



US00RE37731E

(19) **United States**
(12) **Reissued Patent**
Ogawa et al.

(10) **Patent Number:** **US RE37,731 E**
(45) **Date of Reissued Patent:** ***Jun. 11, 2002**

(54) **TWO-ARMED TRANSFER ROBOT**

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(*) Notice: This patent is subject to a terminal disclaimer.

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(21) Appl. No.: **09/648,618**

(22) Filed: **Aug. 28, 2000**

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Related U.S. Patent Documents

Reissue of:

(64) Patent No.: **5,950,495**
Issued: **Sep. 14, 1999**
Appl. No.: **09/036,816**
Filed: **Mar. 9, 1998**

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A two-armed transfer robot includes a pair of double-pantograph mechanisms. These mechanisms are substantially symmetrical to each other with a vertical plane. Each double-pantograph mechanism includes a first pantograph assembly and a second pantograph assembly. The second pantograph assembly supports a handling member for carrying a workpiece to be processed. The second pantograph assembly is offset away from the vertical plane with respect to the first pantograph assembly. A rotation-transmitting mechanism is provided between the first and the second pantograph assemblies of each double-pantograph mechanism. Thus, the two pantograph assemblies of each double-pantograph mechanism are actuated in cooperation for linearly moving the handling member. The handling members of the respective double-pantograph mechanisms are vertically spaced from each other. The handling members are arranged not only to move linearly but to rotate simultaneously around a vertical axis.

(30) **Foreign Application Priority Data**

Jul. 16, 1997 (JP) 9-208637

(51) **Int. Cl.**⁷ **B25J 18/00**

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **74/490.01**; 414/744.5;
414/935; 414/941

(58) **Field of Search** 74/490.01; 414/935,
414/937, 939, 941, 744.5; 901/15

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5 Claims, 15 Drawing Sheets

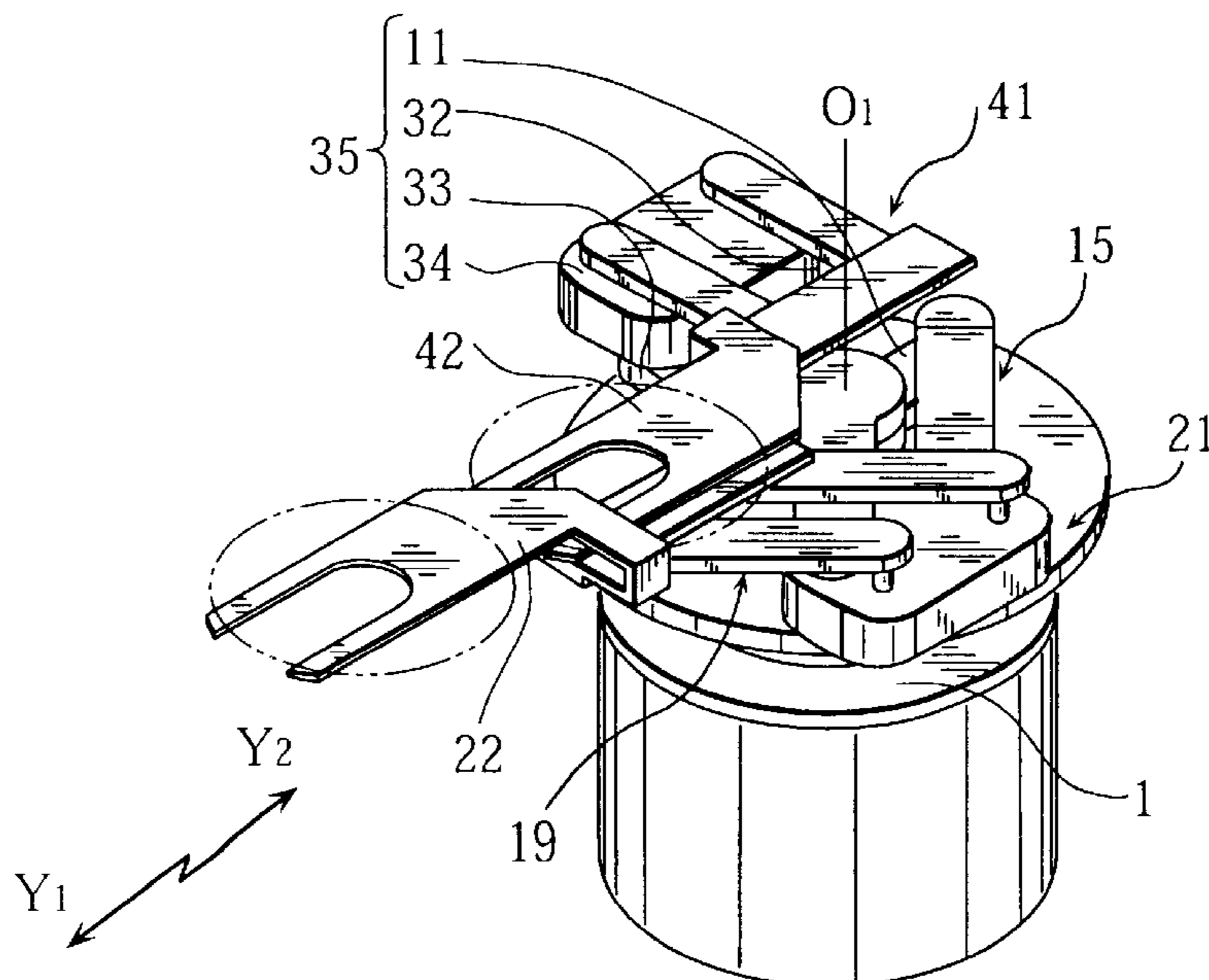


Fig. 1A

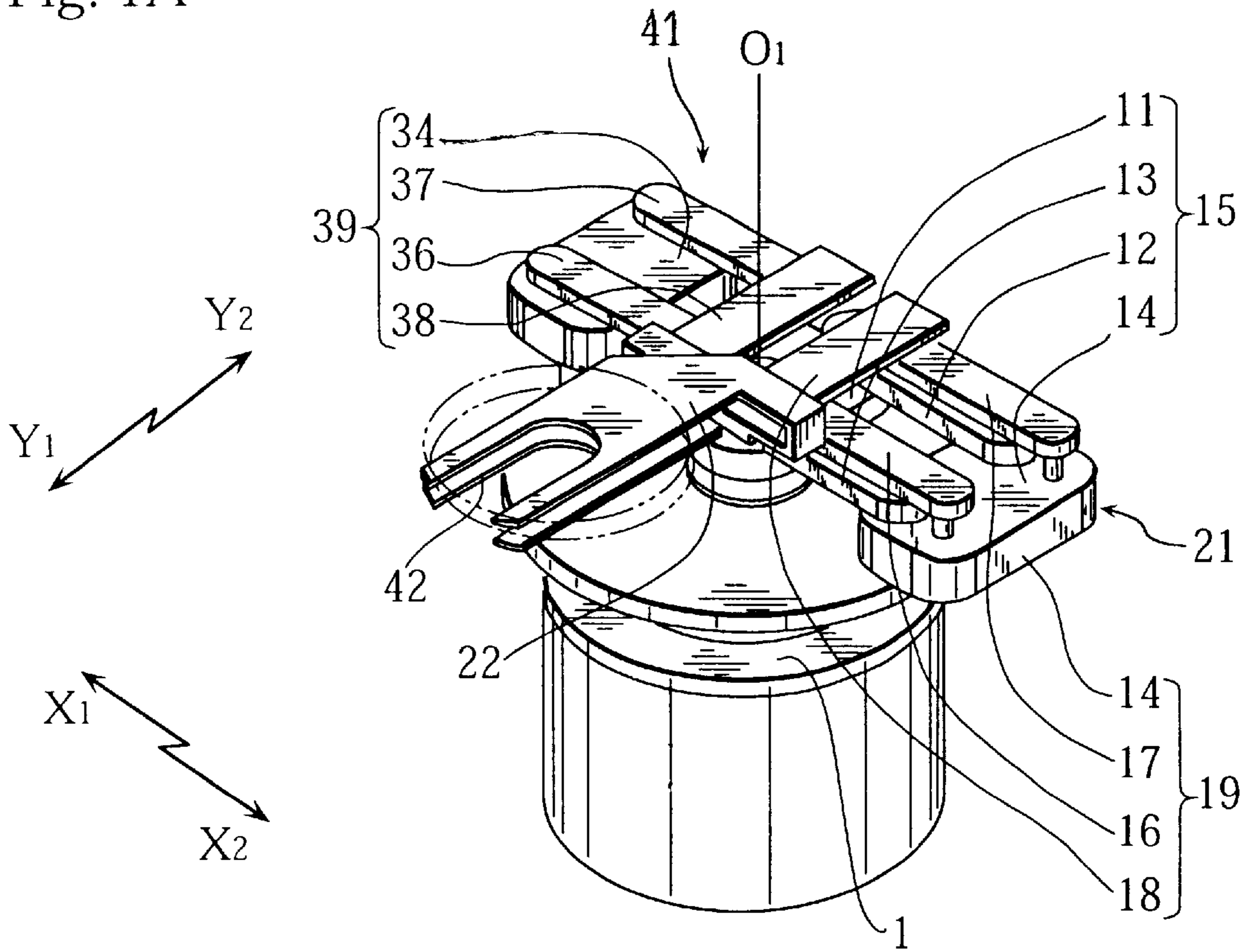


Fig. 1B

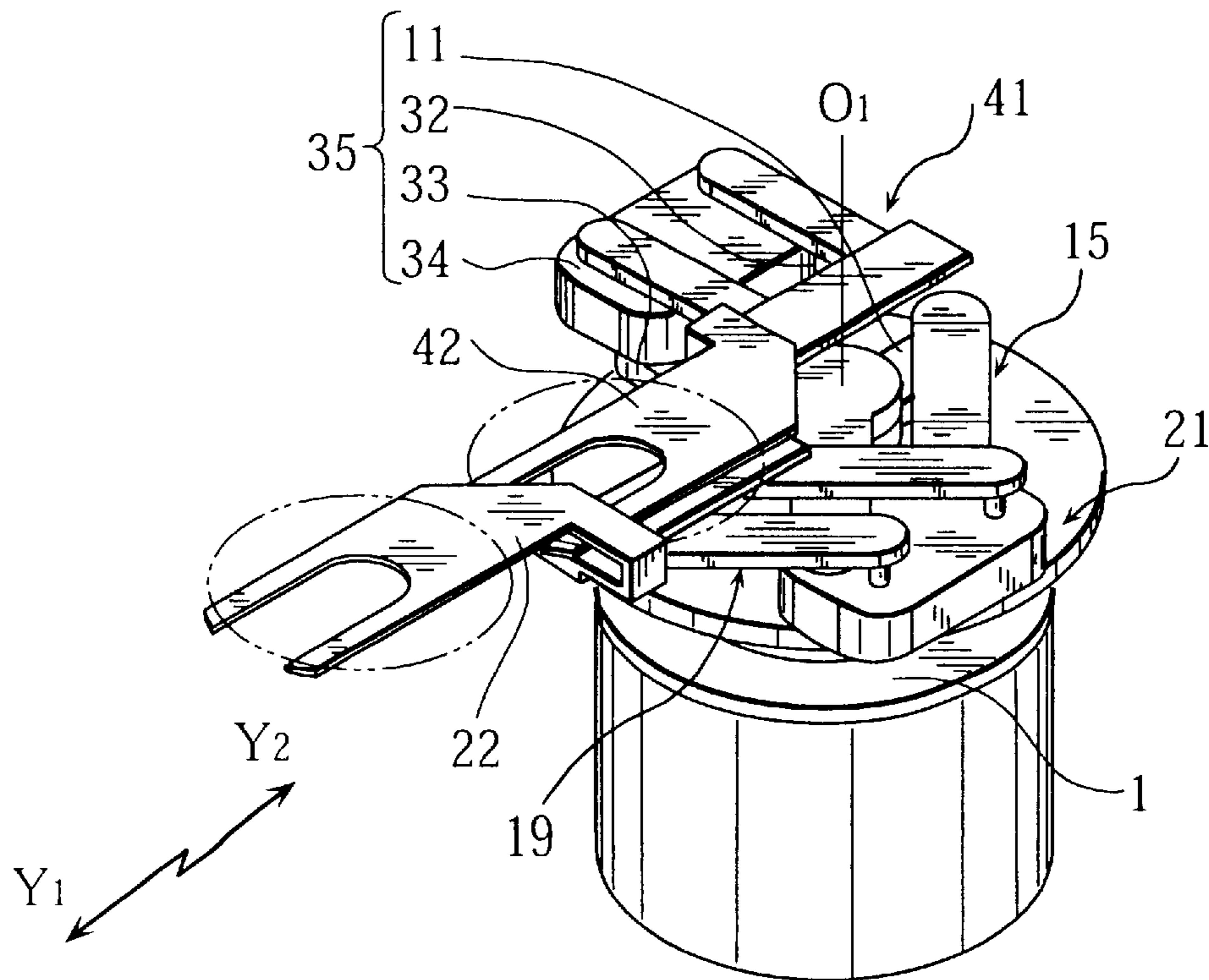


Fig. 2

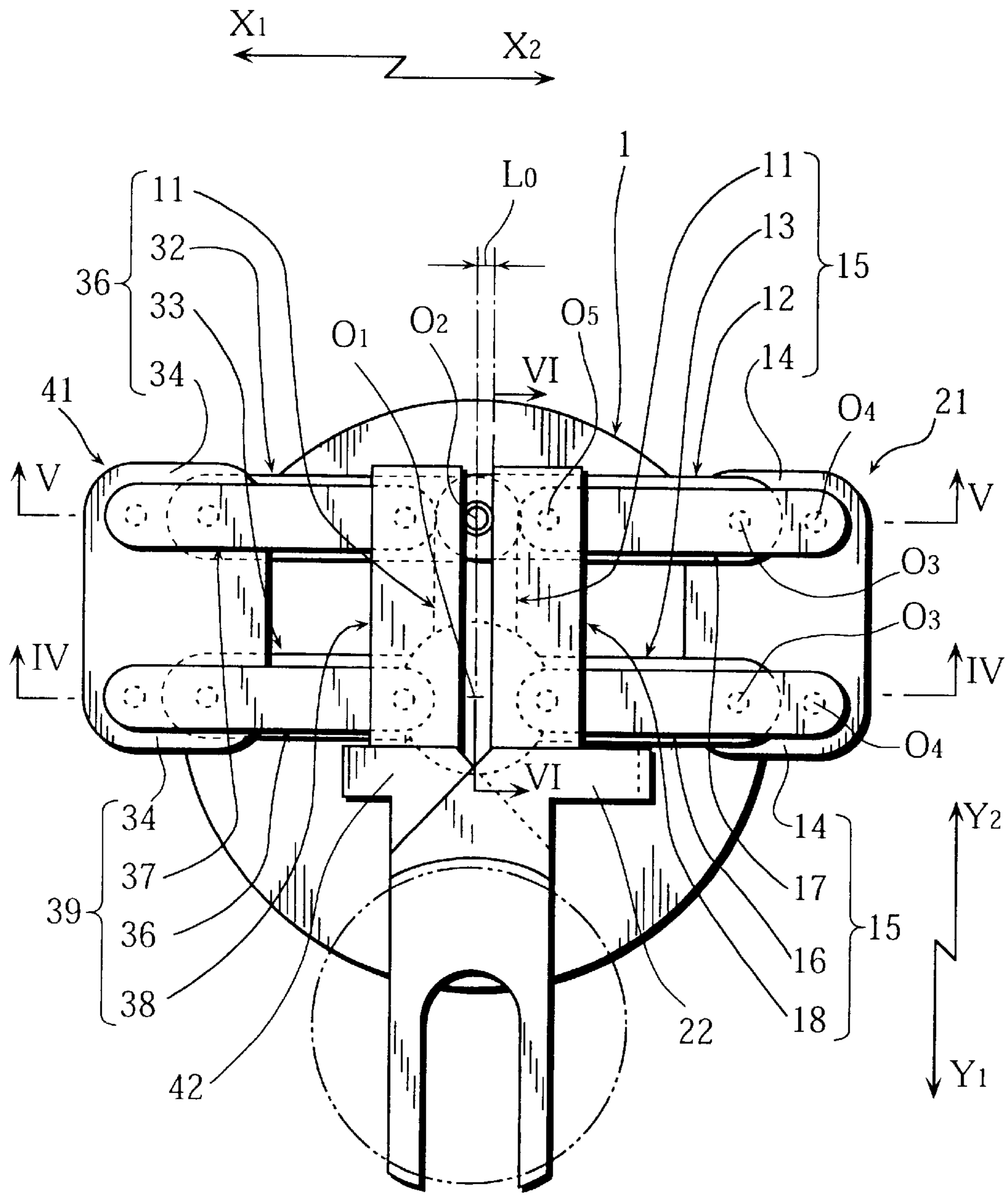


Fig. 3

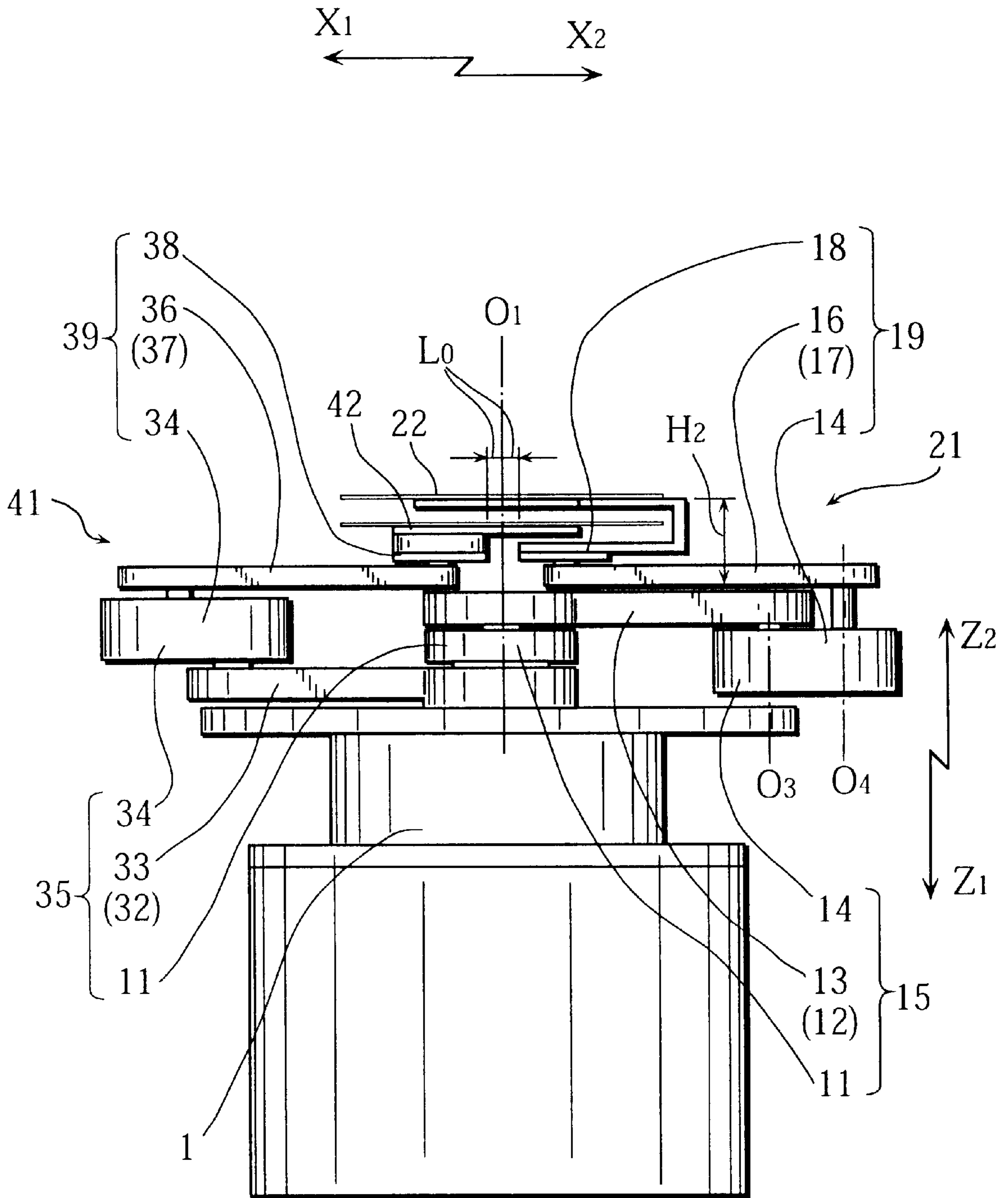


Fig.4

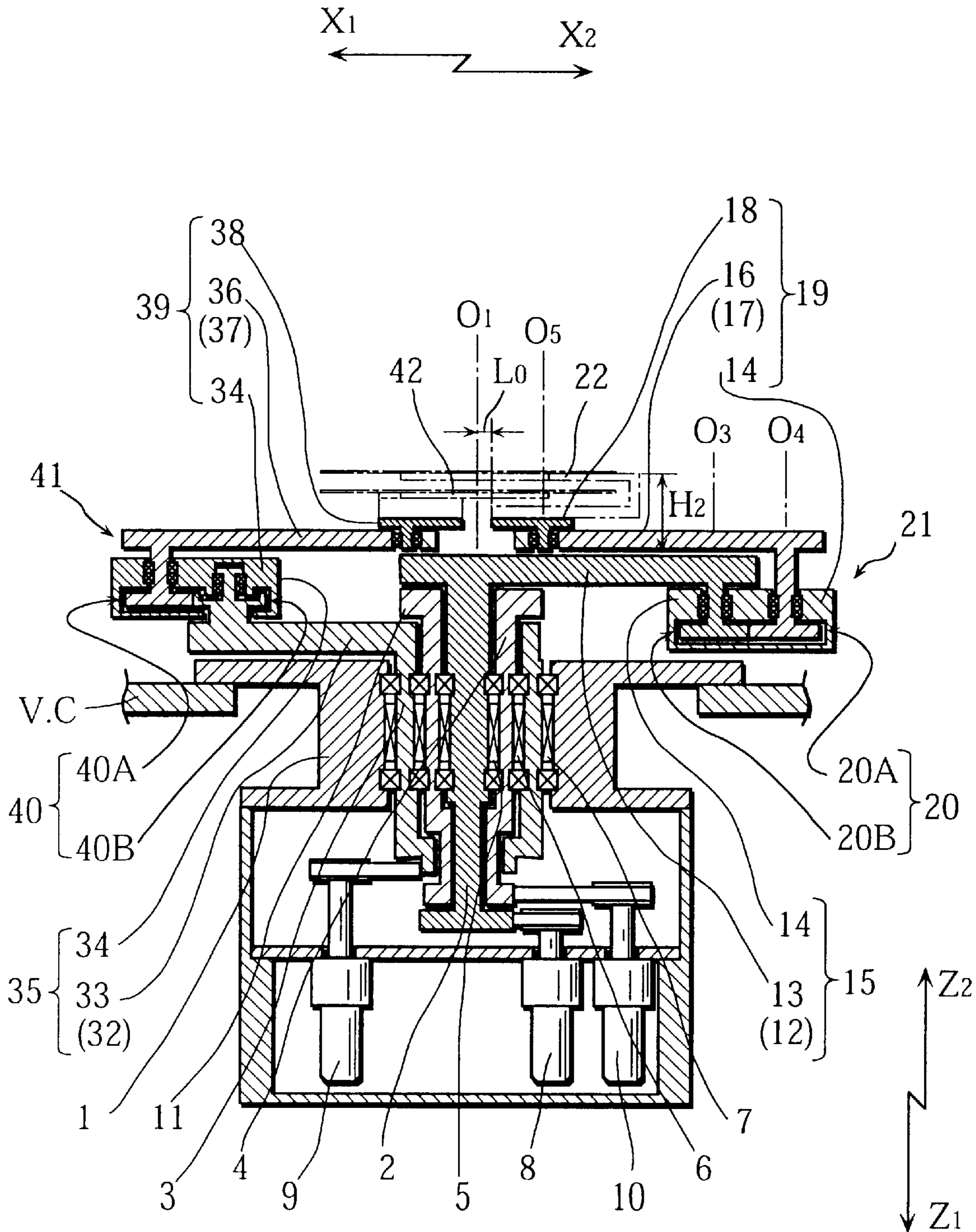


Fig. 5

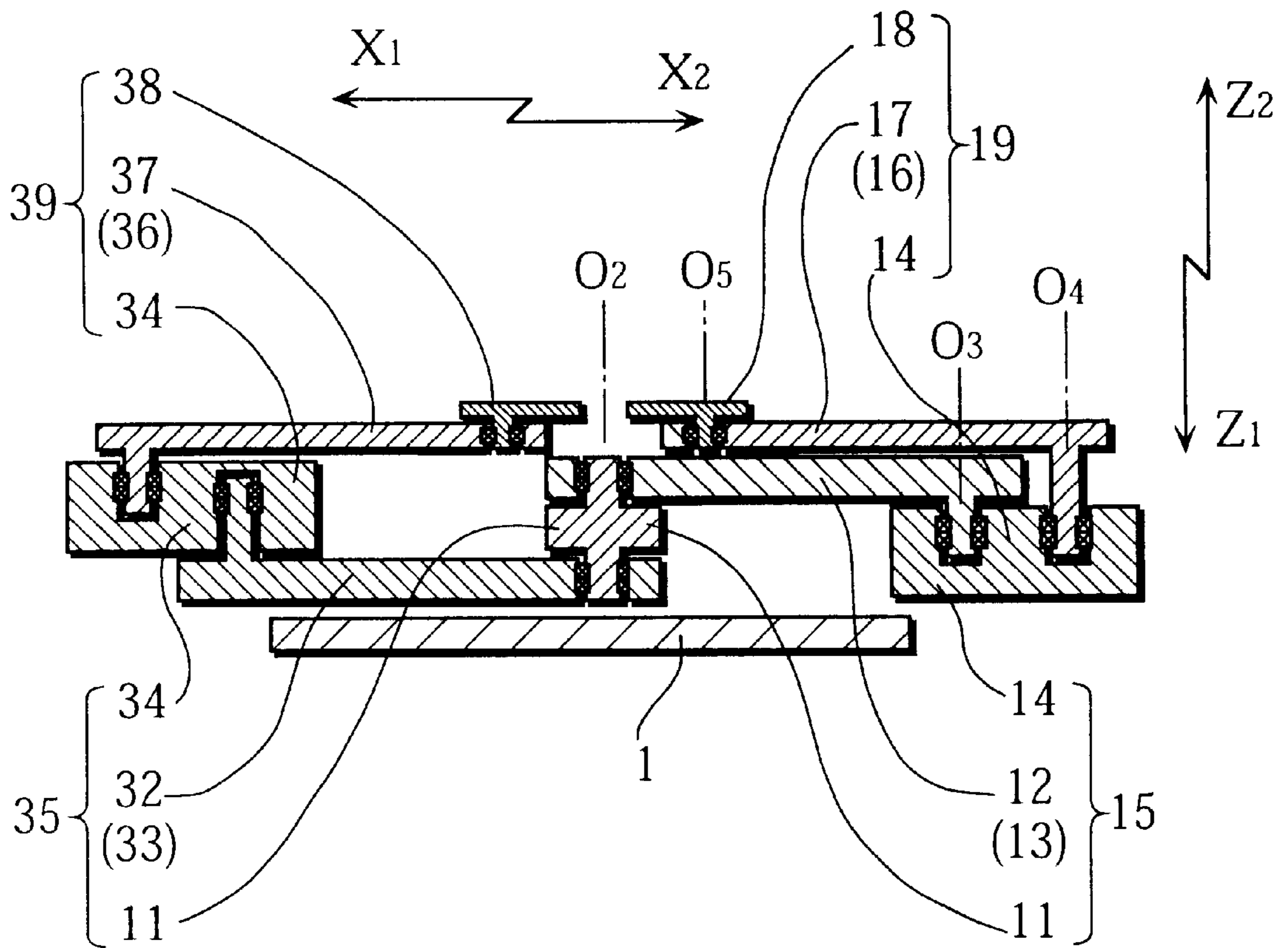


Fig. 6

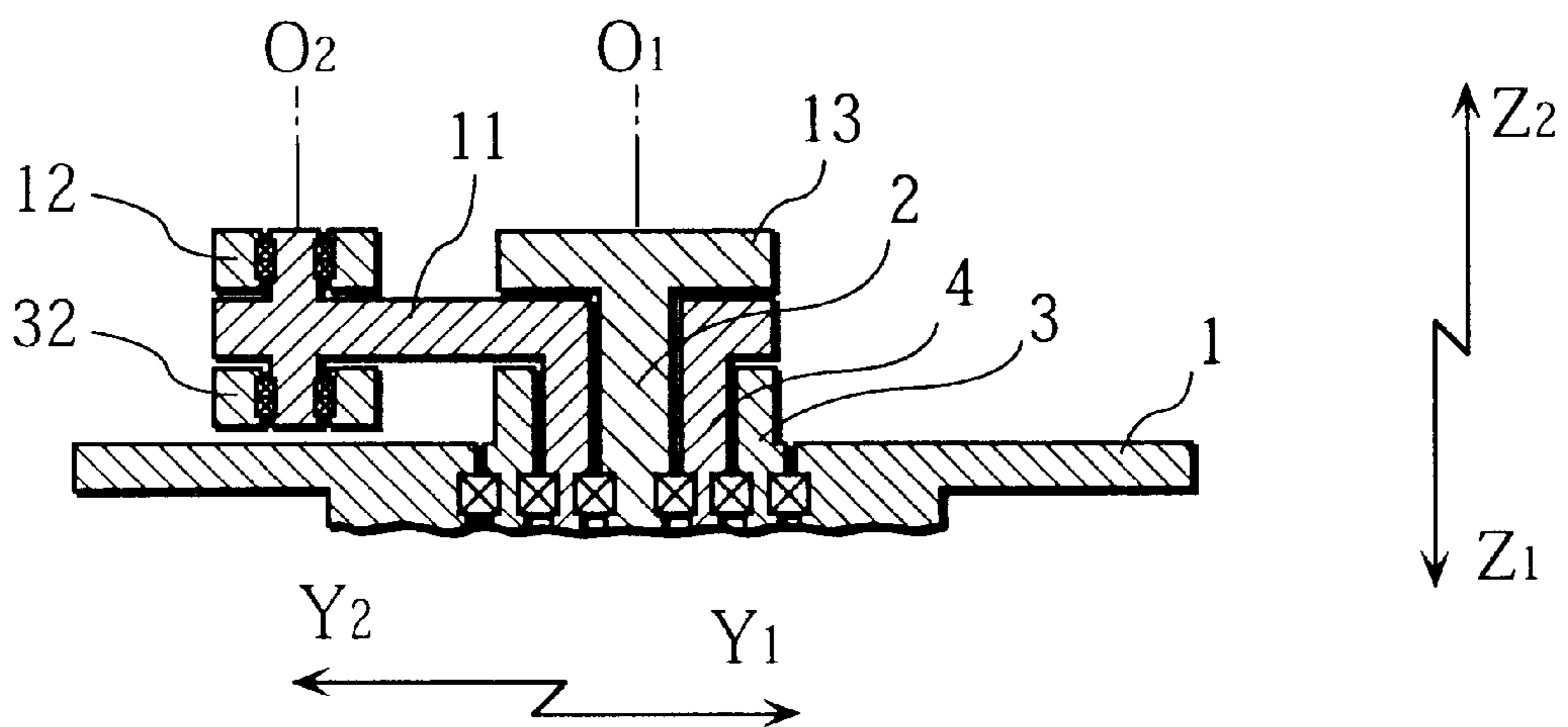


Fig. 7

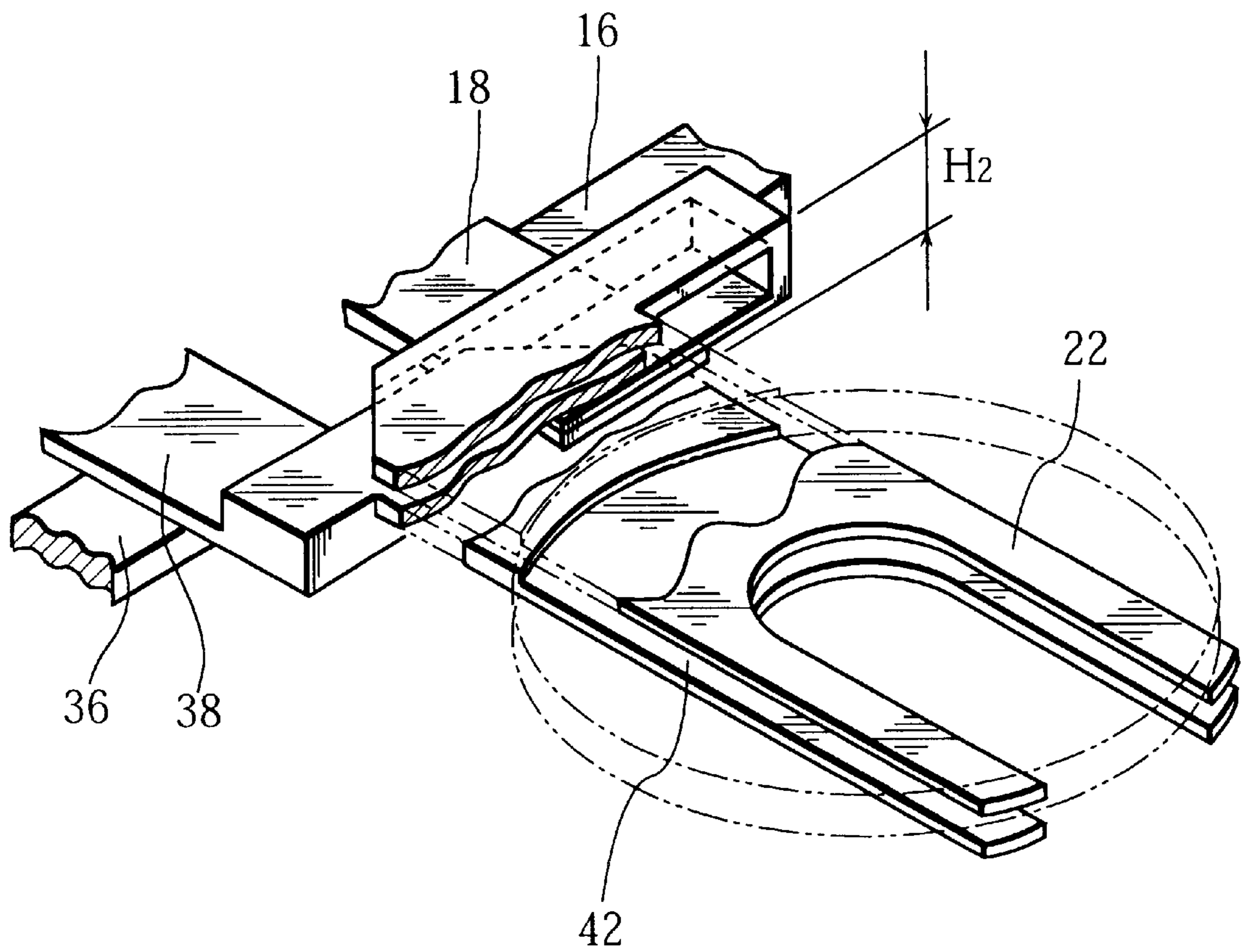


Fig. 8

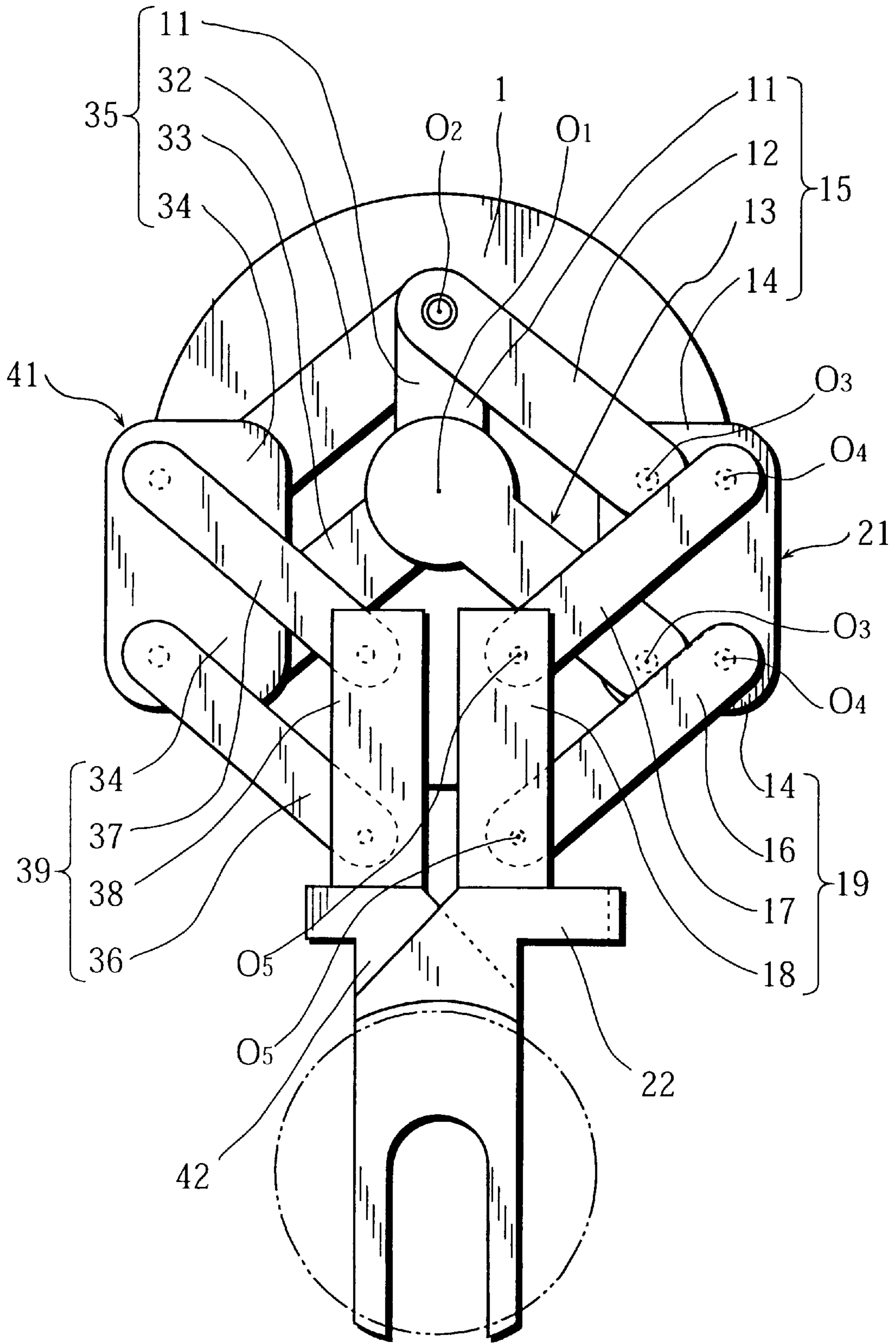


Fig. 9A

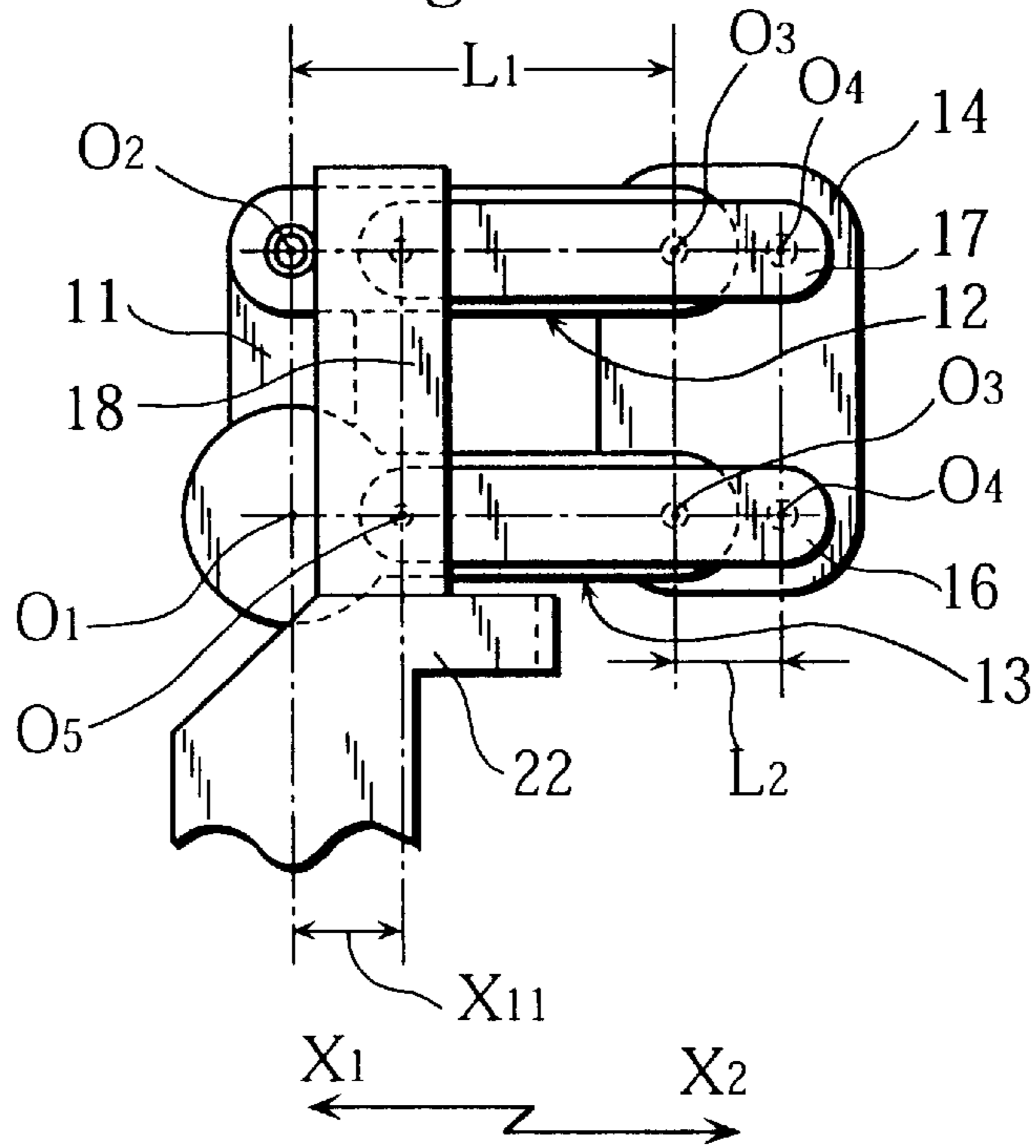


Fig. 9B

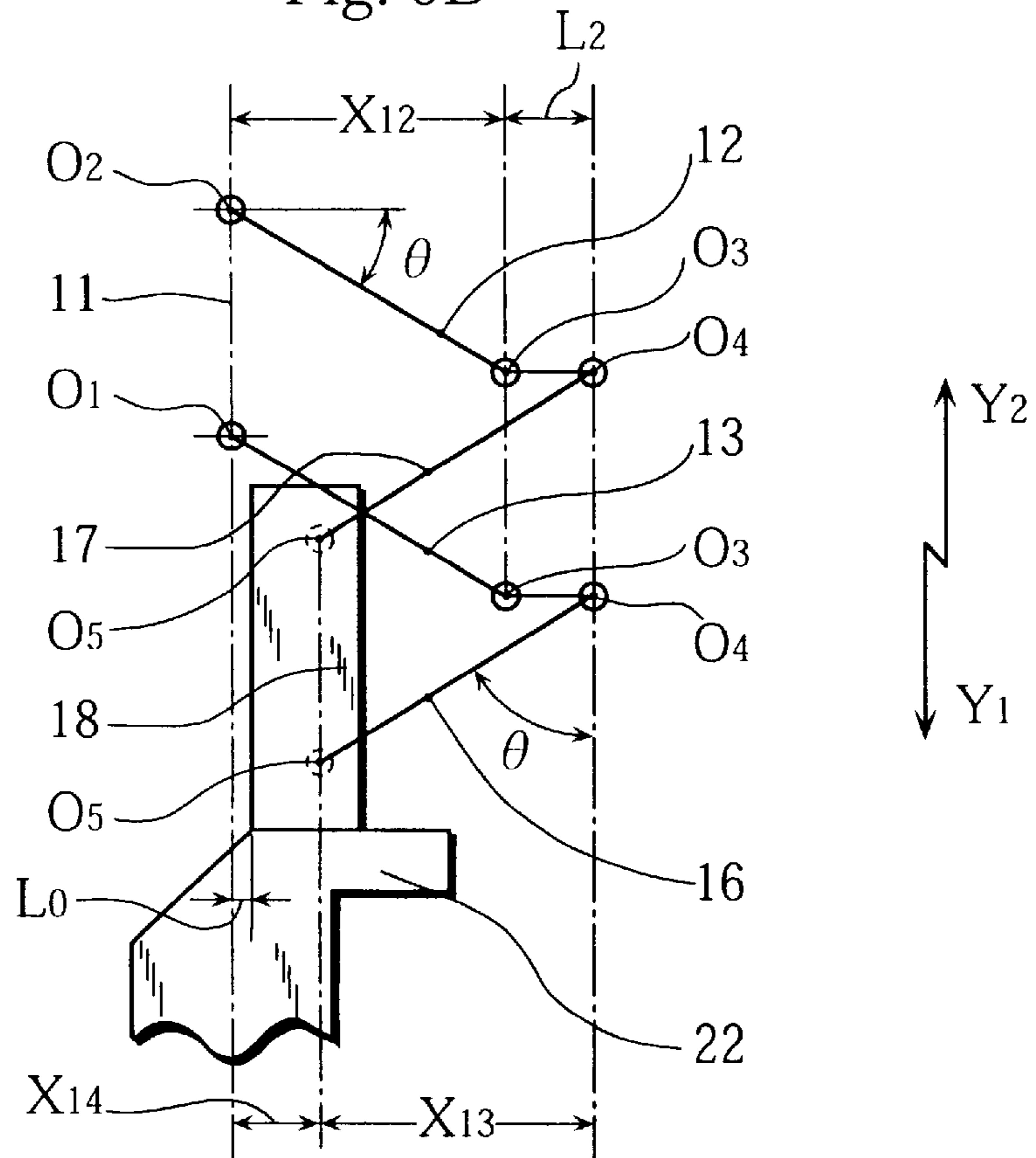


Fig. 10

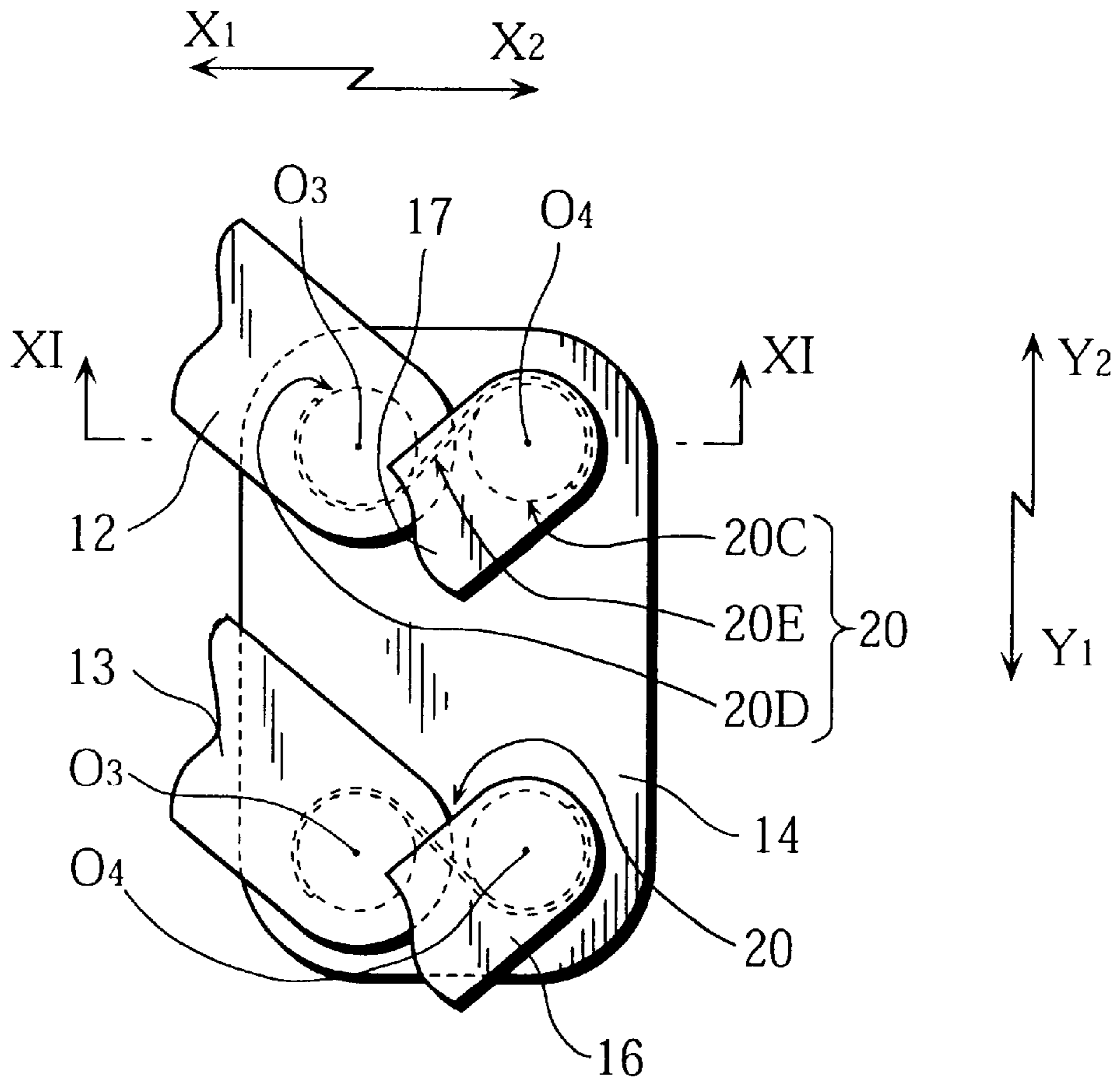


Fig. 11

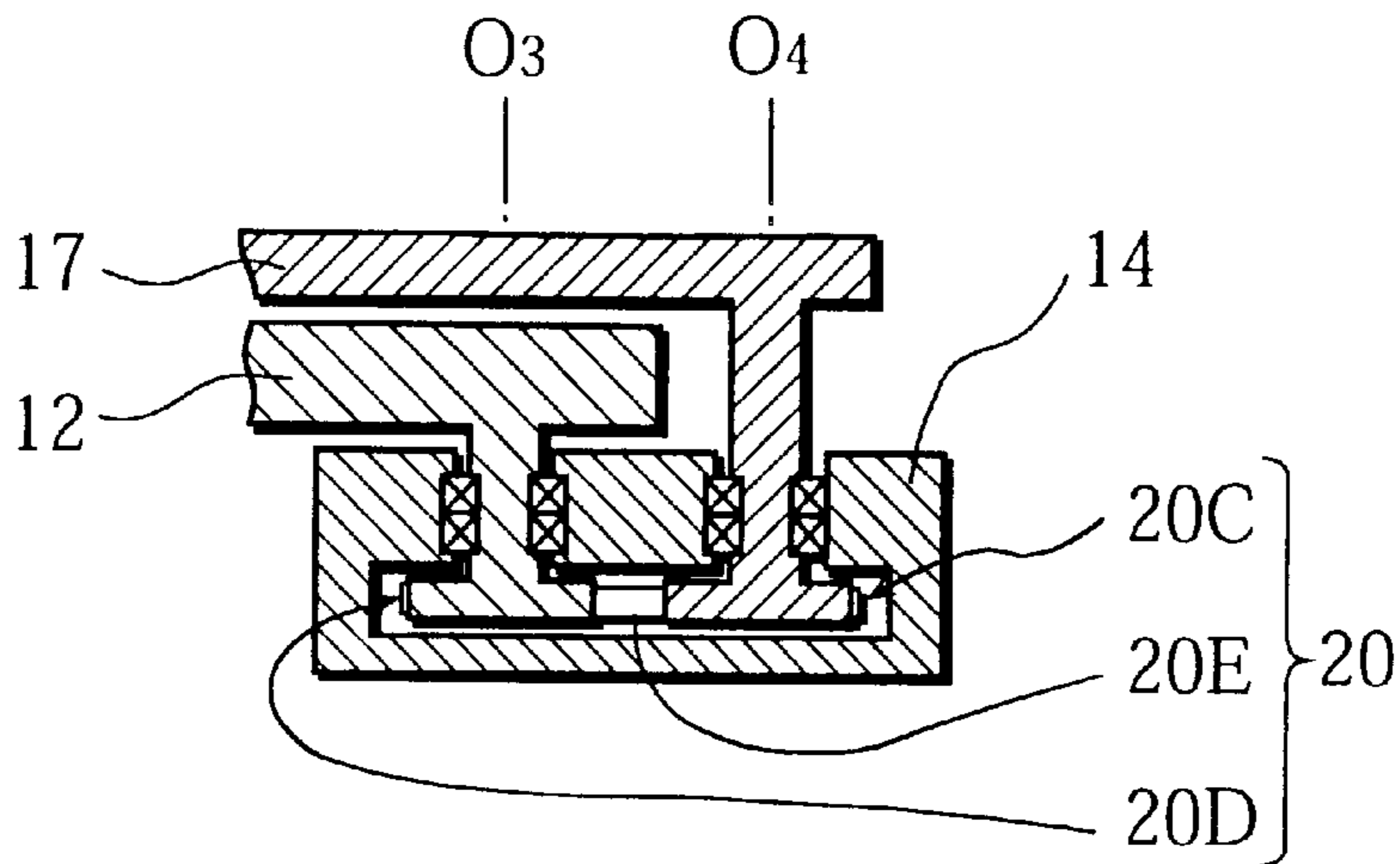


Fig. 12

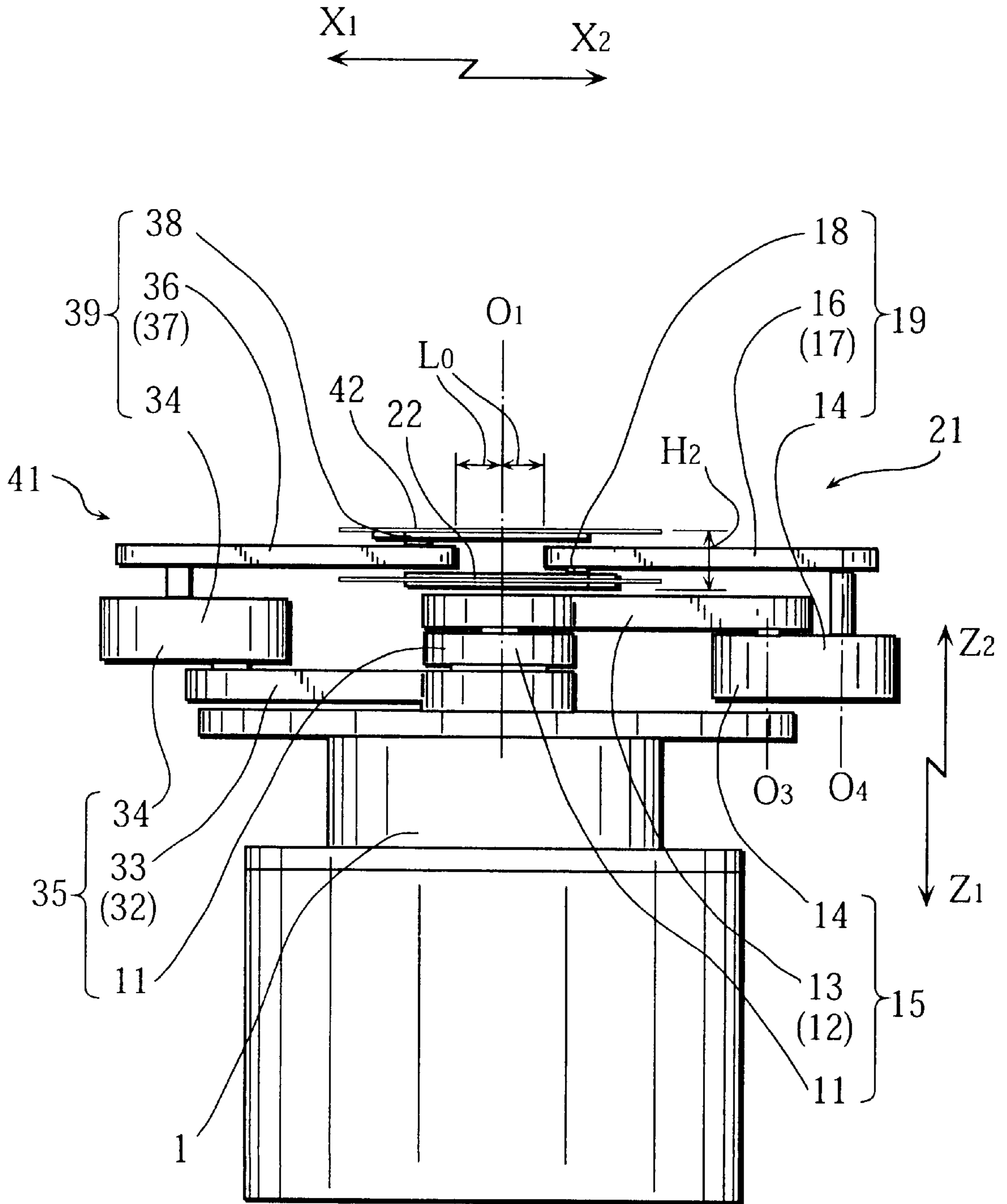


Fig. 13A

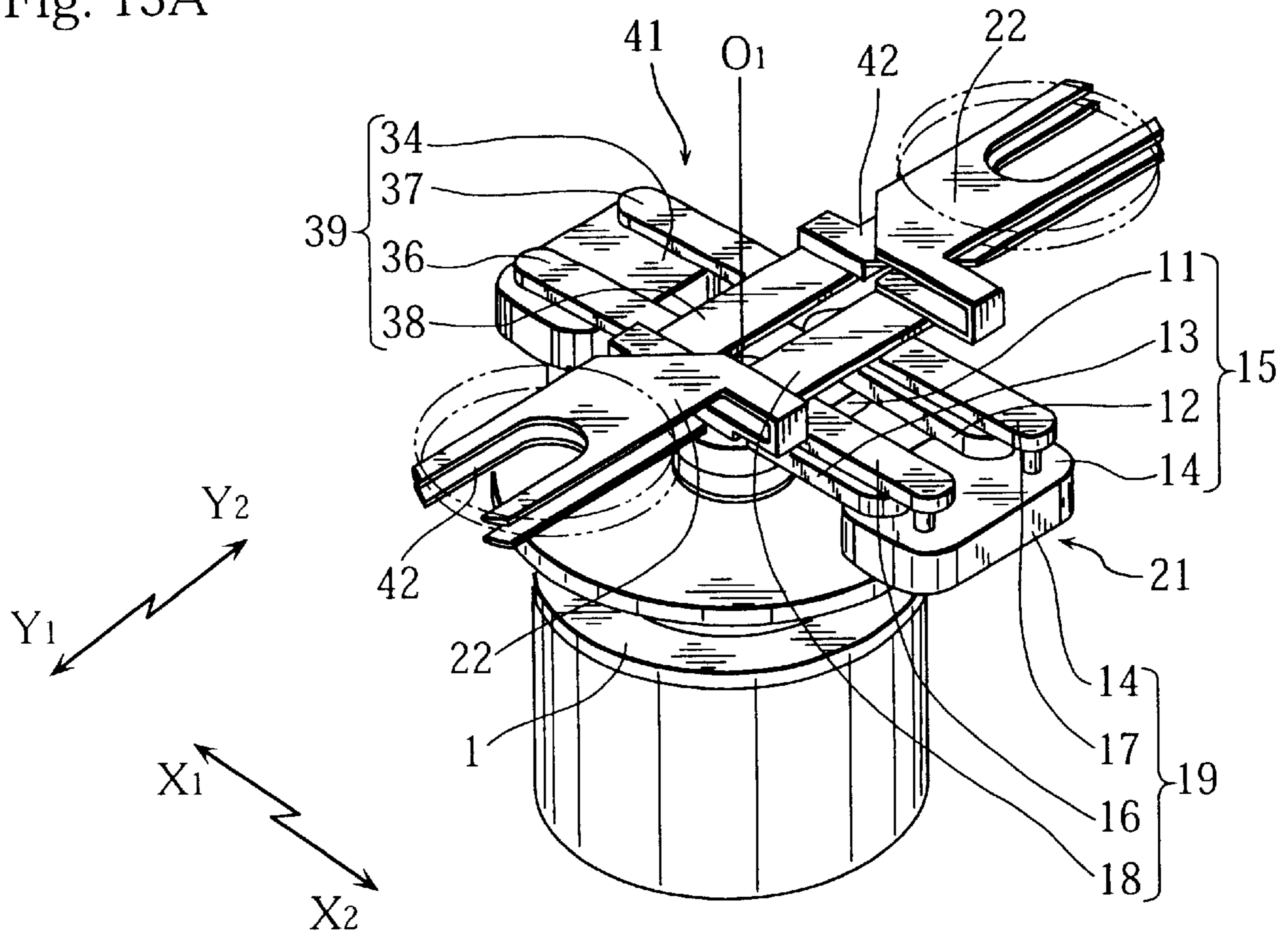


Fig. 13B

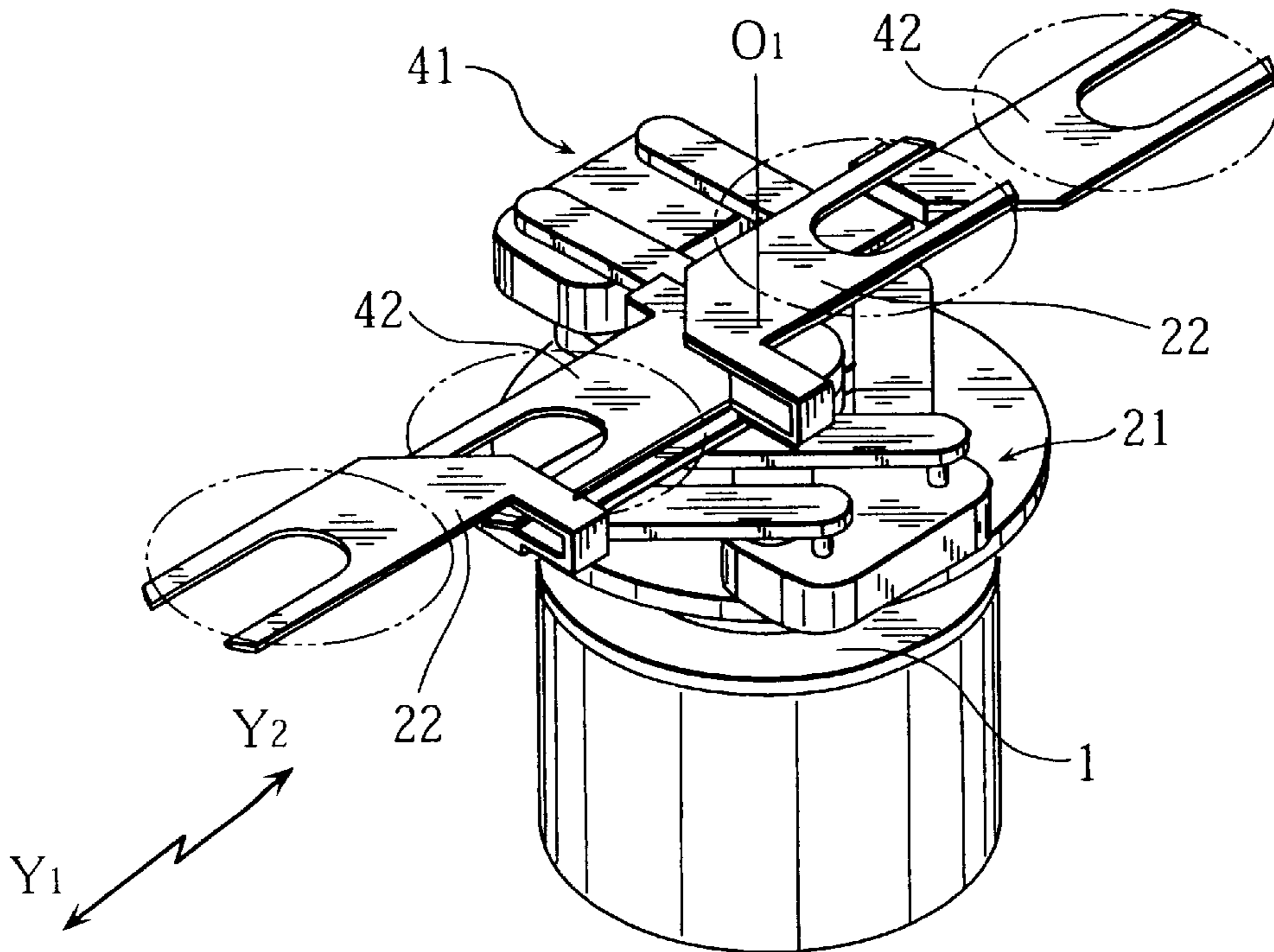


Fig. 14

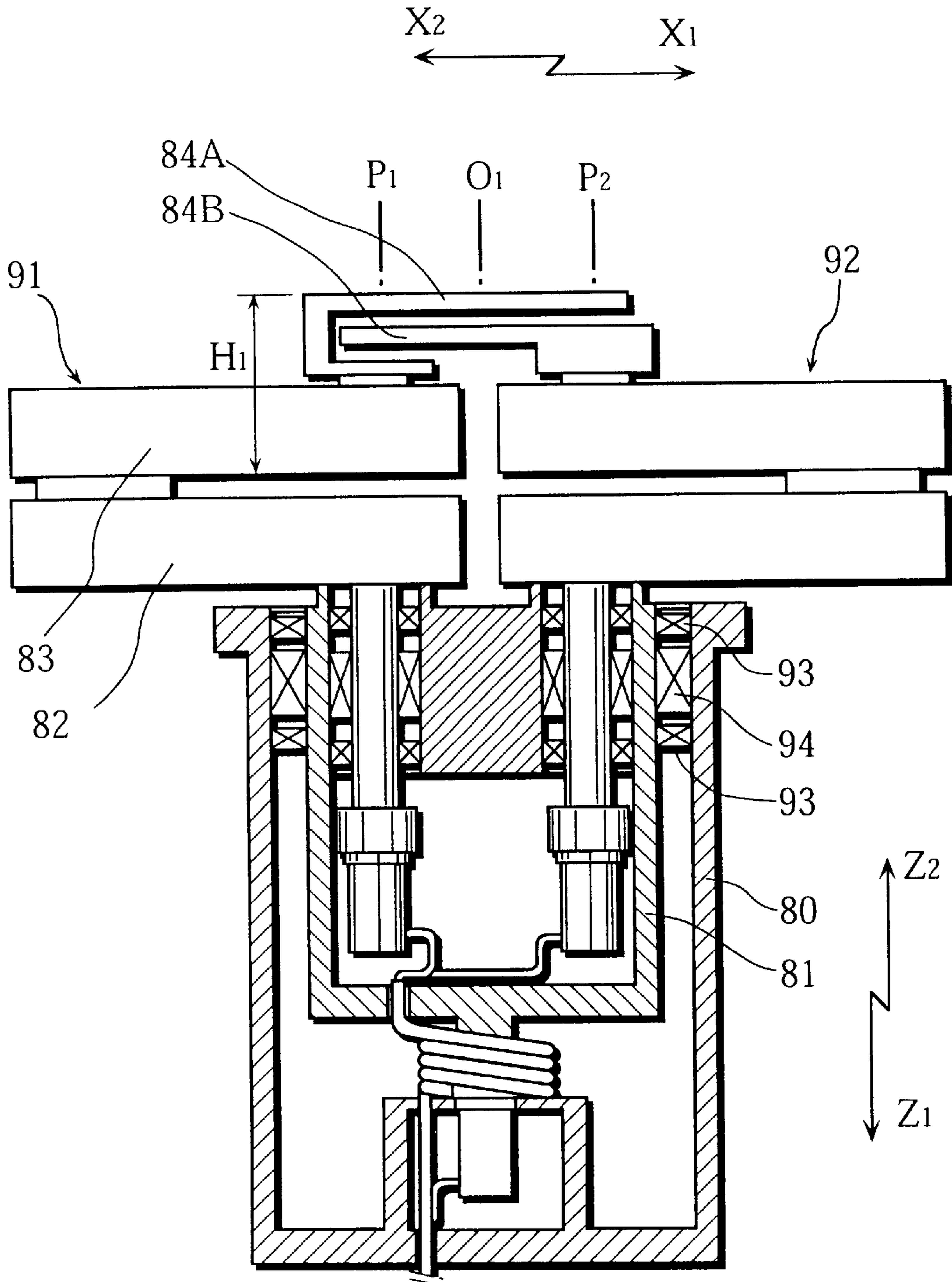


Fig. 15

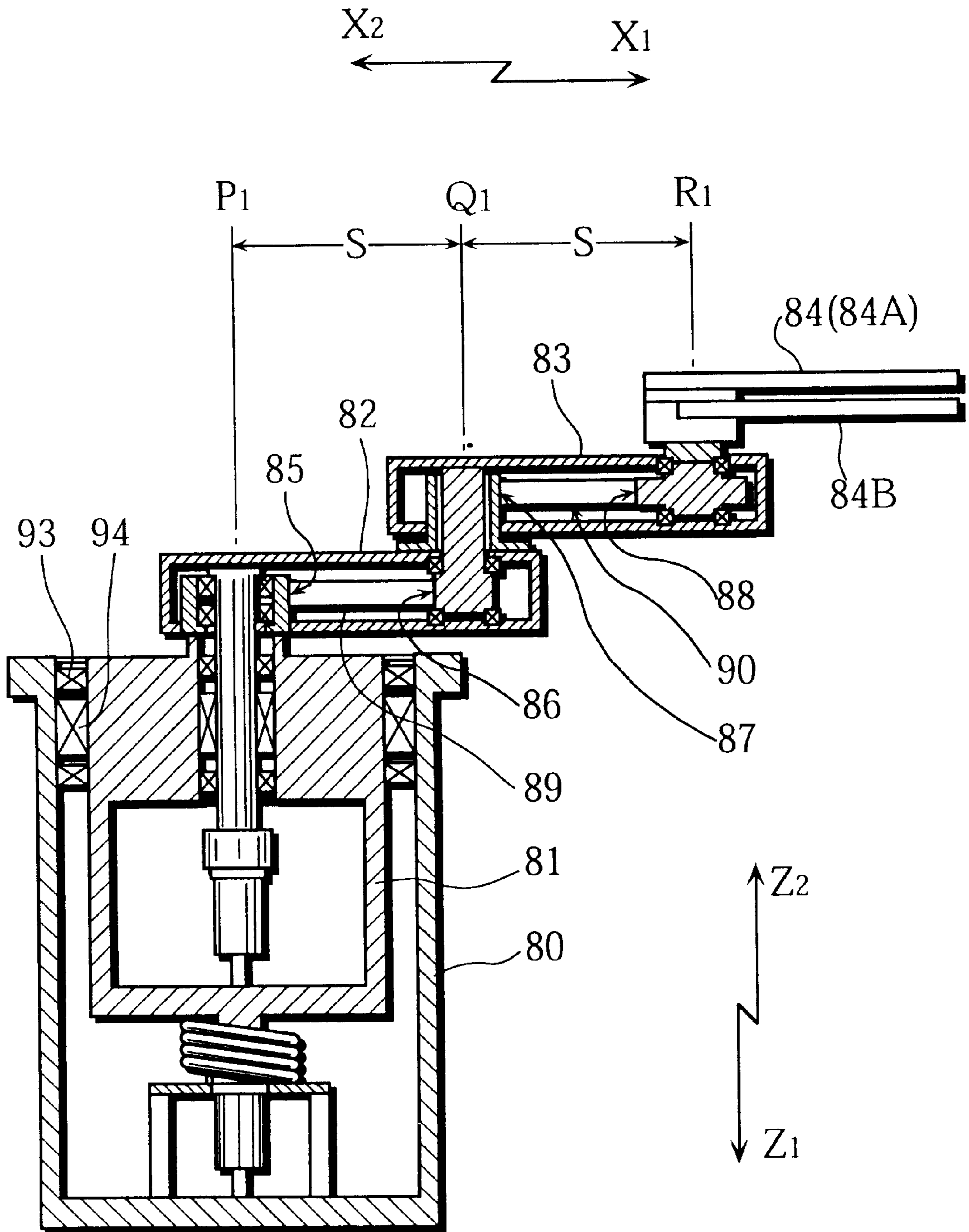


Fig. 16

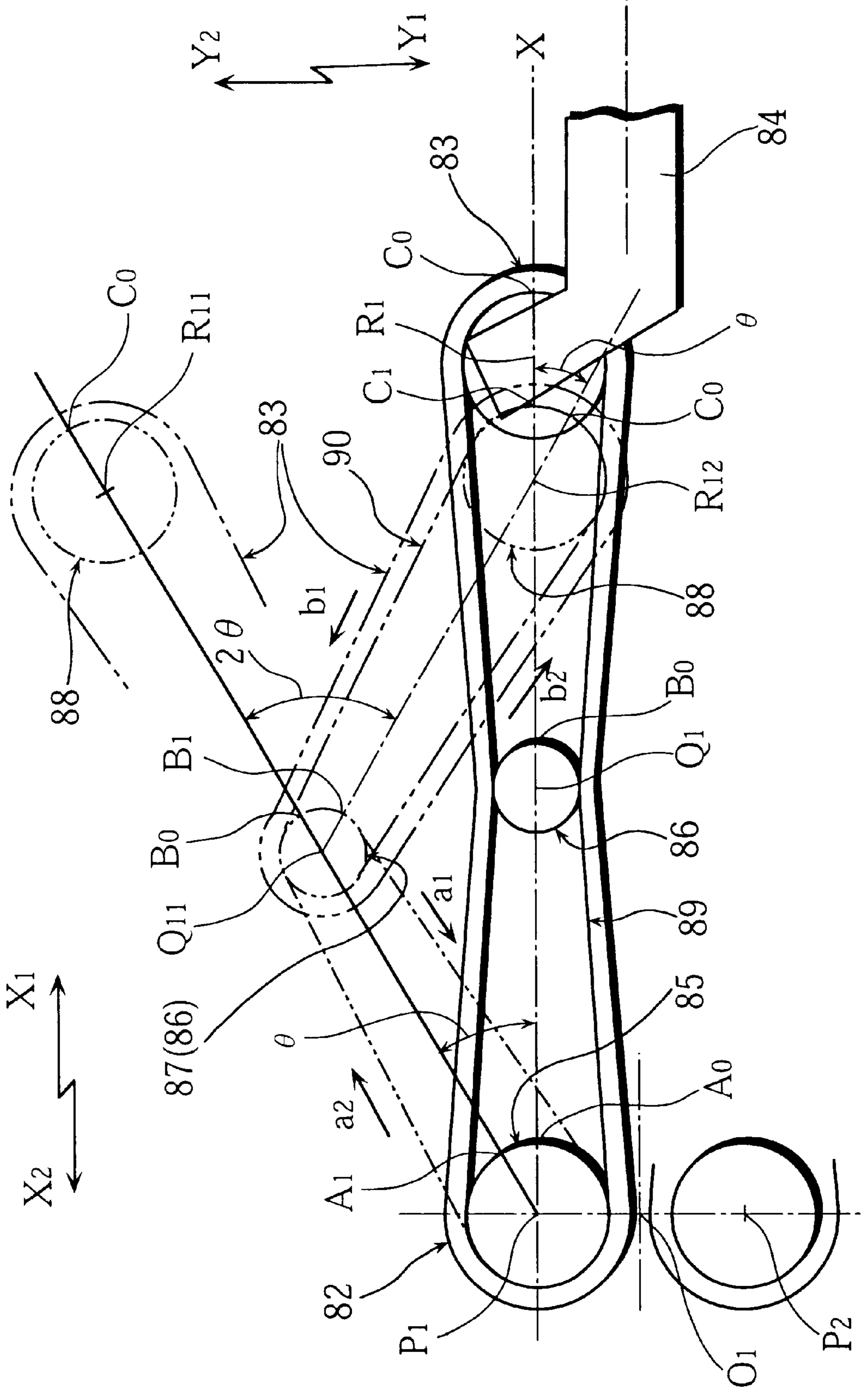
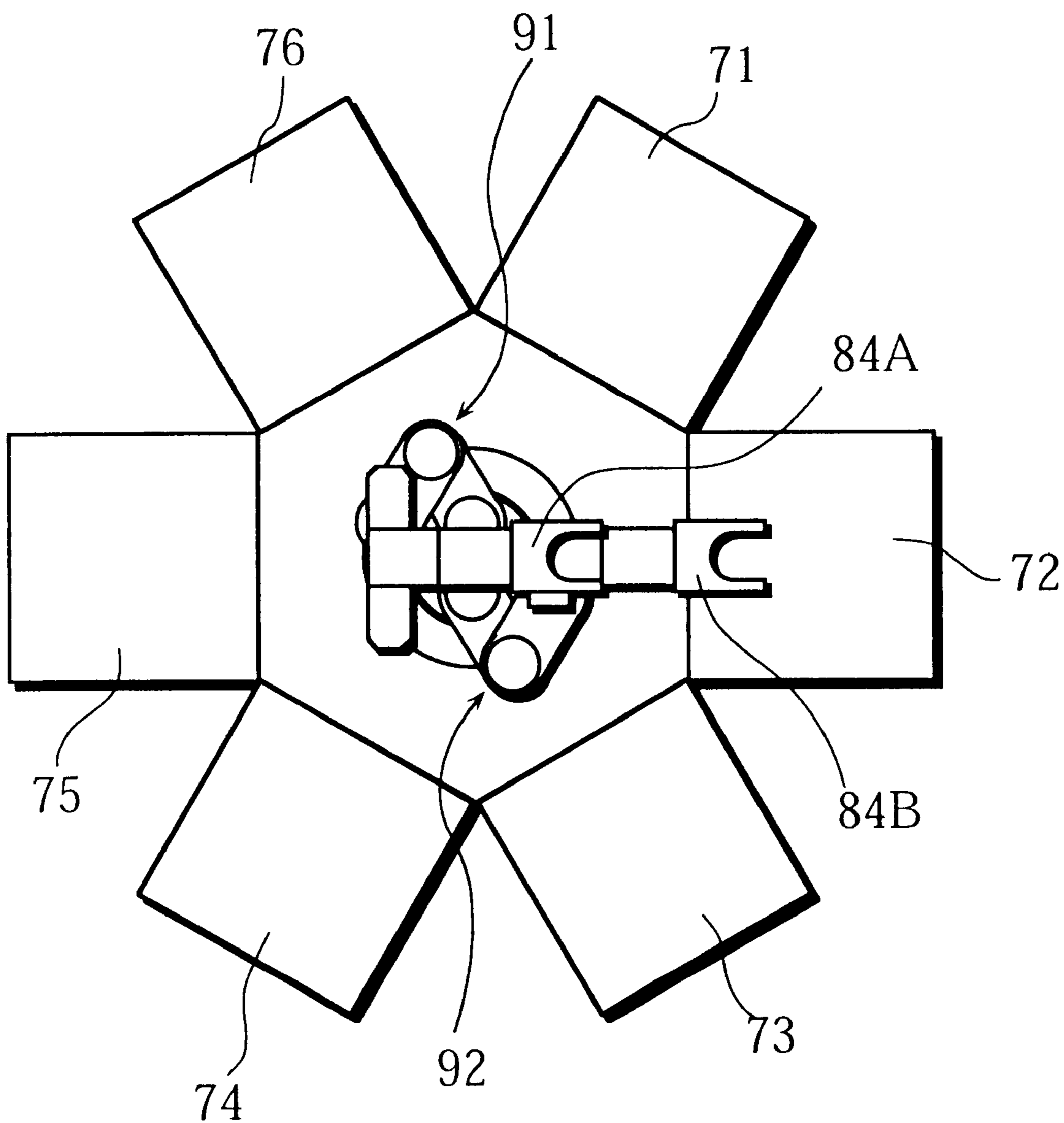


Fig. 17



TWO-ARMED TRANSFER ROBOT

Matter enclosed in heavy brackets [] appears in the original patent but forms no part of this reissue specification; matter printed in italics indicates the additions made by reissue.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a two-armed transfer robot useful for semi-conductor manufacturing equipment, liquid crystal display processing equipment and the like. More particularly, the present invention relates to a two-armed transfer robot for transferring workpieces between processing chambers under a vacuum.

2. Description of the Related Art

In general, transfer robots are used for semi-conductor manufacturing equipment, liquid crystal display processing equipment and the like. The robot has at least one arm mechanism provided with a handling member. An object to be processed or workpiece such as a silicon wafer is placed on the handling member. The arm mechanism is capable of moving horizontally in a straight line as well as rotating in a horizontal plane. A plurality of processing chambers for performing various kinds of processing are arranged around a rotation axis of the robot. With the use of the transfer robot, the workpiece is suitably brought to and taken away from a selected one of the processing chambers.

For improving efficiency in the transferring operation, use has been made of the so-called two-armed transfer robot having two arm mechanisms. Each arm mechanism has a free end at which a handling member is mounted.

A conventional two-armed transfer robot is disclosed in Japanese Patent Application Laid-open No. 7(1995)-142552 for example.

Referring to FIGS. 14–17 of the accompanying drawings, the prior art robot includes a stationary base frame **80**, an inner frame **81** and a first arm **82**. The inner frame is rotatable about a vertical axis O_1 , relative to the base frame **80**, while the first arm is rotatable about a first axis P_1 extending in parallel to the axis O_1 . The rotation of the inner frame **81** is actuated by a driving device fixed to the base frame, while the rotation of the first arm **82** is actuated by a driving device fixed to the inner frame **81**.

Reference numeral **83** indicates a second arm which is rotatable relative to the first arm **82** about a second axis Q_1 , extending in parallel to the first axis P_1 , while reference numeral **84A** indicates a handling member which is rotatable relative to the arm **83** about a third axis R_1 extending in parallel to the second axis Q_1 . Reference numeral **85** indicates a first rotation-transmitting member which is fixed to the inner frame **81** coaxially with the first axis P_1 , while reference numeral **86** indicates a second rotation-transmitting member which is fixed to the second arm **83** coaxially with the second axis Q_1 .

Reference numeral **87** indicates a third rotation-transmitting member fixed to the first arm **82** coaxially with the second axis Q_1 , while reference numeral **88** indicates a fourth rotation-transmitting member fixed to the handling member **84** coaxially with the third axis R_1 .

A first connecting member **89** is provided between the first rotation-transmitting member **85** and the second rotation-transmitting member **86**, while a second connecting member **90** is provided between the third rotation-transmitting member **87** and the fourth rotation-transmitting

member **88**. The distance S between the first and second axes is equal to the distance between the third and fourth axes. The radius ratio of the first rotation-transmitting member **85** to the second rotation-transmitting member **86** is 2 to 1. The radius ratio of the fourth rotation-transmitting member **88** to the third rotation-transmitting member **87** is also 2 to 1.

Chain sprockets or pulleys may be used for the first to fourth rotation-transmitting members **85–88**. Correspondingly, the first and second connecting members **89, 90** may be chains or timing belts.

The first arm mechanism **91** is made up of the above-mentioned elements **82–90**. A second arm mechanism **92**, which is symmetrical to the first arm mechanism with respect to the X—X line, is supported for rotation about the second axis P_2 extending in parallel to the axis O_1 .

Thus, the distance between the axis O_1 , and the first axis P_1 is equal to that between the axis O_1 and the second axis P_2 . The two-armed transfer robot is made up of the above elements **80–92**.

The operations of the first and the second arm mechanisms **91, 92** are symmetrical with respect to the X—X line and substantially the same. Therefore, description will be made to the operation of the first arm mechanism **91**.

First, it is assumed that the inner frame **81** is kept stationary to the fixed base frame **80**, and that the first, second and third axes P_1, Q_1, R_1 are initially located on a common straight line, as shown in FIG. 16. Starting from this state, the first arm **82** is rotated counterclockwise through an angle θ about the first axis P_1 .

During the above operation, the first rotation-transmitting member **85** is stationary, while the second axis Q_1 is rotated counterclockwise through the angle θ to be brought to the Q_{11} position. As a result, a Y_1 -side portion of the first connecting member **89** is wound around the first rotation-transmitting member **85**, whereas a Y_2 -side portion is unwound from the first rotation-transmitting member **85**.

Thus, the first connecting member **89** is shifted in a direction shown by arrows a_1 and a_2 . As a result, the second rotation-transmitting member **86** is rotated clockwise about the second axis Q_1 .

As previously mentioned, the radius ratio of the first rotation-transmitting member **85** to the second rotation-transmitting member **86** is 2 to 1. Thus, when the first arm **82** is rotated counterclockwise about the first axis P_1 through the angle θ , the second rotation-transmitting member **86** is rotated clockwise about the second axis Q_{11} through an angle 2θ .

At this time, since the second rotation-transmitting member **86** is fixed to the second arm **83**, the second rotation-transmitting member **86** and the second arm **83** are rotated clockwise about the second axis Q_1 through an angle 2θ .

If the second arm **83** is not moved relative to the first arm **82**, the third axis is brought to the R_{11} position shown by broken lines when the first arm **82** is rotated counterclockwise about the first axis P_1 through an angle θ , starting from the initial state where the first, the second and the third axes P_1, Q_1, R_1 are positioned on the same line. Actually, however, the second rotation-transmitting member **86** is rotated clockwise about the second axis Q_{11} through an angle 2θ . Therefore, the third axis R_{11} is rotated clockwise about the second axis Q_{11} through the angle 2θ , and brought to the R_{12} position.

As a result, after the first arm **82** is rotated counterclockwise about the first axis P_1 through an angle θ , the third axis R_{12} is still on the straight line extending through the first and the third axis P_1 and R_1 .

Further, when the second arm **83** is rotated clockwise about the second axis Q_{11} through an angle 2θ so that the third axis is brought to the R_{12} position, a Y_2 -side portion of the second connecting member **90** is wound around the third rotation-transmitting member **87**, whereas a Y_1 -side portion

is unwound from the third rotation-transmitting member **87**. As a result, the second connecting member **90** is shifted in a direction b_1-b_2 shown in FIG. 16. Thus, the fourth rotation-transmitting member **88** is rotated counterclockwise about the third axis R_{12} .

When the second arm **83** is rotated clockwise about the second axis Q_{11} through an angle 2θ as described above, the fourth rotation-transmitting member **88** is rotated counterclockwise about the third axis R_{12} through an angle θ since the radius ratio of the fourth rotation-transmitting member **88** to the third rotation-transmitting member **87** is 2 to 1. As a result, a point C_o of the fourth rotation-transmitting member **88** is brought to a point C_1 on the straight line passing through the first and the third axes P_1, R_{12} .

Upon rotation of the first arm **82** about the first axis P_1 in the counterclockwise direction as described above, the first arm mechanism **91** is actuated in the X-direction. Accordingly, the handling member **84A** is moved along the line passing through the first and the third axes P_1, R_1 . During this movement, however, the handling member **84A** does not change its attitude or orientation since it is fixed to the fourth rotation-transmitting member **88**.

Likewise, the second arm mechanism **92** is actuated in the X-direction, while the second handling member **84B** keeping its initial attitude along the line passing through the first and the third axes P_2, R_2 .

The first and the second handling members **84A, 84B** are arranged between the axes P_1, P_2 as viewed in the Y_1-Y_2 direction.

Further, the extremities of the handling members **84A, 84B** are vertically spaced from each other. Thus, upon actuation of the arm mechanisms **91, 92**, the handling members **84A, 84B** can move along the X—X line passing through the axis O_1 without interfering with each other.

When the inner frame **81** is rotated about the axis O_1 , the first and the second arm mechanisms **91, 92** are simultaneously rotated about the axis O_1 .

As shown in FIG. 17, a suitable number (six in the figure) of processing chambers are arranged around the axis O_1 of the two-armed transfer robot. Workpieces are transferred by the robot to these chambers to be processed.

The prior art transfer robot has been found to have the following disadvantages. First, the fourth rotation-transmitting member **88** and the second connecting member **90** are provided at the extremity of the second arm **83** for maintaining the initial orientation of the handling member **84** along the P_1-R_1 line. Therefore, the height H_1 (see FIG. 15) of the arm mechanism is made unfavorably large. This requires that each processing chamber have a large insertion window to allow the passage of the arm mechanism.

Further, as shown in FIGS. 14–16, the axis P_1 of the first arm mechanism **91** and the axis P_2 of the second arm mechanism **92** are spaced from each other, with the axis O_1 of the inner frame **81** located therebetween. This arrangement renders the rotation radius of the inner frame **81** unfavorably large.

Accordingly, the bearings **93** provided around the inner frame **81** have an unfavorably large diameter, and the magnetic fluid seal **94** for hermetic sealing suffers the same problem. With the use of such bearings and magnetic fluid

seal, the overall size of the robot is also increased. Therefore, the price of the robot is rendered unduly high.

Further, the driving devices for linearly moving the handling members **84A, 84B** are mounted on the inner frame **81**. Thus, the driving devices are rotated together with the inner frame **81**. For supplying the driving devices with electricity, use is made of a cable extending from the base frame **80**. Thus, the rotation angle or the number of rotation of the inner frame **81** is limited for preventing the cable from breaking.

For realizing the above-mentioned prevention, a suitable monitoring device and a controlling unit are needed to stop the rotation of the inner frame **81** before the rotation angle of the frame exceeds a predetermined threshold value (540° for example). However, such additional devices make the robot expensive. More importantly, the additional devices do not eliminate the limitation to the rotation angle. Thus, the conventional robot is not only expensive but inconvenient to operate.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It is, therefore, an object of the present invention to provide a compact, inexpensive two-armed transfer robot which is easy to operate and capable of providing good productivity.

According to a first aspect of the present invention, there is provided a two-armed transfer robot including: a first double-pantograph mechanism and a second double-pantograph mechanism symmetrical to the first double-pantograph mechanism with respect to a vertical plane. Each double-pantograph mechanism includes a first pantograph assembly and a second pantograph assembly. The first pantograph assembly has an inner link, a pair of first intermediate links and an outer link associated with the inner link via the first intermediate links. The second pantograph assembly includes the outer link in common with the first pantograph assembly, a pair of second intermediate links and a hand-supporting link associated with the outer link via the second intermediate links. The inner link is common to the first and the second double-pantograph mechanisms. The robot further includes: rotation-transmitting mechanisms provided between the first and the second intermediate links of the respective double-pantograph mechanism; first and second handling members supported by the hand-supporting links of the first and the second double-pantograph mechanisms, respectively; a stationary base member; first to third shafts coaxially rotatable about a first axis extending vertically; and first to third driving devices for actuating the first to the third shafts, respectively. The driving devices are fixed to the base member.

One of the first intermediate links of the first double-pantograph mechanism is fixed to the first shaft for rotation about the first axis, while one of the first intermediate links of the second double-pantograph mechanism is fixed to the second shaft for rotation about the first axis. The inner link is fixed to the third shaft for rotation about the first axis. The other first intermediate links of the respective double-pantograph mechanisms are supported by the inner link for rotation about a common second axis. The first intermediate links and second intermediate links of each double-pantograph mechanism are equal in length. The second pantograph assembly of each double-pantograph mechanism is offset away from the first axis with respect to the first pantograph assembly of said each double-pantograph mechanism. The first and the second handling members are vertically spaced from each other. The handling members

are arranged not only to linearly move in horizontal lines passing through the first axis but to rotate simultaneously around the first axis.

With such an arrangement, the first to the third shafts are coaxially supported about a common vertical axis. Thus, the bearings and the seals provided around the respective shafts are made small in diameter. As a result, the overall size of the transfer robot is rendered relatively small as compared with the conventional robot. Accordingly, the price of the robot is reduced.

Further, according to the present invention, the pantograph assembly carrying a handling member is made advantageously small in thickness since there is no need to use the conventional rotation-transmitting member and connecting member described above. Thus, the height H_2 of the base portions of the respective handling members is reduced. Accordingly, the size of the insertion window or each processing chamber is also reduced.

Further, the first to the third driving devices are attached to the stationary base member. Therefore, unlike the conventional robot, there is no limitation to the rotational angle of the first and the second handling members around the first axis. Thus, the present invention serves to increase productivity.

The second intermediate links of the respective double-pantograph mechanisms may be arranged in a common plane.

The hand-supporting link of one double-pantograph mechanism may be attached to an upper surface of each second intermediate link of said one double-pantograph mechanism, while the hand-supporting link of the other double-pantograph mechanism may be attached to a lower surface of each second intermediate link of said other double-pantograph mechanism.

The first double-pantograph mechanism may include a third handling member which is attached to the hand-supporting link of the first double-pantograph mechanism in a manner that the third handling member projects opposite to the first handling member. Similarly, the second double-pantograph mechanism may include a fourth handling member which is attached to the hand-supporting link of the second double-pantograph mechanism in a manner that the fourth handling member projects opposite to the second handling member.

Each of the first to the third shafts may be rotatably supported via a magnetic fluid seal for hermetic sealing.

Other objects, features and advantages of the present invention will be fully understood from the following detailed description given with reference to the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In the accompanying drawings

FIGS. 1A-1B are perspective views illustrating the operation of a double-pantograph mechanism of a two-armed transfer robot according to the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a plan view showing the robot of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is a front view showing the robot of FIG. 1;

FIG. 4 is a sectional view taken along lines IV-IV in FIG. 2;

FIG. 5 is a sectional view taken along lines V-V in FIG. 2;

FIG. 6 is a sectional view taken along lines VI-VI in FIG. 2;

FIG. 7 is an enlarged view showing the handling members of the robot of FIG. 1;

FIG. 8 is a plan view showing the two double-pantograph mechanisms of the robot in operation;

FIGS. 9A-9B are plan views illustrating the operation of the double-pantograph mechanism;

FIG. 10 is a plan view showing modified rotation-transmitting mechanisms;

FIG. 11 is a sectional view taken along lines XI-XI in FIG. 10;

FIG. 12 is a front view showing a modified arrangement for the handling members;

FIGS. 13A-13B are perspective views showing another embodiment according to the present invention;

FIG. 14 is a front view showing, partly in section, a conventional transfer robot;

FIG. 15 is a sectional view showing the conventional robot of FIG. 14;

FIG. 16 is a plan view illustrating an arm mechanism of the conventional robot in operation; and

FIG. 17 is a plan view showing the conventional robot surrounded by processing chambers.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The present invention will now be described in more specific detail on the basis of embodiments shown in the accompanying drawings.

Referring to FIGS. 1-9, there is illustrated a two-armed transfer robot according to a first embodiment of the present invention. The transfer robot includes a stationary base member 1 and first to third shafts 2-4. The shafts 2-4 are supported by the base member 1 via suitable bearings. The shafts 2-4 are coaxially rotatable about a first axis O_1 extending vertically. The base member 1 may be installed in a vacuum changer V.C. For maintaining the vacuum condition in the vacuum chamber, magnetic fluid seals 5-7 are provided around the respective shafts 2-4.

The illustrated robot also includes first to third driving devices 8-10 for actuation of the respective shafts 2-4. Each driving device is associated with corresponding one of the shafts via a suitable speed reducer, a rotation-transmitting member such as a sprocket or a pulley for example, and a connecting member such as a chain or a timing belt for example.

As shown in FIG. 8, the robot further includes a first pantograph assembly 15 made up of an inner link 11, a pair of first intermediate links 12, 13 and an outer link 14. The inner link 11 extends from the upper end of the third shaft 4 driven by the third driving device 10. An end of the first intermediate link 12 is connected to the inner link 11 for pivotal movement about a second axis O_2 , while the opposite end of the first intermediate link 12 is connected to the outer link 14 for pivotal movement about a third axis O_3 (see also FIGS. 5-6). An end of the first intermediate link 13 is fixed to the first shaft 2 driven by the first driving device 8 (see also FIG. 4), while the opposite end of the first intermediate link 13 is connected to the outer link 14 for pivotal movement about another third axis O_3 . Thus, upon actuation of the first driving device 8, the first intermediate link 13 is caused to pivot about the first axis O_1 .

Similarly, a second pantograph assembly 19 is made up of the outer link 14, a pair of second intermediate links 16, 17 and a hand-supporting link 18. Each of the second interme-

intermediate links **16, 17** has an end connected to the outer link **14** for pivotal movement about a fourth axis O_4 , and the opposite end connected to the hand-supporting link **18** for pivotal movement about a fifth axis O_5 . The second pantograph assembly **19** is offset in the X_2 -direction with respect to the first pantograph assembly **15**. Thus, the line connecting the two fourth axes O_4 is spaced from the line connecting the two third axes O_3 in the X_2 -direction.

In the illustrated embodiment, the distance between the first axis O_1 and the third axis O_3 of the first intermediate link **13** is equal to the distance between the second axis O_2 and the third axis O_3 of the first intermediate link **12**. The former distance is also equal to the distance between the fourth axis O_4 and the fifth axis O_5 of each second intermediate link.

A rotation-transmitting mechanism **20** is provided between the first intermediate link **13** and the second intermediate link **16** (FIG. 4). The rotation-transmitting mechanism **20** includes a first gear **20A** fixed to the second intermediate link **16**, and a second gear **20B** fixed to the first intermediate link **13**. The first and the second gears are arranged in mesh with each other.

The first shaft **2**, the first driving device **8**, the inner link **11** and the above-mentioned elements **12–20** are associated to form a first double-pantograph mechanism **21**.

The robot also includes a second double-pantograph mechanism **41** having an arrangement which is substantially identical to that of the first double-pantograph mechanism **21**. The second double-pantograph mechanism **41** is positionally symmetrical to the first double-pantograph mechanism **21** with respect to the first axis O_1 .

Specifically, a first pantograph assembly **35** is provided which is made up of the inner link **11**, a pair of first intermediate links **32, 33** and a second (outer) link **34**. An end of the first intermediate link **32** is connected to the inner link **11** for pivotal movement about the second axis O_2 , while the opposite end of the first intermediate link **32** is pivotably connected to the outer link **34** (see FIGS. 5–6). An end of the first intermediate link **33** is fixed to the second shaft **3** driven by the second driving device **9** (see FIG. 4), while the opposite end of the first intermediate link **33** is pivotably connected to the outer link **34**. Thus, upon actuation of the second driving device **9**, the first intermediate link **33** is caused to pivot about the first axis O_1 .

Similarly, a second pantograph assembly **39** is made up of the outer link **34**, a pair of second intermediate links **36, 37** and a hand-supporting link **38**. Each of the second intermediate links **36, 37** has an end which is pivotably connected to the outer link **34**, and the opposite end which is pivotably connected to the hand-supporting link **18**. The second pantograph assembly **39** is offset in the X_1 -direction with respect to the first pantograph assembly **35**.

A similar rotation-transmitting mechanism **40** is provided between the first intermediate link **33** and the second intermediate link **36**. The rotation-transmitting mechanism **40** includes a first gear **40A** fixed to the second intermediate link **36**, and a second gear **40B** fixed to the first intermediate link **33**. The first and the second gears are arranged in mesh with each other.

The second shaft **3**, the second driving device **9**, the inner link **11** and the elements **32–40** are associated to form a second double-pantograph mechanism **41**. As shown in FIG. 2, the first and the second double-pantograph mechanisms **21, 41** are symmetrically arranged in the X_1 – X_2 direction with respect to the line connecting the first and the second axes O_1, O_2 .

The hand-supporting link **18** of the first double-pantograph mechanism **21** carries a first handling member **22**, while the hand-supporting link **38** of the second double-pantograph mechanism **41** carries a second handling member **42**. The first and the second handling members **22, 42** are vertically spaced from each other. As will be described hereinafter, each handling member is actuated not only to linearly move along the horizontal line connecting the first and the second axes O_1, O_2 , but to simultaneously rotate around the first axis O_1 .

The illustrated transfer robot is made up of the elements **1–42** described above. A suitable number of processing chambers are arranged around the first axis O_1 in a known manner.

Description will now be made to the operation of the first double-pantograph mechanism **21**. It is assumed that the straight line passing through the first and the second axes O_1, O_2 initially extends in the Y -direction, as shown in FIG. 2.

Upon actuation of the first driving device **8**, the first shaft **2** and the first intermediate link **13** are rotated, clockwise for example as viewed from above, about the first axis O_1 through an angle θ . Then, the first pantograph assembly **15** is shifted in the Y_1 -direction with the first and the second axes O_1, O_2 fixed at the original positions.

In the above instance, the first intermediate link **13** is rotated clockwise about the third axis O_3 through an angle θ with respect to the outer link **14**. Consequently, the second intermediate link **16** is rotated, via the rotation-transmitting mechanism **20**, counterclockwise about the third axis O_4 through an angle θ with respect to the second disk **14**. Thus, the second pantograph assembly **19** is shifted in the Y_1 -direction with respect to the fourth axes O_4 .

As previously described, the distance between the first axis O_1 and the third axis O_3 of the first intermediate link **13** is equal to the distance between the fourth axis O_4 and the fifth axis O_5 of each second intermediate link. Thus, when the distance between the first axis O_1 and the third axis O_3 of the first intermediate link **13** is referred to as L_1 (see FIG. 9A), and the distance between the fourth and the fifth axes O_3, O_4 is referred to as L_2 , the distance X_{11} between the first and the fifth axes O_1, O_5 is equal to the distance L_2 .

Referring to FIG. 9B where the first intermediate link **13** has been rotated clockwise about the first axis O_1 through an angle θ , distances X_{12}, X_{13} and X_{14} are defined between the axes as illustrated. Here, $X_{12}+L_2=X_{13}+X_{14}$ holds. Further, the following relations hold.

$$x_{12}=L_1 \cos \theta, \text{ and}$$

$$x_{13}=L_1 \cos \theta.$$

From these, a relation that $X_{14}=L_2$ is obtained.

Therefore, it is known that $X_{11}=X_{14}=L_2$. Thus, upon clockwise or counterclockwise rotation of the first intermediate link **13** about the first axis O_1 , the fifth axes O_5 are always held on the same line (which means that the hand-supporting link **18** maintains its initial attitude) as the hand-supporting link **18** is being moved in the Y -direction. Therefore, the distance L_2 between the hand-supporting link **18** and the line connecting the first axis O_1 and the second axis O_2 is kept constant while the first double-pantograph mechanism **21** is actuated.

The handling members **22, 42** are arranged so that the center lines of the respective members coincide, as viewed from above, with the line connecting the first axis O_1 and the second axis O_2 . However, as previously described, the handling members **22, 42** are vertically spaced from each other. Thus, when moved horizontally, the handling members do not interfere with each other.

In transferring operation, the first handling member **22** is linearly moved in the Y_1 -direction to a predetermined position (see FIG. 1B) upon actuation of the first double-pantograph mechanism **21**. At the illustrated position, a workpiece is shifted onto or away from the handling member **22**.

After the workpiece is shifted, the first double-pantograph mechanism **21** is moved inward to bring the first handling member **22** to the position illustrated in FIG. 1A. The position of FIG. 1A will be hereinafter referred to as "position of horizontal rotation".

When the first handling member **22** is at the position of horizontal rotation, the second double-pantograph mechanism **41** will be operated. As is easily understood, the operation of the second double-pantograph mechanism **41** is basically the same as that of the first double-pantograph mechanism **21**.

The second handling member **42** is moved in the Y_1 -direction when only the second driving device **3** is actuated. At this time, the second double-pantograph mechanism **41** is horizontally shifted outward to a predetermined position. In this position, a workpiece is shifted onto or away from the second handling member **42**. Thereafter, the second double-pantograph mechanism **41** is moved inward toward the first axis O_1 to bring the second handling member **42** to the position of horizontal rotation.

The first and the second handling members **22**, **42** are simultaneously rotated around the first axis O_1 in the following manner, specifically, with both handling members held at the position of horizontal rotation, the first to the third driving devices **8-10** are synchronously actuated for rotating the first to the third shafts **2-4** in the same direction and at the same angular speed. As a result, the elements attached to the first to the third shafts **2-4** are moved in the same direction. Thus, the above-mentioned elements as a whole are rotated clockwise or counterclockwise about the first axis O_1 , with the handling members **22**, **42** held in the position of horizontal rotation.

After the first and the second handling members **22**, **42** are simultaneously rotated through a predetermined angle, one of the first and the second handling members **22**, **42** is selectively moved outward in a horizontally-extending line passing through the first axis O_1 . Then, workpieces are shifted onto or away from the handling members **24**, **44**.

As previously described, the distance between the first axis O_1 and the third axis O_3 of the first intermediate links **13**, **33** is equal to the distance between the second axis O_2 and the third axis O_3 of the other first intermediate links **12**, **32**. The former distance is also equal to the distance between the fourth axis O_4 and the fifth axis O_5 of the second intermediate links **16-17** and **36-37**. Further, the second pantograph assemblies **19**, **39** are outwardly offset with respect to the first pantograph assemblies **15**, **35**, respectively. With such an arrangement, upon actuation of the first and the second double-pantograph mechanisms **21**, **41**, it is possible to linearly move hand-supporting links **18**, **38** in parallel to the line connecting the first and the second axes O_1 , O_2 , while maintaining the horizontal distance between the hand-supporting links **18** and **38**.

Further, it is possible to provide a simplified transmission assembly for transmitting power from the driving devices to the double-pantograph mechanisms. Thus, the height H_2 (see FIGS. **3**, **4** and **7**) is advantageously small. Accordingly, each processing chamber can be provided with a small window for insertion of the handling members.

Further, the first to the third shafts **2-4** are coaxially arranged for rotation about a common vertical axis. Thus,

the bearings supporting the first to the third shafts **2-4** and the magnetic fluid seals **5-7** can be made small in diameter. Therefore, the transfer robot as a whole is advantageously compact and inexpensive. Since the shafts for actuating the first and the second arm mechanisms are coaxially supported about the first axis O_1 , the distance between the transfer robot and each processing chamber is equal.

Further, unlike the prior art robot, the driving devices **8-10** of the present invention are fixed to the stationary base member **1**, and thus the power cable for supplying the driving devices with electricity does not break due to the rotation of the handling members **22**, **42**. Such an arrangement makes it possible for the first and the second handling members **22**, **42** to be rotated around the first axis O_1 through any desired angle. Thus, the robot of the present invention is more conveniently used than the prior art robot, so that productivity is improved. Further, the robot of the present invention is inexpensive since no additional devices for monitoring the rotation angle of the handling members are needed.

Further, it is possible to reduce the height H_2 for the base portions of the handling members **22**, **42** by arranging the second intermediate links of the respective second pantograph assemblies in the same plane.

Referring to FIGS. **10** and **11**, a modified rotation-transmitting mechanism **20** provided between the first and the second intermediate links **12**, **17** includes a pulley **20D** attached to the first intermediate link **12**, a pulley **20C** attached to the second intermediate link **17** and a belt **20E** extending between the above pulleys. The pulley **20D** is concentric with the third axis O_3 , while the pulley **20C** is concentric with the fourth axis O_4 . A similar rotation-transmitting mechanism may additionally be provided between the first intermediate link **13** and the second intermediate link **16**.

FIG. **12** illustrates a modified pair of second pantograph assemblies. In these assemblies, the hand-supporting link **38** of the double-pantograph mechanism **41** is attached to the upper surfaces of the respective second intermediate links **36**, **37**, while the other hand-supporting link **18** is attached to the lower surfaces of the respective second intermediate links **16**, **17**. With such an arrangement, the height H_2 of the base portions of the handling members **22**, **42** is minimized.

FIG. **13** shows another embodiment of the present invention. According to this embodiment, each of the hand-supporting links **18**, **38** is provided with two handling members horizontally projecting opposite to each other.

The two handling members of each double-pantograph mechanism are moved in the Y_1 - Y_2 direction for example. Thus, four workpieces can be shifted onto or away from the respective handling members, while the robot is held at a single angular position about the first axis O_1 . Typically, the two arm mechanisms will not be moved in the same direction simultaneously. However, it is possible to move the arm mechanisms in the opposite directions for handling two workpieces at the same time.

In this way, the operation time of the robot is reduced, and therefore productivity is improved.

The preferred embodiments of the present invention being thus described, it is obvious that the same may be varied in many ways.

Such variations are not to be regarded as a departure from the spirit and scope of the present invention, and all such modifications as would be obvious to those skilled in the art are intended to be included within the scope of the following claims.

We claim:

1. A two-armed transfer robot comprising:

a first double-pantograph mechanism and a second double-pantograph mechanism, each double-pantograph mechanism including a first pantograph assembly and a second pantograph assembly, the first pantograph assembly having an inner link, a pair of first intermediate links and an outer link associated with the inner link via the first intermediate links, the second pantograph assembly including the outer link in common with the first pantograph assembly, a pair of second intermediate links and a hand-supporting link associated with the outer link via the second intermediate links, the inner link being common to the first and the second double-pantograph mechanisms;

rotation-transmitting mechanisms provided between the first and the second intermediate links of the respective double-pantograph mechanism;

first and second handling members supported by the hand-supporting links of the first and the second double-pantograph mechanisms, respectively;

a stationary base member;

first to third shafts coaxially rotatable about a first axis extending vertically; and

first to third driving devices for actuating the first to the third shafts, respectively, the driving devices being fixed to the base member;

wherein one of the first intermediate links of the first double-pantograph mechanism is fixed to the first shaft for rotation about the first axis, one of the first intermediate links of the second double-pantograph mechanism being fixed to the second shaft for rotation about the first axis, the inner link being fixed to the third shaft for rotation about the first axis, the outer first intermediate links of the respective double-pantograph mechanisms being supported by the inner link for rotation

about a common second axis, the first intermediate links and second intermediate links of each double-pantograph mechanism being equal in length, the second pantograph assembly of each double-pantograph mechanism being offset away from the first axis with respect to the first pantograph assembly of said each double-pantograph mechanism, the first and the second handling members being vertically spaced from each other, the handling members being arranged not only to linearly move in horizontal lines passing through the first axis but to rotate simultaneously around the first axis.

2. The transfer robot according to claim 1, wherein the second intermediate links of the respective double-pantograph mechanisms are arranged in a common plane.

3. The transfer robot according to claim 1, wherein the hand-supporting link of one double-pantograph mechanism is attached to an upper surface of each second intermediate link of said one double-pantograph mechanism, while the hand-supporting link of the other double-pantograph mechanism is attached to a lower surface of each second intermediate link of said other double-pantograph mechanism.

4. The transfer robot according to claim 1, wherein the first double-pantograph mechanism includes a third handling member attached to the hand-supporting link of the first double-pantograph mechanism, the third handling member projecting opposite to the first handling member, while the second double-pantograph mechanism includes a fourth handling member attached to the hand-supporting link of the second double-pantograph mechanism, the fourth handling member projecting opposite to the second handling member.

5. The transfer robot according to claim 1, wherein each of the first to the third shafts are rotatably supported via a magnetic fluid seal for hermetic sealing.

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