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Fiadaptive multi-modal e-pallet control

Abstract

Methods and systems for controlling movement of e-pallets using multi-modal interaction with a user are provided that include: one or more first sensors configured to obtain first sensor data of a first modality pertaining to a command from the user for movement of the e-pallets; one or more second sensors configured to obtain second sensor data of a second modality, different from the first modality, pertaining to the command; and a processor that is coupled to the one or more first sensors and the one or more second sensors, the processor configured to at least facilitate: determining an intended movement of the e-pallets based on both the first sensor data and the second sensor data; and moving the e-pallets in executing the intended movement, in accordance with instructions provided by the processor to actuators of the e-pallets.

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Background/Summary

INTRODUCTION

- (1) The technical field generally relates to electric pallets (e-pallets), and more specifically to the control of e-pallets.
- (2) Various e-pallets today are controlled via pulling by a user/operator, such as via physical touch by a human operator. However, current techniques for control of e-pallets may not be ideal under certain circumstances.
- (3) Accordingly, it is desirable to provide systems and methods for controlling e-pallets. Furthermore, other desirable features and characteristics of the present invention will become apparent from the subsequent detailed description of the invention and the appended claims, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings and this background of the invention.

SUMMARY

- (4) In an exemplary embodiment, a method for controlling movement of one or more e-pallets using multi-modal interaction with a user of the one or more e-pallets is provided, the method including: obtaining, via one or more first sensors, first sensor data of a first modality pertaining to a command from the user for movement of the one or more e-pallets; obtaining, via one or more second sensors, second sensor data of a second modality, different from the first modality, pertaining to the command; determining, via a processor, an intended movement of the one or more e-pallets based on both the first sensor data and the second sensor data; and moving the one or

more e-pallets in executing the intended movement, in accordance with instructions provided by the processor to one or more actuators of the one or more e-pallets.

(5) Also in an exemplary embodiment: the step of obtaining the first sensor data includes obtaining vision sensor data via one or more cameras of the one or more e-pallets as to a hand gesture provided by the user; the step of obtaining the second sensor data includes obtaining audio sensor data via one or more microphones of the one or more e-pallets as to a verbal command provided by the user; and the step of determining the intended movement includes determining, via the processor, the intended movement of the one or more e-pallets based on both the vision sensor data and the audio sensor data.

(6) Also in an exemplary embodiment, the method further includes determining, via the processor, an image quality associated with the vision sensor data: wherein the use of the vision sensor data for determining the intended movement and the moving of the one or more e-pallets is based at least in part on the image quality associated with the vision sensor data.

(7) Also in an exemplary embodiment, the method further includes providing instructions, via the processor, for the user to face the one or more cameras, move closer toward the one or more cameras, or both, when the image quality is less than a predetermined threshold.

(8) Also in an exemplary embodiment, the method further includes determining, via the processor, a sound quality associated with the audio sensor data: wherein the use of the audio sensor data for determining the intended movement and the moving of the one or more e-pallets is based at least in part on the sound quality associated with the audio sensor data.

(9) Also in an exemplary embodiment, the method further includes providing instructions, via the processor, for the user to face the one or more microphones, move closer toward the one or more microphones, or both, when the sound quality is less than a predetermined threshold.

(10) Also in an exemplary embodiment, the method further includes obtaining motion sensor data via one or more additional sensors from an electronic wearable device of the user; wherein the step of determining the intended movement includes determining, via the processor, the intended movement of the one or more e-pallets based on the vision sensor data, the audio sensor data, and the motion sensor data.

(11) Also in an exemplary embodiment, the one or more e-pallets include a plurality of e-pallets, and the method further includes initiating, via instructions provided by the processor, one or more elevator modes of operation for the plurality of e-pallets when entering and exiting an elevator, the one or more elevator modes of operation including a switching of roles of the plurality of e-pallets between a leader role and one or more follower roles.

(12) Also in an exemplary embodiment, the one or more e-pallets include a plurality of e-pallets, and the method further includes initiating, via instructions provided by the processor, one or more dead end modes of operation for the plurality of e-pallets when approaching a dead end in a path in which the plurality of e-pallets are travelling, the one or more dead end modes of operation including a switching of roles of the plurality of e-pallets between a leader role and one or more follower roles.

(13) In another exemplary embodiment, a system is provided for controlling movement of one or more e-pallets using multi-modal interaction with a user of the one or more e-pallets, the system including: one or more first sensors configured to obtain first sensor data of a first modality pertaining to a command from the user for movement of the one or more e-pallets; one or more second sensors configured to obtain second sensor data of a second modality, different from the first modality, pertaining to the command; and a processor that is coupled to the one or more first sensors and the one or more second sensors, the processor configured to at least facilitate: determining an intended movement of the one or more e-pallets based on both the first sensor data and the second sensor data; and moving the one or more e-pallets in executing the intended movement, in accordance with instructions provided by the processor to one or more actuators of the one or more e-pallets.

(14) Also in an exemplary embodiment: the one or more first sensors include one or more cameras configured to obtain vision sensor data as to a hand gesture provided by the user: the one or more second sensors include one or more microphones configured to obtain audio sensor data as to a verbal command provided by the user; and the processor is configured to at least facilitate determining the intended movement of the one or more e-pallets based on both the vision sensor data and the audio sensor data.

(15) Also in an exemplary embodiment, the processor is configured to at least facilitate determining an image quality associated with the vision sensor data; and using the vision sensor data for determining the intended movement and the moving of the one or more e-pallets based at least in part on the image quality associated with the vision sensor data.

(16) Also in an exemplary embodiment, the processor is configured to at least facilitate providing instructions for the user to face the one or more cameras, move closer toward the one or more cameras, or both, when the image quality is less than a predetermined threshold.

(17) Also in an exemplary embodiment, the processor is configured to at least facilitate determining a sound quality associated with the audio sensor data; and using the audio sensor data for determining the intended movement and the moving of the one or more e-pallets based at least in part on the sound quality associated with the audio sensor data.

(18) Also in an exemplary embodiment, the processor is configured to at least facilitate providing instructions for the user to face the one or more microphones, move closer toward the one or more microphones, or both, when the sound quality is less than a predetermined threshold.

(19) Also in an exemplary embodiment, the system further includes one or more additional sensors configured to obtain motion sensor data from an electronic wearable device of the user; wherein the processor is configured to at least facilitate determining the intended movement of the one or more e-pallets based on the vision sensor data, the audio sensor data, and the motion sensor data.

(20) Also in an exemplary embodiment, the one or more e-pallets include a plurality of e-pallets, and the processor is configured to at least facilitate initiating, via instructions provided by the processor, one or more elevator modes of operation for the plurality of e-pallets when entering and exiting an elevator, the one or more elevator modes of operation including a switching of roles of the plurality of e-pallets between a leader role and one or more follower roles.

(21) Also in an exemplary embodiment, the one or more e-pallets include a plurality of e-pallets, and the processor is configured to at least facilitate initiating, via instructions provided by the processor, one or more dead end modes of operation for the plurality of e-pallets when approaching a dead end in a path in which the plurality of e-pallets are travelling, the one or more dead end modes of operation including a switching of roles of the plurality of e-pallets between a leader role and one or more follower roles.

(22) In another exemplary embodiment, an e-pallet device is provided that includes: a body; a plurality of actuators disposed on or within the body; one or more cameras disposed on or within the body and configured to obtain vision sensor data pertaining to a command from a user for movement of the body as represented via a hand gesture of the user; one or more microphones disposed on or within the body and configured to obtain audio sensor data pertaining to the command as represented via an audible utterance of the user; and a processor that is coupled to the one or more cameras, the one or more microphones, and the plurality of actuators, the processor configured to at least facilitate determining an intended movement of the e-pallet device based on both the vision sensor data and the audio sensor data; and moving the e-pallet device in executing the intended movement, in accordance with instructions provided by the processor to the plurality of actuators and that are implemented via the plurality of actuators.

(23) Also in an exemplary embodiment, the e-pallet device further includes one or more additional sensors configured to obtain motion sensor data from an electronic wearable device of the user; and the processor is configured to at least facilitate determining the intended movement of the e-pallet device based on the vision sensor data, the audio sensor data, and the motion sensor data.

Description

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

- (1) The present disclosure will hereinafter be described in conjunction with the following drawing figures, wherein like numerals denote like elements, and wherein:
- (2) FIG. 1 is a functional block diagram of a system including an e-pallet and control for the e-pallet, in connection with an exemplary embodiment; and
- (3) FIG. 2 is a flowchart of a process for controlling one or more e-pallets, and that can be incorporated in connection with the system of FIG. 1, in accordance with an exemplary embodiment;
- (4) FIGS. 3A and 3B are flow diagrams depicting an exemplary implementation of the process of FIG. 2 in which multiple e-pallets are controlled in accordance with a first elevator mode, in accordance with an exemplary embodiment;
- (5) FIGS. 4A and 4B are flow diagrams depicting an exemplary implementation of the process of FIG. 2 in which the e-pallets are controlled in accordance with a second elevator mode, in accordance with an exemplary embodiment;
- (6) FIGS. 5A and 5B are flow diagrams depicting an exemplary implementation of the process of FIG. 2 in which the e-pallets are controlled in accordance with a dead end mode, in accordance with an exemplary embodiment;
- (7) FIG. 6 is a flow diagram depicting an exemplary implementation of the process of FIG. 2 in which the e-pallet is controlled using inputs that are received via multi-modal interaction from a user, in accordance with an exemplary embodiment;
- (8) FIG. 7 is a flow diagram depicting an exemplary implementation of the process of FIG. 2 in which the e-pallet is controlled in accordance with vision and speech inputs from a user, in accordance with an exemplary embodiment;
- (9) FIG. 8 is a flow diagram depicting an exemplary implementation of the process of FIG. 2 in which the e-pallet is controlled in accordance with gesture inputs from a user, in accordance with an exemplary embodiment; and
- (10) FIG. 9 is a flow diagram depicting an exemplary implementation of the process of FIG. 2 in which the e-pallet is controlled in accordance with voice inputs from a user, in accordance with an exemplary embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

- (11) The following detailed description is merely exemplary in nature and is not intended to limit the disclosure or the application and uses thereof. Furthermore, there is no intention to be bound by any theory presented in the preceding background or the following detailed description.
- (12) FIG. 1 illustrates a system **100** for control of an electric pallet (e-pallet) **102**, in accordance with an exemplary embodiment. While the term electric pallet and the abbreviation e-pallet are utilized herein and throughout the application, it will be appreciated that the terms “electric pallet” and “e-pallet” (as used may comprise any number of different types of pallets, carts (e.g., shopping carts, delivery carts, and/or other carts and/or similar types of apparatus), and/or any number of other types of moving platforms. In addition, while a single e-pallet **102** is depicted in FIG. 1, it will be appreciated that in various embodiments the system **100** may include any number of e-pallets **102**, for example that are controlled in concert with one another.
- (13) As depicted in FIG. 1, in certain embodiments the system **100** may also include a user **110**, a remote server **106**, and a communications network **108**. In certain embodiments, the system **100** may also include one or more additional components.
- (14) In various embodiments, the user **110** comprises an operator that provides one or more different types of commands for the e-pallet **102**, including various verbal and/or non-verbal commands. In certain embodiments, the user **110** comprises a human being. In certain

embodiments, the user **110** is wearing one or more electronic wearable devices **111** (e.g., such as a smart watch, earbuds, vest, or the like) that is configured to transmit signals pertaining to movement of the user **110**. In certain other embodiments, the user **110** may comprise a robot and/or other electronic device.

(15) Also in various embodiments, the e-pallet **102** implements the commands provided by the user **110** in accordance with control of the e-pallet **102** that is conducted and/or facilitated by one or more computer systems (including one or more processors) that reside in the e-pallet **102**, the remote server **106**, or both. As depicted in FIG. 1, in various embodiments, the e-pallet communicates with the remote server **106** via one or more communications networks **108** (e.g., one or more wireless communications networks, such as via one or more cellular-based communications networks, one or more satellite-based communications networks, and/or one or more other types of wireless communications networks).

(16) As depicted in FIG. 1, in various embodiments the e-pallet includes a body **112**, a differential drive **101**, one or more wheels **114**, a sensor array **120**, a transceiver **130**, one or more actuators **135**, and a computer system **140**.

(17) In the depicted embodiment, the body **112** substantially encloses other components of the e-pallet **102**. In various embodiments, the differential drive **101** includes at least two motors that control movement of the e-pallet **102** based on a polarity of voltage applied thereto. In addition, in certain embodiments, the wheels **114** are each rotationally coupled to one or more of the axles (not depicted) near a respective corner of the body **112** to facilitate movement of the e-pallet **102**. However, this may vary in different embodiments. Similar, the number and placement of the wheels **114** may also vary in different embodiments.

(18) In various embodiments, the sensor array **120** includes a plurality of sensors that are used for communicating with the user **110**. As depicted in FIG. 2, in various embodiments the sensor array **120** includes one or more cameras **122**, microphones **124**, speakers **126**, and other sensors **127**. In certain embodiments, the cameras **122** obtain sensor data as to inputs pertaining to visual commands (e.g., gestures) from the user **110** pertaining to operation of the e-pallet **102**. Also in certain embodiments, the microphones **124** obtain sensor data as to inputs pertaining to audible commands (e.g., voice commands) from the user **110** pertaining to operation of the e-pallet **102**. In addition, in certain embodiments, the speakers **126** are used to provide feedback from the e-pallet **102** to the user **110**, for example as to suggestions or requests for the user **110** to take one or more actions (e.g., such as moving closer to and/or facing the cameras **122** and/or microphones **124**) to improve the accuracy of the inputs as received by the e-pallet **102**. Also in various embodiments, the sensor array **120** also includes one or more other sensors **127** (e.g., one or more ultra-wide band and/or other radio-based sensors) configured to obtain motion data via the electronic wearable device **111** of the user **110**.

(19) In various embodiments, the transceiver **130** is utilized to communicate with the remote server **106**, for example as to the inputs received from the user **110** and/or the implementation of commands pertaining thereto. In addition, in certain embodiments, the transceiver **130** is also utilized to communicate with other e-pallets, for example as to a coordinated implementation of commands from the user **110**.

(20) Also in various embodiments, the actuators **135** are used to move the e-pallet **102** in connection with the implementation of the commands from the user **110**. In certain embodiments, the actuators **135** are directly or indirectly coupled to the wheels **114** (and/or one or more axles that are coupled thereto), and are configured to cause or facilitate the movement and/or rotation of the wheels **114** in accordance with instructions that are provided by the computer system **140** of the e-pallet **102** and/or by the remote server **106** in connection with implementing the commands provided by the user **110**.

(21) In various embodiments, the computer system **140** is coupled to the sensor array **120**, the transceiver **130**, and the actuators **135**. As depicted in FIG. 1, in various embodiments the computer

system **140** comprises a computer controller that includes a processor **142**, a memory **144**, an interface **146**, a storage device **148**, a bus **150**, and a secondary memory storage device (e.g., disk) **156**. In certain embodiments, the computer system **140** may also include the sensor array **120**, one or more of the other systems or components thereof, and/or one or more other platform components. In addition, it will be appreciated that the computer system **140** may otherwise differ from the embodiment depicted in FIG. 1. For example, the computer system **140** may be coupled to or may otherwise utilize one or more remote computer systems and/or other control systems, for example as part of one or more of the above-identified platform devices and systems.

(22) In various embodiments, the processor **142** performs the computation and control functions of the computer system **140**, and may comprise any type of processor or multiple processors, single integrated circuits such as a microprocessor, or any suitable number of integrated circuit devices and/or circuit boards working in cooperation to accomplish the functions of a processing unit. During operation, the processor **142** executes one or more programs **152** contained within the memory **144** and, as such, controls the general operation of the computer system **140** and the computer system of the computer system **140**, generally in executing the processes described herein, such as the processes discussed further below in connection with FIGS. 2-9.

(23) The memory **144** can be any type of suitable memory. For example, the memory **144** may include various types of dynamic random access memory (DRAM) such as SDRAM, the various types of static RAM (SRAM), and the various types of non-volatile memory (PROM, EPROM, and flash). In certain examples, the memory **144** is located on and/or co-located on the same computer chip as the processor **142**. In the depicted embodiment, the memory **144** stores the above-referenced program **152** along with one or more stored values **154** (e.g., including, in various embodiments, predetermined threshold values for controlling the e-pallet **102**).

(24) The bus **150** serves to transmit programs, data, status and other information or signals between the various components of the computer system of the computer system **140**. The interface **146** allows communications to the computer system of the computer system **140**, for example from a system driver and/or another computer system, and can be implemented using any suitable method and apparatus. In one embodiment, the interface **146** obtains the various data from the sensor array **120** and/or one or more other components and/or systems of the e-pallet **102**. The interface **146** can include one or more network interfaces to communicate with other systems or components. The interface **146** may also include one or more network interfaces to communicate with technicians, and/or one or more storage interfaces to connect to storage apparatuses, such as the storage device **148**.

(25) The storage device **148** can be any suitable type of storage apparatus, including various different types of direct access storage and/or other memory devices. In one exemplary embodiment, the storage device **148** comprises a program product from which memory **144** can receive a program **152** that executes one or more embodiments of one or more processes of the present disclosure, such as the steps of the processes discussed further below in connection with FIGS. 2-9. In another exemplary embodiment, the program product may be directly stored in and/or otherwise accessed by the memory **144** and/or one or more other disks **156** and/or other memory devices.

(26) The bus **150** can be any suitable physical or logical means of connecting computer systems and components. This includes, but is not limited to, direct hard-wired connections, fiber optics, infrared and wireless bus technologies. During operation, the program **152** is stored in the memory **144** and executed by the processor **142**.

(27) It will be appreciated that while this exemplary embodiment is described in the context of a fully functioning computer system, those skilled in the art will recognize that the mechanisms of the present disclosure are capable of being distributed as a program product with one or more types of non-transitory computer-readable signal bearing media used to store the program and the instructions thereof and carry out the distribution thereof, such as a non-transitory computer

readable medium bearing the program and containing computer instructions stored therein for causing a computer processor (such as the processor **142**) to perform and execute the program. Such a program product may take a variety of forms, and the present disclosure applies equally regardless of the particular type of computer-readable signal bearing media used to carry out the distribution. Examples of signal bearing media include: recordable media such as floppy disks, hard drives, memory cards and optical disks, and transmission media such as digital and analog communication links. It will be appreciated that cloud-based storage and/or other techniques may also be utilized in certain embodiments. It will similarly be appreciated that the computer system of the computer system **140** may also otherwise differ from the embodiment depicted in FIG. **1**, for example in that the computer system of the computer system **140** may be coupled to or may otherwise utilize one or more remote computer systems and/or other control systems.

(28) With continued reference to FIG. **1**, in various embodiments the remote server **106** includes a transceiver **160** along with a computer system **170** that includes a processor **172** and a computer memory **174** with stored values **176**. In various embodiments, these components of the remote server **106** are similar in structure and function to those corresponding components of the e-pallet **102** as described above.

(29) FIG. **2** is a flowchart of a process **200** for controlling an e-pallet, in accordance with an exemplary embodiment. In various embodiments, the process **200** incorporates sensor data of different modalities, and further incorporates surrounding conditions such as lightning, noise, and the like for controlling the e-pallet **102**. In addition, in various embodiments, the process **200** may be implemented in connection with the system **100** of FIG. **1**, including the user **110** and one or more e-pallets **102** of FIG. **1**. In certain embodiments, the process **200** may also be implemented in connection with the remote server **106** of FIG. **1**. Also, while a single e-pallet **102** is depicted in FIG. **2**, it will be appreciated that the process **200** may also be utilized for controlling a plurality of e-pallets in accordance with exemplary embodiments.

(30) As depicted in FIG. **2**, in various embodiments, the user **110** provides instructions and commands for movement of the e-pallet **102** using a plurality of modalities, including: hand gestures as well as verbal commands, in addition to commands provided via the electronic wearable device **111**. The control of the e-pallet **102** using each of these techniques is described below.

(31) In various embodiments, vision data **201** from the user **110** is captured via one or more cameras **122** of the e-pallet **102**. In various embodiments, the vision data **201** includes camera images as to hand gestures of the user **110**.

(32) In various embodiments, gesture recognition is performed on the vision data **201** (step **202**). In various embodiments, markerless vision-based gesture recognition is performed by the processor **142** of the e-pallet **102** of FIG. **1**, and/or in certain embodiments by the processor **172** of the remote server **106** of FIG. **1**. In various embodiments, the gesture recognition yields vision gesture recognition output **204** for further processing.

(33) As depicted in FIG. **1**, information as to known gesture meanings is obtained (step **216**). In various embodiments, the information of step **216** includes data as to known meanings of various different hand gestures, such as from the current user **110** and/or from other operators of similar e-pallets. In various embodiments, this data is obtained from a computer memory, such as from the computer memory **144** as stored values **154** therefrom on the e-pallet **102** of FIG. **1**, and/or from the computer memory **174** as stored values **176** therefrom on the remote server **106** of FIG. **1**. In various embodiments, step **216** yields known gesture output **217** for further analysis.

(34) In certain embodiments, the known meanings of the various different hand gestures (e.g., that is stored in the computer memory) include the following: (i) moving forward-push away: the user walks towards the e-pallet with the index finger pointing towards the e-pallet; (ii) moving backward/approach the user more: the user walks away from the e-pallet (e.g., either the user walks backwards facing the e-pallet with the index finger pointing towards the e-pallet, or the user's back

faces the camera); (iii) turning left/push away left: the user walks towards the e-pallet with the index finger pointing left towards the e-pallet; (iv) turning right/push away right: the user walks towards the e-pallet with the index finger pointing right towards the e-pallet; (v) stop motion/park: the user stops walking and/or stops pointing the index finger; (vi) move beside to the right: the user wants to load/unload e-pallet and move to his or her right side by pointing the index finger up; (vii) move beside to the left: the user wants to load/unload e-pallet and move to your left side by pointing the index finger down; (viii) open closure: the user points a clockwise circle; (ix) close closure: the user points a counter-clockwise circle; (x) predefined modes: for example, elevator mode first and second versions, dead-end mode, and so on.

(35) In various embodiments, the vision gesture recognition output **204** is compared with the known gesture output **217** during step **214** along with other data from the microphone **124** of the e-pallet **102** and the electronic wearable device **111** of the user **110**, as described in greater detail further below.

(36) As depicted in FIG. 2, in various embodiments audio data **205** from the user **110** is captured via one or more microphones **124** of the e-pallet **102**. In various embodiments, the audio data **205** includes captured microphone recordings as to the verbal utterances or commands of the user **110**.

(37) In various embodiments, intent recognition is performed on the audio data **205** (step **206**). In various embodiments, speech-based intent recognition is performed by the processor **142** of the e-pallet **102** of FIG. 1, and/or in certain embodiments by the processor **172** of the remote server **106** of FIG. 1. In various embodiments, the speech-based intent recognition yields audio intent recognition output **208** for further processing.

(38) In addition, also as depicted in FIG. 2, in various embodiments motion data **207** from the user **110** is captured. In various embodiments, the motion data **207** includes captured motion data from one or more other sensors **127** of the sensor array **120** from one or more electronic wearable devices **111** of the user **110**.

(39) In various embodiments, motion-based recognition is performed on the motion data **207** (step **210**). In various embodiments, wearable device motion-based gesture recognition is performed by the processor **142** of the e-pallet **102** of FIG. 1, and/or in certain embodiments by the processor **172** of the remote server **106** of FIG. 1. In various embodiments, the motion-based gesture recognition yields motion gesture recognition output **212** for further processing.

(40) In various embodiments, the vision gesture recognition output **204**, the known gesture output **217**, the audio intent recognition output **208**, and the motion gesture recognition output **212** are each compared with one another (step **214**). In various embodiments, the vision gesture recognition output **204**, the known gesture output **217**, the audio intent recognition output **208**, and the motion gesture recognition output **212** are each fused together for analysis by a processor (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. 1) in order to determine a predicted command **218** (based on all of the aggregate data and the processing thereof) from the user **110** for movement of the e-pallet **102**.

(41) In various embodiments, the predicted command is provided to an e-pallet control module including a processor (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. 1) for implementation (step **220**). In various embodiments, the predicted command **218** is implemented in accordance with implementation instructions **222** that are provided by the processor and that are implemented by the e-pallet actuators **135** of FIG. 1 for movement of the e-pallet **102** in a manner corresponding to the predicted command **218** of the user **110**. In various embodiments, the process **200** then either terminates or repeats with updated sensor data.

(42) In various embodiments, in accordance with the process **200** of FIG. 2 and the various embodiments of FIGS. 3A-9, the control of the e-pallets **102** combines motion primitives to generate both relatively simple motions (e.g., push away from me, approach me, push and pull to the right, push and pull to the left, park, open/close closure) as well as complex motion behaviors (e.g., elevator modes, dead-end mode, and related modes such as ramp mode, building ingress

mode, building egress mode, and so on). In addition, also in various embodiments, the control of the e-pallets **102** further includes an adaption of the interaction of e-pallets **102** taking into consideration the surrounding conditions (such lighting, noise, line of sight, and so on).

(43) FIGS. **3A** and **3B** are flow diagrams depicting an exemplary implementation of the process of FIG. **2** in accordance with an exemplary embodiment in which a plurality of e-pallets are controlled in accordance with a first elevator mode in accordance with a process **300**, in accordance with an exemplary embodiment. FIGS. **3A** and **3B** depict the process **300** with three e-pallets, namely: a first e-pallet **301**, a second e-pallet **302**, and a third e-pallet **303**. In various embodiments, each of the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and third e-pallet **303** comprises an e-pallet **102** with the components, characteristics, and features described above in connection with FIG. **1**. In addition, it will be appreciated that the process **300** may also be implemented with a different number of e-pallets in various embodiments.

(44) As depicted in FIG. **3A**, in various embodiments, the process **300** includes an alignment of the e-pallets (step **310**). With reference to FIG. **3B**, in various embodiments, during step **310** the e-pallets are aligned with the first e-pallet **301** positioned as leader, the second e-pallet **302** positioned as first follower (i.e., that directly follows the leader), and the third e-pallet **303** positioned as a second follower (i.e., that directly follows the first follower). Also in various embodiments, the alignment is attained via instructions provided by one or more processors, such as one or more processors **142** of the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and/or third e-pallet **303**, and/or the processor **172** of the remote server **106** of FIG. **1**. In an exemplary embodiment, each of the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and third e-pallet **303** are parked in this sequence in front of an elevator, such as the elevator **305** depicted further below in FIG. **3**.

(45) Also in various embodiments, the process **300** includes steering of the e-pallets (step **312**). With reference to FIG. **3B**, in various embodiments, during step **312** the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and third e-pallet **303** are each rotated ninety degrees. In various embodiments, each of the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and third e-pallet **303** are rotated ninety degrees in a clockwise manner away from the elevator **305**. Also in various embodiments, this is performed via instructions provided by one or more processors, such as one or more processors **142** of the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and/or third e-pallet **303**, and/or the processor **172** of the remote server **106** of FIG. **1**.

(46) Also in various embodiments, the process **300** includes cohesion of the e-pallets (step **314**). With reference to FIG. **3B**, in various embodiments, during step **314** gaps are closed between the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and third e-pallet **303**, generating a calibratable cohesion gap **307** therebetween, and thereby enhancing cohesion between these different e-pallets. Also in various embodiments, this is performed via instructions provided by one or more processors, such as one or more processors **142** of the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and/or third e-pallet **303**, and/or the processor **172** of the remote server **106** of FIG. **1**.

(47) In addition, in various embodiments, the process **300** includes ingress of the e-pallets (step **316**). With reference to FIG. **3B**, in various embodiments, the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and third e-pallet **303** move forward in this order into the elevator **305**. Also in various embodiments, this is performed via instructions provided by one or more processors, such as one or more processors **142** of the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and/or third e-pallet **303**, and/or the processor **172** of the remote server **106** of FIG. **1**.

(48) Also in various embodiments, the process **300** includes egress of the e-pallets (step **318**). With reference to FIG. **3B**, in various embodiments, the first e-pallet **301** and third e-pallet **303** swatch leadership roles, such that: the third e-pallet **303** is now the leader and the third e-pallet **303** is now the second follower (while the second e-pallet **302** remains the first follower). Also in various embodiments, the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and third e-pallet **303** move together in this order out of the elevator **305**. Also in various embodiments, this is performed via instructions provided by one or more processors, such as one or more processors **142** of the first e-pallet **301**,

second e-pallet **302**, and/or third e-pallet **303**, and/or the processor **172** of the remote server **106** of FIG. **1**. In various embodiments, the process **300** then terminates.

(49) FIGS. **4A** and **4B** are flow diagrams depicting an exemplary implementation of the process of FIG. **2** in accordance with another exemplary embodiment in which a plurality of e-pallets are controlled in accordance with a second elevator mode in accordance with a process **400**, in accordance with an exemplary embodiment. FIGS. **4A** and **4B** depict the process **400** with three e-pallets, such as the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and third e-pallet **303** described above in connection with FIGS. **3A** and **3B**. In addition, it will be appreciated that the process **400** may also be implemented with a different number of e-pallets in various embodiments.

(50) As depicted in FIG. **4A**, in various embodiments, the process **400** includes an alignment of the e-pallets (step **410**). With reference to FIG. **4B**, in various embodiments, during step **410** the e-pallets are aligned with the first e-pallet **301** positioned as leader, the second e-pallet **302** positioned as the first follower, and the third e-pallet **303** positioned as the second follower (e.g., similar that of step **310** described above in connection with FIGS. **3A** and **3B**). Also in various embodiments, the alignment is attained via instructions provided by one or more processors, such as one or more processors **142** of the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and/or third e-pallet **303**, and/or the processor **172** of the remote server **106** of FIG. **1**.

(51) Also in various embodiments, the process **400** includes steering of the e-pallets (step **412**). With reference to FIG. **4B**, in various embodiments, during step **412** the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and third e-pallet **303** are each repositioned in parallel. Also in various embodiments, this is performed via instructions provided by one or more processors, such as one or more processors **142** of the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and/or third e-pallet **303**, and/or the processor **172** of the remote server **106** of FIG. **1**.

(52) Also in various embodiments, the process **400** includes cohesion of the e-pallets (step **414**). With reference to FIG. **4B**, in various embodiments, during step **314** gaps are closed between the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and third e-pallet **303**, generating a calibratable cohesion gap **407** therebetween, and thereby enhancing cohesion between these different e-pallets. Also in various embodiments, this is performed via instructions provided by one or more processors, such as one or more processors **142** of the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and/or third e-pallet **303**, and/or the processor **172** of the remote server **106** of FIG. **1**.

(53) In addition, in various embodiments, the process **400** includes ingress of the e-pallets (step **416**). With reference to FIG. **4B**, in various embodiments, the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and third e-pallet **303** move forward in this order into the elevator **305** in a manner such that the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and third e-pallet **303** simultaneously enter the elevator **305** parallel to one another. Also in various embodiments, this is performed via instructions provided by one or more processors, such as one or more processors **142** of the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and/or third e-pallet **303**, and/or the processor **172** of the remote server **106** of FIG. **1**.

(54) Also in various embodiments, the process **400** includes egress of the e-pallets (step **418**). With reference to FIG. **4B**, in various embodiments, the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and third e-pallet **303** move together out of the elevator **305**, simultaneously and parallel to one another. Also in various embodiments, this is performed via instructions provided by one or more processors, such as one or more processors **142** of the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and/or third e-pallet **303**, and/or the processor **172** of the remote server **106** of FIG. **1**.

(55) In addition, in various embodiments, the platoon recovers (step **420**). With reference to FIG. **4B**, in various embodiments, the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and third e-pallet **303** each rotate one hundred eighty degrees clockwise, thereby effectively flipping horizontally, to recover the platoon. Also in various embodiments, this is performed via instructions provided by one or more processors, such as one or more processors **142** of the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and/or third e-pallet **303**, and/or the processor **172** of the remote server **106** of FIG. **1**. In various

embodiments, the process **400** then terminates.

(56) FIGS. **5A** and **5B** are flow diagrams depicting an exemplary implementation of the process of FIG. **2** in accordance with another exemplary embodiment in which a plurality of e-pallets are controlled in accordance with a dead end mode in accordance with a process **500**, in accordance with an exemplary embodiment. FIGS. **5A** and **5B** depict the process **500** with the user **110** of FIG. **1** along with three e-pallets, such as the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and third e-pallet **303** described above in connection with FIGS. **3A** and **3B**. In addition, it will be appreciated that the process **500** may also be implemented with a different number of e-pallets in various embodiments.

(57) As depicted in FIG. **5A**, in various embodiments, the process **500** includes dead end detection (step **510**). In various embodiments, the dead end (e.g., an end of a hallway or passageway) is detected via one or more sensors of one or more of the e-pallets, such as via one or more cameras **122** of the first pallet **301**. With reference to FIG. **5B**, in various embodiments, during step **510** the e-pallets are aligned with the first e-pallet **301** positioned as leader (and in closest proximity to the user **110**), the second e-pallet **302** positioned as the first follower, and the third e-pallet **303** positioned as a second follower. Also in various embodiments, the first pallet **301**, second pallet **302**, and third pallet **303** are pulled toward the dead end, in accordance with instructions provided by one or more processors, such as one or more processors **142** of the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and/or third e-pallet **303**, and/or the processor **172** of the remote server **106** of FIG. **1**.

(58) Also in various embodiments, the process **500** includes a switching of roles (step **512**). With reference to FIG. **5B**, in various embodiments, during step **512** the first e-pallet **301** and third e-pallet **303** switch roles, such that the third e-pallet **303** becomes the leader and the first e-pallet **301** becomes the second follower (while the second e-pallet **302** remains the first follower). Also in various first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and third e-pallet **303** are each repositioned in parallel. Also in various embodiments, this is performed via instructions provided by one or more processors, such as one or more processors **142** of the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and/or third e-pallet **303**, and/or the processor **172** of the remote server **106** of FIG. **1**.

(59) In various embodiments, the process **500** includes a reversing of motion direction (step **514**). With reference to FIG. **5B**, in various embodiments, during step **514** moving direction for each of the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and third e-pallet **303** is changed by changing the polarity of the differential drives **101** of each of the respective e-pallets. Also in various embodiments, this is performed via instructions provided by one or more processors, such as one or more processors **142** of the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and/or third e-pallet **303**, and/or the processor **172** of the remote server **106** of FIG. **1**.

(60) In various embodiments, the e-pallets are pulled away from the dead end (step **516**). With reference to FIG. **5B**, in various embodiments, during step **516** the first e-pallet **301**, the second e-pallet **302**, and the third e-pallet **303** are then pulled away from the dead end in this sequence (i.e., with the first e-pallet **301** being first as the leader, the second e-pallet **302** being next as the first follower, and the third e-pallet **303** being next as the second follower). Also in various embodiments, this is performed via instructions provided by one or more processors, such as one or more processors **142** of the first e-pallet **301**, second e-pallet **302**, and/or third e-pallet **303**, and/or the processor **172** of the remote server **106** of FIG. **1**. In various embodiments, the process **500** then terminates.

(61) FIG. **6** is a flow diagram depicting a process **600** that provides an exemplary implementation of the process **200** of FIG. **2** in which an e-pallet is controlled using inputs that are received via multi-modal interaction from a user, in accordance with an exemplary embodiment. In various embodiments, the process **600** can similarly be implemented in connection with the system **100** of FIG. **1**, including the user **110** and one or more e-pallets **102** of FIG. **1**. In certain embodiments, the process **600** may also be implemented in connection with the remote server **106** of FIG. **1**. Also, while a single e-pallet **102** is depicted in FIG. **6**, it will be appreciated that the process **600** may

also be utilized for controlling a plurality of e-pallets in accordance with exemplary embodiments.

(62) As depicted in FIG. 6, in various embodiments, the user **110** provides instructions and commands for movement of the e-pallet **102** using hand gestures as well as verbal commands. The control of the e-pallet **102** using both gestures and verbal commands is described below.

(63) As depicted in FIG. 6, in various embodiments audio data **602** from the user **110** is captured via one or more microphones **124** of the e-pallet **102**. In various embodiments, the audio data **602** includes captured microphone recordings as to the verbal utterances or commands of the user **110**.

(64) In various embodiments, speech enhancement is performed on the audio data **602** (step **604**). In various embodiments, the speech enhancement is performed by the processor **142** of the e-pallet **102** of FIG. 1, and/or in certain embodiments by the processor **172** of the remote server **106** of FIG. 1. In various embodiments, the speech enhancement yields an enhanced signal **606** for further processing.

(65) In various embodiments, acoustic signal characterization is also performed (step **608**). In various embodiments, the acoustic signal characterization is performed on the audio data **602**, utilizing the enhanced signal **606**. In various embodiments, the acoustic signal characterization is performed by the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. 1, and yields a sound characteristic (S.C.) **610** for the acoustic signal. In certain embodiments, the sound characteristics **610** comprise a sound pressure level (SPL). In other embodiments, the sound characteristic **610** comprises a signal to noise ratio (SNR). In other embodiments, one or more other types of sound characteristics **610** may be utilized.

(66) In various embodiments, a determination is made as to whether the acoustic signal is noisy (step **614**). In various embodiments, this determination is made by one or more processors (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. 1) as to whether the sound characteristic **610** (e.g., SNR or SPL, in certain embodiments) is greater than a predetermined threshold level **612** that is stored in the memory **144** and/or **174** of FIG. 1.

(67) In various embodiments, if it is determined that the acoustic signal is not noisy (e.g., that the sound characteristic **610** is less than or equal to the predetermined threshold level **612**), then voice control is enabled for the e-pallet (step **616**). In various embodiments, this is implemented in accordance with instructions provided by one or more processors (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. 1)

(68) Conversely, in various embodiments, if it is instead determined that the acoustic signal is noisy (e.g., that the sound characteristic **610** is greater than the predetermined threshold level **612**), then speech guidance is activated (step **618**). Specifically, in certain embodiments, instructions are provided from the e-pallet **102** to the user **110** for the user to take one or more actions to improve the audio signal from the user **110**. For example, in certain embodiments, the user **110** may be requested to turn toward the microphone **124** and/or to move closer to the microphone **124**, and so on. In certain embodiments, these instructions may be provided by the speaker **126** in accordance with instructions provided by one or more processors (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. 1).

(69) In various embodiments, a subsequent determination is made as to whether the acoustic signal is still noisy (step **622**). In various embodiments, step **622** is performed similar to step **614**, but with updated data following the speech guidance of step **618**.

(70) In various embodiments, if it is determined in step **622** that the acoustic signal is no longer noisy (e.g., that the sound characteristic **610** is now less than or equal to the predetermined threshold level **612**), then the process proceeds to the above-described step **616**, as voice control is enabled for the e-pallet.

(71) Conversely, in various embodiments, if it is instead determined in step **622** that the acoustic signal is still noisy (e.g., that the sound characteristic **610** is still greater than the predetermined threshold level **612**), then the process proceeds instead to the above-described step **604**, as further speech enhancement is performed (and the process continues in a new iteration).

(72) In addition, as depicted in FIG. 6, in various embodiments vision data **625** from the user **110** is captured via one or more cameras **122** of the e-pallet **102**. In various embodiments, the vision data **625** includes captured camera images as to the hand gestures of the user **110**.

(73) In various embodiments, image enhancement is performed on the vision data **625** (step **636**). In various embodiments, the image enhancement is performed by the processor **142** of the e-pallet **102** of FIG. 1, and/or in certain embodiments by the processor **172** of the remote server **106** of FIG. 1. In various embodiments, the image enhancement yields an enhanced image **637** for further processing.

(74) In various embodiments, an image quality estimate (IQE) is generated for the vision data step (**626**). In certain embodiments, the IQE comprises an image quality index (IQI) for the vision data: however, this may vary in other embodiments. In various embodiments, the image quality estimate (the IQE, and in certain embodiments the IQI) is generated for the vision data **625**, utilizing the enhanced image **637**, by one or more processors (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. 1).

(75) In various embodiments, a determination is made as to whether the IQE (e.g., IQI in certain embodiments) of step **626** is greater than a predetermined threshold value (step **628**). In various embodiments, this determination is made by one or more processors (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. 1) as to whether the IQE (e.g., IQI) is greater than a predetermined threshold level **634** that is stored in the memory **144** and/or **174** of FIG. 1.

(76) In various embodiments, if it is determined in step **628** that the IQE (e.g., IQI) is greater than the predetermined threshold level, then gesture control is enabled for the e-pallet (step **630**). In various embodiments, this is implemented in accordance with instructions provided by one or more processors (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. 1).

(77) Conversely, in various embodiments, if it is instead determined that the IQE (e.g., IQI) is less than or equal to the predetermined threshold value, then vision guidance is activated (step **632**). Specifically, in certain embodiments, instructions are provided from the e-pallet **102** to the user **110** for the user to take one or more actions to improve the vision signal. For example, in certain embodiments, the user **110** may be requested to turn toward the camera **122** and/or to move closer to the camera **122**, and so on. In certain embodiments, these requests for the user **100** may be provided by the speaker **126** in accordance with instructions provided by one or more processors (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. 1).

(78) In various embodiments, a subsequent determination is made as to whether the IQE (e.g., IQI) is still less than or equal to the predetermined threshold (step **636**). In various embodiments, step **636** is performed similar to step **628**, but with updated data following the speech guidance of step **618**.

(79) In various embodiments, if it is determined in step **636** that the IQE (e.g., IQI) is now greater than the predetermined threshold value, then the process proceeds to the above-described step **630**, as gesture control is enabled for the e-pallet.

(80) Conversely, in various embodiments, if it is instead determined in step **636** that the IQI is still less than or equal to the predetermined threshold value, then the process proceeds instead to the above-described step **636**, as further image enhancement is performed (and the process continues in a new iteration).

(81) FIG. 7 is a flow diagram depicting another exemplary implementation of the process **200** of FIG. 2 in which the e-pallet is controlled in accordance with vision and speech inputs from a user, in accordance with an exemplary embodiment. In various embodiments, the process **700** can similarly be implemented in connection with the system **100** of FIG. 1.

(82) As depicted in FIG. 7, in various embodiments vision data **702** from the user **110** is captured via one or more cameras **124** of the e-pallet **102**. In various embodiments, the vision data **702** includes captured camera images as to the hand gestures of the user **110**.

(83) In various embodiments, an image quality estimate (IQE) is generated for the vision data (step

704). In certain embodiments, the IQE comprises an image quality index (IQI) for the vision data; however, this may vary in other embodiments. In various embodiments, the image quality index is generated for the vision data **702** utilized an enhanced image by one or more processors (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. **1**), similar to steps **636** and **637** described above in connection with FIG. **6**.

(84) In various embodiments, a determination is made as to whether the image quality is satisfactory (step **706**). Specifically, in various embodiments, a determination is made as to whether the IQE (e.g., IQI) of step **704** is greater than a predetermined threshold value. In various embodiments, this determination is made by one or more processors (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. **1**) as to whether the IQE (e.g., IQI) is greater than a predetermined threshold level that is stored in the memory **144** and/or **174** of FIG. **1**.

(85) In various embodiments, if it is determined in step **706** that the IQE (e.g., IQI) is greater than the predetermined threshold level, then the process returns to step **704** in a new iteration.

(86) Conversely, in various embodiments, if it is instead determined that the IQE (e.g., IQI) is less than or equal to the predetermined threshold value, then a notification is provided to the user (step **708**). Specifically, in certain embodiments, instructions are provided from the e-pallet **102** to the user **100** for the user to take one or more actions to improve the vision signal. For example, in certain embodiments, the user **100** may be requested to clean the camera **122**. In certain embodiments, these instructions may be provided by the speaker **126** in accordance with instructions provided by one or more processors (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. **1**).

(87) Also as depicted in FIG. **7**, in various embodiments audio data **710** from the user **110** is captured via one or more microphones **124** of the e-pallet **102**. In various embodiments, the audio data **710** includes captured microphone recordings as to the verbal utterances or commands of the user **110**.

(88) In various embodiments, acoustic signal characterization is performed on the audio data **710** (step **712**). In various embodiments, this is performed by the processor **142** of the e-pallet **102** of FIG. **1**, and/or in certain embodiments by the processor **172** of the remote server **106** of FIG. **1**. In various embodiments, the acoustic signal characterization yields a sound pressure level measure (SPL) **713** for the audio signal.

(89) In various embodiments, a determination is made as to whether the acoustic signal is noisy (step **714**). In various embodiments, this determination is made by one or more processors (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. **1**) as to whether the SPL **713** is greater than a predetermined threshold level that is stored in the memory **144** and/or **174** of FIG. **1**.

(90) In various embodiments, if it is determined that the acoustic signal is not noisy (e.g., that the SPL **713** is less than or equal to the predetermined threshold level), then the process proceeds to step **718**, described further below.

(91) Conversely, in various embodiments, if it is instead determined that the signal is noisy (e.g., that the SPL **713** is greater than predetermined threshold level), then a notification is provided to the user (step **716**). Specifically, in certain embodiments, instructions are provided from the e-pallet **102** to the user **100** for the user to take one or more actions to improve the audio signal. For example, in certain embodiments, the user **100** may be requested to speak louder. In certain embodiments, these instructions may be provided by the speaker **126** in accordance with instructions provided by one or more processors (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. **1**).

(92) Also as depicted in FIG. **7**, in various embodiments motion data **707** from the user **110** is captured via one or more electronic wearable devices **111** of the user **110**. In various embodiments, the motion data **707** includes captured motion data from the wearable electronic devices **111** as to motions of the user **110**, such as the user making hand gestures.

(93) In various embodiments, a locating engine is performed for the motion data (step **718**). In

various embodiments, the locating engine is performed by one or more processors, such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. **1**. Also in various embodiments, the locating engine yields both an orientation **719** and location **725** for the user **110** in relation to the microphone **124** of the e-pallet **102**.

(94) In various embodiments, a determination is made as to whether the user appears to be disoriented with respect to the microphone (step **720**). In certain embodiments, this determination comprises a determination as to whether the user **110** is facing the microphone **124** (in which case the user **110** is considered to be properly oriented), or rather whether the user **110** is facing away from the microphone **124** (in which case the user **110** is considered to be disoriented). In various embodiments, this determination is made by one or more processors (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. **1**) based on the orientation **719**.

(95) In various embodiments, if it is determined that the user is not disoriented, then the process proceeds to step **722**. In various embodiments, during step **722**, no further action is taken for the process **700**.

(96) Conversely, if it is instead determined that the user is disoriented, then the process proceeds instead to step **724**. In various embodiments, during step **724**, a notification is provided to the user. Specifically, in certain embodiments, instructions are provided from the e-pallet **102** to the user **100** for the user **110** to face the microphone **124**. In certain embodiments, these instructions may be provided by the speaker **126** in accordance with instructions provided by one or more processors (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. **1**).

(97) In various embodiments, a determination is also made as to whether the user appears to be relatively far away from the microphone (step **726**). In certain embodiments, this determination comprises a determination as to whether a distance between the user **110** and the microphone **124** is greater than a predetermined threshold value. In various embodiments, this determination is made by one or more processors (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. **1**) based on the orientation **719**.

(98) In various embodiments, if it is determined that the user is not relatively far from the microphone (e.g., such that the distance between the user **110** and the microphone **124** is less than or equal to the predetermined threshold value of step **726**), then the process proceeds to the above-described step **720** in a new iteration.

(99) Conversely, in various embodiments, if it is instead determined that the user is relatively far from the microphone (e.g., such that the distance between the user **110** and the microphone **124** is greater than the predetermined threshold value of step **726**), then the process proceeds instead to step **727**. In various embodiments, during step **727**, a notification is provided to the user. Specifically, in certain embodiments, instructions are provided from the e-pallet **102** to the user **100** for the user to move closer to the microphone **124**. In certain embodiments, these instructions may be provided by the speaker **126** in accordance with instructions provided by one or more processors (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. **1**).

(100) FIG. **8** is a flow diagram depicting another exemplary implementation of the process **200** of FIG. **2** in which the e-pallet is controlled in accordance with gesture inputs from a user, in accordance with an exemplary embodiment. In various embodiments, the process **800** can similarly be implemented in connection with the system **100** of FIG. **1**.

(101) As depicted in FIG. **8**, in various embodiments the user **110** provides a gesture command **801**. In various embodiments, the gesture command comprises a hand gesture command.

(102) Also as depicted in FIG. **8**, in various embodiments, vision images **802** are obtained as to the gestures. In various embodiments, the vision images **802** are obtained via one or more cameras **122** of the e-pallet **102**.

(103) In various embodiments, hand keypoint recognition is performed (step **806**). Specifically, in various embodiments, hand keypoint recognition is performed for the vision images **802** via a processor (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. **1**) using mesh model matching

804. In various embodiments, the mesh model matching utilizes one or more depth-based and/or deep-learning based post-estimation techniques, such as OpenPose, DeepPose, and/or Multiview bootstrapping techniques. Also in various embodiments, the hand keypoint recognition yields various keypoints **808**, for example that may include two dimensional and three dimensional keypoints for the hand of the user **110**.

(104) Also in various embodiments, gesture classification is performed (step **812**). Specifically, in various embodiments, gesture classification is performed via a processor (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. **1**) using one or more pretrained models. In certain embodiments, the pretrained models include one or more pretrained cloud and/or edge machine learning (ML) models. Also in various embodiments, the gesture classification yields a recognized gesture **813** from the user **110**.

(105) In various embodiments, a determination is made as to whether there is a gesture match (step **816**). Specifically, in various embodiments, a determination is made via a processor (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. **1**) as to whether the recognized gesture **813** matches one of a plurality of authorized gestures **814** that are stored in memory (such as the memory **144** and/or memory **174** of FIG. **1**). In certain embodiments, the authorized gestures **814** may include factory-default gestures that apply to any number of users. In certain other embodiments, the authorized gestures **814** may be programmed by the individual user **110**. In certain embodiments, the authorized gestures **814** may include the various known gestures **217** described above in connection with step **216** of FIG. **2**.

(106) In various embodiments, if it is determined in step **816** that there is not a match, then the process proceeds to step **818**. In various embodiments, during step **818**, there are no alerts provided as to a match. In certain embodiments, accordingly the user's gesture command **801** is not utilized for controlling the e-pallet **102**.

(107) Conversely, in various embodiments, if it is instead determined in step **816** that there is a match, then the process proceeds instead to step **820**. During step **820**, gesture control mapping, yielding a control command **822** corresponding to the gesture command **801** provided by the user **110**. In various embodiments, this is performed via a processor (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. **1**).

(108) Also in various embodiments, the control command **822** is implemented (step **824**). Specifically, in various embodiments, the control command **822** is implemented via instructions provided by a processor (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. **1**) of an e-pallet control module that are provided thereby to the e-pallet actuators **135** for control of the e-pallet **102**. In various embodiments, the e-pallet actuators **135** cause movement of the e-pallet **102** in the manner (e.g., direction) requested by the user **110** as reflected in the gesture command **801**.

(109) FIG. **9** is a flow diagram depicting an exemplary implementation of the process **200** of FIG. **2** in which the e-pallet is controlled in accordance with voice inputs from a user, in accordance with an exemplary embodiment. In various embodiments, the process **900** can similarly be implemented in connection with the system **100** of FIG. **1**.

(110) As depicted in FIG. **9**, in various embodiments the user **110** provides a voice command **901**. Also as depicted in FIG. **9**, in various embodiments, acoustic utterances **902** are obtained as to the voice commands **901** via one or more microphones **124** of the e-pallet **102**.

(111) In various embodiments, speech enhancement is performed (step **904**). Specifically, in various embodiments, speech enhancement is performed for the acoustic utterances **902** via a processor (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. **1**). Also in various embodiments, the speech enhancement yields an enhanced acoustic signal **906**.

(112) Also in various embodiments, speech recognition is performed (step **908**). In various embodiments, the speech recognition is performed via a processor (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. **1**) using one or more speech recognition engines. Also in various embodiments, the speech recognition yields a recognized text **910** from the user **110**.

(113) In various embodiments, language understanding is performed (step **912**). In various embodiments the language understanding is performed on the recognized text **910** via a processor (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. **1**), yielding a recognized command **914**.
(114) In various embodiments, a determination is made as to whether there is a recognized command match (step **916**). Specifically, in various embodiments, a determination is made via a processor (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. **1**) as to whether the recognized command **914** matches one of a plurality of authorized voice commands that are stored in memory (such as the memory **144** and/or memory **174** of FIG. **1**). In certain embodiments, the authorized voice commands may include factory-default voice commands that apply to any number of users. In certain other embodiments, the authorized voice commands may be programmed by the individual user **110**.

(115) In various embodiments, if it is determined in step **916** that there is not a match, then the process proceeds to step **926**. In various embodiments, during step **926**, there are no alerts provided as to a match. In certain embodiments, accordingly the user's voice command **901** is not utilized for controlling the e-pallet **102**. In various embodiments, the process proceeds to step **932**, described further below.

(116) Conversely, in various embodiments, if it is instead determined in step **916** that there is a match, then the process proceeds instead to step **918**. During step **918**, voice command control mapping, yielding a control command **920** corresponding to the voice command **901** provided by the user **110**. In various embodiments, this is performed via a processor (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. **1**).

(117) Also in various embodiments, the control command **920** is implemented (step **922**). Specifically, in various embodiments, the control command **920** is implemented via instructions provided by a processor (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. **1**) of an e-pallet control module that are provided thereby to the e-pallet actuators **135** for control of the e-pallet **102**. In various embodiments, the e-pallet actuators **135** cause movement of the e-pallet **102** in the manner (e.g., direction) requested by the user **110** as reflected in the voice command **901**.

(118) With reference back to step **912**, in various embodiments the recognized command **914** is also used for dialog management (step **928**). In various embodiments, dialog management is performed by putting together the recognized command **914** in the context of other speech made by the user **110** and/or other circumstances involved (e.g., a type of facility in which the e-pallet **102** and the user **110** are located, and so on). In various embodiments, this step is performed by a processor (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. **1**), and yields an intended conversation **930**.

(119) Also in various embodiments, language generation is performed (step **932**). In various embodiments, during step **932**, a processor (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. **1**) utilizes the intended conversation **930** (and in certain embodiments any additional details pertaining to the no match alert of step **926**) in performing the language generation for storage in memory for future use. Also in various embodiments, the language generation is combined with other data from an audio database (e.g., stored in the memory **144** and/or memory **174** of FIG. **1**) via processor (such as the processor **142** and/or processor **172** of FIG. **1**) in generating a text to speech engine (step **936**) for use in subsequent iterations of the process **900** of FIG. **9**. In certain embodiments, the process **900** then terminates or repeats.

(120) Accordingly, methods, and systems are provided for control of an e-pallet (and/or for control of one or more other types of moving platforms). As described in greater detail above, in various embodiments, vision recognition, audio recognition, and wearable device motion recognition are each utilized in interpreting and implementing the instructions and commands from a user of one or more e-pallets in accordance with various implementations.

(121) It will be appreciated that the systems, methods, and implementations may vary from those depicted in the Figures and described herein. For example, in various embodiments, the system **100**

(e.g., including the e-pallet **102**, the user **110**, the communications network **108**, and/or the remote server **106**), components thereof, and/or other components may differ from those depicted in FIG. 1 and/or described above in connection therewith. It will also be appreciated that the steps of the processes of FIGS. 2-9 may differ, and/or that various steps thereof may be performed simultaneously and/or in a different order, than those depicted in FIGS. 2-9 and/or described above. (122) While at least one exemplary embodiment has been presented in the foregoing detailed description, it should be appreciated that a vast number of variations exist. It should also be appreciated that the exemplary embodiment or exemplary embodiments are only examples, and are not intended to limit the scope, applicability, or configuration of the disclosure in any way. Rather, the foregoing detailed description will provide those skilled in the art with a convenient road map for implementing the exemplary embodiment or exemplary embodiments. It should be understood that various changes can be made in the function and arrangement of elements without departing from the scope of the disclosure as set forth in the appended claims and the legal equivalents thereof.

Claims

1. A method for controlling movement of one or more e-pallets using multi-modal interaction with a user of the one or more e-pallets, the method comprising: obtaining, via one or more first sensors, first sensor data of a first modality pertaining to a command from the user for movement of the one or more e-pallets; obtaining, via one or more second sensors, second sensor data of a second modality, different from the first modality, pertaining to the command; determining, via a processor, an intended movement of the one or more e-pallets based on both the first sensor data and the second sensor data; and moving the one or more e-pallets in executing the intended movement, in accordance with instructions provided by the processor to one or more actuators of the one or more e-pallets.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein: the step of obtaining the first sensor data comprises obtaining vision sensor data via one or more cameras of the one or more e-pallets as to a hand gesture provided by the user; the step of obtaining the second sensor data comprises obtaining audio sensor data via one or more microphones of the one or more e-pallets as to a verbal command provided by the user; and the step of determining the intended movement comprises determining, via the processor, the intended movement of the one or more e-pallets based on both the vision sensor data and the audio sensor data.
3. The method of claim 2, further comprising: determining, via the processor, an image quality associated with the vision sensor data; wherein the use of the vision sensor data for determining the intended movement and the moving of the one or more e-pallets is based at least in part on the image quality associated with the vision sensor data.
4. The method of claim 3, further comprising: providing instructions, via the processor, for the user to face the one or more cameras, move closer toward the one or more cameras, or both, when the image quality is less than a predetermined threshold.
5. The method of claim 2, further comprising: determining, via the processor, a sound quality associated with the audio sensor data; wherein the use of the audio sensor data for determining the intended movement and the moving of the one or more e-pallets is based at least in part on the sound quality associated with the audio sensor data.
6. The method of claim 5, further comprising: providing instructions, via the processor, for the user to face the one or more microphones, move closer toward the one or more microphones, or both, when the sound quality is less than a predetermined threshold.
7. The method of claim 2, further comprising: obtaining motion sensor data via one or more additional sensors from an electronic wearable device of the user; wherein the step of determining the intended movement comprises determining, via the processor, the intended movement of the

one or more e-pallets based on the vision sensor data, the audio sensor data, and the motion sensor data.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more e-pallets comprise a plurality of e-pallets, and the method further comprises: initiating, via instructions provided by the processor, one or more elevator modes of operation for the plurality of e-pallets when entering and exiting an elevator, the one or more elevator modes of operation including a switching of roles of the plurality of e-pallets between a leader role and one or more follower roles.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein the one or more e-pallets comprise a plurality of e-pallets, and the method further comprises: initiating, via instructions provided by the processor, one or more dead end modes of operation for the plurality of e-pallets when approaching a dead end in a path in which the plurality of e-pallets are travelling, the one or more dead end modes of operation including a switching of roles of the plurality of e-pallets between a leader role and one or more follower roles.

10. A system for controlling movement of one or more e-pallets using multi-modal interaction with a user of the one or more e-pallets, the system comprising: one or more first sensors configured to obtain first sensor data of a first modality pertaining to a command from the user for movement of the one or more e-pallets; one or more second sensors configured to obtain second sensor data of a second modality, different from the first modality, pertaining to the command; and a processor that is coupled to the one or more first sensors and the one or more second sensors, the processor configured to at least facilitate: determining an intended movement of the one or more e-pallets based on both the first sensor data and the second sensor data; and moving the one or more e-pallets in executing the intended movement, in accordance with instructions provided by the processor to one or more actuators of the one or more e-pallets.

11. The system of claim 10, wherein: the one or more first sensors comprise one or more cameras configured to obtain vision sensor data as to a hand gesture provided by the user; the one or more second sensors comprise one or more microphones configured to obtain audio sensor as to a verbal command provided by the user; and the processor is configured to at least facilitate determining the intended movement of the one or more e-pallets based on both the vision sensor data and the audio sensor data.

12. The system of claim 11, wherein the processor is configured to at least facilitate: determining an image quality associated with the vision sensor data; and using the vision sensor data for determining the intended movement and the moving of the one or more e-pallets based at least in part on the image quality associated with the vision sensor data.

13. The system of claim 12, wherein the processor is configured to at least facilitate: providing instructions for the user to face the one or more cameras, move closer toward the one or more cameras, or both, when the image quality is less than a predetermined threshold.

14. The system of claim 11, wherein the processor is configured to at least facilitate: determining a sound quality associated with the audio sensor data; and using the audio sensor data for determining the intended movement and the moving of the one or more e-pallets based at least in part on the sound quality associated with the audio sensor data.

15. The system of claim 14, wherein the processor is configured to at least facilitate: providing instructions for the user to face the one or more microphones, move closer toward the one or more microphones, or both, when the sound quality is less than a predetermined threshold.

16. The system of claim 11, further comprising: one or more additional sensors configured to obtain motion sensor data from an electronic wearable device of the user; wherein the processor is configured to at least facilitate determining the intended movement of the one or more e-pallets based on the vision sensor data, the audio sensor data, and the motion sensor data.

17. The system of claim 10, wherein the one or more e-pallets comprise a plurality of e-pallets, and the processor is configured to at least facilitate: initiating, via instructions provided by the processor, one or more elevator modes of operation for the plurality of e-pallets when entering and

exiting an elevator, the one or more elevator modes of operation including a switching of roles of the plurality of e-pallets between a leader role and one or more follower roles.

18. The system of claim 10, wherein the one or more e-pallets comprise a plurality of e-pallets, and the processor is configured to at least facilitate: initiating, via instructions provided by the processor, one or more dead end modes of operation for the plurality of e-pallets when approaching a dead end in a path in which the plurality of e-pallets are travelling, the one or more dead end modes of operation including a switching of roles of the plurality of e-pallets between a leader role and one or more follower roles.

19. An e-pallet device comprising: a body; a plurality of actuators disposed on or within the body; one or more cameras disposed on or within the body and configured to obtain vision sensor data pertaining to a command from a user for movement of the body as represented via a hand gesture of the user; one or more microphones disposed on or within the body and configured to obtain audio sensor data pertaining to the command as represented via an audible utterance of the user; and a processor that is coupled to the one or more cameras, the one or more microphones, and the plurality of actuators, the processor configured to at least facilitate: determining an intended movement of the e-pallet device based on both the vision sensor data and the audio sensor data; and moving the e-pallet device in executing the intended movement, in accordance with instructions provided by the processor to the plurality of actuators and that are implemented via the plurality of actuators.

20. The e-pallet device of claim 19, further comprising: one or more additional sensors configured to obtain motion sensor data from an electronic wearable device of the user; wherein the processor is configured to at least facilitate determining the intended movement of the e-pallet device based on the vision sensor data, the audio sensor data, and the motion sensor data.
