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**INTERPRETATION OF ADSORPTION ISOTHERM HYSTERESIS
FOR AN ACTIVATED CHARCOAL
USING STOCHASTIC PORE NETWORKS**

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13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 words) Water vapor adsorption equilibria on activated carbons typically exhibit hysteresis. The size and shape of the hysteresis loop which separates the adsorption and desorption branches is a strong function of the pore size and interconnectivity of the pore. Neither conventional pore filling models nor statistical thermodynamics approaches provide a means for predicting the extent of hysteresis from only adsorption measurements. This work uses the Kelvin Equation in conjunction with the structural concept of a stochastic network to describe measured water isotherms on BPL carbon.				
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PREFACE

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CONTENTS

	Page
1. INTRODUCTION	7
2. FILLING AND EMPTYING OF A SINGLE PORE	8
3. FILLING AND EMPTYING OF A SIMPLE NETWORK OF PORES	8
4. FITTING A NETWORK TO AN ADSORPTION ISOTHERM	9
5. PREDICTING THE DESORPTION BRANCH OF THE ISOTHERM	10
6. EFFECT OF STRUCTURE RE-ORDERING ON THE DESORPTION BRANCH	11
7. CONCLUSIONS	13
LITERATURE CITED	33
GLOSSARY	35

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure No.

1.	Simple Single Pore Model	15
2.	Pictorialisation of a Simple 4 x 4 Network	16
3.	Water Adsorption/Desorption Isotherms for Network of Fig. 2 ...	17
4.	Pictorialised 20 x 20 Network for Uniform Distribution of Pore Sizes	18
5.	Experimental Adsorption Isotherm Fitted by a Random 20 x 20 Network	19
6.	Numerical Values of 840 Pores in Fitted Random Network (20 x 20)	20
7.	Pictorialisation of the Fitted Random Network	21
8(a).	Number Distribution of Pore Segments	22
8(b).	Volume Distribution of Pore Segments	23
9.	Predicted Desorption Isotherm for Random Network (20 x 20)	24
10.	Comparison of Desorption Isotherms for Random 20 x 20 and 40 x 40 Networks	25
11(a).	Spirally Wound Networks of Pores, Largest Pores on Interior/ Smallest on Exterior	26
11(b).	Spirally Wound Networks of Pores, Smallest Pores on Interior/ Largest on Exterior	27
12.	Predicted Desorption Isotherms for Spiral Winding of Pores	28
13.	Isotherms Predicted Using Patchy Heterogeneity	29
14(a).	Details of Local Reordering with Patchy Heterogeneity, Pores Subjected to Repositioning	30
14(b).	Details of Local Reordering with Patchy Heterogeneity, Pores as Repositioned	31
 Table		
	Pore Emptying Sequence for Simple 4 x 4 Network	32

INTERPRETATION OF ADSORPTION ISOTHERM HYSTERESIS FOR AN ACTIVATED CHARCOAL USING STOCHASTIC PORE NETWORKS

1. INTRODUCTION

Activated carbon is used in countless industrial hygiene and air purification applications. It is important to understand the nature of water adsorption, since in air with non-zero relative humidity, the presence of water inevitably interferes with the concurrent take-up of any toxic or contaminant compounds in the air.

For adsorbents like activated carbon, it is widely recognized that the extent of sorbate take-up is some combination of surface adsorption and capillary condensation. For water adsorption from humid air, experiments show a pronounced hysteresis between the adsorption and desorption branches of the isotherm¹. This hysteresis is suspected to be structurally linked. So far, however, there is no convincing explanation of how the pore space geometry, interior spatial topology and surface texture of an activated carbon can be quantitatively related to adsorption isotherm hysteresis. Grossly simplistic concepts such as the ink bottle explanation², are self-evidently inadequate in representing the seemingly intractable complexities of a porous carbon adsorbent simultaneously exhibiting micro-, meso- and macroporosity.

The concept of random or stochastic networks of simple pores has been available for some time, following the pioneering work by Fatt³. Applications to adsorption using 3-D networks was significantly advanced by Nicholson and Petropoulos⁴. More recently, the crucial impact of the pore size distribution on adsorption isotherm hysteresis has been demonstrated by Thomson and Mann⁵. Also more recently, Petropoulos, et al⁶ have shown how under partially filled conditions a stochastic network exhibits complex interactions of uptake and permeability. More generally, simple stochastic pore networks have been shown to be capable of explaining a wide variety of phenomena in porous materials, including hysteresis in mercury porosimetry^{7,8}, low recovery in water flood oil displacement⁹, catalyst tortuosity under reaction and non-reaction conditions¹⁰, catalyst deactivation by coke laydown^{11,12} and effective diffusivity in Wicke-Kallenbach experiments¹³.

Stochastic pore networks have been devised as a computationally tractable quantitative treatment of the random interconnected pore spaces encountered in typical porous materials. In this work, we demonstrate their application to a specific sample water isotherm in a BPL carbon showing pronounced isotherm hysteresis. The interconnections amongst and between pores of variable sizes seemingly jumbled randomly together, present a simple explanation of the degree of hysteresis observed. Pictorialisations of the deduced networks, albeit only in 2-D and of restricted size amounting to assemblies of pores of the order of thousands,

show how the 'texture' of the pore spaces can be visually presented. It is intended ultimately that stochastic pore networks configured by fractal geometry should provide an SEM image reconstruction basis for pore structure evaluation¹⁴, thereby dispensing with the perpetual necessity to undertake difficult laboratory procedures which in themselves only provide an indirect measure of the detailed morphology of typically highly complex pore spaces.

Activated carbon is used in countless industrial hygiene and air purification applications for removal of organic vapors. In many cases, however, water vapor is present in high concentrations with high adsorption loadings.

2. FILLING AND EMPTYING OF A SINGLE PORE

The process of capillary condensation for an 'idealised' cylindrical pore is shown in Fig. 1. The amount of gas adsorbed in such an idealised geometry can be readily calculated from an understanding of the thickness of the adsorbed layer and the Kelvin Equation. The pressure p at which such a pore will fill with condensed gas is given by:

$$r-t = \frac{-2\sigma V_l \cos \theta}{RT \ln \left(\frac{p}{p_{sat}} \right)} \quad (1)$$

In these circumstances as the pressure of the adsorbing gas is raised from zero to p_{sat} and returned back to zero, there will be a small hysteresis between the adsorption and desorption branches of the isotherm caused by the fact that the pore will empty at a lower pressure since the thickness of the adsorbed layer does not affect the meniscus curvature at the pore emptying pressure⁵. In the event that the thickness t of the adsorbed layer is small relative to the pore radius, any hysteresis effect between adsorption and desorption will be vanishingly small. For porous materials which show a large hysteresis effect, other mechanisms must be sought to explain the widely different paths exhibited by the adsorption and desorption branches of the isotherm.

3. FILLING AND EMPTYING OF A SIMPLE NETWORK OF PORES

Fig. 2 shows a pictorialisation of a simple network of idealised cylindrical pores of size 4×4 . This network contains pores distributed between 0 and 1000 Å and is related to one previously used by Mann and Thomson⁵ to demonstrate how accessibility limitations in a pore network may give pronounced isotherm hysteresis. Using data for water¹ gives the predicted isotherm behaviour depicted in Fig. 3.

The filling of the larger pores is deferred until the dimensionless pressure p/p_{sat} has exceeded 0.8. Thus 95% of the pore volume is filled with condensate as relative pressure increases from 0.86 to 0.89. This corresponds to pores of size 750 to 971 Å.

On reducing the relative pressure from the condition where all the pores are filled, those large pores located on the outside of the network empty at pressures corresponding to their radius. However, there are some 13 pores which are shielded behind smaller pores. They cannot be emptied of condensate until the pressure has fallen sufficiently to empty the shielding pores. This occurs at a relative pressure of 0.55 and produces a sudden reduction in the volume of water adsorbed. Fig. 3 shows a most pronounced hysteresis between the filling and emptying process for this simple network. The full sequence of filling and emptying on a pore by pore basis is shown in Table.

4. FITTING A NETWORK TO AN ADSORPTION ISOTHERM

It is a simple enough matter to construct networks of any size and to compose them with any possible distribution of pore segments. Fig. 4 shows a pictorialised example of a 20 x 20 network which comprises uniformly distributed pores between 10 and 4400 Å with a node spacing of 20,000 Å. In Fig. 4, the pores which obey a uniform distribution have been placed randomly within the network. This means that the size of a given pore is statistically independent of the size of its neighbouring pores. This is termed a stochastic pore network.

The second problem in developing applications of stochastic pore networks is to deduce the statistical distribution of pore segment sizes from a given characterisation method. In this respect, Fig. 5 shows the experimental adsorption/desorption isotherms for a sample of BPL carbon. Fortunately, it is always possible to directly deduce the pore segment distribution for the process of adsorption, since there are no accessibility limitations during capillary filling by condensation. All pores, irrespective of their radius or position in a network, will fill at a relative pressure dictated by the Kelvin Equation (Eq (1)).

A stochastic network is then constructed from the adsorption branch in Fig. 5 by dividing the cumulative volume ordinate into (say) 10 equal volume increments. The first volume increment from 0 to 0.1 must comprise pores between zero and 156 Å in diameter, since the relative pressure abscissa of 0.48 corresponds to the upper limit of pore size in this incremental volume range. Pore segments are then assumed to be uniformly distributed in this range. The second volume increment (between 0.1 and 0.2) then extends to a relative pressure of 0.54 which must correspond to pores with radii between 156 Å and 185 Å. This argument is applied

to each volume increment in turn up to a cumulative volume of 1.0 which obviously corresponds to a complete filling of the network.

The result of this procedure is to provide relative numbers of pores obeying a uniform distribution in each of the ten pore radii ranges. The actual number of pores to be allocated in each of these size ranges is then determined by the size of network to be constructed. The overall numbers of pores have to be coincident with the $2N(N+1)$ pores that form an $N \times N$ stochastic network of pores.

Networks of size 20×20 form convenient visualisations in 2-D on a PC screen, thereby enabling an image based assessment of the character of the stochastic network. The 20×20 network has 840 pores in total. The fitting to the experimental water isotherm in Fig. 5 by the above procedures gives the result depicted in Fig. 6 which shows the 840 pores sizes individually as placed randomly in the network. Fig. 7 then shows a pictorialisation of the network of Fig. 6. The corresponding number distribution and volume distribution histograms are presented in Figs. 8(a) and 8(b) respectively. The juxtaposition of the two figures is striking, since it is immediately evident that the majority of the pore volume is contained in just a few large pores. In fact of the total 840 pores, the five largest pores have radii of 1795, 564, 560, 556, and 542, which account for some 14% of the total network volume. In contrast, 90% by number of the pores have sizes less than 300 Å. It is not immediately obvious, but the accessibility of the few large pores is controlled by the preponderance of much smaller pores. It is inevitable that a large proportion of the larger pores will be hidden amongst smaller ones and this could be expected to lead to a pronounced hysteresis effect.

5. PREDICTING THE DESORPTION BRANCH OF THE ISOTHERM

Once the network in Fig. 6 has been completely filled by condensate, the emptying process, on reduction of the water pressure, will initiate from the largest pore on the exterior. This is of size 541 Å located at row 32 and column 21. No further emptying occurs because the neighbour pores are of sizes 221, 211 and 26 Å. This single emptying step takes place at a relative pressure of 0.81. The desorption process is followed step by step. A significant hysteresis loop is generated because the largest proportion of the larger pores are shielded amongst smaller pores. The full desorption (or emptying) branch is presented in Fig. 9 for the detailed calculation of the entire 840 pores.

As can be seen from Fig. 9, the non-emptying of large hidden pores initially causes the predicted desorption to lie above the experimental result for random placement of pores. However, at around a relative pressure of 0.55, corresponding to the emptying of pores of radius 189 Å, there occurs a very large emptying of a set of connected pores which causes the desorption branch to fall suddenly below

the experimental result. In qualitative terms, this behaviour is linked to the percolation threshold of those pores lying below the size of 189 Å. The result is that some 70% of the whole network dimensionless volume empties as the relative pressure falls from 0.55 to 0.44. Below this percolation type threshold, there is almost negligible shielding possibility of large pores behind small ones. As a result the desorption branch becomes closely coincident with the adsorption one, so that they are effectively indistinguishable.

If these simulations are now carried out for a network of double the size, i.e. a 40 x 40 network comprised of 3280 pores, there is of course little visually detectable change in the adsorption branch of the isotherm. However, because of the increased potential for shielding of large pores behind smaller ones, the desorption branch is always significantly displaced above that for the smaller 20 x 20 network. As a result, although the hysteresis loop is enlarged, the quality of fit to the experimental result is effectively made worse, especially in the relative pressure range from 0.55 down to 0.44. This comparison for 20 x 20 and 40 x 40 networks is shown in Fig. 10.

6. EFFECT OF STRUCTURE RE-ORDERING ON THE DESORPTION BRANCH

So far, the two networks examined have been entirely randomised, so that the size of a pore at any position is taken to be independent of the size of any neighbouring pores. If some order is to be introduced into the assembly of pores in forming a network, it is first of all quite clear that, irrespective of the nature of re-structuring, the adsorption (or filling) branch will be entirely unaffected. It is however evident that the effects of re-structuring from a random basis will show up in the desorption isotherm.

This can be easily demonstrated with respect to an illustrative extreme of re-ordering whereby the full set of random pores are assembled in rank order and then spirally 'wound' into position in the network. If the spiral rewinding places the largest pore at the centre and the smallest pore at the exterior, the pictorialised 20 x 20 network of Fig. 6 appears as shown in Fig. 11(a). This network, which has pore sizes graded in size from the outside to the centre will not empty of sorbate until the value of p/p_{sat} corresponds to the largest outside perimeter pore. For the set of pores from Fig. 6 this corresponds to a very small pore of radius 29 Å. At this extreme of ordered structure, the desorption branch appears as a step change as shown in Fig. 12. This represents the largest possible hysteresis. In contrast, the counterpart spirally wound network with the smallest pore at the centre and the largest on the exterior gives zero hysteresis, so that the desorption branch is exactly coincident everywhere with the adsorption. This network is pictorialised in Fig. 11(b) for the same 20 x 20 network as in Fig. 11(a) and Fig. 6 and the open

accessible nature of all the pores is immediately obvious.

It is therefore clear that a huge variation of possibilities for the desorption branch exists according to extents of restructuring which lie between complete randomness and the extreme of spiralling size ranked assembly.

Fig. 13 then shows an example of a close match of the experimental desorption branch which has been achieved by a small extent of structural reordering. This reordering has three conceptual components. These can be briefly summarised as (i) a preferred location of some of the largest pores on the exterior surface, (ii) a sub-surface layer comprised of a lower proportion of mid-size range pores and (iii) a small proportion of shielded voids in which some of the largest pores are isolated amongst some of the smallest ones. The structural reordering, which we term a patchy heterogeneity, leaves 95% of the pore network completely random, and requires the adjustment of only some 54 pores out of the total of 840 for a 20 x 20 network.

The full details of the structural re-ordering are presented in Fig. 14 in two parts. Fig. 14(a) shows the original locations of the 54 manipulated pores. The remainder of the pores in the network which are not affected are shown as asterisks. The size of these unaffected pores can be read from Fig. 6. Fig. 14(b) then indicates the nature of the changes made and shows the adjusted pores in their new positions. The three stages of adjustments are then as follows.

Firstly, in order to provide for an increased extent of desorption over the relative pressure range from 1.0 down to 0.7, the small number of pores sized from 541 Å down to 400 Å have been relocated on the network exterior. These 8 pores are indicated by enclosure in a single box in Fig. 14(b). The largest of these pores gives an initial desorption at a relative pressure of 0.82 with the remaining pores emptying down to a relative pressure of 0.75. This improves the initial fit of the isotherm (see Fig. 9 for comparison with the fully random network) which is indicative of an increased probability for larger pores to be located at the network exterior.

Secondly, the subsequent accelerated rate of emptying observed for the random network is avoided by replacing some of the exterior pores of size 390 Å down to 295 Å to more interior positions. These are shown underscored in Fig. 14(b) and amount to just 11 pores. These pores have been switched with 11 pores in the range 165 Å down to 158 Å which have been replaced into the vacated 11 pore exterior portions. These pores which have been moved outward are shown as overscored in Fig. 14(b). This second phase of adjustment amounts to a tendency for the immediately inner layers of pores to be smaller on average than for the whole network. As a result of this adjustment, a steadily progressive desorption is

maintained from a relative pressure of 0.7 down to 0.5.

The third and final phase of heterogeneity involves the requirement to avoid a sudden onset of emptying related to a percolation threshold in the relative pressure range from around 0.5, so that there is still a significant water retention at a relative pressure as low as 0.4. This can be achieved by restricting the emptying of the five largest pores by surrounding them by smaller ones. Just three such "shielded voids" are necessary to achieve this and these are shown in large "boxed" conglomerates of pores in Fig. 14(b). The first to empty would be the largest 1795 Å pore surrounded by pores sized from 126 Å to 123 Å. The second conglomerate of 3 large pores forming a single void empties between 72 Å and 68 Å. The final shielded void with a pore size of 542 Å is shielded by very small pores of size 34 Å to 12 Å which empties at a relative pressure of 0.21. As a result of the creation of these three shielded voids, the final portion of the desorption emptying closely follows the experimental result.

Although the particular quantitative details of this restructuring should not be taken to possess precise significance, the concept of partial restructuring comprising a patchy heterogeneity, as distinct from exact randomness, may well be the appropriate qualitative concept to explain the desorption isotherm which has been experimentally measured. It is then possible that this concept of a patchy heterogeneity is related to the processing procedures which have resulted in the formation of the activated carbon particles. In any event, it is clear that partially ordered/partially random structures have the capability to explain and describe the water isotherm hysteresis encountered in this case.

Finally, for the deduced structure at a 20 x 20 size, it can be seen that the largest pore of size 1795 Å is still filled with water at 1/2 desorption, but empty when 3/4 of the desorption has taken place.

7. CONCLUSIONS

- The concept of a simple 2-D stochastic pore network of cylindrical pore segments can be readily applied to deduce the intrinsic pore segment distribution for a specific sample of a BPL activated charcoal. The deduction of the pore size distribution (psd) is simpler than for mercury porosimetry since in adsorption by capillary condensation, there are no accessibility limitations.
- The extent of hysteresis between adsorption and desorption has been shown to be attributed to the way pore segments are assembled together.
- The most extreme hysteresis between the adsorption and desorption

branches occurs when the pore sizes are spirally allocated into a network with the largest pores on the interior sequenced to the smallest pores on the exterior of the network.

- There is a negligible hysteresis for the reversed spiral assembly which has the largest pores on the outside of the network and the smallest ones at the centre.
- For the BPL studied, random assembly of pores produced only a poor approximation of the experimental hysteresis loop. An exact replication could be achieved by using a simple patchy heterogeneity which required manipulation of only 5% of the pores forming the network. This partial restructuring involved larger pores preferentially on the exterior, an inner layer with a smaller proportion of mid-size pores and a small number of shielded voids.

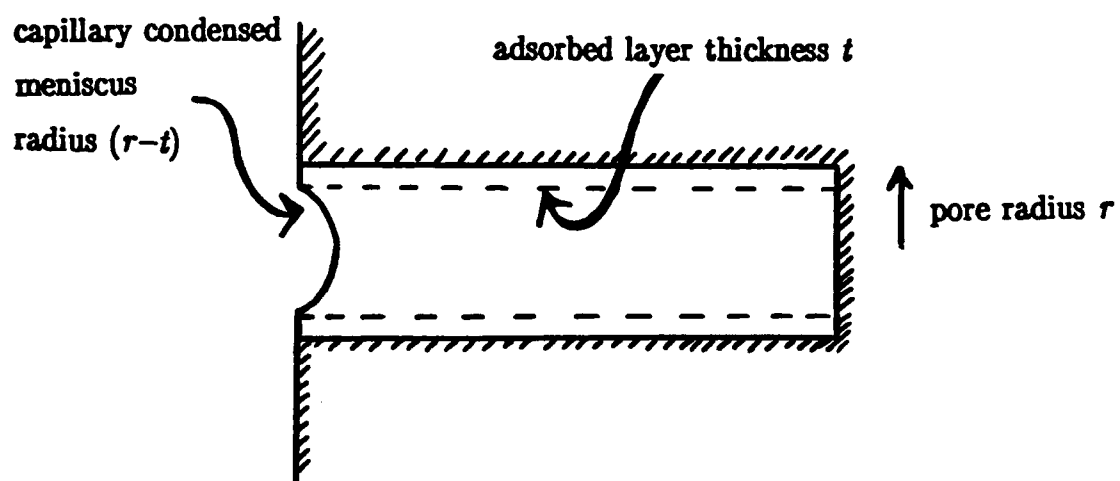


FIG.1 Simple single pore model

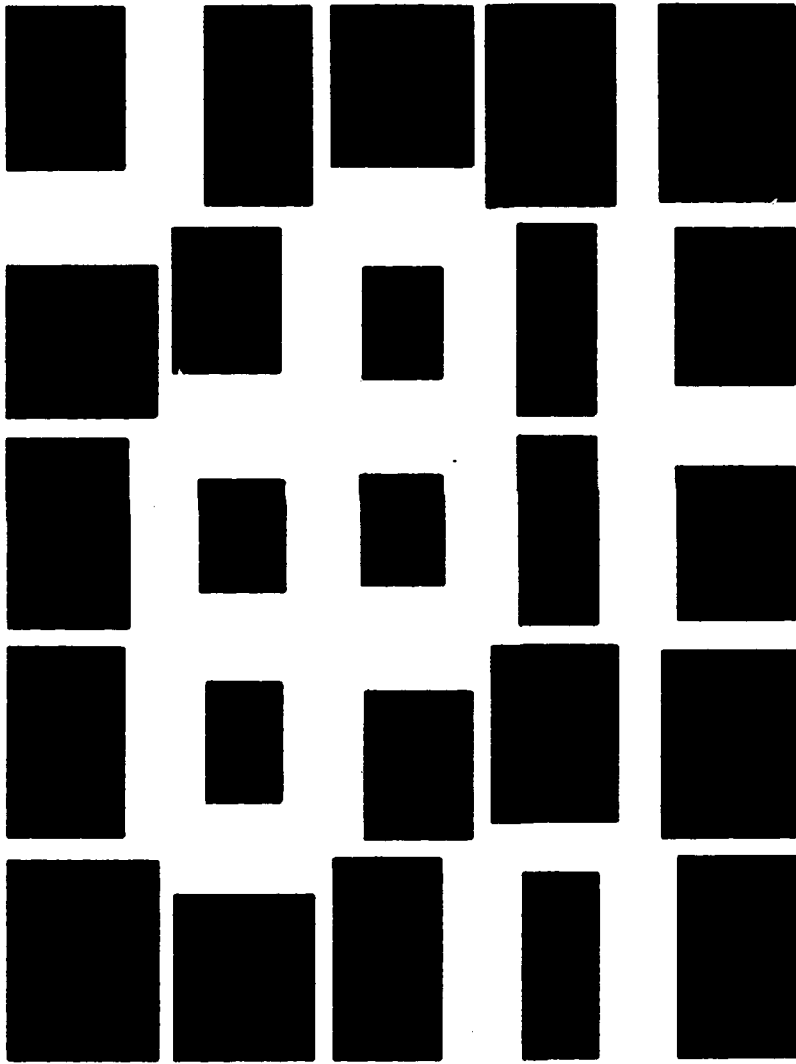


FIG.2 Pictorialisation of a simple 4 x 4 network

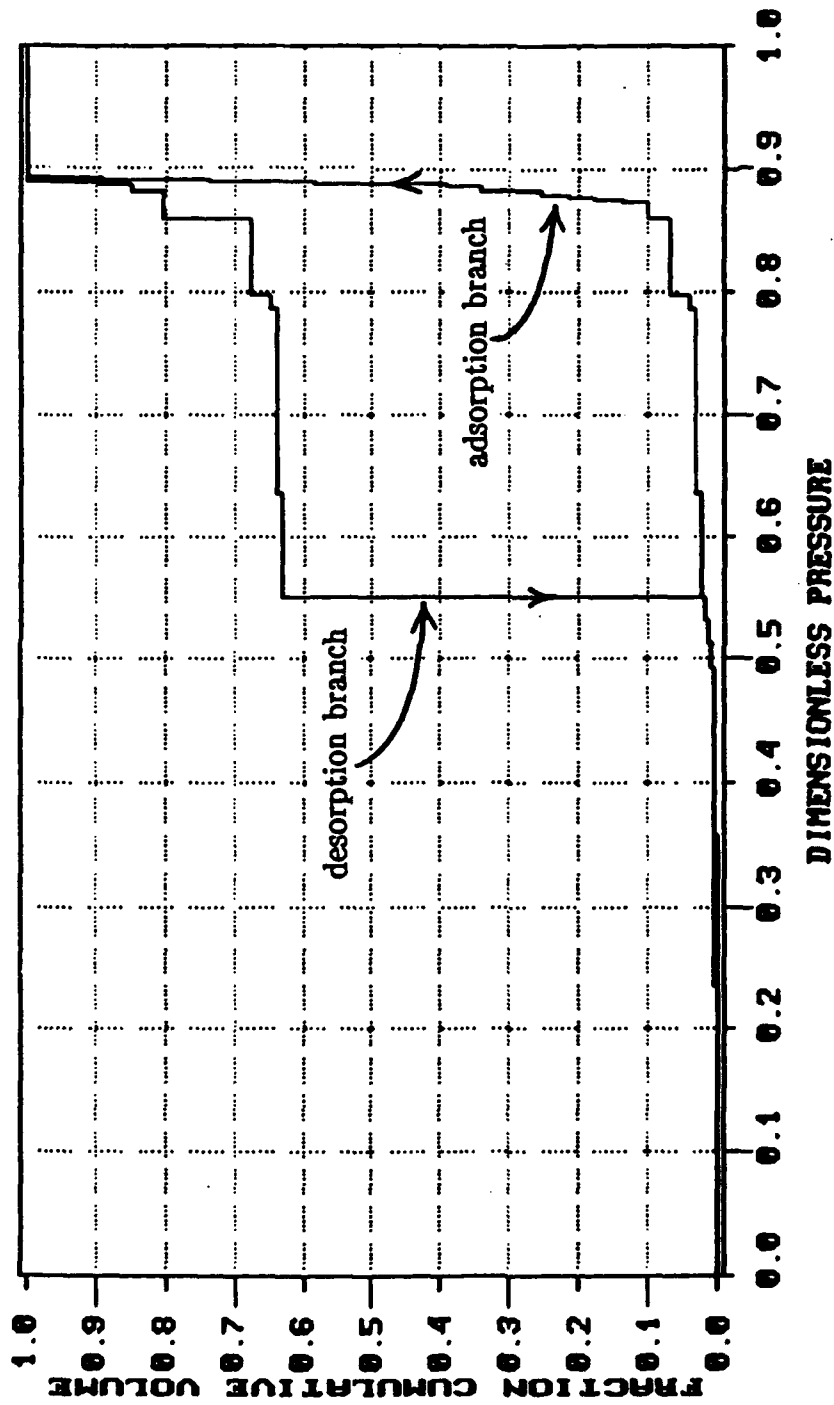


FIG.3 Water adsorption/desorption isotherms for network of Fig.2

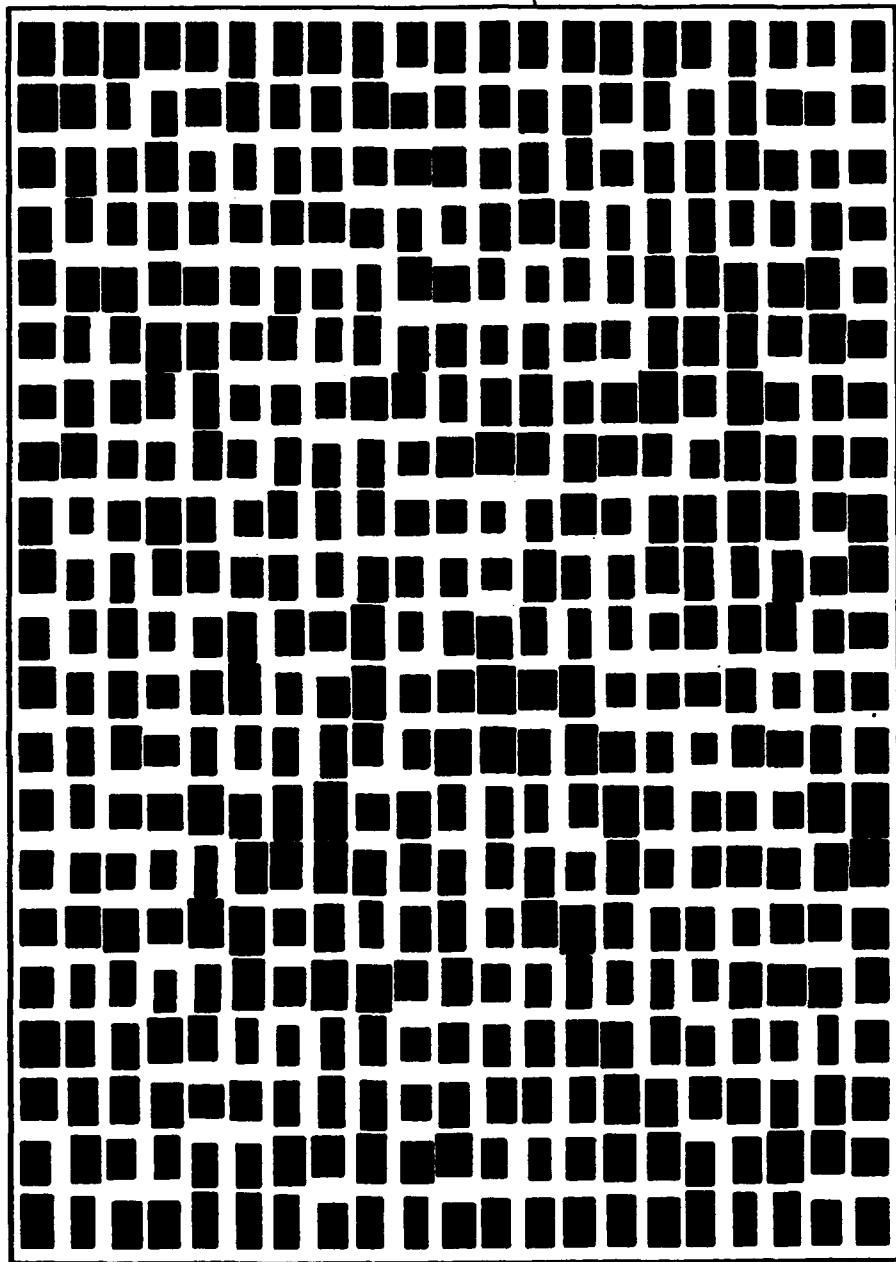


FIG.4 Pictorialised 20 x 20 network for uniform distribution of pore sizes

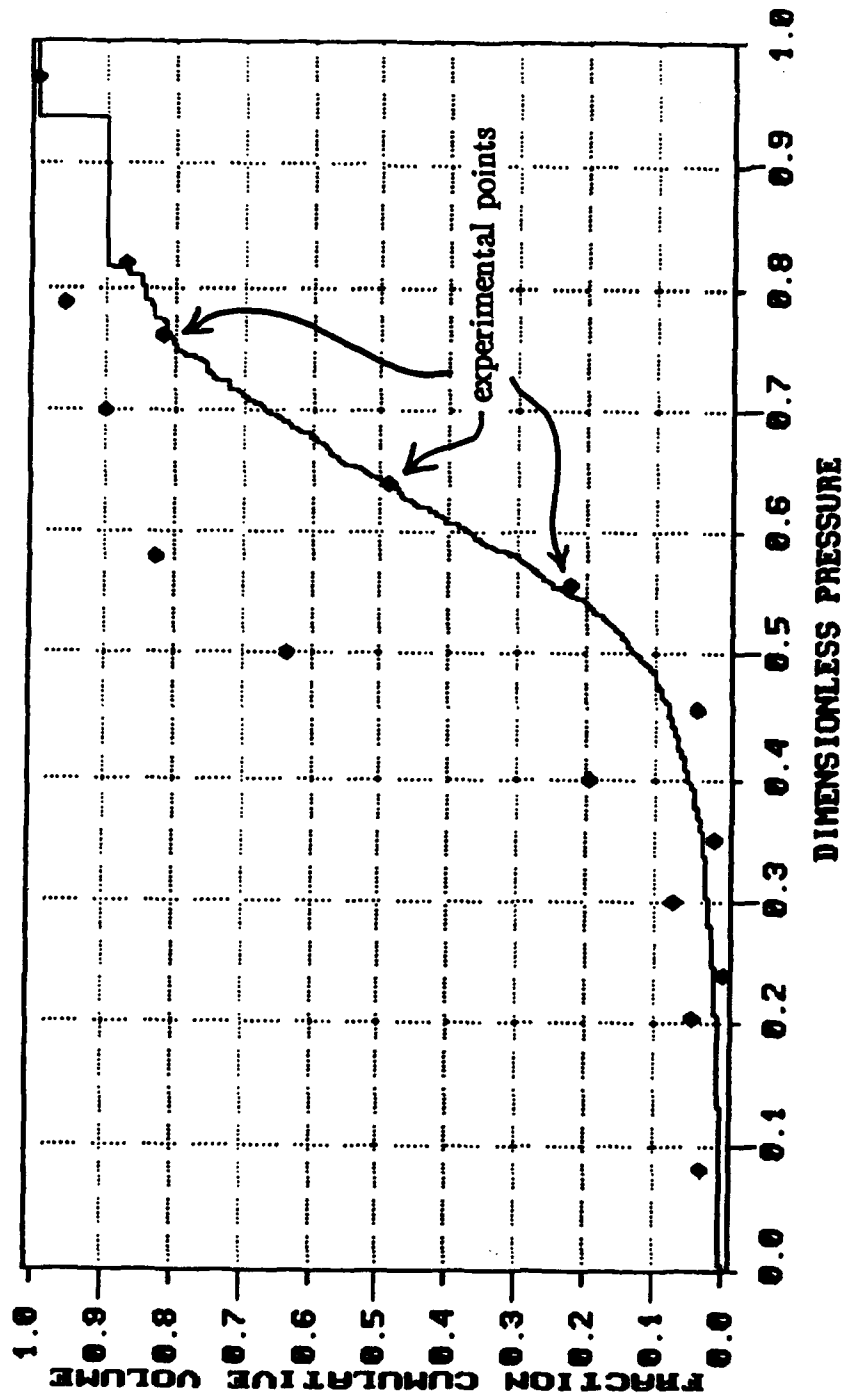


FIG.5 Experimental adsorption isotherm fitted by a random 20 x 20 network

224 260 112 383 157 70 113 69 40 160 108 60 190 61 276 76 317 217 107 189
 332 125 52 292 235 542 175 233 119 115 101 337 275 220 196 65 196 211 193 156 222
 170 34 197 90 150 151 12 46 16 44 99 212 58 254 130 242 232 120 294 303
 211 21 25 100 291 104 217 285 14 100 325 21 114 77 267 383 93 83 170 226 252
 83 64 126 374 24 34 55 15 65 94 72 36 72 205 351 101 124 305 75 243
 173 212 177 305 214 33 4 190 170 230 221 100 59 203 89 32 276 217 202 7 209
 15 154 284 213 77 139 101 107 165 62 176 94 70 71 190 272 79 235 445 166
 391 115 103 100 290 107 93 383 77 104 74 62 177 122 165 174 76 164 131 251 123
 147 177 8 157 212 9 187 232 225 191 12 142 206 144 164 75 237 125 214 73
 227 204 207 144 21 191 200 103 290 287 22 113 39 219 242 140 184 48 118 118 114
 187 127 560 107 93 228 64 110 272 172 37 34 272 100 150 20 36 64 50 126 108
 192 64 170 109 39 104 225 230 22 187 62 12 140 304 135 113 108 148 46 50
 93 113 201 337 123 113 143 36 297 65 175 40 159 31 217 250 313 541 163 116 62
 200 311 26 201 237 162 109 159 300 24 235 234 201 210 153 16 65 171 13 195
 267 239 247 304 59 186 97 255 156 47 192 69 106 251 195 564 226 190 101 62 9
 216 237 123 48 313 85 173 250 479 220 190 16 190 13 110 151 104 211 10 245
 13 28 514 300 286 232 11 55 290 7 183 206 106 74 77 8 395 251 201 20 107
 291 16 130 81 187 201 37 377 331 260 2 1795 213 66 210 181 205 203 175 17
 201 156 175 205 23 109 190 214 172 341 23 33 142 43 231 32 183 195 327 32 196
 200 77 31 173 223 146 179 27 216 300 209 237 104 125 214 227 203 22 192 230
 327 204 70 10 100 195 274 187 210 66 36 171 262 134 166 37 93 108 184 9 52
 178 325 50 69 191 52 327 225 193 275 241 79 96 153 94 91 100 192 154 171
 156 284 339 278 114 241 192 285 116 224 203 189 222 146 174 175 216 556 123 24 72
 90 196 16 139 69 56 234 103 53 267 274 30 123 125 151 74 150 21 10 6
 192 214 199 66 50 101 10 52 250 90 200 183 383 200 105 48 101 79 100 36 138
 241 29 26 50 163 49 66 137 161 255 9 227 62 165 100 196 232 59 71 183
 61 126 165 287 289 46 29 39 20 85 130 138 283 189 66 220 48 132 33 390 146
 350 58 193 7 297 269 69 163 187 86 170 139 178 311 350 32 139 182 136 130
 206 190 119 220 200 141 3 45 149 216 130 165 189 183 214 177 116 37 244 321 50
 139 196 17 112 165 82 196 137 314 120 184 31 176 126 250 153 106 444 300 221
 128 181 192 323 249 174 223 237 141 291 165 192 39 160 150 340 93 215 109 400 7
 213 383 257 51 41 136 306 41 212 247 2 89 152 67 252 159 6 440 67 26
 16 40 160 180 295 300 124 160 62 164 50 61 263 2 240 75 147 59 206 71 231
 107 205 200 216 101 259 33 105 129 181 230 25 185 145 237 59 209 14 24 115
 172 148 196 164 16 211 180 126 46 166 93 92 255 470 21 121 250 68 159 181 98
 37 187 147 38 199 242 112 251 115 225 134 280 351 353 380 100 27 287 5 136
 295 189 84 111 130 79 179 197 211 254 214 128 203 230 165 231 173 243 9 122 84
 228 159 170 63 65 150 236 132 44 153 190 112 90 114 125 159 182 121 92 230
 223 126 3 164 351 134 3 227 20 199 157 286 123 122 114 190 64 206 95 127 254
 101 139 16 330 179 170 56 295 173 10 67 26 216 214 146 132 110 51 100 19

FIG.6 Numerical values of 840 pores in fitted random network (20 x 20)

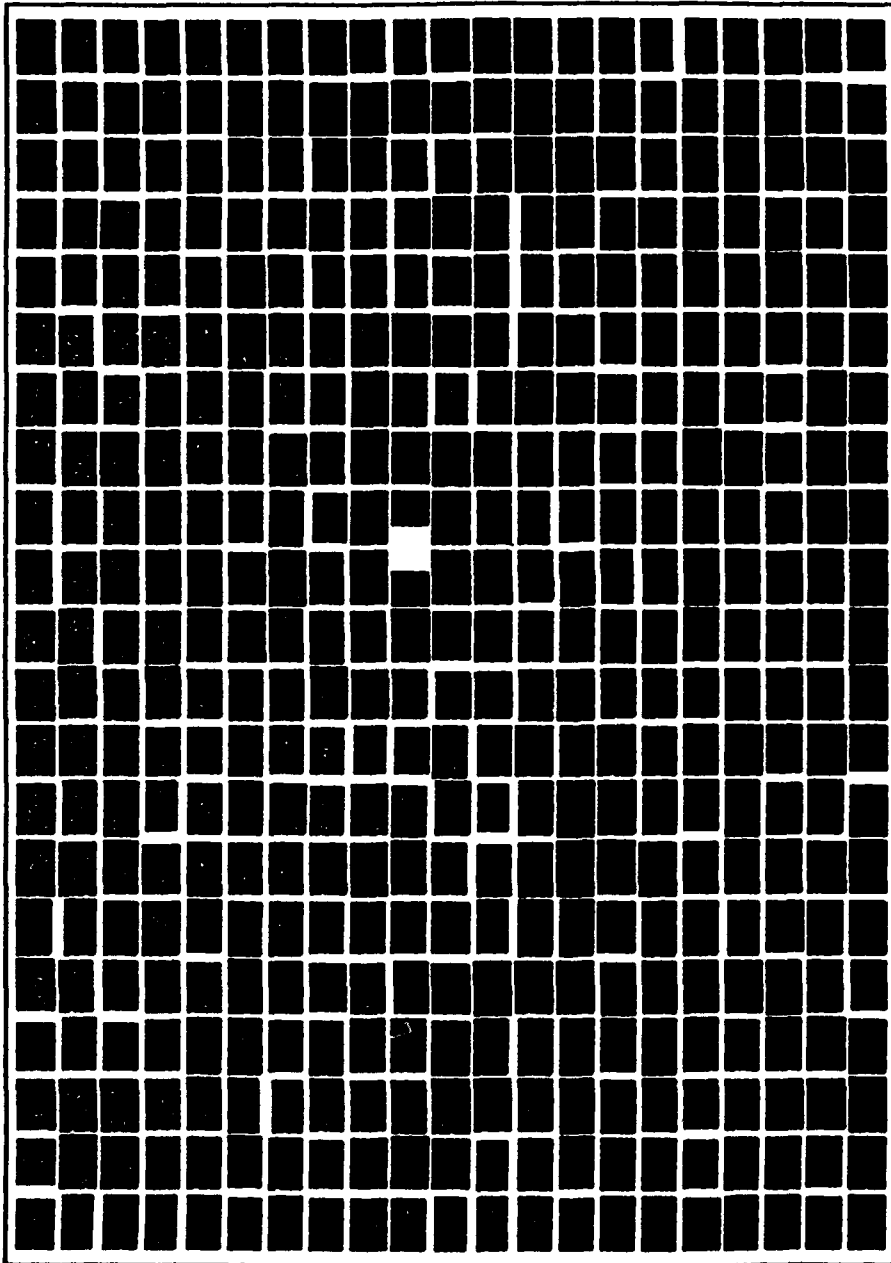


FIG.7 Pictorialisation of the fitted random network

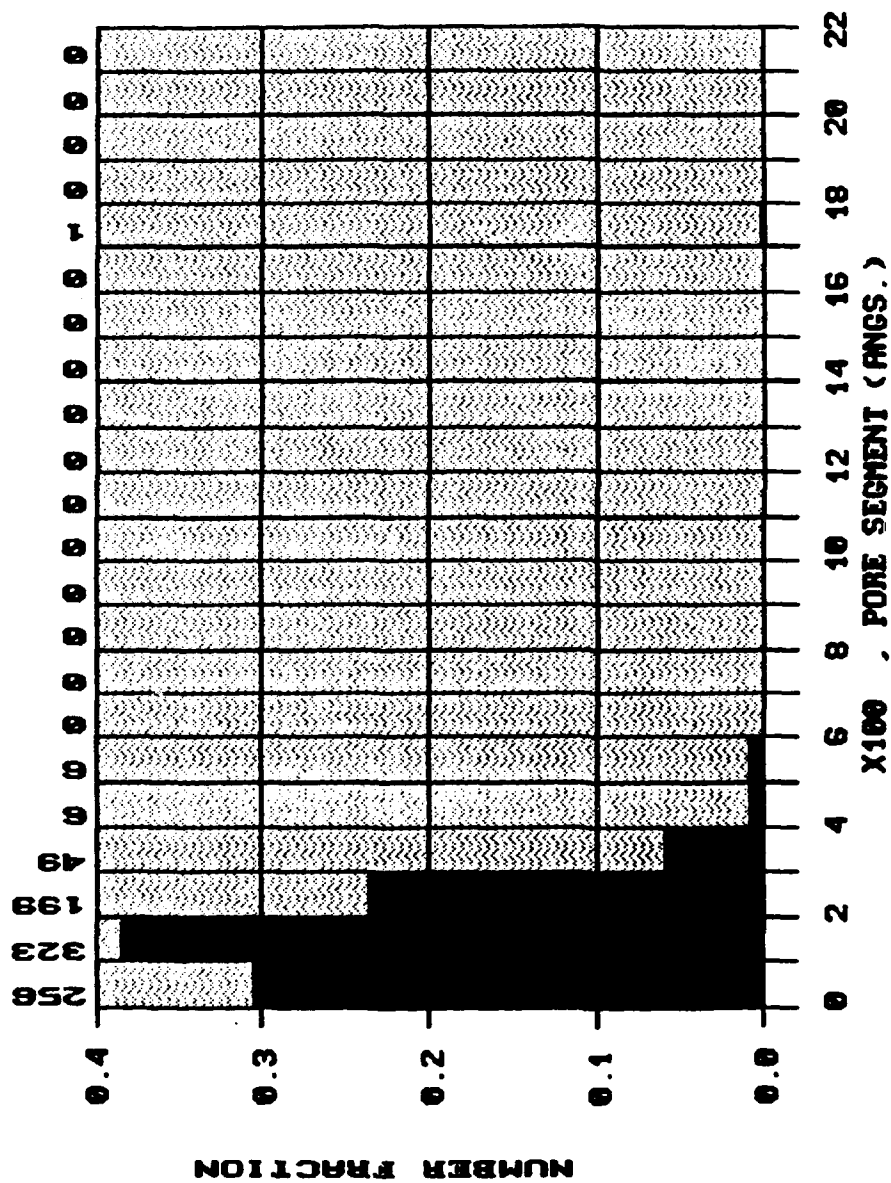


FIG.8(a) Number distribution of pore segments

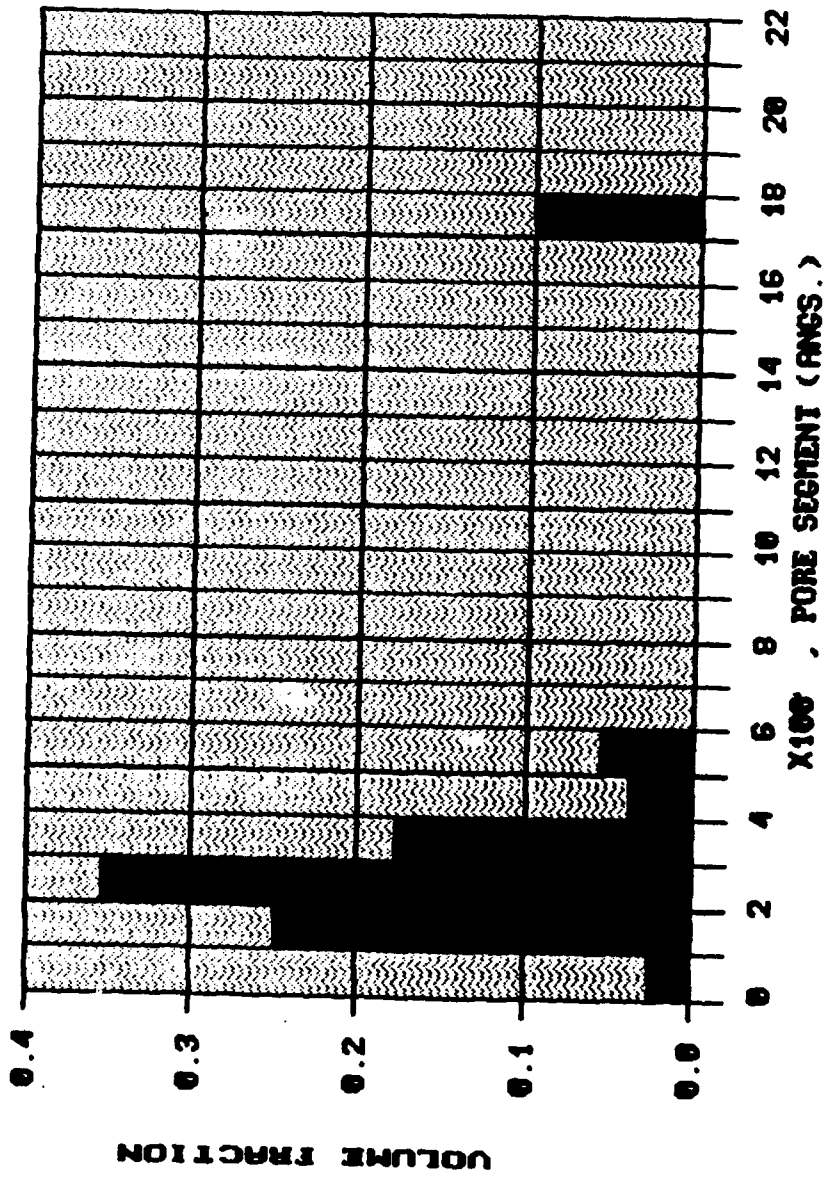


FIG.8(b) Volume distribution of pore segments

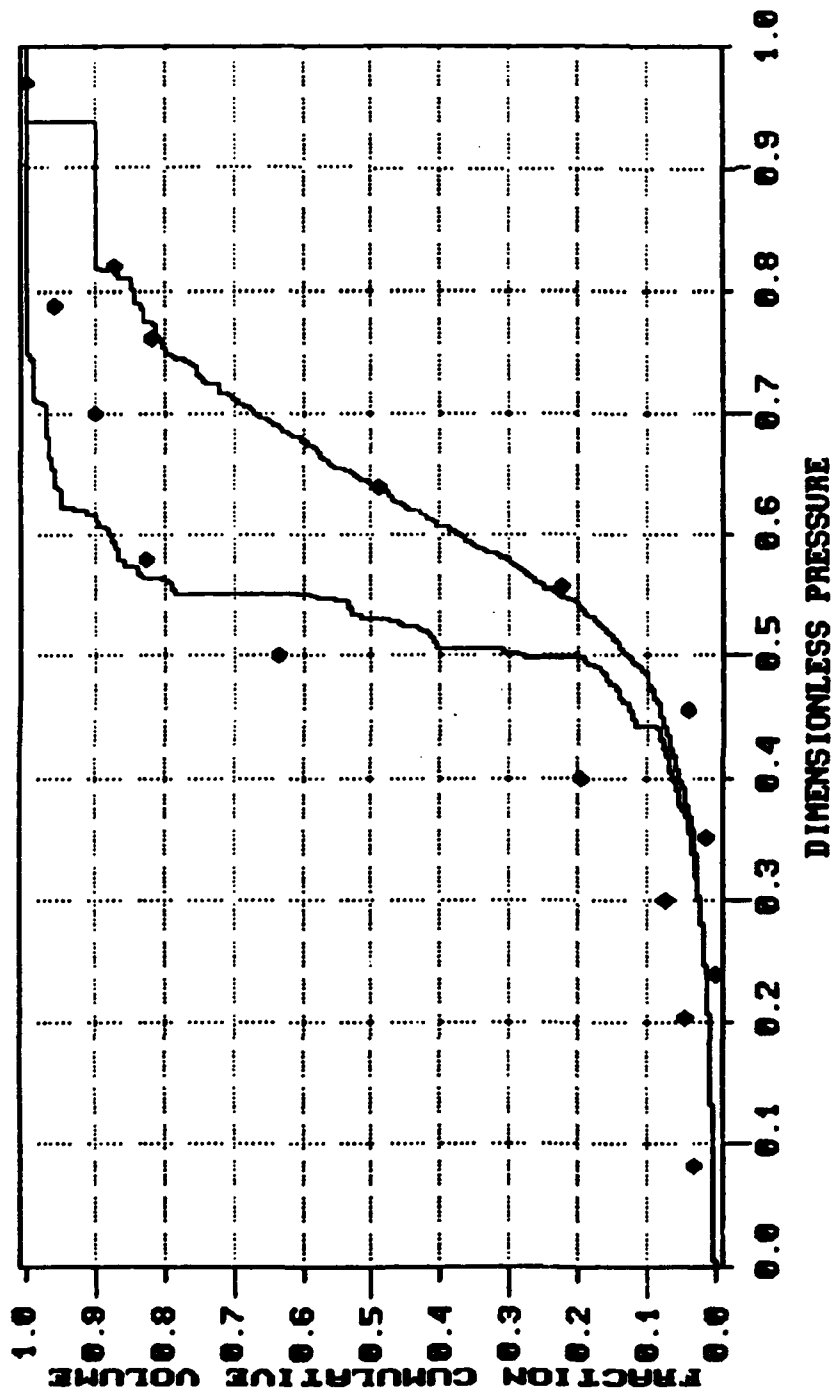


FIG.9 Predicted desorption isotherm for random network (20 x 20)

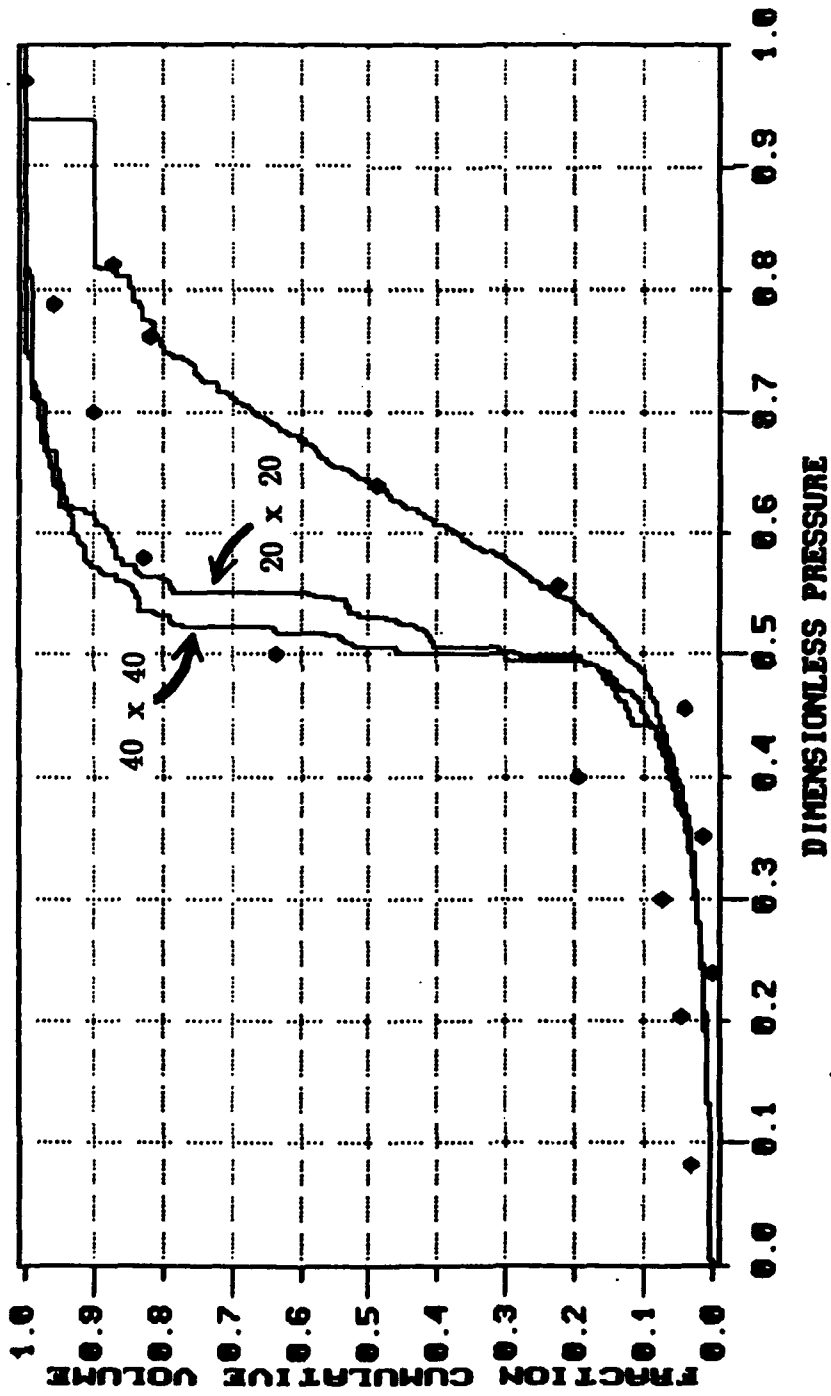


FIG.10 Comparison of desorption isotherms for random 20 x 20 and 40 x 40 networks

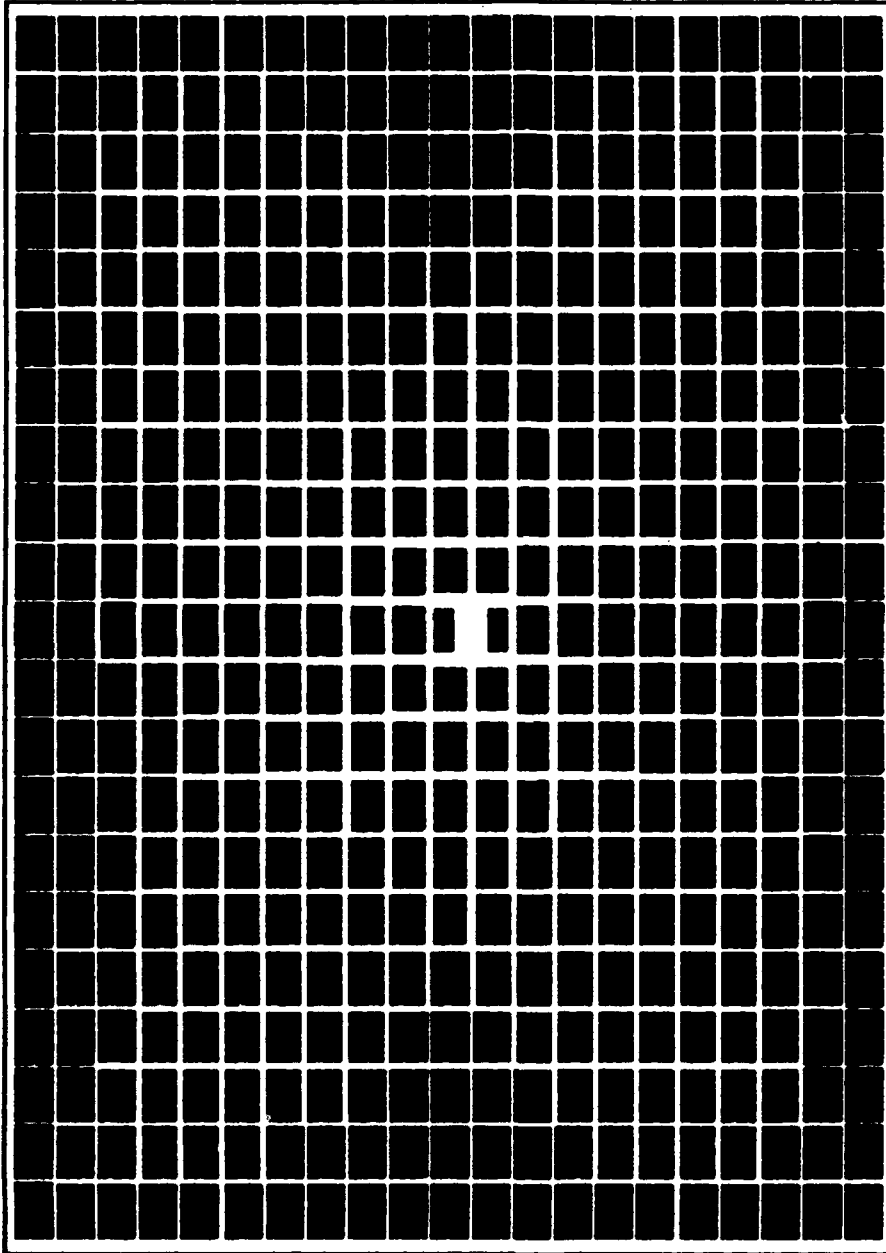


FIG.11a. Spirally wound networks of pores, largest pores on interior/smallest on exterior

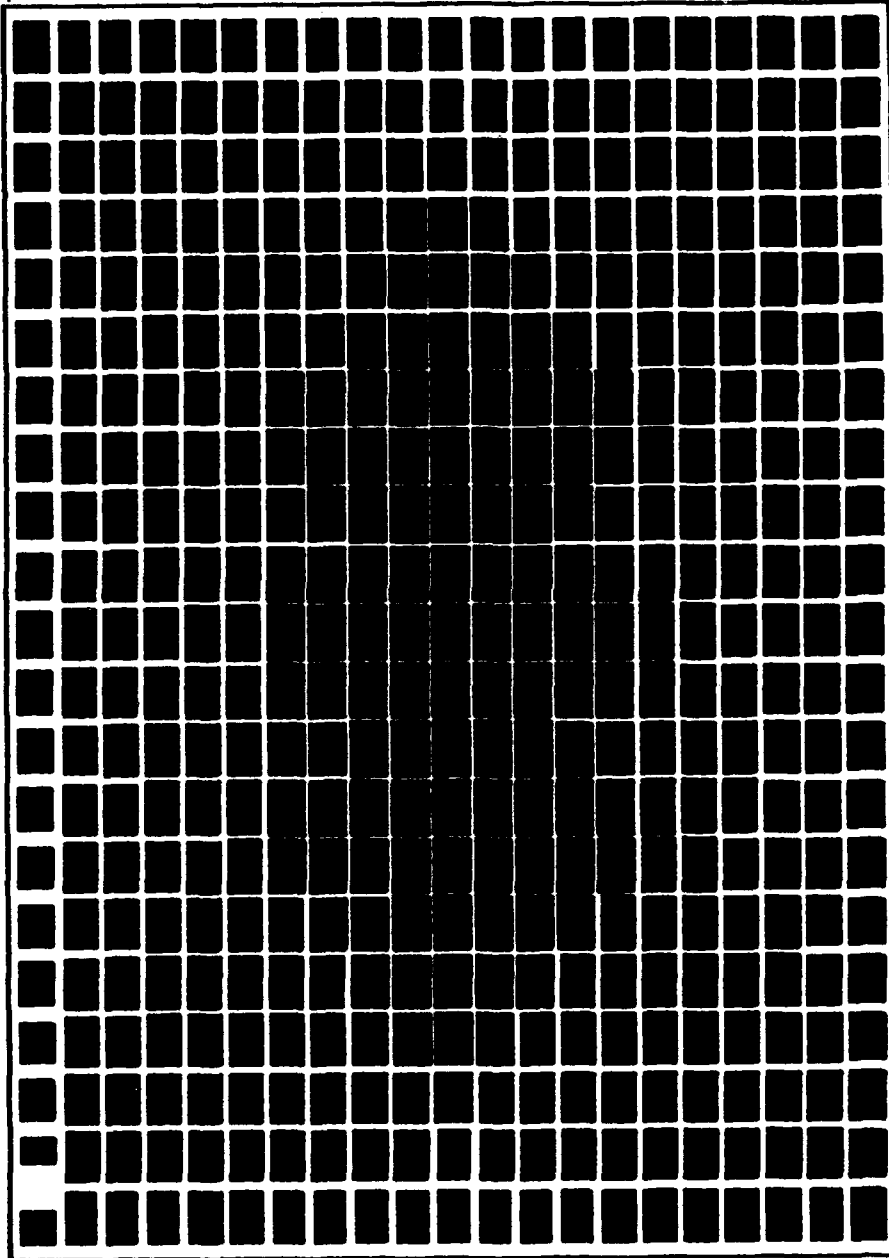


FIG.11b. Spirally wound networks of pores,
smallest pores on interior/largest on exterior

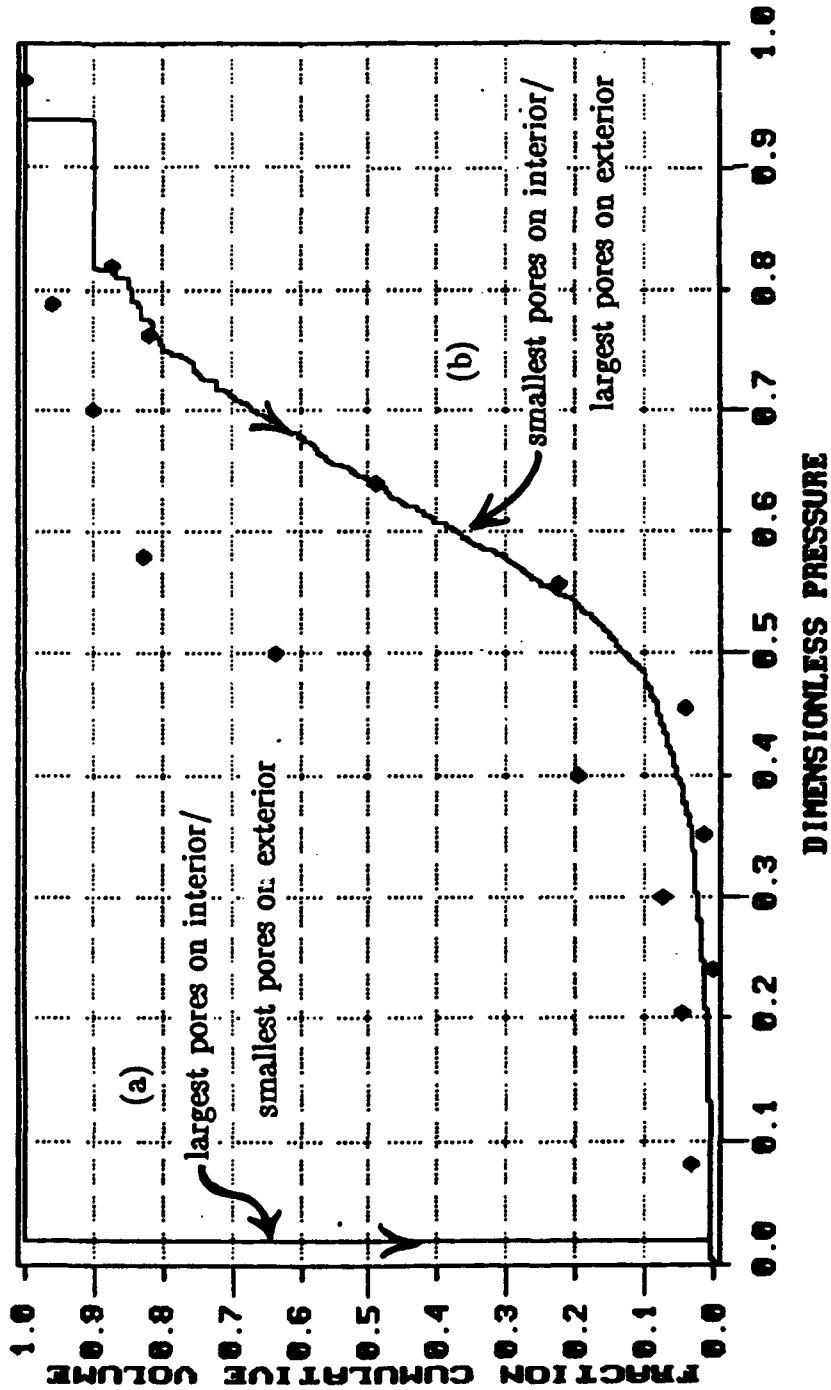


FIG.12 Predicted desorption isotherms for spiral winding of pores

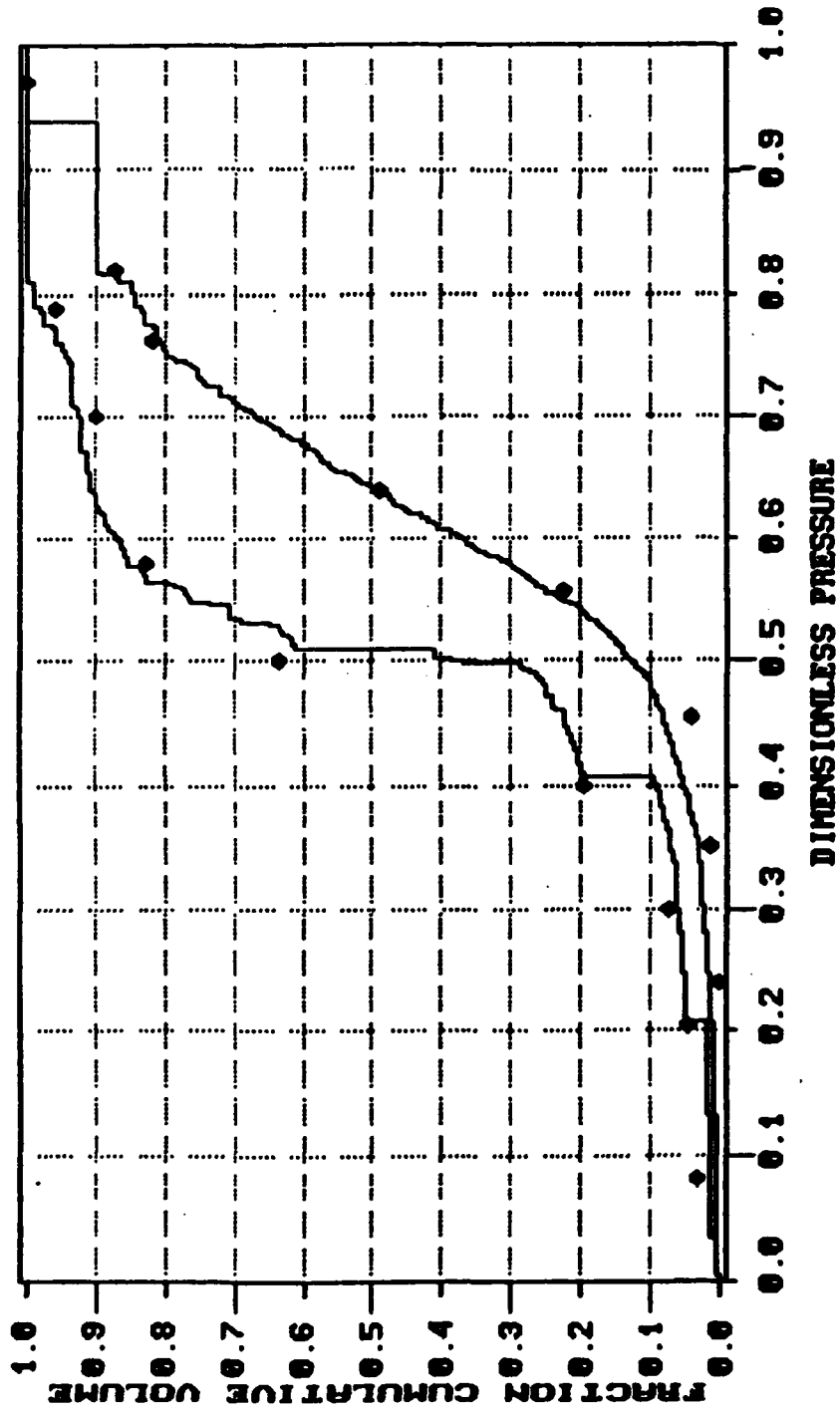


FIG.13 Isotherms predicted using patchy heterogeneity

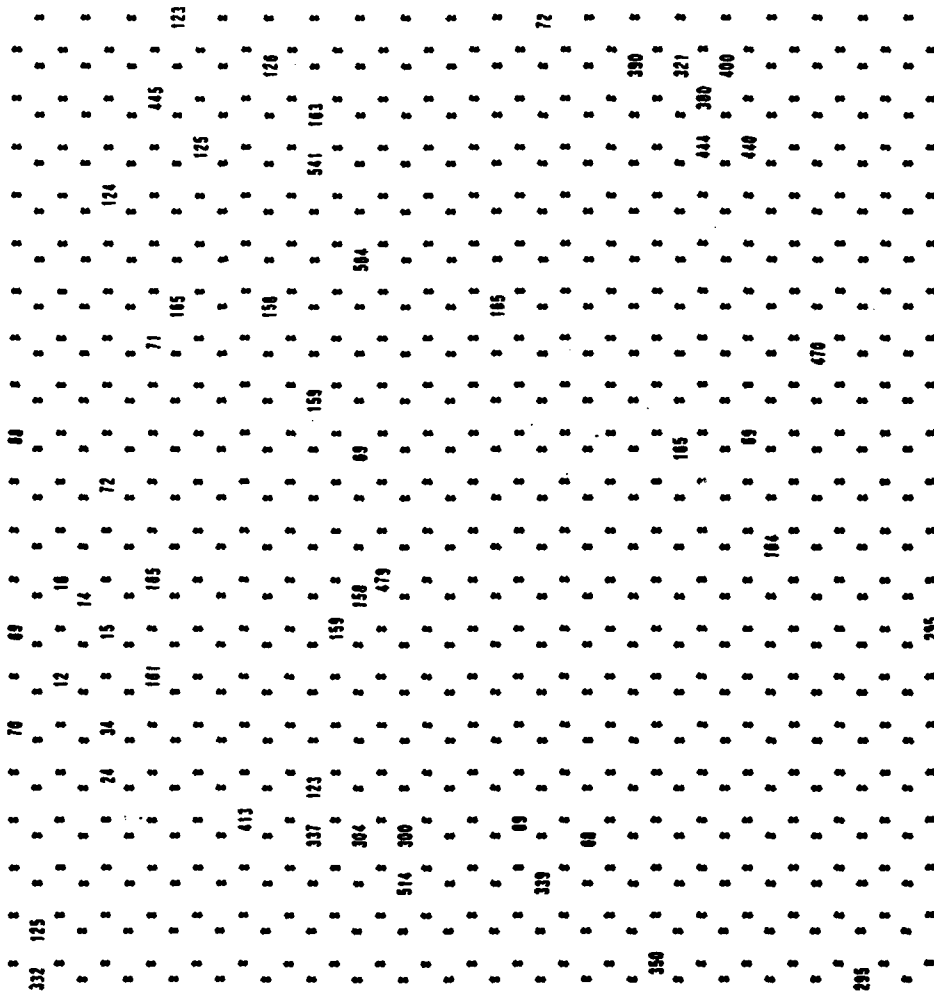


FIG.14a. Details of local reordering with patchy heterogeneity, pores subjected to repositioning

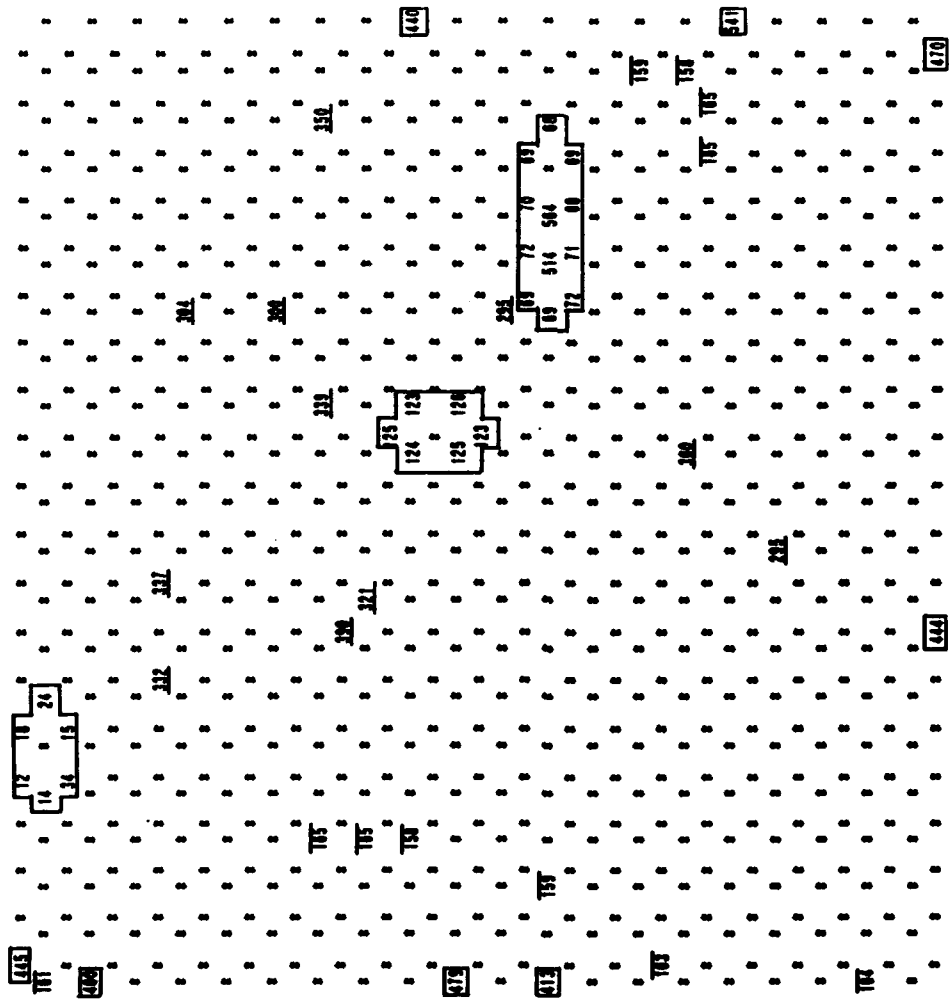


FIG.14b. Details of local reordering with patchy heterogeneity, pores as repositioned

**TABLE PORE EMPTYING SEQUENCE FOR
SIMPLE 4 x 4 NETWORK**

<u>Emptying Range</u>	<u>No of Pores Emptied</u>	<u>Individual Pore Sizes</u>
1000 → 900 Å	4	970, 970, 950, 900
900 → 800 Å	None	—
800 → 700 Å	3	750 → 970, 950
700 → 600 Å	None	—
600 → 500 Å	2	500, 500
500 → 400 Å	1	470
400 → 300 Å	None	—
300 → 200 Å	2	250, 250
200 → 100 Å	28	190, 190, 190 → 950, 930, 990, 880, 950, 1000, 910, 1000, 860, 830, 980, 980, 850 180, 180 170 (x5) 160 (x2) 150 (x2) 110
100 → 0 Å	None	—
Total	40	

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GLOSSARY

p	vapour phase partial pressure of sorbate
P_{psat}	saturation vapour pressure of sorbate
R	gas constant
r	pore radius
T	absolute temperature
t	adsorbed layer thickness
V_L	molar volume of adsorbed phase
σ	surface tension
θ	contact angle