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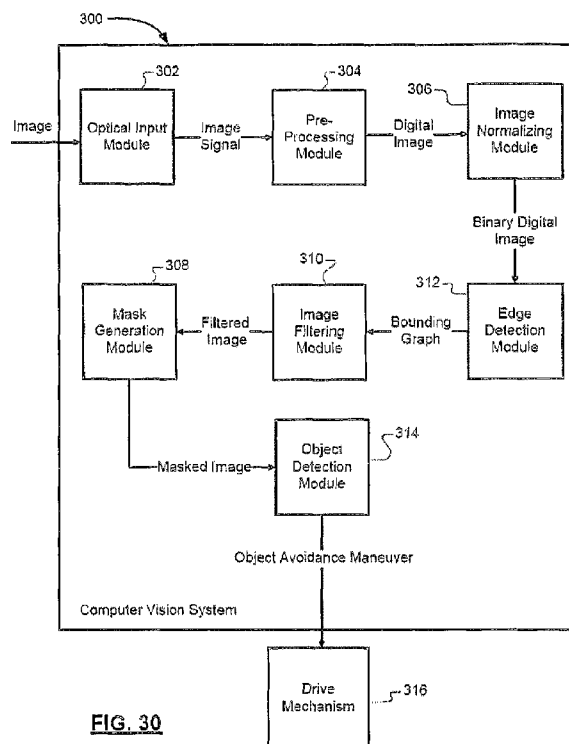
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(54) Title: MACHINE VISION BASED OBSTACLE AVOIDANCE SYSTEM

(57) Abstract: Machine vision based obstacle avoidance system is provided. The system utilizes a CCD camera to capture an image. A normalized image and dynamic masking is used in object detection.

**FIG. 30**



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MACHINE VISION BASED OBSTACLE AVOIDANCE SYSTEM

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims the benefit and priority of India Application Serial No. 02096/CHE/2009, filed August 28, 2009 and United States of America Application Serial No. 12/643,207, filed December 21, 2009. The entire disclosures of the above applications are incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND

Machine vision systems have been proposed in the past as a possible mechanism for object avoidance. Typically, the systems utilize complicated systems which attempt to calculate the distance of an object from the mobile platform based on movement of an object through an array of pixels of a CCD camera. Often, these systems utilize projected laser spots or lines which are projected along a known angle from a moveable platform to calculate the relative distances of an object from the mobile platform. While these systems have been used successfully to varying success, they are computationally complex, which reduces the allowable movement speeds of the mobile platform.

SUMMARY

To overcome the shortcomings of prior machine vision systems, a processor controlled machine vision system for a mobile platform is provided. The system utilizes a CCD camera to capture an image. The image can then be converted to a gray scale image. Pixels having intensity value away from the histogram's global maximum are assigned a first intensity value I_1 , e.g., $I_1 = 0$. The other pixels, which have intensity values close to the global maximum, are assigned a second intensity value I_2 , e.g., $I_2 = 255$, thereby forming a binary image. The number of pixels having the intensity of I_1 and I_2 are counted. If the processor determines the number of pixels having an intensity of I_1 is greater than the number of pixels having an intensity of I_2 , it generates a signal indicative of an object detection.

In one teaching, the system can utilize varying types of masks to improve object detection. For example, one mask can remove objects from the input image which are

far from the mobile platform. Additionally, the processor can use a second mask to look for objects close to the mobile platform.

In yet another teaching, disclosed is a method for dynamically providing masks of varying size which will allow the mobile platform to autonomously determine a best
5 path.

In another teaching, histograms are formed of the variation of intensities of a gray scale image. These histograms can be used to determine appropriate threshold levels for normalization of the images as well as whether an obstacle is located within a imaging system's view.

10 The foregoing summary is illustrative only and is not intended to be in any way limiting. In addition to the illustrative aspects, embodiments, and features described above, further aspects, embodiments, and features will become apparent by reference to the drawings and the following detailed description.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

15 FIG. 1 represents a flow chart of the process according to the teachings of the present disclosure;

FIG. 2 represents a second flow chart according to another teaching;

FIG. 3 represents another flow chart according to yet another teaching;

FIGS. 4-12 represent object detection according to the process of FIG. 3;

20 FIGS. 13a-13c represent masks used to detect objects within a field of view;

FIG. 14 represents a flow chart of alternate detecting processes according to another teaching;

FIGS. 15-23 depict the detection of objects according the process shown in figure 14;

25 FIG. 24 represents flow chart of alternate detecting processes according to another teaching;

FIG. 25 represents an exemplar truth table according to the present teachings;

FIG. 26 represents a mobile platform according to the present teachings;

FIGS. 27A, B and C represent an example of clipping an image;

30 FIGS 28A and B represent an example of the avoidance system handling the detection of a small object;

FIGS. 29A and B represent an example of the avoidance system handling the detection of a nontraversable object;

FIG. 30 represents a system level architecture of an example machine vision system; and

5 FIG. 31 is a block diagram illustrating an example computing device that is arranged for a machine vision system.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

In the following detailed description, reference is made to the accompanying drawings, which form a part hereof. In the drawings, similar symbols typically identify
10 similar components, unless context dictates otherwise. The illustrative embodiments described in the detailed description, drawings, and claims are not meant to be limiting. Other embodiments may be utilized, and other changes may be made, without departing from the spirit or scope of the subject matter presented herein. It will be readily understood that the aspects of the present disclosure, as generally described herein, and
15 illustrated in the figures, can be arranged, substituted, combined, separated, and designed in a wide variety of different configurations, all of which are explicitly contemplated herein.

FIG. 1 is a flow chart 48 representing a method for detecting according to the present teachings. In process block 50, an image of a field of view is detected by an
20 optical input module, such as a CCD camera. In process block 52, pixels having intensity or color not lying between I_L and I_R are set to the first predetermined intensity I_1 . In process block 54, pixels having an intensity or color lying between I_L and I_R are set to a second predetermined intensity I_2 .

In process block 56, the system counts the number of pixels having intensities I_1
25 and I_2 . If the number of pixels having an intensity of I_1 is greater than the number of pixels having an intensity of I_2 , then an object is detected within a field of view. A signal indicative of the detection of an image is then generated by process block 58.

As seen in FIG. 2, a series of masks can be applied to improve object detection. In this regard, as shown in process block 64, a mask M_1 can be applied to an input image.
30 This mask can be used to reduce the effect of objects or locations which are a distance away from the mobile platform. Additionally, after regions are set based on normalized pixel intensity values as described above, a second fixed mask M_2 is applied to the image

to capture the intensity switch that occurs for the pixels belonging to the ground surface situated close to the mobile platform. The sizes of mask M_1 and mask M_2 can be adjusted to adjust the sensitivity of the system. Additionally, adjustment of the size of the masks may allow for an increase or decrease in the speed of the mobile platform.

- 5 While shown as horizontal masks, vertical masks may be applied to the image as well. These masks can be of fixed width and can be overlapping. As described below, these masks can be of varying size, which can be dynamically set.

As shown in FIG. 3, the dynamic mask formation can be accomplished using a processor and CCD camera. In process block 80, the image is received by the processor
10 from the CCD camera. In process block 82, the image is inverted to simplify future calculations. In process block 84, the image is normalized as described in the flow charts shown in FIGS. 1 and 2. After normalization, an edge detection system is run on the inverted image in process block 86. This can be a Canny Edge Detection algorithm. From this algorithm, an edge detection image is formed. An edge detection filter is used
15 in part to obtain a maximum bounding graph of the boundaries of an obstacle. It is envisioned that other edge detection algorithms may be used, such as the Deriche algorithm. The Canny Edge Detection, however, provides an edge detection algorithm that has a low computational complexity.

A low pass filter can be applied to the edges to smooth the results in process
20 block 88. The spatial information of the binary edge-image obtained from the edge detector is converted to a graph with a (x,y)-coordinates of all or most of the points having an intensity equal to the second predetermined intensity, e.g. 255. The image can then be inverted resulting in a maximum bounding graph. It is noted that small dots or marks on the ground surface may give rise to the detection of an edge and, therefore, a
25 sharp peak in the graph. To eliminate sharp noise peaks, the graph can be filtered using the following low-pass filter:

$$Y_t = (1 - a^2)y_{t-1} + (a - a^2)x$$

where, y_t is the y-coordinate of the graph, i.e. the coordinate of the maximum bounding white pixel. It is envisioned that a clipper may then be optionally applied to the results
30 in process block 90 to remove additional noise.

The resulting image is analyzed to determine the locations of zeros and local maximums, or peaks, in the image. Filtering is applied to smoothen the histogram curve

in order to detect stable mask boundaries. Additionally, the location of the peaks or local maximum is used to define the size of masks within the image. In this regard, in process block 96, dynamic mask boundaries based on the location of the zeros are set. In process block 98, the flow chart of FIGS. 1 or 2 can be applied to determine if an obstacle is
5 within the dynamic mask range.

In process block 100, the mobile platform determines the course of the mobile platform depending on the location of detected obstacles within the imaging system's field of view.

According to the teachings herein, shown in figures 4-12 is the use of a Dynamic
10 Mask System for Object Detection as described above. FIG. 4 represents an obstacle within a field of view of the Machine Vision System. In this regard, a broom is shown on a relatively smooth ground surface. As described above in the description of FIGS. 1 and 2, FIG. 5 represents a normalized image of FIG. 4. Pixels having intensity value away from the histogram's global maximum are assigned a first predetermined intensity
15 value I_1 . In this non-limiting example, the intensity is set to zero. The other pixels, which have intensity values close to the global maximum, are assigned a second predetermined intensity value I_2 . In this non-limiting example, the intensity is set to 255. It is understood that that the predetermined intensity and the second predetermined intensity may be set to other values. As described below in detail, the processor can
20 automatically determine an appropriate threshold.

The Histogramic Intensity Switching (HIS) system described herein uses the principle of appearance-based obstacle detection. According to this principle, any pixel that differs in appearance from the ground is classified as an obstacle. HIS system does not make use of any distance measurements between the detected obstacles and the
25 camera. This makes the mobile platform detect obstacles even on an uneven terrain. It is just the mere appearance of the obstacle in front of the camera which is being considered in the decision-making process.

For each image that is captured by the camera, a normalized intensity histogram H_1 of the frame is generated using a mask M_1 . By increasing the height of the mask, the
30 mobile platform needs to travel lesser distances toward the obstacle before it makes an avoidance maneuver. On the other hand, when the mask length is smaller, the mobile platform needs to travel closer to the obstacle before avoiding it. It basically sets the

upper limit of the detection distance of the obstacle from the mobile platform. Mask M_1 could also be set according to the mobile platform size. This enables the system to adjust to different sizes of mobile platforms. Next, the histogram generated using mask M_1 is passed through a low-pass filter to get a smooth output H_{1f} removing all the high frequency components in the histogram. Then, the maximum peak of the filtered histogram H_{1f} is located and its corresponding intensity value is found (I_M). Two intensity values I_L and I_R are then found in H_{1f} by using the following operations:

$$I_L = \max \{i | f(i - \delta) > f(i), f(i + \delta) > f(i)\}$$

$$I_R = \min \{j | f(j - \delta) > f(j), f(j + \delta) > f(j)\}$$

$$\forall i \in (\delta, I_M) \text{ and } \forall j \in (I_M, 255 - \delta)$$

where, i (or j) is an intensity value lying between 0 and 255, $f(i)$ is the number of pixels having intensity i found from the histogram, I_M is the intensity where the maximum occurs, and δ is a resolution parameter which is used to eliminate the occurrences of tightly spaced spurious minima in the histogram.

$$R_1 = [I_L, I_R], R_2 = [0, 255] \setminus [I_L, I_R]$$

FIG. 6 represents the optical inversion of the image which has been performed for computational expediency. FIG. 7 represents the application of an edge detection system which is used to distinguish the regions R_1 , and R_2 which are defined by the intensities I_L and I_R . It is envisioned that a Canny edge detecting algorithm can be used. However, it should be appreciated that a conversion using other edge detection system is possible.

FIG. 8 represents the application of a low pass filter to the image shown in FIG. 7. Additionally, optionally shown is the application of a clipper to the image to reduce the effects of noise. FIGS. 27A, 27B and 27C are provided for an example of clipping. In FIG. 27A a maximum bounding graph 270 received by the low pass filter. The low pass filter identifies a portion of the image to be clipped 272. The portion to be clipped can be a predetermined portion of the graph 272. FIG. 27B shows an example of the clipped output 274. As can be observed from the figure, the identified portion of the graph 272 has been removed from the maximum bounding graph. FIG. 27C shows the output of the low pass filter after clipping. In the figure, the portion that was removed from the image 270 is replaced by a smoothed finish to the graph 274, indicative of an

observed object. It is envisioned that clipping techniques may vary and the figures depict but one example of clipping.

FIG. 9 represents the detection of localized zeros and local maximums in the image shown in FIG. 8. From these locations, dynamic masking regions are formed. It should be noted that rules are established to reduce errors in the formation of the dynamic masks. These rules include the relationship of the zero locations with respect to each other as well as the relationship to the local maximums or peaks. For example, the zeros are preferably a predetermined distance from each other. This will reduce the likelihood objects such as a coin will trigger an individual mask formation.

Distance (PSD) is used to avoid the detection of multiple local peaks that are very closely situated. This helps in detection of the other strong peaks in the image. To find the width of the masks, the graph is passed to a zero detector, which detects the first encountered zeros about the peaks. FIG. 9 shows the detected peaks and zeros. The graph values at $x = 0$ and $x = (\text{Image-width})$ are made zero in order to find a mask for a rising or a falling peak at the boundaries of the graph. The distance between these two detected zeros is termed as the mask-width. A minimum for the values that a mask-width can take is set so as to avoid obstacles of very small sizes getting detected and to make it less error prone. Duplication of the generated masks is avoided by identifying peaks sharing same zeros.

FIG. 10 represents a dynamic mask formed from image of the obstacle in FIG. 4. The flow charts of FIGS. 1 or 2 can be run to determine if the pixel count will indicate an obstacle within the masked region. As shown in FIG. 11, the area behind the obstacle is unavailable for passage and is set to the same region as the obstacle.

As shown in FIG. 12, a plurality of masks can be applied to the digital image. After detecting an obstacle within the masked area, the processor indicates that passage through the region is not possible. These masked areas can then be flagged with their state of obstructedness. As further described below, with reference to FIG. 25, a truth table can be formed which can be used by the processor to map the travel of the mobile platform. After detecting an obstacle within the masked area, the processor indicates that passage through the region is not possible.

FIGS. 13A-13C represent varying masks which can be utilized in the detection of objects. Generally a mask M indicates the pixels that are to be used in an image for a

particular process step. By way of non-limiting example, the mask M may be used in determining which pixels are used to generate a histogram or determining if a portion of an image should be evaluated. The pixels of the image with coordinates (x, y) will be used if $M(x, y) = 0 \dots 255$. These masks can be of fixed size or of a dynamic size. In
5 FIG. 13c, the mask M2 causes the selection of only the first few rows from the bottom of the binary image to generate a histogram that checks for the intensity switch between 0 and 255.

FIG. 14 is a flow chart depicting an example method for detecting obstacles using machine vision, according to the present teachings. In process block 102, an image is
10 inputted to the processor from the CCD camera. A mask M1 is applied to the input image by the processor, in process block 104. This forms a histogram H1 (process block 106). Optionally, a global peak detection system is run on the histogram H1 to find the global maximum. (See process block 108). In process block 110, regions are identified in the image and are segregated. In this regard, regions can be separated into R1 and R2.
15 In process block 112, all pixels having intensities lying in R1 are now changed to an intensity of 255, i.e. painted white, and those whose intensities are in R2 are changed to intensity zero, i.e. painted black. In process block 114, a binary image BI is used to generate a normalized intensity histogram H2 in process block 60. Note that in this example, the new histogram will have only two intensity levels, that is, zero and 255

20 When the number of pixels within the M_2 -masked region of the binary image having a value of zero is more than the number of pixels having a value 255, an obstacle is located close to the mobile platform. Alternatively, when the number of pixels within the M_2 -masked region of the binary image having an intensity of 255 is greater than the number of pixels having a value 0, an obstacle is deemed absent or located far away from
25 the mobile platform.

FIGS. 15-23 represent the detection of an object using the system described in FIG. 14. As shown in FIG. 20, the number of pixels occupied by the obstacle are less than that of the pixels occupied by the ground surface. So, the intensity histogram using mask M_1 peaks at intensities closer to that of the ground surface. This peak will of us
30 fall into region R1 and all the pixels in this region are painted white and the pixels outside are painted black. Therefore, the ground surface is painted white (i.e., intensity value 255) and the obstacles are painted black (i.e. intensity value zero)

With general reference to the second case, shown in FIG. 22 is the intensity histogram generated using mask M_2 and its peak intensity value of 255. This is an indication to the mobile platforms or mobile platform that there are no threatening obstacles and it is safe to move forward. Mask M_2 was introduced, which is applied on the binary image B_I , and its output is used to generate a normalized intensity histogram H_2 . Note that the new histogram will have only two intensity levels, that is, 0 and 255. The mask area of M_2 is set smaller than that of M_1 and it includes those pixels which are closer to the camera.

As the mobile platform moves closer to the obstacle, the obstacle size and the plane image increases. In this situation, the number of pixels, occupied by the obstacle in the masked region M_1 , increases. The histogram slowly changes its shape, peaking at some other intensity value. Now that it has peaked at intensities closer to that of the obstacle, pixels corresponding to the obstacle are in region R1 and the pixels corresponding to regions of the ground surface R2. So the obstacle is now painted white and the ground surface is painted black the histogram generated by the mask M_2 shifts its maximum from 255 intensity value to zero intensity value. This shifting mechanism is called histogrammic intensity switching (HIS) which gives an indication to the mobile platform that there is a threatening obstacle in front and it has to avoid them by turning.

The system helps a mobile platform to detect whether there is a threatening obstacle or not. It does not however give information about the location of the obstacle in the field. This information is important as the mobile platform has to navigate between various obstacles present in the field. So, in order to get information about the location of the obstacles, the system is adapted. The image plane may be split into a plurality of regions. Splitting the image plane can be done in different ways. One such way can be achieved by just splitting the mask M into a plurality (three) partitions. The system is executed simultaneously in all three regions and gives information about the presence of threatening obstacles in each of these regions. Thus the mobile platform now has an obstacle map based on which the mobile platform can execute the avoidance maneuver, either by turning to the left or to the right.

It is envisioned the systems shown in FIGS. 1 – 3 and 14 can be used to regulate movement of the mobile platform. As shown in FIG. 24, the processor can alternate between the HIS System 242 and the Dynamic Mask (DMA) system 244. In situations

where the dynamic mask widths are greater than a minimum value, determined at block 246, the system can revert to the HIS system for a predetermined number of iterations. In order to avoid the positive feedback loop, the system utilizes both the HIS method for one iteration and DMA for the next iteration, alternatively. When the number of pixels
5 occupied by the object is small compared to the number of pixels occupied by the ground surface the system may not register a switch in the intensities of the histogram.

The white pixels that are above the object's black pixels, are the ones corresponding to the ground surface where the mobile platform cannot traverse directly, as the mobile platform approaches the obstacle. Those pixels are deemed equivalent to
10 pixels of an obstacle and are considered part of the obstacle. This makes the obstacle size comparable to that of the mask region and causes a switching. But this, in turn, creates a problem of small obstacles such as a coin or a small stone, being classified as non-traversable obstacles, thereby resulting in replacing the inaccessible pixels with obstacles pixels. This results in undesirable switching. To avoid such a false detection, the mask-
15 width is used as a deciding factor on whether to adopt the above method or not. If the mask-width is below a threshold value, then the method is not opted and therefore not causing the switching to happen even if a dynamic mask gets generated about the object. This threshold can be set based on the mobile platform's capability of climbing over small sized obstacles.

20 FIGS. 28A and 28B depict the scenario when a small obstacle, such as a coin, is observed in a scene. FIGS. 29A and 29B depict a similar situation with a larger object such as a ball. In FIG. 28A, a small coin 280 is detected and a dynamic mask is generated about the coin. The mask width is less than a predetermined threshold and the system will not perform recoloration of the pixels above or below the obstacle. The
25 contribution due to the obstacle pixels is low in relation to the pixels representing the ground surface in the masked region and thus, no switching occurs. In FIG. 29A, however, a larger obstacle is encountered. In FIG 29A, the region behind the ball 290 is colored. In this scenario switching does occur due to the amount of colored pixels in relation to the pixels representing the ground surface. FIG 29B demonstrates the result
30 of the switching. It is noted that the foregoing is provided as an example of dynamic masking of a small image in obstacle to that of a larger obstacle and is in no way intended to be limiting.

FIG. 30 represents a system level architecture of an embodiment of the machine vision system 300. As can be seen, the image is captured by an optical input module 302. A signal corresponding to the captured image is sent to a preprocessing module 304. In the preprocessing module 304, the signal is converted into a digital image and may be inverted. The digital image is then normalized by the image normalizing module 306. The image normalizing module will paint all pixels having an intensity value away from the histogram's global maxima to a first intensity level, e.g., 0, and will paint the remaining pixels to a second intensity level, e.g., 255. The result is a binary image

The binary image is communicated to the edge detection module 312. In the edge detection module 312, an edge detection algorithm is performed to locate any potential images. As described above, one possible algorithm may be the Canny Edge Detection method. The result is a bounding graph. The bounding graph may have, however, noisy edges. Thus, an image filtering module 310 may smoothen the bounding graph. The filtering module 310 may run the image through a low-pass filter as well as a clipping module, the details of which are described above. The filtered image may then be passed to a mask generation module 308. The mask generation module 308 can analyze the filtered image and may generate a dynamic mask to mask portions of the image. The masked image is then analyzed by a object detection module 314 to determine whether any nontraversable objects exist. In the event such obstacles exist, the object detection module 314 determines the location of the object, as described above, and sends a object avoidance maneuver to the drive mechanism. 316. The foregoing was provided for illustrative purposes only and the functionality of the modules described may correspond to the descriptions provided above.

HIS-DMA results in a binary sequence $B_0, B_1, \dots, B_m$, where m is the maximum number of masks allowed, referred to as a *directionality sequence*. The value taken by B_i is based on histogram intensity switching mechanism. It takes the value 1 when switching has occurred and 0 when it has not. The sense of the direction which the mobile platform has to take is determined based on the summation of mask widths whose corresponding B_i registers a value 1. Let al be a value equal to the summation of such switched-mask's width in the left half of the image. And let ar be a value equal to the summation of switched-mask's width in the right half of the image. Let Q be the current state of the mobile platform's motion and Q^+ be its next state. The next state Q^+ is

calculated using Table 1. Q and Q^+ takes values (0, 1, 2) for moving right, left and straight, respectively.

As best seen in FIG. 25 a determination of the next state Q^+ is made. Obstacle avoidance forms a problem to encounter while traversing a ground surface. The mobile platform has to be quick in recognizing a moving obstacle and also should be capable of recognizing thin vertical objects, such as inclined table legs, to avoid collision. The HISDMA system described above successfully avoids all such kinds of obstacles and is also quick to react in real time. Unlike HIS, HISDMA has the capability of maintaining a constant distance inherently based on the camera's orientation while avoiding different sized obstacles.

The mobile platform can include motor driven wheeled vehicles such as robots or wheel chairs. FIG. 26 provides an example embodiment of a mobile platform. This can include a motorized wheelchair 260 equipped with two cameras 262 and a processing unit (not shown). As explained above, HISDMA performs obstacle avoidance for a wide variety of obstacles including thin rods, e.g. horizon Q in FIG. 25), and determination of the next state Q^+ . Obstacle avoidance forms one of the most important problem to encounter while navigating along a path. The system has to be quick in recognizing a moving obstacle and also should be capable of recognizing thin vertical obstacles such as inclined table legs to avoid collision. HISDMA successfully avoids all such kinds of obstacles and is also quick to react in real time. The system also has an advantage over other range sensors in avoiding ditches and recognizing the pavements and the roads.

There may be two cameras 262 attached to the mobile platform 260. In such a configuration, one camera may be placed over each wheel in order to give a wider view of the scene around. Each camera works individually and the obstacle data from both the cameras are analyzed to make a turn to avoid the obstacle. Although it is envisioned that the images captured by both cameras may be combined to assess the situation from a common view of the scene, the two camera system makes it possible to analyze each camera's input individually. Each camera may observe different obstacles. If an obstacle is observed by either camera, appropriate steps may be taken to avoid the obstacle. This method can reduce the complexity of the computations that need to be performed in combining the images. The motorized wheelchair is free to move when there are no detected obstacles in front. But when the system registers a switch on

encountering an obstacle it makes an appropriate turn based on the obstacle's position with respect to the wheelchair.

It is envisioned that the mask partitions can be dynamically generated depending on the desired speed. For example, the reference image can be divided in half to
5 determine if the location of the obstacle is available. Likewise, the image can be recursively divided until the location of the obstacle is ascertained. Based on these divisions of the histogram, the mobile platform can determine the most likely clear path.

Should the mobile platform be a robotic cleaning system, the base structure the base can have a vacuum system or a liquid holding and dispersing mechanism.
10 Additionally, the base can have a driven wheel drive propelled by an electric Motor. The processor of a cleaning system is configured to allow an operator to input an off-line path planning with respect a floor plan and configured to allow the initialization of the mobile platform location prior to the start of an operation. Additionally, the processor can be configured to perform one of a cycle of continuous path execution, perception and
15 localization, event driven path adaptation. Should the processor utilize an events driven path adaptation the system may perform compensation of path tracking errors, and path replanning in case of blockades. It is envisioned the processor can be configured to allow the extraction of uncleaned areas from a drive path after completion of nominal cleaning processes. It is envisioned the processor is configured to calculate appropriate
20 paths to cover all accessible unclean areas and to inspect a digital image and determine the presence of dirt in an area.

FIG. 31 is a block diagram illustrating an example computing device 900 that is arranged for a machine vision system in accordance with the present disclosure. In a very basic configuration 902, computing device 900 typically includes one or more
25 processors 904 and a system memory 906. A memory bus 908 may be used for communicating between processor 904 and system memory 906.

Depending on the desired configuration, processor 904 may be of any type including but not limited to a microprocessor (μ P), a microcontroller (μ C), a digital signal processor (DSP), or any combination thereof. Processor 904 may include one
30 more levels of caching, such as a level one cache 910 and a level two cache 912, a processor core 914, and registers 916. An example processor core 914 may include an arithmetic logic unit (ALU), a floating point unit (FPU), a digital signal processing core

(DSP Core), or any combination thereof. An example memory controller 918 may also be used with processor 904, or in some implementations memory controller 918 may be an internal part of processor 904.

Depending on the desired configuration, system memory 906 may be of any type
5 including but not limited to volatile memory (such as RAM), non-volatile memory (such as ROM, flash memory, etc.) or any combination thereof. System memory 906 may include an operating system 920, one or more applications 922, and program data 924. Application 922 may include a machine vision system 926 that is arranged to perform one or more of the methods described in FIGS. 1, 2 and 14 of the present disclosure and
10 may have an architecture of the machine vision system disclosed in FIG. 30. Program Data 924 may include image data 928 that may be useful for the implementation of the machine vision methods and system, described above. In some embodiments, application 922 may be arranged to operate with program data 924 on operating system 920 such that obstacle avoidance via machine vision may be realized. This described
15 basic configuration 902 is illustrated in FIG. 30 by those components within the inner dashed line.

Computing device 900 may have additional features or functionality, and additional interfaces to facilitate communications between basic configuration 902 and any required devices and interfaces. For example, a bus/interface controller 930 may be
20 used to facilitate communications between basic configuration 902 and one or more data storage devices 932 via a storage interface bus 934. Data storage devices 932 may be removable storage devices 936, non-removable storage devices 938, or a combination thereof. Examples of removable storage and non-removable storage devices include magnetic disk devices such as flexible disk drives and hard-disk drives (HDD), optical
25 disk drives such as compact disk (CD) drives or digital versatile disk (DVD) drives, solid state drives (SSD), and tape drives to name a few. Example computer storage media may include volatile and nonvolatile, removable and non-removable media implemented in any method or technology for storage of information, such as computer readable instructions, data structures, program modules, or other data.

30 System memory 906, removable storage devices 936 and non-removable storage devices 938 are examples of computer storage media. Computer storage media includes, but is not limited to, RAM, ROM, EEPROM, flash memory or other memory

technology, CD-ROM, digital versatile disks (DVD) or other optical storage, magnetic cassettes, magnetic tape, magnetic disk storage or other magnetic storage devices, or any other medium which may be used to store the desired information and which may be accessed by computing device 900. Any such computer storage media may be part of
5 computing device 900.

Computing device 900 may also include an interface bus 940 for facilitating communication from various interface devices (e.g., output devices 942, peripheral interfaces 944, and communication devices 946) to basic configuration 902 via bus/interface controller 930. Example output devices 942 include a graphics processing
10 unit 948 and an audio processing unit 950, which may be configured to communicate to various external devices such as a display or speakers via one or more A/V ports 952. Example peripheral interfaces 944 include a serial interface controller 954 or a parallel interface controller 956, which may be configured to communicate with external devices such as input devices (e.g., keyboard, mouse, pen, voice input device, touch input device,
15 etc.) or other peripheral devices (e.g., printer, scanner, etc.) via one or more I/O ports 958. An example communication device 946 includes a network controller 960, which may be arranged to facilitate communications with one or more other computing devices 962 over a network communication link via one or more communication ports 964.

The network communication link may be one example of a communication
20 media. Communication media may typically be embodied by computer readable instructions, data structures, program modules, or other data in a modulated data signal, such as a carrier wave or other transport mechanism, and may include any information delivery media. A “modulated data signal” may be a signal that has one or more of its characteristics set or changed in such a manner as to encode information in the signal.
25 By way of example, and not limitation, communication media may include wired media such as a wired network or direct-wired connection, and wireless media such as acoustic, radio frequency (RF), microwave, infrared (IR) and other wireless media. The term computer readable media as used herein may include both storage media and communication media.

30 Computing device 900 may be implemented as a portion of a small-form factor portable (or mobile) electronic device such as a cell phone, a personal data assistant (PDA), a personal media player device, a wireless web-watch device, a personal headset

device, an application specific device, or a hybrid device that include any of the above functions. Computing device 900 may also be implemented as a personal computer including both laptop computer and non-laptop computer configurations.

The foregoing summary is illustrative only and is not intended to be in any way
5 limiting. In addition to the illustrative aspects, embodiments, and features described above, further aspects, embodiments, and features will become apparent by reference to the drawings and the following detailed description. A wheelchair is a wheeled mobility device in which the user sits. The device is propelled either manually (by turning the wheels by the hand) or via various automated systems. Wheelchairs are used by people
10 for whom walking is difficult or impossible due to illness (mental or physical), injury, or disability. A basic standard manual wheelchair incorporates a seat and back, two small front (caster) wheels and two large wheels, one on each side, and a foot rest. Wheelchairs are often variations on this basic design, but there are many types of wheelchairs, and they are often highly customized for the individual user's needs.
15 Motorized wheel chairs are electric powered with a joystick to control the movement of the wheelchair. Incorporating obstacle avoidance system to the wheelchair brings about a great advantage as to increase the safety of the person using it. Computer vision plays a vital role in this application as it forms the closest substitute to our vision system. It helps in avoiding the obstacles like humans passing by and recognizing the path
20 boundaries which may not be effectively detected using any of the range sensors like infrared or ultrasonic. As such, the system is equally applicable, by way of non-limiting examples, to other mobile platforms such a self propelled wheel chairs, a robotic cleaners, a robotic vacuum cleaners, or even hand held apparatus such as a cane.

Specially, recognizing ditches, differentiating between the pavements and the
25 road, etc.

As used herein, the term module may refer to, be part of, or include an Application Specific Integrated Circuit (ASIC), an electronic circuit, a processor (shared, dedicated, or group) and/or memory (shared, dedicated, or group) that execute one or more software or firmware programs, a combinational logic circuit, and/or other suitable
30 components that provide the described functionality.

The art has progressed to the point where there is little distinction left between hardware, software, and/or firmware implementations of aspects of systems; the use of

hardware, software, and/or firmware is generally (but not always, in that in certain contexts the choice between hardware and software can become significant) a design choice representing cost vs. efficiency tradeoffs. Those having skill in the art will appreciate that there are various vehicles by which processes and/or systems and/or other technologies described herein can be effected (e.g., hardware, software, and/or firmware), and that the preferred vehicle will vary with the context in which the processes and/or systems and/or other technologies are deployed. For example, if an implementer determines that speed and accuracy are paramount, the implementer may opt for a mainly hardware and/or firmware vehicle; alternatively, if flexibility is paramount, the implementer may opt for a mainly software implementation; or, yet again alternatively, the implementer may opt for some combination of hardware, software, and/or firmware. Hence, there are several possible vehicles by which the processes and/or devices and/or other technologies described herein may be effected, none of which is inherently superior to the other in that any vehicle to be utilized is a choice dependent upon the context in which the vehicle will be deployed and the specific concerns (e.g., speed, flexibility, or predictability) of the implementer, any of which may vary. Those skilled in the art will recognize that optical aspects of implementations will typically employ optically-oriented hardware, software, and or firmware.

In some embodiments, “configured” includes at least one of designed, set up, shaped, implemented, constructed, or adapted for at least one of a particular purpose, application, or function.

It will be understood that, in general, terms used herein, and especially in the appended claims, are generally intended as “open” terms (*e.g.*, the term “including” should be interpreted as “including but not limited to,” the term “having” should be interpreted as “having at least,” the term “includes” should be interpreted as “includes but is not limited to,” etc.). It will be further understood that if a specific number of an introduced claim recitation is intended, such an intent will be explicitly recited in the claim, and in the absence of such recitation no such intent is present. For example, as an aid to understanding, the following appended claims may contain usage of introductory phrases such as “at least one” or “one or more” to introduce claim recitations. However, the use of such phrases should not be construed to imply that the introduction of a claim recitation by the indefinite articles “a” or “an” limits any particular claim containing such

introduced claim recitation to inventions containing only one such recitation, even when the same claim includes the introductory phrases "one or more" or "at least one" and indefinite articles such as "a" or "an" (e.g., "a receiver" should typically be interpreted to mean "at least one receiver"); the same holds true for the use of definite articles used to
5 introduce claim recitations. In addition, even if a specific number of an introduced claim recitation *is* explicitly recited, it will be recognized that such recitation should typically be interpreted to mean *at least* the recited number (e.g., the bare recitation of "at least two chambers," or "a plurality of chambers," without other modifiers, typically means *at least* two chambers).

10 Furthermore, in those instances where a phrase such as "at least one of A, B, and C," "at least one of A, B, or C," or "an [item] selected from the group consisting of A, B, and C," is used, in general such a construction is intended to be disjunctive (e.g., any of these phrases would include but not be limited to systems that have A alone, B alone, C alone, A and B together, A and C together, B and C together, or A, B, and C together,
15 and may further include more than one of A, B, or C, such as A₁, A₂, and C together, A, B₁, B₂, C₁, and C₂ together, or B₁ and B₂ together). It will be further understood that virtually any disjunctive word or phrase presenting two or more alternative terms, whether in the description, claims, or drawings, should be understood to contemplate the possibilities of including one of the terms, either of the terms, or both terms. For
20 example, the phrase "A or B" will be understood to include the possibilities of "A" or "B" or "A and B."

The herein described aspects depict different components contained within, or connected with, different other components. It is to be understood that such depicted architectures are merely examples, and that in fact many other architectures can be
25 implemented which achieve the same functionality. In a conceptual sense, any arrangement of components to achieve the same functionality is effectively "associated" such that the desired functionality is achieved. Hence, any two components herein combined to achieve a particular functionality can be seen as "associated with" each other such that the desired functionality is achieved, irrespective of architectures or
30 intermedial components. Likewise, any two components so associated can also be viewed as being "operably connected," or "operably coupled," to each other to achieve the desired functionality. Any two components capable of being so associated can also

be viewed as being "operably couplable" to each other to achieve the desired functionality. Specific examples of operably couplable include but are not limited to physically mateable or physically interacting components or wirelessly interactable or wirelessly interacting components. Additionally, the methods and systems herein
5 discuss "pixels." It is envisioned herein that this limitation includes hardware or software memory locations.

With respect to the appended claims the recited operations therein may generally be performed in any order. Also, although various operational flows are presented in a sequence(s), it should be understood that the various operations may be performed in
10 other orders than those which are illustrated, or may be performed concurrently. Examples of such alternate orderings may include overlapping, interleaved, interrupted, reordered, incremental, preparatory, supplemental, simultaneous, reverse, or other variant orderings, unless context dictates otherwise. Furthermore, terms like "responsive to," "related to," or other past-tense adjectives are generally not intended to exclude such
15 variants, unless context dictates otherwise.

While various aspects and embodiments have been disclosed herein, the various aspects and embodiments are for purposes of illustration and are not intended to be limiting, with the true scope and spirit being indicated by the following claims.

CLAIMS

1. A method of detecting an obstacle in a field of view of a mobile platform having a base structure, a drive mechanism and a machine vision system, comprising:
 - capturing an image in the form of a signal;
 - 5 converting the signal into a digital image having a plurality of pixels and inverting the digital image;
 - normalizing the digital image by setting pixels in the plurality of pixels having an intensity value away from a histogram global maximum to a first predetermined intensity and setting pixels in the plurality of pixels having intensity values close to the global
 - 10 maximum to a second predetermined intensity;
 - performing edge detection on the normalized digital image, thereby outputting a bounding graph indicating edges of detected objects in the image; and
 - determining local maximums and zeros in the graph, and determining a dynamic mask based on said maximums and zeros, wherein the dynamic mask is applied to a
 - 15 second digital image to determine the presence of an object, wherein pixels having intensity value away from the global maximum of the histogram are assigned a first intensity value I_1 , and pixels which have intensity values close to the global maximum, are assigned a second intensity value I_2 .
- 20 2. The method of claim 1 further comprising filtering noise peaks in the bounding graph.
3. The method of claim 2 further removing a portion of the bounding graph corresponding to additional noise in the bounding graph and replacing said removed
- 25 portion with a smoothed portion.
4. The method of claim 1 wherein the dynamic mask indicates an object detected in a field of view of said machine vision system, and wherein a width and a height of the dynamic mask indicate a traversability of an area corresponding to the mask.

5. The method of claim 1 further comprising partitioning the digital image into a plurality of sections and determining a location of the object by determining a section of the plurality of sections having the dynamic mask located therein.

5 6. The method of claim 5 further comprising sending an object avoidance signal to the drive mechanism thereby causing said base structure to avoid the detected object, wherein the object avoidance signal is based on the determined location of the object.

7. The method of claim 1 further comprising receiving the input image and
10 generating a histogram indicating frequencies of pixel intensities of the plurality of pixels ranging from 0 to 255, wherein said histogram is used to generate a binary image by assigning pixels with predetermined intensities, and said image is used to determine an existence of an object

15 8. The method of claim 1 further comprising applying a second mask to the digital binary image to determine a presence of objects that are in close proximity to the base platform by looking for an intensity switch, wherein said second mask corresponds to a bottom portion of said image.

20 9. The method of claim 1, further comprising converting the digital image into grayscale.

10. A mobile platform comprising:
a base structure;
25 a drive mechanism coupled to the base structure;
a machine vision system including
an optical input module that captures an image in the form of a signal;
a pre-processing module that receives said signal from the optical input
module, that converts the signal into a digital image having a plurality of pixels and that
30 inverts the digital image;
an image normalizing module that normalizes the digital image by setting
pixels in the plurality of pixels having an intensity less than a predetermined threshold to

a first predetermined intensity and setting pixels in the plurality of pixels having an intensity greater than or equal to the predetermined threshold to a second predetermined intensity;

an edge detection module that receives the normalized digital image and
5 performs edge detection the normalized digital image, thereby outputting a bounding graph indicating edges of detected objects in the image; and

a detection module that receives the bounding graph and determines local maximums and zeros in the graph, and determines a dynamic mask based on said maximums and zeros, wherein the dynamic mask is applied to a second digital image to
10 determine the presence of an object.

11. The mobile platform of claim 10 further comprising an image filtering module that receives the bounding graph from the edge detection module and filters noise peaks in the bounding graph.
15

12. The mobile platform of claim 11 further comprising a clipping module that receives the bounding graph from the image filtering module and removes a portion of the bounding graph corresponding to additional noise in the bounding graph and replaces said removed portion with a smoothed portion.
20

13. The mobile platform of claim 10 wherein the dynamic mask indicates an object detected in a field of view of said optical input module, and wherein a width and a height of the dynamic mask indicate a traversability of an area corresponding to the mask.

25 14. The mobile platform of claim 10 further comprising an object detection module that partitions the digital image into a plurality of sections and determines a location of the object by determining a section of the plurality of sections having the dynamic mask located therein.

30 15. The mobile platform of claim 14 wherein the object detection module sends a object avoidance signal to the drive mechanism thereby causing said base structure to

avoid the detected object, wherein the object avoidance signal is based on the determined location of the object.

16. The mobile platform of claim 10 further comprising a histogram generation
5 module that receives the input image and generates a histogram indicating frequencies of pixel intensities of the plurality of pixels ranging from 0 to 255, wherein said histogram is used to generate a binary image by assigning pixels with predetermined intensities, and said image is used to determine an existence of an object

10 17. The mobile platform of claim 10 wherein a second mask is applied to the digital image to determine a presence of objects that are in close proximity to the optical input module, wherein said second mask corresponds to a bottom portion of said image.

18. The mobile platform of claim 10, wherein the preprocessing module converts the
15 digital image into grayscale.

19. The mobile platform of claim 10 wherein said base structure is one of a motorized wheel chair, a wheel chair, a robotic cleaner, a robotic vacuum, and a cane.

20 20. A mobile platform comprising:
a base structure that is one of a motorized wheel chair, a wheel chair, a robotic cleaner, a robotic vacuum, and a cane;
a drive mechanism coupled to the base structure;
a machine vision system including:
25 an optical input module that captures an image in the form of a signal;
a pre-processing module that receives said signal from the optical input module, that converts the signal into a grayscale digital image having a plurality of pixels and that inverts the digital image;
an image normalizing module that normalizes the digital image by setting pixels
30 in the plurality of pixels having an intensity less than a predetermined threshold to a first predetermined intensity and setting pixels in the plurality of pixels having an intensity greater than or equal to the predetermined threshold to a second predetermined intensity;

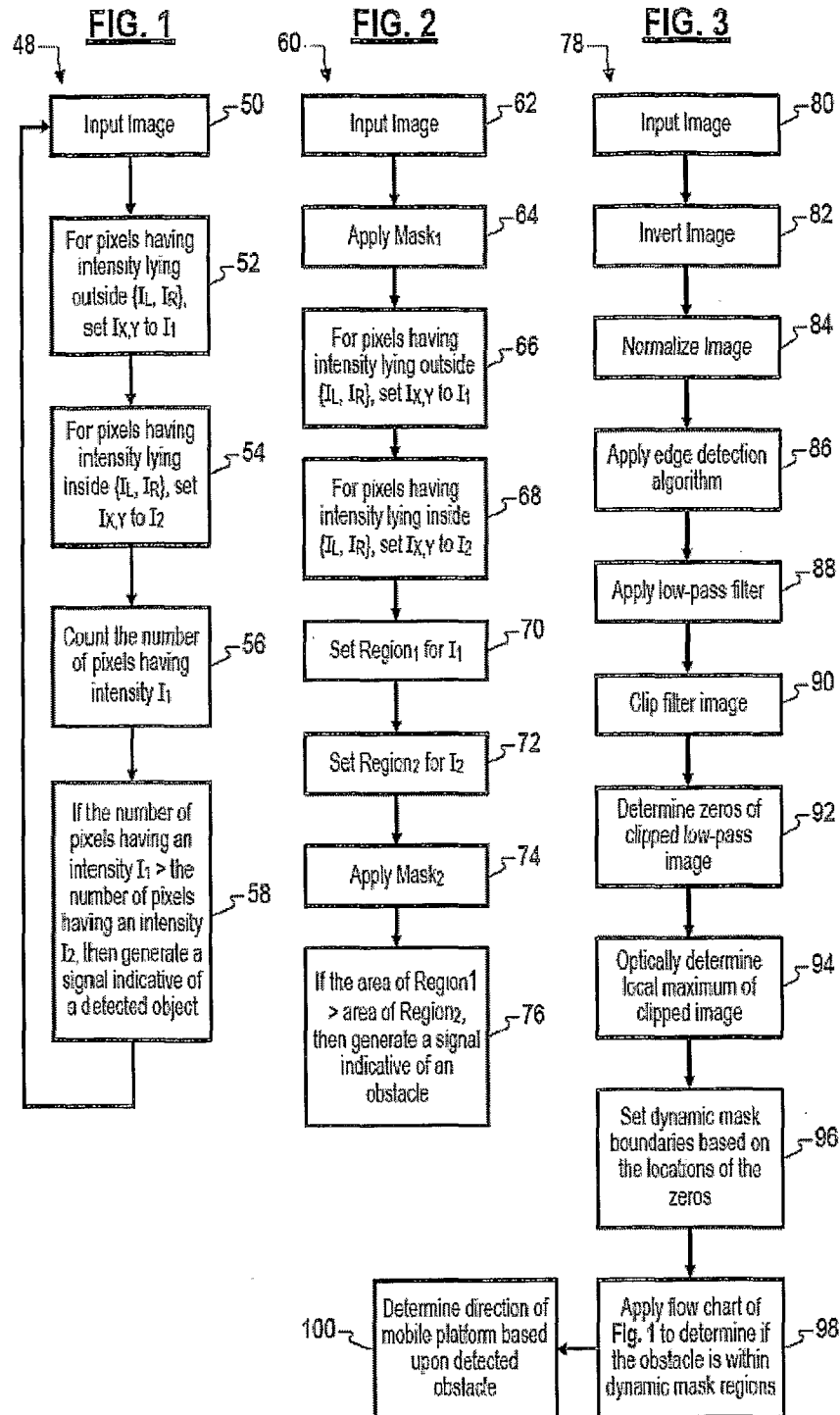
an edge detection module that receives the normalized digital image and performs edge detection the normalized digital image, thereby outputting a bounding graph indicating edges of detected objects in the image;

5 an image filtering module that receives the bounding graph from the edge detection module and filters noise peaks in the bounding graph;

a clipping module that receives the filtered bounding graph from the image filtering module and removes a portion of the filtered bounding graph corresponding to additional noise in the filtered bounding graph and replaces said removed portion with a smoothed portion;

10 a detection module that receives the clipped and filtered bounding graph and determines local maximums and zeros in the graph, and determines a dynamic mask based on said maximums and zeros, wherein the dynamic mask is applied to a second digital image to determine the presence of an object; and

15 an object detection module that partitions the second digital image into a plurality of sections and determines a location of the object by determining a section of the plurality of sections having the dynamic mask located therein.



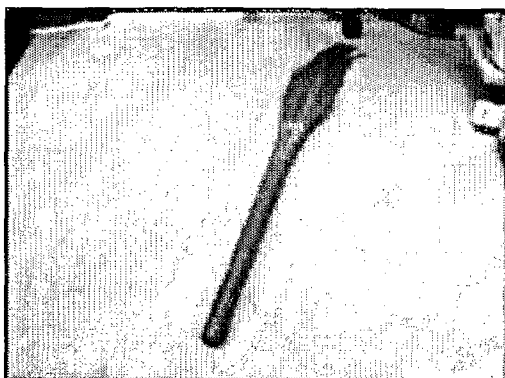


FIG. 4

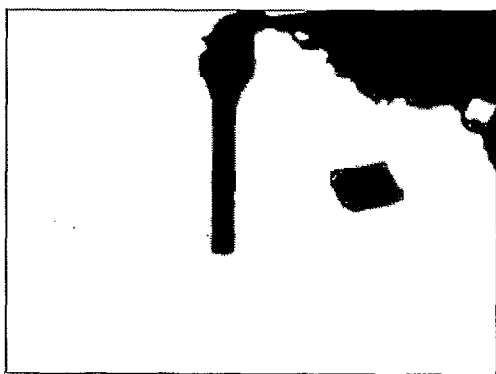
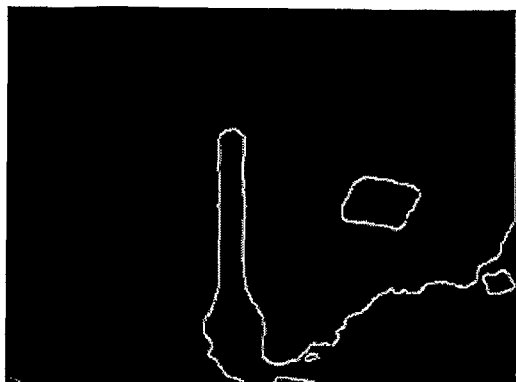
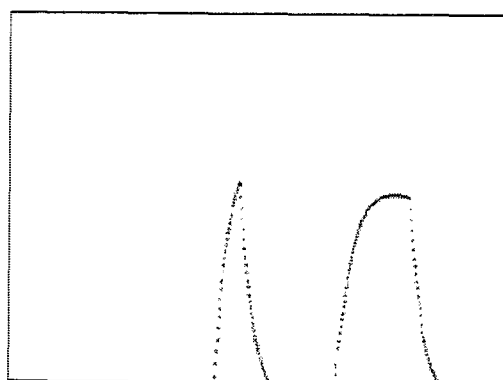
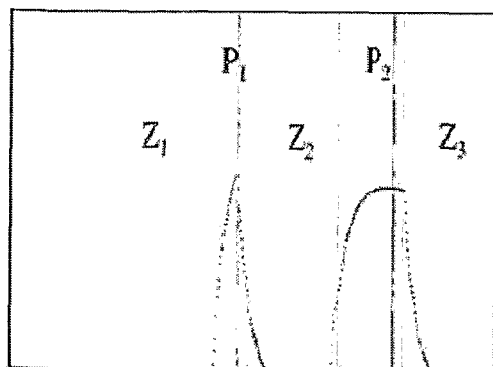


FIG. 5



FIG. 6

**FIG. 7****FIG. 8****FIG. 9**

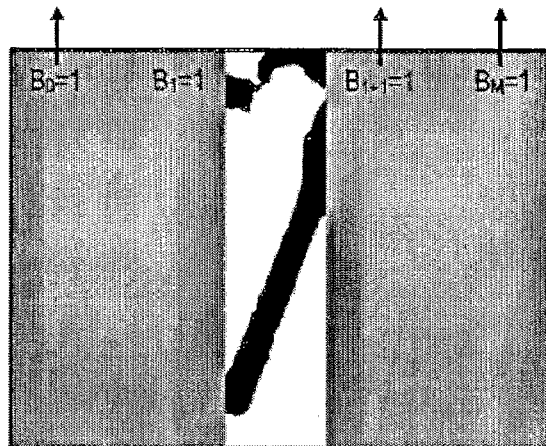


FIG. 10

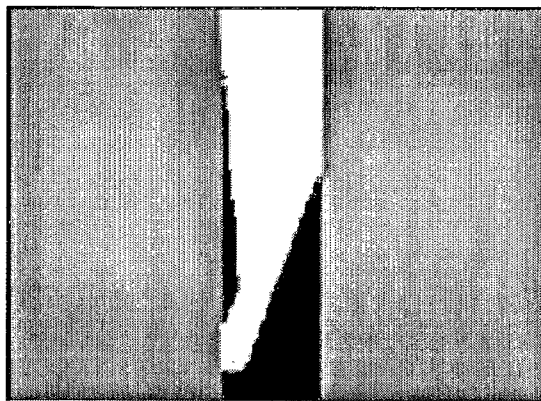


FIG. 11

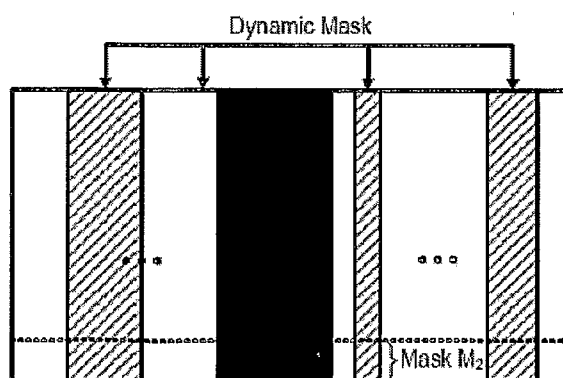


FIG. 12



FIG. 13A



FIG. 13B

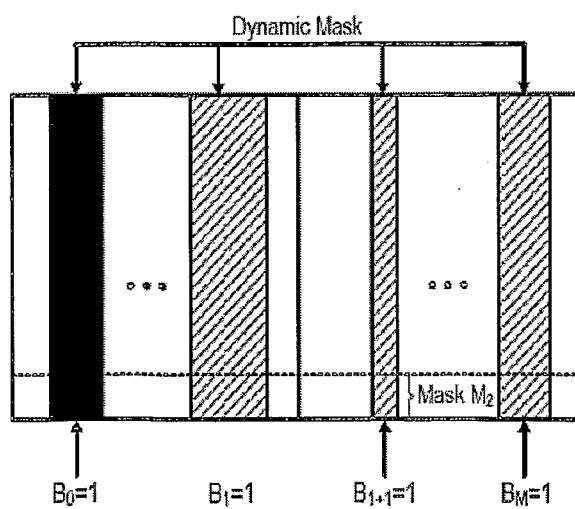
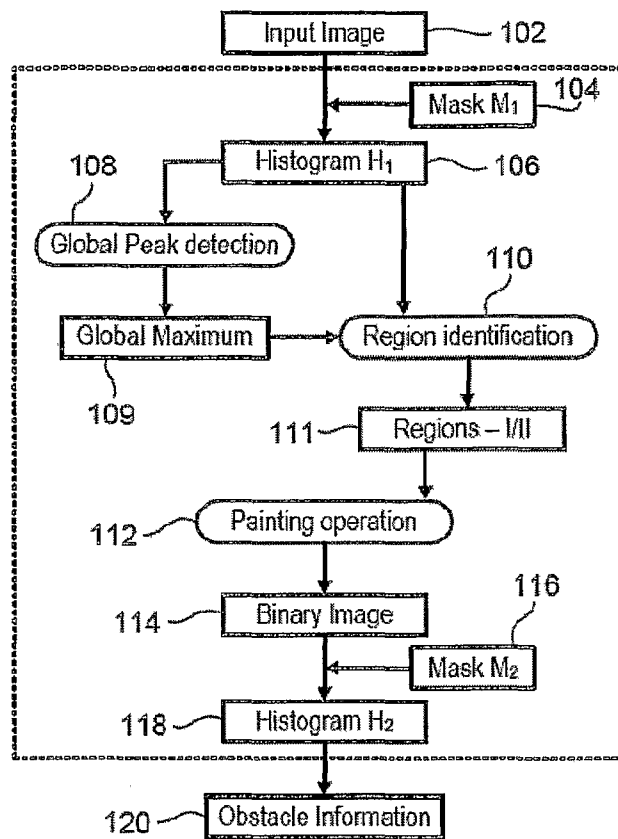
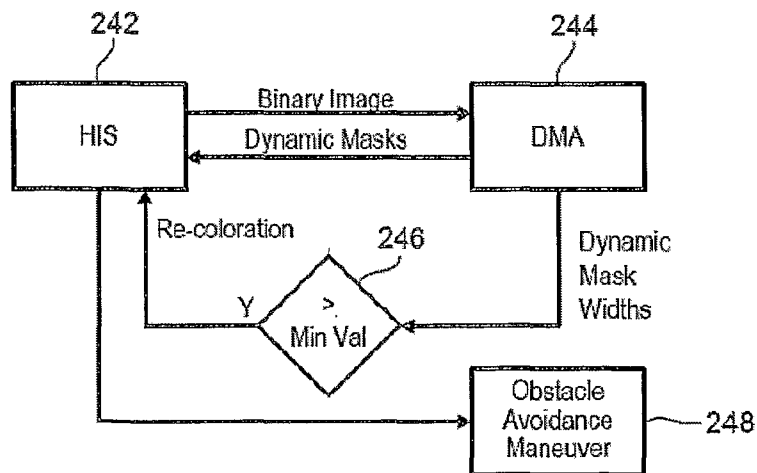


FIG. 13C

**FIG. 14****FIG. 24**

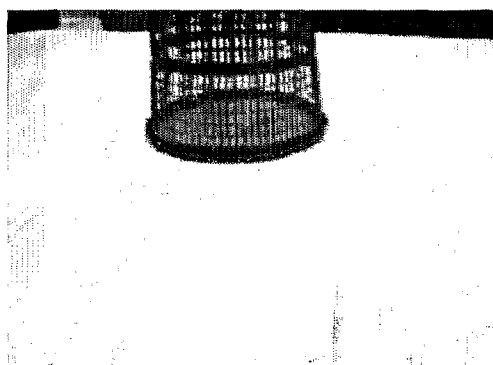


FIG. 15

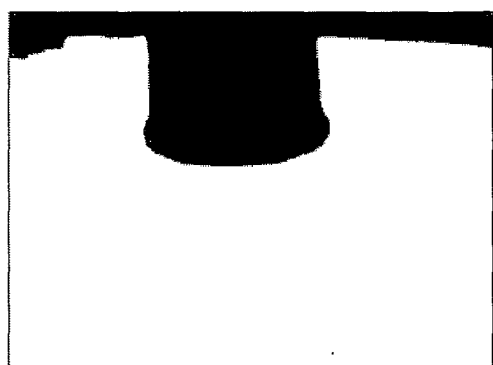


FIG. 16

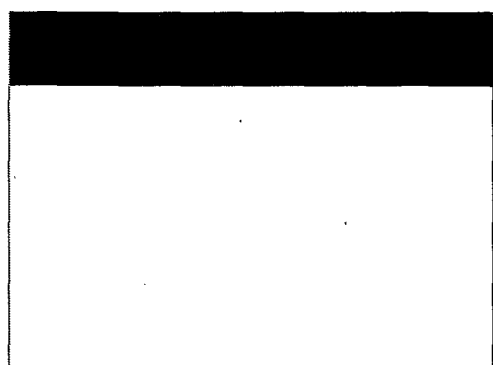
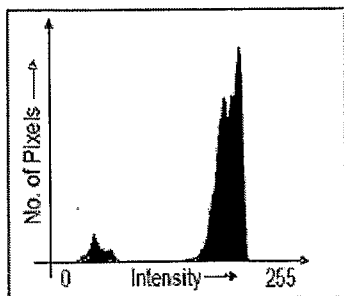
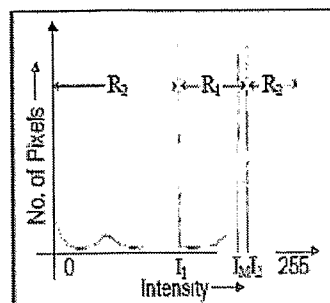
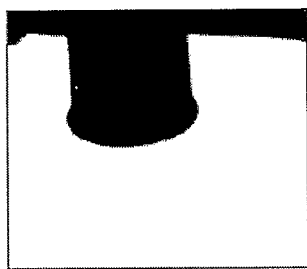
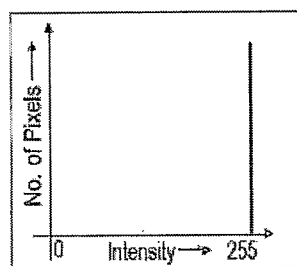
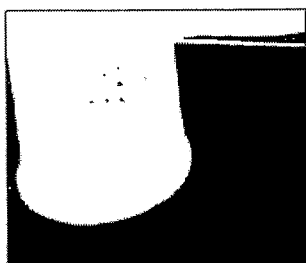
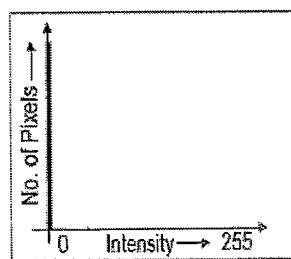
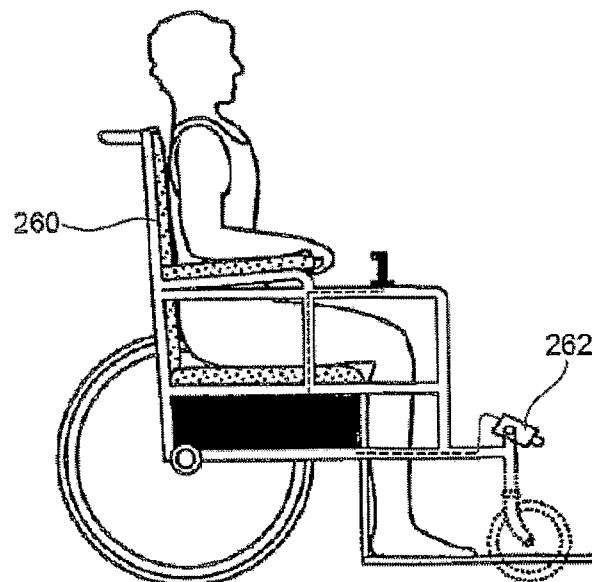


FIG. 17

**FIG. 18****FIG. 19****FIG. 20****FIG. 21****FIG. 22****FIG. 23**

Q	$a_l > a_r$	$a_l \leq a_r$	Q^+
0	-	-	Q
1	-	-	Q
2	1	0	0
2	0	1	1
-	0	0	2

Table 1. Determination of the next state Q^+ **FIG. 25****FIG. 26**

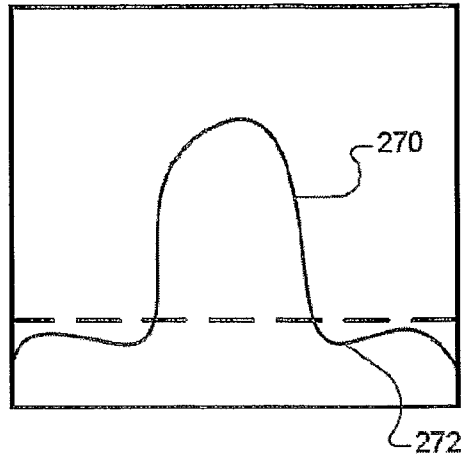


FIG. 27A

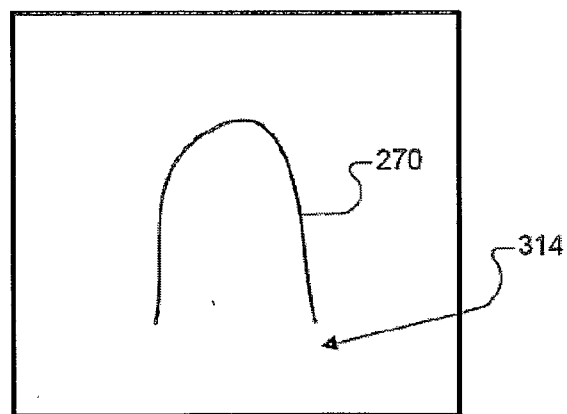


FIG. 27B

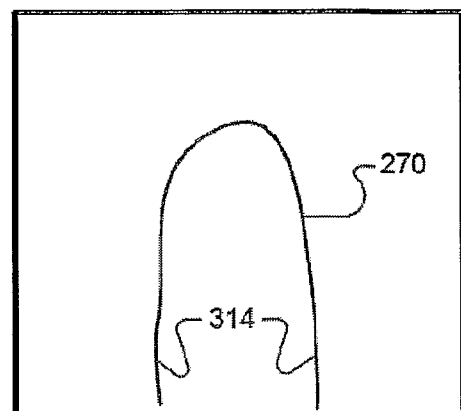


FIG. 27C

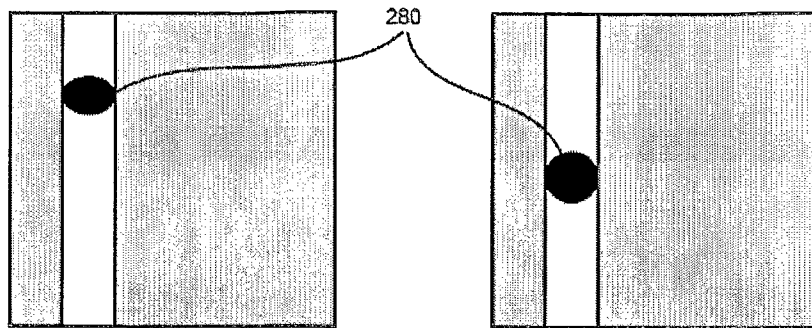


FIG. 28A

FIG. 28B

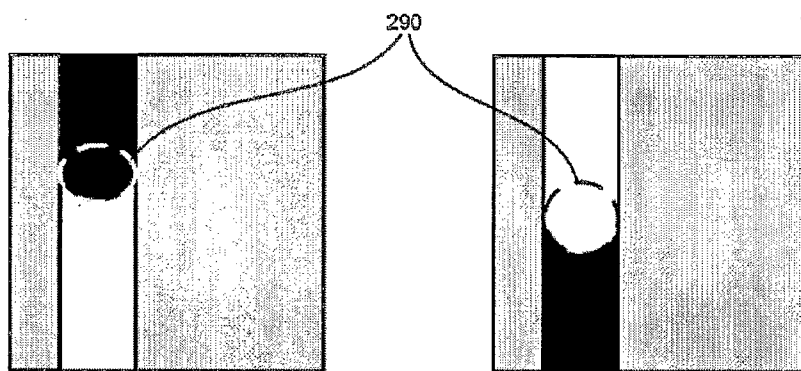


FIG. 29A

FIG. 29B

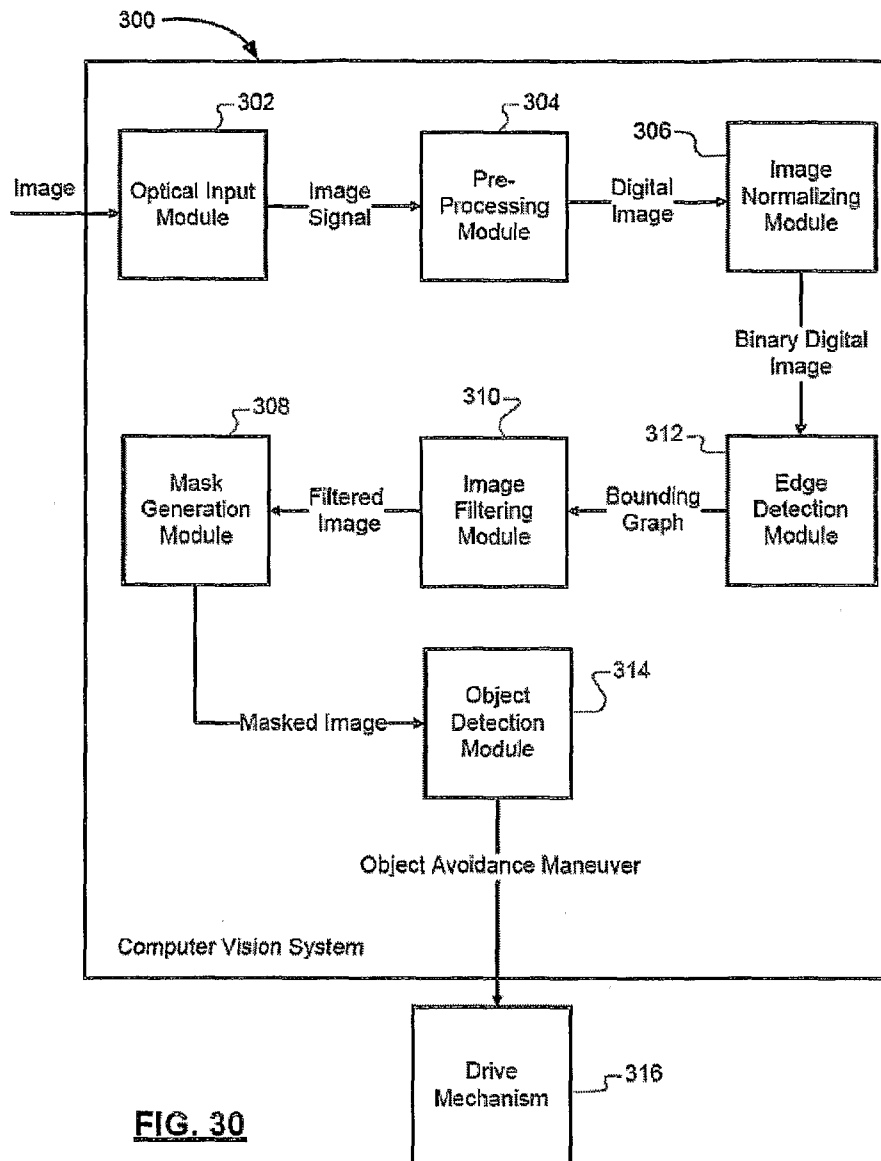
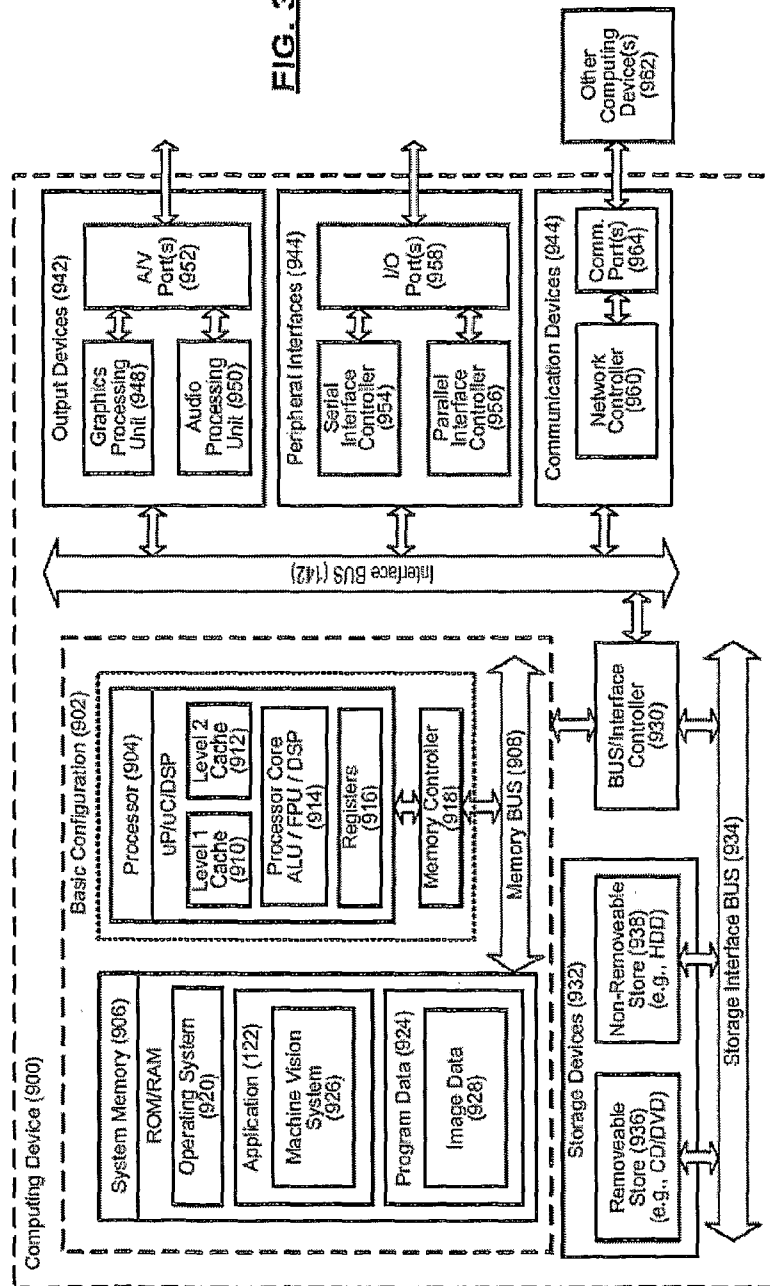


FIG. 31

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/IB2010/053649

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

Int. Cl.

G06T 7/00 (2006.01)

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

WPI, EPODOC, GOOGLE (KEYWORDS): OBSTACLE?, DETECT+, AVOID+, IMAGE+, NORMAL+, BITMAP?, BINAR+, EDGE, MAXIMUM?, ZERO?, MASK+, WHEEL_CHAIR, ROBOT+, NAVIGAT+, EDGE W DETECT+, ROBOT+, NAVIGAT+, CAMERA, CCD, ...

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	Appearance-Based Obstacle Detection with Monocular Color Vision, Proceedings of the Seventeenth National Conference on Artificial Intelligence and Twelfth Conference on Innovative Applications of Artificial Intelligence, July 30 - August 3, 2000, Austin, Texas, USA. AAAI Press / The MIT Press, 2000, ISBN 0-262-51112-6 See whole document.	
A	Building and Evaluating an Intelligent Wheelchair, Benjamin Kuipers, December 10, 2006 See whole document. http://www.cs.utexas.edu/~kuipers/papers/wheelchair.pdf	
A	US 5040116 A (EVANS, Jr et al) 13 August 1991 See whole document.	



Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C



See patent family annex

* Special categories of cited documents:	
"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
"E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date	"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	"&" document member of the same patent family
"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	

Date of the actual completion of the international search
24 November 2010

Date of mailing of the international search report

06 DEC 2010

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International application No.

PCT/IB2010/053649

This Annex lists the known "A" publication level patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned international search report. The Australian Patent Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information.

Patent Document Cited in Search Report				Patent Family Member			
US	5040116	EP	0358628	JP	2170205	US	4954962
Due to data integration issues this family listing may not include 10 digit Australian applications filed since May 2001.							
END OF ANNEX							