

(12) **United States Patent**
Naderer

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 11,780,099 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Oct. 10, 2023**

(54) **ROBOT-AIDED GRINDING APPARATUS**

(71) Applicant: **FerRobotics Compliant Robot Technology GmbH, Linz (AT)**

(72) Inventor: **Ronald Naderer, Oberneukirchen (AT)**

(73) Assignee: **FerRobotics Compliant Robot Technology GmbH, Linz (AT)**

(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 594 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **16/090,534**

(22) PCT Filed: **Apr. 4, 2017**

(86) PCT No.: **PCT/EP2017/057982**

§ 371 (c)(1),

(2) Date: **Oct. 1, 2018**

(87) PCT Pub. No.: **WO2017/174577**

PCT Pub. Date: **Oct. 12, 2017**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2019/0111570 A1 Apr. 18, 2019

(30) **Foreign Application Priority Data**

Apr. 7, 2016 (DE) 10 2016 106 416.5

(51) **Int. Cl.**

B25J 11/00 (2006.01)

B24B 27/00 (2006.01)

(Continued)

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

CPC **B25J 11/0065** (2013.01); **B24B 27/0015** (2013.01); **B24B 27/0038** (2013.01); **B25J 9/101** (2013.01); **B25J 9/123** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

CPC ... **B25J 11/0065**; **B25J 11/0055**; **B25J 11/005**; **B25J 9/101**; **B25J 9/123**; **B25J 9/047**;

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Primary Examiner — Joel D Crandall

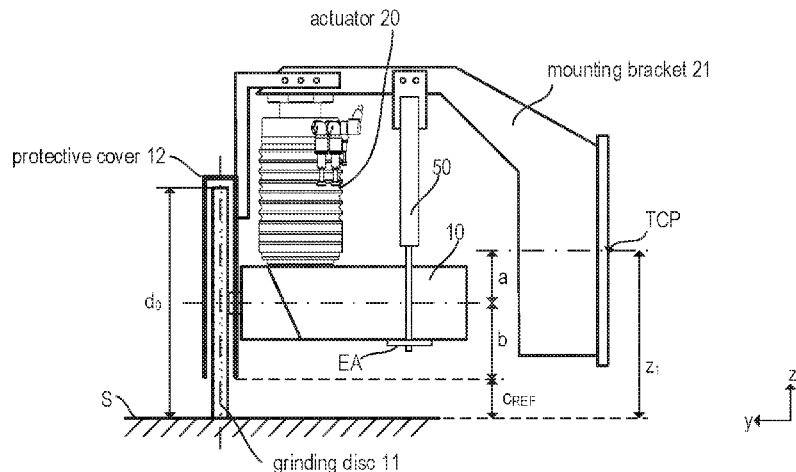
Assistant Examiner — Michael A Gump

(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Murphy, Bilak & Homiller, PLLC

(57) **ABSTRACT**

Described is an apparatus for robot-aided grinding, comprising the following: a manipulator, a linear actuator, and a grinding machine which includes a rotating grinding tool and is connected to the manipulator via the linear actuator. The apparatus further comprises a protective cover that partially surrounds the rotating grinding tool, the rotating grinding tool protruding from the protective cover at least on a first side. An adjusting mechanism is provided which connects the protective cover to the grinding machine and is designed to adjust the position of the protective cover in relation to the grinding machine.

15 Claims, 7 Drawing Sheets



- (51) **Int. Cl.**
B25J 9/10 (2006.01)
B25J 9/12 (2006.01)

- (58) **Field of Classification Search**
 CPC . B25J 9/1005; B25J 9/1015; B25J 9/10; B25J
 9/144; B25J 15/0266; B25J 15/0273;
 B25J 17/0258; B25J 17/0266; B25J
 18/02; B25J 18/025; B24B 27/0015;
 B24B 27/0038; B24B 41/005; B24B
 41/002; B24B 49/10; B24B 49/00
 USPC 451/259, 9-12, 14, 15, 24
 See application file for complete search history.

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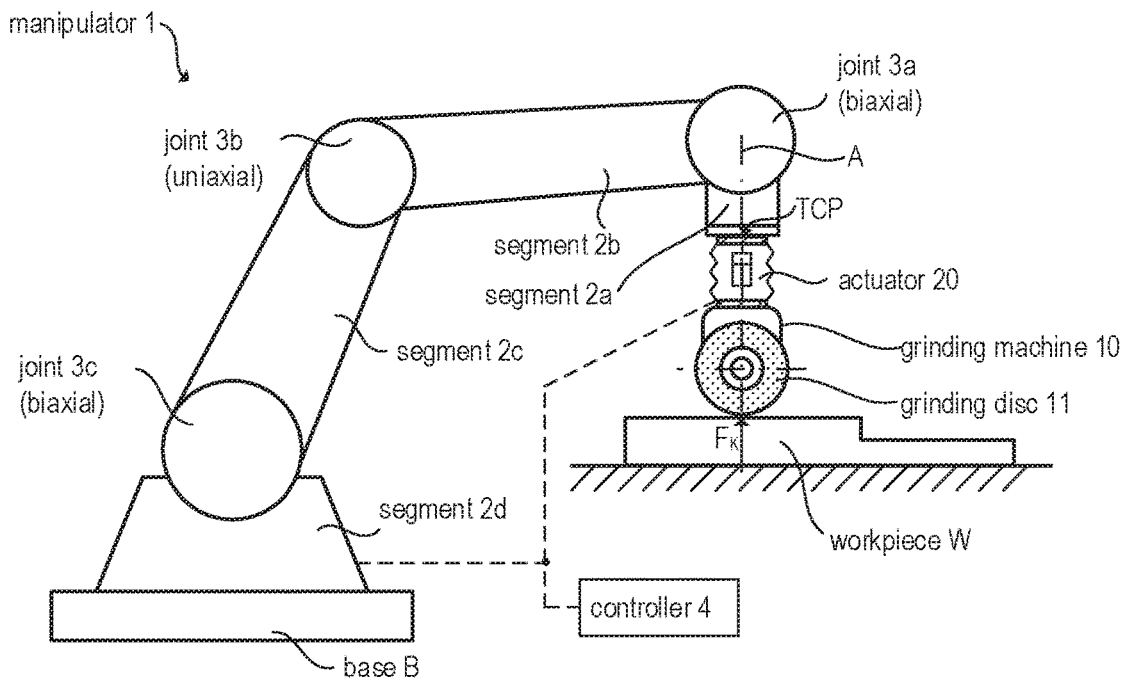


Fig. 1

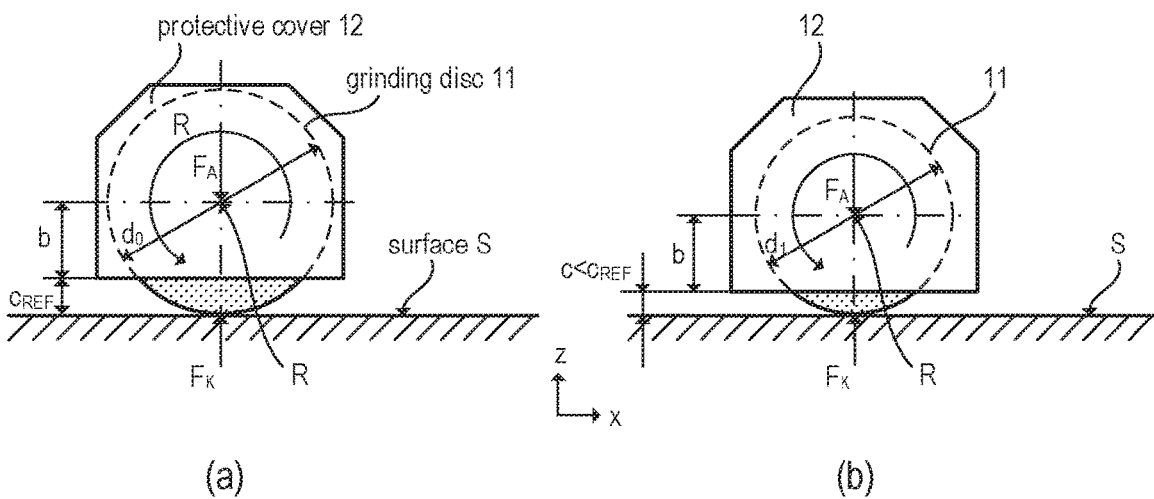


Fig. 2

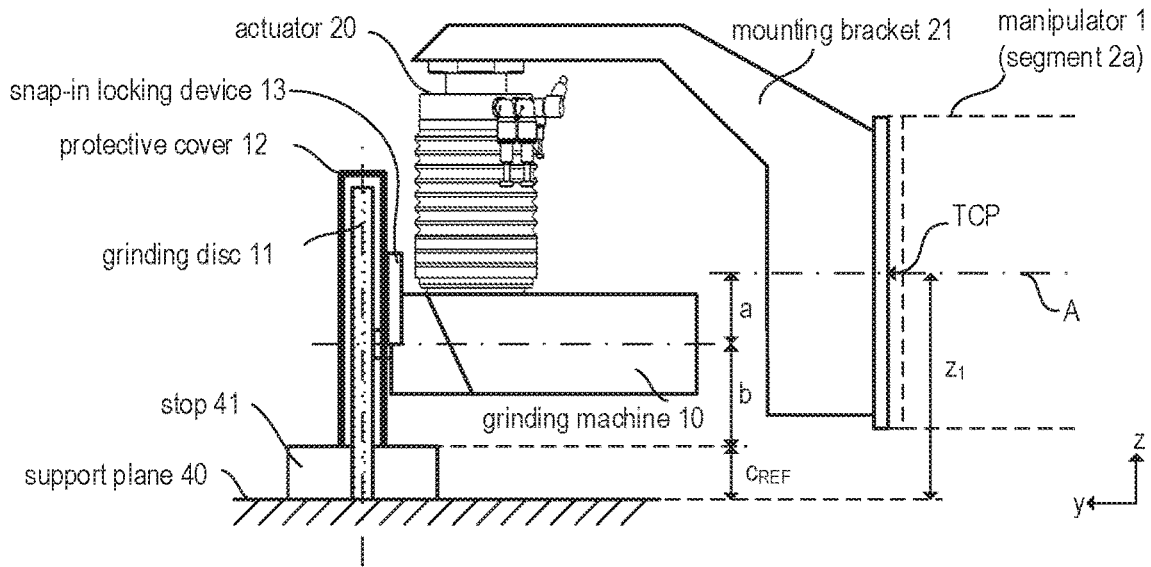


Fig. 3

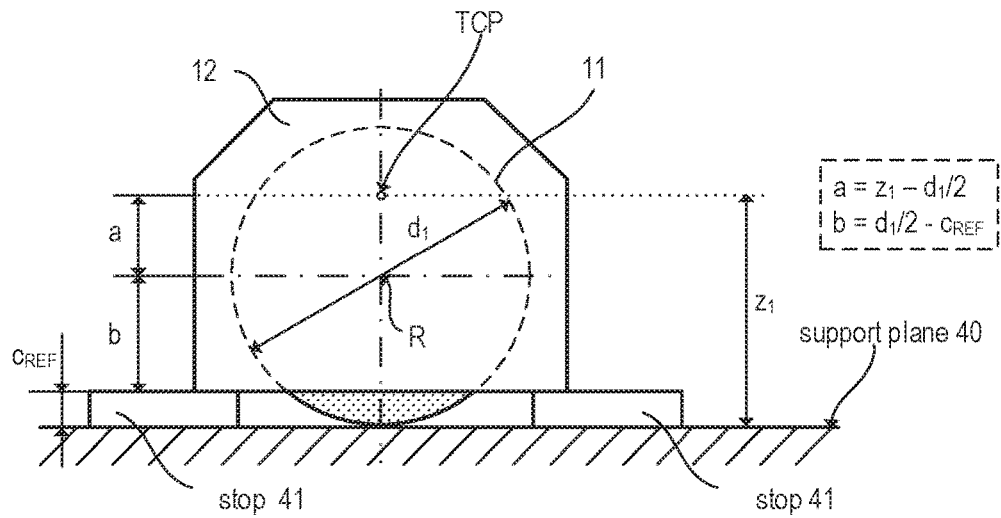
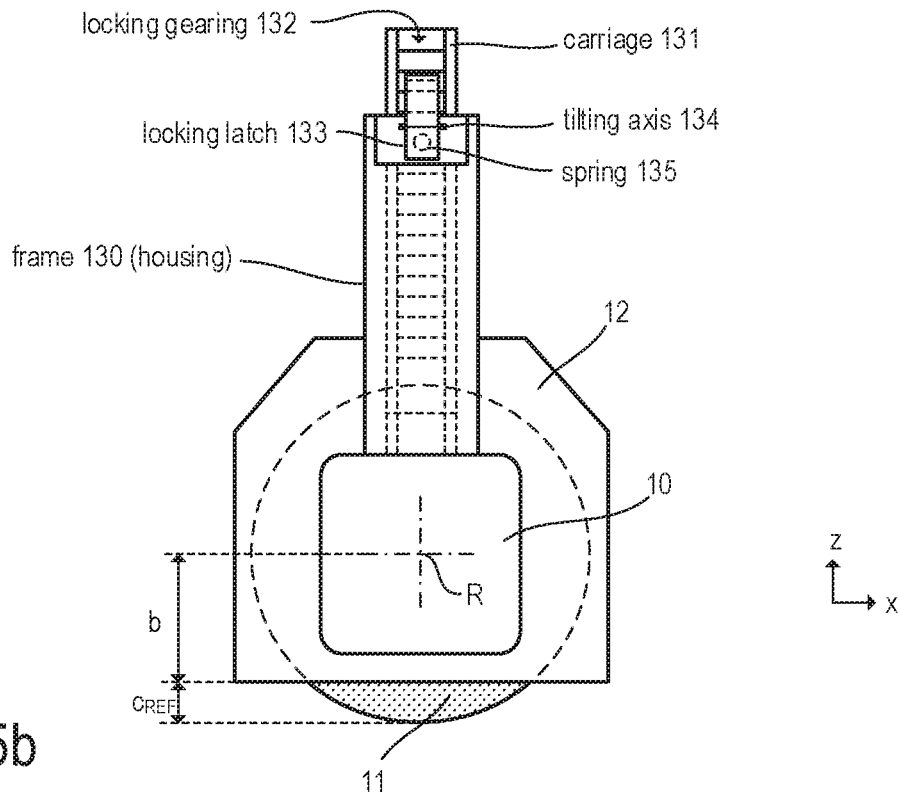
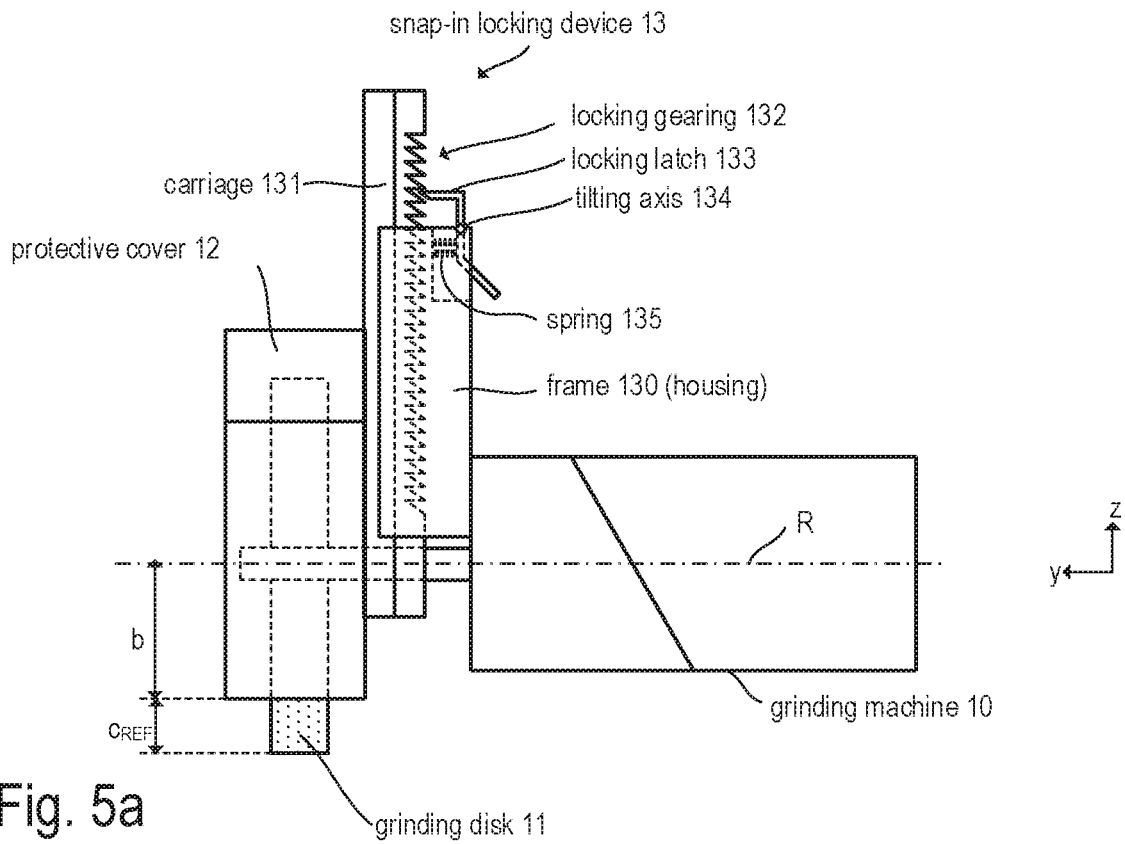
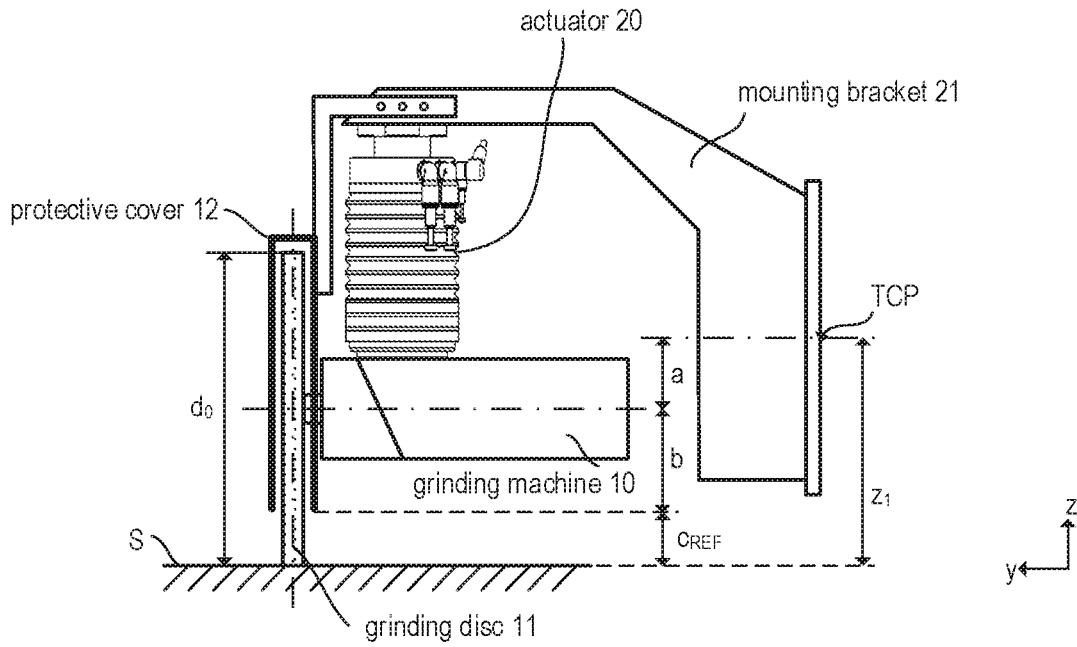
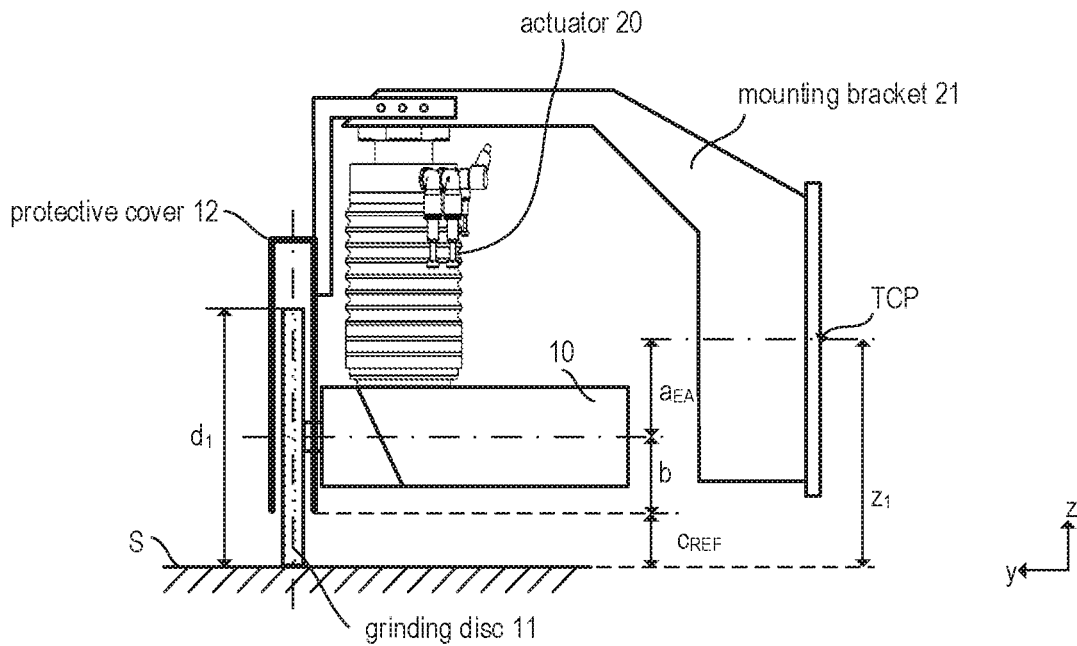


Fig. 4





(a)



(b)

Fig. 6

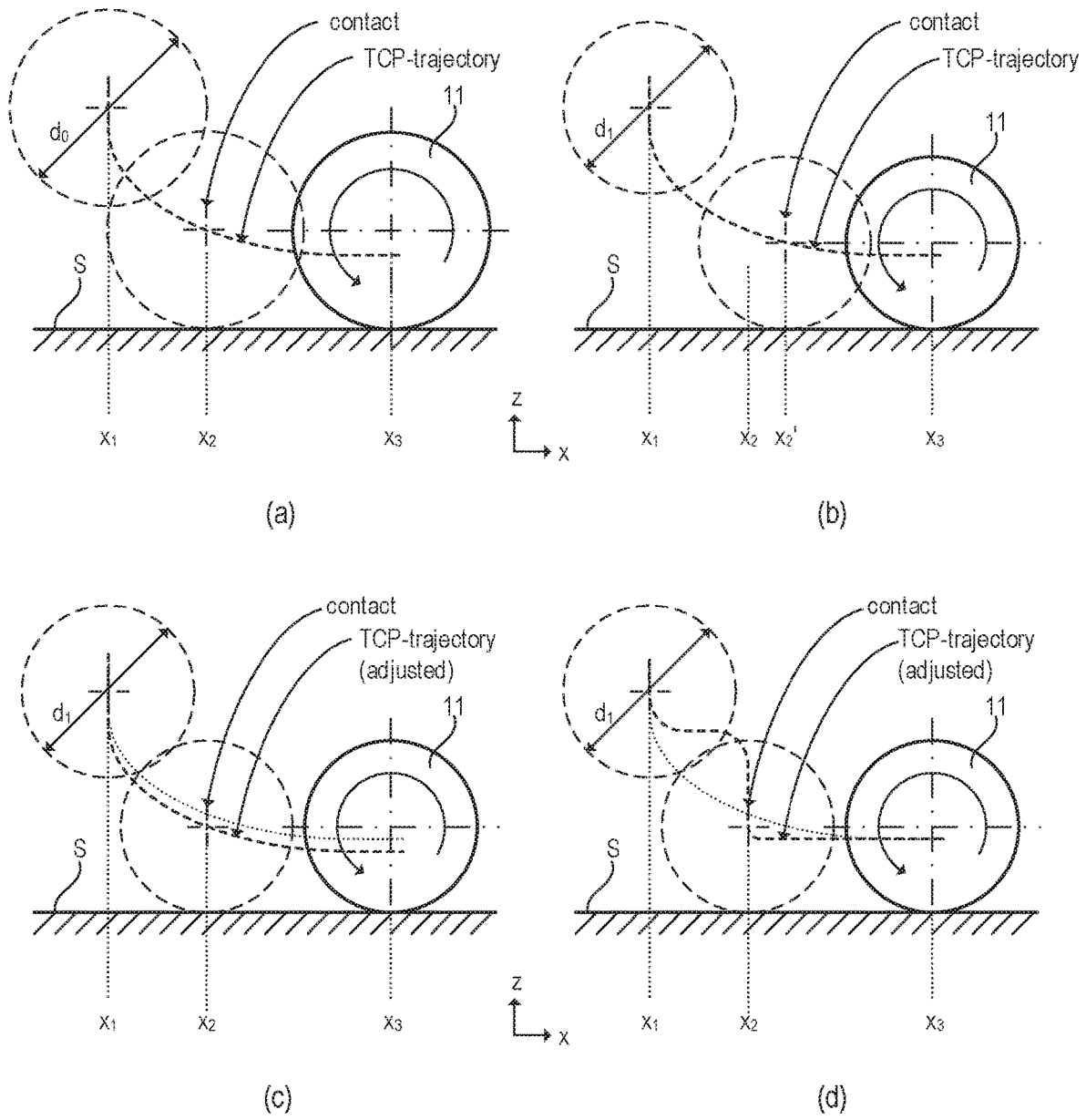


Fig. 7

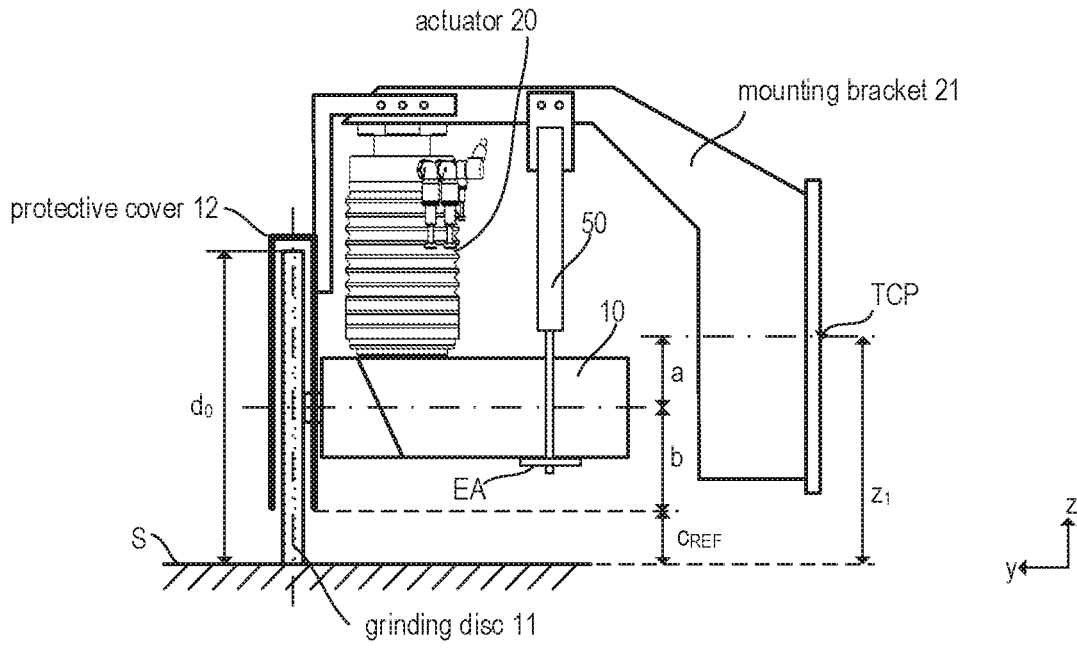


Fig. 8

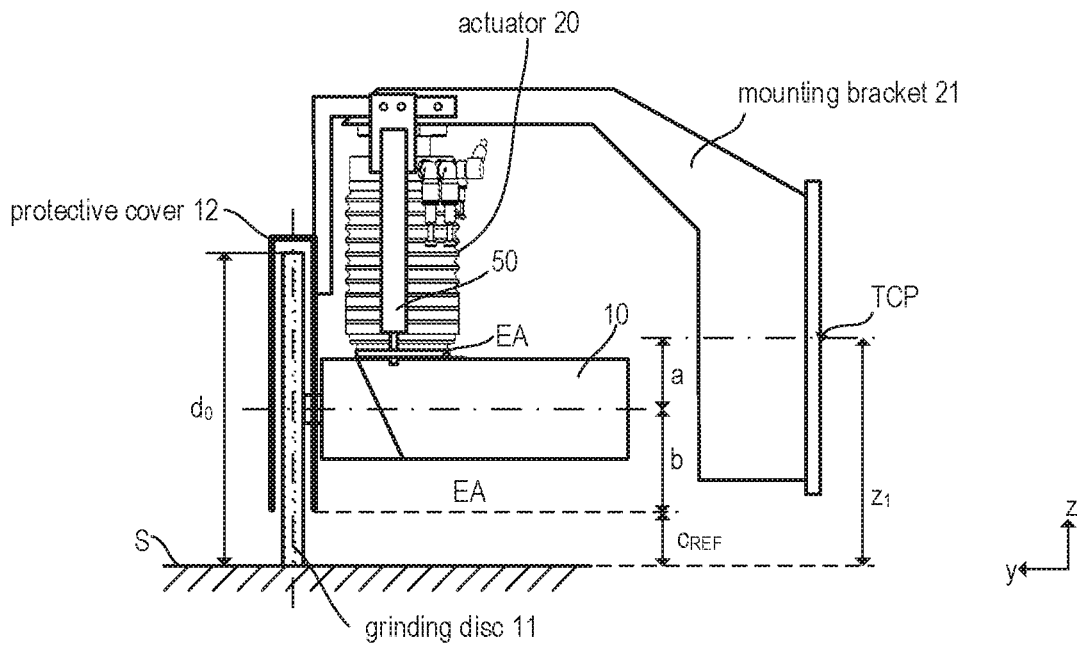


Fig. 9

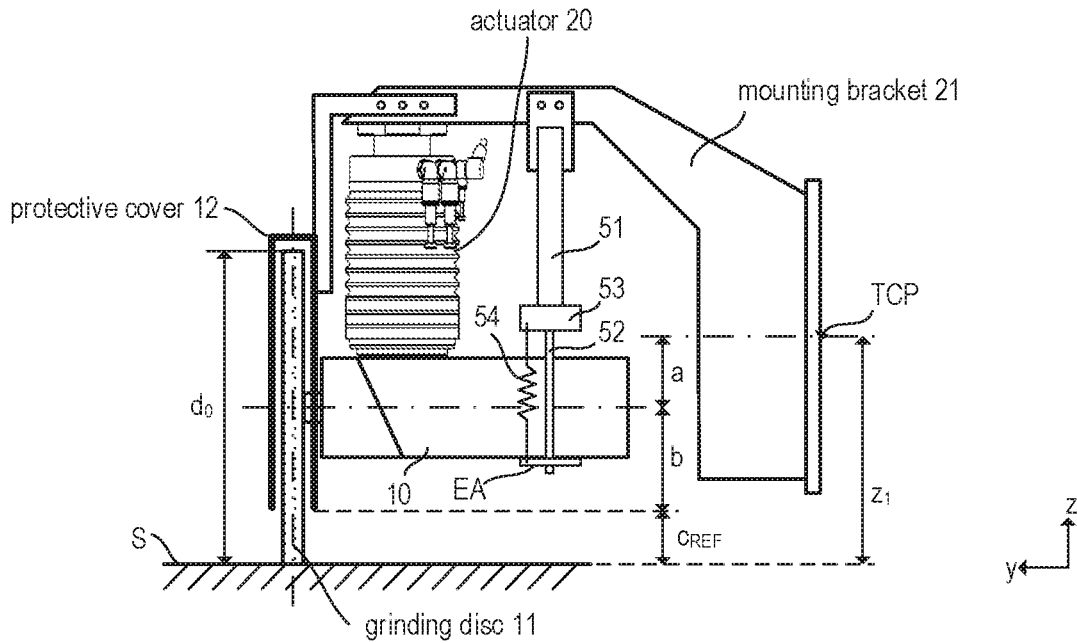


Fig. 10

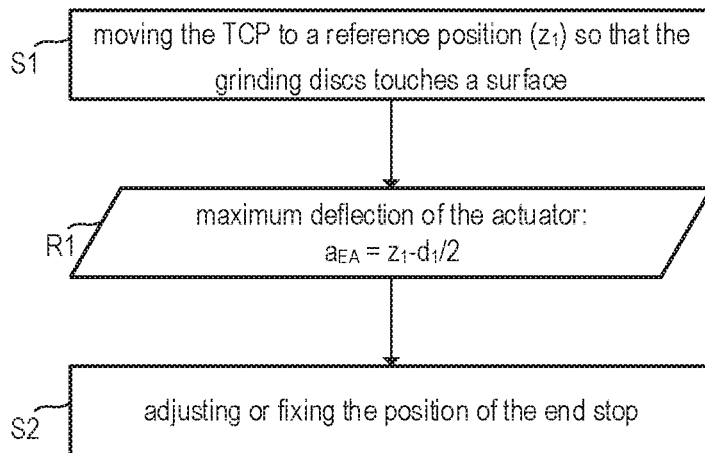


Fig. 11

ROBOT-AIDED GRINDING APPARATUS

TECHNICAL FIELD

This disclosure relates to aspects of a robot-supported grinding apparatus in which a grinding machine with a rotating grinding tool is guided by a manipulator (e.g. an industrial robot).

BACKGROUND

Grinding and polishing processes are playing an increasingly important part in the surface finishing of workpieces. In automated, robot-supported manufacturing, industrial robots are being employed, with the aid of which, e.g. grinding processes can be automated.

In robot-supported grinding apparatuses, a grinding machine with a rotating grinding tool (e.g. grinding disc) is guided by a manipulator, for example, an industrial robot. During the grinding process, the so-called TCP (Tool Center Point) moves along an (in advance programmable, e.g. by means of Teach-In) path (trajectory). The specified path of the TCP determines, for every point in time, the position and orientation of the TCP, and thus of the grinding machine, as well. The robot control that controls the movement of the manipulator therefore generally includes a position control.

For surface finishing processes such as grinding, polishing, etc. it is usually not sufficient to only control the position of the tool, as the processing force (the force between the tool and the workpiece) also plays an important role in the finishing results. For this reason, the tool is generally not rigidly connected to the TCP of the manipulator, but rather via an elastic element which, in the simplest case, may be a spring. In order to adjust the processing force, in many cases a regulation (closed loop control) of the processing force is needed. For the purpose of implementing a force control, the elastic element can be a separate linear actuator that is mechanically coupled between the TCP of the manipulator and the tool (e.g. between TCP and a grinding machine on which a grinding disc is mounted). The linear actuator can be relatively small in comparison to the manipulator and is used, for the most part, to control the processing force while the manipulator moves the tool (together with the linear actuator) along the previously programmed trajectory in a position-controlled manner.

In practice, the wear of the tool may cause problems, e.g. during grinding. A grinding disc becomes worn in the course of the grinding process, as a result of which the diameter of the grinding disc is reduced. As a consequence of this, not only is the circumferential speed (which may also be a relevant processing parameter) reduced, but the position of the grinding machine (in particular that of the axis of rotation of the grinding tool) relative to the surface of the workpiece is also changed. The more the grinding disc is worn down, the closer the grinding machine must be brought to the surface of the workpiece.

The aforementioned wear-related reduction of the size of the grinding tool (grinding disc) has, among others, two consequences. In certain situations, when the trajectory of the TCP has been previously specified, the grinding tool may contact the workpiece surface late (and consequently at the wrong point). Furthermore, the size of the gap between the workpiece surface and any possibly existing protective cover that is mounted on the grinding machine and partially surrounds the grinding disc also changes. The size of this gap influences the effectiveness of a possibly existing suction system (for the removal of grinding dust).

Various embodiments described herein are directed to a robot-supported grinding apparatus that at least partially compensates for the negative or undesired influences resulting from the wear of the grinding tool as well as to related methods.

SUMMARY

An apparatus for robot-supported grinding is described. In accordance with one embodiment, the apparatus comprises the following: a manipulator, a linear actuator and a grinding machine with a rotating grinding tool. The grinding machine is coupled with the manipulator via the linear actuator. Further, the apparatus comprises an end stop that defines the maximum deflection of the linear actuator, wherein the position of the end stop is adjustable.

In accordance with a further embodiment the apparatus for robot-supported grinding comprises the following: a manipulator, a linear actuator and a grinding machine with a rotating grinding tool, wherein the grinding machine is coupled with the manipulator via the linear actuator. The apparatus further comprises a protective cover that partially surrounds the rotating grinding tool, wherein the rotating grinding tool protrudes from the protective cover on at least one side. A positioning device is provided that connects the protective cover to the grinding machine and that is designed to adjust the position of the protective cover relative to the grinding machine.

In accordance with another embodiment, the apparatus for robot-supported grinding comprises the following: a manipulator, a linear actuator and a grinding machine with a rotating grinding tool, wherein the grinding machine is coupled with a TCP of the manipulator via the linear actuator. The apparatus further comprises a protective cover that partially surrounds the grinding tool. The protective cover is rigidly connected to the TCP of the manipulator such that the rotating grinding tool protrudes from the protective cover on at least one first side.

Further, a method for operating a robot-supported grinding device comprising a manipulator, a linear actuator with an adjustable end stop and a grinding machine with a rotating grinding tool is described. Here the grinding machine is coupled with the manipulator via the linear actuator. In accordance with one embodiment, the method comprises adjusting a position of the end stop that defines the maximum deflection of the linear actuator.

In accordance with a further embodiment, the method comprises pressing the grinding tool against a reference surface with the aid of the manipulator, wherein at the same time a first side of a protective cover rests against a stop (41). The protective cover surrounds the grinding tool at least partially and the rotating grinding tool protrudes from the protective cover on at least one side.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Various embodiments are described in greater detail in the following using the examples shown in the figures. The figures are not necessarily true to scale and the invention is not limited to the illustrated aspects. Instead, emphasis is given to illustrating the underlying principles of the embodiments described herein. With regard to the figures:

FIG. 1 is an exemplary schematic illustration of a robot-supported grinding apparatus with a grinding machine that is coupled with an industrial robot by means of a force-controlled linear actuator.

FIG. 2 illustrates with the use of schematic sketches the effect that a grinding disc with a wear-induced reduction in diameter has on the position of a protective cover.

FIG. 3 is a schematic illustration of an embodiment in which the protective cover of a grinding disc is coupled with the grinding machine via a snap-in locking device.

FIG. 4 is a front view of the grinding disc including the protective cover shown in FIG. 3 during the automatic adjustment of the position of the protective cover with the aid of a support plane and at least one stop.

FIG. 5 provides a more detailed side view (perpendicular to the axis of rotation of the grinding disc, FIG. 5a) and a front view (parallel to the axis of rotation of the grinding disc, FIG. 5b) of an example of the snap-in locking device shown in FIG. 3.

FIG. 6 is a schematic illustration of a further embodiment in which the protective cover of a grinding disc is not connected to the grinding machine, but is instead rigidly connected to the TCP of the manipulator; in FIG. 6a the grinding disc is new and in FIG. 6b the grinding disc is already partially worn.

FIG. 7 schematically illustrates the problem that arises when, in a permanently specified trajectory, the TCP of a smaller (due to wear) grinding disc (FIG. 7b) contacts the workpiece later than larger grinding discs (FIG. 7a).

FIG. 8 is a schematic illustration of a further embodiment in which the linear actuator that connects the grinding machine and the TCP rests against an adjustable end stop when there is no contact between workpiece and grinding tool. The adjustment of the end stop can be carried out dependent on the size of the grinding tool.

FIG. 9 shows an alternative to the embodiment illustrated in FIG. 8.

FIG. 10 shows a further alternative to the embodiment illustrated in FIG. 8, here with a rod blocking device for adjusting the end stop instead of an additional actuator.

FIG. 11 is a flow chart illustrating an exemplary method for the automatic adjustment/adaptation of the end stop.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Before describing the various embodiments in detail, a general example of a robot-supported grinding apparatus will be described. This comprises a manipulator 1 (for example, an industrial robot) and a grinding machine 10 with rotating grinding tool (grinding disc), wherein the grinding machine 10 is coupled with the tool center point (TCP) of the manipulator 1 via a linear actuator 20. In the case of an industrial robot having six degrees of freedom, the manipulator may consist of four segments 2a, 2b, 2c and 2d, each of which is connected via joints 3a, 3b and 3c. The first segment is usually rigidly connected to the base B (which, however, need not necessarily be the case). The joint 3c connects the segments 2c and 2d. The joint 3c may be biaxial and allow for rotation of the segment 2c around a horizontal axis of rotation (elevation angle) and around a vertical axis of rotation (azimuth angle). The joint 3b connects the segments 2b and 2c and allows for a swivel movement of the segment 2b relative to the position of the segment 2c. The joint 3a connects the segments 2a and 2b. The joint 3a can be biaxial, thus (similar to the joint 3c) allowing for a swivel movement in two directions. The TCP has a permanent position relative to the segment 2a, wherein this usually includes a rotational joint (not shown) that allows for a rotational movement around a longitudinal axis A (designated in FIG. 1 as a dash-dotted line) of the segment 2a. An actuator is assigned to each axis of a joint and can effect a

rotational movement around the respective joint axis. The actuators in the joints are controlled by a robot control 4 in accordance with a robot program. The TCP can be positioned as desired (within certain limits and with any desired orientation of the axis A).

The manipulator 1 is usually position-controlled, i.e. the robot control can determine the pose (position and orientation) of the TCP and can move the latter along a previously defined trajectory. When the actuator 20 rests against an end stop, the pose of the TCP also defines the pose of the grinding tool. As mentioned early on, the actuator 20 serves to adjust the contact force (processing force) between the tool (grinding disc 11) and the workpiece W to a desired value during the grinding process. Controlling the processing force directly via the manipulator 1 is generally too imprecise for grinding applications because, due to the high inertia of the segments 2a-2c of the manipulator 1, quickly compensating force peaks (e.g. when the grinding tool contacts the workpiece 40) using common manipulators is virtually impossible. For this reason, the robot control is configured to control the pose (position and orientation) of the TCP, whereas controlling the contact force (see also FIG. 2, Contact Force F_K) is performed exclusively by the actuator 20 coupled between the grinding machine 10 and the manipulator 1.

As already mentioned, the contact force F_K between the tool (grinding disc 11) and the workpiece W can be adjusted during the grinding process with the aid of the (linear) actuator 20 and a force control unit (which, for example, may be implemented in the control 4) so that the contact force F_K between grinding tool and workpiece W corresponds to a specifiable desired value. Thereby the contact force is a reaction to the actuator force F_A with which the linear actuator 20 presses against the workpiece surface S (see also FIG. 2). If no contact occurs between workpiece W and grinding disc 11, the actuator 20, as a reaction to this absence of contact force F_K , moves up to an end stop (not shown in FIG. 1 or integrated in the actuator 20). The position control of the manipulator 1 (which can also be integrated in the control 4) can operate completely independently of the force control of the actuator 20. The actuator 20 is not responsible for positioning the grinding machine 10, but instead is only responsible for adjusting and maintaining the desired contact force during the grinding process, as well as for detecting contact between tool and workpiece. A contact can be determined, for example, when the deflection of the actuator 20, beginning at the end stop, becomes smaller or the change in the deflection of the actuator 20 becomes negative.

The actuator may be a pneumatic actuator, e.g. a double-acting pneumatic cylinder. Other pneumatic actuators, however, are also applicable such as, e.g. bellows cylinders and air muscles. As an alternative, direct electric drives (gearless) may also be considered. In the case of a pneumatic actuator, the force control itself can be realized using a control valve, a regulator (implemented in the control 4) and a compressed air reservoir. The specific implementation, however, is of no importance for the further description and will therefore not be discussed in detail.

FIG. 2 shows—in a front view (i.e. in the direction of the axel of rotation of the grinding disc 11)—an example of a grinding disc 11 that is partially covered by a protective cover 12. In FIG. 2 the grinding machine 10, the actuator 20 and the manipulator 1 are omitted for the sake of simplicity. FIGS. 2a (on the left) and 2b (on the right) only differ in the size of the respective grinding discs 11. In FIG. 2a, the diameter d_0 of the grinding disc 11 is larger than in FIG. 2b,

in which the diameter d_1 is smaller due to wear ($d_1 < d_0$). When—as is usually the case—the protective cover **12** is mounted on the grinding machine **10** (not shown in FIG. 2), the protective cover **12** moves together with the grinding machine **10** (and its axis of rotation R). In this example, when the grinding disc **11** contacts a surface S (e.g. of a workpiece), the size of the gap c_{REF} or c (the distance between the surface S and the bottom edge of the protective cover **12**) depends on the diameter of the grinding disc **11**.

In the case depicted in FIG. 2a (a new grinding disc with a diameter d_0), the size of the gap c_{REF} equals the difference between the radius $d_0/2$ of the grinding disc and the distance b between axis of rotation R and the bottom edge of the protective cover ($c_{REF} = d_0/2 - b$). Here the value of the distance b remains the same while the grinding machine **10** is in operation since the protective cover **12**, as is usually the case, is rigidly mounted on the grinding machine **10**. In the case depicted in FIG. 2b (worn grinding disc with diameter d_1), the size of the gap c is smaller ($c < c_{REF}$) because the diameter d_1 of the grinding disc **11** is smaller than in the case of FIG. 2a ($c = d_1/2 - b$). The size of the gap c or c_{REF} can be significant, for example, when a suction system (not shown) for the removal of grinding dust is coupled with the protective cover. The air is suctioned off through the gap between the surface S and the protective cover **12**. In order to achieve good dust extraction, the size of the gap should correspond to a value c_{REF} which—depending on the use and implementation—lies within the range of a few centimeters. A new grinding disc with a diameter, e.g. of 150 mm ($d_0 = 150$ mm) can be worn down to 75 mm during use. For practical application this means that a gap size c must be chosen to be larger than c_{REF} (resulting in a less than optimum suction performance), so that the gap size c remains larger than zero (at least a few millimeters) when the grinding disc becomes worn. Alternatively, the position of the protective cover can be manually adapted by service personnel in regular sequences (in order to change the value b), which is relatively work-intensive and not desirable in robot-supported manufacturing.

The embodiment shown in FIG. 3 allows for an automatic adaptation of the gap size c , ensuring that it remains more or less constant and that it corresponds to the (desired) value c_{REF} ($c \approx c_{REF}$) as the size of the grinding disc **11** changes. FIG. 3 shows, in a side view (the line of sight lying perpendicular to the axis of rotation R of the grinding disc), a grinding machine **10** with a grinding disc **11** that is partially surrounded by a protective cover **12**. The grinding machine **10** is mechanically connected to the manipulator **1** via the actuator **20**. In the illustrated example, a mounting bracket **21** of a form approximately resembling an L is arranged between actuator **20** and the outmost segment **2a** of the manipulator **1** (see also FIG. 1). The mounting bracket **21** is intended for mounting the linear actuator **20** on the manipulator **1**, not coaxially to axis A of segment **2a**, but rather tilted at 90° , so that the axis of rotation R of the grinding machine essentially lies parallel to axis A. Depending on the intended use and specific design of the robot cell, the mounting bracket can also be omitted (the actuator **20** is then directly mounted on the manipulator **1**), or a mounting bracket may be used that has an angle other than 90° .

In contrast to what was described above with regard to FIG. 2, here the protective cover **12** is not rigidly fixed on the grinding machine **10**, but rather by means of a snap-in locking device **13** which allows the protective covering **12** to be shifted in respect to the grinding machine **10**. The snap-in locking device **13** is constructed such that allows the protective cover **12** to be shifted, relative to the housing of

the grinding machine (and thus also relative to the grinding disc), linearly at a right angle to the axis of rotation R (thus also generally parallel to the effective direction of the actuator **20**). If the diameter of the grinding disc **11** changes due to wear, for example, from d_0 to d_1 , the protective cover can be raised by a value $(d_0 - d_1)/2$ by means of the snap-in locking device **13** in order to maintain a gap size between the workpiece surface and the bottom side of the protective cover that at least approximately corresponds to the desired value c_{REF} (cf. also FIG. 2). When the protective cover **12** is shifted, the snap-in locking device **13** can snap into the desired position (distance b) and the protective cover **12** remains at the desired position relative to the grinding machine (at a distance of c_{REF} to the workpiece).

Instead of a snap-in locking device, any other positioning device by means of which the protective cover **12** can be fixated at various positions (relative to the grinding machine **10**) can also be used. One possible alternative would be, e.g. a self-retaining positioning device with which the distance b (see FIG. 3) can be adjusted by means of two friction-coupled elements. In such a case, the static friction between the two elements in the positioning device must be significantly greater than the weight force and any occurring inertia forces of the protective cover **12**. In order to change the distance b , a force must be applied that is greater than the static friction of the positioning device. A further alternative would be a (piston) rod blocking device which, however, is not generally self-blocking, i.e. upon releasing the rod blocking device (before adjustment), the protective cover **12** would fall to the lowest position.

Since the grinding disc becomes smaller during normal operation, it is enough for the positioning device (e.g. the snap-in locking device **13**) to only allow for an adaptation of the position of the protective cover **12** (i.e. the distance b) in one direction—towards smaller distances b —wherein, when the grinding disc **11** is replaced, the positioning device is reset at its maximum distance (b_{MAX}). The snap-in locking device may therefore also include at least one locking latch that allows the position to be linearly adjusted in one direction (towards smaller distances b) while adjustment of the position in the other direction (towards greater distances b) is blocked by the locking latch (similar to a ratchet, see also FIG. 5).

A situation is now assumed in which the protective cover **12** is, at the beginning, so adjusted that the gap size c with a new, unworn grinding disc **11** having a diameter d_0 (e.g. $d_0 = 150$ mm) corresponds exactly to the desired value c_{REF} ($c = c_{REF}$). After a few rounds of grinding, the grinding disc is partially worn and the diameter of the grinding disc **11** has been reduced to a value of d_1 (e.g. $d_1 = 140$ mm), as a result of which the size of the gap c has also been reduced (e.g. by 10 mm, $c < c_{REF}$). In order to enlarge the gap size c back to its original value, the distance b must be adapted (in the present example, b would have to be reduced by 10 mm). In order to be able to automatically adjust the snap-in locking device **13**, which does not require its own drive, when the grinding disc becomes partially worn, a support plane **40** (e.g. a plane reference surface) is located near the manipulator (e.g. next to the workpiece W in the robot cell) on which at least one stop **41** is arranged. The stop **41** defines a plane that lies parallel to the support plane **40** and that is at a distance to the latter that corresponds to the desired value c_{REF} . The manipulator **1** is programmed to periodically (e.g. after every or every second grinding operation) move the grinding machine **10** towards the support plane **40** and into a reference position, pressing the grinding disc **11** against the support plane **40**—similarly to being pressed

against a workpiece but while the grinding disc is not rotating. The at least one stop **41** is arranged such that when the grinding machine is in the reference position—the bottom side of the protective cover **12** rests against the at least one stop **41**. By pressing the grinding disc **11** against the support plane **40** (reference surface), the protective cover **12** is pushed upwards until the gap size c once again (approximately) corresponds to the desired value c_{REF} .

The adjustment procedure for the gap size c_{REF} is illustrated in FIG. 4, which shows the grinding disc **11** together with the protective cover **12**. FIG. 4 is a front view of FIG. 3 (in the direction of the axis of rotation R) that corresponds to the side view shown in FIG. 3. By moving the manipulator to the reference position, the distance b is adjusted to the value $d_1/2 - c_{REF}$, as, in the reference position, the grinding disc **11**, as shown in FIG. 4, contacts the support plane **40** (during which the axis of rotation R lies substantially parallel to the support plane **40**) and the gap size c_{REF} is determined by the at least one stop **41**. With the aid of the aforementioned force control of actuator **20**, the actuator force can be adjusted during this adjustment process such that the grinding disc **11** rests firmly against the support plane **40**. When the grinding machine **10** is again taken off and moved away from the support plane, the protective cover **12** can no longer slide back into its original position as the self-braking function of the positioning device prevents this (when the snap-in locking device **13** is implemented, e.g. using a locking latch or, alternatively, by means of static friction as described above).

In FIG. 5, an embodiment of the snap-in locking device of FIG. 3—as one implementation of the locking device between the protective cover **12** and the grinding machine **10**—is shown in greater detail. FIG. 5a shows a side view (the line of sight lying perpendicular to the axis of rotation R) and FIG. 5b shows a corresponding view from behind (the line of sight lying parallel to the axis of rotation R). The grinding disc **11** is connected to the motor of the grinding machine **10** via the motor shaft (axis of rotation R). The protective cover **12** is connected to the grinding machine **10** via the snap-in locking device **13**. The function of the snap-in locking device was described above. FIG. 5 serves to illustrate a possible implementation of the snap-in locking device. In accordance with this, the snap-in locking device **13** comprises a frame **130** on which a carriage **131** that can be shifted in a linear direction is mounted. In the present example, the carriage can be shifted in the direction z . The carriage comprises a locking gearing **132** into which a locking latch **133** engages which is pre-tensioned with a spring **135** and which is pivotally mounted on the frame **130** around a tilting axis **134**. The spring **135** presses the locking latch **133** against the locking gearing **132**. The locking gearing **132** ensures that the carriage can be shifted in the direction z (the distance b becomes smaller), but that it can only be shifted back in into the original position (against the direction z) when the locking latch **133** is manually lifted against the spring force of the spring **135**.

In the example shown in FIGS. 3 and 4, the distance (perpendicular to the surface) between the workpiece surface and the TCP of the manipulator equals z_1 . The trajectory of the TCP of the manipulator is generally programmed such that the TCP moves at a certain distance z_1 to the workpiece surface. During a grinding operation, the distance z_1 is usually specified in advance by the robot program. A wear-induced reduction of the grinding disc diameter d_0 to a value of d_1 ($d_1 < d_0$) is compensated by increasing the deflection a of the actuator **20** according to the value Δa ($\Delta a = (d_0 - d_1)/2$). The actuator **20** must adapt its deflection a in order to

maintain the desired contact force (see FIGS. 1 and 2). The grinding machine **10** then shifts closer to the workpiece by the value Δa . In order that the position of the protective cover **12** relative to the surface S of the workpiece W does not change when the grinding disc diameter varies, in the embodiment of FIG. 6 the protective cover **12** is not mounted on the grinding machine, but is instead rigidly connected to the TCP of the manipulator **1** (e.g. is attached via an elbow **21'** on the mounting bracket **21**). In FIG. 6a the grinding disc **11** is new and not worn (diameter d_0), whereas in FIG. 6b the grinding disc is partially worn (diameter $d_1 < d_0$), the situation otherwise being identical.

As, in the present embodiment, the protective cover **12** is rigidly connected to the TCP of the manipulator **1** (i.e. not via the actuator **20**), the gap size c does not depend on the diameter of the grinding disc **11**, but instead depends only on the pose of the TCP relative to the surface S of the workpiece (see FIG. 6, distance z_1). The pose of the TCP can be programmed such that the gap size corresponds to the desired value ($c = c_{REF}$). The distances a and b , however, depend differently on the reducing diameter of the grinding disc, whereby b becomes smaller and a becomes larger and the sum $a+b$ always equals the difference $z_1 - c_{REF}$. It further holds true that $b = d_1/2 - c_{REF}$ and $a = z_1 - d_1/2$. By fixating the protective cover **12** to the TCP (i.e. the relative position between TCP and protective cover does not change as the grinding disc becomes worn down), the snap-in locking device used in the previous embodiment can be omitted.

In FIG. 7, a further consequence of the reduction of the diameter of the grinding disc due to wear is illustrated. The diagram in FIG. 7a shows schematically the beginning of a grinding operation, wherein the grinding machine **10** with a rotating grinding disc (new, diameter d_0) is moved by the manipulator **1** towards a surface S to be processed. The trajectory of the TCP is exemplarily designated in FIG. 7a. The TCP moves in the direction x at a desired advancement speed v_x , while drawing near to the surface S (from the starting position x_1). At this stage the actuator **20** exhibits its full deflection a_{MAX} as it rests against its end stop. At the position x_2 the grinding disc **11** contacts the surface S and the deflection a of the actuator declines while the force control is active ($a < a_{MAX}$). At the position x_3 , the grinding disc is in a stationary grinding operation at a constant advancement speed.

In FIGS. 7b to 7d, various situations are depicted in which the diameter of the grinding disc **11** has been reduced, e.g. as a result of wear ($d_1 < d_0$). From the diagram shown in FIG. 7b it can be seen that, when the trajectory of the TCP remains the same, the smaller grinding disc **11** (having the diameter d_1) does not contact the surface at the point x_2 , as in FIG. 7a, but rather at the point x_2' (wherein $x_2' > x_2$), which may not be desirable in some applications as the processed surface is then no longer the same as in the case depicted in FIG. 7a. This problem can be remedied, e.g. by moving the trajectory of the TCP closer to the surface S . Such a situation is depicted in FIG. 7c. The TCP trajectory is shifted by a distance of $(d_0 - d_1)/2$ towards the surface S (against the direction z). This solution, however, requires that the TCP trajectory be adapted (shifted) in dependency on the state of wear of the grinding disc **11** which in some production lines may entail additional unwanted effort.

A different approach is depicted in FIG. 7d. In this case the TCP trajectory is programmed such that the grinding machine at the position x_2 only moves vertically with regard to the surface S and thus the trajectory at the position x_2 runs at a right angle to the surface S . In this case the diameter of the grinding disc **11** is of no consequence. The grinding disc

will always contact the surface S at the point x_2 (only the deflection a of the actuator 20, when in the stationary state (position x_3), will depend on the diameter of the grinding disc). Contacting the surface vertically, however, is also undesirable in some applications, as this creates the risk that too much material will be removed from the surface S at the point x_2 . For optimum results, in some applications it is desirable for the grinding disc 11 to contact the surface S after the grinding machine has already reached the desired advancement speed parallel to the surface S. Under such circumstances, the approach outlined in FIG. 7c (parallel shifting of the TCP) may be better.

With the embodiments illustrated FIGS. 8 and 9, the same results as in FIG. 7c can be obtained without the necessity of adapting the TCP of the manipulator 1. As previously mentioned, here the force controlled actuator 20 rests against its end stop (its deflection a corresponding to the maximum deflection a_{MAX}), as long as no contact exists between the surface S of the workpiece W and the grinding disc 11. The position of the grinding disc 11 relative to the surface is thus determined by the pose of the TCP (see FIG. 8 or 9, distance z_1) and the maximum deflection a_{MAX} of the actuator. In the examples in accordance with FIGS. 8 and 9, the distance between the surface S and the axis of rotation R of the grinding disc 11 equals $z_1 - a_{MAX}$ (as long as no contact exists, afterwards it equals $z_1 - a$). Instead of shifting the TCP trajectory closer to the surface, the end stop of the actuator 20 can also be moved closer to the surface. This would result in the maximum deflection a_{MAX} becoming larger and produce the same results as shifting the TCP trajectory.

The examples in FIGS. 8 and 9 are essentially identical to the example of FIG. 6, except for the adjustable end stop EA for the actuator 20. In both examples (FIGS. 8 and 9), the position of the end stop EA relative to the mounting bracket 21 can be adjusted by means of a positioning element 50 (e.g. electric linear actuator, spindle drive or any other positioning element with or without a drive). In the example of FIG. 9, the lower end of the actuator 20 rests directly against the (adjustable with the positioning element 50) end stop EA. In the example of FIG. 8, the lower end of the motor housing of the grinding machine rests against the end stop EA. Even though it is the motor housing of FIG. 8 that rests against the end stop EA, this end stop still effectively functions as an end stop for the actuator 20, as the grinding machine 10 is rigidly connected to the lower end of the actuator 20.

The positioning element for adjusting the end stop EA can also be formed by the actuator 20 and a completely passive element (such as, e.g. a brake or blocking element). The example shown in FIG. 10 is essentially identical to the example of FIG. 8, wherein the positioning element 50 has been replaced by a (piston) rod blocking device. A rod blocking device is essentially a rod 52 in a linear guide 51 that can be fixated at any position (within a defined range of movement) by means of a blocking element 53 (e.g. an electromechanical or pneumatic brake/clamp). Rod blocking devices are well known and will therefore not be further described here. When the blocking element 53 is disengaged, it can be used to position the end stop EA, e.g. with the aid of a spring element 54, closer to the grinding machine 10 in order to keep the end stop EA in the desired position at the housing of the grinding machine 10. When the blocking element is activated (the rod 52 is blocked in the linear guide 51), the spring force of the spring element 54 produces no effect (the spring element 54 does not act upon the actuator 20). The spring element 54 is optional and depends on the reference position of the TCP. For example,

the reference position of the TCP may be set so that the grinding disc rests upside down on the surface S. In this case the weight force of the piston rod 52 alone suffices to keep it in the desired position (resting against the housing of the grinding machine 10) even when the brake 53 is disengaged.

In order to adjust the position of the end stop EA, the manipulator can move the TCP to a given reference position (distance) relative to a reference surface S (as, e.g. in FIG. 8, distance z_1 to surface), upon which the grinding disc 11 contacts the surface S. This is carried out while the rod blocking device is disengaged (inactive). The deflection a_{EA} of the actuator 20 now depends on the present diameter d_1 of the grinding disc 11. The rod blocking device is then blocked in this reference position (TCP in position z_1), which results in the current deflection a_{EA} of the actuator 20 being "saved" as the maximum deflection (and thus de facto as the position of the end stop). The position of the end stop a_{EA} ($a_{EA} = z_1 - d_1/2$) is thereby adjusted so that the grinding disc 11 always contacts at a TCP position of $z = z_1$ when performing a grinding operation (cf. FIG. 7), regardless of the actual diameter d_1 of the grinding disc 11 (a change in the diameter d_1 is compensated by a change in the position a_{EA}).

FIG. 11 illustrates with the use of a flow chart an example of a method for operating a robot-supported grinding apparatus with automated adjustment/adaptation of the end stop EA that determines the maximum deflection a_{EA} of the actuator 20. Suitable grinding apparatuses were described further above with reference to FIGS. 7 to 10. First, the manipulator 1 moves its TCP into a reference position (relative to a surface S), which is designated in the examples of FIGS. 8-10 as $z = z_1$ (FIG. 11, step S1). In this reference position the grinding disc 11 contacts the surface S, wherein the deflection a of the actuator 20 depends on the current diameter d_1 of the grinding disc. In the examples of FIGS. 8-10 it holds true that $a = z_1 - d_1/2$ (FIG. 11, result R1). This deflection can be "saved" as the maximum deflection, e.g. by activating the rod blocking device (cf. FIG. 10) or by adapting the position of the end stop EA with the aid of a positioning element 50 (cf. FIG. 8 or 9), thus setting the current deflection a of the actuator 20 as the maximum deflection a_{EA} .

Although specific embodiments have been illustrated and described herein, it will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art that a variety of alternate and/or equivalent implementations may be substituted for the specific embodiments shown and described without departing from the scope of the present invention. This application is intended to cover any adaptations or variations of the specific embodiments discussed herein. Therefore, it is intended that this invention be limited only by the claims and the equivalents thereof.

The invention claimed is:

1. An apparatus for robot-supported grinding, the apparatus comprising:
 - a manipulator;
 - a linear actuator;
 - a grinding machine with a rotating grinding tool, the grinding machine being coupled with the manipulator via the linear actuator;
 - an end stop that defines a maximum deflection of the linear actuator, wherein a position of the end stop is adjustable; and
 - a control configured to adjust the end stop based on a size of the rotating grinding tool.
2. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the control is configured to adjust the end stop using a positioning element.

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3. The apparatus of claim 2, wherein the positioning element comprises a rod blocking device.

4. The apparatus of claim 3, wherein the control is configured to disengage the rod blocking device, move a tool center point of the manipulator into a reference position in which the rotating grinding tool contacts a surface, and activate the rod blocking device in order to fixate the position of the end stop.

5. The apparatus of claim 2, wherein the positioning element includes a linear electric drive.

6. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the control is configured to adjust the position of the end stop based on a diameter of the rotating grinding tool.

7. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the control is configured to move a tool center point of the manipulator into a reference position in which the rotating grinding tool contacts a surface, and to adjust the position of the end stop such that a current deflection of the linear actuator equals the maximum deflection defined by the position of the end stop.

8. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the control is configured to move a tool center point of the manipulator into a reference position in which the rotating grinding tool contacts a surface, and to adjust the position of the end stop in dependency on a current deflection of the linear actuator.

9. A method for operating a robot-supported grinding apparatus that comprises a manipulator, a linear actuator with an adjustable end stop and a grinding machine with a rotating grinding tool, the grinding machine being coupled with the manipulator via the linear actuator, the method comprising:

- defining a maximum deflection of the linear actuator by the end stop of the linear actuator; and
- adjusting a position of the end stop of the linear actuator based on a size of the rotating grinding tool.

10. The method of claim 9, wherein the rotating grinding tool is a grinding disc and the position of the end stop is adjusted based on a diameter of the grinding disc.

11. The method of claim 9, wherein adjusting the position of the end stop comprises:

- moving a tool center point of the manipulator into a reference position in which the rotating grinding tool contacts a surface; and
- adjusting the position of the end stop such that a current deflection of the linear actuator equals the maximum deflection defined by the position of the end stop.

12. The method of claim 9, wherein adjusting the position of the end stop comprises:

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moving a tool center point of the manipulator into a reference position in which the rotating grinding tool contacts a surface; and
 adjust the position of the end stop in dependency on a current deflection of the linear actuator.

13. The method of claim 9, wherein adjusting the position of the end stop comprises:

- disengaging a rod blocking device to enable shifting the position of the end stop;
- moving a tool center point of the manipulator into a reference position in which the rotating grinding tool contacts a surface; and
- activating the rod blocking device to fixate the position of the end stop.

14. An apparatus for robot-supported grinding, the apparatus comprising:

- a manipulator;
- a linear actuator;
- a grinding machine with a rotating grinding tool, the grinding machine being coupled with the manipulator via the linear actuator;
- an end stop that defines a maximum deflection of the linear actuator, wherein a position of the end stop is adjustable;
- a rod blocking device coupled to the end stop; and
- a control configured to disengage the rod blocking device, move a tool center point of the manipulator into a reference position in which the rotating grinding tool contacts a surface, and activate the rod blocking device in order to fixate the position of the end stop.

15. A method for operating a robot-supported grinding apparatus that comprises a manipulator, a linear actuator with an adjustable end stop and a grinding machine with a rotating grinding tool, the grinding machine being coupled with the manipulator via the linear actuator, the method comprising:

- defining a maximum deflection of the linear actuator by the end stop of the linear actuator; and
- adjusting a position of the end stop of the linear actuator by:
 - disengaging a rod blocking device to enable shifting the position of the end stop;
 - moving a tool center point of the manipulator into a reference position in which the rotating grinding tool contacts a surface; and
 - activating the rod blocking device to fixate the position of the end stop.

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