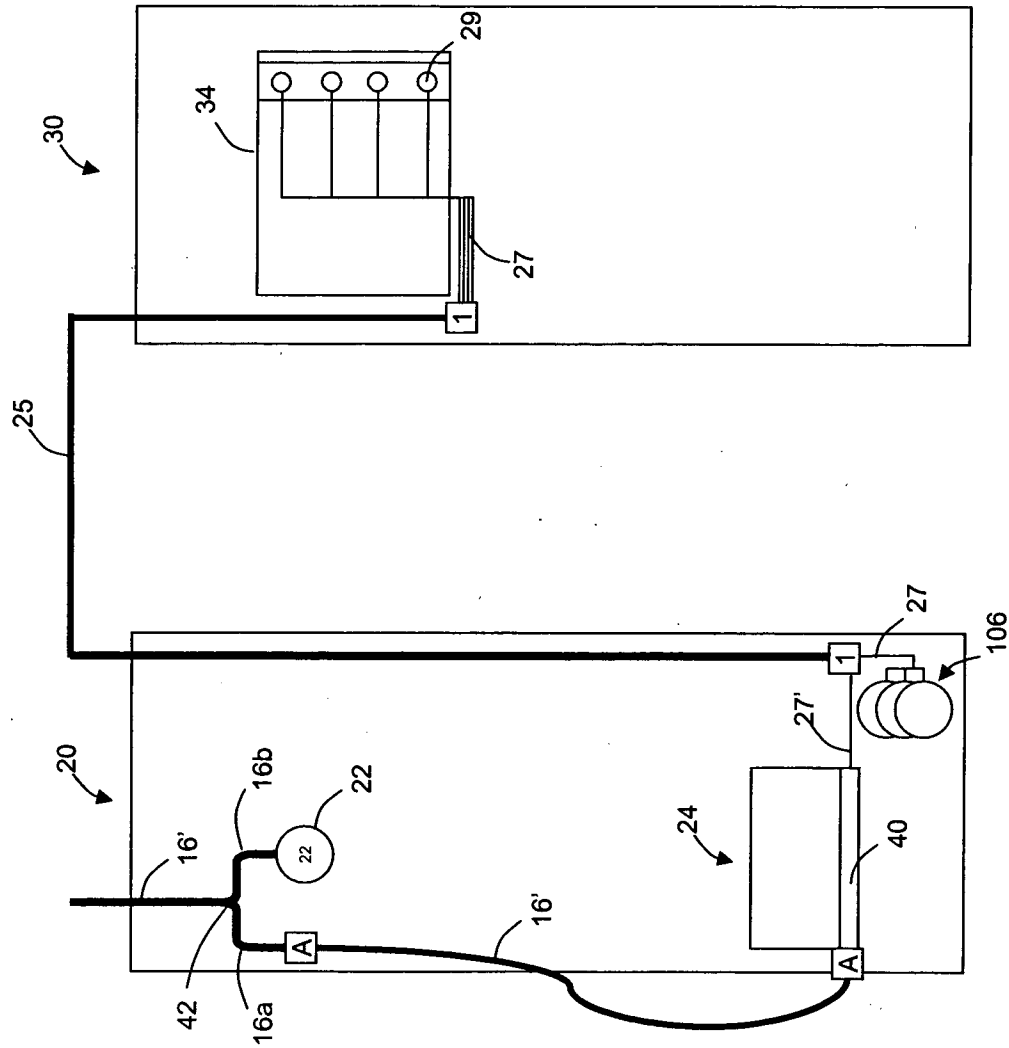


FIGURE 4B

FIGURE 5



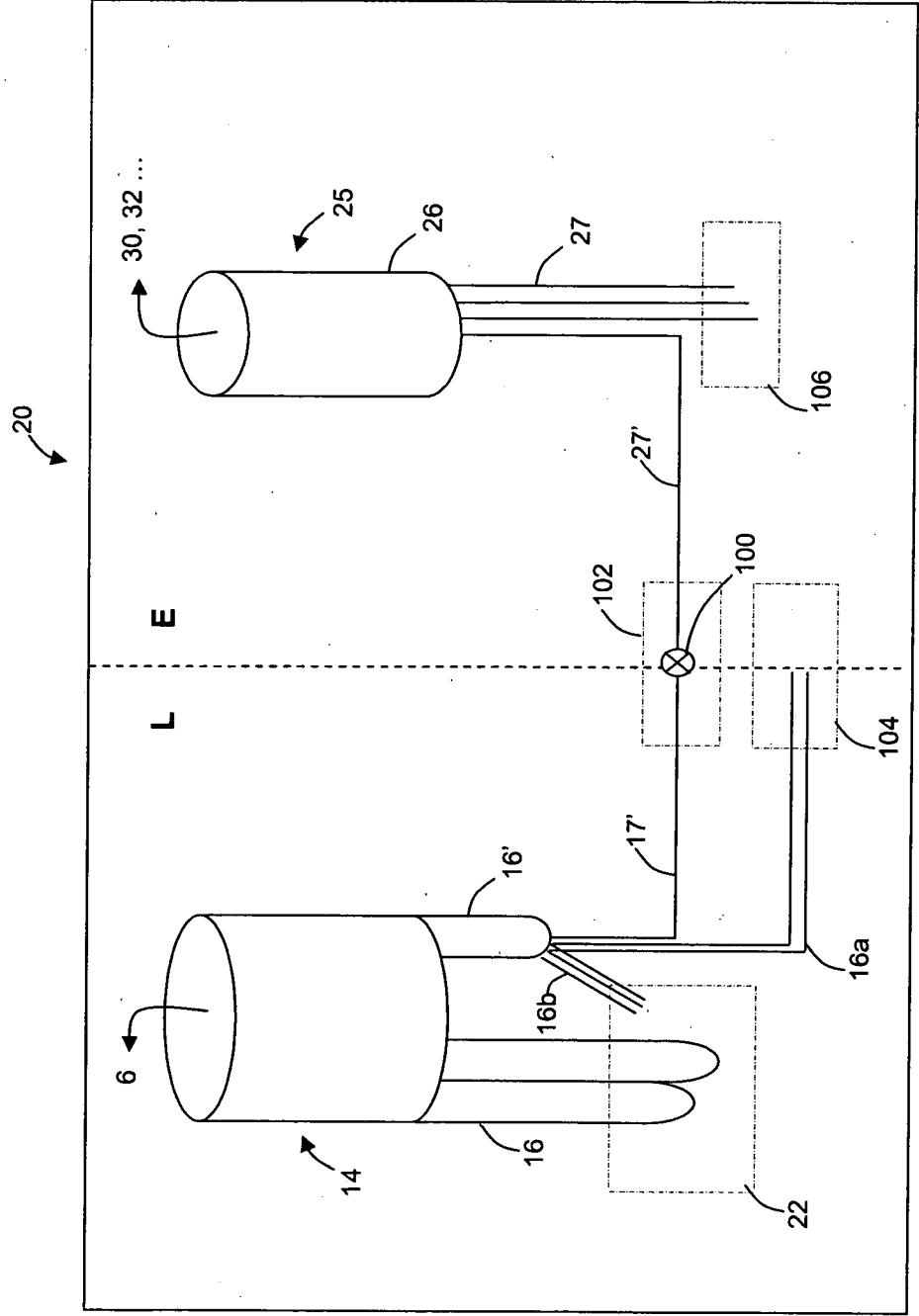
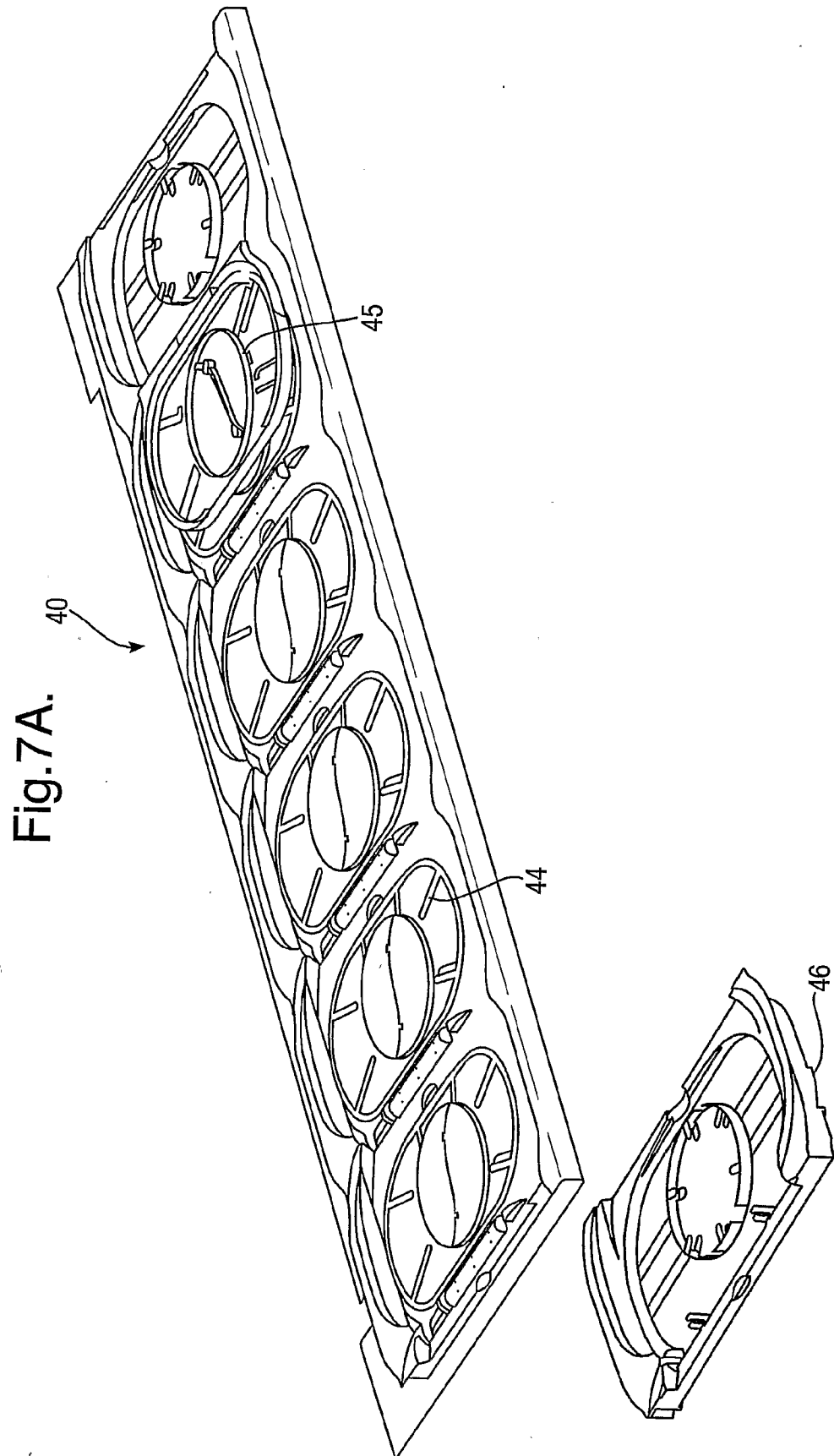


FIGURE 6



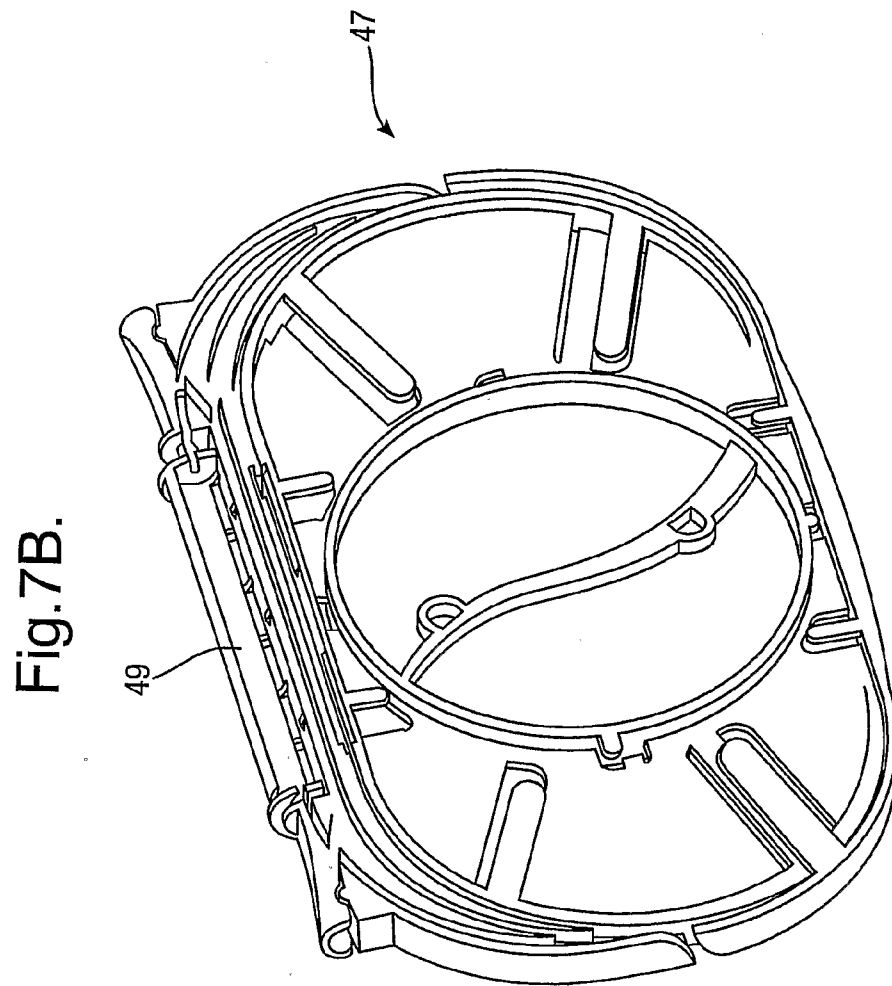
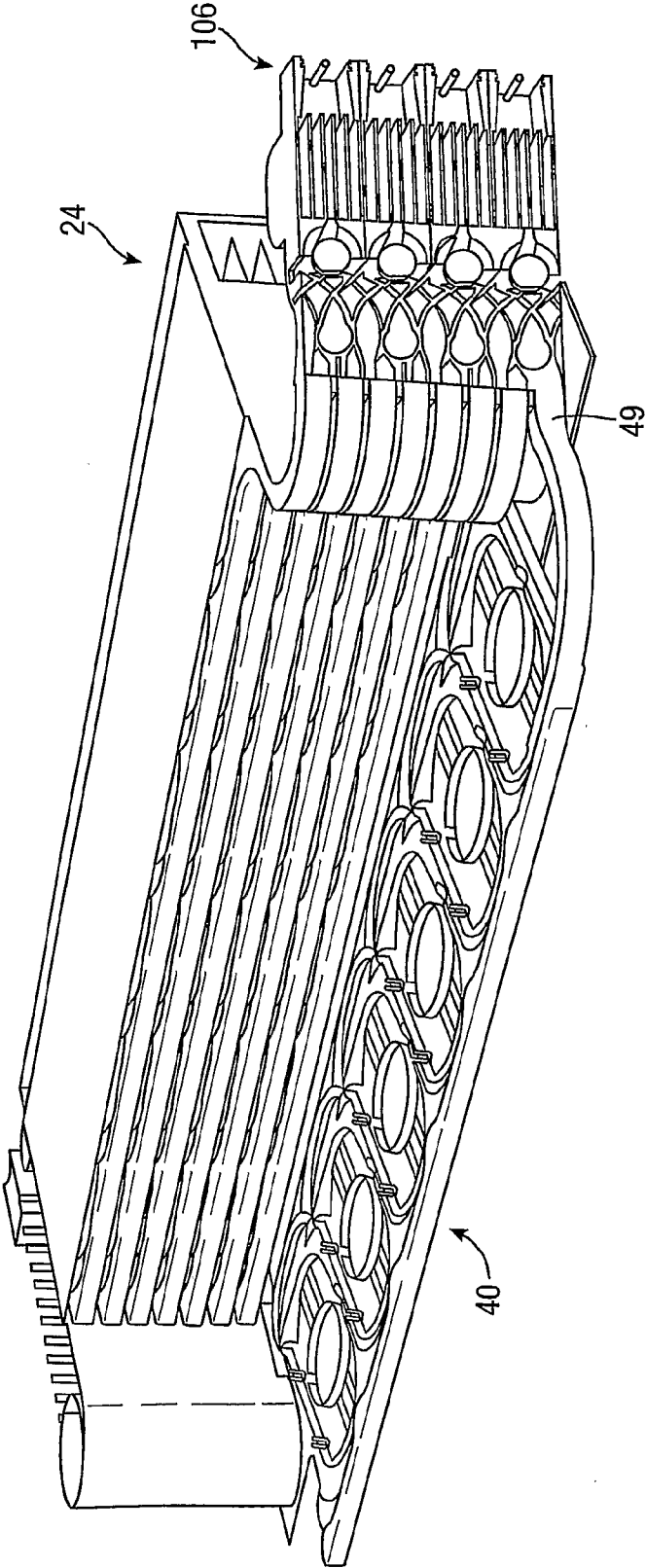
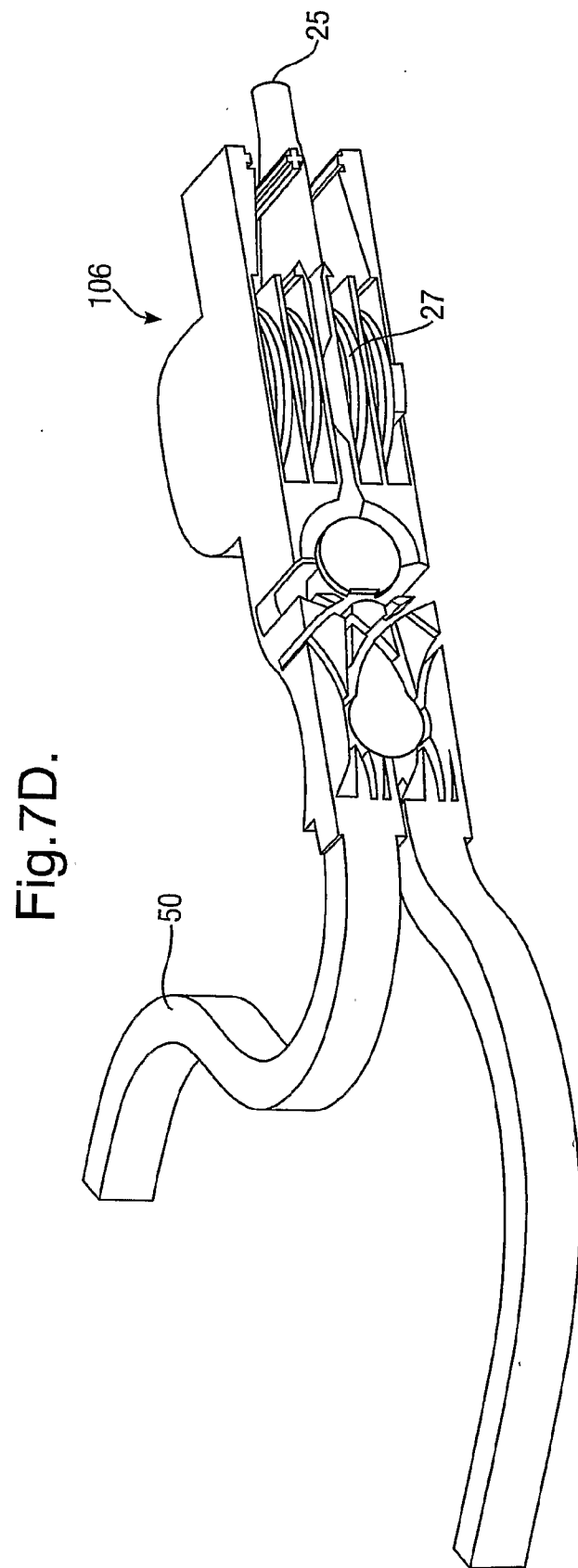
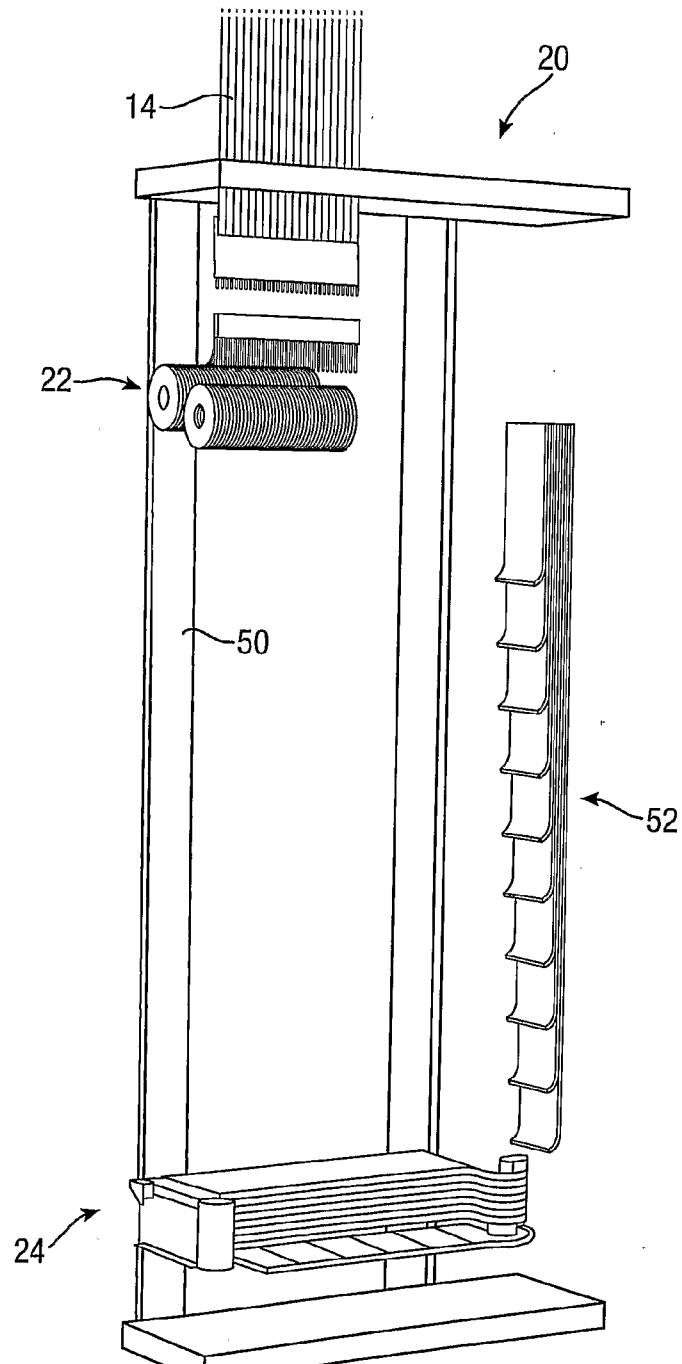
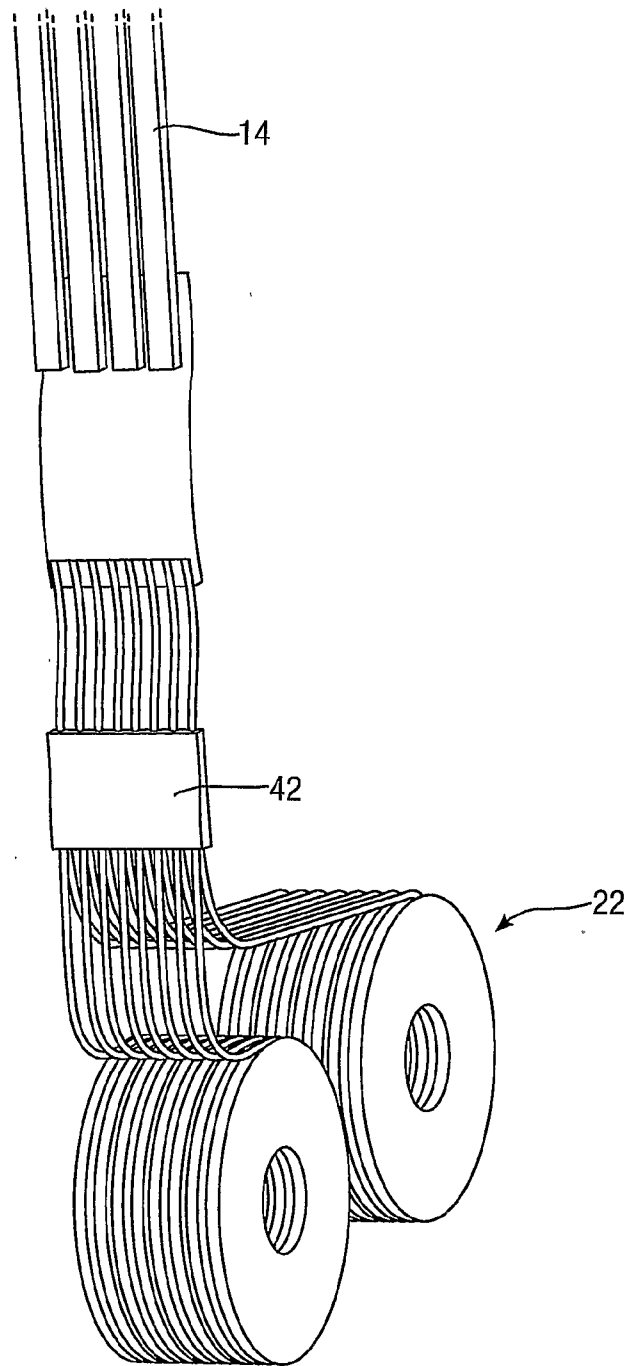


Fig.7C.









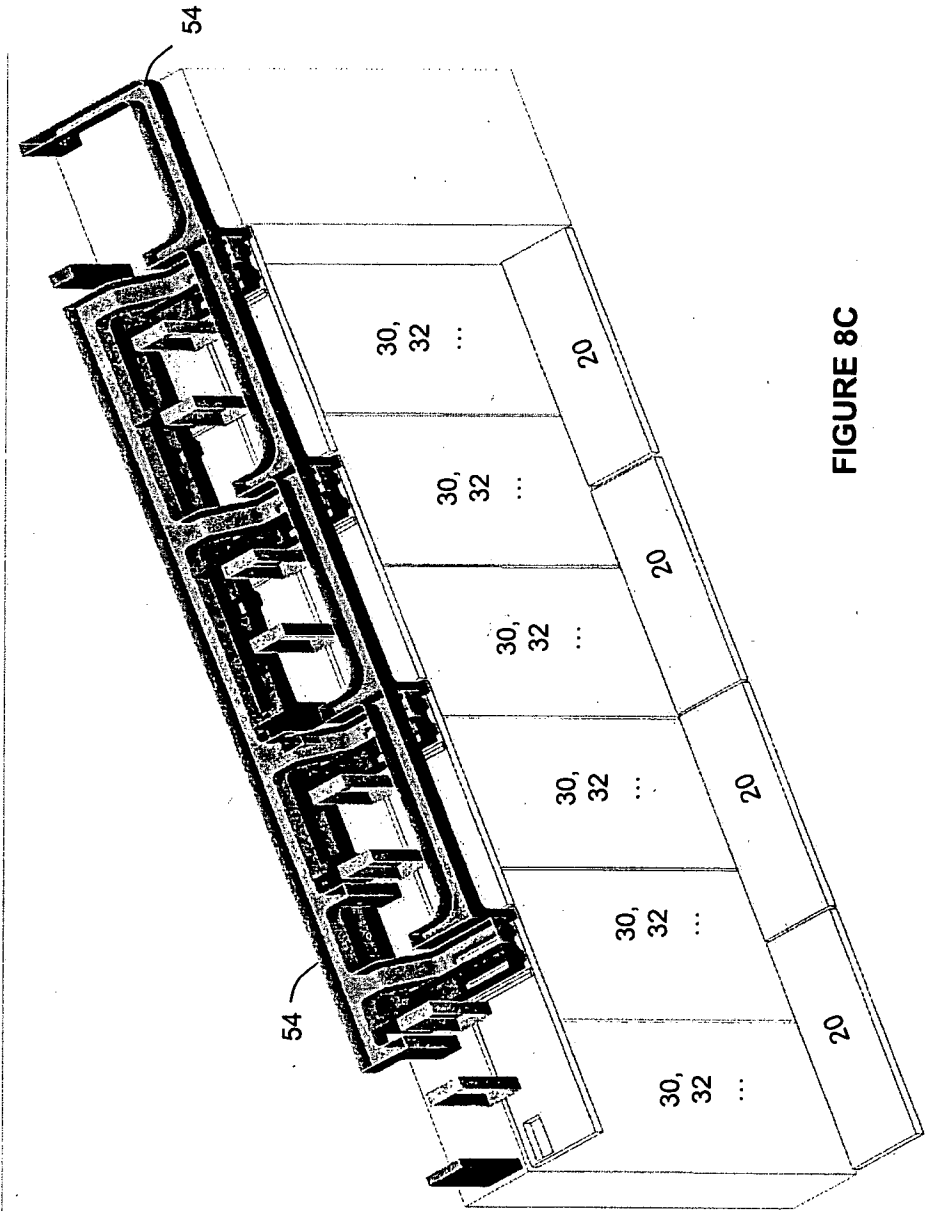


FIGURE 8C

FIGURE 9

