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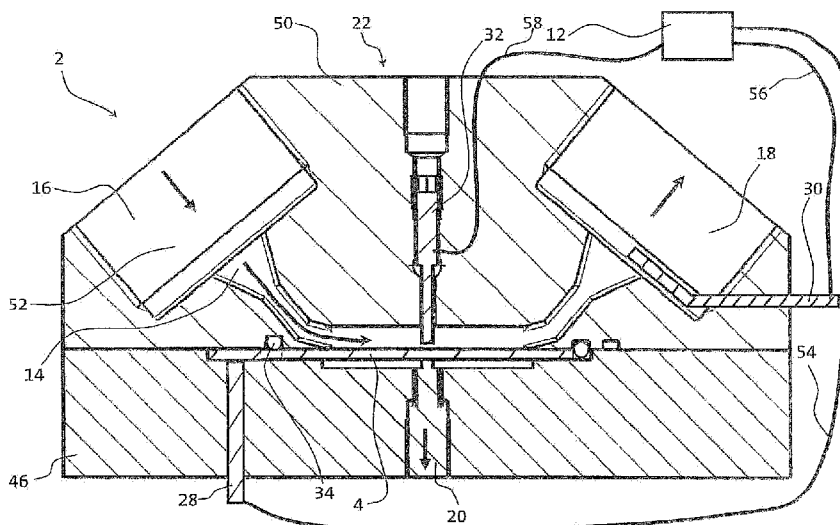
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Fig. 4



(57) Abstract: A filtration system (2) comprising a filtration membrane (4) comprising a porous base layer (8) attached to an electrically conductive filtration layer (6) having pores (10) extending through the filtration layer (6). The filtration system (2) comprises means for attaching a compound (24, 26) on the filtration layer (6) and hereby providing a protective surface layer (40) on the filtration layer (6) or means for forming a second compound (24, 26) from a first compound (24, 26) and attaching the second compound (24, 26) on the filtration layer (6) and hereby providing a protective surface layer (40) on the filtration layer (6).

Filtration system

Description

Generally the invention relates to a filtration system and a method for carrying out a filtration process of a fluid. In particular, the invention relates to a filtration system and a method for carrying out a filtration process of fluids in which heavy fouling occurs.

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Membranes are used in a wide variety of separation applications including food and beverage and water treatment industries. By nature the membrane, the surface contains pores onto which organics, bacteria, and microbes can readily settle, particularly when there is an applied pressure on the system to increase water flux across the membrane.

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Depending on the specific system a wide variety of membrane fouling can occur; scaling due to concentration polarization, bio-fouling due to adhesion of bacteria and growth of biofilms, colloidal fouling from suspended particles, organic films from natural organic matter and humic acids by way of example.

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In some applications repetitive use of back flush is not sufficient to keep the membrane clean and thus a cleaning process (CIP), in which cleaning chemicals are used, is required. In heavy fouling fluids it would be an advantage to have a filtration membrane having intrinsic anti fouling properties.

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The object of the invention is to provide a filtration method and a filtration system that is easy to use and clean when applied in fluids leading to heavy fouling phenomena.

- 5 An object of the invention is to provide a filtration method and a filtration system that is suitable for use in applications in which back flush is not sufficient to clean the filtration membrane.

10 These objectives can be achieved by a filtration membrane having the features defined in claim 1. Preferred embodiments are defined in the dependant sub claims and explained in the following description and shown in the accompanying drawings.

15 The filtration system according to the invention comprises a filtration membrane comprising a porous base layer attached to an electrically conductive filtration layer having pores extending through the filtration layer. The filtration system comprises:

- 20 a) means for attaching a compound on the filtration layer and hereby providing a protective surface layer on the filtration layer and/or
- 25 b) means for forming a second compound from a first compound and attaching the second compound on the filtration layer and hereby providing a protective surface layer on the filtration layer.

The protective surface layer inhibits a fouling layer from growing on the filtration layer. The fouling layer is prevented from growing directly at the surface of the filtration layer.

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It may be an advantage that the filtration system comprises means for, at least partially, cleaving off the protective surface layer from the filtra-

tion layer. Fouling can grow on the protective surface layer and this fouling can be removed by cleaving off the, at least one, compound from the filtration layer. Thus, the filtration membrane is easy to use and clean when applied in heavy fouling fluids. Moreover, the filtration
5 membrane is suitable for use in applications in which back flush is not sufficient to clean the membrane.

The electrically conductive filtration layer may have an electrical conductivity exceeding 1000 S m^{-1} at 293 K.

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It may be beneficial that the filtration system comprises an electrical power source that is connected to the filtration membrane and that the electrical power source is configured to impose an electrical field on the filtration membrane so that the filtration system is configured to:

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- a) attach a compound on the filtration layer through an electrochemical process and
- b) to, at least partially, cleave off the protective surface layer from
20 the filtration layer through an electrochemical process.

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Hereby it is possible to use the electrical power source to control the process of grafting of the protective surface layer and the process of, at least partially, cleaving off the protective surface layer.

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It is possible to establish a filtration system that comprises means for attaching a compound on the filtration layer by using a heat source to heat up the part of the filtration layer on to which the at least one compound is intended to be attached. In addition, it is possible to at least partially cleave off a compound from the filtration layer by heating up areas of the filtration membrane.

Preferably the heating process is carried out locally at the filtration surface. In this way the intended chemical reactions will occur primarily in the regions that are heated up.

- 5 It may be an advantage that the filtration system is configured in a way such that the membrane is arranged in a housing having a fluid inlet for receiving a fluid and a permeate outlet for delivering permeate released from the filtration membrane. This configuration may make it possible to provide a filtration of most fluids.

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It may be an advantage that the filtration system is configured to attach a compound on the filtration layer and, at least partially, cleave off the protective surface layer from the filtration layer by a reversible electrochemical process.

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An electrochemical process may be used to provide a control of the attachment of the protective surface layer. When a reversible electrochemical process is applied it is possible to build the protective layer and to at least partially cleave the protective layer off by using electrochemical regulation means.

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- A reversible electrochemical process may be carried out by using a two electrode system (a working electrode and a counter electrode) or a three electrode system (a working electrode, a counter electrode and a reference electrode) to provide an electric field at the filter membrane surface and hereby influence and control the electrochemical processes in region at and close to the surface of the filtration membrane.

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- 30 It may be beneficial that the filtration system comprises means for determining the transmembrane pressure across the filtration membrane

and/or the flux through the filtration layer of the filtration membrane and that the filtration system is configured to:

a) attach a compound on the filtration layer and

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b) at least partially, cleave off the protective surface layer from the filtration layer,

on the basis of predefined and determined transmembrane pressure and/or flux conditions.

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Hereby it is possible to provide a very efficient regulation of the protective surface layer.

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It may be an advantage that the filtration system is configured to control the thickness and/or density of the protective surface layer by regulating the electrical potential of the filtration layer of the filtration membrane. The electrical potential of the filtration layer may be regulated by using an electrical source that is controlled in order to provide the desired electrical potential on the filtration layer.

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It may be beneficial that the filtration system is configured to control the thickness and/or density of the protective surface layer by regulating the applied electrochemical potential at the surface of the filtration membrane (6) and thus exercising potential control of the layer forming process.

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It may be an advantage that the filtration membrane is configured in a manner so that the thickness and density of the protective surface layer can be controlled by using an electrochemical process. The protective surface layer may comprise one or more layers of at least one compound. It is possible to use compounds based on polyethylene glycol (PEG) chains of various chain lengths and functional groups and hereby

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provide either a thin or thick protective surface layer. Thus, it is possible to vary the layer thickness of the protective surface layer.

Hereby an effect of varied thickness of the grafted layer can be achieved. It would be possible to provide the best anti-fouling property depending on the fluid and the properties of the filtration membrane. It may be an advantage to use an electrochemical process to control the thickness of the protective surface layer because an electrochemical process can be used to provide at least partial regulation of the layer thickness

It may be beneficial to use a diazonium salt having the following form as a compound:

$R-N_2^+ X^-$, where R is aryl and where X is an inorganic or organic anion.

Diazonium salts are capable of generating a very reactive compound that can be attached on the filtration layer. When an electron is transferred to a diazonium salt a highly reactive compound is created. If the reactive compound is generated close to the surface of the filtration layer the created compound can attach to the filtration layer and hereby start building up a protective surface layer at the filtration layer.

Preferable the diazonium compound is on the following form:

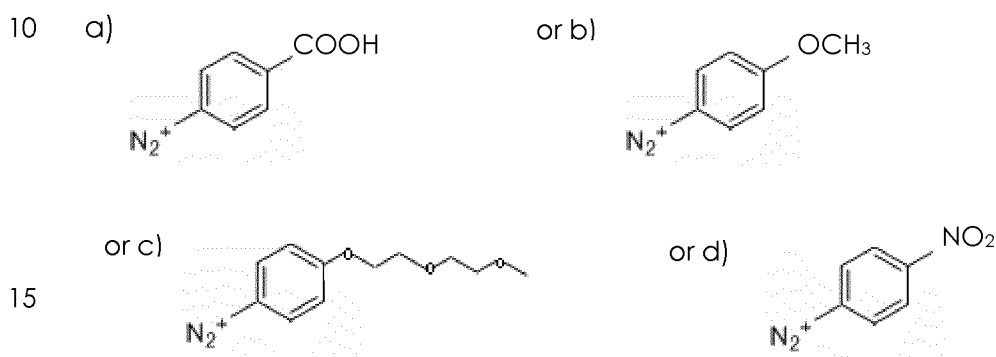
$R-N_2^+ X^-$, where R is an aryl group and X is an inorganic anion

This type of diazonium salts are suitable for being used to build up a protective surface layer at the filtration layer surface.

An electrochemical process may be applied to deliver electrons to the diazonium salts in a certain distance from the surface of the filtration layer. When a high voltage (potential) is applied at the filtration layer

surface a chemical reaction can be initiated in a comparatively large distance from the surface of the filtration layer to generate a protective layer. However, in a situation where a low voltage (potential) is applied at the filtration layer surface a chemical reaction can be initiated in a shorter distance from the surface of the filtration layer to generate a protective layer.

It may be an advantage to use a diazonium salt of the following form:



The diazonium salt in a), 4-(carboxyl) phenyl diazonium tetrafluoroborate, is easily synthesized using protocols well known to a person skilled in the art from a pertinent precursor (*p*-amino-benzoic acid). It may be advantageous to use this particular diazonium compound due to its hydrophilic character as well as its ability to be deprotonated/protonated as a function of pH, i.e. reversibly tune its hydrophilic and charge character. This characteristic may be advantageous in media in which an increase of the hydrophilic character of the membrane reduces the propensity of membrane fouling. In addition, it is known that charged layers on membranes have a tendency to reduce fouling.

30 The diazonium salt in b), 4-(methoxy) phenyl diazonium tetrafluoroborate, is easily synthesized using protocols well known to a person skilled in the art from a pertinent precursor (*p*-methoxy aniline). Another related

promising compound is provided by the commercially available Fast Blue BB salt. It may be advantageous to use these particular diazonium salts as they provide a simplified system incorporating the ether linkage between the benzene ring and substituent. This in part increases the hydrophilic character of the film formed at the surface. Due to the strong electron donating nature of this substitution pattern, such protective layers are comparatively easy to oxidise (i.e. cleave off the surface).

The diazonium salt in c), 4-(2-(2-(methoxy)ethoxy)ethoxy) phenyl diazonium tetrafluoroborate, may offer significant advantages due to the incorporation of a polyethylene glycol function in the layer. It has been shown that polyethylene glycol functionalities in membranes make the membranes much less prone to fouling. In particular this functionality is known to reduce the so-called adsorptive fouling in which a first layer of water molecules is replaced by the fouling solute. The reduction of adsorptive fouling is mainly due to the hydrophilic character of the polyethylene glycol functionality. This may be advantageous in media in which increasing the hydrophilic character of the membrane reduces the propensity of membrane fouling.

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The forth example d), 4-(nitro) phenyl diazonium tetrafluoroborate, is a well known salt to a person skilled in the art. The advantage of this particular salt is that its hydrophilic character may be varied by controlling the oxidation state of the appended nitrogen atom. In the highest oxidation state, NO_2 , it is somewhat polar but can easily (by electrochemical means) be transformed into the reduced forms such as hydroxyl amine, $-\text{NHOH}$, or amine, $-\text{NH}_2$. These latter functional groups can be deprotonated/protonated by change in the pH of the medium and thus, they also have the option to exercise controlled hydrophilic character. Moreover, by reduction of the nitro group to hydroxyl amine or amine, the electronic properties of the nitrogen can be tuned. The nitro group is a strong electron withdrawing group, whereas the amine func-

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tionality is an electron donating group with the hydroxylamine placed in between. Tuning of the electronic properties of the functional group provides a means for change in the surface properties of the filtration layer. Furthermore, if either 4-(hydroxylamine) phenyl diazonium tetra-
5 fluoroborate or 4-(amino) phenyl diazonium tetrafluoroborate are attached to the filtration layer surface the nitrogen based functional groups provide a tag for further chemical modifications of the surface which are not possible with the nitro group.

- 10 It may be an advantage that the filtration layer is a metal layer. Since a metal layer is electrically conductive it is possible to connect the filtration layer to an electrical source and hereby use the filtration layer as a working electrode. Thus, a compound can be attached on the filtration layer and hereby by simple means provide a protective surface layer.
- 15 The at least one compound can be at least partially cleaved off the filtration layer by changing the voltage applied to the surface of the filtration layer.

In addition, it is possible to have a filtration layer made in another electrically conductive material such as electrically conductive composite,
20 carbon or another suitable material.

It may be an advantage that the filtration layer is made of stainless steel. Stainless steel has several advantageous properties that make it
25 suitable for being used as filtration layer in a filtration membrane according to the invention. It is possible to provide a corrosion resistant stainless steel filtration layer having pores in the desired size range, e.g. by a sintering process.

- 30 It may be an advantage that the filtration system comprises a filtration membrane in which the porous base layer and the filtration layer are

made of the same material. It may be beneficial that the porous base layer and the filtration layer are made of stainless steel.

It may be beneficial that the pore size in the filtration layer lies within the
5 range between 10 nm and 500 nm, preferable between 10 nm and 200 nm. A filtration membrane having a filtration layer with pores within these ranges can be applied to filter fluids in the desired filtration range. It is possible to have a filtration layer with huge, moderate or low pore size deviation. In some applications it may be an advantage that the
10 filtration layer has pores in a large size range. In other applications it may be an advantage that the pores in the filtration layer have a limited size distribution.

It may be beneficial that the pore size in the porous base layer lies within
15 the range between 100 nm to 100 μm , preferable 0.5-10 μm . Hereby it is achieved that the filtered fluid can be transported easily through the porous base layer. A porous base layer having pores in this range can be provided with the required mechanical strength so that it is suitable for being a base for the filtration layer.

20 Advantageously, the thickness d of the filtration layer can be 50 nm-10 μm , preferably 200 nm-1000 nm. Hereby it is achieved that an optimum filtration can be carried out by the filtration layer and that the filtration layer has the required mechanical strength and is sufficiently thin to
25 provide an optimum flux through the filtration layer.

It may be beneficial that the thickness d of the porous base layer is 300-3000 μm , preferable 500-1500 μm . Hereby the porous base is provided with the required mechanical strength and thus it is suitable for being a
30 base for the filtration layer.

It may be an advantage that the filtration system comprises a filtration membrane that is plate shaped and has a rectangular geometry. It is possible to have a filtration membrane that consists of several filtration membranes put together to one larger filtration membrane.

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Advantageously, the filtration system is configured to:

- a) carry out a back flush process and
- 10 b) at least partially, cleave off the protective surface layer from the filtration layer basically during the back flush process.

Hereby an electrochemically enhanced back flush can be achieved. Thus, the filtration system can be used to filter heavy fouling fluids and
15 even fluids in which back flush is not sufficient to clean the filtration membrane.

It may be beneficial that the filtration system is configured to drain away compound containing fluid and to add a compound to the fluid.
20 Hereby it is possible to carry out a clean in place (CIP) process.

The method for carrying out a filtration process of a fluid according to the invention uses a filtration membrane comprising a porous base layer attached to an electrically conductive filtration layer having pores extending through the filtration layer and the following step:
25

- a) attachment of a compound on the filtration layer and hereby providing a protective surface layer on the filtration layer or forming a second compound from a first compound and attaching
30 the second compound on the filtration layer and hereby providing a protective surface layer on the filtration layer.

This method provides an efficient way of filtering in heavy fouling fluids and especially fluids in which back flush is not sufficient to clean the filtration membrane.

- 5 It may be an advantage that the method comprises a step in which the protective surface layer is, at least partially, cleaved off the filtration layer during a filtration process. Hereby it is achieved that the fouling layer can be removed easy and efficiently.
- 10 It may be beneficial that the method comprises the step of applying an electrical field to the filtration membrane so that:
- a) a compound is attached on the filtration layer through an electrochemical process and that
- 15
- b) the protective surface layer is, at least partially, cleaved off the filtration layer through an electrochemical process during the filtration process to loosen the layer and enable an easier removal.
- 20 Hereby a very efficient cleaning of the filtration layer can be achieved.

It may be an advantage to apply a method according to the invention where the transmembrane pressure across the filtration membrane and/or the flux through the filtration layer of the filtration membrane is

25 determined and:

- a) a compound is attached on the filtration layer and
- 30
- b) the compound is, at least partially, cleaved off the protective surface layer on the filtration layer based on predefined and determined transmembrane pressure and/or flux conditions during the filtration process.

Hereby it is achieved that the protective surface layer can be grafted and cleaved off according to the actual conditions of the filtration process.

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It may be beneficial to apply a method according to the invention where the thickness of the protective surface layer is controlled by regulating the electrical potential of the filtration layer of the filtration membrane. Hereby it is achieved that control of the thickness of the protective surface layer can be carried out at least to some extent.

It may be an advantage to apply a method according to the invention where a back flush process is performed and that the protective surface layer is, at least partially, cleaved off the filtration layer basically contemporaneous with the back flush process. Hereby it is achieved that the fouling layer can be removed very effectively.

It may be beneficial to apply a method according to the invention where the fluid containing a compound is drained away and that a compound is added to the fluid. Hereby it is achieved that the fouling layer can be removed and the filtration process can be continued afterwards.

It may be an advantage that short pulsed electrical excursions are used during a back flush process. Short pulsed electrical excursions may be provided by an electrical source and they may inhibit fouling from settling on the filtration layer and the protective surface layer.

The present invention will become more fully understood from the detailed description given herein below and the accompanying drawings are given by way of illustration only, and thus, they are not limitative of the present invention, and wherein:

- Fig. 1 shows a schematical cross-sectional view of a filtration layer of a filtration membrane according to the invention;
- 5 Fig. 2a shows a schematic cross-sectional view of a filtration layer of a filtration membrane according to the invention;
- Fig. 2b shows a close up view of a filtration layer provided with a protective surface layer;
- 10 Fig. 3a shows a close up view of a filtration layer during a filtration process;
- Fig. 3b shows a close up view of a filtration layer after the protective surface layer has been removed from it;
- 15 Fig. 4 shows a schematic cross-sectional view of a filtration system according to the invention;
- 20 Fig. 5 a shows a close up view of a filtration layer before attachment of a compound to the filtration layer surface;
- Fig. 5 b shows a close up view of the filtration layer shown in Fig. 5 a when the compound is attached to the filtration layer surface;
- 25 Fig. 6 a shows a close up view of a filtration layer according to the invention;
- 30 Fig. 6 b shows a close up view of a filtration layer in a situation where the surface layer is being cleaved off the filtration layer;

- Fig. 7 a shows a close up view of a grafted layer where the compounds are having long chain lengths;
- 5 Fig. 7 b shows a close up view of a grafted layer where the compounds are having shorter chain lengths;
- Fig. 8 a is a graph showing the flux ratio versus time for a prior art filtration membrane and a filtration membrane according to the invention;
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- Fig. 8 b is a graph showing the flux ratio versus time before and after a CIP process for a prior art filtration membrane and a filtration membrane according to the invention;
- 15
- Fig. 9 a shows examples of compounds that can be used to build an anti fouling layer on a filtration layer of a filtration membrane;
- 20 Fig. 9 b shows example of a compound reaction leading to deposition of an anti fouling layer on a filtration layer of a filtration membrane and
- Fig. 9 c shows how additional layers can be added to the layer shown in Fig. 9.
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Other objects and further scope of applicability of the present invention will become apparent from the detailed description given hereinafter. It should be understood, however, that the detailed description and specific examples and indications of preferred embodiments of the invention, are given by way of illustration only, since various changes and

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modifications within the spirit and scope of the invention will be apparent to those skilled in the art from this detailed description.

Referring now in detail to the drawings for the purpose of illustrating preferred embodiments of the present invention, elements of a filtration membrane 4 according to the present invention is illustrated in Fig. 1-3. The filtration membrane 4 comprises a porous base layer 8 and a filtration layer 6. The filtration layer 6 is attached to the base layer 8 and the filtration layer 6 is provided with pores 10 extending through the filtration layer 6. The pores 10 of the filtration layer 6 may preferably be configured to filter foulants or particles within a specific size range since filtration of small foulants and small particles generally requires smaller pores than filtration of larger particles and foulants.

Fig. 1 shows that the thickness d of the filtration layer 6 is much smaller than the thickness D of the base layer 8. A compound is attached on the filtration layer 6 so that the attached compound constitutes a protective surface layer 40. The protective surface layer is configured to be at least partially cleaved off the filtration layer 6. Moreover, the filtration layer 6 is configured in a way so that a compound can be attached on the filtration layer 6 after the protective layer has been completely or partially cleaved off the filtration layer 6. This may be done by using various methods.

It may be an advantage that the base layer 8 is made in a porous material on to which it is easy to attach the filtration layer 6. It may be an advantage if the base layer 8 and the filtration layer are made in the same materials. By way of example it is possible to make the base layer 8 and the filtration layer in stainless steel. However, it is possible to apply any other suitable material. It is possible to apply ceramic materials, composites, metals or another suitable material. It is possible to make the base layer 8 and the filtration layer 6 in two different materials. A

person skilled in the art would be able to join the base layer 8 and the filtration layer 6 even if they are made in different materials.

5 The filtration membrane 4 may have any suitable geometry. By way of example the filtration membrane 4 may be plate shaped. It is possible to have a filtration membrane 4 that has a curved geometry of a plane geometry. It is possible to build a large filtration membrane 4 out of several smaller filtration membranes 4 that are put together to constitute a large filtration membrane 4.

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Fig. 2 a) illustrates a close up view of a filtration membrane 4 having a filtration layer 6 with a number of pores 10. The width W_1 of the pores 10 of the filtration layer 6 are indicated in Fig. 2 and it can be seen that the width W_1 of the pores 10 vary. It may be assumed that the width W_1 of the pores 10 follow a Gaussian distribution.

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Fig. 2 b) illustrates a close up view of a filtration layer 6 of a filtration membrane 4 according to the invention. The filtration layer 6 is provided with a protective surface layer 40. The protective surface layer 40 is thinner than half of the width W_1 of the pores 10 of the filtration layer 6. The width W_1 of the pores 10 of the filtration layer 6 vary slightly. The filtration layer 6 is provided with a surface layer 40 that covers the surface of the filtration layer 6. Accordingly, the whole surface of the filtration layer 6 is protected by the surface layer 40.

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The thickness of the protective surface layer 40 may vary. It is possible to have a filtration layer 6 with a thickness of 1-500 nm by way of example. The width W_2 of the free space in the pores 10, after the protective surface layer 40 has been deposited on the filtration layer 6, is significantly smaller than the width W_1 of the free space in the pores 10 before the protective surface layer 40 deposition has occurred. Therefore, the deposition of the protective surface layer 40 affects the filter character-

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istics of the filter membrane 4. The width W_1 of the free space in the pores 10, before the surface layer 40 has been attached to the filtration layer 6, may be in the range of 10-500 nm by way of example and the width W_2 of the free space in the pores 10, after a surface layer 40 has been deposited on the filtration layer 6, may be decreased by 2-50% by way of example.

It is, as an example, possible to have a filtration membrane 4 in which the width W_1 of the free space in the pores 10, before the surface layer 40 has been attached to the filtration layer 6, is 100 nm and where the width W_2 of the free space in the pores 10 after a surface layer 40 has been deposited on the filtration layer 6 is 50 nm.

Fig. 3 a) illustrates a close up view of a filtration layer 6 of a filtration membrane 4 during a filtration process. During the filtration process the fluid 14 that is being filtered by a membrane filter 4 according to the invention is being guided along the surface of the filtration layer 6 of the filtration membrane 4. When a filtration membrane 4 according to the present invention is used in a cross flow filtration setup a mean stream of the fluid 14 may travel along an axis, X, that is parallel to the surface of the filtration layer 6. A portion of the fluid 14 enters the pores 10 of the filtration layer 6 and this portion of the fluid 14 is moving along the axis, Y, perpendicular to the surface of the filtration layer 6. It can be seen from Fig. 3 a) that foulants 42, 43, 44 are present in the fluid 14 and that some of these foulants 42, 43, 44 settle along the surface of the pores 10. This phenomenon is known as fouling. Settlement of foulants 42, 43, 44 will increase the resistance for fluid passage through the pores 10. Accordingly, the flux across the filtration membrane 4 (especially the flux through the filtration layer 6 of the filtration membrane 4) will decrease unless a higher pressure is applied to force fluid through the filtration membrane 4.

Fig. 3 a) shows that the fouling occurs in a distance from the filtration layer 6 because the protective surface layer 40 is protecting the filtration layer 6.

5 In Fig. 3 b) the protective surface layer 40 has been removed by a "cleave off process" (this may be done by using electrochemical means). Even though most of the foulants 42, 44 have been removed from the filtration layer 6, a few foulants 42, 44 are still attached to the filtration layer 6. However, since the filtration layer 6 is almost free of foulants 42, 43, 44 the filtration layer 6 is suitable for being used to filter a fluid 14. Preferably, a new protective surface layer 40 is provided to the filtration layer 6 before the filtration layer 6 is used to filter the fluid 14. The foulants 42, 43, 44 may in principle be any type of foulants such as bacteria or inorganic particles by way of example.

15

In some applications it may be possible to cleave off all foulants 42, 43, 44 from the filtration layer 6. A new protective surface layer 40 may preferable be grafted on the filtration layer 6 before the filtration layer 6 is being reused to filter a fluid 14.

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Fig. 4 illustrates a schematic cross-sectional view of a filtration system 2 using a filtration membrane 4 according to the invention. The filtration system 2 comprises a housing 22 configured to guide a fluid 14 along a filtration membrane 4. The housing 22 comprises a fluid inlet 16 through which the fluid 14 enters the housing 22. The housing 22 moreover comprises a fluid outlet 18 for guiding away the fluid 14 that has passed the filtration membrane 4. The fluid 14 that is drained through the fluid outlet 18 may be circulated to the fluid inlet 16 through a fluid pipeline (not shown).

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The housing 22 comprises a base member 46, and a top member 50. Together these members 46, 50 constitute a space 52 configured to re-

ceive and guide the fluid 14 from the fluid inlet 16 along the surface of the filtration membrane 4 and through the fluid outlet 18.

That portion of the fluid that 14 enters the filtration membrane 4 will initially pass through the surface of the filtration layer 6 (see Fig. 1) that will retain items in the liquid that are larger than the pore size of the membrane. Hereafter the filtered fluid (permeate) will continue through the base layer 8 and eventually be drained through the permeate outlet 20. The travel direction of the fluid is indicated with arrows.

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A seal ring 34 are provided between the filtration membrane 4 and the distal ends of the filtration membrane 4 and the side members 46, 48 and the top member 50. An electrical source 12 is arranged next to the filtration system 2. This electrical source 12 delivers the voltage that is applied to the working electrode 28, the counter electrode 30 and the reference electrode 32. The working electrode 28 is connected to the electrical source 12 by a wire 54. The counter electrode 30 is connected to the electrical source 12 by a wire 56 and the reference electrode 32 is connected to the electrical source 12 by a wire 58. The electrical source 12 may comprise or be connected to a control unit (not shown) that is configured to regulate the potential at the working electrode 28, the counter electrode 30 and the reference electrode 32. The control unit may be configured to regulate the potential at the electrodes 28, 30, 32 on the basis of external inputs (sensor inputs by way of example).

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When a suitable potential is provided to the surface of the filtration membrane 4 the surface of the filtration membrane 4 is capable of delivering electrons to compounds in the surrounding fluid 14. Hereby it is possible to initiate an electrochemical process. Under some conditions it is possible to reduce a compound 24, 26 when a positive electrical potential (relative to the counter electrode 30) is applied on the surface of the filtration membrane 6. Under other conditions reduction of a com-

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pound 24, 26 requires that a negative potential is applied on the surface of the filtration membrane 6.

When a diazonium salt is present in the fluid 14 and the required conditions are present near the surface of the filtration membrane 4 it would be possible to reduce a diazonium salt 24, 26 that is present in the fluid 14. The diazonium salt can be reduced when a chemical driving force is present so that the will receive an electron and hereby cleave to release nitrogenous gas (N_2) and generate a highly reactive radical, R, that preferably connects to the surface of the filtration membrane 4 by the creation of a covalent bond (see Fig. 9 b)). Under some conditions it is possible to reverse the electrochemical process and hereby at least partly cleave off the grafted protective surface layer 40 of the filtration layer 6 of the filtration membrane 4, by changing the electrochemical potential and/or polarity of the working electrode 28 and the counter electrode 30. Under some conditions, only very small changes in the potential of the filtration layer 6 of the filtration membrane 4 are required to initiate grafting of a protective surface layer 40 and/or to completely or partially cleave off a protective surface layer 40. Under some conditions even a positive potential (measured relative to the counter electrode) at the filtration membrane 4 can initiate grafting of a protective surface layer 40.

It is possible to use a direct current or an alternating current to control the build up of a protective surface layer 40 and the "cleave off process". Electrical pulsations may be used to provide the intended polarisation of the filtration membrane 4 via the working electrode 28. It is possible to use sensor signals to regulate when a protective surface layer 40 has to be grafted and when a protective surface layer 40 has to be cleaved off. A useful sensor signal may be the flux through the filtration membrane 4 or the transmembrane pressure (TMP).

Advantageously, the protective layer 40 is cleaved off during a back flush process. Hereby it is possible to make a very efficient cleaning of the filtration membrane 4. The protective layer 40 prevents fouling from growing directly on the surface of the filtration membrane 4. Instead the
5 fouling grows on the protective surface layer 40. Accordingly, most of the fouling will be removed from the filtration membrane 4 when the protective surface layer 40 is cleaved off the filtration membrane 4.

It is possible to have a two electrode system consisting of a working
10 electrode 28 and a counter electrode 30.

When a diazonium salt is used to build up a protective surface layer 40 the protective surface layer 40 is very resistant due to the nature of the covalent bindings to the surface of the filtration membrane 4. The pro-
15 tective surface layer 40 may be temperature resistant up to 300 degrees Celsius. Therefore, such protective surface layer 40 is useful to filter a huge area of fluids during rather extreme conditions. This includes liquid as well as gas separation at elevated temperatures.

20 Fig. 5 a) is a close up view of a filtration layer 6 in a situation where no compounds 24 have been attached to the surface of the filtration layer 6. A group of diazonium salts 24 are present in the fluid near the filtration layer 6 of the filtration membrane 4. When free electrons, e^- , are present (e.g. released from the electrically conducting filtration layer 6 of the
25 filtration membrane 4) the diazonium salts 24 will react and decompose and release nitrogenous gas N_2 and a radical, R, that can attach on the filtration layer 6 of the filtration membrane 4. A layer of attached compounds 26 constitute a protective surface layer 40 like the one indicated in Fig. 5 b).

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Fig. 6 a) shows a close up view of a filtration layer 6 of a filtration membrane 4 according to the invention. The filtration membrane 4 is used to

filter a contaminated fluid. The fluid contains foulants 42, 43, 44. A protective surface layer 40 is attached on the filtration layer 6. The protective surface layer 40 prevents the foulants 42, 43, 44 from settling directly on the filtration layer 6. Instead the foulants 42, 43, 44 settle on the protective surface layer 40.

Fig. 6 b) shows a close up view of a filtration layer 6 of a filtration membrane 4 according to the invention. Fig. 6 b) illustrates a situation where the protective surface layer 40 is being cleaved off the filtration layer 6 during a back flush process. It can be seen that the fouling layer foulants 42, 43, 44 are attached on the protective layer 40 of the filtration layer 6. The foulants 42, 44 and the main portion of the protective surface layer 40 are released from the filtration layer 6. In Fig. 6 b) a minor part of the protective surface layer 40 is still attached on the surface of the filtration layer 6 after the "cleave off process" has been carried out. The cleaved off process may be, at least partially, controlled by regulating the electrical potential at the working electrode 28 and/or the counter electrode 30 and/or the reference electrode 32.

Fig. 7 a) illustrates a close up view of a grafted protective surface layer 40 where the compounds have long chains 38 so that the layer thickness L_2 of the protective surface layer 40 is relatively large. The grafted protective surface layer 40 may be a diazonium salt layer containing polyethylene glycol (PEG) chains. A multilayer 39 is grafted on the filtration layer 6 by providing several layers on the top of each other. Hereby, a larger layer thickness L_3 is achieved.

Fig. 7 b) illustrates a close up view of a grafted protective surface layer 40 where the compounds have shorter chains 38. The layer thickness L_1 of the protective surface layer 40 is small compared with the layer thickness L_1 illustrated in Fig. 7 a).

Fig. 8 a) illustrates a graph showing the flux ratio 60 as function of time 62 for a typical filtration membrane that has not been modified and a filtration membrane according to the invention, respectively. The flux ratio 60 as function of time 62 for the filtration membrane according to the present invention is indicated by the top curve 66. The flux ratio 60 as function of time 62 for the non-modified filtration membrane is indicated by the lower curve 68.

It can be seen that the flux ratio 60 of filtration membrane 4 according to the invention is higher than the flux ratio 60 of the prior art filtration membrane. It can also be seen that the flux ratio 60 of the prior art filtration membrane decreases much faster than the flux ratio 60 of the filtration membrane 4 according to the invention. The protective layer 40 on the filtration membrane 4 of the present invention inhibits growth of a fouling layer directly on the surface of the filtration layer 6 of the filtration membrane 4. Therefore, it is possible to keep the filtration layer of the filtration membrane 4 cleaner for a longer time period compared to a prior art filtration membrane. Since the filtration layer 6 of the filtration membrane 4 according to the invention is subject to less fouling or more easily removable fouling than a traditional non-modified filtration membrane, a high flux ratio 60 can be maintained over a long time period. This means that also the flux, under fixed pressure conditions, can be kept high.

Fig. 8 b) is a graph showing the flux ratio 60 versus time 62 before and after a clean in place (CIP) process. The curve 68' is for a typical non-modified filtration membrane while curve 66' is for a filtration membrane 4 according to the invention. The CIP process is carried out at the same time 64 for both the prior art filtration membrane and the filtration membrane 4 according to the present invention. The CIP process is a process of cleaning the surface of the filtration layer 6 of the filtration membrane 4. It is possible to carry out the CIP process in a filtration sys-

tem 2 without disassembling the filtration system 2. Often cleaning chemicals are used to achieve a sufficient cleaning of the surface. The CIP process is carried out in order to clean the filtration membrane so that the flux ratio is increased after a period of use where fouling and/or clogging have been induced.

When the curves 66' and 68' are compared to one another it is noticeable that the filtration membrane 4 according to the invention is less sensitive to fouling than the non-modified filtration membrane. The protective layer 40 attached on the surface of the filtration layer 6 of the filtration membrane 4 can explain this difference.

It is possible to make similar curves showing the transmembrane pressure (TMP) as function of time 62 instead of the flux ratio 60 versus time 62. In fact both the flux ratio 60 and the TMP indicate the filter capacity of the filtration membrane 4. When the flux ratio is close to 100% the filtration membrane is clean and suitable for being used to filter a fluid 14. When the flux ratio 60 is reduced the filter capacity of the filtration membrane 4 is also reduced. A low TMP indicates that the filtration membrane 4 is clean and thus that the filtration membrane 4 has a high filter capacity. A high TMP indicates that a fouling layer causes clogging of the filtration layer of the filtration membrane 4 and that the filtration membrane 4 needs to be cleaned. The limits imposed on when to initiate e.g. a back-flush or a CIP process depends on the specific filtration system and the fluid under investigation.

It can be seen from Fig. 8 b) that the flux ratio 60 is increased following the CIP process. This is indicated by the increasing curve portions 70 in Fig. 8 b).

Fig. 9 a) illustrates a number of diazonium salts 72, 74, 76, 78, 80 that may be used to build an anti fouling layer (a protective surface layer) on a filtration layer 6 of a filtration membrane 4 according to the invention.

5 The diazonium salt 72 is 4-(carboxyl) phenyl diazonium tetrafluoroborate which is easily synthesized using protocols well known to a person skilled in the art from the pertinent precursor (*p*-amino-benzoic acid). It may be advantageous to use this particular diazonium due to its hydrophilic character as well as its ability to be deprotonated/protonated as a
10 function of pH, i.e. reversibly tune its hydrophilic character. This may be advantageous in media in which increasing the hydrophilic character of the membrane reduces the propensity of membrane fouling. It is also known that charged layers on membranes have a tendency to reduce fouling.

15

The diazonium salt 74 is 4-(methoxy) phenyl diazonium tetrafluoroborate which is easily synthesized using protocols well known to a person skilled in the art from the pertinent precursor (*p*-methoxy aniline) Another highly related compound is provided by the commercially available
20 Fast Blue BB salt. It may be advantageous to use these particular diazonium salts as they provide a simplified system incorporating the ether linkage between the benzene ring and substituent. This in part increases the hydrophilic character of the film and due to the electron donating nature of these substituents, these compounds are comparatively easy
25 to oxidise (so that the protective surface layer can be cleaved off by way of example).

The diazonium salt 76 is 4-(2-(2-(methoxy)ethoxy)ethoxy) phenyl diazonium tetrafluoroborate which may offer significant advantages in that
30 it incorporates an albeit short polyethylene glycol function in the layer. Such polyethylene glycol functionalities in membranes have by others been shown to make membranes much less prone to fouling. In particu-

lar it is known to reduce the so-called adsorptive fouling in which a first layer of water molecules is replaced by the fouling solute. This phenomenon is mainly due to its hydrophilic character. This may be advantageous in media in which increasing the hydrophilic character of the membrane reduces the propensity of membrane fouling.

The forth example 78 is 4-(nitro) phenyl diazonium tetrafluoroborate which is a well known diazonium salt to a person skilled in the art. The advantage of this particular salt is that its hydrophilic character may be varied by controlling the oxidation state of the appended nitrogen atom. In the highest oxidation state, NO₂, it is marginally polar but can easily (by electrochemical means) be transformed into the reduced forms such as hydroxyl amine, -NHOH, or amine, -NH₂. These latter will have pH activity and thus also have the option to exercise controlled hydrophilic character.

The final example, 80, is 4-(fluoro) phenyl diazonium tetrafluoroborate. The advantage of this particular species is that it introduces fluorinated functionalities on the surface on the membrane layer. This may increase the chemical resistance of the protective surface layer 40 as well as reduce the propensity of certain types of fouling to adsorb to the surface of the membrane.

As an additional embodiment, combinations of two or more diazonium salts to impose bi- and trifunctional layers on the surface may be advantageous to reduce particular types of fouling on the surface.

Fig. 9 b) illustrates an example of a compound reaction causing deposition of an anti fouling layer (protective surface layer 40) on a filtration layer 6 of a filtration membrane 4 according to the invention. The central idea is that the diazonium salt 84 is electrochemically reduced in a one-electron process to release nitrogen gas 94 and the corresponding

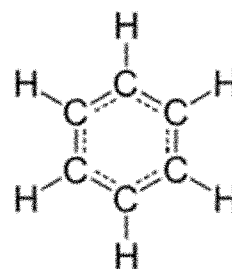
carbon centred radical. This radical 88 can then proceed according to a range of reaction mechanisms including homogeneous reactions, but most importantly also attach to the surface of the filtration layer 6. While the nature of the bond produced between the surface of the electrode and the layer has been the subject of some debate, there exists little doubt that the bonds 96 so made are strong and can persist even strong ultrasonic cleaning protocols.

Fig. 9 c) illustrates how additional layers of a compound 84' can be added to a compound 84 that is attached to the filtration layer 6 of a filtration membrane 4 like the one shown in Fig. 9 b). The grafting process involving diazonium salts does not stop at the level indicated in Fig. 9 b). Rather the electrochemically generated radicals may react with groups already attached to the surface of the filtration layer 6. The degree to which this secondary process continues can to some extent be controlled by the applied electrochemical potential on the working electrode. The potential control exercised can have significant ramifications on the layer structure, density, and thickness. This will be known to a person skilled in the art.

List of reference numerals

	2	-	Filtration system
	4	-	Filtration membrane
5	6	-	Filtration layer
	8	-	Porous base layer
	10	-	Pores
	12	-	Electrical source
	14	-	Fluid
10	16	-	Fluid inlet
	18	-	Fluid outlet
	20	-	Permeate outlet
	22	-	Housing
	24, 26	-	Compound
15	28	-	Working electrode
	30	-	Counter electrode
	32	-	Reference electrode
	34	-	Seal ring (e.g. an O-ring)
	38	-	End chain
20	40	-	Protection layer
	42, 43, 44	-	Foulants
	D, d	-	Layer thickness
	W ₁ , W ₂	-	Width
	X	-	Axis parallel to the surface of the filtration layer
25	Y	-	Axis perpendicular to the surface of the filtration layer
	46	-	Base member
	50	-	Top member
	52	-	Cavity
30	54, 56, 58	-	Wire
	D, d, L ₁ , L ₂ , L ₃	-	Layer thickness
	60	-	Flux ratio

	62	-	Time
	64	-	Time for carrying out a CIP process
	66, 66', 68, 68'-		Curve
	70	-	Increasing curve portion
5	72	-	4-(carboxyl) phenyl diazonium tetrafluoroborate
	74	-	4-(methoxy) phenyl diazonium tetrafluoroborate
	76	-	4-(2-(2-(methoxy)ethoxy)ethoxy) phenyl diazonium tetrafluoroborate
10	78	-	4-(nitro) phenyl diazonium tetrafluoroborate
	80	-	is 4-(fluoro) phenyl diazonium tetrafluoroborate
	84	-	Compound
	86	-	Diazonium group N_2^+
	88	-	Aryl or alkyl
20			
	90	-	Benzene ring
	92	-	Electron, e^-
	94	-	Nitrogenous gas (N_2)
	96	-	Covalent binding



Claims

1. A filtration system (2) comprising a filtration membrane (4) comprising a porous base layer (8) attached to an electrically conductive filtration layer (6) having pores (10) extending through the filtration layer (6) **characterised in** that the filtration system (2) comprises:
 - a) means for attaching a compound (24, 26) on the filtration layer (6) and hereby providing a protective surface layer (40) on the filtration layer (6) and/or
 - b) means for synthesising a second compound (24, 26) from a first compound (24, 26) and attaching the second compound (24, 26) on the filtration layer (6) and hereby providing a protective surface layer (40) on the filtration layer (6).
2. A filtration system (2) according to claim 1, **characterised in** that the filtration system (2) comprises means for, at least partially, cleaving off the protective surface layer (40) from the filtration layer (6).
3. A filtration system (2) according to claim 1 or claim 2 **characterised in** that the filtration system (2) comprises an electrical power source (12) that is connected to the filtration membrane (4) and that the electrical power source (12) is configured to impose an electrical field on the filtration membrane (4) so that the filtration system (2) is configured to:
 - a) attach a compound (24, 26) on the filtration layer (6) through an electrochemical process and

- b) to, at least partially, cleave off the protective surface layer (40) from the filtration layer (6) through an electrochemical process.
4. A filtration system (2) according to one of the preceding claims
5 **characterised in** that the filtration membrane (4) is arranged in a housing (22) having a fluid inlet (16) for receiving a fluid (14) and a permeate outlet (20) for delivering permeate released from the filtration membrane (4).
5. A filtration system (2) according to one of the preceding claims
10 **characterised in** that the filtration system (2) comprises means for determining the transmembrane pressure across the filtration membrane (4) and/or the flux through the filtration layer (6) of the filtration membrane (4) and that the filtration system (2) is configured to:
- 15 a) attach a compound (24, 26) on the filtration layer (6) and
- b) at least partially, cleave off the protective surface layer (40) from the filtration layer (6),
- on the basis of predefined and determined transmembrane pressure and/or flux conditions.
- 20 6. A filtration system (2) according to one of the preceding claims **characterised in** that the filtration system (2) is configured to control the thickness of the protective surface layer (40) by regulating the applied electrochemical potential at the surface of the filtration membrane (6) and thus exercising potential control of the
25 layer forming process.

regulating the electrical potential of the filtration layer (6) of the filtration membrane (4).

7. A filtration system (2) according to one of the preceding claims **characterised in** that filtration system (2) is configured to:

- 5 a) carry out a back flush process and
- b) at least partially, cleave off the protective surface layer (40) from the filtration layer (6) basically during the back flush process.

8. A filtration system (2) according to one of the preceding claims **characterised in** that the filtration system (2) is configured to drain away compound containing fluid and to add a compound (24, 26) to the fluid (14).
- 10

9. A method for carrying out a filtration process of a fluid (14) by using a filtration membrane (4) comprising a porous base layer (8) attached to an electrically conductive filtration layer (6) having pores (10) extending through the filtration layer (6) **characterised in** that the method comprises the following step:
- 15

- a) attaching a compound (24, 26) on the filtration layer (6) and hereby providing a protective surface layer (40) on the filtration layer (6) or forming a second compound (24, 26) from a first compound (24, 26) and attaching the second compound (24, 26) on the filtration layer (6) and hereby providing a protective surface layer (40) on the filtration layer (6).
- 20

10. A method according to claim 9 **characterised in** that the protective surface layer (40) is, at least partially, cleaved off the filtration layer (6) during a filtration process.
11. A method according to claim 9 or claim 10 **characterised in** that
5 an electrical field is provided on the filtration membrane (4) so that:
- a) a compound (24, 26) is attached on the filtration layer (6) through an electrochemical process and that
- b) the protective surface layer (40) is, at least partially, cleaved
10 off the filtration layer (6) through an electrochemical process.
12. A method according to one of the claims 9-11 **characterised in** that the transmembrane pressure across the filtration membrane (4) and/or the flux through the filtration layer (6) of the filtration membrane (4) is determined and that:
- a) a compound (24, 26) is attached on the filtration layer (6) and
15 b) the compound (24, 26) is at least partially, cleaved off the protective surface layer (40) from the filtration layer (6) on the basis of predefined and determined transmembrane pressure and/or flux conditions during the filtration process.
13. A method according to one of the claims 9-12 **characterised in**
20 that the thickness of the protective surface layer (40) is controlled by regulating the electrical potential applied the filtration layer (6) of the filtration membrane (4).

14. A method according to one of the claims 9-13 **characterised in** that a back flush process is carried out and that the protective surface layer (40) is, at least partially, cleaved off the filtration layer (6) basically contemporary with the back flush process.
- 5 15. A method according to one of the claims 9-14 **characterised in** that compound containing fluid is drained away and that a compound (24, 26) is added to the fluid (14) during the filtration process.
- 10 16. A method for carrying out a filtration process of a fluid (14) by using a filtration membrane (4) comprising a porous base layer (8) attached to an electrically conductive filtration layer (6) having pores (10) extending through the filtration layer (6) **characterised in** that a filtration system (2) according to one of the claims 1-8 is used to filter the fluid (14).

Fig. 1

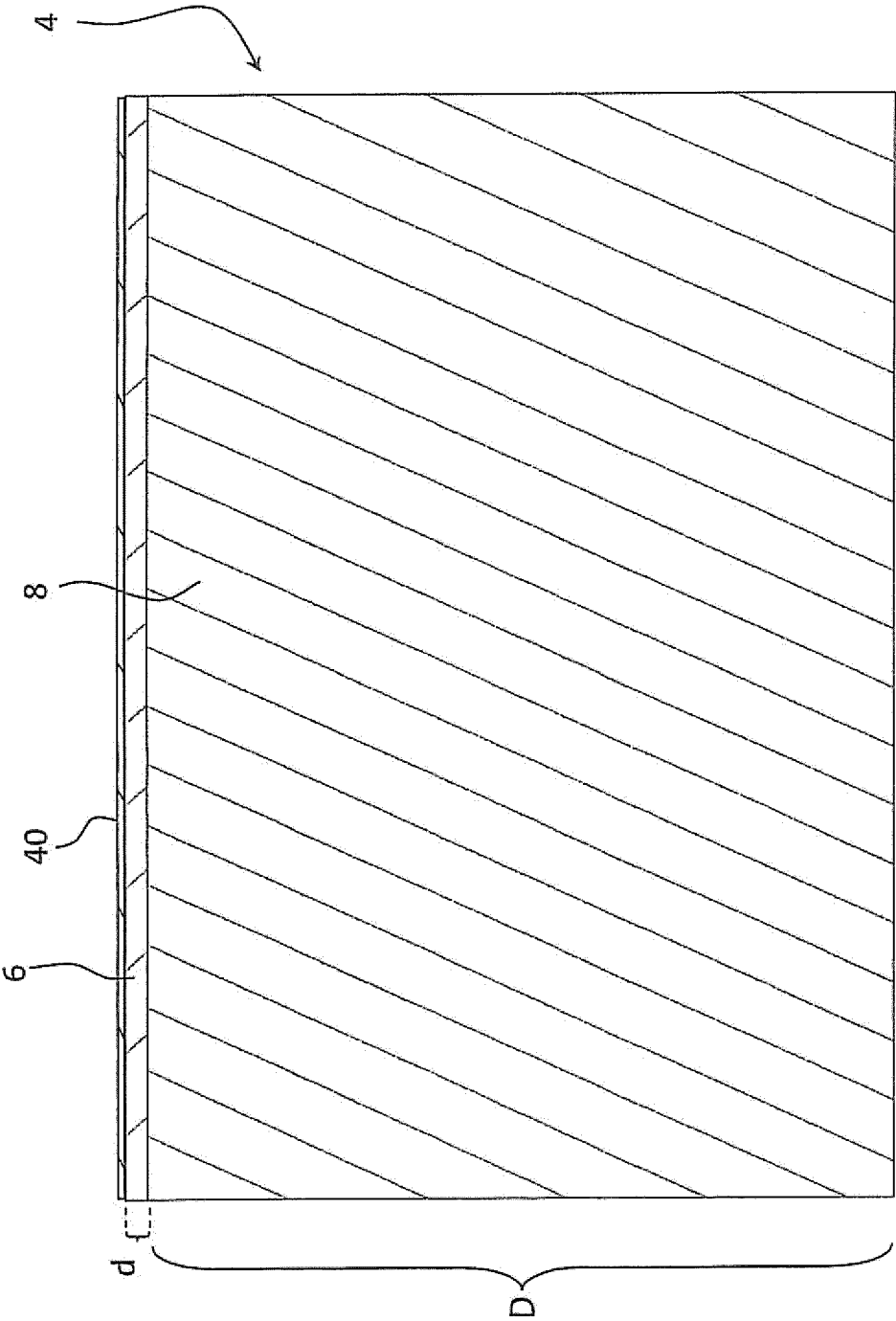


Fig. 2

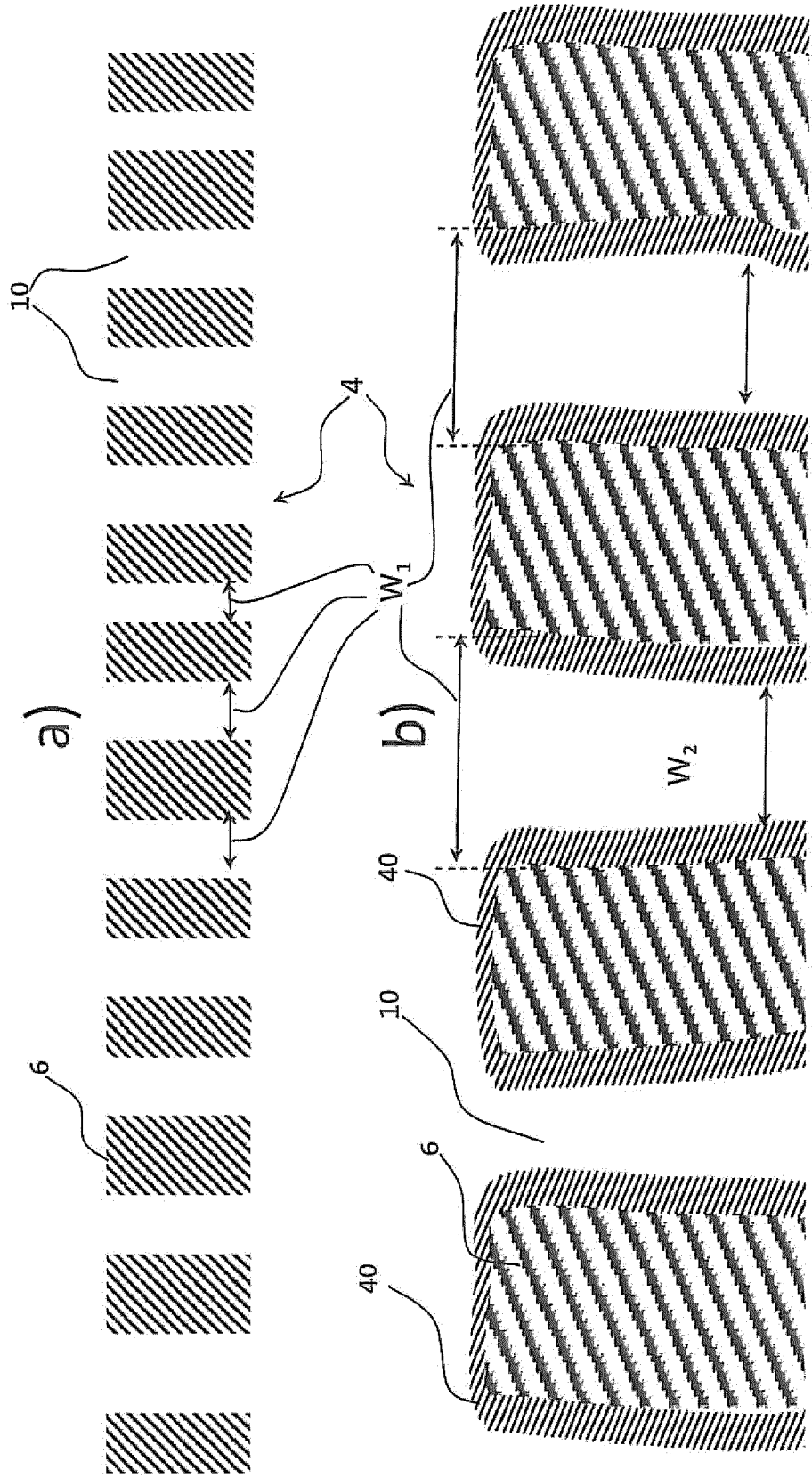
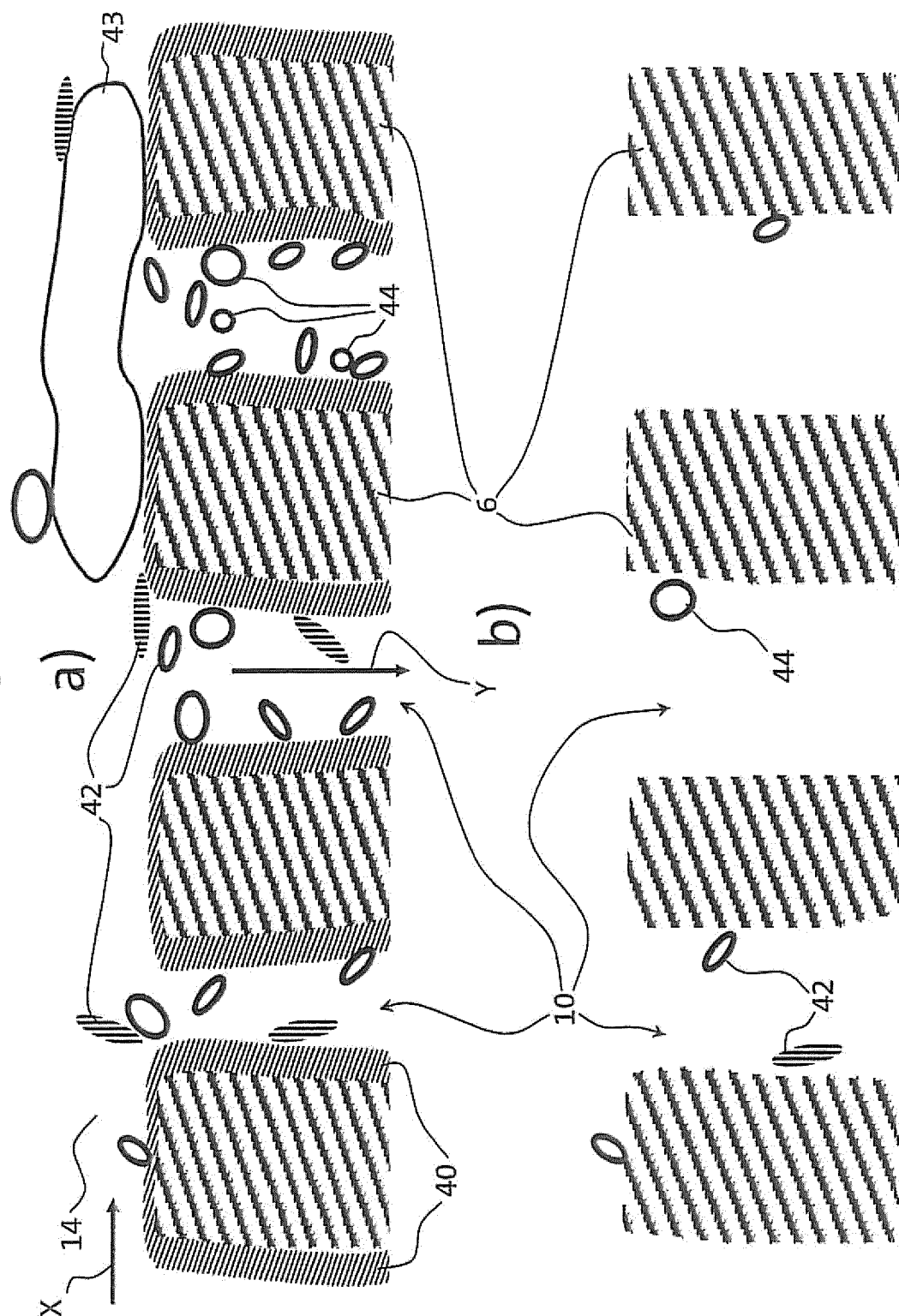


Fig. 3



File 4

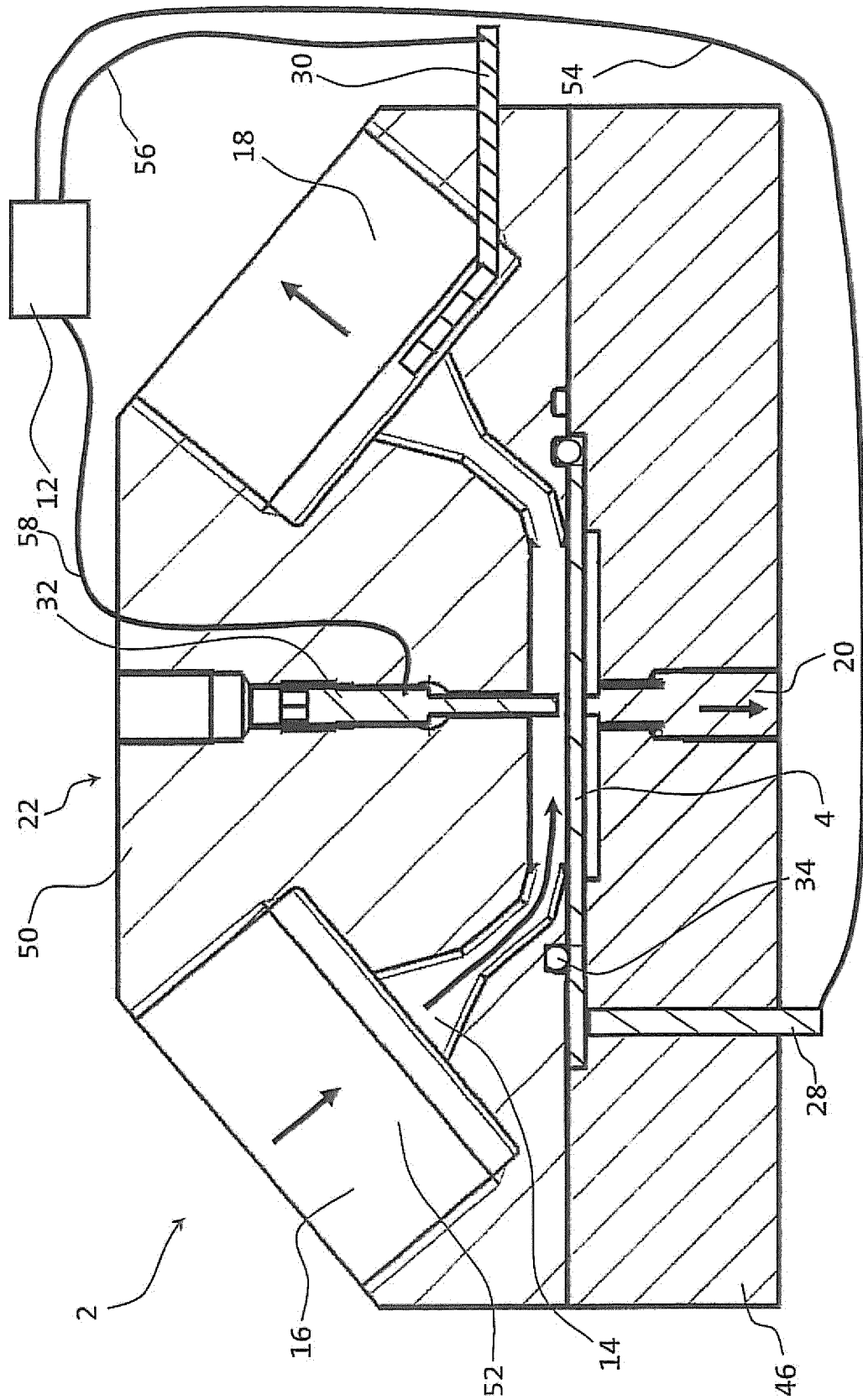


Fig. 5



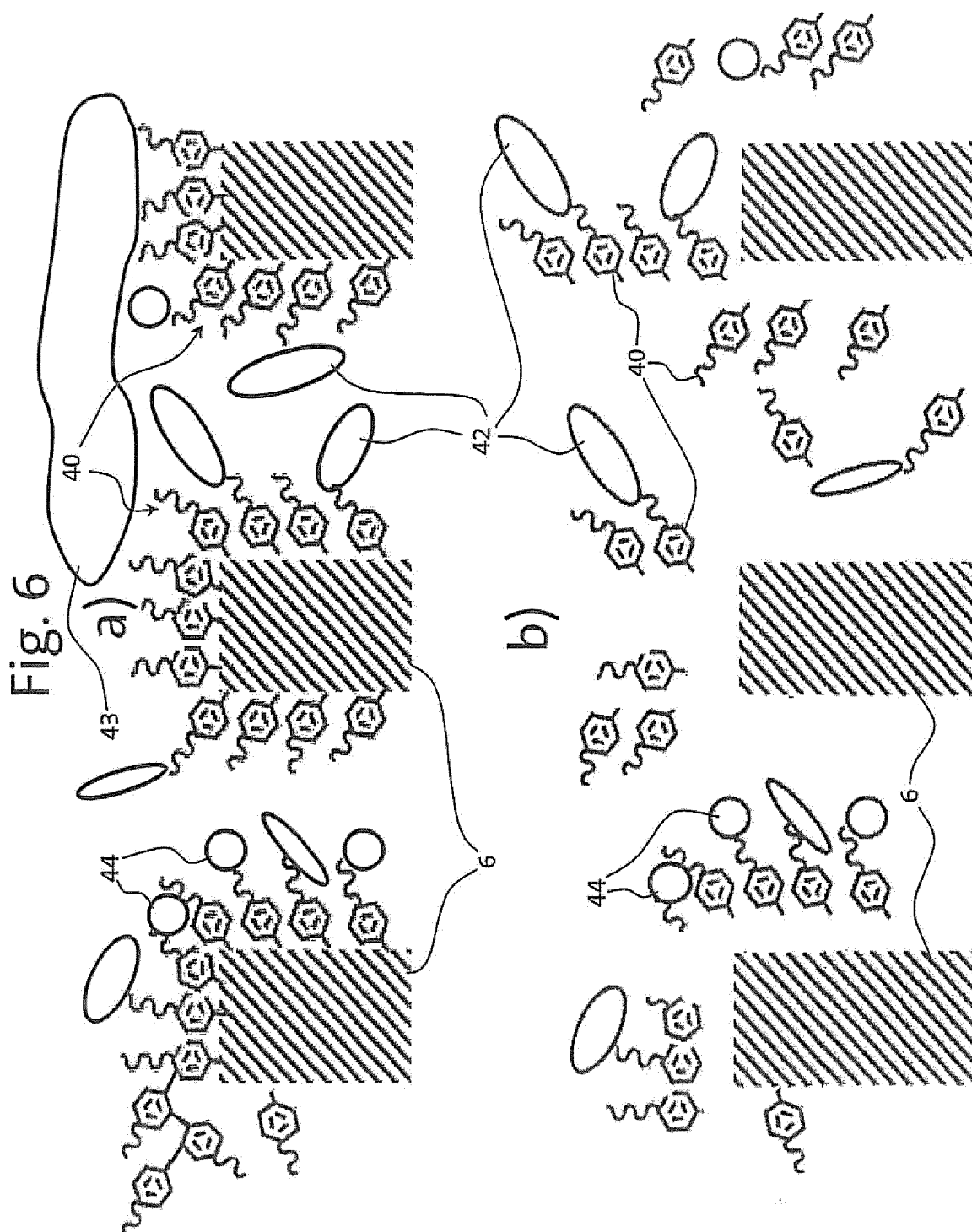


Fig. 7

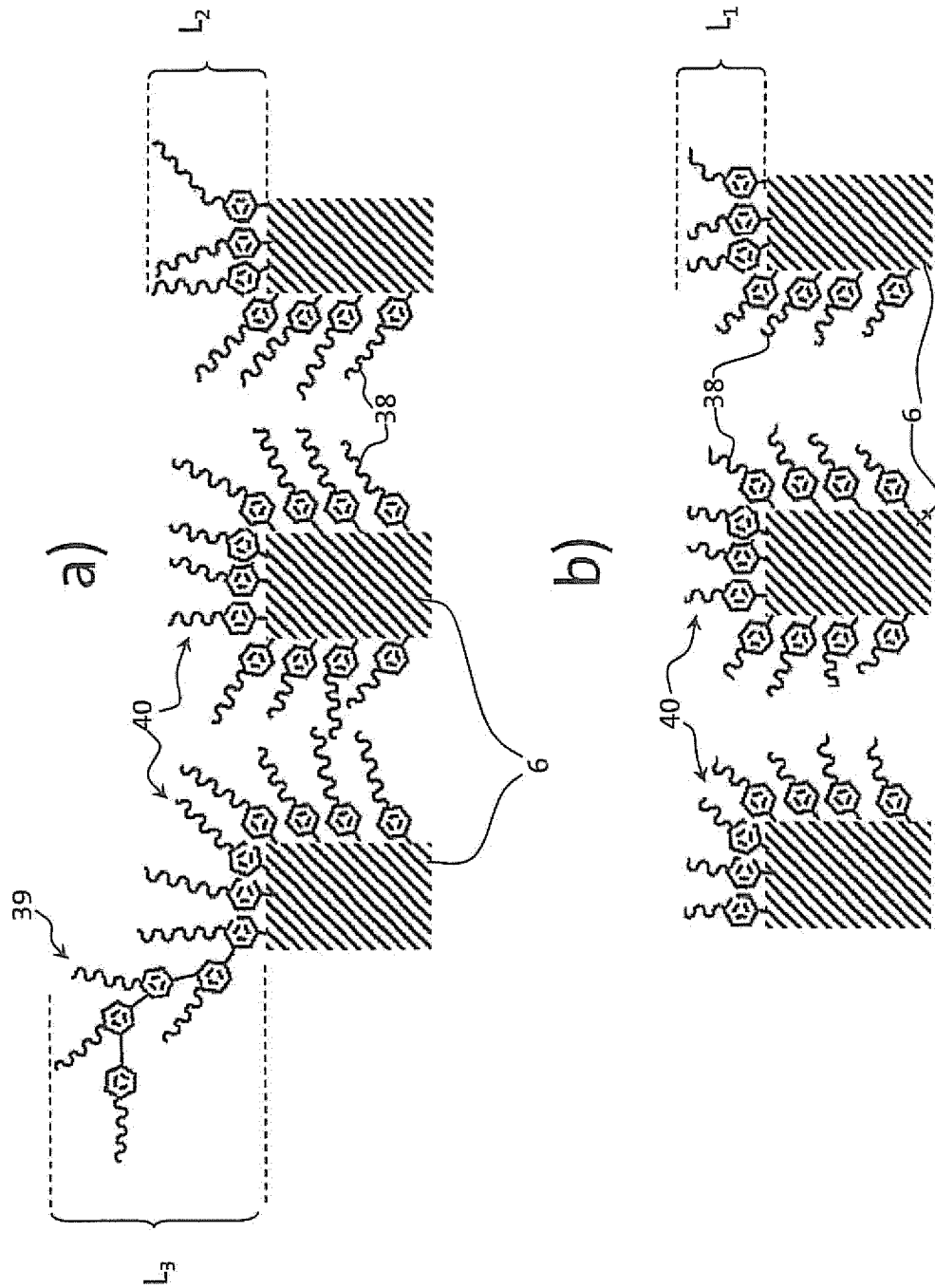


Fig. 8

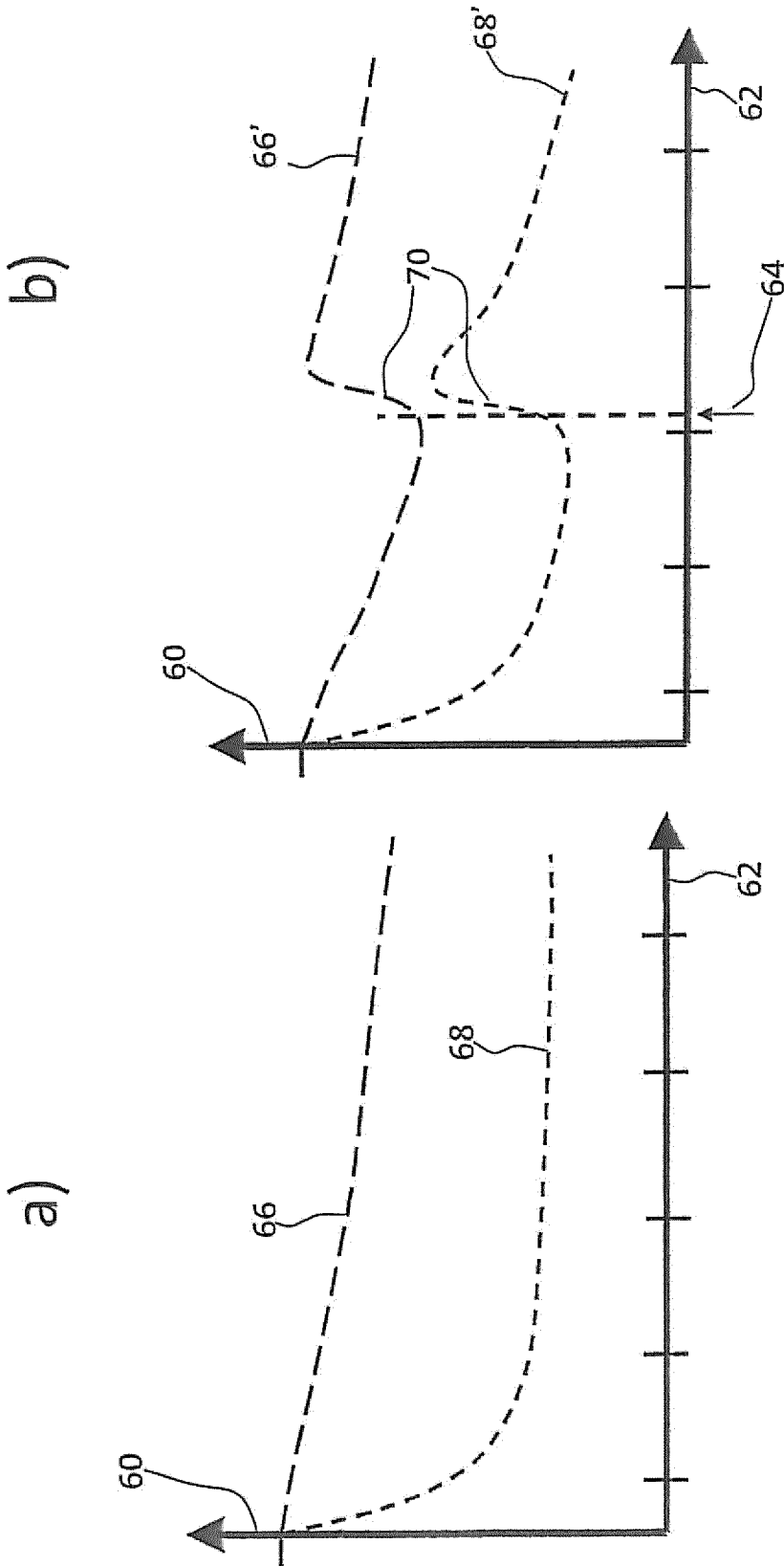
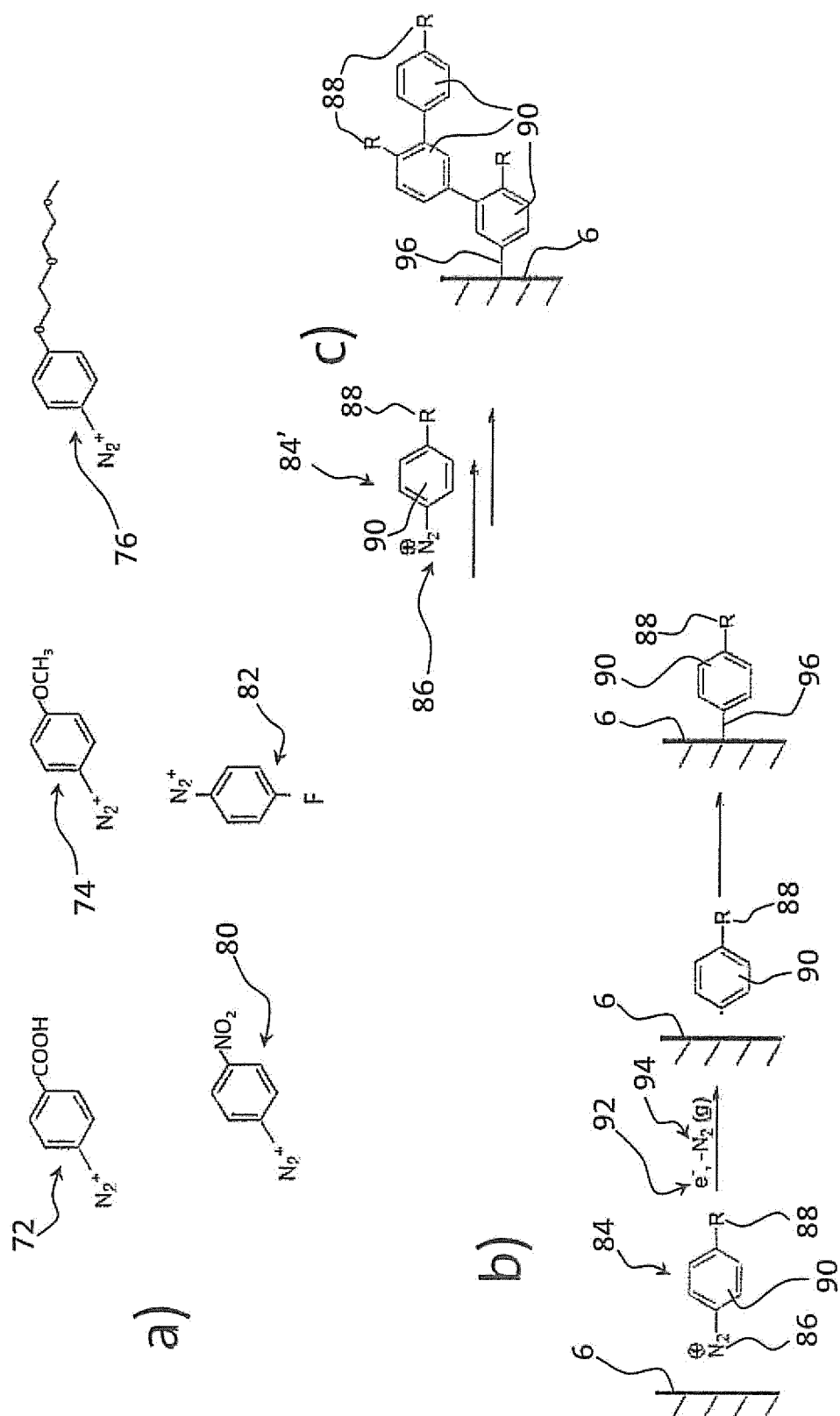


Fig. 9



INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/EP2012/057672

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

INV. B01D65/02 B01D65/08 B01D71/02 B01D67/00
ADD.

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
B01D

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

EPO-Internal, WPI Data

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
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Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.



See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents :

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"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)

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"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art

"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

12 June 2012

Date of mailing of the international search report

18/06/2012

Name and mailing address of the ISA/

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Authorized officer

Veríssimo, Sónia

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/EP2012/057672

C(Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 6 287 432 B1 (MAZANEC TERRY J [US] ET AL) 11 September 2001 (2001-09-11) column 6, line 34 - line 46 column 8, line 3 - line 5 column 14, line 60 - column 16 column 17, line 24 - line 26 column 23, line 52 - line 68 column 24, line 60 - line 67 column 29, line 22 - line 28 column 31; example A claims 1, 20 figures 1-3, 6-13 the whole document -----	1-8
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International application No

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