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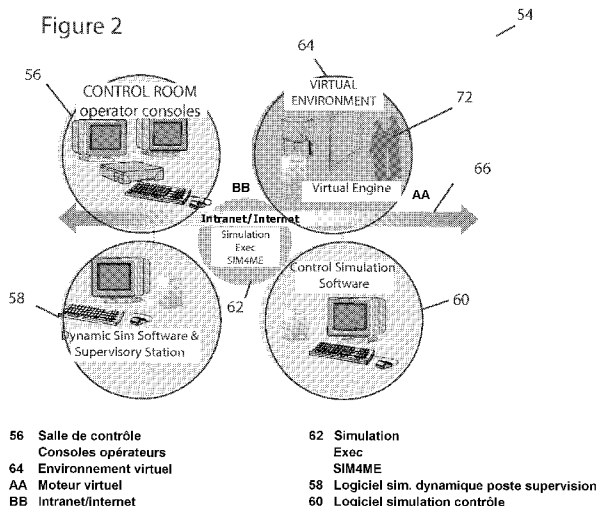
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(54) Title: SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR IMMERSIVE INTERACTION WITH ACTUAL AND/OR SIMULATED FACIL-
ITIES FOR PROCESS, ENVIRONMENTAL AND INDUSTRIAL CONTROL

(57) Abstract: The invention provides, in some aspects, systems for interaction with a control environment that includes controlled equipment along with control devices that monitor and control that controlled equipment. According to some of those aspects, such a system includes first functionality that generates output representing an operational status of the controlled equipment, as well as second functionality that generates output representing an operational of one or more of the control devices. An engine coordinates the first functionality and to the second functionality to generate an operational status of the control environment. A virtual reality environment generates, as a function of that operational status and one or more physical aspects of the control environment, a three-dimensional ("3D") display of the control environment. The virtual reality environment is responsive to user interaction with one or more input devices to generate the 3D display so as to permit the user to interact with at least one of the control devices and the controlled equipment at least as represented by the 3D display of the control environment. The engine applies to at least one of the first and second functionality indicia of those interactions to discern resulting changes in the operational status of the control environment. It applies indicia of those changes to the virtual reality environment to effect corresponding variation in the 3D display of the control environment — i.e., variation indicative of the resulting change in the control environment.



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Systems and Methods for Immersive Interaction with Actual and/or Simulated Facilities for Process, Environmental and Industrial Control

Reference to Related Applications

This application claims the benefit of priority of United States Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 61/074,472, filed June 20, 2008, entitled “Immersive Training Simulator,” and United States Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 61/155,160, filed February 25, 2009, entitled “Systems and Methods for Immersive Interaction with Actual and/or Simulated Facilities for Process, Environmental and Industrial Control.”.

Background of the Invention

The invention pertains to digital data processing and, more particularly, by way of non-limiting example, to immersive interaction with actual and simulated environments. The invention has application, for example, in operation, maintenance and emergency response training for plants and other facilities utilizing process, environmental control, or other industrial and/or non-industrial control.

Facilities dependent on process, environmental, industrial and other control technologies are becoming increasingly complex. This includes multi-acre product assembly plants, pharmaceuticals factories, oil refineries, power plants and other large industrial operations. It also includes sky scrapers and other building complexes with intricate power, climate control, people-mover and other infra-structure “plants.” These are among the facilities that rely on “control” or “control systems” to monitor their characteristics and, thereby, to insure that output, processing, quality and/or efficiency remain within desired limits over the course of time.

Those systems may include many components, from field devices and controllers to workstations and other, more powerful digital data processing apparatus, the functions of which may overlap. Field devices include temperature, flow and other sensors that measure characteristics of the subject device, process or system. They also include valves and other actuators that mechanically, electrically, magnetically, or otherwise effect the desired control.

Controllers generate settings for the control devices based on measurements from sensor-type field devices. Controller operation is typically based on a "control algorithm" that maintains a controlled system at a desired level, or drives it to that level, by minimizing differences between the values measured by the sensors and, for example, a set-point defined by the operator. Workstations, control stations and the like are typically used to configure and monitor the process as a whole. They are often also used to execute higher-levels of process control, e.g., coordinating groups of controllers and responding to alarm conditions occurring within them.

One or more of these control system components may include software and/or hardware logic to monitor characteristics of the facilities that they control and to automatically adjust their operational parameters to insure these limits are achieved. Others display alarms or other indicia of the characteristics, leaving responsibility for adjustment to plant operators or other personnel.

In a petroleum refinery, for example, thousands of controllers physically distributed over acres of the plant may monitor and actuate tens of thousands sensors, actuators and other field devices to transport raw incoming crude for processing. The controllers are, in turn, coordinated by workstations and larger digital data processing equipment to move desired quantities of the crude at desired rates to available boilers and distillate columns. Field devices in and around those boilers and columns monitor the processing parameters to maximize distillate production and to move to the resultant gasoline, diesel fuel and other co-products for downstream processing. Plant personnel monitor and control these operations from workstations in a central control room and strategically disposed control stations. They also perform continual walk-throughs of the refinery for on-hand inspection, adjustment, and maintenance of the equipment. In the event of emergency, emergency response crews execute manual and machine overrides while, at the same time, rescuing those in harm's way.

Whether for a petroleum refinery, an assembly plant, or other complex facility, training personnel for operation and maintenance tasks can be very expensive, especially, given the intricacies introduced and imposed by the underlying process, environmental, industrial and other control technologies. These expenses are compounded when training emergency responders, some of who may have little or no day-to-day familiarity with the facility, are

taken into account. In addition to training, there is considerable added expense for putting personnel in on the “floor” to conduct walk-throughs for routine monitoring, maintenance and the like.

An object of the invention is to provide improved systems and methods for digital data processing.

A related object is to provide such systems and methods for immersive interaction with actual and simulated environments.

A still further related object is to provide such systems and methods for use in the operation, maintenance and emergency response.

Another such related object is to provide such systems and methods as can be used training personnel for operation, maintenance and emergency response.

Yet a still further related object is to provide such systems and methods as can be used in facilities utilizing process, environmental control, or other industrial and/or non-industrial control.

Still yet a further object is to provide such systems and methods as reduce costs associated with operation, maintenance and emergency response and/or training personnel therefore.

Summary of the Invention

The foregoing are among the objects attained by the invention, which provides in some aspects systems for interaction with a control environment that includes controlled equipment along with control devices that monitor and control that controlled equipment. According to some of those aspects, such a system includes first functionality that generates output representing an operational status of the controlled equipment, as well as second functionality that generates output representing an operational of one or more of the control devices. An engine coordinates the first functionality and to the second functionality to generate an operational status of the control environment.

A virtual reality environment generates, as a function of that operational status and one or more physical aspects of the control environment, a three-dimensional ("3D") display of the control environment. The virtual reality environment is responsive to user interaction with one or more input devices to generate the 3D display so as to permit the user to interact with at least one of the control devices and the controlled equipment at least as represented by the 3D display of the control environment. The engine applies to at least one of the first and second functionality indicia of those interactions to discern resulting changes in the operational status of the control environment. It applies indicia of those changes to the virtual reality environment to effect corresponding variation in the 3D display of the control environment — i.e., variation indicative of the resulting change in the control environment.

The virtual reality environment, according to aspects of the invention, displays the control environment as the participant would see it in actuality, i.e., as if he/she were really there. As a result, systems according to the invention a user to experience, via the 3D display of the control environment, interaction with and travel through (e.g., a "walk-through") the control environment — which maybe actual or simulated. They can be used to monitor and control operational parameters of the environment and to support training of plant or other of personnel, e.g., first responders or other safety personnel.

Further aspects of the invention provide systems, for example, as described above, in which physical aspects of the control environment are reflected in a CAD/CAM database

and/or a three-dimensional laser scan of at least a portion of the control environment, i.e., of one or more of the controlled equipment and/or control devices. In related aspects of the invention, those physical aspects may be reflected in a plurality of two-dimensional images of at least a portion of the control environment. This may be, for example, a database containing hundreds or thousands of images of a plant that includes the controlled equipment and/or control devices, and functionality is provided in some aspects of the invention for generating a three-dimensional representation of the control environment from those images.

Still other aspects of the invention provide systems as described above in which the virtual reality environment augments the 3D display of the control environment by (i) superimposing graphics on representations of one or more controlled equipment and/or one or more control devices, and/or (ii) altering the representational displays of controlled equipment, control devices and/or other objects to give the user the impression of seeing into, through and/or around them.

The superimposed graphics, which can include, for example, graphs, equations and other visual aids, can be based on simulated and/or actual operational data for the controlled equipment and/or control devices. The superimposed graphics can also include still and/or video images taken by fixed or mobile cameras (including, by way of non-limiting example, still or video cameras included in mobile phones, personal digital assistants, or PDAs and other such devices that maybe carried by personnel in or around the control environment).

The altered representational displays can, likewise, be based on such simulated and/or actual operational data, e.g., representing the inner workings and/or “behind the scenes” operation of the control devices, the controlled equipment (and the materials they process).

Benefits of system according to foregoing (and other) aspects of the invention are their ability to generate 3D displays of the control environment that not only represent the behavior of the controlled equipment and/or control devices, but do so in a manner that is in agreement with the actual or simulated condition of the control environment.

In still other aspects, the invention provides systems as described above in which the first and/or second functionalities are coupled to any of configuration and a modeling database ("configuration" database), an application database and a runtime database. Such a configuration database can include, for example, one or more control strategies for one or more of the controlled equipment and/or control devices. The application and/or runtime databases can include, for example, simulated and/or actual current operational data for the controlled equipment and/or control devices. Those database(s) may include, instead or in addition, simulated and/or actual historical operational data for the devices and/or equipment.

Yet, in still other aspects, the first functionality includes dynamic simulation software or other functionality that simulates operation of one or more of the controlled equipment. That simulation software may be, for example, a solver or other system for solving mathematical systems of equations.

In related aspects of the invention, the second functionality comprises software or other functionality that simulates operation of one or more of the control devices.

Still further aspects of the invention provide a systems as described above that additionally include a control room workstation or other digital data processor that monitors and/or controls user interaction with the control devices and/or controlled equipment as represented in the 3D display of the control environment. Such a workstation can be used, for example, by a supervisor, training instructor, co-trainee or other person. To that end, the control room digital data processor can be adapted to enable its users to witness effects of interaction between users of the virtual reality environment with respect to at least one of the control devices and the controlled equipment, e.g., as as represented by the 3D display. Likewise, the virtual reality environment can be adapted to enable its users to witness effects of actions by users of the control room digital data processor, again, for example, with with respect to at least one of the control devices and the controlled equipment, e.g., as as represented by the 3D display.

Still further aspects of the invention provide methods for operating and using systems as described above.

These and other aspects of the invention are evident in the drawings and in the description that follows.

Brief Description of the Drawings

A more complete understanding of the invention may be attained by reference to the drawings, in which

Figure 1 depicts an environment of the type with which systems and methods of the invention are practiced;

Figures 2 – 3 depicts a system according to the invention for immersive interaction with an environment of the type shown in Figure 1;

Figures 4A – 4B depict displays of the type generated by systems according to the invention with an augmented display of controlled equipment and/or control devices.

Detailed Description of the Illustrated Embodiment

Figure 1 depicts an environment 5 of the type with which systems and methods of the invention are practiced. The illustrated environment, all or parts of which may be actual or simulated, comprises a control system 10 and a facility controlled by that system 10.

That facility is represented, here, by processing stations 20a – 20d, etc., of the type used in a pharmaceuticals factory, though, in other embodiments, the facility may be an assembly plant, oil refinery, power plant or other industrial or non-industrial operation (such as, by way of non-limiting example, a building complex) that relies on control to monitor characteristics of the controlled equipment, the materials or other things processed by them, the processes by which they are processed, and/or the elements of the control system 10, itself, to insure that output, processing, quality and/or efficiency remain within desired limits over the course of time.

Returning to the drawing, illustrative station 20a of the illustrative pharmaceuticals factory includes mixing chamber 22, fluid inlets 24, 26, fluid outlet 28, paddle 30, cooler 32, and cooler inlet 34. The other processing stations, of which there may be zero or more, may be similarly configured or otherwise.

Illustrated system 10 includes networked control devices that monitor and controlled equipment 22 – 32, the materials or other things processed by them, the processes by which they are processed, and/or the elements of the control system 10, itself, as discussed above. The control devices of illustrated system 10 perform such monitoring and control in accord with process control techniques of the type known in the art. In other embodiments, the control devices may instead or in addition exercise environmental control, or other industrial and/or non-industrial control technologies.

The illustrated control devices include actuator-type field devices ("actuators"), such as the valves depicted as controlling inlets and outlets 24 – 28 and 34. A further actuator is shown controlling paddle 30. These and other actuators utilized by the control system are constructed and operated in the conventional manner, as modified in accord with the teach-

ings hereof. The actuators of the illustrated embodiment operate under control of respective field device controllers, labeled CTL, that are also constructed and operated in the conventional manner to provide initialization, signal conditioning and communications functions.

Rather than using separate controllers CTL, the actuators can be of the intelligent variety and can include integral microprocessors or other digital data processing apparatus for control, initialization, signal conditioning, communications and other control-related functions. For sake of convenience, the label CTL is used regardless of whether the control-related functionality is integral to the actuators (e.g., as in the case of intelligent actuators) or otherwise.

The Illustrated control devices include sensor-type field devices ("sensors"), such as temperature sensor 29 that monitors a temperature, level or other characteristic of fluid in chamber 22. The sensor 29, as well as other sensors and sensing apparatus utilized by the system, are constructed and operated in the conventional manner known in the art, as modified in accord with the teachings hereof. They can be coupled to the control network via a transmitter or other interface device INT that, too, is constructed and operated in the conventional manner, as modified in accord the teachings hereof. The interface devices facilitate initialization, signal conditioning and communications between the sensors and the control system. As above, one or more sensors can be of the intelligent variety, incorporating integral microprocessors or other digital data processing capabilities for initialization, signal conditioning, communications and other control-related functions. Here, too, the label INT is used in reference to the control-related functionality, regardless of whether embodied in an intelligent transmitter or otherwise.

The networked control devices include one or more controllers 36 that monitor and control respective aspects of the hypothetical pharmaceuticals plant in the conventional manner, as modified in accord with the teachings hereof. The controllers can comprise main-frame computers, workstations, personal computers, special-purpose hardware or other digital data processing apparatus capable of performing such monitoring and control functions, as adapted in accord with the teachings hereof. Preferred controllers are constructed and oper-

ated in the manner of the CP control processors commercially available from the assignee hereof, as modified in accord with the teachings herein.

The control system 10 includes a variety of devices that serve as user interfaces and that provide configuration and/or control functions, all in the conventional manner as modified in accord with the teachings hereof. Illustrated for these purposes are workstation 40, laptop computer 42 and handheld computer 44. These devices can provide configuration and control functions directly, as in the case of workstation 40, or in cooperation with server devices, e.g., as in the case of handheld computer 44 and server 46. Apparatus 40 - 44 can couple with the control network directly, e.g., via bus or network connection, or indirectly, e.g., via satellite, wireless connection or modem connection.

Illustrative control devices 36 - 46, CTL and INT are coupled for communications via a medium that permits at least selected ones of the devices to communicate with one another. To this end, in the illustrated embodiment those devices are coupled via one or more networks 48 that are, preferably, IP-based such as, by way of non-limiting example, Ethernets (e.g., local area networks, wide area networks, metropolitan area networks, and the like, by way of non-limiting example). The network(s) can include, as indicated in the drawing, multiple segments such as various wide and local area networks. They may also include high and/or low bandwidth components, such as phone lines, and low and/or high latency components, such as geosynchronous satellites networks. One or more of the control devices 36 - 46 and/or networks 48 can be further coupled to the Internet 50 or other networks via internetwork server 47, or otherwise.

Control system 10, including illustrative devices 36 - 48, may be of the type known in the art and commercially available, by way of non-limiting example, from the assignee hereof. One such control system is described, again, by way of non-limiting example, in United States Patent No. 6,788,980, the teachings of which are incorporated herein by reference.

As per convention in the art, one or more databases contain model(s) of the control system 10 and apparatus at the facility controlled by it and, more particularly, by way of ex-

ample, models of controlled equipment 22 – 32, the materials or other things processed by them, the processes by which they are processed, and/or the elements of the control system 10, including, for example, control devices 36 – 46 — including the control strategy executed by them. Thus, for example, such a model enumerates field devices, control devices, controllers and other apparatus that perform control, specifying their interrelationships and the information transferred between and among them, as well as detailing the calculations and methodology they apply for purposes of control.

Such models can be generated by configurators of the type known in the art (e.g., as disclosed in United States Patents 7,096,465, entitled “Process Control Configuration System with Parameterized Objects,” and 6,788,980, entitled “Methods and Apparatus for Control Using Control Devices That Provide a Virtual Machine Environment and That Communicate Via an IP Network,” the teachings of both which are incorporated herein by reference), or otherwise. These models can be stored in central databases and/or distributed among control devices 36 – 46, e.g., as disclosed in aforementioned, incorporated-by-reference United States Patents 7,096,465 and 6,788,980, as well as in PCT Application WO03/89,995, entitled “Methods and Apparatus for Process, Factory-Floor, Environmental, Computer Aided Manufacturing-Based or Other Control System With Real-Time Data Distribution,” the teachings of which are also incorporated herein by reference.

In addition to configuration or modeling database(s), the system can include one or more application databases and/or runtime databases, e.g., of the type disclosed in aforementioned, incorporated-by-reference PCT Application WO03/89,995, to maintain *inter alia* current and/or historical operational or other information regarding the control system 10 and apparatus at the facility controlled by it and, more particularly, by way of example, controlled equipment 22 – 32, the materials or other things processed by them, the processes by which they are processed, and/or the elements of the control system 10, including, for example, control devices 36 – 46 — including the control strategy for executed by them.

The foregoing configuration/modeling, application and/or runtime databases are represented for illustrative purposes only by elements 52a – 52c in the drawings. Though shown distributed among only several of the control devices 36 – 46 in the drawing, in practice these

may be consolidated in fewer or distributed among more such devices or otherwise, all in the conventional manner known in the art.

As noted above, all or parts of the environment illustrated in Figure 1 may be actual or simulated. Thus, by way of non-limiting example, processing stations 20a – 20d, control devices 36 – 46, and configuration/modeling database may be actual, as may be their operation. Such is the case, for example, in an operational (or “up and running”) factory or other environment. In such a case, application and/or runtime databases, e.g., 52a – 52e, contain actual current and/or historical operational information. Construction and operation of an actual environment of the type illustratively depicted in Figure 1 may be accomplished in a manner known in the art, as adapted in accord with the teachings hereof.

By way of further non-limiting example, processing stations 20a – 20d, control devices 36 – 46, and configuration/modeling database may be actual, yet, their operation may be simulated. Such is the case, for example, in a pre-operational factory or other environment. In such a case, application and/or runtime databases, e.g., 52a – 52e, contain at least some simulated current and/or historical operational information. Simulation of the operation an actual environment of the type illustratively depicted in Figure 1 may be accomplished in a manner known in the art, as adapted in accord with the teachings hereof. Simulation of such operation, e.g., based on configuration/modeling database(s) and/or processing station specifications, may be performed using software packages available in the art, including, by way of non-limiting example, those based on the SIM4ME® simulation software available from the assignee hereof, as adapted in accord with the teachings hereof.

By way of still further non-limiting example, processing stations 20a – 20d, control devices 36 – 46, and configuration/modeling database may be simulated, as may their operation. Such is the case, for example, in a factory or other environment that is under design. Simulation of processing stations and/or control devices may be performed using computer aided design and manufacturing packages of the type known in the art, while simulation of the operation of such stations and devices may be performed using software packages of the type discussed above, all as adapted in accord with the teachings hereof.

Figure 2 depicts a system 54 according to the invention for immersive interaction with an environment 5 of the type described above. More particularly, illustrated system 54 provides for immersive interaction with a simulated such environment, though, it will be readily appreciated from the teachings hereof how such a system can be adapted for immersive interaction with an actual such environment.

Illustrated system 54 includes a control room 56 with operator console(s) 56A, dynamic simulation software 58 and workstation 58A, control device simulation software 60, a simulation engine 62, a virtual reality environment (including a VR engine) 64, coupled for communication via one or more networks 66 or otherwise. Other embodiments may include lesser or more elements and may be configured other than as shown here.

Illustrated control room 56 represents a conventional control room of the type used in connection with process control and other control technologies. In the illustrated embodiment, this can be used to monitor and control operational parameters of the simulated environment 5, e.g., in the same manner with which such a control room monitors and controls operational parameters of an actual environment 5. In this regard, control room 56 can be used to support training of personnel in virtual reality environment 64 and/or it itself (the control room) can be provide an environment for training (e.g., of control room personnel).

Dynamic simulation software 58 generates output representing the operational status of the plant and or other environment and more particularly, by way of non-limiting example, of the (one or more pieces of) controlled equipment 22 – 32 that make up the plant/environment. That software 58 represents dynamic simulation software of the type commercially available in the marketplace, as adapted in accord with the teachings hereof, though other simulation packages known in the art can be used, as well or instead (again, as adapted in accord with the teachings hereof). In addition to supporting activities of a training instructor (e.g., setting up training exercises for trainees in the virtual reality environment 64) via a supervisory workstation, the simulation software 58 includes “solver” and other simulation support tools to simulate operation of an actual plant or other environment. To this end, the simulation software 58 can include or otherwise be coupled to a configuration/modeling database 70 of the type described above that models, for example, the control system 10 and

apparatus at the facility controlled by, as well as the the materials or other things processed by them. Software 58 may execute on the aforesaid supervisory workstation and/or on other suitable digital data processing apparatus of the type known in the marketplace (including, by way of non-limiting example, the aforesaid control room workstations).

Control device simulation software 60 generates output representing the operational status of the control devices (e.g., 36 - 46, CTL and INT) used to monitor and/or control controlled equipment (e.g., 22 - 32). That software 58 simulates operation of controllers and other control devices of a simulated environment 5. The software 60 represents control simulation software of the type commercially available in the marketplace, as adapted in accord with the teachings hereof, though other simulation packages known in the art can be used, as well or instead (again, as adapted in accord with the teachings hereof). The simulation software 60 can include or otherwise be coupled to a configuration/modeling database (not shown) of the type described above that models, for example, control strategies executed by the simulated control devices. Software 60 may execute on a dedicated workstation of the type shown in the drawing and/or on other suitable digital data processing apparatus (including, by way of non-limiting example, the aforesaid supervisory workstation and/or control room workstations).

Simulation engine 62 works with and coordinates activities of the simulation software 58, 60 and control room workstations to simulate operation of an environment 5 of the type described above for incorporation into an immersive display of that environment (e.g., an immersive display of the physical layout of that environment) in virtual reality environment 64. In the illustrated embodiment, simulation engine represents a software package commercially available from the assignee hereof under the trade name SIM4ME, as adapted in accord with the teachings hereof — though other simulation engines available in the marketplace can be used, as well or instead (again, as adapted in accord with the teachings hereof).

Virtual reality environment 64 provides a three-dimensional or other immersive display of the environment 5, including not only the physical layout of that environment but also a reproduction of the operation of the control system 10 and apparatus at the facility controlled by it and, more particularly, by way of example, controlled equipment 22 - 32, the

materials or other things processed by them, the processes by which they are processed, and/or the elements of the control system 10, including, for example, control devices 36 – 46. Simply put, in some embodiments, the virtual reality environment 64 provides an immersive display of the environment 5 that permits the trainee and/or other user (e.g., maintenance personnel, emergency first responders, and so forth) to experience walkthroughs and other interactions with the environment as if he/she were really there.

That display can be conveyed to participants 72 — particularly, for example, trainees — via stereoscopic headgear of the type used for VR displays. Alternatively, or in addition, it can be displayed via projections on walls of a VR “room.” In addition to display of the simulated environment 5, virtual reality environment 64 can provide sounds and other audible queues associated with that environment. Moreover, it can support trainee interaction with the simulated environment 5 via haptic devices, gaming devices (e.g., Nintendo Wii™ controllers), joysticks, wands, mice, keyboards and the like, all as represented in the drawings by input and output elements 74. Such devices can facilitate navigation and/or interactive manipulation of the simulated environment.

Virtual reality environment 64 accepts input from simulation engine 62 representing the status of the environment 5, including, of processing stations 20a – 20d, controlled equipment 22 – 32, the materials or other things processed by them, the processes by which they are processed, and/or the elements of the control system 10, including, for example, control devices 36 – 46. The input may reflect that status for all aspect of the environment or portions thereof, e.g., the status of equipment, materials, control devices, etc., in a vicinity of the participant in the virtual “world” being displayed within VR environment 64.

In order to display the physical layout of the environment 5 to the participant, virtual reality environment 64 includes or is coupled with one or more databases that can include, by way of example, (i) a CAD/CAM representation of the processing stations 20a – 20d, controlled equipment 22 – 32, and/or elements of the control system 10, including, for example, control devices 36 – 46 (or a portion/subset of one or more of the foregoing), (ii) a 3D laser scan-representation of the processing stations 20a – 20d, controlled equipment 22 – 32, and/or elements of the control system 10, including, for example, control devices 36 – 46 (or a

portion/subset of one or more of the foregoing), and/or (iii) 2D photographs of an actual or simulated environment 5 showing the processing stations 20a – 20d, controlled equipment 22 – 32, and/or elements of the control system 10, including, for example, control devices 36 – 46 (or a portion/subset of one or more of the foregoing).

Virtual reality environment 64 can utilize one or more of those databases to construct immersive displays of the environment 5 and, thereby, to allow the participant to navigate through it and interact, for example, with the controlled equipment and control devices in it. Thus, for example, virtual reality environment 64 can utilize a database of thousands of actual (or simulated) photographs of a plant to display 3D “reconstructions” of it with sufficient realism to make the participant feel as if he/she is really there. Software for performing such reconstruction — or, more precisely, for generating a 3D virtual reality display from 2D images — is available in the marketplace under the trade name Studio Max™, although, other technologies providing such capabilities can be used instead or in addition.

Coupled with input from the simulation engine 62, this permits the participant not only to passively “walk through” the environment, but also to actively participate with it. Thus, actions (such as operating controlled equipment and/or control devices) by the participant in the virtual environment displayed to him/her are conveyed by the simulation engine 62 to software 58, 60 to discern how those actions effect changes in the simulated environment 5 (e.g., changes in levels in tanks, variables on display, etc.) which changes are, in turn, fed back by the simulation engine 62 to the virtual reality environment to generate variations in the VR display of the environment — thus, providing action-reaction feedback to the participant.

By way of non-limiting example, then, a trainee who uses a mouse or other input device to simulate opening a valve in the simulated environment displayed by the virtual reality environment 64 can see (and, with sound effects, hear) the results of that action, e.g., as reflected by VR-simulated displays of gauges on a downstream storage tank displayed in environment 64. Likewise, by way of further non-limiting example, a trainee and/or other user (e.g., maintenance personnel, emergency first responders, and so forth) who fails to react

properly to an alarm signaled in the VR environment can witness, in the safety of the VR environment, the simulated rupture of a piece of equipment and resultant flood fire.

In some embodiments, the virtual reality environment 64 displays the simulated environment 5 not only as the participant would see it in actuality (i.e., as if he/she were really there), but also augments that display. This can include superimposing graphs, equations and other visual aids on controlled equipment and/or control devices (e.g., and particularly, for example, on those equipment/devices affected by the participants actions).

This can also include superimposing still and/or video images taken concurrently (e.g., in “real time”) or at a prior time by fixed or mobile cameras, including, by way of non-limiting example, still or video cameras 90 (Figure 1) that are mounted at known locations in or around environment 5 and/or such cameras that are part of mobile phones, PDAs and other such devices 92 carried by personnel 94 (e.g., maintenance personnel, emergency responders, and so forth) disposed in or around the environment 5. In this latter regard, GPS or other positioning signals generated by such mobile devices may be utilized to correlate still and video scenes with displays generated by environment 64 so that the still and/or video images may be appropriately placed in the display, e.g., on or near the corresponding controlled equipment and/or control devices.

An illustration showing one type of augmented display of the type described above is provided, by way of non-limiting example, in Figure 4A, showing a display 76 of the type generated by virtual reality environment 64 representing controlled equipment 78 (here, a valve) and an actuator 80 that controls it. The figure also depicts a graphic — here, graph 82A — generated by virtual reality environment 64 to augment the display 76 of the control environment and, more specifically, to illustrate behavior of valve 78 and/or actuator 80 under a first set of simulated conditions. The display is further augmented with a fire-and-smoke graphic 83 to emphasize, in this instance, a practical consequence of dangerous equipment/device settings.

Augmented displays generated by the virtual reality environment can also include, by way of non-limiting example, altered the display of controlled equipment and/or control de-

vices (or other aspects of the environment 5) to allow the participant to “see” into, through or around objects — something the participant would not be able to do in actuality. Returning to a preceding example, this “augmented” reality can be used, for example, to permit a trainee and/or other user (e.g., maintenance personnel, emergency first responders, and so forth) who uses a mouse or other input device to simulate opening a valve in the simulated environment to see through the walls of downstream storage tank as it fills with liquid.

The augmentation, whether in the form of superimposed graphics and/or see-through (or other altered-display) equipment, can be based on simulated and/or actual operational data for the controlled equipment and/or control devices (as well, as noted above, on still and/or video images acquired concurrently and/or at a prior time by cameras in or around the environment 5). This results in displays of the simulated environment that not only represent the behavior of the controlled equipment and/or control devices, but do so in a manner that is in agreement with actual or simulated conditions of the environment. Continuing the immediately preceding example, such augmented-reality displays generated by the virtual reality environment 64 permit a trainee and/or other user (e.g., maintenance personnel, emergency first responders, and so forth), for example, to see “through” the walls of the storage tank not only to see how opening a valve in the simulated environment causes a downstream storage tank to fill with liquid, but also to see how the rate-of-flow and viscosity of that liquid are affected temperatures, pressures and/or other actual (or simulated) conditions within the upstream and downstream equipment. This is similarly true, by way of example, in regard to the graph 82 shown in Figure 4A.

In preferred embodiments, these experiences by participants in the virtual reality environment 64 can be connected with those of personnel in the control room 56. Thus, for example, the effects of actions taken by personnel in the control room can be witnessed by participants in the virtual reality environment 64, and vice versa. This can be utilized to improve the training, awareness and/or cooperation of all involved.

Further advantages of the systems and methods described above are that they provide for improved training and/or awareness by merging simulation, e.g., provided by software 58 – 62, and control room emulation, e.g., provided by control room 56, with 3D visualiza-

tion, e.g, provided by virtual reality environment 64, based on real time computation, e.g., provided by software 58 – 62 to support bi-directional feedback between the participant and the simulated environment — or “action/reaction” mode interactions.

Such systems and methods can be used not only in support of training plant personnel, but also emergency responders, and others. In addition, they can be used on connection with maintenance and/or asset management functions of environment 5 — particularly, where it is an actual (and not a simulated) environment. Thus, for example, personnel who are readying for a maintenance “run” through a plant can, first, take a simulated run in the virtual reality environment 64 representing it and, thereby, better familiarize and ready themselves for the actual maintenance run to follow. Such simulated runs can include not only VR displays of equipment to be maintained, upgrade and/or removed, but can also provide for simulated manipulation (e.g., removal) of that equipment using mice, game controllers or other input devices supplied with the environment 64.

The aforesaid utilization of system 54 in support of maintenance and/or asset management is supplemented, in some embodiments, by providing coupling the simulation engine 62 and/or VR environment 64 with “back office” asset and maintenance databases 70. The engine 62 and/or environment 62 can utilize information from those databases to highlight for plant personnel taking simulated run-throughs equipment to be worked or otherwise acted upon.

System 54 can, moreover, be coupled to SIMNET and/or other wireless (or wired networks) to facilitate identification of equipment in need of maintenance, upgrading and so forth. Thus, for example, by coupling the simulation engine 62 and/or VR environment 64 with SIMNET-generated data, the engine 62 and/or environment 62 can generate a VR display for plant personnel highlighting equipment requiring action.

System 54 can, still further, be utilized for people-tracking, e.g, in support of regular maintenance features as well as in support of emergency procedures. Thus, for example, by coupling the simulation engine 62 and/or VR environment 64 to a data stream indicating the location of personnel in the environment 5 (e.g., an actual plant), the engine 62 and/or envi-

ronment 64 can generate a VR display for highlighting the location of personnel equipment requiring action. Such a data stream can be generated, by way of non-limiting example, based on GPS-, wireless-, RFID-, walkie-talkie-, or other technologies known in the art.

System 54 can be utilized both for team and individual training. Thus, as noted above, it can be used to coordinate the actions and communications of personnel in the virtual reality training environment 64 and control room 56. It can also be used to coordinate the actions and communications of multiple personnel in the virtual reality training environment 64. Conversely, it can be used to simultaneously training multiple such personnel in the virtual reality training environment 64, with any of their individual actions affecting the VR simulations displayed to the others.

Investigation and/or Analysis (e.g., VR Crisis Control Room)

As noted above, the virtual reality environment 64 can augment the display of the simulated environment 5, e.g., by superimposing graphics (including still and/or video images) on representations of the controlled equipment and/or control devices and/or by altering its presentation of that equipment and/or devices to allow the the participant to “see” into, through or around them. In accord with the discussion of Figure 4A, for example, the augmented displays can permit a trainee and/or other user to see how his or her actions affect behavior of the simulated environment 5, e.g., in light of actual (or simulated) conditions within the upstream and downstream equipment. Of course, it will be appreciated that such augmented displays can be used for other purposes, e.g., for investigation and/or analysis of simulated or actual operation of the environment 5, for maintenance and/or asset management, to name a few.

Augmented displays which show comparative operation of the environment and, more particularly, for example of the controlled equipment and/or control devices therein, can be used for the foregoing purposes and other purposes, as well. More particularly, by way of non-limiting example, augmented displays that allow the user to compare actual operation of the environment 5 with simulated operation of that environment 5 — and, more particularly, by way of non-limiting example, to compare actual and simulated operation of one or

more of the controlled equipment and/or control devices — can facilitate investigation and/or analysis of environment operation, e.g., for crisis control and other purposes. As above, such actual and/or simulated operation can be discerned from, for example, operational data maintained in application and/or runtime databases 52a – 52 and/or from the configuration database 52a – 52e and/or from cameras in or around the environment 5.

An example of an augmented display showing comparative operation, e.g., of actual and simulated operation of environment 5, is presented in Figure 4B. The display 76' shows the same elements as display 76 of Figure 4A, albeit, it includes — in addition to graph (or other graphic) 82A illustrating the simulated behavior of valve 78 and/or actuator 80 under a first set of simulated conditions — a graph (or other graphic) 82B illustrating the behavior of that valve and/or actuator under a second set of those conditions. As above, the display is augmented with a fire-and-smoke graphic 83 indicating potential danger under the depicted conditions. By comparing these graphics 82A, 82B, the user (e.g., plant personnel, emergency first responders and/or others) can investigate and/or analyze potential faults (or improvements or other variances) in equipment/device operation.

The foregoing is by way of example. As noted, comparative operation can be used for other purposes, as well, e.g., training, planning (e.g., plant design), and so forth. Moreover, it will be appreciated that comparative operation may be shown in other ways, e.g., by other superimposed graphics, by see-through (or other altered-display) equipment/devices, and so forth. Thus, continuing the example of Figure 4B, and without limitation, differing modes of operation of valve 78 and/or actuator 80 as effected by two different models of the environment 5 (from configuration database 52a – 52e) may be shown by see-through (or other altered-display) depicts of that valve/actuator in the display 76'.

Example

A more complete understanding of the system 54 may be attained by reference to the discussion below, in which system 54 as practiced in one embodiment of the invention is alternatively referred to as “the System”.

The System delivers a high-fidelity, unit-specific Immersive Training Simulator suitable for operating at operator-selected speeds (e.g., real-time or faster) and capable of training operators on start-up, shutdown, normal and/or faulted operations. The System includes one complete model of the reference plant including process and controls, a full set of instructor functions as well as the virtual plant environment. The System consists of the plant simulation, the control simulations, the Virtual Plant Environment (a/k/a virtual reality environment, simulation computer hardware, trainee hardware stations and the Instructor Station, as described in more detail below.

General

The System includes a Graphical User Interface (GUI) necessary to operate, and maintain a complete and fully functional the Immersive Training Simulator without the needs to recompile code when new module connections are made. Mathematical models with 3D graphical models of the system in object form determine the simulated behavior resembling reality so that complete control room operators and field operators interactions are always possible. Simulated malfunctions are realistic “in nature” representing the result of defined equipment failures or other specifically defined causes.

The System is capable of performing the following:

- replicate continuously, start-up, throughput changes, and shutdown. This may be performed at operator-selected speeds, e.g., real-time or faster (though it may be performed at slower speeds, as well, if the operator so desires). Indeed, in some embodiments, the System can replicate operator training simulation at three-times real-time speeds and higher. The System models malfunctions, together with System changes initiated through actions from the Instructor Station or from field operators;
- for all units included in the System, simulations and virtual plant interactions are provided for those equipment that are operated from the control room and/or for the field and necessary to support all training objectives.

Plant Simulation

The simulator (a/k/a simulation engine 62) is capable of reproducing all modeled aspects of the reference plant. The mathematical models are based on first principles and generate all data and variables required for output to external devices or needed by other simulation systems. The simulator realistically responds to control room operator action during start-up, shutdown, or any normal and abnormal operation and malfunction condition, within the scope of the simulation.

Virtual Plant – VR ENGINE (a/k/a Virtual Reality Environment)

The purpose of the VR Engine is “to run” an environment that is photorealistic and richly detailed, with realistic “look and feel” objects and illuminations, but running in synchronism with the simulation engine 62 and, thus, for example, it can create the virtual (or simulated) environment at the operator-selected speeds (e.g., real-time or faster). A real time program gives the possibility to let the user move and interact freely within the environment, without being bound to prefixed paths or animations as it happens with a more conventional non-real time rendering. Graphics are adopted both to produce and to visualize 3D real time contents. Such technology permits the environment to be rendered 60 times per second, while a classic non-real time rendering approach can take one hour just to process/render one single frame of the environment. Collision geometry, interactive actions/reactions, trends popup or transparent equipments are available.

Control System Simulation

Control system simulation provides an identical representation and functionality of the distributed control system (DCS) configuration, logic and graphics as they are implemented in the real plant.

Instructor Station

A graphic-based instructor station provides the following control and monitoring features:

- Run/Freeze.
- Initialization.
- Snapshot.
- Backtrack.
- Scenario.
- Malfunction Initiation.
- External Parameters and Instructor Controlled Variables.
- Remote Functions.
- Monitored Parameters.
- Trending.
- Trainee Proficiency Review.
- Operators position tracking in the Virtual Plant.
- Tracking the operator in the Virtual Plant

Performance - Steady State Fidelity

Steady state fidelity for the simulator relates to matching the model-predicted performance with reference plant data under full production values and turndown conditions. For the training simulator, the reference data is comprised of a steady state simulation of the plant using a steady state simulator for critical parameters. Plant measurement or equipment design data for non-critical parameters are used when not available from the steady state simulation.

Performance - Transient Fidelity

The system accurately simulates instructor-initiated transients such that an operator is not able to notice significant differences from the real plant, subject to the modeling scope defined herein. The critical and non-critical computed values correspond to the actual

plant parameters in direction to those expected and will not violate the physical laws of nature.

Performance - System Accuracy

The dynamic precision and immersive “touch” of the ITS Models responses are such that operators and process engineers gain quantitative as well as qualitative process knowledge.

The System provides the trainees with a very realistic representation of the actual process units, in such a manner that there is no significant difference between operating on the System or the real plant.

Typically details on objects are available with accuracy as per “human view” at a distance of 25 cm.

Performance -- Malfunctions

The System supports a wide range of malfunctions as standard. Malfunctions could impact control room operators, field operators or both. Typically, approximately up to five custom malfunctions can be selected for validation, since malfunction validation can be highly time-consuming for complex process.

Performance -- Plant Design & Operating Limits

Events, which progress beyond plant design and operation limits, may be possible with the System. In order to avoid ‘negative’ training that would result from operation during such events, indications are provided to alert the instructor when the certain parameters go outside design and operating limits.

Advantages the systems and methods as described above include the following

1. Increase production
 - Reducing plant downtime due to better trained operators; reduces plant trips
 - Reduced scheduled plant down time for maintenance by trained workers; you know what you have to expect on site and do not need to be trained on the job.
 - Real time feedback from field operators on equipment status
2. Control material costs
 - If this counts for maintenance you can reduce the required building material by better planning and train the task
 - Augmented reality allows the operator in the virtual environment to see the process data by superimposing graphics on the controlled equipment and/or control devices, and/or by altering displays of the equipment/devices to give the user the impression of seeing into, through and/or around them. The superimposed graphics (e.g., still and/or video images, graphs, equations and the like) and/or altered displays of the equipment/devices can be based on simulated and/or actual operational data and/or fixed and/or mobile cameras, thereby, representing the behavior of the process equipment by animations that are in agreement with the data coming from the simulator (and/or the actual plant).
3. Control energy costs
4. Maintain plant safety and security
 - All safety aspects by better trained operators; better trained contractors; better trained visitors from vendors

- Location tracking of all people in the plant
 - Emergency task force training very valuable on remote operated areas or very hazard/contaminated areas
 - Show how plant operators, etc., are actively working to mitigate risk in the areas of plant operation and safety of personnel
5. Ensure environmental and regulatory accountability
- EHS can only learn and train after a fatal accident; VR would allow you to do this in a safe environment; train on scenarios you do not want to ever have in reality to be prepared.

This technology hits the bulls-eye in a number of key areas of concern for clients:

6. Lower training costs and start-up time
7. Decrease environmental impact of use of actual or simulated environments, e.g., by decreasing the risks associated with unplanned releases into the atmosphere and other environmental contaminations.

Described above are systems and methods meeting the foregoing objects. It will be appreciated that the embodiment illustrated and described herein are merely examples of the invention and other other embodiments incorporating changes thereto fall within the scope thereof. Thus, by way of non-limiting example, it will be appreciated that the augmented displays that include still and/or video images acquired by fixed and/or mobile cameras can be supplemented with or supplanted by sounds acquired by such cameras or audio acquisition equipment. In view thereof, what we claim is:

Claims

1. A system for interaction with a control environment that includes controlled equipment and control devices that monitor and control that controlled equipment, the system including:

first functionality generating output representing an operational status of one or more of said controlled equipment,

second functionality generating output representing an operational status of one or more of said control devices,

an engine, coupled to the first functionality and to the second functionality, that generates an operational status of the control environment,

a virtual reality environment, coupled to the engine and to one or more representations of one or more physical aspects of the control environment, the virtual reality environment generating a three-dimensional ("3D") display of the control environment,

the virtual reality environment being responsive to user interaction with one or more input devices to generate the 3D display of the control environment of the control environment so as to permit the user to interact with at least one of the control devices and the controlled equipment at least as represented by the 3D display of the control environment,

the engine applying to at least one of the first and second functionality indicia OF user interaction with at least one of the control devices and the controlled equipment to discern a resulting change in the operational status of the control environment, and the control engine applying indicia OF such change to the virtual reality environment to effect corresponding variation in the 3D display of the control environment.

2. The system of claim 1, wherein the virtual reality environment is coupled to a database comprising, as one or more representations of one or more physical aspects of the control environment, a three-dimensional laser scan of at least a portion of the control environment including (i) on or more controlled equipment, (ii) one or more control devices.
3. The system of claim 1, wherein the virtual reality environment is coupled to a database comprising, as one or more representations of one or more physical aspects of the control environment, a plurality of two-dimensional images of at least a portion of the control environment including (i) on or more controlled equipment, (ii) one or more control devices.
4. The system of claim 3, wherein the virtual reality environment is coupled to functionality that generates a three-dimensional representation of the control environment from the plurality of two-dimensional images.
5. The system of claim 1, wherein the virtual reality environment includes a database comprising, as one or more representations of one or more physical aspects of the control environment, a computer-aided design/computer-aided manufacturing (CAD/CAM) representation of at least a portion of the control environment including (i) on or more controlled equipment, (ii) one or more control devices.
6. The system of claim 1, adapted to permit a user to experience, via the 3D display of the control environment, interaction with and travel through the control environment.
7. The system of claim 1, wherein the virtual reality environment augments the 3D display of the control environment by any of (i) superimposing graphics on representational displays of one or more controlled equipment and/or one or more control devices, and (ii) altering the representation of one or more of controlled equipment and/or one or more of the control devices to give the user the impression of seeing into, through and/or around objects.

8. The system of claim 7, wherein the virtual reality environment augments the 3D display of the control environment by superimposing graphics, including any of graphs, equations, still images, video images and other visual aids, on displays of one or more controlled equipment and/or one or more control devices.
9. The system of claim 7, wherein the virtual reality environment augments the 3D display of one or more controlled equipment and/or one or more control devices affected by the actions of the user.
10. The system of claim 7, wherein the virtual reality environment augments the 3D display of the control environment based on one or more of (i) simulated and/or actual operational data for one or more of the controlled equipment and/or one or more of the control devices, and (ii) still and/or video images acquired any of in or around the control environment.
11. The system of claim 1, wherein one or more of the control devices comprise actuator-type field devices, sensor-type field devices, interface devices and/or controllers.
12. A system for interaction with a control environment that includes controlled equipment and control devices that monitor and control that controlled equipment, the system including:

first functionality generating output representing an operational status of a plant or other environment that includes one or more of said controlled equipment,

second functionality generating output representing an operational status of one or more of said control devices,

one or more databases coupled to any of the first functionality and the second functionality, the one or more databases including any of configuration and a modeling database ("configuration" database), an application database and a runtime database,

an engine, coupled to the first functionality and to the second functionality, that generates an operational status of the control environment,

a virtual reality environment, coupled to the engine and to one or more representations of one or more physical aspects of the control environment, the virtual reality environment generating a three-dimensional display of the control environment,

the virtual reality environment being responsive to user interaction with one or more input devices to generate the 3D display of the control environment so as to permit the user to interact with at least one of the control devices and the controlled equipment at least as represented by the 3D display of the control environment,

the engine applying to the at least one of the first and second functionality indicia OF user interaction with at least one of the control devices and the controlled equipment to discern changes on the operational status of the control environment, and the control engine applying indicia of those changes to the virtual reality environment to effect variation in the 3D display of the control environment.

13. The system of claim 12, wherein the configuration database contains one or more control strategies for one or more of the controlled equipment and/or one or more of the control devices.
14. The system of claim 12, wherein one or more of the databases includes simulated and/or actual current operational data for one or more of the controlled equipment and/or one or more of the control devices and/or one or more of the controlled equipment.
15. The system of claim 12, wherein one or more of the databases includes simulated and/or actual historical operational data for the control devices and/or one or more of the controlled equipment.
16. The system of claim 12, in which all or parts of the control environment may be any of actual or simulated.

17. The system of claim 12, wherein the first functionality comprises dynamic simulation functionality that simulates operation of one or more of the controlled equipment.
18. The system of claim 17, wherein the dynamic simulation functionality comprises a solver or other system for solving mathematical systems of equations and/or to other simulate operation of a control environment.
19. The system of claim 12, wherein the second functionality comprises software or other functionality that simulates operation of one or more of the control devices.
20. The system of claim 12, wherein one or more of the control devices comprise actuator-type field devices, sensor-type field devices, interface devices and/or controllers.
21. A system for interaction with a control environment that includes controlled equipment and control devices that monitor and control that controlled equipment, the system including:

first functionality generating output representing an operational status of a plant or other environment that includes one or more of said controlled equipment,

second functionality generating output representing an operational status of one or more of said control devices,

one or more databases coupled to any of the first functionality and the second functionality, the one or more databases including any of configuration and a modeling database ("configuration" database), an application database and a runtime database,

an engine, coupled to the first functionality and to the second functionality, that generates an operational status of the control environment,

a virtual reality environment, coupled to the engine and to one or more representations of one or more physical aspects of the control environment, the virtual reality environment generating a three-dimensional display of the control environment,

the virtual reality environment being responsive to user interaction with one or more input devices to generate the 3D display of the control environment so as to permit the user to interact with at least one of the control devices and the controlled equipment at least as represented by the 3D display of the control environment,

the engine applying to the at least one of the first and second functionality indicia OF user interaction with at least one of the control devices and the controlled equipment to discern changes on the operational status of the control environment, and the control engine applying indicia OF those changes to the virtual reality environment to effect variation in the 3D display of the control environment.

a control room digital data processor, coupled to any of the engine and the virtual reality environment, that monitors and/or controls user interaction with at least one of the control devices and the controlled equipment at least as represented by the 3D display of the control environment.

22. The system of claim 21, wherein the control room digital data processor is adapted to enable users thereof to witness effects of interaction between users of the virtual reality environment with respect to at least one of the control devices and the controlled equipment at least as represented by the 3D display of the control environment.
23. The system of claim 22, wherein the virtual reality environment is adapted to enable users thereof to witness effects of actions by users of the control room digital data processor.
24. The system of claim 21, wherein one or more of the control devices comprise actuator-type field devices, sensor-type field devices, interface devices and/or controllers.

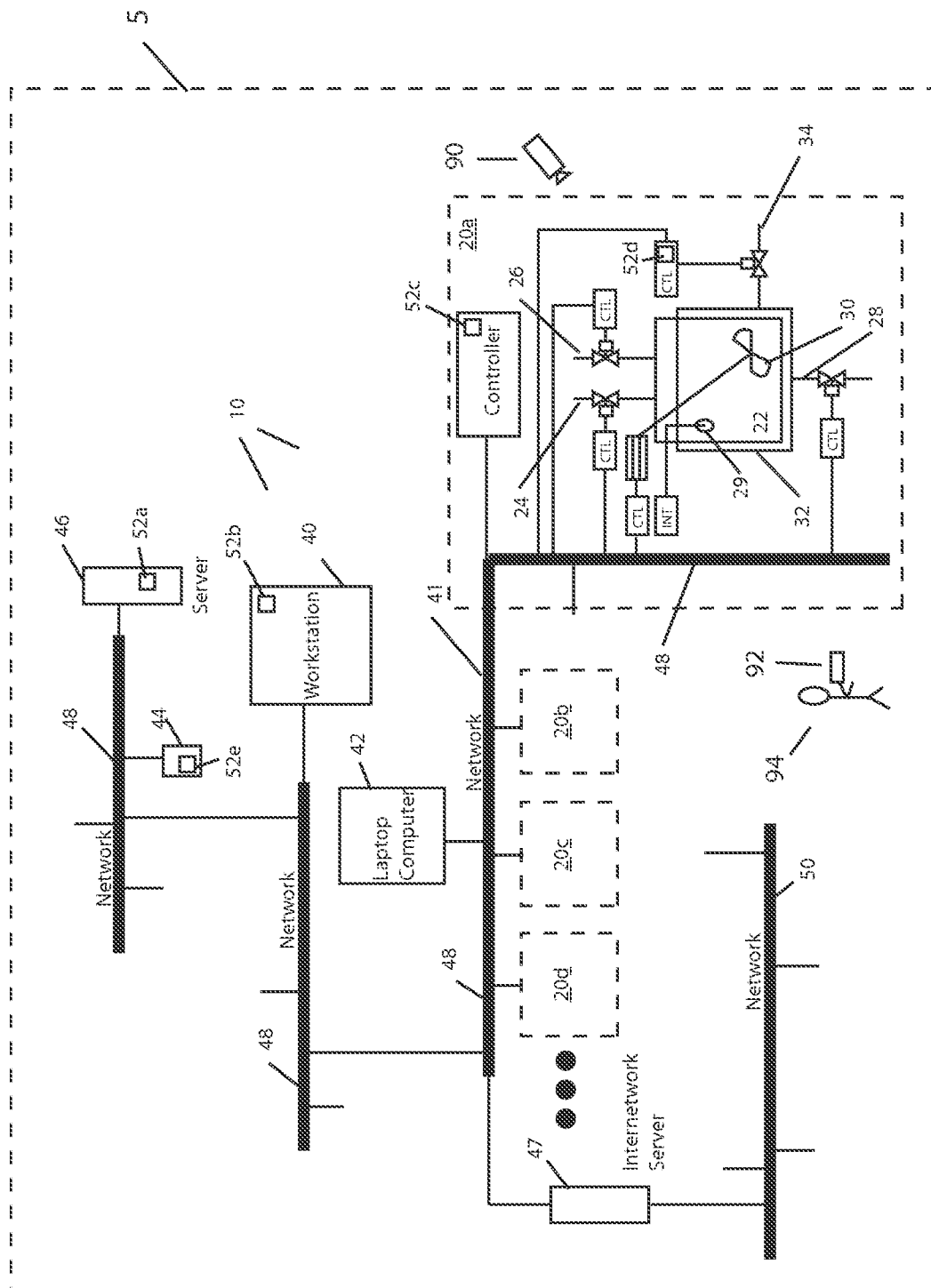
25. A method of interaction with a control environment that includes controlled equipment and control devices that monitor and control that controlled equipment, the method comprising:
 - A. determining any of an actual or simulated operational status of the control environment,
 - B. generating, with a virtual reality environment, a three-dimensional ("3D") display of the control environment from the operational status and from one or more representations of one or more physical aspects of the control environment,
 - C. permitting the user to interact, via one or more input devices, with at least one of the control devices and the controlled equipment at least as represented by the 3D display of the control environment,
 - D. responding user interaction with one or more input devices discern changes on the operational status of the control environment and to effect variation in the 3D display of the control environment based thereon.
26. The method of claim 25, wherein step (A) includes utilizing one or more databases including any of configuration and a modeling database ("configuration" database), an application database and a runtime database to determine any of an operational status of the one or more of controlled equipment and the one or more control devices.
27. The method of claim 26, comprising any or monitoring and/or controlling, via a control room digital data processor, user interaction with the with at least one of the control devices and the controlled equipment at least as represented by the 3D display of the control environment.
28. The method of claim 27, comprising enabling users of the control room digital data processor to witness effects of interaction between users of the virtual reality envi-

ronment and at least one of the control devices and the controlled equipment at least as represented by the 3D display of the control environment.

29. The method of claim 28, comprising enabling users of the virtual reality environment to witness effects of actions by users of the control room digital data processor on at least one of the control devices and the controlled equipment at least as represented by the 3D display of the control environment.
30. The method of claim 26, adapted for use in training plant personnel.
31. The method of claim 26, adapted for use in training emergency responders.
32. The method of claim 26, adapted for use in maintenance and/or asset management.
33. The method of claim 32, comprising performing a simulation run by executing steps (A) - (D) to familiarize personnel who are readying for maintenance of the control environment.
34. The method of claim 33, wherein the step of performing the simulation run includes generating 3D displays of any of controlled equipment and/or control devices to be any of maintained, upgrade and/or removed.
35. The method of claim 34, wherein the step of performing the simulation run includes utilizing the one or more input devices to simulate manipulation of any of controlled equipment and/or control devices to be any of maintained, upgrade and/or removed.
36. The method of claim 33, wherein the step of performing the simulation run includes (i) utilizing asset and maintenance databases to identify one or more controlled equipment and/or one or more control devices to be any of maintained, upgrade and/or removed, and (ii) highlighting that equipment and/or devices in the 3D display of the control environment.

37. The method of claim 33, wherein the step of performing the simulation run includes (i) utilizing information supplied by a SIMNET or other network to which the one or more of the controlled equipment and/or one or more of the control devices are coupled to identify that controlled equipment and/or control devices to be any of maintained, upgrade and/or removed, and (ii) highlighting that equipment and/or devices in the 3D display of the control environment.
38. The method of claim 1, wherein one or more of the control devices comprise actuator-type field devices, sensor-type field devices, interface devices and/or controllers.
39. The method of claim 25, comprising
- tracking positions of one or more persons with respect to the control environment at least as represented by the 3D display thereof, and wherein
- the generating step include generating the 3D display to indicate one or more of those positions of those persons.
40. The method of claim 25, wherein the generating step includes augmenting the 3D display of the control environment by any of (i) superimposing graphics on representational displays of one or more controlled equipment and/or one or more control devices, and (ii) altering the representation to give the user the impression of seeing into, through and/or around objects.
41. The method of claim 40, wherein the generating step includes augmenting the 3D display based on simulated and/or actual operational data for one or more of the controlled equipment and/or one or more of the control devices.
42. The method of claim 40, wherein the generating step includes augmenting the 3D display with any of still and/or video images acquired at any of fixed and/or mobile locations in or around the control environment.

43. The method of claim 40, wherein the generating step includes augmenting the 3D display with any of still and/or video images acquired by mobile phones or personal digital assistants carried by personnel in or around the control environment.
44. The method of claim 40, wherein the generating step includes augmenting the 3D display to depict comparative operation of any of one or more of the controlled equipment and/or one or more of the control devices.
45. The method of claim 44, wherein the augmenting step includes any of (i) superimposing graphics on representational displays of one or more controlled equipment and/or one or more control devices, and (ii) altering the representation of one or more of controlled equipment and/or one or more of the control devices in order to depict simulated operation of such controlled equipment and/or control devices and actual operation of such controlled equipment and/or control devices.
46. The method of claim 44, wherein the augmenting step includes superimposing on the 3D display any of still and/or video images acquired at any of fixed and/or mobile locations in or around the control environment.
47. The method of claim 40, wherein the augmenting step includes superimposing on the 3D display any of still and/or video images acquired by mobile phones or personal digital assistants carried by personnel in or around the control environment.



Figure

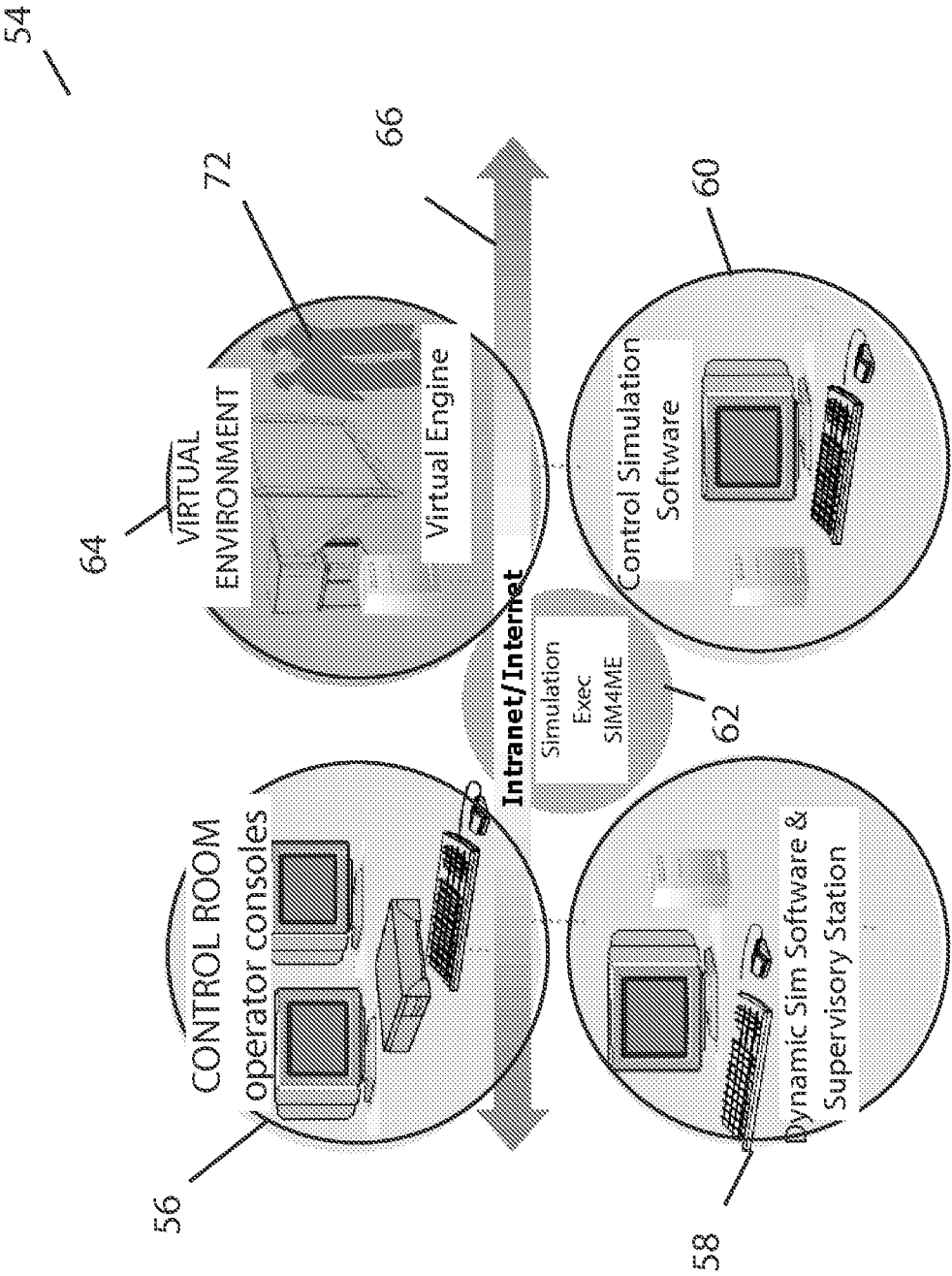


Figure 2

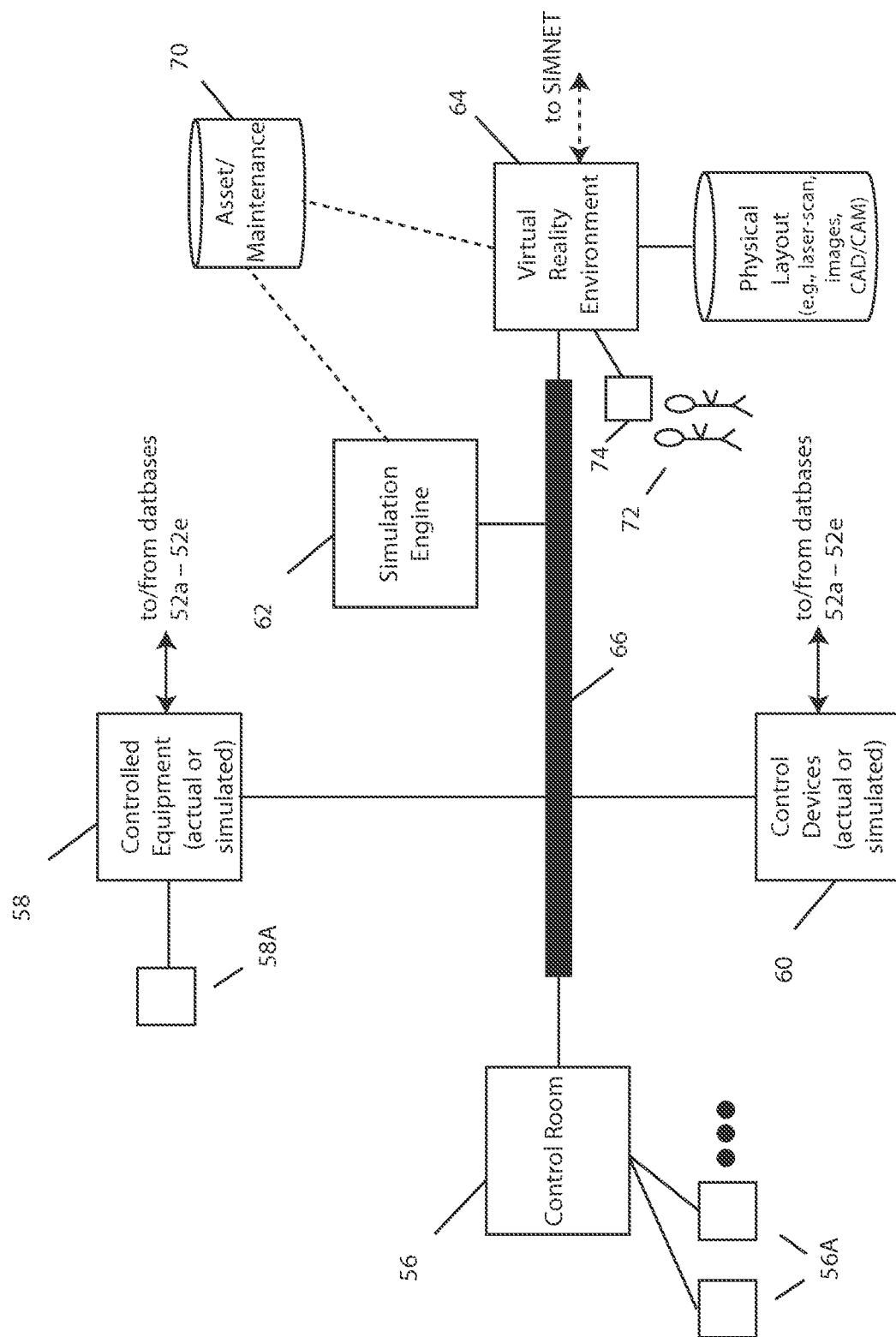


Figure 3

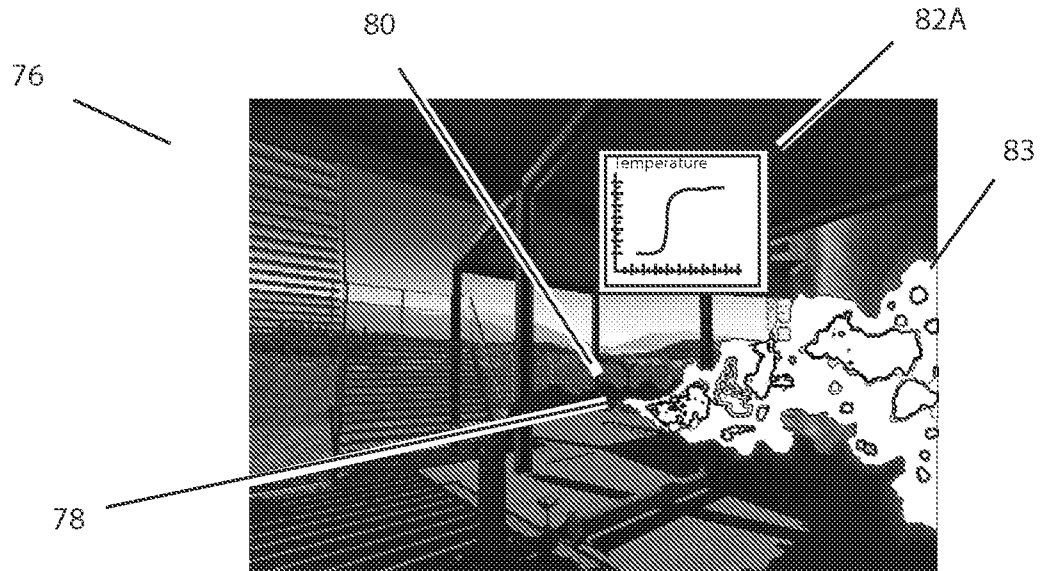


Figure 4A

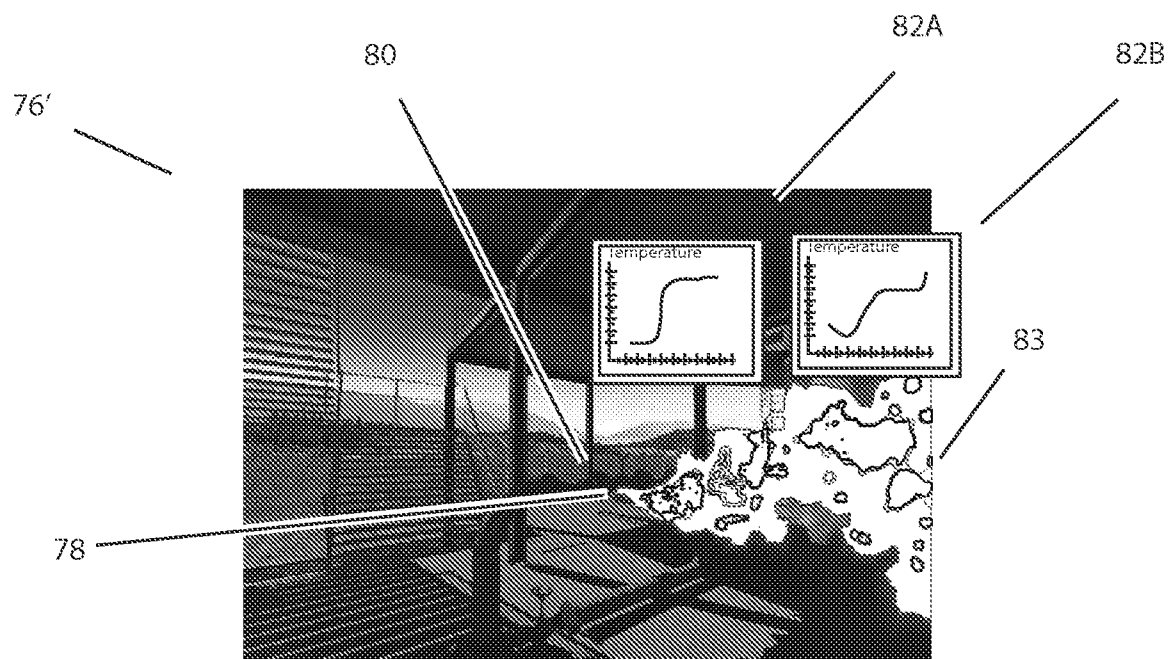


Figure 4B

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US 09/47901

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(8) - G06F 3/048 (2009.01)

USPC - 715/757

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

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

USPC - 715/757

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched
USPC - 715/848-852; 345/418-421 -- text search, see search terms below

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

PubWEST (PGPB,USPT,EPAB,JPAB); Google; Search Terms Used:

controlled environment, equipment, device, industrial, sensor, actuator, engine, status, functionality, scan, CAM, CAD, tracking, personnel, emergency, image, video, simulation, interact, 3D, three dimensional, virtual reality, mobile phone, personal digital assistant

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X ----- Y	US 6,282,455 B1 (Engdahl) 28 August 2001 (28.08.2001), especially Fig 1-77; col 1, ln 15-19; col 3, ln 63-65; col 4, ln 22-39, 44-53, 64-col 5, ln 1, 5-14, 49-59; col 6, ln 66-col 7, ln 15, 40-55; col 8, ln 33-36; col 9, ln 17-34, 40	1-4, 6-30, 32-38, 40-41, 44-45 ----- 5, 31, 39, 42, 43, 46, 47
Y -----	US 2007/0118805 A1 (Kraus et al.) 24 May 2007 (24.05.2007), especially para [0007], [0052]-[0053], [0066]	5, 31, 39, 42, 43, 46, 47
A	US 2005/0283730 A1 (Uyttendaele et al.) 22 December 2005 (22.12.2005), entire document	1-47
A	US 2007/0265089 A1 (Robarts et al.) 15 November 2007 (15.11.2007), entire document	1-47

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

* Special categories of cited documents:

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"E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date

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"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art

"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

21 July 2009 (21.07.2009)

Date of mailing of the international search report

31 JUL 2009

Name and mailing address of the ISA/US

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