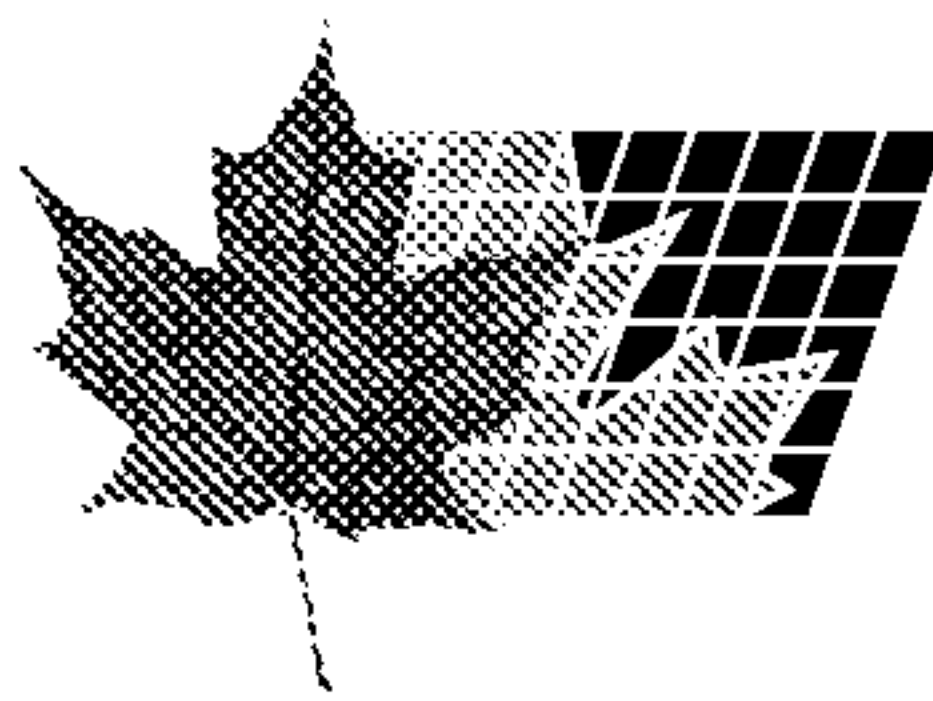




(72) VILELLA, JOSEPH L., US

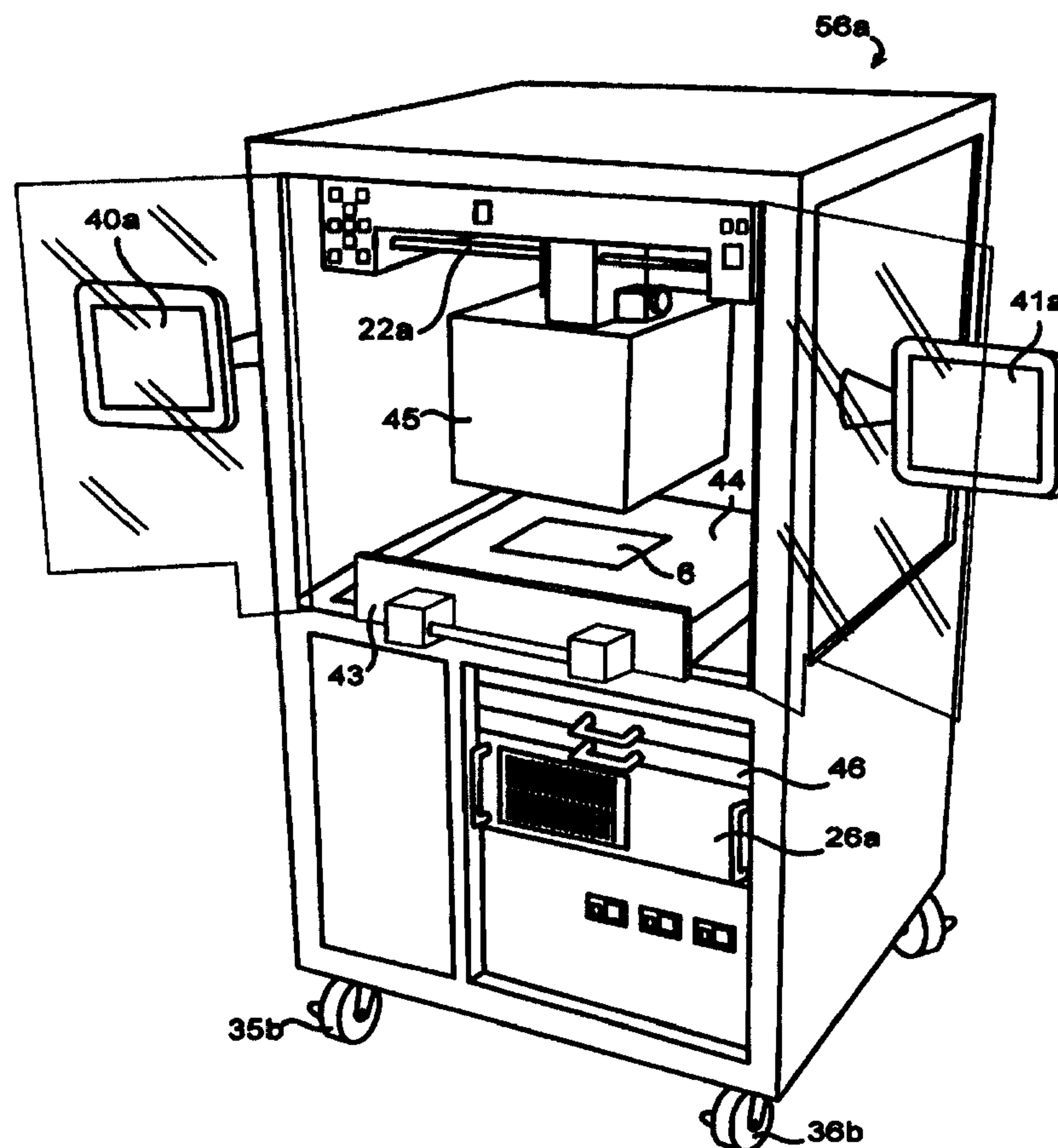
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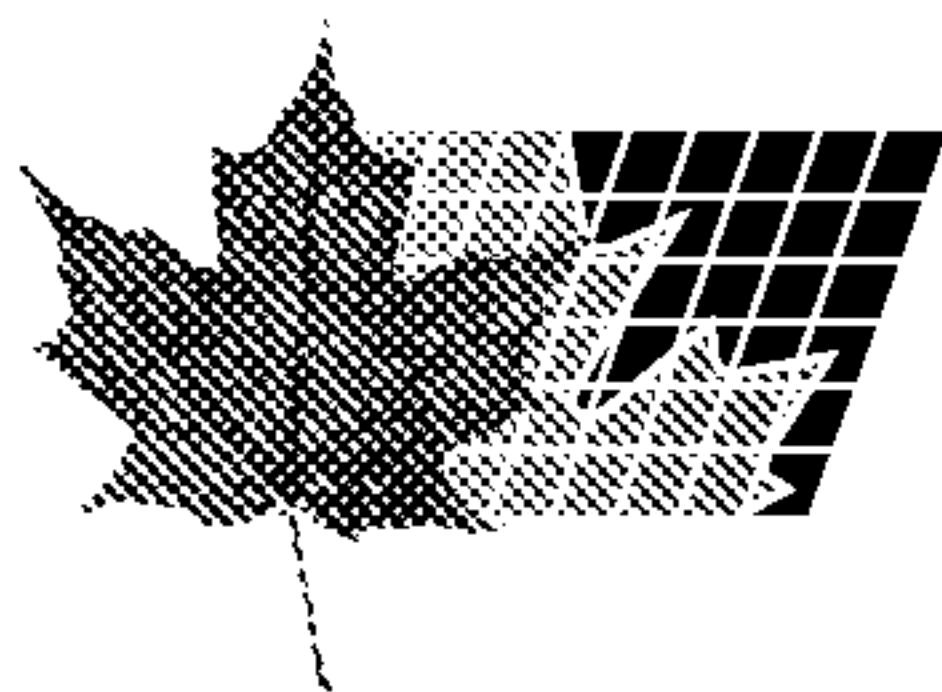
(54) **SYSTEME D'INSPECTION VIDEO D'ENSEMBLE
ELECTRONIQUE**

(54) **ELECTRONIC ASSEMBLY VIDEO INSPECTION SYSTEM**



(57) L'invention concerne un appareil permettant d'évaluer automatiquement la qualité d'un ensemble (6) carte à circuit imprimé au moyen d'une analyse d'image vidéo numérisée. L'appareil s'intègre dans des systèmes existants de fabrication à technologie de montage en surface ("SMT") automatisés à précision relativement faible, en tant que phase d'inspection (56a) pouvant être introduite à différents stades du procédé d'assemblage ou comme une phase séparée à chargement manuel. La phase d'inspection comprend un système vidéo de formation d'images haute résolution et un analyseur d'images vidéo comprenant un ordinateur pilote (26a)

(57) An apparatus for automatically assessing the quality of a printed circuit board assembly (6) using digitized video image analysis. The apparatus integrates with existing relatively low precision automated surface mount technology ("SMT") manufacturing systems as an inspection station (56a) insertable at various steps in the assembly process or as a separate manually loaded station. The inspection station includes a high resolution video imaging system and a video image analyzer comprising an onboard master computer (26a) that generates control signals to reposition the camera mounted within a screen (45) on a movable carriage



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incorporé qui génère des signaux de commande pour repositionner la caméra montée à l'intérieur d'un écran (45) sur un chariot amovible (22a) et/ou pour repositionner le circuit imprimé et régler l'éclairage; l'ordinateur pilote génère également des données d'état de tableau individuel à archiver qui sont affichées graphiquement sur des écrans (40a, 41a) ou utilisées différemment dans une phase de reprise.

(22a) and/or reposition the circuit board, and adjust the lighting; and generates individual board status data to be archived, graphically displayed on monitors (40a, 41a) or otherwise utilized by a rework station.

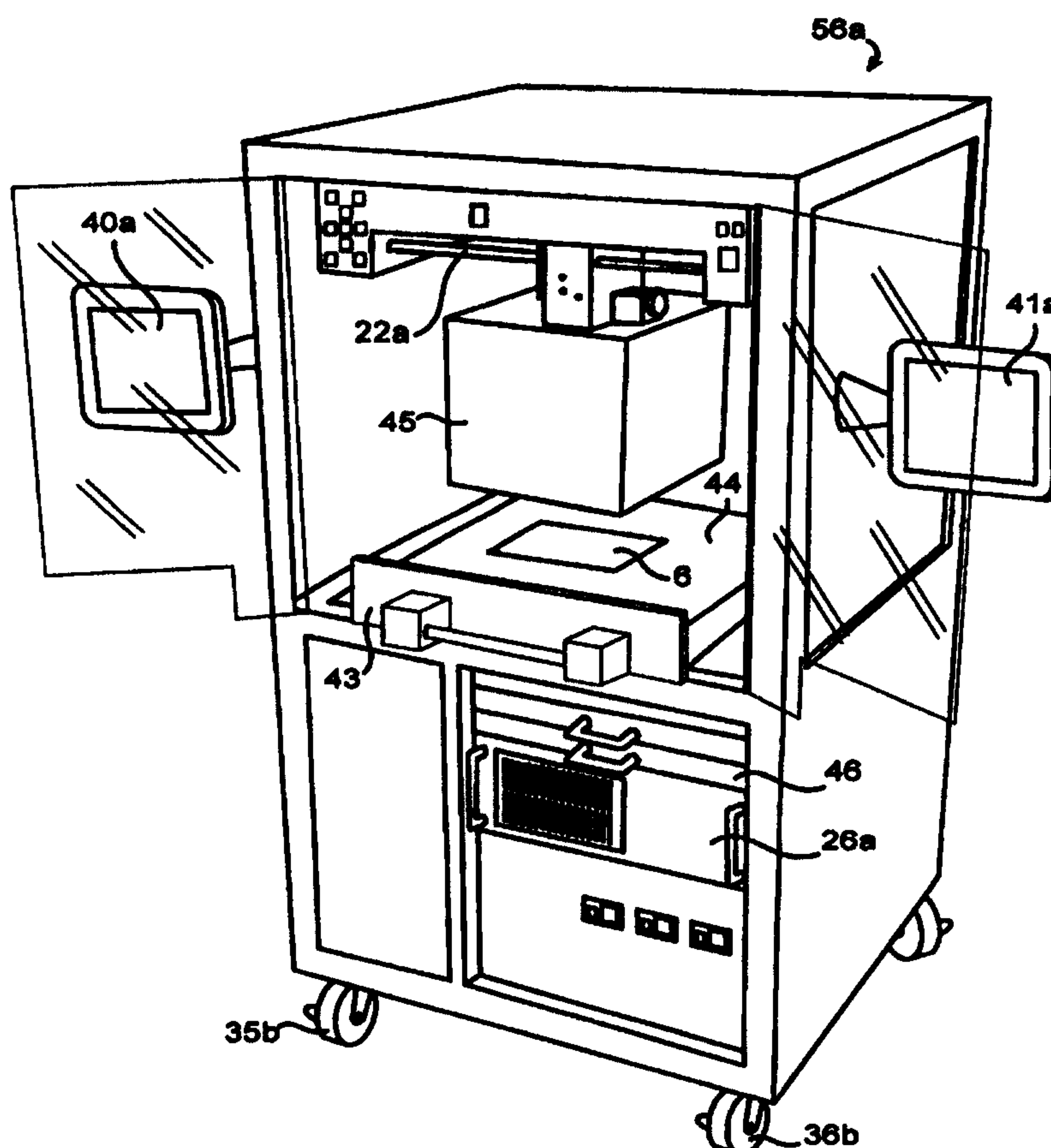
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INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(51) International Patent Classification ⁶ : G06K 9/00, H04N 7/18, G01R 31/00	A1	(11) International Publication Number: WO 99/19825 (43) International Publication Date: 22 April 1999 (22.04.99)
(21) International Application Number: PCT/US98/21383 (22) International Filing Date: 8 October 1998 (08.10.98) (30) Priority Data: 08/947,756 9 October 1997 (09.10.97) US (63) Related by Continuation (CON) or Continuation-in-Part (CIP) to Earlier Application US 08/947,756 (CON) Filed on 9 October 1997 (09.10.97) (71)(72) Applicant and Inventor: VILELLA, Joseph, L. [US/US]; Suite A, 7742 Arjons Drive, San Diego, CA 92126 (US). (74) Agents: CHARMASSON, Henri, J., A. et al.; Suite 150, 1545 Hotel Circle South, San Diego, CA 92108-3412 (US).		(81) Designated States: AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BY, CA, CH, CN, CU, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, GB, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, NO, NZ, PL, PT, RO, RU, SD, SE, SG, SI, SK, SL, TJ, TM, TR, TT, UA, UG, US, UZ, VN, YU, ZW, ARIPO patent (GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, SD, SZ, UG, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, CH, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG). Published <i>With international search report.</i>

(54) Title: ELECTRONIC ASSEMBLY VIDEO INSPECTION SYSTEM**(57) Abstract**

An apparatus for automatically assessing the quality of a printed circuit board assembly (6) using digitized video image analysis. The apparatus integrates with existing relatively low precision automated surface mount technology ("SMT") manufacturing systems as an inspection station (56a) insertable at various steps in the assembly process or as a separate manually loaded station. The inspection station includes a high resolution video imaging system and a video image analyzer comprising an onboard master computer (26a) that generates control signals to reposition the camera mounted within a screen (45) on a movable carriage (22a) and/or reposition the circuit board, and adjust the lighting; and generates individual board status data to be archived, graphically displayed on monitors (40a, 41a) or otherwise utilized by a rework station.



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ELECTRONIC ASSEMBLY VIDEO INSPECTION SYSTEM**Field of the Invention**

This invention relates to automated assembly mechanisms for electronic components, quality assurance, and more particularly to devices used in assessing whether components have been assembled adequately.

Background of the Invention

The ever-increasing miniaturization of electronic components modules and assemblies and the market pressures for cost reduction has made the assembly assembly of those devices a precise, automated, multi-step task. Most devices are assembled using surface mount technology ("SMT") wherein scores, if not hundred of individual components are precisely placed and soldered on at least one printed circuit board in an "assembly line" fashion.

Printed circuit boards travel successively, in-line along conveyors through a series of stations which perform each step in the assembly process. Typically, an empty board enters a solder paste

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delivery system which places uncured solder paste on portions of the board requiring soldered connections. The board then enters one or more chip shooter stations which physically place components on the board. The
5 board then proceeds through an oven which cures the solder paste. After cooling the board is ready for testing and other finalization steps prior to packaging and shipment.

At each step there is a potential for errors to occur which result in a defective board. Some of the
10 potential printed circuit board assembly types of defects include: circuit board defects such as opens and shorts on the traces; placement defects wherein components are missing, of the wrong type, incorrectly oriented, or misaligned; solder defects in amount and
15 placement which can result in solder bridges on the leads or tomb-stoning of components caused by solder contraction during curing; and other defects such as damage caused by mechanical mishandling.

Previous procedures and devices for testing
20 whether defects exist on freshly assembled printed circuit boards suffer from various drawbacks.

Human testing and inspection is costly, slow and subject to a high degree of inaccuracy. The devices used by human testers are typically heavy, bulky, and not
25 readily portable. Electronic in-circuit testing suffers from being slow and highly iterative in order to pinpoint the location of a defect and often cannot

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detect the most common manufacturing errors.

In order to minimize continued work on a board which has already become defective, manufacturers often provide for testing at several stages during assembly. However, a particular piece of automated test apparatus is usually designed to test a specific type of board, specific defects, and/or only at a specific point in the assembly. Therefore, numerous different testing devices have been required.

Current automatic visual or other electro-magnetic radiation based inspection systems suffer from similar drawbacks. X-ray based systems are suited to scan for metallic defects such as faulty traces and subsurface defects. However, high resolution x-ray inspection is expensive and time consuming, and potentially hazardous to nearby human operators.

In other systems, light produced by lamps or LEDs ("Light-Emitting Diodes") is reflected off the surface being inspected into one or more video cameras. Some require the use of two images obtained under different lighting conditions as disclosed in Takahashi, U.S. Patent No. 5,059,559. Other various digital and analog signal analyzing processes can be used to determine the existence of visually detectable defects. For example analyses have been made upon a monochrome intensity comparison measurement of the signal corresponding to the image of the gaps between terminal leads.

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These systems are relatively low resolution and hence slow. If thorough inspection is required, the system must zoom in and successively scan portions of the board in a piecemeal fashion. In addition, monochrome intensity comparisons are prone to inaccuracies where adjacent features have similar intensities. An averagely populated, 3 inch by 5 inch board, such as a standard PCI SVGA video adapter card will take about 1 minute 20 seconds to inspect thoroughly.

Most prior systems require extremely precise location of the board and camera, on the order of .001 of an inch. The board and camera must be made resistant to vibration. The prior solution entailed a massive platform made of slate or other heavy materials, and precise, vibration-resistant board handling and camera carriage mechanisms. Most prior systems weighed greater than 450 kilograms. These requirements increase the cost and lower the portability of the system.

Therefore, it is desirable to have an economical, automated testing system, which quickly detects the existence of the most prevalent manufacturing defects, which determines automatically whether a particular board may benefit from reworking and efficiently informs the rework station of those defects; which keeps track of defects over time to identify problems symptomatic to the assembly system; and which is quickly and easily moved to different points in the assembly line or out of the

-5-

assembly line altogether for manual testing.

The instant invention results from an attempt to reduce cost, and to improve the throughput and efficiency of automated assembly systems.

5

Summary of the Invention

The objects of this invention are: to improve defect detection in the inspection and testing of electronic components assemblies; to more efficiently direct repair; to allow for the monitoring over time of the quality of inspected boards, in order to improve the throughput of automatic assembly mechanisms; to allow portability of the inspection device to various points on the assembly line and off the assembly line altogether for manual testing.

10
15

These and other valuable objects are achieved by an automated, high-resolution, digital image inspection system, installed in a portable low-precision SMT type dispensing station. The system identifies the printed circuit board being inspected, and locates visually detectable defects thereon. The type and location of defects are automatically associated with the board in a database, which is accessible by a rework/repair station, and which allows for statistical monitoring of the history and status of an assembly's product.

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Brief Description of the Drawing

Figure 1 is a process flow block diagram of the populated board inspection system as integrated in a surface mount technology assembly line;

5 Figure 2 is a data flow block diagram of the inspection system according to the invention;

Figure 3 is a diagrammatic perspective view of a first embodiment of the inspection station of the invention having a board handling conveyor;

10 Figure 4 is a diagrammatic perspective view of an alternate embodiment of the inspection station of the invention having a drawer for manually loading boards;

Figure 5 is a perspective view of the manual board positioning mechanism on the drawer;

15 Figure 6 is a perspective view of a board securing oblong pier;

Figure 7 is a cross-sectional view thereof with in-situ circuit board taken along line 7-7; and

20 Figure 8 is a cross-sectional view thereof with in-situ circuit board taken along line 8-8.

Description of the Preferred Embodiment of the Invention

Referring now to the drawing, there is shown in Figure 1 a functional block diagram of a typical SMT assembly line where printed circuit boards are assembled
25 in a series of processing stations. Circuit boards move from solder paste application station 51, to one or

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more chip shooter stations 52, 53 and to an oven 54 for curing. An optional first-in-first-out ("FIFO") buffer station 55 may be used to connect stations which complete their tasks more sporadically, or in different groupings of boards. In the present embodiment the FIFO station 55 is used as a cooling station for groups of boards exiting the curing oven 54 before entering the inspection station 56.

It should be noted that the inspection station 56 may be located between any one of the stations of the assembly process or as a stand alone manually loaded station. However, the preferred location is immediately after the boards have become fully populated, so as to prevent any further processing of defective boards.

In its most automated embodiment, the inspection station 56 will be followed by a board diverter 57 station which, according to the results provided by the inspection station, will direct defective boards to a rework station 58, and good boards to the next SMT processing station 59. The rework station has access to results provided by the inspection station. Optionally, the rework station may employ an additional inspection station 60 for inspecting reworked boards. Repaired boards will re-enter the SMT processing at this point 61 as well.

The preferred inspection station is fully compatible with the inter-station communication protocol

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established by the Surface Mount Equipment Manufacturer's Association ("SMEMA"), which allows for simple communication of board transport statuses to adjacent stations.

5 Referring now to Figure 2, the preferred board inspection system is arranged in several functional units and subsystems. Automatic control is handled by a master subsystem 71 as directed by a vision subsystem 72. During automated "in-line" operation, the master
10 subsystem generates commands to the conveyor controller/interface 73 for activating board handling mechanisms, including a conveyor 5, and to the carriage controller/interface 75 for moving the carriage mounted camera 20, via data communication lines 77, 78. A
15 separate data line 79 carries zoom commands to the camera 20. The master subsystem also carries out other tasks such as the archiving and flow of data to and from the vision subsystem 72 and data entry and storage devices 82 and to the user interface monitor 40. Another data
20 line 91 communicates rework data to and from the rework station 58 and its control monitor. Data lines preferably conform to RS-232 or other well known digital data communications standards.

 In this preferred embodiment of the
25 invention, the camera 20 will output a digital pulse train signal 93 comprising the encoded current video image to the vision subsystem 72. Alternatively, the camera 20

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may issue a video signal which is converted to a digital signal by a digitizer integrated or peripheral with the vision subsystem 72.

5 The vision subsystem 72 comprises a microprocessor controlled digital signal analyzer. Its primary function involves analyzing image data received via a data line 93 from the camera 20 in order to detect board defects. Part of this function involves signaling the master system 71 to generate control commands for
10 accepting and ejecting boards, driving the carriage in order to position the camera 20, and issuing camera zoom commands. Configuration of the vision subsystem occurs through user data entry and storage devices 82 directly or via the master subsystem 71. The vision subsystem 72
15 also directs the current image received from the camera to the image display monitor 41. The vision subsystem 72 handles adjustment of the lighting 95 in the inspection cavity as well.

 The resolution and zoom capabilities of the camera
20 must be selected according to the size, density and appearance of the defects being inspected. A full color camera having a resolution of at least 2000 X 2000 pixels is preferred to discriminate features both by light intensity and wave length, allowing identification of
25 markings on color coded components. However, where defects are discernible in monochrome, and extremely fast inspection is required, a digital black and white camera

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may be used. While an analog signal camera may be employed, a digital camera is preferred for both speed and accuracy.

5 Defects are discovered using digital image analysis techniques well-known in the art such as by testing the scanned images against a table of expected or otherwise acceptable values for certain features, such as space between terminal leads. Preferably, testing involves a numerical, rule based analysis of the images. The type and location of any defect is then added to the database record for the current board being inspected. A decision is also made regarding whether the detected defects are severe enough to require rework of the board.

15 The best mode vision subsystem uses the OMEGATEK 2000 brand digital image analyzing model developed by Omegatek, Inc. of San Diego, California which includes a full color digital camera having resolution of 2000 x 2000 or 4 million pixels, and a color range of 16 million colors, and a fixed or auto zoom lens. This particular
20 type of image analyzing model is based on a 200 MHz PENTIUM brand microprocessor and uses proprietary image processing algorithms.

25 Using a camera having a resolution of at least 4 million pixels, features as small as approximately 12.5 microns (0.5 mils) have been adequately discriminated. Using the OMEGATEK 2000, an averagely populated 3 inch x 5 inch board such as standard PCI SVGA video adapter card will take about 20 to 30 seconds to inspect thoroughly.

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Inspection speed can be further increased by adding more and faster processors to either or both systems.

5 While similar systems can tolerate imprecision of the camera carriage of .001 of an inch, the invention can accommodate imprecision of .02 of an inch. Additionally, the carriage does not have to be as precise or fast as similar systems, thus a less expensive mechanism may be employed. Additionally, it is not necessary to put down stabilizing supports.

10 As a result of the high resolution to the vision subsystem, typical inspections can be done using a single image from a single scanned camera frame. However, if finer detail is required the camera can "zoom-in" and the inspection can be done using multiple images. The
15 distance between the camera and the board typically ranges from 5 to 10 inches, as limited only by the enclosure size with the average distance at 7.2 inches. Although the usual height of components is .5 to .75 inches, unusually tall components such as those 2 inches high, can be
20 accommodated, making reconfiguration of the vision subsystem unnecessary.

Being tolerant of much lower precision movement and placement translates directly into a system that is lighter weight and less expensive. Being more portable,
25 the station can easily be moved to different locations in the assembly line, moved out of the line as a manual inspection or rework station, or off-site .

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Referring now to Figure 3, there is shown the automated embodiment an electronic assembly video inspection station 56. The physical layout of the automated station is governed by its compatibility with standard SMT automated assembly processes. The station comprises a housing 2 having an inner inspection cavity 3 with a lower surface 4 upon which traverses a board handling and transport mechanism, including a conveyor 5 for carrying a circuit board 6 to be inspected.

The conveyor 5 receives the board 6 through an aperture 7 in a side wall 8, then positions it under the camera 20. After inspection, the board 6 continues along the conveyor 5 toward another aperture 9 in an opposite wall 10 through which the board is ejected. The inspection cavity is accessible for maintenance through a pair of access doors 11,12. During manual operation individual boards may be loaded for inspection through these doors, or through a precision alignment drawer described below.

The video camera 20 is mounted to a movable, motorized carriage 21 attached via a track 22 to the ceiling of the cavity 3. The carriage allows for directed width 23 and depth 24 movements of the camera in a plane substantially parallel to the plane of the board 6 being inspected. This allows for the station to inspect boards of varying sizes and complexities.

The carriage is preferably moved via servo motors

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such as a pair of stepping motors powered with a pulsing signal generated by the carriage controller that induces incremental rotational movement of each motor. Each motor in turn drives the carriage along a pair of orthogonally oriented precision linear slides. The first slide is mounted to the enclosure and the second to a portion of the carriage.

Below the inspection cavity 3 is a cabinet housing the master subsystem computer and an electronics bay 27 housing components of the vision subsystem and the various controllers and interfaces necessary for signaling the components of the station, such as the conveyor and carriage controllers. Manual controls such as a power switch 30, conveyor overrides 31, conveyor pneumatic pressure controls 32, carriage overrides 33, and an emergency shut-down switch 34, as well as various status indicators extend from a front panel of the cabinet. Height adjustable legs 35, 36 allow for vertical positioning and orientation of the station housing 2. While the end of the legs may terminate in foot pads 35a, 36a, locking wheels 35b, 36b are preferable as shown in the manual inspection station embodiment of Figure 4.

Atop the station housing 2 are a pair of monitor displays 40, 41 providing user interface screens to the analysis and control system, and images recorded by the camera. An overall station status

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light tree 42 is also provided.

5 The inspection station 56 is preferably adapted from an existing SMT dispensing station such as the Model No. A-618C conveyORIZED automated dispensing system readily available and sold commercially from Asymtek, Inc., of Carlsbad, California. Using this relatively low precision system, the entire inspection station weighs under 250 kilograms. This dispenser provides most of the major components described above in an integrated package.

10 A detailed description of the dispenser is available in the A-612/618C System Operations Manual available from Asymtek, which is incorporated herein by this reference.

15 In general the A-618C provides the housing and board handling mechanisms including a pneumatically driven conveyor and its controller and interfaces, the carriage and its controller and interfaces, and the necessary SMEMA controllers and interconnections. The dispenser is adapted by replacing its fluid injection equipment. There is no need to replace the existing low precision carriage

20 21, since the high resolution vision subsystem can tolerate it. The height of the carriage 21 may be adjusted to allow proper focal distance between the camera 20 and the board 6. The main computer of the dispenser assumes the tasks of the master subsystem of the

25 inspection station. Standard monitors are preferably replaced with Super Video Graphics Array ("SVGA") type monitors for user interface 40 and monitoring camera

image 41.

The A-618C provides for translation of the carriage over a range which will accommodate boards of approximately 46 x 46 centimeters (18 x 18 inches).

5 Even in the most automated system, human intervention is often required to maintain the proper alignment of integrated mechanical components and to monitor the station's progress. Therefore, an operator can observe the image being viewed on the image monitor
10 41, and query the status of the inspection using the interface monitor 40 and data entry devices 82. If necessary, manual operation of the inspection station is available through manipulation of manual controls 30-34.

Board inspection is a multi-step process. First,
15 the vision subsystem is configured according to the type of board to be inspected. Parameters relating to the type, location, and orientation of each component to be inspected on the board are loaded into the vision subsystem via user data entry. Preferably, the
20 information is available via CAD (Computer Aided Design) files or other well known formats. Previous configurations are stored on the master subsystem for quick retrieval from subsequent scans of the same board type.

25 Although a given run of an SMT process is typically configured for a single type of board, it should be noted that the inspection system need not be

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configured for only one type of board on any given run. So long as the system is able to identify each board being inspected, a large number of different typed boards may be successively inspected. This is of particular value in the optional rework inspection station 60 where many successively different boards types may require inspection. Indeed, the rework station may be serving a plurality of SMT lines.

Once the system has been configured for a particular type of board, the inspection process may begin. A circuit board 6 is positioned, face-up, on the conveyor 5 at a so-called "zero-position". The conveyor 5 moves the board 6 to a beginning position under the camera 20. Since the vision system is able to calculate its position from the visible features on the board, highly precise movement of the conveyor and carriage is unnecessary. The inspection can take place with the board 6 remaining on the conveyor 5, eliminating the need for any kind of locking cradle and any board handling mechanisms required to place the board on or remove board from the cradle, further reducing cost and weight, and increasing portability and speed of inspection. However, board locking cradles may be used.

The vision subsystem first identifies the board by reading a barcode or other visible board identifying cue on the board's surface such as a bar code. The vision subsystem capable of identifying and isolating the bar

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code and ascertaining its identification of the board. Hence, separate bar code reading equipment is not necessary. A record relating to the board is retrieved by the master subsystem 26 for recording information about the board generated by the vision subsystem and any system reconfiguration is automatically done by the master subsystem, without user interface. If a record does not exist, the master subsystem will query the operator for descriptive input as described above.

The vision system performs a scan of the board to obtain an image for analysis. The scan may be administered first with a relatively coarse resolution followed by one or more subsequent scans in finer detail to resolve the status of questionable regions discovered during the coarse scan. Preferably, a single frame from the camera is used to increase throughput.

After inspection is complete, the board is ejected for routing to the next SMT station or to the rework station. When rework is necessary, all pertinent information for the rework is automatically available to the rework system. At the rework station a user enters or scans the board identification via a bar code reader or other input device. Data pertaining to that particular board is then retrieved from the database and graphically displayed on the rework monitor. The graphical display preferably comprises a stock image of the type of board being reworked. A stock image is used to reduce the

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amount of data to be sent to the rework station. Overlaid on the image, at the instruction of the rework operator, are visual icons, analogous to red dots on a map showing the location and type of defects for that board. A CAD overlay, and any other pertinent information that has been entered in the database and may also be overlaid or otherwise displayed. Alternately, a simple textual printout of defects can be made available to the rework station.

Referring now to Figure 4, when operated as a manual inspection station for "batch processing", a drawer 43, is available to manually insert a board for inspection. The drawer 43 is located in the front of the station 56a and slides out toward the user. In this embodiment, the station 56a is not part of a SMEA line; therefore, the light tree 42 is unneeded. In addition, both the camera and lights are mounted on the carriage 22a behind a box-like screen 45. The monitors 40a, 41a, master computer 26a, and the various switches and indicators have been relocated. A keyboard is mounted within a second drawer 46.

Referring now to Figures 5-8, the drawer 43 is comprised of a flat surface 48 with a plurality of die holes 47 drilled through at regular intervals both horizontally and vertically. The surface on which the board is placed is approximately parallel to the plane in which the camera travels. A switch 49 with its data line

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50 is located on the holed surface 48, which detects the presence of a board 6.

Able to be affixed to the holed surface 48 are two types of attachments which secure the board in place. The first type are simple elongated piers 80, 81 through which finger tightened screws 83 engaged the holed surface. Typically, for rectangular circuit boards, these piers would be placed at right angles to one another to engage adjacent sides of the board.

The second type of attachment 84, 85 are adjustable brackets which engage the other sides of the board. Each bracket is attached to the holed surface by a pair of finger tightened screws 86 passing through an oblong slot 87. When the screws are partially tightened, the bracket can slide back and forth in a line along the holed surface.

Referring now to Figure 6, each oblong pier 80 is made from strong, rigid material such as aluminum. The top of each pier has a horizontal planar upper surface 100 extending from the top inner edge 101 outward to a vertical planar wall 102 running longitudinally along a median portion of the top of the pier. The height 103 of the wall is roughly commensurate with the thickness of the circuit board 6 in order to adequately secure it. More outwardly located are one or more clamping knobs 104, 105 rotatively mounted to the top of the pier. Each adjustable bracket 84, 85 has a similar board securing

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upper surface and one clamping knob.

Each knob is generally cylindrical shaped having a vertically planar cutaway 106 placed a radial distance from the axis of rotation 107 no greater than the distance from the axis to the wall 102. This allows for extraction of the board when the cutaway is brought into alignment with the wall as shown in Figure 7. When out of alignment as shown in Figure 8, a portion 108 of the bottom surface of the knob extends over and contacts a portion of the top surface of the seated board 6.

Means for maintaining the position of the knobs may be used such as biasing the knob downward through use of a spring 109. Other well-known means may also be used.

Although the instant invention is directed toward the inspection of electronic assemblies such as printed circuit boards having surface mounted components, it is appreciated that the invention applies to other manufactured items having defects which are detectable through visual inspection.

Although in the preferred embodiment describes the camera being movable in a plane, it is appreciated that more complex motion involving vertical movement, and pitch, yaw, and roll movements may be added to the system depending on the type of article being inspected.

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CLAIMS

1 1. A method for visually inspecting electronic
2 component assemblies comprises:

3 positioning each of said assemblies
4 within view of a color digitizing camera of at
5 least four million pixel resolution;

6 obtaining via said camera, an image of
7 the surface of said each of said assemblies;

8 analyzing said image to obtain a record
9 of observed defects;

10 maintaining a database of a plurality of
11 visually perceptible types of potential defects of
12 said assemblies;

13 associating each of said observed
14 defects with one or more of said plurality of
15 visually perceptible potential defects; and

16 generating a graphical display
17 indicating said observed defects.

1 2. The method of Claim 1, wherein said analyzing
2 comprises using a numerical rule based color image
3 analysis algorithm.

1 3. The method of Claim 2, wherein said analyzing

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2 comprises:

3 comparing said image against a record
4 of acceptable values; and

5 identifying areas of said image which do
6 not fall within said values.

1 4. The method of Claim 3, wherein said
2 maintaining comprises:

3 entering assembly layouts including
4 component type locations and orientation into said
5 database.

1 5. The method of Claim 4, wherein said entering
2 comprises interpreting a computer-aided design
3 file describing at least one of said assemblies.

1 6. The method of Claim 5, which further
2 comprises:

3 identifying each of said assemblies
4 via a visual cue on the surface of said board, read
5 by said camera; and

6 categorizing each of said assemblies
7 within one of a plurality of assembly types.

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1 7. The method of Claim 6, wherein said
2 step of positioning comprises:

3 journaling each of said assemblies
4 along a conveyer; and

5 securing each of said assemblies within
6 view of said camera, wherein said securing has an
7 acceptable tolerance coarser than two hundredths of
8 an inch.

1 8. The method of Claim 1, wherein said obtaining
2 comprises:

3 scanning a first course resolution
4 image of said assembly;

5 identifying a potentially defective
6 region of said assembly; and

7 scanning a first fine resolution image of
8 said region.

1 9. The method of Claim 1, which further
2 comprises cataloging said list of defects.

1 10. The method of Claim 1, wherein said
2 step of generating comprises: displaying a
3 template representing said assembly;

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4 displaying a distinct static visual icon
5 for each of said defects at a location on said
6 template corresponding to the location each of said
7 defects on each of said assemblies.

1 11. The method of Claim 10, wherein said
2 visual icon comprises indication of a type of
3 defect.

1 12. The method of Claim 1, wherein said camera is
2 mounted within an enclosure supported by wheels.

1 13. The method of Claim 1, wherein said obtaining
2 comprises positioning said camera a distance of at
3 least 12.7 centimeters above said board.

1 14. An electronic assembly inspection station
2 comprises:

3 a housing containing an inspection bay;

4 a color digitizing camera having a
5 resolution of at least 4 million pixels and a color
6 range of at least 16 million colors, mounted on a
7 movable carriage within said bay;

8 means for journaling an electronic

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9 assembly board within said bay;
10 means for securing said assembly within
11 said bay, and
12 means for analyzing an image of said
13 board obtained by said camera to obtain a list of
14 defects on said board.

1 15. The station of Claim 14, wherein said
2 means for analyzing comprise a vision subsystem
3 using a numerical rule based color image analysis
4 algorithm.

1 16. The station of Claim 14, wherein said means
2 for securing comprise a sliding drawer.

1 17. The station of Claim 14, wherein said image
2 comprises the entire surface of said assembly and
3 is obtained by a single frame scan by said camera.

1 18. The station of Claim 14, which further
2 comprises means for associating said list of
3 defects with said assembly in a database record
4 accessible by a rework station.

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1 19. An automated system for visually inspecting
2 electronic component assemblies comprises:

3 means for positioning at least one of
4 said assemblies beneath a color visible light
5 digitizing camera having a resolution of at least 4
6 million pixels;

7 means for detecting visible defects on
8 the surface of said assembly; and

9 graphical means for displaying said
10 defects at a rework station.

1 20. The station of Claim 19 wherein said
2 positioning means has a tolerance of coarser than
3 one hundredth of an inch.

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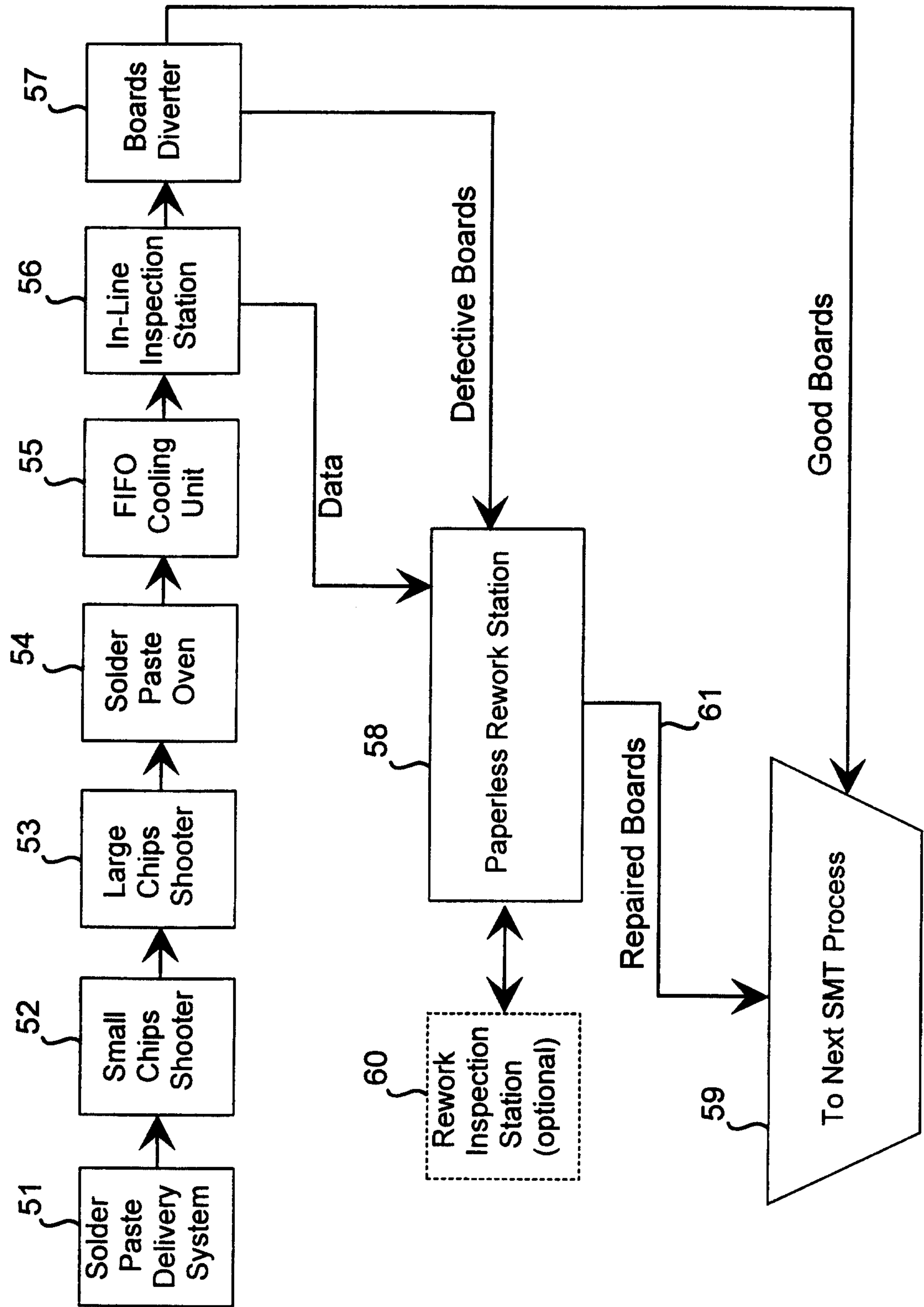


FIG. 1

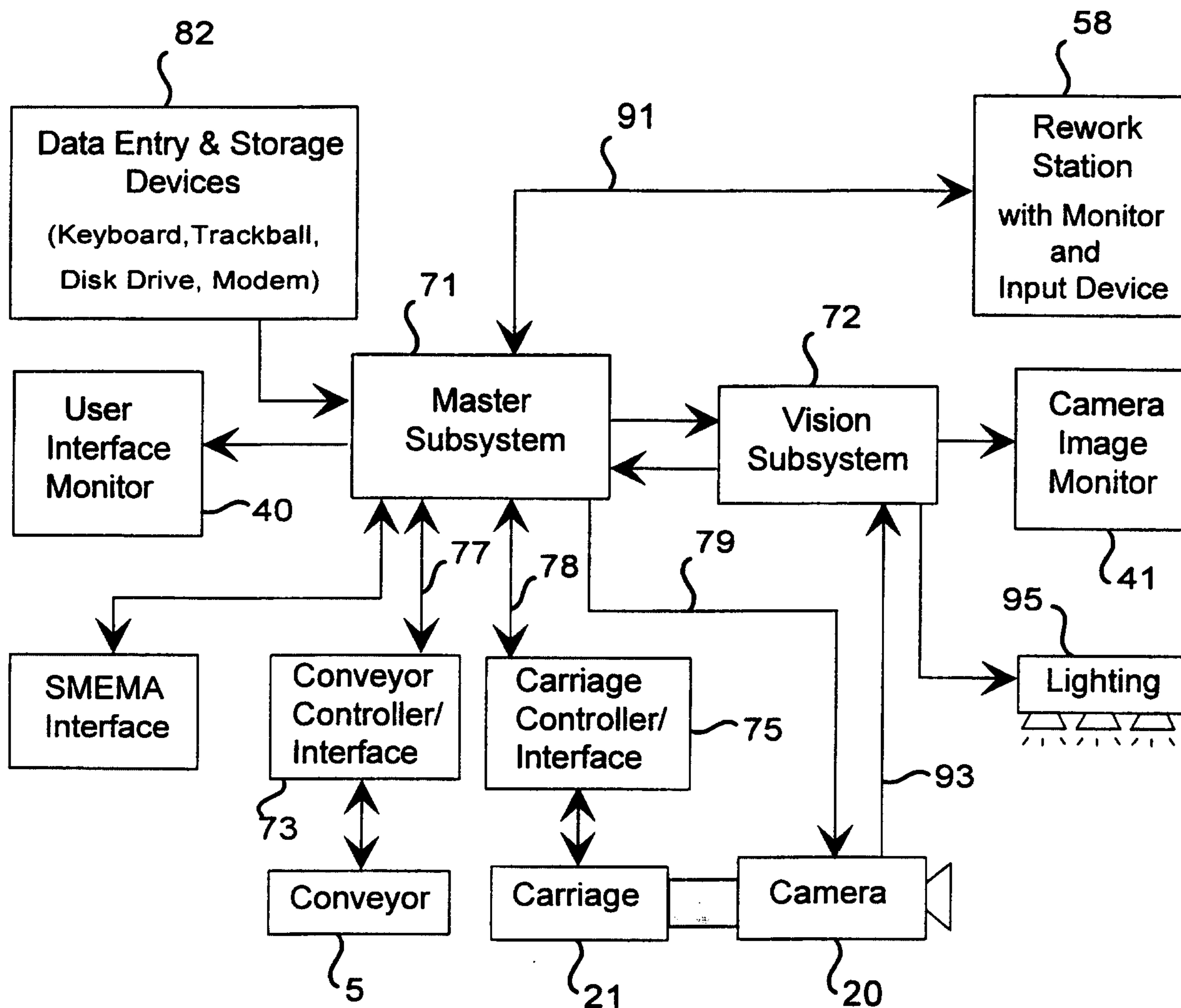


FIG. 2

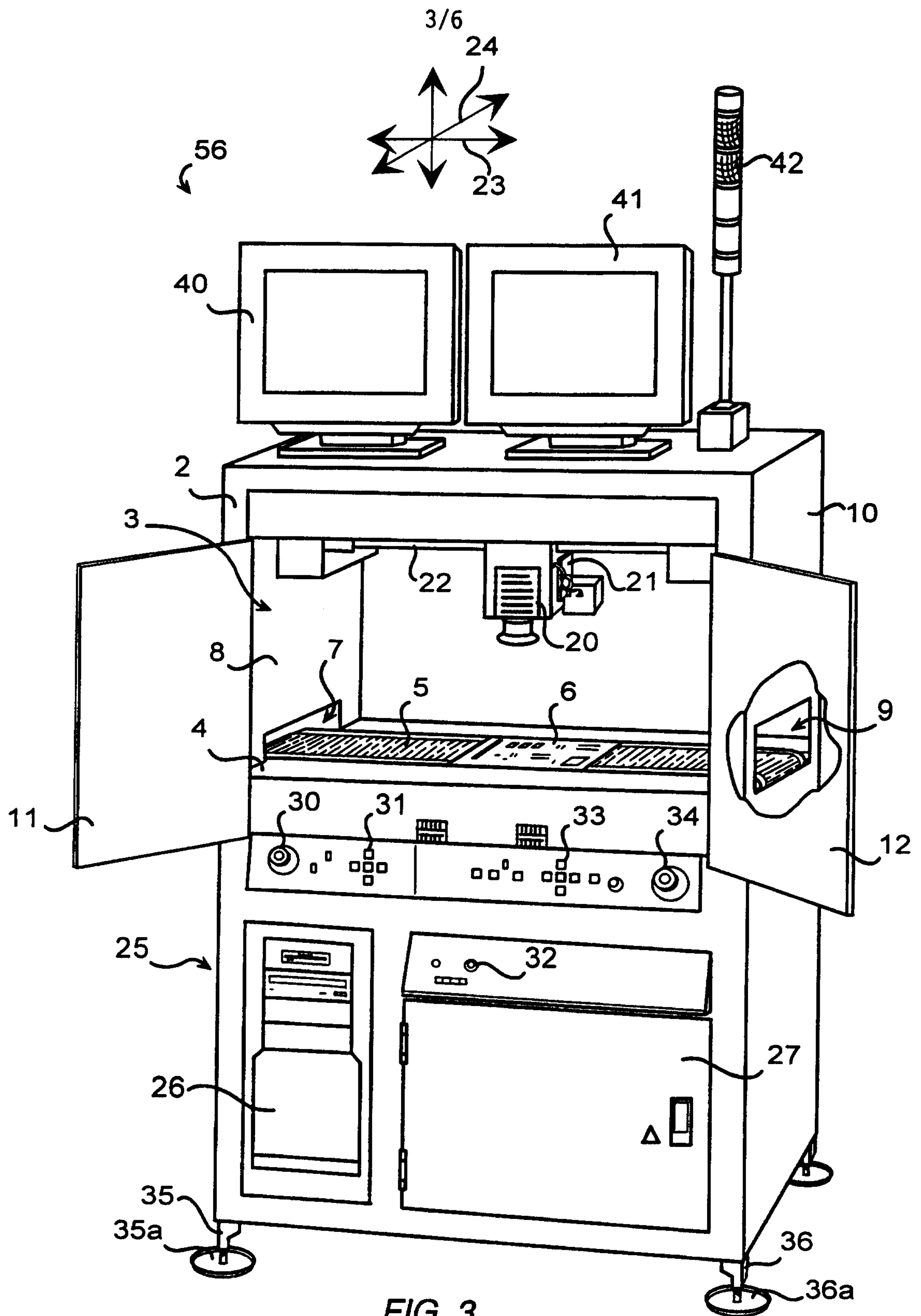


FIG. 3

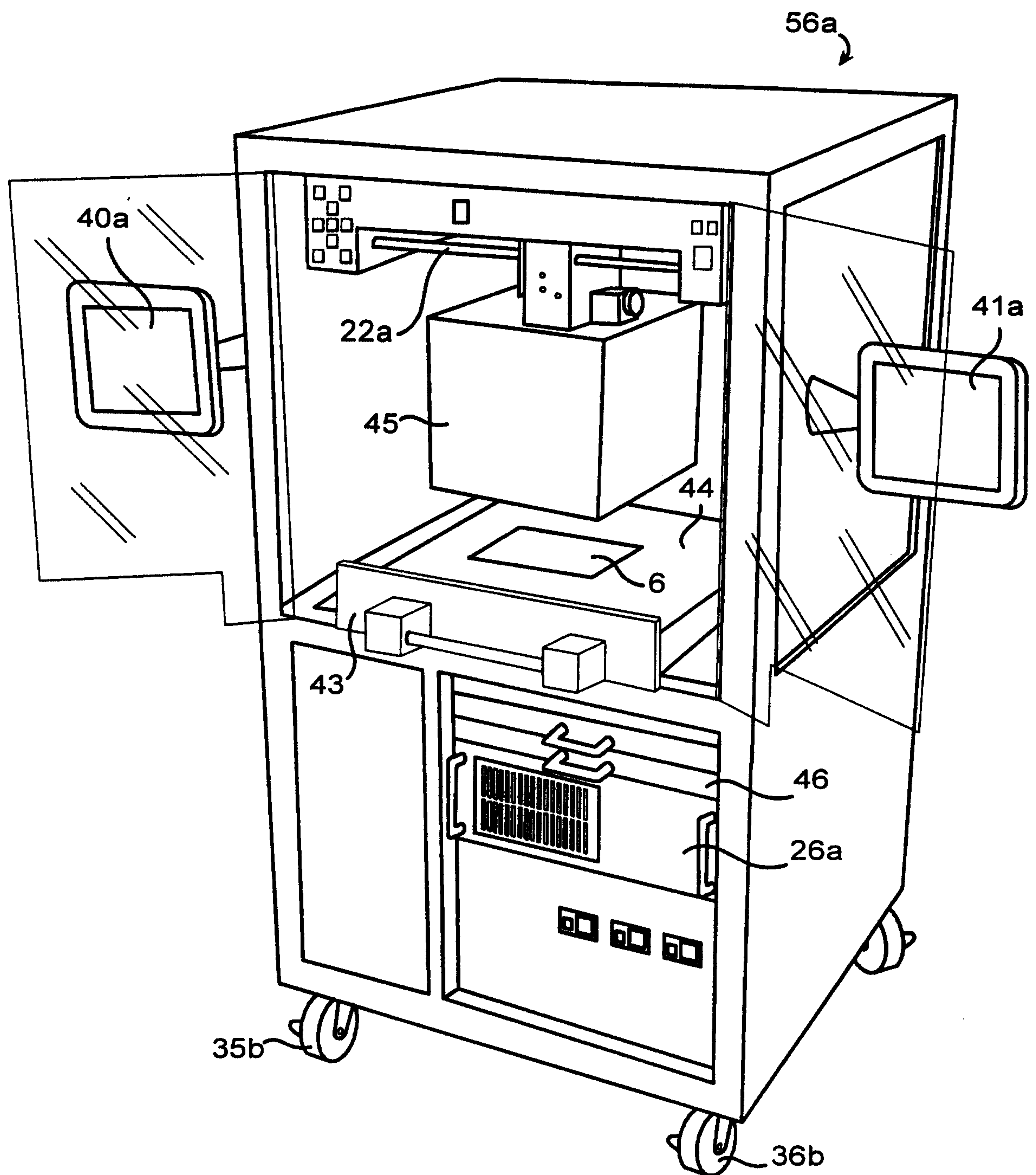


FIG. 4

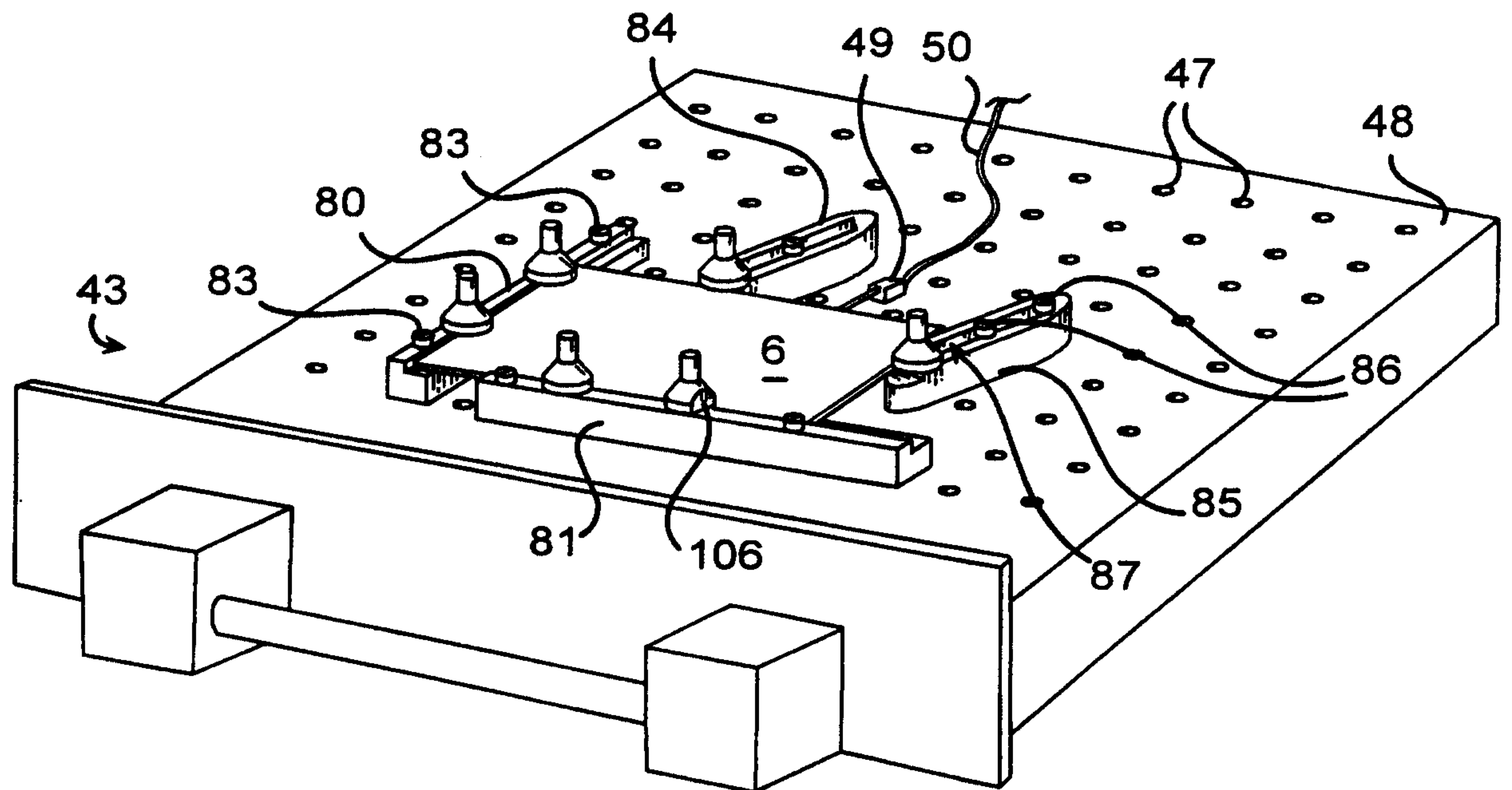


FIG. 5

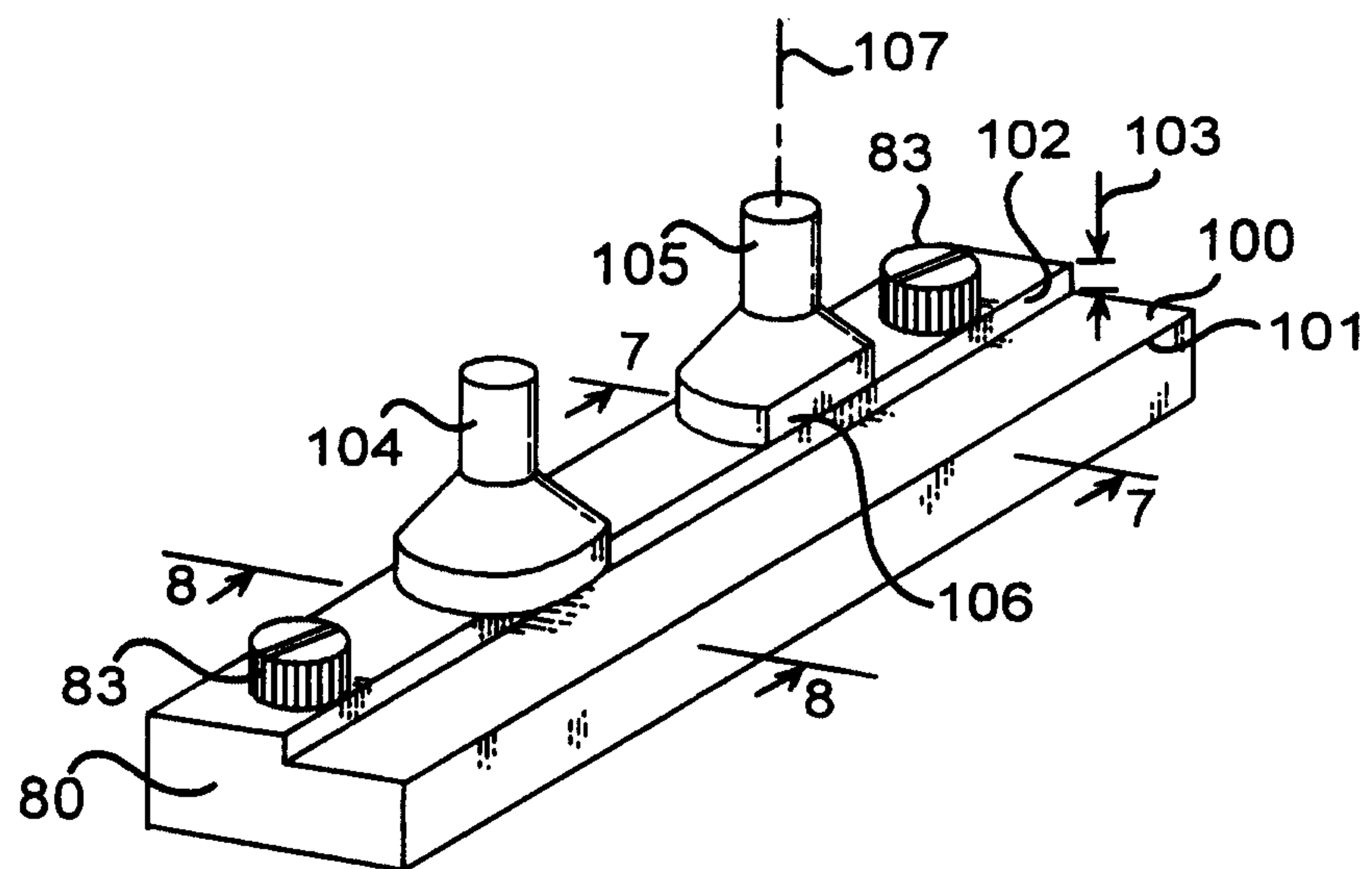


FIG. 6

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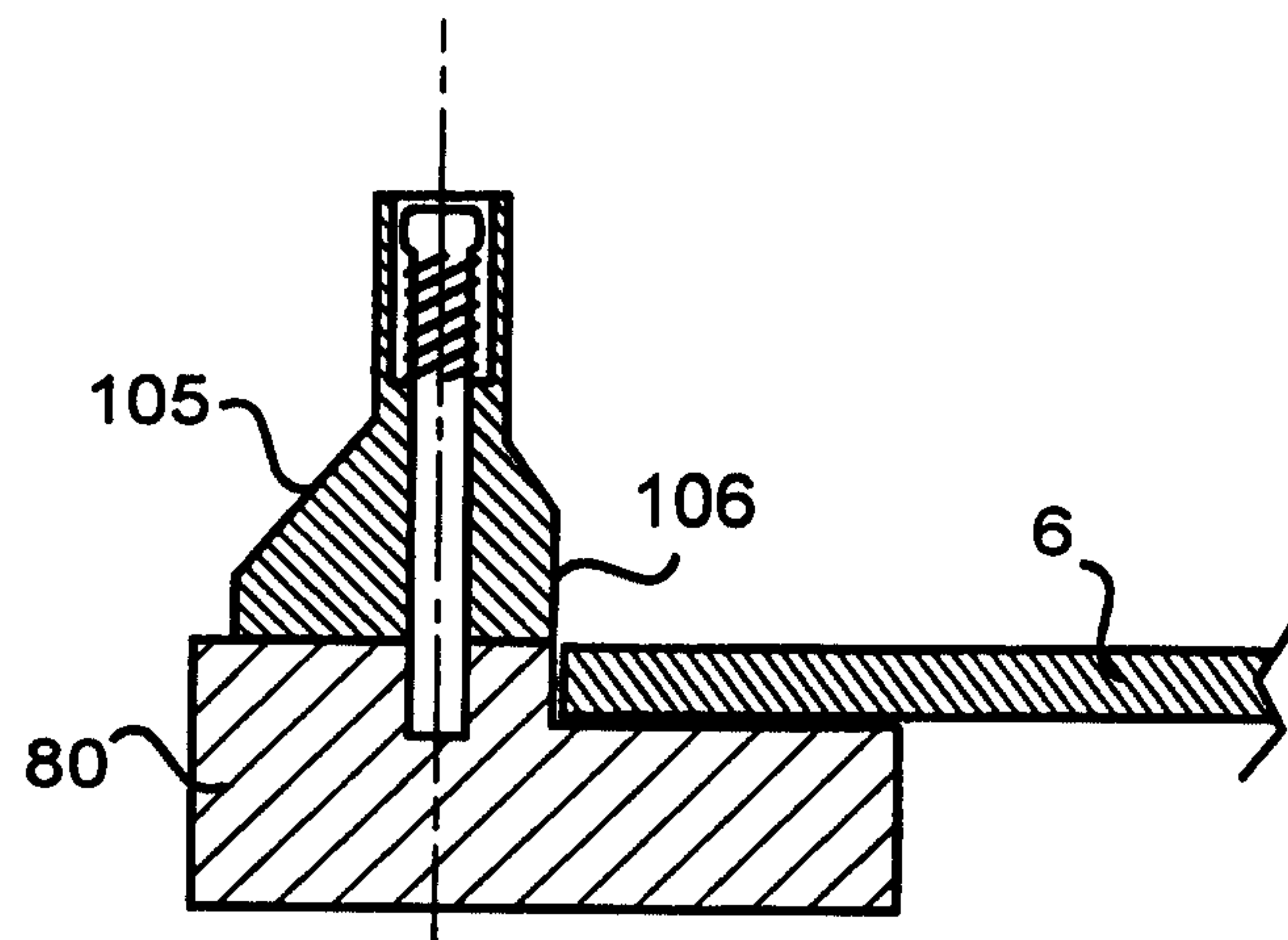


FIG. 7

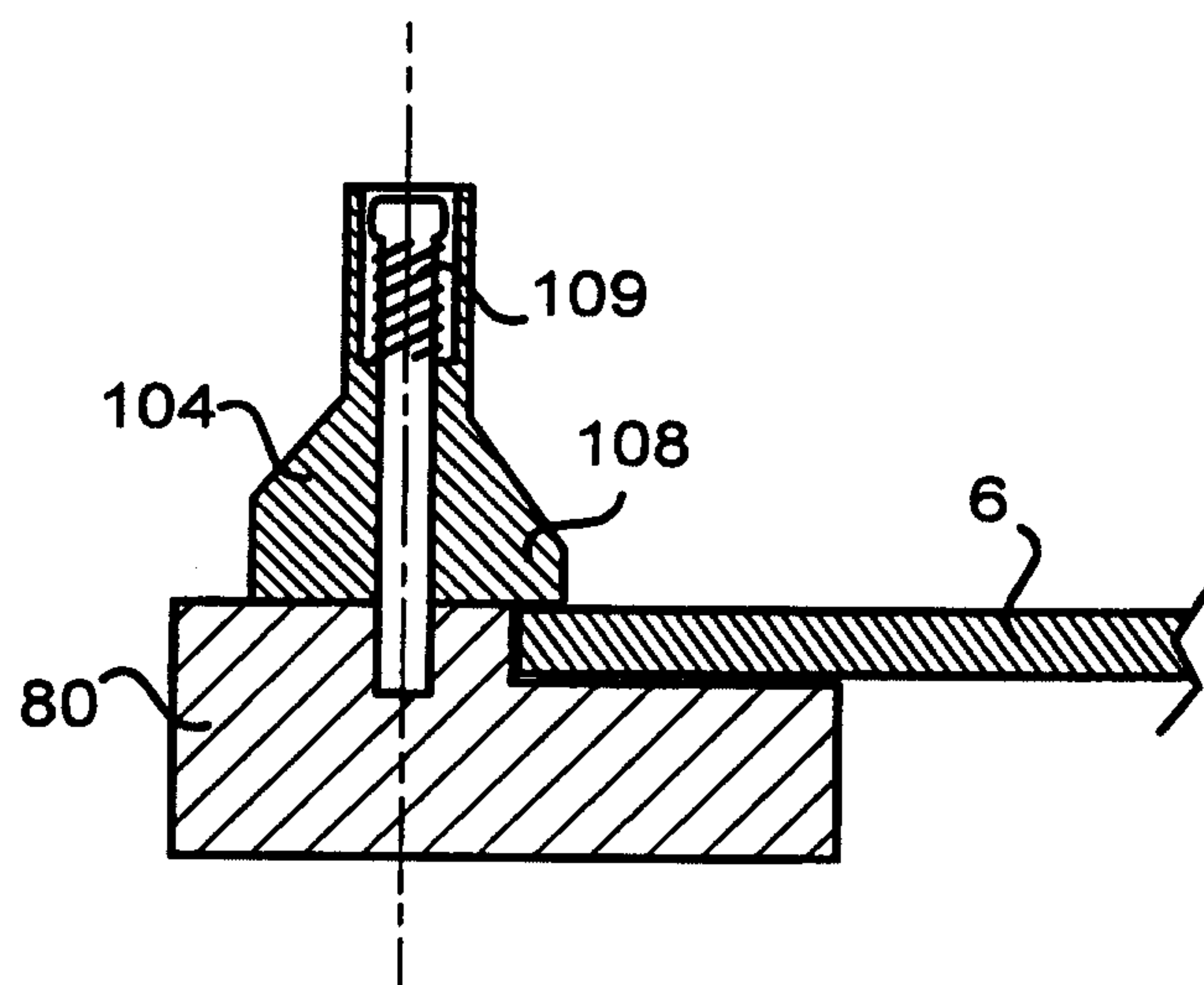


FIG. 8