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Austin

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(54) **APPARATUS FOR CONTRACTING,
LOADING OR CRIMPING
SELF-EXPANDING AND BALLOON
EXPANDABLE STENT DEVICES**

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Related U.S. Application Data

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2001, now Pat. No. 6,823,576, which is a continuation of
application No. 09/401,218, filed on Sep. 22, 1999, now Pat.
No. 6,360,577.

(51) **Int. Cl.⁷** **B23P 21/00; B23P 11/00**

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **29/722; 29/516; 29/508;
72/402**

(58) **Field of Search** 29/283.15, 751,
29/516, 237, 243, 517, 508, 283.5; 72/402;
606/1

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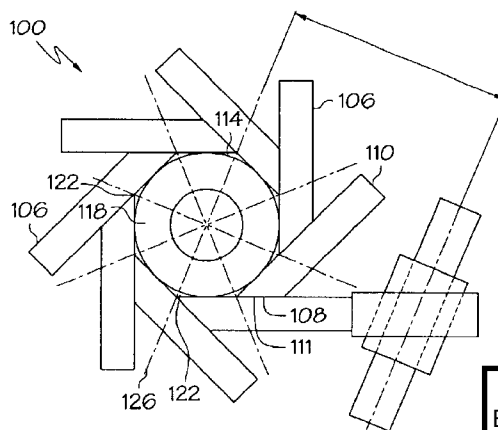
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

An apparatus for manipulating a medical device is formed of at least three coupled movable blades which are disposed about a reference circle to form an aperture whose size may be varied. The aperture capable of being sized to contain a medical device. Each blade is in communication with an actuation device which is capable of moving the blade to alter the size of the aperture. Each blade includes a single radial point which a) lies on the circumference of the reference circle prior to movement of the blade, and b) may be moved only along a radius of the reference circle on movement of the blade.

40 Claims, 15 Drawing Sheets



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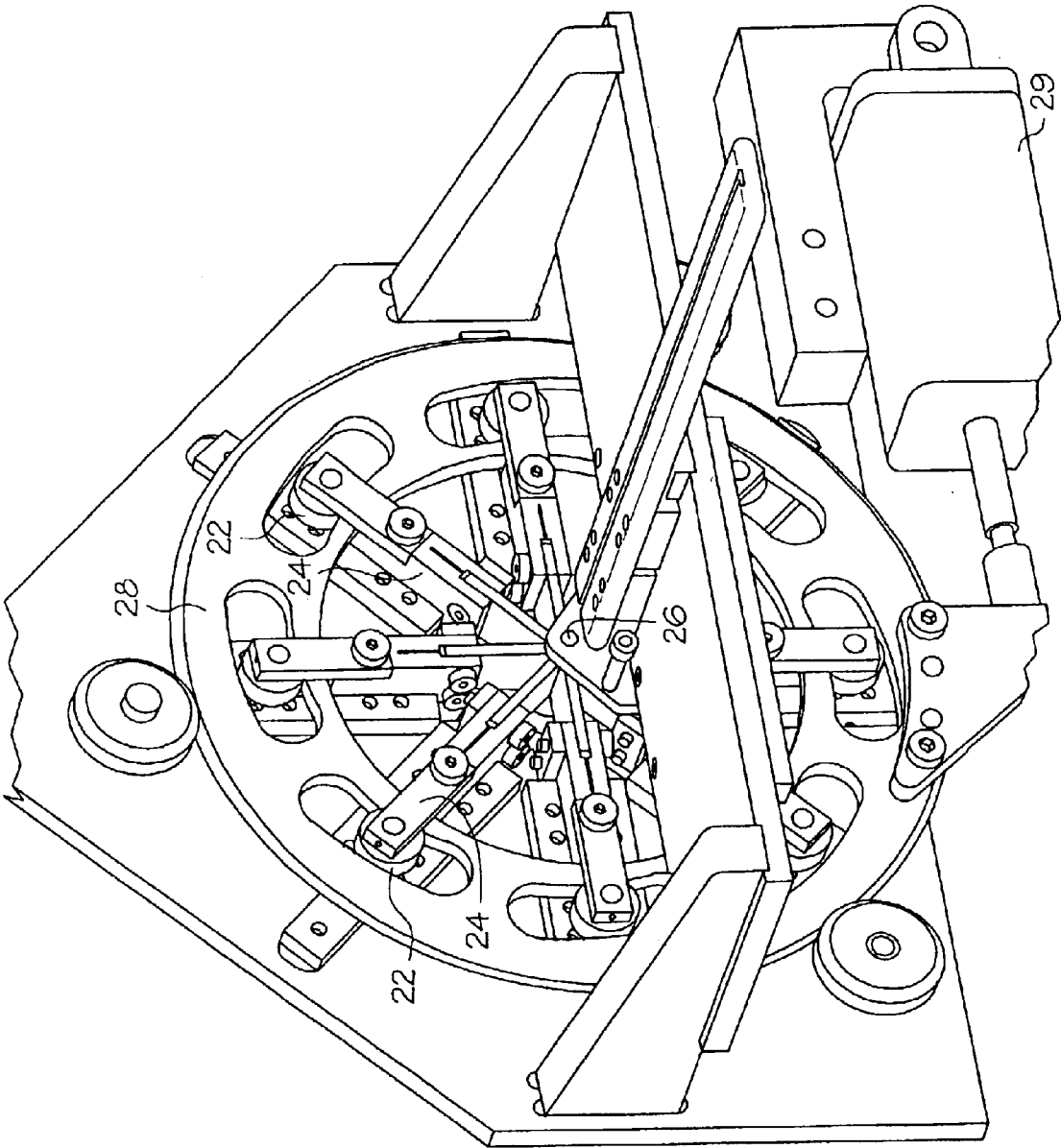


FIG. 1
PRIOR ART

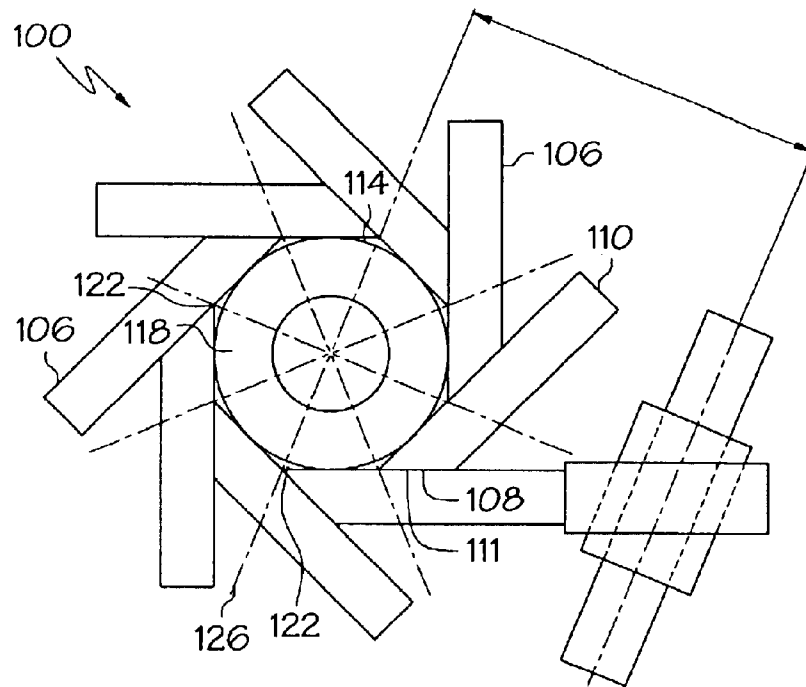


FIG. 2a

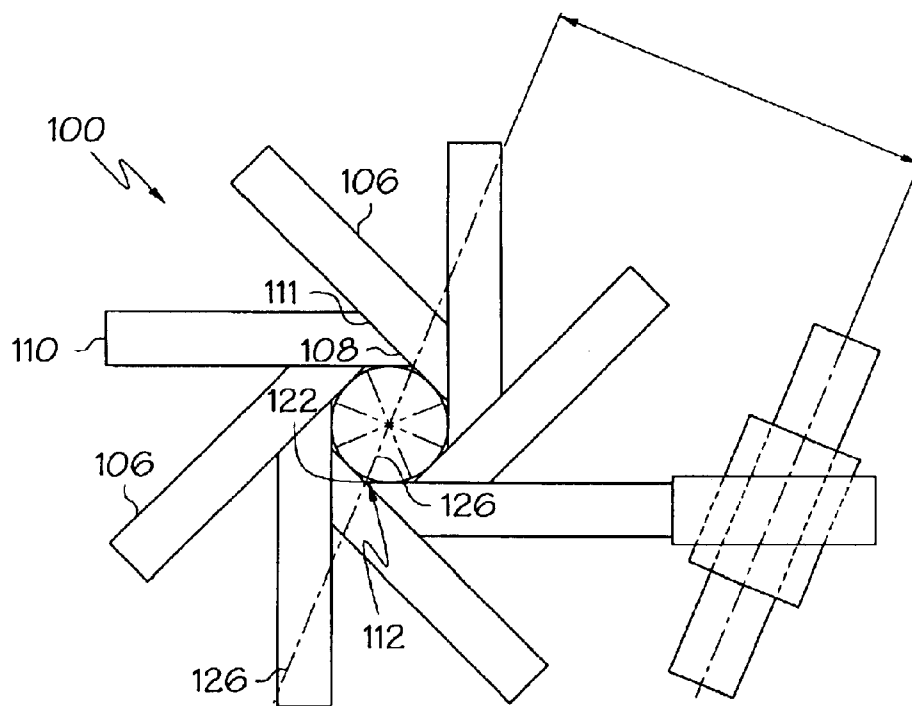


FIG. 2b

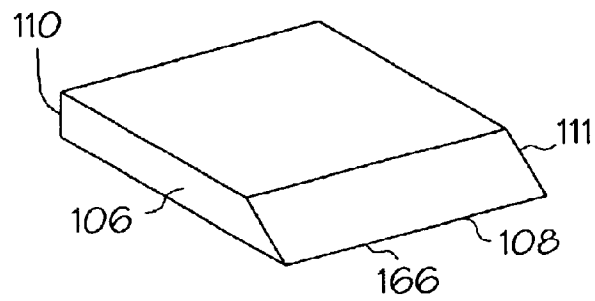


FIG. 3a

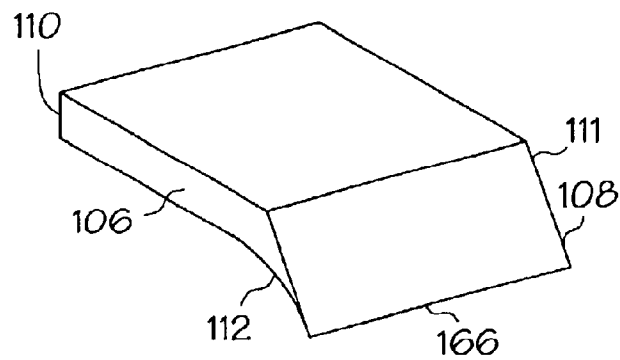


FIG. 3b

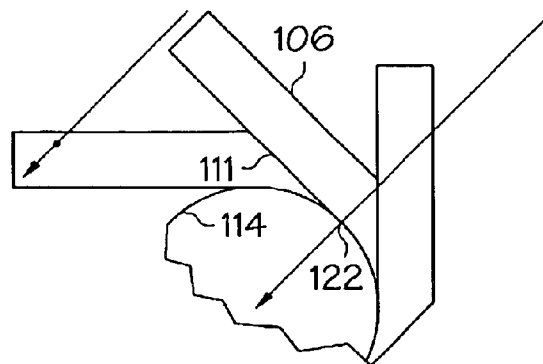


FIG. 3c

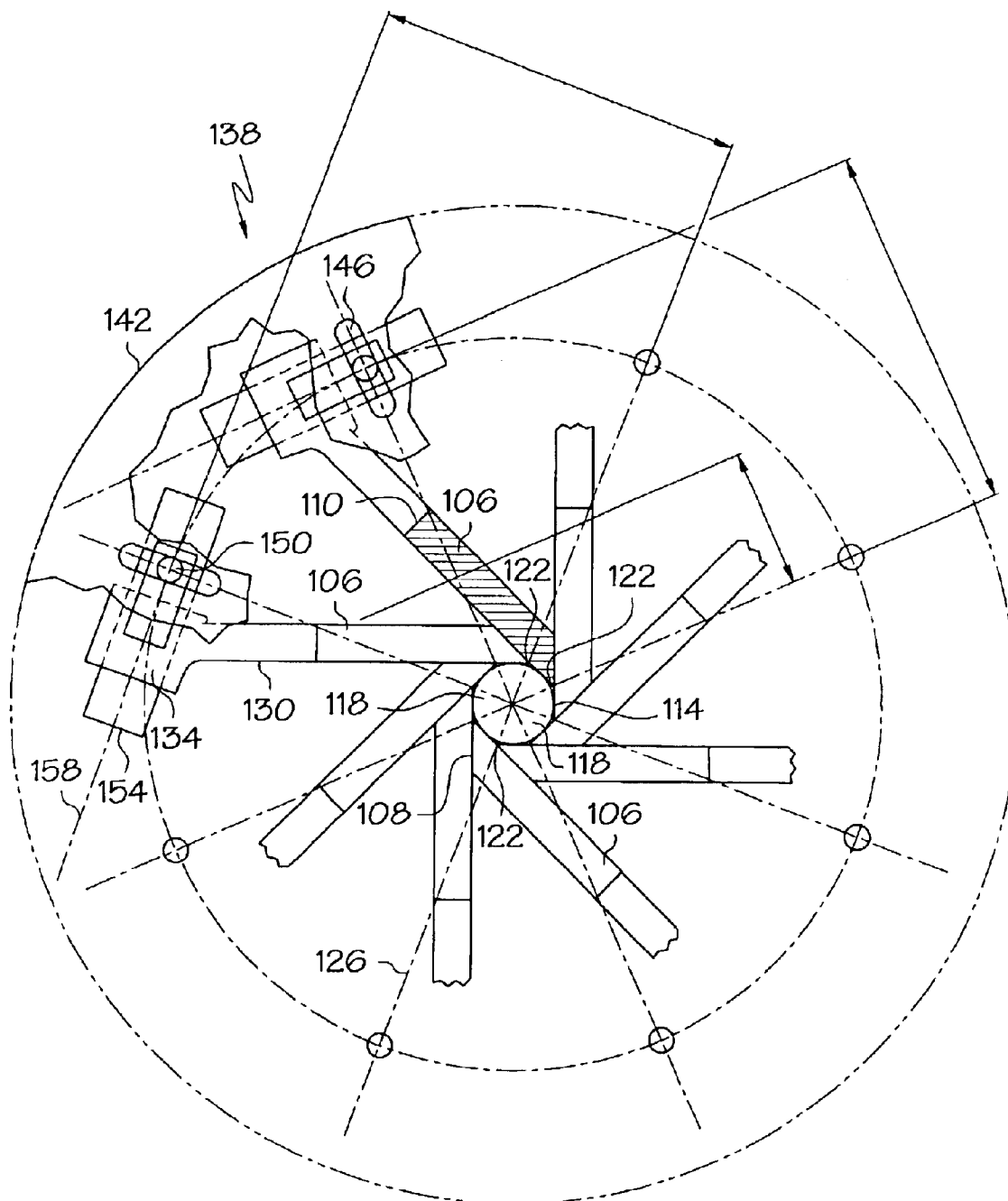


FIG. 4A

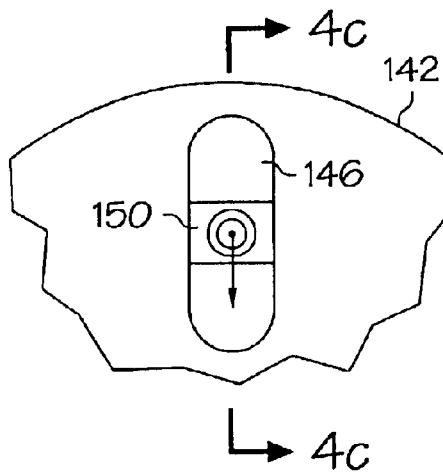


FIG. 4b

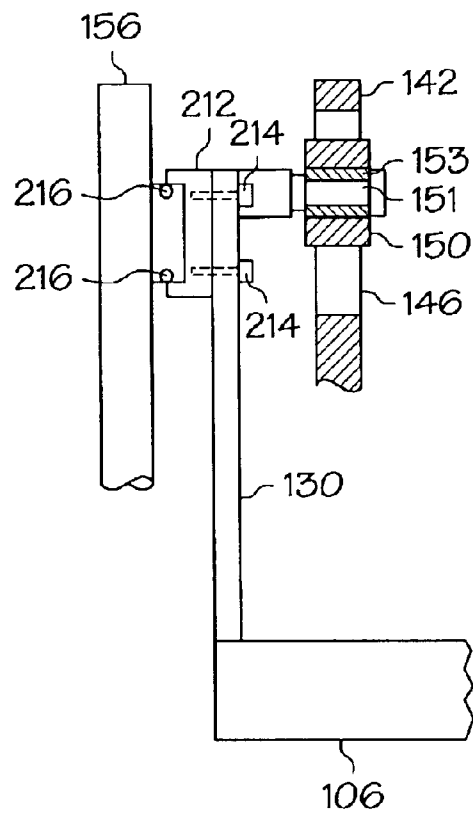


FIG. 4c

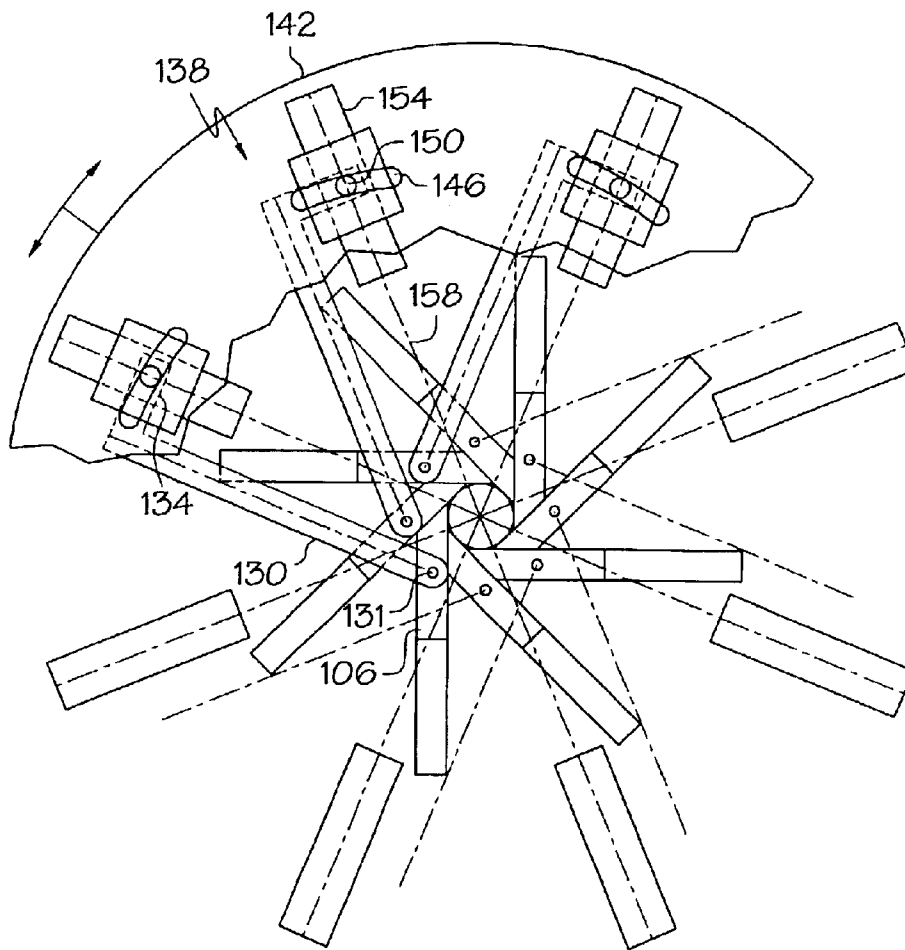


FIG. 5a

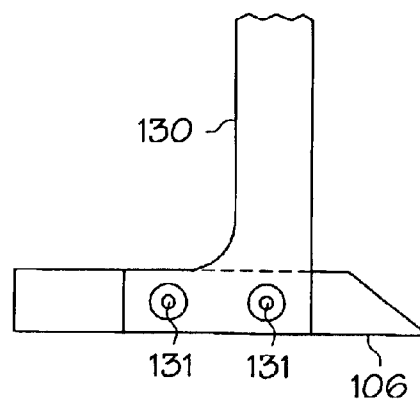


FIG. 5b

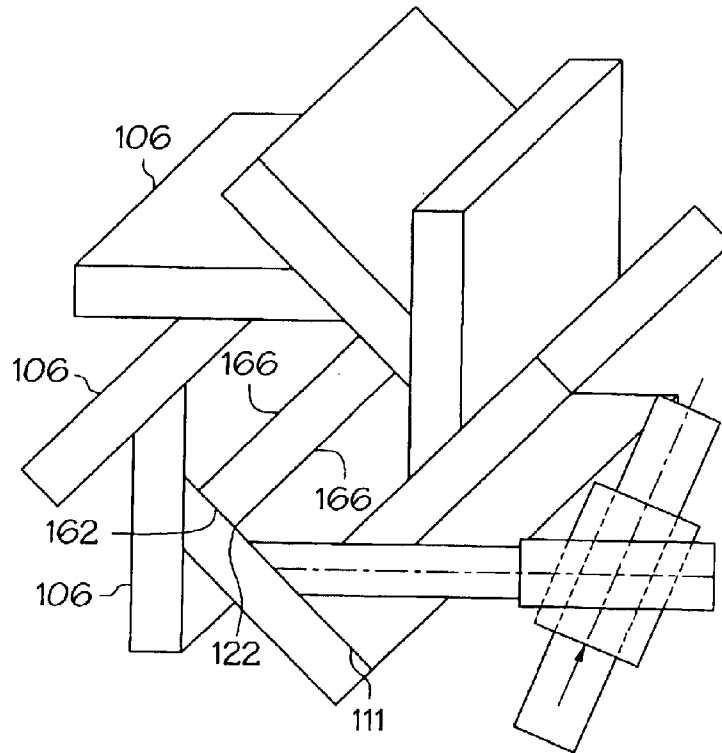


FIG. 6

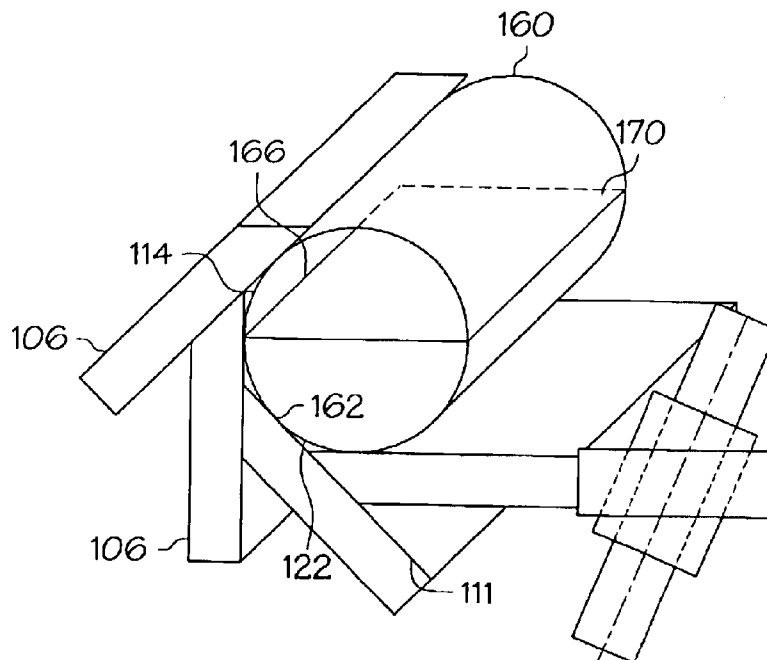


FIG. 7

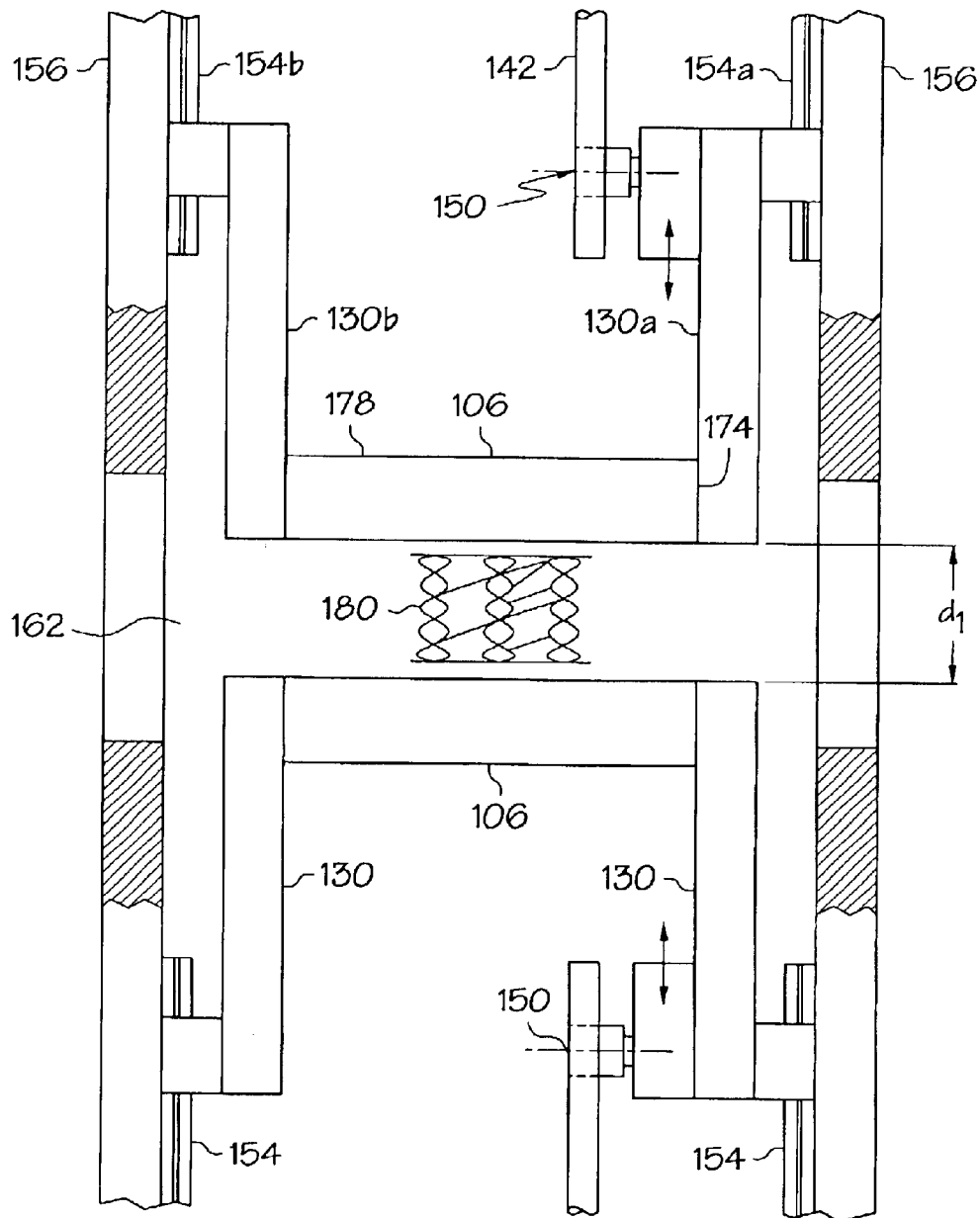


FIG. 8a

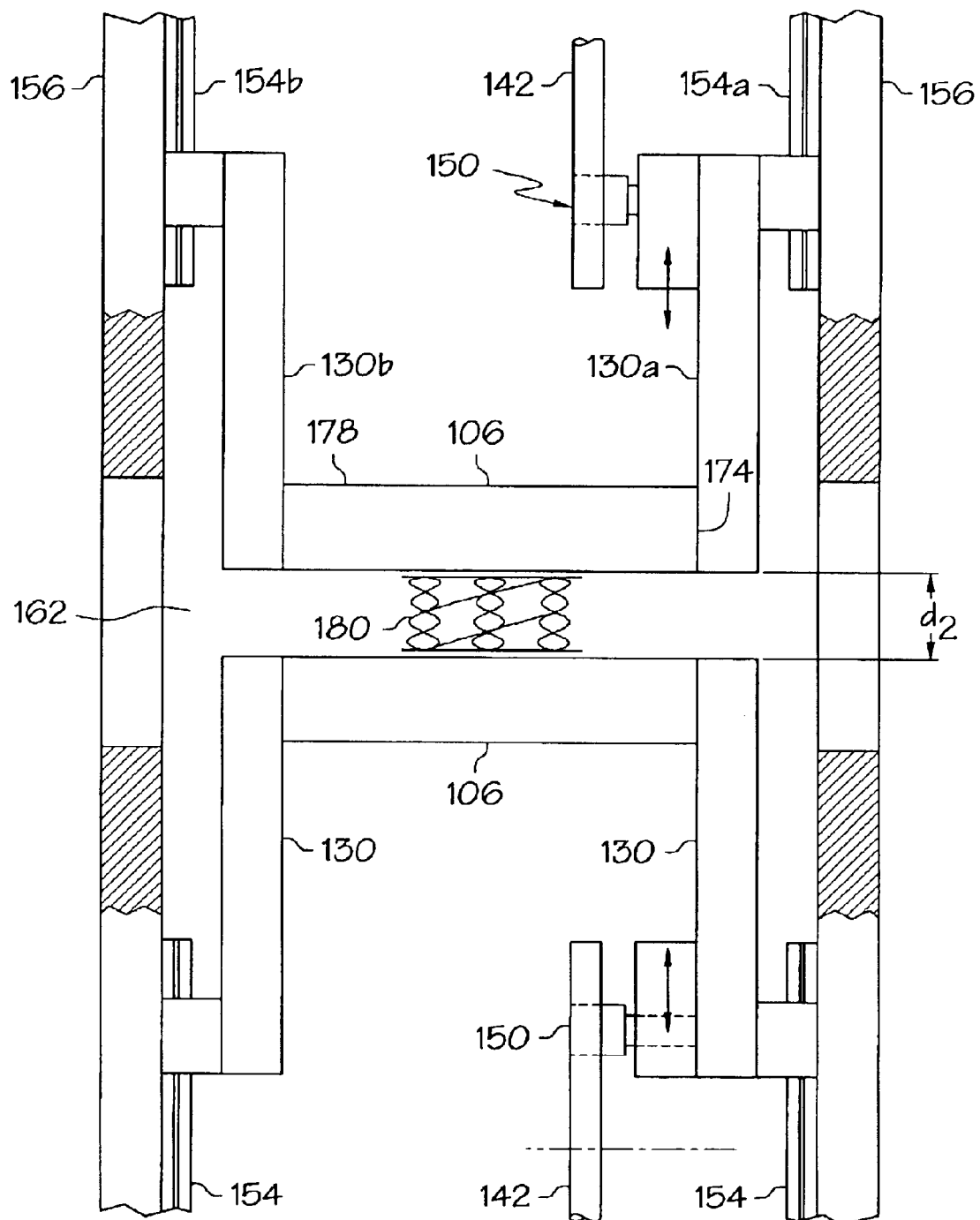


FIG. 8b

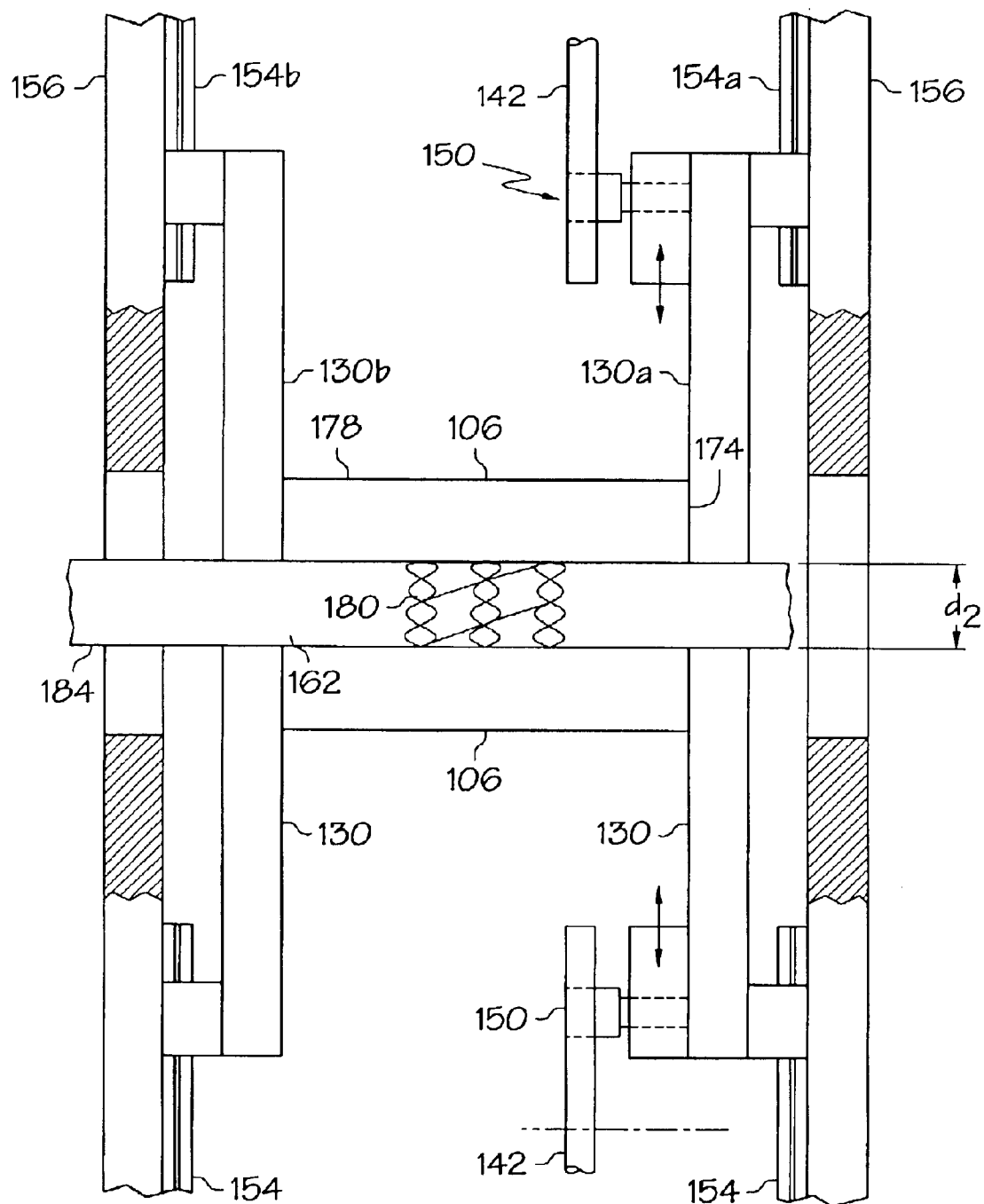


FIG. 8c

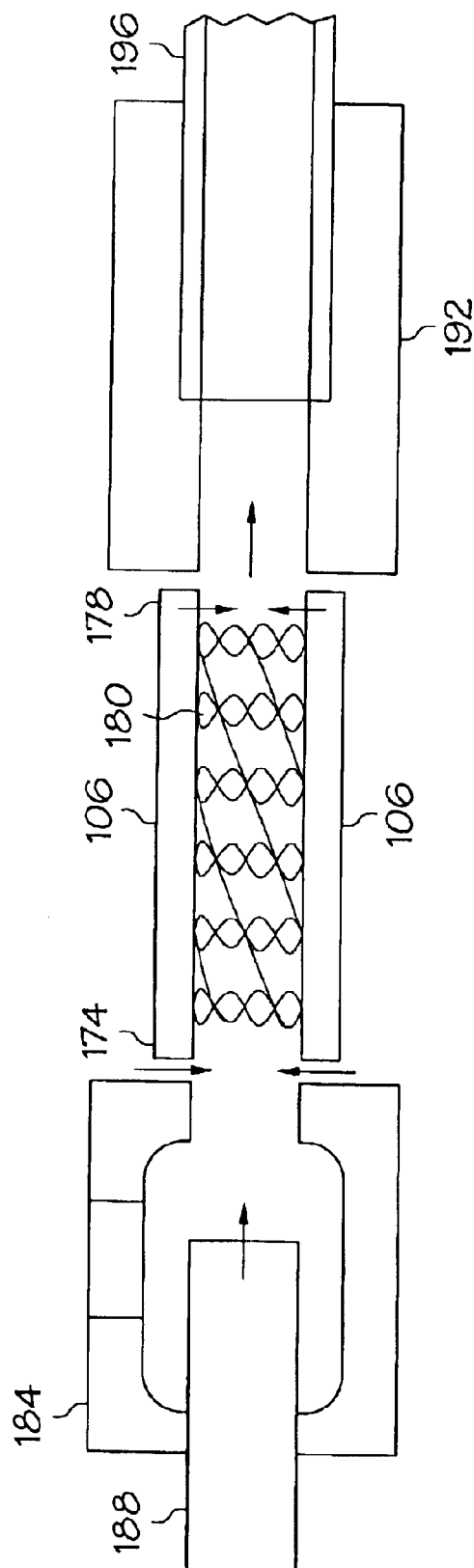


FIG. 9

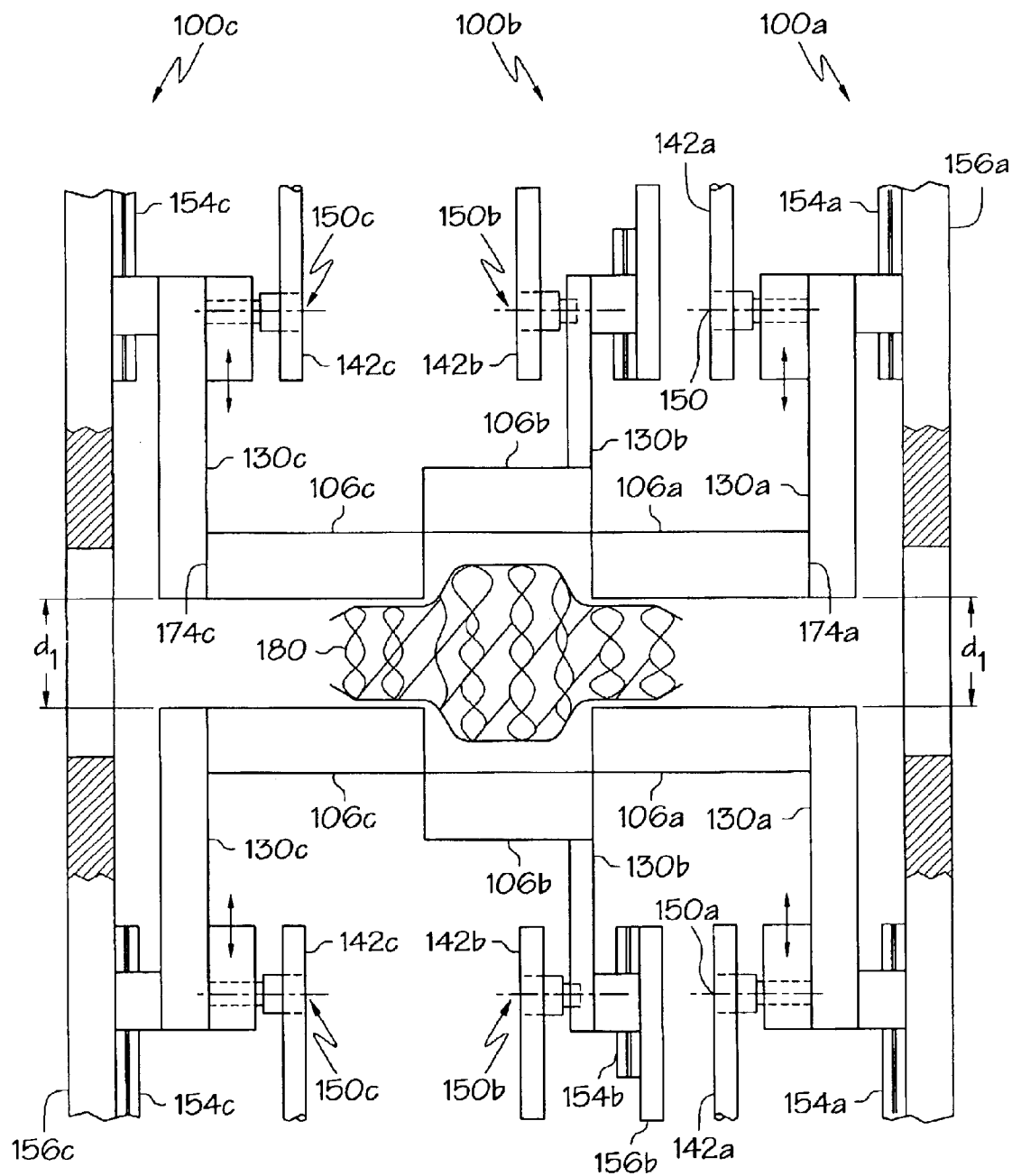


FIG. 10

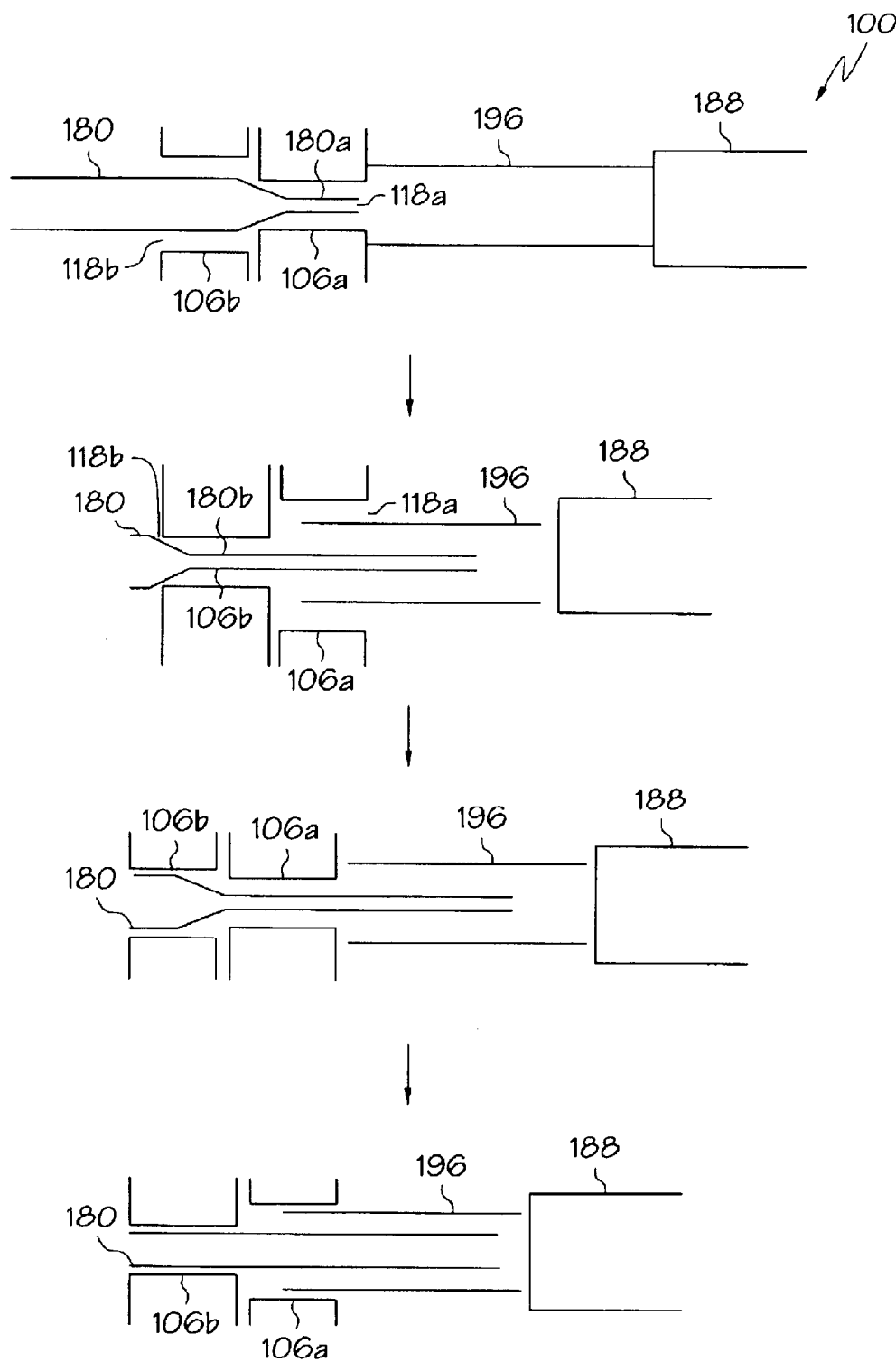


FIG. 11

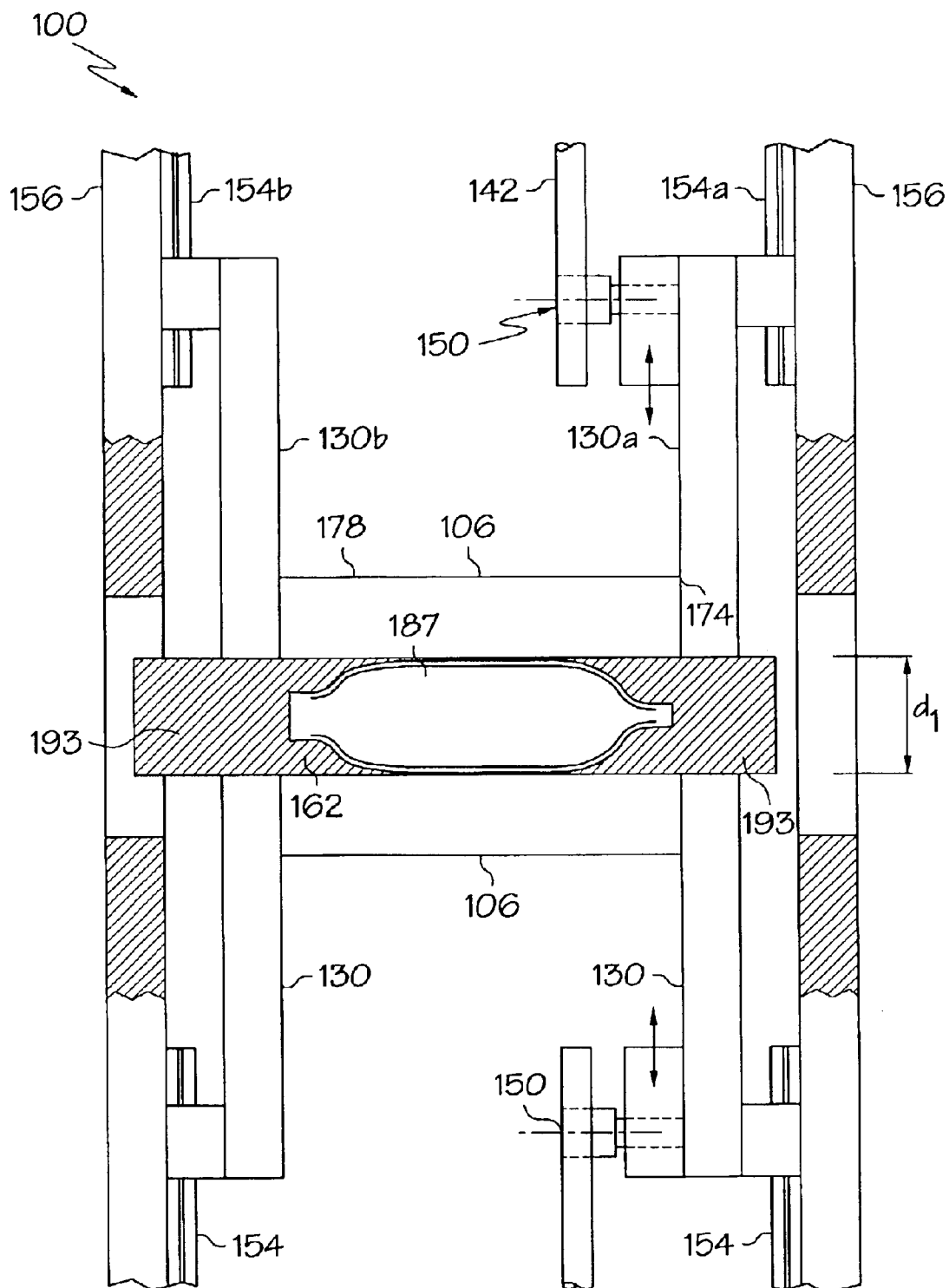


FIG. 12

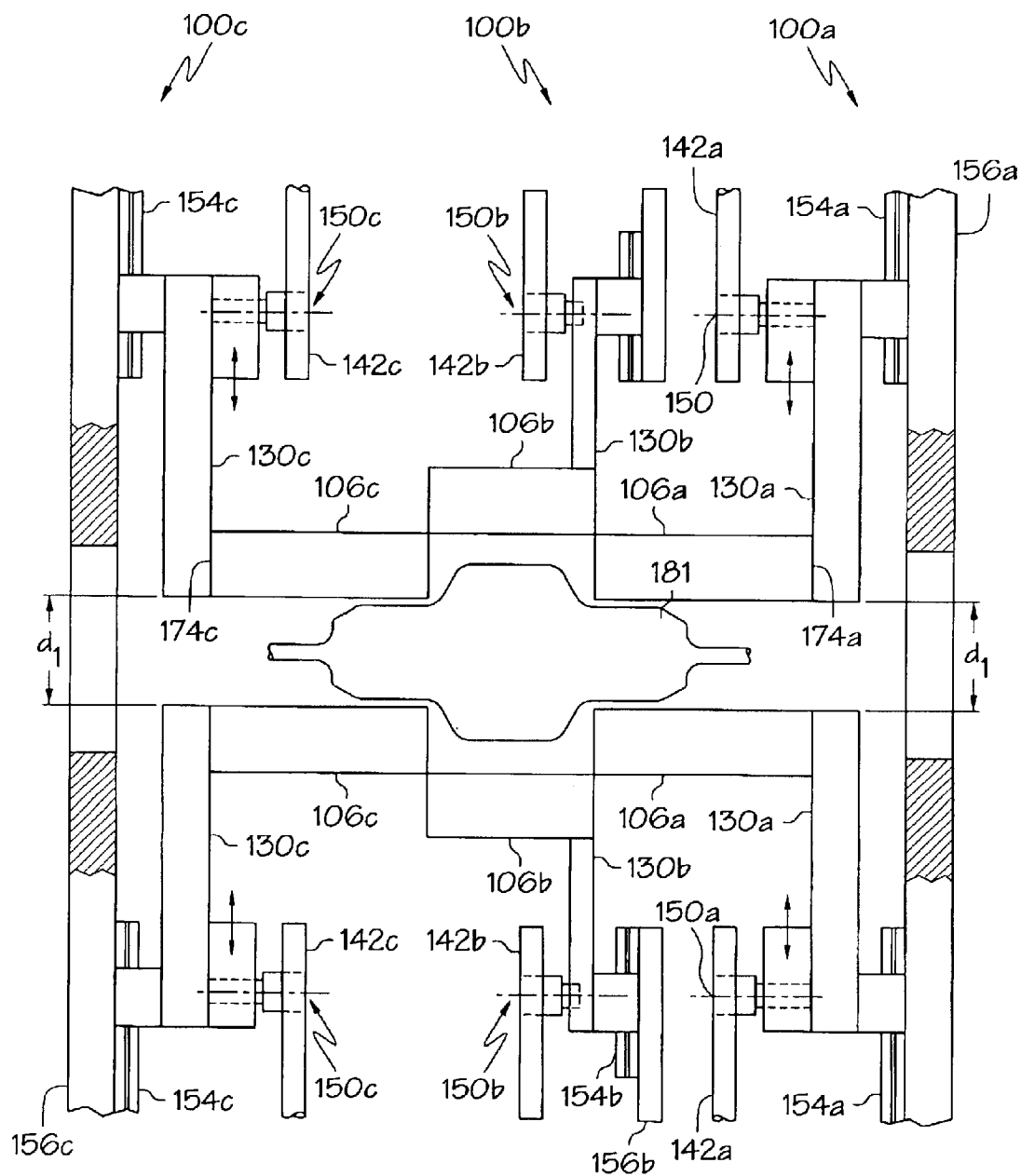


FIG. 13

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APPARATUS FOR CONTRACTING, LOADING OR CRIMPING SELF- EXPANDING AND BALLOON EXPANDABLE STENT DEVICES

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a Continuation application from application Ser. No. 09/966,686 filed Oct. 1, 2001 now U.S. Pat. No. 6,823,576 which is a Continuation application from application Ser. No. 09/401,218 filed Sep. 22, 1999, now U.S. Pat. No. 6,360,577, issued Mar. 26, 2002 the contents of which are hereby incorporated by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to an apparatus and a method for reducing in size a medical device such as a stent, stent-graft, graft, or vena cava filter. The apparatus may be used in particular for fastening a medical device onto a catheter.

Medical devices such as stents, stent-grafts, grafts, or vena cava filters and catheters for their delivery are utilized in a number of medical procedures and situations, and as such their structure and function are well known.

A stent, for example, is a generally cylindrical prosthesis introduced via a catheter into a lumen of a body vessel in a configuration having a generally reduced diameter and then expanded to the diameter of the vessel. In its expanded configuration, the stent supports and reinforces the vessel walls while maintaining the vessel in an open, unobstructed condition.

Stents are typically inflation expandable or self-expanding. Self expanding stents which are constrained by a sheath or other restraining means, must be provided in a reduced diameter.

An example of a stent described in PCT Application No. 960 3092 A1, published Feb. 8, 1996.

In advancing a stent through a body vessel to the deployment site, the stent must be able to securely maintain its axial position on the delivery catheter, without translocating proximally or distally, and especially without becoming separated from the catheter. Stents that are not properly secured or retained to the catheter may slip and either be lost or be deployed in the wrong location. The stent must be crimped in such a way as to minimize or prevent altogether distortion of the stent and to thereby prevent abrasion and/or reduce trauma of the vessel walls.

In the past, this crimping or size reduction has been done by hand often resulting in the application of undesired uneven forces to the stent. Such a stent must either be discarded or re-crimped. Stents which have been crimped or otherwise reduced in size multiple times can suffer from fatigue and may be scored or otherwise marked which can cause thrombosis. A poorly crimped stent can also damage the underlying balloon.

Recently, stent crimping devices have been disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 5,546,646 to Williams et al, U.S. Pat. No. 5,183,085 to Timmermans et al., U.S. Pat. No. 5,626,604 to Coffone, Jr., U.S. Pat. No. 5,725,519, U.S. Pat No. 5,810,873 to Morales, WO 97/20593 and WO 98/19633.

A cam actuated stent crimper, shown in FIG. 1, employs a plurality of arc-shaped or curved slots with semi-circular ends, disposed such that each slot or cam engages a cam follower bearing 22. The arc-shaped or curved surfaces of the slots are inclined to be non-concentric relative to the axis of rotation 26, and therefore rotation of the cam plate 28

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transmits equal radial displacements to the cam follower bearings 22, to simultaneously actuate a like number of linear bearings 24, which have their corresponding linear tracks or rails mounted on a fixed plate. As shown in FIG. 1 the cam plate rotary drive 29 comprises a pneumatic cylinder mounted on a pivot or trunnion, arranged with the cylinder rod connected rotatably to a short arm fixed rigidly to the cam plate. Accordingly, linear motion produced by the pneumatic cylinder translates into controllable arcs of motion of the circular cam plate, which has a projecting V-shaped profile on its outer edge in rolling engagement with three equally spaced rollers with mating inverse V-shaped profiles to provide precise rotatable support to the cam plate. Depending on the direction of rotation, the linear slides which each carry a radially disposed crimping blade, are either moved inwards to apply a crimping force to the stent, or outwards to release the stent. Also when crimping, depending on the degree of rotation of the cam plate, a specific radial crimping displacement may be obtained to match the diametral reduction required for any particular stent.

All U.S. patents and applications and all other published documents mentioned anywhere in this application are incorporated herein by reference in their entirety.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It would be desirable to produce a device capable of crimping a stent uniformly while minimizing the distortion of and scoring and marking of the stent due to the crimping. The present invention is directed to that end.

The present invention is particularly concerned with the crimping and otherwise reducing in size of inflation expandable stents, self-expanding stents and other expandable medical devices. For the purpose of this disclosure, it is understood that the term 'stent' includes stents, stent-grafts, grafts and vena cava filters. It is also understood that the term 'crimping' refers to a reduction in size or profile of a stent.

In the description that follows it is understood that the invention contemplates crimping a medical device either directly to a catheter tube or to a catheter balloon which is disposed about a catheter tube. When reference is made to crimping a medical device to a catheter, a balloon may be situated between the medical device and the catheter tube or the medical device may be crimped to a region of a catheter tube directly. The invention also contemplates crimping a stent in the absence of a catheter to reduce the stent in size.

The present invention is directed, in one embodiment, to an apparatus for reducing a medical device in size. Desirably, the medical device is a stent, a stent-graft, a graft or a vena cava filter, whether self-expandable, balloon expandable or otherwise expandable, although the inventive apparatus may also be employed with any other suitable, generally tubular medical device which must be reduced in size.

The inventive apparatus comprises at least three coupled movable blades disposed about a reference circle to form an aperture whose size may be varied. Each blade is in communication with an actuation device which is capable of moving the blade to alter the size of the aperture. Each blade includes a single radial point on the surface of the blade which a) lies on the circumference of the reference circle prior to movement of the blade, and b) may be moved only along a radius of the reference circle on movement of the blade.

The apparatus further includes an actuation device which comprises a cam and a plurality of linear slide devices. Each

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linear slide device is in communication with a blade. Each of the linear slide devices is also in mechanical communication with the cam. Rotation of the cam results in linear translation of the slide device and blade, such that the slide device moves along an axis parallel to the radius on which the radial point of the blade lies or along the radius itself.

The invention is also directed to an apparatus similar to that described above, with blades disposed about a reference tube to form a tubular aperture whose size may be varied. Each blade is in communication with an actuation device which is capable of moving the blade to alter the size of the tubular aperture. Each blade includes a single line which a) lies on the surface of the reference tube prior to movement of the blade, and b) may be moved only along a radial plane of the reference tube on movement of the blade.

The inventive apparatus finds particular utility in crimping a medical device such as those mentioned above to a catheter or to a balloon disposed about a catheter.

The inventive apparatus also finds utility in reducing the diameter of a medical device such as those mentioned above prior to crimping.

The invention is also directed to a method of manipulating a medical device which comprises the steps of providing the medical device and providing at least three blades capable of applying a radial inward force. The blades are disposed about a reference circle to form a shrinkable aperture. A medical device such as a stent is placed into the shrinkable aperture and the blades simultaneously moved inward to apply a radial inward force to the medical device. The blades are constructed and arranged such that each blade has a single point which a) lies on the circumference of the reference circle prior to movement of the blade, and b) is moved along a radius of the reference circle on movement of the blade.

The inventive apparatus may also be used as a variable size balloon mold. To that end, the invention is further directed to a method of molding a medical balloon. In the practice of the method, a balloon preform prepared through any suitable technique known in the art is provided. The preform is placed in an apparatus which has a shrinkable tubular aperture formed by at least three movable blades disposed about a reference tube. The blades are constructed and arranged such that each blade has a single line which a) lies on the surface of the reference tube prior to movement of the blade, and b) is moved along a radial plane of the reference tube on movement of the blade. The aperture may be set to a predetermined size prior to placement of the preform therein or after placement of the preform therein. An inflation fluid is supplied to the balloon preform to expand the balloon preform until it contacts the blades. The preform may optionally be heated prior to, during or after the blowing step. The thus formed balloon is then pressure relieved and removed from the apparatus.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWING(S)

FIG. 1 shows a perspective view of a stent crimper;

FIG. 2a is a schematic front view of an embodiment of the inventive apparatus;

FIG. 2b is a schematic front view of the embodiment of FIG. 2a after the stent has been reduced in size;

FIGS. 3a and 3b are schematics of blades;

FIG. 3c is a partial schematic front view of an embodiment of the inventive apparatus employing the curved blades of FIG. 3b;

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FIG. 4a is a partial front view of an embodiment of the inventive apparatus;

FIG. 4b is a partial front view of an embodiment of the inventive apparatus;

FIG. 4c shows a side view of the embodiment of FIG. 4b taken along lines 4c—c;

FIG. 5a shows a partial front view of another embodiment of the inventive apparatus;

FIG. 5b shows a link connected to a blade;

FIG. 6 is a schematic, perspective view of an embodiment of the inventive apparatus;

FIG. 7 shows a partial view of the embodiment of FIG. 6;

FIGS. 8a and 8b are partial side elevational views of an embodiment of the inventive apparatus taken along a radial plane during the size reduction process;

FIG. 8c is a partial side elevational view of an embodiment of the inventive apparatus taken along a radial plane following crimping of a stent to a catheter;

FIG. 9 is a diagrammatic side elevational view of an embodiment of the inventive apparatus;

FIG. 10 is a partial side elevational view of an embodiment of the inventive apparatus taken along a radial plane of an embodiment of the invention consisting of three individual apparatuses arranged sequentially;

FIG. 11 is a schematic showing a stent being reduced in size and loaded into a sheath;

FIG. 12 is a partial side elevational view of an embodiment of the inventive apparatus taken along a radial plane showing a balloon that has been molded with the inventive device; and

FIG. 13 is a partial side elevational view taken along a radial plane showing a stepped balloon that has been molded with the inventive device.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

While this invention may be embodied in many different forms, there are described in detail herein specific preferred embodiments of the invention. This description is an exemplification of the principles of the invention and is not intended to limit the invention to the particular embodiments illustrated.

As shown generally at 100 in FIGS. 2a and 2b, the inventive apparatus comprises eight coupled blades 106 disposed about a reference circle 114 to form an aperture 118 whose size may be varied. The apparatus may comprise as few as three blades and as many as sixteen or more blades. Desirably, the apparatus will have four or more blades and more desirably, eight or more blades. The maximum number of blades is limited only by how many blades can physically be coupled together under the relevant size constraints. As the number of blades is increased, the profile of the aperture and hence of the medical device following reduction in size, becomes smoother. FIG. 2b shows the apparatus of FIG. 2a after the stent has been reduced in size.

Blades 106 as shown in FIG. 3a have an inner end 108 which is desirably beveled 111 so as to mesh with adjacent blades and an outer end 110 which is displaced from aperture 118. Aperture 118 is polygonal. Blades 106 may also be shaped with a curved end 112, as shown in FIGS. 3b and 3c so as to form a substantially circular shaped aperture, when the aperture is fully closed.

Each blade 106 includes a single radial point 122 which lies on a radial line 126 of reference circle 114 prior to

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movement of blade **106** and which may be moved only along the radius **126** of reference circle **114** on movement of blade **106**. Desirably, the single radial point **122** will be disposed at the tip of the blade adjacent to beveled end **111**.

In the embodiment shown in FIG. **4a**, radial point **122** lies at the tip of blade **106**. Each blade **106** has a connecting link **130** extending from second end **110**. Connecting link **130** ends in mounting means **134**, typically a mounting flange adapted for attachment to a linear bearing block, for interfacing with an actuation device, shown generally at **138**. Actuation device **138** is capable of simultaneously moving blades **106** to alter the size of aperture **118**.

Actuation device **138** includes actuation plate **142** which is coaxial with reference circle **114**. Actuation plate **142** has eight equi-spaced radial slots **146**. More generally, for every blade there will be a corresponding radial slot on actuation plate **142**. Each radial slot **146** overlaps a mounting means **134** for a linear bearing block at the end of a connecting link **130**. Each blade **106** is engaged to actuation plate **142** via a cam follower bearing **150** disposed in radial slot **146** and attached to mounting means in slotted end **134**.

Each bearing **150** extends from a linear slide **154**. Linear slide **154** is mounted on a non-rotating plate **156** (shown in FIG. **8**). Linear slide **154** is constructed and arranged to slide along a line **158** which is parallel to the radius **126** on which radial point **122** of blade **106** lies.

For the purposes of this disclosure, the term 'cam follower bearing' includes cam follower bearings, low friction rollers, roller bearings, needle roller bearings and a slipper block pivot mounted on a bearing and stub shaft. FIG. **4b** is a partial front view of an embodiment in which a slipper block is used. A side view of the embodiment of FIG. **4b** taken along lines **4c—c** is shown in FIG. **4c**. Slipper block **150** resides in slot **146** of actuation plate **142**. Slipper block **150** is mounted on stub shaft **151** which extends from connecting link **130**. Desirably, bearings **153** will be present between shaft **151** and slipper block **150**. Connecting link **130**, in turn, is fastened to linear bearing block **212** via fasteners **214**. Bearing block **212** is linearly mounted on linear slide which is mounted on fixed plate **156**. Linear motion is facilitated by the presence of bearings **216**.

Cam follower bearing **150** may be replaced by any other suitable connecting member which can connect the slide and the link.

In use, as actuation plate **142** is rotated in a clockwise direction, the clockwise motion of the actuation plate is translated into linear motion of each of linear slide **154** and blade **106** via bearing **150**. Each blade **106** moves outward in a direction parallel to the radius **126** on which the radial point **122** of the blade **106** lies, resulting in the opening of aperture **118**. As actuation plate **142** is rotated in a counterclockwise direction, each blade **106** moves inward in a direction parallel to the radius **126** on which the radial point **122** of the blade **106** lies, resulting in the closing of aperture **118**. As aperture **118** closes, a radially inward force is applied to a medical device disposed in the aperture. The actuation plate is rotated until the desired size reduction of the aperture and medical device has been achieved. Following the reduction, the actuation plate is rotated in the opposite direction to allow for removal of the medical device from the aperture.

The apparatus may be used to reduce the diameter of a suitable medical device such as those disclosed above or may be used to crimp a medical device to a catheter.

Another embodiment of the invention is shown in FIG. **5a**. Each blade **106**, as shown in FIG. **5a**, has a connecting

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link **130** extending therefrom. Connecting link **130** is rigidly attached to blade **106**. Connecting link **130** ends in an angled end **134** for interfacing with an actuation device, shown generally at **138**. Actuation device **138** is capable of simultaneously moving blades **106** to alter the size of aperture **118**.

Actuation device **138** includes a rotatable actuation plate **142** which is co-axial with reference circle **114**. Rotatable actuation plate includes cam slots **146** which are not concentric with the axis of rotation, arcing inward. Each connecting link **130** is engaged to actuation plate **146** via a cam follower bearing **150** disposed in slot **146** and attached to both angled end **134** of connecting link **130** and to a linear slide **154**. Linear slide **154** is mounted on a non-rotating plate similar to that shown in FIG. **8**. Linear slide **154** is constructed and arranged to slide along a radial line **158** on which radial point **122** of blade **106** lies.

Connecting link **130** may be bonded adhesively, welded, joined with a fastener or otherwise joined to blade **106**. As shown in FIG. **5a**, a single screw **131** is used to connect link **130** to blade **106**. FIG. **5b** shows a connecting link **130** including a right angle portion which is fastened to a blade **106** using two screws **131**. Connecting link **130** and blade **106** may optionally be formed of a single piece of material. Regardless of how the connecting member is joined to the blade, no movement of the blade relative to the connecting link is permitted.

In use, as actuation plate **142** is rotated in a clockwise direction, the clockwise motion of the actuation plate is translated into a linear outward motion of each of linear slides **154** and blades **106** via bearings **150** resulting in the opening of aperture **118**. The outward motion results from the radially outward arcing of cam slot **146**. As actuation plate **142** is rotated in a counterclockwise direction, each blade **106**, because of the radially inward arc of cam slots **146**, moves inward in a direction parallel to the radius **126** on which the radial point **122** of the blade **106** lies, resulting in the closing of aperture **118**. As discussed above, as the aperture is decreased in size, a radial inward force is brought to bear against a medical device disposed in the aperture, thereby reducing the size of the medical device.

The embodiment of FIG. **5a** differs from the embodiment of FIG. **4a** in that in the embodiment of FIG. **5a**, the slide moves along the radial line on which the radial point of the attached blade lies whereas in FIG. **4a** the slide moves parallel to the radial line. In both of the embodiments, each of the blades is constrained with two degrees of freedom to satisfy the condition that the movement of the tip be radial in accordance with the invention.

In the embodiments of FIGS. **4a** and **5a**, the slots in the actuation plate are constructed and arranged to allow for a sufficient reduction in size of the aperture so that a medical device can be reduced in size to a desired diameter. Those of ordinary skill in the art will recognize other suitable actuation devices that may be used in the practice of this invention.

Desirably, in the above embodiments, the blades will be as long as or longer than the medical device disposed within so that the medical device is uniformly reduced in size along its entire length.

This is illustrated in the embodiment of FIGS. **6** and **7** and further in FIGS. **3a** and **3b** in which blades **106** are disposed about a reference tube **160** to form a tubular aperture **162** whose size may be varied. Reference circle **114** is seen to lie along reference tube **160**. Each blade **106** is in communication with an actuation device such as that shown in FIG.

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4 or 5. The actuation device is capable of moving blades 106 to alter the size of tubular aperture 162. Each blade 106 includes a single line 166 which a) lies on a radial plane 170 of the reference tube 160 prior to movement of blade 106, and b) may be moved only along a radial plane 170 of reference tube 160 on movement of blade 106. Desirably, reference tube 160 is cylindrical and exceeds the length of the medical device to be reduced in size.

Another embodiment of the invention is illustrated in FIGS. 8a and 8b. In the embodiment of FIGS. 8a and 8b, two non-rotating plates 156 are present, one at each end of the apparatus. Each blade 106 is connected at first end 174 to a linear slide 154a via a connecting link 130a and at second end 178 to a linear slide 154b via a connecting link 130b. Linear slide 154a is mounted on non-rotating plate 156a and linear slide 154b is mounted on non-rotating plate 156b. The presence of the second non-rotating plate 156b, linear slide 154b and connecting link 130b is optional but contributes to providing a rigid frame upon which the connecting links and associated blades may slide without misalignment relative to the reference circle.

FIGS. 8a and 8b illustrate the use of the inventive apparatus in various stages of the size reduction process. In FIG. 8a, stent 180 has been placed in tubular aperture 162 which is characterized by a diameter d_1 . In FIG. 8b, the device has been actuated by rotating actuation plate 142 so as to move blades 106 inward. Aperture 162, as shown in FIG. 8b is characterized by a diameter d_2 which is reduced relative to diameter d_1 . Stent 180 is seen to be of reduced diameter relative to its previous diameter as shown in FIG. 8a.

FIG. 8c differs from FIG. 8b, only in that stent 180 has been crimped onto catheter 184 in FIG. 8c.

Blades 106 may be made of any suitable, hard material including hardened steel. Desirably, the blades will be made of a material such as zirconia ceramic. Blades made of zirconia ceramic may be used without lubrication. Furthermore, because of their low thermal conductivity, they may be used to create a highly insulated chamber suitable for cryogenic processing of martensite in nitinol stents.

Such an embodiment is shown in FIG. 9. Stent 180 is disposed between blades 106 which can move inward in the direction of the arrows. Blades 106 are cooled by a first source of cooling fluid 184 located at first end 174 of blades 106. Although not shown, a second source of cooling fluid may be provided at second end 178 of blades 106 as well. The cooling fluid may be a liquid cryogenic. Exemplary cryogenics include liquid nitrogen, argon or carbon dioxide although other cryogens may also be used. The cooling fluid may also be a chilled gas such as air. The cooling fluid may also be a cooled inert gas such as nitrogen, argon or other inert gasses.

The aperture formed by the blades is a highly insulated chamber which is suitable for cryogenic processing of martensite in nitinol stents. The chamber is maintained at -80°C . and a nitinol stent inserted therein. Upon equilibration of the temperature of the stent, the blades are moved inward to reduce the diameter of the stent. The stent is thus reduced in diameter while being maintained in the martensitic state.

The embodiment of FIG. 9 further has a loading plunger 188 for loading a stent or other suitable medical device into the aperture. A sheath housing 192 which houses sheath 196 is provided at second end 178 of blades 106. Plunger 188 may be further used to transfer the stent after it has been reduced in diameter or size to sheath 196. Desirably, sheath

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196 will have a slightly larger diameter than stent 180 following reduction in size of the stent. More desirably, the fit of the stent within the sheath will be within about $1/32$ " and even more desirably, within about $1/64$ ".

Where lengthy stents or other medical devices are to be reduced in size, the invention contemplates using one of the above described apparatuses with long blades to accommodate the stent. As an alternative, the invention also contemplates disposing two or more of such apparatuses sequentially to form one long aperture. The two or more apertures may then be reduced in size simultaneously or consecutively. The arrangement of FIG. 10 shows an embodiment with three devices 100a-c arranged sequentially. A stepped reduction in size may be achieved by placing a stent 180 or similar medical device in the apparatus and independently reducing each aperture 118a-c to a desired size. To that end, the invention may provide particular utility in manipulating bifurcated stents or other stents whose diameter varies along its length. The embodiment of FIG. 10 shows the end portions of the stent being reduced in size prior to the middle portion of the stent. The device may also be operated so as to reduce the middle portion in size prior to the end portions or in any other sequence.

The invention contemplates yet another approach to reducing the diameter of lengthy stents or similar medical devices, namely walking the stent through the apparatus. This may be accomplished by either moving the stent relative to the apparatus or moving the apparatus relative to the stent as shown schematically in FIG. 11. To that end, stent 180 is inserted in device 100. Aperture 118a is reduced in size with blades 106a in turn reducing portion 180a of stent 180 in size. Aperture 118a is then opened and aperture 118b reduced in size thereby reducing portion 180b of stent 180. Simultaneously, or shortly thereafter, sheath 196 is pushed by plunger 188 over the portion of the stent that has been reduced in size. Aperture 118b is opened and the stent advanced in the apparatus. The process is repeated until the entire length, or the desired portion of the stent or medical device is reduced in size.

The reduction in size of the stent or other medical device may occur as part of a precrimping step or it may occur as part of crimping a stent onto a catheter and desirably, onto a balloon disposed about a catheter. In a general sense, it may be used for manipulating a medical device and specifically, for applying a radial inward force to a medical device.

In another embodiment, the invention is directed to a method of manipulating a medical device. As part of the method, a medical device such as those disclosed above is provided. The device has at least three blades capable of applying a radial inward force. The blades are disposed about a reference circle to form a shrinkable aperture. The blades are constructed and arranged such that each blade has only a single point which a) lies on the circumference of the reference circle prior to movement of the blade, and b) is moved along a radius of the reference circle on movement of the blade. The medical device is placed into the shrinkable aperture and the blades simultaneously moved inward to apply a radial inward force to the medical device and thereby reduce the medical device in size, and desirably, in diameter. Following reduction in size of the medical device, the blades are simultaneously moved outward and the medical device removed from the aperture.

The inventive apparatus may also be incorporated into a blow molding tool to provide a variable size balloon mold as shown generally at 100 in FIG. 12. The various parts of the

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apparatus of FIG. 12 have been discussed in conjunction with FIGS. 8a-c and, with exception of balloon 181 and mold cavity ends 193, the reference numerals used in FIG. 12 correspond to those used for FIGS. 8a-c. Mold cavity ends 193 may be provided in a variety of sizes and lengths to contain the balloon at each end. Desirably, the end molds will be adjustably mounted to a portion of the apparatus such as fixed plates 156 to provide for an adjustable length balloon mold.

The invention is also directed to a method for molding a medical balloon using the inventive apparatus described above. A balloon preform prepared through any standard method is provided. The inventive mold, shown generally at 100 is also provided. Balloon 181 is inserted into aperture 162. Aperture 162 is optionally reduced to a predetermined size and the preform expanded using standard techniques. An inflation fluid, for example, may be supplied to the preform and the preform expanded and heated. The balloon in its expanded state is shown in FIG. 12.

More generally, the invention may be practiced by providing at least three movable blades disposed about a reference tube to form a shrinkable tubular aperture. The blades are constructed and arranged such that each blade has a single line which a) lies on the surface of the reference tube prior to movement of the blade, and b) is moved along a radial plane of the reference tube on movement of the blade. A balloon preform is placed into the shrinkable aperture. The aperture may be set at a predetermined size prior to or following insertion of the balloon therein. An inflation fluid is provided and the balloon preform inflated so that the preform expands to the size of the aperture. The preform may be heated during this inflation/blowing step. The inflation fluid is then removed from the thus formed balloon and the balloon removed from the apparatus.

The balloon may be also be molded in accordance with the method described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,163,989, or in accordance with other methods as are known to those of ordinary skill in the art, substituting the instant apparatus for the standard balloon mold. Other patents which discuss balloon molding include U.S. Pat. No. 5,807,520. Other references illustrating the materials and methods of making catheter balloons include: U.S. Pat. No. 4,413,989 and U.S. Pat. No. 4,456,000 to Schjeldahl et al, U.S. Pat. No. 4,490,421, U.S. Pat. No. Re 32,983 and U.S. Pat. No. Re 33,561 to Levy, and U.S. Pat. No. 4,906,244, U.S. Pat. No. 5,108,415 and U.S. Pat. No. 5,156,612 to Pinchuck et al.

The use of the inventive apparatus as a mold allows for the blowing of a balloon to a predetermined size using a single adjustable size balloon mold thereby eliminating the need to have multiple molds of different sizes.

The invention further contemplates molding a balloon to a desired shape using a plurality of the inventive devices arranged sequentially. As an example of this, shown in FIG. 13, a stepped balloon 181 may be prepared by arranging several devices 100a, 100b and 100c sequentially. A balloon preform is inserted in the aperture formed by the device. The aperture of each device may be preset at a desired size or may be reduced in size to a predetermined size after the balloon preform is inserted therein. The balloon may then be blow molded in accordance with any suitable blow molding technique known in the art.

The invention is also understood to be directed to embodiments employing various combinations of the features disclosed herein.

The above disclosure is intended to be illustrative and not exhaustive. This description will suggest many variations

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and alternatives to one of ordinary skill in this art. All these alternatives and variations are intended to be included within the scope of the attached claims. Those familiar with the art may recognize other equivalents to the specific embodiments described herein which equivalents are also intended to be encompassed by the claims attached hereto.

What is claimed is:

1. A stent crimper comprising:

a plurality of movable dies arranged to form an iris having a longitudinal axis, the iris defining an aperture, the dies disposed about the aperture and between stationary end-walls which are disposed about the longitudinal axis, at least one of the stationary end-walls operatively engaged to the dies at distinct connection locations such that the number of distinct connection locations and the number of dies are the same;

each die having a first straight side and a second straight side, the first straight side and the second straight side converging to form a tip; wherein a portion of the first straight side of each die faces the aperture, each first straight side parallel to the second side of an adjacent die.

2. The stent crimper of claim 1 having a rotatable actuation device coupled to the dies, rotation of the actuation device causing the dies to move inward and reduce the size of the aperture or outward so as to increase the size of the aperture.

3. The stent crimper of claim 1 the dies are cooled below ambient temperature.

4. The stent crimper of claim 3 including a stent within the aperture.

5. The stent crimper of claim 4 wherein the stent is made of nitinol.

6. The stent crimper of claim 1 wherein at least 8 dies are provided.

7. The stent crimper of claim 1 wherein at least 16 dies are provided.

8. The stent crimper of claim 1 wherein the dies are moved cooperatively inward during the moving step.

9. The stent crimper of claim 1 wherein the dies are wedge-shaped.

10. A stent crimper comprising:

a plurality of movable dies arranged to form an iris, the dies disposed about an aperture, the aperture having a longitudinal axis and a substantially regular polygonal shape, each of the dies having an inward facing straight side which faces the longitudinal axis of the aperture, both when the dies move to maximize the aperture and when the dies move to minimize the aperture, the dies between two stationary end-walls disposed about the longitudinal axis, the longitudinal axis passing through a point substantially centered on the end-walls,

a rotatable actuation device coupled to the dies, rotation of the actuation device causing the inward facing straight sides of the dies to move inward and reduce the size of the aperture or outward so as to increase the size of the aperture.

11. The stent crimper of claim 10 wherein a stent is disposed about a medical balloon, the medical balloon disposed about a catheter.

12. The stent crimper of claim 11 having a stent, wherein the stent is made of nitinol.

13. The stent crimper of claim 10 wherein a stent is cooled below ambient temperature prior to reducing the size of the aperture.

14. The stent crimper of claim 10 wherein the dies are wedge-shaped.

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15. The stent crimper of claim 10 wherein at least 8 dies are provided.

16. The stent crimper of claim 10 wherein at least 16 wedge-shaped dies are provided.

17. The stent crimper of claim 10 wherein an entire stent is disposed in the aperture.

18. A stent crimper comprising:

eight or more movable dies arranged to form an iris, the iris defining an aperture of a substantially regular polygonal shape, the aperture having a longitudinal axis, each die having an inward facing flat portion which faces the longitudinal axis of the aperture both when the dies move to maximize the aperture and when the dies move to minimize the aperture, the dies between stationary end walls and operatively engaged to at least one of the stationary end-walls, the stationary end-walls disposed about the longitudinal axis,

the iris comprising at least eight of the inward facing flat portions, the aperture being reducible in size by moving the inward facing flat portions toward the longitudinal axis of the aperture,

a rotatable actuation device coupled to the dies, rotation of the actuation device causing the inward facing straight sides of the dies to move inward and reduce the size of the aperture or outward so as to increase the size of the aperture.

19. The stent crimper of claim 18 wherein a stent is disposed about a medical balloon, the medical balloon disposed about a catheter.

20. The stent crimper of claim 18 wherein the dies are cooled below ambient temperature.

21. The stent crimper of claim 20 including a stent in the aperture, wherein the stent is made of nitinol.

22. A stent crimping assembly comprising a stent crimper as in claim 20 and a loading device for loading a stent in the aperture.

23. The stent crimper of claim 18 wherein the dies are wedge-shaped.

24. The stent crimper of claim 18 wherein at least 16 dies are provided.

25. The stent crimper of claim 18 wherein the dies are moved cooperatively inward during the moving step.

26. The stent crimper of claim 18 wherein an entire stent is disposed in the aperture.

27. A stent crimper comprising:

an aperture with a plurality of movable blades disposed thereabout, the aperture having a longitudinal axis and being substantially polygonal, the blades between stationary end-walls substantially centered about the longitudinal axis, the blades coupled to one another so as to be movable inward or outward simultaneously, movement of the blades outward increasing the size of the aperture, movement of the blades inward decreasing the size of the aperture, the aperture remaining substantially regular polygonal when it is sized to receive a stent therein and when the blades minimize the aperture.

28. The stent crimper of claim 27 further comprising a rotatable actuation device coupled to the blades, rotation of the actuation device causing the blades to move inward or outward.

29. The stent crimper of claim 28 wherein the dies are cooled below ambient temperature.

30. The stent crimper of claim 29 including a stent, wherein the stent is made of nitinol.

31. The stent crimper of claim 28 wherein the dies are wedge-shaped.

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32. The stent crimper of claim 28 wherein at least 16 dies are provided.

33. The stent crimper of claim 28 wherein the dies are moved cooperatively inward during the moving step.

34. The stent crimper of claim 28 wherein an entire stent is disposed in the aperture.

35. The stent crimper of claim 27 wherein a stent is disposed about a medical balloon, the medical balloon disposed about a catheter.

36. A stent crimper comprising:

an aperture with a plurality of movable blades disposed thereabout, the aperture being substantially polygonal, the blades coupled to one another so as to be movable inward or outward simultaneously, movement of the blades outward increasing the size of the aperture, movement of the blades inward decreasing the size of the aperture, the aperture remaining substantially regular polygonal when it is sized to receive a stent therein and when the blades minimize the aperture;

a cryogenic source, the cryogenic source in fluid communication with the stent crimper so as to cool the blades.

37. A stent crimper comprising:

a plurality of overlapping movable dies arranged to form an iris, the dies disposed about an aperture, the aperture having a longitudinal axis, the dies between stationary end-walls disposed about the longitudinal axis, the dies operatively engaged to at least one of the stationary end-walls;

each die having a first straight side and a second straight side, the first straight side and the second straight side converging to form a tip; wherein a portion of the first straight side of each die faces the aperture, each first straight side parallel to the second side of an adjacent die.

38. A stent crimper comprising:

a plurality of movable dies and a thermal cooling unit for cooling the dies, the plurality of moveable dies arranged to form an iris disposed about an aperture, the aperture having a longitudinal axis, the plurality of movable dies between stationary end-walls substantially centered about the longitudinal axis, at least one stationary end-wall operatively engaged to the dies at distinct connection locations such that the number of distinct connection locations and the number of dies are the same, each die in communication with an actuation device, the actuation device constructed and arranged such that rotational motion of the actuation device opens or closes the aperture.

39. A stent crimper comprising:

a plurality of movable dies arranged to form an iris disposed about an aperture, the aperture having a center and a first opening and a second opening, the dies constructed and arranged to have a length exceeding the length of a stent with a longitudinal axis passing through both the first opening and the second opening, each die in communication with an actuation device, the actuation device constructed and arranged such that rotational motion of the actuation device opens or closes the aperture;

each die having a first straight side and a second straight side, the first straight side and the second straight side

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converging to form a tip; wherein a portion of the first straight side of each die faces the aperture, each first straight side parallel to the second side of an adjacent die.

40. A stent crimper comprising:

a plurality of movable dies arranged to form an iris disposed about an aperture, the aperture having a longitudinal axis, the plurality of movable dies between stationary plates disposed about the longitudinal axis, each die in communication with an actuation device, ¹⁰ the actuation device constructed and arranged such that

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rotational motion of the actuation device opens or closes the aperture, the dies operatively engaged to at least one of the stationary plates;

each die having a first straight side and a second straight side, the first straight side and the second straight side converging to form a tip; wherein a portion of the first straight side of each die faces the aperture, each first straight side parallel to the second side of an adjacent die.

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