

The invention relates to an optical component for producing
5 linearly polarized light having a predetermined polarization
direction from incident light, the component being of use as a
polarization mask in the exposure of polarization-sensitive
layers, to the preparation of such components and to their
preferred use. The term "producing" is to be understood for the
10 purposes of this description as denoting both the actual
production of linearly polarized light from unpolarized light and
changing the polarization direction of incident light which has
already been linearly polarized.

15 Various processes and materials have recently become
known in which anisotropic material properties are induced by
irradiation with linearly polarized light. The anisotropic
property - i.e., the preferred direction of the material in
microscopically small zones - can be varied by location of the
20 polarized light. In addition to optical anisotropy it is more
particularly the steric anisotropy which gives these materials
their interest for industry. Liquid crystals in contact with a
polymer material are oriented in accordance with the preferred
direction thereof by the steric anisotropy of such material.
25 These photostructurable polymers are therefore eminently
suitable as orientation layers for liquid crystals, it being
possible for the orientation direction to be varied in the
micrometre range.

30 US-A-4 974 941 describes a process based on a guest-host
system wherein a preferred direction is induced by irradiation
with linearly polarized light of an appropriate wavelength by the
cis-trans-isomerization of dyes. Liquid crystals in contact with
a surface thus irradiated are oriented in accordance with this
35 preferred direction. This orientation process is reversible - i.e.,
by further irradiation of the layer with light of a second
polarization direction, the orientation direction already written
in can be turned again. This reorientation process can be repeated



as often as required and is therefore particularly interesting in connection with re-alignable optical memories.

US-A-5 389 698 discloses photostructurable orientation
5 layers in which, in contrast to the reversible orientation process
hereinbefore described, an irreversible anisotropic polymer
network is built up. The optical and orienting properties induced
in the network during the exposure with linearly polarized light
are photostable and so cannot be further re-oriented by further
10 exposures. These photo-oriented polymer networks (PPN) can
therefore be used wherever stable, structured or unstructured LC
orientation layers or optical elements such as non-absorptive
colour filters, linear and cholesteric polarization filters, optical
delay layers or the like are needed.

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As a rule, in the exposure of a photostructurable orientation
layer at least two different polarization states of the light have
to be used to write in a definite pattern. Various exposure
processes for impressing polarization patterns into
20 photostructurable layers are known at present. All the known
processes have the disadvantage that the total information
cannot be transmitted in parallel fashion but must be transmitted
serially - i.e., in more than a single exposure step. The known
processes are therefore complex, costly and time-consuming.

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For instance, a scanner can be used to apply the information
to the photostructurable layer in dot form. In this case the
polarization direction can be varied from dot to dot. However, in
the transfer of high-information-content patterns only a very
30 short exposure time is available for each dot if the total exposure
time for the pattern is not to exceed acceptable limits.
Consequently, the energy necessary for the orientation must be
applied to a small region of the layer in a short time, so that the
heat loadability of the photostructurable material is severely
35 stressed.

Another possibility, described in US 5 389 698, is for the
layer to be irradiated with polarized light through a mask. This

enables all the zones or regions of a layer which have the same orientation direction to be exposed simultaneously. Many different orientation directions can therefore be written into a layer by the use of further masks. An exposure step is necessary
5 in this process for each orientation direction, the transmission direction of the polarization filter having to be adjusted and the mask having to be changed and positioned each time. Positioning the mask is a particularly time-consuming operation.

10 Since a particular transmission direction of the polarizer is associated with each mask in this stepwise exposure process, the polarizer itself can be part of the mask. A polarizing mask of this kind can be produced in various ways by known technologies, for example, by laminating a film on to a polarization film. A
15 polarizing mask of this kind can be produced in various ways by known technologies, for example, by laminating a film on to a polarization film. A polarizing mask of this kind could be improved if all the necessary polarization directions could be integrated in a single mask so that a complete polarization
20 pattern could be transferred to a photostructurable layer in a single exposure step. A polarization mask of this kind for the preparation of LC orientation layers is mentioned in EP-A-632 311 but no indication is given about how such a
polarization mask might be produced. In fact the stretching
25 process conventional in the preparation of polarization films automatically leads to a consistent polarization direction over large areas.

US-A-5 327 285 discloses a process for producing
30 polymerizers having two polarization directions which differ zonewise in the micrometre range. The process is based on the technology for producing polarizer films. The polarizing properties of two polarizer films are extinguished zonewise by chemical or mechanical treatment and stuck together accurately
35 at a 90° offset from one another. However, due to the stringent requirements for positioning the two films and sticking them together the differently polarizing zones cannot be made as small as required. Also, parallax errors caused by the stacking of the

relatively thick polarization films on one another limit the number of possible polarization directions to two.

It is the object of the invention to devise an optical component enabling linearly polarized light to be produced with zonewise differing polarization directions for use, for example, to prepare masks enabling a polarization orientation pattern to be written into a polarization-sensitive layer in a single exposure step.

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To this end, according to the invention, zones are present which are limited from one another on the light output side and which have at least intermittently different polarization directions.

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Accordingly, in a preferred embodiment of the invention a liquid crystal layer is so oriented in different directions zonewise that incident light is polarized after passing through the liquid crystal layer, the polarization plane of the light varying in accordance with the orientation pattern.

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Preferably, the zones have different powers of optical rotation so that in such zones the polarization plane of incident linear polarized light is rotated through different angles. The term "powers of rotation" is to be understood as denoting herein both the ability of twisted liquid crystals to rotate the polarization direction of the light and also to produce a different polarization direction by birefringency.

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The orientation of the liquid crystal layer can be determined either permanently, by a correspondingly structured orientation layer, or dynamically, in a liquid crystal cell which has electrodes. In the latter case the orientation pattern can be altered very simply by electrical activation of the discrete picture dots. The switch feature of these polarization masks provides great flexibility enabling masks to be altered under computer control in fractions of seconds. Individual items of

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information such as text, numbers or images can therefore be transferred rapidly.

On the other hand, permanency of the polarization pattern
5 can be achieved either by a cross-linked liquid crystal layer on an individual substrate having the orientation layer or by a liquid crystal cell, in which latter case at least one of the two orientation layers of such cell must have a structured orientation.

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Since the polarization direction provided by polarization masks having a permanent polarization pattern must be adjustable as required, pixel by pixel, the use of such masks is particularly useful in cases in which it is required to transfer
15 patterns having more than two different polarization directions. Various technologies can be used to produce the structured orientation necessary for this purpose. Preferably, photo-structurable materials exposed through masks with light of a different polarization direction can be used in this case too.
20 Also, this one-off process of preparing polarization masks can be carried out by technologies, for example, rubbing in different directions, the zones which are not to be rubbed being covered, or impressing an orientation pattern with a mechanical stamp, which would be too elaborate for mass-production of orientation
25 layers.

In the case of exposure through a polarizing mask the incident light can be polarized either by a conventional polarizer disposed in front of the liquid crystal layer and having a
30 consistent transmission direction or by doping the liquid crystal layer with dichroic molecules, the same being chosen in accordance with the spectral sensitivity of the photostructurable material.

35 Embodiments of the invention will be described hereinafter with reference to the accompanying drawings wherein:

Fig.1 shows an arrangement for producing a layer of cross-linked LC monomers with differing orientations zonewise;

Fig.2 shows an arrangement in which the layer prepared in accordance with Fig.1 is used as a birefringent mask;

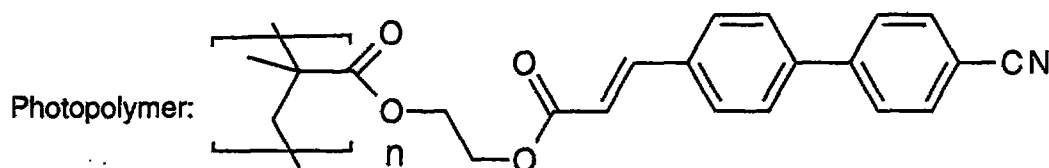
Fig.3 shows an arrangement in which a structurally oriented LC cell is used as polarization-rotating mask, and

Fig.4 shows an electrically switchable polarization-rotating mask.

Example 1

Preparation of a photostructured PPN layer

Cinnamic acid derivatives can be considered, for example, as PPN material. A material having a high glass point ($T_g=133^\circ\text{C}$) was chosen for the examples having PPN layers:



The PPN material was dissolved in NMP to a concentration of 5%. This solution was then used to apply a PPN layer to a glass plate by spincoating at 2000 rpm. The layer was then dried at 130°C on a heat bench for 2 hours and at 130°C in vacuo for a further 4 hours. The layer was then exposed for 5 minutes at room temperature with the linearly polarized light of a 200 W Hg very high pressure lamp, whereafter the layer could be used as an orientation layer for liquid crystals.

Example 2

Preparation of a layer consisting of cross-linked LC monomers (see Fig.1)

5 A PPN layer 1 was prepared as in Example 1, the substrate 2 used being a plate of UV-permeable borosilicate glass. The polarization direction of the UV light was offset by 45° for the radiation of the left and right plate half.

10 As described in the still unpublished Patent Application RAN 4701/152, a mixture of cross-linkable LC monomers was dissolved in anisole to a 20% concentration and applied to the exposed PPN layer by spincoating at room temperature.

15 For the photo-induced cross-linking the layer was irradiated in vacuo with isotropic light from a 150 W xenon for 30 minutes. The cross-linked liquid crystal layer (LCP) 3 was stable in respect of mechanical, heat and UV stressing. When the cross-linked layer was observed under crossed polarizers it was found to be birefringent. The optical axes 4, 5 of the left and right plate halves formed an angle of 45°. The liquid crystals had taken over the orientation of the PPN layer and retained it during the cross-linking process.

Example 3

Exposure of a PPN layer through a birefringent mask (see Fig.2)

30 The optical delay of the layer prepared in Example 2 was approximately 170 nm near the 336 nm mercury line. This plate 1, 2, 3 was then so placed as a birefringent mask on a glass plate coated with the PPN material such that the layer sides contacted one another. The PPN layer was then irradiated through the birefringent mask with polarized UV light 6 having the wave-length 336 nm for 5 minutes. The polarization direction of the UV light was adjusted parallel to the optical axis of the left half of the birefringent mask. The polarization direction of the UV

light is therefore maintained in its passage through the left half of the mask while the right plate half acted as a $\lambda/2$ delay plate and thus rotated in the polarization direction through 90° .

5 After exposure a liquid crystal layer was applied to the PPN layer by spincoating as in Example 2. It was found by means of a tilt compensator that the liquid crystals on the left and right plate halves were perpendicular to one another in the plane of the plate.

10 Birefringent masks which rotate the polarization plane of the incident light through less than 90° can be prepared similarly. For this purpose the angle between the differently oriented optical axes must be less than 45° . This method can also be used
15 to produce polarizing masks which have many zones each differing from one another in the direction of their optical axes.

Example 4

20 Structurally oriented LC cell as polarization-rotating mask
 (see Fig.3)

As in Example 2, a PPN-coated borosilicate glass plate 7 was irradiated with linearly polarized UV light, the polarization
25 direction thereof being rotated through 45° between the irradiation of the left half and right half of the plate. A polyimide orientation layer was applied to a second borosilicate glass plate 8 and the same was rubbed with a cloth parallel to its longitudinal edge. The two glass plates were then combined to
30 form a $6\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ thick LC cell such that the left half of the PPN plate together with the polyimide plate formed a parallel cell. Correspondingly, the orientation directions of the right PPN half and of the polyimide layer formed an angle of 45° . The cell was then filled with a nematic liquid crystal. When a polarizer 9 was
35 placed on the back of the polyimide-coated glass plate with its transmission direction parallel to the direction of rubbing, the left half of the cell was at maximum darkness when the transmission direction of an analyser above the polarizer was

arranged perpendicularly to the transmission direction of the polarizer. However, the right cell half was at maximum darkness when the analyser was rotated through 45° . Consequently, the polarization plane of the incident light remained unchanged in the
5 passage through the left cell half but was rotated through 45° in the right half.

This cell was mounted by way of the PPN side on another PPN-coated glass plate. The PPN layer was then irradiated
10 through the cell with UV light polarized parallel to the polyimide rubbing direction. A liquid crystal layer was then applied by spincoating to the PPN layer. When the latter layer was observed under crossed polarizers, it was seen that the liquid crystal had been oriented, the orientation direction differing by 45° between
15 the left and right plate halves.

Example 5

Electrically switchable polarization-rotating mask (see Fig.4)
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Polyimide layers 14, 15 were applied by spincoating to two borosilicate glass plates 10, 11 having 1×1 cm ITO electrodes 12, 13. An orientation direction 16, 17 was predetermined on each plate by rubbing the polyimide layers with a cloth. The
25 rubbing direction differed by 45° between the two plates. They were then mounted by means of a $6 \mu\text{m}$ thick spacer to form a liquid crystal cell such that the two electrode surfaces overlapped. The cell was then filled with a nematic liquid crystal mixture 18. Because of the different wall orientations a rotating
30 cell having a 45° twist was created.

When the transmission direction of a polarizer 19 on the bottom of the cell was arranged to be parallel to the rubbing direction, an analyser placed above the cell had to be rotated
35 through 45° for maximum brightness. Further rotation of the analyser through 90° produced maximum darkness of the cell. When a sufficiently large voltage was applied to the two ITO electrode, the liquid crystal molecules near the electrode surface

oriented themselves with their longitudinal axis perpendicular to the glass surface. In this zone the transmitted light retained the polarization direction predetermined by the polarizer - i.e., the analyser had to be adjusted parallel to the polarizer for maximum brightness.

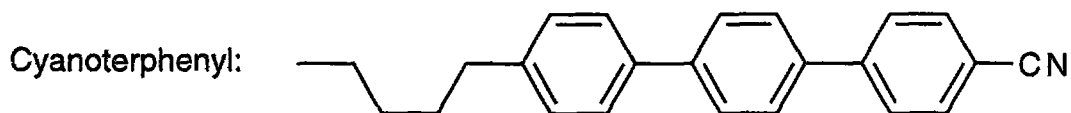
This cell was mounted on a PPN coated glass plate. A polarizer was mounted on the back of the cell such that its transmission direction was parallel to the rubbing direction of the glass plate near the polarizer. While the PPN layer was then exposed through the polarizer and cell, the cell remained active. After irradiation a liquid crystal layer was applied to the PPN layer by spin coating. When this liquid crystal layer was arranged below crossed polarizers it could be seen that the liquid crystal had been oriented. The orientation direction of the region exposed through the switched part of the liquid crystal cell differed by 45° from the direction in the other zones.

Example 6

LCP polarizer

As in Example 2, a PPN layer on a borosilicate glass plate was oriented by irradiation with polarized light parallel to the longitudinal edge in the left half and at 45° in the right half.

A mixture of cross-linkable LC monomers was doped with 3% of the following cyanoterphenyl molecule:



Cyanoterphenyl was chosen because maximum absorption occurs at the same wavelength as in the case of the PPN material used ($\lambda_{\text{max}}=310 \text{ nm}$). The doped mixture was dissolved in anisole to a 40% concentration and applied by spincoating to the exposed PPN layer at room temperature. The liquid crystals took over the orientation determined by the PPN exposure and retained such

orientation after the subsequent cross-linking. The cyano-terphenyls had oriented themselves in accordance with the liquid crystal matrix, as was shown by the fact that the transmission measured at 310 nm parallel to the director was 20 times less than the transmission perpendicular to the director. Since the cross-linkable liquid crystal molecules used do not contribute to absorption in the range above 300 nm, this must be due to the dichroism of the cyanoterphenyls.

The resulting plate was mounted as a polarizing mask with the layer side downwards on a PPN coated glass plate and irradiated with isotropic UV light from the mask side. A liquid crystal layer was then applied to the PPN layer by spincoating. When the spincoated layer was placed under crossed polarizers, it could be seen that the liquid crystal had been oriented, the orientation directions of the left and right halves of the plate differing from one another by 45°.

The use of an LCP polarizing mask to produce orientation patterns in photosensitive materials does not require the use of an external polarizer. Polarization and the determination of the polarization plane is dealt with pixel by pixel by the polarizing mask.

Example 7

Structurally oriented liquid crystal cell as polarizing mask

As in Example 2, a PPN layer on a borosilicate glass plate was oriented by irradiation with polarized light so as to be parallel in the longitudinal edge in the left half and 45° to the longitudinal edge in the right half.

A polyimide orientation layer was applied to a second borosilicate glass plate and rubbed with a cloth parallel to the longitudinal edge. The two glass plates were then combined to form a 6 µm thick LC cell such that the left half of the PPN plate together with the polyimide plate formed a parallel cell.

Correspondingly, the orientation directions of the right PPN half and of the polyimide layer formed an angle of 45° to one another. The cell was then filled with a liquid crystal mixture doped with 1% cyanoterphenyl. When a polarizer was placed on the back of the polyimide-coated glass plate such that its transmission direction was parallel to the rubbing direction, the left half of the cell was in maximum darkness when the transmission direction of an analyser above it was perpendicular to the transmission direction of the polarizer. However, the right half of the cell was at maximum darkness when the analyser was rotated through 45° . The polarization plane of the incident light remained unchanged in the passage through the left half of the cell and was rotated through 45° in the passage through the right half.

This cell was mounted by way of its PPN side on another PPN-coated glass plate. The PPN layer was then irradiated with isotropic UV light through the cell, whereafter a liquid crystal layer was applied to the PPN layer by spincoating. When this layer was then placed below crossed polarizers, it could be seen that the liquid crystal had been oriented, the directions of orientation in the left half and right half of the plate differing from one another by 45° . This example shows that the exposure with a structurally oriented LCD polarizing mask requires no additional external polarizer.

Example 8

Self-polarizing switchable LCD mask

Finger electrodes of ITO were prepared in an area of 1 cm^2 on a borosilicate glass plate. The width of the electrode paths, which were disposed parallel to the plate edge, was $20 \mu\text{m}$ and the distance between the paths was $40 \mu\text{m}$. A polyimide layer was then applied on top and rubbed with a cloth at 45° to the direction of the electrode paths. A second borosilicate plate without any electrode was also coated with polyimide and rubbed at 45° to the longitudinal edge such that after assembly of the

two plates a parallel cell arose. The between-plates distance was 6 μm . A nematic liquid crystal mixture having a negative dielectric anisotropy was doped with 1% cyanoterphenyl and charged into the cell. When an appropriately high voltage was applied to the finger, electrodes molecules near the electrode plate oriented themselves parallel to the electrode paths. Consequently, the liquid crystal had a structure with a 45° twist near the finger electrodes, whereas the parallel confirmation remained in the unswitched zone outside the electrodes.

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The cell was then mounted on a PPN-coated glass plate. The PPN layer was then irradiated through the switched cell with isotropic UV light, whereafter a liquid crystal layer was applied to the PPN layer by spin coating. When the liquid crystal layer was then placed below crossed polarizers, it could be seen that the liquid crystal had been oriented and the orientation direction in the zone covered by the finger electrode area differed by 45° from the orientation direction in the outer zone. No external polarizer was needed in this construction either. The UV light is polarized by the doped liquid crystal mixture, the polarization plane being switchable through 45° by activation of the cell. It is therefore unnecessary to change the mask between transfers of different items of information.

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1. An optical component for producing linearly polarized light having a predetermined polarization direction from incident light, wherein zones are present which are limited from one another on the light output side and which have at least intermittently different polarization directions.
2. An optical component according to claim 1, wherein the zones have different powers of optical rotation so that in such zones the polarization plane of incident linearly polarized light is rotated through different angles.
3. An optical component according to claim 1, wherein the zones are linear polarizers having different polarization directions from one another.
4. An optical component according to claim 3, wherein dichroic molecules are embedded in an oriented liquid crystal layer having zones of different orientation.
5. An optical component according to claim 4, wherein the liquid crystal is disposed in a liquid crystal cell and is oriented on one or both sides by orientation layers.
6. An optical component according to claim 1 consisting of at least one optically anisotropic layer, wherein the directions of the optical axes in at least two zones in the layer plane differ from one another.
7. An optical component according to claim 6, wherein at least one of the anisotropic layers consists of a liquid crystal, the optical axis being determined by the orientation direction of the liquid crystal.
8. An optical component according to claim 1, wherein a liquid crystal is disposed between two transparent plates having orientation layers, the orientation directions of the two plates





being rotated relatively to one another at least in one opposite zone, so that there is a twisting of the liquid crystal and consequently the polarization plane of linearly polarized light is rotated by light guidance.

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9. An optical component according to claim 4 or 8, wherein at least one of the two substrates in contact with the liquid crystal has electrodes so that the liquid crystal can be deformed by the application of an adequate voltage.

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10. An optical component according to claim 9, wherein the electrodes are devised at least to some extent as finger electrodes so that the liquid crystal experiences a planar deformation when a voltage is applied.

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11. An optical component according to any of claims 4 and 8 to 10, wherein the liquid crystal is twisted zonewise through any desired angle between 0° and a multiple of 360° .

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12. An optical component according to any of claims 4 and 8 to 10, wherein the liquid crystal is twisted zonewise through any desired angle between 0° and 180° .

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13. An optical component according to any of claims 4 and 8 to 10, wherein the liquid crystal is twisted differently zonewise.

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14. An optical component according to claim 13, wherein the twisting of at least two zones differs by $(n \cdot 90^\circ + 45^\circ)$, n being a positive or negative integer or 0.

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15. An optical component according to claim 13, wherein the twisting of at least two zones differs by $(n \cdot 180^\circ + 90^\circ)$, n being a positive or negative integer or 0.

16. An optical component according to any of claims 3, 4 and 7 to 15, wherein the zonewise differing orientation of the





liquid crystal layer is caused by at least one orientation layer which has a locally varying orientation pattern.

17. An optical component according to claim 16, wherein
5 the orientation layer is photostructured.

18. An optical component according to claim 17, wherein
the photostructured orientation layer consists of a
photostructured polymer network.
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19. An optical component according to any of claims 3, 4
and 7-15, wherein the liquid crystal layer consists of polymeric
or cross-linked liquid crystals (LCP).

20. An optical component according to claims 3 and 19,
15 wherein the dichroic molecules themselves are polymerisable or
cross-linkable.

21. An optical component according to claim 19 or 20,
20 wherein the layer structure consisting of an orientation layer and
an LCP layer is in contact on only one side with a transparent
substrate.

22. An optical component according to claim 21, wherein
25 the orientation directions differ zonewise by any desired angle
between 0° and 180°.

23. Use of an optical component according to any of the
previous claims to impress a locally varying polarization pattern
30 on a light beam.

24. Use of an optical component according to claim 9 or
10 to impress a dynamically variable polarization pattern on a
light beam.
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25. Use of an optical component according to any of
claims 2-4 and 9-22 to impress a locally varying polarization
pattern on an unpolarized light beam.





26. Use of an optical component according to any of claims 1 to 22 for the parallel transfer of information by polarization-coded light.

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27. Use of an optical component according to any of claims 1 to 22 as a mask for the simultaneous transfer of a complete polarization pattern onto a polarization-sensitive photostructurable layer.

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28. Use of an optical component according to any of claims 1 to 22 as a mask for the simultaneous transfer of a complete polarization pattern onto a polarization-sensitive photostructurable layer, wherein the photolayer to be exposed consists of a PPN material.

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This Sheet Has Been Replaced