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(54) **CONTEXT-SENSITIVE SAFETY  
MONITORING OF COLLABORATIVE WORK  
ENVIRONMENTS**

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(21) Appl. No.: **18/106,619**

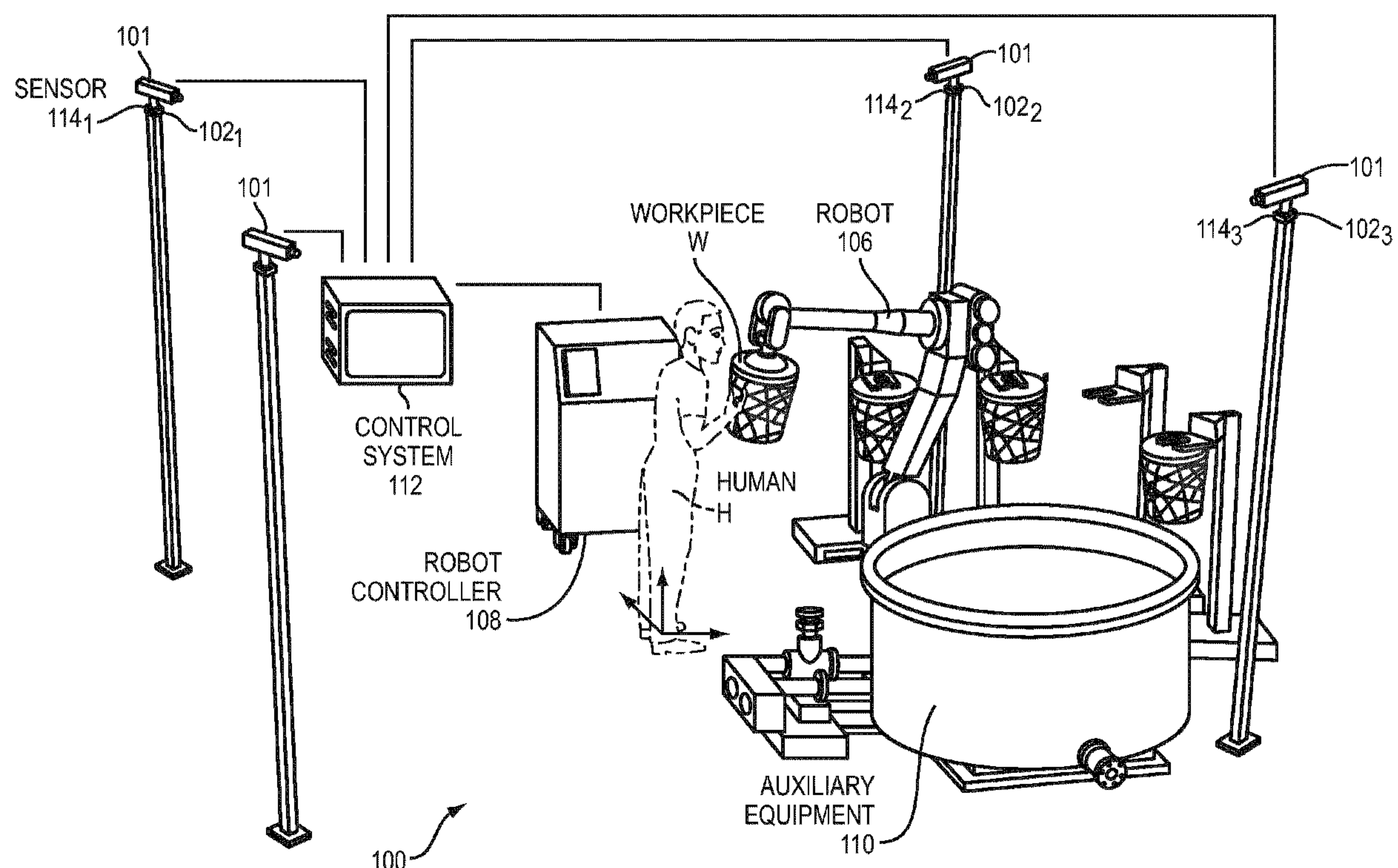
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(63) Continuation of application No. 17/739,815, filed on May 9, 2022, now Pat. No. 11,602,852, which is a continuation-in-part of application No. 16/999,676, filed on Aug. 21, 2020, now Pat. No. 11,396,099, application No. 18/106,619 is a continuation-in-part of application No. 17/712,563, filed on Apr. 4, 2022, now Pat. No. 11,623,356, which is a continuation of application No. 16/919,959, filed on Jul. 2, 2020, now

(57) **ABSTRACT**

Various embodiments for enforcing safe operation of machinery performing an activity in a three-dimensional (3D) workspace includes computationally generating a 3D spatial representation of the workspace; computationally mapping 3D regions of the workspace corresponding to space occupied by the machinery and a human; and based thereon, restricting operation of the machinery in accordance with a safety protocol during physical performance of the activity. Limited-access zones are defined within which the presence of a human will not affect operation of the machinery.



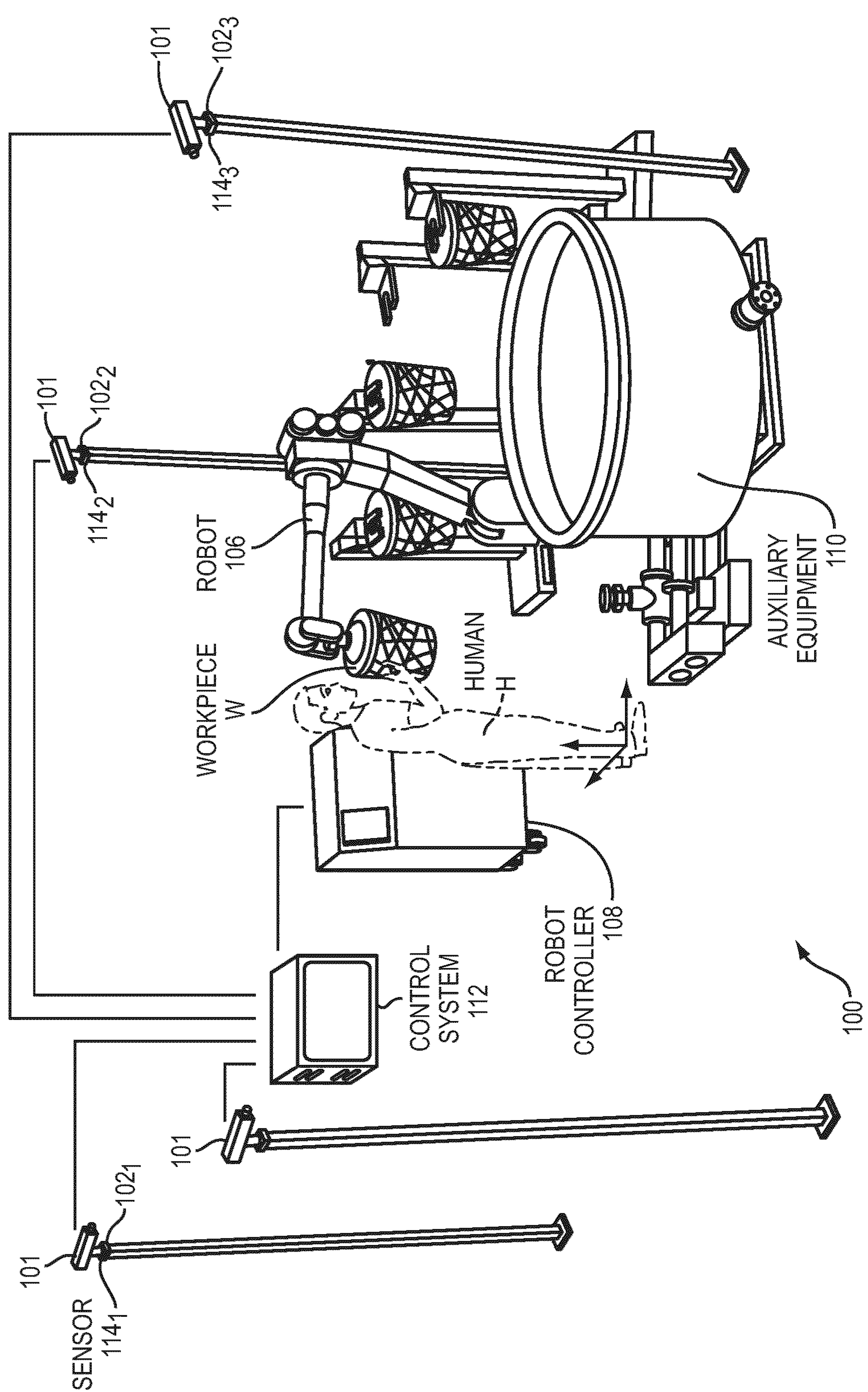


FIG. 1



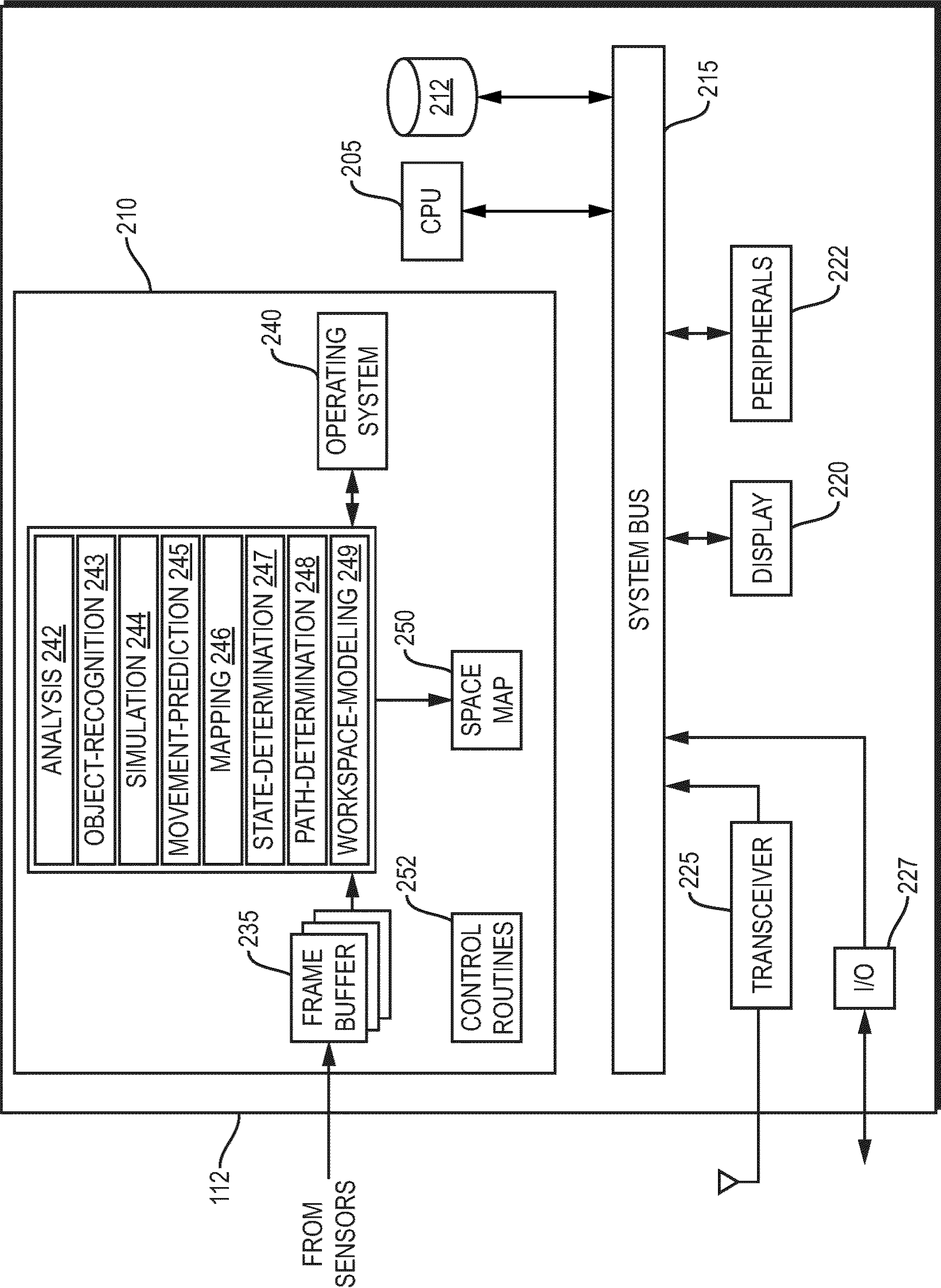


FIG. 2

FIG. 3A

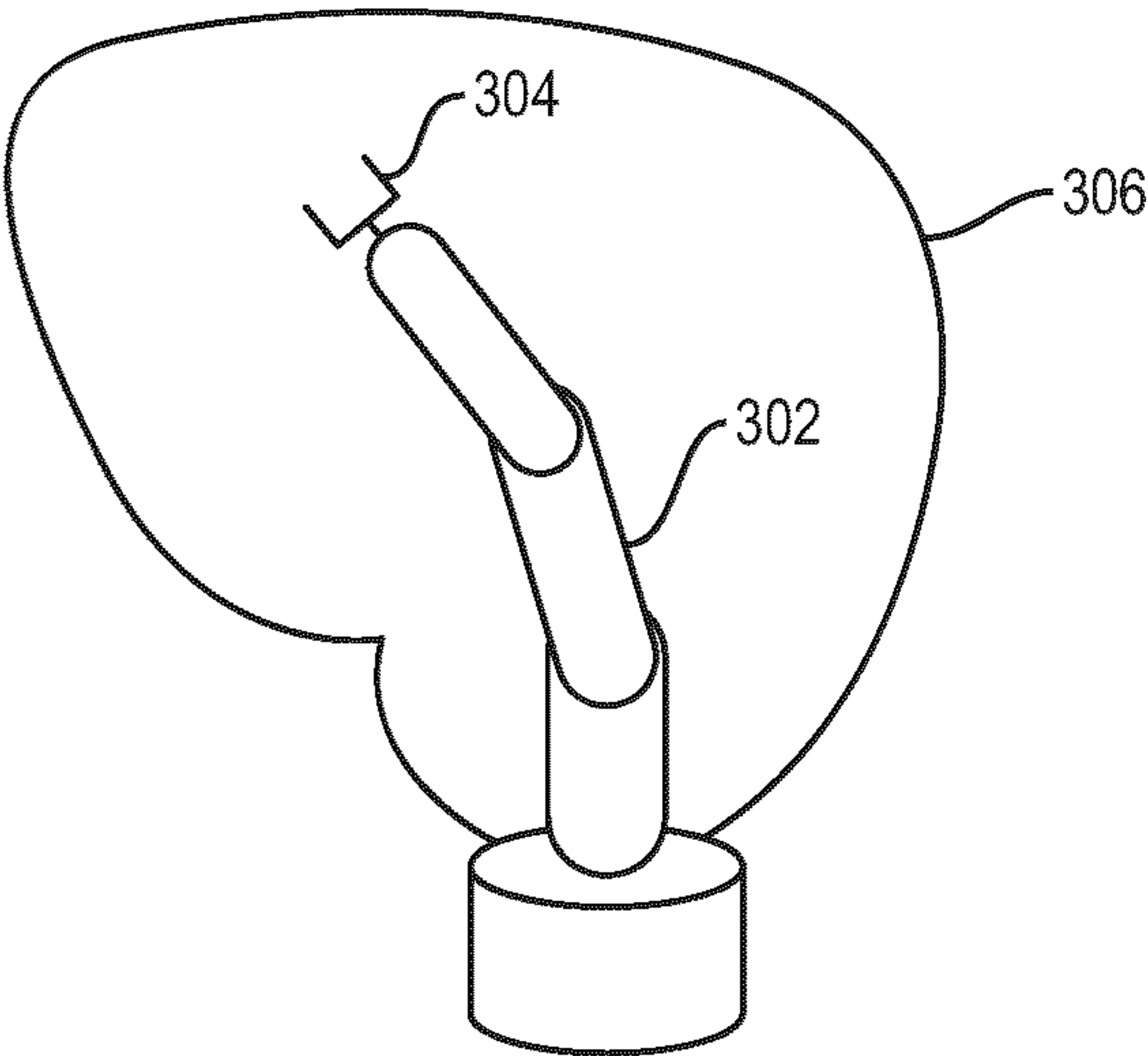


FIG. 3B

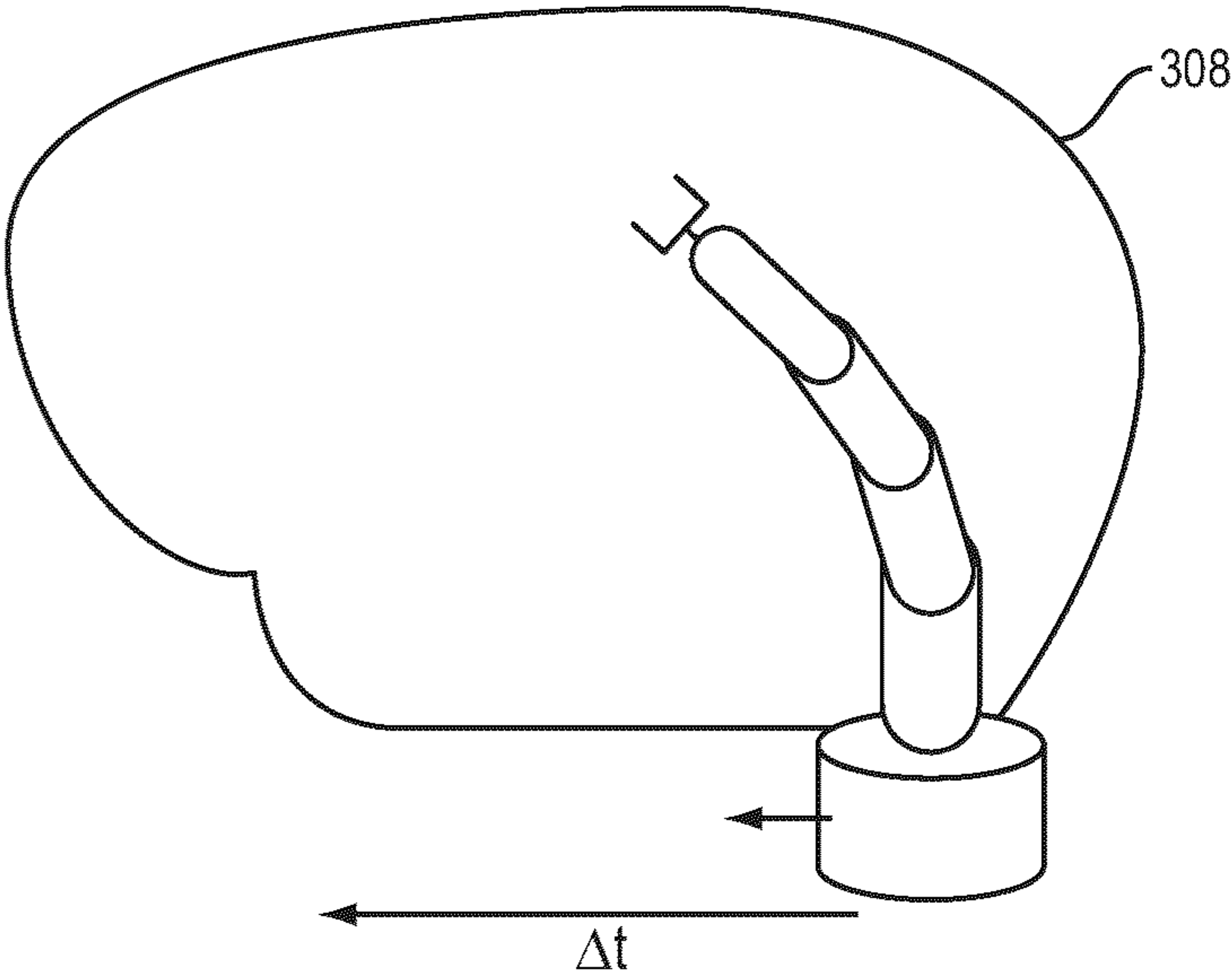
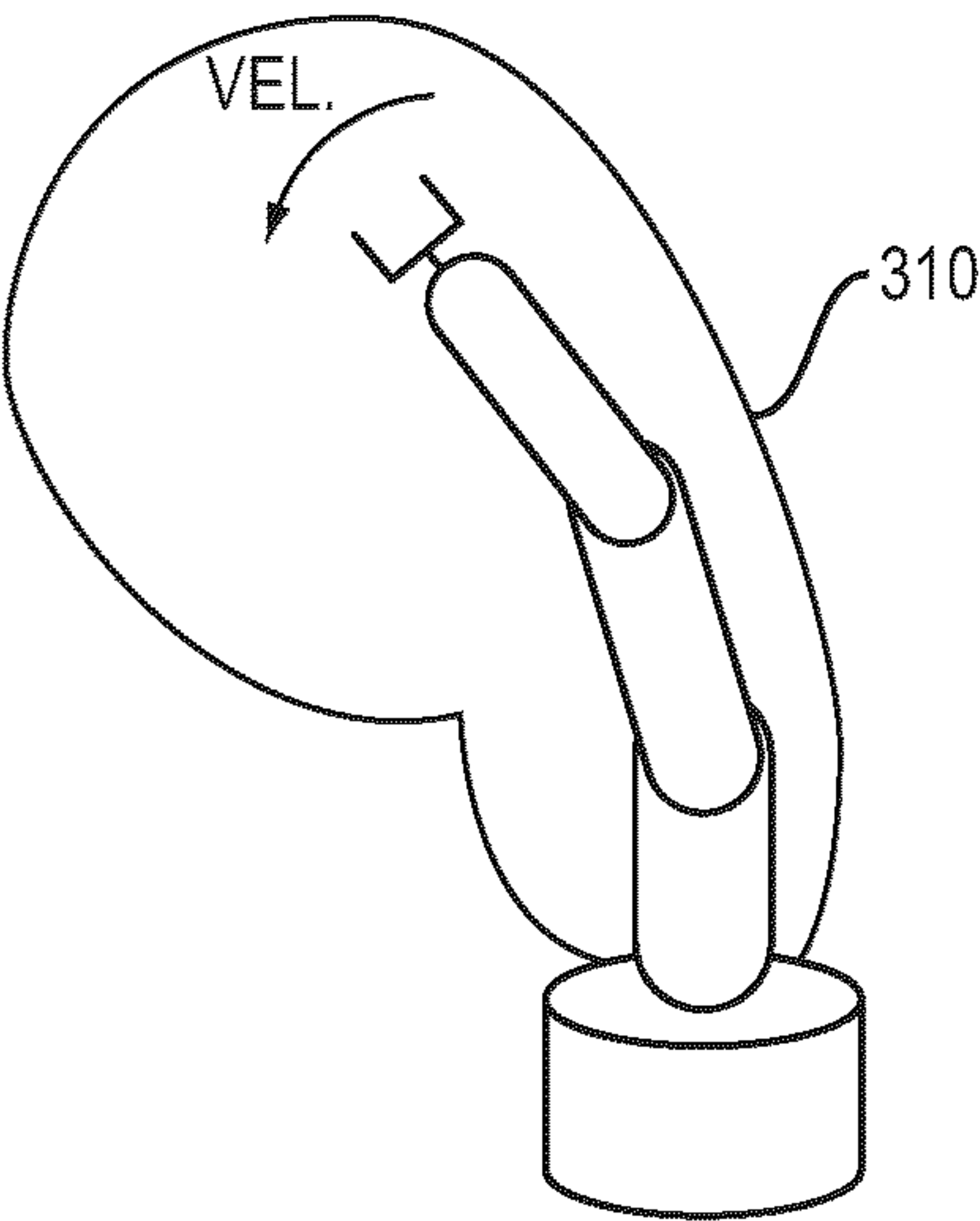


FIG. 3C



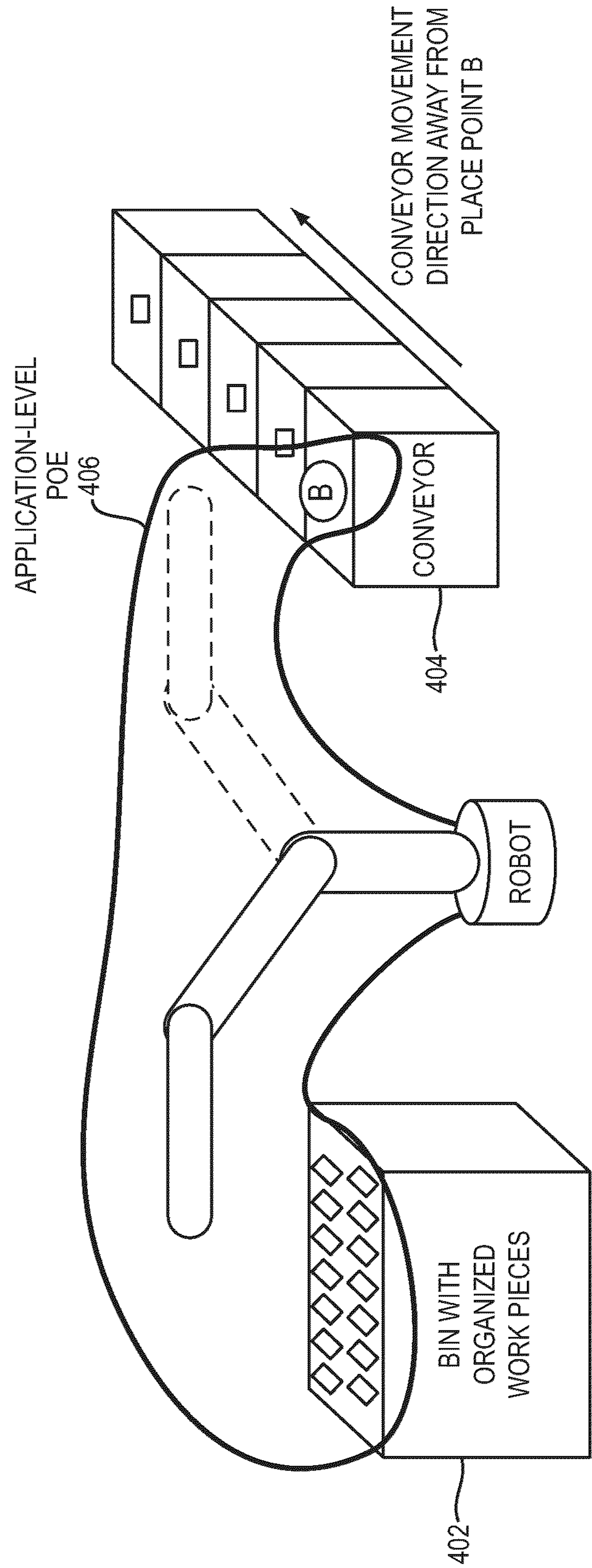


FIG. 4



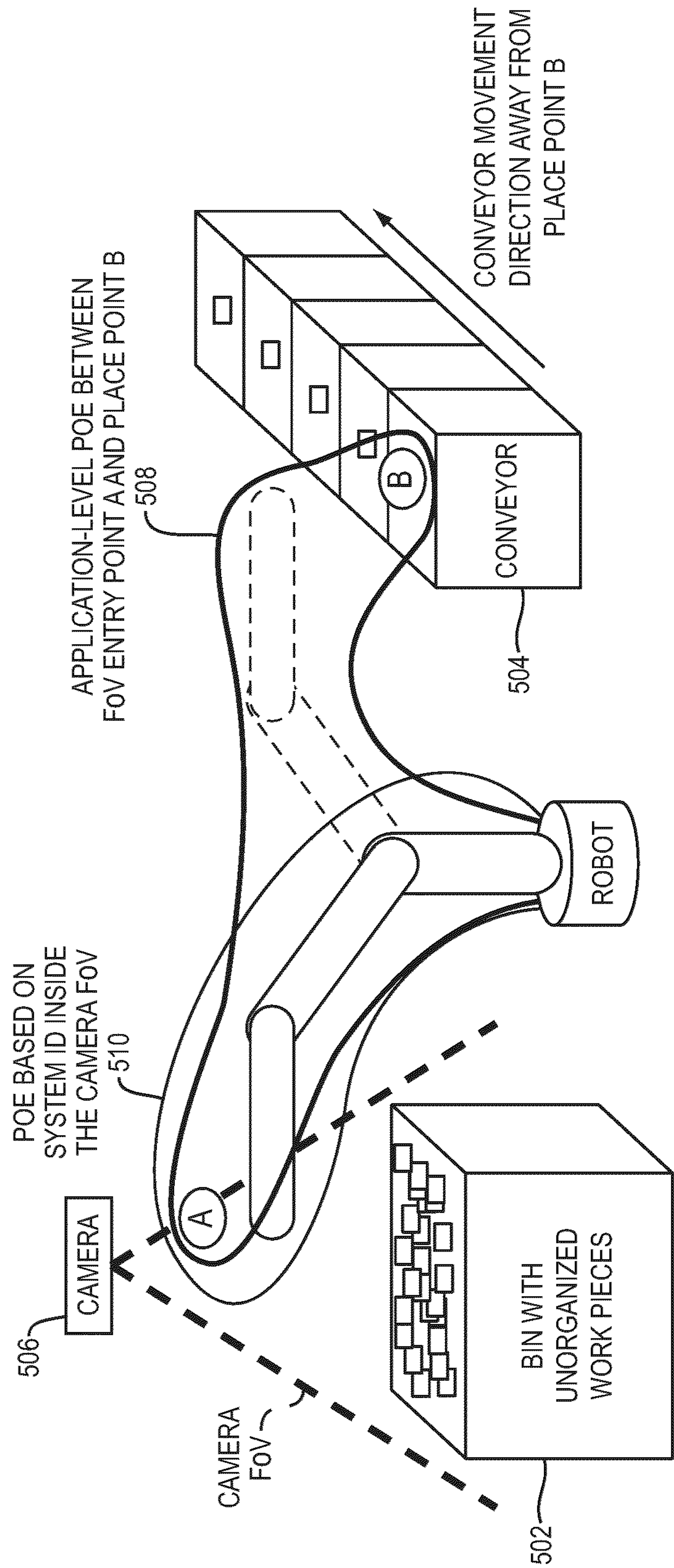


FIG. 5A

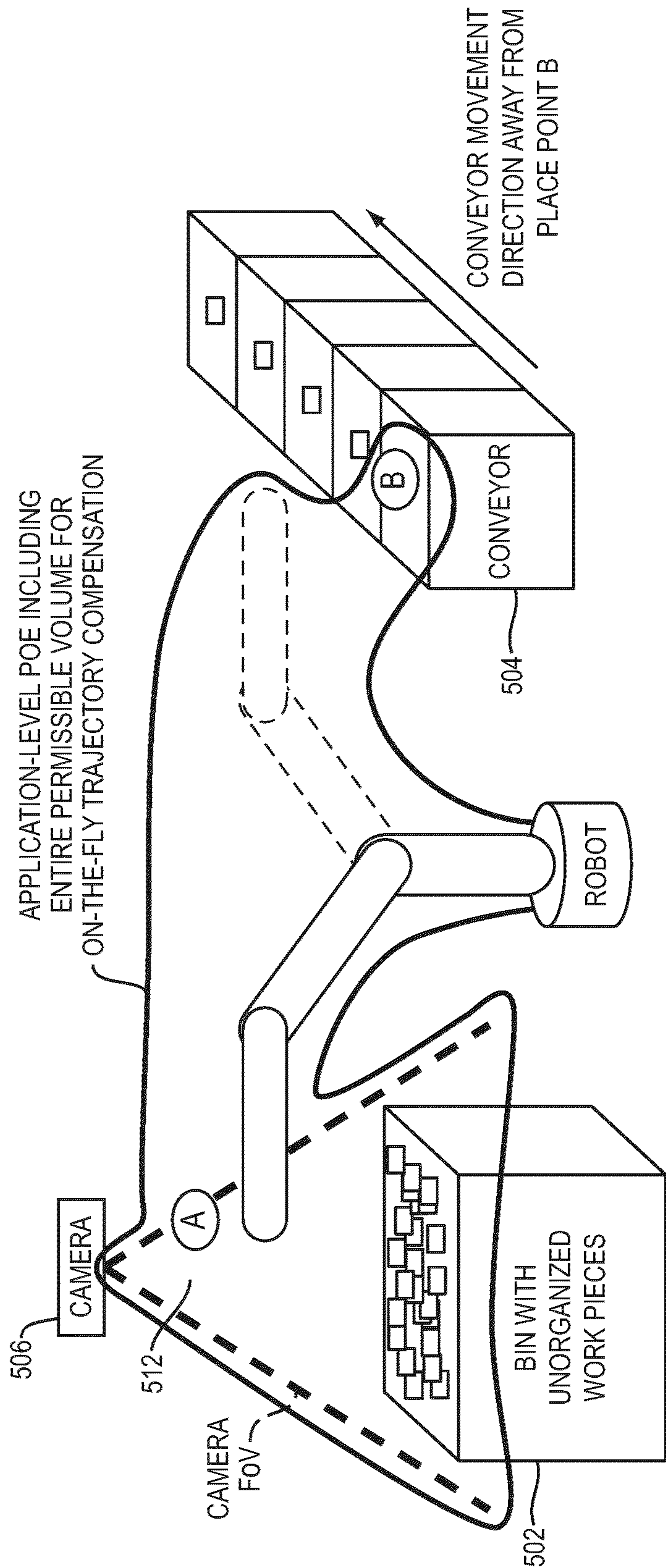


FIG. 5B

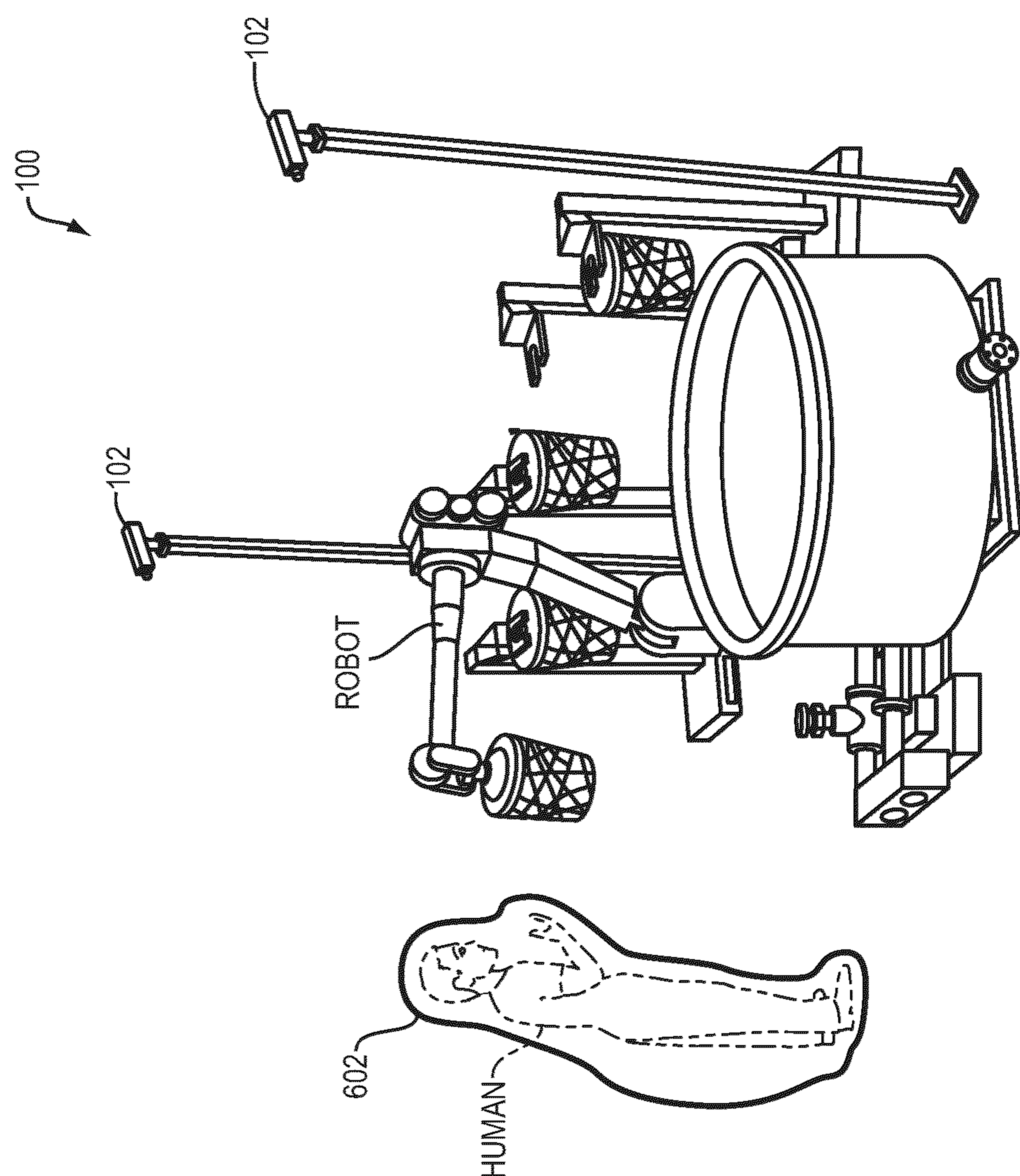


FIG. 6A





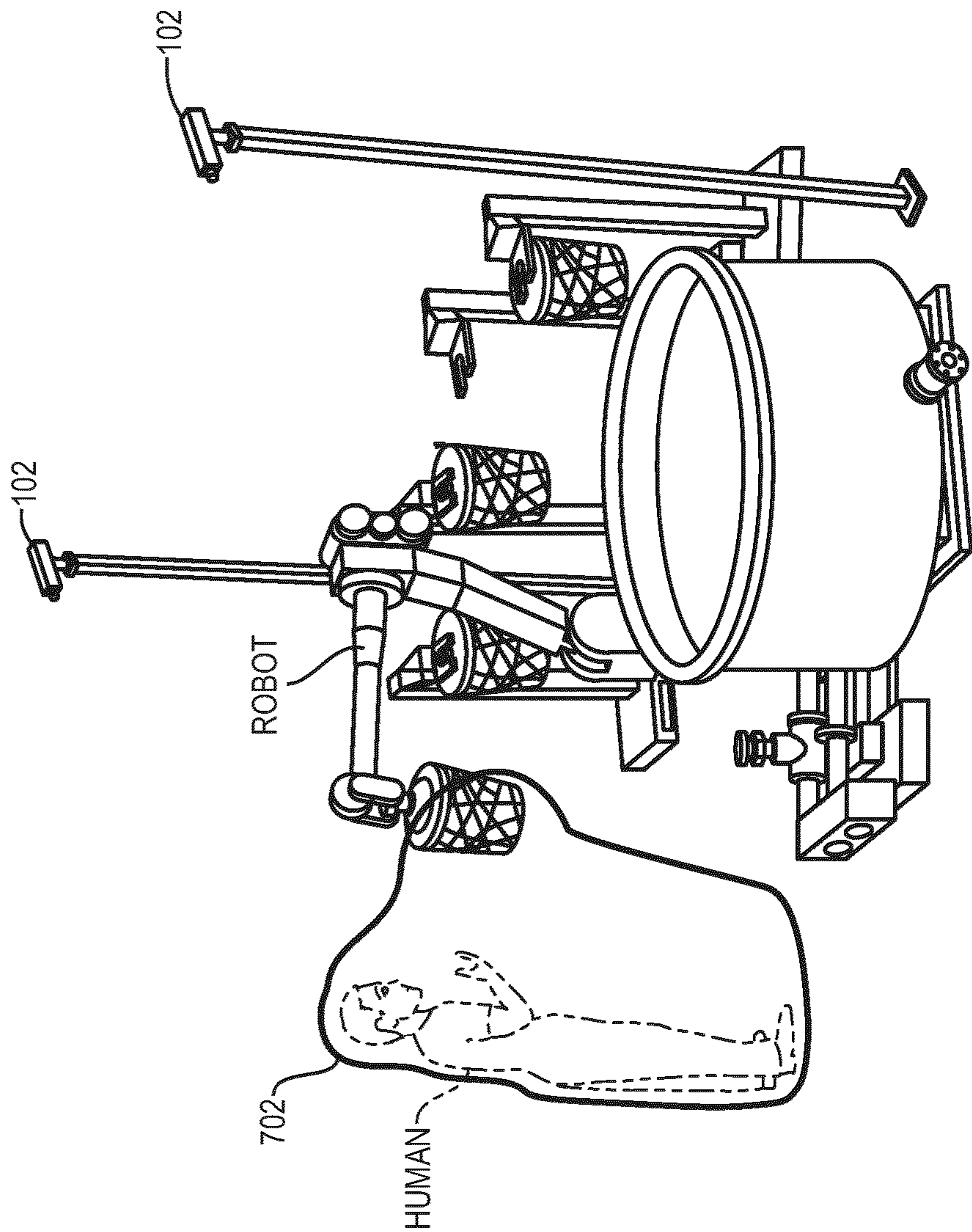


FIG. 7A

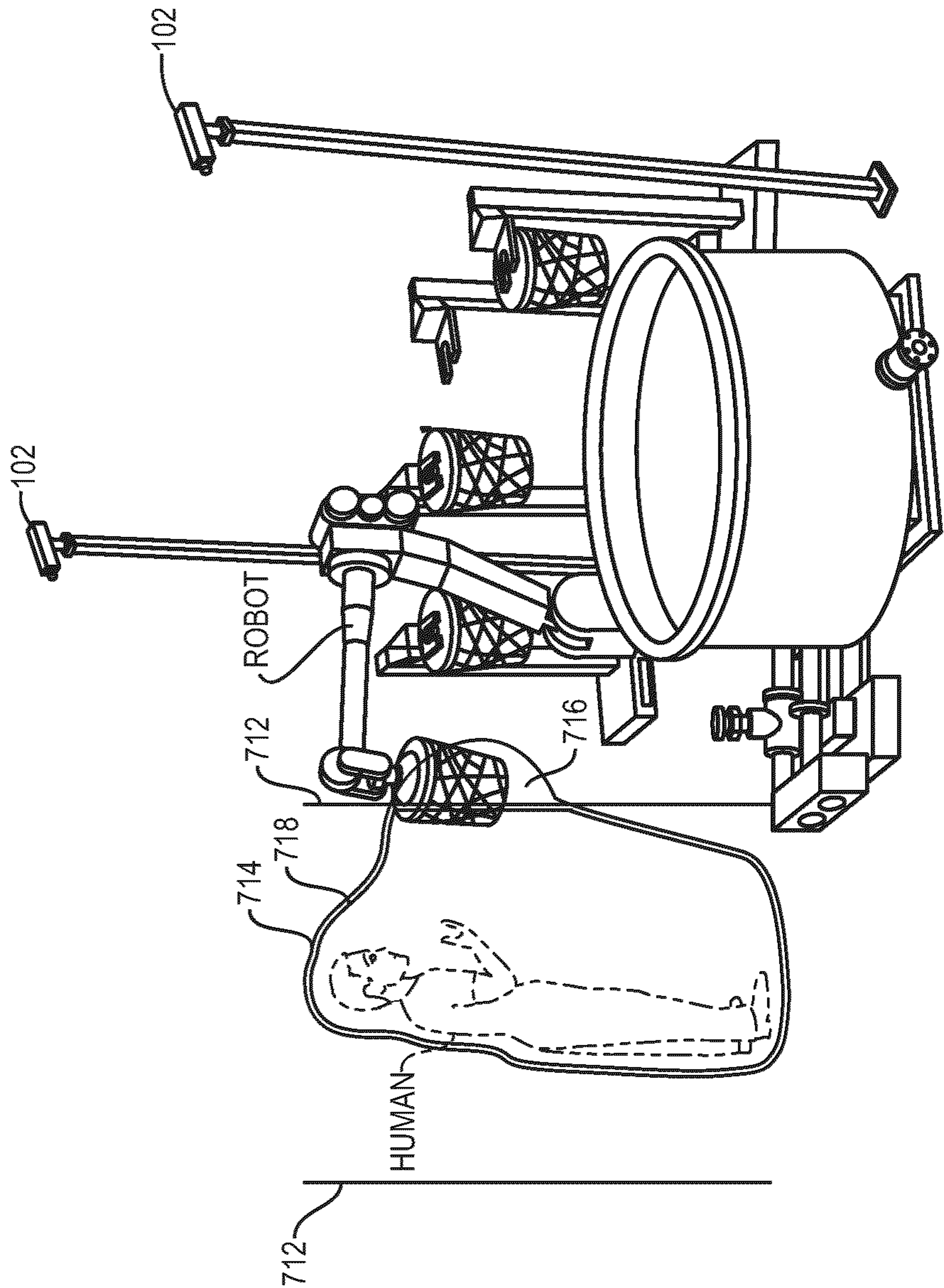


FIG. 7B



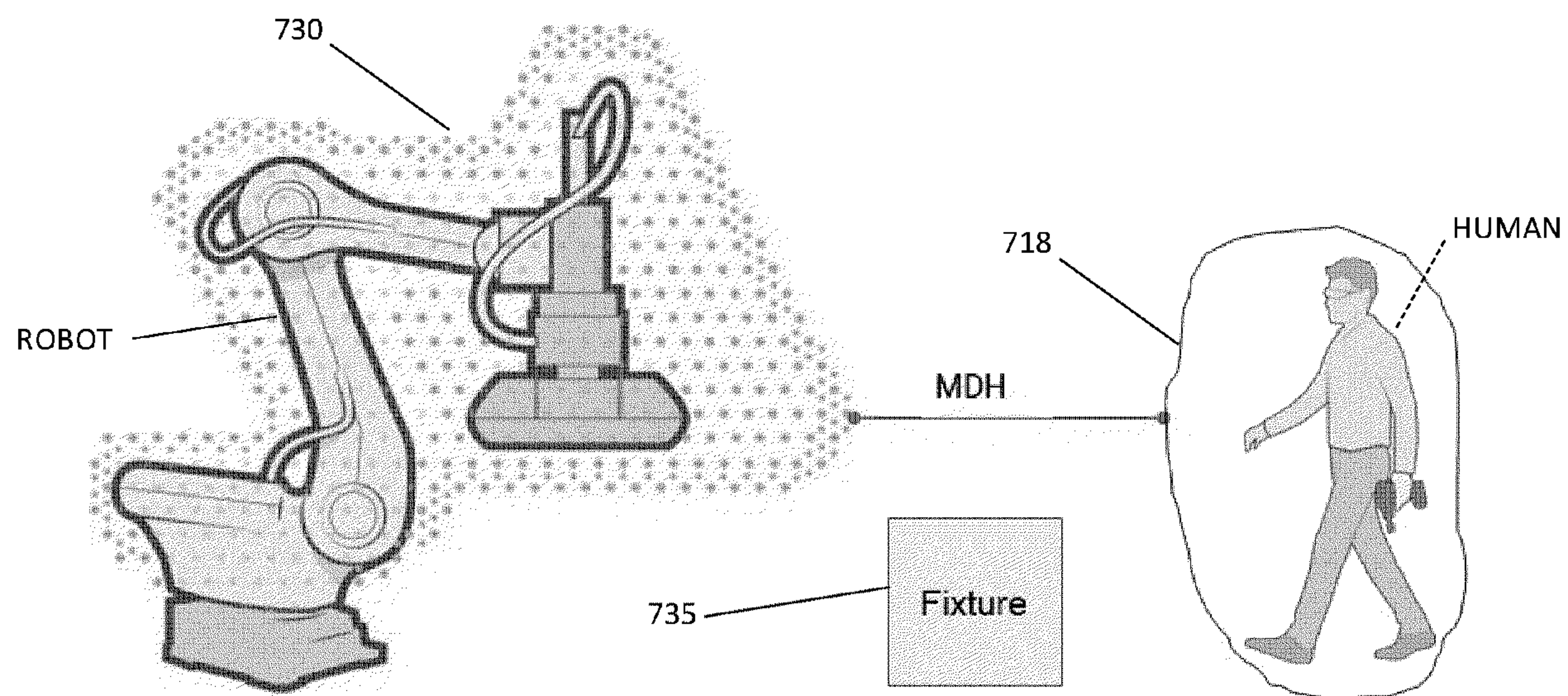


FIG. 7C

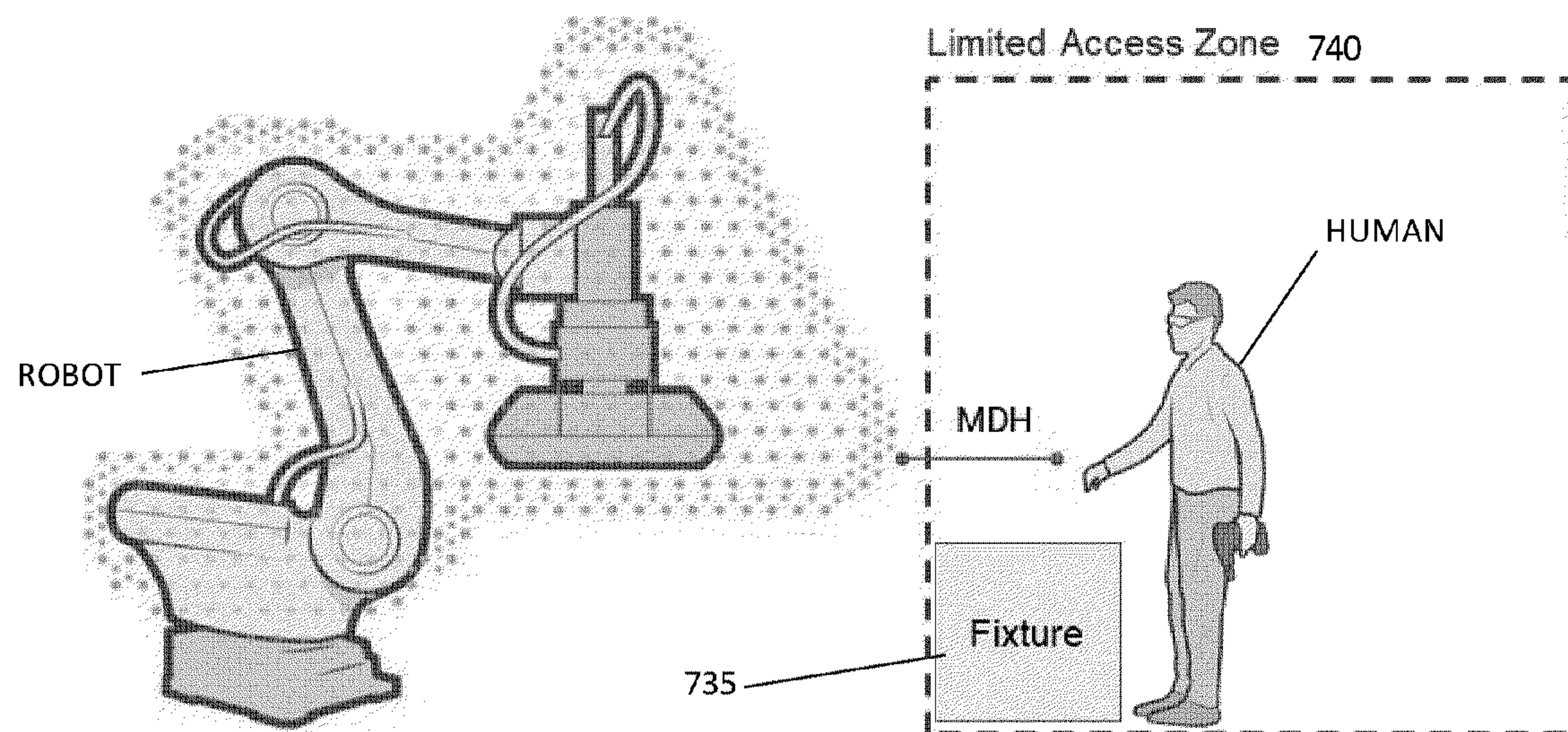


FIG. 7D



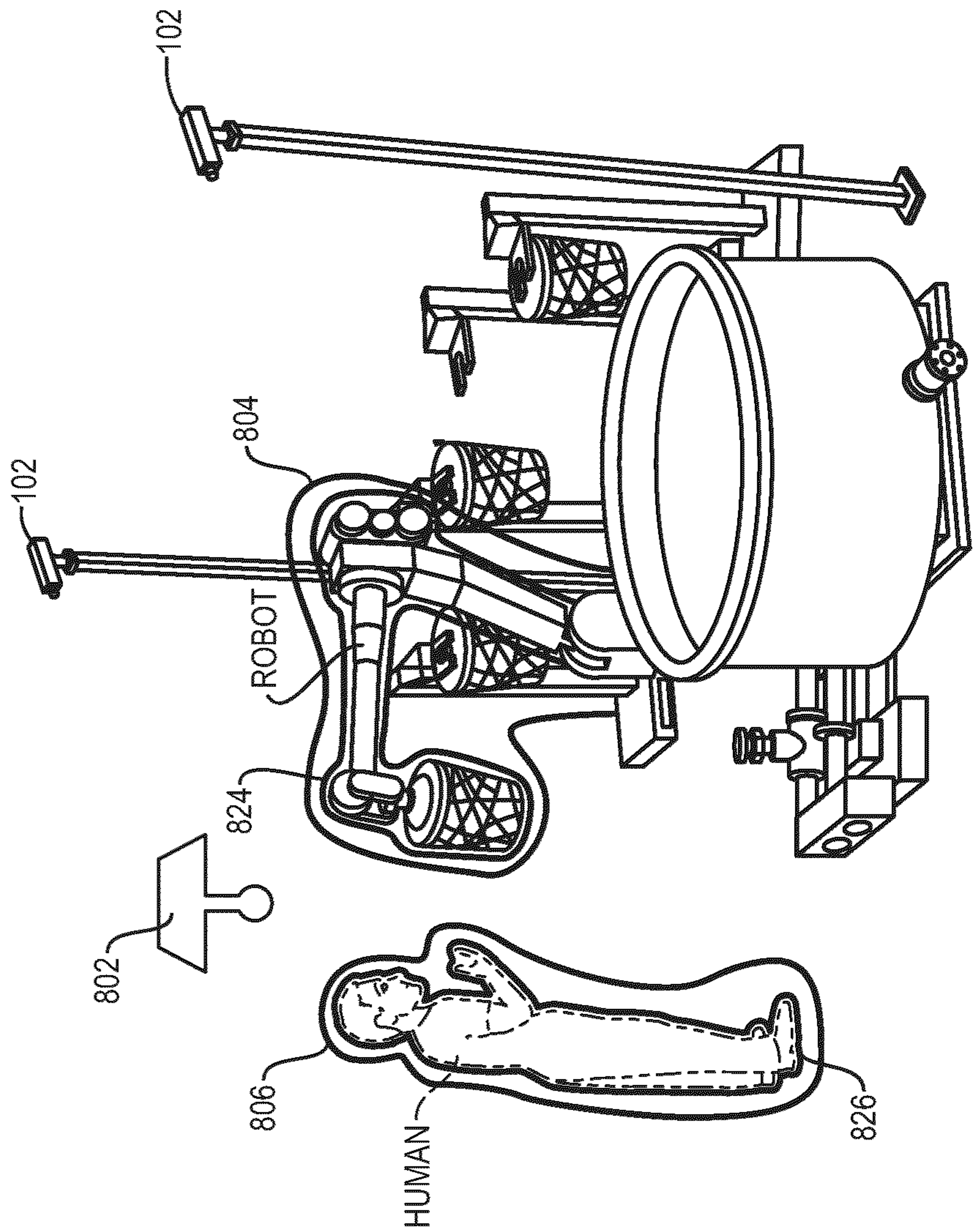


FIG. 8A

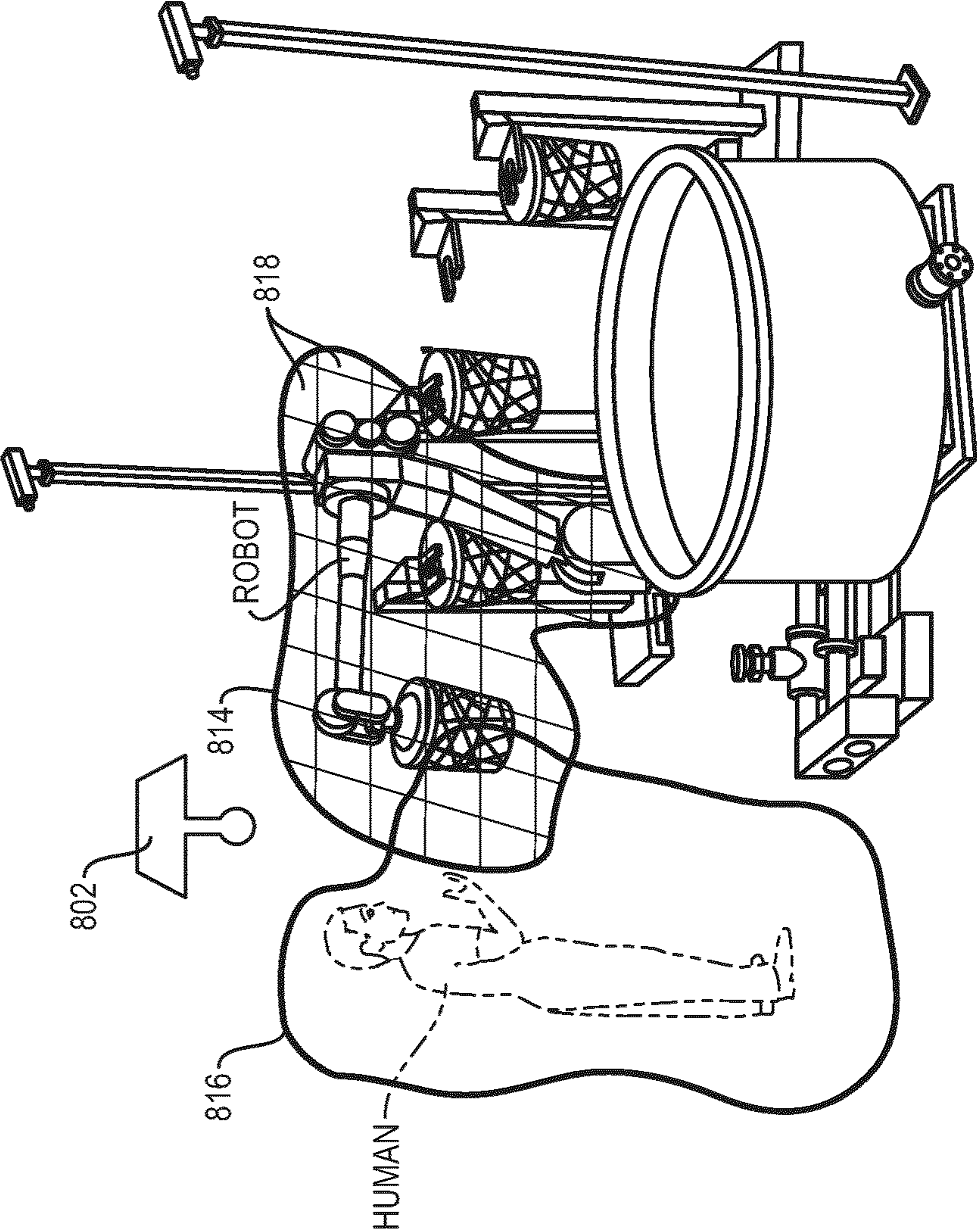


FIG. 8B



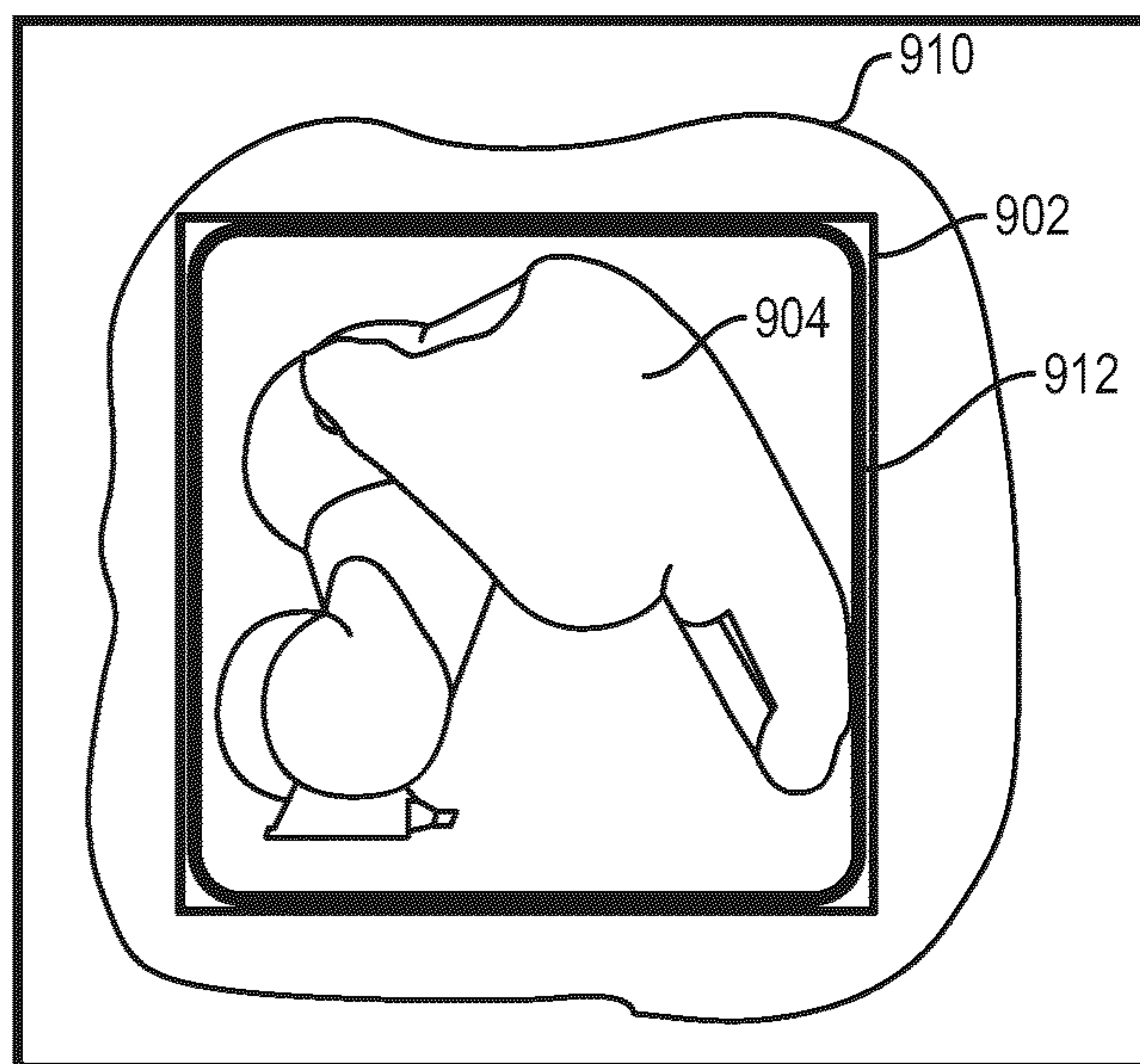


FIG. 9A

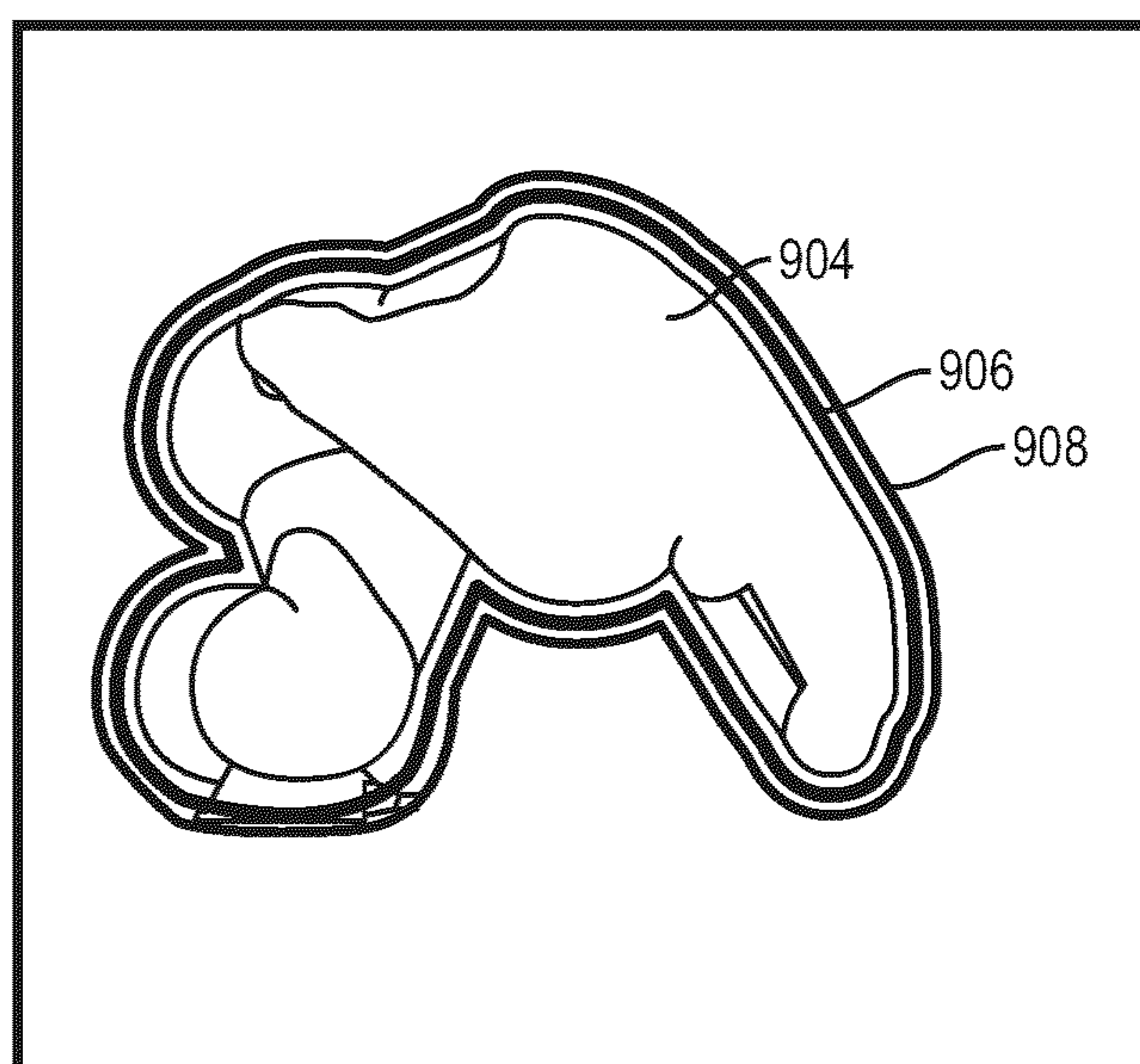


FIG. 9B

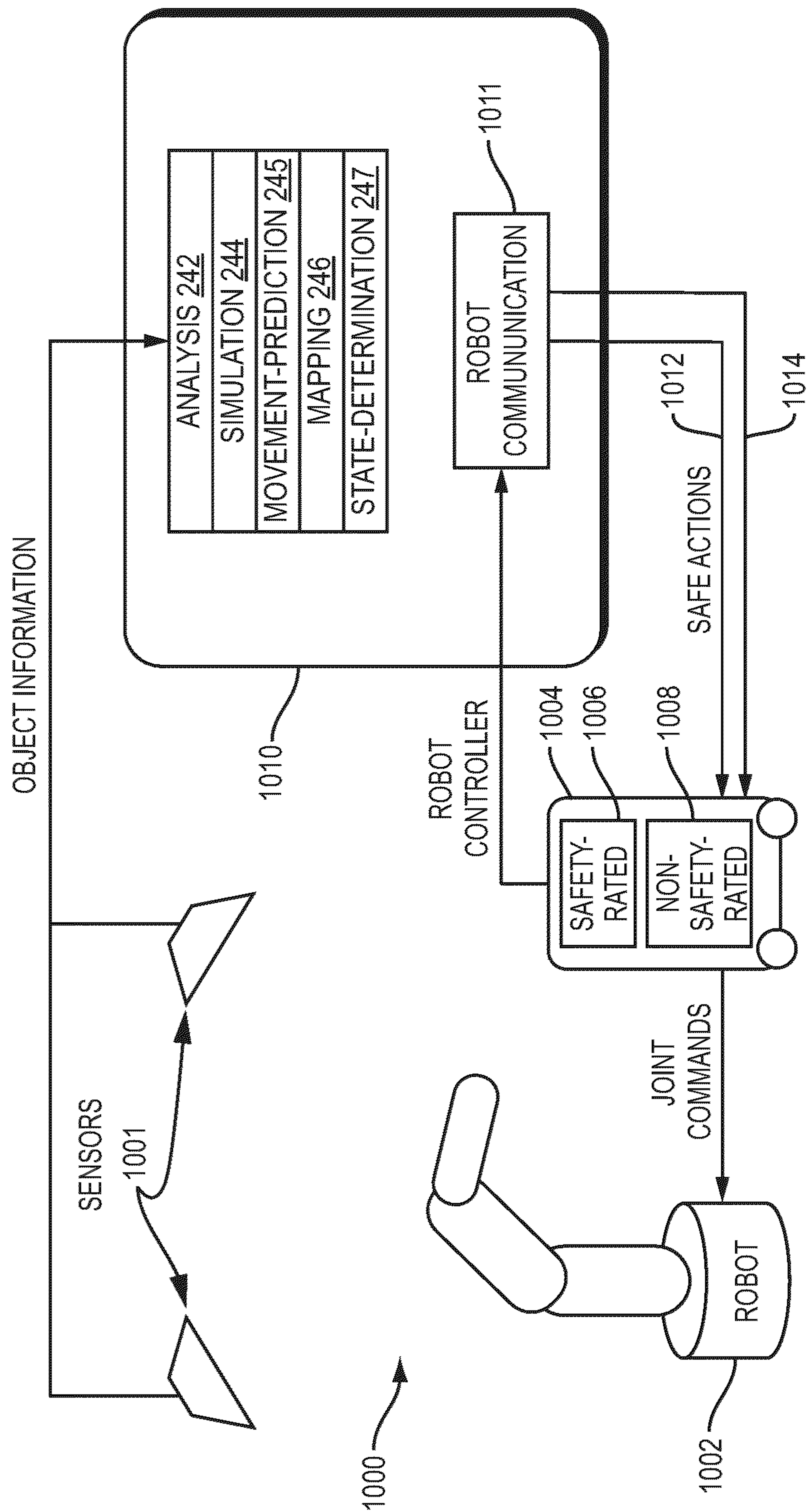


FIG. 10

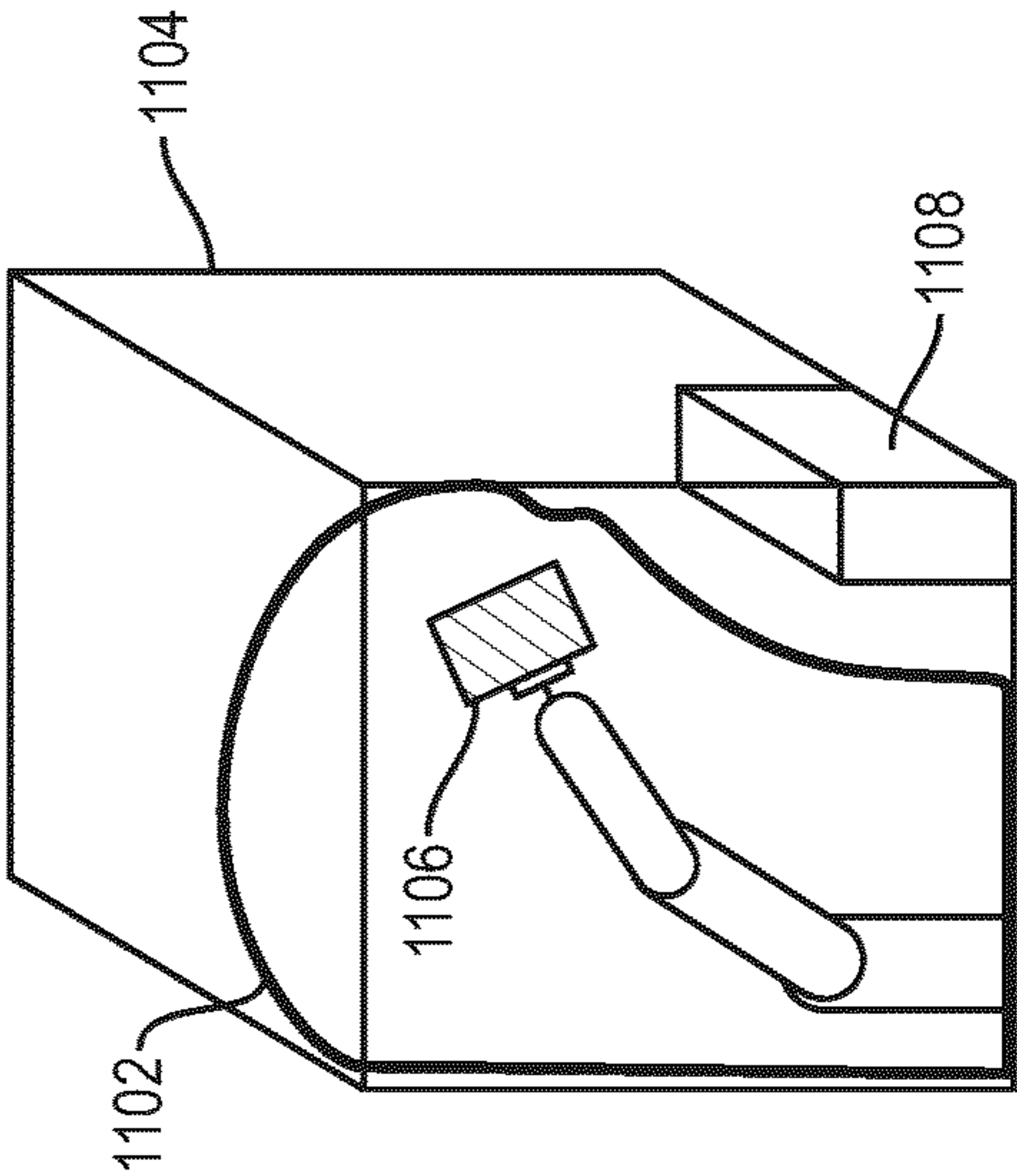


FIG. 11A

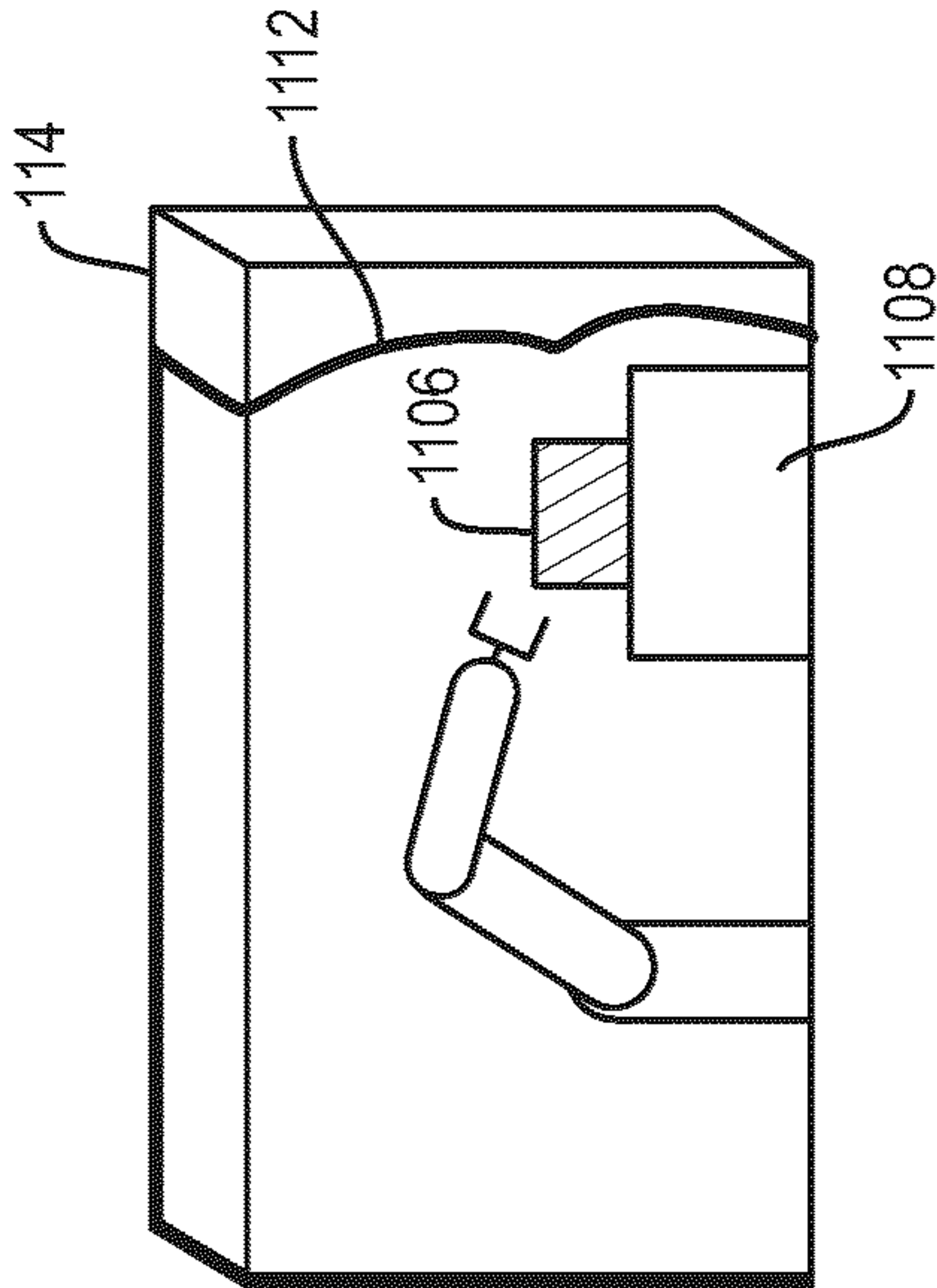


FIG. 11B



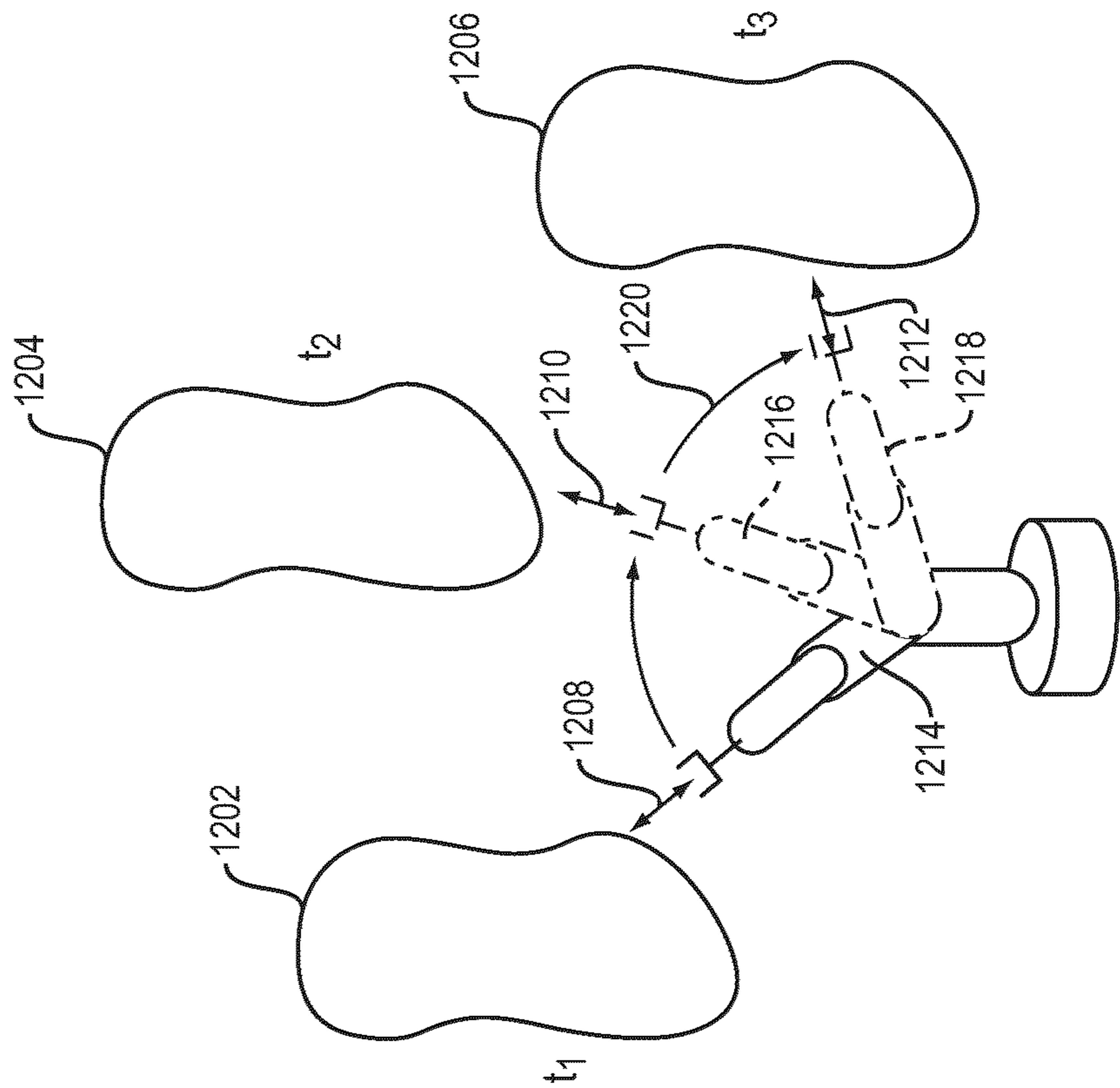


FIG. 12A

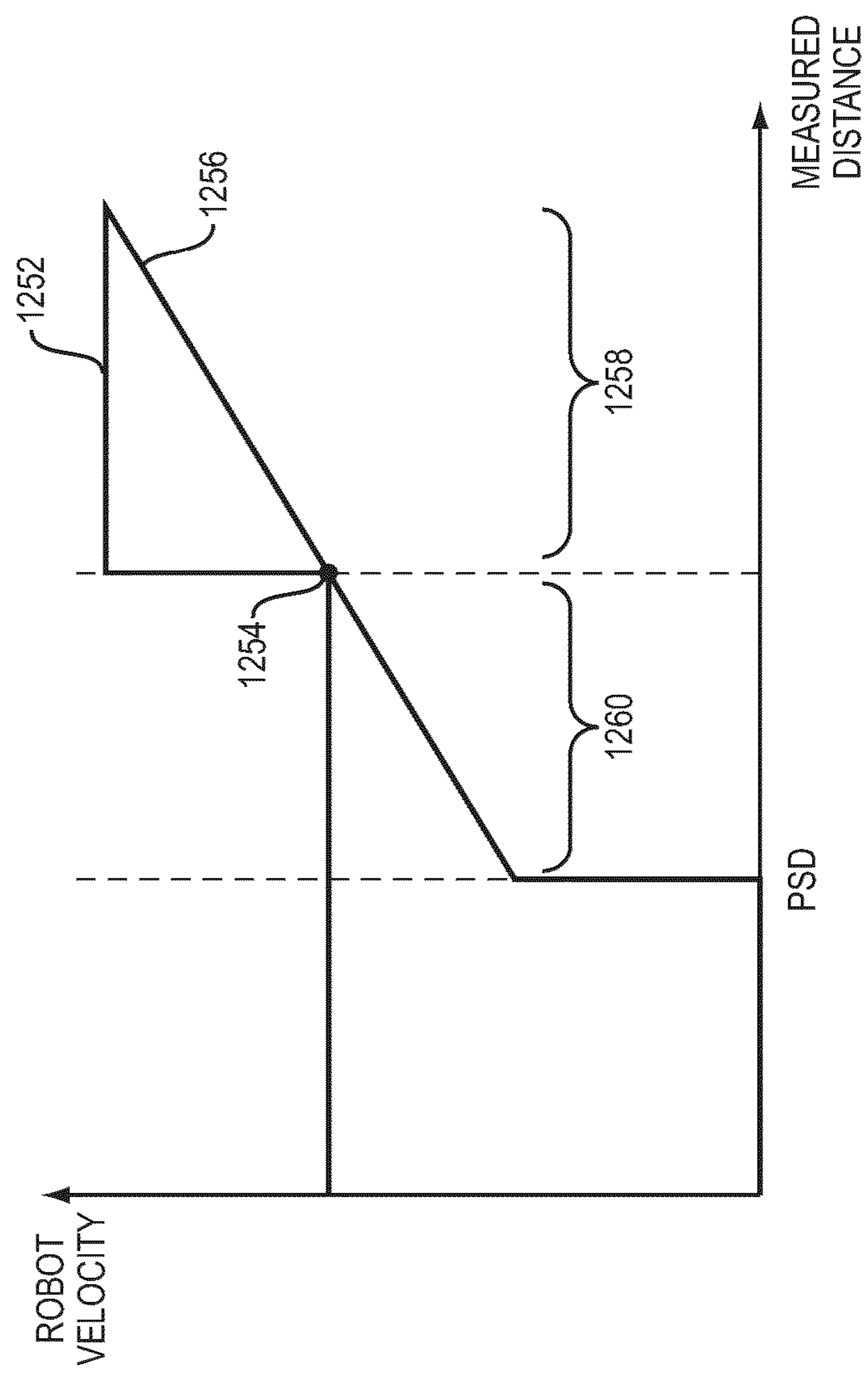


FIG. 12B

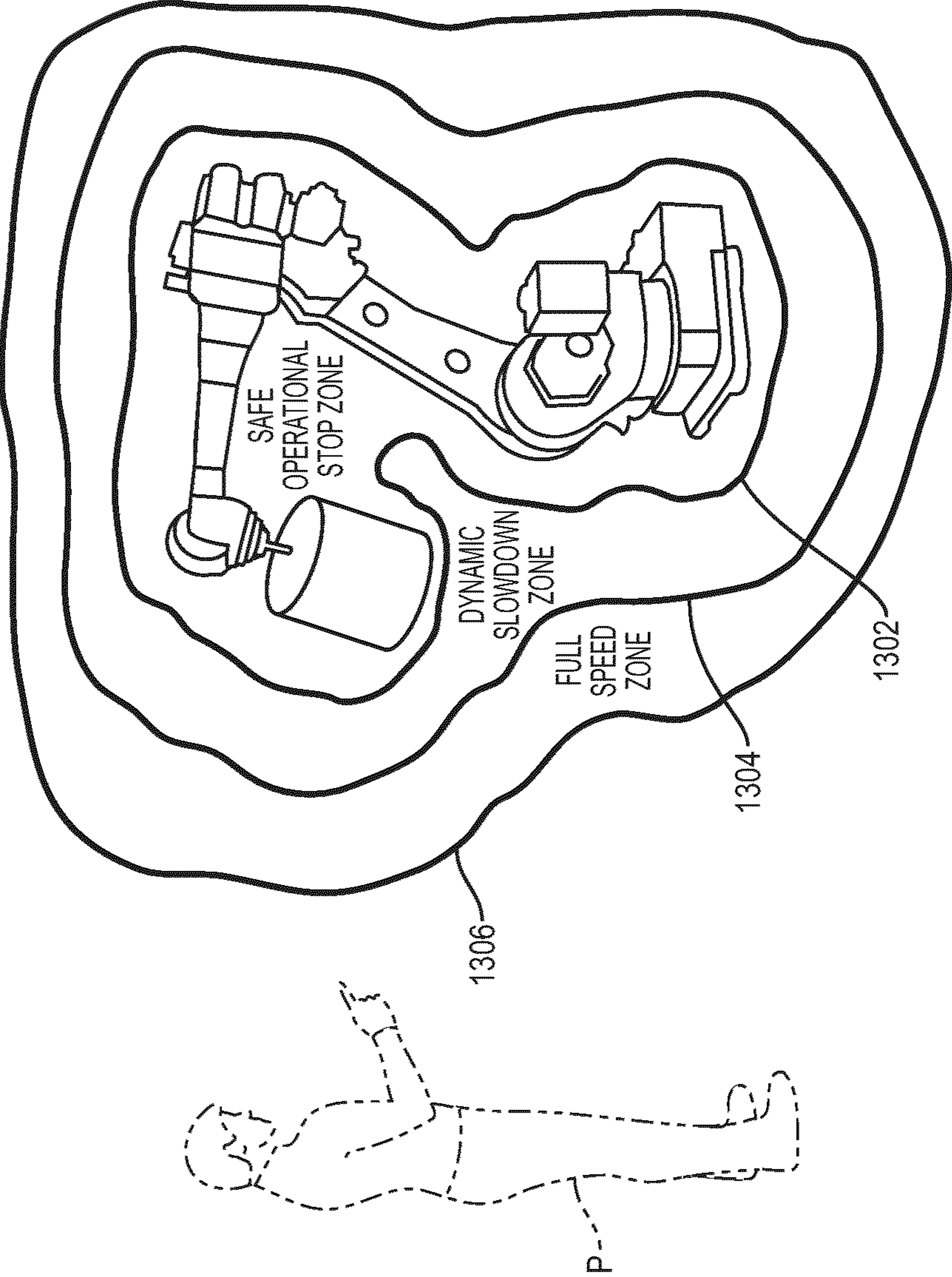


FIG. 13



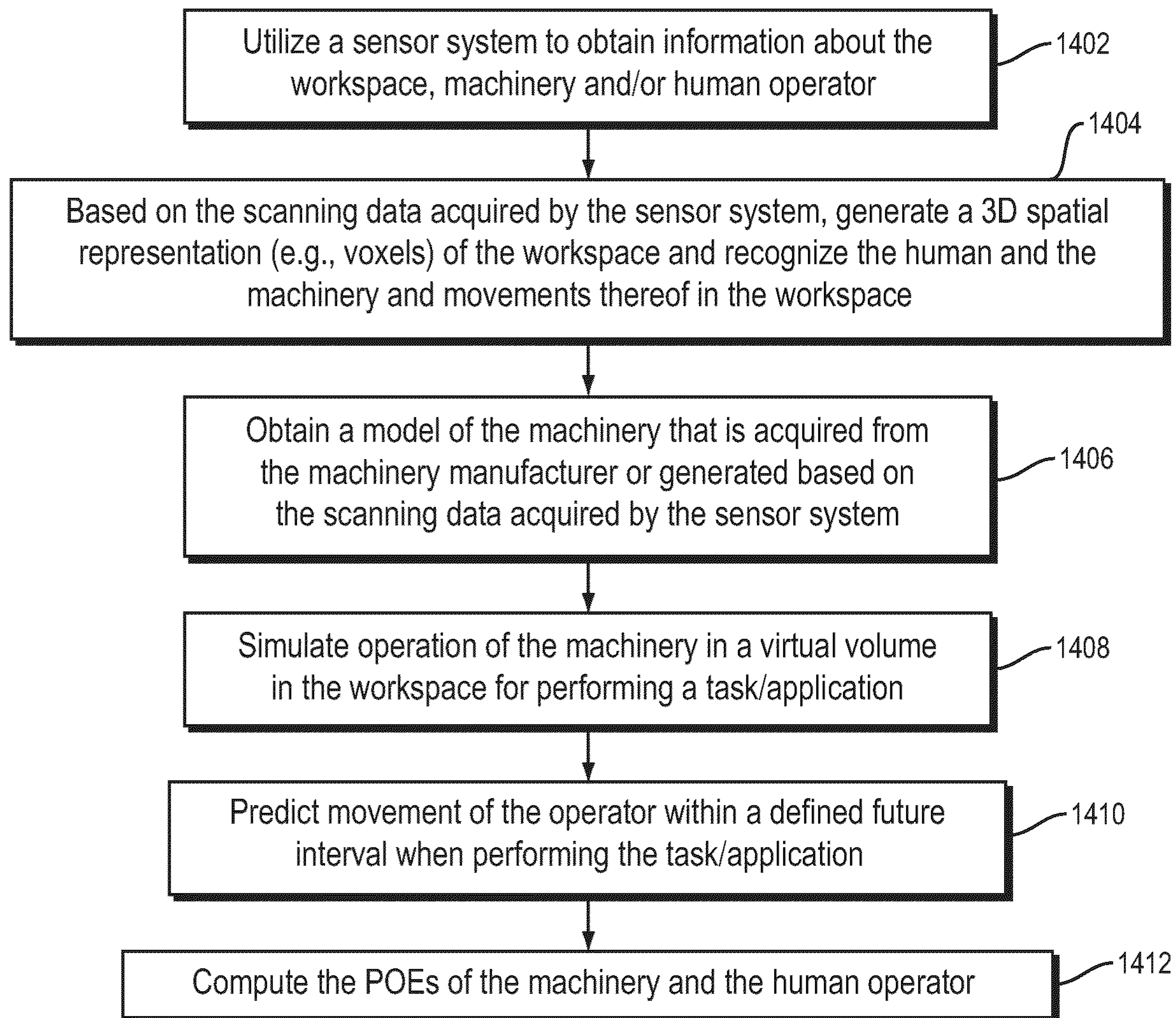


FIG. 14A

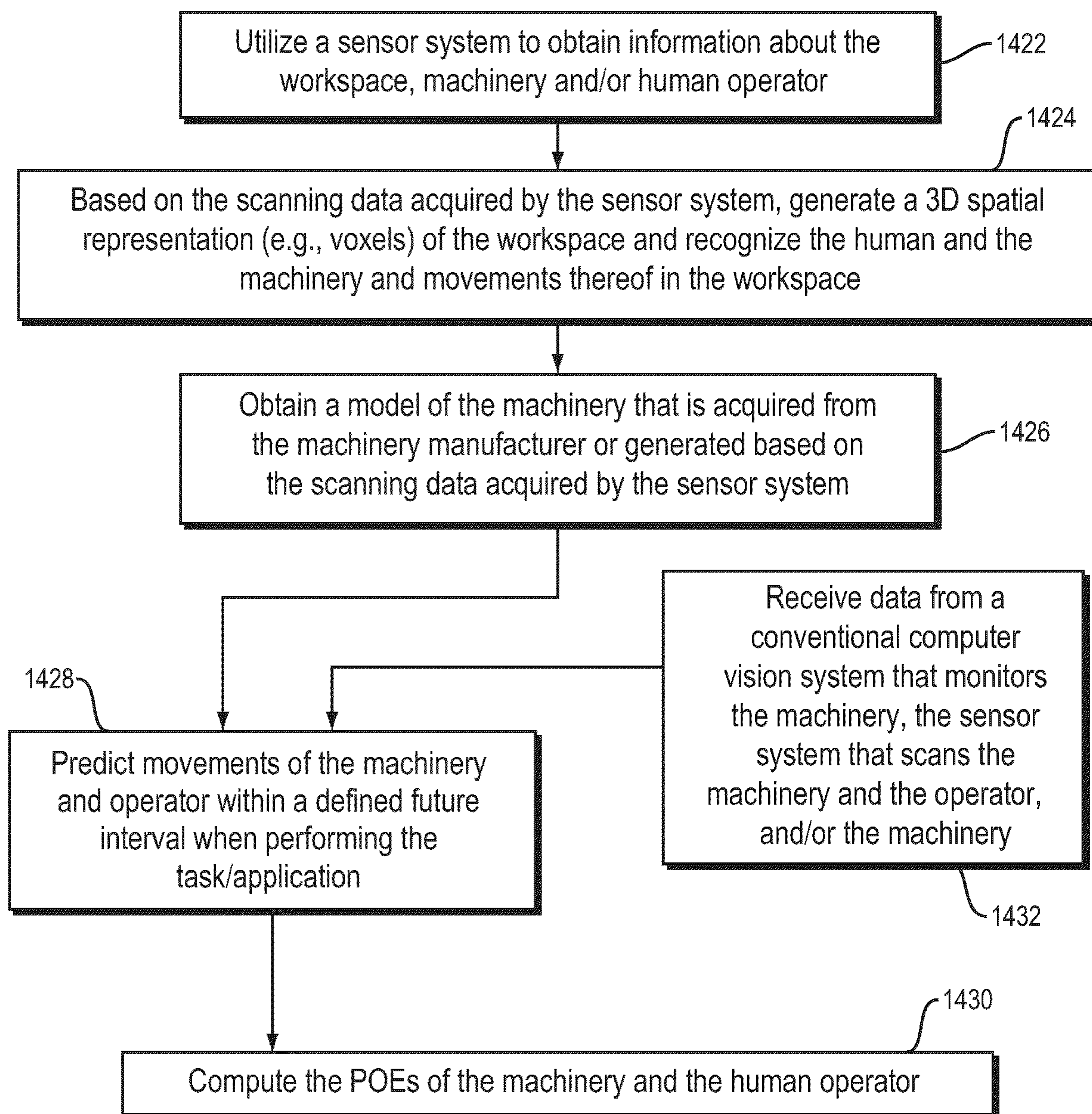


FIG. 14B



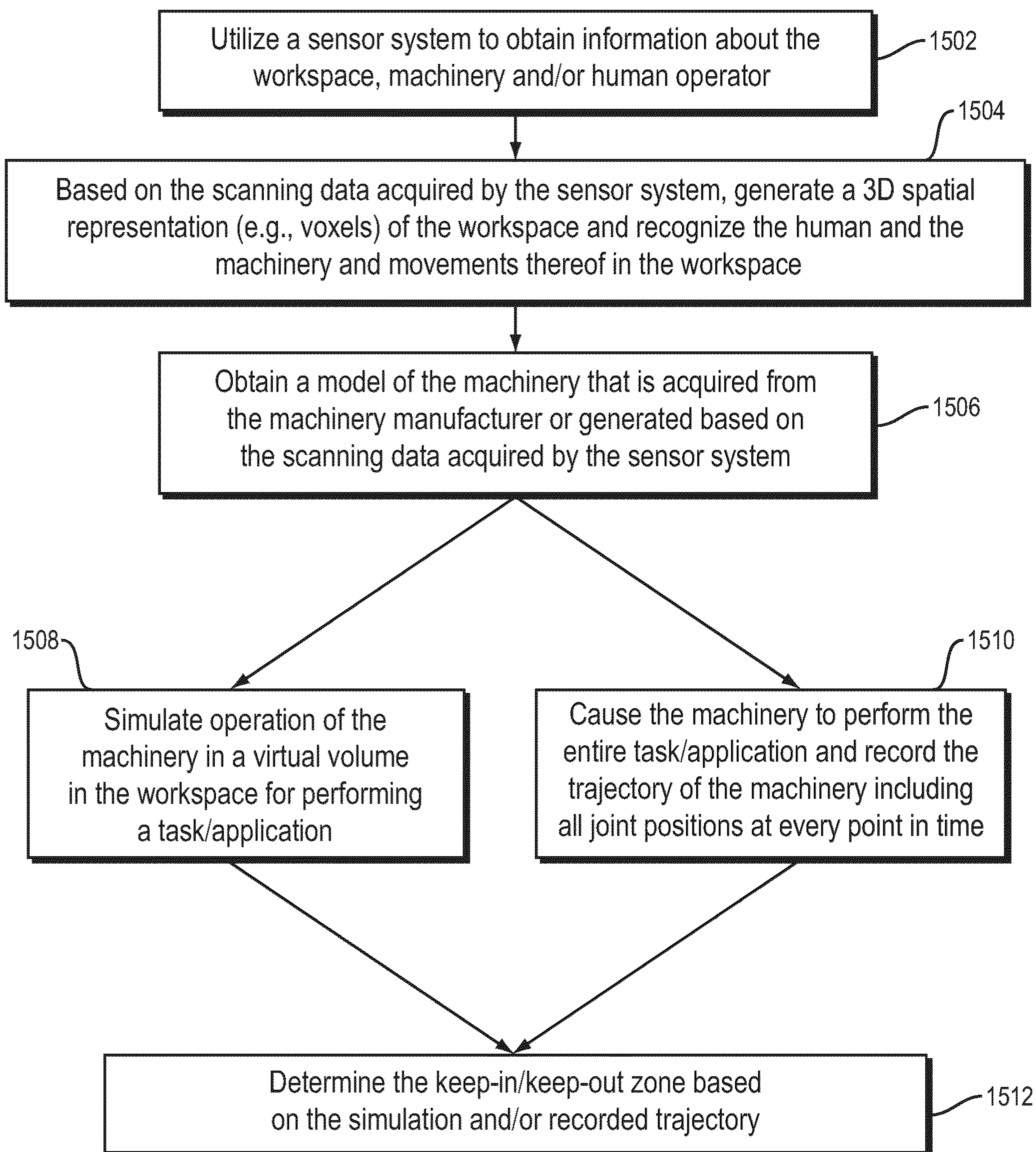


FIG. 15



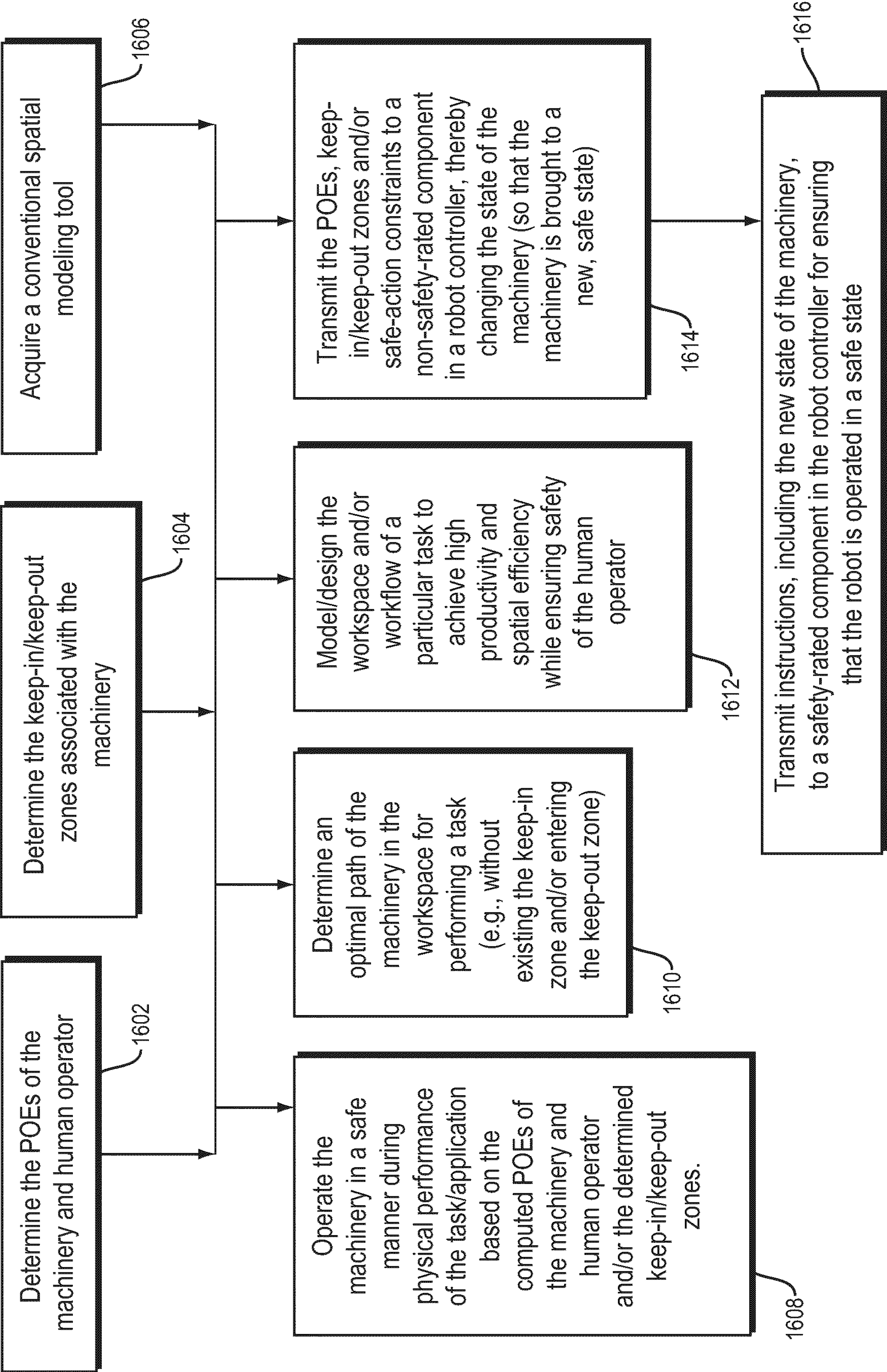


FIG. 16



## CONTEXT-SENSITIVE SAFETY MONITORING OF COLLABORATIVE WORK ENVIRONMENTS

### CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

**[0001]** This is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Serial No. 16/999,676, filed on Aug. 21, 2020, which claims priority to U.S. Provisional Pat. Application Nos. 62/890,718 (filed on Aug. 23, 2019) and 63/048,338 (filed on Jul. 6, 2020). The entire disclosures of the foregoing priority documents are hereby incorporated by reference.

### FIELD OF THE INVENTION

**[0002]** The field of the invention relates, generally, to operation of potentially dangerous machinery and, in particular, to collaborative human-robot applications.

### BACKGROUND

**[0003]** Traditional machinery for manufacturing and other industrial applications has been supplanted by, or supplemented with, new forms of automation that save costs, increase productivity and quality, eliminate dangerous, laborious, or repetitive work, and/or augment human capability. For example, industrial robots possess strength, speed, reliability, and lifetimes that may far exceed human potential. The recent trend toward increased human-robot collaboration in manufacturing workcells imposes particularly stringent requirements on robot performance and capabilities. Conventional industrial robots are dangerous to humans and are usually kept separate from humans through guarding — e.g., robots may be surrounded by a cage with doors that, when opened, cause an electrical circuit to place the machinery in a safe state. Other approaches involve light curtains or two-dimensional (2D) area sensors that slow down or shut off the machinery when humans approach it or cross a prescribed distance threshold. These systems disadvantageously constrain collaborative use of the workspace.

**[0004]** On the other hand, having humans and robots operate in the same workspace places additional demands on robot performance. Both may change position and configuration in rapid and unexpected ways, putting additional performance requirements on the robot's response times, kinematics, and dynamics. Typical industrial robots are fixed, but nonetheless have powerful arms that can cause injury over a wide “envelope” of possible movement trajectories; having knowledge of these trajectories in spaces where humans are present is thus fundamental to safe operation.

**[0005]** In general, robot arms comprise a number of mechanical links connected by revolute and prismatic joints that can be precisely controlled, and a controller coordinates all of the joints to achieve trajectories that are determined and programmed by an automation or manufacturing engineer for a specific application. Systems that can accurately control the robot trajectory are essential for safety in collaborative human-robot applications. However, the accuracy of industrial robots is limited by factors such as manufacturing tolerances (e.g., relating to fabrication of the mechanical arm), joint friction, drive nonlinearities, and tracking errors of the control system. In addition, backlash or compliances

in the drives and joints of these robot manipulators can limit the positioning accuracy and the dynamic performance of the robot arm.

**[0006]** Kinematic definitions of industrial robots, which describe the total reachable volume (or “joint space”) of the manipulator, are derived from the individual robot link geometry and their assembly. A dynamic model of the robot is generated by taking the kinematic definition as an input, adding to it information about the speeds, accelerations, forces, range-of-motion limits, and moments that the robot is capable of at each joint interface, and applying a system identification procedure to estimate the robot dynamic model parameters. Accurate dynamic robot models are needed in many areas, such as mechanical design, workcell and performance simulation, control, diagnosis, safety and risk assessment, and supervision. For example, dexterous manipulation tasks and interaction with the environment, including humans in the vicinity of the robot, may demand accurate knowledge of the dynamic model of the robot for a specific application. Once estimated, robot model parameters can be used to compute stopping distances and other safety-related quantities. Because robot links are typically large, heavy metal castings fitted with motors, they have significant inertia while moving. Depending on the initial speed, payload, and robot orientation, a robot can take a significant time (and travel a great distance, many meters is not unusual) to stop after a stop command has been issued.

**[0007]** Dynamic models of robot arms are represented in terms of various inertial and friction parameters that are either measured directly or determined experimentally. While the model structure of robot manipulators is well known, the parameter values needed for system identification are not always available, since dynamic parameters are rarely provided by the robot manufacturers and often are not directly measurable. Determination of these parameters from computer-aided design (CAD) data or models may not yield a complete representation because they may not include dynamic effects like joint friction, joint and drive elasticities, and masses introduced by additional equipment such as end effectors, workpieces, or the robot dress package.

**[0008]** One important need for effective robotic system identification is in the estimation of joint acceleration characteristics and robot stopping distances for the safety rating of robotic equipment. As humans physically approach robotic arms, a safety system can engage and cut or reduce power to the arm, but robot inertia can keep the robot arm moving. The effective stopping distance (measured from the engagement of the safety system, such as a stopping command) is an important input for determining the safe separation distance from the robot arm given inertial effects. Similarly, all sensor systems include some amount of latency, and joint acceleration characteristics determine how the robot's state can change between measurement and application of control output. Robot manufacturers usually provide curves or graphs showing stopping distances and times, but these curves can be difficult to interpret, may be sparse and of low resolution, tend to reflect specific loads, and typically do not include acceleration or indicate the robot position at the time of engaging the stop. An improved approach to modeling and predicting robot dynamics under constraints and differing environmental conditions (such as varying payloads and end effectors) is set forth in U.S. Pat. No.



11,254,004, the entire disclosure of which is hereby incorporated by reference.

**[0009]** Even with robot behavior fully modeled, however, safe operation for a given application — particularly if that application involves interaction with or proximity to humans — depends on the spatial arrangement of the workspace, the relative positions of the robot and people or vulnerable objects, the task being performed, and robot stopping capabilities. For example, if robot movements are simple and consistently repeated over short periods, nearby human operators can observe and quickly learn them, and safely and easily plan and execute their own actions without violating safe separation distance. However, if robot movements are more complex or aperiodic, or if they happen over longer periods or broader areas, then nearby humans can err in predicting robot movement and move in a way that can violate safe separation distance.

**[0010]** Accordingly, there is a need for approaches that facilitate spatial modeling by incorporating the human-robot collaboration and, if desired, visualization of calculated safe or unsafe regions in the vicinity of a robot and/or a human operator based on the task performed by the robot and/or the human operator. This approach should apply more generally to any type of industrial machinery that operates in proximity to and/or collaboration with human workers.

#### SUMMARY

**[0011]** The present invention is directed to approaches for modeling the dynamics of machinery and/or human activities in a workspace for safety by taking into account collaborative workflows and processes. Although the ensuing discussion focuses on industrial robots, it should be understood that the present invention and the approaches described herein are applicable to any type of controlled industrial machinery whose operation occurs in the vicinity of, and can pose a danger to, human workers.

**[0012]** In various embodiments, the spatial regions potentially occupied by any portion of the robot (or other machinery) and the human operator within a defined time interval or during performance of all or a defined portion of a task or an application are generated, e.g., calculated dynamically and, if desired, represented visually. These “potential occupancy envelopes” (POEs) may be based on the states (e.g., the current and expected positions, velocities, accelerations, geometry and/or kinematics) of the robot and the human operator (e.g., in accordance with the ISO 13855 standard, “Positioning of safeguards with respect to the approach speeds of parts of the human body”). POEs may be computed based on a simulation of the robot’s performance of a task, with the simulated trajectories of moving robot parts (including workpieces) establishing the three-dimensional (3D) contours of the POE in space. Alternatively, POEs may be obtained based on observation (e.g., using 3D sensors) of the robot as it performs the task, with the observed trajectories used to establish the POE contours.

**[0013]** In some embodiments, a “keep-in” zone and/or a “keep-out” zone associated with the robot can be defined, e.g., based on the POEs of the robot and human operator. In the former case, operation of the robot is constrained so that all portions of the robot and workpieces remain within the spatial region defined by the keep-in zone. In the latter case, operation of the robot is constrained so that no portions

of the robot and workpieces penetrate the keep-out zone. Based on the POEs of the robot and human operator and/or the keep-in/keep-out zones, movement of the robot during physical performance of the activity may be restricted in order to ensure safety.

**[0014]** In various embodiments, “limited-access zones” (LAZs) are defined computationally and/or manually. Within a LAZ, the presence of a human will not affect operation of the machinery because there is no practical danger of contact with machinery performing its programmed tasks. For example, a table or fixture may be situated so as to limit physical access by humans to hazards such as operating machinery. Indeed, in a LAZ it may not even be necessary to generate or monitor POEs at all. LAZs may be defined computationally based on the physical layout of the workspace (as captured by sensors and interpreted by a computer vision system, for example), a kinematic model of human motion and, in some embodiments, by heuristics placing limits on likely human movement; or may be defined manually by an operator.

**[0015]** In various embodiments, one or more two-dimensional (2D) and/or three-dimensional (3D) imaging sensors are employed to scan the robot, human operator and/or workspace during actual execution of the task. Based thereon, the POEs of the robot and the human operator can be updated in real-time and provided as feedback to adjust the state (e.g., position, orientation, velocity, acceleration, etc.) of the robot and/or the modeled workspace. In some embodiments, the scanning data is stored in memory and can be used as an input when modeling the workspace in the same human-robot collaborative application next time. In some embodiments, robot state can be communicated from the robot controller, and subsequently validated by the 2D and/or 3D imaging sensors. In other embodiments, the scanning data may be exported from the system in a variety of formats for use in other CAD software. In still other embodiments, the POE is generated by simulating performance (rather than scanning actual performance) of a task by a robot or other machinery.

**[0016]** Additionally or alternatively, a protective separation distance (PSD) defining the minimum distance separating the robot from the operator and/or other safety-related entities can be computed. Again, the PSD may be continuously updated based on the scanning data of the robot and/or human operator acquired during execution of the task. In one embodiment, information about the computed PSD is combined with the POE of the human operator; based thereon, an optimal path of the robot in the workspace can then be determined.

**[0017]** Accordingly, in a first aspect, the invention pertains to a safety system for enforcing safe operation of machinery performing an activity in a 3D workspace. In various embodiments, the system comprises a computer memory for storing (i) a model of the machinery and its permitted movements and (ii) a safety protocol specifying speed restrictions of the machinery in proximity to a human and a minimum separation distance between the machinery and a human; and a processor configured to computationally generate, from the stored images, a 3D spatial representation of the workspace; computationally map, via a mapping module, a first 3D region of the workspace corresponding to space occupied by the machinery within the workspace augmented by a 3D envelope around the machinery spanning all movements executed by the machinery during per-



formance of the activity; computationally define a second 3D region of the workspace corresponding to space occupied or potentially occupied by a human within the workspace augmented by a 3D envelope around the human corresponding to anticipated movements of the human within the workspace during the interval; and computationally define a third 3D region of the workspace within which a fixed object prevents a proximity between a human and the machinery from being less than the minimum separation distance, wherein the processor is configured to, during physical performance of the activity, (a) restrict operation of the machinery in accordance with a safety protocol based on proximity between the first and second regions and (b) not restrict operation of the machinery when a human is in the third region.

**[0018]** In various embodiments, operation of the machinery is not restricted even if a minimum distance between the first and second 3D regions is below the minimum separation distance. The second region may be defined at least in part by the current direction, velocity and acceleration of the human, and may be further defined at least in part based on a kinematic model of human motion and/or at least in part by a worst-case speed.

**[0019]** In some embodiments, the third region is defined manually via an interface. The third region may be defined computationally based on the 3D spatial representation of the workspace including the fixed object. In some embodiments, the second region is not defined when the human is within the third region.

**[0020]** In a second aspect, the invention relates to a method of enforcing safe operation of machinery performing an activity in a 3D workspace. In various embodiments, the method comprises the steps of storing (i) a computational model of the machinery and its permitted movements and (ii) a safety protocol specifying speed restrictions of the machinery in proximity to a human and a minimum separation distance between the machinery and a human; computationally generating, from the stored images, a 3D spatial representation of the workspace; computationally mapping a first 3D region of the workspace corresponding to space occupied by the machinery within the workspace augmented by a computationally defined 3D envelope around the machinery spanning all movements executed by the machinery during performance of the activity; computationally defining a second 3D region of the workspace corresponding to space occupied or potentially occupied by a human within the workspace augmented by a computationally defined 3D envelope around the human corresponding to anticipated movements of the human within the workspace during the interval; computationally defining a third 3D region of the workspace within which a fixed object prevents a proximity between a human and the machinery from being less than the minimum separation distance; and during physical performance of the activity, (a) restricting operation of the machinery in accordance with a safety protocol based on proximity between the first and second regions and (b) not restricting operation of the machinery when a human is in the third region.

**[0021]** In various embodiments, operation of the machinery is not restricted even if a minimum distance between the first and second 3D regions is below the minimum separation distance. The second region may be defined at least in part by the current direction, velocity and acceleration of the human, and may be further defined at least in part based on a

kinematic model of human motion and/or at least in part by a worst-case speed.

**[0022]** In some embodiments, the third region is defined manually via an interface. The third region may be defined computationally based on the 3D spatial representation of the workspace including the fixed object. In some embodiments, the second region is not defined when the human is within the third region.

**[0023]** In general, as used herein, the term “robot” means any type of controllable industrial equipment for performing automated operations — such as moving, manipulating, picking and placing, processing, joining, cutting, welding, etc. — on workpieces. The term “substantially” means  $\pm 10\%$ , and in some embodiments,  $\pm 5\%$ . In addition, reference throughout this specification to “one example,” “an example,” “one embodiment,” or “an embodiment” means that a particular feature, structure, or characteristic described in connection with the example is included in at least one example of the present technology. Thus, the occurrences of the phrases “in one example,” “in an example,” “one embodiment,” or “an embodiment” in various places throughout this specification are not necessarily all referring to the same example. Furthermore, the particular features, structures, routines, steps, or characteristics may be combined in any suitable manner in one or more examples of the technology. The headings provided herein are for convenience only and are not intended to limit or interpret the scope or meaning of the claimed technology.

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

**[0024]** In the drawings, like reference characters generally refer to the same parts throughout the different views. Also, the drawings are not necessarily to scale, with an emphasis instead generally being placed upon illustrating the principles of the invention. In the following description, various embodiments of the present invention are described with reference to the following drawings, in which:

**[0025]** FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a human-robot collaborative workspace in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention;

**[0026]** FIG. 2 schematically illustrates a control system in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention;

**[0027]** FIGS. 3A-3C depict exemplary POEs of machinery (in particular, a robot arm) in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention;

**[0028]** FIG. 4 depicts an exemplary task-level or application-level POE of machinery, in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention, when the trajectory of the machinery does not change once programmed;

**[0029]** FIGS. 5A and 5B depict exemplary task-level or application-level POEs of the machinery, in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention, when the trajectory of the machinery changes during operation;

**[0030]** FIGS. 6A and 6B depict exemplary POEs of a human operator in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention;

**[0031]** FIG. 7A depicts an exemplary task-level or application-level POE of a human operator when performing a task or an application in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention;



[0032] FIG. 7B depicts an exemplary truncated POE of a human operator in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention;

[0033] FIGS. 7C and 7D depict generation of a LAZ;

[0034] FIGS. 8A and 8B illustrate display of the POEs of the machinery and human operator in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention;

[0035] FIGS. 9A and 9B depict exemplary keep-in zones associated with the machinery in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention;

[0036] FIG. 10 schematically illustrates an object-monitoring system in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention;

[0037] FIGS. 11A and 11B depict dynamically updated POEs of the machinery in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention;

[0038] FIG. 12A depicts an optimal path for the machinery when performing a task or an application in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention;

[0039] FIG. 12B depicts limiting the velocity of the machinery in a safety-rated way in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention;

[0040] FIG. 13 schematically illustrates the definition of progressive safety envelopes in proximity to the machinery in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention;

[0041] FIGS. 14A and 14B are flow charts illustrating exemplary approaches for computing the POEs of the machinery and human operator in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention;

[0042] FIG. 15 is a flow chart illustrating an exemplary approach for determining a keep-in zone and/or a keep-out zone in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention; and

[0043] FIG. 16 is a flow chart illustrating an approach for performing various functions in different applications based on the POEs of the machinery and human operator and/or the keep-in/keep-out zones in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0044] The following discussion describes an integrated system and methods for fully modeling and/or computing in real time the robot dynamics and/or human activities in a workspace for safety. In some cases, this involves semantic analysis of a robot in the workspace and identification of the workpieces with which it interacts. It should be understood, however, that these various elements may be implemented separately or together in desired combinations; the inventive aspects discussed herein do not require all of the described elements, which are set forth together merely for ease of presentation and to illustrate their interoperability. The system as described represents merely one embodiment.

[0045] Refer first to FIG. 1, which illustrates a representative human-robot collaborative workspace 100 equipped with a safety system including a sensor system 101 having one or more sensors representatively indicated at 102<sub>1</sub>, 102<sub>2</sub>, 102<sub>3</sub> for monitoring the workspace 100. Each sensor may be associated with a grid of pixels for recording data (such as images having depth, range or any 3D information) of a portion of the workspace within the sensor field of view. The sensors 102<sub>1-3</sub> may be conventional optical sensors such as cameras, e.g., 3D time-of-flight (ToF) cameras, stereo vision

cameras, or 3D LIDAR sensors or radar-based sensors, ideally with high frame rates (e.g., between 25 frames per second (FPS) and 100 FPS). The mode of operation of the sensors 102<sub>1-3</sub> is not critical so long as a 3D representation of the workspace 100 is obtainable from images or other data obtained by the sensors 102<sub>1-3</sub>. The sensors 102<sub>1-3</sub> may collectively cover and can monitor the entire workspace (or at least a portion thereof) 100, which includes a robot 106 controlled by a conventional robot controller 108. The robot 106 interacts with various workpieces W, and a human operator H in the workspace 100 may interact with the workpieces W and/or the robot 106 to perform a task. The workspace 100 may also contain various items of auxiliary equipment 110. As used herein the robot 106 and auxiliary equipment 110 are denoted as machinery in the workspace 100.

[0046] In various embodiments, data obtained by each of the sensors 102<sub>1-3</sub> is transmitted to a control system 112. Based thereon, the control system 112 may computationally generate a 3D spatial representation (e.g., voxels) of the workspace 100, recognize the robot 106, human operator and/or workpiece handled by the robot and/or human operator, and track movements thereof as further described below. In addition, the sensors 102<sub>1-3</sub> may be supported by various software and/or hardware components 114<sub>1-3</sub> for changing the configurations (e.g., orientations and/or positions) of the sensors 102<sub>1-3</sub>; the control system 112 may be configured to adjust the sensors so as to provide optimal coverage of the monitored area in the workspace 100. The volume of space covered by each sensor — typically a solid truncated pyramid or solid frustum — may be represented in any suitable fashion, e.g., the space may be divided into a 3D grid of small (5 cm, for example) voxels or other suitable form of volumetric representation. For example, a 3D representation of the workspace 100 may be generated using 2D or 3D ray tracing. This ray tracing can be performed dynamically or via the use of precomputed volumes, where objects in the workspace 100 are previously identified and captured by the control system 112. For convenience of presentation, the ensuing discussion assumes a voxel representation, and the control system 112 maintains an internal representation of the workspace 100 at the voxel level.

[0047] FIG. 2 illustrates, in greater detail, a representative embodiment of the control system 112, which may be implemented on a general-purpose computer. The control system 112 includes a central processing unit (CPU) 205, system memory 210, and one or more non-volatile mass storage devices (such as one or more hard disks and/or optical storage units) 212. The control system 112 further includes a bidirectional system bus 215 over which the CPU 205, functional modules in the memory 210, and storage device 212 communicate with each other as well as with internal or external input/output (I/O) devices, such as a display 220 and peripherals 222 (which may include traditional input devices such as a keyboard or a mouse). The control system 112 also includes a wireless transceiver 225 and one or more I/O ports 227. The transceiver 225 and I/O ports 227 may provide a network interface. The term “network” is herein used broadly to connote wired or wireless networks of computers or telecommunications devices (such as wired or wireless telephones, tablets, etc.). For example, a computer network may be a local area network (LAN) or a wide area network (WAN). When used in a LAN networking environment, computers may be connected to the LAN through a



network interface or adapter; for example, a supervisor may establish communication with the control system **112** using a tablet that wirelessly joins the network. When used in a WAN networking environment, computers typically include a modem or other communication mechanism. Modems may be internal or external, and may be connected to the system bus via the user-input interface, or other appropriate mechanism. Networked computers may be connected over the Internet, an Intranet, Extranet, Ethernet, or any other system that provides communications. Some suitable communications protocols include TCP/IP, UDP, or OSI, for example. For wireless communications, communications protocols may include IEEE 802.11x (“Wi-Fi”), Bluetooth, ZigBee, IrDa, near-field communication (NFC), or other suitable protocol. Furthermore, components of the system may communicate through a combination of wired or wireless paths, and communication may involve both computer and telecommunications networks.

[0048] The CPU **205** is typically a microprocessor, but in various embodiments may be a microcontroller, peripheral integrated circuit element, a CSIC (customer-specific integrated circuit), an ASIC (application-specific integrated circuit), a logic circuit, a digital signal processor, a programmable logic device such as an FPGA (field-programmable gate array), PLD (programmable logic device), PLA (programmable logic array), RFID processor, graphics processing unit (GPU), smart chip, or any other device or arrangement of devices that is capable of implementing the steps of the processes of the invention.

[0049] The system memory **210** may store a model of the machinery characterizing its geometry and kinematics and its permitted movements in the workspace. The model may be obtained from the machinery manufacturer or, alternatively, generated by the control system **112** based on the scanning data acquired by the sensor system **101**. In addition, the memory **210** may store a safety protocol specifying various safety measures such as speed restrictions of the machinery in proximity to the human operator, a minimum separation distance between the machinery and the human, etc. In some embodiments, the memory **210** contains a series of frame buffers **235**, i.e., partitions that store, in digital form (e.g., as pixels or voxels, or as depth maps), images obtained by the sensors **102<sub>1-3</sub>**; the data may actually arrive via I/O ports **227** and/or transceiver **225** as discussed above.

[0050] The system memory **210** contains instructions, conceptually illustrated as a group of modules, that control the operation of CPU **205** and its interaction with the other hardware components. An operating system **240** (e.g., Windows or Linux) directs the execution of low-level, basic system functions such as memory allocation, file management and operation of the mass storage device **212**. At a higher level, and as described in greater detail below, an analysis module **242** may register the images acquired by the sensor system **101** in the frame buffers **235**, generate a 3D spatial representation (e.g., voxels) of the workspace and analyze the images to classify regions of the monitored workspace **100**; an object-recognition module **243** may recognize the human and the machinery and movements thereof in the workspace based on the data acquired by the sensor system **101**; a simulation module **244** may computationally perform at least a portion of the application/task performed by the machinery in accordance with the stored machinery model and application/task; a movement prediction module **245** may predict movements of the machinery and/or the

human operator within a defined future interval (e.g., 0.1 sec, 0.5 sec, 1 sec, etc.) based on, for example, the current state (e.g., position, orientation, velocity, acceleration, etc.) thereof; a mapping module **246** may map or identify the POEs of the machinery and/or the human operator within the workspace; a state determination module **247** may determine an updated state of the machinery such that the machinery can be operated in a safe state; a path determination module **248** may determine a path along which the machinery can perform the activity; and a workspace modeling module **249** may model the workspace parameter (e.g., the dimensions, workflow, locations of the equipment and/or resources). The result of the classification, object recognition and simulation as well as the POEs of the machinery and/or human, the determined optimal path and workspace parameters may be stored in a space map **250**, which contains a volumetric representation of the workspace **100** with each voxel (or other unit of representation) labeled, within the space map, as described herein. Alternatively, the space map **250** may simply be a 3D array of voxels, with voxel labels being stored in a separate database (in memory **210** or in mass storage **212**).

[0051] In addition, the control system **112** may communicate with the robot controller **108** to control operation of the machinery in the workspace **100** (e.g., performing a task/application programmed in the controller **108** or the control system **112**) using conventional control routines collectively indicated at **252**. As explained below, the configuration of the workspace may well change over time as persons and/or machines move about; the control routines **252** may be responsive to these changes in operating machinery to achieve high levels of safety. All of the modules in system memory **210** may be coded in any suitable programming language, including, without limitation, high-level languages such as C, C++, C#, Java, Python, Ruby, Scala, and Lua, utilizing, without limitation, any suitable frameworks and libraries such as TensorFlow, Keras, PyTorch, Caffe or Theano. Additionally, the software can be implemented in an assembly language and/or machine language directed to the microprocessor resident on a target device.

[0052] When a task/application involves human-robot collaboration, it may be desired to model and/or compute, in real time, the robot dynamics and/or human activities and provide safety mapping of the robot and/or human in the workspace **100**. Mapping a safe and/or unsafe region in human-robot collaborative applications, however, is a complicated process because, for example, the robot state (e.g., current position, velocity, acceleration, payload, etc.) that represents the basis for extrapolating to all possibilities of the robot speed, load, and extension is subject to abrupt change. These possibilities typically depend on the robot kinematics and dynamics (including singularities and handling of redundant axes, e.g., elbow-up or elbow-down configurations) as well as the dynamics of the end effector and workpiece. Moreover, the safe region may be defined in terms of a degree rather than simply as “safe.” The process of modeling the robot dynamics and mapping the safe region, however, may be simplified by assuming that the robot’s current position is fixed and estimating the region that any portion of the robot may conceivably occupy within a short future time interval only. Thus, various embodiments of the present invention include approaches to modeling the robot dynamics and/or human activities in the workspace **100** and mapping the human-robot collaborative workspace



**100** (e.g., calculating the safe and/or unsafe regions) over short intervals based on the current states (e.g., current positions, velocities, accelerations, geometries, kinematics, expected positions and/or orientations associated with the next action in the task/application) associated with the machinery (including the robot **106** and/or other industrial equipment) and the human operator. In addition, the modeling and mapping procedure may be repeated (based on, for example, the scanning data of the machinery and the human acquired by the sensor system **101** during performance of the task/application) over time, thereby effectively updating the safe and/or unsafe regions on a quasi-continuous basis in real time.

**[0053]** To model the robot dynamics and/or human activities in the workspace **100** and map the safe and/or unsafe regions, in various embodiments, the control system **112** first computationally generates a 3D spatial representation (e.g., as voxels) of the workspace **100** where the machinery (including the robot **106** and auxiliary equipment), workpiece and human operator are based on, for example, the scanning data acquired by the sensor system **101**. In addition, the control system **112** may access the memory **210** or mass storage **212** to retrieve a model of the machinery characterizing the geometry and kinematics of the machinery and its permitted movements in the workspace. The model may be obtained from the robot manufacturer or, alternatively, generated by the control system **112** based on the scanning data acquired by the sensor system prior to mapping the safe and/or unsafe regions in the workspace **100**. Based on the machinery model and the currently known information about the machinery, a spatial POE of the machinery can be estimated. As a spatial map, the POE may be represented in any computationally convenient form, e.g., as a cloud of points, a grid of voxels, a vectorized representation, or other format. For convenience, the ensuing discussion will assume a voxel representation.

**[0054]** FIG. 3A illustrates a scenario in which only the current position of a robot **302** and the current state of an end-effector **304** are known. To estimate the spatial POE **306** of the robot **302** and the end-effector **304** within a predetermined time interval, it may be necessary to consider a range of possible starting velocities for all joints of the robot **302** (since the robot joint velocities are unknown) and allow the joint velocities to evolve within the predetermined time interval according to accelerations/decelerations consistent with the robot kinematics and dynamics. The entire spatial region **306** that the robot and end-effector may potentially occupy within the predetermined time interval is herein referred to as a static, “robot-level” POE. Thus, the robot-level POE may encompass all points that a stationary robot may possibly reach based on its geometry and kinematics, or if the robot is mobile, may extend in space to encompass the entire region reachable by the robot within the predefined time. For example, referring to FIG. 3B, if the robot is constrained to move along a linear track, the robot-level POE **308** would correspond to a linearly stretched version of the stationary robot POE **306**, with the width of the stretch dictated by the chosen time window  $\Delta t$ .

**[0055]** In one embodiment, the POE **306** represents a 3D region which the robot and end-effector may occupy before being brought to a safe state. Thus, in this embodiment, the time interval for computing the POE **306** is based on the time required to bring the robot to the safe state. For example, referring again to FIG. 3A, the POE **306** may be based

on the worst-case stopping times and distances (e.g., the longest stopping times with the furthest distances) in all possible directions. Alternatively, the POE **306** may be based on the worst-case stopping time of the robot in a direction toward the human operator. In some embodiments, the POE **306** is established at an application or task level, spanning all voxels potentially reached by the robot during performance of a particular task/application as further described below.

**[0056]** In addition, the POE **306** may be refined based on safety features of the robot **106**; for example, the safety features may include a safety system that initiates a protective stop even when the velocity or acceleration of the robot is not known. Knowing that a protective stop has been initiated and its protective stop input is being held may effectively truncate the POE **306** of the robot (since the robot will only decelerate until a complete stop is reached). In one embodiment, the POE **306** is continuously updated at fixed time intervals (thereby changing the spatial extent thereof in a stepwise manner) during deceleration of the robot; thus, if the time intervals are sufficiently short, the POE **306** is effectively updated on a quasi-continuous basis in real time.

**[0057]** FIG. 3C depicts another scenario where the robot’s state — e.g., the position, velocity and acceleration — are known. In this case, based on the known movement in a particular direction with a particular speed, a more refined (and smaller) time-bounded POE **310** may be computed based on the assumption that the protective stop may be initiated. In one embodiment, the reduced-size POE **310** corresponding to a short time interval is determined based on the instantaneously calculated deceleration from the current, known velocity to a complete stop and then acceleration to a velocity in the opposite direction within the short time interval.

**[0058]** In various embodiments, the POE of the machinery is more narrowly defined to correspond to the execution of a task or an application, i.e., all points that the robot may or can reach during performance of the task/application. This “task-level” or “application-level” POE may be estimated based on known robot operating parameters and the task/application program executed by the robot controller. For example, the control system **112** may access the memory **210** and/or storage **212** to retrieve the model of the machinery and the task/application program that the machinery will execute. Based thereon, the control system **112** may simulate operation of the machinery in a virtual volume (e.g., defined as a spatial region of voxels) in the workspace **100** for performing the task/application. The simulated machinery may sweep out a path in the virtual volume as the simulation progresses; the voxels that represent the spatial volume encountered by the machinery for performing the entire task/application correspond to a static task-level or application-level POE. In addition, because the machinery dynamically changes its trajectory (e.g., the pose, velocity and acceleration) during execution of the task/application, a dynamic POE may be defined as the spatial region that the machinery, as it performs the task/application, may reach from its current position within a predefined time interval. The dynamic POE may be determined based on the current state (e.g., the current position, current velocity and current acceleration) of the machinery and the programmed movements of the machinery in performing the task/application beginning at the current time. Thus, the dynamic POE may vary throughout performance of the entire task/application



— i.e., different sub-tasks (or sub-applications) may correspond to different POEs. In one embodiment, the POE associated with each sub-task or sub-application has a timestamp representing its temporal relation with the initial POE associated with the initial position of the machinery when it commences the task/application. The overall task-level or application-level POE (i.e., the static task-level or application-level POE) then corresponds to the union of all possible sub-task-level or sub-application-level POEs (i.e., the dynamic task-level or application-level POEs).

[0059] In some embodiments, parameters of the machinery are not known with sufficient precision to support an accurate simulation; in this case, the actual machinery may be run through the entire task/application routine and all joint positions at every point in time during the trajectory are recorded (e.g., by the sensory system 101 and/or the robot controller). Additional characteristics that may be captured during the recording include (i) the position of the tool-center-point in X, Y, Z, R, P, Y coordinates; (ii) the positions of all robot joints in joint space, J1, J2, J3, J4, J5, J6,... Jn; and (iii) the maximum achieved speed and acceleration for each joint during the desired motion. The control system 112 may then computationally create the static and/or dynamic task-level (or application-level) POE based on the recorded geometry of the machinery. For example, if the motion of the machinery is captured optically using cameras; the control system 112 may utilize a conventional computer-vision program to spatially map the motion of the machinery in the workspace 100 and, based thereon, create the POE of the machinery. In one embodiment, the range of each joint motion is profiled, and a safety-rated soft-axis limiting in joint space by the robot controller can bound the allowable range that each individual axis can move, thereby truncating the POE of the machinery as the maximum and minimum joint position for a particular application. In this case, the safety-rated limits can be enforced by the robot controller, resulting in a controller-initiated protective stop when, for example, (i) the robot position exceeds the safety-rated limits due to robot failure, (ii) an external position-based application profiling is incomplete, (iii) any observations were not properly recorded, and/or (iv) the application itself was changed to encompass a larger volume in the workspace without recharacterization.

[0060] A simple example of the task/application-level POE can be seen in FIG. 4, which illustrates a pick-and-place operation that never changes trajectory between an organized bin 402 of parts (or workpieces) and a repetitive place location, point B, on a conveyor belt 404. This operation can be run continuously, with robot positions read over a statistically significant number of cycles, to determine the range of sensor noise. Incorporation of sensor noise into the computation ensures adequate safety by effectively accounting for the worst-case spatial occupancy given sensor error or imperfections. Based on the programmed robotic trajectory and an additional input characterizing the size of the workpiece, the control system 112 may generate an application-level POE 406.

[0061] In FIG. 4, there may be no meaningful difference between the static task-level POE and any dynamic POE that may be defined at any point in the execution of the task since the robot trajectory does not change once programmed. But this may change if, for example, the task is altered during execution and/or the robot trajectory is modified by an external device. FIG. 5A depicts an exemplary

robotic application that varies the robotic trajectory during operation; as a result, the application-level POE of the robot is updated in real time accordingly. As depicted, the bin 502 may arrive at a robot workstation full of unorganized workpieces in varying orientations. The robot is programmed to pick each workpiece from the bin 502 and place it at point B on a conveyor belt 504. More specifically, the task may be accomplished by mounting a camera 506 above the bin 502 to determine the position and orientation of each workpiece and causing the robot controller to perform on-the-fly trajectory compensation to pick the next workpiece for transfer to the conveyor belt 504. If point A is defined as the location where the robot always enters and exits the camera's field of view (FoV), the static application-level POE 508 between the FoV entry point A and the place point B is identical to the POE 406 shown in FIG. 4. To determine the POE within the camera's view (i.e., upon the robot entering the entry point A), at least two scenarios can be envisioned. FIG. 5A illustrates the first scenario, where upon crossing through FoV entry point A, the calculation of the POE 510 becomes that of a time-bounded dynamic task-level POE — i.e., the POE 510 may be estimated by computing the region that the robot, as it performs the task, may reach from its current position within a predefined time interval. In the second scenario as depicted in FIG. 5B, a bounded region 512, corresponding to the volume within which trajectory compensation is permissible, is added to the characterized application-level POE 508 between FoV entry point A and place point B. As a result, the entire permissible envelope of on-the-fly trajectory compensation is explicitly constrained in computing the static application-level POE.

[0062] In various embodiments, the control system 112 facilitates operation of the machinery based on the determined POE thereof. For example, during performance of a task, the sensor system 101 may continuously monitor the position of the machinery, and the control system 112 may compare the actual machinery position to the simulated POE. If a deviation of the actual machinery position from the simulated POE exceeds a predetermined threshold (e.g., 1 meter), the control system 112 may change the pose (position and/or orientation) and/or the velocity (e.g., to a full stop) of the robot for ensuring human safety. Additionally or alternatively, the control system 112 may preemptively change the pose and/or velocity of the robot before the deviation actually exceeds the predetermined threshold. For example, upon determining that the deviation gradually increases and is approaching the predetermined threshold during execution of the task, the control system 112 may preemptively reduce the velocity of the machinery; this may avoid the situation where the inertia of the machinery causes the deviation to exceed the predetermined threshold.

[0063] To fully map the workspace 100 in a human-robot collaborative application, it may be desired to consider the presence and movement of the human operator in the vicinity of the machinery. Thus, in various embodiments, a spatial POE of the human operator that characterizes the spatial region potentially occupied by any portion of the human operator is based on any possible or anticipated movements of the human operator within a defined time interval or during performance of a task or an application; this region is computed and mapped in the workspace. As used herein, the term “possible movements” or “anticipated movements” of the human includes a bounded possible location within the defined time interval. This may be based on the current



direction, velocity and acceleration of the human and, in some embodiments, on a kinematic model of human motion (e.g., ISO 13855 standards defining expected human motion in a hazardous setting). In other embodiments, rather than a detailed model, possible or anticipated movements are based on simplifying worst-case assumptions, e.g., that humans can move in every direction equivalently, and that all directions are equally possible.

[0064] To compute/map the POE of the human operator, the control system 112 may first utilize the sensor system 101 to acquire the current position and/or pose of the operator in the workspace 100. In addition, the control system 112 may determine (i) the future position and pose of the operator in the workspace using a well-characterized human model or (ii) all space presently or potentially occupied by any potential operator based on the assumption that the operator can move in any direction at a maximum operator velocity as defined by the standards such as ISO 13855. Again, the operator's position and pose can be treated as a moment frozen in space at the time of image acquisition, and the operator is assumed to be able to move in any direction with any speed and acceleration consistent with the linear and angular kinematics and dynamics of human motion in the immediate future (e.g., in a time interval,  $\delta t$ , after the image-acquisition moment), or at some maximum velocity as defined by the standards. For example, referring to FIG. 6A, a POE 602 that instantaneously characterizes the spatial region potentially occupied by any portion of the human body in the time interval  $\delta t$  can be computed based on the worst-case scenario (e.g., the furthest distance with the fastest speed) that the human operator can move.

[0065] In some embodiments, the POE 602 of the human operator is refined by acquiring more information about the operator. For example, the sensor system 101 may acquire a series of scanning data (e.g., images) within a time interval  $\Delta t$ . By analyzing the operator's positions and poses in the scanning data and based on the time period  $\Delta t$ , the operator's moving direction, velocity and acceleration can be determined. This information, in combination with the linear and angular kinematics and dynamics of human motion, may reduce the potential distance reachable by the operator in the immediate future time  $\delta t$ , thereby refining the POE of the operator (e.g., POE 604 in FIG. 6B). This "future-interval POE" for the operator is analogous to the robot-level POE described above.

[0066] In addition, similar to the POE of the machinery above, the POE of the human operator can be established at an application/task level. For example, referring to FIG. 7, based on the particular task that the operator is required to perform, the location(s) of the resources (e.g., workpieces or equipment) associated with the task, and the linear and angular kinematics and dynamics of human motion, the spatial region that is potentially (or likely) reachable by the operator during performance of the particular task can be computed. The POE 702 of the operator can be defined as the voxels of the spatial region potentially reachable by the operator during performance of the particular task. In some embodiments, the operator may carry a workpiece (e.g., a large but light piece of sheet metal) to an operator-load station for performing the task/application. In this situation, the POE of the operator may be computed by including the geometry of the workpiece, which again, may be acquired by, for example, the sensor system 101.

[0067] Further, the POE of the human operator may be truncated based on workspace configuration. For example, referring to FIG. 7B, the workspace may include a physical fence 712 defining the area where the operator can perform a task. Thus, even though the computed POE 714 of the operator indicates that the operator may reach a region 716, the physical fence 712 restricts this movement. As a result, a truncated POE 718 of the operator excluding the region 716 in accordance with the location of the physical fence 712 can be determined. In some embodiments, the workspace includes a turnstile or a type of door that, for example, always allows exit but only permits entry to a collaborative area during certain points of a cycle. Again, based on the location and design of the turnstile/door, the POE of the human operator may be adjusted (e.g., truncated).

[0068] This concept can be generalized to define "limited-access zones" (LAZs) within which the presence of a human will not affect operation of the machinery; in a LAZ it may not even be necessary to generate or monitor POEs at all, although in some cases the LAZ may reduce the spatial envelope of a human's POE to reflect the physical inaccessibility of regions within the workspace. LAZs may be defined computationally, by the control system 112, or manually by an operator. With reference to FIG. 7C, the distance between the POE 718 of an operator and a robot POE 730 may, due to the operator's movement, reach a "minimum distance to hazard" (MDH) limit despite the relatively large space between the operator and the robot. Yet the presence of a fixture 735 (e.g., a table, conveyor or other fixed object) restricts movement of the operator and, at a minimum, means that the POE 718 is larger than necessary. But in fact, as shown in FIG. 7D, because of the physical restriction on the operator's movements, the MDH may actually be smaller, and in fact, the fixture 735 may effectively preclude dangerous interactions between the operator and the robot altogether. In such cases, a LAZ 740 may be defined either computationally or manually. If computationally defined, the LAZ 740 may be computed by the control system based on the identified objects (including the fixture 735) within the workspace and the POEs of machinery operating therein, as well as a kinematic model of human motion as described above. If desired, the human kinematic model may be supplemented by heuristics representing practical limits to probable human movement, e.g., the unlikelihood that the operator will lean over the fixture 735 to place himself in danger. If the LAZ is added manually, the user may interact with the control system 112 (e.g., directly or using a mobile device in wireless communication therewith) via an interface that depicts the workspace and allows the user to define a 3D region thereof as the LAZ. The control system 112 may be configured simply to ignore activity within any LAZ, not restricting the activity of the robot despite the presence of humans within the LAZ and, in some embodiments, not even defining (or updating) POEs around humans in the LAZ and disregarding MDH limits.

[0069] Because human movement is subject to practical kinematic constraints, it may not be necessary to generate and update full POEs around people moving within the workspace. Instead, the MDH between a hazard and the human may be monitored directly, without a full POE; that is, instead of considering the full range of possible human motion, it is possible to monitor only the distance between a hazard and the closest point on the human (represented as a point cloud or 3D object, for example) to determine whether



the MDH limit is violated. The closest point can, of course, reflect anticipated possible movements (e.g., the human may raise her arm to grasp or point), but as long as such movements are either anticipated or monitored frequently enough, the single MDH segment (rather than a full spatial envelope of points and associated distances to the hazard) may be sufficient.

**[0070]** The robot-level POE (and/or application-level POE) of the machinery and/or the future-interval POE (and/or application-level POE) of the human operator may be used to show the operator where to stand and/or what to do during a particular part of the task using suitable indicators (e.g., lights, sounds, displayed visualizations, etc.), and an alert can be raised if the operator unexpectedly leaves the operator POE. In one embodiment, the POEs of the machinery and human operator are both presented on a local display or communicated to a smartphone or tablet application (or other methods, such as augmented reality (AR) or virtual reality (VR)) for display thereon. For example, referring to FIG. 8A, the display **802** may depict the POE **804** of the robot and the POE **806** of the human operator in the immediate future time  $\delta t$ . Alternatively, referring to FIG. 8B, the display **802** may show the largest POE **814** of the robot and the largest POE **816** of the operator during execution of a particular task. In addition, referring again to FIG. 8A, the display **802** may further illustrate the spatial regions **824**, **826** that are currently occupied by the robot and operator, respectively; the currently occupied regions **824**, **826** may be displayed in a sequential or overlapping manner with the POEs **804** and **806** of the robot and the operator. Displaying the POEs thus allows the human operator to visualize the spatial regions that are currently occupied and will be potentially occupied by the machinery and the operator himself; this may further ensure safety and promote more efficient planning of operator motion based on knowledge of where the machinery will be at what time.

**[0071]** In some embodiments, the machinery is operated based on the POE thereof, the POE of the human operator, and/or a safety protocol that specifies one or more safety measures (e.g., a minimum separation distance or a protective separation distance (PSD) between the machinery and the operator as further described below, a maximum speed of the machinery when in proximity to a human, etc.). For example, during performance of a particular task, the control system **112** may restrict or alter the robot operation based on proximity between the POEs of the robot and the human operator for ensuring that the safety measures in the protocol are satisfied. For example, upon determining that the POEs of the robot and the human operator in the next moment may overlap, the control system **112** may bring the robot to a safe state (e.g., having a reduced speed and/or a different pose), thereby avoiding a contact with the human operator in proximity thereto. The control system **112** may directly control the operation and state of the robot or, alternatively, may send instructions to the robot controller **108** that then controls the robotic operation/state based on the received instructions as further described below.

**[0072]** In addition, the degree of alternation of the robot operation/state may depend on the degree of overlap between the POEs of the robot and the operator. For example, referring again to FIG. 8B, the POE **814** of the robot may be divided into multiple nested, spatially distinct 3D subzones **818**; in one embodiment, the more subzones **818** that overlap the POE **816** of the human operator, the larger

the degree by which the robot operation/state is altered (e.g., having a larger decrease in the speed or a larger degree of change in the orientation).

**[0073]** In various embodiments, based on the computed robot-level POE **804**, future-interval POE **806** of the human operator, or dynamic and/or static application-level POEs **814**, **816** of the machinery and human operator for performing a specific action or an entire task, the workspace parameter (such as the dimensions thereof, the workflow, the locations of the resources, etc.) can be modeled to achieve high productivity and spatial efficiency while ensuring safety of the human operator. For example, based on the static task-level POE **814** of the machinery and the largest computed POE **816** of the operator during execution of the task, the minimum dimensions of the workcell can be determined. In addition, the locations and/or orientations of the equipment and/or resources (e.g., the robot, conveyor belt, workpieces) in the workspace can be arranged such that they are easily reachable by the machinery and/or operator while minimizing the overlapped region between the POEs of the machinery and the operator in order to ensure safety. In one embodiment, the computed POEs of the machinery and/or human operator are combined with a conventional spatial modeling tool (e.g., supplied by Delmia Global Operations or Tecnomatix) to model the workspace. For example, the POEs of the machinery and/or human operator may be used as input modules to the conventional spatial modeling tool so as to augment their capabilities to include the human-robot collaboration when designing the workspace and/or workflow of a particular task.

**[0074]** In various embodiments, the dynamic task-level POE of the machinery and/or the task-level POE of the operator is continuously updated during actual execution of the task; such updates can be reflected on the display **802**. For example, during execution of the task, the sensor system **101** may periodically scan the machinery, human operator and/or workspace. Based on the scanning data, the poses (e.g., positions and/or orientation) of the machinery and/or human operator can be updated. In addition, by comparing the updated poses with the previous poses of the machinery and/or human operator, the moving directions, velocities and/or accelerations associated with the machinery and operator can be determined. In various embodiments, based on the updated poses, moving directions, velocities and/or accelerations, the POEs of the machinery and operator in the next moment (i.e., after a time increment) can be computed and updated. Additionally, as explained above, the POEs of the machinery and/or human operator may be updated by further taking into account next actions that are specified to be performed in the particular task.

**[0075]** In some embodiments, the continuously updated POEs of the machinery and the human operator are provided as feedback for adjusting the operation of the machinery and/or other setup in the workspace to ensure safety as further described below. For example, when the updated POEs of the machinery and the operator indicate that the operator may be too close to the robot (e.g., a distance smaller than the minimum separation distance defined in the safety protocol), either at present or within a fixed interval (e.g., the robot stopping time), a stop command may be issued to the machinery. In one embodiment, the scanning data of the machinery and/or operator acquired during actual execution of the task is stored in memory and can be used as



an input when modeling the workflow of the same human-robot collaborative application in the workspace next time.

**[0076]** In addition, the computed POEs of the machinery and/or human operator may provide insights when determining an optimal path of the machinery for performing a particular task. For example, as further described below, multiple POEs of the operator may be computed based on his/her actions to be performed for the task. Based on the computed POEs of the human operator and the setup (e.g., locations and/or orientations) of the equipment and/or resources in the workspace, the moving path of the machinery in the workspace for performing the task can be optimized so as to maximize the productivity and space efficiency while ensuring safety of the operator.

**[0077]** In some embodiments, path optimization includes creation of a 3D “keep-in” zone (or volume) (i.e., a zone/volume to which the robot is restricted during operation) and/or a “keep-out” zone (or volume) (i.e., a zone/volume from which the robot is restricted during operation). Keep-in and keep-out zones restrict robot motion through safe limitations on the possible robot axis positions in Cartesian and/or joint space. Safety limits may be set outside these zones so that, for example, their breach by the robot in operation triggers a stop. Conventionally, robot keep-in zones are defined as prismatic bodies. For example, referring to FIG. 9A, a keep-in zone **902** determined using the conventional approach takes the form of a prismatic volume; the keep-in zone **902** is typically larger than the total swept volume **904** of the machinery during operation (which may be determined either by simulation or characterization using, for example, scanning data acquired by the sensor system **101**). Based on the determined keep-in zone **902**, the robot controller may implement a position-limiting function to enforce the position limiting of the machinery to be within the keep-in zone **902**.

**[0078]** The machinery path determined based on prismatic volumes, however, may not be optimal. In addition, complex robot motions may be difficult to represent as prismatic volumes due to the complex nature of their surfaces and the geometry of the end effectors and workpieces mounted on the robot; as a result, the prismatic volume will be larger than necessary for safety. To overcome this challenge and optimize the moving path of the machinery for performing a task, various embodiments establish and store in memory the swept volume of the machinery (including, for example, robot links, end effectors and workpieces) throughout a programmed routine (e.g., a POE of the machinery), and then define the keep-in zone based on the POE as a detailed volume composed of, e.g., mesh surfaces, NURBS or T-spline solid bodies. That is, the keep-in zone may be arbitrary in shape and not assembled from base prismatic volumes. For example, referring to FIG. 9B, a POE **906** of the machinery may be established by recording the motion of the machinery as it performs the application or task, or alternatively, by a computational simulation defining performance of the task (and the spatial volume within which the task takes place). The keep-in zone **908** defined based on the POE **906** of the machinery thus includes a much smaller region compared to the conventional keep-in zone **902**. Because the keep-in zone **908** is tailored based on the specific task/application it executes (as opposed to the prismatic volume offered by conventional modeling tools), a smaller machine footprint can be realized. This may advantageously allow more accurate determination of the optimal path for

the machinery when performing a particular task and/or design of a workspace or workflow. In various embodiments, the keep-in zone is enforced by the control system **112**, which can transmit instructions to the robot controller to restrict movement of the machinery as further described below. For example, upon detecting that a portion of the machinery is outside (or is predicted to exit) the keep-in zone **908**, the control system **112** may issue a stop command to the robot controller, which can then cause the machinery to fully stop.

**[0079]** As described above, the POE of the machinery may be static or dynamic, and may be robot-level or task-level. A static, robot-level POE represents the entire spatial region that the machinery may possibly reach within a specified time, and thus corresponds to the most conservative possible safety zone; a keep-in zone determined based on the static robot-level POE may not be truly a keep-in zone because the machinery’s movements are not constrained. If the machinery is stopped or slowed down when a human reaches a prescribed separation distance from any outer point of this zone, the machinery’s operation may be curtailed even when intrusions are distant from its near-term reach. A static, task-level POE reduces the volume or distance within which an intrusion will trigger a safety stop or a slowdown to a specific taskdefined volume and consequently reduces potential robot downtime without compromising human safety. Thus, the keep-in zone determined based on the static, task-level POE of the machinery is smaller than that determined based on the static, robot-level POE. A dynamic, task-level or application-level POE of the machinery may further reduce the POE (and thereby the keep-in zone) based on a specific point in the execution of a task by the machinery. A dynamic task-level POE achieves the smallest sacrifice of productive robot activity while respecting safety guidelines.

**[0080]** Alternatively, the keep-in zone may be defined based on the boundary of the total swept volume **904** of the machinery during operation or slight padding/offset of the total swept volume **904** to account for measurement or simulation error. This approach may be utilized when, for example, the computed POE of the machinery is sufficiently large. For example, referring again to FIG. 9A, the computed POE **910** of the machinery may be larger than the keep-in zone **902**. But because the machinery cannot move outside the keep-in zone **902**, the POE **910** has to be truncated based on the prismatic geometry of the keep-in zone **902**. The truncated POE **912**, however, also involves a prismatic volume, so determining the machinery path based thereon may thus not be optimal. In contrast, referring again to FIG. 9B, the POE **906** truncated based on the application/task-specific keep-in zone **908** may include a smaller volume that is tailored to the application/task being executed; thereby allowing more accurate determination of the optimal path for the machinery and/or design of a workspace or workflow.

**[0081]** In various embodiments, the actual or potential movement of the human operator is evaluated against the robot-level or application-level POE of the machinery to define the keep-in zone. Expected human speeds in industrial environments are referenced in ISO 13855:2010, ISO 61496-1:2012 and ISO 10218:2011. For example, human bodies are expected to move no faster than 1.6 m/s and human extremities are expected to move no faster than 2 m/s. In one embodiment, the points reachable by the human operator in a given unit of time is approximated by



a volume surrounding the operator, which can be defined as the human POE as described above. If the human operator is moving, the human POE moves with her. Thus, as the human POE approaches the task-level POE of the robot, the latter may be reduced in dimension along the direction of human travel to preserve a safe separation distance. In one embodiment, this reduced task-level POE of the robot (which varies dynamically based on the tracked and/or estimated movement of the operator) is defined as a keep-in zone. So long as the robot can continue performing elements of the task within the smaller (and potentially shrinking) POE (i.e., keep-in zone), the robot can continue to operate productively; otherwise, it may stop. Alternatively, the dynamic task-level POE of the machinery may be reduced in response to an advancing human by slowing down the machinery as further described below. This permits the machinery to keep working at a slower rate rather than stopping completely. Moreover, slower machinery movement may in itself pose a lower safety risk.

[0082] In various embodiments, the keep-in and keep-out zones are implemented in the machinery having separate safety-rated and non-safety-rated control systems, typically in compliance with an industrial safety standard. Safety architectures and safety ratings are described, for example, in U.S. Serial No. 16/800,429, entitled “Safety-Rated Processor System Architecture,” filed on Feb. 25, 2020, the entire contents of which are hereby incorporated by reference. Non-safety-rated systems, by contrast, are not designed for integration into safety systems (e.g., in accordance with the safety standard).

[0083] Operation of the safety-rated and non-safety-rated control systems is best understood with reference to the conceptual illustration of system organization and operation of FIG. 10. As described above, a sensor system 1001 monitors the workspace 1000, which includes the machinery (e.g., a robot) 1002. Movements of the machinery are controlled by a conventional robot controller 1004, which may be part of or separate from the robot itself; for example, a single robot controller may issue commands to more than one robot. The robot’s activities may primarily involve a robot arm, the movements of which are orchestrated by the robot controller 1004 using joint commands that operate the robot arm joints to effect a desired movement. In various embodiments, the robot controller 1004 includes a safety-rated component (e.g., a functional safety unit) 1006 and a non-safety-rated component 1008. The safety-rated component 1006 may enforce the robot’s state (e.g., position, orientation, speed, etc.) such that the robot is operated in a safe manner. The safety-rated component 1006 typically incorporates a closed control loop together with the electronics and hardware associated with machine control inputs. The non-safety-rated component 1008 may be controlled externally to change the robot’s state (e.g., slow down or stop the robot) but not in a safe manner — i.e., the non-safety-rated component cannot be guaranteed to change the robot’s state, such as slowing down or stopping the robot, within a determined period of time for ensuring safety. In one embodiment, the non-safety-rated component 1008 contains the task-level programming that causes the robot to perform an application. The safety-rated component 1006, by contrast, may perform only a monitoring function, i.e., it does not govern the robot motion — instead, it only monitors positions and velocities (e.g., based on the machine state maintained by the non-safety-rated component 1008) and

issues commands to safely slow down or stop the robot if the robot’s position or velocity strays outside predetermined limits. Commands from the safety-rated monitoring component 1006 may override robot movements dictated by the task-level programming or other non-safety-rated control commands.

[0084] Typically, the robot controller 1004 itself does not have a safe way to govern (e.g., modify) the state (e.g., speed, position, etc.) of the robot; rather, it only has a safe way to enforce a given state. To govern and enforce the state of the robot in a safe manner, in various embodiments, an object-monitoring system (OMS) 1010 is implemented to cooperatively work with the safety-rated component 1006 and non-safety-rated component 1008 as further described below. In one embodiment, the OMS 1010 obtains information about objects from the sensor system 1001 and uses this sensor information to identify relevant objects in the workspace 1000. For example, OMS 1010 may, based on the information obtained from the sensor system (and/or the robot), monitor whether the robot is in a safe state (e.g., remains within a specific zone (e.g., the keep-in zone), stays below a specified speed, etc.), and if not, issues a safe-action command (e.g., stop) to the robot controller 1004.

[0085] For example, OMS 1010 may determine the current state of the robot and/or the human operator and computationally generate a POE for the robot and/or a POE for the human operator when performing a task in the workspace 1000. The POEs of the robot and/or human operator may then be transferred to the safety-rated component for use as a keep-in zone as described above. Alternatively, the POEs of the robot and/or human operator may be shared by the safety-rated and non-safety-rated control components of the robot controller. OMS 1010 may transmit the POEs and/or safe-action constraints to the robot controller 1004 via any suitable wired or wireless protocol. (In an industrial robot, control electronics typically reside in an external control box. However, in the case of a robot with a built-in controller, OMS 1010 communicates directly with the robot’s onboard controller.) In various embodiments, OMS 1010 includes a robot communication module 1011 that communicates with the safety-rated component 1006 and non-safety-rated component 1008 via a safety-rated channel (e.g., digital I/O) 1012 and a non-safety-rated channel (e.g., an Ethernet connector) 1014, respectively. In addition, when the robot violates the safety measures specified in the safety protocol, OMS 1010 may issue commands to the robot controller 1004 via both the safety-rated and non-safety-rated channels. For example, upon determining that the robot speed exceeds a predetermined maximum speed when in proximity to the human (or the robot is outside the keep-in zone or the PSD exceeds the predetermined threshold), OMS 1010 may first issue a command to the non-safety-rated component 1008 via the non-safety-rated channel 1014 to reduce the robot speed to a desired value (e.g., below or at the maximum speed), thereby reducing the dynamic POE of the robot. This action, however, is non-safety-rated. Thus, after the robot speed is reduced to the desired value (or the dynamic POE of the robot is reduced to the desired size), OMS 1010 may issue another command to the safety-rated component 1008 via the safety-rated channel 1012 such that the safety-rated component 1008 can enforce a new robot speed, which is generally higher than the reduced robot speed (or a new keep-in zone based



on the reduced dynamic POE of the robot). Accordingly, various embodiments effectively “safety rate” the function provided by the non-safety-rated component **1008** by causing the non-safety-rated component **1008** to first reduce the speed or dynamic POE of the robot in spatial extent in an unsafe way, and then engaging the safety-rated (e.g., monitoring) component to ensure that the robot remains in the now-reduced speed (or, within the now-reduced POE, as a new keep-in zone). Similar approaches can be implemented to increase the speed or POE of the robot in a safe manner during performance of the task. (It will be appreciated that, with reference to FIG. 2, the functions of OMS **1010** described above are performed in a control system **112** by analysis module **242**, simulation module **244**, movement-prediction module **245**, mapping module **246**, state determination module **247** and, in some cases, the control routines **252**.)

**[0086]** Similarly, the keep-out zone may be determined based on the POE of the human operator. Again, a static future-interval POE represents the entire spatial region that the human operator may possibly reach within a specified time, and thus corresponds to the most conservative possible keep-out zone within which an intrusion of the robot will trigger a safety stop or slowdown. A static task-level POE of the human operator may reduce the determined keep-out zone in accordance with the task to be performed, and a dynamic, task-level or application-level POE of the human may further reduce the keep-out zone based on a specific point in the execution of a task by the human. In addition, the POE of the human operator can be shared by the safety-rated and non-safety-rated control components as described above for operating the robot in a safe manner. For example, upon detecting intrusion of the robot in the keep-out zone, the OMS **1010** may issue a command to the non-safety-rated control component to slow down the robot in an unsafe way, and then engaging the safety-rated robot control (e.g., monitoring) component to ensure that the robot remains outside the keep-out zone or has a speed below the predetermined value.

**[0087]** Once the keep-in zone and/or keep-out zone are defined, the machinery is safely constrained within the keep-in zone, or prevented from entering the keep-out zone, reducing the POE of the machinery as discussed above. Further, path optimization may include dynamic changing or switching of zones throughout the task, creating multiple POEs of different sizes, in a similar way as described for the operator. Moreover, switching of these dynamic zones may be triggered not only by a priori knowledge of the machinery program as described above, but also by the instantaneous detected location of the machinery or the human operator. For example, if a robot is tasked to pick up a part, bring it to a fixture, then perform a machining operation on the part, the POE of the robot can be dynamically updated based on safety-rated axis limiting at different times within the program. FIGS. 11A and 11B illustrate this scenario. FIG. 11A depicts the robot POE **1102** truncated by a large keep-in zone **1104**, allowing the robot to pick up a part **1106** and bring it to a fixture **1108**. Upon placement of the part **1106** in the fixture **1108** and while the robot is performing a machining task on the part **1106**, as shown in FIG. 11B, the keep-in zone **1114** is dynamically switched to a smaller state, further truncating the POE **1112** during this part of the robot program.

**[0088]** Additionally or alternatively, once the machinery’s current state (e.g., payload, position, orientation, velocity and/or acceleration) is acquired, a PSD (generally defined as the minimum distance separating the machinery from the operator for ensuring safety) and/or other safety-related measures can be computed. For example, the PSD may be computed based on the POEs of the machinery and the human operator as well as any keep-in and/or keep-out zones. Again, because the machinery’s state may change during execution of the task, the PSD may be continuously updated throughout the task as well. This can be achieved by, for example, using the sensor system **101** to periodically acquire the updated state of the machinery and the operator, and, based thereon, updating the PSD. In addition, the updated PSD may be compared to a predetermined threshold; if the updated PSD is smaller than the threshold, the control system **112** may adjust (e.g., reduce), for example, the speed of the machinery as further described below so as to bring the robot to a safe state. In various embodiments, the computed PSD is combined with the POE of the human operator to determine the optimal speed or robot path (or choosing among possible paths) for executing a task. For example, referring to FIG. 12A, the envelopes **1202-1206** represent the largest POEs of the operator at three instants,  $t_1$ - $t_3$ , respectively, during execution of a human-robot collaborative application; based on the computed PSDs **1208-1212**, the robot’s locations **1214-1218** that can be closest to the operator at the instants  $t_1$ - $t_3$ , respectively, during performance of the task (while avoiding safety hazards) can be determined. As a result, an optimal path **1220** for the robot movement including the instants  $t_1$ - $t_3$  can be determined. Alternatively, instead of determining the unconstrained optimal path, the POE and PSD information can be used to select among allowed or predetermined paths given programmed or environmental constraints — i.e., identifying the path alternative that provides greatest efficiency without violating safety constraints.

**[0089]** In various embodiments, the computed PSD is utilized to govern the speed (or other states) of the machinery; this may be implemented in, for example, an application where the machinery path cannot deviate from its original programmed trajectory. In this case, the PSD between the POEs of the human and the machinery is dynamically computed during performance of the task and continuously compared to the instantaneous measured distance between the human and the machinery (using, e.g., the sensor system **101**). However, instead of a system that alters the path of the machinery, or simply initiates a protective stop when the PSD is violated, the control system **112** may govern (e.g., modify) the current speed of the machinery to a lower set point at a distance larger than the PSD. At the instant when the machinery reaches the lower set point, not only will the POE of the machinery be smaller, but the distance that the operator is from the new POE of the machinery will be larger, thereby ensuring safety of the human operator. FIG. 12B depicts this scenario. Line **1252** represents a safety-rated joint monitor, corresponding to a velocity at which an emergency stop is initiated at point **1254**. In this example, line **1252** corresponds to the velocity used to compute the size of the machinery’s POE. Line **1256** corresponds to the commanded (and actual) speed of the machinery. As the measured distance between the POEs of the machinery and human operator decreases, the commanded speed of the machinery may decrease accordingly,



but the size of the machinery's POE does not change (e.g., in region **1258**). Once the machinery has slowed down to the particular set point **1254** (at a distance larger than the PSD), the velocity at which the safety-rated joint monitor may trigger an emergency stop can be decreased in a stepwise manner to shrink the POE of the machinery (e.g., in region **1260**). The decreased POE of the machinery (corresponding to a decreased PSD) may allow the operator to work in closer proximity to the machinery in a safetycompliant manner. In one embodiment, governing to the lower set point is achieved using a precomputed safety function that is already present in the robot controller or, alternatively, using a safety-rated monitor paired with a non-safety governor.

**[0090]** Further, the spatial mapping described herein (e.g., the POEs of the machinery and human operator and/or the keep-in/keep-out zone) may be combined with enhanced robot control as described in U.S. Pat. No. 10,099,372 ("372 patent"), the entire disclosure of which is hereby incorporated by reference. The '372 patent considers dynamic environments in which objects and people come, go, and change position; hence, safe actions are calculated by a safe-action determination module (SADM) in real time based on all sensed relevant objects and on the current state of the robot, and these safe actions may be updated each cycle so as to ensure that the robot does not collide with the human operator and/or any stationary object.

**[0091]** One approach to achieving this is to modulate the robot's maximum velocity (by which is meant the velocity of the robot itself or any appendage thereof) proportionally to the minimum distance between any point on the robot and any point in the relevant set of sensed objects to be avoided. For example, the robot may be allowed to operate at maximum speed when the closest object or human is further away than some threshold distance beyond which collisions are not a concern, and the robot is halted altogether if an object/human is within the PSD. For example, referring to FIG. 13, an interior 3D danger zone **1302** around the robot may be computationally generated by the SADM based on the computed PSD or keep-in zone associated with the robot described above; if any portion of the human operator crosses into the danger zone **1302** — or is predicted to do so within the next cycle based on the computed POE of the human operator — operation of the robot may be halted. In addition, a second 3D zone **1304** enclosing and slightly larger than the danger zone **1302** may be defined also based on the computed PSD or keep-in zone associated with the robot. If any portion of the human operator crosses the threshold of zone **1304** but is still outside the interior danger zone **1302**, the robot is signaled to operate at a slower speed. In one embodiment, the robot is proactively slowed down when the future interval POE of the operator overlaps spatially with the second zone **1304** such that the next future interval POE cannot possibly enter the danger zone **1302**. Further, an outer zone **1306** corresponding to a boundary may be defined such that outside this zone **1306**, all movements of the human operator are considered safe because, within an operational cycle, they cannot bring the operator sufficiently close to the robot to pose a danger. In one embodiment, detection of any portion of the operator's body within the outer zone **1306** but still outside the second 3D zone **1304** allows the robot **904** to continue operating at full speed. These zones **1302-1306** may be updated if the robot is moved (or moves) within the environment and may complement the POE in terms of overall robot control.

**[0092]** In various embodiments, sufficient margin can be added to each of the zones **1302-1306** to account for movement of relevant objects or humans toward the robot at some maximum realistic velocity. Additionally or alternatively, state estimation techniques based on information detected by the sensor system **101** can be used to project the movements of the human and other objects forward in time. For example, skeletal tracking techniques can be used to identify moving limbs of humans that have been detected and limit potential collisions based on properties of the human body and estimated movements of, e.g., a person's arm rather than the entire person. The robot can then be operated based on the progressive safety zones **1302-1306** and the projected movements of the human and other objects.

**[0093]** FIG. 14A illustrates an exemplary approach for computing a POE of the machinery and/or human operator based at least in part on simulation of the machinery's operation in accordance herewith. In a first step **1402**, the sensor system is activated to acquire information about the workspace, machinery and/or human operator. In a second step **1404**, based on the scanning data acquired by the sensor system, the control system generates a 3D spatial representation (e.g., voxels) of the workspace (e.g., using the analysis module **242**) and recognize the human and the machinery and movements thereof in the workspace (e.g., using the object-recognition module **243**). In a third step **1406**, the control system accesses the system memory to retrieve a model of the machinery that is acquired from the machinery manufacturer (or the conventional modeling tool) or generated based on the scanning data acquired by the sensor system. In a fourth step **1408**, the control system (e.g., the simulation module **244**) simulates operation of the machinery in a virtual volume in the workspace for performing a task/application. The simulation module **244** typically receives parameters characterizing the geometry and kinematics of the machinery (e.g., based on the machinery model) and is programmed with the task that the machinery is to perform; that task may also be programmed in the machinery (e.g., robot) controller. In one embodiment, the simulation result is then transmitted to the mapping module **246**. (The division of responsibility between the modules **244**, **246** is one possible design choice.) In addition, the control system (e.g., the movement-prediction module **245**) may predict movement of the operator within a defined future interval when performing the task/application (step **1410**). The movement prediction module **245** may utilize the current state of the operator and identification parameters characterizing the geometry and kinematics of the operator to predict all possible spatial regions that may be occupied by any portion of the human operator within the defined interval when performing the task/application. This data may then be passed to the mapping module **246**, and once again, the division of responsibility between the modules **245**, **246** is one possible design choice. Based on the simulation results and the predicted movement of the operator, the mapping module **246** creates spatial maps (e.g., POEs) of points within a workspace that may potentially be occupied by the machinery and the human operator (step **1412**).

**[0094]** FIG. 14B illustrates an exemplary approach for computing dynamic POEs of the machinery and/or human operator when executing a task/application in accordance herewith. In a first step **1422**, the sensor system is activated to acquire information about the workspace, machinery and/or human operator. In a second step **1424**, based on the scan-



ning data acquired by the sensor system, the control system generates a 3D spatial representation (e.g., voxels) of the workspace (e.g., using the analysis module **242**) and recognizes the human and the machinery and movements thereof in the workspace (e.g., using the object-recognition module **243**). In a third step **1426**, the control system accesses system memory to retrieve a model of the machinery acquired from the machinery manufacturer (or a conventional modeling tool) or generated based on the scanning data acquired by the sensor system. In a fourth step **1428**, the control system (e.g., the movement-prediction module **245**) predicts movements of the machinery and/or operator within a defined future interval when performing the task/application. For example, the movement-prediction module **245** may utilize the current states of the machinery and the operator and identification parameters characterizing the geometry and kinematics of the machinery (e.g., based on the machinery model) and the operator to predict all possible spatial regions that may be occupied by any portion of the machinery and any portion of the human operator within the defined interval when performing the task/application. In a fifth step **1430**, based on the predicted movements of the machinery and the operator, the mapping module **246** creates the POEs of the machinery and the human operator.

[0095] In one embodiment, the mapping module **246** can receive data from a conventional computer vision system that monitors the machinery, the sensor system that scans the machinery and the operator, and/or the robot (e.g., joint position data, keep-in zones and/or intended trajectory), in step **1432**. The computer vision system utilizes the sensor system to track movements of the machinery and the operator during physical execution of the task. The computer vision system is calibrated to the coordinate reference frame of the workspace and transmits to the mapping module **246** coordinate data corresponding to the movements of the machinery and the operator. In various embodiments, the tracking data is then provided to the movement-prediction module **245** for predicting the movements of the machinery and the operator in the next time interval (step **1428**). Subsequently, the mapping module **246** transforms this prediction data into voxel-level representations to produce the POEs of the machinery and the operator in the next time interval (step **1430**). Steps **1428-1432** may be iteratively performed during execution of the task.

[0096] FIG. **15** illustrates an exemplary approach for determining a keep-in zone and/or a keep-out zone in accordance herewith. In a first step **1502**, the sensor system is activated to acquire information about the workspace, machinery and/or human operator. In a second step **1504**, based on the scanning data acquired by the sensor system, the control system generates a 3D spatial representation (e.g., voxels) of the workspace (e.g., using the analysis module **242**) and recognize the human and the machinery and movements thereof in the workspace (e.g., using the object-recognition module **243**). In a third step **1506**, the control system accesses system memory to retrieve a model of the machinery acquired from the machinery manufacturer (or the conventional modeling tool) or generated based on the scanning data acquired by the sensor system. In a fourth step **1508**, the control system (e.g., the simulation module **244**) simulates operation of the machinery in a virtual volume in the workspace in performing a task/application. Additionally or alternatively, the control system may cause the machinery to perform the entire task/application

and record the trajectory of the machinery including all joint positions at every point in time (step **1510**). Based on the simulation results and/or the recording data, the mapping module **246** determines the keep-in zone and/or keep-out zone associated with the machinery (step **1512**). To achieve this, in one embodiment, the mapping module **246** first computes the POEs of the machinery and the human operator based on the simulation results and/or the recording data and then determines the keep-in zone and keep-out zone based on the POEs of the machinery and the POE of the operator, respectively.

[0097] FIG. **16** depicts approaches to performing various functions (such as enforcing safe operation of the machinery when performing a task in the workspace, determining an optimal path of the machinery in the workspace for performing the task, and modeling/designing the workspace and/or workflow of the task) in different applications based on the computed POEs of the machinery and human operator and/or the keep-in/keep-out zones in accordance herewith. In a first step **1602**, the POEs of the machinery and human operator are determined using the approaches described above (e.g., FIGS. **14A** and **14B**). Additionally or alternatively, in a step **1608**, information about the keep-in/keep-out zones associated with the machinery may be acquired from the robot controller and/or determined using the approaches described above (e.g., FIG. **15**). In one embodiment, a conventional spatial modeling tool (e.g., supplied by Delmia Global Operations or Tecnomatix) is optionally acquired (step **1606**). Based on the computed POEs of the machinery and human operator and/or keep-in/keep-out zones, the machinery may be operated in a safe manner during physical performance of the task/application as described above (step **1608**). For example, the simulation module **244** may compute a degree of proximity between the POEs of the machinery and human operator (e.g., the PSD), and then the statedetermination module **247** may determine the state (e.g., position, orientation, velocity, acceleration, etc.) of the machinery such that the machinery can be operated in a safe state; subsequently, the control system may transmit the determined state to the robot controller to cause and ensure the machinery to be operated in a safe state.

[0098] Additionally or alternatively, the control system (e.g., the path-determination module **248**) may determine an optimal path of the machinery in the workspace for performing the task (e.g., without exiting the keep-in zone and/or entering the keep-out zone) based on the computed POEs of the machinery and human operator and/or keep-in/keep-out zones (e.g., by communicating them to a CAD system) and/or utilizing the conventional spatial modeling tool (step **1610**). In some embodiments, the control system (e.g., the workspace-modeling module **249**) computationally models the workspace parameter (e.g., the dimensions, workflow, locations of the equipment and/or resources) based on the computed POEs of the machinery and the human operator and/or the keep-in/keep-out zone (e.g., by communicating them to a CAD system) and/or utilizing the conventional spatial modeling tool so as to achieve high productivity and spatial efficiency while ensuring safety of the human operator (step **1612**). For example, the workcell can be configured around areas of danger with minimum wasted space. In addition, the POEs and/or keep-in/keep-out zones can be used to coordinate multi-robot tasks, design collaborative applications in which the operator is expected to occupy



some portion of the task-level POE in each robot cycle, estimate workcell (or broader facility) production rates, perform statistical analysis of predicted robot location, speed and power usage over time, and monitor the (wear-and-tear) decay of performance in actuation and position sensing through noise characterization. From the workpiece side, the changing volume of a workpiece can be observed as it is processed, for example, in a subtractive application or a pal-letizer/depalletizer.

**[0099]** Further, in various embodiments, the control system can transmit the POEs and/or keep-in/keep-out zones to a non-safety-rated component in a robot controller via, for example, the robot communication module **1011** and the non-safety-rated channel **1014** for adjusting the state (e.g., speed, position, etc.) of the machinery (step **1614**) so that the machinery is brought to a new, safe state. Subsequently, the control system can transmit instructions including, for example, the new state of the machinery to a safety-rated component in the robot controller for ensuring that the machinery is operated in a safe state (step **1616**).

**[0100]** The terms and expressions employed herein are used as terms and expressions of description and not of limitation, and there is no intention, in the use of such terms and expressions, of excluding any equivalents of the features shown and described or portions thereof. In addition, having described certain embodiments of the invention, it will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art that other embodiments incorporating the concepts disclosed herein may be used without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. Accordingly, the described embodiments are to be considered in all respects as only illustrative and not restrictive.

**1-16.** (canceled)

**17.** A safety system for enforcing safe operation of machinery performing an activity in a three-dimensional (3D) workspace, the system comprising:

a computer memory for storing (i) a model of the machinery and its permitted movements and (ii) a safety protocol specifying speed restrictions of the machinery in proximity to a human and a minimum separation distance between the machinery and a human; and

a processor configured to:

computationally generate a 3D spatial representation of the workspace;

simulate, via a simulation module, performance of at least a portion of the activity by the machinery in accordance with the stored model;

map, via a mapping module, a first 3D region of the workspace corresponding to space occupied by the machinery within the workspace augmented by a 3D envelope around the machinery spanning movements simulated by the simulation module;

identify a second 3D region of the workspace corresponding to space occupied or potentially occupied by a human within the workspace augmented by a 3D envelope around the human corresponding to anticipated movements of the human within the workspace within a predetermined future time; and

during physical performance of the activity, restrict operation of the machinery in accordance with a safety protocol based on proximity between the first and second regions.

**18.** The safety system of claim **17**, wherein the simulation module is configured to dynamically simulate the first and

second 3D regions of the workspace based at least in part on current states associated with the machinery and the human, wherein the current states comprise at least one of current positions, current orientations, expected positions associated with a next action in the activity, expected orientations associated with the next action in the activity, velocities, accelerations, geometries and/or kinematics.

**19.** The safety system of claim **17**, wherein the first 3D region is confined to a spatial region reachable by the machinery only during performance of the activity.

**20.** The safety system of claim **17**, wherein the first 3D region includes a global spatial region reachable by the machinery during performance of any activity.

**21.** The safety system of claim **17**, wherein the workspace is computationally represented as a plurality of voxels.

**22.** The safety system of claim **17**, further comprising a computer vision system that itself comprises:

a plurality of sensors distributed about the workspace, each of the sensors being associated with a grid of pixels for recording images of a portion of the workspace within a sensor field of view, the images including depth information; and

an object-recognition module for recognizing the human and the machinery and movements thereof.

**23.** The safety system of claim **22**, wherein the workspace portions collectively cover the entire workspace.

**24.** The safety system of claim **17**, wherein the first 3D region is divided into a plurality of nested, spatially distinct 3D subzones.

**25.** The safety system of claim **24**, wherein overlap between the second 3D region and each of the subzones results in a different degree of alteration of the operation of the machinery.

**26.** The safety system of claim **17**, wherein the processor is further configured to recognize a workpiece being handled by the machinery and treat the workpiece as a portion thereof in identifying the first 3D region.

**27.** The safety system of claim **17**, wherein the processor is further configured to recognize a workpiece being handled by the human and treat the workpiece as a portion of the human in identifying the second 3D region.

**28.** The safety system of claim **17**, wherein the processor is configured to dynamically control operation of the machinery so that it may be brought to a safe state without contacting a human in proximity thereto.

**29.** The safety system of claim **17**, wherein the processor is further configured to:

acquire scanning data of the machinery and the human during performance of the task; and

update the first and second 3D regions based at least in part on the scanning data of the machinery and the human operator, respectively.

**30.** The safety system of claim **17**, wherein the processor is further configured to stop the machinery during physical performance of the activity if the machinery is determined to have deviated outside of operating outside the simulated 3D region.

**31.** The safety system of claim **17**, wherein the processor is further configured to preemptively stop the machinery during physical performance of the activity based on predicted operation of the machinery before a potential deviation event such that inertia does not cause the machine to deviate outside of the simulated 3D region.

**32.** The safety system of claim **17**, wherein the processor is further configured to (i) identify one or more third 3D regions



of the workspace within each of which a fixed object prevents a proximity between a human and the machinery from being less than the minimum separation distance, and (ii) during physical performance of the activity, not restrict operation of the machinery when one or more humans only occupy at least one said third region.

**33.** A method of enforcing safe operation of machinery performing an activity in a three-dimensional (3D) workspace, the method comprising:

electronically storing (i) a model of the machinery and its permitted movements and (ii) a safety protocol specifying speed restrictions of the machinery in proximity to a human and a minimum separation distance between the machinery and a human;

computationally generating a 3D spatial representation of the workspace;

computationally simulating performance of at least a portion of the activity by the machinery in accordance with the stored model;

computationally mapping a first 3D region of the workspace corresponding to space occupied by the machinery within the workspace augmented by a 3D envelope around the machinery spanning computationally simulated movements;

computationally identifying a second 3D region of the workspace corresponding to space occupied or potentially occupied by a human within the workspace augmented by a 3D envelope around the human corresponding to anticipated movements of the human within the workspace within a predetermined future time; and

during physical performance of the activity, restricting operation of the machinery in accordance with a safety protocol based on proximity between the first and second regions.

**34.** The method of claim **33**, wherein the simulation step comprises dynamically simulating the first and second 3D regions of the workspace based at least in part on current states associated with the machinery and the human, wherein the current states comprise at least one of current positions, current orientations, expected positions associated with a next action in the activity, expected orientations associated with the next action in the activity, velocities, accelerations, geometries and/or kinematics.

**35.** The method of claim **33**, wherein the first 3D region is confined to a spatial region reachable by the machinery only during performance of the activity.

**36.** The method of claim **33**, wherein the first 3D region includes a global spatial region reachable by the machinery during performance of any activity.

**37.** The method of claim **33**, wherein the workspace is computationally represented as a plurality of voxels.

**38.** The method of claim **33**, further comprising:

providing a plurality of sensors distributed about the workspace, each of the sensors being associated with a grid of pixels for recording images of a portion of the workspace within a sensor field of view, the images including depth information; and

computationally recognizing, based on the images, the human and the machinery and movements thereof.

**39.** The method of claim **38**, wherein the workspace portions collectively cover the entire workspace.

**40.** The method of claim **33**, wherein the first 3D region is divided into a plurality of nested, spatially distinct 3D subzones.

**41.** The method of claim **40**, wherein overlap between the second 3D region and each of the subzones results in a different degree of alteration of the operation of the machinery.

**42.** The method of claim **33**, further comprising computationally recognizing a workpiece being handled by the machinery and treating the workpiece as a portion thereof in identifying the first 3D region.

**43.** The method of claim **33**, further comprising computationally recognizing a workpiece being handled by the human and treating the workpiece as a portion of the human in identifying the second 3D region.

**44.** The method of claim **33**, further comprising dynamically controlling operation of the machinery so that it may be brought to a safe state without contacting a human in proximity thereto.

**45.** The method of claim **33**, further comprising:

acquiring scanning data of the machinery and the human during performance of the task; and

updating the first and second 3D regions based at least in part on the scanning data of the machinery and the human operator, respectively.

**46.** The method of claim **33**, further comprising stopping the machinery during physical performance of the activity if the machinery is determined to have deviated outside of operating outside the simulated 3D region.

**47.** The method of claim **33**, further comprising preemptively stopping the machinery during physical performance of the activity based on predicted operation of the machinery before a potential deviation event such that inertia does not cause the machine to deviate outside of the simulated 3D region.

**48.** The method of claim **33**, further comprising (i) computationally identifying one or more third 3D regions of the workspace within each of which a fixed object prevents a proximity between a human and the machinery from being less than the minimum separation distance, and (ii) during physical performance of the activity, not restricting operation of the machinery when one or more humans only occupy at least one said third region.

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