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(54) **MICROSCOPE DEVICE FOR A COMPUTER SYSTEM**

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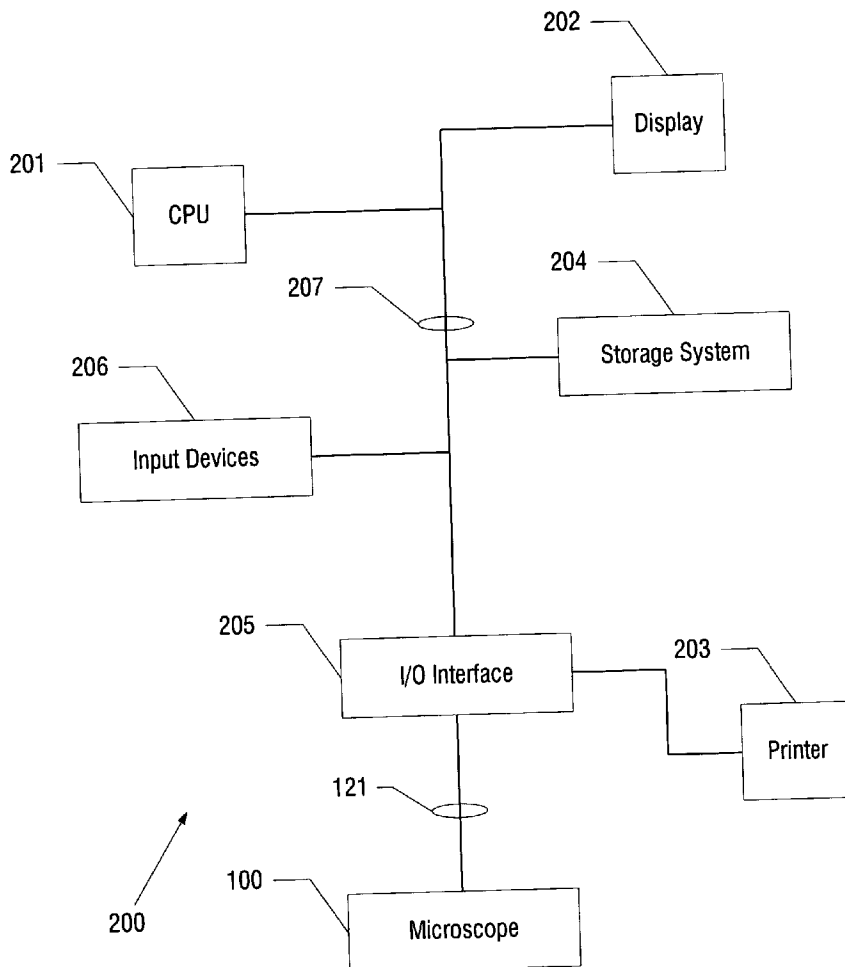
(60) Division of application No. 09/568,391, filed on May 10, 2000, now Pat. No. 6,636,354, which is a continuation-in-part of application No. 09/474,380, filed on Dec. 29, 1999.

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(52) **U.S. Cl.** **359/385**

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A computer microscope system having a housing, imager circuit including an imaging device and support circuits, and optical unit is coupled to a computer system running a microscope control program to provide convenient imaging of objects at one or more magnification levels. The microscope control program provides control and user interface between the microscope, computer hardware and the user, thus allowing for easy manipulation of the microscope (and the images generated) by the user.



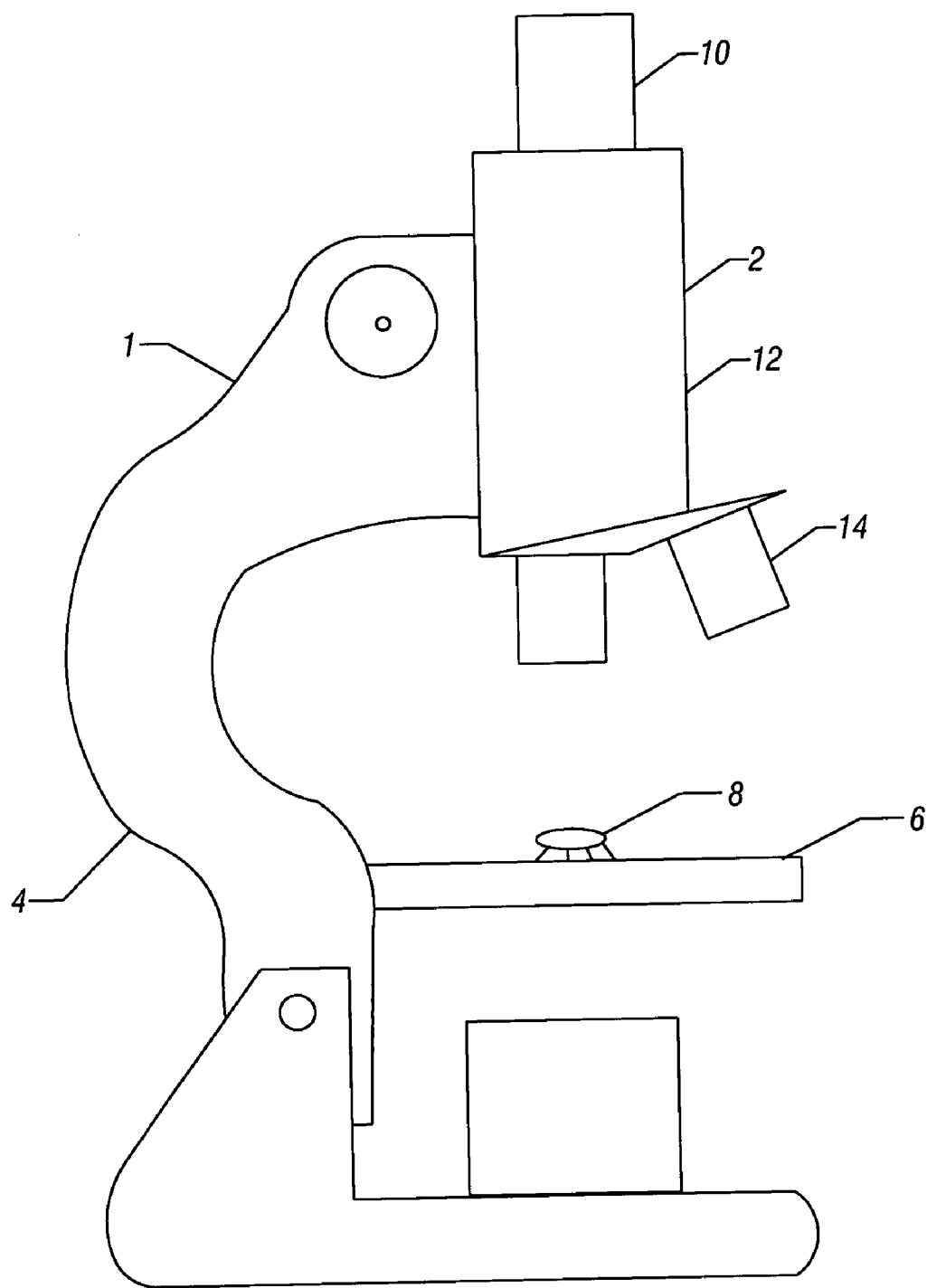


FIG. 1
(PRIOR ART)

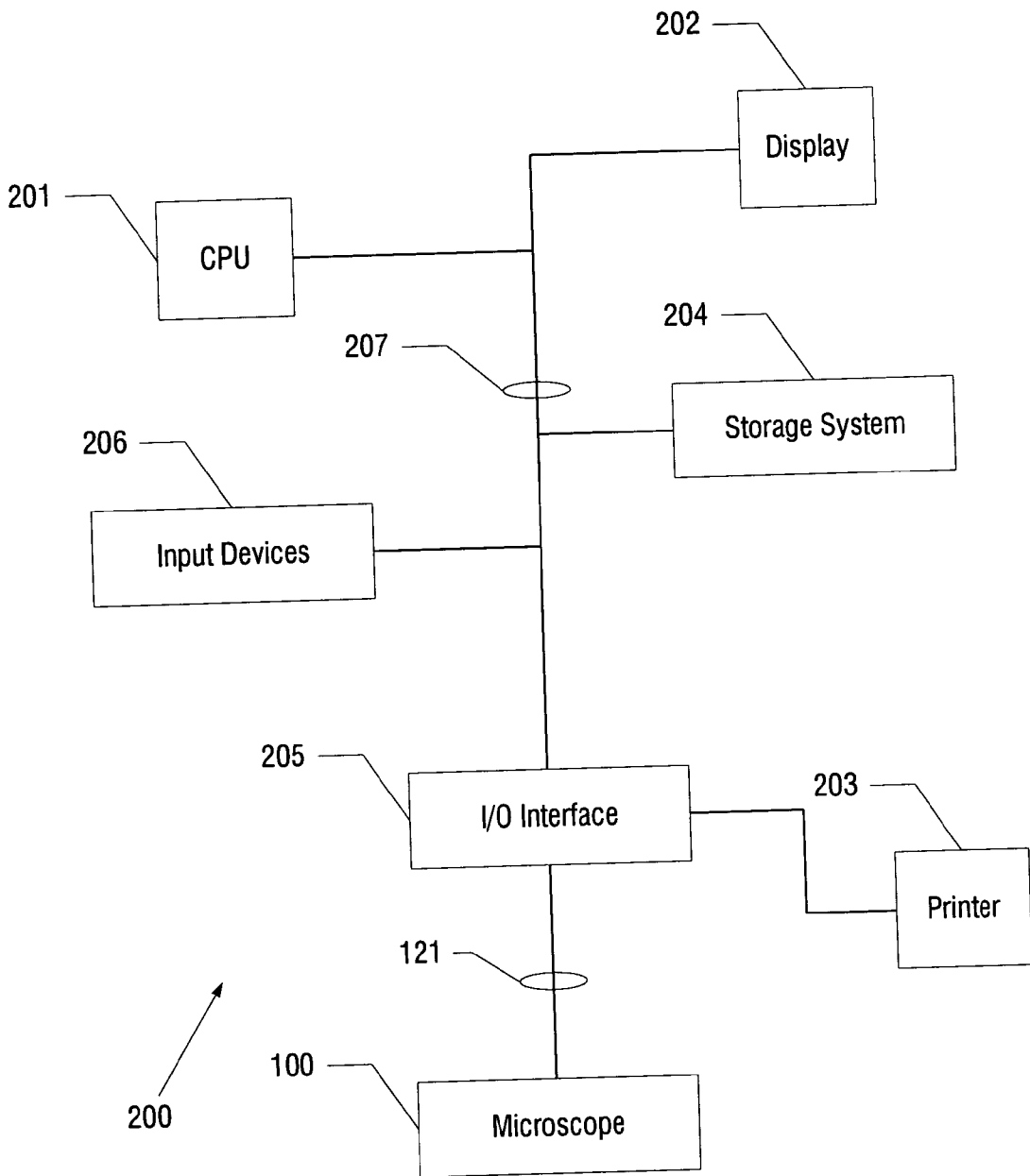


FIG. 2

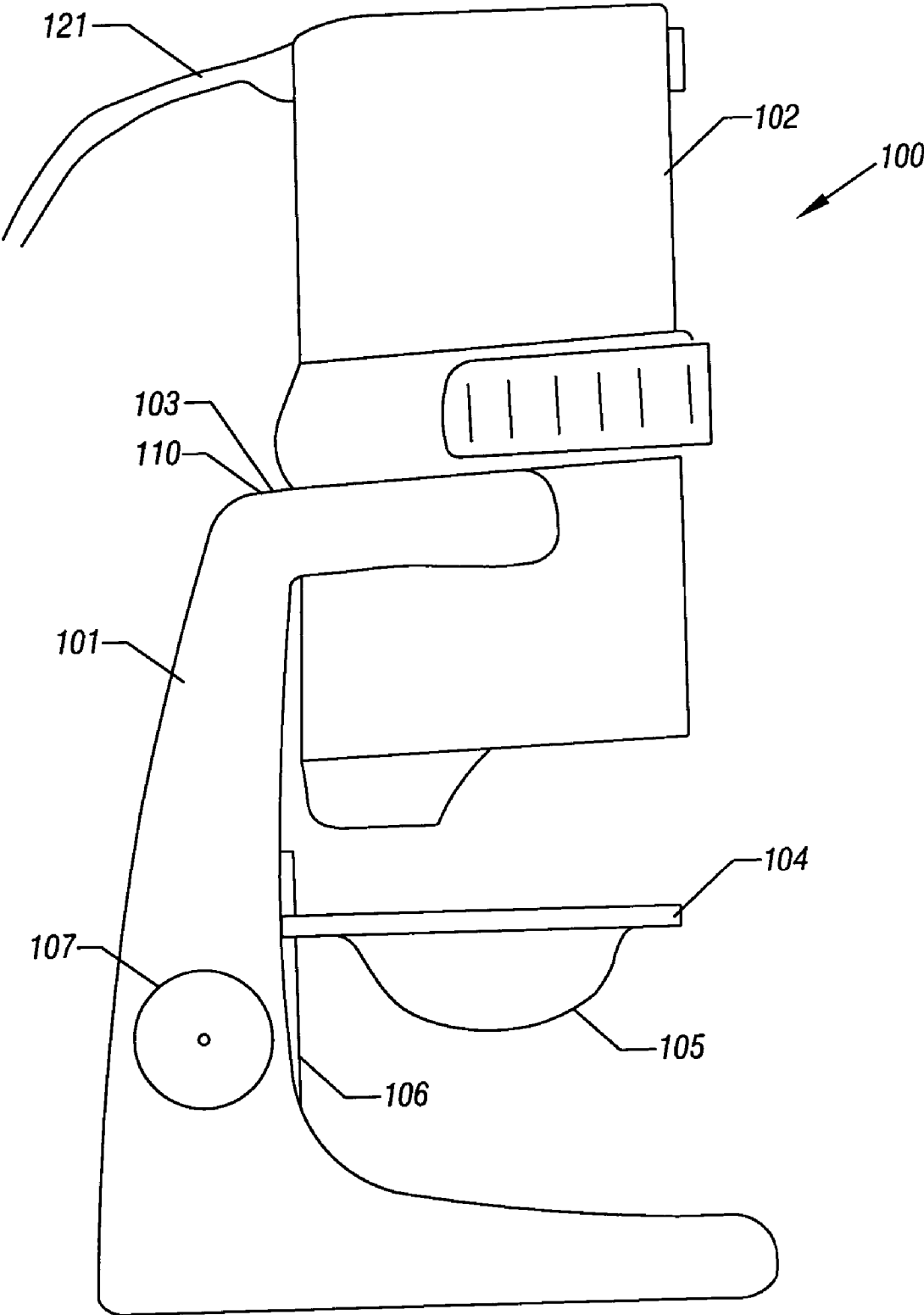


FIG. 3

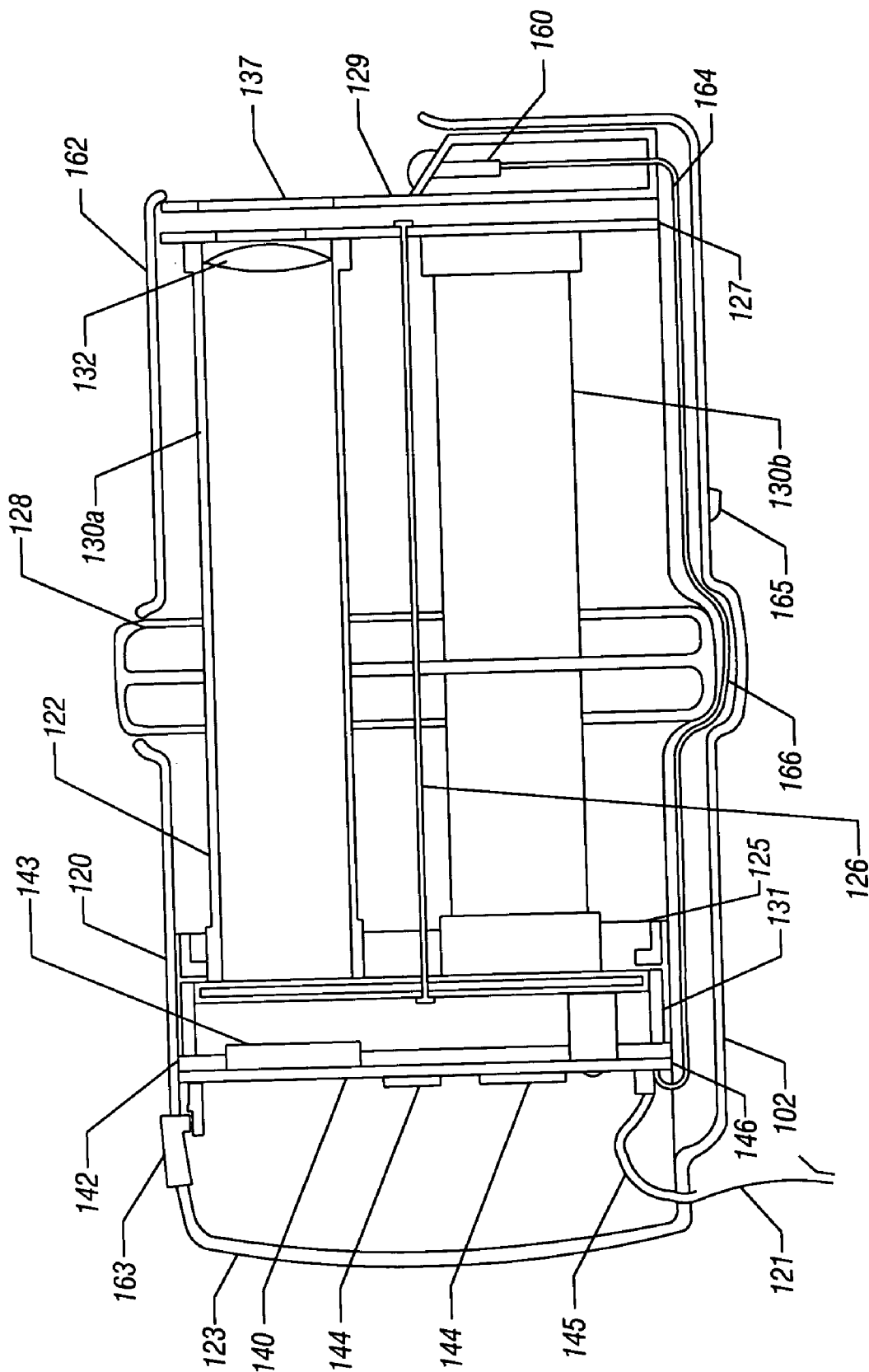


FIG. 4

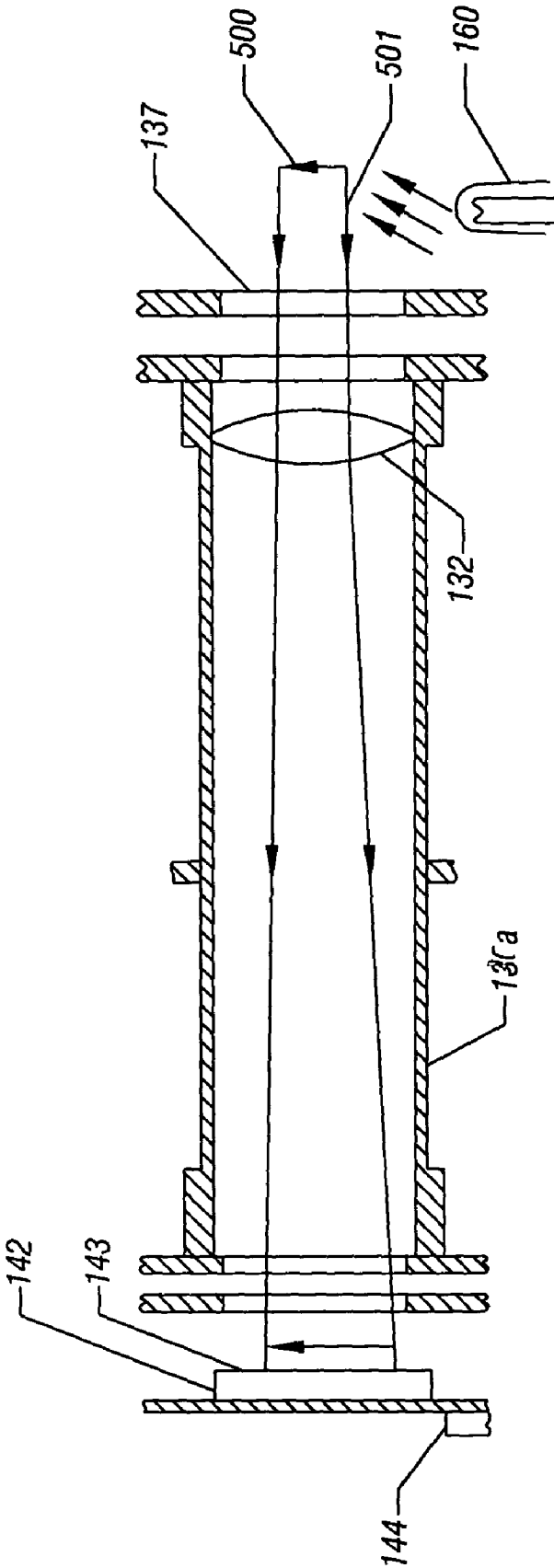


FIG. 5

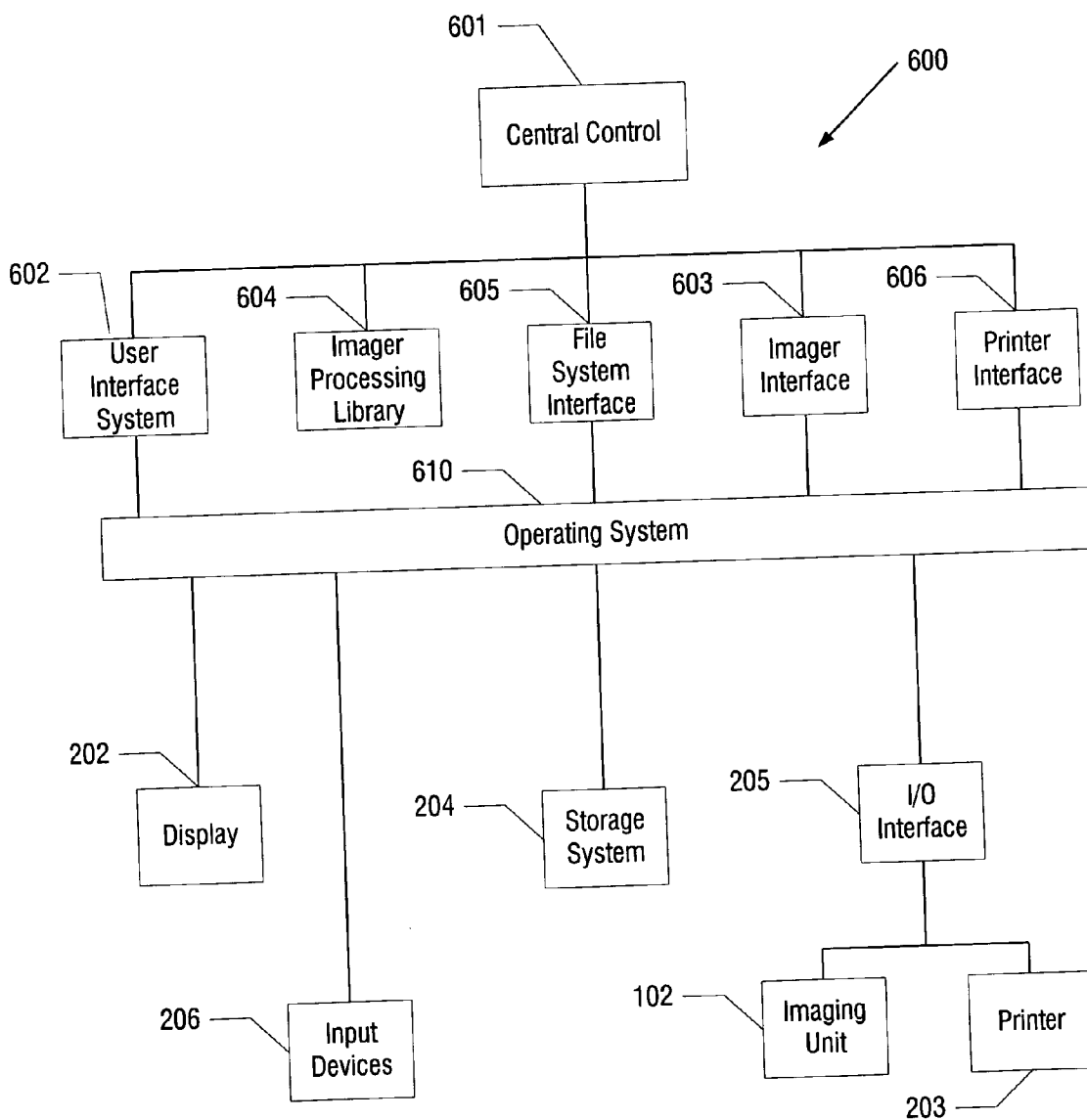


FIG. 6

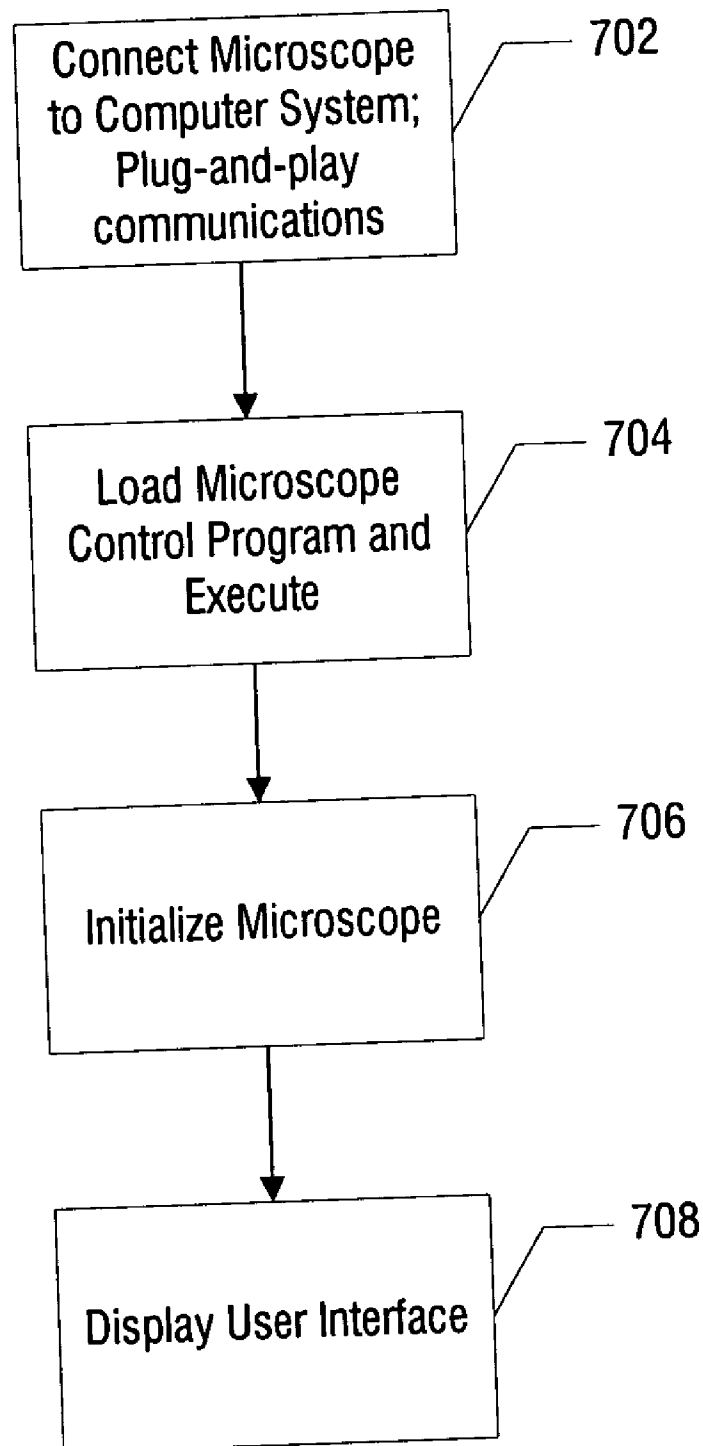
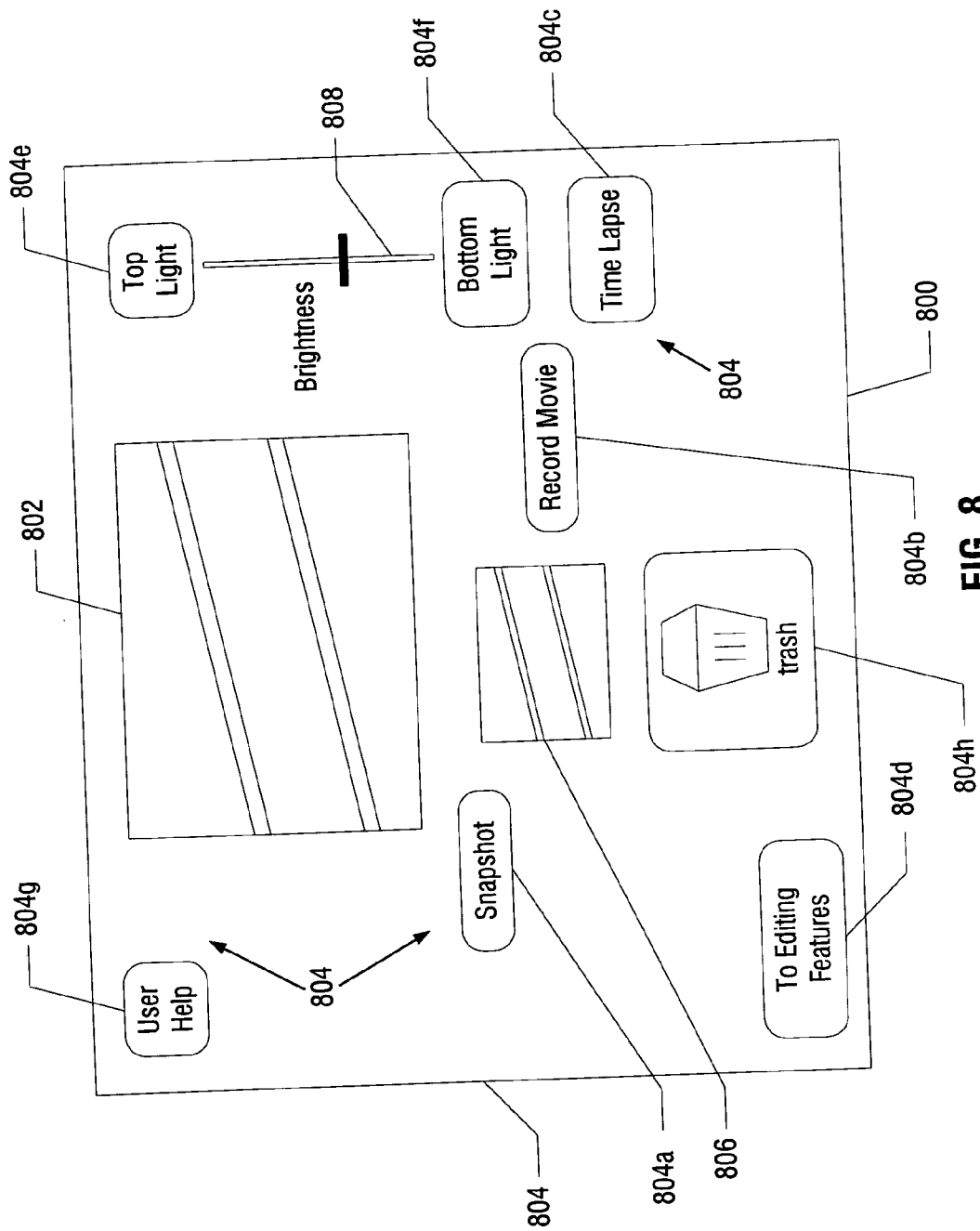
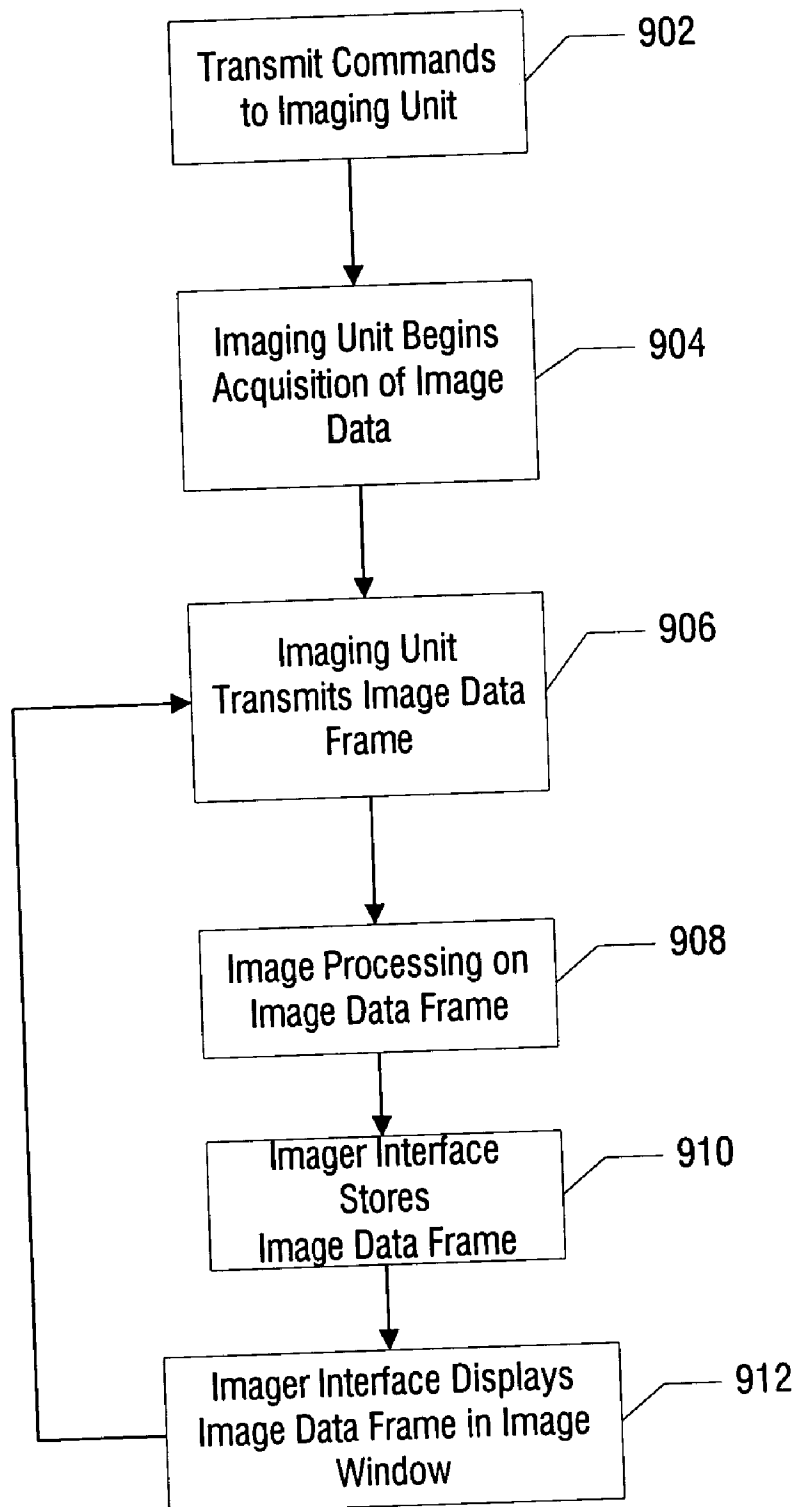


FIG. 7



**FIG. 9**

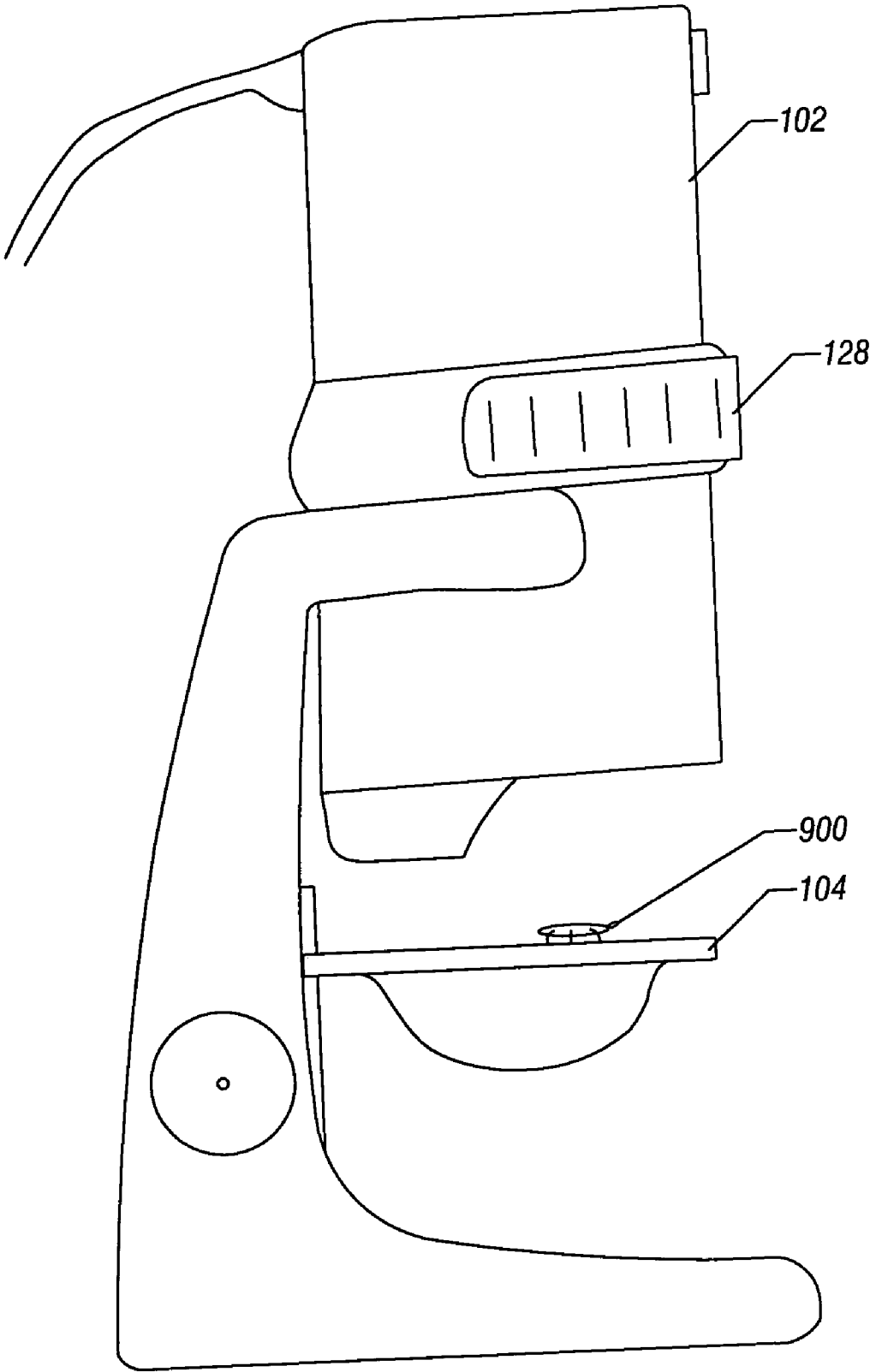


FIG. 10

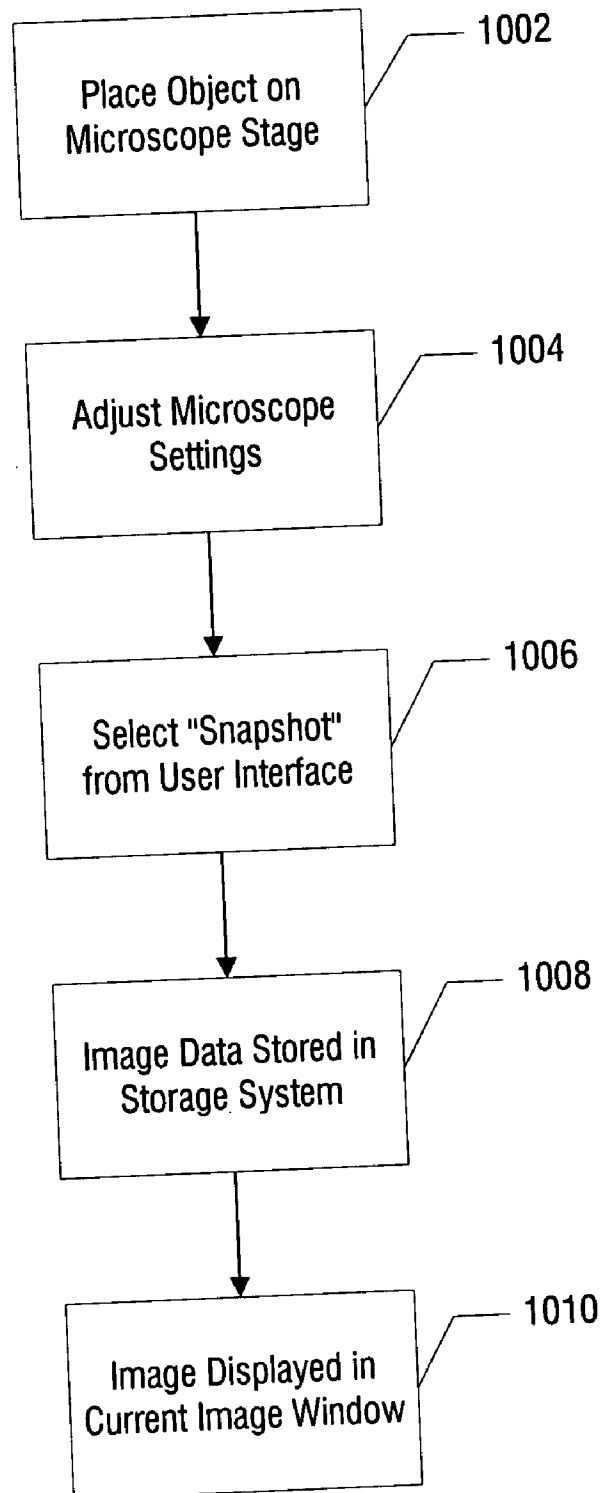


FIG. 11

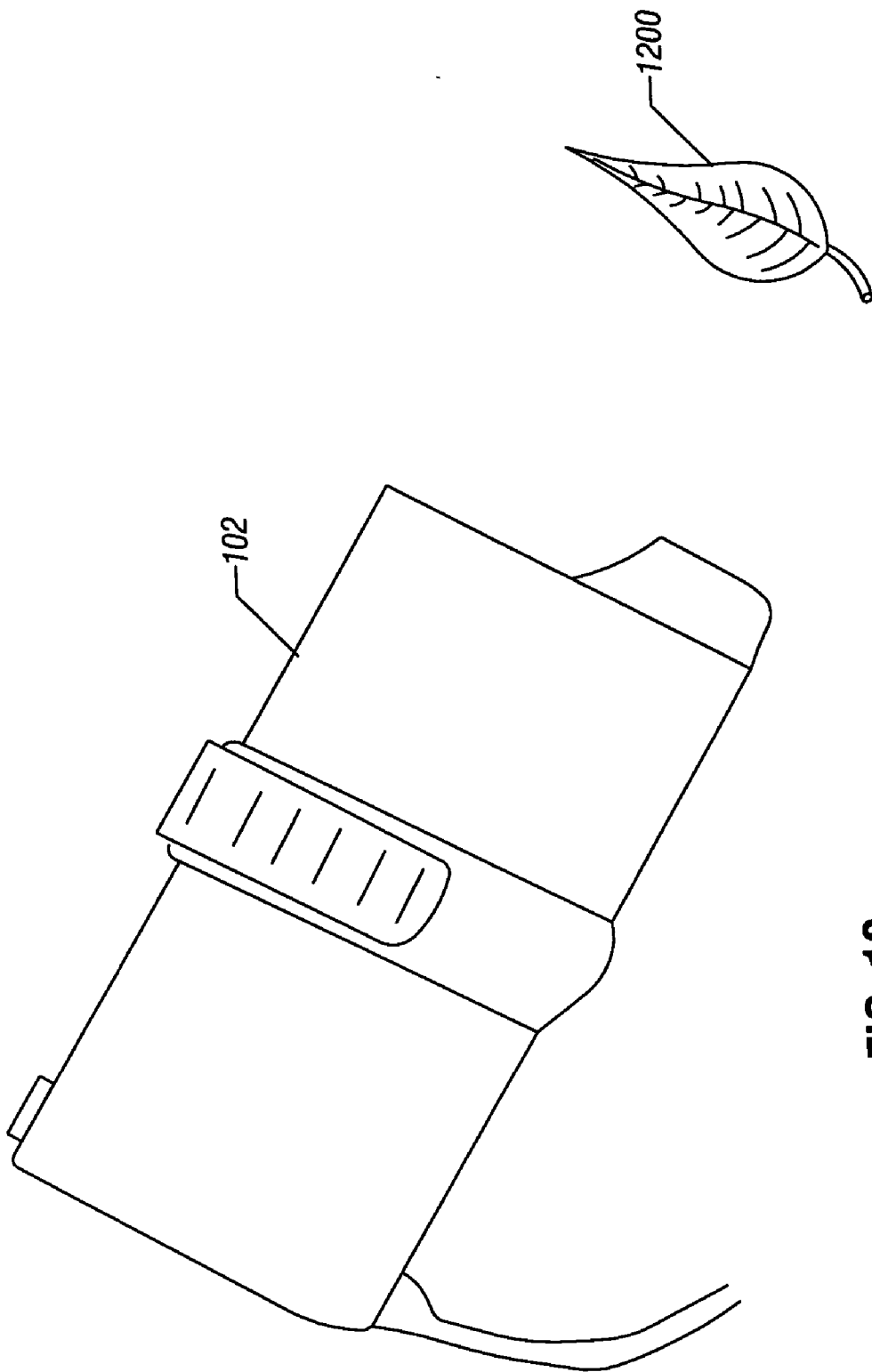


FIG. 12

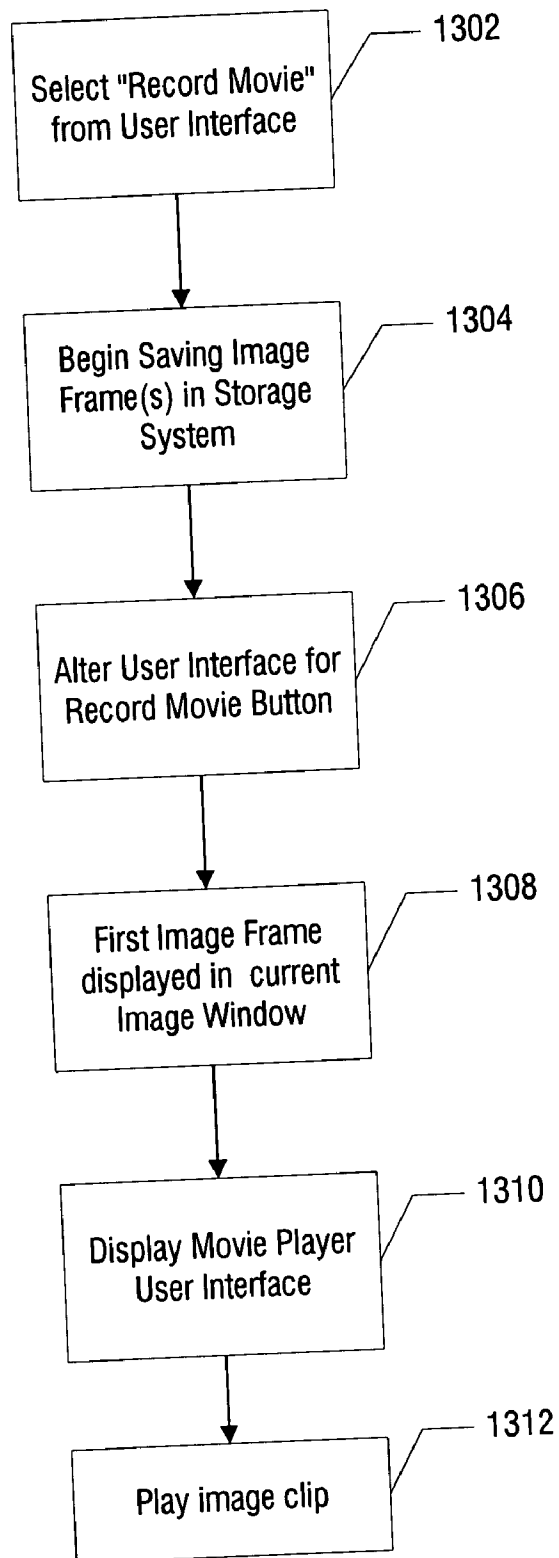


FIG. 13

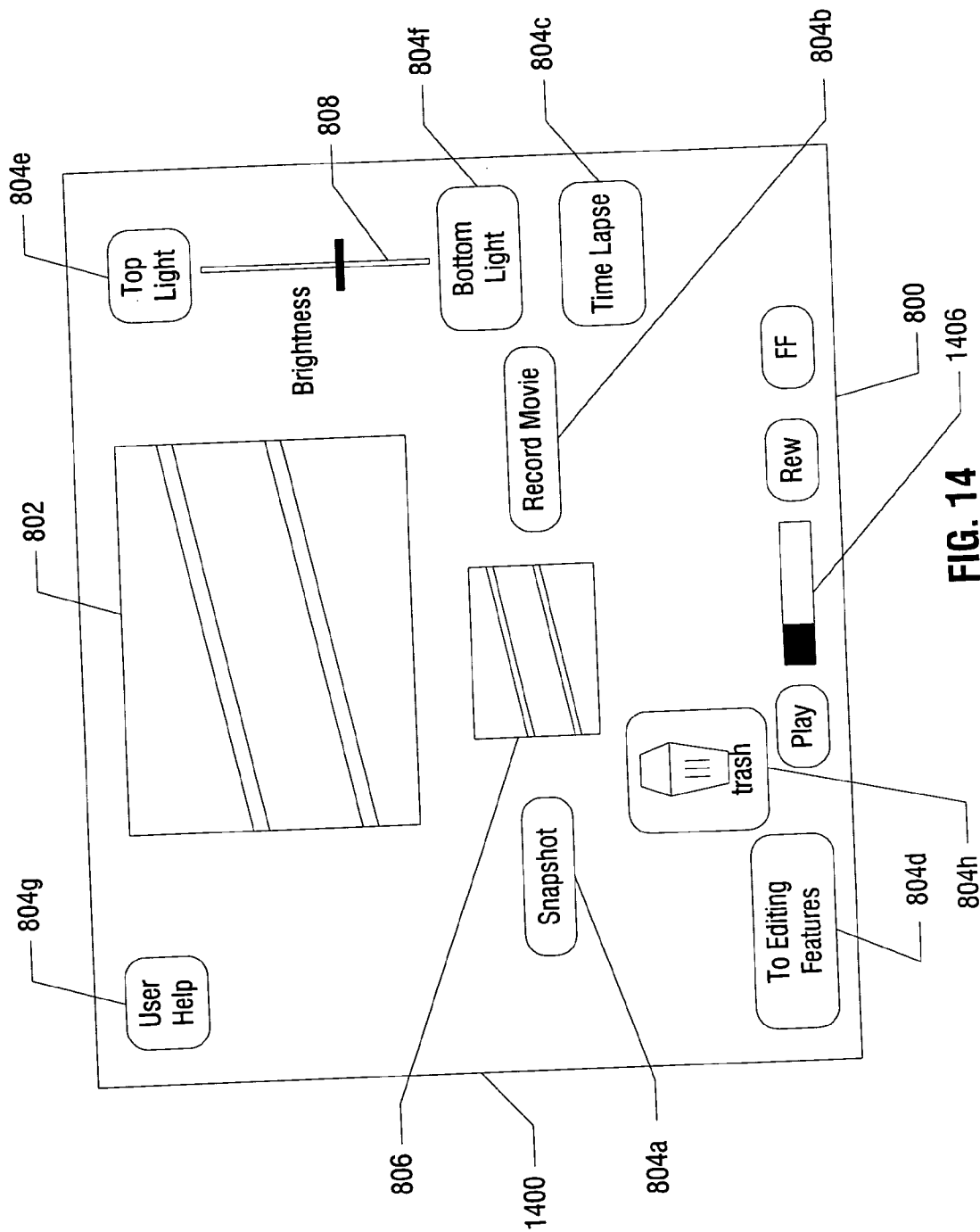
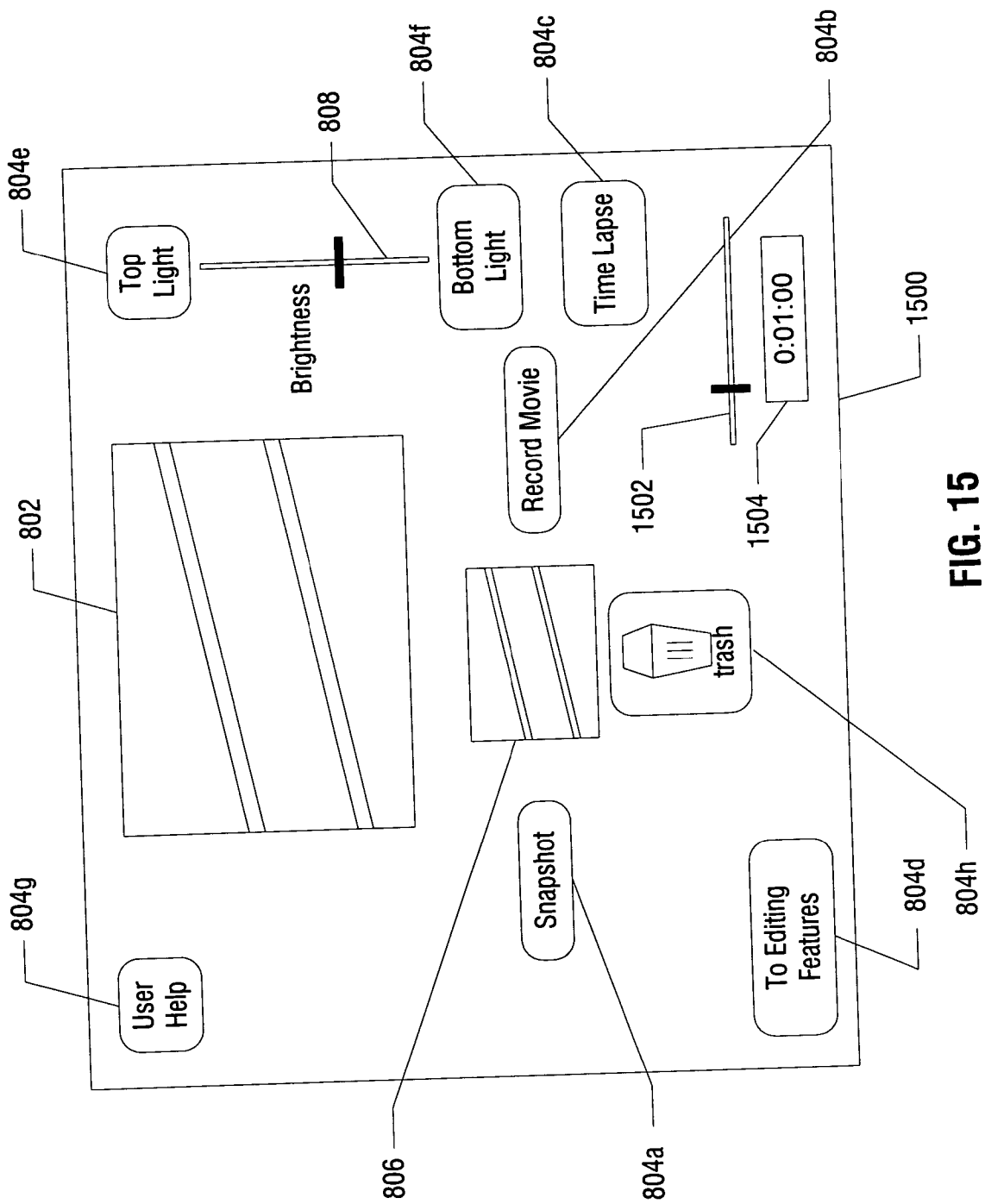
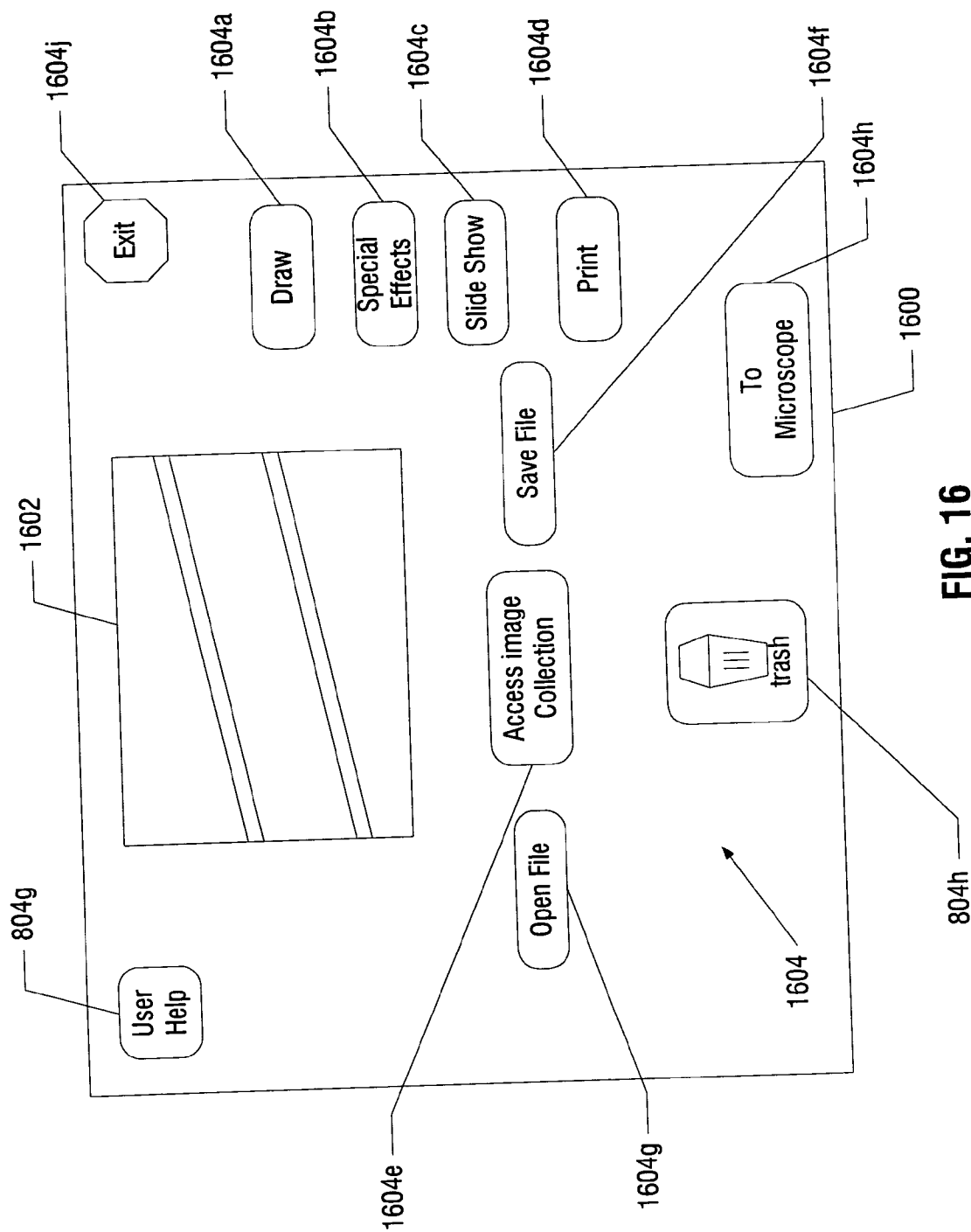


FIG. 14





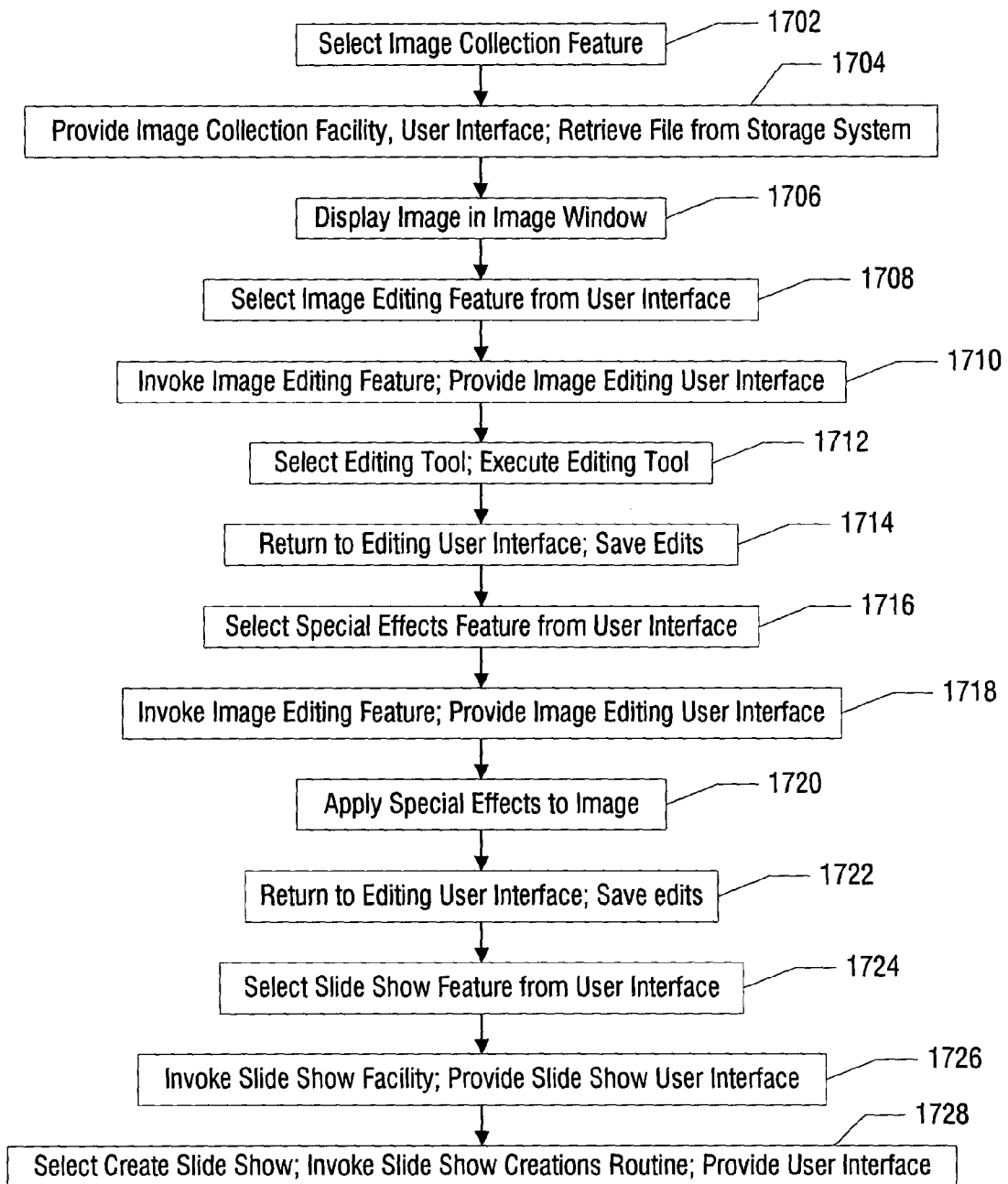


FIG. 17

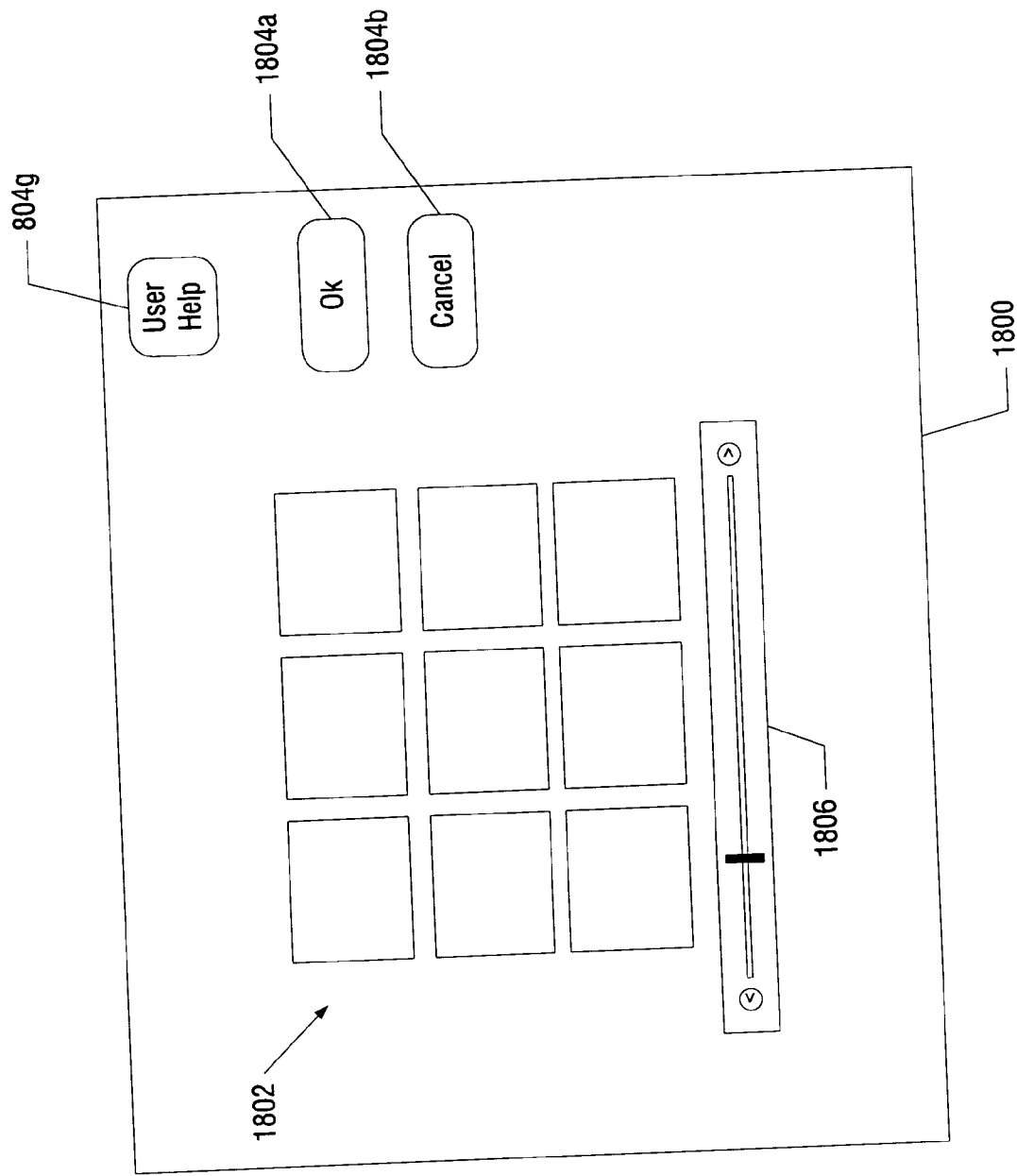


FIG. 18

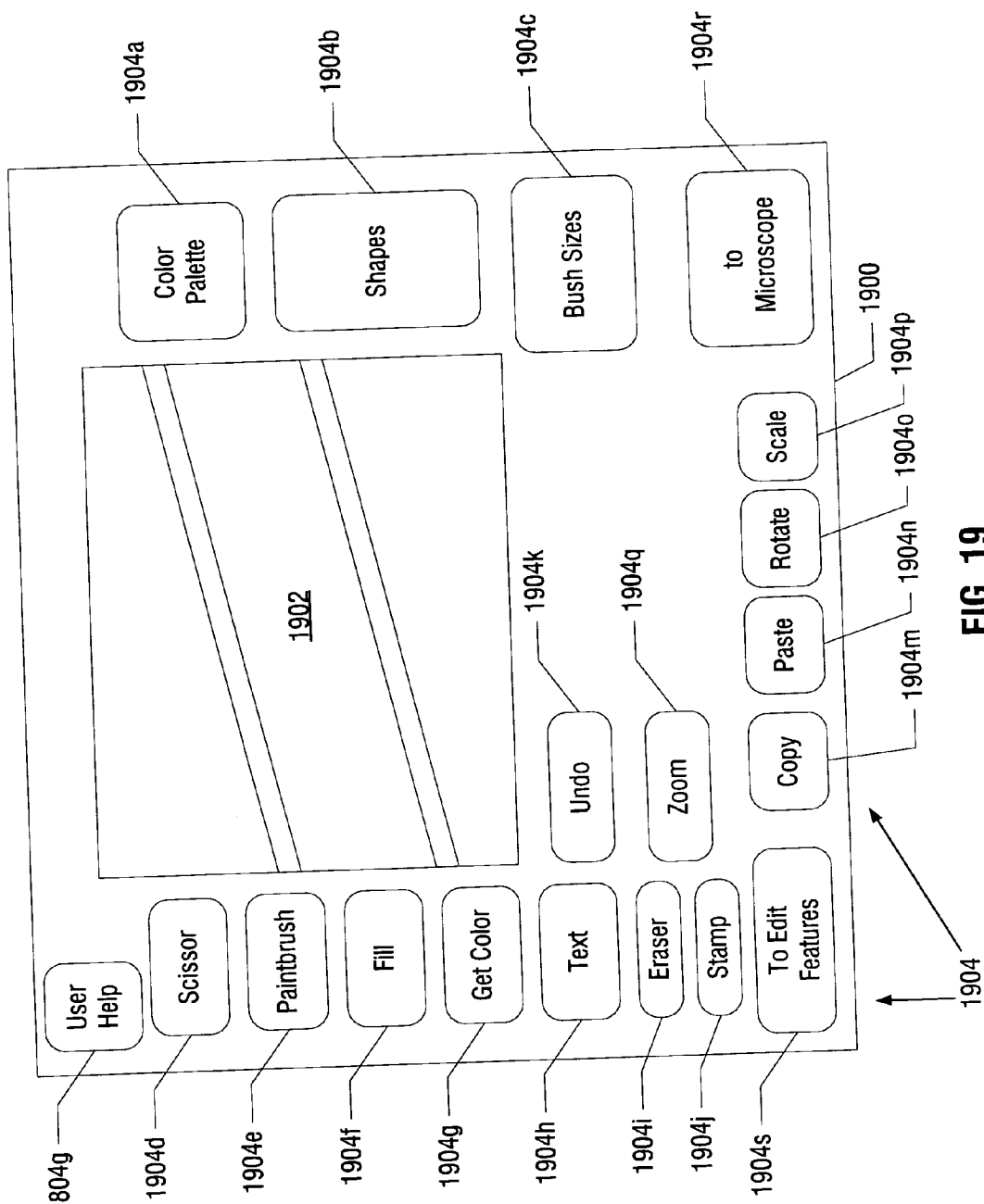


FIG. 19

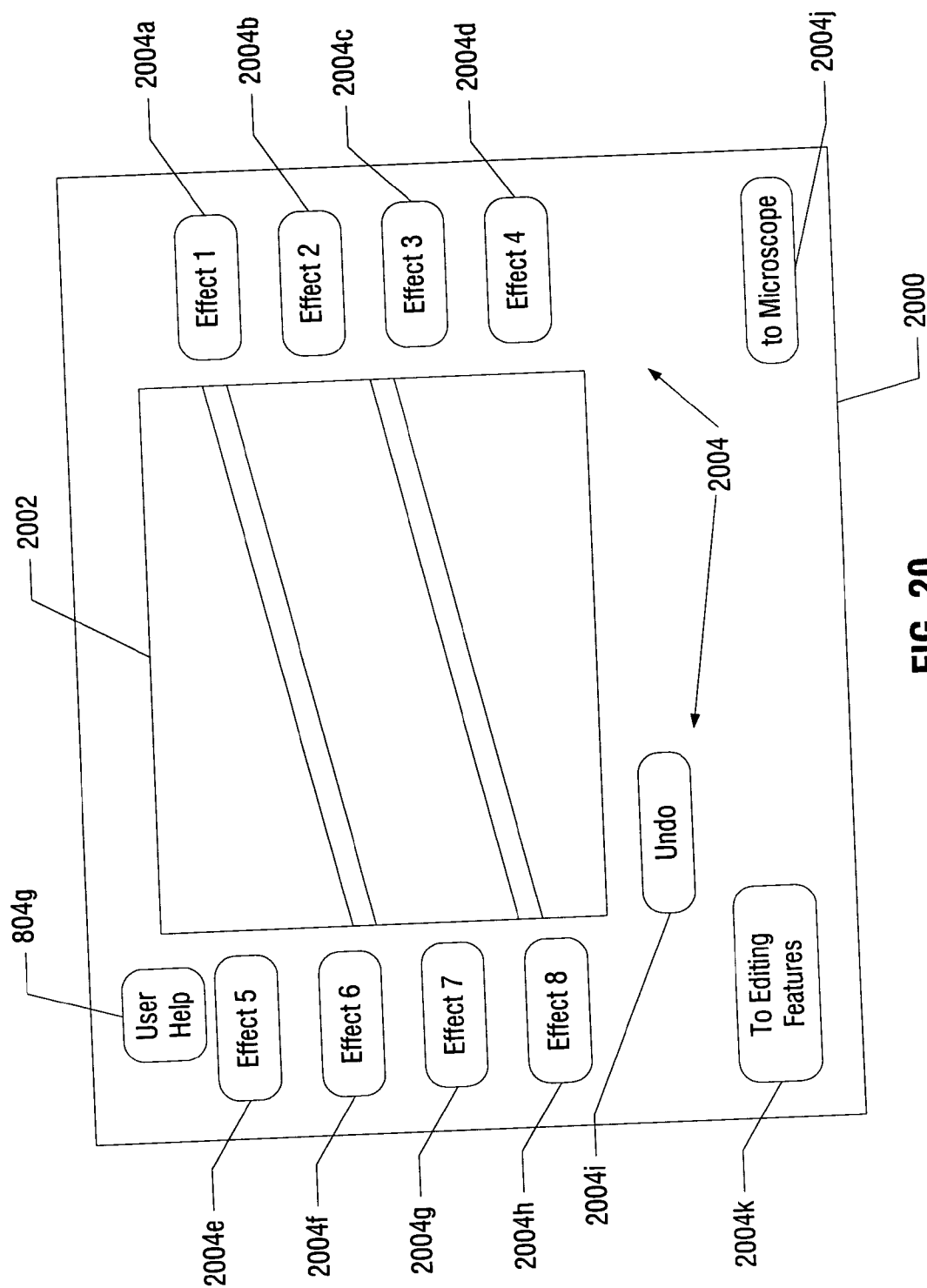
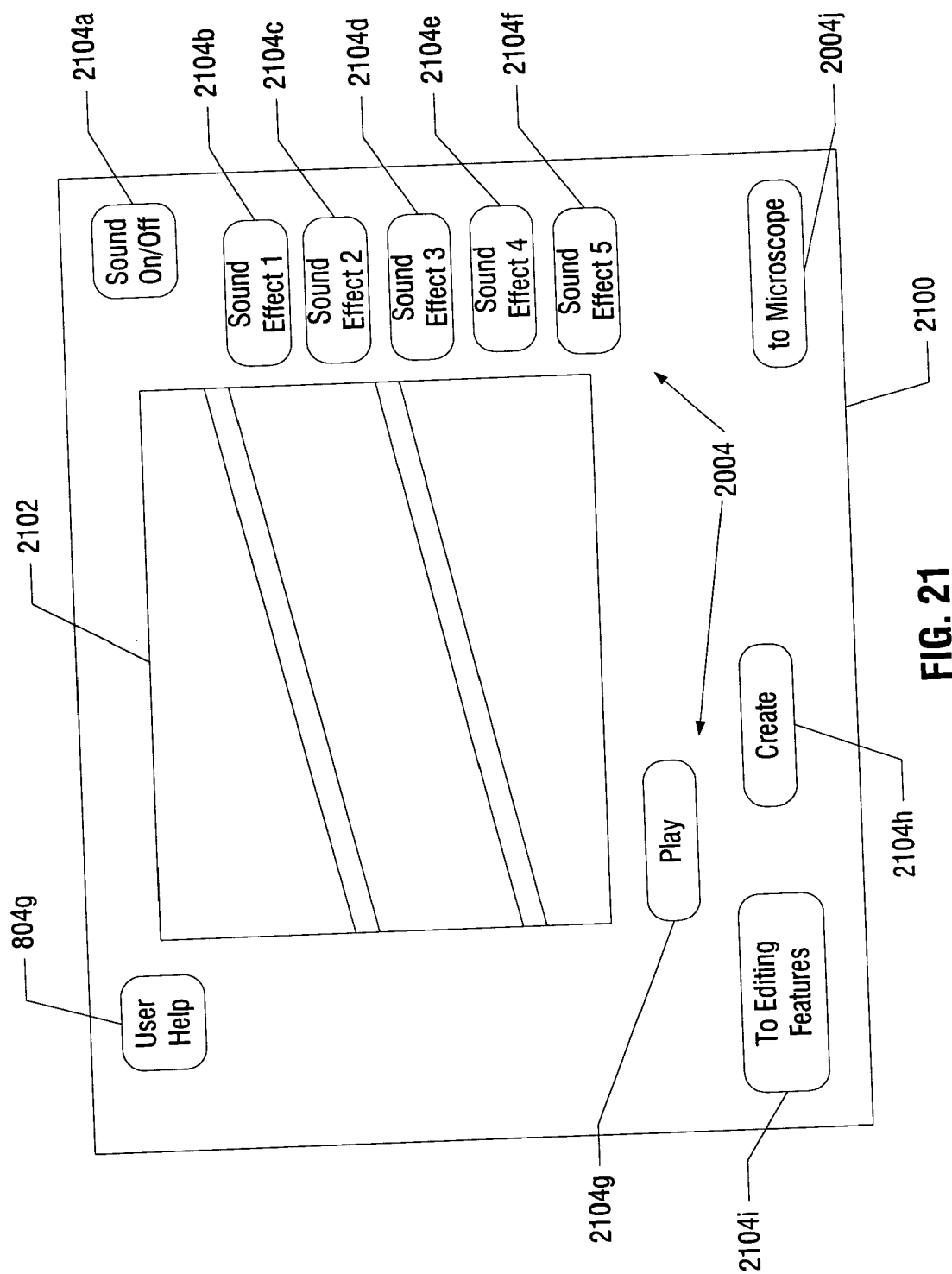


FIG. 20



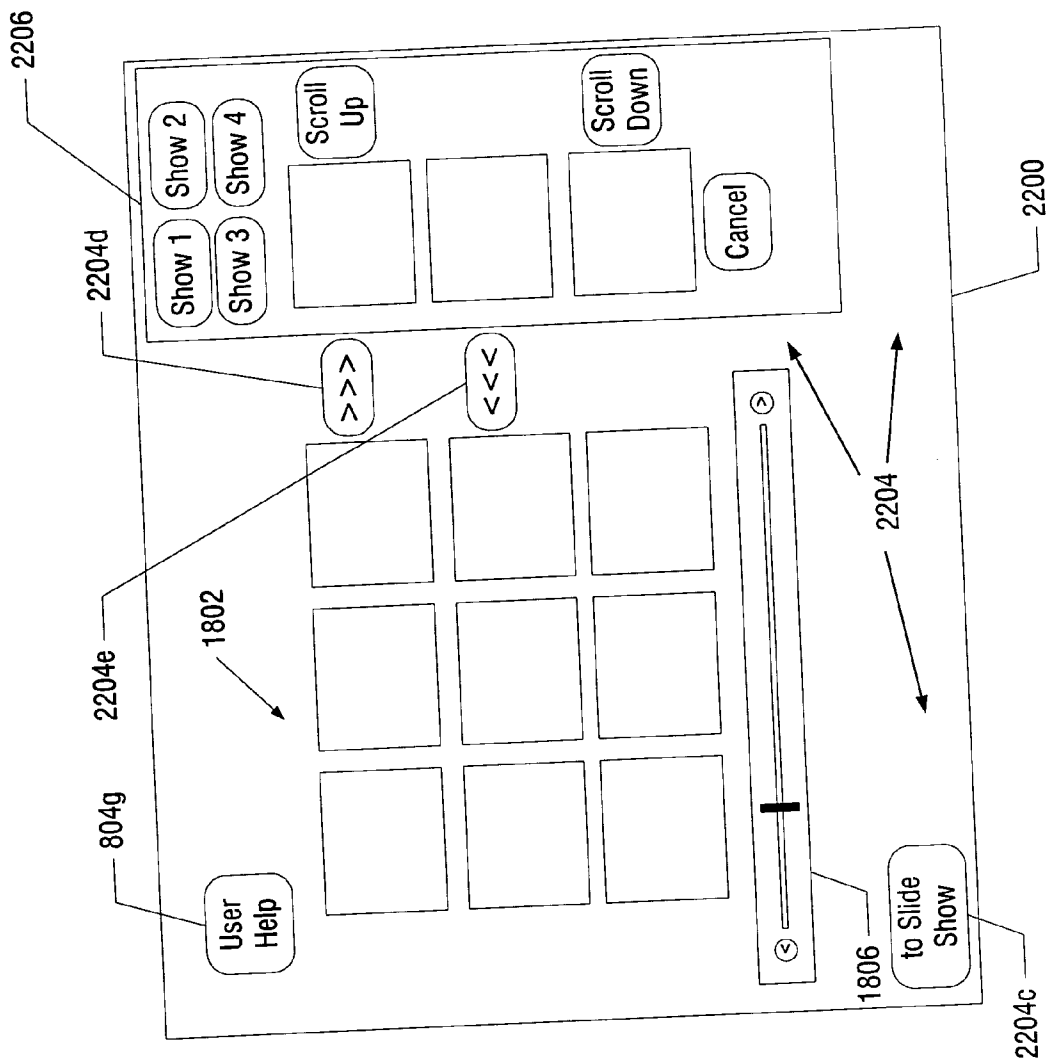


FIG. 22

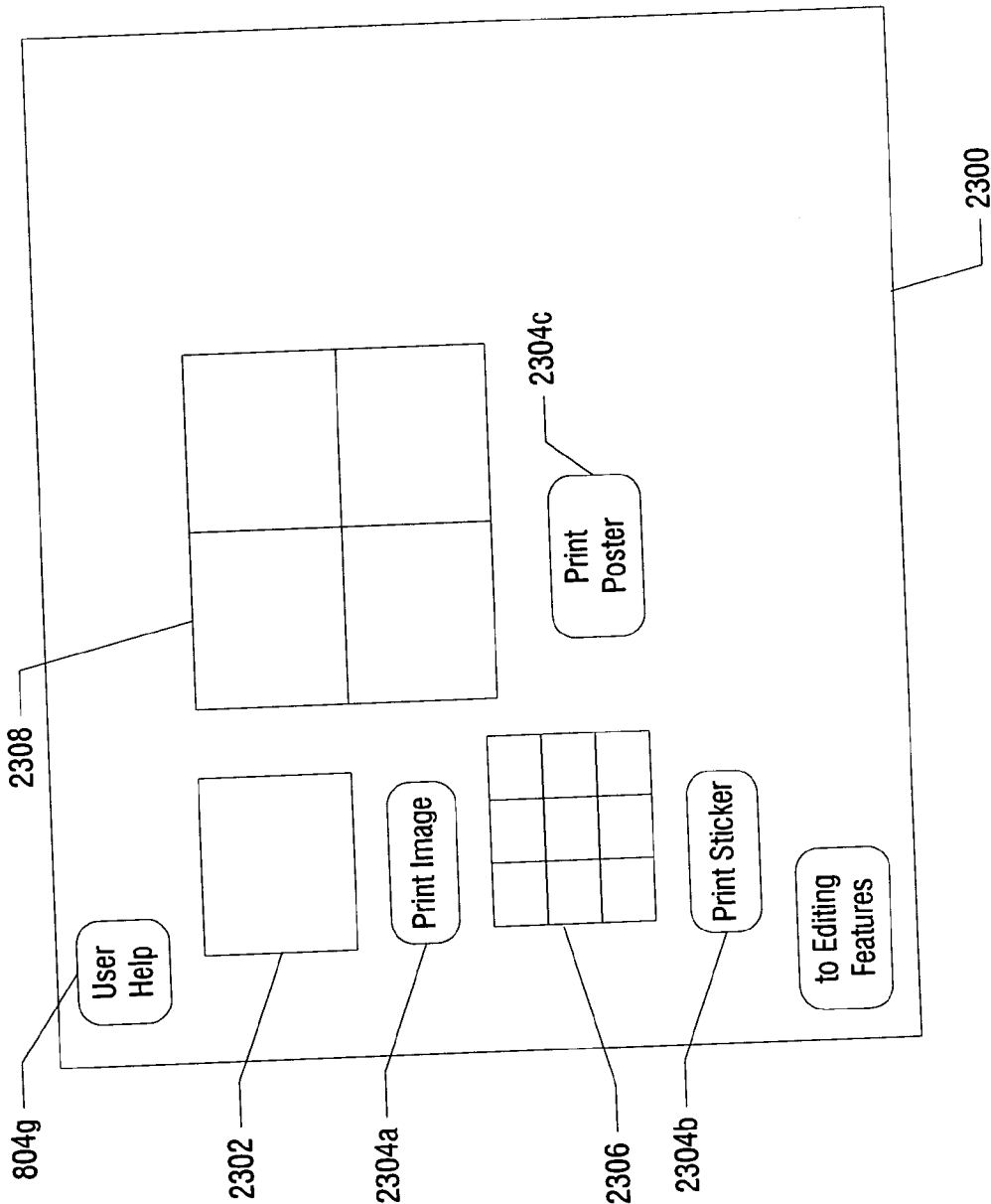


FIG. 23

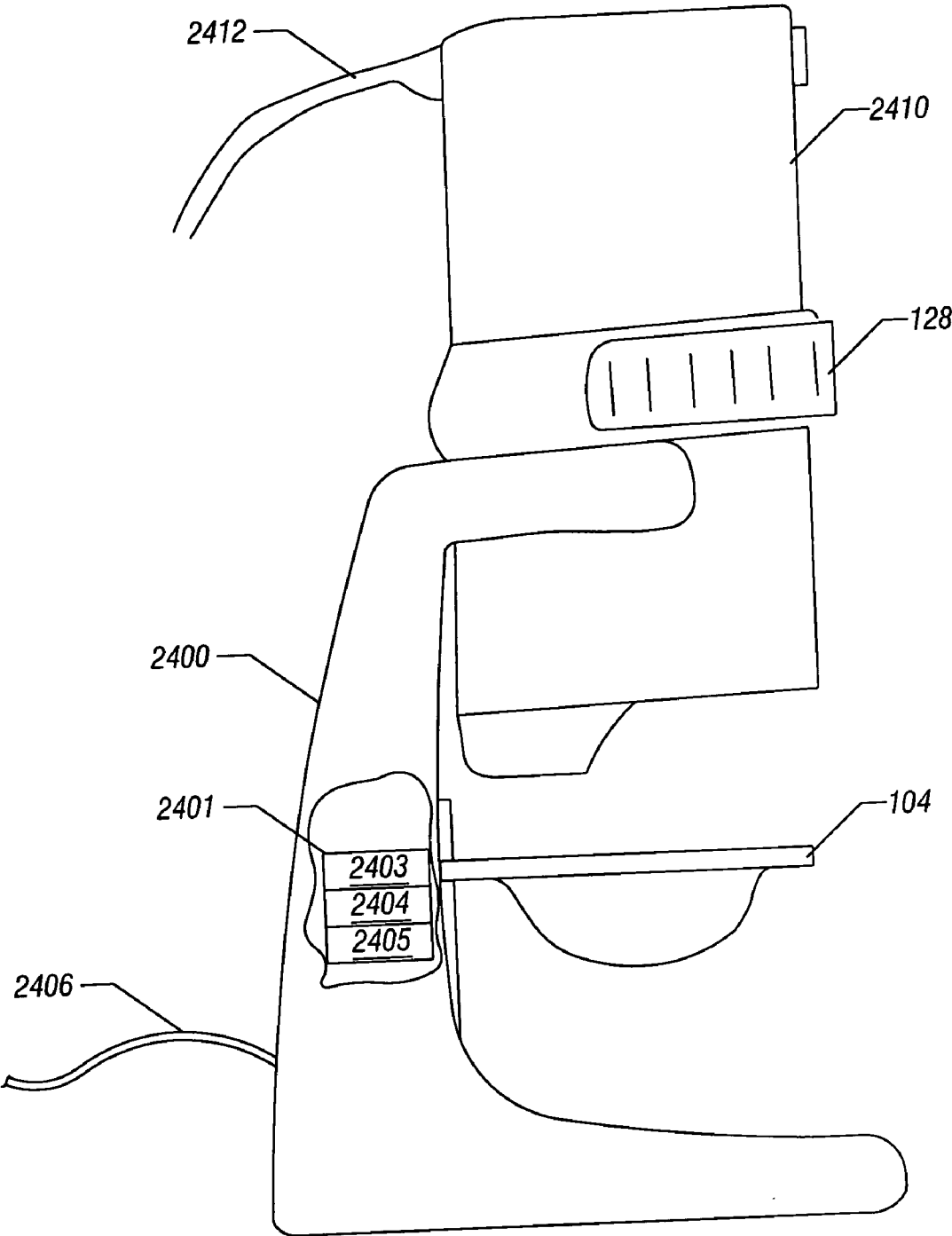
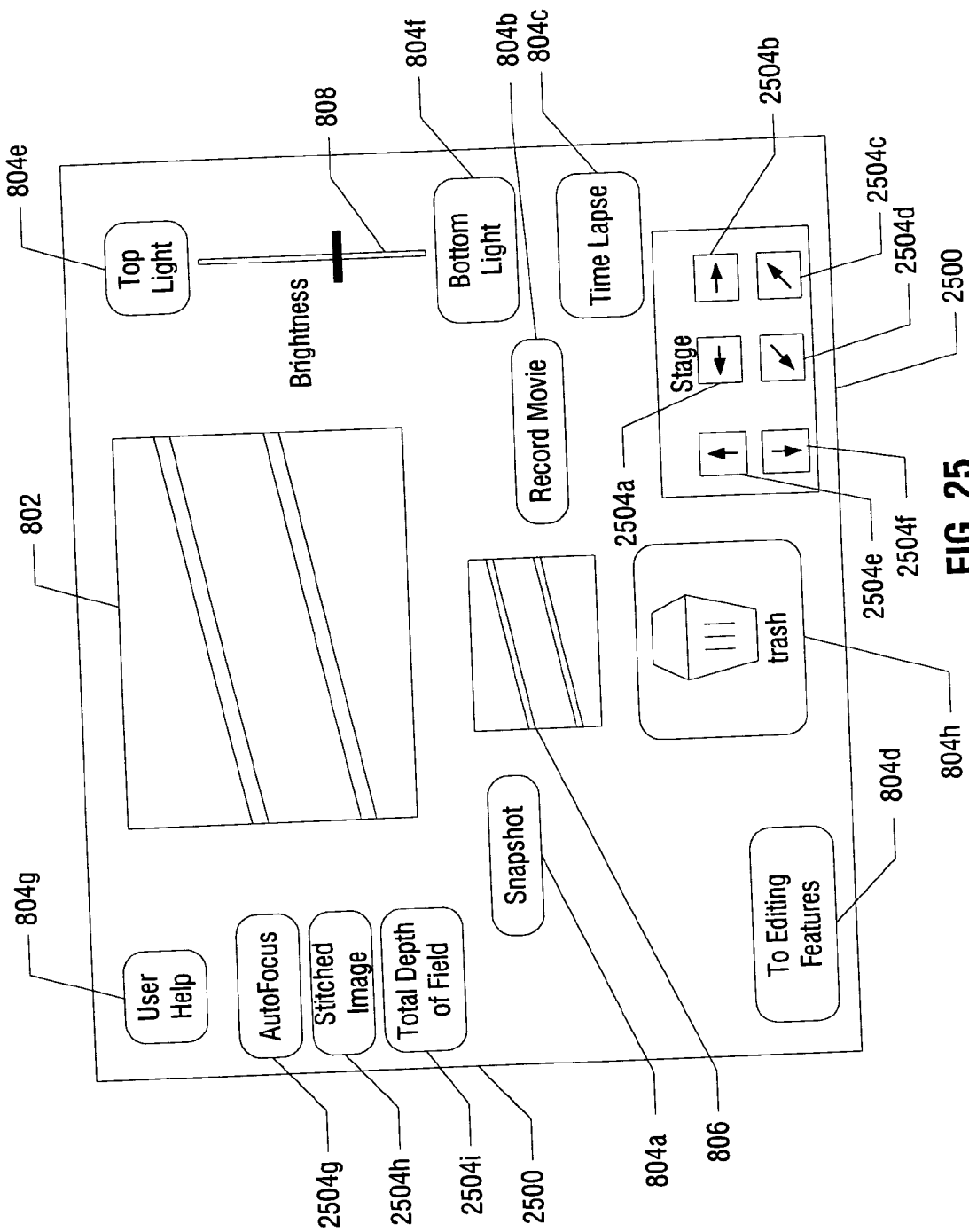


FIG. 24



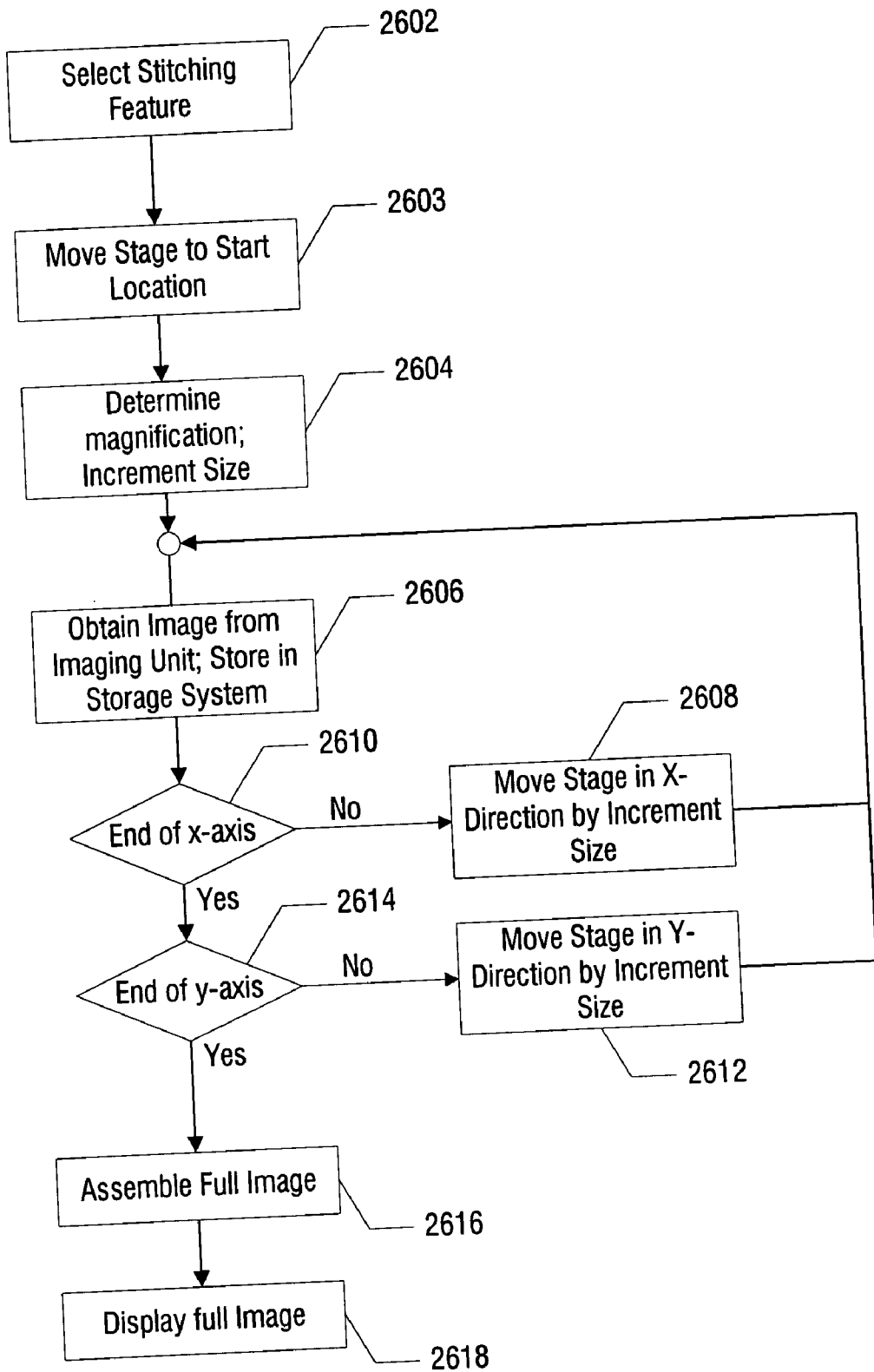


FIG. 26

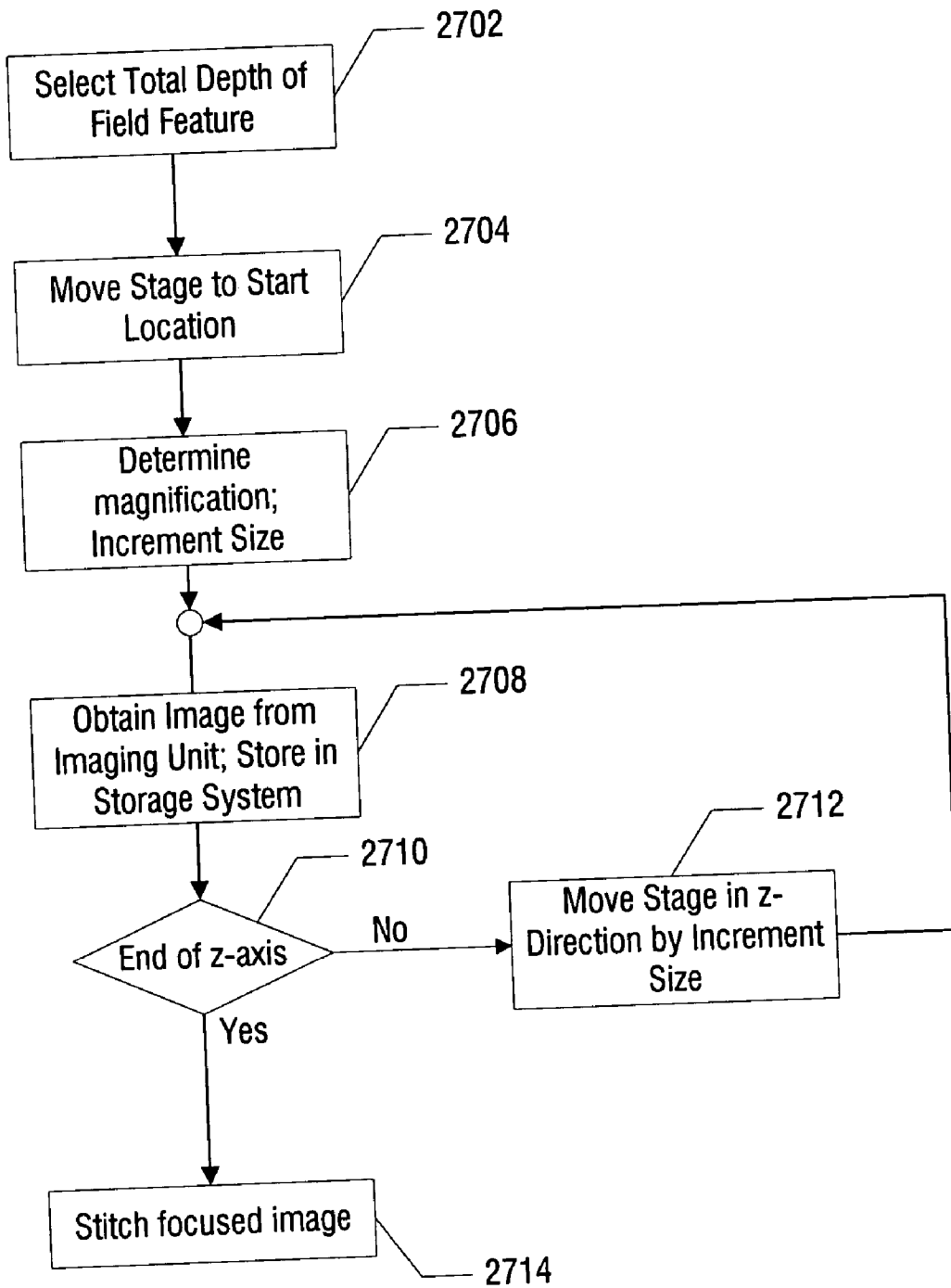


FIG. 27

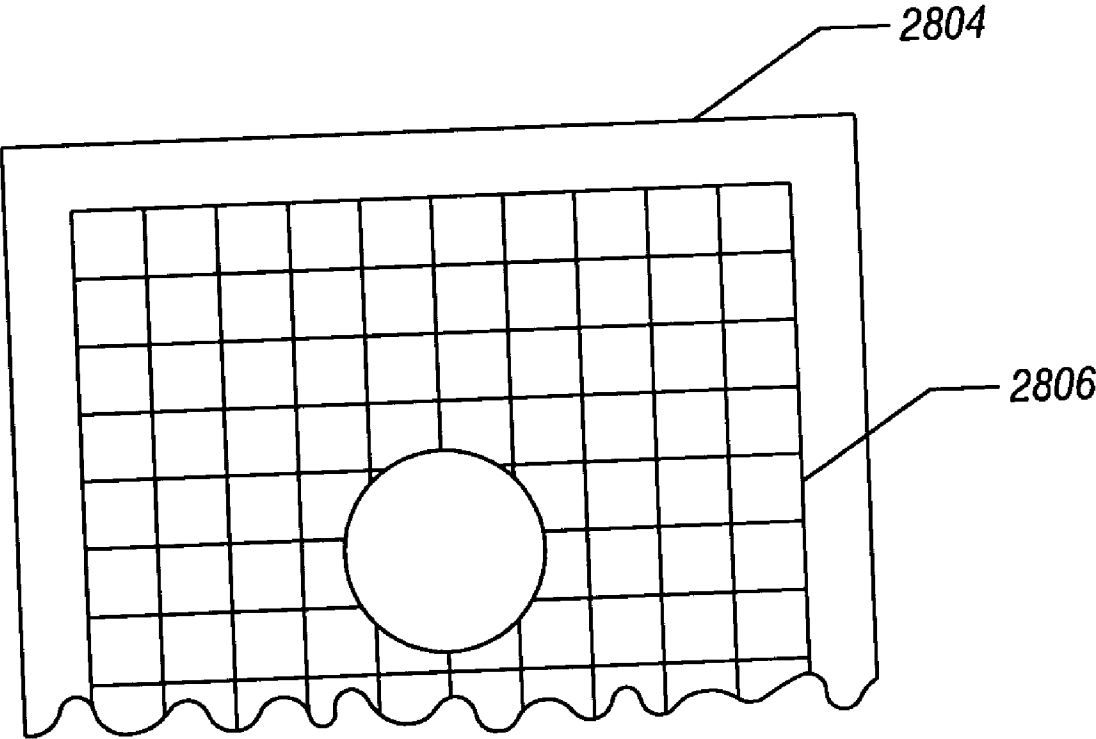


FIG. 28

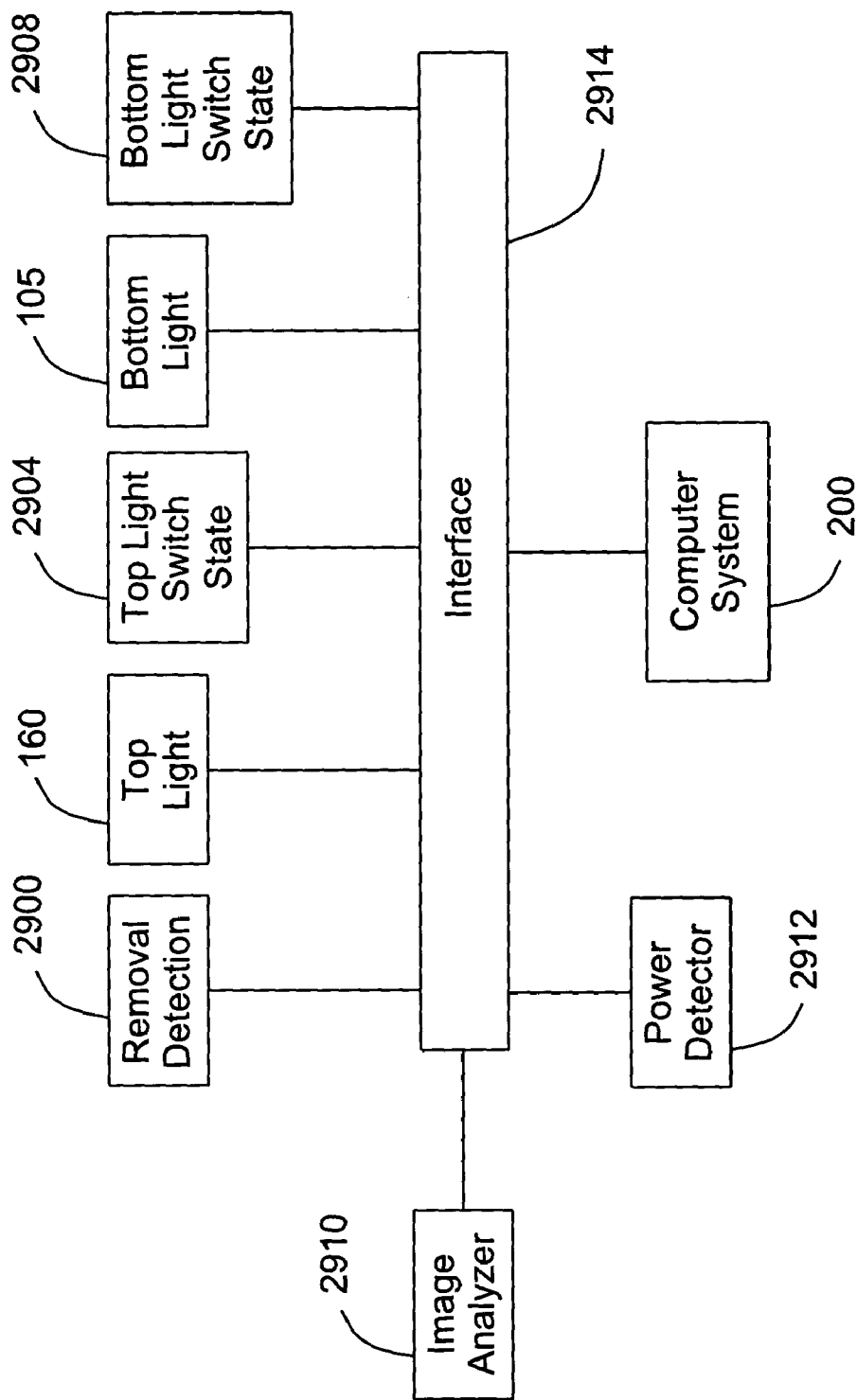


FIG. 29

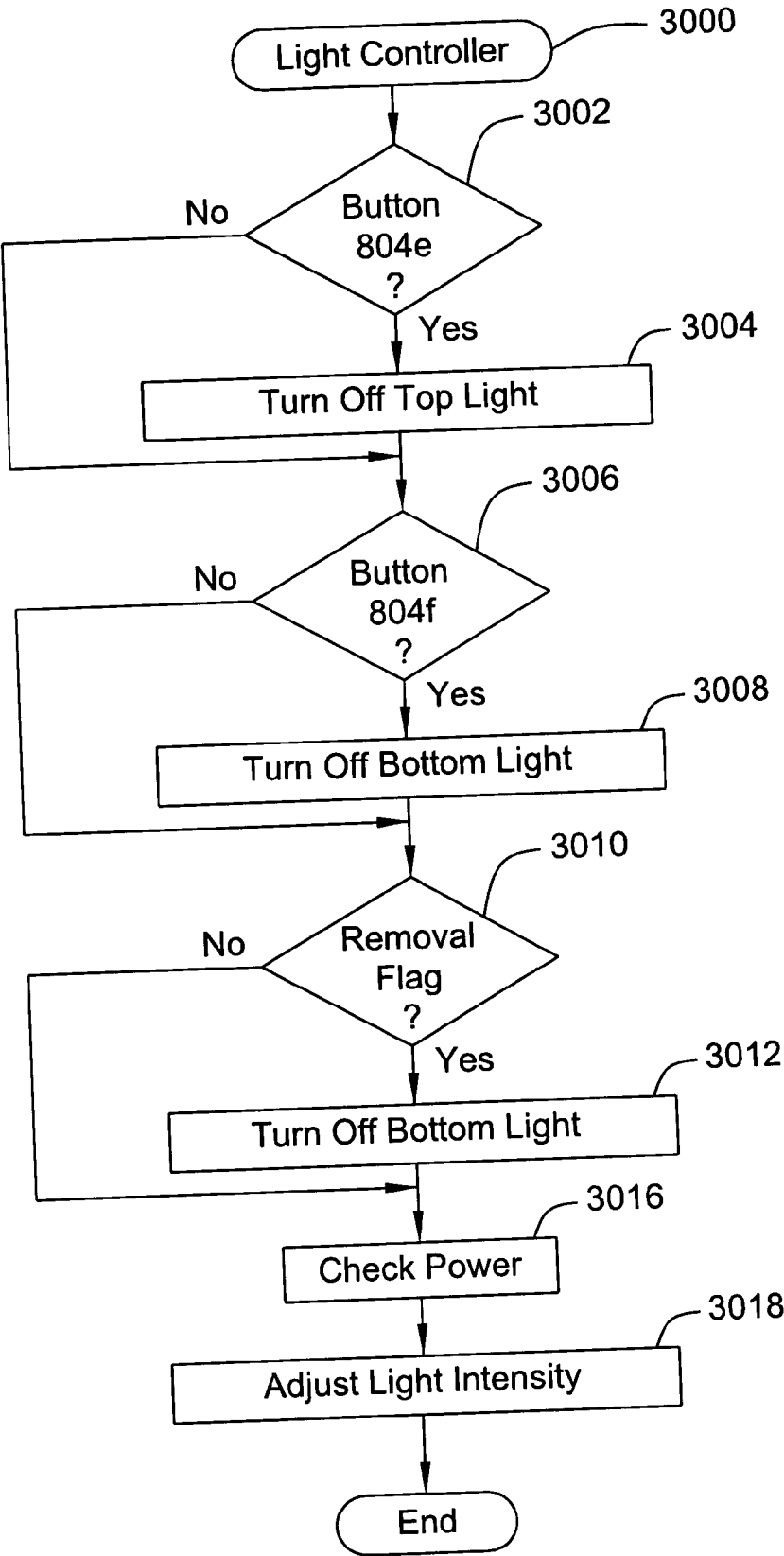


FIG. 30

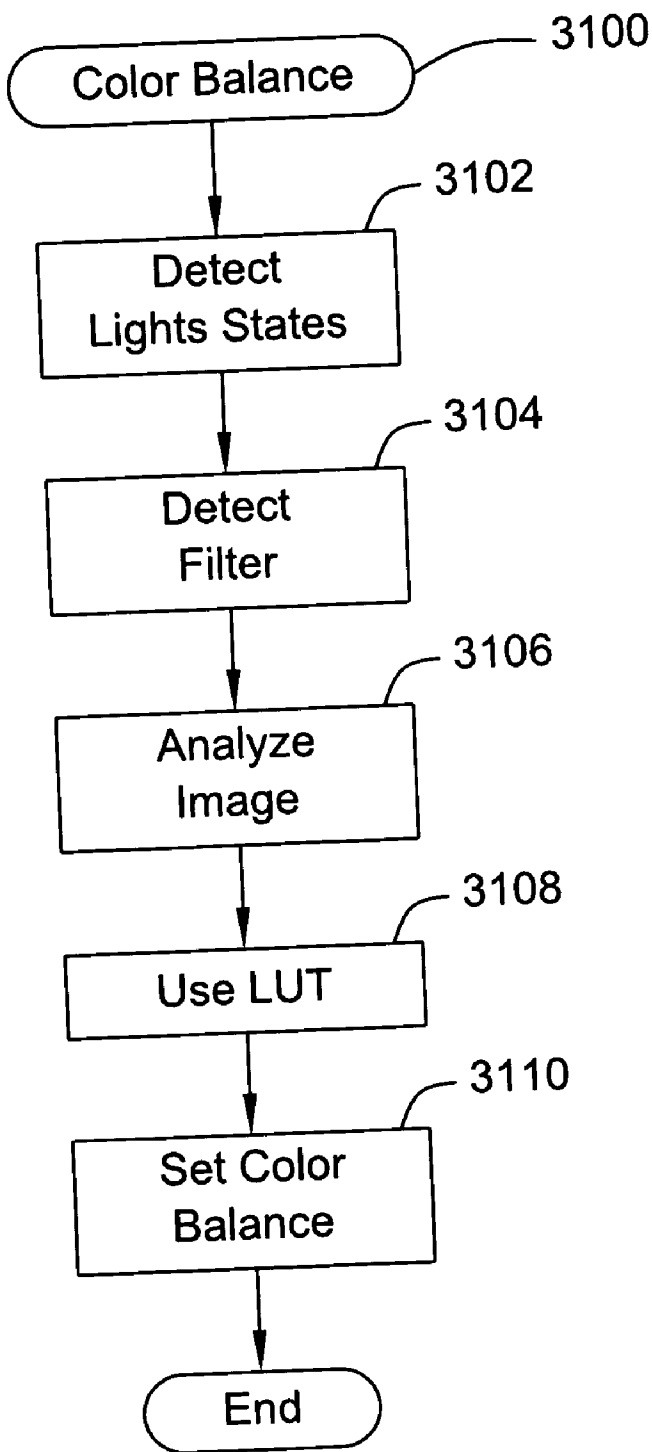


FIG. 31

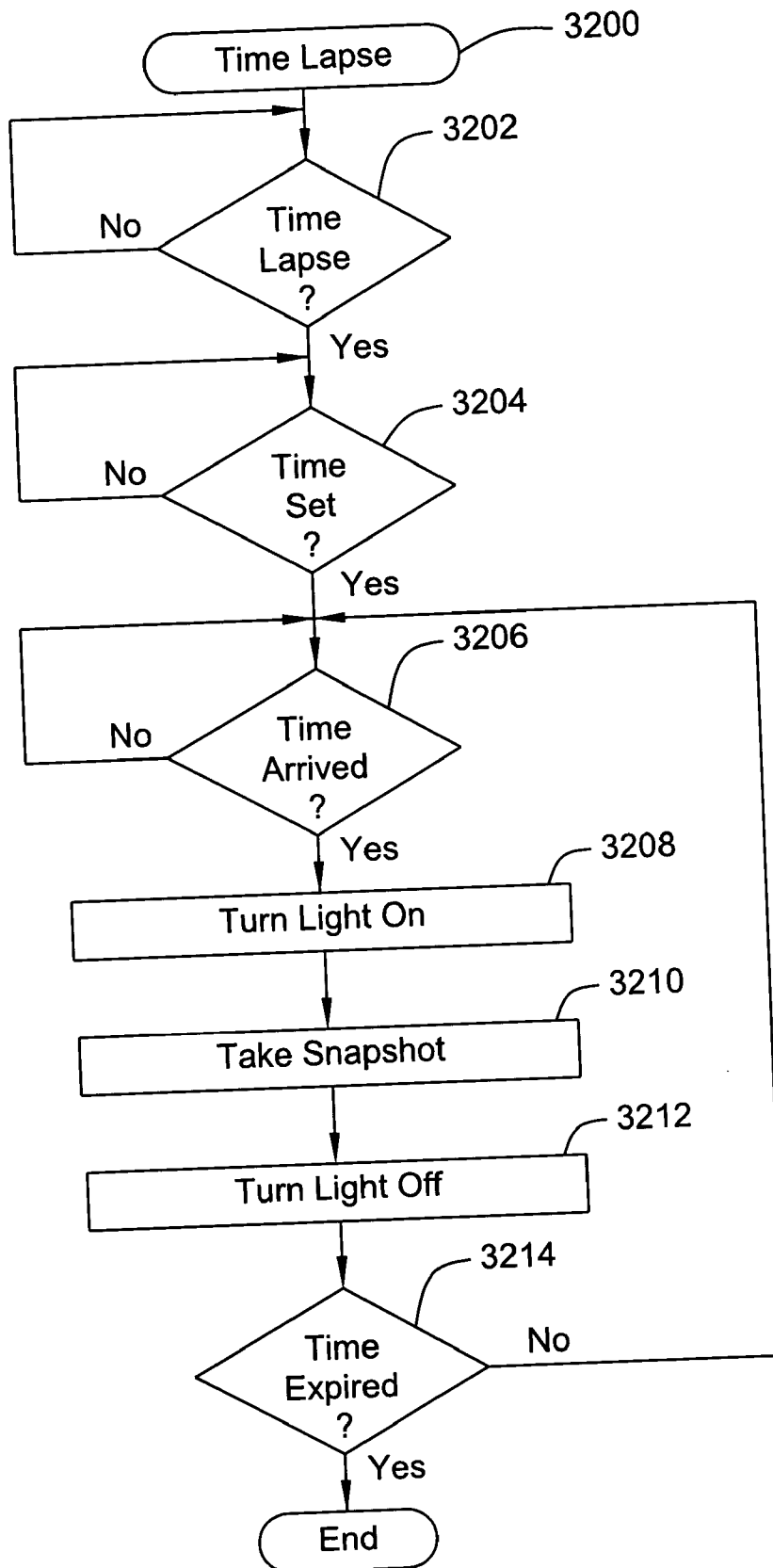


FIG. 32

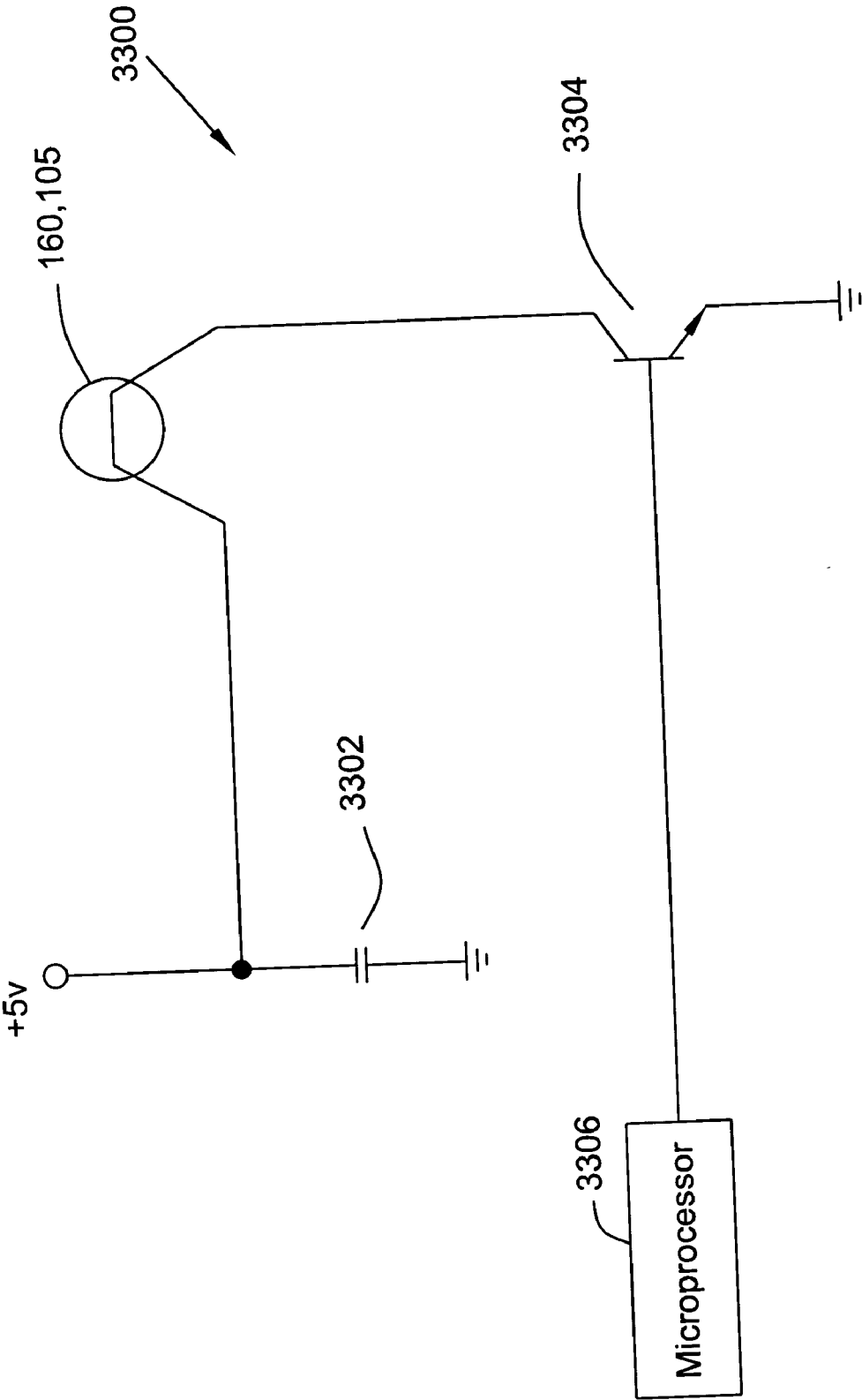


FIG. 33

MICROSCOPE DEVICE FOR A COMPUTER SYSTEM

RELATED APPLICATION

[0001] This application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/474,380 filed Dec. 29, 1999.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Microscopes are generally known in the scientific fields as instruments for viewing features on objects that are too small for viewing with the naked eye. The typical microscope is illustrated in FIG. 1. Microscope 1 consists of an optical unit 2 and base 4 that supports the optical unit 2. The base 4 also supports a stage 6 upon which an object 8 may be placed for viewing by a user of the microscope 1. Optical unit 2 includes an eyepiece 10 (also called an ocular), viewing cylinder 12 and magnifying lens unit 14. The magnifying lens unit 14 is positioned at the bottom of viewing cylinder 12 in order to receive light reflected from the object 8. The magnifying lens unit 14 typically includes two or more "objective" lenses of differing magnification levels, and the magnifying lens unit 14 may be rotated by the user so that one of the objective lenses is placed in an image path of the optical unit 2 to select a desired magnification level. Viewing cylinder 12 is typically a hollow cylinder that serves as an enclosed area for transmission of light from the selected objective lens of the magnifying lens unit to the eyepiece 10. Eyepiece 10 may include a magnifying lens to further magnify the image received from the magnifying lens unit 14, and to allow light rays to pass through the eyepiece into the exterior environment. The user may position an eye behind the eyepiece 10 to view a magnified image of the object 8.

[0003] The prior art microscope has been used in conjunction with a computer to allow the magnified image to be electronically viewed and stored on a computer system. One such system places a charge coupled device (CCD) imager behind the eyepiece 10 of the prior art microscope 1. The CCD imager (and associated electronics) is coupled to a computer system to allow the acquisition of digital images representing the magnified image of object 8. The microscope 1 itself is not altered.

[0004] These prior art CCD-microscope combinations have generally been highly technical in implementation (designed for use by research laboratories) requiring specific knowledge of computer systems and imaging in implementing the system. They are generally not usable by people without advanced technical knowledge (for example, children of small age). Such people would, however, be fascinated by the ability to see the microscopic features on various objects. Moreover, as computer systems have become a part of more households and educational facilities, it has become desirous to design costsensitive, computer-related devices and applications that will be appealing to children (and easily usable by teachers). Children are generally interested in the use of computer systems, and thus to be able to appeal to this interest with computer-related educational applications may be useful in enhancing educational opportunity and development.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0005] FIG. 1 shows a prior art microscope;

[0006] FIG. 2 shows a computer system in conjunction with an electronic microscope, according to the present invention;

[0007] FIG. 3 shows a side view of the electronic microscope of FIG. 2, according to the present invention;

[0008] FIG. 4 shows a cross-sectional view of an imaging unit of the electronic microscope of FIG. 2, according to the present invention;

[0009] FIG. 5 shows a cross-sectional view of the imaging unit of FIG. 4 including a light ray diagram, according to the present invention;

[0010] FIG. 6 shows a block diagram of a microscope control program, according to the present invention;

[0011] FIG. 7 shows a flow chart of a start-up procedure, according to the present invention;

[0012] FIG. 8 shows a microscope user interface, according to the present invention;

[0013] FIG. 9 shows a flow chart of an exemplary image acquisition process for the electronic microscope according to the present inventions;

[0014] FIG. 10 shows a side view of the electronic microscope of FIG. 2 in conjunction with a first example of the operation of the electronic microscope, according to the present invention;

[0015] FIG. 11 shows a flow chart of the first example of the operation of the electronic microscope, according to the present invention;

[0016] FIG. 12 shows a side view of the electronic microscope of FIG. 2 in conjunction with a second example of the operation of the electronic microscope, according to the present invention;

[0017] FIG. 13 shows a flow chart of the operation of a movie clip feature, according to the present invention;

[0018] FIG. 14 shows movie player user interface, according to the present invention;

[0019] FIG. 15 shows a time lapse interface, according to the present invention;

[0020] FIG. 16 shows an editing user interface, according to the present invention;

[0021] FIG. 17 shows a flow chart of a third example of the operation of the electronic microscope, according to the present invention;

[0022] FIG. 18 shows an image collection user interface, according to the present invention;

[0023] FIG. 19 shows an image editing user interface, according to the present invention;

[0024] FIG. 20 shows a special effects user interface, according to the present invention;

[0025] FIG. 21 shows a first slide show user interface, according to the present invention;

[0026] FIG. 22 shows a second slide show user interface, according to the present invention;

[0027] FIG. 23 shows a printing user interface, according to the present invention;

[0028] FIG. 24 shows a side view of a base having a motorized motion system, according to the present invention;

[0029] FIG. 25 shows a motorized user interface, according to the present invention;

[0030] FIG. 26 shows a flow chart of an example of the operation of a stitching operation, according to the present invention;

[0031] FIG. 27 shows a flow chart of an example of the operation of a total depth of field operation, according to the present invention;

[0032] FIG. 28 shows a top view of a stage with a measurement grid, according to the present invention;

[0033] FIG. 29 is a block diagram of one embodiment of the present invention;

[0034] FIG. 30 is a flow chart for software for implementing a light controller in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

[0035] FIG. 31 is a flow chart for software for implementing a color balance feature in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

[0036] FIG. 32 is a flow chart for software for implementing a time lapse feature in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention; and

[0037] FIG. 33 is a flash circuit that may be used in one embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0038] According to the present invention, an electronic or “computer” microscope device for use with a computer system may be implemented and used as described herein. The electronic microscope is advantageously designed to be easily implemented and used by non-technically trained people, for example, children, in conjunction with the data storage and manipulation facilities of a computer system. According to the present invention, the computer microscope may be an “integrated” package of viewing equipment and software, allowing for ease of use and installation. The combination of the computer system with the microscope will generate enthusiasm in children to use the microscope to explore the nature of various objects around them, enhancing the education of such children. The combination will also be a popular source of entertainment. The microscope may be implemented in a cost-effective manner.

[0039] As used herein, the phrases “at least one” and “a number of” refer to one or more items, while the phrase “a plurality of” refers to more than one item. Also, the terms “coupled” and “connected” as used in the context of electrical devices denote an operative/electrical connection, and thus may include incidental well known items to facilitate such coupling or connection (such as connectors, drivers, transceivers, glue logic, and so forth). The reference numer-

als used herein are used consistently across all figures to refer to the same object when that object is shown in multiple figures.

[0040] FIG. 2 shows a first exemplary embodiment of an electronic microscope 100 in conjunction with an exemplary computer system 200, implemented according to the present invention. Electronic microscope 100 is coupled to the computer system 200 via cable 121, which may comprise a number of individual wires to carry signals between the computer system 200 and the microscope 100. Exemplary computer system 200 comprises a central processing unit (CPU) 201 (e.g., a microprocessor), a display 202 (e.g., cathode ray tube, liquid crystal display), input devices 206 (e.g., a keyboard or mouse), a storage system 204 (e.g., RAM, optical disks, magnetic disks) and a bus 207 to couple each of these components to each other. The electrical interface between the microscope 100 and the computer system 200 is formed via an Input/Output (I/O) interface 205, which may comprise any of the various well known interface formats, such as Universal Serial Bus (USB), serial interface, parallel printer interface, Peripheral Components Interconnect (PCI) interface, Industry Standard Architecture (ISA) interface, or other interface format. I/O interface 205 may also be coupled to bus 207. A printer 203 or other device for creating “hard copy” of images may also be included in computer system 200, connected to the bus 207, for example, via the I/O interface 205.

[0041] FIG. 3 illustrates the exemplary electronic microscope 100. Microscope 100 comprises a base 101 and an imaging unit 102. The imaging unit 102 is supported by an imager unit holder 110 that is part of the base 101, for example, by arms 103 that extend horizontally from the base 101. Arms 103 may be permanently connected to imaging unit 102 (such that the imaging unit 102 and base 101 are a single assembly), or may be detachably connected to the imaging unit 102, allowing the imaging unit 102 to be used without the base 101. The base 101 further includes a stage 104 positioned, for example, below the arms 103, such that the imaging unit 102 may obtain an image of objects placed on the stage 104 when the imaging unit is connected to arms 103. Stage 104 includes a light source 105 positioned on the bottom of the stage 104 to back illuminate objects on the stage 104. Stage 104 may be movable via a motion system 106. As shown in FIG. 3, the stage 104 is movable in the z-direction (i.e., vertically) via a manual motion system, for example, a knob 107 and tongue and groove members on the knob and the stage (not shown). Rotation of knob 107 thus causes stage 104 to move upwardly or downwardly (relative to the imaging unit 102), depending on the direction of rotation.

[0042] Light source 105 and other electrically powered devices in base 101 may be separately powered and controlled, for example via a power cord and switch. Alternatively, a power and/or control connection may be provided from the imaging unit 102, for example, via mating electrical contacts in the imaging unit 102 and base 101 (described further below).

[0043] FIG. 4 shows a cross-sectional view of the exemplary imaging unit 102. Exemplary imaging unit 102 comprises a housing 120 which encloses various elements of the imaging unit 102. At a distal end 162 of the housing 120 is a covering plate 129 that includes a non-magnifying lens

137 which allows light to enter the housing 120 while protecting the interior of housing 120 from external elements (e.g., dirt, liquids). The housing 120 may be sealed to deter liquids from seeping into the imaging unit 102, which may be advantageous where the microscope 100 is intended for use with children, who are prone to accidents and spills. Cable 121 extends from a proximate end 123 of housing 120. Cable 121 comprises a number of wires 145 to provide communications and electrical connections between the imaging unit 102 and the computer system 200 (see FIG. 2). Alternatively, cable 121 may be replaced by a wireless connection (e.g., infrared or radio communication) to provide communication between the imaging unit 102 and the computer system 200 (power may be separately supplied).

[0044] Imaging unit 102 further comprises an optical unit 122, which is located toward the distal end 162 of the housing 120. Optical unit 122 includes a top plate 125 and a bottom plate 127, which are used to fix in place various optical elements of the optical unit 122. Optical unit 122 may be rotatably mounted within the housing 120, for example, via a rod 126 extending longitudinally through the housing 120 and connected to the bottom plate 127 and a connecting plate 131 (which does not rotate). Other means for rotatable connection can, of course, be used. Optical unit 122 further comprises a grip 128 that protrudes from the housing 120 and completely encircles the optical unit 122. Exemplary grip 128 allows a user to rotate the optical unit 122 about the rod 126.

[0045] The optical unit 122 will include a number of "optical paths" used to direct light towards imaging electronics. The exemplary optical unit 122 depicted in FIG. 4 includes three optical paths 130 (only two are shown in the cross-section of FIG. 4, individually labeled 130a and 130b), arranged equidistantly in optical unit 122. The multiple optical paths 130 may be used, for example, to provide different magnification levels to light which traverses each path. As such, each optical path 130 includes a number of lenses 132 to provide varying magnification levels and fields of view. In the present example, one lens 132 is used in optical path 130a, providing a 60x magnification level, while two lenses 132 (not shown) are used in optical path 130b to provide a 200x magnification level. The specific characteristics of the lenses 132 may be chosen to effectively implement the desired magnification levels, as is well known. Such lenses are available from Applied Image Group, Tucson, Ariz., or other optics sources. To provide for rotation of the optical paths, the top plate 125 of optical unit 122 interacts with connecting plate 131 to provide guidance and a "keying" system (not shown) to indicate proper alignment of an optical path with an imaging device (described below). Well known keying system embodiments may be used (e.g., rib-in-groove).

[0046] Imaging unit 102 further includes an imager circuit 140, positioned toward the proximate end 123 of the housing 120. Imager circuit 140 includes an imaging device 142 and support circuits 144 disposed on at least one printed circuit board 146. Imaging device 142 may comprise one of many electronic imaging devices commercially available and having a resolution size useful for generating images with a large field of view. One such device would be a VVL 6444 CMOS sensor provided by VLSI Vision, Scotland, which has a 320x240 pixel resolution. Imaging device 142 is positioned such that an imaging surface 143 of the imaging

device 142 may be located behind one of the optical paths 130 of the optical unit 122, in order to receive light projected through the optical path 130, as described below.

[0047] Imaging device 142 is electrically connected to support circuits 144. Support circuits 144 are themselves electrically connected to the wires 145 of cable 121. Support circuits 144 may include transceivers, amplifiers, and a micro controller/microprocessor system or other control logic system (for example, a VVL CPIA 1.6 controller) in order to transmit image data produced by the imaging device 142 to computer system 200 via wires 145, and to receive control signals from computer system 200. Support circuits 144 may include other circuit elements as needed in order to enable clear, consistent communication between the imaging device 142 and the computer system 200 or to provide power and/or control to other electrical portions of the microscope 100. For example, support circuits 144 may include facilities to establish "plug and play" connections with the computer system 200. Support circuits 144 may also implement a removal detection circuit that determines whether the imaging unit 102 is mounted in the base 101, and can provide an indication that the imaging unit is mounted in the base 101.

[0048] Imaging unit 102 further includes a light source 160, disposed at the distal end 162 of the housing 120. As depicted in FIG. 4, the light source 160 may be exposed to the exterior of housing 120, allowing the light source 160 to illuminate an object placed in front of the non-magnifying lens 137. Light source 160 may comprise any well known source of illumination, such as a lamp or LED. Light source 160 may receive power from the imager circuit 140 via cable 164. Control of light source 160 in this example is via computer system 200, although a manual switch could also be used.

[0049] Imaging unit 102 may further include a switch button 163 disposed, for example, adjacent to circuit board 146 and extending out of housing 120. Switch button 163 may be used, for example, to allow manual sampling of image data, as will be further described below. Imaging unit 102 may further include electrical contacts 165 extending out from housing 120 and positioned to contact mating electrical contacts in the base 101. Electrical contacts 165 are electrically connected to the imager circuit 140 via wires 166. Electrical contacts 165 allow for power/control of components in the base 101 (e.g., the lamp 105) via the imager circuit 140 (and computer system 200) when the imaging unit 102 is mounted in the base 101. The removal detection circuit of the imager circuit 140 may use the electrical contacts 165 to determine whether the imaging unit 102 is mounted in the base 101.

[0050] The resulting operation of the exemplary imaging unit 102 will now be described with reference to FIG. 5, which shows a cut-away cross section of optical path 130a and imager circuit 140, and a light ray diagram of the imaging unit 102 being used for an illustrative imaging operation. Object 500 is placed in front of the imaging unit 102, and specifically in front of non-magnifying lens 137. Optical path 130a has been previously rotated such that it is located in line with imaging device 142. Object 500 may be illuminated via light source 160 to provide ample reflected light from the object 500 to obtain an image. Light rays 501 reflected from object 500 are received by non-magnifying

lens 137 and passed through (without magnification) to the lens 132. Light rays 501 thus represent an image of the object 500.

[0051] Lens 132 magnifies the image of object 500 by a known amount (depending on the properties of the lens—in this case 60×) by deflecting the received light rays 501 as they travel through the lens 132. The deflected light rays 501 exit the lens 132, travel through the optical path 130a, and are received on the imaging surface 143 of imaging device 142. Since the light rays 501 have been deflected by lens 132, the image of object 500 perceived at the imaging surface 143 is larger than the size of object 500. Imaging device 142 performs an imaging operation (according to the type of imaging device used) to detect the light rays 501 and generates an electrical signal representing the magnified image at image surface 143. The electrical signal may then be conditioned/formatted by support circuits 144 (for example, adjusting color, white balance, brightness, and data compression) and transmitted via cable 121 to computer system 200 (see FIG. 2).

[0052] Microscope 100 may be constructed from materials such as plastics for durability and cost-savings. Microscope 100 may also be constructed to avoid sharp corners (which could cause injury). Since microscope 100 may be operated as a “hand held” device (i.e., without base 101), it is also advantageous to make microscope 100 as lightweight as possible.

[0053] As mentioned previously, an exemplary use of the microscope 100 is in conjunction with a computer system 200. FIG. 6 shows a block diagram of various logical elements of an exemplary microscope control program 600 executed in the computer system 200 and used to control the microscope 100. The functionality described by FIG. 6 may be implemented, for example, via a software program written using any of the various well known computer languages (C++, Visual Basic, etc.), and loaded and/or executed from the storage system 204 (for example, from a CD or magnetic disk). The functionality of FIG. 6 is depicted in terms of various logical systems and interfaces, however the functionality described may be grouped in alternate arrangements of routines, modules, objects or other software structures, as is well known.

[0054] A central control unit 601 (which provides overall program and device control) is logically coupled to a user interface system 602, which provides the user with a display and allows the user to select features and functions provided by the control program 600 and the microscope 100. Central control unit 601 is further logically coupled to an imager interface 603, which provides communication between the imaging unit 102 of microscope 100 and the control program 600. Central control unit 601 is also logically coupled to a file system interface 605, which allows the user to store and retrieve image data (still images and multi-image “clips”) using storage system 204, and an image processing library 604, which allows the user to perform various editing operations on images either received from microscope 100 or stored in storage system 204. Central control unit 601 is further logically coupled to a printer interface 606. Further features may also be included in microscope control program 600 as desired. Note also that some of these features may be implemented in an operating system 610 (e.g., Microsoft Windows) running on computer system 200.

Furthermore, access by the various software units to the hardware elements of computer system 200 (e.g., user interface system 602 access to the display 202, printer interface 606 access to printer 203) may be via the facilities of operating system 610, as is well known.

[0055] In order to operate the microscope 100 in conjunction with the microscope control program 600 of computer system 200, a “start-up” procedure is first conducted. FIG. 7 shows a flow chart illustrating exemplary steps to such a start-up procedure. In step 702, the microscope 100 is connected to the computer system 200 via the cable 121, according to the appropriate connection method, as described above. Microscope 100 may be equipped to become operable with the computer system 200 (via the operating system 610) upon connection to the I/O interface 205, for example, via the well known “plug-and-play” interoperability standard. The control program 600 may then be loaded and executed (step 704). Control program 600 may initialize the microscope 100 by, for example, performing test communications with the imaging unit 102 to establish that the microscope is properly connected and functional (step 706). The control system 601 then instructs user interface system 602 to provide a user interface on display 202 to allow the user to access the features and functionality of the microscope 100 (step 708). Further steps may also be included in the start up procedure.

[0056] FIG. 8 shows an exemplary microscope user interface 800 provided by user interface system 602. Microscope user interface 800 is displayed on display 202 of the computer system 200. User interface system 602 allows a user to provide input via the input devices 206 (e.g., keyboard, mouse) in order to access the features of the microscope control program 600 and the microscope 100. As shown in FIG. 8, user interface 800 includes an image window 802 for showing image data, for example, generated by the microscope 100. Image window 802 may be sized so as to accommodate the size of the images produced by the microscope 100 (or an image-processed variation thereof), and in this example, is 512 pixels x 384 pixels. A current image window 806 is also provided in user interface 800 to view image data (a current image or clip) most recently sampled from the image data stream (described below).

[0057] A plurality of graphically depicted “buttons” 804 are arranged around the image window 802 to allow the user to select a function assigned to a respective button 804 by graphically “pressing” the button. In this example, microscope user interface 800 includes the following buttons:

[0058] “Snapshot” button 804a—accesses a “snapshot” feature—samples a single image from the stream of images produced by the imaging unit 102;

[0059] “Record Movie” button 804b—accesses a “movie clip” feature—makes multiple samples of the continuous stream of image data produced by the imaging unit 102;

[0060] “Time Lapse” button 804c—accesses a “time lapse” feature—makes multiple image samples over a specified duration for a specified sampling period;

[0061] “to Editing Features” button 804d—accesses user interface for editing features;

[0062] “Top Light” button 804e and “Bottom Light” button 804f—accesses controls for turning on/off the light source 160 of the imaging unit 102 or the light source 105 of base 101;

[0063] “User Help” button 804g—accesses a viewer for instructional information (e.g., a help file); and

[0064] “Trash” button 804h—deletes the sample(s) stored for current image window 806.

[0065] Each button may be identified by a picture icon and/or text phrase representing its function, for example, the “Trash” button 804h may be represented by a trash can. Such identification may be desirable particularly for use with children.

[0066] Upon execution of user interface 800, the microscope control program 600 may instruct the imaging unit 102 (via the imager interface 603) to begin providing image data to computer system 200. FIG. 9 shows a flow chart of an exemplary process performed for image acquisition from imaging unit 102. In step 902, imager interface 603 provides the necessary commands to the imaging unit 102 to initiate image acquisition. According to these commands, imaging unit 102 (and specifically imager circuit 140) begins acquisition of magnified images of objects disposed in front of the imaging unit 102 (via the imaging process described previously) at a specified rate (step 904), for example, four images per second. Each magnified image is transmitted as an image data “frame” to the imager interface 603, for example, via cable 121 and I/O interface 205 (step 906). Imager interface 603 may then perform various image processing functions on the image data frame in order to format the image data for display in user interface 800, for example, bilinear pixel interpolation (step 908), although no image processing may be needed. The image data frame is then stored in storage system 204 (step 910), and displayed in image window 802 of user interface 800 (step 912). As new image data frames are received from the imaging unit 102, imager interface will replace the previously stored and displayed image data frame with the new image data frames. Because the individual images are generated at a relatively fast rate, the user may be able to see approximately continuous “real-time” video in the image window 802 (although this video actually may be “choppy” and slightly delayed).

[0067] Included in user interface 800 are buttons 804e and 804f to control the light sources 160, 105, and a graphical slide 808, which may be used to specify the brightness level of the image data produced by the imaging unit 102. The user interface unit 602 may alter the buttons 804e and 804f to indicate the state of the light sources 160, 105 (i.e., on or off) by shading the buttons 804e, 804f. The graphical slide 808 may be used to alter the brightness conditioning performed on the image data by the imager circuit 140. The microscope user interface 800 may be set as the first user interface displayed when the microscope control program 600 is executed.

[0068] A first example of the operation of exemplary microscope control program 600 in conjunction with the exemplary microscope 100 will now be illustrated by reference to FIGS. 10 and 11. This first example of operation will illustrate a process to obtain a single image from the microscope 100. Referring now to FIG. 11, which shows a

flow chart of this first exemplary operation, in step 1002, the user places an object 900 for which a microscopic image is desired in front of imaging unit 102, for example, by placing the object 900 on stage 104. FIG. 10 shows an arrangement of microscope 100 to image the object 900 (as shown, a bug). The user may then adjust the settings of the microscope 100 (step 1004), for example, by rotating the optical unit 122 of imaging unit 102 (via grip 128) to select the optical path 130 having the desired magnification level, by adjusting the height of stage 104, or turning on/off the light sources 105, 160. Imaging unit 102 will be generating a stream of image data frames that are received at computer system 200 and displayed in the image window 802. The user may then save an image of the object 900, for example, by selecting the button 804a (the “snapshot” button) in user interface 800 (step 1006). Upon selecting the button 804a, the central control 601 invokes a snapshot facility in imager interface 603, which saves a single frame from the stream of image data frames being produced by imaging unit 102 (step 1008). User interface system 602 displays the current image in current image window 806 (step 1010).

[0069] Once the magnified image has been acquired, the user may view the image via the current image window 806 to see if the image is clear, focused, directed at the right portion of the object 900, and so forth. If unacceptable, the user may re-adjust the microscope 100 and resample the magnified image (steps 1004-1010). If the image is acceptable, the user can then access the further features of the microscope control program 600 to perform various activities using the sampled image (e.g., saving the image, editing the image, etc.), as will be described below.

[0070] A second example of the operation of the microscope 100 in conjunction with the control program 600 is illustrated by FIG. 12. This second example illustrates use of the imaging unit 102 independently from the base 101, e.g., as a “hand-held” device. The user may place the imaging unit 102 behind an object 1200 for which a microscopic image is desired (as shown in FIG. 12, a leaf on the ground). As with the first operation example described above (see FIG. 11), the user may adjust the settings of the microscope 100, for example, by rotating the optical unit 122 of imaging unit 102 to select the optical path 130 having the desired magnification level, by adjusting the brightness level, or by turning on/off the light source 160. Because the imaging unit 102 is not connected to base 101, electrical contacts 165 of imaging unit 102 are not mated with the base 101. The control program 600 recognizes the disconnection from base 101 (for example, due to a message sent from the removal detection circuitry of imaging unit 102), and may disable the “bottom light” button 804f in user interface 800. The user may then acquire an image from the continuous stream of magnified images being produced by imaging unit 102, for example, by pressing the switch button 163 of imaging unit 102, which in this example has the same effect as pressing the “snapshot” button 804a in user interface 800. Use of the switch button 163 may be more convenient where the imaging unit 102 is being used at a distance from the computer system 200.

[0071] Microscope control program 600 also provides a feature that allows the creation of multi-image “clips” of image data (“movie clips”). Referring to user interface 800 (FIG. 8), the user may select the “record movie” button 804b to access the movie clip feature. (Alternatively, the

user may press and hold the switch button **163** for an extended period of time to indicate that the record movie feature is desired.) The operation of the movie clip feature is reflected by the flow chart of **FIG. 13**. Upon selecting the button **804b** (step **1302**), the imager interface **603** begins sampling of image frames being transmitted by the imaging unit **102** by storage of these frames in the storage system **204** (step **1304**). The central control **601** instructs the user interface system **602** to alter the user interface **800** to show that pressing the “record movie” button **804b** again will stop the sampling of image frames (step **1306**). When the user presses the button **804b** to stop image sampling (or after a certain timeout period occurs), the first frame of the sample image frames is displayed in the current image window **806** (step **1308**). In step **1310**, a movie player user interface **1400** is displayed (for example, as shown in **FIG. 14**), which provides buttons **1404** to manipulate the movie clip: to play the clip (button **1404a**), to rewind the clip (button **1404b**), and to fast forward the clip (button **1404c**). A position bar **1406** may also be displayed to show the present position in the clip. The user may play the clip (step **1312**) by selecting the play button **1404a**, causing the image frames of the movie clip to be displayed sequentially in current image window **806**.

[0072] Microscope control program **600** also provides a feature that allows the creation of “time lapse” imaging of objects using the microscope **100**. The user may access the time lapse creation feature by selecting the button **804c** from user interface **800**. Upon selection of button **804c**, a time lapse user interface **1500** (for example as depicted in **FIG. 15**) may be displayed. As shown in **FIG. 15**, a slide bar **1502** is provided to adjust the duration of the time lapse period. A display **1504** of the time associated with the slide bar setting is also provided. A further slide bar and display may also be provided to set the interval between each sample. After entry of these parameters, the time lapse creation feature performs sampling of the image data stream from the imaging unit **102** according to the timing parameters. The sampling process will be similar to that used to perform movie clip recording (see **FIG. 13**), except that the sampling is performed according to the timing specified through the time lapse user interface **1500**.

[0073] Exemplary microscope control program **600** provides additional features to further manipulate the images received from the microscope **100**. These features are accessed, for example, by selecting the “to Editing Features” button **804d** from microscope user interface **800**. Selecting the button **804d** causes the control program **600** to display editing user interface **1600**, illustrated in **FIG. 16**. As shown, editing user interface **1600** provides an image window **1602**, which may be used to display the current image frame (or, in the case of a clip, the first frame of the stored clip). Also provided in editing user interface **1600** are buttons **1604** that allow access to various editing, presentation and file storage facilities provided by the microscope control program **600**:

[0074] “Draw” button **1604a**—provides access to an image editing program to edit the current image;

[0075] “Special Effects” button **1604b**—provides access to an image editing program to apply effects to the current image;

[0076] “Slide Show” button **1604c**—provides access to a slide show creation program;

[0077] “Print” button **1604d**—provides access to a printing program to print out the current image(s);

[0078] “Access Image Collection” button **1604e**—provides access to a facility for storage and retrieval of image frames without using file names;

[0079] “Save File” button **1604f**—provides access to a file save facility to save the current image frame as a file (uses file names);

[0080] “Open File” button **1604g**—provides access to a file retrieve facility to retrieve an image frame file and store as the current image (displayed in image window **1602**);

[0081] “to Microscope” button **1604h**—provides access to the microscope user interface **800**; and

[0082] “Exit” button **1604i**—exits the microscope control program **600**.

[0083] Each of the facilities and interfaces described above are integrated into the microscope control program **600** (for example, as part of image processing library **604**), thus allowing easy manipulation of the image data sampled from the microscope **100** by otherwise unskilled computer users (e.g., children).

[0084] A third example of the operation of the microscope **100** and the control program **600** of computer system **200** will now be described with reference to **FIGS. 16-22**. In this third example, a user retrieves image data previously saved in the storage system **204** of computer system **200**, and uses the image processing library **604** of control program **600** to edit the image data and create a multimedia slide show. **FIG. 17** shows a flow chart of this third operational example. In step **1702**, the user selects the button **1604e** from editing user interface **1600** (the “access image collection” button, see **FIG. 16**), which causes the control program **600** to provide an image collection facility to allow the user to select a file stored in storage system **204** (step **1704**). **FIG. 18** is an exemplary image collection user interface **1800** for the image collection facility, which is displayed by user interface unit **602**. Image collection facility stores each image (or movie clip) in an image collection without the need for file names, by using a graphical representation of the image data. For example, miniature images **1802** of each image frame (or the first frame of a clip) may be displayed in the image collection user interface **1800**, thus allowing the user to select a desired image from the image collection simply and quickly. A scroll bar **1806** is provided to scroll through the miniature images **1802**, and buttons **1804a** and **1804b** are provided to indicate whether the selection is “OK” or should be “Canceled,” respectively.

[0085] Selection of a miniature image from the image collection facility causes the image data associated with that miniature image **1802** to be set as the current image frame (for example, via retrieval by the file system interface **605** of the image from the storage system **204**), and the image frame is displayed in the image window **1602** of editing user interface **1600** (step **1706**).

[0086] In step **1708**, the user selects the button **1604a** (the “draw” button), which causes the control program **600** to execute the image editing facility of image processing library **604**. User interface system **602** provides an image editing user interface **1900** on the display **202** (step **1710**).

An exemplary image editing user interface **1900** is depicted in **FIG. 19**. An editing window **1902** is provided similar to the image window **1602** from editing user interface **1600**, in which the image from the current image frame is displayed. Around editing window **1902** are a number of graphically displayed buttons **1904** to allow the user to select an editing feature provided by the image editing facility. As indicated by the buttons **1904**, image editing facility provides several well-known editing features: a color palette (**1904a**), a number of shapes to apply to the image (**1904b**), a number of brush sizes to use during editing (**1904c**), scissors (**1904d**), a paintbrush (**1904e**), a color filler (**1904f**), a color match to get color (**1904g**), a text inserter (**1904h**), an eraser (**1904i**), a stamp to apply selected shapes to the image (**1904j**), an image flipper (**1904k**), selected copy (**1904m**), paste (**1904n**), selected rotate (**1904o**), image scaling (**1904p**), and zoom (**1904q**). Other well-known features could also be implemented. An undo feature (button **1904k**) allows previous edits to be reversed. As with the user interfaces **800** and **1600**, a picture icon or text may be used to form or label each button **1904**, in order to indicate the function assigned to the button **1904**.

[**0087**] In step **1712**, the user performs editing on the image using one or more of the tools represented by the buttons **1904** provided in image editing user interface **1904**. After the user has completed any desired editing, the user may exit the image editing facility by selecting either a “to Edit Features” button **1904s** (which returns the user to the editing user interface **1600**) or by selecting the “to Microscope” button **1904r** (which send the user to the microscope user interface **800** for further use of microscope **100**). In either case, the edited image frame is stored in the image collection. In this example, the user opts to return to the editing user interface **1600** (step **1714**).

[**0088**] From the editing user interface, the user may then perform further editing of the image by selecting button **1604b** (step **1716**), which invokes a special effects editing facility of the image processing library **604** (step **1718**). **FIG. 20** shows an example of a special effects user interface **2000** corresponding to the features provided by the special effects editing facility. An editing window **2002** is provided to display the current image and any edits made to the image (similar to the editing window **1902** of the image editing facility). Buttons **2004a-h** provide a number of effects that may be applied to the image frame (e.g., morphing, swirling, cubing). The type of effect may be indicated by a graphical indication in the button **2004**. An “undo” button **2004i** is provided to reverse applied effects. Once any special effects have been applied (step **1720**), the user may again exit by returning to the editing user interface **1600** via the “to Editing Features” button **2004k** or by going to the microscope user interface **800** via the “to Microscope” button **2004l**. In this case, the user opts to return to the editing user interface **1600** (step **1722**).

[**0089**] From the editing user interface, the user may then create a multimedia slide show using images stored in the image collection, by selecting the “Slide Show” button **1604c** (step **1724**) to cause the control program **600** to invoke a slide show facility (step **1726**). **FIG. 21** shows an example of a first slide show user interface **2100**. An image window **2102** is provided to show slide show images. Button **2104a** allows the user to enable the use of sound effects with the slide show. Buttons **2104b-f** allows the user to add

different sound effects to the image being displayed in the image window **2102**. Button **2104g** allows the user to play the slide show. Button **2104h** allows the user to create a series of images to use as the slide show. Pressing button **2104h** (step **1728**) causes the control program **600** to execute a slide show creation routine and provide second slide show user interface **2200**, shown in **FIG. 22**.

[**0090**] As shown in **FIG. 22**, the slide show creation routine uses the image collection display **1802** and scroll bar **1806** used in the image collection user interface **1800** to allow the user to access the image collection. In addition, buttons **2204d** and **2204e** are provided to add and remove image frames for one of a number of slide shows as displayed in area **2206** (in this example, four slide shows are supported). After the images are added and arranged in the slide show displayed in area **2206** (step **1730**), the user may select the “to Slide Show” button **2204c** to return to the slide show facility. The user may then play the slide show (step **1732**) by pressing the “play” button **2104g**.

[**0091**] The user also is provided a printing facility (via printer interface **606**) to print the current image to printer **203**. The user may select button **1604d** from editing user interface **1600** to invoke the printing facility. **FIG. 23** is an example of a printing user interface **2300**. As shown by the printing user interface **2300**, the user is provided with three printing options via the printing facility: printing the current image frame as a single image on a single sheet of paper (“print image” button **2304a**), printing the current image frame as multiple images on a single sheet of paper (“print stickers” button **2304b**), or printing the current image frame a single image on multiple sheets of paper (“print poster” button **2304c**). A preview window **2302** shows the expected result of printing the current image frame on a single sheet of paper. A preview window **2306** shows the expected result of printing multiple copies of the current image frame on a single sheet of paper (for example, as a 3×3 array). A preview window **2308** shows the expected result of printing the current image frame on multiple sheets of paper (for example, on a 2×2 array of paper).

[**0092**] The microscope **100** and microscope control program **600** examples described above according to the present invention thus allow for easy user acquisition and manipulation of magnified images of objects. Microscope **100** provides a durable and easy to use piece of equipment for magnified imaging, and microscope control program **600** (via computer system **200**) provides an easy to use integrated operational environment for users to manipulate the microscope **100** and view, edit and store magnified images.

[**0093**] Additional features may be incorporated into the exemplary microscope **100**. One such feature is a motorized motion system to drive the stage **104** of base **101**. This motorized motion system may include a z-axis motor, x-axis motor, and/or y-axis motor. In addition to allowing stage position control via the user interface, where a z-axis motor is provided, the microscope may provide an autofocus operation and a “total depth of field” feature (obtaining multiple images focused for different field depths). Where x- or y-axis motors are used, the microscope may provide “stitching” operation to create a large image from a number of smaller images. Each of these features is described below.

[**0094**] An example of a motorized motion system and its attendant features is illustrated in **FIGS. 24-26**. **FIG. 24**

illustrates a base **2400**, similar to base **101**, but including a motorized motion system **2401**. The motorized motion system **2401** includes a z-axis motor **2403**, an x-axis motor **2404**, and a y-axis motor **2405** (illustrated through a cutaway interior view in **FIG. 24**), each of which is mounted in the base **2400**. Motors **2403**, **2404** and **2405** may be implemented as stepper motors, allowing controlled, incremental movements, as is well known. Motors **2403-2405** include circuitry to allow for motor control, and may be electrically connected to the I/O interface **205** of the computer system **200** to allow for control of the motors. This connection may be made in various ways, for example, a cable **2406** may be directly connected from the base **2400** to the computer system **200**. Alternatively, the connection may be made through cable **2412** of imaging unit **2410** (which is similar to imaging unit **102**, with additional features as well as become apparent below). Electrical contacts in the base **2400** and corresponding contacts in the imaging unit **2410** (similar to those used in imaging unit **102** to control light **105** in base **101**) may be used to achieve this connection. Motors **2403-2405** may physically interface with stage **104** in any well known manner to effect the movement of the stage **104** in the x, y or z directions (e.g., via tongue-and-groove gearing).

[0095] **FIG. 25** illustrates a motorized user interface **2500**, which provides access to the additional features available via the use of motorized movement system **2401**. User interface **2500** is similar to microscope user interface **800**, with the addition of buttons **2504a-2504i**: buttons **2504a-f** provide access to a facility for direct user control of the stage position in the x, y and z directions; button **2504g** provides access to the autofocus feature; button **2504h** provides access to the stitched image feature; and button **2504i** provides access to the total depth of field feature. Note that motorized user interface **2500** will vary depending on the actual implementation of motor system **2401**—if only a z-axis motor **2403** is used, there is no need for buttons **2504a-2504d**, or for the stitched image button **2504h**, and these buttons may be omitted.

[0096] The software for performing control of the motorized motion system may be implemented independently or as part of one of the existing subunits of control program **600**. In this example, the control of the motorized motion system **2401** is performed as part of the imager interface **603**, which provides signals to the motorized motion system **2401** via the I/O interface **205**. The autofocus feature may be implemented using well known autofocus algorithms, which may also be implemented independently or as part of the imager interface **603**. Selection of the autofocus button **2504g** thus causes autofocusing of the image via movement of the stage in the z-direction.

[0097] The stitching feature and the total depth of focus feature may be implemented, for example, as part of the image processing library **604**. The stitching feature is illustrated by the flow chart of **FIG. 26**. In step **2602**, the user selects the stitching feature by selecting the “stitched image” button **2504h** from user interface **2500**. According to the stitching feature, the stage **104** is then positioned at a starting location in the x- and y-axes (step **2603**). In step **2604**, the magnification level being provided by the imaging unit **2410** is determined in order to determine the distance to move the stage for each image (the “increment size”). This determi-

nation may be made from user input (i.e., the user enters the magnification level), or automatically (as is described below).

[0098] In step **2606**, an image is acquired and stored in the storage system **204**. A check is made to see if the stage **104** has been moved across the entire x-axis range of motion (step **2610**). If not, the stage **104** is then moved in the x-direction by one increment size (step **2608**), and another image is obtained (step **2606**). Once the stage **104** has reached the end of its x-axis motion, a check is made to see if the stage **104** has reached the end of its y-axis range of motion (step **2614**). If not, the stage **104** is then moved in the y-direction by one increment size (step **2612**), and images are again acquired over the x-axis range of motion (steps **2606-2610**). Once the entire stage area has been imaged, a “full” image (likely larger than the individual acquired images) may now be stitched together according to known stitching algorithms (step **2616**). Once the full image has been stitched, the full image may be displayed (step **2618**), for example, in image window **802**. Addition scrolling and zooming features may be provided for better viewing.

[0099] The total depth of focus (field) feature is illustrated in the flow chart of **FIG. 27**. In step **2702**, the user selects the “total depth of field” button **2504i** from user interface **2500**. According to the total depth of field feature, the stage **104** is positioned at a starting z-axis position (step **2704**). The magnification level being provided by the imaging unit **2410** is determined either manually or automatically (as described below) to set the increment to use for moving the stage **104** in the z-direction (step **2706**). An image is then obtained from the imaging unit **2410** and stored in the storage system **204** (step **2708**). If the stage **104** has not been moved over the entire z-axis range (step **2710**), the stage is moved one increment in the z-direction (step **2712**) and another image is acquired (step **2708**). If the stage **104** has moved over the entire z-axis range, all the images have been acquired, and may then be stitched together to present, for example, a single in-focus image (step **2714**).

[0100] As an alternative, to achieve stage motion for the stitching feature and total depth of focus feature, the motorized motion system may be replaced by a (well-known) spring-loaded motion system, such that the user may provide the “power” needed to move the stage through “winding” of a spring mechanism.

[0101] Another additional feature that may be included is an automatic magnification detection operation, which allows the control program **600** to determine the magnification level being provided by the imaging unit **2410**. In one embodiment of this feature, the magnification level of each of the available optical paths **130** is “hard wired” into the imager unit **2410**, such that the imager circuit **140** may detect the identity of the optical path **130** that is positioned in front of the imaging surface **143**, with knowledge of the magnification level provided by that particular optical path, and thereafter provide this information to the computer system **200** when requested.

[0102] In a second embodiment, the magnification level is determined based on a measurement of the size of the actual field of view provided by the optical path **130**. This size is determined based on recognition of measurement marks placed on the stage. **FIG. 28** illustrates a top view of a portion of a stage **2804**, similar to stage **104**, but including

a measurement grid **2806**. Measurement grid **2806** is laid out in a predetermined measurement unit (e.g., 5 mm per grid line), such that magnification level determination software can determine the size of the field of view (and thus the magnification level of the optical path **130** being used). The magnification level determination software can be implemented as part of the imager circuit **140**, or as part of the control program **600**.

[0103] Referring to **FIG. 29**, computer system **200** is coupled to an interface **2914** that interfaces the system **200** with a plurality of components that provide control information to the computer system **200** or receive control information from the computer system **200** in one embodiment of the invention. For example, the interface **2914** is coupled to a top light **160** coupled to the imaging unit **102** and a bottom light **105** coupled to the base **101**. Similarly, a top light switch state detector **2904** and a bottom light switch state detector **2908** detect the on or off states of the respective top light **160** and bottom light **105**. Also coupled to the interface **2914** is a removal detection unit **2900** that detects when the imaging unit **102** is detached from the base **101**. Also, an image analyzer **2910** analyzes information about the images that are captured by the imaging unit **102** to provide feedback for color balance determinations. In addition, a power detector **2912** determines the amount of power available for operating the lights **105** and **160** so that the computer system **200** may make adjustments as described hereinafter.

[0104] Turning next to **FIG. 30**, light controller software **3000** may be operative to control the states of the lights **105** and **160** in one embodiment of the invention. Initially, a check at diamond **3002** determines whether the button **804e** is operated. If so, the top light **160** is turned off as indicated in block **3004**. Next, a check at diamond **3006** determines if the button **804f** has been operated. In such case, the bottom light **105** is turned off as indicated in block **3008**.

[0105] A check at diamond **3010** determines whether a removal flag has been set. The removal flag is set when the removal detection circuit **2900** detects the removal of the imaging unit **102** from the base **101**. The detection may include detecting the opening of the contacts **165** (**FIG. 4**).

[0106] If the removal flag is set, the bottom light **105** is automatically turned off as indicated in block **3012**. This preserves the lifetime of the bottom light **105** and may allow additional power to be provided to the light **160** that accompanies the imaging unit **102** in some situations. In the same operation the top light **160** may automatically be turned on.

[0107] Next, the available power is checked as indicated in block **3016**. In some cases, the available power is not sufficient to do all the different operations of the microscope and still power both the top light **160** and bottom light **105**. For example power may be supplied to the imaging unit **102** and base **101** from a Universal Serial Bus (USB) power connection, which supplies relatively low power for communication. Based on the available power, the light intensity of one or more of the lights **105** and **160** may be adjusted or balanced as indicated in block **3018**. Alternatively, one light may be powered off while the other is powered on.

[0108] Turning next to **FIG. 31**, the color balance software **3100** is responsible for adjusting the color balance of the images produced by the microscope **100** based on a number

of different factors. Initially, the on/off states of each of the lights **105** and **160** is determined as indicated in block **3102**. In addition, the presence of any filters is determined as indicated in block **3104**. Additional filters may be added to the bottom light source **105** or the top light source **160**. This may be done by placing a filter on the stage **104** over the light **105** or by replacing the existing diffusing filter in the stage **104** itself. Using a filter may be advantageous in dark field microscopy and polarized light microscopy as two examples.

[0109] A check at block **3106** collects information from the image analyzer **2910**. An analysis of the actual images that are being captured may be undertaken to obtain feedback on the lighting conditions. For example, it may be determined that the lights **105** or **160** are getting too old or a bulb is burning out and therefore adjustment of color balance may be needed. For example, if the imaged portion of the stage **104** is determined to be under or over exposed compared to prior images, lighting conditions may be compared. In some cases, it may be desirable to generate a message to the user to report poor light conditions.

[0110] Next, in block **3108**, the parameters determined with respect to the on and off state of the lights, the presence or absence of filters, the particular types of lights utilized, whether artificial light is utilized, which lights are utilized and the image analysis may be applied to a look-up table (LUT) to determine how to re-align the color balance as indicated in block **3108**. The color balance is set using all or part of this information as indicated in block **3110**.

[0111] Finally, turning to **FIG. 32**, the time lapse software **3200**, in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention, initially determines whether the time lapse feature has been selected as indicated in diamond **3202**. If so, a check at diamond **3204** determines whether a time has been set to determine the start time or duration time of the time lapse sequence as indicated in diamond **3204**. If so, a check at diamond **3206** determines if the set time has arrived.

[0112] When the set time arrives, one or both lights **105** and **160** are automatically turned on as indicated in block **3208**. A snapshot is automatically taken as indicated in block **3210**. Thereafter, the lights are turned off as indicated in block **3212**. A check at diamond **3214** determines whether the duration for the time lapse sequence has expired. If so, the flow ends. Otherwise, the flow cycles back to proceed through sequences of turning lights on, taking snapshots and turning lights off. As a result, the time lapse can be implemented in a hands free fashion and the user does not have to be present to make the snapshots or to control the lights in some embodiments. In between snapshots, the microscope **100** may be less obtrusive since the lights do not have to remain turned on.

[0113] Referring to **FIG. 33**, a flash circuit **3300** in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention may be utilized to provide a flash of light, for example for capturing snapshots. Even in situations where the power supply (indicated as five volts) is obtained through a USB connection, a capacitor **3302** may be utilized to produce an instant light source that may have an intensity greater than that of a normally powered lamp.

[0114] In the circuit **3300**, the microprocessor **3306** turns the transistor **3304** on to discharge the capacitor **3302**

through a light such as one of the top or bottom lights **160** and **105**. When the power is applied, the capacitor **3302** is charged up. When it is desired to emit a flash, the capacitor **3302** may be discharged through the transistor **3304** to ground.

[0115] While the preceding discussion has referred to a top and a bottom light **160** and **105**, one, two or more light bulbs may be utilized. In addition, the light bulbs may be provided by an auxiliary light source that is not physically connected to the microscope **100** but may be electrically coupled thereto.

[0116] While the present invention has been described with respect to a limited number of embodiments, those skilled in the art will appreciate numerous modifications and variations therefrom. It is intended that the appended claims cover all such modifications and variations as fall within the true spirit and scope of this present invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A method comprising:

removably supporting a microscope imaging unit on a base;

providing a first light coupled to said unit and a second light coupled to said base;

monitoring for removal of said unit from said base; and

automatically turning said second light off in response to removal of said unit from said base.

2. The method of claim 1 including determining when said unit has been removed from said base by monitoring contacts between said unit and said base.

3. The method of claim 1 including providing a graphical user interface that allows the user to enter light control signals and determining whether the user has requested that one of said first or second lights be turned off, and in response to said request turning off the requested light.

4. The method of claim 1 further including adjusting the light intensity of said first and second lights based on the available power.

5. The method of claim 1 including monitoring the available power and determining whether to operate either of said first or second lights.

6. The method of claim 1 including monitoring the available power and determining whether to operate both of said first and second lights.

7. The method of claim 1 including determining whether said first or second light is on.

8. The method of claim 1 including turning on said first light in response to removal of said unit from said base.

9. An article comprising a medium storing instructions that enable a processor-based system to:

monitor for the removal of a microscope imaging unit from a microscope imaging unit supporting base;

determine whether said unit has been removed from said base; and

in response to the removal of said unit from said base, turn off a light coupled to said base.

10. The article of claim 9 further storing instructions that enable the processor-based system to determine when said unit has been removed from said base by monitoring contacts between said unit and said base.

11. The article of claim 9 further storing instructions that enable the processor-based system to provide a graphical user interface that allows the user to enter light control signals and determine whether the user has requested that one of a first or second lights be turned off and in response to said request turning off the requested light.

12. The article of claim 9 further storing instructions that enable the processor-based system to adjust the light intensity of a first and a second light based on the available power.

13. The article of claim 9 further storing instructions that enable the processor-based system to monitor the available power and determine whether to operate either of a first or second lights.

14. The article of claim 9 further storing instructions that enable the processor-based system to monitor the available power and determine whether to operate both of a first and second lights.

15. The article of claim 9 further storing instructions that enable the processor-based system to determine whether a first or a second light is on.

16. The article of claim 9 including storing instructions that enable the processor-based system to turn a light on said imaging unit on in response to the removal of said unit from said base.

17. A microscope comprising:

a microscope imaging unit;

a base removably supporting said microscope imaging unit;

a first light coupled to said unit and a second light coupled to said base;

a circuit to monitor for removal of said unit from said base; and

a control circuit that automatically turns said second light off in response to removal of said unit from said base.

18. A method comprising:

detecting the on/off state of at least one light associated with a microscope;

analyzing an image captured by an imaging unit associated with said microscope; and

setting the color balance of said imaging unit at least in part based on an analysis of said image, the on/off state of said light, and the nature of said light.

19. The method of claim 18 including detecting the presence of a filter on said microscope, and adjusting the color balance based on the presence of said filter.

20. The method of claim 18 including detecting the state of each of two lights, determining the nature of each of said lights and setting the color balance for said imaging unit.

21. The method of claim 18 including detecting the on/off state of a first light associated with said imaging unit and a second light associated with a base which removably supports said imaging unit.

22. An article comprising a medium storing instructions that enable a processor-based system to:

detect the on/off state of at least one light associated with a microscope;

analyze an image captured by an imaging unit associated with said microscope; and

set the color balance of said imaging unit at least in part based on an analysis of said image recorded by an imaging unit, the on/off state of said light, and the nature of said light.

23. The article of claim 22 further storing instructions that enable the processor-based system to detect the presence of a filter on said microscope and adjust the color balance based on the presence of said filter.

24. The article of claim 22 further storing instructions that enable the processor-based system to detect the state of each of two lights, determine the nature of each of said lights, and set the color balance for said imaging unit.

25. A microscope comprising:

a digital imaging sensor;

a first light associated with said imaging sensor;

a detector to detect the on or off state of said light;

an image analyzer to analyze an image captured by said imaging sensor; and

a device to set the color balance of said imaging sensor at least in part based on the analysis of said image, the on/off state of said light and the nature of said light.

26. A method comprising:

automatically turning on a light to expose an object to be imaged by a digital imaging microscope;

automatically capturing an image after said light has been turned on; and

automatically turning said light off after said image has been captured.

27. The method of claim 26 including repeatedly turning said light on, capturing an image and turning said light off until a predetermined amount of time has expired.

28. The method of claim 27 including determining whether a preset time has arrived and automatically turning said light on when said preset time has arrived.

29. An article comprising a medium storing instructions that enable a processor-based system to:

automatically turn on a light to expose an object to be imaged by a digital imaging microscope;

automatically capture an image after said light has been turned on; and

automatically turn said light off after said image has been captured.

30. A digital imaging microscope comprising:

a control circuit including a timer to automatically turn a light on to expose an object to be imaged;

an image capture device that automatically captures an image after said light has been turned on; and

said control circuit automatically turning said light off after said image has been captured.

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