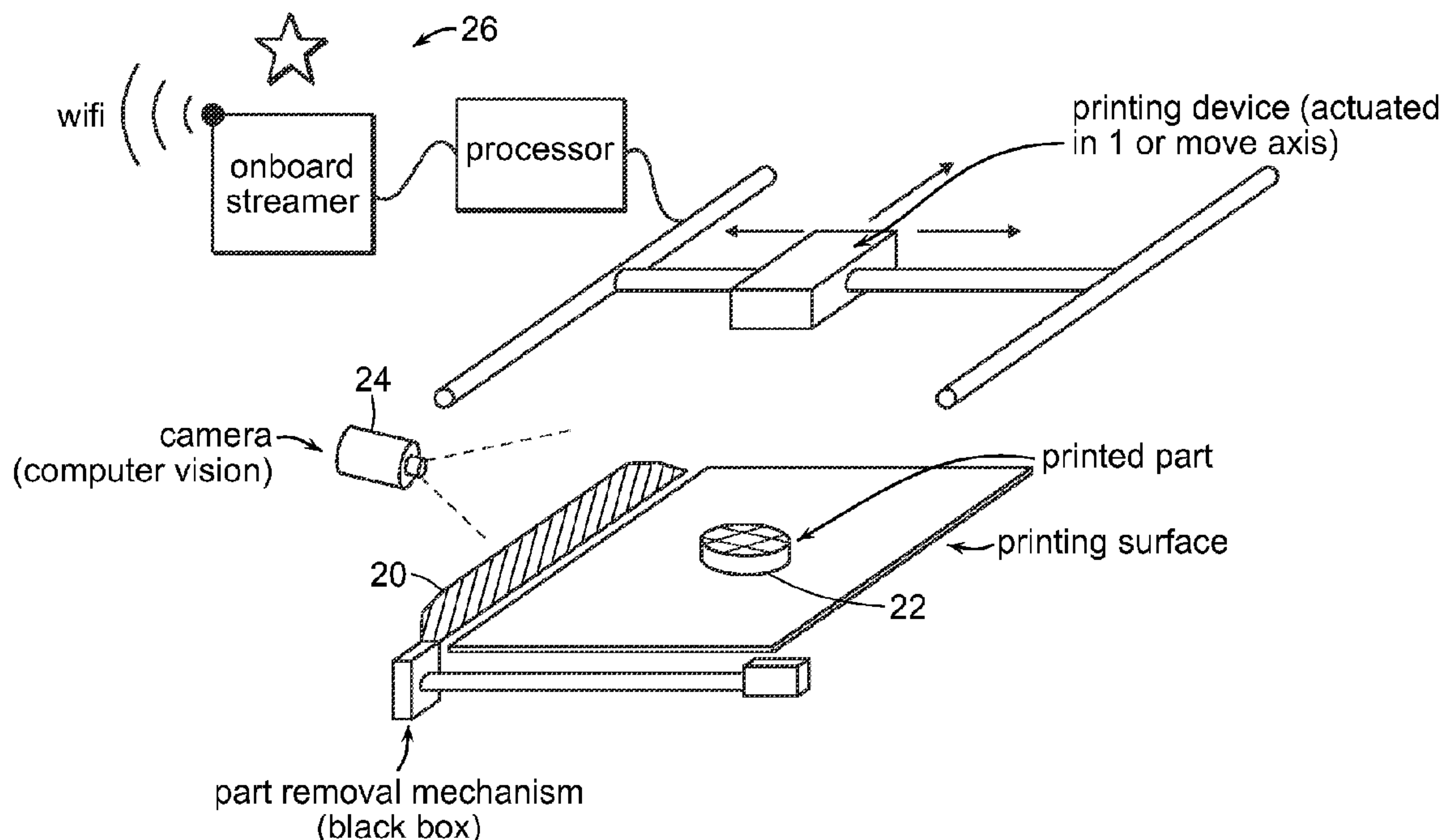




(86) **Date de dépôt PCT/PCT Filing Date:** 2014/01/31  
(87) **Date publication PCT/PCT Publication Date:** 2014/08/07  
(45) **Date de délivrance/Issue Date:** 2019/06/25  
(85) **Entrée phase nationale/National Entry:** 2015/07/28  
(86) **N° demande PCT/PCT Application No.:** US 2014/014078  
(87) **N° publication PCT/PCT Publication No.:** 2014/121032  
(30) **Priorités/Priorities:** 2013/02/01 (US61/759,686);  
2014/01/16 (US14/157,027)

(51) **Cl.Int./Int.Cl.** **B29C 64/379** (2017.01),  
**B29C 64/10** (2017.01), **B29C 64/30** (2017.01)  
(72) **Inventeurs/Inventors:**  
PEREZ, ALFONSO ALEXANDER, US;  
HAID, CHRISTOPHER MICHAEL, US;  
PIEPER, FORREST W., US;  
PENA DOLL, MATEO, US  
(73) **Propriétaire/Owner:**  
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, US  
(74) **Agent:** SMART & BIGGAR

(54) **Titre : RETRAIT AUTOMATISE DE PIECE D'IMPRESSION TRIDIMENSIONNELLE**  
(54) **Title: AUTOMATED THREE-DIMENSIONAL PRINTER PART REMOVAL**



(57) **Abrégé/Abstract:**

Three-dimensional printing system with automated part removal. In one embodiment, the system includes a printing surface on which a part is made and a printing device supported for controlled movement with respect to the printing surface to print the part on the printing surface. A blade is supported for motion across the printing surface to release the part from the printing surface. The present printing system according to the invention requires fewer user steps than known in the prior art.

## (12) INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(19) World Intellectual Property  
Organization  
International Bureau



(43) International Publication Date  
7 August 2014 (07.08.2014)

(10) International Publication Number  
**WO 2014/121032 A1**

(51) International Patent Classification:  
**B29C 67/00** (2006.01) **B29C 37/00** (2006.01)

(21) International Application Number:  
PCT/US2014/014078

(22) International Filing Date:  
31 January 2014 (31.01.2014)

(25) Filing Language: English

(26) Publication Language: English

(30) Priority Data:  
61/759,686 1 February 2013 (01.02.2013) US  
14/157,027 16 January 2014 (16.01.2014) US

(71) Applicant: **MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY** [US/US]; 77 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02139 (US).

(72) Inventors: **PEREZ, Alfonso, Alexander**; 4668 Palm Brooke Circle, West Palm Beach, FL 33417 (US). **HAID, Christopher, Michael**; 94 Old Bay Road, Bolton, MA 01740 (US). **PIEPER, Forrest, W.**; 501 West 1st Street, Nederland, CO 80466 (US). **PENA DOLL, Mateo**; 4801 Cameron Road, Elk, CA 95432 (US).

(74) Agents: **CONNORS, Matthew, E.** et al.; Gesmer Updegrave LLP, 40 Broad Street, Boston, MA 02109 (US).

(81) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of national protection available): AE, AG, AL, AM, AO, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BH, BN, BR, BW, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CL, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DO, DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, GT, HN, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IR, IS, JP, KE, KG, KN, KP, KR, KZ, LA, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LY, MA, MD, ME, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MY, MZ, NA, NG, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PA, PE, PG, PH, PL, PT, QA, RO, RS, RU, RW, SA, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SM, ST, SV, SY, TH, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, ZA, ZM, ZW.

(84) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available): ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LR, LS, MW, MZ, NA, RW, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, RU, TJ, TM), European (AL, AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, LV, MC, MK, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, RS, SE, SI, SK, SM, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, KM, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

## Published:

- with international search report (Art. 21(3))
- before the expiration of the time limit for amending the claims and to be republished in the event of receipt of amendments (Rule 48.2(h))

(54) Title: AUTOMATED THREE-DIMENSIONAL PRINTER PART REMOVAL

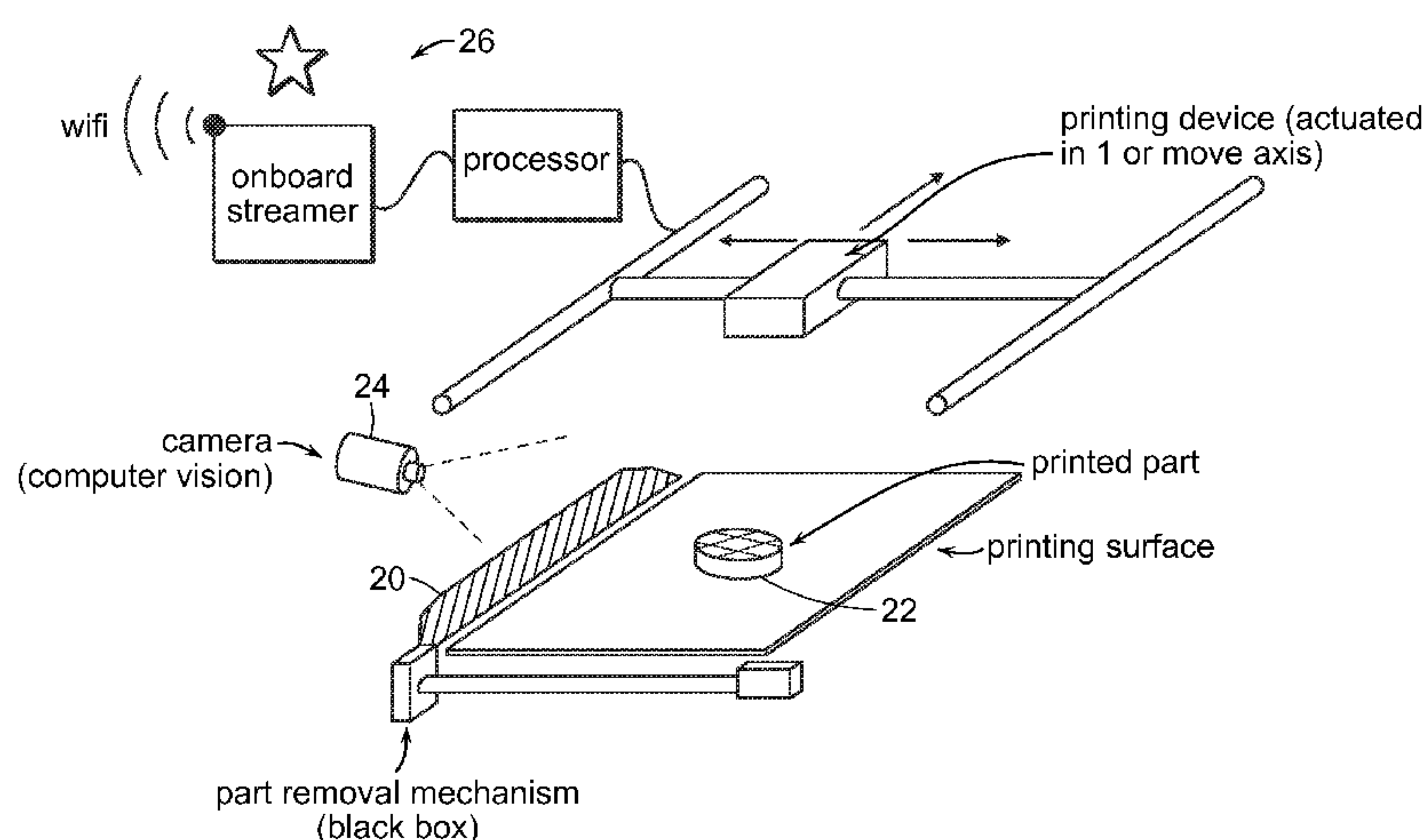


FIG. 3

(57) Abstract: Three-dimensional printing system with automated part removal. In one embodiment, the system includes a printing surface on which a part is made and a printing device supported for controlled movement with respect to the printing surface to print the part on the printing surface. A blade is supported for motion across the printing surface to release the part from the printing surface. The present printing system according to the invention requires fewer user steps than known in the prior art.

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## AUTOMATED THREE-DIMENSIONAL PRINTER PART REMOVAL

### Background

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This invention relates to 3-D printers and more particularly to automated part removal in a 3-D printer.

3-D printing, a form of additive manufacturing, is a laborious manufacturing process in its existing state. A generic prior art printer 10 shown in Fig. 1 includes a printing surface 12 and a movable carriage 14 that carries a printing device 16. The prior art system shown in Fig. 1 typically includes a tethered computer 18.

As shown in Fig. 2, prior art printers typically require six or more user steps as shown in the figure. First, a user designs a 3-D model on CAD software. The user then uploads a 3-D model of the part to be made to a slicing program. After the user manually calibrates 150-250 settings, the slicing program generates machine code for the 3-D printer 10. The fourth step of a process is to upload the machine code to a printing host in the form of a program on a computer or an SD card. From there, the machine code is streamed to a microprocessor on the printer 10, controlling actuation. After the printer is done printing, the part is removed manually. After inspecting the quality of the part, the user decides if the part needs to be reprinted.

A fully automated 3-D printer system requires automated part removal so as to eliminate the need for a local operator to remove a part in order to start a next job. Current automated part removal systems exist in three forms: conveyor belts, extruder head attachments, and heating/cooling the printing bed. In general, the disadvantages of these systems are detrimental to the printing process and/or the removal process. Conveyor belt systems have not been successful generally because the platform is flexible, leading to warped parts. A conveyor belt with rigid tracks might provide a rather expensive solution. It is also known to attach a removal paddle or block to an extruder head. Such arrangements typically cause excessive stress on the drive train and may cause misalignment in the print nozzle leading to leveling issues. Finally, it

is known to use heating/cooling to release a part from the printing surface. In such systems, the printing surface is hot during printing. Upon completion of printing the part, the plate is allowed to cool passively. Shrinkage causes the part to “pop.”

5

### Summary

In one aspect, a three-dimensional printing system disclosed herein includes a printing surface on which a part is made. A printing device may be supported for controlled movement with respect to the printing surface to print the part on the printing surface. A blade may be supported for motion across the printing surface to release the part from the printing surface. In some embodiments, a solenoid-controlled pneumatic piston is used to move the blade. The blade may be cantilevered from a support on one side of the printing surface. Alternatively, the blade may be supported on both sides of the printing surface. For a cantilevered blade, the support may form a compliant joint. In some embodiments, the blade may have a hardened steel portion that engages the part.

In illustrative embodiments, a lead screw may be provided to move the blade. Alternatively, a drive pulley driving a belt can be used to move the blade. A rack and pinion arrangement may also be employed to move the blade. In embodiments, the blade may be caused to vibrate to facilitate part removal.

In another aspect, a 3-D printing system disclosed herein includes a printing surface on which a part is printed, the printing surface including holes in an array. A printing device may be supported for controlled movement with respect to the printing surface to print the part on the printing surface. Pins may be arranged in an array matching the array of holes and means may be provided for pushing the pins through the holes to lift the part from the surface. In one embodiment, the means for pushing the pins through the holes comprises lowering the printing surface onto the pins. Alternatively, means may be provided for pushing the pins through the hole by raising the pins.

30

In yet another aspect, a three-dimensional printing system is disclosed which includes a printing surface including at least one hole beneath the part location. Compressed air may be introduced through the hole to lift a part from the surface.

5 In still another aspect, the system may include means for vibrating the printing surface. An electromagnet may be used to vibrate the printing surface.

In still another aspect, a three-dimensional printing system disclosed herein comprises: a printing surface on which a part is made; a printing device supported for controlled movement  
10 with respect to the printing surface to print the part on the printing surface; and a blade supported for motion across the printing surface to release the part from the printing surface, wherein the blade is cantilevered from a support on one side of the printing surface or wherein the blade is supported on both sides of the printing surface.

15 Many of the embodiments disclosed herein further include a helper device to remove a released part. Helpers may include a compressed air jet, fixed barrier to restrain a released part and a pivoting barrier attached to a blade.

#### **Brief Description of the Drawing**

20 Fig. 1 is a perspective view of a prior art three-dimensional printing apparatus.

Fig. 2 is a block diagram showing user steps with regard to prior art three-dimensional printing devices.

25 Fig. 3 is a perspective, exploded view of a printer according to an embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 4 is a block diagram showing the user steps in conjunction with the three-dimensional printer disclosed herein.

30 Fig. 5 is a perspective view of a shovel/blade embodiment for removing a printed part.

Fig. 6 is a cross-sectional view of an embodiment of the invention using pins to urge a part away from the printing surface.

Fig. 7 is a schematic illustration of an embodiment of the invention using air pressure delivered from beneath the printing surface to release a printed part.

Fig. 8 constitutes views of a cantilevered blade in one embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 9 is a perspective view of an aluminum support for receiving a hardened steel sheet to serve as a blade for use in the invention.

Fig. 10 is a perspective view of an embodiment of the invention using a threaded rod or a lead screw to move the blade for part removal.

Fig. 11 is a schematic illustration showing a blade supported on both sides of the printing surface.

Fig. 12 is a schematic illustration of an electromagnet used to vibrate the printing surface for part removal.

20

Fig. 13 is a schematic illustration of structure to vibrate a blade to facilitate part removal.

Fig. 14 is a schematic illustration of the use of compressed air to remove a released part.

25 Fig. 15 is a schematic illustration of a barrier brush used to receive a released part.

Fig. 16 constitutes views of a blade mounted spring-pivot for removing a part.

Fig. 17 is another embodiment of a flexible barrier used to remove a part.

30

Fig. 18 shows a pivoting barrier with a fixed brush.

Fig. 19 is a perspective view of a pivot barrier for use in conjunction with the invention disclosed herein.

5 Fig. 20 is a cross-sectioned view of the underside of the print plate with grooves for kinematically coupling to a support structure.

### Description of the Preferred Embodiment

10

With reference now to Fig. 3, an embodiment of the invention includes a part removal blade 20 which can be moved to release a printed part 22. A camera 24 is provided for assessing a part during and after it has been printed. The present invention also includes an onboard printer host 26 that is connected to a Wi-Fi network. Software for repairing and slicing 3-D models is stored in the cloud as opposed to a computer tethered to a printer as in prior art systems. An automated queue is provided to dictate the next part that the printer will print.

With reference now to Fig. 4, the system disclosed herein requires merely three user steps as opposed to the six steps discussed above with respect to prior art 3-D printers. In the present system, after content creation, a 3-D model is uploaded to the system. After an administrator approval (optional), the part is automatically repaired and sliced (machine code is generated from the 3-D model) with automatically selected slicing settings (based on two user inputs for speed versus quality and speed versus strength) in the cloud, then automatically loaded onto an automated queue for a particular printer. When the printer has reached that part on the queue, the g-code (machine code) is automatically loaded into the printer's local host program (typically on a local micro-computer), and streamed to the printer's microprocessor. As the printing process proceeds, the camera 24 monitors each 2-D layer using automated computer vision to ensure that the part is printing correctly. If the part fails at any layer, the part is automatically removed and reprinted (re-slicing with different setting occurs before re-printing if the artificial intelligence software deems it necessary). The finished part (quality inspected again by the computer vision subsystem) is removed and ready for pickup. The printer then moves on to the

20  
25  
30

next part on the queue. In total, there are strictly three user steps: content creation, 3-D model upload, and finished part pickup.

With reference now to Fig. 5, an embodiment of the part removal system is illustrated. A  
5 blade 20 is arranged for motion across the print plate 12 using a pneumatic piston 25 to move the plate under the motive force of compressed air controlled by a solenoid valve 27. It will be understood that the motive force moving the blade 20 is adjusted to remove a part without damaging the part.

10 Another embodiment of the part removal system disclosed herein is shown in Fig. 6. In this embodiment, holes in an array are made through the printing bed or surface 12. A plurality of ejector pins 30 are arranged beneath the print surface 12. After a part has been printed, either the print surface 12 is lowered onto the pins 30, or the pins 30 are lifted to pass through the array of holes to lift a printed part as shown in the figure.

15 Yet another embodiment of the invention is shown in Fig. 7. In this embodiment, there is a hole in the print surface 12 through which air is injected from underneath the printed part 32. The air pressure lifts the printed part as shown in the lower portion of Fig. 7.

20 Yet another embodiment of the invention is illustrated in Fig. 8. In this embodiment, the blade 20 is cantilevered at a compliant joint 34 on one side of the unit. The blade 20 is leveled on the printing surface and moves across the printing surface to release a part. As shown in Fig. 9, it is preferred that the blade 20 have a substrate such as aluminum to which is attached a hardened steel sheet 36 to provide the part lifting capability.

25 Fig. 10 illustrates an embodiment in which a threaded rod or lead screw 38 causes the blade 20 to traverse the printing surface 12 to engage and then remove a printed part. As shown in Fig. 11, it is contemplated that the blade 20 may be supported on both sides by guides 40 and 42.

30

Yet another embodiment of the invention is shown in Fig. 12 in which an electromagnet 44 causes the print plate 12 to vibrate in a way selected to release a part printed on the print plate 12. In yet another embodiment, as shown in Fig. 13, the blade 20 itself is caused to vibrate. A motor 46 with a non-concentric weight may be provided to cause the blade 20 to vibrate.

5

After parts have been released as discussed above, compressed air may be used to remove a part from the printing surface 12 as shown in Fig. 14.

Fig. 15 illustrates a fixed brush 48 that impedes movement of a part. Figs. 16 and 17 show additional embodiments of arrangements for removing a part that has already been released from the surface. Fig. 18 is a perspective view showing the fixed barrier. Fig. 19 shows a pivoting barrier.

Fig. 20 is a cross-sectional view of the underside of the printing surface 12 in one embodiment. Grooves 40 are adapted to mate with protrusions extending from the printer's support so that plate 12 will be level with respect to the support structure. The arrangement forms a kinematic coupling as is well-known to those of ordinary skill in the art. The arrangement of the grooves 40 shown in Fig. 20 allows the plate 12 to be positioned at a selected rotational orientation. It is preferred that once in place, the plate 12 be preloaded by, for example, a magnet or a spring to secure the plate 12 in the coupled position.

The present invention provides automated part removal solutions that solve the printing and removal disadvantages discussed above in conjunction with the prior art. The present invention discloses structures and methods that provide automated part removal at a much lower cost.

It is recognized that modifications and variations of the present invention will be apparent to those of ordinary skills in the art and it is intended that all such modifications and variations be included within the scope of the appended claims.

30

**What is claimed is:**

- 1 1. A three-dimensional printing system comprising:  
2  
3 a printing surface on which a part is made;  
4  
5 a printing device supported for controlled movement with respect to the printing  
6 surface to print the part on the printing surface; and  
7  
8 a blade supported for motion across the printing surface to release the part from the  
9 printing surface,  
10  
11 wherein the blade is cantilevered from a support on one side of the printing surface or  
12 wherein the blade is supported on both sides of the printing surface.
- 1 2. The printing system of claim 1 further including a solenoid-controlled pneumatic piston to  
2 move the blade.
- 1 3. The printing system of claim 1 wherein the blade is cantilevered from a support on one side  
2 of the printing surface.
- 1 4. The printing system of claim 1 wherein the blade is supported on both sides of the printing  
2 surface.
- 1 5. The printing system of claim 3 wherein the support forms a compliant joint.
- 1 6. The printing system of claim 1 wherein the blade has a hardened steel portion that engages  
2 the part.
- 1 7. The printing system of claim 1 further including a lead screw to move the blade.

1 8. The printing system of claim 1 further including a drive pulley driving a belt to move the  
2 blade to remove the printed part.

1 9. The printing system of claim 1 further including a rack and pinion arrangement to move the  
2 blade.

1 10. The printing system of claim 1 further including means to cause the blade to vibrate.

1 11. The printing system of claim 1 further including a helper device to remove the released  
2 part.

1 12. The printing system of claim 11 further including a compressed air jet to remove the  
2 released part.

1 13. The printing system of claim 1 further including a fixed barrier to restrain a released part.

1 14. The printing system of claim 1 further including a torqued pivoting barrier attached to the  
2 blade.

1 15. The printing system of claim 1 further including an elastic band mounted on the blade to  
2 remove a released part.

1 16. The printing system of claim 1 further including a computer vision system including at  
2 least one camera to detect successful part removal.

1 17. The printing system of claim 1 wherein the printing surface is kinematically coupled to a  
2 support structure for rapid and precise leveling of the printing surface.

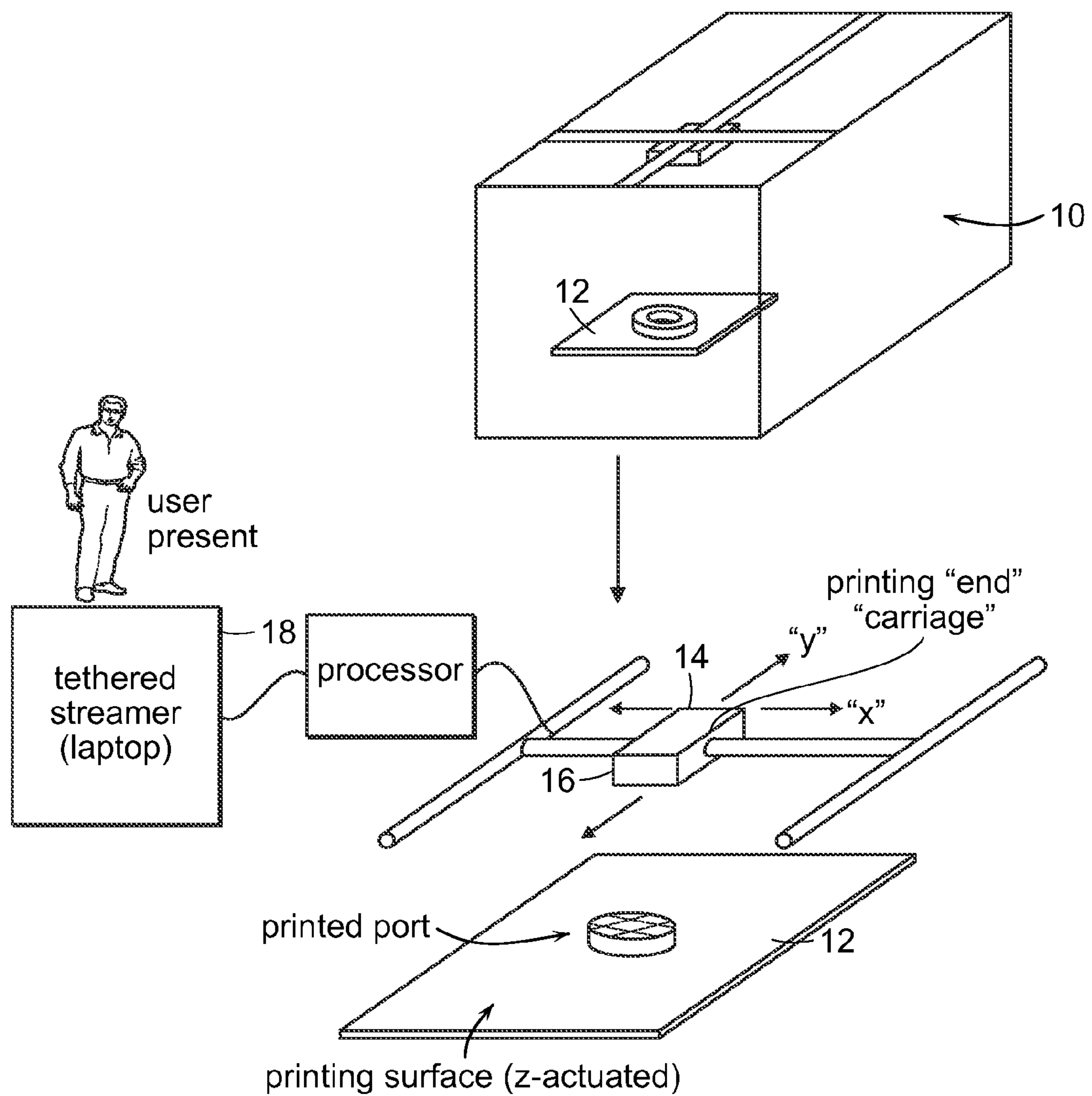
1 18. The printing system of claim 17 further including structure to preload the printing surface  
2 with respect to the support structure.

1 19. The printing system of claim 18 wherein the preload structure includes a magnet.

1 20. The printing system of claim 17 wherein the support structure includes a plurality of  
2 protrusions extending from the support structure allowing the printing surface to assume an  
3 approximately level position at a selected rotational orientation.

1 21. The system of any one of claims 1 to 20 wherein the blade is supported for motion across  
2 the printing surface while remaining in contact with the printing surface throughout the motion  
3 to traverse the printing surface and to engage and release the part from the printing surface.

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**FIG. 1**  
(PRIOR ART)

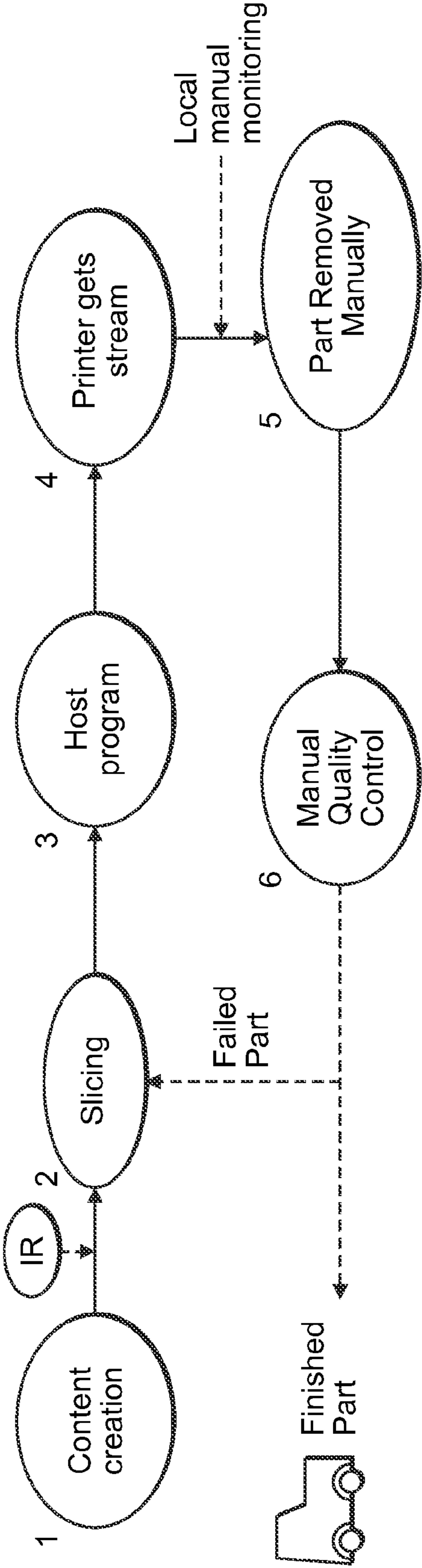


FIG. 2  
(PRIOR ART)

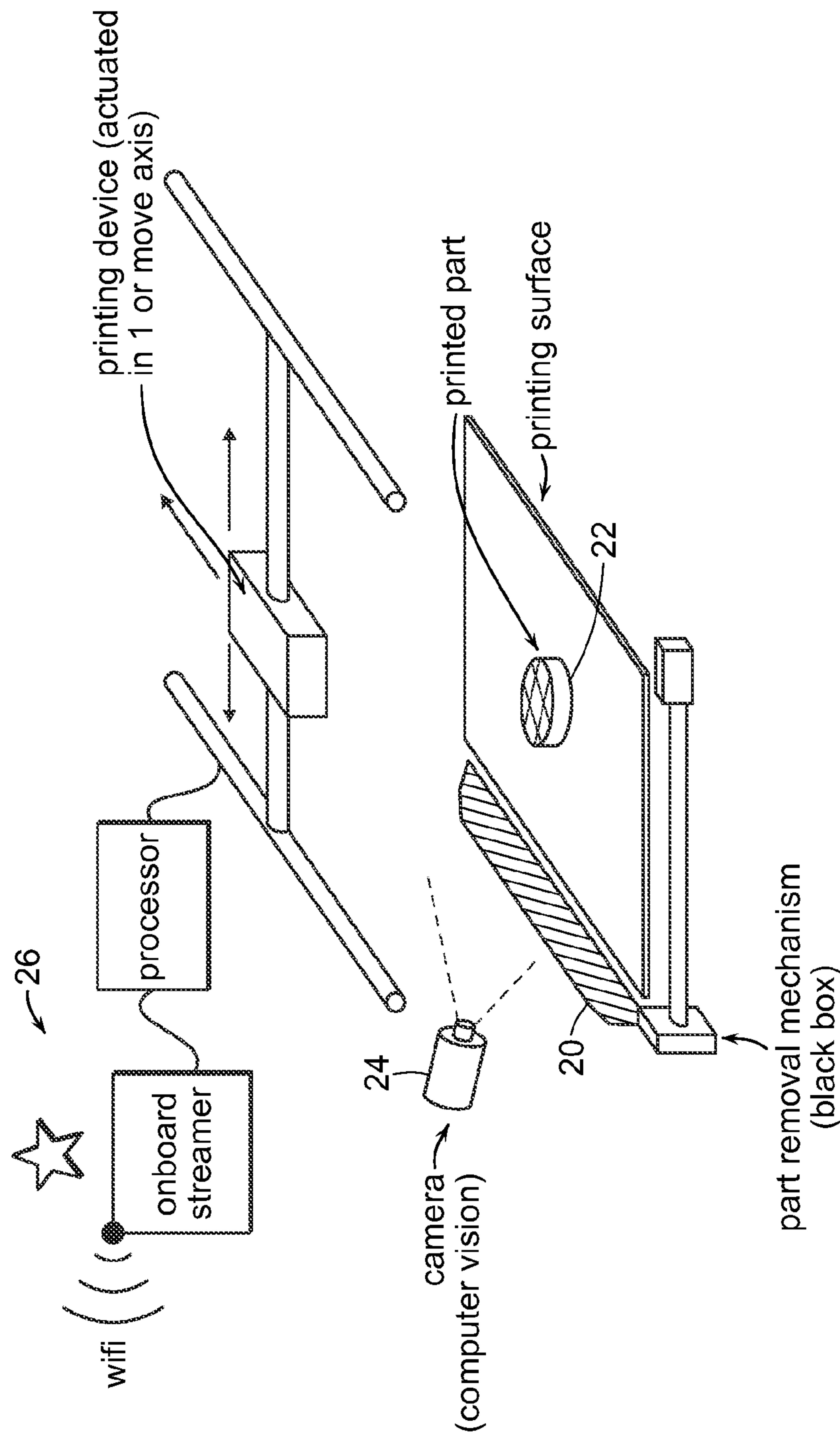


FIG. 3

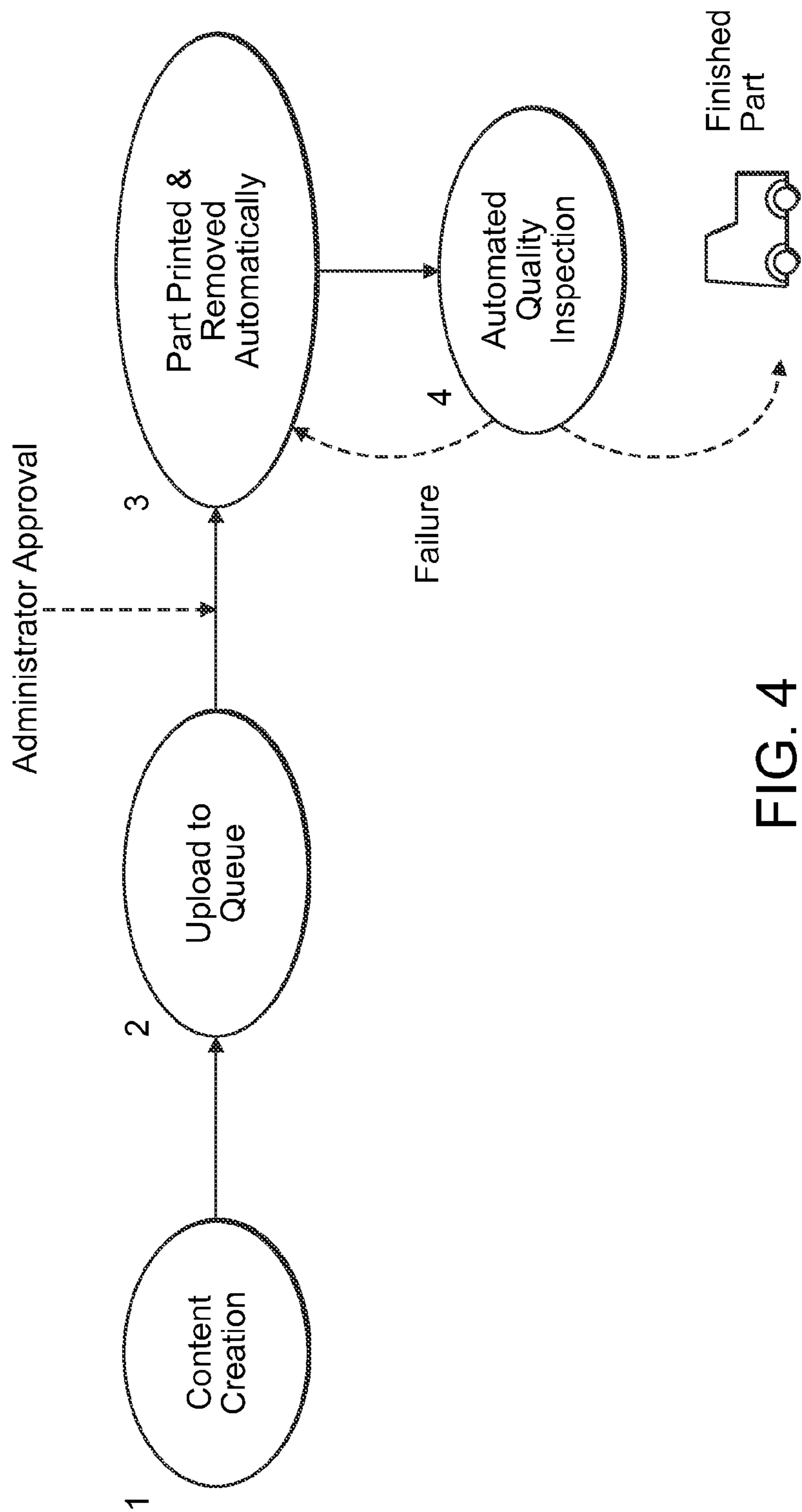


FIG. 4

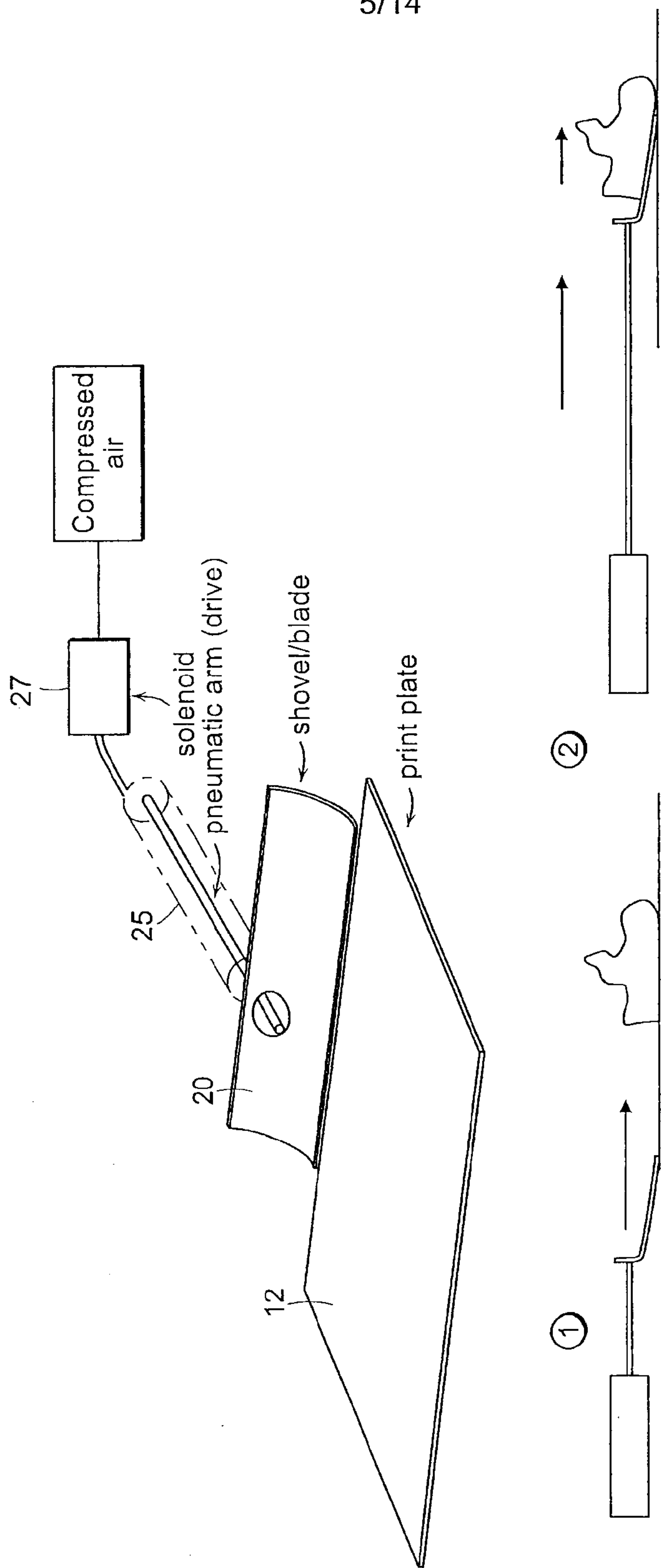


FIG. 5

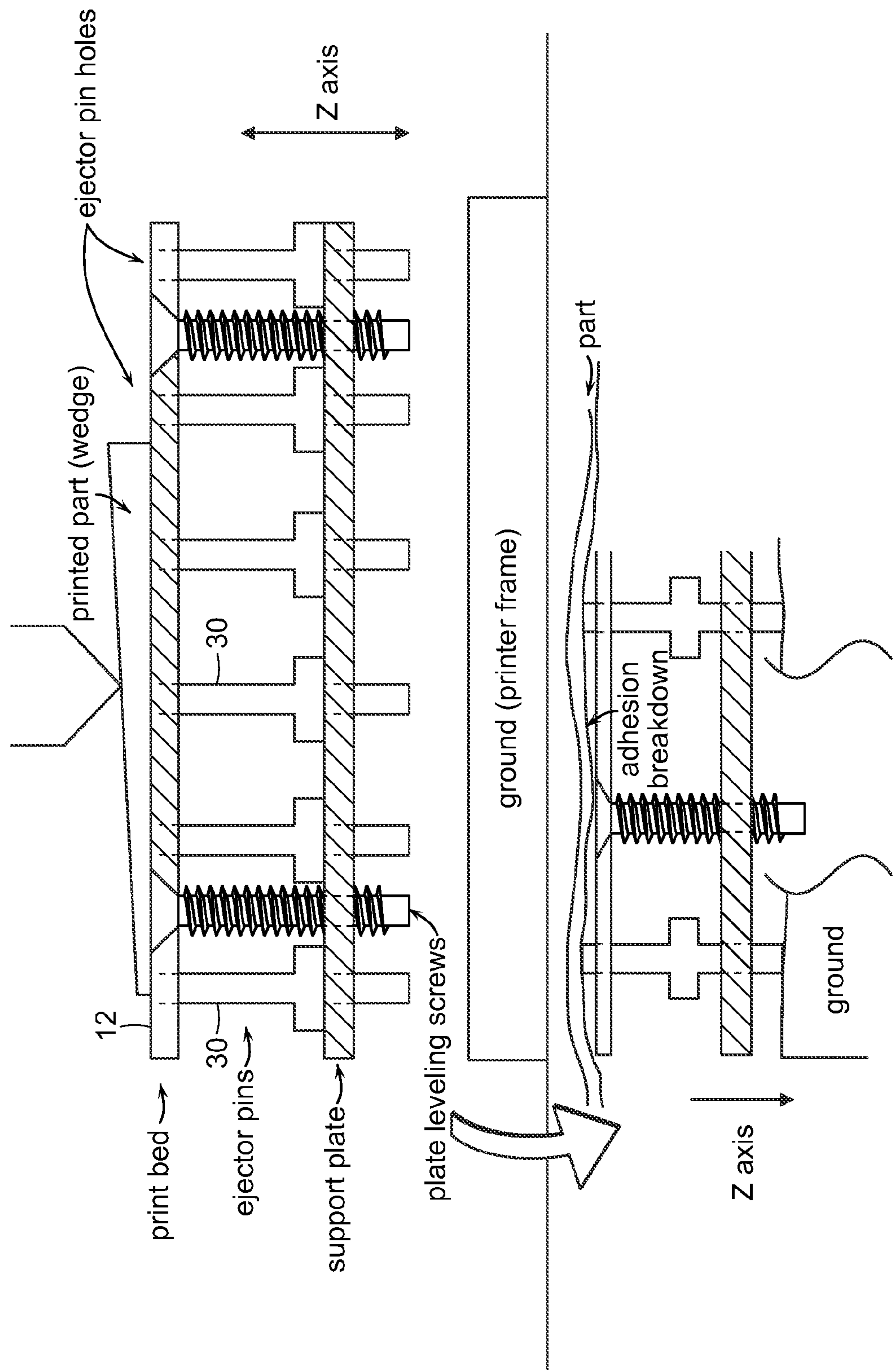


FIG. 6

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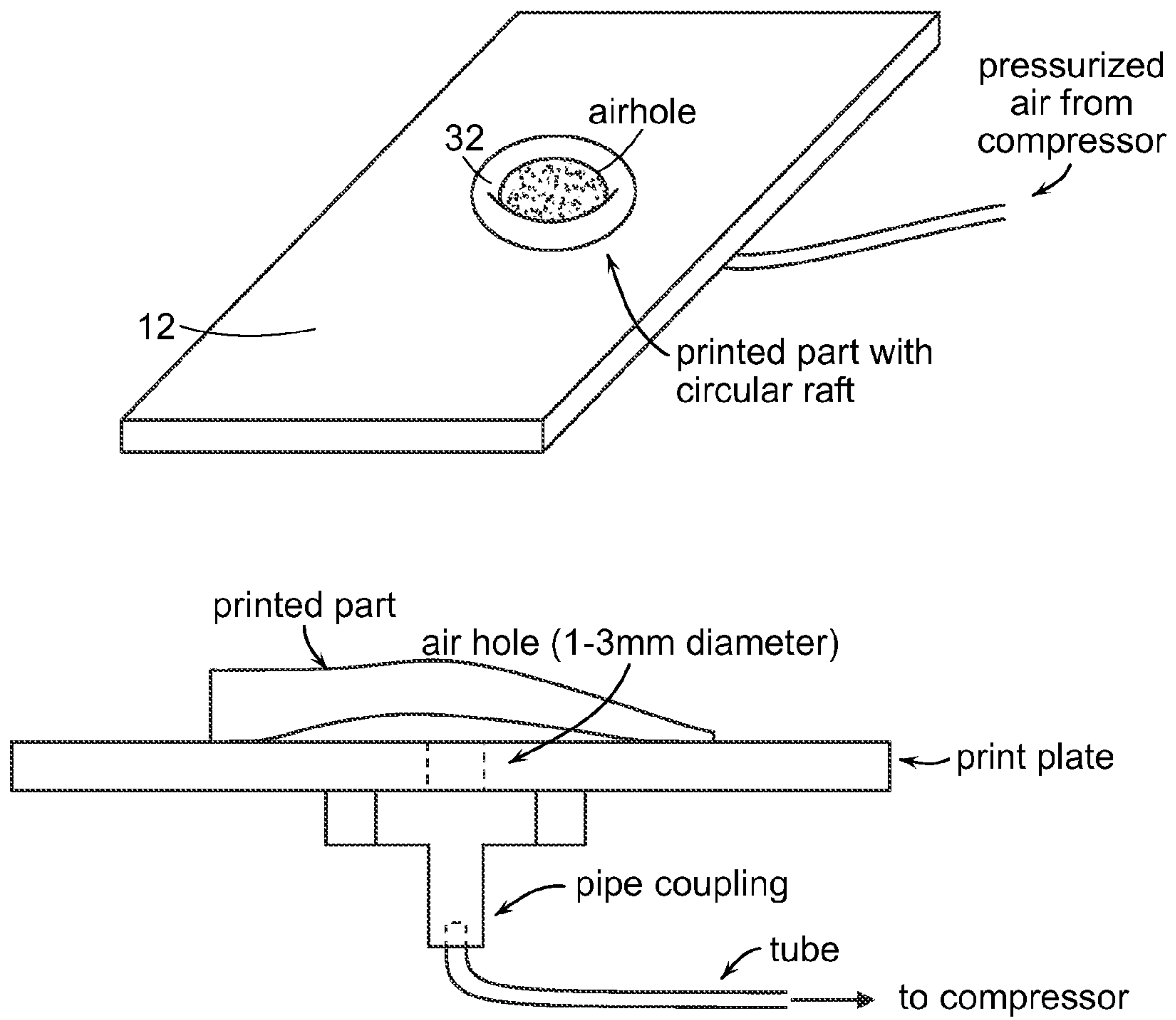
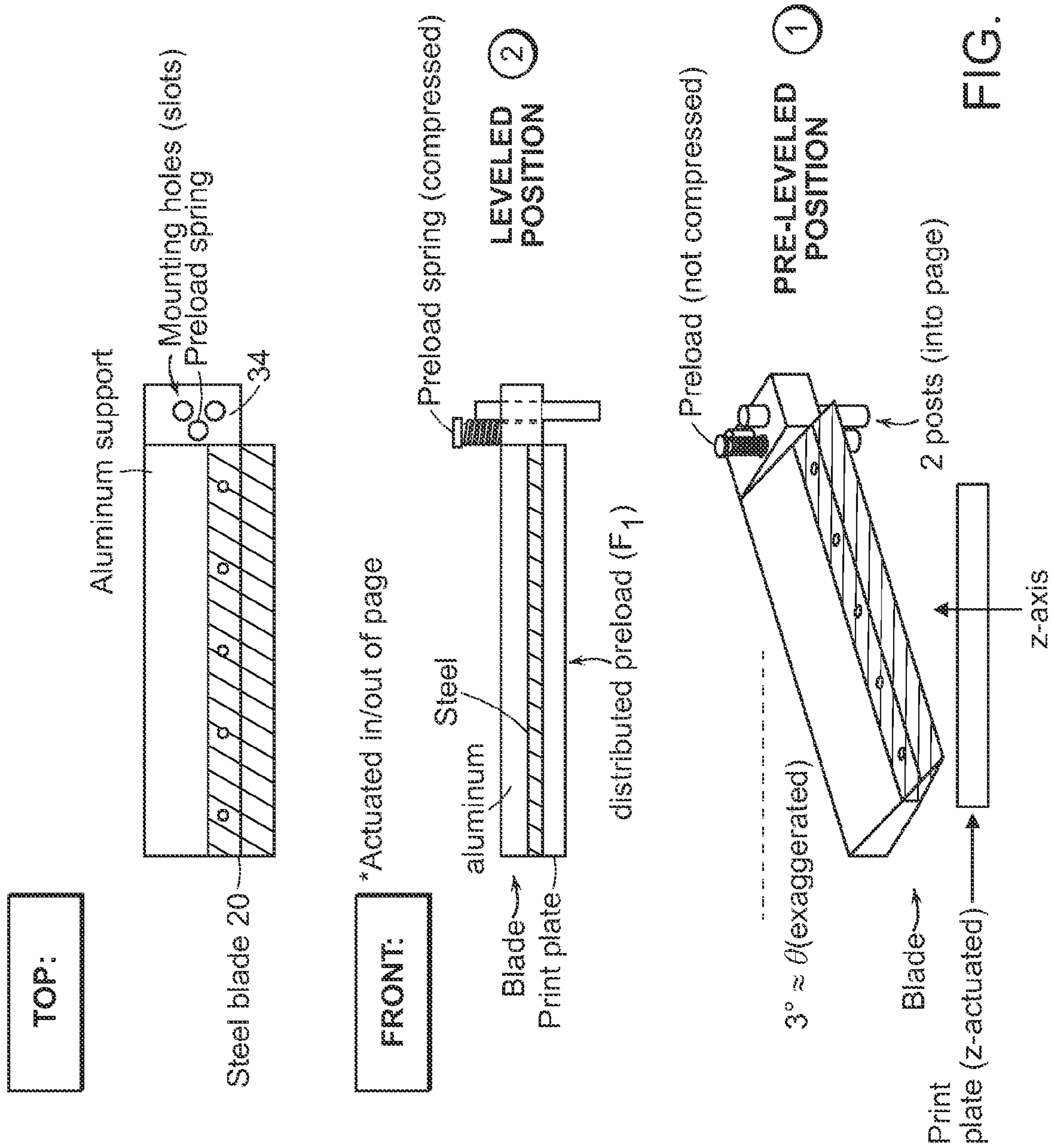


FIG. 7



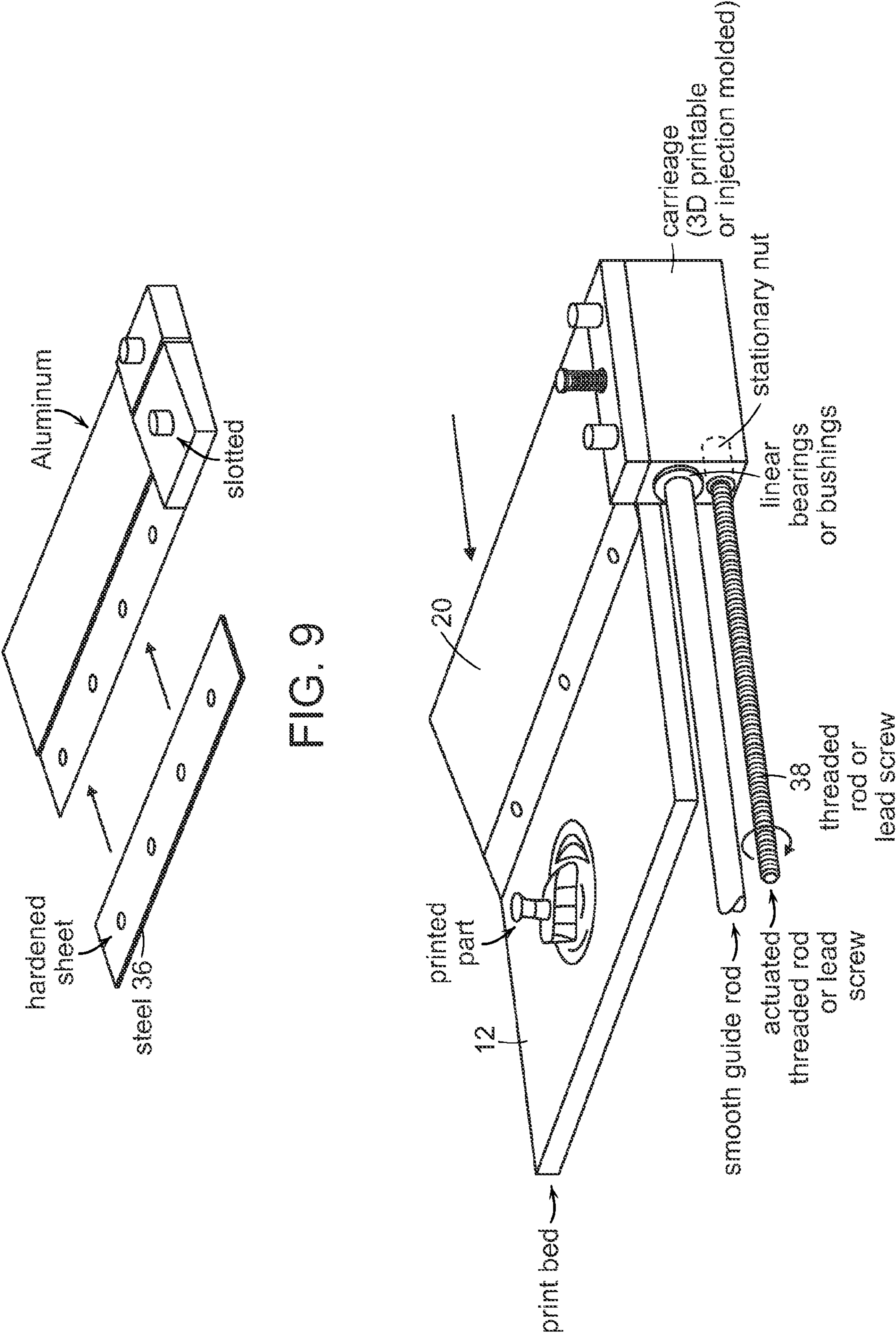


FIG. 9

FIG. 10

## Replacement Sheet

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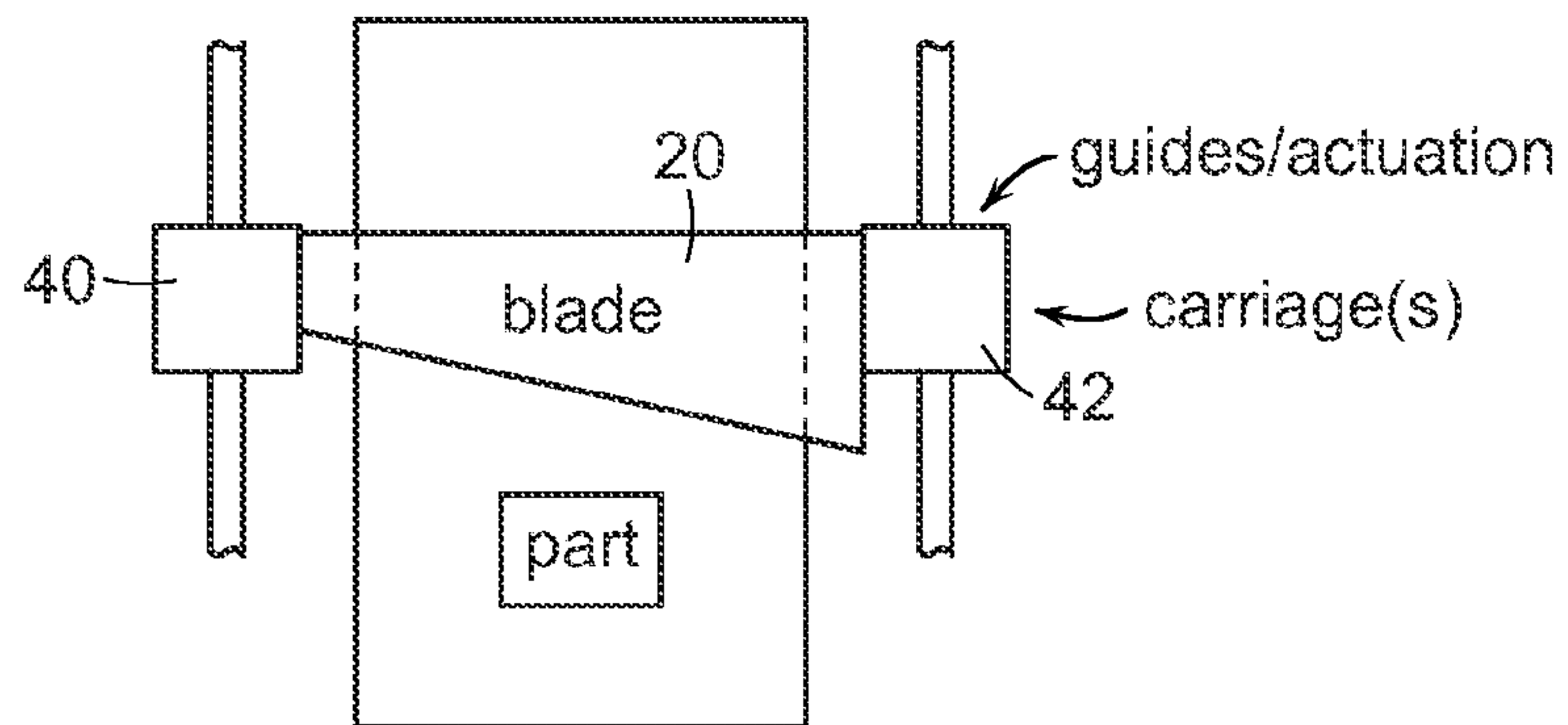


FIG. 11

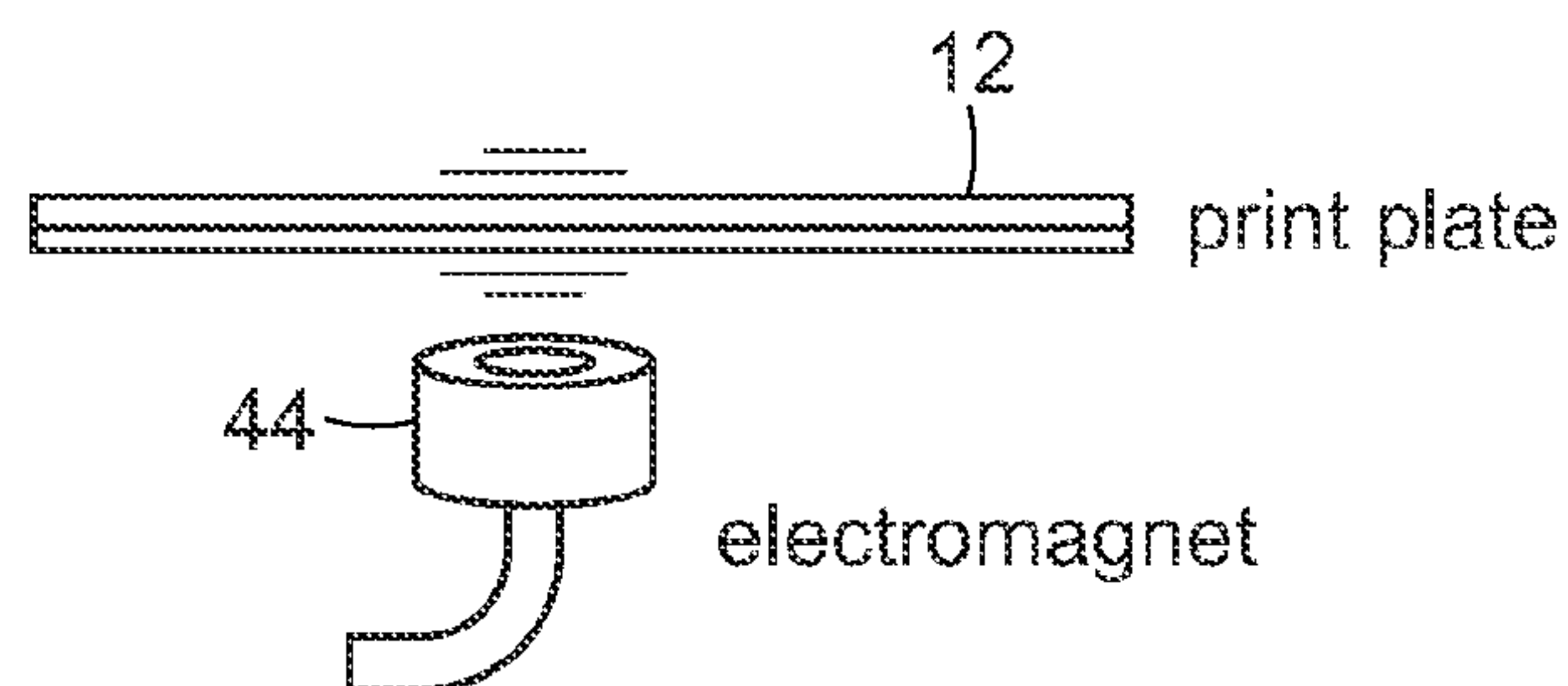


FIG. 12

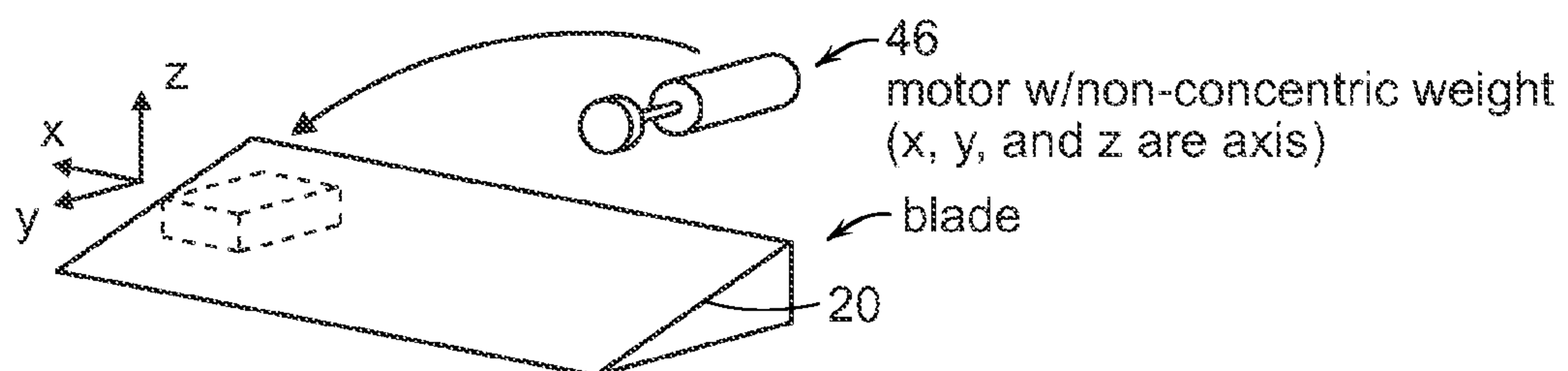


FIG. 13

SUBSTITUTE SHEET (RULE 26)

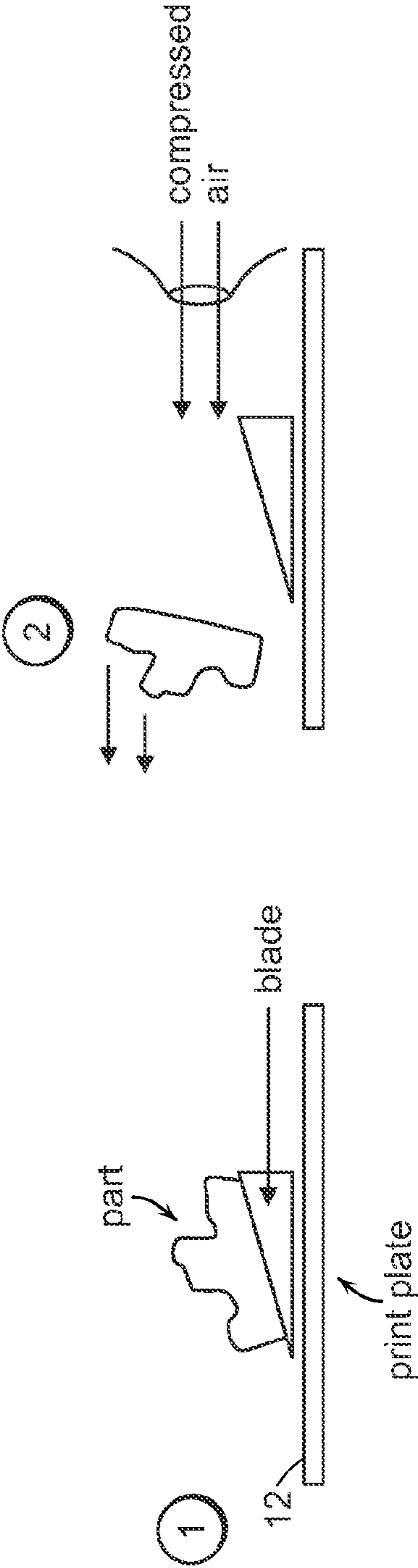


FIG. 14

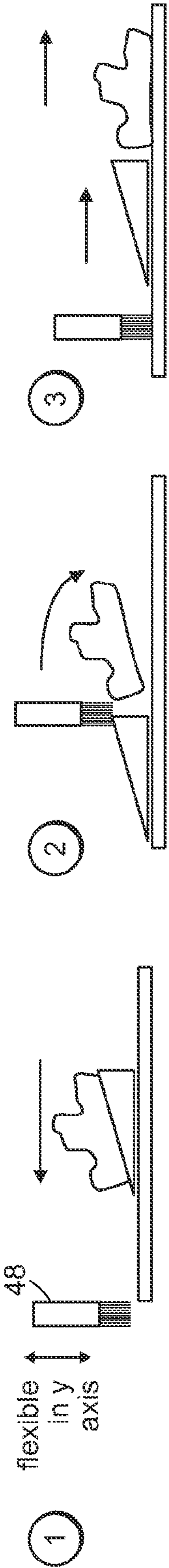
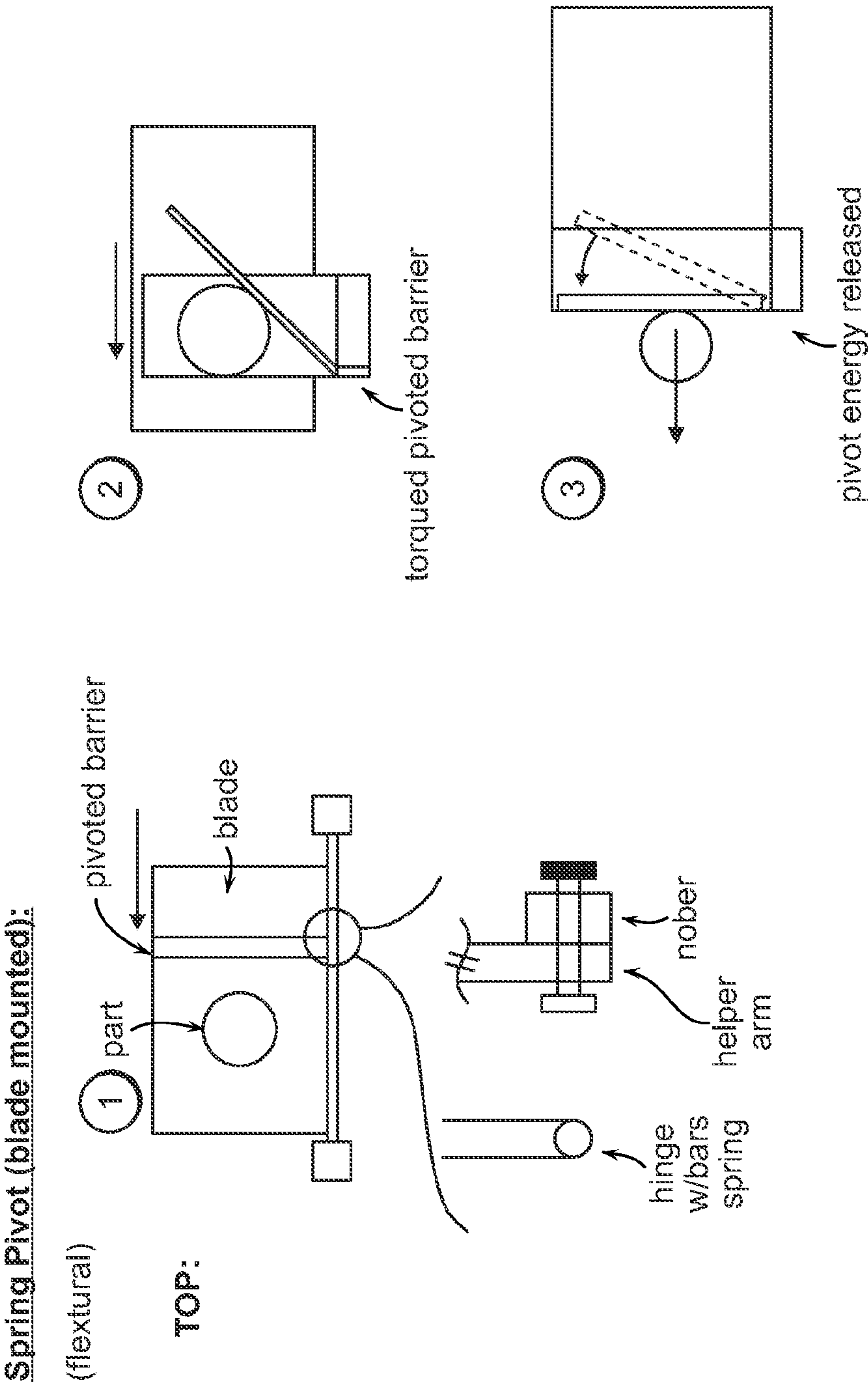


FIG. 15



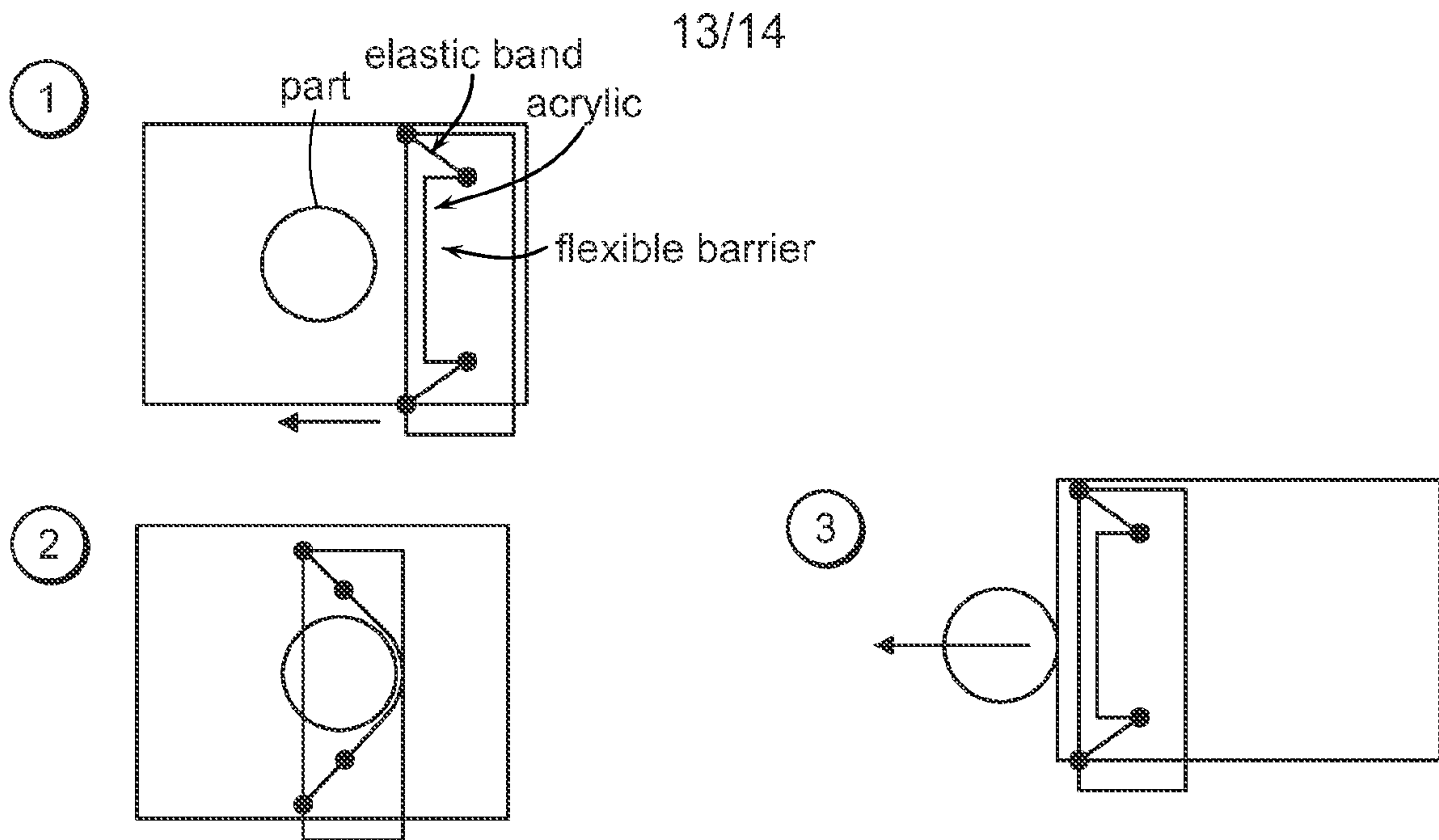


FIG. 17

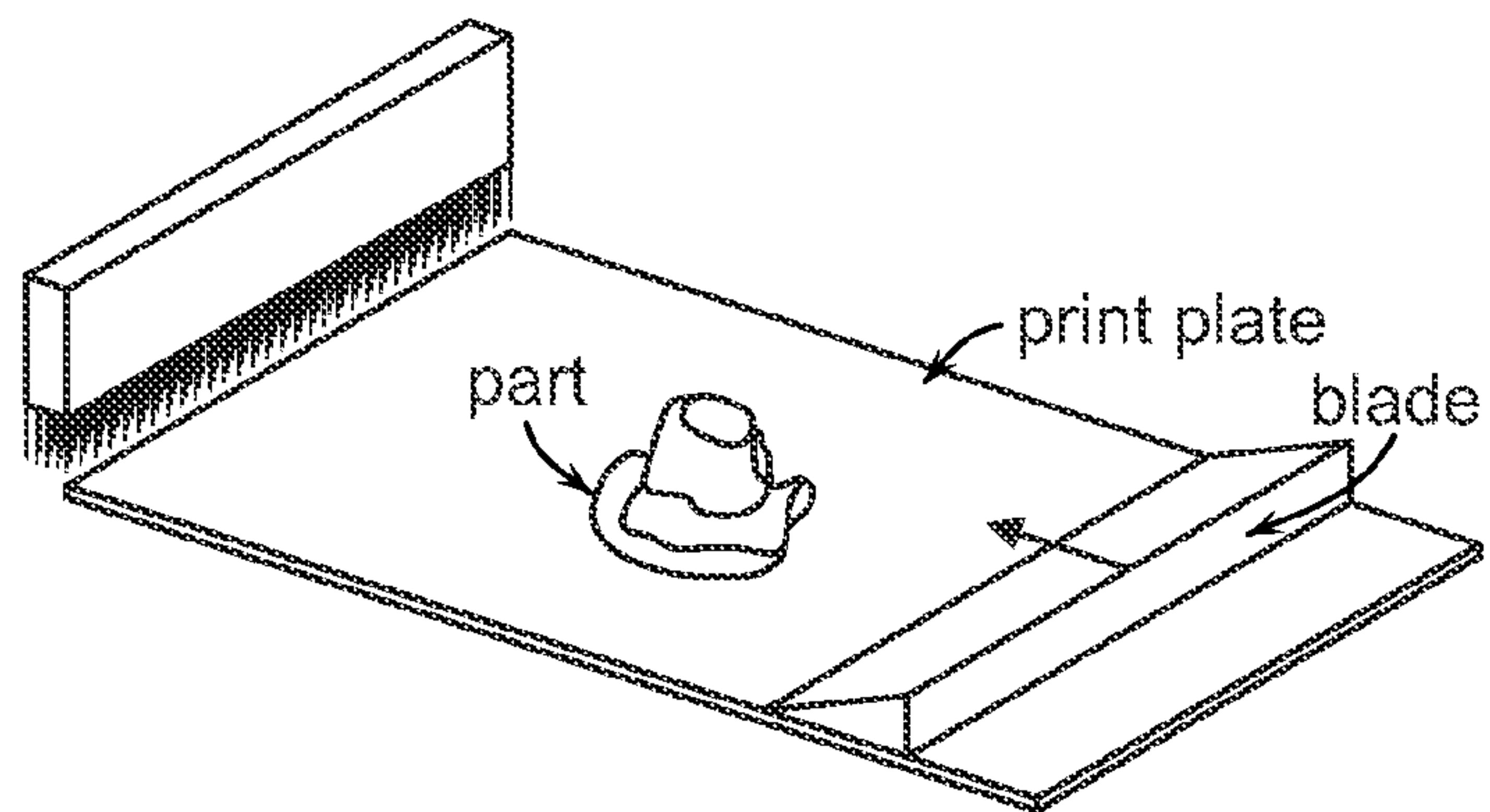


FIG. 18

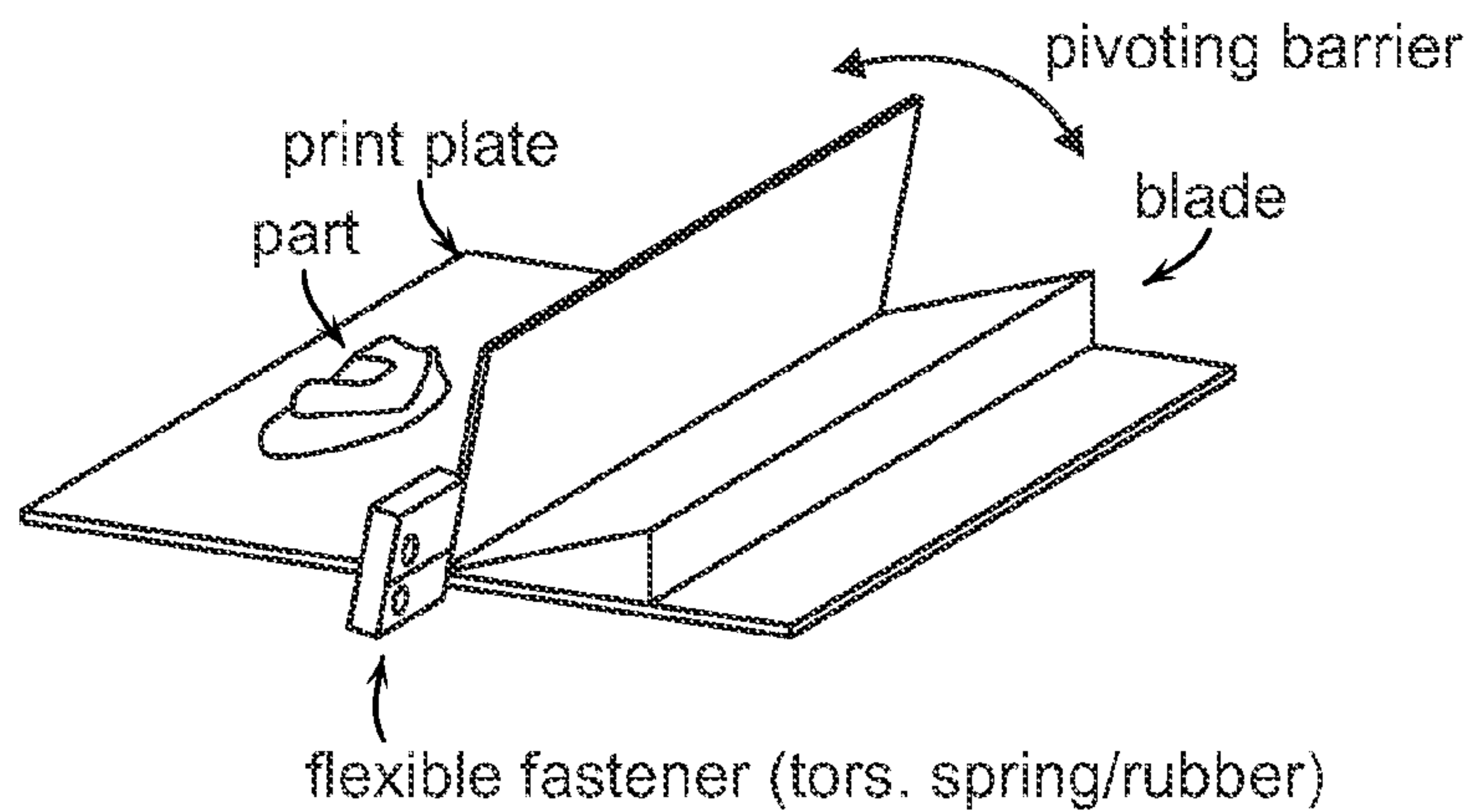


FIG. 19  
SUBSTITUTE SHEET (RULE 26)

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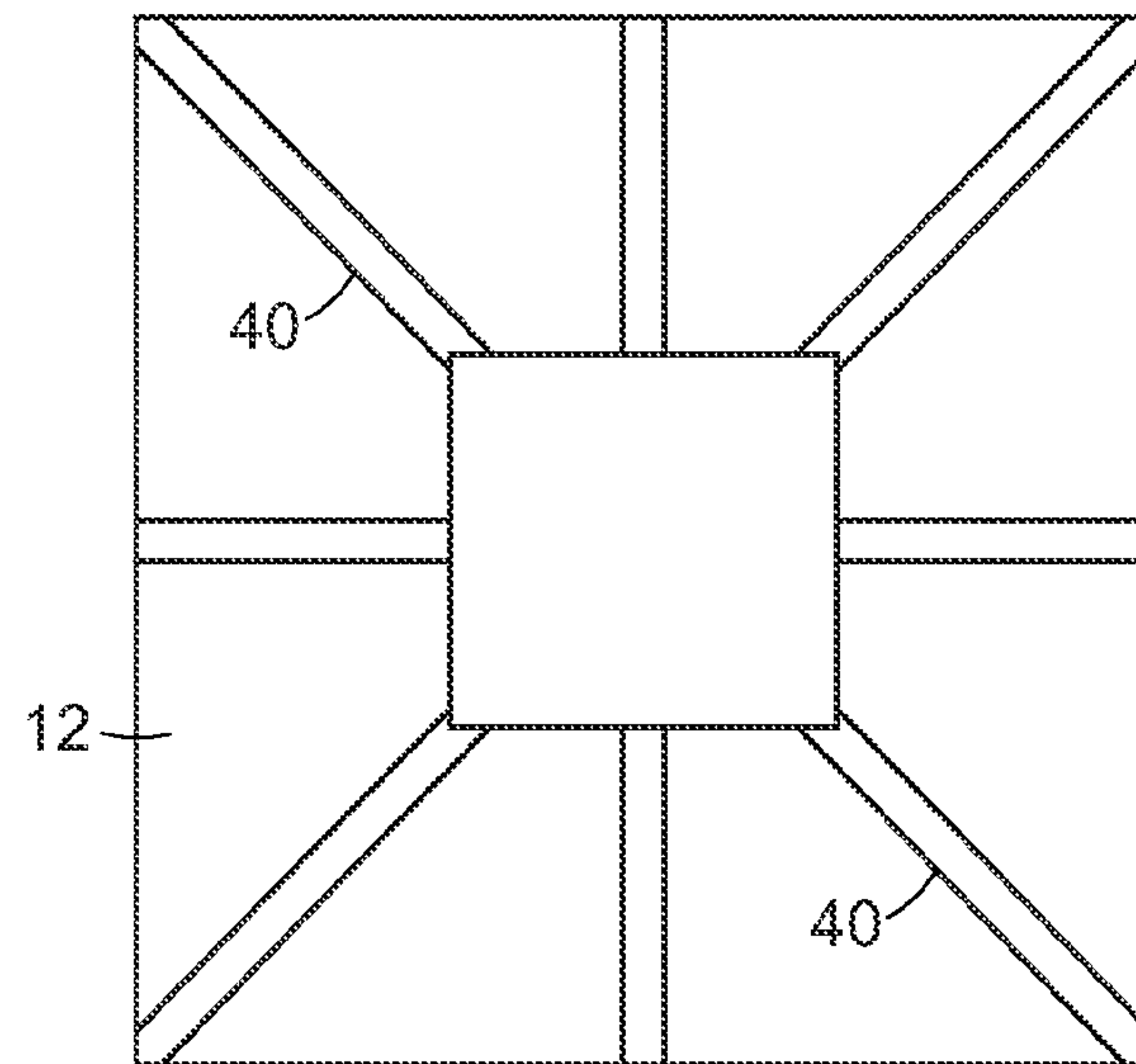


FIG. 20

