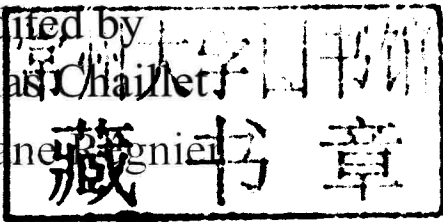


# **Microrobotics for Micromanipulation**

**Edited by  
Nicolas Chaillet  
Stéphane Régnier**

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Nicolas Chaillet  
Stéphane Renner



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## Microrobotics for Micromanipulation

## Foreword

Robotics, as established over the last 40 years, has relied on the idea that imitation of manual actions by humans is the best strategy for creating manipulators able to replace the work of humans for highly repetitive tasks in the manufacturing industry. Subsequently, with the advent of mobile robots, it was human and animal locomotion that inspired researchers. Almost anything conceived by nature has been copied in robots, from jumping robots to eel-like robots and robotic coloscopes imitating caterpillars.

As the dimensions of these robots decrease, adhesive problems come to dominate over problems related strictly to mobility. Here again, bio-inspired approaches have flourished. Again, in the context of the exploration of the gastrointestinal tract, for recent endoscopic video capsules ingested by the patient, the challenge has been to understand sliding effects in order to control its movement, or to temporarily attach it to a wall in order to perform a biopsy. Various types of interface have been designed for controlling adhesive effects, based on biomimetic models. One example is the hierarchical lattices of micro- and nanofibers – inspired by those found on the feet of geckos – which exploit van der Waals type forces. Another is that of microfiber lattices covered with a hydrophobic liquid – the secretion of which is triggered by the pressure of a foot resting on the ground, as observed in crickets and cockroaches – an effect that relies on capillary forces. These two examples illustrate the continuity between robotics in the macroworld, whose theoretical and technological underpinnings are well understood in most ways, and robotics in the microworld, where the first steps are only just being taken.

This book reveals the complexities inherent in microrobotics compared to the more familiar macrorobotics. The first difference is the complexity of the theory of the physics of the microworld compared to the macroworld: in the macroworld, gravity and inertial forces behave in a relatively simple manner; the underlying models are within the grasp of any user with a Master's level university education in mechanics or robotics. In the microworld, on the other hand, the surface forces and contact

forces that hold sway require a much more sophisticated understanding of physics – in particular electrostatics, thermodynamics, fluid physics, material science, etc. The behavioral laws for fluids, models of friction and roughness must be translated to these small scales. The sorts of effects seen on this scale cannot be reduced to analytical equations whose coefficients are “easily” identifiable physical parameters. The models used introduce empirical or experimental constants that are difficult to quantify, and depend on the materials involved in the interaction, their shapes, and their environment.

The next difference is in terms of experiments: the measured forces may be tens of nano-Newtons; motion can range from microns to millimeters, with resolutions between  $0.1\text{ }\mu\text{m}$  and  $25\text{ }\mu\text{m}$  and as small as a microradian in orientation. Under these sorts of constraints, environmental conditions play a strong role. For example, a change in temperature of just  $5^\circ$  leads to an expansion of  $15\text{ }\mu\text{m}$  in a 100 mm aluminum rod. Humidity also has a strong effect on these interaction forces. It is thus clear that microrobot design, and that of the associated support structures (from working stations up to microfactories), is a whole new field of research beyond conventional robotics, and one that considerably borrows from microelectronics and microsystems.

The final difference is in the nature and diversity of applications for micromanipulation: these can range from the assembly of mechanical, electronic or optical components for products in everyday use, which are being increasingly miniaturized, to the exploration of the living world through the design of micro-instruments, microprobes, microsensors, etc. for diagnostics, monitoring, therapy, surgery, manipulation of cells in their natural environment, and so on. Microrobotics also contributes to the expansion of scientific and technological frontiers by contributing to the development and characterization of novel actuators, materials and processes. Whatever the objectives, it is clear that between the specified need and the integration of a microrobotic solution, a multidisciplinary approach encapsulating a broad spectrum of skills will be called for.

*Microrobotics for Micromanipulation* is an ambitious work offering a thorough overview of the field and a detailed discussion of specific problems. It reveals a whole new world, along with its limitations, achievements and future prospects, over the course of a thorough state of the art that includes well over 350 references. The theoretical underpinnings are illustrated with real experiments on platforms such as those developed at the ISIR/SI, Paris (formerly LRP) and the FEMTO-ST AS2M, Besançon (formerly LAB). These are used to give a better understanding of the observed phenomena and their complexity. The presentation is clear, rigorous and well illustrated, with a wide range of examples of prototypes and industrial products. Chapters 1–4 end with a series of exercises and answers, something unusual and which deserves special mention in such books. This adds to the undeniable pedagogical qualities of the book.

It was with great interest that I read this book, and it is with great confidence that I recommend it to the reader. It is the fruit of considerable collective effort that includes contributions from the main players in the field (at ISIR and at FEMTO-ST, but also at CEA/LIST, Fontenay aux Roses, IEMN/ISEN, Lille and the Université Libre de Bruxelles). The effort was led by two French pioneers of microrobotics, Stéphane Régnier and Nicolas Chaillet. It deserves to become a definitive reference for future designers and users of microrobots, whether qualified engineers or students in the course of Master's-level study, and whether or not they have prior training in robotics. It will also be a mine of information for doctoral students, qualified researchers and industrial researchers, particularly those who have been regular participants in the French GDR Robotique (robotics research group) working on multiscale manipulation.

I also finished the book with a feeling of nostalgia, remembering the late Alain Bourjault, who launched this theme in 1995 and who supported it throughout his life with great determination. This book definitely owes a great deal to him.

Étienne DOMBRE, DR CNRS, LIRMM, Head of the Robotics Research Group,  
CNRS, France

# Introduction

Microrobotics is a recent field that has developed over the last 20 years. Following on from an earlier work published in 2002, *La microrobotique* [BOU 02], and in light of recent results within the field, we decided to write a new book targeted at engineers, students and researchers. This book would present a specific field of microrobotics in greater detail that is specifically involved with the manipulation of micron-sized objects.

Generally speaking, a microrobot is a robot that performs tasks in the microworld – in other words the world of micron-sized objects, also known as micro-objects. A microrobot can:

- manipulate micro-objects, in which case it is known as a micromanipulator.

Although a micromanipulator is not necessarily itself micron-sized, it is generally preferable that it should be small, in particular for reasons of structural rigidity and position resolution. This resolution must be submicron so that it can manipulate and position micron-sized objects. The effector of a micromanipulator must, on the other hand, necessarily be micron-sized, since it is immersed in the microworld, interacting with micro-objects. All or part of such a microrobot may be based on deformable structures; this avoids the backlash and friction inherent in articulated mechanisms, which, bearing in mind the scale we are working on, are liable to catastrophically degrade the resolution;

- be totally immersed in the microworld, in which case the microrobot itself is micron-sized.

Such robots are generally mobile, able to move in a confined environment (such as within the human body) in order to carry out a task (which might be the transport of micro-objects).

This book very much focuses on the first type, i.e. the manipulation of micron-sized objects, also known as micromanipulation. Given the increasing

miniaturization of everyday consumer products, the need for micromanipulation is growing, and in particular for microassembly. Micromechanisms (watches, medical, etc.), microsystems, optics, microelectronics and biology are increasingly in need of efficient and reliable methods of micromanipulation. This book obviously has a bias towards the manipulation of objects by robotic means: inspired by methods that have been tried and tested on macroscopic scales, microrobotics offer the flexibility required in the fabrication of products that have some degree of variability.

Self-assembly, which involves exploiting forces that can cause several micro-objects to position themselves spontaneously at predetermined positions on a surface (making use of long-range forces such as electrostatic forces, or contact forces such as capillary forces), is not within the scope of the present book. This book will concentrate on manipulation by microrobots (which is by nature serial, in contrast to self-assembly, which is parallel but at present still not very flexible).

It should be noted that a microrobot is not necessarily a “MEMS” (*Micro-Electro-Mechanical System*), in other words a microsystem mostly fabricated using microfabrication technologies coming from microelectronics. It may, however, make use of microfabrication technologies, integrating one or more MEMSs, especially for its effectors. If the whole robot is micron-sized, it may itself be a MEMS.

The physical scales discussed in this book span a broad range: the microworld covers the range of  $1\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ – $1\text{ mm}$ , which is three whole orders of magnitude! It is clear that the physical effects underlying the static and dynamic behaviors involved will vary in strength over such a large range of scales. It is thus important to recognize and understand them as much as possible. Furthermore, many micromanipulation solutions have appeared in recent years that make use of phenomena specific to the scales they operate on. Each solution has its own advantages and disadvantages, but to date no one solution has shown enough clear advantages to raise it clearly above the others. As a result, an understanding of the physics of the microworld is a crucial element of microrobotics, both to understand the behavior of objects on this scale and to appreciate the specific effects used in a given micropreparator. The first chapter of this book describes in detail this physics and the forces involved.

In order to achieve very high positioning resolutions, and consequently very high repeatabilities and precisions, specific actuators may be used, and in particular ones based on active materials such as piezoelectric ceramics, which are currently without question the most widely used material for driving micromanipulators. Chapter 2 presents some of these actuator materials, along with a discussion of guiding with the use of compliant structures.

Generally speaking, the change in the balance of forces involved on the macroscopic scale (where volume-based forces such as weight and inertia dominate)

and on the microscopic scale (where surface-based forces such as capillary and electrostatic forces dominate) renders the problem of prehension a particularly delicate one. Chapter 3 therefore discusses microprehensors and micromanipulation strategies applicable in this context.

Beyond the crucial issue of prehension, the scale we are working on also introduces requirements on manipulators. In addition, given that a human cannot directly view the workspace, and cannot feel forces on the microscopic scale, a micromanipulation station must incorporate a vision system and suitable force measurement apparatus. Even if the station is not to be fully automatic, these are crucial for remote operation. All this, along with some elements of control theory, is presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 5 describes fabrication technologies suitable for microsystems and particularly useful for the fabrication of all or part of a microrobot.

Chapter 6 offers two future directions for micromanipulation:

- further reduction in the scale of the objects to be manipulated, extending the manipulation to nanometer-sized objects. This field of nanorobotics, still in its infancy, is likely to prove an extremely useful complement to the growth of nanotechnologies;
- integration of micromanipulators into a more complete miniaturized production system for microproducts. Such a production system, still very much in the early research stages, is commonly referred to as a microfactory.

Throughout this book, a recurring theme is that of scaling effects. Compared to the macroscopic scale, these introduce a very marked evolution in the dynamics of objects, and require a complete rethink of their function and the techniques used to manipulate them. The three scientific principles underlying this development are:

- knowledge of the dynamics of the microworld, in order to understand it and exploit specific phenomena;
- (micro)mechatronics, for the construction of suitable microrobotic components and structures;
- control of microrobotic systems, and associated perception functions.

We hope that this book, with its detailed review of microrobotics in the sense of robotics for micromanipulation, and its exercises to help the reader understand and master the field, will help engineers, students and researchers to become familiar with this recent field, and to contribute to its development through their scientific and technological work.

# Table of Contents

<b>Foreword</b> . . . . .	xvii
<b>Introduction</b> . . . . .	xxi
<b>Chapter 1. The Physics of the Microworld</b> . . . . .	1
Michaël GAUTHIER, Pierre LAMBERT and Stéphane RÉGNIER	
1.1. Introduction . . . . .	1
1.1.1. Scale effect . . . . .	1
1.1.2. Illustration of the scale effect . . . . .	2
1.1.3. Microworlds . . . . .	3
1.2. Details of the microworld . . . . .	4
1.2.1. Perception . . . . .	5
1.2.1.1. Position-sensing . . . . .	5
1.2.1.2. Force-sensing . . . . .	6
1.2.2. Design of microactuators and fabrication technology . . . . .	7
1.2.3. Micro-object behavior . . . . .	7
1.2.4. Environmental control . . . . .	8
1.2.5. Repeatability and dexterity of microrobots . . . . .	8
1.2.6. Summary . . . . .	8
1.3. Surface forces . . . . .	8
1.3.1. Van der Waals forces . . . . .	9
1.3.1.1. Origins . . . . .	10
1.3.1.2. Intermolecular van der Waals potential . . . . .	11
1.3.1.3. Integration of the intermolecular potential . . . . .	12
1.3.1.4. Hamaker constant . . . . .	14
1.3.1.5. Lifshitz theory . . . . .	14
1.3.1.6. Combination equations . . . . .	16
1.3.1.7. Retardation effects in van der Waals forces . . . . .	16

1.3.1.8. Simplified Derjaguin model . . . . .	17
1.3.1.9. Numerical approach . . . . .	19
1.3.2. Surface tension effects: capillary forces . . . . .	22
1.3.3. Electrostatic forces . . . . .	35
1.3.3.1. Plane-plane and plane-sphere models . . . . .	36
1.3.3.2. Conical model . . . . .	38
1.3.3.3. Asymptotic model . . . . .	38
1.3.3.4. Inclined conical model . . . . .	39
1.3.3.5. Hyperboloid model . . . . .	40
1.4. Contact forces . . . . .	40
1.4.1. Introduction to the thermodynamics of surfaces . . . . .	40
1.4.2. Various models . . . . .	42
1.4.2.1. Hertz model . . . . .	42
1.4.2.2. JKR model . . . . .	44
1.4.2.3. DMT model . . . . .	45
1.4.2.4. Dugdale model . . . . .	45
1.4.3. Transition between surface energy and the Hamaker constant . . . . .	46
1.5. Experimental analysis of forces for micromanipulation . . . . .	48
1.5.1. The atomic force microscope . . . . .	48
1.5.1.1. Description of an atomic force microscope . . . . .	48
1.5.1.2. Method of measurement . . . . .	50
1.5.1.3. Pull-off forces and van der Waals forces . . . . .	52
1.5.1.4. Electrostatic forces . . . . .	54
1.5.2. Measurement of capillary forces . . . . .	56
1.5.2.1. Description of the force measurement system . . . . .	56
1.5.2.2. Analysis of the measurement of force-distance characteristics . . . . .	57
1.6. Forces in liquid media . . . . .	60
1.6.1. Impact of the liquid medium on surface forces and adhesive forces . . . . .	60
1.6.1.1. Impact of the liquid medium on capillary forces . . . . .	60
1.6.1.2. Impact of liquids on the electrostatic force . . . . .	60
1.6.1.3. Impact of liquid on the pull-off force . . . . .	61
1.6.1.4. Impact of liquid on van der Waals forces . . . . .	61
1.6.1.5. Some measurements in water . . . . .	62
1.6.2. Electric double-layer models . . . . .	62
1.6.2.1. Surface charges in liquid media . . . . .	63
1.6.2.2. Qualitative models of the electric double layer . . . . .	64
1.6.2.3. Stern model . . . . .	64
1.6.2.4. Zeta potential . . . . .	65
1.6.2.5. Poisson-Boltzmann equation . . . . .	66
1.6.3. Sphere-sphere and sphere-plane interactions . . . . .	67
1.6.3.1. LSA method . . . . .	67

1.6.3.2. Derjaguin method . . . . .	68
1.6.3.3. Enhanced formulae . . . . .	69
1.6.3.4. DLVO theory . . . . .	71
1.6.3.5. XDLVO model . . . . .	72
1.6.4. Impact of hydrodynamic effects on immersed manipulation . . . .	74
1.6.4.1. Fluid regime relevant to microrobotics . . . . .	74
1.6.4.2. Flow laws . . . . .	75
1.6.4.3. Applied forces . . . . .	77
1.6.4.4. Impact on the behavior of micro-objects . . . . .	77
1.7. Friction and roughness . . . . .	78
1.7.1. Simplified description of microscopic friction . . . . .	78
1.7.1.1. Admonton's laws . . . . .	78
1.7.1.2. The Bowden and Tabor adhesion model . . . . .	78
1.7.1.3. Single asperity approach . . . . .	80
1.7.1.4. Microscopic approach . . . . .	80
1.7.2. Roughness . . . . .	80
1.7.2.1. Surface profiles: a multiscale problem . . . . .	81
1.7.2.2. Surface profile measurement . . . . .	82
1.7.2.3. Roughness models . . . . .	82
1.7.2.4. Roughness models and fabrication processes . . . . .	84
1.8. Relevant parameters and indicators . . . . .	85
1.8.1. Relevant parameters . . . . .	85
1.8.2. List of constants . . . . .	86
1.8.2.1. Hamaker constants . . . . .	86
1.8.2.2. Surface energy . . . . .	87
1.8.2.3. Contact angle and surface tension . . . . .	87
1.9. Exercises . . . . .	88
1.9.1. Impact of viscous effects on the behavior of micro-objects . . . .	88
1.9.2. Illustration of the impact of capillary forces during micromanipulation in an immersed medium . . . . .	89
1.9.3. Estimating the van der Waals force for an interaction between a cone and a plane using the Derjaguin method . . . . .	90
1.9.4. Analysis of the experimental force curve . . . . .	90
1.9.5. Numerical calculation of the capillary force between two parallel plates . . . . .	91
1.9.6. Calculation of the capillary force by derivation of the interfacial energy . . . . .	92
1.9.6.1. Useful information . . . . .	92
1.9.6.2. Force between a sphere and a plane . . . . .	93
1.9.7. Choice of probe for force measurement . . . . .	94
1.10. List of symbols . . . . .	95

<b>Chapter 2. Actuators for Microrobotics</b> . . . . .	99
Nicolas CHAILLET, Moustapha HAFEZ and Pierre LAMBERT	
2.1. Introduction . . . . .	99
2.2. Principles of motion and guiding . . . . .	100
2.2.1. Motion generation . . . . .	100
2.2.2. From sliding guidance to compliant guidance . . . . .	104
2.3. Classification of actuators . . . . .	111
2.4. Piezoelectric actuators . . . . .	113
2.4.1. Introduction to piezoelectricity . . . . .	113
2.4.2. Principles of piezoelectric materials . . . . .	115
2.4.3. Ferroelectricity in piezoelectric ceramics . . . . .	116
2.4.4. Properties of piezoelectric ceramics . . . . .	117
2.4.4.1. Mechanical deformations . . . . .	117
2.4.4.2. Electrical displacement . . . . .	117
2.4.4.3. Generalization to 3D space . . . . .	118
2.4.5. Multilayer (stack) actuators . . . . .	121
2.4.6. Bimorph (bender) actuators . . . . .	122
2.4.7. Stick-slip actuators . . . . .	125
2.5. Electrostatic actuators . . . . .	126
2.5.1. Principles . . . . .	129
2.5.2. Elementary electrostatic actuator . . . . .	130
2.5.2.1. Vertical actuator with parallel plates . . . . .	130
2.5.2.2. Lateral actuator using parallel plates . . . . .	133
2.5.2.3. Scale effect . . . . .	135
2.5.3. Comb drive . . . . .	137
2.5.4. Scratch-drive actuator . . . . .	138
2.5.5. Conclusion . . . . .	141
2.6. Thermal actuators . . . . .	141
2.6.1. Scale effect . . . . .	141
2.6.2. Actuators based on thermal expansion . . . . .	143
2.6.2.1. Thermal bilayer . . . . .	144
2.6.2.2. Thermal gradient microactuators . . . . .	148
2.6.3. Shape memory alloys . . . . .	151
2.6.3.1. Preamble . . . . .	151
2.6.3.2. Principle . . . . .	151
2.6.3.3. One-way memory effect . . . . .	155
2.6.3.4. Two-way memory effect . . . . .	155
2.6.3.5. Applications in micromanipulation . . . . .	156
2.6.3.6. Other materials . . . . .	159
2.7. Electro-active polymers . . . . .	160
2.7.1. Ionic polymers . . . . .	160
2.7.1.1. IPMC polymers ( <i>ionic polymer metal composites</i> ) . . . . .	160
2.7.1.2. Conductive polymers . . . . .	161

2.7.2. Electrical polymers . . . . .	163
2.7.2.1. Dielectric elastomers . . . . .	163
2.7.2.2. Piezoelectric polymers . . . . .	165
2.8. Magneto-/electrorheological fluids . . . . .	165
2.8.1. Physics of MR fluids . . . . .	166
2.8.2. Example of fluid application: haptic interface for musical keyboards . . . . .	168
2.9. Summary . . . . .	170
2.10. Suppliers of active materials . . . . .	170
2.10.1. Suppliers of piezoelectric materials . . . . .	170
2.10.2. Suppliers of shape memory alloys . . . . .	173
2.10.3. Suppliers of electro-active polymers . . . . .	173
2.10.4. Supplier of MR fluids . . . . .	173
2.10.5. Supplier of magnetostrictive actuators . . . . .	173
2.11. Exercises . . . . .	173
2.11.1. Dimensioning of a four-neck table . . . . .	173
2.11.2. Case study of a multilayer actuator . . . . .	174
2.11.3. Case study of a bimorph actuator . . . . .	175
2.11.4. Motion of a dielectric . . . . .	175
2.11.5. “ <i>xy</i> ” actuator . . . . .	176
2.11.6. Analysis of a thermal bilayer actuator . . . . .	178
2.11.7. Calculation for a simple AMF actuator . . . . .	178

### **Chapter 3. Microhandling and Micromanipulation Strategies . . . . . 179**

Michaël GAUTHIER, Pierre LAMBERT and Stéphane RÉGNIER

3.1. Introduction . . . . .	179
3.2. Contact-free micromanipulation and positioning . . . . .	180
3.2.1. Using optical tweezers . . . . .	180
3.2.2. Using electrostatic forces . . . . .	183
3.2.2.1. Expression for the electrophoretic force . . . . .	184
3.2.2.2. Dielectrophoretic torque . . . . .	185
3.2.2.3. Application of dielectrophoresis in micromanipulation . . . . .	186
3.2.2.4. Particle positioning using electrophoresis . . . . .	188
3.2.2.5. Use of a d.c. electric field . . . . .	188
3.2.3. Using magnetic forces . . . . .	189
3.2.4. Acoustic levitation . . . . .	191
3.3. Contact-based micromanipulation and positioning . . . . .	197
3.3.1. Using grippers with jaws . . . . .	197
3.3.1.1. Monolithic actuator-based microgrippers . . . . .	198
3.3.1.2. Multicomponent microgrippers . . . . .	199
3.3.1.3. Gripper with passive jaws . . . . .	201
3.3.2. Using phase changes . . . . .	203
3.3.3. Vacuum gripping . . . . .	206

3.3.4. Manipulation by adhesion . . . . .	207
3.3.4.1. Description of a manipulation task . . . . .	207
3.3.4.2. Discussion of the pick-up and release phases . . . . .	208
3.3.4.3. Static pick-up and release experiments in dry media . . . . .	211
3.3.5. Capillary gripping . . . . .	212
3.4. Release strategies . . . . .	220
3.4.1. Dynamic release . . . . .	220
3.4.1.1. Bulk pick-up and selective release . . . . .	224
3.4.2. Release of micro-objects through dielectrophoresis . . . . .	226
3.4.3. Rolling . . . . .	227
3.4.3.1. Experimental release using rolling . . . . .	228
3.4.3.2. Precise release by rolling . . . . .	229
3.5. Summary . . . . .	230
3.6. Conclusion . . . . .	234
3.7. Exercises . . . . .	234
3.7.1. Acoustic levitation . . . . .	234
3.7.2. Numerical study of inertial deposition . . . . .	234
3.7.3. Numerical study of rolling . . . . .	236
3.7.4. Establishing a frequency range for the validity of the simplified formula for the dielectrophoretic force . . . . .	238
3.7.5. Determination of the Bode plot of the Clausius-Mosotti equation . . . . .	239
3.7.6. Calculation of the dielectrophoretic force applied to a micro-object . . . . .	239
3.7.7. Behavior of a laser-trapped object . . . . .	241
3.7.8. Simultaneous manipulation of several micro-objects using a single laser . . . . .	242
<b>Chapter 4. Architecture of a Micromanipulation Station . . . . .</b>	<b>243</b>
Joël AGNUS, Mehdi BOUKALLEL, Cédric CLÉVY, Soukalo DEMBÉLÉ and Stéphane RÉGNIER	
4.1. Introduction . . . . .	243
4.2. Kinenatics . . . . .	244
4.2.1. Overview . . . . .	244
4.2.2. Evolution and history . . . . .	245
4.2.3. Range of available architectures . . . . .	246
4.2.3.1. Mobile working post robots . . . . .	247
4.2.3.2. Fixed working post robots . . . . .	250
4.2.4. Current solutions . . . . .	253
4.2.4.1. Commercial systems . . . . .	253
4.2.4.2. Study and development of novel systems . . . . .	254
4.2.4.3. Integration examples . . . . .	256
4.2.4.4. Example: the $\mu$ MAD system . . . . .	257

4.3. Visual perception . . . . .	261
4.3.1. Importance of the image . . . . .	261
4.3.2. Imaging . . . . .	262
4.3.3. Properties . . . . .	263
4.3.4. Modeling and calibration . . . . .	269
4.3.5. Improving the field of view . . . . .	271
4.3.5.1. Physical solutions . . . . .	271
4.3.5.2. Software-based solutions . . . . .	272
4.3.6. Increasing the depth of field . . . . .	276
4.3.7. High-resolution metrology . . . . .	278
4.3.8. Reference control of the image capture system . . . . .	279
4.3.8.1. A simple example: 2D visual servoing . . . . .	281
4.4. Force sensing . . . . .	283
4.4.1. Architecture of force measurement systems . . . . .	285
4.4.1.1. Indirect measurement methods . . . . .	286
4.4.1.2. Direct measurement methods . . . . .	286
4.4.2. Force measurement using sensors integrated into a microgripper . . . . .	287
4.4.2.1. Examples of resistive strain gauges . . . . .	287
4.4.2.2. Examples of capacitive force sensors . . . . .	291
4.5. Introduction to sensor-based linear multivariable control . . . . .	294
4.5.1. Microrobotic servo systems . . . . .	294
4.5.2. Multivariable systems . . . . .	295
4.5.2.1. Differential representation . . . . .	295
4.5.2.2. Transfer matrix representation . . . . .	296
4.5.2.3. State-space model . . . . .	296
4.5.3. Concepts of controllability and observability . . . . .	296
4.5.4. Controllability . . . . .	297
4.5.5. Observability . . . . .	297
4.5.6. Control techniques for multivariable systems . . . . .	297
4.5.6.1. Control decoupling . . . . .	297
4.5.6.2. Optimal linear quadratic control . . . . .	299
4.6. Application to automation and remote operation for micromanipulation tasks . . . . .	300
4.6.1. Force feedback control with one degree of freedom . . . . .	300
4.6.2. Remote micromanipulation with one degree of freedom . . . . .	304
4.6.2.1. Master device: “Brigit” haptic interface . . . . .	304
4.6.2.2. Slave organ: $\mu$ MAD micro-manipulator . . . . .	305
4.6.2.3. Investigation of various couplings . . . . .	306
4.6.2.4. Homothetic coupling . . . . .	307
4.6.2.5. Passive coupling . . . . .	308
4.6.2.6. Relative performance of the two coupling strategies . . . . .	309
4.6.2.7. Industrial haptic interface . . . . .	315