
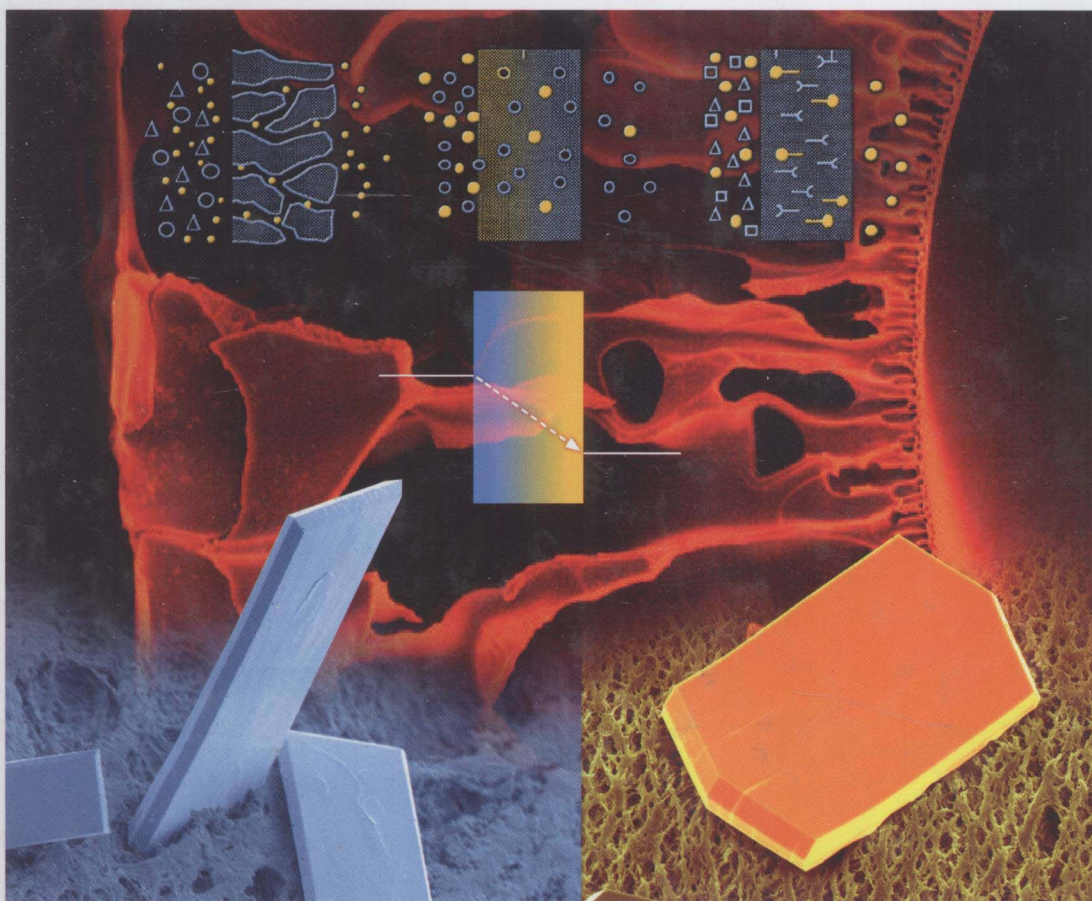


Edited by Enrico Drioli
and Lidiatta Giorno

 WILEY-VCH

Membrane Operations

Innovative Separations and Transformations



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Introduction

Membrane processes are state of the art technologies in various industrial sectors, including gas separation, wastewater treatment, food processing and medical applications.

Modelling methodologies are contributing significantly to the knowledge-based development of membrane materials and engineering.

Micro-ultrafiltration and reverse osmosis are mature technologies for separations based on molecular exclusion and solution-diffusion mechanisms, respectively. Cleaning and maintenance procedures able to control fouling to an acceptable extent have made these processes commercially suitable.

Some of the largest plants for seawater desalination, wastewater treatment and gas separation are already based on membrane engineering. For example, the Ashkelon Desalination Plant for seawater reverse osmosis (SWRO), in Israel, has been fully operational since December 2005 and produces more than 100 million m³ of desalinated water per year. One of the largest submerged membrane bioreactor unit in the world was recently built in Porto Marghera (Italy) to treat tertiary water. The growth in membrane installations for water treatment in the past decade has resulted in a decreased cost of desalination facilities, with the consequence that the cost of the reclaimed water for membrane plants has also been reduced.

Membranes are growing significantly also in gas separation, for example, the current market size of carbon-dioxide separation from natural gas is more than 70 million Euro/year.

Medical applications are among the most important in the membrane market, with hemodialysis, blood oxygenators, plasma separation and fractionation being the traditional areas of applications, while artificial and bioartificial organs and regenerative medicine represent emerging areas in the field.

Nanofiltration has achieved a good stage of development, gaining attention in various applications for separations based on both molecular exclusion and charge interaction as well as on the solution-diffusion mechanism. In particular, nanofiltration is considered among the most suitable technologies for solvent separation. More recent processes such as membrane reactors, membrane contactors, and membranes in life science are also developing very rapidly. The optimal design of

chemical transformation processes with control of reagent supply and/or product removal through catalytic membranes and membrane reactors is one of the most attractive solutions in process intensification. The catalytic action of biocatalysts is extremely efficient, selective and highly stereospecific when compared to conventional chemical catalysts. Membrane bioreactors are particularly attractive in terms of ecocompatibility, because they do not require additives, are able to operate at moderate temperature and pressure, reduce the formation of by-products, while permitting the production of high valuable coproducts. This may allow challenges in developing new production lines moving towards zero discharge to be faced. The development of catalytic membrane reactors for high-temperature applications became realistic more recently, with the development of high-temperature-resistant membranes.

The major market for membrane bioreactors is represented by wastewater treatment with the use of submerged modules configuration. These are considered among the best available technologies by the European Directives on Environment. Membrane bioreactors are also applied in food, red and white biotechnology. In these cases, the external loop configuration is used.

Membrane contactors, including membrane crystallizers and membrane emulsifiers, are among the most recent membrane operations with growing interest in various industrial sectors. For example, membrane emulsification has grown from the 1990s, when it was first developed in Japan, to nowadays with applications in food, chemical, pharmaceutical and cosmetic fields. In Europe, the research at the academic level has achieved a thorough knowledge both from experimental and theoretical points of view. This is fuelling the industrial interest towards the membrane emulsification technology, especially for those productions that involve labile bioactive molecules.

In general, nowadays the attention towards membrane science and technology is increasing significantly. Drivers of this interest include the need for technologies to enable sustainable production, directives and regulations about the use of eco-friendly technologies, consumer demand for high-quality and safe products, public concern about environment, and stakeholder confidence in and acceptance of advanced technologies.

Current initiatives recognize that a sustainable solution to the increasing demand of goods and energy is in the rational integration and implementation of new technologies able to achieve concrete benefits for manufacturing and processing, substantially increasing process precision, reducing equipment size, saving energy, reducing costs, and minimizing environmental impact.

Membranes and membrane processes are best suited in this context as their basic aspects well satisfy the requirements of process intensification for a sustainable industrial production. In fact, they are precise and flexible processing techniques, able to maximize phase contact, integrate conversion and separation processes, with improved efficiency and with significantly lower energy requirements compared to conventional techniques.

This multiauthor book highlights the current state and advances in membranes and membrane operations referring to three major roles of the membrane: mole-

cular separation, (bio)chemical transformation and phase contactors. Each topic includes fundamentals and applications of membranes and membrane operations.

The largest section is constituted by membranes in molecular separation, which is the most traditional application of membranes. Significant advances of membrane science and technologies are expected in transformation processes and membrane contactors for conventional and innovative applications.

Contents

List of Contributors XVII

Introduction XXIII

Part One Molecular Separation 1

- 1 Molecular Modeling, A Tool for the Knowledge-Based Design of Polymer-Based Membrane Materials 3**
Dieter Hofmann and Elena Tocci
 - 1.1 Introduction 3
 - 1.2 Basics of Molecular Modeling of Polymer-Based Membrane Materials 5
 - 1.3 Selected Applications 7
 - 1.3.1 Hard- and Software 7
 - 1.3.2 Simulation/Prediction of Transport Parameters and Model Validation 8
 - 1.3.2.1 Prediction of Solubility Parameters 9
 - 1.3.2.2 Prediction of Diffusion Constants 9
 - 1.3.3 Permeability of Small Molecules and Free-Volume Distribution 12
 - 1.3.3.1 Examples of Polymers with Low Permeability of Small Molecules (e.g., $\text{PO}_2 \leq 50$ Barrer) 13
 - 1.3.3.2 Examples of Polymers with High Permeability of Small Molecules (e.g., $50 \text{ Barrer} \leq \text{PO}_2 \leq 200 \text{ Barrer}$) 13
 - 1.3.3.3 Examples of Polymers with Ultrahigh Permeability of Small Molecules (e.g., $\text{PO}_2 \geq 1000 \text{ Barrer}$) 14
 - 1.4 Summary 16
 - References 17
- 2 Polymeric Membranes for Molecular Separations 19**
Heru Susanto and Mathias Ulbricht
 - 2.1 Introduction 19
 - 2.2 Membrane Classification 19

2.3	Membrane Polymer Characteristics	22
2.3.1	Polymer Structure and Properties	22
2.3.2	Membrane Polymer Selection	23
2.3.2.1	Polymers for Porous Barriers	23
2.3.2.2	Polymers for Nonporous Barrier	25
2.3.2.3	Polymers for Charged Barrier	26
2.4	Membrane Preparation	26
2.4.1	Track-Etching of Polymer Films	26
2.4.2	Phase Separation of Polymer Solutions	27
2.4.3	Composite Membrane Preparation	30
2.4.4	Mixed-Matrix Membranes	32
2.5	Membrane Modification	32
2.6	Established and Novel Polymer Membranes for Molecular Separations	34
2.6.1	Ultrafiltration	34
2.6.2	Reverse Osmosis and Nanofiltration	36
2.6.3	Pervaporation	37
2.6.4	Separations Using Ion-Exchange Membranes	38
2.7	Conclusion and Outlook	40
	References	41
3	Fundamentals of Membrane Solvent Separation and Pervaporation	45
	<i>Bart Van der Bruggen</i>	
3.1	Introduction: Separation Needs for Organic Solvents	45
3.2	Pervaporation and Nanofiltration Principles	46
3.3	Membrane Materials and Properties for Solvent Separation	48
3.3.1	Solvent-Stable Polymeric Membrane Materials	48
3.3.2	Ceramic Membrane Materials	49
3.3.3	Solvent Stability	52
3.3.4	Structural Properties for Membranes in NF and PV	52
3.4	Flux and Separation Prediction	53
3.4.1	Flux Models in NF	53
3.4.2	Rejection in NF	55
3.4.3	Models for PV: from Solution-Diffusion to Maxwell–Stefan	56
3.4.4	Hybrid Simulations	57
3.5	Conclusions	58
	References	58
4	Fundamentals of Membrane Gas Separation	63
	<i>Tom M. Murphy, Grant T. Offord, and Don R. Paul</i>	
4.1	Introduction	63
4.2	Polymer Structure and Permeation Behavior	64
4.3	Membranes from Glassy Polymers: Physical Aging	69
4.4	Membranes from Rubbery Polymers: Enhanced CO ₂ Selectivity	75

4.5	Summary	79
	References	79
5	Fundamentals in Electromembrane Separation Processes	83
	<i>Heinrich Strathmann</i>	
5.1	Introduction	83
5.2	The Structures and Functions of Ion-Exchange Membranes	84
5.2.1	Ion-Exchange Membrane Materials and Structures	85
5.2.2	Preparation of Ion-Exchange Membranes	85
5.2.2.1	Preparation Procedure of Heterogeneous Ion-Exchange Membranes	86
5.2.2.2	Preparation of Homogeneous Ion-Exchange Membranes	86
5.2.2.3	Special Property Membranes	88
5.3	Transport of Ions in Membranes and Solutions	88
5.3.1	Electric Current and Ohm's Law in Electrolyte Solutions	89
5.3.2	Mass Transport in Membranes and Solutions	91
5.3.2.1	The Driving Force and Fluxes in Electromembrane Processes	91
5.3.2.2	Electrical Current and Fluxes of Ions	91
5.3.2.3	The Transport Number and the Membrane Permselectivity	92
5.3.2.4	Membrane Counterion Permselectivity	93
5.3.2.5	Water Transport in Electrodialysis	94
5.4	The Principle of Electromembrane Processes	95
5.4.1	Electrodialysis	95
5.4.1.1	Electrodialysis System and Process Design	96
5.4.1.2	Electrodialysis Process Costs	102
5.4.2	Electrodialysis with Bipolar Membranes	107
5.4.2.1	Electrodialysis with Bipolar Membrane System and Process Design	108
5.4.2.2	Electrodialysis with Bipolar Membrane Process Costs	110
5.4.3	Continuous Electrodeionization	113
5.4.3.1	System Components and Process Design Aspects	113
5.4.3.2	Operational Problems in Practical Application of Electrodeionization	115
5.4.4	Other Electromembrane Separation Processes	115
	References	118
6	Fouling in Membrane Processes	121
	<i>Anthony G. Fane, Tzyy H. Chong, and Pierre Le-Clech</i>	
6.1	Introduction	121
6.1.1	Characteristics of Fouling	121
6.1.2	Causes of Fouling	123
6.1.3	Fouling Mechanisms and Theory	125
6.1.4	Critical and Sustainable Flux	125
6.1.5	Fouling and Operating Mode	126
6.2	Low-Pressure Processes	126

6.2.1	Particulate Fouling	126
6.2.2	Colloidal and Macrosolute Fouling	127
6.2.3	Biofouling and Biofilms	128
6.2.4	Case Studies	128
6.2.4.1	Water Treatment and Membrane Pretreatment	128
6.2.4.2	Membrane Bioreactor (MBR)	129
6.3	High-Pressure Processes	130
6.3.1	Particulate and Colloidal Fouling	130
6.3.2	Biofouling	132
6.3.3	Scale Formation	133
6.3.4	Cake-Enhanced Osmotic Pressure	135
6.4	Conclusions	136
	References	136
7	Energy and Environmental Issues and Impacts of Membranes in Industry	139
	<i>William J. Koros, Adam Kratochvil, Shu Shu, and Shabbir Husain</i>	
7.1	Introduction	139
7.2	Hydrodynamic Sieving (MF and UF) Separations	141
7.3	Fractionation of Low Molecular Weight Mixtures (NF, D, RO, GS)	142
7.4	Reverse Osmosis – The Prototype Large-Scale Success	144
7.5	Energy-Efficiency Increases – A Look to the Future	145
7.5.1	Success Stories Built on Existing Membrane Materials and Formation Technology	146
7.5.2	Future Opportunities Relying Upon Developmental Membrane Materials and Formation Technology	149
7.5.2.1	High-Performance Olefin–Paraffin Separation Membranes	149
7.5.2.2	Coal Gasification with CO ₂ Capture for Sequestration	154
7.6	Key Hurdles to Overcome for Broadly Expanding the Membrane-Separation Platform	158
7.7	Some Concluding Thoughts	160
	References	161
8	Membrane Gas-Separation: Applications	167
	<i>Richard W. Baker</i>	
8.1	Industry Background	167
8.2	Current Membrane Gas-Separation Technology	167
8.2.1	Membrane Types and Module Configurations	168
8.2.1.1	Hollow Fine Fiber Membranes and Modules	169
8.2.1.2	Capillary Fiber Membranes and Modules	170
8.2.1.3	Flat-Sheet Membranes and Spiral-Wound Modules	170
8.2.2	Module Size	170
8.3	Applications of Gas-Separation Membranes	171
8.3.1	Nitrogen from Air	171

8.3.2	Air Drying	173
8.3.3	Hydrogen Separation	175
8.3.4	Natural-Gas Treatment	178
8.3.4.1	Carbon-Dioxide Separation	179
8.3.4.2	Separation of Heavy Hydrocarbons	182
8.3.4.3	Nitrogen Separation from High-Nitrogen Gas	182
8.3.5	Vapor/Gas Separations in Petrochemical Operations	183
8.4	Future Applications	186
8.4.1	CO ₂ /N ₂ Separations	186
8.4.2	CO ₂ /H ₂ Separations	188
8.4.3	Water/Ethanol Separations	189
8.4.4	Separation of Organic Vapor Mixtures	191
8.5	Summary/Conclusion	191
	References	192
9	CO₂ Capture with Membrane Systems	195
	<i>Rune Bredesen, Izumi Kumakiri, and Thijs Peters</i>	
9.1	Introduction	195
9.1.1	CO ₂ and Greenhouse-Gas Problem	195
9.1.2	CO ₂ Capture Processes and Technologies	196
9.2	Membrane Processes in Energy Systems with CO ₂ Capture	199
9.2.1	Processes Including Oxygen-Separation Membranes	199
9.2.2	Precombustion Decarbonization Processes Including Hydrogen and Carbon Dioxide Membrane Separation	202
9.2.3	Postcombustion Capture Processes with Membrane Separation	205
9.3	Properties of Membranes for Hydrogen, Oxygen, and Carbon Dioxide Separation	206
9.3.1	Membranes for Oxygen Separation in Precombustion Decarbonization and Oxy-Fuel Processes	206
9.3.1.1	Flux and Separation	206
9.3.1.2	Stability Issues	207
9.3.2	Membranes for Hydrogen Separation in Precombustion Decarbonization	207
9.3.2.1	Microporous Membranes	208
9.3.2.2	Dense Metal Membranes	209
9.3.2.3	Stability Issues	209
9.3.2.4	Dense Ceramic Membranes	210
9.3.3	Membranes for CO ₂ Separation in Precombustion Decarbonization	211
9.3.4	CO ₂ Separation in Postcombustion Capture	211
9.3.4.1	CO ₂ Separation Membranes	211
9.3.4.2	Membrane Contactors for CO ₂ Capture	212
9.4	Challenges in Membrane Operation	212