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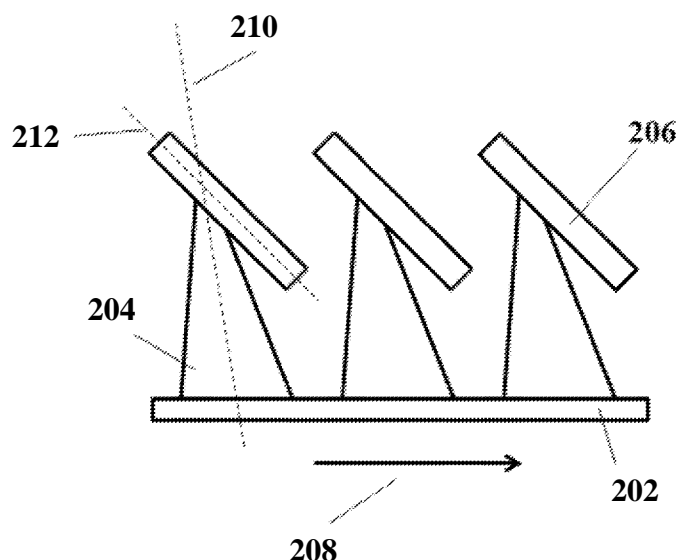


FIG. 2B

(57) Abstract: Provided are systems and methods for the post-treatment of dry adhesive microstructures. The microstructures may be post-treated to comprise mushroom-like flaps at their tips to interface with the contact surface. In some aspects, a change in material composition of the microstructures in a dry adhesive may affect mechanical properties to enhance or diminish overall adhesive performance. For example, conductive additives can be added to the material to improve adhesive performance. In other aspects, microstructures comprising conductive material may allow for pre-load engagement sensing systems to be integrated into the microstructures.



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SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR POST-TREATMENT OF DRY ADHESIVE MICROSTRUCTURES

CROSS-REFERENCE

[0001] This application claims the benefit of U.S. Patent Application No. 15/460,440, filed March 16, 2017, which application is entirely incorporated herein by reference.

STATEMENT AS TO FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH

[0002] This invention was made with the support of the United States government under Contract number NNX16CP19C awarded by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program. The United States government has certain rights in the invention.

BACKGROUND

[0003] Artificial fibrillar microstructures have been shown to mimic the dry adhesive capabilities of micro-scale setae on the toes of the gecko lizard. In particular, individual fibrillar microstructures can be configured to conform to an adhering surface to improve real contact area and thereby increase attractive forces (e.g., intermolecular van der Waals forces) between the individual fibers and the contact surface. Dry adhesives, which are not dependent on liquid secretion, can adhere to and release from contact surfaces without leaving residue on the surfaces and with minimal contamination, allowing for repeated uses and longer lifetimes.

[0004] Physical characteristics and material properties of fibrillar microstructures can enhance or diminish their adhesive performance. For instance, synthetic fibrillar microstructures may be fabricated or post-treated to comprise tips having specific shapes, such as mushroom-like flaps, that can increase the real contact area between the individual fibers and the contact surface and significantly enhance the dry adhesive performance of these synthetic fibrillar microstructures. In another instance, the synthetic fibrillar microstructures may be fabricated or post-treated to comprise materials having different material properties. In some instances, different material properties, such as material conductivity, may allow for sensing systems to be integrated into the microstructures.

SUMMARY

[0005] Recognized herein are systems and methods for the post-treatment of dry adhesive microstructures that can improve adhesive performance. In some aspects, the microstructures can be post-treated to change physical characteristics, such as to comprise mushroom-like flaps.

In other aspects, the microstructures can be post-treated, or initially fabricated, to comprise different materials. In some instances, microstructures comprising conductive material may be integrated into an engagement sensing system.

[0006] Provided is a method for post-treating dry adhesive microstructures to form post-treated tips. The method can comprise: directing a liquid polymer layer to self-align with a plurality of microstructures adjacent to a gripping surface; receiving, by a computer processor, a reading of applied pressure on said gripping surface by said liquid polymer layer; adjusting a position of said liquid polymer layer relative to a position of said gripping surface based at least in part on said reading of applied pressure and a predetermined dipping pressure; retracting said liquid polymer layer such that a portion of said liquid polymer layer is retained on a tip of each microstructure of said plurality of microstructures; and curing said portion of said liquid polymer layer.

[0007] In some embodiments, the computer processor can receive the reading of the applied pressure on the gripping surface by the liquid polymer layer and adjust the position of the liquid polymer layer in real-time.

[0008] In some embodiments, the curing can be performed while pressing the tip of each microstructure against a surface. The surface can be a hard surface.

[0009] In some embodiments, pressing the tip of each microstructure against the surface can comprise directing the surface to self-align with the plurality of microstructures. After self-alignment of the surface, the method can further comprise receiving, by the computer processor, a reading of applied pressure on the gripping pad by the surface, and adjusting a position of the surface using the reading of applied pressure on the gripping pad by the hard surface and a predetermined pressing pressure. The computer processor can receive the reading of the applied pressure on the gripping surface by the surface and adjust the position of the surface in real-time.

[0010] In some embodiments, the position of the gripping surface can be stationary throughout the method. For example, the gripping surface can be fixed in place, and either the liquid polymer layer or the surface, or both, can be moved relative to the stationary gripping surface.

[0011] In some embodiments, each microstructure of the plurality of microstructures can be oriented substantially along the same direction. For example, this can allow for directional control of the dry adhesives. In some embodiments, the microstructures of the plurality of microstructures can have parallel longitudinal axes, wherein the parallel longitudinal axes are oriented with respect to a normal of the gripping surface at an angle greater than zero degrees.

[0012] In some embodiments, each microstructure of the plurality of microstructures can include a first surface and a second surface, wherein the first surface has a greater surface area than the second surface. For example, each microstructure can be wedge-shaped.

[0013] In some embodiments, the plurality of microstructures and the liquid polymer layer can comprise the same elastomer. In some embodiments, the plurality of microstructures can comprise conductive additive(s). In some embodiments, the liquid polymer layer can comprise conductive additive(s).

[0014] In some embodiments, a given post-treated tip of the post-treated tips can comprise one or more flaps each projecting from a characteristic axis of the given post-treated tip. The characteristic axis of the given post-treated tip can be a longitudinal axis of the given post-treated tip.

[0015] In some embodiments, the one or more flaps can have parallel longitudinal axes, wherein the longitudinal axes are oriented with respect to a normal of the gripping surface at an angle greater than zero degrees. In some embodiments, the longitudinal axes of the one or more flaps can be non-parallel to longitudinal axes of the plurality of microstructures.

[0016] Provided is an apparatus for treating dry adhesive microstructures to form tips. The apparatus can comprise a plate comprising a gripping surface, wherein the gripping surface comprises a plurality of microstructures and an elevating plate having a first surface and a second surface opposite the first surface, wherein the first surface interfaces with the gripping surface and wherein the elevating plate is rotatable about a spherical joint coupled to the second surface. The apparatus can further comprise an arm having a proximal end and a distal end, wherein the distal end is coupled to the spherical joint and the proximal end is attached to a linear stage configured to move in an axis normal to a plane of the plate, a pressure sensor configured to measure applied pressure on the gripping surface by the elevating plate, and one or more computer processors operatively coupled to the pressure sensor and the linear stage, wherein the one or more computer processors are individually or collectively programmed to (i) receive from the pressure sensor readings of applied pressure, and (ii) use the readings of applied pressure and a predetermined pressure setting to adjust a position of the linear stage relative to a position of the plate.

[0017] In some embodiments, the elevating plate can be loaded with a liquid layer of uncured polymer. In some embodiments, the liquid layer of uncured polymer can comprise conductive additive(s). In some embodiments, the elevating plate can be a hard surface. In some embodiments, the elevating plate can be loaded with a separate hard surface.

[0018] In some embodiments, the first surface of the elevating plate can self-align to the gripping surface upon making contact.

[0019] In some embodiments, the one or more computer processors can adjust the position of the linear stage with micrometer accuracy. Alternatively, the computer processor can adjust the position of the linear stage with nanometer accuracy.

[0020] In some embodiments, a given tip of the tips formed from this apparatus can comprise one or more flaps each projecting from a characteristic axis of the given tip.

[0021] Provided is an integrated engagement sensing system in a gripping pad. An engagement sensing system can be integrated into a plurality of microstructures on a backing layer. The integrated engagement sensing system can comprise a backing layer comprising a first material having a first electrical conductivity, a plurality of microstructure stalks comprising a second material having a second electrical conductivity, wherein an end of each microstructure stalk of the plurality of microstructure stalks is coupled to the backing layer, and wherein each microstructure stalk is configured to couple to at least one neighboring microstructure stalk when the gripping surface is in an engaged state, and wherein the second electrical conductivity is higher than the first electrical conductivity, a plurality of sensing electrodes disposed on or adjacent to the backing layer, wherein any two sensing electrodes of the plurality of sensing electrodes are configured to measure voltage, and one or more computer processors operatively coupled to the plurality of sensing electrodes, wherein the one or more computer processors are individually or collectively programmed to (i) apply a current to the backing layer, (ii) receive a reading of the voltage, and (iii) based on the reading of the voltage, determine the engaged state of the gripping surface.

[0022] In some embodiments, a change in the reading of the voltage can be indicative of the engaged state.

[0023] In some embodiments, the current can be direct current, and the engaged state can be determined when each microstructure stalk contacts at least one neighboring microstructure stalk. In some embodiments, the current can be an alternating current, and the engaged state can be determined when each microstructure stalk achieves near contact with at least one neighboring microstructure stalk.

[0024] In some embodiments, the second electrical conductivity can be at least one or more magnitudes higher than the first electrical conductivity.

[0025] In some embodiments, the one or more computer processors can be individually or collectively programmed to perform a mechanical action on the gripping surface based at least in part on the engaged state. In some instances, the mechanical action can be an application or

release of shear load. In some instances, the mechanical action can be an application or release of pre-load.

[0026] In some embodiments, each microstmcture stalk of the plurality of microstmcture stalks can include a first surface and a second surface, wherein the first surface has a greater surface area than the second surface. In some embodiments, each microstmcture stalk of the plurality of microstmcture stalks can comprise post-treated tips.

[0027] In some embodiments, the system further comprises a light source, an optical sensor, and a plurality of peripheral electrodes in electrical communication, and positioned at the periphery of the backing layer. The one or more computer processors may be individually or collectively programmed to apply a current to the periphery of the backing layer, receive a reading of voltage at the optical sensor, and based on the reading of voltage at the optical sensor, determine the engaged state of the gripping surface

[0028] In some embodiments, the optical sensor is a phototransistor.

[0029] In some embodiments, the light source is a light emitting diode.

[0030] Provided is a method for sensing engagement of a gripping surface. The method can comprise: applying a current to a backing layer of a gripping surface, wherein an end of each microstmcture stalk of a plurality of microstmcture stalks is attached to the backing layer; measuring a voltage or current between a first reference point and a second reference point, wherein the first and second reference points are located on the backing layer; opening a conductive pathway between the first and second reference points through the plurality of microstmcture stalks, wherein each microstmcture stalk is coupled to at least one neighboring microstmcture stalk when the gripping surface is in an engaged state and wherein the plurality of microstmcture stalks has a higher conductivity than the backing layer; and determining, from a change in the voltage or current, the engaged state of the gripping surface.

[0031] In some embodiments, a change in the reading of the voltage or current can be indicative of an engaged state.

[0032] In some embodiments, the plurality of microstmcture stalks can have an electrical conductivity at least one or more magnitudes higher than an electrical conductivity of the backing layer.

[0033] In some embodiments, the current can be direct current, and the engaged state can be determined when each microstmcture stalk contacts at least one neighboring microstmcture stalk. In some embodiments, the current can be an alternating current, and the engaged state can be determined when each microstmcture stalk achieves near contact with at least one neighboring microstmcture stalk.

[0034] In some embodiments, the method can further comprise performing a mechanical action on the gripping surface based at least in part on the engaged state. The mechanical action can be an application or release of shear load. The mechanical action can be an application or release of pre-load.

[0035] In some embodiments, each microstructure stalk of the plurality of microstructure stalks can include a first surface and a second surface, wherein the first surface has a greater surface area than the second surface.

[0036] In some embodiments, each microstructure stalk of the plurality of microstructure stalks can comprise post-treated tips.

[0037] In another aspect, provided is a system for manipulating an object. The system can comprise a backing layer, a plurality of microstructure stalks protruding from the backing layer, wherein a given microstructure stalk of the plurality of microstructure stalks comprises material doped with at least one conductive additive, and one or more flaps projecting from a characteristic axis of each of the plurality of microstructure stalks, which one or more flaps are separate from the plurality of microstructure stalks.

[0038] In some embodiments, at least one conductive additive can comprise a carbon nanotube. In some embodiments, at least one conductive additive can comprise carbon black.

[0039] In some embodiments, at least one conductive additive can protrude from an outer surface of the given microstructure stalk as asperities. In some embodiments, at least one conductive additive can protrudes from the outer surface as an asperity.

[0040] Additional aspects and advantages of the present disclosure will become readily apparent to those skilled in this art from the following detailed description, wherein only illustrative embodiments of the present disclosure are shown and described. As will be realized, the present disclosure is capable of other and different embodiments, and its several details are capable of modifications in various obvious respects, all without departing from the disclosure.

Accordingly, the drawings and description are to be regarded as illustrative in nature, and not as restrictive.

INCORPORATION BY REFERENCE

[0041] All publications, patents, and patent applications mentioned in this specification are herein incorporated by reference to the same extent as if each individual publication, patent, or patent application was specifically and individually indicated to be incorporated by reference. To the extent publications and patents or patent applications incorporated by reference contradict the

disclosure contained in the specification, the specification is intended to supersede and/or take precedence over any such contradictory material.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0042] The novel features of the invention are set forth with particularity in the appended claims. A better understanding of the features and advantages of the present invention will be obtained by reference to the following detailed description that sets forth illustrative embodiments, in which the principles of the invention are utilized, and the accompanying drawings (also "Figure" and "FIG." herein), of which:

[0043] **FIG. 1A** illustrates a perspective view of exemplary microstructures on a surface of a gripping pad in an unloaded state.

[0044] **FIG. 1B** illustrates a perspective view of exemplary microstructures on a surface of a gripping pad in a loaded state.

[0045] **FIG. 2A** shows a cross-sectional front view of pre-treatment microstructures on a surface of a gripping pad.

[0046] **FIG. 2B** shows a cross-sectional front view of post-treatment microstructures on a surface of a gripping pad.

[0047] **FIG. 2C** can be a perspective view of a post-treatment microstructure on a surface of a gripping pad.

[0048] **FIGS. 3A-D** illustrate a dipping process that adds mushroom-like flaps to the tip of each dry adhesive microstructure stalk. **FIG. 3A** shows a first step, **FIG. 3B** shows a second step, **FIG. 3C** shows a third step, and **FIG. 3D** shows a fourth step.

[0049] **FIG. 4A** shows a post-treatment apparatus in a relaxed position.

[0050] **FIG. 4B** shows a post-treatment apparatus in a pressure applying position.

[0051] **FIG. 5** shows a block diagram of the post-treatment apparatus with a control system.

[0052] **FIG. 6** illustrates a method for the post-treatment of dry adhesive microstructures.

[0053] **FIG. 7** illustrates a curing process.

[0054] **FIG. 8** shows a schematic force diagram of a gripping pad.

[0055] **FIG. 9A** shows a cross-sectional front view of a plurality of wedge-shaped microstructure stalks stemming from a backing layer in an unengaged state.

[0056] **FIG. 9B** shows a cross-sectional front view of the plurality of wedge-shaped microstructure stalks in an engaged state.

[0057] **FIG. 10** illustrates a method for sensing engagement.

[0058] **FIGs. 11A and 11B** show a cross-sectional side view and cross-sectional bottom view of an optical engagement sensing system, respectively.

[0059] **FIG. 12** shows a schematic diagram of a gripping control system.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0060] The present disclosure provides systems and methods for the post-treatment of dry adhesive microstructures. In some aspects, a change in physical characteristics, such as a shape, size, or volume, of microstructures in a dry adhesive may affect the degree of van der Waals interactions between the microstructures and a contact surface to enhance or diminish overall adhesive performance. As such, the microstructures may be post-treated to change one or more physical characteristics to improve adhesive performance. For example, the microstructures may be post-treated to comprise mushroom-like flaps at their tips to interface with the contact surface. An increased contact area at the interface can increase attractive forces (e.g., van der Waals interactions). In some aspects, a change in material composition of the microstructures in a dry adhesive may affect mechanical properties, such as work of adhesion and modulus of elasticity (e.g., Young's modulus), of the dry adhesive to enhance or diminish overall adhesive performance. For example, conductive additives can be added to the material to improve adhesive performance. In other aspects, microstructures comprising conductive material may allow for pre-load engagement sensing systems to be integrated into the microstructures.

[0061] The term "elastomer" in the descriptions herein, refers to a material that changes properties in response to an applied force. Elastomers, in various formulations, respond to normal forces, compression, torque, or shear stresses or forces. Some elastomers are also referred to as "rubber," "polymer," or "silicone." Typically, but not always, an elastomer responds to an applied force with a physical deformation. Additionally, elastomers can be designed to change various properties such as impedance in response to applied force, stress, or torque. Elastomers can be configured to change properties when stressed in one dimension, or in multiple dimensions.

[0062] Elastomers can be formulated and produced with various properties that may be desirable for a given application, for example desired flexibility, stiffness (i.e. spring constant or dimensional change in response to pressure), conformability (i.e. ability to follow a curved or complex contour), thickness, color, or electrical or heat conductivity. Another property of an elastomer is "durometer," which is its hardness or resistance to permanent deformation.

[0063] Microstructures having different physical characteristics, such as in shape, size, and/or volume, can comprise different adhesive properties. In some aspects, physical characteristics,

such as a shape, size, or volume, of microstructures in a dry adhesive may affect the degree of van der Waals interactions between the microstructures and a contact surface to enhance or diminish overall adhesive performance. The microstructures may be post-treated to change one or more physical characteristics to improve adhesive performance.

[0064] **FIG. 1A** illustrates a perspective view of exemplary microstructures on a surface of a gripping pad in an unloaded state. **FIG. 1A** is not drawn to scale. A plurality of microstructures **102** may populate a surface **104** of a gripping pad or any other surface intended for adhesion. The surface **104** can represent a sample portion of a larger surface intended for adhesion. Surfaces comprising microstructures, such as the surface **104**, may also be referred to as backing layers. A microstructure stalk may comprise two ends, a first end rooted in the backing layer and a second end, such as a tip of the stalk, extending longitudinally away from the backing layer. The tip of a microstructure stalk may be pointed. Alternatively the tip of a microstructure stalk may be flat, rounded, or comprise a more complex pattern. Each of the microstructures **102** may comprise substantially uniform geometric structures. For example, **FIG. 1A** shows an array of uniform wedge-like microstructures wherein the cross-sectional front view of each microstructure is triangular (see **FIG. 2A**) with a base rooted on the surface **104** and a tip extending longitudinally away from the surface **104**. Alternatively, the microstructures **102** may comprise conical, cylindrical, cubical, trapezoidal, or other more complex geometric structures with similar or different cross-sectional shapes.

[0065] The microstructures **102** can have micro-scale dimensions. For instance, a microstructure can have a maximum dimension of less than about 300, 250, 200, 150, 140, 130, 120, 110, 100, 90, 80, 70, 60, 50, 45, 40, 35, 30, 25, 20, 15, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5 μm . A maximum dimension of the microstructure may be a dimension of the microstructure (e.g., length, width, height, altitude, diameter, etc.) that is greater than the other dimensions of the microstructure. In one example, the wedge-like microstructure can have a dimension of about 60 μm in height, 20 μm in width, and 200 μm in length. In some instances, each of the microstructures **102** may be laid out on the surface **104** in an evenly-spaced array or a grid-like pattern. For example, an edge of the base of each microstructure **102** may be separated from the closest edge of the base of a neighboring microstructure by a distance of about 20-40 μm . In other instances, each of the microstructures **102** may be laid out in an arbitrary pattern with non-uniform gaps between each microstructure.

[0066] The backing layer can have any thickness. For instance, the backing layer can have a maximum thickness of at most about 5 millimeters (mm), 4.5 mm, 4 mm, 3.5 mm, 3 mm, 2.5 mm, 2 mm, 1.5 mm, 1 mm, 0.5 mm, 0.4 mm, 0.3 mm, 0.2 mm, 0.1 mm or less. Alternatively or in addition, the backing layer can have a maximum thickness of at least about 0.1 mm, 0.2 mm,

0.3 mm, 0.4 mm, 0.5 mm, 1 mm, 1.5 mm, 2 mm, 2.5 mm, 3 mm, 3.5 mm, 4 mm, 4.5 mm, 5 mm or more.

[0067] Directional control, wherein the gripping surface comprising the microstructures **102** is configured to adhere to a contact surface when a shear load is applied in a preferred direction **110** and detach when the shear load is relaxed, can be achieved by orienting each microstructure **102** in substantially the same direction on the surface **104**. The tip, or a characteristic axis (e.g., axis **210** in FIG. **2A**), of each microstructure can be configured to tilt away from the preferred direction **110** of shear load. The characteristic axis can be a longitudinal axis. In the unloaded state, as in FIG. **1A**, the tips of the wedge-like microstructure **102** allow only for minimal contact area between the microstructures and a contact surface, which allows for relatively low Van der Waals interactions and therefore low adhesive performance. When a shear load is applied to the microstructures **102** in the preferred direction **110**, the microstructures **102** can conform, or bend, against the contact surface, as in FIG. **1B** (contact surface not shown), in a direction opposite the preferred direction **110** such that the contact area between the microstructures and the contact surface significantly increases, which allows for relatively high Van der Waals interactions and therefore higher adhesive performance. When the shear load is relaxed, the microstructures **102** can revert to the initial unloaded state, as in FIG. **1A**. The microstructures **102** may comprise a compliant material (e.g., elastomers) that can withstand repeated structural conformations between the unloaded state and the loaded state. The materials comprising the microstructures will be discussed further below.

[0068] FIG. **1B** illustrates a perspective view of exemplary microstructures on a surface of a gripping pad in a loaded state. FIG. **1B** is not drawn to scale. A plurality of microstructures **106** may populate a surface **108** of a gripping pad or any other surface intended for adhesion. In the loaded state, as described above, a shear load is applied in a preferred direction **112** which bends the microstructures **106** against a contact surface (not shown in FIG. **1B**) in a direction opposite the preferred direction **112**, increasing the real contact area between the microstructures **106** and the contact surface. A wedge-like structure, with an extended length along an axis, may provide increased contact area along the extended length. In some instances, the surfaces **104** and **108** can be the same surface, the preferred directions **110** and **112** can be the same direction, and the microstructures **102** and **106** may represent the same microstructures in an unloaded state and a loaded state, respectively.

[0069] The dry adhesive performance of these microstructures can be significantly enhanced through a post-treatment process that reconfigures the respective tips of each microstructure to add a mushroom-like flap to the tip of each fiber. During a loaded state of the microstructures,

the mushroom-like flap may provide increased contact area between the microstructures and the contact surface.

[0070] **FIG. 2A** shows a cross-sectional front view of pre-treatment microstructures on a surface of a gripping pad and **FIG. 2B** shows a cross-sectional front view of post-treatment microstructures on a surface of a gripping pad. In **FIG. 2A**, a plurality of pre-treatment wedge-shaped microstructures **204** populate a surface **202** of a gripping pad or any other surface intended for adhesion. The surface **202** can represent a sample portion of a larger surface intended for adhesion. Each of the microstructures **204** has a longitudinal axis **210** tilting away from a preferred direction **208** of shear load. In some instances, **FIG. 2A** can be a cross-sectional front view of **FIG. 1A**.

[0071] **FIG. 2B** shows the wedge-shaped microstructures **204** comprising post-treatment tips **206** that resemble mushroom-like flaps. The longitudinal axis **212** of each post-treatment tip can tilt away from the preferred direction **208** at a larger angle than the longitudinal axis **210** of the microstructures **204**. **FIG. 2C** can be a perspective view of a microstructure in **FIG. 2B**. The post-treatment tips **206** can comprise a substantially flat surface with a latitudinal axis **214** substantially parallel to the surface **202**. In a loaded state, beneficially, the added surface area of the post-treatment tips **206** can bend against a contact surface (not shown in **FIGS. 2A** and **2B**) in a direction opposite to the preferred direction **208** and provide a larger contact area between the microstructures and the contact surface. The larger contact area can produce greater attractive forces (e.g., higher Van der Waals interactions) and improve the adhesive performance of the gripping surface. **FIGS. 2A-C** are not drawn to scale.

[0072] The post-treatment tips can be fabricated through a dipping process. **FIGS. 3A-D**, in the order of **FIG. 3A** to **FIG. 3B** to **FIG. 3C** to **FIG. 3D**, illustrate a dipping process that adds mushroom-like flaps **310** to the tips of each of the dry adhesive microstructure stalks **306**. In **FIG. 3A**, a backing layer **308** surface of a gripping pad, or other surface intended for adhesion, comprises a plurality of microstructure stalks **306**. A thin layer of uncured liquid polymer **304** is formed, such as through high-speed spin coating techniques, and carried on a substrate (e.g., glass wafer) **302**. The liquid polymer layer **304** is aligned to face, at some distance above, the tips of the microstructure stalks **306**. The liquid polymer layer **304** can be aligned such that it is parallel, or substantially parallel, to the backing layer **308**. In some instances, the uncured liquid polymer **304** can comprise the same elastomer as that the microstructure stalks **306** comprise. In other instances, the uncured liquid polymer **304** can comprise different materials than those the microstructure stalks **306** comprise.

[0073] Next, in **FIG. 3B**, the tips of the microstructures **306** are dipped into the liquid polymer layer **304**. In some instances, the liquid polymer layer **304** can be brought down towards the microstructure stalks **306**. Alternatively, the microstructure stalks **306** can be brought upward towards the liquid polymer layer **304**. Alternatively, both the microstructure stalks **306** and the liquid layer **304** can be brought towards the other. After dipping, the microstructure stalks **306** are retracted from the liquid polymer layer **304**, or the liquid polymer layer **304** is retracted from the microstructure stalks **306**, and each microstructure stalk **306** retains some amount of the uncured liquid polymer **304** at its tip. Next, in **FIG. 3C**, the tips of the microstructure stalks **306** are brought into contact with a hard surface **312** (e.g., glass wafer) such that the uncured liquid polymer **304** is pressed against the hard surface **312**. The hard surface **312** may be parallel, or substantially parallel, to the backing layer **308** and be sufficiently hard to withstand the pressing of the tips without deformation. The uncured polymer **304** on the tips of the microstructures **306** may be cured while being pressed, under a constant load, against the hard surface **312**. Next, in **FIG. 3D**, the cured microstructures can be peeled from the hard surface **312** to result in the microstructures **306** comprising the mushroom-like flaps **310**.

[0074] The magnitude of the constant load during the pressing step may be varied to vary and/or the resulting tilting angle (e.g., angle between the longitudinal axes **210** and **212** in **FIG. 2B**) of the post-treatment tips. The magnitude of the load may be varied to vary and/or optimize the resulting shape (e.g., mushroom-like flaps, spatula shape, etc.) of the post-treated tips. For example, the downward pressure may range from about 5 kilopascals (kPa) to about 30 kPa. Alternatively or in addition, the downward pressure may be at least about 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50 kPa or more. Alternatively or in addition, the downward pressure may be at most about 50, 45, 40, 35, 30, 25, 20, 15, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 kPa or lower. In some instances, greater downward pressure may be applied to obtain a greater tilting angle.

[0075] The post-treatment process of **FIGS. 3A-3D** may alternatively have the microstructure stalks **306** positioned on top with the tips facing downwards and the liquid polymer layer **304** and the hard surface **312** positioned below the microstructure stalks **306**.

[0076] In some instances, during or subsequent to spin-coating of viscous material (e.g., liquid polymer), such material may accumulate at or near the center of the spin-coating axis. This may cause uneven post-treatment of the tips of the microstructure across the gripping pad during the dipping process. For example, microstructure tips positioned at different radial positions (relative to the spin-coating axis) may retain different amounts of polymer material that are cured after pressing against the surface. The resulting gripping pad may have different, un-even

adhesive properties across the gripping pad. To address the problem, a targeted area from the gripping pad may be removed to allow for even post treatment over the entirety of the pad. For example, a circular shape having an area of 176 square millimeters (mm^2) may be removed from the center (e.g., aligning with the spin-coating axis) of the gripping pad to allow for even post treatment of tips. Alternatively, any other shape, such as rectangular, polygonal, or non-polygonal shape may be removed from the gripping pad. Alternatively or in addition, any other area may be removed from the gripping pad. For example, at least about 50, 100, 110, 120, 130, 140, 150, 160, 170, 180, 190, 200, 250 mm^2 or larger area may be removed. Alternatively or in addition, at most about 250, 200, 190, 180, 170, 160, 150, 140, 130, 120, 110, 100, 50 or less area may be removed. In some instances, the area may be removed from a non-center location of the gripping pad.

[0077] As described above, the post-treatment tip manufacturing process can require the precise alignment of different surfaces (e.g., gripping pad, uncured layer of liquid polymer, hard surface) as well as the application of a constant and precise load during the dipping and pressing stages. An applied weight dipping strategy can be subject to the individual skills and experiences of an operator or technician, and repeated processes may yield non-uniform batches. Provided are systems and methods that can automate the manufacturing process and enable the mass manufacture of uniform yields of post-treated dry adhesive microstructures. The method can apply a hard-stop based dipping strategy in place of the applied weight method.

[0078] **FIGS. 4A** and **4B** show examples of a post-treatment apparatus. **FIG. 4A** shows the apparatus in a relaxed position and **FIG. 4B** shows the apparatus in a pressure applying position. The post-treatment apparatus may comprise a stationary wafer **406** and an elevating wafer **408**. Alternatively, the post-treatment apparatus may comprise a stationary plate and an elevating plate. The stationary wafer **406** and elevating wafer **408** may be glass wafers. The stationary wafer **406** may be fixed in place to a base plate **404** by a first set of thumb screws **420**. The first set of thumb screws **420** may comprise any number (e.g., 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, etc.) of thumb screws placed around the periphery of the stationary wafer **406**. A thumb screw may be a screw configured to rotate clockwise or counterclockwise around an axis, wherein a rotation in one direction can perform a locking action and a rotation in the other direction can perform an unlocking action. The thumb screw may comprise a cap which an operator, or a control system, of the apparatus, by hand or by tool, can grip and rotate. For example, loosening one or more screws **420**, in either a clockwise or counterclockwise direction, can unlock and release the stationary wafer **406** from the base plate **404**, and tightening one or more screws **420**, in an opposite direction, can lock the stationary wafer **406** in place to the base plate **404**.

Alternatively, the same locking and unlocking actions can be achieved through interfaces other than thumb screws (e.g., bolts, switches, levers, magnets, hatches, etc.). Similarly, the elevating wafer **408** may be fixed in place, such as to a top plate **410**, by a second set of thumb screws **412** which operate in the same manner as the first set of thumb screws **420**. For example, loosening one or more screws **412**, in either a clockwise or counterclockwise direction, can unlock and release the elevating wafer **408** from the top plate **410**, and tightening one or more screws **412**, in an opposite direction, can lock the elevating wafer **408** in place to the top plate **410**. The stationary wafer **406** and the elevating wafer **408** may be conveniently loaded and unloaded by loosening and tightening the thumb screws **412**, **420**.

[0079] During the post-treatment process, a gripping pad comprising dry adhesive microstructures may be placed on the stationary wafer **406** such that the tips of the microstructures are facing up. The base plate **404** carrying the stationary wafer **406** may be placed above a load cell **402**. The load cell **402** can be configured to measure the applied pressure on the gripping pad, such as applied by the elevating wafer **408**, during the post-treatment process and transmit the applied pressure readings to a control system (not shown in **FIGS. 4A** and **4B**). The initial position of the stationary wafer **406** relative to the load cell **402** can be maintained via retaining springs. In some instances, the load cell **402** can be replaced by other pressure or force sensors.

[0080] An elevating arm **416** may comprise a proximal end and a distal end. The top plate **410** may be connected to the distal end of the elevating arm **416** via a spherical joint **414**. The top plate **410**, and the elevating wafer **408** fixed to the top plate **410**, may rotate about the spherical joint **414**. In some instances, the spherical joint **414** may comprise a ball swivel that allows rotational movement in one, two or three degrees of freedom. For example, the elevating wafer **408** may be configured to change roll, pitch, and yaw about the spherical joint **414**. In another example, the elevating wafer **408** may be configured to change only roll and pitch, only roll and yaw, or only pitch and yaw about the spherical joint **414**. In another example, the elevating wafer **408** may be configured to change only roll, only pitch, or only yaw.

[0081] The proximal end of the elevating arm **416** can be attached to a motorized linear stage **418**, and the elevating arm **416** can be configured to move in an axis (e.g., z-axis) normal to the plane of the stationary wafer. The motorized linear stage **418** can be a linear potentiometer. The motorized linear stage **418** may operate on a stepper motor. The same control system receiving the load cell readings may transmit instructions to the stepper motor of the motorized linear stage **418**. Through the control system, during the post-treatment process, the elevating wafer **408**, and constituents thereon, may be systematically driven into the gripping pad on the stationary

wafer **406** by the motorized linear stage **416** with micrometer accuracy. For example, the control system may alternate the apparatus between a relaxed position, as in **FIG. 4A**, and a pressure applying position, as in **FIG. 4B**. The control system may further control the degree of pressure applied in the pressure applying position. In some instances, the control system may control the motorized linear stage **416** with nanometer accuracy. The elevating wafer **408**, such as via the linear stage **416**, may be configured to apply a downward pressure on the gripping pad of from about 5 kPa to about 30 kPa. Alternatively or in addition, the downward pressure may be at least about 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50 kPa or more. Alternatively or in addition, the downward pressure may be at most about 50, 45, 40, 35, 30, 25, 20, 15, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 kPa or lower.

[0082] In some instances, the elevating arm **416** can be configured to move non-linearly (e.g., arcuate, curved, freeform). For example, the elevating arm **416** may move in other axes (e.g., x-axis, y-axis, z-axis) or in an arcuate line.

[0083] Because the height and/or altitude of the microstructures on the gripping pad can be about 100 μm , the precise and accurate alignment of the elevating wafer **408** and the gripping pad on the stationary wafer **406** can be important.

[0084] Beneficially, the elevating wafer **408** may self-align itself to the stationary wafer. The elevating wafer **408** may rotate about the spherical joint **414** until the elevating wafer **408** comes into contact with the gripping pad on the stationary wafer **406**, upon which the elevating wafer **408** can self-align itself to the surface of the gripping pad. In some instances, a bottom surface of the elevating wafer **408** may comprise a thin layer of uncured polymer (e.g., liquid polymer layer **304** in **FIG. 3A**) to which the microstructures on the gripping pad is dipped into. In some instances, the elevating wafer may comprise a hard surface (e.g., hard surface **312** in **FIG. 3C**) against which the microstructure stalks are pressed and the uncured polymer on their tips are cured. The elevating wafer **408** may be loaded or unloaded from the apparatus by tightening and/or loosening the thumb screws **412**.

[0085] **FIG. 5** shows a block diagram of the post-treatment apparatus with a control system. The post-treatment apparatus may comprise a stationary wafer **504** and an elevating wafer **506**. The stationary wafer **504**, on which a gripping pad can be placed, can be positioned above a load cell **502**. The initial position of the stationary wafer **504** relative to the load cell **502** can be maintained via retaining springs. The elevating wafer **506** can be connected to an elevating arm **510** via a spherical joint **508**. The elevating wafer **506** may rotate (e.g., yaw, pitch, roll) about the spherical joint **508**. In some instances, the elevating wafer **506** may be connected to the spherical joint **508** at its center of gravity. In other instances, the elevating wafer **506** may be

connected to the spherical joint **508** at a different location in which the elevating wafer **506** can obtain a substantially parallel position to the stationary wafer **504** in its freedom of movement. The elevating arm **510** may be attached to a motorized linear stage **512** and be capable of moving linearly along an axis normal to the plane of the stationary wafer **504**.

[0086] The control system **514** may be configured to receive load cell **502** readings and control the position of the motorized linear stage **512** with micrometer accuracy, based on a desired pressure setting and the load cell **502** readings on the gripping pad. In some instances, the control system **514** may be configured to control the position of the motorized linear stage **512** with nanometer accuracy. For example, the control system **514** may comprise a first microcontroller (e.g., Arduino® Uno) communicatively coupled to the load cell **502** to receive readings of applied load on the gripping pad, a second microcontroller communicatively coupled to a stepper motor to control the position of the motorized linear stage **512**, and a graphical user interface (e.g., LCD display) communicatively coupled to the first and/or second microcontrollers. Alternatively, the control system **514** may comprise a single microcontroller to perform both functions of the first and second microcontrollers. Alternatively or in addition, the control system **514** may comprise one or more computer processors. Alternatively or in addition, the control system **514** may comprise a different type of user interface or a display to enhance user control. The control system **514** may communicate (e.g., transmit instructions) with the motorized linear stage **512** via wired or wireless (e.g., wireless networks, Bluetooth, Wi-Fi, etc.) connections. The control system **514** may communicate (e.g., receive readings) with the load cell **502** via wired or wireless connections.

[0087] In some instances, the post-treatment apparatus may further comprise a heating system to facilitate the curing of the liquid polymer on the tips of the microstructures during pressing. The heating system may comprise a heating element and a temperature sensor. For example, the heating element can be a heating film (e.g., Polyimide Flexible Adhesive Thermo Foil Heating Film). Alternatively, the heating element can be any other element that can conduct heat (e.g., heating pad, heating coil, etc.) or radiate heat (e.g., UV light). The heating element (e.g., heating film) can be attached to a heat conducting plate (e.g., copper plate). A surface of the heat conducting plate can be attached to (e.g., stacked in direct contact with) a surface of the elevating wafer **506** (e.g., glass wafer). For example, the heat conducting plate can be placed between the elevating wafer **408** and the top plate **410** in **FIGS. 4A** and **4B**. Beneficially, the heat conducting plate can evenly distribute heat on the elevating wafer **408**. The temperature sensor can be a thermistor. The temperature sensor can be nested inside the heat conducting plate. In some instances, the temperature sensor can be placed near the center (e.g., on a lateral surface, in

a depth, etc.) of the heat conducting plate. In some instances, the temperature sensor can be nested closer to the elevating wafer **408**. When heat is applied by the heating element during curing, the temperature sensor can measure the temperature of the heating plate, which can be a good indicator of the curing temperature-the temperature of the copper can be higher than the temperature of the elevating wafer **408**.

[0088] The control system **514** (in **FIG. 5**) may be configured to receive temperature sensor readings and control the heat applied by the heating element, based on a desired temperature setting and the temperature sensor readings on the heating plate. The desired temperature setting can be a desired curing temperature. For example, the curing temperature can be adjustable up to 220°C. Alternatively, the curing temperature can be lower or higher. The control system **514** may communicate (e.g., transmit instructions) with the heating element via wired or wireless (e.g., wireless networks, Bluetooth, Wi-Fi, etc.) connections. The control system **514** may communicate (e.g., receive readings) with the temperature sensor via wired or wireless connections.

[0089] For instance, if the load cell **502** readings received by the control system **514** are less than a desired pressure, the control system **514** may transmit instructions to the motorized linear stage **512** to adjust the elevating arm **510** to a lower position to apply more pressure on the gripping pad. In contrast, if the load cell **502** readings received by the control system **514** are greater than the desired pressure, the control system **514** may transmit instructions to the motorized linear stage **512** to adjust the elevating arm **510** to a higher position to alleviate the pressure from the gripping pad. If the load cell **502** readings received by the control system **514** are within an acceptable error range (e.g., within a micrometer, a tenth of a micrometer, a hundredth of a micrometer, a nanometer, etc.) of the desired pressure, the control system **514** may transmit instructions to the motorized linear stage **512** to maintain the elevating arm **510** at the current position. The control system **514** may receive and transmit data and/or instructions in real time. Real-time can include a response time of less than 1 second, tenths of a second, hundredths of a second, or a millisecond. That is, the control system **514** may apply, maintain, or adjust a specified applied pressure in real-time. In some instances, the load cell **502** can be replaced by other force or pressure sensors that are communicatively coupled to the control system **514**. The control system **514** may receive applied pressure readings from a load cell or any other force or pressure sensors.

[0090] **FIG. 6** illustrates a method for the post-treatment of dry adhesive microstructures. Each microstructure stalk may comprise two ends, a first end rooted in the surface of a gripping pad (e.g., backing layer) and a second end extending longitudinally away from the surface. The

microstructures may be directional or non-directional. The microstructures may comprise symmetrical or asymmetrical structures and/or cross-sections. For example, the microstructures may comprise a wedge-shaped geometric structure. Alternatively, the microstructures may comprise conical, cylindrical, cubical, trapezoidal, or other more complex geometric structures. The microstructures may be of relatively uniform height with micro-scale dimensions. For instance, a microstructure can have a maximum height and/or altitude of less than about 100, 90, 80, 70, 60, 50, 45, 40, 35, 30, 25, 20, 15, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5 μm . In one example, a wedge-like microstructure can have a dimension of about 60 μm in height, 20 μm in width, and 200 μm in length.

[0091] The method may comprise, at a first step **601**, directing a liquid polymer layer to self-align itself with a gripping pad. For example, a first surface of an elevating wafer can be directed to self-align with a surface of the gripping pad, wherein the first surface of the elevating wafer is coated with a thin layer of uncured liquid polymer, and wherein the thin layer of uncured liquid polymer is facing the microstructure stalks on the gripping pad. The elevating wafer can self-align to the gripping pad by initially having some amount of rotational freedom (e.g., pitch, roll, yaw) about a fixed point on a second surface of the elevating wafer which is opposite the first surface and gradually losing such amount of rotational freedom as the contact area between the first surface of the elevating wafer and the microstructure stalks on the gripping pad increases. For example, the elevating wafer may rotate about a spherical joint on the second surface. In some instances, the elevating wafer may begin to self-align itself to the gripping pad when at least an area on the first surface of the elevating wafer comes into contact with one or more microstructure stalks on the gripping pad. Beneficially, this self-alignment can provide even dipping of the uncured liquid polymer on the tips of each microstructure stalk on the gripping pad. Linearly driving a misaligned elevating wafer into the gripping pad may, for example, result in heavier dipping of a plurality of microstructure stalks in one region of the gripping pad and lighter, or no, dipping of a plurality of microstructures stalks in another region of the gripping pad.

[0092] In a next step **602**, a control system may receive a reading of applied pressure on the gripping pad by the liquid polymer layer. In some instances, the applied pressure reading may be transmitted to the control system by a load cell placed below the gripping pad. Alternatively, the applied pressure reading may be transmitted to the control system by other force or pressure sensors.

[0093] In the next step **603**, the control system may, based on the reading of the applied pressure and a desired pressure setting, adjust a linear position of the elevating wafer relative to the

position of the stationary wafer to maintain, increase, or decrease the applied pressure on the gripping pad. The desired pressure setting may vary depending on desired parameters or desired products of the dipping process (e.g., desired length of microstructure tip dipped, amount of uncured polymer retained on tip when elevating wafer is retracted, etc.). For example, for a microstructure stalk with a height of about $100\ \mu\text{m}$, the desired pressure setting can be configured to dip the stalk between $25\ \mu\text{m}$ to $100\ \text{nm}$ in $1\ \mu\text{m}$ increments, $0.5\ \mu\text{m}$ increments, $0.1\ \mu\text{m}$, $0.01\ \mu\text{m}$, or $1\ \text{nm}$ in the uncured liquid polymer layer. The control system may receive applied pressure readings in real-time and provide instructions to adjust the linear position of the elevated wafer in real-time. In some instances, the elevating wafer can be configured to move non-linearly (e.g., arcuate, curved, freeform). For example, the position of the elevating wafer can be adjusted relative to the stationary wafer in any coordinates (e.g., Cartesian coordinates, polar coordinates, etc.).

[0094] After dipping under the desired pressure setting, in the next step **604**, the elevating wafer can be retracted such that the microstructure stalks retain some amount of uncured liquid polymer on their tips. In a next step **605**, the microstructure stalks can be cured while the tips with the uncured liquid polymer are pressed against a hard surface. The hard surface can be removed after curing to yield the microstructure stalks comprising post-treatment tips resembling mushroom-like flaps.

[0095] In some instances, the curing process may comprise the same self-aligning process and pressure control system as the dipping process, as shown in **FIG. 7**. For instance, the method may further comprise directing **701** the hard surface to self-align with the gripping pad. The self-alignment of the hard surface to the gripping pad may be similar to the self-alignment of the liquid polymer layer to the gripping pad. Beneficially, this self-alignment can provide even pressing of the uncured liquid polymer on the tips of each microstructure stalk on the gripping pad against the hard surface. Pressing against a misaligned hard surface may, for example, result in the formation of post-treatment tips on the microstructure stalks at uneven angles (e.g., tilt of longitudinal axis **212** relative to tilt of longitudinal axis **210** in **FIG. 2B**) or post-treatment tips with uneven shapes (e.g., flatness or curvature of mushroom like flaps, etc.) across the surface of the gripping pad.

[0096] During pressing and curing, the control system may receive **702** a reading of applied pressure on the gripping pad by the hard surface. The applied pressure reading may be transmitted to the control system by a load cell placed below the gripping pad. The control system may, based on the reading of the applied pressure and a desired pressure setting for the pressing stage, adjust **703** a linear position of the hard surface to maintain, increase, or decrease

the applied pressure on the gripping pad. The desired pressure setting may vary depending on desired parameters of the post-treatment tips (e.g., desired surface area of mushroom-like flap, desired angle of tilt of the post-treatment tips relative to the microstructure stalk, etc.). The control system may receive applied pressure readings in real-time and provide instructions to adjust the linear position of the hard surface in real-time.

[0097] After the uncured liquid polymer is cured on the microstructures, the hard surface can be retracted **704**. One or more steps of the methods described above may be performed using the aforementioned post-treatment apparatus (e.g., described with **FIGS. 4** and **5**). Alternatively, the methods above may be performed, individually or collectively, through use of other devices, tools, and/or manual labor.

[0098] In some aspects, material composition of the microstructures in a dry adhesive may affect mechanical properties, such as work of adhesion and modulus of elasticity (i.e., Young's modulus), of the adhesive to enhance or diminish overall adhesive performance.

[0099] The dry adhesive microstructures may comprise, in part or in whole, a conductive material. In some instances, the microstructures may comprise a high-conductivity elastomer. In other instances, the microstructures may comprise an elastomer doped with conductive additives. Materials comprising conductive additives may, among other changes effected, improve in electrical conductivity, tensile strength, hardness, and elastic modulus characteristics. Some conductive additives include carbon nanotubes (CNTs) and carbon black. Generally, because an increase in modulus of elasticity translates to an increase in adhesive performance, the addition of conductive additives to the microstructures will increase the elastic modulus and thereby increase normal adhesion pressure.

[0100] In some instances, microstructures stalks (such as the microstructures **204** in **FIG. 2A**) may be fabricated with material (e.g., elastomer) doped with conductive additives such as carbon nanotubes and carbon black. The microstructures comprising conductive additives, wholly or in part, may increase normal adhesion pressure and improve adhesive performance. Additionally, conductive additives may also alter the geometry of the stalks. For example, during a curing process, conductive additives (e.g., carbon nanotubes) can protrude from an outer surface of the stalks as asperities, which can also impact the adhesion pressure and improve adhesive performance.

[0101] Alternatively or in addition, the material forming post-treatment tips (such as the tips **212** in **FIG. 2B**) of the microstructures, such as the liquid layer of uncured polymer **304** in **FIG. 3A-3C**, may be doped with conductive additives. The microstructures comprising conductive

additives, wholly or in part, may increase normal adhesion pressure and improve adhesive performance.

[0102] In other aspects, microstructures comprising conductive material may provide an integrated pre-load engagement sensing system.

[0103] **FIG. 8** shows a schematic force diagram of a gripping pad. When a gripping pad **804** is placed on a surface **802**, wherein the tips of the microstructures on the gripping pad **804** are interfacing with the surface **802**, there are three characteristic forces acting on the pad: a preload force **812**, an adhesion force **812**, and a shear force **806**, **808**. The gripping pad **804** can be any surface, comprising a plurality of microstructures, intended for adhesion. The surface **802** can be any surface the gripping pad **804** is intended to grip (e.g., wall, object, etc.). A preload force **812** and a shear force **806** can be considered activation forces and the adhesion force **812** can be the force produced, and the force intended, when the gripping pad **804** is activated. In some instances, a shear force **806** in a preferred direction can be an activation force and a shear force **808** in a direction opposite the preferred direction can be a deactivation force.

[0104] An adequate preload force **812** must be applied at each gripping pad **804** to ensure that the gripping pad **804** is engaged when shear loads (e.g., producing the shear forces **806**) are applied to the gripping pad **804**. The preload force **812** can be a force on the gripping pad **804** oriented towards the surface **802**. The resulting adhesion force **810** can be a force oriented away from the surface **802**. In some instances, the preload, shear, and/or adhesion forces can be individual or collective forces acting on or resulting from individual microstructures on the gripping pad **804**.

[0105] The microstructures on the surface of a gripping pad **804** may not always completely engage when shear loading is applied. Without adequate engagement, the microstructures on the surface of the gripping pad **804** may not sufficiently conform, or bend, against the surface **802** (as in the microstructures **106** in the loaded state in **FIG. 1B**) when a shear force **806** is applied. It is therefore beneficial to be able to detect or sense a state of pre-load engagement or a lack thereof. Provided are systems and methods for sensing pre-load engagement of microstructures on a gripping pad.

[0106] The sensing element can be integrated into the microstructures themselves. **FIGS. 9A** and **9B** show integrated engagement sensing systems in an unengaged state and an engaged state, respectively. **FIGS. 9A** and **9B** are not drawn to scale. While **FIGS. 9A** and **9B** show exemplary wedge-shaped microstructures, as a person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize, the sensing systems may comprise microstructures of different geometric structures.

[0107] **FIG. 9A** shows a cross-sectional front view of a plurality of wedge-shaped microstructure stalks 908 stemming from a backing layer 910 in an unengaged state. The microstructure stalks 908 and backing layer 910 can be cast out of two layers of conductive material (e.g., elastomer) atop a printed circuit board 906. The printed circuit board 906 can be parallel to the plane of the backing layer 910. The printed circuit board 906 can comprise a power channel 902, a ground channel 904 and multiple sensing channels 920. A plurality of sensing channels 920 may be spaced out through the plane of the circuit board 906. In some instances, each of the sensing channels 920 may be positioned on the circuit board 906 in an evenly-spaced array or a grid-like pattern. In other instances, each of the sensing channels 920 may be laid out in an arbitrary pattern with non-uniform gaps between each channel. In some instances, each of the sensing channels 920 may be positioned on one or more key reference locations. A sensing channel 920 can be an electrode.

[0108] The microstructure stalks 908 and backing layer 910 may each comprise a material of different conductivity. For example, the microstructure stalks 908 may comprise a material several orders of magnitude more conductive than the material of the backing layer 910. The microstructure stalks 908 can comprise a high conductivity elastomer and the backing layer 910 can comprise a low conductivity elastomer. In some instances, such high conductivity elastomer can have a resistivity from about 0.0001 Ohm-cm and 100 Ohm-cm, or 0.001 Ohm-cm and 10 Ohm-cm. In some instances, such low-conductivity elastomer can have a resistivity from about 10 Ohm-cm and 100 kOhm-cm, or 100 Ohm-cm and 10 kOhm-cm.

[0109] Engagement of the microstructures 908 may be detected or sensed by letting a current flow through the backing layer 910 and measuring a voltage or current between two reference channels 920. The current applied can be an alternating current (AC) or a direct current (DC). The current can be applied through the power channel 902. Alternatively, the current can be applied through other electrodes. Because the backing layer 910 comprises a low conductivity material, the current has a path of high resistivity 912 through the backing layer 910. When the microstructures are not engaged (as in **FIG. 9A**), the high conductivity stalks 908 are isolated from one another and the high resistivity path 912 is the least resistive path available to the current to reach one or more sensing channels 920 on the backing layer 912. Thus, when the dry adhesive is unengaged, no change in voltage or current is measured.

[0110] For a given current applied through the power 902 electrode, the measured voltage from the sensing electrodes 920 can decrease the closer they are to the ground 904, assuming a uniformly conductive elastomer.

[0111] **FIG. 9B** shows a cross-sectional front view of the plurality of wedge-shaped microstructure stalks **908** in an engaged state against the surface **916**. The surface **916** can be any surface that the microstructure stalks **908** are intended to grip, such as the surfaces of walls or those of objects.

[0112] When the microstructures are engaged, in some instances, the high conductivity stalks **908** can make contact with one another, as illustrated in **FIG. 9B**, opening conductive pathways through the high conductivity stalks **908**. For example, when a DC voltage, or current, is applied, there can be an increased current flow through the contacting stalks **908** which is a significantly less resistive path **914** than the high resistivity path **912** which runs through the backing layer **910**. Because the current can flow through the less resistive path **914**, voltage measurement will drop. In some instances, voltage can be measured between the ground **904** channel and a sensing channel **920**. In other instances, voltage can be measured between any two sensing channels **920**.

[0113] In some cases, an AC voltage, or current, can be applied. When the microstructures are engaged, in some instances, the high conductivity stalks **908** may not necessarily make direct contact with one another. For example, the stalks **908** may make, or achieve, near contact with one another. When the high conductivity stalks move closer together, a change in impedance can be measured due to a change in capacitance.

[0114] Thus, a state of engagement or lack of engagement of an adhesive comprising the microstructures can be sensed by configuring the microstructures to provide conductive pathways in an engaged state and measuring changes in voltage. **FIG. 10** shows a method for sensing engagement. The method may comprise, at a first operation **1001**, applying a current to a backing layer. The backing layer may comprise a plurality of microstructures. At a next operation **1002**, the voltage between a first reference point and a second reference point on the backing layer can be measured. Either the first reference point or the second reference point can be the ground **904** channel. At a next operation **1003**, a conductive pathway for the current can be opened through a plurality of microstructure stalks, wherein each microstructure stalk of the plurality of microstructure stalks contacts at least one neighboring microstructure stalk in an engaged state. At a next operation **1004**, an engaged state, or lack of engaged state, can be determined from a change in voltage, or lack of change in voltage, respectively.

[0115] In some instances, the electronics for these sensing mechanisms can operate at the periphery of a gripping pad comprising the microstructures so as to not interfere with the operation of other electrostatic elements that can be included in the gripping pad.

[0116] In some instances, the integrated engagement sensing system can operate in conjunction with other sensing systems (e.g., optical sensing systems, auditory sensing systems, tactical sensing systems, electrostatic sensing systems, etc.) that can sense different objects or different activities. One or more other sensing systems can be integrated into the gripping pad.

Alternatively or in addition, one or more other sensing systems can be located remotely to or external to the gripping pad.

[0117] Provided herein are optical engagement sensing systems that may be used alternatively to or in addition to the integrated engagement sensing system described elsewhere herein. One or more elements of the gripping pad may comprise a clear, transparent, or translucent material which allows at least partial optical communication through or across the material of the one or more elements in response to an optical source, such as a light source (e.g., infrared (IR) light emitting diode (LED)). For example, the gripping pad may comprise clear, transparent, or translucent microstructures. In some instances, the gripping pad may comprise a clear, transparent, or translucent backing layer. In some instances, the gripping pad may comprise a clear, transparent, or translucent intermediary layer. When a normal pre-loading force is applied, and shear force applied thereafter, the microstructures may deform and bend against a target surface (e.g., the surface of a target object, surface of a wall, etc.), causing an optical change in the material. A significant optical change may result from even small pre-loading forces. For example, in the instance of a clear material, the material may become translucent and reflect and scatter light from the light source.

[0118] The gripping pad may comprise one or more light sensors, such as IR phototransistors, to detect the optical change. The gripping pad may comprise other optical sensors (e.g., cameras) to detect the optical change. The light source may be configured to provide infrared (IR) light. Alternatively or in addition, the light source may be configured to provide electromagnetic waves of different wavelengths. The light sensors may be configured to sense the wavelength (or changes thereof) provide by the light source. The optical engagement sensing systems may be used with target objects having a surface that has appreciable light (e.g., IR) reflectivity. For example, the optical engagement sensing system may provide more accurate and precise results for sensing engagement to relatively flat surfaces having some degree of light reflectivity than to surfaces having large features that protrude towards the sensor and have minimal light reflectivity.

[0119] **FIGS. 11A and 11B** show a cross-sectional side view and cross-sectional bottom view of an optical engagement sensing system, respectively. **FIGs. 11A and 11B** are not drawn to scale. **FIG. 11A** shows plurality of wedge-shaped microstructure stalks **1106** stemming from a backing

layer 1102 in an engaged state against a target surface 1108. The microstructure stalks 1106 and backing layer 1102 can be adjacent to and/or cast atop a printed circuit board 1104. The printed circuit board 1104 can be parallel to the plane of the backing layer 1102. The microstructure stalks, backing layer, and printed circuit board illustrated in **FIGS. 11A-B** may correspond to the microstructure stalks, backing layer, and printed circuit board illustrated in **FIGS. 9A-B**. For example, the microstructure stalks 1106 and backing layer 1102 may comprise materials of different conductivity and the printed circuit board 1104 can comprise various electronics (e.g., a power channel 902, a ground channel 904 and multiple sensing channels 920) to facilitate sensing.

[0120] An optical element support structure 1110 may surround the printed circuit board 1104 at its periphery on the same side relative to the backing layer 1102. While **FIGS. 11A-11B** illustrate a circular gripping pad (e.g., microstructure stalks, backing layer, printed circuit board assembly) having a generally circular shape, any other shape (e.g., polygonal, non-polygonal) may be used. In this example, a ring-like support structure 1110 may surround a circular printed circuit board 1104 and be positioned adjacent to the backing layer 1102. The support structure 1110 may be substantially parallel to the plane of the backing layer 1102. The support structure 1110 may or may not contact the printed circuit board 1104. In some instances, the support structure 1110 may or may not have the same thickness as the printed circuit board 1104. Beneficially, the optical sensing system may still be in optical communication with the backing layer and/or the microstructure stalks even with the lack of transparency or clearness of the printed circuit board 1104. Alternatively, in some instances, the peripheral electronics in the support structure 1110 may replace the circuit board 1104.

[0121] Referring to **FIG. 11B**, a plurality of optical elements 1114, 1116 may be spaced out through the support structure 1110. For example, the support structure 1110 may comprise one or more light emitting diodes 1116 and one or more phototransistors 1114. In this example, there are **3** LEDs and **12** phototransistors. The phototransistors may be wide-angle phototransistors. The phototransistors may be narrow-angle phototransistors. The one or more phototransistors 1114 may comprise a mixture of wide-angle and narrow-angle phototransistors. For example, of the **12** illustrated phototransistors in **FIG. 11B**, **6** may be wide-angle and **6** may be narrow-angle phototransistors arranged in alternating fashion. Beneficially, narrow-angle phototransistors may provide benefits by additionally relaying information about object range (e.g., distance of target object surface from the sensing pad) and wide-angle phototransistors may provide benefits by additionally relaying information about augment force applied by or to the target object. In some instances, each of the optical elements 1114, 1116 may be positioned on the support structure

1110 in an evenly-spaced array. For example, each of the one or more LEDs **1116** may be evenly spaced across the circular ring-like structure **1110** to provide even, distributed light to the backing layer **1102** and/or microstructures **1106**. In other instances, each of the optical elements **1114**, **1116** may be laid out in an arbitrary pattern with non-uniform gaps between each element. In some instances, each of the optical elements **1114**, **1116** may be positioned at one or more key reference locations.

[0122] Each of the one or more phototransistors **1114** (or other optical sensors) may be connected in series with a measurement resistor to construct a voltage divider architecture. Voltage output may be measured and collected by a controller. The electronics of the optical elements may be routed through the support structure **1110** to a connector **1112**. In some instances, the electronics of the optical elements **1114**, **1116** may be electrically coupled to the electronics of the printed circuit board **1104**.

[0123] Engagement of the microstructures **1106** against the surface **1108** may be detected or sensed by providing light from a light source (e.g., LED **1114**) and detecting an optical change in response to the light source via the phototransistors **1116**. This may be achieved by applying a current and making voltage measurement at the measurement resistors (connected to each optical sensor (e.g., phototransistor)). For example, a clear backing layer **1102** having clear microstructures **1106** may become translucent and reflect and scatter more light from the light source as they engage the surface **1108** and bend. Light emitted from the LEDs may undergo diffuse reflection against surfaces of the backing layer and/or microstructure, resulting in omnidirectional reflection angles due to surface irregularities and reduction of intensity due to absorption and scattering of light through various media (e.g., elastomer, air, etc.). Changes in voltage values measured at the measurement resistor to determine engagement state.

Alternatively or in addition, because light cast from the light source will be received at multiple angles from the phototransistors, based on receipt angles and relative sensor location, the optical sensing system may be used to determine object distance.

[0124] In some instances, the optical engagement system described with respect to **FIGS. 11A-11B** may be used in conjunction with the integrated engagement system described with respect to **FIGS. 9A-9B**. For example, the optical engagement system may be used to confirm engagement status determined by the integrated engagement system. Alternatively, the integrated engagement system may be used to confirm engagement status determined by the optical engagement system. Alternatively or in addition, data obtained from both the optical engagement system and the integrated engagement system may be combined to determine engagement status of the microstructure adhesives. The engagement systems described herein

may be able to discern not only binary states, such as engaged or unengaged states, but also intermediary engagement states and determine a degree of engagement. For example, the voltage measurements from either or both engagement systems may be linearly or non-linearly correlated to an engagement scale.

[0125] **FIG. 12** shows a gripping control system. Sensor data from a gripping pad **1202** or constituents thereon, such as a circuit board **1208** and/or optical element support structure **1210**, such as voltage readings or other sensor measurements, can be transmitted to a gripping control system **1204**. The gripping control system **1204** may comprise one or more microcontrollers. Alternatively or in addition, the gripping control system **1204** may comprise one or more computer processors. In some instances, the gripping control system may control mechanics **1206** of a gripping system. The mechanics **1206** of a gripping system can include a mechanical application or release of shear load, a mechanical application or release of pre-load, a mechanical positioning of a gripping pad **1202** on a surface (e.g., object, wall, etc.), a mechanical rotation of the gripping pad **1202**, and other mechanical performances. Such mechanical performances can be effectuated by actuators, motors, joints, arms, fasteners, and other mechanical systems. The gripping control system **1204** may interpret sensor data to determine a state of engagement. In some instances, the gripping control system **1204** may, based on a determination of a state of engagement, direct mechanics **1206** of the gripping system, such as to apply or release a shear load (e.g., via an actuator).

[0126] The gripping control system **1204** may communicate (e.g., transmit, receive instructions) with the gripping pad **1202** via wired or wireless (e.g., wireless networks, Bluetooth, Wi-Fi, etc.) connections. The gripping control system **1204** may communicate (e.g., transmit, receive instructions) with the mechanics **1206** of the gripping pad **1202** via wired or wireless connections.

[0127] The present disclosure provides control systems that are programmed to implement systems and methods of the disclosure. For example, a computer system is programmed or otherwise configured to perform the functions of various control systems described above, such as the control system **514** in **FIG. 5** and the gripping control system **1204** in **FIG. 12**. In some instances, there may be a separate computer system communicating with the control systems described herein. In some instances, the computer system can comprise one or more microprocessors. Alternatively or in addition, the computer system can comprise one or more microcontrollers. The computer system can be an electronic device of a user (e.g., operator, technician, controller, engineer, etc.) or a computer system that is remotely located with respect to the electronic device. The electronic device can be a mobile electronic device.

[0128] The computer system includes a central processing unit (CPU, also "processor" and "computer processor" herein), which can be a single core or multi core processor, or a plurality of processors for parallel processing. The computer system also includes memory or memory location (e.g., random-access memory, read-only memory, flash memory), electronic storage unit (e.g., hard disk), communication interface (e.g., network adapter) for communicating with one or more other systems (e.g., other computer systems, mechanical systems, gripping systems, etc.), and peripheral devices, such as cache, other memory, data storage and/or electronic display adapters. The memory, storage unit, communication interface and peripheral devices are in communication with the CPU through a communication bus (solid lines), such as a motherboard. The storage unit can be a data storage unit (or data repository) for storing data. The computer system can be operatively coupled to a computer network ("network") with the aid of the communication interface. The network can be the Internet, an internet and/or extranet, or an intranet and/or extranet that is in communication with the Internet. The network in some cases is a telecommunication and/or data network. The computer network can include one or more computer servers, which can enable distributed computing, such as cloud computing. The network, in some cases with the aid of the computer system, can implement a peer-to-peer network, which may enable devices coupled to the computer system to behave as a client or a server.

[0129] The CPU can execute a sequence of machine-readable instructions, which can be embodied in a program or software. The instructions may be stored in a memory location, such as the memory. The instructions can be directed to the CPU, which can subsequently program or otherwise configure the CPU to implement systems and methods of the present disclosure. Examples of operations performed by the CPU can include fetch, decode, execute, and writeback.

[0130] The CPU can be part of a circuit, such as an integrated circuit. One or more other components of the system can be included in the circuit. In some cases, the circuit is an application specific integrated circuit (ASIC).

[0131] The storage unit can store files, such as drivers, libraries and saved programs. The storage unit can store user data (e.g., user preferences, user programs, machine default settings). The computer system in some cases can include one or more additional data storage units that are external to the computer system, such as located on a remote server that is in communication with the computer system through an intranet or the Internet.

[0132] The computer system (e.g., control system 514, gripping control system 1204) can communicate with one or more remote computer systems through the network. For instance, the

computer system can communicate with a remote computer system of a user (e.g., lab technician, robot controller, etc.). Examples of remote computer systems include personal computers (e.g., portable PC), slate or tablet PC's (e.g., Apple® iPad, Samsung® Galaxy Tab), telephones, Smart phones (e.g., Apple® iPhone, Android-enabled device, Blackberry®), or personal digital assistants. The user can access the computer system via the computer network.

[0133] Methods as described herein can be implemented by way of machine (e.g., computer processor) executable code stored on an electronic storage location of the computer system, such as, for example, on the memory or electronic storage unit. The machine executable or machine readable code can be provided in the form of software. During use, the code can be executed by the processor. In some cases, the code can be retrieved from the storage unit and stored on the memory for ready access by the processor. In some situations, the electronic storage unit can be precluded, and machine-executable instructions are stored on memory.

[0134] The code can be pre-compiled and configured for use with a machine having a processor adapted to execute the code, or can be compiled during runtime. The code can be supplied in a programming language that can be selected to enable the code to execute in a pre-compiled or as-compiled fashion.

[0135] Aspects of the systems and methods provided herein can be embodied in programming. Various aspects of the technology may be thought of as "products" or "articles of manufacture" typically in the form of machine (or processor) executable code and/or associated data that is carried on or embodied in a type of machine readable medium. Machine-executable code can be stored on an electronic storage unit, such as memory (e.g., read-only memory, random-access memory, flash memory) or a hard disk. "Storage" type media can include any or all of the tangible memory of the computers, processors or the like, or associated modules thereof, such as various semiconductor memories, tape drives, disk drives and the like, which may provide non-transitory storage at any time for the software programming. All or portions of the software may at times be communicated through the Internet or various other telecommunication networks. Such communications, for example, may enable loading of the software from one computer or processor into another, for example, from a management server or host computer into the computer platform of an application server. Thus, another type of media that may bear the software elements includes optical, electrical and electromagnetic waves, such as used across physical interfaces between local devices, through wired and optical landline networks and over various air-links. The physical elements that carry such waves, such as wired or wireless links, optical links or the like, also may be considered as media bearing the software. As used herein, unless restricted to non-transitory, tangible "storage" media, terms

such as computer or machine "readable medium" refer to any medium that participates in providing instructions to a processor for execution.

[0136] Hence, a machine readable medium, such as computer-executable code, may take many forms, including but not limited to, a tangible storage medium, a carrier wave medium or physical transmission medium. Non-volatile storage media include, for example, optical or magnetic disks, such as any of the storage devices in any computer(s) or the like, such as may be used to implement the databases, etc. shown in the drawings. Volatile storage media include dynamic memory, such as main memory of such a computer platform. Tangible transmission media include coaxial cables; copper wire and fiber optics, including the wires that comprise a bus within a computer system. Carrier-wave transmission media may take the form of electric or electromagnetic signals, or acoustic or light waves such as those generated during radio frequency (RF) and infrared (IR) data communications. Common forms of computer-readable media therefore include for example: a floppy disk, a flexible disk, hard disk, magnetic tape, any other magnetic medium, a CD-ROM, DVD or DVD-ROM, any other optical medium, punch cards paper tape, any other physical storage medium with patterns of holes, a RAM, a ROM, a PROM and EPROM, a FLASH-EPROM, any other memory chip or cartridge, a carrier wave transporting data or instructions, cables or links transporting such a carrier wave, or any other medium from which a computer may read programming code and/or data. Many of these forms of computer readable media may be involved in carrying one or more sequences of one or more instructions to a processor for execution.

[0137] The computer system can include or be in communication with an electronic display (e.g., LED) that comprises a user interface (UI) for providing, for example, sensor data readings (e.g., applied pressure readings, voltage readings, etc.), timers, dry adhesive engagement status updates, available mechanical actions. Examples of UI's include, without limitation, a graphical user interface (GUI) and web-based user interface.

[0138] Methods and systems of the present disclosure can be implemented by way of one or more algorithms. An algorithm can be implemented by way of software upon execution by the central processing unit. The algorithm can, for example, receive and transmit commands, interpret applied pressure readings, determine and direct a linear position of a pressure applying wafer based on the applied pressure readings and a desired pressure reading, interpret a voltage measurement, determine an adhesive's engagement status from such voltage measurements, and direct and control one or more mechanics of a gripping system.

[0139] While preferred embodiments of the present invention have been shown and described herein, it will be obvious to those skilled in the art that such embodiments are provided by way

of example only. It is not intended that the invention be limited by the specific examples provided within the specification. While the invention has been described with reference to the aforementioned specification, the descriptions and illustrations of the embodiments herein are not meant to be construed in a limiting sense. Numerous variations, changes, and substitutions will now occur to those skilled in the art without departing from the invention. Furthermore, it shall be understood that all aspects of the invention are not limited to the specific depictions, configurations or relative proportions set forth herein which depend upon a variety of conditions and variables. It should be understood that various alternatives to the embodiments of the invention described herein may be employed in practicing the invention. It is therefore contemplated that the invention shall also cover any such alternatives, modifications, variations or equivalents. It is intended that the following claims define the scope of the invention and that methods and structures within the scope of these claims and their equivalents be covered thereby.

CLAIMS

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for post-treating dry adhesive microstructures to form post-treated tips, comprising:
 - (a) directing a liquid polymer layer to self-align with a plurality of microstructures adjacent to a gripping surface;
 - (b) receiving, by a computer processor, a reading of applied pressure on said gripping surface by said liquid polymer layer;
 - (c) adjusting a position of said liquid polymer layer relative to a position of said gripping surface based at least in part on said reading of applied pressure and a predetermined dipping pressure;
 - (d) retracting said liquid polymer layer such that a portion of said liquid polymer layer is retained on a tip of each microstructure of said plurality of microstructures; and
 - (e) curing said portion of said liquid polymer layer.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein said computer processor receives said reading of said applied pressure on said gripping surface by said liquid polymer layer and adjusts said position of said liquid polymer layer in real-time.
3. The method of claim 1, said curing in (e) is performed while pressing said tip of each microstructure against a surface.
4. The method of claim 3, wherein pressing said tip of each microstructure against said surface comprises directing said surface to self-align with said plurality of microstructures.
5. The method of claim 4, further comprising (i) receiving, by said computer processor, a reading of applied pressure on said gripping surface by said surface, and (ii) adjusting a position of said surface using said reading of applied pressure and a predetermined pressing pressure.
6. The method of claim 5, wherein said computer processor receives said reading of said applied pressure on said gripping surface by said surface and adjusts said position of said surface in real-time.
7. The method of claim 1, wherein during (a)-(e), said position of said gripping surface is stationary.
8. The method of claim 1, wherein each microstructure of said plurality of microstructures is oriented substantially along the same direction.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein microstructures of said plurality of microstructures have parallel longitudinal axes, wherein said parallel longitudinal axes are oriented with respect to a normal of said gripping surface at an angle greater than zero degrees.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein each microstructure of said plurality of microstructures includes a first surface and a second surface, wherein said first surface has a greater surface area than said second surface.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein said plurality of microstructures and said liquid polymer layer comprise the same elastomer.

12. The method of claim 1, wherein said plurality of microstructures comprises conductive additive(s).

13. The method of claim 1, wherein said liquid polymer layer comprises conductive additive(s).

14. The method of claim 1, wherein a given post-treated tip of said post-treated tips comprises one or more flaps each projecting from a characteristic axis of said given post-treated tip.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein said one or more flaps have parallel longitudinal axes, wherein said longitudinal axes are oriented with respect to a normal of said gripping surface at an angle greater than zero degrees.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein said longitudinal axes of said one or more flaps are non-parallel to longitudinal axes of said plurality of microstructures.

17. An apparatus for treating dry adhesive microstructures to form tips, comprising:
a plate comprising a gripping surface, wherein said gripping surface comprises a plurality of microstructures;

an elevating plate having a first surface and a second surface opposite said first surface, wherein said first surface interfaces with said gripping surface and wherein said elevating plate is rotatable about a spherical joint coupled to said second surface;

an arm having a proximal end and a distal end, wherein said distal end is coupled to said spherical joint and said proximal end is attached to a linear stage configured to move in an axis normal to a plane of said plate;

a pressure sensor configured to measure applied pressure on said gripping surface by said elevating plate; and

one or more computer processors operatively coupled to said pressure sensor and said linear stage, wherein said one or more computer processors are individually or collectively programmed to (i) receive from said pressure sensor readings of applied pressure, and (ii) use

said readings of applied pressure and a predetermined pressure setting to adjust a position of said linear stage relative to a position of said plate.

18. The apparatus of claim 17, wherein said elevating plate is loaded with a liquid layer of uncured polymer.

19. The apparatus of claim 17, wherein said liquid layer of uncured polymer comprises conductive additive(s).

20. The apparatus of claim 17, wherein said elevating plate is a hard surface.

21. The apparatus of claim 17, wherein said first surface of said elevating plate self-aligns to said gripping surface upon contact.

22. The apparatus of claim 17, wherein said one or more computer processors adjusts said position of said linear stage with micrometer accuracy.

23. The apparatus of claim 17, wherein a given tip of said tips comprises one or more flaps each projecting from a characteristic axis of said given tip.

24. An integrated engagement sensing system in a gripping surface, comprising:
a backing layer comprising a first material having a first electrical conductivity;
a plurality of microstructure stalks comprising a second material having a second electrical conductivity, wherein an end of each microstructure stalk of said plurality of microstructure stalks is coupled to said backing layer, and wherein each microstructure stalk is configured to couple to at least one neighboring microstructure stalk when said gripping surface is in an engaged state, and wherein said second electrical conductivity is higher than said first electrical conductivity;

a plurality of sensing electrodes disposed on or adjacent to said backing layer, wherein any two sensing electrodes of said plurality of sensing electrodes are configured to measure voltage; and

one or more computer processors operatively coupled to said plurality of sensing electrodes, wherein said one or more computer processors are individually or collectively programmed to (i) apply a current to said backing layer, (ii) receive a reading of said voltage, and (iii) based on said reading of said voltage, determine said engaged state of said gripping surface.

25. The system of claim 24, wherein a change in said reading of said voltage is indicative of an engaged state.

26. The system of claim 24, wherein said current is direct current, and said engaged state is determined when each microstructure stalk contacts at least one neighboring microstructure stalk.

27. The system of claim 24, wherein said current is an alternating current, and said engaged state is determined when each microstructure stalk achieves near contact with at least one neighboring microstructure stalk.

28. The system of claim 24, wherein said second electrical conductivity is at least one or more magnitudes higher than said first electrical conductivity.

29. The system of claim 24, wherein said one or more computer processors are individually or collectively programmed to perform a mechanical action on said gripping surface based at least in part on said engaged state.

30. The system of claim 29, wherein said mechanical action is an application or release of shear load.

31. The system of claim 29, wherein said mechanical action is an application or release of pre-load.

32. The system of claim 24, wherein each microstructure stalk of said plurality of microstructure stalks includes a first surface and a second surface, wherein said first surface has a greater surface area than said second surface.

33. The system of claim 24, wherein each microstructure stalk of said plurality of microstructure stalks comprises post-treated tips.

34. The system of claim 24, further comprising a light source, an optical sensor, and a plurality of peripheral electrodes in electrical communication, and positioned at the periphery of said backing layer, wherein said one or more computer processors are individually or collectively programmed to apply a current to said periphery of said backing layer, receive a reading of voltage at said optical sensor, and based on said reading of voltage at said optical sensor, determine said engaged state of said gripping surface

35. The system of claim 34, wherein said optical sensor is a phototransistor.

36. The system of claim 34, wherein said light source is a light emitting diode.

37. A method for sensing engagement of a gripping surface, comprising:

(a) applying a current to a backing layer of a gripping surface, wherein an end of each microstructure stalk of a plurality of microstructure stalks is attached to said backing layer;

(b) measuring a voltage or current between a first reference point and a second reference point, wherein said first and second reference points are located on said backing layer;

(c) opening a conductive pathway between said first and second reference points through said plurality of microstructure stalks, wherein each microstructure stalk is

coupled to at least one neighboring microstmcture stalk when said gripping surface is in an engaged state and wherein said plurality of microstmcture stalks has a higher conductivity than said backing layer; and

(d) determining, from a change in said voltage or current, said engaged state of said gripping surface.

38. The method of claim 37, wherein a change in a reading of said voltage or current is indicative of an engaged state.

39. The method of claim 37, wherein said plurality of microstmcture stalks has an electrical conductivity at least one or more magnitudes higher than an electrical conductivity of said backing layer.

40. The method of claim 37, wherein said current is direct current, and said engaged state is determined when each microstmcture stalk contacts at least one neighboring microstmcture stalk.

41. The method of claim 37, wherein said current is an alternating current, and said engaged state is determined when each microstmcture stalk achieves near contact with at least one neighboring microstmcture stalk.

42. The method of claim 37, further comprising performing a mechanical action on said gripping surface based at least in part on said engaged state.

43. The method of claim 42, wherein said mechanical action is an application or release of shear load.

44. The method of claim 42, wherein said mechanical action is an application or release of pre-load.

45. The method of claim 37, wherein each microstmcture stalk of said plurality of microstmcture stalks includes a first surface and a second surface, wherein said first surface has a greater surface area than said second surface.

46. The method of claim 37, wherein each microstmcture stalk of said plurality of microstmcture stalks comprises post-treated tips.

47. A system for manipulating an object, comprising:

a backing layer;

a plurality of microstmcture stalks protmding from said backing layer, wherein a given microstmcture stalk of said plurality of microstmcture stalks comprises material doped with at least one conductive additive; and

one or more flaps projecting from a characteristic axis of each of said plurality of microstructure stalks, which one or more flaps are separate from said plurality of microstructure stalks.

48. The system of claim 47, wherein said at least one conductive additive comprises a carbon nanotube.

49. The system of claim 47, wherein said at least one conductive additive comprises carbon black.

50. The system of claim 47, wherein said at least one conductive additive protrudes from an outer surface of said given microstructure stalk as asperities.

51. The system of claim 50, wherein said at least one conductive additive protrudes from said outer surface as an asperity.

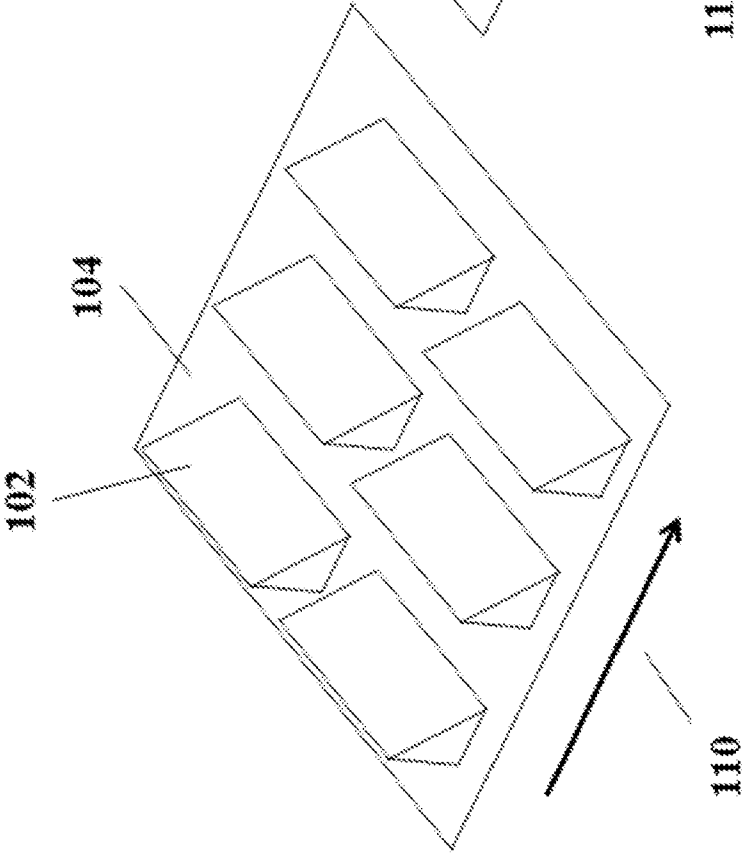


FIG. 1A

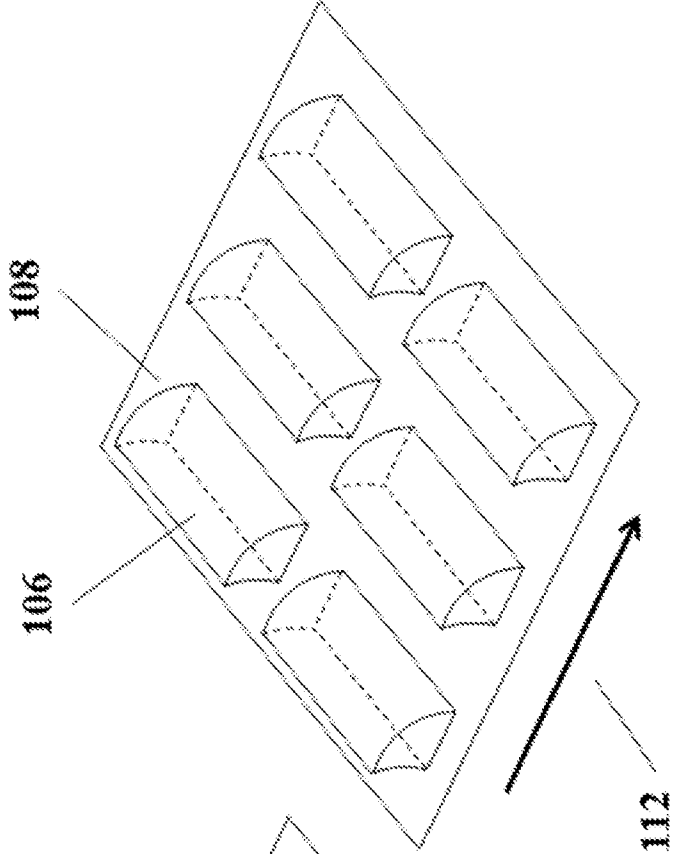


FIG. 1B

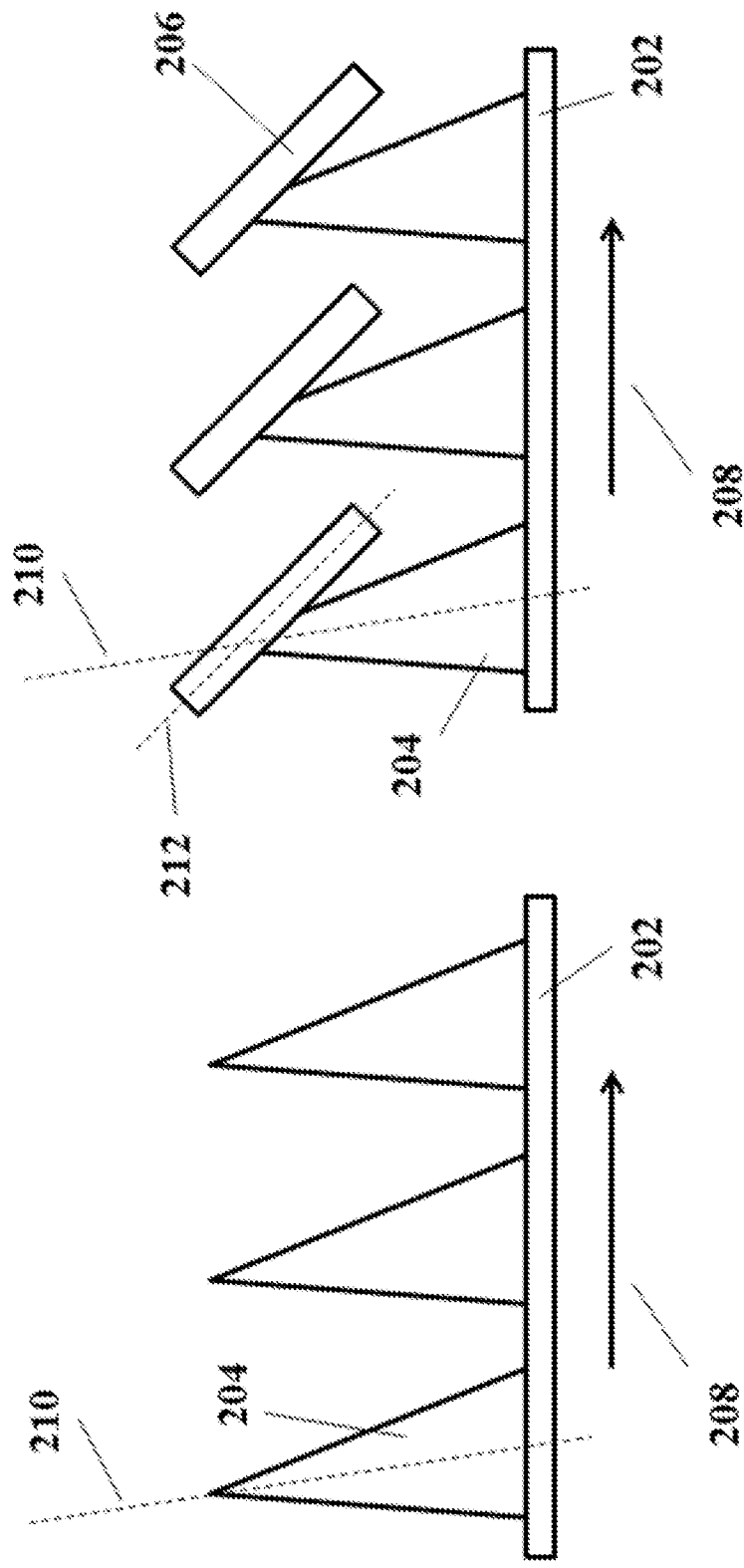


FIG. 2B

FIG. 2A

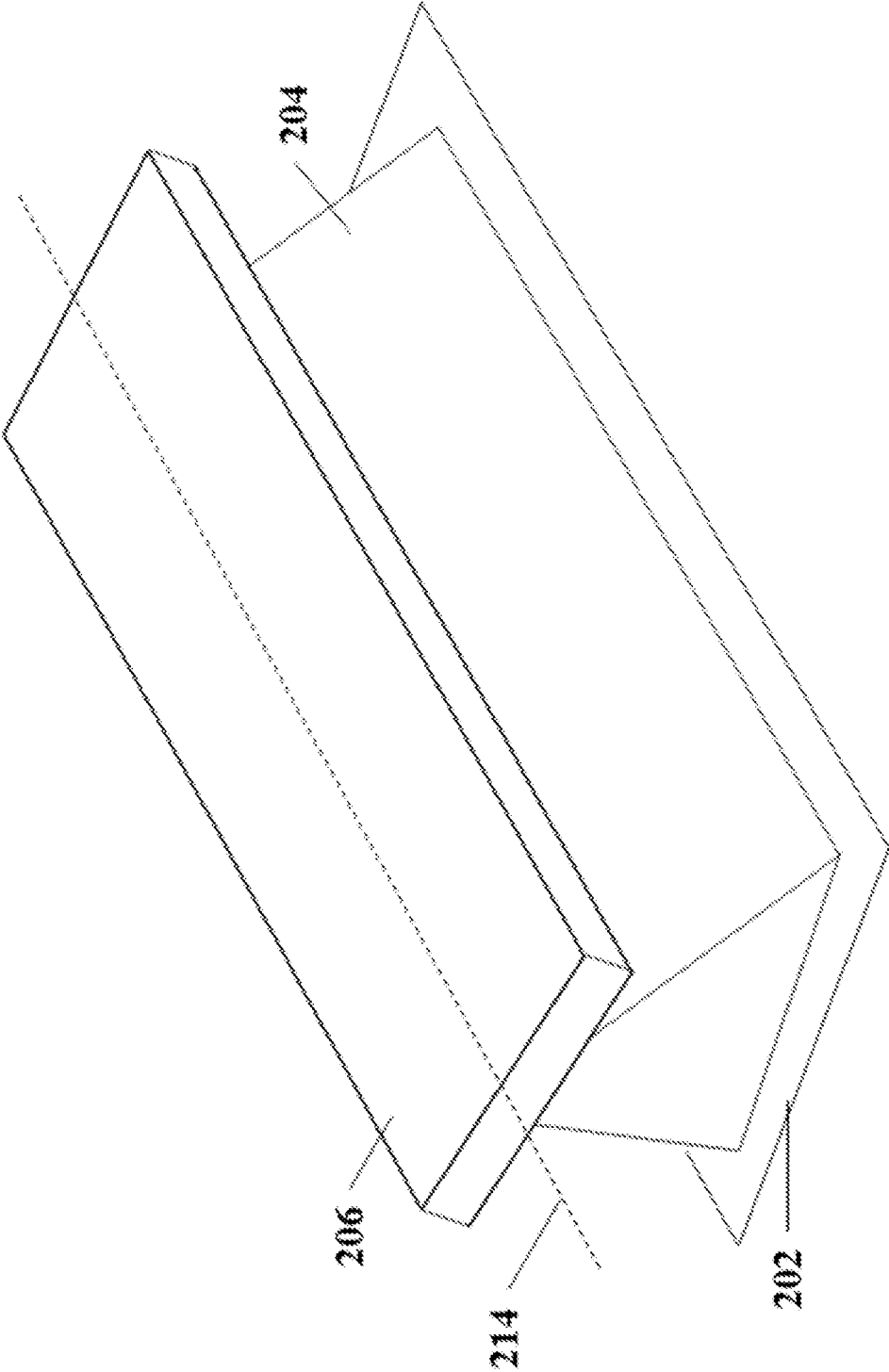


FIG. 2C

FIG. 3A

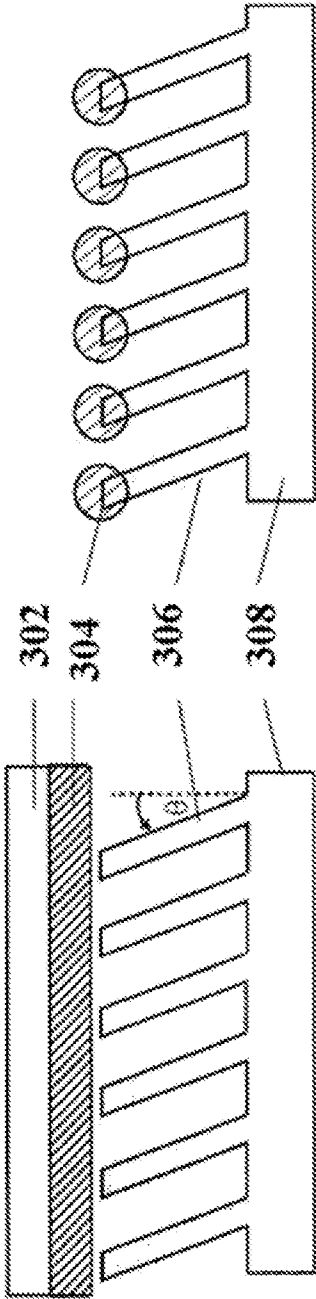


FIG. 3B

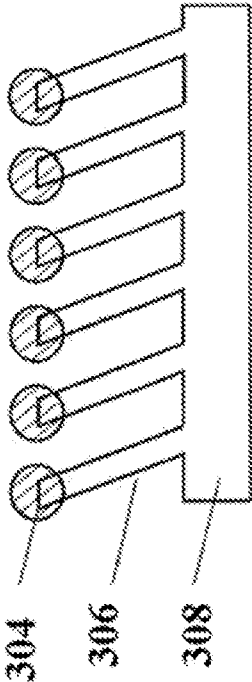


FIG. 3C

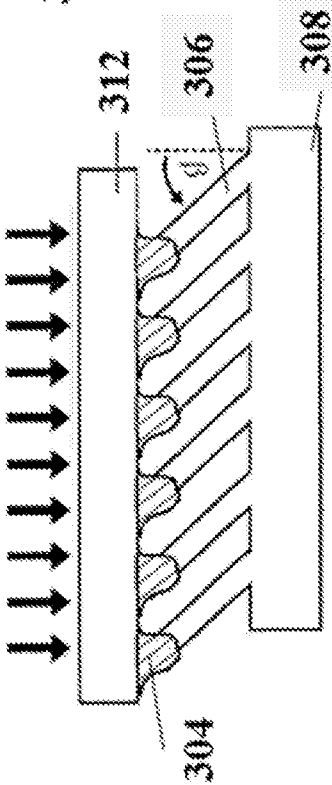
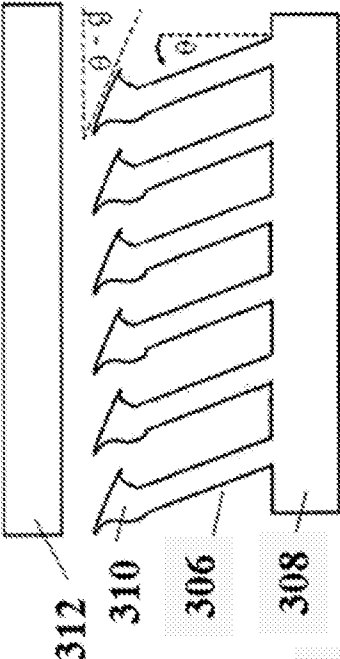


FIG. 3D



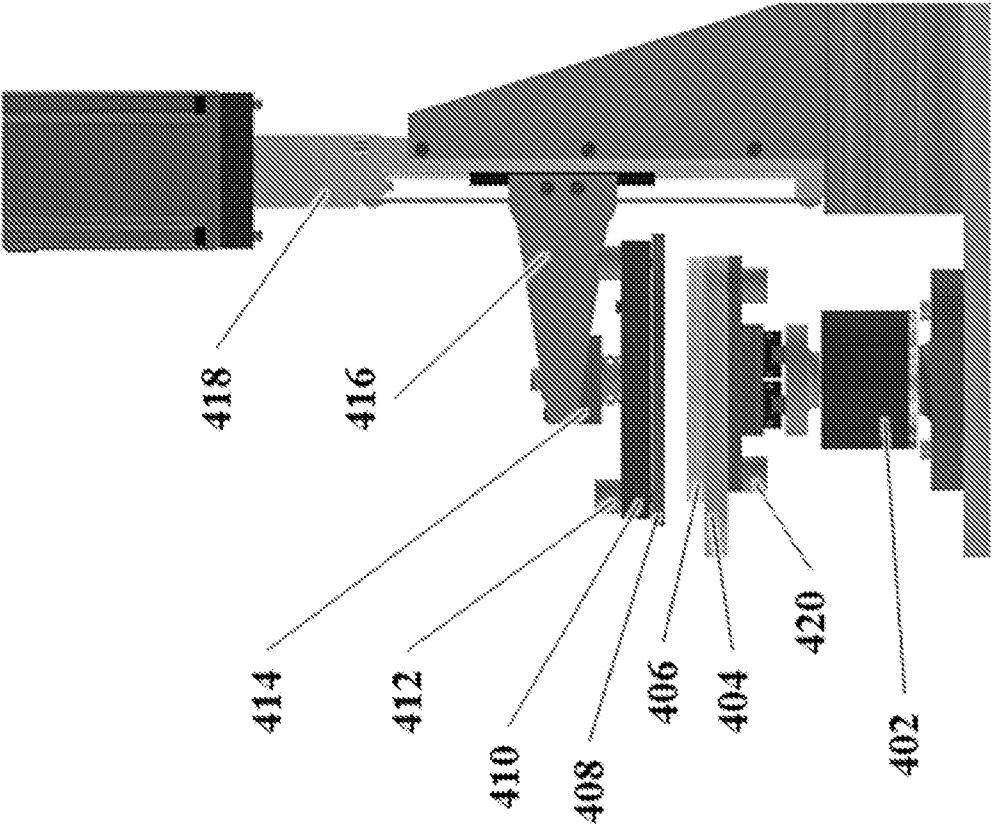


FIG. 4A

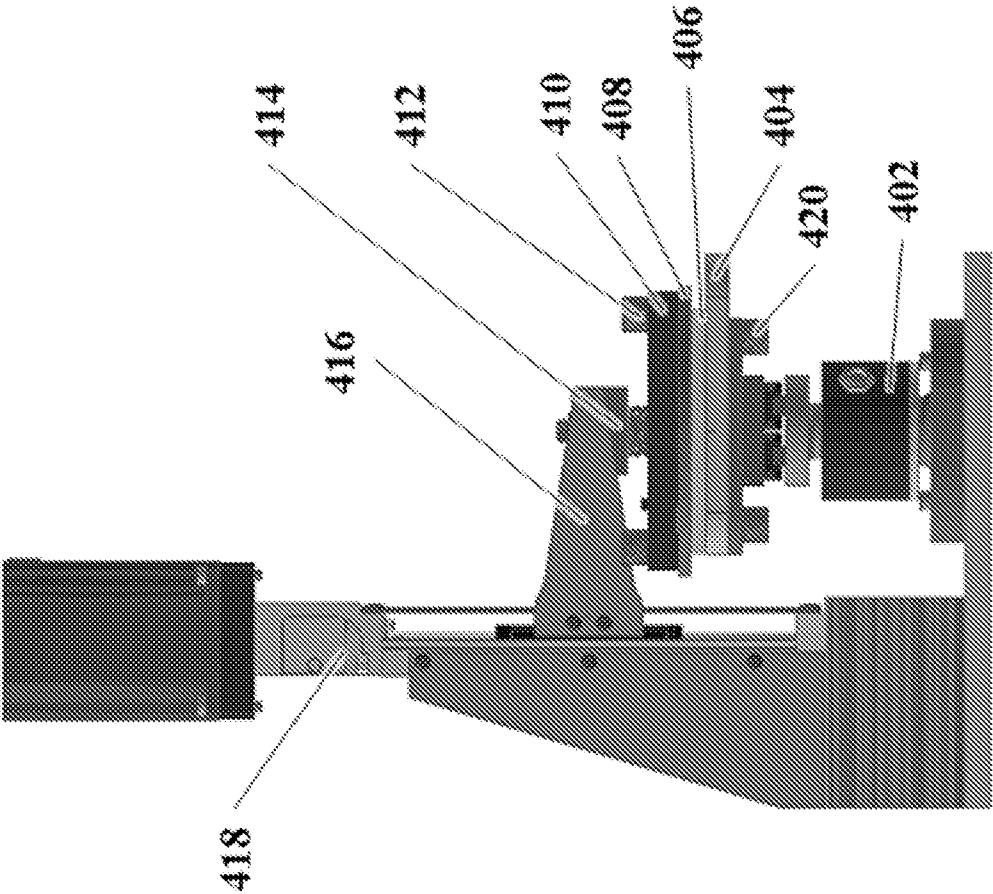


FIG. 4B

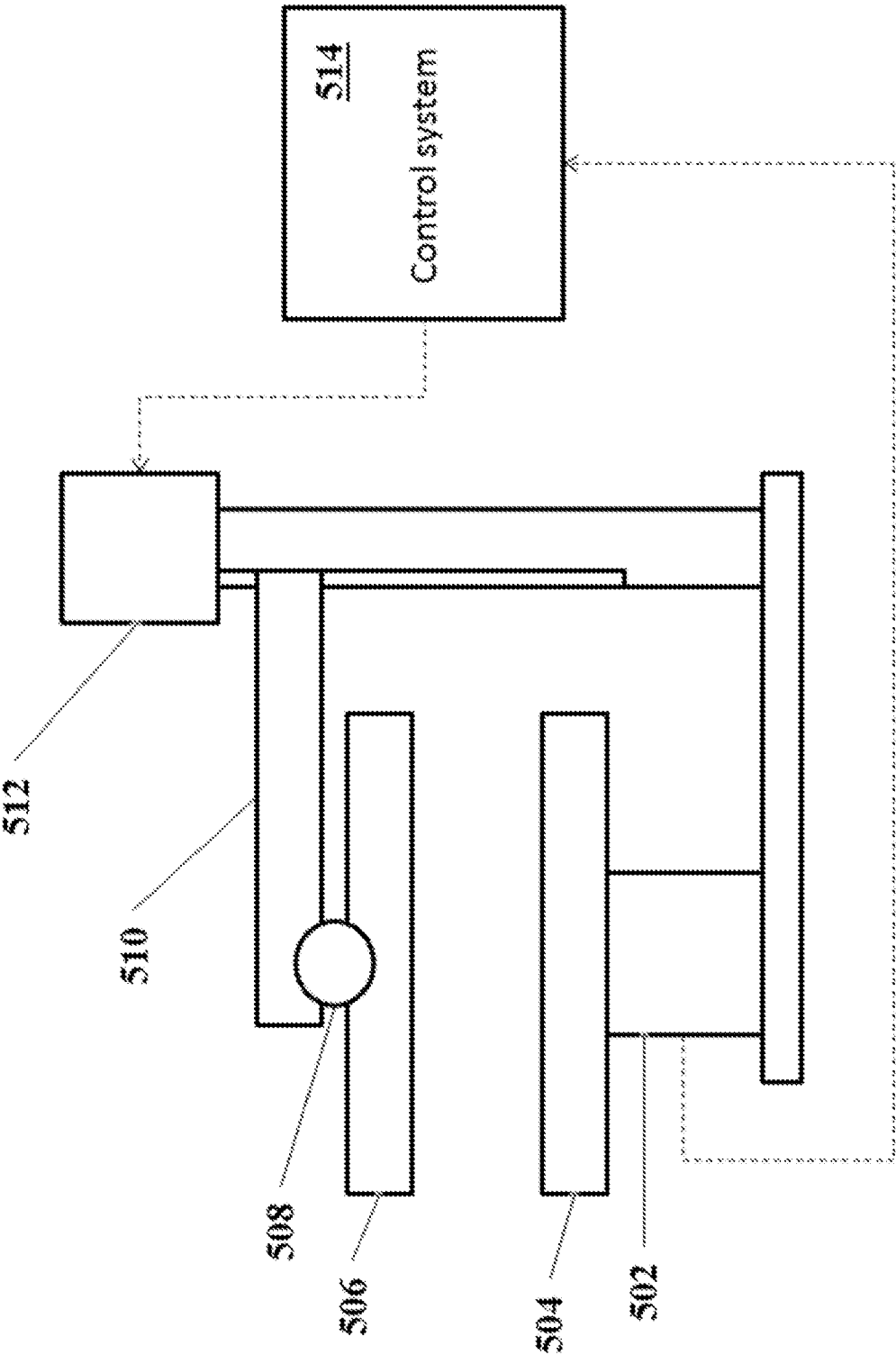
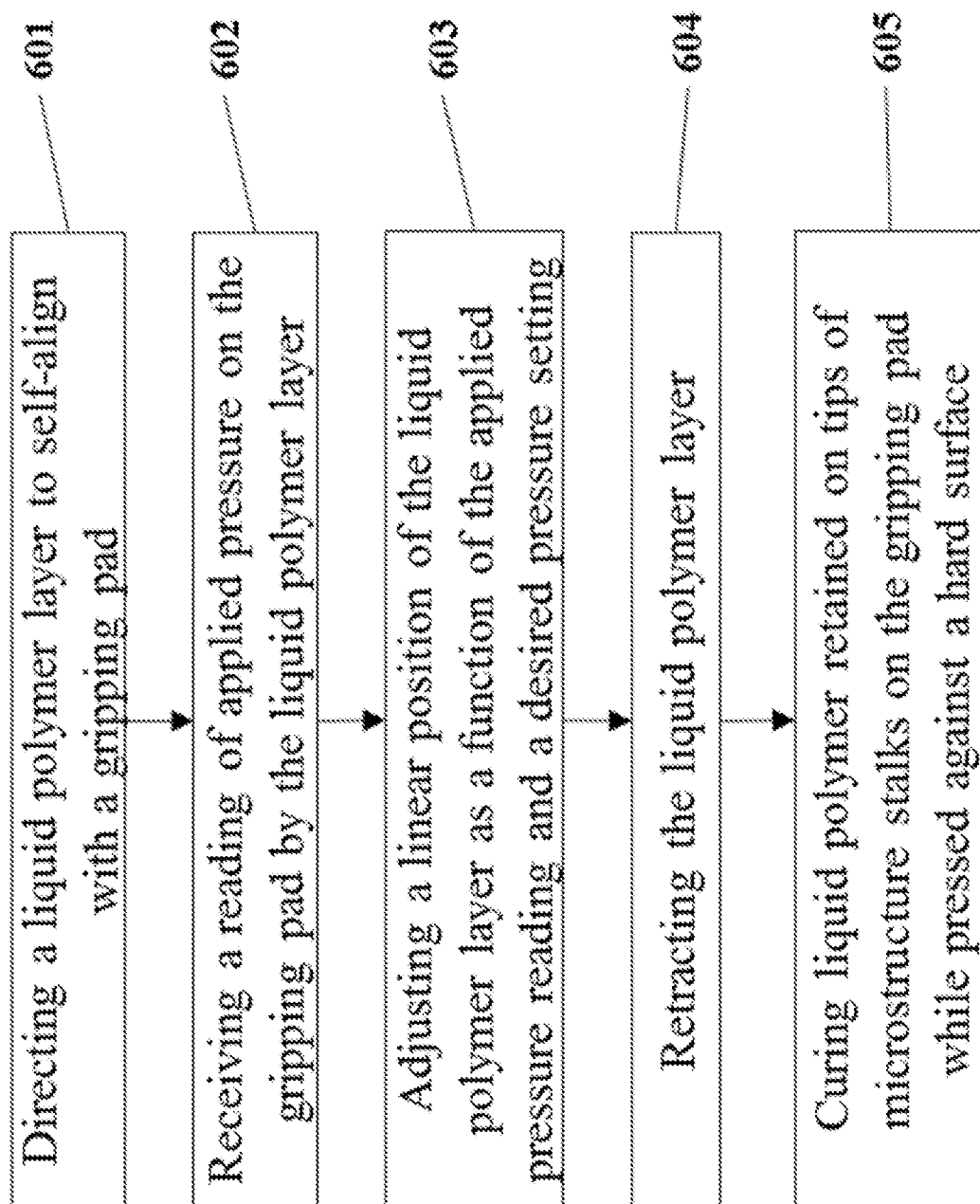


FIG. 5

**FIG. 6**

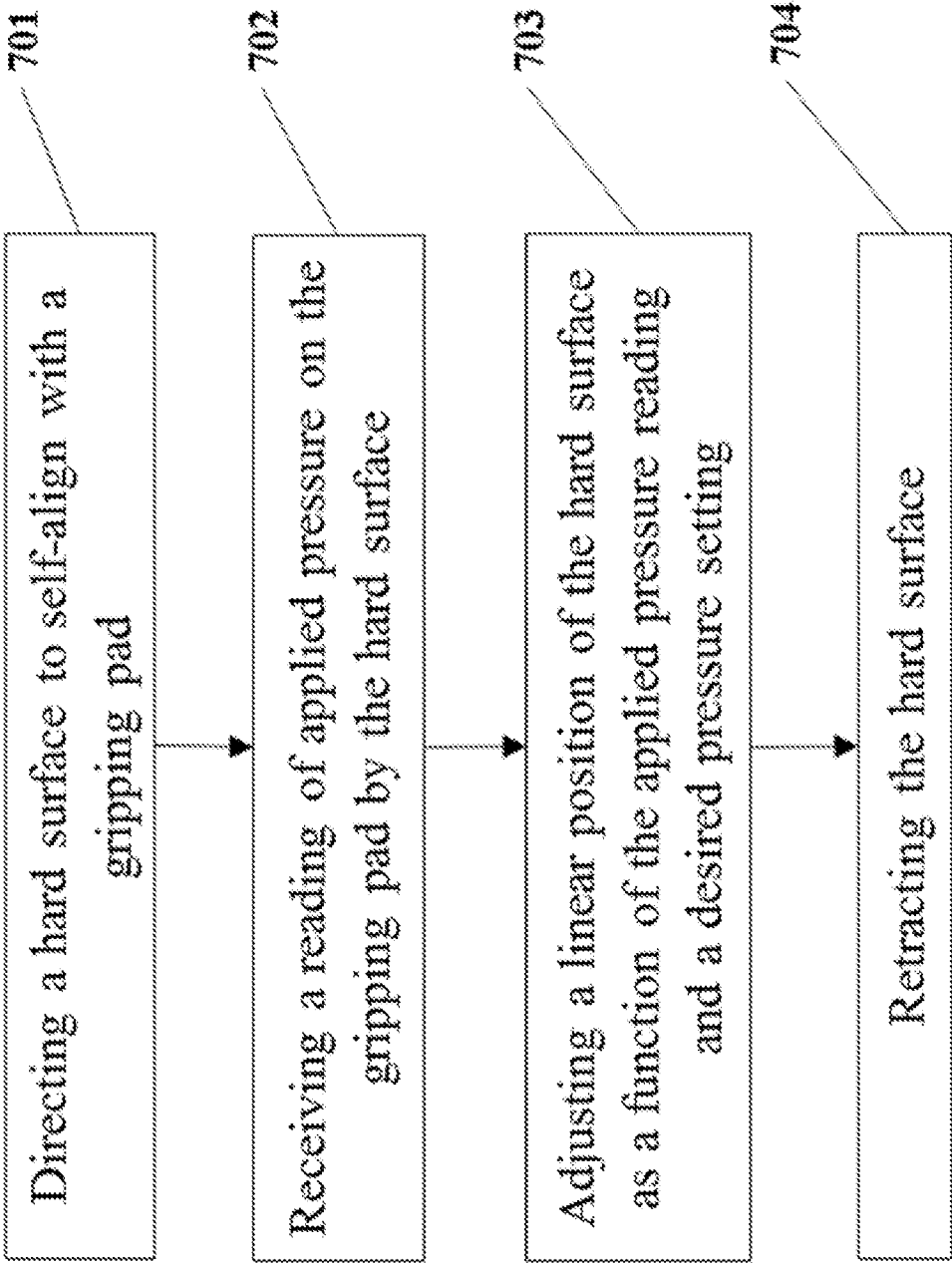


FIG. 7

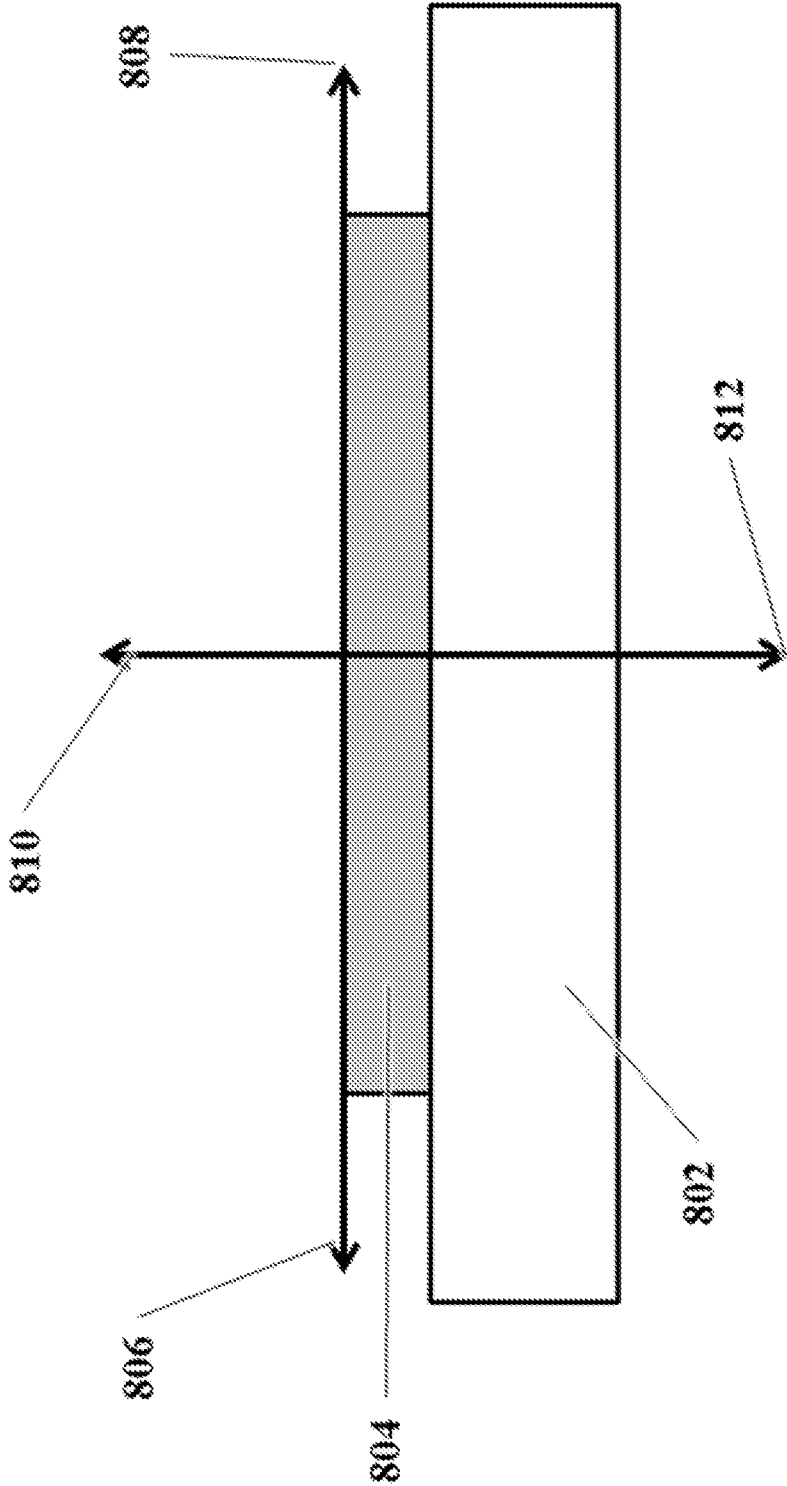


FIG. 8

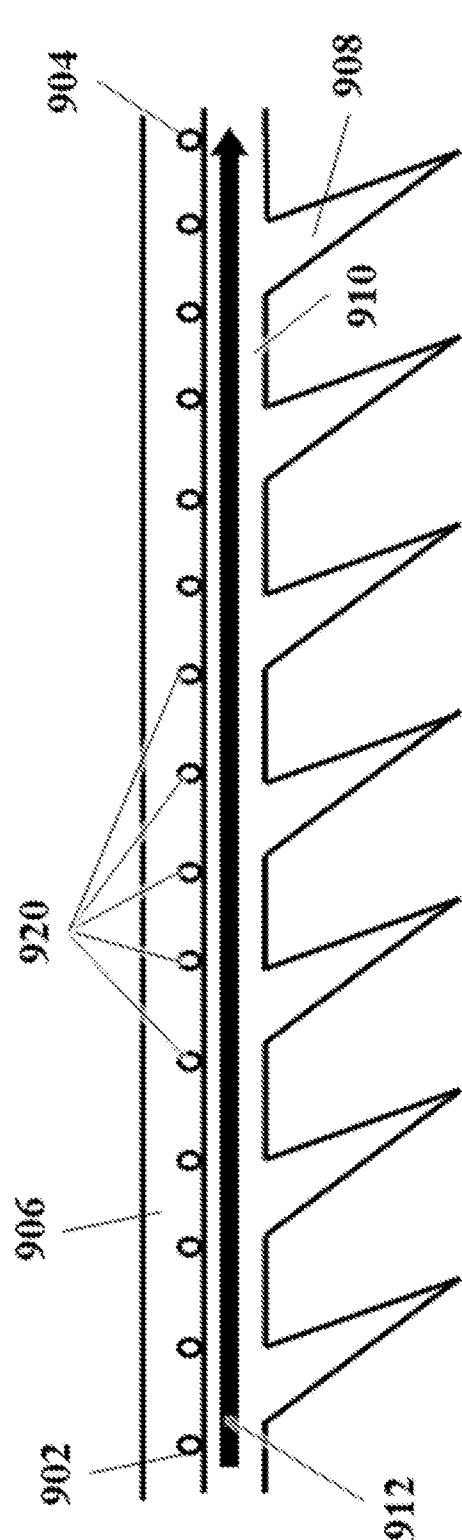


FIG. 9A

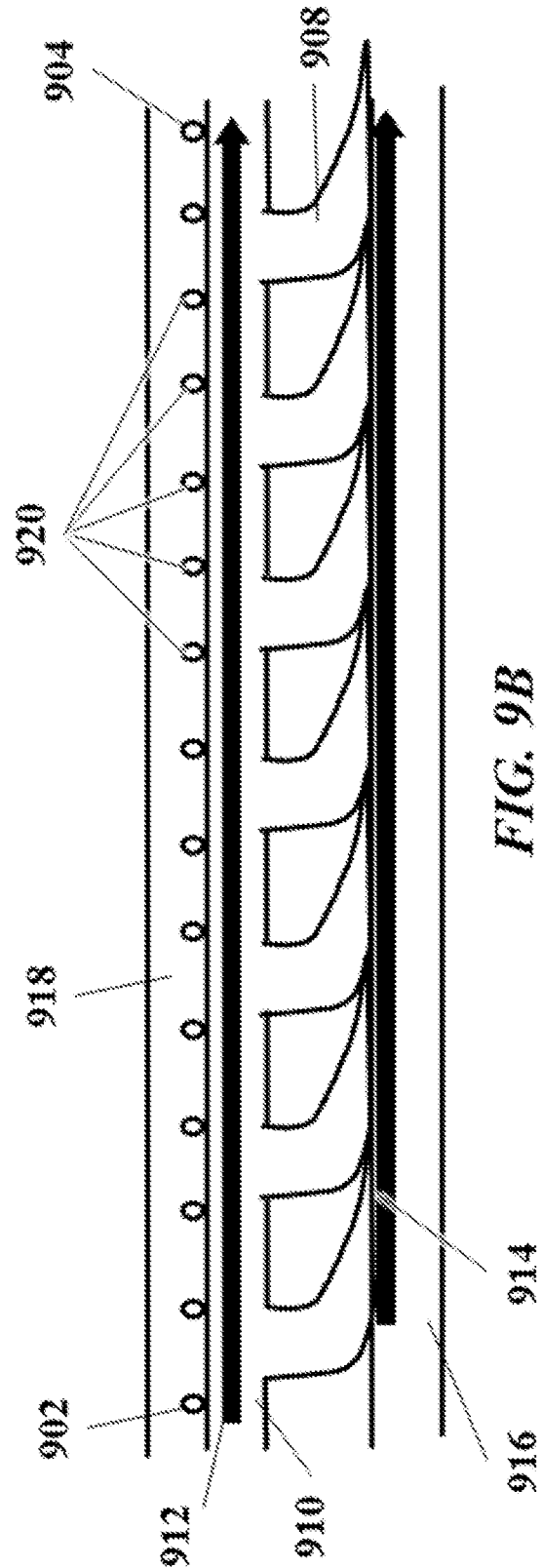
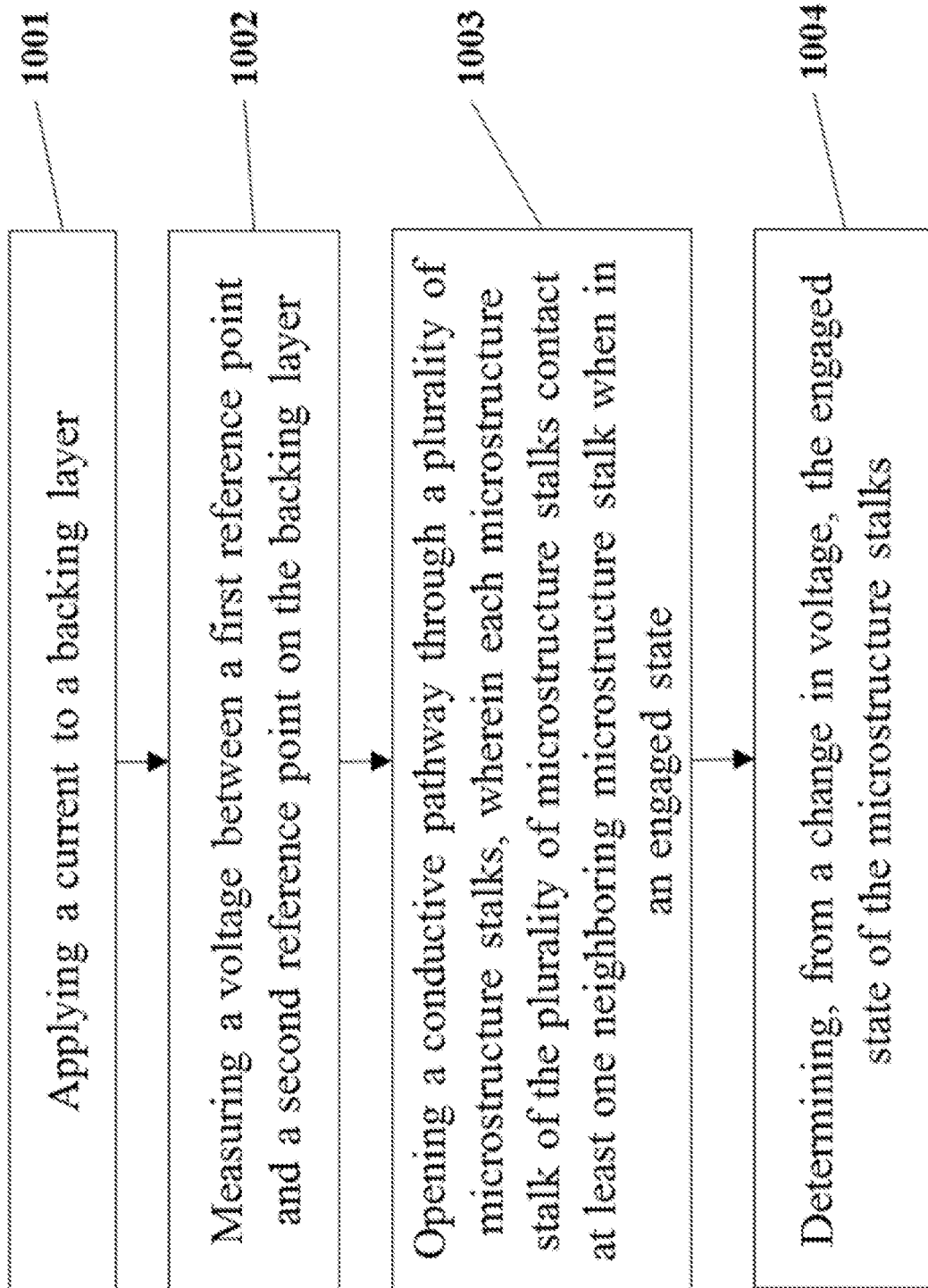


FIG. 9B

12/14

*FIG. 10*

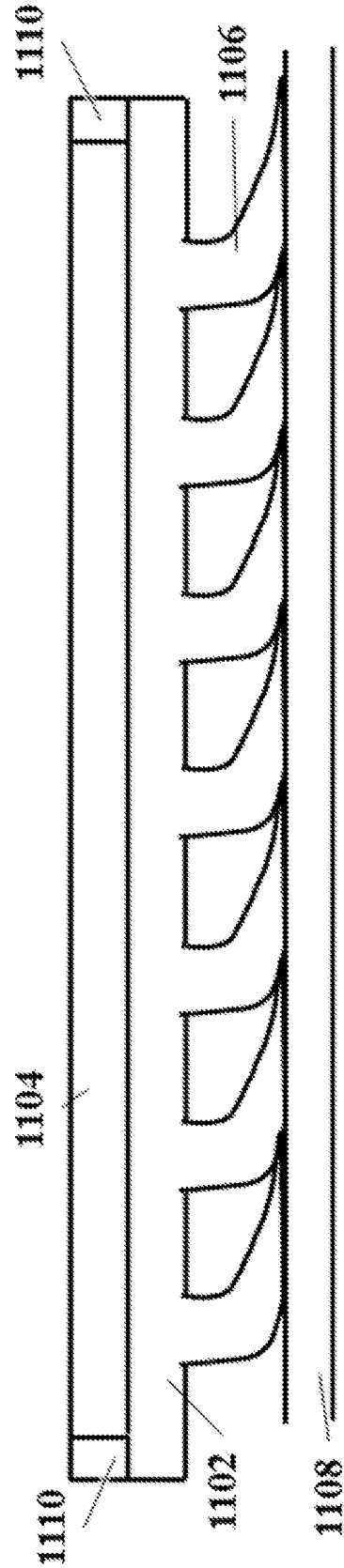


FIG. 11A

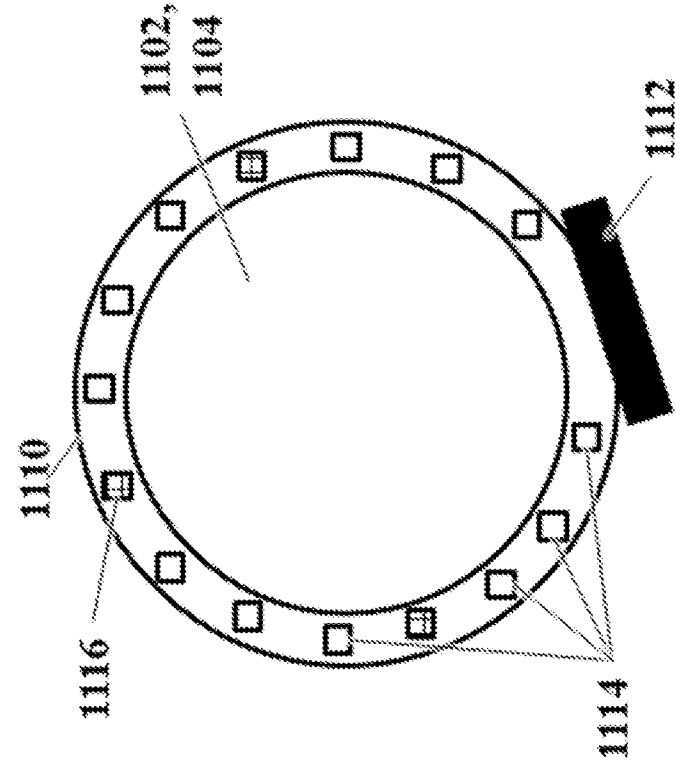


FIG. 11B

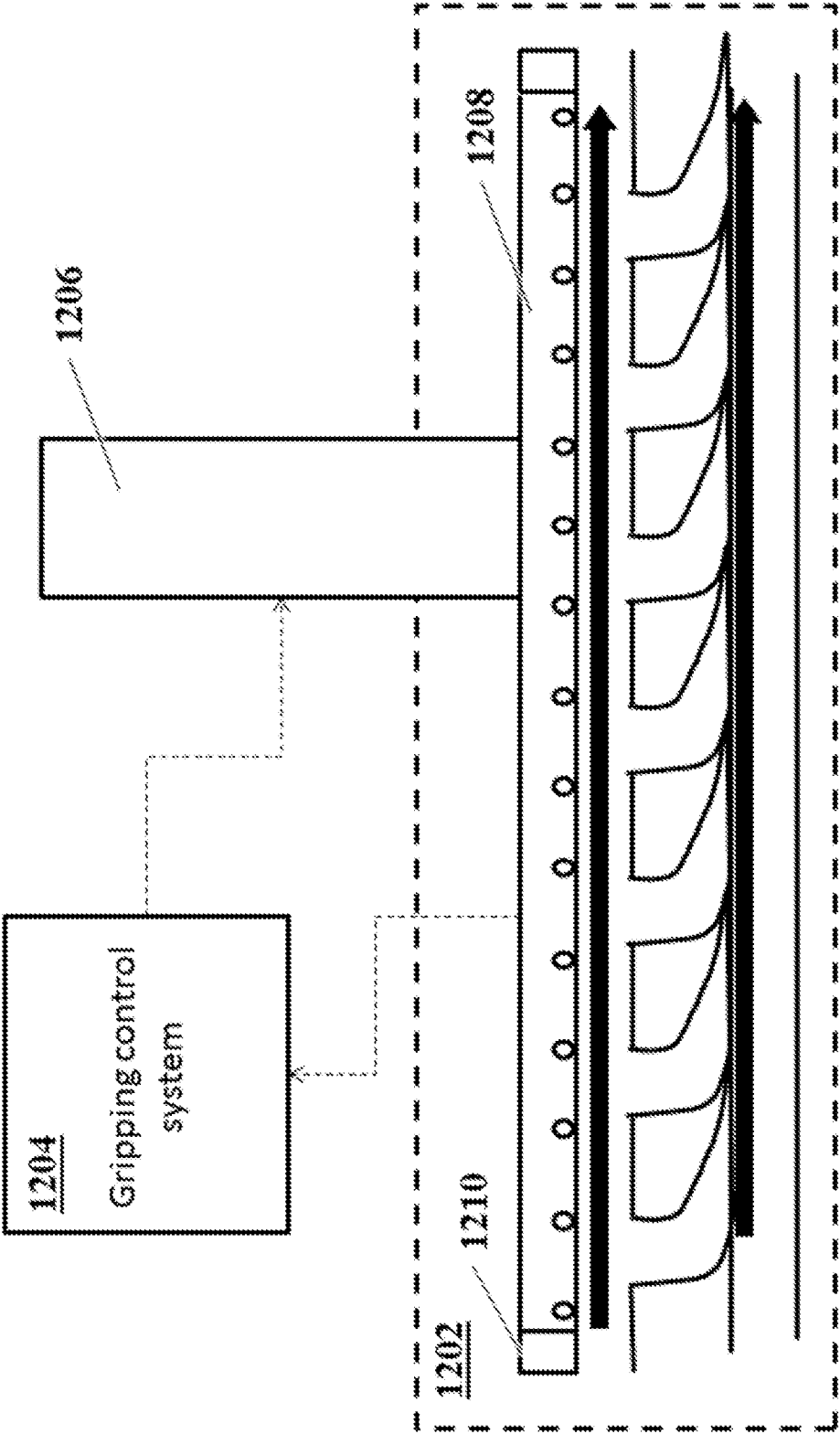


FIG. 12

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US 18/22994

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(8) - B32B 37/00, C09J 9/00, B29C 43/00 (2018.01)

CPC - B29C 39/026, B29C 39/10, B29C 41/20, B29K 2105/0058, C09J 2201/626, Y10T 428/23957, H01L 22/20, H01L 21/6715, H01L 22/26, B05C 3/18

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

See Search History Document

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

See Search History Document

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

See Search History Document

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 2013/0251937 A1 (SITTI et al.) 26 September 2013 (26.09.2013) the entire document, and more specifically: para [0038], [0080], [0089]; figures 3A-3D	1-16
A	US 2013/0236990 A1 (KABUSHIKI KAISHA TOSHIBA) 12 September 2013 (12.09.2013) the entire document, and more specifically: para [0008], [0019], [0041], [0046], [0049]-[0050], [0087]; claim 1 and 4; figure 1	1-16
A	US 4,135,006 A (READAL et al.) 16 January 1979 (16.01.1979); the entire document	1-16
A	US 6,132,807 A (HESS et al.) 17 October 2000 (17.10.2000); the entire document	1-16
A	US 6,494,645 B1 (SEITZ et al.) 17 December 2002 (17.12.2002); the entire document	1-16

H

Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:	"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
"E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date	"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"&" document member of the same patent family
"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	
"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	

Date of the actual completion of the international search

9 July 2018

Date of mailing of the international search report

23 JUL 2018

Name and mailing address of the ISA/US

Mail Stop PCT, Attn: ISA/US, Commissioner for Patents
P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, Virginia 22313-1450

Facsimile No. 571-273-8300

Authorized officer:

Lee W. Young

PCT Helpdesk: 571-272-4300

PCT OSP: 571-272-7774

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US 18/22994

Box No. II Observations where certain claims were found unsearchable (Continuation of item 2 of first sheet)

This international search report has not been established in respect of certain claims under Article 17(2)(a) for the following reasons:

1. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they relate to subject matter not required to be searched by this Authority, namely:
2. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they relate to parts of the international application that do not comply with the prescribed requirements to such an extent that no meaningful international search can be carried out, specifically:
3. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they are dependent claims and are not drafted in accordance with the second and third sentences of Rule 6.4(a).

Box No. III Observations where unity of invention is lacking (Continuation of item 3 of first sheet)

This International Searching Authority found multiple inventions in this international application, as follows:
This application contains the following inventions or groups of inventions which are not so linked as to form a single general inventive concept under PCT Rule 13.1. In order for all inventions to be examined, the appropriate additional examination fees must be paid.

Group I: Claims 1-16, directed a method for post-treating dry adhesive microstructures to form post-treated tips.

Group II: Claims 17-23, directed to an apparatus for treating dry adhesive microstructures to form tips.

Group III: Claims 24-51, directed to a system or method comprising plurality of microstructure stalks protruding/attached to a backing layer.

please see the continuation at the end of this form

1. ☐ As all required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers all searchable claims.
2. ☐ As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying additional fees, this Authority did not invite payment of additional fees.
3. ☐ As only some of the required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers only those claims for which fees were paid, specifically claims Nos.:
4. ☒ No required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant. Consequently, this international search report is restricted to the invention first mentioned in the claims; it is covered by claims Nos.:
1-16

Remark on Protest

- ☐ The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest and, where applicable, the payment of a protest fee.
- ☒ The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest but the applicable protest fee was not paid within the time limit specified in the invitation.
- ☐ No protest accompanied the payment of additional search fees.

"continuation of Box III (Lack of Unity) **

The inventions listed as Groups I-III do not relate to a single general inventive concept under PCT Rule 13.1 because, under PCT Rule 13.2, they lack the same or corresponding special technical features for the following reasons:

Special Technical Features:

Group I requires a method for post-treating dry adhesive microstructures to form post-treated tips; directing a liquid polymer layer to self-align with a plurality of microstructures adjacent to a gripping surface; adjusting a position of said liquid polymer layer relative to a position of said gripping surface based at least in part on said reading of applied pressure and a predetermined dipping pressure; retracting said liquid polymer layer such that a portion of said liquid polymer layer is retained on a tip of each microstructure of said plurality of microstructures; and curing said portion of said liquid polymer layer, not required by groups II-III.

Group II requires an apparatus comprising plate comprising a gripping surface; an elevating plate having a first surface and a second surface opposite said first surface, wherein said first surface interfaces with said gripping surface and wherein said elevating plate is rotatable about a spherical joint coupled to said second surface; an arm having a proximal end and a distal end, wherein said distal end is coupled to said spherical joint and said proximal end is attached to a linear stage configured to move in an axis normal to a plane of said plate; a pressure sensor configured to measure applied pressure on said gripping surface by said elevating plate; and one or more computer processors operatively coupled to said pressure sensor and said linear stage, wherein said one or more computer processors are individually or collectively programmed to use said readings of applied pressure and a predetermined pressure setting to adjust a position of said linear stage relative to a position of said plate, not required by groups I and III.

Group III requires a system or method comprising backing layer; a plurality of microstructure stalks protruding/attached to said backing layer; conductive/conductivity, not required by groups I and II.

Common Technical Features:

Groups I and II share the technical feature of treating dry adhesive microstructures to form tips; gripping surface; plurality of microstructures; receiving, by a computer processor, a reading of applied pressure on said gripping surface; adjusting a position. However, these shared technical features do not represent a contribution over prior art, because the shared technical feature is being obvious over US 2013/0251937 A1 to Sitti et al. (hereinafter Sitti). Sitti teaches treating dry adhesive microstructures to form tips (para [0038], [0089]; figures 3a-3d; Fabrication of vertical and angled microfibers and nanofibers with adhesive qualities. The fabrication includes adding angled mushroom tips 28 to fibers 22. This is done with when the fibers (dry adhesive microstructures) are dipped into the liquid 40 and retracted, retaining some polymer 40 at the tips 28. Next, the fibers 28 are brought into contact with a tip-shaping surface 42, such as a substrate, and pressed with a constant load during curing, bending the fibers 22 to angle beta.); gripping surface (para [0086]; figures 3a-3d; the gripping surface can be thought as the backing layer 20 here); plurality of microstructures (para [0038]; microfibers); applied pressure on said gripping surface (para [0089]; figures 3a-3d; The fibers 22, which are attached to the backing layer 20 (gripping surface) are brought into contact with a tip-shaping surface 42, such as a substrate, and pressed with a constant load during curing, bending the fibers 22 to angle beta.); adjusting a position (para [0089]; figures 3a-3d; The fibers 22, which are attached to the backing layer 20 (gripping surface) are brought into contact with a tip-shaping surface 42, such as a substrate, and pressed with a constant load during curing, bending the fibers 22 to angle beta.). Sitti does not explicitly teach receiving, by a computer processor, a reading of applied pressure on said gripping surface. However, as Sitti teaches applying pressure on said gripping surface (para [0089]; figures 3a-3d); then it would have been obvious to one ordinary skilled in the art to receiving, by a computer processor, a reading of applied pressure on said gripping surface; because the pressure is at a constant load during curing to bend the fibers to a specific angle (para [0089]). Further, by varying the fiber geometry or the load during curing, the tip angle can be fabricated anywhere from 0 (no tip angle) to 90 degrees (para [0094]). Hence, in order to read the load/applied-pressure, and to ensure a constant load/applied-pressure to make a specific angle; and to change the angle by changing the load/applied-pressure.

Groups II and III share the technical feature of gripping surface, stalks/tips; sensors/sensor-electrodes; measure; one or more computer processors are individually or collectively programmed to receive a reading. However, these shared technical features do not represent a contribution over prior art, because the shared technical feature is being anticipated by US 2011/0137463 A1 to Alcazar et al. (hereinafter Alcazar). Alcazar teaches gripping surface (para [0021]; gripping surface); stalks/tips (para [0042]; protrusions); sensors (para [0021]; sensors); measure (para [0021]; devices that are configured to measure spatially distributed data); one computer processor [is] individually programmed to receive a reading (para [0040]; the computing unit receives and processes the footprints).

Groups I, II and III share the technical feature of gripping surface; stalks/tips; computer processors. However, these shared technical features do not represent a contribution over prior art, because the shared technical feature is being anticipated by Alcazar. Alcazar teaches gripping surface (para [0021]; gripping surface); stalks/tips (para [0042]; protrusions); computer processors (para [0040]; the computing unit receives and processes the footprints).

As the shared technical features were known in the art at the time of the invention, they cannot be considered common technical features that would otherwise unify the groups. Therefore, Groups I-III lack unity under PCT Rule 13.