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(54) **SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR IMAGING AND ILLUMINATION FOR CELL CONFLUENCE MEASUREMENT**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

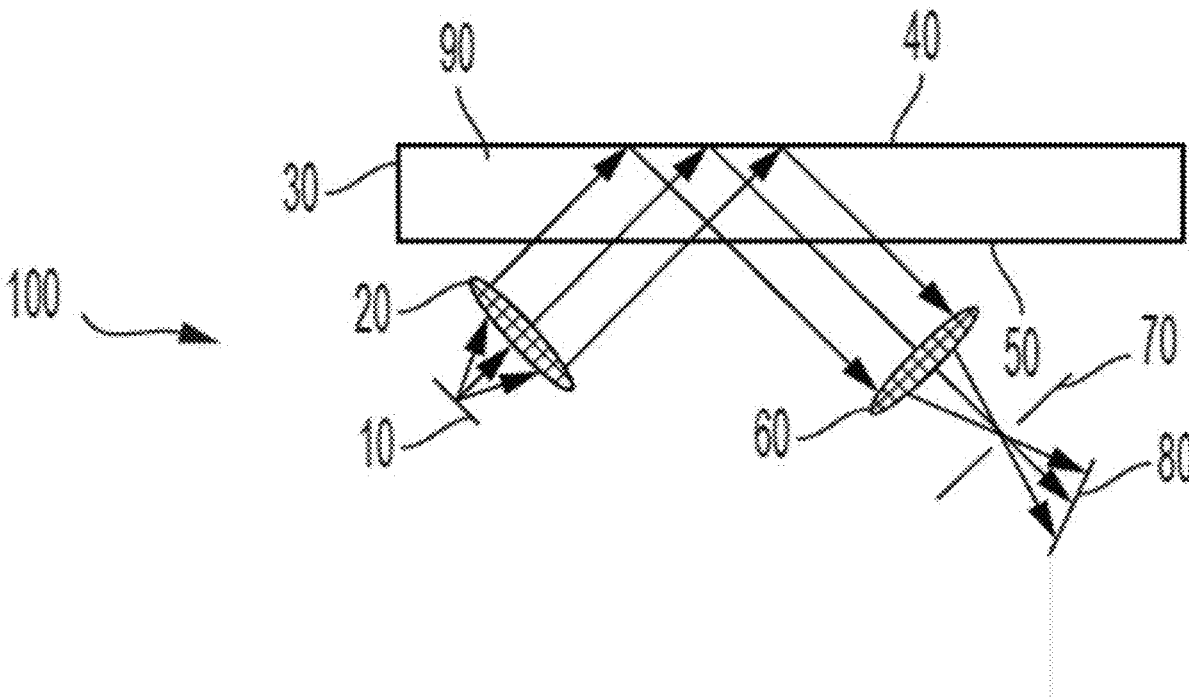
(21) Appl. No.: **16/797,378**

A cell monitoring plate comprises a flat surface on which multiple cell culturing vessels may be stacked. The flats surface has multiple optical imaging systems embedded therein to fully image a cell culture vessels stacked on the plate. Each one of the multiple optical imaging systems provides both illumination and imaging through a single aperture in the surface of the monitoring plate.

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Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. PCT/US2019/063712, filed on Nov. 27, 2019.



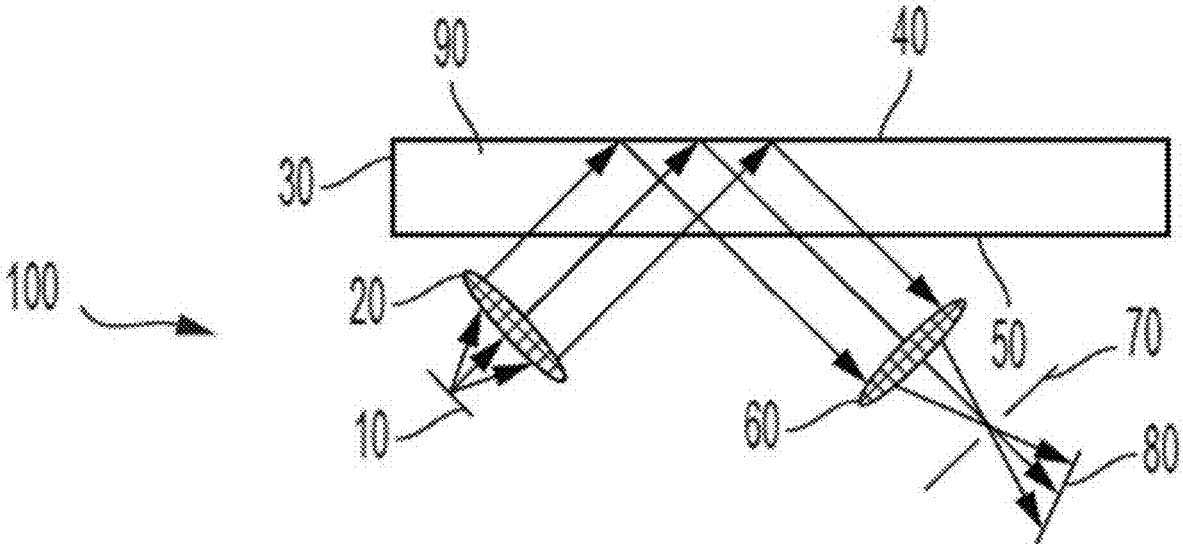


FIG. 1

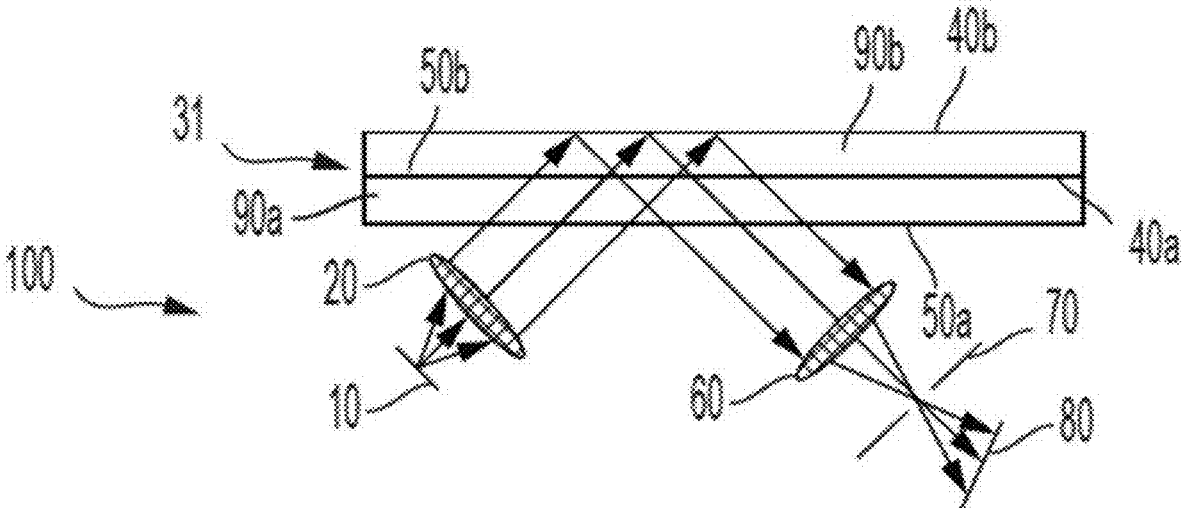
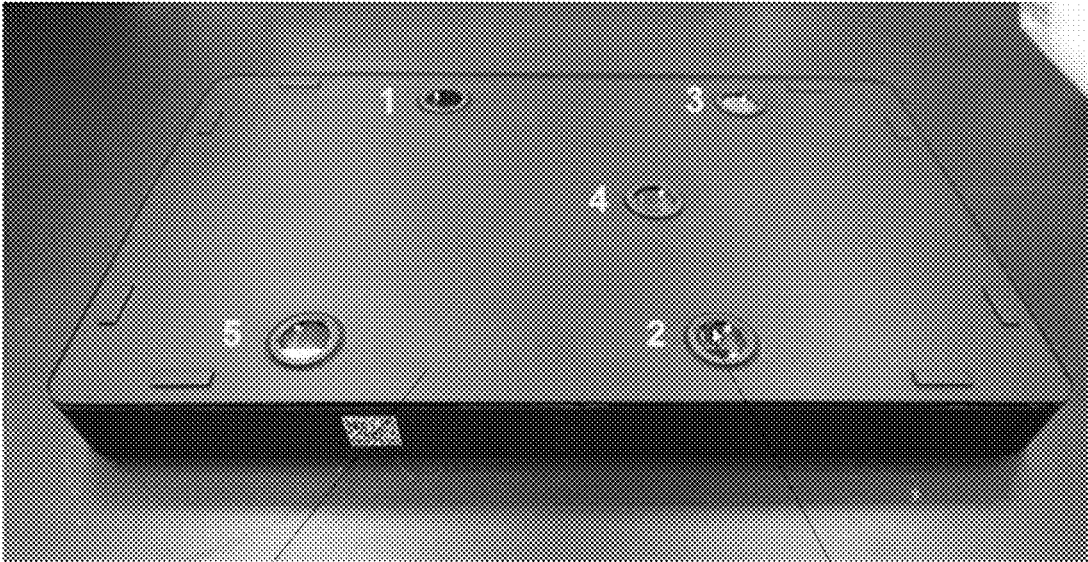


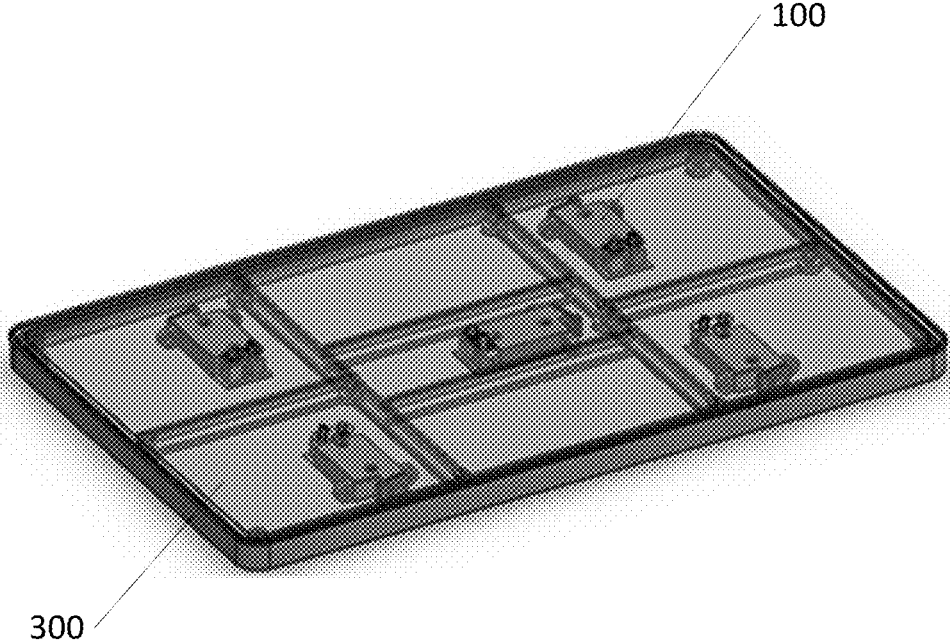
FIG. 2



300

302

FIG. 3



100

300

FIG. 4

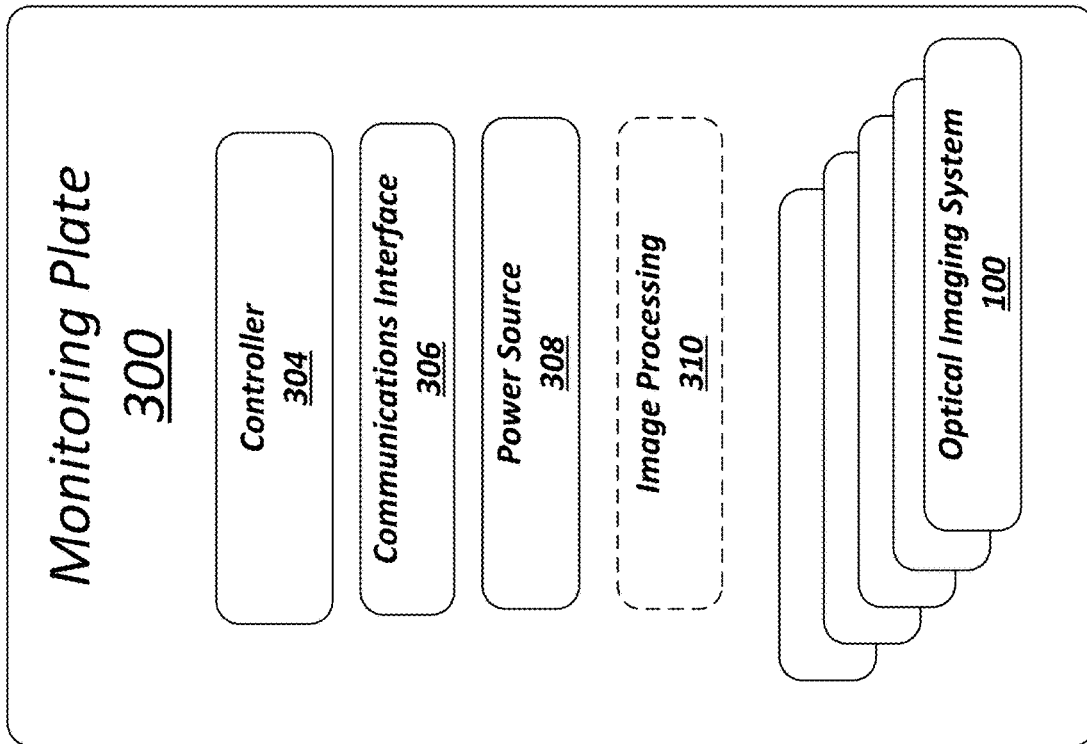


FIG. 5A

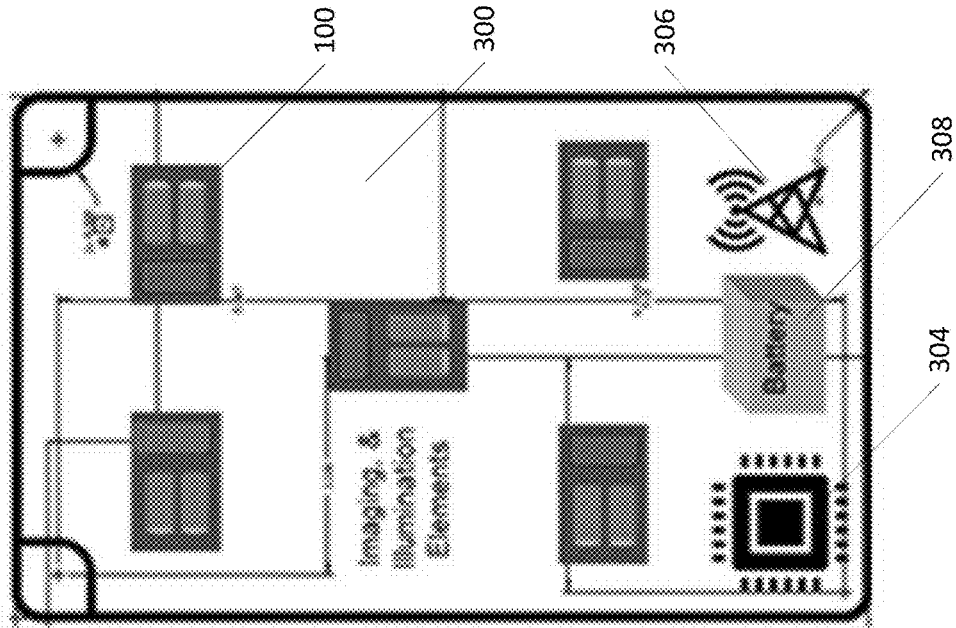


FIG. 5B

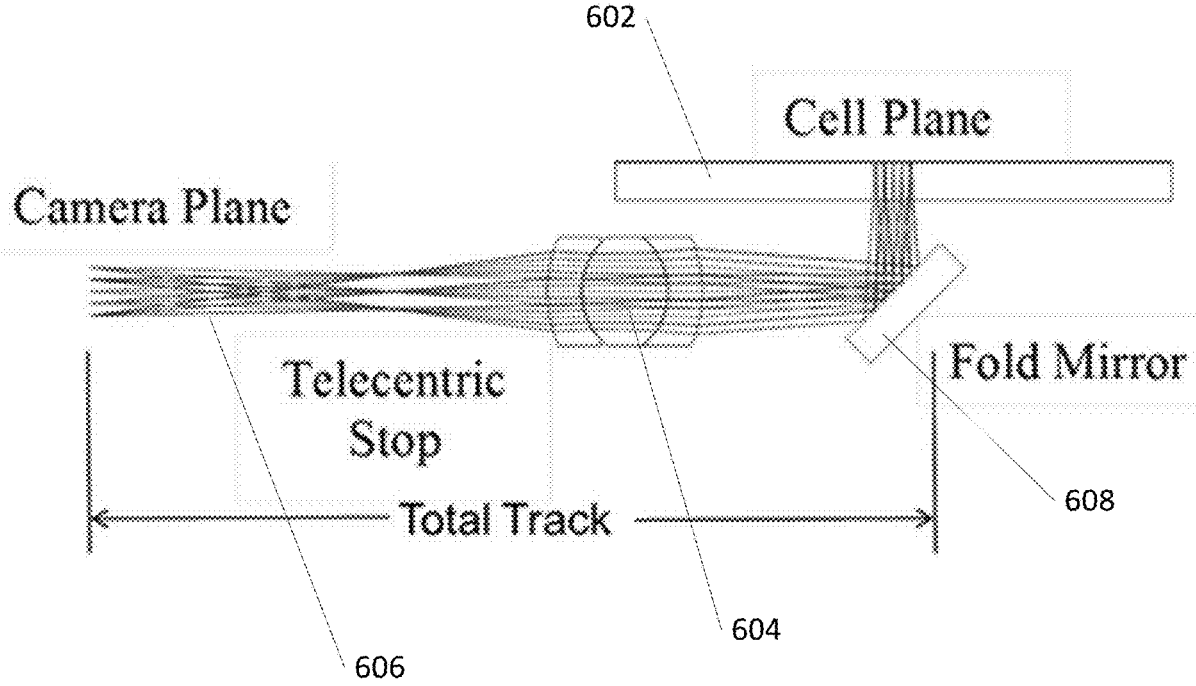


FIG. 6

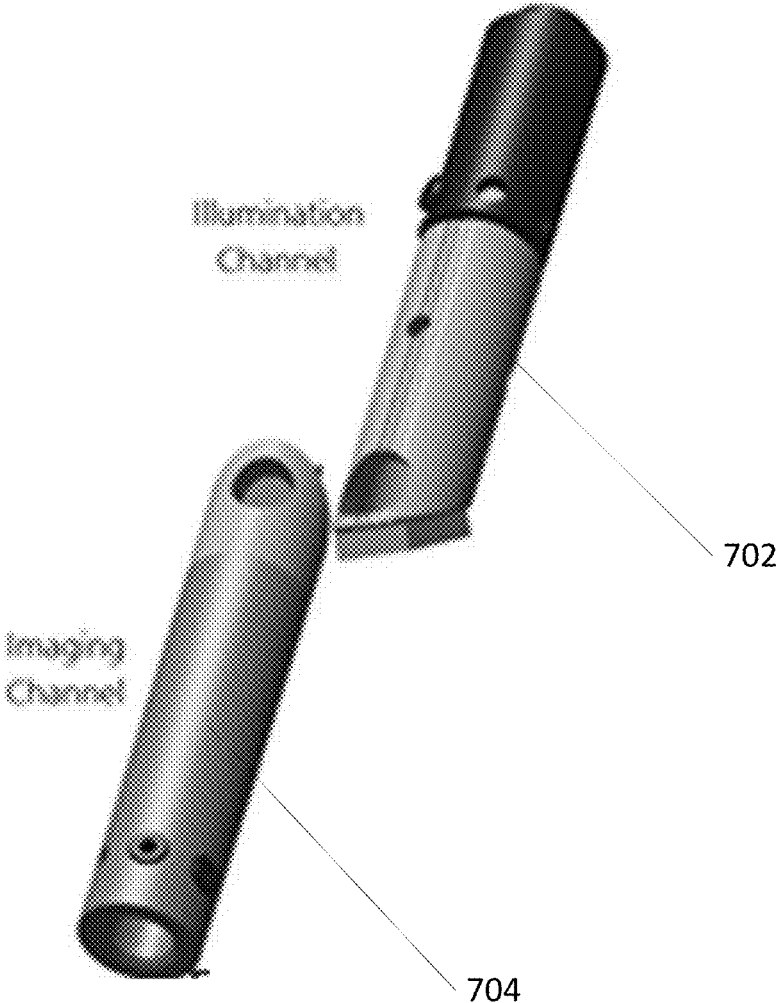


FIG. 7

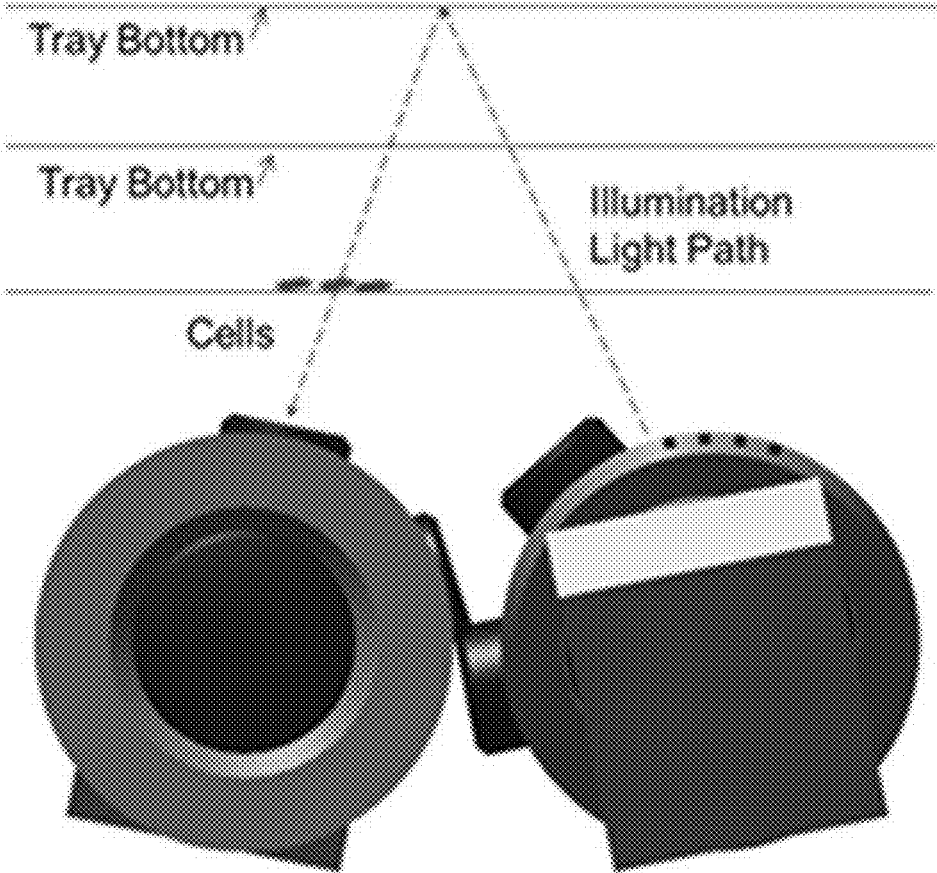


FIG. 8

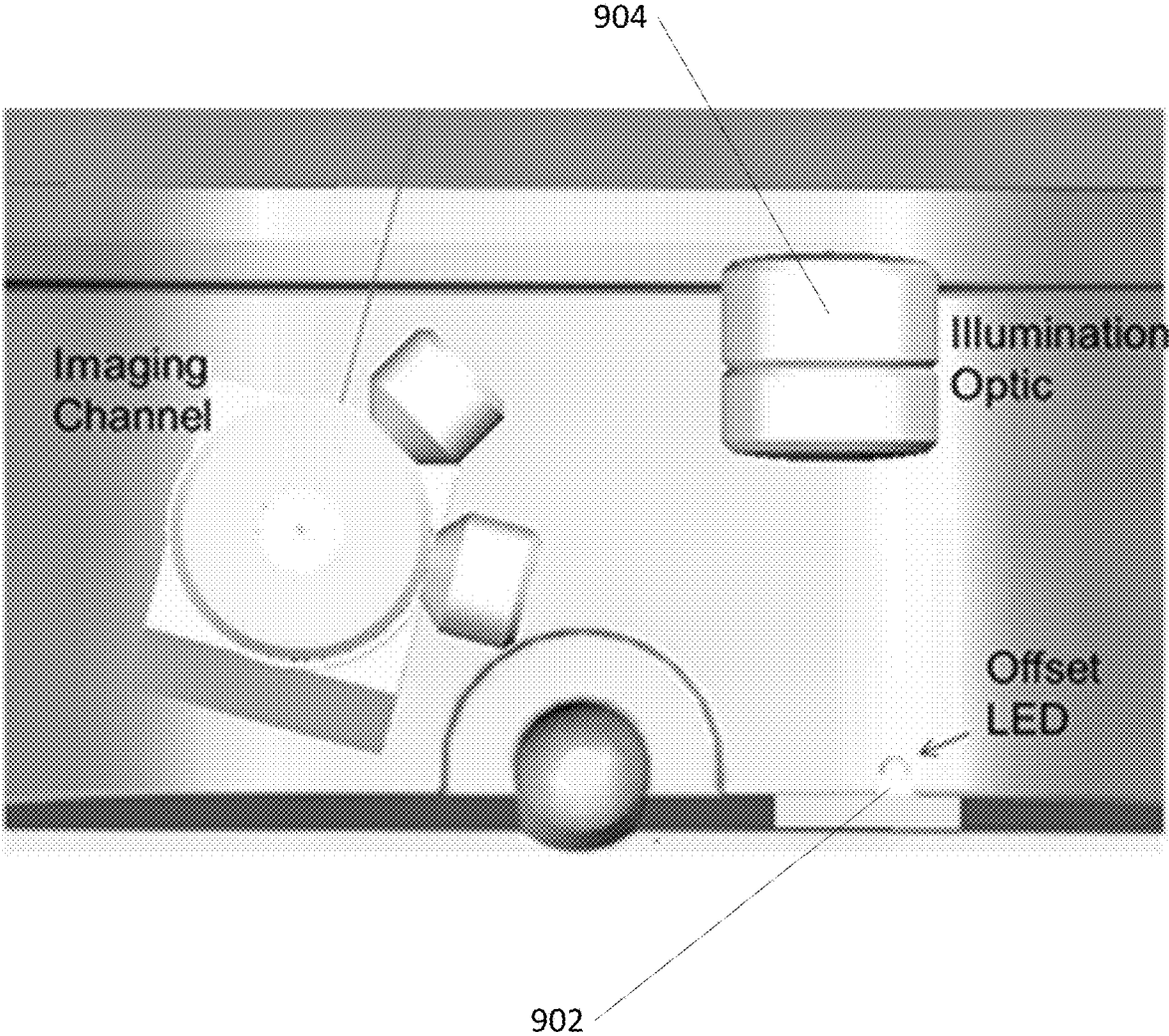


FIG. 9

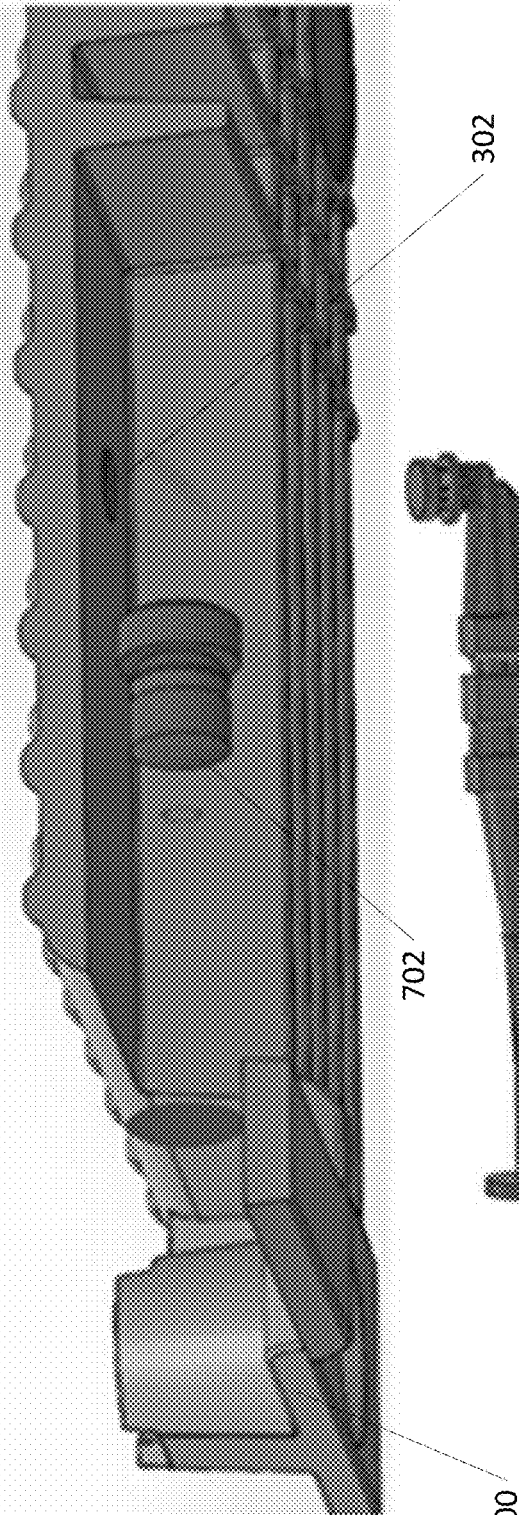


FIG. 10A

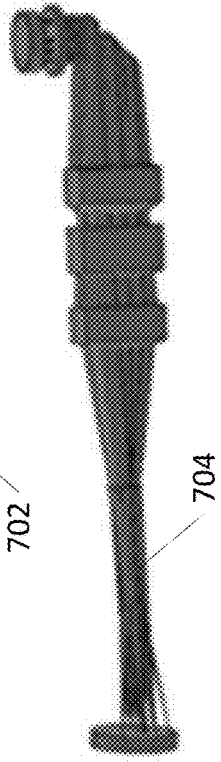


FIG. 10B

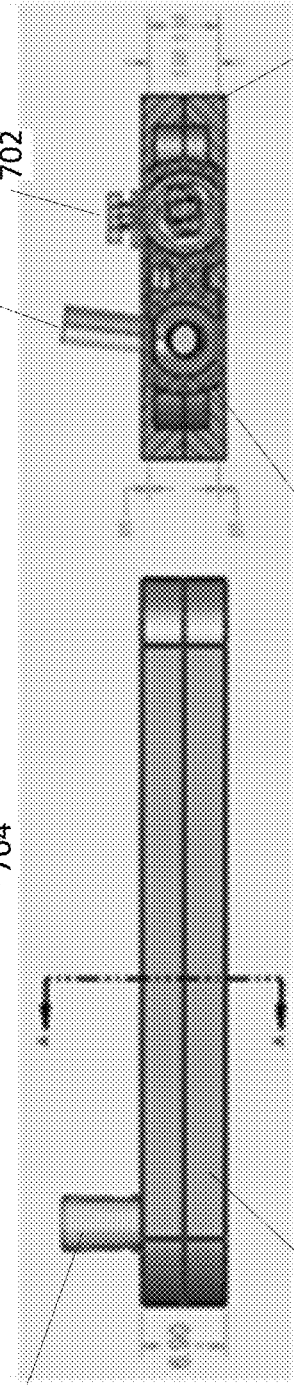


FIG. 10C

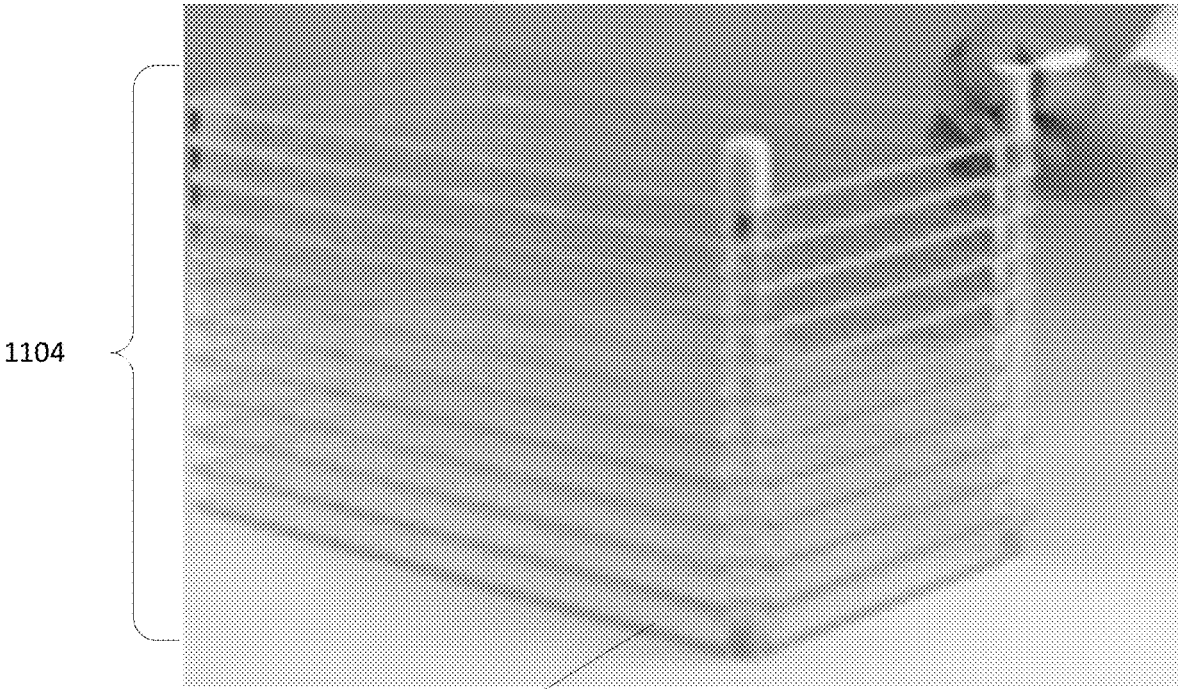


FIG. 11A

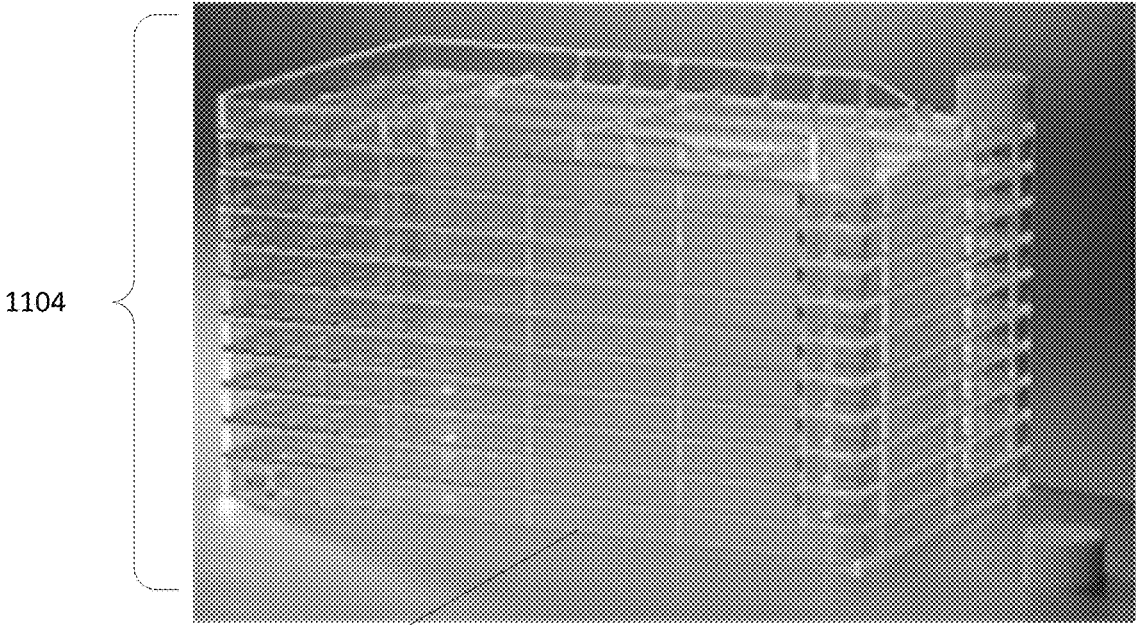


FIG. 11B

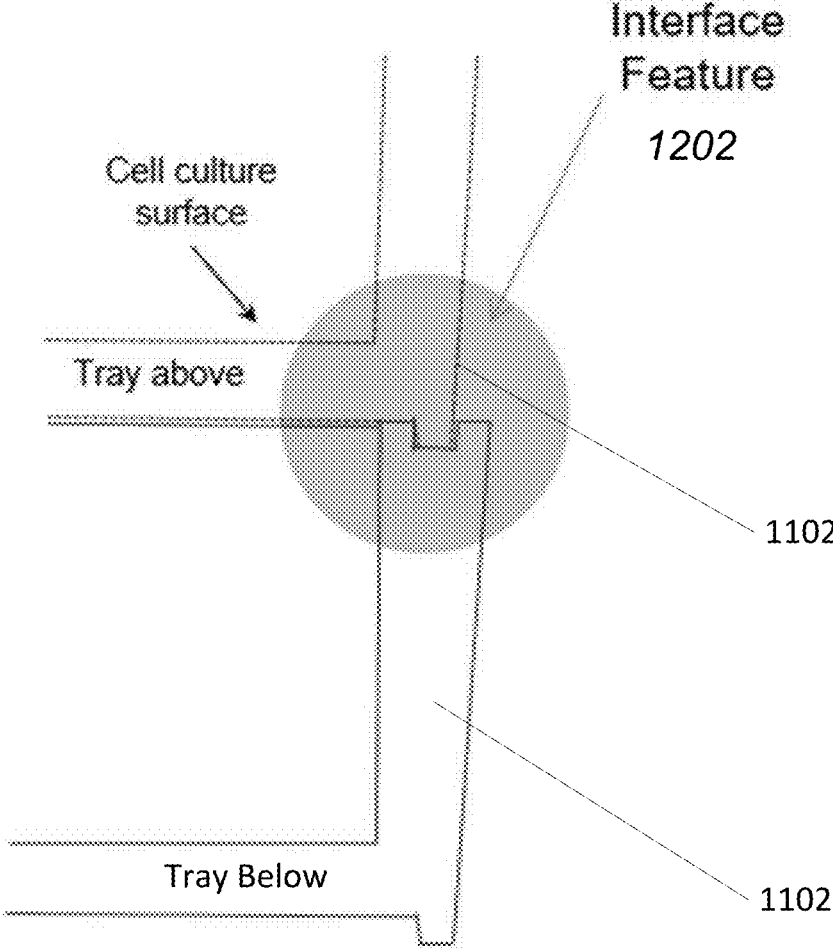


FIG. 12

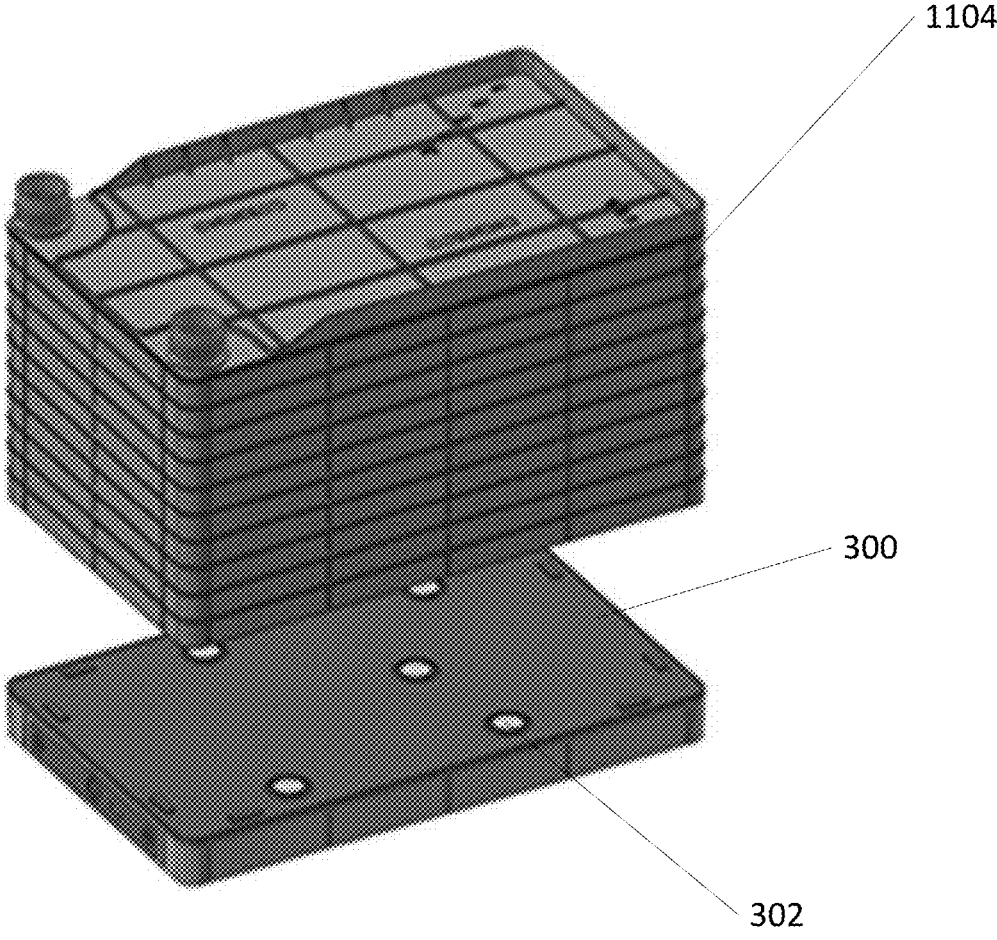


FIG. 13

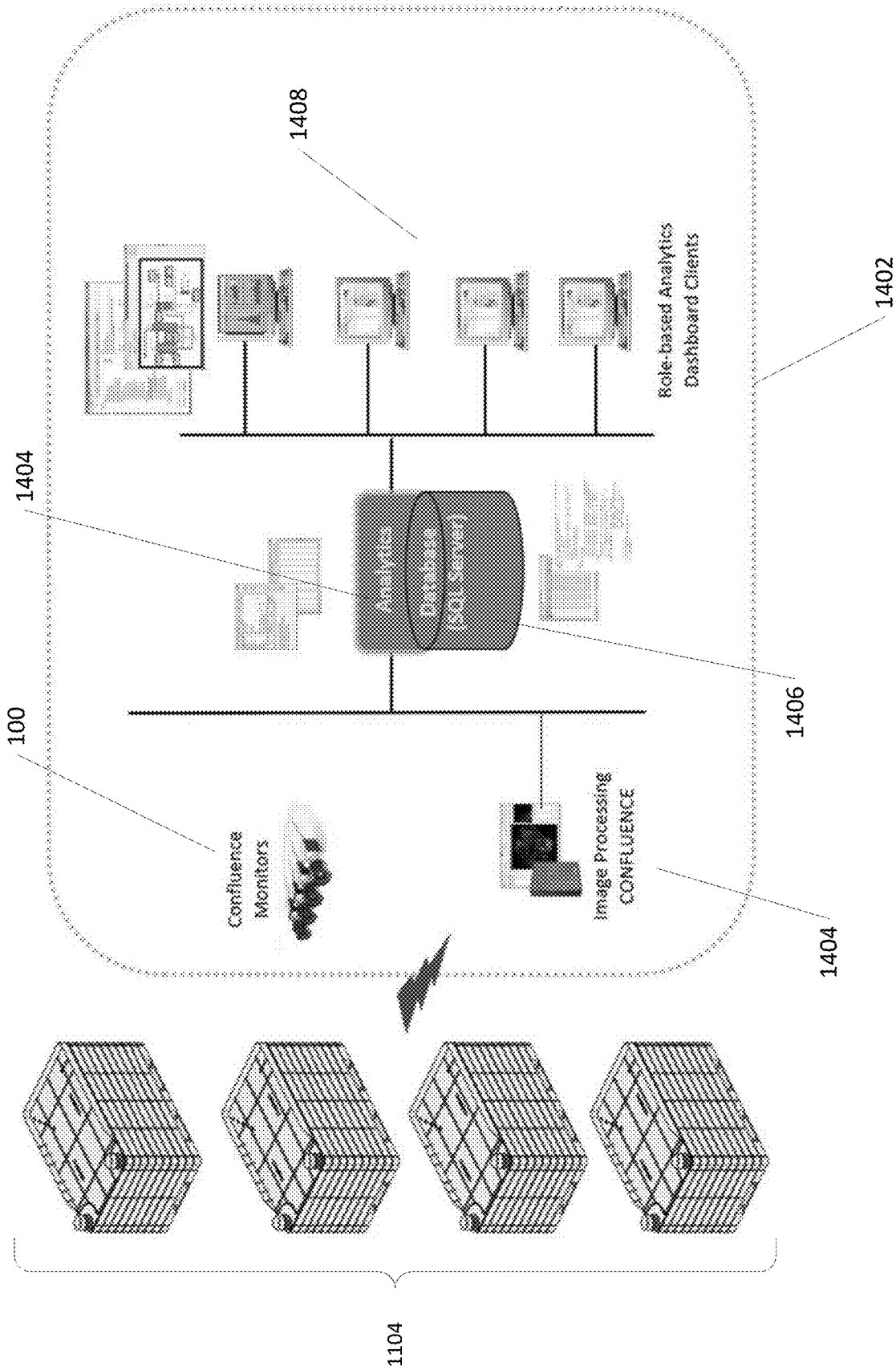


FIG. 14

Computing Architecture
1500

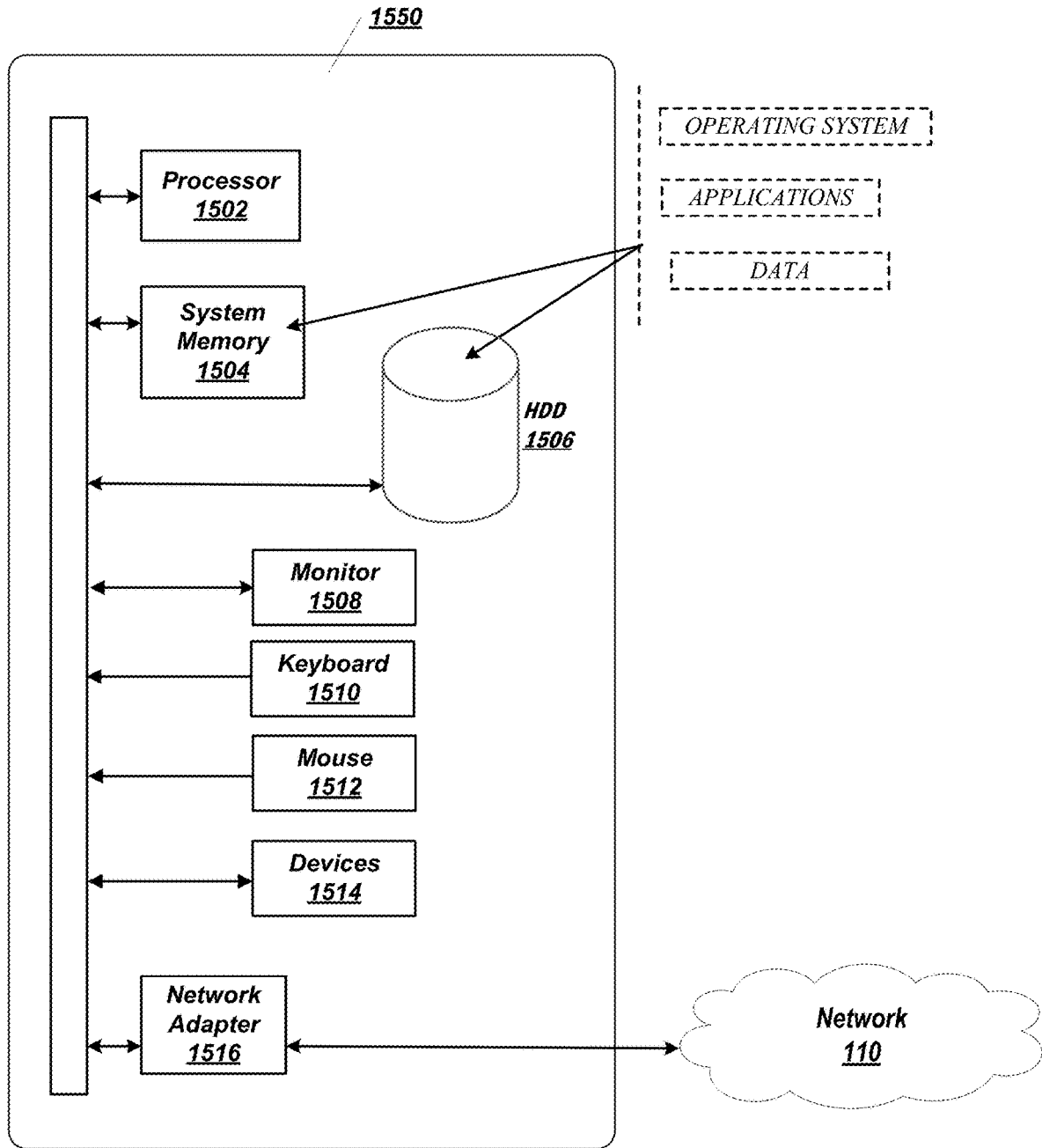


FIG. 15

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR IMAGING AND ILLUMINATION FOR CELL CONFLUENCE MEASUREMENT

RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a continuation of International Application No. PCT/US2019/063712 filed on Nov. 27, 2019, which claims the benefit of priority under 35 U.S.C. § 120 of U.S. Provisional Application Ser. No. 62/773,899 filed on Nov. 30, 2018, both applications being incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] This invention pertains to the field of laboratory work, and, in particular, to the equipment and methods used in a laboratory environment for imaging of microscopic structures such as cells. More particularly, the present disclosure relates to systems and methods for measurement of cell culture confluence.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] Cell culture is an indispensable tool that has found many important and valuable applications in a wide range of areas such as drug screening, toxicity testing, genetic engineering, therapeutic protein and vaccine production. In general, mammalian cell lines are cultured in an incubator, where it is beneficial to closely monitor and control temperature, humidity and CO₂ content. During the cell culture processes, the cells seeded in a culture vessel filled with culture media must be monitored as they grow before being processed in downstream processes.

[0004] For example, cell confluency of cell culture may be monitored. Generally, cells are subcultured or passaged when they reach 80%-90% confluency because cells could lose their proliferating and gene expression phenotype when they become overgrown. In addition to cell confluency, a wide range of other important applications such as cell migration tracking, cell density measurement, and total cell number estimation also require frequent observation.

[0005] To visualize confluency, a bench top light microscope is typically used. Cell culture vessels containing both cells and cell culture media are taken out of the cell incubator and placed on a specimen stage of a light microscope. Researchers observe the cells in a bright field mode through the ocular lens (eyepiece) of the microscope. Cell confluency is often measured by counting cells, which can be a tedious and error-prone process.

[0006] The method of observation with a bench top light microscope has several major drawbacks. For example, researchers have to frequently manually take cell culture vessels out of the cell incubator. This procedure may interfere with the cell culture process. When cell culture vessels are removed from the cell incubator, the cells experience an environment change including temperature, atmosphere and humidity. Furthermore, there exists potential that the cell culture gets contaminated due to frequent contact of cell culture vessels with incompletely sterilized labware outside of the cell incubator. The contamination of cell cultures with microorganisms (bacteria, fungi, yeast, etc.) can change the biochemical and biophysical behaviors of cells, or even cause the death of cells.

[0007] Thus, there is a desire and need to monitor cells without having to physically move the cell culture vessels

from the incubator environment to a microscope. One significant problem is that the illumination required for viewing these cells with high contrast must come from behind the cells, that is, a back illumination that transmits through the cells and then enters the objective lens of the microscope. This becomes challenging if the optical imaging system and the illumination system are physically located in different places in the stack. It would be very beneficial to have the imaging and illumination channels in the same area of the stack to make modifications to the tray stacks and alignment between the channels easier.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0008] Disclosed herein is a system and method for imaging cells in trays with illumination and imaging systems that sit side-by-side but still allow for back illumination of the cells. The imaging and illumination system is compact and functional and can be used with cell growth trays.

[0009] The invention includes at least one transparent tray for growing living cells, a second tray stacked on top of the first tray, an imaging system for forming an image of an area in the tray where cells are growing, an illumination system for back illuminating the cells in transmission. The imaging system includes a lens system, a telecentric aperture stop, and an image sensor. The illumination system includes a light source for generating a light within a spectral band and a lens for creating a collimated image of the light source, wherein the collimated image of the source passes through the surface of the tray that the cells are growing on at an oblique angle and reflects off the second tray surface to back illuminate the cells on the first tray surface and wherein this back illuminated light then enters the imaging system and the image of the source is re-imaged by the imaging system lens into the telecentric stop and the image of the cells is created on the image sensor.

[0010] It is an object of this invention that the optical axis of the illumination system is reflected into the optical axis of the imaging system by a tray surface above the object tray. This allows the illumination system to be next to the imaging system and yet still illuminate the object cells from behind. This configuration requires the plane of the cells to be at an oblique angle to the optical axis of both the illumination and the imaging systems. Thus, the image plane created by the imaging system lens is tilted at an angle to the optical axis. This creates a focus shift across the field of view unless the image sensor is tilted to compensate this by satisfying the Scheimpflug condition.

[0011] Integrating the invention into a stand-alone monitoring plate can allow the use of the system with industry standard cell culturing vessels. The invention has an advantage because the illumination system and the imaging system are next to each other and, as such, can be installed as a monolithic apparatus. They can be pre-aligned to each other and take up minimal space in the cell growth trays. Any space taken up by a camera system is space that cannot be used for cell growth. This minimizes the space and creates an image of the cells by rear illumination.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0012] FIG. 1 schematically illustrates a detector/illumination source for a single cell culture plate.

[0013] FIG. 2 schematically illustrates a detector/illumination source for multiple, stacked cell culture plates.

[0014] FIG. 3 is an illustration of a monitoring plate in accordance with one embodiment of the invention.

[0015] FIG. 4 is an illustration of the monitoring plate of FIG. 3 having the top removed to show the relative size and positioning of each optical imaging system with respect to the interior of the monitoring plate.

[0016] FIG. 5, View (A) is a logical block diagram showing components of the monitoring plate. View (B) shows one possible layout of the imaging portion of the components in the interior of the monitoring plate.

[0017] FIG. 6 is a schematic illustration of one embodiment of an optical path of a single optical imaging system suitable for use in the monitoring plate.

[0018] FIG. 7 is an illustration of one possible embodiment of a hardware configuration for containing the illumination component and the imaging component of an optical imaging system.

[0019] FIG. 8 is another view of the components of the optical imaging system of FIG. 7, showing their relative positions.

[0020] FIG. 9 shows an alternate embodiment for positioning components of the optical imaging system for providing off-angle illumination.

[0021] FIG. 10, View(A) shows a cut-away view of the monitoring plate showing positioning of one or the multiple optical imaging systems. View (B) shows a side view of the monitoring plate, showing the relatively thin aspect ratio. View (C) is a top view of one aperture in the top surface of the monitoring plate, showing the imaging and illumination components of a single optical imaging system sharing the aperture.

[0022] FIG. 11, Views (A,B) show two embodiments of commercially-available cell culture plates arranged in stacked configurations and suitable for use with the monitoring plate described herein.

[0023] FIG. 12 shows one embodiment of an interface feature which allows for the stacking of the cell culture plates.

[0024] FIG. 13 is an illustration of stacked cell culture plates relative to monitoring plate.

[0025] FIG. 14 is a logical diagram of a system for applying analytics to the images captured by the one or more monitoring plates to determine cell confluence and other characteristics of the cultures.

[0026] FIG. 15 shows a computing architecture suitable for supporting the functions of the connected ecosystem for the laboratory environment as described herein.

DEFINITIONS

[0027] The terms “confluence” and “confluency”, as used herein, refer to the proportion of a cell culture substrate surface occupied by cells.

[0028] As used herein, “have,” “having,” “include,” “including,” “comprise,” “comprising” or the like are used in their open-ended sense, and generally mean “including, but not limited to.”

[0029] The singular forms “a,” “an” and “the” include plural referents unless the context clearly dictates otherwise. The endpoints of all ranges reciting the same characteristic are independently combinable and inclusive of the recited endpoint. All references are incorporated herein by reference.

[0030] The terms “top”, “bottom”, “side”, “upper”, “lower”, “above”, “below” and the like are used herein for

descriptive purposes and not necessarily for describing permanent relative positions. It should be understood that the terms so used are interchangeable under appropriate circumstances such that embodiments of the present disclosure are, for example, capable of operation in other orientations than those illustrated or otherwise described herein.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0031] Reference will now be made in detail to the present embodiment(s), an example(s) of which is/are illustrated in the accompanying drawings. Whenever possible, the same reference numerals will be used throughout the drawings to refer to the same or like parts.

[0032] All scientific and technical terms used herein have meanings commonly used in the art unless otherwise specified. Any definitions provided herein are to facilitate understanding of certain terms used frequently herein and are not meant to limit the scope of the present disclosure.

[0033] The present disclosure is described below, at first generally, then in detail on the basis of several exemplary embodiments. The features shown in combination with one another in the individual exemplary embodiments do not all have to be realized. In particular, individual features may also be omitted or combined in some other way with other features shown of the same exemplary embodiment or else of other exemplary embodiments.

[0034] The invention comprises an illumination and imaging system to view cells growing on a flat tray bottom. When viewing an object that is transparent, it can be difficult to see any contrast in the edges of the cell. One method that works well is to illuminate the cells from behind and direct the illumination source to enter and underfill the entrance pupil of the objective lens of the imaging system.

[0035] Embodiments of this invention provide the benefit of positioning the imaging and illumination channels on the same side of the cells being imaged. Thus, the imaging and illumination channels can be located in the same area of the cell culture stack, making modifications to the tray stacks and alignment between the channels easier. In addition, embodiments of this invention offer compact imaging solutions that allow cell culture vessels to remain in-place for imaging, eliminating the need to relocate a cell culture vessel from an incubator environment to an imaging platform. Such relocation of the vessel is not desirable as it can disturb the cells, change the environmental conditions of the cells, thereby negatively impact the resulting cell culture.

[0036] Embodiments of the present disclosure relate to a compact optical imaging system for cell culture monitoring built into a monitoring plate on which multiple cell culture trays may be stacked. The monitoring plate includes a plurality of detectors and illumination sources. A collimating lens is positioned between a surface of a cell culture vessel and the illumination source, wherein the illumination source is configured to emit light at an angle oblique to the surface of the cell culture vessel. The detector has a related lens positioned between the surface of the cell culture vessel and the detector, wherein the lens focuses light to the detector through an aperture stop, and wherein the detector is configured to receive light exiting the surface of the cell culture vessel at an angle oblique to the surface.

[0037] The system is configured to be operated in bright field mode, which allows for various aspects of cell culture health to be determined through image analysis of a bright field image. Additionally, systems as described herein have

a small footprint that permits the system to be integrated into, or removably associated with, a cell culture vessel in a way that allows for continuous monitoring of cell culture status using a bright field mode.

[0038] FIG. 1 schematically illustrates one of the plurality of detector/illumination source from a monitoring plate. It should be appreciated that the schematic illustration of FIG. 1 is not drawn to scale. As shown, the compact optical imaging system **100** includes an illumination source **10** and a collimating lens **20**. The illumination source **10** is oriented to emit light that is collimated by the collimating lens **20** and directed toward a first surface **50** of a cell culture vessel **30**. The illumination source **10** may be, for example but not limited to, a light emitting diode (LED) or an array of LEDs. Alternatively, the illumination source **10** may be a non-LED light source, such as an incandescent, compact fluorescent (CFL), halogen, or other source configured to produce and emit a beam of light. The illumination source **10** may produce a white light or a colored light of any wavelength or combination of wavelengths in the visible spectrum.

[0039] As further shown in FIG. 1, the optical imaging system **100** includes a detector **80**. The detector **80** includes an image sensor for detecting light impinging on the image sensor and converting the light into an electrical signal. The image sensor may be a charge-coupled device (CCD) sensor, a complementary metal oxide semiconductor (CMOS) sensor, or any other type of sensor that is capable of converting light into an electrical signal. Alternatively, the detector **80** may simply include a CCD, CMOS, or other image sensor. The system **100** further includes a lens **60** for collecting light and an aperture stop **70** disposed between the first surface **50** of the cell culture vessel **30** and the detector **80**, wherein the lens **60** collects light and focuses the light through the aperture stop **70** and onto the detector **80**.

[0040] According to embodiments of the present disclosure, the illumination source **10**, collimating lens **20**, and any other optical components in the path of the light emitted from the illumination source **10** are positioned to transmit the light such that the direction of the light beam as it enters the cell culture vessel **100** is at an angle oblique to the first surface **50**. Similarly, the detector **80** is positioned at an angle to receive light exiting the first surface **50** of the cell culture vessel **100** at an angle that is oblique to the surface **50** (i.e., neither parallel to or at a right angle to surface **50**). In operation, a light beam is emitted from the illumination source **10** in the direction of the first surface **50** of the cell culture vessel **30**, wherein the first surface **50** contains live cells to be imaged. The light beam travels into and through a cell culture vessel **90** of the cell culture vessel **30**, contacts a second surface **40** of the cell culture vessel **30** positioned on an opposite side of the cell culture vessel **90**, and is redirected at an angle in the direction of the detector **80**. After being redirected, the light passes through cells on the first surface **50** of the cell culture vessel **30** before being focused by lens **60** to the aperture stop **70**. The image of the illumination source **10** is created at the aperture stop **70** such that the source image underfills the aperture size. When underfilling the telecentric stop, the appropriate contrast of the imaged cells is generated so that they can be viewed clearly. The image of the illumination source is conjugate to the aperture stop.

[0041] As shown, the illumination source **10** and the detector **80** are configured to be positioned on the same side of the first surface **50** of the cell culture vessel **30**. This

configuration allows for the system **100** to operate in a bright field mode, thus backlighting the cells to be imaged. In a bright field mode, light from an illumination source enters an imaging objective lens assembly directly, and viewed objects absorb, change the phase of, or redirect some of the transmitted light such that the sample appears dark on a bright background. When operated in bright field mode, the system **100** allows for various aspects of cell culture health to be determined through image analysis of a bright field image, including, but not limited to, cell count, cell confluency, cell density, and cell migration tracking.

[0042] FIG. 2 illustrates an example of the optical imaging system **100**, according to embodiments of this disclosure, for imaging cells in a multi-layered cell culture vessel **31**, or in a stack of cell culture vessels. Components of the optical imaging system **100** correspond to those of like reference numerals in FIG. 1. The multi-layered cell culture vessel **31** includes a first cell culture vessel **90a** having a first surface **50a** and a second surface **40a** on an opposite side of the first cell culture vessel **90a** from the first surface **50a**. The multi-layered cell culture vessel **31** further includes a second cell culture vessel **90b** having a first surface **50b** and a second surface **40b** on an opposite side of the cell culture vessel **90b** from the first surface **50b**. The compact optical imaging system **100** operates similarly as described above with reference to the single-layered cell culture vessel as shown in FIG. 1. However, in the multi-layered cell culture vessel **31**, the optical imaging system **100** can be arranged so that a light beam from the illumination source **10** can be redirected from the further (?) second surface **40b** of the second cell culture vessel **90b** toward the detection system.

[0043] According to embodiments of this disclosure, the cells to be imaged in a multi-layered cell culture vessel, such as the one shown in FIG. 2, for example, can be imaged using illumination that is redirected from a surface of a cell culture vessel other than the cell culture vessel containing the imaged cells. While the multi-layered cell culture vessel **31** of FIG. 2 only shows two cell culture vessels **90a**, **90b**, it is contemplated that embodiments of the compact optical imaging system can be used in multi-layered cell culture vessels having variety of numbers of layers or cell culture vessels. The light beam from the illumination source of the optical system can therefore be redirected by a surface of the cell culture vessel immediately above the cell culture vessel containing the cells to be imaged, or the light beam may be directed by a cell culture vessel that is two or more levels above the cell culture vessel containing the cells to be imaged. Further, the surface used to redirect the light beam from the illumination source can be a bottom surface (e.g., first surface **50b**) of a cell culture vessel, or a top surface (e.g., second surface **40b**) of a cell culture vessel.

[0044] In some embodiments each cell culture vessel can have a bottom surface upon which the cell culture rests. In such cases, the bottom surface of the next higher tray in the stack may act as the top for the vessel immediately below it and may be used to redirect light back into the cell culture. Alternatively, each cell culture vessel may have a cover which may serve as the surface from which the light is redirected into the cell culture. It is contemplated that each cell culture vessel (i.e. each layer in the stack) will contain only one cell culture.

[0045] FIG. 3 shows an illustration of a monitoring plate **300** in accordance with an embodiment of the invention. The monitoring plate **300** shown is equipped with five optical

imaging systems labeled 1-5. Each of the five apertures 302 shown in FIG. 3 services one optical imaging system 100, acting as an aperture for both transmission of the light source to the culture and collection of the image. Although the illustration of FIG. 3 shows five optical imaging systems 100, it would be realized by one of skill in the art that any number of optical imaging systems 100 can be used and that the multiple optical imaging systems 100 can be arranged in any way such as to provide coverage of the entire, or at least a majority of a cell culture vessel.

[0046] FIG. 4 shows monitoring plate 300 of FIG. 3 having the top removed to show the relative size and positioning of each optical imaging system 100 with respect to the interior of monitoring plate 300. Once again, the arrangement in number of optical imaging systems shown in FIG. 4 is exemplary in nature.

[0047] In addition to the multiple optical imaging systems 100, monitoring plate 300 may contain additional components, as shown in View (A) of FIG. 5. In addition to multiple optical imaging systems 100, monitoring plate 300 may include a controller component 304 for controlling the overall operation of the other components within monitoring plate 300. Monitoring plate 300 may be equipped with a communications interface 306 sending images collected by the multiple optical imaging systems 100 off unit for processing. Communications interface may be a wired connection or may be a wireless connection, for example, Wi-Fi or Bluetooth. Controller component 304 may receive commands via communication interface 306 to initiate imaging of the cell cultures. Monitoring plate 300 will also require a power source to power the controller 304, the communications interface 306 and the multiple optical imaging systems 100. Power source 308 may comprise a battery, a rechargeable battery or an external power source accessible via a power source interface. Monitoring plate 300 may also optionally include imaging processing component 310, which may optionally process the images collected by multiple imaging systems 100. In such a case, communications interface 306 would communicate the results of the image processing off unit in lieu of or in addition to transmitting the actual images off unit. Image processing component 310 may include one or more machine learning models trained to determine cell confluence based on images of cell cultures, or other means to determine cell confluence from images. View (B) of FIG. 5 shows one possible layout of the components shown in View (A) in the interior of monitoring plate 300.

[0048] FIG. 6 shows one embodiment of a layout of the imaging portion of a single optical imaging system 100. The cells sit on the surface of the tray at the cell plane 602 and light from them is imaged by a lens 604. The image is formed at the camera plane 606 where the sensor resides. A telecentric aperture stop is placed at the rear focal point of the lens to ensure that the angular distribution of light across the images the same. Fold mirror 608 allows the optical imaging system 100 to be offset from and orthogonal to the aperture 302 in monitoring plate 300.

[0049] FIG. 7 shows one possible embodiment of a hardware configuration for containing the illumination component 702 and the imaging component 704. The illumination component 702 could be positioned above the imaging channel 704 at the expense of additional space in the stack of trays. However, FIG. 8 shows an embodiment which allows the illumination component 702 and the imaging

component 704 to be kept in the same plane. In FIG. 8, the tubes containing the illumination component 702 and the imaging component 704 are rotated (or clocked) such that the illumination light passes through the cell tray and strikes another tray surface at an angle. This light then reflects off the tray surface and illuminates the cells from behind. Note that the plane that the cells are on is at an oblique angle to the optical axis of the imaging system. Illumination component 702 and imaging component 704 may be housed as a single optical imaging system 100 as shown in FIG. 4. It is contemplated that both illumination component 702 and imaging component 704 will both share aperture 302 defined in monitoring plate 300.

[0050] FIG. 9 shows an alternate embodiment for delivering the angled illumination. As shown in FIG. 9, the LED light source 902 is offset from the axis of the illumination optic 904. The amount of offset sets the illumination angle.

[0051] FIG. 10 shows several views of monitoring plate 300 showing one of the multiple optical imaging systems 100 positioned therein. View (A) of FIG. 10 shows a cutaway perspective view showing a single aperture 302 shared by illumination component 702 and imaging component 704. View (B) shows a side view of monitoring plate 300 showing that the arrangement of optical components previously describes allows the maintenance of the thin aspect ratio of monitoring plate 300. Also shown in View (B) is post 1002 protruding from the top surface of monitoring plate 300. Post 1002 allows the alignment of a cell culture vessel, for example, the cell culture vessel 1102 shown in View (A) of FIG. 11, with monitoring plate 300 and as such, with multiple optical imaging systems 100. View (C) shows a single aperture 302 defined in the service of monitoring plate 300 being shared by both imaging component 704 and illumination component 702.

[0052] FIG. 11, Views(A,B) are illustrations of several commercially-available cell culture vessels 1102 stacked one on top of another to form stack 1104, suitable for use with monitoring plate 300. FIG. 12 shows one embodiment of a method by which the trays 1102 may be aligned with each other by providing interface feature 1202. It should be noted that the interface feature 1202 shown in FIG. 12 is exemplary only and that any means of aligning the cell culture vessels 1102 one on top of the other is contemplated to be within the scope of the invention. FIG. 13 shows a stack of cell culture vessels 1104 about to be placed on monitoring plate 304 imaging.

[0053] In one embodiment of the invention, it is contemplated that only the bottom cell culture vessel 1102 of stack 1104 will be imaged. In such a case, the optical parameters of each optical imaging system 100, for example, the focal length of imaging component 704, may be preset such as to be focused only on the bottom most layer of stack 1104. Thereafter, it may be assumed that upper layers of stack 1104 will contain cultures having similar characteristics to the culture in the bottom most layer. In such a case, the results for the upper layers of stack 1104 may be interpolated based on the measurement of the bottom most layer.

[0054] In alternate embodiments, is contemplated that optical imaging systems 100 will be able to refocus such as to be focused on upper layers of stack 1104. In such a case, the optical parameters, including the focal length of imaging component 704 may need to be adjusted to be focused on a particular layer within stack 104. The components comprising imaging component 704 and illumination component

702 may be moved via mechanical means, for example, servos or MEMS components. In alternate embodiments, the components may be dynamically configurable to change their characteristics in a non-mechanical manner. In addition, to image multiple layers in stack **1104** will be necessary that illumination component be capable of illuminating specific layers, which means that the source of illumination must be capable of illuminating the layers through one or more layers of cultures below the layer being imaged. In such cases, it is contemplated that illumination source may be, for example, a laser's light source, an infrared light source, or a wide spectrum light source having a high-intensity.

[0055] As one non-limiting example of the invention, the optical imaging systems **100** may be configured as described in FIG. 1 or FIG. 2 such that the direction of the light beam emitted by the illumination component **702** enters a cell culture vessel of a cell culture layer **1102** positioned above monitoring plate **300** at an angle oblique to the surface of the cell culture layer **1102**. Similarly, the imaging component **704** of the optical imaging system **100** is positioned at an oblique angle relative to the direction of the light beam being received by the optical sensor from the cell culture layer **1102**. The direction of the light beam is also at an angle that is oblique to the surface of the cell culture layer **1102** as it passes through the area of the cell culture layer **1102** where the cells being imaged are located. Because the light passes through the surface of the cell culture vessel at an oblique angle, the light beam is also at an oblique angle relative to the cells adhered to that surface. This will result in a focus shift across the field of view if the image sensor is perpendicular to the light beam. Thus, the image sensor can be positioned at an oblique angle relative to the light beam so that the cells can be imaging in focus across the field of view, in accordance with the Scheimpflug principle. In operation of the optical imaging system **100**, a light beam is emitted from the illumination component **702** positioned in monitoring plate **300** in the direction of the cell culture layer **1102** positioned above monitoring plate **300**, wherein a first surface of the cell culture layer **1102** contains live cells to be imaged. The light beam travels into and through the cell culture layer **1102**, contacts the bottom surface of the cell culture layer **1102** positioned directly above the cell culture layer **1102** being imaged, and is redirected at an angle in the direction of the image sensor positioned in the monitoring plate **300**. After being redirected, the light passes through cells on the first surface of the cell culture layer **1102** and is focused to the image sensor.

[0056] The images obtained from multiple imaging systems **100** may be processed to determine the confluence of the cell cultures contained in cell culture layers **1102**. FIG. 14 shows a system for making the determination of the cell confluence. Multiple images from multiple stacks **1104** of cell cultures to be received by system **1402**. Analytics component **1402** may analyze the images using analytics **1404** to approximate a value for the cell confluence exhibited by each layer **1102** in stacks **1104**. Analytics **1404** may comprise, for example, one or more machine learning databases trained to approximate confluence. In alternative embodiments, other forms of analytics may be used. Analytics **1404** may utilize database **1406** in support of the effort to analyze the images. Database **1406** may contain, for example, the machine learning models used to analyze the images. Results of the analysis from analytics **1404** may be

output on one or more dashboard clients **1408** which may present the results in a variety of different ways.

[0057] The analytics component **1402** may be embodied as hardware accompanied by a processor executing instructions from a non-volatile, computer-readable medium. A computing architecture suitable for use in support of the systems and apparatuses is shown in FIG. 15, which illustrates an embodiment of an exemplary computing architecture **1500** suitable for implementing the various embodiments as previously described. In one embodiment, the computing architecture **1500** may, in whole or in part, comprise or be implemented as part of an electronic device, such as a computer, smartphone or tablet computing device **1550**. The embodiments are not limited in this context.

[0058] As used in this application, the terms "system" and "component" are intended to refer to a computer-related entity, either hardware, a combination of hardware and software, software, or software in execution, examples of which are provided by the exemplary computing architecture **1500**. For example, a component can be, but is not limited to being, a process running on a processor, a processor, a hard disk drive, multiple storage drives (of optical and/or magnetic storage medium), an object, an executable, a thread of execution, a program, and/or a computer. By way of illustration, both an application running on a server and the server can be a component. One or more components can reside within a process and/or thread of execution, and a component can be localized on one computer and/or distributed between two or more computers. Further, components may be communicatively coupled to each other by various types of communications media to coordinate operations. The coordination may involve the uni-directional or bi-directional exchange of information. For instance, the components may communicate information in the form of signals communicated over the communications media. The information can be implemented as signals allocated to various signal lines. In such allocations, each message is a signal. Further embodiments, however, may alternatively employ data messages. Such data messages may be sent across various connections. Exemplary connections include parallel interfaces, serial interfaces, and bus interfaces.

[0059] The computing architecture **1500** includes various common computing elements, such as one or more processors, multi-core processors, co-processors, memory units, chipsets, controllers, peripherals, interfaces, oscillators, timing devices, video cards, audio cards, multimedia input/output (I/O) components, power supplies, and so forth, all of which are able to communicate as necessary using appropriate connections. The embodiments, however, are not limited to implementation by the computing architecture **1500**.

[0060] As shown in FIG. 15, the computing architecture **1500** comprises computer **1550** comprising a processor **1502**, and a system memory **1504**. The processor **1502** can be any of various commercially available processors. Dual microprocessors, multi-core processors, and other multi-processor architectures may also be employed as processor **1502**.

[0061] An interface is provided for system components including, but not limited to, the system memory **1504** to the processing unit **1502**. The interface can be any of several types of bus structure that may further interconnect to a memory bus (with or without a memory controller), a peripheral bus, and a local bus using any of a variety of

commercially available bus architectures. Interface adapters may connect to the system bus **1206** via a slot architecture. Example slot architectures may include without limitation Accelerated Graphics Port (AGP), Card Bus, (Extended) Industry Standard Architecture ((E)ISA), Micro Channel Architecture (MCA), NuBus, Peripheral Component Interconnect (Extended) (PCI(X)), PCI Express, Personal Computer Memory Card International Association (PCMCIA), and the like.

[0062] The computing architecture **1500** may comprise a non-volatile, computer-readable storage medium, such as a hard disk drive (HDD) or solid state drive to store logic. Examples of a computer-readable storage medium may include any tangible media capable of storing electronic data, including volatile memory or non-volatile memory, removable or non-removable memory, erasable or non-erasable memory, writeable or re-writable memory, and so forth. Examples of logic may include executable computer program instructions implemented using any suitable type of code, such as source code, compiled code, interpreted code, executable code, static code, dynamic code, object-oriented code, visual code, and the like. Embodiments may also be at least partly implemented as instructions contained in or on a non-transitory computer-readable medium, which may be read and executed by one or more processors to enable performance of the operations described herein.

[0063] The system memory **1504** may include various types of computer-readable storage media in the form of one or more higher speed memory units, such as read-only memory (ROM), random-access memory (RAM), dynamic RAM (DRAM), Double-Data-Rate DRAM (DDRAM), synchronous DRAM (SDRAM), static RAM (SRAM), programmable ROM (PROM), erasable programmable ROM (EPROM), electrically erasable programmable ROM (EEPROM), flash memory, polymer memory such as ferroelectric polymer memory, ovonic memory, phase change or ferroelectric memory, silicon-oxide-nitride-oxide-silicon (SONOS) memory, magnetic or optical cards, an array of devices such as Redundant Array of Independent Disks (RAID) drives, solid state memory devices (e.g., USB memory, solid state drives (SSD) and any other type of storage media suitable for storing information. A basic input/output system (BIOS) can be stored in a non-volatile portion of system memory **1504**.

[0064] The drives and associated computer-readable media provide volatile and/or nonvolatile storage of an operating system **1520**, applications **1522**, and related data and data structures **1524**. Applications **1522** may be in the form of software comprising computer-executable instructions. In one embodiment, the one or more applications **1522** and data **1524** may comprise, for example, the analytics component **1402** described above and used to analyze images received from one or more monitoring plates **300**.

[0065] A user can enter commands and information into the computer **1550** through one or more wire/wireless input devices, for example, a keyboard **1510** and a pointing device, such as a mouse **1512**. Other devices **1514** may include, for example, monitoring plate **300**, or a smart incubator. Other types of user input devices **1514** may include, for example, microphones, infra-red (IR) remote controls, radio-frequency (RF) remote controls, game pads, electronic pencils, card readers, dongles, finger print readers, gloves, graphics tablets, joysticks, keyboards, retina readers, touch screens (e.g., capacitive, resistive, etc.), trackballs,

trackpads, sensors, projectors, lasers scanners and the like. These and other input and output devices are often connected to computer **850** via various means, including serial ports, USB connections, wired network connections, Wi-Fi connections, Bluetooth connections, etc.

[0066] A monitor **1508** or other type of display device may be used to provide video output **222** to a user. The monitor **1508** may be internal or external to the computer **1550**. Monitor **1508** may act as both a display device and as an input device, as in the case of a touch-screen display commonly found on smartphones and tablet computing devices. In addition to the monitor **1508**, a computer typically includes other peripheral output devices, such as speakers, printers, and so forth which may be used to provide audio outputs **224**.

[0067] The computer **1550** may operate in a networked environment using logical connections via wire and/or wireless communications to one or more remote, networked computers, such as monitoring plates **300**. The networked computer can be a workstation, a server computer, a router, a personal computer, portable computer, microprocessor-based entertainment appliance, a peer device or other common network node, and typically includes many or all of the elements described relative to the computer **1550**. The logical connection depicted includes connectivity to a local area network (LAN) or wide area network (WAN) **110**. Such LAN and WAN networking environments are commonplace in offices and companies, and facilitate enterprise-wide computer networks, such as intranets, all of which may connect to a global communications network, for example, the Internet. Computer **1550** may be connected to the LAN/WAN **110** via a wired or wireless communication network interface or adaptor **1516**. Network adapter **1516** can facilitate wired or wireless communications to the LAN/WAN **110**, which may also include a wireless access point disposed thereon for communicating with the wireless functionality of the network adaptor **1516**.

[0068] A monitoring plate **300** having multiple integrated optical imaging systems **100** for imaging one or more layers of cull culture vessels **1102** has been described herein. In addition, an analytics component **1402** for analyzing images received from one or more monitoring plates **300** and for estimating the cell confluence of cell cultures contained in one or more layers of cull culture vessels **1102**, as well as the computing architecture **1500** sufficient to support the analytics component **1402**, have been described herein. Exemplary physical and logical components and arrangements of components have been used in the description of the monitoring plate **300** and analytics component **1402**, however, as will be realized by one of skill in the art, many different arrangements of the physical and logical components, or substitutions therefor, may be used without deviating from the intended scope of the invention. For example, different configurations of illumination component **702** and imaging component **704** are within the scope of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. An apparatus comprising:
 - a housing having a flat top surface;
 - one or more apertures disposed in the flat top surface;
 - one or more optical imaging systems disposed within the housing and configured to image a culture in a cell culture vessel placed on the flat top surface of the housing.

2. The apparatus of claim 1, the one or more optical imaging systems each comprising:

- an imaging component; and
- an illumination component.

3. The apparatus of claim 2, the illumination component configured to direct light at an oblique angle to a surface above the culture in the cell culture vessel such that the light is reflected off of the surface such as to illuminate the culture from a side opposite the imaging component.

4. The apparatus of claim 3, wherein the surface reflecting the light is the bottom surface of the cell culture vessels stacked on top of the cell culture vessel placed on the flat top surface of the housing.

5. The apparatus of claim 2, the imaging component being disposed in the housing offset from one of the apertures in the top surface of the housing, further comprising:

- a mirror located directly underneath the aperture and angled to direct light from the culture to the imaging component.

6. The apparatus of claim 5, the imaging component having a focal length fixed to image the culture in the cell culture vessel placed directly on the top surface of the housing.

7. The apparatus of claim 5, the imaging component having a movable focal length which may be adjusted to image cultures located in cell culture vessels stacked on the cell culture vessel placed directly on the top surface of the housing.

8. The apparatus of claim 2, the illumination component configured to vary the oblique angle such as to illuminate cultures located in cell culture vessels stacked on the cell culture vessel placed directly on the top surface of the housing.

9. The apparatus of claim 2, further comprising:
- a communications interface;
 - a controller; and
 - a power source for powering communications interface, the controller, and the one or more optical imaging systems.

10. The apparatus of claim 9, the controller receiving commands via the communication interface to image cultures located in one or more cell culture vessels stacked on the top surface of the housing.

11. The apparatus of claim 10, the computer controller transmitting images from the one or more optical imaging systems via the communications interface.

12. The apparatus of claim 9, further comprising:
- an image processing component for processing of images collected from the one or more optical imaging systems.

13. The apparatus of claim 12, the imaging processing component analyzing images collected from the one or more optical imaging systems to determine confluence of cell cultures located in one or more cell culture vessels stacked on the top surface of the housing.

14. The apparatus of claim 13, imaging processing component comprising one or more machine learning models trained to determine cell confluence from images.

15. The apparatus of claim 13, the imaging process component configured to transmit the results of the image analysis via the communications interface.

16. A method for determining cell confluence in a cell culture comprising:

providing one or more optical imaging systems, each optical imaging system comprising an imaging component and illumination component below the cell culture;

directing light from the illumination component at an oblique angle to a reflective surface above the cell culture such that the cell culture is illuminated from a side opposite the imaging component;

capturing an image of the illuminated cell culture with the imaging component.

17. The method of claim 16, further comprising collecting images of the cell culture from one or more of the optical imaging systems.

18. The method of claim 17, further comprising transmitting the collected image via a communications interface.

19. The method of claim 17, further comprising analyzing the collected images using an image processing component, the image processing component configured to detect cell confluence in the cell culture.

20. The method of claim 19, further comprising transmitting the results of the image analysis via the communications interface.

21. An apparatus comprising:

- a cell culture vessel having a top surface and a bottom surface;
- a housing having a flat top surface wherein the bottom surface of the cell culture vessel is disposed on top of the flat top surface;
- one or more apertures disposed in the flat top surface;
- one or more optical imaging systems disposed within the housing and configured to image a culture in the cell culture vessel placed on the flat top surface of the housing.

22. The apparatus of claim 21, the one or more optical imaging systems each comprising:

- an imaging component; and
- an illumination component.

23. The apparatus of claim 22, the illumination component configured to direct light at an oblique angle to the top surface of the culture vessel such that the light is reflected off of the top surface such as to illuminate the culture from a side opposite the imaging component.

24. The apparatus of claim 22, further comprising a second cell culture vessel having a second bottom surface and a second top surface, wherein the second bottom surface of the second cell culture vessel is disposed adjacent the top surface of the cell culture surface.

25. The apparatus of claim 24, the illumination component configured to direct light at an oblique angle to through the culture vessel such that the light is reflected off of the second bottom surface of the second cell culture vessel such as to illuminate the culture in the cell culture vessel from a side opposite the imaging component.

26. The apparatus of claim 22, the imaging component being disposed in the housing offset from one of the apertures in the top surface of the housing, further comprising:

- a mirror located directly underneath the aperture and angled to direct light from the culture to the imaging component.

27. The apparatus of claim 26, the imaging component having a focal length fixed to image the culture in the cell culture vessel placed directly on the top surface of the housing.

28. The apparatus of claim **26**, the imaging component having a movable focal length which may be adjusted to image cultures located in the second cell vessel stacked on the cell culture vessel placed directly on the top surface of the housing.

29. The apparatus of claim **22**, the illumination component configured to vary the oblique angle such as to illuminate cultures located in the second cell culture vessel stacked on the cell culture vessel placed directly on the top surface of the housing.

30. The apparatus of claim **22**, further comprising:

a communications interface;

a controller; and

a power source for powering communications interface, the controller, and the one or more optical imaging systems.

31. The apparatus of claim **30**, the controller receiving commands via the communication interface to image cultures located in one or more cell culture vessels stacked on the top surface of the housing.

32. The apparatus of claim **31**, the computer controller transmitting images from the one or more optical imaging systems via the communications interface.

33. The apparatus of claim **30**, further comprising:

an image processing component for processing of images collected from the one or more optical imaging systems.

34. The apparatus of claim **33**, the imaging processing component analyzing images collected from the one or more optical imaging systems to determine confluence of cell cultures located in one or more cell culture vessels stacked on the top surface of the housing.

35. The apparatus of claim **34**, imaging processing component comprising one or more machine learning models trained to determine cell confluence from images.

36. The apparatus of claim **34**, the imaging process component configured to transmit the results of the image analysis via the communications interface.

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