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Clark et al.

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(54) **MANDREL CONFIGURATION MONITORING SYSTEM**

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See application file for complete search history.

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G01S 13/00 (2006.01)
G05B 19/19 (2006.01)
G05B 19/402 (2006.01)

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(52) **U.S. Cl.**

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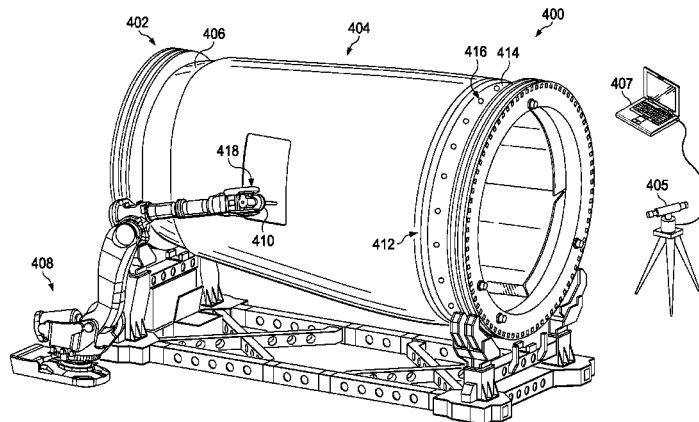
(57) **ABSTRACT**

A method and system for monitoring a mandrel. A first plurality of transmitting devices is positioned with respect to the mandrel. Signals from a portion of the first plurality of transmitting devices are received at a receiving device. The signals are processed to determine a configuration of the mandrel.

22 Claims, 15 Drawing Sheets

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

CPC G01B 11/00; G01B 21/00; G01S 13/00; G05B 19/19; G05B 19/402



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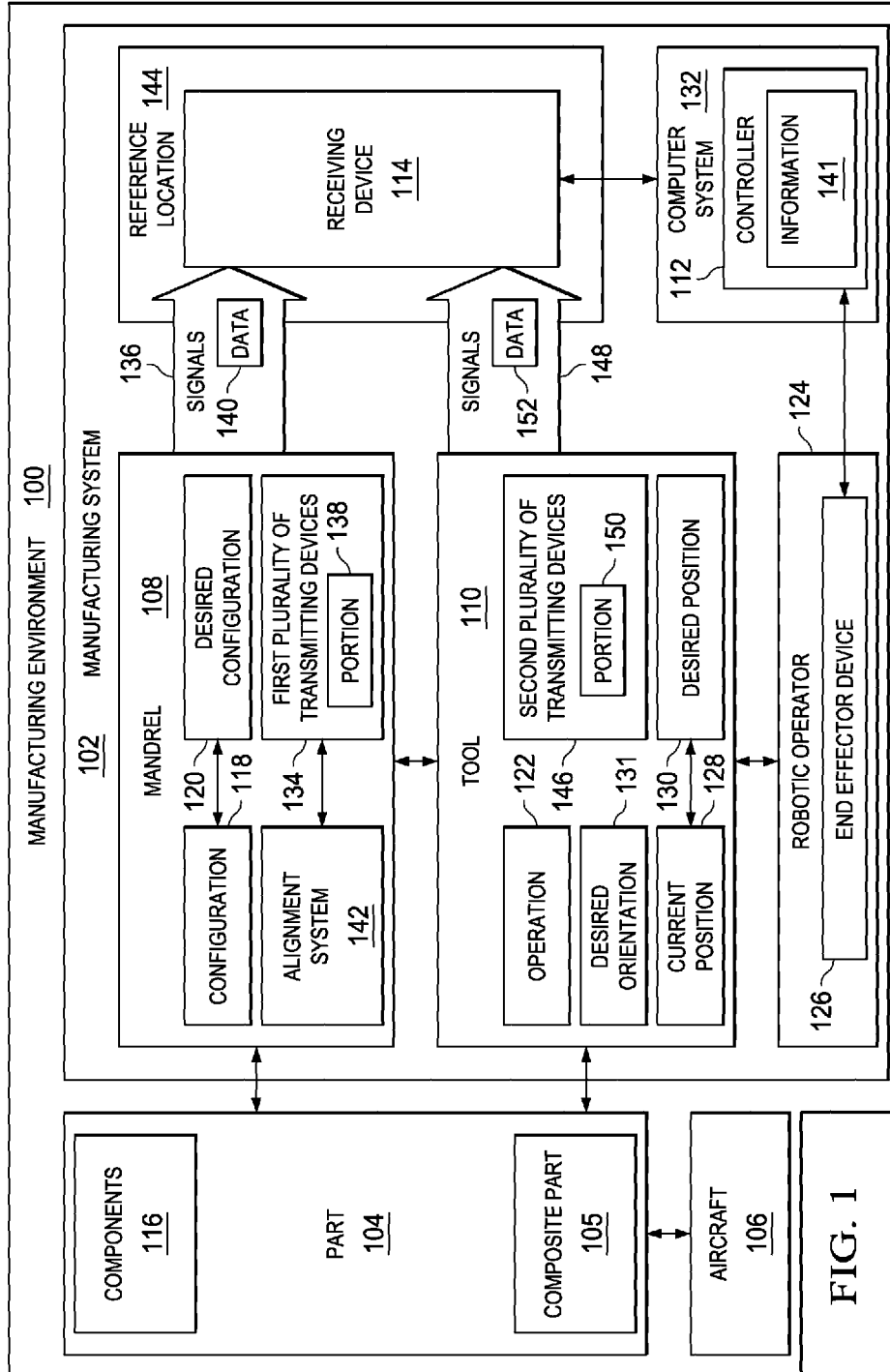


FIG. 1

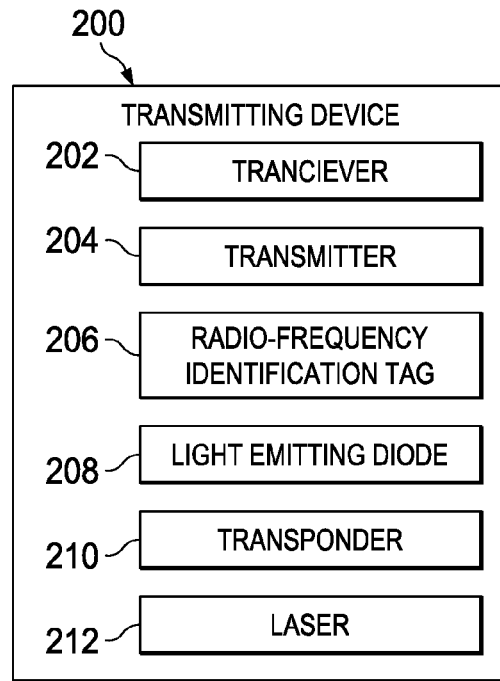


FIG. 2

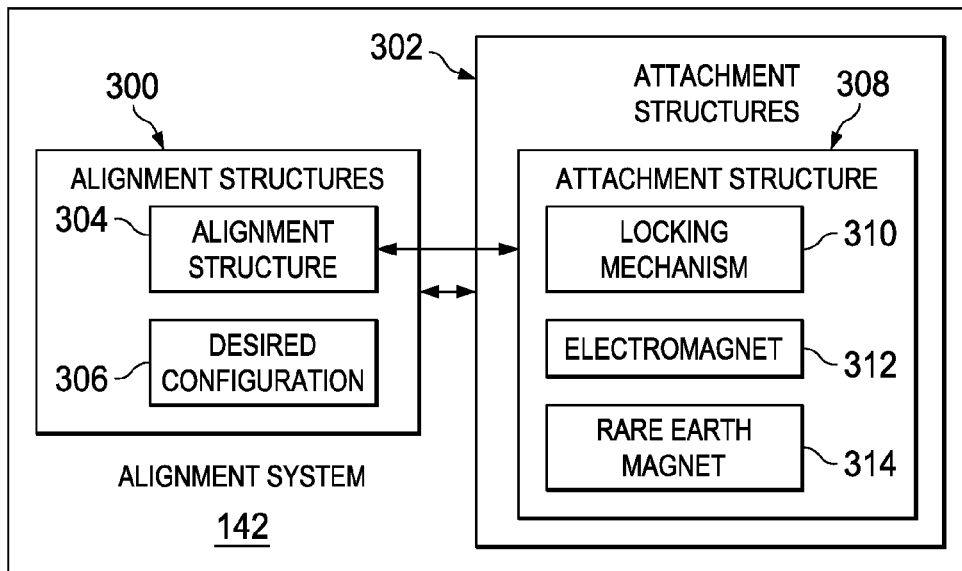


FIG. 3

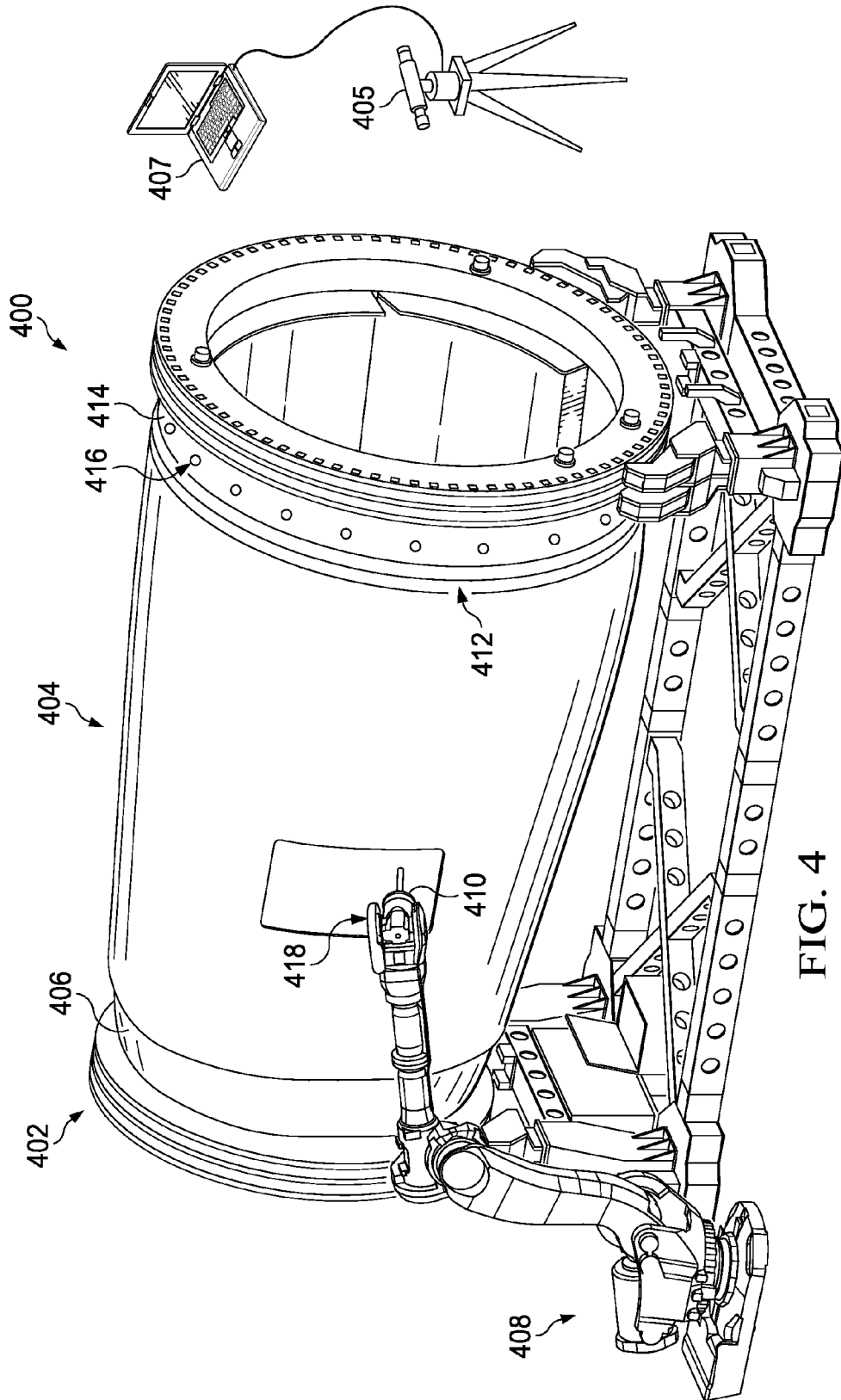


FIG. 4

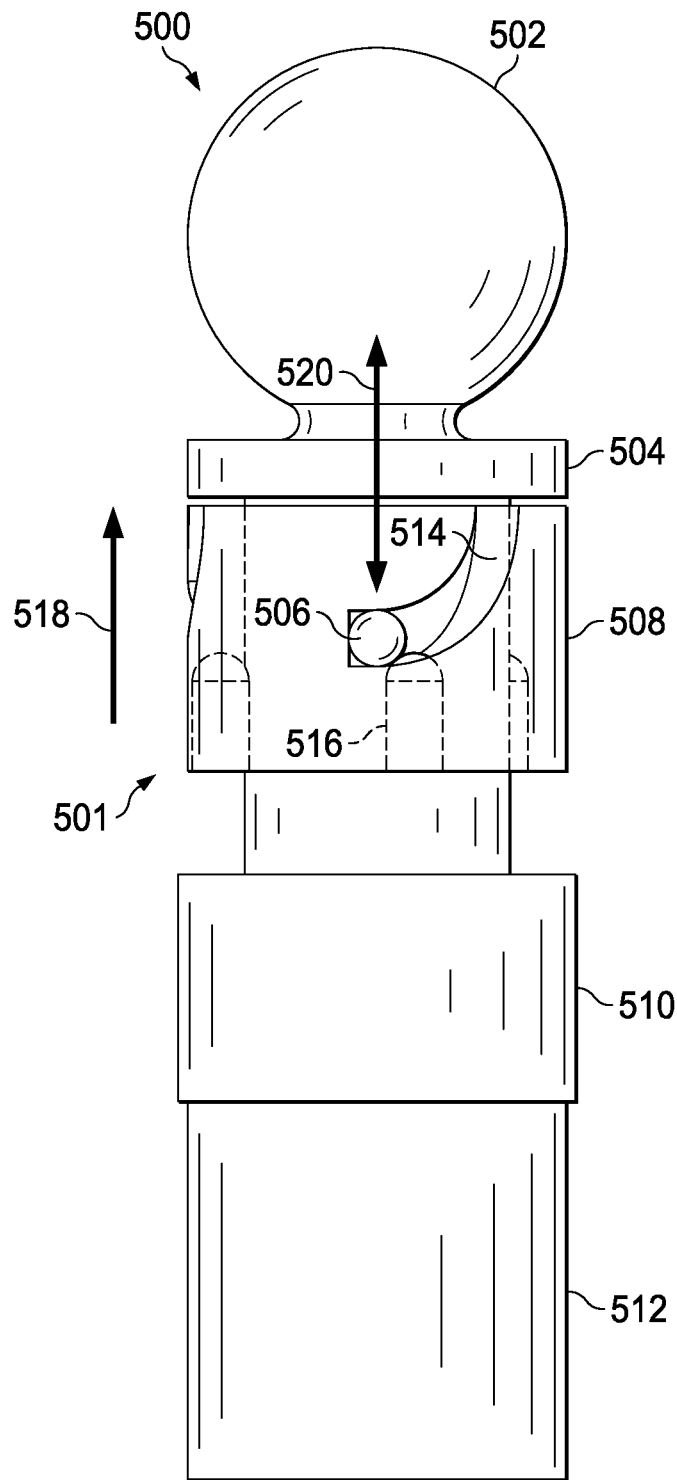


FIG. 5

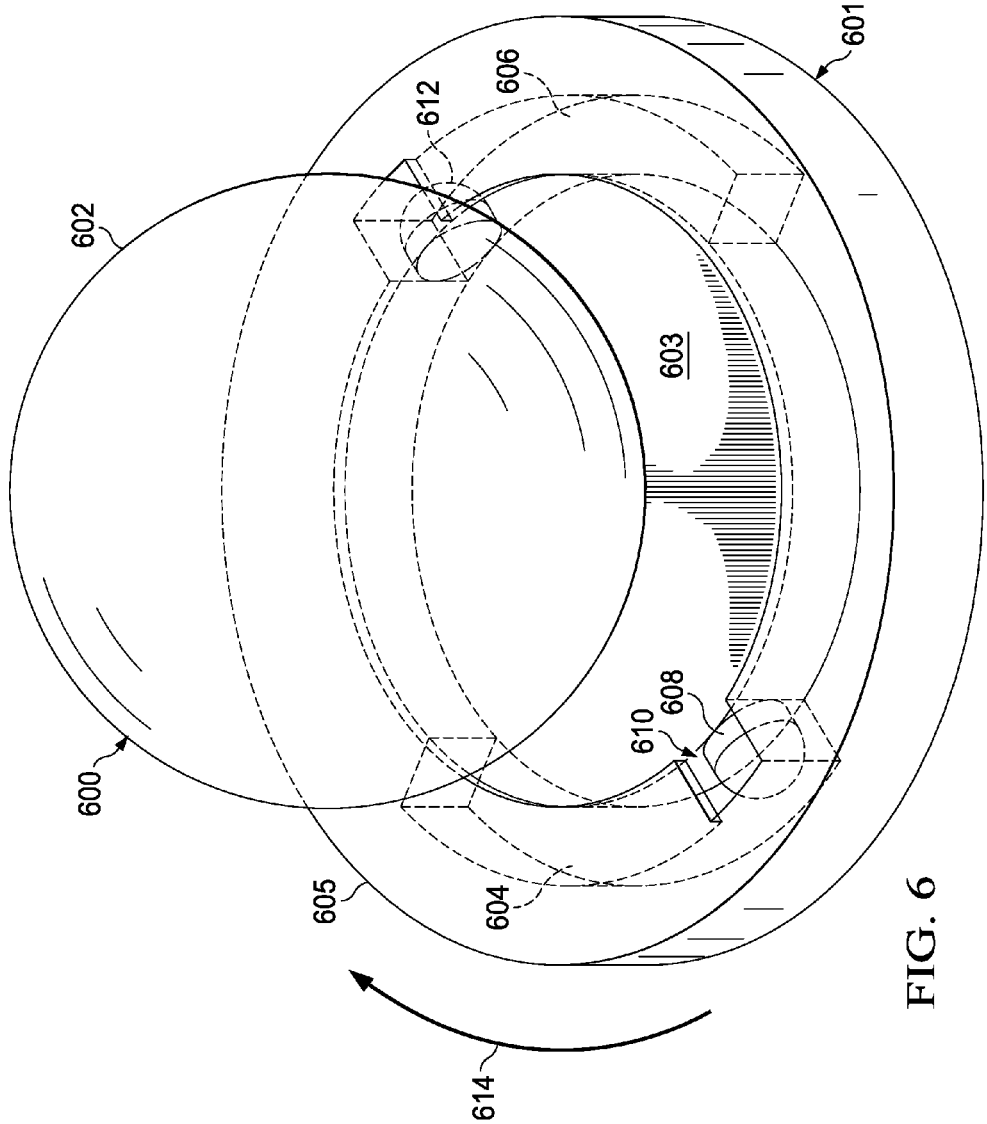


FIG. 6

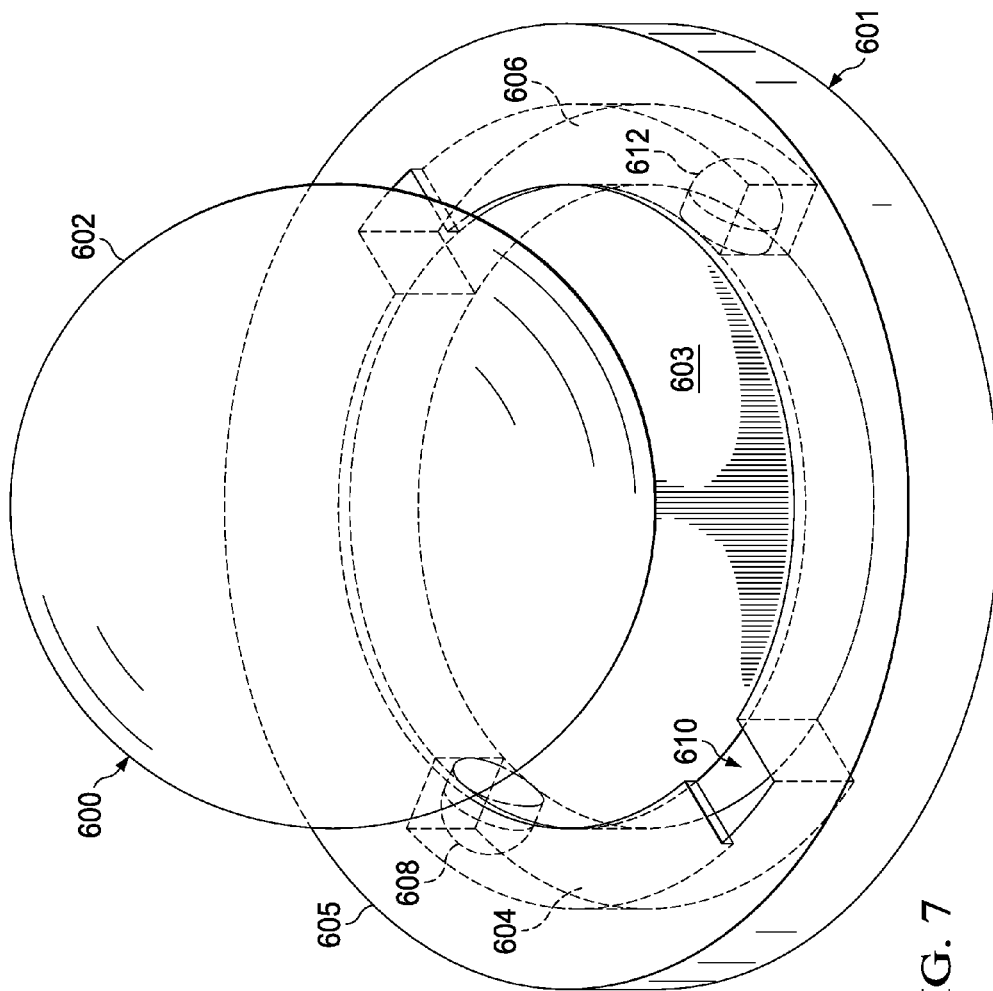


FIG. 7

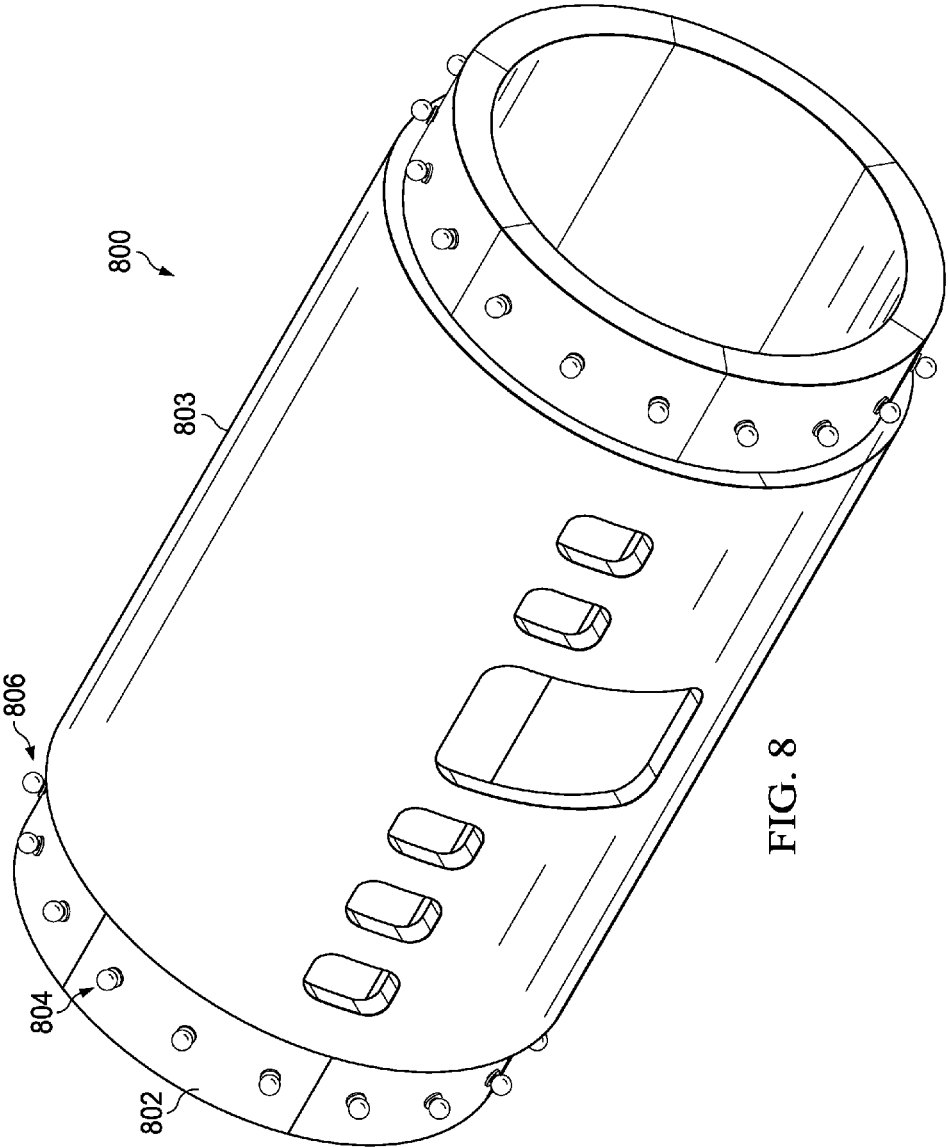


FIG. 8

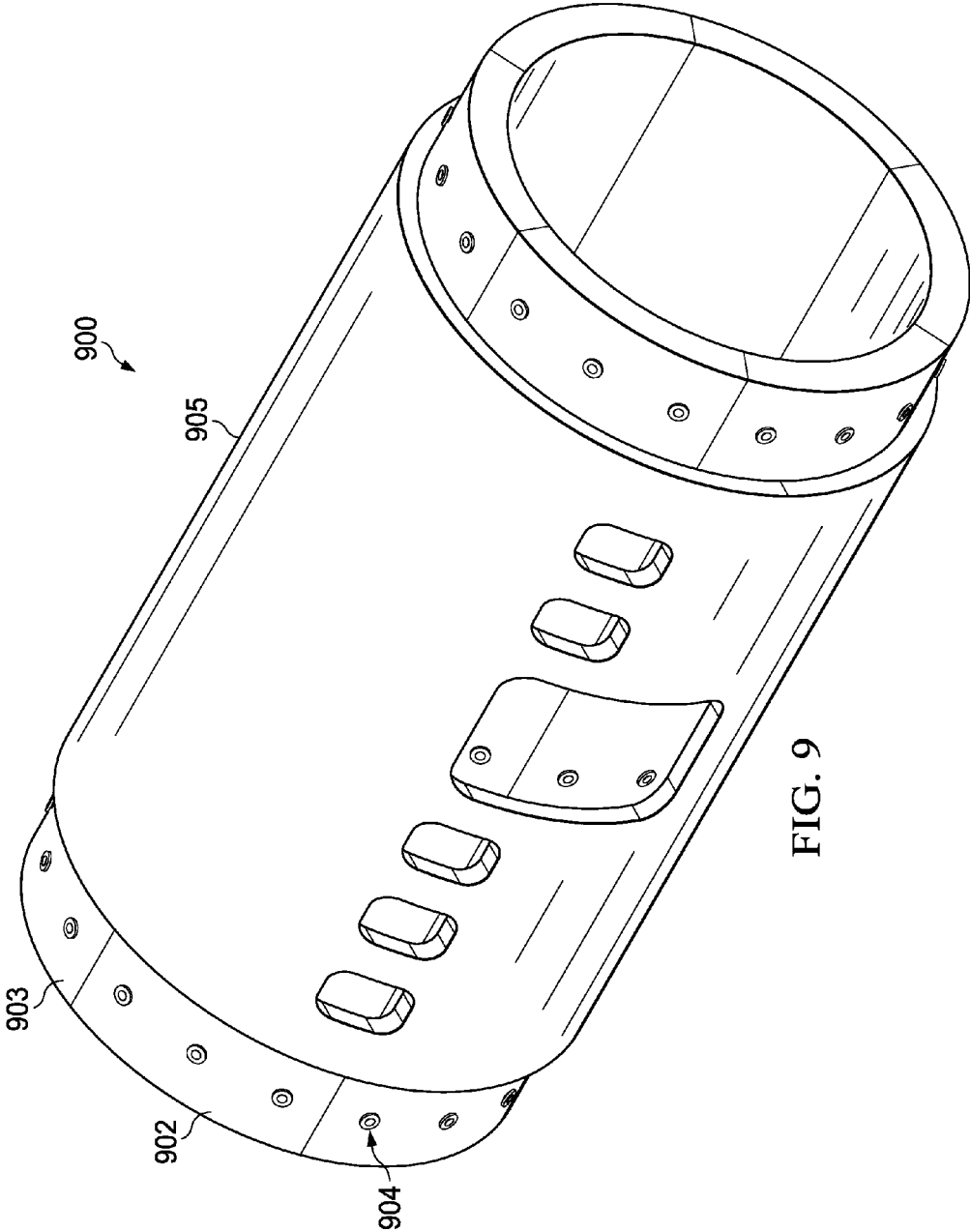


FIG. 9

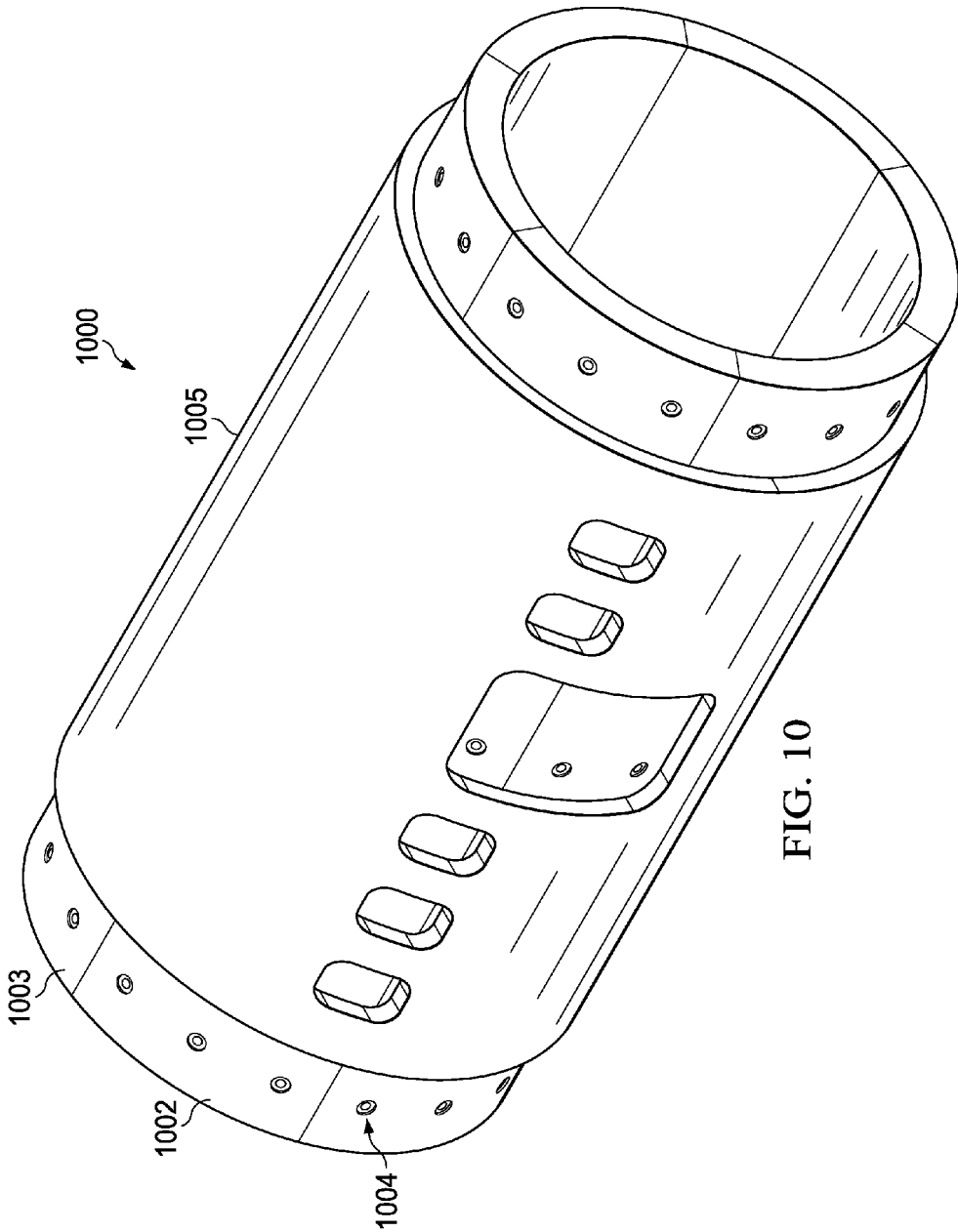


FIG. 10

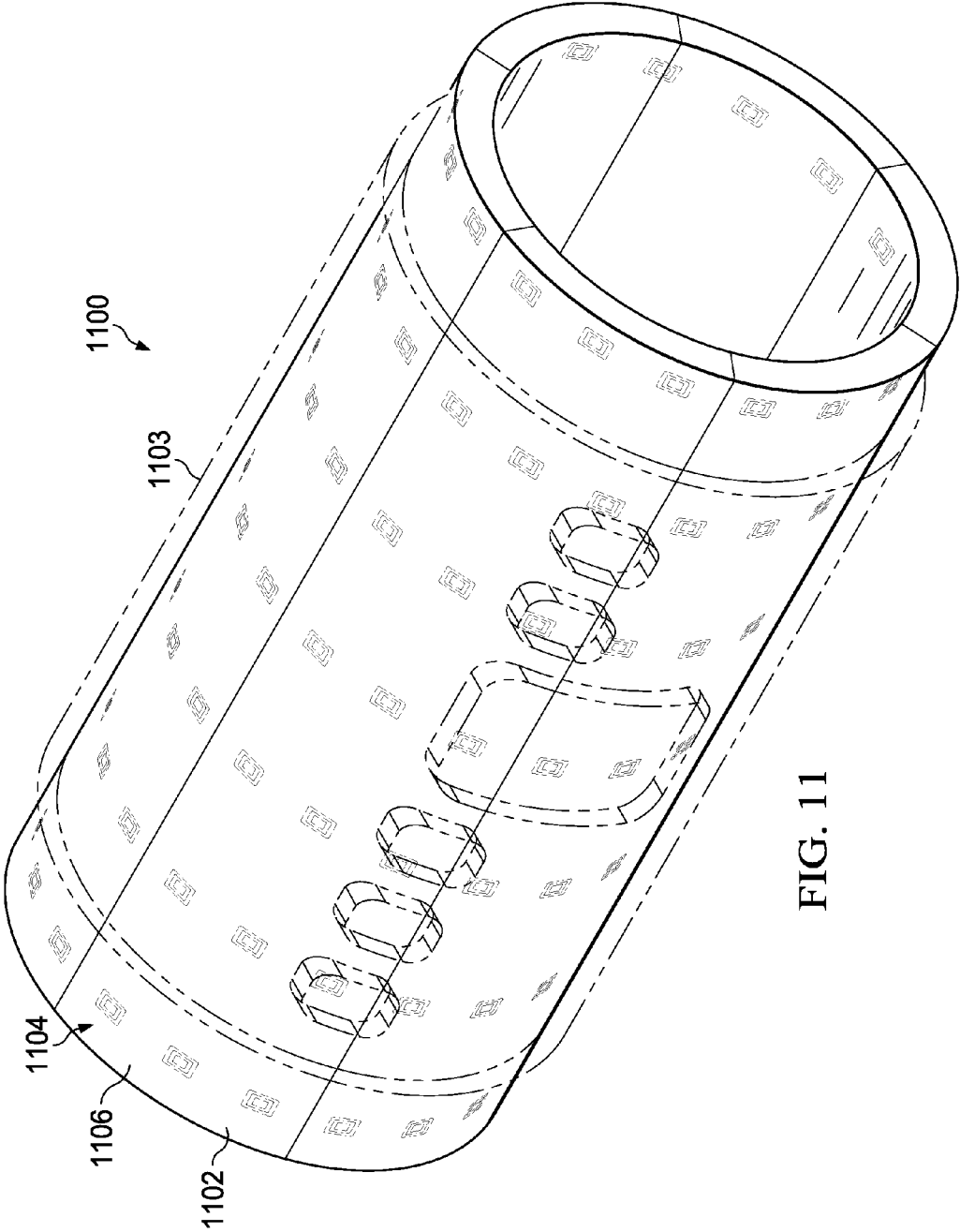


FIG. 11

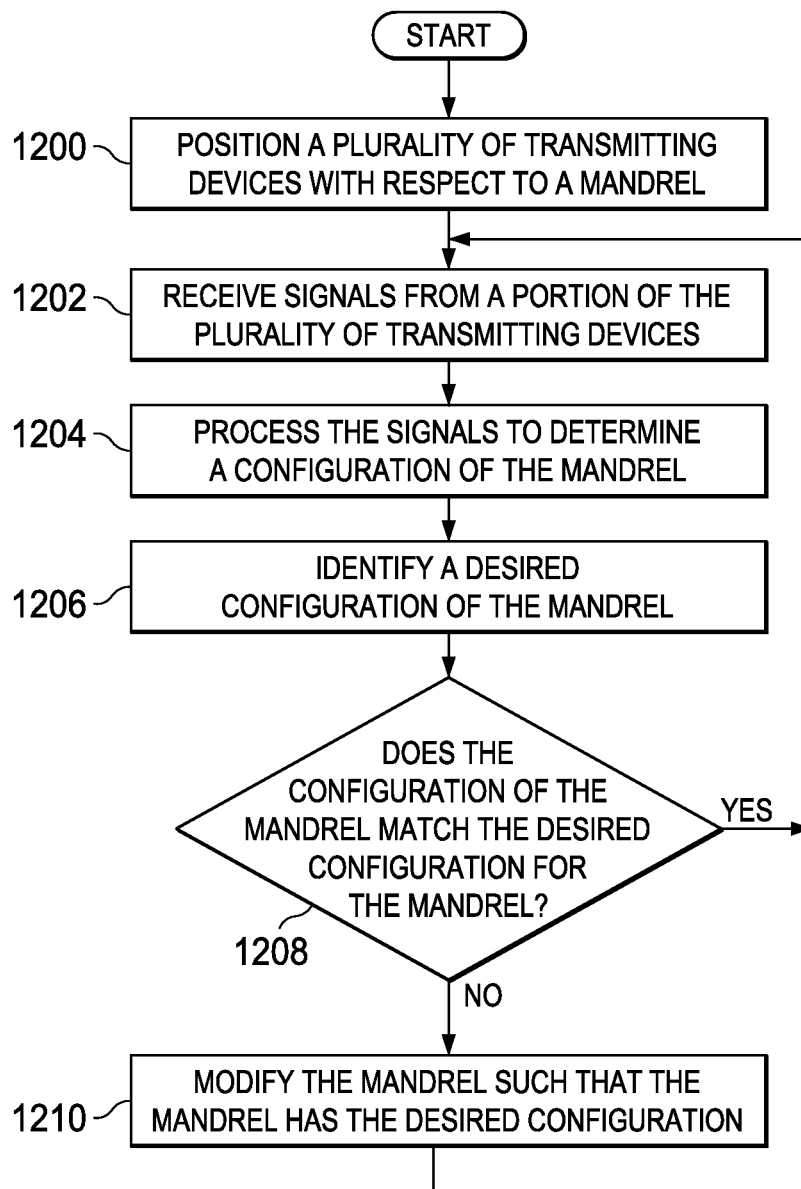


FIG. 12

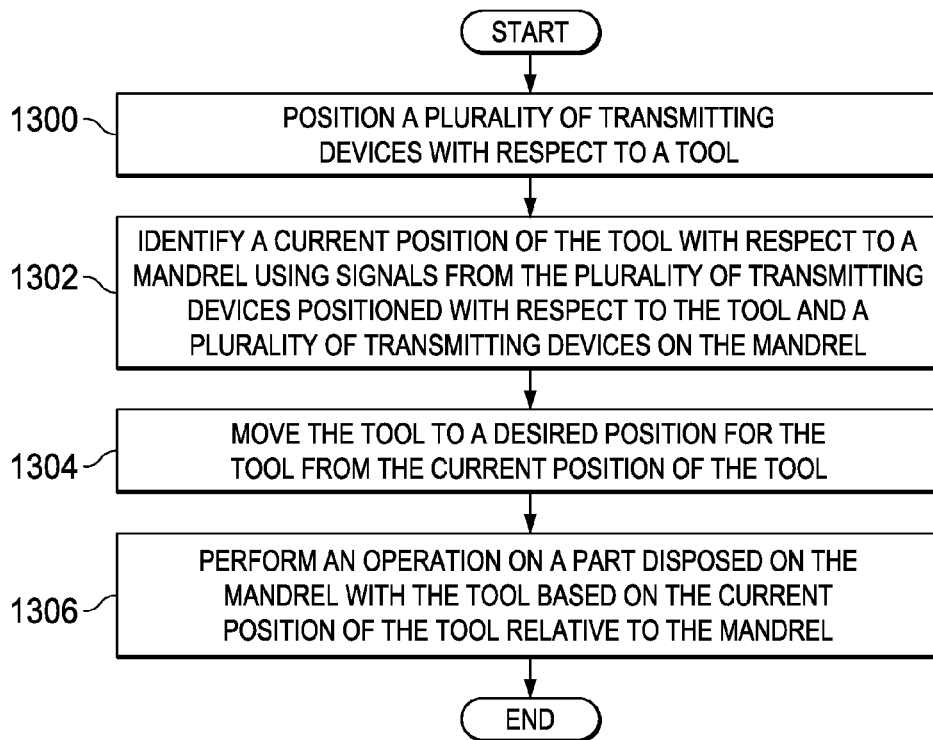


FIG. 13

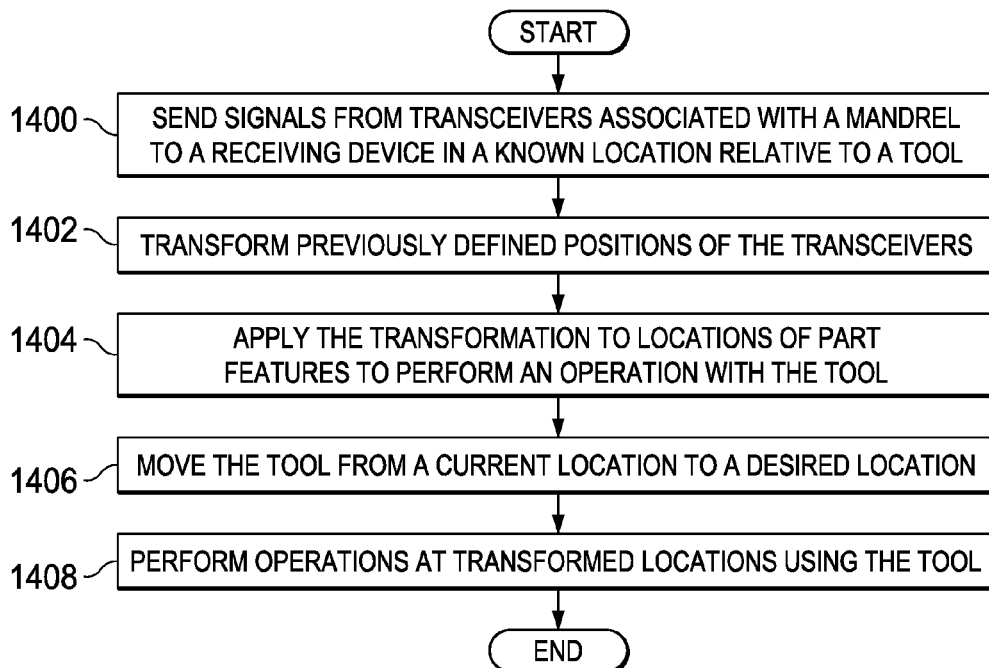


FIG. 14

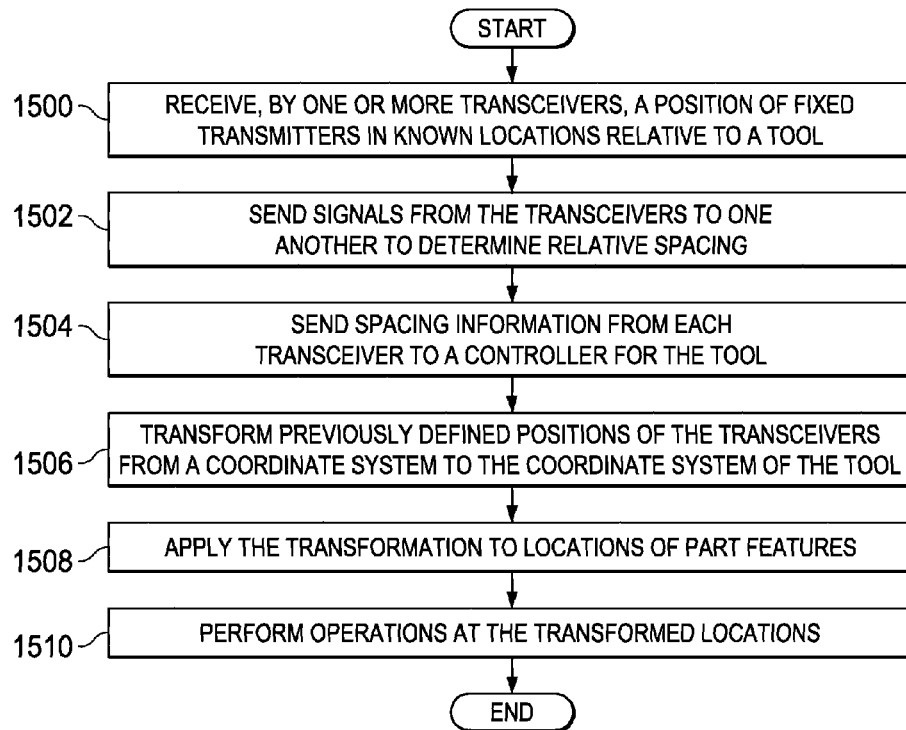


FIG. 15

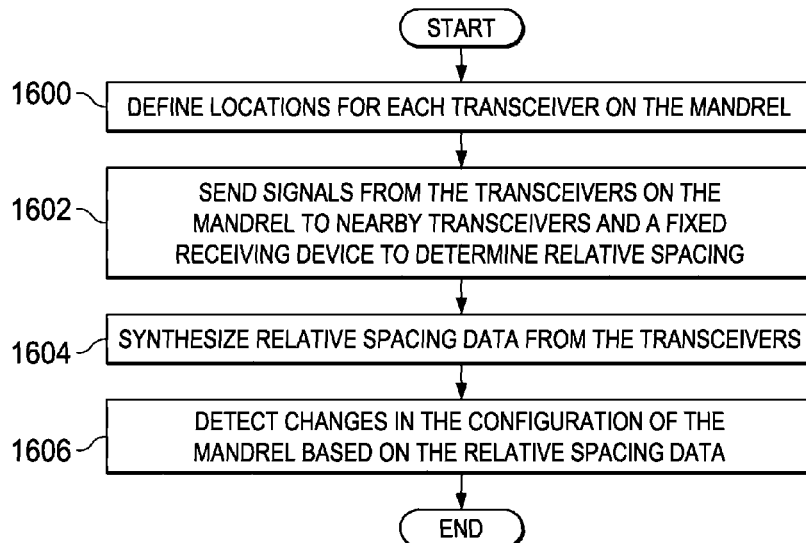


FIG. 16

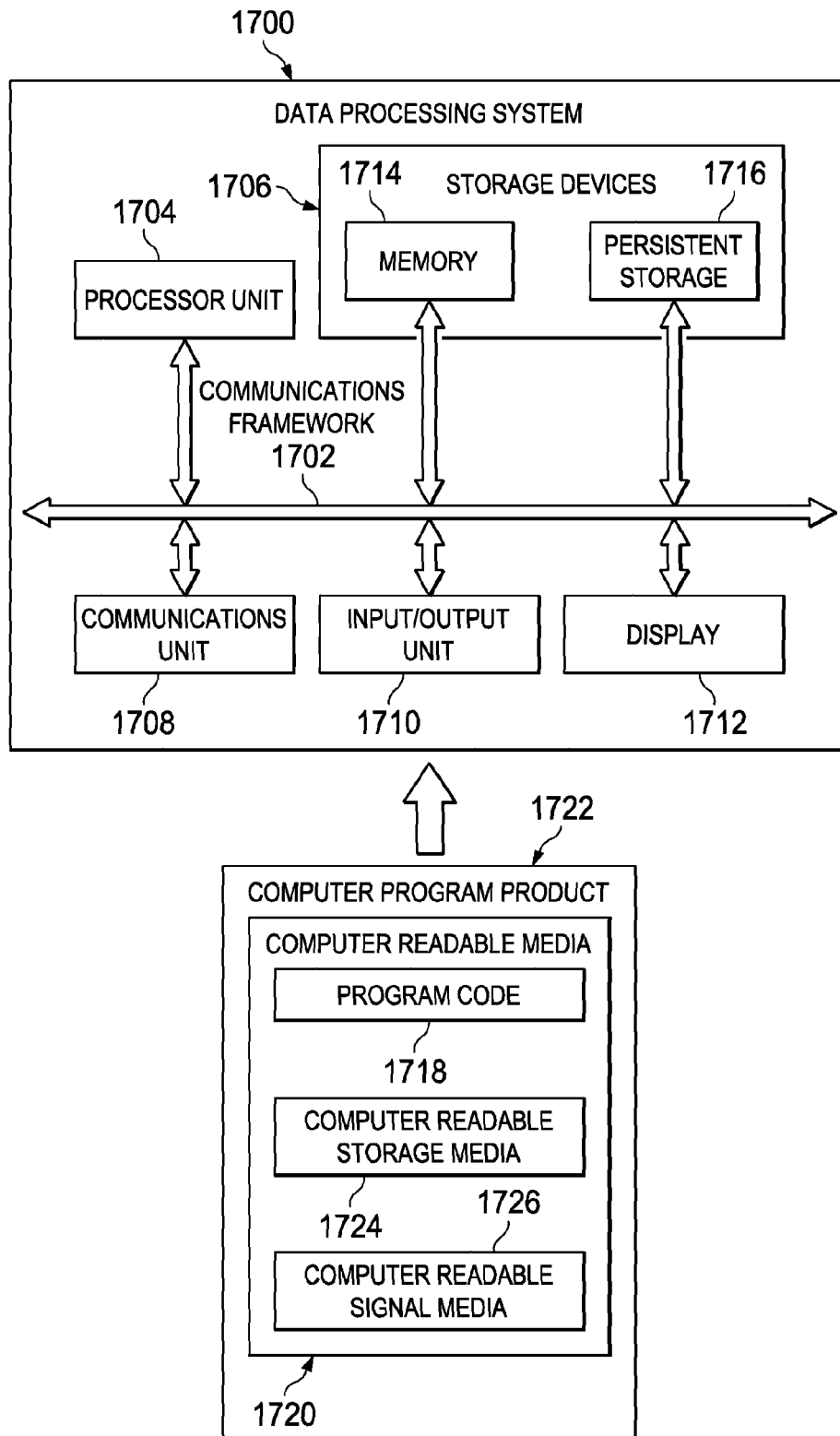


FIG. 17

FIG. 18

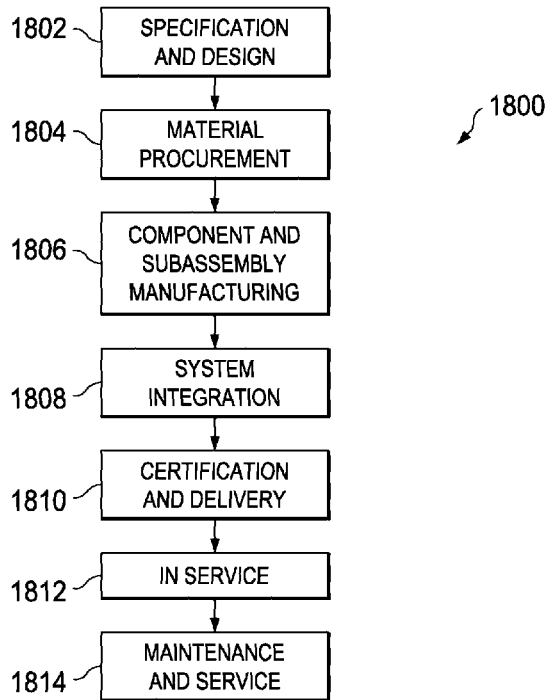
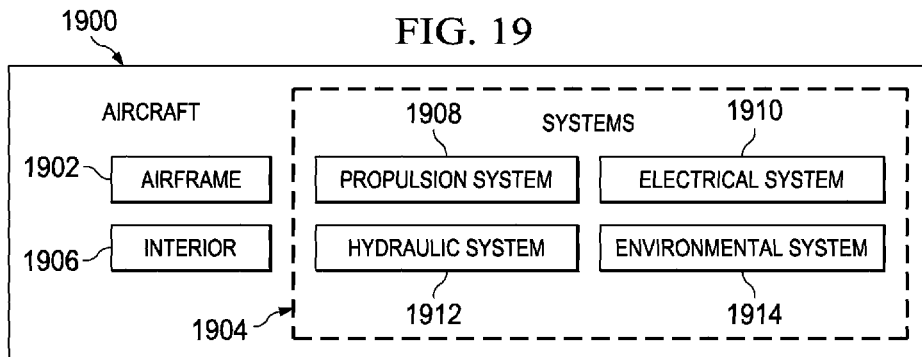


FIG. 19



MANDREL CONFIGURATION MONITORING SYSTEM

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Field

The present disclosure relates generally to manufacturing and, in particular, to manufacturing parts for vehicles using a mandrel. Still more particularly, the present disclosure relates to a mandrel configuration monitoring system.

2. Background

Manufacturing parts for an aircraft is a complex and time-consuming process. Hundreds of thousands of parts may be designed and assembled to complete an aircraft.

Manufacturing different parts for the aircraft involves performing operations on the parts in forming the parts for use in manufacturing the aircraft. These operations may include, for example, without limitation, drilling, counter-sinking, fastening, coupling, sealing, coating, inspection, or other suitable types of operations. These operations may be performed by a tool such that each part is ready for assembly with other parts in the aircraft.

With composite parts, one or more layers of composite material are typically laid up on a mold. This mold may take the form of a mandrel. The different layers may be laid up in different orientations and different numbers of layers may be used for the composite part being manufactured.

After the different layers of composite material have been laid up on the mandrel, the layers of composite material may be consolidated and cured upon exposure to temperature and pressure, thus forming the composite part. Various operations may be performed on the composite layers after curing. For instance, holes may be drilled in the composite structure such that the composite part may be attached to a frame for a fuselage. As another example, a portion of the composite part may be cut out to form a door.

In manufacturing aircraft parts, guides are used to maintain a desired position for an aircraft part during manufacturing. With composite parts, the position of the composite part on the mandrel is important in forming features on the composite parts. For instance, a mechanical guide, or target, is sometimes used to maintain the desired position for a composite part during various stages of manufacturing. Targets may be used to determine a proper location to perform operations to form features on the composite part. In some cases, the features may be used to align the composite part with another composite part, a metal part, or some other suitable type of part. In other cases, these features are used to fasten parts together. These features may be, for example, holes, channels, slots, posts, and other suitable features that may be used to align composite parts with each other.

After manufacturing, parts are then assembled to form an aircraft. During the assembly of the aircraft, placement of parts relative to each other is important. For example, properly aligning one part with respect to another part allows assembly of the aircraft to be completed in an efficient manner. Precise locations of the features formed in the parts are needed for proper assembly. For instance, holes in two parts should align to properly fasten the parts together.

If parts are misaligned, however, undesired inconsistencies may occur. For example, if a hole is drilled in an undesired location, the part may not be fastened to another part in the assembly as desired. In another illustrative example, if a mandrel is deformed, the corresponding composite part also may be deformed.

Because the aircraft is made up of hundreds of thousands of parts, even small inconsistencies can result in parts being reworked or discarded. As a result, assembly of an aircraft may take more time than desired, the cost may be greater than desired, or both. Therefore, it would be desirable to have a method and apparatus that take into account at least some of the issues discussed above, as well as other possible issues.

SUMMARY

In one illustrative embodiment, a method for monitoring a mandrel is provided. A first plurality of transmitting devices is positioned with respect to the mandrel. Signals from a portion of the first plurality of transmitting devices are received at a receiving device. The signals are processed to determine a configuration of the mandrel.

In another illustrative embodiment, a system comprises a mandrel, a first plurality of transmitting devices physically associated with the mandrel, and a receiving device. The receiving device is configured to receive signals from a portion of the first plurality of transmitting devices.

In yet another illustrative embodiment, a method for monitoring a configuration of a mandrel is provided. A plurality of transceivers is attached to the mandrel. Signals from a portion of the plurality of transceivers are received at a receiving device. The signals are processed to determine the configuration of the mandrel. The configuration of the mandrel is compared to a desired configuration for the mandrel. The mandrel is determined whether to be replaced based on a comparison.

The features and functions can be achieved independently in various embodiments of the present disclosure or may be combined in yet other embodiments in which further details can be seen with reference to the following description and drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The novel features believed characteristic of the illustrative embodiments are set forth in the appended claims. The illustrative embodiments, however, as well as a preferred mode of use, further objectives and features thereof, will best be understood by reference to the following detailed description of an illustrative embodiment of the present disclosure when read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein:

FIG. 1 is an illustration of a block diagram of a manufacturing environment in accordance with an illustrative embodiment;

FIG. 2 is an illustration of a block diagram of a transmitting device in accordance with an illustrative embodiment;

FIG. 3 is an illustration of a block diagram of an alignment system in accordance with an illustrative embodiment;

FIG. 4 is an illustration of a manufacturing environment in accordance with an illustrative embodiment;

FIG. 5 is an illustration of a perspective view of an attachment structure and an alignment structure in accordance with an illustrative embodiment;

FIG. 6 is an illustration of a top view of an alignment structure and an attachment structure in accordance with an illustrative embodiment;

FIG. 7 is an illustration of a top view of an alignment structure and an attachment structure in accordance with an illustrative embodiment;

3

FIG. 8 is an illustration of a mandrel with a plurality of transmitting devices in accordance with an illustrative embodiment;

FIG. 9 is an illustration of a mandrel with a plurality of transmitting devices in accordance with an illustrative embodiment;

FIG. 10 is an illustration of a mandrel with a plurality of transmitting devices in accordance with an illustrative embodiment;

FIG. 11 is an illustration of a mandrel with a plurality of transmitting devices in accordance with an illustrative embodiment;

FIG. 12 is an illustration of a flowchart of a process for monitoring a configuration of a mandrel in accordance with an illustrative embodiment;

FIG. 13 is an illustration of a flowchart of a process for positioning a tool with respect to a mandrel in accordance with an illustrative embodiment;

FIG. 14 is an illustration of a flowchart of a process for performing an operation on a part in accordance with an illustrative embodiment;

FIG. 15 is an illustration of a flowchart of a process for performing an operation on a part in accordance with an illustrative embodiment;

FIG. 16 is an illustration of a flowchart of a process for monitoring a configuration of a mandrel in accordance with an illustrative embodiment;

FIG. 17 is an illustration of a data processing system in the form of a block diagram in accordance with an illustrative embodiment;

FIG. 18 is an illustration of an aircraft manufacturing and service method in the form of a block diagram in accordance with an illustrative embodiment; and

FIG. 19 is an illustration of an aircraft in the form of a block diagram in which an illustrative embodiment may be implemented.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The illustrative embodiments recognize and take into account one or more different considerations. For example, the illustrative embodiments recognize and take into account that it is desirable to have a manufacturing system with an increased likelihood of producing parts with the correct specifications. The illustrative embodiments recognize and take into account, however, that during the manufacturing process, conditions in the manufacturing environment change. For example, without limitation, when a mandrel is used to form a part, the configuration of the mandrel may change after a number of uses. For instance, the mandrel may deform after a number of uses. A mandrel is a deformed mandrel when the change results in the mandrel having features that are out of tolerance.

The illustrative embodiments recognize and take into account that it is desirable to determine whether the configuration of the mandrel has changed in an undesired manner. Since parts that are formed on the mandrel often take the shape of the mandrel, in some cases, a deformed mandrel results in a part that may not be usable in an aircraft. If the part is not usable, the part is reworked or discarded.

The illustrative embodiments also recognize and take into account that the tools used to perform operations on the part may need to be controlled with a desired level of precision. In some cases, controlling the operation of the tool with the desired level of precision is difficult because the part may move while operations are performed by the tool. Accord-

4

ingly, the position of the tool may be offset from the desired position by an amount greater than preferred.

The illustrative embodiments further recognize and take into account that it may be desirable to reduce unwanted movement of a part on a mandrel while operations are being performed on the part. The illustrative embodiments also recognize and take into account that real-time information about the configuration of at least one of the part, the mandrel, or the tool is desirable so that an operator may adjust these structures to reduce the number of parts that need to be reworked or discarded. For instance, the part may need to be adjusted such that holes are drilled properly for the assembly of the aircraft.

Thus, the illustrative embodiments provide a method and apparatus for monitoring a configuration of a mandrel. A first plurality of transmitting devices is positioned with respect to the mandrel. Signals from a portion of the first plurality of transmitting devices are received at a receiving device. The signals are processed to determine the configuration of the mandrel.

Referring now to the figures and, in particular, with reference to FIG. 1, an illustration of a block diagram of a manufacturing environment is depicted in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. In this depicted example, manufacturing environment 100 includes manufacturing system 102.

As depicted, manufacturing system 102 is used to manufacture part 104 for aircraft 106. In this illustrative example, part 104 takes a number of different forms. For example, part 104 may be selected from one of a skin panel, a flange, a bladder, a reservoir, a spar, a control surface, and other suitable types of part for aircraft 106.

In this depicted example, part 104 may be formed from various materials. For instance, part 104 may be formed from at least one of a metal, a metal alloy, a composite material, or some other suitable type of material.

As used herein, the phrase "at least one of," when used with a list of items, means different combinations of one or more of the listed items may be used and only one of the items in the list may be needed. The item may be a particular object, thing, or category. In other words, "at least one of" means any combination of items or number of items may be used from the list, but not all of the items in the list may be required.

For example, "at least one of item A, item B, and item C" may mean item A; item A and item B; item B; item A, item B, and item C; or item B and item C. In some cases, "at least one of item A, item B, and item C" may mean, for example, without limitation, two of item A, one of item B, and ten of item C; four of item B and seven of item C; or some other suitable combination.

In this illustrative example, manufacturing system 102 includes mandrel 108, tool 110, controller 112, and receiving device 114. As depicted, mandrel 108 is a structure used to form part 104. In particular, mandrel 108 is used to shape part 104 in a desired manner.

For example, when part 104 is composite part 105, one or more layers of composite material are laid up on mandrel 108. The layers of composite material are then cured on mandrel 108 when exposed to a desired level of heat, pressure, or some combination thereof. Accordingly, composite part 105 is formed having a shape that corresponds to the contours of mandrel 108. If the shape of mandrel 108 changes, the shape of composite part 105 laid up on mandrel 108 also changes.

In another illustrative example, components 116 may be assembled to form part 104. For example, when forming part

5

104, components 116 may be fastened to one another. Mandrel 108 is used to shape part 104. In this illustrative example, part 104 is comprised of components 116. As depicted, mandrel 108 is configured to provide support for assembly of components 116 to form part 104.

In another illustrative example, components 116 are connected to one another using an adhesive to form part 104. In yet another illustrative example, components 116 are modified while on mandrel 108. For instance, components 116 are assembled and then holes are drilled into one or more of components 116 to form part 104 for installation in aircraft 106.

As illustrated, mandrel 108 comprises a number of different materials. As used herein, a “number of” items may be one or more items. In this illustrative example, a number of materials is one or more materials. In this depicted example, mandrel 108 comprises materials selected from at least one of a metal, a metal alloy, a composite material, or other suitable type of materials that provide the desired shape of part 104 for use in aircraft 106.

As depicted, mandrel 108 has configuration 118. Configuration 118 includes the physical characteristics of mandrel 108 in three-dimensional space. Configuration 118 comprises at least one of orientation, position, shape, and other suitable physical characteristics of mandrel 108. Configuration 118 is a current configuration for mandrel 108 at a point in time.

In this illustrative example, mandrel 108 also has desired configuration 120. Desired configuration 120 is a form of mandrel 108 that shapes part 104 in a desired manner. Desired configuration 120 is selected based on at least one of a shape, an orientation, a material, a size, a thickness, or some other desired characteristics for part 104.

As illustrated, to form part 104 for use in aircraft 106, it is desirable for configuration 118 of mandrel 108 to match desired configuration 120 within selected tolerances. When mandrel 108 has desired configuration 120, part 104 is formed to its specifications.

If configuration 118 of mandrel 108 does not match desired configuration 120 within selected tolerances, part 104 is not formed as desired, which may result in rework of part 104. In some cases, part 104 is discarded and a new part is formed. For instance, when mandrel 108 does not have desired configuration 120, layers of composite material for composite part 105 laid up on mandrel 108 may not have a desired configuration. As a result, composite part 105 may not be usable in assembling a fuselage of aircraft 106, may not pass certification, may cause aircraft 106 to have incorrect specifications, or a combination thereof.

In this depicted example, tool 110 is a device used to perform operation 122 on structures within manufacturing environment 100. For example, tool 110 is configured to perform operation 122 on at least one of mandrel 108, part 104, or some other structure within manufacturing environment 100.

In this illustrative example, tool 110 takes a number of different forms. For example, tool 110 may be selected from one of a composite layup device, a drill, a camera, an ultrasonic array, a fastener installer, a sealant applicator, a painting device, a mill, a marking device, a laser, a probe, a material applicator, a sensor or some other suitable tool.

Tool 110 is a single device in this example. In other illustrative examples, other tools in addition to tool 110 may be present in manufacturing system 102. In still other illustrative examples, tool 110 may have more than one device. For instance, tool 110 may include a fastener installer and a sealant applicator in one illustrative example.

6

As depicted, tool 110 moves relative to mandrel 108 to perform operation 122 on part 104. In this depicted example, operation 122 may be selected from one of a composite layup operation, a drilling operation, a fastener installation operation, a sealing operation, an inspection operation, a painting operation, a milling operation, a material application operation, a sensing operation, or some other suitable operation.

For example, when tool 110 is an ultrasonic array, tool 110 is used to inspect part 104 for inconsistencies. In another illustrative example, tool 110 may be a drill used to drill holes in part 104. In yet another illustrative example, tool 110 may include a sprayer configured to apply paint to part 104. In still another illustrative example, tool 110 is used to apply material to form part 104. For instance, layers of composite material may be applied by tool 110 to mandrel 108 to form composite part 105.

In this illustrative example, tool 110 is operated by robotic operator 124. Robotic operator 124 may take the form of, for example, without limitation, a robotic arm. In this depicted example, tool 110 is moved about mandrel 108 to perform operation 122 on part 104 using robotic operator 124. In particular, tool 110 may take the form of end effector device 126 configured for use with robotic operator 124.

As illustrated, tool 110 has current position 128 with respect to mandrel 108. In this illustrative example, current position 128 is the position of tool 110 with respect to mandrel 108 at the current time. For example, when operation 122 is a drilling operation and tool 110 has completed that drilling operation, tool 110 may have a current position that is retracted. Tool 110 will need to be moved to another location to drill another hole in part 104 on mandrel 108. In a similar fashion, when operation 122 is a composite layup operation, tool 110 may have a current position at one end of mandrel 108. Tool 110 will need to be moved to another location to layup another layer of composite material on mandrel 108.

Tool 110 also has desired position 130. Desired position 130 is a position with respect to mandrel 108 that is desired for tool 110 to perform operation 122. Desired position 130 is a location in three-dimensional space in this illustrative example.

For instance, desired position 130 may be a position where another hole is to be drilled in part 104. In another illustrative example, when operation 122 is a painting operation, desired position 130 for tool 110 is a position within a selected distance from the surface of part 104. In still another example, desired position 130 is a position for tool 110 to begin laying up additional composite material. Tool 110 moves from current position 128 to desired position 130 to perform operation 122.

In this illustrative example, tool 110 has desired orientation 131. Desired orientation 131 may be selected based on operation 122. For example, desired orientation 131 may be selected for tool 110 when performing a drilling operation. In another illustrative example, desired orientation 131 may be selected for a milling operation.

When tool 110 is operated by robotic operator 124, controller 112 is used. Controller 112 may be hardware in this illustrative example, but may include firmware or software in other illustrative examples.

When software is used, the operations performed by controller 112 may be implemented in program code configured to run on a processor unit. When firmware is used, the operations performed by controller 112 may be implemented in program code and data and stored in persistent memory to run on a processor unit. When hardware is

employed, the hardware may include circuits that operate to perform the operations in controller **112**.

In the illustrative examples, the hardware may take the form of a circuit system, an integrated circuit, an application specific integrated circuit (ASIC), a programmable logic device, or some other suitable type of hardware configured to perform a number of operations. With a programmable logic device, the device may be configured to perform the number of operations. The device may be reconfigured at a later time or may be permanently configured to perform the number of operations. Examples of programmable logic devices include, for example, a programmable logic array, a programmable array logic, a field programmable logic array, a field programmable gate array, and other suitable hardware devices. Additionally, the processes may be implemented in organic components integrated with inorganic components and may be comprised entirely of organic components excluding a human being. For example, the processes may be implemented as circuits in organic semiconductors.

Controller **112** is configured to move tool **110** operated by robotic operator **124** from current position **128** to desired position **130**. In this illustrative example, controller **112** is implemented using computer system **132**. Computer system **132** may comprise one or more computers. When more than one computer is present in computer system **132**, those computers are in communication with each other over a communications medium such as a network.

In some illustrative examples, controller **112** in computer system **132** is physically associated with robotic operator **124**. For example, a first component, such as a controller **112**, may be considered to be physically associated with a second component, such as robotic operator **124**, by being secured to the second component, bonded to the second component, mounted to the second component, welded to the second component, fastened to the second component, connected to the second component in some other suitable manner, or a combination thereof. The first component also may be connected to the second component using a third component. Further, the first component may be considered to be associated with the second component by being formed as part of the second component, formed as an extension of the second component, or a combination thereof.

In other illustrative examples, computer system **132** with controller **112** is a remote unit. In this case, controller **112** communicates with robotic operator **124** through a wired or wireless communications medium.

In this depicted example, first plurality of transmitting devices **134** is physically associated with mandrel **108**. First plurality of transmitting devices **134** is configured to provide information about the position of first plurality of transmitting devices **134**. First plurality of transmitting devices **134** are electronic devices that generate signals **136**.

First plurality of transmitting devices **134** may be active devices, passive devices, or a combination thereof. When first plurality of transmitting devices **134** are active, first plurality of transmitting devices **134** may generate signals **136** without receiving an excitation signal from another source. When first plurality of transmitting devices **134** are passive, first plurality of transmitting devices **134** do not transmit signals until activated. In other words, passive transmitting devices transmit signals after receiving an excitation signal from another source.

As illustrated, signals **136** take a number of different forms. For example, signals **136** may take the form of at least one of an electromagnetic signal, an optical signal, other suitable types of signals, or a combination thereof. As an example, first plurality of transmitting devices **134** trans-

mit signals **136** in the form of radio waves. In another illustrative example, first plurality of transmitting devices **134** transmits signals **136** in the form of light. Signals **136** may be transmitted over a communications medium selected from at least one of wireless communications links, optical fiber cable, a wire, or other suitable types of communications links.

In this illustrative example, signals **136** are transmitted from portion **138** of first plurality of transmitting devices **134**. Portion **138** is one or more of first plurality of transmitting devices **134**. In other words, signals **136** may be transmitted from one transmitting device in first plurality of transmitting devices **134**, more than one transmitting device in first plurality of transmitting devices **134**, or all of first plurality of transmitting devices **134** at the same time.

In this depicted example, receiving device **114** is an electronic device that receives signals **136**. In this illustrative example, receiving device **114** takes a number of different forms. For example, receiving device **114** may be selected from one of a radio receiver, a transceiver, an interferometer, a camera or other light capture device, and other suitable types of receiving devices.

As illustrated, receiving device **114** is in reference location **144**. Reference location **144** is a position for receiving device **114** in manufacturing environment **100**. Reference location **144** for receiving device **114** is used to determine the configuration of first plurality of transmitting devices **134** based on signals **136**. Reference location **144** is also used to locate receiving device **114** with respect to tool **110** in this illustrative example.

Data **140** from signals **136** is processed by controller **112**. For example, controller **112** processes data **140** to generate information **141** about mandrel **108**. Information **141** takes various different forms. For instance, information **141** may be selected from at least one of a shape, an orientation, a position, or other suitable information about mandrel **108**.

Controller **112** also may identify desired configuration **120** for mandrel **108**. In this illustrative example, desired configuration **120** is identified using user input. Desired configuration **120** may be identified in another manner, depending on the particular implementation.

If controller **112** determines that desired configuration **120** and configuration **118** for mandrel **108** do not match within selected tolerances, mandrel **108** may be modified such that mandrel **108** has desired configuration **120**. In some examples, this modification includes the rework of mandrel **108**. In other illustrative examples, mandrel **108** is replaced. For instance, controller **112** may determine, based on at least one of the orientation, the position, or the shape of mandrel **108**, that mandrel **108** should be replaced.

As depicted, first plurality of transmitting devices **134** is positioned on mandrel **108** in a number of different ways. For instance, first plurality of transmitting devices **134** may be placed along the surface of mandrel **108**. In another illustrative example, at least one of first plurality of transmitting devices **134** are embedded within mandrel **108**.

In this depicted example, alignment system **142** is also associated with mandrel **108**. Alignment system **142** includes a number of mechanical structures configured to align part **104** with respect to mandrel **108**. First plurality of transmitting devices **134** may be associated with alignment system **142** in some examples. For instance, each of first plurality of transmitting devices **134** may be attached to one of the mechanical structures within alignment system **142**.

In this depicted example, second plurality of transmitting devices **146** is positioned with respect to tool **110**. Second plurality of transmitting devices **146** may be attached to the

outer surface of tool **110**, within a housing for tool **110**, or some combination thereof. Receiving device **114** receives signals **148** from portion **150** of second plurality of transmitting devices **146**.

In this illustrative example, controller **112** processes data **152** from signals **148** to move tool **110**. In one illustrative example, controller **112** is configured to determine current position **128** of tool **110** using signals **148** received from portion **150** of second plurality of transmitting devices **146** and signals **136** received from portion **138** of first plurality of transmitting devices **134**.

After current position **128** of tool **110** is identified, controller **112** moves tool **110** from current position **128** to desired position **130** to perform operation **122** on part **104** associated with mandrel **108**. For example, controller **112** may command robotic operator **124** to move tool **110** to desired position **130** based on signals **136** received from portion **138** of first plurality of transmitting devices **134**.

With the use of first plurality of transmitting devices **134** and second plurality of transmitting devices **146**, part **104** is less likely to need rework or be discarded. First plurality of transmitting devices **134** provide information **141** about mandrel **108** such that modifications may be made to mandrel **108** to manufacture part **104** in a desired manner. For instance, with information **141** about mandrel **108** from first plurality of transmitting devices **134**, configuration **118** of mandrel **108** may be continuously monitored. Any deviations in configuration **118** of mandrel **108** may be detected before part **104** is manufactured in an undesired manner. As an example, when part **104** is composite part **105**, configuration **118** of mandrel **108** may be continuously monitored such that composite part **105** laid up on mandrel **108** has a desired shape.

In one illustrative example, data **140** in signals **136** from first plurality of transmitting devices **134** may indicate that mandrel **108** needs to be replaced. Mandrel **108** can then be replaced before manufacturing another part. In another illustrative example, data **140** from first plurality of transmitting devices **134** indicates that a portion of mandrel **108** needs to be reworked. In this case, only that portion of mandrel **108** may need to be reworked and mandrel **108** may be salvageable.

With the use of second plurality of transmitting devices **146**, tool **110** is allowed to be operated with a desired level of precision, resulting in more consistent and efficient performance of operation **122** on part **104**. Data **152** in signals **148** from second plurality of transmitting devices **146** may indicate that tool **110** is not properly aligned with respect to part **104**. For example, tool **110** used to drill holes in part **104** may be a half-inch lower than desired. Controller **112** then moves tool **110** to desired position **130** in this case.

In another illustrative example, tool **110** used to layup composite material may not have a desired orientation to layup the composite material in the correct direction. Controller **112** then moves tool **110** to desired orientation **131**.

In this manner, manufacturing system **102** using first plurality of transmitting devices **134** and second plurality of transmitting devices **146** operates more efficiently than some currently used systems, while reducing the need for rework or discarding parts formed using components within manufacturing system **102**. As a result, cost savings in manufacturing parts is realized.

With reference now to FIG. **2**, an illustration of a block diagram of a transmitting device is depicted in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. Transmitting device **200** is an example of a transmitting device that may be used in first plurality of transmitting devices **134** in FIG. **1**. Transmitting

device **200** also may be used in second plurality of transmitting devices **146** in FIG. **1**.

In this depicted example, transmitting device **200** may be selected from one of transceiver **202**, transmitter **204**, radio-frequency identification tag **206**, light-emitting diode **208**, and transponder **210**. In other illustrative examples, other types of transmitting devices may be used for transmitting device **200**, depending on the particular implementation.

As depicted, transceiver **202** is an electronic device that comprises both a transmitting device and a receiving device which are combined and share common circuitry in a single housing. When transmitting device **200** is transceiver **202**, transmitting device **200** can communicate with other transmitting devices in first plurality of transmitting devices **134**, second plurality of transmitting devices **146**, or both which have transmitting and receiving capabilities. In other words, transceiver **202** is configured to communicate with other transceivers associated with mandrel **108**, tool **110**, or both, as shown in block form in FIG. **1**. Transceiver **202** sends signals **136** in FIG. **1** to other transceivers in first plurality of transmitting devices **134**, second plurality of transmitting devices **146**, receiving device **114** in reference location **144**, other receiving devices in manufacturing environment **100** shown in block form in FIG. **1**, or a combination thereof.

In this illustrative example, transmitter **204** is an electronic device configured to send signals **136**. When transmitting device **200** is transmitter **204**, it is not configured to receive signals from other devices.

As illustrated, radio-frequency identification tag **206** is a device comprising electronically stored information. Radio-frequency identification tag **206** may be active, passive, or semi-passive. When radio-frequency identification tag **206** is an active or semi-passive transmitting device, radio-frequency identification tag **206** periodically transmits its identification signal. With an active or semi-passive tag, an integrated battery is included in radio-frequency identification tag **206**. When radio-frequency identification tag **206** is passive, it may be activated by an external power source to generate a signal.

Signals from radio-frequency identification tag **206** can be sent even if radio-frequency identification tag **206** is covered by an object or is not visible. For example, radio-frequency identification tag **206** may be embedded in mandrel **108** and still provide signals **136**.

As depicted, light-emitting diode **208** is a semiconductor light source. Light-emitting diode **208** is powered by a power source selected from one of a direct connection, a battery, a renewable power source and other suitable types of power. When the power source for light-emitting diode **208** is a renewable source, the power source may be selected from one of a solar cell, a heat-charged capacitor, a motion-charged capacitor, or some other suitable renewable source.

In this illustrative example, transponder **210** is an electronic device that emits a signal when an input signal is received from another device. In other words, transponder **210** may not send signals until it is activated, or interrogated, by another device. In some illustrative examples, transponder **210** may be physically associated with a receiving device. As depicted, laser **212** is a device configured to generate a beam of coherent light. Laser **212** may generate the beam at various points in the manufacturing process of a part.

The type of device selected for transmitting device **200** is based on various manufacturing factors. These factors include, for example, without limitation, cost, size, shape,

11

availability, performance at high temperatures, signal strength, structural integrity, other suitable factors, or a combination thereof.

In this illustrative example, each of first plurality of transmitting devices **134** may be the same or a different type of transmitting device. For instance, one portion of first plurality of transmitting devices **134** may be light-emitting diodes, while another portion of first plurality of transmitting devices **134** are transceivers. In a similar fashion, transmitting devices selected for a portion of second plurality of transmitting devices **146** may be the same or different transmitting devices than those selected for first plurality of transmitting devices **134**, for other portions of second plurality of transmitting devices **146**, or a combination thereof.

As depicted, configuration **118** of mandrel **108**, current position **128** of tool **110** in FIG. 1, or both may be updated in real-time, depending on the type of transmitting device selected. As the number of transmitting devices present in first plurality of transmitting devices **134** increases, the accuracy of the determination of configuration **118** of mandrel **108** also increases. In a similar fashion, as the number of transmitting devices present in second plurality of transmitting devices **146** increases, controller **112** controls tool **110** with an increased level of precision.

With reference next to FIG. 3, an illustration of a block diagram of an alignment system is depicted in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. In this depicted example, components within alignment system **142** are shown.

As depicted, alignment system **142** includes alignment structures **300** and attachment structures **302**. In this illustrative example, alignment structures **300** are mechanical components positioned along a surface of mandrel **108** in FIG. 1. Alignment structures **300** may be referred to as "targets." In this illustrative example, alignment structures **300** are secured to mandrel **108** and used as reference points to position part **104** and tool **110** in FIG. 1 with respect to mandrel **108**.

In this illustrative example, alignment structures **300** include alignment structure **304**. Alignment structure **304** is formed from various types of materials. For example, alignment structure **304** is formed from metal, ferrous metal, metal alloy, plastic, composite material, and other suitable types of materials and combinations of materials.

As depicted, alignment structures **300** are configured to connect to mandrel **108** using attachment structures **302** such that alignment structures **300** maintain desired configuration **306**. In this illustrative example, alignment structure **304** is physically associated with attachment structure **308** in attachment structures **302**.

In this depicted example, desired configuration **306** comprises a position and orientation of each alignment structure with respect to mandrel **108**. In other words, attachment structures **302** secure alignment structures **300** to mandrel **108** such that alignment structures **300** do not move relative to mandrel **108**.

In this illustrative example, attachment structure **308** takes a number of different forms. For example, attachment structure **308** is selected from one of locking mechanism **310**, electromagnet **312**, and rare earth magnet **314**. Attachment structure **308** may take other forms other than the ones shown, depending on the particular implementation.

When attachment structure **308** is locking mechanism **310**, attachment structure **308** is installed within mandrel **108** such that alignment structure **304** can engage with attachment structure **308**. In other words, each alignment structure is mechanically retained by an attachment structure.

12

When attachment structure **308** is electromagnet **312**, a number of conductive wire coils may be embedded in mandrel **108**. Each wire coil is connected to a power source and used to secure alignment structure **304**. In this case, alignment structure **304** comprises a ferrous metal.

When attachment structure **308** is a rare earth magnet, rare earth magnet **314** is embedded within mandrel **108**. Alignment structure **304** comprising ferrous metal is positioned on top of rare earth magnet **314** to secure alignment structure **304** to mandrel **108**.

In this depicted example, each of the plurality of transmitting devices is physically associated with one of alignment structures **300**. Accordingly, the transmitting device only moves as mandrel **108** changes configuration **118**.

As configuration **118** of mandrel **108** changes, the configuration of at least one of alignment structures **300** changes. As a result, information about a change in configuration of alignment structures **300** yields information about the change in configuration **118** of mandrel **108**. For example, if configuration **118** of mandrel **108** changes such that one of alignment structures **300** associated with a transmitting device moves, that transmitting device will send signals **136** to receiving device **114** in FIG. 1. Signals **136** may then be processed to determine the change in configuration **118** of that portion of mandrel **108**.

The illustration of manufacturing environment **100** and the components within manufacturing system **102** shown in FIGS. 1-3 are not meant to imply physical or architectural limitations to the manner in which an illustrative embodiment may be implemented. Other components in addition to or in place of the ones illustrated may be used. Some components may be optional. Also, the blocks are presented to illustrate some functional components. One or more of these blocks may be combined, divided, or combined and divided into different blocks when implemented in an illustrative embodiment.

Although the illustrative examples are described with respect to an aircraft, an illustrative embodiment may be applied to other types of platforms. The platform may be, for example, a mobile platform, a stationary platform, a land-based structure, an aquatic-based structure, and a space-based structure. More specifically, the platform, may be a surface ship, a tank, a personnel carrier, a train, a spacecraft, a space station, a satellite, a submarine, an automobile, a power plant, a bridge, a dam, a house, a manufacturing facility, a building, and other suitable platforms.

Moreover, although tool **110** is described as being operated by robotic operator **124**, a human operator also may operate tool **110** in some cases. For instance, a human operator may layup composite material on mandrel **108** for forming a composite part. In still another example, the human operator may drill holes in part **104** using tool **110**. It is desirable for the human operator to determine whether part **104** is in the correct position and mandrel **108** has desired configuration **120** such that the human operator may perform operation **122** with tool **110** to form part **104** accurately for use in aircraft **106**.

In other illustrative examples, a third plurality of transmitting devices may be positioned on part **104**. In this case, the third plurality of transmitting devices sends signals to receiving device **114**. From these signals, the configuration of part **104** is determined.

In still other illustrative examples, receiving device **114** is mounted on tool **110**. For example, receiving device **114** may be mounted on end effector device **126** of robotic operator **124**. In this case, receiving device **114** mounted on tool **110** receives signals **136** from first plurality of trans-

mitting devices **134** such that controller **112** may position tool **110** with respect to mandrel **108**. In this illustrative example, controller **112** may be physically associated with robotic operator **124** and receiving device **114**.

In some cases, tool **110** may be a material applicator such as a three-dimensional printer. In this case, mandrel **108** may be absent and manufacturing environment **100** is a printing environment. In this illustrative example, the third plurality of transmitting devices may be placed on a portion of part **104** that has already been completed to orient tool **110** to print the remaining portion of part **104**.

In still other illustrative examples, tool **110** is a sensor. For instance, tool **110** may be a temperature sensor configured to provide information about the temperature of part **104** at different stages of manufacturing for part **104**. In other illustrative examples, tool **110** may include a plurality of devices. For instance, tool **110** may include a fastener installer, a sealant applicator, and a camera.

Turning next to FIG. 4, an illustration of a manufacturing environment is depicted in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. In this depicted example, manufacturing environment **400** and the components within manufacturing environment **400** are examples of an implementation for components within manufacturing environment **100** shown in block form in FIG. 1.

In this illustrative example, manufacturing environment **400** includes manufacturing system **402**, part **404**, receiving device **405**, and controller **407**. Manufacturing system **402** includes mandrel **406** and robotic operator **408** in this illustrative example.

As depicted, robotic operator **408** is configured to operate drill **410** to drill holes in part **404**. Controller **407** moves drill **410** to a desired position to drill holes in part **404**.

In this depicted example, alignment structures **412** are arranged along outer surface **414** of mandrel **406**. Alignment structures **412** are mechanical structures used to provide a mechanical reference system to position part **404** in this illustrative example. In this example, alignment structures **412** are not physically associated with transmitting devices. Rather, alignment structures **412** are installed in mandrel **406** at fixed locations. First plurality of transmitting devices **416** are installed in fixed locations different than the locations of alignment structures **412**.

As illustrated, first plurality of transmitting devices **416** are positioned along outer surface **414** of mandrel **406**. Receiving device **405** receives signals from first plurality of transmitting devices **416**. In this illustrative example, controller **407** uses data from the signals to determine the configuration of mandrel **406**. For example, as part **404** is being formed, controller **407** may identify that modifications need to be made to mandrel **406** before finishing part **404**.

In this illustrative example, second plurality of transmitting devices **418** is positioned on drill **410**. Second plurality of transmitting devices **418** communicates with receiving device **405** such that controller **407** can determine the position of drill **410** and move drill **410** to a desired position. In some cases, first plurality of transmitting devices **416** and second plurality of transmitting devices **418** are transceivers committed to communicate with one another.

For example, a portion of first plurality of transmitting devices **416** in the vicinity of a hole to be drilled communicates their positions to second plurality of transmitting devices **418**. Controller **407** has knowledge of nominal positions of first plurality of transmitting devices **416** relative to the hole to be drilled. Controller **407** communicates to robotic operator **408** a desired position and a desired orientation for drill **410**. As drill **410** moves to the approxi-

mate location of the hole to be drilled, the position and orientation of drill **410** may be refined based on the portion of first plurality of transmitting devices **416** until drill **410** reaches a final position to drill the hole.

In other illustrative examples, a third plurality of transmitting devices (not shown) may be positioned with respect to part **404**. In this instance, the transmitting devices may be removably connected to part **404**.

Turning next to FIG. 5, an illustration of a perspective view of an attachment structure and an alignment structure are depicted in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. In this depicted example, alignment structure **500** is an example of an alignment structure in alignment structures **412** from FIG. 4.

As depicted, alignment structure **500** is engaged with attachment structure **501**. Alignment structure **500** and attachment structure **501** are examples of one implementation for alignment structure **304** and attachment structure **308**, respectively, shown in block form in FIG. 3.

In this illustrative example, alignment structure **500** comprises tooling ball **502** and base **504** in this illustrative example. Tooling ball **502** is a sphere in this depicted example. In other illustrative examples, alignment structure **500** may take other forms. For instance, alignment structure **500** may have a shape selected from one of a cube, a cylinder, a prism, a disc, or some other suitable shape.

As illustrated, base **504** of alignment structure **500** has protrusions **506**. Protrusions **506** extend from the sides of base **504** such that alignment structure **500** can lock into place in attachment structure **501**. In this illustrative example, base **504** has two protrusions **506**, but only one is shown in this view.

In this depicted example, attachment structure **501** comprises bushing **508**, interface **510**, and spring **512**. In this depicted example, bushing **508** includes slots **514**. Slots **514** in bushing **508** are configured to receive protrusions **506** of alignment structure **500**. Retention springs **516** prevent protrusions **506** from moving backward and alignment structure **500** from falling out of attachment structure **501**.

As illustrated, spring **512** provides consistent contact with bushing **508** in the direction of arrow **518**. In this illustrative example, spring **512** is selected from one of a tension spring, a compression spring, a coil spring, a flat spring, or some other suitable type of spring. Retention springs **516** may be selected from similar types of springs, depending on the functionality involved. In some cases, spring **512** is positioned within a housing.

In this depicted example, interface **510** is configured to keep force from spring **512** applied along axis **520** of alignment structure **500**. Interface **510** is attached to spring **512** to give base **504** a level platform on which to rest. Additionally, interface **510** protects the upper coils of spring **512** from an uneven load that may cause a kink and decrease the long-term effectiveness of spring **512**. In some illustrative examples, interface **510** may be absent from attachment structure **501**.

In this illustrative example, bushing **508**, interface **510**, and spring **512** are integrated into a mandrel. In other words, bushing **508**, interface **510**, and spring **512** are formed as part of the mandrel. In some illustrative examples, these components are embedded in the mandrel for easy installation of alignment structure **500**.

As depicted, attachment structure **501** provides an efficient way to install alignment structure **500** in a mandrel. Bushing **508** with slots **514** allow alignment structure **500** to easily engage with attachment structure **501** and hold alignment structure **500** in place during manufacturing of a part.

15

Moreover, an operator may quickly install alignment structure **500** without the need for tape or other adhesives that can degrade in the manufacturing environment.

In some illustrative examples, a transmitting device is physically associated with alignment structure **500**. In this case, the transmitting device may be placed inside tooling ball **502**, attached to tooling ball **502**, or associated with tooling ball **502** in some other suitable manner. Accordingly, both alignment structure **500** and the transmitting device may be installed more quickly and easily than some currently used systems. The secure attachment of alignment structure **500** with attachment structure **501** will enable an operator to identify outlying attachment structures relative to a fixed reference location or surrounding alignment structures with transmitting devices.

In FIG. 6, an illustration of a top view of an alignment structure and an attachment structure is depicted in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. In this depicted example, a top view of alignment structure **600** and attachment structure **601** is shown. Alignment structure **600** and attachment structure **601** are another example of one implementation for alignment structure **304** and attachment structure **308** shown in block form in FIG. 3.

As depicted, alignment structure **600** includes tooling ball **602** and base **603**. Attachment structure **601** includes slot **604** and slot **606** on each side of bushing **605**. Attachment structure **601** is formed as part of the mandrel in this illustrative example.

As illustrated, protrusion **608** of base **603** of alignment structure **600** is positioned within opening **610** of slot **604**, while protrusion **612** is positioned within an opening (not shown) in slot **606**. To install alignment structure **600**, an operator moves alignment structure **600** in the direction of arrow **614** until retention springs or other mechanisms within bushing **605** are activated.

Turning next to FIG. 7, an illustration of a top view of an alignment structure and an attachment structure is depicted in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. In this depicted example, alignment structure **600** has been moved in the direction of arrow **614** in FIG. 6. Alignment structure **600** is now locked in place using attachment structure **601**.

The illustrations of the alignment structures and attachment structures in FIGS. 5-7 are merely examples of how alignment structure **304** and attachment structure **308** from FIG. 3 may be implemented as physical structures. The illustrations of the alignment structures and attachment structures in FIGS. 5-7 are not meant to imply physical or architectural limitations to the manner in which an illustrative embodiment may be implemented. Other components in addition to or in place of the ones illustrated may be used. Some components may be optional.

For example, bushing **508** in FIG. 5 may have external threads in some illustrative examples. In another illustrative example, another retention device is used instead of retention springs **516** in FIG. 5. For example, magnets may be positioned on the innermost faces of slot **604** and slot **606** in FIG. 6.

In other illustrative examples, protrusions **506** may be spring loaded. In yet another illustrative example, a rare earth magnet, an electromagnet, or some other suitable retention device may be used in place of spring **512** and bushing **508**, depending on the particular implementation.

With reference now to FIG. 8, an illustration of a mandrel with a plurality of transmitting devices is depicted in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. In this depicted example, plurality of transmitting devices **800** are positioned

16

with respect to mandrel **802**. Part **803** is being manufactured on mandrel **802**. For instance, part **803** may be a composite part laid up on mandrel **802**.

As illustrated, plurality of transmitting devices **800** are transceivers **804**. Transceivers **804** are physically associated with alignment structures **806**. In other words, each of transceivers **804** are attached to alignment structures **806**. Each of alignment structures **806** have been locked into place using an attachment structure (not shown) installed in mandrel **802**.

While alignment structures **806** provide a visual reference system to align part **803** on mandrel **802**, transceivers **804** send signals to a receiving device such that the configuration of each of alignment structures **806** is determined. Accordingly, information about at least one of the shape, orientation, and position of mandrel **802** can be generated.

In some illustrative examples, alignment structures **806** may be configured to identify themselves as misplaced. For instance, if the spacing between surrounding alignment structures **806** deviates from a nominal value, a signal may be generated indicating that rework, replacement, or another modification should be made to that particular alignment structure, mandrel **802**, or both. In some cases, since alignment structures **806** are secured to mandrel **802**, a change in any one of alignment structures **806** with a corresponding transceiver indicates a change in configuration of mandrel **802**.

Turning now to FIG. 9, an illustration of a mandrel with a plurality of transmitting devices is depicted in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. In this depicted example, plurality of transmitting devices **900** is positioned with respect to mandrel **902**. Part **905** is being manufactured on mandrel **902** in this illustrative example.

In this illustrative example, attachment structures are absent. Plurality of transmitting devices **900** is positioned along outer surface **903** of mandrel **902**. Plurality of transmitting devices **900** are light-emitting diodes **904** in this illustrative example.

Light-emitting diodes **904** may be positioned such that light-emitting diodes **904** are flush, recessed, protruding, or some combination thereof with respect to outer surface **903** of mandrel **902**. In this illustrative example, light-emitting diodes **904** are shown protruding from outer surface **903** of mandrel **902**.

In this depicted example, optical sensors detect locations of light-emitting diodes **904** to identify the location of part **905** on mandrel **902**, the configuration of mandrel **902**, or both. The optical sensors are examples of receiving devices for light emitted by light-emitting diodes **904**.

In other illustrative examples, light-emitting diodes **904** can be referenced to a fixed location away from part **905**, each other, or a combination thereof. In this illustrative example, the position of part **905**, the configuration of the mandrel, or both may be continuously updated while light-emitting diodes **904** are lit.

As illustrated, light-emitting diodes **904** provide a low-cost, energy-efficient light source that can be easily replaced. When light-emitting diodes **904** are recessed beneath outer surface **903** of mandrel **902**, the position of light-emitting diodes **904** reduces the risk of the part colliding with one of light-emitting diodes **904**, further reducing the risk for damage of light-emitting diodes **904**.

In some examples, light-emitting diodes **904** are positioned using attachment structures such as those described in FIGS. 5-7. In other illustrative examples, light-emitting diodes **904** are removably connected to mandrel **902**.

17

With reference next to FIG. 10, an illustration of a mandrel with a plurality of transmitting devices is depicted in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. In this depicted example, plurality of transmitting devices 1000 is positioned with respect to mandrel 1002. Part 1005 is being manufactured on mandrel 1002 in this illustrative example.

Plurality of transmitting devices 1000 comprise positioning system devices 1004. Positioning system devices 1004 are part of a positioning system in this illustrative example. This positioning system may be a global positioning system or a local positioning system. When the positioning system is a global positioning system, each of positioning system devices 1004 determines its position from signals sent by global positioning system satellites. When the positioning system is a local positioning system, each of positioning system devices 1004 determines its position from signals sent by signaling beacons in reference locations within the manufacturing environment.

In this depicted example, positioning system devices 1004 may transmit position information at regular intervals to a local receiver remote from mandrel 1002. The receiver receives the position information from each of positioning system devices 1004. The position information may then be processed to determine the configuration of mandrel 1002.

In this depicted example, positioning system devices 1004 may be positioned such that positioning system devices 1004 are flush, recessed, protruding, or some combination thereof with respect to outer surface 1003 of mandrel 1002. In this illustrative example, positioning system devices 1004 are shown recessed from outer surface 1003 of mandrel 1002.

Referring next to FIG. 11, an illustration of a mandrel with a plurality of transmitting devices is depicted in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. In this depicted example, plurality of transmitting devices 1100 are positioned with respect to mandrel 1102. Part 1103 is being manufactured on mandrel 1102 in this illustrative example. Plurality of transmitting devices 1100 take the form of radio-frequency identification tags 1104 in this illustrative example.

Radio-frequency identification tags 1104 may be positioned along outer surface 1106 of mandrel 1102, embedded within mandrel 1102, or positioned with respect to mandrel 1102 in some other suitable manner. In a similar fashion to light-emitting diodes 904 in FIG. 9, radio-frequency identification tags 1104 may be referenced to fixed locations, to each other, or a combination thereof. The position of part 1103 on mandrel 1102, the configuration of mandrel 1102, or both may be updated continuously, depending on where radio-frequency identification tags 1104 are positioned.

In this illustrative example, radio-frequency identification tags 1104 are embedded within mandrel 1102 underneath outer surface 1106 of mandrel 1102. Mandrel 1102 and part 1103 are shown in phantom such that radio-frequency identification tags 1104 are visible in this illustrative example. Radio-frequency identification tags 1104 are passive in this illustrative example but may be active in other illustrative examples.

With radio-frequency identification tags 1104 embedded within mandrel 1102, the risk of collision with part 1103 on mandrel 1102 is reduced or eliminated, thus extending the life of radio-frequency identification tags 1104. Embedding radio-frequency identification tags 1104 may be desirable for forming a composite part where the entire surface of mandrel 1102 needs to be accessed. For example, layers of composite material may be laid up on mandrel 1102 and radio-frequency identification tags 1104 can still provide

18

signals detectable by a receiving device. The receiving device is a radio-frequency identification tag reader in this illustrative example.

The illustrations of plurality of transmitting devices in FIGS. 8-11 are not meant to imply physical or architectural limitations to the manner in which an illustrative embodiment may be implemented. Other components in addition to or in place of the ones illustrated may be used. Some components may be optional. For example, the mandrels shown in FIGS. 8-11 are segmented mandrels. Six segments have been assembled to form each of the mandrels shown. In other illustrative examples, other numbers of segments may be assembled to form the mandrel or the mandrel may be one piece.

The different components shown in FIGS. 4-11 may be illustrative examples of how components shown in block form in FIGS. 1-3 can be implemented as physical structures. Additionally, some of the components in FIGS. 4-11 may be combined with components in FIGS. 1-3, used with components in FIGS. 1-3, or a combination of the two.

With reference now to FIG. 12, an illustration of a flowchart of a process for monitoring a configuration of a mandrel is depicted in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. In this depicted example, the process described in FIG. 12 may be an example of a process implemented in manufacturing environment 400 using first plurality of transmitting devices 416 in FIG. 4.

The process begins by positioning a plurality of transmitting devices with respect to a mandrel (operation 1200). For instance, transmitting devices are positioned along the outer surface of the mandrel.

The process then receives signals from a portion of the plurality of transmitting devices (operation 1202). The signals are received by a receiving device in this illustrative example.

Next, the signals are processed to determine the configuration of the mandrel (operation 1204). The configuration is a current configuration for the mandrel in this illustrative example. The configuration of the mandrel may change over time in an undesired manner. In operation 1204, a position, orientation, shape, or combination thereof of the mandrel is determined. For instance, the information from the plurality of transmitting devices may provide information about the contour of the surface of the mandrel.

The process then identifies a desired configuration of the mandrel (operation 1206). The desired configuration of the mandrel may be identified from a model, a database of parameters for the mandrel, user input, some other suitable source, or a combination thereof. Thereafter, a determination is made as to whether the configuration of the mandrel matches the desired configuration for the mandrel (operation 1208). In some cases, the configuration of the mandrel matches the desired configuration for the mandrel within selected tolerances.

If the configuration of the mandrel matches the desired configuration, the process returns to operation 1202 as described above. If the configuration of the mandrel does not match the desired configuration of the mandrel, the mandrel is modified such that the mandrel has the desired configuration (operation 1210) with the process returning to operation 1202 as described above. This modification includes rework and, in some cases, replacing the mandrel.

In this manner, the configuration of the mandrel is continuously monitored for deformation using the first plurality of transmitting devices and the receiving device. Accordingly, the process reduces inconsistencies in parts formed on

the mandrel by ensuring that the mandrel maintains the desired configuration throughout the manufacturing process.

Turning next to FIG. 13, an illustration of a flowchart of a process for positioning a tool with respect to a mandrel is depicted in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. As depicted, the process described in FIG. 13 may be an example of a process implemented in manufacturing environment 400 in using drill 410 and manufacturing system 402 to perform an operation on part 404 in FIG. 4.

The process begins by positioning a plurality of transmitting devices with respect to a tool (operation 1300). The transmitting devices are mounted on the tool in this illustrative example.

Next, the process identifies a current position of the tool with respect to a mandrel using signals from the plurality of transmitting devices positioned with respect to the tool and a plurality of transmitting devices on the mandrel (operation 1302). The signals are received by a receiving device in this illustrative example.

Thereafter, the tool is moved to a desired position for the tool from the current position of the tool (operation 1304). The process then performs an operation on a part disposed on the mandrel with the tool based on the current position of the tool relative to the mandrel (operation 1306) with the process terminating thereafter.

In some cases, the tool will perform a number of operations on the part. In one illustrative example, the tool drills holes in the part. In this case, the process described in FIG. 13 will repeat until the number of operations are performed by the tool in a desired manner. In other words, signals from the plurality of transmitting devices are processed to continuously update the position of the tool with respect to the mandrel and move the tool from its current position to a desired position.

With reference to FIG. 14, an illustration of a flowchart of a process for performing an operation on a part is depicted in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. As depicted, the process described in FIG. 14 may be an example of a process implemented in manufacturing environment 400 in using drill 410 and manufacturing system 402 to perform an operation on part 404 in FIG. 4. In particular, the process described in FIG. 14 is used to perform an operation on a part in a manufacturing environment with fixed locations for the receiving device.

The process begins by sending signals from transceivers associated with a mandrel to a receiving device in a known location relative to a tool (operation 1400). The signals from the transceivers communicate the position of each transceiver to fixed receiving devices. In one illustrative example, the positions are communicated using a "machine coordinate system." A machine coordinate system is a reference system in which the tool operates. If the positions are not communicated in a reference coordinate system used by the tool, the positions are processed to match the reference coordinate system.

The process then transforms previously defined positions of the transceivers (operation 1402). The previous positions of the transceivers may be translated from a "part coordinate system." In this illustrative example, the airplane coordinate system is a reference system in which airplane parts are located in three-dimensional space.

Thereafter, the process applies the transformation to locations of part features to perform an operation with the tool (operation 1404). Next, the process moves the tool from a current location to a desired location (operation 1406). The

process then performs operations at transformed locations using the tool (operation 1408) with the process terminating thereafter.

Turning next to FIG. 15, an illustration of a flowchart of a process for performing an operation on a part is depicted in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. As depicted, the process described in FIG. 15 may be an example of a process implemented in manufacturing environment 400 in using drill 410 and manufacturing system 402 to perform an operation on part 404 in FIG. 4. In particular, the process described in FIG. 15 is used to perform an operation on a part in a manufacturing environment with fixed transmitter locations.

The process begins by receiving, by one or more transceivers, the position of fixed transmitters in known locations relative to a tool (operation 1500). The positions may be received in a machine coordinate system by all transceivers.

Next, the process sends signals from the transceivers to one another to determine relative spacing (operation 1502). Spacing information from each transceiver is then sent to a controller for the tool (operation 1504). In some examples, the controller optimizes the information to match conditions for the tool.

Thereafter, the process transforms previously defined positions of the transceivers from a coordinate system to the coordinate system of tool (operation 1506). For instance, the positions may be transformed from an airplane coordinate system to a machine coordinate system. The process then applies the transformation to locations of part features (operation 1508). Next, the tool performs operations at the transformed locations (operation 1510) with the process terminating thereafter.

In FIG. 16, an illustration of a flowchart of a process for monitoring a configuration of a mandrel is depicted in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. In this depicted example, the process described in FIG. 16 may be an example of a process implemented in manufacturing environment 400 using first plurality of transmitting devices 416 in FIG. 4.

The process begins by defining locations for each transceiver on the mandrel (operation 1600). The locations for each transceiver may be defined through a calibration process prior to the use of the mandrel to manufacture a part.

Next, signals are sent from the transceivers on the mandrel to nearby transceivers and a fixed receiving device to determine relative spacing (operation 1602). The fixed receiving device may be associated with a controller.

Thereafter, the process synthesizes relative spacing data from the transceivers (operation 1604). In this illustrative example, the controller synthesizes the spacing data and fits a point cloud to locations defined through calibration.

The process then detects changes in the configuration of the mandrel based on the relative spacing data (operation 1606) with the process terminating thereafter. For instance, when the mandrel is comprised of segments joined together, changes in shape are detected within mandrel segments and between mandrel segments. In this manner, the transceivers can detect if the mandrel segments were not joined correctly, are deforming with use, or a combination thereof. In other illustrative examples, the process detects other types of inconsistencies with respect to the mandrel.

The flowcharts and block diagrams in the different depicted embodiments illustrate the architecture, functionality, and operation of some possible implementations of apparatuses and methods in an illustrative embodiment. In this regard, each block in the flowcharts or block diagrams

may represent at least one of a module, a segment, a function, or a portion of an operation or step.

In some alternative implementations of an illustrative embodiment, the function or functions noted in the blocks may occur out of the order noted in the figures. For example, in some cases, two blocks shown in succession may be executed substantially concurrently, or the blocks may sometimes be performed in the reverse order, depending upon the functionality involved. Also, other blocks may be added in addition to the illustrated blocks in a flowchart or block diagram.

Turning now to FIG. 17, an illustration of a data processing system in the form of a block diagram is depicted in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. Data processing system 1700 may be used to implement one or more computers in computer system 132 in FIG. 1. As depicted, data processing system 1700 includes communications framework 1702, which provides communications between processor unit 1704, storage devices 1706, communications unit 1708, input/output unit 1710, and display 1712. In some cases, communications framework 1702 may be implemented as a bus system.

Processor unit 1704 is configured to execute instructions for software to perform a number of operations. Processor unit 1704 may comprise a number of processors, a multi-processor core, some other type of processor, or some combination thereof, depending on the implementation. In some cases, processor unit 1704 may take the form of a hardware unit, such as a circuit system, an application specific integrated circuit (ASIC), a programmable logic device, or some other suitable type of hardware unit.

Instructions for the operating system, applications, programs, or both run by processor unit 1704 may be located in storage devices 1706. Storage devices 1706 may be in communication with processor unit 1704 through communications framework 1702. As used herein, a storage device, also referred to as a computer readable storage device, is any piece of hardware capable of storing information on a temporary basis, permanent basis, or both. This information may include, but is not limited to, at least one of data, program code, or other information.

Memory 1714 and persistent storage 1716 are examples of storage devices 1706. Memory 1714 may take the form of, for example, a random access memory or some type of volatile or non-volatile storage device. Persistent storage 1716 may comprise any number of components or devices. For example, persistent storage 1716 may comprise a hard drive, a flash memory, a rewritable optical disk, a rewritable magnetic tape, or some combination of the above. The media used by persistent storage 1716 may or may not be removable.

Communications unit 1708 allows data processing system 1700 to communicate with other data processing systems, devices, or some combination thereof. Communications unit 1708 may provide communications using physical and/or wireless communications links.

Input/output unit 1710 allows input to be received from and output to be sent to other devices connected to data processing system 1700. For example, input/output unit 1710 may allow user input to be received through at least one of a keyboard, a mouse, or some other type of input device. As another example, input/output unit 1710 may allow output to be sent to a printer connected to data processing system 1700.

Display 1712 is configured to display information to a user. Display 1712 may comprise, for example, without limitation, selected from one of a monitor, a touch screen, a

laser display, a holographic display, a virtual display device, or some other type of display device.

In this illustrative example, the processes of the different illustrative embodiments may be performed by processor unit 1704 using computer-implemented instructions. These instructions may be referred to as program code, computer usable program code, or computer readable program code and may be read and executed by one or more processors in processor unit 1704.

In these examples, program code 1718 is located in a functional form on computer readable media 1720, which is selectively removable, and may be loaded onto or transferred to data processing system 1700 for execution by processor unit 1704. Program code 1718 and computer readable media 1720 together form computer program product 1722. In this illustrative example, computer readable media 1720 may be computer readable storage media 1724 or computer readable signal media 1726.

Computer readable storage media 1724 is a physical or tangible storage device used to store program code 1718 rather than a medium that propagates or transmits program code 1718. Computer readable storage media 1724 may be, for example, without limitation, an optical or magnetic disk or a persistent storage device that is connected to data processing system 1700.

Alternatively, program code 1718 may be transferred to data processing system 1700 using computer readable signal media 1726. Computer readable signal media 1726 may be, for example, a propagated data signal containing program code 1718. This data signal may be an electromagnetic signal, an optical signal, or some other type of signal that can be transmitted over physical, wireless communications links, or some combination thereof.

The illustration of data processing system 1700 in FIG. 17 is not meant to provide architectural limitations to the manner in which the illustrative embodiments may be implemented. The different illustrative embodiments may be implemented in a data processing system that includes components in addition to or in place of those illustrated for data processing system 1700. Further, components shown in FIG. 17 may be varied from the illustrative examples shown.

Illustrative embodiments of the disclosure may be described in the context of aircraft manufacturing and service method 1800 as shown in FIG. 18 and aircraft 1900 as shown in FIG. 19. Turning first to FIG. 18, an illustration of an aircraft manufacturing and service method is depicted in accordance with an illustrative embodiment. During pre-production, aircraft manufacturing and service method 1800 may include specification and design 1802 of aircraft 1900 in FIG. 19 and material procurement 1804.

During production, component and subassembly manufacturing 1806 and system integration 1808 of aircraft 1900 in FIG. 19 takes place. Thereafter, aircraft 1900 in FIG. 19 may go through certification and delivery 1810 in order to be placed in service 1812. While in service 1812 by a customer, aircraft 1900 in FIG. 19 is scheduled for routine maintenance and service 1814, which may include modification, reconfiguration, refurbishment, and other maintenance or service.

Each of the processes of aircraft manufacturing and service method 1800 may be performed or carried out by at least one of a system integrator, a third party, or an operator. In these examples, the operator may be a customer. For the purposes of this description, a system integrator may include, without limitation, any number of aircraft manufacturers and major-system subcontractors; a third party may include, without limitation, any number of vendors, subcon-

tractors, and suppliers; and an operator may be an airline, a leasing company, a military entity, a service organization, and so on.

With reference now to FIG. 19, an illustration of an aircraft is depicted in which an illustrative embodiment may be implemented. In this example, aircraft 1900 is produced by aircraft manufacturing and service method 1800 in FIG. 18 and may include airframe 1902 with plurality of systems 1904 and interior 1906. Examples of systems 1904 include one or more of propulsion system 1908, electrical system 1910, hydraulic system 1912, and environmental system 1914. Any number of other systems may be included. Although an aerospace example is shown, different illustrative embodiments may be applied to other industries, such as the automotive industry.

Apparatuses and methods embodied herein may be employed during at least one of the stages of aircraft manufacturing and service method 1800 in FIG. 18. In particular, manufacturing system 102 with first plurality of transmitting devices 134 and second plurality of transmitting devices 146 from FIG. 1 may be used during any one of the stages of aircraft manufacturing and service method 1800. For example, without limitation, manufacturing system 102 with first plurality of transmitting devices 134 and second plurality of transmitting devices 146 from FIG. 1 may be used to monitor configuration 118 of mandrel 108, the position of part 104, or both during component and subassembly manufacturing 1806. In some cases, second plurality of transmitting devices 146 also may be used during system integration 1808, routine maintenance and service 1814, or some other stage of aircraft manufacturing and service method 1800.

In one illustrative example, components or subassemblies produced in component and subassembly manufacturing 1806 in FIG. 18 may be fabricated or manufactured in a manner similar to components or subassemblies produced while aircraft 1900 is in service 1812 in FIG. 18. As yet another example, one or more apparatus embodiments, method embodiments, or a combination thereof may be utilized during production stages, such as component and subassembly manufacturing 1806 and system integration 1808 in FIG. 18. One or more apparatus embodiments, method embodiments, or a combination thereof may be utilized while aircraft 1900 is in service 1812, during maintenance and service 1814, or both in FIG. 18. The use of a number of the different illustrative embodiments may substantially expedite the assembly of aircraft 1900, reduce the cost of aircraft 1900, or both.

Thus, the illustrative embodiments provide a method and system for monitoring configuration 118 of mandrel 108. First plurality of transmitting devices 134 is positioned with respect to mandrel 108. Signals 136 from portion 150 of first plurality of transmitting devices 134 are received at receiving device 114. Signals 136 are processed to determine configuration 118 of mandrel 108.

With the use of an illustrative embodiment, the configuration of a mandrel is more easily monitored than with currently used systems. The shape, position, and orientation of the mandrel may be determined in real-time. As a result, modifications can be made to the mandrel such that parts formed on the mandrel are formed in a desired manner. For instance, the configuration of the mandrel may be monitored such that layers of composite material may be laid up on the mandrel and cured to form the desired shape, thickness, or both shape and thickness of the composite part. When the configuration of the mandrel is monitored, undesired incon-

sistencies in the composite part due to a deformed or misaligned mandrel may be reduced or eliminated.

The illustrative embodiments also provide an efficient process for positioning a tool with respect to a mandrel. With the use of transceivers positioned on the mandrel and the tool, the tool can be controlled to perform operations on the part with greater precision. In this manner, the illustrative embodiments reduce the risk that the part formed on the mandrel needs to be reworked or discarded.

Additionally, the illustrative embodiments provide an efficient system to attach alignment structures and transmitting devices associated with alignment structures such that the transmitting devices remain in fixed locations. Accordingly, the configuration of the mandrel is determined more easily. Reducing the installation time of transmitting devices on the mandrel further reduces the manufacturing time for parts formed with the mandrel.

The description of the different illustrative embodiments has been presented for purposes of illustration and description, and is not intended to be exhaustive or limited to the embodiments in the form disclosed. Many modifications and variations will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art. Further, different illustrative embodiments may provide different features as compared to other desirable embodiments. The embodiment or embodiments selected are chosen and described in order to best explain the principles of the embodiments, the practical application, and to enable others of ordinary skill in the art to understand the disclosure for various embodiments with various modifications as are suited to the particular use contemplated.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for monitoring a mandrel, the method comprising:
 - positioning a first plurality of transmitting devices on the mandrel, each transmitting device of the first plurality of transmitting devices being configured to generate a signal indicative of a position of the transmitting device;
 - receiving, at a receiving device, the signals indicative of the positions of the transmitting devices from a portion of the first plurality of transmitting devices;
 - processing the signals indicative of the positions of the transmitting devices from the portion of the first plurality of transmitting devices to determine a current configuration of the mandrel;
 - identifying a desired configuration for the mandrel;
 - comparing the current configuration to the desired configuration; and
 - when the current configuration does not match the desired configuration, modifying the mandrel such that the mandrel has the desired configuration, wherein the current configuration does not match the desired configuration when the mandrel has deformed such that a current position of one of the transmitting devices in the current configuration does not match a desired position of the one of the transmitting devices in the desired configuration.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein positioning the first plurality of transmitting devices comprises:
 - embedding at least one of the first plurality of transmitting devices within the mandrel.
3. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
 - positioning a second plurality of transmitting devices with respect to a tool;
 - identifying a current position of the tool with respect to the mandrel using the signals received from the portion

25

of the first plurality of transmitting devices and signals received from the second plurality of transmitting devices; and moving the tool to a desired position for the tool from the current position of the tool.

4. The method of claim 3 further comprising: performing an operation on a part disposed on the mandrel with the tool based on the current position of the tool relative to the mandrel.

5. The method of claim 4, wherein performing the operation comprises performing one of a composite layup operation, a drilling operation, a fastener installation operation, a sealing operation, an inspection operation, a painting operation, a milling operation, a material application operation, and a sensing operation.

6. The method of claim 1 further comprising: locating the receiving device in a reference location with respect to the mandrel.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein processing the signals from the portion of the first plurality of transmitting devices comprises: determining an orientation of the mandrel.

8. The method of claim 7, wherein processing the signals comprises: determining a shape of the mandrel.

9. The method of claim 8 further comprising: determining, based on at least one of the orientation, a position, or the shape of the mandrel, whether to replace the mandrel.

10. The method of claim 1 further comprising: positioning alignment structures on the mandrel configured to connect to the mandrel using attachment structures associated with the mandrel such that the alignment structures maintain a desired orientation for the mandrel.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein the current configuration does not match the desired configuration when the mandrel has deformed such that the current position does not match the desired position by more than a selected tolerance specified for the mandrel.

12. A system comprising:
 a mandrel;
 a first plurality of transmitting devices physically associated with the mandrel, each transmitting device of the first plurality of transmitting devices being configured to generate a signal indicative of position of the transmitting device; and
 a receiving device configured to receive the signals indicative of the positions of the transmitting devices from a portion of the first plurality of transmitting devices; and
 a controller operatively coupled to the receiving device and configured to process the signals indicative of the positions of the transmitting devices from the portion of the first plurality of transmitting devices to determine a current configuration of the mandrel, to identify a desired configuration for the mandrel, to compare the current configuration to the desired configuration, and, when the current configuration does not match the desired configuration, to modify the mandrel such that the mandrel has the desired configuration, wherein the current configuration does not match the desired configuration when the mandrel has deformed such that a current position of one of the transmitting devices in the current configuration does not match a desired position of the one of the transmitting devices in the desired configuration.

26

13. The system of claim 12, wherein a transmitting device in the first plurality of transmitting devices comprises at least one of a transceiver, a transmitter, a radio-frequency identification tag, a light-emitting diode, a transponder, or a laser.

14. The system of claim 12 further comprising:
 a second plurality of transmitting devices physically associated with a tool; and
 wherein the controller is further configured to identify a current position of the tool using signals received from a portion of the second plurality of transmitting devices and move the tool from the current position to a desired position to perform an operation on a part associated with the mandrel.

15. The system of claim 14, wherein the tool is selected from one of a composite layup device, a drill, a camera, an ultrasonic array, a fastener installer, a sealant applicator, a painting device, a mill, a marking device, a laser, a probe, a material applicator, and a sensor.

16. The system of claim 12, wherein the signals from the portion of the first plurality of transmitting devices provide data from which information about at least one of a shape, an orientation, and a position of the mandrel can be generated.

17. The system of claim 12 further comprising:
 attachment structures associated with the mandrel; and
 alignment structures positioned along a surface of the mandrel and configured to connect to the mandrel using the attachment structures such that the alignment structures maintain a desired configuration, wherein each transmitting device in the first plurality of transmitting devices is associated with one of the alignment structures.

18. The system of claim 12, wherein each transmitting device in the first plurality of transmitting devices comprises a transceiver configured to communicate with other transceivers associated with the mandrel.

19. The system of claim 12, wherein the receiving device is mounted on a tool.

20. The system of claim 12, wherein the current configuration does not match the desired configuration when the mandrel has deformed such that the current position does not match the desired position by more than a selected tolerance specified for the mandrel.

21. A method for monitoring a current configuration of a mandrel, the method comprising:
 attaching a plurality of transceivers to the mandrel, each transceiver of the plurality of transceivers being configured to generate a signal indicative of a position of the transceiver;
 receiving, at a receiving device, the signals indicative of the positions of the transmitting devices from a portion of the plurality of transceivers;
 processing the signals indicative of the positions of the transmitting devices to determine the current configuration of the mandrel;
 comparing the current configuration of the mandrel to a desired configuration for the mandrel; and
 replacing the mandrel when the current configuration does not match the desired configuration, wherein the current configuration does not match the desired configuration when the mandrel has deformed such that a current position of one of the transmitting devices in the current configuration does not match a desired position of the one of the transmitting devices in the desired configuration.

22. The method of claim 21, wherein the current configuration does not match the desired configuration when the mandrel has deformed such that the current position does not match the desired position by more than a selected tolerance specified for the mandrel.

5

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