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(54) **MINIMALLY INVASIVE SURGICAL APPARATUS WITH SIDE EXIT INSTRUMENTS**

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PATENT DEPT
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(73) Assignee: **Intuitive Surgical, Inc.**, Sunnyvale, CA (US)

(21) Appl. No.: **11/762,170**

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Related U.S. Application Data

(60) Provisional application No. 60/813,028, filed on Jun. 13, 2006. Provisional application No. 60/813,029, filed on Jun. 13, 2006. Provisional application No. 60/813,030, filed on Jun. 13, 2006. Provisional application No. 60/813,075, filed on Jun. 13, 2006. Provisional application No. 60/813,125, filed on Jun. 13, 2006. Provisional application No. 60/813,126, filed on Jun. 13, 2006. Provisional application No. 60/813,129, filed on Jun. 13, 2006. Provisional application No. 60/813,131, filed on Jun. 13, 2006. Provisional application No. 60/813,172, filed on Jun. 13, 2006. Provisional application No. 60/813,173, filed on Jun. 13, 2006. Provisional application No. 60/813,198, filed on Jun. 13, 2006. Provisional application No. 60/813,207, filed on Jun. 13, 2006. Provisional application No. 60/813,328, filed on Jun. 13, 2006.

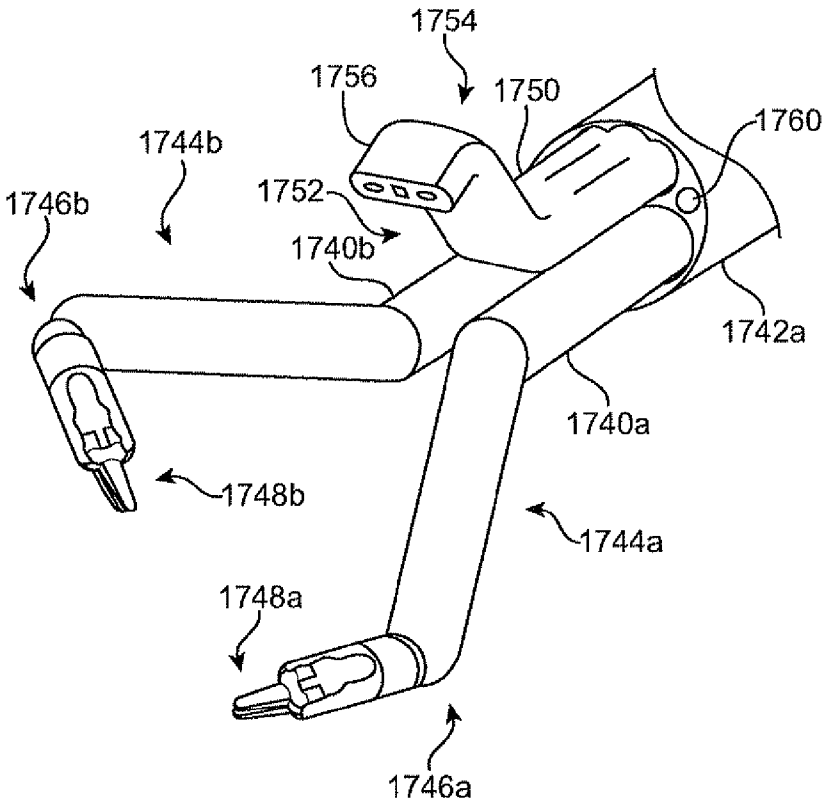
Publication Classification

(51) **Int. Cl.**
A61B 19/00 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **606/130**; 901/14

(57) **ABSTRACT**

Two primary guide tubes are inserted through a secondary guide tube, and the primary guide tubes exit via side exit ports of the secondary guide tube. Surgical instruments are inserted through the primary guide tubes. The surgical instruments are telemanipulatively operated by moving components of the instruments and/or components of the primary guide tubes and/or components of the secondary guide tube. A stereoscopic image capture component is at the distal end of the secondary guide tube.



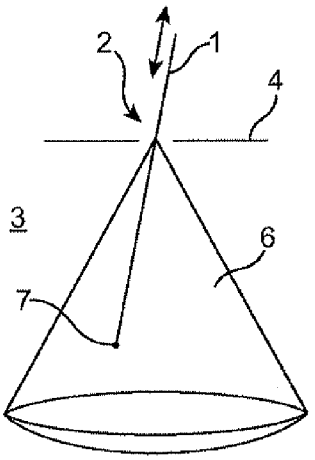


FIG. 1
(PRIOR ART)

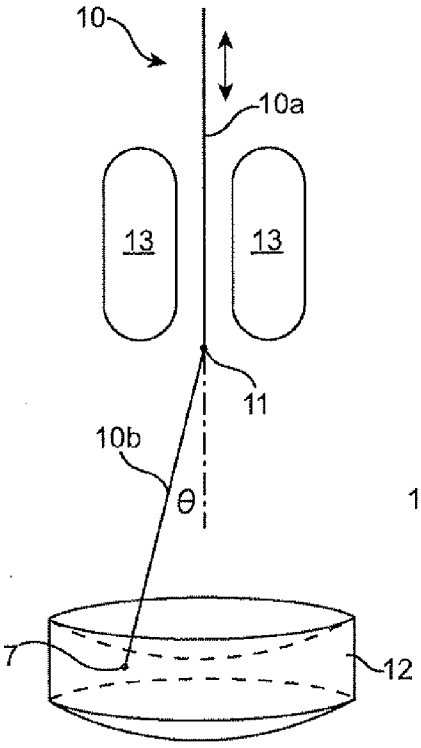


FIG. 2A

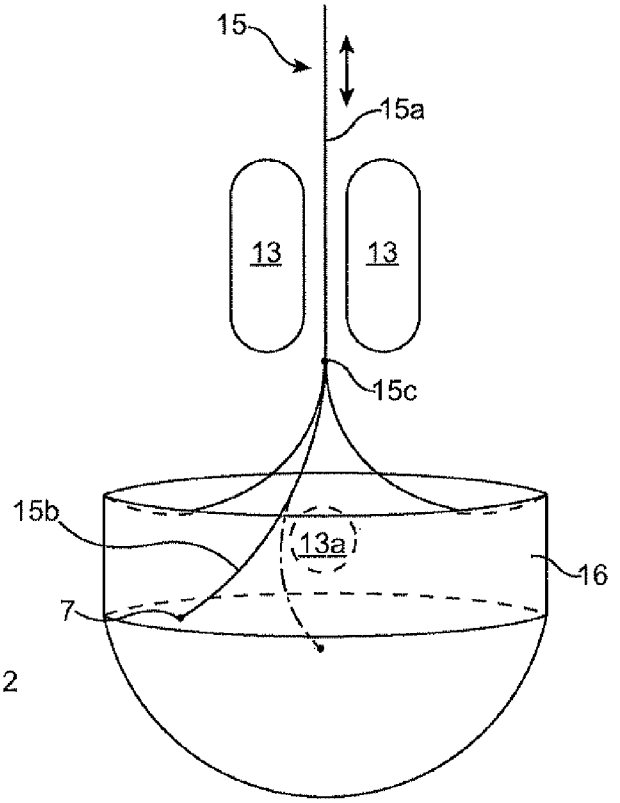
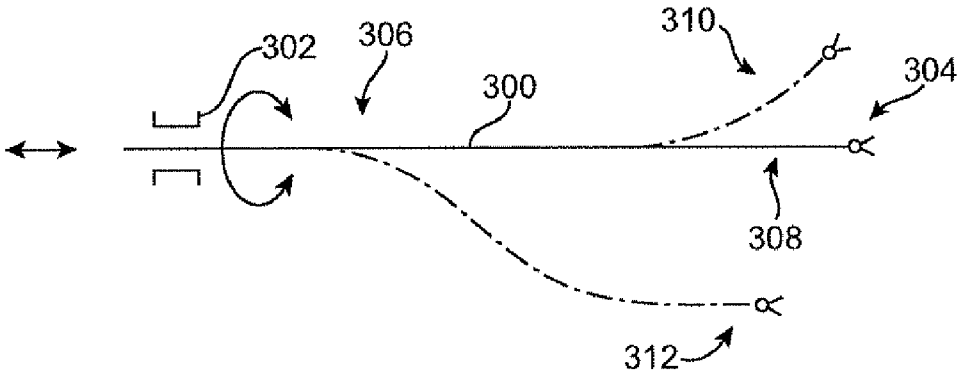


FIG. 2B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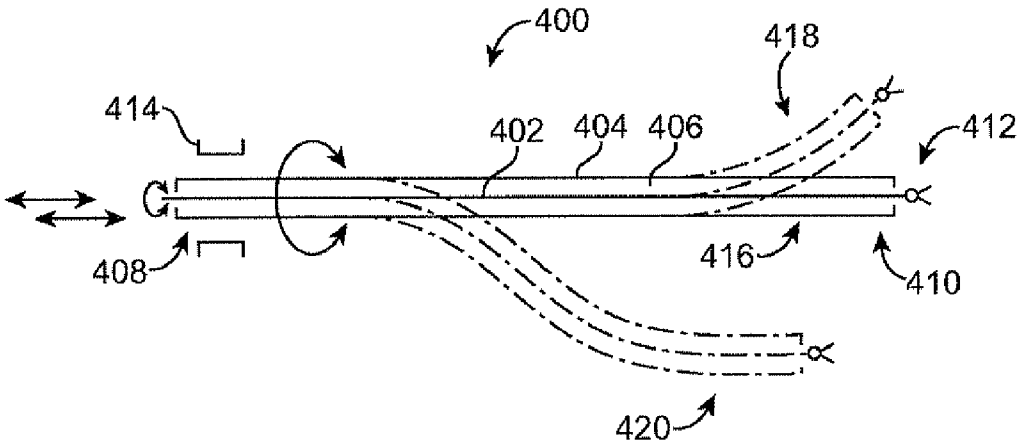
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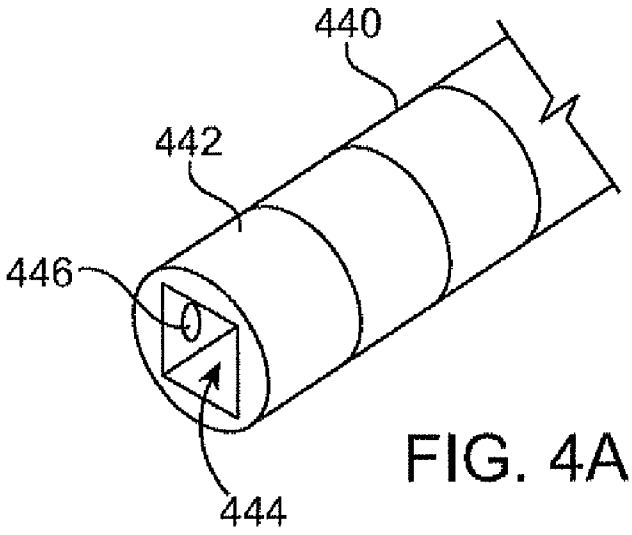
FIG. 4



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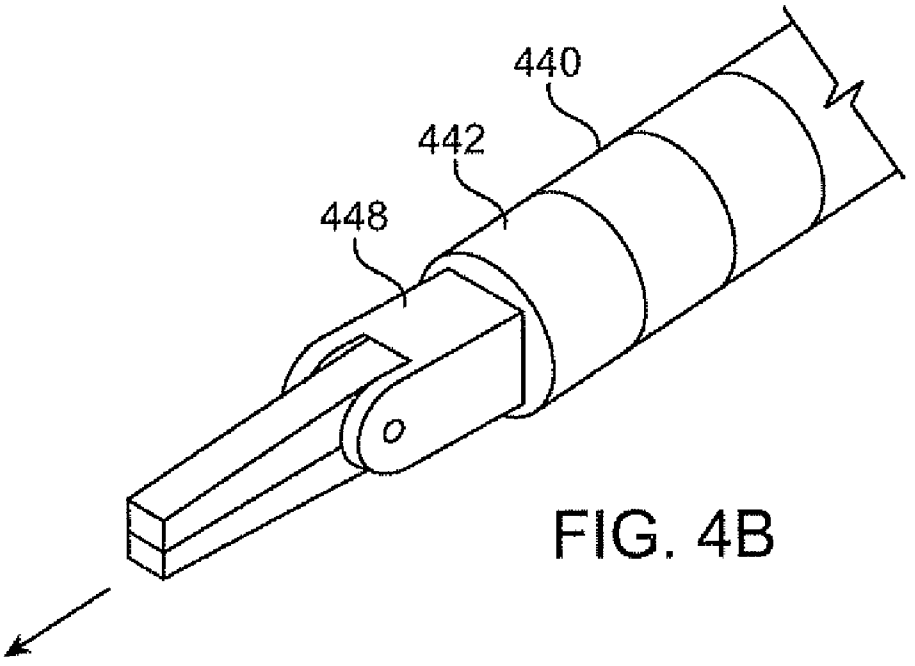

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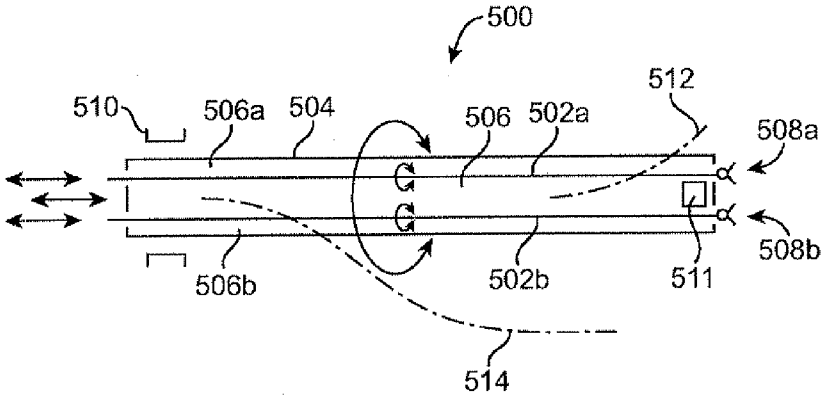
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FIG. 5

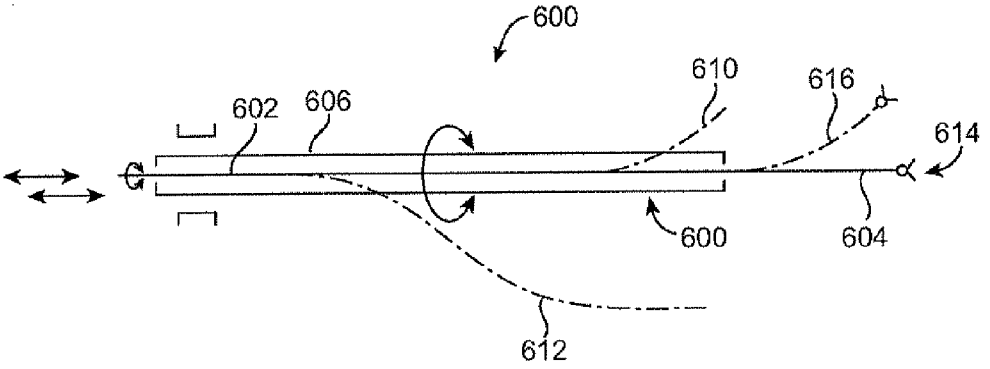
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FIG. 6

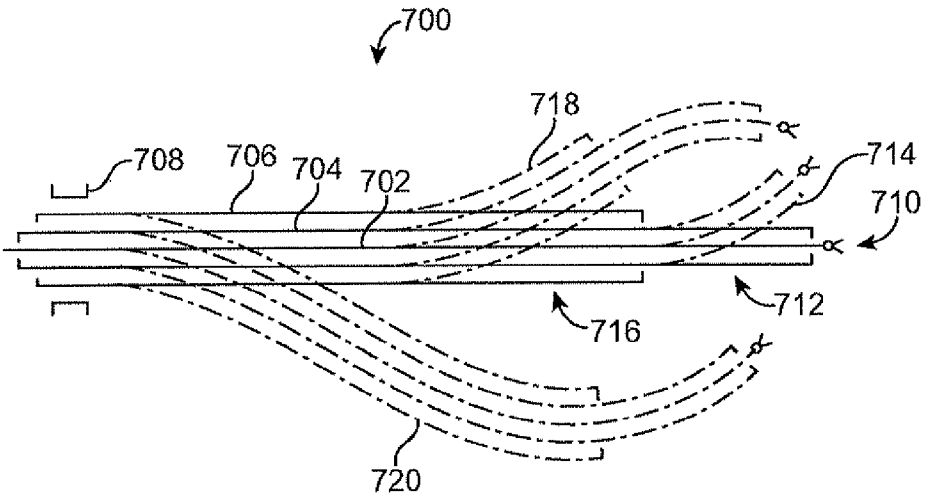
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FIG. 7

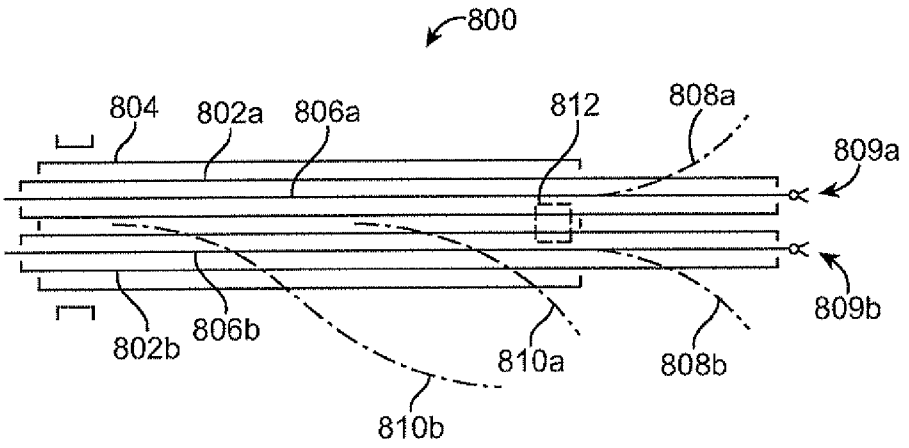
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FIG. 8

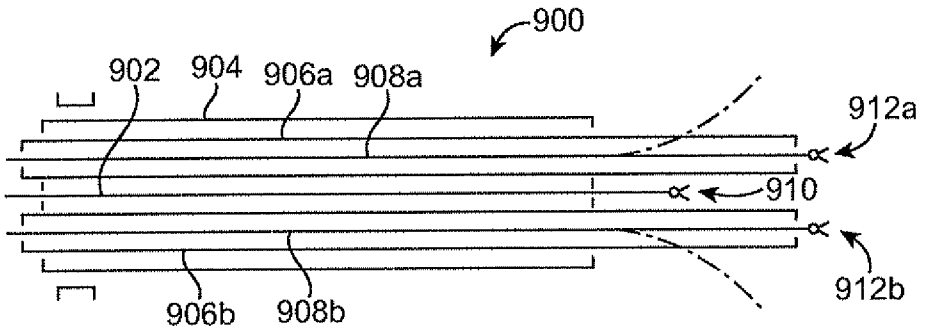

FIG.9

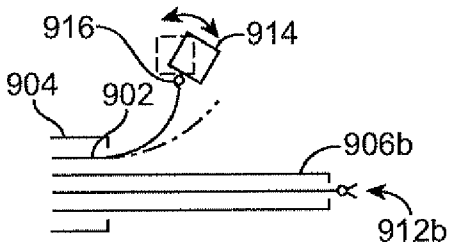

FIG.9A

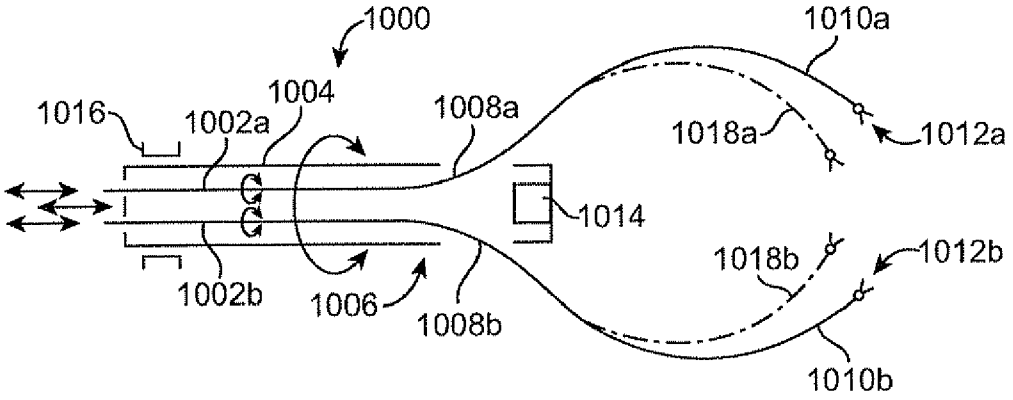

FIG.10

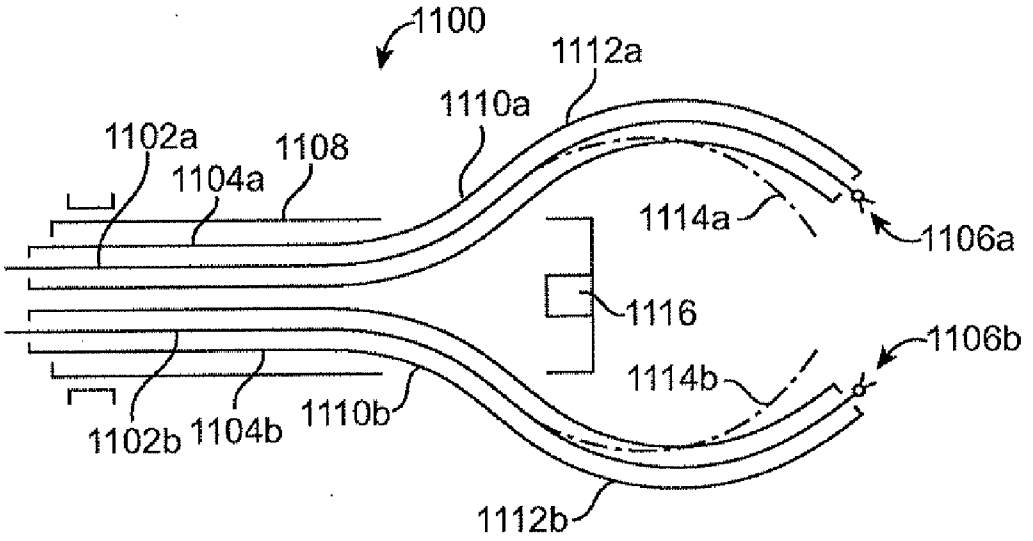
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FIG.11

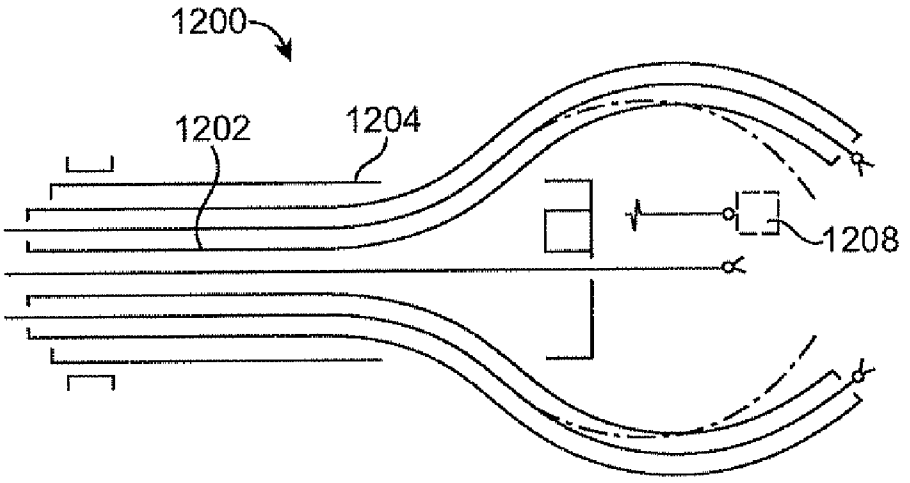
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FIG.12

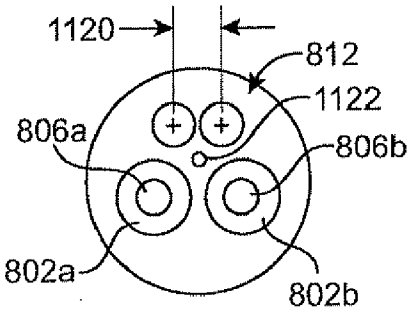

FIG. 11A

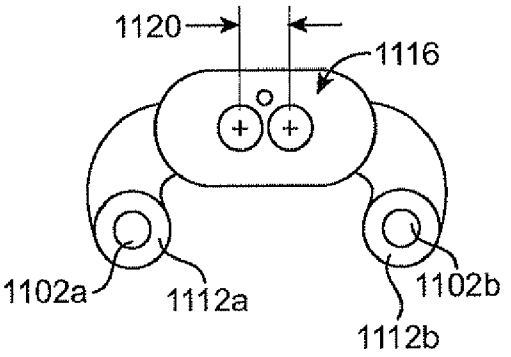

FIG. 11B

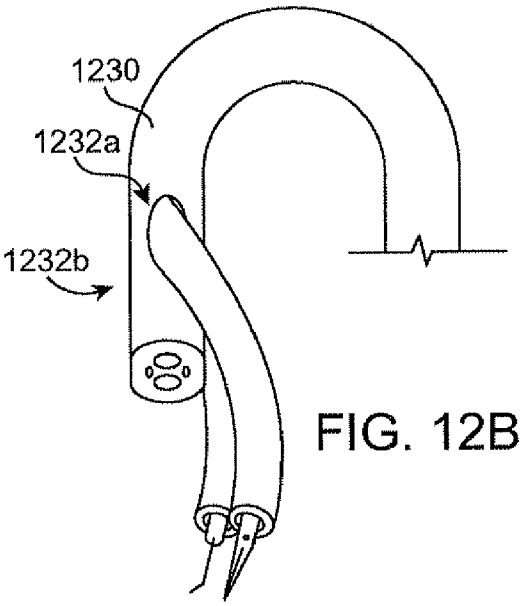

FIG. 12B

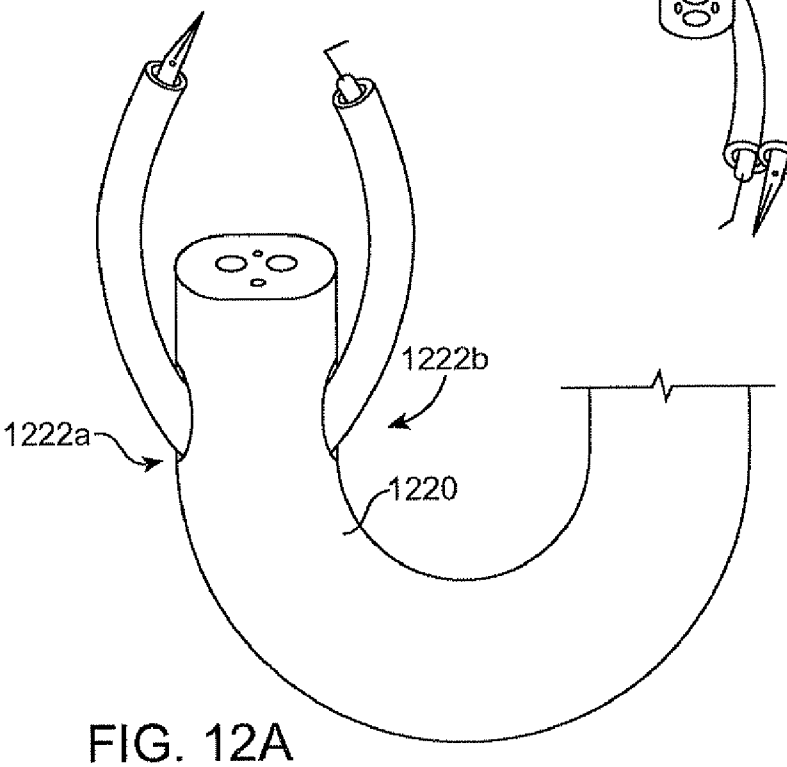

FIG. 12A

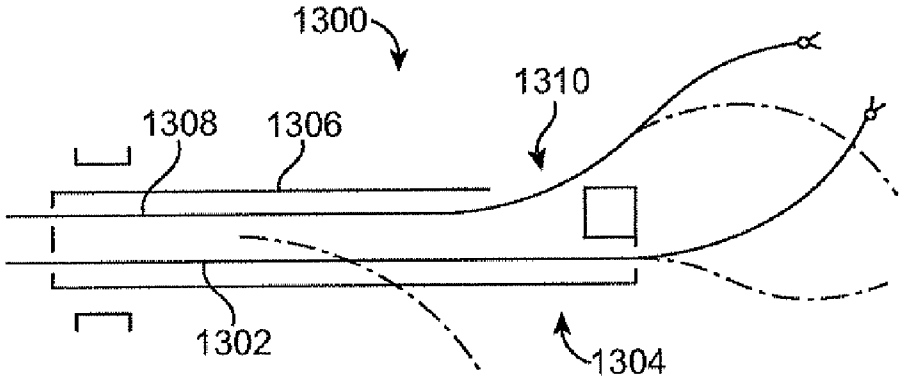
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FIG. 13

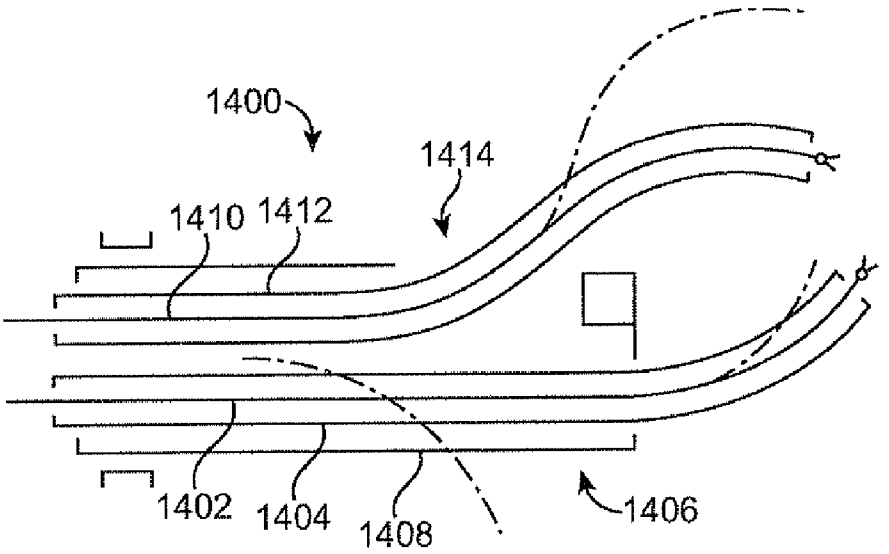
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FIG. 14

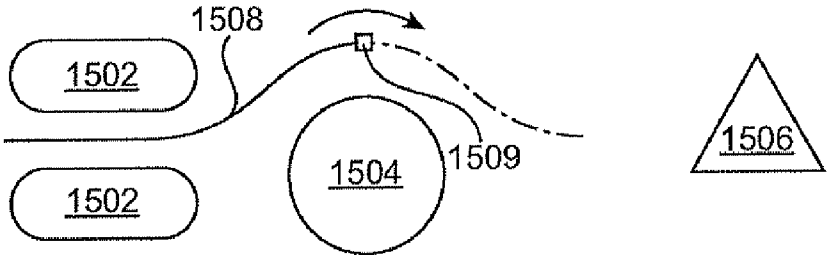


FIG. 15A

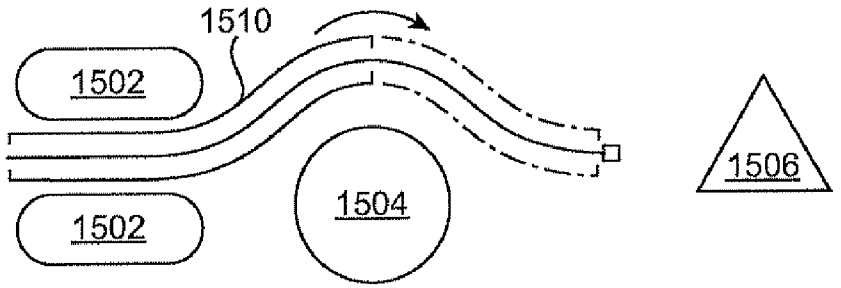


FIG. 15B

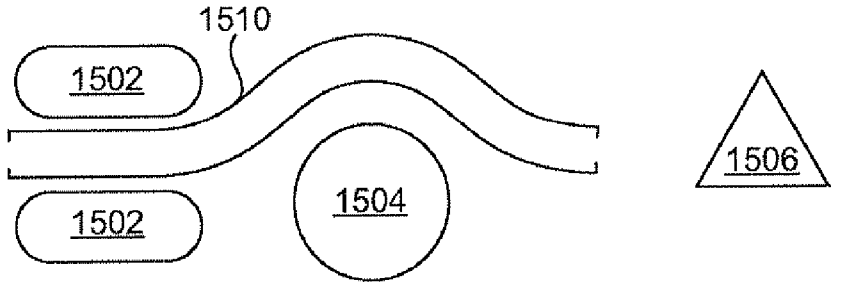


FIG. 15C

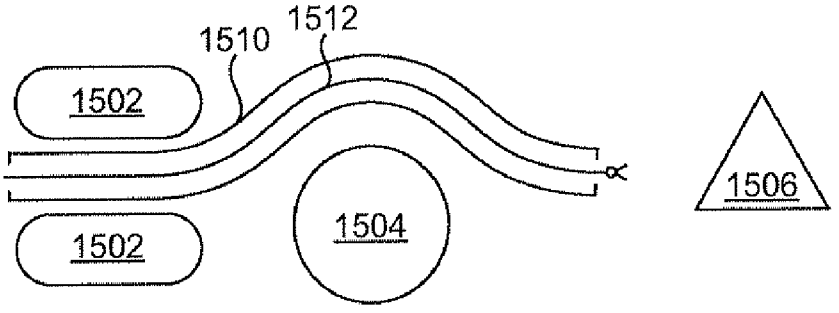


FIG. 15D

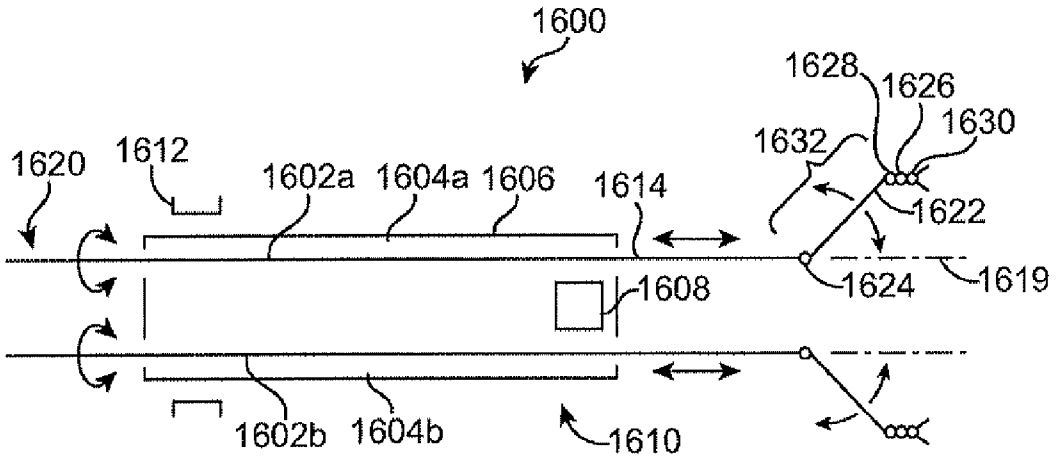


FIG. 16

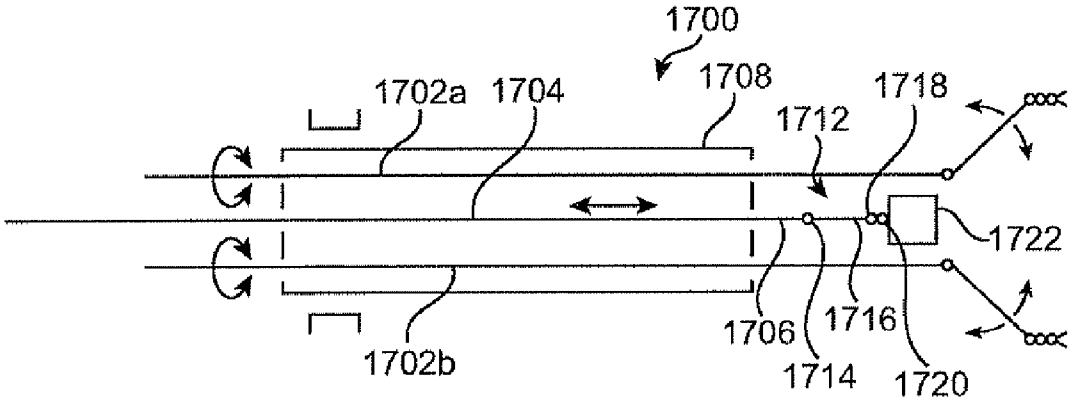


FIG. 17

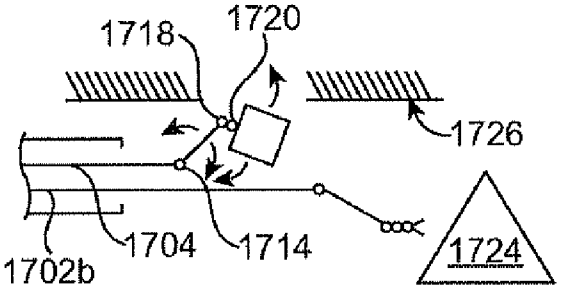


FIG. 17A

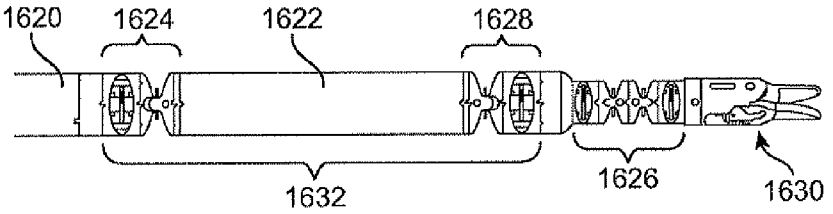
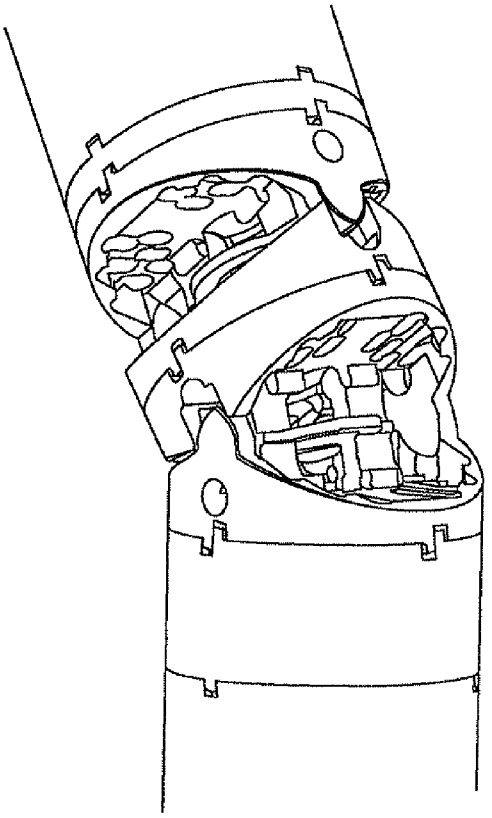


FIG. 16A



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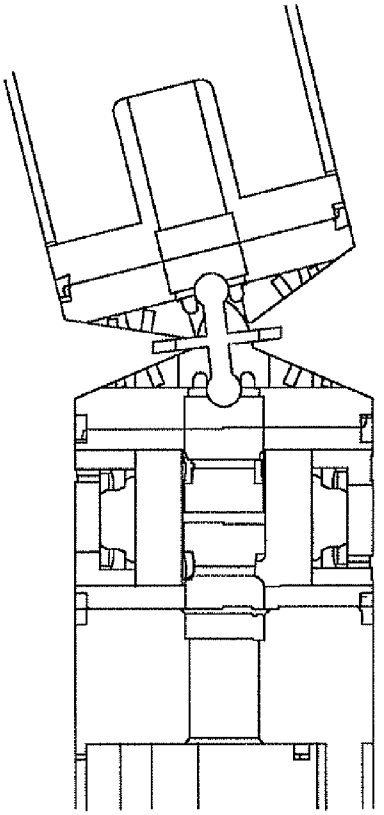
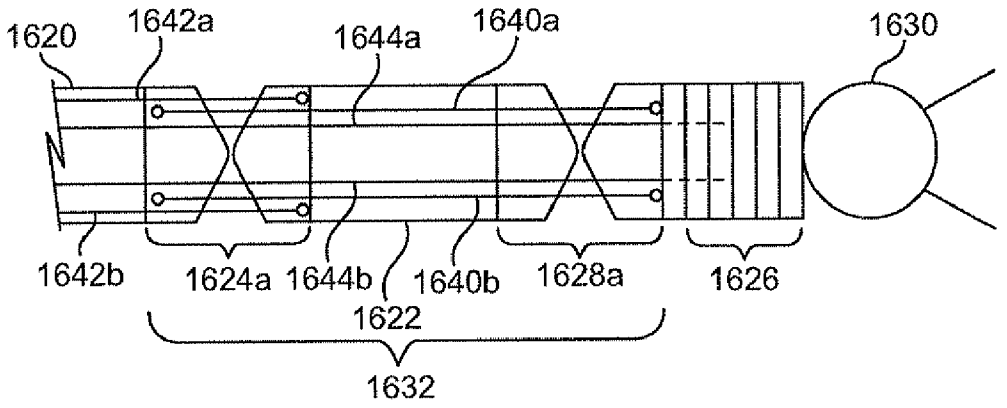


FIG. 16C



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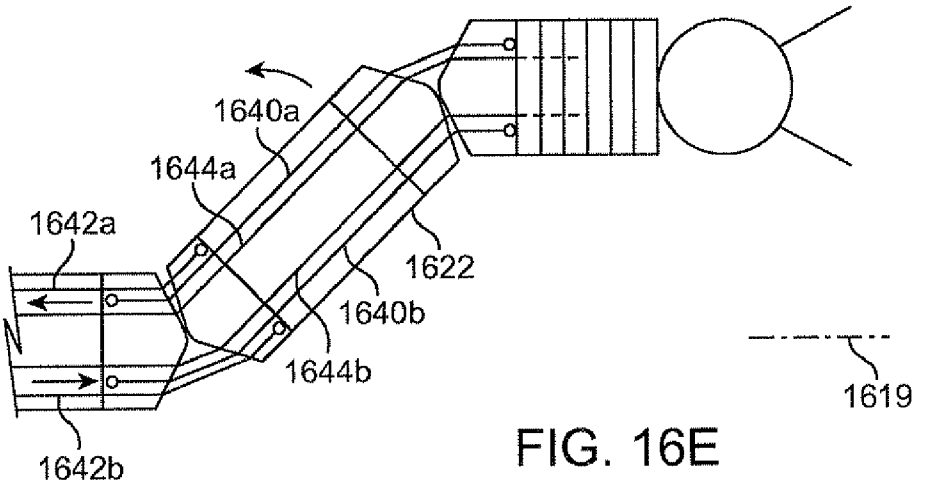

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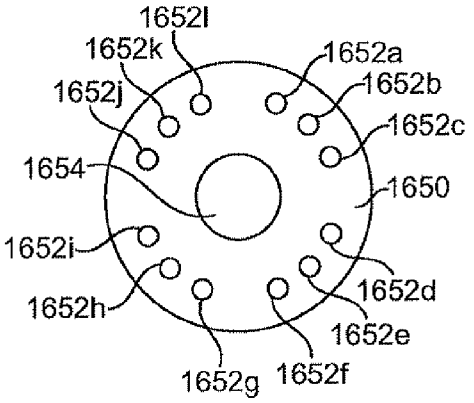

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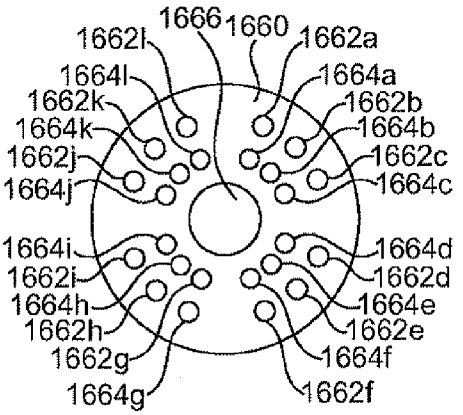
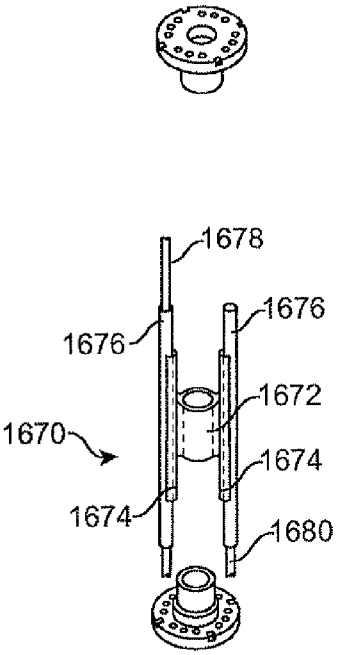


FIG. 16G



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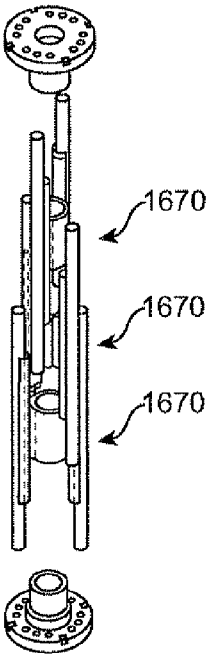

FIG. 16I

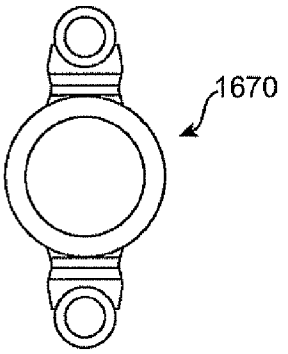

FIG. 16J

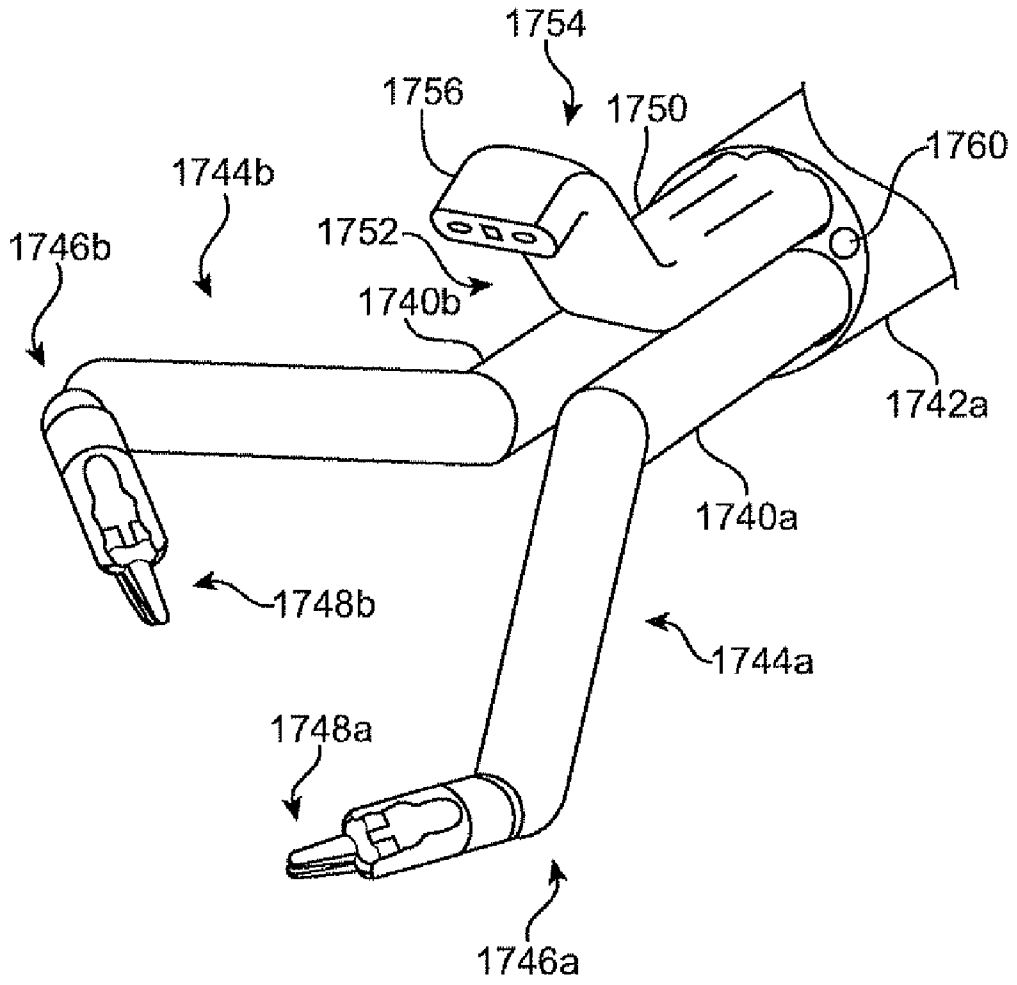
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FIG. 17B

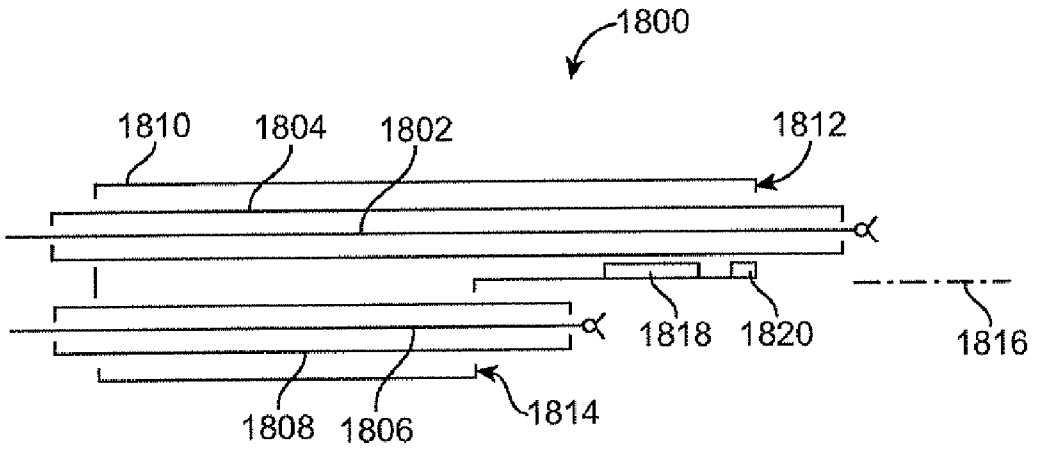


FIG. 18

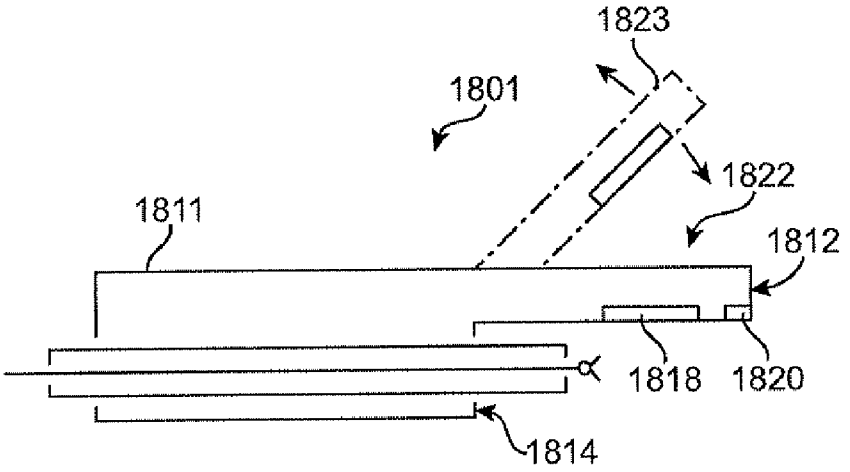


FIG. 18A

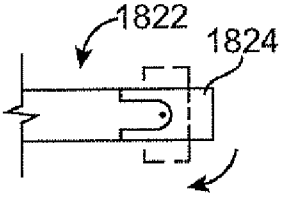
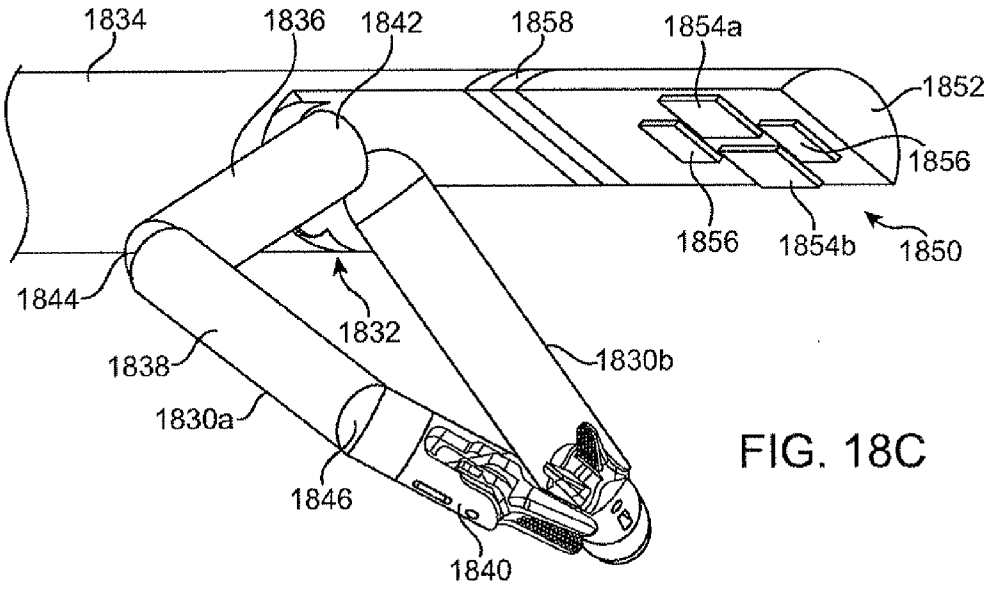


FIG. 18B



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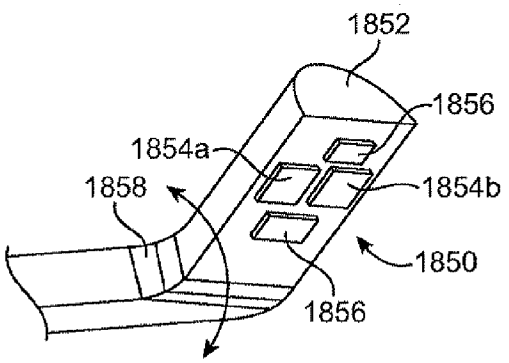

FIG. 18D

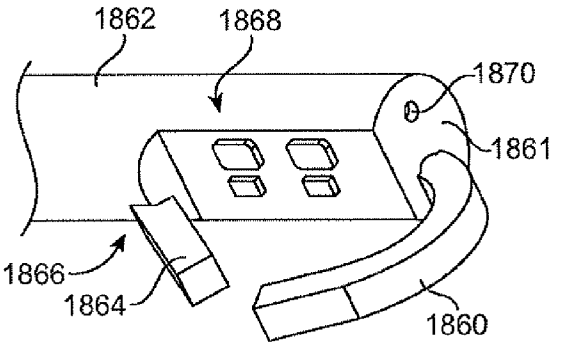

FIG. 18E

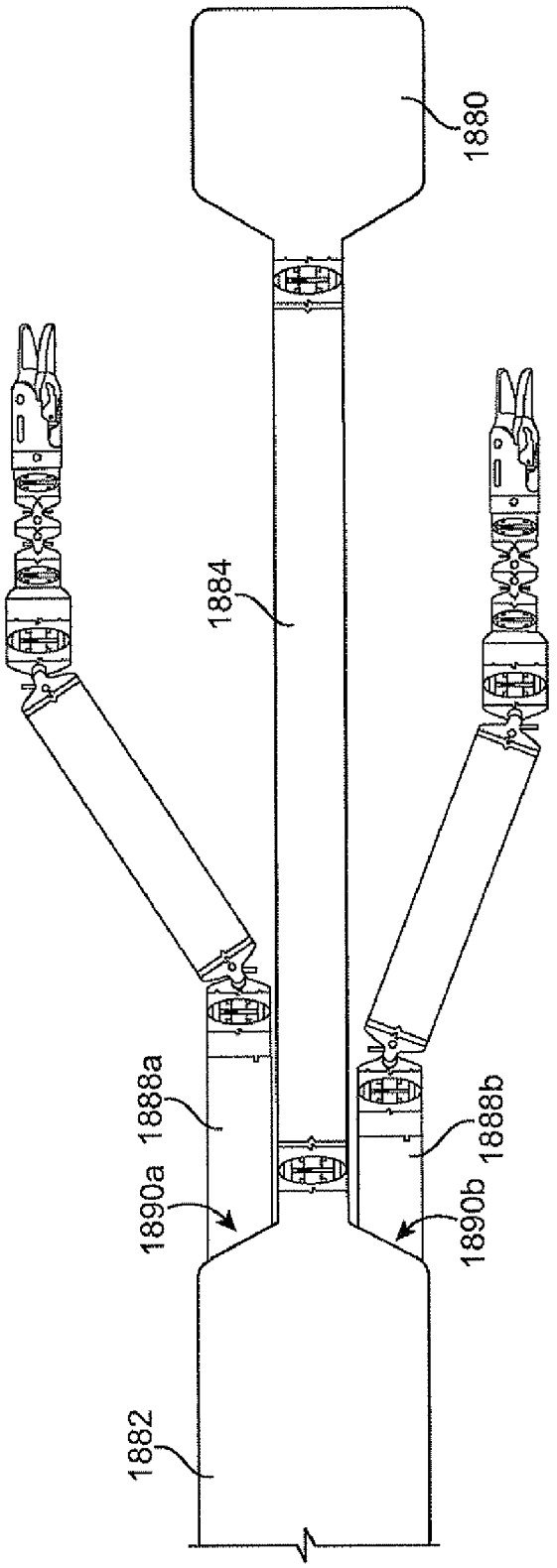

FIG. 18F

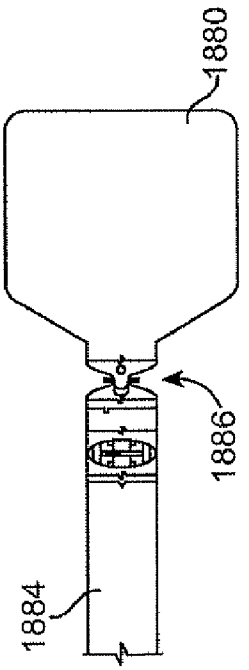

FIG. 18G

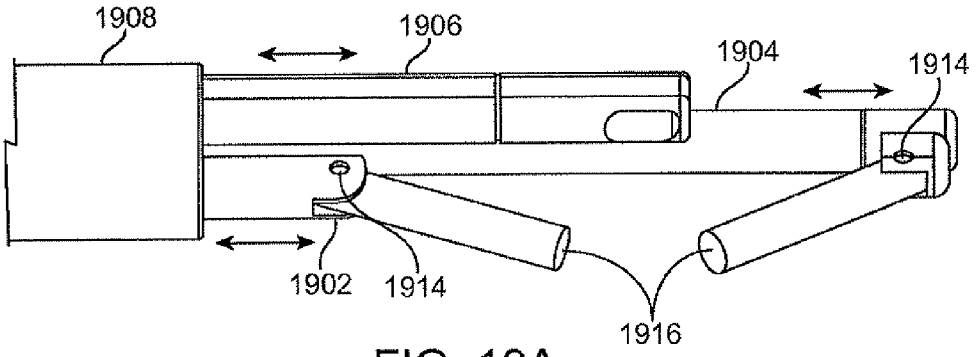

FIG. 19A

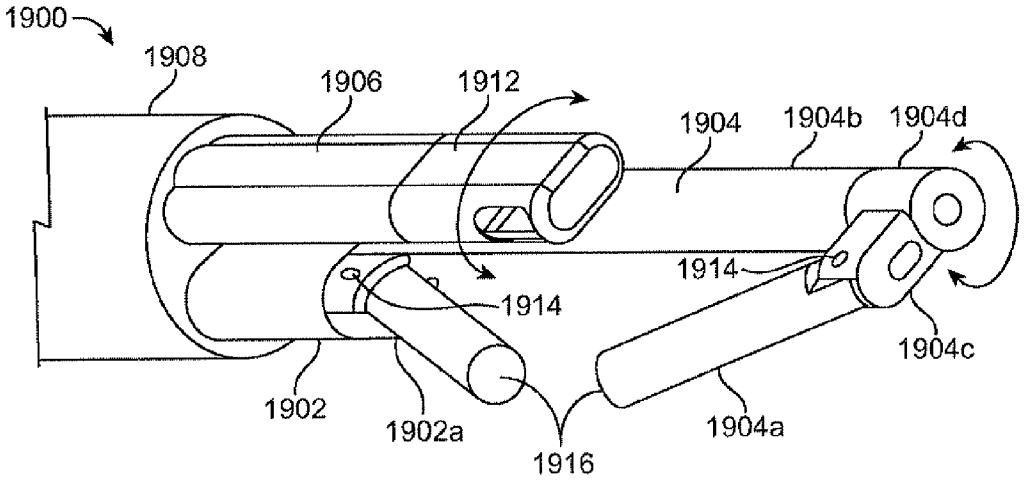

FIG. 19

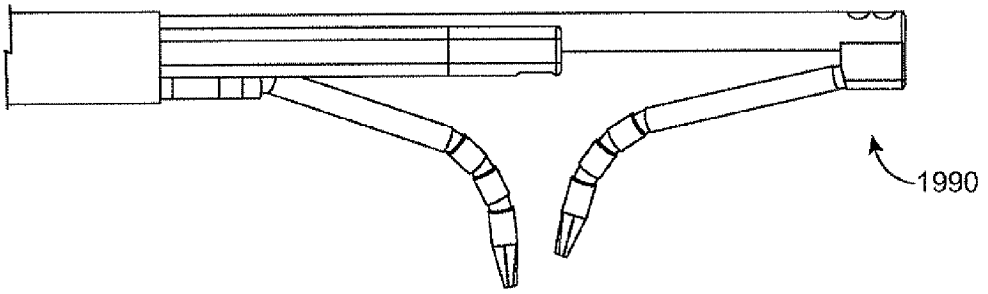

FIG. 19K

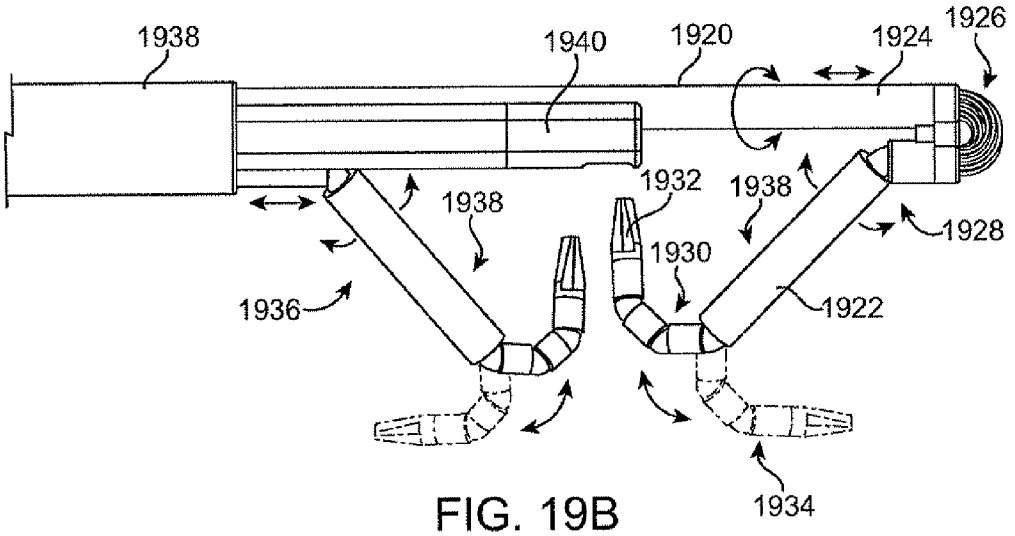

FIG. 19B

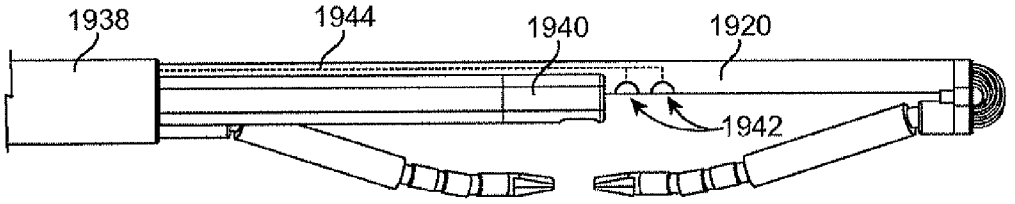

FIG. 19C

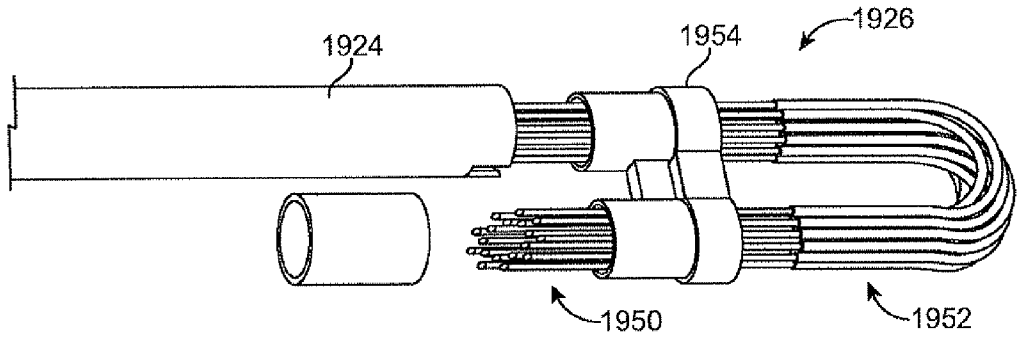

FIG. 19D

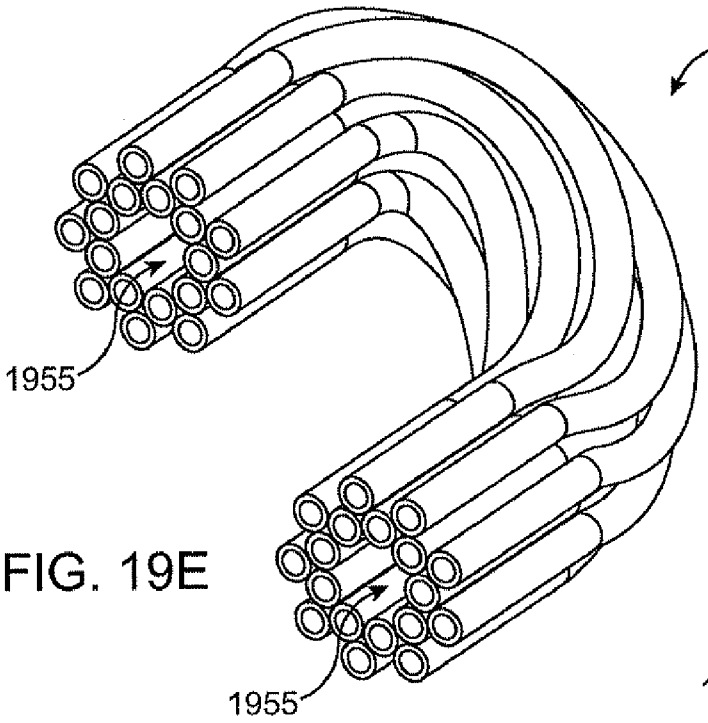

FIG. 19E

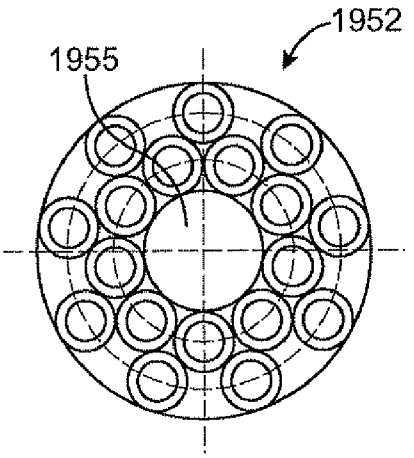

FIG. 19F

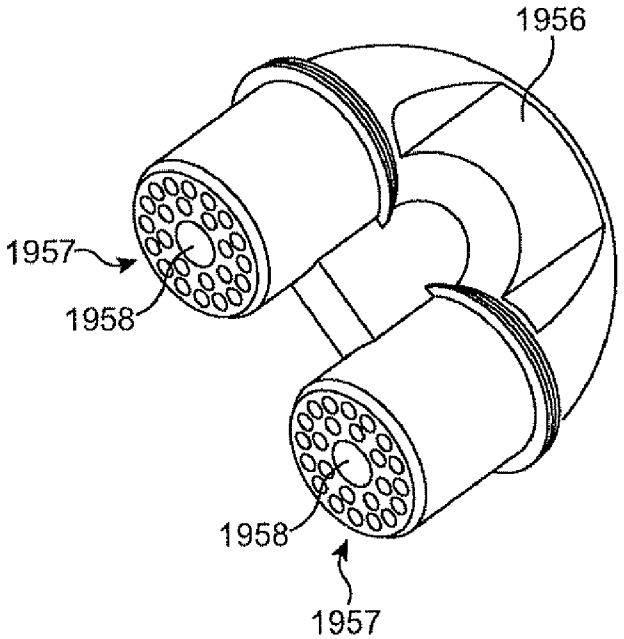

FIG. 19G

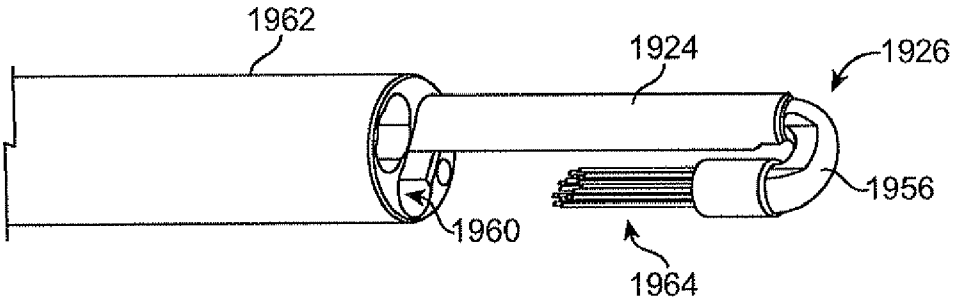

FIG. 19H

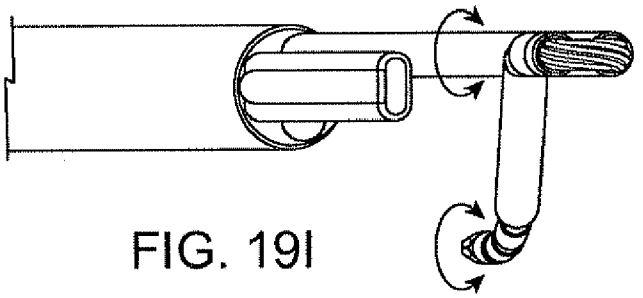

FIG. 19I

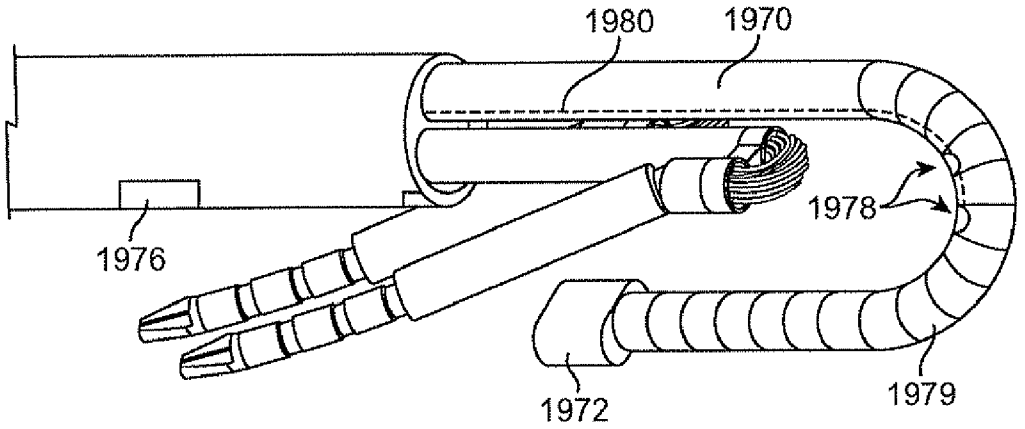

FIG. 19J

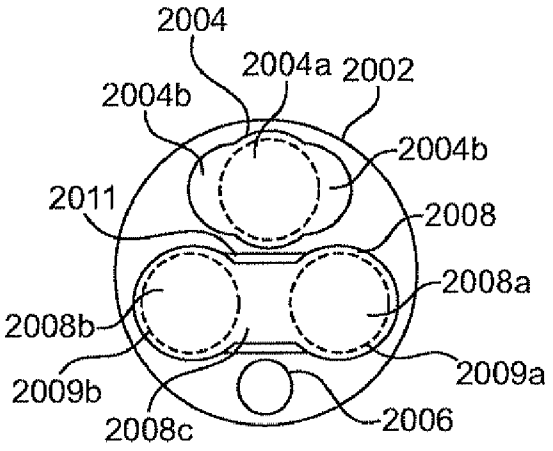

FIG. 20A

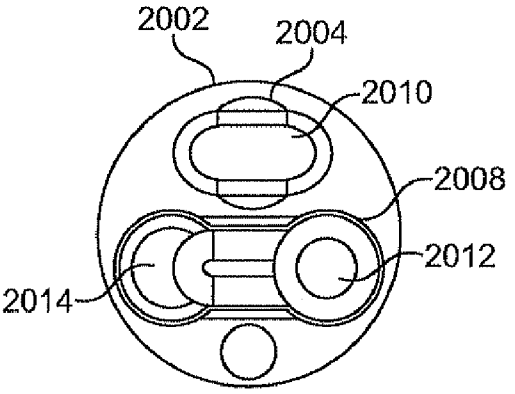

FIG. 20B

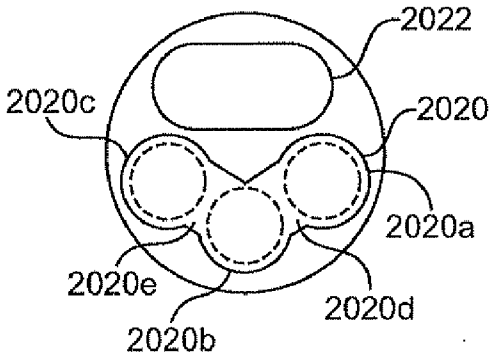

FIG. 20C

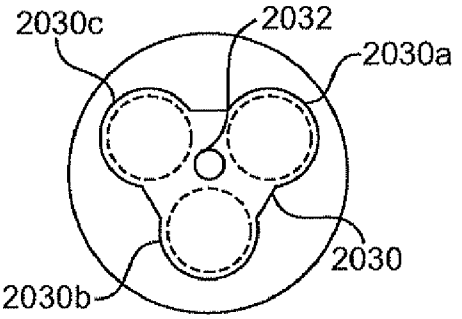

FIG. 20D

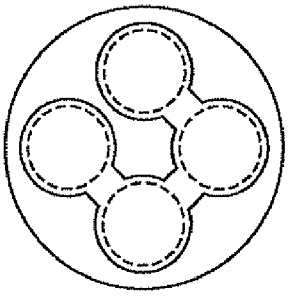

FIG. 20E

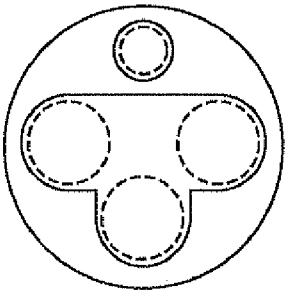

FIG. 20F

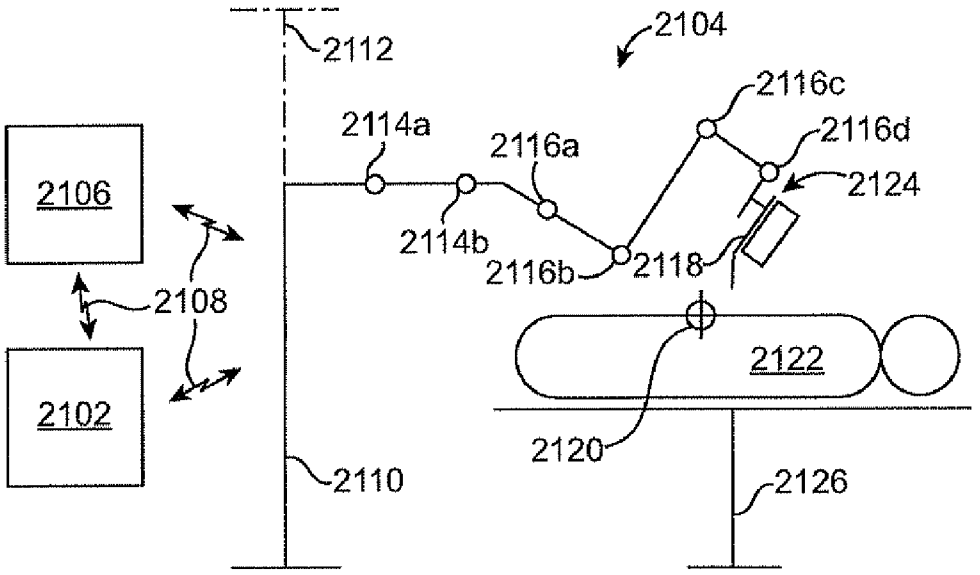

FIG. 21A

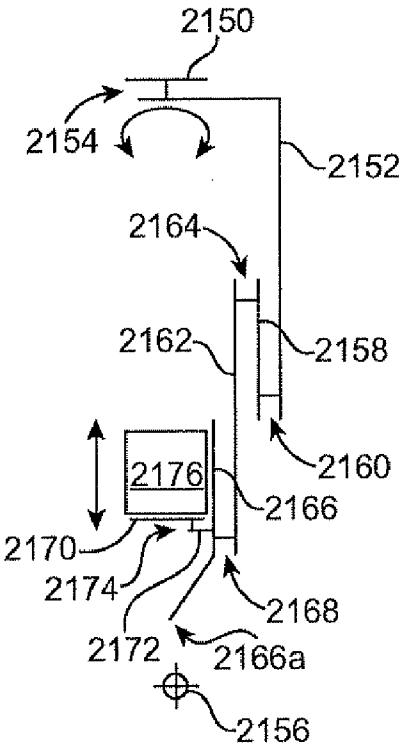

FIG. 21B

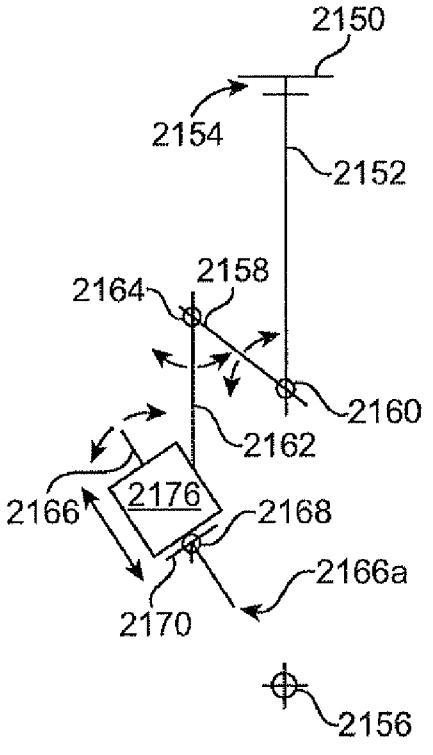

FIG. 21C

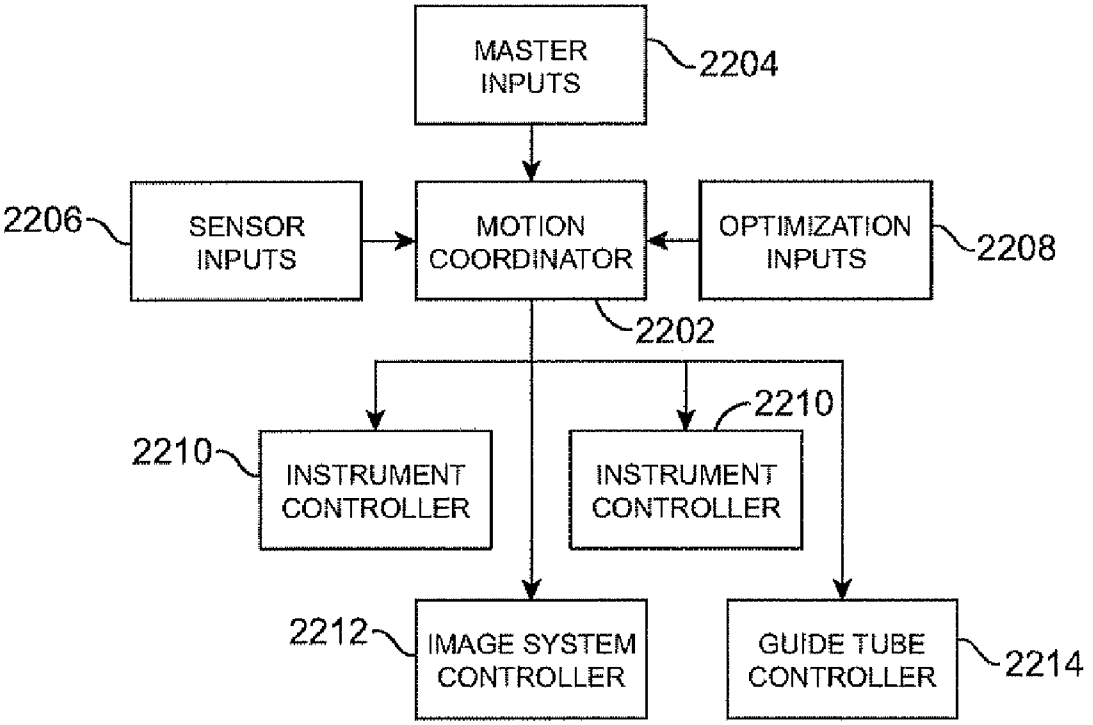
MASTER INPUTS
2204
2206
SENSOR INPUTS
MOTION COORDINATOR
OPTIMIZATION INPUTS
2208
2202
2210
2210
INSTRUMENT CONTROLLER
INSTRUMENT CONTROLLER
2212
IMAGE SYSTEM CONTROLLER
GUIDE TUBE CONTROLLER
2214

FIG. 22A

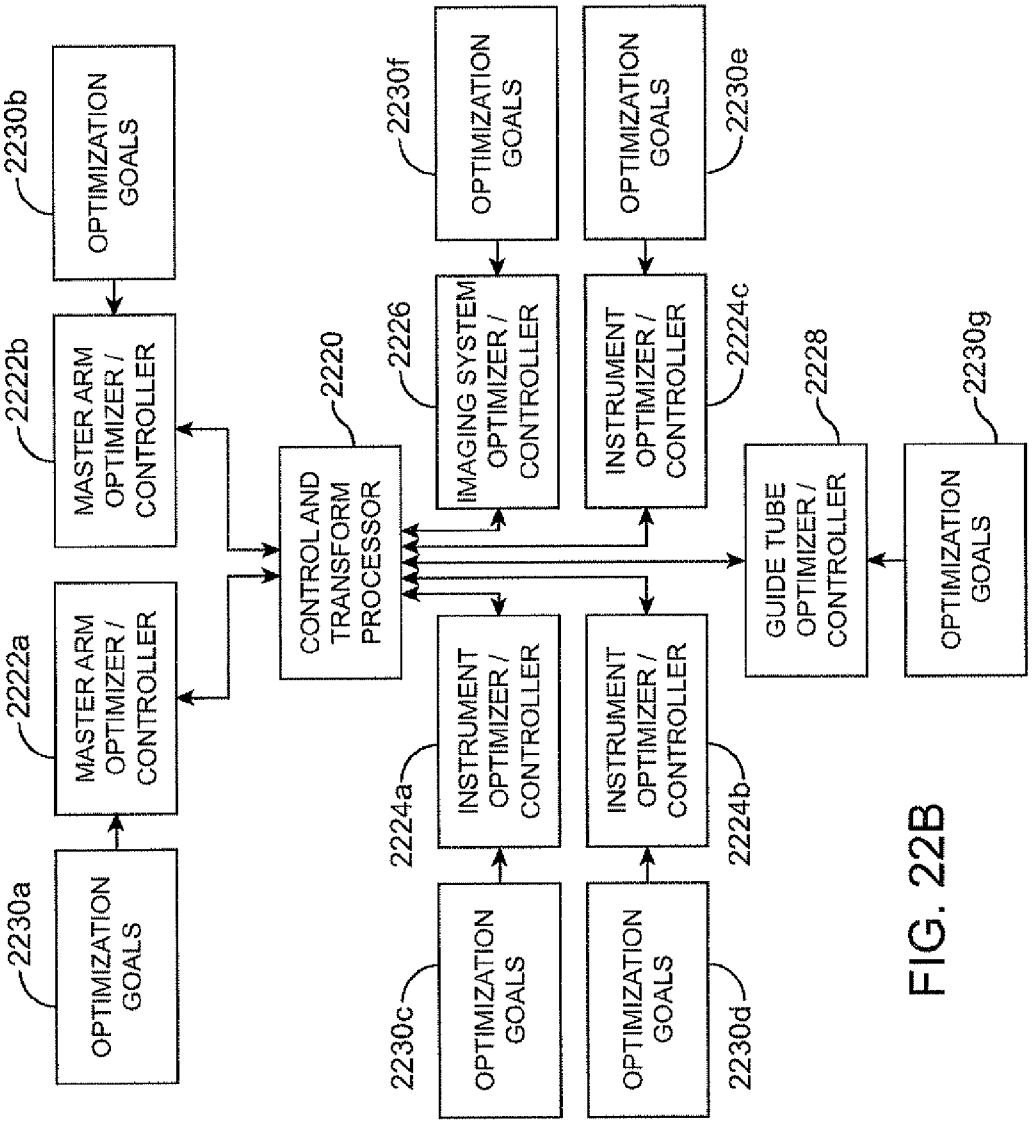
2230a
OPTIMIZATION GOALS
2222a
MASTER ARM OPTIMIZER / CONTROLLER
2230b
OPTIMIZATION GOALS
2222b
MASTER ARM OPTIMIZER / CONTROLLER
2220
CONTROL AND TRANSFORM PROCESSOR
2230c
OPTIMIZATION GOALS
2224a
INSTRUMENT OPTIMIZER / CONTROLLER
2230d
OPTIMIZATION GOALS
2224b
INSTRUMENT OPTIMIZER / CONTROLLER
2226
IMAGING SYSTEM OPTIMIZER / CONTROLLER
2230f
OPTIMIZATION GOALS
2224c
INSTRUMENT OPTIMIZER / CONTROLLER
2230e
OPTIMIZATION GOALS
2228
GUIDE TUBE OPTIMIZER / CONTROLLER
2230g
OPTIMIZATION GOALS

FIG. 22B

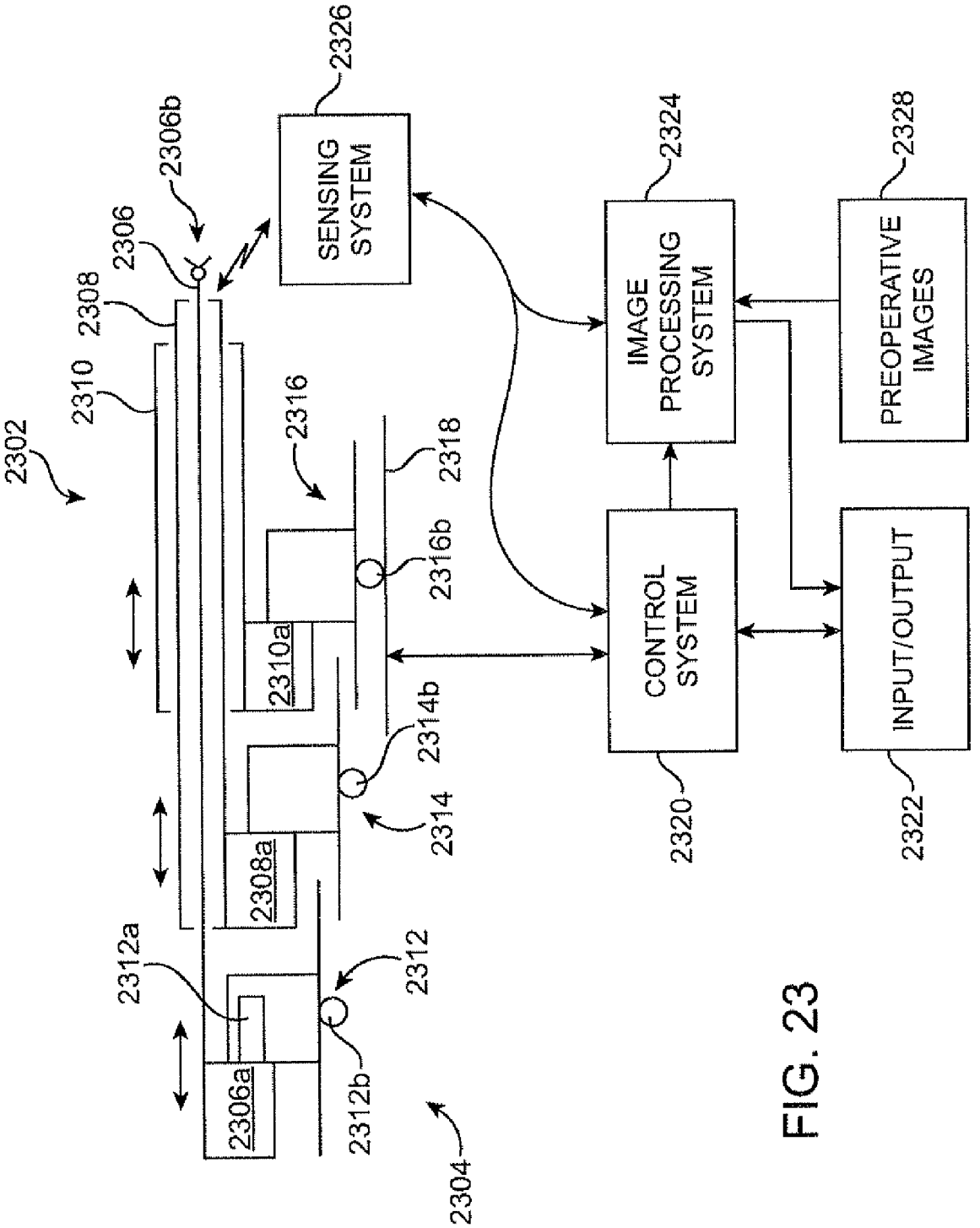
2326
SENSING SYSTEM
2306b
2306
2308
2310
2302
2316
2318
2316b
2310a
2314b
2314
2308a
2312a
2312
2312b
2306a
2304
2324
IMAGE PROCESSING SYSTEM
2328
PREOPERATIVE IMAGES
CONTROL SYSTEM
INPUT/OUTPUT
2320
2322

FIG. 23

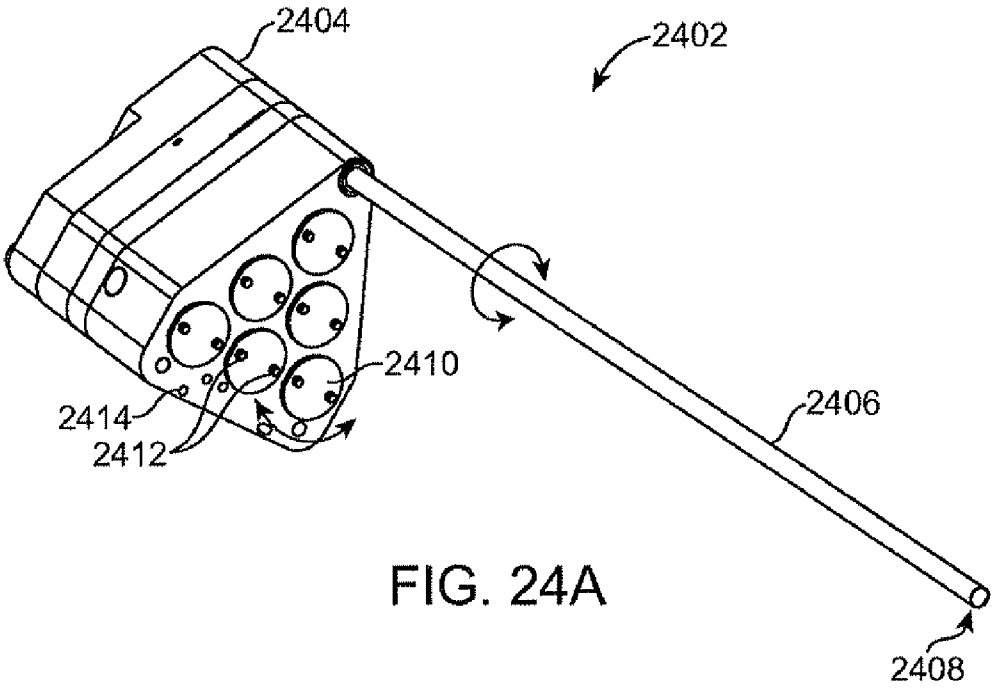

FIG. 24A

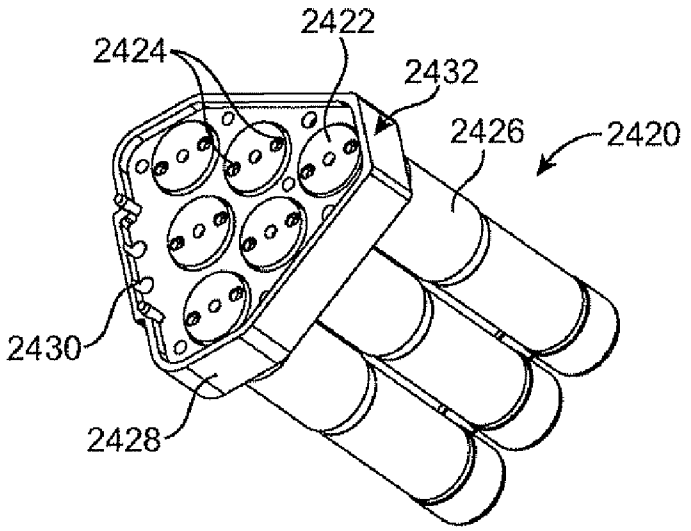

FIG. 24B

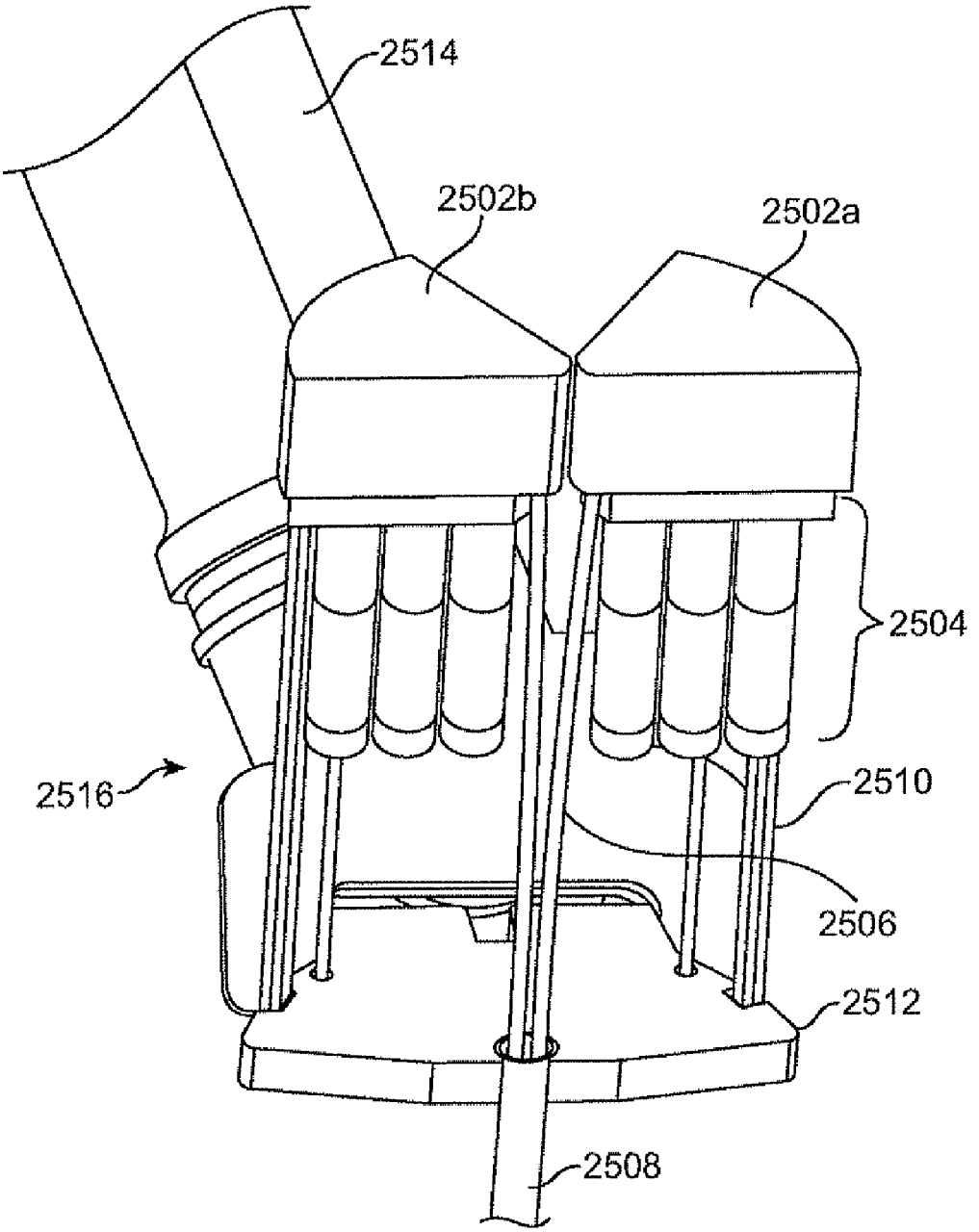

FIG. 25A

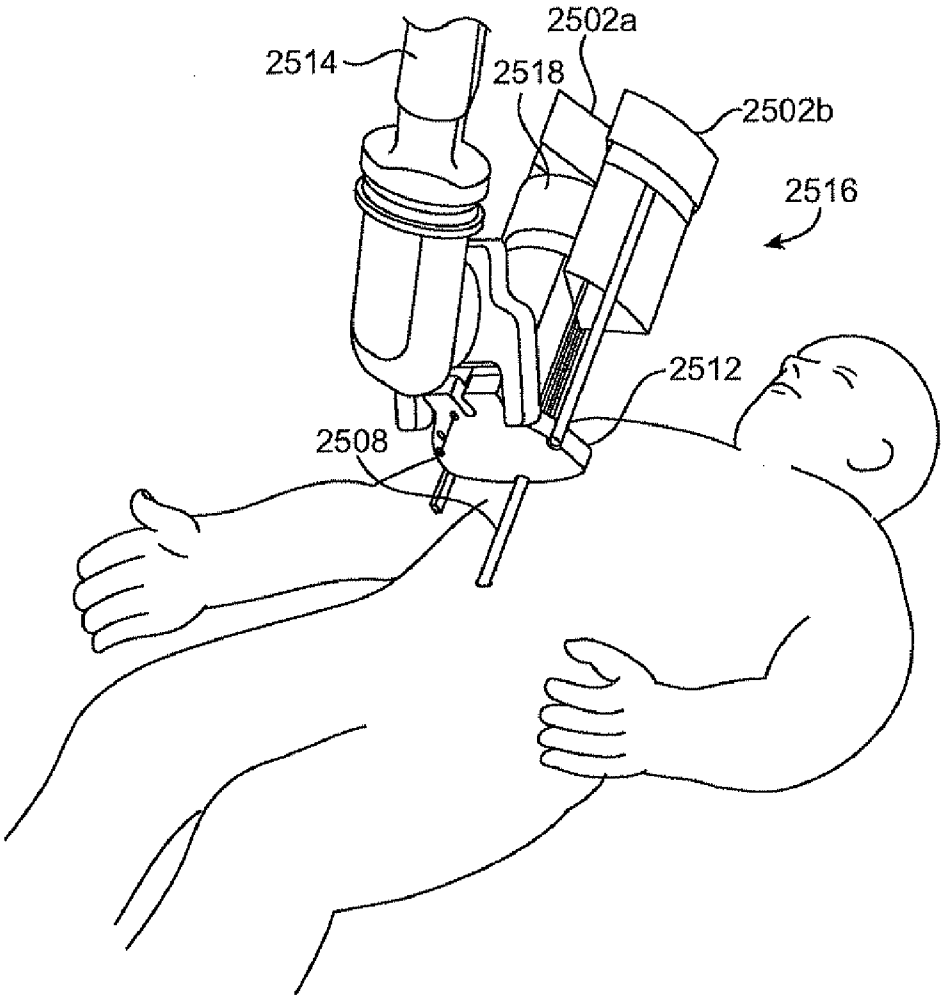

FIG. 25B

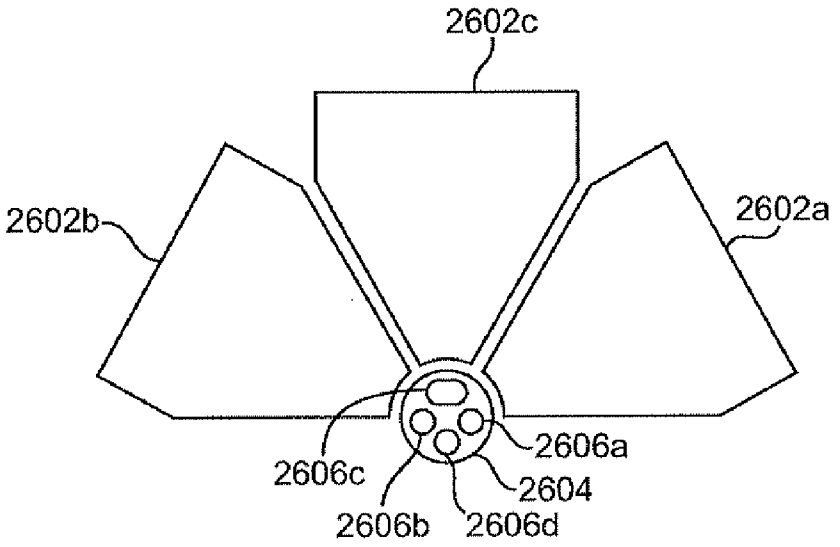

FIG. 26A

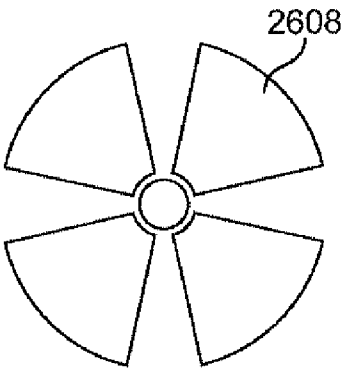

FIG. 26B

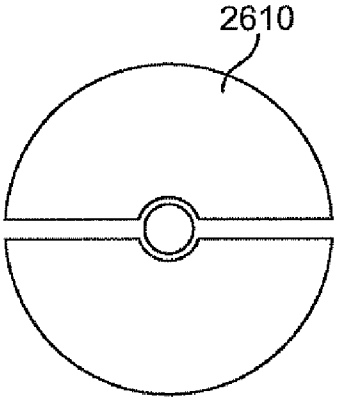

FIG. 26C

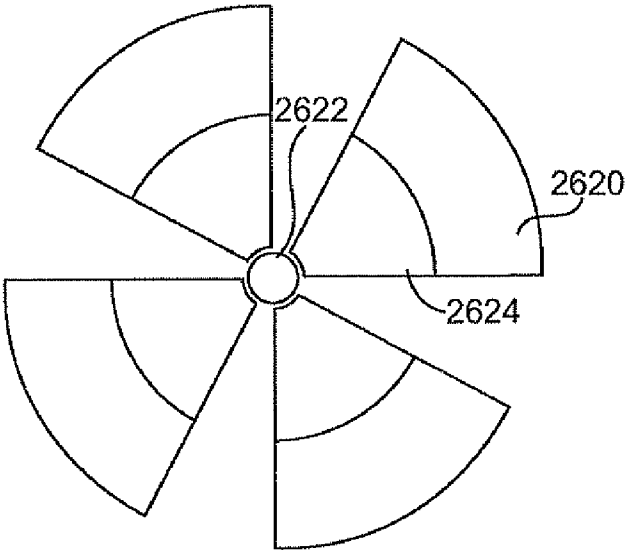

FIG. 26D

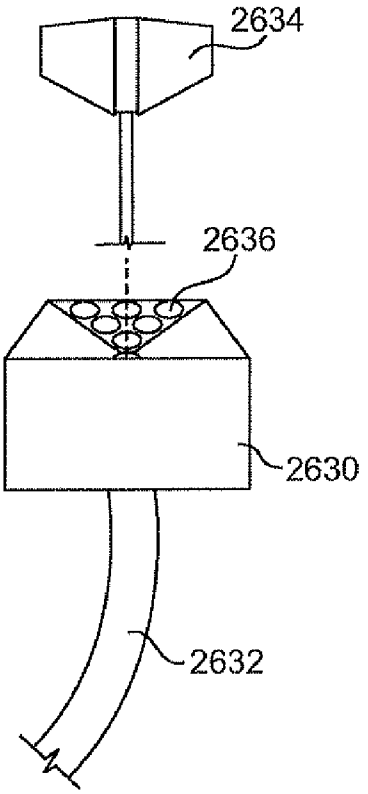

FIG. 26E

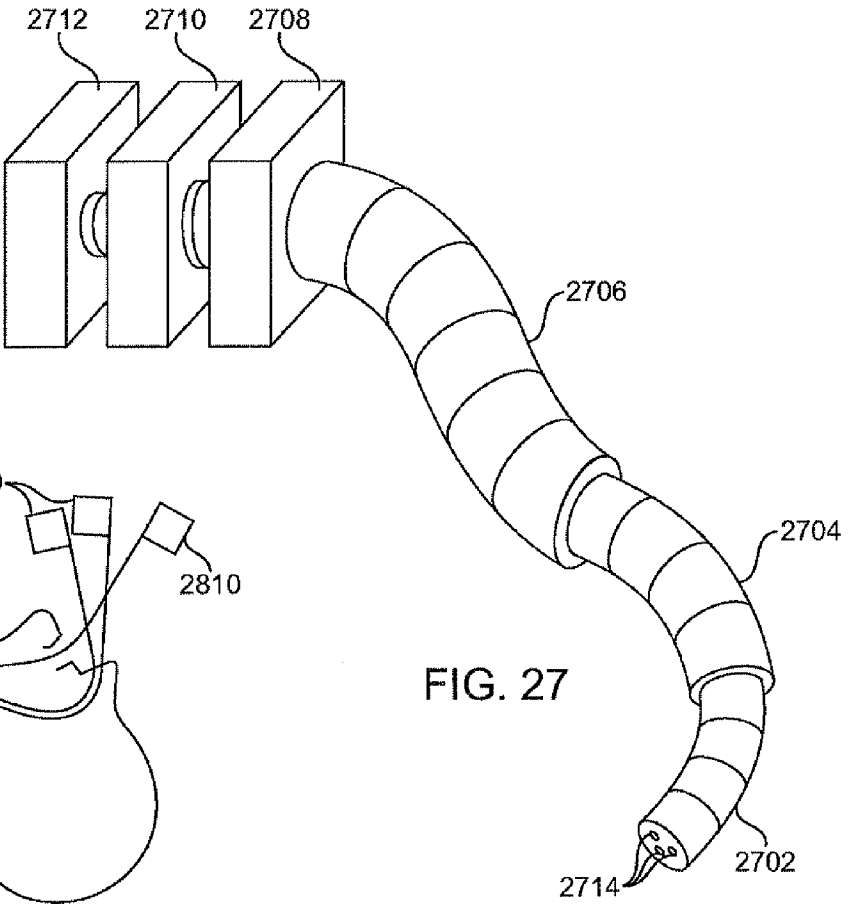

FIG. 27

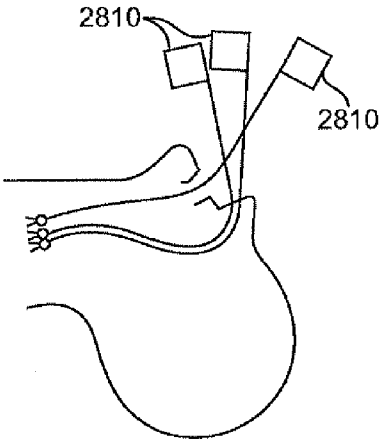

FIG. 28B

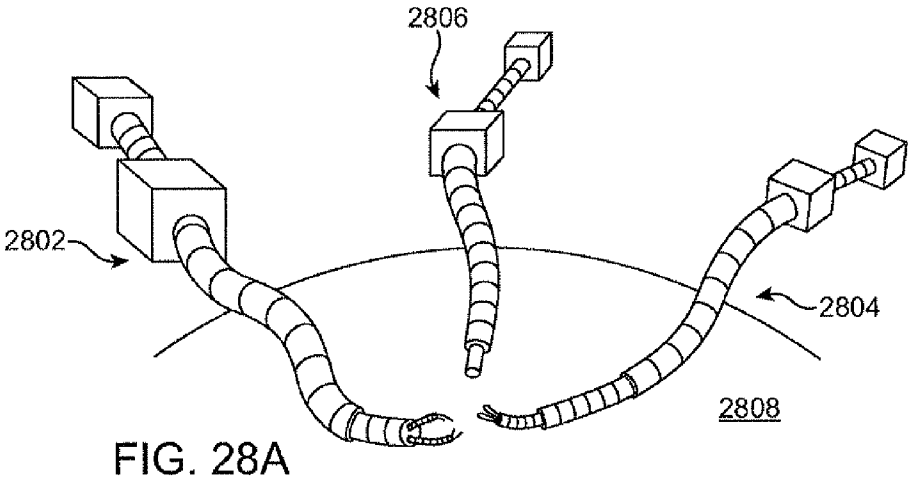

FIG. 28A

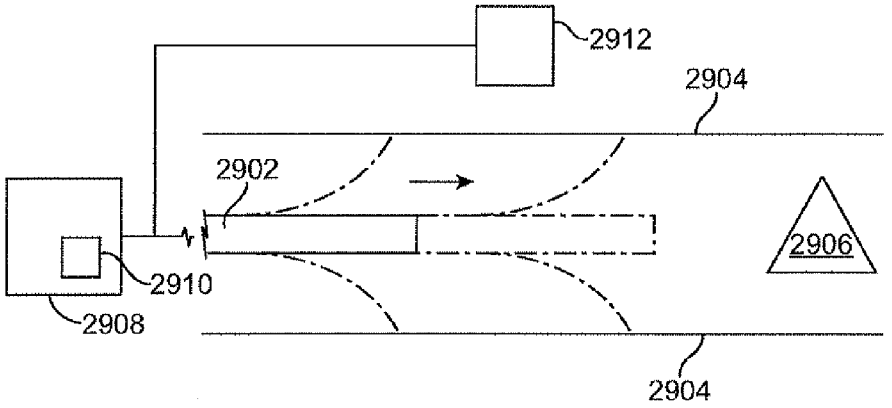

FIG. 29A

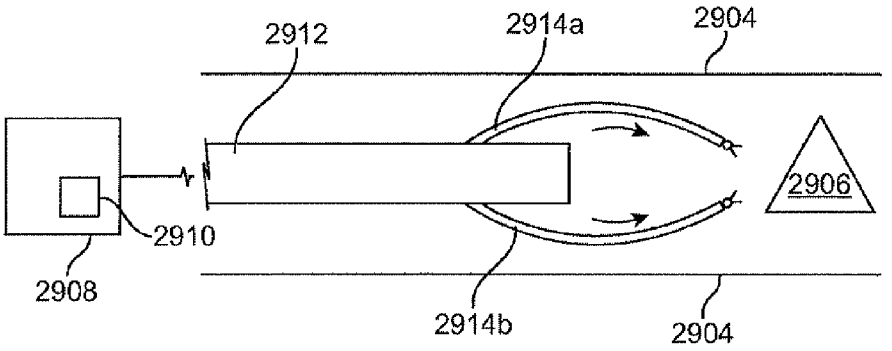

FIG. 29B

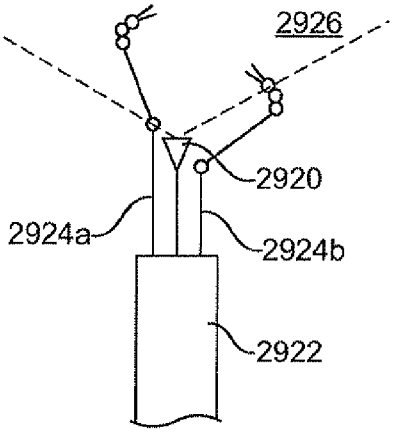

FIG. 29C

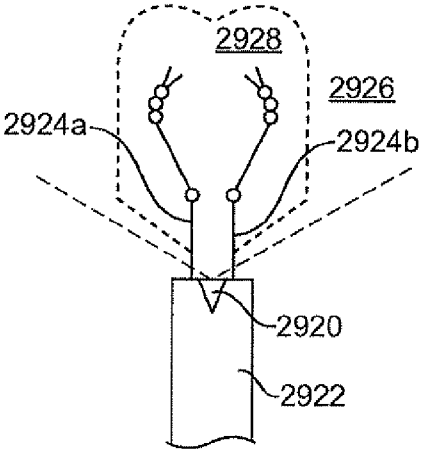

FIG. 29D

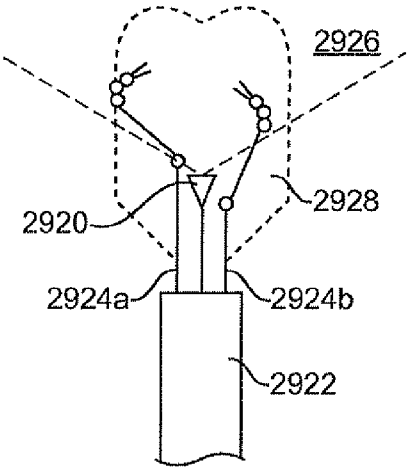

FIG. 29E

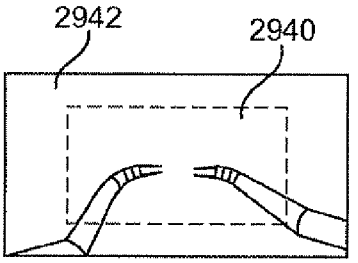

FIG. 29F

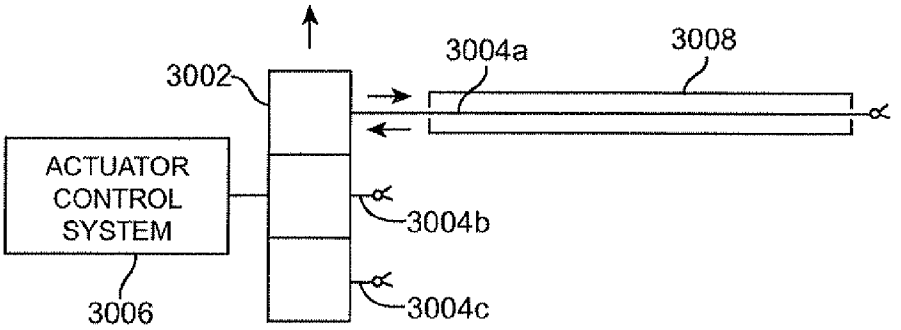

FIG. 30

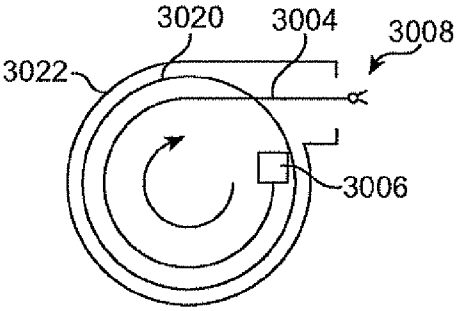

FIG. 30A

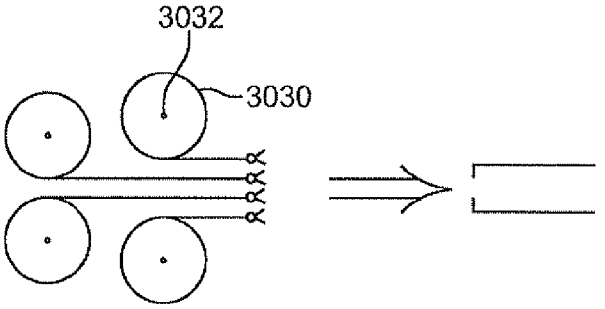

FIG. 30B

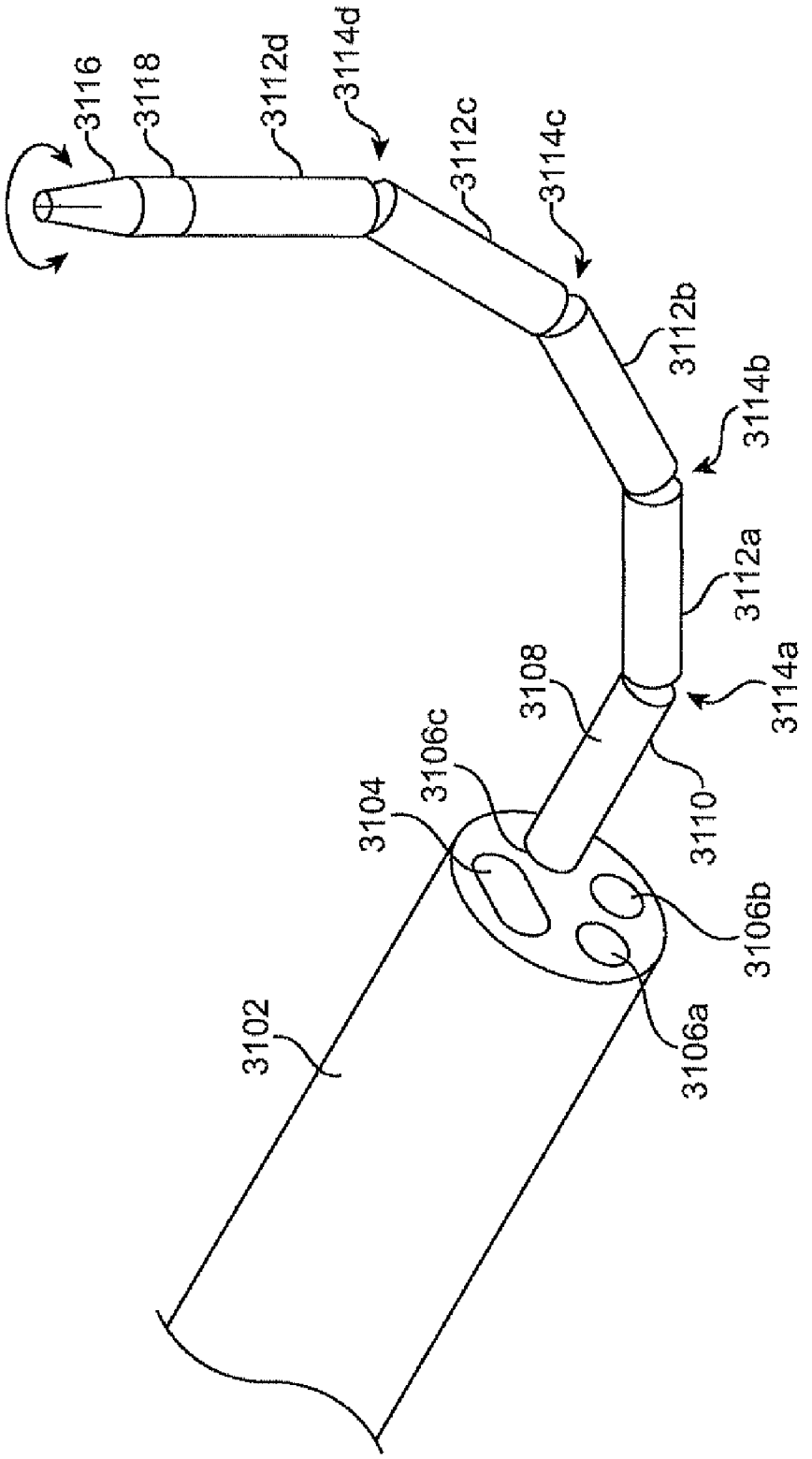
3116
3118
3112d
3114d
3112c
3114c
3112b
3114b
3112a
3114a
3108
3106c
3104
3110
3106b
3106a
3102

FIG. 31

MINIMALLY INVASIVE SURGICAL APPARATUS WITH SIDE EXIT INSTRUMENTS

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims the priority benefit of the following United States Provisional patent applications, all of which are incorporated by reference:

[0002] U.S. patent application No. 60/813,028 entitled "Single port system 2" filed 13 Jun. 2006 by Cooper et al.;

[0003] U.S. patent application No. 60/813,029 entitled "Single port surgical system 1" filed 13 Jun. 2006 by Cooper;

[0004] U.S. patent application No. 60/813,030 entitled "Independently actuated optical train" filed 13 Jun. 2006 by Larkin et al.;

[0005] U.S. patent application No. 60/813,075 entitled "Modular cannula architecture" filed 13 Jun. 2006 by Larkin et al.;

[0006] U.S. patent application No. 60/813,125 entitled "Methods for delivering instruments to a surgical site with minimal disturbance to intermediate structures" filed 13 Jun. 2006 by Larkin et al.;

[0007] U.S. patent application No. 60/813,126 entitled "Rigid single port surgical system" filed 13 Jun. 2006 by Cooper;

[0008] U.S. patent application No. 60/813,129 entitled "Minimum net force actuation" filed 13 Jun. 2006 by Cooper et al.;

[0009] U.S. patent application No. 60/813,131 entitled "Side working tools and camera" filed 13 Jun. 2006 by Duval et al.;

[0010] U.S. patent application No. 60/813,172 entitled "Passing cables through joints" filed 13 Jun. 2006 by Cooper;

[0011] U.S. patent application No. 60/813,173 entitled "Hollow smoothly bending instrument joints" filed 13 Jun. 2006 by Larkin et al.;

[0012] U.S. patent application No. 60/813,198 entitled "Retraction devices and methods" filed 13 Jun. 2006 by Mohr et al.;

[0013] U.S. patent application No. 60/813,207 entitled "Sensory architecture for endoluminal robots" filed 13 Jun. 2006 by Diolaiti et al.; and

[0014] U.S. patent application No. 60/813,328 entitled "Concept for single port laparoscopic surgery" filed 13 Jun. 2006 by Mohr et al.

[0015] In addition, this application is related to the following concurrently filed United States patent applications, all of which are incorporated by reference:

[0016] U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. 00500] entitled "Retraction of tissue for single port entry, robotically assisted medical procedures" by Mohr;

[0017] U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. 00501] entitled "Bracing of bundled medical devices for single port entry, robotically assisted medical procedures" by Mohr et al.;

[0018] U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. 00502] entitled "Extendable suction surface for bracing medical devices during robotically assisted medical procedures" by Schena;

[0019] U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. 00560] entitled "Control system configured to compensate for non-ideal actuator-to-joint linkage characteristics in a medical robotic system" by Diolaiti et al.;

[0020] U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. 00580] entitled "Surgical instrument actuation system" by Cooper et al.;

[0021] U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. 00581] entitled "Surgical instrument actuator" by Cooper et al.;

[0022] U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. 00990] entitled "Minimally invasive surgical system" by Larkin et al.;

[0023] U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. 01000] entitled "Minimally invasive surgical instrument advancement" by Larkin;

[0024] U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. 01010] entitled "Surgical instrument control and actuation" by Cooper et al.;

[0025] U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. 01020] entitled "Surgical instrument with parallel motion mechanism" by Cooper;

[0026] U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. 01030] entitled "Minimally invasive surgical apparatus with side exit instruments" by Larkin;

[0027] U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. 01040] entitled "Minimally invasive surgical instrument system" by Larkin;

[0028] U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. 01050] entitled "Side looking minimally invasive surgery instrument assembly" by Cooper et al.;

[0029] U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. 01051] entitled "Side looking minimally invasive surgery instrument assembly" by Cooper et al.;

[0030] U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. 01060] entitled "Guide tube control of minimally invasive surgical instruments" by Larkin et al.;

[0031] U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. 01070] entitled "Minimally invasive surgery guide tube" by Larkin et al.;

[0032] U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. 01071] entitled "Minimally invasive surgery guide tube" by Larkin et al.;

[0033] U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. 01080] entitled "Minimally invasive surgical apparatus with independent imaging system" by Diolaiti et al.;

[0034] U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. 01090] entitled "Minimally invasive surgical illumination" by Schena et al.;

[0035] U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. 01100] entitled "Retrograde instrument" by Duval et al.;

[0036] U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. 01101] entitled "Retrograde instrument" by Duval et al.;

[0037] U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. 01110] entitled "Preventing instrument/tissue collisions" by Larkin;

[0038] U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. 01120] entitled "Minimally invasive surgery instrument assembly with reduced cross section" by Larkin et al.;

[0039] U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. 01130] entitled "Minimally invasive surgical system" by Larkin et al.;

[0040] U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. 01140] entitled "Minimally invasive surgical system" by Larkin et al.; and

[0041] U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. 01150] entitled "Minimally invasive surgical system" by Diolaiti et al.

STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT

[0042] None.

BACKGROUND

[0043] 1. Field of Invention

[0044] Aspects of the invention are associated with systems and procedures used for minimally invasive surgery, and more particularly to telemanipulative systems used for such surgery.

[0045] 2. Background Art

[0046] Minimally invasive surgery is known under various names (e.g., endoscopy, laparoscopy, arthroscopy, endovascular, keyhole, etc.), often specific to the anatomical area in which work is done. Such surgery includes the use of both hand-held and teleoperated/telemanipulated/telepresence (robot assisted/telerobotics) equipment, such as the da Vinci® Surgical System made by Intuitive Surgical, Inc. of Sunnyvale, Calif. Both diagnostic (e.g., biopsy) and therapeutic procedures are done. Instruments may be inserted into a patient percutaneously via surgical incision or via natural orifice. A new, experimental minimally invasive surgery variation is Natural Orifice Transluminal Endoscopic Surgery (NOTES), in which instruments enter via a natural orifice (e.g., mouth, nostril, ear canal anus, vagina, urethra) and continue to a surgical site via a transluminal incision (e.g., in a gastric or colonic wall) within the body. Although teleoperative surgery using the da Vinci® Surgical System provides great benefits over, for instance, many hand-held procedures, for some patients and for some anatomical areas the da Vinci® Surgical System is unable to effectively access a surgical site. In addition, further reducing the size and number of incisions aids patient recovery and helps reduce patient trauma and discomfort.

[0047] The number of degrees of freedom (DOFs) is the number of independent variables that uniquely identify the pose/configuration of a system. Since robotic manipulators are kinematic chains that map the (input) joint space into the (output) Cartesian space, the notion of DOF can be expressed in any of these two spaces. In particular, the set of joint DOFs is the set of joint variables for all the independently controlled joints. Without loss of generality, joints are mechanisms that provide a single translational (prismatic joints) or rotational (revolute joints) DOF. Any mechanism that provides more than one DOF motion is considered, from a kinematic modeling perspective, as two or more separate joints. The set of Cartesian DOFs is usually represented by the three translational (position) variables (e.g., surge, heave, sway) and by the three rotational (orientation) variables (e.g. Euler angles or roll/pitch/yaw angles) that describe the position and orientation of an end effector (or tip) frame with respect to a given reference Cartesian frame.

[0048] For example, a planar mechanism with an end effector mounted on two independent and perpendicular rails has the capability of controlling the x/y position within the area spanned by the two rails (prismatic DOFs). If the end effector can be rotated around an axis perpendicular to the plane of the rails, then there are then three input DOFs (the two rail positions and the yaw angle) that correspond to three output DOFs (the x/y position and the orientation angle of the end effector).

[0049] Although the number of Cartesian DOFs is at most six, a condition in which all the translational and orientational variables are independently controlled, the number of joint DOFs is generally the result of design choices that involve considerations of the complexity of the mechanism and the task specifications. Accordingly, the number of joint DOFs can be more than, equal to, or less than six. For non-redundant kinematic chains, the number of independently controlled joints is equal to the degree of mobility for the end effector frame. For a certain number of prismatic and revolute joint DOFs, the end effector frame will have an equal number of DOFs (except when in singular configurations) in Cartesian space that will correspond to a combination of translational (x/y/z position) and rotational (roll/pitch/yaw orientation angle) motions.

[0050] The distinction between the input and the output DOFs is extremely important in situations with redundant or "defective" kinematic chains (e.g., mechanical manipulators). In particular, "defective" manipulators have fewer than six independently controlled joints and therefore do not have the capability of fully controlling end effector position and orientation. Instead, defective manipulators are limited to controlling only a subset of the position and orientation variables. On the other hand, redundant manipulators have more than six joint DOFs. Thus, a redundant manipulator can use more than one joint configuration to establish a desired 6-DOF end effector pose. In other words, additional degrees of freedom can be used to control not just the end effector position and orientation but also the "shape" of the

manipulator itself. In addition to the kinematic degrees of freedom, mechanisms may have other DOFs, such as the pivoting lever movement of gripping jaws or scissors blades.

[0051] It is also important to consider reference frames for the space in which DOFs are specified. For example, a single DOF change in joint space (e.g., the joint between two links rotates) may result in a motion that combines changes in the Cartesian translational and orientational variables of the frame attached to the distal tip of one of the links (the frame at the distal tip both rotates and translates through space). Kinematics describes the process of converting from one measurement space to another. For example, using joint space measurements to determine the Cartesian space position and orientation of a reference frame at the tip of a kinematic chain is "forward" kinematics. Using Cartesian space position and orientation for the reference frame at the tip of a kinematic chain to determine the required joint positions is "inverse" kinematics. If there are any revolute joints, kinematics involves non-linear (trigonometric) functions.

SUMMARY

[0052] In accordance with aspects of the invention two primary guide tubes are inserted through a secondary guide tube, and the primary guide tubes exit via side exit ports of the secondary guide tube. Surgical instruments are inserted through the primary guide tubes. The surgical instruments are telemanipulatively operated by moving components of the instruments and/or components of the primary guide tubes and/or components of the secondary guide tube. A stereoscopic image capture component is at the distal end of the secondary guide tube.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0053] FIG. **1** is a diagrammatic view of a minimally invasive surgical instrument and its motion about a pivot point represented by an incision or natural orifice.

[0054] FIG. **2**A is a diagrammatic view of another minimally invasive surgical instrument and its motion.

[0055] FIG. **2**B is a diagrammatic view of yet another minimally invasive surgical instrument and its motion.

[0056] FIG. **3** is a schematic view of a minimally invasive surgical instrument.

[0057] FIG. **4** is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of a minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly.

[0058] FIGS. **4**A and **4**B are diagrammatic perspective views that illustrate aspects of a removable instrument that is held in place within guide tube.

[0059] FIG. **5** is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of a second minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly.

[0060] FIG. **6** is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of a third minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly.

[0061] FIG. **7** is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of a fourth minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly.

[0062] FIG. **8** is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of a fifth minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly.

[0063] FIG. **9** is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of a sixth minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly.

[0064] FIG. **9**A is a schematic view that illustrates a detail of an alternate aspect of FIG. **9**.

[0065] FIG. **10** is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of a seventh minimally invasive surgical assembly.

[0066] FIG. **11** is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of an eighth minimally invasive surgical assembly.

[0067] FIGS. **11**A and **111**B are diagrammatic end views of surgical instrument assemblies.

[0068] FIG. **12** is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of a ninth minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly.

[0069] FIGS. **12**A and **12**B are diagrammatic views of retroflexive positions.

[0070] FIG. **13** is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of a tenth minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly.

[0071] FIG. **14** is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of an eleventh minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly.

[0072] FIGS. **15**A-**15**D are schematic views that illustrate aspects of inserting a flexible, steerable surgical instrument and surgical instrument assembly.

[0073] FIG. **16** is a schematic view that illustrates a twelfth aspect of a minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly.

[0074] FIG. **16**A is a side elevation view of an embodiment of the distal portion of a minimally invasive surgical instrument that includes a parallel motion mechanism.

[0075] FIG. **16**B is a perspective view, and FIG. **16**C is a cross-sectional view, of an embodiment of joints in a parallel motion mechanism.

[0076] FIGS. **16**D and **16**E are schematic views that illustrate design and operation aspects of a parallel motion mechanism.

[0077] FIGS. **16**F and **16**G are diagrammatic end views of link disks in a parallel motion mechanism.

[0078] FIGS. **16**H and **16**I are diagrammatic perspective views of stiffening brackets in a parallel motion mechanism.

[0079] FIG. **16**J is a diagrammatic end view of a stiffening bracket.

[0080] FIG. **17** is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of a thirteenth minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly.

[0081] FIG. **17**A is a schematic side view of a detail of FIG. **17**.

[0082] FIG. **17**B is a diagrammatic perspective view of a surgical instrument assembly.

[0083] FIG. **18** is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of a fourteenth minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly.

[0084] FIG. **18**A is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of an imaging system at the distal end of an instrument assembly.

[0085] FIG. **18**B is a schematic view that shows that illustrates aspects of imaging system movement.

[0086] FIG. **18**C is a diagrammatic perspective view of a minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly.

[0087] FIG. **18**D is a diagrammatic perspective view that illustrates how a distal end of a surgical instrument assembly pitches up and down.

[0088] FIG. **18**E is another diagrammatic perspective view of a minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly.

[0089] FIG. **18**F is a diagrammatic plan view of a surgical instrument assembly with a movable imaging system at the distal tip of a guide tube, and FIG. **18**G is a diagrammatic detail that shows an alternate aspect of the surgical instrument assembly shown in FIG. **18**F.

[0090] FIG. **19** is a diagrammatic perspective view that illustrates aspects of a fifteenth minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly.

[0091] FIG. **19**A is another diagrammatic perspective view of the embodiment depicted in FIG. **19**.

[0092] FIG. **19**B is a plan view of a surgical instrument assembly.

[0093] FIG. **19**C is another plan view of the surgical instrument assembly shown in FIG. **19**.

[0094] FIG. **19**D is an exploded perspective view that illustrates aspects of a surgical instrument mechanism.

[0095] FIG. **19**E is a perspective view of cable guide tubes.

[0096] FIG. **19**F is an end elevation view of cable guide tubes.

[0097] FIG. **19**G is a perspective view of a cable guide piece.

[0098] FIG. **19**H is a perspective view that illustrates aspects of a surgical instrument passing through and exiting from a guide tube.

[0099] FIG. **19**I is a perspective view that illustrates aspects of a surgical instrument's motion after exiting from a guide tube.

[0100] FIG. **19**J is a perspective view that illustrates aspects of a surgical instrument assembly with two retrograde surgical instruments.

[0101] FIG. **19**K is a plan view of a surgical instrument assembly.

[0102] FIG. **20**A is an end elevation view of the distal end face of a guide tube.

[0103] FIG. **20**B is an end elevation view of the distal end face of guide tube shown in FIG. **20**A, with an imaging system and two surgical instruments.

[0104] FIG. **20**C is an end elevation view that illustrates a guide tube with an instrument channel that includes grooves arranged in a "V" shape.

[0105] FIGS. **20**D, **20**E, and **20**F are each end elevation views that illustrate other guide tube channel configurations.

[0106] FIG. **21**A is a schematic view of a robot-assisted minimally invasive telesurgical system.

[0107] FIGS. **21**B and **21**C are schematic views of a patient side support system in a telesurgical system.

[0108] FIG. **22**A is a diagrammatic view of a centralized motion control system for a minimally invasive telesurgical system.

[0109] FIG. **22**B is a diagrammatic view of a distributed motion control system for a minimally invasive telesurgical system.

[0110] FIG. **23** is a schematic view of an interface between a surgical instrument assembly and an actuator assembly.

[0111] FIG. **24**A is a perspective view of the proximal segment of a minimally invasive surgical instrument.

[0112] FIG. **24**B is a perspective view of a segment of an actuator assembly **2420** that mates with and actuates the instrument shown in FIG. **24**A.

[0113] FIG. **25**A is a diagrammatic perspective view that illustrates mounting minimally invasive surgical instruments and actuator assemblies at the end of a setup arm.

[0114] FIG. **25**B is another diagrammatic perspective view that illustrates mounting minimally invasive surgical instruments and actuator assemblies at the end of a setup arm.

[0115] FIG. **26**A is a diagrammatic end view of instrument transmission mechanisms and a guide tube.

[0116] FIGS. **26**B, **26**C, and **26**D are diagrammatic end views of transmission mechanisms spaced around a guide tube.

[0117] FIG. **26**E is a diagrammatic exploded perspective view of an actuator housing and an instrument.

[0118] FIG. **27** is a diagrammatic view of transmission mechanisms associated with flexible coaxial guide tubes and instruments.

[0119] FIG. **28**A is a diagrammatic view of multi-port surgery.

[0120] FIG. **28**B is another diagrammatic view of multi-port surgery.

[0121] FIGS. **29**A and **29**B are diagrammatic views of minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly position sensing.

[0122] FIGS. **29**C-**29**E are diagrammatic plan views that illustrate further aspects of preventing undesired instrument collision with tissue.

[0123] FIG. **29**F is a diagrammatic view of an image mosaiced output display for a surgeon.

[0124] FIG. **30** is a schematic view of a mechanism for automatically exchanging minimally invasive surgical instruments.

[0125] FIG. **30**A is a schematic view of storing an instrument or other component on a drum.

[0126] FIG. **30**B is a schematic view of storing automatically replaceable instruments on spools.

[0127] FIG. **31** is a diagrammatic perspective view of an illustrative minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly that includes a multi-jointed instrument dedicated to retraction.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0128] This description and the accompanying drawings that illustrate aspects and embodiments of the present invention should not be taken as limiting—the claims define the protected invention. Various mechanical, compositional, structural, electrical, and operational changes may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of this description and the claims. In some instances, well-known circuits, structures, and techniques have not been shown in detail in order not to obscure the invention. Like numbers in two or more figures represent the same or similar elements.

[0129] Further, this description's terminology is not intended to limit the invention. For example, spatially relative terms—such as "beneath", "below", "lower", "above", "upper", "proximal", "distal", and the like—may be used to describe one element's or feature's relationship to another element or feature as illustrated in the figures. These spatially relative terms are intended to encompass different positions and orientations of the device in use or operation in addition to the position and orientation shown in the figures. For example, if the device in the figures is turned over, elements described as "below" or "beneath" other elements or features would then be "above" or "over" the other elements or features. Thus, the exemplary term "below" can encompass both positions and orientations of above and below. The device may be otherwise oriented (rotated 90 degrees or at other orientations), and the spatially relative descriptors used herein interpreted accordingly. Likewise, descriptions of movement along and around various axes includes various special device positions and orientations. In addition, the singular forms "a", "an", and "the" are intended to include the plural forms as well, unless the context indicates otherwise. And, the terms "comprises", "comprising", "includes", and the like specify the presence of stated features, steps, operations, elements, and/or components but do not preclude the presence or addition of one or more other features, steps, operations, elements, components, and/or groups. Components described as coupled may be electrically or mechanically directly coupled, or they may be indirectly coupled via one or more intermediate components.

[0130] Telemanipulation and like terms generally refer to an operator manipulating a master device (e.g., an input kinematic chain) in a relatively natural way (e.g., a natural hand or finger movement), whereupon the master device movements are made into commands that are processed and transmitted in real time to a slave device (e.g., an output kinematic chain) that reacts nearly instantaneously to the commands and to environmental forces. Telemanipulation is disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 6,574,355 (Green), which is incorporated by reference.

[0131] To avoid repetition in the figures and the descriptions below of the various aspects and illustrative embodiments, it should be understood that many features are common to many aspects and embodiments. Omission of an aspect from a description or figure does not imply that the aspect is missing from embodiments that incorporate that aspect. Instead, the aspect may have been omitted for clarity and to avoid prolix description.

[0132] Accordingly, several general aspects apply to various descriptions below. For example, at least one surgical end effector is shown or described in various figures. An end effector is the part of the minimally invasive surgical instrument or assembly that performs a specific surgical function (e.g., forceps/graspers, needle drivers, scissors, electrocautery hooks, staplers, clip appliers/removers, etc.). Many end effectors have a single DOF (e.g., graspers that open and close). The end effector may be coupled to the surgical instrument body with a mechanism the provides one or more additional DOFs, such as "wrist" type mechanisms. Examples of such mechanisms are shown in U.S. Pat. No. 6,371,952 (Madhani et al.) and in U.S. Pat. No. 6,817,974 (Cooper et al.), both of which are incorporated by reference, and may be known as various Intuitive Surgical, Inc. Endowrist® mechanisms as used on both 8 mm and 5 mm instruments for the da Vinci® Surgical System. Although the surgical instruments described herein generally include end effectors, it should be understood that in some aspects an end effector may be omitted. For example, the distal tip of an instrument body shaft may be used to retract tissue. As another example, suction or irrigation openings may exist at the distal tip of a body shaft or the wrist mechanism. In these aspects, it should be understood that descriptions of positioning and orienting an end effector include positioning and orienting the tip of a surgical instrument that does not have an end effector. For example, a description that addresses the reference frame for a tip of an end effector should also be read to include the reference frame of the a tip of a surgical instrument that does not have an end effector.

[0133] Throughout this description, it should be understood that a mono- or stereoscopic imaging system/image capture component/camera device may be placed at the distal end of an instrument wherever an end effector is shown or described (the device may be considered a "camera instrument"), or it may be placed near or at the distal end of any guide tube or other instrument assembly element. Accordingly, the terms "imaging system" and the like as used herein should be broadly construed to include both image capture components and combinations of image capture components with associated circuitry and hardware, within the context of the aspects and embodiments being described. Such endoscopic imaging systems (e.g. optical, infrared, ultrasound, etc.) include systems with distally positioned image sensing chips and associated circuits that relay captured image data via a wired or wireless connection to outside the body. Such endoscopic imaging systems also include systems that relay images for capture outside the body (e.g., by using rod lenses or fiber optics). In some instruments or instrument assemblies a direct view optical system (the endoscopic image is viewed directly at an eyepiece) may be used. An example of a distally positioned semiconductor stereoscopic imaging system is described in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/614,661 "Stereoscopic Endoscope" (Shafer et al.), which is incorporated by reference. Well-known endoscopic imaging system components, such as electrical and fiber optic illumination connections, are omitted or symbolically represented for clarity. Illumination for endoscopic imaging is typically represented in the drawings by a single illumination port. It should be understood that these depictions are exemplary. The sizes, positions, and numbers of illumination ports may vary. Illumination ports are typically arranged on multiple sides of the imaging apertures, or completely surrounding the imaging apertures, to minimize deep shadows.

[0134] In this description, cannulas are typically used to prevent a surgical instrument or guide tube from rubbing on

patient tissue. Cannulas may be used for both incisions and natural orifices. For situations in which an instrument or guide tube does not frequently translate or rotate relative to its insertion (longitudinal) axis, a cannula may not be used. For situations that require insulation, the cannula may include a seal to prevent excess insufflation gas leakage past the instrument or guide tube. For example, for thoracic surgery that does not require insufflation, the cannula seal may be omitted, and if instruments or guide tube insertion axis movement is minimal, then the cannula itself may be omitted. A rigid guide tube may function as a cannula in some configurations for instruments that are inserted relative to the guide tube. Cannulas and guide tubes may be, e.g., steel or extruded plastic. Plastic, which is less expensive than steel, may be suitable for one-time use.

[0135] Various instances and assemblies of flexible surgical instruments and guide tubes are shown and described. Such flexibility, in this description, is achieved in various ways. For example, a segment or an instrument or guide tube may be a continuously curving flexible structure, such as one based on a helical wound coil or on tubes with various segments removed (e.g., kerf-type cuts). Or, the flexible part may be made of a series of short, pivotally connected segments ("vertebrae") that provide a snake-like approximation of a continuously curving structure. Instrument and guide tube structures may include those in U.S. Patent Application Pub. No. US 2004/0138700 (Cooper et al.), which is incorporated by reference. For clarity, the figures and associated descriptions generally show only two segments of instruments and guide tubes, termed proximal (closer to the transmission mechanism; farther from the surgical site) and distal (farther from the transmission mechanism; closer to the surgical site). It should be understood that the instruments and guide tubes may be divided into three or more segments, each segment being rigid, passively flexible, or actively flexible. Flexing and bending as described for a distal segment a proximal segment, or an entire mechanism also apply to intermediate segments that have been omitted for clarity. For instance, an intermediate segment between proximal and distal segments may bend in a simple or compound curve. Flexible segments may be various lengths. Segments with a smaller outside diameter may have a smaller minimum radius of curvature while bending than segments with a larger outside diameter. For cable-controlled systems, unacceptably high cable friction or binding limits minimum radius of curvature and the total bend angle while bending. The guide tube's (or any joint's) minimum bend radius is such that it does not kink or otherwise inhibit the smooth motion of the inner surgical instrument's mechanism. Flexible components may be, for example, up to approximately four feet in length and approximately 0.6 inches in diameter. Other lengths and diameters (e.g., shorter, smaller) and the degree of flexibility for a specific mechanism may be determined by the target anatomy for which the mechanism has been designed.

[0136] In some instances only a distal segment of an instrument or guide tube is flexible, and the proximal segment is rigid. In other instances, the entire segment of the instrument or guide tube that is inside the patient is flexible. In still other instances, an extreme distal segment may be rigid, and one or more other proximal segments are flexible. The flexible segments may be passive or they may be actively controllable ("steerable"). Such active control may be done using, for example, sets of opposing cables (e.g., one set controlling "pitch" and an orthogonal set controlling "yaw"; three cables can be used to perform similar action). Other control elements such as small electric or magnetic actuators, shape memory alloys, electroactive polymers ("artificial muscle"), pneumatic or hydraulic bellows or pistons, and the like may be used. In instances in which a segment of an instrument or guide tube is fully or partially inside another guide tube, various combinations of passive and active flexibility may exist. For instance, an actively flexible instrument inside a passively flexible guide tube may exert sufficient lateral force to flex the surrounding guide tube. Similarly, an actively flexible guide tube may flex a passively flexible instrument inside it. Actively flexible segments of guide tubes and instruments may work in concert. For both flexible and rigid instruments and guide tubes, control cables placed farther from the center longitudinal axis may provide a mechanical advantage over cables placed nearer to the center longitudinal axis, depending on compliance considerations in the various designs.

[0137] The flexible segment's compliance (stiffness) may vary from being almost completely flaccid (small internal frictions exist) to being substantially rigid. In some aspects, the compliance is controllable. For example, a segment or all of a flexible segment of an instrument or guide tube can be made substantially (i.e., effectively but not infinitely) rigid (the segment is "rigidizable" or "lockable"). The lockable segment may be locked in a straight, simple curve or in a compound curve shape. Locking may be accomplished by applying tension to one or more cables that run longitudinally along the instrument or guide tube that is sufficient to cause friction to prevent adjacent vertebrae from moving. The cable or cables may run through a large, central hole in each vertebra or may run through smaller holes near the vertebra's outer circumference. Alternatively, the drive element of one or more motors that move one or more control cables may be soft-locked in position (e.g., by servocontrol) to hold the cables in position and thereby prevent instrument or guide tube movement, thus locking the vertebrae in place. Keeping a motor drive element in place may be done to effectively keep other movable instrument and guide tube components in place as well. It should be understood that the stiffness under servocontrol, although effective, is generally less than the stiffness that may be obtained with braking placed directly on joints, such as the braking used to keep passive setup joints in place. Cable stiffness generally dominates because it is generally less than servosystem or braked joint stiffness.

[0138] In some situations, the compliance of the flexible segment may be continuously varied between flaccid and rigid states. For example, locking cable tension can be increased to increase stiffness but without locking the flexible segment in a rigid state. Such intermediate compliance may allow for telesurgical operation while reducing tissue trauma that may occur due to movements caused by reactive forces from the surgical site. Suitable bend sensors incorporated into the flexible segment allow the telesurgical system to determine instrument and/or guide tube position as it bends. U.S. Patent Application Pub. No. US 2006/0013523 (Childers et al.), which is incorporated by reference, discloses a fiber optic position shape sensing device and method. U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/491,384 (Larkin et al.), which is incorporated by reference, discloses fiber optic bend sensors (e.g. fiber Bragg gratings) used in the control of such segments and flexible devices.

[0139] A surgeon's inputs to control aspects of the minimally invasive surgical instrument assemblies, instruments, and end effectors as described herein are generally done using an intuitive, camera referenced control interface. For example, the da Vinci® Surgical System includes a Surgeon's console with such a control interface, which may be modified to control aspects described herein. The surgeon manipulates one or more master manual input mechanisms having, e.g., 6 DOFs to control the slave instrument assembly and instrument. The input mechanisms include a finger-operated grasper to control one or more end effector DOFs (e.g., closing grasping jaws). Intuitive control is provided by orienting the relative positions of the end effectors and the endoscopic imaging system with the positions of the surgeon's input mechanisms and image output display. This orientation allows the surgeon to manipulate the input mechanisms and end effector controls as if viewing the surgical work site in substantially true presence. This teleoperation true presence means that the surgeon views an image from a perspective that appears to be that of an operator directly viewing and working at the surgical site. U.S. Pat. No. 6,671,581 (Niemeyer et al.), which is incorporated by reference, contains further information on camera referenced control in a minimally invasive surgical apparatus.

[0140] FIG. **1** is a diagrammatic view of a minimally invasive surgical instrument **1** and its motion. As shown in FIG. **1**, surgical instrument **1** is a straight, rigid instrument that is inserted via a small incision **2** into a body cavity (e.g., the abdominal cavity) or lumen **3**. Incision **2** is made in a relatively thin body wall tissue structure **4**, such as the abdominal wall. A surgeon moves instrument **1** either by hand (e.g., by operating a conventional laparoscopic instrument) or by robotic teleoperation (e.g., using Intuitive Surgical, Inc.'s da Vinci® Surgical System). Since instrument **1** is straight, its movement is partially constrained by incision **2**. Instrument **1** may be translated in the direction of its longitudinal axis (inserted or withdrawn) and may be rotated around its longitudinal axis. Instrument **1** also pivots at a center point **5**, which is approximately at incision **2**, to sweep an end effector **7** through a volume **6**. An optional wrist mechanism (not shown) at the distal end of instrument **1** may be used to control end effector **7**'s orientation. In some situations, however, an intermediate tissue structure (e.g., an organ or vessel, a thick tissue wall **4**, a curving body lumen wall etc.) prevents instrument **1** from pivoting around its center point **5** at incision **2** in some or all directions, which prevents a surgeon from reaching a desired surgical site.

[0141] If a minimally invasive surgical instrument is designed to bend between the position at which it enters the patient and the surgical site, then the intermediate tissue structure does not constrain positioning of the instruments end effector. Such bending may be done in two ways. First, two or more long, rigid body segments are each coupled together by a joint. Second, a flexible mechanism as described above is used. The position of the rigid body segment(s) and the flexible mechanism are actively controlled to position and orient the end effector at the instrument's distal end.

[0142] FIG. **2**A is a diagrammatic view of another minimally invasive surgical instrument **10** and its motion in accordance with aspects of the invention. As shown in FIG. **2**A, instrument **10** includes an illustrative proximal instrument body segment **10***a* and an illustrative distal instrument body segment **10***b*. In some aspects, more than two body segments may be used. As depicted, both proximal and distal body segments **10***a*,**10***b* are straight and rigid. Alternatively, one or both body segments **10***a*,**10***b* could be curved for a particular path or task. The two body segments **10***a*,**10***b* are coupled at a joint **11** that allows distal body segment **10***b* to move. In some aspects joint **11** allows segment **11***b* to move with a single DOF with reference to segment **10***a*, and in other aspects joint **11** allows segment **10***b* to move with two DOFs with reference to segment **10***a* segment. Instrument **10** can be translated along its longitudinal (insertion) axis. In some aspects, proximal segment **10** can be rolled around its longitudinal axis. Accordingly, end effector **7** positioned at the distal end of distal body segment **11***b* can be positioned within a volume **12**. In some aspects joint **11** provides a single DOF, and so end effector **7** sweeps along a planar curve that rotates as proximal segment **10***a* rotates around its longitudinal axis. In some aspects joint **11** provides two DOFs, and so end effector **7** sweeps along a curved surface. The height of volume **12** depends on the amount of instrument **10**'s insertion. Volume **12** is shown as an illustrative cylinder with concave/convex ends. Other volume shapes are possible, depending on the segments and joint motions at instrument **10**'s distal end. For example, in some aspects distal segment **11***b* may be displaced by an angle θ from segment **10***a*'s longitudinal axis that is larger than 90 degrees (this bending back on itself is termed "retroflexive"). An optional wrist mechanism (not shown) may be used to change end effector **7**'s orientation.

[0143] Unlike instrument **1** shown in FIG. **1**, instrument **10** is not constrained by a pivot point at a body wall because joint **11** is located deep within the patient. Therefore, instrument **10** can be inserted into a patient past intermediate tissue structures **13** that would otherwise constrain instrument **1**'s motion (e.g., the esophagus, if gastric surgery is to be performed) or that cannot be disturbed (e.g., brain tissues if neurosurgery is to be performed). Accordingly, aspects of surgical instrument **10** allow a surgeon to reach tissue that cannot be reached or operated upon by using instrument **1**. Removing the constraint that the surgical instrument segments be straight and rigid allows even more surgical access to tissue structures.

[0144] Instead of using only rigid instrument body segments, one or more flexible segments may be used. FIG. **2**B is a diagrammatic view of another minimally invasive surgical instrument **15** and its motion in accordance with aspects of the invention. As shown in FIG. **2**B, surgical instrument **15** has a proximal instrument body segment **15***a* and a distal instrument body segment **15***b*. Instead of being straight and rigid, distal body segment **15***b* is flexible as described above. In some aspects flexible distal segment **15***b* is coupled to straight (or, alternatively, curved), rigid proximal segment **15***a* at an intermediate position **15***c*. In other aspects, both proximal instrument body segment **15***a* and distal instrument body segment **15***b* are flexible, and intermediate instrument body position **15***c* is illustrative of the position at which the two segments are jointed. Instrument body segment **15***b* is shown with an illustrative simple curve. In other aspects as discussed below body segment **11***b* may be a compound curve in either two or three dimensions.

[0145] During surgery, instrument **15** positions end effector **7** at various positions in illustrative volume **16**. Instrument body segment **15***a* remains constrained by intermediate tissue structures **13** and instrument body segment **15***b* flexes. Distal segment **15***b*'s length and bend radius determines if instrument **15** can operate retroflexively. It can be seen that compound bending of instrument body segment **15***b* will allow a surgeon to maneuver around another intermediate tissue structure **13***a* within volume **16**. (A similar action may be performed if instrument **10** (FIG. **2**A) has two or more distal segments.) An optional wrist mechanism (not shown) is used to control end effector **7**'s orientation. In addition, in some aspects if flexible segment **15***b* is designed to transmit roll, then end effector **7** can be rolled by rolling instrument **15** (either with or without a wrist mechanism).

[0146] The surgical instruments **10** and **15** illustrated in FIGS. **2**A and **2**B are not limited to single instruments. The architectures illustrated by instruments **10** and **15** may be applied to assemblies that combine one or more of various guide tubes, surgical instruments, and guide probes such as those described below. And, one or more imaging systems (endoscopes) may be added to such instruments and instrument assemblies. The aspects described below in association with the figures are illustrative of aspects generally described in FIGS. **2**A and **2**B. Therefore, aspects of the invention provide multiple telemanipulated surgical instruments, each surgical instrument working independently of the other and each having an end effector with at least six actively controlled DOFs in Cartesian space (i.e., surge, heave, sway, roll, pitch, yaw), via a single entry port in a patient. Further, aspects of the invention provide multiple telemanipulated surgical instruments, each surgical instrument working independently of the other and each having an end effector with at least six actively controlled DOFs in Cartesian space (i.e., surge, heave, sway, roll, pitch, yaw), via a single entry port in a patient and past intermediate tissue that restricts lateral movement of a rigid instrument body. The end effectors' six DOFs in Cartesian space are in addition to DOFs provided by, e.g., moving a guide tube through which the instruments extend to reach a surgical site.

Surgical Instrument Assemblies

[0147] FIG. **3** is a schematic view of a minimally invasive surgical instrument **300**. Surgical instrument **300** is typically inserted into a patient's body via a cannula **302** or via a natural orifice or incision. An end effector **304** is mounted at the end of instrument **300**. In some instances instrument **300**'s body is passively flexible along its entire length in a manner similar to existing flexible minimally invasive surgical instruments. For example, a cable axially runs through a helical wound wire coil and outer sheath that protects the cable, and the cable translates within the coil to operate the end effector (e.g., a "Bowden" cable). As another example, a series of small, annular vertebra segments may be used to make instrument **300** flexible. In other instances, instrument **300**'s body may be separated into a proximal segment **306** and a distal segment **308**. Each instrument body segment **306**,**308** may be rigid, passively flexible, or actively flexible. Flexible segments may be made rigid ("rigidizable" or "lockable") in various straight or curved positions. As shown in FIG. **3**, for example, proximal segment **306** may be inherently or lockably rigid, and distal segment **308** may be passively or actively flexible. In other instances, both proximal and distal segments **306**,**308** (essentially the entire segment of instrument **302** that is inside the patient's body) may be passively or actively flexible and rigidizable in various combinations.

[0148] The surgical instrument **300** shown in FIG. **3** provides various degrees of freedom for end effector **304**. To control end effector **304**'s position, for example, a combination of instrument **300** insertion and distal segment **308** bending is specified. To control end effector **304**'s orientation, a combination of instrument **300** roll and distal segment **308** bending is specified. Accordingly, if distal segment **308** can only be placed in a simple curve (as illustrated by alternate position **310**), then 4 DOFs are available. If end effector **304** position is specified, then end effector **304** pitch and yaw is a function of the position. If end effector **304** orientation is specified, then the heave and sway position is a function of the orientation. Therefore, a distal wrist mechanism is added to control end effector **304**'s orientation so that both position and orientation may be specified. If distal segment **308** can be placed in a compound curve (as illustrated by alternate position **312**), then 6 DOFs are available, and end effector **304**'s position and orientation may be specified. Even though end effector **304**'s position and orientation may be independently specified in such a 6 DOF instrument, a distal wrist mechanism may be added to provide enhanced control over end effector **304**'s orientation. This enhanced control allows, e.g., a pitch and yaw displacement that is larger than provided by the various poses that distal segment **308** can assume, pitch and yaw displacement while distal segment **308** remains in a particular pose, and pitch and yaw displacement in surgical situations where tissue constrains the shape of distal segment **308**'s pose.

[0149] FIG. **4** is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of a minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly **400**. Instrument assembly **400** includes a surgical instrument **402**, which may be similar to surgical instrument **300** as described with reference to FIG. **3**, and a guide tube **404**. Guide tube **404** has at least one longitudinal channel **406**, which may be fully or partially enclosed, that runs from proximal end **408** to distal end **410**. Surgical instrument **402** runs through channel **406** and may be, for example, snap-fitted into a non-rotating socket to maintain position within guide tube **404**. Guide tube **404** may have other channels (not shown) through which, e.g., irrigation or suction may be provided to a surgical site, in addition to channels associated with active control mechanisms (e.g., cables for steering or locking). End effector **412** is coupled to the distal end of surgical instrument **402**. Instrument assembly **400** is inserted into a patient via cannula **414** or via natural orifice or incision. In some instances, a cannula-type guide may be used to assist insertion via natural orifice. Cannula **414** and such cannula-type guides may be straight or curved to facilitate insertion (e.g., for laryngeal surgery). Surgical instrument assembly **400**'s cross section may be circular or other shape (e.g., elliptical, rounded polygon). Various combinations of surgical instrument **402** and guide tube **404** may be rigid, passively flexible, and actively flexible, as well as variably compliant and/or lockable, as described above. In some instances, an optional endoscopic imaging system (not shown) may be at the distal end of guide tube **404**.

[0150] Just as some or all of surgical instrument **300** (FIG. **3**) may be flexed to move its end effector to various positions

and orientations, surgical instrument assembly **400** may be similarly flexed to move end effector **412** to various positions and orientations. Distal end segment **416**, or the entire length of instrument assembly **400**, may be actively flexed to heave and/or sway end effector **412**. Combinations of bending and rolling may also be used to displace end effector **412**. Compound bends may prevent end effector **412** from pitching and/or yawing during lateral translations as described above. Alternate positions **418** and **420** illustrate these active flexings. In accordance with an aspect of the invention, in some instances distal segment **416** of guide tube **404** provides small, wrist-like pitch and yaw orientation for end effector **412**. Other segments of instrument assembly **400** provide end effector roll and position.

[**0151**] Surgical instrument assembly **400** potentially provides more DOFs, some redundant, for end effector **412** than surgical instrument **300** provides for end effector **304**, as described with reference to FIG. **3**. As shown in FIG. **4**, in some aspects surgical instrument **402** may rotate within guide tube **404**, and/or guide tube **404** may rotate within cannula **414** (or the natural orifice), to cause end effector **412** to be displaced in roll around instrument assembly **400**'s longitudinal axis. Instrument **402** may translate within guide tube **404**, and/or guide tube **404** may translate within cannula **414**, to cause end effector **412** to be displaced (surged) along instrument assembly **400**'s longitudinal axis. Alternatively, instrument **402** is held in position within guide tube **404** as described below. The lateral bending force that the guide tube's distal segment **416** exerts on the surgical instrument's distal end **402** is sufficiently strong to allow end effector **412** to perform its surgical task. In some instances, end effector **412** may be coupled to the distal end of surgical instrument **402** via a wrist mechanism that provides one or more additional DOFs (e.g., roll, pitch, yaw).

[**0152**] FIG. **4** also illustrates that when a guide tube bends, the bend must not bind operation of an instrument or another guide tube that runs inside it. For instance, guide tube **404** must not bend in such a way that a cable operating end effector **412** is frictionally bound or permanently kinked. In some aspects the radius of curvature is mechanically limited by, e.g., the structure of the individual vertebrae that make up the flexible guide tube. In other aspects the radius of curvature is limited by a control system, described below, to provide, e.g., a smoother behavior during actuation. Further, in some aspects cables for inner instruments or guide tubes must not shift to a shorter path between their proximal and distal ends so that the components they control are not affected as the guide tube bends (such shifting may be compensated for by using distal bend/shape sensors and a control system that maintains proper cable length). Cable path lengths may be stabilized by using sheathes (e.g. Bowden cables) for cables running through the center of the flexible joints or by routing cables through the joint peripheries as described below for virtual pivot point joints.

[**0153**] In some instances surgical instrument **402** is removable and may be replaced with a different surgical instrument that has a structure similar to instrument **402** but a different end effector so as to perform a different surgical task. Accordingly, a single guide tube **404** may be used to provide wrist-like DOFs for one or more interchangeable surgical instruments **402**. In some instances the surgical instruments may be interchanged while guide tube **404** remains in the patient. Such interchangeability is described in more detail below. The guide tube allows the newly inserted instrument to be positioned directly at the surgical site, regardless of the trajectory. And, one guide tube **404** may be withdrawn and replaced with another during surgery, either with or without an instrument **402** fully or partially inserted. Since some or all of the controllable DOFs are in the guide tube, in some aspects the instrument can be inexpensively made and therefore disposable, and the guide tube can be made sterilizable and reusable.

[**0154**] FIGS. **4**A and **4**B are diagrammatic perspective views that illustrate aspects of a removable instrument that is held in place within guide tube **440**. The distal end **442** of guide tube **440** has an opening **444** though which the distal end of the instrument passes. Opening **444** is optionally made non-round to prevent the instrument from rolling within guide tube **440**. An optional fitting **446** (e.g., a spring that snaps into a detent, etc.) holds the instrument's end effector **448** in position to keep the instrument from translating through the guide tube. A round opening **444** allows the instrument to roll while fitting **446** keeps the instrument from translating. When the fitting **446** releases the instrument (e.g., when sufficient pulling force is applied), the instrument may be withdrawn from the guide tube. Distal end **442** may be a wrist mechanism for the instrument's end effector in some aspects. The roll prevention configuration and the fitting are illustratively shown at the distal end of the guide tube but may be placed at various positions (e.g., at the insertion end of the guide tube). The roll prevention configuration and the fitting can be used in the various aspects described below for other instrument and guide tube combinations, with the understanding that the roll preventing configuration and the fitting will remove a redundant insertion DOF and/or a redundant roll DOF.

[**0155**] Instrument assembly **400** may be inserted in a rigidized or locked state, or it may be actively steered during insertion in order to reach a target surgical site. In some aspects instrument **402** and guide tube **404** are alternatively coaxially advanced. For example, instrument **402** is actively steered part way along the trajectory to the surgical site and then locked (only the distal section of the instrument (or guide tube) need be actively steerable; the more proximal sections may be passive or may use curve propagation as the instrument (or guide tube) advances). Curve propagation is disclosed in, e.g., Ikuta, K. et al., "Shape memory alloy servo actuator system with electric resistance feedback and application for active endoscope," 1988 IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation, Apr. 24-29, 1988, Vol. 1, pages 427-430, which is incorporated by reference. Guide tube **404** is then passively advanced to the distal end of instrument **402** and locked to support further advancement of instrument **402**. The coaxial alternating advancing and locking continues until the surgical site is reached along the desired trajectory. Alternatively, guide tube **404** is actively steerable and lockable, and instrument **402** is passively advanced and locked within guide tube until the surgical site is reached. If both surgical instrument **402** and guide tube **404** are actively steerable, then they may "leapfrog" each other as they coaxially advance and lock along the trajectory to the surgical site. Such coaxial insertion may also be used with any combination of two or more instruments and guide tubes described herein.

[**0156**] FIG. **5** is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of a second minimally invasive surgical instrument assem-

bly **500**. Surgical instrument assembly **500** illustrates that two or more surgical instruments **502***a*,**502***b* may be surrounded by a single guide tube **504**. Surgical instruments **502***a*,**502***b* may run longitudinally through guide tube **504** in a single channel **506**. Or, surgical instruments **502***a*,**502***b* may each run through guide tube **504** in unique, individual channels **506***a*,**506***b*. End effectors **508***a*,**508***b* are each coupled to the distal ends of instruments **502***a*,**502***b*. Instrument assembly **500** is inserted via cannula **510** and as described above. Instrument assembly **500**'s cross section may be circular, elliptical, or other shape (e.g., rounded rectangle or other polygon). Various combinations of surgical instruments **502***a*,**502***b* and guide tube **504** may be rigid, passively flexible, and actively flexible, as well as lockable, as described above. An illustrative optional imaging system **511** (e.g., one or more image capture chips with associated optics and electronics) is positioned at the distal end of guide tube **504**. The imaging system **511** has a field of view that may be used to assist advancing guide tube **504** and that allows a surgeon to view end effectors **508***a*,**508***b* working at a surgical site.

[**0157**] Surgical instrument assembly **500** operates in a manner similar to that of surgical instrument assembly **400** (FIG. **4**), except that it is illustrative of aspects in which two or more surgical instruments extend through a single guide tube from a proximal to a distal end. Accordingly, the descriptions above of additional channels, active and passive flexibility, locking/rigidizing, various DOFs, the optional use of wrist mechanisms, instrument interchangeability, alternating coaxial advancing, and cannulas apply to instrument assembly **500**. Distal end segment and entire assembly flexibility are illustrated by alternate position lines **512** and **514**, similar to those shown in the preceding figures as described above. Compound bending of guide tube **504** provides at least 6 DOFs for end effectors **508***a*,**508***b* as described above. Alternating coaxial advancement may done as described above. Various ways of such advancing are possible. For example, in some aspects both instruments may be used and the guide tube slides over both instruments; in other aspects first one instrument is advanced and locked, then the guide tube is advanced and locked, then the other instrument is advanced and locked, etc.

[**0158**] FIG. **6** is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of a third minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly **600**. Surgical instrument assembly **600** operates in a manner similar to that of surgical instrument assembly **400** (FIG. **4**), except that it is illustrative of aspects in which a surgical instrument **602**'s actively flexible distal segment **604** extends beyond the distal end of guide tube **606**. Active flexibility of guide tube **606**'s distal end segment **608** and/or of the entire guide tube **606** are illustrated by alternate position lines **610** and **612**. Active flexibility of instrument **602**'s distal segment **604** moves end effector **614** to illustrative alternate position **616**. Accordingly, end effector **614** experiences wrist-like DOFs (e.g., roll, pitch, yaw) from the movement of instrument **602**'s distal segment **604**, from the movement of guide tube **606**'s distal segment **608**, and/or from a combination of movements by distal segments **604**, **608**. Thus, instrument assembly **600** illustrates aspects in which combinations of instruments and guide tubes provide redundant position and orientation DOFs for end effector **614**. The descriptions above of additional channels, active and passive flexibility, locking/rigidizing, various degrees of freedom, increased lateral force application and stiffness, the optional use of wrist mechanisms and imaging systems, instrument interchangeability, alternating coaxial advancing, and cannulas apply to instrument assembly **600**.

[**0159**] FIG. **7** is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of a fourth minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly **700**. As shown in FIG. **7**, surgical instrument **702** extends through primary guide tube **704** along instrument assembly **700**'s longitudinal axis. In addition, primary guide tube **704** extends through secondary guide tube **706** along the longitudinal axis. In some instances surgical instrument assembly **700** is inserted via a cannula **708**. End effector **710** is coupled to the distal end of surgical instrument **702** so that it extends just beyond primary guide tube **704**'s distal end.

[**0160**] End effector **710**'s redundant DOFs, other than the inherent one or more DOFs associated with its specific task (e.g., gripping), are provided in various ways. Surgical instrument **702** may rotate within primary guide tube **704**, and/or primary guide tube **704** may rotate within secondary guide tube **706**, and/or secondary guide tube **706** may rotate within cannula **708** (or a natural orifice or incision), which causes end effector **710** to be displaced in roll around instrument assembly **700**'s longitudinal axis. Surgical instrument **702** may translate within primary guide tube **704**, and/or primary guide tube **704** may translate within secondary guide tube **706**, and/or secondary guide tube **706** may translate within cannula **708**, to displace (surge) end effector **710** along instrument assembly **700**'s longitudinal axis.

[**0161**] As shown in FIG. **7**, an actively flexible distal segment **712** of primary guide tube **704** extends beyond secondary guide tube **706**'s distal end. Distal segment **712** may cause end effector **710** to be heaved and/or swayed (with incidental pitch and yaw as discussed above), adding one or two additional degrees of freedom as illustrated by alternate position **714**. Similarly, an actively flexible distal segment **716** of secondary guide tube **706**, or the entire secondary guide tube **706**, may cause end effector **710** to be heaved and/or swayed, adding one or two more degrees of freedom as illustrated by alternate positions **718** and **720**. Since instrument assembly **700** provides various combinations of roll, heave, and sway displacements for end effector **710**, a wrist-type mechanism may not be required to couple end effector **710** to surgical instrument **702**, although such a mechanism may be used to provide an additional one or more degrees of freedom (e.g., roll, pitch, yaw).

[**0162**] As indicated by the alternate position lines in FIG. **7**, the primary and secondary guide tubes can maneuver end effector **710** with various combinations of simple and compound bends. In one illustrative embodiment, secondary guide tube **702**'s active flexibility is used for relatively large movements of end effector **710**, and primary guide tube distal segment **712**'s active flexibility is used for relatively small, wrist-type movements of end effector **710**. The amount of such motion depends on the distance that distal segment **712** extends beyond secondary guide tube **706**, and so may provide motion similar to that described in FIG. **2**B.

[**0163**] In some instances surgical instrument **702** may extend beyond primary guide tube **704** as described in FIG. **6**. The descriptions above of additional channels, active and passive flexibility, locking/rigidizing, various DOFs, increased lateral force application and stiffness, instrument interchangeability, alternating coaxial advancing, and cannulas apply to instrument assembly **700**. In addition, since

secondary guide tube **706** has an even greater outer diameter than primary guide tube **704**, actuation and locking mechanisms for secondary guide tube **706** may provide an increased lateral force and stiffness against reaction forces than either instrument **702** or primary guide tube **704** may provide alone or together.

[**0164**] FIG. **8** is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of a fifth minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly **800**. Surgical instrument assembly **800** illustrates that two or more primary guide tubes **802***a*,**802***b* may be surrounded by a single secondary guide tube **804**. An illustrative surgical instrument **806***a*,**806***b* runs though each of primary guide tubes **802***a*,**802***b*. The primary guide tubes **802***a*,**802***b* have an architecture generally similar to surgical instrument assembly **400** (FIG. **4**). In some instances, however, one or more primary guide tubes **802** may have an architecture similar to surgical instrument assembly **500** (FIG. **5**) or surgical instrument assembly **600** (FIG. **6**). Active flexibility of the distal segments of primary guide tubes **802***a*,**802***b* that extend beyond the distal end of secondary guide tube **804** are illustrated by alternate position lines **808***a*,**808***b*. The distal segments of primary guide tubes **802***a*,**802***b* can move end effectors **809***a*,**809***b* adjacent one another at various positions at a surgical site within a patient so as to perform various surgical tasks. Various active flexibilities of secondary guide tube **804** are illustrated by alternate position lines **810***a*,**810***b*. The descriptions above of additional channels, active and passive flexibility, locking/rigidizing, various DOFs, increased lateral force application and stiffness, the optional use of wrist mechanisms, instrument interchangeability, alternating coaxial advancing, and cannulas apply to instrument assembly **800**.

[**0165**] In some instances an endoscopic imaging system **812**, represented schematically by a dashed box, is positioned at secondary guide tube **804**'s distal end. Imaging system **812** may be mono- or stereoscopic as described above and may have a viewing angle aligned with or angled (e.g., 30 degrees) from instrument assembly **800**'s longitudinal axis. In some instances imaging system **812** is positioned between primary guide tubes **802***a*,**802***b*. In other instances imaging system **812** is positioned above, below, or to the side of primary guide tubes **802***a*,**802***b* to make secondary guide tube **804**'s cross section more compact (e.g., one stereoscopic lens window above and one below the primary guide tubes **802***a*,**802***b*; camera referenced control for this configuration is made possible if the primary guide tubes bend out and then inwards towards the surgical site roughly coplanar with the interpupillary axis).

[**0166**] FIG. **9** is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of a sixth minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly **900**. Instrument assembly **900** is similar to instrument assembly **800** (FIG. **8**), except that an illustrative additional surgical instrument **902** extends through secondary guide tube **904**, but surgical instrument **902** is not surrounded by a primary guide tube. Accordingly, the relationship between surgical instrument **902** and secondary guide tube **904** is similar to that described between the surgical instruments and guide tubes as shown in FIGS. **4** and **6**. The relationship between the primary guide tube **906***a*,**906***b* and instrument **908***a*,**908***b* assemblies is similar to that described for aspects illustrated by FIGS. **7** and **8**. Instrument assembly **900** is illustrative of a secondary guide tube through which extend various combinations of one or more primary guide tube and instrument assemblies as well as one or more instruments without guide tubes.

[**0167**] In some instances surgical instrument **902** is rigid or passively flexible and its end effector **910** is used to grasp and pull tissue to assist the surgical tasks that end effectors **912***a*,**912***b* at the ends of instruments **908***a*,**908***b* perform. Although rigid or passively flexible, instrument **902** is capable of pulling with considerable force. In other instances surgical instrument may perform other functions, such as retraction, irrigation, suction, etc. Further, if an endoscopic imaging system is placed at the distal end of secondary guide tube **904**, as illustrated by instrument assembly **800** (FIG. **8**), then instrument **902** may be used to service (e.g., clean with a jet of fluid) the imaging system's window(s).

[**0168**] In still other instances, as mentioned above, surgical instrument **902**'s distal end is actively flexible, and end effector **910** is replaced by an endoscopic imaging system **914** as shown in FIG. **9**A. In these instances a distal imaging device may be coupled to the actively flexible end of surgical instrument **902** with a wrist-type mechanism **916** that provides at least a DOF in pitch. Such an architecture allows the image sensing device to be moved out from between the distal ends of primary guide tubes **906***a*,**906***b* and then the viewing angle is pitched (and/or yawed) to align the center of the visual field with the area at which the end effectors **912***a*,**912***b* are working. This architecture enables a surgeon to work, at a surgical site via a single entry port into the body, with two independently actuated surgical end effectors and an endoscopic imaging system that is independent of the surgical instruments. Another benefit of the independently controlled imaging system illustrated in FIG. **9**A is tissue retraction, as shown and described more fully with reference to FIG. **17**A below.

[**0169**] In accordance with aspects described above, one or more surgical instruments exit at the distal end of an guide tube, which may be a flat face or other shape, square or inclined to the assembly's longitudinal axis. In accordance with other aspects, one or more surgical instruments exit from the side of a guide tube. FIG. **10** is a schematic view that illustrates such aspects in a seventh minimally invasive surgical assembly **1000**.

[**0170**] As shown in FIG. **10**, two surgical instruments **1002***a*,**1002***b* (illustrative of two or more instruments) extend longitudinally through guide tube **1004**. Instruments **1002***a*,**1002***b* exit guide tube **1004**'s distal segment **1006** via side exit ports **1008***a*,**1008***b* instead of at guide tube **1004**'s extreme distal end. The side exit ports **1008***a*,**1008***b* may be oriented to be generally opposite each other (i.e., displaced approximately 180 degrees from each other) or they may be separated by a lesser angle (e.g., 120 degrees). And, the side exit ports may have various angular orientations around distal segment **1006** in aspects in which more than two exit ports are used for one, two, or more than two instruments **1002**. In one aspect, one side exit port is farther from guide tube **104**'s distal tip than another side exit port. Instrument **1002***a*'s distal segment **1010***a* and instrument **1002***b*'s distal segment **1010***b* are each independently actively flexible so as to move end effectors **1012***a*,**1012***b* for work at a surgical site. Various combinations of simple or compound bending with instrument roll and insertion, along with optional wrist mechanisms, provide the required end effector DOFs. An

endoscopic imaging system **1014** is positioned at the distal end of guide tube **1004**. Imaging system **1014**'s viewing angle may be aligned with instrument assembly **1000**'s longitudinal axis, or the viewing angle may be angled (e.g., 30 degrees) from the longitudinal axis. In some aspects the viewing angle may be actively changed during a surgical procedure using, e.g., one or move movable reflecting surfaces (mirrors, prisms). The descriptions above of additional channels, active and passive flexibility, locking/rigidizing, various DOFS, increased lateral force and stiffness, the optional use of wrist mechanisms, instrument interchangeability, and cannulas apply to instrument assembly **1000**.

[**0171**] Surgical assembly **1000** is inserted into a patient via incision or natural orifice, in some instances through cannula **1016** or a similar guiding structure as described above. As guide tube **1004** is inserted, in some instances surgical instruments **1002***a*,**1002***b* are either fully or partly retracted so that they do not extend beyond openings **1002***a*, **1008***b* as guide tube **1004** advances towards a surgical site. Images from imaging system **1014** may assist advancement. Once guide tube **1004** is in position at the surgical site, instruments **1002***a*,**1002***b* may then be inserted and/or advanced within guide tube **1004** to reach the surgical site. Guide tube **1004** may be actively flexed during a surgical procedure to provide gross movements at the surgical site while instrument distal segments **1010***a*,**1010***b* perform fine movements to complete the surgical task, as illustrated by alternate position lines **1018***a*,**1018***b*. The surgeon views images from imaging system **1014** while performing surgical tasks with end effectors **1012***a*,**1012***b*. Since the surgeon cannot see images from imaging system **1014** of distal segments **1010***a*,**1010***b* as they exit side ports **1008***a*,**1008***b*, in some aspects a control system, described below, controls distal segments **1010***a*,**1010***b* as they exit from guide tube **1004** so that they curve to meet in front of imaging system **1014**. In other aspects, a luminal space is mapped as described below, and the control system uses the mapping data to guide the end effectors into imaging system **1014**'s field of view. In still other aspects the distal end of the guide tube may be moved, e.g., to the left from a known space, thereby allowing the right instrument to be inserted into the "safe" space to the right of the guide tube. Then, likewise, the distal end of guide tube is moved to the right and the left instrument is moved into the "safe" space to the left of the guide tube. For aspects in which the distal end of the guide tube moves upward independently of the part of the guide tube at which the instruments exit, the instruments may be similarly inserted into the "safe" space underneath the upwardly displaced distal end of the guide tube. For withdrawal, or subsequent large repositioning, instruments **1002***a*,**1002***b* may be withdrawn through side exit ports **1008***a*,**1008***b*, either partially into or entirely from guide tube **1004**.

[**0172**] FIG. **11** is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of an eighth minimally invasive surgical assembly **1100**. As shown in FIG. **11**, surgical instrument **1102***a* extends through primary guide tube **1104***a* along its longitudinal axis. Likewise, surgical instrument **1102***b* extends through primary guide tube **1104***b* along its longitudinal axis. End effectors **1106***a*,**1106***b* are coupled to the distal ends of instruments **1102***a*,**1102***b*. Primary guide tubes **1104***a*,**1104***b* extend longitudinally through secondary guide tube **1108**. In a manner similar to the way surgical instruments **1002***a*, **1002***b* exit side ports **1008***a*,**1008***b* of guide tube **1004**'s distal segment **1106**, primary guide tubes **1104***a*,**1104***b* exit side ports **1110***a*,**1110***b* of secondary guide tube **1108**. The distal segments **1112***a*,**1112***b* of primary guide tubes **1104***a*, **1104***b* actively flex to move end effectors **1106***a*,**1106***b*, as illustrated by alternate position lines **1114***a*,**1114***b*. An endoscopic imaging system **1116** is positioned at secondary guide tube **1108**'s distal end. The descriptions above of additional channels, active and passive flexibility, locking/rigidizing, various DOFs, increased lateral force application and stiffness, the optional use of wrist mechanisms, instrument interchangeability, cannulas, and endoscopic imaging systems apply to instrument assembly **1100**.

[**0173**] Instrument assembly **1100** operates in a manner similar to instrument assembly **1000** (FIG. **10**). The principal difference between the two aspects is the use of both secondary and primary guide tubes in assembly **1100**. The relationship between instrument assemblies **1100** and **1000** is therefore akin to the relationship between instrument assemblies **800** (FIG. **8**) and **500** (FIG. **5**). The descriptions above of insertion, full or partial instrument retraction during insertion and repositioning, use of the imaging system, use of primary and secondary guide tubes, and controlled extension of instruments apply to aspects of instrument assembly **1100**.

[**0174**] FIGS. **11**A and **11**B are diagrammatic end views of surgical instrument assemblies, and they illustrate that a side-exit assembly such as assemblies **1000** (FIG. **10**) and **1100** (FIG. **11**) may be used to reduce the overall cross-sectional area of a guide tube or secondary guide tube. FIG. **11**A is an illustrative view of an assembly, such as assembly **800** (the circular cross-sectional shape is merely illustrative), in which instrument/guide tube combinations **802***a*, **806***a* and **802***b*,**806***b* exit from the distal end of a guide tube or secondary guide tube. In this illustrative example, imaging system **812** is a stereoscopic imaging system with an interpupillary distance **1120** between imaging ports and an illustrative illumination port **1122**. As shown in FIG. **11**B's illustrative example, the side-exit assembly's instrument/distal guide tube segment combinations **1102***a*,**1112***a* and **1102***b*,**1112***b* have the same cross-sectional dimensions as combinations **802***a*,**806***a* and **802***b*,**806***b* shown in FIG. **11**A. And, illustrative stereoscopic imaging system **1116** has the same interpupillary distance **1120** as imaging system **812** as shown in FIG. **11**A. If the endoscopic image is captured and digitized at the distal end of the guide tube, then the guide tube area proximal of the image capture and digitizing components can be used for instruments and actuation instead of for optics (e.g., fiber bundles, rod lenses, etc.). Consequently, the oblong-shaped cross-sectional area of FIG. **11**B's side-exit guide tube is smaller than the cross-sectional area of FIG. **11**A's end-exit guide tube, and the imaging system's interpupillary distance is the same. This reduced cross-sectional area may be an advantage for, e.g., the size and location of an incision to be used, for the size of a particular natural orifice, or for the position of intermediate tissue between the entry port and the surgical site. Such an oblong cross-sectional shape can be used in other instrument assembly guide tubes described herein.

[**0175**] FIG. **12** is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of a ninth minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly **1200**. Instrument assembly **1200** is similar to instrument assembly **1100**, with an additional surgical instrument **1202**

that extends from the distal end of secondary guide tube **1204**. Surgical instrument **1202** operates in a manner similar to surgical instrument **902** (FIG. **9**), being in some aspects rigid and in others passively or actively flexible as described above. And, end effector **1206** may be replaced with an endoscopic imaging system as described with reference to FIGS. **9** and **9**A or FIGS. **17** and **17**A so that in some aspects instrument assembly **1200** has an independently operated, optionally wrist-mounted, endoscopic imaging system **1208** as illustrated in FIG. **12**.

[**0176**] FIGS. **12**A and **12**B are diagrammatic views of embodiments that illustrate retroflexive positions in examples of side-exit guide tubes, similar to retroflexive movement for end-exit guide tubes discussed above. FIG. **12**A illustrates that in one aspect the side-exit instrument assembly **1220** actively bends in a plane that is approximately coplanar with the side exit ports **1222***a* and **1222***b* (yaw with reference to the visual field reference). FIG. **12**B illustrates that in another aspect the side exit instrument assembly **1230** actively bends in a plane that is approximately perpendicular to the side exit ports **1232***a* and **1232***b* (hidden) (pitch with reference to the visual field reference). Assembly **1230**'s bend radius may be smaller than assembly **1220**'s bend radius, other dimensions being substantially the same, due to the mechanical structure. In some aspects the side-exit instrument assembly may simultaneously yaw and pitch, and the assembly may yaw/pitch distally of the side exit ports.

[**0177**] FIGS. **13** and **14** are schematic views that illustrate tenth and eleventh aspects of minimally invasive surgical instrument assemblies **1300** (FIG. **13**) and **1400** (FIG. **1400**). Surgical instrument assemblies **1300** and **1400** combine aspects of surgical instrument assemblies illustrated in FIGS. **3**-**12**B and the associated descriptions. Specifically, instrument assembly **1300** illustrates aspects in which one or more surgical instruments **1302** exit the end of a distal segment **1304** of a guide tube **1306**, and one or more other surgical instruments **1308** exit from a side exit port **1310** at guide tube **1306**'s distal segment **1304**. Likewise, instrument assembly **1400** illustrates aspects in which one or more surgical instruments **1402** run coaxially within one or more primary guide tubes **1404** that exit the end of a distal segment **1406** of a secondary guide tube **1408**, and one or more other surgical instruments **1410** run coaxially through one or more other primary guide tubes **1412** that run coaxially within secondary guide tube **1408** and exit from one or more side exit ports **1414** at secondary guide tube **1408**'s distal segment **1406**. The descriptions above of additional channels, active and passive flexibility, locking/rigidizing, various DOFs, increased lateral force application and stiffness, the optional use of wrist mechanisms, instrument interchangeability, cannulas, and endoscopic imaging systems apply to instrument assemblies **1300** and **1400**.

[**0178**] In many instances an instrument or instrument assembly as described herein can be actively or passively positioned at a surgical site. A sufficiently flexible and maneuverable surgical instrument or surgical instrument assembly, such as those described herein, may be inserted with one or more segments of the instrument or assembly functioning in accordance with the insertion description below. In some instances, however, a guide probe can be used to initially define some or all of the trajectory between the entry port and the surgical site. The guide probe may be maneuvered using, e.g., image data from an imaging system at the guide probe's distal tip, real time image data from an external imaging system (e.g., ultrasound, fluoroscopy, MRI), preoperative image data and computer analysis of likely trajectory, and various combinations of these data.

[**0179**] FIGS. **15**A-**15**D are schematic views that illustrate aspects of inserting a flexible, steerable surgical instrument and surgical instrument assembly, such as those described herein, by using a guide probe to maneuver past intermediate tissue structures so as to reach a surgical site within a patient. Insertion may be via natural orifice or incision, either with or without using a cannula (not shown) as described above. As shown in FIG. **15**A, a first intermediate tissue structure **1502** prevents a surgical instrument or surgical instrument assembly from operating with a pivoting center point generally where it enters the body, as shown in FIG. **1**. In addition, a second intermediate tissue structure **1504** exists between the position where the instrument or instrument assembly passes the first intermediate tissue structure **1502** and the target surgical site **1506**, as shown in FIG. **2**B. An instrument or instrument assembly must be guided between and around the intermediate tissue structures to reach the surgical site.

[**0180**] As shown in FIG. **15**A, in one aspect a guide probe **1508** is inserted past first intermediate structure **1502** and is then actively maneuvered around second intermediate tissue structure **1504** to reach surgical site **1506** or another desired position. The guide probe's primary function is to establish a trajectory to the surgical site. An optional endoscopic imaging system **1509** may be mounted at guide probe **1508**'s distal tip. In some aspects curve propagation as described above is used during insertion—curves initially formed by steering the distal end are automatically propagated in a proximal direction on the guide probe as it is advanced towards the surgical site. Such curve propagation is done using, e.g., control systems as described below. Once at its desired position, guide probe **1508** is then rigidized so as to maintain its two- or three-dimensional curved shape. Next, a guide tube **1510** is inserted coaxially over guide probe **1508**, as shown in FIG. **15**B. The guide tube **1510** may be inserted to an intermediate position as shown, or it may be inserted and maneuvered to a position at surgical site **1506** as shown by the alternate position lines. In some aspects, the guide probe and guide tube may be coaxially inserted, first one, then the other in a repeated, alternating way. Guide tube **1510** is illustrative of various primary and secondary guide tubes, such as those shown in FIGS. **4**-**14**. Once in a desired position, guide tube **1510** is then rigidized to maintain the shape defined by guide probe **1508**, which is then withdrawn as shown in FIG. **15**C. After the guide probe is withdrawn, a surgical instrument or surgical instrument assembly **1512** may then be inserted through guide tube **1510** to reach surgical site **1506**, as shown in FIG. **15**D.

[**0181**] To facilitate guide tube insertion, in one aspect the guide probe extends beyond the coaxial guide tube by a distance sufficient to allow the guide probe to enter a patient and reach the surgical site. Then, the guide probe is coaxially inserted. In an alternate aspect, a proximal portion (e.g., the transmission mechanism; see FIG. **27** for an illustrative view) of the guide probe is removable to allow the guide tube to be coaxially inserted over the guide probe.

[**0182**] As an illustrative example in accordance with surgical instrument assembly **400** (FIG. **4**), a guide probe is

inserted, guide tube **404** is inserted over the guide probe, the guide probe is withdrawn, and then surgical instrument **402** is inserted through guide tube **404**. A similar procedure can be used for guide tubes with multiple instrument channels, such as surgical instrument assembly **500** (FIG. **5**). As another illustrative example in accordance with surgical instrument assembly **700** (FIG. **7**), a guide probe is inserted, primary guide tube **704** is inserted over the guide probe, secondary guide tube **706** is inserted over primary guide tube **704**, the guide probe is withdrawn, and instrument **702** is inserted through primary guide tube **704**. Alternately, a guide probe having a relatively larger outer diameter is inserted, secondary guide tube **706** is inserted over the guide probe, the guide probe is withdrawn, and primary guide tube **704** and instrument **706** are then inserted through secondary guide tube **706**. A similar procedure can be used for secondary guide tubes that have two or more primary guide tube and/or instrument channels. As yet another illustrative example, guide tube **1510** is analogous to cannula **708**, and instrument assembly **700** is inserted through guide tube **1510**. Many variations in insertion order are possible and are within the scope of the invention.

[0183] Referring again to FIG. **2**A, it can be seen that a rigid distal segment of a minimally invasive surgical instrument can also provide access to a large volume deep within the body that is accessed through an intermediate tissue structure. Such mechanisms may be mechanically simpler to build and operate, and therefore may be less expensive and easier to control than systems that use flexible technology. And, in some aspects such mechanisms may work back on themselves to provide a capability similar to the retroflexive bending described above.

[0184] FIG. **16** is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of a twelfth minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly **1600**. As shown in FIG. **16**, two surgical instruments **1602***a*,**1602***b* extend through channels **1604***a*,**1604***b* that extend longitudinally through rigid guide tube **1606**. In some aspects guide tube **1606** is straight and in others it is curved to accommodate a particular insertion port (the instruments are similarly curved to facilitate insertion). Guide tube **1606** may have various cross-sectional shapes (e.g., circular, oval, rounded polygon), and various numbers of surgical instruments and channels may be used. Some optional working channels may be used to provide supporting surgical functions such as irrigation and suction. In some aspects an endoscopic imaging system (e.g., mono- or stereoscopic image capture or direct view) is at guide tube **1606**'s distal end **1610**. In one aspect guide tube **1606** is inserted into a patient via an incision (e.g., approximately 2.0 cm at the umbilicus) or natural orifice, either with or without the use of a cannula **1612** or similar guiding structure. In some aspects guide tube **1606** may rotate within cannula **1612**.

[0185] As shown in FIG. **16**, surgical instruments **1602***a* and **1602***b* function in a like manner, and many instrument functions (body roll, wrist operation, end effector operation, etc.) are similar to the surgical instruments used in the da Vinci® Surgical System (both 8 mm and 5 mm instrument body diameters). In other aspects the instruments may function differently and/or have capabilities not embodied in da Vinci® Surgical System instruments (e.g., one instrument may be straight one instrument may be jointed, one instrument may be flexible, etc.). In the illustrative aspect shown in FIG. **16**, instrument **1602***a* includes a transmission portion (not shown) at its proximal end, an elongated instrument body **1614**, one of various surgical end effectors **1616**, and a snake-like two degree of freedom wrist mechanism **1618** that couples end effector **1616** to instrument body **1614**. As in the da Vinci® Surgical Systems, in some aspects the transmission portion includes disks that interface with electrical actuators (e.g., servomotors) permanently mounted on a support arm so that instruments may easily be changed. Other linkages such as matching gimbal plates and levers may be used to transfer actuating forces at the mechanical interface. Mechanical mechanisms (e.g., gears, levers, gimbals) in the transmission portion transfer the actuating forces from the disks to cables, wires, and/or cable, wire, and hypotube combinations that run through one or more channels in instrument body **1614** (which may include one or more articulated segments) to control wrist **1618** and end effector **1616** movement. In some aspects, one or more disks and associated mechanisms transfer actuating forces that roll instrument body **1614** around its longitudinal axis **1619** as shown. In some aspects the actuators for a particular instrument are themselves mounted on a single linear actuator that moves instrument body **1614** longitudinally as shown within channel **1604***a*. The main segment of instrument body **1614** is a substantially rigid single tube, although in some aspects it may be slightly resiliently flexible. This small flexibility allows a proximal body segment **1620** proximal of guide tube **1606** (i.e., outside the patient) be slightly flexed so that several instrument bodies can be spaced more closely within guide tube **1606** than their individual transmission segment housings would otherwise allow, like several cut flowers of equal length being placed in a small-necked vase. This flexing is minimal (e.g., less than or equal to about a 5-degree bend angle in one embodiment) and does not induce significant friction because the bend angle for the control cables and hypotubes inside the instrument body is small.

[0186] As shown in FIG. **16**, instruments **1602***a* and **1602***b* each include a proximal body segment that extends through the guide tube and at least one distal body segment that is positioned beyond the guide tube's distal end. For example, instrument **1602***a* includes proximal body segment **1620** that extends through guide tube **1606**, a distal body segment **1622** that is coupled to proximal body segment **1620** at a joint **1624**, a wrist mechanism **1626** that is coupled to distal body segment **1622** at another joint **1628** (the coupling may include another, short distal body segment), and an end effector **1630**. In some aspects the distal body segment **1622** and joints **1624** and **1628** function as a parallel motion mechanism **1632** in which the position of a reference frame at the distal end of the mechanism may be changed with respect to a reference frame at the proximal end of the mechanism without changing the orientation of the distal reference frame.

[0187] FIG. **16**A is a side elevation view of an embodiment of the distal end of instrument **1602***a*, which includes parallel motion mechanism **1632**, wrist mechanism **1626**, and end effector **1630**. In this illustrative embodiment, parallel motion mechanism **1632**'s diameter is approximately 7 mm, and wrist **1626**'s diameter is approximately 5 mm. FIG. **16**A shows that joints **1624** and **1628** each have two hinges that pivot around orthogonal axes. As one hinge pivots in joint **1624**, the corresponding hinge pivots an equal amount in the opposite direction in joint **1628**. Accordingly,

as distal body segment **1622** moves, the orientation of wrist **1626** and end effector **1630** remain essentially unaffected. The hinges are constructed with rolling contact so that cable lengths on each side of the pivot remain balanced ("virtual pivot points"); details are disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 6,817,974 (Cooper et al.), which is incorporated by reference. U.S. Pat. No. 6,817,974 further discloses details about the Yaw-Pitch-Pitch-Yaw (YPPY; alternately PYYP) arrangement of the hinges in parallel motion mechanism **1632** (wrist **1626** is similarly configured), which provides a constant velocity roll configuration. Consequently, roll of proximal body segment **1620** is smoothly transferred to end effector **1630**. Cables, wires, or bendable hypotubes are routed through a center channel in body segments **1620**,**1622**, in joints **1624**, **1628**, and in wrist **1626** to operate end effector **1630** (e.g., opening and closing jaws in a gripper as shown). Cables that operate parallel motion mechanism **1632** and wrist **1626** are routed through openings near the periphery of the joints. FIG. **16**B is a perspective view, and FIG. **16**C is a cross-sectional view, of an illustrative embodiment of joints **1624**, **1628**.

[**0188**] As described herein, parallel motion mechanism **1632** includes two joints **1624** and **1628**. Since the joints **1624**,**1628** are coupled together, however, they do not operate independently of one another. Therefore, in joint space the entire parallel motion mechanism **1632** may be considered a single joint with two degrees of freedom (i.e., pitch and yaw) if "joints"**1624** and **1628** each have two orthogonal hinges (the position of the distal end of the mechanism may change in 3D Cartesian space), or as a single joint with one degree of freedom (i.e., pitch or yaw) if "joints"**1624** and **1628** each have a single hinge (the position of the distal end of the mechanism may change only in 2D Cartesian space). If parallel motion mechanism **1632** has two DOFs in joint space, then it functions as a constant velocity joint and transmits roll. Mechanism **1632**'s motion is "parallel" because the relative orientations of the proximal and distal ends (frames) of the mechanism remain constant as the mechanism changes the distal end's (frame's) position.

[**0189**] FIGS. **16**D and **16**E are schematic views that illustrate aspects of parallel motion mechanism **1632**'s design and operation principles. For clarity, only one set (i.e., PP or YY) of corresponding pivoting hinges is shown. The other set of hinges works the same way. Each hinge has a proximal link disk and a distal link disk. As shown in FIG. **16**D, a first set of cables **1640***a*,**1640***b* are positioned on opposite sides of parallel motion mechanism **1632** and couple the proximal link disk in hinge **1624***a* to the distal link disk in hinge **1628***b*. The two cables **1640***a*,**1640***b* are illustrative of various combinations of cables that may be used (e.g., two cables on each side for increased strength; three cables spaced approximately 120 degrees apart will maintain parallelism in both planes; etc.). A second set of cables **1642***a*,**1642***b* are coupled to the distal link disk of hinge **1624***a* and run back through proximal body segment **1620** to the transmission mechanism (not shown). Other cables that control wrist mechanism **1626** and end effector **1630** are illustrated by a third set of cables **1644***a*,**1644***b*.

[**0190**] As shown in FIG. **16**E, when the transmission mechanism applies a tensile force on cable **1642***a* (cable **1642***b* is allowed to pay out), hinge **1624***a* pivots. The cable **1640***a*,**1640***b* coupling between the proximal link disk of hinge **1624***a* and the distal link disk of hinge **1628***a* causes hinge **1628***a* to pivot an equal amount in the opposite direction. Consequently, wrist **1626** and end effector **1630** are laterally displaced away from longitudinal axis **1619** of proximal body segment **1620**. The lengths of cables **1644***a*, **1644***b* are unaffected by the movement because of the hinge design, and so wrist **1626** and end effector **1630** orientation are also unaffected by the movement. If proximal instrument body segment **1620** were to remain stationary, then end effector **1630** translates slightly in a direction aligned with longitudinal axis **1619** (surged) in the patient's reference frame. Therefore, the control system, described below, compensates for this small movement by moving proximate body segment **1620** by an amount necessary to keep end effector **1630** at a constant insertion depth in the patient's reference frame.

[**0191**] In some instances when transmitting roll to the end effector is not required (e.g., for suction or irrigation tools, for an imaging system), each joint in the parallel movement mechanism may have only a single pivoting hinge. Further, skilled artisans will understand that if keeping end effector orientation is not required, then the parallel motion mechanism may be omitted. For instance, a proximal instrument body segment may be coupled to a distal instrument body segment at a joint with a single pivoting axis so that the proximal body segment must be rolled to move an end effector at the distal end of the distal body segment from side to side. Or, two or more elongated distal body segments may be used. If roll is not required, then the cross section of the body segments does not have to be round. In some aspects, the wrist mechanism may be eliminated.

[**0192**] FIG. **16**F is a diagrammatic end view of a link disk, and it illustrates aspects of cable routing in a parallel motion mechanism. As shown in FIG. **16**F, twelve cable routing holes are placed near the outside perimeter of link disk **1650**. The cable routing holes are spaced 22.5 degrees apart from one another between the 3, 6, 9, and 12 O'clock positions on link disk **1650**. Holes are not placed at the 3, 6, 9, and 12 O'clock positions because of the hinge components (not shown) on the obverse and reverse sides of link disk **1650**. Starting at the 12 O'clock position, the holes are labeled **1652***a*-**16521**. Four sets of three cables each are dedicated to four functions. A first set of cables maintains the parallel function in the parallel motion mechanism and are routed through holes **1652***a*, **1652***e*, and **1652***i*. A second set of cables are used to move a distal part of a wrist mechanism (e.g., wrist mechanism **1626**) and are routed through holes **1652***b*, **1652***f*, and **1652***j*. A third set of cables are used to move the parallel motion mechanism and are routed through holes **1652***c*, **1652***g*, and **1652***k*. A fourth set of cables are used to move a proximal part of the wrist mechanism and are routed through holes **1652***d*, **1652***h*, and **16521**. Cables and other components associated with an end effector are routed through central hole **1654** in link disk **1650**.

[**0193**] FIG. **16**G is another diagrammatic end view of a link disk, and it illustrates further aspects of cable routing in a parallel motion mechanism. As shown in FIG. **16**G, a first set of 12 cable routing holes are placed around the outside perimeter of link disk **1660** in a manner similar to those shown in FIG. **16**F. In addition, a second set of 12 cable routing holes are placed around a concentric circle inside the first set of holes. Starting at the 12 O'clock position, the outer ring of cable routing holes are labeled **1662***a*-**16621**, and the inner ring of holes are labeled **1664***a*-**16641**. Cables

associated with the parallel motion mechanism are routed through the outer ring of holes **1662**, and cables associated with the wrist mechanism are routed through the inner ring of holes **1664**. A first set of three cable pairs maintains the parallel function in the parallel motion mechanism and are routed through adjacent holes **1662***a* and **16621**, **1662***d* and **1662***e*, and **1662***h* and **1662***i*. A second set of three cable pairs are used to move the parallel motion mechanism and are routed through adjacent holes **1662***b* and **1662***c*, **1662***f* and **1662***g*, and **1662***j* and **1662***k*. A third set of three cable pairs is used to move a proximal part of the wrist mechanism and are routed through adjacent holes **1664***a* and **1664***l*, **1664***d* and **1664***e*, and **1664***h* and **1664***i*. A fourth set of three cable pairs are used to move a distal part of the wrist mechanism and are routed through adjacent holes **1664***b* and **1664***c*, **1664***f* and **1664***g*, and **1664***j* and **1664***k*. Cables and other components associated with an end effector are routed through central hole **1666** in link disk **1660**.

[**0194**] The use of cable pairs as illustrated in FIG. **16**G increases actuation stiffness above the stiffness of using a single cable. The increased stiffness allows the instrument components to be more accurately positioned during movement (e.g., the increased stiffness helps to reduce motion hysteresis). In one example, such cable pairs are used for an instrument with a parallel motion mechanism that is approximately 7 mm in diameter. Instruments with smaller diameters (e.g., approximately 5 mm in diameter), however, may not have sufficient internal space to accommodate cable pairs. In these situations, single cables routed in accordance with FIG. **16**F may be coupled to a cable on the opposite side of the parallel motion mechanism. Aspects of such coupling are illustrated in FIGS. **16**H-**16**J.

[**0195**] FIG. **16**H is a diagrammatic perspective view of a stiffening bracket **1670** that couples cables routed on opposite sides of a parallel motion mechanism's body segment. Bracket **1670** has a cross piece **1672** and two parallel support members **1674** attached (e.g., welded) on opposite sides of cross piece **1672**. A hypotube **1676** is attached (e.g., welded) to each support member so that the hypotubes are parallel to each other. The hypotubes **1676** are spaced apart a distance slightly less than the free space distance between the two cables to be coupled. The cable **1678** that maintains the parallel motion mechanism's parallel function is threaded through its associated hypotube **1676** as the cable extends between its two anchor points in the parallel motion mechanism. The hypotube **1676** is crimped to keep cable **1678** in place. The end of cable **1680** that is used to move the parallel motion mechanism is threaded into its associated hypotube **1676**, which is crimped to keep cable **1680** in place. Consequently, the distal end of cable **1680** is anchored to a middle position (not necessarily halfway) of cable **1678**. Referring to FIG. **16**F, cables running through holes **1652***a* and **1652***g* are coupled together, cables running through holes **1652***c* and **1652***i* are coupled together, and cables running through holes **1652***e* and **1652***k* are coupled together. FIG. **16**I illustrates an aspect of how multiple brackets **1670** may be positioned within the body of a parallel motion mechanism. That is, each cable that is associated with moving the parallel motion mechanism is coupled to an opposite side cable associated with maintaining the parallel function of the parallel motion mechanism.

[**0196**] Due to the way the hinges are constructed, described above, the cables that maintain the parallel function move within the body of the parallel motion mechanism, even though they are anchored at either end of the parallel motion mechanism. Therefore, for a given motion of the parallel motion mechanism, the cable coupling requires that the cables **1680**, which move the parallel motion mechanism, move twice as far as they would if they were anchored to the parallel motion mechanism's body segment as illustrated in, e.g., FIGS. **16**D-**16**E. The effect of this coupling increases joint stiffness approximately four times more than non-coupled cables because the cable moves twice as far, and because the load on the cable is half as great for a given joint torque.

[**0197**] FIG. **16**J is a diagrammatic end view of a stiffening bracket **1670**. As shown in FIG. **16**J, cross piece **1672** is hollow so that cables and other components associated with an end effector may be routed through the cross piece. In one aspect, cross piece **1672** is made using electrical discharge machining. Referring again to FIG. **16**, the proximal body portion, parallel motion mechanism, wrist, and end effector are aligned along longitudinal axis **1619** to allow the instrument to be inserted and withdrawn through guide tube **1606**. Accordingly, two or more independently operating, exchangeable instruments, each with parallel motion mechanisms, can be simultaneously inserted via guide tube **1606** to allow a surgeon to enter a patient via a single entry port and work within a large volume deep within a patient. Each independent instrument's end effector has a full 6 DOF in Cartesian space (instrument insertion and the parallel motion mechanism provide the translation DOFs, and instrument body roll and the wrist mechanism provide the orientation DOFs). Further, the instruments **1602***a*,**1602***b* may be partially withdrawn so that, e.g., only the wrist and end effectors extend from the guide tube **1606**'s distal end **1610**. In this configuration, the one or more wrists and end effectors can perform limited surgical work.

[**0198**] FIG. **17** is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of a thirteenth minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly **1700**. Surgical instrument assembly **1700** is similar to instrument assembly **1600** (FIGS. **16**-**16**J) in that surgical instruments **1702***a*,**1702***b* function similarly to instruments **1602***a*,**1602***b* as described above, but instead of a fixed endoscopic imaging system at the end of the guide tube, assembly **1700** has an independently operating endoscopic imaging system **1704**.

[**0199**] In one aspect, imaging system **1704** is mechanically similar to surgical instruments **1602** as described above. Summarizing these aspects as shown in FIG. **17**, optical system **1704** includes a substantially rigid elongate tubular proximal body segment **1706** that extends through guide tube **1708**, and at proximal body segment **1706**'s distal end there is coupled a 1 or 2 DOF parallel motion mechanism **1712** that is similar to parallel motion mechanism **1622** (FIGS. **16**-**16**J). Parallel motion mechanism **1712** includes a first joint **1714**, an intermediate distal body segment **1716**, and a second joint **1718**. As shown in FIG. **17**, in some aspects a wrist mechanism or other active joint (e.g., one DOF to allow changing pitch angle; two DOFs to allow changing pitch and yaw angles) **1720** couples an image capture component **1722** to second joint **1718**. Alternatively, in another aspect joint **1714** is an independently controllable one or two DOF joint (pitch/yaw), joint **1718** is another independently controllable one or two DOF joint (e.g., pitch/yaw), and image capture component **1722** is coupled

directly at the distal end of the joint **1718** mechanism. An example of a suitable stereoscopic image capture component is shown in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/614,661, incorporated by reference above. In some aspects imaging system **1704** moves longitudinally (surges) inside guide tube **1708**. Control of imaging system **1704** is further described in concurrently filed U.S. patent application Ser. No. _____ [Atty Docket No. ISRG **00560**] (Diolaiti et al.) entitled "Control System Configured to Compensate for Non-Ideal Actuator-to-Joint Linkage Characteristics in a Medical Robotic System", which is incorporated by reference. In some aspects, roll may be undesirable because of a need to preserve a particular field of view orientation. Having heave, sway, surge, yaw, and pitch DOFs allows the image capture component to be moved to various positions while preserving a particular camera reference for assembly **1700** and viewing alignment for the surgeon.

[**0200**] FIG. **17**A is, for illustrative purposes only, a side view schematic to FIG. **17**'s plan view schematic. FIG. **17**A shows that parallel motion mechanism **1712** moves image capture component **1722** away from surgical instrument assembly **1700**'s longitudinal centerline. This displacement provides an improved view of surgical site **1724** because some or all of the instrument body distal segment ends are not present in the image output to the surgeon as would occur in, e.g., instrument assembly **1600** (FIG. **16**). The pitch of parallel motion mechanism **1712** and of image capture component **1722** is controllable, as illustrated by the arrows.

[**0201**] FIG. **17**B is a diagrammatic perspective view that illustrates an embodiment of surgical instrument assembly **1700**. As shown, two independently teleoperated surgical instruments **1740***a*,**1740***b* (each instrument is associated with a separate master—e.g. one left hand master for the left instrument and one right hand master for the right instrument) run through and emerge at the distal end of a rigid guide tube **1742**. Each instrument **1740***a*,**1740***b* is a 6 DOF instrument, as described above, and includes a parallel motion mechanism **1744***a*,**1744***b*, as described above, with wrists **1746***a*,**1746***b* and end effectors **1748***a*,**1748***b* attached. In addition, an independently teleoperated endoscopic imaging system **1750** runs through and emerges at the distal end of guide tube **1742**. In some aspects imaging system **1750** also includes a parallel motion mechanism **1752**, a pitch-only wrist mechanism **1754** at the distal end of the parallel motion mechanism **1752** (the mechanism may have either one or two DOFs in joint space), and a stereoscopic endoscopic image capture component **1756** coupled to wrist mechanism **1754**. In other aspects, wrist mechanism **1754** may include a yaw DOF. In yet another aspect, the proximal and distal joints in imaging system **1750** are independently controlled. In an illustrative use, parallel motion mechanism **1752** heaves and sways image capture component **1756** up and to the side, and wrist mechanism **1754** orients image capture component **1756** to place the center of the field of view between the instrument tips if the instruments are working to the side of the guide tube's extended centerline. In another illustrative use, the distal body segment of imaging system is independently pitched up (in some aspects also independently yawed), and image capture component **1756** is independently pitched down (in some aspects also independently yawed). As discussed above and below, imaging system **1750** may be moved to various places to retract tissue.

[**0202**] Also shown is an auxiliary channel **1760**, through which, e.g., irrigation, suction, or other surgical items may be introduced or withdrawn. In some aspects, one or more small steerable devices (e.g., illustrated by instrument **902** in FIG. **9**) may be inserted via auxiliary channel **1760** to spray a cleaning fluid (e.g., pressurized water, gas) and/or a drying agent (e.g., pressurized air or insufflation gas) on the imaging system's windows to clean them. In another aspect, such a cleaning wand may be a passive device that attaches to the camera before insertion. In yet another aspect, the end of the wand is automatically hooked to the image capture component as the image capture component emerges from the guide tube's distal end. A spring gently pulls on the cleaning wand so that it tends to retract into the guide tube as the imaging system is withdrawn from the guide tube.

[**0203**] FIG. **17**A further illustrates that as image capture component **1722** is moved away from assembly **1700**'s centerline it may press against and move an overlying tissue structure surface **1726**, thereby retracting the tissue structure from the surgical site as shown. The use of imaging system **1704** to retract tissue is illustrative of using other surgical instruments, or a device specifically designed for the task, to retract tissue. Such "tent-pole" type retraction may be performed by any of the various movable components described herein, such as the distal end exit or side exit flexible devices and the parallel motion mechanisms on the rigid body component devices, as well as other devices discussed below (e.g., with reference to FIG. **31**).

[**0204**] In some aspects, one or more surgical instruments may exit from a guide tube generally aligned with the guide tube's longitudinal axis but not at the guide tubes distal end. FIG. **18** is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of a fourteenth minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly **1800**. As shown in FIG. **18**, a first surgical instrument **1802** runs coaxially through primary guide tube **1804**, and a second surgical instrument **1806** runs coaxially through primary guide tube **1808**. Instrument and primary guide tube combinations **1802**,**1804** and **1806**,**1808** are illustrative of the various flexible and rigid instruments and instrument/guide tube combinations described above. Instrument/guide tube combination **1802**,**1804** extends through and exits at secondary guide tube **1810**'s extreme distal end **1812**. Instrument/guide tube combination **1806**,**1808** extends through secondary guide tube **1810** and exits at an intermediate position **1814** that is proximally spaced from extreme distal end **1812**. In contrast to the side exits that direct instruments away from the guide tube's longitudinal axis as shown in, e.g., assemblies **1300** (FIG. **13**) and **1400** (FIG. **14**), instrument/guide tube combination **1806**,**1808** exits generally aligned with secondary guide tube **1810**'s longitudinal axis **1816**. The distal and intermediate position guide tube face angles may be other than perpendicular to axis **1816**.

[**0205**] FIG. **18** also shows that endoscopic imaging system **1818** is positioned on secondary guide tube **1810** between extreme distal end **1812** and intermediate position **1814**. Imaging system **1818**'s field of view is directed generally perpendicular to longitudinal axis **1816**. During surgery (e.g., within a long, narrow space), the surgical site is located within imaging system **1818**'s field of view and instrument/guide tube combinations **1802**,**1804** and **1806**, **1808** (working somewhat retrograde from its distal end **1812** exit) are moved to work at the surgical site. Imaging system

1818 is, in some aspects, an electronic stereoscopic image capture system. In some aspects, a second imaging system **1820** (e.g., a monoscopic system with lower resolution than imaging system **1818**) is located to have a field of view generally aligned with axis **1816** to assist instrument assembly **1800** insertion. It can be seen that the architecture illustrated in FIG. **18** allows the guide tube's cross section to be relatively small-enough to accommodate the instruments and/or guide tubes that run through it (see e.g., FIG. **11**B and associated description)—but the imaging system dimensions (e.g., the interpupillary distance in a stereoscopic system) can be larger than if positioned at the guide tube's distal end face.

[**0206**] FIG. **18**A is a schematic view that illustrates further aspects of an imaging system at the distal end of an illustrative instrument assembly **1801**. As shown in FIG. **18**A, one or more instruments and/or instrument/guide tube combinations exit from guide tube **1811**'s intermediate position **1814** as described above. Guide tube **1811**'s distal end segment **1822** is pivotally mounted so that it can be pitched in relation to guide tube **1811**'s main segment as shown by alternate position lines **1823**, although not necessarily pivoting near the intermediate position as depicted. Alternate position **1823** is illustrative of various movements and mechanisms. For example, in one aspect a parallel motion mechanism as described above is used to displace imaging system **1818**. In another example, alternate position **1823** represents positioning and orienting imaging system **1818** with two independently controllable **1** or **2** DOF joints. Other combinations of joints and links may be used. Accordingly, imaging system **1818**'s field of view direction can be altered, space permitting in the surgical site's vicinity. Distal end **1822** may be positioned above the exit ports as shown in FIG. **18**A, or it may be positioned between the exit ports to provide a smaller instrument assembly cross section as illustrated by FIG. **18**F.

[**0207**] FIG. **18**B is another schematic view which shows that an imaging system **1824** may pivot in distal end segment **1822**, as shown by the alternate position lines and arrow. Pivoting imaging system **1824** may be at the extreme distal end of the guide tube, or it may be positioned somewhat proximally from the extreme distal end (in which case in some aspects the second imaging system **1820** can be positioned at the distal end to provide viewing along the instrument assembly's longitudinal axis while imaging system **1824** is viewing to the side).

[**0208**] FIG. **18**C is a diagrammatic perspective view of an embodiment of a minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly that incorporates aspects of instrument assemblies **1800** and **1801**. As shown in FIG. **18**C, two surgical instruments **1830***a*,**1830***b*, each with rigid, movable distal links, extend from intermediate position **1832** on guide tube **1834**. Each instrument **1830***a*,**1830***b* includes an upper arm link **1836**, a lower arm link **1838**, and an end effector **1840** (illustrative grippers are shown). A shoulder joint **1842** couples upper arm link **1836** to the instrument body (not shown) that extends back through guide tube **1834**. An elbow joint **1844** couples upper arm link **1836** to lower arm link **1838**, and a wrist joint **1846** couples lower arm link **1838** to the end effector **1840**. In some aspects, parallel motion mechanisms as described above with reference to FIGS. **16**A-**16**J may be used, and in other aspects the shoulder and elbow joints may be independently controlled, as are the wrist joints **1846**. In some aspects only a single arm link is used; in others more than two arm links are used. In some aspects, one or both shoulder joints **1842** are fixed to guide tube **1834** so that there is no associated instrument body.

[**0209**] FIG. **18**C further shows that a stereoscopic imaging system **1850** is mounted near the extreme distal end **1852** of guide tube **1834**. As shown, imaging system **1850** includes right and left image capture elements **1854***a*,**1854***b*, which may be positioned behind protective imaging ports, and illumination output ports (LEDs, optical fiber ends, and/or associated prisms that direct illumination light as desired) **1856**. As described above, imaging system **1850**'s field of view is generally perpendicular to guide tube **1834**'s longitudinal axis so that a surgeon clearly sees end effectors **1840** working at a surgical site to the side of guide tube **1834**'s distal end. And, the axis between the imaging apertures is preferably generally parallel to a line between the surgical instrument tips, an alignment that presents to the surgeon an orientation in which the instrument tips map into natural and comfortable hand positions at the master console. In some aspects, as illustrated in FIG. **18**A, guide tube **1834**'s distal end pivots at a joint **1858** so that imaging system **1850**'s field of view direction can be changed, as described above. Joint **1858** may be positioned at various locations on guide tube **1834**. In one aspect, guide tube **1834** is approximately 12 mm outer diameter, the instruments are approximately 5 mm outer diameter, and imaging system **1850**'s lenses are about 3, mm across with an interpupillary distance of about 5 mm. FIG. **18**D is a diagrammatic perspective view that illustrates how the distal end pitches up and down so that imaging system **1850** can look forwards (toward the distal direction; anterograde viewing) or backwards (toward the proximal direction; retrograde viewing).

[**0210**] As mentioned elsewhere in this description, although many aspects and embodiments are shown and described as having instruments and/or guide tubes that extend through other guide tubes, in other aspects instruments and/or guide tubes may be fixed at the end of, or at intermediate positions on, an instrument assembly structure so as to be integral with that structure. In some aspects, the fixed instruments and/or guide tubes may, however, be replaceable in vitro if the structure is removed from a patient. For example, a surgeon may remove the instrument assembly from the patient, replace one or more instruments that are attached (e.g., using known mechanisms) at the end or at an intermediate position with one or more other instruments, and then reinsert the instrument assembly.

[**0211**] FIG. **18**E is a diagrammatic perspective view of an embodiment of a minimally invasive surgical instrument in which a movable surgical instrument **1860** (e.g., a U-Turn instrument as described below, a flexible arm, a multilink arm, and the like) is fixed at the extreme distal end **1861** of a guide tube **1862**. Thus, the combination of guide tube **1862** and instrument **1862** functions in a manner similar to segments **15***a* and **15***b* of instrument **15** as shown and described in FIG. **2**B. In addition, a second surgical instrument **1864** is either fixed at an intermediate position **1866** on guide tube **1862** or is removable as described above. And, as described above, an imaging system **1868** with a field of view direction generally perpendicular to guide tube **1862**'s longitudinal axis is positioned near guide tube **1862**'s distal end.

[0212] During insertion, in one aspect instrument **1860** is straightened to be generally aligned with the longitudinal axis, and instrument **1864** is either similarly aligned with the longitudinal axis (if fixed; if removably attached) or is at least partially withdrawn into the guide tube. Alternatively, in another aspect instrument **1860** may be retroflexively folded back against guide tube **1862**. An optional second imaging system **1870** positioned at distal end **1861** may be used to assist insertion as described above.

[0213] FIG. **18**F is an illustrative diagrammatic plan view of another aspect of a surgical instrument assembly with a movable imaging system at the distal tip of a guide tube. As depicted in FIG. **18**F, an endoscopic image capture component **1880** is at the distal end of parallel motion mechanism **1884**, which is coupled at the distal end of guide tube **1882**. As shown, parallel motion mechanism **1884** has a single DOF in joint space so that it moves image capture component **1880** out of the page, towards the person looking at the figure. In some aspects, parallel motion mechanism may be thinner (between the two instruments) than shown in the figure since it has only one DOF as shown. In other aspects, parallel motion mechanism **1884** may have two DOFs as described above. Alternatively, two independently controllable joints may be used, with each joint generally placed where the hinges are shown in parallel motion mechanism **1884**. In one aspect guide tube **1882** has an oblong cross section, as illustrated by FIG. **11**B.

[0214] Additional DOFs may be used to orient image capture component **1880**. For example, FIG. **18**G illustrates that an independent yaw joint **1886** may be placed between parallel motion mechanism **1884** and image capture component **1880**. Joint **1886** is illustrative of various single and multiple DOF joints that may be used (e.g., pitch or pitch/yaw). As illustrated below in FIG. **19**J, in one aspect a flexible arm may be used instead of parallel motion mechanism **1884**. Optics in image capture component **1880** may provide a down looking angle (e.g., 30 degrees).

[0215] FIG. **18**F further shows that in one aspect parallel motion mechanism **1884** is long enough to allow the parallel motion mechanisms, wrist mechanisms, and end effectors of independently controllable instruments **1888***a* and **1888***b* to extend though intermediate position exit ports **1890***a* and **1890***b* in guide tube **1882** and move while image capture component **1880** is still aligned with the center of guide tube **1882**. When parallel motion mechanism **1884** moves image capture component **1880** away from being aligned with guide tube **1882**, instruments **1888***a* and **1888***b* can extend underneath image capture component **1880** to reach a surgical site.

[0216] FIG. **19** is a diagrammatic perspective view that illustrates aspects of a fifteenth minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly, showing an illustrative distal segment **1900** of the assembly. This assembly **1900**, like some of the variations of assembly **1800** (FIGS. **18**-**18**G), is primarily intended for surgical work to be performed generally to the side of the assembly rather than in front of its distal end. In the embodiment shown in FIG. **19**, a first surgical instrument **1902**, a second surgical instrument **1904**, and an imaging system **1906** extend through a guide tube **1908**. Various combinations of instruments and imaging systems may be used, either removable or fixed as described above. Surgical instrument **1902** generally works like the various instruments described above, its distal segment **1902***a* being rigid or flexible as described. And, instrument **1902** is illustrative of aspects in which is used a primary guide tube and instrument combination as described above. Guide tube **1908** may be rigid or flexible as described above. The surgical instrument bodies are, e.g., about 7 mm in diameter.

[0217] The image capture system in imaging system **1906** has a field of view that is generally perpendicular to instrument assembly **1900**'s longitudinal axis so that the surgeon can work at a site located to the side of the assembly. Imaging system **1906** may translate longitudinally (surge) within a channel defined in guide tube **1908**, may be fixed to the distal end of guide tube **1908**, or may be an integral part of guide tube **1908** as illustrated by aspects of assembly **1800** (FIGS. **18**-**18**G). In some aspects with a round instrument body, imaging system **1906** may roll within the channel. The round instrument body must be large enough to accommodate, e.g., sensor data wiring (unless a wireless link is used) and an optical fiber illumination bundle. In other aspects the distal end **1912** alone may roll about imaging system **1906**'s longitudinal axis, as shown by the arrows, so as to place the surgical site within the field of view. If the distal end **1912** alone rolls, then an interface allows the sensor data wiring (unless a wireless link is used) and, e.g., power wires or optical fibers for illumination to bend to accommodate the roll.

[0218] Surgical instrument **1904** is designed to work primarily in retrograde. As shown in FIG. **19**, the distal segment **1904***a* of instrument **1904** is joined to a body segment **1904***b* by a U-Turn mechanism **1904***c*. Components (such as, e.g., levers, pulleys, gears, gimbals, cables, cable guide tubes, and the like) inside U-turn assembly **1904***c* transmit mechanical forces (e.g., from cable or cable/hypotube combinations) around the U-turn (not necessarily 180 degrees as shown; other turn angles may be used) to move distal segment **1904***a* and an optional wrist mechanism, and to operate an end effector (not shown). U-Turn mechanism **1904***c* is distinguished from flexible mechanical structures because, e.g., it transmits mechanical forces through a radius of curvature that is significantly less than the minimum radius of curvature of equivalently sized flexible mechanical structures. Further, since the U-Turn mechanism does not itself move, the distance between a point where an actuating force enters the U-Turn mechanism and the point where the actuating force exits the U-Turn mechanism is unchangeable. For aspects in which a joint is placed in body segment **1904***b* so that it is divided into proximal and distal segments, and if instrument body roll is not transmitted through the joint then the distal tip **1904***d* may be configured to rotate around the distal segment's longitudinal axis.

[0219] FIG. **19**A is another diagrammatic perspective view of the embodiment depicted in FIG. **19**, and it illustrates that during surgical work the distal ends of instruments **1902** and **1904** are generally within imaging system **1906**'s field of view to the side of assembly **1900**.

[0220] FIGS. **19** and **19**A further show that in some aspects the surgical instrument distal ends are coupled to the main bodies at a single pivot point **1914**. Movement in more than one plane is facilitated by, e.g., a ball and socket type joint as illustrated above in FIG. **18**C (**1842**) and below in FIGS. **19**B and **19**C. In other aspects, joints such as those

shown in FIGS. **16**A-C are used. End effectors (not shown) may be coupled directly or via wrist mechanisms at the extreme distal ends **1916**.

[**0221**] FIG. **19**B is a plan view of a surgical instrument assembly embodiment that incorporates a U-turn surgical instrument **1920**. Distal instrument forearm segment **1922** is coupled to instrument main body segment **1924** via U-Turn mechanism **1926** and an illustrative controllable ball joint **1928**. Wrist 1930 (ball and annular segment flexible mechanism is shown for illustration; other wrist mechanisms may be used as described above) couples end effector **1932** to the distal end of forearm segment **1922**. Cables (not shown) that move forearm **1922**, wrist **1930**, and end effector **1932** are routed through individual cable guides in U-Turn mechanism **1926**, as described in more detail below. The alternate position lines **1934** illustrate that in some instances wrist **1930** can bend at least 135 degrees in three dimensions to enable end effector **1932** to be oriented in various useful ways. An embodiment of such a wrist may incorporate, e.g., three **2**-DOF joints of two hinges each, as described above with reference to FIGS. **16**A-C. Each **2**-DOF joint allows about 45 degrees of pitch and yaw from being aligned with forearm link **1922**'s longitudinal axis. In some aspects, rather than using the indexed joints as shown, a parallel motion mechanism and wrist combination as described above may be used. The surgical instrument assembly shown in FIG. **19**C also incorporates a second surgical instrument **1936** that operates similarly to instrument **1920**, except that it does not incorporate the U-Turn mechanism.

[**0222**] FIG. **19**C is another plan view of the surgical instrument assembly embodiment shown in FIG. **19**B, with surgical instrument **1920** extended farther out of guide tube **1938**. In FIG. **19**B, the end effectors are working close to and pointing generally at imaging system **1940**. In FIG. **19**C, the end effectors are still working close to imaging system **1940**, but they are now pointing generally perpendicular to imaging system **1940**'s viewing angle. Thus FIG. **19**C illustrates that instrument **1920**'s extension distance from guide tube **1938** may depend on the end effector angle commanded by a master input control. It can also be seen that in some aspects if a command is given to change the end effector's orientation while maintaining its position, then the instrument body and forearm link must be moved to a new pose.

[**0223**] FIG. **19**D is an exploded perspective view that illustrates aspects of routing cables (the term "cable" is illustrative of various filars (herein, the term "filars" should be broadly construed and includes, e.g., single- and multi-strand threads or even very fine hypotubes) that may be used) that control distal instrument components through a U-Turn mechanism. As shown in FIG. **19**D, actuator cables **1950** for, e.g., forearm link **1922**, wrist **1930**, and end effector **1932** run through instrument main body segment **1924** and are routed through individual cable guide tubes **1952**, which route cables **1950** around the U-Turn. The cable guide tubes are, e.g., stainless steel hypotubes. Brace **1954** clamps and therefore stabilizes both ends of the cable guide tubes **1952**. Alternatively, or in addition, the cable guide tubes may be soldered or brazed. An outer cover may cover and protect the cable guide tubes and also any tissue against which the U-Turn instrument may press as it extends from its guide tube. In the embodiment shown, each individual cable guide tube is approximately the same length and has approximately the same bend radius (there are some small differences, as shown in the Figures). The approximately equal length and bend radius tubes make each cable's compliance, a function of diameter and length, approximately the same. Friction depends on the load and total bend angle of each cable.

[**0224**] In this illustrative embodiment, 18 cable guide tubes are shown. To control distal DOFs, the theoretical minimum number of tension cables is DOFs+1. More cables can be used for simplicity, to increase strength or stiffness, or to constrain joint behavior. In an illustrative 5 mm wrist mechanism as shown above, for example, two of the hinges are slaved through cables to two other hinges. In this example, 18 cables would be used to control 4 distal DOFs plus end effector grip. In some embodiments there is no roll control for the wrist mechanism. End effector roll is provided by rolling the instrument body shaft inside the guide tube. With coordinated movement of the other joints, rolling the instrument body shaft will roll the end effector around its end point.

[**0225**] FIG. **19**E is a perspective view of an illustrative embodiment of the cable guide tubes **1952**. A total of 18 cable guide tubes are shown. The cable guide tubes are arranged so as to form a central channel **1955**, through which may be routed control cables for an end effector, surgical implements for suction, irrigation, or electrocautery, and the like. An optional sleeve (not shown) may be inserted within channel **1955** to reduce friction. Other numbers of guide tubes (e.g., 9) may be used.

[**0226**] FIG. **19**F is an end elevation view that shows the arrangement of guide tubes **1952** around the central channel **1955**.

[**0227**] FIG. **19**G is a perspective view of an illustrative embodiment of an alternate way of routing cables around the U-Turn. Instead of using the multiple cable guide tubes **1952** and brace **1954**, they are constructed as a single part **1956**. Metal casting or rapid metal prototyping is used to make the part, which includes individual channels **1957** through which the cables are routed, and a central channel **1958** through which other components may be routed as discussed above.

[**0228**] FIG. **19**H is a perspective view that illustrates aspects of a surgical instrument with a U-Turn mechanism passing through and exiting from a guide tube. A single channel **1960** in guide tube **1962** is shaped to accommodate both the instrument's main body segment **1924** and the retrograde segment **1964** (only the control cables for the retrograde segment are shown; see e.g., FIG. **19**B), which is folded back towards the main body segment as the instrument moves within the channel. The channel is pinched in the middle, so that when the U-Turn mechanism and retrograde segment exit the guide tube, the portion of the channel through which the main body segment passes still securely holds the main body segment. The single piece U-Turn part **1956** is also pinched as shown so that they slide within channel **1960**. Once retrograde segment **1964** has exited guide tube **1962**, a second instrument may be inserted through the portion of channel **1960** through which retrograde segment **1964** passed. Various other channel shapes that allow multiple instruments to be inserted through the guide tube are described in more detail below.

[**0229**] FIG. **19**I is a perspective view that illustrates that once the U-Turn instrument exits the guide tube it may be

rolled within the channel and then the forearm link can be moved so that the end effector is positioned within the imaging system's field of view. In one aspect, keeping the end effector in position and rolling the instrument body within the guide tube rolls the end effector, as shown by the rotational arrows, because of the nature of the joints.

[0230] FIG. **19**J is a perspective view that illustrates aspects of a surgical instrument assembly embodiment that uses more than one U-Turn retrograde surgical instrument. Using two U-Turn instruments allows the end effectors to work back closely to the guide tube. In order to provide image capture for the surgeon, an illustrative independent imaging system **1970** is shown with an image capture component **1972** mounted at the end of an illustrative flexible mechanism **1974**. A U-Turn mechanism or a series of rigid links may be used instead of a flexible mechanism. Retroflexing the imaging system allows image capture component **1972**'s field of view to encompass the two U-Turn instrument end effectors. Alternatively, an imaging system **1976** may be positioned at the side of the guide tube if the end effectors are to work generally to the side of the instrument assembly.

[0231] FIG. **19**K is a plan view that illustrates another aspect of the U-turn mechanism **1990**, which uses small levers, for example, to transmit forces from the main instrument body to the distal forearm link, wrist mechanism, and end effector. Various cables, wires, rods, hypotubes, and the like, and combinations of these components, may be used in the main body and forearm and are coupled to the force transmission components.

[0232] Depending on the location of the surgical work site in relation to the instrument assembly and instruments to be used, illumination for the imaging system may be positioned at various places in side- and retroflexive-working systems. In addition to, or instead of, having one or more illumination output ports near the image capture component as described above, one or more illumination LEDs may be placed on the body of the retroflexive tool, Referring to FIG. **19**C, for example, one or more LEDs may be placed at an illustrative position **1942**, along instrument main body segment **1920**. Or, LEDs may be placed along the forearm segment at, e.g., **1938** as shown in FIG. **19**B. Likewise, LEDs may be placed at the inner curve of a retroflexing flexible mechanism, such as at positions **1978** shown in FIG. **19**J. An advantage of placing additional illumination some distance away from the imaging apertures is that the additional illumination may provide shadows, which provides better depth cues. Illumination near or surrounding the imaging apertures, however, prevents the shadows from becoming so deep that details are not visible in the shadowed areas. Accordingly, in some aspects illumination both near to and far from the imaging apertures is used.

[0233] One or more channels, illustrated by dashed lines **1944** (FIG. **19**C) or **1980** (FIG. **19**J), in the structure on which the LEDs are mounted may carry cooling fluid (e.g., water) past the LEDs. The LED die (or multiple LED die) can be mounted on the obverse side of a thermally conductive substrate (e.g., an aluminum plate, a plated ceramic), which is bonded to the cooling channel so that the reverse side of the substrate is exposed to the cooling flow. Techniques for bonding LEDs to substrates are well known and can be adapted for use with liquid cooling. The cooling fluid may circulate in a closed system, or it may empty either inside or outside the patient. For an open cooling system that empties into the patient, a sterile, biocompatible fluid (e.g., sterile isotonic saline) is used. Suction may be used to remove the cooling fluid from the patient. In addition, the cooling fluid discharged into the patient may be used to perform other functions. For example, the discharged cooling fluid may be directed across the imaging lenses. The fluid may clean the lenses or prevent body fluids, smoke, or surgical debris from sticking to the lenses.

[0234] The amount of cooling fluid to keep an LED within an acceptable temperature range is fairly small. For example, an LED that dissipates about 4 Watts of electrical power as heat can be cooled with a flow of about 0.1 cc/sec of water through 0.020-inch OD plastic tubing (e.g., 12 feet total length; 6 feet supply and 6 feet return), and the water will experience only about a 10-degree Celsius temperature rise.

[0235] The use of LEDs as described above is an example of alternative illumination placement on the instruments. In some aspects, fiber light guides may be used, in which case cooling considerations do not apply.

[0236] As discussed above, in some aspects the cross-sectional area of a guide tube must accommodate instruments which themselves have distal portions with a relatively large cross-sectional area. In order to minimize the guide tube's cross-sectional area, in one aspect more than one instrument is inserted through a single specially shaped channel.

[0237] FIG. **20**A is an end elevation view of the distal end face of illustrative guide tube **2002**. Guide tube **2002**'s lateral cross section is similarly configured (i.e., the channels depicted extend through the entire guide tube). As shown in FIG. **20**A, guide tube **2002** has three channels (more or fewer channels may be used). Channel **2004** accommodates an endoluminal imaging system and may have various cross-sectional shapes (e.g., round, oval, rounded polygon, etc.). The shape illustrated in FIG. **20**A is a circle overlaid and centered on a rounded rectangle. The circular bore **2004***a* of channel **2004** accommodates the imaging system's body (illustrated by dashed lines), and the slots **2004***b* (the ends of the rounded rectangle) on either side of the circular bore **2004***a* allow the image capture element, which is wider than the cylindrical body segment, to pass through channel **2004**. Since the circular bore **2004***a* has a slightly larger diameter than slots **2004***b* (the channel **2004** cross section is an oblong, biconvex shape), the imaging system's body segment is held in place within channel **2004** after the image capture element exits guide tube **2002**'s distal end.

[0238] Channel **2006**, depicted as a single, circular bore, is an optional auxiliary channel and may be used for irrigation, suction, small (e.g., 3 mm diameter) instruments, etc.

[0239] Channel **2008** is uniquely shaped to simultaneously accommodate two surgical instruments in which one has a distal end segment larger than its body segment, such as instruments **1902** and **1904** (FIG. **19**). As shown in FIG. **20**A, channel **2008**'s cross-sectional shape is generally oblong with a pinched center across the major axis (the cross section is an oblong, biconcave shape). Channel **2008** includes two cylindrical bores **2008***a*,**2008***b* through which

cylindrical instrument bodies are inserted. The bores **2008***a*, **2008***b* are interconnected by a slot **2008***c*. As an instrument body (illustrated by the circular dashed line **2009***a*) is inserted through bore **2008***a*, for example, the instrument's distal portion, which is larger than its proximal body segment passes through at least part of slot **2008***c* and possibly some or all of bore **2008***b*. FIG. **19**H illustrates this aspect. Once the instrument's distal portion has been inserted beyond the guide tube's distal end, the instrument's proximal body segment is rotated within bore **2008***a*, which holds the proximal body segment in place. Consequently, another instrument (illustrated by the circular dashed line **2009***b*), either cylindrical or with an enlarged distal portion that fits through slot **2008***c*, can be inserted through bore **2008***b*. This channel configuration and insertion process can be used for various instruments with odd-shaped distal portions, such as staplers, clip appliers, and other special task instruments, as well as for the retrograde working instruments described herein. In addition, an imaging device having a distal image capture component cross section larger than its body cross section and shaped to pass through the channel's oblong cross section may be similarly inserted, followed by one or more other instruments. The lip **2011** of channel **2008**, or any channel, is in some instances rounded or beveled as shown to facilitate instrument withdrawal into the guide tube.

[**0240**] FIG. **20**B is an end elevation view of the distal end face of guide tube **2002** with an illustrative imaging system **2010** and two surgical instruments **2012**,**2014**, all extending from their insertion channels **2004**,**2008**. Instrument **2012** is a U-Turn mechanism type retrograde working instrument, similar to the illustrative embodiment shown in FIGS. **19** and **19**A. Instrument **2014** is generally circular in cross section during insertion, although during insertion a portion of instrument **2014** may extend into any portion of slot **2008***c* that instrument **2012** does not occupy. As another example, an instrument with the multiple cable guide tube U-Turn mechanism, similar to the embodiments shown in FIGS. **19**B-**19**I, may be inserted through channel **2008**, with the body and distal portions of the instrument passing through the bores and the pinched portion of the U-Turn mechanism passing through the slot between the bores.

[**0241**] The channel topography illustrated in FIG. **20**A can be adapted to allow, e.g., two instruments with large distal ends to be inserted through a guide tube, possibly adding a third instrument as well. FIG. **20**C is an end elevation view that illustrates aspects in which an instrument channel includes bores arranged in a "V" shape, although the "V" may be flattened so that three or more channel bores are side-by-side in a line. As shown, channel **2020** includes three cylindrical bores **2020***a*,**2020***b*,**2020***c*, with slot **2020***d* joining bores **2020***a* and **2020***b*, and slot **2020***e* joining bores **2020***b* and **2020***c*. Bores **2020***a* and **2020***c* are shown at the ends of the "V" shape, and bore **2020***b* is shown at the vertex of the "V" shape. Illustratively, a first retrograde working instrument with a U-Turn mechanism is inserted via bores **2020***a* and **2020***b*, and then a second retrograde working instrument with a U-Turn mechanism is inserted via bores **2020***c* and **2020***b*. Once inserted, the three bores allow either of the instruments to be independently removed-one instrument does not have to be removed to allow the other instrument to be removed. An optional third instrument may be inserted via bore **2020***b* once two other instruments are inserted with their proximal body segments held in place within bores **2020***a* and **2020***c*. It can be seen that two large-ended instruments and an optional third instrument may be inserted via channel **2020** in various combinations. An imaging system may be inserted via channel **2022**, which may be a rounded rectangle as shown, circular, or various other shapes as illustrated herein (e.g., **2004** in FIG. **20**A). Alternatively, if an imaging system has a suitably shaped distal end, it may be inserted via channel **2020**. An assembly with two retrograde working instruments and an imaging system is illustrated in FIG. **19**J.

[**0242**] FIGS. **20**D, **20**E, and **20**F are each end elevation views that illustrate aspects of other channel configurations that may be used to accommodate one or more instruments with large distal ends. FIG. **20**D shows channel **2030** with three bores **2030***a*,**2030***b*,**2030***c* in a triangular arrangement. The slots that interconnect adjacent bores merge into a single opening that connects each bore with the other two (i.e., the top of the "V" shape illustrated in FIG. **20**C is joined by a third slot. The channel has a generally triangular cross section, and the bores are at the triangle's vertices). Also shown is an illustrative spacer **2032**, shown centered in channel **2030**, which helps keep the instrument bodies in their bores or positioned at their vertexes if the channel sides between the bores are not sufficiently pinched to hold the instrument bodies in place within the bores. FIG. **20**E illustrates that the channel can have any number of bores to accept surgical instruments (four are shown with the bores arranged at the corners of a square). FIG. **20**F illustrates a channel with a "T" shape, the bores for the instruments being the three ends of the "T". A spacer such as shown in FIG. **20**D may be used to keep instruments properly positioned within the "T", or the connecting openings between the bores may be slightly pinched to keep the instruments in their bores. Other cross-sectional channel shapes (e.g., a cross or "X" shape; it can be seen that a "T" shape is part of such a cross or "X" shape) may be used with a cross-sectional configuration or a separate component that keeps a surgical instrument's body or shaft in place within the channel.

[**0243**] In FIGS. **20**A-**20**F, the bores that hold the proximal segments of the instrument and imaging system bodies are shown as circular, which allows the bodies to roll within the bores. In some aspects, however, some or all the bores may have non-circular cross sections to prevent the body segments from rolling within the bores. For example, one non-circular bore may be dedicated to holding the proximal body segment of an imaging system, which is kept from rolling. Or, specifically shaped bores may be used to ensure that only a particular device may be inserted into a particular bore. In some aspects, however, any surgical instrument or imaging system may be inserted via any bore.

Support and Control Aspects

[**0244**] FIG. **21**A is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of a robot-assisted (telemanipulative) minimally invasive surgical system that uses aspects of the minimally invasive surgical instruments, instrument assemblies, and manipulation and control systems described herein. This system's general architecture is similar to the architecture of other such systems such as Intuitive Surgical, Inc.'s da Vinci® Surgical System and the Zeus® Surgical System. The three main components are a surgeon's console **2102**, a patient side support system **2104**, and a video system **2106**,

all interconnected **2108** by wired or wireless connections as shown. One or more electronic data processors may be variously located in these main components to provide system functionality.

[**0245**] The surgeon's console **2102** includes, e.g., multiple DOF mechanical input ("master") devices that allow the surgeon to manipulate the surgical instruments, guide tubes, and imaging system ("slave") devices as described herein. These input devices may in some aspects provide haptic feedback from the instruments and instrument assembly components to the surgeon. Console **2102** also includes a stereoscopic video output display positioned such that images on the display are generally focused at a distance that corresponds to the surgeon's hands working behind/below the display screen. These aspects are discussed more fully in U.S. Pat. No. 6,671,581, which is incorporated by reference above. Control during insertion may be accomplished, for example, in a manner similar to telemanipulated endoscope control in the da Vinci® Surgical System—in one aspect the surgeon virtually moves the image with one or both of the masters; she uses the masters to move the image side to side and to pull it towards herself, consequently commanding the imaging system and its associated instrument assembly (e.g., a flexible guide tube) to steer towards a fixed center point on the output display and to advance inside the patient. In one aspect the camera control is designed to give the impression that the masters are fixed to the image so that the image moves in the same direction that the master handles are moved, as in the da Vinci® surgical system. This design causes the masters to be in the correct location to control the instruments when the surgeon exits from camera control, and consequently it avoids the need to clutch (disengage), move, and declutch (engage) the masters back into position prior to beginning or resuming instrument control. In some aspects the master position may be made proportional to the insertion velocity to avoid using a large master workspace. Alternatively, the surgeon may clutch and declutch the masters to use a ratcheting action for insertion. In some aspects, insertion (e.g., past the glottis when entering via the esophagus) may be controlled manually (e.g., by hand operated wheels), and automated insertion (e.g., servomotor driven rollers) is then done when the distal end of the surgical instrument assembly is near the surgical site. Pre-operative or real time image data (e.g., MRI, X-ray) of the patient's anatomical structures and spaces available for insertion trajectories may be used to assist insertion.

[**0246**] The patient side support system **2104** includes a floor-mounted base **2110**, or alternately a ceiling mounted base **2112** as shown by the alternate lines. The base may be movable or fixed (e.g., to the floor, ceiling, or other equipment such as an operating table). In one embodiment the manipulator arm assembly is a modified da Vinci® Surgical System arm assembly. The arm assembly includes two illustrative passive rotational setup joints **2114***a*,**2114***b*, which allow manual positioning of the coupled links when their brakes are released. A passive prismatic setup joint (not shown) between the arm assembly and the base may be used to allow for large vertical adjustments. In addition, the arm assembly includes illustrative active roll joint **2116***a* and active yaw joint **2116***b*. Joints **2116***c* and **2116***d* act as a parallel mechanism so that a guide tube (of a surgical instrument assembly) held by guide manipulator **2118** moves around remote center **2120** at an entry port, such as patient **1222**'s umbilicus. An active prismatic joint **2124** is used to insert and withdraw the guide tube. One or more surgical instruments and an endoscopic imaging system are independently mounted to guide manipulator **2118**. The various setup and active joints allow the manipulators to move the guide tube, instruments, and imaging system when patient **2122** is placed in various positions on movable table **2126**.

[**0247**] FIGS. **21**B and **21**C are schematic side and front elevation views of another illustrative embodiment of a patient side support system. Base **2150** is fixed (e.g., floor or ceiling mounted). Link **2152** is coupled to base **2150** at passive rotational setup joint **2154**. As shown, joint **2154**'s rotational axis is aligned with remote center point **2156**, which is generally the position at which a guide tube (of a surgical instrument assembly, not shown) enters the patient (e.g., at the umbilicus for abdominal surgery). Link **2158** is coupled to link **2152** at rotational joint **2160**. Link **2162** is coupled to link **2158** at rotational joint **2164**. Link **2166** is coupled to link **2162** at rotational joint **2168**. The guide tube is mounted to slide through the end **2166***a* of link **2166**. Manipulator platform **2170** is supported and coupled to link **2166** by a prismatic joint **2172** and a rotational joint **2174**. Prismatic joint **2172** inserts and withdraws the guide tube as it slides along link **2166**. Joint **2174** includes a bearing assembly that holds a "C" shaped ring cantilever. As the "C" ring slides through the bearing it rotates around a center point inside the "C", thereby rolling the guide tube. The opening in the "C" allows guide tubes to be mounted or exchanged without moving overlying manipulators. Manipulator platform **2170** supports multiple manipulators **2176** for surgical instruments and an imaging system, described below.

[**0248**] These illustrative manipulator arm assemblies are used, for example, for instrument assemblies that include a rigid guide tube and are operated to move with reference to a remote center. Certain setup and active joints in the manipulator arm may be omitted if motion around a remote center is not required. It should be understood that manipulator arms may include various combinations of links, passive, and active joints (redundant DOFs may be provided) to achieve a necessary range of poses for surgery.

[**0249**] Referring again to FIG. **21**A, video system **2106** performs image processing functions for, e.g., captured endoscopic imaging data of the surgical site and/or preoperative or real time image data from other imaging systems external to the patient. Imaging system **2106** outputs processed image data (e.g., images of the surgical site, as well as relevant control and patient information) to the surgeon at the surgeon's console **2102**. In some aspects the processed image data is output to an optional external monitor visible to other operating room personnel or to one or more locations remote from the operating room (e.g., a surgeon at another location may monitor the video; live feed video may be used for training; etc.).

[**0250**] FIG. **22**A is a diagrammatic view that illustrates aspects of a centralized motion control and coordination system architecture for minimally invasive telesurgical systems that incorporate surgical instrument assemblies and components described herein. A motion coordinator system **2202** receives master inputs **2204**, sensor inputs **2206**, and optimization inputs **2208**.

[**0251**] Master inputs **2204** may include the surgeon's arm, wrist, hand, and finger movements on the master control

mechanisms. Inputs may also be from other movements (e.g., finger, foot, knee, etc. pressing or moving buttons, levers, switches, etc.) and commands (e.g., voice) that control the position and orientation of a particular component or that control a task-specific operation (e.g., energizing an electrocautery end effector or laser, imaging system operation, and the like).

[0252] Sensor inputs **2206** may include position information from, e.g., measured servomotor position or sensed bend information. U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/491,384 (Larkin, et al.) entitled "Robotic surgery system including position sensors using fiber Bragg gratings", incorporated by reference, describes the use of fiber Bragg gratings for position sensing. Such bend sensors may be incorporated into the various instruments and imaging systems described herein to be used when determining position and orientation information for a component (e.g., an end effector tip). Position and orientation information may also be generated by one or more sensors (e.g., fluoroscopy, MRI, ultrasound, and the like) positioned outside of the patient, and which in real time sense changes in position and orientation of components inside the patient.

[0253] As described below, the user interface has three coupled control modes: a mode for the instrument (s), a mode for the imaging system, and a mode for the guide tube. These coupled modes enable the user to address the system as a whole rather than directly controlling a single portion. Therefore, the motion coordinator must determine how to take advantage of the overall system kinematics (i.e., the total DOFs of the system) in order to achieve certain goals. For example, one goal may be to optimize instrument workspace for a particular configuration. Another goal may be to keep the imaging system's field of view centered between two instruments. Therefore, optimization inputs **2208** may be high-level commands, or the inputs may include more detailed commands or sensory information. An example of a high level command would be a command to an intelligent controller to optimize a workspace. An example of a more detailed command would be for an imaging system to start or stop optimizing its camera. An example of a sensor input would be a signal that a workspace limit had been reached.

[0254] Motion coordinator **2202** outputs command signals to various actuator controllers and actuators (e.g., servomotors) associated with manipulators for the various telesurgical system arms. FIG. **22**A depicts an example of output signals being sent to two instrument controllers **2210**, to an imaging system controller **2212**, and to a guide tube controller **2214**. Other numbers and combinations of controllers may be used.

[0255] As an example, such a motion coordination system may be used to control surgical instrument assembly **1700** (FIG. **17**). Instrument controllers **2210** are associated with instruments **1702***a*,**1702***b*, imaging system controller **2212** is associated with imaging system **1704**, and guide tube controller **2214** is associated with guide tube **1708**. Accordingly, in some aspects the surgeon who operates the telesurgical system will simultaneously and automatically access at least the three control modes identified above: an instrument control mode for moving the instruments, an imaging system control mode for moving the imaging system, and a guide tube control mode for moving the guide tube. A similar centralized architecture may be adapted to work with the various other mechanism aspects described herein.

[0256] FIG. **22**B is a diagrammatic view that illustrates aspects of a distributed motion control and coordination system architecture for minimally invasive telesurgical systems that incorporate surgical instrument assemblies and components described herein. In the illustrative aspects shown in FIG. **22**B, control and transform processor **2220** exchanges information with two master arm optimizer/controllers **2222***a*,**2222***b*, with three surgical instrument optimizer/controllers **2224***a*,**2224***b*,**2224***c*, with an imaging system optimizer/controller **2226**, and with a guide tube optimizer/controller **2228**. Each optimizer/controller is associated with a master or slave arm (which includes, e.g., the camera (imaging system) arm, the guide tube arm, and the instrument arms) in the telesurgical system. Each of the optimizer/controllers receives arm-specific optimization goals **2230***a*-**2230***g*.

[0257] The double-headed arrows between control and transform processor **2220** and the various optimizer/controllers represents the exchange of Following Data associated with the optimizer/controller's arm. Following Data includes the full Cartesian configuration of the entire arm, including base frame and distal tip frame. Control and transform processor **2220** routes the Following Data received from each optimizer/controller to all the optimizer/controllers so that each optimizer/controller has data about the current Cartesian configuration of all arms in the system. In addition, the optimizer/controller for each arm receives optimization goals that are unique for the arm. Each arm's optimizer/controller then uses the other arm positions as inputs and constraints as it pursues its optimization goals. In one aspect, each optimization controller uses an embedded local optimizer to pursue its optimization goals. The optimization module for each arm's optimizer/controller can be independently turned on or off. For example, the optimization module for only the imaging system and the guide tube may be turned on.

[0258] The distributed control architecture provides more flexibility than the centralized architecture, although with the potential for decreased performance. It easier to add in a new arm and to change the overall system configuration if such a distributed control architecture is used rather than if a centralized architecture is used. In this distributed architecture, however, the optimization is local versus the global optimization that can be performed with the centralized architecture, in which a single module is aware of the full system's state.

[0259] FIG. **23** is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of an interface between surgical instrument assembly **2302**, which represents flexible and rigid mechanisms as variously described herein, and an illustrative actuator assembly **2304**. For the purposes of this example, instrument assembly **2302** includes surgical instrument **2306**, primary guide tube **2308** that surrounds instrument **2306**, and secondary guide tube **2310** that surrounds primary guide tube **2308**.

[0260] As shown in FIG. **23**, a transmission mechanism is positioned at the proximal ends of each instrument or guide tube: transmission mechanism **2306***a* for instrument **2306**, transmission mechanism **2308***a* for primary guide tube **2308**, and transmission mechanism **2310***a* for secondary guide tube **2310**. Each transmission mechanism is mechani-

cally and removably coupled to an associated actuator mechanism: transmission mechanism **2306***a* to actuator mechanism **2312**, transmission mechanism **2308***a* to actuator mechanism **2314**, transmission mechanism **2310***a* to actuator mechanism **2316**. In one aspect, mating disks are used as in the da Vinci® Surgical System instrument interface, as shown in more detail below. In another aspect, mating gimbal plates and levers are used. Various mechanical components (e.g., gears, levers, cables, pulleys, cable guides, gimbals, etc.) in the transmission mechanisms are used to transfer the mechanical force from the interface to the controlled element. Each actuator mechanism includes at least one actuator (e.g., servomotor (brushed or brushless)) that controls movement at the distal end of the associated instrument or guide tube. For example, actuator **2312***a* is an electric servomotor that controls surgical instrument **2306**'s end effector **2306***b* grip DOF. An instrument (including a guide probe as described herein) or guide tube (or, collectively, the instrument assembly) may be decoupled from the associated actuator mechanism(s) and slid out as shown. It may then be replaced by another instrument or guide tube. In addition to the mechanical interface there is an electronic interface between each transmission mechanism and actuator mechanism. This electronic interface allows data (e.g., instrument/guide tube type) to be transferred.

[0261] In some instances one or more DOFs may be manually actuated. For instance, surgical instrument **2306** may be a passively flexible laparoscopic instrument with a hand-actuated end effector grip DOF, and guide tube **2308** may be actively steerable to provide wrist motion as described above. In this example, the surgeon servocontrols the guide tube DOFs and an assistant hand controls the instrument grip DOF.

[0262] In addition to the actuators that control the instrument and/or guide tube elements, each actuator assembly may also include an actuator component (e.g., motor-driven cable, lead screw, pinion gear, etc.; linear motor; and the like) that provides motion along instrument assembly **2302**'s longitudinal axis (surge). As shown in the FIG. **23** example, actuator mechanism **2312** includes linear actuator **2312***b*, actuator mechanism **2314** includes linear actuator **2314***b*, and actuator mechanism **2316** includes linear actuator **2316***b*, so that instrument **2306**, primary guide tube **2308**, and secondary guide tube **2310** can each be independently coaxially moved. As further shown in FIG. **23**, actuator assembly **2316** is mounted to setup arm **2318**, either passively or actively as described above. In active mounting architectures, the active mounting may be used to control one or more component DOFs (e.g., insertion of a rigid guide tube).

[0263] Control signals from control system **2320** control the various servomotor actuators in actuator assembly **2304**. The control signals are, e.g., associated with the surgeon's master inputs at input/output system **2322** to move instrument assembly **2302**'s mechanical slave components. In turn, various feedback signals from sensors in actuator assembly **2304**, and/or instrument assembly **2302**, and/or other components are passed to control system **2320**. Such feedback signals may be pose information, as indicated by servomotor position or other position, orientation, and force information, such as may be obtained with the use of fiber Bragg grating-based sensors. Feedback signals may also include force sensing information, such as tissue reactive forces, to be, e.g., visually or haptically output to the surgeon at input/output system **2322**.

[0264] Image data from an endoscopic imaging system associated with instrument assembly **2302** are passed to image processing system **2324**. Such image data may include, e.g., stereoscopic image data to be processed and output to the surgeon via input/output system **2322** as shown. Image processing may also be used to determine instrument position, which is input to the control system as a form of distal position feedback sensor. In addition, an optional sensing system **2326** positioned outside and near the patient may sense position or other data associated with instrument assembly **2302**. Sensing system **2326** may be static or may be controlled by control system **2320** (the actuators are not shown, and may be similar to those depicted or to known mechanical servo components), and it may include one or more actual sensors positioned near the patient. Position information (e.g., from one or more wireless transmitters, REID chips, etc.) and other data from sensing system **2326** may be routed to control system **2320**. If such position information or other data is to be visually output to the surgeon, control system **2320** passes it in either raw or processed form to image processing system **2324** for integration with the surgeon's output display at input/output system **2322**. Further, any image data, such as fluoroscopic or other real-time imaging (ultrasound, X-ray, MRI, and the like), from sensing system **2326** are sent to image processing system **2324** for integration with the surgeon's display. And, real-time images from sensing system **2326** may be integrated with preoperative images accessed by image processing system **2324** for integration with the surgeon's display. In this way, for instance, preoperative images of certain tissue (e.g., brain tissue structures) are received from a data storage location **2328**, may be enhanced for better visibility, the preoperative images are registered with other tissue landmarks in real time images, and the combined preoperative and real time images are used along with position information from instrument and actuator assemblies **2302**, **2304** and/or sensing system **2326** to present an output display that assists the surgeon to maneuver instrument assembly **2302** towards a surgical site without damaging intermediate tissue structures.

[0265] FIG. **24**A is a perspective view of the proximal portion of a minimally invasive surgical instrument **2402**. As shown in FIG. **24**A, instrument **2402** includes a transmission mechanism **2404** coupled to the proximal end of an instrument body tube **2406**. Components at body tube **2406**'s distal end **2408** are omitted for clarity and may include, e.g., the 2 DOF parallel motion mechanism, wrist, and end effector combination as described above; joints and an endoscopic imaging system as described above; etc. In the illustrative embodiment shown, transmission mechanism **2404** includes six interface disks **2410**. One or more disks **2410** are associated with a DOF for instrument **240**. For instance, one disk may be associated with instrument body roll DOF, and a second disk may be associated with end effector grip DOF. As shown, in one instance the disks are arranged in a hexagonal lattice for compactness—in this case six disks in a triangular shape. Other lattice patterns or more arbitrary arrangements may be used. Mechanical components (e.g., gears, levers, gimbals, cables, etc.) inside transmission mechanism **2404** transmit roll torques on disks **2410** to e.g., body tube **2406** (for roll) and to components

coupled to distal end mechanisms. Cables and/or cable and hypotube combinations that control distal end DOFs run through body tube **2406**. In one instance the body tube is approximately 7 mm in diameter, and in another instance it is approximately 5 mm in diameter. Raised pins **2412**, spaced eccentrically, provide proper disk **2410** orientation when mated with an associated actuator disk. One or more electronic interface connectors **2414** provide an electronic interface between instrument **2402** and its associated actuator mechanism. In some instances instrument **2402** may pass information stored in a semiconductor memory integrated circuit to the control system via its associated actuator mechanism. Such passed information may include instrument type identification, number of instrument uses, and the like. In some instances the control system may update the stored information (e.g., to record number of uses to determine routine maintenance scheduling or to prevent using an instrument after a prescribed number of times). U.S. Pat. No. 6,866,671 (Tierney et al.), which discusses storing information on instruments, is incorporated by reference. The electronic interface may also include power for, e.g., an electrocautery end effector. Alternately, such a power connection may be positioned elsewhere on instrument **2402** (e.g., on transmission mechanism **2404**'s housing). Other connectors for, e.g., optical fiber lasers, optical fiber distal bend or force sensors, irrigation, suction, etc. may be included. As shown, transmission mechanism **2404**'s housing is roughly wedge- or pie-shaped to allow it to be closely positioned to similar housings, as illustrated below.

[**0266**] FIG. **24**B is a perspective view of a portion of an actuator assembly **2420** that mates with and actuates components in surgical instrument **2402**. Actuator disks **2422** are arranged to mate with interface disks **2410**. Holes **2424** in disks **2422** are aligned to receive pins **2412** in only a single 360-degree orientation. Each disk **2422** is turned by an associated rotating servomotor actuator **2426**, which receives servocontrol inputs as described above. A roughly wedge-shaped mounting bracket **2428**, shaped to correspond to instrument **2402**'s transmission mechanism housing, supports the disks **2422**, servomotor actuators **2426**, and an electronic interface **2430** that mates with instrument **2402**'s interface connectors **2414**. In one instance instrument **2402** is held against actuator assembly **2420** by spring clips (not shown) to allow easy removal. As shown in FIG. **24**B, a portion **2432** of actuator assembly housing **2428** is truncated to allow instrument body tube **2406** to pass by. Alternatively, a hole may be placed in the actuator assembly to allow the body tube to pass through. Sterilized spacers (reusable or disposable; usually plastic) may be used to separate the actuator assembly and the instrument's transmission mechanism to maintain a sterile surgical field. A sterile thin plastic sheet or "drape" (e.g., 0.002-inch thick polyethylene) is used to cover portions of the actuator assembly not covered by the spacer, as well as to cover portions of the manipulator arm. U.S. Pat. No. 6,866,671, incorporated by reference above, discusses such spacers and drapes.

[**0267**] FIG. **25**A is a diagrammatic perspective view that illustrates aspects of mounting minimally invasive surgical instruments and their associated actuator assemblies at the end of a setup/manipulator arm. As shown in FIG. **25**A, surgical instrument **2502***a* is mounted on actuator assembly **2504**, so that the transmission mechanism mates with the actuator assembly (optional spacer/drape is not shown) as described above. Instrument **2502***a*'s body tube **2506** extends past actuator assembly **2504** and enters a port in rigid guide tube **2508**. As depicted, body tube **2506**, although substantially rigid, is bent slightly between the transmission mechanism housing and the guide tube as discussed above with reference to FIG. **16**. This bending allows the instrument body tube bores in the entry guide to be spaced closer than the size of their transmission mechanisms would otherwise allow. Since the bend angle in the rigid instrument body tube is less than the bend angle for a flexible (e.g., flaccid) instrument body, cables can be stiffer than in a flexible body. High cable stiffness is important because of the number of distal DOFs being controlled in the instrument. Also, the rigid instrument body is easier to insert into a guide tube than a flexible body. In one embodiment the bending is resilient so that the body tube assumes its straight shape when the instrument is withdrawn from the guide tube (the body tube may be formed with a permanent bend, which would prevent instrument body roll). Actuator assembly **2504** is mounted to a linear actuator **2510** (e.g. a servocontrolled lead screw and nut or a ball screw and nut assembly) that controls body tube **2506**'s insertion within guide tube **2508**. The second instrument **2502***b* is mounted with similar mechanisms as shown. In addition, an imaging system (not shown) may be similarly mounted.

[**0268**] FIG. **25**A further shows that guide tube **2508** is removably mounted to support platform **2512**. This mounting may be, for example, similar to the mounting used to hold a cannula on a da Vinci® Surgical System manipulator arm. Removable and replaceable guide tubes allow different guide tubes that are designed for use with different procedures to be used with the same telemanipulative system (e.g., guide tubes with different cross-sectional shapes or various numbers and shapes of working and auxiliary channels). In turn, actuator platform **2512** is mounted to robot manipulator arm **2514** (e.g., 4 DOF) using one or more additional actuator mechanisms (e.g., for pitch, yaw, roll, insertion). In turn, manipulator arm **2514** may be mounted to a passive setup arm, as described above with reference to FIG. **21**A.

[**0269**] FIG. **25**B is a diagrammatic perspective view that illustrates aspects shown in FIG. **25**A from a different angle and with reference to a patient. In FIG. **25**B, arm **2514** and platform **2512** are positioned so that guide tube **2508** enters the patient's abdomen at the umbilicus. This entry is illustrative of various natural orifice and incision entries, including percutaneous and transluminal (e.g., transgastric, transcolonic, transrectal, transvaginal, transrectouterine (Douglas pouch), etc.) incisions. FIG. **25**B also illustrates how the linear actuators for each instrument/imaging system operate independently by showing imaging system **2518** inserted and instruments **2502***a*,**2502***b* withdrawn. These aspects may apply to other surgical instrument assemblies described herein (e.g., flexible guide tubes with end- or side-exit ports, side working tools, etc.). It can be seen that in some instances the manipulator arm moves to rotate guide tube **2508** around a remote center **2520** at the entry port into a patient. If intermediate tissue restricts movement around a remote center, however, the arm can maintain guide tube **2508** in position.

[**0270**] As discussed above, in one aspect the instruments and their transmission mechanisms are arranged around a guide tube in a generally pie-wedge layout as shown in FIG. **26**A, which is a diagrammatic end view of instrument

transmission mechanisms and a guide tube (the vertices of the wedge shapes are oriented towards an extended centerline of the guide tube). The vertices of the wedge shapes are shown slightly truncated; the wedge shape should be understood to be broadly construed and to include both acute and obtuse vertex angles. Instrument transmission mechanisms **2602***a*,**2602***b* transfer control forces from servomotors to instruments inserted via guide tube **2604**'s working channels **2606***a*,**2606***b*. Imaging system transmission mechanism **2608** transfers control forces from servomotors to the multi-DOF imaging system instrument inserted via guide tube **2604**'s imaging system channel **2606***c*. One or more optional guide tube channels **2604***d* allow for manually inserting an instrument, irrigation, suction, etc. FIGS. **26**B and **26**C are similar diagrammatic end views and illustrate that transmission mechanisms may be spaced around the guide tube in other configurations, such as four wedges **2608** spaced 360-degrees around the guide tube (FIG. **26**B), or two half-circle shaped housings **2610** (FIG. **26**C). It can also be seen from the aspects illustrated in FIGS. **25**A, **25**B, **26**A, **26**B, and **26**C that transmission assemblies can not only be spaced around the guide tube but can be stacked one above or behind the other as FIG. **23** schematically illustrates. FIG. **26**D is another diagrammatic end view that illustrates that actuator mechanisms **2620** may be placed farther from guide tube **2622**'s extended centerline than the instrument/guide tube and imaging system transmission mechanisms **2624**.

[**0271**] FIG. **26**E is a diagrammatic exploded perspective view that illustrates that actuator mechanisms for more than one component may be placed in a single housing. As shown in FIG. **26**E, actuator mechanism housing **2630** includes servomotors and associated components (not shown) used to move guide tube **2632**. Housing **2630** also includes servomotors and associated components used to operate instrument **2634**. Instrument **2634**'s body and distal segments are inserted through housing **2630** as shown, and interface components **2636** on housing **2630** connect with corresponding components (e.g., disks **2410** (FIG. **24**)) on instrument **2634**. Such an arrangement may be used for, e.g., the side exit surgical instrument assemblies described herein, in which there are two housings **2634**, each associated with one of the side exiting instruments or guide tubes.

[**0272**] Details about the mechanical and electrical interfaces for the various instruments, guide tubes, and imaging systems, and also about sterile draping to preserve the sterile field, are discussed in U.S. Pat. No. 6,866,671 (Tierney et al.) and U.S. Pat. No. 6,132,368 (Cooper), both of which are incorporated by reference. Mechanical interface mechanisms are not limited to the disks shown and described. Other mechanisms such as rocking plates, gimbals, moving pins, levers, cable latches, and other removable couplings may be used.

[**0273**] FIG. **27** is a diagrammatic view that illustrates aspects of transmission mechanisms associated with flexible coaxial guide tubes and instruments. FIG. **27** shows primary guide tube **2702** running coaxially through and exiting the distal end of secondary guide tube **2704**. Likewise, secondary guide tube **2704** runs coaxially through and exits the distal end of tertiary guide tube **2706**. Transmission and actuator mechanism **2708** is associated with tertiary guide tube **2706**. Transmission and actuator mechanism **2710** is associated with secondary guide tube **2704**, and a proximal segment of guide tube **2704** extends through (alternatively, adjacent to) transmission and actuator mechanism **2710** before entering tertiary guide tube **2706**. Likewise, transmission and actuator mechanism **2712** is associated with primary guide tube **2702**, and a proximal segment of guide tube **2702** extends through (alternatively, adjacent to) transmission and actuator mechanisms **2708**,**2710** before entering secondary and tertiary guide tubes **2704**,**2706**. Transmission mechanisms for instruments and an imaging system (not shown) running through and exiting the distal ends of channels **2714** in primary guide tube **2702** may be similarly stacked generally along the instrument assembly's longitudinal axis, or they may be arranged around guide tube **2702**'s extended longitudinal axis at its proximal end as described above. Or, the controller positions may be combined side-by-side and stacked, such as for a side-exit assembly in which transmission mechanisms for the side-exiting components are positioned side-by-side, and both are stacked behind the guide tube transmission mechanism. Intermediate exit assemblies may be similarly configured. Instrument and/or imaging system actuators and controls may also be combined within the same housing as an actuator and transmission mechanism for a guide tube.

[**0274**] In many aspects the devices described herein are used as single-port devices-all components necessary to complete a surgical procedure enter the body via a single entry port. In some aspects, however, multiple devices and ports may be used. FIG. **28**A is a diagrammatic view that illustrates multi-port aspects as three surgical instrument assemblies enter the body at three different ports. Instrument assembly **2802** includes a primary guide tube, a secondary guide tube, and two instruments, along with associated transmission and actuator mechanisms, as described above. In this illustrative example, instrument assembly **2804** includes a primary guide tube, a secondary guide tube, and a single instrument, along with associated transmission and actuator mechanisms, as described above. Imaging system assembly **2806** includes a guide tube and an imaging system, along with associated transmission and actuator mechanisms, as described above. Each of these mechanisms **2802**, **2804**,**2806** enters the body **2808** via a separate, unique port as shown. The devices shown are illustrative of the various rigid and flexible aspects described herein.

[**0275**] FIG. **28**B is another diagrammatic view that illustrates multi-port aspects. FIG. **28**B shows three illustrative instruments or assemblies **2810** entering different natural orifices (nostrils, mouth) and then continuing via a single body lumen (throat) to reach a surgical site.

[**0276**] FIGS. **29**A and **29**B are diagrammatic views that illustrate further aspects of minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly position sensing and motion control. As shown in FIG. **29**A, the distal end **2902** of a surgical instrument device or assembly is advanced within the walls **2904** of a body lumen or other cavity towards surgical site **2906**. Distal end **2902** is illustrative of various components, such as a guide probe or guide tube as described above. As distal end **2902** advances it is moved (flexed as shown, or pivoted at a joint) up and down and side to side, as depicted by the alternate position lines. As the tip of distal end **2902** touches, or comes close to touching, a position on walls **2904**, actuator control system **2908** records the tip's position and stores the position data in memory **2910**. Tip position information may come directly from the surgical instrument assembly or from an external sensor **2912**, as described

above. The tip may be bent in various 3-dimensional directions so that it touches or nearly touches walls **2904** in various patterns (e.g., a series of rings, a helix, a series of various crosses or stars, etc.), either under a surgeon's direct control or under automatic control by control system **2908**. Once the lumen's or cavity's interior space is mapped, the space information is used to assist advancing subsequent surgical instrument assembly components, as illustrated in FIG. **29**B. As an example, a secondary guide tube **2912** with side exit ports is shown, and control system **2908** uses the map information to prevent primary guide tubes **2914***a*, **2914***b* and their associated end effectors from interfering with walls **2904** as they are advanced towards surgical site **2906**.

[**0277**] FIGS. **29**C-**29**E are diagrammatic plan views that illustrate further aspects of preventing undesired instrument collision with tissue. Instruments may collide with patient tissue outside of an imaging system's field of view in spaces confined by patient anatomy (e.g., laryngeal surgery). Such collisions may damage tissue. For multi-DOF surgical instruments, some DOFs may be inside the field of view while other, more proximal DOFs may be outside the field of view. Consequently, a surgeon may be unaware that tissue damage is occurring as these proximal DOFs move. As shown in FIG. **29**C, for example, an endoscopic imaging system **2920** extends from the end of guide tube **2922**. The left side working instrument **2924***a* is placed so that all DOFs are within imaging system **2920**'s field of view **2926** (bounded by the dashed lines). The right side working instrument **2924***b*, however, has proximal DOFs (an illustrative parallel motion mechanism as described above and wrist are shown) that are outside field of view **2926**, even though instrument **2924***b*'s end effector is within field of view **2926**. This instrument position is illustrative of tasks such as tying sutures.

[**0278**] In one aspect, field of view boundaries can be determined when the camera is manufactured so that the boundaries are known in relation to the camera head (image capture component). The boundary information is then stored in a nonvolatile memory associated with the imaging system that incorporates the camera head. Consequently, the control system can use the imaging system instrument's kinematic and joint position information to locate the camera head relative to the working instruments, and therefore the control system can determine the field of view boundaries relative to the working instruments. Instruments are then controlled to work within the boundaries.

[**0279**] In another aspect for stereoscopic imaging systems, field of view boundaries can be determined relative to the instruments by using machine vision algorithms to identify the instruments and their positions in the field of view. This "tool tracking" subject is disclosed in U.S. Patent Application Publication No. US 2006/0258938 A1 (Hoffman et al.), which is incorporated by reference.

[**0280**] As shown in FIG. **29**D, imaging system **2920** is placed so that the camera head is just at the distal end of guide tube **2922**. Instruments **2924***a* and **2924***b* are extended from the distal end of the guide tube and within imaging system **2920**'s field of view. An "Allowable Volume" is defined to be coincident with the field of view boundaries. The control system prevents any part of instruments **2924***a* and **2924***b* from moving outside the Allowable Volume. Since the surgeon can see all distal moving parts of instruments **2924***a* and **2924***b*, the surgeon then moves the instruments without colliding with surrounding tissue. The instrument movements are recorded, and an "Instrument Volume"**2928** (bounded by the dotted lines), which is bounded by the farthest movements of the instruments, is determined. The Instrument Volume is a convex volume within which instruments may be moved without colliding with tissue.

[**0281**] Next, imaging system **2920** is inserted as shown in FIG. **29**E. As a result, field of view **2926** is also inserted, and parts of instruments **2924***a*,**2924***b* are outside of the inserted field of view **2926**. A new Allowable Volume is determined to be the newly inserted field of view plus the previously determined Instrument Volume that is outside of the field of view. Therefore, the control system will allow the surgeon to move an instrument anywhere within the new Allowable Volume. The process may be repeated for further field of view insertions or for guide tube **2922** movements. This scheme allows a surgeon to define the allowable instrument range of motion in real time without requiring a tissue model. The surgeon is only required to trace the boundaries of the instrument range of motion inside the field of view, and the control system will record this information as the field of view is changed.

[**0282**] Another way to prevent unwanted instrument/tissue collision is by using image mosaicing. FIG. **29**F is a diagrammatic view of a display (e.g., stereoscopic) that a surgeon sees during a surgical procedure. As shown in FIG. **29**F, the image from the new, more inserted field of view **2940** (bounded by the dashed lines) is registered and mosaiced with the image from the old, more withdrawn field of view **2942**. Image mosaicing is known (see e.g., U.S. Pat. No. 4,673,988 (Jansson et al.) and U.S. Pat. No. 5,999,662 (Burt et al.), which are incorporated by reference) and has been applied to medical equipment (see e.g., U.S. Pat. No. 7,194,118 (Harris et al.), which is incorporated by reference). As a result the surgeon sees an area larger than the current more inserted field of view. A kinematically accurate graphical simulation of the instruments is shown in the old field of view **2942** so that the surgeon can see possible collisions in this region as the instruments move.

[**0283**] In some aspects, minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly components may be replaced by hand during surgery. In other aspects, components may be automatically replaced. FIG. **30** is a schematic view that illustrates a mechanism for automatically exchanging minimally invasive surgical instruments (e.g., those of approximately 3 mm diameter, such as flexible laparoscopic instruments with a single grip DOF) during surgery. As shown in FIG. **30**, an instrument magazine **3002** has several instruments **3004***a*, **3004***b*,**3004***c* stored (e.g., three, as depicted). The instruments may be stored on a drum, linearly extended, or otherwise. In some aspects, the instruments in magazine **3002** are selected for each surgical procedure—that is, the surgeon determines the instruments to be used for a specific procedure, and magazine **3002** is configured accordingly. As FIG. **30** illustrates, magazine **3002** is positioned to allow actuator control system **3006** to advance instrument **3004***a* into guide tube **3008**. To exchange an instrument, control system **3006** withdraws instrument **3004***a* from guide tube **3008** and repositions magazine **3002** to advance either instrument **3004***b* or **3004***c* into guide tube **3008**. The magazine, instruments, and guide tube shown in FIG. **30** are illustrative of various components described herein (e.g., instruments, primary and secondary guide tubes, guide probes, imaging systems (optical, infrared, ultrasound), and the like).

[0284] FIG. **30**A is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of storing an instrument or other component on a drum. Instrument **3004** is extended as drum **3020** rotates inside magazine housing **3022**. Actuator **3006** for instrument **3004**'s end effector **3008** is positioned on drum **3020**. Actuator **3006** is illustrative of other actuator assemblies that may be used if, for example, a steerable guide tube is to be advanced instead. Instrument **3004** is coiled loosely enough so that the cable actuator for end effector **3008** does not bind within its flexible cover. FIG. **30**B is a schematic view that illustrates aspects of storing automatically replaceable instruments on spools **3030** mounted on individual capstans **3032**.

[0285] FIG. **31** is a diagrammatic perspective view that shows aspects of an illustrative minimally invasive surgical instrument assembly that includes a multi-jointed instrument dedicated to retraction. As shown in FIG. **31**, guide tube **3102** includes a channel **3104**, through which an imaging system is inserted, and three channels **3106***a*,**3106***b*,**3106***c*, through which surgical instruments may be inserted. Retraction instrument **3108** is shown extending through channel **3106***c*.

[0286] As depicted, retraction instrument **3108** includes a proximal instrument body **3110** and four serial links **3112***a-d*. Four joints **3114***a-d* couple proximal instrument body **3110** and links **3112***a-d* together. In one aspect, each joint **3114***a-d* is an independently controllable single DOF pitch joint. In other aspects the joints may have additional DOFs. An actively controlled (either hand or telemanipulated) gripper **3116** is mounted at the distal end of the most distal link **3112***d* via a passive roll joint **3118**. In some aspects other end effectors, or none, may be substituted for the gripper. In one aspect the combined length of links **3112***a-d* and gripper **3116** is sufficient to retract tissue beyond the working envelope of instruments that extend through channels **3106***a* and **3106***b*. For example, the combined lengths of the links and the gripper may be approximately equal to the full insertion range (e.g., approximately 5 inches) of the instruments. Four links and joints are shown, and other numbers of links and joints may be used. Retraction is done using various combinations of pitching joints **3114***a-d* and rolling instrument **3108** within channel **3106***c*.

[0287] For retraction, instrument **3108** is inserted so that each joint **3114***a-d* is exposed one after the other. Insertion depth may be varied so that retraction can begin at various distances from the distal end of the guide tube with various numbers of joints as the joints exit from the guide tube's distal end. That is, for example, retraction may begin as soon as joint **3114***d* is inserted past the distal end of the guide tube. For retraction, gripper **3116** may grip tissue. Passive roll joint **3118** prevents the gripped tissue from being torqued as instrument **3108** is rolled within channel **3106***c*. In one aspect, the control system couples the motions of instrument **3108** and guide tube **3102**. This coupled control of motion allows tissue to be held in place by gripper **3116** as the guide tube is moved to the left or right "underneath" the retracted tissue. For example, as the distal end of guide tube **3102** is moved to the left, instrument **3108** is rolled (and joint **3114***a-d* pitch may be changed) to move gripper **3116** to the right.

[0288] FIG. **31** further illustrates an aspect of instrument position and control within guide tubes. The working surgical instruments need not be inserted though guide tube channels that correspond to or are aligned with their working position. For example, as shown in FIG. **31** the left side working instrument does not have to be inserted through the left-most channel **3106***c*. Instead, the left side working instrument may be inserted via the "bottom" channel **3106***b*. The right side working instrument may then be inserted via the right-most channel **3106***a*. Then, the left and right side working instruments may be controlled to work at a surgical site in alignment with the field of view of an imaging system inserted via channel **3104** that has not been rolled or yawed. Stated another way, the left-right axis between the working instruments' insertion channels does not have to be aligned with the left-right axis between the working instruments' end effectors at the surgical site or with the left-right axis interpupillary axis of the stereoscopic imaging system. Further, by the control system recognizing which instrument is coupled to each particular actuator, left-right instrument position may be varied. For example, retraction instrument **3108** may be inserted via channel **3106***a*, the right side working instrument may be inserted via channel **3106***b*, and the left side working instrument may be inserted via channel **3106***c*. In some aspects, with appropriately shaped channels and/or imaging systems, the imaging system may be inserted via one of several channels. For example, "top" channel **3104** and "bottom" channel **3106***b* may be oblong shaped with a center bore that holds a cylindrical instrument body, as shown in FIG. **20**A. Consequently, an imaging system may be inserted via the "top" or "bottom" channel, and a working instrument may be inserted via the other "top" or "bottom" channel.

[0289] These descriptions of examples of various minimally invasive surgical systems, assemblies, and instruments, and of the associated components, are not to be taken as limiting. It should be understood that many variations that incorporate the aspects described herein are possible. For example, various combinations of rigid and flexible instruments and instrument components, and of guide tubes and guide tube components, fall within the scope of this description. The claims define the invention.

1. A surgical instrument assembly comprising:

a secondary guide tube having at least two side exit ports;

a first primary guide tube that extends through the secondary guide tube and exits via a first one of the side exit ports;

a second primary guide tube that extends through the secondary guide tube and exits via a second one of the side exit ports;

a first surgical instrument that extends through and exits a distal end of the first primary guide tube; and

a second surgical instrument that extends through and exits a distal end of the second primary guide tube.

2. The assembly of claim 1:

wherein the first side exit port is directly opposite the second side exit port.

3. (canceled)

4. The assembly of claim 1:

wherein the first primary guide tube comprises a bend sensor.

5. (canceled)

6. The assembly of claim 1:

wherein the first instrument comprises a bend sensor.

7. The assembly of claim 1:

wherein at least a portion of the first primary guide tube that extends from the first one of the side exit ports comprises an actively controllable flexible segment.

8. The assembly of claim 7:

wherein the actively controllable flexible segment of the first primary guide tube is the most distal segment of the first primary guide tube; and

wherein the actively controllable flexible segment of the first primary guide tube moves an end effector of the first surgical instrument.

9. The assembly of claim 1:

wherein the first surgical instrument can be removed and replaced with a third surgical instrument during a surgical procedure.

10. The assembly of claim 1:

wherein the first primary guide tube can be removed and replaced with a third primary guide tube during a surgical procedure.

11. The assembly of claim 1, further comprising:

a third surgical instrument that extends through and exits the distal end of the secondary guide tube.

12. (canceled)

13. The assembly of claim 1:

wherein the secondary guide tube comprises an actively controllable flexible portion.

14. The assembly of claim 1:

wherein the secondary guide tube comprises an actively controllable retroflexive portion.

15. The assembly of claim 1:

wherein the retroflexive portion retroflexes in a pitch degree of freedom, in a yaw degree of freedom, or in both pitch and yaw degrees of freedom.

16. The assembly of claim 1:

wherein a portion of the secondary guide tube between the side exit ports and the distal end is flexible; and

wherein the portion of the secondary guide tube between the side exit ports and the distal end is movable while the positions of the side exit ports remain unchanged.

17. The assembly of claim 1:

wherein a cross sectional shape of the secondary guide tube comprises an oblong shape;

wherein the first primary guide tube extends through a first end of the oblong shape; and

wherein the second primary guide tube extends through a second end of the oblong shape.

18. The assembly of claim 1, further comprising:

a telemanipulative control system that controls movement of the secondary guide tube, the first and second primary guide tubes, and the first and second surgical instruments.

19. (canceled)

20. A method comprising:

extending a first primary guide tube through a first side exit port in a secondary guide tube;

extending a second primary guide tube through a second side exit port in the secondary guide tube;

extending a first surgical instrument through the first primary guide tube;

extending a second surgical instrument through the second primary guide tube; and

positioning a distal end of the first surgical instrument and a distal end of the second surgical instruments in a field of view of a stereoscopic image capture component.

21. The method of claim 20, further comprising:

automatically extending a distal end of the first primary guide tube into the field of view of the image capture component as the first primary guide tube is extended from the first side exit port.

22. The method of claim 20, further comprising:

replacing the first primary guide tube with a third primary guide tube during a surgical procedure; and

positioning a distal end of the third primary guide tube within the field of view of the image capture component.

23. The method of claim 20, further comprising:

extending a third surgical instrument through an exit port at the distal end of the guide tube.

24. The method of claim 20, further comprising:

retroflexing the secondary guide tube.

25. The method of claim 20, further comprising:

retroflexing the secondary guide tube in a pitch degree of freedom, in a yaw degree of freedom, or in both Ditch and yaw degrees of freedom.

26. The method of claim 20, further comprising:

moving a segment of the secondary guide tube that is between the side exit ports and the distal end of the secondary guide tube while the side exit ports remain stationary.

27. The method of claim 20, further comprising:

telemanipulatively controlling the secondary guide tube, the first primary guide tube, the secondary guide tube, the first surgical instrument, and the second surgical instrument.

28. A method comprising:

automatically guiding a distal portion of a primary guide tube as the distal portion extends through a side exit port of a secondary guide tube so that a distal end of the primary guide tube is automatically moved into a field of view of an endoscopic vision system; and

inserting a surgical instrument through the extended primary guide tube so that a distal end of the surgical instrument is within the field of view of the endoscopic vision system.

29. The method of claim 28 further comprising:

moving the distal portion of the primary guide tube so as to apply a working force by the distal end of the surgical instrument against tissue.

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