

IMPROVEMENTS IN METHODS FOR PRODUCING LENS ARRAYS**FIELD OF THE INVENTION**

The present invention relates to improved methods for designing and
5 manufacturing lens arrays, and to lens arrays produced thereby.

BACKGROUND

Lens arrays allow the generation of a number of different types of optical
effect. For example, an array of lenses focussed on underlying image elements at
the focal plane of the array can generate integral images which appear to be
10 three dimensional, which move, change magnification or morph as the viewing
angle changes, or which have apparent depth outside the plane of the lens array.
A further effect can be achieved by interleaving two or more images underneath
the lenses, for example in strips underneath a plurality of cylindrical lenses, so
that the viewer sees different images as the viewing angle changes. Such visual
15 effects are useful in a number of applications including displays, promotional
materials, collectable articles and as optically variable devices in security
documents.

Lens arrays are generally manufactured from transparent polymeric
materials to produce a sheet of material, referred to herein as a lenticular sheet.
20 The pattern of the lenslets forming the array is embossed or otherwise formed on
one side of the sheet, and the opposing side of the sheet is formed into a flat,
generally gloss-type surface. The image elements are applied to or placed at the
flat surface and may be formed, for example, by printing or by a laser marking
process. The sheet material is commonly manufactured as a monolayer, but
25 multilayer methods are also used.

The image elements may comprise printed dots. In one process, prior to
printing, a continuous image representing the desired final print on the flat surface
is converted to a halftone image. After printing, the halftone image will appear as
a plurality of printed dots on the flat surface.

30 The thickness (usually termed the gauge thickness) of the lenticular sheet
has traditionally been determined by the focal length of the lenslets, such that
incoming light rays substantially focus at the flat surface of the sheet. This design
is chosen to take advantage of the so-called sampling effect. The sampling effect

ensures that a dot printed at the focal length of the lens will appear to an observer at a particular viewing angle as a line across a cylindrical lens, and will appear to fill the entire lens area for a non-cylindrical lens. Therefore, an observer cannot distinguish two adjacent dots inside a single lens at a particular viewing angle.

5 In some cases, the material thickness and lens frequency (or pitch) of the lenslets may be pre-selected according to the needs of the end product, as well as the gauge limitations of the sheet material manufacturing process. The lens radius of curvature is then determined based on additional parameters such as the refractive index and Abbe number of the polymeric material used, so as to
10 focus incoming light rays substantially at the flat side of the sheet.

 The recent trend in the art has been to produce thinner lenticular sheets so as to reduce manufacturing costs, while at the same time broadening the potential applications of optical effect articles. However, a thinner lenticular sheet generally requires a higher lens frequency in order to produce a focussed image.
15 For example, a material produced with a gauge thickness of 85 microns in polyester would require a lens frequency of approximately 224 lenslets per centimetre. Printing optical effect imagery on these high frequency microlens arrays is particularly challenging, and severely limits the type of effect that can be achieved and the type of press and prepress methods than can be used.
20 Furthermore, a high rate of waste material often results as very high line screens must be utilised and very accurate colour-to-colour registration becomes critical. These problems have meant that use of very high frequency lenticular sheet material has heretofore been limited.

 One attempt to overcome the above problems is described in US patent
25 No. 6,833,960. Lenses are formed as hemispheres on a substrate using curable resins in a printing press. In this method, it is not possible to form the lenses on the substrate at their focal point. The lenses are thus substantially off-focus and this nullifies the sampling effect. The imagery produced by the method is thus substantially blurred.

30 Another method is described in US patent No. 6,989,931 and includes a composite image comprised of printed stripes viewable through a lenticular screen from a first angle, with an object or image placed a distance behind the lenticular screen viewable through transparent stripes at a second angle. In one

embodiment, a lenticular material thinner than its focal length is contemplated. However, an arbitrary off-focus design of this nature is not suitable for multiplexed lenticular imagery or intricate moiré effects because it can produce severe blurring and loss of image contrast.

5 Accordingly, there is a need for a method of reducing the gauge thickness of a lens array without introducing substantial blurring or other objectionable image artifacts.

 In some circumstances it may be desirable to manufacture a lenticular sheet at a particular gauge thickness. If this is the case, it may then be desirable
10 to reduce the lens frequency, *ie* to increase the width of each lenslet, in order to maintain image quality in view of the constraints of the printing process (or other process for forming the image elements) to be used. It is therefore desirable to provide a lens array and a method which allows a lower lens frequency to be used without introducing substantial blurring or other objectionable image
15 artifacts.

 Any discussion of documents, acts, materials, devices, articles or the like which has been included in the present specification is solely for providing a context for the present invention. It is not to be taken as an admission that any or all of these matters form part of the prior art base or were common general
20 knowledge in the field relevant to the present invention as it existed in Australia before the priority date of each claim in this application.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

 In one aspect, the present invention provides a lens array for imaging a plurality of image elements in an object plane, the lens array including a plurality
25 of lenslets formed in or on one side of a transparent or translucent material with the image elements disposed on the opposite side, the lens array having a gauge thickness corresponding to the distance from the apex of each lenslet to the object plane, wherein each lenslet has a set of lens parameters, with the gauge thickness and/or at least one lens parameter optimised such that each lenslet has
30 a focal point size in the object plane which is substantially equal to the size of the image elements in the object plane, or which varies from the size of the image elements by predetermined amount.

In another aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of manufacturing a lens array for imaging a plurality of image elements in an object plane, the lens array including a plurality of lenslets, the lens array having a gauge thickness corresponding to the distance from the apex of each lenslet to the object plane, the method including the steps of:

determining a scale parameter which is representative of the size of the image elements in at least part of the object plane,

using the scale parameter to optimize the gauge thickness and/or at least one parameter of a set of lens parameters for each lenslet,

and forming the lens array with said gauge thickness and said lens parameters in or on one side of a transparent or translucent material with the image elements being disposed on the opposite side of the transparent or translucent material,

whereby, the lenslets have a focal point size in the object plane which is substantially equal to the size of the image elements, or which varies from the size of the image elements by a predetermined amount.

The set of lens parameters may include lens width, refractive index, sag height, radius of curvature, conic parameter and Abbe number. Some or all of these may be varied in order to obtain a focal point size with the desired characteristics in the object plane.

Preferably, each lenslet has a cross-section which is a conic section. The lenslets may be cylindrical or have a part-spherical or aspherical cross-section. Each lenslet is preferably rotationally symmetric in the plane of the lens array. In one embodiment, each lenslet may be an elongate lenticule having substantially uniform cross section along its length.

DEFINITIONS

Focal point size H

As used herein, the term focal point size refers to the dimensions, usually an effective diameter or width, of the geometrical distribution of points at which rays refracted through a lens intersect with an object plane at a particular viewing angle. The focal point size may be inferred from theoretical calculations, ray tracing simulations, or from actual measurements. The present inventors have found that ray tracing simulations using software such as ZEMAX closely match

direct measurements of lenses designed according to the methods described herein. The ray tracing simulation can be adjusted to account for the fact that incoming rays are not exactly parallel in reality.

Focal length f

5 In the present specification, focal length, when used in reference to a microlens in a lens array, means the distance from the vertex of the microlens to the position of the focus given by locating the maximum of the power density distribution when collimated radiation is incident from the lens side of the array (see T. Miyashita, "Standardization for microlenses and microlens arrays" (2007)
10 *Japanese Journal of Applied Physics* **46**, p 5391).

Gauge thickness t

The gauge thickness is the distance from the apex of a lenslet on one side of the transparent or translucent material to the surface on the opposite side of the translucent material on which the image elements are provided which
15 substantially coincides with the object plane.

Lens frequency and pitch

The lens frequency of a lens array is the number of lenslets in a given distance across the surface of the lens array. The pitch is the distance from the apex of one lenslet to the apex of the adjacent lenslet. In a uniform lens array, the
20 pitch has an inverse relationship to the lens frequency.

Lens width W

The width of a lenslet in a microlens array is the distance from one edge of the lenslet to the opposite edge of the lenslet. In a lens array with hemispherical or semi-cylindrical lenslets, the width will be equal to the diameter of the lenslets.
25

Radius of curvature R

The radius of curvature of a lenslet is the distance from a point on the surface of the lens to a point at which the normal to the lens surface intersects a line extending perpendicularly through the apex of the lenslet (the lens axis).

Sag height s

30 The sag height or surface sag s of a lenslet is the distance from the apex to a point on the axis intersected by the shortest line from the edge of a lenslet extending perpendicularly through the axis.

Refractive index n

The refractive index of a medium n is the ratio of the speed of light in vacuo to the speed of light in the medium. The refractive index n of a lens determines the amount by which light rays reaching the lens surface will be refracted, according to Snell's law:

5
$$n_1 * \sin(\alpha) = n * \sin(\theta),$$

where α is the angle between an incident ray and the normal at the point of incidence at the lens surface, θ is the angle between the refracted ray and the normal at the point of incidence, and n_1 is the refractive index of air (as an approximation n_1 may be taken to be 1).

10 **Conic constant P**

The conic constant P is a quantity describing conic sections, and is used in geometric optics to specify spherical ($P = 1$), elliptical ($0 < P < 1$, or $P > 1$), parabolic ($P = 0$), and hyperbolic ($P < 0$) lens. Some references use the letter K to represent the conic constant. K is related to P via $K = P - 1$.

15 **Lobe Angle**

The lobe angle of a lens is the entire viewing angle formed by the lens.

Abbe number

The Abbe number of a transparent or translucent material is a measure of the dispersion (variation of refractive index with wavelength) of the material. An appropriate choice of Abbe number for a lens can help to minimize chromatic aberration.

Security document

As used herein, the term security document includes all types of documents and tokens of value and identification documents including, but not limited to the following: items of currency such as banknotes and coins, credit cards, cheques, passports, identity cards, securities and share certificates, driver's licences, deeds of title, travel documents such as airline and train tickets, entrance cards and tickets, birth, death and marriage certificates, and academic transcripts.

30 **Transparent Windows and Half Windows**

As used herein the term window refers to a transparent or translucent area in the security document compared to the substantially opaque region to which printing is applied. The window may be fully transparent so that it allows the

transmission of light substantially unaffected, or it may be partly transparent or translucent partially allowing the transmission of light but without allowing objects to be seen clearly through the window area.

A window area may be formed in a polymeric security document which has
5 at least one layer of transparent polymeric material and one or more opacifying layers applied to at least one side of a transparent polymeric substrate, by omitting least one opacifying layer in the region forming the window area. If opacifying layers are applied to both sides of a transparent substrate a fully transparent window may be formed by omitting the opacifying layers on both
10 sides of the transparent substrate in the window area.

A partly transparent or translucent area, hereinafter referred to as a "**half-window**", may be formed in a polymeric security document which has opacifying layers on both sides by omitting the opacifying layers on one side only of the security document in the window area so that the "half-window" is not fully
15 transparent, but allows some light to pass through without allowing objects to be viewed clearly through the half-window.

Alternatively, it is possible for the substrates to be formed from an substantially opaque material, such as paper or fibrous material, with an insert of transparent plastics material inserted into a cut-out, or recess in the paper or
20 fibrous substrate to form a transparent window or a translucent half-window area.

Opacifying layers

One or more opacifying layers may be applied to a transparent substrate to increase the opacity of the security document. An opacifying layer is such that
25 $L_T < L_0$, where L_0 is the amount of light incident on the document, and L_T is the amount of light transmitted through the document. An opacifying layer may comprise any one or more of a variety of opacifying coatings. For example, the opacifying coatings may comprise a pigment, such as titanium dioxide, dispersed within a binder or carrier of heat-activated cross-linkable polymeric material. Alternatively, a substrate of transparent plastic material could be sandwiched
30 between opacifying layers of paper or other partially or substantially opaque material to which indicia may be subsequently printed or otherwise applied.

In one embodiment of the invention, the gauge thickness of the lens array may be optimised with respect to the size of the image elements and the set of lens parameters.

In another embodiment, the lens parameters may be optimised with respect to the size of the image elements and the gauge thickness.

By choosing lens parameters such that the focal point size is correlated with the size of the image elements, the thickness of the lens array, or the lens frequency, can be reduced without substantially sacrificing image quality. This is because the majority of rays refracted through the lenslets and reaching the object plane will still intersect with the region covered by an image element at the desired viewing angle or angles and this allows the sampling effect to be maintained.

The thickness of the lens array can be reduced to provide a thinner lenticular sheet which still results in high quality image effects. Alternatively, the thickness can be maintained whilst widening the lenslets to allow more printing to be included under each lenslet, thus improving image quality and/or allowing for more complex visual effects to be produced.

Preferably, the thickness of the lens array is less than the focal length of all of the lenslets.

In a particularly preferred embodiment, the predetermined amount by which the focal point size varies from the size of the image elements is less than an estimated variability in the size of the image elements. The estimated variability may be the standard deviation, mean absolute deviation or the interquartile range of the size of the image elements. If the focal point size is larger than the size of the image elements, this allows for an even thinner lenticular sheet whilst substantially maintaining the desired image quality, since in general, only a relatively small portion of the power density distribution of the refracted rays will lie at the edges of the spot. If the focal point size is slightly smaller, the transitions between the image components producing the image effects can be made smoother.

In practice, we have found that a predetermined amount based on variation of up to 20% can produce high quality imagery whilst still accounting for the variation in printed image element size in the majority of situations. However,

if greater precision is required, the variability may be estimated from the actual size distribution of the printed image elements by any of the aforementioned methods.

The image elements may take the form of dots, lines or other shapes. The image elements may be applied to a surface in the object plane on the opposite side of the transparent or translucent material in a variety of ways, including laser marking. In one preferred embodiment, the image elements are printed on said surface in the object plane. The method of the invention may include the step of applying a plurality of printed dots to a rear surface of the transparent or translucent material with the lenslets formed on a front surface to form an optically variable device or article. Alternatively, a plurality of printed dots may be applied to a substrate (for example, of fibrous or polymeric material), and the substrate attached to the rear surface of the transparent or translucent material.

The lenslets may be formed by an embossing process in a transparent or translucent radiation-curable material applied to a substrate. The transparent or translucent radiation-curable material may be cured following embossing, but is preferably embossed and cured substantially simultaneously. The substrate is preferably formed from a transparent or translucent polymeric material with the combined thickness of the substrate and radiation curable material corresponding to the gauge thickness of the lens array. In a particularly preferred embodiment, the substrate is a flexible, sheet-like structure, and the substrate and radiation curable material form part of a security document, such as a banknote, credit card or the like. The substrate preferably has substantially the same refractive index as the lenslets.

In one preferred embodiment, the set of lens parameters is the same for each lenslet.

In another preferred embodiment, the focal point size, when averaged over at least two directions within the lobe angle of the lenslet, is substantially equal to the size of the image elements, or varies from the size of the image elements by a predetermined amount.

The directions over which the focal point size are averaged preferably include the on-axis direction, and an off-axis direction near the edge of the lobe angle.

In another aspect, the present invention provides a method of designing a lens array for imaging a plurality of image elements in an object plane, the lens array including a plurality of lenslets and having a gauge thickness corresponding to the distance from the apex of each lenslet to the object plane, the method including the steps of:

estimating a scale parameter which is representative of the size of the image elements in the object plane,

selecting a set of lens parameters for each lenslet, and

designing the lens array using the scale parameter to optimize the gauge thickness and/or at least one lens parameter of the set of lens parameters for each lenslet, wherein each lenslet has a focal point size in the object plane which is substantially equal to the size of the image elements, or which varies from the size of the image elements by a predetermined amount.

Preferably, the thickness of a lens array including the lenslets is less than the focal length of all of the lenslets.

The set of lens parameters may be the same for each lenslet. Alternatively, the lenslets in an area or areas of the lens array may have different lens parameters to the lenslets in the remainder of the lens array.

Preferably, the method further includes the step of measuring the sizes of the image elements in at least part of the object plane, wherein the scale parameter is estimated from the measured sizes of the image elements. The measurement may be performed using a densitometer, or alternatively may be performed by directly measuring the sizes of the image elements. Preferably, the image elements are part of a calibration template. In a particularly preferred embodiment, the image elements are printed lines or dots.

Measuring the sizes of the printed lines or dots allows the lens design to be tailored to the actual characteristics of the print, which may depend on the type of printing apparatus, inks and other materials, and prepress equipment used.

The scale parameter may be estimated by computing the mean or maximum of the sizes of the image elements. Alternatively, it may be estimated using a robust estimator, preferably an M-estimator, or one of the median, upper quartile or interquartile mean of the sizes of the image elements.

In a further aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of manufacturing an optically variable device, including the steps of:

providing a substrate;

applying image elements to the substrate, said image elements being
5 located in an object plane;

determining a scale parameter which is representative of the size of the image elements; and

forming a plurality of lenslets in a transparent or translucent material on the substrate;

10 wherein each lenslet has a set of lens parameters determined so that the lenslets have a focal point size in the object plane which is substantially equal to the size of the image elements, or which varies from the size of the image elements by a predetermined amount.

In one preferred embodiment, the scale parameter is determined by
15 measuring the sizes of the image elements.

Preferably, the substrate is formed from a transparent or translucent sheet-like material with the lenslets formed in or on a first surface on one side of the substrate and the image elements applied to a second surface on the opposite side of the substrate. The lenslets may be formed in the transparent or
20 translucent sheet-like material itself. Alternatively, the lenslets may be formed in a transparent or translucent layer, *eg* by embossing a radiation-curable transparent or translucent resin, applied to a substrate which may be transparent, translucent or opaque.

The image elements may be formed by any convenient process, including
25 printing or laser marking. In a particularly preferred method, the image elements are printed dots.

In another aspect of the present invention, there is provided an optically variable device, including a substrate and a plurality of lenslets formed in or on the substrate, and a plurality of image elements located in an object plane in or
30 on the substrate, wherein each lenslet has a set of lens parameters determined so that the lenslets have a focal point size in the object plane which is substantially equal to the size of the image elements, or which varies from the size of the image elements by a predetermined amount.

Preferably, the lenslets are part of a lens array having a gauge thickness which is less than the focal length of each of the lenslets.

In a further aspect, the present invention provides an optically variable device including a lens array according to the first aspect of the invention.

- 5 An optically variable device manufactured by the methods above may be applied to a wide range of articles, though the invention has particular application to the field of security documents, and more particularly to security documents and articles formed from a flexible sheet-like substrate, such as banknotes or the like. The optically variable device may be formed in a window or half-window area
10 of the security document.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Preferred embodiments of the invention will now be described, by way of non-limiting example only, with reference to the accompanying figures, in which:

- Figure 1 shows a cross section through a lens array of prior art design;
15 Figure 2 shows one embodiment of the lens array of the present invention;
Figure 3 shows an alternative embodiment of the lens array of the present invention;
Figures 4 to 6 depict the on- and off-axis focal point sizes of three lenslets according to different embodiments of the present invention;
20 Figure 7 shows the input and output dot shapes of two different printing processes;
Figure 8 shows the power density distributions of a prior art lenslet and a lenslet according to one embodiment of the present invention, respectively;
Figure 9 shows incident light rays being refracted through a lenslet
25 according to one embodiment of the present invention;
Figure 10 depicts the geometry of a lenslet;
Figures 11(a) to 11(d) illustrate a schematic cross-sectional view through an article incorporating a lens array and image elements and the intermediate steps by which the article is formed;
30 Figures 12(a) to 12(c) show a schematic cross-sectional view through an article similar to that of Figure 11(d), made by a modified method;

Figures 13(a) to 13(d) illustrate a schematic cross-sectional view through an alternative article incorporating a lens array and image elements, and the intermediate steps by which the article is formed;

Figures 14 and 15 are block diagrams showing two different embodiments of a lens array manufacturing process for producing the articles of Figures 11 to 13;

Figure 16 is a set of interleaved printed image elements of an example lenticular device; and

Figure 17 illustrates the (simulated) relative illumination of points along the width of the image elements of the device of Figure 16, when viewed (a) on-axis and (b) off-axis at an angle which is at or near the edge of the lobe angle.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring initially to Figure 1, there is shown a lens array 20 of prior art design, having a gauge thickness t , in which lenslets 22 having a width W and substantially spherical profile focus incident rays 28a and 28b onto the black dots 26a and the white dots 26b respectively. The dots have been printed on lower surface 24. The thickness t is substantially equal to the focal length of the lenslets, and so the focal point size 30 is at a minimum.

The focal point size 30 of the prior art lenslet is smaller than the resolution of the printing at the lower surface 24. For example, traditional lenticular offset lithographic methods print an average halftone dot size of approximately 25 microns. A properly designed lenticular lens of 254 microns in width will collimate light to a focal point size of approximately five microns on axis, which is substantially smaller than the size of the printed dots 26a, 26b.

Referring now to Figure 2, there is shown a lens array 120 according to one preferred embodiment of the present invention. Incident rays 128a, 128b are refracted towards dots 26a, 26b respectively. The lens array 120 has a thickness t' which is less than t , and the lenslets 122 have a width W . The lenslets 122 are designed in such a way that the focal point sizes 130a, 130b are substantially equal in extent to dots 26a, 26b. We have found that as long as the focal point size does not exceed the average width of a printed halftone dot by more than 20%, the quality of the image is not compromised. We have also found that simply producing an arbitrary non-focussing design severely degrades the image

quality, resulting in an objectionably blurred image. The focal point size may also be slightly smaller than the average width, preferably no more than 20% smaller.

Figure 3 depicts an alternative lens array design, in which lens array 220 is at the same thickness t as prior art lens array 20, but the width W of the lenslets 222 has been increased. At the same time, other lens parameters have been varied so that incident rays 228a, 228b are refracted and arrive at the object plane 224 to intersect with dots 26a, 26b so that the focal point sizes 230a, 230b are again substantially equal in extent to the dots 26a, 26b. For example, the lens radius of curvature can be made larger, as shown in Figure 3, possibly simultaneously varying other lens parameters such as refractive index, conic parameter or Abbe number in order to achieve the optimum image quality.

Figure 4 illustrates a cross sectional side view of a ray trace of a wide angle lenslet 105 designed according to one embodiment of the present invention. Rays 102 refracted at surface 101 reach the object plane 104 and result in focal point sizes 103A, 103B. In this embodiment, the focal point sizes of on-axis points 103A and off-axis points 103B have been weighted equally across the entire viewing angle of the lenslet, this angle also being known as the lobe angle.

Figure 5 shows a cross sectional side view of a ray trace of an alternative wide angle lenslet 101 where the focal point width is substantially equal to the average width of printed halftone dots 109A, across the lobe angle. In Figure 6 there is shown a cross sectional side view of a ray trace of a further wide angle lenslet where the printed halftone dots 109A are larger still, allowing for a further reduction in material thickness, or a coarser lens frequency, or both.

In Figure 7 the top row of dots 110 represents digital pixels of a known width 109B on a print calibration form that are output to a printing plate. Row 111 illustrates the printed result of printing row 110, where noticeable dot gain results in an average dot width 109C. Row 112 illustrates the printed result of printing row 110 using another print method, where the dot gain is even greater than row 111, resulting in average dot width 109D. In this illustration, a different lens design may apply for the printed dots in row 111 than the printed dots in row 112, where the optimised lens design for row 111 may resemble Figure 5, and the optimized lens design of row 112 may more closely resemble Figure 6.

Referring now to Figure 8, there is shown a projection view of a printed halftone dot 109C imaged by a lenslet according to one embodiment of the present invention. Figure 8(a) shows contours 250 of the power density distribution 255 which would result if the object plane was located at the focal plane 252 of the array to produce spot 256 (Figure 9). Instead, the spot 266 in object plane 262 is larger than the dot 109C, but has a power density distribution 260, 265 such that the majority of the incident radiation is still reaching dot 109C in order to preserve the sampling effect.

In order to print a continuous tone image to paper or synthetic materials such as plastics, it is necessary to convert it to a halftone image. A number of methods for doing so are known in the art. Such methods represent continuous tone through the use of binary dots of either varying sizes, so called amplitude modulation (AM) methods, or dots of the same size with varying frequency, so called frequency modulation (FM) methods. Various combinations of the two methods, called hybrids, are also used. For the present purposes, any of these methods may be employed. However, the FM method, in its variety of forms including but not limited to dithering, error diffusion, or random or stochastic screening, is the preferred method because the dots remain generally constant in size.

Measurement of the characteristics of the printed halftone dots can be accomplished using a variety of known methods. For example, the average dot size can be determined by printing a press calibration template consisting of swatches of dots of a given size and having various densities, where each swatch typically represents a density value from one percent to ninety nine percent. The template is subsequently imaged to film or plate, and printed onto the smooth side of an optical effect substrate. The printed result is then scanned using a densitometer, or similar tool, to determine the printed dot size.

Alternatively, the average dot size can be measured directly, for example using a microscope fitted with a reticle displaying increments of measurement. In the direct method, a sample of dots can be measured in each tonal value range, recorded, and their sizes averaged.

We have found that measurement of dots at a tonal value of about 20% provides the best results.

In some instances it may not be possible or feasible to obtain the above measurements, because of varying press conditions or the like. If this is the case then an average expected dot size can be estimated, from previous experience or otherwise.

5 With reference to Figure 10, we now describe one method of optimising the design of a lenslet for use in the present invention. For the purposes of this non-limiting example, we take lenslet 300 to be an aspheric lens which is rotationally symmetric. This method relies on relatively simple theoretical calculations using geometrical optics, and ignoring edge effects at the periphery of the lens. The skilled person will appreciate that many other methods are possible, including the
10 use of more sophisticated physical models, ray tracing simulations and so on.

In Figure 10(a), an image element in the form of a printed dot 305 of full width H and half-width h is located in an object plane an unknown distance t (the gauge thickness) from the origin of the (x,y) coordinate system, which
15 corresponds with the vertex 310 of the lens 300. Lens 300 has a sag height s and a half-width w , and refractive index n (not shown in Figure). An optimal lens design will result in incident ray 320 which is incident parallel to the x axis, arriving at the edge 315 of lens 300 and refracted at an angle β intersecting the top of the dot 305. We thus wish to find an expression for t in terms of the lens parameters
20 and the half-width h which is a scale parameter representative of the size of the dot 305.

The equation of the lens profile function $y(x)$ is given by

$$P * x^2 - 2 * R * x + y(x)^2 = 0,$$

where R is the lens radius at the edge 305 of the lens, and P is the conic constant and is equal to $1-e^2$, where e is the eccentricity. In principle, a more general lens
25 profile function $y(x)$ including higher powers of x could be chosen. However, it is generally more convenient for lens design purposes to use the quadratic form of $y(x)$ as above.

The normal 330 to the surface of the lens at edge 305 ($x=s$, $y=w$) has a
30 slope

$$m(x) = \frac{-1}{y'(x)}$$

17

where $y'(x)$ is the first derivative of $y(x)$. This slope is equal to $\tan(\alpha)$ where α is the angle between incident ray 320 and the normal 330, and so

$$\tan(\alpha) = m(x)$$

so that

$$5 \quad \alpha(x) = \text{ArcTan}\left(\frac{\sqrt{2 * R * x - P * x^2}}{P * x - R}\right).$$

By Snell's law,

$$n_1 * \sin(\alpha) = n * \sin(\theta)$$

where θ is the angle between refracted ray 320' and the normal 330, and n_1 is the refractive index of air (taken to be 1 as an approximation hereafter). Hence

$$10 \quad \theta = \text{ArcSin}\left(\frac{\sin(\alpha)}{n}\right).$$

The slope A of the line joining (s, w) and (t, h) is

$$A = -\tan(\beta)$$

and substituting for $\beta = \alpha - \theta$,

$$A = -\tan\left[\alpha(s) - \text{ArcSin}\left(\frac{\sin(\alpha(s))}{n}\right)\right]. \quad (1)$$

15

It is relatively straightforward to show that t can be written as

$$t = s + \frac{h - w}{A} \quad (2)$$

with A as in Eq (1) above and

$$\alpha(s) = \text{ArcTan}\left(\frac{w}{\sqrt{R^2 - P * w^2}}\right). \quad (3)$$

20

The thickness t can be optimised with respect to one or more of the lens parameters R , n , P , w and s in the usual way, ie by taking the partial derivatives of the expression in Eq (2) with respect to one or more of those parameters and setting the partial derivatives equal to zero. The resulting system of equations can be solved analytically or numerically in order to find the set of lens parameters which gives the optimal lens thickness.

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surface 411 on one side of the substrate 410 and image elements 426a, 426b formed on a rear surface 412 on the opposite side of the substrate 410. In a preferred method of manufacturing the article 400, the image elements 426a, 426b are first applied to the rear surface 412 of the substrate 410 on said
5 opposite side (Figure 11(a)). The image elements 426a, 426b are preferably applied by printing on said rear surface 412, though they may be formed in or on said rear surface by other methods, including laser marking.

Figure 11(b) shows a transparent or translucent embossable layer 415 applied to the front surface 411 of the transparent or translucent substrate 401.
10 Preferably the embossable layer is a radiation curable liquid, resin or ink, which may be applied by a printing process. The layer 415 is then embossed with an embossing shim 416 (Figure 11(c)) to form a plurality of lenslets 422 of the lens array 420 in the layer 415 in register with the image elements 426a, 426b on the rear surface 412 of the substrate 410. The embossed layer 415 may be cured by
15 radiation, eg by UV, X-rays, electron beams or heat (IR), either simultaneously during the embossing process or subsequently, to fix the embossed structure of the lenslets 422 in the lens array 420.

Referring to Figure 12 there is shown an alternative method for producing an article 500 similar to that of Figure 11(d) in that it is formed from a substrate
20 510 of transparent or translucent material having a lens array 520 formed in an embossable layer 515 applied to a front surface 511 of the substrate and image elements 526a, 526b formed in or on the rear surface 512 of the substrate.

In the method shown in Figure 12, the embossable layer 515 is first applied to the front surface 511 on one side of the substrate 510 (Figure 12(a)) and then
25 embossed by embossing shim 516 (Figure 12(b)) before the image elements 526a, 526b are applied to the rear surface 512 on the opposite side of the substrate 510. Again, the embossable layer 515 may be formed from a radiation curable liquid, resin or ink which is preferably applied by a printing process, and is preferably cured by radiation either substantially simultaneously during the
30 embossing process or thereafter. The image elements 526a, 526b may be formed by printing or laser marking on the rear surface 512 of the substrate 510 to form the resulting article 500 of Figure 12(c).

In the resulting articles 400, 500 of Figure 11(d) and Figure 12(c), it will be appreciated that the lens arrays 420, 520 have a gauge thickness $t = p + q$, where p is the thickness of the transparent or translucent substrate 410, 510 and q is the thickness of the transparent or translucent layer 415, 515 measured from the front surface 411, 511 of the substrate 410, 510 to the apex of each lenslet 422, 522 after embossing.

In many cases, the thicknesses p and q of the substrate 410 and layer 415 will be predetermined, the average dot size $H = 2h$ will be determined by the printing method or other process used to form the image elements, and one or more lens parameters, *eg* lens width $W = 2w$, radius of curvature R , sag s , refractive index n or conic constant P may be optimised in relation to $t (= p + q)$ to create an embossing shim for forming the lens array 420, 520 in accordance with the process of Figure 14 described later.

Referring to Figures 13(a) to 13(d) there is shown a method for producing an article 600 which has a lens array 620 formed in a transparent or translucent layer 615 applied over image elements 626a, 626b on a front surface 611 of one side of a substrate 610. The substrate 610 in Figure 13 may be transparent, translucent or opaque since the lens array 620 and the image elements 626a, 626b are formed on the same side of the substrate 610. In the method shown in Figure 13, the image elements 626a, 626b are first applied to the front surface 611 on the substrate, preferably by printing (Figure 13(a)), before the transparent or translucent layer 615 is applied (Figure 13(b)) and embossed by embossing shim 616. Once again, the embossable layer 615 may be formed from a radiation curable liquid, resin or ink, which is preferably applied by a printing process, and is cured by radiation either simultaneously or subsequently to fix the lens structure of the lenslets 622 of the lens array 620.

The resulting article 600 of Figure 13(d) differs from that of Figures 11(d) and 12(c) in that the thickness p of the substrate 610 has no effect on the gauge thickness t of the lens array 620 which is substantially equal to the thickness q of the transparent or translucent layer 615 (allowing for the thickness of the image elements 626a, 626b). As the gauge thickness t of the lens array 620 of article 600 is likely to be less than the gauge thickness t of the lens arrays 420, 520 of articles 400, 500 of Figures 11(a) and 12(a), the method of the present invention

may be used to compensate for the reduced gauge thickness by reducing the lens width W , or radius of curvature R , or adjusting other parameters of the lenslets 622 of the lens array 620, by appropriate variation of the shape of the embossing shim 616.

5 Referring now to Figure 14, there is shown a flow chart for a process for creating an embossing shim for use with certain embodiments of the present invention. Firstly, a calibration template is printed (step 700), and the dot size measured (step 710) as described above. Then an initial set of lens parameters is chosen (step 720) and the parameters varied in a multivariate optimisation
10 process (steps 730, 740). Once a solution is found, an embossing shim can be created (step 750) for use in the fabrication process.

In Figures 15(a) and 15(b), flow charts of two alternative methods for forming an optical effect article are shown. In both cases a substrate is provided (step 800). The process shown in Figure 15(a) is suitable for forming the articles
15 400 and 600 of Figures 11 and 13. In the embodiment of Figure 15(a), two or more interleaved images are applied to a front or rear surface of the substrate (step 810), preferably by printing. A radiation curable ink may then be applied to the front surface of the substrate (step 820), for example by a printing process, and the ink is then embossed with an embossing shim obtained from step 750 of
20 Figure 14. The ink is then cured to form the lenslets of the optical effect article in the embossed surface. The curing step may occur substantially simultaneously with the embossing step (step 830). In Figure 15(b), the radiation curable ink is instead applied to one side of the substrate first (step 840). The ink is then embossed with an embossing shim obtained from step 750 of Figure 14 and
25 cured to form the lenslets (step 850). The image elements are then applied to the side of the substrate opposite the lenslets, in register with the lenslets, in order to form the optical effect article.

EXAMPLE

Referring to Figure 16, there is shown an example of a printed interleaved
30 image 900 which is used to produce a binary "flipping image" effect when paired with a suitable lens array. In the example shown, the image elements are black image elements in the form of stripes 901 interleaved with white image elements in the form of stripes 902. In this case, the black stripes are formed from black ink

which is printed on a clear layer or a layer of white ink, so that the white stripes are formed by clear areas devoid of ink, or white ink to which black ink has not been applied. When viewed through a lenticular lens array having lenticules 930, a device having a combination of lenticular array and image elements 901, 902 produces a switch from the image 910 shown at upper left in Figure 16 to image 920, in which black and white areas are reversed, as the device is tilted with respect to the viewer about an axis parallel to the direction of the stripes.

The black and white stripes 901, 902 were applied to a substrate by gravure printing. Upon measurement using the reticle of a microscope, the black stripes were found to have an average width of 32 microns, while the white stripes had an average width of 31.5 microns. The average value of 32 microns for the black stripes was taken to be the scale parameter representative of the size of the image elements. The width W of the lenticules 930 (shown overlaid in outline on the printed image elements 901, 902) was fixed at 63.5 microns, and the gauge thickness t optimised using the expression in Equation (2). This resulted in an optimum gauge thickness t of 90 microns at a sag height s of 10 microns and a radius of curvature R of 55.4 microns, compared to a gauge thickness of approximately 162 microns if the image elements were located at the nominal focal length of the lenticules.

In order to check that the focal point sizes of lenticules having the above design were sufficiently close to the image element size to produce the desired flipping image effect, the above parameters were input to a ray tracing simulation in optical system design software produced by Zemax Development Corporation and sold under the trade mark ZEMAX. The relative illumination plots shown in Figures 17(a) and 17(b) can be used to determine the focal point size, this being the distance between the pairs of points (960a, 960b) and (961a, 961b) respectively where the relative illumination drops to zero. It can be seen that the on-axis focal spot size 951 is approximately 30 microns while the off-axis focal spot size 952 at the edge of the lobe angle is approximately 23 microns. An "average" image element viewed on axis will thus be within 6%-7% of the focal spot size.

It will be appreciated that various modifications may be made to the embodiments of the invention described above without departing from the spirit or

scope of the invention. For example, it is possible that lenslet structures of a lens array could be directly embossed into a surface of a transparent or translucent substrate, instead of into a transparent or translucent embossable layer applied to a substrate. Also, whilst printing is the preferred process for forming image
5 elements, the image elements may be formed by laser marking. In this case, it is possible for a laser to be directed through a transparent or translucent substrate or layer from a laser source on one side of the substrate or layer to mark a laser sensitive surface on the opposite side of the substrate or layer to form the image elements after the lens array has been formed.

CLAIMS

1. A lens array for imaging a plurality of image elements in an object plane, the lens array including a plurality of lenslets formed in or on one side of a transparent or translucent material with the image elements disposed on the opposite side, the lens array having a gauge thickness corresponding to the distance from the apex of each lenslet to the object plane, wherein each lenslet has a set of lens parameters, with the gauge thickness and/or at least one lens parameter optimised such that each lenslet has an effective focal width in the object plane which is substantially equal to the size of the image elements in the object plane, or which varies from the size of the image elements by a predetermined amount.
2. A lens array according to claim 1, wherein the set of lens parameters for the lenslets include two or more of the following: lens width, refractive index, sag height, radius of curvature, conic parameter and Abbe number.
3. A lens array according to claim 1 or claim 2 wherein the gauge thickness of the lens array is optimised with respect to the size of the image elements and the set of lens parameters.
4. A lens array according to any one of claims 1 to 3 wherein the lens parameters are optimised with respect to the size of the image elements and the gauge thickness.
5. A lens array according to claim 3 or claim 4, wherein the gauge thickness of the lens array is less than the focal length of all of the lenslets.
6. A lens array according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the predetermined amount by which the effective focal width varies is less than an estimated variability in the size of the image elements.
7. A lens array according to claim 6, wherein the estimated variability is the standard deviation, median absolute deviation or interquartile range of the size of the image elements.

8. A lens array according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the predetermined amount by which the effective focal width varies from the size of the image elements is not more than 20% of the size of the image elements.

9. A lens array according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the image elements take the form of dots or lines.

10. A lens array according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the image elements are applied to a surface on the opposite side of the transparent or translucent material by printing.

11. A lens array according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the image elements are applied to a surface on the opposite side of the transparent or translucent material by laser marking.

12. A lens array according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the lens array includes a substrate of transparent or translucent polymeric material having a first or front surface on or in which the lenslets are formed, and a second or rear surface to which the image elements are applied.

13. A lens array according to claim 12 as appended to claim 10, wherein a plurality of printed dots are printed on the second or rear surface of the substrate in the object plane.

14. A lens array according to claim 10, wherein a plurality of printed dots are printed on a substrate, and the substrate is attached to a transparent or translucent material of the lens array.

15. A lens array according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the lenslets are formed by an embossing process in a transparent or translucent radiation-curable material.

16. A lens array according to claim 15, wherein the radiation-curable material is applied to a substrate formed from a transparent or translucent

material, and the combined thickness of the substrate and radiation-curable material corresponds to the gauge thickness of the lens array.

17. A lens array according to claim 16, wherein the substrate and the lenslets have substantially the same refractive index.

18. A lens array according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the set of lens parameters is the same for each of the lenslets.

19. A lens array according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the lenslets in one area or areas of the lens array have different lens parameters from the lenslets in another area or other areas of the lens array.

20. A lens array according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the effective focal width, when averaged over two or more directions within the lobe angle of the lenslet, is substantially equal to the size of the image elements, or varies from the size of the image elements by a predetermined amount.

21. A lens array according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein each lenslet has a cross-section which is a conic section.

22. A lens array according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein each lenslet is rotationally symmetric in the plane of the lens array.

23. A lens array according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein each lenslet is an elongate lenticule having substantially uniform cross section along its length.

24. A lens array according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the plurality of image elements includes at least two interleaved arrays of image elements.

25. A method of manufacturing a lens array for imaging a plurality of image elements in an object plane, the lens array including a plurality of lenslets, the

lens array having a gauge thickness corresponding to the distance from the apex of each lenslet to the object plane, the method including the steps of:

determining a scale parameter which is representative of the size of the image elements in at least part of the object plane,

using the scale parameter to optimize the gauge thickness and/or at least one parameter of a set of lens parameters for each lenslet,

and forming the lens array with said gauge thickness and said lens parameters in or on one side of a transparent or translucent material with the image elements being disposed on the opposite side of the transparent or translucent material,

whereby, the lenslets have an effective focal width in the object plane which is substantially equal to the size of the image elements, or which varies from the size of the image elements by a predetermined amount.

26. A method according to claim 25, wherein the step of optimizing at least one parameter of the set of lens parameters for the lenslets include two or more of the following: lens width, refractive index, sag height, radius of curvature, conic parameter and Abbe number.

27. A method according to claim 25 or claim 26 including the step of optimizing the gauge thickness of the lens array with respect to the size of the image elements and the set of lens parameters.

28. A method according to any one of claims 25 to 27 including optimizing the lens parameters with respect to the size of the image elements and the gauge thickness.

29. A method according to claim 27 or claim 28, including forming the gauge thickness of the lens array to be less than the focal length of all of the lenslets.

30. A method according to any one of the preceding claims 25 to 29, including the step of providing that the predetermined amount by which the effective focal width varies is less than an estimated variability in the size of the image elements.

31. A method according to claim 30, including the step of providing that the estimated variability is the standard deviation, median absolute deviation or interquartile range of the size of the image elements.

32. A method according to any one of the preceding claims 25 to 31, including the step of providing that the predetermined amount by which the effective focal width varies from the size of the image elements is not more than 20% of the size of the image elements.

33. A method according to any one of the preceding claims 25 to 32, including forming the image elements as dots or lines.

34. A method according to any one of the preceding claims 25 to 33, including the step of applying the image elements to a surface on the opposite side of the transparent or translucent material by printing.

35. A method according to any one of the preceding claims 25 to 34, including the step of applying the image elements to a surface on the opposite side of the transparent or translucent material by laser marking.

36. A method according to any one of the preceding claims 25 to 35, wherein forming the lens array includes forming the lenslets on or in a first or front surface of a substrate of transparent or translucent polymeric material, and applying the image elements to a second or rear surface.

37. A method according to claim 36 as appended to claim 34, including the step of printing a plurality of printed dots on the second or rear surface of the substrate in the object plane.

38. A method according to claim 34, including the step of printing a plurality of dots on a substrate, and attaching the substrate to a transparent or translucent material of the lens array.

39. A method according to any one of the preceding claims 25 to 38, including the step of forming the lenslets by an embossing process in a transparent or translucent radiation-curable material.

40. A method according to claim 39, including the step of applying radiation-curable material to a substrate formed from a transparent or translucent material, wherein the combined thickness of the substrate and radiation-curable material corresponds to the gauge thickness of the lens array.

41. A method according to claim 40, including the step of providing that the substrate and the lenslets have substantially the same refractive index.

42. A method according to any one of the preceding claims 25 to 41, including the step of providing that the set of lens parameters is the same for each of the lenslets.

43. A method according to any one of the preceding claims 25 to 42, including the step of forming the lenslets in one area or areas of the lens array to have different lens parameters from the lenslets in another area or other areas of the lens array.

44. A method according to any one of the preceding claims 25 to 43, including the step of providing that the effective focal width, when averaged over two or more directions within the lobe angle of the lenslet, is substantially equal to the size of the image elements, or varies from the size of the image elements by a predetermined amount.

45. A method according to any one of the preceding claims 25 to 44, including the step of providing that each lenslet has a cross-section which is a conic section.

46. A method according to any one of the preceding claims 25 to 45, including the step of providing that each lenslet is rotationally symmetric in the plane of the lens array.

47. A method according to any one of the preceding claims 25 to 46, including the step of providing that each lenslet is an elongate lenticule having substantially uniform cross section along its length.

48. A method according to any one of the preceding claims 25 to 47, wherein the plurality of image elements includes at least two interleaved arrays of image elements.

49. A method of designing a lens array for imaging a plurality of image elements in an object plane the lens array including a plurality of lenslets and having a gauge thickness corresponding to the distance from the apex of each lenslet to the object plane, the method including the steps of:

estimating a scale parameter which is representative of the size of the image elements in the object plane,

selecting a set of lens parameters for each lenslet, and

designing the lens array using the scale parameter to optimize the gauge thickness and/or at least one lens parameter of the set of lens parameters for each lenslet, wherein each lenslet has an effective focal width in the object plane which is substantially equal to the size of the image elements, or which varies from the size of the image elements by a predetermined amount.

50. A method according to claim 49, wherein the set of lens parameters includes refractive index, sag height, lens width, radius of curvature, conic parameter and Abbe number.

51. A method according to claim 49 or claim 50, further including the step of measuring the sizes of the image elements in at least part of the object

plane, wherein the scale parameter is estimated from the measured sizes of the image elements.

52. A method according to claim 51, wherein the measurement is performed using a densitometer.

53. A method according to claim 51, wherein the measurement is performed by directly measuring the sizes of the image elements.

54. A method according to any one of claims 49 to 53, wherein the image elements are part of a calibration template.

55. A method according to any one of claims 49 to 53, wherein the scale parameter is estimated by computing the mean or maximum of the sizes of the image elements.

56. A method according to any one of claims 49 to 54, wherein the scale parameter is estimated using a robust estimator.

57. A method according to claim 56, wherein the robust estimator is an M-estimator.

58. A method according to claim 56, wherein the robust estimator is one of the median, upper quartile or interquartile mean of the sizes of the image elements.

59. A method according to any one of the preceding claims 49 to 58, wherein the plurality of image elements includes at least two interleaved arrays of image elements.

60. A method of manufacturing an optically variable device, including the steps of:

providing a substrate;

applying image elements to the substrate, said image elements being located in an object plane;

determining a scale parameter which is representative of the size of the image elements;

and forming a plurality of lenslets in a transparent or translucent material on the substrate;

wherein each lenslet has a set of lens parameters determined so that the lenslets have an effective focal width in the object plane which is substantially equal to the size of the image elements, or which varies from the size of the image elements by a predetermined amount.

61. A method according to claim 60, wherein the scale parameter is determined by measuring the sizes of the image elements.

62. A method according to claim 60 or claim 61, including the step of forming the lenslets as part of a lens array having a gauge thickness which is less than the focal length of each of the lenslets.

63. A method according to any one of the preceding claims 60 to 62, wherein the plurality of image elements includes at least two interleaved arrays of image elements.

64. An optically variable device, including a substrate and a plurality of lenslets formed in or on the substrate, and a plurality of image elements located in an object plane in or on the substrate, wherein each lenslet has a set of lens parameters determined so that the lenslets have an effective focal width in the object plane which is substantially equal to the size of the image elements, or which varies from the size of the image elements by a predetermined amount.

65. A device according to claim 64, wherein the lenslets are part of a lens array having a gauge thickness which is less than the focal length of each of the lenslets.

66. A device according to claim 64 or claim 65, wherein the plurality of image elements includes at least two interleaved arrays of image elements.

67. An optically variable device, including a lens array according to any one of claims 1 to 24.

68. An optically variable device, including a lens array as manufactured by any one of claims 25 to 48.

69. A security document including an optically variable device according to any one of claims 64 to 68.

70. A security document according to claim 69, wherein the optically variable device is formed in a window or half-window area of the security document.