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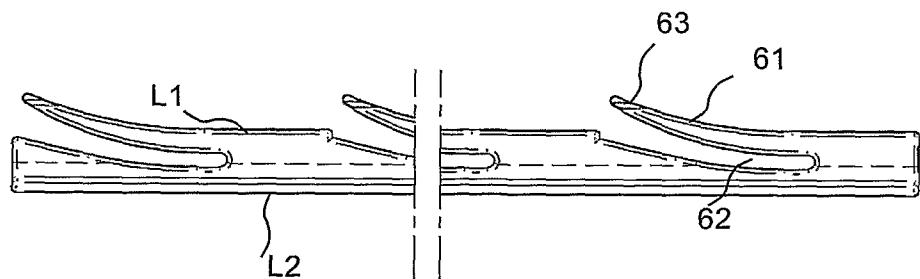
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(54) Title: MECHANICAL LOCKING OF FLOOR PANELS WITH A FLEXIBLE BRISTLE TONGUE



(57) Abstract: Floor panels (1, 1') are shown, which are provided with a mechanical locking system comprising a displaceable tongue (15) in a displacement groove (40). The tongue is moulded and provided with bendable protrusions (61).

MECHANICAL LOCKING OF FLOOR PANELS WITH A FLEXIBLE
BRISTLE TONGUE

Area of Invention

The invention generally relates to the field of floor panels with mechanical locking systems with a flexible and
5 displaceable tongue. The invention also relates to a partly bendable tongue for a building panel with such a mechanical locking system.

Background of the Invention

In particular, yet not restrictive manner, the invention
10 concerns a tongue for a floor panel and a set of floor panels mechanically joined to preferably a floating floor. However, the invention is as well applicable to building panels in general. More particularly invention relates to the type of mechanically locking systems comprising a
15 flexible or partly flexible tongue and/or displaceable tongue, in order to facilitate the installation of building panels

A floor panel of this type is presented in WO2006/043893, which discloses a floor panel with a
20 locking system comprising a locking element cooperating with a locking groove, for horizontal locking, and a flexible tongue cooperating with a tongue groove, for locking in a vertical direction. The flexible tongue bends in the horizontal plane during connection of the floor
25 panels and makes it possible to install the panels by vertical folding or solely by vertical movement. By "vertical folding" is meant a connection of three panels where a first and second panel are in a connected state

and where a single angling action connects two perpendicular edges of a new third panel, at the same time, to the first and the second panel. Such a connection takes place for example when a long side of the first 5 panel in a first row is already connected to a long side of a second panel in a second row. The third panel, which in this text is referred to as "folding panel" is then connected by angling to the long side of the first panel in the first row. This specific type of angling action, 10 which also connects the short side of the new third panel and second panel in the second row, is referred to as "vertical folding". It is also possible to connect two panels by lowering a whole panel solely by a substantially vertical movement against another panel where no 15 substantial turning of the panel edge is involved. This connection of two panels is referred to as "vertical locking"

Similar floor panels are further described in WO2003/016654, which discloses locking system comprising a 20 tongue with a flexible tab. The tongue is extending and bending essentially in a vertical direction and the tip of the tab cooperates with a tongue groove for vertical locking. The flexible tab is directed upwards and located on the folding panel. The major disadvantage of such an 25 embodiment is that the flexible tab must be displaced inwards by a sharp panel edge as shown in figure 17a

Definition of Some Terms

In the following text, the visible surface of the installed floor panel is called "front face", while the 30 opposite side of the floor panel, facing the sub floor, is called "rear face". The edge between the front and rear face is called "joint edge". By "horizontal plane" is

meant a plane, which extends parallel to the outer part of the surface layer. Immediately juxtaposed upper parts of two adjacent joint edges of two joined floor panels together define a "vertical plane" perpendicular to the 5 horizontal plane.

By "joint" or "locking system" are meant co acting connecting means, which connect the floor panels vertically and/or horizontally. By "mechanical locking system" is meant that joining can take place without glue.

10 Mechanical locking systems can in many cases also be combined with gluing. By "integrated with" means formed in one piece with the panel or factory connected to the panel.

By a "flexible tongue" is meant a separate tongue which 15 has a length direction along the joint edges and which is forming a part of the vertical locking system and could be displaced horizontally during locking. The tongue could for example be bendable or have a flexible and resilient part in such a way that it can bend along its length and 20 spring back to its initial position.

By "angling" is meant a connection that occurs by a turning motion, during which an angular change occurs between two parts that are being connected, or disconnected. When angling relates to connection of two 25 floor panels, the angular motion takes place with the upper parts of joint edges at least partly being in contact with each other, during at least part of the motion.

Summary of the Invention

30 The present invention aims a set of floor panel or a floating flooring and tongue for a floor panel, which

provides for new embodiments according to different aspects offering respective advantages. Useful areas for the invention are floor panels of any shape and material e.g. laminate, wood, HDF, veneer or stone.

5 According to a first object, the invention provides for a set of floor panels comprising a mechanically locking system at two adjacent edges of a first and a second panel, whereby the locking system is configured to connect a first panel to a second panel in the horizontal and
10 10 vertical plane. The locking system is provided, in order to facilitate the installation, with a displaceable tongue for locking in the vertical plane. The tongue is displaceable in a displacement groove in the edge of one of the floor panels and is configured to cooperate with a
15 tongue groove in the other of said floor panels. A first long edge of the tongue comprises at least two bendable protrusions extending essentially in the horizontal plane and bendable in the horizontal plane. A second long edge of the tongue, which in the connected state extends
20 20 outside the displacement groove, has an essentially straight outer edge over substantially the whole length of the tongue.

As the floor panel according to the first object of the invention is provided with a displaceable tongue with
25 25 bendable protrusions and an essentially straight outer edge this offers several advantages. A first advantage consists in that the floor panels are locked in the vertical direction along substantially the whole length of the tongue. A second advantage is that it is possible to
30 30 mould the tongues in one part in e.g. plastic material and if desired to cut them up in shorter tongues, which all have essentially the same properties. The same moulding

tool could be used to produce flexible tongues for different panel widths. Especially the displacement resistance and the locking strength per length unit could be achieved. A third advantage is that the displacement 5 resistance, due to the bending of the protrusions are essentially the same along the whole tongue. A larger number of protrusions provides for a more constant displacement resistance along the edge of the tongue. If the panels are installed by vertical folding a constant 10 displacement resistance over the length of the tongue is desired. Also a high angle between the fold panel and the second panel when the fold panel initially contact the tongue in the second panel is provided. The protrusions are designed to allow displacement but also to prevent 15 tilting of the tongue.

A floor panel of this type is known from WO2006/043893, as mentioned above, and discloses a bow shaped flexible tongue bendable in the length direction. The drawback of this bow shaped tongue is that due to the shape, there is 20 no locking at the end of the tongue. One embodiment is shown that provides locking along the whole length (fig 7f), but that tongue consists of two connected parts (38, 39). It is also important that the tongue easily springs back after being displaced into the displacement groove 25 during installation. Therefore it is advantageously if the part of the tongue which cooperate with the adjacent panel is relatively stable and is provided with sliding surfaces with an area enough to avoid that the tongue get stuck before reaching its final position for vertical locking. A 30 sliding surface at the tip of a tab or a protrusion is therefore not a useful solution.

Advantageously, the protrusions of the tongue are bow shaped, providing an essentially constant moment arm during installation of the panels and bending of the protrusions.

5 Preferably, the tongue comprises a recess at each protrusion, resulting in avoiding of deformation and cracking of the protrusion if the tongue is displaced too far and too much force is applied.

Preferably, the length of the tongue is of more than 90%
10 of the width WS of front face of the panel; in other preferred embodiments the length of the tongue is preferably in the range from 75% to substantially the same as the width WS of front face.

According to a second object, the invention provides for
15 a tongue for a building panel, said tongue is of an elongated shape and made of moulded plastic. The tongue comprises at least two protrusions at a first long edge of the tongue. The protrusions are bendable in a plane parallel to the upper surface of the tongue and extending
20 essentially in the parallel plane. Furthermore, the tongue has a second long edge, which is essentially straight over substantially the whole length of the tongue.

A first advantage consists in that the tongue provides for locking in the vertical direction along the whole
25 length of the tongue. A second advantage is that it is possible to mould the tongue in one part in plastic and if desired cutting the tongue in shorter tongues, which all have essentially the same properties. Especially the displacement resistance and the locking strength per
30 length unit are essentially the same. A third advantage is that the displacement resistance, due to the bending of

the protrusions are essentially the same along the whole tongue. A larger number of protrusions provides for a more constant displacement resistance along the edge of the tongue. Even rather rigid materials such as reinforced plastic, metals, for example aluminium and wood may be made flexible with protrusions according to the principle of the invention. If the panels are installed by vertical folding, e.g. by the installation method explained below (see fig 5), a constant displacement resistance is desired

10 According to a third object, the invention provides for a set of floor panels comprising a mechanically locking system at two adjacent edges of a first and a second panel, whereby the locking system is configured to connect a first panel to a second panel in the horizontal and

15 vertical plane. The locking system is provided, in order to facilitate the installation, with a displaceable tongue for locking in the vertical plane. The tongue is displaceable in a displacement groove in the edge of one of the floor panels and is configured to cooperate with a

20 tongue groove in the other of said floor panels. At least one long edge of the tongue, which in the connected state extends outside the displacement groove comprises at least two bendable protrusions extending essentially in the horizontal plane and bendable in the horizontal plane.

25 This embodiment with displaceable and bendable protrusions at the outer edge offers several advantages. The whole tongue may also be displaceable. A first advantage consists in that only a part of the tongue has to be pressed into the displacement groove during folding and

30 this will decrease the friction force that has to be overcome during folding. The protrusions are in one embodiment slightly thinner than the body of the tongue. A

small play of about 0,01 to about 0,10 mm may for example be provide between at least a part of the protrusion and the displacement groove and this play could substantially eliminate friction during displacement even in the case

- 5 when the groove, due to production tolerances, is slightly smaller than the tongue body. A second advantage is that the protrusions could spring back independently of each other and a more reliable locking is obtained even in cases where the friction forces varies due to production
- 10 tolerances of the displacement groove and/or the tongue groove.

According to a fourth object, the invention provides for a locking system for floor panels comprising a mechanically locking system at two adjacent edges of a

- 15 first and a second panel, whereby the mechanically locking system comprising a first connector for locking in a horizontal direction (D2) perpendicular to the adjacent edges and a second connector comprising, in order to facilitate the installation, a separate tongue, preferably
- 20 made of a separate material than the core of the panel, for locking in a vertical direction (D1). A part of the tongue is flexible and bendable in the horizontal and/or vertical plane. The locking system is configured to connect a first panel to a second panel by angling,
- 25 snapping, vertical folding and vertical locking. Such a locking system offers the advantage that the panels could be locked in several ways and this facilitates installation.

- 30 According to a fifth object, the invention comprises an installation method to connect panels preferably floor panels. The panels comprise short sides with a mechanical locking system for locking the adjacent short edges

vertically with a separate tongue comprising a flexible part and horizontally with a locking strip comprising a locking element and long sides with a mechanical locking system comprising a tongue, a groove a locking strip and a locking groove that allows vertical and horizontal locking by angling. The method comprising the steps of:

- a) Installing a second row of panels by connecting the short sides of the panels with vertical locking or horizontal snapping whereby the flexible part of the tongue is displaced
- 10 b) Connecting the second row to an adjacent and already installed first row by angling.

All references to "a/an/the [element, device, component, means, step, etc]" are to be interpreted openly as referring to at least one instance of said element, device, component, means, step, etc., unless explicitly stated otherwise.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Figs 1a-d illustrate a prior art locking system
20 Figs 2a-b show a prior art flexible tongue during the locking action.

Figs 3a-b show a floor panels with a prior art mechanical locking system on a short side.

Figs 4a-b show how short sides of two floor panels could
25 be locked with vertical folding according to prior art.

Figs 5a-c show panels according to one embodiment of the invention and a prefered locking method.

Figs 6 a-c shows displaceable tongues in embodiments according to the invention.

Figs 7a-b shows the displaceable tongues in an embodiment according to the invention in a top view and a
5 3D view

Figs 8a-b show the bending of the protrusion of the tongue, during installation, according to embodiments of the invention.

Figs 9a-d show installation with vertical folding or
10 vertical locking according to one embodiment of the invention.

Figs 10a-d show installation with snapping according to one embodiment of the invention

15 Figs 11a-d show an embodiment of installation with snapping facilitated by a flexible tongue and bending of a locking strip

Figs 12a-d show an embodiment of installation and disconnection of panels with angling.

Figs 13a-b show an embodiment of an installation method.
20 Figs 13 c-d show embodiments with separate materials connected to the panel edge.

Figs 14a-c show embodiments according to the invention.

Figs 15a-b show embodiments according to the invention.

25 Figs 16a-e show embodiments according to the third object of the invention.

Fig 16f-g show embodiments of the tongue according to the invention.

Fig 16h-i show embodiments of the the invention.

Figs 17a-c show embodiments of locking systems which
5 could be applied in the fourth and fifth object of the invention.

Figs 17d-e shows embodiment of the invention.

Description of Embodiments of the Invention

As represented in figures 5-18, the invention relates to
10 a set of floor panels with a displaceable tongue,
displaceable tongue for a floor panel, a locking system
for floor panels and a method to install floor panels.

A prior art floor panel 1, 1' provided with a mechanical
locking system and a displaceable tongue is described with
15 reference to Figs 1a-1d.

Figure 1a illustrates schematically a cross-section of a joint between a short side joint edge 4a of a panel 1 and an opposite short side joint edge 4b of a second panel 1'.

The front faces of the panels are essentially positioned
20 in a common horizontal plane HP, and the upper parts 21,
41 of the joint edges 4a, 4b abut against each other in a vertical plane VP. The mechanical locking system provides locking of the panels relative to each other in the vertical direction D1 as well as the horizontal direction
25 D2.

To provide joining of the two joint edges in the D1 and D2 directions, the edges of the floor panel have in a manner known per se a locking strip 6 with a locking

element 8 in one joint edge, hereafter referred to as the "strip panel" which cooperates with a locking groove 14 in the other joint edge, hereafter referred to as the "fold panel", and provides the horizontal locking.

5 The prior art mechanical locking system comprises a separate flexible tongue 30 fixed into a displacement groove 40 formed in one of the joint edges. The flexible tongue 30 has a groove portion P1, which is located in the displacement groove 40 and a projecting portion P2
10 projecting outside the displacement groove 40. The projecting portion P2 of the flexible tongue 30 in one of the joint edges cooperates with a tongue groove 20 formed in the other joint edge.

15 The flexible tongue 30 has a protruding part P2 with a rounded outer part 31 and a sliding surface 32, which in this embodiment is formed like a bevel. It has upper 33 and lower 35 tongue displacement surfaces and an inner part 34.

20 The displacement groove 40 has an upper 42 and a lower 46 opening, which in this embodiment are rounded, a bottom 44 and upper 43 and lower 45 groove displacement surfaces, which preferably are essentially parallel with the horizontal plane HP.

25 The tongue groove 20 has a tongue-locking surface 22, which cooperates with the flexible tongue 30 and locks the joint edges in a vertical direction D1. The fold panel 1' has a vertical locking surface 24, which is closer to the rear face 62 than the tongue groove 20. The vertical locking surface 24 cooperates with the strip 6 and locks
30 the joint edges in another vertical direction. The fold panel has in this embodiment a sliding surface 23 which

cooperated during locking with the sliding surface 32 of the tongue.

Figure 3a shows a cross section A-A of a panel according to figure 3b seen from above. The flexible tongue 30 has a 5 length L along the joint edge, a width W parallel to the horizontal plane and perpendicular to the length L and a thickness T in the vertical direction D1. The sum of the largest groove portion P1 and the largest protruding part P2 is the total width TW. The flexible tongue has also in 10 this embodiment a middle section MS and two edge sections ES adjacent to the middle section. The size of the protruding part P2 and the groove portion P1 varies in this embodiment along the length L and the tongue is spaced from the two corner sections 9a and 9b. The 15 flexible tongue 30 has on one of the edge sections a friction connection 36 which could be shaped for instance as a local small vertical protrusion. This friction connection keeps the flexible tongue in the displacement groove 40 during installation, or during production, 20 packaging and transport, if the flexible tongue is integrated with the floor panel at the factory.

Figure 2a and 2b shows the position of the flexible tongue 30 after the first displacement towards the bottom 44 of the displacement groove 40. The displacement is 25 caused essentially by bending of the flexible tongue 30 in its length direction L parallel to the width W. This feature is essential for this prior art.

The fold panel could be disconnected with a needle shaped tool, which could be inserted from the corner 30 section 9b into the tongue groove 20 and press the flexible tongue back into the displacement groove 40. The fold

panel could then be angled up while the strip panel is still on the sub floor. Of course the panels could also be disconnected in the traditional way.

Figure 4a and 4b shows one embodiment of a vertical folding. A first panel 1'' in a first row is connected to a second 1 panel in a second row. The new panel 1' is connected with its long side 5a to the long side 5b of the first panel with angling. This angling action also connects the short side 4b of the new pane with the short side 4a of the second panel. The fold panel 1' is locked to the strip panel 1 with a combined vertical and turning motion along the vertical plane VP. The protruding part P2 has a rounded and or angled folding part P2' which during folding cooperates with the sliding surface 23 of the folding panel 1'. The combined effect of a folding part P2', and a sliding surface 32 of the tongue which during the folding cooperates with the sliding surface 23 of the fold panel 1' facilitates the first displacement of the flexible tongue 30. An essential feature of this embodiment is the position of the projecting portion P2, which is spaced from the corner section 9a and 9b. The spacing is at least 10 % of the length of the joint edge, in this case the visible short side 4a.

Figure 5a-5c show an embodiment of the set of floor panels with a displaceable tongue according to the invention and a preferred installation method. In this embodiment the length of the tongue is of more than 90% of the width WS of front face of the panel, in other preferred embodiments the length of the tongue is preferably in the range from 75% to substantially the same as the width WS of front face. Preferably, the length of the tongue is about the total width of the panel minus the

width of the locking system of the adjacent edges of the panel. A small bevel may be provided at the ends of the outer edge, but the straight part of the tongue at the outer edge has preferably a length substantially equal to 5 the length of the tongue or desirable more than 90%. The new panel 1' is in angled position with an upper part of the joint edge in contact with the first panel 1'' in the first row. The new panel 1', is then displaced towards the second panel 1 until the edges are essentially in contact 10 and a part of the flexible tongue 15 is pressed into the displacement groove 40 as can be seen in the figure 5b. The new panel 1' is then folded down towards the second panel 1. Since the displacement of the new panel 1' presses only an edge section of the flexible tongue 15 15 into the displacement groove 40, vertical folding will be possible to make with less resistance. Installation could be made with a displaceable tongue that has a straight outer edge. When panels with the known bow shaped tongue 30 (see figure 2-4) are installed the whole tongue has to 20 be pressed into the displacement groove. When comparing the known bow shaped tongue with a tongue according to the invention less force is needed for a tongue with the same spring constant per length unit of the tongue. It is therefore possible, using the principles of the invention, 25 to use a tongue with higher spring constant per length unit and higher spring back force, resulting in more reliable final position of the tongue. With this installation method is the bevelled sliding surface of the fold panel not necessary, or may be smaller, which is an 30 advantage for thin panels. If the tongue is not long enough, the installation method above is not working and the bevelled sliding surface of the fold panel is needed.

1..

Figure 5c show that the tongue could be on the folding panel.

A preferred production method according to the invention is injection moulding. With this production method a wide variety of complex three-dimensional shapes could be produced at low cost and the flexible tongues 15 may easily be connected to each other to form tongue blanks 50. A tongue could also be made of an extruded or machined plastic or metal section, which could be further shaped with for example punching to form a flexible tongue according to the invention. The drawback with extrusion, besides the additional production steps, is that it is hard to reinforce the tongue, e.g. by fibres. 10

As can be seen when comparing figure 5 and 4, the angle between the new panel 1' and the second panel 1 is higher, for the panels with the tongue according to an embodiment of the invention, when the new panel initially contacts the end of the tongue 15 and begins to displace the tongue into the displacement groove 40. Its an advantage if the angle is higher, since a higher angle means a more comfortable working position in which it is easier to apply a higher force pushing the tongue into the displacement groove. 15 20

Any type of polymer materials could be used such as PA (nylon), POM, PC, PP, PET or PE or similar having the properties described above in the different embodiments. These plastic materials could be when injection moulding is used be reinforced with for instance glass fibre, Kevlar fibre, carbon fibre or talk or chalk. A preferred material is glass fibre, preferably extra long, reinforced PP or POM. 25 30

Figure 6a-e shows embodiments of the tongue 15 according to the invention. They are all configured to be inserted in a groove in a floor panel, in a similar way as described for the prior art tongues and panels in reference to figure 1-4 above. All methods to injection mould, insert and also the tool for disassembling described in WO2006/043893 and partly in the description and figures 1-4 above are applicable to the invention.

Figure 6a shows an embodiment with a first long edge L1 and a second long edge L2. The first long edge has protrusions extending in a plane parallel to the topside 64 of the tongue 15 and with an angle relative the longitudinal direction of the tongue.

Figure 6a-b show the embodiment, in top and in a side view, with a first long edge L1 and a second long edge L2. The first long edge has protrusions 61 extending in a plane parallel to the topside, an upper displacement surface 61, and rear side, a lower displacement surface, of the tongue and with an angle relative the longitudinal direction of the tongue. The protrusions are preferably bow shaped and, in a particular preferred embodiment, the tongue is provided with a recess 62 at each protrusion 61. The recess is preferably adapted to the size and shape of the protrusion.

The protrusions are preferably provided with a friction connection 63, most preferably close to or at the tip of the protrusion, which could be shaped for instance as a local small vertical protrusion. This friction connection keeps the flexible tongue in the displacement groove 40 during installation, or during production, packaging and

transport, if the displaceable tongue is integrated with the floor panel at the factory.

Figure 6d shows the tongue 15 in the cross section B-B in figure 6c and positioned in the displacement groove 40 of a panel 1. The upper and lower displacement surface of the tongue is configured to cooperate with an upper 43 and a lower 45 groove displacement surfaces. The panel comprising a locking strip 6 and a locking element 8 for horizontal locking. The panel 1 is configured to be 10 connected to a second panel 1' in a similar way as the prior art panel 1' in figure 1a-1d. The upper displacement surface (64) and/or the lower displacement surface (65) of the tongue is in one preferred embodiment provided with a bevelled edge, presenting a sliding surface (32, 31) and 15 an inclined locking surface (66), respectively. The inclined locking surface cooperates preferably with an inclined tongue-locking surface 22 in the tongue groove (20).

In embodiments according to fig. 6d and 6e, the 20 displacement groove (40) is formed in one piece with the core of the panel, but other alternatives are possible. The Displacement groove may be formed in a separate material, for example HDF, which is connected to a wood core in a parquet floor. The displacement groove may be 25 formed of U-shaped plastic or metal sections, which are connected to the panel with for example a snap connection, glue or friction. These alternatives could be used to reduce friction and to facilitate horizontal displacement of the tongue in the displacement groove. The displacement 30 groove may also be treated with a friction reducing agent. These principles may also be applied to the tongue groove.

Figure 6e shows that the tongue 15 may also be inserted into the displacement groove 40 of a panel for locking in the horizontal plane. The tongue is displaced in the vertical plane during connection of the panels. These type 5 of panels are connected by a movement in the horizontal plane -"horizontal snapping".

To facilitate the installation it is advantageously if the spring constant of the protruding part is as linear as possible. A linear spring constant results in a nice and 10 smooth connection movement without suddenly or heavily increased displacement resistant. According to one embodiment, this is achieved by a bow shaped protrusion. Figure 8b shows that a bow shaped protrusion results in an essentially constant moment arm, the force is during the 15 whole course of connecting two panels at the tip of the protrusion, and a essentially linear spring constant. Figure 8a shows that a straight protrusion results in that the moment arm is changed during the course; the force is spread out over a larger part of the length of the 20 protrusion, resulting in an increased spring constant during the course. F is the displacement force and L is the displaced distance.

The preferred recess at the protrusion has the advantage that the protrusion is not destroyed if too much force is 25 applied or the tongue is displaced too far. The protrusion is pushed into the recess and a cracking of the protrusion is avoided.

Figures 7a-b show two enlarged embodiments of a part of the tongue in a top view and in a 3D view. The figures 30 show a casting gate 71 which is cut off before insertion into the displacement groove.

It is preferred that the length of the protrusion PL is larger than the total width TW of the tongue. The total width is the width of the tongue W plus the distance from the tongue body to the tip of the protrusion perpendicular to the length direction of the tongue. In the most preferred embodiment, PL is larger than $2 \times TW$. It is also preferred that the recess is wider near the tip of the protrusion than near the bottom of the recess; as shown in figure 7a.

Preferably, the force to displace the tongue 1 mm is per 100 mm length of the tongue in the range of about 20 to about 30 N.

Preferably the length of the protrusion PL is in the range of about 10 mm to about 20 mm, the width W of the tongue is in the range of about 3 mm to about 6 mm and the total width TW of the tongue is in the range of about 5 mm to about 11 mm. The length of the body part BP between two protrusions, i.e. the distance from the root of one protrusion to the tip of an adjacent protrusion, is in the range of about 3 mm to about 10 mm. As a non limiting example, for a width of a floor panel of about 200 mm, including the width of the locking system at adjacent edges, with a tongue length of about 180 mm, having 9 protrusions the protrusion length is about 15 mm, the length of the body part BP is about 5 mm, the width of the tongue W is about 5 mm and the total width TW is about 8 mm.

The tongues according to the embodiments of the invention are all possible to mould in one piece. It is further possible to cut the moulded tongue in shorter pieces which all have the same properties per length unit,

provided that the number of protrusions is not to few.

Another production method is extrusion combined with punching or cutting of the recess and the protrusions of the tongue.

5 Figures 9a-9d show a locking system, which allow vertical folding and vertical locking according to the main principles of the invention. In order to facilitate locking, the locking system comprises a friction reducing agent (71, 71', 71'') such as wax, oil or similar

10 chemicals at the edge of folding panel 1' and/or at the locking element 8 and/or at the locking grove 14.

Preferably all flexible tongues shown in this application are provided with a friction reducing agent, e.g. wax or oil.

15 Figures 10a-10d show that a locking system, which allows vertical folding, also could be designed to be locked with horizontal snapping. In this embodiment the snapping is mainly facilitated by the flexible tongue (15). The locking system could be designed to be locked with a

20 substantial horizontal displacement or with a combination of horizontal and vertical displacement, as shown in figures 10a-d. The outer parts of the tongue 15 and the edge of the folding panel 1 could be designed with bevels and/or rounded parts that facilitate snapping

25 Figures 11a -11d show that the snapping could also be combined with a flexible strip (6) that during snapping is bended downwards towards the sub floor.

Figures 12a - 12d show that the locking system also could be designed to allow locking with angling. Figure 30 12d shows that the locking system also could be unlocked with angling. Wax and other types of friction reducing

agents could also be applied in the displacement groove, the tongue groove or in the locking system and especially on surfaces that during locking are in contact with the flexible tongue. Such friction reducing agent will improve 5 the locking and unlocking functions in all locking systems, for example shown in figures 2b, 13c-d, 14a-c, 15a-b and 17a-e where a part of a tongue is flexible.

A locking system, which could be locked with vertical folding, vertical locking, angling and snapping could have 10 many different types of tongues, which are made of a separate material than the core of the panel, which tongues are connected to a panel edge and which tongues have at least one part that is flexible. Examples of embodiments of locking systems and separate tongues that 15 allow such locking are shown in figures 2b, 13c-d, 14a-c, 15a-b and 17a-e. All types of flexible tongues, which for example have snap tabs, are bended in length direction, have flexible protrusions inside or outside a groove etc could be used. According to the invention a locking system 20 with a separate tongue which has at least one flexible part is provided and this locking system has locking means which allow vertical and horizontal locking with vertical folding, vertical locking snapping with or without a flexible strip and with angling. It could also be unlocked 25 by angling. Such a locking system will offer several advantages during installation of floor panels. Of course locking systems could be designed such that one or several of the above mentioned locking function could be prevented. For example a locking element, which has a 30 locking surface essentially perpendicular to the horizontal plane, will prevent disassembly with angling up

of the panel. Such a locking system will however have a high strength in the horizontal direction.

Vertical folding is in most cases the most convenient installation method. However, figures 13a and 13 b show an 5 alternative installation method. The short sides of panels in a first row R1 are connected. The short sides of panels in a second row R2 are connected to each other by vertical locking or horizontal snapping where a part of a separate tongue, comprising a flexible part, is displaced 10 during locking. Such a connecting method is extremely easy since the panels could be laid flat on the sub floor short edge against short edge and connected. They do not have to be angled or snapped together with a tapping block. The two adjacent rows R1 and R2 are then connected with 15 angling.

The method comprise installation of floor panels comprising short edges with a mechanical locking system for locking the adjacent short edges vertically with a separate tongue comprising a flexible part and 20 horizontally with a locking strip comprising a locking element and long sides with a mechanical locking system comprising a tongue, a groove a locking strip and a locking groove that allows vertical and horizontal locking by angling

25 a) Installing a second row R2 of panels by connecting the short sides of the panels with vertical locking or horizontal snapping whereby the flexible part of the tongue is displaced

30 b) Connecting the second row R2 to an installed and adjacent row R2 by angling.

Figure 13c-13 show that separate materials 72-73 could be used to improve strength and locking functions. Such separate materials that could be connected as an edge portion in a for example a laminate or wood floor panel 5 and they could preferably comprise hard wood, plywood, plastic materials, HDF, MDF and similar. Separate materials could be attached to one or both edges. They could form a part of the displacement groove, as shown in figure 13c, a part of the tongue groove 20, as shown in figure 13d or even at least a part of the locking strip 6 10 and the locking groove 14 as shown in figure 13e. Separate materials could be used in all locking systems with separate and partly flexible tongues. These principles could be used for example in locking systems shown in 15 figures 17a-17e

Figures 14a and 14b show that the protrusions 61 could be located inside or outside the displacement groove 40. The flexible protrusions, which are located outside the displacement groove, could be designed to cooperate with 20 the tongue groove and to lock the panels vertically.

Figure 15a shows an embodiment of the flexible tongue 15 with protrusions 61 partly outside the displacement groove and with a bow shaped inner part.

Figure 14c shows that one short edge portion (E1) of the 25 flexible tongue (15) which is located in the same direction as the direction as the protrusions, will bend out (provided that the friction connection do not prevent such bending) if a force F is pressed against the tongue when it is in the displacement groove with the protrusions 30 inside the groove. Therefore it is preferred that in this embodiment, protrusions should be directed towards the

part of the panel where the folding starts, as shown in fig 14a. Such an embodiment offers the advantage that the flexible tongue will not snap out during the final part of the folding. It is preferred that the flexible tongue has 5 at least one rounded or bevelled end portion (70). Such a portion could be integrated in a moulded tongue. It could also be for example a punched or cut part in a tongue, which is extruded. In this embodiment there are protrusions 61a and 61b at the edge portions of the tongue 10 and these extrusions extend in different directions away from each other. The tongue has also two short edge portions E1 and E1 which are formed such that they do not extend outside the displacement groove as much as the middle part of the tongue. Such an embodiment will 15 facilitate installation. The shape of the protrusions and the short edge portions could be used separately or in combination.

Figures 15b shows an embodiment with flexible tongues 15, 15' on two opposite edges of the same panel. This is 20 useful in advanced installations. All embodiments of separate tongues shown in this application could be used.

Figures 16a-16e shows embodiments of a flexible tongue 15 with protrusions. Fig. 16a shows protrusions 61 with bevelled or rounder tips (71). Figure 16b shows the 25 protrusions in a compressed position when they are pressed into the displacement groove 40. Fig 16c shows round shapes 72 at the outer part of the protrusions, which facilitates installations with vertical folding from both long edges.

30 Figures 16d and 16e show embodiments with double protrusions 16, 16' inside and outside the displacement

groove 40. All embodiments could be combined. For example a tongue with double protrusions as in figures 16d and 16e could have rounder outer parts 72 as in figure 16c.

Figure 16h and 16a-b shows that the flexible tongue 15 could have a body 15a which is slightly thicker than the part of the part 61a of the protrusion 61 which is displaceable in the displacement groove 40 during locking. The play between the displacement groove and the protrusion reduces the friction and facilitates a reliable displacement of the protrusion 61. It is preferred that protrusions and flexible parts are such that the parts of the tongue which lock in the tongue groove exert a pressure force in locked position. An example is a tongue, which comprise flexible parts, which after 100 hours of compression, corresponding to the compression during vertical folding, could spring back to a position, which is at least 90% of their initial position.

Figures 16f and 16g show embodiments of the tongue, which are symmetric in a vertical plane perpendicular to the edge of the floor panel. These tongues have the same properties for both folding directions. The tongue in figure 16g with protrusions extending outwards at both ends of the tongue also has the advantage of support at the outer most edge of the tongue. In another preferred embodiment of a tongue with protrusions only in one direction, the tongue is symmetric in a horizontal plane, which gives the advantage that it is possible to turn the tongue up side down, resulting in the same properties for both folding directions.

30 A locking surface of a locking element 8 at a locking strip 6 could be made with different angles, bevels and

radius. The locking surface of the locking element 8 may e.g. extend inwardly towards the upper edge of the panel, as shown in figure 16i. The vertical locking could in such an embodiment consist of a flexible tongue 15 and a 5 locking element 8 on a locking strip 6.

Figure 17a shows a flexible tongue 15 with flexible tab 75 extending upwards. The flexible tongue is connected to the folding panel 1.

Figure 17b shows a flexible tongue 15 with flexible tab 10 75 extending downwards. The flexible tongue is connected to the edge, which has a locking strip 6 extending from the edge. This embodiment is an improvement of the locking system shown in figure 17a since the flexible tab is not displaced by a sharp panel edge. The folding panel could 15 be formed with a sliding surface 23, which facilitates the displacement of the snap tab 75. The snap tab could be designed with a pre tension, which presses the folding panel downwards in locked position. The tongue with the flexible tab 75 could be combined with a bow shaped form 20 or protrusions according to the main principles of the invention.

Figure 17c shows that a flexible tab 75 could be located inside a displacement groove. It could be directed upwards or downwards and a separate tongue could have flexible 25 tabs inside and/or outside a displacement groove.

Figure 17d shows an embodiment with two displaceable tongues 15, 15' over and under each other. Fig 17e shows that the flexible tongue could be locked against a part of the locking strip 6. All tongues shown in this application 30 could be used in such locking systems.

A flexible tongue with protrusion could be used to lock very thin floor panels for example about 6 mm and even thinner. Even with a vertical thickness of a flexible tongue of about 1 mm a strong vertical locking could be obtained. Protrusions could be made extremely small. They could for example extent only about 1 mm or even less into the tongue groove and there could be more than 1 protrusion per 10 mm of the tongue length.

CLAIMS

1. A set of floor panels (1, 1', 1''), essentially identical, comprising a first and a second connector (20, 30, 6, 8, 14), which are integrated with the floor panels 5 (1, 1', 1'') and configured to connect a first floor panel (1') to a second floor (1) panel at adjacent edges

whereby the first connector comprising an upwardly directed locking element at one of the floor panels configured to cooperate with a locking groove (6, 8, 14) 10 in the other of said floorboards for connecting said first floor panel (1') with said second floor panel (1) in a horizontal direction (D2) perpendicular to the adjacent edges,

whereby the second connector comprising a flexible 15 tongue (15), of moulded plastic, in a displacement groove (40) in an edge of one of the floor panels (1, 1'), the flexible tongue (15) is configured to cooperate with a tongue groove in the other of said floor panels (1, 1') for locking the floor panels together in a vertical 20 direction (D1),

the flexible tongue is displaceable in the horizontal direction in the displacement groove, characterised in that the tongue comprising at least two protrusions at a first long edge (L1) of the 25 tongue, bendable in the horizontal plane, and extending essentially in a horizontal plane, and

that the tongue (15) has a second long edge (L2), which is configured to extend outside the displacement groove in the connected state, and that the outer edge of the second 30 long edge (L2) is essentially straight over substantially the whole length of the tongue.

2. The set of floor panels as claimed in claim 1,
wherein there is an angle between the protrusion 61 and
the longitudinal direction of the tongue 15.

3. The set of floor panels as claimed in claim 1 or 2,
5 wherein the protrusions 61 are bow shaped.

4. The set of floor panels as claimed in anyone of the
preceding claims, wherein the protrusions 61 extend into
the displacement groove 40.

5. The set of floor panels as claimed in anyone of the
10 preceding claims, wherein the first floor panel is
configured to be locked to the second floor panels with
vertical folding or solely vertical locking

6. The set of floor panels as claimed in anyone of the
claims 1-5, wherein the length of the tongue is more than
15 75% of the width WS of the front face of the floor panels
(1, 1').

7. The set of floor panels as claimed in anyone of the
claims 1-6, wherein the length of the tongue is more than
90% of the width WS of the front face of the floor panels.

20 8. The set of floor panels as claimed in anyone of the
claims 1-7, wherein the length of the tongue is
substantially the same as the width WS of the front face
of the floor panels.

25 9. The set of floor panels as claimed in anyone of the
claims 1-8, wherein the first long edge (L1) of the tongue
comprising a recess at each protrusion.

10. The set of floor panels as claimed in anyone of the claims 1-9, wherein the essentially straight edge of the tongue (15) is continuously.

11. A set of floor panels (1, 1', 1''), essentially identical, comprising a first and a second connector (20, 30, 6, 8, 14), which are integrated with the floor panels (1, 1', 1'') and configured to connect a first floor panel to a second floor panel (1) at adjacent edges,

10 whereby the first connector comprising an upwardly directed locking element at one of the floor panels configured to cooperate with a locking groove (6, 8, 14) in the other of said floorboards for connecting said first floor panel (1') with said second floor panel (1) in a horizontal direction (D2) perpendicular to the adjacent 15 edges,

20 whereby the second connector comprising a flexible tongue (15) in a displacement groove (40) in an edge of one of the floor panels (1, 1'), the flexible tongue (15) is configured to cooperate with a tongue groove (20) in the other of said floor panels for locking the floor panels together in a vertical direction (D1),

25 characterised in that the tongue comprising at least two protrusions (61) bendable in the horizontal plane, and extending essentially in a horizontal plane, and

that a part of the protrusions are configured, in the connected state, to extend outside the displacement groove (40) and into the tongue groove (20).

12. The set of floor panels as claimed in claim 11, wherein there is an angle between the protrusion 61 and the longitudinal direction of the tongue 15.

13. The set of floor panels as claimed in claim 11 or 5 12, wherein the protrusions 61 are bow shaped.

14. The set of floor panels as claimed in anyone of claims 11-13, wherein the first floor panel is configured to be locked to the second floor panels with vertical folding or solely vertical locking.

10 15. A floor panel having an edge portion presenting a sidewardly open groove, in which a tongue formed as a separate part is received, characterised in that the tongue (30) comprising at least two bow shaped protrusions (61) at a first long edge (L1) of the tongue, 15 and

that the protrusions are arranged bendable in the groove in a plane parallel to the front face of the panel and extending essentially in the plane.

20 16. The floor panel as claimed claim 15, wherein the tongue (15) has a second long edge (L2), which extends outside the groove.

17. The floor panel as claimed claim 15 or 16, wherein the second long edge (L2) is essentially straight over substantially the whole length of the tongue.

25 18. A floor panel as claimed in any one of claims 15-17, wherein the tongue presents a recess (150) in the plane and in a direction parallel with the length direction of the sidewardly open groove.

19. A floor panel as claimed in claim 17, wherein a space is formed by said recess (150) and a bottom of the groove, and wherein a portion of the tongue is bendable into said space.

5 20. A floor panel as claimed in claim 15, wherein a part of the protrusions extends outside the displacement groove.

10 21. A floor panel as claimed in any one of claims 15-20, wherein the tongue presents a sliding surface (32), which is inclined relative to the main plane of the floor panel.

15 22. A tongue (15) for a building panel, said tongue is of an elongated shape and made of moulded plastic characterised in that the tongue (15) comprising at least two protrusions (61) at a first long edge (L1) of the tongue, and

that the protrusions are bendable in a plane parallel to the upper surface (64) of the tongue and extending essentially in the parallel plane and,

20 23. The tongue as claimed in claim 22, wherein there is an angle between the protrusions (61) and the longitudinal direction of the tongue.

25 24. The tongue as claimed in claim 22 or 23, wherein the protrusions (61) are bow formed.

25. The tongue as claimed in anyone of the claims 22-24, wherein the protrusions (61) are configured to extend into a displacement groove (40) of the floor panel.

26. The tongue as claimed in anyone of the claims 22-25,
5 wherein the first long edge (L1) of the tongue comprising a recess (62) at each protrusion (63).

27. The tongue as claimed in claim 26, wherein the size of the recess (63) is adapted to the size of the protrusion (62).

10 28. The tongue as claimed in claim 26 or 27, wherein the shape of the recess (62) is adapted to the shape the protrusion (61).

29. The tongue as claimed in anyone of the claims 22-28, wherein the essentially straight edge (L2) of the tongue
15 (15) is continuously.

30. The tongue as claimed in anyone of the claims 22-29, wherein the upper (64) and lower (65) surface of the tongue are displacement surfaces.

31. The tongue as claimed in anyone of the claims 22-30,
20 wherein the upper displacement surface (64) and/or the lower displacement surface (65) has/have a bevelled edge, presenting a sliding surface (32, 31) and an inclined locking surface (66), respectively.

32. The tongue as claimed in anyone of the claims 22-31,
25 wherein a vertical protrusion (63) is arranged at the upper side and/or at the lower side of the horizontal protrusions (61).

33. The tongue as claimed in claim 32, wherein the vertical protrusion (63) is arranged close to or at the tip of horizontal protrusions (61).

5 34. The tongue as claimed in any one of the claims 22-33, wherein tongue (15) is made PP or POM, and reinforced with fibres, e.g. glass fibres.

35. The tongue as claimed in anyone of the claims 22-34, wherein the building panel is a floor panel.

10 36. The tongue as claimed in anyone of the claims 22-35 wherein the displacements groove is made of a different material than the core of the panel.

15 37. The tongue as claimed in anyone of the claims 22-36 wherein the length of the protrusion (PL) is larger than the total width (TW) of the tongue, whereby the total width is the width of the tongue (W) plus the distance, perpendicular to the length direction of the tongue, from the tongue body to the tip of the protrusion.

38. The tongue as claimed in claim 37 wherein the length of the protrusion (PL) is larger than $2 \times TW$.

20 39. The tongue as claimed in anyone of the claims 22-38 wherein force to compress the tongue 1 mm in the width direction is per 100 mm length of the tongue in the range of about 20 to about 30 N.

25 40. A locking system for floor panels comprising a mechanically locking system at two adjacent edges of a first and a second panel, whereby the mechanically locking system comprising a first connector for locking in a horizontal direction (D2) perpendicular to the adjacent edges and a second connector comprising in order to

facilitate the installation a separate tongue (15, 30), for locking in a vertical direction (D1) whereby a part of the tongue is flexible and bendable in the horizontal and/or vertical plane characterised in that

5 the locking system is configured to connect a first panel to a second panel by angling, substantially horizontal snapping and vertical locking.

41. The set of floor panels as claimed in claim 40, wherein the flexible part is bendable in the horizontal
10 plane in the length direction of the tongue.

42. The set of floor panels as claimed in claim 40, wherein the flexible part of the tongue is a snap tab bendable in the vertical direction.

43. The set of floor panels as claimed in claim 40-42,
15 wherein the flexible part is configured to be displaced in a groove formed in the first and the second panel.

44. The set of floor panels as claimed in claim 40-43, wherein the tongue is made of a separate material than the material of the core of the panel.

20 45. A method to connect floor panels comprising short edges with a mechanical locking system comprising a separate tongue with a flexible part for locking adjacent short edges vertically and a locking strip with a locking element cooperating with a locking groove for horizontally
25 locking, and long edges with a mechanical locking system comprising a tongue, a groove, a locking strip and a locking groove for vertical and horizontal locking by angling characterised in that the method comprising the steps of:

- a) installing a second row R2 of panels by connecting the short sides of the panels with vertical locking or snapping, whereby the flexible part of the tongue is displaced and

5 b) connecting the second R2 row to an installed and adjacent first rows R1 by angling.

Fig. 1a

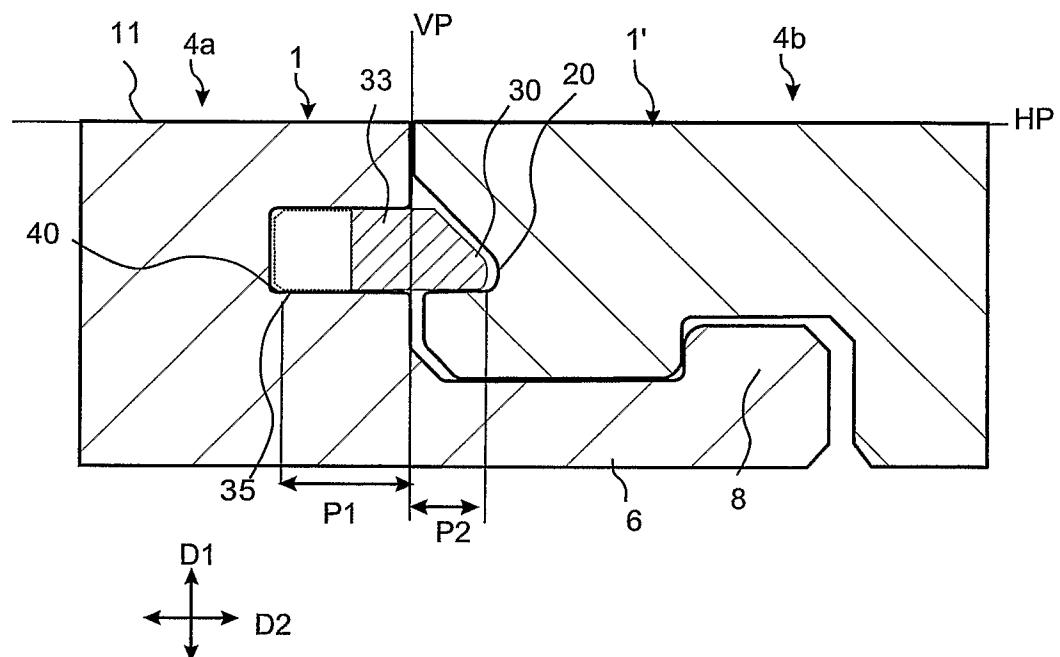


Fig. 1c

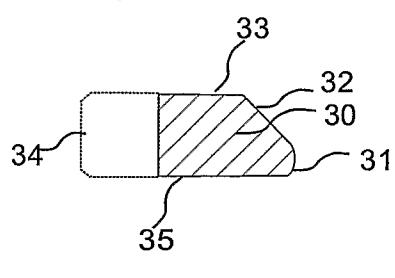


Fig. 1b

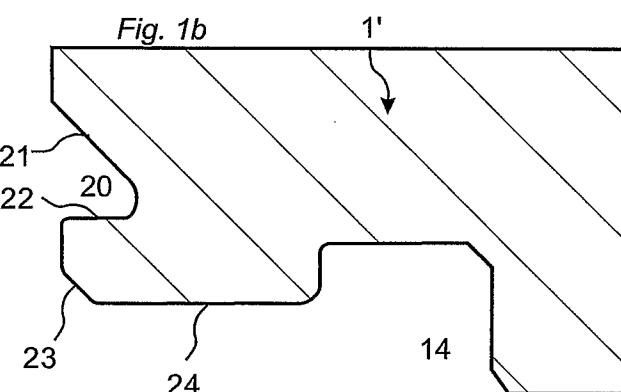
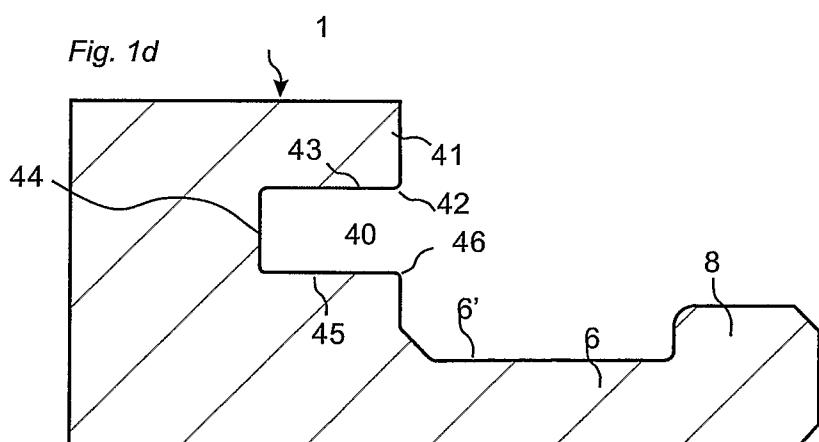


Fig. 1d



Prior Art

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Fig. 2a

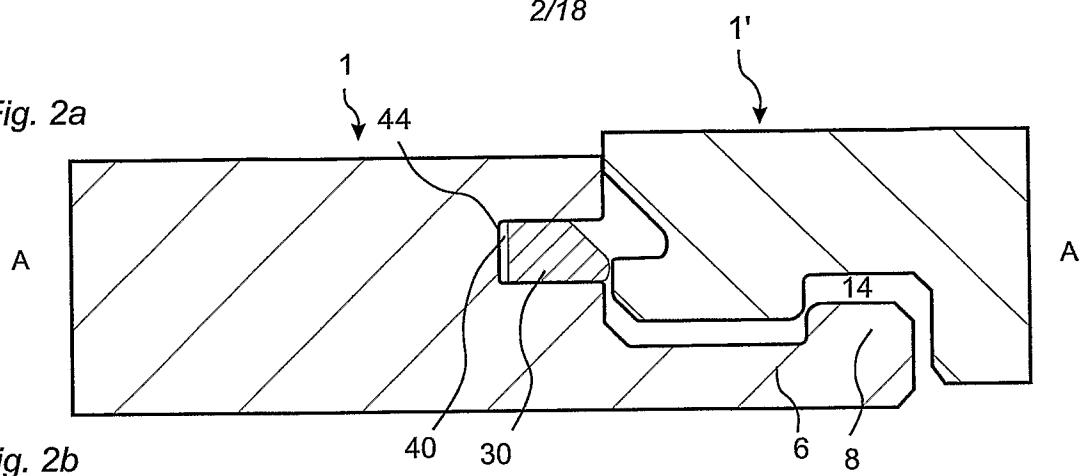
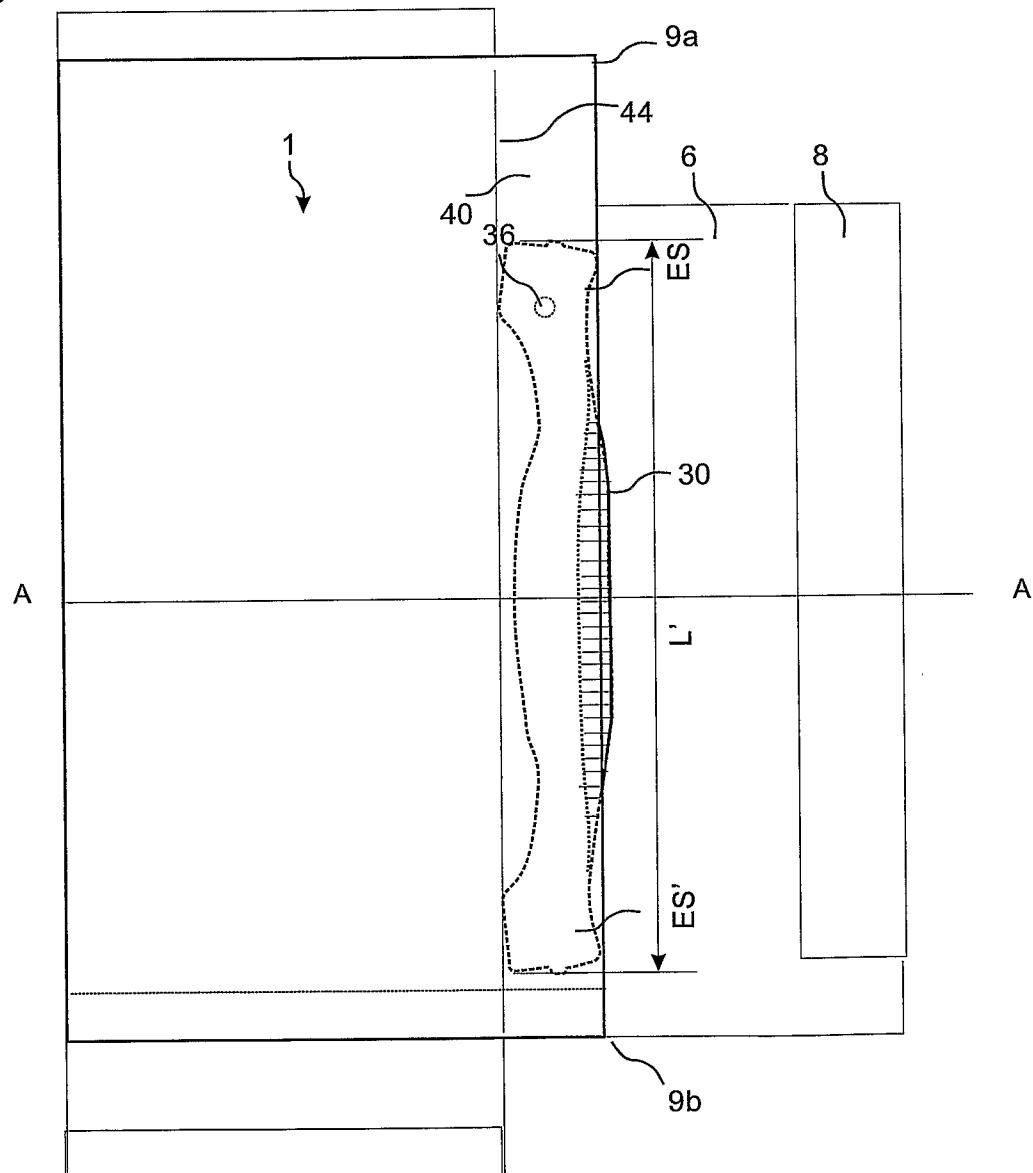
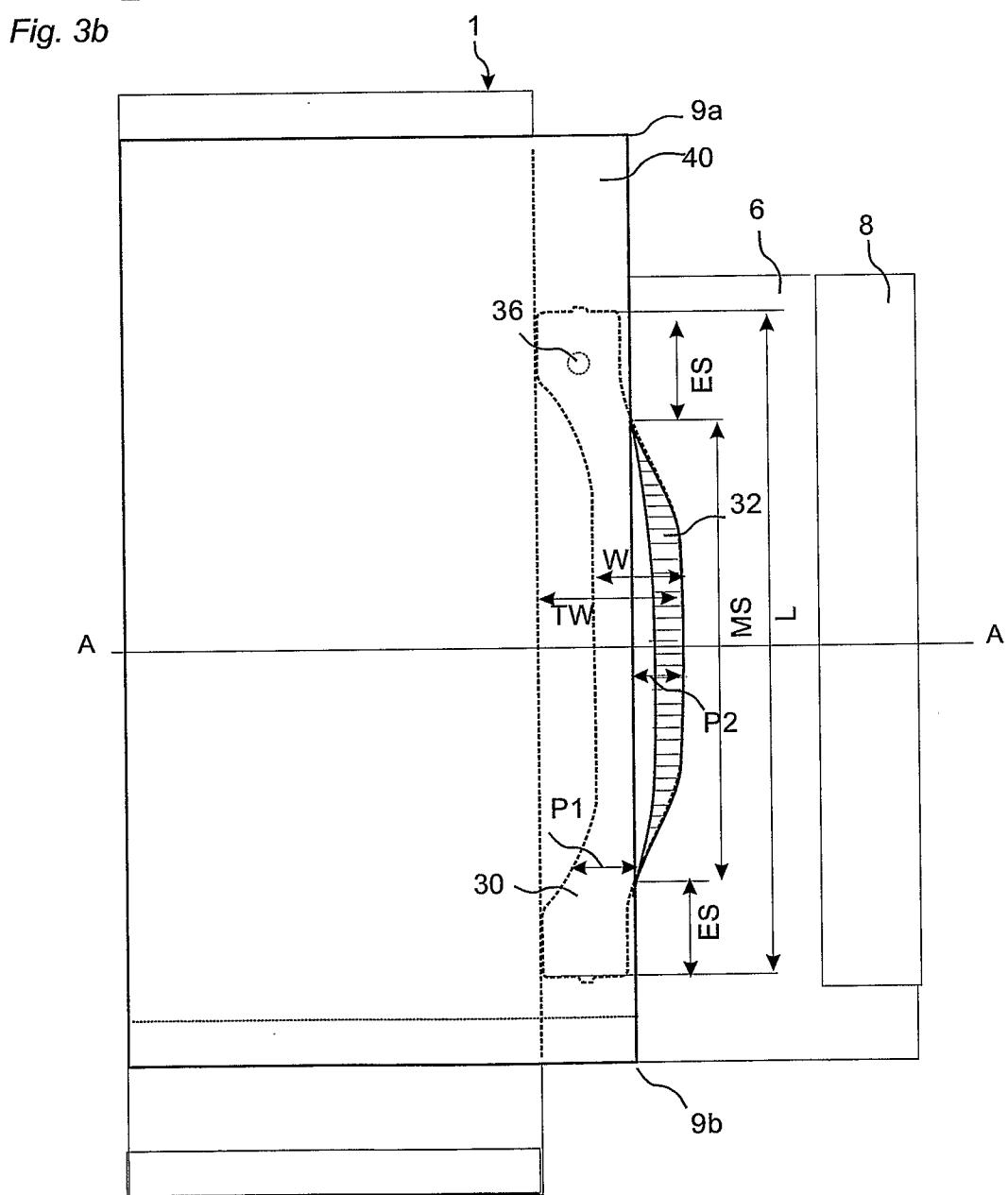
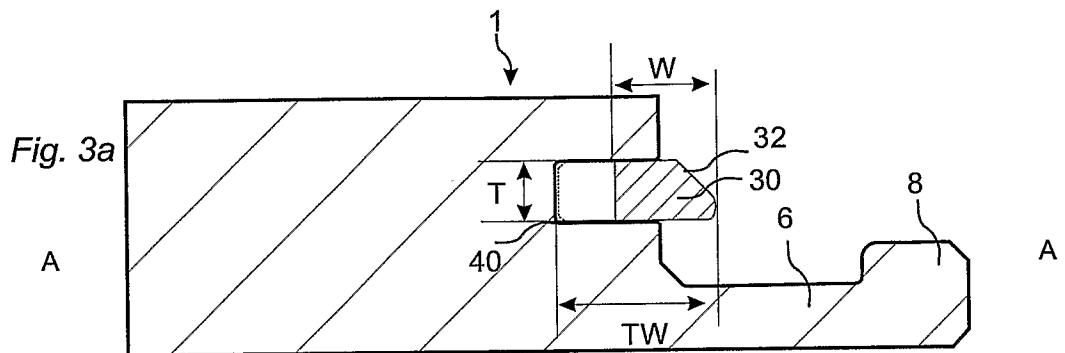


Fig. 2b



Prior Art

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Prior Art

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Fig. 4a

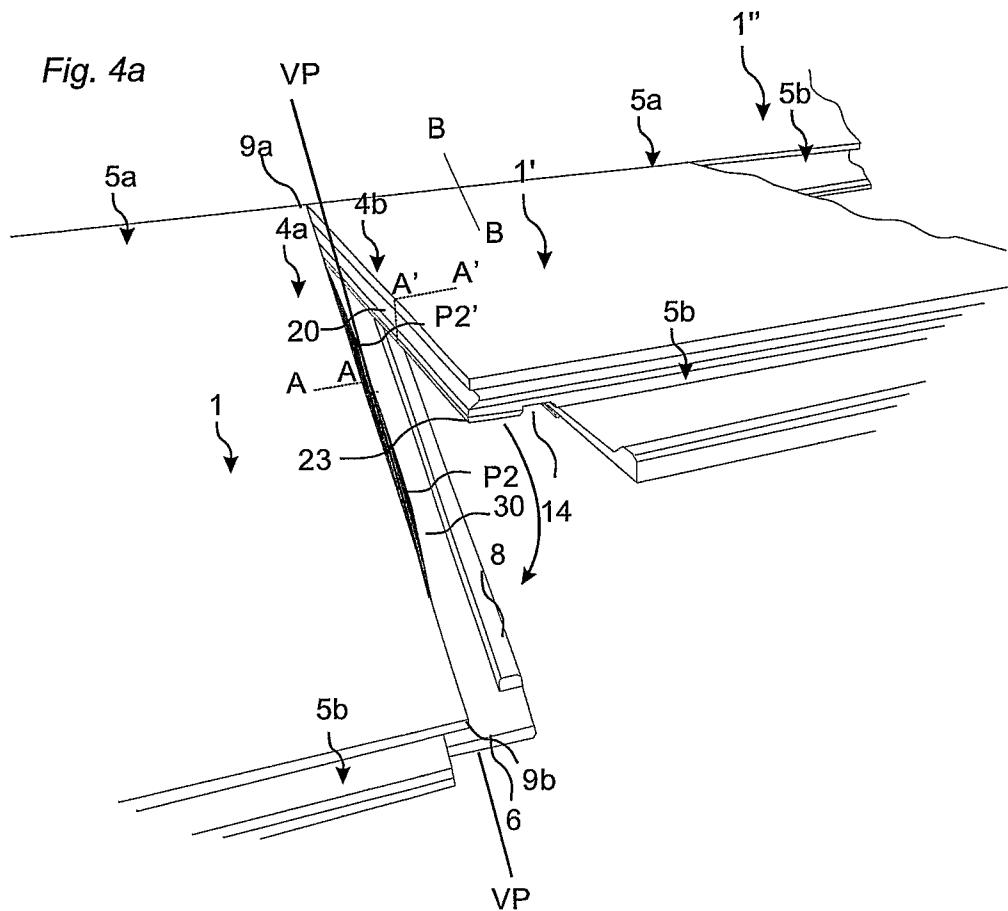
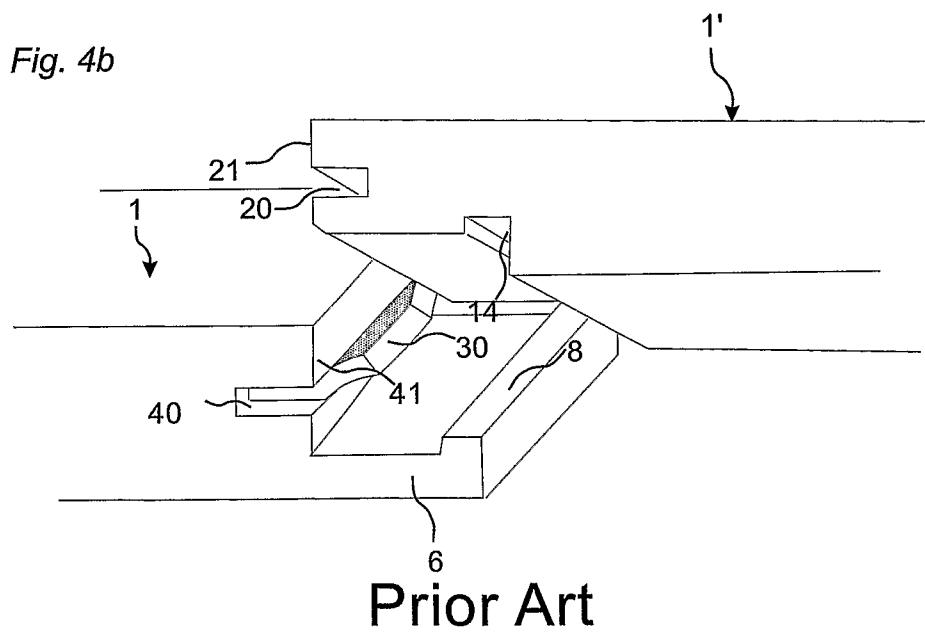


Fig. 4b



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Fig. 5a

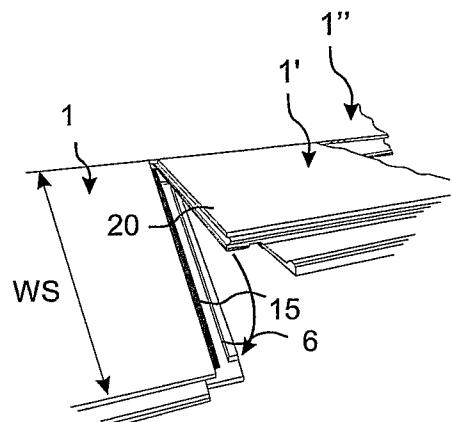


Fig. 5b

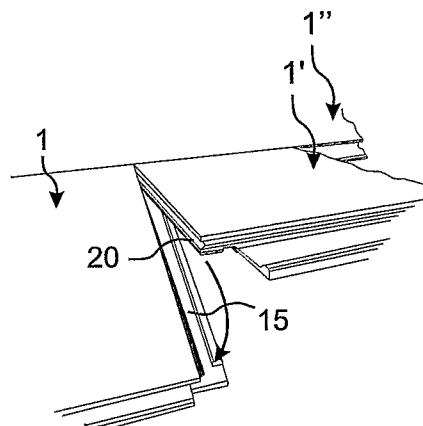
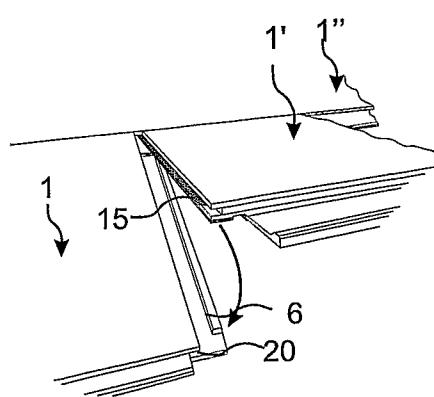


Fig. 5c



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Fig. 6a

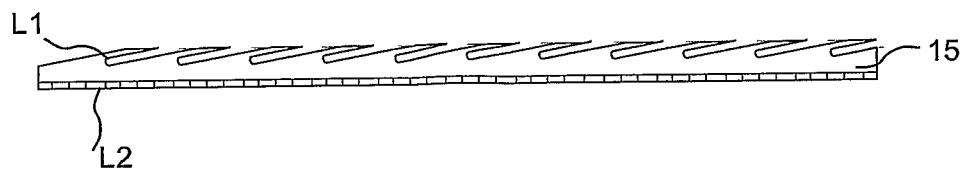


Fig. 6b

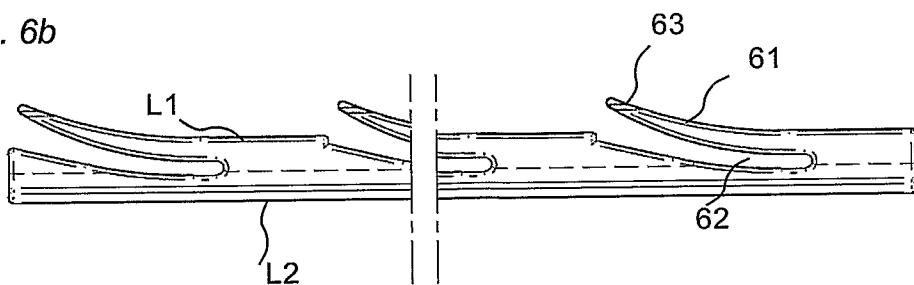


Fig. 6c

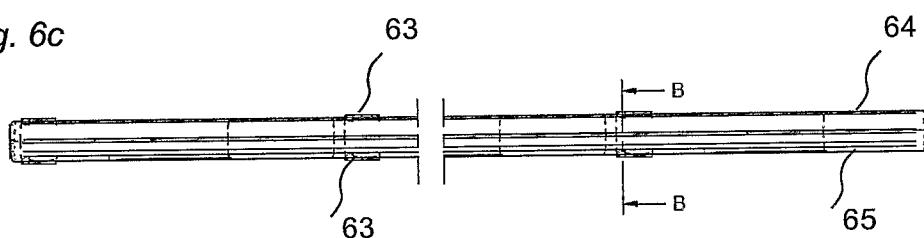


Fig. 6d

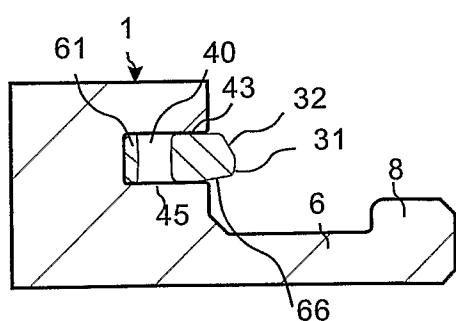
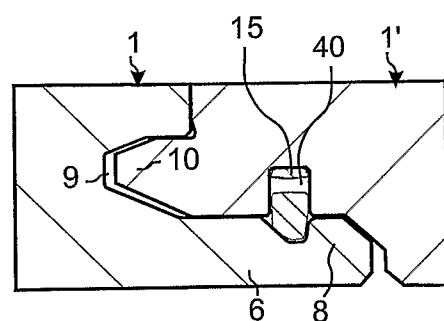


Fig. 6e



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Fig. 7a

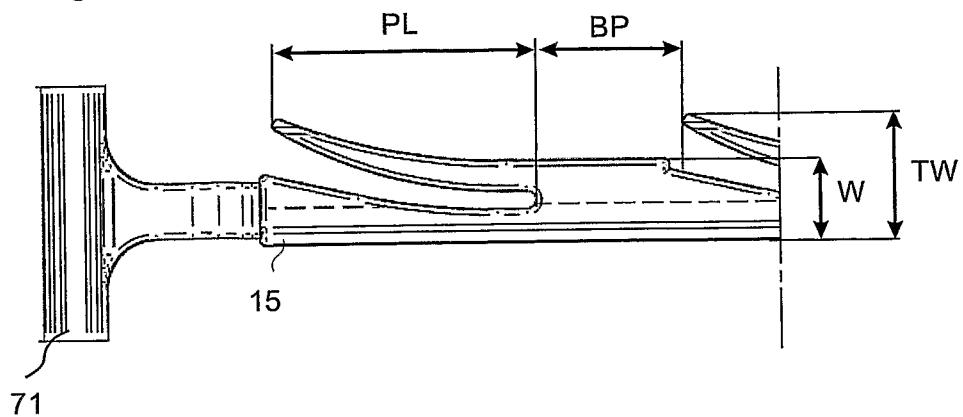
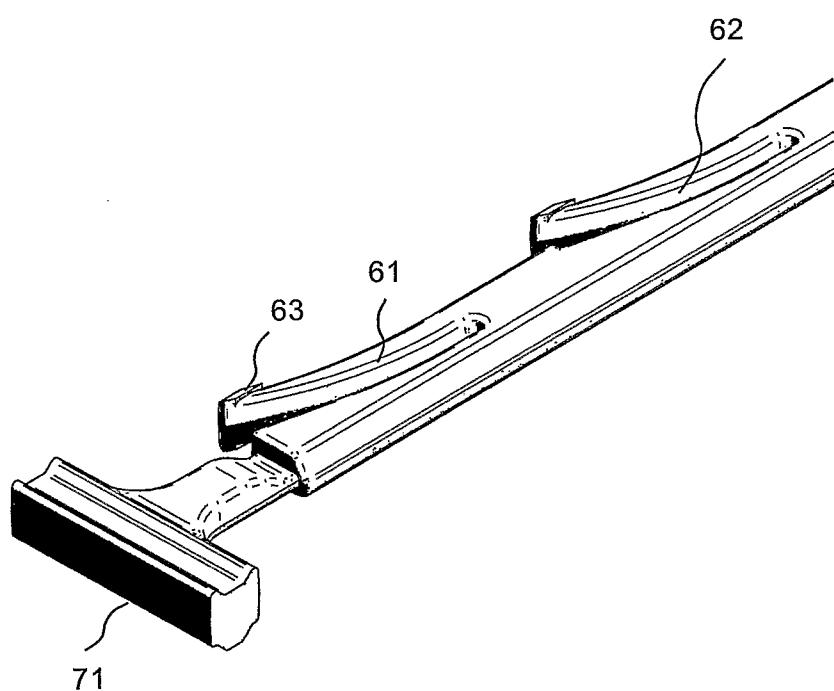


Fig. 7b



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Fig. 8a

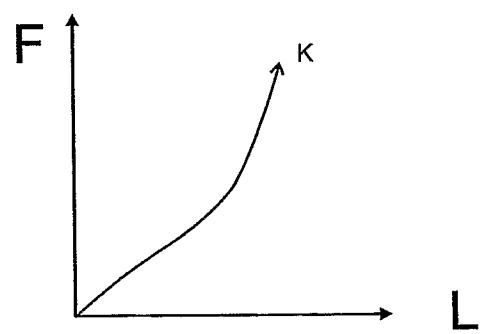
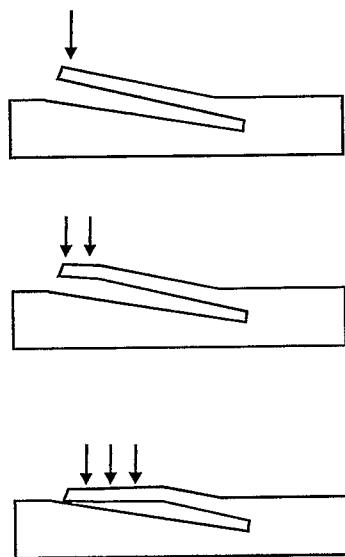
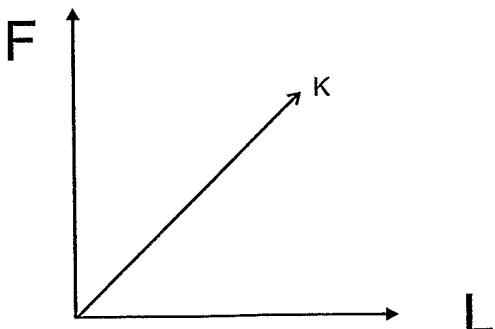
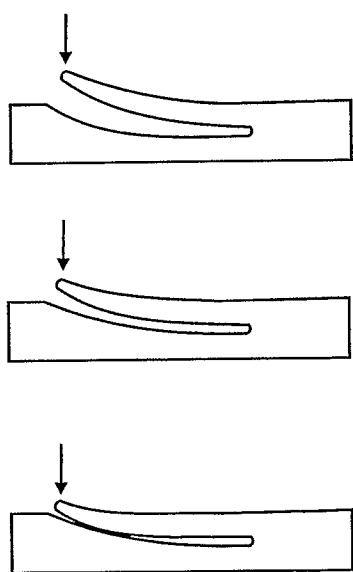


Fig. 8b



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Fig. 9a

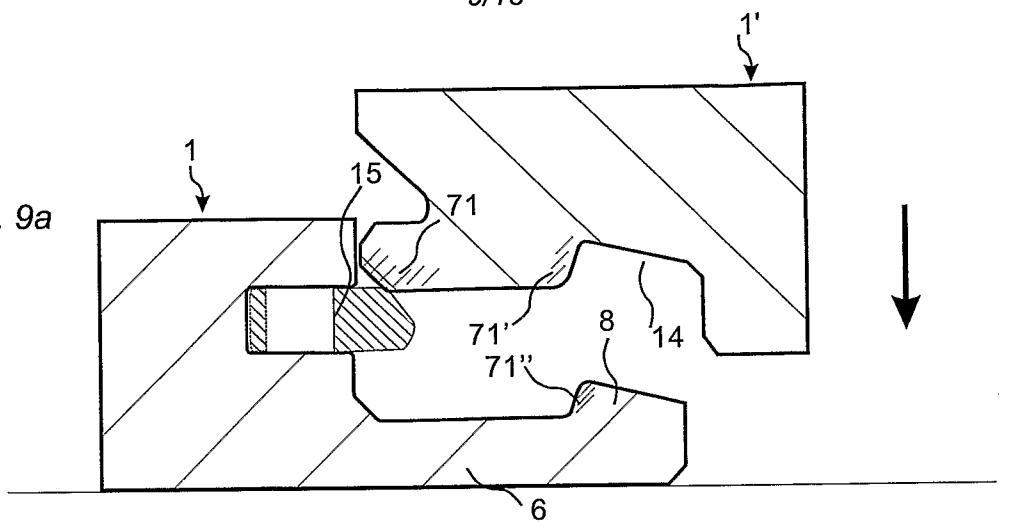


Fig. 9b

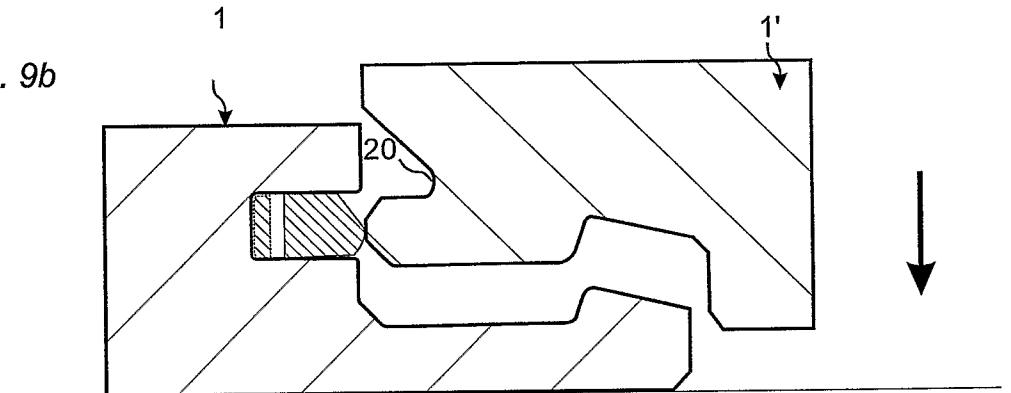


Fig. 9c

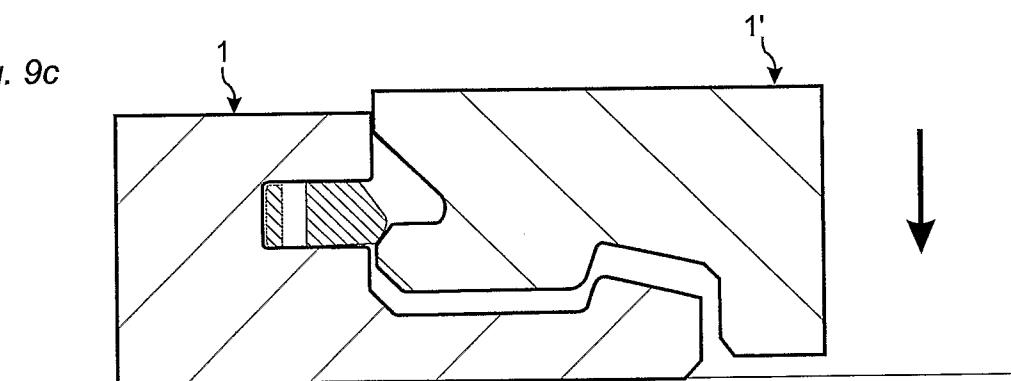
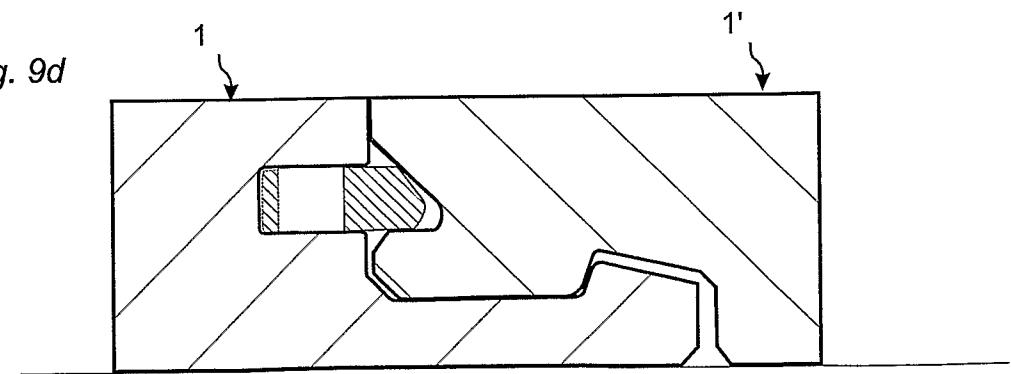
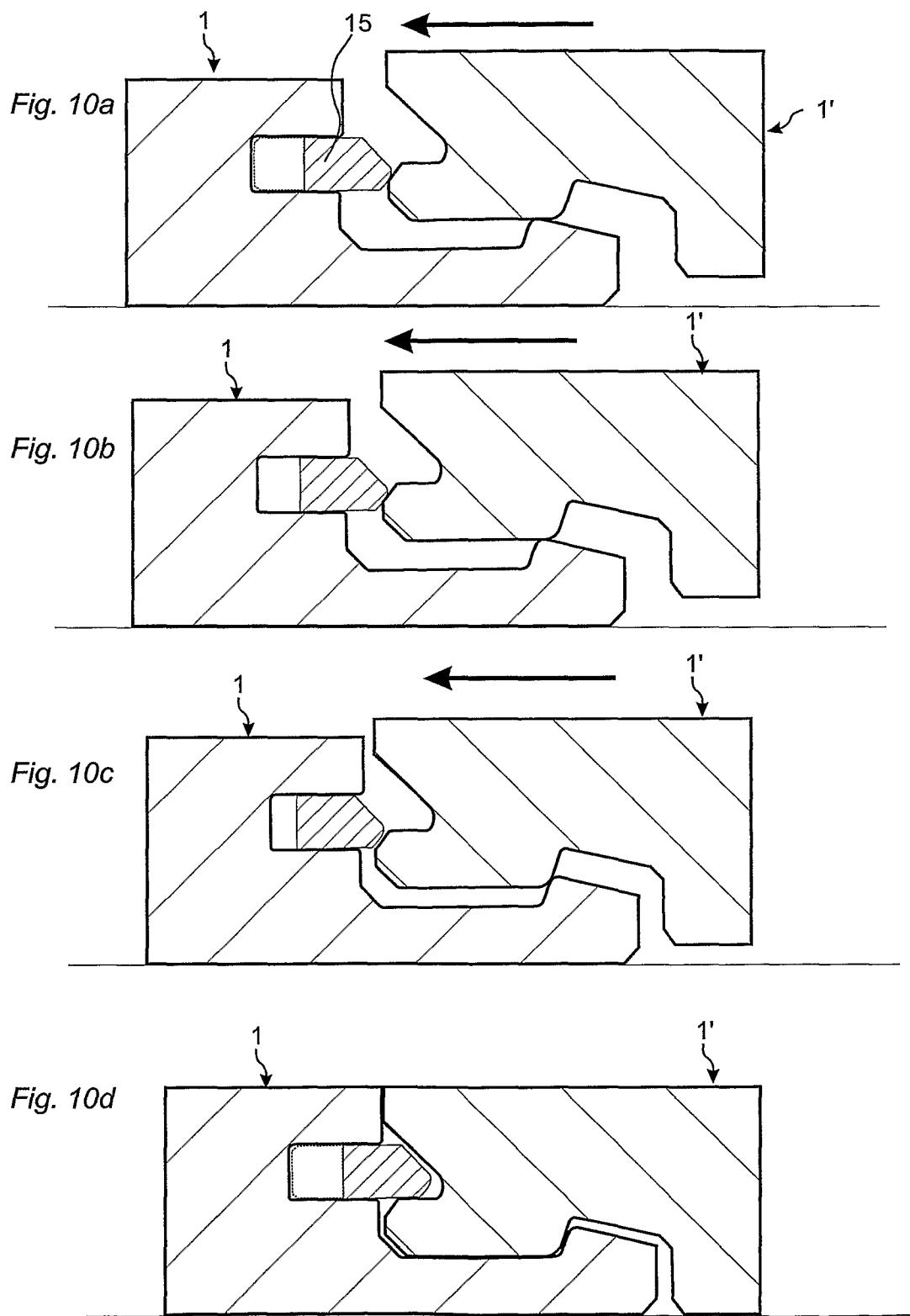


Fig. 9d



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Fig. 11a

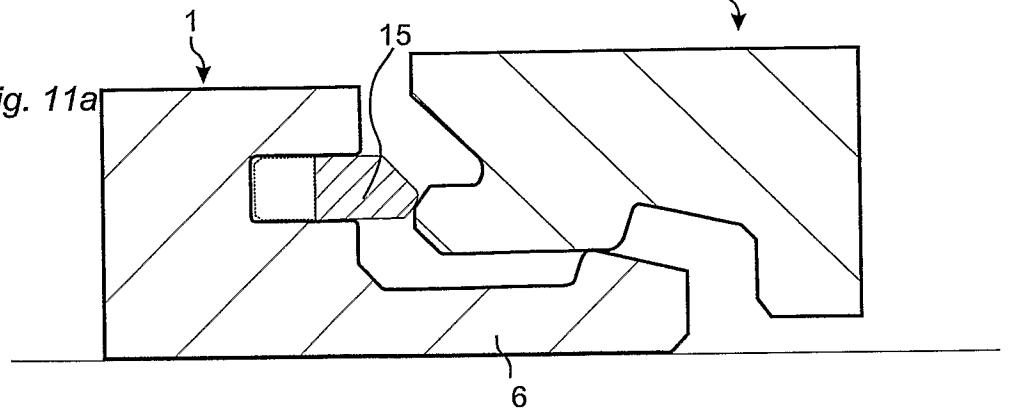


Fig. 11b

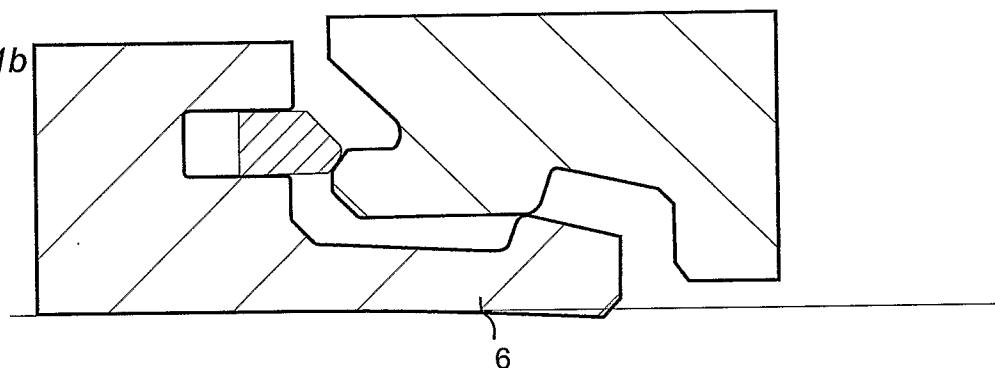


Fig. 11c

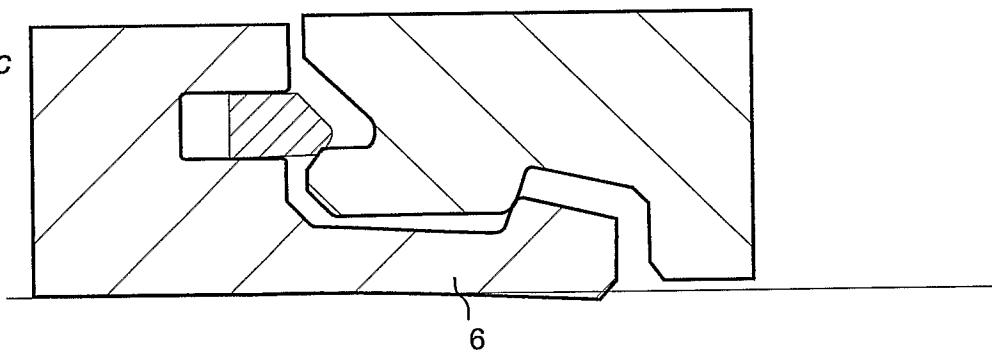
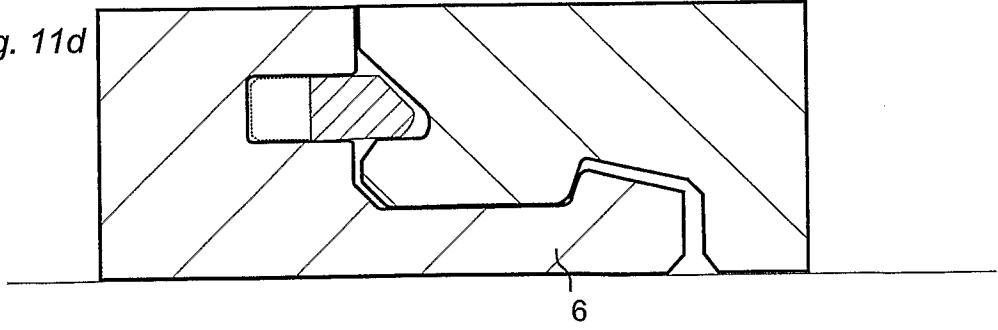
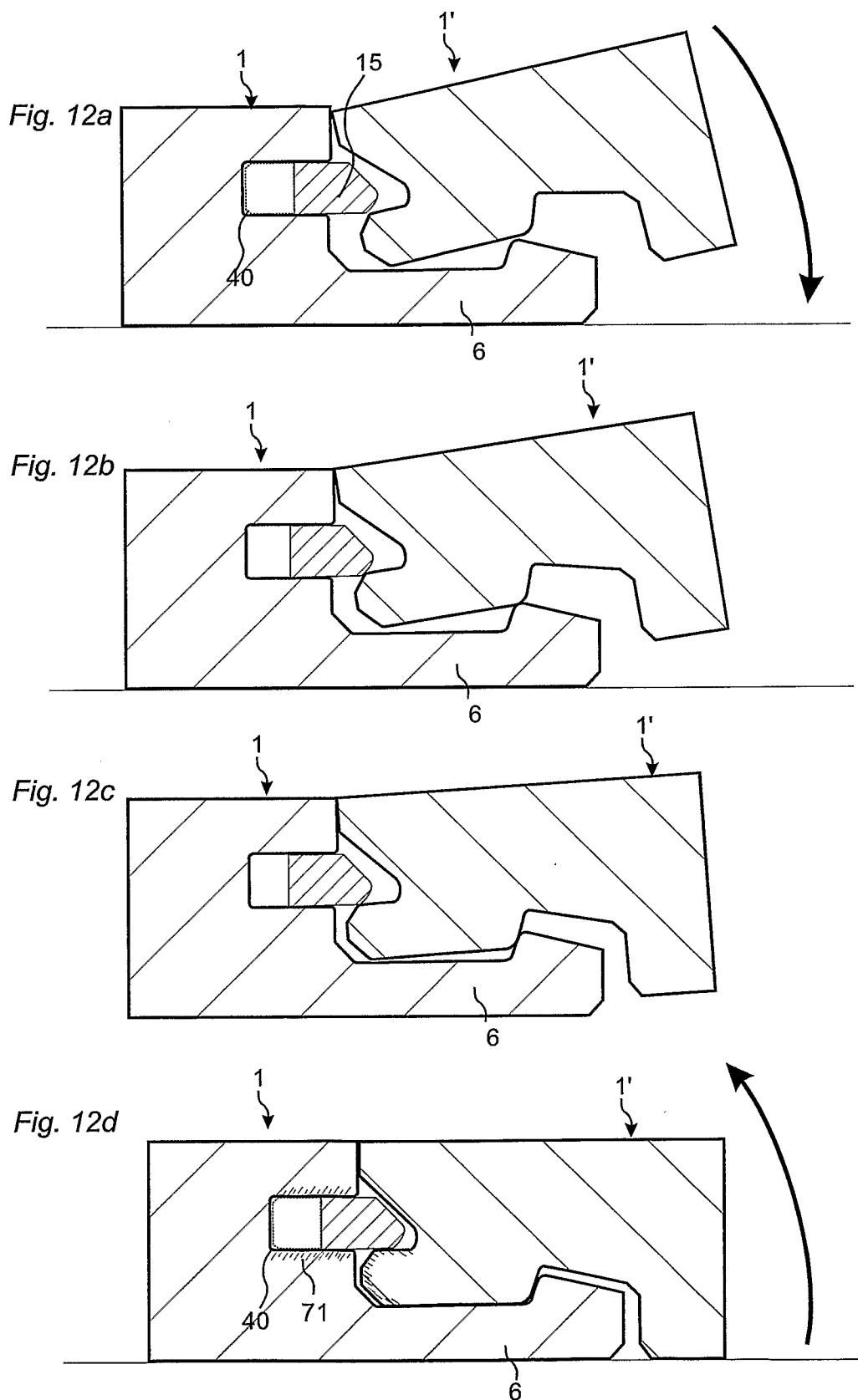


Fig. 11d



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Fig. 13a

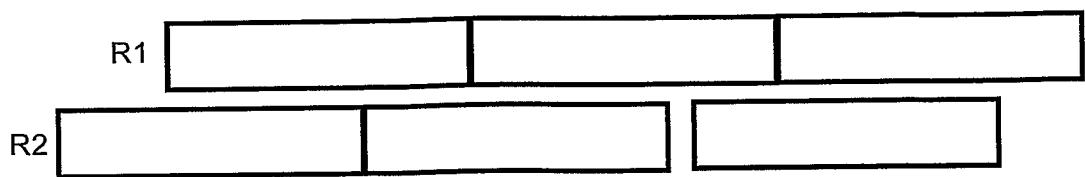


Fig. 13b

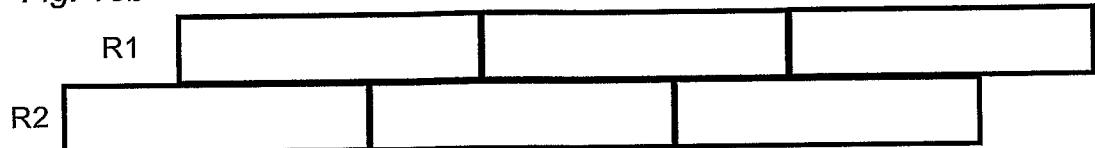


Fig. 13c

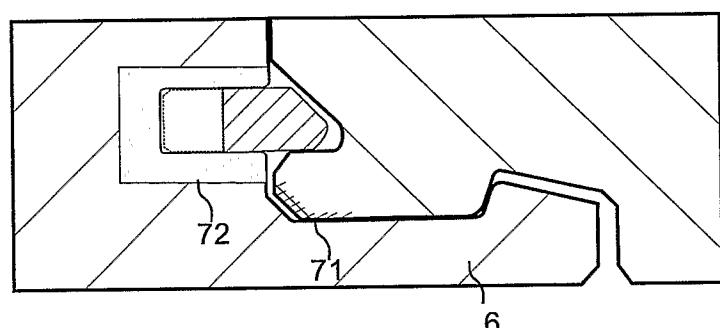


Fig. 13d

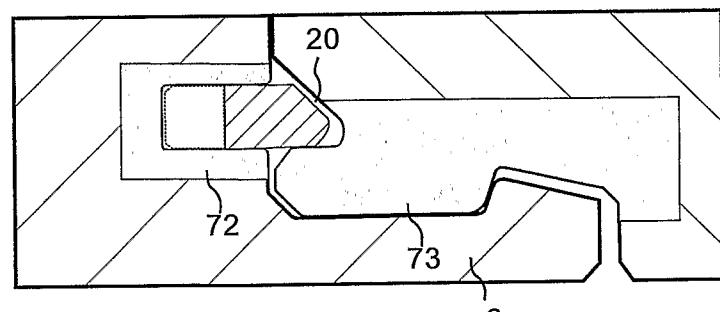


Fig. 13e

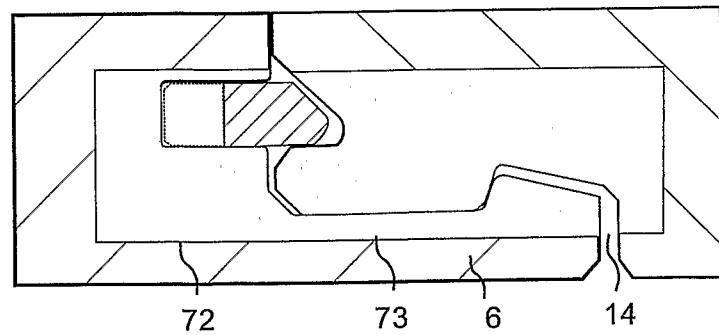


Fig. 14a

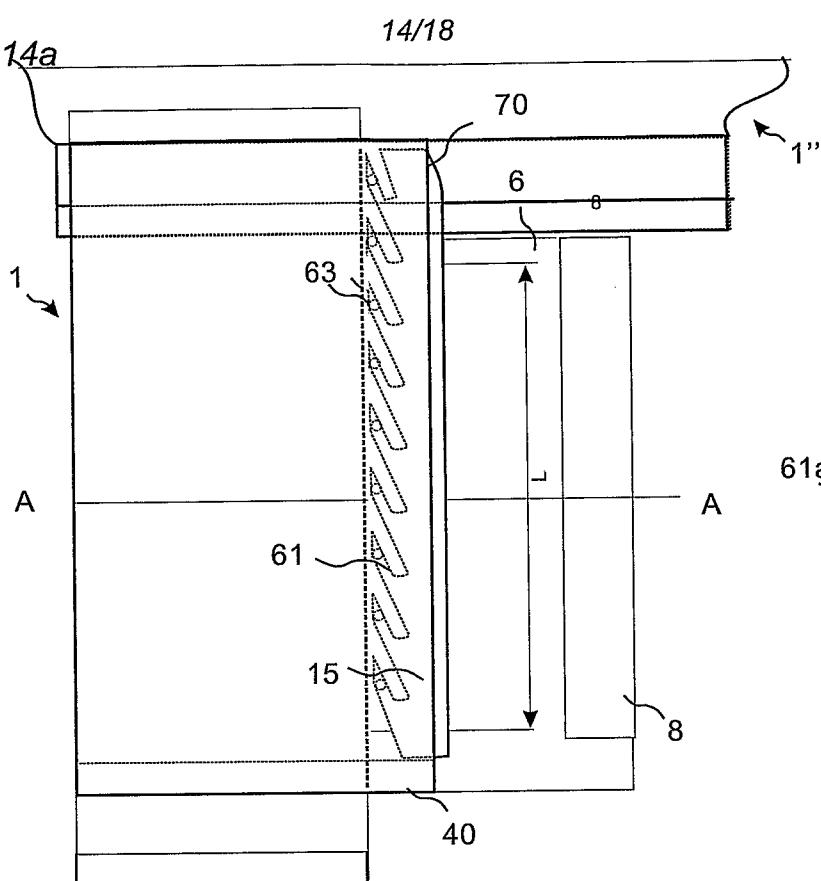
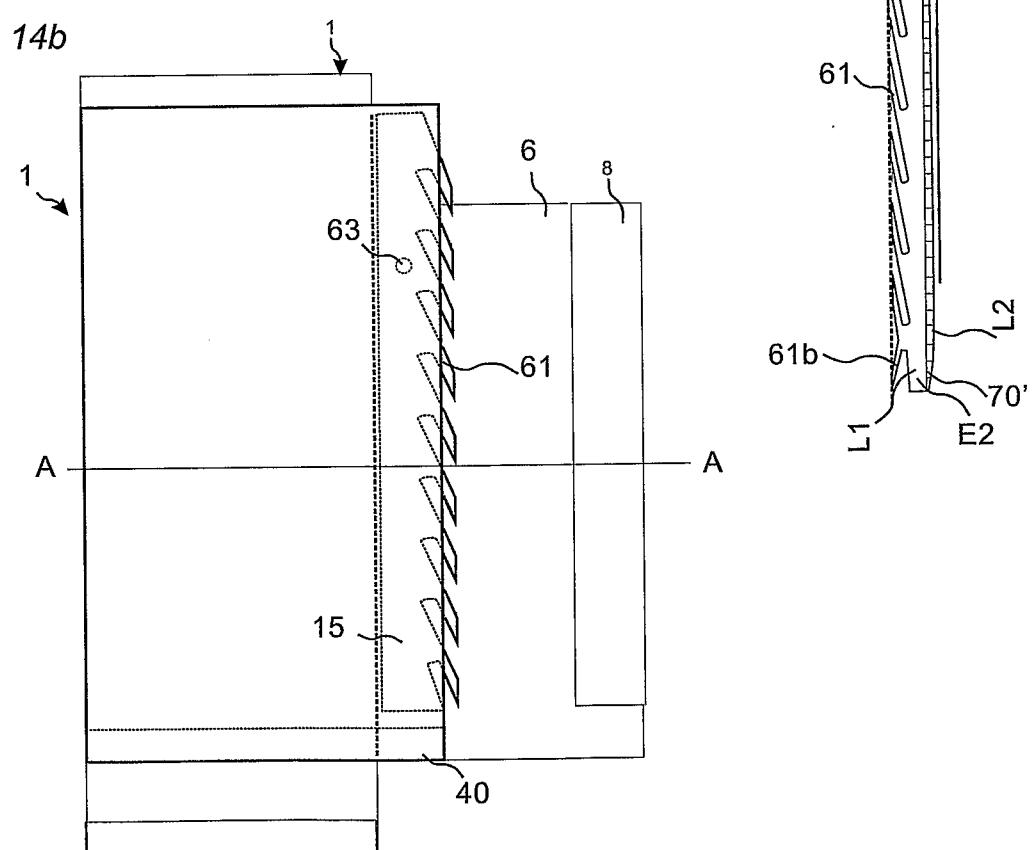


Fig. 14b



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Fig. 15a

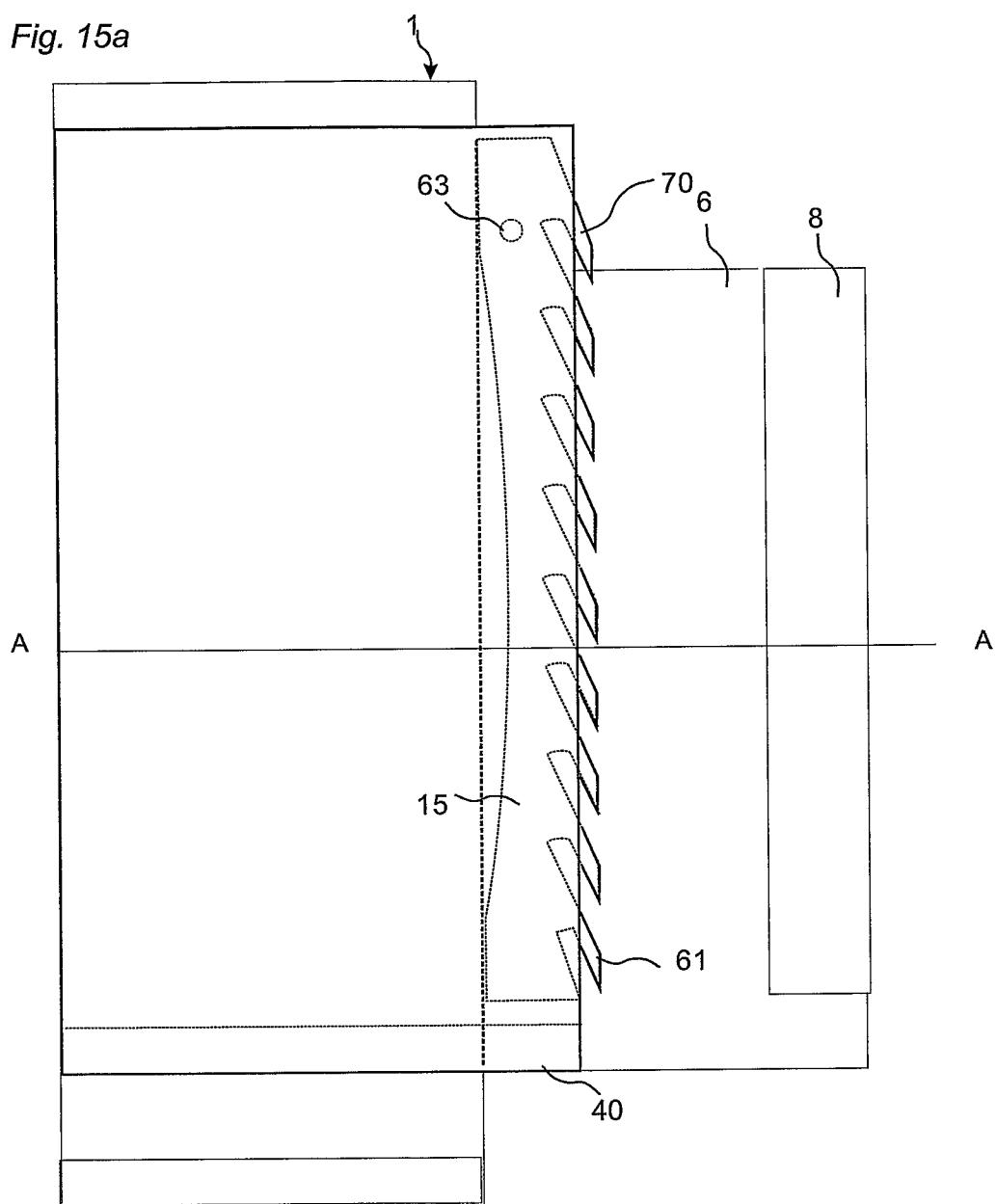
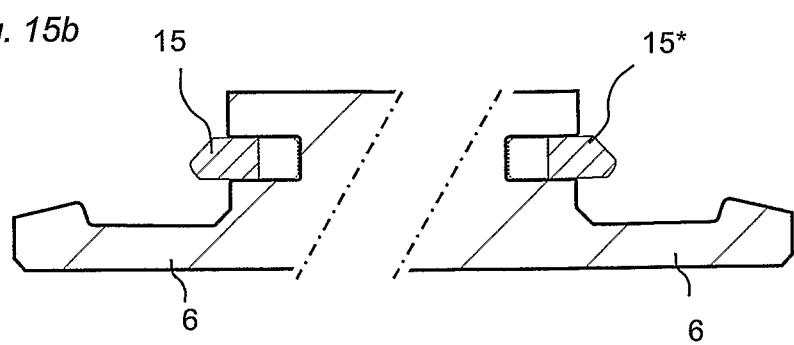


Fig. 15b



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Fig. 16a

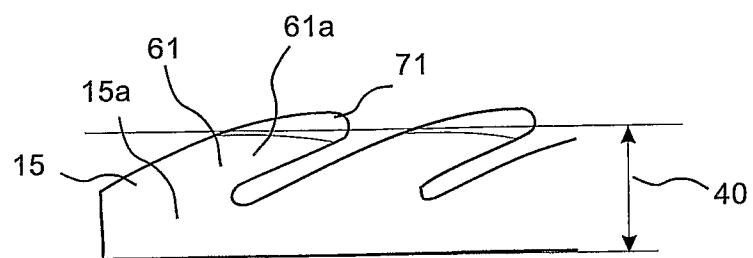


Fig. 16b

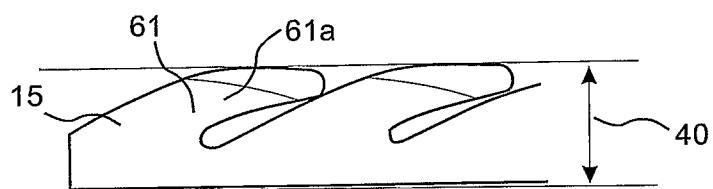


Fig. 16c

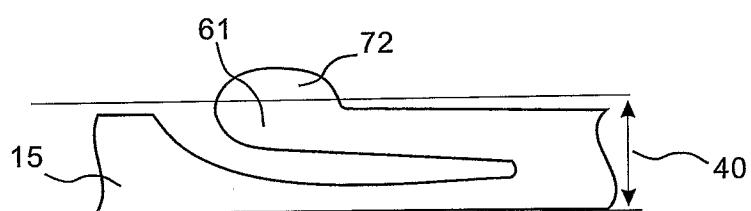


Fig. 16d

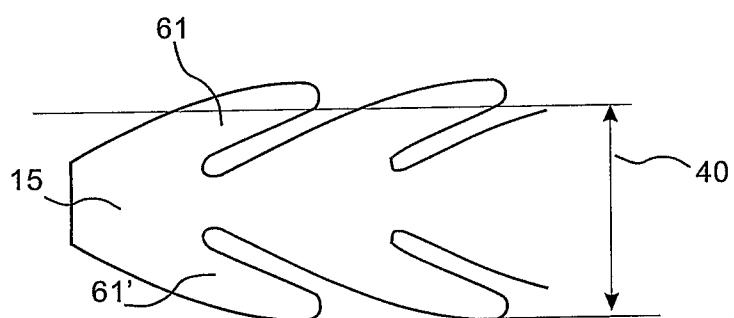
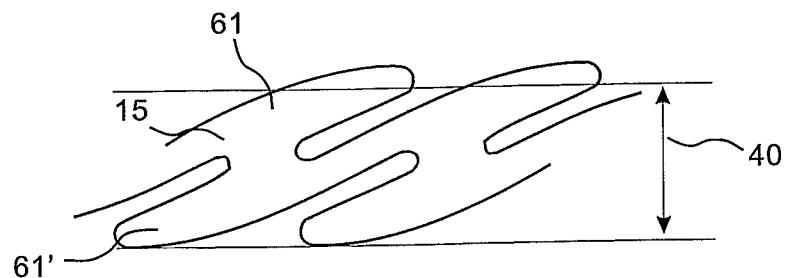


Fig. 16e



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Fig. 16f



Fig. 16g



Fig. 16h

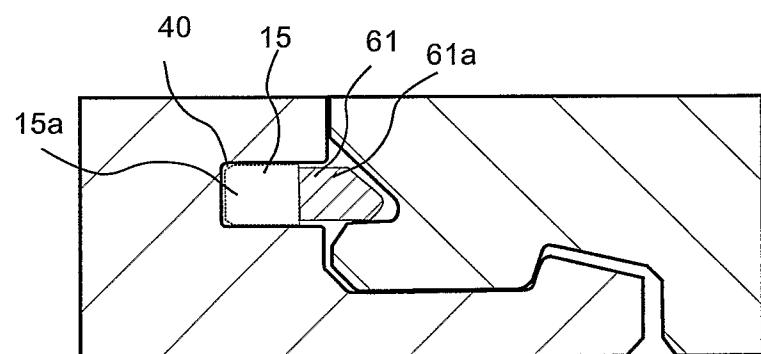
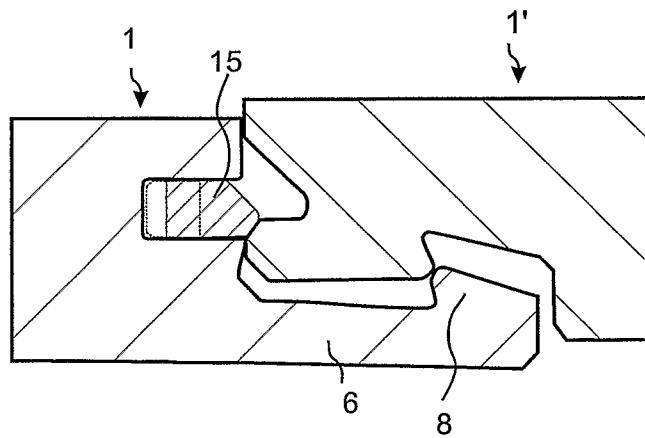


Fig. 16i



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Fig. 17a

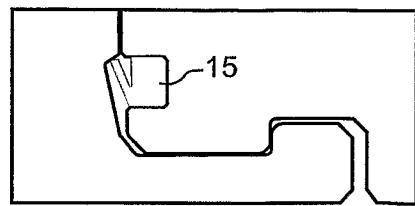
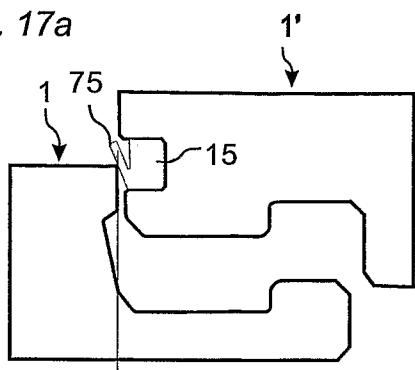


Fig. 17b VP

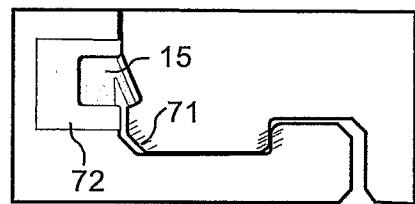
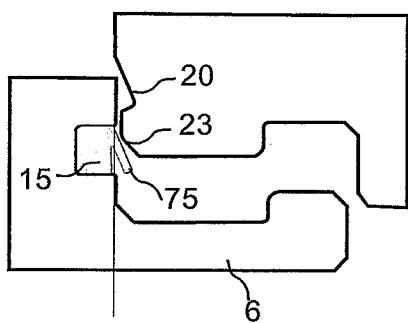


Fig. 17c VP

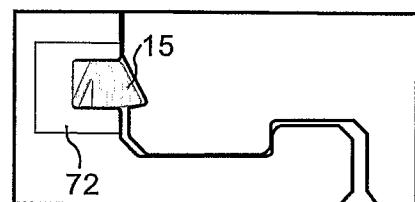
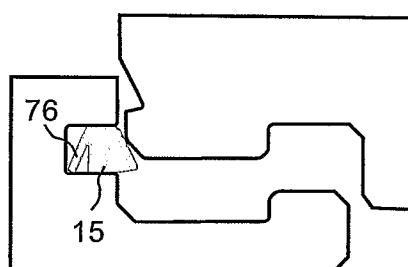


Fig. 17d

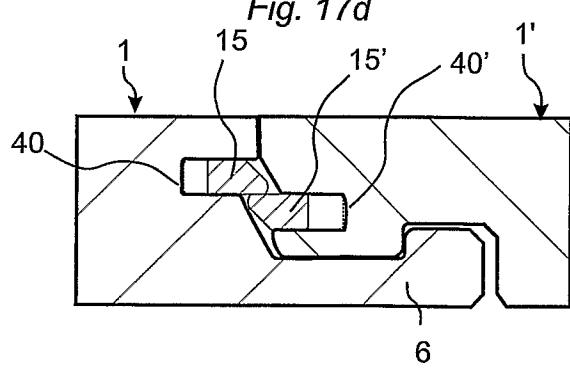


Fig. 17e

