

COMPUTER INPUT DEVICE TRACKING

SIX DEGREES OF FREEDOM

References Cited U.S. Patent Documents

<u>4662752</u>	May., 1987	Tucker et al.	356/375.
<u>4672562</u>	Jun., 1987	Egli et al.	
<u>4761000</u>	Aug., 1988	Fisher et al.	5/608.
<u>4811608</u>	Mar., 1989	Hilton.	
<u>5045843</u>	Sep., 1991	Hansen.	
<u>5128671</u>	Jul., 1992	Thomas, Jr.	
<u>5146566</u>	Sep., 1992	Hollis, Jr. et al.	
<u>5212888</u>	May., 1993	Cary et al.	33/18.
<u>5222400</u>	Jun., 1993	Hilton.	
<u>5227985</u>	Jul., 1993	DeMenthon.	
<u>5230623</u>	Jul., 1993	Guthrie et al.	
<u>5297061</u>	Mar., 1994	Dementhon et al.	
<u>5335557</u>	Aug., 1994	Yasutake.	
<u>5446798</u>	Aug., 1995	Morita et al.	
<u>5672820</u>	Sep., 1997	Rossi et al.	
<u>5856844</u>	Jan., 1999	Batterman et al.	
<u>5889505</u>	Mar., 1999	Toyama et al.	
<u>6172354</u>	Jan., 2001	Adan et al.	250/221.
<u>6417836</u>	Jul., 2002	Kumar et al.	

Field of the Invention

[0001] The present invention relates to computer input devices.

[0002] In particular, this invention relates to a computer input device having a plurality of tracking points and a camera to allow entry of three-dimensional (3D), six-degrees-of-freedom data into a computer or gaming device.

Background of the Invention

[0003] At present, the main input devices for computers are the keyboard and a pointer device commonly called a "mouse". For computer gaming purposes, additional devices

such as joysticks and gaming consoles with specialized buttons are available to give more input choices to the user in the game's virtual environment. However, these are two-dimensional input devices used for entering 3D information. More recently, "computer interface apparels" such as gaming gloves, actually worn by gamers, are used to input their choice of movements into the computer games.

[0004] Despite this plethora of input devices, no satisfactory device exists to accept the desired movements in sword fighting, or racket, club or bat-swinging movements for certain computer games. Other possible applications include symphony-conducting baton movements or the waving of a "magic wand" to perform magical tricks in games. The combined use of cursor control keys and rolling of trackballs do not satisfactorily convey the user's intended movements for the virtual object or character he controls in some computer games.

[0005] In addition, other applications beyond the realm of computer games such as computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacturing (CAD/CAM) work, require three-dimensional (3D) input when modifying 3D renditions of designs. Current input devices do not allow ease of use of such applications.

[0006] In recent years there have been plethora of technologies being developed and marketed to achieve such 3D, six-degrees-of-freedom (6-DOF) tracking. These include magnetic field-based trackers, ultrasonic mouse, accelerometer/gyro-based trackers, and technologies based on pull-strings and mechanical linkages. However all these technologies require expensive components, difficult to setup and operate, some of which require extensive preparation of operating environment to avoid interference, and are thus not generally available for consumer market.

[0007] Beside these technologies, there have been attempts to use machine-vision based technology to achieve 3D/6-DOF tracking using low-cost, commonly available digital cameras that could input real-time images to computers. Such technologies generally require putting a predefined cluster of light sources as tracking points onto the object to be tracked, and from the projected image of these tracking points in the camera the provided algorithms would perform the 3D reconstruction process to recover the position and orientation of the object being tracked.

[0008] An example of such an input device is described in U.S. Patent No. 5,889,505 entitled "Vision-Based Six-Degrees-of-Freedom Computer Input Device" and issued to Toyama et. al. The position and orientation of this input device are determined by tracking a physical object suspended by cables as it is moved by a user. The tracking mechanism requires either an initialization where the tracked mechanism is first imaged in a "home position", or a comparison of current data to previously stored data. The Z coordinate is measured by computing how far apart the pixels of the tracked object are from its centroid. Thus, this method includes all the pixels of the tracked object in its Z computation. Another problem with this approach is that it computes orientation by tracking two reference points

that have different distinguishing characteristics. In other words, these reference points must be visually distinguishable. Yet another drawback of this approach is that it does not provide absolute values for the rotation and translation parameters, but only values that are proportional to the actual quantities. These values must then be scaled before being used to control applications.

[0009] U.S. Pat. No. 5,856,844, issued to Batterman et al. and entitled "Method and Apparatus for Determining Position and Orientation," describes a method for determining the six degrees of freedom of a head mounted display and a handle to which an optically-modulated target is attached. The target is marked with squares on its surface, and by tracking the perspective views of these squares, six degrees of freedom are computed. A problem with this approach is that it requires a special orientation mark in the optically-modulated target, in order to identify the ordering of the squares. Another problem is that this approach determines rotation angles directly, and is therefore unduly prone to noise-related distortions.

[0010] Techniques described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,227,985, issued to DeMenthon and entitled "Computer Vision System for Position Monitoring in Three Dimensions Using Non-Coplanar Light Sources Attached to a Monitored Object," and U.S. Pat. No. 5,297,061, issued to DeMenthon et al. and entitled "Three Dimensional Pointing Device Monitored by Computer Vision," determine position and orientation of an object by utilizing a set of non-coplanar light sources mounted on the object. A problem with this approach is that the use of non-coplanar light sources makes the device more difficult to manufacture and therefore more costly. Another problem is that the light sources used in this approach are of different sizes, in order to correctly identify the ordering of the light sources in the corresponding image, which adds additional complexity to the device. This requirement would also become problematic if the tracker is positioned very close to the camera, especially if wide-angle lens is used, as the perspective projection would cause the projected images of the light sources out of proportion and thereby making the comparison of their actual sizes very difficult. The use of large-size light sources would also reduce the resolution of the tracking and increases the occurrence of light sources' overlapping. Moreover this approach is capable of only hemispherical tracking, as the algorithm would not be able resolve, without assuming that the device only need to operate for one-half of the full sphere of tracking, the ambiguity that any unique light sources' projection can be the result of at least two very distinct tracker's states. This limitation can also be easily deduced from the preferred embodiment described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,297,061, which involves using tips of optical fibers as the light sources. Such arrangement would allow the light sources to be observable in the camera only if they are oriented towards it. Its function is thus limited to being a pointing device as spelt out in the invention's title.

[0011] U.S. Pat. No. 4,672,562, issued to Egli et al. and entitled "Method and Apparatus for Determining Location and Orientation of Objects," describes an input device comprising

an orthogonally-related target array. The points are arranged in a very specific configuration such that the fourth target point forms a common intersection point of first, second and third line projections passing separately through the first three points and intersecting the fourth point. In addition, these line projections must form three right angles at the fourth target point. Such constraints are generally undesirable in that they can render the device difficult to manufacture and use. It is also computationally expensive to online-reconstruct the 3D / six-DOF information using the vector replicas' approach. The device is also limited to hemispherical tracking even if the tracked object is transparent, as the configuration would not allow the algorithm to distinguish if the tracked surface is facing towards or away from the camera.

[0012] More recently, U.S. Pat. No. 6,417,836, issued to Kumar et al. and entitled "Computer Input Device Having Six Degrees of Freedom For Controlling Movement of a Three-Dimensional Object", describes an input device comprising a handle with a plate attached to an upper portion thereof. Associated with an upper planar portion of the plate is a set of at least five principle lighting sources. This device is capable of providing only hemispherical tracking as the light sources will not be visible to the camera if the upper planar portion of the plate is oriented away from it. The computation involved in the 3D reconstruction process is also expensive as it involves much online equation-solving for finding the three-dimensional positions of all the lighting sources first prior to finding the orientations. Moreover the device's design is not ergonomic for most gaming purposes and cannot be handled as a stick-like manipulator, which is the common shape of most virtual arsenals used in electronic games.

[0013] In view of the above, a need clearly exists for an intuitive, ergonomic and low-cost input device that enables representation and input of 3D movements by users into computer and gaming devices, while also avoiding the problems associated with the conventional approaches, particularly on the points regarding limited hemispherical tracking, lack of ergonomics as a gaming device, non-coplanar configuration, and complexity in online computations required in the reconstruction process.

Summary of the Invention

[0014] The present invention seeks to provide an improved input device that is capable of tracking three-dimensional, six-degrees-of-freedom positions, coding the tracking result into digital data and inputting it into a computer in real time, said input device has a handheld tracker comprising an arrangement of one array of tracking points to define a first axis, a second array of tracking points to define a second axis or plane orthogonal to the first axis, with distances between the tracking points carefully selected such that a two-dimensional image of the tracking points captured by a camera can be used by a processor to determine the position and orientation of the input device in three-dimensional

space using a provided algorithm. At least one tracking point is embedded within the tracker's body in such a way that its presence or absence in the captured image within the camera is used to determine whether the tracker is oriented towards or away from the camera.

[0015] Accordingly, in one aspect, the present invention provides an input device comprising a "T"-shape tracker wand with a reference spine plus a cross piece, both reference spine and cross piece having a plurality of active tracking points, at least one camera, and at least a processor. It also has an ergonomically designed pen-like handle that allows the user to comfortably grip it for manipulation. One of the tracking points is embedded within the wand's handle such that it is only partially observable, so that its presence or absence in the captured image within the camera provides the cue of whether the wand is oriented towards or away from the camera. By mounting a proper optical bandpass filter in the camera's lens, these tracking points would be captured by the camera and appear as bright spots on its imaging plane while the background scene would be blocked out.

[0016] In accordance with the invention, the driver software determines the corresponding label for each of the bright spots in the image solely from their relative 2D positions, and then extracts simple 2D geometrical data such as lengths and angles between some of the lines that connect these bright spots in certain ways. With these 2D geometrical data it then directly reads essential parameters from a pre-computed lookup table for completing the reconstruction process determining the 6-DOF data of the tracker. These 6-DOF data are then sent to other processes running in the computer for re-producing the tracker's position and orientation on a virtual object in the virtual environment.

[0017] The present invention has numerous significant improvements and advantages over the previously described conventional approaches. The most significant of these is that the invention uses four tracking points that are observable from all directions for the 3D/6-DOF hemispherical tracking, and together with the use of the presence or absence of a fifth tracking point to resolve whether the hemisphere of tracking is the one facing towards or away from the camera. In this way the device is capable of providing more than hemispherical, even nearly full-spherical / all-round tracking with just five tracking points and using just one camera.

[0018] Another very distinctive advantage is that the minimal configuration of the tracker wand allows the full 3D/6-DOF reconstruction to be carried out with fast extraction of simple 2D features in the projected image of the tracking points, followed by fast fetching of approximate solution from offline-computed, small-size lookup table with little online equation-solving. Such use of lookup table in this invention efficiently puts the major bulk of required processing to off-line computations and greatly reduces the need for online computations, thereby resulting in extremely fast reconstruction process using very little computational resources. The use of such minimal number of tracking points also

minimize the occurrence of their overlapping, and greatly simplify the driver software's requirement on exceptions' handling when overlapping occurs.

[0019] All the tracking points are not required to be distinguishable from each other by their sizes or other properties, as only their relative positions in the image are required for the algorithm to label them prior to the reconstruction. This implies that small-size but bright tracking points could be used to improve the resolution and accuracy of tracking, as well as minimizing the occurrence of overlapping.

[0020] The tracker wand can be conveniently handled like a pen or stick and allows ergonomic handling and manipulation for gaming purposes, as holding and swaying it are perceptually similar to holding and swaying a miniaturized sword, bat or racket. Its flat "T"-shape is also entirely planar for easy storage and handling.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[0021] A preferred embodiment of the present invention will now be more fully described, by way of example, with reference to the drawings of which:

[0022] FIG. 1 illustrates the details of an embodiment of the tracker wand of the present invention;

[0023] FIG.2 illustrates an embodiment of the main components of the present invention;

[0024] FIG. 3 shows the translation and orientation of the wand from the original condition in which its frame of reference coincides with the camera's frame of reference;

[0025] FIG. 4 illustrates, with the wand's fifth tracking point within the line-of-sight of the camera and hence five spots appearing on the image, how the two main axes of the wand is determined in the iterative process of the algorithm of the present invention;

[0026] FIG. 5 illustrates the wand's fifth tracking point's forward hemisphere facing away from the camera and hence there are only four spots appearing on the image (FIG.5A); and

[0027] FIG.6 shows two alternative embodiments of the wand of the present invention.

Detailed Description of the Invention

[0028] A detailed description of the present invention will now be given in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention. In the following description, details are provided to describe the preferred embodiment. It shall be apparent to one skilled in the art, however, that the invention may be practiced without such details. Some of these details may not be described at length so as not to obscure the invention.

[0029] It is an object of the present invention to provide an input device for computer and gaming devices that accept 3D input. Such device is capable of providing nearly full-spherical, all-round tracking within its operating volume.

[0030] It is another object of the present invention to provide an input device for computer and gaming devices that allow the reproduction of intended 3D, 6 DOF movements of virtual objects in the virtual environment. This type of movement input may be performed with minimal processor demands so that the present invention can be used in simpler, smaller or less expensive computers and gaming devices and not require too much processor resources from other concurrently-running processes.

[0031] The terms “computer” and “gaming devices” include, but are not limited to, any computing device that require 3D input such as CAD/CAM workstations, “personal computers”, dedicated computer gaming consoles and devices, personal digital assistants, and dedicated processors for processing images captured by the present invention.

[0032] The invention includes a handheld tracker comprising a first array of tracking points to define a first axis, a second array of tracking points to define a second axis or plane orthogonal to the first axis, with the distances between the points carefully selected such that a two-dimensional image of the tracking points can be used to determine the position and orientation of the input device in three-dimensional space.

[0033] Referring now to FIG.1, an embodiment in accordance with the present invention is illustrated. The array should not be seen to be limited to the embodiments described. One element of the preferred embodiment of the present invention is the input device is the wand **101**, a longitudinal device that is substantially straight having a handle **100**, a reference spine **103** and a cross piece **120**. The user manipulates the wand by grasping it substantially at the handle **100**.

[0034] The cross piece **120** is orthogonally disposed near the tip of reference spine **103**. In the preferred embodiment, the cross piece **120** is substantially straight such that it forms a plane with the longitudinal axis of the wand **101**, although cross pieces in the shape of the letter “L” or in form of triangles or polygons may also be used.

[0035] Disposed on the wand **101**, on its reference spine **103**, is a first plurality of tracking points. A second plurality of tracking points is also disposed on the cross piece **120**. These tracking points **110** may be active light emitters or passive light reflectors.

[0036] The wavelengths of light usable range from infrared, through visible light to ultra-violet light.

[0037] In the preferred embodiment, the tracking points **110** are active Infrared Light-Emitting Diodes (IR LEDs) with their electricity-conducting connectors **112** soldered together and formed a “T” arrangement, as shown in FIG.1. These IR LEDs are specially prepared so that their emissions are all-spherical instead of forward-cone as they are originally designed for. One method to achieve this is to coat them with a layer of suitable pigment such as acrylic or enamel paint. This would make the emissions from the tracking points **110** observable by the camera **130**, an element of the present invention, regardless of how the wand **101** is oriented as long as they are not obscured and are within the field and range of view of the camera **130**. The exception is the fifth tracking point **111** nearest

the handle **100** which is positioned inside the handle **100** in a manner such that it can be captured by the camera **130** only when its forward hemisphere is facing towards the camera **130**. These IR LEDs are powered by one or more batteries stored in the handle **100**, which has a switch at its bottom end **102** for turning the power on or off. The IR LEDs and their connectors **112** in the reference spine **103** and the cross piece **120** are overmolded with a layer of transparent plastic coating **104** for reinforcing the structure and protecting the IR LEDs. For most desktop applications, the wand **101** is no more than 20 cm long, a length that caters to a wide range of users. There are two tracking points at either end of the cross piece **120** which is preferably about 6 cm long. Note that the tracking point on the reference spine furthest from the handle **100** is not necessarily in collinear arrangement with these two tracking points on the extremes of the cross piece **120**, although it is more desirable to be so as this would reduce the complexity of computations for the reconstruction process.

[0038] In the case where the tracking points **110** are passive light reflectors, their shapes should be that of a globe or ball to maximize retro-reflection of light back at the direction where it comes from. The exception is the fifth tracking point **111** embedded in the handle **100**. Instead of being in a globe or half globe shape, this tracking point is only slightly domed. A lighting mean **150**, preferably co-axially mounted beside the camera's lens **140**, is required to illuminate the tracking points **110** (FIG.2).

[0039] Another method of supplying light source to the tracking points is by channeling the light from a single main source housed in the handle, through optic fibers to the respective tracking points' sites, and then have the light dispersed through spherical diffusers that are attached to the terminals of the optic fibers.

[0040] Other elements of the present invention include at least one suitable imaging device **130** such as a digital camera with complementary metal oxide semiconductor (CMOS) or charge-coupled device (CCD) sensors (Fig.2). In the preferred embodiment, one camera **130** is used and it is connected to a processor **190**, sending captured images to the processor **190** in real-time with trivial time lag. The camera's lens **140** has an Infrared-pass filter **141** mounted in front of it such that only the infrared light within the narrow band of the IR LEDs would pass through, and the background scene would be blocked out from the image **300**. Hence only the tracking points **110** would appear in the image **300** as bright spots **301** in a dark background.

[0041] In operation, the user grasps the handle **100** of the wand **101** of the present invention and wields it as if he is handling the virtual device of choice. The light from tracking points **110** is captured as bright spots **301** by the camera **130**. The camera **130** then in turn transmits the image **300** to the processor **190**.

[0042] The present invention works within the field of view and in line of sight of the camera **130**. Thus, the ideal position for the camera **130** is in close proximity to the display

screen of the computer or gaming device with the camera **130** pointed substantially at the volume of space in which the user desires to wield the wand **101**.

[0043] To help the user remain in this volume of space covered by the field of view of the camera **130**, a pad **160** with a border marking **180** may be used to help the user estimate the field of view of the camera **130**. A circle **170** marked in the center of the pad **160** helps the user to center the wand **101** at the start of the application or game. The surface material of the pad **160** is also selected to minimize reflection of the light used.

[0044] All transformation parameters relating to the wand's position (translation $T=(t_x, t_y, t_z)$) and orientation such as pitch **201**, roll **203** and yaw **202** are expressed with respect to the frame of reference of the camera **130** (X_c, Y_c, Z_c) (FIG. 3).

[0045] The wand's frame (X_w, Y_w, Z_w) is assumed to be aligned with the camera's frame (X_c, Y_c, Z_c) as an original condition. Any point on the wand $w = (x, y, z, 1)$ is transformed to another point $w' = (x', y', z', 1)$ in the camera's space by the following "XYZ fixed angle" transformation:

$$w' = T + R_z R_y R_x w$$

where R_x is the pitch rotation matrix about the X_c axis;

R_y is the yaw rotation matrix about the Y_c axis and

R_z is the roll rotation matrix about the Z_c axis

[0046] The positions of the bright spots **301** in each captured image **300** are used by the accompanying algorithm of the present invention to reconstruct the position and orientation of the wand **101** at each time interval. They provide information such as the distance between the cross piece's two tracking points d_1 (the value of which is indicated by the line **323** in FIG. 4) and the distance between the two tracking points d_2 of the wand **101** nearest the cross piece **120** (the value of which is indicated by the line **322** in FIG. 4).

[0047] The algorithm of the present invention is capable of performing the 3D/6-DOF reconstruction with a minimum of four tracking points **110**. Depending on whether the wand **101** is oriented towards or away from the camera **130**, the fifth tracking point **111** may or may not be captured by the camera **130**. FIG.4 illustrates a case where the wand **101** is oriented towards the camera **130** such that the fifth tracking point **111** is within the line-of-sight of the camera **130**, and thus there are five spots **301** appearing in the image **300** in the camera's imaging plane **310** as shown in FIG.4A.

[0048] FIG.5 illustrates a case where the wand **101** is oriented away from the camera **130** such that the fifth tracking point **111** is not within the line-of-sight of the camera **130**, and thus there are only four spots **301** appearing in the image **300** as shown in FIG.5A.

[0049] The four or five bright spots **301** present in the captured image **300** are used by the algorithm of the present invention to determine the longitudinal axis and the included angle θ **324** as illustrated in FIG. 4.

[0050] FIG. 4A shows an example of the image **300** of the five tracking points **110** in 3D space captured by the camera **130** as five bright spots **301** in 2D representation. There are ten possible lines for joining any two spots **301** (FIG. 4B) in this case. If there were only four spots **301**, then there would be only six possible lines joining any two spots **301**.

[0051] The algorithm will begin by comparing a first (**320** in FIG. 4C) of these ten possible lines with another of the other nine possible lines to determine if the first line **320** bisects the other line **321** (FIG. 4C). This process is repeated (an unsuccessful example is shown in FIG. 4D) until such two lines that best-fit this relationship are found (FIG. 4E). Thus, the line **322** that bisects another line is the longitudinal axis of the wand. The line **323** being bisected is the line defined by the tracking points **110** of the cross piece **120**, i.e. its axis.

[0052] When these two axes have been identified by the algorithm, the intersection of the two axes defines the position of the reference origin **105** on the wand **101** (FIG. 1). This is represented by the position **326** on the captured image **300**. The wand's design could be in the form such that the reference origin **105** coincides with the centroid of the tracking point at the middle of the cross piece **120** as shown in FIG. 1, or just an arbitrary point not physically designated by any of the tracking point.

[0053] In addition, the included angle θ of these two axes as well as the ratio of d_1 and d_2 as captured by the camera **130** can also be determined. From line **323** and the x-axis of the image, δ (**325** in FIG. 4E), the angle formed by the projected axis of the cross piece with the horizontal axis of the image can also be determined. The degree of roll can then be directly assigned by the angle δ .

[0054] Concomitantly, the translations t_x and t_y can be directly interpreted from the position of the wand's reference origin **326** in the captured image **300**.

[0055] The last bit information required is whether the fifth tracking point **111** on the wand **101** can be seen in the captured image **300**. This information is represented by the Boolean P_5 which is *true* when the point is present and *false* when the point is absent.

[0056] Once these essential parameters are known, essential portion of the wand's position and orientation may then be reconstructed or obtained from information stored in a prepared lookup table that performs the mapping:

$$\langle \theta, d_1/d_2, P_5 \rangle \rightarrow \langle \text{pitch, yaw, } l_l, l_u \rangle$$

where l_l and l_u are the projected distances of either:

- a. the two tracking points of the cross piece, if $d_1/d_2 \geq 1$; or
- b. the distance of the fourth tracking point **327** on the wand **101** from the wand's projected origin **326**, if $d_1/d_2 < 1$;

in the captured image **300** when the wand's origin is at distances from the camera **130** at the lower limit z_l and the upper limit z_u respectively, of the usable operating range from the camera **130**, and where the wand's **101** orientation is at the specific pitch and yaw given in the mapping above.

[0057] The usable operating range thus defined is important as the lookup table has been generated based on this usable operational range from the camera **130**. The usable operational range do not limit the present invention as the operating range can be varied and scaled to different applications with accompanying lookup tables. For most desktop applications, the two limits z_l and z_u are set at 10 cm and 70 cm respectively.

[0058] The distance t_z , the distance of the translated wand's origin **105** from the camera **130** can then be approximated from the following formula:

$$t_z = z_l + ((z_u - z_l) \times (l_l - d_1)/(l_l - l_u)), \text{ if } d_1/d_2 \geq 1; \text{ or}$$

$$t_z = z_l + ((z_u - z_l) \times (l_l - d_2)/(l_l - l_u)), \text{ if } d_1/d_2 < 1$$

[0059] With the present invention, tracking user movements of the wand **101** simply entails capturing the tracking points **110** in the image **300**, determining their projected positions in the image **300**, from which the essential parameters of the wand's position and orientation can be determined and then reconstructing the movement in the virtual environment concerned. This process is repeated at desired time intervals for as long as the present invention is in use.

[0060] It will be appreciated by one skilled in the art that there will be occasions in which the other objects such as the part of the user's body or the wand itself may mask one or more of the tracking points **110** from the line of sight of the camera **130**, or there could be occasions where the spots in the image overlap. When this happens, a simple algorithm may not be able to accommodate such situations. To overcome this limitation, any driver software implementing this algorithm can be programmed to predict the intended trajectory or movement of the wand so as to ignore such situations and to resume processing when sufficient tracking points are detected again. With continual motion of the user's hand, such situations are not expected to occur with sufficient frequency to even cause any annoyance with users.

[0061] The minimum number of tracking points **110** to be captured in the image **300** for the preferred embodiment to operate is four. In the case when the camera **130** fails to capture this minimum number of tracking points **110** within a predetermined time intervals, the driver software would alert the user that an intolerable obscuration of the tracking points **110** has occurred.

[0062] Such situations may arise when the wand **101** is out of the field of view of the camera **130**, or prolonged obscuration by some object or that power to the tracking points **110** is off. The pad **160** of FIG. 1 will help avoid such situations by reminding the user to keep the wand within the field of view of the camera.

[0063] The distances between the tracking points **110** have been carefully determined to minimize ambiguity when interpreting them on the images **300** captured by the camera **130** so that the position and orientation of the wand **101** can be rapidly reconstructed. It is also desirable to use small-size but high-power LEDs, which achieve a high brightness-to-spots'

size ratio that would ensure high resolution and low likelihood of occurrence of spots' overlapping for reconstruction process.

[0064] Another possible way to reconstruct the position of the wand **101** from the relative positions of the tracking points **110** in the captured image **300** is by standard 3D reconstruction algorithms found in most textbooks on robotic vision and computer graphics techniques, as well as in some related prior patents. However such algorithms are computationally expensive and discourage real-time operations in typical computers. As such, implementation of such algorithms is also not desirable at the time of this application as it goes against the aim of the present invention of implementation in simple computing devices. As such, a lookup table, which is generated off-line, is used in the preferred embodiment to provide a fast response time at the expense of high precision in tracking. This tradeoff of accuracy for speed is desirable for gaming purpose.

[0065] Despite this, the elements of the present invention will still work with algorithms that reconstruct 3D movements when processor capabilities are able to accommodate such algorithms.

[0066] While a grayscale or color camera is usable under the present invention, cameras optimized to represent images using 1 bit per pixel (that is, in strict black and white representation) is preferred as data transmission requirements are minimized.

[0067] It will be appreciated by one skilled in the art that many embodiments are possible under the scope of the present invention. For example, the cross piece may be a V or L-shaped piece (FIG. 6A), equilateral triangle (FIG. 6B) or regular polygon. The present invention will work as long as the tracking points **110** of the cross piece all lie on a plane orthogonal to the longitudinal axis of the wand, and the appropriate reconstruction algorithm crafted for it.

[0068] Each tracking point **110** of the present invention may also emit or reflect different unique colors or wavelengths distinguishable by a color camera. In such an embodiment, speed and robustness of reconstruction of the wand's position may be greatly increased as it will be easier and faster and more certain in distinguishing the essential parameters of the wand's position. In this embodiment, the LED at each tracking point may be of distinctive color to better correspond its location in the image to that on the wand. The LEDs can also operate in pulsed mode, with camera's shuttle synchronized with the pulse rate, to achieve faster motion capture.

[0069] The present invention is also scalable, depending on the application. For example, a larger-size wand can be designed for full-body gaming platform. Other conventional control modules such as push buttons and joysticks can also be incorporated onto the handle **100** of the wand **101** to make the device a self-contained full controller eradicating the need for accessing the keyboard or mouse for total control of the interaction.

[0070] The sensitivity of the present invention can be increased, say for tracking a surgeon's hand, by bringing the camera nearer the wand or by using cameras with higher resolution.

[0071] Alternatively, more gross movements such as the swing of a modified racket, bat or club may be better captured by moving the camera further away. Capturing of images from these sports equipment may be done by placing tracking points on them or on representative simulated equipment.

[0072] As technology advances, the refresh rate for capturing the images and the sensitivity of tracking may also be enhanced as processor speeds and capabilities increase.

[0073] While the use of one camera has been described, it is possible to implement the present invention with more than one camera. If more than one camera are used, triangulation techniques may be used to better reconstruct the distance of wand from the cameras. The use of more cameras also has the advantage of improved obscuration-tolerance, such that the device would not stop operating if the wand is obscured from one camera. Such arrangement also has the advantage of better ambiguity-resolving, as in the situation when spots' overlapping occurs in one camera it will unlikely to occur in another camera if the relative placement of these cameras are carefully done.

[0074] It will be appreciated by one skilled in the art that the algorithm described can be readily implemented in a variety of programming languages at various levels from high level programming languages, to assembly languages to machine languages. The integration of the present invention to various gaming and CAD/CAM applications may also be readily performed by one skilled in the art.

[0075] The present invention therefore provides an input device comprising a wand with a cross piece, a camera, a processor and an algorithm and lookup table to allow users to overcome, or at least alleviate, the problems of the prior art.

[0076] Although in the preferred embodiment, the processor used is that of the computer to which the camera is connected to, a separate, dedicated processor for interpreting the captured images to obtain the position and orientation of the wand may also be used under the scope of the present invention.

[0077] In addition, while the present invention has capability to determine the 3D, 6 DOF input data, it will be apparent to one skilled in the art that the present invention can also be readily modified to track either 3DOF input data alone, as desired for other applications.

[0078] Alternatively, as illustrated in Figure 7, the cross piece in the "T" configuration may be disposed near the handle **720** and forms an "inverted-T" configuration so that the tracker **700** could be in the shape of a sword. The algorithm described above can be easily modified to work with this "inverted-T" configuration. Additional LEDs **710** may be embedded along the two main axes defined by the tracking points **110** in tracker's body for indicating the states of the corresponding push buttons **711** on the handle **720**.

[0079] The present invention could also be used for tracking a model gun's pointing direction in shooting games. As shown in Figure 8, only three tracking points **110** would be required on the model gun **800** to achieve full 6-DOF hemispherical tracking for this application. This can be achieved due to the fact that the nominal set of operational pose of the gun is much smaller than those for sword or bat, and such additional prior knowledge of its operation can be used in the design of the algorithm to optimize the use of minimum tracking points. From these three tracking points, the accompanying algorithm would be able to determine the direction of the line-of-sight (LOS) **820** of the gun's barrel in three-dimensional space and hence the point-of-intercept **830** between the LOS and the two-dimensional segment on the display screen **810**. Additional LEDs **801** for indicating the states of the control buttons **803** and trigger **804** may also be mounted along the two main axes defined by the three tracking points **110**. This method of gun's tracking has many advantages over existing "GUNCON" tracking technology. The main advantage is that it can be utilized with all types of display hardware such as LCD, Plasma and projector monitors and not necessarily only with the CRT monitors. It also provides full 6-DOF tracking for additional locomotion controls, and its operation would not be degraded due to dim target display. There is also no need for complex hard wiring between the processor and the model gun.

[0080] It will be appreciated that although one preferred embodiment has been described in detail, various modifications and improvements can be made by a person skilled in the art without departing from the scope of the present invention.

Claims

1. An input device with three-dimensional, six-degrees-of-freedom data input for a computer, said input device comprising:
A handheld tracker with an arrangement of a first array of tracking points to define a first axis, a second array of tracking points to define a second axis or plane orthogonal to the first axis, with distances between the tracking points carefully selected such that a two-dimensional image of the tracking points can be used to determine the position and orientation of the input device in three-dimensional space using a provided algorithm;
at least one camera; and
at least one processor.
2. The input device of Claim 1, said provided tracker further comprises at least one tracking point embedded within the tracker's body in such a way that its presence or absence in the captured image within the camera is used to determine whether the tracker is oriented towards or away from the camera.
3. The input device of Claim 1, said provided algorithm further comprising:
identifying projected positions of the tracking points in a captured two-dimensional image;
identifying the projections of first axis and the second axis or plane from the captured image;
determining essential parameters of the arrangement from the identified first axis and second axis or plane;
obtaining from a lookup table essential information related to position and orientation of the tracker; and
reconstructing the three-dimensional position and orientation of the input device for the computer.
4. The input device of Claim 1, said input device capable of being modified to only determine its own position in three-dimensional space.
5. The input device of Claim 1, said input device capable of being modified to only determine its own pitch, roll and yaw in three-dimensional space.
6. The input device of Claim 1, said input device further comprising at least one lighting means.

7. The input device of Claim 1, said input device further comprising one or more signaling points for indicating the state of control buttons housed in the tracker.
8. A computer input device providing three-dimensional, six-degrees-of-freedom data input for a computer, said input device comprising:
 - a handheld wand, said wand further comprising a reference spine and a cross piece orthogonally-disposed with longitudinal axis of the wand; the reference spine and cross piece further comprising a plurality of tracking points;
 - at least one camera;
 - at least one processor; and
 - an algorithm able to determine position and orientation of the wand from two-dimensional images of tracking points on the wand captured by the at least one imaging device from a lookup table.
9. The input device of Claim 8, wherein one tracking point is embedded within the wand's handle in such a way that its presence or absence in the captured image within the camera is used to determine whether the wand is oriented towards or away from the camera.
10. The input device of Claim 8, wherein said cross piece is disposed perpendicular to the wand.
11. The input device of Claim 8, the plurality of tracking points of the wand comprising passive light reflectors and where said input device further comprising at least one lighting means.
12. The input device of Claim 11, wherein said at least one lighting means is in a ring form co-axially disposed around lens of said camera.
13. The input device of Claim 8, the plurality of tracking points of the wand comprising active light emitters.
14. The wand of Claim 13, said plurality of tracking points comprising active light emitters for different wavelengths.
15. The input device of Claim 8, wherein distances between the tracking points are carefully selected to avoid ambiguity in the determination of the position and orientation of the wand by the algorithm.
16. The input device of Claim 8, wherein the camera further comprising zero or more filters for selected wavelength range of light used.

17. The input device of Claim 8, said input device further comprising a pad to help a user estimate the field of view of said camera.
18. The input device of Claim 8, said input device further comprising one or more signaling points for indicating the state of control buttons housed in the wand.