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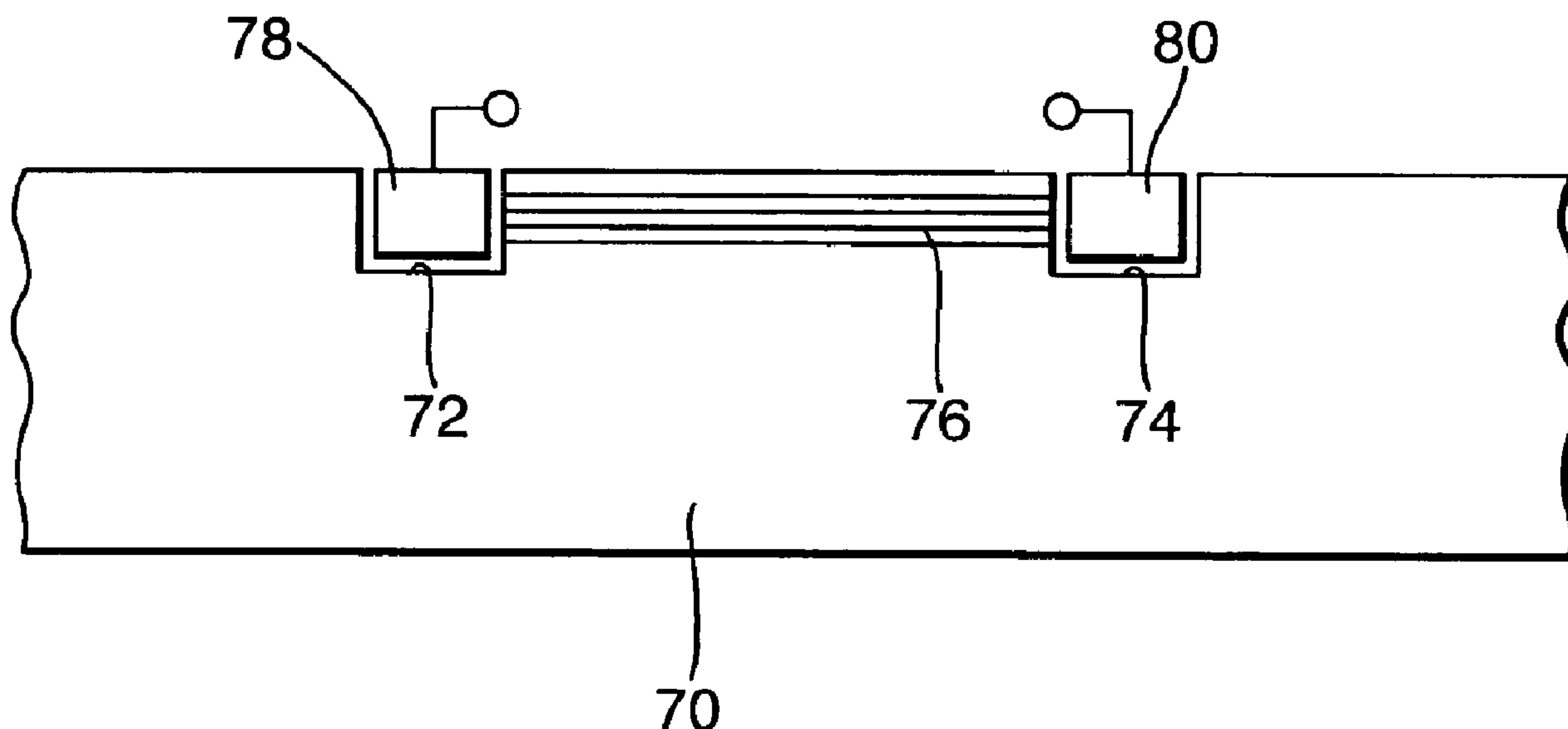
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STRUTURE MATERIELLE
(54) Title: ELECTRICAL POWER SOURCE COMPRISING A HOLLOW FIBRE INCORPORATED IN A MATERIAL
STRUCTURE



(57) Abrégé/Abstract:

An electrical power source comprising at least one hollow fibre incorporated in a material structure, wherein said at least one hollow fibre forms part of an electric circuit capable of storing or generating electrical power. In this way power sources may be provided as an integral part of a fibre composite structure or fabric.

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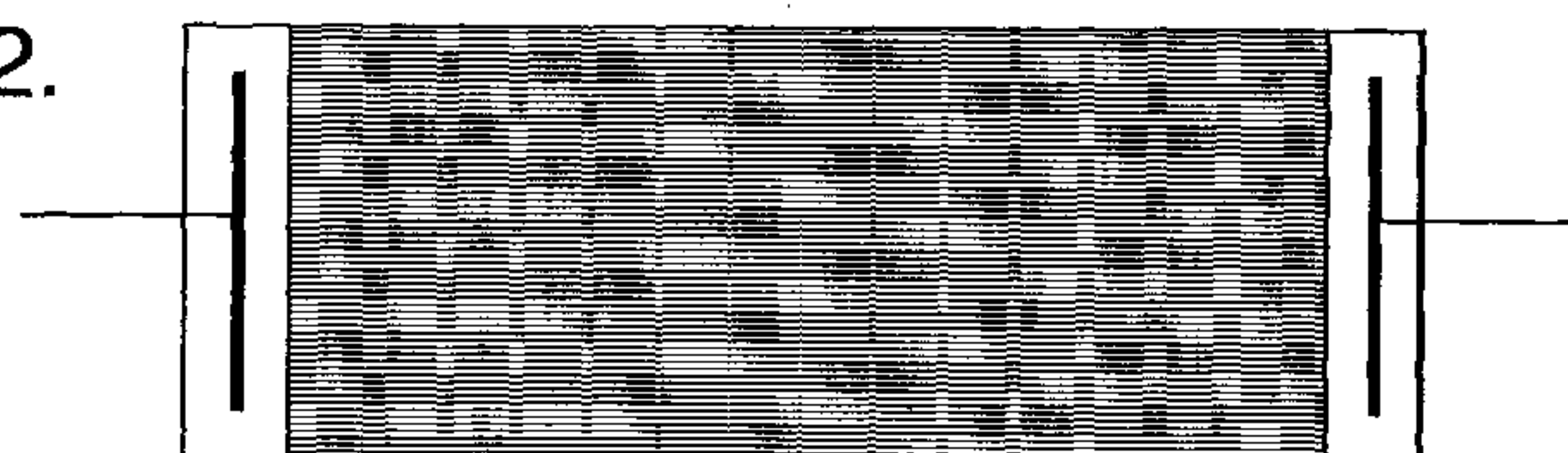
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Fig.2.



(57) Abstract: An electrical power source comprising at least one hollow fibre incorporated in a material structure, wherein said at least one hollow fibre forms part of an electric circuit capable of storing or generating electrical power. In this way power sources may be provided as an integral part of a fibre composite structure or fabric.

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ELECTRICAL POWER SOURCE COMPRISING A HOLLOW FIBRE INCORPORATED IN A MATERIAL STRUCTURE

This invention relates to electrical power sources and in particular, but not exclusively, to power sources that are integral with a structure or other material.

5 There are many instances where a vehicle requires a power source to generate or store electrical power for control or operation of the device. Typically such electrical power sources take the form of conventional battery packs that are disposed within the vehicle. Such electrical power sources occupy space and contribute to the weight of the vehicle. Also the electrical
10 power sources can often be some way away from where the power is to be delivered, therefore requiring cabling to connect the power source with both the circuit to which it is to be connected as well as any charging circuit. The remote nature of such power sources can also be problematic if the structure is partially damaged.

15 We have developed and disclosed in earlier pending patent applications new techniques for integrating into fibre composite materials detectors and shielding arrangements for providing vehicle components to detect the incidence of harmful electromagnetic radiation (e.g. nuclear radiation) and to provide active shielding from such radiation. In this way a component such as a
20 skin element of a vehicle can be produced that has a special capability integrated therein. Similar technology has also been developed using fibre reinforced material to enable the radar cross section of a vehicle or object to be considerably reduced using actively modifiable materials within some of the fibres making up a surface or layer in a vehicle or other object. This surface or
25 layer may also have important structural, aerodynamic or shielding properties. Such equipment and also other such technologies under development require electrical power and it is desirable to provide a power source that can be integrated into the fibre reinforced material along with the active elements in the composite material making up e.g. the detection and shielding functions. There
30 is therefore a need to provide composite materials that have a power source integrated therein and which can supply electrical power to electrical circuits

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integrated into the same material or to other components that may be remote from the power source.

Likewise there is a need to provide a suitable power source in fabrics and materials made of an agglomeration of fibres for use in a wide range of applications including
5 for example being laid up as a reinforcement mat in a fibre composite material or for other applications such as shielding, clothing etc.

We have designed a power source that may be integrated into the fibres making up a fibre composite structure or other material along with other active functionality if required.

10 Accordingly, in one aspect, this invention provides an electrical power source comprising at least one hollow fibre incorporated into a material structure, wherein said at least one hollow fibre forms part of an electric circuit or component capable of storing or generating electrical power.

The at least one hollow fibre may be an elongate hollow fibre.

15 Preferably said at least one hollow fibre is contained in a matrix material thereby to provide a fibre reinforced material. In this manner a fibre composite material may be provided with an integral power source. The matrix material may conveniently comprise a polymeric, elastomeric, metal, or ceramics material or any other suitable matrix material, or mixtures of the aforesaid.

20 Alternatively or additionally the elongate hollow fibres may be woven knitted, spun filament wound or matted, to form a material comprising an agglomeration of said elongate hollow fibres. The fibres may make up a relatively rigid structure or they may define a flexible or drapable structure, cloth or material.

The elongate hollow fibres may be made of any suitable material including
25 those already used for fibre reinforcement, for example a material selected from the group comprising carbon fibres, glass fibres, mineral fibres, ceramic fibres, polymeric fibres, and metal fibres.

Many different types of power source are envisaged; in one embodiment said elongate hollow fibres form an active or passive component of an

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electrochemical cell. Thus said elongate hollow fibres may contain an electrolyte forming part of said electrochemical cell. In one arrangement, the fibres contain an electrolyte and act as an ion bridge between two electrolyte compartments containing respective electrodes. Alternatively the matrix material
5 in which the fibres are contained may be an ionic conductive polymer which acts as the electrolyte in the cell. The elongate hollow fibres may have coated or deposited thereon spaced electrode regions, or be otherwise treated to render selected parts thereof electrically conducting to serve as an electrode region. The electrode regions may be provided on opposite internal wall regions
10 of said elongate hollow fibres. Alternatively or additionally said spaced electrode regions may be disposed concentrically with respect to said elongate hollow fibres, and spaced from each other by e.g. a polymer material. In another arrangement, the electrodes may be spaced periodically along the length of the fibre.

15 The or each elongate fibre may contain a plurality of electrochemical cells disposed along the length of the fibre. Each of the electrochemical cells in a fibre may be connected in parallel between a positive and a negative terminal. Alternatively each of the cells in a fibre may be connected in series between a positive and a negative terminal.

20 Said elongate hollow fibres may form part of an electrochemical cell making up a secondary battery and said power source further may include means for charging said secondary battery.

In another form of power source, at least some of said elongate hollow fibres form part of a fuel cell. Thus the elongate hollow fibres may contain a
25 plurality of fuel cells disposed along their length. Each of said fuel cells in a fibre may be connected in parallel between a positive and a negative terminal. Alternatively each of the fuel cells in a fibre may be connected in series between a positive and a negative terminal.

In another form of power source, at least some of said elongate hollow
30 fibres form part of a photovoltaic cell. Thus the elongate hollow fibres may contain a plurality of photovoltaic cells disposed along their length. Each of said

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photovoltaic cells in a fibre may be connected in parallel between a positive and a negative terminal. Alternatively each of the photovoltaic cells in a fibre may be connected in series between a positive and a negative terminal.

In yet another form of power source at least some of said elongate
5 hollow fibres form part of a capacitor. Thus the hollow fibres may include spaced electrodes with a suitable dielectric therebetween. The electrode configurations for this capacitive power source may be similar to those used in the electrochemical cells. Numerous configurations are possible for example, on
10 a single hollow fibre, spaced electrodes could be deposited on the inner and outer surfaces of the hollow fibre respectively. Alternatively the inner (and/or outer) surface may have deposited thereon in succession a first electrode layer, a dielectric layer, and a second electrode layer.

In another scheme, the fibres may be packed in a generally uniform array and each provided with an electrically conducting core serving as an electrode,
15 so that the fibre material and the fibre matrix material both serve as dielectrics. Alternate layers may be interconnected to give an interdigitated capacitive structure.

Various options are available for the connections between fibres; thus at least some of the elongate hollow fibres that form part of the electrical circuit
20 capable of storing or generating power may be connected with their positive and negative terminals in parallel. Alternatively or additionally at least some of the elongate hollow fibres that form part of the electrical circuit capable of storing or generating power may be connected with their positive and negative terminals in series.

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According to another aspect of the invention, there is provided an electrical power source comprising at least one hollow fibre incorporated in a material structure, wherein said at least one hollow fibre forms part of an electric circuit for storing or generating electrical power, wherein said at least one hollow fibre is
5 contained in a matrix of a material of the material structure thereby to provide a fibre reinforced material, and wherein the at least one hollow fibre contains an electrolyte and acts as an ion bridge between two electrolyte compartments containing respective electrodes.

The invention extends to a land, air, space or water vehicle comprising
10 a skin element incorporating an electrical power source as described above, and to a flexible material or garment incorporating an electrical power source as described above.

Whilst the invention has been described above, it extends to any inventive combination or sub-combination of the features set out above or described
15 herein.

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The invention may be performed in various ways and, by way of example only, various embodiments thereof will now be described in detail, reference being made to the following drawings, in which

Figure 1 is a schematic of the construction of a basic
5 electrochemical cell;

Figure 2 is a schematic view of a composite fibre power source in accordance with an embodiment of this invention;

Figure 3 is a schematic of a series of cells formed in a hollow fibre in accordance with an embodiment of this invention;

10 Figures 4(a) and (b) show two different options for metallisation within a fibre to provide an electrode structure;

Figures 5(a) and (b) show schematically parallel and series groupings of power source cells within a fibre;

15 Figures 6(a) and (b) show schematically fibres containing series connected power source cells, connected in series and parallel respectively;

Figure 7 shows schematically fibres containing parallel connected power source cells, connected in parallel;

Figure 8 shows the basic construction of a power source in the form of a fuel cell;

20 Figure 9 is a schematic view of a Gratzel cell;

Figure 10 is a schematic of a battery structure using a hollow fibre containing an ion bridge;

Figures 11(a) and (b) are schematic section and plan views respectively of an electrochemical cell arrangement in accordance with an
25 embodiment of the invention;

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Figure 12 is a schematic view of a Gratzel cell arrangement in accordance with an embodiment of the invention, and

Figure 13 is a schematic view of a fuel cell arrangement in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

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The embodiments comprise power sources that are incorporated into small hollow fibres that also provide important, if not principal, material properties of the structure, whether that be a fibre reinforced plastics composite material, or flexible mat or weave of fibrous material.

Various types of power source may be used, including batteries, fuel cells, light harvesting sources such as solar cells, power sources that exploit thermoelectric effects, power sources that rely on conversion of acoustic energy, mechanical devices based on magnetic coupling or piezoelectric effects for example, as well as nuclear power sources. Furthermore the power source may be one or more capacitors that can store electric charge. In the embodiments below, we give examples of specific technologies.

Batteries

Figure 1 shows a schematic of the construction of a basic electrochemical cell 10. It consists of five elements, the case 12 which forms the outer container and holds the active materials, two electrodes 14,16 a membrane 18 separating the two electrodes and an electrolyte 20. The different types of batteries available include zinc-carbon; alkaline; lithium, lithium-iodide and lead-iodide chemistry batteries; lead-acid; nickel-cadmium; nickel-metal hydride; lithium-ion; zinc-air; zinc-mercury oxide; silver-zinc; and metal-chloride. Some of the above are primary batteries (single use, disposable) and others secondary (rechargeable) batteries.

A variety of materials and chemicals are used in modern rechargeable battery arrangements. The electrodes are metals, oxides, alloys or carbon based, for example lead/lead oxide, cadmium/nickel oxide, nickel oxide/metal hydride (complex alloys of lanthanides/Ni or Ti/Zr), LiCoO₂/graphite, fluorinated graphite. The electrolytes are usually of liquids, gels or even pastes, such as sulphuric acid, potassium hydroxide, lithium salts in organic solvents, and

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Polymer electrolytes (gels). The membrane can be a porous ceramic or polymer selected from e.g. porous ionic ceramics, polymer electrolytes and permeable polymers. The cases can be made of steel, plastic and even glass has been used.

Figure 2 shows a specific example of a battery in which a section of structural
 5 fibre reinforced polymeric material comprises hollow reinforcement fibres that contain an electrolyte (here KNO_3) that acts as an ion bridge between spaced electrode compartments containing suitable electrolytes (here CuSO_4 , ZnSO_4 respectively) for two electrodes of copper and zinc respectively. In this arrangement the fibres themselves do not need to be provided with electrodes because they simply serve as hollow ion bridges between the
 10 electrolyte compartments.

Many other electrochemical arrangements are possible. For example a hollow fibre may be plated internally at one end with nickel and at the other end with iron, with the remainder of the core of the fibre of being filled with KOH , to provide a robust rechargeable battery.

Figure 3 shows a schematic of how a typical battery, (in this case a lead acid battery), may be connected in series to form a linear arrangement and implemented within a hollow fibre acting as the casing. It will be seen that this is made up of a series of cells
 15 each comprising the basic components of the cell described above, namely a casing 22/12, an electrolyte 20, electrodes 14,16, and a membrane 18. The cells are connected in series
 20 by a conductor connecting each opposed pair of electrodes 14,16. The conductor may be formed by metallising the inner surface of the hollow fibre 22.

The constituent materials are metals (two different types of metals are required for the anode 14 and cathode 16), an electrolyte 20, which may be a liquid or a gel, a barrier material or membrane 18 between the anode and cathode (such as a polymer) and
 25 some form of metallisation or conductive pathway for the interconnection.

The electrodes have to be separated within the fibre, and suitable materials include ion permeable materials, such as porous ceramics, polymer or

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gels. Alternative strategies for electrode placement may be employed, such as for example concentric electrodes 14,16 consisting of metallisation on the internal fibre walls sandwiched with a polymeric material (Figure 4(a)), or a linear arrangement of anode 16 and cathode 18 spatially separated from each other by deposition of each on opposing regions of fibre 22 (Figure 4(b)) or even along the fibre length. Figures 4(a) and (b) are electrode arrangements in fibre bore viewed looking down the fibre axis; (a) shows a polymer electrolyte 20 sandwiched between electrodes 14, 16 and (b) shows facing electrodes 14,16 with electrolyte 20 in the fibre bore.

Location of materials laterally (along the fibre length) within the fibre can be achieved using a variety of strategies. Techniques such as positional control of reactants, co-displacement of reagents, reactant site inhibition and selective deposition may all be used. For example discretised growth of metal at selected areas on the internal fibre bore surfaces may be used. Material incorporation vertically, i.e. fibre wall to fibre wall can be undertaken by multilayering methods, for example metallisation of internal walls of fibres, their subsequent overcoating with a polymeric material, followed by incorporation of electrolytic fluid. Interconnection of cells within the fibre may be achieved using various methods including introduction of a conductive medium within the fibre, or selective deposition within the fibres.

Within a fibre or a fibre composite any materials forming a cell are grouped to obtain a practically functioning structure with useful voltage or current output. This is equally applicable for any of the power generation methods identified above and hence the power generation element is considered purely as a generic element at this stage. Figures 5(a) and (b) show how a group of any such power elements can be arranged within a fibre. The Figures shows both a parallel (Figure 5 (a)) and a series arrangement (Figure 5 (b)).

Furthermore the connections between fibres may be series, parallel or both. Figure 6(a) and 6(b) show how a series arrangement of power cells in a fibre may be connected together in both a serial arrangement (Figure 6(a)) and a parallel arrangement (Figure 6(b)).

Figure 7 shows an arrangement of fibres each containing a plurality of power cells connected in parallel, with the fibres themselves then also being connected in parallel.

Capacitors

5 As a variant on the arrangement of Figure 4(a) a capacitor may be constructed in a similar manner by depositing the first electrode on the inner surface of the fibre and then a dielectric laid on to the first electrode with a second electrode being deposited on the dielectric. This gives a structure of two concentric electrodes disposed within the bore of the fibre, and sandwiched
10 to either side of a cylindrical element of dielectric material. Other configurations such as that shown in Figure 4(b) may be used, but with dielectric in place of the electrolyte.

Fuel Cells

Fuel cells are electrochemical cells but in contrast to batteries rely upon
15 the continuous flow of chemicals into the cell. A schematic of the major constituents of a fuel cell is shown in Figure 8, and shows the anode, cathode and the electrolyte separating the electrodes. Hydrogen is the most common of the fuels used and flows in to the anode and dissociates into hydrogen ions and electrons. The protons travel through the electrolyte whilst
20 the electrons flow around the external circuit, thus supplying power. The hydrogen ions diffuse through the electrolyte, which may for example be a polymer film, and combine with the oxygen and electrons to produce the water as the waste product.

Table 1 below summarises the different materials that are used for fuel
25 cell technology. Several types of electrolytes, liquid or solid may be used such as for example potassium hydroxide, ceramics or a proton conducting polymer membrane. The electrodes can be made of conducting materials, e.g. metals, nanotubes, etc and are usually coated with a catalyst such as platinum to increase the reaction efficiency. Alternatives to hydrogen fuels are also
30 employed, e.g. alcohols or other hydrocarbons, but these are then processed using a reformer which generates hydrogen from the fuel.

Type	Electrolyte	T Range/C	Catalyst
Alkaline	KOH	50-150	nickel positive
Phosphoric	H ₃ PO ₄	200	Pt on C
PEM	polymer	100	Pt on C
Carbonate	Li ₂ CO ₃	650	Li ₂ O/NiO
Solid Oxide	Yttria/zirconia	700-1000	Lanthanides

TABLE 1 Main Types of Fuel Cell

Photovoltaic Sources

Photovoltaic energy is a major potential renewable fuel source. Solar cells technology is dominated currently by silicon based materials but these are difficult to manufacture and are expensive. Gratzel cells are currently being developed as they could provide a low cost alternative to silicon cells and display similar efficiencies to silicon under direct lighting conditions and improved efficiencies under low light conditions.

Gratzel cells consist of liquid electrolytes containing a dye sensitised material to absorb incident radiation. Figure 9 shows a schematic of Gratzel cell which uses a titania (TiO₂) colloid coated with a sensitiser dye. Incident light passes through the transparent conductive coating (eg Indium Tin Oxide) of the cell and is absorbed by the sensitiser/titania colloid. Photoelectrons are generated, accumulate at the negative electrode then flow through the external circuit. The liquid electrolyte, which may be an iodide for example, completes the circuit and the sensitiser is reduced to its original state.

Thus a power source may provided by plating transparent electrodes on the surfaces of a fibre in a manner similar to that shown in the configuration of Figure 4(b) and the bore of the fibre is filled with an electrolyte containing coated colloidal titania as sensitiser.

Example 1

A structure as pictured in Figure 10 was constructed. It consists of two electrodes, Cu and Zn, immersed in aqueous copper sulphate and aqueous

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zinc sulphate respectively and connected together with potassium nitrate electrolytic gel incorporated within a 6 mm tube . All reagents including the gel were prepared in our laboratories. When the electrodes were connected through a multimeter a voltage of around 1.7V was measured. The tubing was
 5 replaced with successively smaller diameter materials to internal diameters of 1mm. These structures provided voltages of around 1.5 V. The length of the tubes was several centimetres, typically around 15 cm.

With further experimentation and revaluation of the chemistry of the
 10 gel/electrolyte combination and development of filling methods manufactured structures were manufactured with an internal diameter of 47 microns. A voltage between 0.2 and 0.8 volts was obtained with 47 micron internal diameter fibres. The data is tabulated below in TABLE 2.

Diameter (mm)		
Diameter (mm)	Length (cm)	Voltage (V)
0.40	7.3	1.5
0.25	7.5	1.5
0.30	5.0	0.9
0.25	4.0	1.0
1.00	20.0	0.8-0.9
0.047	2.0	0.2
0.047	2.5	0.2
0.047	1.0	0.8
0.047	5.5	0.4
0.047	3.0	0.5
0.047	5.0	0.6

15 With all of the technologies described above a hollow fibre is adapted so that it is capable of delivering electrical power across its ends. We have

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disclosed connection methods for connecting together fibres is series, parallel or hybrid arrangements. The fibres may then be formed into composite fibre components using existing techniques. Thus the fibres may be assembled in woven/non-woven mats which are pre-impregnated with a curable plastic material. Alternatively the fibres or mats may be laid in a mould which is then filled with a curable plastics material. Still further the fibres may be made up into a flexible fabric material that has the ability to deliver electrical power.

Referring now to Figures 11(a) and 11(b), in another arrangement an electrochemical cell is made up by providing a composite structure in the form of a sheet of composite material 70 which has two wells 72, 74 formed in it. Extending between the wells, and in flow communication with each, are a number of hollow fibres 76 each containing an electrolyte. The electrolyte may typically comprise an aqueous solution or gel potassium hydroxide which acts as an ion bridge between the wells. Each of the wells is fitted with a suitable metal electrodes 78, 80 for example nickel in one and iron in the other, or nickel in one and cadmium in the other. There are of course numerous other suitable materials. The metal electrodes in combination with the ion bridge make up an electrochemical cell.

In other examples, the wells could contain respective electrolytes such as copper sulphate and zinc sulphate and, in contact therewith, respective metal electrodes of copper and zinc. The electrochemical cell so formed may be interconnected in parallel or series as required. The interconnects may be in the form of conducting tracks on the surface of the composite material but it is particularly preferred for the connections to be made by means of electrically conducting fibres 82 embedded in the matrix material, for example carbon or other electrically conducting fibres. These fibres may conveniently also serve a fibre reinforcing function to the matrix material.

Figure 12 shows the components of a Gratzel cell disposed within a fibre in accordance with the invention. Figure 13 shows the components of a fuel cell disposed within a fibre in accordance with the invention.

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It will be appreciated that the apparatus and methods described herein may be used with other techniques in which a composite fibre structure is configured to perform functions other than purely structural. For example the apparatus and methods herein may be combined with other techniques to make
5 up intelligent structures capable of e.g. shielding and detection of radiation and/or structures capable with a facility the structural health monitoring and/or self repair.

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CLAIMS:

1. An electrical power source comprising at least one hollow fibre incorporated in a material structure, wherein said at least one hollow fibre forms part of an electric circuit for storing or generating electrical power, wherein said at least
5 one hollow fibre is contained in a matrix of a material of the material structure thereby to provide a fibre reinforced material, and wherein the at least one hollow fibre contains an electrolyte and acts as an ion bridge between two electrolyte compartments containing respective electrodes.
2. An electrical power source according to claim 1, wherein said at least
10 one hollow fibre is made of carbon fibres, or glass fibres, or mineral fibres, or ceramic fibres, or polymeric fibres, or metal fibres.
3. An electrical power source according to claim 1 or claim 2, comprising a plurality of hollow fibres that are woven, knitted, spun filament wound or matted to form a material comprising an agglomeration of said hollow fibres.
- 15 4. An electrical power source according to any one of claims 1 to 3, wherein said electrolyte forms part of an electrochemical cell.
5. An electrical power source according to any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein said at least one hollow fibre has coated or deposited thereon spaced electrically conducting electrode regions.
- 20 6. An electrical power source according to claim 5 wherein said spaced electrically conducting electrode regions are provided on opposite internal wall regions of said at least one hollow fibre.
7. An electrical power source according to claim 5 wherein said spaced electrically conducting electrode regions are disposed concentrically with respect to
25 said at least one hollow fibre.

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8. An electrical power source according to any one of claims 1 to 7, wherein each fibre contains a plurality of electrochemical cells disposed along the length of the fibre.
9. An electrical power source according to claim 8, wherein each of the
5 electrochemical cells in said each fibre is connected in parallel between a positive and a negative input/output terminal.
10. An electrical power source according to claim 8, wherein each of the electrochemical cells in said each fibre is connected in series between a positive and a negative terminal.
- 10 11. An electrical power source according to any one of claims 1 to 10, wherein said at least one hollow fibre forms part of an electrochemical cell making up a secondary battery and said power source further includes means for charging said secondary battery.
12. An electrical power source according to any one of claims 1 to 3,
15 wherein said at least one hollow fibre forms part of a fuel cell.
13. An electrical power source according to claim 12, wherein said at least one hollow fibre contains a plurality of fuel cells disposed along the length.
14. An electrical power source according to claim 13, wherein each of said fuel cells is connected in parallel between a positive and a negative terminal.
- 20 15. An electrical power source according to claim 13, wherein each of the fuel cells is connected in series between a positive and a negative terminal.
16. An electrical power source according to any one of claims 1 to 3, wherein said at least one hollow fibre forms part of a photovoltaic cell.

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17. An electrical power source according to claim 16, wherein said at least one hollow fibre contains a plurality of photovoltaic cells disposed along the length.

18. An electrical power source according to any one of claims 1 to 3, including first and second hollow fibres, each forming an active or passive component
5 of a respective different power source selected from electrochemical cells, photovoltaic cells, fuel cells and charge storage devices.

19. An electrical power source according to any one of claims 1 to 18, wherein said at least one hollow fibre is an elongate hollow fibre.

20. A vehicle comprising a skin element incorporating an electrical power
10 source according to any one of claims 1 to 19.

21. A garment comprising an electrical power source as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 19.

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Fig.1.

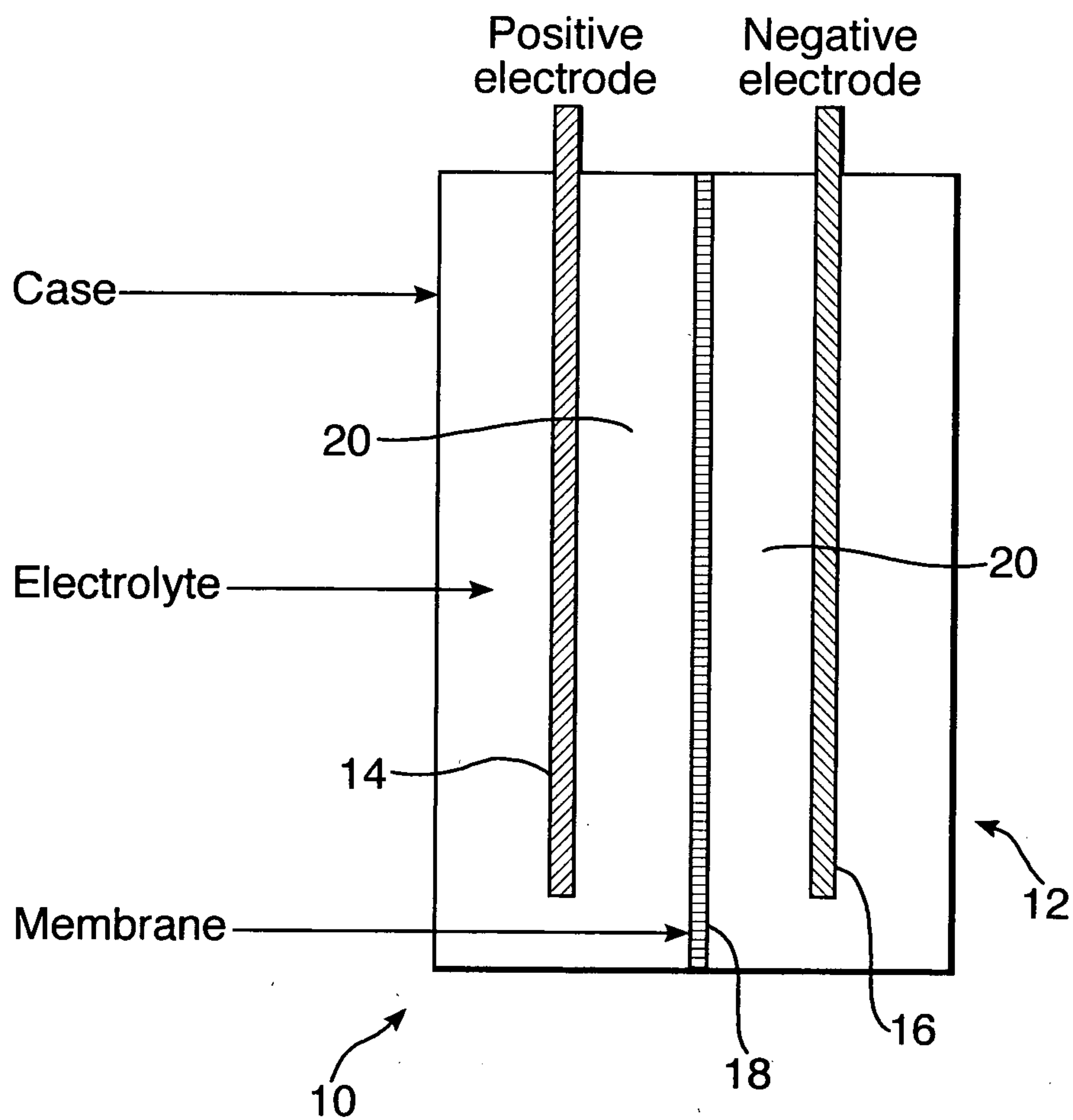
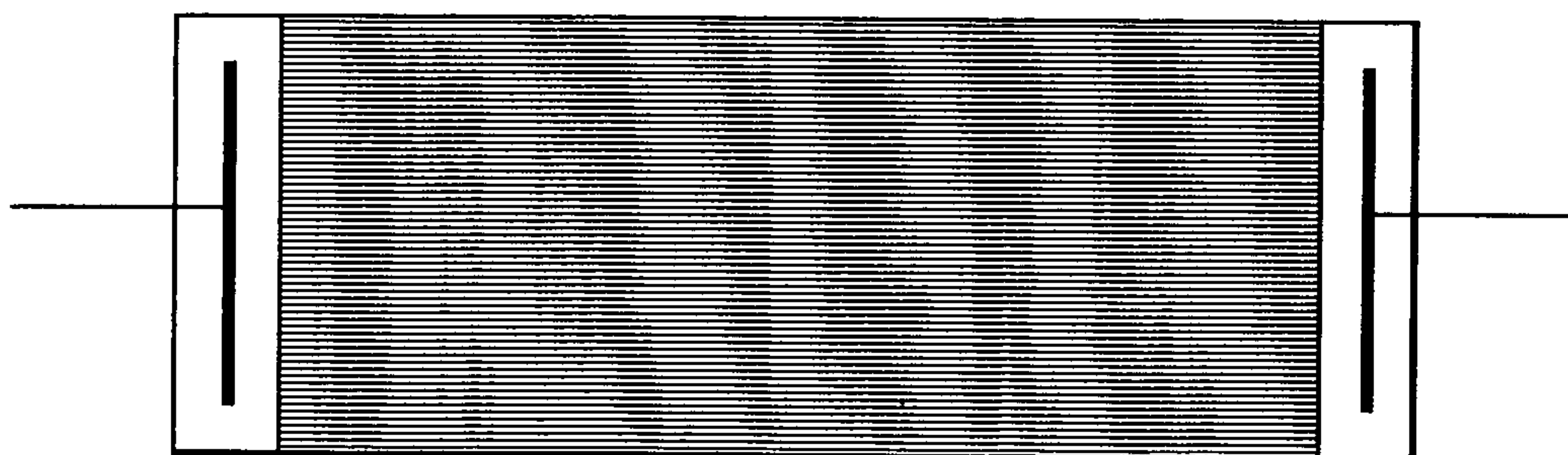


Fig.2.



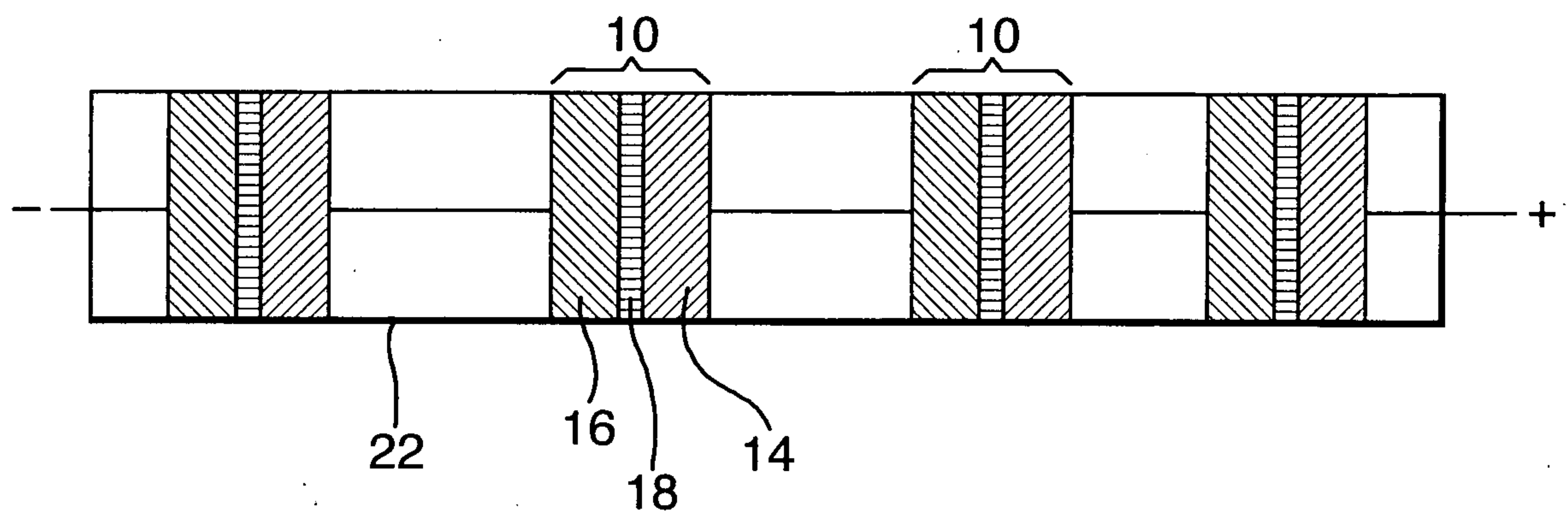
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Fig.3.

Fig.4a.

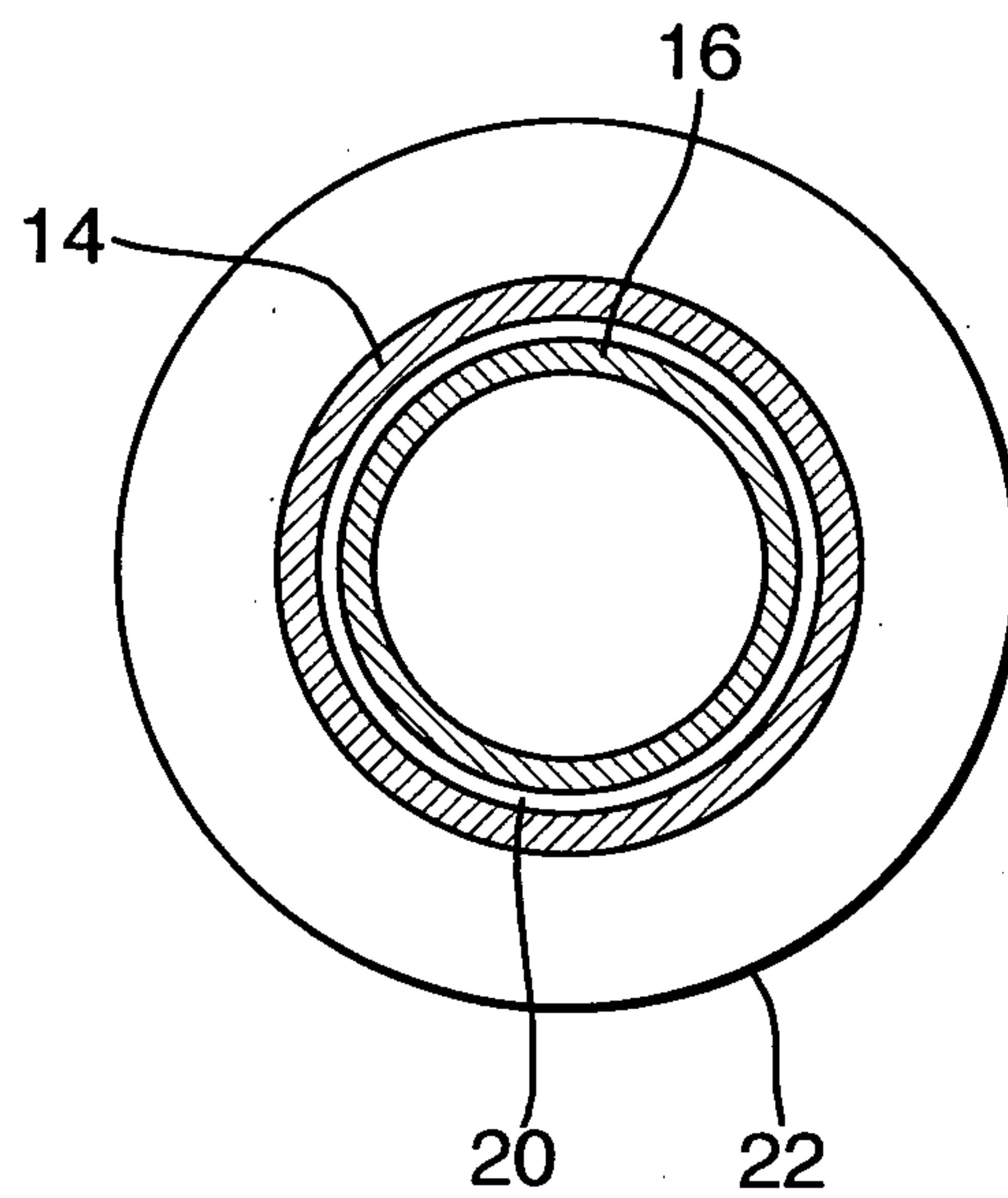


Fig.4b.

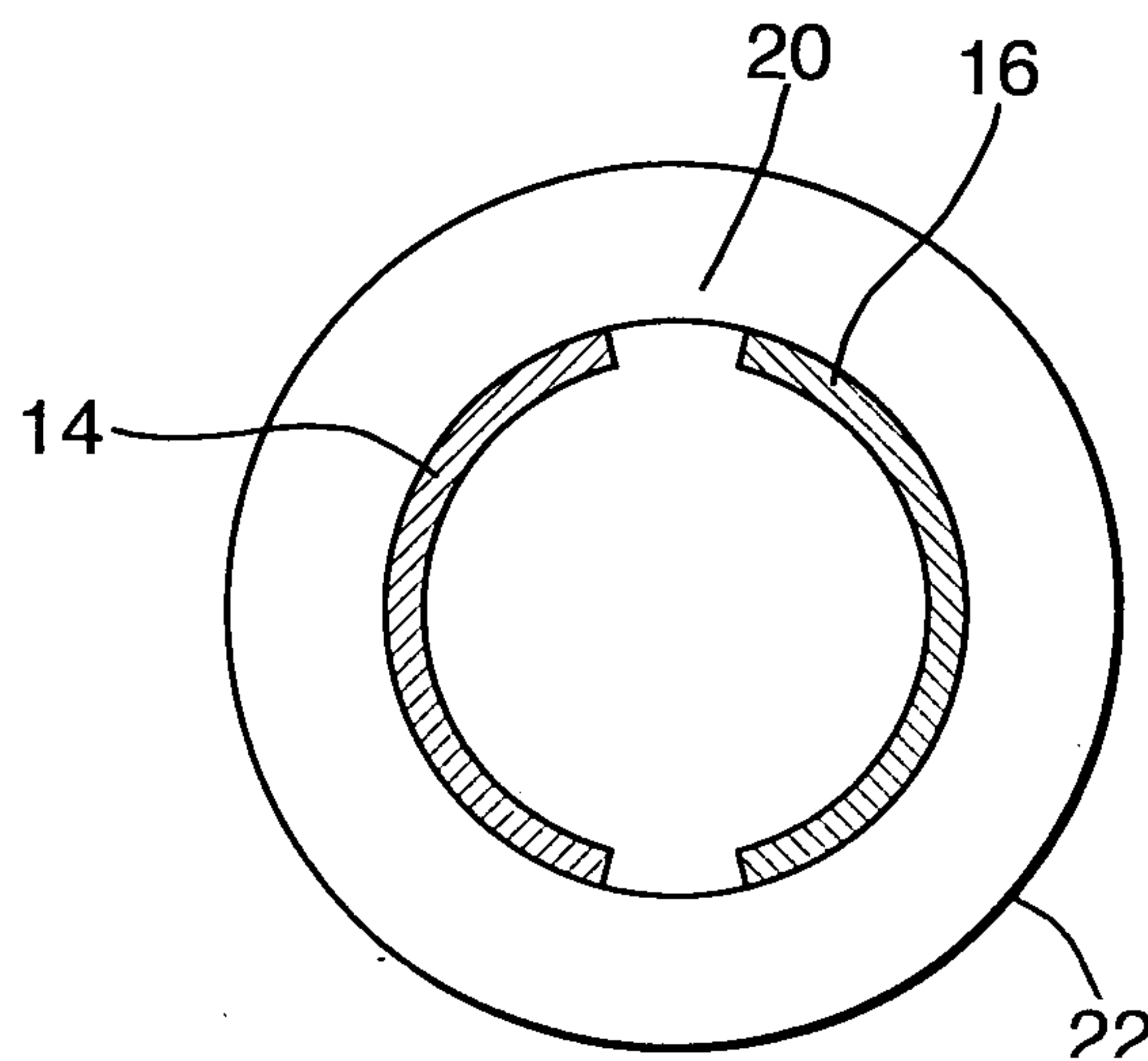


Fig. 5a

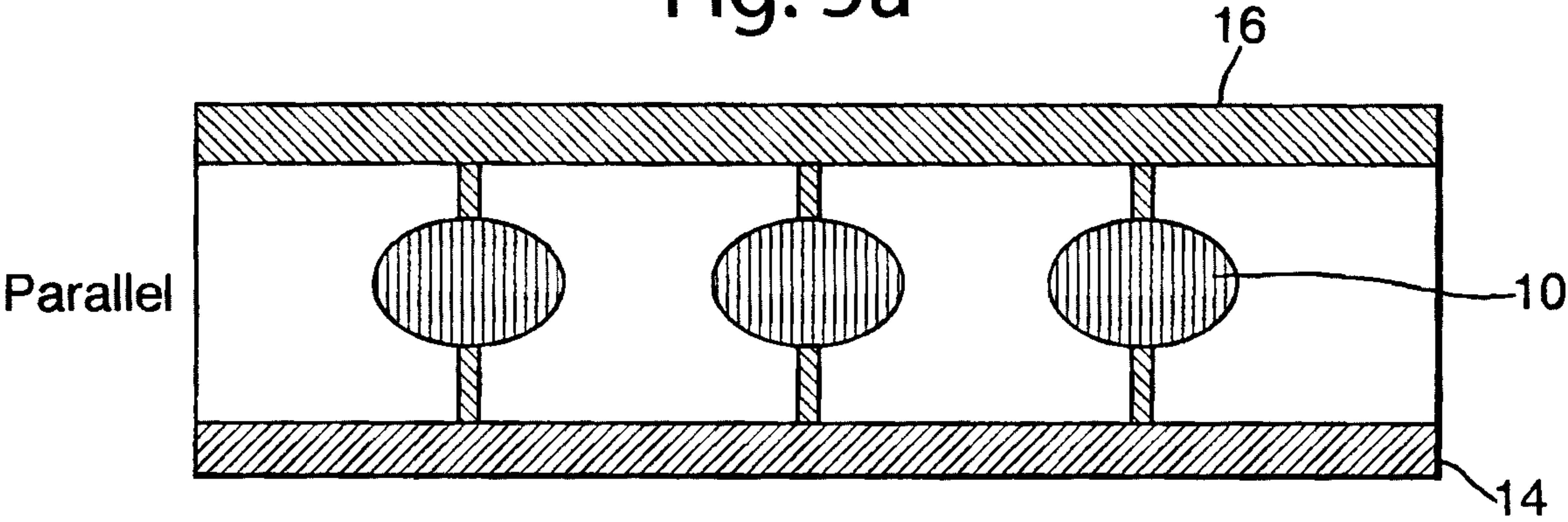
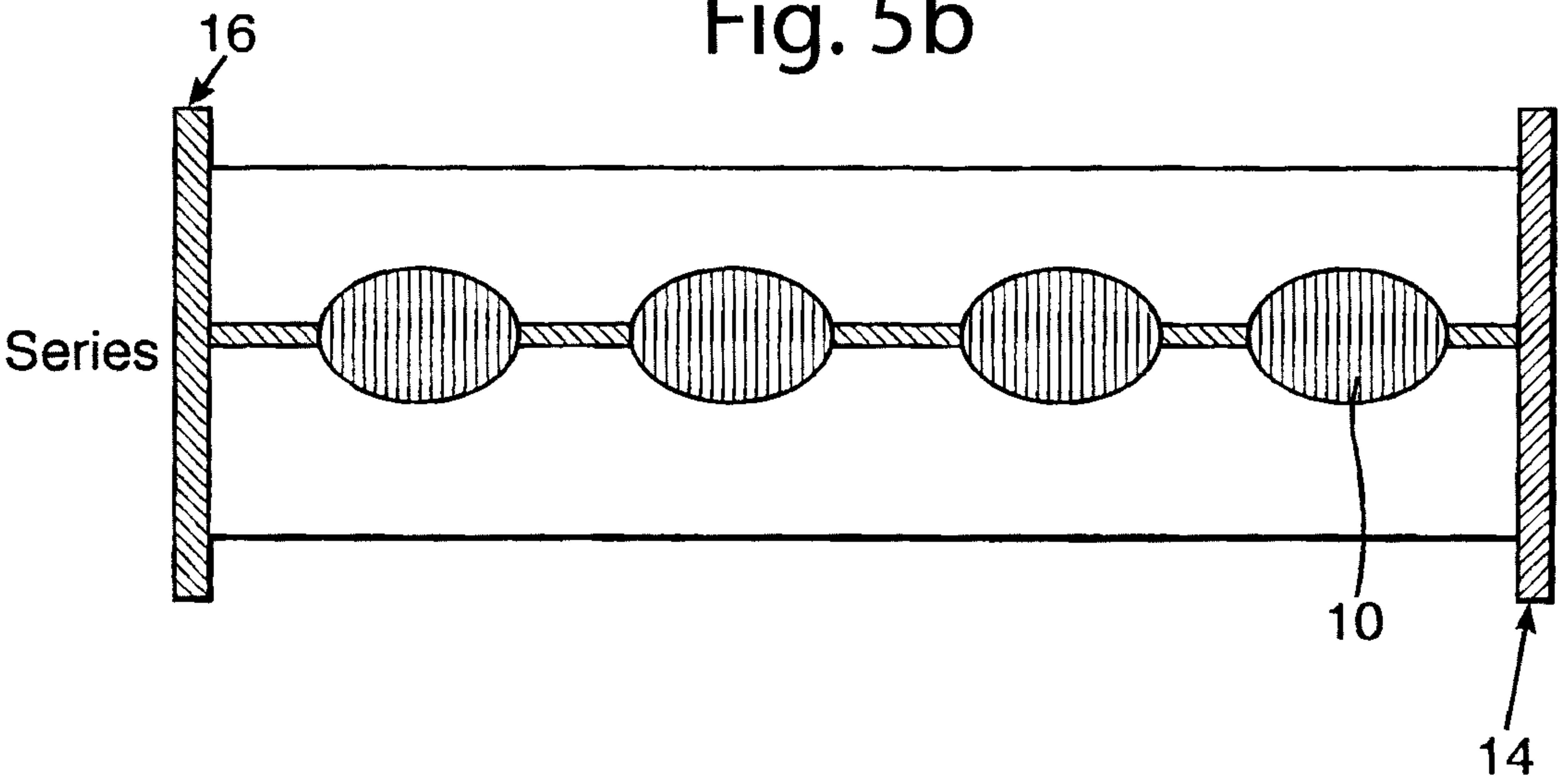


Fig. 5b



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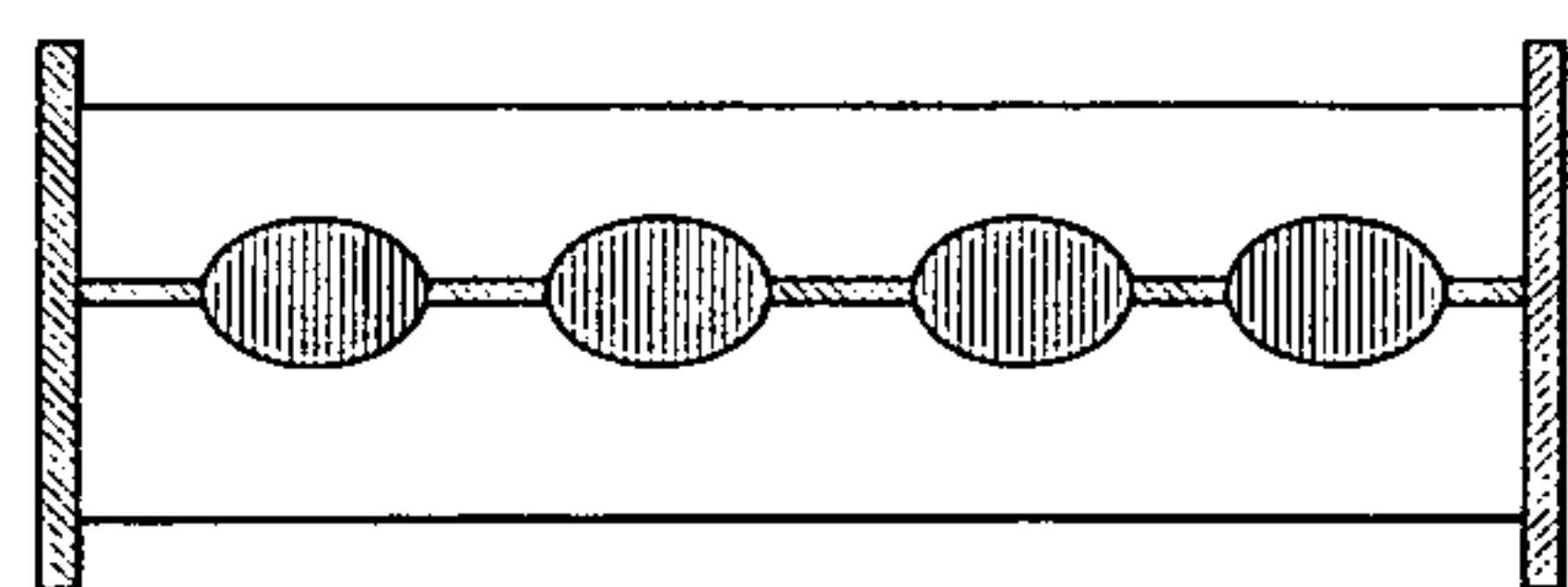


Fig.6a.

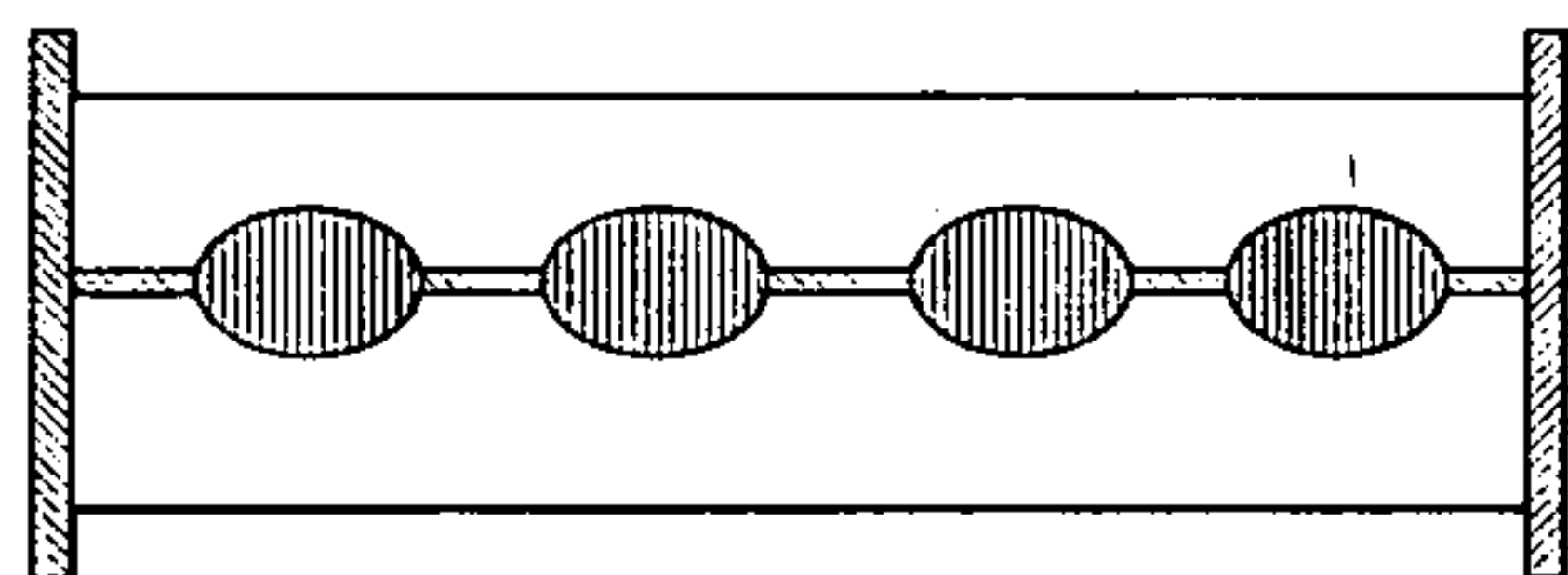
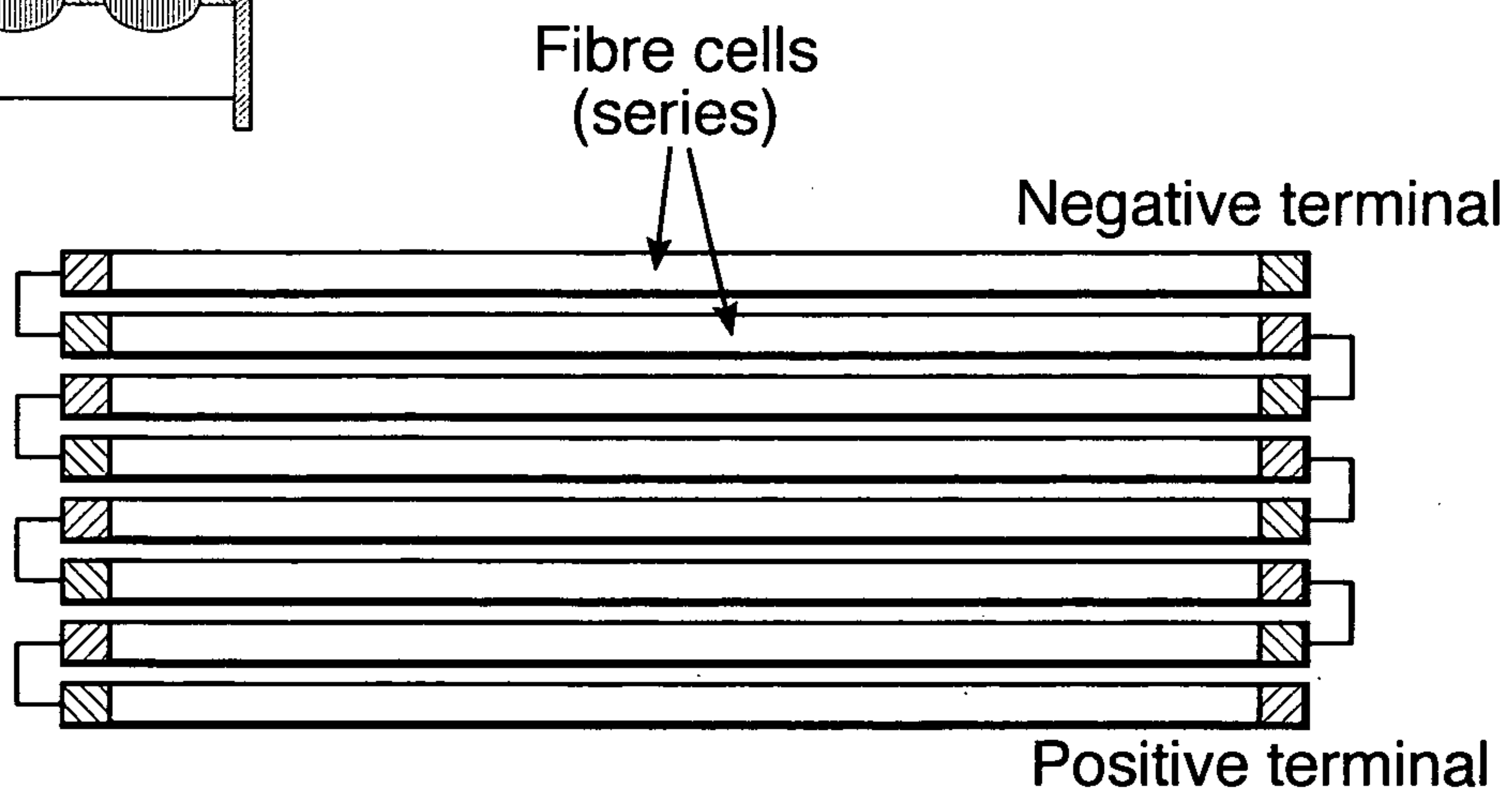
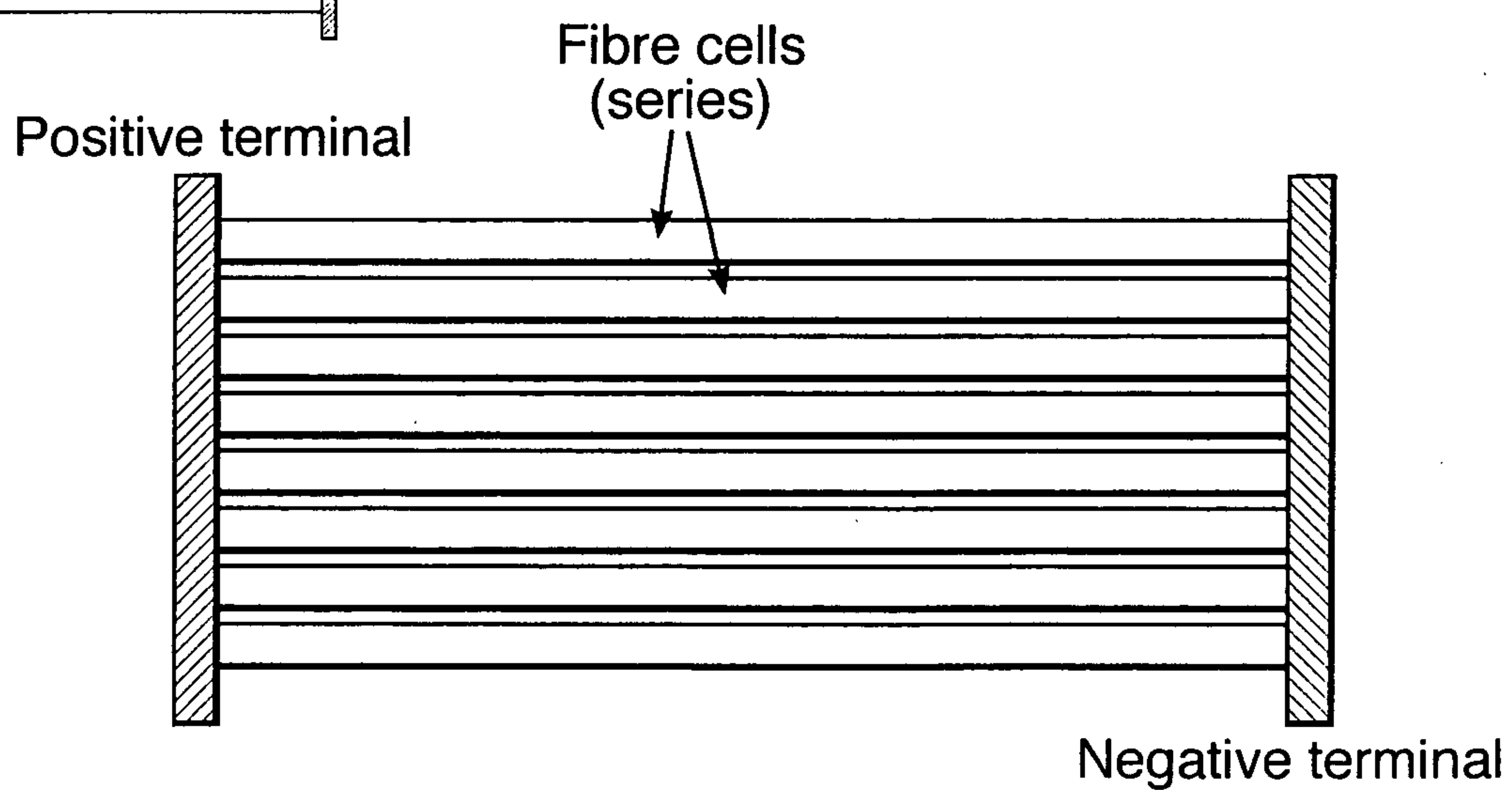


Fig.6b.



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Fig.7.

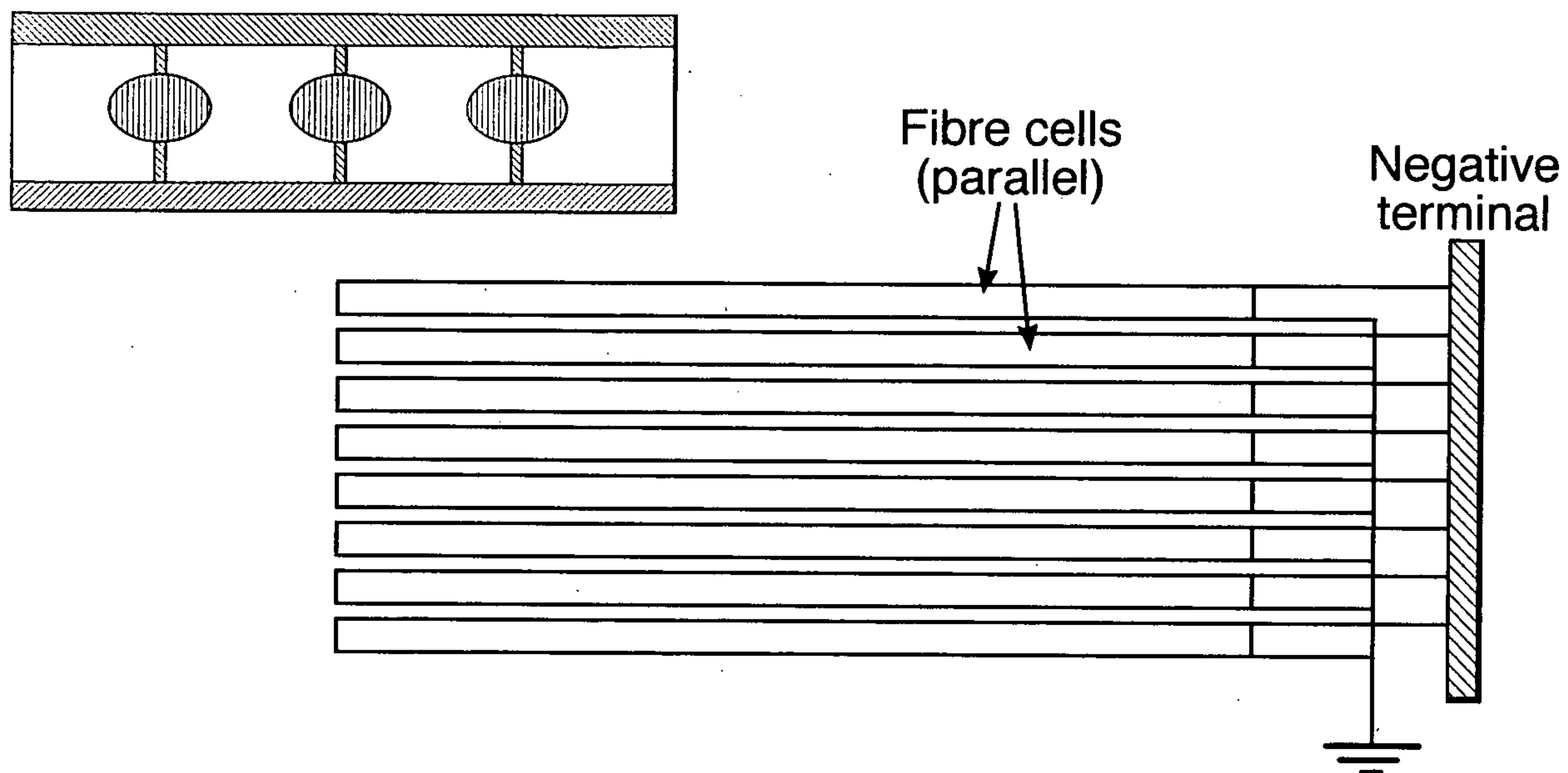
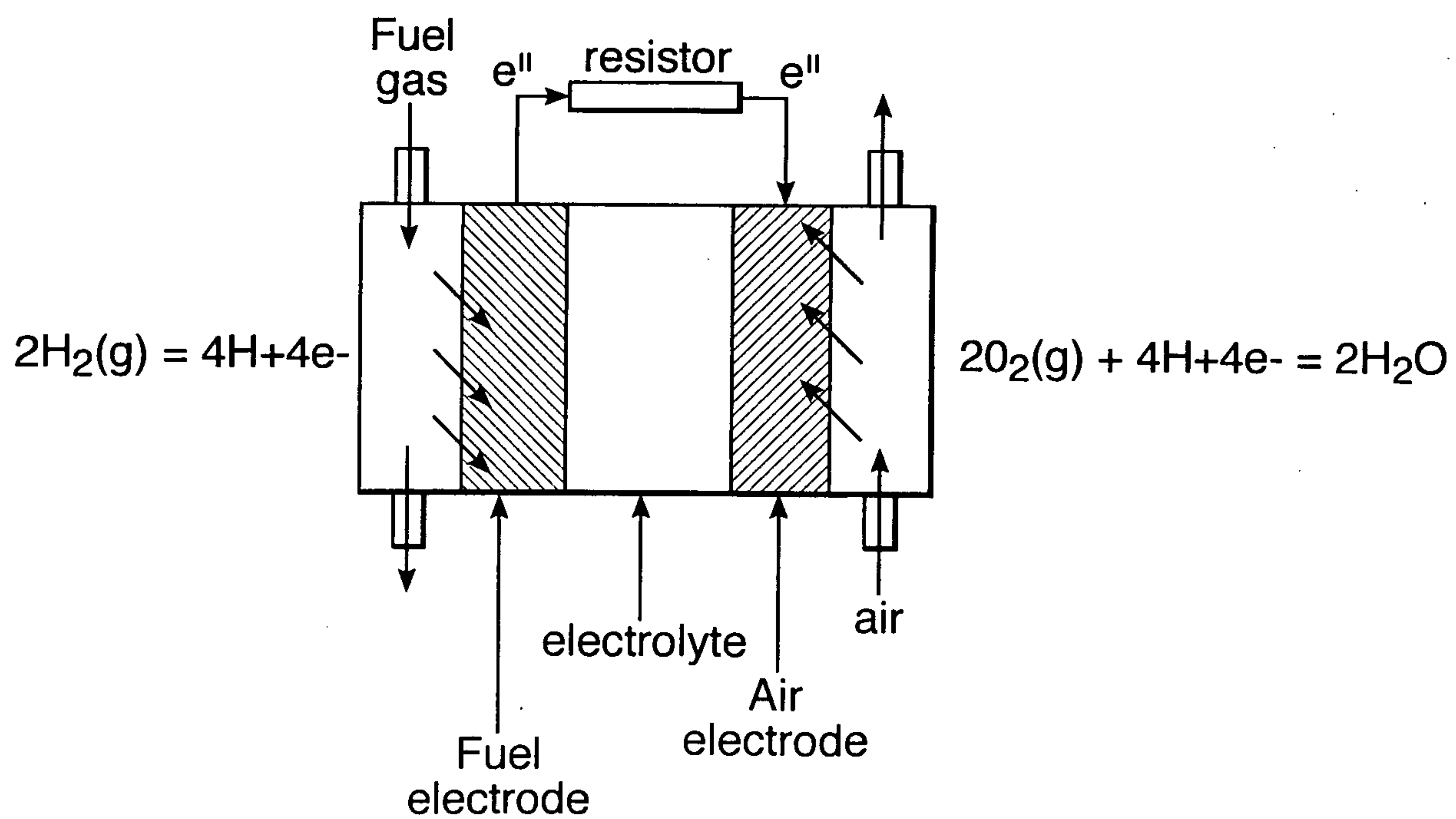


Fig.8.



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Fig.9.

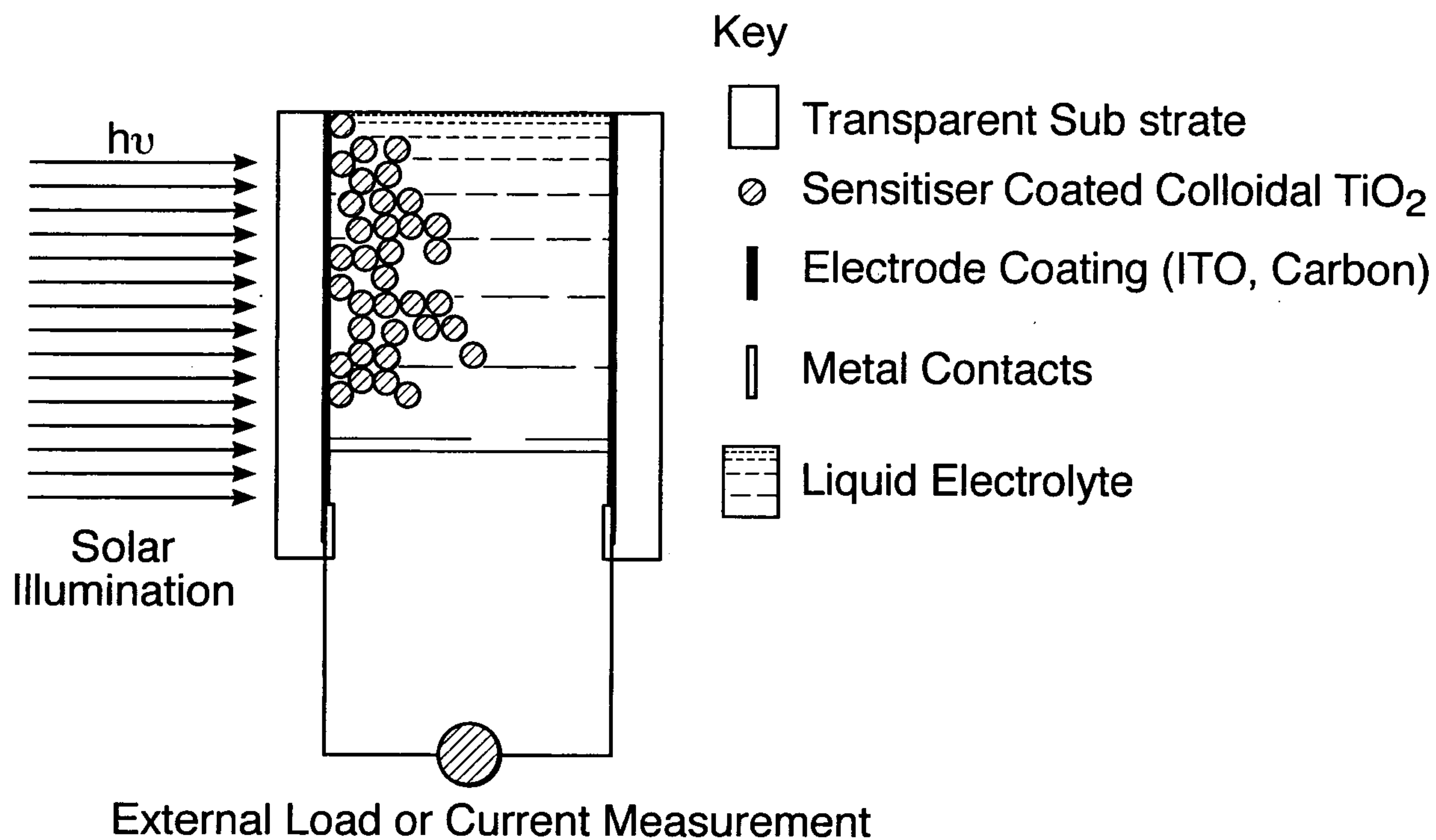
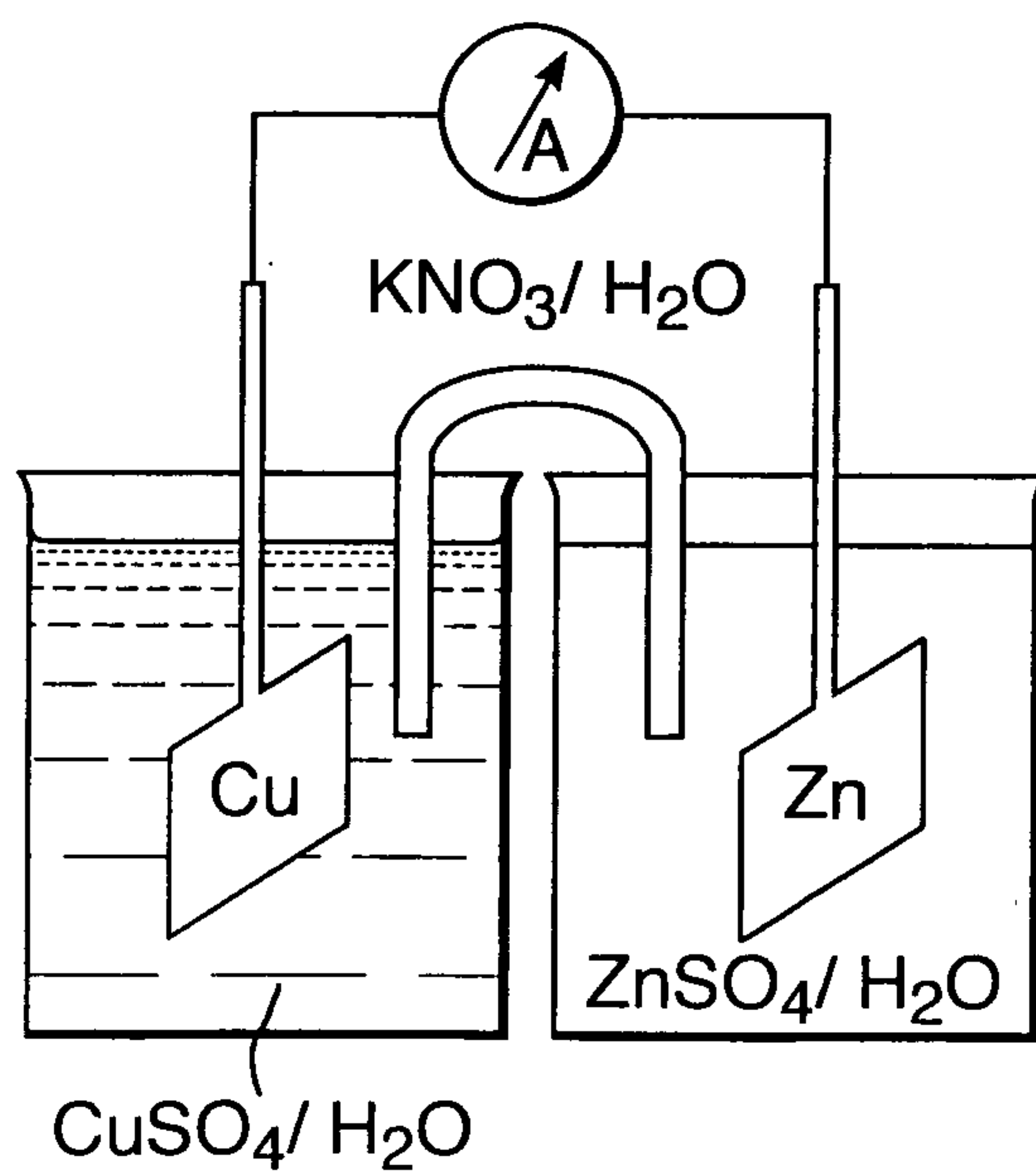


Fig.10.



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Fig.11a.

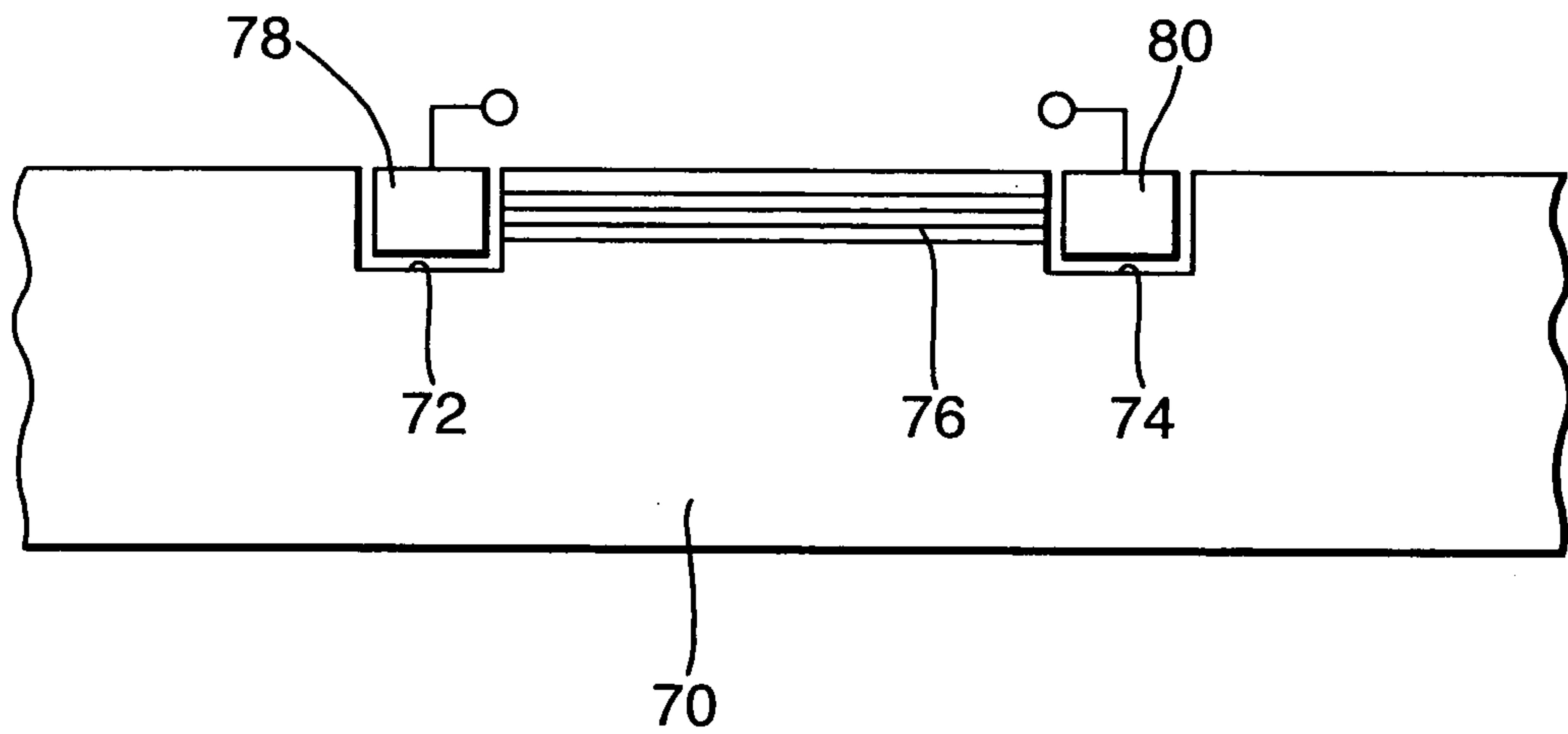
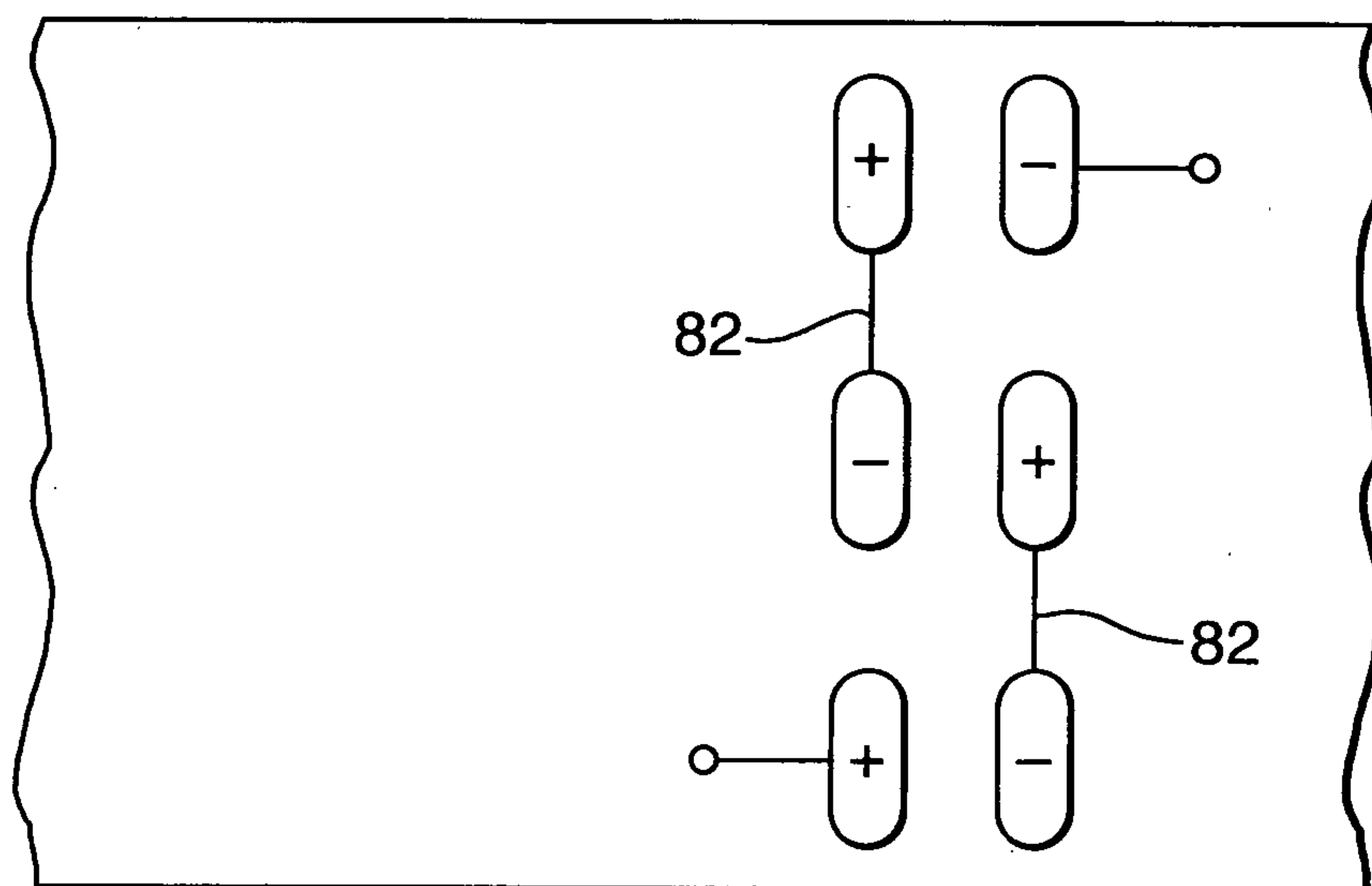


Fig.11b.



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Fig.12.

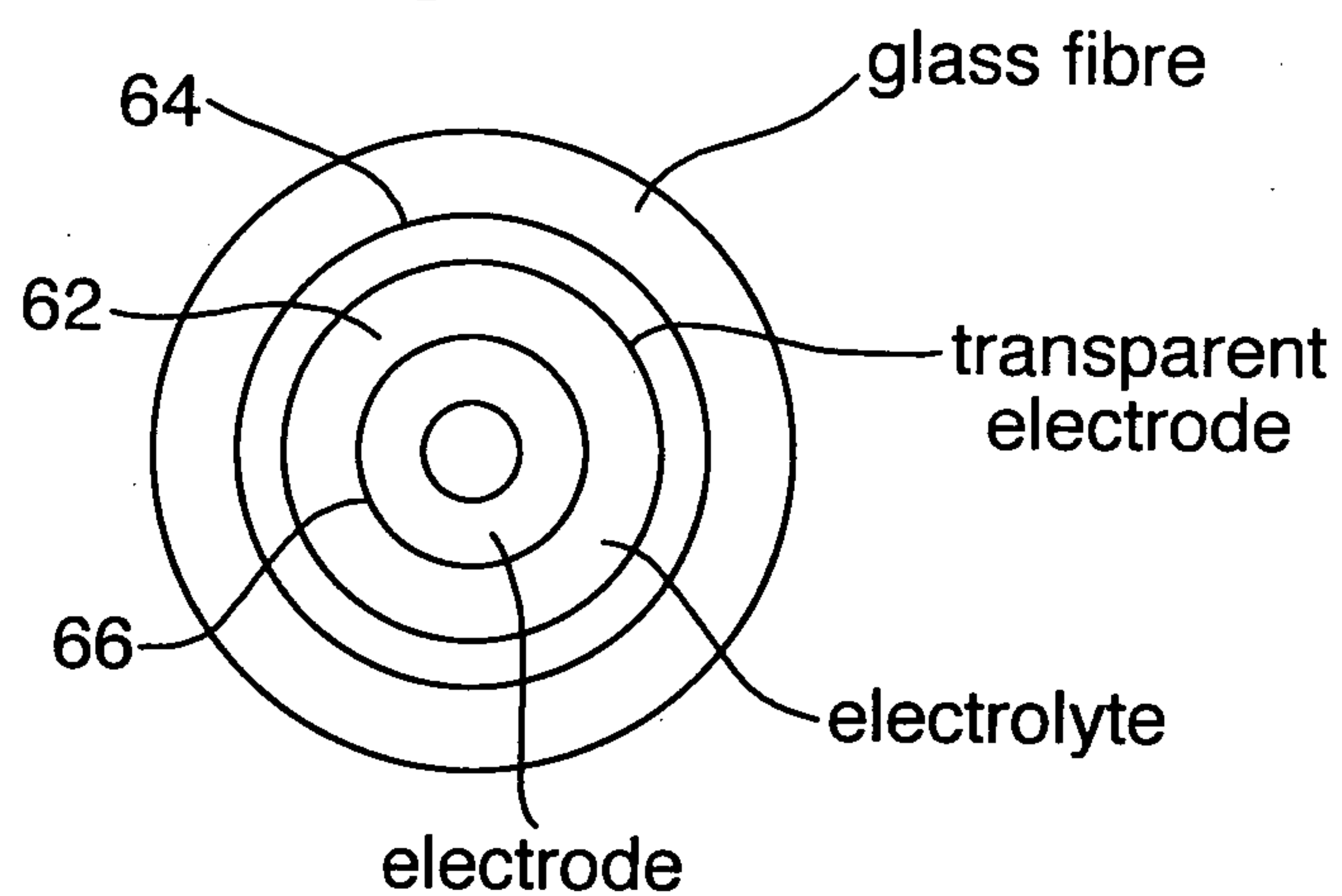


Fig.13.

