

Immersion v. Sony

IEOR 190G

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Parties Involved

- Sony Corporation
 - one of the world's largest media conglomerates.
 - leading manufacturers of electronics, video, communications, video game consoles, and information technology products for the consumer and professional markets.
- Immersion Corporation
 - San Jose firm founded in 1993
 - developer of “haptic technology”
 - Holds patent portfolio of over 700 patents
- Microsoft Corporation
 - multinational computer technology corporation
 - signed an agreement with Immersion in 1999 to share each other's “feel simulation technology”.
 - Sued by Immersion in 2002, but settled and acquired 10% interest in Immersion.

The Case

- Immersion claimed Sony and Microsoft infringed on claims in U.S. Patent 6,424,333 and U.S. Patent 6,275,213 (extensions of U.S. Patent 6,088,017)
- Microsoft settled out of court, purchasing a 10% share in Immersion
- Sony went to court and lost
 - Immersion Awarded \$82 million
 - Judgment required Sony to suspend the sale of all controllers containing Immersion-patented technology

Haptic Technology

- Based on the Greek word "haptesthai," meaning touch, haptic technology enables people to feel touch sensations while interacting with a digital display, like a computer screen and a hardware device such as a joystick or mouse. Immersion's haptic technology, brand-named TouchSense(TM), enhances the user experience with sight, sound and touch simultaneously.



U.S. Patent 6,088,017

- The device employs one or more vibrotactile units, where each unit comprises a mass and a mass-moving actuator.
- As the mass is accelerated by the mass-moving actuator, the entire vibrotactile unit vibrates.

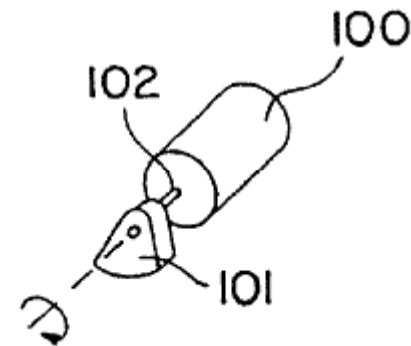
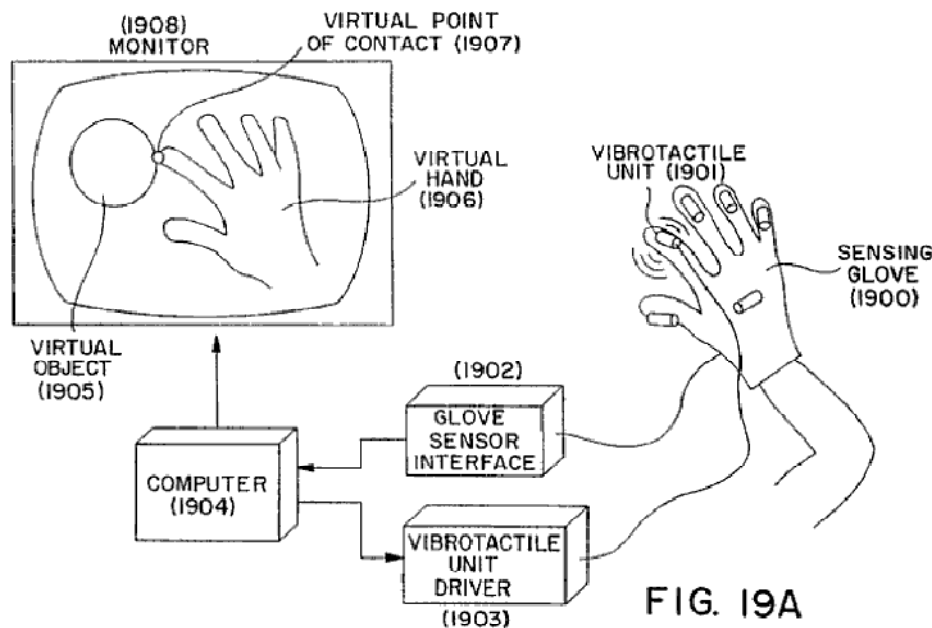


FIG. 1A

U.S. Patent 6,088,017

- The vibrotactile unit may be used in conjunction with a spatial placement sensing device which measures the spatial placement of a measured body part.



U.S. Patent 6,088,017

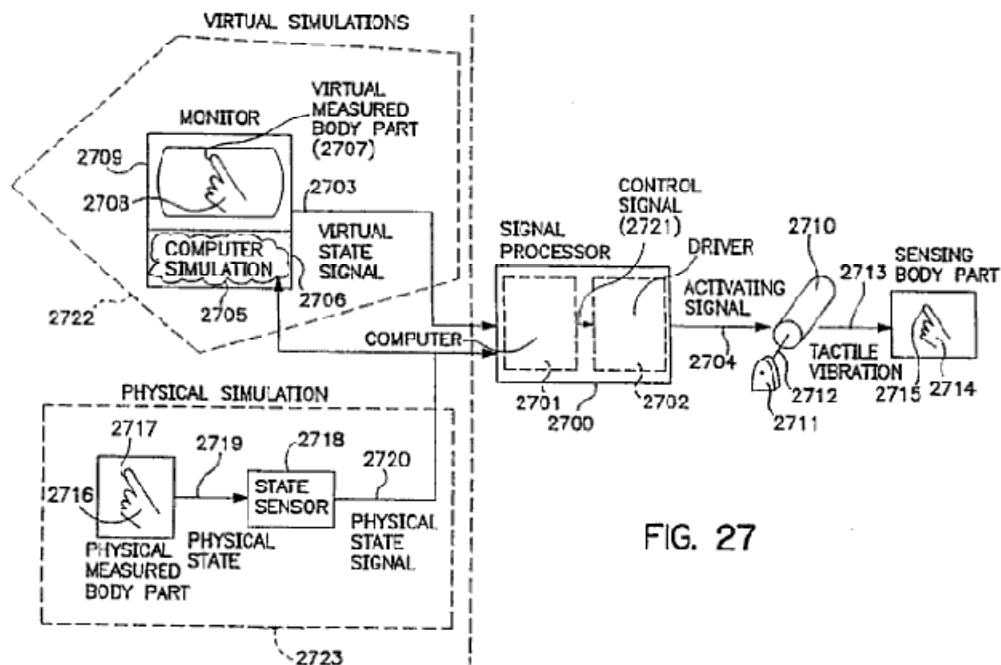


FIG. 27

- A computing device uses the spatial placement of the measured body part to determine the desired vibratory stimulus to be provided by the vibrotactile unit.
- The computing device may control the level of vibratory feedback perceived by the corresponding sensing body part in response to the motion of the measured body part.

Prior Art?

- US Patent 6,200,253
 - Commercialized as the Nintendo Rumble Pak
 - However specifically talks about being a detachable device



And Now?

- *Thorner v. Sony Computer Entertainment America, Inc.*
 - Case No. 09-01894 (NJ filed April 21, 2009)
 - Craig Thorner, a witness from the case, claims he was “tricked into cooperating and signing away his own patent rights for a fraction of their worth.”
 - Thorner, represented by same lawyers that represented Sony, licensed patent to Performance Designed Products LLC (formerly Electro Source)
 - Claims that Sony and PDP were working together because “it was highly beneficial to have Electrosorce [sic] negotiate with Mr. Thorner because if Mr. Thorner was speaking to Sony directly, perhaps he would ask for a much, much higher number.”

Additional References

- <http://www.patentarcade.com/2009/05/sonyimmersion-plot-thickens.html>
- <http://www.engadget.com/2009/04/24/sony-sued-for-cheating-man-out-of-rumble-patents>
- <http://immr.client.shareholder.com/ReleaseDetail.cfm?ReleaseID=111788>
- <http://www.techdirt.com/articles/20080527/1619231238.shtml>
- <http://www.daledietrich.com/gaming/sony-finally-settles-rumble-patent-dispute-with-immersion/>
- <http://ps3.kombo.com/article.php?artid=10030>
- <http://www.google.com/patents?vid=6200253>
- <http://www.google.com/patents?vid=6424333>
- <http://www.google.com/patents?vid=6275213>
- <http://www.google.com/patents?vid=6088017>