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(54) **METHODS AND DEVICES FOR
MICROFLUIDIC POINT-OF-CARE
IMMUNOASSAYS**

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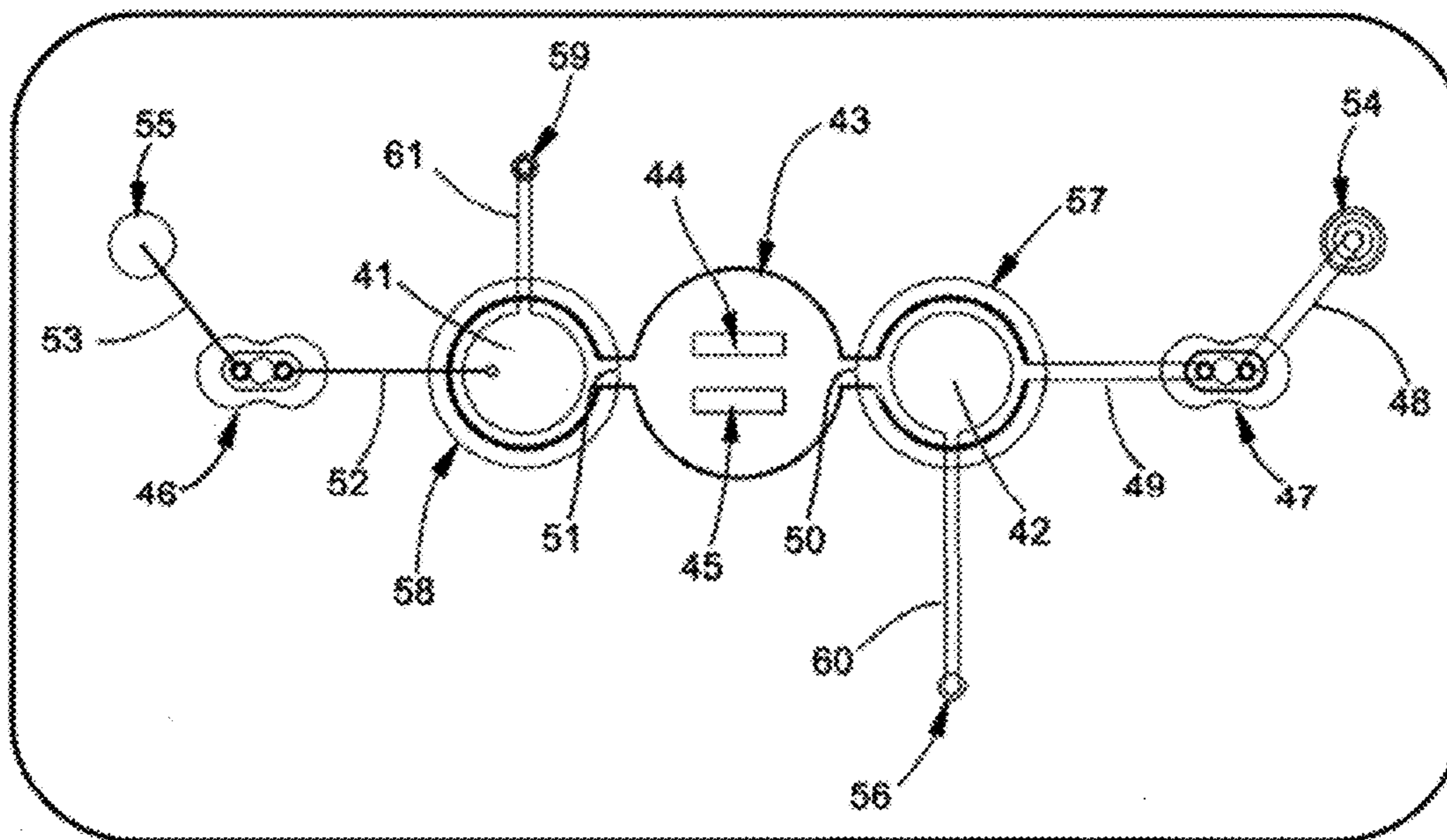
Related U.S. Application Data

(60) Division of application No. 12/341,637, filed on Dec. 22, 2008, now Pat. No. 8,110,392, which is a continuation of application No. PCT/US2007/014522, filed on Jun. 22, 2007.

(57) **ABSTRACT**

Microfluidic methods and devices for heterogeneous binding and agglutination assays are disclosed, with improvements relating to mixing and to reagent and sample manipulation in systems designed for safe handling of clinical test samples.

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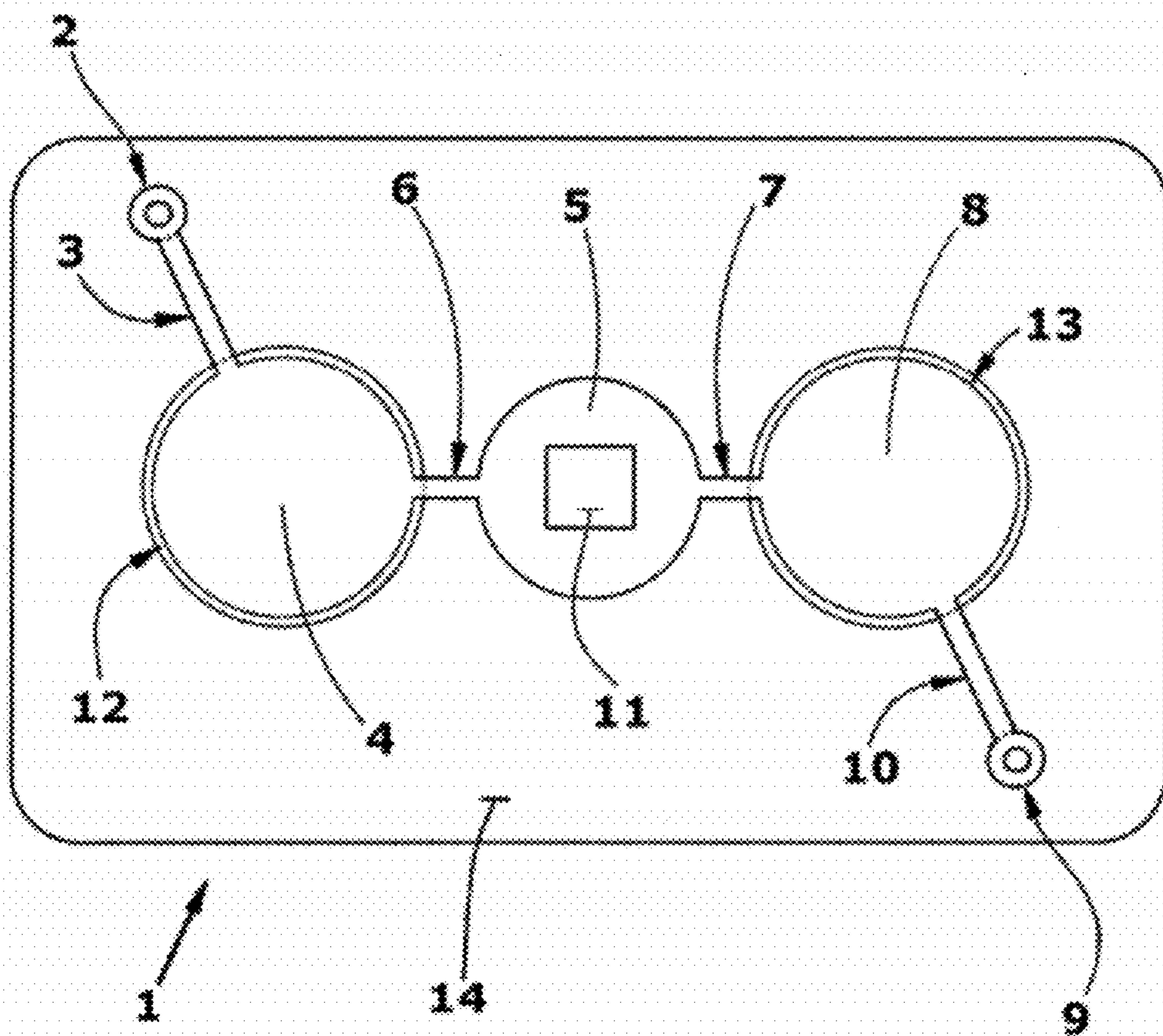


FIG. 1

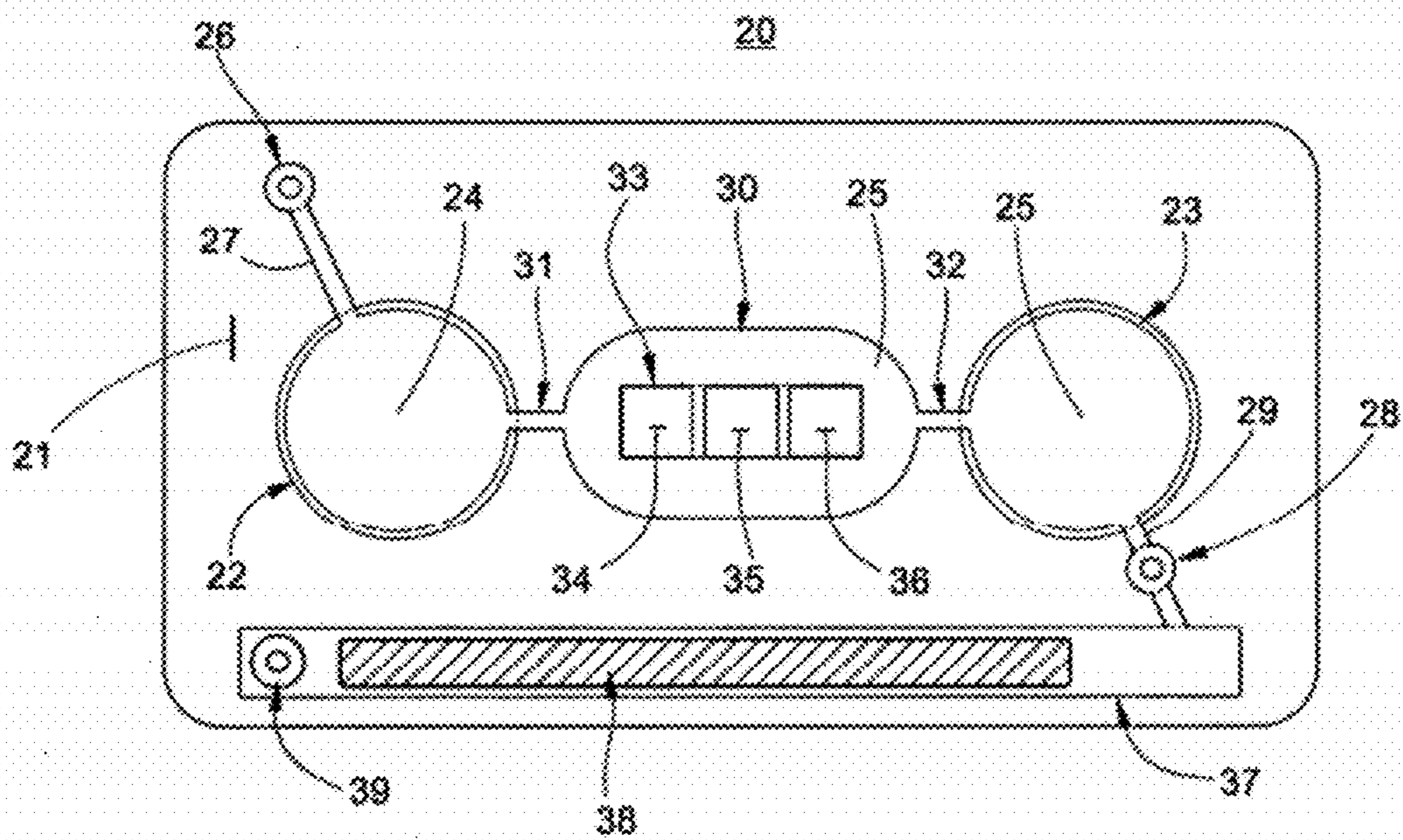


FIG. 2

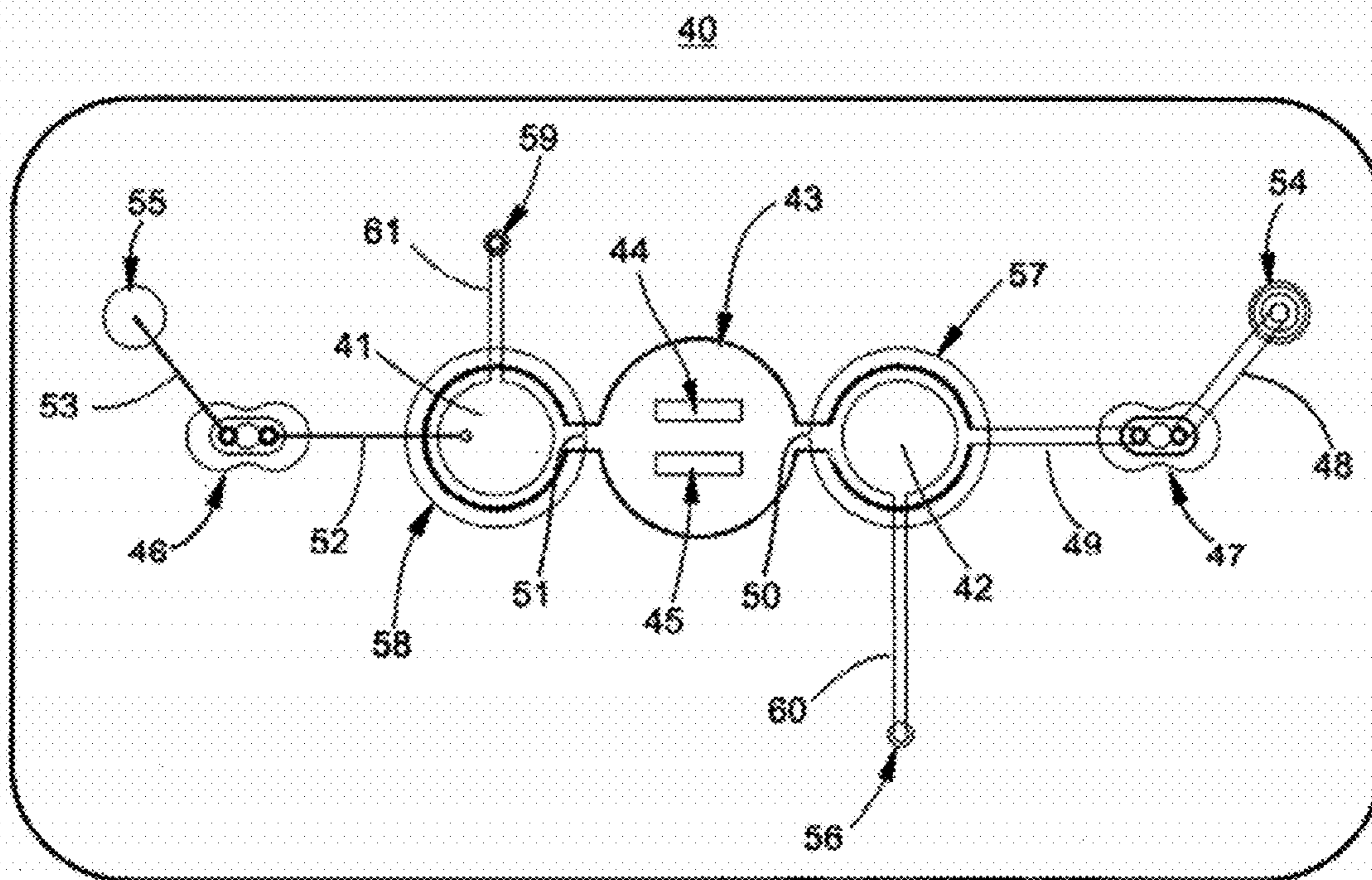


FIG. 3

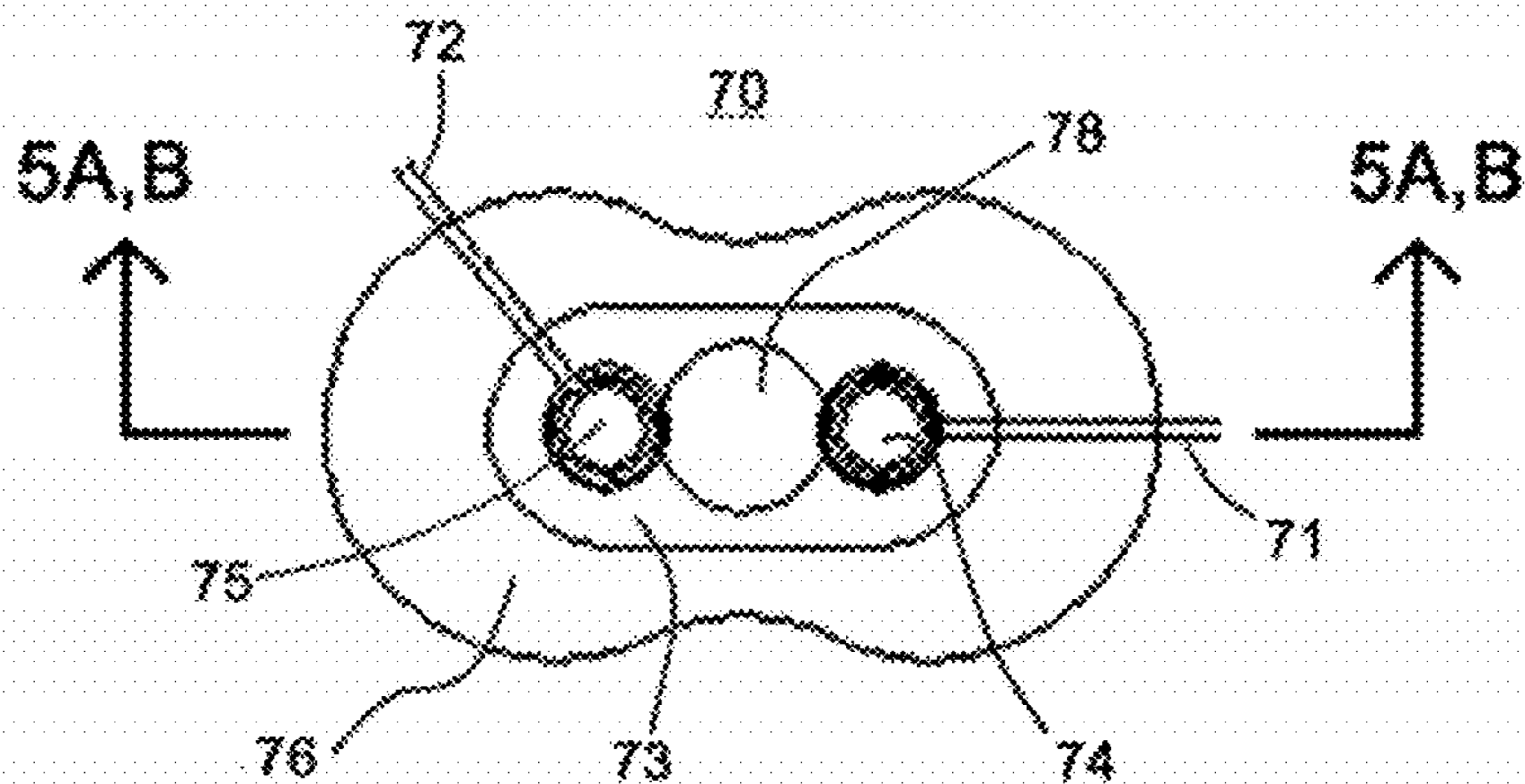


FIG. 4

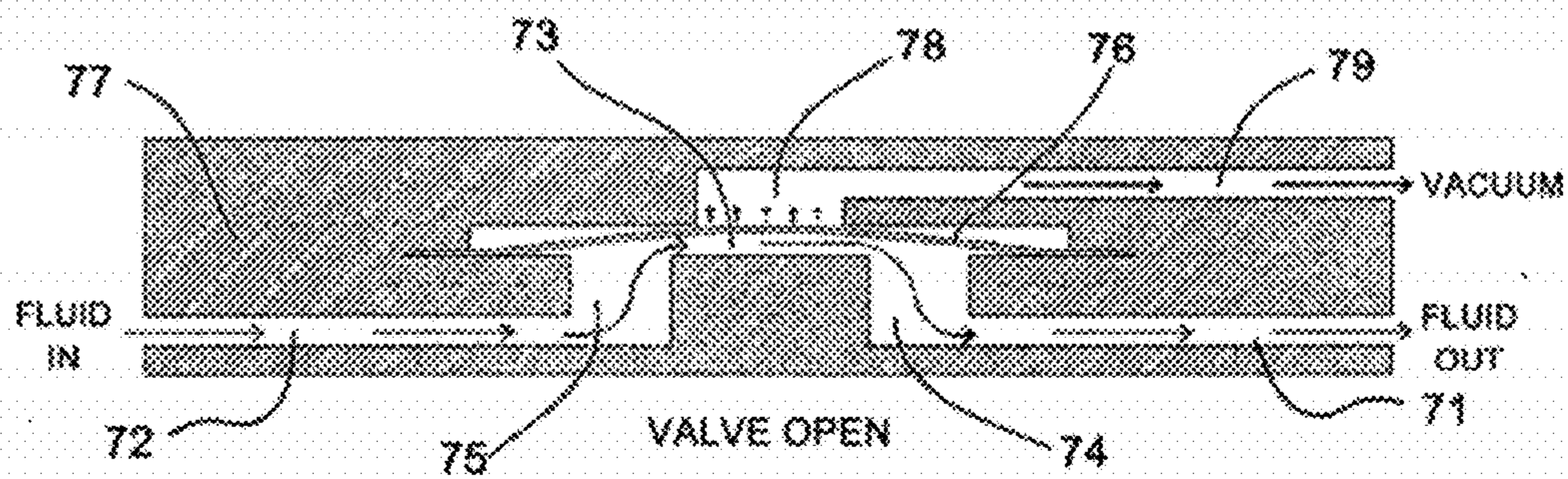


FIG. 5A

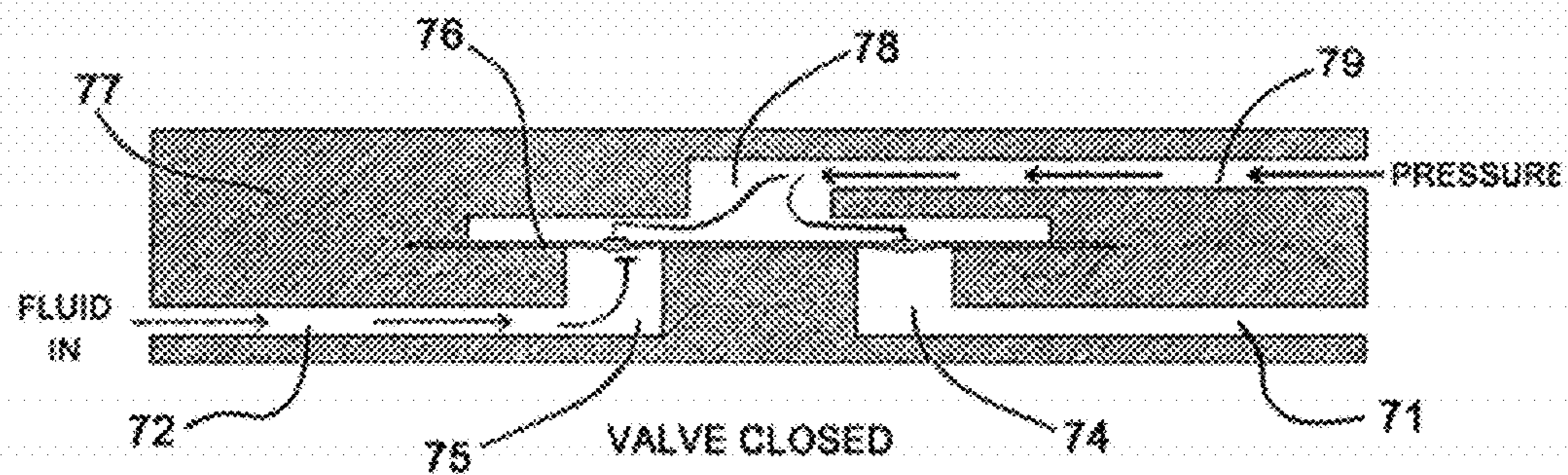


FIG. 5B

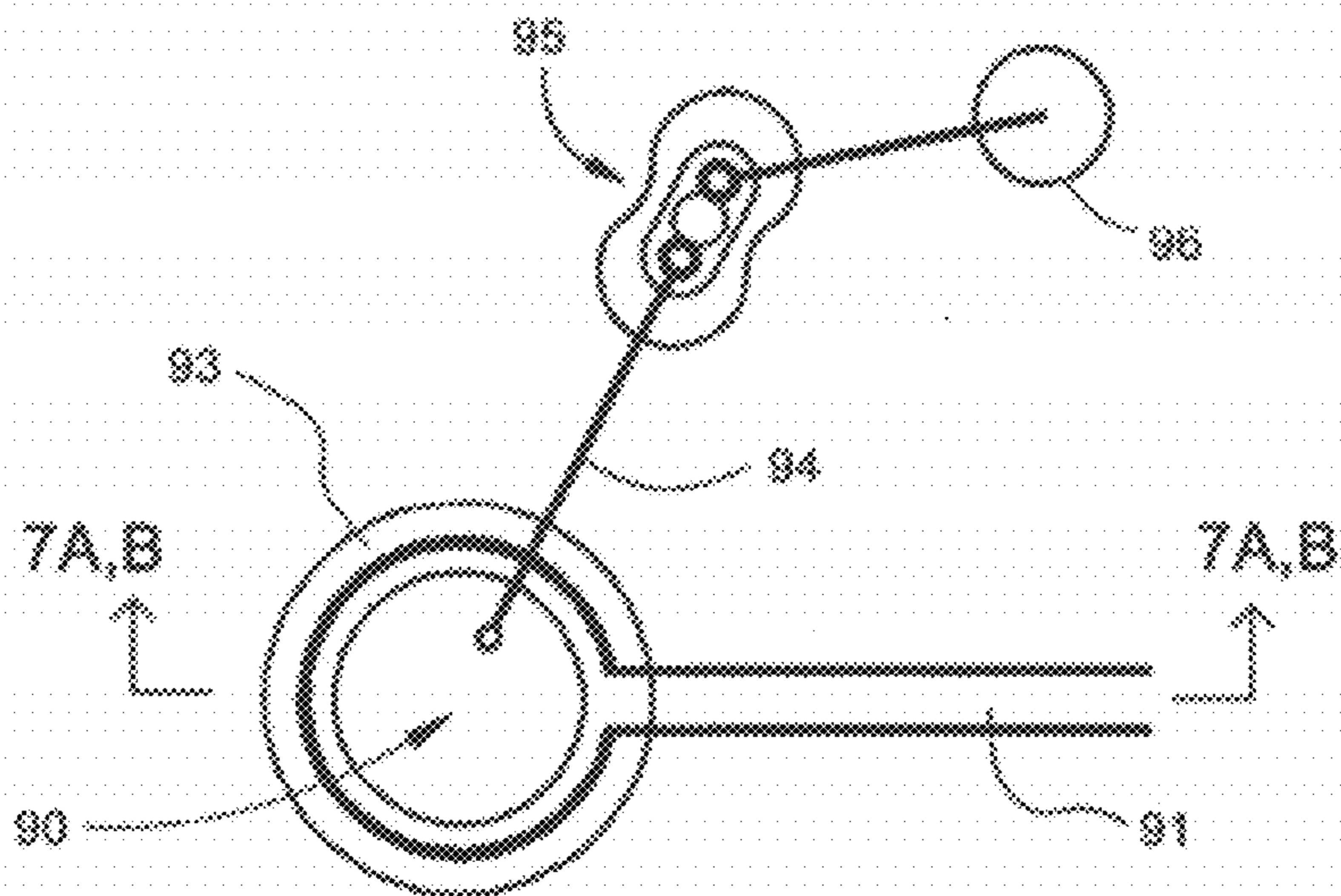


FIG. 6

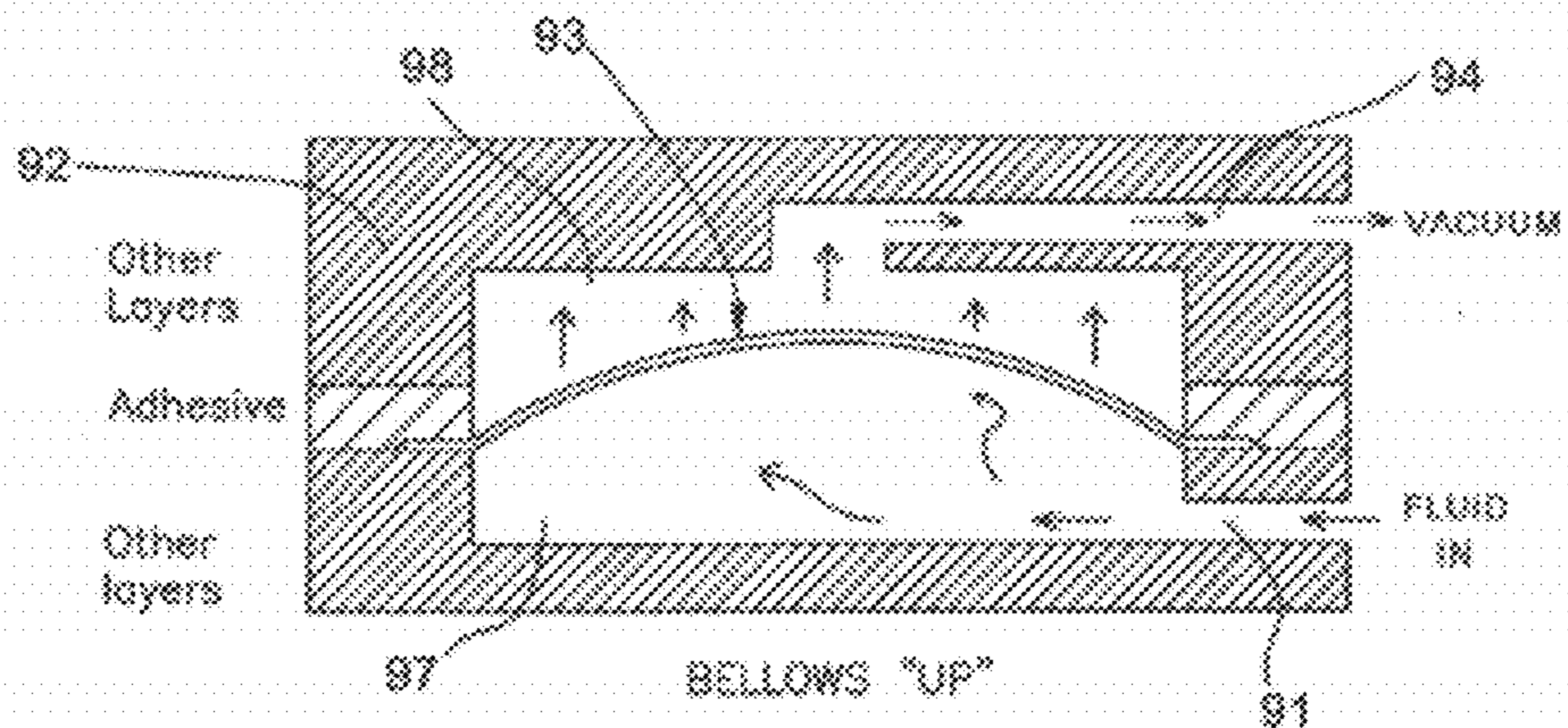


FIG. 7A

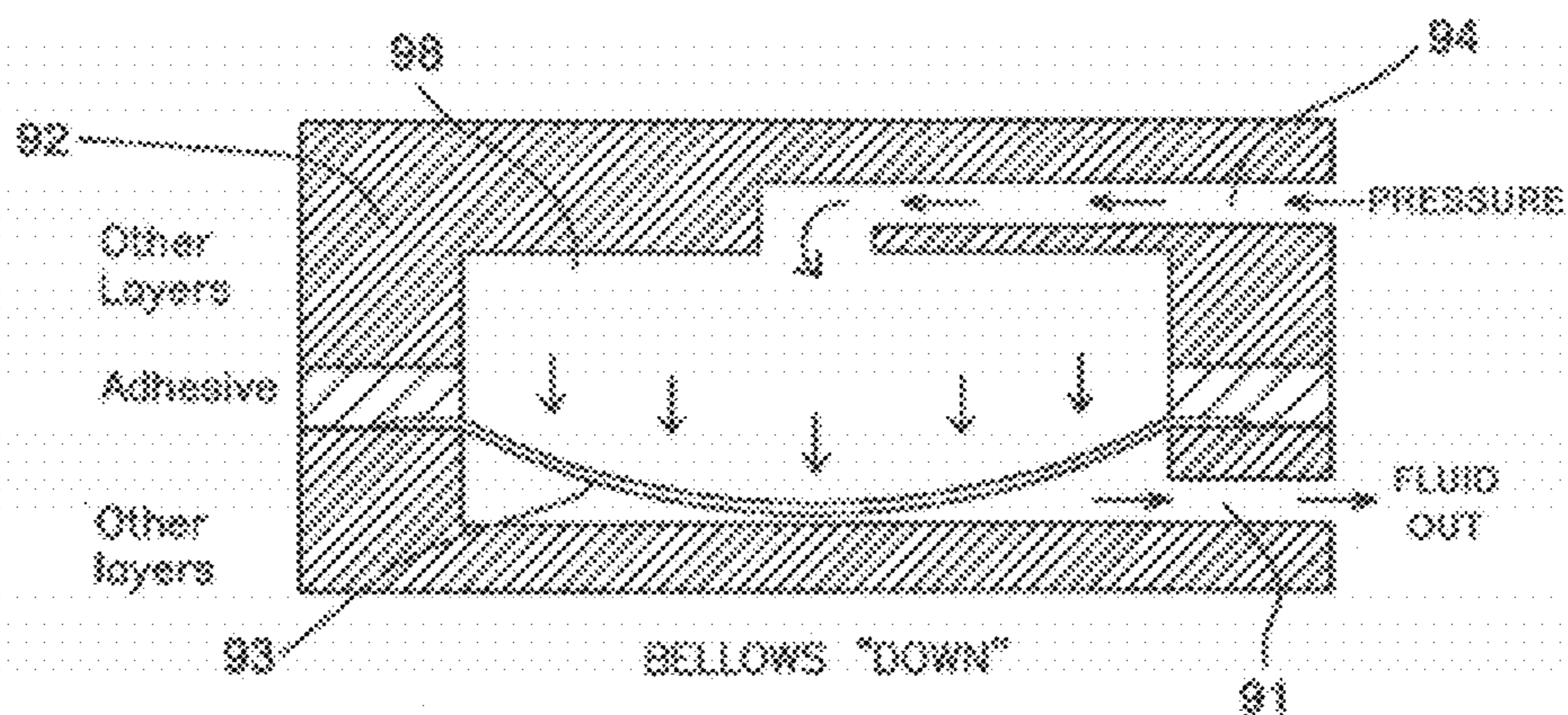


FIG. 7B

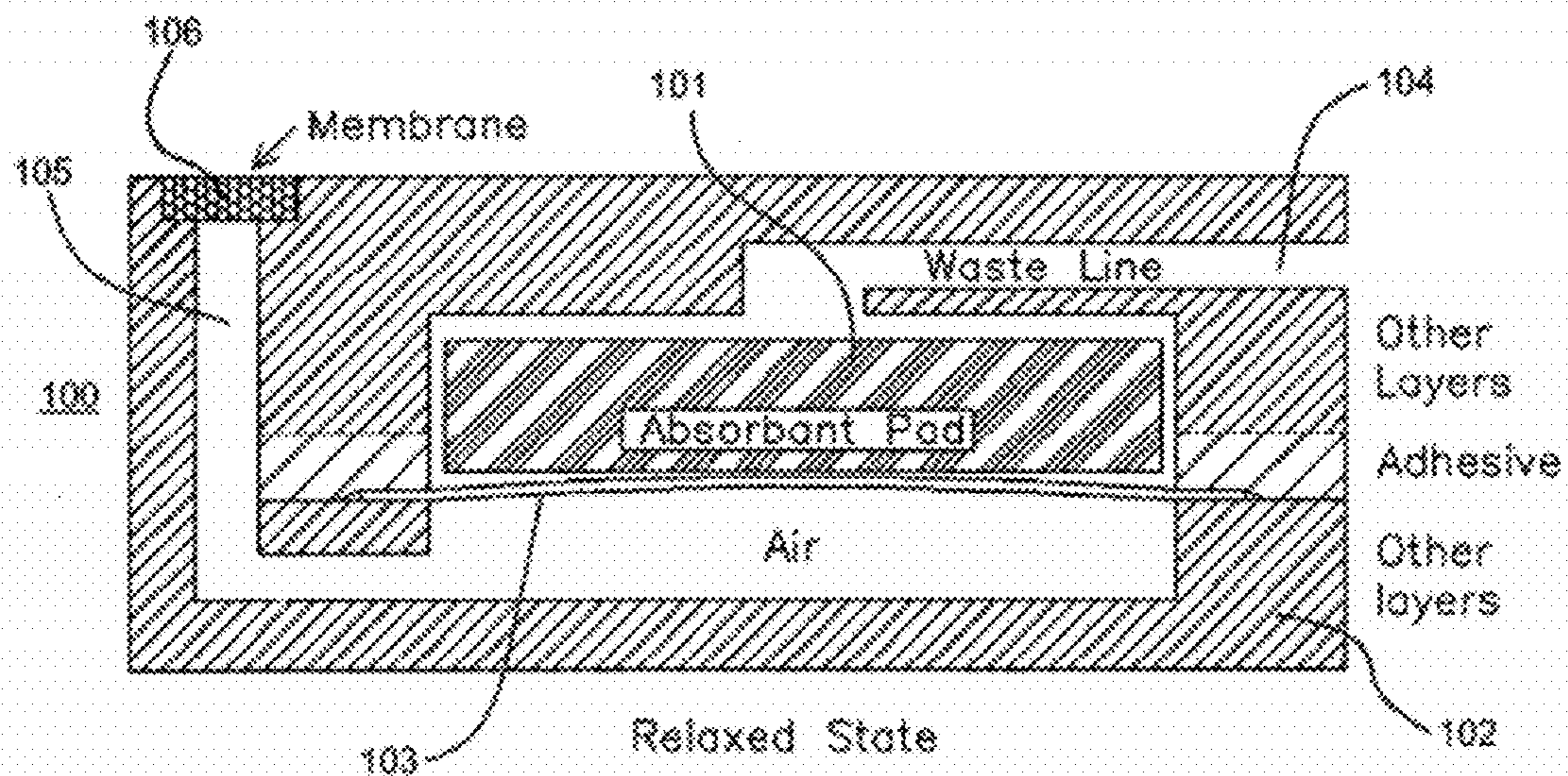


FIG. 8A

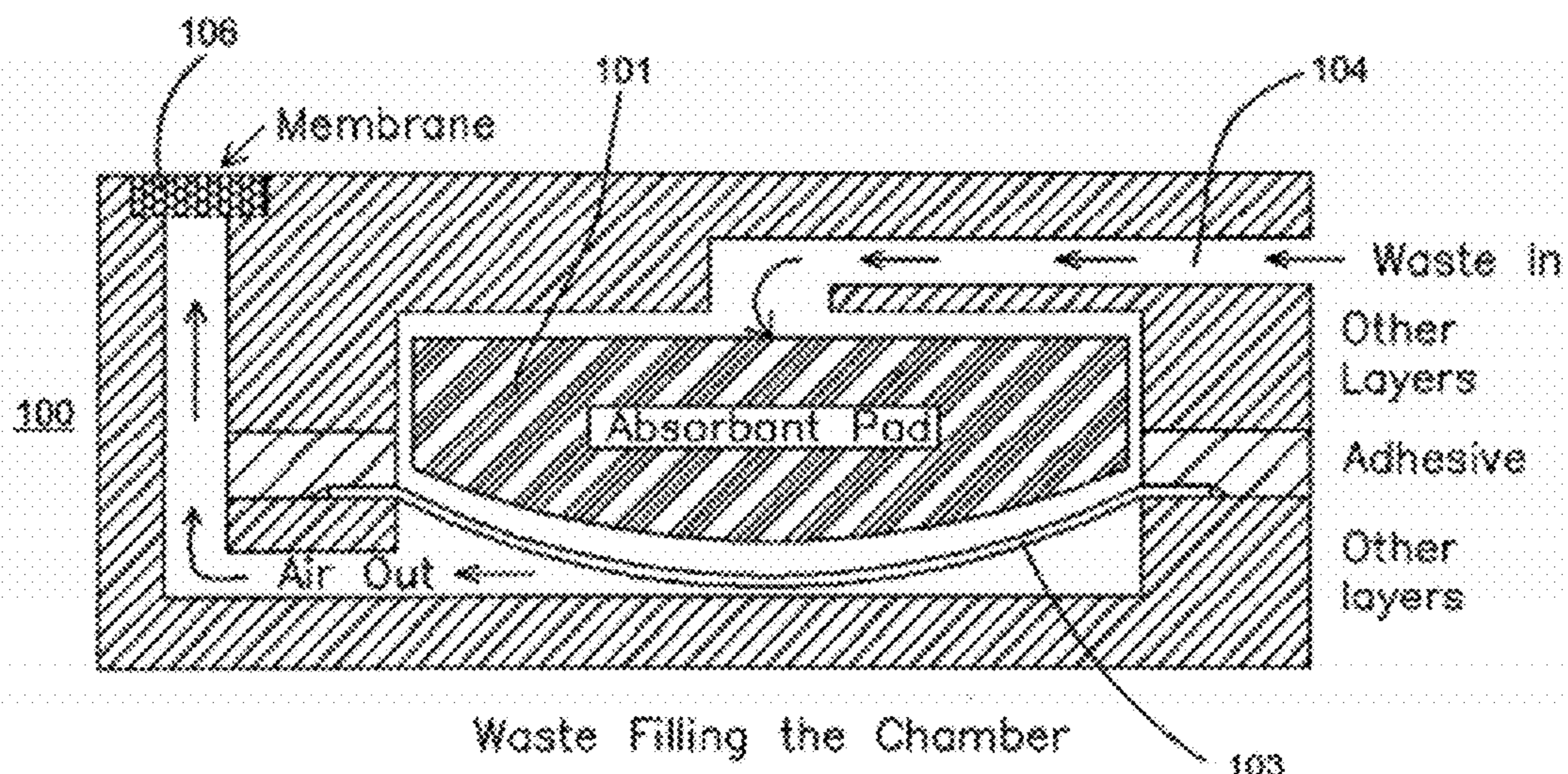
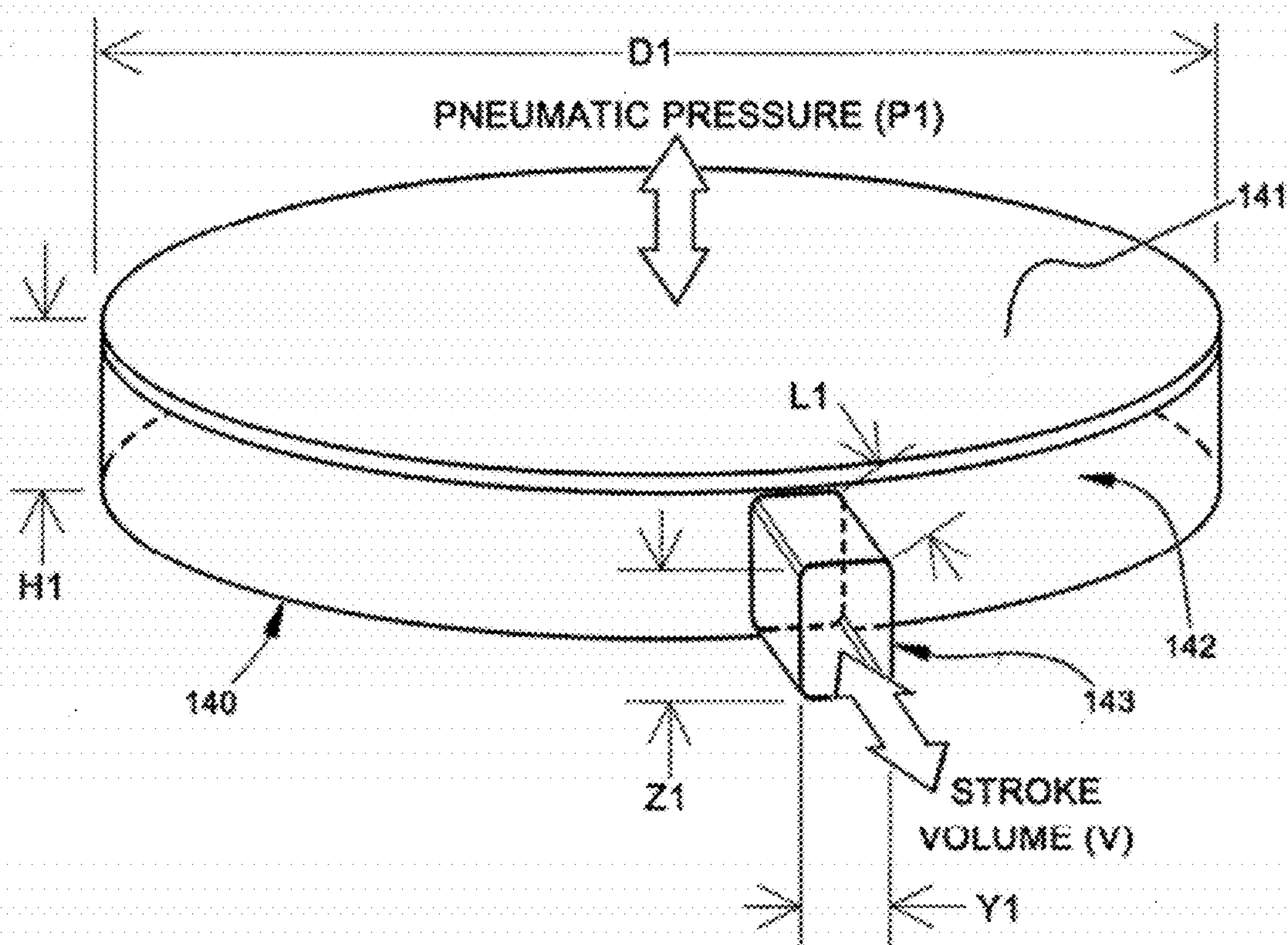


FIG. 8B



PUMP CHAMBER DIAMETER D1	PUMP CHAMBER RESTING VOLUME	PUMP CHAMBER STROKE DISPLACEMENT
~5700 μm	~55 μL	\pm ~45 μL

APERTURE WIDTH Y1 (μm)	APERTURE DEPTH Z1 (μm)	APERTURE LENGTH L1 (μm)
~1000 μm	~1800 μm	~1500 μm

FIG. 9

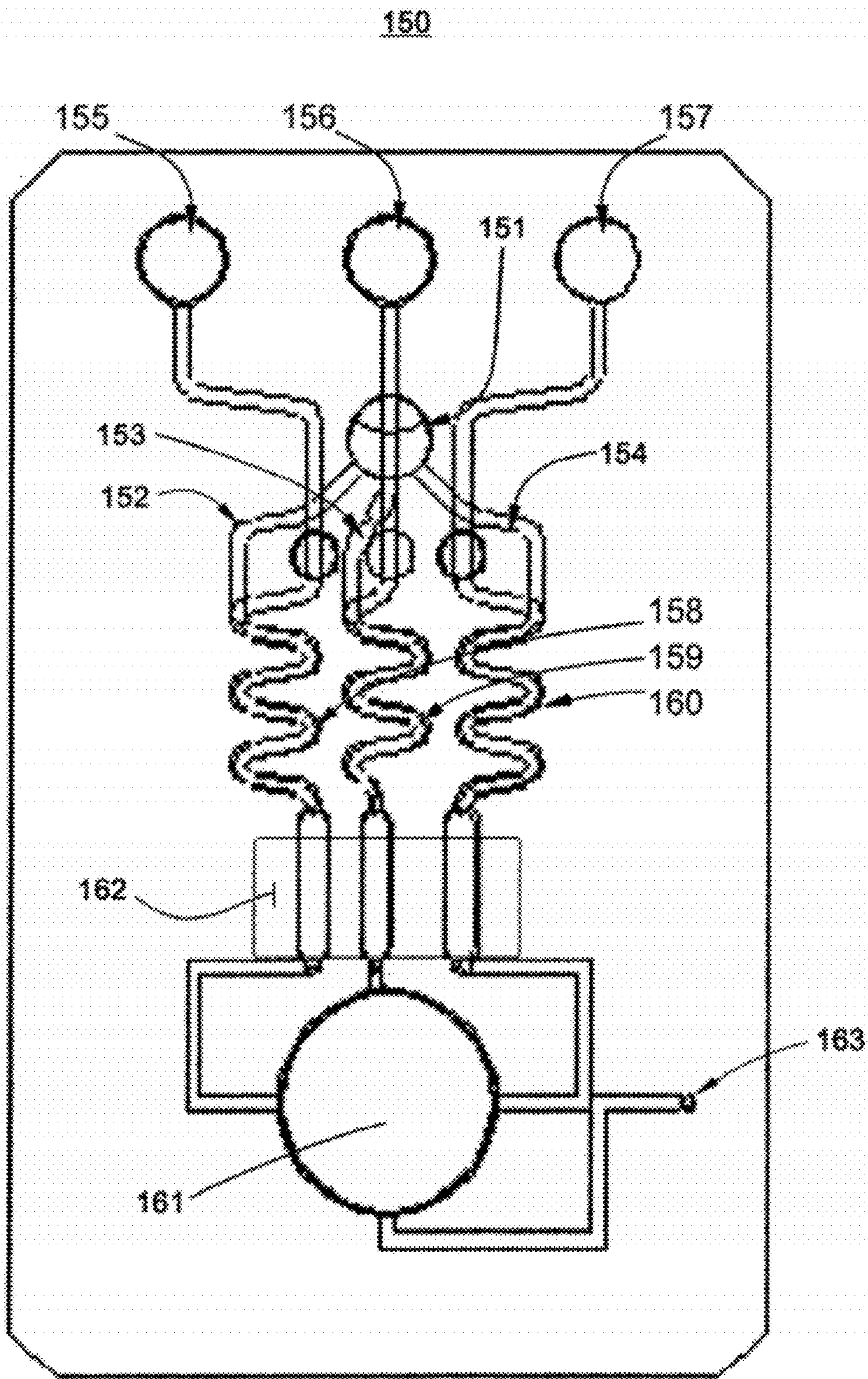


FIG. 10

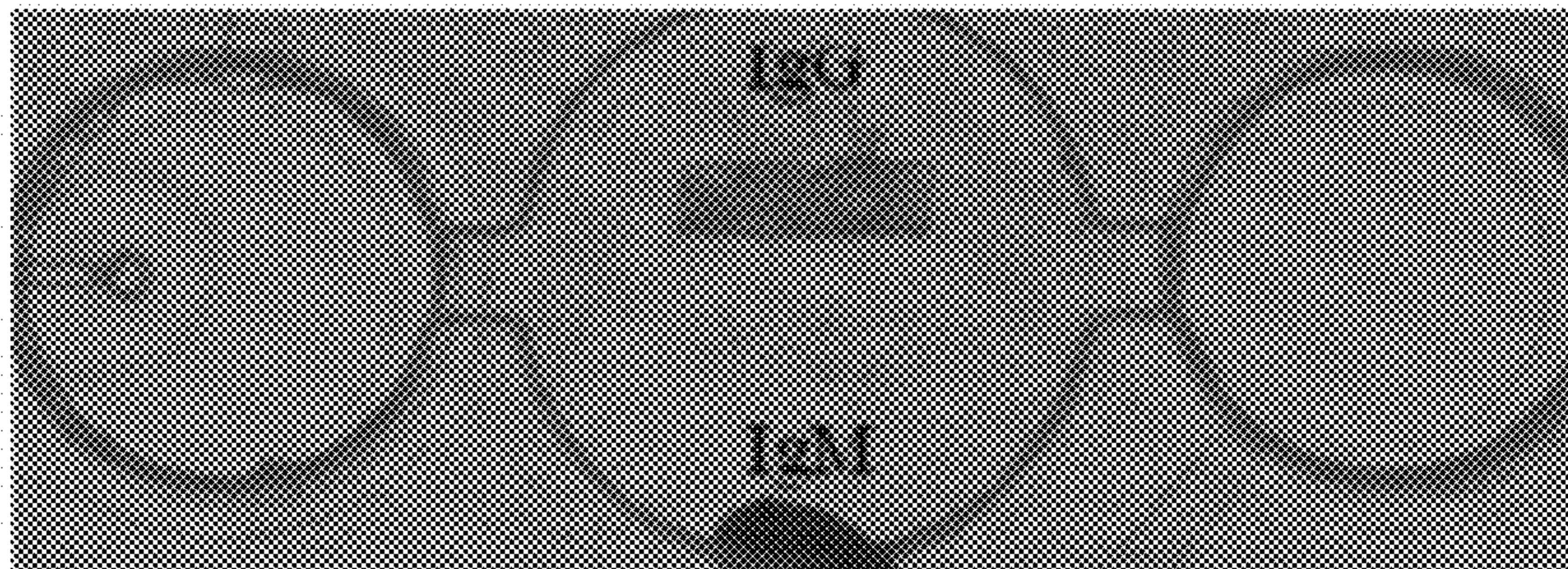
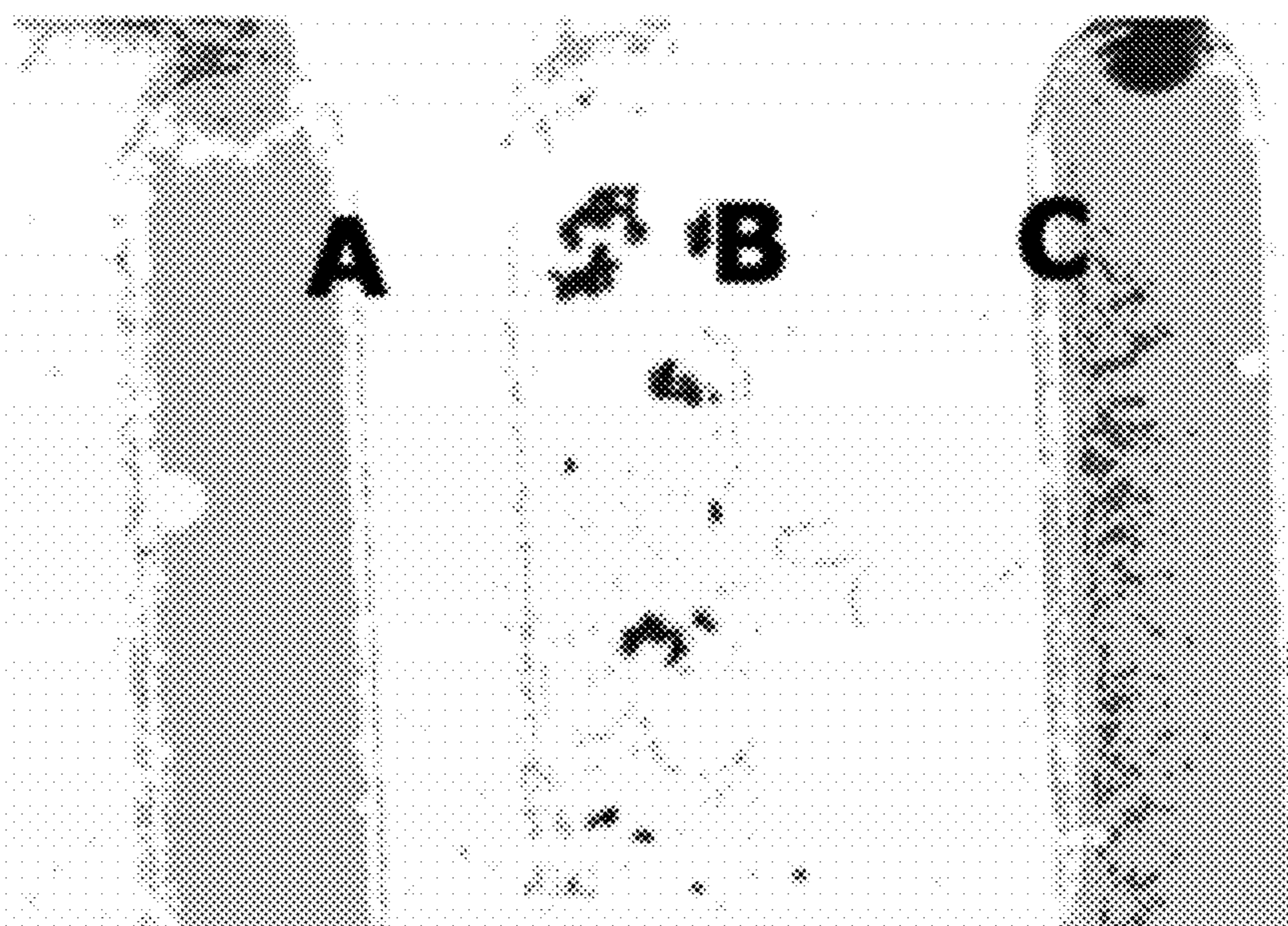


FIG. 11



- A. Negative Control
- B. Positive for Agglutination
- C. Negative Control

FIG. 12

**METHODS AND DEVICES FOR
MICROFLUIDIC POINT-OF-CARE
IMMUNOASSAYS**

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED
APPLICATION

[0001] This application is a divisional of application Ser. No. 12/341,637, filed Dec. 22, 2008, which is a continuation of International PCT Patent Application No. PCT/US2007/014522, filed Jun. 22, 2007, which claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/816,204, filed Jun. 23, 2006. These applications are incorporated herein by reference in their entireties.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] 1. Field of the Invention

[0003] The invention relates to clinical assays performed in microfluidic devices and in particular to heterogeneous binding and agglutination immunoassays and to disposable devices for point-of-care immunodiagnosics.

[0004] 2. Description of the Related Art

[0005] Detection of biomarkers at the point of care (such as, for example, in the field, in remote areas, in a doctor's office, and at the bedside in a hospital) has the potential to offer real time diagnostic information, improve patient care outcomes, decrease sample volumes, and provide analytical information from a broad range of biological samples, many of which may be acquired relatively non-invasively.

[0006] Co-assigned patents and patent applications relevant to the development of clinical assays in a microfluidic device test format include PCT Publication No. WO200201184 ("Fluid Mixing in Microfluidic Structures"), U.S. Pat. No. 6,743,399 ("Pumpless Microfluidics"), U.S. Pat. No. 6,488,896 ("Microfluidic Analysis Cartridge"), U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 20050106066 ("Microfluidic Devices for Fluid Manipulation and Analysis"), U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 20020160518 ("Microfluidic Sedimentation"), U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 20030124619 ("Microscale Diffusion Immunoassay"), U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 20030175990 ("Microfluidic Channel Network Device"), U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 20050013732 ("Method and System for Microfluidic Manipulation, Amplification and Analysis of Fluids, For Example, Bacteria Assays and Antiglobulin Testing"), U.S. Pat. No. 6,581,899 ("Valve for Use in Microfluidic Structures"), and PCT Publication No. WO2007/064635 ("Microfluidic Cell Capture and Mixing Circuit"), all of which are hereby incorporated by reference in their entireties. Also incorporated herein by reference is U.S. Pat. No. 6,729,352, which relates to microfluidic valve structures.

[0007] Capillary action has proven useful in designing small disposable diagnostic devices, as discussed in, for example, U.S. Pat. No. 5,415,994, U.S. Pat. No. 5,658,723 and PCT Publication No. WO199633399. However, to improve sensitivity, mixing during affinity capture is likely to be helpful. Mixing small volumes, however, is not without unique problems. The problem of mixing in a microvolume is variously addressed in, for example, U.S. Pat. Nos. 6,468,807, 6,916,113, 6,872,566 and 6,729,352 (which describes a "slit mixer") and also in Hardt, S. et al. ("Passive Micromixers for Applications in the Microreactor and μ TAS Fields", *Microfluid Nanofluid*, vol. 1:108-118, 2005).

[0008] Further related art includes the Maui® Mixer sold by BioMicro Systems and described in PCT Publication No. WO2003015923, U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 20050019898 and U.S. Pat. No. 7,223,363. The teaching of these disclosures relates particularly to use of a pair of flexible bladders mounted at each end of a rectilinear microfluidic chamber and a gasketed assembly for sealing the chamber to a glass slide. Preferred dimensions are given, and the claims are generally directed to a rectilinear chamber with parallel sides. In particular, the height of the chamber is generally 10 to 500 μ m and the height is small relative to the length and to the width. The walls of the chamber are selected to be smooth and to run parallel to the axis of flow so as to avoid trapping of air bubbles and reduced mixing efficiency. U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,100,626 and 6,303,389 also teach parallel channel walls.

[0009] Mixing is achieved with sonication in U.S. Pat. No. 6,326,211 and with agitation in U.S. Pat. No. 6,309,875. See also PCT Publication Nos. WO200201184 and WO200170381, and U.S. Pat. Nos. 6,287,850, 6,272,939, 6,158,712, 5,922,591 and 5,639,428. However, these methods depend on relatively large sample volumes, large hybridization chambers and inconvenient or complicated equipment not readily adapted to the point of care. Also of related interest, U.S. Pat. No. 5,718,567 describes a microscale diaphragm pump with check valves and a titanium diaphragm, U.S. Pat. No. 7,052,594 to Pelrine describes an electrically active diaphragm for use in microfluidic pumps, and U.S. Pat. No. 6,843,263 to Koh describes microfluidic cards with "a deformable chamber" having an elastic thin film cover and a mechanical actuator, the film serving to seal the body and the mechanical actuator serving to deform the film and move plugs of fluid in the body, relying on the elasticity of the film and open venting to generate reciprocal flow of the fluid plug. The pressurization of an open vented system containing hazardous sample is a serious disadvantage of the teachings of U.S. Pat. No. 5,718,567.

[0010] However, in contemplating use of disposable microfluidic device-based assays of clinical specimens, design of fully closed, "single-entry" systems has not been adequately addressed. In view of contamination hazards associated with working with potentially infectious human samples, resealable entry into the device with gasketed sealing means is often simply not acceptable. Moreover, the assay format must be robust and readily adapted for use with a wide range of biomarkers, both in automated and manual assays, at the point of care. To achieve these objectives, further improvement in mixing arts for microvolumes is needed.

[0011] Accordingly, although there have been advances in the field, there remains a need in the art for microfluidic device-based immunoassays that meet the foregoing criteria. The present invention addresses these needs and provides further related advantages.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0012] Microfluidic device-based point-of-care immunoassays are disclosed for biomarker molecules associated with pathology in a vertebrate host, man or animal. Advances in materials and miniaturization now permit the adaptation of these assays to a new generation of devices for bioassays based on microfluidics; these can be formatted either as hand-held cartridges (also termed "cards"), or as cartridges for automated or semi-automated, machine-aided testing. Microfluidic device-based assays enable small-volume sampling, with point-of-care results from a broad variety of bio-

logical fluids and samples in real time, and optionally, assay cartridges that work with single use reagent packs, or are fully self-contained and operable entirely by hand.

[0013] Complete enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) systems in a microfluidic device format are provided for detection of a wide spectrum of biomarker molecules. Such devices are generally disposable and low-cost. Bioassays adapted to a robust microfluidics device format include solid phase affinity-capture assays such as those based on antibody/antigen, antigen/antibody, antibody/protein A, glycomer/lectin, and, generally, signal molecule/receptor as target:affinity-capture pairs. Preferred solid phase affinity-capture assay systems for ELISA include antibody/antigen, antigen/antibody, antibody/protein A, streptavidin/avidin, and histidine/NTA target:affinity-capture pairs. Enzyme-linked antibodies, antigens, streptavidin, and histidine-rich proteins are generally available or may be synthesized by techniques well known in the art. Detection systems for immunoaffinity capture and tagging or amplification of target biomarker signals include, for example, enzyme-linked conjugates and chromogenic substrates (immunochromogenic and ELISA-type detection), streptavidin-enzyme conjugates (again with ELISA-type or immunochromogenic detection), antibody-coupled beads, antigen-coupled beads (with immunoprecipitin or agglutination-type detection), protein A-coupled beads, streptavidin-coupled beads, and enzyme- or bead-conjugated protein-histidine-nickel chelates. Beads for tagging can be colored, fluorescent, luminescent, tagged with radio-frequency transmitters, or otherwise labeled so that binding or agglutination can be readily detected. Titrations and binding neutralization assays also provide detectable endpoints. The microfluidic device-based immunoassays disclosed here also anticipate the use of magnetic beads in affinity concentration steps or mixing.

[0014] Mixing of small volumes as required to contact the target analyte with the solid-phase affinity capture agent and with reagents is accomplished with diaphragm pumps, herein termed “bellows pumps”, useful to generate reciprocating flow across the affinity capture site, which is placed between a pair of such pumps. Stagnant liquid is broken up by use of “flow constricting” or “flow focusing” apertures positioned between the pumps and the central chamber containing the affinity capture site or sites, eliminating the need for impellers and reducing incubation time. Mean flow velocity is increased by the focusing apertures, causing exit plume microeddies characteristic of turbulent or near-turbulent flow that aid mixing, an inventive adaptation of a Penberthy educator to a micro-scale. This mixing method is referred to herein as “micro-educative mixing” or “educative mixing”. By pairing bellows pumps inside the body of a microfluidic device, the system can be completely closed (without venting) during operation, a useful precaution against operator exposure to the contents of the device.

[0015] As a device or apparatus, disclosed herein is a combination of a first bellows pump fluidly connected by a first flow constricting aperture to an assay chamber and an opposing second bellows pump fluidly connected by a second flow constricting aperture to the assay chamber, wherein the bellows pumps are configured with pneumatic actuators for tandem operation whereby fluid is pumped back and forth through the assay chamber without venting, and further wherein the first and second flow constricting apertures are

configured for micro-educative mixing, the assay chamber further comprising an affinity capture site for heterogeneous binding assay.

[0016] As an operational process, disclosed herein is a method for heterogeneous binding assay in a microfluidic device, comprising the steps of: pumping a fluidized sample containing a target analyte back and forth across an affinity capture site without venting, said pumping step further comprising micro-educative mixing with tandem bellows pumps; and detecting bound target analyte.

[0017] For example, in one embodiment, a microfluidic card for performing heterogeneous binding assays is disclosed, comprising: a) a first bellows pump fluidly connected by a first flow constricting aperture to an assay chamber; and b) a second bellows pump fluidly connected by a second flow constricting aperture to said assay chamber, wherein: i) said first and second bellows pumps comprise pneumatic actuators for tandem operation whereby fluid is pumped back and forth through said assay chamber without venting; ii) said first and second flow constricting apertures are configured for micro-educative mixing; and iii) said assay chamber further comprises an affinity capture site for heterogeneous binding assay.

[0018] In a further embodiment, said card further comprises: a) a plastic card body with external surfaces encasing: i) said first bellows pump, wherein said first bellows pump comprises a first pump cavity bisected in coronal plane by a first flexible diaphragm, said first flexible diaphragm dividing said first pump cavity into an upper half-chamber and a lower half-chamber; ii) said second bellows pump, wherein said second bellows pump comprises a second pump cavity bisected in coronal plane by a second flexible diaphragm, said second flexible diaphragm dividing said second pump cavity into an upper half-chamber and a lower half-chamber; and iii) said assay chamber, wherein said assay chamber has a volume V_2 and further comprises a test field with immobilized affinity agent and a transparent cover, wherein both of said lower half-chambers of said first and second bellows pumps are adapted for receiving a fluid, and wherein both of said lower half-chambers of said first and second bellows pumps have a volume V_1 and a diameter D_1 ; and b) a first actuator channel pneumatically connected to said upper half-chamber of said first bellows pump and a second actuator channel pneumatically connected to said upper half-chamber of said second bellows pump, wherein said first and second actuator channels are adapted for connection to an off-card pneumatic pressure source such that the first and second flexible diaphragms are pneumatically actuated in alternation, thereby generating reciprocating flow of a fluid between the lower half-chambers of said first and second bellows pumps and through said first and second flow constricting apertures and said assay chamber, wherein: x) said first flow constricting aperture has a maximum width Y_1 , a maximum depth Z_1 , and a length L_1 , and fluidly connects said lower half-chamber of said first bellows pump to said assay chamber; y) said second flow constricting aperture also has a maximum width Y_1 , maximum depth Z_1 , and length L_1 , and fluidly connects said lower half-chamber of said second bellows pump to said assay chamber; and z) ratios Z_1/D_1 and Y_1/D_1 are less than 0.5.

[0019] In yet a further embodiment, each of said first and second flexible diaphragms are comprised of an elastomeric film sealingly affixed to said plastic card body so as to isolate fluid within said plastic card body from said external surfaces.

[0020] In yet a further embodiment, the microfluidic card further comprises sanitary means selected from the group consisting of: a) sanitary means for fluid porting; b) sanitary means for air venting; c) sanitary means for valving; and d) sanitary means for capturing waste.

[0021] In yet a further embodiment, said sanitary means for fluid porting comprises a sample inlet port adapted for single entry of a sample fluid without contamination of said external surfaces.

[0022] In yet a further embodiment, said sanitary means for air venting comprises a gas-permeable:water impermeable filter barrier configured to prevent escape of fluid from the microfluidic card.

[0023] In yet a further embodiment, said sanitary means for valving comprises: a) a microcavity in said plastic card body, said microcavity having an upper wall, a lower rim and a bottom plate; b) a first microfluidic channel entering said microcavity through said bottom plate at a first via; c) a second microfluidic channel entering said microcavity through said bottom plate at a second via, said first and second vias separated by a valve sill; d) a flexible film attached to said lower rim around the full circumference of said microcavity, said film having a first surface facing said bottom plate, and a second surface facing said upper wall, said flexible film configured to alternate between a first position, wherein said first surface of said film is sealingly seated against both said first and second vias and said valve sill, and a second position, wherein said second surface of said film is contacting said upper wall; and e) a microfluidic pneumatic control channel entering said microcavity through said upper wall and configured to supply positive and negative pressure to said microcavity, thereby actuating said sanitary means for valving by moving said flexible film between said first position and said second position while isolating fluid within said plastic card body from said external surfaces.

[0024] In yet a further embodiment, said sanitary means for capturing waste comprises: a) a waste receiving reservoir having a waste fluid channel end and a vent end; b) an absorbent bat disposed within said waste receiving reservoir and contacting said waste fluid channel end; and c) a flexible film disposed within said waste receiving reservoir and having a first side facing said absorbent bat and a second side facing said vent end, wherein said flexible film is sealed to said plastic body such that said flexible film separates said vent end and said waste fluid channel end, wherein said vent end comprises a vent exiting said external surface of said plastic body.

[0025] In yet a further embodiment, said vent further comprises a gas-permeable:water impermeable filter barrier.

[0026] In yet a further embodiment, said volume V1, diameter D1, and said aperture dimensions Y1, Z1, and L1 are configured for micro-educative mixing.

[0027] In a second embodiment, a microfluidic card comprising an on-board waste fluid isolation apparatus is disclosed, said on-board waste fluid isolation apparatus comprising: a) a plastic body having an external surface and encasing a waste receiving reservoir having a waste fluid channel end and a vent end; b) an absorbent bat disposed within said waste receiving reservoir and contacting said waste fluid channel end; and c) a flexible film separately disposed within said waste receiving reservoir and having a first side facing said absorbent bat and a second side facing said vent end, wherein said flexible film is sealed to said plastic body such that said flexible film isolatingly separates

said waste fluid channel end and said vent end, wherein said vent end further comprises a vent exiting said external surface of said plastic body.

[0028] In a further embodiment, said vent further comprises a gas-permeable:water impermeable filter barrier.

[0029] In a third embodiment, a kit for performing a heterogeneous binding assay on a clinical sample is disclosed comprising a microfluidic card of the foregoing embodiments.

[0030] In a fourth embodiment, a kit for performing a heterogeneous binding assay on a clinical sample is disclosed comprising a microfluidic card of the foregoing embodiments.

[0031] In a fifth embodiment, a method for performing heterogeneous binding assays in a microfluidic device is disclosed comprising the steps of: a) pumping a fluidized sample comprising a target analyte back and forth across an affinity capture site between tandem bellows pumps without venting; and b) detecting target analyte bound on said affinity capture site, wherein said pumping step further comprises pumping said fluidized sample through an aperture and micro-educatively mixing said fluidized sample.

[0032] In a further embodiment, said step for detecting a target analyte bound on said affinity capture site comprises detecting a bound chromogenic or fluorescent tag.

[0033] In another further embodiment, said step for detecting a target analyte bound on said affinity capture site comprises detection by direct or indirect ELISA.

[0034] In a sixth embodiment, a microfluidic card for performing agglutination assays is disclosed comprising a serpentine channel, an affinity capture agent comprising a bead or cell, and an optical window for detecting an agglutination reaction upstream from an on-board waste fluid isolation apparatus.

[0035] In a further embodiment, said on-board waste fluid isolation apparatus comprises: a) a plastic body having an external surface and encasing a waste receiving reservoir having a waste fluid channel end and a vent end; b) an absorbent bat disposed within said waste receiving reservoir and contacting said waste fluid channel end; and c) a flexible film separately disposed within said waste receiving reservoir and having a first side facing said absorbent bat and a second side facing said vent end, wherein said flexible film is sealed to said plastic body such that said flexible film isolatingly separates said waste fluid channel end and said vent end, wherein said vent end further comprises a vent exiting said external surface of said plastic body.

[0036] In yet a further embodiment, said vent further comprises a gas-permeable:water impermeable filter barrier.

[0037] These and other aspects of the invention will be evident upon reference to the following detailed description and attached drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

[0038] In the drawings, identical reference numbers identify similar elements or acts. The sizes and relative positions of elements in the drawings are not necessarily drawn to scale. For example, the shapes of various elements and angles are not drawn to scale, and some of these elements are arbitrarily enlarged and positioned to improve drawing legibility. Further, the particular shapes of the elements as drawn, are not intended to convey any information regarding the actual shape of the particular elements, and have been solely selected for ease of recognition in the drawings.

[0039] FIG. 1 illustrates an embodiment of a simple microfluidic card for immunoassay in a manual, automated or semi-automated format.

[0040] FIG. 2 illustrates a “test strip” mounted in a simple microfluidic card for immunoassay of multiple analytes from a single sample.

[0041] FIG. 3 is a schematic of a microfluidic immunoassay device with valves adapted for automated or semi-automated use.

[0042] FIG. 4 is a plan view of a microfluidic, pneumatic shutoff valve.

[0043] FIGS. 5A and 5B are section views of a microfluidic, pneumatic shutoff valve with open and closed positions shown.

[0044] FIG. 6 is a plan view of a microfluidic “bellows pump” for fluid pumping and mixing.

[0045] FIGS. 7A and 7B are sectional views of a microfluidic “bellows pump” for fluid pumping and mixing.

[0046] FIGS. 8A and 8B are sectional views of a microfluidic “waste pack” with an elastomeric inner sanitary isolation layer.

[0047] FIG. 9 is a conceptual model of a mixing aperture and bellows pump with representative dimensional and design considerations.

[0048] FIG. 10 is an embodiment of a microfluidic device for an agglutination assay.

[0049] FIG. 11 is a photomicrograph of an assay chamber of the invention, showing the results of an assay of Example 2. A positive assay is indicated by a dark color characteristic of TMB precipitation in the test zone labelled IgG (upper bar).

[0050] FIG. 12 is a photomicrograph showing the results of an agglutination reaction of Example 7.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0051] The following definitions are provided as an aid in interpreting the claims and specification herein. All of U.S. patents, U.S. patent application publications, U.S. patent applications, foreign patents, foreign patent applications and non-patent publications referred to in this specification and/or listed in the Application Data Sheet are incorporated herein by reference, in their entirety. Where such works, incorporated herein by reference, and definitions contained therein are inconsistent in part or in whole with those supplied here, the definition used therein may supplement but shall not supersede the definition provided herein.

[0052] “Micro-educative mixing” refers to a unique method of mixing at a microscale, whereby the ejectate of a diaphragm-actuated pumping chamber is channeled into an adjoining channel or chamber through a “focusing” or “flow constricting” aperture, thus forming a microscale plume which entrains or “educts” the surrounding bulk fluid. While not bound by theory, mean flow velocity and hence shear rate is increased by the focusing apertures, causing exit plume microeddies characteristic of turbulent or near-turbulent flow in the receiving chamber. This mixing method is referred to herein as “micro-educative or educative mixing”. Stagnant liquid is broken up, eliminating the need for impellers and static mixers. By pairing bellows pumps, it is shown herein that a dual pump/dual aperture educative mixing apparatus can be completely closed (without venting) during operation, a useful precaution against operator exposure to the contents of the device, and is bidirectional, improving efficiency.

[0053] In other words, “educative mixing” or “micro-educative mixing”, is a process step whereby a liquid is forced

through a microscale aperture and exits as a plume into a stagnant or slow moving bulk fluid, and the bulk fluid is entrained or educted into the rapidly moving plume, the plume further shedding eddies which mix with the educted fluid. The process step bears a relationship to the “Penberthy in-tank mixer” in function, but is adapted here structurally to a microscale or microfluidic device scale and format.

[0054] “Biomarker” means a molecule or molecules associated with a physiological condition of health or pathology in a vertebrate. Biomarkers may include not only the proteome, genome and metabolome of the vertebrate host, but also the proteome, genome and metabolome of normal flora or pathogenic infectious agents of the vertebrate body, including bacterial, protozoan, and viral pathogens. Preferred biomarkers include antigens and antibodies.

[0055] “Test samples” means representative biosamples including, but not limited to, blood, serum, plasma, buffy coat, wound exudates, pus, lung and other respiratory aspirates, nasal aspirates, bronchial lavage fluids, saliva, sputum, medial and inner ear aspirates, cyst aspirates, cerebral spinal fluid, feces, urine, tears, mammary secretions, ovarian contents, ascites fluid, mucous, stomach fluid, gastrointestinal contents, urethral discharge, synovial fluid, peritoneal fluid, vaginal fluid or discharge, amniotic fluid, semen or the like. Assay from swabs or lavages representative of mucosal secretions and epithelia are also anticipated, for example mucosal swabs of the throat, tonsils, gingival, nasal passages, vagina, urethra, anus, and eyes, as are homogenates, lysates and digests of tissue specimens of all sorts. Besides physiological fluids, samples of water, food products, air filtrates, and so forth may also be test specimens.

[0056] “Solid-phase capture” refers to affinity binding and concentration of an analyte or analyte:detection system complex on a solid phase particle, bead, surface, or porous adsorbent material. Solid phase capture may be achieved with immobilized antigen, antibody, avidin, nickel-NTA, lectin, or other ligand/receptor systems.

[0057] “Target analyte or antibody”: Analyte is used broadly to indicate the biomarker detected by the assay, but it should be understood that antibodies may be both reagents of an assay and also analytes. By definition, the target analyte is not a reagent. For example, antibodies found in blood, mucous secretions, and tissue test samples may be diagnostic for a clinical condition. Antibodies used as detection tags are reagents. Serodiagnosis of a pathogen can occur by detection of an antibody to the pathogen. Similarly, assays may be designed to directly detect the target pathogen.

[0058] “Capture molecule or antibody” refer to reagents. Affinity capture of target analytes by capture molecules is a useful concentrating and detection means in microfluidic device-based assays. Targets include analytes, ligands or antibodies. Capture molecules and their respective target analyte pairs include antibody/antigen, antigen/antibody, antibody/protein A, glycomer/lectin, signal molecule/receptor, and histidine:nickel chelates. These are termed “target:affinity-capture pairs”.

[0059] “Immunsorbent” is understood in the context of an analyte-sorbent complex or antibody-sorbent complex for use in immunoassays as a solid-phase capture surface. Preferred sorbent materials have relatively high surface areas and are wettable under assay conditions. Sorbent materials that have been successfully “decorated” with capture agent or antibody include agarose in bead form, such as Sephadex, other carbohydrates such as dextran, cellulose and nitrocel-

lulose, plastics such as polystyrene, polycarbonate, polypropylene and polyamide, inorganic substrates such as glass, silica gel and aluminum oxide, and high molecular weight cross-linked proteins. Plastics are optionally plasma-treated to improve binding and may be masked during plasma treatment to localize binding sites in the test field. Immunosorbent materials may be fabricated and used in the form of particles, beads, mats, sponges, filters, fibers, plates, and the like.

[0060] “Immobilize”: Assays are built up from reagents that are soluble or are solubilized upon rehydration in the test sample, a diluent, or in another reagent, and from reagents that serve to capture and concentrate the analyte at a defined location or surface in the device. The terms “immobilize” or “immobilized” as used herein indicate that test analyte and affinity capture reagent binding is in effect irreversible under conditions of the assay.

[0061] “Agglutination” refers to a class of analyte:affinity capture molecular binding interactions characterized by formation of colloidal flocs or macroscopic aggregates. When antibodies are the capture molecules, such antibodies are termed agglutinins. Precipitins also produce agglutination-like reactions with particles.

[0062] “Endpoint” is used here as shorthand for a “result” from either qualitative or quantitative assays, and may refer to both stable endpoints where a constant activity or level is attained, and to rate reactions, where the slope of a reactant or product concentration as a function of time is monitored continuously.

[0063] “Microfluidic device” is a hydraulic device, cartridge or card with at least one internal channel, void or other structure having at least one dimension smaller than 500 microns, but in some cases twice that, as when the sample contains particles or a bead reagent is used. The devices described here may be hybrids of microfluidic and microscale fluid structures, but generally require small sample volumes less than 1 mL, more preferably less than 200 uL, and most preferably less than 50 uL. Microscale is taken to indicate an internal dimension less than 5 mm, but in most instances less than about 2 mm. On-board processing means for fluidic operations of pumping, diluting, concentrating, dissolving, diffusing, mixing, reacting, precipitating, adsorbing, filtering, lysing, separating, metering, heating, cooling, and condensing as are known in the art may be incorporated in the device. Microfluidic devices may be fabricated from various materials using techniques such as laser stenciling, embossing, stamping, injection molding, masking, etching, and three-dimensional soft lithography. Laminated microfluidic devices are further fabricated with adhesive interlayers or by thermal adhesiveless bonding techniques, such by pressure treatment of oriented polypropylene. Fabrication of injection molded microfluidic devices may include sonic welding or UV-curing glues for assembly of parts.

[0064] “Microfluidic channel”, also termed “microchannel”, means a fluid channel having variable length, but cross-sectional area often less than 500 μm , in some cases twice that, as when the sample contains particles or a bead reagent is used. Microfluidic fluid flow behavior in a microfluidic channel is highly non-ideal and laminar, as in Poiseuille flow, and may be more dependent on wall wetting properties and diameter than on pressure drop. Hybrid microscale and microfluidic devices are encompassed here. Microfluidic channel surfaces may be passivated if desired.

[0065] “Microfluidic valves” include hydraulic, mechanic, pneumatic, magnetic, and electrostatic actuator means with at

least one dimension smaller than about 500 μm , in some cases twice that, as when the sample contains particles or a bead reagent is used. A representative flap valve of the genus is described in U.S. Pat. No. 6,431,212. One-way “check” valves are also known in the art and can be used to direct the flow of solubilized reagents and sample for microfluidic device-based assays. Ball pinch valves as described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,718,567, are also useful in the devices of the present invention, as may be the valves of U.S. Pat. No. 6,729,352.

[0066] “Microfluidic pumps” are inclusive of “microscale pumps”, and include for example, bulbs, bellows, diaphragms, and bubble microactuators intended to force movement of fluids, where the structures of the pump are in fluidic connection with a microfluidic channel. Such structures include the mechanically actuated recirculating pumps described in U.S. Pat. No. 6,743,399 and U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 20050106066. Such pumps may be robotically operated or operated by hand. Electroosmotic pumps are also provided. Such pumps can be used in place of external drives to propulse the flow of solubilized reagents and sample in microfluidic device-based assays.

[0067] “Bellows Pump”, in the pneumatic embodiment, is a device formed as a cavity, often cylindrical in shape, bisected in coronal section by an elastomeric diaphragm to form an “upper” (or first) and a “lower” (or second) half-chamber which are not fluidically connected. The diaphragm is controlled by a pneumatic pulse generator generally connected to the upper half-chamber. Positive pressure above the diaphragm distends it, displacing the contents of the second half-chamber, negative gauge pressure (suction) retracts it, expanding the second half-chamber and drawing fluid in. By half-chamber, it should be understood that the upper and lower half-chambers are roughly symmetrical or equal in volume above and below the diaphragm. The lower half-chamber is connected to a fluid in-port and out-port. The fluid in-port and out-port may be separate ports or a single port. As described above, a pneumatic pulse generator is pneumatically connected to the upper half-chamber, generally by a microchannel, which is valved. In the complete apparatus, pneumatic actuation is programmable. Thus, programmable pneumatic pressure logic used by the pulse generator will actuate the diaphragm on signal and open and close valves on signal. When the pulse generator is off-cartridge, nipples or inlets, a pneumatic manifold and solenoid valves are provided to connect the card with the controller.

[0068] In use, fluid enters the lower half-chamber of a bellows pump through the inlet when negative pressure is applied to the diaphragm (or passively, when fluid is pushed in by a second bellows pump). Then, when positive pressure is applied to the diaphragm, during the downstroke, the fluid contents of the chamber are displaced out through the outlet. By supplying a train of positive and negative pressure pulses to a diaphragm, fluid can be moved in and out of a bellows pump chamber. This fluid motion becomes directional by the application of synchronized valve logic.

[0069] Pairs of bellows pumps, i.e., “dual bellows pumps”, can mix fluids or suspensions when configured with a first diaphragm pressure-actuated and a second diaphragm passive so as to force reciprocating flow between the two bellows chambers. Reciprocating flow can also be obtained by synchronously actuating both diaphragms with alternating or inverted pneumatic pulses. Similarly, a multiplicity of bellows pumps can be fluidly connected in series to perform a

mixing function. Note that a manual embodiment is obtained by joining the flexible membrane to the cover over the bellows pump chamber, so that the flexible cover can be simply pressed with a thumb or finger in order to expel fluid from the bellows chamber, and that pairs of bellows pumps, manually operated as described, can be used to pump fluid back and forth through a central chamber or channel with eductive mixing as described and embodied here.

[0070] “Self-priming” connotes a microfluidic channel that is fabricated from a material or is treated so that the channel is wettable and capillary flow begins generally without the need to prime the channel.

[0071] “Via” refers to a step in a microfluidic channel through a layer, most characteristic of laminated devices built from sheets or rolls, but may also be found in molded devices with multiple layers.

[0072] “Isolation” or “isolated” refers to a system of seals and enclosures that protect the user from exposure to clinical materials potentially contaminated with an infectious agent, toxin or unknown biohazard. For example, a single-entry device may optionally include a flexible bung which is self-sealing following withdrawal of the sample dispensing device. Isolation microfluidic devices may also include vent filters and any on-board “reagent-”, “waste-” or “rinse pack” sealingly enclosed within the device. Medical isolation is commonly further characterized as “reverse isolation” or “forward isolation”, as would be known by those skilled in the art. Exposure may occur if the operator of the device is contacted by the sample; contamination of the sample may occur if the sample is contacted by the operator, or by a fomite, or by another sample.

[0073] “Single entry” devices are disposable, and intended for single use. Generally, one sample per device is applied, the device is then sealed, and the assay performed. Swab capture devices are a means for sanitary sample capture in which the swab to be analyzed is inserted into the device and the handle is broken off so that the swab becomes sealed inside the device. Closures in which blood, plasma or other bodily fluid, or lavages, is taken up in the device by pipetting, by aspiration or by capillary action and the orifice then sealed are also recognized here as single-entry means.

[0074] “Waste pack” is a cavity or reservoir that serves as a receptacle for discharged sample, rinse solution, and waste reagents. Typically, a waste pack also includes an absorbent pad, for example consisting of a fibrous bat with or without a hydrophilic polymer, and includes absorbent foams; absorbent sponges; superabsorbent polymers; or absorbent gelling materials. The absorbent pad is commonly a bibulous material and also can be used to propulse fluid flow by capillary wetting in place of, or in concert with, microfluidic pumps. Other materials include papers, sponges, diaper materials, Contec-Wipe™ (Contec, Spartanburg S.C. USA), for example.

[0075] In a preferred embodiment, waste packs may be used to contain biohazardous material by incorporating a flexible or elastomeric film or membrane sealingly attached to the body of the microfluidic device and enclosing the waste pack, which contains an absorbent bat, in a waste chamber inside the device body. The membrane stretches as the bibulous material expands. The cavity outside the isolation layer is vented to atmosphere, but the membrane ensures that waste material is contained and isolated. The bibulous material may be pre-treated to comprise a disinfectant as an added precaution.

[0076] “Vent” refers to a pore intercommunicating between an internal cavity and the atmosphere. An isolation vent further is fabricated of a housing containing a membrane composition that is selected to prevent transit of fluids but is permeable to gas, thus forming a liquid barrier. An example is Mupor™ a porous PTFE composition available from Porex Porous Products Group (Fairburn Ga., USA).

[0077] “Test field” refers to the site or zone in a microfluidic device-based assay where the assay endpoint is observed or measured. A preferred test field is, for example, an optical window in the coverplate of the device, optionally equipped with a magnifying lens.

[0078] “Means for isolation” include impermeable cartridge body, gas permeable hydrophobic venting, bibulous padding in waste chamber, disinfectant in waste chamber, elastomeric membrane separating pneumatic actuator from blister pack, flexible membrane separating bibulous padding from vent, valve with elastomeric membrane actuated by suction pressure, suction pressure in said sample entry port, on-board reagent pack, single-entry sample port, and disposable device, among others.

[0079] “Means for detecting” as used herein refers to a device for assessing and displaying an endpoint, i.e., the result of an assay, and may include a detection channel and test pads. Detection endpoints are evaluated by an observer visually in a test field, or by a machine equipped with a spectrophotometer, fluorometer, luminometer, photomultiplier tube, photodiode, nephelometer, photon counter, voltmeter, ammeter, pH meter, capacitive sensor, radio-frequency transmitter, magnetoresistometer, or Hall-effect device. Particles, beads and microspheres, impregnated with color or having a higher diffraction index, may be used to facilitate visual or machine-enhanced detection of an assay endpoint. Magnifying lenses in the cover plate, optical filters, colored fluids and labeling may be used to improve detection and interpretation of assay results. Means for detection of particles, beads and microspheres may include “labels” or “tags” such as, but not limited to, dyes such as chromophores and fluorophores; FRET probes (including those known as “Molecular Beacons”), enzyme-linked antibodies and their chromogenic substrates, radio frequency tags, plasmon resonance, or magnetic moment as are known in the prior art.

[0080] Colloidal particles with unique chromogenic signatures depending on their self-association are also anticipated to provide detectable endpoints.

[0081] QDots, such as CdSe coated with ZnS, decorated on magnetic beads, or amalgamations of QDots and paramagnetic Fe₃O₄ microparticles, optionally in a sol gel microparticulate matrix or prepared in a reverse emulsion, are a convenient method of improving the sensitivity of an assay of the present invention, thereby permitting smaller test pads and larger arrays. Fluorescence quenching assays are anticipated. A variety of substrate and product chromophores associated with enzyme-linked immunoassays are also well known in the art and provide a means for amplifying a detection signal so as to improve the sensitivity of the assay. Detection systems are optionally qualitative, quantitative or semi-quantitative.

[0082] “Target Biomarkers”: Those skilled in immunology are familiar with ELISA and agglutination assays. Targets for microfluidic detection assays include diagnostic biomarkers useful in the practice of internal medicine. Classes of biomarkers suitable for ELISA are well-known in the art and include proteins and peptides associated with pathology, hor-

mones, tissue and coagulation factors, and small molecules, etc. These would include cancer markers associated with bladder, prostate, breast or lung cancer, for example, and also blood group antigens and antibodies useful for testing cross-match compatibility.

[0083] Targets also include infectious and parasitic agents. In the early and acute phase of an infection, laboratory diagnosis tends to rely on direct detection of the invading pathogen. This may involve in vitro culture or microscopic examination of test specimens. Test tube and microtiter plate-formatted serological methods are also useful. Non-specific assays such as cold-agglutinins or sedimentation rate of whole blood are also used to support the clinical impression. Definitive laboratory tests rely extensively on live culture. But for a number of reasons, this is not fully satisfactory. Culture methods are plagued by delays, sample contamination, false negatives, and in the case of emerging diseases, by lack of reliable growth substrates and protocols for culture of viable organisms. Some well known but very fastidious pathogens are also not routinely cultured.

[0084] In particular, time to culture is unsatisfactory. Blood cultures are typically, for example, not read for 14 to 20 hours, and a positive culture, indicated by turbidity in liquid broth, must be followed by isolation of the causative organism on solid media, identification by biochemical tests, with subsequent antibiotic susceptibility testing. Cultures for tuberculosis typically are read 3-6 weeks after inoculation. Viral culture, which relies on cell and tissue culture, or inoculation of egg chorioallantoic membrane, takes one to fourteen days and is difficult at best. Detection of protozoan parasites generally relies on microscopic observations or serodiagnosis, tests that are not generally available outside of specialized clinical laboratories. In vitro testing and sample handling is also inherently unsafe and can contribute to iatrogenic infections.

[0085] Therefore, there has been substantial interest in developing laboratory diagnostic tests based on biomarkers developed from the genome, proteome, or metabolome of known and emerging pathogens, particularly tests that minimize sample handling and that provide results in real time or near real time at the point of care.

[0086] The range of needed assays can be grasped from the following partial list of known pathogens, which must be differentiated from closely related microbial normal flora and environmental contaminants.

[0087] Airborne respiratory pathogens include, for example, *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, *Streptococcus pyogenes*, *Mycoplasma pneumoniae*, *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, *Bordetella pertussis*, *Legionella pneumophila*, *Corynebacterium diphtheriae*, *Haemophilus influenzae*, *Chlamydia pneumoniae*, Varicella virus, Measles virus, Mumps virus, Respiratory Syncytial Virus, Coronavirus, Rubella virus, Influenza virus, including hemagglutinin group H1-5, Adenovirus and *Pneumocystis carinii*, among others, and for which serodiagnosis is feasible.

[0088] Food and water-borne enteric pathogens include, for example, *Salmonella typhosa*, *Salmonella enteridis*, *Salmonella choleraesuis*, *Salmonella typhimurium*, *Shigella dysenteriae*, *Campylobacter jejuni*, *Vibrio cholera*, *Helicobacter pylori*, *Escherichia coli* (strains producing heat stable or heat labile enterotoxin, such as serotype O157:H7), *Clostridium botulinum* as a source of toxin, *Clostridium perfringens*, *Listeria monocytogenes*, Polio virus, and Hepatitis virus A and B,

Entamoeba histolytic, *Schistosoma mansoni*, *Clonorchis sinensis*, *Trichinella spiralis*, for example.

[0089] Blood-borne pathogens include, for example, *Salmonella typhosa*, *Salmonella paratyphi*, *Bacillus anthracis*, *Brucella abortus*, *Brucella suis*, *Brucella melitensis*, *Yersinia (Pasteurella) pestis*, *Pasteurella multocida*, *Francisella tularensis*, *Spirillum minus*, *Burkholderia mallei*, *Leptospirum icteroohaemorrhagiae*, *Coxiella burnetii*, *Rickettsia typhi*, Hantavirus, Dengue fever virus, Yellow fever virus (and other viruses of the Flavivirus group), West Nile virus, Japanese B encephalitis virus, St Louis encephalitis, Western equine encephalitis, Human immunodeficiency virus 1 and 2, Human T-cell leukemia virus 1 and 2, *Dirofilaria immitis* in dogs, *Plasmodium vivax*, falciparum, malaria, ovale and berghei to name a few.

[0090] Sexually transmitted diseases include, for example, Syphilis (*Treponema pallidum*), *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*, *Chlamydia trachomatis*, Human Immunodeficiency virus, Papilloma virus, Herpes simplex and also *Candida albicans*, an ascomycete.

[0091] Wound and bite pathogens include, for example, *Staphylococcus aureus*, *Streptococcus pyogenes* serotypes responsible for necrotizing fasciitis, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, *Clostridium perfringens*, *Clostridium tetani*, *Yersinia pestis*, *Bacillus anthracis*, and *Bacteroides fragilis*. Infections resulting from bites by mosquitoes, ticks, fleas and other arthropods generally are classified as blood-borne infections.

[0092] Central nervous system and CSF pathogens include, for example, *Neisseria meningitidis*, *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, *Listeria monocytogenes*, syphilis, *Haemophilus influenzae* serotype B, *Acinetobacter* spp, *Escherichia coli*, *Enterobacter* spp, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, *Staphylococcus aureus*, viral encephalitis such as Japanese B encephalitis, Mumps virus, Polio virus, herpes viruses (HSV-1, HSV-2), varicella zoster virus, and Rabies virus, and so forth.

[0093] Representative urinary pathogens are dominated by gram negative rods, and include, for example, *Proteus mirabilis*, *Proteus vulgaris*, *Escherichia coli*, *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, *Enterobacter cloacae*, and occasional *Pseudomonas* infections.

[0094] Normal flora of the respiratory tract include, for example, Streptococcal species, Corynebacteriaceae, and Neisseriaceae that must be differentiated from potential pathogens. Normal flora of the gastrointestinal tract include, for example, *Methanobrevibacter smithii*, *Bifidobacterium longum*, *Streptococcus faecalis*, Firmicutes, including Clostridia and Faecalibacteria, Lactobacillaceae, Acinetobacteria, Propionobacteriaceae, Bacteroidaceae, and Enterobacteriaceae, as well as unidentified archaeobacterial groups and species.

[0095] Although some organisms, when found in certain test specimens, are conclusively pathogenic, pathogenicity is not absolutely black or white. For example, *Escherichia coli* is widely regarded as a non-pathogen, and is ubiquitous in the colon contents of humans. However, certain strains acquire a *Shigella*-like enterotoxin that can result in highly disabling dysentery. Therefore, mere speciation of an isolate can be misleading, and a more complete assessment of the virulence of any isolate requires an inventory of its capacity to be invasive, toxigenic, and to resist host defenses. Importantly, a large body of clinical experience has demonstrated that certain organisms are typically associated with disease, and that virulent organisms commonly produce an immune response.

This is the basis of vaccination, and also of serodiagnosis. Thus the need for point of care immunodiagnosics.

[0096] Immunoassay-type solid phase affinity capture sites for a microfluidic device-based assays are optionally localized in a diagnostic card on the plane of a test field in the form of a pad, zone or site. The capture molecule selected for the assay is adsorbed or crosslinked to the solid support matrix by methods known in the art. Support substrates include filter pads, sponges, beads, membranes, plastics, and other solids. In some instances the analyte may be coupled chemically or non-covalently to the solid phase and in others it may be incorporated into a material to be coated onto the solid surface. Solid substrates of this type are used in the same manner as for dipstick technology, an analogous art. In a microfluidic card for manual use, an optical window is typically provided with a view of the test site.

[0097] Solid supports are sometimes composed of a porous material, with pore sizes available range from 0.1 micron to about 250 microns, and may include depth filters, where pore size varies with depth in the material. Such solid supports are generally hydrophilic to ensure wettability or are treated to be hydrophilic. Bibulous materials, i.e., those absorbing aqueous solutions by capillary action, are well known in the art. Such materials include natural polymeric materials such as cellulosic materials (for example cotton, filter paper, chromatographic paper, nitrocellulose and cellulose acetate), agarose and crosslinked dextrans; but also include inorganic powders or fibers such as glass, silica gel, derivatized silica, diatomaceous earth, aluminum oxide; synthetic polymers such as polyethersulfones, polyesters, poly(vinyl chloride), vinyl chloride-propylene copolymer, vinyl chloride-vinyl acetate copolymer, polyacrylamides, polyacrylates, polyamides, nylons for example, wettable polyvinylidene fluoride (PVDF), either used as supplied or in composites with other materials; and ceramic materials or exploded metals. However, the solid support should not interfere with the detection signal. The porous material is typically attached to rigid or semi-rigid backing.

[0098] The porous material may be polyfunctional or be capable of being polyfunctionalized to enable covalent bonding of the capture molecule, for example with an aldehyde or with osmium tetroxide. Capture molecules may also be immobilized by non-covalent forces. Drying is often used as a means of “fixing” biological molecules to a surface-active solid support.

[0099] Solid phase substrates may also selected from plastic surfaces. Plastic surfaces such as polystyrene, polycarbonate, polypropylene, polyethylene terephthalate (PET), and polyamide have a native surface activity and will tightly adsorb biological molecules, but may optionally be activated to increase the density and tightness of adsorption of the capture molecule by gas plasma treatment, typically an etching gas such as nitrogen, oxygen or air (corona treatment) in plasma form. These gases serve to derivatize the polymer backbones of the solid support, creating ionizable and reactive amine and nitro groups or hydroxyl and carboxyl groups respectively. Such activated surfaces may be derivatized with heterobifunctional linkers to aid in attachment of the capture molecule. Glutaraldehyde pretreatment of the plastic surfaces has also been used. In general, any method known in the art for attaching the capture molecule to the immunosorbent that results in a usable solid phase affinity capture complex may be used.

[0100] Masking is commonly used to define boundaries within which the capture molecule will be fixed to the plastic surface. Masking to mark out a test site aids in visual recognition of a positive assay and also in machine-aided image analysis of automated test results. Plastic surfaces may be passivated outside the defined boundaries of the mask, or in negative masking techniques, the plastic surface will be activated, such as by low pressure gas plasma treatment, where unmasked.

[0101] The above listed solid phase affinity capture materials may also be formed as microspheres, beads, platelets, and other particle shapes. Immunosorbent beads well known in the art include latex beads, agarose in bead form (such as Sepharose 4B-Pharmacia); dextran beads, crosslinked proteins prepared as microspheres, magnetic microspheres containing a ferrite core, and silicate microspheres containing fluorophores, quantum dots, or even radiofrequency tags, and modified on the surface to permit crosslinking. Numerous forms of latex are prepared by emulsion techniques, and are available tagged with dyes, both fluorescent and colored, quantum dots. Antigens can be coupled to bifluorescent beads such as those provided by Luminex Corporation (Austin Tex., USA) by a two-step carbodiimide process. Sedimentation of beads in microfluidic device-based assays has been described, and the size is typically optimized for the application. Thus beads can serve not only as solid phase supports for affinity capture, but also as indicator or labeling agents.

[0102] As a recent example of the state of the art, a synthetic matrix suitable for ELISA was created by copolymerizing plastic monomers with peptides consisting of the epitope site of nonstructural protein 1 of flavivirus, in this case Dengue Virus. These molecularly imprinted polymers, were then deposited on a solid underlayer (Dar-Fu Tai et al. “Artificial Receptors in Serologic Tests for the Early Diagnosis of Dengue Virus Infection” *Clinical Chemistry* 10:1373 (2006)). This solid phase affinity capture material performed very well in detecting seropositive sera supplied by the CDC.

[0103] Blocking agents, in particular certain detergents and proteins, weaken non-specific interactive forces that contribute to high background signals in ELISA. Blocking agents include bovine serum albumin, optionally methylated or succinylated, whole normal serum, such as horse serum or fetal calf serum, and other commercially available proteins such as casein, gelatin and non-fat dry milk.

[0104] Detergent-based blocking agents can also be used. The types of detergents which are appropriate are selected from nonionic, amphoteric, cationic, or anionic forms, and the selection is based on the nature of the solid surfaces being blocked. Considerations which govern the selection of the appropriate detergent blocking agent are well understood in the art. It is preferred to use detergents in combination with protein-based blocking agents. Suitable detergents which can be used either alone or in admixture with the protein blocking agents include polyoxyethylene sorbitan alcohol detergents (i.e., the Tween series), polyoxyethylene alcohols such as Nonidet P450 or polyoxyethylene ethers such as Triton X-100.

[0105] Referring now to the figures, FIG. 1 shows a microfluidic device for ELISA immunoassays. In this first embodiment, the device is constructed by a lamination process from layers of clear plastic such as polyethylene terephthalate (PET), polystyrene, polycarbonates, polyacrylates, or polyesters in general, joined by interposed layers of adhesive. Microchannels, voids and holes are first machined from the

plastic layers and adhesive before assembly, so that a microfluidic network is formed. Alternatively, the device may be constructed by injection molding of a cover and base layer, optionally with interposed plastic layers of increasing complexity, the layers held together with adhesive or fused under pressure with heat or solvent.

[0106] Shown in FIG. 1 is a simple card 1 for immunoassay development. The card body is plastic and has coverplate 14 and baseplate (not shown). A schematic representation of the device ports and underlying microfluidic channels, reservoirs and structures is shown. Flexible layers 12 and 13 cover the fluid chambers of bellows pumps 4 and 8 and may be elastically deformed so as to propel fluid from one reservoir to the other and back in a reciprocal motion. The device is backed by a rigid sheet of material (not shown) so that all internal cavities are sealed.

[0107] In operation, sample port 2, via microchannel 3, is used to introduce test sample into the reservoir of left bellows pump 4. Similarly, “waste” port 9, via microchannel 10, is used to introduce and discard reagent solutions into and out of the fluid chambers of right bellows pump 8. Ports 2 and 9 extend through the device cover 14 and are continuous with the fluid chambers of bellows pumps 4 and 8. Microchannels 3 and 10 may be modified to include valves (not shown).

[0108] Active reciprocal flow of fluid between the right and left reservoirs is conducted through assay chamber 5 via focusing apertures 6 and 7. Note that a vent is not required for actual operation of the dual pump device because the displacement of fluid from one chamber during the pump downstroke is balanced by displacement of fluid into the other, the flexible membrane being compliant in both up and down directions. Assay chamber 5 is fully sealed and contains test field 11. Test field 11 is coated with immobilized affinity capture molecule.

[0109] Prior to assembly, reagents can be applied in or on microfluidic channels and test fields in a variety of ways. Various “printing” techniques are suitable for application of liquid reagents to layers of the device, e.g., micro-syringes, pens using metered pumps, direct printing, ink jet printing, air-brush, and contact (or filament) methods, and the layers or sheets are then assembled into the completed device. For operation of the fully assembled card, sample can be injected through a self-sealing bung, or pipetted or otherwise deposited into the device and sealed with a sanitary closure such as a cap, stopper, lid or tape. A pinch, ball, flap or peanut valve in the sample inlet port further seals the system. All such microfluidic cards are generally intended for single use followed by disposal.

[0110] Alternatively, the test sample may be mixed first with a detection antibody, and the mixture is then passed over the capture antibody on a solid phase matrix or test zone. After free detection antibody is rinsed away, color development indicates the presence of bound analyte-detection antibody complexes. U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 20060127886 teaches away from adding test sample directly to detection antibody. The ordinary person skilled in the art is familiar with ways in which the order of steps in an assay protocol may be varied.

[0111] “Indirect” ELISA is used to increase sensitivity. First introduced in U.S. Pat. No. 4,235,960, the indirect ELISA employs a bridging ligand which is applied to bound target analyte on the solid phase capture matrix and recognizes the target analyte. Bridging ligands, such as antibodies to immobilized antigen, build up the immunoprecipitin lattice

at the site of analyte binding. After another wash, detection reagent is then applied. In a typical “indirect” ELISA test format, detection antibody is directed against the immunoglobulin tails of the bridging antibody, not the analyte. Five-fold or more increases in the quantity of bound detection antibody can be achieved. After final wash series, addition of color reagent results in a strong signal even in the presence of relatively low concentrations of analyte.

[0112] The “indirect” ELISA format has another advantage. Any number of target analytes, each forming complexes with bridging antibodies on physically separate test zones, can be detected with a common, or universal, detecting antibody.

[0113] In FIG. 2, we show that an affinity capture solid phase matrix can be subdivided into smaller zones and pre-treated with separate affinity capture molecules for capture and analysis of multiple analytes. For example, a test strip composed of a row of five test field zones, as bands, strips, or spots, each embodying a unique reagent, provides a plurality of affinity capture matrices for simultaneous assay of five analytes. Means of applying affinity capture molecules includes the printing of bands, strips, or spots, for example with a dot-matrix printer or other dispenser (BioDot). Test fields may optionally be provided for control and validation of the assay. The zones may be laid down in unique shapes, for example a “plus” sign, a “minus” sign, or a “checkmark” to indicate their significance, and are typically labeled with instructions on a cover applied to the coverplate of the device or can be read by an instrument such as an optical scanner.

[0114] Shown in FIG. 2 is a microfluidic device 20 with coverplate 21 and baseplate (not shown) and a schematic representation of the device ports, chambers, and connecting microfluidic channels, reservoirs and structures. Flexible layers 22 and 23 cover the reservoirs of bellows pumps 24 and 25 and may be elastically deformed so as to propel fluid from one reservoir to the other and back in a reciprocal motion.

[0115] In operation, sample port 26, via microchannel 27, is used to introduce test sample into the fluid chamber of left bellows pump 24. Similarly, “waste” port 28, via microchannel 29, is used to introduce and discard reagent solutions into and out of the fluid chamber of right bellows pump 25. Ports 26 and 28 extend through the device cover 21 and are fluidly continuous with the fluid chamber of bellows pumps 24 and 25. Microchannels 27 and 29 may be modified to introduce valves (not shown), as may be useful in sanitary applications. The mixing embodiment shown here remains operable when all external vents are closed.

[0116] Active reciprocal flow of fluid between the right and left pump chambers is conducted through assay chamber 30 via focusing apertures 31 and 32. Assay chamber 30 is fully sealed and contains test strip 33. As illustrated in this embodiment, test strip 33 is coated with three species of immobilized affinity capture molecules in zones marked 34, 35, and 36 respectively. Assay chamber volume V2 is typically equal to, greater than, or less than pump bellows chamber volume V1. An optical window typically overlies the assay chamber in these devices.

[0117] In this build, the test strip 33 and zones 34, 35 and 36, were prepared of PET plastic and negatively masked with an adhesive protective layer. The exposed plastic was then subjected to plasma etching under carbon dioxide (or argon) gas in order to derivatize the polymer backbones, which increases wetting and surface adsorption properties of the plastic. After application of the capture molecules in a coating

buffer and drying, the mask is then removed and the plastic heated to 50-60° C. for a few minutes, optionally under vacuum or inert gas, to fix the molecules to the plastic. The test strip is then blocked with a blocking solution to eliminate nonspecific absorption of analyte or reagents and dried before assembly into the test cavity of the microfluidic device of FIG. 2.

[0118] Devices may also contain an absorbent pad or bat 38, located for example in the waste reservoir 37 of FIG. 2. Absorbent pads or bats are used to retain discarded sample and reagents, and as is well known in the art, the absorbent may also assist in promoting directional capillary action. Examples of substances that may be used include cellulose, cellulose nitrate, cellulose acetate, glass fiber, nylon, polyelectrolyte ion exchange membrane, acrylic copolymer/nylon, Whatman 3M, polyethersulfone, 470 and 740-E from Schleicher and Schuell, (Keen, N.H. USA), or D28 from Whatman (Fairfield, N.J. USA), can be selected for their high fluid absorption and wicking speed. Waste receptacle 37 also includes a vent 39. Said vent may be formed from a housing containing an isolation filter or membrane that prevents transit of aqueous fluids but is permeable to gas, a useful sanitary measure.

[0119] FIG. 3 represents a schematic of a device 40 suitable for automation or semi-automation of an ELISA assay, or other heterogeneous binding immunoassay, in a microfluidics format. Analogously to FIGS. 1 and 2, right and left bellows pumps 41, 42 are used to power reciprocal fluid flow across assay chamber 43, shown here as containing two test fields (positive 44 and negative 45, see also FIG. 10) in which the appropriate capture molecules have been immobilized. Also shown are right and left valves 46, 47 controlling microfluidic channels 48, 49, 52, and 53 used in sample and reagent addition, mixing, rinsing, and in venting air during sample loading. Focusing apertures 50, 51 oppose each other as shown here, but may enter assay chamber 43 at angles off the center axis. Fluid port 54 is a sample inlet port; port 55 is an air vent fluidly connected with the sample inlet and is used to purge air from the system during sample loading, but is not necessary and can be closed for the micro-eductive mixing process. Port 55 may be replaced by a waste collection reservoir. Thus the fluid circuit is comprised of ports 54 and 55, channels 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, fluid chambers of the bellows pumps 41, 42, and assay chamber 43. Pneumatic channels and air pressure ports off-card (not shown) are used to drive diaphragm 57 of bellows pump 42 and diaphragm 58 of bellows pump 41. Air vents 56, 59 equilibrate pressure above the diaphragm of bellows pumps 41, 42. Not shown is a waste reservoir. Pneumatic valves 46, 47, pumps 41, 42, pneumatic actuators, and waste structures of representative microfluidic devices 1, 20 and 40 are described in more detail in the following figures.

[0120] FIG. 4 shows a pneumatic “peanut” valve 70 schematically and its action is shown in cartoon form in FIGS. 5A and 5B (upper panel—valve open; lower panel—valve closed). In FIGS. 4 and 5A and 5B, microfluidic channels 71, 72 entering from the right and upper left enter a microcavity 73 (100-500 microns in diameter) at two vias 74, 75 capped by a flexible polyurethane or PET diaphragm layer 76 that is laser welded to the plastic body 77 of the valve. An elastomer is preferred for the diaphragm. A third cavity 78, apposing the flexible layer, but located in a layer of the valve body above the fluid path, serves as a pneumatic actuator. Negative pressure (see FIGS. 5A and 5B), via control pneumatic actuator

channel 79, pulls the flexible layer up and away from the step vias 74, 75 in the fluid path, opening a path for fluid to flow from the left to right microchannels 71, 72 as shown. Similarly, when positive air pressure is applied to the pneumatic actuator or control circuit, the valve is closed, blocking fluid flow. The pneumatic actuator circuit is also a microfluidic structure, and is built into the card. Valves 70 can be ganged or operated independently from positive and negative air pressure sources off-card. Generally this is handled by computer, but manual activation may also be used. This valve structure is used for stop flow in the Microflow microfluidics assay instrument (Micronics, Redmond Wash. USA). Note that the fluid path is isolated so that no user contact with the test fluids is possible following entry of the sample into the valve body and that the default position of a valve with elastomeric diaphragm is “closed”.

[0121] FIG. 6 is plan view of a microfluidic bellows pump 90. The pump works analogously to a diaphragm pump as can be seen from FIGS. 7A and 7B. For reference, the pump cavity is divided into two approximately equal volume chambers, a “lower” half-chamber 97 and an “upper” half-chamber 98, the lower half-chamber 97 for containing fluid, and the upper half-chamber 98 for pneumatic actuation. “Upper” and “lower” chambers, of course, can be inverted or stood on end without limitation. At rest, bellows pump flexible diaphragm 93 bisects the pump cavity in a coronal plane. Flexible diaphragm 93 is optionally an elastomer. Fluid enters the lower half-chamber 97 of the pump cavity through microfluidic inlet channel 91 in the plastic body 92 when the flexible diaphragm 93 is pulled up by vacuum (or passively when primed with fluid under pressure) and exits when the flexible diaphragm 93 is pushed down by pneumatic pressure in upper half-chamber 98. Here, pneumatic actuator channel 94 connecting with upper half-chamber 98, valve 95, and pneumatic pressure source 96 are used to control the pump. Similarly, in a manual embodiment, when the enclosing flexible layer (top, bottom, or top and bottom of the card) is depressed (either by hand or by machine), fluid is displaced from the bellows reservoir and escapes through fluidly connected microchannels. When dual bellows pumps are placed in tandem as shown in FIGS. 1-3, thumb pressure alternated from one pump to the other will result in reciprocating flow. Check valves can be positioned in the microchannels on either side of a bellows pump to force directional flow. Alternatively, check valves may be used to fully seal the dual pump subassembly during eductive mixing. In eductive mixing, air pressure in actuator channel 94 of upper half-chamber 98 is pulsed, driving flexible diaphragm 93, which in turn drives fluid in the lower half-chamber 97. The mathematics of the operation are described in more detail in a simplified schematic in FIG. 9.

[0122] Bellows pump materials may be varied to select the required stiffness and elasticity. Elastic layers generate positive pressure when the pump surface is depressed and negative pressure when the surface is released. We have found that both positive and negative pressure-induced flows, away from or toward the bellows pump respectively, can be advantageously used in operation of microfluidic device based assays. Note again that the user is isolated from contact with the sample and reagent fluids.

[0123] In one embodiment, the microfluidic device is packaged in the form of a kit, and contains on-board reagents sufficient for analysis of a single clinical test specimen. Most preferably, these kit-packaged cards are single-entry (i.e., a

single entry to introduce the sample is made) and the card is otherwise sealed and self-contained.

[0124] FIGS. 8A and 8B shows a cross-section through a waste receiving reservoir or apparatus 100 designed to prevent egress of contaminated sample and reagents from the microfluidic assay card. Waste entering through waste fluid channel 104 is imbibed into bibulous material (an absorbant pad or bat 101) positioned in the waste receiving reservoir in the plastic body of the card 102. The pad 101 swells as liquid is absorbed, as depicted in FIG. 8B. The waste receiving reservoir has a waste fluid channel aspect (here upper) and a vent aspect (here lower). Flexible or elastic film layer 103 separates the waste fluid channel aspect from the vent aspect of the waste receiving reservoir. A vent 105 is provided in the waste reservoir so that as the inner membrane expands, air pressure is equalized in the reservoir. Note that the vent may be supplied with a liquid barrier filter or membrane 106 to prevent egress of fluid as an additional safety measure. A flexible layer covering the waste receiving reservoir allows the reservoir to serve as a bellows pump.

[0125] Similarly, for reagent administration in a closed system, reagent is premeasured into a blister pouch in a sealed cavity on the card. In one embodiment for releasing the reagent when required, a sharp, positioned under the blister pouch, is contacted with the pouch when finger or mechanical pressure is applied to the opposing film, rupturing the pouch and releasing the contents. The chamber is fluidly joined with a microfluidic channel so that the reagent is simultaneously released and forced by the pressure through the device in the required direction.

[0126] Color development reagent, for example, or antibody reagents, may be safely stored in on-board blister pouches for use in the assay or added through a reagent port. By use of on-board blister pouches, the user is isolated from contact with biologicals or chemicals used in the assay.

[0127] FIG. 9 demonstrates a “first cut” design calculation for eductive mixing. FIG. 9 is intended to be read with FIG. 7 and FIGS. 1, 2 and 3. FIG. 9 shows a lower bellows pump cavity 140, in explanation the “lower half-chamber” or fluid side of the pump. FIG. 7 shows a complete sectional view of a bellows pump with diaphragm 93 and both upper and lower half-chambers 97, 98. FIGS. 1-3 show how such bellows pumps 4, 8, 24, 25, 41, 42 are used in pairs.

[0128] Now turning to FIG. 9, the lower half-chamber 140 of the bellows pump cavity is modeled as a cylinder with a flexible cover diaphragm 141, and with base and walls. The baseplate and coverplate 21 of the card body 20 are not shown here so that the internal fluid voids are more clearly represented. The upper half of the bellows pump cavity (see FIGS. 7A, 7B element 98) and pneumatic actuator circuit 94 are also not shown for clarity. The flexible cover diaphragm 141 must be compliant, as illustrated in FIG. 7, and is preferably elastic and durable. The cylinder has height H1, diameter D1, and nominal volume V1 142. The working diameter of the bellows diaphragm is an “effective diameter” based on compliance of the cover film and the pneumatic pressure, and therefore the actual displacement or “stroke” volume Vs of the flexible membrane from its resting to its fully compressed and extended position (convex deformation downward) is typically less than the nominal volume of the half-chamber V1 142 due to imperfect compliance and dead volume. Because pneumatic pressure is used instead of mechanical actuation, stroke volume is improved due to reduction of dead volume. The fractional effective fluid stroke volume (Vs/V1) of the

pneumatically actuated bellows pump is greater than 0.5, preferably greater than 0.8. We also call attention to the active downstroke volume Vx, which is in fact may be greater than the displacement volume Vs because the stroke typically begins with the flexible cover distended (concave deformation upward) due to priming with fluid on the power stroke of the companion or tandem bellows pump, keeping in mind that these pumps are always used in pairs as shown in FIGS. 1-3. On the active power stroke of one diaphragm, the tandem diaphragm in the other chamber will become distended during its passive fill half cycle, and can then deliver a greater active stroke volume Vx on its power downstroke half cycle. Advantageously, Vx may be double Vs. The method of use involves depressing the flexible membrane of one pump, then the other, in alternation, so as to cause reciprocal flow back and forth through a central chamber separating the dual pump chambers. The total volume exchanged may be the sum of the active volumes of both pump chambers. In use, one pump is typically active and one passive during each half cycle, alternating in tandem, and thus further differentiating the mechanism from a pair of pump chambers in series. The pneumatic actuator may thus be directed to one of the two diaphragms, and the other diaphragm can be configured to follow passively, its upper half-chamber vented to atmosphere. Advantageously, the fluid systems can be completely closed during the mixing operation (i.e., without venting on the fluid side), a useful precaution against accidental operator exposure to the contents of the device and against formation of aerosols.

[0129] “Flow constrictive” or “flow focusing” aperture 143 has width Y1, depth Z1, and length L1. As shown, Y1 is a smaller than Z1, but this is not required. The purpose of the flow constriction is to accelerate the fluid in the aperture’s cross sectional area so that the Poiseuille or parabolic flow regime characteristic of this scale of device is disrupted and microeddies, turbulence, and fluid jets form, emulating the action of a Penberthy eductor at a microscale. Mean velocities of 10-500 mm/sec are sought for immunoassay development as described here, and the aperture dimensions, active downstroke volume, and pressure pulse P1 on the flexible layer is configured to produce nominal average velocities in the range of 10 to 500 mm/sec, more preferably 20 to 200 mm/sec and most preferably 25-100 mm/sec, and increasing the apparent Reynold’s number at the plume fringes.

[0130] These aperture dimensions and mixer conditions are configured to correspond to shear rates (flow linear velocity over dimension or diameter) in the range of 5 sec⁻¹ to 500 sec⁻¹. Shear rates of up to 3000 sec⁻¹ are contemplated. Note that the shear rate may be calculated relative to Y as the critical dimension or Z as the critical dimension, where the critical dimension is generally the narrowest point of passage of the fluid and the flow velocity is determined by the pump chamber volume, diaphragm diameter D1 and stroke rate. The aperture may be generally rectangular in cross section, generally circular in cross section with diameter Y, or any convenient shape. Y may optionally equal Z; Z may optionally equal the height of the pump chamber H1. Aperture dimension L1 is generally selected to focus flow and is in the range of a few micrometers to a few millimeters. Ratios Z1/D1 and Y1/D1 are generally determined to be less than 0.5, more preferably less than 0.25, and preferably less than 0.1. Design optimization involves reducing both Y and Z while increasing stroke volume. Improved mixing characteristics are thus obtained by optimizing both the aperture and diaphragm configuration. A more complicated design calcu-

lation, also modeling viscosity, density and localized turbulent flow, may also be performed, or the design may be optimized empirically. Note that a critical lower limit in aperture dimension is crossed when wall shear results in destruction of assay targets or reagents, as is again best determined empirically. Secondary design considerations, generally optimized during assay development, include cycle time and duration of cycling, incubation temperature, pressure pulse interval and waveform, and pressure amplitude P1. Pressure pulses of 10 psig in the actuator channel (channel 94, upper half-chamber 98, FIG. 7B), with the tandem diaphragm operated passively on each half-stroke, were used in the examples presented here, but other pressures result in working embodiments also, for example a combination of positive pressure applied to one diaphragm while negative pressure is applied to the other. Pulse pressures in the range of about 0.1 Atm to about 5 Atm or higher are useful.

[0131] Turning to FIG. 10, shown is a microfluidic card 150 for use in an agglutination assay. From a sample reservoir 151, three matching microfluidic channels distribute the sample fluid at a controlled rate into three channels of the assay 152, 153, 154. From reagent reservoirs at the top of the card 155, 156, 157, up to three reagents may be introduced into separate analytical channels. More or fewer channels may be used. The serpentine microchannels 158, 159, 160 are primed manually or mechanically with the bellows pump shown near the bottom of the card, which may also be a sealed waste reservoir 161, as described in FIG. 8. Vent 163 balances pressure in the waste reservoir. The vent 163 may contain a water impermeable:gas permeable filter barrier. The vent exit may also contain a valve (not shown) to assist in priming with bellows pump 161 fitted with an elastic cover layer in the coverplate. The results of the agglutination are read in a window for the test field 162 (see result in FIG. 12). Reagents with beads or cells coated with an affinity capture agent may be used to assist in detecting agglutination. Note that in an alternative configuration of an assay on the same card, a single reagent can be introduced into the “sample” reservoir and multiple samples can be introduced into the “reagent” reservoirs at the top of the card. Various permutations of the means and order of sample and reagent addition are easily contemplated. These agglutination assays may be used to diagnose infectious disease or to do crossmatches or to detect drugs.

[0132] FIGS. 11 and 12 are endpoint data for assays performed as described in the Examples discussed below.

[0133] Microfluidic channels built by layered sheet construction typically have square cross-sectional profiles. For reagents employing beads in agglutination reactions, the channel diameters are adjusted to permit passage of individual beads and bead agglomerates. Bead diameters are typically in the range of 1-100 microns, more preferably 2-15 microns (mean size) and the channel diameter must be sized accordingly.

[0134] Microchannels constructed of layers formed by extrusion molding may have more rounded channel profiles and a radius on each “via”. The internal channel surfaces of injection molded parts are also somewhat smoother. The flow characteristics of the channels are significant because of the profound surface effects in the microflow regime. Surface tension and viscosity compound surface roughness effects. Channel surfaces may be passivated as required. The most narrow dimension of a channel has the most profound effect on flow. It follows that flow in channels that are based on

square or circular cross-sectional profiles is controlled by the diameter or diagonal width, and design is typically varied to take advantage of this behavior. Reduction of taper in the direction of flow leads to a capillary effect for diameters below 200 microns. Conversely, opening up a channel to form a bulb stops flow unless pressure is applied. Vias in a channel can be designed to promote directional flow, a sort of solid state check valve.

[0135] Agglutination is a well known way of detecting an antigen:antibody reaction. Agglutination that is detectable by visible inspection is preferred. Of these visible means, colored microparticles, particularly what are known as “beads” in the art, are more preferred.

[0136] Colorable beads or particles and colorable latex beads are also known in the art and useful as detection means for immunoassays (see, for example, U.S. Pat. Nos. 4,373,932 and 4,837,168, both of which are incorporated herein by reference). Colored reagent solutions may also be used to enhance the visual characteristics of agglutination and aid interpretation. For visualization of agglutinations of very small particles, magnifying lens windows may be formed in the coverplate or faceplate of the device.

[0137] Optionally, beads may be “tagged” with labels to improve the sensitivity of detection. Fluorescent molecules, such as the rhodamine, fluorescein, or umbelliferone series, employed by themselves or with a quencher molecule, may be used (see, for example, U.S. Pat. Nos. 3,996,345 and 4,366,241, both of which are herein incorporated by reference). Chemiluminescent molecules, such as luminol, luciferin, lucigenin, or oxalyl chloride can be used as a signal means (see, for example, U.S. Pat. No. 4,104,029, herein incorporated by reference). Enzymatic systems that react with a colorless substrate to give a precipitated colored product, such as conjugated horseradish peroxidase with aminoethylcarbazole and hydrogen peroxide as substrate are also useful as signal means. Single and dual labeling may be used on a single bead species, or optionally, multiple bead species, each containing an individually recognizable signature of a combination of chromophores or fluorophores may be used.

[0138] Typically, it is desired to modify the surface of the particles in some manner so that they are more readily able to bind to the analyte. In such instances, the particles may be modified with certain specific affinity binding molecules to form conjugated particles. Immunoreactive affinity binding molecules include antigens, haptens, aptamers, antibodies (primary or secondary), and complexes thereof, including those formed by recombinant DNA methods, in hybridomas, or by peptide synthesis. Other common agglutination detection systems based on affinity capture include but are not limited to, biotin and avidin (or derivatives thereof), biotin and streptavidin, carbohydrates and lectins, effector and receptor molecules in general, and the nickel:histidine system.

[0139] The affinity capture molecule, for example an antigen or agglutinin antibody, may generally be attached to the bead using any of a variety of well-known techniques. For instance, covalent attachment of the specific binding members to the detection probes (e.g., particles) may be accomplished using carboxylic, amino, aldehyde, bromoacetyl, iodoacetyl, thiol, epoxy and other reactive or linking functional groups, as well as residual free radicals and radical cations, through which a protein coupling reaction may be accomplished.

[0140] The procedures for coupling enzymes to the present first members are well known in the art and are described, for example, in J. H. Kennedy et al., Clin. Chim Acta 70:1 (1976). Reagents used for this procedure include glutaraldehyde, p-toluene diisocyanate, various carbodiimide reagents, p-benzoquinone m-periodate, N,N-o-hexylenedimaleimide, heterobifunctional crosslinkers, and the like.

EXAMPLES

Example 1

Preparation and Assembly of a Microfluidic Assay Device

[0141] A microfluidic device for ELISA immunoassay was prepared as follows:

[0142] 1. Human IgG (0.5 ug in bicarbonate binding buffer pH 9) was deposited onto a plasma-treated test field of a PET sheet. Human IgM was applied as a negative control to a second test field. The proteins were then fixed to the plastic by drying for 5 minutes at 60° C.

[0143] 2. After fixation, the test fields were blocked for 30 minutes with casein buffer (biotin free) and washed twice with PBST (phosphate buffered saline with 0.1% TWEEN 20).

[0144] 3. After drying, the treated PET sheets were then assembled between adhesive layers in the microfluidic device of FIG. 3 with integrated pneumatic circuitry for pressurizing the bellows pumps and opening and closing sanitary valves.

Example 2

Performance of an ELISA Immunoassay in a Microfluidic Device

[0145] A standard assay for ELISA, useful as a benchmark in method development, involves detection of immobilized human IgG on a solid substrate, followed by blocking and detection of the IgG with biotin-labelled anti-human antibody. The biotin in turn is detected with enzyme-labelled streptavidin.

[0146] Procedure:

[0147] 1. Referring to the microfluidic device prepared as described in Example 1, anti-human IgG biotin (Pierce, 180 uL, 1:10,000 in casein buffer) was added through the sample port, and the device was incubated for 1 min with slow mixing. The test fields were then rinsed with PBST, with slow mixing for 1 min before removing the rinse. A Microflow microfluidics assay instrument (Micronics, Redmond Wash. USA) was used to perform mixing and washing.

[0148] 2. Detection reagent (Poly SA-HRP) was added with incubation for 1 min with slow mixing. Poly SA-HRP is streptavidin labeled with horseradish peroxidase. The test fields were again washed.

[0149] 3. TMB (Scytek, TMB High Sensitivity Developing Solution, 180 uL, 1:500 in casein buffer) was added. Following a 2 min incubation to develop color, and a 1 minute wash with PBST, results were scored.

[0150] 4. A positive reaction was for the IgG test field was indicated by a dark blue precipitate of the diimine.

[0151] In this example, TMB (3,3',5,5'-Tetramethylbenzidine) in Citrate/Acetate Buffer was used as the chromogen. Results are shown in the close-up photo insert of FIG. 11. The chamber is described in FIG. 3 and FIG. 9. Note the blue color characteristic of TMB precipitation in the test zone labelled IgG (upper). IgM (lower) was used as a negative control.

Example 3

Assembly of a Microfluidic Device for Immunoassay of Antibodies to Capsular Polysaccharides of *Streptococcus pyogenes*

[0152] Assembly of test card:

[0153] 1. Capsular mucosaccharide antigen purified from Group A *Streptococcus pyogenes* is immobilized on a N₂ plasma activated polyester sheet by co-polymerization with acrylamide monomer. The sheet is previously masked to define the test field area.

[0154] 2. The plasma treated test field and surrounding areas are then blocked for 30 minutes with casein buffer and washed twice with PBST (phosphate buffered saline with 0.1% TWEEN 20).

[0155] 3. After drying, a stack of laminate layers including the antigen-treated polyester sheet are assembled in a microfluidic device generally dimensioned as described in FIG. 9 and assembled with fluidic circuitry per the pattern of FIG. 1.

Example 4

Performance of an Immunodiagnostic Assay in a Microfluidic Device Format

[0156] Procedure:

[0157] 1. Referring to the microfluidic device prepared as described in Example 3, 200 µl of horseradish peroxidase conjugated Group A-S. *pyogenes* anti-capsular antibody in casein buffer is added through the sample port, and the solution is contacted with the test layer with micro-educative mixing for about 1 min. The test layer is then rinsed 3× with PBST.

[0158] 2. Develop with 200 µl ABTS and hydrogen peroxide in citrate buffer, pH 3.3. Mix and incubate for 2 minutes followed by a one minute wash with PBST.

[0159] 3. Positive reactions are indicated by a dark blue precipitate of the diimine which collects on the solid phase affinity capture matrix.

[0160] In this example, 2,2'-azino-di-(3-ethylbenzthiazoline sulphonic acid) and 0.03% H.sub.2 O.sub.2 in 0.1 M citrate buffer pH 4.2 is used as the developing solution. Sensitivity of the assay is improved by use of 0.1% Tween-80 in the rinse (see U.S. Pat. No. 4,810,630) and development solution to retard degradation of the HRP and o-dianisidine to enhance color development.

Example 5

Test Strip for Detection of Antibodies to a Panel of Respiratory Pathogens

[0161] Three test areas are negatively masked on a sheet of polystyrene corresponding to a window in a microfluidic device and the plastic is plasma activated. The following antigens, diluted to 2-5 ug/mL, are then immobilized on one each of the test pads:

[0162] 1. *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, mixed O-serotypes capsular polysaccharide antigens

[0163] 2. *Streptococcus pyogenes*, Group A capsular antigen

[0164] 3. Influenza virus, Type A, mixed hemagglutinins H1-H5

[0165] The test strip is then blocked and assembled in a sealed microfluidic assay device of FIG. 2. Following prepa-

ration of the device, patient serum (1:10 dilution in 180 μ L PAABS buffer composed of PBS, 1% BSA, 0.02% sodium azide pH 7.4) is pipetted into the completed microfluidic device through the sample port. The serum is allowed to wet the test pads and the device is incubated 5 min with slow mixing. The test strip is then rinsed 1 \times with PAABS. A solution of Goat anti-human IgG and Goat anti-human IgM (2:1) at appropriate dilutions in PAABS (200 μ L) is added through the sample port and allowed to incubate on the test strip at RT for 20 min. Following incubation, the test strip is rinsed 1 \times and drained. Detection antibody, a solution of anti-goat IgG conjugated with glucose oxidase, is then applied and incubated at RT for 10 min. Following incubation, the test strip is again rinsed and drained. Development is performed with a solution of nitroblue tetrazolium dye (NBT) in TRIS buffer pH 9.5. A positive serum antibody test is indicated by the development of a blue to purple color on the test strip at the location of one of the antigen pads and is diagnostic of a new or recent infection.

Example 6

Influenza Antigen in a Nasal Lavage

[0166] Influenza undergoes a rapid clinical course. Early on, respiratory epithelial lavages contain infectious agent, non-infectious nucleocapsid and envelope debris, and Influenza antigen:IgA complexes. The diagnostic approach taken here involves detection of IgA specific to the Influenza virus. Detection of antibodies is described here.

[0167] To prepare horseradish-peroxidase labelled Influenza virus (HPLIV), the method cited by Nielsen is followed [Nielsen, S L et al. 1986. Detection of Immunoglobulin G Antibodies to Cytomegalovirus Antigens by Antibody Capture Enzyme-Linked Immunosorbent Assay. *J Clin Microbiol*, December 1986, p. 998-1003], but with Influenza virus particles purchased from Fitzgerald Industries (Concord Mass., USA). A microfluidic device is prepared by first immobilizing monoclonal mouse anti-human IgA on the surface of a test strip and blocking with casein-tween blocking solution. The test strip is mounted in a cavity of the device before final assembly. During assembly, the sample reservoir (ie. in a bellows pump chamber) is wetted with 10 μ g of HMLIV reagent in 50 μ L TBS 1% bovine serum albumin 0.1% Tween 80 (TBSBT) and dried in place under vacuum. Coarsely filtered saline nasal lavage, 2 mL, is buffered with 0.2 mL TRIS to pH 7.4, and the entire volume is transferred to the sample reservoir of the microfluidic device. The material is incubated in place for 2 min to fully dissolve the antigen-conjugate. Sample solution is then passed back and forth across the test field capture site, using the dual bellows system to generate slow reciprocal flow for 2 min. During this process, HRP-labelled virus particles are coated by any IgA antibodies in the sample, and any IgA in the sample is captured by the excess of anti-IgA immobilized on the test strip. After incubation, the device is washed 3 \times with TBSBT buffer and the rinses drained into the waste reservoir. An adjoining blister pouch (CDRP) fluidly connected to the test chamber contains the color developing reagent. Pressing on a diaphragm overlying the CDRP ruptures the pouch and releases color developing reagent into the test cavity. Development of a blue color precipitate on the test strip is indicative of an immune response, and confirms the presence of immobilized IgA complexes with the HRP-complexed influenza antigen. All mixing and wash steps use educative mixing.

Example 7

Development of an Agglutination Immunoassay

[0168] The microfluidic device used in this assay is that shown in FIG. 7. This card can be used to test two or three reagents against a common liquid bead reagent. As a positive test, anti-human IgG Fc fragment-specific biotin conjugated antibody (Pierce) was dissolved in PBS at a concentration of 24 μ g/mL. PBS was used as a negative control. Blue streptavidin-coated beads (Seradyne, 1% solids) suspension was diluted by adding 3 μ L of the resuspended beads to 50 μ L PBS. The bead solution was placed in a well communicating with each of the test channels. Antibody solution and PBS were placed in test wells at the top of the card. PBS was placed above the left and right channels; antibody solution was placed above the center channel. Using suction pressure generated by a bellows pump, the test solutions and reagent beads were brought into descending serpentine channels in the card and allowed to react as flow continued. There was an immediate strong agglutination reaction in the channel containing streptavidin-coated beads and antibody biotin conjugate. The PBS channel was negative for agglutination. A close up photograph of the results in an assay window is shown in FIG. 12.

Example 8

Agglutination Test for Bladder Tumor Antigen (BTA) in Urine

[0169] Clean catch urine is collected for the test at the point of care. Specimens with a specific gravity greater than 1.020 are acceptable for the test. The microfluidics card of FIG. 10 is readily adaptable for the test. Urine is placed in the upper center well. Positive and negative test fluids are placed in the side wells. Anti-human BTA IgG conjugated with latex beads is placed in the lower reagent well. The bellows pump is used to initiate flow and mixing of the sample and reagent streams. As each fluid mixes and incubates in the serpentine channels, agglutination of the latex beads observed through the optical window over the center channel indicates a positive immunodiagnosis for the presence of the tumor antigen. The bead reagent fluid is optionally colored to aid the user in following the progress of the assay.

Example 9

Agglutination Test for Enteric Pathogens

[0170] Diarrhoeal fluid, 20 mL, which is mostly electrolyte with some mucous, is collected with sterile technique and transferred to a 50 mL polypropylene centrifuge tube. 20 mL of TRIS buffer 0.1M pH 7.0 containing 0.01% thimerosal is added. After light centrifugation in a tabletop centrifuge at 5000 rpm for 10 min to remove grossly visible detritus and mucous strands, the supernatant is decanted into a clean sample container for testing. This solution potentially contains infectious agent and is handled with appropriate precautions. The pretreated sample is analyzed in a diagnostic card of the present invention. Preparation of the card is as follows. Cutouts on thin layers of PET are prepared by laser lithography. Latex beads (Seradyne blue) with antibody to the infectious agents of interest are obtained and resuspended in Citrate 1% BSA 0.1% Triton-X 100 pH 7 lyophilization buffer. The bead suspension is spotted or otherwise applied in the serpentine channels of the card at a concentration sufficient

for the assay and is then lyophilized in place. Tests show that this protocol results in a dry bead layer that is readily solubilized by the sample fluid.

[0171] In this example, dried beads conjugated with antibody for the following enteric pathogens are used:

[0172] 1. *Shigella dysenteriae*

[0173] 2. *Escherichia coli* serotype 0157:H7

[0174] 3. *Salmonella* sp, polyvalent anti-capsular and flagellar antibody

[0175] 300 uL of the processed sample is introduced into the sample reservoir of the card. The card is tipped up and tapped to initiate flow, then laid flat or stood on a surface. Fluid exits the sample well through one or more microfluidic channels and makes its way to the larger diameter channels containing the bead lyophilizate. Agglutination in the presence of the appropriate antigen:antibody pairs begins almost immediately as the beads are solubilized in the flow stream. Flow continues through each of the descending serpentine channel to a test field under a window in the card where the results can be read and interpreted. Fluid reaching the waste reservoir is isolated from the user by an elastomeric inner isolation layer, and the reservoir is further isolated with a liquid barrier membrane in the vent as a further safety feature. An absorbent pad in the waste reservoir fills by capillary action, holding the waste. By use of appropriately designed sample ports, and incorporation of a sealed waste receptacle with liquid barrier vent, no potentially biohazardous material is released during the assay. The card is a single-entry closed system and is adapted for applications involving testing for pathogenic microorganisms and parasites. The card is suitable for point-of-care use.

[0176] Unless the context requires otherwise, throughout the specification and claims which follow, the word “comprise” and variations thereof, such as, “comprises” and “comprising” are to be construed in an open, inclusive sense, that is as “including, but not limited to”.

[0177] Reference throughout this specification to “one embodiment” or “an embodiment” means that a particular feature, structure or characteristic described in connection with the embodiment is included in at least one embodiment of the present invention. Thus, the appearances of the phrases “in one embodiment” or “in an embodiment” in various places throughout this specification are not necessarily all referring to the same embodiment. Furthermore, the particular features, structures, or characteristics may be combined in any suitable manner in one or more embodiments.

[0178] While the above description contains specificities, these specificities should not be construed as limitations on the scope of the invention, but rather as exemplifications of embodiments of the invention. That is to say, the foregoing description of the invention is exemplary for purposes of illustration and explanation. Without departing from the spirit and scope of this invention, one skilled in the art can make various changes and modifications to the invention to adapt it to various usages and conditions without inventive step. As such, these changes and modifications are properly, equitably, and intended to be within the full range of equivalence of the following claims. Thus the scope of the invention should be determined by the appended claims and their legal equivalents, rather than by the examples given.

What is claimed is:

1. A microfluidic card for performing heterogeneous binding assays, comprising:

- a) a first bellows pump fluidly connected by a first flow constricting aperture to an assay chamber; and
- b) a second bellows pump fluidly connected by a second flow constricting aperture to said assay chamber,

wherein:

- i) said first and second bellows pumps comprise pneumatic actuators for tandem operation whereby fluid is pumped back and forth through said assay chamber without venting;
- ii) said first and second flow constricting apertures are configured for micro-eductive mixing; and
- iii) said assay chamber further comprises an affinity capture site for heterogeneous binding assay.

2. A microfluidic card of claim 1, wherein said card further comprises:

- a) a plastic card body with external surfaces encasing:
 - i) said first bellows pump, wherein said first bellows pump comprises a first pump cavity bisected in coronal plane by a first flexible diaphragm, said first flexible diaphragm dividing said first pump cavity into an upper half-chamber and a lower half-chamber;
 - ii) said second bellows pump, wherein said second bellows pump comprises a second pump cavity bisected in coronal plane by a second flexible diaphragm, said second flexible diaphragm dividing said second pump cavity into an upper half-chamber and a lower half-chamber; and
 - iii) said assay chamber, wherein said assay chamber has a volume V2 and further comprises a test field with immobilized affinity agent and a transparent cover,

wherein both of said lower half-chambers of said first and second bellows pumps are adapted for receiving a fluid, and wherein both of said lower half-chambers of said first and second bellows pumps have a volume V1 and a diameter D1; and

- b) a first actuator channel pneumatically connected to said upper half-chamber of said first bellows pump and a second actuator channel pneumatically connected to said upper half-chamber of said second bellows pump, wherein said first and second actuator channels are adapted for connection to an off-card pneumatic pressure source such that the first and second flexible diaphragms are pneumatically actuated in alternation, thereby generating reciprocating flow of a fluid between the lower half-chambers of said first and second bellows pumps and through said first and second flow constricting apertures and said assay chamber,

wherein:

- x) said first flow constricting aperture has a maximum width Y1, a maximum depth Z1, and a length L1, and fluidly connects said lower half-chamber of said first bellows pump to said assay chamber;
- y) said second flow constricting aperture also has a maximum width Y1, maximum depth Z1, and length L1, and fluidly connects said lower half-chamber of said second bellows pump to said assay chamber; and
- z) ratios Z1/D1 and Y1/D1 are less than 0.5.

3. A microfluidic card of claim 2, wherein each of said first and second flexible diaphragms are comprised of an elasto-

meric film sealingly affixed to said plastic card body so as to isolate fluid within said plastic card body from said external surfaces.

4. A microfluidic card of claim 2, further comprising sanitary means selected from the group consisting of:

- a) sanitary means for fluid porting;
- b) sanitary means for air venting;
- c) sanitary means for valving; and
- d) sanitary means for capturing waste.

5. A microfluidic card of claim 4, wherein said sanitary means for fluid porting comprises a sample inlet port adapted for single entry of a sample fluid without contamination of said external surfaces.

6. A microfluidic card of claim 4, wherein said sanitary means for air venting comprises a gas-permeable:water impermeable filter barrier configured to prevent escape of fluid from the microfluidic card.

7. A microfluidic card of claim 4, wherein said sanitary means for valving comprises:

- a) a microcavity in said plastic card body, said microcavity having an upper wall, a lower rim and a bottom plate;
- b) a first microfluidic channel entering said microcavity through said bottom plate at a first via;
- c) a second microfluidic channel entering said microcavity through said bottom plate at a second via, said first and second vias separated by a valve sill;
- d) a flexible film attached to said lower rim around the full circumference of said microcavity, said film having a first surface facing said bottom plate, and a second surface facing said upper wall, said flexible film configured to alternate between a first position, wherein said first surface of said film is sealingly seated against both said first and second vias and said valve sill, and a second position, wherein said second surface of said film is contacting said upper wall; and
- e) a microfluidic pneumatic control channel entering said microcavity through said upper wall and configured to supply positive and negative pressure to said microcavity, thereby actuating said sanitary means for valving by moving said flexible film between said first position and said second position while isolating fluid within said plastic card body from said external surfaces.

8. A microfluidic card of claim 4, wherein said sanitary means for capturing waste comprises:

- a) a waste receiving reservoir having a waste fluid channel end and a vent end;
- b) an absorbent bat disposed within said waste receiving reservoir and contacting said waste fluid channel end; and
- c) a flexible film disposed within said waste receiving reservoir and having a first side facing said absorbent bat and a second side facing said vent end, wherein said flexible film is sealed to said plastic body such that said flexible film separates said vent end and said waste fluid channel end,

wherein said vent end comprises a vent exiting said external surface of said plastic body.

9. A microfluidic card of claim 8, said vent further comprising a gas-permeable:water impermeable filter barrier.

10. A microfluidic card of claim 2, wherein said volume V1, diameter D1, and said aperture dimensions Y1, Z1, and L1 are configured for micro-educative mixing.

11. A microfluidic card comprising an on-board waste fluid isolation apparatus, said on-board waste fluid isolation apparatus comprising:

- a) a plastic body having an external surface and encasing a waste receiving reservoir having a waste fluid channel end and a vent end;
- b) an absorbent bat disposed within said waste receiving reservoir and contacting said waste fluid channel end; and
- c) a flexible film separatingly disposed within said waste receiving reservoir and having a first side facing said absorbent bat and a second side facing said vent end, wherein said flexible film is sealed to said plastic body such that said flexible film isolatingly separates said waste fluid channel end and said vent end,

wherein said vent end further comprises a vent exiting said external surface of said plastic body.

12. A microfluidic card of claim 11, wherein said vent further comprising a gas-permeable:water impermeable filter barrier.

13. A kit for performing a heterogeneous binding assay on a clinical sample comprising a microfluidic card of claim 1.

14. A kit for performing a heterogeneous binding assay on a clinical sample comprising a microfluidic card of claim 11.

15. A method for performing heterogeneous binding assays in a microfluidic device comprising the steps of:

- a) pumping a fluidized sample comprising a target analyte back and forth across an affinity capture site between tandem bellows pumps without venting; and
- b) detecting target analyte bound on said affinity capture site,

wherein said pumping step further comprises pumping said fluidized sample through an aperture and micro-educatively mixing said fluidized sample.

16. A method of claim 15, wherein said step for detecting a target analyte bound on said affinity capture site comprises detecting a bound chromogenic or fluorescent tag.

17. A method of claim 15, wherein said step for detecting a target analyte bound on said affinity capture site comprises detection by direct or indirect ELISA.

18. A microfluidic card for performing agglutination assays comprising a serpentine channel, an affinity capture agent comprising a bead or cell, and an optical window for detecting an agglutination reaction upstream from an on-board waste fluid isolation apparatus.

19. A microfluidic card of claim 18, wherein said on-board waste fluid isolation apparatus comprises:

- a) a plastic body having an external surface and encasing a waste receiving reservoir having a waste fluid channel end and a vent end;
- b) an absorbent bat disposed within said waste receiving reservoir and contacting said waste fluid channel end; and
- c) a flexible film separatingly disposed within said waste receiving reservoir and having a first side facing said absorbent bat and a second side facing said vent end, wherein said flexible film is sealed to said plastic body such that said flexible film isolatingly separates said waste fluid channel end and said vent end,

wherein said vent end further comprises a vent exiting said external surface of said plastic body.

20. A microfluidic card of claim 19, wherein said vent further comprises a gas-permeable:water impermeable filter barrier.