

ORIENTATION LAYER FOR A LIQUID CRYSTAL MATERIAL

The invention relates to an orientation layer for a liquid crystal material

Liquid crystal (LC) devices normally comprise a thin cell containing a liquid crystal material, the upper and lower inside faces of the cell carrying (usually transparent) orientation layers. These innermost layers are imparting a preferred orientation to liquid crystal molecules in their vicinity by defining the actual arrangement of the liquid crystal director close to the boundary. This preferred orientation tends to persist even away from the orientation layers due to the strong interaction of the liquid crystal molecules.

In nematic liquid crystals, the boundary can be characterised by the direction of the director (azimuth and tilt) the orientating layer induces in the liquid crystal, together with a parameter – the anchoring energy – that describes the strength of this anchoring, i.e. the change of the orientation if elastic deformations apply a torque to the boundary layers.

In ferroelectric liquid crystal displays (LCD) – which are based on chiral smectic-C liquid crystals – things are more complicated, since the orientation of the smectic layers as well as the orientation of the director inside the layers have to be defined. Furthermore, the quality of the liquid crystal alignment also depends to a large degree on the liquid crystal material used. Therefore, numerous combinations of orienting layers and liquid crystal materials have been proposed.

The existence of an orientation layer can bring difficulties:

In liquid crystal displays with large spontaneous polarisation P_s such as Deformed Helix Ferroelectric (DHF) or Short-pitch Bistable Ferroelectric (SBF) or antiferroelectric liquid crystal displays, the voltage drop over the isolating orientation layer is large for a large thickness d_{OR} of the orientation layer. This voltage drop is approximately given by

$$U_{OR} = \frac{P_S d_{OR}}{\epsilon \epsilon_0}$$

where ϵ is the dielectric constant of the orienting layer and ϵ_0 is the permittivity of vacuum. Taking $P_S = 1 \text{ mC/m}^2$, $d_{OR} = 100 \text{ nm}$, $\epsilon = 3$ results in $U_{OR} = 3.8 \text{ V}$ per orienting layer.

- 5 Similar considerations hold for electroclinic liquid crystal displays (cf. e.g. S. Garroff and R. B. Meyer, Phys. Rev. Lett., 38, 848-851, 1977).

In liquid crystal displays with lower P_S , such as Alternating Polarisation Domain (APD) or Surface Stabilised Ferroelectric (SSF) liquid crystal displays, this voltage drop is smaller, but still undesirable.

- 10 In addition, SSF liquid crystal displays require thin orientation layers to avoid the build-up of polarisation charges which lead to ghost pictures in SSF liquid crystal displays.

Thus, one condition is important, namely, the orientation layer must be thin.

- 15 As a consequence, also orientation layers for SSF liquid crystal displays are thin, sometimes even monomolecular (e.g. Langmuir-Blodgett films).

- 20 The standard procedure to prepare orienting layers consists of coating the substrates with a thin polymer layer and subsequent rubbing of the layer to induce the desired orientation direction. This rubbing process has undesirable side-effects such as giving rise to dust particles, which are particularly damaging in the production of small-cell-gap (below $2\mu\text{m}$) liquid crystal displays, thus including most ferroelectric liquid crystal displays.

EP 756 193 describes a technique to align liquid crystals with a two-layer process:

A first layer of a linearly photopolymerisable material is coated onto the substrate and exposed to polarised light. This light induces crosslinking reactions in the layer, and because polarised light is used, this crosslinking induces an anisotropy in the layer. Such layers are called linearly photopolymerised polymer (LPP) layers, also known as photo-oriented polymer networks (PPN).

A second layer of nematic monomers or prepolymers is then applied. This nematic liquid crystal is oriented by the LPP layer, i.e. the anisotropy in the LPP layer is transferred to the nematic liquid crystal layer. This oriented nematic prepolymer layer is then photopolymerised and thus permanently fixed as a highly anisotropic polymer network (for such networks also the term 'liquid crystalline polymer networks', LCP's, is being used). In turn, this nematic prepolymer-based anisotropic network can act as an orienting layer for liquid crystals.

This procedure uses two layers, the LPP and the nematic prepolymer-based anisotropic network, thus doubling the overall thickness of the orientation layer. Furthermore, if the nematic prepolymer layer is of the order of or thinner than the extrapolation length [see e.g. P. G. de Gennes and J. Prost, "The Physics of Liquid Crystals", 2nd edition, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1993, p. 196], the liquid crystal can no longer average or smooth over microscopic irregularities in the orienting layer. Precise numbers for this extrapolation length are not known, but typical values quoted are larger than 100 nm. Very thin nematic prepolymer layers – and, therefore, also the nematic prepolymer-based anisotropic networks made from those prepolymer layers – will not orient homogeneously but will reflect the microscopic irregularities of the underlying LPP layer.

In total contrast to the foregoing, and in opposition to received teaching, the present invention consists in a component comprising a liquid crystal material in contact with an orientation layer, the orientation layer having a first layer of a linearly photopolymerised polymer and a second layer of a nematic prepolymer-based anisotropic network, characterised in that the overall thickness of the two layers together does not exceed 40 nanometers.

Preferably each of the layers is less than 20 nm thick.

Especially advantageous for many cases is an overall layer thickness of less than 20 nm, and most preferably the overall layer thickness is less than 10 nm.

Such orientation layers are surprisingly especially suited for use with
5 ferroelectric liquid crystal materials, such as for Deformed Helix Ferroelectric or Short-pitch Bistable Ferroelectric or Alternating Polarisation Domain or Surface Stabilised Ferroelectric or antiferroelectric liquid crystal displays, as well as for electroclinic liquid crystal displays.

The orientation layer may be patterned as for multi-domain pixel operation, in
10 other words the orientation may vary locally.

The nematic prepolymer-based anisotropic network is preferably photopolymerised, however, it is also possible to use a different polymerisation method, such as c.g. thermal polymerisation.

With orientation layers according to the invention advantageous homogeneous
15 alignments and textures of liquid crystal material and high contrast ratios are achievable, which often are superior to an orientation layer consisting of LPP only.

Furthermore, the two-layer technique allows to control the tilt angle of the second layer, the nematic prepolymer-based anisotropic network, and thus also the tilt angle of the ferroelectric liquid crystal in a ferroelectric liquid crystal display. This
20 can be very important to control the formation of chevron structures in smectic ferroelectric liquid crystal layers.

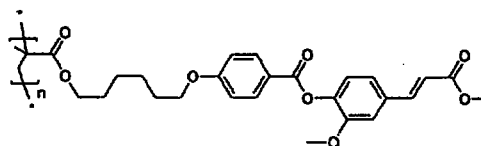
The invention will now be described by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which Figure 1 shows a liquid crystal cell embodying orientation layers according to the invention.

25 The liquid crystal cell shown schematically in Figure 1, which also corresponds to our example test-cells, consists of two identical substrate assemblies (11, 13, 15, 17) and (12, 14, 16, 18) kept apart by spacers 19 and glued together (not shown)

outside the operative area. The substrates are glass plates (11,12) coated with conductive indium-tin-oxide (ITO) electrodes (13, 14), linearly photopolymerised polymer (LPP) layers (15, 16) and liquid crystalline polymer network (LCP) layers (17,18). The cell gap is 1.6 μm .

- 5 The LPP compound used is the photoaligning material A, diluted to 0.7% polymer in cyclopentanone.

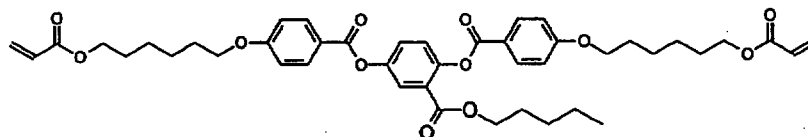
Photopolymer A:



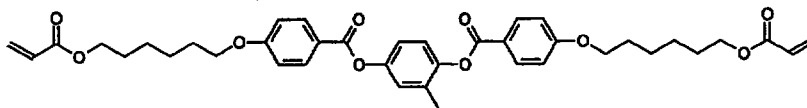
- The ITO-coated substrates are spin-coated with this solution (30 sec at 5000 rpm). After drying, the samples are cured for 15 min at 150 °C and then
10 illuminated for 3 min by polarised light from a high pressure Hg arc-lamp with filters (Schott UG11 and WG 295) to select the spectral range of 300..330 nm. The resulting thickness of the layer was determined as 9 nm, measured with a surface profiler (Alpha-Step 500 from Tencore).

- The nematic liquid crystal prepolymer used is a mixture M_{LCP} that comprises
15 the following liquid crystalline diacrylate monomers:

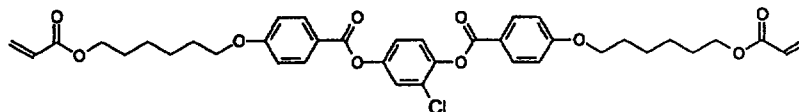
Mon1:



Mon2:



Mon3:



In addition to the diacrylate monomers, photoinitiator IRGACURE 369 from Ciba SC as well as BHT (2,6-di-tert-butyl-4-methylphenol/"butyl hydroxytoluene") which serves as an inhibitor, are added to the mixture. Thus the composition of mixture M_{LCP} is as follows:

Mon1	77 wt%
Mon2	14.5 wt%
Mon3	4.7 wt%
Irgacure 369	1.9 wt%
BHT	1.9 wt%

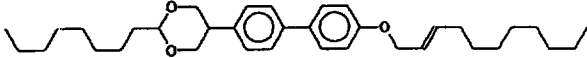
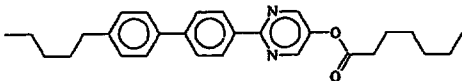
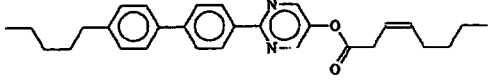
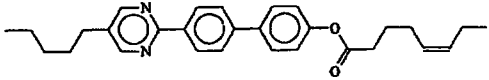
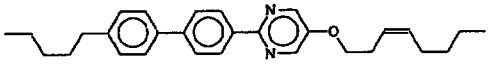
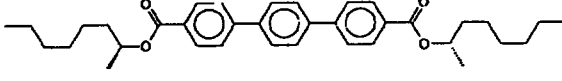
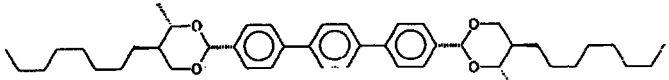
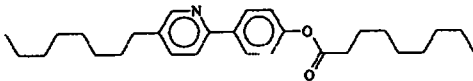
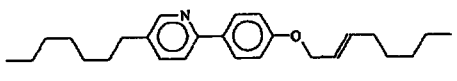
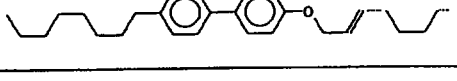
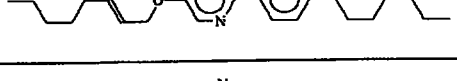
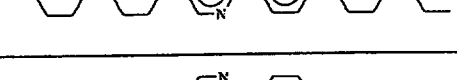
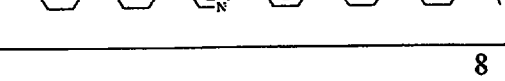
The mixture M_{LCP} is diluted to 0.7% polymer in anisole. The said LPP-coated substrates are spin-coated with this solution (30 sec at 5000 rpm). After drying, the samples are illuminated in a nitrogen atmosphere for 3 min by light from a 150 W Hg arc-lamp with no additional filters. The thus produced hybrid layer of LPP and LCP had an overall thickness of 18 nanometers.

The cells are filled with a ferroelectric liquid crystalline material, mixture SC980110 (see table I), at 110 °C by capillary action. The orientation of the ferroelectric liquid crystal layer 20 is optimised by the following forming procedure: the cell is kept for about 2 minutes at a temperature about 1 °C below the nematic-Sc* transition temperature with a 3 V (amplitude), 800 Hz square wave voltage applied and then cooled to room temperature, keeping the voltage on. During this curing process, most dislocations disappear, and a high contrast ratio of 130:1 is achieved.

This contrast ratio is the ratio of the light transmission for the sample oriented for maximum and for minimum transmission, respectively. These light transmissions

are measured in a polarising microscope with a 4/0.1 objective lens in a measuring area with an effective diameter of 0.47 mm.

Table I : Composition of SC980110

Structure	weight-%
	5.9
	1.1
	1.1
	2.2
	2.5
	25.0
	12.0
	4.7
	4.7
	4.7
	9.4
	14.0
	14.0

CLAIMS

1. Orientation layer for a liquid crystal material comprising a first layer of a linearly photopolymerised polymer and a second layer of a nematic prepolymer-based anisotropic network, characterised in that the overall thickness of the two layers together does not exceed 40 nanometers.
2. Orientation layer according to claim 1, wherein each of the two layers is less than 20 nanometers thick.
3. Orientation layer according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the overall thickness of the two layers is less than 20 nanometers.
4. Orientation layer according to any preceding claim, wherein the overall thickness of the two layers is less than 10 nanometers.
5. Orientation layer according to any preceding claim, wherein the orientation varies locally.
6. Orientation layer according to any preceding claim, wherein the second layer is in contact with a liquid crystal material.
7. Orientation layer according to Claim 6, wherein the liquid crystal material is ferroelectric.
8. Liquid crystal cell comprising an orientation layer according to any preceding claim.



9. Liquid crystal cell according to claim 8, which is of the Deformed Helix Ferroelectric (DHF) type.
10. Liquid crystal cell according to claim 8, which is of the Short-pitch Bistable Ferroelectric (SBF) type.
- 5 11. Liquid crystal cell according to claim 8, which is of the Alternating Polarisation Domain (APD) type.
12. Liquid crystal cell according to claim 8, which is of the Surface Stabilised Ferroelectric (SSF) type.
13. Liquid crystal cell according to claim 8, which is of the antiferroelectric type.
- 10 14. Liquid crystal cell according to claim 8, which is of the electroclinic type.