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(54) **ELECTROACTIVE POLYMER ANIMATED DEVICES**

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Related U.S. Application Data

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(51) **Int. Cl.**⁷ **H02N 1/00**

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **310/309**

(58) **Field of Search** 310/309, 328, 310/800

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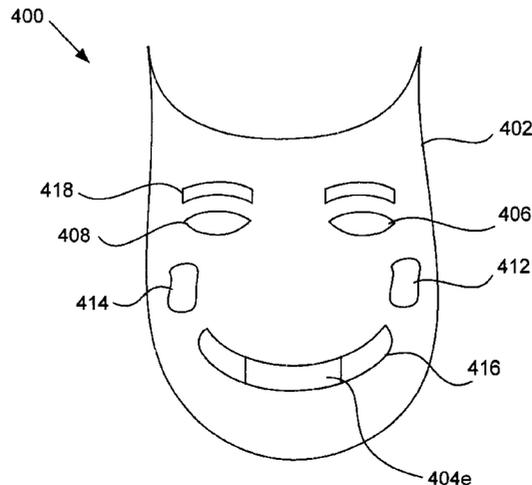
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

The present invention relates to animated devices that include one or more electroactive polymer transducers. When actuated by electrical energy, an electroactive polymer produces mechanical deflection in one or more directions. This deflection may be used to produce motion of a feature included in an animated device. Electroactive polymer transducers offer customizable shapes and deflections. Combining different ways to configure and constrain a polymer, different ways to arrange active areas on a single polymer, different animated device designs, and different polymer orientations, permits a broad range of animated devices that use an electroactive polymer transducer to produce motion. These animated devices find use in a wide range of animated device applications.

80 Claims, 14 Drawing Sheets



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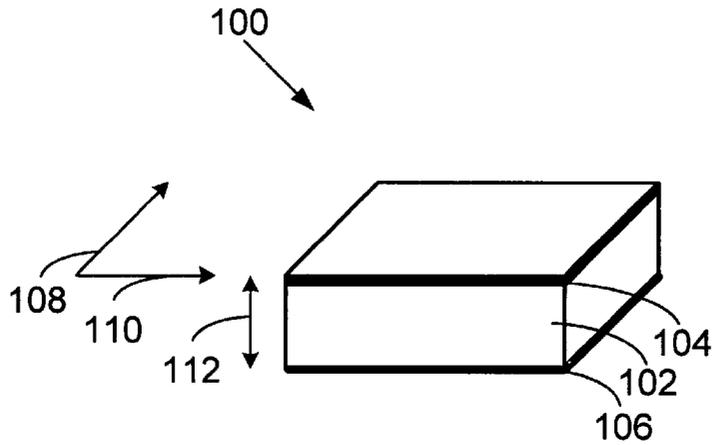


FIG. 1A

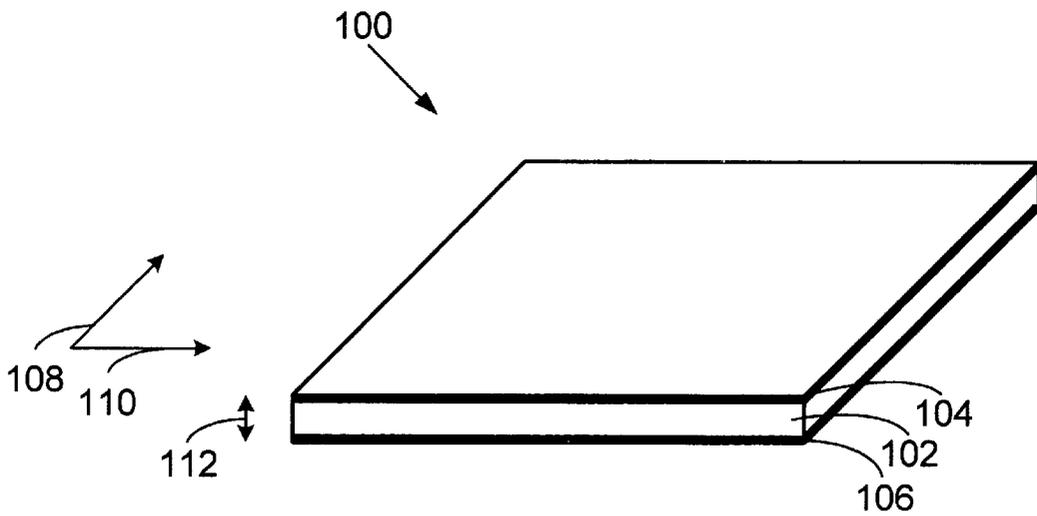


FIG. 1B

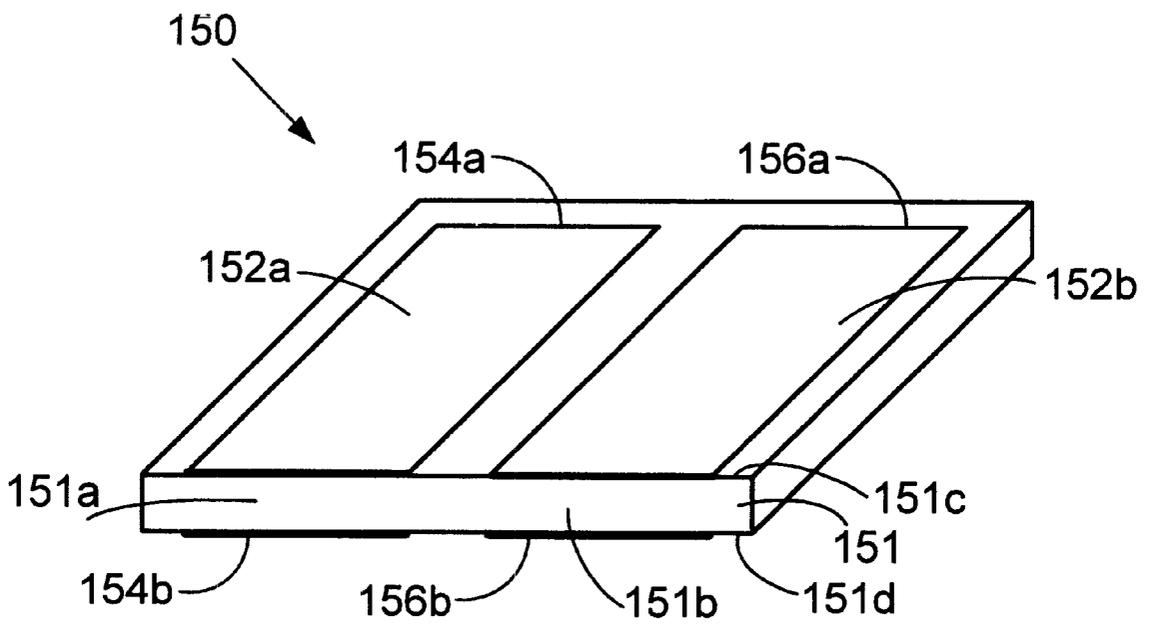


FIG. 1C

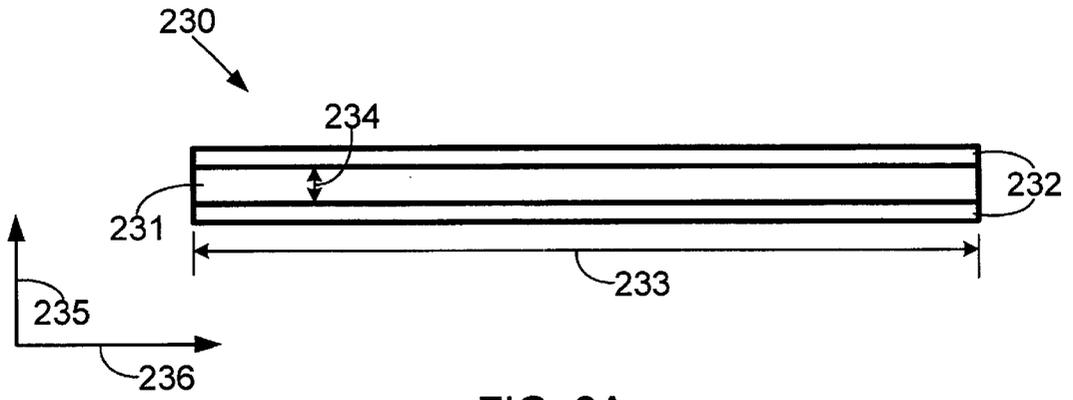


FIG. 2A

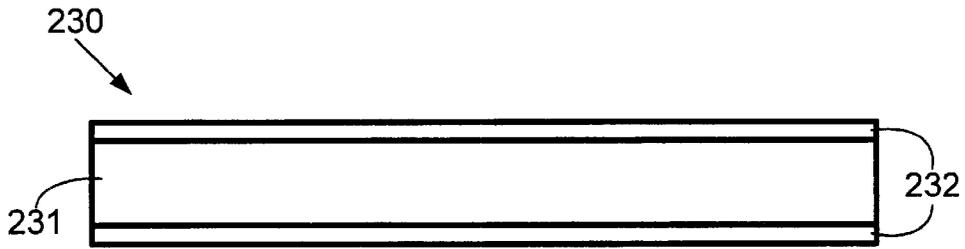


FIG. 2B

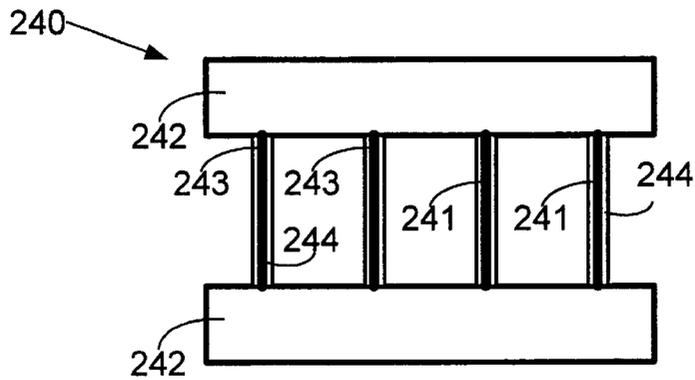


FIG. 2C

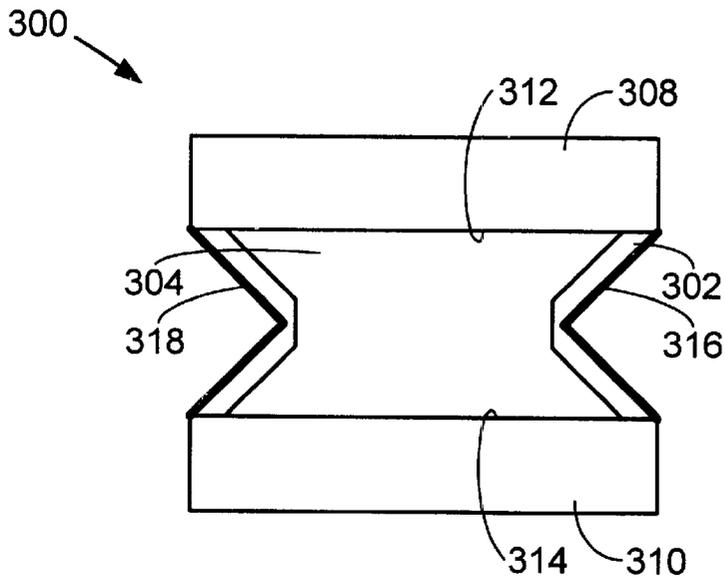


FIG. 2D

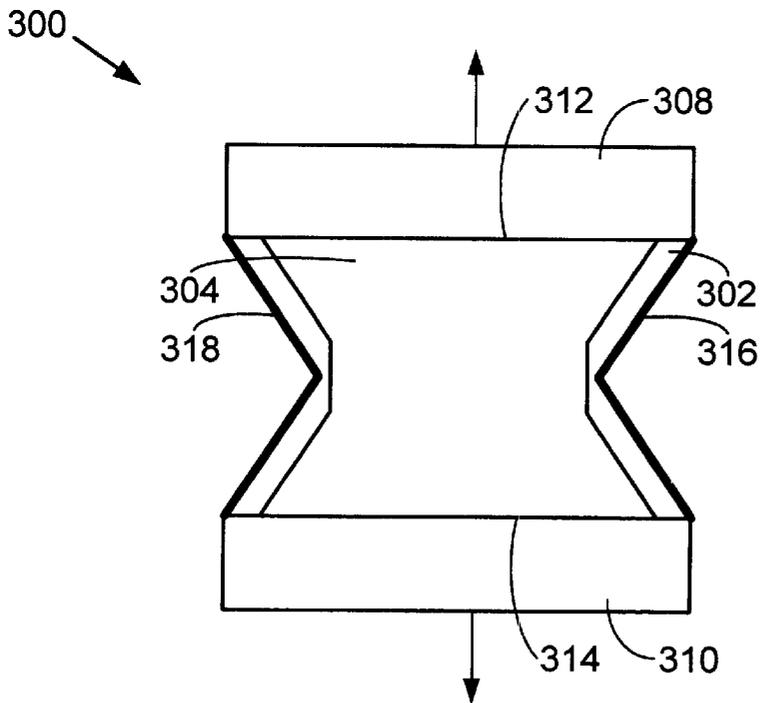


FIG. 2E

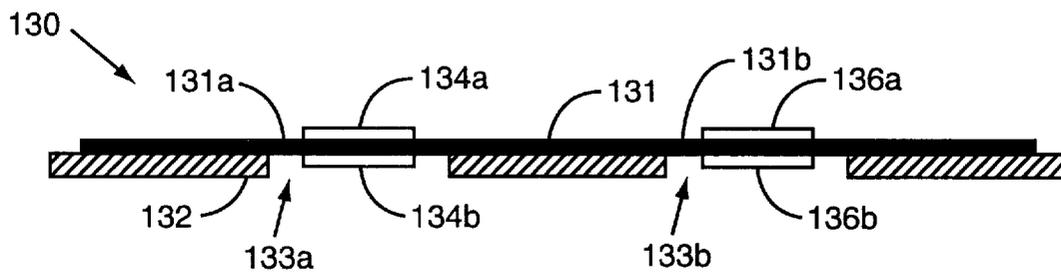


FIG. 2F

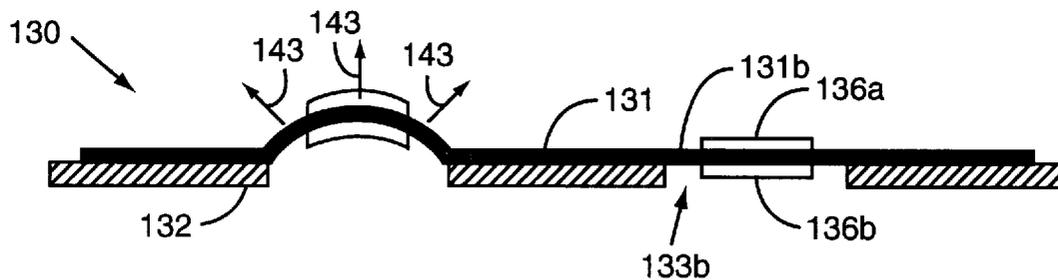


FIG. 2G

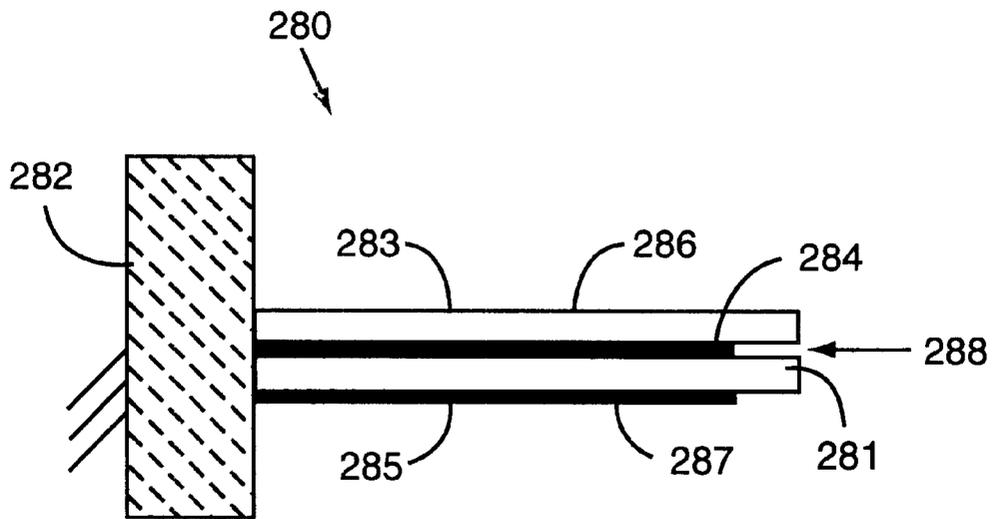


FIG. 2H

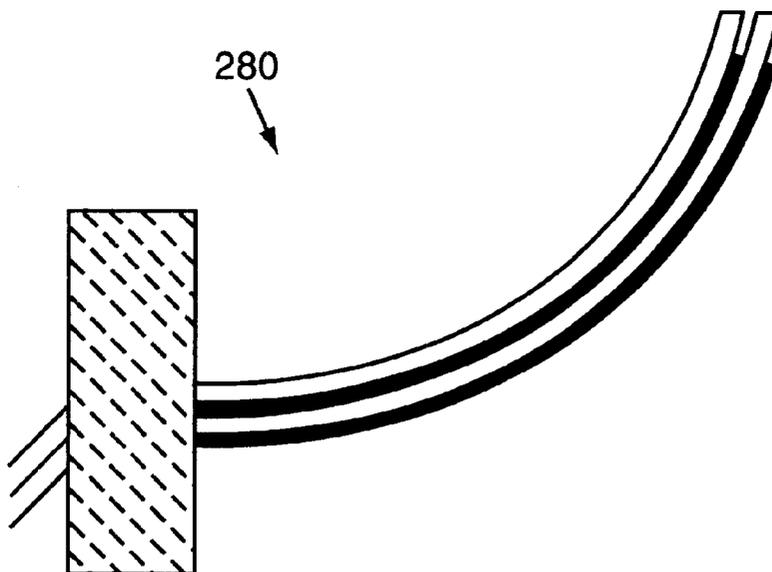


FIG. 2I

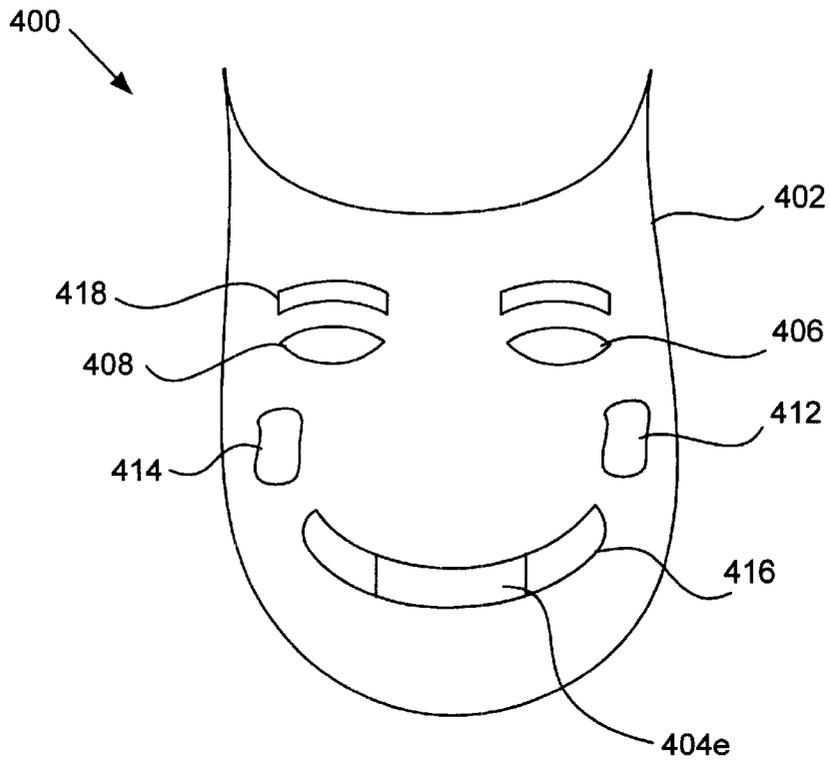


FIG. 3A

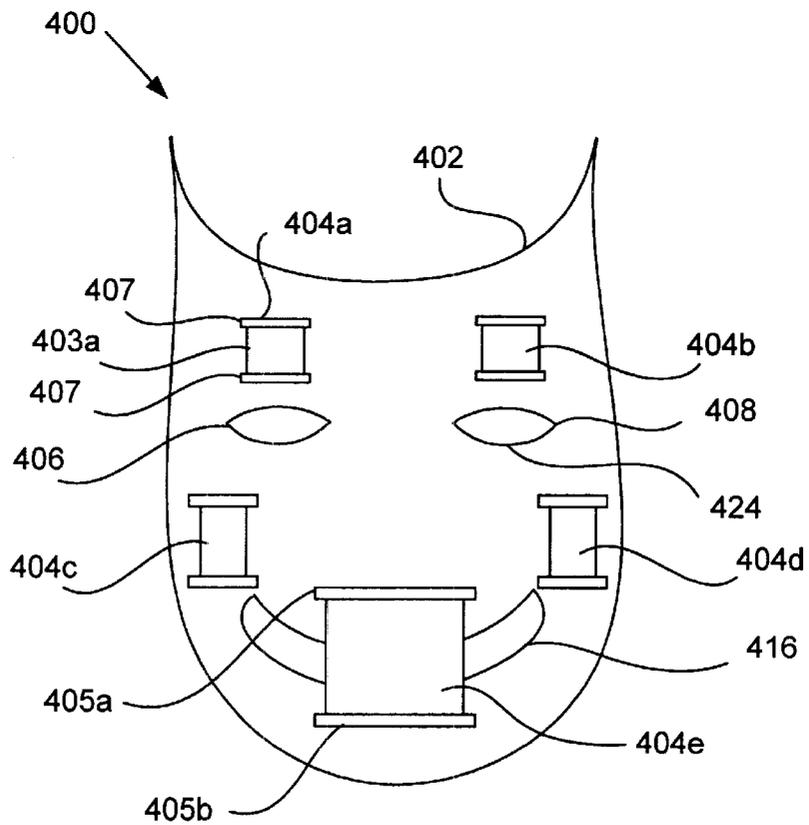


FIG. 3B

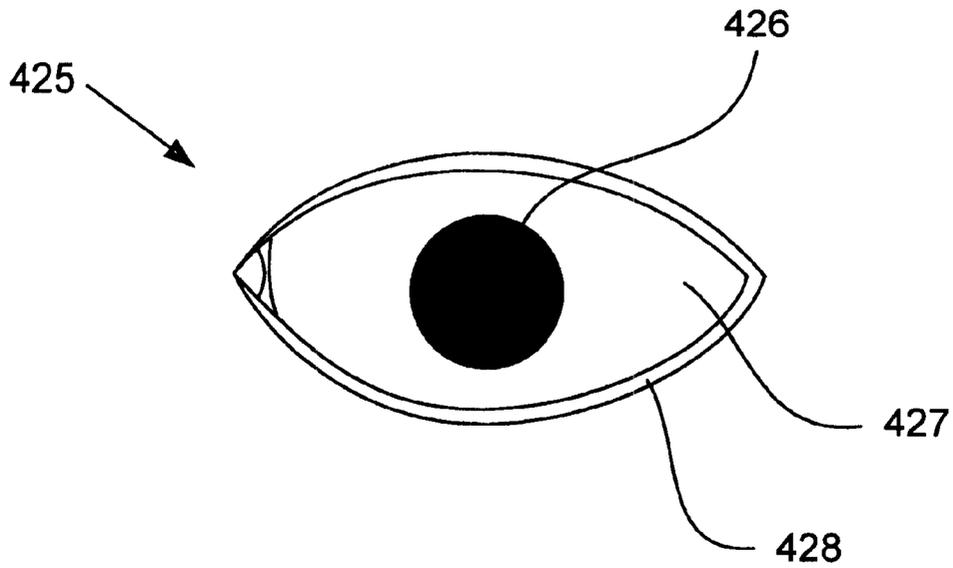


FIG. 3C

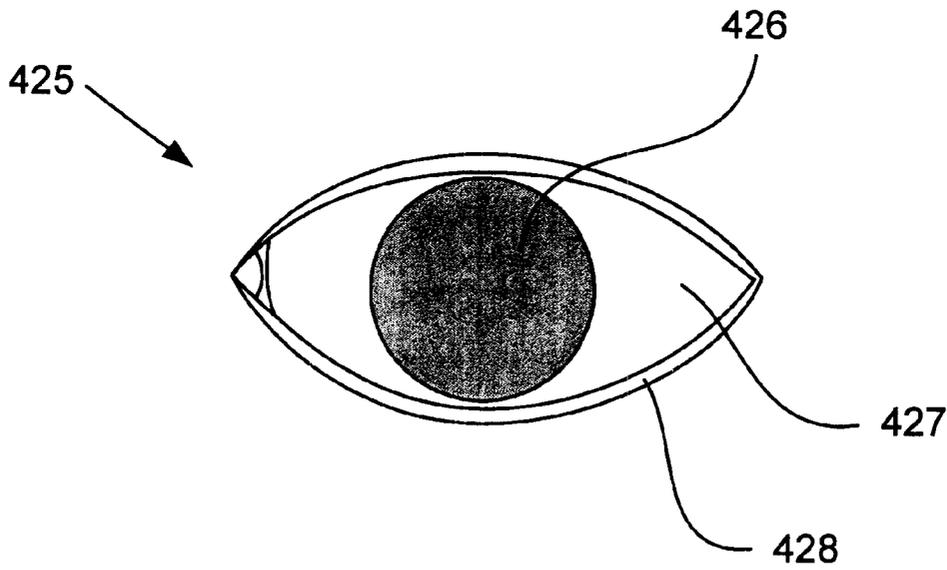


FIG. 3D

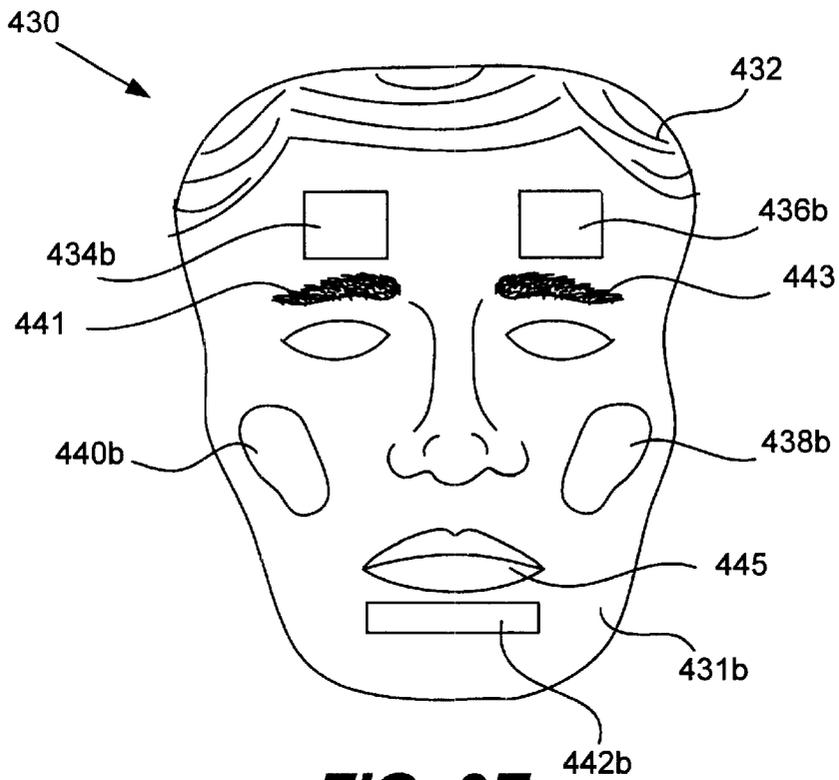


FIG. 3E

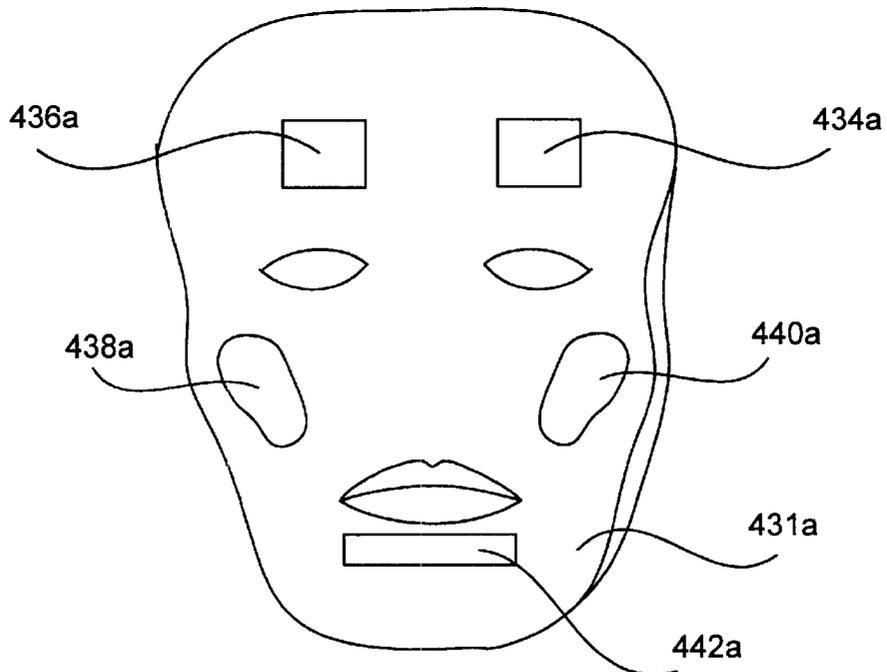


FIG. 3F

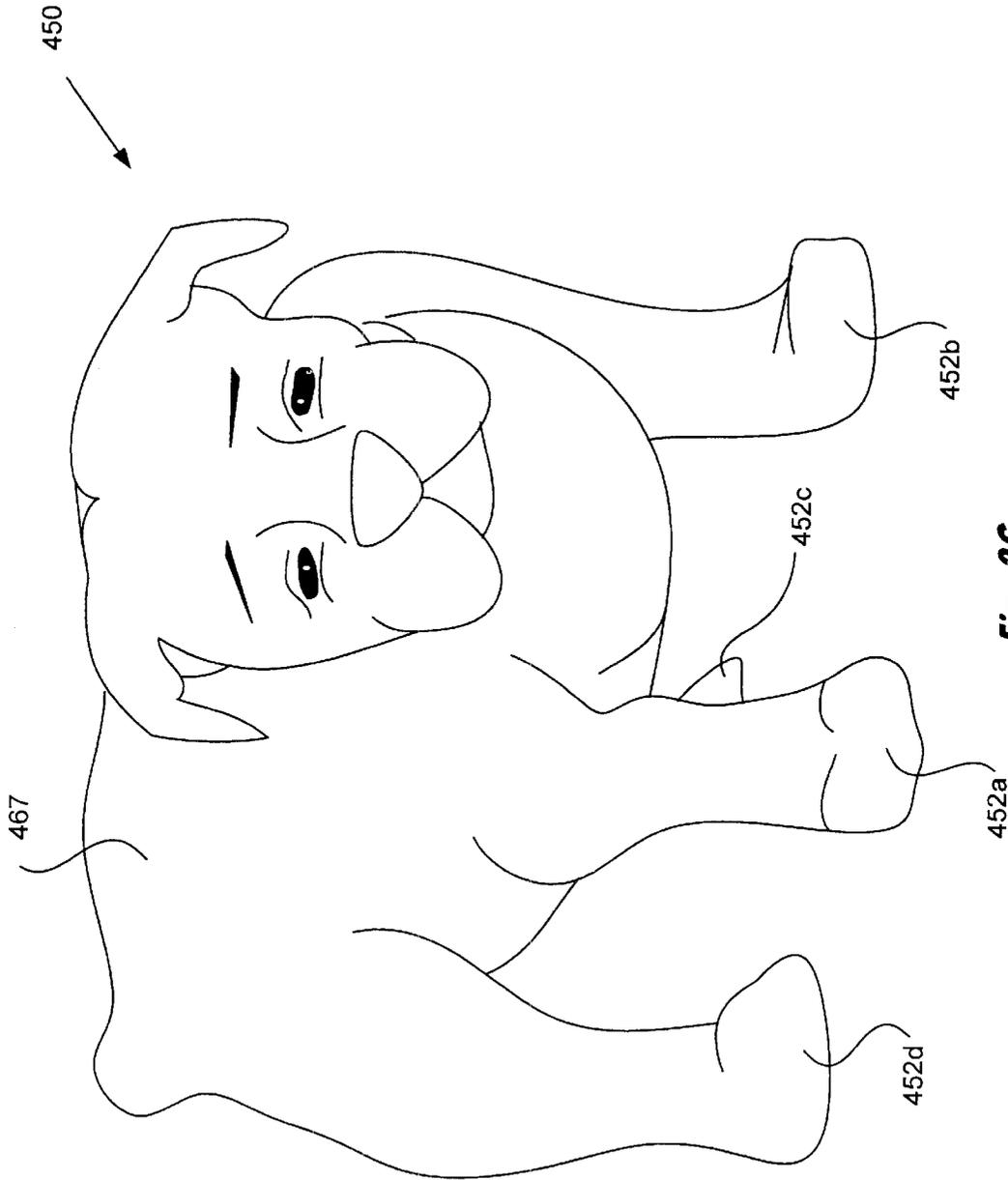


Fig. 3G

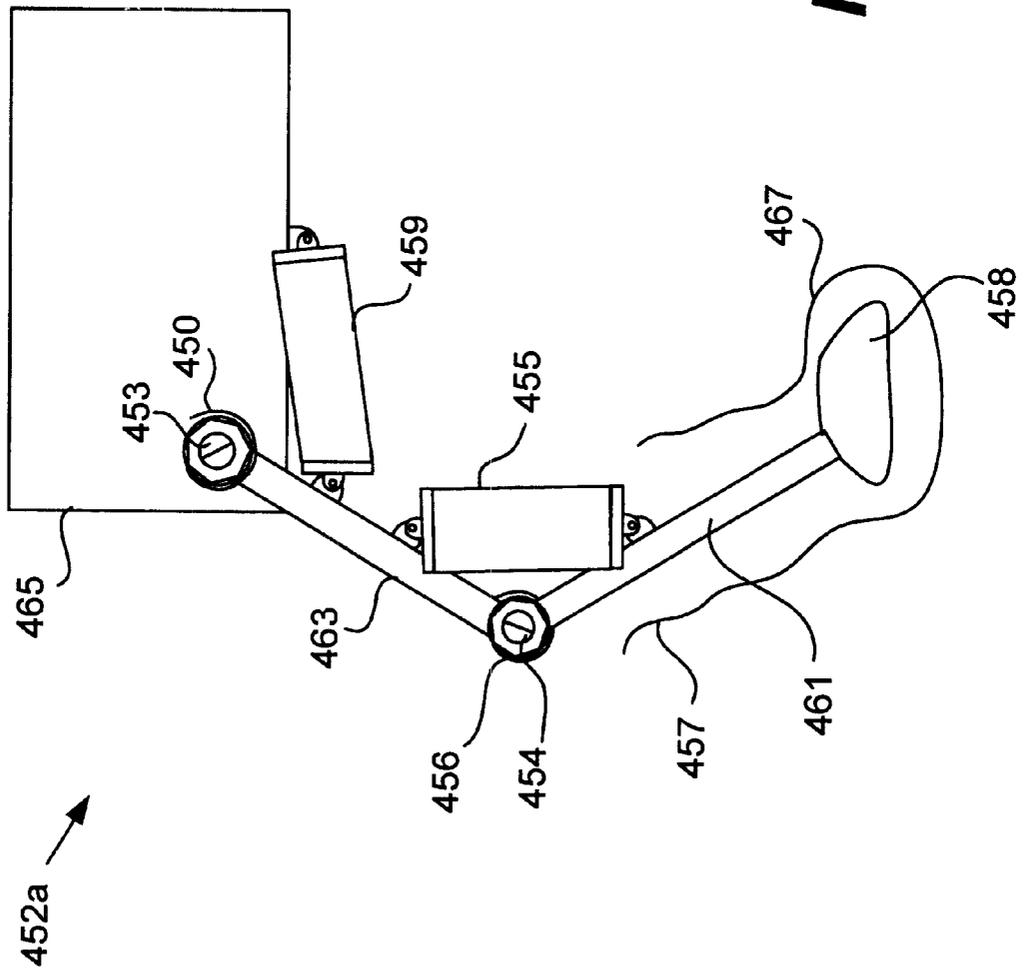


FIG. 3H

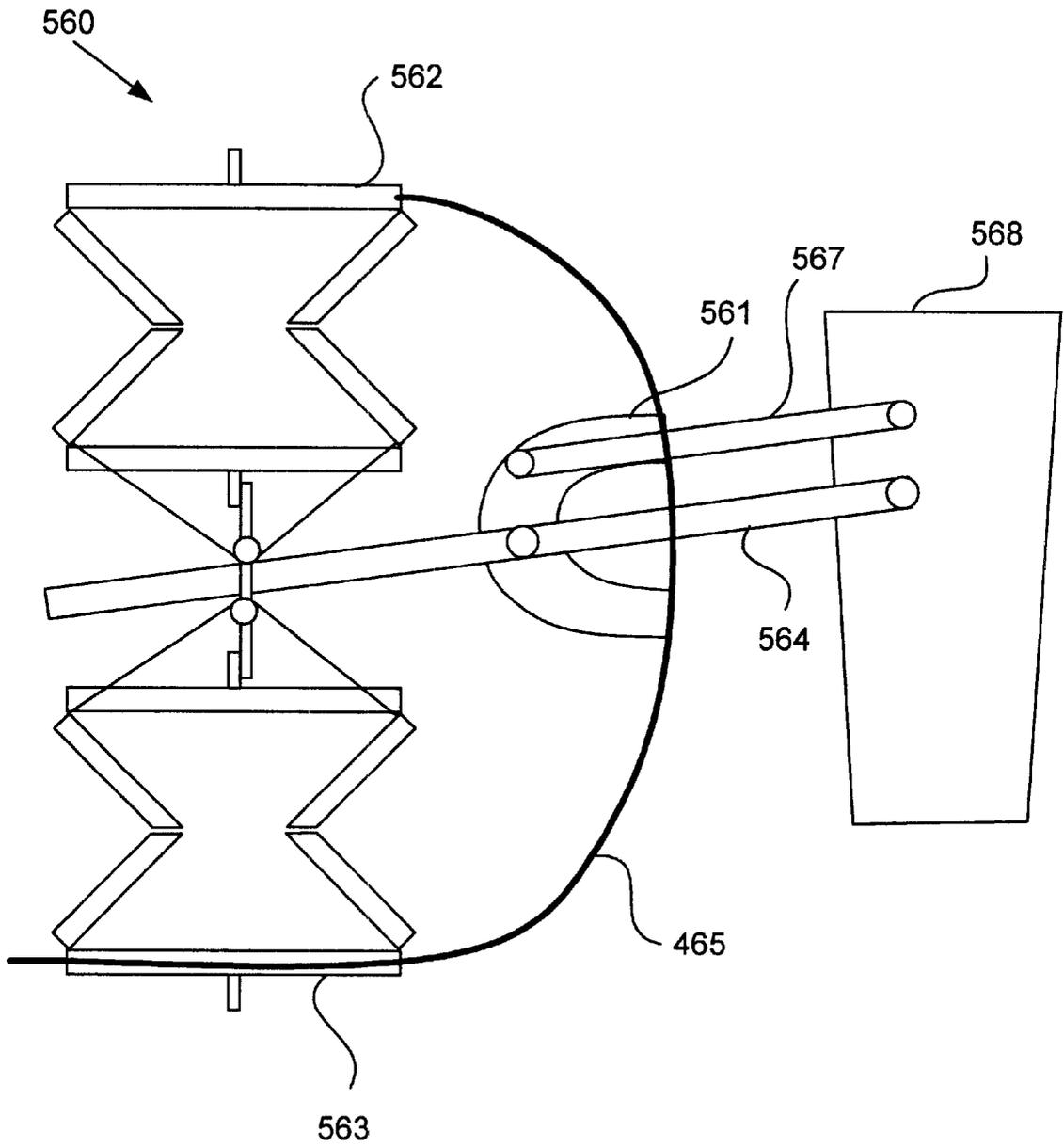


FIG. 3I

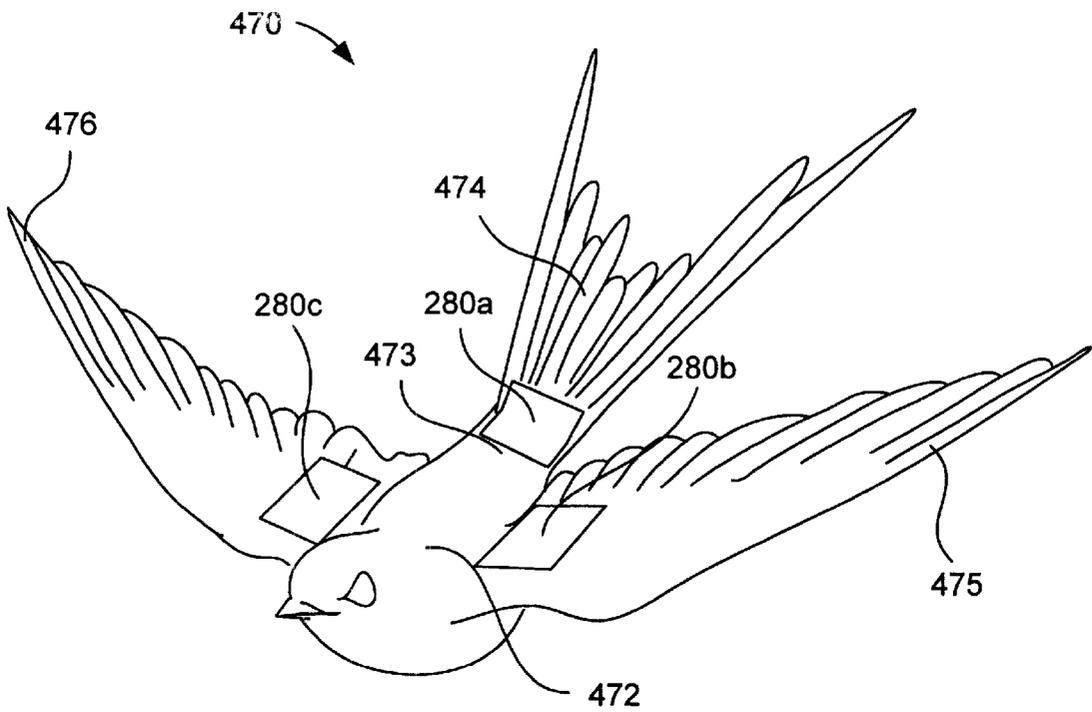


FIG. 3J

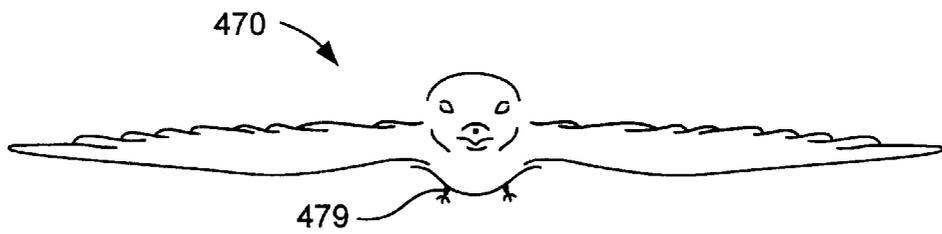


FIG. 3K

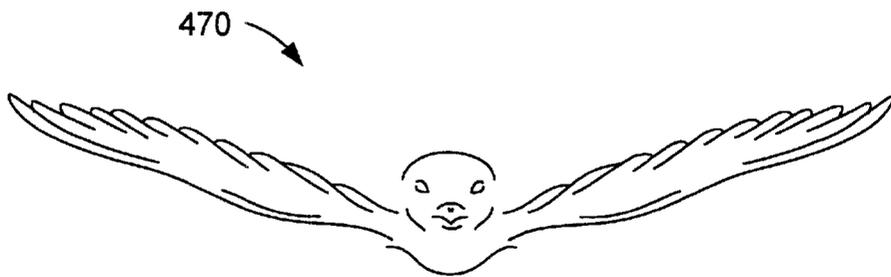


FIG. 3L

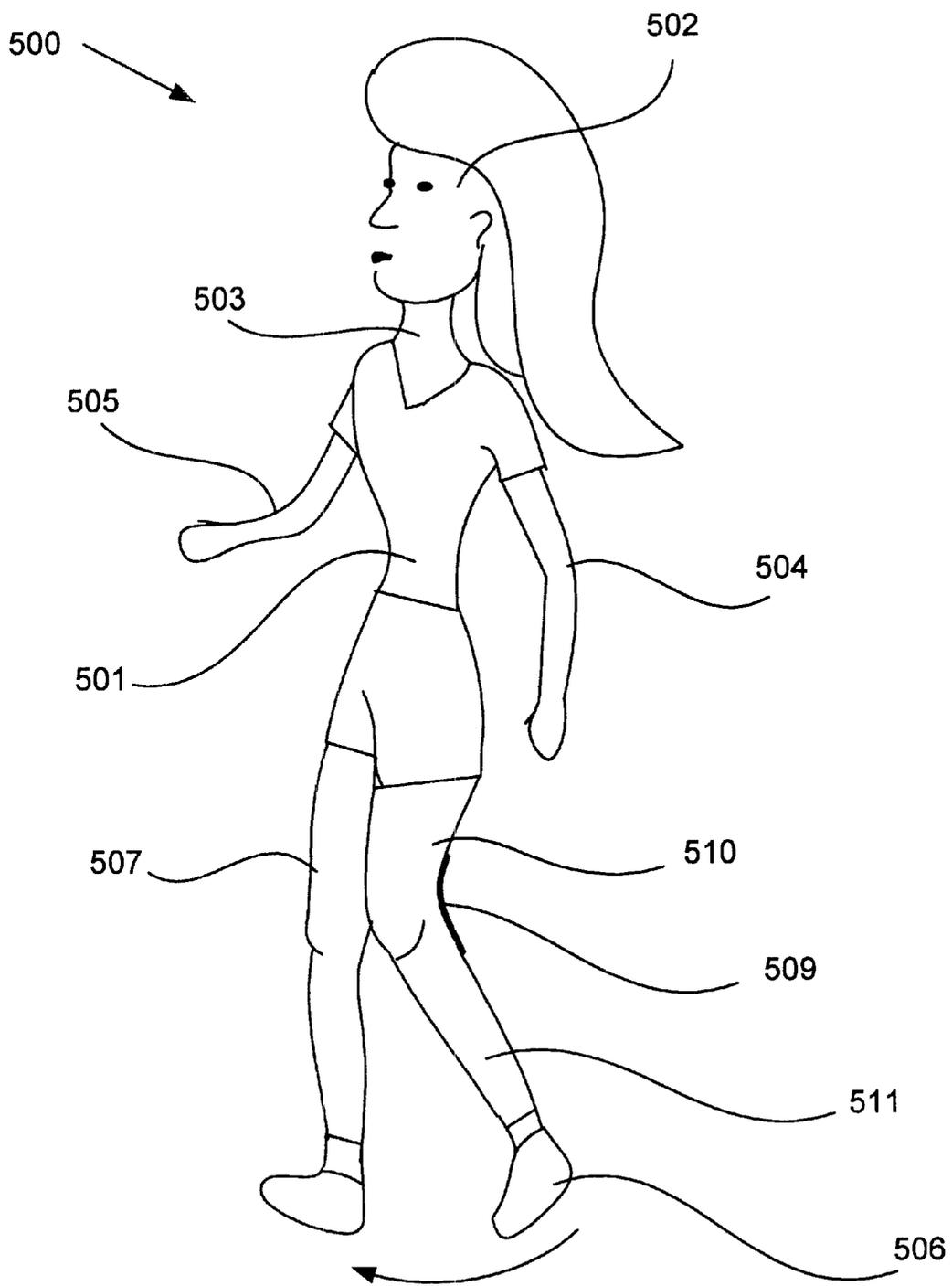


FIG. 3M

ELECTROACTIVE POLYMER ANIMATED DEVICES

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application claims priority under 35 U.S.C. §119(e) from co-pending U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/194,817 filed Apr. 5, 2000, which is incorporated by reference herein for all purposes.

U.S. GOVERNMENT RIGHTS

This application was made in part with government support awarded by the Office of Naval Research under contract numbers N00014-96-C-0026, N00014-97-C-0352, and N00174-99-C-0032; and by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency under contract number DABT63-98-C-0024. The government has certain rights in the invention.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to animated devices comprising one or more electroactive polymers. More particularly, the present invention relates to animated devices having motion powered by electroactive polymer transducers, and their use in various applications such as toys and animatronics.

An animatronic device is an animated device with motion likeness of a human, creature, or animal. Conventional animatronic devices include animatronic puppets, robots, creatures, special effects make-up, scenic props, sets, etc. These devices find wide use in themed rides, dark walks, scenery, and special effects for the film and television industries.

Motion for an animatronic device is typically powered by an electric or mechanical source. The most common source of power for an animatronic device is electric motors such as AC, DC, servo, and stepper motors. Compressed air and pressurized hydraulic fluid are also used to power air and hydraulic motors in larger animatronic devices. Each of these forms of power has advantages and disadvantages that determines its usage.

AC and DC motors provide continuous rotary output, which is often not suitable for simple animatronic devices. For example, a simple animatronic device may require a lead screw and other mechanical assistance to convert continuous rotary output of a motor into simple linear motion. AC motors provide continuous rotary motion but are limited to a few speeds that are a function of the AC line frequency, e.g., 1800 and 3600 rpm based on 60 Hz in the U.S. If other outputs speeds are desired for an animatronic device, a gearbox speed reducer is required; thus further complicating the animatronic device. Servomotors are fast response, closed loop control motors capable of providing programmed motion. In addition to the above rotary to linear complications, these devices are also very expensive. Unlike servomotors, stepper motors are open loop, meaning they receive no feedback as to whether the output device has responded as requested. While being relatively good at holding an output in one position, stepper motors often are poor with motion, get out of phase with a desired control, moderately expensive, require special controllers, and thus not ideal for many animatronic devices.

Air and hydraulic motors have more limited application in animatronics than electric motors since they require the availability of a compressed air or hydraulic source. The

additional weight, complexity and relative inefficiency of the power source makes these devices unsuitable for many animatronic applications, particularly for small mobile devices, since extremely small compressors and valves are currently unobtainable. Although individual air motors and air cylinders are relatively cheap, these pneumatic systems are also quite expensive when the cost of all the ancillary equipment is considered.

In addition to the specific drawbacks discussed with respect to each source of power, all of the above systems are generally heavy, bulky and not suitable for many applications where light weight and small size is desirable. Conventional electromagnetic technologies also typically do not have sufficient energy densities (the work output on a per volume or per mass basis) to construct many animatronic devices. The deficiency of many conventional devices is greater at small scales. As electromagnetic devices are scaled-down in size, their efficiency decreases. Further, the above technologies provide strict mechanical output. Many animatronic applications require a high degree of mobility or dexterity that is difficult to achieve with conventional actuation technologies.

In view of the foregoing, alternative devices that convert from an input energy to mechanical energy would be desirable.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to animated devices that comprise one or more polymer based transducers. When a voltage is applied to electrodes contacting an electroactive polymer, the polymer deflects. Deflection of the transducer may then be converted into motion of a feature included in an animated device. Electroactive polymer transducers enable complex and customized animatronic devices by overcoming many of the actuator limitations described above. In this application, electroactive polymer transducers represent a simple, light weight, customizable, and efficient replacement for conventional actuators in animatronic devices.

In one aspect, the present invention relates to an animated device. The device comprises a feature capable of motion between a first position and a second position. The animated device also comprises a transducer configured to provide at least a portion of the motion between the first position and the second position for the feature. The transducer comprises an active area, which includes at least two electrodes coupled to a portion of an electroactive polymer. The portion is capable of deflection in response to a change in electric field provided by the at least two electrodes.

In another aspect, the present invention relates to an animated face. The face comprises a facial feature capable of motion between a first position and a second position. The face also comprises a transducer configured to provide at least a portion of the motion between the first position and the second position for the facial feature. The transducer comprises an active area, which includes at least two electrodes coupled to a portion of an electroactive polymer. The portion capable of deflection in response to a change in electric field provided by the at least two electrodes.

In yet another aspect, the present invention relates to an animated toy. The toy has a feature capable of motion between a first position and a second position. The animated toy also comprises a transducer configured to provide at least a portion of the motion between the first position and the second position. The transducer comprising an active area, which includes at least two electrodes coupled to a

portion of an electroactive polymer. The portion capable of deflection in response to a change in electric field provided by the at least two electrodes.

In still another aspect, the present invention relates to an animated skin. The animated skin comprises a feature capable of motion between a first position and a second position. The animated skin also comprises a transducer configured to provide at least a portion of the motion between the first position and the second position for the feature. The transducer comprises an active area, which includes at least two electrodes coupled to a portion of an electroactive polymer. The portion is capable of deflection in response to a change in electric field provided by the at least two electrodes.

In another aspect, the present invention relates to an animated device. The animated device has a feature capable of motion between a first position and a second position. The animated device comprises a transducer configured to provide at least a portion of the motion between the first position and the second position for the feature. The transducer comprises an active area, which includes at least two electrodes coupled to a portion of an electroactive polymer. The portion is capable of deflection in response to a change in electric field provided by the at least two electrodes. The animated device also comprises a sensor.

In yet another aspect, the present invention relates to an animated device. The animated device has a feature capable of motion between a first position and a second position. The animated device comprises a transducer configured to provide at least a portion of the motion between the first position and the second position for the feature. The transducer comprising an active area, which includes at least two electrodes coupled to a portion of an electroactive polymer, the portion capable of deflection in response to a change in electric field provided by the at least two electrodes. The animated device also capable of acoustic emission.

In still another aspect, the present invention relates to an animated device capable of surface based locomotion. The animated device has a feature capable of motion between a first position and a second position. The animated device comprises a transducer configured to provide at least a portion of the motion between the first position and the second position for the feature. The transducer comprises an active area, which includes at least two electrodes coupled to a portion of an electroactive polymer, the portion capable of deflection in response to a change in electric field provided by the at least two electrodes. The device is configured such that motion between the first position and the second position for the feature provides at least a portion of the surface based locomotion.

In another aspect, the present invention relates to a doll. The doll comprises a body comprising a torso having a pair of arms extending therefrom, a head, a pair of legs extending downwardly therefrom, a neck portion supporting the head. The doll also comprises a transducer configured to move a feature on the doll. The transducer comprises an active area, which includes at least two electrodes coupled to a portion of an electroactive polymer. The portion capable of deflection in response to a change in electric field provided by the at least two electrodes.

In yet another aspect, the present invention relates to an animated device having likeness of a human and a feature capable of motion between a first position and a second position. The animated device comprises a transducer configured to provide at least a portion of the motion between the first position and the second position for the feature. The

transducer comprises an active area, which includes at least two electrodes coupled to a portion of an electroactive polymer. The portion capable of deflection in response to a change in electric field provided by the at least two electrodes. The feature has a human likeness.

These and other features and advantages of the present invention will be described in the following description of the invention and associated figures.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIGS. 1A and 1B illustrate a top perspective view of a transducer before and after application of a voltage in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 1C illustrates a cross-sectional side view of a diaphragm transducer including an electroactive polymer before application of a voltage in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 2A and 2B illustrate a linear motion actuator suitable for use with some animated devices of the present invention.

FIG. 2C illustrates cross-sectional side view of a multi-layer actuator suitable for use with some animated devices of the present invention.

FIGS. 2D and 2E illustrate an actuator suitable for use some animated devices of the present invention.

FIG. 2F illustrates a cross-sectional side view of a diaphragm actuator before application of a voltage in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 2G illustrates a cross-sectional view of the diaphragm actuator of FIG. 2F after application of a voltage in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

FIGS. 2H and 2I illustrate a bending beam actuator suitable for use with some animated devices of the present invention.

FIGS. 3A–B illustrate an animatronic face in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

FIGS. 3C–D illustrate an animatronic eye in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

FIGS. 3E–F illustrate an animatronic face in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 3G illustrates a toy dog in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 3H illustrates leg assembly for the toy dog of FIG. 3G in accordance with a specific embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 3I illustrates leg assembly in accordance with another specific embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 3J–L illustrate a toy bird in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 3M illustrates a front perspective view of a toy doll constructed in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The present invention will now be described in detail with reference to a few preferred embodiments thereof as illustrated in the accompanying drawings. In the following description, numerous specific details are set forth in order to provide a thorough understanding of the present invention. It will be apparent, however, to one skilled in the art, that the present invention may be practiced without some or all of these specific details. In other instances, well known process steps and/or structures have not been described in detail in order to not unnecessarily obscure the present invention.

1. Overview

The present invention relates to animated devices that include one or more electroactive polymers. When actuated by electrical energy, an electroactive polymer produces mechanical deflection. Deflection of the electroactive polymer transducer may be used to produce motion of a feature of an animated device. The feature may be a leg or other body part included in an animated toy, for example. Electroactive polymer transducers offer customizable deflections by arranging one or more active areas on a single polymer and offer customizable shapes, e.g., rolls, diaphragms, etc. Multiple polymers may be included in a device by stacking or otherwise combining individual polymers. Combining different ways to arrange a polymer in a device, different polymer actuators, different ways to arrange active areas on a single polymer and different animated device designs, permits a broad range of animated devices that use an electroactive polymer to produce motion. These animated devices find use in a wide range of animated device applications.

As the term is used herein, an animated device refers to a device, figure or object that simulates motion of a living organism or a portion of an organism. Exemplary animated devices include animatronic devices, toys, masks, mannequins, displays, scenic and entertainment industry set decorations, novelty items, etc. Typically, the animated device is designed or configured to seem alive or moving or has some form of lifelike movement. In one embodiment, the devices are configured to simulate human actions and movements. This also includes non-living objects that simulate life-like characteristics, e.g., tea cups having actuated facial features that simulate talking. As mentioned above, an animatronic device is one class of animated device with motion likeness of a human, creature, or animal.

2. General Structure of Electroactive Polymers

The transformation between electrical and mechanical energy in devices of the present invention is based on energy conversion of one or more active areas of an electroactive polymer. Electroactive polymers deflect when actuated by electrical energy. To help illustrate the performance of an electroactive polymer in converting electrical energy to mechanical energy, FIG. 1A illustrates a top perspective view of a transducer portion **100** in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention. The transducer portion **100** comprises an electroactive polymer **102** for converting between electrical energy and mechanical energy. In one embodiment, an electroactive polymer refers to a polymer that acts as an insulating dielectric between two electrodes and may deflect upon application of a voltage difference between the two electrodes. Top and bottom electrodes **104** and **106** are attached to the electroactive polymer **102** on its top and bottom surfaces, respectively, to provide a voltage difference across a portion of the polymer **102**. Polymer **102** deflects with a change in electric field provided by the top and bottom electrodes **104** and **106**. Deflection of the transducer portion **100** in response to a change in electric field provided by the electrodes **104** and **106** is referred to as actuation. As polymer **102** changes in size, the deflection may be used to produce mechanical work.

FIG. 1B illustrates a top perspective view of the transducer portion **100** including deflection in response to a change in electric field. In general, deflection refers to any displacement, expansion, contraction, torsion, linear or area strain, or any other deformation of a portion of the polymer **102**. The change in electric field corresponding to the voltage difference applied to or by the electrodes **104** and

106 produces mechanical pressure within polymer **102**. In this case, the unlike electrical charges produced by electrodes **104** and **106** attract each other and provide a compressive force between electrodes **104** and **106** and an expansion force on polymer **102** in planar directions **108** and **110**, causing polymer **102** to compress between electrodes **104** and **106** and stretch in the planar directions **108** and **110**.

In some cases, electrodes **104** and **106** cover a limited portion of polymer **102** relative to the total area of the polymer. This may be done to prevent electrical breakdown around the edge of polymer **102** or to achieve customized deflections for one or more portions of the polymer. As the term is used herein, an active area is defined as a portion of a transducer comprising polymer material **102** and at least two electrodes. When the active area is used to convert electrical energy to mechanical energy, the active area includes a portion of polymer **102** having sufficient electrostatic force to enable deflection of the portion. As will be described below, a polymer of the present invention may have multiple active areas. In some cases, polymer **102** material outside an active area may act as an external spring force on the active area during deflection. More specifically, polymer material outside the active area may resist active area deflection by its contraction or expansion. Removal of the voltage difference and the induced charge causes the reverse effects.

Electrodes **104** and **106** are compliant and change shape with polymer **102**. The configuration of polymer **102** and electrodes **104** and **106** provides for increasing polymer **102** response with deflection. More specifically, as the transducer portion **100** deflects, compression of polymer **102** brings the opposite charges of electrodes **104** and **106** closer and the stretching of polymer **102** separates similar charges in each electrode. In one embodiment, one of the electrodes **104** and **106** is ground.

In general, the transducer portion **100** continues to deflect until mechanical forces balance the electrostatic forces driving the deflection. The mechanical forces include elastic restoring forces of the polymer **102** material, the compliance of electrodes **104** and **106**, and any external resistance provided by a device and/or load coupled to the transducer portion **100**, etc. The deflection of the transducer portion **100** as a result of the applied voltage may also depend on a number of other factors such as the polymer **102** dielectric constant and the size of polymer **102**.

Electroactive polymers in accordance with the present invention are capable of deflection in any direction. After application of the voltage between the electrodes **104** and **106**, the electroactive polymer **102** increases in size in both planar directions **108** and **110**. In some cases, the electroactive polymer **102** is incompressible, e.g. has a substantially constant volume under stress. In this case, the polymer **102** decreases in thickness as a result of the expansion in the planar directions **108** and **110**. It should be noted that the present invention is not limited to incompressible polymers and deflection of the polymer **102** may not conform to such a simple relationship.

In one embodiment, electroactive polymer **102** is pre-strained. Pre-strain of a polymer may be described, in one or more directions, as the change in dimension in a direction after pre-straining relative to the dimension in that direction before pre-straining. The pre-strain may comprise elastic deformation of polymer **102** and be formed, for example, by stretching the polymer in tension and fixing one or more of the edges while stretched. For many polymers, pre-strain improves conversion between electrical and mechanical

energy. The improved mechanical response enables greater mechanical work for an electroactive polymer, e.g., larger deflections and actuation pressures. In one embodiment, pre-strain improves the dielectric strength of the polymer. In another embodiment, the pre-strain is elastic. After actuation, an elastically pre-strained polymer could, in principle, be unfixed and return to its original state. The pre-strain may be imposed at the boundaries using a rigid frame or may also be implemented locally for a portion of the polymer.

The quantity of pre-strain for a polymer may be based on the electroactive polymer and the desired performance of the polymer in an actuator or application. For some polymers of the present invention, pre-strain in one or more directions may range from -100 percent to 600 percent. By way of example, for a VHB acrylic elastomer having isotropic pre-strain, pre-strains of at least about 100 percent, and preferably between about 200-400 percent, may be used in each direction. In one embodiment, the polymer is pre-strained by a factor in the range of about 1.5 times to 50 times the original area. For an anisotropic acrylic pre-strained to enhance actuation in a compliant direction, pre-strains between about 400-500 percent may be used in the stiffened direction and pre-strains between about 20-200 percent may be used in the compliant direction. In some cases, pre-strain may be added in one direction such that a negative pre-strain occurs in another direction, e.g. 600 percent in one direction coupled with -100 percent in an orthogonal direction. In these cases, the net change in area due to the pre-strain is typically positive.

In one embodiment, pre-strain is applied uniformly over a portion of polymer **102** to produce an isotropic pre-strained polymer. For example, an acrylic elastomeric polymer may be stretched by 200 to 400 percent in both planar directions. In another embodiment, pre-strain is applied unequally in different directions for a portion of polymer **102** to produce an anisotropic pre-strained polymer. In this case, polymer **102** may deflect greater in one direction than another when actuated. While not wishing to be bound by theory, it is believed that pre-straining a polymer in one direction may increase the stiffness of the polymer in the pre-strain direction. Correspondingly, the polymer is relatively stiffer in the high pre-strain direction and more compliant in the low pre-strain direction and, upon actuation, more deflection occurs in the low pre-strain direction. In one embodiment, the deflection in direction **108** of transducer portion **100** can be enhanced by exploiting large pre-strain in the perpendicular direction **110**. For example, an acrylic elastomeric polymer used in the transducer portion **100** may be stretched by 100 percent in direction **108** and by 500 percent in the perpendicular direction **110**. The quantity of pre-strain for a polymer may be based on the polymer material and the desired performance of the polymer in an application. Pre-strain suitable for use with the present invention is further described in copending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/619,848, which is incorporated by reference for all purposes.

Generally, after the polymer is pre-strained, it may be fixed to one or more objects. Each object is preferably suitably stiff to maintain the level of pre-strain desired in the polymer. The polymer may be fixed to the one or more objects according to any conventional method known in the art such as a chemical adhesive, an adhesive layer or material, mechanical attachment, etc.

Transducers and polymers of the present invention are not limited to any particular shape, geometry, or type of deflection. For example, a polymer and electrodes may be formed

into any geometry or shape including tubes and rolls, stretched polymers attached between multiple rigid structures, stretched polymers attached across a frame of any geometry—including curved or complex geometries, across a frame having one or more joints, etc. Deflection of a transducer according to the present invention includes linear expansion and compression in one or more directions, bending, axial deflection when the polymer is rolled, deflection out of a hole provided on a substrate, etc. Deflection of a transducer may be affected by how the polymer is constrained by a frame or rigid structures attached to the polymer. In one embodiment, a flexible material that is stiffer in elongation than the polymer is attached to one side of a transducer to induce bending when the polymer is actuated.

Materials suitable for use as a pre-strained polymer with the present invention may include any substantially insulating polymer or rubber (or combination thereof) that deforms in response to an electrostatic force or whose deformation results in a change in electric field. One suitable material is NuSil CF19-2186 as provided by NuSil Technology of Carpinteria, Calif. Other exemplary materials suitable for use as a pre-strained polymer include silicone elastomers such as those provided by Dow Corning of Midland, Mich., acrylic elastomers such as VHB 4910 acrylic elastomer as produced by 3M Corporation of St. Paul, Minn., polyurethanes, thermoplastic elastomers, copolymers comprising PVDF, pressure-sensitive adhesives, fluoroelastomers, polymers comprising silicone and acrylic moieties, and the like. Polymers comprising silicone and acrylic moieties may include copolymers comprising silicone and acrylic moieties, polymer blends comprising a silicone elastomer and an acrylic elastomer, for example. Combinations of some of these materials may also be used as the electroactive polymer in transducers of this invention.

An electroactive polymer of the present invention may have a wide range of thicknesses. In one embodiment, polymer thickness may range between about 1 micrometer and 2 millimeters. Polymer thickness may be reduced by stretching the film in one or both planar directions. In many cases, electroactive polymers of the present invention may be fabricated and implemented as thin films. Thicknesses suitable for these thin films may be below 100 micrometers.

Suitable actuation voltages for electroactive polymers, or portions thereof, may vary based on the material properties of the electroactive polymer (e.g., dielectric constant) and the dimensions of the polymer (e.g., polymer film thickness). For example, actuation electric fields used to actuate polymer **102** in FIG. **1A** may range in magnitude from about 0 V/m to about 440 MV/m. Actuation electric fields in this range may produce a pressure in the range of about 0 Pa to about 10 MPa. In order for the transducer to produce greater forces, the thickness of the polymer layer may be increased. Actuation voltages for a particular polymer may be reduced by increasing the dielectric constant, decreasing the polymer thickness, and decreasing the modulus of elasticity, for example.

Generally, electrodes suitable for use with the present invention may be of any shape and material provided that they are able to supply a suitable voltage to an electroactive polymer. The voltage may be either constant or varying over time. In one embodiment, the electrodes adhere to a surface of the polymer. As electroactive polymers of the present invention may deflect at high strains, electrodes attached to the polymers should also deflect without compromising mechanical or electrical performance. Correspondingly, the present invention may include compliant electrodes that

conform to the changing shape of an electroactive polymer to which they are attached. The electrodes may be only applied to a portion of an electroactive polymer and define an active area according to their geometry. In many cases, such as the pupil described below with respect to FIG. 3C, the shape of the electrode provides substantial simulation of a feature in an animated device.

Various types of electrodes suitable for use with the present invention are described in copending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/619,848, which was previously incorporated by reference above. Electrodes described therein and suitable for use with the present invention include structured electrodes comprising metal traces and charge distribution layers, textured electrodes comprising varying out of plane dimensions, conductive greases such as carbon greases or silver greases, colloidal suspensions, high aspect ratio conductive materials such as carbon fibrils and carbon nanotubes, and mixtures of ionically conductive materials.

Materials used for electrodes of the present invention may vary. Suitable materials used in an electrode may include graphite, carbon black, colloidal suspensions, thin metals including silver and gold, silver filled and carbon filled gels and polymers, and ionically or electrically conductive polymers. In a specific embodiment, an electrode suitable for use with the present invention comprises 80 percent carbon grease and 20 percent carbon black in a silicone rubber binder such as Stockwell RTV60-CON as produced by Stockwell Rubber Co. Inc. of Philadelphia, Pa. The carbon grease is of the type such as NyoGel 756G as provided by Nye Lubricant Inc. of Fairhaven, Mass. The conductive grease may also be mixed with an elastomer, such as silicon elastomer RTV 118 as produced by General Electric of Waterford, N.Y., to provide a gel-like conductive grease.

It is understood that certain electrode materials may work well with particular polymers and may not work as well for others. For example, carbon fibrils work well with acrylic elastomer polymers while not as well with silicone polymers. For most transducers, desirable properties for the compliant electrode may include one or more of the following: low modulus of elasticity, low mechanical damping, low surface resistivity, uniform resistivity, chemical and environmental stability, chemical compatibility with the electroactive polymer, good adherence to the electroactive polymer, and the ability to form smooth surfaces. In some cases, a transducer of the present invention may implement two different types of electrodes, e.g. a different electrode type for each active area or different electrode types on opposing sides of a polymer.

Electronic drivers are typically connected to the electrodes. The voltage provided to electroactive polymer will depend upon specifics of an application. In one embodiment, a transducer of the present invention is driven electrically by modulating an applied voltage about a DC bias voltage. Modulation about a bias voltage allows for improved sensitivity and linearity of the transducer to the applied voltage.

Transducers of the present invention are also capable of acoustic emission. More specifically, transducers of the present invention may be actuated at frequencies to produce sound in a medium such as air. Thus, the same transducer responsible for actuation of a feature in an animated device may also be responsible for acoustic emission for the animated device. Typically, an audio signal is provided to electrodes in contact with the polymer such that sound waves are produced during rapid actuation and elastic contraction of the transducer. The signal may be a signal from

a stereo player or microphone that has been amplified and converted to the correct voltage range. For example, a transducer used to provide acoustic emission may be driven by a signal of up to 200 to 1000 volts peak to peak on top of a bias voltage ranging from about 750 to 2000 volts DC. However, it will be appreciated that the particular voltages used may vary based on the parameters of an application. Further description of electroactive polymer transducers used to produce sound is described in commonly owned, co-pending U.S. patent application entitled "Elastomeric Dielectric Polymer Film Sonic Actuator" naming R. E. Pelrine et al. as inventors, filed on Jul. 19, 1999 (U.S. application Ser. No. 09/356,801), which is incorporated herein for all purposes.

Although the discussion so far has focused primarily on one type of electroactive polymer commonly referred to as dielectric elastomers (transducer **100** of FIG. 1A), animated devices of the present invention may also incorporate other conventional electroactive polymers. As the term is used herein, an electroactive polymer refers to a polymer that responds to electrical stimulation. Other common classes of electroactive polymer suitable for use with many embodiments of the present invention include electrostrictive polymers, electronic electroactive polymers, and ionic electroactive polymers, and some copolymers. Electrostrictive polymers are characterized by the non-linear reaction of an electroactive polymer (relating strain to E^2). Electronic electroactive polymers typically change shape or dimensions due to migration of electrons in response to electric field (usually dry). Ionic electroactive polymers are polymers that change shape or dimensions due to migration of ions in response to electric field (usually wet and contains electrolyte). Irradiated copolymer of polyvinylidene difluoride and trifluoroethylene P(VDF-TrFE) is an electroactive polymer suitable for use with some embodiments of the present invention.

3. Multiple Active Areas

In accordance with the present invention, the term "monolithic" is used herein to refer to electroactive polymers, transducers, and devices comprising a plurality of active areas on a single electroactive polymer.

FIG. 1C illustrates a monolithic transducer **150** comprising a plurality of active areas in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention. The monolithic transducer **150** converts between electrical energy and mechanical energy. The monolithic transducer **150** comprises an electroactive polymer **151** including two active areas **152a** and **152b**. The polymer **151** can be held using, for example, a rigid frame (not shown) attached at the edges of the polymer **151**.

The active area **152a** has top and bottom electrodes **154a** and **154b** attached to the polymer **151** on its top and bottom surfaces **151c** and **151d**, respectively. The electrodes **154a** and **154b** provide a voltage difference across a portion **151a** of the polymer **151**. The portion **151a** deflects with a change in electric field provided by the electrodes **154a** and **154b**. The portion **151a** comprises the polymer **151** between the electrodes **154a** and **154b** and any other portions of the polymer **151** having sufficient electrostatic force to enable deflection upon application of voltages using the electrodes **154a** and **154b**.

The active area **152b** has top and bottom electrodes **156a** and **156b** attached to the polymer **151** on its top and bottom surfaces **151c** and **151d**, respectively. The electrodes **156a** and **156b** provide a voltage difference across a portion **151b** of the polymer **151**. The portion **151b** deflects with a change

in electric field provided by the electrodes **156a** and **156b**. The portion **151b** comprises the polymer **151** between the electrodes **156a** and **156b** and any other portions of the polymer **151** having sufficient stress induced by the electrostatic force to enable deflection upon application of voltages using the electrodes **156a** and **156b**.

Active areas for monolithic polymers and transducers of the present invention may be flexibly arranged. In one embodiment, active areas in a polymer are arranged such that elasticity of the active areas is balanced. In another embodiment, a transducer of the present invention includes a plurality of symmetrically arranged active areas. Further description of monolithic transducers suitable for use with the present invention are further described in commonly owned U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/779,203, which is incorporated by reference herein for all purposes.

4. Actuator Designs

The deflection of an electroactive polymer can be used in a variety of ways to produce mechanical energy. One common implementation of a transducer in an animated device is within an actuator. Generally speaking, animated devices of the present invention may be implemented with a variety of actuators—including conventional actuators retrofitted with a polymer and custom actuators specially designed for one or more polymers. Conventional actuators include extenders, bending beams, stacks, diaphragms, etc. Several different exemplary actuators suitable for use with some animated devices of the present invention will now be discussed.

A straightforward electroactive polymer drive is one where the transducer acts as a linear actuator in much the same way as a conventional pneumatic or hydraulic cylinder might be employed. FIGS. 2A–2E illustrate several linear electroactive polymer actuators suitable for use with the present invention.

The shape and constraint of an electroactive polymer may affect deflection. An aspect ratio for an electroactive polymer is defined as the ratio of its length to width. If the aspect ratio is high (e.g., an aspect ratio of at least about 4:1) and the polymer is constrained along its length by rigid members, then the combination may result in a substantially one-dimensional deflection in the width direction.

FIG. 2A and 2B illustrate a linear motion actuator **230** suitable for use with devices of the present invention. The linear motion actuator **230** is a planar mechanism having mechanical deflection in one direction. The linear motion actuator **230** comprises a polymer **231** having a length **233** substantially greater than its width **234** (e.g., an aspect ratio at least about 4:1). The polymer **231** is attached on opposite sides to stiff members **232** of a frame along its length **233**. The stiff members **232** have a greater stiffness than the polymer **231**. The geometric edge constraint provided by the stiff members **232** substantially prevents displacement in a direction **236** along the polymer length **233** and facilitates deflection almost exclusively in a direction **235**. When the linear motion actuator **230** is implemented with a polymer **231** having anisotropic pre-strain, such as a higher pre-strain in the direction **236** than in the direction **235**, then the polymer **231** is stiffer in the direction **236** than in the direction **235** and large deflections in the direction **235** may result.

A collection of electroactive polymers or actuators may be mechanically linked to form a larger actuator with a common output, e.g. force and/or displacement. By using a small electroactive polymer as a base unit in a collection, conversion of electric energy to mechanical energy may be scaled

according to an application. By way of example, multiple linear motion actuators **230** may be combined in series in the direction **235** to form an actuator having a cumulative deflection of all the linear motion actuators in the series.

FIG. 2C illustrates cross-sectional side view of a multilayer actuator **240** for converting from electrical energy to mechanical energy. The multilayer actuator **240** includes four pre-strained polymers **241** arranged in parallel and each attached to a rigid frame **242** such that they have the same deflection. Electrodes **243** and **244** are deposited on opposite surfaces of each polymer **241** and are in electrical communication such that they provide simultaneous electrostatic actuation to the four pre-strained polymers **241**. The multilayer actuator **240** provides cumulative force output of the individual polymer layers **241**. In one embodiment, electrodes **243** and **244** are arranged to provide separate actuation for each polymer **241**. In this manner, one may use on-off voltage control actuation of each polymer **241**. This arrangement provides a user relatively simple control of force magnitude for the multilayer actuator **240**.

FIGS. 2D and 2E illustrate a linear actuator **300** suitable for use some animated devices of the present invention. The actuator **300** includes a polymer **302** arranged in a manner which causes a portion of the polymer to deflect in response to a change in electric field. Electrodes **304** are attached to opposite surfaces (only the foremost electrode is shown) of the polymer **302** and cover a substantial portion of the polymer **302**. Two stiff members **308** and **310** extend along opposite edges **312** and **314** of the polymer **302**. Flexures **316** and **318** are situated along the remaining edges of the polymer **302**. The flexures **316** and **318** improve conversion from electrical energy to mechanical energy for the actuator **300**.

The flexures **316** and **318** couple polymer **302** deflection in one direction into deflection in another direction. In one embodiment, each of the flexures **316** and **318** rest at an angle about 45 degrees in the plane of the polymer **302**. Upon actuation of the polymer **302**, expansion of the polymer **302** in the direction **320** causes the stiff members **308** and **310** to move apart, as shown in FIG. 2E. In addition, expansion of the polymer **302** in the direction **322** causes the flexures **316** and **318** to straighten, and further separates the stiff members **308** and **310**. In this manner, the actuator **300** couples expansion of the polymer **302** in both planar directions **320** and **322** into mechanical output in the direction **320**.

One advantage of the actuator **300** is that the entire structure is planar. In addition to simplifying fabrication, the planar structure of the actuator **300** allows for easy mechanical coupling to produce multilayer designs. By way of example, the stiff members **308** and **310** may be mechanically coupled (e.g., glued or similarly fixed) to their respective counterparts of a second actuator **300** to provide two actuators **300** in parallel in order to increase the force output over single actuator **300**. Similarly, the stiff member **308** from one actuator may be attached to the stiff member **310** from a second actuator in order to provide multiple actuators in series that increase the deflection output over a single actuator **300**.

In another embodiment, electroactive polymers suitable for use the present invention may be rolled or folded into linear transducers and actuators that deflect axially while converting from electrical energy to mechanical energy. As fabrication of electroactive polymers is often simplest with fewer numbers of layers, rolled actuators provide an efficient manner of squeezing large layers of polymer into a compact

shape. Rolled or folded transducers and actuators typically include two or more layers of polymer. Rolled or folded actuators are applicable wherever linear actuators are used, such as legs and fingers, high force grippers, or some of the animated designs described below.

FIG. 2F–G illustrate a cross-sectional side view of a monolithic diaphragm actuator **130** comprising a monolithic polymer **131** before deflection in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention. The polymer **131** is attached to a frame **132**. The frame **132** includes apertures **133a** and **133b** that allow deflection of polymer portions **131a** and **131b** perpendicular to the area of the apertures **133a** and **133b**, respectively. The diaphragm device **130** comprises electrodes **134a** and **134b** attached on either side of the portion **131a** to provide a voltage difference across the portion **131a**. Electrodes **136a** and **136b** are deposited on either side of the portion **131b** to provide a voltage difference across the portion **131b**. The electrodes **134** and **136** are compliant and change shape with polymer **131** as it deflects. In the voltage-off configuration of FIG. 2F, polymer **131** is stretched and secured to frame **132** with tension to achieve pre-strain.

Using electrodes **134** and **136**, portions **131a** and **131b** are capable of independent deflection. For example, upon application of a suitable voltage between electrodes **134a** and **134b**, portion **131a** expands away from the plane of the frame **132**, as illustrated in FIG. 2G. Each of the portions **131a** and **131b** is capable of expansion in both perpendicular directions away from the plane. In one embodiment, one side of polymer **131** comprises a bias pressure that influences the expansion of the polymer film **131** to continually actuate upward in the direction of arrows **143** (FIG. 2G). In another embodiment, a swelling agent such as a small amount of silicone oil is applied to the bottom side to influence the expansion of polymer **131** in the direction of arrows **143**. The swelling agent allows the diaphragm to continually actuate in a desired direction without using a bias pressure. The swelling agent causes slight permanent deflection in one direction as determined during fabrication, e.g. by supplying a slight pressure to the bottom side when the swelling agent is applied. The swelling agent allows the diaphragm to continually actuate in a desired direction without using a bias pressure.

FIG. 2H illustrates a bending beam actuator **280** suitable for use with animated devices of the present invention. The bending beam actuator **280** includes a polymer **281** fixed at one end by member **282** and attached to a flexible thin material **283** such as polyimide or mylar using an adhesive layer, for example. The flexible thin material **283** has a modulus of elasticity greater than the polymer **281**. The difference in modulus of elasticity for the top and bottom sides **286** and **287** of the bending beam actuator **280** causes the bending beam actuator **280** to bend upon actuation. Electrodes **284** and **285** are attached to the opposite sides of the polymer **281** to provide electrical energy. The bending beam actuator **280** includes a free end **288** having a single bending degree of freedom. Deflection of the free end **288** may be measured by the difference in angle between the free end **288** and the end fixed by the rigid support **282**. FIG. 2I illustrates the bending beam actuator **280** with a 90 degree bending angle. The maximum bending angle for the bending beam actuator **280** will vary with a number of factors including the polymer material, the actuator length, the bending stiffness of the electrodes **284** and **285** and flexible thin material **283**, etc.

Although FIGS. 2A–2I illustrate several actuators suitable for use with motors of the present invention, other actuators

including one or more electroactive polymers may also be used. Other exemplary actuators include bending beam actuators, diaphragm actuators and inchworm actuators are also suitable for use with the present invention. Additional exemplary linear and non-linear actuators suitable for use with the present invention are described in commonly owned U.S. patent application application Ser. No. 09/619,848, which was previously incorporated by reference.

5. Animated Devices

5.1 Exemplary Animated Devices

Electroactive polymer transducers are well-suited for use in animatronic devices such as animatronic faces. FIGS. 3A–B illustrate front and back perspective views, respectively, of an animatronic face **400** in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention. The face **400** is made from a polymer mold **402** of silicone rubber and is fabricated according to conventional silicone rubber molding techniques. Attached on the inside of the mold **402** are a series of actuators **404a–e**. Each of the actuators **404a–e** comprise a transducer having an electroactive polymer **403** and electrodes attached on opposing surfaces of the electroactive polymer **403**. The polymer mold **402** is flexible and changes shape with deflection of the actuators **404a–e**. The flexibility of the polymer may be controlled so that the motion occurs primarily in certain regions of interest. This control may be accomplished by molding the polymer thinner in certain areas. A relatively rigid frame with hinged joints may also be incorporated beneath the polymer to ensure that motion only occurs between specific regions of the polymer.

Each actuator **404** is responsible for providing motion of a separate feature of face **400**. In one embodiment, each actuator **404** is a linear actuator similar to the linear actuator of FIGS. 2D and 2E and has opposing rigid members **407** attached to mold **402**. The rigid members **407** translate deflection of each electroactive polymer transducer into motion of a feature for the face **400**. For example, actuator **404e** has upper and lower rigid members **405a** and **405b** that are attached above and below a mouth **416**.

Referring to the outer appearance of the face **400** (FIG. 3A), actuation and deflection of actuator **404a** vertically opens right eye **406**. When electrical energy is removed from actuator **404a**, elastic return of electroactive polymer **403a** included in actuator **404a**, and elastic return of the mold **402**, return right eye **406** to its resting position. Similarly, deflection of actuator **404b** vertically opens a left eye **408**. When electrical energy is removed from actuator **404b**, elastic return of mold **402** and electroactive polymer **403b** return left eye **408** to its resting position. Deflection and elastic return of actuators **404c** and **404d** provide motion for right and left cheeks **412** and **414**, respectively. Deflection and elastic return of actuator **404e** provides motion for mouth **416**.

Actuators **404a–e** are capable of independent actuation and may be individually or collectively used to simulate motion of a human face. For example, independent actuation of actuator **404e** may be used to simulate mouth **416** movements corresponding to speech for the face **400**. As electroactive polymers are capable of independent and complex time varying deflections, controlled actuation of multiple actuators **404a–e** may be used to simulate complicated motions such as those that simulate human emotion. In a specific embodiment, independent actuation of actuators **404a–d** are used to provide facial expressions that correspond emotionally to speech provided by mouth **416**. For example, actuators **404a** and **404b** may both be actuated to

open both eyes **406** and **408**, thereby simulating surprise for face **400**. The degree of surprise may be varied by differing the speed and displacement magnitude of actuation of actuators **404a** and **404b**. Eyebrows **418** may also accentuate the effect of displacement and human-like simulation provided by actuators **404a** and **404b**. Alternatively, actuators **404c** and **404d** may be simultaneously actuated to simulate a human smile. The type of smile, or degree of emotion conveyed by the smile, may be varied by differential actuation of the actuators **404c** and **404d**. As one skilled in animatronics will appreciate, controlled actuation of actuators **404a-e** may be performed in a variety of ways to convey emotion and facial expressions for face **400**.

Actuator **404e** is configured such that the polymer included therein is capable of producing sound. In this case, the same transducer may be used for both actuation of mouth **416** and acoustic emission. When actuation and acoustic emission is performed simultaneously, the audio signal is superimposed on an actuation signal. The actuation is distinguished from the acoustic emission signal largely by frequency. The acoustic signal is typically of much higher frequency and lower magnitude than the lower frequency actuation signal. This high-frequency signal will have little effect on the resultant motion. In many cases, a DC bias is included with the high-frequency acoustic signal. This DC bias will produce a small amount of actuator motion which is usually acceptable. Often the acoustic emission is done at the same time as the actuation. In this case, the bias may be part of the actuation signal (linearly superimposed). The magnitude of the acoustic signal may be scaled such that the magnitude of the acoustic response is of the desired frequency profile, regardless of the magnitude of the actuation signal.

Additional humanlike motions may be applied to the face **400** using other animatronic devices used in conjunction with face **400**. FIGS. 3C-D illustrate an animatronic eye **425** in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention. Eye **425** is a planar transducer having electrodes **426** patterned on opposite sides of polymer **427**. Polymer **427** is attached on its perimeter to a frame **428**. Frame **428** allows attachment to the inner surface of polymer **402** of face **400** in regions **424** near each eye. Eye **425** need not be flat. In another embodiment, eye **425** comprises a polymer stretched over a convex surface. The surface may be a slippery material that allows polymer **427** to slide over it. A lubricant may also be disposed between polymer **427** and the convex surface. A suitable lubricant might be a petroleum oil in the case of acrylic materials. This approach could also be used in allowing many of the facial motions described above to move over a convex surface rather than operate in at a flat plane.

Electrodes **426** cover a central circular portion of polymer **427**, are dark and opaque, and thus resemble a human eye pupil. Actuation using electrodes **426** (attached on both sides of the film) causes polymer **427** in the region of electrodes **426** to expand in the plane. Electrodes **426** change shape with polymer **427**. Thus, planar expansion of polymer **427** increases the darkened surface area of electrodes **426** and simulates dilation of a pupil, as illustrated in FIG. 3D. Portions of the polymer **427** outside the active area corresponding to electrodes **426** provide a contractile resistance to actuation. To enhance aesthetic appeal, polymer **427** material not covered by electrodes **426** may be colored white. When used with face **400**, dilation and contraction of the electrodes **426** may be used to contribute to the simulation of human emotions by face **400**. For example, actuation of eye **425** may be in conjunction with actuation of actuators **404a** and **404b** to simulate surprise for face **400**.

FIGS. 3E-F illustrate front and back perspective views, respectively, of animatronic face **430** in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention. Face **430** comprises a monolithic transducer including polymer **432** and electrode pairs **434**, **436**, **438**, and **442** attached to outer and inner surfaces **431a** and **431b** of polymer **432** (e.g., **434a** on inner surface **431a** and **434b** on outer surface **431b**). Thus, polymer **432** is a monolithic polymer comprising four active areas that provide independent deflections and motions for the face **430**. Polymer **431** comprises silicone rubber that is molded into a shape that provides the outer aesthetic appearance for face **430**. In one embodiment, polymer **432** is relatively thin and has a thickness in the range of about 0.020 to about 0.10 millimeters.

Each electrode pair **434**, **436**, **438**, **440**, and **442** is responsible for actuation of a separate portion of the polymer **432** to produce motion for a separate feature for face **430**. Actuation of electrode pair **434** moves right eyebrow **441** down. Actuation of electrode pair **436** moves left eyebrow **443** down. Actuation of electrode pair **442** closes mouth **445**. When electrical energy is removed from electrode pairs **434**, **436**, and **442**, elastic return of polymer **432** returns each feature **441**, **443**, and **445** to its resting position before actuation. Electrode pairs **438** and **440** are patterned on the right and left cheek areas of face **430**, respectively, to provide active areas that expand out of the plane similar to the monolithic diaphragm actuator described in FIGS. 2F and 2G. Actuation of the active area **438** may be used to simulate the bulging of the right cheek for face **430**. Actuation of the active area **442** may be used to simulate the bulging of the left cheek. In one embodiment, a swelling agent such as a small amount of silicone oil is applied to the inner side **431b** of polymer **431** to influence outward expansion of polymer **431**. As one skilled in animatronics will appreciate, electrodes may be arranged on polymer mold **432** in a variety of ways to establish desired skin deformations, provide controlled facial expressions, and convey emotions for face **430**.

Electrode pairs **434**, **436**, **438**, **440**, and **442** are arranged with separate electrical communication. Independence of the electrode pairs allows electrical energy to be separately supplied to different portions of the polymer; thus allowing independent control for each of the active areas. Independent control may include deflection at different times, rates, and degrees of deflection. In another embodiment, two or more electrodes for face **430** are electrically coupled, e.g., electrode pairs **434** and **436** to allow for common actuation of eyebrows **441** and **443**.

The electroactive polymer **432** exploits the flexibility of the electroactive polymer material as well as the ability to fabricate structures with high degrees of freedom by patterning multiple electrode pairs on a single polymer. In one embodiment, electrode pairs are patterned on polymer mold **432** to simulate facial features and facial muscle of a human. These simulated facial muscles may then be used to provide motion for features of the face **432** that simulates human facial movements. As one of skill in the art will appreciate, there are an abundant number of facial features, facial muscles, facial movements, and facial expressions that may be simulated using individual or multiple dedicated active areas on an electroactive polymer.

While the face **430** is illustrated as having a symmetrical appearance, it is understood that animated faces and devices of the present invention may comprise multiple active areas having a non-symmetrical and custom geometries. It is also understood that active areas may be combined in any configuration. These custom geometry active areas and

configurations may be used, alone or a combination, to produce any custom two-dimensional deflection. In some cases, two active areas responsible for motion of separate features may be actuated together to provide movement for a separate portion of face **430** not specifically associated with the features associated with each of the active areas. For example, simultaneous actuation of electrode pairs **434** and **436** may also cause polymer material between the active areas in the central forehead region **439** to raise with eyebrows **441** and **443**. It is also contemplated that elastic return may be used to provide controlled deflection. Similar to simultaneous actuation, elastic return of one portion of the polymer **432** corresponding to first active area may be combined with actuation of a second active area to provide a specialized movement for face **430**, e.g., to provide movement for a separate portion of face **430** not specifically associated with the features associated with each of the active areas

In one embodiment, polymer **432** is substantially thin and flexible, and may be attached conformably to solid structures having flat and curved surfaces as if polymer **432** is an external skin. Face **430** then takes the shape of the structure that it is fixed to. Non-fixed portions are then be capable of motion as determined by active areas arranged on polymer **432**. As described above, face **430** may be partially attached to a convex surface that allows motion for features communicating with an electroactive polymer transducer. The convex surface would then allow for non-linear motion of the flexible polymer **432** about the convex surface. As illustrated in FIGS. 3E-F, electrode pairs are deposited on both sides, outward and hidden, of face **430**. To hide opaque or unsightly electrode pairs on the outside and showing surface of the face **430**, a cosmetic outer skin may cover the face **430**. The outer cosmetic skin may be made of polyurethane, pigmented silicone rubber or natural latex rubber, for example. In another embodiment, the outer surface of polymer **432** is painted to hide the outer electrodes.

In another aspect, electroactive polymer transducers of the present invention are used in toys. FIG. 3G illustrates a top perspective view of toy dog **450** in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention. Frame **465** (FIG. 3H) provides structural support for dog **450**. Skin **467** is attached to frame **465** and provides an outer cover that protects internal components and provides an aesthetic appearance. Dog **450** is capable of legged surface based locomotion and includes four leg assemblies **452a-d** powered by one or more electroactive polymer transducers.

FIG. 3H illustrates a cutaway side view of leg assembly **452a** showing the leg assembly inside skin **467** in accordance with a specific embodiment of the present invention. Leg assembly **452a** is a two degree of freedom structure having a first-degree freedom about pin **453** and a second degree of freedom about pin **454**. Pin **453** is fixed to frame **465** of toy dog **450**.

A first transducer **455** operates against a bias spring **456** to provide rotational motion between lower member **461** and upper member **463** of leg assembly **452a**. Transducer **455** is a linear transducer rotably coupled to a central portion of lower member **461** at one end and rotably coupled to a central portion of upper member **463** at its opposite end. Bias spring **456** provides a counterclockwise bias force for leg **457** about pin **454** that maintains a resting position for leg **457** when transducer **455** is not actuated. As shown, actuation of transducer **455** rotates the lower member **461** of leg **457** clockwise about pin **454** to push lower member **461** down. When electricity is removed from transducer **455**, elastic energy stored in bias spring **456** rotates lower member **461** counterclockwise and returns leg **457** to its resting position.

A second transducer **459** operates against a bias spring **450** to provide rotational motion between the upper member **463** of leg assembly **452a** and frame **465**. Transducer **459** is a linear transducer rotably coupled to a central portion of upper member **463** and rotably coupled to frame **465** at its opposite end. As shown, actuation of transducer **459** rotates upper member **463** clockwise about pin **453** to move leg **457** backwards. When electricity is removed from transducer **459**, elastic energy stored in bias spring **450** moves leg **457** forward and returns leg **457** to its lateral resting position.

Together, transducer **455** and transducer **459** may be used to provide two degree of freedom motion for any part of lower member **461**. Thus, transducers **455** and **459** may be used to contribute to a legged locomotion trajectory for a distal portion of leg **457**. Leg assembly **452a** may then be used in combination with other similar leg assemblies to provide a legged locomotion for dog **450**. For example, electrical energy is removed from transducer **455** to pick lower member **461** up, and electrical energy is removed from transducer **459** to move lower member **461** and upper member **463** forward. In this case, elastic energy stored in springs **450** and **456** moves the distal end of leg **457** forward by rotating upper member **463** about pin **453** and lower member **461** about pin **454**. At some point during forward displacement of leg **457**, electrical energy is provided to transducers **459** and **455**, bringing the distal portion of leg **457** down. Electrical energy may be provided either simultaneously or separately to provide a specific trajectory for the distal portion of leg **457**. Leg **457** also includes padding **458** at its distal end attached to lower member **461**. Padding **458** provides a compliant and larger area of contact with a surface that dog **450** is traversing to assist legged locomotion.

Although leg assembly **452a** disk illustrated with transducers **459** and **455** providing clockwise rotation for their respective leg members about the pin joints as shown, it is understood that transducers **459** and **455** may each be oppositely coupled to their respective leg members in order to provide counterclockwise rotation for actuation of each transducer. In this case, activation of the polymer provides rotation in the opposite direction. One of skill in the art will appreciate that there are numerous trajectories that the distal end **461** can take in legged locomotion such as trajectories associated with walking, trotting, and running, for example. In a specific embodiment, springs **450** and **456** supply a constant force for deflection about each pin. Deflection about each pin may then follow a constant energy path to provide an energy efficient method for legged locomotion of dog **450**. Deflection of an electroactive polymer using a constant energy path is described in further detail in commonly owned, pending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/779,373, which is incorporated by reference for all purposes.

Each transducer **455** and **459** is driven by a dc—dc converter with a maximum output of 5 kV and 500 mW of power. A dc—dc converter suitable for use with transducers **455** and **459** is model Q50 as provided by EMCO High Voltage of Sutter Creek, Calif. Actuation of transducers **455** and **459** may be initiated in a number of ways. In one embodiment, dog **450** includes a processor that coordinates actuation of transducers included in all four leg assemblies **452a-d**. A processor, such as the PIC18C family of processors as provided by Microchip Technology Inc. of Chandler, Ariz., may be suitable to control each of the transducers **455** and **459** as well as their respective dc—dc converters. The processor may be coupled to a switch or a depressible push button which the user actuates by squeezing a portion of dog

450. Dog 450 may also include a battery or other electrical storage device enclosed within frame 465 that provides electrical energy to transducers 455 and 459 and the processor.

FIG. 3I illustrates a leg assembly 560 in accordance with another specific embodiment of the present invention. Leg assembly 560 is a one degree of freedom structure having a rotational degree freedom about brace 561. Brace 561 provides fixed attachment to a frame 465. Transducer 562 actuates antagonistically against transducer 563. Both transducers 562 and 563 are attached at their proximate ends to member 564 and attached at their distal ends to frame 465. Member 564 rotates at its central portion 564a about brace 561 and has a free end 564b that is rotably coupled to leg 568. Member 567 provides torsional support for the leg assembly 560 and is rotably coupled at its proximate end to brace 561 and rotably coupled at its distal end to leg 568. Together, transducers 562 and 563 control the vertical position of leg 568. Leg assembly 560 may include another transducer that controls lateral displacement of leg assembly 560.

FIG. 3J–L illustrate top perspective and front views of a toy bird 470 in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention. Bird 470 comprises a body 472 having a neck 471 and supports a pair of legs 479. Bird 470 also comprises several bending beam actuators 280a–c. Each bending beam actuator 280 is attached at their proximate end to body 472 and provides motion for a feature of bird 470 relative to body 472.

Deflection of bending beam actuator 280a rotates tail feathers 474 about a connection point 473 on body 472. Wings 475 and 476 are connected to distal ends of bending beam actuators 280b and 280c, respectively. In their resting position, wings 475 and 476 lie 180 degrees apart (FIG. 3K). Actuation of bending beam actuator 280b rotates wing 475 upward about body 472 (FIG. 3L). Actuation of bending beam actuator 280c rotates wing 476 upward about body 472. Thus, actuation of bending beam actuators 280b and 280c causes wings 475 and 476 to rotate upwards towards each other as illustrated in FIG. 3L.

When electricity is removed from the electrodes included in actuator 280b, elastic energy of the polymer included in the actuator returns wing 475 to its resting position. A similar elastic return occurs for actuator 280c and wing 476. Electrical energy may be repeatedly provided to actuators 280b and 280c to simulate flapping and flying for bird 470.

In another embodiment, a thin transducer, comprising an electroactive polymer and electrodes, covers one of the wings 475 or 476. The thin transducer is custom patterned monolithically according to simulate the shape of feathers for the bird 470. The transducer may then be used to reconfigure the shape of each wing according to the pattern of electrodes to simulate cruising and evasive motions of birds in flight.

FIG. 3M illustrates a front perspective view of a hand held toy doll 500 constructed in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention. Doll 500 includes a body comprising a unitary torso 501 having a neck 503 supporting a head 502. Torso 501 further supports a pair of arms 504 and 505 and a pair of legs 506 and 507. Arms 504 and 505 are passive. Preferably arms 504 and 505 are somewhat pivotal in their attachment to torso 501 such that a user is able to induce motion of arms 504 and 505.

Legs 506 and 507 are also somewhat pivotal in their attachment to torso 501 and each capable of user movement relative to torso 501 about the attachment. In addition, each

leg 506 and 507 includes an electroactive polymer transducer that simulates kicking motion for doll 500. More specifically, transducer 509 is configured on the anterior side of leg 506 and attached at one end to thigh portion 510 of leg 506 and attached at its opposite end to lower leg portion 511. Actuation of transducer 509 causes lower leg portion 511 to rotate about knee joint 512, thus providing motion for leg 506. Doll 500 may be provided with a ball. A user, in conjunction with actuation of transducer 509, may use doll 500 to simulate kicking of the ball.

Actuation of transducer 509 may be initiated in a number of ways. In one embodiment, the transducer 509 is coupled to a depressible push button which the user actuates by squeezing a portion of doll torso 501. The transducer 509 and actuates when the depressible pushbutton is pushed or after the depressible pushbutton is released. In another embodiment, doll 500 includes a microphone and electric driving circuitry that allows voice activation of transducer 509. Doll 500 may also include a battery or electrical storage device enclosed within torso 501. Transducer 509 is driven by a control circuit and dc—dc converter with an output of 5 kV and 300 mW of power. A dc—dc converter suitable for use with transducer 509 is model Q50 as provided by EMCO High Voltage Inc. of Sutter Creek, Calif.

Doll 500 is intended to meet the need for more interactive hand held dolls as opposed to more sophisticated dolls that operate on their own. In contrast, one of skill in the art will appreciate that doll 500 may include numerous other electroactive polymer transducers that are processor controlled and designed to operate on their own without user assistance. Broadly speaking, one aspect of the present invention relates to articulated dolls including one or more electroactive polymer transducers. The dolls may be such devices employing an electroactive polymer that drives a movement feature—that is manually activated or processor activated. Toy dolls are a well known segment of the toy industry. Thus, dolls have been provided which vary from large “life size” dolls to small fashion dolls. Further variation is found in the material of dolls varying from soft so-called “plush” dolls to hand held hard plastic dolls and doll figures. By way of further variation, dolls may be provided that vary from simple dolls which have one or two moving features to dolls which are extremely active and able to perform various movements or activities.

While the doll 500 has been described specifically with respect to electroactive polymer transducers that provide motion that simulates kicking, it is understood that there a variety of other lifelike actions and movements that doll 500 may designed to simulate. Other exemplary lifelike actions whose movements an electroactive polymer transducer may contribute to simulation of include simulated skating action, liquid drinking action, swallowing action, smiling, arm waving, dancing, talking, throwing, blinking, burping, rolling over, etc. Lifelike movements that may be powered by an electroactive polymer transducer include may also any of those associated with the human actions listed above and any movements associated with a specific body part. Exemplary head 503 movements relative to torso 501 include nodding, twisting and universal movement of the head relative to the torso.

In general, toys in accordance with one aspect of the present invention include any toy that simulates motion of a living organism or a portion of an organism, such as hand held dolls, stuffed and plush toys, articulated action figures, action figure accessories, preschool learning toys, preschool talking & sound toys, mechanical design kits, robotic/virtual pets, etc. Each toy and may use one or more electroactive

polymer transducers to provide motion for limbs, body segments, or appendages such as wings, antennae, etc. Toys of the present invention comprising one or more electroactive polymer transducers may include animated games. Exemplary animated games include those that use electroactive polymer transducers to direct static devices into motion for game purposes (e.g., to move a ball into a hole) and fighting toys having movements powered by one or more electroactive polymers and controlled by a user. As will be described in further detail below, transducers included in the fighting toys may also comprise electroactive polymer transducers with sensor capabilities.

One manner of classifying the large number of toys having motion powered by electroactive polymers of the present invention is by the type of motion produced by electroactive polymer. In one embodiment, electroactive polymer animated devices correspond to toys having surface based locomotion such as ground based and/or gravity-assisted locomotion powered by one or more electroactive polymer transducers. Exemplary surface based types of locomotion include legged locomotion (bipedal, multiple legged, walking, trotting, crawling, running, etc.), hopping (e.g., rabbits, frogs, kangaroos, etc.), wheeled locomotion (e.g., cars, trains, bicycles), and slithering (e.g., snakes, snails, slugs, etc.). Other exemplary types of locomotion include swimming (fish, eels, etc.) and flying, flapping and soaring (e.g. birds, butterflies, dragonflies, aircraft, etc.

In another embodiment, electroactive transducer powered toy has mobility independent from its user, e.g., wheeled vehicles such as trains and cars, legged animals such as dogs and dinosaurs, battery operated vehicles, electric/battery car sets & accessories, etc. In some cases, the devices may include remote control that controls actuation and deflection of an electroactive polymer. One of skill in the art will appreciate the abundant number of robotic toys that may be designed including electroactive polymer transducer and remote control.

An animated device that employs an electroactive polymer transducer may be considered a direct drive device where the transducer directly translates into motion of the feature. In many cases, back drivability associated with electroactive polymers included in a direct drive devices is desirable for an application. As the term is used herein, backdrivability refers to the ability to move a transducer against a direction of its actuation. Electroactive polymers typically have a low stiffness relative to their conventional electromechanical counterparts. More specifically, back drivability may be accomplished by overcoming the stiffness of the polymer during motion between a first position and a second position. This inherent low stiffness may provide a back drivability that is advantageous in some applications. For example, should an animated device in a theme park accidentally contact an object during motion, motion may be stopped by overcoming the stiffness of the polymer. As a result, the shock and initial force would typically be low relative to conventional electromechanical actuation, potentially reducing the amount of force experienced by the object. Thus, an animated device is in accordance with the present invention may be designed with a back drivability for motion of a feature between two positions. In one embodiment, the back drivability is accomplished by setting a maximum stiffness of polymer and device for motion of the feature between the first and second position.

In a specific embodiment, toys of the present invention comprise a feature that is back drivable. Since electroactive polymers are inherently compliant as discussed, back drivability for the toy may be accomplished by overcoming the

stiffness of the polymer during motion between one position, e.g., a resting position, and a second position, e.g., a position of actuation. In addition, polymer material may be selected based on the back drivability requirements of an application.

5 Polymer that is more compliant may add a larger compliance to the operation of an animatronic device by potentially reducing impact forces if an undesired collision occurs.

5.2 Animated Device Overview

Having briefly discussed several exemplary animated devices, some general aspects that may apply to animated devices of the present invention will now be discussed. In general, an animated device in accordance with the present invention comprises one or more electroactive polymers configured to provide motion for a feature of the device. The feature may be any portion of the device having motion at least partially contributed to by deflection (actuation or elastic return) of an electroactive polymer. There are an abundant number of animated device designs suitable for use with the present invention—including conventional animated devices retrofitted with one or more electroactive polymers and custom animated devices specially designed for electroactive polymer usage. Since many electroactive polymer transducers can operate well over a large range of sizes with little change in performance, electroactive polymer powered animated devices have many potential applications for both and large small devices.

An electroactive polymer may have customized deflections and strokes; thus permitting customized motions for a particular animated device. The use of multiple electroactive polymers in an animated device allows for the development of dextrous devices with numerous customized degrees of freedom. These customizable deflections and strokes also provide power without the need for complex transmission mechanisms such as cables and gears, resulting in lightweight actuation that is ideal for small, compact, and lightweight animated devices. Since no complex transmission mechanisms are needed, the remainder of the animated device is typically less complex and expensive than conventional forms of actuation.

The simplicity and high-efficiency of electrical to mechanical energy conversion provided by electroactive polymer transducers also allows improved animated devices in mobile and lightweight applications where available energy is limited. For example, mobile toys such as animated animals and remote control vehicles may benefit from the lightweight advantages of using an electroactive polymer transducer. Since the transducer is substantially lighter than a conventional electromagnetic motor, and the need for complex transmission mechanisms is removed for many devices, less demanding electrical energy storage devices are required. For example, the lighter weight gained by using an electroactive polymer transducer allows a smaller battery to be used or the same size battery may be used for a longer duration.

The present invention is also suitable for animated devices having a distributed transducer scheme. In a distributed transducer scheme, multiple links and transducers are used wherein each transducer drives a link directly, thus allowing a specific control for each link and therefore greater dexterity for the entire device. For example, an animatronic mannequin may have separate electroactive polymer transducers that power an upper arm, lower arm, wrist, and individual fingers. In this scheme, lightweight transducers are advantageous since a transducer is often required to move and support distal links that each include the added mass of a downlink transducer. One of skill in the

art will appreciate the value of light weight in robotics, toys, and animatronics devices having multiple links.

A collection of electroactive polymers or actuators may be mechanically linked to form a larger actuator with a common output, e.g. force and/or displacement. By using a small electroactive polymer as a base unit in a collection, conversion of electric energy to mechanical energy may be scaled according to an application. By way of example, multiple linear motion devices **230** (FIG. **2C**) may be combined in series in the direction **235** to form an actuator having a cumulative deflection of all the linear motion devices in the series. Electroactive polymer transducers and actuators—either individually or mechanically linked in a collection—may be referred to as ‘artificial muscle’. For purposes herein, an artificial muscle is defined as one or more transducers and/or actuators having a single output force and/or displacement. Artificial muscles may be implemented on a micro or macro level and may comprise any one or more of the transducers and actuators described herein.

Given the customizable shape of electroactive polymers, animatronic devices using electroactive polymer transducers may then be designed to mimic any natural muscle based organism. Duplication of natural muscle thus allows electroactive polymer transducer powered animated devices to produce many natural motions and dynamics related to living organisms; and thus animated devices based on these organisms. For example, the large stroke capability of electroactive polymers allows them to be used directly as linear actuators in much the same way as muscle is used in biological animals, e.g., a biceps muscle. Further, the performance of electroactive polymer transducers is largely scale invariant, e.g., independent of size or mass. One can readily see the advantage of artificial muscle transducers in animatronic devices by noting the many conventional biological analogs to highly articulated animatronic devices that operate using muscular-like actuation. These include analogs such as fingers, hands, arms, legs, heads, limbs, body segments, wings, and appendages for a variety of insects and animals.

Animated devices of the present invention may also be designed and configured such that a mechanical property of a transducer substantially simulates a mechanical property of a real muscle. Exemplary mechanical properties that may be simulated by an electroactive polymer include stiffness, stroke, shape, strain, pressure, speed of response, efficiency, compliance, modularity (transducers may be stacked in parallel or linked in series) damping, and bulging in the middle as the muscle contracts. In one embodiment, electroactive polymer transducers are used to substantially simulate open loop or passive behavior of natural muscle. In this case, the transducers act as both a spring and damper in a passive manner similar to their natural counterparts.

5.3 Sensor Functionality

Animated devices of the present invention may also include a sensor. The sensor may sense a quantity or item included in the device and/or sense a quantity or item detected from the environment around the device. Quantities sensed may include haptic, acoustic, visual, or kinesthetic feedback, for example. In one embodiment, the sensor is a conventional sensor technology, e.g., a microphone or light sensor. In another embodiment, the sensor is an electroactive polymer transducer operating as a sensor.

FIGS. **1A** and **1B** may be used to show one manner in which the transducer portion **100** converts mechanical energy to electrical energy and acts as a sensor. If the transducer portion **100** is mechanically stretched by external

forces to a thinner, larger area shape such as that shown in FIG. **1B**, and a relatively small voltage difference (less than that necessary to actuate the film to the configuration in FIG. **1B**) is applied between electrodes **104** and **106**, the transducer portion **100** will contract in area between the electrodes to a shape such as in FIG. **1A** when the external forces are removed. Once the transducer portion **100** is stretched, the relatively small voltage difference is provided such that the resulting electrostatic forces are insufficient to balance the elastic restoring forces of the stretch. The transducer portion **100** therefore contracts, and it becomes thicker and has a smaller planar area in the plane defined by directions **108** and **110** (orthogonal to the thickness between electrodes). When polymer **102** becomes thicker, it separates electrodes **104** and **106** and their corresponding unlike charges, thus raising the electrical energy and voltage of the charge. Further, when electrodes **104** and **106** contract to a smaller area, like charges within each electrode compress, also raising the electrical energy and voltage of the charge. Thus, with different charges on electrodes **104** and **106**, contraction from a shape such as that shown in FIG. **1B** to one such as that shown in FIG. **1A** raises the electrical energy of the charge—which may be detected and measured by a circuit in electrical communication with the electrodes. That is, mechanical deflection is being turned into electrical energy and the transducer portion **100** is acting as a mechanical deflection sensor. Sensing performance of electroactive polymer is described in further described in copending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/619,848, which was previously incorporated by reference for all purposes. In one embodiment, a device may be configured such that sensing may be performed simultaneously with the actuation. In this case, a small amplitude high frequency signal may be superimposed on the driving signal. Circuitry may then measure the high frequency response of the polymer as an indication of the capacitance. Such techniques are well-known to those skilled in the art.

In a specific embodiment, an electroactive polymer transducer acts as a large capacitor. By measuring changes in capacitance, corresponding changes in polymer physical dimensions and force loading may be calculated. Thus, the transducer may be used to detect motion of a feature included in an animated device, e.g., an arm. In one embodiment, the same electroactive polymer transducer that provides mechanical output in an animated device also provides sensing capabilities. These transducers may then be made into “smart transducers” that intrinsically incorporate position, force, tactile sensing, etc. These smart transducers may simplify feedback control of mechanical output for an animated device, thus allowing for enhanced dexterity and controlled mechanical output.

In one embodiment, transducers of the present invention act as a haptic sensor for detecting touch. For example, transducer **432** of face **430** may be used to detect whether the face **430** is in contact with an object. Sensing contact may be advantageous for toys that provide an interactive and automatic response with a user. Force sensors, electroactive polymer based or other, may also be used to detect touch applied to the toy.

In another embodiment, transducers of the present invention act as kinesthetic interfaces. Since the transducers operate through a simple drive mechanism rather than a complex transmission, position and force measurements from the transducer may give a direct measurement of the position and loading on a feature included in an animatronic device.

In another embodiment, the animatronic eye of FIGS. **3C–3D** is used in an optical sensor. In this case, electrode

426 has an opacity that varies with deflection. A transparent or substantially translucent polymer 427 is attached to the opacity varying electrode and deflection of the polymer 427 is used to modulate opacity of the eye. In the case of an optical switch, the opacity varying transducer interrupts a light source communicating with a light sensor. Thus, deflection of the transparent polymer 427 causes the opacity varying electrode to deflect and affect the light sensor (turn the switch on/off). In a specific embodiment, the opacity varying electrode includes carbon fibrils or carbon nanotubes that become less opaque as electrode area increases and the area fibril density decreases.

5.4 Interactive Capability

Animated devices of the present invention may also be interactive with their environment. Interactive abilities of the present invention refer to both automatic interaction and manual interaction.

In one embodiment, animated devices of the present invention include a processor. Combining the ability to design animated devices having customized motions, sensing abilities of electroactive polymer transducers and conventional sensors, and electrical communication with a processor, animated devices of the present invention may be programmed with automatic interactive capabilities.

In a specific embodiment, a stuffed toy comprises a processor that communicates independently with electrodes that actuate transducers in the toy. The toy may also comprise sensing capabilities that provide haptic, acoustic, visual, or kinesthetic information. The information is then provided to the processor, which is programmed to make decisions based on the feedback. In more elaborate designs, the sensor and processor may combine to make decisions based on context of the quantity being sensed. In a specific embodiment, electroactive polymer force sensors provide temporal and magnitude force information that a processor differentiates in order to provide interactive responses. For example, when a child user yanks on a stuffed toy, the processor receives the force information from the sensors and provides an acoustic signal to a transducer. The stuffed toy then interactively responds with an acoustic output of 'ouch' from the transducer.

In one embodiment, an animated device provides biomimetic responses to a person interacting with the device. As to term is used herein, a biomimetic response refers to response of a device that copies or mimics nature. For example, the stuffed toy just described may provide a suitable empathetic response based on feedback from a child. Thus, the sensors may sense a particular state of the child playing with the stuffed toy and then respond accordingly, e.g., the sensors detect sadness in the child using voice recognition and the processor responds by actuating facial transducers for the stuffed toy similar to mask 430 of FIG. 4C to produce an empathetic facial gesture. The biomimetic response may be selected to diffuse the state of the person, e.g., the sensors detect sadness in the child and the processor actuates electroactive polymer transducers in the device to provide a happy response including both happy facial gestures and an acoustic output. In this case, the stuffed toy is designed with electroactive polymer transducers that provide all movements associated with the appropriate empathetic responses required for interaction between the toy and person. This may include reactive eye movements, body language, facial gestures, acoustic output, etc. In another embodiment, animated devices for use in a theme park may be designed with biomimetic responses to a user.

In another embodiment, an animated device of the present invention provides tactile interaction with its environment. For example, one or more haptic sensors may be arranged under the skin in various places of the animated device. Each of the haptic sensors then detects touch for different body portion of the animated device. The same transducer may then be responsible for actuation in response to user interaction. For example, a haptic electroactive polymer sensor may be placed in the nose of the stuffed toy and the nose wiggles when touched (via actuation of the electroactive polymer). Alternatively, the stuffed toy may receive time varying force feedback from its environment and react accordingly. For example the stuffed toy previously discussed may be a teddy bear that reactively pushes back when its paw is pushed. In a more elaborate design, the magnitude of reactive push is proportional to the force magnitude pushing on the paw. In another embodiment, automatic toy interaction is designed not to stop an action based on sensor feedback. For example, a toy dinosaur with biting capabilities powered by electroactive polymer transducers uses force feedback from the transducers to decide when not to keep biting.

In another embodiment, an animated device has a set of responses based on a given input. For example, a toy dinosaur comprising a number of electroactive polymer transducers, a depressible button switch on its back, and a processor that responds to depression of the button, may have a series of programmed responses to depression of the button, e.g., locomotion and acoustic output. The depressible button may be an electroactive polymer transducer acting as a sensor or a simple conventional electrical switch in communication with the processor.

Interactive toys of the present invention need not include a processor. For the exemplary fighting men game mentioned above, an individual fighter in the game may include be designed with joint compliance that provides an automatic and appropriate response when hit by another fighter, e.g., the fighter falls down after being hit hard in the head by the other fighter. In this case, a user may provide manual control of the transducers in their corresponding motions for the toy fighter.

5.5. Additional Applications

As the present invention includes transducers that may be implemented in both the micro and macro scales, and with a wide variety of designs, the present invention finds use in a broad range of applications where animated motion is desired. Provided below are some additional exemplary applications for electroactive polymer transducer animated devices.

Animated devices of the present invention are also well-suited for use in the entertainment industry. Exemplary applications include animated device use in moving displays of theatre, theme parks, theme park rides, dark walks, scenery, and special effects for the film and television industries. Since downtime due to mechanical failure and repair is a nontrivial consideration for conventional animatronic devices in theme park rides, the simplicity and reliability electroactive polymers provide make them well-suited for this application. In many cases, fault tolerance may be built into an electroactive polymer based animatronic device included in theme park ride by using several smaller transducers in parallel, thus increasing reliability of the device and minimizing downtime of the ride.

One of skill in the art will appreciate the wide use of animatronics in entertainment special effects work. Some exemplary animated devices found in the entertainment

industry suitable for use with electroactive polymer transducers include animatronic puppets, creatures and creature effects, sculptures, masks, special effects make-up, figures, prosthetics, props, scenic and set decorations, and character costumes. Exemplary creature effects include masked monsters, aliens, apes, dinosaurs, animatronic figures, etc. Special effects makeup include effects such as latex masks and devices added to a person, animal or other device, e.g., to appear if skin is bulging by putting a prosthetic on their skin and actuating it.

The present invention is also suitable for sporting animated devices. Exemplary sporting animated devices include decoys such as animated ducks used for attracting game and electroactive polymer transducer powered fishing lures. The decoys may also be used in animal and pest traps such as a flapping fly, crawling insect or wiggling worm or insect used in a pest trap, for example.

Animated devices of the present invention may also be used in medical training. This includes mannequins and training instruments that incorporate sensing and interactive capabilities. For example, a CPR training mannequin may include force sensors to detect the degree of chest expansion provided by a CPR trainee. In addition, the CPR training mannequin may include customized motions of a feature that provides interactive response based on CPR trainee performance, e.g., a diaphragm actuator that operates similar to actuator 130 of FIG. 2F and repeatedly actuates to simulate a pulse.

The present invention also finds use in novelty items that include animated motion. Exemplary novelty items suitable for use with present invention include singing fish, dancing flowers, Halloween and Christmas novelty items such as dancing Santas, etc.

8. Conclusion

While this invention has been described in terms of several preferred embodiments, there are alterations, permutations, and equivalents that fall within the scope of this invention which have been omitted for brevity's sake. By way of example, although the present invention has been described in terms of several numerous applied material electrodes, the present invention is not limited to these materials and in some cases may include air as an electrode. It is therefore intended that the scope of the invention should be determined with reference to the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. An animated device comprising:

a feature capable of motion between a first position and a second position;

a transducer either included in the feature or coupled to the feature and configured to provide at least a portion of the motion between the first position and the second position for the feature, the transducer comprising an active area, which includes at least two electrodes coupled to a portion of an electro active polymer, the portion capable of deflection in response to a change in electric field provided by the at least two electrodes; and

wherein the polymer has an elastic modulus below about 100 MPa and the polymer is pre-strained by a factor in the range of about 1.5 times to 50 times its original area.

2. The device of claim 1 wherein elastic return of the electroactive polymer provides at least a portion of the motion from the second position to the first position.

3. The device of claim 1 wherein the electroactive polymer is elastically pre strained.

4. The device of claim 1 wherein the electroactive polymer is a dielectric elastomer.

5. The device of claim 1 wherein the electroactive polymer is molded.

6. The device of claim 1 further including a frame coupled to the electroactive polymer and configured to provide structural support for the device.

7. The device of claim 1 wherein a mechanical property of the transducer substantially simulates a mechanical property of a real muscle.

8. The device of claim 1 wherein the device is one of a toy, a puppet, and an animatronic device.

9. The device of claim 8 further comprising a second transducer, the second transducer comprising a second active area, which includes at least two second active area electrodes coupled to a portion of a second electroactive polymer, the portion capable of deflection in response to a change in electric field provided by the at least two second active area electrodes.

10. The device of claim 1 wherein the transducer is included in a linear actuator.

11. The device of claim 1 wherein the device is included in one of an animated display, a set, a prop, and a moving display of an amusement park ride.

12. The device of claim 1 wherein the device includes a first member attached to the polymer which is also attached to the feature, wherein the feature configured to rotate about the first member upon deflection of the polymer.

13. The device of claim 1 wherein the transducer further comprises a second active area, said second active area comprising at least two second active area electrodes and a second portion of the electroactive polymer coupled to the at least two second active area electrodes.

14. The device of claim 13 wherein the first active area and the second active area are capable of independent actuation.

15. The device of claim 1 wherein the device is a distributed animated device.

16. The device of claim 15 wherein the distributed animated device comprises an arm.

17. The device of claim 1 wherein the device includes a remote control receiver that receives remote control signals that affect deflection of the portion of the electroactive polymer.

18. The device of claim 1 wherein the device is one of a decoy or a fishing lure.

19. The device of claim 1 wherein the device is configured such that the transducer is used in a sensor configured to detect a parameter included in the device or detect a parameter from the environment around the device.

20. The device of claim 19 wherein the sensor provides one of haptic and force feedback.

21. The device of claim 1 wherein the device is configured such that the transducer is capable of producing sound.

22. The device of claim 1 wherein the device is backdrivable between the first position and the second position by overcoming the stiffness of the polymer during motion between the first position and the second position.

23. The device of claim 22 wherein backdriving is accomplished by overcoming the stiffness of the polymer during motion between the first position and the second position.

24. The device of claim 1 wherein the device is capable of surface based locomotion.

25. The device of claim 24 wherein the feature is a leg and the first position and the second position are included in legged locomotive positions of a toy.

26. The device of claim 1 wherein motion between the first position and the second position for the feature has human likeness.

27. An animated face comprising:
 a facial feature capable of motion between a first position and a second position;
 a transducer either included in the facial feature or coupled to the facial feature and configured to provide at least a portion of the motion between the first position and the second position for the facial feature, the transducer comprising an active area, which includes at least two electrodes coupled to a portion of an electroactive polymer, the portion capable of deflection in response to a change in electric field provided by the at least two electrodes; and
 wherein the polymer has an elastic modulus below about 100 MPa.

28. The animated face of claim 27 wherein the electroactive polymer is molded to the shape of the face.

29. The animated face of claim 28 further comprising an outer skin attached to an outer surface of the polymer.

30. The animated face of claim 27 wherein the facial feature is a mouth and the first position and the second position correspond to positions of the mouth.

31. The animated face of claim 27 wherein the facial feature is an eyebrow and the first position and the second position correspond to positions of the eyebrow.

32. The animated face of claim 27 wherein the facial feature is a pupil and actuation of the polymer corresponds to dilation of the pupil.

33. The animated face of claim 27 wherein the transducer further comprises a second active area, said second active area comprising at least two second active area electrodes and a second portion of the electroactive polymer coupled to the at least two second active area electrodes.

34. The animated face of claim 33 wherein said first and second active areas are actuated one of independently or together to provide motion for one or more parts of said face.

35. An animated toy comprising:
 a feature capable of motion between a first position and a second position;
 a transducer either included in the feature or coupled to the feature and configured to provide at least a portion of the motion between the first position and the second position for the feature, the transducer comprising an active area, which includes at least two electrodes coupled to a portion of an electroactive polymer, the portion capable of deflection in response to a change in electric field provided by the at least two electrodes; and
 wherein the polymer has an elastic modulus below about 100 MPa and the polymer is pre-strained by a factor in the range of about 1.5 times to 50 times its original area.

36. The toy of claim 35 wherein the first position and the second position are included in facial positions of the toy.

37. The toy of claim 35 wherein the toy is capable of surface based locomotion.

38. The toy of claim 35 wherein the first position and the second position are included in legged locomotive positions of the toy.

39. The toy of claim 35 wherein the electroactive polymer is a dielectric elastomer.

40. The toy of claim 35 wherein the device includes a remote control receiver that receives remote control signals that affect deflection of the portion of the electroactive polymer.

41. The toy of claim 35 wherein the toy comprises a sensor configured to detect a parameter included in the device or detect a parameter from the environment around the device.

42. The toy of claim 41 wherein the toy is configured such that the transducer is used in the sensor.

43. The toy of claim 42 wherein the sensor provides one of haptic and force feedback.

44. The toy of claim 35 wherein the toy is configured such that the transducer is capable of producing sound.

45. The toy of claim 35 wherein the toy is backdrivable between the first position and the second position by overcoming the stiffness of the polymer during motion between the first position and the second position.

46. The toy of claim 45 wherein the first position and the second position are included in legged locomotive positions of the toy.

47. The toy of claim 35 wherein the toy comprises a distributed transducer scheme.

48. The toy of claim 35 wherein the toy comprises a body including a torso having a pair of arms extending therefrom, a head, a pair of legs extending downwardly therefrom, a neck portion supporting the head.

49. An animated skin comprising:
 a feature capable of motion between a first position and a second position;
 a transducer either included in the skin or coupled to the skin and configured to provide at least a portion of the motion between the first position and the second position for the feature, the transducer comprising an active area, which includes at least two electrodes coupled to a portion of an electroactive polymer, the portion capable of deflection in response to a change in electric field provided by the at least two electrodes; and
 wherein the polymer has an elastic modulus below about 100 MPa.

50. The animated skin of claim 49 further comprising a convex surface attached to a portion of the skin.

51. The animated skin of claim 49 further comprising an outer skin attached to an outer surface of the polymer.

52. The animated skin of claim 49 wherein the transducer is included in a diaphragm actuator.

53. The animated skin of claim 49 wherein the device is configured such that the transducer is capable of producing sound.

54. An animated device comprising:
 a feature capable of motion between a first position and a second position;
 a transducer either included in the feature or coupled to the feature and configured to provide at least a portion of the motion between the first position and the second position for the feature, the transducer comprising an active area, which includes at least two electrodes coupled to a portion of an electroactive polymer, the portion capable of deflection in response to a change in electric field provided by the at least two electrodes, wherein the polymer has an elastic modulus below about 100 MPa;
 a sensor configured to detect a parameter included in the device or detect a parameter from the environment around the device.

55. The device of claim 54 wherein the sensor provides one of haptic information, kinesthetic information, visual information, and acoustic information.

56. The device of claim 54 wherein the sensor comprises a second electroactive polymer.

57. The device of claim 54 wherein the sensor comprises the transducer.

58. The device of claim 54 wherein the device is configured such that sensing may be performed simultaneously with the actuation.

59. The device of claim 54 further comprising a processor and electrical communication with the at least two electrodes.

60. The device of claim 59 wherein the processor is in electrical communication with the sensor.

61. The device of claim 60 wherein the device is capable of responding to stimulus provided by its environment that is detected by the sensor.

62. The device of claim 61 wherein the device provides biomimetic responses to a user.

63. The device of claim 54 wherein the device is one of a toy and an animatronic device.

64. An animated device comprising:

a feature capable of motion between a first position and a second position;

a transducer either included in the feature or coupled to the feature and configured to provide at least a portion of the motion between the first position and the second position for the feature, the transducer comprising an active area, which includes at least two electrodes coupled to a portion of an electroactive polymer, the portion capable of deflection in response to a change in electric field provided by the at least two electrodes, wherein the polymer has an elastic modulus below about 100 MPa;

a sound generator configured to produce sound.

65. The device of claim 64 wherein the transducer is configured to produce sound.

66. The device of claim 64 further comprising a second transducer, said second transducer comprising at least two second transducer electrodes coupled to a portion of a second electroactive polymer, the portion of the second electroactive polymer capable of deflection in response to a change in electric field provided by the at least two second transducer electrodes, and wherein the second transducer is configured to produce sound.

67. The device of claim 64 wherein the device comprises a sensor configured to detect a parameter included in the device or detect a parameter from the environment around the device.

68. The device of claim 64 wherein the device is configured such that the transducer is used in the sensor.

69. The device of claim 67 where in the sensor detects acoustic information.

70. An animated device capable of surface based locomotion, the animated device comprising:

a feature capable of motion between a first position and a second position;

a transducer either included in the feature or coupled to the feature and configured to provide at least a portion

of the motion between the first position and the second position for the feature, the transducer comprising an active area, which includes at least two electrodes coupled to a portion of an electroactive polymer, the portion capable of deflection in response to a change in electric field provided by the at least two electrodes, wherein the polymer has an elastic modulus below about 100 MPa; and

wherein the device is configured such that motion between the first position and the second position for the feature provides at least a portion of the surface based locomotion.

71. The device of claim 70 wherein the surface locomotion is wheeled locomotion and the feature is a wheel driven by the transducer.

72. The device of claim 70 wherein the surface locomotion is legged locomotion and the feature is a leg.

73. The device of claim 72 wherein the device is a toy.

74. The device of claim 70 wherein the device includes a remote control receiver that receives remote control signals that affect deflection of the portion of the electroactive polymer.

75. An animated device having likeness of a human, the animated device comprising:

a feature capable of motion between a first position and a second position;

a transducer either included in the feature or coupled to the feature and configured to provide at least a portion of the motion between the first position and the second position for the feature, the transducer comprising an active area, which includes at least two electrodes coupled to a portion of an electroactive polymer, the portion capable of deflection in response to a change in electric field provided by at least two electrodes, wherein the polymer has an elastic modulus below about 100 Mpa; and

wherein the feature has a human likeness.

76. The device of claim 75 wherein the motion between the first position and the second position for the feature has a human likeness.

77. The device of claim 75 wherein the device resembles a non-living object and the transducer provides motion for a feature having a human likeness.

78. The device of claim 75 wherein the electroactive polymer is a dielectric elastomer.

79. The device of claim 75 wherein the device is a distributed animated device.

80. The device of claim 79 wherein the distributed animated device comprises an arm.

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